

## Online gaming disorder in adolescents: A case series highlighting behavioural addiction and treatment approaches

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### ABSTRACT

Online gaming addiction is a growing concern among adolescents, affecting their academic performance, emotional well-being, and social interactions. This paper explores the experiences of two high-achieving students who developed gaming addiction, leading to academic decline, emotional distress, and withdrawal from family and friends. The case series discusses the symptoms, psychological impact, and treatment approaches, including structured digital detox plans and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). The findings highlight the importance of early intervention and targeted therapeutic strategies to help adolescents overcome gaming addiction and restore a healthy balance in their lives. Effective management through CBT, digital detox programs, and family support can significantly reduce the negative impact of excessive gaming and improve overall adolescent well-being

**Keywords:** Online gaming addiction, adolescents, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), digital detox

### INTRODUCTION

Online gaming has gained immense popularity among adolescents, offering entertainment, social interaction, and an escape from reality. However, excessive gaming can lead to behavioural addiction, negatively impacting mental health, academic performance, and social relationships. Gaming addiction has been associated with increased anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and decreased impulse control.<sup>[1]</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) officially recognized Gaming Disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), defining it as a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behaviour leading to significant impairment in daily life.<sup>[2]</sup>

Management of gaming addiction involves a multimodal approach, including psychoeducation, behavioural therapy, family interventions, and structured digital detox plans. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is the most widely recommended psychological intervention, helping individuals identify and modify maladaptive thought patterns and behaviours related to gaming addiction.<sup>[3]</sup>

Parental guidance and structured routines incorporating alternative activities such as sports, social engagement, and academic planning play a crucial role in recovery.<sup>[4]</sup> This paper presents two case studies of adolescents who transitioned from being high achievers to struggling with gaming addiction, exploring the psychological implications and the interventions that facilitated their recovery.

#### Case Study 1: R.G 16 Years Old


Mr. RG, a 16-year-old boy from an urban middle-class family, was an academically proficient student, consistently ranking among the top performers in his school. Both of his parents, working professionals, actively supported his education and extracurricular pursuits.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, RG began playing an online multiplayer battle game. Initially a leisure activity, his gaming gradually escalated to over 10 hours per day. Consequently, his academic performance declined significantly—he started skipping

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**How to Cite the Article:** Mirza A, Sahu KK. Online gaming disorder in adolescents: A case series highlighting behavioural addiction and treatment approaches. Indian J Psychiatr Soc Work 2025;16(1):52-55.

Access the Article Online	
<b>DOI:</b> 10.29120/IJPSW.2025.v16.i1.671	<b>Quick Response Code</b> 
<b>Website:</b> http://pswjournal.org/index.php/ijpsw	



assignments, lost interest in studies, and failed to meet deadlines. His parents observed notable behavioural changes, including increased irritability, social withdrawal, and secrecy regarding his gaming habits.

RG began neglecting self-care, often skipping meals, avoiding family interactions, and staying awake late into the night to play. His sleep cycle was severely disrupted, leading to chronic fatigue and difficulty concentrating in school. His once-strong friendships deteriorated as he prioritized online gaming over social engagements. Over time, he exhibited emotional distress, experiencing anxiety and diminished self-esteem due to academic setbacks. Additionally, he displayed withdrawal symptoms, such as restlessness and agitation, when restricted from gaming.

Concerned about his deteriorating mental health and academic performance, his parents sought professional intervention. A psychiatrist diagnosed him with Gaming disorder (GD) and recommended Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). The intervention focused on helping RG recognize compulsive gaming patterns and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

### **INTERVENTIONS**

A structured digital detox plan was implemented, gradually reducing RG's screen time while encouraging alternative activities such as physical exercise and social interactions. He attended weekly Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) sessions, which focused on identifying triggers, developing impulse control strategies, and enhancing self-discipline.

Additionally, family therapy sessions were conducted to help his parents understand the psychological impact of gaming addiction and adopt supportive, non-punitive approaches to managing his behaviour. With consistent therapy, parental support, and a structured routine, RG gradually regained control over his gaming habits, improved his academic performance, and restored his relationships with family and friends.

### **CASE STUDY 2: A.H., 15 YEARS OLD**

Ms. A.H., a 15-year-old girl from a highly competitive academic environment, was an aspiring medical student. She actively participated in school activities and consistently

maintained high grades. Disciplined and hardworking, she was strongly motivated to achieve her goal of becoming a doctor.

However, she discovered an online role-playing game that provided an escape from academic pressures. Initially a casual player, she gradually became engrossed in the virtual world, spending excessive hours gaming, losing track of time, and neglecting her academic responsibilities. As her gaming addiction intensified, she began skipping meals, avoiding family interactions, and even playing during school hours. Her academic performance declined sharply as she failed to complete coursework and missed deadlines.

