

## SYMPOSIA

### Women and Behavioural Addiction - New paths in research and treatment

Chair(s): **FULVIA PREVER** Psychotherapist,  
Scientific Director of **Women& Gambling Project SUN(N)COOP - Italy**  
AISDiCo (Italian Academy of Sciences of Behavioural Addictions);  
ALEA (Association for Gambling Studies and Risky Behaviour)  
President of Varenna Foundation (for youth mental health support),  
**ANA ISABEL ESTEVEZ GUTIERREZ**, Professor at **Universidad de Deusto Bilbao** ) Spain

It becomes more and more obvious that a gendered approach to research, prevention and treatment is highly relevant to gain a better understanding of and be more responsive to female-specific aspects of behavioural addiction.

Literature and studies on Women and Gambling Disorder and other Behavioural Addiction are scarce, both in Europe and all over the world. Moreover, the existing data are not specific to women but inferred from mostly male samples. Nevertheless, more and more women are affected by pathological gambling and other non-substance related addictions.

Obviously, women have a crucial role in family and society, and their gambling or other addictive behaviours, which are often underestimated, may have a deep impact on their social and personal life. One key issue is that women often experience great difficulty in finding appropriate treatment services. Most health clinics are not “female friendly”, and treatment programs very rarely offer female-specific treatment approaches.

In 2020 a pandemic struck all over the world. It deeply affected our lives and existence, our physical and mental health, in many ways. B.A. played an important role in women’s life during the various COVID-19 lockdowns. Women paid high costs in this period and taking care of their health is now even more important. It’s crucial to learn from your experiences as researchers and clinicians and to gather data from all over the world to enrich our shared understanding of these issues, to compare, discuss and improve research and treatment for the women on whose behalf we are working on.

#### 1) Kuss - Prevention for Female Users: Exploring Gender Issues of Online Addictions

**Olatz Lopez-Fernandez<sup>1</sup>, Anne-Marie Hastrup Kristenses<sup>2</sup>, Daria J. Kuss<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Researcher as Psychologist at Fundación Jiménez Díaz University Hospital Health Research Institute, <sup>2</sup> Assistant researcher Psychology, Københavns Universitet, <sup>3</sup> Associate Professor in Psychology, Cyberpsychology Research Group Lead, Nottingham Trent University

Internet use-related addiction is increasingly being recognised on a European scale due to the inclusion of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) in the appendix of the fifth Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 2013, and the inclusion of Gaming Disorder in the eleventh International Classification of Diseases in 2018. However, findings on the extent of these current problems extracted by reviews, one inside the European Union (EU) and the other outside the EU, support some insight about female online uses, a target to which not much attention has been paid. The authors, therefore, have reviewed scientific and grey literature regarding women online uses worldwide and discuss early detection, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention in paying respect to gender issues.

## 2) Estevez - Risk factors associated with gambling and gaming addiction in girls

Ana Estévez<sup>1</sup>, Paula Jauregui, Laura Macía<sup>2</sup>, Cristina Martín<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor in University of Deusto- Spain, <sup>2</sup> University of Deusto- Spain

Introduction. The existence of gender differences in gambling and videogaming has been consistently reported (Baggio et al., 2018). Gender differences have also been found in emotional experience and management and relational links associated with greater severity of addictive behaviors (Sancho et al., 2019). These factors may constitute significant predictors of gambling and videogaming in adolescent (Estevez et al., 2017). The aim of this study was to analyze gender differences in risk factors associated with gambling and gaming addiction. Method. 1208 adolescents participated in this study. Screening measures for at-risk gambling and gaming, affective states, alexithymia, emotion regulation, resilience, stressful life events and, finally, attachment to parents and friends. Results. Female participants did not show any association between the gambling and the psychological measures. However, they showed higher scores at the gaming associated with higher catastrophizing strategy in the emotion regulation questionnaire, lower maternal attachment, lower resilience, and higher difficulty at describing feelings in the alexithymia scale. Conclusions. These results suggest the existence of gender differences in the risk factors associated with addictive behaviors.

## 3) Prever - Family Life Space in a pilot gender study: shadows and lights in female gambling experience

Maddalena Borsani<sup>1,2</sup>, Monica Minci<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Fulvia Prever<sup>1,2,4,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SUN(N)COOP; <sup>2</sup>ALEA (Association for Gambling Studies and Risky Behaviour); Italy; <sup>3</sup>Gambling Therapy, Gordon Moody - UK; <sup>4</sup>AISDiCo (Italian Academy of Sciences of Behavioural Addictions); <sup>5</sup>President of Varenna Foundation for youth mental health support

Research evidence shows that gambling represents a way for women to express sufferings related to dysfunctional relationships within the family as well as the deep effect of lack of family on women's demand for treatment, retention and outcome (Brandt, Wöhr, Prever, 2014).

