

Effects of COVID-19 lockdowns on addiction to social networking sites and associations with changes in loneliness, sexual functioning, and eating styles

Rui Miguel Costa¹

Beatriz Freitas²

Beatriz Saraiva²

Guilherme Martins²

Matilde Barata²

Patrícia Marujo²

¹William James Center for Research, Ispa – Instituto Universitário,
Lisbon, Portugal

² Ispa – Instituto Universitário, Lisbon, Portugal

rcosta@ispa.pt

There are no conflicts of interest.



- **Addiction to online social media is related to a variety of mental health problems.**
- **And sexual problems? An overlooked question...**

Three studies show that social media addiction is related to sexual problems.

Alimoradi Z, Lin CY, Imani V, Griffiths MD, Pakpour AH. (2019). **Social media addiction and sexual dysfunction among Iranian women: The mediating role of intimacy and social support.** *Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 8*, 318-325.

Pawlikowska A. et al. (2022). **Internet addiction and Polish women's sexual functioning: the role of social media, online pornography, and game use during the COVID-19 pandemic - online surveys based on FSFI and BSMAS questionnaires.** *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*, 8193.

Fuzeiro V, Martins C, Gonçalves, C, Rolo Santos A, Costa RM. (2022). **Sexual function and problematic use of smartphones and social networking sites.** *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 19*, 1303-1308.

Fuzeiro V, Martins C, Gonçalves, C, Rolo Santos A, Costa RM. (2022). **Sexual function and problematic use of smartphones and social networking sites.** *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 19, 1303-1308.

- Aggregated data from four studies carried during 2018-2021.
- 946 women e 235 men: information on sexual functioning and smartphone addiction.
- 536 women e 194 men: information on sexual functioning and social media addiction.

- Smartphone Addiction Scale – Short Version (SAS –SV)
e.g., “Missed planned work due to smartphone use”.
- Internet Addiction Test (IAT) adapted to the specific use of social media
e.g., “Do your job performance or productivity suffer because of staying on social media”.
- International Index of Erectile Function (IIEF)
- Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI)
- Female Sexual Distress Scale – Revised (FSDS-R)

Male subsample

Severity of social media addiction correlates with sexual problems.

	Social media addiction	Smartphone addiction
Erectile function	-.26***	-.20***
Orgasm	-.20**	-.06
Sexual desire	-.17*	-.08
Intercourse satisfaction	-.20**	-.08
Overall sexual satisfaction	-.30***	-.08

Female subsample

Severity of social media addiction correlates with sexual problems.

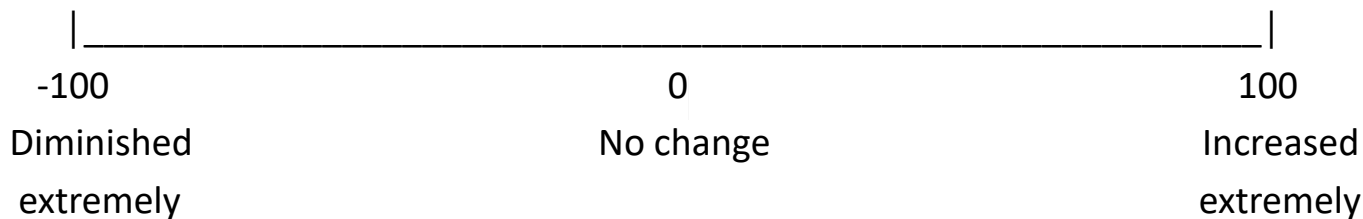
	Social media addiction	Smartphone addiction
Sexual desire	-.10*	-.06
Sexual arousal	-.22***	-.14***
Lubrication	-.13**	-.15***
Orgasm	-.20***	-.17***
Sexual satisfaction	-.23***	-.06
(Lack of) pain	-.19***	-.17***
Sexual distress	.33***	.22***

Study 2. How changes in social media addiction correlated with changes in sexual function, relationship quality, loneliness, and eating behaviors during COVID-19 lockdowns in Portugal?

