

Average age of adult computer game addicts is 35, US study shows

The average age of adult computer game addicts is 35, a US study has found, casting doubt on the traditional stereotype of gamers as college geeks.

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However, the research, of more than 500 adults, reinforced other images of technology addicts by finding that they were fatter and more depressed than the general population and reliant on the internet for finding friends.

Investigators from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Emory University and Andrews University analysed survey data from people ranging in age from 19 to 90 in the Seattle-Tacoma area on health risks, media use and perceptions, including those related to video-game playing; and demographic factors.

They found measurable correlations between video-game playing and health risks.

Participants reported whether they were players or non-players, and weekly usage was collected.

Internet usage was assessed, as was the relative importance of the Internet as a social support.

Other elements studied included self-assessments of depression, personality, health status, physical and mental health, body mass index (BMI), and poor quality of life.

Those surveyed also estimated the time they spent during a typical week surfing the net and watching telly, including videos and DVDs.

Nearly half (45.1 per cent) reported playing video games.

Female video-game players reported greater depression and lower health status than female non-players.

Male video-game players reported higher BMI and more internet use time than non-players.

The only factor common to both men and women players was greater reliance on the net for social support.

Dr James B Weaver III, of CDC, Atlanta, said: "As hypothesized, health-risk factors specifically, a higher BMI and a greater number of poor mental-health days differentiated adult video-game players from non-players.

"Video-game players also reported lower extraversion, consistent with research on adolescents that linked video game playing to a sedentary lifestyle and overweight status, and to mental-health concerns.

"Internet community support and time spent online distinguished adult video-game players from non-players, a finding consistent with prior research pointing to the willingness of adult video-game enthusiasts to sacrifice real-world social activities to play video games.

"The data illustrate the need for further research among adults to clarify how to use digital opportunities more effectively to promote health and prevent disease."

Dr Brian Primack, from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, suggests that many video games are different enough from original forms of play that they may be better defined as "play-like activities."

He said: "There are noteworthy differences between the oldest forms of play - for example chase games - and today's 'play-like activities.'

"These play-like activities may stimulate the right centres of the brain to be engaging.

"However, the differences between today's 'play-like activities' and original forms of play may illuminate some of the observed health-related correlates discovered."

Dr. Primack said the greatest challenge will be maintaining the balance.

He added: "How do we simultaneously help the public steer away from imitation play-like activities, harness the potentially positive aspects of video games, and keep in perspective the overall place of video games in our society?"

"There are massive, powerful industries promoting many play-like activities. And industry giants that can afford to will successfully tout the potential benefits of health-related products they develop.

"But who will be left to remind us that for children and adults alike Hide-And-Seek and Freeze Tag are still probably what we need most?"

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