



Review Article

Pornography, sexuality, and internet addiction: Psychological impacts across the lifespan and preventive strategies for youth

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Abstract

As people age, their sexuality evolves. Youth is a critical time for sexual development, marked by curiosity and exploration. In adulthood, individuals often face challenges like maintaining intimacy. The influence of pornography varies across life stages, serving as an informal teacher for youth but potentially leading to unfulfilled expectations or relationship issues for adults. Early exposure to online pornography can have significant psychological impacts on youth, affecting mental health, sexual development, and overall wellbeing. Research shows that such exposure can lead to hypersexualisation, skewed perspectives on sex, and misconceptions about sexual behaviour. Adolescents addicted to pornography may suffer from cognitive and emotional impairments, including obsessive-compulsive thoughts, sleep disturbances, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. This can result in decreased life satisfaction, mental health issues like depression and anxiety, and problematic sexual behaviours in adulthood. Excessive pornography consumption is linked to dangerous sexual behaviours, internet addiction, and distorted sexual standards, potentially normalising aggressive sexual activities. Forensic implications include a higher risk of developing paraphilias, engaging in sexual aggression, or becoming victims of online sexual victimisation. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive education,

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Sexuality, Youth, Pornography, Internet addiction, India, Computer misuse

parental monitoring, and regulatory measures to mitigate the adverse effects of early pornography exposure on adolescents.

Introduction

People change in many ways as they get older, and sexuality is no exception. This evolution frequently touches on the usage of pornography, a complicated and contentious subject. Age-related physical and psychological changes, personal experiences, and cultural attitudes all have an

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impact on the complex interaction that exists between sexuality, ageing, and pornography consumption. Youth is a crucial time for sexual development, characterised by sexual orientation construction, curiosity, and exploration.^[1,2,3]

People's views about sexuality change as they grow older and eventually make the shift from childhood to adulthood. People frequently get into committed relationships as adults and have new difficulties, like sustaining closeness and sexual desire. The influence of pornography on sexuality is multifaceted and varies greatly depending on the stage of life. Pornography can serve as an informal teacher for young people, frequently filling in the gaps left by insufficient systems of sexual education. Pornography can be a source of unfulfilled expectations and relationship problems for adults, or it can be a tool for discovery and fulfilment. Another important effect of pornography is psychological.^[1] Consuming pornography can cause addiction or even feelings of guilt and shame for many people. Pornography, internet addiction, and pathological computer misuse are becoming more widely acknowledged as serious behavioural concerns that are frequently linked to a range of psychological and social issues. Numerous research has looked at the causes of these behaviours as well as any possible repercussions. There are progressively pressing issues facing contemporary society. This review explores the many facets of these problems, including genetic susceptibilities, epidemiology, co-occurring mental illnesses, and therapies. It offers thorough knowledge based on current research findings.^[4,5]

Epidemiology, diagnostics and comorbidities

Sun et al. (2016) investigated the genetic elements that contribute to internet overuse and hypothesised that some genetic profiles may guard against it. This study discovered that inattention due to specific genetic markers could lessen the likelihood of internet misuse, disputing the concept that it is solely an addiction. By looking at genetic loci related to inattention, the researchers discovered that those who carried specific alleles (e.g., DRD4 2R and 7R, 5-HTTLPR long) were less likely to acquire internet overuse habits. This suggests that hereditary variables associated with

attentiveness play a significant role in internet usage patterns, potentially separating internet overuse from classic addiction models.^[1] Sim et al. (2012) present a conceptual framework for analysing pathological technology usage, encompassing computers, video games, and the internet. They prefer the term "Pathological Technology Use" (PTU) over "internet addiction" due to its broader relevance and construct validity. The study underscores the need for a uniform set of diagnostic criteria to facilitate research and treatment of PTU, addressing various aspects of this behavioural condition.^[5] Petersen et al. (2009) provide a thorough examination of the global epidemiology of pathological internet use (PIU), highlighting prevalence rates ranging from 1.5% to 8.2%. Their research emphasises the necessity for reliable diagnostic techniques, which are critical for understanding the disorder's reach and impact.^[2] Aznar Díaz et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive review and meta-analysis, identifying diseases associated with problematic internet usage (PIU), such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, stress, sleep difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and eating disorders. This analysis highlights the extensive effects of PIU on physical and mental health, calling for interdisciplinary approaches to address these interconnected issues.^[4]

