



## “Beyond the Screen: Psychiatric Nursing Approaches in Managing Internet Gaming Disorder”

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**Abstract:** Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) has emerged as a significant mental health concern in the digital era, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Characterized by excessive and compulsive engagement in online gaming activities, IGD negatively affects psychological, social, educational, and occupational functioning. The inclusion of IGD in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) as a condition warranting further study and its recognition in the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11), highlight its growing clinical importance. Psychiatric nurses play a crucial role in the prevention, assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation of individuals affected by IGD. Their responsibilities extend beyond symptom management to include psychoeducation, therapeutic communication, family counseling, relapse prevention, and promotion of healthy coping mechanisms. This review article explores the etiology, epidemiology, neurobiological basis, diagnostic criteria, psychosocial consequences, and evidence-based psychiatric nursing interventions for managing IGD. The article also emphasizes the importance of holistic care, multidisciplinary collaboration, and culturally sensitive nursing approaches in addressing this behavioral addiction. Strengthening psychiatric nursing competencies in digital addiction management is essential for improving patient outcomes and enhancing mental health services in the modern technological landscape.

**Keywords:** Internet Gaming Disorder, Psychiatric Nursing, Behavioral Addiction, Mental Health Nursing, Digital Addiction, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Adolescents, Psychoeducation, Gaming Addiction, Nursing Interventions

### Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology and internet accessibility has dramatically transformed recreational activities worldwide. Online gaming has become one of the most popular forms of entertainment across all age groups, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Multiplayer online games, virtual reality platforms, and competitive e-sports environments provide immersive experiences that encourage prolonged engagement. While gaming can offer cognitive stimulation, social interaction, and stress relief, excessive and uncontrolled gaming behavior may result in significant psychological and social impairments. Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) has therefore emerged as an important public health issue requiring psychiatric attention.

Internet Gaming Disorder refers to persistent and recurrent engagement in online or offline digital games leading to

clinically significant impairment or distress. The condition is characterized by preoccupation with gaming, withdrawal symptoms when gaming is restricted, loss of control, neglect of personal responsibilities, and continuation of gaming despite negative consequences. The American Psychiatric Association included IGD in Section III of the DSM-5 as a condition requiring further research, whereas the World Health Organization officially recognized Gaming Disorder in ICD-11.<sup>1,2</sup>

The prevalence of IGD has increased considerably due to the widespread use of smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media integration into gaming platforms. Adolescents are especially vulnerable because of developmental immaturity, peer influence, emotional instability, and easy access to digital devices. Excessive gaming may contribute to academic decline, sleep



disturbances, social isolation, anxiety, depression, aggression, and suicidal ideation.<sup>3</sup>

Psychiatric nurses occupy a central position in managing IGD due to their direct involvement in mental health assessment, therapeutic interventions, counseling, and rehabilitation services. Their holistic approach enables comprehensive care addressing biological, psychological, social, and environmental dimensions of addiction. Psychiatric nursing interventions aim not only to reduce gaming behaviors but also to improve emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, coping skills, and quality of life.

This review article discusses psychiatric nursing approaches in managing Internet Gaming Disorder, including assessment strategies, therapeutic interventions, family-centered care, relapse prevention, and community mental health perspectives.

### Concept and Definition of Internet Gaming Disorder

Internet Gaming Disorder is classified as a behavioral addiction involving maladaptive patterns of gaming behavior that interfere with daily functioning. Unlike substance-related addictions, IGD does not involve chemical intoxication but demonstrates similar psychological and neurobiological mechanisms including craving, tolerance, withdrawal, and compulsive behavior.<sup>4</sup> DSM-5 proposes nine diagnostic criteria for IGD, including preoccupation with gaming, withdrawal symptoms, tolerance, unsuccessful attempts to reduce gaming, loss of interest in other activities, continued excessive gaming despite problems, deception regarding gaming duration, gaming to escape negative moods, and jeopardizing relationships or opportunities because of gaming.<sup>5</sup> ICD-11 defines Gaming Disorder as impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other interests, and continuation despite harmful consequences lasting for at least twelve months.<sup>2</sup>

