



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The impact of video gaming on mental health and psychosocial functioning in children and adolescents: A narrative review

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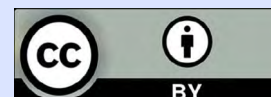
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ABSTRAKT

Background. Video gaming is one of the most common leisure activities among children and adolescents worldwide. Growing concerns about problematic gaming and Gaming Disorder have increased research on the impact of gaming on mental health and psychosocial functioning.

Aim. This narrative review aimed to summarize and critically evaluate current evidence on the relationship between video gaming, mental health, and psychosocial functioning in children and adolescents.

Material and methods. A narrative review was conducted using publications identified through PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The primary search focused on studies published between January 2014 and February 2026 examining associations between video gaming, mental health, and psychosocial functioning in individuals younger than 18 years. Seminal publications published before 2014 were also included to provide conceptual and historical context. Original studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses were considered.

Results. Problematic gaming and Gaming Disorder are associated with increased risks of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, psychosocial difficulties, and poorer academic functioning. In contrast, moderate gaming may provide cognitive, emotional, and social benefits, including improved problem-solving, cognitive flexibility, stress reduction, and opportunities for social interaction. The relationship between gaming and mental health is influenced by individual, familial, and environmental factors.

Conclusions. Video gaming may exert both positive and negative effects on mental health and psychosocial functioning in children and adolescents. Gaming duration alone is a poor predictor of adverse outcomes; functional impairment, gaming motivations, and psychosocial context appear to be more important determinants. Promoting balanced gaming habits and early recognition of problematic gaming may maximize benefits while reducing potential harms.

KEYWORDS

video gaming, video games, gaming disorder, mental health, psychosocial functioning, psychological well-being, adolescents, children, youth

1. Introduction

Video gaming has become one of the most widespread forms of entertainment among children and adolescents worldwide. Rapid technological development, widespread internet access, and the increasing availability of gaming platforms have contributed to a substantial rise in gaming participation among young people. Contemporary video games are no longer limited to simple recreational activities but have evolved into complex digital environments that incorporate social interaction, competition, cooperation, and immersive virtual experiences. As a result, gaming has become an integral component of modern youth culture and an important aspect of everyday life for many children and adolescents (Granic et al., 2014; Johannes et al., 2021).

The growing popularity of video games has stimulated extensive scientific interest regarding their potential effects on mental health and psychosocial functioning. Although gaming is often perceived as a harmless leisure activity, concerns have emerged about the consequences of excessive or maladaptive gaming behaviors. At the same time, recent reviews suggest that screen-related behaviors may exert both beneficial and adverse effects on the mental, physical, and social health of children and adolescents, depending on the context, intensity, and characteristics of use (Stępień et al., 2026). Researchers have increasingly investigated the relationship between video game use and various psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, social withdrawal, reduced academic performance, and behavioral difficulties (Paulus et al., 2018; Coutelle et al., 2024). Simultaneously, other studies have highlighted potential benefits associated with gaming, including improved cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, visuospatial skills, and opportunities for social engagement (Granic et al., 2014).

Mental health disorders represent a major public health concern among children and adolescents. According to recent epidemiological estimates, approximately one in seven adolescents experiences a mental health disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders among the most common conditions affecting this population. The increasing prevalence of psychological difficulties among young people has intensified the need to identify modifiable lifestyle factors that may influence emotional well-being and psychosocial development. Given the substantial amount of time many children spend playing video games, understanding the relationship between gaming behavior and mental health outcomes has be-

come increasingly important for healthcare professionals, educators, parents, and policymakers.

Particular attention has been directed toward problematic gaming behaviors and their potential clinical implications. In 2019, the World Health Organization officially recognized Gaming Disorder in the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). This condition is characterized by impaired control over gaming, prioritization of gaming over other activities, and continuation of gaming despite negative consequences. The inclusion of Gaming Disorder in ICD-11 has significantly increased scientific interest in identifying risk factors, prevalence rates, and long-term consequences associated with excessive gaming among young individuals (King et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2021).

