

Psychological Effects of Porn Addiction



The Aware Academy's Production

Article series



The subject of pornography, even to this day and age, is still considered taboo and despite the distaste surrounding the topic, many still patronize pornography. In the United States alone, according to statistics, 40 million people are consistent porn site visitors ¹, which fuel the annual income of the porn industry ranking at more than \$13B.²

Researchers have now begun to delve into the possible relationship between pornography use and a person's psychological well-being such as depression, distress, compulsivity, and sexual dysfunction,³ since studies have indicated that there was an increase in pornography consumption by 20%.⁴ However, whether or not there is substantial distinction between people who consume or do not consume pornography and their well-being is yet to be fully concentrated on in literature.

Pornography Consumption and Mental Health

People who consume pornography habitually are constantly observed to demonstrate signs of poorer mental health and are more at risk to developing depression.³ Furthermore, there have been studies that consistently support that people who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to demonstrate depression.⁵ Some experts, however, believe the relationship to be the proverbial chicken and egg: does a depressed individual seek and get addicted to porn to feel better? Or does he become depressed due to his consumption of pornography?

Some research suggests that those who suffer from depression or anxiety resort to pornography as a coping mechanism. The attack of depression may push the individual to turn to pornography to masturbate as a means to release stress, or to distract the self from negative feelings and emotions. Some studies also revealed that those who showed high indicators of depression also had higher tendencies to seek out porn. On the other hand, others suggest that the consumption itself is the possible contributing factor to the distress.⁴

"The addiction itself, in most cases, is not the main problem, but the emotional PAIN that had led to it that truly need our absolute attention."

— Wael Ibrahim - Founder of The Aware Academy

A recent path of research has started to zoom into how the person itself perceives or interprets the consumption of pornography and how it affects the mental health. In studies conducted, those who admittedly perceive themselves as “porn addicts” have higher probability to convey their psychological distress regardless of the frequency of their porn consumption. ^{6,7} Other studies moreover yielded that those who were more religious despite consuming pornography less frequently than normal were more likely to report the internal spiritual battle they were experiencing. ^{7,8}

In line with these studies, it is evident that the anxiety and depression does not stem solely from the frequency and high consumption of pornographic materials but from the moral incongruence that one feels from his action or practice. Although many are engaged in porn consumption, it is not widely and openly talked about. Socioeconomic background, work position, or the inclusion to religious institutions that perceive pornography consumption as unacceptable can greatly affect one’s mental health and push the person towards depression and anxiety. The “failure” to get over the addiction and the self-perception that being a porn addict is bad could further contribute to the negative emotions directed to the self. The inner battle wrapped in shame and guilt between values and behavior is a great driving force to mental distress.



Porn and Other Negative Effects

While the largest consumer of porn according to statistics is the 35-49 age group, at least 70% of men aged 18-24 visit a porn site at least once per month.¹ It might seem normal as adolescence is the peak of curiosity, it might not be something parents would want to think their teenagers are doing on their laptops and cellphones. In correlation with this, these age groups are continually studied for anxiety and depression, where they most likely have already succumbed to the long-term effects.⁹

Some women see their partner's porn consumption damaging to their self-perception and self-esteem while also affecting their feelings of intimacy.¹⁰ They may feel less attractive, too fat, or lacking as compared to the beautiful and desirable actresses that they see on porn. Women further expressed apprehension as they feel that they are expected to perform as those that they watched. Men, on the other hand, conveyed insecurities with their body image and sexual performance. An individual's self-esteem is defined by various factors such as appearance, performance, and relationship satisfaction.¹¹ Self-esteem may vary daily depending on the situation a person is into, but the relationship it has with anxiety and depression have also been proven in various studies.

In an open letter published by Dr. Gottman, intimacy between partners creates connection and communication. But when one partner becomes addicted to and becomes accustomed to relieving one's self using porn, the intimate bond and interaction between them becomes tainted, strained and eventually broken. The other partner may also feel pushed away or neglected.¹² In some cases, porn has also led to disinterest in actual sexual contact and interaction with the partner.

Does porn immediately equate to negativity? According to Liberman¹³, it was observed that the discovery and exposure to various sexual behaviors were the reasons of feminist porn viewers to seek pornography. Several studies also demonstrated that respondents believed to have broadened their experience of sex and have enhanced intimate relationships due to their consumption of pornography.¹⁰ Proponents further claim that porn provides them with a safe outlet to fulfill their fantasies.

Porn and Other Negative Effects

As they say, everything in excess is bad. While there is no one specific scale to measure whether one is using pornography excessively, experts have agreed on a couple of warning signs to look out for. When porn becomes an integral part of life and it starts to cause neglect of other important aspects of your daily living such as personal care and work, then there is a big possibility of addiction. Moreover, people addicted to porn no longer gets fulfilled with their sex life, becomes less interested with social encounters and distant with their partners.

Porn addiction can lead from bad to worst really quick. And such negative outcomes are supported by various studies conducted over time.

Citations:

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