

Pornography Deviance Studies, Internet Addiction, Harms, and Prevention

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Abstract

The expansion of new spaces, including cyberspace, entails numerous positive and negative consequences. From a negative perspective, the ease of rapid, simple, and low-cost access to any data has had undesirable effects, one of which is the increase of sexual addiction in its virtual form. Pornography, as part of this type of addiction, has inflicted significant damage on human relationships, which deserves careful consideration. Disruptions in sexual communication and harmful sexual miseducation—including the promotion of sexual violence—are among the consequences of obscene content. By presenting the existing problems, this study seeks to find solutions for the prevention and treatment of this issue to improve the population's psychological well-being and prevent behavioral disorders. These disorders can become more difficult to treat over time as this type of addiction deepens. Various countries have been examined, and global statistics on this subject have been provided.

Keywords: pornography, sexual addiction, cyberspace, prevention, deviance

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1. Introduction

Addiction and excessive dependency are not new challenges for humanity; however, with the expansion of cyberspace and the ease of access to virtually any content, both the form of addiction and the nature of related disorders have become more complex (Cheng, 2025; Dubey, 2025). Stress, anxiety, and the fast pace of life in the modern world have intensified various forms of addiction (Tanha, 2022). Among these, sexual addiction—and more specifically, pornography—is not an issue that can be easily ignored (Memon, 2025). Regardless of its causes, the negative consequences of pornography consumption demand attention. Weakening of emotional connections, mood disturbances, sleep deprivation, certain physical health problems, time wastage, and many other issues are among its outcomes (Mirkhan, 2024). Although different countries have had almost similar experiences, their responses vary depending on available resources and the significance assigned to this issue (Sedighian Bidgoli, 2022). Statistics reveal a growing prevalence and expansion of this phenomenon (Taylor, 2022). Low self-esteem, internal voids, and similar psychological vulnerabilities may be underlying roots worthy of investigation (Memon, 2025). Ultimately, treating this problem can involve psychiatric or psychological interventions (Dubey, 2025). Education and preventive measures that many individuals have not received throughout life may also be crucial (Fasih

[Ramandi, 2019](#)). Two primary questions arise: first, whether this form of addiction shows similarities with other addictions, such as substance use, to allow for parallel treatment approaches; and second, whether recovery from this addiction necessarily requires specialized intervention or can also occur through alternative methods. We will address these questions in the conclusion. Our purpose here is to raise awareness, highlight the seriousness of the issue, and prompt mental health stakeholders—including the judiciary, government, and civil organizations—to act. By identifying harm points, many aspects of this subject will be clarified from a criminological and deviance studies perspective ([Rostam Ali Zadeh, 2020](#)).

2. Characteristics, Effects, and Symptoms

The spread of pornography in recent years has been primarily driven by the widespread accessibility of the internet, enabling individuals to consume large volumes of sexual content at low cost ([Lewczuk, 2020](#)). Scientific research in different countries indicates concerning prevalence rates; for instance, among Indian university students, problematic pornography use reaches 12.5%, with addiction rates reported at 4% among men and 1% among women ([Memon, 2025](#)). Based on these trends, it is necessary to define two key phenomena: internet addiction and pornography addiction ([Cheng, 2025](#); [Rai, 2022](#)).

2.1. Terminology

Internet addiction is a behavioral disorder characterized by persistent preoccupation and uncontrolled use of the internet, leading to functional impairment or distress. This disorder encompasses a range of online activities, including excessive gaming, social media use, and compulsive browsing ([Cheng, 2025](#)). Pornography addiction is defined as a form of obsessive-compulsive behavior accompanied by intrusive sexual imagery and repetitive acts aimed at reducing distress, despite the user's recognition of their excessiveness or irrationality ([Rai, 2022](#)). Pornography itself refers to textual, visual, or audio materials depicting or describing sexual acts or genitalia with the intent to arouse viewers ([Gjerlow, 2025](#)). Sexual addiction is a broader construct than pornography addiction, referring to compulsive, intense sexual behaviors that persist despite awareness of harmful physical or emotional consequences ([Jha, 2022](#)).

