**Presentation title:**

Treating the Couple - Exploring the impact of Sexual Addiction and compulsive sexual behaviour on the Couples' Relationships and the wider family

**Introduction:**

The National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity (NCSAC, 2007) claims that nearly six percent of the general population have a problem with Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity (SA&C) sexual behaviour. What further complicates this issue is that the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V, 2013) does not yet recognise sexual compulsivity as a disorder. SA&C sexual behaviour is a progressive intimacy disorder in which an individual cannot control his or her sexual impulses and/or actions. The individual becomes so obsessed with sexual desires and behaviours that it negatively affects other areas of his or her life, such as relationships, families and careers.

**Objective:**

The aim of this study was to explore the impact of SA&C sexual behaviour on the couple relationship. To further investigate the impact of SA&C sexual behaviour, an 18-question online survey was designed to target couples in which one member self-identified as having issues around SA&C sexual behaviour. An online survey was also considered more convenient for participants and therefore more likely to reach a wider, more diverse audience and produce a larger sample of data.

**Method:**

The research consists of mixed quantitative and qualitative research methods with thematic analysis and descriptive statistics analysis. The qualitative research assisted in describing specific aspects of participants' lives, such as in-depth insights into clients' experiences of the impacts of addiction. The qualitative data also provided data necessary to explore the impact of SA&C sexual behaviour (Chase, 2005) on couples.

To analyse the research both thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were chosen. This is because they are methods of analysis that seek to uncover patterns of meaning in respondents' accounts of experiences and they help to describe the data (Charmaz 2006; Rennie 2006).

**Findings:**

The findings of study showed that SA&C sexual behaviour presented a challenge for participant couples and had a damaging effect on their relationships. The findings also highlight the need for specialised addiction treatment and support, and the analysis illustrates how beneficial this can be for a couple in crisis. The positive news from the research findings is that the majority of relationships not only survived SA&C sexual behaviour, but 72% of participants remained in their relationship. The conclusions of this study evidenced that nearly 94% of respondents reported that negative consequences continued after problematic sexual behaviour affected their relationships. Moreover, this study showed that the majority of the participants (70%) believe that people who report with SA&C sexual behaviour think it is imperative that they are treated as a couple instead of as individuals.

**Conclusion:**

This study explored some important issues whilst examining the impact of SA&C sexual behaviour on the couple relationship. There is little doubt that SA&C sexual behaviour, linked to internet usage, will continue to proliferate. This study has sought to contribute to the rationale that, traditionally, couples' therapists have been trained to work with couples in conflict, and on psycho-sexual issues and infidelity.