GAMING DISORDER E SAÚDE MENTAL EM ADOLESCENTES: ASSOCIAÇÃO COM ANSIEDADE E DEPRESSÃO – UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

GAMING DISORDER AND MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS: ASSOCIATION WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION – AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

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RESUMO

Introdução: O uso crescente e descontrolado de jogos eletrônicos entre adolescentes tem despertado preocupação devido aos prejuízos sociais, acadêmicos e emocionais associados. O Gaming Disorder (transtorno do jogo eletrônico), caracterizado pela perda de controle e priorização dos jogos em detrimento de outras atividades diárias, correlaciona-se consistentemente a prejuízos e sofrimentos na saúde mental. Objetivo: Analisar a associação entre Gaming Disorder e sintomas de ansiedade e depressão em adolescentes. Método: Realizou-se uma revisão integrativa da literatura na base de dados PubMed/MEDLINE, considerando publicações entre janeiro de 2021 e agosto de 2026. Foram utilizados os termos “Gaming Disorder”, “Internet Gaming Disorder”, “problematic gaming”, “adolescent”, “depression” e “anxiety”, combinados pelos operadores booleanos AND e OR. Incluíram-se estudos em português ou inglês, envolvendo adolescentes ou jovens, que investigassem a relação entre o comportamento problemático de jogar e sintomas de ansiedade e/ou depressão. Resultados: Os estudos demonstraram associação significativa entre o comportamento problemático relacionado aos jogos e prejuízos na saúde mental, especialmente sintomas depressivos e ansiosos. Pesquisas longitudinais apontaram relações temporais consistentes, sugerindo que essa associação apresenta caráter complexo e potencialmente bidirecional. Conclusão: O Gaming Disorder apresenta associação relevante com sintomas de ansiedade e depressão durante a adolescência. A identificação precoce desses comportamentos pode contribuir para o reconhecimento de indivíduos em maior vulnerabilidade, subsidiando estratégias eficazes de prevenção e cuidado em saúde mental.

Palavras-chave: Saúde do Adolescente. Adição aos Jogos pela Internet. Ansiedade. Depressão.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The growing and uncontrolled use of electronic games among adolescents has raised concern due to associated social, academic, and emotional impairments. Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), characterized by a loss of control and the prioritization of gaming over other daily activities, is consistently correlated with mental

health impairments and distress. Objective: To analyze the association between Internet Gaming Disorder and symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents. Method: An integrative literature review was conducted in the PubMed/MEDLINE database, considering publications between January 2021 and August 2026. The terms “Gaming Disorder”, “Internet Gaming Disorder”, “problematic gaming”, “adolescent”, “depression”, and “anxiety” were used, combined by the Boolean operators AND and OR. Articles published in Portuguese or English involving adolescents or youth that investigated the relationship between problematic gaming behavior and symptoms of anxiety and/or depression were included. Results: The analyzed studies demonstrated a significant association between problematic gaming behavior and mental health impairments, especially depressive and anxiety symptoms. Longitudinal studies also indicated consistent temporal relationships, suggesting that this association presents a complex and potentially bidirectional nature. Conclusion: Internet Gaming Disorder presents a relevant association with symptoms of anxiety and depression during adolescence. Early identification of these behaviors can contribute to the recognition of individuals in situations of greater vulnerability, supporting effective mental health prevention and care strategies.

Keywords: Adolescent Health. Gaming Disorder. Anxiety. Depression.

INTRODUCTION

The excessive use of electronic games among adolescents has raised concerns about behaviors that may cause problems in their social, academic, and emotional lives. In this context, Gaming Disorder (GD), recognized in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), is characterized by a pathological pattern of gaming behavior, such as loss of control over gaming, prioritizing this activity over other activities, and continuing to play even when there are negative consequences.[1] The literature has identified an association between problematic gaming and symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescents.[2–6]

Adolescence is an important period of physical, emotional, and social development and is also a period of greater vulnerability to mental health problems. Depression and anxiety are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents, and mental health problems during this period may affect school performance, social relationships, and overall well-being.[7] Therefore, identifying behaviors that may be associated with mental health problems during adolescence is particularly important.

In addition, evidence suggests that the relationship between problematic gaming and mental health is complex and potentially bidirectional.[2,3] Psychological distress may contribute to increased gaming as a way of dealing with negative emotions, while problematic gaming may also be associated with worsening emotional symptoms.[2,3,6] Therefore, understanding this

relationship is important for the early identification and prevention of mental health problems among adolescents.

Given the relevance of this topic and the importance of understanding the relationship between problematic gaming and adolescents' mental health, this study aims to analyze the association between Gaming Disorder and symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents through an integrative literature review.

METHODS

This is an integrative literature review based on the following guiding question: What is the association between Gaming Disorder and symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents? The search was conducted in the PubMed/MEDLINE database using the descriptors and free terms “Gaming Disorder,” “Internet Gaming Disorder,” “problematic gaming,” “adolescent,” “depression,” and “anxiety,” combined with the Boolean operators AND and OR. Articles published between 2021 and 2026, in Portuguese or English, were included. Studies involving adolescents and investigating Gaming Disorder, Internet Gaming Disorder, or problematic gaming in association with symptoms of anxiety and depression were considered eligible. Studies conducted exclusively with adults, studies addressing only general internet or social media use, as well as case reports, editorials, letters to the editor, conference abstracts, and duplicate articles were excluded. After screening titles and abstracts, followed by full-text reading, the eligible studies were qualitatively analyzed and their main findings were summarized. After removing duplicates and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, five studies were selected for analysis. As this review study relied exclusively on secondary, anonymized, and publicly available data, it was exempt from institutional ethical review board approval.

RESULTS

The selected studies involved adolescent populations, with sample sizes ranging from just over one thousand to tens of thousands of participants. Most studies used longitudinal designs, allowing the relationship between Gaming Disorder and mental health symptoms to be investigated over time. Overall, associations were found between Gaming Disorder and mental health problems, especially depression and anxiety. Liu et al. observed that depressive symptoms and greater time spent gaming were independent predictors of the development of Gaming Disorder.[4] Wang et al. identified an association between Gaming Disorder symptoms

and depression, while more recent longitudinal studies demonstrated interactions between Gaming Disorder, anxiety, and depression throughout adolescence.[2,3,5] The population-based longitudinal study by Meng et al. also found reciprocal relationships between Gaming Disorder symptoms and anxiety over time.[3] The systematic review by Coutelle et al. identified a higher frequency of psychiatric comorbidities, including anxiety and depression, among adolescents with problematic gaming.[6] Although the studies differed in sample size, methodology, and assessment instruments, their findings were generally consistent in identifying a relationship between problematic gaming and emotional symptoms. Overall, the findings suggest a complex relationship between Gaming Disorder and mental health problems, with evidence of longitudinal associations and possible bidirectional relationships between problematic gaming and emotional symptoms

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate an association between Gaming Disorder and symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents. However, this relationship is complex and potentially bidirectional, and it is not possible to establish a causal relationship based on the available evidence.

In addition, early recognition of problematic gaming patterns and related psychological distress may help identify adolescents who are more vulnerable and contribute to the development of mental health prevention and care strategies.

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