

# INTERNET SEX ADDICTION



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## Introduction

Since the inception of internet, everything has become a click away. Internet has become enormous source of information for all. Gradually it is reaching more and more people and the world is becoming a cyber-village. But its excessive and compulsive use has made some people addicted to it. Most people don't assume excessive sex as an addiction and there are different sociological, conventional, scientific and moral standpoints for excessive sex [1]. Concept of excessive sex being pathological is not new, rather it has been described in different ways since centuries by different names like Casanova Type, Compulsive Promiscuity, Compulsive Sexuality, Don Juanism, Don Juan Syndrome, Don Juan Complex, Erotomania, Hypereroticism, Hyperlibido, Idiopathic Sexual Precocity, Libertinism. The Messalina Complex, Nymphomania, Over Sexuality, Pansexual Promiscuity, Pathologic Promiscuity, Satyriasis and Sexual Hyperversion [2]. Initially human being used to fulfil sexual needs

only through natural sex but as the human have advanced, they have adapted different modalities to fulfill their sexual needs and internet is latest and most widely used medium which has led to a kind of addiction known as internet sex addiction. Internet pornography is any pornography that is accessible over the internet, primarily via websites, peer-to-peer file sharing, or using net news groups. The availability of widespread public access to the World Wide Web in 1991 led to the growth of internet pornography.

Although it is difficult to establish the extent of sex addiction but estimates range from 3-6% of the total population. Prevalence of internet addiction in Indian college population using Young's original criteria: 74.5% as moderate users, 24.8% as possible addicts, and 0.7% as addicts [3]. One study of a sample of 9,265 people found that 1% of Internet users were clearly addicted to cybersex and 17% of users met criteria for problematic sexual compulsivity on Kalichman Sexual Compulsivity Scale [4]. Research on internet addiction disorder indicates that rates may range from 1.5 to 8.2% in Europeans and Americans [5].

Further, researches in this field also indicate a high correlation between childhood abuse and sexual addiction in adulthood, and it is common for sex addicts to have faced high levels of emotional, physical and sexual abuse [6]. Newer technologies have great impact on society either in positive or negative way.

Adolescent are more commonly affected as they are more technology savvy than adults and they frequently use technologies like television, the internet, CDs, videos, audio system, books and magazines etc. for communication, recreation and entertainment. Surprisingly in several countries, many adolescents spend six to seven hours per day using internet or other media. One of the most common uses of internet in adolescents is about exploring regarding sex and sexuality [7]. From a study in Malaysia it was

estimated that about 12% all websites were related to sexual materials or pornography, many of which are very popular among adolescents [8]. It is a matter of concern as this number is very alarming because internet influence a lot about how the people think, feel and react in the real world.

Internet sex addiction has been defined as a sexual addiction characterized by internet sexual activity that causes serious negative consequences to one's physical, mental, social, well-being. It is also known as cybersex addiction and it's a type of internet addiction [9, 20]. Internet sex addiction manifests through various behaviors like reading erotic stories, viewing & downloading online pornography, online activity in adult fantasy, chat rooms, cybersex relationships, masturbation while engaged in online activity, the search for offline sexual partners and information about sexual activity. Cybersex addiction is a form of internet addiction disorder which can be considered a subtype of technological addiction which is defined as non-chemical or behavioral dependency that comprehends excessive human-machine interaction [10].

According to Young (1999) there are five subtypes of internet addiction proposed: (a) cyber-sexual addiction (compulsive use of adult websites for cybersex and cyber-porn); (b) cyber-relationship addiction (over-involvement in online relationships); (c) Net compulsions (obsessive/compulsive activities such as online gambling, shopping); (d) information overload (compulsive web surfing or database searching); and (e) computer addiction (obsessive computer game playing). Only first two are specifically related to potential sexually-based addictions [11].

### Diagnostic criteria for internet addiction

Beard recommends that the following five diagnostic criteria are required for a diagnosis of Internet addiction: (1) Is preoccupied with the



Internet (thinks about previous online activity or anticipate next online session); (2) Needs to use the Internet with increased amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction; (3) Has made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use; (4) Is restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use; (5) Has stayed online longer than originally intended. Additionally, at least one of the following must be present: (6) Has jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the Internet; (7) Has lied to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet; (8) Uses the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression) [12].

