

Recognition of 'gaming disorder' as an illness by the World Health Organization (WHO)

The German games industry takes the challenges in the areas of media competence and excessive media use very seriously. However, the inclusion of so-called gaming disorder in the draft of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) of the World Health Organization has, with good reason, led to numerous debates. The recognition of addiction to computer and video games as an illness, as is currently under discussion, is highly problematic given the lack of the scientific basis necessary for such a far-reaching decision.

This lack of reliable study results is also the reason for the development of resistance among many academic experts to the recognition of 'gaming disorder'. As in the question of internet addiction, large numbers of physicians in the field dispute that excessive gaming constitutes a distinct syndrome. They outline their extensive critique of the current debate in the paper ['A weak scientific basis for gaming disorder: Let us err on the side of caution'](#). This follows the publication last year of a guest article in the Süddeutsche Zeitung under the title ['Wie Millionen Computerspieler zu Süchtigen erklärt werden sollen'](#) (How millions of computer gamers are to be declared addicts), in which Prof. Thorsten Quandt aptly summarised criticism voiced by many researchers with regard to the recognition of 'game addiction'.

An official recognition of addiction to games as an illness is not just unfounded, but also dangerous: Children and adolescents who are actually healthy could be stigmatised, for example because their changing media reality is not understood. As with any leisure activity, there is nothing unusual about digital gaming taking on great significance in certain life phases. Pathologising such behaviour would lead to numerous misdiagnoses. It would additionally result in serious mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorder going

undiagnosed and untreated in many patients, and in the downplaying of substance dependencies like alcohol or drug addictions.

Media literacy is a key competency necessary for the prevention of the excessive, unhealthy use of computer games and the internet, and should be acquired at as early an age as possible. To this end, we in the games industry have long been actively committed to the Entertainment Software Self-Regulation Body (USK), the Stiftung Digitale Spielekultur (Digital Games Culture Foundation) and the Spielraum institute. The USK and the Stiftung Digitale Spielekultur jointly offer a free advice booklet to parents that includes valuable recommendations on such topics as the length of playing and media-use time and excessive use.