

KORUS

Transforming young gamers: A qualitative study of the gaming routines, health practices, and motivation in esports and education of elite esports students in Norway

Stian Overå & Niri Talberg, Centre for Addiction Issues, Norway

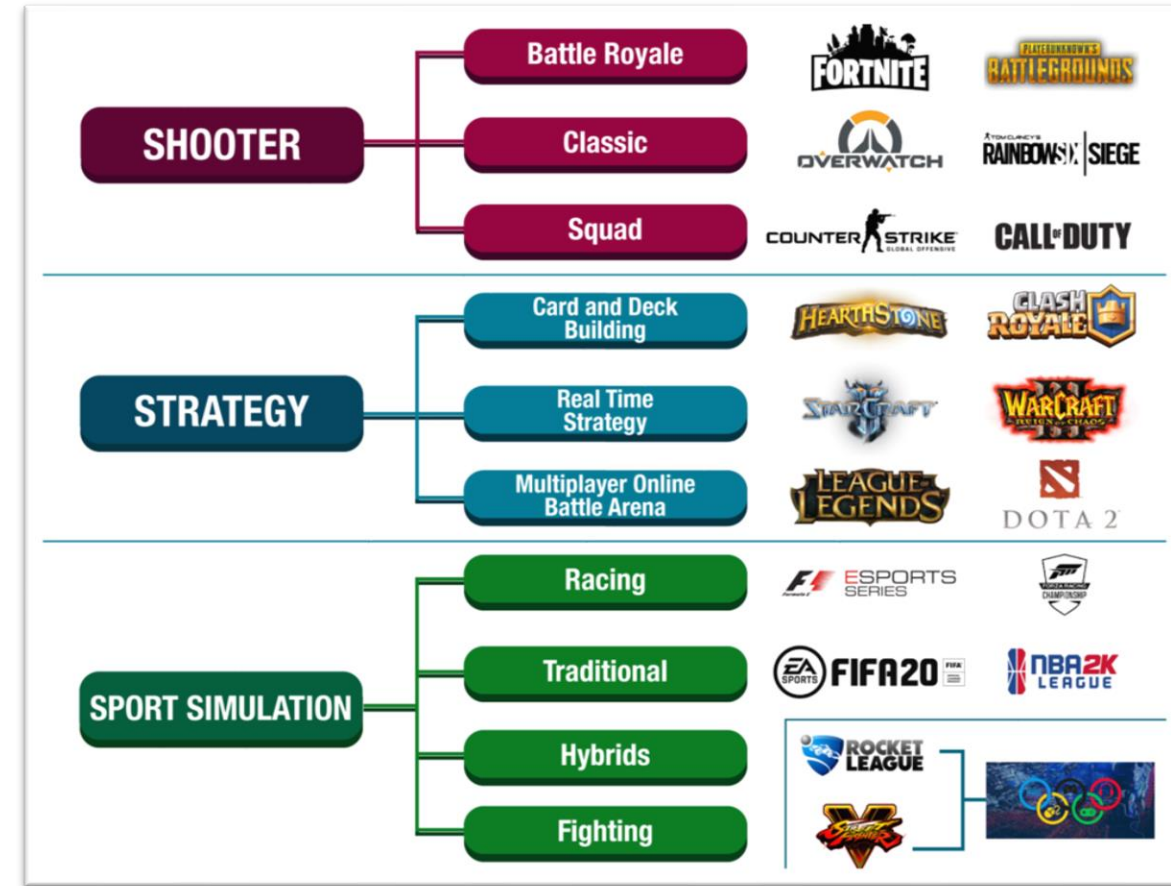
EASG, Rome 12.09.2024





What is esports?

- “Organized competitive gaming” (Pluss et al., 2022)
- From subculture to popular culture
- Involves many different genres and games
- Esports has entered the education system





Purpose and approach

- Postdoctoral research, 2020-2026
- Objective: explore Norwegian high school students' experiences from an elite esports program, and how entering the program influenced other areas of their lives (e.g., gaming routines, health, future ambitions)
- Interviews with 12 students (9 boys, 3 girls)
- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2014)





Main themes



**1. THE 24-HOURS-
ATHLETE**



**2. LEVELLING UP ON
GAMING HABITS**



**3. ASSERTING THAT
ESPORTS IS NOT A
CAREER PLAN**



1. The 24-hours-athlete

Main insight: As students transitioned from casual gamers to «elite sports students», they became more aware of the importance of physical training, nutrition, and sleep in enhancing their in-game performance and overall health.

