

The Epstein Addiction Inventory (EAI): Determining Whether Addictions – Both Behavioral and Substance – Are Severe Enough to Require Treatment

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Abstract

The language of addiction has been used inconsistently for hundreds of years in the English language, and it is not just the general public that is confused about the language of addiction; so is the professional community. Although today, medical professionals usually define “addiction” as an unhealthful dependence on a chemical substance, early uses of the word defined it as a harmful *behavior* of some sort – gambling or gluttony, for example. Today, internet-entrenched pop psych attaches the word addiction to almost any activity in which people go to extremes: gaming, sex, chocolate, shopping, exercise, and even internet activity are all frequently labeled “addictions,” even though they are not listed in the DSM-5-TR. Gaming addiction is especially controversial, with many clinicians insisting that it be added to the DSM-5; it was ultimately mentioned in the appendix. In the present study, we introduce a new online questionnaire designed to help people distinguish between activities (substance-related or behavioral) so severe that they should probably seek professional help; activities that might be troublesome but that probably should not be labeled addictions; and activities that are perhaps little more than strong interests. The questionnaire also links people to resources where they can get professional help. The questionnaire employs a simple and efficient check-off format that people can typically complete in 5-to-10 minutes. It includes 69 items, 3 for each of 23 categories of possible addiction. We use a “concurrent study design” to assess the validity of the questionnaire. Validity evidence was strong with test scores proving to be strongly associated with answers participants gave to 12 criterion questions. Reliability, as measured primarily by internal consistency, was also strong. We also found that behavioral addictions were far more common than substance addictions, and, surprisingly, that behavioral addictions were far better predictors of life outcomes as measured by our criterion questions ($p < .001$). Our results suggest that this new questionnaire will be especially helpful to internet users who have concerns about their possible addictions, especially given the large and growing number of nonvalidated tests of addiction that are currently spreading online.