The aim of this study is to explore how gambling can represent an active subject within the system (Prever&Locati, 2017) and to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Family Life Space" as a tool to investigate both family dynamics and the role of gambling, to improve clinical assessment and treatment.

The present pilot study includes four Italian women gamblers joining Azzardo&Donne group and two of their significant relatives.

The FLS test (Mostwin, 1974) was administered with clinical interview.

Circular questions were crucial steps of therapeutic process and enabled the *presentification* of third party when the family member couldn't be present (Boscolo&Bertrando, 1996).

Results indicate that FLS is effective to describe communication and facilitate interaction among family members. In particular, the results highlighted: a) how difficult it is for women to have support and b) confirm FLS as prediction tool to support women seeking for help in addition and to evaluate adherence to treatment.

Study results show clearly where Gambling is placed within the family and how it affects relationships, evolving over the time.

Study limitation is mainly related to qualitative case investigation, not representative for the entire female gambling population. Nevertheless, according to literature, this confirms the value of deep interviews for a better understanding of women shadows and light in gambling experience.

## 4) Jimenez-Murcia- Women, Eating Disorders, Gambling Disorder and Food Addiction: Exploring their Relationship

**Susana Jiménez-Murcia**

Behavioral Addictions Unit, Department of Psychiatry, Bellvitge University Hospital-IDIBELL, University of Barcelona, CIBERobn, ISCIII (Barcelona, Spain)

**Introduction:** The food addiction (FA) concept has been explored as a potential risk factor in the development and prognosis of mental health conditions, including eating disorders (ED), obesity (OBE) and behavioral addictions such as gambling disorder (GD).

**Objectives:** a) To analyze the differences in clinical presentation of patients with ED, OBE, GD and FA comorbidity when assessing by different variables such as gender; b) To provide a better phenotypic characterization of the FA construct by conducting a clustering analysis of FA in two conditions (ED and OBE).

**Method:** The clinical sample included patients diagnosed with these mental disorders attending a specialized eating disorders and behavioral addictions units.

**Results:** A worse psychopathological state was found in patients with FA, who obtained higher scores in harm avoidance and lower in self-directedness when assessing personality traits. Patients with FA comorbidity were characterized by having a higher BMI in both genders. Moreover, among women with FA a longer GD duration was found. Three clusters of FA participants were identified. Cluster 1 (dysfunctional) was characterized by the highest ED severity and emotional distress, and more dysfunctional personality traits. Cluster 2 (moderate) showed moderate levels of ED symptomatology. Finally, cluster 3 (adaptive) was characterized by low levels of ED symptomatology, and more functional personality traits.

**Conclusion:** The assessment of FA condition in patients with several mental disorders may be helpful to optimize preventive and therapeutic approaches. Future studies should address whether these three food addiction phenotypes are related to prognosis and therapy outcome.

## 5) Muller - Buying-shopping disorder – a female-specific mental health problem?

**Astrid Müller<sup>1</sup>, Maithilee Joshi<sup>1</sup>, Nora M. Laskowski<sup>1,2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany

<sup>2</sup>Department of Clinical Psychology, Psychotherapy and Diagnostics, Technische Universität Braunschweig, Germany

**Background:** The key features of compulsive buying-shopping disorder (CBSD) are the diminished control over buying/shopping of consumer goods that are not needed, resulting in substantial negative consequences such as clinically significant distress and impairment in important areas of functioning (e.g., financial problems, familial conflicts, fraud). Population-based studies suggest that about 5% of adults are at-risk for BSD, whereas the majority of surveys have found that there are higher prevalence rates among women. Treatment-seeking samples with BSD consistently comprise more female than male patients. The talk will be addressing phenomenological aspects and underlying mechanisms associated with BSD in women.

**Methods:** A sample of 90 female patients was investigated by using clinical interviews to assess BSD. Standardized questionnaires were used to assess symptom severity of BSD and comorbid mental disorders, e.g., anxiety, depressive, somatoform and hoarding disorder.

