The effect of stress on adolescent gaming addiction: 
The comparison of Korean and Chinese high school students

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**Objective:** In today’s society gaming addiction has become a world-wide problem, accelerated by the internet, smart-devices, etc. It is not difficult to find high school students who are addicted to smartphone games for a while. This has increased our interest as to why teenagers get addicted to games; and we wanted to find out whether stress would play a role in the addiction. Teenagers in South Korea and China get stress from school, parents, friends, etc. However, they are rarely provided with adequate ways to relieve their stress. Focusing on this issue we adopted the ‘self-medication’ theory. We focused on the point that people readily prescribed themselves something to relieve their stress and hypothesized that games could be one of the self-prescribed medications. This study aims to find out whether stress can be a factor in teenagers’ gaming addiction; what kind of stress (stress from school, parents, or peers) causes the gaming addiction; and whether there is a cultural difference in gaming addiction affected by stress.

**Methods:** The survey was given to 200 Korean teenagers and 187 Chinese teenagers aged from 16 to 18 years old. The stress-related questions asked subjects to score the level of stress they get from each of three categories (parents, peers, and academic pressure). Apart from the stress-related questions, the subjects were asked a series of questions that show whether they are addicted to games or not.

**Results:** The survey results showed a positive relationship between overall levels of stress and game addiction for both countries (Korea-male$\beta=.59$ & female$\beta=.59$/China-male$\beta=.60$ & female$\beta=.69$, significance for both countries and genders,all $p$s<.001). However, there was a difference between the two countries as to what kind of stress affected the addiction the most. For Korean teenagers stress caused by parents was the most significant factor (male$\beta=.49$& female$\beta=.41$,all $p$s<.001). However, academic stress was the most significant factor for Chinese teenagers (male$\beta=.44$& female$\beta=.51$,all $p$s<.001). Stress from parents, on the other hand, was no significance for both genders. This result can be effectively used in gaming addiction therapy in that therapist can see the significance of stress and try to relieve the stress focusing on the specific type.

**Keywords:** gaming addiction;adolescent; stress; self-medication;cultural difference