Mental health, substance use, and clinically relevant DSM-5 symptoms of internet gaming disorder in young people.

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Introduction: There are increasing concerns about internet gaming disorder (IGD) in young people. We currently have a limited understanding of the etiology of IGD. The NHMRC-funded Healthy Gamer prospective study is identifying key risk factors and protective mechanisms for IGD in young people. This presentation describes the baseline associations between mental health, substance use, and clinically relevant DSM-5 IGD symptoms in a large sample of young people.

Methods: Young people aged 16-25 years, who lived in Australia and played videogames ≥3 times per month were recruited via social media. Participants completed a baseline, 1-, 3- and 6-month online survey. The baseline association between mental health (depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, loneliness, wellbeing) and substance use (tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and methamphetamines) and IGD was first examined in separate logistic regression models, controlling for age, sex and videogame play frequency. A final model containing significant variables was then run.

Results: A total of 1427 of the 2888 participants completed the baseline survey containing mental health and substance use measures. Participants were a mean age of 19.67 (SD = 2.71) years and 706 identified as male, 560 as female, 108 non-binary and 25 preferred not to say. The majority played videogames 2-4 days a week to daily. The IGD-10 Test identified 147 (10.3%) young people with clinically relevant symptoms of DSM-5 gaming disorder (≥5 criteria). Young people who were older, identified as male, played videogames more frequently (OR 1.5), reported more depression (OR 1.1) and ADHD (OR 1.1) symptoms and drank alcohol less frequently were more likely to have clinically relevant IGD symptoms.

Discussions and Conclusions: Identifying young people at risk of IGD could inform the development of early intervention programs. This study identified candidate risk and protective factors for clinically relevant IGD symptoms for further testing in the prospective study.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This work was supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Ideas Grant (APP2011768). The authors have nothing else to declare.