

ST.GALLEN SYMPOSIUM

Global Essay Competition 2024

Title: Exploring the Unseen Crisis: The Scarcity of Awareness Addressing the Adverse Effect of Pornography on Male Adolescents

Essay:

Introduction:

In Greek mythology, there was a guy named Narcissus. His name comes from the Greek word for "feeling zoned out." So, Narcissus saw his face in a pond and thought, "Who's that handsome fellow?" He did not realize it was just his own reflection! Eventually, Narcissus became so reliant on his aquatic doppelganger that he was essentially a puppet. Next up is Echo, a nymph who uses echoes of her own words to win Narcissus over. But nope, Narcissus was too busy being obsessed with his pond buddy turning into a one-man island (Hamdija, 2019; Spearman, 1964).

Narcissus in the Digital Era:

Now, let's fast forward to today. Imagine Narcissus with a computer instead of a pond. He is totally hooked on not-so-nice pictures on the screen, losing touch with the real world (Hamdija, 2019). Pornography is one of these on-screen platforms where a modern-day Narcissus can get stuck and become dependent in a closed system of excessive stimulation. Using McLuhan's theory (1964), Hamdija (2019) argued that various forms of pornography can excessively stimulate a person, essentially stretching the capabilities of the central nervous system resulting in a kind of numbness or "autoamputation." This means it effectively shuts down a certain "organ, sense, or function" as a protective measure.

The digital age has made access to pornography easier and more anonymous, leading to a significant increase in consumption among male adolescents and young adults (Owens et al., 2012). The modern equivalent of Narcissus, engrossed in his computer screen, becomes desensitized as this digital extension dulls his senses. He turns into a mere instrument for pornographic imagery and developing many problems that are adverse to his sexual, social and psychological well-being.

Erectile Dysfunction as a Sexual Dysfunction:

Sexual dysfunction refers to a problem occurring during any phase of the sexual response cycle that prevents an individual or couple from experiencing satisfaction from sexual activity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). One of the common sexual dysfunctions among men is erectile dysfunction (ED) which is a common medical condition where a man finds it difficult to achieve or maintain an erection that is sufficient for sexual intercourse or other sexual activity (Miller, 2000).

Transition of ED among Male Adolescents:

Historical studies previously indicated that erectile dysfunction (ED) was predominantly an issue for older men, with significantly lower incidence rates in younger males (Prins et al., 2002). However, a dramatic shift occurred over a span of just ten years

(Park et al., 2016). Back in early 2000, in the kingdom of older gents aged 40 to 80, ED rates were at a cool of 13%. But fast forward to 2011, the picture changed big time! Suddenly, younger lads, aged 18 to 40, were seeing their ED rates skyrocket to a whopping 14% to 28%. Talk about a plot twist!

Prevalence of ED among Male Adolescents:

Think about it: back in the day only about 2% of the young folks faced this dragon (Prins et al., 2002). But by 2011, Landripet & Štulhofer (2015) revealed that up to 28% were jousting with ED! And it was not just in Europe. Over in Canada, O'Sullivan et al., (2014) found that more than half of the young males aged 16 to 21 were battling sexual woes. Even the brave lads in military service were not immune, with a 2014 study by Wilcox et al. (2015) showing a 33.2% ED rate among those aged 21–40. By 2015, the dragon grew stronger, with up to 31% of sexually active men facing ED, as Landripet & Štulhofer (2015) reported.

How Erectile Dysfunction Relates with Pornography?

Now, one might think ED is all about lifestyle or health woes, but a significant number of research says otherwise. Researchers like Pizzol et al., (2016), Sutton et al., (2015), Bancroft & Janssen (2000) started whispering about a sneaky villain: excessive internet pornography! Turns out, too much screen time with naughty pixels during the formative years can twist one's ideas about the birds and the bees, leading to a nasty case of Porn Induced Erectile Dysfunction (PIED), as Brown & L'Engle (2009) pointed out. As the kingdom of porn tube sites expanded, researchers, like Park et al., (2016), noticed that young men under 40 were increasingly grappling with a dragon named sexual dysfunction. The Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behavior (GSSAB) from 2001-2002 to 2011 started connecting dots that pointed to internet pornography as the mischievous culprit (Landripet & Štulhofer, 2015; Nicolosi et al., 2004).

Park et al., (2016) explained that porn induced erectile dysfunction stem from changes in the brain circuits that manage sexual desire and erections. It's hypothesized that too much reaction to internet pornography, combined with a reduced response to normal rewards, could be the cause. These brain changes are similar to what happens with overuse of natural rewards or drugs and are driven by dopamine spikes in the reward system.

