



Commentary

Child pornography : Behavioural insights on adolescent sexuality

Maneesha Varghese Pellissery

Masters Student, School of Allied Health, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK

Date of Submission :

26 September 2022

Date of Acceptance :

02 November 2022

Key words:

Child pornography, Behaviour,
Adolescents, Adolescent sexuality

Abstract

Exposure to the modern internet world has resulted in positive and negative impacts on children, adolescents, and adults. Advancements in technology and exposure to the internet have tremendously contributed to the rise in online crimes involving children. Child pornography is a dreadful offense that can knowingly or unknowingly destroy the mental and physical health of a child involved in it. Watching pornography, showing sexual behaviours, and being curious about understanding sexuality is a part of the normal behaviour of an adolescent. However, these behavioural changes leading to dangerous habits need serious attention. Adolescent sexuality is significantly associated with their habits during development and peer groups. When these habits turn into addictions, clinical measures must be considered.

Introduction

Adolescence is a progression stage where prominent sexual developments occur in every individual when puberty is attained. Fortenberry (2013) described adolescent sexuality as an act of risk-taking which needs wide social measures to control. Physical,

psychological, and social aspects have equivalent implications in determining sexual behaviours along with peer pressure, where peers are the powerful socialization agents (Abbot and Treboux, 2001). An adolescent's thought process tends to explore and understand sexuality by various means, which is impacted readily by the peer group. This develops a curiosity among them, encouraging watching pornography leading to addiction and following sexual practices. Hence becoming the victim of sexual abuse is also not uncommon. Ministry of Women and Child Development explains child pornography as any visual portrayal that includes child sexual explicit conduct in a photograph, video, digital or system-generated images identical to

Corresponding author: Dr. Maneesha Varghese Pellissery

Email: manishamargaretta@gmail.com

How to cite the article: Pellissery, M. V. (2022). Child pornography: Behavioural insights on adolescent sexuality. *Indian Journal of Health, Sexuality and Culture*, 8(2), 96–99.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7503282

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 License which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

a genuine child or depicted as a child (India Code, 2019). This addiction can negatively impact the behaviour of adolescents or may act in harmful sexual ways.

Child pornography and adolescent sexuality

The internet era has enabled access to multiple things at the fingertip, which leads to favorable as well as adverse impacts. One of the adverse effects is the exposure to sexually explicit content on the internet triggered by behavioral, social, and physical changes in adolescents. Phishing and hacking are some of the online crimes. Child pornography is considered a dreadful offense happening on the internet. Sexuality is a complicated human behaviour that is impacted by psychological factors, social and cultural norms, appearance, and experiences and is very specific for adolescents (Kar et al., 2015). A cross-sectional study in six European countries has portrayed that male adolescents showed the greater possibility of pornography exposure than females (Andrie et al, 2021). Current studies from the UK illustrated that nearly 53% of children aged 11-16 years are exposed to online pornography, and most of them have seen it before 14 years of age (Quadara et al., 2017).

Different reasons are identified as why individuals participate in child pornography, such as sexual gratification, control, and emotional getaway from real-life scenarios such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Pulido, 2014). Children arouse them, they usually consider themselves like children, and feel less threatened by a child (Seto, 2009). The raised amount of child pornography material is a contributing factor which is also passed to peer networks through mobile phones, thus causing other teens to watch pornographies. The statistics by Internet Watch Foundation (2019) showed an alarming trend in child sexual abuse materials compared

to 2018, which insisted European Commission prioritize this issue (European Commission, 2020). Considering a teenager, once exposed to any pornography materials, knowingly or unknowingly, they may not be able to stop watching and can make this a habit that keeps on growing along with them, leading to pedophilia (Raising children, 2020).

Child pornography: behavioural changes in adolescents

As part of the healthy development of an adolescent, it is quite normal that they show most sexual behaviors. Parents do not have to raise concerns about such actions. Teenagers may be sexually active with someone of similar age or opposite sex and masturbate in private. However, some behaviours might not be normal or need serious consideration, such as persistently feeling or showing their genitals, watching online pornography often, finding ways to stay alone with younger children, showing sexual content to them, and compelling others to engage in sexual practices (Raising children, 2020). Behavioural science research has indicated that the sexual attitudes of teens as well as sexual behaviours are influenced by pornography exposure (Andrie et al, 2021). Dysfunctional internet behaviour (DIB) is a serious threat to adolescents, where internet pornography was the top searched term (Andrie et al, 2021). Addiction to child pornography may increase the probability of earliest first-time sexual experience, preferably with younger children resulting in child abuse. Such adolescents imagine children as their tools for sexual gratification, and these children will be familiar with them in some ways. Evidence also proposes that pornographies shape sexual practices which are not real, thus, the thoughts are directed as it is normal to behave to a child in the way they have seen in the pornographies (Quadara et al., 2017). The human brain is amazing, and a teen's brain is supersensitive to certain stimuli, where behaviours can become

habitual very soon. Prolonged exposure of an adolescent to child pornography videos can cause their brain to create deep neural pathways which make them eager to watch pornography again, persisting even when they are an adult. Child pornography in every way harms children as well as adolescents both emotionally and physically.

