

Latest Trends in Internet Addiction Disorder : Concepts, Symptoms, Theories, Triggers and Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT :

The papers entitled Latest trends in Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) : concepts, symptoms, theories, triggers and coping strategies is a descriptive, informative and explanatory paper. Main focus of the paper is on behavioral problems and symptoms which arise due to extensive use of internet, coping strategies of reduction of this latest clinical disorder with some pleasure deriving skills which are practical and within the reach of everyone are also discussed. Reading of latest research findings which are included in this paper will facilitate the individual in leading a happy, healthy, peaceful and energetic life. In the end author has given some humble suggestions for making the atmosphere of schools, colleges and community congenial and relaxing in the interest of progressive global community.

INTRODUCTION :

In the first decade of 21st century we have done a very rapid and fast technological changes and advancements. But these advancements are not giving relaxation to our children, youngsters and adults which is the basic requirement of this stressed era in which we are living. Modern means of communication which is shrinking distances between people and has flattered the world into a compact and easily accessible global community. It means we are saving time and dependency on other persons but side by side these are giving some behavioral problems like withdrawal, depression, worry and anxiety which are very near to psychiatric disorders. Out of many other psychiatric/mental disorders, internet addiction disorder is the most common disorder of recent times. Youngsters are openly admitting to being addicted to the internet and it is already becoming an addiction.

This mental disease needs immediate attention of educationists, policy makers, psychiatrist, psychologists, social workers and religious leaders who are concerned with the well being of individuals' global peace and health. This paper is an attempt to give right direction to students, teachers, patients, and general public for reducing this dangerous disease for the betterment of Mankind.

MEANING & CONCEPT

Meaning of Internet

The Internet is a worldwide, publicly accessible series of interconnected computer networks that transmit data by packet switching using the standard Internet Protocol (IP). It is a "network of networks" that consists of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business, and government networks, which together carry various information and services, such as electronic mail, online chat, file transfer, and the interlinked web pages and other resources of the World Wide Web.

Meaning of Addiction

The term addiction does not appear in the most recent version of the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1995). Of all the diagnoses referenced in the DSM-IV, substance dependence may come the closest to capturing the essence of what has traditionally been labeled addiction (Walters, 1996) and provides a workable definition of addiction. The seven criteria considered under this diagnosis are withdrawal, tolerance, pre-occupation with the substance, heavier or more frequent use of the substance than intended, centralized activities to procure more of the substance, loss of interest in other social, occupational and recreational activities and disregard for the physical or psychological consequences caused by the use of the substance.

While many believe the term addiction should only be applied to cases involving chemical substances (Walker, 1998), (Rachlin, 1990), similar diagnostic criteria have been applied to a number of problem behaviors such as pathological gambling (Griffiths, 1990; Walters, 1996), eating disorders (Lacey, 1993; Lesieur and Blume, 1993), sexual addictions, generic technological addictions (Griffiths, 1995), and video game addiction (Soper, 1983; Keepers, 1990; Griffiths, 1991 & 1992). Escaping through watching televisions, eating chocolate or surfing the internet are what some people termed as soft addiction (Ganahi, 2003). However, when such activities result in negative physical, mental, interpersonal, professional or social consequence, they move out of the realm of the soft addictions.

Meaning of Internet Addiction

According to Bratter & Forest, 1985, like all other addiction, Internet addiction is a psycho physiological disorder involving tolerance (the same amount of usage elicits less response; increased amounts necessary to evoke the same amount of pleasure), withdrawal symptoms (especially tremors, anxiety and moodiness), affective disturbances (depression, irritability), and interruption of social relationships (a decline or loss, either in quality or quantity).

Internet Addiction Disorder...

The term internet addiction disorder was coined by Dr. Evan Goldverg in 1995. The term Internet addiction is defined as spending so much time online that internet use adversely affects marriages, family and social life, academics, work & psychological and physical well-being. Due to the nature of internet addiction disorder (failed impulse control without involving an intoxicant), internet addiction disorder is said to be closet to pathological gambling as defined by the diagnostic and statistical manual of Mental disorders –IV, published by the American Psychiatry Association (APA), 1995.

To be diagnosed as having internet addiction disorder, a person must meet certain criteria as prescribed by the APA, 1995. Three or more of these criteria must be present at any time during a 12 month period.

- 1) Tolerance : These refers to the need for increasing amounts of time on the internet to achieved satisfaction or significant diminishing effects with continued use of the same amount of time on internet.
- 2) Two or more withdrawal symptoms developing within days to one month after reduction of internet use or cessation of internet use, and these must cause distress or impair social, personal or occupational functioning. These include psychomotor agitation, i.e. trembling and tremors; anxiety obsessive thinking about what is happening on the internet; voluntary or involuntary type movements of the fingers.
- 3) Use of the Internet is engaged in to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.
- 4) The Internet is often accessed more often, or for longer periods of time than was intended. A significant amount of time is spent in activities related to internet use (e.g. Internet books, trying out new World Wide Web browsers, researching Internet vendors, etc.
- 5) Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of Internet use.
- 6) The individual risks the loss of a significant relationships, job, educational or career opportunities because of excessive use of the internet.

