

Recent research on the emotional, behavioral, and sexual harms of pornography to children, adolescents, and teens

(all citations are 2018-2023)

Effects of porn on sexual behavior

Porn gives rise to sexual misconduct.

Viewing porn is linked to adolescent and teen sexual harassment and assault, including having sex with someone who is incapacitated. Indeed, “any pornography use resulted in a significantly greater likelihood of physically coercive behavior.”^{1 2}

Porn can lead to abuse of younger children.

Boys and adolescents exposed to porn are more likely to engage in inappropriate touching of younger children. This is especially true for boys who intentionally seek out porn.³

Porn leads to violent sex.

Adolescents who view online porn are more likely to act aggressively during sex, including slapping and insulting their partners.⁵

Porn encourages strangulation.

Porn promotes “choking,” which is considered “non-fatal strangulation” in the medical profession. The neurological consequences can include unconsciousness, brain injury, seizure, motor and speech disorders, memory loss, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).^{6,7}

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of the violence in porn (punching, gagging, etc.) is aimed at women.⁴



Porn puts girls at risk of being victimized.

Early internet exposure to porn for girls is a risk factor for later experiences of sexual abuse, sexual coercion, and sexual aggression.⁸

Porn teaches that hurting women is pleasurable.

Video titles on the most popular porn websites promote criminal acts of sexual violence (e.g., coercion, rape) as normal and desirable.⁹ 97% of the violence in porn (punching, gagging, etc.) is aimed at women.¹⁰ The victims, especially teen girls, are almost always shown enjoying the brutality.¹¹



Effects of porn on general behavior

Porn can lead to bullying.

Frequent use of pornography is linked to young people perpetrating face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying.¹²

Porn is linked to poor relationship skills.

Adolescent porn users often lack the social-emotional skills to say “no” to unhealthy relationships and unwanted sex. They rate themselves poorly at choosing trustworthy partners, communicating how they want to be treated, setting limits and realistic expectations, and making decisions rather than letting things happen.¹³

Porn is related to substance abuse.

Adolescents and teens who view porn are more likely to use illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.¹⁴

Porn can harm social relations.

“Research suggests that adolescents who use pornography ... have lower degrees of social integration ... and decreased emotional bonding with caregivers.”¹⁵

Effects of porn on emotions and thought

Porn alters young people’s brains.

The under-developed adolescent brain is particularly susceptible to the content of porn,¹⁶ which can lead to dysfunctional stress responses and poor executive function, including impairments in judgment, memory, and emotional regulation.^{17 18}

Porn can lead to depression.

Early use of porn may trigger adolescent depression and psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., headache, irritability, trouble sleeping). Unhappy adolescents may turn to porn for “mood management,” leading to further dysfunction and negative effects on their mental health.^{18 19}

Porn teaches sexism and objectification.

Adolescent boys who consume porn are more likely to value girls and women only for their appearance and willingness to satisfy men’s desires, to believe that it is more important for women to be pretty than smart, and that women should obey men.^{20 21}

Porn teaches acceptance of violence against women.

Both boys and girls who view porn are more accepting of sexual violence against women and rape myths (e.g., the victim asked for it or wanted it). They also are more likely to trivialize sexual aggression.^{22 23}

Porn is linked to negative body image and low self-esteem in girls.

Girls who view porn may develop distorted and unrealistic expectations about the appearance of a normal woman’s body, thus impairing the healthy development of their self-esteem.²⁴

