

## *Internet addiction as New Addiction? \**

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***Summary.** The Internet has brought about many changes in people's lives, at the social, psychological and educational level, but excessive use can cause a particular addiction, called Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD), which consists in not being able to control the need to connect to the internet, remaining connected many hours and losing track of time. This addiction can cause various kinds of problems: physical, financial, within relationships, at work or at school. Some of the different kinds of addiction include the addiction to internet sex, virtual relationships, internet activity, excessive information and virtual games. Therefore, we need to identify the guidelines to regulate the use in terms of time, to prevent internet addiction and avoid falling into the many traps of the internet.*

***Keywords:** Teenagers, Addiction, Internet, Prevention, Technology*

### **Today's teens: a digital generation.**

The daily life of children in industrialized countries today, compared to that of the past generations, is characterized by the massive presence of the so called new technologies (Computers, Internet, Mobile, Ipad, Ipod and others), resulting in a generation gap between the previous generation and the current one, so clear that today we talk of age divide (Pattaro, 2006).

Today's youths, from industrialized countries, living in this era of Information Communication Technology, are nicknamed E-Generation or Digital Generation or Digital Natives by European Institutions, as well as

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through another expression that identifies them, always on, that is always connected. Furthermore, they are considered multitasking experts, for they can do many things at once, like listening to music while sending a text message, or chatting while talking on the phone and more.

One of the new technologies used is the Internet, which is nothing more than a network of several computers, which together form a connection system that allows the rapid exchange of information between people who are physically and geographically distant from one another. All the computers that make up a network are equally important to each other, there is no central computer and other peripheral ones or a more important computer than another, and all computers send and receive information from each other (Toller, 2011).

The origin of the Internet dates back to the Cold War era (1969 to be exact), in which the U.S. Defence Department commissioned the ARPA (Advanced Research Project Agency) to create a network connection between several computers, where all computers could receive and transmit information freely between them. The first network was created for military purposes and later used for commercial purposes. The boom in the growth of internet took place in the nineties when the World Wide Web was established. From that moment Internet began to spread rapidly, formed by a large number of networks, each of which collected a given number of personal computers.

The introduction of the Internet, as a technological innovation for modern society has brought about in the people's lives many positive changes which are social, psychological and educational: internet users can speak and maintain rapports with people far from them, information is quickly obtained, they can play and learn (Guerreschi, 2005).

Internet is designed to cater for different needs of the person: for play (with the Internet you can have fun, playing alone or with others), participation (with the internet you can belong to a group, for joining new groups and taking part in the various activities organized by the group), usefulness (with the Internet you can collect all the required information or make purchases), and on a personal scale (with Internet you can satisfy the need to create, develop / improve or maintain significant relationships) (Tonioni, 2011).

With the Internet, the individual user can send or receive documents, videos, images, sounds, and use programmes to send texts, make calculations, draw, and chat in real time.

Teenagers use the Internet to do research for their studies related to topics studied in class, they chat in order to make new friends, they use the webcam to see each other, emails are used to exchange information, data

and more, they visit websites or blogs dedicated to their idols, they download ringtones for mobiles, and so on. Parents are increasingly surprised by the ability of their children to use the computer and new technology in general, so much so that this new ability creates a reversal of roles: the children, more practical and experienced new media and Internet browsers and users, teach their parents (and adults in general) how to use them (Toller, 2011).

Even though the children teach their parents the “procedures” involved in using the different kinds of media and not the other way round, parents should try not to completely reverse their role as educators, for they have the duty of teaching how to use the new media in a correct and responsible way, especially the Internet, since the Internet hides many traps, easy to fall victim to, and if measures for responsible use are not taken, it may become a true addiction. In order to do this, parents need to read up and learn about all the different uses or activities available on the Internet (children do not teach everything to their parents), because the Internet is used for a multitude of purposes, as stated before, satisfying different personal and individual needs.

Internet, like any medium, is neither negative nor positive in itself, but it can be used in the correct way or the wrong way. It is useless for parents to forbid their children to use the Internet, they would secretly do so and in the wrong way, therefore parents might as well provide the right skills to deal with and manage any risks in an appropriate way (Tonioni, 2011).

