

Internet Junkies

Editorial Staff

The addictive qualities of escapist diversions like drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and gambling are well documented. Now there's a new addiction on the block. The culprit this time is the Internet.

Late last summer, a study conducted by Kimberly Young of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford¹ found that people dependent on online communication (chat rooms, surfing the Web and e-mail) suffered "withdrawals" and other symptoms similar to drug or alcohol addiction when they were restrained from using the Internet.

Young's study found that middle-aged housewives are the most likely to be addicted. Other groups in the "addicted" category included the disabled, retired people, and students, all groups believed to have more weekly leisure time than average. Most of these addicts spend about 40 hours a week on the Web, with the primary areas of interest being chat rooms and online games. E-mail and newsgroups were also popular, but the act of actually surfing the Web, particularly for anything educational, was one of the lowest areas measured.

Doug Fazel, deputy director of affairs for the American Psychological Association, noted that there is a growing interest in Internet addiction and that more information is forthcoming. "With the growth of the Internet being exponential, this will be something looked at as time goes on to see what effect its having on behavior," commented Mr. Fazel.

1. Rath T. Internet an addiction? Available from C/Net news services ([url=<http://www.news.com>]<http://www.news.com>[url]).

MAY 1998