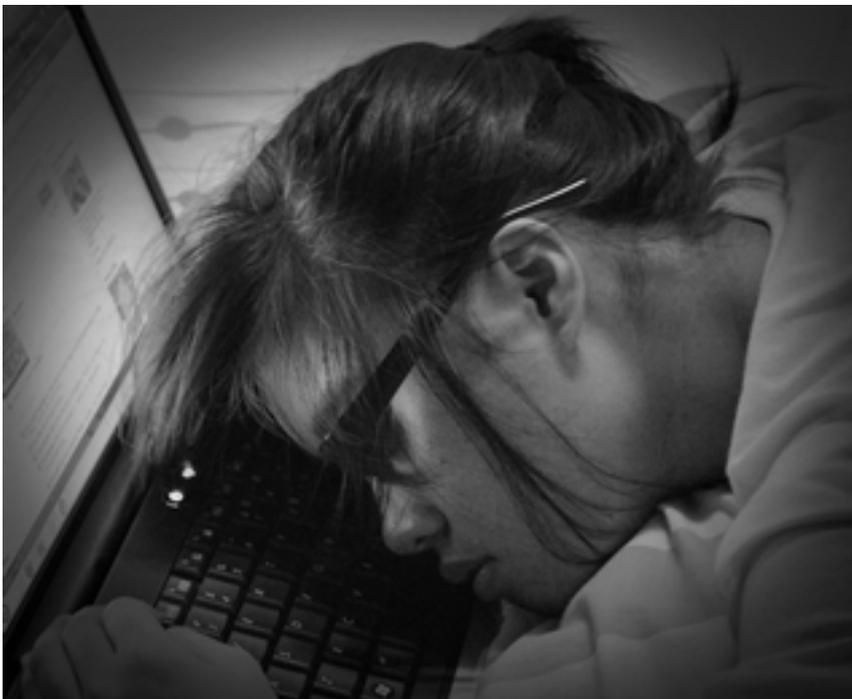


Internet addiction: A growing concern?

Written by Sassy Mom
Sunday, 11 April 2010 00:00

Who can live without the Internet?

Most people today rely on the web for almost anything. With just one click, one can find information within seconds when it would have taken hours, even days, poring through encyclopedias in the past. [Social networking sites](#) have made the world smaller, as we find friends we have lost touch with since childhood years. The Internet also provides online conveniences such as shopping, banking and paying bills. Indeed, it has changed the way we live.



However, technology comes with a price. With the advent of internet came the proliferation of identity theft and [pornography](#) and, lately, the emergence of a new [disorder](#) called [Internet Addiction Disorder](#) (IAD), which is now a subject of research among scientists and psychologists.

In the Philippines, there is a [growing concern regarding Internet addiction among children and teenagers.](#)

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Living virtual lives

Similar to gambling, Internet addiction is included in the [process type of addiction](#) which is an addiction to certain mood-altering behaviors. Internet addicts develop a compulsive habit to surf the net, join chat rooms, and nurture virtual characters by playing online games.

Just recently, [a three-month-old baby from South Korea died](#) of neglect while both her parents [indulged themselves in online gaming](#). Ironically, the couple was raising a virtual child they named "Anima."

According to a [police officer in Suwon](#), "The couple seemed to have lost their will to live a normal life, because they didn't have jobs and gave birth to a premature baby." It was reported that the couple became obsessed with the internet game [Prius Online](#).

This news is sad and shocking. But many people are actually like them, only with varying degrees and probably with consequences not as grave.

Caught up in the net

People are caught up in the net due to various reasons, but mostly for relaxation, work, or both. When balance is lost and more time is devoted in the virtual world, the Internet starts to become addictive.

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Escaping from Reality. The Korean couple found escape from the reality of caring for a premature baby by nurturing a virtual baby. The net provides an escape from problems of the real world and relieves the feelings of guilt, helplessness, anxiety and despair. These emotions increase the need to isolate themselves and avoid the consequences of the dilemma they are facing at the moment, in assuming the role of a whole new persona.

The Need for Acceptance. In [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) , love and belonging form part of the third layer of man's needs. All humans need to feel a sense of social acceptance - to love and be loved.

This aspect of the hierarchy explains why people involve themselves in socializing online through chatrooms and social networking sites. Although this kind of socialization utilizes a different kind of method, many people opt to make use of this because it still gives them the feeling of isolation at the same time.

