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Alert over rise in video games amid Covid-19 restrictions

Bahrain News

By Ghazi Alshehabi © Thu, 09 Jul 2020



PARENTS have been urged to provide alternative activities for their children to help them avoid becoming addicted to playing video games, following an in-depth local study into the craze.

With few organised outside activities due to Covid-19 restrictions, many youngsters have little better to do than play on their smartphones, consoles and laptops at home.

The Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat) surveyed around 3,600 children and young adults, between the ages of 10 to 18, to study their gaming habits.

The results highlight serious concerns although not all the findings were negative.

"We found that there were some positive impacts of playing video games," revealed surveys and opinion polls director Ejlal Bubshait.

"For example, 84 per cent of those who were surveyed said they felt calmer, 78pc said they felt less selfish, 70pc said they were less stressed and 64pc less lonely.

"As for physical health, we looked at the impact on eyesight and found that 72pc had not noticed any changes.

"As for their eating habits, 66pc said there had been no changes for them in that regard and 57pc did not register any changes in weight.

"However, the remaining percentage did and 50pc said they suffered from headaches and pain in the neck and back.

"This goes back to the issue that most people play on their phones with small screens and, no matter what, they cannot sit in a very comfortable way.

"Even after just 15 minutes it's normal for some to feel pain because they are focusing on a small, bright screen."

The study showed that 60pc of those surveyed play video games on a regular basis, with 32pc playing occasionally and only 8pc said they did not play at all.

The majority said they used their mobile phones to participate.

The survey also found that 32pc played between an hour and two hours a day, 25pc played for more than two hours, 16pc played for less than half an hour and 27pc did not play on a daily basis at all.



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She added that 76pc of gamers said they did not suffer from sleeping problems or insomnia, 52pc did not have any anger issues, 52pc did not have any issues with depression, 50pc did not prefer to be alone, or isolated, and 80pc did not change how they interacted with friends and family.

Ms Bubshait believes that with the continuing Covid-19 crisis, and the summer holidays, children are more likely to increase the amount of time they are battling or racing in a virtual world.

"Parents should have the ability to control how long their children play, for example having a specific time either in the morning or evening.

"They also have to create other activities for them to do during the rest of the day," she urged.

She suggested introducing more books into a child's life and installing educational programmes on the computer, as well as allowing youngsters to gain new skills.

"There are also different types of educational and skill developing games, even games that make them exercise and move! For example, if they've played Fortnite for an hour they could perhaps then go and play something that's non-violent," she said.

Last year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) voted to recognise video game addiction as an official illness, despite some opposition from academics and industry bodies.

WHO says that in order for a person to be diagnosed with video game addiction, their behaviour must be "of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning".

In 2018, the organisation included video game addiction within the 11th revision of its International Classification of Diseases after concerns the gaming industry encouraged compulsive play.

Security

All 194 members of the WHO have now agreed to adopt the revision and it will come into effect on January 1, 2022.

The GDN previously reported that gaming-related web attacks had increased by more than 50pc and experts in Bahrain urged families to take security measures.

Online predators have been exploiting the increased popularity in video games during the Covid-19 crisis to launch attacks, according to global cybersecurity company Kaspersky.

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