

ACADEMIC COMPUTER USE WITH MENTAL HEALTH AMONG U.S ADOLESCENTS: YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY, 2015

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Abstract: Despite a plethora of studies for the association between playing video games and cognitive skills, aggression, and depression, limited studies have been conducted on the gender differences in its association. The present study aimed to determine gender differences in association of gaming or non-academic computer use with mental health problems including depressive disorder, suicide and suicidal behavior, and being bullied at school or in cyberbullying among adolescents in the United States using 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. One in 5 adolescents spent ≥ 5 hours daily for gaming and non-academic computer use whereas 18% did not spend any time for either purpose. More females than males reported no or ≥ 5 hours spent in gaming and non-academic computer use ($p < 0.001$). A pattern of change in prevalence of each mental problem by time spent had a J-shaped curve; the prevalence decreased initially, increased slowly, and then increased rapidly from 4 hours or more. The association pattern, however, differed between genders; while the prevalence of mental problems steadily increased with increased time among females, the changing pattern for males followed a J-shaped curve. We found that female adolescents were more likely to have suffered from all three mental health problems than male adolescents. No or ≥ 5 hours daily spent on gaming or non-academic computer use was associated with increased mental problems. As evidenced in the J-shaped relationship, 1 hour or less gaming or non-academic computer use may reduce depression, suicidal behavior, and bullying compared to non-use or excessive use.

Key words: Adolescents, depression, mental health, playing games, internet use.