In a recent research, psychologists identified some other characteristics viz. feeling of restlessness or irritability when attempting to cut down or stop internet use. The second is that the internet is used as a way of escaping problems or relieving feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety or depression. The third characteristic is that the user lies to family members or friends to conceal the extent of involvement with the internet. And finally, the user returns repeatedly excesses fees.

Young (1996) developed brief eight-item criteria to provide a screening instrument for addictive internet use. Patients were considered addicted when answering yes to five (or more) of the questions. Young (1996) stated that the cut off score of five was consistent with the number of criteria used for pathological gambling and was seen as an adequate number of criteria to differentiate normal from pathological addictive internet use. Further, Young (1996) pointed out that internet dependent spent an average of 38 hours per week surfing the internet.

SYMPTOMS OF INTERNET ADDICTION

Young (2000), the founder of the center for On line Addiction, has identified eight key symptoms. According to her, if five or more apply, one needs to consider it as an addiction.

1. Preoccupation – one thinks constantly about previous online activity or keep looking forward to the next online session. Some people crave time on the internet the way a smoker craves a cigarette.
2. Increased use – one needs to spend increasing amounts of time online to achieve satisfaction.
3. Inability to stop – one can't cut back on one's internet use, even after several attempts. Some people can't stop visiting chat rooms while at the office, even though they know their bosses are monitoring the sites they visit.
4. Withdrawal symptoms – one feels restless, moody, depressed or irritable when one attempts to stop or cut down internet use.
5. Lost sense of time – everyone lets time slip by occasionally while on the internet. This should be considered a problem only if it happens consistently and the person also experience some of the other symptoms on this list.
6. Risky behaviors – these include jeopardizing a significant relationship, job or educational or career opportunity because of internet.
7. Telling lies – This includes lying to family members, a therapist, or others to conceal the extent of one's involvement with the internet. Someone who's seeing a therapist for depression might not tell the therapist about her internet use.
8. Escape to the Internet – one uses the internet as a way to avoid thinking about problems, or to allay depression or feelings of helplessness.

The symptoms of internet addiction can be classified under two broad categories as given –

PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

- I. Having a sense of well being or euphoria while at the computer.
- II. Inability to stop the activity.
- III. Craving for more and more time on the internet.
- IV. Feeling empty, depressed, and irritable when not at the computer.
- V. Using on line services every day without skipping.
- VI. Losing track of time after making a connection.
- VII. Going out less and less.
- VIII. Spending less and less time on meals at home or at work, and eating in front of the monitor.
- IX. Denying spending too much time on the Net.
- X. Others complaining of your spending too much time in front of monitor.
- XI. Checking on your mailbox too many times a day.
- XII. Logging onto the Net while already busy at work.
- XIII. Sneaking online when spouse or family members are not at home, with a sense of relief.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- I. Dry eyes
- II. Migraine headache
- III. Backache
- IV. Eating irregularities, such as skipping meals.
- V. Failure to attend to personal hygiene.
- VI. Sleep disturbances, change in sleep pattern.
- VII. Gastroentitis

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Individuals who are dissatisfied or upset by a particular area or multiple areas of their lives have an increased chance of abusing internet, to avoid an unhappy situation such as marital or job satisfaction, medical illness, unemployment, or academic instability.

Mitchell (2000) reported that several withdrawal symptoms are related to internet addiction including nervousness, agitation, and aggression, as well as an addiction syndrome that includes the presence of withdrawal symptoms, increasing tolerance, and loss of control. A high rate of comorbid mental disorders has also been reported, especially depressive symptoms and social impairment.

Philips and Reddie (2007) reported that technological predispositions, decisional styles, and self-esteem may potentially influence the extent to which people use email at work. Higher levels of email use in the workplace could be predicted by avoidant decisional styles such as procrastination and buck passing.

Metheson (2006) reported that parental overprotection is a risk factor for number of psychological problems in overprotected subjects. Such regulatory excess has been linked in studies to drug addiction (Andersson and Eisemann, 2003), disruptive behavior disorders (Rey and Plapp, 1990; depression (parker et al. 1987), likelihood of being bullied (Rigby et al 1999), antisocial personality disorder (Reti et al 2002), school phobia (Torma and Halstic 1975), agoraphobia (de Ruiter 1994). Obsessive-compulsive disorder (de Ruiter 1994, anxiety disorder (Clayer et al 1984), dependent personality disorder and failures of autonomy (Howe and Madgett 1975; Ruchkin 1998).