There are diverse reasons for individuals experimenting with different forms of sexual behaviours which can be associated with an individual's psychological disorders. Most common reasons associated with internet sex addictions are low self-esteem, severely distorted body image, untreated sexual dysfunction, social isolation, depression and recovery from a prior sexual addiction [13]. Other minor reasons for this addiction include struggles for intimacy, self-worth, self-identity, self-understanding [14].

### Problems with internet sex addiction

Similar to craving for alcohol, emotions such as stress, depression, loneliness or anxiety can lead to an addict's need to go online, which acts as source of temporary distraction to fill an emotional gap [15]. Internet sex addicts also explain that they feel a difference between online and offline emotions. They feel frustrated, worried, angry, anxious and depressed when offline but feel excited, thrilled, disinhibited and more desirable when they are online. These strong positive emotions associated with internet sex reinforce the compulsive behavior [16].

### Models of internet sex addiction

Internet is relatively more preferred and highly compelling than other media due to its interactivity, seductivity and disinhibiting effects [17]. In order to understand the attraction of the internet, several model have been developed. One of them is Triple A Engine suggested by Cooper (1998) which is comprised of accessibility, affordability and anonymity, three primary factors that promotes usage of the internet for sexual purposes [18].

A variant of the Triple A Engine was developed by Young which is called as ACE model that comprised of anonymity, convenience and escape. These factors are the risk factors for Internet users with psychological vulnerabilities, which can render them for developing such compulsive behavior to use internet for sexual fantasy [18, 6].

Another framework developed by Carnes et al known as Cyberhex is a six-sided figure representing various aspects of the internet including interactive, intoxicating, isolating, integral, inexpensive, and imposing. These component when combined together can create an almost 'hex' or trancelike state [19].

Since internet has the potential to provide short-term relief, excitement and distraction, is also a cause for excessive use. Sexually related activities on the internet are perceived to be legal, available in the privacy of one's own home, do not put users at risk for sexually transmitted disease, and are easily hidden without obvious evidence of any sexual encounter which gives the sense of safety and ready access to partners[20]. Internet also provides anonymity of the user, due to which user have a greater sense of perceived control over the content and nature of the online sexual experience. Because of all these factors addictive use of internet has increased manifold [11].



## Process of internet sex addiction

Internet sex addiction is very difficult process and its severity increases with time. There are five consecutive and independent processes: discovery, experience, escalation, compulsion and despair. These stages highlight how internet users can use it as a means of progressive cycle of addiction. 'Discovery' is the first step of the addiction process. New users discover the internet as an exciting feeling and he finds great and interesting things on the internet and start to search various information. After that comes 'Experience', when people who start using internet using various methods like sex chat, webcams develop sexual behaviors on internet without problems initially and gradually become used to masturbation and exploring new sexual behavior without assessing that this behavior can be so addictive later on. In 'Escalation', users develop tolerance and in order to achieve the same initial pleasure they start using internet for more and more for their sexual gratification. These behaviors become very chronic and inappropriate and it becomes more worrisome when a person enters the room of incest and child sexual because the mind appearing in this section is ready to find their sexual prey in real space. In 'Compulsion', users develops violence and uses coercion. This stage of life becomes dangerous for marital life and relationship and patients develops distressing emotions and nervousness. At this stage strong sense of compulsion for internet develops which gradually becomes out of control. Ultimately 'Disappointment' results in the final stage of the process of addiction, when addict realizes that he has been hit hard due to addiction and considers himself an addict. He will be more disappointed by the day he thought that his life is out of control due to the internet. The person feels guilt and shame. After that the emotional behavior of the addict

sees itself as a personal failure and promises not to do it again and tries to reorganize his life like before [21].

