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In Korea, a boot camp cure for web obsession

Martin Fackler
26 Nov 2007

MOKCHEON, South Korea - the compound, part boot camp, part rehab centre - resembles programs around the world for troubled youths. Drill instructors drive young men through military-style obstacle courses, counsellors lead group sessions and there are even therapeutic workshops on pottery and drumming.

But these young people are not battling alcohol or drugs. Rather, they have severe cases of what many in this country believe is a new and potentially deadly affliction: cyberspace addiction.

They come here, to the Jump Up Internet Rescue School, the first camp of its kind in South Korea, to be cured.

South Korea is one of the most wired nations on earth. Perhaps no other country has

so fully embraced the internet. Ninety per cent of homes connect to cheap, high-speed broadband, online gaming is a professional sport and social life for the young revolves around the "PC bang", dim internet parlours that sit on almost every street corner.

But such ready access comes at a price as legions of obsessed users find that they cannot tear themselves away from their computer screens.

Compulsive internet use has been identified as a mental health issue in other countries, including the United States.

It is a national issue in South Korea where, in recent years, some users have died from exhaustion after playing online games for days on end.

Increasingly, students are skipping school to stay online, behaviour that is considered shocking in this intensely competitive society.

Up to 30 per cent of South Koreans under 18, or about 2.4 million people, are at risk of internet addiction, says Ahn Dong-hyun, a child psychiatrist at Hanyang University in

Seoul, who has just completed a three-year government-funded survey of the problem.

They spend at least two hours a day online, usually playing games or chatting. Of those, up to 250,000 probably show signs of actual addiction, such as an inability to stop themselves from using computers, rising levels of tolerance that drive them to seek ever longer sessions online and withdrawal symptoms such as anger and craving when prevented from logging on.

To address the problem the government has built a network of 140 internet-addiction counselling centres, in addition to treatment programs at almost 100 hospitals and, most recently, the Internet Rescue camp.

Researchers have developed a checklist for diagnosing the addiction and determining its severity, the K-Scale (the K is for Korea).

In September, South Korea held the first international symposium on internet addiction.

"Korea has been most aggressive in embracing the internet," says Koh Young-sam, head of the government-run Internet Addiction Counselling Centre. "Now we have to lead in dealing with its consequences."

Some health experts question whether internet or computer overuse is an addiction in the strict

medical sense but many agree such obsessions are a growing problem in many countries.

Doctors in China and Taiwan report similar disorders among their youth. Dr Jerald J. Block, a psychiatrist at Oregon Health and Science University, estimates up to 9 million Americans may be at risk of a disorder which he calls pathological computer use. However, in the US only a handful of clinics specialises in treating it.

"Korea is on the leading edge," Block says. "They are ahead in defining and researching the problem and recognise as a society that they have a major issue."

The rescue camp, in a forested area about an hour south of Seoul, treats the most severe cases. The camp held its first two 12-day sessions this earlier year, each with 16 to 18 male participants. (South Korean researchers say an overwhelming majority of compulsive computer users are male.)

The camp is government funded and attendance is free. It is too early to determine how effective it will be but demand is high with up to five applications for each spot. Administrators plan to double the number of sessions next year.

The participants, who live at the camp, are denied computer use and allowed only an hour of mobile phone calls a day, to prevent them from playing online games via the phone. They follow a rigorous regimen of physical

exercise and group activities, such as horseback riding, aimed at building emotional connections to the real world and weakening those with the virtual one.

"It is most important to provide them experience of a lifestyle without the internet," says Lee Yun-hee, a counsellor. "Young Koreans don't know what this is like."

Initially, campers were found sneaking off to go online but are now under constant surveillance - even while asleep - and are kept busy with chores, such as washing their clothes and cleaning their rooms.

One participant, Lee Chang-hoon, 15, began using the computer to pass the time while his parents were working and he was home alone. He says he quickly came to prefer the virtual world, where he seemed to enjoy more success and popularity than in the real one.

He spent 17 hours a day online, mostly looking at Japanese comics and playing a combat role-playing game called Sudden Attack. He played all night and skipped school two or three times a week to catch up on sleep.

