# Yale expert discusses digital addiction risks

**By Victoria Cruz**
**News Writer**

On April 7, the university hosted Dr. Marc Potenza, a professor in the Child Study Center and Neuroscience at the Yale School of Medicine.

Problematic Usage of Digital Technologies: Addictive Behaviors Involving Gambling, Gaming, Pornography and Social Media aimed to equip young people with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly digital world responsibly.

"I never realized how much algorithms shape our behavior, and it's honestly scary to think about how it affects our brains in ways we may not understand yet," biology major Craig Huydic, a senior, said.

Digital technologies have become embedded in our everyday lives. While they enhance communication, productivity and entertainment, they also present risks for what is increasingly referred to as problematic usage of the internet.

PUI includes gaming, gambling, social media and pornography, which may share underlying features of impaired impulse control and motivation.

A major focus of the presentation was the link between digital use and youth behavioral health.

Concerns are being raised as externalizing behaviors like aggression are on the rise, as well as internalizing issues like anxiety and depression.

These patterns are being observed through sleep disturbances, including difficulty maintaining and going to sleep. They act as compounding factors with PUI throughout childhood and adolescence.

Media plays a major role in establishing these patterns. Intensive time spent online, especially during teenage years is detrimental due to rapid brain development.

Since motivational systems develop faster than the prefrontal cortex, people at this stage are more likely to take risks.

Digital engagement is at an all-time high among youth. Data presented from the Pew Research Center identified that 46% of teenagers report being online constantly. Platforms like YouTube, Tik Tok, Snapchat and Instagram are commonly used.

Potenza emphasized that psychological tension is often created by these platforms, causing connection versus loneliness, engagement versus fear of missing out, and authenticity versus idealized self-presentation.

Other concerns were raised about unrestricted access and exposure to inappropriate content online.

As director of multiple research initiatives at Yale focused on addictions and impulse control disorders, Potenza shed light on how modern digital environments are shaping youth development and outcomes.

Problematic usage varies across different demographics.

According to research on internet gaming disorder and social media addiction, extensive findings reveal that females are more prone to problems with social media use, while internet gaming is more common among males.




PHOTO | VICTORIA CRUZ

**Dr. Marc Potenza, a professor in the Child Study Center and Neuroscience at the Yale School of Medicine speaking during the digitial addiction discussion on April 7 in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom.**

Potenza also discussed the various classifications of behavioral addictions. Gaming disorder has been included in ICD-11 as a clinical condition. This addition has been met with resistance from the gaming industry.

With sports betting increasing in popularity, some states have been prompted to create support services and propose regulations.

"As a public health major, it's become striking how under-researched these topics are considering how damaging they are. We still have a long way to go," public health major Natalia Gillner, a junior, said.

While digital tools offer clear benefits, the talk emphasizes a need to balance access with protections.

# U.S.-Iran ceasefire faces uncertainty

**By Victoria Cruz**
**News Writere**

On April 7, the U.S. and Iran agreed to a conditional two-week ceasefire over a month into the conflict. The key condition of this ceasefire is for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, their leverage in negotiations.

The Strait of Hormuz is the most critical chokepoint for trade. Roughly 20-30% of global daily oil consumption passes through the strait according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

"I think the deal looks like it's a good step in the right direction. Based on the conduct that I have seen from Trump throughout this whole deal, it's really not conducive of someone who's supposed to be a leader of one of the largest nations in the world," business administration major Tom Gilbertie, a senior, said.

Pressure on the United States to take action towards peace increased after President Trump posted on Truth Social, said "A whole civilization will die tonight" in reference to the Iranian people.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stepped up to lead negotiations. The ceasefire was effective the next day. Trump claimed that since all military objectives have been met, the U.S. is now open to negotiations.

Iran put forward a 10-point plan that details their conditions for reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

The specifics include compensation for reconstruction efforts, complete cessation of war in Iran and neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen and a commitment to lift sanctions in the region.

Israel has agreed to back the deal but said that its conditions cannot extend to Lebanon, where they have been fighting Hezbollah.

After the ceasefire was announced, Pakistan invited leaders from Iran and the U.S. to attend peace talks.

This talk lasted 21 hours according to PBS but did not result in any long-standing agreement to finish the war or reopen the strait.

The U.S., led by Vice President JD Vance in negations, said the main hinderance to peace talks is Iran's inability to commit to not seeking out nuclear weapons. Tehran has always denied claims that they seek nuclear weapons.

Both Iran and the U.S. have said that despite the initial talk not leading to any concrete conclusion, both sides are willing to keep discussions open.

Trump now said he will issue an immediate blockade of the strait to mitigate Iran's negotiation power.

He stated that taking control of the strait is the only way to ensure safe transit for ships during negotiations.

"The ceasefire is only in name. The U.S.' actions have contradicted what Trump posted on social media, and it's being publicized into a circus. The photo and video evidence of damage to lives and infrastructure in more than one country is astounding because it's originating from one country," political science major Abbey Candelora, a senior, said.

