



Pornography and Its Consequences

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Key Points

Pornography negatively impacts society by deconstructing families, traumatizing children, and creating mental and physical health issues for individuals suffering from addiction.

It is largely impossible to tell whether or not a piece of pornography depicts the abuse of a sex trafficking victim. The increasing demand for violent pornography will only augment the suffering of sexual abuse victims.

Pornography is unavoidable in the digital modern age. It is important for parents to develop action strategies for preparing their children to avoid pornography.

Pornography is an addictive fixation that haunts more than 40 million Americans each year.¹ It targets women and children as the central victims of violence and exploitation. Although anyone can become a consumer of pornography, men are most frequently victimized by pornography through experiencing the negative mental and physical impacts of sexual addictions. Pornography undermines marriages, destroys families, and steals the innocence of children, who can rarely avoid being exposed to explicit material in the digital 21st century.

Pornography is readily available on the internet. In fact, 35 percent of all internet downloads are related to pornography.² The correlation between digitization and pornography use has been augmented by the isolation and extended periods of remote work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, after pandemic-induced lockdowns began, there was a 25

percent increase in total pornographic internet traffic compared to an average day within the previous four years.³

A 2017 Gallup survey showed that 36 percent of Americans think that pornography is morally acceptable. By 2018, this statistic had increased to 43 percent.⁴ This shift evinces modern culture's growing acceptance of pornography, despite its inherent evils and the moral degradation that it represents.

The consequences of pornography's production and usage are comprehensive. Pornography alters the minds of individual users, thereby impacting the stability of every social institution, beginning with the family. Although recent exposés have proven sex trafficking and filmed sexual assault are a frequent source of pornography, major pornography providers have not been shut down for their role in perpetuating the exploitation and abuse of victims.

Consequences for the Family

Pornography usage is indisputably toxic to the development of a healthy family life, primarily because it affects the balance of trust and intimacy within a marriage. According to a 2020 study, pornography viewing is never positively associated with quality of relationship.⁵ Married couples who struggle with pornography usage are twice as likely to divorce as couples who do not.⁶ For couples dealing with one partner's pornography use, 68 percent note that one or both partners have lost interest in sexual activity within their marriage.⁷ Pornography's divisive impact on marriages demonstrates that this type of infidelity must not be taken lightly.

Pornography destroys marriages by weakening the foundations of the union. In marriages where a spouse has not yet discovered the other's pornography habit, there is nevertheless increased evidence of anxiety, reduced trust, and increased conflict due to the tension of concealment.⁸ Even in instances when a discovered pornography habit does not lead to divorce, the impact on the victimized spouse is devastating; 70 percent of wives who discover their husband's pornography use display signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).⁹

Beyond the psychological and emotional toll of pornography within marriages, there is a notable link between pornography use and domestic violence.¹⁰ Eighty-seven percent of pornography includes aggression against women.¹¹ As a result, pornography users grow desensitized to violence and begin to mimic the actions they consistently view.¹² Pornography users show increased tendencies towards sexually objectifying others and committing acts of sexual violence.¹³ Normalizing aggression towards women and children through pornographic desensitization results in increased abuse, even towards members of one's own family.¹⁴

The remaining members of the family unit are collateral damage in the wake of a parent's pornography habit. In addition to the potential consequences of divorce, growing up in a home where pornography is used increases the risk of children being exposed to sexually graphic images, which constitutes child sexual abuse.¹⁵ Children enduring trauma resulting from pornographic exposure may experience anxiety, fear, obsession with sexuality, sleep disturbances, and behavioral issues.¹⁶ The consequences of exposure to pornography in the home are life-altering for children.

Consequences for Children

Although proponents of pornography consider its use to be a personal decision, it too often comes at the cost of the exploitation of those who are most vulnerable: children. In 2018, there were 45 million images of child sexual abuse material (*i.e.*, pornography depicting minors) reported; this number increased to 69.1 million images in 2019.¹⁷ Tragically, 67 percent of child sexual abuse material victims report that their biological parents or guardians were their abusers.¹⁸

A 2021 report by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) attempted to promulgate the idea that children have a universal right to access pornography in order to receive "vital sexuality education."¹⁹ The report goes on to claim that there is "no consensus" about the negativity of the impact of pornography on children. This type of deceptive language demonstrates the willingness of even major advocacy institutions to overlook the sexual exploitation of children at the hands of the pornography industry, as well as the negative psychological implications for children that view pornography.

