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Study: Web porn addicts at 200,000

NEW YORK (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of Internet users show compulsion for porn sites, X-rated chat rooms or other sexual materials online, according to a study released Wednesday.

In one of the first studies to estimate the number of "cybersex compulsives," researchers say there are at least 200,000 and millions more are at risk.

"This is a hidden public health hazard exploding, in part, because very few are recognizing it as such or taking it seriously," according to the psychologists at Stanford and Duquesne universities. Their study appears in the March issue of the journal Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity.

The researchers classified users as "cybersex compulsives" if they spent more than 11 hours a week visiting sexually oriented areas and scored high on a 10-item questionnaire about relationships and attitudes toward sex.

The researchers, led by Al Cooper, clinical director at the San Jose Marital and Sexuality Centre, found evidence that compulsives have more problems with relationships and jobs than Internet users who visit X-rated sites casually.

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"There is and should be a lot of concerns about these people. They are developing problems that can be serious."

Al Cooper

director, San Jose Marital and Sexuality Centre

concerns about these people," Cooper said. "They are developing problems that can be serious."

He called for more research and education. Among the topics to explore: whether sexual compulsion online leads to more sex crimes offline.

Past studies examined how many people visited porn sites and how much time they spend there. But very few studies attempted to estimate the number of compulsives, said Mark Wiederhold, a professor at the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego.

Wiederhold, who was not involved with the research, called the conclusions conservative but significant, "pointing to a huge number we can't ignore."

Wiederhold and Cooper both raised concerns about how partici-

pants were picked. For the survey, conducted in the spring of 1998, more than 13,500 visitors to the MSNBC news site were asked to answer a questionnaire. Because of such self-selection, it is impossible to tell whether the group accurately represents all Internet users.

Plus, participants may have lied or denied they had a problem.

The researchers tossed out incomplete responses or multiple questionnaires appearing to come from the same individual. They kept 9,265 surveys from respondents ages 18 to 90.

Only 96 of these people, or about 1 percent, fit researchers' definition for being cybersex compulsive. Applying that percentage to 20 million people visiting sexual sites each month, the researchers came up with the figure of 200,000.

Organ deficit spurs live donations

More doctors are turning to live donors as transplant techniques improve and waiting lists grow.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kyle McNamara watched a co-worker succumbing to liver failure and did what he thinks anyone would do — he donated a piece of his liver.

"After talking to the surgeons and really getting the information, it really wasn't a hard decision," he said.

Others might be more hesitant, but McNamara is part of a growing group of living donors. In particular, organ donations from people who are not related to the recipients have tripled in the past year, as the waiting lists have grown and transplantation techniques have improved.

Overall, the number of living donors giving up a kidney or, increasingly, a section of their livers, has more than doubled in the past decade, according to a report released Tuesday by the United Network for Organ Sharing. This network runs the nation's transplant system.

"It's just something anyone in my

group would do," said McNamara, 32, of Braintree, Mass. He donated part of his liver to Randy Roberts, a friend, but not a lifelong buddy or close confidant.

More often, the donor is a relative — someone like Andrew Kennedy, who donated a part of his liver to his mother. She had six months to live, and the doctors told her she'd never make it to the top of the long waiting list.

"At first I said no," said Kennedy, 62, of Niverville, N.Y. "He said, 'Ma, you can't do that to me.' He said, 'You gave me life, and now it's my turn to repay it.'"

Four months after the surgery, both Kennedys are doing well.

Nationwide, there were 4,273 living donors in 1998, up from 1,918 a decade earlier, according to the organ-sharing network. In 1998, one in five donated organs came from a living donor.

Nearly 18 percent of the living donors were unrelated to the recipients — mostly close friends and co-workers, with an occasional stranger. About 40 percent were siblings, 20 percent parents, 16 percent offspring and 7 percent other relatives.

Donations from people who have died — called cadaveric donors — have also increased, though not as dramatically, and only because there's been an increase in the number of older donors. Donors over age 50 now account for 29 percent of all cadaveric donors.

All told, there were 5,798 cadaveric donors in 1998, up about 6 percent from 1997 and about 45 percent since 1989.

Still, in 1998, 4,860 people died while waiting for a transplant, triple the numbers of a decade earlier. The number of people on the waiting list also tripled, to 64,373 by the end of 1998.

Today, the waiting list tops 68,000.

Those bleak numbers make people more interested in helping out, experts say.

"Family members are more inclined to ask (about donating), seeing their loved one progressing before their eyes and knowing they're still a long way from being at the top of the list," said Dr. Elizabeth Pomfret, director of the live donor liver transplant program at Lahey Clinic in Burlington, Mass.

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