### Epidemiology of Internet Gaming Disorder

The prevalence of IGD varies across countries due to differences in diagnostic methods, cultural attitudes, and gaming accessibility. Studies indicate prevalence rates ranging from 1% to 15% among adolescents and young

adults.<sup>6</sup> Asian countries such as South Korea, China, and Japan report higher prevalence due to the popularity of online gaming cultures and competitive gaming industries. Males are generally more affected than females because of greater involvement in multiplayer combat and competitive gaming genres. Adolescents with poor family support, academic stress, social anxiety, low self-esteem, and psychiatric comorbidities are at increased risk.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1: Risk Factors Associated with Internet Gaming Disorder**

Biological Factors	Psychological Factors	Social Factors	Environmental Factors
Genetic vulnerability	Depression	Peer pressure	Easy internet access
Neurochemical imbalance	Anxiety	Family conflict	Availability of smartphones
Impulsivity	Low self-esteem	Social isolation	Lack of parental supervision
Sleep disturbances	Poor coping skills	Bullying	Pandemic-related confinement
Attention deficits	Emotional dysregulation	Academic stress	Competitive gaming culture

### Etiological Factors

The development of IGD is multifactorial involving biological, psychological, and environmental influences.

#### Neurobiological Factors

Research suggests that excessive gaming activates brain reward pathways similar to substance addictions. Dopamine release within the mesolimbic system reinforces pleasurable gaming experiences, leading to repeated engagement.<sup>8</sup> Functional neuroimaging studies demonstrate altered activity in the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and striatum among individuals with IGD. These abnormalities impair impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation.

#### Psychological Factors

Psychological vulnerabilities significantly contribute to IGD. Individuals with depression, anxiety, loneliness, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and social phobia may use gaming as a coping mechanism for emotional distress.<sup>9</sup> Gaming environments provide temporary



escape from real-life problems, promoting dependency over time.

### Family and Social Factors

Poor parental supervision, dysfunctional family relationships, lack of emotional support, and social isolation increase susceptibility to gaming addiction. Adolescents experiencing bullying or interpersonal rejection may seek acceptance and identity through online gaming communities.<sup>^10^</sup>

### Environmental Factors

Technological advancements, affordable internet services, aggressive gaming marketing strategies, and increased screen exposure contribute to widespread gaming behaviors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged lockdowns significantly increased screen time and gaming dependency among youth.<sup>^11^</sup>

### Clinical Manifestations of Internet Gaming Disorder

Individuals with IGD display behavioral, psychological, cognitive, and physical symptoms that impair multiple areas of functioning.

Behavioral manifestations include prolonged gaming sessions, neglect of personal hygiene, social withdrawal, irritability when interrupted, lying about gaming duration, and inability to reduce gaming activities. Psychological symptoms may include anxiety, depression, mood swings, frustration, emotional instability, and aggressive behavior.<sup>^12^</sup>

Cognitive symptoms involve impaired concentration, poor academic performance, reduced productivity, and obsessive thoughts about gaming. Physical manifestations include headaches, eye strain, sleep disturbances, obesity, musculoskeletal pain, and fatigue due to prolonged sedentary behavior.<sup>^13^</sup>

**Table 2: Common Signs and Symptoms of Internet Gaming Disorder**

Domain	Manifestations
Behavioral	Compulsive gaming, neglect of responsibilities, social withdrawal
Emotional	Irritability, anxiety, depression, mood swings

Cognitive	Poor concentration, gaming preoccupation, impaired judgment
Physical	Sleep problems, headaches, fatigue, eye strain
Social	Relationship conflicts, isolation, poor communication
Academic/Occupational	Reduced performance, absenteeism, lack of motivation

### Psychiatric Comorbidities Associated with IGD

Internet Gaming Disorder frequently coexists with other psychiatric disorders. Depression and anxiety are among the most common comorbidities. Excessive gaming may worsen depressive symptoms through social isolation and sleep deprivation.<sup>^14^</sup>

ADHD is strongly associated with IGD because impulsivity and difficulty regulating attention increase vulnerability to compulsive gaming behaviors. Social anxiety disorder also contributes significantly as online environments may appear safer than face-to-face interactions.<sup>^15^</sup>

Substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive traits, personality disorders, and suicidal behaviors may coexist with severe IGD. Comprehensive psychiatric evaluation is therefore essential for accurate diagnosis and treatment planning.

### Assessment and Diagnosis

Accurate assessment of IGD requires comprehensive psychiatric evaluation. Psychiatric nurses play a key role in identifying problematic gaming behaviors through observation, interviews, and standardized assessment tools.

