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Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)

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Abstract

The term "Internet Addiction Disorder", recognizes the dependence of the "network" as a pathology, an obsessive / compulsive disorder, which drives a person to overuse of this technology and includes a wide variety of behaviors and problems with impulse control. You can be addicted to a substance, or by activity, such as the use of new means of information and communication. In the last decades, was recorded an exponential increase of dependence of the network; difficult to eliminate because it is linked to the pursuit of pleasure, of happiness. However, there are distinctive elements that allow experts to identify risk behaviors Internet addiction. In this intention, according to the Center for Online Addiction American, there are 5 specific types of Internet addiction: 1. Addictive cyber – sex (cybersex), 2. Cyber addiction - relational (virtual relations), 3. Addiction to Gaming Net (virtual games or role), 4. Addictive of the Web or information overload (obsessive search for information), 5. Addictive of computers or computer addiction. With this assumption, enable that the Internet is used in a positive way by young people but also by adults, it is necessary that you put in place a primary prevention: assure that children have a sure and intelligent web surfing; To awaken family to new educational needs of childhood and of teen; to involve school and society to educate the responsible use of new technologies. Bearing in mind that the real socialization should never be totally replaced by the virtual one.

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1 Introduction

Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) is a definition introduced for the first time by Ivan Goldberg in 1995. It

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describes the net addiction as “a pathology, an disorder, an overuse of this technology, including a wide range of behaviours and impulse-control.(Goldberg, 1955)¹. Over the last decades it has exponentially increased the number of cases where the object of addiction is a licit and socially accepted behaviour or activity. In short, as it happens with chemical substances, IAD is a habit, pathology hard to be removed because it is strictly related to the search of pleasure and happiness. It also interferes in a more and more obsessive-compulsive way with the biochemical and nervous systems negatively affecting the way of living and for some people it is able to change personal perceptions of space/time, perceptual levels the unconsciousness, and produces neurobiological abnormalities (Potenza, 2006). To be short, internet addicted people are not instantly aware of their subjection and even when they are likely to be aware, symptoms – which may be various depending on the specific problem – are drift to be hide (Nettuno, 2010).

2. Specific types of Internet Addiction

If, as previously stated, recognizing addictions is not something easy to do, it can be said that addictions exist when: a subject’s behaviour affects mental and physical health; it damages relationships with family and friends; it interferes with work; it causes economical instability; it incites to commit crimes (De Postis, et al., 2009). However, some distinctive elements are recognisable. They let to identify some Internet Addiction behaviours at risk. Such elements are: salience, frequency, duration, intensity, withdrawal symptoms, and conflict, relapse. According to the American Center for Online Addiction, indeed, five specific types of Internet Addictions have been identified in general terms:

- 1) Cyber Sexual Addiction. Addicted people download, use and trade cyber pornographic materials and they are also very often involved in adult chat rooms, obsessed by cyber sex and cyber pornographic materials.
- 2) Cyber Relationship Addiction. Addicted people turn out to be too much involved with cyber relationships and they can even be caught up in cyber adultery (Lavenia, Marcucci, 2005).
- 3) Social Network Addiction. All virtual communities which people can create public or semi-public profiles. Facebook is the most famous social network; it counts 60 millions of users constantly growing.
- 4) Net Gaming Addiction. It includes a wide range of behaviours like gambling, video games, shopping and obsessive e-trading.
- 5) Information Overload. Also know as information overload addiction. The abundance of information on the Internet creates a new compulsive behaviour which is related to the web surfing or searching of databases. Addicted people use more and more time to search and organize data. An obsessive-compulsive tendency and a reduction of work productivity are connected with this type of addiction.
- 6) Computer Addiction. In the 80s, computer games such as Solitaire and Minesweeper were programmed into computers and researchers found that obsessive computer game playing became problematic in organizational settings (Guerreschi, 2011).

