Internet addiction in the Netherlands
a brief overview

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The colleagues

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IVO research on internet addiction

Some publications:


IVO research on internet addiction

Some projects


• Monitor Internet and Youth
IVO research on internet addiction

Focus on

• Internet addiction in general (Meerkerk)
• Online video games (van Rooij)
• Online pornography (Meerkerk)

• Social media?
Some findings

Internet addiction?
• Internet dependence
• Pathological internet use
• Problematic internet use
• Compulsive internet use

Similarities with
• Substance dependence
• Impulse control disorder
• Obsessive compulsive disorder
Some findings

Characteristics (criteria?)

- Loss of control:
  - Longer than intended
  - Quitting attempts without success
  - Relapse
- Preoccupation:
  - Salience
  - Immersion
  - Neglecting other pursuits
- Mood modification (coping)
- Conflict
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Tolerance

Monomania
Some findings

Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS)

• Based on
  – DSM criteria for substance abuse
  – DSM criteria pathological gambling
  – Criteria for behavioral addiction as described by Griffiths
  – Interviews with self-declared ‘internet addicts’

• Items tap on
  – loss of control
  – preoccupation
  – withdrawal symptoms
  – coping / mood modification
  – conflict

• Tested in various populations:
  – High reliability: Cronbach’s alpha ≈ 0.90
  – Factorial invariance across time, gender, age, heavy versus non-heavy internet use
Some findings

Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS)

How often...
• do you find it difficult to stop using the internet when you are online?
• do you continue to use the internet despite your intention to stop?
• do others say you should use the internet less?
• do you prefer to use the internet instead of spending time with others?
• are you short of sleep because of the internet?
• do you think about the internet, even when not online?
• do you look forward to your next internet session?
• do you think you should use the internet less often?
• have you unsuccessfully tried to spend less time on the internet?
• do you rush through your (home) work in order to go on the internet?
• do you neglect your daily obligations because you prefer to go on the internet?
• do you go on the internet when you are feeling down?
• do you use the internet to escape from your sorrows or get relief from negative feelings?
• do you feel restless, frustrated or irritated when you cannot use the internet?
Some findings

Compulsive Internet Use is related to

• Psychosocial wellbeing
  – Loneliness (+)
  – Self-esteem (-)
  – Depressive symptoms (+)

• Personality factors
  – Emotional stability (-)
  – Impulsivity (delay discounting) (+)

• Social anxiety
Some findings

Main applications related to CIU

• Online games, *mmorpg's*

• Online pornography "*It's all about sex!*"

• Social media: profile sites (e.g. *Facebook*)
Attractiveness of internet

What makes the internet so attractive?

• Diversity
• Availability, Simplicity / ease, Abundance, Affordability
• Continuity, Repeatability (escaping in a virtual world → mood modification, coping)
• Anonymity (→ inhibition)

*Instant availability of rewarding stimuli*
Attractiveness of online games

- Character Growth (level 1-70)
- Social interaction: building / maintenance of social contacts (Peer Pressure)
- Status, prestige
- Learning skills
- Competition
- Control
- Escape in virtual world (coping)

Note: increasing investment!
Consequences CIU

• Sleep deprivation, poor diet, low physical activity
• Psychosocial well-being
• Impairment in social functioning (offline)
• Impairment in school and work productivity

‘Social isolation and stagnation in development’
Prevalences

• 1% Dutch adult population (Meerkerk 2009)
• 3.2% adolescents (Van Rooij 2008)
• 5.4% adolescent gamers (Van Rooij 2008)
• 1.5% game addicts (Lemmens 2009)

Various international studies: <1% ↔ 10-20-30%
• Method
• Population
Pornography
Online pornography addiction

Study ´De opwinding voorbij´
(Beyond arousal)
(Meerkerk et al., 2011)

Research questions:

1. Who does how often what; what is ‘normal´?

2. Porno addiction: prevalence and characteristics
Online pornography addiction

Methods

• Interviews with therapists
• online questionnaire

• February 2011
• N = 1951 (Response 73%)
• ♀ & ♂ age 18 to 89 year
• Mean 54.5 year (s.d. 14.7)

• Anonym
• „Online-Erotica“
Results online questionnaire porn use

How often do you spend time on online erotica?

≥ 1-2 x/week:
  – 18% ♂
  – 2% ♀

≥ 3-5 x/week:
  – 7% ♂
  – ±0% ♀
Results online questionnaire porn use

- Popular are video's, photo's and stories (♀)
  - www.youporn.com and Google
- 2% paid
- Interactive porn (chat, webcam) not so popular
- ♂ >> ♀
- Relatively little difference by age
- Singles > having a partner

- Men between 18-54 years with no relationship:
  - 40% ≥ 1-2 x/week
  - 20% ≥ 3-5 x/week
Results online questionnaire porn addiction

Subjective experience

"Do you consider yourself addicted to online erotica?"

- 8% 'a little'
- 1% 'fairly'
- 0% 'very much'
Results online questionnaire porn addiction

Results CIUS

E.g. How often are you short of sleep because of online erotica?

never
rarely
sometimes
often
very often

Very low values:
59%: 1
Max. 3.2
1% ≥ 3
Results online questionnaire

Results in pornography ‘addiction’

- Prevalence ≈ 1%
- Especially single men
- Less satisfied with relationship and sex life
- More active sex life, more sexual partners and more often masturbate
- Higher depression
- Higher impulsivity
- More sensitive to punishment (BIS)
- Less sensitive to reward (BAS)
Treatment

• Cognitive behavioral therapy
• Time management
• Relapse prevention:
  – recognizing triggers
  – alternative coping strategies
  – pursuits
• Lifestyle Training
Conclusions

• Internet addictions (online gaming, pornography etc.) are to be taken seriously
• Prevalence rather low
• Dutch addiction care organizations can offer an effective therapy
• Awareness needed of doctors, social workers, psychologists, prevention and addiction care workers, policy makers, parents, schools
• Responsibility of the gaming industry?
General remarks

Goal of the Belgian study:

• Nature
• Severity
• Extent

• Formulating advice for addiction care organizations (including prevention)

• Characteristics of the target group (‘internet addicts´)
  – Psychosocial wellbeing variables
  – Personality measures

• Applications triggering risky use

• Prevalence: cut off point