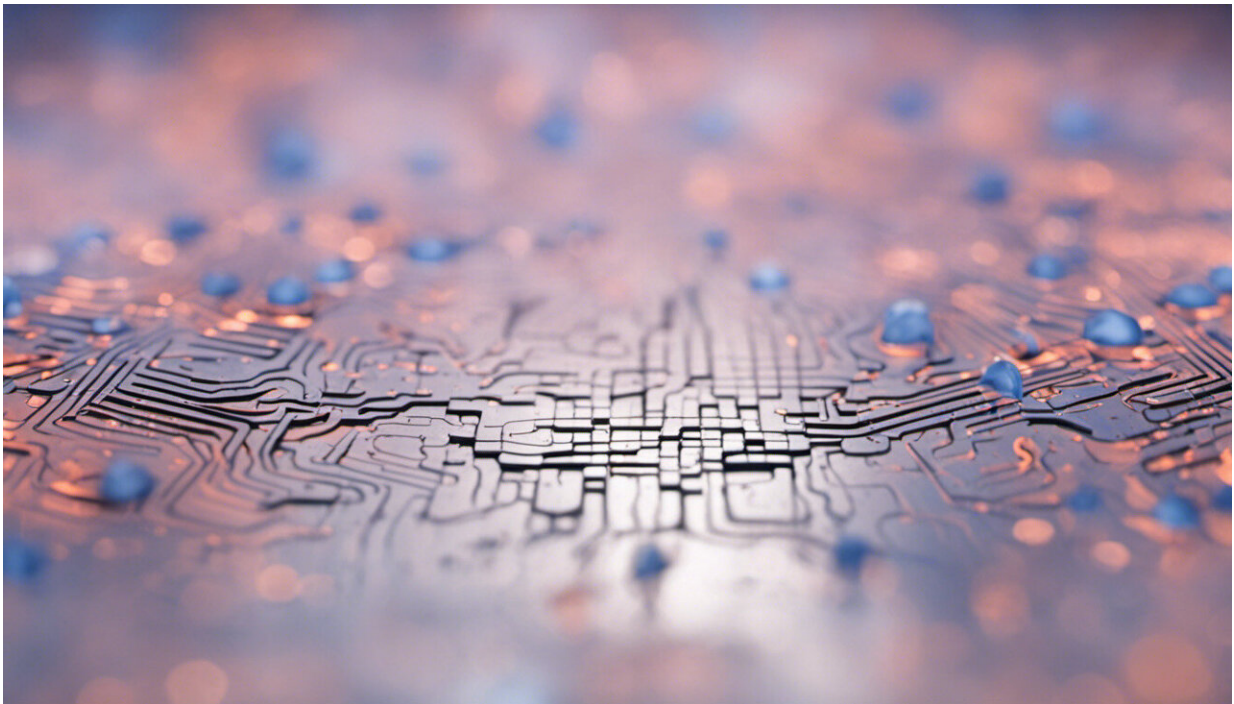# High Internet, video game use linked to mental health issues

June 27 2016, by Michelle Wheeler, Sciencenetwork Wa

Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

Teenagers who use the Internet, social media or electronic games excessively are more likely to experience mental health issues and engage in risk-taking behaviour, research suggests.

The survey of almost 3000 Australians aged between 11 and 17 years

found 10 per cent used the Internet for more than nine hours a day during the week.

On weekends, 12 per cent were online for more than nine hours a day.

Telethon Kids Institute senior research analyst Wayne Rikkers says the study found about four per cent of young people—or 78,000 Australians—exhibit problematic behaviour related to the Internet or gaming.

"We found very strong links between that [problematic] behaviour and very high levels of psychological distress, suicide attempts and alcohol abuse," she says.

"Whether or not they had problems using the Internet first and then they developed the psychological stress or whether they already had psychological problems and then they spent more time on the Internet, unfortunately we don't know."

The study used data from the second Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing and was published last month (May 13) in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

Ms Rikkers encourages parents to sit down with their children if they are worried about their Internet or gaming time.

"It's important to understand not just why kids are spending time online but what they're actually doing online as well," she says.

"Research shows that one in three kids seek help for mental health problems by going online so I think it's good for parents to perhaps go online with the kids and get an idea for what the pattern of activity is."

Boys and girls typically use the Internet in different ways, Ms Rikkers says.

"Girls tend to go online for social interaction or support or being connected whereas boys tend to go online more seeking information or for entertainment," she says.

"We found a really, really high incidence of girls with psychological distress going online whereas with boys it tended to be boys that had conduct or hyperactivity problems…one looking for help, one looking for distraction."

Ms Rikkers says doctors treating problem gaming or Internet use should "dig a little bit deeper."

"Research in America has found that kids may present for one symptom and they get treated for that one symptom," she says.

"We'd advise clinicians to treat the symptoms as a group and see what other problems the kids may have that they might not always volunteer.

What to look for

Teens were defined as having problematic Internet or gaming behaviour if they answered yes, fairly often or very often to at least four of the following five questions:

- Do you go without eating or sleeping because of the Internet or electronic games?
- Do you feel bothered when you cannot be on the Internet or play electronic games?
- Do you catch yourself surfing the Internet or playing electronic games when you are not really interested?

- Do you spend less time than you should with family or friends or doing school work/work because of the time you spent on the Internet or playing electronic games?
- Have you tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the Internet or playing electronic games?

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) *a science news website based at Scitech.*

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