

Psi Counselling news

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COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS

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From the National Chair

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The National committee has completed three audio conferences and one face-to-face meeting over the past year and we were very happy to see the results of our efforts come to fruition at the Counselling College Stream Day at the APS Conference in Perth on Saturday 4th October 2003.

The AGM, 12-1pm on that day, was streamlined to allow time for members questions and comments. We also arranged for lunch to be served during the AGM so those who wished to participate in other programmes in the afternoon sessions were able to do so.

Looking over the year, the committee has endeavoured to build on the previous three years when the National Executive operated from Victoria. We have been involved in compiling the guidelines for alternate college entry and these are now at the stage of being presented to National Office.

The Accreditation Committee has been involved in flying around Australia to university campuses, checking on the Masters of Counselling programmes. Areas that need to be addressed by various courses have been highlighted and praise has been delivered to successful programmes. The next challenge is to put together guidelines for professional doctorates and a committee is being formed to address this.

The latest issue of the Counselling College Journal was received with many compliments from our members. Dr. George Wills and Dr.



Alison Talbot will be retiring this year. Dr. Geoff Denham will be editor and requests those who are interested in being part of the Journal team to contact him directly.

The Professional Development Committee is still processing your seminars, workshops and courses and appreciate the efforts you all go to in order to keep up your PD points. On the one hand it may be difficult to find the time to do those 30 points a year but just remember that eligible PD now includes literature, audio and video information that you may complete without leaving your office or home.

The Membership Committee is excited about the formation of the new guidelines for alternate college entry as this has been a difficulty for those who wish to join the college when there are no Masters of Counselling courses available. We look forward to welcoming new members and hope those who are thinking of joining will submit their application or check with us whether there is a possibility of acceptance based on the new guidelines.

The committee stepped down at the AGM and members offered themselves for another term. We were delighted that our offer was gratefully received. We do, however, look forward to seeing others step forward to make up a new committee for 2003-2004. Please remember that it doesn't matter in which state you reside in order to be a member of the National Executive. Most meetings and discussions are done by telephone conference audio and email.

Best wishes
Lorraine D. Corne
Chair, National Executive
APS College of Counselling Psychologists

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Psi Counselling news

APS Conference Report for WA College of Counselling Psychologists

As a first time attendee at a National APS Conference, I felt very proud to be West Australian. Our local conveners, in conjunction with the national office, have every right to be proud of all aspects of the conference held recently in Perth.

As part of the WA Branch of the APS College of Counselling Psychologists, the conference provided a wonderful opportunity to meet with other Counselling Psychologists from across Australia. Putting faces (and pretty good looking ones at that) to our colleagues whom we have known by name only was a pure pleasure.

The local Counselling College branch in Western Australia organised a couple of social functions and an inspiring and outstanding day of workshops and presentations for the Saturday of the conference. The dinner at the Olive Tree Restaurant went down a treat, as did the luncheon at the AGM. I am led to believe we had a record attendance at the AGM. This is not surprising, as all available seating was taken up and we then had people sitting on benches, the floor and spilling out of the doorway into the hall. A terrifically rewarding event for those of our national and regional executives who put so many hours into the College and Counselling Psychology in general.

The conference as a whole brought quality up to date research results, as well as validated applied treatment initiatives that were of great value to all those attending. Well done to all invited speakers, presenters and poster display participants from all colleges.

Making connections, interacting, feeling part of a body of professional people dedicated to helping others, hearing much laughter, watching the appreciation and enthusiasm of new psychologists and College members and enhancing personal knowledge in specialist areas provided great heart for Counselling Psychologists and the profession of Psychology as a whole.

Georgina Timms
Executive Committee Member
WA Branch, College of Counselling Psychologists



(from left) Georgina Timms, Lidia Genovese, Claudia Ovenden, Angelique Mietz, Lorna Dick, Wendy Meynart (front)



From left standing - Lidia Genovese, Greg Coman, Jan Grant, Lorraine Corne, Elizabeth Tindle, Geoff Denham, Claudi Ovenden, Gail Boyle Sitting from left - Maria Pirrello, Georgina Timms, Wendy Meynart, Angelique Mietz, Lorna Dick

Feature Counselling Article

A new innovation for this issue, to be continued if proved successful, is the inclusion of a feature article. National Executive members have identified a number of seminal articles likely to be of interest to those in the counselling psychology profession.