The Internet has radically changed society, for it has revolutionized the concept of space: today we no longer speak only of the physical space in which to socialize and form new relationships, learn, acquire knowledge, but there is a new space, a virtual one, called cyberspace (Guerreschi, 2005). Before the creation of the Internet, the distinction was only between the real world and the imaginary world (which includes everything related to fantasies and dreams), while the virtual world, or virtual reality, is nothing more than “a simulated reality, by electronic means”, which does nothing but simulate actual reality (Tonioni, 2011: 56).

## **2. Internet Addiction or Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD).**

The development of the Internet and its applications has greatly improved the lives of individuals, but this evolution in the way we communicate and "navigate" has also led to excessive use of the internet, so as to cause an addiction to it, called Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD). It consists in the inability of controlling the need to connect to the Internet,

because it is considered by the user, as a container of all anxieties and frustrations. For this reason many hours are spent connected to the Internet, losing track of time (Guerreschi, 2005).

In 1995, American psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg, was the first to speak of Internet addiction, coining the term Internet Addiction Disorder. He proposed including in the DSM, Internet addiction disorder because he considered excessive and uncontrolled use of the Internet as a real addiction and wanted it to be evaluated as such. The scientific world has never included this syndrome in the DSM (in fact it is not present in the DSM-IV), because there is no consensus in the scientific community about considering it one of the established addictions. For some researchers, excessive and uncontrolled use of the Internet is not an addiction, but simply a “problematic use of the Internet” or “Internet-mania”, while other researchers and doctors define (and treat) this uncontrolled use as an addiction (Pattaro, 2006).

Kimberly Young (1996) is one of the first researchers who carried out the earliest studies on Internet addiction, presenting the model ACE (Accessibility, Control, Excitement) to explain the three factors that can facilitate and establish an Internet addiction.

Accessibility: any activity on the internet is easily accessed because it is not restricted to any defined physical location, but it can be used from any distance, with instant gratification.

Control: there is a greater ease in managing and controlling Internet activities than those carried out in real life.

Excitement: The Internet offers many stimuli that excite and motivate the individual, because it is a medium that permits one to carry out many activities and live different experiences, not always possible in real life, such as creating different identities.

According to Young, those at risk of developing an addiction to the Internet are between the ages of 15 and 40, and have communication difficulties, linked to psychological problems from family or relationships. From the observations conducted by Couyoumdjian, Baiocco and Del Miglio (2006) on several individuals addicted to Internet use, emerged the profile of a typical addict that is male, a teenager, with little confidence in himself, with identity issues and social anxieties, no friends or relationships in real life, his computer being his only friend.

It is important not to label an individual as an Internet addict simply because he uses the Internet, according to Young (1996). In order to diagnose an Internet addiction with respect to the individual in question, at least five of the following diagnostic criteria should be satisfied within a period of at least six months, such as:

- the constant worrying about what is happening on the Internet at times when he is not connected and pre-programming future activities to be carried out during future connections;
- the desire to connect to the Internet more often and for longer, in order to achieve the same degree of satisfaction;
- forcing oneself to decrease the time spent on the Internet;
- the negative repercussion of forcing oneself to decrease Internet time, causing depression or irritability;
- not being able to detach oneself from the internet after a proposed time of use has elapsed;
- studies, relationships or work can suffer due to excessive use of the internet;
- hiding to other family members the time spent online and their involvement in the internet;
- using the internet to escape the difficulties and disappointments of real life.

These characteristics help determine if an individual exhibits an addiction to the internet, but it is not that easy to diagnose a syndrome of this kind, and we must bear in mind that today's reality is in some respects unknown to adults, who lived their teenage years in times when the space-time dimensions were different. Hence the consequent labelling of this diversity as pathological, accompanied by the difficulty of accepting the reversal of the roles of parents, less experienced than their children.

