



The Help Seeking Sex Addicted Patients Increase in Iran: A Report from Iran's Sexaholics Anonymous

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

Compulsive sexual behavior (CSB) is a relatively common disorder with significant individual and public health ramifications (1). Sexual Addictive/compulsive problematic behaviors cause impairment in important life areas including marriage or important social relationships, or affect work (2). Without conduction of epidemiological studies, the frequency of CSB is roughly 3%–6%, with a male predominance (3). It was reported 4.4% and 4.9% of current and lifetime prevalence of CSB, respectively in psychiatric inpatients. A study indicated the lifetime prevalence of CSB in 59% and 14.5% of gay or bisexual and heterosexual males, respectively (3). In a study on self-identified subjects with CSB around 80% of the subjects endorsed sexual abuse in childhood (3). The prevalence of CSB and its consequences in Iran and other countries is not known at the moment (4).

The Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) association is a Non-Governmental Organization consisting of people whose main problem is sex. SA was founded by Roy K in 1970s. Sexual addicts were noted SA more helpful than other twelve-step groups and other treatment options (5). Patient with sex addiction in Iran try to hide the issue not to be judged and punished by the society. There

should be an understanding about the increasing number of help seekers among individuals with sex addiction in Iran to predict and provide treatment methods for them.

The current study investigated the increase in the number of sex addicted patients seeking treatment in SA.

In this nationwide cross sectional study, census data were collected from the organizers of the SA Central Council in Iran. The SA association established in 31 Mar 2003 in Shiraz (6). At the moment, SA is active in about 29 provinces of Iran and has more than 5000 members. They celebrated the 15th anniversary of the SA's activities in Iran while this association still does not have a registration number for official activity. The Persian-speaking sessions, abroad the following years were added e.g. in Germany and Austria. The Meetings are also held with Skype and old sober SA members from other countries in Iran. Individuals with sex addiction can join the SA groups via www.sa-iran.org and find the nearest and most appropriate meeting place (6, 7). The average number of visitors to SA website in 2016 was 80 people per day, while 1260 people per day in 2018 visit this website. More than 34,000 people visit the site monthly.



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Table 1 presents the nationwide census report of SA’s activity. Overall, the number of newcomers would be 825 men in 2016, 1,314 men in 2017 and 2578 men in 2018, respectively. The number of recovery sessions, 557 sessions in 2016, 721

sessions in 2017, and 1246 sessions per week in 2018. Newcomers were attracted to Skype meetings: 639 people in 5 groups and 13 sessions (men), 2 groups and 2 sessions (women) in 2018.

Table 1: SA Census Report of new members in Iran

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Newcomers</i>	<i>Weekly Recovery Sessions</i>
2016 Feb.	303	154
2016 May	134	115
2016 Aug.	180	155
2016 Nov.	208	133
2017 Feb.	355	150
2017 May	298	179
2017 Aug.	194	141
2017 Nov.	467	251
2018 Feb.	421	287
2018 May	613	228
2018 Aug.	726	357
2018 Nov.	788	374

The inability of individuals with CBS to control their impulses may cause destructive results including behaviors such as sexual harassment and criminal sexual misconducts. In a study on sex offenders, 72% of pedophiles and 38% of rapists fit the sexual compulsivity criteria (5). Officials in Iran have not revealed statistical information about this issue, and even deny the existence of such incidents. However, the news reported the hidden growth of sexual crimes in Iran (8). Fear of punishment and feeling of shame and guilt originated in religious beliefs, as well as customary prejudice in the community, have caused hiding the problem of sex and the lack of eagerness for treatment, and the inability to use recovery programs. Activating SA meetings in prisons, especially for prisoners of sexual crimes, should be considered. Among the Muslim countries in the Middle East, Iran is the only area where the SA meetings were held. The increase membership in the SA in Iran is seen. This association faces the problem of providing place for meetings in Iran. Another limitation of sexual addict access to the recovery program is due to the geographical distribution of the meeting places in Iran. The re-

covery is a long-term process in behavioral addiction such as sex addiction. Some of the obstacles seem more pronounced for female SA in particular, in such close culture like Iran (4). Multilingualization of the global SA website “SA.org” makes it more useable for non-English speaking individuals.

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Conflict of interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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