

Research on the Psychological Impact of the Policy Practice of Preventing Minors from Indulging in Online Games in China

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Abstract: With the expansion of online games, there is a relatively more severe issue involving minors' excessive use of games. To this end, the Chinese government has issued several policy initiatives that are intended to stop minors from getting hooked on online games. This study aims to examine the psychological consequences of these policy practices on children. Through literature review, and case study, the changes in minors' mental health status before and after the implementation of the policy were assessed, and the role of family, school and social environment in the implementation of the policy was also examined. This research identified that these policies have successfully limited the overuse of online games among minors to a certain extent but at the same time, it has introduced new psychological issues like anxiety and social isolation among the young people. Also, the issues that parents and educators encounter in the process of policy execution are also worth considering. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations, such as introducing flexible time limits and regular review of the policy, are made in order to enhance policy implementation towards the improvement of the mental health of minors.

Keywords: Minors, Online games, Policy practice, Psychological impact.

1. Introduction

The policy landscape for online gaming in China is shaped by cultural attitudes regarding the use of technology, a fear of parents over children's technology consumption, and scientific studies into the effects of gaming. China is one of the biggest gaming markets and thus encounters the problem of how to reap the advantages of technology while protecting children's growth. Precautionary steps have been taken to ensure the appropriate usage of digital citizenship to safeguard special groups of people. Some of the measures include: restrictions on the time that one is allowed to spend on gaming activities and the age of the person to be allowed to participate. The effects of these regulations on the psychological aspect of people remains a topic of Discussion among scholars. This paper critically analyses the available literature on the impact of China's policies on the psychological welfare of children and adolescents concerning addiction, mental health, social relations, and academic achievement. It builds on the literature on youth policy and on empirical research to offer an analysis of the policy's features and potential impacts on youth in China.

2. Analysis of Underage Addiction to Online Game

2.1. Current Circumstances of Minors on Addicting to Games in China

In China, with the increasing demand for the Internet for the course study, homework assignment, online shopping, and electronic entertainment, minors spend more time in the internet environment. However, the minors are notoriously known to lack self-control and self-regulation, the issue of minors' internet addiction is gradually escalating and this situation should not be overlooked since it may affect the well-being of minors. According to the study Personal characteristics related to the risk of adolescent internet addiction: It was conducted in Shanghai, China. [1], Xu and his partners prove. This study found that 8.8% of the 5122 adolescents in Shanghai are within the standard of AIA (Adolescent Internet Addiction). Furthermore, Beard and Wolf described Problematic Internet Use (PIU) as the use of the internet that causes psychological, social, academic, and occupational problems in a person's life[2]. The PIU prevalence rate of the students in the high school of Guangdong was nearly 12.2%. [3]

2.2. Gaming Addiction and Behavioral Impacts

At the heart of debates on policies regulating minors' access to online games in China is the issue of addiction and its consequences on the behavior of the young population. Studies reveal that pathological gaming causes addiction that includes preoccupation with the game, the experience of withdrawal symptoms if one cannot access the game, and functional deterioration in day-to-day activities. Some of the policies that have been put in place to reduce such risks are the gaming time limits where the companies set the maximum time that a player can spend in a day or a week. For instance, according to Kuss research shows that legislative measures are very effective in controlling for the incidences of gaming addiction among the youths. [4]

However, people still have a debate on whether these rules can help to prevent an individual from engaging in addictive behaviors. Others argue that such rules may have other negative impacts and make children to become sneakier in order to avoid getting into trouble. For instance, some children would be more opportunistic, cheat parents' money or face recognition, and the policy makes some corporations take the opportunity to launch some more hidden or bad games specifically for minors. Also, there is a need to further understand the negative impact of gaming addiction on the mental health since rules may not necessarily help change the long-term behavior of game addicts and may even worsen the situation.

2.3. Mental Health and Psychological Well-being

Other than the addiction aspect, limitations of minors' access to online games are not only a matter of policy in relation to addiction but also have a psychological effect on the mental health of individuals. It has also been associated with poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation particularly among young people. Proponents of gaming restrictions argue that setting the gaming time will help improve the mental health of people since they will have balanced lifestyles and not be exposed to certain immoral content. A study conducted by Johnson Chun-Sing Cheung and his team in Hong Kong revealed that adolescent depression is connected to internet and pornography exposure, which in turn is associated with the level of loneliness. [5]

Opponents argue that banning some types of online games may consider the positive impact they have on that group of the population, such as helping them relieve stress or interact with others. The struggle is here which way to turn, to shield the children and at the same time does not smother their spirit of liberty and development. Knowing the impact of gaming on mental health develops policies that benefit the minors' wellbeing with time while taking the various consequences of the rules.

Longitudinal research with teens that investigated the mental health of teens before and after the introduction of the gaming rules was investigated which shows that These studies describe how these rules influence teens' feelings over time and emphasize the need to monitor and verify these rules. The research indicates that the rules indeed help teens to participate in life and improve their mental status, but some Internet addictions attributed to a lack of satisfaction in real life, such as disharmonious parent-children relationships and lack of support by schools, which should be more concern based on each child's situation.