Despite concerns regarding problematic gaming, the relationship between video game use and psychological well-being remains complex. Current evidence suggests that gaming should not be viewed solely as a risk factor for adverse mental health outcomes. Several studies have demonstrated that moderate gaming may provide opportunities for stress reduction, emotional regulation, social connectedness, and cognitive development. Multiplayer online games, for example, may facilitate the formation of friendships and provide a sense of belonging, particularly among socially isolated adolescents. Furthermore, certain educational and prosocial games have been associated with improvements in learning outcomes, cooperation, and communication skills (Granic et al., 2014). At the same time, contemporary research increasingly suggests that the relationship between gaming and mental health is more nuanced than previously assumed. Large-scale population studies and systematic reviews indicate that the overall association between gaming engagement and psychological well-being is generally small and highly dependent on contextual factors, including gaming motivations, social environment, family support, and pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Richard et al., 2020). Consequently, gaming duration alone may be a relatively poor predictor of adverse mental health outcomes, whereas problematic patterns of use and functional impairment appear to be more clinically relevant indicators of risk.

Psychosocial functioning represents another important dimension of child and adolescent development potentially influenced by gaming behavior. Psychosocial functioning encompasses interpersonal relationships, family interactions, school performance, emotional adjustment, and participation in social activities. Excessive gaming has been associa-

ted with family conflicts, peer difficulties, academic problems, and reduced engagement in offline activities. However, some studies suggest that gaming may also promote social competence and facilitate meaningful peer interactions, particularly within collaborative gaming environments. These seemingly contradictory findings indicate that the effects of gaming may depend on factors such as duration of play, game genre, individual vulnerability, and the broader social context in which gaming occurs (Lobel et al., 2017).

The scientific literature investigating the association between video gaming, mental health, and psychosocial functioning has expanded considerably during the past decade. Nevertheless, findings remain heterogeneous, and significant debate continues regarding whether gaming exerts predominantly beneficial, harmful, or neutral effects on psychological development. Moreover, the rapid evolution of gaming technologies and the increasing integration of social features into gaming platforms necessitate continuous evaluation of emerging evidence.

Given the growing prevalence of video gaming among children and adolescents and the increasing recognition of mental health challenges within this population, a comprehensive synthesis of current research is warranted. Understanding both the risks and potential benefits of gaming is essential for developing evidence-based recommendations that support healthy gaming habits and promote optimal psychosocial development among young people.

Research Objective

The aim of this narrative review was to summarize and critically evaluate current evidence regarding the associations between video gaming, mental health, and psychosocial functioning in children and adolescents.

2. Research materials and methods

2.1. Participants

As this study is a narrative review, no human participants were directly recruited or examined. The material analyzed consisted of scientific publications investigating the relationship between video gaming and mental health, psychosocial functioning, emotional well-being, and behavioral outcomes in children and

adolescents. Studies involving participants aged up to 18 years were considered relevant for inclusion. Both clinical and non-clinical populations were taken into account.

2.2. Procedure / Measure

This narrative review was based on a structured search of the scientific literature to identify studies examining the relationship between video gaming, mental health, and psychosocial functioning among children and adolescents. Electronic searches were performed in PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. Google Scholar was additionally used to identify potentially relevant articles and to screen reference lists for supplementary studies.

The search strategy included combinations of the following keywords and Boolean operators:

(„video game*” OR „gaming” OR „video gaming” OR „internet gaming disorder” OR „gaming disorder”)

AND

(„mental health” OR „depression” OR „anxiety” OR „psychological well-being” OR „emotional regulation”)

AND

(„psychosocial functioning” OR „social functioning” OR „academic performance” OR „family relationships”)

AND

(„children” OR „adolescents” OR „youth”).

The primary literature search focused on studies published between January 2014 and February 2026. Additionally, selected seminal publications published before 2014 were included to provide conceptual and historical context.

Original research articles, longitudinal studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses examining associations between video gaming and mental health or psychosocial outcomes in individuals younger than 18 years were included. Publications focusing exclusively on adults, conference abstracts, editorials, opinion papers, non-peer-reviewed reports, and studies unrelated to mental health or psychosocial functioning were excluded.

The identified literature was reviewed for relevance based on titles, abstracts, and full texts where appropriate. Publications addressing the objectives of this narrative review and providing relevant evidence on the relationship between video gaming, mental health, and psychosocial functioning in children and adolescents were selected for inclusion. Due to the

narrative nature of this review, no formal quality assessment, risk of bias evaluation, or quantitative synthesis was performed.

2.3. Data collection and analysis / Statistical analysis

Data were collected through a structured literature search and manual screening of retrieved publications. Information extracted from eligible studies included study design, sample characteristics, gaming-related variables, mental health outcomes, psychosocial measures, and principal findings.

The collected evidence was synthesized narratively. Studies were grouped according to major thematic areas, including positive effects of gaming, adverse mental health outcomes, psychosocial consequences, and factors moderating the relationship between gaming and psychological well-being. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the included studies, no quantitative meta-analysis was performed.

