

Internet and video game addiction needs better treatment

April 29 2014, by David Ellis

(Medical Xpress)—University of Adelaide researchers are shedding light on the unique problems of video and internet gaming addiction, and say there's strong evidence to suggest that new treatments should be developed for these conditions.

The work, conducted by Associate Professor Paul Delfabbro and Dr Daniel King in the University's School of Psychology, has investigated gaps in the current knowledge of internet and video gaming [addiction](#), and the effectiveness of treatments used.

Their latest paper, published this month in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, shows that outcomes of treatments for internet gaming disorder are poorly measured and understood, and there's often little or no follow up in the longer term.

"There is a lack of understanding generally at both a clinical and a research level about what thought processes an addicted gamer is going through," says Associate Professor Delfabbro.

"Our research has already explored a range of thought processes that gamers experience, but much more work is needed. By better understanding the unique elements of gaming, the cognitive responses of addicted gamers, and the long-term implications of treatment, it's our hope that we can improve outcomes for people suffering this addiction," he says.

Associate Professor Delfabbro says this work has implications for the use of a common therapy used to treat addiction, known as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). The therapy addresses people's emotions, behaviour and cognitive processes through a series of goal-oriented, systematic procedures.

"In practices right around the world, cognitive-behavioural therapy has become widely promoted and accepted as the best approach for treating internet and [video game addiction](#), without really understanding whether or not it will be effective in these cases," Associate Professor Delfabbro says.

"We know that CBT has some use for treating [gambling addiction](#), but gamers aren't like gamblers. For a start, the games involve skill, whereas most CBT for gamblers focuses on addressing mistaken beliefs about chance and randomness. It's also very hard to provide this as an effective therapy when the underlying [thought processes](#) of gamers are not well understood."

Associate Professor Delfabbro says many people use gaming as an alternative to reality.

"Within the gaming culture are people who have trouble developing relationships in the real world and often prioritising their activities. This is in stark contrast to their abilities to make decisions and to achieve in a virtual environment. In some instances, both their sense of identity and their sense of purpose are tied in with the goals of an internet game or video [game](#). Some gamers may identify more closely with their virtual character or avatar than they do to people in the [real world](#)."

More information: King, D. L. and Delfabbro, P. H. (2014), "Internet Gaming Disorder Treatment: A Review of Definitions of Diagnosis and Treatment Outcome." *J. Clin. Psychol.* doi: 10.1002/jclp.22097

Provided by University of Adelaide

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