

Video-game playing for less than an hour a day is linked with better-adjusted children

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Image credit: Openeducation

A new study suggests video game-playing for less than an hour a day is linked with better-adjusted children and teenagers. The research, carried out by Oxford University, found that young people who indulged in a little video game-playing were associated with being better adjusted than those who had never played or those who were on video games for three hours or more. The study finds no positive or negative effects for young people who played 'moderately' between one to three hours a day. However, the study, published in the journal, *Pediatrics*, suggests that the influence of video games on children, for good or for ill, is very small when compared with more 'enduring' factors, such as whether the child

is from a functioning family, their school relationships, and whether they are materially deprived.

This is thought to be the first study to examine both the positive and [negative effects](#) of gaming using a representative sample of [children](#) and adolescents. It involved nearly 5,000 young people, half male and half female, drawn from a nationally representative study of UK households. Participants, between 10 and 15 years old, were asked how much time they typically spent on console-based or computer-based games. The same group also answered questions about how satisfied they were with their lives, their levels of hyperactivity and inattention; empathy; and how they got on with their peers.

The results suggest that three in four British children and teenagers play video games on a daily basis, and that those who spent more than half their daily free time playing electronic games were not as well adjusted. It speculates that this could be because they miss out on other enriching activities and possibly expose themselves to inappropriate content designed for adults. Meanwhile, when compared to non-players and those who played very frequently, those who played video games for less than an hour (estimated to be less than one-third of their daily free time), were associated with the highest levels of sociability and were most likely to say they were satisfied with their lives. They also appeared to have fewer friendship and emotional problems, and reported less hyperactivity than the other groups.

Study author Dr Andrew Przybylski from the Oxford Internet Institute said: 'These results support recent laboratory-based experiments that have identified the downsides to playing electronic games. However, high levels of [video game](#)-playing appear to be only weakly linked to children's behavioural problems in the real world. Likewise, the small, positive effects we observed for low levels of play on electronic games do not support the idea that video games on their own can help children

develop in an increasingly digital world.

'Some of the positive effects identified in past gaming research were mirrored in these data but the effects were quite small, suggesting that any benefits may be limited to a narrow range of action games. Further research needs to be carried out to look closely at the specific attributes of games that make them beneficial or harmful. It will also be important to identify how social environments such as family, peers, and the community shape how gaming experiences influence young people.'

Past research on non-interactive forms of entertainment have led to recommended time limits for how long children play video games, yet the study argues that such guidelines have little scientific basis. It suggests the relative benefits or risks of games vary widely in how they are structured and in the incentives they offer players. Previous research suggests that roughly half of young people in the UK are light players of less than an hour a day. Nearly one-third of children spend one to three hours, while roughly 10-15% of [young people](#) invest more than three hours daily or more than half of their free time each day playing [electronic games](#).

More information: The paper, 'Electronic gaming and psychosocial adjustment', by Andrew Przybylski is published by the journal, *Pediatrics*, on Monday, 4 August.

Provided by Oxford University

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