

Brief overview of the WHO Collaborative Project on the Development of New International Screening and Diagnostic Instruments for Gaming Disorder and Gambling Disorder

In this brief letter, we report a new World Health Organization (WHO)-led project developing gold standard instruments to detect gaming disorder and gambling disorder following their inclusion in the 'disorders due to addictive behaviours' section of the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) [1].

Online gaming is a common recreational activity globally, particularly among young people. In recent years, there has been increasing recognition that maladaptive patterns of video gaming may lead to functional impairment and psychological distress for some players [2–5]. In several countries, this issue has generated significant public health concerns [6, 7].

In 2013, internet gaming disorder was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)-5 as a condition requiring further study [8], and gaming disorder was included in ICD-11 in 2019 [1]. These classification and nomenclature changes, coupled with well-documented limitations of existing instruments [9–11], underscore the need for psychometrically robust instruments that distinguish across the spectrum of gaming behaviours, including 'regular and otherwise healthy gaming behaviours', 'hazardous gaming' and 'gaming disorder' [12].

The expansion of legal gambling opportunities has raised public health concerns about gambling behaviour and potential progressions to gambling disorder [13, 14]. By contrast to gaming disorder, gambling disorder has long been included in formal disease classification systems. Several screening and diagnostic instruments have been developed to assess gambling disorder. However, most are based on DSM-IV criteria and have been developed and/or validated in North American adult samples [15].

Against this background, the WHO Collaborative Project on the Development of New International Screening and Diagnostic Instruments for Gaming Disorder and Gambling Disorder was established in 2017 at the Fourth WHO Meeting on the Public Health Implications of Addictive Behaviours in Istanbul, Turkey. The project is managed by a Working Group and Advisory Group (see author list). Members include international clinical and research experts in nosological classification, psychiatry, clinical psychology, internal medicine, family practice, epidemiology, neurobiology and public health. Advice is also received from gamers. A protocol was designed to develop the instruments through 10 steps. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2023.

Once completed, this project will facilitate identification and diagnosis of gaming and gambling disorders. It will also contribute to the development of monitoring frameworks by generating comparable epidemiological data and facilitate training and capacity building of health professionals. Further, these instruments will support clinical practice, and help develop and evaluate therapeutic interventions and services required by patients and relatives.

Implementation of the project in multiple countries/jurisdictions will help to attract attention to these conditions on national health agendas, increase capacity of health and social services to help people with gaming and gambling disorders and raise public awareness of the adverse consequences of excessive gaming and gambling. This process will strengthen international collaboration and support networking on clinical and public health dimensions of gaming and gambling. Dissemination of knowledge is a key area for global action at the WHO and, accordingly, the new instruments will be made available in multiple languages to facilitate their use globally. Interested readers can contact the corresponding author if they have any questions or comments on this project.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this paper and they do not necessarily represent the official position, policies, views or decision of any other organization. M.N.P. reports broader interests, which did not influence this paper, but are noted here for context. M.N.P. has consulted for and advised pharmaceutical and health-care entities including AXA, Idorsia and Opiant/Lakelight Therapeutics. He has also consulted for and advised other entities including Game Day Data and the Addiction Policy Forum; received research support from the Mohegan Sun Casino and the National Center for Responsible Gaming (now the International Center for Responsible Gaming).

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KEYWORDS

Addictive behaviours, assessment, diagnosis, gambling, gaming, screening, video games, WHO

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