A study by Tonioni (2011) highlights the factors that parents may wish to consider in order to understand more easily if their child is addicted to the Internet, or not. In particular, the number of hours that their child spends online is the first sign that a parent must note. However, there is no specific number of hours that defines an addiction. More than anything it is necessary to assess how the internet activity occupies the thoughts of the individual during the day and how much it obstructs the regular course of other activities. Another warning of Internet addiction concerns the behaviour of the individual at school. According to parents, a child who may suffer from a form of Internet addiction will show a decline in school performance. This is not always true, as some teenagers have very high academic grades, but suffer from a form of Internet addiction. In these cases, warning signs come from the relationship factor, that is, by considering the type of friendships that an individual has in the classroom and assessing whether they are positive or negative. Often a teenager may isolate himself/herself in the Internet world, developing an addiction to it, especially if he/she is friendless or experiencing a negative relationship with the peers, characterized by acts of bullying, insults or being made fun

of. The lack of real friendships can be a symptom of Internet addiction. In fact, often teenagers who cannot form a real and “physical” friendship isolate themselves in the virtual world by creating “cold” relationships, since they lack emotional involvement due to the physical distance between the individuals. The lack of affection and of falling in love, experienced as a natural situation, is not perceived as something missing or as a choice, and stems from the difficulty of perceiving and expressing affection. There is a gradual decline of interest in the passions and activities that the individual has regularly carried out in his life and that are seen as an imposition by his parents or as an extension of his school, in favour of various activities carried out solely on the Internet. The presence in the family without an active and engaging participation of the individual leads to a casual coexistence, characterized by a certain distance. This situation occurs in cases where there is no strong relationship or an active rapport with family members, resulting in difficulties of integration in school, friendships or business. Aggression is one of the withdrawal symptoms that occur when an exasperated parent unplugs the computer or the modem or confiscates the entire computer, creating a sort of abstinence. The aggressive reaction can be more or less violent, for the individual sees it as an invasion of privacy.

### **3. The consequences of I.A.D and the different forms of Internet addiction.**

Internet addiction can cause, to the affected individual, many problems such as physical, relational, at work or school, and financial. The physical disorders depend mainly on the excessive amount of time spent on a computer and a sedentary lifestyle. In particular, back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, muscular pain in the arm, circulatory problems in the lower limbs due to an excessive sedentary lifestyle, eye strain, migraines, insomnia, irregular meals.

In reference to the problems of a relational nature, Internet addiction causes an individual to spend more hours in front of a computer and fewer hours devoted to the important relationships in his life (love, friends, and family). This is because the Internet is a great way to escape life, daily reality and its problems, but in this way, the individual gradually loses touch with reality, disregarding any activities and relationships. In addition to relationship problems, Internet addiction can cause problems at work or at school. For a while now, Internet use has been introduced in schools and

in the workplace (especially in offices), but in addition to being a great resource for improving productivity, it can become the cause of failure at work or at school if used without moderation, since it generates fatigue. Many employees have been fired for unprofessional use and misuse of the Internet.

Finally, Internet addiction can cause big financial problems, in cases where the individual participates in auctions, online gambling, online commerce, lotteries. In fact, normal use of the Internet can lead to the loss of reasonable amounts of money, Internet addiction could lead to the loss of large fortunes. Other financial problems arise from addiction to pornographic websites, since these often require payments and the use of credit cards (Guerreschi, 2005).

Internet Addiction is considered a peculiar type of compulsive disorder, its symptoms being manifest, according to a study conducted by Jerard J. Block (2008), in the excessive desire to connect to the Internet to play games, chat, send emails, search for porn sites. Failure to connect makes individuals nervous, agitated, irritable, and prone to depression: all forms assimilable to the withdrawal syndrome. Excessive use of the internet is accompanied by deep anxieties and concerns and is based on obsessions that cross the boundaries of reality.

In addition, Dr. Young (1996) identifies five different types of online addiction:

1. Cyber-sex addiction, the search for pornographic material on the internet or the search for erotic relationships as a means of sexual gratification: the individuals that suffer from this form of addiction carry out various activities related to sex, which causes arousal, and the individuals have no control over the time spent on internet, nor its consequences.

