

This article was contributed by Dr Ng Kit Seng and published in Today newspaper on 19th June, 2009.

Managing Sex Addicts

Helping to curb desire

On the surface, Robert (not his real name) was a happily married man. Behind closed doors, he was a sex addict whose compulsive sexual habits were taking a heavy toll on his career and 25-year marriage.

Addicted to having extramarital affairs and pay-sex, Robert is one of the many sex addicts whom psychologist Dr Ng Kit Seng – the director of The Center For Psychology – has seen during the course of his two-decade long clinical experience.

The 52-year-old's interest in treating those with sex addiction was piqued when he attended a clinical workshop 15 years ago.

That was even before pornography became readily available on the Internet, said Dr Ng, adding that sex addiction was not commonly treated at that time.

"Now, in Singapore, there are a lot of such cases and it's not only about people who are addicted to online porn. Sex addicts can also be addicted to things like exhibitionism, compulsive sexual relationships, anonymous sex, compulsive masturbation, voyeurism, indecent phone calls, child molestation and rape."

The majority (about 90 percent) of the sex addicts he counsels are men.

Interestingly, a common misconception about sex addicts is that they are poorly educated, or are starved of sexual satisfaction, said Dr Ng.

Over 65 percent of his patients are married.

"It's not about the lack of sex. It's about their addiction to it and their compulsive behaviour," he said.

Dr Ng added that sex addicts tend to be compulsive. Generally, many of them are loners, have poor stress management skills, or don't have many other interests. They also have distorted views about sexuality and women.

"A sex addict may also have a relative with a similar addiction. As such, he is very likely to learn to become one too," added Dr Ng.

Surprisingly, even in a conservative Asian society, most of his patients are willing to talk about sex-related issues.

"In the doctor's office, most of them are quite open about their problems. Society now is very different from say, my mum's generation," he said.

Having worked with many sex addicts, Dr Ng said one of the challenges is to motivate patients to follow through post-treatment.

He admitted that it is an addiction that is not easy to overcome and relapses do occur.

Dr Ng also feels that there is a lack of community support groups.

“There are plenty of interest groups – such as sports or motorbiking clubs – for men, but not many have a positive influence on their emotional well-being. For instance, a men’s group which allows participants to talk about life and their relationships would be very helpful,” he said.