



Commentary

Pornography addiction and its influence on sexual behavior, intimate relationship and other life domains

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, scientific literatures increasingly reporting about pornography addiction as a serious issue (Kar, 2016). Pornography is defined as the portrayal of sexual subject matter for the purpose of sexual arousal using various means that include books, magazines, drawings, videos, and video gaming. In other terms, it is the depiction of the act rather than the act itself (George et al., 2019). In recent years, pornography viewing has increased significantly with easy access to internet and mobile phones. Self-perceived pornography addiction (SPPA) is becoming more widely recognised as a phenomenon in science and popular culture, with critics warning of the alleged negative consequences. Despite this, 'pornography' or 'porn addiction' is not a scientifically recognised condition, and scholars disagree on its meaning, whether it even exists (Duffy et al.,

2016). Weiss (2014), a well-known psychotherapist who specializes in treating sex and porn addiction, suggested that regular watching of pornography for 12 or more hours a week signals an addiction (Williams, 2017). In today's world, pornography addiction can't be thought without thinking about the internet addiction as internet is the most common mode that delivers pornographic content readily to its consumers, whenever they need (Kar, 2016).

Excessive pornography exposure has been linked to psychiatric comorbidities including anxiety and depression, as well as sexual dysfunction. Individuals, who are addicted to pornography have lower levels of social integration, more behavioural problems, more depressive symptoms, and less emotional bonding with their partners (George et al., 2019).

People may perceive pornography as 'real' rather than 'fantasy' and this negatively influences the attitude and real-life sexual behaviour, particularly when people's source of sexual information is limited (Lim et al., 2016). Teenagers and adolescents gain most of their sexual knowledge from their peer (the ultimate source being internet) and through pornography. Most porn videos remain very much divergent from the reality.

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They create various false impressions on mind like bigger the size of the penis, more they will be able to satisfy their female partners or more the duration of penetration and more the moaning by female partner, more pleasurable is the sex. So rather than focusing on formation of emotional bond, and deriving pleasure from intimacy, many a times male partner ends of causing pain rather than pleasure (Jha, 2014). People tend to develop negative self-image as the males tend to look down upon their penis size, body shape, duration for which they are able to achieve erection and the females become conscious about the size of their breast, body shape, shape of genitalia, body hair and what not. This has led to increasing demands for surgeries like penile enlargement, breast implants, and labiaplasty only for aesthetic reasons (Lim et al., 2016). Most pornographic content shows male as dominant and female as a submissive partner rather than showing them as equal partners engaging in emotionally driven sexual activity, thus defining their roles (Lim et al., 2016). The content affects real-life sexual behaviour and ultimately brings frustration.

Watching excessive pornography causes repeated release of dopamine in the reward circuit of brain causing neuroplastic changes which reinforces the experience. It also leads to development of tolerance so that during natural sexual intercourse the individual has lesser level of excitement. To get the high level of sexual excitement the individual thus becomes dependent on explicit content and internet pornography (Love et al., 2015). When these individuals actually indulge in sex, they tend to get lesser gratification with the partner. Pornography use causes alteration in the sexual threshold. Pornography has unique properties in the sense that there is a limitless novelty, potential for easy escalation to more extreme form of pornographic content, video format, high-quality content etc. Such exotic

content is potent enough to condition sexual arousal to pornography use which does not readily transit to real-life partnered sex, and thus, sex with the desired partner may not meet the expectations and arousal declines (Landripet and Štulhofer, 2015).

Individuals develop undue expectation from the partner as well as from themselves. Some men develop frustration when they are not able to perform longer enough (even when there is no complaint from the partner). Some tend to force their partner into uncomfortable positions and indulge in unnatural sex as they try to imitate the porn contents. In order to fulfil the fantasy, these individuals forget the norms of consensual sex, leading to the increasing rates of violence against women. The increasing popularity of heterosexual anal sex, which many women actually dislike, has also been attributed anecdotally to its depiction in pornography. There are studies suggesting that watching violence in pornography has led to increased misogyny and gender-based violence in real life. Thus, the locus of control which is ideally divided between both the partners in a natural sex leading to intimacy and harmony becomes centered around one individual only.

An early encounter with pornography leads to over-enthusiastic viewing of the sexual content. People forget that sex is just a part of life and not the core of it, with excessive pornography use, their life domains become restricted to just one. Excessive use of pornography makes the individual socially aloof and negatively impacts social and family life. As pornography addiction is seen mostly in adolescents, there are adverse effects on the academic achievements (Agarwal and Kar, 2015).