At some effort and some expense to the College and the editorial team, permission has been granted by the copyright owners to reproduce the below article.

The College acknowledges and thanks Taylor and Francis, publishers, for permission to reproduce:

Morris, N. & Raabe, B. (2002). Some legal implications of CBT stress counselling in the workplace. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, Vol 30 (1), 55-62.

We commend the article to you and welcome your feedback on it.

Some legal implications of CBT stress counselling in the workplace

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ABSTRACT

One tends to think of stress counselling in the workplace as providing a useful, therapeutic aid to enhancing the psychological well-being of the employee. However recent, successful litigation in the UK against 'stress-inducing' employers suggests that therapists need to be aware of the possible pitfalls of providing such a service. Employers and insurers facing large compensation claims are likely to try and reduce their liability by apportioning some 'blame' to the employee. Some therapeutic approaches, for example, cognitive therapy, may be efficacious but provide a perspective that can be given a different interpretation in court. For example, developing 'insight' into one's own contribution

to stress may, legally, be construed as contributing to culpability or blame. Recommendations for reducing that likelihood are provided.

In the USA there have been successful attempts to sue employers for creating psychologically stressful work environments (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987) and this has recently occurred in the UK also. This suggests that the role of counselling in the workplace may be about to take on a new dimension in the light of such cases. In Janice Howell's recent successful action (December 2000) against her former employers Newport County Borough Council, she received a settlement worth £254,362 after the Borough Council admitted liability for intolerable working conditions at Maindee Junior School, Newport, Gwent. Mrs Howell was able to argue that she suffered unacceptable levels of stress while teaching at the school. Returning from extended sick leave with medical evidence that her previous working conditions were injurious to her health, she faced similar stressful conditions and took early retirement when she was unable to cope (reported in *The Times*, London, 5 December 2000, www.thetimes.co.uk). This is not the first such case, precedent was set in 1995, and the particular conditions associated with this precedent suggest that employers, especially when they are statutory bodies, may turn to workplace counsellors to help them reduce their liability. This article examines the implications of employer liability for workplace psychological stress for therapists. It does not address other legal implications for practitioners but these are covered in great detail by Jenkins (1997).

The tort of negligence

In cases of alleged workplace induced stress actions are brought for the tort of negligence. For an action for negligence to succeed the injured party must show that the defendant owes them a duty of care and that this duty of care has been breached. This involves showing that the injured party could be considered to be the *neighbour* of the defendant. In *Donoghue v Stevenson* (1932, cited in Owen, 2000) the neighbour principle was established and Lord Aitken opined that a neighbour was anyone so closely affected by an act that it is reasonable to expect that one could contemplate that one's acts or omissions might cause them injury. Thus, unless there is a specific statutory duty, a duty of care is only present if the court accepts that there is a reasonable expectation of possible injury.

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It is only in the last 50 years that English law has extended the tort of negligence to encompass 'psychiatric injury' (Barrett & Howells, 2000). Initially successful actions were confined to cases involving 'nervous shock' ensuing from involvement in, or close observation of, events causing or likely to cause severe physical injury or death. Thus the law recognised conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder. However, it is only in the last 10 years in the UK that actions for negligence have succeeded when 'mental breakdown' has accrued from persistent work overload.

Under common law an employer has a duty to provide 'competent' fellow employees and a safe work environment. The employers, provided they are not using self-employed workers or those employed by an independent sub-contractor, are vicariously liable for the negligence of their employees *in the course of employment*. Thus a company has a duty to provide a safe environment for its staff and it is corporately liable for the negligence of its employees but only in relation to their performance of work duties (Owen, 2000). Hence, a local authority, for example, whose management team fail to observe a *reasonable* duty of care to an employee is liable for the negligence of the management team. The crucial factor here is *what constitutes reasonable?* As noted above, there is no absolute duty of care so, for example, an action for negligence may fail if it would not be reasonably foreseeable that injury would occur. Injury *per se* does not constitute negligence.

