



Committee: World Health Organization

Topic: Video games listed as a mental disorder

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Children's learning, health and social skills could be positively impacted by playing video games, according to a review of research published by the American Psychological Association. Even video games that have violence may have some benefits. People who play "action" video games, many of which are deemed violent, could improve cognitive skills such as spatial navigation, reasoning, memory and perception. One study found that "shooter" video games improved spatial skills just as well as academic courses specifically designed to enhance those same skills.

INTRODUCTION

The gaming disorder is included in a section on "disorders due to addictive behaviors." To warrant a diagnosis of the new disorder, excessive behavior should be evident for a period of at least a year. But playing lots of video games doesn't necessarily mean a person has the disorder—the behavior has to significantly impair personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other aspects of your life.

Although it is not yet recognized by the World Health Organization as a diagnosable disorder, video game addiction is a very real problem for many people. According to the University of New Mexico, recent studies suggest that 6 to 15 percent of all gamers exhibit signs that could be

characterized as addiction. Though this disorder can have significant consequences to those suffering from it, its signs and symptoms can sometimes be very difficult to recognize.

Many different causes factor into video game addiction. One of the main reasons that video games can become so addictive, however, is they are designed to be that way. Video game designers, like anyone else trying to make a profit, are always looking for ways to get more people playing their games. They accomplish this by making a game just challenging enough to keep you coming back for more but not so hard that the player eventually gives up. In other words, success for a gamer often feels just out of reach. In this respect, video game addiction is very similar to another more widely recognized disorder: gambling addiction.

As with any other addiction, video game addiction has warning signs. It is important to know how to recognize these signs if you or someone you care about is an avid gamer. According to the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery, these symptoms can be both emotional and physical.

Some of the emotional signs or symptoms of video game addiction include:

- Feelings of restlessness and/or irritability when unable to play
- Preoccupation with thoughts of previous online activity or anticipation of the next online session
- Lying to friends or family members regarding the amount of time spent playing
- Isolation from others in order to spend more time gaming

Some of the physical signs or symptoms of video game addiction include:

- Fatigue

- Migraines due to intense concentration or eye strain
- Carpal tunnel syndrome caused by the overuse of a controller or computer mouse
- Poor personal hygiene

On the other hand, after nearly every mass shooting since Columbine, policymakers have cited violent video games as a likely culprit. The evidence doesn't support this claim. The focus on games instead of actual gun control measures tends to be a misguided distraction at best. And yet, according to White House press secretary Sarah Sanders, video game companies should look out for invitations from the White House for a meeting with the president to discuss the "ongoing debate over school safety."

This puts game developers in a familiar and frustrating position, because talking to authorities seems unlikely to do much more than waste everyone's time. But there *are* things the game industry can and should be doing to address gun culture—not as the origin of the problem, but as part of a wider movement to help fix it.

CURRENT SITUATION

Its 11th International Classification of Diseases (ICD) will include the condition "gaming disorder". The last version of the ICD was completed in 1992, with the new guide due to be published in 2018. The draft document describes it as a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behavior so severe that it takes "precedence over other life interests"

The guide contains codes for diseases, signs and symptoms and is used by doctors and researchers to track and diagnose disease. It will suggest that abnormal gaming behavior should be

in evidence over a period of at least 12 months "for a diagnosis to be assigned" but added that period might be shortened "if symptoms are severe".

Symptoms include:

- impaired control over gaming (frequency, intensity, duration)
- increased priority given to gaming
- continuation or escalation of gaming despite negative consequences

Like any other compulsive disorder, video game addiction can have severe negative consequences. Though most of the symptoms listed above have short-term effects, they can lead to more severe long-term repercussions if not addressed properly. For example, someone addicted to video games will often avoid sleeping or eating proper meals in order to continue gaming. While the short-term effects of this may include hunger and fatigue, it could eventually lead to a sleep disorder or diet-related health issues. Similarly, those who isolate themselves from others in order to play video games may miss out on family events, outings with friends, or other events in the short-term. If this continues to be a pattern for a long period of time, however, addicts might find themselves without any friends at all.

Other long-term effects of video game addiction to consider are the financial, academic and occupational consequences involved. Video games and video game equipment can be very expensive, especially when factoring in recurring costs such as the high-speed Internet connection required for online multiplayer games. These games can also be very time-consuming, leaving addicted gamers with less time to focus on their education or career.

A recent study from the University of Oxford suggested that, although children spend a lot of time on their screens, they generally managed to intertwine their digital pastimes with daily life. The research - looking at children aged eight to 18 - found that boys spent longer playing video games than girls.

Different findings show that technology is being used with and in some cases perhaps to support other activities, like homework for instance, and not pushing them out; just like we adults do, children spread their digital tech use throughout the day, while doing other things.

Another study published in 2013 in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* found that playing video games can enhance motivation, cognitive effort, and increased efforts over long periods of time, as many games require players to reach multiple levels for an ultimate long-term goal. These benefits are similar to what children gain from sports, arts, clubs and hobbies, reported *Forbes*. University of California, Irvine, researchers found in 2015 that playing 3-D video games can **boost memory formation**—adding to the literature that shows those types of games can improve hand-eye coordination and reaction time.

Designing video games specifically to improve health could also boost their benefits. *STAT* reported earlier this month that a new video game from Akili Interactive Labs aided attention and inhibitory control in children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in its late-stage study on the game. Those findings were in comparison with children who played an action-driven video game that was designed as a placebo. Another recent study in mid-December revealed that people who play action video games performed better in a challenging reading task and in visual attention span. Visual attention span is one component of visual attention that has been linked to reading development and dyslexia, and researchers said that combining visual attention span

training with specific aspects of action video games could help build future programs to improve reading acquisition and remediation for dyslexia.

Mass shootings have spurred game designers to action before. Charlie Cleveland was in the early stages of developing the game that would become *Subnautica* when Adam Lanza shot and killed 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Cleveland resolved to create a game that could be “one vote toward a world with less guns.” They’re completely absent from the final product, which was released in January and dedicated to the families of Newtown. “I’ve never believed that video game violence creates more real-world violence,” he wrote. “But I couldn’t just sit by and ‘add more guns’ to the world either.”

COUNTRIES INVOLVED

Some countries had already identified it as a major public health issue. Many, including the UK, have private addiction clinics to "treat" the condition. 50 new cases of digital addiction each year and his criteria is based on whether the activity is affecting basic things such as sleep, eating, socializing and education.

Many psychiatrists refer to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the fifth edition of which was published in 2013. In that, internet gaming disorder is listed as a "condition for further study", meaning it is not officially recognized.

SOUTH KOREA: Lots of countries are grappling with the issue and in South Korea the government has introduced a law banning access for children under 16 from online games between midnight and 06:00.

JAPAN: In Japan, players are alerted if they spend more than a certain amount of time each month playing games

CHINA: There, internet giant Tencent has limited the hours that children can play its most popular games.

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