Baroni et al. (2019) explored internet addiction in individuals undergoing substance abuse therapy. The study revealed that individuals using stimulants like cocaine exhibited higher rates of internet and pornography addiction compared to those using sedatives such as heroin and alcohol. This suggests that internet use may act as a "stimulant" for individuals with existing addictive behaviours, stressing the need for targeted therapies for this demographic.^[3] Petersen et al. (2009) also address the significant comorbidity of PIU with psychiatric disorders like ADHD and mood disorders. These findings highlight the complexities of PIU, underscoring the importance of comprehensive diagnostic criteria and treatment strategies that consider coexisting conditions.^[2]

Early exposure to pornography's psychological effects on youth

Early exposure to pornography has a substantial

psychological impact on young people's mental health, sexual development, and overall wellbeing. Early exposure to pornography has a substantial impact on teens' psychosexual development. Gasso and Bruch-Granados (2021) found that early exposure to pornographic material can result in hyper-sexualisation and altered conceptions of sex and relationships. Young people frequently have incorrect expectations and beliefs about sex, which can influence their future sexual behaviours and relationships.^[6] Teenagers who become addicted to online pornography have serious emotional and cognitive problems, according to research by Setyawati et al. (2020). These include an intense urge to have sex, obsessive-compulsive thinking about sexual content, and sleep problems brought on by persistently visualising sexual scenarios. These cognitive effects might cause social disengagement and make it harder to build positive interpersonal relationships.^[7] There is a connection between early exposure to pornography and poor mental health consequences. According to Young's 2017 study, early exposure can have a detrimental effect on an adult's sexual conduct, life satisfaction, and mental health. Early exposure to pornography increases the risk of mental health problems like anxiety and depression, as well as poorer life satisfaction and problematic sexual activity.^[8] A child's early exposure to pornography can influence their sexual behaviour and views negatively. Adarsh and Sahoo (2023) claim that consuming too much pornography as a teenager might lead to dangerous sexual practices, internet addiction, and a skewed perception of sexual norms. The normalisation of violent or non-consensual sexual actions is frequently brought about by this exposure, which can cause issues in relationships.^[9] Not to be overlooked are the forensic consequences of early exposure to pornography. According to Gasso and Bruch-Granados (2021), early exposure may raise the likelihood of paraphilias, sexual assault, and victimisation by online sexual predators. The people engaged may face serious legal and societal repercussions because of these behavioural changes.^[6]

Youth who consume pornography may spread false beliefs about relationships, sexuality, and self-worth. Numerous ways that this happens are highlighted by research:

Unrealistic expectations and misconceptions: Pornography frequently presents inflated or unrealistic sexual situations, which causes young viewers to establish false beliefs about relationships, sexual performance, and physical beauty. This causes a disconnect between impressions influenced by the media and actual experiences.^[10,11]

Persistence of sexual myths: A lot of young people who watch porn may absorb myths about intimacy and permission or preconceptions about gender roles. According to research comparing the cultural impacts of Germany and Poland, pornography can perpetuate pre-existing sexual stereotypes, which are frequently influenced by taboos in the family and society.^[11]

Effect on relationships and communication: Being exposed to pornography may make it harder to have frank conversations about sex. Young people may experience pressure to fit in with what they see on screen, which could limit their capacity to communicate real feelings and expectations in interpersonal relationships.^[10]

Damage to self-esteem: People's perceptions of their bodies and their self-worth might be adversely affected by watching well-chosen and edited content because they compare themselves to the frequently unattainable ideals presented.^[10]

Reinforcement of negative behaviours: Frequent exposure might normalise violent or non-consensual behaviours that are portrayed in some pornographic materials, which may have an impact on views towards appropriate sexual behaviour.^[11] These detrimental consequences can be lessened by educational initiatives that prioritise critical media literacy, healthy relationships, and candid conversations about sexuality. These actions encourage responsible and knowledgeable attitudes towards sexuality and provide young people with the ability to discern between fact and fantasy.

Indian internet users and pornography

Significant behavioural shifts have resulted from India's growing internet connectivity, especially regarding the consumption of pornography.