Walker v Northumberland County Council (1995) established that

'it may be negligence for an employer to expose employees to conditions where they are so stressed as to be caused psychiatric injury' (Barrett & Howells, 2000, p. 433).

The plaintiff, Walker, had been a social services officer in Blythe, in the north-east of England, for 17 years when he requested extra staff and management guidance as the caseload in the area increased. Assistance was not forthcoming and Walker had a 'nervous breakdown' and took 3 months' sick leave following medical advice. On returning to work his workload was not reduced in line with the expectation of phased re-entry, he had a second breakdown and was dismissed from his post on grounds of ill health. The local authority, while admitting that they owed Walker a duty of care to provide a reasonably safe working environment, argued that they had not breached that duty. They further argued that if the risk

to Walker's health was reasonably foreseeable they had not acted unreasonably in not reducing his workload because they faced budgetary constraints that made this difficult or impossible. Mr Justice Colman found for Walker. He discussed the difficulties of establishing foreseeability and causation when the 'damage' was 'psychiatric' rather than physical. However, he argued that Walker's first breakdown was so 'substantial and damaging' that there was a foreseeable risk of this re-occurring if Walker returned to the same working conditions. The crux of the case is that the first breakdown was not predictable *but* the second breakdown was foreseeable, so the County Council was negligent in its treatment of Walker. Furthermore, there was no precedent in English law that a statutory body could use matters of policy (for example, fiscal considerations) to negate their obligation to provide a reasonably safe work environment. This case is directly applicable to Janice Howell's case. Taken together these cases suggest that employers, especially statutory bodies, will need to respond in an effective manner when employees suffer 'stress injury'. When negligence has been established damages are usually awarded but these can, under the Law Reform (Contributory Negligence) Act 1945, be very substantially reduced if the plaintiff can be shown to have contributed to the damage inflicted. It seems likely that employers will attempt to limit their liability by claiming contributory negligence. One way to attempt this would be to show that they had provided effective stress counselling services to employees, thus establishing that they were not indifferent to stress in the workplace.

Counselling in the workplace

However, therapists have pointed out that counselling support in the workplace may be radically different to the provision for alleviating stress in other aspects of life (Carroll, 1997). It may be brief and/or involve large group sessions. In addition, the options available for reducing stress may be limited because the stressed employee may not have the power within the organisation to implement appropriate changes. The therapist in a workplace setting may have useful observations to make on how stress might be reduced but rarely has the power to implement them. Thus counselling may be somewhat impotent because of unwillingness by management to implement change while nevertheless claiming that stress reduction procedures, in the form of availability of counselling, are in place.

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An increasingly popular provision is Stress Management Training (SMT). SMT tends to employ cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), combined with relaxation and stress inoculation techniques (Meichenbaum, 1985; Reynolds & Briner, 1996). This may be potentially problematic *in this* context (Morris & Raabe, 2001). It could be argued that such a package negates the need for major organisational change and Reynolds and Briner (1996) are of the opinion that

‘Interventions which attempt to change organisational or job characteristics are uncommon, commercially unattractive and very often reported in the context of organisation(al) . . . changes rather than as planned interventions with a specific focus on stress reduction’ (p. 144).

More recently, Arthur (2000) has concluded that Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) have a role to play in supporting psychologically stressed employees but do not, in themselves, suffice to ameliorate the effects of stress. He concludes that they must be only part of a strategy requiring active involvement of management and adaptation of work practices.

Cognitive therapy and contributory negligence

Cognitive therapy, in particular, has a number of characteristics that make it an obvious choice for stress management and it is some of these characteristics that are potentially problematic. These characteristics have been succinctly outlined by its original founder:

‘(C)ognitive therapy consists of all the approaches that alleviate psychological distress through the medium of correcting faulty conceptions and self signals . . . By correcting erroneous beliefs, we can damp down or alter excessive, inappropriate emotional reactions’ (Beck, 1989, p. 214).

