

# Understanding Behavioral Addiction in Asia: Implications for Behavioral Intervention

**Prof. Catherine So-kum Tang**

## **Abstract:**

Behavioral addiction refers to an excessive and pathological involvement in an activity that exposes the individual to mood-altering stimuli to produce pleasure or relieve pain.

With rapid changes in the physical and social environment globally, new categories of behavioral addiction have also emerged. These new behavioral addictions include addiction to internet/social media use, internet gaming, internet gambling, overeating and irregular eating, excessive exercise, and compulsive buying etc. Although not yet formally recognized as a clinical disorder, these new behavioral addictions incorporate the experience of “classic” addiction symptoms similar to alcohol and drug addiction. Furthermore, available literature on substance use addiction such as smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse and gambling shows that there is a high co-morbidity with other forms of substance use and that it typically co-occurs with various physical, mental health, family, and social problems. However, it remains unclear whether the new categories of behavioral addictions will also have a high co-morbidity and have similar adverse implications. There are also concerns that existing behavioral intervention for substance use may not fully address the specific needs of individuals who engage in these new behavioral addictions. Without a good understanding of the contributing factors and their implications for intervention, it would be difficult to devise appropriate intervention strategies or make decision on the allocation of resources for public education, prevention, and intervention programs that target at reducing these new behavioral addictions.

At present, there is a paucity of research on these new behavioral addictions in Asian countries. Available studies conducted in the Western countries indicate that adolescents and young adults are the most likely to engage in the addictive behaviors, hence, this presentation will focus on young adults aged between 15 to 25 years old. This presentation will disseminate findings of a series of studies conducted in 6 urbanized regions/countries in Asia, namely China, Hong Kong and Macau, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. It will include research findings on the prevalence rates of individual addictions and their co-morbidity with other behavioral addictions, the associations between these addictions and various psychosocial and family factors, as well as various mental and physical outcomes. The implications of these results in relation to public education, prevention and intervention programs that target at reducing these new behavioral addictions will also be discussed.