

## Prevention and Control of Harmful Internet-Related Behaviors and Disorders in the USA

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## Current Opposing Views in the USA



Nicholas Kardaras, *The New York Post*, Aug 27, 2016

Why calling screentime 'digital heroin' is digital garbage

*Inciting fear about the dangers of digital media is counter productive*

By Rachel Becker on August 30, 2016 04:31 pm

Rachel Becker, *The Verge*, Aug 30, 2016



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## Difficult to Determine Public Health Impact of Excessive Internet Use in the USA

- Different Definitions of Excessive and Problematic Internet Use (PIU)
- Different Definitions and Other Factors Have Led to Widely Variable Prevalence Estimates
- Prevalence of PIU in US Nationally Representative Adult Sample Estimated at 0.7%, with 13.7% Acknowledging At Least One Criterion (Aboujaoude et al, 2006)
- Higher Estimates of PIU (25% to 50%) Reported Amongst College Students (Fortson et al, 2007)



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## Current Status of Policy Response

- Although Data Suggest Significant Negative Health Measures (Particularly Mental Health Concerns Like Depression) Associated with Various Forms of PIU in USA, Few Policies Have Been Enacted to Address PIU
- US Policies Have Largely Been Focused on Limiting Content (Obscenity, Pornography, Gambling), Particularly to Youth
- Examples Include the Community Decency and Childhood Online Protection Acts, Which Have Been Stricken Down
- Existing Acts Protect Against Obtaining Information from Children Under 13, Copyright Protection, and Maintaining Private Information of National Safety

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## Current Status of Internet Gambling Policy Response in the USA

- Internet Gambling Policy Changing Has Been Changing Over the Past 20 Years
- Interpretation of the Federal Wire Act Made Internet Gambling Illegal in the 1990s and 2000s
- The Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act in 2006 Was Intended to Make Enforcement Feasible
- The Internet Gambling Consumer Protection and Enforcement Act of 2009 Has Permitted A Movement Towards Legalization of Internet Gambling in Certain States

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## Current Status of Research and Treatment in the USA

- Concerns Have Been Raised Regarding the Current Research and Treatment Structures Not Being Amenable to Addressing PIU in the USA
- With Respect to the Structure of NIH, There is No Institute that Has a Home for Behavioral Addictions Including Internet-Use Disorders (Potenza, 2014)
- Absence of Billable Diagnostic Codes for Internet-Use Disorders Limits Health Insurance Coverage and Therefore Treatment in the United States (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016)

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## Current Non-Governmental Policies

- Workplaces Typically Have Rules and Regulations Regarding Internet Use Albeit Not Typically Focused on PIU (Breslau et al, 2015)
- Guidelines for Healthy Use of the Internet Have Been Suggested and Help for Those with Problematic Use Proposed (e.g., Through Employee Assistance Programs) Although These Are Typically Not in Place (Breslau et al, 2015)
- Specific Groups (e.g., The US Air Force, With 6% Found to Have PIU) Might Have Specific Needs With Respect to PIU (Breslau et al, 2015)

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## Current Treatments

- Data From Randomized Clinical Trials Lacking for PIU
- Several Groups Have Published with Open-Label Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Associated with Reductions in PIU at 12 Weeks and 6 Months (Young et al, 2013)
- Another Study Found A Combination of CBT, Motivational Interviewing and Readiness to Change Improved Quality of Life and Depressive Features But Did Not Change PIU in Men with PIU Related to Sexual Behaviors (Orzack et al, 2006)
- A Residential Facility Focusing on PIU (reSTART) Uses Multiple Modalities But Does Not Appear to Have Published Outcomes (Breslau et al, 2015)



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## Prevention and Policy

- Will Be Important to Gather Information to Develop Empirically Validated Prevention Strategies In the United States
  - Health Guidelines About Healthy Patterns of Digital Technology Usage to Validate Recommendations of Healthy Internet-Use Guidelines by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Amongst Others)
  - Important to Consider From a Developmental Perspective Duration, Type and Content of Digital Technology Usage (Gaming, Gambling, Shopping, Pornography, Social Networking, Hookups, etc)
- Will Be Important to Consider How Best to Develop, Implement and Enforce Policies Relating to Healthy Internet Use



## Conclusions

- There Exist Multiple Views About PIU in the US
- Policy Regarding Internet Use in the US Has Largely Focused on Restricting Access Based on Content Rather Than on PIU
- There Exist Considerable Gaps in Knowledge Regarding the Prevalence and Impact of PIU in the US, As Well as Significant Gaps with Respect to Empirically Validated Prevention and Treatment Approaches
- To Limit the Impact of PIU, Additional Data Should Be Collected and Assessed Over Time and Interventions Tested Directly

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