

Video game addiction needs standard definition

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(Medical Xpress)—Researchers at the University of Adelaide say treatment for people affected by video game "addiction" would be improved if a standard definition of the problem were adopted by psychologists.

Dr Daniel King, a Senior Research Associate in the School of Psychology, has made the call following an extensive review of worldwide research into "pathological" or harmful [video game](#) playing behaviour.

Published in this month's issue of the journal *Clinical Psychology Review*, his study has found that there is no clear consensus on what constitutes pathological video gaming, and how it should be measured.

"[Video game addiction](#), as it's often known in the media and by the public, has been around since the 1980s. Over that time, and with developments in technology, the problem of pathological video gaming has grown significantly. However, the research is lagging behind," Dr King says.

"Much of the research has borrowed extensively from the fields of [problem gambling](#) and [substance dependence](#). Today, '[internet use disorder](#)' is being debated as a kind of mental illness.

"Although there are some similarities, video gaming is not the same as gambling. Pathological video gaming has its own set of addictive

components which can be distinct to internet gambling or other behaviours like online shopping and using social media. We need to better understand the unique elements of pathological video gaming."

Based on his research and previous studies, Dr King says he believes the three key elements of pathological video gaming are: [withdrawal symptoms](#) when not gaming; a sense of loss of control over gaming; and harmful consequences of prolonged gaming.

"People affected by this pathological behaviour suffer [negative consequences](#) personally and interpersonally - it can damage relationships, careers, sleep, and health more broadly," he says.

"It's really hard to treat people effectively if as a profession we don't have a standard definition of pathological video gaming. Studies need a standard definition to identify clinical cases and measure outcomes. We need to get serious about measuring the problem in a valid and consistent way so that we know the treatment is being effective."

Dr King says the research community should not lose sight of the fact that playing video games can be a positive experience.

"For most people, playing video games adds value and enjoyment to their lives. We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that it's okay to be 'healthily obsessed' with games. But for those people who have a problem, we can do more to understand and treat them."

More information: www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0272735813000056

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