Sun et al (2005) reported that less parental monitoring and more unsupervised time were positively related to e-mail use, chat room use.

Matheson (2006) reported parental overprotection involving disaffected subjects' moral character negatively, in the sense that it tends to vitiate the conditions required for the subject to develop moral virtues.

Young (1996) found that 58% of students reported a decline in study habits, a significant drop in grades, missed classes or being placed on probation due to excessive internet use. A survey initiated by counselors at university of Texas at Austin found that 14% of the students met the criteria for internet addiction (Scherer, 1997). This led the counseling center to initiate an internet addiction Support Group when they noticed academic impairment and poor integration in extracurricular activities due to excessive internet use on campus. Brady (1996) stated that 43% of the normally successful students failed due to extensive patterns of late night log-ons to the university computer systems.

A recent online survey at two campus – conducted at the university of Texas (Scherer, 1997) and Bryant College (Morahan – Martin, 1997) have further documented that pathological internet use is problematic for academic performance and relationship functioning.

Scherer (1997) found that excessive internet use becomes problematic when it results in impaired functioning such as compromised grades or failure to fulfill responsibilities. Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and instant messaging are widely used by college students to meet and get to know one another. 33% of the students prefer communicating online rather than meeting face to face.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INTERNET USAGE

In a study on Multiusers, Cherney (1994) found that men tend to use more physically violent imagery, and that women are overall more affectionate towards other characters. Scherer (1997) and Greenfield (1999) reported a preponderance of male internet addicts.

The online social behavior is an extension of traditional social behavior, as females tend to be higher on intimacy than males. They also communicate over the internet with family and friends more frequently than men. (Hussong 1997, PEW 2000)

Cooper (2000) found that men and women addicts seem to prefer sites that fit behavioral stereotypes of their own gender. Women were more likely to spend time flirting or having Cybersex with others in sexually oriented chat rooms, while men were drawn to porn web sites. Men prefer visual stimuli and more focused sexual experiences, while women are more interested in relationships and interactions.

Stevenson and Scealy (2002) reported that males were more likely to use the internet for downloading entertainment. Shy males were more likely to use the internet for recreation/leisure activities. Ko et al (2005) found that subjects who played online games were predominantly male. Gender differences were also found in the severity of online gaming addiction and motives for playing. Older age, lower self esteem, and low satisfaction with daily life were associated with more severe addiction among males, but not among females.

THEORIES OF INTERNET ADDICTION

Ferris (2003) listed the following theories to explain Internet Addiction

1) Biomedical Theories

These explanations focus on the role of hereditary and congenital factors, chemical imbalances in the brain and neurotransmitters. According to this perspective, these factors cause some people to be more susceptible to addiction (Sue, 1994). There is definitive research that shows that some drugs act to fill in the gaps of the neurons

in the brain, fooling the brain into sending out faulty information. This, it is thought, is one reason for the high one gets from engaging in activities such as running, drug use and gambling. This might apply to Internet Addiction also, since many opportunities on the internet generate fun and excitement.

2) Psychodynamic Theories

Psychodynamic theorists and personality theorists account for addiction through early childhood traumas, correlation with other personality traits or other disorders, and inherited psychological dispositions (Sue, 1994). A dispositional model or diathesis – stress model of addiction might help in understanding internet addiction disorder. Certain people, due to a variety of factors may be predisposed (diathesis) to developing an addiction to something, be it alcohol, heroin, gambling, sex, shopping, or on-line computer services. They could go through their entire lives never developing any kind of addiction. On the other hand, if stress or a combination of stressors, affect the person at a critical time, the person may be more inclined to develop an addiction. If the person begins drinking alcohol even occasionally, but continues to increase consumption, he may develop a dependency on alcohol. The same premise holds for internet addiction. The right combination of time, person and event, may lead to addiction.

3) Behavioral Theories

These explanations are based on B.F. Skinner's studies on operant conditioning. The person performs a behavior. This applies to addictions, specifically internet addiction in the following way: Being hooked to drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, the internet, and shopping offer many rewards. They offer love, excitement, physical, emotional, and material comfort, and the means to escape from reality. These can all be rewards. If an individual wants these rewards and learns that the internet will allow him to escape, or receive love, or have fun, he will probably turn to the internet the next time he feels these needs. This becomes reinforcing, and the cycle continues.

4) Socio-cultural Theories

According to Sue (1994) addictions may vary according to gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion and country. Some addictions are more common among persons of different categories e.g. Alcoholism is most common in the middle socioeconomic classes. Not enough data is available yet about those persons addicted to the internet to determine if a particular class is most predominant though some researchers Sun et al. (2005) report that higher socioeconomic status and Asian ethnicity were associated with higher internet use.