**Results:** The “mixed” form of buying/shopping, which includes offline and online buying/shopping, was the most common CBSD subtype in the present female sample. Clothing and cosmetics were reported as the preferred product categories. About one fourth of the sample met the

questionnaire threshold for major depression, and more than half of the sample met the thresholds for hoarding disorder, somatoform disorder, or generalized anxiety disorder. Conclusions: The preferred product categories are in line with other studies. The findings confirm previous reports concerning the comorbidity of CBSD with other mental disorders, indicating a high level of distress associated with BSD in women.

## 6) Kowalewska- Identifying patterns of sexual functioning of women seeking treatment for compulsive sexual behavior.

**Ewelina Kowalewska<sup>1</sup>, Katarzyna Obarska<sup>2</sup>, Magdalena Telega<sup>3</sup>,**

<sup>1</sup>Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education, Warsaw, Poland, <sup>2</sup>Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, <sup>3</sup>University of Finance and Management, Warsaw, Poland,

Background: Despite the body of research regarding compulsive sexual behavior (CSB), there are little data on these behaviors among women. The current study aims to gather knowledge about the frequency of various forms of CSB among women, and their broader clinical picture (e.g., psychological role of certain behaviors, impact on family or romantic relationship and sexual functioning).

Methods: Qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 25 Polish women (aged 22-44) seeking treatment for CSB. Self-reported instruments measuring CBS symptoms, anxiety, depression, and impulsivity, were also performed.

Results: The most common problematic sexual behavior was engaging in casual sex, following by masturbation, preoccupation with sexual thoughts, and pornography use. 15 out of 25 women (60%) reported the occurrence of pornography and masturbation binges. In most cases, engaging in sexual activity was associated with excitement, high sexual arousal, and “disconnection” from reality. Women reported engaging in sexual behavior aimed at gaining acceptance, closeness, and validation. A significant proportion of women were exposed to negative life events in the past, such as separation of parents, family conflicts, physical, emotional, or/and sexual abuse. Sexual activity often occurred after the consumption of alcohol or other psychoactive substances.

Conclusions: Our results will inform future studies on interventions targeting women with CSB by addressing individual and cultural factors experienced by with women seeking treatment for CSB.

Keywords: Women, Compulsive Sexual Behavior

## 7) Hastrup-Kristenses - The Female Gamer Concept: Insights from a Qualitative Exploration of Female Gamers from Different Countries

**Daria J. Kuss<sup>1</sup>, A. Jess Williams<sup>2</sup>, Anne-Marie Hastrup Kristenses<sup>3</sup>, Olatz Lopez-Fernandez<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor in Psychology, Cyberpsychology Research Group Lead, Nottingham Trent University, <sup>2</sup>Institute for Mental Health, University of Birmingham, <sup>3</sup>Assistant researcher Psychology, Københavns Universitet, <sup>4</sup>Researcher as Psychologist at Fundación Jiménez Díaz University Hospital Health Research Institute

Within gaming culture, female gamers have historically been excluded, objectified and stigmatised. Given their increasing presence in popular online games and some engaging in excessive and problematic play, it is surprising that research including female gamer samples is scarce. There is limited knowledge available as to who they are, how, and why they play. In order to fill this gap in knowledge, the present study aimed to explore the female gamer concept from an international perspective using a qualitative interview methodology. The sample for this study were recruited by an invite to interview using contact information they left at the end of a related survey. To take part in both studies, participants needed to play video games, be able to communicate in English and identify as a woman. Participants were 20 women, ranging in age from 21 to 39 years (M=26.06, SD=4.63). Eighty percent (n=16) were from Europe, primarily the

U.K. (n=14), Spain (n=1), Norway (n=1), the remaining number were from the USA (n=3) and Canada (n=1). Fifty percent of participants selected to take part in a written interview. After transcription and full anonymization of all interviews was complete, thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data following the guidelines offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). Results revealed the following themes: (i) “gamer” identity, (ii) social skills, (iii) escape, (iv) other considerations regarding gender. Implications and future directions are discussed.

## **ROUND TABLE Women and Behavioural Addiction - New paths in research and treatment**

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### **1) Wardle - Focus groups with young women - gendered risk perceptions and values about gambling**

**Heather Wardle**

Assistant Professor, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Project grant funded by Wellcome

Repeated surveys have shown differences between male and female gambling behaviours, with men being more likely to experience problems and engage in certain activities. This too is evident among younger people too. However, few studies have examined how and why different perceptions and behaviours among men and women exist. Drawing on focus groups with young people aged 14-16, this presentation will explore gendered constructs of risk and attitudes to gambling and how this manifests in different perceptions of gambling. Among boys, gendered

notions of masculinity and competition were important themes in their views of gambling whereas for girls views about gambling were situated within broader narratives of risk, safety and sensibility, co-constructed within familial settings. These themes will be explored with reference to their impact on what this may mean for prevention activities among young men and women.