2.3.1. Statistical Software

No original statistical analyses were conducted because the present study was based exclusively on previously published literature. Consequently, no statistical software was required. The review employed qualitative synthesis methods to summarize and interpret the findings of the included studies.

2.3.2. AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used exclusively to support language editing, grammar correction, stylistic refinement, and improvement of academic English. AI-assisted tools were not used for literature selection, data extraction, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or formulation of scientific conclusions.

All screening decisions, interpretation of evidence, synthesis of findings, and final conclusions were performed independently by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and scientific content of the manuscript.

3. Research results

3.1. Video Gaming and Mental Health Outcomes

The relationship between video gaming and mental health among children and adolescents has been extensively investigated over the past decade. Existing

evidence suggests that gaming behavior may influence various psychological domains, including depression, anxiety, stress, emotional regulation, and overall psychological well-being. However, findings remain heterogeneous, reflecting differences in gaming patterns, study populations, and methodological approaches.

Several studies have reported significant associations between excessive gaming and depressive symptoms. In a longitudinal study involving children and adolescents, Gentile et al. (2011) demonstrated that pathological gaming predicted increased levels of depression, anxiety, and social phobia over a two-year follow-up period. Similarly, Paulus et al. (2018) found that problematic gaming was associated with poorer emotional functioning and elevated psychological distress among adolescents.

Anxiety symptoms have also been frequently linked to problematic gaming behaviors. A systematic review conducted by Mihara and Higuchi (2017) indicated that anxiety disorders represent one of the most common psychiatric comorbidities observed among individuals with gaming-related problems. Comparable findings were reported in the meta-analysis by Coutelle et al. (2024), which demonstrated moderate positive associations between gaming disorder and anxiety symptoms across diverse populations.

Sleep disturbances constitute another important mental health concern associated with excessive gaming. Männikkö et al. (2020) reported that problematic gaming was associated with poorer sleep quality, shorter sleep duration, and increased daytime fatigue. Similar findings have been reported in broader research on screen exposure and internet-related behaviors, which have been linked to delayed sleep onset, reduced sleep quality, and daytime sleepiness among children and adolescents (Peracchia & Curcio, 2018; Hale & Guan, 2015; Alimoradi et al., 2019). Given the well-established relationship between sleep and emotional functioning, disrupted sleep may represent a key mechanism linking gaming behavior with adverse psychological outcomes.

3.2. Gaming Disorder and Problematic Gaming

Growing scientific attention has been directed toward Gaming Disorder and problematic gaming behaviors. The formal inclusion of Gaming Disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) by the World Health Organization has further stimulated research on its epidemiology, risk factors, and clinical consequences.

According to the ICD-11, Gaming Disorder is characterized by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities,

and continuation of gaming despite negative consequences. The disorder must result in significant impairment in personal, social, educational, or occupational functioning (World Health Organization, 2019).

Although the inclusion of Gaming Disorder in ICD-11 has increased diagnostic consistency, the conceptualization and diagnostic boundaries of problematic gaming continue to be debated. Earlier discussions surrounding Internet Gaming Disorder in DSM-5 emphasized the need for further research regarding diagnostic criteria, clinical validity, and differentiation between highly engaged and disordered gamers (Petry et al., 2015). The DSM-5-TR continues to include Internet Gaming Disorder in the section of conditions warranting further study (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). In parallel, several psychometric instruments have been developed and validated to facilitate the assessment of gaming-related problems in both research and clinical settings (Pontes & Griffiths, 2015).

Epidemiological studies indicate considerable variation in prevalence estimates. In a meta-analysis of 53 studies, Fam (2018) reported prevalence rates ranging from approximately 1% to 9%, depending on diagnostic criteria and study methodology. Stevens et al. (2021) in a more recent systematic review and meta-analysis, estimated the global prevalence of gaming disorder at approximately 3%.

Research consistently demonstrates that gaming disorder is associated with multiple psychiatric comorbidities. Recent meta-analytic evidence has further confirmed significant associations between gaming disorder and depressive symptoms, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and reduced quality of life among adolescents (Gao et al., 2022; Darvesh et al., 2020). Mihara and Higuchi (2017) identified strong associations with depression, anxiety disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and social difficulties. Similarly, Paulus et al. (2018) found that adolescents meeting criteria for problematic gaming reported significantly poorer psychological functioning compared with non-problematic gamers.

