



D40 The Obsession With Online Role-Playing Games and Child Neglect Deaths

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how a caregiver's obsessive on-line gaming activities can contribute to child neglect deaths.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by bringing to light the negative impact of obsessive on-line gaming on parents' ability to properly care for their children. Supervisory neglect can often be difficult to ascertain particularly in the absence of other witnesses. This presentation supplies an additional line of questioning to the investigator which may shed some light on the predisposing or direct causes of effect in child neglect deaths.

Research on obsessive internet use and electronic gaming has provided insight into a host of potential problems not only for the individual(s) but also for those around them. Those often most at risk are children neglected due to this obsessive behavior, particularly those who lack the ability to engage in the most basic of self-care. Of the various types of child abuse, neglect is the most prevalent form. In 2007, an estimated 1,760 children died due to abuse or neglect, with 34.1% of all fatalities attributed to neglect. Physical and supervisory neglect become significant concerns when the caregiver(s) are obsessively preoccupied with the above-mentioned media. Neglect issues become even more concerning when caregivers engage in "Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games" (MMORPGs) as unlike many other types of media, there is no ability to immediately "pause" the game and MMORPGs have no termination point, leading to marathon gaming sessions in which all other concerns are ignored including the well being of their infants and children.

In this paper, four case studies will be presented that constitute both physical and supervisory neglect that resulted in death. In each case study, parental obsession with on-line gaming and its role in each child's death will be discussed. In the cases presented, all children were under the age of four, with three under the age of one year. In three cases, the parents admitted to leaving their children unsupervised on average up to 14.5 hours while they either played on-line games or slept after extensive gaming sessions.

The published literature has identified several factors as "indicators" of the potential to abuse or neglect children. The indicators of abuse include depression, psychological inadequacy and poor problem solving skills amongst several others. The purpose of this paper is to propose obsessive preoccupation with MMORPGs or online role-playing as another indicator of potential child neglect. Although the obsessive behavior may be a symptom of some of the indicators noted above, it is important to explore this avenue of investigation when processing a child death scene.

Child Neglect, Online Role-Playing Addiction, Child Death