

Managing Texting Addiction with Gradual Reduction Protocol

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Abstract

Internet and social media have become part and parcel of the present-day life. It has its vested pros and cons. It connects with social and technical world, gives avenues for exposure but at the same time it isolates individuals from the other people. People sitting at their home chatting with people at the other end of the globe but are aloof from their family members. This piece of research paper is a case study of texting addiction and gradual reduction as treatment protocol. Normally the concept of complete abstinence as applied by the practitioners but it is suggested that gradual reduction can also work well for the same. Moreover, it reduces the risk of side effects of psychiatric medicines and the chances of withdrawals.

Keywords: *Texting; Addiction; Treatment; Gradual Reduction; Complete; Abstinence*

Introduction

Addiction is a complex condition, a brain disease that is manifested by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequence. People with addiction (severe substance use disorder) have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s), such as alcohol or drugs, to the point that it takes over their life [1].

According to behavioural scientists everything that can stimulate a person can be addictive; and whenever a habit turns into compulsion, can be considered as an addiction. Further, they also believe that there are a number of similarities as well as some differences between drug addiction and behavioural addictions [2]. Behavioural addiction - also sometimes called "process addictions," is referred to a person becoming addicted to certain activities. These might include - shopping, video games, sex, exercise, gambling, social media uses, cell phone, texting and eating. In spite of the hot debates on the issue - whether or not behavioural addictions should be considered as "real" addictions there is huge amount of research which shows that these activities symptomatically are very close to those of drug and alcohol addictions [3]. The objective of this case study is to suggest that gradual reduction therapy is the best one and the researchers applied gradual reduction therapy, helped the client and it proved to be quite effective.

Diagnosis of addiction

Three major criteria of addiction diagnosis:

- **Loss of control:** A craving or strong urge to use the substance (substance addiction)/involve in the activity (behavioural addiction) and desire or failed attempts to cut down or control substance use/activity involvement [1].
- **Withdrawals:** Abnormal physical or psychological features that follow the abrupt discontinuation of a drug/behaviour that has the capability of producing physical/psychological dependence. In example, common withdrawal symptoms include sweating, Goosebumps, vomiting, anxiety, insomnia, and muscle pain, tremors, headache, running nose, watery eyes, etc. (symptoms vary for different types of addictions) [1].

- **Tolerance:** Need for larger amounts to get the same effect [1].

Signs of texting addiction

According to the *American Journal of Psychiatry* excessive gaming, or virtual sex, email and texting may be a form of addiction. They have described four main symptoms that can indicate that there is a problem when it comes to texting [4]:

- Excessive use of texting to the extent that you lose track of time or neglect things like eating and sleeping.
- Feelings of withdrawal if you do not have access to your phone/texts that can lead to anger and depression.
- Tolerance - A constant need for more time on the phone and/or looking for ways to upgrade your phone's texting capabilities.
- Experiencing negative repercussions of the addiction, such as problems in family and/or peer relationships, fatigue, underachieving, and/or increased arguments with others.

Negative effects of excessive texting

There are lot of negative effects of excessing texting. People keep on texting throughout the night that may affect their physical and psychological health, texting while driving leads to lot of accidents. Sexting is another problem related to excessive texting. Further, excessive texting may lead to cyber bullying and repetitive stress injuries. Texting is also a prominent way of spreading rumours that may lead to dire consequences.

Profile of the client

Name: Santosh Kumar (Name changed)

Gender: Male

Age: 22 years

Occupation: Engineering Student.

Information from the family

The client's father discussed about his son in February 2018. He told us that Santosh had left his college and was staying at home since last one month probably and being father his concern was quite genuine. According to the report given by the father, the client is on phone for more than 17 hours out of 24 hours. If we (family members) take cell-phone from him or ask him to leave it, he was not ready at all and at times we (family members) could clearly note the uncomfortable (at times his hands started trembling) he felt without phone or when asked to leave phone. Then, finally, we interacted with Santosh.

Interaction with the client

The client told how he got into all this. The client had no Facebook (FB) account earlier, was quite sober, happy go lucky going and obedient guy. Loved to stay with family and enjoyed being with family but for higher education (B. Tech) he joined hostel far away from home. According to Santosh there he made his FB account. The subject was already interested in writing on current social and political issues and he found FB appropriate (because lot of people would read him) and attractive (because the positive feedback, for example, like, agree, wow...etc, would motivate him to write more and more) platform to write blogs and posts on the social and, at times, political issues.

Away from the house, and the client also told that he had very few friends, no one to keep watch on the client. The client had plenty of time to write on different topics of his interest and share on FB. Then he started looking for likes and dislikes for his posts and blogs on FB. When there were likes he used to get happy and when dislikes, out of worry/ a sense failure he used to delete those posts. Then he started

skipping his classes because teachers had started noting what he had been doing there in the class. He was busy doing the same during night also, and this was how he got fail in his course.

The client could keep texting even if there was no internet thinking that it could be uploaded later on but even this *wait* could irritate him!! This all took around 1 and half year and finally he called his father and told everything and asked for help. This was something very positive about him which is rarely the case with patients of addiction. The client was using texting for more than 17 hours per day.

The therapy administered - Gradual reduction protocol

Researchers were handling lot of patients suffering from addiction. The protocol followed was the detoxifying the patient and complete abstinence from the object of addiction, and then a holistic approach to treat them. The approach included psychoeducation also. But in the case of cell-phone and particularly text addiction (the present case), the counsellor started with slow/gradual reduction because of lack of inpatient set-up. The client was given non android phone instead of smart phone, later on it was fixed that after every two hours the client would use non android phone for 20 to 30 minutes. The family members were quite sensible; they could understand what the counsellor had been asking them to do. The counsellor asked client's father to sleep by the client so that whenever, in the night he craved for texting the client's father would make client busy by talking to the client or by switching the TV on (cognitive distraction). Basically, the craving lasts for about 10 to 15 minutes. If the person having addiction is made busy for that period of time the craving will wane off for that time. At times, during daytime, he was allowed to use his cell phone. Treatment also included play activity.

Regarding relapse: As the treatment plan was gradual reduction, in early days using cell phone was part of treatment.

Basically, there are two protocols for treatment of addiction problem:

1. Complete abstinence
2. Gradual reduction

Normally, in India most of the deaddiction and rehabilitation centres follow complete abstinence protocol for the treatment of addiction. Gradual reduction approach can also work well. Many people have recognized that gradual reduction could reduce withdrawal symptoms and help people get clean in the long run. Others argue that addicts will struggle to stick to a pre-designated amount of their chosen substance and therefore relapse is likely [5] but relapse is, actually, part of recovery. If needed, for help a psychiatrist can also be resorted to. In gradual reduction the positive attitude and firm determination of client is quite important. Support from the family and significant others, like as friends and relatives, also plays significant role in the treatment. The treatment protocol is quite fruitful and can prove helpful for those who don't have access to rehabs or don't want to stay there in. But they need proper counselling and treatment protocol. Further, along with addiction problems patients may develop other psychological problems which need psychological attention.

Conclusion

Texting addiction and other forms of behavioural addictions are posing a threat for the new generation and are a cause of serious concern for the responsible people. Anyone can fall prey to this menace. Gradual reduction is a healthy and easy way to get rid of the addiction problems. It's time to rethink about the addiction and addiction treatment protocols.

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