Pratt and Barling (1988) suggest that stress results from the interplay between the individual and his or her environment and involves the stressed individual *appraising* this interaction as being challenging and leading to doubts about their ability to cope with this challenge. One facet of cognitive therapy, in the workplace, is that it aims, among other things, to help the individual not simply to re-appraise the idea of the workplace as over-challenging in some way but to lead the individual to insight, into *their own role* in ‘creating’ the stressful situation by making them aware of their behaviours that contribute to the stressfulness of the situation. It is this that

we find problematic. Therapeutically this makes a lot of sense, but from a legal standpoint, with regard to establishing negligence, insight into one’s response to stress may constitute an acknowledgement of partial blame, thus providing grounds for contributory negligence. Unwittingly a therapist could provide the employer with the wherewithal to partially avoid liability. This need not happen if the therapist is aware of the legal implications and discusses this carefully with the counselled individual.

The use of cognitive therapy when employees become stressed at work opens up two immediate legal defences that may be used to support a claim of contributory negligence. First, stressed individuals may ‘improve’ after counselling and then deteriorate when returned to the stressful situation with the implication that they have been taught coping strategies, but these may be ineffective because the individual is *constitutionally* unsuited to the work rather than because the work environment is dysfunctional. Second, it is unlikely that all employees will show severe stress responses and this also may be used evidentially to divert blame from the employer. For example, cognitive therapy may reveal attitudinal differences between overtly stressed employees and the rest of the workforce.

Egan and Cowan (1979) distinguish between two modes of counselling: upstream and downstream help. Cognitive therapy, in the workplace, has become a ‘downstream’ approach to stress. These authors, in line with the majority of therapists, argue that one should intervene upstream, by modifying work practices rather than ‘wait’ downstream to rescue those floundering because they are stressed. Helping downstream creates a seriously dysfunctional work situation because those aided downstream are returned to the stressful work situation, upstream, to face the same stressors again - a situation experienced by Janice Howell and John Walker. A downstream approach offers coping as the main option.

Coping and culpability

Dew *et al.* (1996) define coping as

‘the cognitions and behaviours, adopted by the individual following the recognition of a stressful encounter, that are in some way designed to deal with that encounter or its consequences’ (p. 117).

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Such coping is not necessarily helpful *per se*. Many coping strategies, for example, avoidance, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking, etc., may be harmful. Cognitive therapy, or any other form of reputable therapy, is unlikely to lead intentionally to any of these options, but these examples highlight that coping comes with costs. There is a difference between ceasing to be stressed because the source of stress has gone away and perceiving a stress reduction because one has changed one's interpretation of the meaning of a situation. Cognitive therapy addresses the removal of the stressor by helping the individual change their work practices within the degrees of freedom available to the worker. However, re-appraising the nature of the stress may not be appropriate if the workplace is seriously dysfunctional, suggesting that the stress is actually a realistic response to the conditions encountered. Coping is clearly necessary but is no substitute for re-engineering the work environment in some instances.

Indeed, some therapeutic systems may help to construct a stress discourse that is, inadvertently, highly compatible with legal doctrines of culpability. Newton (1995) argues that

'The subject created within stress discourse appears as that of a person whose stress is chiefly a function of their own self, whether this is because of their instincts, their stress appraisal, their outmoded physiology or their sense of their psychological environment. Such a creation denies a number of alternatives, and in particular is decontextualized, apolitical, ahistorical and decollectivised' (p. 18).

We have focused on cognitive therapy because, although most therapies strive to help clients attain insight, cognitive therapy explicitly acknowledges the importance of changing one's cognitions and encourages self-appraisal of one's role in stressful situation thus closely fitting the discursive model suggested by Newton (1995). Any stress management programme that is centred around such explicit self-appraisal may work in favour, however unintentionally, of a management facing legal action. The language of cognitive re-appraisal easily translates into acceptance of culpability. Thus employers may feel obliged to 'blame' the employee for poor job performance to avoid legal culpability (Lowman, 1993). In a study into workplace stress in the USA, management were found to favour counselling employees while trade union members expressed more support for changing the environment and work practices (Neale *et al.*, 1982) suggesting, perhaps, an unwillingness by workers to accept 'blame' for stress. On a more positive note Cooper and Cartwright (1996) argue

that

'activities aimed solely at individuals' reactions to stressful circumstances, and not also targeted at modifying the circumstances themselves, will not be sufficient to avoid the negative legal ramifications' (p. 90).