Assessment includes evaluation of gaming patterns, duration, emotional triggers, family dynamics, academic performance, sleep habits, and social functioning. Nurses should assess coexisting psychiatric symptoms, suicidal ideation, substance use, and coping abilities.<sup>^16^</sup>

Several screening instruments are used for diagnosing IGD, including:

- Internet Gaming Disorder Scale (IGDS)
- Gaming Addiction Scale (GAS)
- Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT)
- Problematic Online Gaming Questionnaire (POGQ)



Mental status examination helps identify mood disturbances, cognitive impairments, impulse control issues, and behavioral abnormalities.

### Role of Psychiatric Nurses in Managing Internet Gaming Disorder

Psychiatric nurses contribute significantly to prevention, early identification, therapeutic intervention, rehabilitation, and follow-up care for individuals with IGD. Their patient-centered and holistic approach enables effective management of emotional, behavioral, and social aspects of addiction.

#### Therapeutic Relationship and Communication

Establishing trust and therapeutic rapport is fundamental in psychiatric nursing care. Patients with IGD may demonstrate denial, resistance, or defensiveness regarding their gaming behavior. Nurses should employ empathetic listening, nonjudgmental attitudes, and supportive communication techniques to encourage openness and treatment adherence.<sup>17^</sup>

Motivational interviewing techniques help patients recognize the negative consequences of excessive gaming and develop intrinsic motivation for behavioral change.

#### Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation is an essential nursing intervention aimed at improving patient and family awareness regarding IGD. Nurses educate individuals about the psychological, physical, and social consequences of gaming addiction. Information regarding healthy screen habits, sleep hygiene, stress management, and time management strategies should be provided.<sup>18^</sup>

Family education is equally important because parental involvement significantly influences treatment outcomes in adolescents.

#### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Psychiatric Nursing

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is considered one of the most effective interventions for IGD. Psychiatric nurses trained in CBT techniques assist patients in identifying maladaptive thoughts, emotional triggers, and dysfunctional behaviors related to gaming.<sup>19^</sup>

CBT interventions focus on:

- Identifying gaming-related cognitive distortions
- Enhancing coping skills
- Developing problem-solving abilities
- Improving emotional regulation
- Promoting alternative recreational activities

Behavioral strategies include activity scheduling, gaming time restrictions, stimulus control, and reinforcement of positive behaviors.

**Table 3: Psychiatric Nursing Interventions in IGD Management**

Nursing Intervention	Purpose
Psychoeducation	Improve awareness regarding gaming addiction
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Modify maladaptive thoughts and behaviors
Motivational Interviewing	Enhance readiness for behavioral change
Family Counseling	Improve communication and support
Stress Management Training	Reduce emotional triggers
Sleep Hygiene Education	Improve sleep quality
Social Skills Training	Enhance interpersonal functioning
Relapse Prevention Planning	Maintain long-term recovery

#### Family-Centered Psychiatric Nursing Care

Family involvement plays a critical role in the management of IGD, especially among adolescents. Dysfunctional family relationships often contribute to excessive gaming behavior. Psychiatric nurses help families improve communication, establish healthy boundaries, and provide emotional support.<sup>20^</sup>

Family counseling sessions focus on reducing conflicts, enhancing parental supervision, and encouraging healthy recreational activities. Parents should be educated regarding appropriate screen-time monitoring without adopting punitive or authoritarian approaches that may worsen resistance.

Supportive family environments improve treatment adherence and reduce relapse rates.

#### Stress Management and Coping Skill Enhancement

Stress and emotional dysregulation frequently trigger excessive gaming behaviors. Psychiatric nurses teach



adaptive coping strategies to help individuals manage stress effectively without relying on gaming as an escape mechanism.<sup>21^</sup>

Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery can reduce anxiety and emotional distress. Encouraging participation in sports, hobbies, creative arts, and social activities helps replace unhealthy gaming habits.

Time management and goal-setting interventions improve self-control and daily functioning.

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### Group Therapy and Peer Support

Group therapy provides opportunities for individuals with IGD to share experiences, improve social skills, and receive emotional support from peers facing similar challenges.<sup>22^</sup> Psychiatric nurses facilitate therapeutic group sessions focusing on emotional expression, coping strategies, relapse prevention, and interpersonal communication.