“I think it is pretty common to think that gamers just sit in front of a computer and eat a lot of junk food and stuff like that. I kind of had that mindset before, too. Because that is how I thought about it, that is how it was portrayed. But after I started here, I was completely shocked by how much it has to do with diet, exercise, tactics, and so much more. It has given me a completely different view of it.” (Sara)

“We have a lot of focus on jogging and endurance. A game can last up to four hours and staying focused for four hours straight can be quite tiring. It's the same as chess, it can be tiring and, you just kind of sit there.” (Julia)

“I'm a lot fitter as an esports athlete than if I had just been a gamer. So, I think the body has gotten better too.” (Daniel)



1. The 24-hours-athlete

“If I just sleep more, if I sleep optimally, I think I will perform at least 10% better as a player.” (Jonas)

“I have got a better sleep structure. We had a sleep seminar with a sleep expert at the end of last semester. We learned techniques we can use to fall asleep, and they have helped. I must work more on my sleep rhythm, but it [the seminar] helped a lot.” (David)



2. Levelling up on gaming habits

Main insight: Students reduced gaming hours and became more strategic, emphasizing quality over quantity. They spent more time analyzing gameplay and developed self-directed learning methods to improve their skills.

“I think I've started playing less than before. I've realized that just playing a lot doesn't make you better. You must think about what you're doing, right.” (David)

“I used to just play, play, play. If I lost five games in a row, I'd keep going. But now, if I lose one or two, I take at least a 10-minute break. I get up, drink water, walk the dogs, or do something else before continuing.” (Tobias, 18)

“It would probably be to think more about what I do, because it wasn't until a year ago that I really started thinking, ‘If I do this, then I must do that, too’. Don't just play on autopilot, since that is almost what I have been doing until now.” (Julian)



3. Asserting that esports is not the career plan

Main insight: Most students didn't view esports as a long-term career but as a passion. The program helped them feel a sense of belonging and increased their motivation in school.

"It used to be a dream, but it's not as big now. I have realized that I'm not going to be the best in the world. I just want to play and develop myself as part of a team, I would be more than happy with that." (Sarah)

"It would be fun, but I am afraid my hobby would become more of a thing I must do. I think it would ruin some of the charm of gaming and that it would become a burden instead of 'oh, I am super excited to sit down and play with my friends'" (Marie, 18).

"I get Higher Education Entrance Qualification, and I'm allowed to play video games, that's kind of the dream." (Oscar)



Final thoughts

- Esports, as «youth sports 2.0» (Tjørndal & Skauge, 2021) can promote healthy practices among young gamers.
- Well-structured esports programs support the needs of competence, autonomy, and belonging (SDT- framework, Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000).
- Sleep is a key area for future research and campaigns targeting esports communities
- Ethnographic studies and long-term research are needed to understand esports' impact over time.





Other topics to be explored in the study

Toxicity

Skins and gambling-like activities

Esports betting

Transferable skills

Stigma

Mental health

+++

Article

Prevalence and Characteristics of Female and Male Esports Players among Norwegian Youth: A General Population Study

Stian Overå ¹, Anders Bakken ² and Christer Hyggen ^{2,*}

¹ Norwegian National Advisory Unit on Concurrent Substance Abuse & Mental Health Disorders, Hospital Innlandet Trust and Norway, 2381 Brumunddal, Norway; stian.overa@sykehuset-innlandet.no

² Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), OsloMet—Oslo Metropolitan University, 0130 Oslo, Norway; abakk@oslomet.no

* Correspondence: chrihy@oslomet.no; Tel.: +47-40-20-37-47

Abstract: Electronic sports (esports) have evolved into a major cultural phenomenon in the 21st century, mirroring traditional sports with organized, competitive play. This study investigates the prevalence of esports participation and characteristics of esports players among Norwegian adolescents. Using data from the Ungdata survey, a comprehensive web-based survey of Norwegian adolescents that includes questions on demographics, health, physical activity, social relations, and leisure activities such as gaming and esports, we analyzed responses from 70,695 students aged 16–18 years collected during 2021–2023. We conclude that about one out of twenty in the age group of 16–18 years actively engage in esports. The figure conceals significant gender differences: only 0.7% of girls, compared to 8.8% of boys, actively participate in esports. While female esports players differ noticeably from non-players on almost all indicators included in our analyses, the picture among boys reflects more similarities between esports players and other boys, than differences. Among the esports players, females almost consistently reported more negative experiences than males, including less physical socialization, lower self-rated health, higher rates of loneliness and sleeping problems, and a greater difficulty fitting in at school. Despite these negative aspects, esports players maintain close friendships similar to their non-playing peers.

KORUS

stian.overa@sykehuset-innlandet.no

niri@sykehuset-innlandet.no