Numerous facets of this occurrence have been studied in research studies, including its frequency, consequences, and connections to other problems. In a study published in 2022, Kumar et al. investigated the prevalence and consequences of internet pornography consumption among Indian medical students. According to the study, 11% of participants used internet pornography problematically, with male and married students being more likely to do so. The results of the study indicated that longer periods of pornography usage were associated with worse overall health and a worse standard of living, indicating major effects on wellbeing and academic achievement.^[12,13] Math et al. (2014) investigated the possible connection between sexual offences in India and the use of pornography. While there was a positive correlation between internet usage and sexual crime rates, their study-which examined crime data spanning several decades-found that this association was no longer significant when population growth was considered. The findings suggest that there was no significant correlation between the prevalence of rape and other sexual offences against women and the ease of access to pornography.^[14] Shaik and Rajkumar (2015) investigated the connection between child sexual offences in India and internet use. Even after accounting for population increase, their examination of crime data showed a strong correlation between the prevalence of sexual offences against minors and internet accessibility. According to this study, more people having access to the internet may be more likely to report child sexual abuse cases because of the availability of child pornography.^[15] Sharma et al.'s (2019) survey revealed how common it was for a community sample in India to use pornography. According to the survey, 8.3% of participants had a pornography addiction; rates were greater among men. The results highlight the necessity for in-depth research to comprehend the wider ramifications of pornography use in Indian culture.^[16]

Preventive actions

Youth who consume online pornography may suffer grave consequences for their social, psychological, and emotional growth. It is essential to put preventive measures into place to lessen these effects.^[17]

- ♦ By putting limits on their gadgets and keeping an eye on the websites their kids visit, parents should actively oversee their kids' internet usage. It can be helpful to have regular conversations about internet use and its possible risks.
- ♦ Promoting open communication with kids and setting up a secure environment where kids may talk to each other about anything that happened to them online, even if it involves pornography.
- ♦ Parents ought to teach their kids the value of using the internet safely, the dangers of pornography, how to spot improper content, and what to do if they come across it.
- ♦ All-encompassing curricula that cover internet safety and the possible negative effects of pornography ought to be implemented in schools. Workshops, seminars, and curriculum integration centred on digital literacy and appropriate internet use are examples of these programmes.
- ♦ Including thorough sex education covering subjects including healthy sexual development, the distinction between relationships in real life and pornography, and the influence of pornography on attitudes towards sex and relationships.
- ♦ Promoting peer education initiatives in which more experienced students teach younger peers about the dangers of pornography and how to avoid it.
- ♦ By offering digital literacy instruction to assist young people in using the internet securely and analysing online information. This entails knowing how algorithms function, identifying manipulative content, and telling safe from dangerous stuff.
- ♦ Equipping young people with the ability to critically assess and inquire about the media they consume.
- ♦ Restricting access to pornographic websites by using parental control software, which can filter offensive content, impose usage caps, and offer activity reports.
- ♦ Verifying that social media and search engines have safe search options enabled.
- ♦ Providing young people who have been

exposed to pornography or are experiencing its effects with access to therapy and support services. They can analyse their experiences and create appropriate coping mechanisms with the aid of professional supervision.

- ♦ Forming support groups where young people can talk about their experiences and get encouragement from their peers. For people struggling with addiction or obsessive tendencies linked to pornography, this can be especially helpful.
- ♦ Including information on mental health in school curricula to assist students in comprehending the psychological effects of pornography and where to go for support if necessary.
- ♦ Enforcing age verification regulations to prevent minors from accessing pornographic websites.
- ♦ Starting community workshops and public awareness initiatives to inform people about the dangers of internet pornography and to encourage responsible internet usage.
- ♦ Providing informational materials, including pamphlets, manuals, and online resources, on safe internet behaviours and where to get assistance if you have concerns about pornography.

Discussion

India, a country of over 1.4 billion people, has a complex and multifaceted relationship with sexuality and digital content. The advent of the internet has brought about significant changes in how Indians access and engage with sexual content, including pornography. With over 700 million internet users, India is one of the largest online markets in the world. The availability and consumption of pornography have surged with the proliferation of smart phones and affordable data plans. According to Pornhub's 2019 data, India was the third-largest consumer of their content globally.^[18,19] Research suggests that internet addiction, pathological computer use, and pornography are complex problems impacted by social, psychological, and genetic variables. Comprehending these intricacies can facilitate enhanced diagnostic and therapeutic approaches,

