

Singaporean youths spend more time gaming than American youths: Study

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SINGAPORE - An inaugural study of 3,000 youths here has found that Singaporean adolescents spend more time than American youths on video gaming.

On average, gamers here spend about 20 hours per week on gaming, as compared to about 13 hours for American youths.

Of this group, about one in 10 were found to display symptoms of obsessive, or pathological, video gaming, which caused significant disruption to their regular lives.

Such pathological gamers also spend twice as much time gaming, averaging more than 37 hours a week. They are more likely to have poorer grades, are less social and more hostile, and have more health problems like wrist pain.

Other countries with high rates of obsessive gamers include China (14 per cent), South Korea (10.2 per cent) and Spain (9.9 per cent), said the study.

This study, conducted by the National Institute of Education (NIE), and supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Media Development Authority (MDA), polled Primary 3 and 4, as well as Secondary 1 and 2 students from 12 schools.

According to the researchers, this survey was done in the light of increasing access to the Internet, which has contributed to public concern with obsessive video gaming among children.

Singapore has one of the highest household broadband penetration rates in the world.

IDA statistics show that, as of last year, 82 per cent of households here had access to broadband Internet.

Researchers noted that while gaming can be useful - as teachers have used it as a teaching tool, and the use of computers is encouraged in schools - there needs to be a balance.

"The Singapore Government has been actively developing the island-state into a vibrant global media city so as to foster a creative economy and connected society, but it must also look out for the needs of vulnerable youth who may have difficulty in maintaining a healthy balance", said the study.

A check with Touch Community Services found that the number of cases involving youths engaged in obsessive video gaming has crept up in the last few years. It has seen a 44 per cent leap in the period from 2009 to present, from the period 2006 to 2008.

The cyber wellness arm at Touch said that such youths may go as far as to steal money to maintain their habits, or increasingly spend more money to maintain the same level of excitement.

Indeed, the NIE study found that 4 per cent admitted to doing so, while 5 per cent said they had borrowed money to fuel their habit.

Responding on this issue, the MOE said that the topic of game addiction is covered at primary schools, and this expands to Internet addiction at secondary schools.

"Complementing the structured teaching of life skills, schools have put in place systems to facilitate the early identification of and support for students who need help, including students with game addiction problems.

"These students are referred for counselling to help them manage their problems effectively," said an MOE spokesman, who added that it works with the Institute of Mental Health on professional counselling for parents and students.