



CARTAS AL EDITOR

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## ADDICTIVE PHENOMENON DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### EL FENÓMENO ADICTIVO DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

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The addictive phenomenon is constantly changing, resilient, and related to global developments (EMCDDA, 2019). Thus, trends in addictive behaviors are linked to multiple social, individual, economic and legal factors that create a challenging context for the implementation of effective health responses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to international mandates of social distancing and lockdown (R. Stein, 2020). It has involved higher difficulties for the distribution of illegal drugs but a window of opportunity for the legal ones and the online related markets. Even large tech companies and porn industry, have promoted the online gaming, gambling and pornography consumption as a health measure, with slogans such as "play your part, play at home" ("<https://www.pornhub.com/insights/corona-virus>," 2020; "<https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2020/04/08/covid-19-video-game-addiction-poised-to-spread-during-coronavirus-lockdown>," 2020). The current situation has involved a change in the behavioral patterns of many citizens, with a reported increase on "to-go" alcohol sales for home consumption and on different sorts of online activities (Generalizados, 2020; "[https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12319351](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12319351)," 2020). Moreover, the uncertainty associated with COVID-19 and its consequences has generated psychological pressure, other health-related problems and negative emotions, with extreme fear, anxiety, worry and despair being increasingly common (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; M. B. Stein, 2020; Torales, O'Higgins, Castaldelli-Maia, & Ventriglio, 2020). These negative emotional responses, along with the situation of isolation and loneliness, the availability and accessibility to Premium online options and a possible increase in free time are some of the risk factors that have been identified in the development and maintenance of addictive behaviors (Estévez, Jáuregui, Sánchez-Marcos, López-González, & Griffiths, 2017; Jiang, Li, & Shypenka, 2018; Volkow, 2020).

With that in mind, we believe different scenarios may be in place. Of the individuals who previously had an addiction and were already under treatment before COVID-19, some may have seen their addictive behavior controlled, especially in those cases where it was offline (e.g. slot machines in gambling disorder)(Deans, Thomas, Daube, & Derevensky, 2016). However, many individuals may have significantly increased their addictive behavior in a time where the access to the health system is diminished. Recent studies during COVID-19 pandemic suggest increased use of the Internet, mostly for pornography, gaming, gambling and online shopping ("<https://www.pornhub.com/insights/corona-virus>," 2020). Also,

the possibility of "substitute addiction" or "addiction shift" should also be considered in the framework of COVID-19. Any addiction could be replaced by another one in order to obtain rewards such as relaxation, escape, pleasure and reduction of the negative affect (Koball, Glodosky, Ramirez, Kallies, & Gearhardt, 2019; Sussman & Black, 2008). Of the individuals with no previous addiction, some will experience an increase of addictive behaviors. These are more vulnerable to develop addictive patterns at high risk of evolving into substance use disorders or behavioral addictions.

It is of utmost importance to put together scientific and clinical knowledge to provide further immediate consensus on the implementation of multilevel approaches to mitigate the consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown may have in the global addictive phenomenon ("<https://patologiadual.es/publicaciones/>," 2020). Therefore, prevention and early detection programs are to be further implemented with governmental action on the limitation and or regulation of the advertisement industry and further promoting psychoeducation in the community. Conspicuously, the impact of the COVID-19 on the addiction phenomenon may not only be in the current stage of the pandemic but further impact in the years to come.

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