The addiction to cybersex can be passive that is when an individual is addicted to viewing pornographic images and videos and masturbation; it's active when an individual is addicted to online sex via chat, email or webcam.

Specifically, sexual activities performed by a cybersex addict are watching and/or downloading pornographic films or photos while masturbating, reading or writing letters or erotic stories, exchanging emails, contacts or responding to personal advertisements in order to constantly meet new and various sexual partners, visit erotic chats, start up affairs that take place entirely online, or that result in sexual encounters, phone sex.

Individuals who choose to put these activities into practice, slowly falling into a state of cybersex addiction, act in this manner for various reasons: to avoid intimacy with another person; to have the least possible

romantic involvement; the feeling of total control and better management of the partner; for the anonymity that the Internet ensures, permitting the individual, either the passive user or the addict, to carry out freely all their sexual fantasies, even the most outrageous ones, without feeling judged.

Cooper (1998) conducted a research where the outcome established that 90% of those who participated in the survey spent less than ten hours a week on different cybersex practices and of those 8% were addicts. It was also found that men are more dependent on cybersex than women (5 to 1), although the number of women addicts is rising considerably. In his research, Cooper identifies differences in male and female cybersex addicts: the former connect to look at pornographic photos, while the latter are mainly addicted to erotic chats, because women prefer to talk about sex and pursue a form of interaction. According to research conducted by Young, there are different reasons that drive and attract men and women to cybersex practices: the men that indulge in cybersex do it because they are insecure about their physical appearance and they relate better to a woman without feeling judged, or by doing so they do not suffer from performance anxiety, or they can avoid facing problems such as premature ejaculation or impotence. Women, however, carry out cybersex activities because the distance created by the computer permits them to hide physical flaws, they are more uninhibited, and feel free to talk about sex. Cybersex addiction upsets both the addict and those around him. The relationship most affected by cybersex addiction is that of the couple, 49,87% of those interviewed regard any cybersex activity as cheating, even without physical contact, while the remaining 50,13% do not consider cybersex cheating for the lack of physical contact or romantic involvement. These relationship problems do not only involve the partner, but are also extended to the children, because of the little time dedicated to them, since the addict is more involved in the various cybersex activities.

2. Cyber-relational addiction, searching for online relationships at the expense of real life family and friends: the addict is overly involved in relationships, whether friendly or romantic in nature, originated and developed on the Internet, by exchanging emails, in chat rooms, social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Addiction occurs when virtual relationships gradually become more important than the real ones, with the subjects devoting all their time to these virtual relationships that end up replacing the real ones. In so doing, the addict, by this time dependent on the virtual relationships, moves away from the real world, breaks all ties with the people around him and begins to live only in a parallel and virtual world, surrounded by idealized people. The virtual friendships are easier to build and maintain than real ones, since an individual can easily confide

and become intimate with others, protected from the screen that facilitates opening up, without embarrassment or fear of blushing; furthermore, virtual friendships develop faster than real ones and have the characteristic of always being there, because on the Internet one can find people online to become friends with, at any time of the day or night.

3. Net-compulsion, which includes pathological gambling, compulsive trading and online shopping. Individuals can log in to virtual casinos, interactive games, Internet stores for purchasing items online and making online transactions: the individual is addicted to all those activities on internet that can cause considerable loss of money and consequent financial crisis, such as online gambling (online poker, online casinos for betting) and shopping-commerce.

4. Information overload, compulsive pursuit of information moving from one site to another at the expense of work and family: the individual uses the Internet to find growing amounts of information, that is organized with precision and anguish. The excessive amount of information has no special purpose, but the individual, continuously and obsessively, moves from one site to another to find news and new information to be retained. According to a 1997 study, *Glued to the Screen: An investigation into information addiction worldwide*, half of the individuals interviewed suffer from this particular form of addiction, they consider the possession of large amounts of information on any topic highly essential, in order to be able to make better decisions and have a higher social status than those who have less information (Reuters Business Information, 1997; Guerreschi, 2005, 54). In doing so, these individuals do not realize they suffer from information overload within the mind, preventing them from putting the information to good use and not being able to benefit from it.

