

## Characteristics of Users of an Online Self-help Programme for People with Internet Addiction: Symptoms, Motivation, Negative Consequences and Benefits of its Reduction



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**BACKGROUND:** In 2011 an online self-help programme for people with Internet addiction was launched.

**OBJECTIVES:** To identify the most used online applications, the symptoms of Internet addiction according to six basic dimensions, motivation to Internet addiction, the negative consequences of such behaviour, and the benefits resulting from its reduction. **METHOD:** CIAS, qualitative analysis of data obtained from the self-help programme.

**PARTICIPANTS:** 273 people registered with the self-help programme for individuals showing Internet addiction.

**RESULTS:** The most popular online applications with addictive potential were online social communication applications. As regards the salience symptom, thoughts about current online events, spending too much time online, and craving were the most common categories. Tolerance is manifested by the excessive amount of time spent online, constant connection to the Internet, and setting up new accounts and profiles. As regards withdrawal symptoms, the

most frequently identified categories were restlessness/agitation and anger/irritability. Concerning interpersonal conflicts, the categories of conflicts with loved ones, limitation of social contacts, and lying were identified, while intrapersonal conflicts were manifested in the general conflict of being online versus not being online and in specific conflicts such as work/study vs. being online or obligations vs. being online. The reported time span of their relapses ranged from the previous few days to several months. The most common motives for Internet addiction were limited social skills and excessive stress. The most frequent negative consequences of Internet addiction mentioned by the respondents were those pertaining to the employment and school domain. **CONCLUSION:** Internet addiction is a behavioural addiction that impairs psychosocial rather than somatic functioning. This may be the reason why these clients rarely come into contact with psychiatric addiction treatment services.

**KEY WORDS:** INTERNET – INTERNET ADDICTION – ONLINE SELF-HELP PROGRAMME

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