

Online Gaming: Child's Play or Obsession? A Kids Help Phone Online Survey

September 2009

1 800 668 6868
Kids Help Phone
kidshelpphone.ca

CELEBRATING
20 YEARS

Researched and written by:

- Carol Gladwell, M.Ed., Counselling Manager, Kids Help Phone
- Dr. Janice Currie, C. Psych, Vice President, Counselling Services, Kids Help Phone

Based on the following data:

- Kids Help Phone/Jeunesse, J'écoute online survey conducted December 15, 2008 – January 15, 2009

Survey responses and messages posted to Kids Help Phone's website (posts) which are quoted in the body of the report have been edited for grammar and spelling. Some posts included in the French report have been translated from English.

The information reported in this report is based on survey information collected by Kids Help Phone. The results of this survey may not represent general population trends.

© 2009, Kids Help Phone, All Rights Reserved

For permission to reprint, please contact:
Virginia Middleton
Coordinator, Public Relations
416-586-5437, x 8345
virginia.middleton@kidshelpphone.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Executive Summary	2
Methodology	2
Key Highlights	2
Conclusions.....	3
Background: What is Online Gaming?.....	5
Game Types and Definitions	7
What Kids Are Saying: Sample of Posts to kidshelpphone.ca	8
Description and Demographics of the Survey	10
Survey Findings:	
Geographic Trends.....	11
Age Trends.....	13
Gender Trends.....	16
Game Trends.....	18
Playing Trends	20
Parental Supervision of Game Playing	25
Privacy and Personal Safety in Online Gaming.....	27
Online Gaming Addiction.....	28
Responsible Gaming: What Kids Can Do	31
Responsible Gaming: What Adults Can Do	32
Concluding Remarks.....	33
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Kids Help Phone’s Online Survey	35
Appendix B: About Kids Help Phone.....	39
Appendix C: Definitions	41
Appendix D: Bibliography.....	42

INTRODUCTION

Since 1989, Kids Help Phone has been helping young people with the issues and concerns impacting their lives in the moment. From the everyday issues of growing up, to issues that require the intervention of police, emergency or child welfare agencies, our professional counsellors have been a lifeline for an entire generation of young people across Canada.

Because Kids Help Phone is privileged to have the trust of young people, we are in the unique position of hearing their very personal stories. Our agency therefore has its finger on the pulse of kids' current and ongoing interests and concerns. One of the topics we've been hearing about more and more is online activity.

In recent years, online gaming has become an increasingly popular activity among kids and teens (Shieh & Cheng, 2007). In fact, the video and computer game sector is the fastest growing entertainment industry in the world and is second only to music in profitability (Abelman, 2007, p.100). In 2008, gaming was a two billion dollar industry (CBC's "Fifth Estate": "Video Gaming Obsession", Friday, March 6, 2009).

Kids Help Phone decided to investigate this emerging issue by going directly to kids and surveying them about their experiences with online gaming. A number of high-profile, gaming-related tragedies in different parts of the world have sparked the public's attention, and raised serious concerns about online gaming addiction. However, the popularity of gaming and concerns about addiction are by no means new. In fact, in 1998, Dr. Kimberly S. Young wrote about online gaming addiction in her groundbreaking book entitled *Caught in the Net: How To Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction and a Winning Strategy for Recovery*. Dr. Young, internationally known for her work in the area of Internet addiction, founded The Center for Online Addiction over a decade

ago. This organization consults to educational institutions, mental health clinics and corporations dealing with Internet misuse.

Dr. Young noted in her book that online games are one of the most addictive activities of Internet use and predicted this problem would escalate and become a potential worldwide epidemic. Her words have proven prophetic; online gaming has indeed grown to be an even greater phenomenon during the last decade and is still not well understood as a potentially problematic issue for kids. While not all online gaming behaviour results in addiction, extreme scenarios or tragedy, and though gaming can in fact enhance literacy, attention, reaction time and higher-level thinking skills (Delwiche, 2006; Feng, Spence & Pratt, 2007), enough of our kids spend substantial portions of their time playing online games to warrant a closer examination of this popular pastime.

This report is an analysis of responses to an online survey posted to kidshelpphone.ca, jeunessejecoute.ca and Kids Help Phone's Windows Live Messenger tab (in English and French) over a four week period at the end of 2008/beginning of 2009, and includes additional research and commentary from a variety of academic experts and media professionals about the subject of gaming and gaming addiction.

The overall results of the survey create a compelling snapshot of why and where kids invest their time in online gaming; what games they play and with whom; and what effects they believe gaming has on themselves and others. It is hoped that the trends revealed by these answers will further inform parents, educators and kids themselves about online gaming.

Dr. Janice Currie, C. Psych.
Vice President, Counselling Services
Kids Help Phone

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Different issues concerning gaming have been brought forward to Kids Help Phone by the kids of Canada, and a number of high-profile, gaming-related tragedies in different parts of the world have sparked the public's attention and raised serious concerns about addiction to online gaming.

This report is an analysis of responses to an online survey posted to kidshelpphone.ca, jeunessejecoute.ca and Kids Help Phone's Windows Live Messenger tab (in English and French) over a four week period at the end of 2008/beginning of 2009, and includes additional research and commentary from a variety of academic experts and media professionals about the subject of gaming and gaming addiction. The overall results of the survey create a compelling snapshot of why and where kids invest their time in online gaming; what games they play and with whom; and what effects they believe gaming has on themselves and others.

METHODOLOGY

During the four week period between December 15, 2008 and January 15, 2009, Kids Help Phone conducted a voluntary, anonymous survey in both English and French about online gaming. The survey was posted on the Kids Help Phone website (kidshelpphone.ca and jeunessejecoute.ca), and the Kids Help Phone tab on the Windows Live Messenger site.

The survey posed 22 questions to kids about their online gaming behaviour. The questions were aimed at soliciting the reasons they engage in this activity, their gaming preferences, their concerns about gaming, and their various stories, thoughts and feelings about this activity.

- 2,793 surveys were completed (of which 384 were completed in French).
- Over half of the responses (63%) were from young people aged 14 and under.
- 64% of respondents were female.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- An overwhelming majority of kids indicated that they believed that online gaming could be addictive. This was seen in the anecdotal responses received from respondents (available in the full report).
- Eleven per cent of respondents said they didn't think they would be able to stop online gaming on their own – a sign of online gaming addiction.
- Younger age groups seemed to be more concerned with the potentially addictive nature of video games.
- Sixty-two per cent of female respondents said they play online games less than 5 hours per week (compared to 44% of boys), while 15% of male respondents played more than 20 hours per week (compared to 8% of girls).
- Fifty-three per cent of respondents said that having fun with friends was their primary reason for playing online games; 39% of boys also said competition was a motivation, while 42% of girls also said they play to help forget their problems.

- Fifty-nine per cent of respondents said that online gaming gets in the way of their school work; 56% said online gaming gets in the way of getting adequate physical exercise.
- Of the survey respondents who selected social interactive as their favourite game type, 90% were girls; of the survey respondents who selected First-Person Shooter as their favourite game type, 72% were males.
- More than 47% of respondents to this survey indicated that their parents don't, or may not know, what games they are playing online.
- Forty-four per cent of survey respondents said their parents do not limit their gaming time, but that they limit their own time; 35% said they can play online games as often as they want.
- While the sample size was small compared to other regions, responses from the Northern Territories (the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut) indicated some concerning trends in the use of online games.
 - More than 50% of overall respondents from the Northern Territories said they spent more than 20 hours per week playing online games (compared to 10% in the rest of the country).
 - Forty-eight per cent said they wouldn't be able to stop gaming on their own, compared with 11% in the country-wide results.
 - Youth from this area showed a significant preference for first-person shooter games (43% of youth from the Yukon selected this game type as a favourite) and Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs) (60% of respondents who selected this game type as preferred were from the Northwest Territories).
 - Competition was a motivating factor for 48% of respondents (versus 29% for the rest of Canada).

CONCLUSIONS

As kids continue to turn online for many aspects of their lives, it is only natural that they turn to the virtual world for their entertainment and social interaction. That online gaming often mixes these two things is one of the reasons that this activity has become so pervasive among kids, teens and young adults.

To encourage responsible gaming in young people today, adults first need to learn more about the Internet and video games. Experts agree that parents and other adults have a lot of catching up to do in this regard. Here are some helpful recommendations:

- Keep your family's computer in a common area of your home so that you can monitor your kids' online activities.
- Ask your child or teen to teach you about their favourite online games: how they are played and what makes them interesting and appealing to play.
- Become familiar with the parental control features on popular gaming systems and use these features as appropriate.
- Be supportive of your child's/teen's online gaming, but negotiate reasonable rules and time limits that are age-appropriate; model this behaviour by not spending excessive amounts of

time online. If your child/teen lives alternately with another parent, try to maintain consistency in approaches to your child's online gaming activity.

- Make homework a priority.
- Make regular physical exercise and outdoor activity a priority.
- Make sure your child/teen has access to activities other than online gaming, and encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities.
- Watch for any negative changes in your child's behaviour and guard against any increase in their online gaming. Pay particular attention to your child if they appear introverted, lonely or isolated, or if they are dealing with family problems.

Adults and kids both need to be aware of the potential problems and educate themselves on what to do if they feel their gaming, or a friend's gaming, is becoming a problem. It is clear from the responses to the Kids Help Phone survey that parents need to get more involved in their kids' gaming habits – learn about gaming, the types of games kids are playing and the interactive features of each; set limits on how much time young people can play each day or each week and enforce those limits (e.g., ensure kids aren't sneaking an extra few hours of gaming in when parents are asleep); ensure that kids' online world isn't negatively impacting school, their social life or health; ensure kids are interacting with friends and peers offline as well as online.

Most importantly, both adults and kids need to be aware that gaming can become a problem, leading to an unhealthy obsession or even addiction in some individuals. Excessive time spent online, becoming consumed with a game or with the idea of gaming, and playing in isolation can all be signs of problem gaming. Everyone needs to be aware of these signs and know where to seek help when someone needs assistance to reduce or stop gaming.

Kids Help Phone is a service that offers information, referral and professional counselling for kids experiencing online gaming problems (or any other problem). Counsellors can be reached 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at 1-800-668-6868 or online at kidshelpphone.ca.



As kids continue to turn online for many aspects of their lives, it is only natural that they turn to the virtual world for their entertainment and social interaction.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS ONLINE GAMING?

Online gaming is an activity involving the use of a computer, laptop, television with gaming console or a gaming handheld (or even a personal digital assistant) to engage in playing video games. These games can be downloaded from the Internet, accessed by a browser, or bought and used on a computer, Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Wii or other gaming system with online capabilities. Accessibility to these games is widespread and online gaming has become a regular feature within the world of children's play. Our survey respondents noted:

"[Kids are] being exposed to more advanced and easier to use technology earlier and earlier."

"Our world is technological, everyone and everything is ONLINE including this quiz also it's fun, it's kinda like a craze."

The online gaming possibilities are endless, and descriptions of more than 38,000 games across 100 platforms (i.e., modes of play) can be found on the website www.all.game.com. There are socially interactive games, games of strategy and cooperative/collaborative games. Some games are for play by one person against the computer and others by two or more people. Players can be together in the same room, or simultaneously online in locations all over the world in real time. Some games are graphically violent and aggressive in nature, while others depict more benign content and promote positive, affirming and mutually respectful relationships between two or more individuals.

The realism of the graphics in online games continues to become more sophisticated, contributing to the seductive, mesmerizing appeal of the games and the potential to get "lost" in them for lengthy periods. As one survey respondent said:

"The games on the computer keep getting better and better, whether it be graphics, more complicated quests, etc., etc. Kids begin to see these as a very attractive thing to spend their time doing."

This mesmerizing appeal is also described as 'stickiness' or 'flow' (Lee, Lu & Lin, 2007; Wu, Li & Rao, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The concept of cognitive 'flow' predicts that an experience which totally engages an individual (like an on-line game) will create the conditions conducive to creating cognitive 'flow'. This total engagement or 'flow' is a highly pleasant and desired experience which will encourage the gamer to engage repeatedly in a given game or experience.

In addition to the seductive appeal of realistic graphics, games that are played in real time (games referred to as Massively Multiplayer Online games or MMOs) require participants to stay online for long periods of time in order to keep up with the action. These games, in which there are increasingly higher levels to attain, can go on literally for hours and days, as players compete with themselves or other opponents to achieve a higher rank or beat their last score.

Participants could also have a specific role (moderator, “the best to shut enemy”) in the group playing (sometimes called a clan or guild) and be pressured to stay online longer to help out the team. They could also be in contact in real time with other participants around the world, which would explain why some wake up in the middle of the night to connect with European or other countries in different time zones.

Research has shown that violent videogames (such as the *Halo*, *World of Warcraft* or *Call of Duty* series) may desensitize youth to violence, increase aggressive behaviour in children and young adults and increase physiological arousal and aggression-related thoughts and feelings (Abelman, 2007; Olivier, 2000).

In contrast to the popularity of the violent games cited above, non-violent games also have a large fan base. For example, the music game ‘Rock Band’ is said to be the biggest seller in Canada in 2008 (Fifth Estate, 2009). ‘Rock Band’ provides a positive social experience for single players or groups, as well as the opportunity to learn and practice both solo and cooperative musical skills and fine motor coordination. These positive effects are among others which include the notion of cognitive ‘flow’ (Wu, Li & Rao, 2008), enhanced self-esteem (Young, 1998) and reduced social anxiety (Wu & Liu, 2007).

“The games on the computer keep getting better and better, whether it be graphics, more complicated quests, etc., etc. Kids begin to see these as a very attractive thing to spend their time doing.”



GAME TYPES AND DEFINITIONS

Online games fall into a variety of categories, defined by the style of game as well as the amount of interaction the individual player has with other players. For the purposes of this report, Kids Help Phone looked at the following game types (for detailed definitions, see Appendix C):

- *Online game* is a game played over a computer network. These games can range from simple text-based games to games incorporating complex graphics and virtual worlds populated by many players simultaneously.
- *First Person Shooter (FPS)* is a video game genre featuring a first person perspective, in which the player views the action as if through the eyes of the protagonist and in which the primary element is combat, based around shooting.
- *Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG or MMO)* is a video game genre capable of supporting hundreds or thousands of players simultaneously. By necessity, they are played on the Internet and feature at least one persistent world. This type of game also involves external forums, chats, clans or guilds.
- *MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game)* is a variant on MMO (see above).
- *Real-time Strategy (RTS)* is a genre of computer war games which do not progress incrementally and in which players are not taking turns. The typical RTS game features resource gathering, base building, in-game technological development and indirect control of units.
- *Virtual World/Social Interactive* games focus on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.
- *Role-playing game (RPG)* is a type of game in which the participants assume the roles of game characters.

([Wikipedia](#), n.d.)



WHAT KIDS ARE SAYING: SAMPLE OF POSTS TO kidshelpphone.ca

Kids Help Phone's counsellors have been hearing more about online activity, including gaming habits and addictions, in recent years. A sample of the types of posts received by Kids Help Phone at kidshelpphone.ca reveals that kids are aware of their gaming habits and the habits of their friends. (Posts have been edited for spelling and grammar.)

