

PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS AND CO-MORBID DISORDERS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNET ADDICTION AND PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING: ANALYSES OF A CLINICAL SAMPLE

K.W. Müller¹, M.E. Beutel², K. Wölfling¹

¹Outpatient Clinic for Behavioral Addictions, ²Department of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, University Medical Centre Mainz, Mainz, Germany

Introduction: Despite growing interest in internet addiction (IA), there is still no consensus in perceiving it as a distinct clinical disorder. Proposals of including IA in the DSM-V and possibly also ICD-11 have strengthened the notion that it has a lot of features justifying its nosological classification as a primary disorder.

Objectives: Besides a large number of epidemiological surveys, clinical examinations investigating psychopathological symptoms and co-morbidity in a standardized way are still missing. Hence, clinical data is very important in the research on IA as it might support data gained in representative studies.

Aims: The purpose of the study was to provide further clinical characterisation of IA.

Methods: A clinical sample from a specialized outpatient clinic in Germany was examined by clinical ratings (GAF; psychiatric co-morbidity) and questionnaires (SCL-90R, PHQ). Two clinical groups were included: Patients meeting criteria for IA (n=80) and patients with pathological gambling (n=80). For further statistical comparison, healthy controls (n=80) were recruited too.

Results: Both clinical groups scored significantly higher in SCL-90R and PHQ than the controls. Patients with IA showed similar profiles in SCL-90R as pathological gamblers with no significant differences in any sub-scale. Also, scores of GAF were similar. Expert ratings on co-morbidity indicate that depression is associated with both disorders. In IA also social phobia is common.

Conclusions: Patients with IA and pathological gamblers display comparable levels of psychopathological symptoms and impairment. IA seems to cause significant psychopathological strain similar to pathological gambling that is accepted as a clinical disorder since the 1980ies.