

news

Net addicts mentally ill, top psychiatrist says

INTERNET addiction is a “common” mental disorder that should be recognised by health officials, says a leading psychiatrist.

Mark Schliebs

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INTERNET addiction is a “common” mental disorder that should be recognised by health officials, an editorial in one of the world’s leading psychiatry journals says.

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The *American Journal of Psychiatry* published an editorial claiming that internet addiction met the criterion for a mental disorder and called on the American Psychiatric Association to officially list it as such.

The editorial’s author, Jerald Block, said internet addiction consists of three particular subtypes: excessive gambling, sexual preoccupations and email or text messaging.

“Internet addiction appears to be a common disorder that merits inclusion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,” Dr Block said in the journal.

Dr Block said all internet addictions had four common components: excessive use, withdrawal, tolerance and negative repercussions.

He said internet addicts developed a tolerance to a certain level of technology, making them want to upgrade software and hardware. Social isolation and fatigue were listed as examples of “negative repercussions” to internet addiction.

Dr Block said the number of people that could be deemed as having addictions was large.

“After a series of ten cardiopulmonary-related deaths in internet cafés and a game-related murder, South Korea considers internet addiction one of its most serious public health issues,” he said.

“Using data from 2006, the South Korean government estimates that approximately 210,000 South Korean children are afflicted and require treatment.

“About 80 per cent of those needing treatment may need psychotropic medications, and perhaps 20 per cent to 24 per cent require hospitalisation.”

He said it was very hard to gauge the extent of the problem in the US and some other countries due to the popularity of home internet connections.

“Unlike in Asia, where internet cafes are frequently used, in the United States games and virtual sex are accessed from the home.

“Attempts to measure the phenomenon are clouded by shame, denial, and minimisation.”

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American Journal of Psychiatry editorial - <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/165/3/306>

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - <http://dsm5.org/>

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