"I live on my own (I get money from a source I'd rather not discuss) and I'm addicted to World of Warcraft (PC-GAME). WoW (World of Warcraft) is a MMORPG (Massive multiplayer online role playing game), WoW is a highly addictive game to some people, I should know I'm one of those people.

"Game addiction is no joke, people may laugh when you say you're addicted to a computer game. To people like me WoW goes first, it goes before going out with your friends, personal hygiene, education, sleeping, eating. Here's an example. Yesterday (Sunday) I did not go to sleep until 8 am today (the time school starts), got up at about 3 pm and probably not going to sleep tonight. Yeah, right there that's at least 23 hours of WoW in a row (Sunday-Monday).

"You may think, 'hey, just uninstall it from your computer and quit'. No! It's like telling a drug addict to stop, or an addictive gambler to stop, it's not going to happen that easy. I did some research and video game addiction like this is very similar to gambling addiction, same part of your brain telling you not to stop.

"My dreams are to become a Police Officer and to be a 'mix martial arts fighter'. But how can I accomplish those by not going to school, by not going to my Judo and Jujitsu classes anymore. I've become even more 'anti social' than I was before, and I'm a really shy person! My apartment is a mess, my hygiene is kept to a minimum, I just sit on the couch and play WoW 24/7, well almost 24/7. On top of all that, I'm a very, very lazy person. I'm not overweight, I hardly eat.

"I come to you for advice. I don't know what to do. I can't go to one of those 'game addiction' places, with school and all. I like my life as it is, but I know this can't last forever, I want to go to college and accomplish my dreams. People tell me to stop, thinking 'HA, game addiction, just quit'... No. When I think about quitting, I think, 'Well I worked on my account and characters for about 2 years now, all that work into them, still so much more to do.' My friends call me pathetic, they don't understand, they say I'm destroying my life... I know I am, I wish it was that easy to quit, but it's not."

"I got a problem. My bro is off the wire. He is obsessed with a game called World of Warcraft... He doesn't move, he doesn't exercise AT ALL. He swears if he doesn't win!! I don't mean 'Oh my!!' I mean heavy stuff man!! Plus all he does is eat and sit there. I'm worried for his health. He also hates me!! I don't even think he is my bro any more. I want the old caring brother I used to have."

"My friend, Jim (that's not his real name, I'm just using it as an example), is addicted to World of Warcraft (WoW), an addictive computer game. He plays hours and hours a

day, during school hours, in class, at recess, after school, and regularly pulls all-nighters to play this game.

“All of this time spent on the game is not being spent on homework, and thus he is on the verge of failing out. Jim has to stay after school every day to catch up on his work, which he just plays more WoW.

“I can’t tell his parents, because if I do they would surely take WoW away altogether, and that is not a good solution. I think the best thing would be having a way to control and stop him from playing during school.

“I play WoW as well, although I only play on my free time, for around an hour every other day. I think that is reasonable for both him and me. Even if he wants to play more than me, if it was on his free time then that would be fine.

“The teachers never catch him playing because he is really stealth about playing it. I have tried to stop him, but it is impossible. What can I do to control his addiction?

“I honestly think that stopping him from playing WoW is not the answer, but at the same time I am worried about him failing. Please help me. I am worried as first term is coming to a close.”

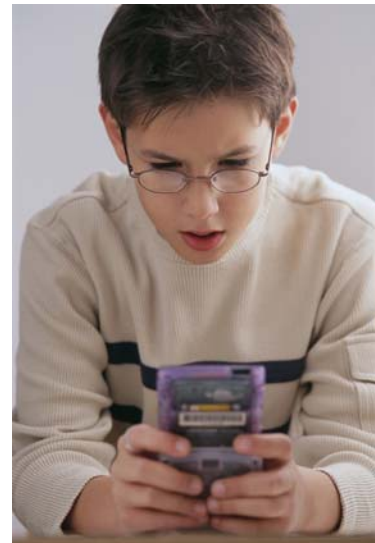
“... Well with my computer addiction, I’ve taken a small break from my main account. (It will be a week Tuesday.) I’ve left all my friends and made a new account which isn’t quite as fun. It makes me realize how dull the game really is if you don’t have friends and something to look forward to.

“But I could never leave the game altogether... I need it. I need to have them with me to talk to.

“I like it better than my real friends... I have no idea why. I would rather spend a day on the computer than at a sleep over. In fact at sleepovers I’m usually on my friends’ computer... I’m sad with myself.

“But I do know this is wrong. I need my life back. Although what’s always on my mind is the Habbo game itself.

“Someone mentioned something about community help or something ... I’m not sure what it was ... just stuff in my area to get help. Also a counsellor mentioned to try and keep busy? Sure I can keep busy for a mere 2 hours but then what? With my mind fixed on a game I crave... How can I keep myself off 24/7? Am I even doing the right thing by asking for help if I feel as though I will be vulnerable without it? There is still more to my past history with Internet chatting. I once again will not get into it...but I still need help with quitting this...”



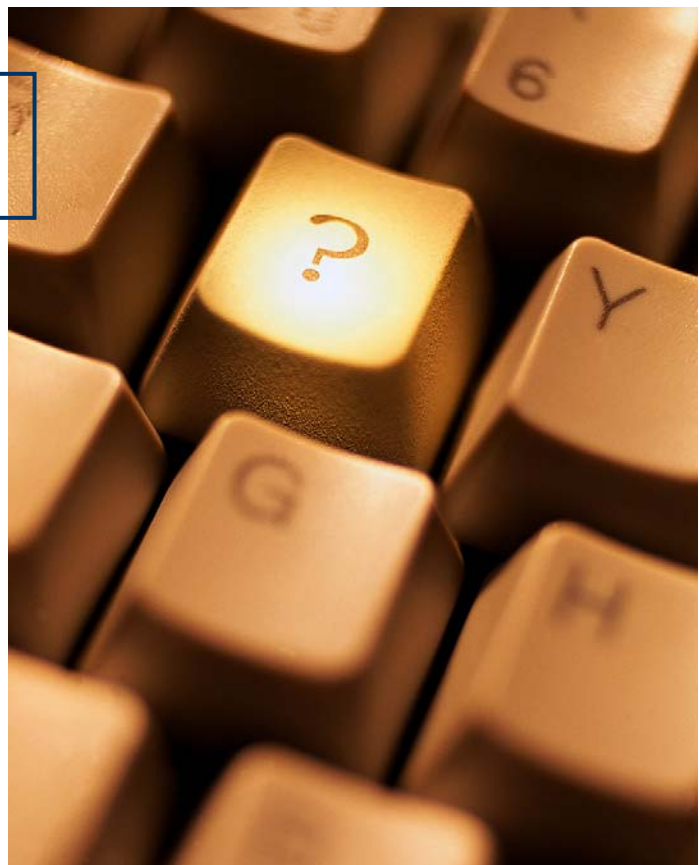
DESCRIPTION AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SURVEY

During the four week period between December 15, 2008 and January 15, 2009, Kids Help Phone conducted a voluntary, anonymous survey in both English and French about online gaming. The survey was posted on the Kids Help Phone website (www.kidshelpphone.ca and www.jeunessejecoute.ca) and the Kids Help Phone tab on the Windows Live Messenger site.

The survey posed 22 questions to kids about their online gaming behaviour. The questions were aimed at soliciting the reasons they engage in this activity, their gaming preferences, their concerns about gaming and their various stories, thoughts and feelings about this activity. The complete online survey is attached to this report as 'Appendix A'.

In total, 2,793 surveys were completed (of which 384 were completed in French). Of the total completed surveys, 64% of respondents were female. While responses were received from every province and territory, the majority of English responses came from Ontario (50%), while the bulk of French responses came from Quebec (92%).

In total, 2,793 surveys were completed...

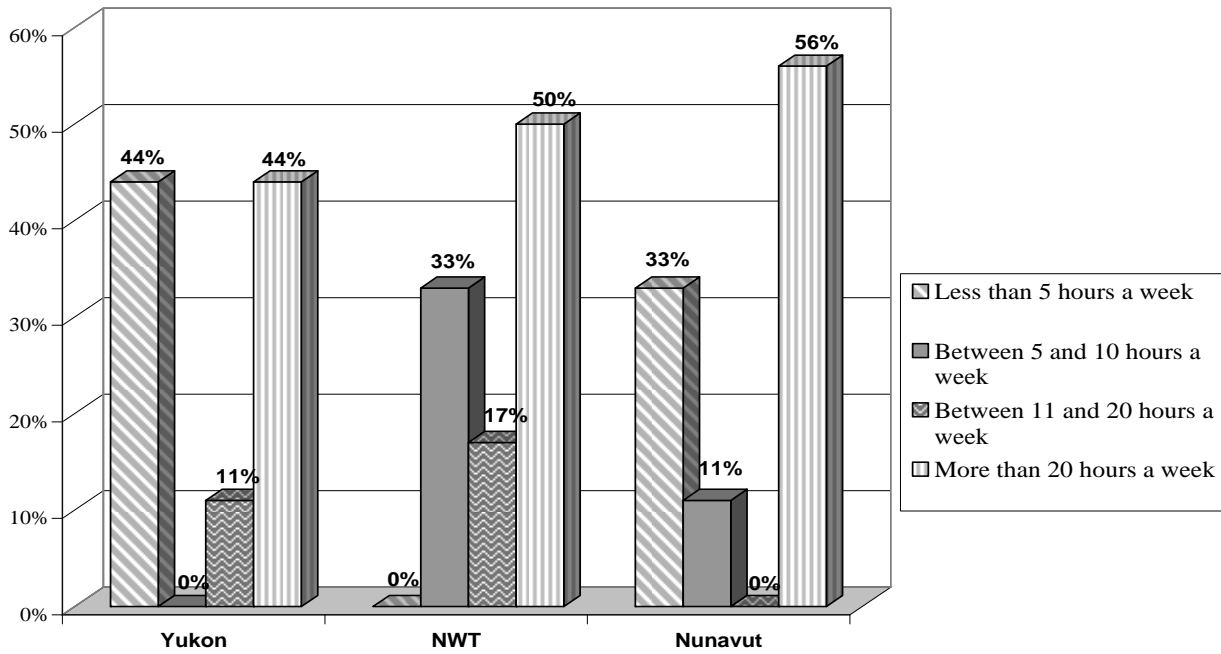


SURVEY FINDINGS

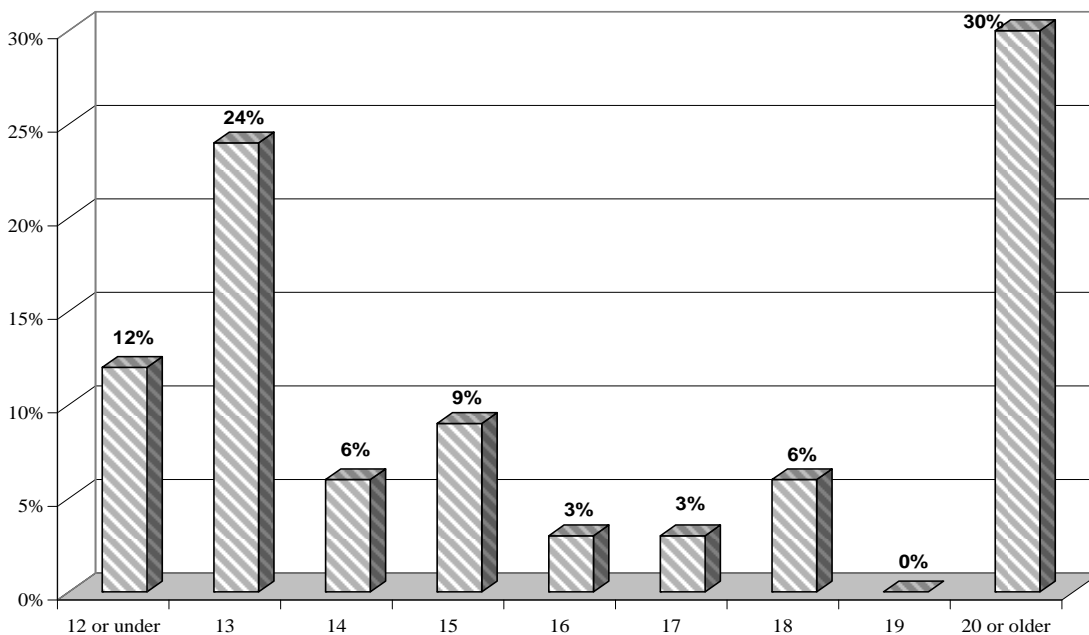
Geographic Trends

While surveys were completed by kids representing every province and territory across Canada, one geographic area demonstrated some discrepant and concerning trends in the use of online games. This region was the Northern Territories (the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut).

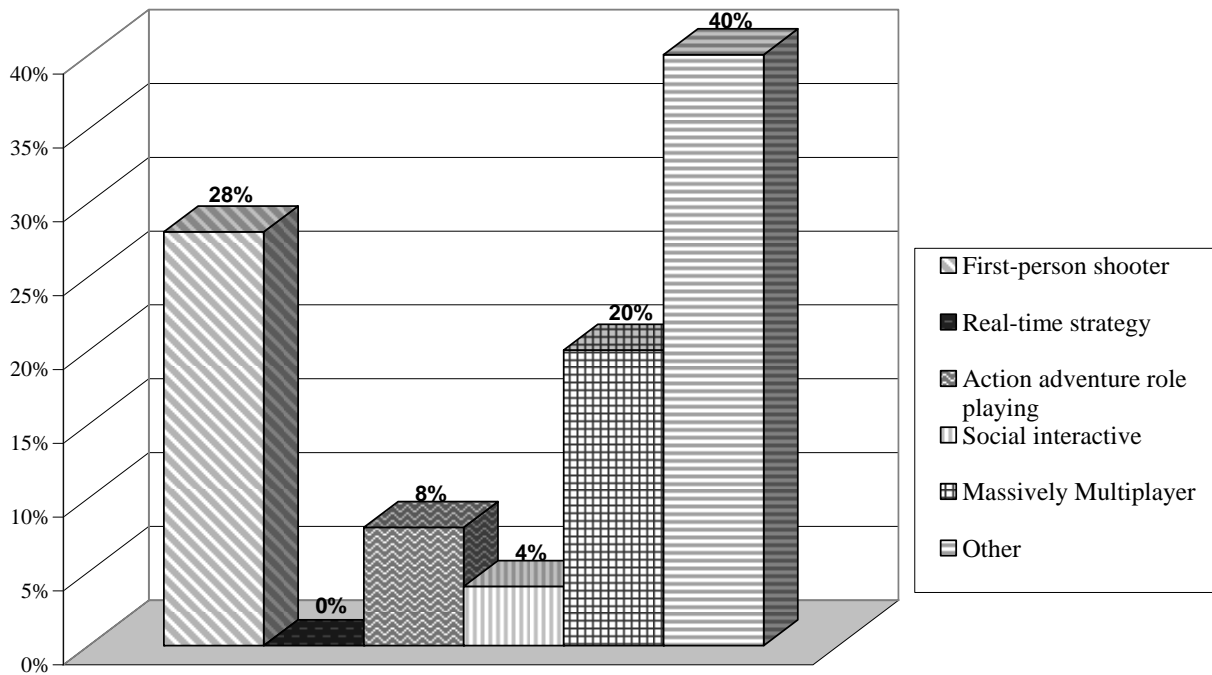
1.1 Time spent gaming by respondents from Northern Territories



1.2 Age of respondents from the Northern Territories



1.3 Game preferences among youth in the Northern Territories



While the sample sizes for this population were small compared to other regions (29 youth participated from the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut), respondents from this region showed unique trends compared to the rest of the country:

- The number of respondents over 20 (31%) was higher than any other region.
- More than 50% of overall respondents from the Northern Territories said they spent more than 20 hours per week playing online games (compared to 10% in the rest of the country).
- Forty-eight per cent said they wouldn't be able to stop gaming on their own, compared with 11% in the country-wide results.
- Youth from this area showed a significant preference for first-person shooter games (43% of youth from the Yukon selected this game type as a favourite) and MMOs (60% of respondents who selected this game type were from the Northwest Territories). These two games types are known to be the most addictive.
- Competition was a motivating factor for 48% of respondents (versus 29% for the rest of Canada).
- A strong majority of youth from the Northern Territories said gaming gets in the way of other parts of their life, but unlike other regions where school and exercise habits suffer most, 80% of respondents from the Northern Territories said that their offline activities with friends are most impacted.
- The portion of time spent playing online games does not appear to lessen with age (as it appears to in the rest of Canada), but instead is sustained across the age span.