Israel surprised the world with an announcement to open negotiations between them and Lebanon.

The states have no formal relations with each other, but Israel hopes to get Lebanon to take responsibility for disarming Hezbollah. After the ceasefire announcement, Israel proceeded to inundate Beirut with airstrikes and killed over 300 people.

April 8 was the deadliest day in Lebanon since the war began, according to Human Rights Watch,.

The ceasefire will end on April 22 as Pakistan has conveyed the intention to facilitate peace talks.

Students are expressing concerns over how and if the ceasefire will lead to permanent peace in the region.

"I think Americans are just tired of this inconsistent leadership. It's just emblematic of how he's been behaving throughout his entire presidency. And we will see how tired Americans are of that in the midterms," Gilbertie said.

# Students learn suicide prevention

When college students think about mental health resources, they might picture counseling centers, crisis lines or therapy appointments. But one of the most powerful tools against suicide might not be found in a clinic— it might start with a simple conversation.

College campuses throughout Connecticut are training students to recognize warning signs, ask direct questions and connect someone in crisis to professional help. The training — called Question, Persuade, Refer — aims to give students the confidence to be part of the statewide response to increased suicide rates.

"You don't have to be a counselor or therapist to help someone," Wellbeing Specialist Erin Duff, who leads the QPR training at the university, said. "You just have to be willing to pay attention and step in when something feels off."

On an early November morning, Duff and nine students sat around a table in a conference room in the Adanti Student Center.

Duff said the part everyone hesitates about is asking the question: "Are you thinking about suicide?"

Duff outlined that the direct question, feel like they are crossing an invisible line.

These 90-minute sessions teach participants how to spot warning signs, ask direct questions and refer someone to help. During a separate session led by Wellbeing Coordinator Allyson Regis, participants practiced how to respond in real-life situations.

The university has been hosting the training since 2022. In the 2024-25 school year, a total of 345 students and staff attended the training.

Suicide remains a serious and persistent public health concern in Connecticut and beyond.

Over the past three decades, the state has seen a gradual but noticeable increase in suicide deaths across the state.

Between 2019 and 2023, the state averaged roughly 370-400 suicide deaths per year compared to about 100 homicides each year.

While deaths among young adults aged 20-24 have declined as a percentage of total suicides, the age group still represents nearly 6% of statewide suicides, at 23 deaths in 2024.




PHOTO | MACKENZIE BYERLEE

**Wellbeing Specialist Erin Duff leading the QPR training in an Adanti Student Center conference room on Nov. 18.**

Men account for roughly three-quarters of all suicide deaths; middle-aged and older men remain the most at risk.

Suicide prevention has long been a focus in Connecticut, with targeted youth initiatives dating back to the 1980s.

Now, a statewide approach that reaches all age groups, the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board, brings together hundreds of agencies for monthly prevention and planning efforts.

The state's latest Suicide Prevention Plan, among other efforts, calls for stronger coordination around campus trainings and programs.

Connecticut's prevention network also includes programs like Fresh Check Day, an interactive fair promoting mental health awareness through peer engagement.

Fresh Check Day, founded in 2012 by the Jordan Porco Foundation and now managed by Connecticut Children's Medical Center, aims to normalize mental health discussions.

"The program is designed to be flexible and adaptable so each campus can shape it to meet its specific needs," Program Outreach Coordinator Isabella Baldino said.

Several Connecticut colleges, including University of Connecticut and the state community college system, host Fresh Check days each year.

"FCD is not titled a suicide prevention fair, otherwise students wouldn't likely attend," Hyman said. "Better to market it as a mental health and suicide prevention and resources fair."

The fair features booths, food and interactive displays, including one where students wrote affirmations like, "I am shy, but I am not weak."

"All booths at the event have messaging embedded that speak to suicide prevention," Hyman said.

Other programs include UConn HELPS, a training that covers common myths, warning signs and key resources, and Programs On-The-Go, a wellness initiative at CCSU that sends guest speakers to deliver presentations about mental health.

Biology major Jadelyn Garcia Medina, a junior who serves as a peer mentor coordinator and orientation ambassador, said the QPR training is a great way to better understand how to support others.

"The training is a good reminder to stay open-minded and to be kind to everyone. You never know what someone is going through, and learning different ways to support students can make a real difference," Garcia Medina said.

Brian Quinnett, the executive director of the QPR Institute, described the training as intentional and very straightforward.

"You recognize someone in a mental health crisis, start a conversation and help get them to professional care," Quinnett said.

Quinnett revealed that the true impact is hard to count because "lives saved" cannot be tracked perfectly. The strategy is simple: train as many people as possible so help is nearby when someone needs it.

"You need to train thousands to save one and millions to save thousands," Quinnett said. "The more people we train, the more lives we believe are being saved."

**This story was a collaboration between Professor Gil's Journalism 220 Class by students Mackenzie Byerlee, Draven Dabrowski, Aminata Diakite, Rachel Rose, Valentina Toro and Catherine Vu.**

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