Chapter 8
Treatment of Internet Addiction and Internet Gaming Disorder in Adolescence: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Internet use is growing year after year and adolescents represent a large proportion of internet users. There is a scholarly interest in teen internet gaming disorder (IGD) and internet addiction (IA) is constantly increasing, but little is known about the treatments of IA and IGD. This study systematically reviews the literature of the last fifteen years, focusing on two main aspects: adolescence, and IA and IGD intervention programs. The inclusion criteria were (1) contain empirical data, (2) include an analysis relating to IA or IGD, (3) include teen samples aged between 13 and 19 years or with an average age within this range, and (4) provide a full-text article published in English. A total number of 17 papers were included, 7 focused on IA and 10 focused on IGD. Prevalence and different treatment-related outcomes are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Internet use continues to grow all over the world, year after year. In January 2017, there were more than almost 4 billion of Internet users, with a penetration of 50% (We are social, 2017), and adolescents represent a large proportion of Internet users. Among younger Internet users, 95% of teenagers and 99% of young adults are web users (Pew Research Center, 2016; Online Safety Site, 2017). Nowadays, comput-
ers, video games, and technological devices are part of young people’s everyday lives (Stip, Thibault, Beauchamp-Chatel, & Kisely, 2016), but, despite their social, communicative, and emotional function, the excessive use of the Internet can harmfully affect adolescents’ daily routines, with negative effects on their psychological state (Leung, 2006; Tam, 2016).

The scholar interest in internet gaming disorder (IGD) and, overall, in Internet use, misuse, and addiction is constantly increasing and there are several reviews addressing their determinants and causes, diagnosis, epidemiology, phenomenology, comorbid disorders, negative effects on adolescent development, and neuroimaging findings. However, few studies have focused on the prevention and effectiveness of treatment of Internet addiction (IA) and IGD (King & Delfabbro, 2014; Yeun & Han, 2016; Chun, Shim, & Kim, 2017).

The aim of this study is to review the literature of the last fifteen years about the different treatments of adolescents’ IA and IGD.

BACKGROUND

The adolescence is a period of life when teenagers are particularly susceptible to mental health risks and dependence-behaviours (Marcelli, & Bracconnier, 2006; Munno, Saroldi, Bechon, Sterpone, & Zullo, 2016). It is a transitional phase in which they need to acquire a sense of self and autonomy, often related to lower capability of self-control and higher propensity for risky behaviours (Erikson, 1968; Marcelli, & Bracconnier, 2006; Munno et al., 2016). In this regard, as Sonia Livingstone (2008) stated, the teen widespread Internet use provides boys and girls risky opportunities. Indeed, whilst web improves educational and social communication among adolescents, facilitating self-presentations, connections with friends, and new relationships (Kraut et al., 2002; Van den Eijnden, Meerkerk, Vermulst, Spijkerman, & Engels, 2008; Boursier & Manna, 2018a), the Internet misuse and abuse could negatively affect adolescents’ everyday life (Leung, 2006; Tam, 2016; Boursier & Manna, 2018a). Moreover, the widespread and often excessive Internet usage has led to the emergence of abuse symptoms (Kuss, Griffiths, Karila, & Billieux, 2014), animating the scientific debate about its effects and the validity of the term “Internet addiction” (IA): its classification is a contentious issue (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016) because of its different terminological, conceptual, and operational definitions.

In 1996, the psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg satirically coined the term “Internet Addiction Disorder” and described this maladaptive condition as an analogue to substance dependence, with its typical symptoms: tolerance, withdrawal, lack of control, relapse, large amounts of time spent online, negative consequences, and continuation of use irrespective of problem awareness. Gradually, the scholar interest on internet addiction increased, animating debates about whether IA should be considered as a new disorder (Petry & O’Brien, 2013). Following these debates, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) included Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) in the appendix of the updated version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-5) in 2013, as condition that requires further research before it can be accepted for inclusion in the main manual (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016). The IGD classification in DSM-5 is similar to substance use and Gambling Disorder, and it contains nine criteria: (i) preoccupation with Internet games; (ii) withdrawal symptoms when online gaming is discontinued;