The reasons cited by youth living in the Northern Territories for an increase in online gaming are as follows:

“Cause [kids] don’t have anything else to do”

“Maybe because they wanted to get away from their personal life like me. Because they have a mean stepfather.”

“I have no friends so I try to gain some gaming online.”

“It teaches me interesting things.”

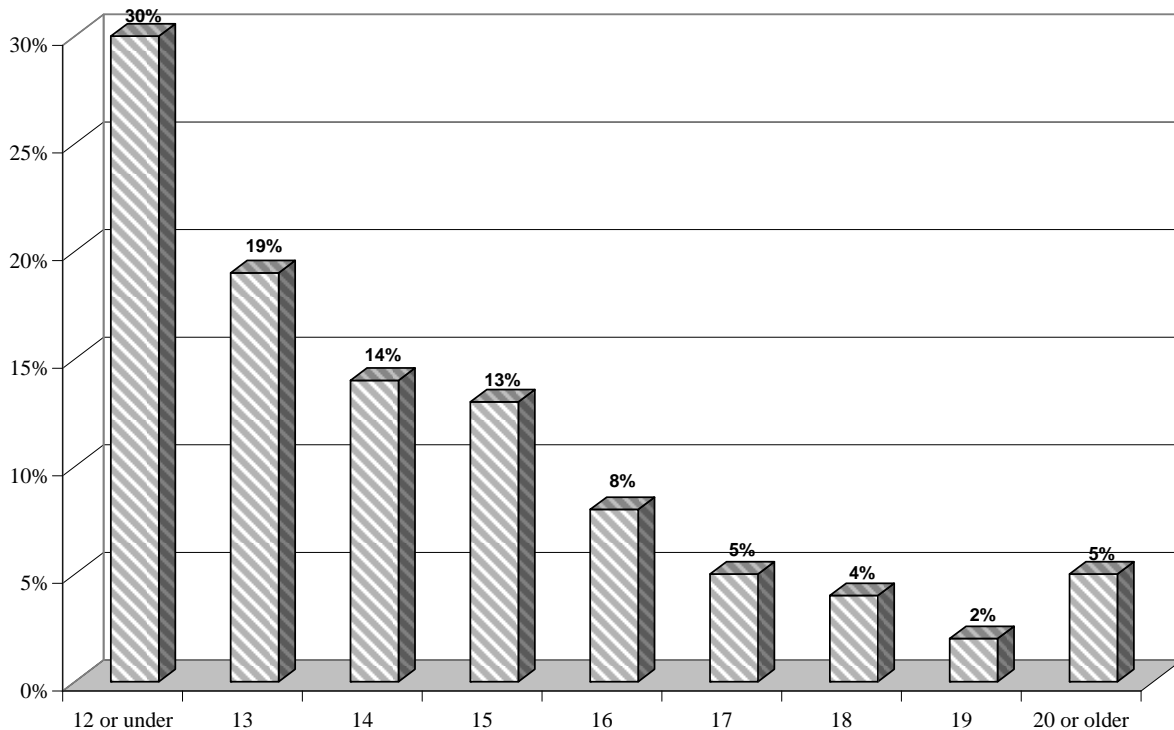
“I just chat, try to find people like me.”

While the results must be treated with caution because of the small sample size, several factors can be hypothesized as contributing to these concerning responses – the scarcity of social and community resources, distance between individuals/isolation of communities and fewer employment opportunities. Clearly further research is needed to identify whether these trends are indeed representative of this population of kids in Canada.

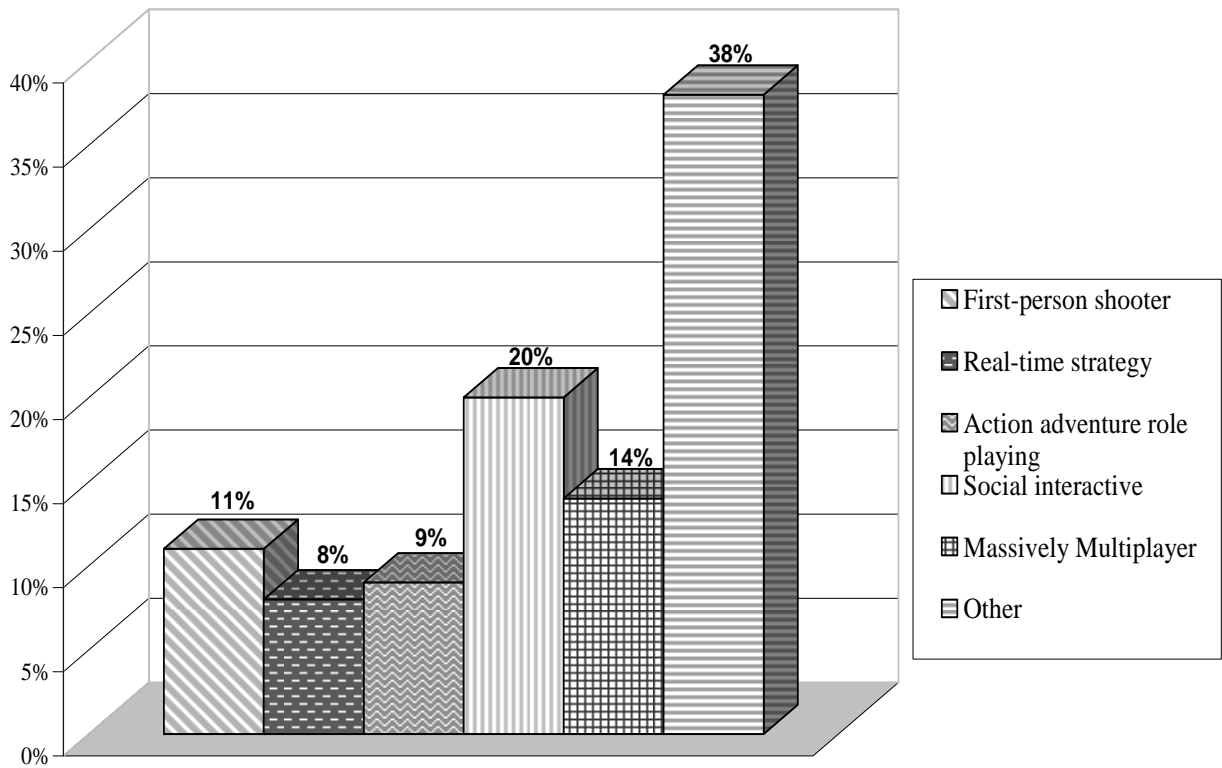
Forty-eight per cent said they wouldn’t be able to stop gaming on their own, compared with 11% in the country-wide results.

Age Trends

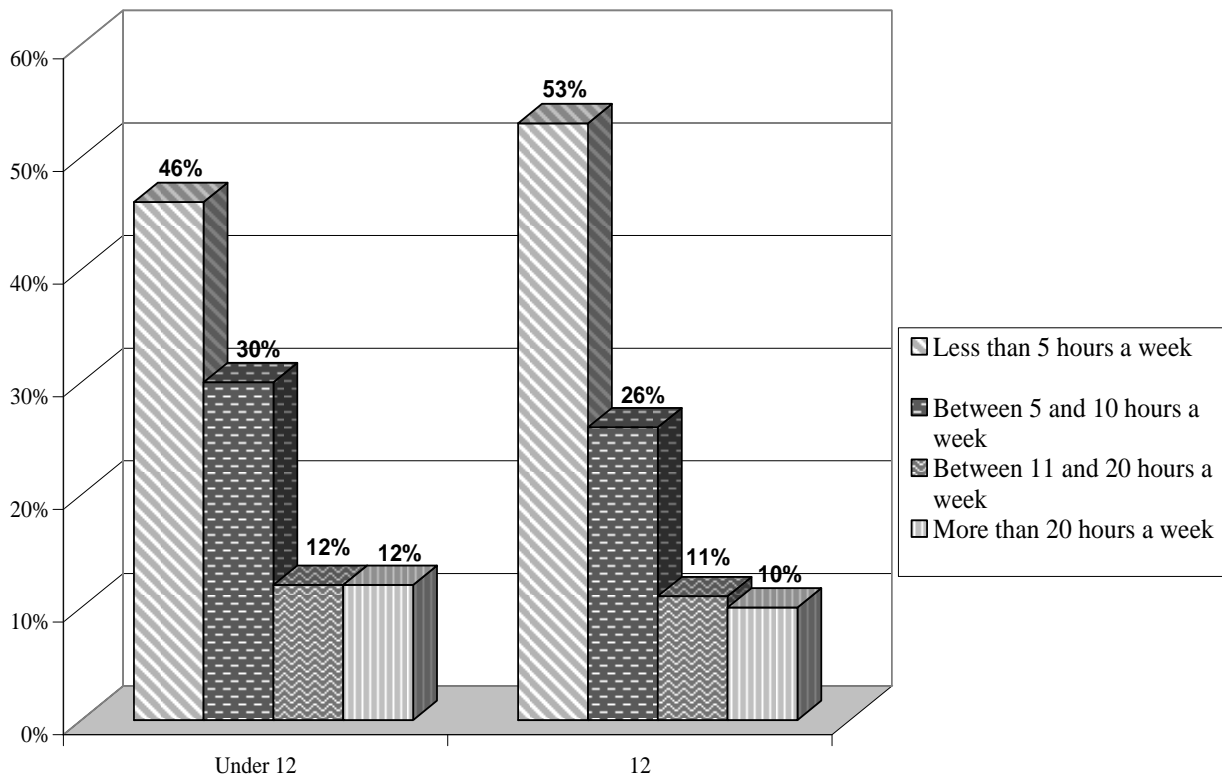
1.4 Age of respondents



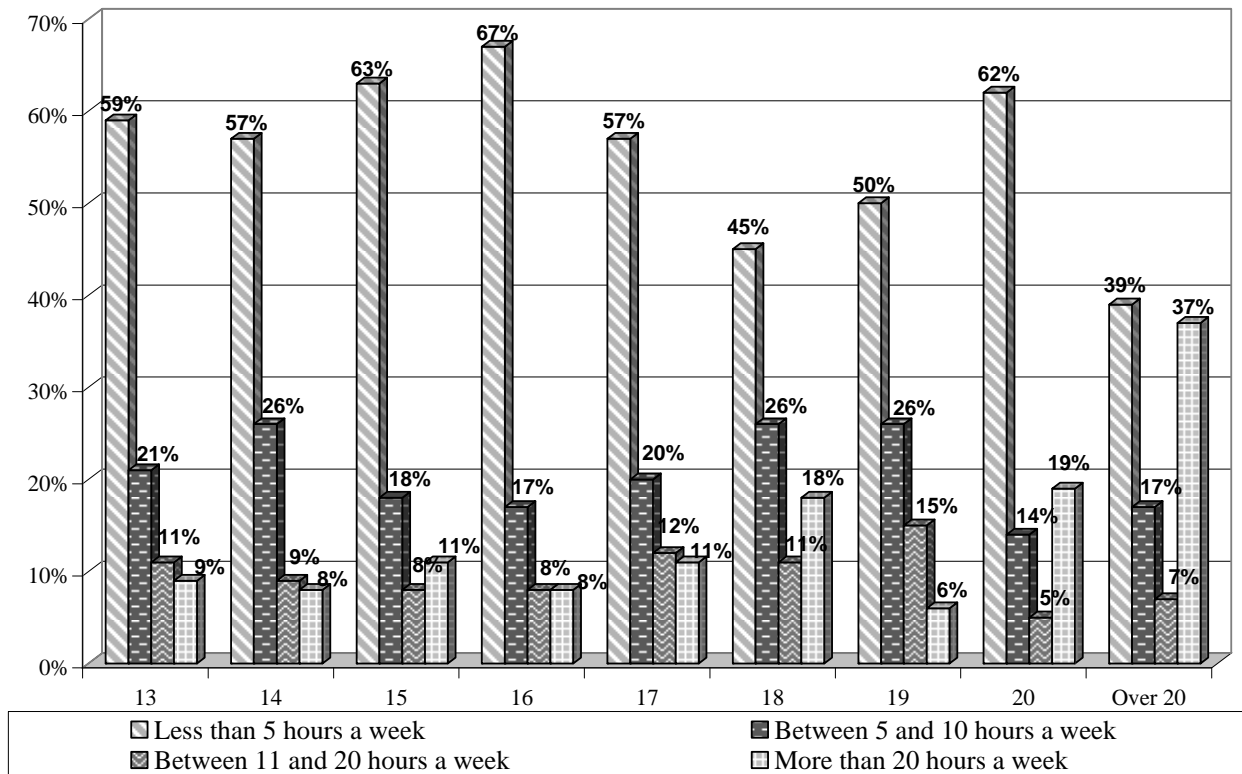
1.5 Game preferences for kids 12 and under



1.6 Time spent gaming – kids 12 and under



1.7 Time spent gaming – kids 13 and over



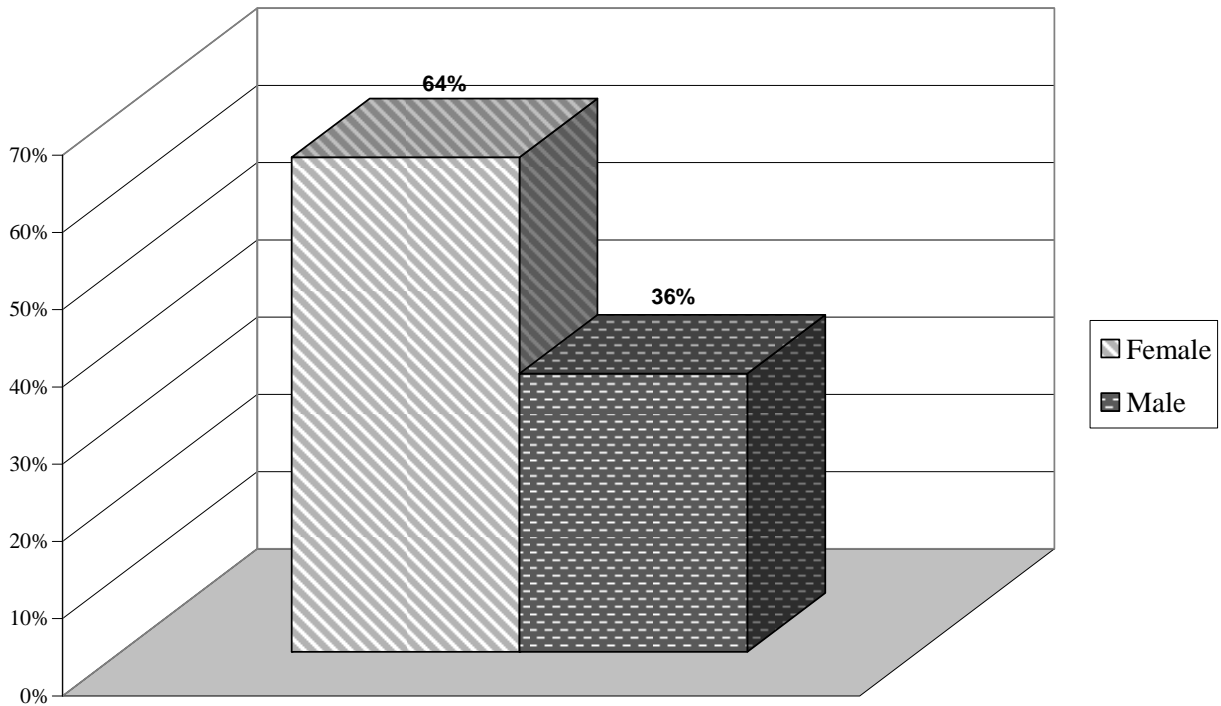
Respondents ranged in age from 12 and under, to 20 and older, with the youngest group representing 30% of responses, the 13 to 14 year old group representing 33% and the group from 15 to 20 years plus representing the remainder or 37%. There was a slight skew towards older respondents on the French survey relative to the English one.