underscoring the necessity of adopting a holistic methodology to tackle this escalating issue. Early exposure to pornography has a significant negative psychological influence on young people, impairing their general wellbeing, sexual development, and mental health. To lessen these detrimental impacts, it is imperative to address this issue through comprehensive education, parental monitoring, and policy solutions. The use of pornography by Indian internet users is a complex problem that has repercussions for crime, social conduct, and health. According to research, to fully comprehend the wider effects of pornography use in India, more studies, preventive measures, and targeted interventions are required. To mitigate the negative effects of online pornography on young people, prevention strategies must take a multidisciplinary approach, combining mental health specialists, educators, parents, and legislators. Despite its widespread consumption, pornography remains a contentious issue in India. The Indian Government has repeatedly attempted to regulate and restrict access to pornographic websites. In 2015, the Government ordered internet service providers to block 857 pornographic websites, although the ban was partially rolled back following public outcry and legal challenges. In 2018, another major crackdown led to the banning of over 800 porn websites. These efforts highlight the ongoing tension between regulatory measures and the public's demand for access to adult content.^[20,21] In contemporary India, the Kamasutra has become a symbol of cultural pride and historical liberalism in sexual matters. However, its modern interpretation often focuses more on its erotic content, sometimes overshadowing its broader philosophical and sociological insights. The commercial and popular representations of the Kamasutra in films, literature, and online content have further fuelled this perception.^[22] Despite the historical context provided by texts like the Kamasutra, modern Indian society tends to be conservative about issues of sexuality. Pornography is often viewed as morally corrupting and detrimental to social values. Critics argue that it promotes unrealistic and harmful views of sex and relationships, while supporters claim it is a legitimate form of adult entertainment and expression. Concerns about its impact on youth also shape the debate over pornography in India.

With the average age of internet users in India being relatively young, there is a significant focus on protecting minors from exposure to explicit content. This has led to discussions about the effectiveness of bans versus the need for comprehensive sex education.^[23,24] Although it is not as commonly discussed, older persons' use of pornography is a significant topic for research since it has implications for the larger context of sexuality and ageing. Studies show that older people are watching more and more porn. While younger people still make up most watchers, older adults are clearly present in this group, according to a study published in the 'Archives of Sexual Behaviour' (Wright et al., 2016).^[25] Increased accessibility to digital media and shifting social attitudes that support the consumption of pornography could have an impact on this development. The relationship between pornography, youth, age, and sexuality is complex and multidimensional. Although pornography can provide a platform for sexual education and exploration, there are possible hazards associated with it, especially for young people. It is essential to comprehend how sexuality changes over time and how pornography functions in various spheres of life to support healthy sexual development and overall wellbeing. Navigating these complications requires open communication, thorough sexual education, and a sophisticated grasp of the effects of pornography. Research by Bowling & Fritz (2021), analysing differences in sexual behaviours and aggression across various categories of pornography-specifically heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian content-has revealed notable patterns. Bisexual scenes were found to exhibit a higher prevalence of aggressive actions and overtly sexual behaviours compared to heterosexual and lesbian categories. Interestingly, the one notable exception to this trend was the depiction of female orgasms, which occurred less frequently in bisexual scenes than in the other two categories. This suggests that the portrayal of sexuality in bisexual pornography might lean toward more dynamic or sensationalised scenarios, possibly catering to a broader audience's varied preferences. In contrast, heterosexual and lesbian pornography often depicts sexual activities with a relatively lower frequency of aggressive behaviour, potentially reflecting more traditional or niche-oriented consumer expectations. These findings underline the diverse ways in which sexual

content is framed depending on its intended audience and the roles aggression and intimacy play in shaping these portrayals. Such variations not only influence viewer perceptions but also contribute to discussions about how media representations affect societal attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and consent. This highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of how different categories of sexual content can perpetuate or challenge stereotypes and norms.^[26]

Conclusion

The proliferation of websites, apps, and social media platforms has significantly increased the accessibility of pornography, drawing substantial attention from researchers. Opinions among experts remain divided regarding its societal and psychological impacts. Overindulgence in porn has been linked to inflated sexual expectations, which can cause discontent in relationships involving actual people. Griffiths, 2012 stated that Addiction to pornography is a recognised condition that can interfere with an individual's capacity to participate in happy, healthy relationships.^[27] The interplay between the internet, Kamasutra, and pornography in India reflects broader societal dynamics and cultural tensions. While the Kamasutra offers a glimpse into a historically liberal view of sexuality, modern India's relationship with pornography is marked by conservative attitudes, legal restrictions, and ethical debates. As internet access continues to grow, these issues will likely remain at the forefront of discussions about sexuality and digital content in India. We can lessen the harmful effects of pornography and create a safer online environment for young people by enforcing appropriate legislation, implementing comprehensive education, promoting digital literacy, using technological tools, offering counselling services, and encouraging community involvement.

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