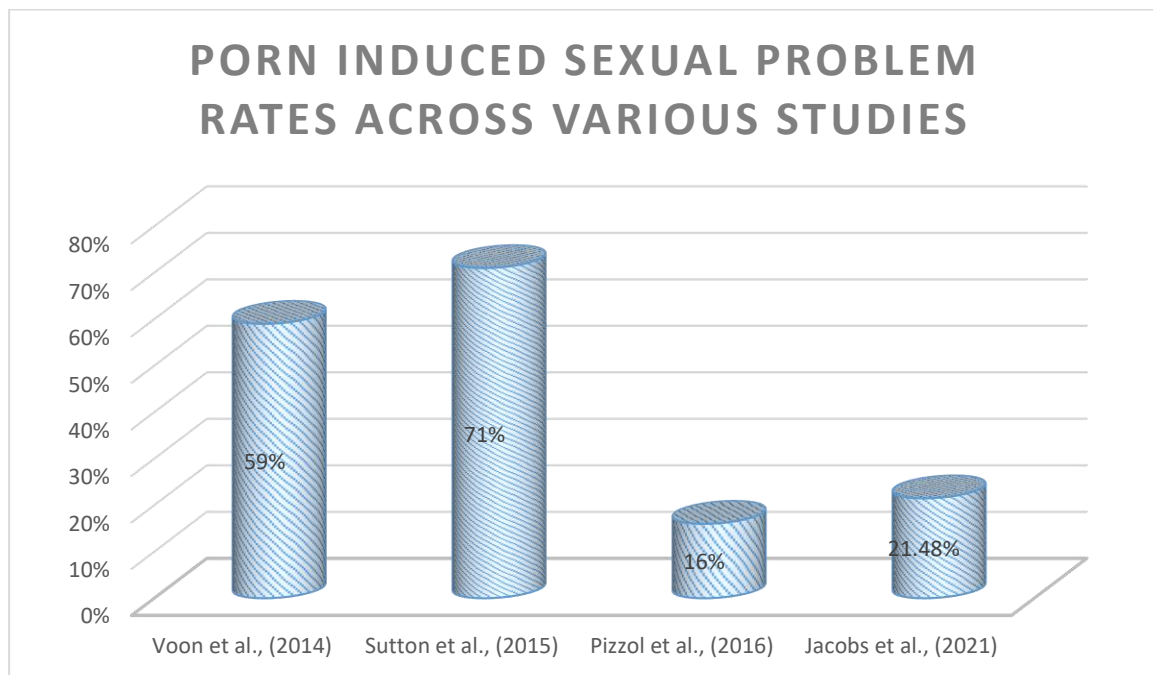


Figure 1: Porn Induced Sexual Problem Rates Across Various Studies

Pornography and Sexual Health:

Numerous academic research link pornography intake to sexual health issues. After studying 2015 high school seniors, Pizzol et al., (2016) discovered that 16% of those who watched internet porn more than once a week had less sexual desire. In 2015, Sutton et al., found that men averaging 41.5 years who used pornography seven or more hours a week had a host of sexual dysfunctions, with 71% having romance issues. Voon et al.'s 2014 fMRI study found that 11 of 19 young adults who watched obsessive internet porn had lower sexual desire and function in real life but not online. A 2020 survey of 3419 men aged 18–35 using the Cyber Pornography Addiction Test and International Index of Erectile Function found that 21.48% had some form of erectile dysfunction, with higher online pornography consumption linked to higher ED risk (Jacobs et al., 2021).

Pornography and Psychological Health:

Multiple mental health issues can develop in children and adolescents who are exposed to pornography at an early age. Brown et al. (2006) found that pornographic media use is associated with an increased risk of cognitive impairment, negative effects on brain development, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Teens and young adults are more vulnerable to developing skewed sexual ideals, low self-esteem, and relationship problems as a result of their idealized views of sex, relationships, and bodies (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016).

Pornography and Social Perception:

The impact of pornography extends beyond psychological effects, influencing social behaviours and relationships. It often fosters unhealthy attitudes towards sex and gender, promoting misogyny, aggression, and objectification (Wright et al., 2015). These attitudes can lead to impaired social interactions, difficulties in forming intimate relationships, and distorted views of consent and sexual norms (Bridges et al., 2010).

Scarcity of Awareness:

There is a notable lack of awareness and discussion in educational and family settings about the potential harms of pornography. Sex education programs often fail to address the specific issues related to pornography consumption, leaving young people uninformed about its potential negative impacts (Mattebo et al., 2014). Moreover, cultural taboos surrounding discussions of sex and pornography contribute to the scarcity of awareness. Many parents and educators feel uncomfortable discussing the topic, which leads to a lack of guidance for young people navigating their sexual development (Morgan, 2011). Epstein & Ward (2008) found that boys encounter less sexual education than girls which compels them to rely more heavily on the internet based adult materials.

