

Lost Online, Then Lust Online

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Abstract

Internet sex addiction is an emerging issue world-wide. It commonly affects the younger generation. Phenomenologically, patients with internet sex addiction possess the characters of internet addiction and sex addiction. It has been conceptualized recently. This review focuses on – how people lost online, then lust online.

Keywords: Internet Addiction; Sex Addiction; Internet Sex Addiction.

Introduction

Decades back, affluents could only afford to use technology for communication, hence issues related to use of technology was a matter of affluents. With time, there is enormous growth in science and technology. Now a common man can avail the facility of technology for communication as it is easily available, accessible and affordable. Yesterday's affluent's issue became the issue of common man, today.

Mobile phones and internet technologies help in facilitating communication among people. Now, it is not merely medium of communication; it helps in exploring the information and entertainment world. People, who used to experience anxiety about socializing with on different situations, can comfortably communicate through technology with strangers. Mobile phones and internet are commonly

used technologies for communication in these days. The addiction of technology is commonly attracting the younger generation [1].

Internet Addiction – Understanding the Underlying Mystery

The addictive aspect of internet gained attention nearly two decades back and various terminologies like – “Internet addiction”, “Pathological internet use” and “Internet addictive disorder” have been interchangeably used to explain this entity [2]. Internets and mobiles have specific in built applications like – online game, which attracts the interest of young population to involve in playing online games [3]. These online games make an individual dissociated from self or project personal feelings to a new role identity, which is far from the reality of life [3]. A child or adolescent, who frequently indulges in online games with aggressive content, identifies himself/herself with the aggressor and it may not cause problem for him/her in the game. However, when it comes to the real life scene, the child tries to replicate the aggressive game experience without thinking about the consequences; the resultant being an impulsive or aggressive-disruptive behavior. Mobile and internet technologies also facilitate exposure of an adolescent to pornography & online gambling, hence also maintain other behavioral addictions like–sex addiction and pathological gambling [3]. Individuals addicted to internet may misuse particular categories of information or entertainment like – cybersex, online games, social networking or online chatting [2].

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Internet Sex Addiction – An Emerging Issue

Addictive behaviour related to sex also involves the same brain regions as seen with abuse of drugs [4].

Addiction to sex is characterized by a compulsive behaviour to involve in sexual activities, despite having adverse consequences [5]. Gender differences do exist among users with internet sex addiction. Prevalence of internet sex addiction is more common among males than females [6]. Men use cybersex more frequently and crave more for it, in comparison to their women counterparts, as found in a recent study [7]. Adolescents, who spend significant time online are at risk of indulgence in online sexual behavior, which is likely to influence their future marital life adversely [8].

Phenomenologically, a lot of similarities exist between sex addiction, compulsive sexual behavior and internet sex addiction (cyber-sex addiction) as a reason of which these terminologies are interchangeably used in many contexts [9]. The horizon of "Sex addiction" and "Compulsive sexual behavior" are much broader than "internet sex addiction". Individuals with internet sex addiction must meet the criteria of addiction for online (internet based) sexual activities. It may be related to virtual room chat or watching pornography in a compulsive manner for arousal. Patients with internet sex addiction may have overlapping features of sex addiction as well as internet addiction as explained

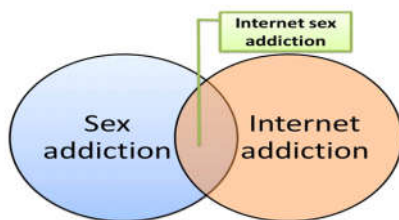


Fig. 1: Internet sex addiction

in Figure 1.

Internet sex addiction has many adverse impacts on the physical as well as psychosocial wellbeing of the individual. It may cause marital disharmony, relational issues, high risk sexual behaviour, financial loss, legal issues, loss of work, insomnia, sexual transmitted diseases etc [10]. The psycho-social impact of internet pornography on an individual is controversial. Some argue that internet pornography increases the risk of sexual violence and abuse, at the same time a counter argument exists, which emphasizes the protective role of internet pornography in channelizing the sexual impulses to a non-destructive mode. Many argue that pornography, which are soft-core and non-violent in nature may be harmless [5]. When the sexual impulses or compulsions fall into the pattern of addiction, it starts causing impairment.

Individuals, who get addicted to cybersex or online pornography, usually have addiction to the use of technologies like internet or mobile. Internet addiction plays the role of gateway to online sex addiction. There is no general consensus regarding the clinical features and criteria for diagnosis of cybersex addiction [11]. In a recent study on heterosexual males, it was found that individuals with tendencies of addiction towards cybersex had high approach or avoidance behavior towards sexually arousing stimuli [11]. Sexual addiction is frequently associated with problematic online pornography use [5]. Individuals having strong inclination towards violent hard-core pornography are frequently indulged in sexual aggression in comparison to those inclined towards non-violent soft-core pornography [5]. Laier et al (2014), in their study on female internet pornography users found that – craving, severity of psychological problems, sexual excitation sensitivity and sexual arousal related to pornographic pictures predict about tendencies towards cybersex addiction [12]. Comparing the issue of cybersex addiction among the genders revealed that – men have more craving and higher frequency of pornography use than women [13].

Addiction to cybersex leads to compulsive sexual behavior, which may result in dysfunctional coping, dysfunctional intimacy, addiction and conditioned problematic sexual behavior [14]. A study on online sex offenders revealed that many of them indulge in such criminal activities due to their compulsive sexual behavior [15]. These groups of people spend a considerable time on line. Individuals, who have addiction to cybersex often, get sexually aroused and experience craving with pornographic cues [16]. Various mental processes like – learning, gratification as well as reinforcement play vital roles in sustaining cybersex addiction [16].

Intervention Outlines

There is significant overlapping between the pathology of behavioral addiction (eg. Internet addiction) and substances addiction [17], hence the management approach to behavioral addiction may be guided by the principle of substance addiction management.

Psychological interventions like – cognitive behavioral intervention and stimulus control followed by graded exposure are effective in technology addiction [18]. Bipolar affective disorder is one of the common psychiatric co-morbidity associated with internet addiction including cybersex addiction and mood stabilizers are likely to be helpful in the management of cybersex addiction like bipolar

affective disorder [2]. Therapeutic target also focuses on management of psychiatric co-morbidities including anger management, impulse control, stress management, childhood trauma and grief[5]. Restricting internet use and focusing on relationship-oriented sexuality are also helpful [5]. Relapse prevention strategies, enhancement of intimacy, reconstruction of lovemap, reconditioning the arousal and coping skill training are also effective in reducing compulsive sexual behavior [14].

Carbonell et al (2009), had studied all published articles on PubMed and PsycINFO, between 1996 to 2005 and found that internet addiction (>85%) to be most studied and cell phone addiction (2.1%) to be least studied phenomenon of “technology addiction” [19]. But, considering the popularity of cell phones among people, especially in the adolescents, it needs to be studied with much emphasis in the coming years.

Conclusion

Patients with internet sex addiction (cyber-sex addiction) should be explored for internet addiction in other forms like chatting, shopping and gaming. Similarly, they should be also explored about offline addictive sexual behavior and paraphilias. These additional factors need to be considered in management plan as the roots of internet sex addiction spreads deep in the territory of sex addiction and internet addiction. This broader approach may help in delivering holistic care.

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