There are impacts on physical health too. Only 2-3% of online heterosexual pornography depict condom use. Non-use

of condoms in sexual intercourse is a key factor in HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) risk (Lim et al., 2016). Increased pornography viewing has been associated with early sexual debut, more number of partners, casual sex and multiple partnered sex. Recently these sites have included live audio/video calling options and social networking thus increasing the risk of multiple sexual encounters. Including gaming and premium membership subscription with pornography sites has emerged as a way to dig in financially and making the use further more addictive. These individuals are also at higher risk of falling prey of cyber-crimes, sexual crimes and getting conned.

Recommendation to alleviate the impact of pornography addiction on various life domains

Viewing pornography is extremely popular and trending nowadays but due to lack of research, the impact of watching excessive of it remains uncertain. Viewing pornography is one of the recreational and leisure activity.

It's excessive use and neglecting mainstream activities is definitely problematic. This undoubtedly has a negative impact on mental health. It affects an individual's personal, social, and work-life as the person remains mentally occupied with thoughts of pornography. There is lack of awareness among individuals about the secondary issues which they face. Some of these being negative self-identity, reduced self-confidence and negative body image which needs to be addressed during the psychiatric interview. As most viewers who tend to develop addictive behaviour are of impressionable age, parents need to keep a check on them while taking care that they don't become very intrusive. To know and deal with the actual impact of excessive use of pornography it is important that at least every case, especially the younger ones presenting to the OPDs with complains of excessive mobile phone use, decreased family interaction and remaining in closed doors using internet for long hours should be assessed for excessive use of pornography and should be given therapy for same.

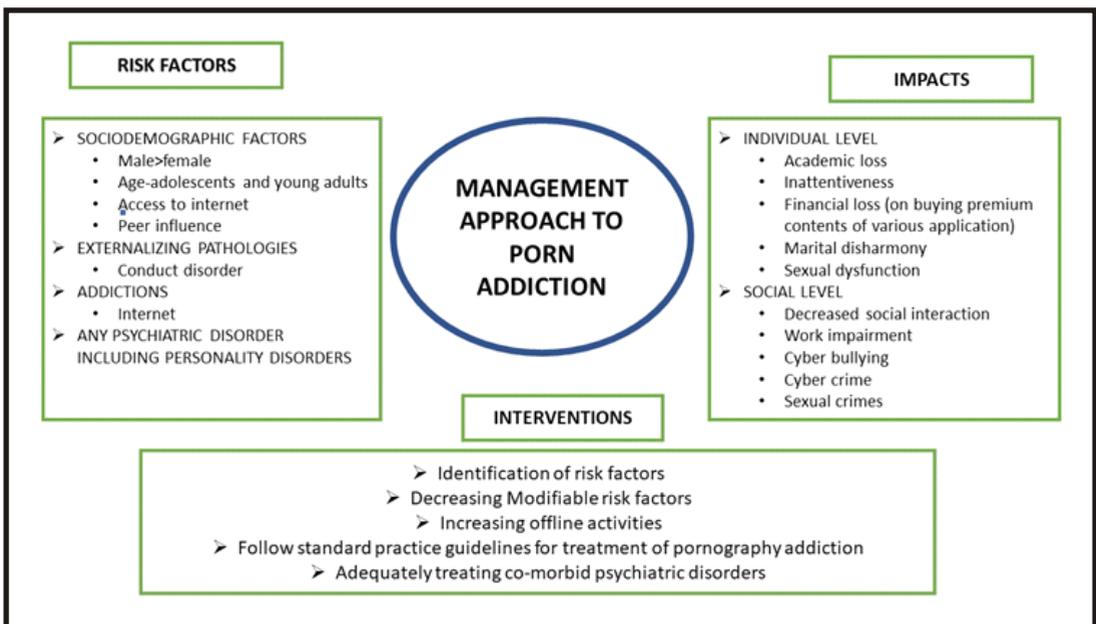


Figure 1. Summary of management approach to pornography addiction

Pornography use usually begins at young age and it is difficult to ask for the caregiver's consent to interview these age groups, which therefore poses an obstacle in providing treatment and further research. Questionnaire on the use of porn and its impact on the lives of individuals is difficult to ask, thus limiting our knowledge in this field.

Most of the researches generally take into account the male use of pornography, there by ignore 50% of the population, and thus there is a lot of biased data. There are reports that pornography viewing by the female partner increases sexual gratification whereas excessive viewing of porn by the males are linked to decrease sexual satisfaction for both partners (Lim et al., 2016). Rather than

completely banning pornography, incorporating sex education in schools and colleges is important. They should have the knowledge to differentiate fantasy from reality. Pornography should not be the sole source of information about sex. Along with this, content available in pornography needs to be filtered, monitored and some of it needs to be completely banned. This includes showing aggression, sadomasochism, bestiality and child pornography etc. The management approach to porn addiction (figure 1) emphasizes on identifying the risk factors and impact of pornography addiction on the well being of the individual. Addressing the modifiable risk factors adequately is expected to provide benefits in individuals with pornography addiction.

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