

# Gaming to socialise or escape: Research scopes out problematic gaming habits

DARWIN, NT - NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA, September 3, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- People who have autistic-like traits, but who fall short of a clinical diagnosis, are at risk of problematic gaming according to a new Charles Darwin University (CDU) study exploring what factors can lead to gaming disorders.

Concerns over problematic video gaming have increased in recent years, with nearly one third of the global population playing games.



Professor Kim Caudwell is a co-author on the study.

Researchers surveyed individuals to understand how people use gaming as an escape, such as from real-life stress, problems or negative emotions.

Survey participants played video games for at least one hour per week, with more than half the respondents saying they engage in video games for more than 10 hours per week.

Co-authors and CDU Senior Lecturer in Psychology [Dr Mal Flack](#) and [Professor Kim Caudwell](#) said the results were valuable because most current research focused on problematic gaming with a clinical focus, such as among those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

"We found that people with autistic-like traits (ALTs) were not as strongly linked to social motives as escape motives, but that both of these motives helped explain the link between ALTs and gaming," Professor Caudwell said.

"The findings suggest that those with higher ALTs may engage in gaming less for social reasons and more for escape reasons, and that ALTs may be a risk factor from problem gaming."

Professor Caudwell said the findings don't imply having autism spectrum disorder or autistic-like traits lead to problem gaming, rather the results highlight the importance of understanding what

shapes gaming behaviour.

"We need to ensure gaming remains a balanced activity," Professor Caudwell said.

"By focusing on these underlying motivations, interventions for problem gaming may more effectively address the reasons gaming becomes problematic, while avoiding the stigmatisation of high gaming engagement.

"We need to make sure we are not pathologising gaming, rather understanding that when it is problematic, motives are really important to focus on."

Future avenues of research include expanding the survey pool to capture a wider range of respondents and exploring other factors which could contribute to problem gaming such as mental health and game preferences.

A mediation analysis of Autistic-like traits and gaming motivations on problem gaming symptoms: Are the effects of social and escape motives the same? was published in the journal Addictive Behaviors Reports.

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