When his parents told him he had to go to school, he reacted violently.

"He didn't seem to be able to control himself," says his mother, Kim Soon-yeol, a hairdresser. "He used to be so passionate about his

favourite subjects [at school]. Now, he gives up easily and gets even more absorbed in his games."

Her son was at first reluctant to give up his pastime.

"I don't have a problem," Chang-hoon says three days after starting the camp. "Seventeen hours a day online is fine." But later that day, he seems to start changing his mind, if only slightly.

As a drill instructor barks orders, Chang-hoon and 17 other boys march through a cold autumn rain to the obstacle course. Wet and shivering, Chang-hoon climbs the first obstacle, a telephone pole with small metal rungs. At the top, he slowly stands up, legs quaking, arms outstretched for balance. Below, the other boys hold a safety rope attached to a harness on his chest.

"Do you have anything to tell your mother?" the drill instructor shouts from below.

"No!" he yells.

"Tell your mother you love her!" orders the instructor.

"I love you, my parents!" he says.

"Then jump!" orders the instructor. Chang-hoon squats and leaps to a nearby trapeze, catching it in his hands.

After Chang-hoon descends, he says, "That was better than games!"

Was it thrilling enough to wean him from the internet?

"I'm not thinking about games now, so maybe this will help," he says. "From now on, maybe I'll just spend five hours a day online."



NSW Govt sets up mental health helpline for flood victims

11 Jan 2008

New South Wales Health Minister Reba Meagher says a mental health helpline has been set up to assist people in flood-affected areas of the State's north coast.

Ms Meagher visited residents in the village of Coraki today, where floodwater forced staff at the local hospital to sleep on-site for several days.

She says the community has rallied in tremendous fashion, but the stress involved can take a toll.

"Losing property, losing stock or seeing your much-loved home affected by floodwaters can be really stressful for people," she said.

"Sometimes they just need a bit of a helping hand over the rough periods."

The helpline number is 1300 364 968.



National forum attendees richer

29 Oct 2007

A recent forum provided Parentline and Maternal and Child Health Line service managers the opportunity to share their stories of success, explore challenges and show support for each other.

Victoria was the host for the third **National and New Zealand Parenting and Maternal and Child Health Line Forum** on the 22-23 October 2007.

The forum attracted a large number of attendees, with sector representation from every Australian state and New Zealand.

Forum details

Over the two days a variety of exceptional Victorian speakers presented their research findings and program learnings.

Speakers included:

- Diana Smart, Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Robyn Miller, Principal Child

Protection
Practitioner

- key speakers from the Parenting Research Centre.

Topics covered online counselling, emotional intelligence and parenting, and working with fathers.

Response

overwhelmingly positive

Feedback from participants was positive, highlighting the richness of information and the value of hearing about service initiatives from other states and New Zealand.

One attendee, Kim Litchfield from Parentline Queensland, commented, 'A huge amount of information was passed on and much was achieved in 2 days.'

Anne Marie Morris from New Zealand Plunketline said she was 'richer for the experience and knowledge shared.'

Further information

Adelaide will be the host of the next annual forum in 2008.

For more information about Parentline visit the [Parentline website](#).

Visit the [Children, youth and families website](#) for more information on maternal and child health line.

Authorised by Stuart Lindner - A/Regional Director Eastern Metropolitan Region



Credit is becoming simpler

Daniel Dasey & Michelle Taverniti
9 Dec 2007

CONSUMERS will soon be able to pay for goods at hundreds of retail outlets with a simple wave of their credit card as smart card technology not requiring a signature is rolled out across NSW.

The Commonwealth Bank has announced it expects hundreds of businesses, including McDonald's, Caltex and IGA, to adopt its PayPass technology in 2008. To make a payment up to \$35, a consumer just taps a silicon-chip embedded credit card - or mobile phone - on a scanner and the amount is automatically deducted.

In a trial last month, credit chips were also inserted in mobile phones that enabled owners to likewise "tap and go" for purchases.

But the increasing ease with which cards can be used is expected to worsen the country's credit problem.

