

A new addiction: Internet junkies

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While compulsive gambling is only beginning to be addressed by mental health professionals, they must now face a new affliction: Internet addiction.

"The problem isn't widespread but we know of serious cases in which teenagers don't leave the house, don't have interpersonal relationships, and have been isolated in front of their computer screen for the past two or three years, and only speak in the language of the characters they play with in network video games," says Louise Nadeau, a professor at the Université de Montréal's Department of Psychology.

"In a few years we'll have couples in therapy because the Internet will have become their main occupation."

Nadeau is director of the new university institute on addiction. It was created last year by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. The mandate of the institute is to conduct epidemiological studies on addiction, evaluate the services available to patients, guarantee state-of-the-art practices, and document new forms of addiction.

There is no lack of data on compulsive gambling and alcoholism. But there is a vacuum when it comes to Internet addiction. "There is no reliable study or clinical data on the issue," says Nadeau. "We are starting from scratch."

A survey conducted in the Quebec health network concluded that hundreds of patients have consulted a professional about this issue.

Researchers hope to further develop this data and determine the clinical threshold of addiction, establish how the disease evolves and elaborate intervention techniques.

To better communicate their findings the institute will use a knowledge broker. "It's like a journalist for a research team but the public is made up of clinicians," explains Nadeau. "The broker must communicate the data in accessible terms and make sure it is targeted to the needs of practitioners."

Source: University of Montreal

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