## Warning signs

Young has also produced a checklist of warning signs for cyber sexual addiction [21]. These are:

1. Routinely spending significant amounts of time in chat rooms and private messaging with the sole purpose of finding cybersex.
2. Feeling preoccupied with using the Internet to find online sexual partners.
3. Frequently using anonymous communication to engage in sexual fantasies not typically carried out in real-life.
4. Anticipating the next on-line session with the expectation of finding sexual arousal or gratification.
5. Frequently moving from cybersex to phone sex (or even real-life meetings).
6. Hiding on-line interactions from a significant other.
7. Feeling guilt or shame about online use.
8. Accidentally being aroused by cybersex at first and then actively seeking it out when logging online.
9. Masturbating while online while engaged in erotic chat.
10. Less investment with a real-life sexual partner and a preference for cybersex as a primary form of sexual gratification.

## Evaluation

There has been also a variety of assessment tools used in evaluation. Young's Internet Addiction Test, the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ) developed by Demetrovics, Szeredi, and Pozsa and the Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS) are all examples of instruments to assess this disorder [22]. One can evaluate oneself by using free instruments accessible on the web like



1. Cyber sexual Addiction Test ([www.netaddiction.com](http://www.netaddiction.com))
2. Male Sexual Addiction Screening Test ([www.sexhelp.com](http://www.sexhelp.com))
3. Women's Sexual Screening Addiction Test ([www.sexhelp.com](http://www.sexhelp.com))
4. Sexual Compulsive Anonymous (<http://www.sexaa.org>)

## Management

Today, most people need to use the computer every day for work. As most of the jobs involve computers complete abstinence from the Internet may be impossible. Forcing the internet sex addict to use self-control and abstinence from cyberporn or cybersex while they are using the computer is important to achieve corrective action. According to Patriccarnes, an expert in sex addiction, while treating online sex addiction, several immediate types of crisis intervention should be employed that reduces access to internet sex. Concrete steps should be taken like moving the computer to a public area in the house, installing filtering software like Cyber Patrol, Surf Watch, Net Nany and self-limiting the time of being online and time of the day being online and disclosing to one trustworthy person the nature of the problem. These actions as 'first-order changes' provide crisis management to the symptoms surrounding internet sex addiction. More self-reflection and raised awareness is required on the underlying issues which drives for online sex addiction such as depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, or obsessive compulsive disorders [23].

Schneider and Weiss in their book 'Cybersex Exposed' discuss the importance to put together a Sexual Recovery Plan which is an adaptation from Sex Addicts Anonymous, done in the form of three columns that represent the areas needing attention and focus. Column 1 asks the addict to list actions that he or she knows are

shameful, problematic, Column 2 asks the addict to list the actions of thoughts that lead to problem situations and Column 3 asks to list the positive rewards of maintaining sobriety and refraining from internet sex [7]. According to Young, recovery from internet sex addiction is similar to recovery from food addiction and she has also given an integrated recovery approach that combines cognitive-behavioral and insight-oriented therapies. Like food addicts cannot simply stay away from food, sex addicts must discover healthier ways to live with the internet. Addicts must readily identify and understand the underlying emotional, cognitive, or contextual factors that trigger the addictive behavior, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, stress, marital troubles, divorce, or career problems, and learn to cope with those underlying issues in a more adaptive manner.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy has been suggested as a possible effective treatment for pornography addiction, though no clinical trials have been performed to assess effectiveness among pornography addicts. Acceptance and commitment therapy has also been shown to be a potentially effective treatment for problematic internet pornography viewing [12].

The role of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI), mood stabilizers and antipsychotics has been inconclusive although psychotherapy and behavioral techniques have shown successful results even without pharmacotherapy. One of the researchers has found out relationship of mesolimbic system related to reward given by sex and used Naltrexone to suppress excessive sexual activity [11].

## Conclusion

In the emerging era lot of young people are exposed to the internet and it has become important medium of social interaction. However, it may still remain a matter of debate whether to



call internet addiction a distinct disorder by itself or a behavioral problem secondary to another disorder. At present, DSM IV has not accepted criteria to diagnose or label internet addiction. In

future, if it is added, it is more likely to be classified as an impulse control disorders not elsewhere classified rather than in the diagnostic criteria for substance dependence [24, 25].

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