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Casual Video Games: Stress Management Technique in Women

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Abstract: *In the modern era, roles of women are redefined and they are ever-engaged in a multitude of jobs. Women are busy trying to maintain a balance among their household activities, their career, their social activities and a number of other miscellaneous tasks. Handling all these activities simultaneously with responsibility and efficiency is no small task and women are often subjected to stress. Living under constant pressure and stress invites many serious medical disorders such as diabetes, depression etc. to name a few. Stress management is, therefore, the need of the hour. Traditional stress management techniques include meditation, yoga, exercise, music etc. These techniques, no doubt, are very effective. However, with the ever increasing cases of stress and depression, other techniques to manage stress need to be explored. One such technique could be Casual Video Games (CVGs). These days these games are extremely popular with the mass as they are fun and easy to play. In the present study, we explore the possibility of using CVGs as remedial technique to handle stress, particularly in women.*

Keywords: *Casual Video Games (CVGs), Stress, Diabetes, Depression, Stress Management Techniques etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are living in an era where changes are happening at a very fast pace and they frequently have to face new challenges. They are also coming out of their traditional roles and are playing newer roles. This is more pronounced in the case of women who, in addition to their traditional roles of housewives, are also taking up a career and are becoming worldly wise. Women are engaged in multiple roles and are trying to strike a balance among these roles. In order to effectively manage all these roles, they are working very hard and are often subjected to pressure and stress.

Scientists and researchers across the world have observed that constant exposure to stress accounts for many medical imbalance viz. depression, diabetes etc., thereby establishing a relationship between stress and physical health. In many cases, it proves disastrous by leading up to the growth of tumor. Stress can affect and impair both the physical and the psychological health of humans. This prompted the researchers to focus on the functioning of emotional response to psycho-social stimuli. These researches led to the discovery of fight or flight response of human beings to the stressful situation.

Allostasis is a natural adaptive process and refers to a person's capability to acclimatize to adverse stimuli by maintaining homeostasis through the production of adrenalin, cortisol and other such mediators. Under stress, these mediators help human beings to cope up with the situation but they are also responsible for allostatic overload which is the wear and tear on the body and brain that result from being stressed out. However, since the stress levels these days are rising, there is a need to look for external activities which can release the stress and help in improving the general well-being of the person. Traditionally, to

release stress, people used to resort to external activities like, yoga, meditation, exercise, music, movies, shopping etc. But, in the modern era, where the life is redefined by the presence of numerous electronic gadgets, stress can also be managed by them. Casual video games, which are played using these gadgets, can also act as a stress buster.

There have been a number of researches on video games. However, most of them highlight the negative impact these video games have on people, especially kids. Very few studies are there which highlight the positive impact of these video games such as enhancing the brain, eye and hand coordination, facilitation of education, development of social relationships etc. Little is known about the positive health effects of casual video games and even less about the physiological processes or health benefits that underlie participation. In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand why casual video games are popular among women and how can be helpful as a stress buster.

II. CASUAL VIDEO GAMES

Casual Video Games are the video games which are characterized by their simple rules and lack of commitment to the game. Anybody can pick up the game, play for some time and then get on with their work. Unlike hardcore games, people don't have to devote long hours and don't have to pick up where they left off earlier on.

A number of casual video games are popularly played by masses. To achieve the purpose of the study, various casual video games which are popularly played especially by women were identified and their impact on various psychological and physiological aspects were analyzed. Few such popular casual video games were:

Bejeweled 2

PopCap Games are responsible for the development of this game. There are a number of different coloured gems in the game. The position of the gems can be swapped with adjacent gems. A player is needed to create a chain of three or more same coloured gems through swapping of adjacent gems. Whenever such a chain is formed, the player gets to score, the chain disappears and some other random series of gems would fall from the top. There are different levels like Classic, Puzzle, Endless, and Action modes. It is a very simple and engaging game and does not need much tactics.

Bookworm Adventures

It is a word forming game, developed by PopCap Games. The players are required to create words from sets of letters along with the exciting computer role playing game elements. Lex, the Bookworm, fights and damages the enemy by forming words. Both Lex and his adversary have health meters which, when depleted, signal defeat.

Chuzzle

It is puzzle game created by Raptisoft Games and published by PopCap Games. There is a 6x6 board containing multi-colored fuzzleballs, also known as "Chuzzles". These chuzzles need to be removed. On the removal of the chuzzles players score point and other chuzzles fall in their place. Moves are made by dragging rows and columns.

III. DISCUSSION

Typically, most gamers play video games, whether casual or hardcore, for fun. These games are played by players of all ages and genre. Of the total gaming population, women make up 38% of the population. This percentage increases when considering casual video games. In casual video games, women make up 74% of the gamers' population. This reflects that women prefer casual video games over hardcore video games. The popularity of casual video games among women could be accredited to a number of reasons. These games are fun and easy to play. They can be easily learnt and don't require long hours. They are not very expensive. Women can take a short break from their rigorous routine, play these games, revive themselves and go back to their work routine.

Besides giving fun and enjoyment, casual video games can also act as a means to relieve stress. There have been studies which reveal that brain activities are positively affected by these games and there is significant reduction in the activities of brain which are associated with avoidance or withdrawal. Thus, under stressful situation, instead of retreating and withdrawing from the situation, it releases stress and enables one to face the situation.

While playing these games, the players need to contemplate and concentrate on the game. As a result, during that period, the mind is shifted from the stressors and is relaxed. The energy is positively redirected. At times, the gamers are transported into a fantasy world, much away from the reality. For the time being, the gamers forget their stressful situation and the mind is much relaxed. Positive hormones are discharged and the gamer feels invigorated. After the short spell with the game, when the women resume her work, they feel rejuvenated and revitalized.

At the same time, there is continuous hand and eye movement required for punching and focusing on the screen. These commands are given to the hand and the eyes by the brain. Thus, there is increased coordination among the three. As a result of being positively engaged in some other positive and fun activity, stress is considerably reduced by the reduction of the cortisol level, a stress hormone, by 17%. Then there are certain low level tactical and strategy games, which although don't require complicated thought process and moves, are still helpful in improving the strategic thinking, which can help to solve work and home related problems in a very easy manner. Studies show that thirty minutes of playing video games can reduce stress levels significantly and the gamers feel much better after the game.

IV. CONCLUSION

We get only one life and therefore we should enjoy every moment of it and live happily. However, in today's fast-paced world, the demands of life are overwhelming and people are living very stressful life. Women, especially, are leading extremely stressed life as they are playing multiple roles; being mother, wife, daughter, career woman etc. at the same time. They need ways which will allow them to release their stress and any source of stress-relief is welcome. Playing video games in moderation can be a pretty good relaxation tool and actually provide them with a respite they are looking for. Apart from being a tool for relieving low level stress, playing video games can also have positive effects on mental and physical health.

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