

Parents' perception and mediation of video game risk in Norway

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When it comes to video games, boys are the main source of parents' concern, and maybe rightly so.

According to Norwegian data from the research project EU Kids Online, 69% of [boys](#) aged 9–17 report that they play daily, while only 15%–19% of the girls do the same,

In his [doctoral thesis](#), Khalid Ezat Azam, a research fellow at the Department of Media and Communication, has examined children's and [young people](#)'s gaming habits and the concerns they give rise to. Some of his findings are surprising.

"We found that it is fathers who worry most frequently that their child is gaming too much. This is contradictory to previous research, which has pointed in the opposite direction. In previous research, the respondents have often been [mothers](#)," says Azam.

In the EU Kids Online project, however, there was a relatively even number of mothers and fathers participating in the data collection in Norway.

Parents of girls mentioned fathers and uncles

In Norway, 1001 boys and girls participated in the survey, together with either their mother or their father. Half of the fathers expressed concern. There was a 62% greater chance of expressed concern among the fathers.

Together with professor Elisabeth Staksrud and researcher Kjartan Ólafsson, Azam analyzed the questionnaires answered by both children and parents.

In addition, he conducted qualitative interviews with parents. In these interviews, the findings supported previous findings showing that parents are most concerned about the boys.

"Especially when parents talked about being addicted to computer games, the focus was instantly shifted to the boys. In some instances, we interviewed girl parents. They then mentioned a cousin, an uncle or someone they'd read about," says Azam.

He believes that boys, to a larger extent than girls, are seen as "guilty until proven innocent."

"It's like at an airport, where certain target groups are suspected to be involved in crime. Several measures are taken against these groups, even though it's frowned upon. Similarly, boys are followed with argus eyes when it comes to computer games. The parents know that boys get into trouble more often, and they want to take precautions," he thinks.

How often the child played also made a difference in how concerned the parents were.

"The threshold seems to be between children who play every day and those who play less often. If the child says that he or she plays daily or several times a day, the parents are more concerned," Azam tells.

The doctoral thesis contains several findings. Amongst other things, it suggests that:

- Parents are more concerned if their child is younger.
- Parents who usually agree with their children about the rules for playing are less concerned than other parents.

The family environment is not significant

Certain findings surprised Azam and his colleagues:

For example, the child's experience of the family environment didn't

seem to influence the parents' concerns. The children were asked whether they are listened to at home, whether the family tries to help them and whether they feel safe there. The fact that none of these factors seemed to matter, contradicts the findings in previous research.

Whether the child spent any time with friends face to face did not seem to influence their parents' concern, either. Neither did the child's participation in activities outside the home.

Azam underlines that self-reported data from children could have methodological limitations.

"It must also be noted that there was a representative selection that took part in the study, where problem gamers or gamers at risk of developing problems may disappear in the crowd," he adds.

"We believe the concerns are largely about the precautionous approach to computer games among most parents, rather than a reaction to a problem that has already arisen," he says.

The [family environment](#) and other factors related to the children's actions would probably be more significant if the sample included more children with gaming problems or families with a high level of conflict.

Fathers with bitter experiences?

When fathers both in interviews and surveys expressed more concern than mothers, Azam speculates on whether this is related to the fathers' own experiences.

"This is a generation of parents who grew up with computer games. If you are 45-50 years old today and a father, there is a greater chance that you played computer games when you were younger than if you are a

mother around the same age. Maybe it was great fun, but some may have experienced that they lost friends or that it affected their grades. Some of the fathers do mention this," Azam tells.

"If the fathers haven't experienced it, they may have seen or heard of others who have," he adds.

Both play along and set boundaries

Meanwhile, the interviews indicate that mothers feel a greater pressure to be a "dynamic parent"—in this case to show interest, keep up to date on new games, and make rules in collaboration with the children, in line with the recommendations from the foundation Barnevakten (Kids and Media).

"In the interviews, several of the mothers say they feel bad about not providing enough support to their children when it comes to gaming, and that they feel they should join their gaming more often. It seems to be more important for mothers to live up to this ideal," says Azam.

"Fathers rarely feel this kind of pressure, according to the interviews he has conducted. This possibly also influences the parents' concern," he says.

Maybe it is easier for the [fathers](#) to say that they are concerned. While the mothers spend more time reflecting upon what a good parent is, and whether a good parent needs to be concerned about their children's gaming, he wonders.

Azam believes it is difficult to know these days what the ideal for a good parent is in this area. He thinks that the advice about supporting [children](#)'s gaming is no "one size fits all."

"This kind of advice is tailored to technology optimists. Going forward, one should consider making the advice more inclusive, so that they meet families with different views on digital media," he says.

Azam's findings are part of his doctoral thesis, "Digital parenting in the risk society: Parents' perception and mediation of video game risk."

Provided by University of Oslo

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