## 2) Achab - Dealing with gender bias in treatment demands regarding Internet-related disorders

### **Sophia Achab**

MD,PhD, senior lecturer PD; Responsible of Specialized facility in addictive behaviors, University Hospitals of Geneva, CH; WHO Collaborating Center in Training and Research in Mental Health (Addiction), Faculty of medicine,University of Geneva, CH

Internet-related disorders are increasing motives for treatment demands worldwide. Adequate treatment coverage is a big challenge for health systems, since it consists in availability of sufficient dedicated facilities, of well-trained health professionals, of increased awareness of public audience about alarming symptoms in favor of treatment need and of continuous treatment facilities' agility to adapt to emerging and changing treatment needs.

In a daily basis, treatment facilities that are being sought by patients and receiving referrals by relatives, are facing several gender biases regarding Internet-related disorders. A first one is that these demands are mostly coming from males and women are under-represented in treatment settings, although prevalence rates in general population are quite comparable. A second gender bias is that of concerns and referrals coming from parents or health professionals are mostly for Gaming disorders in male and for social network and smartphone use disorders for female. A third gender bias is that of relatives triggering the treatment seeking and being active in daily support during treatment process are mostly mothers and female partners.

To achieve gender equity in access to treatment and support, health systems will have to address these gender biases and health professionals will have to tackle it and to adapt to gender specificities regarding increasing Internet related disorders' treatment demands. Discussing these issues in a round table with international experts could be a first step toward increased visibility of these phenomenon and collecting transcultural opinions on its resolution tracks.

## 3) Grall-Bronnec – Online Gambling : comparison of women vs men

**Anaïs Saillard<sup>1</sup>, Marie Grall-Bronnec<sup>1,2</sup>, Morgane Rousselet<sup>1,2</sup>, Elsa Thiabaud<sup>1</sup>, Juliette Leboucher<sup>1</sup>, Julie Caillon<sup>1,2</sup>, Gaëlle Challet-Bouju<sup>1,2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>CHU Nantes, Addictology and Psychiatry Department, Nantes, France

<sup>2</sup>Nantes University, Tours University, INSERM, SPHERE U1246 "MethodS in Patients-centered outcomes and HEalth ResEarch", Nantes, France

**Background.** In France, the prevalence of online gambling has largely increased over the last decade, and women represent a third of problem gamblers.

**Objective.** Our study aimed to compare gambling habits between women and men among 450 non-problematic and at-risk online gamblers.

**Method.** Participants completed a structured interview exploring their gambling habits, gambling-related motives and negative consequences.

**Results.** Women were more likely than men to mention spending money as the main negative consequence, although they had a lower self-imposed budget per week dedicated to gambling.

**Discussion.** Our results raise the question of control and guilt over money that women can experience regarding online gambling.

## 4) Lopez-Fernandez - Measuring Female Gaming: Insights from an International Quantitative Exploration of Female Gamers

**Olatz Lopez-Fernandez<sup>1</sup>, Jess Williams<sup>2</sup>, Daria J. Kuss<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>PhD, FHEA\* Senior Lecturer, Course Coordinator Postgraduate Program of Addictive Behaviours Turning Point, Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University, <sup>2</sup>Nottingham Trent University, <sup>3</sup>Associate Profession in Psychology – Nottingham Trent University

Research investigating female gaming is relatively scarce, especially using a quantitative approach. However, there is evidence suggesting clinicians are increasingly treating problem gaming as a behavioural addiction. The objective of this presentation is to measure the female gamer phenomenon to establish an international profile, to determine predictors associated with perceived Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), and to identify those who are potentially at risk of developing gaming disorder. An online survey was applied through international gaming forums (N = 625) assessing sociodemographic, gaming devices, play genres, and scales on gaming, gender issues, and psychological outcomes. Female gamers reported the use of video games, especially popular online games using computers and consoles. The proportion of gamers with IGD was very low (1%). Several risk factors were identified for IGD high scores (i.e., achievement and social motivations, embodied presence and identification with the avatar, hostility and social phobia together with negative body image, playing Multiplayer Online Battle Arena games, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, and First-Person-Shooter games). Findings highlight the profile of those who are at risk of problematic gaming which will be discussed to support gender issues related to gaming appropriately.

