

## The Straits Times

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Feb 1, 2010

### Kids steal to feed gaming

MORE children are stealing credit cards and cash from their parents to secretly purchase virtual items for computer games.

These items are typically weapons that help a player advance in a game, or limited-edition virtual collectibles.

At Touch Cyber Wellness & Sports, a cyber-wellness education programme for youths run by voluntary welfare group Touch Community Services, counsellors have seen 14 per cent of the 191 gamers they have counselled from 2006 to last year exhibit stealing behaviour, said its manager, Mr Poh Yeang Cherng.

Mr Nicholas Gabriel Lim, executive director of psychological-services provider iGROW, said that in the last five years, seven in 10 youths whom he had counselled steal money to buy items such as MP3 players and mobile phones. In the past year, he has seen a shift towards stealing for gaming - from hardly any cases, to two out of 10.

Mr Poh added that a reason for the problem is that game developers are exploring different ways to maximise revenue from games. Developers used to make money just from the sale of games. Today, however, they also earn revenue from the trading of virtual items, he said.

'In recent years, we observed that payment for games' features has become easily accessible to children and youths,' he said, citing payment methods such as value cards from convenience stores, SAM machines, SMS-payments and ez-link cards. The accessibility of payment methods encourages children and youths to use them, which can cause more theft cases, he said. -- MYPAPER