In general, younger kids (12 and under) demonstrated an interest in the widest variety of games, but tended toward more socially interactive games and first-person shooter games, and a full 50% of kids 12 and under said they played online games for five hours a week or less, suggesting a healthy balance between their online and offline worlds.

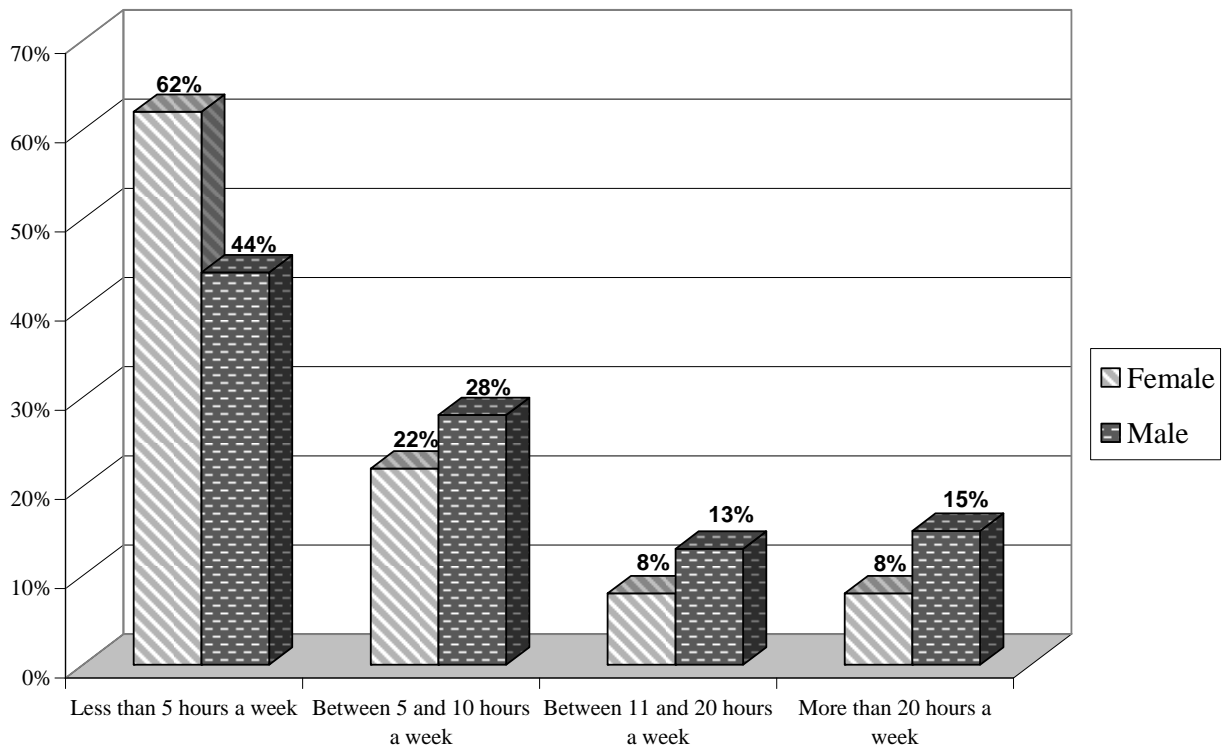
In our sample, younger age groups also seemed to be more concerned with the potentially addictive nature of video games. Concern about time spent online decreased as the age of respondents increased. Of pre-teens (12 and under) who participated in the survey, 20% said they completely or somewhat agreed when asked if they worried about playing online games too much (compared to 3% of respondents aged 18 and over) and 11% said they would not be able to stop gaming on their own (an additional 26% indicated that they weren't sure if they could stop on their own). These results suggest that many of the kids who responded to the survey were concerned about their own ability to control the amount of time they spend playing online games (which could be a precursor to problem gaming or gaming addiction).

Gender Trends

1.8 Respondents



1.9 Time spent gaming (male versus female)



The research literature on gender trends suggests that gaming is more a male issue than a female one. Lo, Wang and Fang (2005) found that approximately 80% of boys versus 20% of girls engage in online gaming. A recent Dutch study also confirmed that boys are more likely to play video games than girls, and that male players tend to spend more time on games than female players (Lemmens, Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). This research indicates that males who play online games are more at risk of becoming addicted to them than females.

In the current Kids Help Phone's survey, more responses were received from females than males (females 64% vs. males 36%). This gender split is representative of Kids Help Phone's service user trends, but also suggests that online gaming is an area of interest for both genders.

Overall, female respondents to Kids Help Phone's survey tended to express more concern than males about time spent playing online games, indicating that they may be more aware of the negative effects of playing online games.

Estimates from several research studies (e.g., Kirriemuir, 2005; Wang, Chen, Lin and Wang, 2008) indicate that kids and teens tend to play online games from 12 to 20 hours per week. The kids and teens who play over 20 hours a week are typified as being preoccupied with gaming, while those who play over 24 hours a week fall into an unhealthy gaming category (Waite, 2007). Males who responded to the Kids Help Phone survey indicated that they devote more time to gaming than the female respondents – with 62% of females saying they play less than 5 hours per week (compared to 44% of boys), while 15% of male respondents played more than 20 hours per week (compared to 8% of girls).

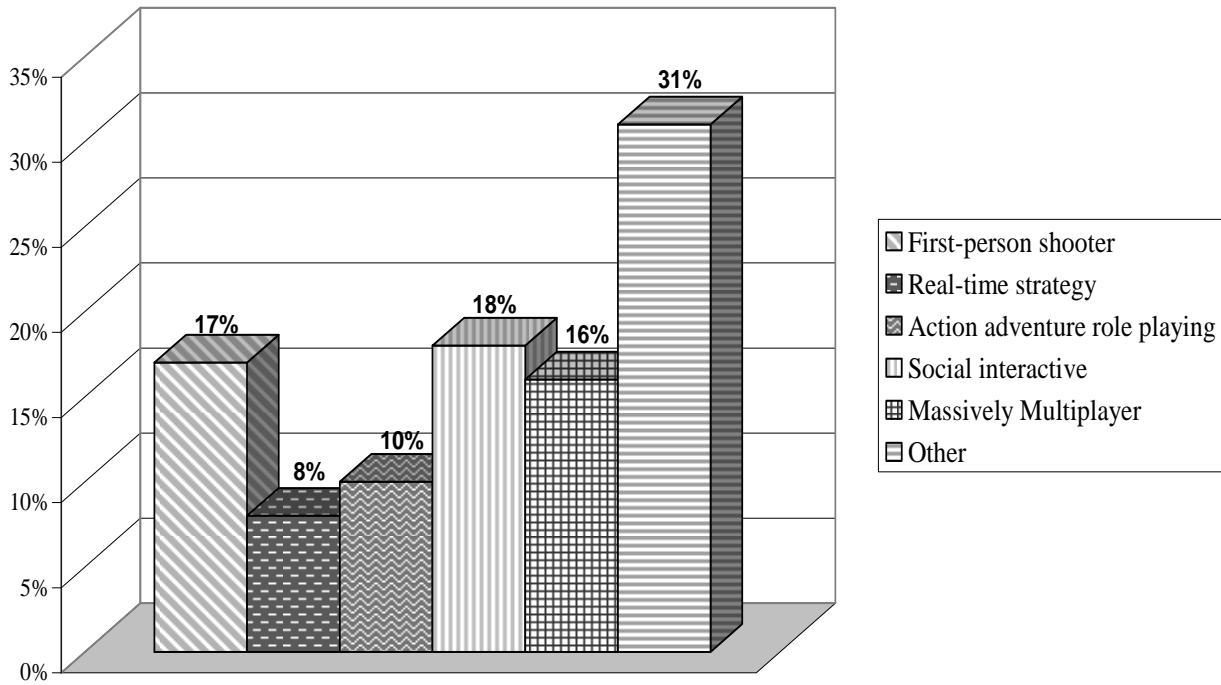
From the above results, we can see that males are devoting approximately twice the time to online gaming than females. Since the amount of time playing online games has been found to predict the severity of problem behaviour (Kirriemuir, 2005; Wang, Chen, Lin and Wang, 2008), the Kids Help Phone's survey suggests that boys are at greater risk of adopting problematic gaming habits.



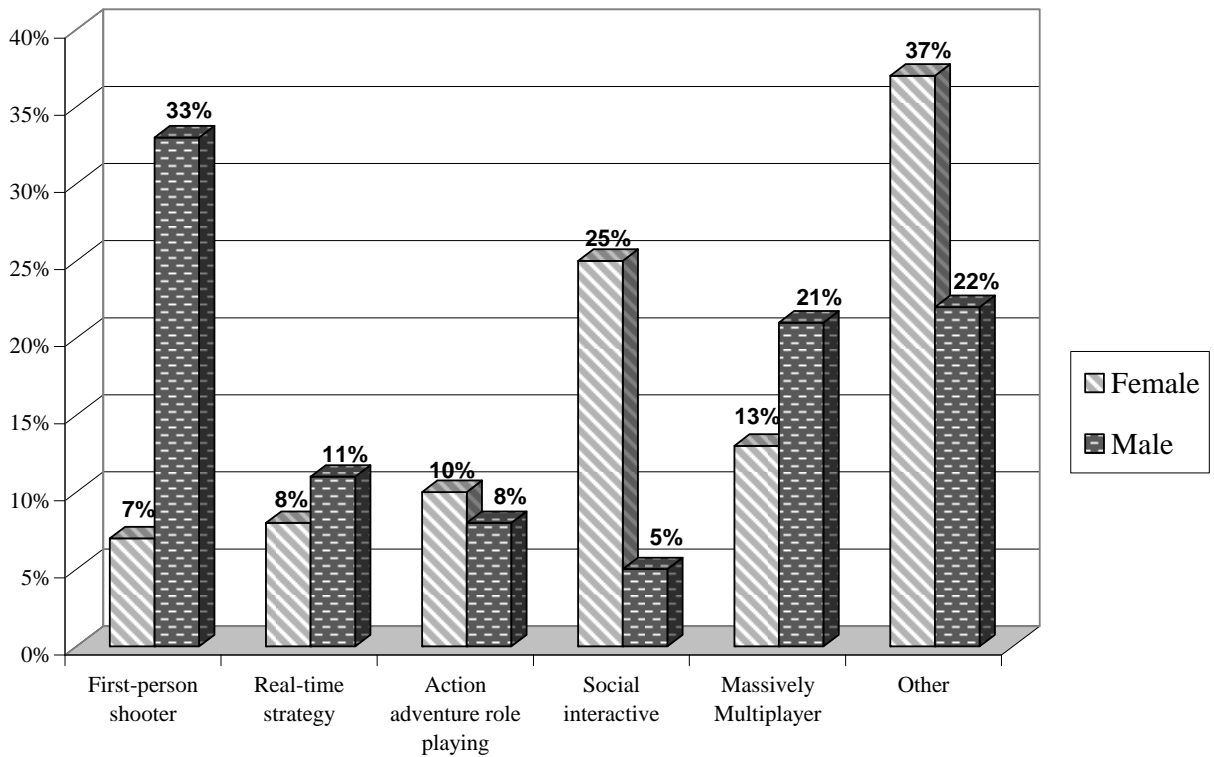
Males who responded to the Kids Help Phone survey indicated that they devote more time to gaming than the female respondents...