The increasing market for child sexual abuse material has likewise contributed to a cultural shift evident in the hyper-sexualization of adolescent girls. One study shows that children in elementary school are potentially exposed to as many as 80,000 sexualized portrayals of girls in the span of one year.²⁰ Research indicates that girls who are exposed to sexualized portrayals of young women show increased rates of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem.²¹

Consequences for Society

A disturbingly large percentage of pornography is created through the suffering of sex trafficking and rape victims. According to one study, 49 percent of sexual exploitation survivors said that they were filmed for pornography.²² Because of the high demand for nonconsensual and violent pornography, it is often impossible to determine whether a particular video is staged or if it depicts the real-life abuse of a victim which may continue beyond the runtime of the film itself. Even in pornography that does not appear explicitly violent, there is often no way of knowing whether the participants have been threatened or coerced.

In 2020, the BBC broke the story of Rose Kalemba, whose rape at the age of 14 had been circulated on the popular pornography site Pornhub for years.²³ Even though Rose contacted the site multiple times explaining that the videos depicted sexual violence against a minor, Pornhub took no action until Rose posed as a lawyer threatening legal consequences. Several months later, the *New York Times* published an exposé titled “The Children of Pornhub” that brought to light Pornhub’s efforts to continue streaming videos that depicted the rape of adolescents.²⁴

Consequences of Pornography Consumption

The lasting effects of pornography use on the human brain are comparable to the impacts of drugs; users experience an unnatural surge of dopamine secretion, causing addiction and a lack of satisfaction in sexual situations without the presence of the stimulant.²⁵ Pornography users are also predisposed to

struggle with depression and anxiety, as well as impulse control and moral decision-making.²⁶ Pornography use is also positively correlated with erectile dysfunction in men.²⁷

Pornography also causes users to seek more and more deviant forms of material in order to maintain interest, leading to increased consumption of violent or extremely perverse pornography. In one study, 46.9 percent of participants said that over time they had begun to watch pornography that had previously repulsed them.²⁸

It is important to note that pornography usage is not a strictly male vice. In 2019, one popular pornography site's visitors were 32 percent female.²⁹ Even among women, the escalating nature of pornography is evident; studies of search statistics on pornography sites have shown that women are even more likely to search for material that is aggressive towards women than men are.³⁰

Pornography can come in several forms, including the genre of erotic literature such as the infamous *Fifty Shades of Grey* series. A 2021 study found that the main consumers of erotic novels are heterosexual women in committed relationships. The study discussed the conclusion that women find special interest in this genre because it provides guidance and ideas for their own romantic relationships.³¹ This niche area of pornography, though it sidesteps the issue of potential sexual abuse or trafficking, nevertheless perpetuates unhealthy ideas of sexuality in the minds of readers.

A Lack of Enforcement

Traditionally, the government has attempted to keep a tight lid on sex trafficking and public obscenity, but in matters of pornography, that lid has been loosened substantially in recent years, except where child pornography is concerned. Decades ago, Congress passed federal laws against obscenity that have been found to be constitutional.³² However, these laws are too seldom enforced.³³ Family Research Council calls for aggressive enforcement of existing laws to combat the scourge of pornography, as well as stronger laws to protect children from exposure to pornography online. Given the massive, deleterious individual, marital, familial, and social effects of pornography, we cannot afford to let the government abdicate its duty to enforce the people's duly-enacted laws.

Tips for Parents

- Know the passwords to your children's devices, and have your children leave their devices with you overnight.
- Always use parental and content controls that cable providers and online media services make available.
- Create a household rule that all electronic devices be available for you to check on at all times.³⁴
- Be diligent about fostering healthy relationships with your children and encouraging them in the pursuit of their faith. Teens with a strong faith and a solid relationship with their parents are less likely to pursue pornography.³⁵
- Facilitate open and honest conversations with your children about the evils and harms of pornography. Refer to this resource³⁶ on broaching the topic of pornography with your children by starting early, empowering them with basic knowledge, and creating a plan.
- If a child's pornography usage is discovered, do not panic. Instead, refer to resources like this for help.³⁷ Also see the resources listed below for counseling on combatting pornography habits and recovery from addiction.

