

# Have school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic increased problematic gaming behaviors in young people?



## What was the aim of the study?

To investigate the attitudes and behavioral tendencies toward gaming in Japanese elementary, middle, and high school students following school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the gaming behavior of young people?

Although advances in smartphones and computers have made it easier to access the internet, there is growing concern that excess exposure to online games is harming children's social functioning. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools to prevent the spread of the virus, and students were unable to continue their usual hobbies and sports. Instead, many turned to online gaming, sometimes excessively so. However, how exactly has the pandemic affected gaming behaviors in young people and what are the consequences of these effects?



## Methods of the study

A survey was conducted in **5012 elementary to high school students** to evaluate:

- 1 Gaming behaviors: time spent playing games, money spent on gaming, age when starting gaming
- 2 Evaluation of excessive or addictive gaming behaviors to identify students potentially at risk for gaming disorder (PGD)
- 3 Internet addiction
- 4 Psychological difficulties
- 5 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on anxiety and gaming behaviors



## What were the main findings of the study?



**7% of students met the criteria for PGD**

- The PGD group spent more time and money on gaming, started gaming at an earlier age, had higher rates of school avoidance and absenteeism, were more likely to have internet dependency
- The PGD group felt more anxious about COVID-19, which led to more gaming behaviors



## What were the main conclusions of the study?

The COVID-19 pandemic may have negatively affected the psychological state of young people, which caused a rise in game-related behaviors and the risk of developing gaming disorder. PGD individuals may be more socially and psychologically vulnerable and therefore may require more support, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, to prevent the development of gaming disorder and internet dependence.

## Key messages

- Increased exposure to digital gaming content in youth has raised serious health concerns.
- School closures due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have increased exposure to gaming and led to addictive gaming behavior in young people.
- Young people at risk of developing gaming disorder not only display characteristic game-related behaviors but are also psychologically and socially vulnerable and may require special support, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.