

## BEHAVIOURAL ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UYO EDUCATION ZONE, AKWA IBOM STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between behavioural addictions and mental well-being among secondary school students in the Uyo Education Zone, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study focused on two behavioural addiction variables: compulsive social media use and compulsive gaming. A correlational research design was adopted, with a sample of 250 Senior Secondary School Two students selected using multi-stage sampling techniques from a population of 12,847 students. The Behavioural Addictions and Mental Well-being Questionnaire (BAMWQ) was used for data collection, with a reliability coefficient of 0.82 obtained through the Cronbach Alpha method. Data were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed a significant, high negative relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being ( $r = -.505, p < .05$ ), and a significant, moderate negative relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being ( $r = -.358, p < .05$ ). The study concluded that behavioural addictions, particularly those related to digital media use, pose significant threats to adolescent mental health. Implications for guidance and counselling practice are discussed, and recommendations include integrating psycho-educational modules into school curricula and promoting healthy digital habits among students.

**Keywords:** Behavioural addictions, mental well-being, compulsive social media use, compulsive gaming, secondary school students, guidance and counselling

### Introduction

Mental well-being is critical for secondary school students' development and academic success. The World Health Organization (2022) defines it as a state of emotional, psychological, and social health that enables individuals to cope with stress, realize their abilities, and contribute to their community. Adolescence is a foundational period for psychological resilience (Kessler et al., 2005), and poor mental well-being can lead to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, undermining academic achievement. Students with behavioural addictions face heightened risks due to sleep loss, social isolation, and stress Inuaeyen *et al.* (2024) While these trends are global, the cultural and economic context of the Uyo Education Zone may uniquely shape them.

Behavioural addiction involves compulsive, non-substance-related actions that provide psychological rewards but disrupt daily life (Griffiths, 2021). Unlike substance addiction, it activates the brain's reward system through the behaviour itself. A key feature is the inability to

resist harmful impulses (Grant *et al.*, 2015). With increased access to digital platforms, secondary school students are increasingly vulnerable to addictions like excessive social media use and compulsive gaming, which have long-term mental health implications. These issues are particularly pressing in Uyo due to growing digital access and societal influences.

Compulsive social media use refers to uncontrollable engagement with platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, or TikTok, often for validation or escapism (Twenge & Campbell, 2022). It has been linked to depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (BMC Psychology, 2023), disrupts sleep, and exposes students to negative content, harming emotional stability (Yale Medicine, 2023). Compulsive gaming involves an irresistible urge to play video or mobile games, leading to neglect of academic and social duties (King *et al.*, 2021). It is associated with aggression, social isolation, and reduced academic performance, as game rewards reinforce addictive cycles and negative emotional outcomes.

The relationship between behavioural addiction and mental well-being is reciprocal: addiction disrupts routines and worsens mental health, while poor mental well-being increases reliance on digital activities as escape mechanisms (Andreassen *et al.*, 2016; Brand *et al.*, 2019). Despite global evidence, research in Nigeria, especially Akwa Ibom State remains limited. The Uyo Education Zone's rapid urbanization and evolving norms make context-specific research essential for targeted interventions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mental well-being among secondary school students in the Uyo Education Zone is facing significant threats due to increasing behavioural addictions, particularly in social media use and gaming. Excessive social media use has been linked to anxiety, depression, and social comparison, as students become preoccupied with online validation at the expense of real-world relationships and academic focus. Similarly, online gaming addiction contributes to sleep deprivation, aggressive behaviours, and withdrawal from social activities, further hampering students' mental health. Despite these growing concerns, there is limited awareness and intervention to address the specific impact of these behavioural addictions in the Uyo Education Zone. This study sought to examine the relationship between these behavioural addictions and the mental well-being of secondary school students in Uyo.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students?
2. What is the relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students.

### **Empirical Review**

Gabriel (2024) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health. Analyzing 45 studies (N = 153,285 adolescents), the study revealed small but significant associations between increased social media use and increased depressive symptoms ( $r = 0.12$ ), anxiety ( $r = 0.10$ ), and loneliness ( $r = 0.15$ ), with a significant negative

association with self-esteem ( $r = -0.08$ ). Perez (2024) investigated online game addiction and mental well-being among 162 high school students in the Philippines. Using the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale and DASS-21, results showed significant positive correlations between mobile game addiction and depression ( $r = .435$ ), anxiety ( $r = .421$ ), and stress ( $r = .523$ ). The study concluded that gaming provides temporary relief but ultimately worsens emotional distress.

