



# THE MOST DANGEROUS PLAYGROUND IS NOW ... *IN OUR KIDS' POCKETS*

## Hardcore Pornography on Digital Devices Is Damaging America's Children

With more than half of children in the U.S. now owning smartphones by age 11, and the time kids spend on digital devices averaging four to seven hours per day,<sup>1</sup> we can't deny the incredible influence of the online world.

And while this technology offers many benefits to kids when it comes to both learning and entertainment, **the ease with which young children can access hardcore pornography on digital devices is deeply troubling—and damaging their development.**

### Hardcore Pornography and Children on Digital Devices



#### Readily Available

A nationally representative sample of 14- to 18-year-olds reported that 84.4% of males and 57% of females viewed pornography.<sup>1</sup> A search of slang sexual terms quickly yields myriad of results that include hardcore videos and pictures. No proof of age is required.



#### Frequently Violent

A 2022 survey found that 52% of 13- to 17-year-olds who had been exposed to pornography (73% of 1300+ sample) saw violent pornography including choking (36%), someone in pain (37%), or depictions of what appeared to be rape (19%).<sup>2</sup>



#### Poorly Controlled

Technology corporations have placed the burden on parents, schools, and even children to protect themselves from pornography, and government agencies have been slow to recognize and address childhood pornography exposure and exploitation of children online.

Virtually all devices have built-in filters to block pornography, but the filters are turned "OFF" when devices are activated. **By mandating that cell phones and tablets default to safety upon activation, parents can more easily protect their children from destructive content.**

## Damage Caused by Childhood Exposure to Pornography

Adolescents are more susceptible than adults to addictions and to developmental effects on the brain.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, there are many potential negative consequences related to children viewing pornography:

**Sexual Violence:** Longitudinal research shows that childhood exposure to violent pornography predicts a nearly six-fold increase in self-reported sexually aggressive behavior later in life.<sup>5</sup> A meta-analysis of 37 studies found that exposure to violent or rape pornography increased a child's odds of experiencing sexual exploitation by nearly three times.<sup>6</sup>

**Sharing of Self-produced Child Sexual Abuse Material:** In 2020, 34% of 13- to 14-year-olds said it is normal for kids to share self-generated nude photos of themselves with others.<sup>7</sup> Sending, receiving, and asking someone for nude images ("sexts") is significantly associated with pornography use among boys and girls.<sup>8</sup> Sexting, when involving minors, is legally classified as child sexual abuse material (child pornography) which is a serious U.S. federal crime.

**Child Sexual Exploitation:** Self-generated imagery now accounts for nearly a third of web pages featuring sexual images of children (child pornography).<sup>9</sup>

**Poor Academic Achievement:** The more adolescent boys view pornography online, the poorer their grades are.<sup>10</sup> Low academic performance among adolescents is linked with poor social skills, aggressive behavior, and earlier sexual intercourse.<sup>11</sup>

**Mental and Social Disorders:** Use of hardcore pornography is linked to harmful outcomes such as mental health problems,<sup>12</sup> child-on-child harmful sexual behaviors,<sup>13</sup> risky sexual behaviors,<sup>14</sup> and physical and sexual victimization.<sup>15</sup>

**Long-Term Pornography Use:** Among males, younger age of first exposure to pornography has been linked to higher rates of pornography use later in life,<sup>16</sup> as well as the viewing of animal and child sexual abuse material (i.e., child pornography) as adults.<sup>17</sup>

**Links to Prostitution:** Frequent male users of pornography are significantly more likely to have sold and purchased sex than other males of the same age."<sup>18</sup>

## What Youth Say About the Impact of Their Exposure to Pornography

"Because of porn, I have slowly become unsociable towards my friends and family, and I have never been able to have a romantic relationship with anyone besides the screen of my computer."

— Male, 19 years old<sup>19</sup>

"I think pornography has made me react positively to non-consensual sex and violence against women."

— Female, 16 years old<sup>20</sup>



"I've been struggling for so long, and it's taxing on my mind and body. I'm tired and have little motivation, which often leads to me skipping homework assignments and social gatherings just because of porn. I'm honestly scared, scared for my future, my relationships, and my well-being."

— Male, 18 years old<sup>21</sup>

"I think it really destroyed my brain, and I feel incredibly devastated that I was exposed to so much porn."

— Female pop star Billie Eilish, 19 years old<sup>22</sup>



- <sup>1</sup> Paul J. Wright, Bryant Paul and Debby Herbenick, "Preliminary Insights from a U.S. Probability Sample on Adolescents' Pornography Exposure, Media, Psychology, and Sexual Aggression," *Journal of Health Communication* (2021), doi: 10.1080/10810730.2021.1887980.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael B. Robb and Supreet Mann, *Teens and Pornography*, Common Sense Media (2022), <https://www.common SenseMedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2022-teens-and-pornography-final-web.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> Fiona Vera-Gray et al., *The British Journal of Criminology* (2021): 1-18, doi:10.1093/bjc/azab035.
- <sup>4</sup> Tamara L. Doremus-Fitzwater, Elena I. Varlinskaya, and Linda P. Spear, "Motivational Systems in Adolescence: Possible Implications for Age Differences in Substance Abuse and Other Risk Taking Behaviors," *Brain and Cognition* 71, no. 1 (2010):114-123, doi: 10.1016/j.bandc.2009.08.008 (accessed February 9, 2022); Frances E. Jensen with Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guild to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).
- <sup>5</sup> Michele L. Ybarra et al., "X-Rated Material and Perpetration of Sexually Aggressive Behavior among Children and Adolescents: Is There a Link?" *Aggressive Behavior* 37, no. 1 (2011): 1-18, doi: 1002/ab.20367 (accessed January 11, 2022).
- <sup>6</sup> Jessica Laird et al., "Demographic and Psychological Factors Associated with Child Sexual Exploitation. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *JAMA Network Open* 3, no. 9 (2020):1-17, doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.17682 (accessed January 11, 2022). Note mean age of the total 67,453 unique participants was 16.2 years.
- <sup>7</sup> THORN and Benson Strategy Group, *Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Youth Attitudes and Experiences in 2020. Finding from 2020 Quantitative Research among 9-17 Year Olds*, (November 2021); [https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/SGCSAM\\_Attitudes&Experiences\\_YouthMonitoring\\_FullReport\\_2021\\_FINAL\(1\).pdf](https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/SGCSAM_Attitudes&Experiences_YouthMonitoring_FullReport_2021_FINAL(1).pdf) (accessed January 12, 2022).
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- <sup>9</sup> Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), "The Dark Side of the Selfie: IWF Partners with the Marie Collins Foundation in New campaign to Call on Young Men to Report Self-generated Sexual Images of Under 18s," January 15, 2020; <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news/dark-side-of-selfie-iwf-partners-marie-collins-foundation-new-campaign-to-call-on-young-men-to> (accessed January 11, 2022).
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- <sup>12</sup> Megan S. C. Lim, Paul A. Aguis, Elise R. Carroette, et al., "Young Australians Use of Pornography and Associations with Sexual Risk Behaviors," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 41, no. 4 (2017): 438-443, doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12678 (accessed February 9, 2022).
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- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> CNN and Reuters, "Billie Eilish says watching porn from age 11 'really destroyed my brain,'" December 16, 2021