Conclusions and recommendations

It seems unlikely, given recent legal decisions, that employers will be able to ignore their responsibility to provide a reasonably psychologically safe environment. One major source of stress is overwork, and certain professionals, for example, teachers and health service workers, are frequently highlighted as having stressful, heavily work-laden occupations. In many cases these workers are employees of statutory bodies (for example, county councils) whose solution to budgetary restrictions is sometimes covertly to increase staff workload. It is likely therefore that existing stress management provisions will be increased rather than workloads reduced. There is unlikely to be any full defence for employers who overwork their staff so it is more likely that they will use stress management provisions to limit liability and therefore reduce legal damages. Therapists need to be aware that facilitating the employee's insight into their own contribution to their stress may be therapeutically beneficial but a different interpretation may be placed upon it in any ensuing lawsuit. Insight could become blame.

One might conclude from this that employers are not interested in reducing workplace stress and that therapists would be wise to refrain from offering cognitive therapy services. Many employers behave responsibly and sympathetically when faced with employee stress but, increasingly, insurance cover for potential negligence claims is held and insurance companies handling claims will attempt to reduce liability as much as possible. The therapist is in the unenviable position of trying to facilitate insight while avoiding implying client culpability. This may create an ethical dilemma for the therapist in terms of what, if any, advice should be given to the client. Bond (2000) provides a useful discussion of the pitfalls involved in advising clients.

We have four basic recommendations for 'insight without implying culpability'.

1. The client should be helped to arrive at an understanding of the behaviours involved in stress but should see that

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these behaviours are embedded in a complex way in environmental and interpersonal interactions. As such 'cause' is distributed across these domains rather than concentrated in the individual. Such complex causal factors are not easily quantifiable. It is an essential feature of contributory negligence that it must in some way, acceptable to the court, be quantified.

2. Notwithstanding the complexity of stress situations, stress often results, in part, from factors clearly beyond the control of the client, for example, increased workload. Given that stress may closely follow a change in work practice, there may be some possibility of quantification here and this is unlikely to work against the client. If quantification is possible, then for a negligence suit the calculations should be made.

3. It should be emphasised that the client is fully compliant with the stress management/therapy offered and is therefore diligently doing all he or she can to combat the effects of stress.

4. Therapists should ensure that they are acquainted with the latest EAPs, retraining if necessary, to ensure that any advice given to clients is informed by contemporary knowledge. It may be that therapies that encourage overt appraisal of one's role in stressful situations will not be used as a basis for reducing liability in negligence. However, historically Law of Tort case law shows that as successful actions in tort are brought they are followed by new strategies for showing contributory negligence (Owen, 2000). It is unlikely that damages of the magnitude awarded to Mrs Howell will not stimulate insurance company lawyers to examine all legal means to reduce liability. Vigilance is advisable.

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Pathological Internet Use (PIU) in University Students: A new addiction

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that some university students who have free and readily available access to personal computers, under perform in their first year of study. Their internet use, game playing or chat room activities may result in academic, social and lifestyle problems.

The First World Congress on Internet Addiction which was held in Zurich, Switzerland in September 2000 is thought to have legitimized a new disorder.

This paper will address this comparatively recent phenomenon, computer/cyber addiction, that has been observed in all age groups and is directly related to the growth of technology in the late 20th and early 21st Century. There is evidence to believe that this “disorder” may have a small but significant contribution to student attrition rate. The paper will present research that has been carried out on internet use in some western universities over the past ten years. It will also present case studies from one Australian University.

