



NATIONAL
CENTER ON
SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION

Exposing the Connections Between All Forms of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse
Images (Child
Pornography)

Image-based
Sexual Abuse

Objectification

Pornography

Prostitution

Sex Trafficking

Sexting

Sexual Addictions
and Compulsivity

Sexual Assault
and Violence

Sexualization
of Children

Violence Against
Women

THE LINKS BETWEEN

Pornography and Sexual Violence

Online pornography is a relatively new environmental factor in human life, with nearly endless quantities and extremities. It is therefore vital to examine its effects through a public health model, particularly because it is ubiquitous among minors and adults alike.

A study of university students found that 93% of boys and 62% of girls had seen Internet pornography during adolescence. The researchers reported that the degree of exposure to paraphilic and deviant sexual activity before age 18 was of “particular concern.”¹ Another sample has shown that among college males, nearly 49% first encountered pornography before age 13.²

The large-scale private use of hardcore pornography by millions of people has public ramifications and often acts as their sexual education. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors shaped by pornography use have a profound impact on not only users’ private relationships, but also their professional and social relationships.

IMPACTS ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION

Teaches Users that Women Enjoy Sexual Violence and Degradation: A content analysis of 172 videos from the website Pornhub.com examined the influence of age (teenage performer vs. adult performer) on aggression and pleasure depicted in popular heterosexual pornographic videos uploaded to the site between the years 2000 and 2016. The findings were as follows:

- Teenagers were more likely to experience particular forms of aggression and degrading or risky sex acts. Specifically, teenagers were more than twice as likely as adults (21.8 vs 9.4%) to be in videos featuring anal penetration, and about five times more likely (12.7 vs. 2.5%) to be in videos featuring forceful anal penetration with an apparent intent to cause pain. Yet, when broadly considering aggression in pornography, teenagers were subject to similar levels of aggression experienced by older performers.
- Teenagers were also more likely to be in pornography in which the male ejaculated in their mouth or on their face than adults (65.4 vs. 45.3%).
- 90% of teenage females in videos containing visible aggression displayed pleasure, compare to 54% when visible aggression was not present.
- Teenagers were significantly more likely to display pleasure in videos that included spanking, forced vaginal or anal penetration, and forced gagging than in videos that did not include these acts.
- Females of all ages were more likely to display pleasure in videos featuring physical aggression than those that did not.

1 Chiara Sabina, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor, “The Nature and Dynamics of Internet Pornography Exposure for Youth,” *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 11, no. 6 (2008): 691–693.

2 Chyng Sun, Ana Bridges, Jennifer Johnson, and Matt Ezzell, “Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 45, no. 4 (May, 2016): 983–94.

In response to these findings, the researcher noted that the prevalence of aggressive and demeaning acts in videos featuring teenagers, “may signal to viewers of all ages that these acts are not only normative and legitimate, but perhaps even expected,” thus creating social pressure on both young women and men to re-enact them with their sexual partners. Of further concern, it was noted that “the high prevalence of unprotected anal intercourse in such videos may lead female teenagers to engage more frequently in unprotected anal sex,” thus increasing their risk for various STDs.³

A 2010 analysis of the 50 most popular pornographic videos (those bought and rented most often) found that 88% of scenes contained physical violence, and 49% contained verbal aggression. Eighty-seven percent of aggressive acts were perpetrated against women, and 95% of their responses were either neutral or expressions of pleasure.⁴

Committing Sexual Offenses and Accepting Rape Myths: A meta-analysis of 46 studies reported that the effects of exposure to pornographic material are “clear and consistent,” and that pornography use puts people at increased risk for committing sexual offenses and accepting rape myths.⁵

Increased Verbal and Physical Aggression: A 2015 meta-analysis of 22 studies from seven countries found that internationally the consumption of pornography was significantly associated with increases in verbal and physical aggression, among males and females alike.⁶

Link to Harmful/Problem Sexualized Behavior in Youth: A study of 950 child patients presenting for suspected child abuse (primarily sexual abuse, but also some cases of severe physical abuse) to a Child Advocacy Center in the Midwestern U.S., examined intake and self-reported assessment data collected in 2015. The children ranged in age from 3 to 18; 74% were female. Analysis found that children who disclosed exposure to pornography were at 3.3 times greater likelihood of engaging in problem sexualized behavior (PSB) compared to those who did not disclose pornography exposure.

The researchers explained: “Having exposure to pornography at a young age may not only introduce children to behaviors they may eventually acquire, but the children may have those behaviors reinforced by seeing the models (e.g. the individuals shown in the pornography medium, the person who exposed the child to pornography, etc.) being rewarded by the behavior. If the benefits of such sexual behavior are reinforced for the child, they may have a higher likelihood of adopting the behavior themselves.”⁷

Like other public health issues, not all exposed to pornography have the same response. However, for many, repeated exposure and use is strongly correlated to problematic sexual behaviors including sexually aggressive and violent behaviors. Research is also showing correlations to child-on-child harmful sexual behavior, increased STI rates, and increased sexual dysfunction among young men.

Learn more about the public health impacts of pornography at EndSexualExploitation.org/publichealth

3 Eran Shor, “Age, Aggression, and Pleasure in Popular Online Pornographic Videos,” *Violence Against Women* (2018): 1-19, doi: 10.1177/1077801218804101. Of note, videos including more than two participants were not included in the analysis.

4 Ana J. Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Erica Scharrer, Chyng Sun, and Rachael Liberman, “Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update,” *Violence against Women* 16, no. 10 (2010): 1065–1085.

5 Elizabeth Paolucci-Oddone, Mark Genuis, and Claudio Violato, “A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Pornography,” *The Changing Family and Child Development*, ed. Claudio Violato, Elizabeth Paolucci, and Mark Genuis (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 48–59.

6 Paul J. Wright, Robert S. Tokunaga, and Ashley Kraus, “A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies,” *Journal of Communication* 66, no. 1 (February 2016): 183–205.

7 Rebecca Dillard, Kathryn Maguire-Jack, Kathryn Showalter, et al., “Abuse Disclosures of Youth with Problem Sexualized Behaviors and Trauma Symptomology,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 88 (2019): 201-211, doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.11.019.