Game Trends

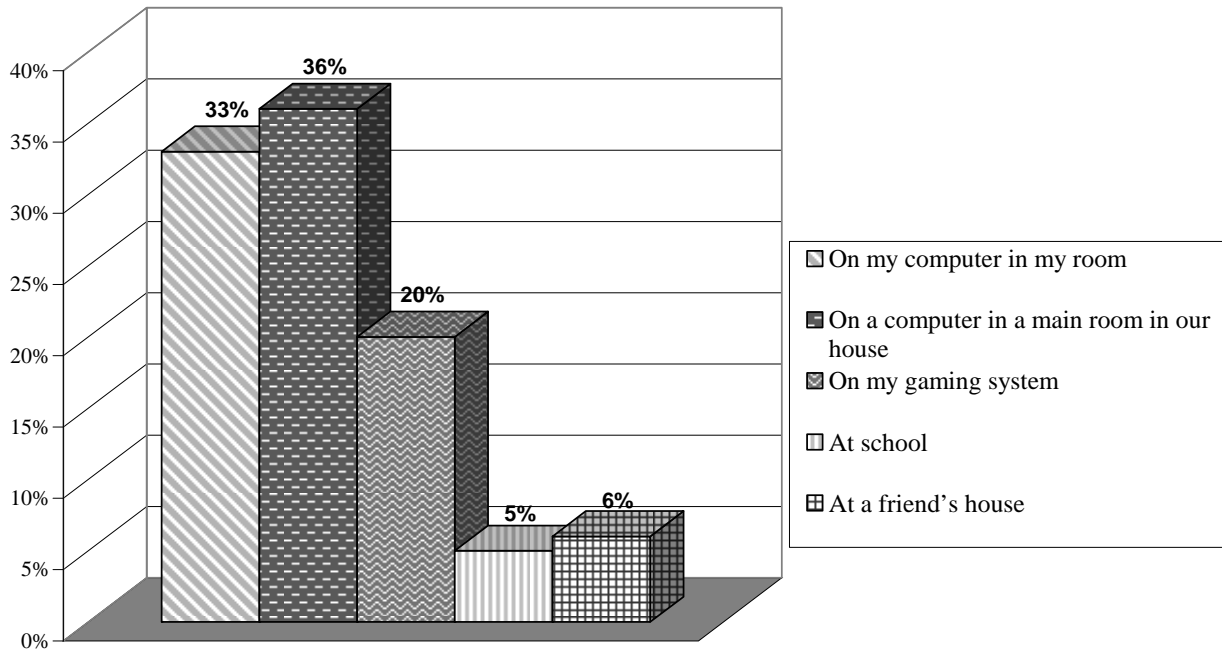
1.10 Game preferences



1.11 Game preferences (male versus female)



1.12 Location of gaming activity



Answers from respondents about their game preferences do not indicate that violent games are played more often than pro-social games. On the contrary, 31% chose “other” as their favourite online game. Of these responses, some interesting themes can be seen:

- Educational (e.g., Sudoku, Mind Benders, cards and puzzles, online safety games)
- Board games (e.g., Chess, Scrabble, Monopoly D)
- Sports (e.g., skateboarding, hockey, lacrosse, Wii Fit)
- Social Networking (e.g., Windows Live Messenger, Facebook)
- Social Interactive (e.g., Habbo)
- Musical (e.g., Rock Band, Guitar Hero)
- Domestic (e.g., makeover or room design games, dress-up, restaurant games, animal games)
- Pop Culture (e.g., Barbie Princess Palace games, Belle’s Beauty Boutique, Disney Games, Hannah Montana World Tour, Nancy Drew)

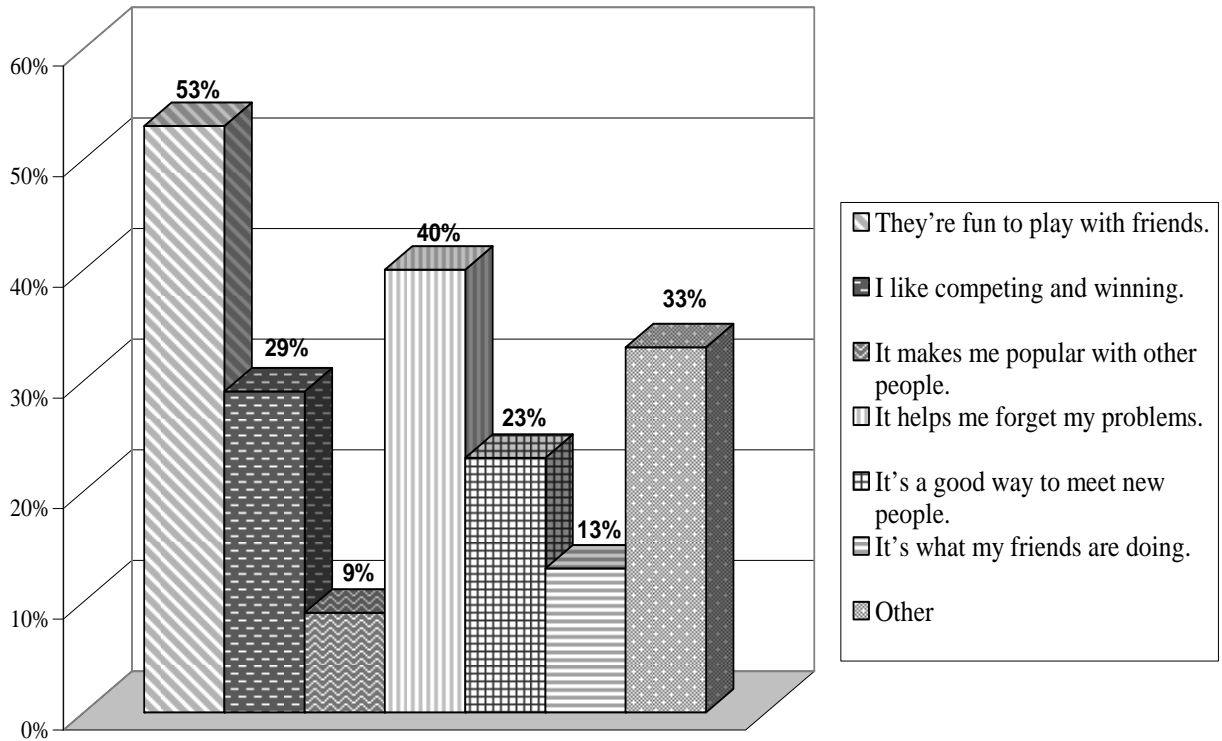
Many of the above responses indicate that a considerable number of kids engage in a variety of online games that enhance cognitive and social skills, while providing enjoyment of a positive nature compared to the games with violent content.

Females tend to prefer games in which they’re connecting with others and engaging in non-violent action. Of the survey respondents who selected social interactive as their favourite game type, 90% were girls. Of those who selected Action Adventure Role Playing, 69% were girls. In the literature, females are reported to like collaborative, social and visually interesting games (Agosto, 2004).

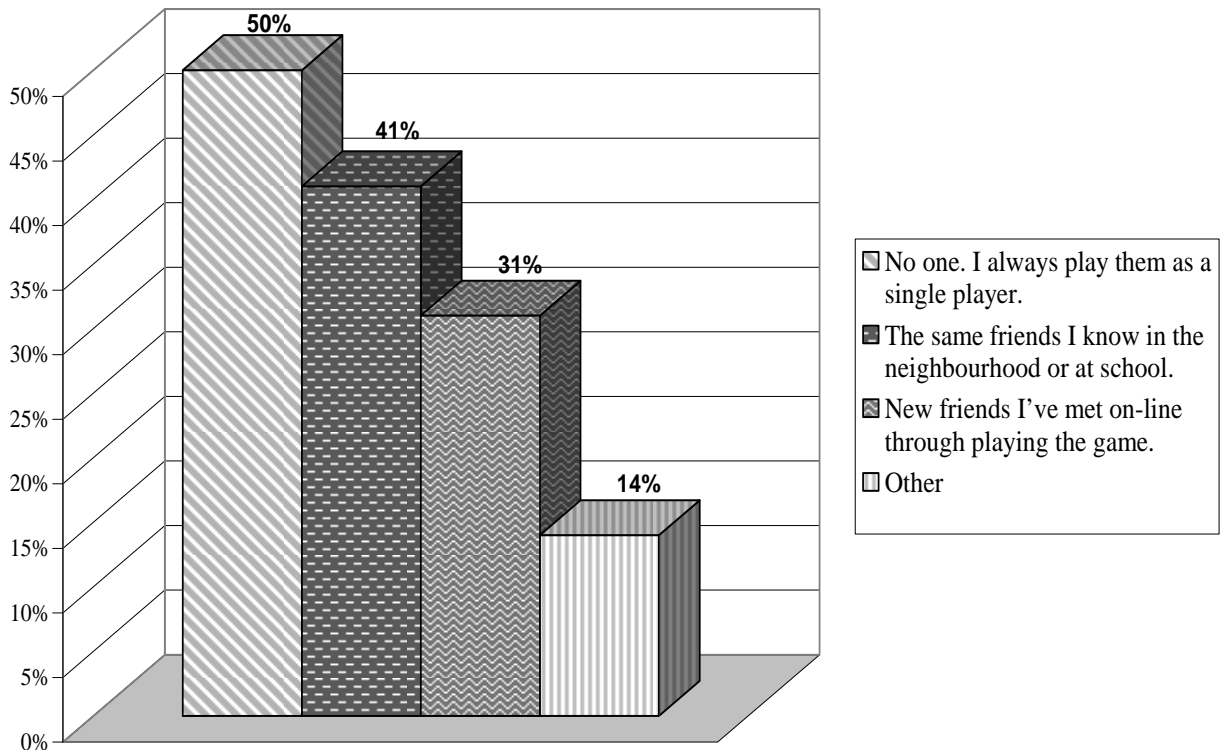
On the other hand, boys tend to gravitate more toward action games involving violence. Of the survey respondents who selected First-Person Shooter as their favourite game type, 72% were males. Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs) were also popular with boys, being selected by 48% of the males.

Playing Trends

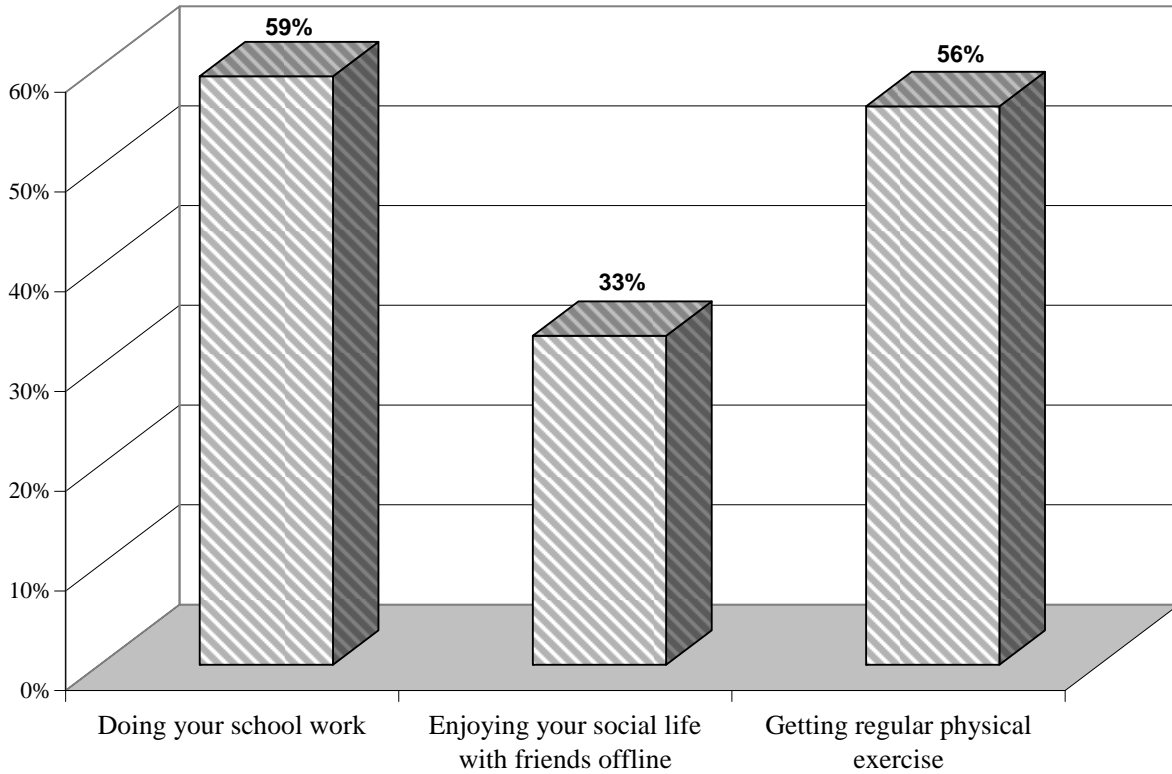
1.13 Reasons for playing online games



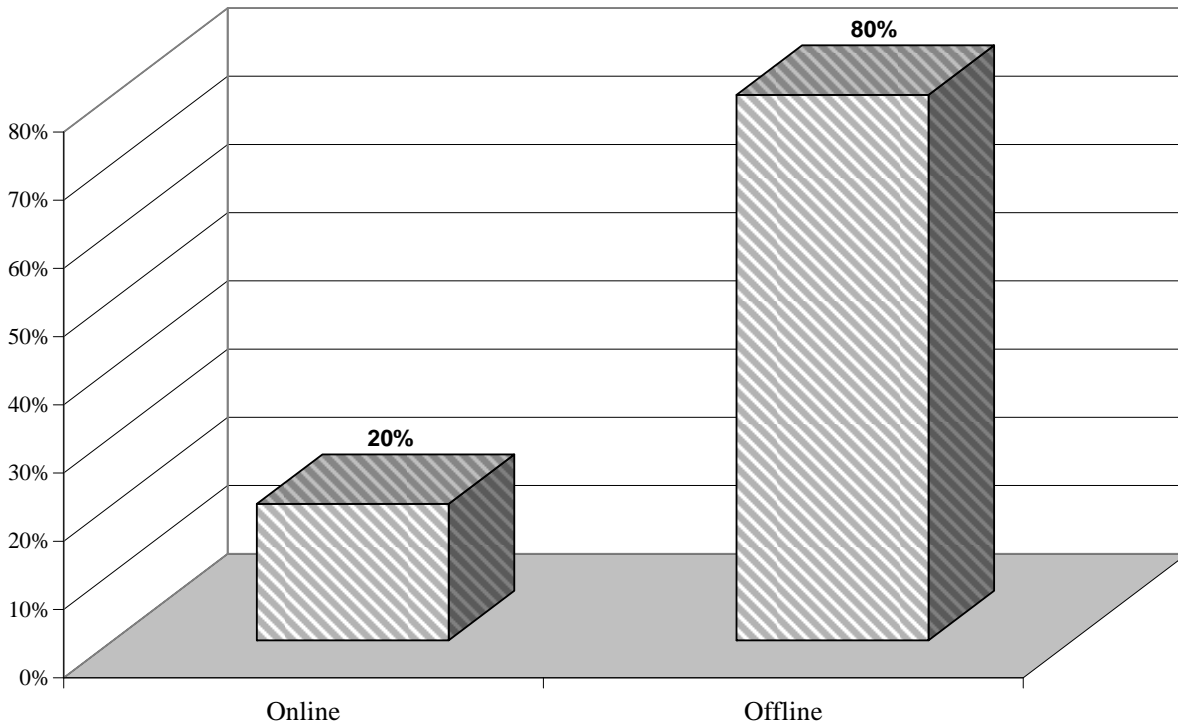
1.14 Who kids are playing online games with



1.15 Activities impacted by online gaming



1.16 If you had the choice to spend time gaming online or getting together with friends offline, which would you choose?



Motivation

The most popular reason cited for engaging in online gaming involved some element of friendship or popularity – they're fun to play with friends, it makes me popular with other people, it's a good way to meet new people, it's what my friends are doing (98%). It is obvious from these responses that a large number of kids get enjoyment from the social aspect of online games. This activity has the potential to raise self-esteem and allow kids to gain a sense of confidence and accomplishment (Shieh & Cheng, 2007). It can also enhance socializing and allow players to practice pro-social and cooperative skills (Squire, 2002).

The second most popular reason playing online involved using online gaming as a way to forget ones' problems (40%). That number gets higher (50%) among those who said they worry about playing online games too much.

"I know that I play games more when something is going wrong or becoming out of control in my life. Some kids might be like me and just want to get away from life altogether and enter a new animated online world."

"It's a way to escape our own life and be someone we can't be."