Every so often, a student will come to the Counselling Service at Queensland University, looking for help with such an obsessive use of their PC for other than university work that they have stopped attending lectures, cut down on face to face contact with their peers and are failing their subjects. Sometimes the PC has to be moved to the kitchen so that a parent can monitor its use but in many instances there is no one to provide this support. The following two cases illustrate the type of problem described.

Joe (fictitious name), a 24 year old international student, was referred to the Counselling Service by his faculty because he was not coping with his studies. He was being

supported financially by his parents in an Asian country and was the third child in a family of four children. Joe freely admitted that he did not attend lectures, tutorials or peer assisted study sessions (PASS) groups. He rarely came on campus. Joe had very little social life and did not belong to any “chat” groups on line. He was quite isolated.

Joe said that he could not get motivated by his study and was very bored with it. The only activity that interested him, he said, was computer game playing. Joe reported that he would get excited when he was getting close to solving the problems of the game and working them out. He said that he did not cook meals as he had never done so at home and that most of his meals were from fast food outlets or were delivered. On some occasions he did not leave his home for weeks on end. Joe downloaded and printed off all the subject lecture notes and assignments and usually managed to make sense of them and submit his assignment. He was a very intelligent young man and had managed to scrape through many of his subjects with the minimum of effort. He was, however, very concerned that he would have to face his father one day and have to explain why he had failed subjects.

David, a 24 year old first year Australian student self referred to the Counselling Service for help in trying to get some motivation and strategies for doing university work. David had previously attended another university and had been excluded a number of times and managed to get back into his course. He had a slight physical disability which meant that university authorities may have been more sympathetic to his case. David explained that he had a very close peer group who chatted to each other on line (MUDs) and played interactive games incessantly. David described how he would sit at his computer for 16 hours until he was so exhausted he would lie on his bed for a few hours before resuming the chat. In leisure time the group would meet at a friend’s house and continue the camaraderie. He said that no drugs or alcohol were used. He rarely washed his clothes and apparently had quite a reputation amongst his friends and others for ‘BO’ and foul smelling apparel (which his friends would waft around outside the window to get some fresh air to them). Because he spent so much time on line, he decided to enroll in a Bachelor of Information Technology when he finally changed university. David was receiving government financial support until the year in which he came to see me. It had been cut off. From that time his mother sent him money every week. She believed that he only had one semester to go before completing his degree and did not know that he had received any exclusions. David felt very bad about this and was not looking forward to having to

'face the music'. Basically David had very little to show for his years at university and had consumed considerable government and family finances in the process.

The personal computer is an essential tool in the learning process and in the academic success of any university student in the twenty first century. Personal computers bring enormous advantages to those who have free and readily available access to them. In Australia and in North America this statement is undoubtedly true, however in some parts of the world including universities in parts of Europe, ease of access and availability can not be assumed. Some European academics can not conceive of student on-line computer use posing a problem. Their main concern is with the disparity between those that do and do not have computer access. They perceive the problem being one of discrimination when there are too few computers, an occurrence in many European universities. One university in southern Spain had only 250 computers for some thousands of students, and students continued to submit hand written assignments (personal communication, Granada, September 2000).

The latest Australian report states that 70% of Australian homes own a computer and all universities in 2002 have well equipped, usually 24 hour access computer laboratories. The importance of Information Technology is acknowledged and it has transformed the life and learning of university students.

So, why the concern about personal computer use amongst students? This paper will try to answer that question by discussing some recent studies which suggest that for some university students, their study habits are affected negatively by their dependence on their computer. Some recognize this and try to do something or ask for help. Others remain isolated in their depression, anxiety or despair but still may not realize that their life has changed for the worse because of their intensity and/or duration of PC use.

Anderson (1998) carried out an exploratory study of students at eight New York Universities to find out how much time students spend on the internet and if 'excessive', does it result in academic, social or lifestyle difficulties? He examined whether some faculties were more prone to be 'dependent' on the internet than others. The sample included 647 males and 647 females and he found that the average on-line time was 100 minutes a day. The 494 students in the hard sciences spent 123 minutes a day compared with the 289 Liberal Arts students 79 minutes per day.

The internet users were divided into high use group and a low use group. The former (6%) spent more than 400 minutes per day on the net.