Adekunle (2025) studied mental health and gaming addiction among youth in Lagos, Nigeria, finding that video games negatively affect young people's mental health, with high levels of gaming exposure among students who actively play games for relaxation or skill development. Schønning *et al.* (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study of 2,350 adolescents (ages 11–15) in Greater London using stratified random sampling. They found that secondary school students using social media for over three hours daily had significantly higher odds of depression ( $OR = 1.70$ ) and anxiety ( $OR = 1.60$ ) compared to those using it for 30 minutes or less. Sleep deprivation (<9 hours on weekdays) mediated 11–33% of this association. Girls and those exhibiting compulsive features (salience, withdrawal, conflict) were most affected. The study concluded that problematic, not general, social media use drives poor mental health, and improving sleep hygiene is a key intervention target.

Teague *et al.* (2026) conducted a cross-sectional national census survey of 100,991 Australian secondary students (grades 4–12, ages 9–18) using multi-stage cluster random sampling. The results revealed a U-shaped association: both non-users and heavy users ( $\geq 12.5$  hours/week) had lower well-being than moderate users. Heavy-using girls in grades 7–9 showed the highest risk ( $OR = 3.13$ ). Students with public accounts had 39% higher odds of anxiety and depression ( $OR = 1.39$ ), while active parental guidance reduced poor well-being odds ( $OR = 0.85$ ). The study concluded that complete abstinence is not protective; instead, moderate, guided, and private social media use is associated with the best mental health outcomes for secondary school students.

Coutelle, Balzer, Rolling, and Lalanne (2024) conducted a systematic review titled "Problematic Gaming, Psychiatric Comorbidities, and Adolescence: A Systematic Review of the Literature" in *Addictive Behaviors*, examining psychiatric comorbidities associated with problematic gaming in adolescents. The review synthesized 30 studies comprising 3,683 adolescents (63% boys) from Europe, North America, and Asia, identified through systematic PubMed and searches. Using qualitative synthesis, the researchers found that ADHD prevalence among compulsive gamers ranged from 44% to 73%, and these adolescents showed significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, and emotional-behavioral problems compared to peers. The study concluded that compulsive gaming is closely linked to multiple psychiatric comorbidities, particularly ADHD, depression, and anxiety, requiring multilevel assessment approaches.

### **Theoretical Review**

This study is anchored on three theoretical perspectives: Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Social Learning Theory (SLT). CBT, developed by Aaron Beck in the 1960s, posits that behaviours, including addictive ones, stem from maladaptive thought patterns and learned responses (Beck, 2011). According to CBT, individuals engage in compulsive behaviours due to distorted cognitions and reinforcement, creating a cycle of dependency. This theory is relevant to behavioural addiction because it suggests that students in Uyo might develop habits such as excessive technology use as a way to cope with academic stress or emotional discomfort. Over time, these behaviours can impair mental well-being by increasing anxiety, guilt, or reducing self-efficacy when underlying issues remain unresolved.

Self-Determination Theory, proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), states that human motivation is driven by three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are unmet, individuals may seek external sources of satisfaction, potentially leading to addictive behaviours. Adolescents with unmet autonomy needs may seek control in virtual environments, while those lacking competence in real-world tasks may turn to digital spaces where they experience mastery through achievements.

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura posits that individuals adopt habits by observing, imitating, and modeling others, such as peers or media figures, and continue them if rewarded (e.g., social approval or pleasure). This theory applies to behavioural addiction among secondary students because it highlights how environmental influences like peer groups or societal trends shape compulsive behaviours. In Uyo, students might observe classmates engaging in excessive digital activities and imitate them, especially if these behaviours are normalized or praised.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a correlational research design, which is ideal for determining existing relationships between variables as they occur naturally (Nwankwo, 2013). The study was conducted in the Uyo Education Zone of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, comprising seven Local Government Areas: Uyo, Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Etinan, and Nsit Ubium. This zone presents a mixture of urban, semi-urban, and rural communities. The target population comprised all Senior Secondary School Two (SSS 2) students in the Uyo Education Zone, totaling 12,847 students according to records from the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education (2024/2025 academic session). A sample of 250 senior secondary school students was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. In the first stage, five secondary schools were selected using stratified random sampling. In the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select students proportionally.

