

Examining psychological and neuronal mechanisms of Compulsive Sexual Behavior among women

The over 20 year long discussion among therapists and researchers about how to conceptualize compulsive sexual behaviors (CSB) remains unsolved. Our previous research allowed us to identify the key neuronal mechanisms underlying CSB in men, and propose the conceptualization that will be included in future classifications of mental disorders. However, almost all the existing data from the CSB apply to men. Research describing the clinical characteristics of women with CSB is lacking. This noticeable lack of empirical investigations about CSB in women requires a quick catch-up, especially when preliminary studies show significant gender differences in the clinical picture of CSB.

The purpose of this study is to: 1.) gather knowledge about the frequency of various forms of compulsive sexual behavior among women, and their broader clinical picture (e.g., relationships with specific personality profiles, psychological role of certain behaviors, impact on relationships and sexual functioning); 2.) examine the co-occurrence of CSB with other behavioral addictions, substance use, and/or other mental disorders; 3.) verify whether neuronal mechanisms underlying CSB in women are the same as in men; and 4.) verify the causal nature of identified neuronal mechanisms by examining whether the psychological training leading to their weakening will be accompanied by effective CSB symptoms reduction. The project includes questionnaire and diary measurements, fMRI experiment, and psychological intervention based on mindfulness techniques.

The current project would provide world-class, high-profile data in the context of current inclusion of CSB into the ICD-11 classification by the World Health Organization. Given the increasing availability of pornographic material related to the rise of the Internet, and growing number of people suffering from a loss of control over sexual behavior, this project would have a significant impact on public health and intervention efforts occurring around the world. Results obtained in this project will contribute to identify patterns of sexual functioning in women with CSB, and provide guidance for future clinical trials on effective methods to help women suffering from these problems.