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## INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY: AWARENESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH (13-26 YEARS)

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### Abstract

The Internet has changed the way we access the world, estimating that up to 90% of youth between 12 and 18 years have access to an enormous array of material, including educational links, sports info, chat rooms and unfortunately, pornography. Depiction of a sexual nature in India is considered immoral, addictive and noxious, labelling them pornographic, and attempting to have them suppressed under obscenity and other laws, with varying degrees of success. According to the Porn hub 2018 Statistics, 33.5 billion people visited the website with India ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world (Kumar, 2019). As COVID-19 spread globally, an increasing number of youths went online in pursuit of gratification, thus increasing the use of pornography and making it important to check the knowledge and awareness about its use and effects. The objectives of current study were to ascertain the perception of youth and adolescents regarding internet pornography and to provide guidelines and recommendations regarding its use, impact and effects of internet pornography among adolescents (13-19 years) and youth (20-26 years) for their mental health and well-being. Data was collected through a self-constructed tool (6 open and 13 closed ended) with a sample size of 200 participants (50 adolescents [13-19 years] and 150 youth [20-26 years]). Results revealed, that almost all of the participants indicated that the gadget as a source of exposure to internet pornography was the mobile phone and a large majority of young adults and majority of adolescents stated that sexual excitement and curiosity to get information about sex were the reasons for initial exposure of internet pornography. Guidelines suggested were mindful viewing by not having unrealistic expectations, viewing in limitation and engaging in social and leisure activities as well as developing new skills and also being provided with moral and sex education and awareness on the ill effects of excessive pornography use.

### Keywords

Internet, pornography, COVID-19, adolescents and youth

### Introduction

In India, screening for pornography use, sexual addiction and the knowledge and awareness of the same has largely been ignored by mental health professionals and thus, there is a lack of research related to pornography and its effects. Despite the increased access, public discourse and attitudes on pornography remain muted and a taboo in many parts of India (George et al. 2019). As COVID-19 spread globally, social distancing, self-isolation/quarantine, and national lockdowns became crucial to control the pandemic. However, these measures could also lead to increase in social isolation, loneliness and stress, which can alter the consumption of pornography habits. In India however, an increasing number of people went online in pursuit of gratification. The average increase in porn-watching from India alone, was 33%, three times that of the average rise worldwide, which stood at 10.5%. The use of pornography is therefore increasing and thus it was important to check the knowledge and spread awareness about the use of pornography and its effects.

The aim therefore, was to empower youth and adolescents by providing them with guidelines regarding its use and effects.

The objectives of the present study were as follows:

1. To ascertain the knowledge of adolescents (13-19yrs) and youth (20-26yrs) regarding: a) meaning b) gender more exposed to internet pornography c) gadget as a source of exposure d) reason for initial exposure
2. To ascertain the perception of the use of internet pornography in relation to a) benefits and adverse effects on well-being and mental health b) strategies to overcome the adverse effects c) guidelines for teens and youth, parents and counsellors.
3. To develop a brochure raising awareness and broadening the perspective of adolescents and youth on pornography literacy.

## Methodology

**Research design:** Exploratory research- The research design applicable to the current study was an exploratory research design as it seeks to study a relatively unexplored and socially displeasing area regarding the knowledge and awareness of internet pornography among adolescents (13-19 years) and youth (20-26 years).

**Sampling Technique, Sample Size and Sample Characteristics:** Snowball and purposive/judgmental sampling was implemented. The sample size consisted of 200 participants, adolescents in the age range of 13-19 years (20 males & 30 females) and youth in the age range of 20-26 years (50 males & 100 females). Majority of the participants were never married (86.5%). Current occupation placement of most of the participants was studying (61%) followed by working (part-time or full-time) (37%).

**Inclusion criteria:** The key features of the target population that the investigators will use to answer their research question. In this research it was as follows:

1. Participants with good comprehension of the English language.
2. Participants were not discriminated on the basis of caste, community, socio-economic status and religion.
3. Participants using gadgets with internet facilities.

