

Effectiveness of video gameplay restrictions questioned in new study

August 10 2023



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Legal restrictions placed on the amount of time young people in China can play video games may be less effective than originally thought, a new study has revealed.

To investigate the effectiveness of the [policy](#), a team of researchers led by the University of York, [analyzed over 7 billion hours](#) of playtime data from tens of thousands of games, with data drawn from over two billion accounts from players in China, where [legal restrictions](#) on playtime for [young people](#) have been in place since 2019.

The research team, however, did not find evidence of a decrease in heavy play of games after these restrictions were put in place.

The [video games industry](#) has witnessed a surge in popularity, and as many as 4 billion people are now estimated to engage in gaming worldwide each year.

Many countries across the globe have expressed concerns about the number of hours young people spend playing video games and the potential impact of this on well-being. In response to these concerns, in 2019 China restricted playtime for people under 18.

China is one of the first countries to explore legal means of restricting gameplay for young people with the aim of limiting the potential risks of gaming to well-being, and the policy was assumed to be effective, with some bodies suggesting that it had resolved issues relating to disordered gaming.

Dr. David Zendle, from the University of York's Department of Computer Science, said, "Policymakers around the world have been discussing how to understand the impact of video gameplay, particularly on young people, for some time now, and how to ensure a healthy relationship with games. The UK government, for example, has recently issued guidelines for high quality research into gaming and well-being to inform future decision making."

"The restrictions in China allowed us to look, for the first time, at the

real behavioral impact of regulation on reducing the time people spent in gameplay and whether this policy had the desired effect."

"We found no evidence of a decrease in the prevalence of heavy play and more research is needed to understand why, but the work certainly highlights that this kind of analysis can be useful for policymakers, anywhere in the world, to move forward confidently in discussions around regulations in the digital space."

Dr. Catherine Flick, from De Montfort University, said, "We hope that the work will provide a case study for understanding how a government's policy decisions affect—or do not affect—the lives of real people on a grand scale, and form a blueprint for future data-led public policy evaluation to lead to better and more effective policymaking."

This research represents the first time [big data](#) has been used to evaluate the effect of public policy in games.

Leon Y. Xiao, from the IT University of Copenhagen, emphasized the importance of independent research when evaluating policymaking: "Given previous industry-affiliated claims that this policy has 'solved video game addiction,' it made sense in a Chinese context to consider scaling it up to other domains. In fact, the Chinese government is currently consulting on limiting screen time among young people by law, although parents may override those limits."

"These results now suggest that the potential effectiveness of such policymaking could benefit from being monitored by non-industry-affiliated, independent researchers."

The research is published at a time when there are growing global efforts to regulate technology and its impact on society. The UK's Online Safety Bill, the European Parliament's rules on [in-game](#) purchases, and the

ongoing focus on regulating [social media](#) in the U.S., are current examples of how governments worldwide are seeking to address digital challenges, particularly concerning the protection of children. The research suggests a path forward for such efforts.

Professor Anders Drachen, from the University of Southern Denmark, emphasized the potential of this data-led approach in evaluating technology regulation, stating "It is now possible to tractably analyze billions of hours of digital behavioral data, which can help lead to a better understanding of how to develop effective policies around online behavior. This study is an example of how we can use such data to assess whether a policy actually impacts citizens or companies in the way it is intended to."

The research is published in *Nature Human Behavior*.

More information: David Zendle et al, No evidence that Chinese playtime mandates reduced heavy gaming in one segment of the video games industry, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41562-023-01669-8 , www.nature.com/articles/s41562-023-01669-8

Provided by University of York

Citation: Effectiveness of video gameplay restrictions questioned in new study (2023, August 10) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-08-effectiveness-video-gameplay-restrictions.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.