

Addiction

Dependence on drugs or behaviours

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Addiction

What is Addiction?

Addiction is a neuropsychological disorder characterized by a persistent and intense urge to use a drug or engage in a behaviour that produces an immediate natural reward, despite substantial long-term harm and other negative consequences.

Kinds of Addictions

Substance use disorder (drug addiction) changes brain circuitry such that the brain's reward system is compromised, causing functional consequences for stress management and self-control.

Behavioural addictions include gambling, shopping, internet, social media, video games, and pornography and sexual addiction.

Impacts of addictions

Addiction to alcohol, marijuana, prescription medications, high fat/salt/sugar foods, gambling, and other substances or activities can cause serious health issues and problems with academic performance, family members, friends, coworkers, work, money, and the law.

Addictions are profitable

Creating an addiction is good for business as it traps customers and increases profits, so it is a common part of business strategies where the end justifies any means. The illegal drug trade, for example, is highly profitable.

Bahá'í principles for addiction

Most Bahá'í references are to substance addictions, but the same principles apply to behavioural addictions. When people lack any higher human spiritual purpose, and give priority to immediate satisfaction of physical desires and pleasures, they are vulnerable to addictions. This is an expression of our materialistic consumer society and economy. Becoming aware of the causes and dangers of addiction can help us to avoid temptations.

Materialism

Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. One result is a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense of hopelessness in the ranks of those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies.

(Universal House of Justice, To Baha'is in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010)

Preoccupation with material life

...the dominant model of development depends on a society of vigorous consumers of material goods. In such a model, endlessly rising levels of consumption are cast as indicators of progress and prosperity. This preoccupation with... material objects and comforts (as sources of meaning, happiness and social acceptance) has consolidated itself in the structures of power and information to the exclusion of competing voices and paradigms. The unfettered cultivation of needs and wants has led to a system fully dependent on excessive consumption for a privileged few, while reinforcing exclusion, poverty and inequality, for the majority.

(Bahá'í International Community, *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism*, 2010)

Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs

Concerning the use of alcoholic drinks and drugs..., they have been explicitly forbidden in the 'Kitáb-i-Aqdas'. Opium is, undoubtedly, prohibited. But smoking, though allowed, is discouraged.

(letter on behalf of the Guardian, 27 December 1933, *Dawn of a New Day*, pp.196-197)



Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs

Gambling and the use of opium have been forbidden unto you. Eschew them both, O people, and be not of those who transgress. Beware of using any substance that induceth sluggishness and torpor in the human temple and inflicteth harm upon the body.

Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs

As to opium, it is foul and accursed. God protect us from the punishment He inflicteth on the user. According to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, it is forbidden, and its use is utterly condemned. Reason showeth that smoking opium is a kind of insanity, and experience attesteth that the user is completely cut off from the human kingdom. May God protect all against the perpetration of an act so hideous as this, an act which layeth in ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human, and which causeth the user to be dispossessed for ever and ever. For opium fasteneth on the soul so that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 170)

Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs

Concerning the so-called 'spiritual' virtues of the hallucinogens... spiritual stimulation should come from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh, and not through physical means such as drugs and agents.
...hallucinogenic agents are a form of intoxicant. ...the friends, including the youth, are required strictly to abstain from all forms of intoxicants....

(Universal House of Justice to NSA of US, 15 April 1965)

Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs

Bahá'ís should not use hallucinogenic agents, including LSD, peyote and similar substances, except when prescribed for medical treatment. ...marijuana... is... a milder form of cannabis, the species used to produce hashish.

“Regarding hashish... this is the worst of all intoxicants, and its prohibition is explicitly revealed. Its use causeth the disintegration of thought and the complete torpor of the soul.... Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but... this wicked hashish extinguisheth the mind, freezeth the spirit, petrifieth the soul, wasteth the body and leaveth man frustrated and lost.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)

(Universal House of Justice to NSA of Hawaiian Islands, 11 November 1967)

Tobacco and Nicotine

...in the sight of God, the smoking of tobacco is a thing which is blamed and condemned, very unclean, and of which the result is by degrees injurious. Besides it is a cause of expense and of loss of time and it is a harmful habit....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, p.335)

Sex Addiction

The world today is submerged, amongst other things, in an over-exaggeration of the importance of physical love, and a dearth of spiritual values. In as far as possible the believers should try to realise this and rise above the level of their fellow-men who are, typical of all decadent periods in history, placing so much over-emphasis on the purely physical side of mating. Outside of their normal, legitimate married life they should seek to establish bonds of comradeship and love which are eternal and founded on the spiritual life of man, not on his physical life.

(letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 September 1941, quoted in Messages of the UHJ, 1968-1973, p.108-109)

Sex Addiction

The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigour.

(letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 13 December 1940, quoted in Messages of the UHJ, 1968-1973, p.109)

Sex Addiction

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but its regulation and control.

(letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 September 1938, quoted in Messages of the UHJ, 1968-1973, p.108)

Social Media Addiction

Social media has become an integral component of everyday life. Instant entertainment, information, and connectivity make social media appealing. For some individuals, having access to these platforms transforms into an addiction. **Social media addiction** is characterized by excessive and compulsive usage that affects daily functioning and overall well-being.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: [10.7759/cureus.72499](https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.72499))

Social Media Addiction

It encompasses more than just spending an excessive amount of time online; it involves compulsively checking for updates, feeling anxious when offline, and suffering from negative impacts on real-life relationships and responsibilities. This addiction can manifest in several ways, such as avoiding personal and professional obligations and experiencing significant distress when unable to access any social media platforms.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: 10.7759/cureus.72499)

Social Media Addiction

Rates of social media addiction among teenagers range from 5% to 20%. The most common ways that teenagers engage in social media platforms include activities such as endless scrolling, reacting to posts, and direct messaging in a digital environment. ...teenagers often spend an average of two to four hours per day engaged in various social media platforms, with many recognizing significant disruptions to their daily routines due to online interactions.

Social Media Addiction

...people with poor self-esteem regularly turn to social media for affirmation, which may heighten feelings of inferiority. Social media is a double-edged instrument in the present digital world; it encourages comparison to well-chosen pictures and lifestyles while additionally making connections easier. Addiction to social media and dependence may result from this dynamic.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. *Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive*. Cureus
DOI: [10.7759/cureus.72499](https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.72499))

Social Media Addiction

Prolonged use of these platforms has been linked to heightened levels of anxiety and depression, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Many individuals resort to social media as a coping mechanism to manage stress or loneliness. While these platforms can provide a sense of community, they often worsen feelings of inadequacy and isolation through constant comparisons to others' curated lives.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
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Social Media Addiction

Variable reward systems have been incorporated into social media platforms to increase engagement among users, particularly among teenagers. This system functions similarly to a gaming device since it establishes a dopamine-driven feedback loop whenever users are uncertain if they will be given likes, shares, or comments. In particular, intermittent reinforcement may have significant effects. Teenagers who utilize social media show an intense desire to keep using it since they are uncertain if they will be approved or recognized. The reward pathways in the brain can be triggered by an expectation of achieving social approval.

Social Media Addiction

One of the main reasons that adolescents rely on social media platforms is due to peer pressure. There is a strong desire for social acceptance and belonging that influences teenagers to participate in social media activities. Through influence from their peers, many teenagers have to conform their interests and behaviours to those of their social circles.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
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Social Media Addiction

Peer pressure and social comparison can work together to create a vicious cycle whereby increased social media use is motivated by the need for approval and the fear of falling short of peers. Teenagers' self-acceptance and the development of healthy online behaviours depend on an understanding of these relationships. Promoting candid conversations regarding the effects of social media can enable teenagers to deal with these issues more skillfully.

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Social Media Addiction

These platforms are especially interesting to younger users because of a number of important design elements that greatly improve user engagement.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: 10.7759/cureus.72499)

Social Media Addiction

The **infinite scroll feature**... makes it possible for users to explore content constantly and uninterrupted, resulting in a smooth experience that promotes extended use. Infinite scrolling makes it simple for users to lose track of time and engage in prolonged platform sessions by doing away with natural stopping points like page breaks.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
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Social Media Addiction

Algorithm-driven content personalizes the posts that users view based on their previous interactions and preferences. Adolescents are more likely to see posts that are relevant to their preferences because of this customization, which also makes the material displayed more relevant. ...this focused scheme not only enhances user participation but also builds a stronger bond with the platform.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: 10.7759/cureus.72499)

Social Media Addiction

Personalized notifications are essential for preserving user interest. Users are prompted to check their profiles often by the thrill and sense of urgency created by alerts about new likes, comments, or messages. Teenagers find it challenging to resist the impulse to log in and stay connected because of this continuous barrage of notifications, which fosters habitual use.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: 10.7759/cureus.72499)

Social Media Addiction

Teenagers who use social media regularly are more inclined to struggle with anxiety, depression, and a general decline in life satisfaction.... The long-term use of social media could negatively impact sleep quality, which exacerbates mental health problems. Adolescent eating disorders and appearance-related anxiety may worsen as an effect of the emphasis on ideals of beauty that permeate social media culture. This pressure to live up to unrealistic expectations of beauty can lead to serious mental health problems and an adverse self-image.

Social Media Addiction

Social media helps individuals connect and share information; however, it also poses challenges that may negatively impact children's academic achievement and the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: 10.7759/cureus.72499)

Social Media Addiction

Several factors contribute to social media addiction among teenagers. Psychologically, low self-esteem and mental health issues like anxiety and depression can drive excessive use, as social media offers a coping mechanism and validation. Socially, peer pressure and exposure to idealized online images exacerbate addiction by fostering negative self-comparisons and a desire for social acceptance.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
DOI: 10.7759/cureus.72499)

Social Media Addiction

From a technological point of view, social media engagement algorithms are becoming more complex and designed to maintain users' attention for as long as possible. Features like endless scrolling are implemented, which increases the risk of addiction and normalizes prolonged usage. As a result, people find it more difficult to notice when their online behaviour becomes problematic.

(Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera. 2024. Understanding Social Media Addiction: A Deep Dive. *Cureus*
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Avoiding Addiction

When we turn to our higher spiritual purpose to refine our character and to be of service to others in advancing civilisation, we have a strong motivation to avoid any addictions. If we help others to discover their spiritual potential, we can fill the vacuum in their lives that they may otherwise try to fill through an addiction.