Neurobiological studies provide additional support for the clinical relevance of gaming disorder. Functional neuroimaging investigations have demonstrated alterations in brain regions involved in reward processing, impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation among individuals exhibiting problematic gaming patterns (Dong et al., 2015). These findings support the view that gaming disorder shares certain neurobiological and behavioral mechanisms with substance-related and other addictive disorders, although important differences remain to be clarified.

3.3. Video Gaming and Psychosocial Functioning

Video gaming may significantly influence psychosocial functioning during childhood and adolescence. Psychosocial outcomes encompass social relationships, family functioning, peer interactions, academic performance, and participation in everyday activities.

Several studies have reported associations between excessive gaming and impaired social functioning. Lemmens et al. (2011) observed that pathological gaming was linked to lower social competence, increased loneliness, and reduced self-esteem among adolescents. Similar findings were reported by Gentile et al. (2011), who found that pathological gamers experienced greater social difficulties than their peers. These associations appear to be particularly pronounced among adolescents with pre-existing psychosocial vulnerabilities. Some evidence suggests that the relationship between gaming involvement and social competence may be complex and bidirectional, with outcomes varying according to individual psychosocial characteristics and patterns of engagement (Kowert & Oldmeadow, 2013). Longitudinal evidence suggests a bidirectional pattern, in which problematic gaming may both contribute to and be reinforced by social isolation, thereby increasing risk for adverse psychosocial outcomes (Lemmens et al., 2011; Warberg et al., 2020). Recent systematic reviews have continued to identify significant associations between problematic gaming and social difficulties, reduced quality of life, and impaired psychosocial adjustment among adolescents, although effect sizes vary across studies (Gao et al., 2022).

Academic functioning has also been examined extensively. Research suggests that excessive gaming may interfere with educational achievement through reduced study time, diminished concentration, and sleep-related problems. A systematic review by Mihara and Higuchi (2017) identified consistent evidence linking problematic gaming with poorer academic outcomes and reduced school engagement.

Family relationships represent another important aspect of psychosocial functioning. Several studies have reported that family conflict and limited parental supervision are associated with an increased risk of problematic gaming (Paulus et al., 2018; Mihara & Higuchi, 2017). Conversely, supportive family environments and effective parental monitoring appear to mitigate negative gaming-related outcomes. Longitudinal research indicates that family-, school-, and media-related factors may jointly influence the development of problematic gaming behaviors, highli-

ghting the importance of broader environmental determinants beyond individual vulnerability (Rehbein & Baier, 2013). Furthermore, supportive communication with parents may buffer some of the negative psychosocial effects associated with electronic media use during adolescence (Boniel-Nissim et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, not all studies report uniformly negative consequences. Online gaming environments may facilitate social interaction, cooperation, and peer support, particularly among adolescents who experience difficulties in traditional face-to-face relationships (Kowal et al., 2021). Moreover, online gaming communities may provide opportunities for identity exploration, social belonging, and maintenance of peer relationships, especially among youth with limited offline social resources (Kowert et al., 2014; Boniel-Nissim et al., 2015).

These findings suggest that the psychosocial effects of gaming are highly context-dependent and may vary according to individual vulnerability, gaming motivations, family environment, and the broader social context in which gaming occurs.

3.4. Potential Benefits of Video Gaming

Although concerns regarding problematic gaming are well documented, increasing attention has been devoted to the potential benefits of video gaming. Contemporary research suggests that gaming may contribute positively to cognitive, emotional, and social development when practiced in moderation.

One of the most consistently reported benefits concerns cognitive functioning. Granic et al. (2014) argued that many video games require attention, working memory, strategic thinking, cognitive flexibility, and problem-solving skills. These demands may facilitate the development of executive functions and adaptive learning strategies (Granic et al., 2014; Green & Bavelier, 2015; Bediou et al., 2018). Earlier meta-analytic findings have also reported improvements in information-processing performance among video game players (Powers et al., 2013). Furthermore, evidence suggests that action video games may enhance attentional control, visuospatial processing, and cognitive flexibility, although the magnitude of these effects varies considerably across studies (Bediou et al., 2018).

Video games may also provide opportunities for social interaction and cooperation. Multiplayer environments encourage communication, teamwork, leadership, and collective problem-solving. Research suggests that cooperative gaming experiences may strengthen interpersonal skills and promote peer bonding among adolescents (Granic et al., 2014). Online gaming communities may additionally foster a sense

of belonging and provide opportunities for maintaining social connections, particularly among individuals who experience difficulties in offline social interactions (Kowert et al., 2014).

