

WHO's Revised Guide Classifies 'Gaming Disorder' as Mental Health Condition

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With the release of a stable version for implementation of its 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) diagnostic guide on Monday, the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified "gaming disorder" as a mental health condition. The guide lists gaming disorder as part of a subset of "mental, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders" that are "due to addictive behaviours." The mental "disorders due to addictive behaviours" classification also includes gambling disorder.

ICD-11 describes gaming disorder as follows:

Gaming disorder is characterized by a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behaviour ('digital gaming' or 'video-gaming'), which may be online (i.e., over the internet) or offline, manifested by: 1) impaired control over gaming (e.g., onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, context); 2) increasing priority given to gaming to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other life interests and daily activities; and 3) continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. The

behaviour pattern is of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning. The pattern of gaming behaviour may be continuous or episodic and recurrent. The gaming behaviour and other features are normally evident over a period of at least 12 months in order for a diagnosis to be assigned, although the required duration may be shortened if all diagnostic requirements are met and symptoms are severe.

The Entertainment Software Association, which opposes classifying gaming addiction as a disorder, has criticized the new revision of ICD-11. The organization said, "It is extremely important to note that the proposed draft circulating is not final and it is still under discussion and review." Some critics of the gaming disorder classification believe research is still inconclusive and think naming gaming addiction as a disease could harm the video game industry.

Researchers pointed out that they do not necessarily believe games themselves are harmful. Douglas Gentile of Iowa State University said, "The majority of people don't have a severe problem with it." However, he cautioned that "over 3 million children" have suffered as a result of excessive gaming. His team discovered "that when kids became addicted, their depression increased, their anxiety increased, their social phobia increased and their grades decreased."

Many researchers such as Gentile believe that recognizing the WHO's gaming disorder designation may help patients seek medical treatment and receive coverage from insurers. In the United States, the American Psychological Association (APA) relies on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) rather than the ICD. The fifth edition of the DSM, which the APA released in 2013, refers to internet gaming disorder as a "condition for further study." The APA has reportedly fought insurers to use the ICD rather than its own DSM when determining coverage.

Many countries outside the United States rely on the ICD to classify diseases. While WHO released the version of ICD-11 for implementation on Monday, the final draft is expected to be submitted to WHO's World Health Assembly for final approval in 2019. WHO first [proposed](#) the inclusion of gaming disorder in ICD-11 in January.

Characters obsessed with gaming are prevalent in anime and manga. In the [*Recovery of an MMO Junkie*](#) anime, which premiered in October, a 30-year-old woman quits her job to reinvent herself as an online gamer.