Is it really a disorder?

As more and more researchers take interest in [Internet addiction research](#) , it is essential to note that IAD is still not yet officially recognized as a mental health disorder in the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th. Edition](#) (DSM-IV). However, some psychologists believe that IAD merits [the inclusion in the DSM-V](#)

How much is too much?

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Information, social media marketing, entertainment and communication are only some of the reasons why people surf the web. In addition there are jobs that can be done remotely, such as [virtual assistants](#) and online writing jobs. For people engaged in these kinds of services, the Internet is an important tool in their daily lives.

In this new realm of addiction, the borderline between normal and excessive use of the net is not clearly defined. Obviously, it varies depending on the need of the person which is why the addictive potential of the Internet greatly relies on the discipline of the user. Similar to any other hobby or recreational activities, some people grow a fondness for devoting more time over the net, which leads to compulsive Internet habit.



Researchers have shown that this excessiveness can bring about emotional, psychological and social implications. In the book, [Caught in the Net](#), Kimberly Young Ph.D. talked about a marriage failing because the husband could not control his time over the net leaving the wife feeling neglected and ignored. [Dr. Young](#) is one of the people who took interest in the research of Internet addiction; it includes [a battery of tests](#) to determine if a person is already a computer addict.

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Some people end up [having failed marriages](#) , [losing their jobs](#) or causing harm to others by using a tool intended to benefit mankind.

Recognizing red flags

There are certain signs to indicate that a person already has potential problems resulting from pathological internet use. In an interview with Ria Tirazona, a practicing psychologist and a contributor here at [the Philippine Online Chronicles](#) , she discusses the more tangible signs of unhealthy computer use, naming them as The Four D's.

Take charge!

The internet is an important tool needed for school work. Do not ban the computer; instead take

□ **Learn and be aware of what your kids are doing in the internet.**

□ **Supervise the websites they surf. Consider using**

□ **Teach and establish guidelines on the use of the net, such as:**

o **Limit time of usage;**

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o No computer use until after assignments are done;

o Establish and enforce consequences when guidelines are not followed.

□ Engage them in sports and outdoor activities.

□ Situate the computer in a common area in the house and not inside the bedroom.

□ Be a role model. Your children look up to you so they tend to follow your habits. Examine your

□ Talk to your children after failed attempts to control the excessiveness. There can be an under

DYSFUNCTION: A person jeopardizes or compromises his work, school, family, and relationships because of spending too much time on the net. Losing track of time and neglecting your responsibilities are definitely signs that a person is extremely absorbed in the Internet.

DANGER: A person risks or sacrifices personal health through excessive use. People develop unhealthy habits just to stay online, such as staying up until the wee hours of the morning simply because one cannot control the urge to chat or play games. Skipping a meal, a bladder break, or even missing out on physical activities can pose serious danger to one's health.

DISTRESS: The absence of the Internet causes [stress and anxiety](#) . According to studies, most people nowadays are so addicted to the net that whenever they cannot connect online, it brings them panic attacks. They feel helpless and irritable.

DEVIANCE: People addicted to the Internet exhibit behaviours deviating from accepted norms of society. Secrecy is probably one of the strongest signs of net addiction. When a person has

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a feeling of guilt and shame every time he or she stays online, the consequences could lead to lying - hiding the use of the net, the sites that you surf and the games that you play because you feel that the people around you will not understand.

The Internet is not going to have an exodus in the near future. It will only become more powerful and prevalent. There are several ways to counteract the perils of excessive Internet usage before it becomes a serious problem.

Manage or limit Internet use. Control the urge to stay online longer than intended.

Engage in other hobbies such as reading, cooking, biking, and other sports. Hobbies that allow you to be physically active will not only alleviate stress. It can also be very beneficial to your health.

Meet with friends. Interacting with *real* people improves a person's [interpersonal skills](#) .

Recognizing the signs will help computer addicts confront and deal with their addiction. A person should consider getting support from friends and loved ones or seeking professional help if they suspect that they are slowly becoming addicted to the net.

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Sassy Mom is a mom to two wonderful kids. Formerly an HR practitioner specializing Training and Organization Development, she now finds joy and pride in being a stay-at-home mom and a

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