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INTERNET ADDICTION AS COMORBID DISORDER IN PATIENTS WITH A SUBSTANCE-RELATED DISORDER: RESULTS FROM A SURVEY IN GERMAN INPATIENT CLINICS

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Introduction: Internet Addiction (IA) is discussed as a serious health problem. Epidemiologic investigations show prevalence rates of 3% of internet users that fulfil criteria for IA. Reported symptoms like tolerance, withdrawal, and craving resemble those of substance-related disorders. Although there is no final agreement on the classification of IA, it has often been referred to as a non-substance-related addiction fostering current issues on the next revision of DSM (Holden, 2010).

Objectives: Although IA has been investigated in epidemiologic studies there is no research of its prevalence in patients in treatment because of a substance-related disorder. Regarding similarities between IA and substance-related disorders, theories suggest increased prevalence of comorbid IA in these patients.

Aims: This study focused on the identification of prevalence of comorbid IA among patients with a primary substance-related disorder in different in-patient clinics across Germany.

Methods: Sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Health 1826 patients were screened with a diagnostic inventory for IA. For further description additional questionnaires were given assessing aspects of personality (NEO-FFI) and psychopathology (SCL-90R, BDI-II).

Results: 4.1% of the patients fulfilled criteria of IA. In these most common primary diagnoses were pathological gambling and dependency of cannabis. Concerning personality IA-subsample showed increased neuroticism and introversion. Highest symptom burden was found in depression and social insecurity.

Conclusions: Among patients with substance-related disorder prevalence of IA is more common than in healthy samples. Results recommend separate screening for IA in inpatient clinics for substance-related disorders to guarantee full psychological care for patients with IA.