106 students (9%) fitted the criteria for internet dependence (93 male and 13 female) as defined by the DSM IV criteria for substance dependence (Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for Internet Dependence based on DSM IV criteria for substance Dependence.

1. Tolerance
2. Withdrawal
3. Using larger amounts over longer period than was intended
4. The desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or to control use.
5. A great deal of time spent in obtaining, using or recovering from it.
6. Social, occupational or recreational activities are reduced.
7. Use continues in spite of negative effects.

"Dependent students" averaged 229 minutes per day of use compared to non dependent students 73 minutes, the range being from 5 minutes to 1200 minutes per day. The dependent students were significantly more likely to indicate that their online use negatively affected their academic performance, meeting new people and sleep patterns (some reporting having less than four hours sleep in 24).

The computer science major students had 54% of those fitting the criteria for dependency: 74% were in the hard sciences, 16% in the Art and Sciences and 10% were in the Liberal Arts. This study was conducted in class time. As some extreme users rarely leave their homes and do not attend classes, it was possible that they were not included in the survey. This study supported an earlier study (Shere, 1997) which found that 135 of 531 university student subjects fitted the dependence criteria, 72% of whom were male. Similarly, Welsh (1999) sampled 810 students in Boston University and found that 8% fitted the criteria for dependence, most of whom were male.

Young (1996) was one of the first researchers to identify what she believed was a new clinical disorder. Again, she used the DSM IV criteria but did not use the one used in previous studies for substance dependence. Instead, she used the criteria for pathological gambling as she believed internet addiction was an impulse control disorder. The screening instrument she used consisted of eight questions.

If five were answered positively, the subject was classified as dependent (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Screening Instrument for Internet Dependence used by Young (1996) based on DSM IV criteria for pathological gambling.

1. Do you feel preoccupied with the internet?
2. Do you feel the need to use the net with increasing amounts of time to achieve satisfaction?
3. Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop net use?
4. Do you feel restless, moody, depressed or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop net use?
5. Do you stay on line longer than intended?
6. Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship job, educational or career opportunity because of the net?
7. Have you lied to family members or others to conceal your involvement with the net?
8. Do you use the net as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving moods (eg depression, anxiety, guilt etc.)

If subjects answer yes to five or more questions, they are classified as dependent (an addicted user).

There are those who dispute such a disorder as internet addiction. Gavagham (1997) wrote in "Going nuts in cyberspace" that she refused to believe that internet addiction is an emerging clinical disorder. She acknowledged that some people spend hours glued to their computer screens and that some are painfully shy and/or antisocial and "find solace" on the web but that was not a problem.

The first Congress on Internet Addiction was held in Zurich, Switzerland in September 2000. This congress was reported to "legitimize" the new disorder of internet addiction. Further studies have been undertaken with university students since this congress. Of great significance is the study by Davis (2001) who queried the term "addiction" preferring to substitute the term 'pathological internet use' (PIU). Davis used a cognitive-behavioural model suggesting that in many pathological internet users, there may be an existing psychopathology which predisposed the student, making them vulnerable in the presence of a stressor. Several studies have implicated underlying psychopathology in overuse of the internet, including depression, social anxiety and substance misuse or dependence (Kraut et al., 1998; Greenfield, 2000).

The cognitive-behavioural model of Davis suggests that psychopathology is a necessary cause of symptoms of PIU. Cognitions or beliefs about self can be self doubt, low self efficacy and negative self appraisal for example "I am only good on the internet and negative world appraisal such as "the internet is the only place that I am respected" or "people treat me badly off-line".

A lack of social support and subsequent social isolation can result in PIU. Those with PIU use the PC to postpone or avoid their responsibilities which can result in significant problems with daily functioning. The internet had become the student's lifeline to the outer world. They may not leave their home, some do not attend lectures and tutorials and rarely attend campus. They may neglect their health by eating irregularly and poorly, they may not exercise and may sit in one position for hours. They lose a diurnal body clock, sleeping when they are too exhausted to continue (Tindle, 1999, 2000, 2001).