Gaming has additionally been associated with emotional benefits. Recreational gaming may contribute to stress reduction, relaxation, and positive emotional experiences. Przybylski and Weinstein (2017), in a large-scale study involving over 120,000 adolescents, found that moderate gaming was associated with slightly higher levels of psychosocial adjustment compared with both non-gamers and excessive gamers. During periods of increased social isolation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, gaming has also been reported to provide opportunities for social connectedness, emotional coping, and maintenance of psychological well-being (Barr & Copeland-Stewart, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020). Furthermore, serious games and educational games have demonstrated potential applications in health promotion, education, and psychological interventions. Emerging evidence suggests that game-based approaches may improve motivation, engagement, learning outcomes, and health-related behaviors among children and adolescents (Granic et al., 2014; Pallavicini et al., 2018). Recent systematic reviews further suggest that gaming-based interventions may alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression in selected populations and support psychosocial development in children and adolescents with neurodevelopmental conditions (Townsend et al., 2022; Carneiro et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2026). In addition, psychological interventions targeting problematic gaming have demonstrated promising effectiveness in reducing gaming-related symptoms and improving psychological functioning (Kim et al., 2022).

Overall, current evidence indicates that video gaming should not be viewed exclusively as either harmful or beneficial. Rather, its effects appear to depend on the amount of gaming, gaming motivations, game characteristics, individual vulnerabilities, and environmental influences (Granic et al., 2014; Johannes et al., 2021; Orben & Przybylski, 2019).

4. Discussion

The present narrative review examined the current evidence regarding the impact of video gaming on mental health and psychosocial functioning among children and adolescents. The findings indicate that video gaming is a multifaceted phenomenon whose effects cannot be categorized as exclusively positive or negative. Instead, the available evidence suggests that

gaming outcomes depend on the interaction between individual characteristics, gaming patterns, psychosocial context, and environmental factors.

One of the most important observations emerging from the reviewed literature concerns the relationship between gaming and mental health outcomes. Numerous studies have demonstrated associations between problematic gaming and increased levels of depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and emotional difficulties (Gentile et al., 2011; Mihara & Higuchi, 2017; Coutelle et al., 2024). However, the direction of these associations remains uncertain. While excessive gaming may contribute to mental health problems through social withdrawal, sleep disturbances, and reduced engagement in offline activities, psychological difficulties may also predispose young individuals to use gaming as a coping strategy. Király et al. (2015) and Plante et al. (2019) suggested that gaming may function as a coping strategy, allowing adolescents to escape from stress, loneliness, or emotional distress, although reliance on this mechanism may increase the risk of problematic gaming. Consequently, the relationship between gaming and mental health appears to be bidirectional rather than strictly causal.

An important limitation of the current evidence is the predominance of cross-sectional studies, which limits causal inference. Many studies rely on self-reported gaming behavior and mental health outcomes, increasing the risk of reporting bias. Furthermore, substantial heterogeneity exists regarding the diagnostic criteria and measurement tools used to assess problematic gaming and Gaming Disorder. These methodological differences may partly explain inconsistencies across studies and complicate direct comparisons between findings.

The findings related to Gaming Disorder further support the view that problematic gaming represents a clinically relevant condition in a subset of vulnerable individuals. Following its inclusion in the ICD-11, increasing attention has been devoted to understanding its epidemiology and consequences (World Health Organization, 2019). Although prevalence estimates vary substantially across studies, meta-analytic evidence indicates that approximately 2–3% of adolescents may exhibit clinically significant gaming-related problems (Fam, 2018; Stevens et al., 2021). Importantly, most children and adolescents who play video games do not develop Gaming Disorder, emphasizing the need to distinguish between recreational gaming and pathological gaming behavior. This distinction is particularly important in clinical practice, where concerns regarding gaming are often based solely on gaming duration rather than functional impairment.

The reviewed literature also highlights the importance of psychosocial functioning as both a determinant and consequence of gaming behavior. Consistent evidence suggests that problematic gaming is associated with poorer social competence, increased loneliness, family conflicts, and academic difficulties (Lemmens et al., 2011; Gentile et al., 2011; Mihara & Higuchi, 2017). Nevertheless, psychosocial outcomes appear to depend heavily on the social context in which gaming occurs. Online gaming environments may facilitate social interaction, cooperation, and peer support, particularly among adolescents who experience difficulties in traditional face-to-face relationships (Kowal et al., 2021). Therefore, the social consequences of gaming cannot be interpreted solely through the lens of screen exposure or gaming duration.