- 3.353 participants completed an online survey (2.677 women, 676 men)

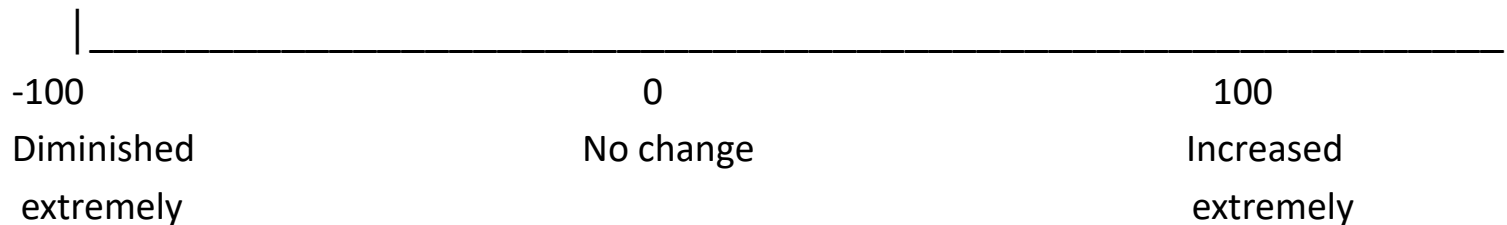
- **Adaptation of the Internet Addiction Test (IAT)**

e.g., “You stayed on social media longer than you intended”



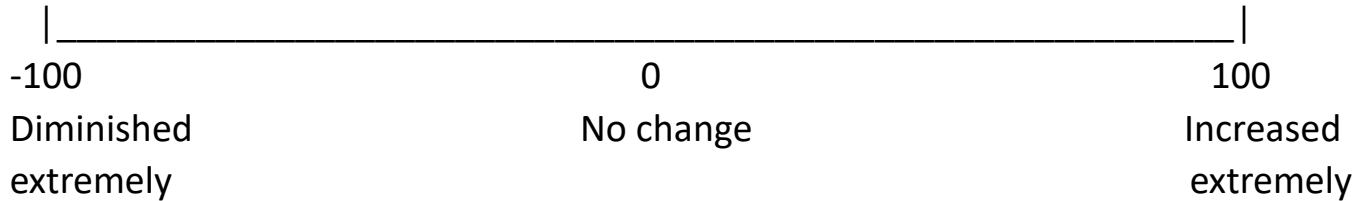
- **Adaptation of the PROMIS Loneliness Scale**

e.g., “Feeling isolated from others”



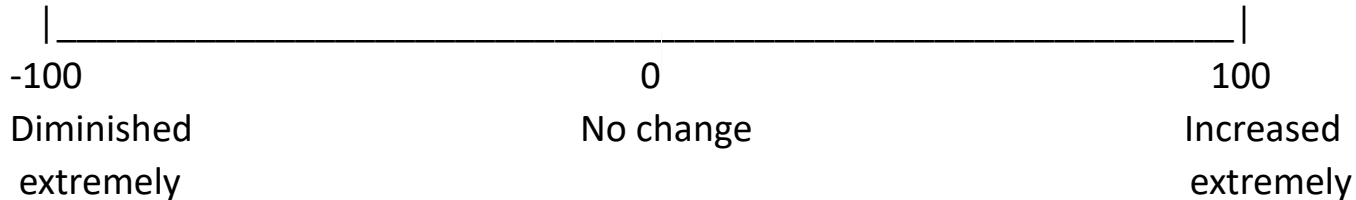
● **Adaptation of the International Index of Erectile Function**

e.g., “Erections are rigid enough to allow penetration”



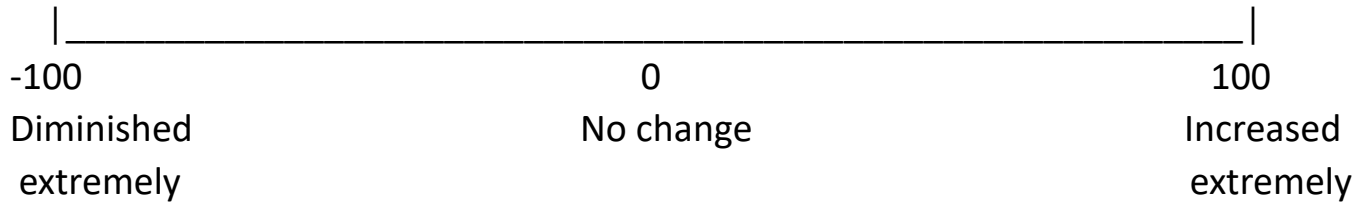
● **Adaptation of the Female Sexual Function Index**

e.g., “Level of arousal during intercourse”