5. Computer addiction, looking for video games or virtual role-playing games that occupy the user for many hours, under a false identity: the individual is too busy with virtual games, developing a real form of addiction. What draws the individual to these games are the graphics, the special settings, the fictional characters, but most of all the addict can become a character or an avatar they have always dreamed of being, with their own personal specifications and characteristics. The anonymity allows each player to create or choose a character that best expresses their personality freely. The risk is assuming that personality in virtual reality for a long time, forgetting that it is only a game. In these cases, the individual desires to escape everyday life, rejecting it completely, taking refuge in the virtual character of the role play. Another German research has highlighted how the addiction to virtual games can be compared to that of light drugs or alcohol.

In addition to these types of online addiction, specified by Young, Caretti (2000) identifies a disorder different from addiction, called Trance Dissociativa da Videoterminale, the consequence of which is a state of involuntary trance, with altered states of consciousness, depersonalization and loss of sense of personal identity. It is possible that the individual substitutes his/her own identity with another one that influences the real identity, to the point of losing control of himself/herself and of the situation. The anonymity and the absence of normal time and space restrictions facilitate these experiences. This state of trance leads the individual to lose touch with reality, as in dreaming, with a return to reality accompanied by amnesia.

Thus, the anonymity, the absence of time and space barriers, the desire for almightiness, the feelings of pleasure different from that of real life, are all elements that can cause a person with psychological or psychiatric difficulties to be overcome by such an addiction. How and why an individual becomes addicted to the internet, Cantelmi, Del Miglio, Talli, D'Andrea (2000) have identified two phases, the first of which is the fase Tossicofilica, in which there is a growing increase in the hours of online connection and an increase in chat, loss of sleep, more focus on emails and favourite websites; the second is the fase Tossicomantica, in which there is a prolonged connection enough to seriously damage relationships and work. This second phase concerns mainly individuals between the ages of 15 and 40, with high computer skills, with psychological, psychiatric or significant family problems, the reason why the internet represents an escape from reality.

#### **4. Prevention and treatment of I.A.D.**

Much research has been conducted to verify any connections between a dysfunctional use of new technologies and psychological and social problems. In this regard, Cantelmi et al. (2000) claim that the time factor can't fully explain the phenomenon of internet addiction. La Bisi (2003) has determined, by the time factor, the quality of the use of the internet, assessing whether the students use the technology solely for school research that requires the consultation of different sites, which does not involve any risk of addiction and in fact his research showed that the risk of developing harmful forms of addiction is not high, because teenagers prefer real life to a virtual one. The researcher proceeds to say that those at risk are limited in number and are suffering from forms of individual pathologies, such as psychological frailty or difficult family situations, so the internet is an escape from real life and a relief in the virtual life.

Therefore, the use of the internet could be a kind of escape into narcissism, which Livolsi (2006) identifies as a search for anything that can give immediate gratification to the individual placing himself at the centre of the world and from that narcissism stems the internet addiction. Internet allows you to advance your knowledge in terms of geography, entertainment, relationships, that is why it's an individual and social wellbeing, but when the "journey" turns into "escape", then the wellbeing becomes an individual and social malaise (Pattaro, 2006).

Other research showed a link between the use of violent video games and increased aggression, and a lack of empathy, greater social hostility, negative school results and impatience towards the suffering of others, because they are convinced that violence is a useful and acceptable behaviour (Vanni, 2009). In contrast, other studies have shown that violent video games are a way out for those people who have a tendency to be aggressive or are suffering from frustration, stimulating new bonds between fathers and sons and new social relations among peers (Jansz & Martens, 2005).

Online communication and use of the Internet makes teenagers, rather than adults, more vulnerable to the risk of becoming addicted to technology, because the possession of the necessary skills in order to use the new media is a requirement dictated by today's society so as not to be excluded from it. Vanni (2009) explains that the teenager who spends many hours online and sleeps little manifests a chronic fatigue that has a negative impact on academic performance and commitment in other activities. He adds that those individuals, who study with the TV or radio on, do not remember as well as those studying in silence and that the violent content on television increases the possibility of committing delinquent acts over thirty years later.