3. Behavioural an psychological consequences highlighted by practice

In general terms, the above analyzed types of Internet Addiction Disorder may cause some additional psycho/behavioural results and psychic discomfort. Specialists have observed that, after repeating behaviours over time, kids, adolescents and adults learn to get satisfaction not more by human/affective contacts (family and friends), but merely by a screen, seeking refuge in a relational/affective/social loneliness which changes relations with self and others because it is independently experienced without any emotional perspective (Ko, Yen et. Al. 2005). Moreover, those who repeat behaviours as such are exposed to a new kind of pathology: the online loneliness syndrome (Ferraro, Caci, et al., 2007).

All the addicted situations examined show that the most serious consequences concern family, financial resources, and work. Addicted subjects prefer cyber relationships taking time away from interpersonal relations, basic for a well-balanced social life. It is pretty easy browsing the net for hours getting lost - without being aware of it - in that structure with its all endless links. The user will find him o herself browsing without a specific purpose while his o her mind will be totally oriented toward a compulsive use of the technology (Del Miglio, Corbelli 2006:139-156). It is clear that the Internet is able to provoke mood swings, deep and seductive feelings aimed to ride

over daily-life problems such as, for instance, hiding its own personality behind the screen to feel safe and protected. Thereby, addicted individuals will be able to create their own world seeking refuge in virtual world – a substitute for the real one – altering temporal experience. In this case, the misinterpretation of time is actually comparable with the one provoked by drugs which gives to addicted subjects a feeling of omnipotence (La Paglia, La Cascia, La Barbera, 2013).

4. Most evident behavioural symptoms

The most important behavioural symptoms characterizing Internet addiction are:

- The need to spend more and more time on the Internet to get satisfied.
- A pronounced lack of interest in all activities except the Internet.
- When the addiction is reduced or interrupted, experiencing psychomotor agitation, anxiety, depression, obsessive thinking about what is going on the Internet, typical withdrawal symptoms (Shapira, Lessig, Goldsmith, 2003).
- The need to log on to the Internet more and more often and for length of time extended compared with what planned in advance.
- The inability to interrupt or keep under control the use of the Internet.
- The waste of time in Internet related activities.
- Keeping on using the Internet despite of the awareness of healthy, social, psychological issues.

From a cognitive-behavioural prospective, some authors say that some maladjusted perceptions are observable in Internet Addicted people:

- Distorted thoughts about self and the world.
- Distorted perceptions about experiences of inadequacy, insecurity, low self-confidence, and relationship problems.
- Other researches have shown that addicted people may have personality disorders like:
- Mood disorders, anxiety, and impulse dyscontrol.
- With regard to health issues, addicted people have:
- Sleep disturbances, back aches, head aches, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, tired eyes, bad eating habits (Davis, 2001).

Addicted people's social and affective dimensions are also compromised by the abuse of the Internet because of the fact that cyber – relationships are made easier by the anonymity. Hiding their own identities in the long term, addicted individuals will feel safe seeking refuge in the virtual world, a proper substitute for the real one, with the shape of a technological obsession. This way, they will also have the chance to create their own world altering temporal experience. Time distortion phenomenon is comparable with the one provoked by drugs which gives to addicted subjects a feeling of omnipotence.

It is clear that the Internet is able to provoke mood swings, deep and seductive feelings aimed to ride over daily-life problems. Those who are unconditionally caught in and by the net have a tendency to be easily irritable when other people try to disturb their escape from reality (Cantelmi, 2007).

Addicted people deny the problem – even despite the evidence as it usually happens with other types of addictions – affirming that the Net is not dangerous at all. Indeed, it can be interpreted and lived as a container of events where the subject can actually find its own subjectivity and, as it happens in the real life, there is always a choice to be made between a safe path and a risky one. As a matter of fact, it appears to be hard asking for help when the problem is created by a powerful and innovative technology considered worthwhile by the great majority of people (La Barbera, Sideli, 2006).

