

South Korea Cracks Down on Video Gaming Addiction

Written by 3K Admin

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By Geoffrey Cain / Seoul Tuesday, Apr. 20, 2010

Ever since Yoon Hyuk-joo, a 16-year-old in Seoul, started playing the popular computer game StarCraft eight years ago, studying has taken the backseat. For six hours every day in dim, smoky Internet cafes known in the South Korean capital as "PC Bangs," Yoon leads a squad of soldiers in Battlefield Online and then maims the undead in Counter-Strike: Zombies. His idols aren't your usual baseball players or Korean pop-music stars: the high-school student looks to inspiration from Lim Yo-hwan, known in South Korea as "The Emperor." Lim is one of the most successful professional StarCraft players of all time, whose celebrity has spurred fans to label him and his actress girlfriend as the South Korean equivalent of Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore.

But in a country where video game champions live like rock stars, Yoon concedes that too many teenagers are getting hooked to the hobby. He was pleased last week when the government ordered what it calls a "nighttime shutdown" for gamers: the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism directed the operators of the three most popular games to block, starting by September, children under 18 from playing games between midnight and 8 a.m. Another rule will significantly slow down their internet connections if they play for too many hours into the night, rendering the more graphics-intensive games unplayable, and several other bills are pending in the National Assembly that could restrict kids' gaming habits even further. "It's a great idea," says Yoon. "Video game addiction is having bad effects on our generation. The kids have to study and grow up eventually."

(See pictures of South Korean video gamers.)

South Korea is one of the most wired countries in the world, but that connectivity comes with a price. Since the early 2000s, occasional reports of compulsive video-game players dying or murdering loved ones to satisfy their addictions have raised hackles at the industry, a large domestic market valued at about \$2.4 billion in which 30 million people are thought to play regularly. The government has introduced the ban one month after police discovered a three-month-old baby starved to death while her parents were busy nurturing their virtual baby on a game at an Internet cafe.

It also comes one month after the Korean e-Sports Association (KeSPA), a governing body of professional computer game sports, reportedly filed charges against a group of retired StarCraft players and officials for allegedly manipulating the betting system — a testament to how seriously some Koreans have come to take the game. In February, a 22-year-old Korean man was charged with murdering his mother after she pestered him to stop playing. And in 2005, one of the most famous cases, a 28-year-old man went into cardiac arrest and died after playing StarCraft for 50 hours with a few bathroom breaks. That was a particularly bad year for the country, when 10 people died from video game addiction-related causes.

(See 10 things to do in Seoul.)

Psychologists estimate 10% of South Korean schoolchildren have shown signs of video-game addiction, thought by some psychiatrists to be one of the highest rates in the world, along with China. Video game addiction — though not officially recognized in the U.S. by the American Psychological Association — typically includes symptoms such as becoming withdrawn or angry when not allowed to play; severe cases can cause addicts to simply stop eating or sleeping until they're back on their binge. For years, South Korea has been at the forefront of treating the disorder. In 2002, before the issue had risen to global prominence, the government opened one of the region's first Internet addiction treatment centers, perched away in the countryside. Since then, hundreds of private hospitals and clinics have opened specialized units in the country to treat these disorders, and the government even opened a

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hotline for gaming addicts in 2006. At the treatment centers, patients typically spend two weeks or more "de-toxing" from their video game use, partaking in outdoor activities and arts and crafts instead. They also discuss with counselors the problems that video games have created for their health and social lives, supposedly releasing their anxiety. </p><p align="justify">Source:

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