# Experts warn of escalating mobile game addiction harming children’s health and learning



Concerns over mobile game addiction among children have escalated significantly as greater accessibility to smartphones and the internet has facilitated increased gaming activity. This addiction is now recognised not only by parents and educators but also by health professionals, who point out that excessive gaming often detracts from academic responsibilities, social interactions, and overall physical health.

Dr. Mohd Abrar Guroo, a Senior Consultant at the Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (IMHANS) Srinagar, defines mobile game addiction as a compulsive disorder that disrupts children’s daily routines and interpersonal relationships. Speaking to the publication, Dr. Guroo noted, “I have treated children who become so consumed by gaming that they neglect basic needs like eating, sleeping, or studying.” He elaborated on the neurological basis for this addiction, explaining that gaming activates the brain’s reward system, causing the release of dopamine, which reinforces the gaming behaviour and can lead to a dependency cycle.

The physical impacts of gaming addiction are also concerning, with many children experiencing neck and back pain due to poor posture, eye strain from prolonged screen exposure, and an increase in obesity levels attributable to a lack of physical activity. Dr. Guroo remarked on the associated mental health issues, indicating that many young gamers present symptoms of anxiety and depression, often becoming irritable or restless when not engaged in gaming.

Dr. Guroo encourages parents to watch for early warning signs of gaming addiction, which may include frequent disputes over gaming time, sneaking in extra playtime, and emotional withdrawal from family interactions and hobbies. He expressed concern over the deterioration of social skills among gaming-addicted children, stating that they often replace real-life interactions with virtual ones, leading to difficulties in forming meaningful relationships. The academic ramifications are equally troubling, as children may suffer from declining grades and difficulty concentrating.

Several underlying factors contribute to this burgeoning addiction among children, including the design of numerous games which deliberately utilise reward systems to maintain player engagement. Multiplayer games offer social validation, fostering online relationships that may keep children playing for extended periods. Moreover, children facing academic pressure, family conflicts, or emotional distress may seek solace in gaming, making them more susceptible to addiction. Dr. Guroo also highlighted the vulnerability of children with existing mental health conditions such as ADHD or anxiety.

To counteract these patterns, Dr. Guroo advocates for establishing clear boundaries and routines, such as device-free meals and screen-free hours before bedtime. He emphasises that while parental control apps can be useful, open communication tends to yield the most effective outcomes. “I have seen cases where gaming behaviours transition into gambling-like tendencies,” he observed, noting that some games contain loot boxes or microtransactions, which can encourage excessive spending without awareness of the consequences.

Encouraging healthier habits can also be achieved through structured routines that include offline activities, like sports, art, or family adventures, which can divert attention away from screens. Dr. Guroo recommends a collaborative approach when discussing gaming limits with children. He emphasises the importance of explaining the reasoning behind restrictions and setting mutual goals for balancing gaming with other pursuits.

Educational institutions also have a pivotal role in addressing gaming addiction. Schools can promote digital literacy, conduct workshops to raise awareness about the risks associated with excessive gaming, and provide extracurricular activities that encourage offline engagement. Dr. Guroo pointed out the necessity for teachers and counsellors to be vigilant for signs of gaming addiction, such as declining academic performance or social withdrawal.

In cases where gaming addiction has taken hold, early consultation with mental health professionals is often advised. Therapeutic options, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), can assist children in identifying triggers and developing healthier coping strategies. Mindfulness practices and technological tools, including screen-time trackers, can further help in managing gaming habits. Severe cases may require a combination of medication and counselling.

Dr. Suhail Naik, an Assistant Professor at New Children Hospital, GMC Srinagar, has highlighted the parallels between smartphone addiction and substance use disorders, stating that individuals may experience severe psychological and physical symptoms when deprived of their phones. He notes that adolescents under twenty are particularly at risk, as their self-control skills are still developing. He referred to the guidelines set by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which recommend zero screen time for children under two and a maximum of one hour daily for older children. "Unfortunately," Dr. Naik commented, “many parents use smartphones as a tool to calm or distract their children, inadvertently encouraging addiction.”

The effects of smartphone addiction on brain structure echo those of drug addiction, although strategies such as digital detox programmes and specialised addiction centres can offer pathways to recovery. Dr. Naik advocates for parents to actively manage their child’s screen time by promoting outdoor play and physical activity while engaging in enjoyable, stimulating activities together.

As the prevalence of mobile gaming and smartphone addiction continues to rise among children, experts underscore the importance of awareness and timely intervention from both parents and educators to mitigate its negative impacts on youth health and development.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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