The struggle to balance her academic aspirations with compulsive gaming led to significant emotional distress. She exhibited mood swings, heightened irritability, and restlessness when her gaming sessions were interrupted. Sleep deprivation became a major concern, as she frequently stayed up late, resulting in chronic fatigue and impaired cognitive function during the day. Over time, her mental health deteriorated further, manifesting as anxiety and depressive symptoms. She experienced overwhelming guilt and feelings of worthlessness for failing to manage her studies, which reinforced her reliance on gaming as an escape mechanism.

Recognizing these drastic behavioural changes, her parents sought professional intervention. A.H. was diagnosed with gaming disorder and enrolled in psychoeducation sessions to help her understand the detrimental impact of excessive gaming on her overall well-being.

### **INTERVENTIONS**

A.H. underwent behavioural therapy, focusing on self-regulation techniques and adaptive coping strategies to replace excessive gaming. She was encouraged to participate in structured offline activities that aligned with her academic and personal development. A personalized study schedule was implemented to help her regain academic focus, while mindfulness techniques were incorporated to manage stress and anxiety.

Her parents attended counselling sessions to learn effective strategies for setting boundaries and providing emotional support without resorting to punitive measures. With consistent therapy, parental supervision, and structured

digital detox strategies, A.H. gradually regained control over her daily routine. She successfully reduced her screen time, re-engaged in academic pursuits, and adopted healthier coping mechanisms for managing stress. Over time, she resumed her studies with renewed focus, rebuilding her self-confidence and emotional well-being.

## DISCUSSION

The cases of RG and A.H. clearly highlight the detrimental impact of online gaming addiction on adolescents, particularly concerning their mental health and academic performance. Research consistently indicates that excessive gaming among adolescents is associated with various psychosocial issues, including depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, disruptions in family dynamics, and a decline in overall quality of life. This is evident in RG and A.H.'s cases, where both exhibited symptoms of social withdrawal, irritability, and neglect of personal responsibilities—common consequences of gaming addiction.<sup>[5]</sup>

Furthermore, studies have documented a direct correlation between problematic gaming behaviour and poor academic outcomes. Adolescents addicted to gaming often experience a decline in academic performance due to reduced study time, poor concentration, and lack of engagement in schoolwork. Both RG and A.H. neglected their studies in favour of gaming, aligning with trends observed in the literature.<sup>[6]</sup>

Interventions, particularly Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), have proven effective in treating gaming addiction.<sup>[7,8]</sup> A clinical trial conducted by Wölfling et al.<sup>[9]</sup> demonstrated that CBT significantly reduced symptoms of gaming disorder among adolescents by helping them recognize and modify their compulsive gaming behaviours. RG and A.H. benefited from CBT, which contributed to their recovery by addressing the underlying behavioural issues related to their addiction.<sup>[9]</sup> Additionally, structured digital detox plans—incorporating gradual reductions in screen time and encouraging participation in offline activities—have been effective in managing gaming addiction. These strategies align with best practices recommended for treating gaming disorders, aiming to reduce gaming time and promote more productive, non-screen-related activities.

Another key element in the intervention process is parental involvement. Studies emphasize the crucial role of family support in the recovery process for adolescents with gaming addiction. Parents can help manage their children's screen time, encourage healthier routines, and provide emotional support throughout treatment. In both RG's and A.H.'s cases, active family involvement facilitated their progress and recovery, supporting the findings of King et al., who highlighted the importance of family engagement in managing internet gaming disorders.<sup>[10]</sup>

These cases underscore the significance of early identification and intervention in addressing online gaming addiction among adolescents. By integrating therapeutic approaches such as CBT, structured digital detox programs, and strong family support, it is possible to mitigate the negative effects of excessive gaming. Early intervention not only reduces mental health challenges but also helps adolescents regain control over their academic performance and overall well-being.

Since the recognition of gaming disorder, numerous researchers have debated its scientific foundation and clinical relevance. There is ongoing discussion about whether it constitutes a distinct disorder or merely reflects an underlying condition. Therefore, it is essential to identify and address the associated psychosocial factors and co-occurring disorders alongside gaming disorder.<sup>[11, 12]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Online gaming addiction is an emerging concern for adolescent mental health, particularly among high-achieving students who may turn to gaming as a coping mechanism for stress. Without timely intervention, excessive gaming can result in significant academic, social, and psychological repercussions. These case studies highlight the critical role of structured interventions, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), digital detox strategies, and parental involvement, in effectively managing gaming addiction. Future research should explore the long-term efficacy of gaming addiction treatments and focus on developing comprehensive prevention programs within schools and communities.

**Financial support and sponsorship:** Nil.

**Conflicts of interest:** None

**Ethical considerations:** Taken

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**Received on:** 11-02-2025

**Revised on:** 21-02-2025

**Accepted on:** 21-02-2025

**Published on:** 21-02-2025