

Article: 0464

Topic: EPO10 - e-Poster Oral 10: Addictive Behaviours, Anxiety Disorders and Somatoform Disorders

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## Treating Internet Addiction - the Expert Perspective

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### Introduction:

Internet addiction is a behavioural problem that has gained increasing scientific recognition in the last decade, with some researchers claiming it is a '21st Century epidemic', leading the APA to include *Internet Gaming Disorder* in the appendix of the DSM-5.

### Objectives/Aims:

Internet addiction treatment literature is scarce, particularly regarding the expert view on Internet addiction. To fill this gap in knowledge, this paper aims to explore how Internet addiction therapy experts experience the presenting problem of Internet addiction in psychotherapy.

### Methods:

A total of 20 psychotherapists from 6 different countries (i.e., Germany, UK, USA, Canada, Austria and Switzerland) were interviewed regarding their individual experience of treating clients suffering from Internet addiction. Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

### Results:

Two superordinate themes were identified during the analysis: 'risk' and 'addiction'. Risk factors included individual, situational and structural characteristics. Psychotherapists treating Internet addiction viewed Internet addiction as actual psychopathology, containing addiction symptoms, criteria and diagnosis, and drew on its similarities with other addictions.

### Conclusions:

Internet addiction treatment experts highlight the existence and severity of Internet addiction as psychopathology requiring professional therapy. Clients who seek help for their Internet addiction-related problems experience their condition as distressing and as significantly impairing their functioning. Internet addiction fulfils the conditions for a mental disorder classification as outlined in the DSM-5, and should be taken seriously not to marginalise those affected. Parents and significant others, researchers and clinicians, and healthcare and insurance providers may benefit from the presented insights.