**Research process and Developing the Tool:** In the initial process of the research, the researchers listed various topics which were generated by interviewing experts from the field of Human Development as well as their areas of interest from prior literature reviewed in journals and articles. As pornography and its use is not an openly talked about subject, the topic selected was then modified into the perception of adolescents and youth regarding the knowledge and awareness of internet pornography. The tool was self-constructed after careful review of the objectives of the research in order to better understand the knowledge and awareness of internet pornography among adolescents and youth. 19 questions were constructed (6 open ended and 13 closed ended). It was a self-devised and semi structured questionnaire which was set in such a way that the researchers were able to gain an understanding into individuals' awareness on this topic as well as the reasons for which internet pornography is initially viewed according to the perception of the participants whereas several other aspects related to internet pornography. The reason for having both open and closed ended questions was to gain a more profound understanding on the depth of knowledge and awareness the participants possessed regarding the selected topic which assisted the researchers in developing a brochure with the benefits, adverse effects, strategies and guidelines for adolescents, youth, parents, teachers and counsellors to enhance their well-being and mental health.

**Plan of analysis:** Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The plan of analysis was done for different objectives of the study. The responses of participants were qualitatively analysed using theme extraction and quantitatively analysed using frequencies and percentages.

## Results and Discussion

**Meaning of the term internet pornography:** Majority of the teens/adolescents (66%) and a large majority of young adults (76.67%) defined internet pornography as online viewing of sexual content such as pictures, videos, e-books, video games and sexually explicit material including nudity and sexual intercourse whereas few of the participants [teens/adolescents (14%); young adults (12.67%)] described internet pornography as material or content used for sexual arousal and sexual gratification.

**Gender most exposed to internet pornography:** When the participants were asked regarding the gender most exposed to internet pornography majority of participant teens/adolescent (62%) and more of the young adults/youth (58.6%) indicated that both the males and females are equally exposed.

**Gadget as a source of exposure to internet pornography:** Almost all of the participants indicated that the gadget as a source of exposure to internet pornography was the mobile phone [teens/adolescents (98%); young adult (95.33%)]. However, an individual being exposed to internet pornography through the laptop was indicated by majority of the participants [teens/adolescents (60%); young adults (66.66%)].

**The reason for initial exposure to internet pornography:** Equal number and large majority of young adults (72.66%) and majority of teens/adolescents stated that sexual excitement (64%) and curiosity to get information about sex (68%) were the reasons of initial exposure of internet pornography. However, a majority of the young adults (67.33%) and little more than half of the teens/adolescents stated that exploration was the reason for initial exposure of internet pornography.

**Perception regarding the benefits and adverse effects of use of internet pornography on well-being and mental health of adolescents (13-19years) and youth (20-26years)** Varied responses were obtained regarding, benefits of watching internet pornography. About half of them, indicated that they were: making an individual more open minded about sex [teens/

adolescents (54%); young adults (42%)), enabling individuals to gain more knowledge about sex [teens/ adolescents (52%); young adults (44%).

Mixed responses were obtained from participants regarding the adverse effects of viewing internet pornography, indicating that little more than one third of the adolescents (38%) and more of the young adults (50%) stated an increase in risky behaviors such as engaging in early sexual activity, unsafe sex, alcoholism, drugs etc. Little less than quarter of the teens/adolescents (24%) and little more than half of the young adults (51.3%) stated that objectifying people can be an adverse effect of watching internet pornography.

**Strategies to overcome the adverse effects of internet pornography:** Little less than half (48%) to little more than half (56%) of the young adults and a quarter to little less than half of the teens (ranging from 24% to 40%) suggested engaging in physical and social activities, engaging in hobbies and leisure activities, developing self- motivation, developing new skills were the strategies to overcome the adverse effects of internet pornography.

**Guidelines obtained for enhancing the well-being and mental health of teens/adolescents and young adults/youth**

1. Mindful viewing by not having unrealistic expectations and viewing in limitation [teens/adolescents (48%); young adults (29.53%)].
2. Engaging in social and leisure activities, hobbies and developing new skills [teens/adolescents (24%); young adults (15.33%)].
3. Being provided with moral and sex education and awareness on the ill effects of excessive pornography use [teens/adolescents (20%); young adults (24%)].

**Guidelines obtained to help parents for enhancing the well-being and mental health of teens/adolescents and young adults/youth were as follows.**

1. Parents being comfortable and having an open conversation about pornography and being less aggressive with their children [teens/adolescents (40%); young adults (45.33%)].
2. Parents should provide youth with moral and sex education and being comfortable and giving knowledge about pornography and making them aware about it [teens/adolescents (16%); young adults (32.66%)].
3. Parents monitoring children activity, keeping eye on them and their friend circle and also checking their search history will help enhance their wellbeing and mental health [teens/adolescents (30%); young adults (14.66%)].
4. Parents being supportive, understanding, friendly and having a healthy atmosphere around them. [teens/adolescent (18%); young adult (18.66%)].