## 5) Adeeva - Emotional intelligence as a coping resource of co-dependent women

**Svetlana Khazova<sup>1</sup>, Tatiana Adeeva<sup>1</sup>, Inna Tikhonova<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Kostroma State University

Background and aims: Dependence in a family creates a personally significant difficult situation for co-dependents. They become susceptible to an addict's mood and behavior and stress caused by anxiety for their life and their struggle to recover. They cope with stress in a certain way. The research aim is to study female co-dependents' coping behavior and its correlation with their emotional intelligence.

Methods: Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (1998), Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). The study involves of 30 women aged from 32 to 55 in close relationships with a substance addict.

Results: Female co-dependents prefer such coping strategies as positive reappraisal, self-control, seeking social support, planful problem solving. Accepting responsibility, distancing, confrontative coping, and escape-avoidance coping strategies are less preferable in the group.

The emotional intelligence data indicate a lower level of one's emotional regulation, a vague awareness of one's emotions, a low ability to interpret emotional information and use it to solve life problems.

The correlation between individual Emotional Intelligence characteristics and coping strategies is identified ( $p \leq 0.001$ ): if co-dependents' ability to identify their own and others' emotions and maintain their emotional state enhances, they are less likely to choose distancing; if the ability to identify emotions and use to solve problems improves, the respondents prefer positive reappraisal. It stimulates the process of "facing" with a real life situation, changes one's

perception of it, and creates a resource for further coping efforts. The study was funded by RFBR (research project № 20-013-00435a).

## 6) Kryukova - Factors of Outlook Rejuvenation Addiction in Women

**Tatiana Kryukova<sup>1</sup>, Anna Osminina<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Kostroma State University, Russian Federation

Background and aims: unwanted signs of aging cause appearance concerns and stress in middle-aged women (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2014; Trekels & Eggermont, 2017; Labunskaya, 2018). To cope with stress of negative self-perception women try to use caring manipulations. Midlife women affected by appearance concerns form the outlook rejuvenation addiction. The study is identifying its factors. Methods: the sample - 52 women (aged 40 - 60) concerning outlook age changes. They undergo rejuvenation facial-body procedures in the aesthetic medicine centre. Interview and customers' statistical analysis are used to confirm addictive behavior in a longitudinal study. Results: statistics show continuance and regularity in undergoing manipulations to transform appearance – the willing to improve a face (get rid of wrinkles), skin elasticity, face and body contours, etc. 40% of women visit the centre for more than 12 years, the frequency says that 48% (25 women) use aesthetic services (not surgical) from 4-5 to 11 times a month becoming their addicts. Among the factors of B.Addictions there are self-appearance discontent, high level of outlook significance and value in studied women (in a control group members place less emphasis on the importance of physical appearance); stress and discomfort caused by loss of attractiveness with age, by their subjective evaluation. Regular undergoing of aesthetic services to look younger is women's coping to reduce stress and fear of the future, to develop better interpersonal relationships, to improve the emotional background - the emergence of positive emotions, a sense of security and satisfaction. The study is supported by RFBR, 18-013-01005"

## 7) Cecchelli- Comparison of males and females in a sample of adult ADHD patients: clinical profile, comorbidity and behavioral addictions.

**Chiara Cecchelli<sup>1</sup>, Anna Rapicavoli<sup>1</sup>, Luisa Vignozzi<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Braincenter- Firenze- Italy

Background: sex differences in the prevalence of ADHD are well documented in the literature, like others neurodevelopmental disorders, it is more prevalent in males, with a males to females ratio of 7-8:1 in clinical settings and 3-4:1 in community samples. The discrepancy in sex ratio between clinic and community samples highlights that a large number of females remain unidentified and untreated. There is increasing recognition that females with ADHD show a modified set of behaviors, symptoms and comorbidities, when compared with ADHD males. Methods: 60 ADHD outpatients (30 males and 30 females), recruited at the Brain Center Firenze, were evaluated collecting demographic variables, using psychometric instruments and neuropsychological tests, in order to highlight gender differences in clinical presentation. Results: preliminary results show a trend towards a higher education and employment rates in females compared to males, despite higher scores at the Barkley Adult ADHD Rating Scale-IV (a clinical scale for assessment of ADHD symptoms) and similar scores at the Symptoms of Depression Questionnaire (SDQ). With regard to Behavioral Addictions, females show more food addiction, shopping addiction and internet addiction while males show higher score at the scales for sex addiction and gambling. Conclusion: in the present study, females tend to show a better functioning in spite of higher score in the scale for assessment of ADHD symptoms.