Controversy is the Key Obstacle:

Research on porn induced erectile dysfunction is mostly co-relational which makes it hard to distinguish the impact of extraneous variables those might be associated with this problem. As a commitment to evidence-based practices and the complexity of human sexuality the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counsellors, and Therapists (AASECT) does not support linking problems related to sexual behaviours exclusively to a porn/sexual addiction process as a standard practice (Sher, 2023). But this debate does not eradicate clinical evidence where porn withdrawal mitigates erectile dysfunction among the clients (Begovic, 2019; Park et al., 2016). In 2020, the European Association of Urology Virtual Congress concluded that excessive pornography consumption is associated with a rise in erectile dysfunction cases (Sher, 2023). The positive correlation between ED and pornography consumption in the current literature, though not appear as a direct causation, is quite concerning!

Strategies to Handle the Problem:

Addressing the adverse effects of pornography requires comprehensive strategies. This essay promotes a novel comprehensive strategy to handle this problem called "**6-fold Path to PIED Prevention**". Developing a comprehensive strategy and policy framework to prevent this problem among the young population involves several key components.

6-fold Path to PIED Prevention

Research and Monitoring	Education and Awareness	Access Restriction	Healthcare Integration	Public Campaigning	Establishment of Regulatory Body
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Figure 2 6-fold Path to PIED Prevention

- 1. Education and Awareness:** Imagine a world where young minds are educated about the effects of pornography, focusing on health and wisdom. Sex education classes explain how excessive exposure to adult content can lead to problems like PIED. Community centres with interactive workshops led by experts in psychology and sex therapy can help parents and young adults understand the issue. An age-appropriate online portal with articles, FAQs, and guidance on sexual health can be created, providing a friendly expert to answer questions discreetly and without judgment. This is a vision of a well-informed society, ready to tackle this problem head-on, reducing stigma, and promoting healthier, happier relationships.
- 2. Research and Monitoring:** With lab coats and clipboards in hand, let's meet a group of super-sleuths who are going to dig deep into the world of science to find out how PIED affects young people. They monitor changes in online behaviour, examine statistics, and look for narrative patterns. Academics, medical professionals, and public servants are all working together on this aim. This is more than just research; it's an effort to maintain effective and innovative techniques by keeping everyone informed and to keep them on top of their game!
- 3. Access Restrictions:** Envision an elite group of internet vigilantes whose goal is to protect the youth of today from harm while they are online. Their tools? Smart age verification for adult-oriented websites, limiting access to those who are legally able to view it. Together with the government and internet providers, they maintain a watchful check on everything happening in the online realm. In order to prevent minors from seeing explicit material online, they have even teamed up with IT companies to construct a digital fortress.
- 4. Healthcare Integration:** In the world of healthcare, there's a new superhero squad who are specially trained to tackle the problem of pornography. And guess what? They team up with mental health wizards for the ultimate combo of care. Their mission? To spread the word, share the latest research, and make sure every clinic is a fortress of knowledge and support. It's healthcare, but with a cape!
- 5. Public Campaigning:** Imagine smart, attention-grabbing ads showing up on your phone, warning you about the dangers of using adult content too often. These ads use well-known faces to spread the word, particularly among young people, and they're

entertaining and engaging as well as instructive. On top of that, they're removing obstacles, dismantling stereotypes, and directing people to resources that can help them. It's going around like a big, bright billboard promoting good sexual habits, and people are discussing, learning, and changing for the better because of it!



Figure 3 Warning Poster About Minors Sexually Exploiting Internet Platform (BBC News, May 26, 2021)

- 6. Establishment of a Regulatory Body:** Just pretend for a second that the vast majority of the "wildlife" (i.e., porn) seen on the internet is completely fictional. Nevertheless, I apologize! A lot of the younger explorers are assuming these plays are actual documentaries, which is making them wonder about the bees and birds in ways they never imagined. The brand-new and fantastic Regulatory Body for Porn Broadcasting (for fun, let's call them the "Fiction Fixers")...they're here, saving the day! Like those disclaimers in action movies that state "No aliens were harmed in the making of this film," these caped crusaders of clarity are on a mission to ensure that every steamy scene comes with a large, bold label: "Hey, this is just for show!" What is the objective? For the benefit of all, particularly the younger generation, in making sense of this fantastical wasteland and realizing that relationships and the actual world are very different.

Conclusion:

The exploration into the scarcity of awareness regarding the adverse effects of pornography on male adolescents reveals a multi-faceted crisis. This essay shows how excessive pornography causes erectile dysfunction in young men. The shift in ED prevalence from older to younger men emphasizes the need to address this issue. Pornography may harm male sexual health, yet proposed framework addresses it holistically in the broader theme of

“Sex Education” (And, yes it can be as cool as the TV show itself!!). This comprehensive strategy aims not only to combat PIED but also to foster a more informed and healthier society in the digital age.

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