The instrument for data collection was a researcher-structured questionnaire titled "Behavioural Addictions and Mental Well-being Questionnaire (BAMWQ)". Items were developed using a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire consisted of three sections: compulsive social media use scale, compulsive gaming scale, and mental well-being scale adapted from the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. The questionnaire was subjected to face validation by three experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Guidance and Counselling. Reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** What is the relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students?

**Table 1:** Summary of correlation between compulsive social media use and mental well-being.

Variables	N	R	Remark
Compulsive Social Media Use	250	-0.505	High Negative Relationship
Mental Well-being			

Table 1 shows that the r-value is -0.505. This implies that there is a high negative relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students. This indicates that the mental well-being of secondary school students reduces to a very high extent with an increase in compulsive social media use.

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students?

**Table 2:** Summary of correlation between compulsive gaming and mental well-being

Variables	N	R	Remark
Compulsive Gaming	250	-0.358	Moderate Negative Relationship
Mental Well-being			

Table 2 shows that the r-value is -0.358. This implies that there is a moderate negative relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students. This indicates that the mental well-being of secondary school students reduces with an increase in compulsive gaming.

Null Hypothesis One (Ho<sub>1</sub>): There is no significant relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students.

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation for Compulsive Social Media Use and Mental Well-Being well-being

**Table 3:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation for compulsive social media use and mental well-being

Variables	X	SD	N	R	p-value	Decison
Compulsive Social Media Use	17.76	5.03	250	-0.505	0.000	Reject Ho1 P<0.05
Mental Well-being	35.14	7.96				

Significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 3 shows that  $r = -0.505$  and the p-value (.000) is less than the .05 alpha level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis one (Ho<sub>1</sub>) was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Education Zone.

Null Hypothesis Two (Ho<sub>2</sub>): There is no significant relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students.

**Table 4:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation for compulsive gaming and mental well-being

Variables	X	SD	N	R	p-value	Decison
Compulsive Gaming	18.22	5.85	250	-0.358	0.000	Reject Ho1 P<0.05
Mental Well-being	35.14	7.96				

Significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 4 shows that  $r = -0.358$  and the p-value (.000) is less than the .05 alpha level of significance. Based on this result, the null hypothesis two (Ho<sub>2</sub>) was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Education Zone.

**Summary of Findings**

1. There is a significant high negative relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being of secondary school students ( $r = -0.505$ ,  $p < .05$ ).
2. There is a significant moderate negative relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being of secondary school students ( $r = -0.358$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### Discussion of Findings

The finding of a significant high negative relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being aligns with previous research. Gabriel (2024) found that increased social media use was associated with increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, and loneliness, with a negative association with self-esteem. This finding can be attributed to several factors prevalent in the Uyo Education Zone, including easy access to internet-enabled devices, peer influence, and the growing cultural trend of online socialization. The competitive display of lifestyles on social media platforms exposes students to unhealthy social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO), heightening stress levels and undermining mental well-being (Keles et al., 2020).

The moderate negative relationship between compulsive gaming and mental well-being is consistent with Perez (2024), who reported positive correlations between mobile game addiction and social anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Similarly, Adekunle (2025) found that video games negatively affect young people's mental health. This moderate relationship suggests that while excessive gaming diminishes positive mental health indicators, its influence may be less potent than that of social media use. This could be attributed to the structured nature of gaming compared to the socially comparative nature of social media platforms.

The correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.505$ ,  $p < .05$  indicates a \*\*moderate to strong negative relationship\*\* between compulsive social media use and mental well-being among secondary school students. This means that as compulsive social media use increases, mental well-being tends to decrease in a predictable, linear fashion.

The negative sign of the correlation confirms the inverse association: higher levels of problematic use (characterized by loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, conflict with daily activities, and salience) correspond with lower scores on measures of mental well-being (such as life satisfaction, happiness, emotional regulation, and low levels of anxiety or depression).

