

EDITOR'S PICK

Mental Health official: No link between gaming, violence

Staff, wire reports Aug 30, 2018



As investigators in Florida work to determine what led a 24-year-old video game enthusiast to shoot two other gamers to death before committing suicide, a local mental health professional said video games are likely not to blame for the incident.

David Katz, 24, of Baltimore, also wounded 10 others Sunday inside a pizzeria and bar hosting a "Madden NFL 19" tournament in Jacksonville, Florida. Katz was among about 130 gamers attending the competition at a mall in Jacksonville.

Bill Giguere, development officer with the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama Inc., said video game designers are smart enough to know what features in a game will stimulate pleasure centers in the brain. He added there is no definitive research to suggest a correlation between gaming and violent behavior.

"When something like (the Florida shooting) happens, we're desperate to find a bad guy, but the venues where (mass shootings occur) are pretty diverse," Giguere said. "What I often tell people is a lot of (mass shooters) have a diagnosed mental illness, and sometimes there are other variables. We need to do some number crunching and find a reason why this keeps happening."

Mental health history

Court records in Maryland show Katz had previously been hospitalized for mental illness. Divorce filings from his parents say that as an adolescent he was twice hospitalized in psychiatric facilities and was prescribed antipsychotic and antidepressant medications.

Katz carried two handguns, including one equipped with a laser sight, into the tournament venue but only fired one of them, Jacksonville Sheriff Mike Williams told a news conference Monday. Surveillance video revealed Katz was the only shooter, but his motive remains unknown.

The divorce filings also say Katz started obsessively playing video games as a boy, sometimes refusing to go to school or to bathe.

His mother, Elizabeth Katz, a toxicologist who worked at the Department of Agriculture, said in court papers that she would confiscate some of her son's gaming equipment after finding him playing games in the wee hours.

At one point, she put his gaming controllers in her bedroom behind a locked door and he punched a hole in the door, she said. When a boy, he sometimes "curled up into a ball," refused to attend school and sobbed, she said. She asserted that her ex-husband, a NASA engineer, instructed David not to take Risperidal — an anti-psychotic medication prescribed to him.

In late 2007, Katz was admitted to the Sheppard Pratt mental health system near his Maryland home for about 12 days. Court documents say a psychiatrist at that time administered antidepressants. He later spent about 13 days at Potomac Ridge, a mental health services facility in Rockville.

In June, the World Health Organization classified compulsive video game playing as a mental health condition. WHO said classifying "gaming disorder" as a separate addiction will help governments, families and health care workers be more vigilant and prepared to identify the risks.

The agency and other experts were quick to note that cases of the condition are still very rare, with no more than up to 3 percent of all gamers believed to be affected.

The American Psychiatric Association has not yet deemed gaming disorder to be a new mental health problem. In a 2013 statement, the association said it's "a condition warranting more clinical research and experience before it might be considered for inclusion" in its own diagnostic manual.

— *The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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