2.2. Characteristics of Sexual Addiction

Sexual addiction can be differentiated from other sexual behavior patterns in three main ways: (1) the individual lacks control over their sexual actions, (2) the behavior results in significant harm, and (3) it persists despite the awareness of its adverse outcomes ([Sahithya, 2022](#)). Sexual addiction is a serious clinical problem with damaging consequences and is often comorbid with anxiety disorders, depression, substance use disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other psychiatric or medical conditions ([Sahithya, 2022](#)). Studies have shown that many sexual addicts also present with co-occurring personality disorders such as borderline or paranoid personality, aggression, and emotional instability ([Sahithya, 2022](#)).

Two major patterns of pornography addiction have been observed: (1) episodic heavy use, characterized by intense but intermittent consumption, which may be less harmful due to longer intervals between exposure; and (2) persistent, regular use, which is highly damaging because the time between viewing sessions is minimal ([Lewczuk, 2020](#)).

A hallmark feature of pornography and sexual addiction is *tolerance*: (1) over time, individuals require longer viewing durations to achieve the same level of arousal; and (2) they seek increasingly extreme or novel pornographic content to reach initial stimulation levels ([Lewczuk, 2020](#)).

2.3. Consequences

The consequences of pornography and sexual addiction can be classified into physical, psychological, and social categories.

2.3.1. *Physical Effects*

These effects can present in various ways and may be temporary or persistent.

A. Erectile Dysfunction

Over the past 20 years, research has documented negative sexual outcomes associated with pornography use. Physicians have recently reported a rising prevalence of erectile dysfunction among young men and identified pornography addiction as a contributing factor (Whelan, 2021). Pornography-induced sexual dysfunction is well documented in case studies and frequently self-reported by young men on platforms such as the NoFap online community (Whelan, 2021). These effects may be reversible upon abstinence from pornography; however, it is essential to note that physical consequences can cascade into psychological harm, including relationship deterioration, depression, and other mental health issues (Mirkhan, 2024).

B. Delayed Ejaculation

Delayed or premature ejaculation, sexual dissatisfaction, and reduced sexual interest in a partner are also linked to compulsive pornography use (Whelan, 2021). These effects resemble the sexual side effects observed in substance use disorders, particularly with stimulant drugs such as methamphetamine, which initially may enhance sexual drive but eventually lead to sexual dysfunction and relationship impairment (Tanha, 2022).

C. Masturbation

Research in Iran has identified masturbation and atypical sexual arousal as frequent consequences of pornography consumption, along with early puberty and premature sexual awakening (Khalajabadi Farahani, 2019b). Moreover, the ease of access to sexual interactions via cyberspace—even among adolescents—poses risks of emotional trauma, severe heartbreak, and suicidal ideation following unstable relationships (Khalajabadi Farahani, 2019a). Masturbation may arise from underlying psychological issues such as unexpressed anger, depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Esmaeili, 2022). Pornography consumption can exacerbate these vulnerabilities by externalizing internal distress and reinforcing maladaptive coping mechanisms. Excessive masturbation may also lead to fatigue, sleep disturbances, irritability, overeating, and, in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts (Mirkhan, 2024).

D. Psychological Effects

Excessive internet use can negatively affect mental health, contributing to depression, anxiety, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Taylor, 2022). Many individuals tend to rely on the internet as an emotional crutch to cope with negative feelings, which in turn undermines the development of healthy emotional expression and interpersonal connection. Overuse of the internet reduces engagement in offline activities, leading to the erosion of relationships with friends, family, and others (Taylor, 2022).

A study in Iran reported that pornography consumption among young people leads to depression because, after sexual arousal in this environment and the absence of appropriate outlets, individuals may turn to depressive states, anxiety, and even family violence (Khalajabadi Farahani, 2019b). Initially, users may view pornography as a way to cope with psychological concerns, but over time it becomes itself a source of depression and other mental health issues (Mirkhan, 2024). Another Iranian study indicated that pornography exposure contributes to distrust and negative expectations toward future spouses among young men (Khalajabadi Farahani, 2019a).

