

INTERNET ADDICTION: ACTUAL STATUS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS

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Introduction: Internet over-consumption can cause dysfunctional usage resulting in several deleterious outcomes. The “Internet Use Disorder” is gaining importance in diagnostic manuals as its prevalence increases.

Objectives: The objective of the study was to examine how this upcoming disorder is assessed at present.

Aims: We present the actual status of Internet addiction assessment tools and develop a theoretical framework for optimizing “Internet Use Disorder” assessment tools design.

Methods: A factorial structure analysis of tools assessing Internet addiction for adolescents and adults published between January 1993 and October 2011 was performed and a theoretical framework for optimizing tools design was developed. The descriptive properties of 14 questionnaires were measured and the position of the instruments' methodology, validity, reliability and model fit was presented, along with the preferred factorial analysis method and validation technique.

Results: Results indicate some heterogeneity in study methodology and differences in descriptive and dimensional aspects of assessment tools. The three factor categories compulsive Internet use, negative outcomes and salience were central to Internet addiction questionnaires. Furthermore, the social dimension was often under-represented. No significant difference was observed in the distribution of factor categories across Internet addiction questionnaires and DSM-IV-TR and ICD-10 diagnostic criteria for substance dependence.

Conclusions: The validity and reliability of the evaluated questionnaires reflect the newness of this field. The under-representation of the social use of Internet is a problematic situation as it is causing considerable damages. Future research should consider that Internet addiction evaluation questionnaires need refinement. Appropriate strategies are proposed.