2.4. Policy Implementation Mechanism

The Chinese government has implemented several measures aimed at controlling online gaming for the underage population to a certain extent and tracking the implementation of the set restrictions. These mechanisms include:

- **Time Restrictions:** Since 2019, measures have been taken to govern the time minors spend gaming, initially at 1.5 hours on working days and 3 hours on the weekends. New measures were put in place in the year 2021, these included; the regulation of gaming time to one hour on each day of the weekend and holidays [6]. The goal is to curb excessive gaming and ensure that people spend a reasonable amount of time on other real-life activities.
- **Real-Name Registration and Verification:** To ensure that the stated time limits are adhered to, game developers must incorporate the real name registration system. This system connects gaming accounts with the official identification numbers and hence allows the authorities to regulate and control the gaming time depending on the age of the user to filter out minors. [6]
- **Parental Controls:** The policy also focuses on the improvement of parental control options. This entails such measures as the time which one is supposed to spend on gaming and check on the frequency. More efforts should be made to get parents involved in monitoring their children's gaming activities. [6]
- **Penalties for Non-Compliance:** Non-compliance with these regulations attracts severe consequences such as financial penalties and limitations on the operating permits of the developers. This pushes gaming companies to keep on following the rules and regulations set in the game industry. [6].

3. Analysis of Policy Practice

3.1. Effect on Reduction in Gaming Time and Addiction

Chinese regulation, which limits gaming time for minors, has had the desired effect of reducing the gaming time among the minors. Some of the current research findings show that through time limits, the time that minors spend on online games has been cut down to the intended policy of dealing with the consequences of gaming addiction. Before the rules, much gaming led to wrong behaviors in school, unhealthy interpersonal relationship, and health complications including loneliness. The policy states that students should not play on the internet for more than an hour in a day on weekends and holidays, and this has reduced the time spent on gaming to 3 hours per week since 2022 [7,8]. This is different from the past where the minors were hooked on gaming for hours in a day especially in the evening. This shows that the policy has contributed to the reduction of gaming addictions among the children, improved academic performance, and most importantly got them engaged in other extra-curriculum activities.

3.2. Mental Impact after the Policy

China's policy, which restricts the time that children spend on online gaming, has positive and negative impacts on mental health. Positively, the policy has enhanced sleep and decreased exposure to gaming among young users. After the policy, most of the students said that excessive gaming made them sleep at irregular times, perform poorly at school, and experience stress and loneliness. [7] Due to the policy, the time spent in gaming has been regulated, and hence, these complications have been managed, and the individuals have adopted healthier lifestyles and less stress as a result of the effects of over exposure to gaming. On the other hand, the policy also has its drawbacks. [6] Most minors consider online games as a source of entertainment, social relations, and emotional help. The restriction has brought about frustration and anxiety among the youths as they feel isolated from their peers and are deprived of a fundamental way of expressing themselves and interacting with their peers, given the fact that youths of today lack social skills. [9] This disconnection may result in loneliness because gaming is a primary social arena for youth. It may also restrain activities likely to offer the same level of satisfaction and engagement, thus resulting in boredom and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, some adolescents view the restrictions as a form of infringement on their rights to freedom. Thus they develop a rebellious mentality. These feelings can negatively impact a person's self-esteem and mental health, which will outweigh the positives of the policy, such as the decrease in addiction and better sleep, by introducing new mental health concerns. The policy also creates more responsibility for parents and caregivers to ensure the rules are followed, and this leads to family stress and conflicts due to some of the improper behaviors and punishments that are administered by parents and caregivers. [10]

3.3. Advice for the Policy

In order to enhance the policy on protection from online gaming among minors in China, the following recommendations could be made in a bid to ensure that the effectiveness of the policy does not compromise the healthy development of the young users of the internet:

- **Enhance Parental Involvement and Education:** Inform parents on the signs of this problem and guide them on how to deal with children's gaming time for better compliance with the guidelines. Encourage parents to help ensure that gaming is healthy and that children abide by the rules. For example, parents could take their children out for entertainment instead of a sedentary lifestyle with electronic devices.
- **Introduce Flexible Time Limits:** It is recommended that the time spent on games be more flexible, taking into consideration a child's timetable and other chores or homework assignments. For example, children can be given 4 hours in total per week and 2 hours per day for each day's up limits, thus children can distribute the limits according to their schedule. More game time can be allowed to achieve positive results such as good grades or exercising.
- **Regular Policy Reviews and Adaptations:** Establish periodic review of the policy and the frequency from its effectiveness point of view and from the point of view of the minors, parents, educators and mental health specialists. According to the feedback of these objects, making the policy become consummate.

The above recommendations can therefore help in enhancing the policy to deal with the various dynamics of gaming addiction while at the same time encouraging the healthy and positive pastime activities of children and young people online.

4. Conclusion

The policy of Preventing Minors from Indulging in Online Games in China focuses on combating the issue of young people's over-gaming. It has implications for the online environment as well as the well-being of young people. Studies reveal that although the policy reduces the time the children spend on gaming, it results in adverse effects such as frustration and rebellion among young people. Some pupils can seek other ways of cheating or even going around the system, hence the loopholes in the system. The policy fails to find a middle ground where control meets the respect for the youth's freedom, making the youths feel lonely. The complete effect on mental health is still a debate. Further topics could be defined by shifting the focus from the prohibition of certain activities to the development of regulations for self-control and media competence and the society including parents, schools and online game developers should take actions to foster health of minors and guide them participate to the real life. This might help with gaming disorders and provide children with tools to regulate gaming. Identify the impact on mental health and behavior in the future is crucial to enhance the policy and protect people's rights.

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