**Guidelines for counsellors dealing with teens and youth viewing internet pornography to enhance their well-being and mental health they were as follows.**

1. Providing moral and sex education and awareness on the ill effects of excessive pornography use [teens/ adolescents (22%) young adults (16.67%)].
2. Providing guidance and understanding the adolescents and youth without being judgemental [teens/adolescents (16%) young adults (23.33%)].
3. Having an open healthy and comfortable conversation [teens/adolescents (18%) young adults (11.33%)].
4. Not sure [teens/adolescents (24%) young adults (16%)].

3. To develop a brochure raising awareness and broadening the perspective of adolescents and youth on pornography literacy.

### INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY: IMPACT AND EFFECTS ON ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH



### INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

is the online viewing or downloading of sexually explicit material such as

PICTURES

VIDEOS

E-BOOKS



Healthy sex	Pornography sex
Loving	Violent
Uplifting	Degrading
Selfless	Selfish
Builds emotional bonds	Leads to social isolation

  

### BENEFITS

- Helps relieve stress.
- Enables individuals to gain more knowledge about sex.
- Makes individuals more open minded about sex.
- Improves sexual skills.
- Satisfies sexual needs.

### ADVERSE EFFECTS

- Causes addiction
- Promotes objectifying people
- Creates a decrease in focus/concentration
- Creates unrealistic expectations by disabling the individual to distinguish between fiction and reality
- Engaging in risky behaviours such as early sexual activity, unsafe sex, alcoholism, drugs etc.

### STRATEGIES FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH TO OVERCOME THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY



- Develop self-motivation and self-control by restricting the use of internet pornography.
- Develop new skills by engaging in hobbies, physical, social and leisure activities.
- Accept and seek assistance from family, friends, teachers and counsellors.
- Mindful viewing by not having unrealistic expectations.

### GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

- Monitor internet activities and keep a check on their friend circle.
- Be supportive, understanding, friendly and have a healthy atmosphere around them.
- Be less aggressive and have an open healthy conversation about pornography.
- Provide them with moral and sex education

### GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS AND COUNSELLORS

- Provide moral and sex education and awareness on the ill effects of excessive use of pornography.
- Have an open, healthy and comfortable conversation.
- Provide guidance and understanding towards adolescents and youth without being judgemental.

Activate Windows  
Go to Settings to activate Windows

The review of literature showed that majority of the times, the exposure to internet pornography was unwanted or by chance, however contradicting this, the current research revealed sexual excitement, curiosity to get information about sex and exploration as the reasons for initial exposure (Wolak et al. 2007).

In the current research, when asked about the gender which is more exposed to internet pornography, majority of the participants indicated that both males and females are equally exposed, contradicting the review of literature which indicated that more males than females acknowledge the use of internet pornography (Sharma et al. 2019).

Similar to most of the literature reviewed, the current research also stated that the adverse effects of internet pornography were an increase in risky behaviours such as engaging in early sexual activity, unsafe sex, alcoholism, drugs, objectifying people, decrease in focus/concentration and causing addiction. (Camilleri et al. 2021). However, some of the literature reviewed also contradicted the current research stating that pornography exposure whether deliberate or not, was not associated with risky sexual behaviour and seemed to be a negligible risk factor. It indicated that more than looking at pornography exposure as a risk factor for risky sexual behaviour, it could be used as a starter point for discussions about sexuality with adolescents (Luder et al. 2021).

The current research indicates engaging in physical and social activities, engaging in hobbies and leisure activities, developing self- motivation, developing new skills and enhancing the influence of faith and spirituality as strategies used to overcome the adverse effects of internet pornography. Similarly, the review of literature also suggests self-motivation, mindfulness, religiosity and spirituality as factors that can positively influence mental health (Camilleri et al. 2021).

### Contribution of the Study

The researchers have created an open and closed ended questionnaire during the pandemic and have been able to successfully execute it on a large group of 200 participants in a span of 3-4 months as it was difficult to locate a standardized tool on awareness regarding internet pornography.

One of the significant contributions of this research has been to create a brochure with brief information on internet pornography as well as strategies and guidelines for parents, teachers, counsellors and teens and youth themselves to enhance their well-being and mental health which is indeed rewarding for all those who participated in the research.

The researchers are also willing to conduct workshops for adolescents and youth for internet pornography.

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