

## Chapter 29

# Impact of Online Dating, Cyber Stalking, Cybersex, and Pornography on Mental Health

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### ABSTRACT

*Online behavior varies according to the purpose and situations and many get involved in intimate relations, like in online dating, which have an impact on the person and his mental health. The chapter focused on the impact of online dating, cyber stalking, cybersex, and pornography on mental health. Though many studied the online dating among adolescents and adults, that of old age group is not yet fully explored especially about their sexual needs. It is worth exploring factors related to risky sexual behaviors among gay and bisexual individuals. Online dating for mentally ill people is an under-researched area. Cyberstalking is an important issue, especially among adolescents and young adults, and cybersex and cyber pornography threatens the safety and mental health in addition to the problems of addiction and child trafficking, and it is linked with high sexual risk behaviors and sex crimes. It is necessary to develop tailored psychotherapeutic and pharmacological interventions by taking into account the complexity and heterogeneity of the problems.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cyber-psychology is an emerging discipline that focuses on the study of human-machine interaction. It is an area of psychology focusing on the study of *the effects of cyberspace on the behavior of humans and of society in general*. (Grand Dictionnaire de la langue française, 2000). It deals with cyber space interaction and impacts of virtual realities. Virtual reality can be defined as *the application that makes it possible for the user to navigate and to interact in real time with an environment in three dimensions generated by a computer* (Pratt, Zyda, & Kelleher, 1995). Researchers are trying to understand about virtual realities and how it affects human behavior and its pros and cons. Social networking is one of the major topics widely discussed. According to Cambridge dictionary social networking is the use of

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websites and other internet services to communicate with other people and make friends. Online behavior varies according to the purpose and situations and many get involved in intimate relations, like in online dating. Though it has many positive benefits, it is considered a major risk to mental health issues. This chapter focuses on impact of online dating, cyber stalking, cybersex and pornography on mental health.

## **ONLINE BEHAVIORS**

Mostly the online behaviors are not similar to the actual behaviors of the person in reality depends on the purpose of the interaction. People usually look for companionship and sexual attraction as common relationship goals (Graham, 2011; Masuda, 2003). Many different types of online relationship exists such as internet dating, cybersex, social networking relationships, online gaming, online forums and chat rooms, and Professional relationships. Each type varies according to the purpose and the way of interaction and it will have an impact on the person and his mental health especially interactions related to internet dating, cybersex, social networking relationships, and online gaming. The following section will focus on online dating with special focus on older adults, men engaging in sex with men and bisexuals, and mentally ill individuals; cyber stalking, cybersex and pornography and its relation with mental health.

## **ONLINE DATING**

Online dating is gaining popularity all over the world and many reasons such as increased divorce rate, loneliness, and delayed marriage among many are the reasons for the popularity. Many factors affect the online dating, for example, for men, age, educational level, and self-rated physical attractiveness are important qualities and for women, they are not being overweight, self-rated physical attractiveness, and having a photo (Fiore, 2004). Whyte and Torgler (2017) explored factors that influence matches of online dating participants' stated preference for particular characteristics in a potential partner and compares these with the characteristics of the online daters actually contacted. The nature of online dating facilitates exploration of the differences between stated preference and actual choice by participants, as online daters willingly provide a range of demographics on their ideal partner. They found that factors such as a person's age, their education level, and a more social personality all increase the number of factors they choose in a potential partner that match their original stated preference. Males (relative to females) appear to match fewer characteristics when contacting potential love interests. Conversely, age interaction effects demonstrate that males in their late 60's are increasingly more selective (than females) regarding who they contact. Psychological factors also play a part in engaging online dating. But studies also reported that online dating was unrelated to income and educational level (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) and gives less accurate information such as men lied more about their height, and women lied more about their weight (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). Cali, Coleman, and Campbell (2013) reported that women showed stigma and strong self-protective behavior in online relationship initiation who had never been on a date with someone they had met online was also reported.

The description of profile varies if widower or divorcees seeking partners online. For widowed individuals, online dating sites may function as venues to explore their past experiences and engage in the construction of a post-loss identity or a post-loss "ideal self" (Young & Caplan, 2010). They found that one-third of widowed individuals discussed their loss in their profiles. In addition, about one-third

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