Figures showing our collective card debt could hit \$43 billion - or more than \$2000 for every Australian - by the end of this month have created concerns for the fledgling Labor Government

and prompted warnings from consumer groups.

The nation's new Assistant Treasurer, Chris Bowen, announced yesterday he would examine the issue of banks sending unsolicited credit increase offers to customers.

Mr Bowen said he was concerned consumers unable to afford credit were receiving offers that would place them even further in debt.

"The idea is making sure that the financial services providers are not writing to people already over their heads and offering them more [credit]," Mr Bowen said.

Michael Gleeson, from the Commonwealth Bank, said the PayPass system was being phased in across the state following trials on the Central Coast, Wollongong and in Sutherland.

"The card never leaves your hand. As a result of that, the chances of fraud are virtually eliminated," he said. "It's far more secure technology. There are no consumer repercussions at all. In the event that the card is lost, stolen or inappropriately used, the bank assumes the risk, not the consumer."

Mr Gleeson said 33,000 PayPass chips had been distributed in 40 trial locations. "There was no instance of fraud at all," he said.

The most recent Reserve Bank figures show Australians owed \$41.1 billion on their credit cards at the end of September, up \$4 billion, or more than 10 per cent, from the September 2006 figure of \$37.1 billion. The December 2006 debt was just under \$39 billion, suggesting Australians will owe \$43 billion by month's end. The amount owed on credit cards has close to tripled since 2000. Card spending typically blows out \$1 billion in December alone.

Two of the country's leading consumer groups have called for tougher regulations for banks making unsolicited offers of credit increases.

Their calls come as Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia figures reveal a 16.9 per cent rise in insolvencies across Australia. Excessive use of credit cards was a key driver of bankruptcies, after being unemployed. Figures up to the end of June showed 25,238 people went bankrupt last year.

Katherine Lane, from the Consumer Credit Legal Centre, said families were struggling to make credit-card payments after being hit by a fiscal "triple whammy".

"First there's inflation - things are costing more," she said. "Then we have higher debt and then higher repayments on the debt because of the interest rate rises. It's a recipe for financial hardship."

Ms Lane said the legal centre telephone counselling service typically handled 12,000 calls from people in credit trouble each year and was unable to respond to a further 300 to 500 a month. Christopher Zinn, spokesman for the Australian Consumers' Association, agreed something needed to be done about the number of credit offers people were receiving.

"There's all kind of inducements and seductions," he said. "What they never tell you is the stories of people who went for the offer and were unable to service the loan."

Mr Zinn warned families to think twice before going over their head on credit. "There are some people who carry debt for almost the whole year until the next Christmas," he said.



\$800,000 Boost for Babes Foundation

Melissa Meeham
15 Nov 2007

NATIONAL grief counselling charity the Bonnie Babes Foundation has welcomed the announcement of a one-off \$800,000 grant to support its baby, neonatal and family life-saving work.

Berwick resident Ann Stanton was present for the

announcement made by federal Health Minister Tony Abbott last week.

Ms Stanton, 54, was 20 when she lost her much-wanted baby Louise.

Ms Stanton did not receive any counselling in the hospital and caught a bus home after her release from hospital.

With no access to counselling and support, Ms Stanton blamed herself for Louise's loss.

"I represent the older generation of women who have lost children through miscarriage," Ms Stanton said.

More than 20 years after losing Louise, Ms Stanton met Rachel Stanfield-Porter, who had recently established the Bonnie Babes Foundation in her suburban home.

Ms Stanton finally received the help and support she needed and has been involved as a volunteer for the past 13 years.

"The silent sorrow experienced by families struggling to cope with a loss in this way is profound. One in four pregnancies ends in a loss in Australia, one in 20 babies are born prematurely and one in 200 much-wanted babies are stillborn," Ms Stanfield-Porter said.

Bonnie Babes Foundation provides resources and support to maternity hospitals across Australia, as well as to GPs,

obstetricians and gynaecologists, maternal, child and community health centres.

"This support will enable us to extend the availability of our much needed grief resources across the country, as well as supporting our education of health professionals to empower them to provide appropriate, timely assistance to families in a dignified manner," Ms Stanfield-Porter said.