Recent evidence suggests that the relationship between gaming and mental health may be considerably more nuanced than previously assumed. Large-scale population studies indicate that the overall association between gaming engagement and psychological well-being is generally small and strongly influenced by contextual variables, including gaming motivations, social support, family environment, and pre-existing mental health vulnerabilities (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Johannes et al., 2021; Richard et al., 2020). Consequently, gaming duration alone appears to be a relatively poor predictor of adverse outcomes, whereas functional impairment and maladaptive patterns of use may represent more clinically meaningful indicators of risk (Orben & Przybylski, 2019).

Furthermore, contemporary research increasingly emphasizes that most children and adolescents who engage in regular gaming do not develop clinically significant gaming-related problems. This observation supports a dimensional perspective in which recreational gaming, intensive gaming, and gaming disorder should be viewed as distinct phenomena rather than points on a simple continuum. Such differentiation may help prevent unnecessary pathologization of normative recreational activities while facilitating identification of individuals who genuinely require clinical intervention.

An important finding of this review is the growing body of evidence supporting the potential benefits of video gaming. Contemporary perspectives increasingly challenge earlier assumptions that gaming is primarily harmful to young people. Granic et al. (2014) emphasized that many video games promote cognitive flexibility, strategic thinking, problem-solving abilities, and persistence. Similarly, Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) reported that moderate

gaming was associated with slightly better psychosocial adjustment than either non-gaming or excessive gaming. These findings suggest that moderate gaming may constitute a normative and potentially beneficial recreational activity when integrated into a balanced lifestyle.

The apparent contradictions in the literature may be explained by the heterogeneity of gaming experiences. Video games differ substantially with regard to genre, social components, competitiveness, educational value, and psychological demands. Likewise, children and adolescents engage in gaming for different reasons, including entertainment, socialization, achievement, stress reduction, and emotional escape. Colder Carras et al. (2018) argued that gaming motivations may be more informative predictors of outcomes than gaming duration alone. Consequently, future studies should move beyond simplistic measures of screen time and examine the qualitative aspects of gaming behavior.

Several practical implications emerge from the reviewed evidence. Healthcare professionals should consider both the risks and benefits of gaming when assessing children's and adolescents' digital media use. Excessive restrictions may overlook the potential cognitive and social benefits associated with moderate gaming, whereas inadequate supervision may increase the risk of problematic gaming behaviors. Parents and educators should focus on promoting healthy gaming habits, encouraging balanced daily routines, monitoring signs of functional impairment, and maintaining open communication regarding digital activities.

The present review has several limitations. First, much of the available evidence is based on cross-sectional research, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships. Second, considerable heterogeneity exists regarding the definitions and measurement tools used to assess problematic gaming and mental health outcomes. Third, cultural differences may influence both gaming behaviors and their psychosocial consequences, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings across populations. Future longitudinal studies and standardized assessment approaches are needed to clarify causal pathways and identify factors that promote healthy gaming engagement while reducing potential harms.

Overall, the current body of evidence supports a balanced perspective on video gaming. While problematic gaming may be associated with significant psychological and psychosocial difficulties, moderate gaming can provide opportunities for cognitive stimulation, social interaction, and emotional enjoyment. Understanding the conditions under which

gaming contributes to positive or negative outcomes remains a critical challenge for future research and clinical practice.

5. Conclusions

Video gaming has become an integral component of contemporary childhood and adolescence, influencing multiple aspects of mental health and psychosocial functioning. The evidence reviewed in this study indicates that the effects of gaming are complex and cannot be characterized as uniformly beneficial or harmful. Rather, outcomes appear to depend on the intensity and purpose of gaming, individual psychological characteristics, family environment, and broader social context.

Current research suggests that moderate and well-balanced gaming may support cognitive development, emotional well-being, social interaction, and recreational needs. At the same time, excessive or problematic gaming has been associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, impaired academic performance, social difficulties, and reduced overall psychosocial functioning. These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between healthy gaming engagement and maladaptive gaming behaviors.

The results of this review emphasize the need for a balanced approach among healthcare professionals, educators, and parents. Monitoring gaming habits should focus not only on the amount of time spent gaming but also on gaming motivations, functional impairment, and the impact of gaming on daily life. Early identification of problematic gaming behaviors may facilitate timely intervention and reduce the risk of adverse psychological outcomes.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal and prospective studies to better understand causal relationships between gaming and mental health. Given the growing prevalence of video gaming worldwide, promoting healthy gaming behaviors should be considered an important component of contemporary child and adolescent mental health prevention strategies.

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