The magnitude of  $r = -0.505$  is noteworthy. In psychological research, correlations above 0.5 are considered practically significant, suggesting that compulsive social media use explains approximately 25.5% of the variance in mental well-being (since the coefficient of determination,  $r^2 = 0.255$ ). This is a substantial effect size, particularly for a cross-sectional study involving complex human behaviors and multiple confounding variables. The statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) indicates that this observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance, with the probability of a Type I error being less than 5 percent. Given the sample sizes typical in secondary school research (often exceeding several hundred participants), this finding is robust and generalizable to similar populations.

However, several interpretive caveats are important. First, correlation does not imply causation; the negative relationship could reflect that poor mental well-being predisposes students to compulsive use (reverse causation), that a third variable such as pre-existing depression or family dysfunction drives both, or that bidirectional effects operate over time. Second, the finding likely masks important subgroup differences, as prior research has shown stronger associations for adolescent girls, younger adolescents (ages 12-15), and those with pre-existing vulnerabilities such as ADHD or anxiety. Third, the distinction between compulsive use and general use is critical; this finding specifically addresses problematic, loss-of-control patterns rather than all social media engagement.

From a practical standpoint, this finding supports school-based screening for compulsive social media use as a potential marker for students at risk of poor mental well-being. It also suggests that interventions targeting the mechanisms of compulsive use, such as fear of missing out (FOMO), social comparison, sleep disruption, and reward-seeking loops, may yield meaningful improvements in student mental health outcomes. The effect size of  $r = -0.505$  is clinically meaningful at the population level, even if individual responses vary considerably.

### **Implications for Guidance and Counselling Practice**

The findings of this study have significant implications for guidance and counselling practice in secondary schools, particularly within the Uyo Education Zone and similar contexts. First, the strong negative relationship between compulsive social media use and mental well-being underscores the need for school counsellors to integrate digital literacy and mental health awareness into their psycho-educational programmes. Counsellors should develop classroom-based guidance modules that help students recognize early warning signs of compulsive social media use, such as persistent urges to check platforms, neglect of academic duties, and emotional distress when offline.

Second, in light of the moderate yet significant impact of compulsive gaming, counsellors are advised to integrate brief screening tools into routine counselling sessions to detect at-risk students. Such early detection facilitates timely interventions, including CBT-based group counselling that emphasizes impulse control, time management, and alternative coping strategies for stress. Third, counsellors should collaborate with parents and teachers to establish consistent boundaries around digital device use. This includes facilitating parent-teacher-counsellor workshops on monitoring online behaviour without alienating students, as well as promoting offline recreational activities that satisfy adolescents' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as suggested by Self-Determination Theory.

Fourth, school counsellors should advocate for the inclusion of behavioural addiction awareness in school health policy. This may involve training teachers to recognize signs of digital addiction and refer students appropriately, as well as establishing peer support groups where students can share experiences and coping strategies. Finally, counsellors should adopt a non-stigmatizing, trauma-informed approach when addressing behavioural addictions. Many students may use social media or gaming as maladaptive coping mechanisms for underlying issues such as academic pressure, family conflict, or low self-esteem. Therefore, counselling interventions should address these root causes rather than merely restricting behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study indicate that students who engage excessively in social networking tend to report lower levels of mental well-being. While gaming in moderation may not be harmful, compulsive gaming behaviours have the potential to erode students' emotional health and resilience. The study concluded that behavioural addictions, particularly compulsive social media use and compulsive gaming, pose significant threats to the mental well-being of secondary school students in the Uyo Education Zone. The strong impact of compulsive social media use highlights the urgent need for interventions promoting healthy digital habits, while the moderate effect of compulsive gaming suggests that balanced recreational engagement should be encouraged.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ministry of Education should incorporate psycho-educational modules into the secondary school curriculum addressing behavioural addictions, their effects on mental well-being, and strategies for prevention and coping.
2. Parents should actively monitor their children's online activities and gaming habits while providing emotional support and guidance.
3. School counsellors should develop targeted intervention programmes for students identified with high levels of behavioural addictions.
4. School authorities in collaboration with counsellors should organize regular workshops educating students on responsible social media use, self-regulation skills, and recognition of signs of digital addiction.
5. Schools should encourage participation in sports, creative arts, and offline activities as healthy alternatives to excessive gaming and social media use.

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