"It's easier to pretend you're someone amazing than to face the reality that you have issues. It's easier to make friends online who don't know you than to go out in the real world and let everyone see who you really are."

"I think they (me included) are spending more time because you can do so much more in an online game than you can do in the real world".

"MMOs are giving kids who feel different (the chance) to connect with each other to be accepted. The only problem is that people get too lost."

These types of responses speak to the social isolation and lack of self-esteem that can often drive some kids to over-engage in playing online games.

In terms of gender, both male and female respondents to the survey noted having fun with friends as their main reason for playing online games (53%). However, a large percentage of boys also indicated that competition was a main reason for playing (39%), while more girls turned to games to help them forget their problems (42%).

In total, 33% of kids selected "other" as their reason for spending time online gaming. These "other" responses clearly fall into two distinct categories: boredom and emotional support.

"Bullied, bored, no resources; I mean literally nothing!"

"There aren't enough things to do. Rec. centres are being closed because of this recession."

"It's fun, helps relieve stress."

"I like doing it for fun and it calms me down if I am angry."

"It helps pass the time because my friends don't live near me."

“When I play online role playing games, I feel much stronger than I am in real life. When I defeat an opponent or something I feel good....”

Thus, passing the time and occupying one’s self were very common responses to this question, as were reflections on the effect of raising self-esteem and stress relief as an outcome of gaming.

Who Kids Are Playing With

Just over 50% of kids in the sample indicated that they play online games as a single player. This large group of kids is also engaging in online games for reasons other than having fun with friends (such as relaxing, entertaining oneself, challenging one’s cognitive skills, forgetting problems, having nothing else to do).

Thirty one per cent of kids report they are playing online with people they meet through their games. When asked, the majority of youth said they are only playing online with these people and know how to stay safe. However, this indication that youth are meeting new people through these online games, outside their circle of real life friends, is concerning.

“Gaming online is a social activity and makes it easy to interact with other people. It also guarantees anonymity and allows a person to become whomever they wish.”

“[I play with] the people who are also playing the game. I don’t go off and meet them though, just play the game with them.”

Impact on Offline Life

Our survey results are clear in suggesting that kids in Canada feel online gaming is interfering with other areas of their lives.

In total, 59% reported that gaming gets in the way of their school work and 56% said it gets in the way of regular exercise (e.g., skating, playing sports or biking with friends). Moreover, for those playing more hours per week (i.e., those playing between 11 and 20 hours per week), 61% said gaming got in the way of both their school work and 61% said it interfered with getting regular physical exercise. These results suggest that the more hours played per week, the greater the negative impact on school work and regular exercise. Other negative physical effects cited in the literature include neck pain, elbow pain, and tenosynovitis (“nintendinitis”), obesity and poor cardiovascular fitness (Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield & Gross, 2000).

Another area of significant impact is time spent socializing offline with friends. When asked about the choice of being offline with friends or spending time online, 80% of respondents said they would choose to be with their friends offline.

If this is true, then why are some youth spending excessive time gaming online instead of doing what they say they’d like to be doing – spending time with friends? The answer may lie in the magnetic draw of gaming online (the effect of cognitive ‘flow’). Many kids acknowledge that they can spend lengthy periods engaged in online games without realizing how much time has passed. For some respondents, though, the choice to play games online rather than spending

time with friends offline may be a function of their feelings of low self-esteem and social anxiety.

“Maybe because they have no friends, and they think no one cares and they get bullied when they go anywhere so they stay home and play games all the time.”

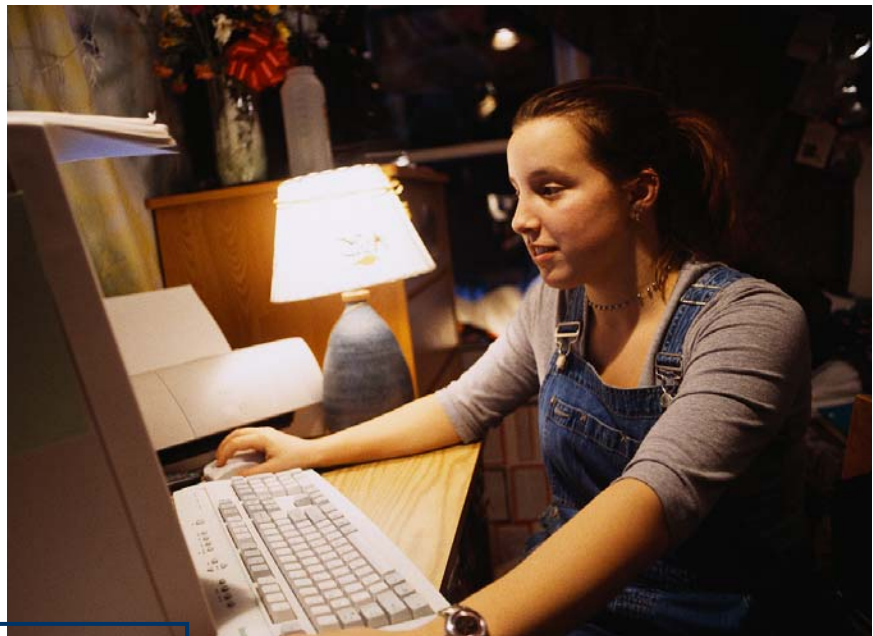
“I believe it is that kids like me are afraid to take off our masks at school so instead we show ourselves on the Internet where online friends can be made.”

“Because they have no friends or maybe the outside world is just too hard for them”

“Because you can meet new people and you can be someone you’re not, i.e., because we don’t have to worry about people mocking your style or appearance, if we have a boyfriend or girlfriend, it doesn’t have those high expectations.”

“Maybe in our world now, especially in middle and secondary schools there are cliques or groups and kids outside the cliques who feel unimportant or out of place or even hated, cannot think about it playing online”.

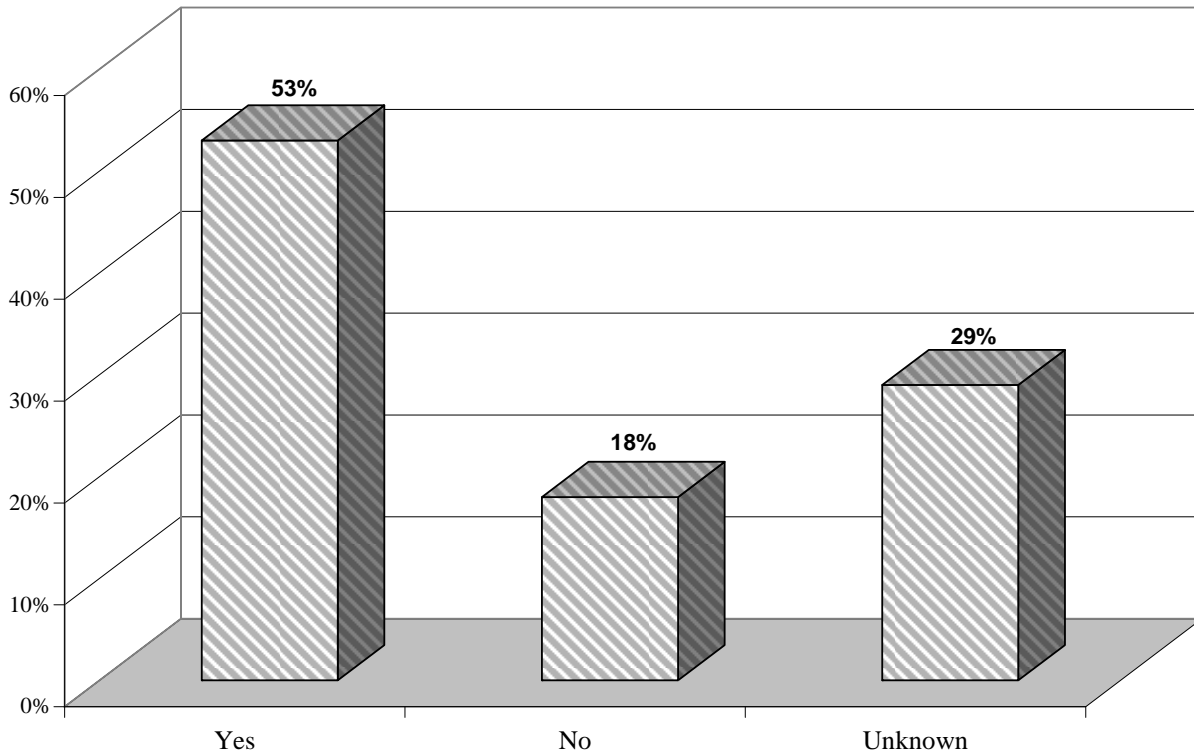
Research studies have supported the notion of kids turning to online games when they are feeling socially anxious and are experiencing low self esteem (Wu & Liu, 2007; Young, 1998).



Many kids acknowledge that they can spend lengthy periods engaged in online games without realizing how much time has passed.

Parental Supervision of Game Playing

1.17 Do parents know their kids' online gaming habits?



For many adults, the Internet itself is largely unknown territory. Today's kids, on the other hand, have learned from a very young age how to use this technology, so it is an environment with which they are intimately familiar and navigate with ease.

More than 47% of respondents to this survey indicated that their parents don't, or may not know, what games they are playing online. Moreover, 33% of respondents reported they are playing games on computers located in their bedroom instead of in main rooms within the house where parents or guardians can observe the games being played. This lack of parental understanding and supervision, combined with playing online games in rooms isolated from the rest of the family, may result in kids playing games which are not age-appropriate or which have not been set up to ensure maximum safety and privacy protection.

For example, of the total respondents who said they prefer MMOs, 42% indicated that they are playing most often in their rooms, compared to respondents who prefer social interactive games, 47% of whom are playing in the main room of the house. Due to the social nature of MMO games (i.e., external forums, chats, clans or guilds) and their often violent content, MMO players can become more and more involved with others online for increasingly longer periods of time. This can set the stage for increasing alienation from family and friends, desensitization to violence and increased aggression, and addiction to online games.

Related to the question of parents' awareness of games played is their monitoring of the time their children are playing them. Forty-four per cent of the survey respondents said their parents do not limit their time gaming, but that they themselves limit their own time; 35% said they can play online games as often as they want.

"...parents want to be their kids' friends and therefore don't set limits..."

"Many kids don't have caring parents who take care of them, they don't have after-school activities to go to, and they don't know what to do with themselves, so they spend their time playing games"

"[Some kids] secretly go on games their parents don't allow them to go on and they get addicted to it."

"Games are made to be more addictive these days so the developers can make more money, and when one kid starts playing a game and thinks it's good he/she will tell their friends and the news of the game will spread like a plague, and since the parents aren't putting up much of a resistance the kids get what they want."

"Kids are addicted to playing. And it can get really bad and that is why I think that parents should set a time limit so that the kids still get to do physical activity, and play with real friends instead of the ones on the computer that you meet."

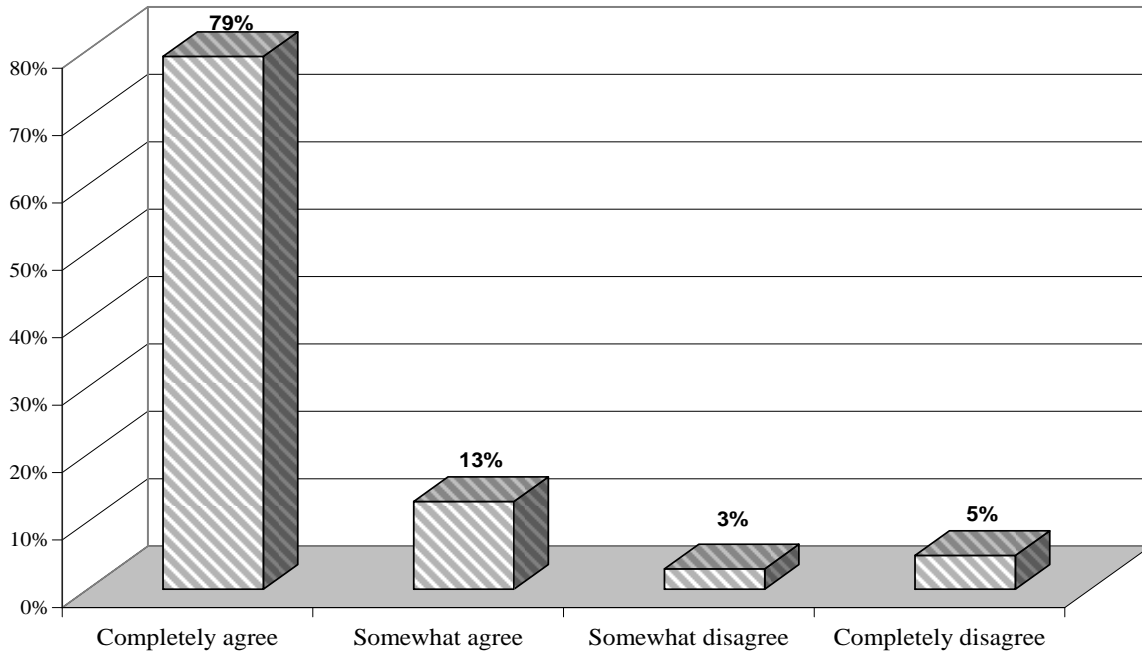
Many parents may not be aware of the ways in which they can monitor and/or limit their child's gaming behaviour. For example, all games are rated with respect to content and suggested age. The graphics on the actual game case are very revealing as well. Of additional assistance to adults are the parental controls on all modern consoles. For example, Xbox 360, a very popular gaming system, provides parents with Access Restriction via a password they can set. This ensures that only games with specific ratings can be played and sets the length of time they can be played (CBC: Fifth Estate, March 6, 2009).



Many parents may not be aware of the ways in which they can monitor and/or limit their child's gaming behaviour.

Privacy and Personal Safety in Online Gaming

1.18 “I know what I should and shouldn’t do in order to protect my privacy and stay safe when playing games online.”



When asked if they had ever met or talked to someone they met online, 61% of the respondents said “no, never”. This suggests that a substantial percentage of kids are aware of the dangers of talking or meeting with someone they met online. However, a concerning number (17%) acknowledged having talked or met (more than once) with someone they met online.

Of the kids who completed the Kids Help Phone survey, 79% “completely agree” that they know what they should and shouldn’t do in order to protect their privacy and stay safe while playing games online. This response is reassuring; however, there are 5% who said they do not know how to keep themselves safe online.