"The Government's announcement of funds to establish a free call number will allow those experiencing the loss of a baby to access immediate grief counselling over the telephone, 24 hours a day, every day of the year without the burden of paying STD charges.

"The foundation receives many calls for help from families in rural, regional and remote areas where provision of general health care is lacking."

If you have information that you would like published in our newsletter please email us at

info@helplines.org.au



More quit smoking after bans

Rachael Brown
2 Oct 2007

Anti-smoking campaigner, Quit, is reporting a 20 per cent boost in weekend calls to its helpline, since smoking bans were introduced.

Since the bans on smoking in indoor public places began in July, 800 smokers have called the helpline on weekends.

Quit's Executive Director Fiona Sharkie says the increase represents a major cultural shift.

She says five years ago, smokers would have been too busy going out on Saturday and Sunday to consider quitting.

Ms Sharkie says smokers are breaking their habits because of a more supportive environment.

"Bars and clubs were typically places where people could go and smoke so in a sense that acted as a positive sort of encouragement or endorsement for smoking more cigarettes," she said.

"Whereas now bars and clubs with the smoke free bans have become places that discourage or not

encourage you to smoke," Ms Sharkie said.



Learn to be a Counselling Supervisor

Counselling supervision provides a safeguard for clients, a support for counsellors and a process through which counsellors can develop their skills. It is also a necessary requirement for counsellors to maintain professional registration with most industry Associations.

As a counsellor, becoming a Professional Supervisor is also an excellent way to develop your network and earn extra income. You can learn the specific skill set to become a Professional Supervision through AIPC's self-paced program.

For more information, please visit www.aipc.net.au/enquiries/supertrain/



'Presenteeism' costs Qld businesses \$5.1 billion

'Presenteeism' is a major financial concern for Queensland businesses, costing more than \$5.1 billion each year, says Dr Nick Foster of Mensline Australia.

Depression is the number one cause (19%) of growing workplace trend - whereby employees attend work but are not fully functioning - amounting to a cost of over \$976 million for Queensland businesses.

"Just as organisations have long realised the economic benefits of a physically fit workforce, innovative businesses are working to reduce 'presenteeism', which often finds its basis in poor personal relationships," says Foster.

Each year Mensline Australia provides telephone counselling services to over 8,000 Queensland men about family and relationship issues and how they impact their personal, professional and social lives.

Leading businessman Bob Ansett, keynote speaker at the Mensline Australia breakfast in Brisbane on

Thursday, says he experienced this very problem while establishing Budget in Australia.

"Equipping people with the skills to access psychological support is critical to business success, resulting in better engaged and higher performing staff," says Ansett.

Mensline Australia delivers the workplace training program Staying Connected, a workshop developed by the Child Support Agency. Drawing on Mensline Australia's specialist experience with men, the program provides staff with the tools to strengthen their relationships with their children post separation.

"Businesses such as Australia Post (who have implemented the Staying Connected workshop) are enjoying the financial rewards of a productive, personally engaged and positive workforce – an area which also brings satisfying social benefits for all businesses," says Foster.

Each year Mensline Australia provides telephone counselling services to over 8,000 Queensland men about family and relationship issues and how they impact their personal, professional and social lives.



VoIP is Lifeline's lifeline

17 Jan 2008

When you extend a critical lifeline to those in need, that last thing you want them to hear is a busy signal.

Lifeline Australia provides a nationwide, 24-hour telephone counselling service manned by volunteers spread throughout the country. The service was founded in 1963 by the late Reverend Dr Sir Alan Walker, and originally operated out of the Methodist Central Mission in Sydney.

Today it has grown to rely on more than 4,000 Australian volunteers across 63 sites, many in regional areas. The service receives roughly one call every minute, with the average call lasting around 20 minutes.

Growing demand meant more than half of incoming calls were going unanswered, says Lifeline Australia chief executive Dawn O'Neil. O'Neil is also the Deputy Chair of the Mental Health Council of Australia and a board member of the Commonwealth appointed

National Advisory Council for Suicide prevention. "In the early nineties we went to a '13' system, which allowed people to access our service through a single phone number, however the technology sitting underneath remained exactly the same. Initially people could only call the 13 number and connect to the nearest Lifeline centre. Over time we were able to overflow those calls if that line was busy to another location, but only four locations in total."

