

PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECTS OF PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE

Momčilo Mirković,¹ Jovana Todorović,²

¹University in Prishtina - Kosovska Mitrovica, School of Medicine, Kosovska Mitrovica, Serbia

²University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine, Belgrade, Serbia

DOI: 10.5937/BatutPHCO24019M

Background: In recent years, problematic internet use has become a significant public health problem.

Methods and Objectives: The method consists in a search of contemporary literature regarding the most important aspects of problematic Internet use. The main objective of this paper is to provide a basic overview of current scientific findings in conceptualization, measurement and research on problematic Internet use.

Results: There is wide agreement that the Internet can serve as a tool that enhances well-being. It is more difficult, however, to find consensus around the issue of problematic Internet use. That may be in part because scientific investigation has lagged far behind technological advances and media attention. The diagnostic schemas that have been proposed since 1996, and the screening tools that have been developed, stress similarities with substance use, impulse control disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Problematic internet use generally refers to use of Internet content that is out of control and leads to difficulties in daily functioning. That includes generalized problematic internet use, but also specific forms, such as problematic use of video games, social networks and pornography. Prevalence figures vary as a function of the diagnostic definition used, the age group studied, and whether the surveys were conducted online. Studies suggest high comorbidity rates with mood disorders and, among younger individuals, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Treatment should address any comorbid conditions present, as those may be causing, or exacerbating, problematic Internet use. Interventions that may specifically target problematic Internet use include cognitive behavioral therapy, but detailed guidelines must await further studies. For a medium that has so radically changed how we conduct our lives, the Internet's effects on our psychology remain understudied.

Conclusions: More research is needed into the pathophysiology, epidemiology, natural course, and treatment of problematic Internet use. In addition, the more subtle psychological changes, such as disinhibition, that seem to characterize people's online behavior also deserve attention, even if they cannot be seen as necessarily pathological.

Keywords: public health, problematic use, internet, measurement, questionnaire