Child abuse and pornography

Online pornography access is effortless nowadays and raises considerations about the health and well-being of children. Children are forced to engage in unwanted sexual activities that later adversely affect them. Adolescents exposed to these pornographies in various ways can be addicted, resulting in dangerous behavioural changes that even harm children (Raising children, 2020). According to the reports by CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention), 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 13 boys are exposed to some kind of sexual exploitation (CDC, 2022). Child pornography is a way where adolescents find sexual gratification when exposed, which leads them to think that it is normal to behave to a child in a way they have seen. Premature sexual experience curiosity also leads to abuse (Quadara et al., 2017). A crucial factor here is that the abuse victims are known to the predators in one way or another. Other forms of abuse that children may face from adolescents include continuously touching the genitals of children, persistently showing their genitals to children, and using sexually explicit language (Raising children, 2020).

Pornography addiction in adolescents and clinical implications

Studies have reported that pornography usage has various consequences. However, in contrast, possibilities of favorable effects of watching pornography are also mentioned in them. Defining pornography as unhealthy or healthy depends upon who defines it, particularly among adolescents (Farre et al,

2020). When watching pornography is unhealthy, it turns out to be an addiction. From the clinical point of view, it is vital to assess the influence of child pornography in developing adolescent sexuality, associated behaviours, and lifestyle. Adolescents begin to watch child pornography for various reasons, where peer pressure is the most common (Abbott and Treboux, 2001). They may not be able to control their habit, and behaviour changes are seen in them that can even harm the children. For such adolescents, interventions and treatment methods should identify the problem initially and then treat it with the same importance as substance or alcohol addiction. Counseling and behavioural therapies can help them rather than isolating them from exposure to harmful content (Haney, 2006). Clinicians will have to evaluate the correlation between multiple variables and the consumption of child pornography to initialize better preventive measures for problems related to adolescent sexuality.

Conclusion

This article focuses on the behavioural changes in adolescent sexuality due to exposure to child pornography. Various reasons are seen for an adolescent to watch child pornography that can eventually lead to pornography addiction and child abuse. It is not a matter of concern when adolescents watch or show sexual behaviour as it is a part of their healthy development. However, parents must provide their children with proper care and treatment when they show any sort of serious sexual behaviour. While evaluating the relationship between pornography and their habits, clinicians should be able to figure out the actual problem behind it so that clinicians can tackle it effectively.

Acknowledgment : None

Conflict of interest: None

References

- Abbott, G.S. and Treboux, D. Teen Sexuality, Editor(s): Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Balt es, International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, Pergamon, 2001, pp.15537-15540.
- Andrie, E.K., Sakou, I.I., Tzavela, E.C., Richardson, C. and Tsitsika, A.K. (2021). Adolescents' online pornography exposure and its relationship to sociodemographic and psychopathological correlates: a cross-sectional study in six European countries. *Children*, 8(10), p.925.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Fast Facts: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse | Violence Prevention. <<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html>>
- European Commission., 2020. Increased amount of child sexual abuse material detected in Europe. <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/increased-amount-child-sexual-abuse-material-detected-europe-2020-04-28_en>
- Fortenberry, J.D. (2013). Puberty and adolescent sexuality. *Hormones and behaviour*, 64(2), pp.280-287.
- Farré, J.M., Montejo, A.L., Agulló, M., Granero, R., ChiclanaActis, C., Villena, A., Maideu, E., Sánchez, M., Fernández-Aranda, F., Jiménez-Murcia, S. and Mestre-Bach, G. (2020). Pornography use in adolescents and its clinical implications. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 9(11), p.3625.
- Haney, J.M. (2006). Teenagers and pornography addiction: Treating the silent epidemic. *Vistas: Compelling perspectives on counseling*, pp.49-52.
- India Code. (2019). Section 2 Definitions. <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC_CEN_13_14_00005_201232_1517807323686&orderno=2>
- Kar, S.K., Choudhury, A. and Singh, A.P. (2015). Understanding normal development of adolescent sexuality: A bumpy ride. *Journal of human reproductive sciences*, 8(2), p.70.
- Pulido, M. (2014). Internet Child Pornography: Who Is at the Keyboard? https://www.huffpost.com/entry/internet-child-pornography_b_4562194 [Last accessed on 28-10-2022].
- Quadara, A., El-Murr, A. and Latham, J. (2017). The effects of pornography on children and young people. Australian Institute of Family Studies: Melbourne.
- Raisingchildren. (2020). Problematic and harmful sexual behaviour in children and teenagers. <<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/development/puberty-sexual-development/problematic-sexual-behaviour>>
- Seto, M.C. (2009). Pedophilia. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 5, pp.391-407.