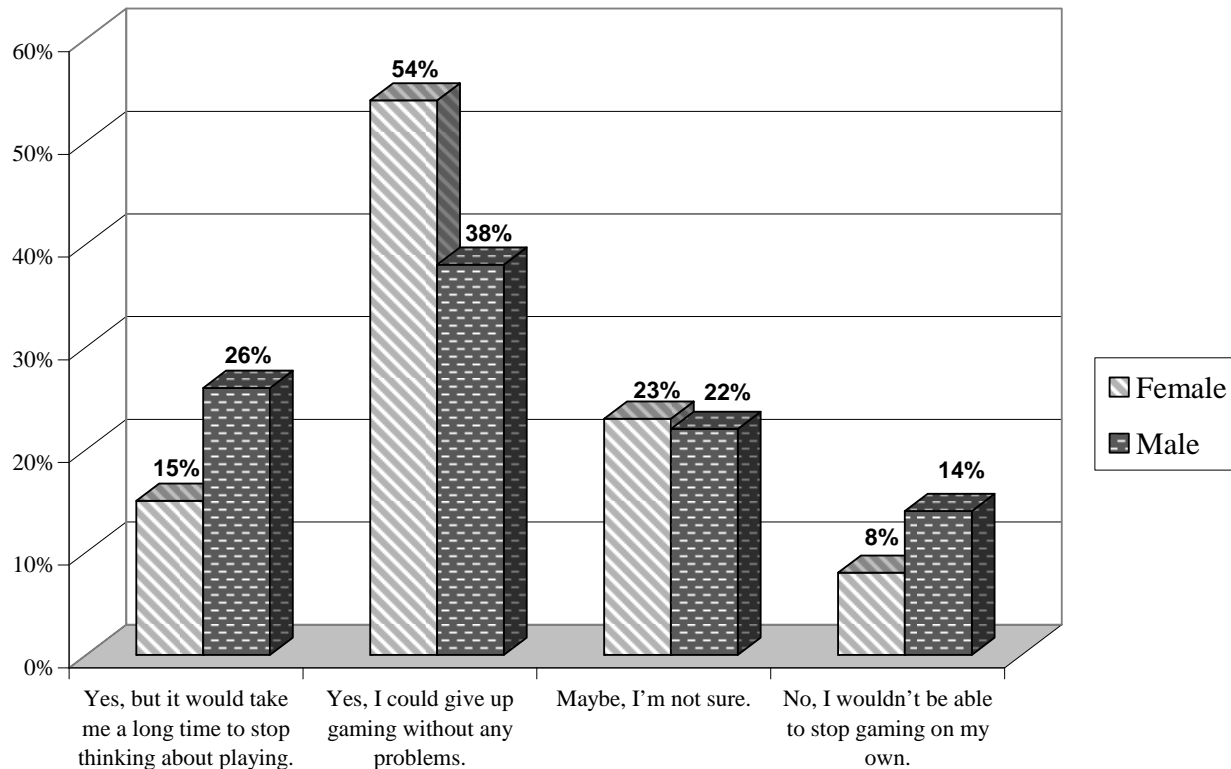
“Sometimes someone can say that they are the same age as you are and then they ask to meet you somewhere, and then you find out that the person is a 40-year-old man that likes to take young kids.”

“People do not know who they are talking to, and it could be anyone in the world.”

The number of media reports of serious incidents resulting from kids’ lack of awareness of how to protect themselves online supports the concerning reality that some kids truly do not know how to protect themselves while playing online games, or that while kids say they know how to protect themselves online, they are not necessarily following the steps required to protect themselves. (A 2008 Kids Help Phone report on online safety found that while 71% of kids said they know how to stay safe online, 10% said they often met up with people they met online and did not know offline and 13% said they sometimes gave out personal information to someone they didn’t know offline.)

ONLINE GAMING ADDICTION

1.19 “I could stop playing online games today”



When asked if they felt that online gaming was addictive, an overwhelming majority of kids (79%) indicated that they believed that online gaming could be addictive. While all responses were anecdotal, many kids recognized that time spent online gaming could get out of hand.

“I think that a lot of youth today have adapted to computers too much, and explore the Internet, and find new and interesting things to play [games]. When they find these things out, they get addicted, and when they get addicted, they don't want to give it up. Then it becomes a habit, playing those games. They probably don't even realize that they are spending a heck of a lot more time on the computer/Internet than they do hanging out with their friends and family.”

“Yes, because my friend was addicted to games online and when his mom told him he was grounded, he ran away. He didn't come back for a whole week.”

“I'm an addict. Some of the questions I only answer with my recent gaming schedule, but before I would spend 24 hours playing a video game. It is addictive, it's like a drug, without the criminal record.”

“Yes. I'm addicted to it and it is destroying my life. Once you get into the habit or venting all the anger in typing or something like killing monsters on RPG games that makes you feel good so you do it more and more.”

Other youth suggested that the lack of parental monitoring leads to problem gaming.

“It is addictive, that is a fact especially with MMORPGS. The fact that you can indirectly interact with so many people by doing something directly with them through the game, means you are interacting with them. This can be dangerous, especially for young kids who do not have other things (such as worrying about their future or life) to distract them. I think the parents should be responsible for keeping their kids at bay before they tip over and fall into an unacceptable behaviour...”

The majority of the kids who responded to the survey considered themselves in control of the amount of time they spent gaming and felt readily able to stop playing completely. Of the overall respondents, 48% said, “yes, I could give up gaming without any problems”, whereas 19% said “yes, but it would take a long time for me to stop thinking about gaming”.

A widely cited 2007 American study by Harris Interactive (see <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NEWS/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1196>) found that 94% of the boys surveyed play video games at least once a month. The study found that the average 13 to 18 year old plays 14 hours a week. For most of these kids, a game is just a game. However, 8.5% of youth gamers, age 8 to 18, can be classified as clinically “addicted” to their online games. In the Kids Help Phone survey, 11% of all respondents indicated they could not stop gaming on their own (64% males and 36% females).

While there is no recognized entity for “Gaming Addiction” in the Diagnostics and Statistical Manual, 4th Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000), Griffiths and Wood (2000) have postulated that online games can lead to behaviours dangerously close to pathological gambling with slot machines. These researchers suggest that the term “gaming” could be substituted for “gambling” in the definitions of the addictive behaviours associated with gambling in the DSM-IV-TR:

1. Showing preoccupation with the activity (e.g., planning the next experience, reliving previous games, getting to another level).
2. Has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop the activity.
3. Uses the activity as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression, etc.
4. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with the activity.
5. Has jeopardized or lost a relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of the activity.

There is controversy as to whether obsessive online gaming is a true addiction. However, there is some evidence of the release of the neurochemical substance dopamine in the brain of gamers (Koepp, Gunn, Lawrence, Cunningham, Dagher, Jones, Brooks, Bench & Grasby, 1998), as is present in other types of addictive behaviour and, as mentioned earlier, a number of deaths have been attributed to gaming addiction, either directly (suicide or neglect of needs) or indirectly (i.e., collateral damage such as the neglect of dependents, loss of financial resources) (www.olganon.ca, n.d.).

Like other forms of addiction, support services for gaming addicts have begun to develop across Canada and the United States. While not yet as widely known as the Alcoholics Anonymous network, On-Line Gamers Anonymous (OLG-Anon) is available to support people with video game-related problems. On-Line Gamers Anonymous was founded in Nashville, Tennessee by Liz Woolley following the suicide of her 21-year-old son Shawn on Thanksgiving Day, 2001. Shawn had been a lifelong video gaming fan, but his mother noted that his personality changed dramatically after he began to play 'Everquest'. Woolley recalled of her son, "within three months, he had quit his job, got evicted from his apartment and become depressed and anti-social. He actually replaced his family and friends with the game." (Campbell, Colin and Gatehouse, Jonathon, November 2008). It is clear from his mother's description that Shawn fit the criteria for online gaming addiction and that his tragic suicide was in part a consequence of it.

In early November, 2008, OLG-Anon's first Canadian chapter was being launched by Brad Dorrance, a man who tried to commit suicide in December 2007 after gaming had severely impacted his life (Campbell, Colin and Gatehouse, Jonathon, November 2008). The organization's website (www.olganon.org) features information about online gaming addiction and provides suggestions on how to get help for this problem.

The Kids Help Phone survey asked kids for their ideas about how to assist a friend with a gaming addiction and many kids suggested trying to gradually 'wean' or 'ease' a friend off gaming.

"I would support him in downloading a game limiter."

"I'd slowly and assertively bring up the topic so I could efficiently help them with his problem."

"Talk to them about the joys not on the computer and the disadvantages online".

"I would say 'dude, you have to stop, you're addicted' and if that doesn't work I would say 'talk to an adult or something because you're out of control'."

"I would make a deal with them that we would both cut down on our hours and spend the time together so that neither of us broke the deal, that way they weren't going through it alone".

"I'd look to see what other factors could be influencing their need for time online – maybe they're feeling lonely or frustrated with school. I'd try to work with them to help remedy that problem first, and then see if the need for gaming wore off a little once they became happier with their everyday life".

The responses from many of the kids reflect their knowledge of the complex world of gaming, their ability to detect problem gaming behaviour in their friends (and sometimes in themselves), and their concern and caring about these friends. Their answers also reflect thoughtful and creative solutions for helping their friends and their determination to make it work.

"I would make a deal with them that we would both cut down on our hours and spend the time together so that neither of us broke the deal, that way they weren't going through it alone."

RESPONSIBLE GAMING: WHAT KIDS CAN DO

It's clear from kids' survey responses that many are playing online games far more than they feel they should. In light of this, they offered some of their own ideas for playing safely, staying healthy and enjoying a social life with family and friends offline. Some of these ideas are included in the following recommendations for responsible gaming:

- Never give out your name, address, phone number, e-mail address or other identifying information to people you have met online.
- Never arrange to meet someone in person whom you've met online, unless you have talked about this with your parent or guardian and/or are accompanied by them to a meeting.
- Don't play your games in your bedroom. Playing in a common area of the house where other people are around and can ensure you don't get too drawn into a game.
- Before getting too attached to a particular game, try varying the games you play so you don't invest too much of your time playing.
- Make homework a priority. If it helps, make a schedule of when you'll do homework and when you'll spend time online each week.
- Get enough sleep and log off your game at least a half hour before you go to bed so that you can fall asleep more easily.
- Make sure you get regular exercise so that you keep healthy physically and mentally.
- Spend time with your friends and family; having a social life is important to your overall well being.
- If you live in a community where there aren't a lot of resources, try to get together with friends and think of activities you could enjoy together; ask teachers or other adults to help you if you need ideas.
- If you find yourself getting irritable when you're asked to stop gaming or if spending time online becomes more enjoyable/important to you than being with friends and family, you'll know it's time to do other things more often!
- Let go of your online commitments. (For example, are you part of a group, a team or a "guild" that takes up too much time? Do you have moderating or administrative responsibilities?)
- If you play overnight/ miss meal break and want to come back to healthier life style, ask your parents to help you stay away. You won't like them in short term, but you will thank them soon.

If you or someone you know has a gaming problem, or if you're feeling lonely or isolated from friends and peers, reach out for help from an adult like a teacher, coach, librarian or relative you think you might be able to trust. You can also call or send a post to Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868 or kidshelpphone.ca).

RESPONSIBLE GAMING: WHAT ADULTS CAN DO

To encourage responsible gaming in young people today, adults first need to learn more about the Internet and video games. Experts agree that parents and other adults have a lot of catching up to do in this regard. Here are some helpful recommendations:

- Keep your family's computer in a common area of your home so that you can monitor your kids' online activities.
- Check the content and ratings of games and learn how you can monitor their modes of play, i.e., gaming system, hand held, downloads. If you are willing to let your child play games not rated for their age, spend time with them to look at the content and discuss the action with them. Share your opinions and values while watching it.
- Ask your child or teen to teach you about their favourite online games: how they are played and what makes them interesting and appealing to play.
- Go online with your child/teen. This will not only strengthen your relationship, but you'll also be able to see the positive and negative effects that playing has on your child.
- Keep abreast of the rapid changes in gaming technology and talk to your kids about how to maintain their privacy/safety online.
- Only buy games that are recommended for your child's age range. This will help ensure that they aren't exposed to inappropriate material or content beyond their level of development and maturity.
- Be supportive of your child/teen's online gaming, but negotiate reasonable rules and time limits that are age-appropriate; model this behaviour by not spending excessive amounts of time online. If your child/teen lives alternately with another parent, try to maintain consistency in approaches to your child's online gaming activity.
- Make homework a priority.
- Make regular physical exercise and outdoor activity a priority.
- Ensure your child/teen gets enough sleep at night in order function well; they should stop playing their online games at least a half hour before going to bed to avoid being over-stimulated visually and mentally.
- Make sure you're spending time with your child/teen on a regular basis and engage in activities you all find enjoyable.
- Make sure your child/teen has access to activities other than online gaming and encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities.
- Watch for any negative changes in your child's behaviour and guard against any increase in their online gaming. Pay particular attention to your child if they appear introverted, lonely or isolated or if they are dealing with family problems.

- Do not take away either the computer or the game; it will only lead to kids finding other ways or locations to play. Instead talk about it with them and negotiate the use of the computer and game.

The above suggestions will hopefully help parents, adults and educators to create a balance for kids between playing online games and engaging in other activities and, as Dr. Young said over a decade ago, to assign online games their proper role in children's lives (1998, p. 146).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Children and youth today have grown up with technology in a way that no other generation has. The fact that the Internet is accessible to them virtually everywhere they go – home, school, coffee shops or retailers with wireless access, over cell phones – adds to the immersion young people have in the online world.

As kids continue to turn online for many aspects of their lives, it is only natural that they turn to the virtual world for their entertainment and social interaction. That online gaming often mixes these two things is one of the reasons that this activity has become so pervasive among kids, teens and young adults.

In addition to fulfilling the need for interaction with friends and peers, online gaming is accessible and acceptable to a wider group of people than many other activities – it appeals to both boys and girls, has something to offer kids of all ages, can be done at any hour of the day or night and, thanks to free programs and sites, can be accessible to people of varying economic levels. As developers continue to advance the abilities of gaming technology (providing better graphics, more complex challenges and more interactive options), the online world becomes more and more appealing to young people.

Despite some negative press in recent years, online gaming does offer young people benefits, such as improving memory, building knowledge, developing better eye-hand coordination, etc. It also offers youth who are isolated (either geographically or socially) a quick and, to an extent, safe way to connect with others. However, online gaming can have negative impacts. The Kids Help Phone survey provides intriguing insights into to kids' perceptions of online gaming and the dangers associated with it. Some of these negative impacts evident in the results of the current survey include:

- Online games were reported to interfere with both school work and physical exercise by the majority of respondents.
- Online games were reported to be potentially addictive for about 11% of kids surveyed (i.e., kids reported they were unable to stop playing online games on their own).
- There are concerns about the amount of time online games are played by kids in Northern Territories (the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut), which is much higher than for the rest of the country.
- Video games are not well understood nor is their use well supervised by parents/guardians.

Adults and kids both need to be aware of the potential problems and educate themselves on what to do if they feel their gaming, or a friend's gaming, is becoming a problem. It is clear from the responses to the Kids Help Phone survey that parents need to get more involved in their kids' gaming habits – learn about gaming, the types of games kids are playing and the interactive features of each; set limits on how much time young people can play each day or each week and enforce those limits (e.g., ensure kids aren't sneaking an extra few hours of gaming in when parents are asleep); ensure that kids' online world isn't negatively impacting school, their social life or health; ensure kids are interacting with friends and peers offline as well as online.

Most importantly, both adults and kids need to be aware that gaming can become a problem, leading to an unhealthy obsession or even addiction in some individuals. Excessive time spent online, becoming consumed with a game or with the idea of gaming, and playing in isolation can all be signs of problem gaming. Everyone needs to be aware of these signs and know where to seek help when someone needs assistance to reduce or stop gaming. Kids Help Phone is a service that offers information, referral and professional counselling for kids experiencing online gaming problems and we are only a phone call or a web post away for the kids who need us.