Living detached from the real world—even without pornography use—can impair social growth and maturity. A person who spends most of their time at home, purchases goods online, and disconnects from outside social interactions is at risk of developing delusions, depression, and functional impairments (Mirkhan, 2024). When such an individual also engages in compulsive pornography use, feelings of paranoia, hopelessness, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem become more intense. Cyberspace and pornography may initially create a false sense of safety within one's home, but as addiction progresses, this artificial security turns into multiple psychological disorders that require extensive changes to overcome (Esmaeili, 2022).

D. Social Effects

Internet addiction refers to compulsive and anxiety-driven overuse of the internet that significantly impairs daily functioning, social relationships, and psychological well-being (Dubey, 2025). Those affected often prioritize being online over fulfilling

responsibilities such as work, personal hygiene, or interpersonal interactions. Pornography addiction, as a subtype of behavioral addiction, involves repetitive and uncontrolled use of sexually explicit material. Like other addictions, it is marked by craving and diminished self-control (Stormezand, 2021). Online surveys suggest that between 5% and 9% of pornography users experience functional impairments in social, psychological, or occupational areas, with these issues being more common among men (Lewczuk, 2020).

Historically, pornography consumption involved media such as videos, DVDs, CDs, and magazines, but the rise of the internet has radically expanded its availability (Stormezand, 2021). Research in Iran revealed that pornography among youth leads to earlier initiation of sexual activity and a reduction in the age of first sexual intercourse, especially for girls (Khalajabadi Farahani, 2019b). Even at a milder level, pornography use was associated with increased masturbation, child sexual assault, and infidelity (Fasih Ramandi, 2019). Early sexual engagement creates social and psychological imbalances, as younger individuals lack the maturity and knowledge to navigate intimate relationships, leading to serial, non-committed encounters and associated harm (Memon, 2025).

Pornography addiction negatively impacts academic achievement and career development. Adolescents in Iranian interviews reported that their teenage years—ideally devoted to learning and planning for the future—were disrupted by sexual online content (Khalajabadi Farahani, 2019a). Furthermore, isolation and withdrawal from social spaces were frequently reported among users (Mirkhan, 2024). Spending long hours on pornography leads to delayed sleep, sleep deprivation, and, consequently, diminished professional and social functioning (Mirkhan, 2024).

Time wastage emerges as one of the most striking harms of pornography use. In today's world, where time is the primary determinant of success, individuals deeply immersed in cyberspace and especially pornography struggle to allocate quality time for life pursuits. Even when time is technically available, fatigue, lethargy, and sleepiness reduce its usefulness (Taylor, 2022). This cycle puts heavy consumers of pornography at a disadvantage compared to those with moderate resources but consistent effort and persistence.

2.4. *Symptoms*

Numerous symptoms are associated with pornography addiction; here, two major ones are highlighted.

2.4.1. *Restlessness*

Research in India has shown that pornography addiction leads to restlessness, irritability, and heightened reactivity when individuals cannot access desired sexual content. These responses closely resemble clinical anxiety (Memon, 2025). Such restlessness parallels the withdrawal syndrome seen in substance addiction. Individuals attempting to quit pornography often experience agitation, irritability, and anger, a phenomenon similar to the physical withdrawal experienced during substance detoxification (Rai, 2022). Pornography acts like an analgesic, temporarily masking anxiety and fear; when it is unavailable, stress and restlessness resurface intensely (Jha, 2022).

2.4.2. *Craving and Urge*

Pornography addiction is classified as a behavioral addiction because it shares characteristics with substance-related addictions, including craving or compulsive urge, tolerance, and withdrawal-like symptoms. It can also involve various online activities such as gaming, social networking, or compulsive browsing (Dubey, 2025). Internet addiction among adolescents has become an increasing global concern, with studies showing that 24.6% of teenagers in India suffer from this condition (Dubey, 2025). Some reports indicate that many adolescents initially perceive visiting pornographic websites as harmless but gradually develop insatiable cravings, seeking newer and more stimulating images and videos to achieve the same excitement (Fasih Ramandi, 2019).

The concept of “craving” was first introduced by Bill Wilson in the context of Alcoholics Anonymous, describing alcoholism as a disease accompanied by an uncontrollable thirst for consumption—where one drink can trigger an endless cycle of use.