Peer support groups reduce feelings of isolation and promote accountability during recovery. Adolescents particularly benefit from structured group activities that encourage social interaction beyond digital environments.

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### Pharmacological Management

There is currently no specific medication approved exclusively for IGD. However, pharmacotherapy may be useful in managing associated psychiatric symptoms such as depression, anxiety, impulsivity, and ADHD.<sup>23^</sup>

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), mood stabilizers, and stimulants may be prescribed based on individual psychiatric assessment. Psychiatric nurses monitor medication adherence, therapeutic effects, side effects, and patient responses during treatment.

Medication should always be combined with psychosocial and behavioral interventions for optimal outcomes.

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### Rehabilitation and Relapse Prevention

Recovery from IGD requires long-term behavioral changes and continuous support. Psychiatric nurses assist patients

in identifying high-risk situations, emotional triggers, and relapse warning signs.<sup>24^</sup>

Relapse prevention strategies include:

- Structured daily routines
- Limiting screen exposure
- Regular counseling sessions
- Development of offline hobbies
- Strengthening social relationships
- Stress reduction techniques

Follow-up care and community support programs help sustain recovery and improve psychosocial functioning.

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### Preventive Psychiatric Nursing Strategies

Preventive interventions are essential for reducing the incidence of IGD. Psychiatric nurses contribute to mental health promotion through school-based awareness programs, parental guidance sessions, and community education initiatives.<sup>25^</sup>

Primary prevention focuses on promoting healthy digital habits and balanced lifestyles among children and adolescents. Secondary prevention involves early identification of problematic gaming behaviors and timely intervention. Tertiary prevention aims at rehabilitation and prevention of relapse among diagnosed individuals.

School mental health programs can help students develop emotional resilience, healthy coping mechanisms, and responsible internet use behaviors.

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### Ethical and Cultural Considerations

Psychiatric nurses must provide culturally sensitive care while respecting patient autonomy, confidentiality, and dignity. Cultural beliefs regarding technology use, parenting styles, and mental illness influence attitudes toward IGD and treatment-seeking behaviors.<sup>26^</sup>

Ethical challenges may arise when implementing screen restrictions, involving family members, or managing adolescents who refuse treatment. Nurses should balance patient rights with safety considerations while promoting collaborative decision-making.

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### Challenges Faced by Psychiatric Nurses



Psychiatric nurses encounter multiple challenges in managing IGD. Limited awareness regarding behavioral addictions, inadequate training, social normalization of excessive gaming, and lack of specialized treatment centers may hinder effective care.<sup>27^</sup>

Patients often demonstrate denial regarding addiction severity, reducing treatment motivation. Families may also underestimate the harmful effects of gaming behavior. Resource limitations, insufficient staffing, and technological advancements further complicate intervention efforts.

Continuous professional education and evidence-based training programs are necessary to enhance psychiatric nursing competencies in digital addiction management.

### Future Directions in Psychiatric Nursing Practice

Future psychiatric nursing approaches should integrate technological advancements with mental health care delivery. Telepsychiatry, digital monitoring tools, mobile health applications, and online counseling platforms can support early intervention and follow-up care.<sup>28^</sup>

Research focusing on culturally appropriate interventions, school mental health strategies, family-based therapies, and neurobiological mechanisms of IGD is essential for improving treatment effectiveness. Psychiatric nursing curricula should include behavioral addiction management and digital mental health competencies.

Interdisciplinary collaboration among nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, and social workers is vital for comprehensive care delivery.

### Conclusion

Internet Gaming Disorder represents a growing behavioral addiction with significant psychological, social, academic, and physical consequences. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable due to developmental, emotional, and environmental factors. Psychiatric nurses play an indispensable role in the prevention, assessment, treatment, rehabilitation, and relapse prevention of IGD. Comprehensive psychiatric nursing approaches involving psychoeducation, therapeutic communication, cognitive behavioral interventions, family counseling, stress

management, and community support can significantly improve patient outcomes. Holistic and patient-centered care addressing emotional, social, and behavioral dimensions is essential for sustainable recovery.

As digital technologies continue to evolve, psychiatric nurses must adapt to emerging mental health challenges through continuous education, evidence-based practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Strengthening psychiatric nursing involvement in behavioral addiction management is critical for promoting mental well-being in the digital age.

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