As technology continues to progress, and as the Internet continues to provide new and interesting ways for youth to entertain themselves, online gaming will continue to grow in accessibility and popularity. More in depth research needs to be done to understand the factors that influence the amount of time kids spend gaming and how to help them overcome problem gaming behaviours.

By taking an active role in our kids' online gaming activities, by learning about the benefits and pitfalls of the online world, and by making an effort to talk to children and youth, not just about gaming, but also about the potential addictive habits of this activity, we can help ensure that young people in Canada avoid the potential health and social risks associated with online life.

Most importantly, both adults and kids need to be aware that gaming can become a problem, leading to an unhealthy obsession or even addiction in some individuals.



Kids Help Phone's Online Survey

Kids Help Phone is doing a study on gaming and you can help! It will only take a few minutes of your time, but it will help us understand how youth are gaming online.

The answers you give are 100% anonymous.

We will be using the responses and stories you share with us in our study. Any stories you share could be reprinted word-for-word in our report. We'll be releasing the study to the media and on this website in May 2009. But remember, we will never know who you are and we never ask for personal information. Your answers are always completely anonymous!

Thanks for helping us with our study!

About You

1. Where are you from?
 - a. British Columbia
 - b. Alberta
 - c. Saskatchewan
 - d. Manitoba
 - e. Ontario
 - f. Quebec
 - g. New Brunswick
 - h. Nova Scotia
 - i. Prince Edward Island
 - j. Newfoundland and Labrador
 - k. Yukon
 - l. Northwest Territories
 - m. Nunavut

2. Are you:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender

3. How old are you?
 - a. Under 12
 - b. 12
 - c. 13
 - d. 14
 - e. 15
 - f. 16
 - g. 17
 - h. 18
 - i. 19
 - j. 20
 - k. Over 20

About Online Gaming:

1. How many hours a week do you spend playing online games?
 - a. Less than 5 hours a week
 - b. Between 5 and 10 hours a week
 - c. Between 11 and 20 hours a week
 - d. More than 20 hours a week

2. What is your favourite type of game?
 - a. First-person shooter (for example, Doom or Call of Duty)
 - b. Real-time strategy (for example, Age of Empires or Prince of Persia)
 - c. Action adventure role playing (for example, Mass Effect or Astro Empire)
 - d. Social interactive (for example, Second Life or Webkinz)
 - e. Massively Multiplayer (for example, World of Warcraft – with external forums, chats, clans or guilds, etc).
 - f. Other

3. Where do you play most often?
 - a. On my computer in my room.
 - b. On a computer in a main room in our house.
 - c. On my gaming system.
 - d. At school.
 - e. At a friend's house.

4. Does your favourite game require you to purchase points, weapons or other things online in order to play the game?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. What is the main reason (or reasons) you play online games? (check as many as apply to you):
 - a. They're fun to play with friends.
 - b. I like competing and winning.
 - c. It makes me popular with other people.
 - d. It helps me forget my problems.
 - e. It's a good way to meet new people.
 - f. It's what my friends are doing.
 - g. Other.

6. Who do you play online games with? (check as many as apply to you):
 - a. No one. I always play them as a single player.
 - b. The same friends I know in the neighbourhood or at school.
 - c. New friends I've met on-line through playing the game.

7. Do your parents/guardians know which games you're playing online?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know

8. Do your parents/guardians limit your gaming time?
 - a. Yes, they've set a maximum number of hours I can play every week.
 - b. Yes, we talked together to set a limit.
 - c. No, I can play as often as I want.
 - d. No, but I limit my own time online.
9. Does your online gaming get in the way of: (check as many as apply to you)
 - a. Doing your school work.
 - b. Enjoying your social life with friends offline.
 - c. Getting regular physical exercise (like skating, playing sports or biking with friends)
10. If you had the choice to spend time gaming online or getting together with friends offline, which would you choose?
 - a. Spending time online
 - b. Spending time offline

Tell us how you feel about the following statements.

11. "I get upset/angry when I'm asked to turn off my game to do things like homework, chores or spend time with my offline friends."
 - a. Completely agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Somewhat disagree
 - d. Completely disagree
12. "I often say no to doing things with friends or family offline so that I can spend more time gaming online."
 - a. Completely agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Somewhat disagree
 - d. Completely disagree
13. "I've met or talked with someone offline who I met through my online gaming."
 - a. Yes, more than once.
 - b. Yes, but just one time.
 - c. No, but I've thought about it.
 - d. No, never.
14. "I know what I should and shouldn't do in order to protect my privacy and stay safe when playing games online."
 - a. Completely agree
 - b. Somewhat agree
 - c. Somewhat disagree
 - d. Completely disagree

15. "I worry that I play online games too much."
- Completely agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Completely disagree
16. "I could stop playing online games today."
- Yes, but it would take me a long time to stop thinking about playing.
 - Yes, I could give up gaming without any problems.
 - Maybe, I'm not sure.
 - No, I wouldn't be able to stop gaming on my own.

We want your opinion:

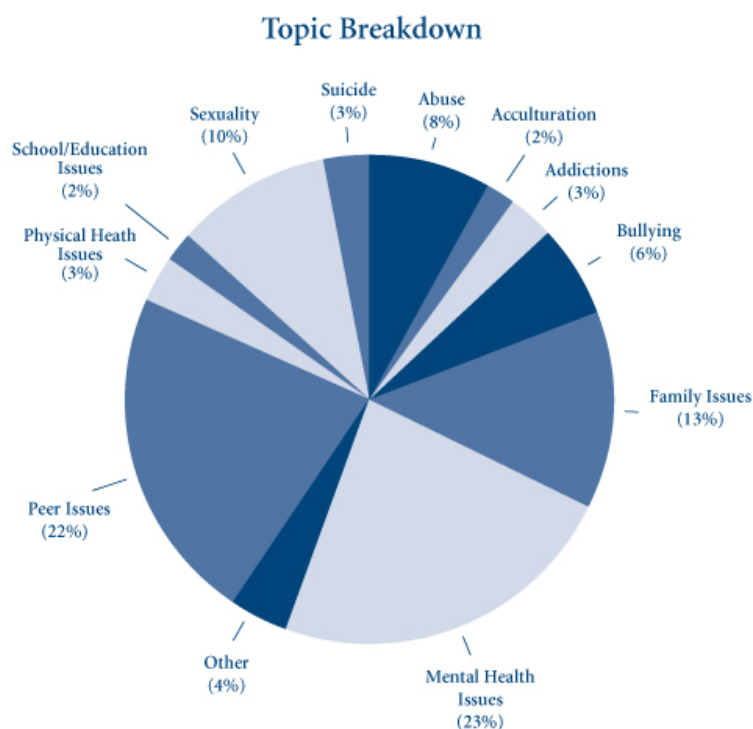
17. Why do you think kids are spending more and more time gaming online?
18. Do you think online gaming can be dangerous or addictive? Why or why not?
19. What would you do to help a friend who had a problem with online gaming?

About Kids Help Phone

- Kids Help Phone provides toll-free, bilingual, confidential and anonymous phone and web counselling, referral and information for children and youth across Canada, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- More than 10,000 committed volunteers help Kids Help Phone be there for kids by raising funds and awareness in their communities.
- Kids Help Phone is a Canadian not-for-profit organization that receives no core government or United Way funding.
- President & CEO: Sharon Wood
- Board of Directors Chair: Steve Wuthmann, Toronto

Our Services

- Kids Help Phone helped kids in need from almost 3,000 communities more than 2.2 million times on the phone and online in 2008.
- Age of clients: five to 20 years.



- Counselling and information services are offered by phone and online, allowing kids to connect with a counsellor whenever, and through whichever medium they choose.
- Kids Help Phone maintains a comprehensive national computer database of children's services (almost 37,000 listings) which enables counsellors to connect kids to resources in their own communities.
- Kids Help Phone's online services include: entries to the "Express Yourself" section; visits to the informational topic and link libraries; and reading questions from other kids in the "Ask a Counsellor" sections and benefiting from the counsellors' responses.
- An average of 78 young people read and benefit from the counselling responses to each question asked online.

Our Counsellors

- Kids Help Phone is one of the few help lines that uses highly-trained, professional counsellors on the phone and online.
- There are approximately 100 full-time and part-time counsellors working at Kids Help Phone.
- Counsellors working at Kids Help Phone are all trained professionals with a minimum of three to five years of relevant experience in the social service sector and a wide variety of backgrounds including: child and youth work, education, public health, sexual health, social work, psychology and sociology.

Our Partners

- Start-up funding and a substantial portion of current funding are supplied by Kids Help Phone's founding sponsors: BMO Financial Group (which also funds the Student Ambassador Program), Bell Canada, Nestlé Canada and Parmalat Canada.
- Kids Help Phone relies on the generous support of our founding partners, sponsors, marketing partners, government and community partners, and corporate and individual donors to raise the funds we need to continue being there for kids.

Definitions

Online game is a game played over a computer network. These games can range from simple text-based games to games incorporating complex graphics and virtual worlds populated by many players simultaneously. There are many genres of these games including action/adventure, life simulation/virtual world, puzzles/games, music/dance and sports. Many online games have associated online communities, making online games a form of social activity beyond single player games.

First Person Shooter (FPS) is a video game genre featuring a first person perspective, in which the player views the action as if through the eyes of the protagonist and in which the primary element is combat, based around shooting. Advanced 3D graphics and multiplayer gaming are integral elements. (Examples: Doom, Halo 3 and Call of Duty.)

Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG or MMO) is a video game genre capable of supporting hundreds or thousands of players simultaneously. By necessity, they are played on the Internet and feature at least one persistent world. They are, however, not necessarily games played on personal computers as most of the newer game consoles, including the Xbox 360, PlayStation Portable, PlayStation 3, Nintendo DS and Nintendo Wii can access the Internet and may therefore run MMO games. This type of game also involves external forums, chats, clans or guilds. (Examples: Guild Wars, World of Warcraft and Runescape.)

MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) is a variant on MMO (see above).

Real-time Strategy (RTS) is a genre of computer war games which do not progress incrementally with players taking turns. The typical RTS game features resource gathering, base building, in-game technological development and indirect control of units. The tasks a player must perform to succeed at an RTS can be very demanding, and complex user interfaces have evolved to cope with the challenge. (Examples: Age of Empires, Prince of Persia, StarCraft, My Sims and Sims 2.)

Virtual World/Social Interactive games focus on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. These sites can also have role-playing elements to them. Most are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services. (Examples: Habbo, Webkinz and Second Life.)

Role-playing game (RPG) is a type of game in which the participants assume the roles of game characters. Participants determine the actions of their characters based on their characterization and the actions succeed or fail according to a system of rules and guidelines. (Examples: Astro Empire, Mass Effect, Grand Theft Auto.)

([Wikipedia](#), n.d.)

Bibliography

- Abelman, R. (2007). Fighting the war on indecency: Mediating TV, Internet and videogame usage among achieving and underachieving gifted children. *Roeper Review*, 29(2), 100-112.
- Agosto, D.E. (2004). Girls and gaming: a summary of the research with implications for practice. *Teacher Librarian*, 31(3), 8-14.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed. - Text Revision)*. Washington DC: Author.
- Campbell, Colin and Gatehouse, Jonathon, "What Happened to Brandon?" in MacLean's, November 10, 2008. (www.macleans.ca)
- CBC: Fifth Estate, March 6, 2009. "Video Gaming Obsession".
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Delwiche, A. (2006). Massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) in the new media classroom. *Educational Technology & Society*, 9(33), 160-172.
- Feng, J., Spence, I. & Pratt, J. (2007) Playing an action video game reduces gender differences in spatial cognition. *Psychological Science*, 18(10), 850-855.
- Griffiths, M. & Wood, R.T.A. (2000). Risk factors in adolescence: the case of gambling, videogame playing and the internet. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 16 (2/3), 199-225.
- Harris Interactive, (2007) Retrieved April 29, 2009
<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/NEWS/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1196>
- Kirriemuir, J. (2005) Parallel worlds: Online games and digital information services. *D-Lib Magazine*, 11(12). Retrieved from ISSN 1082-9873.
www.dlib.org/dlib/december05/kirriemuir/12kirriemuir.html
- Koepp, M. J., Gunn, R. N., Lawrence, A.D., Cunningham, V.J., Dagher, A., Jones, T., Brooks, D.J., Bench, C.J., & Grasby, P.M. (1998). Evidence for striatal dopamine release during a video game. *Nature* 393, 266-268. Retrieved from
<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v393/n6682/full/393266a0.html>
- Lee, C.-L., Lu, H-P. & Lin, J. (2007). Using website stickiness strategy to stick online readers: web-based RPG reading. Retrieved from www.iasl-online.org/files/IASL2008-Program.pdf
- Lemmens, J. S., Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2009). [Development and validation of a game addiction scale for adolescents](#). *Media Psychology*, 12, 77-95.

Lo, S.-K., Wang C.-C. & Fang, W. (2005). Physical interpersonal relationships and social anxiety among online game players. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 8(8), 15-20.

Olivier, K. (2000). The effect of violent internet games on children and juveniles. *Crime Research in South Africa*, 1(1). Retrieved from www.crisa.org.za – webviol.pdf.

OLG-Anon website: www.olganon.org

Onstad, Katrina. “Modern Times: Hitting Home”. In Chatelaine, January 2009.

Shieh, K.-F. & Cheng, M.-S. (2007). An empirical study of experiential value and lifestyles and their effects on satisfaction in adolescents: An example using online gaming. *Adolescence*, 42(165). 199-215.

Squire, K. (2002). Cultural framing of computer/video games. *Game Studies*, 2(July). Retrieved from <http://gamestudies.org/0102/squire>.

Subrahmanyam, K., Kraut, R. Greenfield, P., & Gross, E. (2000). The impact of computer use on children’s and adolescents’ development. *Children and Computer Technology*, 10 (2), 23-144.

Waite, T.R. (2007). *Plugged In: A clinicians’ and families’ guide to online video game addiction*. Baltimore, MD: PublishAmerica.

Wan, C.-S. & Chiou, W.-B. (2007). The motivations of adolescents who are addicted to online games: A cognitive perspective. *Adolescents*, 42 (165), 179-197.

Wang, E., Chen, Lin, L. & Wang, M. (2008). The relationship between leisure satisfaction and life satisfaction of adolescents concerning online games. *Adolescents*, 43 (169), 177-184.

[Wikipedia](http://www.wikipedia.org/en) (n.d.) Retrieved April 3, 2009, from www.wikipedia.org/en

Wu, J., Li, P. & Rao, S. (2008). Why they enjoy virtual game worlds? An empirical investigation. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 9 (3), 219-230.

Wu, J. & Liu, D. (2007). The effects of trust and enjoyment on intention to play online games. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 8 (2), 128-140.

Young, K. S. (1998). *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction and a Winning Strategy for Recovery*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.





CELEBRATING
20 **YEARS**

Kids Help Phone
439 University Avenue
Suite 300
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 1Y8