5. Stages in the development of pathology

Researchers (Lavenia, 2010), have highlighted two particular stages in the development of the pathology, common for all the users of the Internet. Each single stage of telematic development – the learning process made by Internet newbies – has got specific risks. The first stage is marked by observations and research activities. Users usually discover online news, newspapers and magazines, online gambling, trading and pornography. The risks mainly related to this stage are the compulsive ones. Users start activities in the ways more suitable for them and things like online speculation, gambling, pornography, easily become compulsive activities. In the second stage, on the other hand, users discover and start using chat rooms, MUD and other online role games. The risks mainly related to this stage may be dangerous blind dates, social isolation, addiction, Cyber-sex Addiction, the loss of contact with the real world, feelings of omnipotence. The so-called net addictions appears in this stage and people with social and communicative difficulties may be at increased risk of developing addictions. In situations as such the addiction is an escaping behaviour, that is to say the subject seeks refuge in the Internet to escape from its own existential problems.

6. Contributing factors to the onset of pathologies

However, some contributing factors to the onset of internet-related pathologies have been discovered and in more than 50% of cases, IAD can be generated by certain pre-existing pathologies: multiple addictions, psychopathological conditions (depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, compulsive sexual behaviour, pathological gambling), situational factors (Burnout Syndrome, marital conflict, childhood abuse), excessive consumption, the reductions of life experience and real life relationships, problems at work and with family (Rosso, Prelati, Olivieri, Mungo, 2005). Moreover, it is expedient to highlight the pathological potentialities of the Internet (anonymity and feelings of omnipotence which can degenerate in paedophilia, cyber-sex, fake identities, on line gambling, etc.). Reading the news is enough to have a better understanding of the risks that may affect the Internet generation the figures are alarming: in 2005 in the Japan alone there were 34 cases of mass suicide through the Internet. The phenomenon of the suicides planned through the Internet among adolescents started in 2003. Since then the number of dead has tripled and, in some limit cases, someone decided to kill him or herself letting his or her avatar - a cyber self - living on the net a parallel life well away from frustrations¹.

7. Conclusions

In spite of all the problems above mentioned, the Net is surely not to be demonized. On the contrary, excess is negative and counterproductive for people, as it generally happens with abuse. Being aware of how to properly use the technology is essential. It means using carefully the technology – and its undeniable benefits – without the charm of emulation and that feeling of omnipotence and power easily produced by the Internet. It is also needed reducing the daily amount of time spent on the Internet (not more than one or two hours per day) trying not to use the technology like a daily routine to be respected at all costs, but completing the use of the Internet with some real life interactions like social relations, pastimes, etc. This way the Net will not be the favourite way of escape from reality and the only way people have to have a contact with self and others (Del Miglio, Corbelli, 2006). Prevention appears to be one of the most useful methods to avoid addictions. It would be appropriate to use it with children, adolescents, and people at risk with pre-existing pathologies or negative experiences of life. With such a premises, it is required a prime prevention assuring people – especially children – a safe and clever web surfing. This way the Internet will be a safe technology and not a trap. But it is essential that families pay the due attention to the new

¹ An avatar is an object (graphical representation) of the user in online communities, in Internet Forums, in virtual games. The written form of the word “avatar” is in Sanskrit, it originates in Hinduism where it stands for incarnation, the descent of a deity in a terrestrial form. In the jargon of the Internet, with a metaphorical meaning, the word describes a real person who decides to introduce him or herself to the virtual community through a graphical representation of him or herself, a sort of incarnation like a deity: an avatar. Available:<http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar>.

educative needs of children and adolescents. On the other hand, schools should pay serious attention to the evaluative dynamics of users, families and society (Dombrowski, LeMasney, Ahia, Dickson, 2004).

With regards to schools, it is needed to shift from talking about technology to using it – an education made with and through technologies. Such a methodological change is an urgent need because of the conspicuous gap between schools context and reality or extra-school contexts which usually give to families and students more than what schools actually do (Damade 2001). To conclude, technology and its education should never be divided from educational dimensions which contemplate emotional, sentimental and sexual education. In addition, throughout individual daily learning experiences (within family, school, society), real life socialization should never be completely replaced by the virtual one. This way, the amount of time daily spent on the Internet is lower than the amount of time spent for real life socialization (Leung, 2004).

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