#3123 Title: Assessing international alcohol and internet use patterns during COVID-19 isolationusing an online survey: Highlighting distinct stressors conferring risk tocompulsive behaviours

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Objectives and aims:

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has required drastic safety measures to contain virus spread, including an extended self-isolation period. Those with greater perceived or actual life stress are vulnerable to develop or reinstate problematic behaviourscharacterised by addiction and compulsive mechanisms. Thus, we assessed how the COVID-19 pandemic and isolation measures affected alcohol consumption and internet use in the general population.

Methods:

We developed an online international survey, entitled Habit Tracker (HabiT), completed by 1,346 adults (≥18 years), which measured changes inamount and severity of alcohol consumption (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test; AUDIT),online gaming (Internet Gaming Disorder Scale-Short Form; IGDS9-SF), and pornography viewing (Cyber Pornography Addiction Test; CYPAT) before (post-hoc recall)and during the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdown. These measures were related to ten COVID-19-specific stress factors. Lastly, we assessed psychiatric factors widely recognized to be associated with problematic alcohol and internet use such as anxiety, depression (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale; HADS), and impulsivity (Short Impulsive-Behavior Scale; SUPPS-P).

Results:

Of the sample, we observed an overall increase in online gaming and a decrease alcohol consumption and pornography viewing. Those who increased their amount and severity of alcohol use (36%) during lockdown reported stress associated with the pandemic itself, such as being an essential workerdirectly caringfor those with or having a loved one become severely ill from COVID-19. Further, those residing in the United Kingdom- as opposed the United States or Canada- increased their weekly amount of alcohol consumption. Alternatively, those who increased online gaming (64%) and pornographyviewing (43%)reported low frequency or poor quality social interactions resultant of lockdown measures. All three groups displayed higher levels of depression, anxiety, and urgency impulsivity.

Conclusions:

Our findings underscore the theoretical mechanism of negative emotionality underlying forms of compulsive behaviour driven by stress, depression, and anxiety;while highlighting distinct avenues by which these behaviours can manifest.Limitations include subjects being within varying phases of lockdown during the time of testing and a large degree of study dropout (n=1,515). We emphasise the relevance of identifying those in need of greater support services to mitigate negative health outcomes associated with problematic alcohol consumption and internet usage in the context of COVID-19 isolation.