Orman (1996) argued that many students who have allowed their personal computer to have a detrimental affect on their lives begin, as in all addictions, by denying that there is a problem and fail to ask for help. They may lack pleasure in their lives and struggle to cope with managing even the most basic aspects of their daily functioning. They are unable to organize their time to complete assignments whilst at the same time continuing to spend many hours in front of the computer screen. They may fail to attend university events such as examinations and their academic performance slips. They are in danger of failing their subjects or dropping out of university.

Dr. Yoni Ryan has said (Background Briefing, Radio National, 2001) that education is a social activity and the majority of university students want to talk with real people. She went on to say that university education is an interpersonal affair and the relationship between people is critical to learning and the educational process. The students described in this paper play a minimum role in university social behaviour and may not establish face to face relationships on campus. They do not become integrated into the university community.

Students who may be in trouble need to be identified and helped. Tutors may have to keep rolls of attendance and contact those students who consistently miss lectures or tutorials. Referral to specialist faculty staff or student services may help those who are experiencing difficulties.

University counselling services can provide professional assistance to those who wish to avail themselves. Such

services at the University of Queensland and most other universities are free and confidential.

Summary

This paper has given a brief overview of a comparatively recent problem emerging on many campuses in North America and Australia as a result of the exponential growth in information technology. Although the percentage of students fitting the criteria for PIU is small, PIU may be making a significant contribution to the high attrition rate seen in many Australian Universities.

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Journal News

The Journal of Counselling Psychology has been an ongoing source of pride for the College. The editorial committee comprising George Wills, Geoff Denham and Alison Talbot has been practically the only one amongst the Colleges able to produce the required copies of the Journal in a year and on time. The Journal is a professionally developed and produced document in every respect and they deserve congratulations for their efforts in this achievement over a considerable period of time.

George and Alison will be stepping down later this year and Geoff will be continuing as editor and will be seeking expressions of interest from individuals to assist him in the editorial role during 2004.



Journal editors Dr George Wills and Dr Geoff Denham
(absent: Dr Alison Talbot)

APS College Unit web page

The College is now well and truly represented on the APS website.

The address for the site is:

<http://www.aps.psychsociety.com.au/units/colleges/default.asp>

College members are invited to contribute to the content of our web site. Be mindful that material on the site is available to the widest readership - it is not confined to psychologists - so keep this in mind when wording any contributions.

You are also encouraged to visit the site frequently, since it is designed to augment the Newsletter as a means to keep you up to date with College activities and other items of interest to our profession.

To submit material for inclusion on the site, please contact the College's website coordinator at:

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Editorial Policy

Aims and Objectives

The Newsletter of the APS College of Counselling Psychologists is produced by the National Executive of the College in collaboration with State Branch Committees and National College sub committees. Its target audience is College members. It serves as a means for communication among the membership and as a publicity tool for the Society in the public arena. It promotes the work of College members, provides a forum for discussion and keeps members aware of forthcoming events.

Contents

Newsletter contents will vary from issue to issue but will attempt to include editorial comment, a National Chair's report, State Branch reports, promotion of national-based training and professional development activities, membership surveys on various issues, news from College members and advertising.



*Dr. Greg Coman,
Editor*

Contributions

The Editorial Board encourages College members to contribute articles to the Newsletter. Effort will be made to ensure publication of all articles submitted but publication of articles cannot be guaranteed. The Editorial Board reproduces in good faith information sent for inclusion in the Newsletter. It accepts no responsibility for the correctness or otherwise of information included in the articles presented nor does it necessarily endorse the views expressed in printed articles. It respects the rights to freedom of thoughts and speech and encourages active debate amongst members.

Material for inclusion in the Newsletter is to be submitted to the Editor by the relevant deadline. Submissions are to be in electronic format only (Word documents) sent on disk to PO Box 454 Turramurra NSW 2074 or emailed to gcoman@nags.org.au

Advertising

Advertising in the Newsletter is welcome. Rates are available on application. Placement of an advertisement is not an endorsement of the advertiser by the College. Approval of advertising rests with the Editorial Board.