The new technologies enhance the process of self growth for teenagers as they provide huge opportunities, but they can become a social malaise when it's the virtual world educating young people, by substituting the family and the school in the educational process (Pattaro, 2006).

To sum up, the educational responsibility of adults is essential when providing young people with the skills they need to positively use the internet, in order to prevent addiction or the possibility of falling into any hidden traps online. In this regard, there are many parents who have organized themselves into associations to exchange ideas and practical knowledge on the use that their children make of the Internet. One of these associations has created a set of guidelines for parents on the use of computers by children, *Parents: teens & technology*, according to which parents should limit the time of use of the computer by teenagers, setting a

time or the number of hours connected to the Internet. It is important to monitor the use and clearly establish what is allowed and what is forbidden to do, preventing access to unwanted sites through the installation of special software “filters” and software that enable you to view the history. These filters are called parental control and should be age appropriate, as it is useful to apply it to the threshold of adolescence. It is therefore necessary to establish and inform young people about the penalties they may incur in the event of infringement of the rules. One suggestion is to put the family computer in an area accessible to all, in order to control them. If parents consider their children to be immature in the management of the computer, they should have a password to prevent use in their absence. Another tip is to give clear and precise instructions about how to behave on the Internet, not to respond to messages from strangers or business proposals received via email. In addition, parents should continuously update their technological knowledge and, through constructive dialogue, should adequately educate their children, so that they acquire mature technological capabilities that prevent them from falling into the traps of the internet (Vanni, 2009).

According to Tonioni (2011), in order to safeguard their children from problems associated with the use of Internet, parents should explain to them that people met in chat can be as dangerous as any strangers met in real life, so they should always distrust them and be on guard towards them and talk about it if they get into trouble or have problems of any nature; parents should warn their children of particular contents found on the Internet, such as websites of a sexual nature and scam sites; parents must explain to their children that it is illegal to download music, films, video games or take part in gambling (even if it is virtual); parents must inform their children to ask permission to use credit cards or other cards on the internet, they have to teach their children the correct way to select and gather information on the internet, developing an analytical mind in order to distinguish between facts and opinions, prejudices and stereotypes and this is possible only by supporting them in finding information for a period of time sufficient enough to show them the importance of the type of site that has the information, the importance of knowing the professionalism of the author who wrote it and the importance of comparison with multiple sources that deal with the same information in order to verify reliability and truthfulness; parents should inform children the importance of the protection of privacy and personal data.

When the children are too young, parents should discourage every encounter with people met on the internet, explaining that these people could be dangerous to the same extent as those encountered in the street.

Teenagers must be told that if they meet someone in chat and then want to meet them personally, they can do so, but with great caution, informing parents or a close friend, letting many people know about the location and time of the meeting, the exact place, and it would be best never to meet anyone alone, but in the company of a friend and in crowded places and public areas. Another way in which parents can protect their children, and at the same time create in them a self-protective behaviour is to tell them never to provide private information (names, addresses, phone numbers, name of school, name and surname of close friends), or exchange pictures with strangers or send aggressive, vulgar and offensive messages.

However, if communication does not help and the child seems to be addicted on the Internet, for the treatment and care of the Internet addiction disorder it would be ideal to contact a specialized centre. This type of addiction is not readily treated in Italy, but there is a specialized centre in Rome and one in Turin. Another viable alternative, to intervene and fight this type of addiction, is provided by local services, such as CIM (mental hygiene centre), or CMS (mental health centre), or the DSM (Department of Mental Health), and ask for the help of a competent therapist. Otherwise, parents can try to consult a therapist at the SerT, even if they are structures that, rather than deal with new addictions and Internet addiction, they deal with the "classic" addictions to drugs or alcohol. The last alternative would be the use of a therapist who operates privately, putting into account the expenses involved with this kind of service. In general, whatever the solution chosen for their child, it is important that a parent prefers one that allows the creation of a relationship of trust, especially between the therapist and the addicted child. The initial difficulty of parents is convincing their children that they are affected by this form of addiction and need to seek medical attention. The teenagers addicted to the internet deny having a problem and refuse medical care. However, parents should insist, without ever tiring, even if they were to fail several times (Tonioni, 2011).

