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The structure of compulsive sexual behavior: A network analysis study

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Abstract

Introduction: Compulsive sexual behavior is a phenomenon characterized by a persistent failure to control intense, repetitive sexual impulses or urges, resulting in repetitive sexual behavior that causes marked distress or impairment in personal, familial, social, educational, or occupational areas of functioning. Despite its major impact on mental health and quality of life, little is known about its internal structure and whether this phenomenon differs across genders, age groups, and risk status. *Methods:* By considering a large online sample (n = 3186; 68.3% males), ranging from 14 to 64 years old, compulsive sexual behavior was explored by means of network analysis. State-of-the-art analytical techniques were adopted to investigate the pattern of association among the different elements of compulsive sexual behavior, identify possible communities of nodes, pinpoint the most central nodes, and detect differences between males and females, among different age groups, as well as between individuals at low and high risk of developing a full-blown disorder. *Results:* The analyses revealed that the network was characterized by three communities, namely consequence, preoccupation, and (perceived) impulse dyscontrol, and that the most central node was related to (perceived) impulse dyscontrol. No substantial differences were found between males and females and across age. Failing to meet one's own commitments and responsibilities was more central in individuals at high risk of developing a full-blown disorder than in those at low risk. *Discussion:* The structure of compulsive sexual behaviour was revealed as substantially stable across age groups and gender, with a specific node structure difference for individuals at risk. These findings could be of importance for both preventive and treatment purposes.



deactivation strategies. Of particular interest is the confused activation style, since it is characterized by high degrees of both hyperactivation and deactivation and, thus, can be relevant in clinical settings.



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