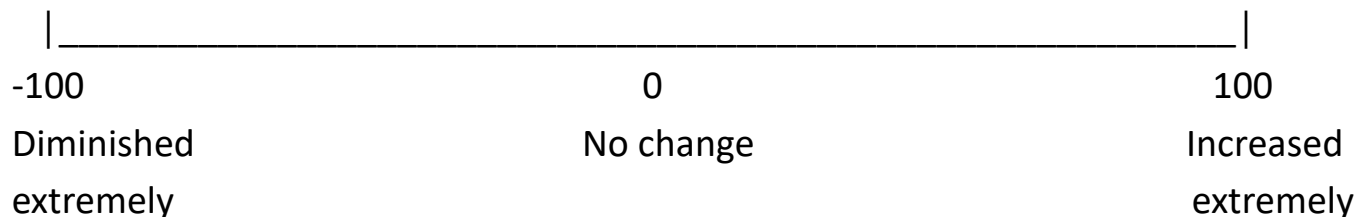
● **Adaptation of the Perceived Relationship Quality Componentes Inventory**

e.g., “Love for partner”

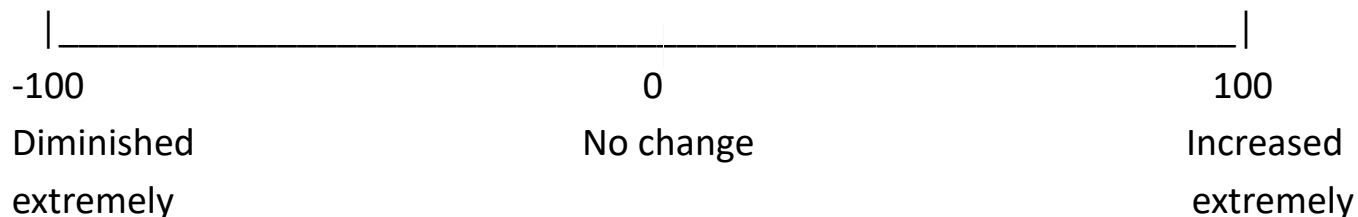


● Adaptation of the Three-Factor Eating Questionnaire

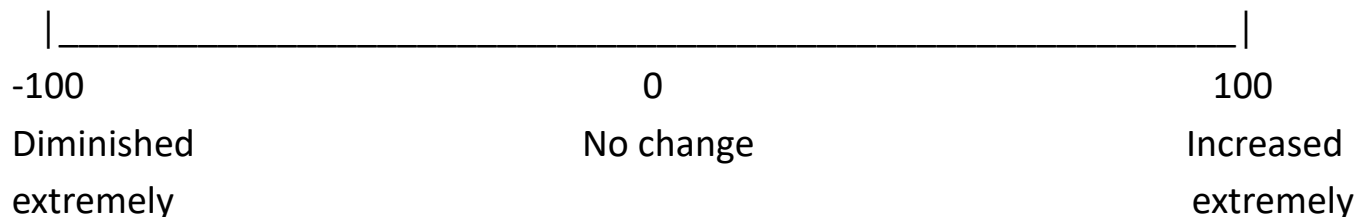
- **Emotional eating:** e.g., “I start to eat when I feel anxious”



- **Uncontrolled eating:** e.g., “Sometimes when I start eating, I just can’t seem to stop”



- **Cognitive restraint:** e.g., “I consciously restrict how much I eat during meals to avoid gaining weight”



Worsening of social media addiction correlated with worsening of sexual function, loneliness, and dysfunctional eating styles during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Portugal.

	Men Social media addiction <i>r</i> (all $p < .001$)
Erectile function	-.19
Orgasm	-.20
Sexual desire	-.30
Overall sexual satisfaction	-.21
Intercourse satisfaction	-.32
Loneliness	.27
Emotional eating	.43
Uncontrolled eating	.42
Cognitive restraint	.15

Worsening of social media addiction correlated with worsening of sexual function, loneliness, and dysfunctional eating styles during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Portugal.

	Women Social media addiction <i>R</i> (all $p < .05$)
Sexual desire	-.14
Arousal	-.23
Lubrication	-.23
Orgasm	-.20
Sexual satisfaction	-.28
(Lack of) pain	-.34
Sexual distress	.51
Loneliness	.23
Emotional eating	.25
Uncontrolled eating	.33
Cognitive restraint	.05

Worsening of social media addiction correlated with worsening of relationship quality with partner

	Women Social media addiction <i>r</i> (all $p < .001$)	Men Social media addiction <i>r</i> (all $p < .001$)
Relationship satisfaction	-.26	-.34
Relationship commitment	-.25	-.44
Relationship intimacy	-.24	-.32
Trust in partner	-.27	-.44
Passion	-.27	-.42
Love	-.27	-.40

Strongest mediators of the relationships between social media addiction and sexual problems across all dimensions – all Sobel tests significant at $p < .0000001$!!!

Conclusion

- Sexual problems and symptoms of social media addiction appear to be correlated.
- Explanatory mechanisms will have to be explored. Reductions in relationship quality with partner might play an important role.