Conclusion

The devastating consequences of pornography in society can be combated by the active decisions of individuals to resist its appeal. Maintaining accountability within marriages ensures that pornography usage does not have to wreak havoc on the life of the family. Protecting the eyes and minds of children to the greatest extent possible in the modern world will assist future generations in avoiding the dangerous mental and physical consequences of pornography usage. By taking a stand against the pornography industry and avoiding pornography consumption, it is also possible to decrease the profitability of the sex trafficking industry and to help preserve the human dignity of sexual assault victims.

RESOURCES

For Individuals and Couples

- **National Center on Sexual Exploitation** (endsexualexploitation.org) – Leading organization opposing pornography and indecency through public education and the application of law.
- **STRIVE** (strive21.com) – A 21-Day Porn Detox that helps men understand why they go to pornography in the first place, why they should break free, and equips men with the knowledge, tools, and accountability needed to quit pornography and begin to live the life to which God is calling them.
- **Covenant Eyes** (covenanteyes.com) – An internet accountability resource with the goal of equipping people with tools that provide protection and encourage accountability and trust in the fight against internet temptation.
- **XXXchurch** (xxxchurch.com) – A ministry project seeking to be the voice of change while providing places and resources needed to aid those struggling and in need of help.
- **Live Free** (livefree.app) – A private and safe community for men struggling with lust and pornography where they can find support, accountability, practical teaching, and hope.
- **Sex Addicts Anonymous** (saa-recovery.org) – A recovery program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) that has been adapted, with permission, for recovery from sex addiction.
- **Sexaholics Anonymous** (sa.org) – A recovery program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) that has been adapted, with permission, for recovery from sex addiction.
- **Recovering Couples Anonymous** (recovering-couples.org) – A recovery program for men and women whose lives have been affected by their partner or spouse's compulsive sexual behavior. It is based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) and has been adapted, with permission, for couples recovering from sex addiction.

- **S-Anon** (sanon.org) – A recovery program for men and women whose lives have been affected by someone else’s compulsive sexual behavior. It is based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) and has been adapted, with permission, for recovery from the impact of sex addiction.
- **Co-dependents of Sex Addicts (COSA)** (cosa-recovery.org) – A recovery program for men and women whose lives have been affected by their partner or spouse’s compulsive sexual behavior. It is based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) and has been adapted, with permission, for couples recovering from sex addiction.

For Parents

- **Fight The New Drug** (fightthenewdrug.org) – An organization that exists to provide individuals the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding pornography by raising awareness on its harmful effects, using only science, facts, and personal accounts.
- **Enough Is Enough** (enough.org) – A national leader on the front lines of making the internet safer for children and families. Pioneers and leads the effort to confront online pornography, child pornography, child stalking, and sexual predation with innovative initiatives and effective communications.
- **iKeepSafe** (ikeepSAFE.org) – Certifies products that provide a safe digital landscape for children, schools, and families by supporting the protection of student privacy while advancing learning in a digital culture. They provide data privacy certifications to technology companies, educational resources to schools, and information to the community.
- **Movieguide** (movieguide.org) – A ministry that hopes to cultivate a better media landscape for children and future generations by assisting parents in determining what content is safe for children to watch.

Prevention and Help for Those in the Pornography Industry

- **CyberTipline** (report.cybertip.org) – Official place to file complaints with the federal government about child pornography and suspected child sexual exploitation. Directed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, in connection with the FBI.
- **Traffickinghub** (traffickinghub.com) – A non-partisan effort to hold the largest pornography website in the world, Pornhub, accountable for enabling and profiting off of the mass sex trafficking and exploitation of women and minors.
- **Girls Educational and Mentoring Services** (gems-girls.org) – A mentoring organization with a mission to empower girls and young women, ages 12-24, who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking to exit the commercial sex industry and develop to their full potential.

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