Looking for a better way to utilise its available volunteer base, Lifeline Australia spent eighteen months examining how it could matching demand and supply. "Was it that we needed more counsellors? Was it that we needed them in different locations? When we added up the amount of counsellors and the number of incoming calls we actually had enough supply to meet demand but we just couldn't get them to match up," O'Neil says. "We needed to set up some sort of virtual call centre so that we could flow the calls around the country nationally and match supply with demand. We could also certainly see the trend into the future was for people to want to access services like ours through a whole range of different mediums and technologies, such as email and SMS."

After one false start, Lifeline Australia turned to IT services company Getronics - which implemented Cisco's

Unified Communications Manager and Cisco Unified Contact Centre. The system uses Voice over IP to allows calls to be re-routed to any available line at any Lifeline site in the country - using a mixture of ISDN lines and DSL to provide a minimum 512 kbps link.

The key to the project was clearly defining Lifeline Australia's requirements, says Getronics consulting services director Rob McCabe. "When the project started Lifeline Australia wasn't really sure about exactly what they wanted. They knew that they weren't working efficiently because of the infrastructure they had. The knew there was technology available that could address those issues, but they didn't know what it could provide in terms of the bigger picture." "We had to get them to think about and articulate what they actually wanted so we could get a final solution in place."

With Getronics onboard and the project back on track, Lifeline Australia made fast progress. "We set ourselves an initial target which was to have an eighty five per cent call answer rate, so that callers at least getting place in the queue. We achieved that within the first month. Prior to that it was about forty per cent which is just dreadful," O'Neil says. "More than half of our centres are in rural and regional Australia. In most of those locations they did not even have a PC on the desk. So the very first thing we had to do was familiarise the

telephone counsellors with a PC. Now we've rolled out computers, IP phones, routers and printers to all the locations. Since then we've fully integrated our CRM system with the phone system so when a call comes in it automatically populates part of the call record." "Now we have visibility. We know how many calls are waiting in the queue, how many counsellors we have available across the country at any time of the day and how many are on calls. We can view all that real time, so we can finally see what we're dealing with."



New Members

By Geraldine James

A warm welcome to

- Intellectual Disability Rights Service NSW
- Impotence Australia
- PLWHA Vic
- CAPS NSW
- The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre
- Cancer Helpline SA
- Down Syndrome Society of SA
- Alzheimer's Australia SA
- LifeLine SA/NT
- Eating Disorders Foundation Inc
- National Association of People Living with HIV/Aids NSW

www.helplines.org.au



DIARY DATES

March 2008

Talk it over
**Mens
 Line**
 AUSTRALIA

7 – 8 March
 Mensline Australia
 Forging New Territory
 Sydney NSW
www.menslineaus.org.au

April 2008



16 – 18 April
 5th Australian Family &
 Community Strengths
 Conference
 Uni of Newcastle NSW
www.menslineaus.org.au

June 2008

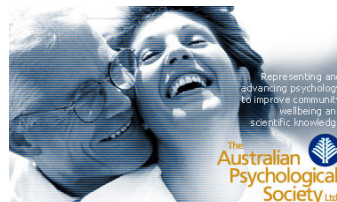


23 – 26 June
 5th International Conference
 Information Technology
 & Applications
 (ICITA 2008)
 Cairns QLD
www.icita.org

September 2008



2 – 5 September
 TheMHS Conference
 Be the Change you want
 Auckland NZ
www.themhs.org



23 – 27 September
 APS Conference
 Hobart Tasmania
 Psychology Making and Impact
www.apsconference.com.au

November 2008



5 – 9 November
 17th International
 Conference
 on Incontinence
 Hobart Tasmania
www.continence.org.au

December 2008



December
 Helplines Australia AGM
 Sydney Counselling Centre
 Parramatta
www.helplines.org.au

Future 2011



World Congress of
 Psychotherapists
 Sydney NSW
www.wcp2011.org

