

SEX, ADDICTIONS & IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

Table 1

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INTRODUCTION: Sexual addiction is a term used to describe the behavior of a person who has an unusually intense sex drive or obsession with sex (Carnes, 1983). The idea that people can suffer from sexual addiction has been quite a debated point. Goodman (1992) stated that any behavior that is used to produce gratification and to escape internal discomfort can be engaged in compulsively and can constitute an addictive disorder. The US National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity has defined sexual addiction as “engaging in persistent and escalating patterns of sexual behavior acted out despite increasing negative consequences to self and others”.

Interestingly, it has been repeatedly found that sexual addiction co-occurs (i.e., dual diagnosis) with addiction to drugs and alcohol or other substances. In the present study, it was assumed that the drug addicts’ population is particularly incline to develop sexual addiction. Similarly to the vulnerability model of drug addictions, we hypothesized a vulnerability model of sexual addiction in which certain *psychological factors* can either prevent or promote the development of a sexual addiction disorder.

PURPOSE: An important goal of this study was to explore those psychological factors that are usually associated with substance addictions and that might be also associated with the sexual addiction disorder. Specifically, we focused on (a) self-esteem (Keegan, 1987), (b) self-efficacy (Marlatt & Gordon, 1985), (c) irrational thinking (Ellis, McInerney, DiGiuseppe & Yeager, 1988), (d) trait anxiety (Sanders, 1983), and (e) alexithymia (Taylor, Parker & Bagby, 1990).

METHOD: 64 drug addicts following a community treatment were asked to fill in several scales. The mean age was 36 years ($SD = 10$) for women ($N = 16$) and 33 years ($SD = 7$) for men ($N = 43$).

RESULTS: As can be seen in Table 1, all psychological measures were internally coherent and correlated with the sex addiction scale like it usually happens with any substance addiction.

Measure (1=low, 6=high)	Cronbach's α	r (SSA)
1. Self-esteem scale	.88	-.33*
2. Self-efficacy scale	.87	-.30*
3. Attitude and Belief scale:		
- Irrational “Demandingness”	.77	.48**
4. Trait Anxiety scale	.78	.40**
5. Toronto Alexithymia scale	.83	.38*
6. Sexual addiction scale (SSA)	.82	1.00

Note. * = $p < .01$, ** = $p < .001$

A linear regression model was computed in which the sexual addiction scale was the criterion and all the other measures were the predictors. The model was found to be significant, R change $F(3, 60) = 6.32$, $p < .001$. In line with Ellis et al. (1988)’s notion that demandingness is the fundamental Irrational Belief, and is present in all psychopathologies, we found demandingness to be the best predictor of sexual addiction, $\beta = .40$, $t(60) = 3.56$, $p < .001$. Importantly, when demandingness was controlled, only alexithymia ($\beta = .26$, $t(60) = 1.86$, $p = .07$) –marginally-predicted sexual addiction.

CONCLUSIONS: Present results support the notion that excesses in sexual behaviour may develop into sexual addiction. Alike substance addictions, sexual addiction was coherently associated with the psychological variables explored in the present study. Moreover, irrational thinking seems to play a central role in making people vulnerable to sex-addiction.

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