

Is Classifying 'Gaming Addiction' as a Mental Health Disorder Helpful?

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Introduction

American Psychiatric Association (2013)

- declined to add “internet gaming disorder” into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.)
- proposed criteria added in “conditions for further study”

Proposed Diagnostic Criteria

- most common in
 - male adolescents (12 - 20 years old)
 - Asian countries
- mild / moderate / severe

Proposed Diagnostic Criteria

1. preoccupation or obsession with Internet games.
2. withdrawal symptoms when not playing Internet games.
3. a build-up of tolerance – more time needs to be spent playing the games.
4. tried to stop or curb playing Internet games, but has failed to do so.
5. loss of interest in other life activities, such as hobbies.
6. continued overuse of Internet games even with the knowledge of how much they impact a person's life.
7. lied to others about his or her Internet game usage.
8. uses Internet games to relieve anxiety or guilt
9. lost or put at risk an opportunity or relationship because of Internet games.

World Health Organization (2018)

- added 'gaming disorder' into the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)
- defines gaming disorder as
 - a pattern of behavior for at least 12 months in which gaming is out of control
 - an increased priority given to gaming, whereby it takes precedence over other interests and daily activities.
 - a continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences

Arguments against

(Aarseth et al., 2017)

1. Quality of the research base is low

- lots of controversies, no consensus amongst scholars (Griffiths et al., 2016)
- current research is speculative, clinical studies scarce and have low sample sizes (Van Rooij, Schoenmakers, & van de Mheen, 2017)

2. Operationalization

- relies too heavily on substance use and gambling criteria
- significant difference between behavioural and substance driven problematic behaviour (withdrawal, tolerance) (Griffiths et al., 2016; Van Rooij & Prause, 2014)
- pathologizes thoughts, feelings, and behaviours which may be unproblematic to gamers
- Low specificity leads to misclassification of gamers having problems
- Current criteria not properly evaluated for construct, content and face validity - lack of clinical data
- Emerging evidence - current criteria is not aligned with gaming context and culture, therefore, is not able to predict problematic outcomes

3. No consensus on symptomatology and assessment of problematic gaming

- Current claims regarding symptoms/predictors based on flawed interpretations of survey data/application of statistical analysis, or overreliance on psychometric evaluations
- Few studies reveal high comorbidity between gaming disorders and other disorders, i.e. problematic gaming could be coping mechanism associated with other disorders (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014)

4. Moral panic about harm of video games

- premature application of clinical diagnosis, treatment of false-positive cases amongst children and adolescents.
- proposed categories likely to be met with significant skepticism & controversy by WHO
- pathologizing one form of entertainment may lead to a slippery slope of diagnoses involving sports, work, food, etc., which may lead to a saturation of behavioural disorders

5. Research locked into confirmatory approach rather than exploration of boundaries of normal vs pathological

- More screening instruments instead of stimulating fundamental validation and theoretical work (confirmatory thinking vs exploratory thinking)
- Resources may be wasted when relying on the inappropriate usage of theories of substance use disorder

6. Stigma towards gamers

- Adds tension to parent-child relationship
- Diagnoses used to control, restrict children -> “gaming addiction camps”
- disorder might detract attention from improving media literacy, parental education, and other factors that would actually contribute to the resolution of some of the issues with problematic gaming.

Arguments for

(Király and Demetrovics, 2017)

1. Despite lack of clinical, qualitative, longitudinal studies, emerging research suggests that a minority of gamers do have functional and psychological impairments related to excessive gaming (Chappell, Eatough, Davies, & Griffiths, 2006; Ko et al., 2014)

2. Problem behaviors, such as gambling or gaming disorder, hold great similarities in symptomatology and neurobiology with traditional substance-related disorders even if important differences exist as well (Hellman, Schoenmakers, Nordstrom, & van Holst, 2013)

3. Gaming disorder proposal an attempt to unify distinct opinions in the field by including criterias with strong/medium support to create a common ground for assessment/clinical diagnosis.

The inclusion of gaming disorder would not hinder researchers to further test the highly debated criteria as the next revision of the DSM encourages such studies.

4. Formal diagnosis might actually decrease stigmatization

- viewing problematic gaming as a disorder instead of a personal weakness or bad character, etc.

i.e., depression viewed as a mental disorder instead of being lazy (Hing, Russell, & Gainsbury, 2016)

5. Formal diagnosis might also clarify and popularize difference between high engagement, and gaming disorder

- functional/psychological impairment must be present and not just based on gaming hours (Demetrovics & Király, 2016; Király, Tóth, Urbán, Demetrovics, & Maraz, 2017)

6. Formal diagnosis used as a common starting point for research, potentially evolving further due to ongoing research.

Eg. gambling

- DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994, 2000)
 - > considered impulse control disorder
- DSM-5
 - > substance related and addictive disorders

Evaluating

Arguments against

- > Tends to fall into a 'slippery slope'
- > Has no conflict of interest
- > One of the authors of the paper is cited in the journal in a contradictory manner (i.e., the author contradicts themselves in their past journal).

Arguments for

- > Demetrovics has participated in consultation meetings convened by the WHO from 2015 onward and received travel support from it.
- However, both Király and Demetrovics state that the views expressed in the paper are of their own
- > Uses more references
- > Uses up to date references
- > Manages to refute every single point that Aarseth et. al. has made.

Conclusion

Based on the evaluation, I stand by the classification of 'gaming disorder' being helpful

(arguments for)

thank you for
listening!

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