

NETFLIX ADDICTION: 21 Century Issues



How many times have you binge watched your favorite series all at once? Is it excruciatingly difficult to not click the next episode when it is so easily available? How long did it take to complete the whole season 1 of Sacred Games?

For majority of people the answer to these questions is troubling. Netflix has something for everyone and for every mood. Unlike traditional TV series with one episode each day or week, streaming platforms like Netflix have whole series or seasons readily available. It is hard to stop yourself especially when the last episode ended with a cliff hanger what is going to happen next? What harm could watching just one more episode would really do? Cliff hangers produce acute stress.

In situation of acute stress the body produces an excess of CRH, a hormone that mediates the release of other stress hormones in the body. This leads to bodily arousal, which in turn causes the body to remain alert.

So, when you're faced with that cliffhanger, you're suddenly not so tired and you find yourself watching another episode. Such binge watching for its duration does make you happy. It helps you escape the reality and provides immediate gratification. Although in the end you are left with incomplete work or tasks and all your time is lost, which then causes stress. To escape that stress you go back to Netflix. It is a vicious cycle and it is becoming more and easier to get trapped in it.

Since 1996, Internet Addiction Disorder became prevalent and was considered for inclusion into the hospital arrangement as a disorder. And, while this represents an extreme that won't affect most Netflix users, it is a reality when you're talking about binge-watching TV for hours on end and as Netflix CEO Reed Hastings admitted that he would want to keep viewers watching. In an earnings call last year, Hastings said, "You know, think about it, when you watch a show from Netflix and you get addicted to it, you stay up late at night."



And hence leads to completing with sleep on margin.” According to a report by Limelight Networks, Indians spend 8 hours 29 minutes watching online video content, which is far more than the global trend of six hours and 45 minutes. Things seem to have hit an extreme however, as The Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) clinic at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru recently admitted the first person suffering from Netflix addiction in the country. The patient was an unemployed 26-year-old male who checked into the NIMHANS after using Netflix to escape the reality of his unemployment for six months, according to the *The Hindu*.

The addiction also leads to decline in efficiency in work, and problems in interpersonal relationships. In teenager these addiction leads in bad study performance, which is another cause of stress and guilt in students.

Another problem with internet addiction is lack of physical activities in adults and children as well, which is causing problems such as obesity, other medical conditions. And Due to neglect in social activities, adults and children lack confidence and social skills to deal with daily life problems

Manoj Kumar Sharma, a clinical psychologist at the institute’s Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT), told *The Hindu* that the man turned to Netflix to escape pressures from family to find a job, forgetting his problems and deriving “immense pleasure” from it. “Netflix addiction” isn’t in the DSM-5 and controversy surrounds the ideas of similar screen-related addictions. Working on the patient’s self control Dr. Sharma said, “We didn’t recommend him not to watch anything because at this moment he didn’t have anything constructive to do. We brought lifestyle changes which can bring some significant amount of distraction in him.” Activities like meditation and alternative hobbies,



such as sports or nature walks, are encouraged, Sharma and Sen said.

Addiction with streaming services can be seen in the same light as obsession with gaming, which was qualified as a disorder by the World Health Organization in June, a decision met with skepticism by some mental health experts. Addiction experts say one of the major reasons people opt to endlessly watch online shows is to cut themselves off from reality. They want to find themselves in a virtual space where they do not need to resolve a "real crisis", they added.

According to The Print, Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma of the SHUT Clinic said he had seen a marked increase in the number of addiction cases pertaining to the abuse of social media, gaming and video-on-demand. "Earlier, I used to get two to three cases of gaming or mobile phone addiction in a week," he told The Print.

"Now, out of the 10 cases referred to me, eight turn out to be extreme ones. Addiction among the youngsters, aged between eight and 14 years, continues to be centered on gaming, apps such as Netflix are more for the adults, who find emotional gratification (in the streaming services) as they are under constant stress" Dr Sharma added. Caution should be applied in self-diagnosis.

Although it is better to take certain precautions before such binge watching becomes problematic (a coping mechanism). If you feel that streaming apps or video games are causing disturbance in your life, it is time to take some steps you can either go cold turkey or progressively reduce the time spent and effectively manage the time.

Either way it needs self control and strong will as creators of these apps, series or games are leaving no stone unturned in making them more and more appealing or addictive.

Dr. Sharma listed three major parameters that should raise a red flag: If the person is pre-occupied with Netflix (or online video streaming apps) or games all day, begins to lose control and is unable to stop despite spending 10 to 12 hours on it, and neglects his/her environment.

If you notice these three things in a friend or relative, it is time to seek help.



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