With regard to the therapeutic pathways that an I.A.D. addict can choose to take, what needs to be taken into account are the individual needs and predispositions:

- Self-help groups are composed of people who suffer from a common problem. These groups meet periodically to exchange experiences and to set rules for the use of the internet in order to regain control of their lives. The self-help groups are both in offline mode, with face-to-face encounters, and online, with meetings over the Internet that are not of much help.

- Therapeutic Counselling: is a path that permits the individual to understand the motivations that underlie addiction, in view of a psychological change.

- Individual Psychotherapy is recommended in cases where the internet addiction is accompanied by a prior disorder. Individual psychotherapy allows the individual to become aware of the inner self and its importance as well as change.

- The Twelve Steps are aimed at personal and spiritual recovery of the individual, through a process similar to that of Alcoholics Anonymous.

- Strategies for detoxification provide a valuable aid in addressing and resolving the problem, particularly from a behavioural point of view.

With regard to treatment through therapeutic rehabilitation, Dr. Young highlights how the treatment should be designed to bring the addict to a moderate and controlled use of the internet and, for this purpose, she presents twenty known-behavioural strategies, for example, one task is to recognize what is being lost, making a list of all the activities that are being neglected because of the internet, raising awareness of the sacrifices made because of the internet addiction, examine the time spent online, noting the number of hours spent on the internet and all the activities carried out in the period of one week, in order to measure the amount and the quality of the activities on the internet; using techniques of time management, learning to manage online connection time, replacing it with an alternative activity, such as a hobby, in order to eliminate this habit and encourage change; establish strict internet time, learning to disconnect at the appointed time, through the use of tricks that favour the disconnection; finding support in the real world, by joining, for example, a self-help group to share experiences with others and thus find psychological comfort; to recognize what triggers the behaviour, paying attention to the emotion that is felt before connecting and during the connection, in order to understand what the individual is running from and what they want to achieve when they are on internet; to carry at all times, cards with positive messages, making a list of all the positive things that would result from limiting the number of connections and all the negative things and problems caused by an extended internet connection, to be read every time there's a desire to connect to the internet, in order to find the strength to control oneself; to take important steps to pinpoint the real problems, identifying and addressing those difficulties from which an individual runs, taking refuge in the internet and promoting the development of the addiction.

In Italy, an experiment has recently been conducted in the form of online psychotherapy for individuals addicted to the internet, with free access to the site [www.psychoinside.it](http://www.psychoinside.it). However, this kind of therapeutic

service raises several concerns, even though access is easy and anonymous, it lacks a neutral and adequate setting that is suitable for treatment. Valid help for the Study and Treatment of Internet Addiction Disorder is provided by the SIIPa.C., The Italian Society of Intervention for Compulsive disorders (Guerreschi, 2005).

## **Conclusions**

In all behavioral addictions, which lack a toxic agent comparable to the substance that causes physical dependence, we should always consider the abusive behavior of individuals, paying attention to any pre-existing psychosocial and psychological variables, such as relationship difficulties or social deficiencies, which induce the individual in taking refuge on the internet in order not to confront their existential problems.

Extensive research conducted on “Internet addiction” has shown the limit of not being able to obtain statistically significant and generalized data that sheds light on a possible fortuitous relationship between internet abuse and psychopathology.

However, it is evident that the internet has enticing features, attracting individuals with low self-esteem or relationship difficulties, because of the anonymity, which encourages uninhibited behavior, the ability to find social support online and the creation of an identity parallel to the real one, possibly constituting risk factors for the development of a true Internet addiction (Cantelmi et al., 2000).

In conclusion, it should be noted that we should not demonize and condemn the use of new technologies, as online experiences offer the opportunity to experience new realities, but we should be careful in using the internet, while remaining vigilant about one’s own behavior.

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