

# **Willingness to use serious games in psychotherapeutic treatment: An international comparison of psychotherapists and patients**

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**Keywords:** E-Mental Health, Serious Games, patients, psychotherapists, cross-cultural research

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## **Abstract**

*Theoretical background.* Compared to internet and mobile communication, video and computer games are still rarely used for psychotherapeutic treatment (Eichenberg & Huss, 2021). This also applies to the so-called serious games, interactive computer learning games that improve cognitive learning processes or behavior in a digital learning environment (Shute, Ventura, Bauer & Zapata-Rivera, 2009). Although the few empirical findings to date indicate the effectiveness of serious games in psychotherapeutic treatment settings, there is a lack of studies on the intention to use serious games in a national and international comparison.

*Research question.* Do patients and psychotherapists differ in the respective countries with regard to their willingness to use serious games in psychotherapeutic applications?

*Method.* The survey of basic attitudes towards serious games was carried out between 2016 and 2020 using an online questionnaire, consisting of a version for patients and for psychotherapists, in the following countries: Australia, China, Germany, Finland, Italy, Canada, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa and the United Kingdom. *Results.* The findings show that 18% of all patients (N = 1317) have already heard of serious games. About 78% of them would also intend to use them for

psychotherapeutic treatment in the future. Approximately 26% of all psychotherapists (N = 1497) were already familiar with the concept of serious games and 79% of them would consider using them. The psychodynamic therapy approach significantly reduced the likelihood of using serious games ( $b = -0.39$ ,  $p = .022$ ). In both samples, the influence of positive expectations on intentions to use serious games was significantly stronger in individualistic countries than in collectivistic countries.

*Conclusion.* Based on country-specific attitude patterns, contextual conditions can be derived that fundamentally promote or even prevent a positive perception of media applications.