TRIGGERS OF INTERNET ADDICTION

According to the center for Internet Addiction Recovery, Internet Addiction affects people of varying ages, cultural backgrounds, occupations and educational levels. The following problems are likely triggers for Internet Addictions –

Substance Abuse – over half of internet addicts suffer from other addictions, mainly to drugs, alcohol, smoking and sex.

Mental illness – trends shows that internet addicts suffer from emotional problems such as depression and anxiety related disorders and often uses the fantasy world of the internet to psychologically escape unpleasant feelings or stressful situations.

Relationship troubles – in almost 75% of cases, internet addicts use applications such as chat rooms, instant messaging or online gaming as a safe way of establishing new relationships and more confidently relating to others.

COPING STRATEGIES

Internet addiction disorder can be treated by many simple techniques which are not only simple but also give pleasure and relaxation to the patient suffering with internet addiction.

Following is the list of simple pleasure deriving techniques out of which internet addict can use any technique according to environment and his/her needs, interest and aptitudes –

• Yoga Meditation and Dhyan	• Theater
• Clapping	• Positive thought
• Laughing	• Creative writing, craft work, cooking
• Shopping	• Sitting & spending time with nature
• Occupational	• Weekend break with family & friends
• Aroma	• Eating nutritive and balanced diet
• Long Drive	• Collection of good quotations
• Brisk Walking	• Playing with pets
• Relaxation through party	• Gardening
• Get together of like minded persons	• Reading books & journals
• Music – Vocal, Instrumental and dance	• Playing games
• Massage	• Watching television
• Acupressure	• Be a good listener

Following table gives an insight for coping strategies of internet addiction disorder. These strategies are very useful for recovering from the disorder. Skills given above can be used for reducing stress level, worry and tension.

COPING STRATEGIES OF INTERNET ADDICTS

Physical strategies	Intellectual/Mental strategies
Progressive relaxation	Cognitive restructuring
Biofeedback	Systematic desensitization
Visualization	Thought - stopping
Sensory Awareness	Reframing
Deep breathing	Values clarification
Hot tubs (Jacuzzi, sauna)	
Massage	
Yoga	
Exercise	
Diet	
Social strategies	Emotional strategies
Interpersonal skill training	Catharses/emotional discharge
Assertiveness	Self-awareness
Support Groups	Withdrawal
Networking	
Spiritual strategies	Environmental strategies
Meditation	Time Management
Prayer	Problem Solving
Faith/Hope	Goal setting
	Lifestyle assessment
	Decision Making

Physical strategies can prevent the build of physical tension and provide immediate tools to control situational stress and situational stress reactions.

Intellectual strategies are also beneficial in interrupting the stress cycle by altering the perception of a specific event as stressful. Social strategies tend to increase the individual skill in dealing with potentially stressful situation and after options for receiving nature and support from others.

The list of emotional and spiritual strategies for managing stress is much shorter and is based primarily on clinical observation. These techniques may be helpful at any stage of the stress cycle.

Environmental strategies help individual assess and alter the stress producing aspects of their surroundings as well as change habitual behavior that tend to disrupt and complicate their environment.

HUMBLE SUGGESTIONS

1. As internet addiction disorder is more prevalent in youngsters, counseling sessions in schools and colleges should be given to diagnosed internet addicts and students in general by expert administrators, academicians, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and religious leaders
2. Internet users should be advised to use internet giving breaks in the form of some recreational activities of their choice-like listening music, playing any indoor or outdoor game, socializing with friends, taking nature therapy or taking any therapeutic technique which gives them peace of mind and relaxation.
3. Introvert patients of this disorder should be counseled for breaking their isolation habit by parting and spending much time with their intimate friends, parents and family members.
4. Strict rules should be observed in cyber cafes, schools and colleges for limited use of internet.
5. Sites which are making our adolescents and youth characterless should be discouraged by authorities.
6. Sites which inculcate good heritage and moral values should be encouraged.
7. Exhibitions and posters display exclusively should be arranged for the awareness IAD in a beautiful and attractive style.
8. Seminars, workshop and conferences should be exclusively arranged on the disease in which patients of this disease, family of patients and other supportive groups, organizations and institutes must be involved with psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers.
9. Multidisciplinary approach i.e. social sciences, pure sciences, languages, commerce and education faculties should be given responsibilities for viewing social, family and other problems of this disease and simple and practical ways must be suggested to solve these problems with co-ordinated approach.

CONCLUSION

To sum up the present paper of latest trends in Internet Addiction Disorder : concepts, symptoms, theories, triggers and coping strategies is a theoretical and self explanatory paper on internet addicts which is spreading it's wings at an alarming rate in present day scenario. Theoretical explanations and review of related literature which are useful for eliminating this dangerous disease are given. Emphasis is given on coping strategies and skills for fighting with this behavioral disorder in the interest of individual herself/himself, family, society, community and universe as a whole.

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