

Esports and Aging: The Impact of Social Play on Loneliness and Well-Being

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Abstract

Esports has become an increasingly popular activity among older adults, yet its effects on loneliness and well-being remain underexplored. Traditionally associated with younger demographics, esports is now attracting older individuals who engage in team-based gaming. Social play may offer substantial benefits, particularly for those living in geographically isolated areas or experiencing limited social interaction. This qualitative study investigates how participation in esports influences the psychological and physical health of older adults, focusing on their experiences of loneliness and well-being.

The study involved two semi-structured group interviews and a structured survey with eight esports players aged 62 to 81 from Finland, Sweden, and Singapore. Participants evaluated their health and social experiences using Likert-scale ratings and open-ended responses. The data were analyzed using affinity diagramming to identify recurring themes.

Findings revealed improvements in hand-eye coordination, memory, reaction speed, multitasking, concentration, perception, and manual dexterity. Physical condition showed modest enhancement. Participants reported that social play alleviated feelings of loneliness. Many developed new friendships and experienced a sense of community; some played alongside their grandchildren, fostering intergenerational connections. Esports were described not only as cognitively stimulating but also as a motivator for increased physical activity.

The study suggests that social esports participation can enhance older adults' well-being and reduce loneliness. Team-based gaming provides meaningful social engagement and may serve as a tool for maintaining cognitive and physical functioning. Esports hold potential to promote social inclusion and self-efficacy among older populations, particularly in remote regions, and may contribute to active aging strategies.