Internet Sex Addiction – A New Distinct Disorder

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Internet addiction is a common disorder that is seeking inclusion in DSM-V\(^1,2\), as it fulfills all the diagnostic characteristics i.e. excessive use; withdrawal; tolerance and negative repercussions. Internet sex addiction is a severe form of internet addiction.

Sexual addiction is defined as having a sick or pathological (out of balance) relationship with sex that is harmful to one’s self or to others\(^3\). Internet sex is also defined as the consensual sexual discussion on-line for the purpose of achieving arousal or an orgasm. It is also known by the names – ‘Cybersex’, ‘Cyber porn addiction’, ‘Cybering’, ‘Virtual sex addiction’, ‘sex addiction’ and ‘Sexual addiction. Sexual addicts form a compulsive and obsessive need to find sexual gratification. Like an addict, withdrawal symptom can occur with absence of the habit. Sex addicts are generally secret about their sexual activities and they deny their habit when confronted about it.

Internet sex addiction results more frequently due to anonymity and convenience provided in the internet. Internet technology also provides an interactive experience and a realm of virtual intimacy for its users. Online videos, chats room games, photo galleries and virtual reality provide users with several different medium through which they can obtain and purchase porn\(^3\). Behind the anonymity of cyberspace, online users can conceal their age, marital status, gender, race, vocation, or appearance. It has contributed to an increasing number of sex addicts. Unsuspecting internet users fall to victim to cyber-sex obsession. There are web sites that are gateways to other more explicit and shocking content. Before long people can end up involved in sexual content that is way beyond their original interest and desire. It eventually becomes sick. A “danger downloader” is someone who views content that eventually creates a compulsion to explore potentially dangerous behavior in real life. “Danger downloaders” actually go out to fulfill their sexual fantasies with people who have cyber names like “Slave Master”. The online porn industry uses many strategies to promote use of their sites, including Pop-up windows (trap users in an endless loop of porn), Home page hijacking (planting a Java script command on computers to change the user’s default home page to a porn site), Stealth sites (a variety of techniques, including buying up expired domain names, exploiting common misspellings, or using well-known names of companies or artists) and Hidden key words that are picked up by search engines (Porn operators bury key words, including brand names of popular toys or names of pop artists, in the code of their Web sites to lead children and teens to their sites).

Accordingly to an MSNBC report\(^3\), cyber sex is a growing addiction like any addiction, if excessively used. Cyber-sex can interfere with daily activities and can ruin relationships. People have lost jobs, spouses and money because of their addiction to online sex. It can also create misconception related to normal sexual life. People who suffer from low self-esteem, a distorted body image, untreated sexual dysfunction, or a prior sexual addiction are more at risk to develop cybersex/cyber porn addictions.

In a survey\(^4\), it was found that 7 of 10 participants keep online sexual activities a secret, 1 in 5 men and 1 in 8 women use computers at work to access sexual material; 6 times as many men engage in online sexual pursuits as women. 17 percent of respondents that were not at risk before the internet may be vulnerable to sex addiction that interferes with their daily lives. One percent of respondents could be classified as cyber-sex
compulsives. Estimates suggest that 1 in 5 Internet addicts are engaged in some form of online sexual activity (primarily viewing cyber porn and/or engaging in cybersex). Studies show that men are more likely to view cyber porn, while women are more likely to engage in erotic chat. The Cybersex Addiction Test — (developed by Dr. Kimberly Young, contains ten questions and it outlines the common warning signs associated with the disorder), Porn Addiction Questionnaire (from Self Help: Overcoming Pornography Addiction) and Cybersex Addiction Questionnaire (Rob Weiss, M.A., from the Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health) can be used to assess the addiction.

Treating internet sex addiction requires special care, as complete abstinence from the computer isn’t always possible in today’s technological world. Addicts often need the computer for work or school making the temptation to return to online sex just a mouse click away. To help cybersex addicts understand the emotional and psychological factors leading to relapse, one can provide in-person, telephone, and online counseling for immediate, caring, and confidential advice to deal with addiction. The best thing is to avoid becoming cyber sex addicted is to abstain from surfing the net for porn. The sites can also be blocked as done in some institutions and countries. The best way is to discuss the problem. There are websites which are providing help to sex addicts. Participation in a local sex and love recovery group, stopping acting out, remove dissatisfaction with emotional or sexual life and psychotherapy sessions are other measures used. The self-help 12-Step programs Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA) and Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) specialize in recovery from cybersex or Internet porn addiction.

References
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