Similarly, in pornography addiction, even a single relapse can reignite compulsive use, making recovery more challenging (Memon, 2025). Thus, individuals recovering from pornography addiction are advised to avoid even minimal exposure, as satisfying the initial urge may unconsciously lead back to entrenched addictive patterns (Esmaeili, 2022).

3. Causes of Pornography and Sexual Addiction

Pornography and sexual addiction, beyond their symptoms and consequences, have identifiable underlying causes.

3.1. Psychological Causes

Several psychological factors predispose individuals to internet and pornography addiction. Depression and anxiety increase vulnerability to compulsive internet use. A lack of emotional support within one's living environment drives people to seek comfort online. Those who suffer from extreme shyness, low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, or fear of rejection may avoid real-life social interactions and instead create false online identities or avatars to present the self they wish to be (Taylor, 2022).

Some theories suggest that excessive sexual behavior is an attempt to heal from adverse early childhood experiences. Insecure attachment patterns and deficits in emotional regulation act as risk factors, predisposing individuals to contradictory sexual and emotional behaviors—such as intense longing for intimacy combined with deep fear of it (Memon, 2025). Uncontrolled sexual behaviors may reflect a desire for validation from multiple sexual partners. Some researchers even conceptualize sexual addiction as a defensive mechanism against existential anxiety and death-related fears (Sahithya, 2022). Childhood experiences are key; unconscious imprints formed in early years can later manifest as maladaptive sexual coping strategies. These entrenched patterns often require long-term psychotherapeutic work to resolve (Esmaeili, 2022). Feelings of hopelessness and fear of the outside world can fuel isolation and avoidance, pushing individuals to rely on pornography as a temporary emotional anesthetic, though remaining trapped in this false comfort is highly dangerous and hinders healthy development (Mirkhan, 2024).

3.2. Neurobiological Causes

Neurobiological models propose that endocrine abnormalities, brain pathologies, substance abuse, and imbalances between the sexual activation and inhibition systems may underlie sexual addiction (Sahithya, 2022). Temporal lobe dysfunction has also been implicated. Additionally, the pleasurable release of dopamine and serotonin during sexual stimulation creates strong reinforcement pathways, driving compulsive behaviors (Jha, 2022). In essence, individuals lacking natural positive stimulation in life—such as healthy social bonds, physical activity, or joyful shared experiences—may turn to artificial arousal for temporary mood elevation (Mirkhan, 2024).

Lifestyle deficits, including poor emotional skills, limited social support, and absence of fulfilling activities, further strengthen these neurochemical loops (Taylor, 2022). Modern evidence also highlights the role of nutrition in neuropsychiatric regulation; poor diet can negatively impact the nervous system, fostering anger, stress, and maladaptive coping patterns (Esmaeili, 2022). Conversely, fermented and probiotic foods have been shown to help reduce depression by improving gut-brain signaling and stabilizing mood (Jha, 2022).

3.3. COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing created widespread boredom and emotional stagnation. Many individuals turned to online pornography as an accessible substitute for real-life sexual contact, resulting in a significant surge in pornography site traffic globally (Jha, 2022). In Iran, research among university students found a strong positive relationship between social isolation and both internet and pornography addiction, with social isolation accounting for up to 75% of the contributing factors—a remarkable proportion (Tanha, 2022).

3.4. *Expansion of Pornographic Websites*

The emergence of free internet platforms, such as Pornhub launched in 2007, drastically increased pornography consumption, especially among men (Whelan, 2021). With smartphones and computers providing continuous access to curated sexual content, treatment-seeking for pornography addiction has risen steadily (Whelan, 2021). Major pornography sites like Pornhub and Xvideos have faced criticism for inadequate monitoring systems to prevent the uploading of child sexual exploitation material, non-consensual sexual content, and sexual violence (Gjerlow, 2025). Reports highlight the insufficient efforts by such platforms to remove illegal and harmful content, further amplifying the risks associated with pornography consumption (Gjerlow, 2025).

4. **Prevention**

Two major types of prevention are emphasized in criminology and can be applied to the present issue as well.

4.1. *Situational Prevention*

Situational prevention focuses on strengthening the potential targets of crime and deviance. Here, the “target” is internet access; thus, imposing restrictions for certain age groups and individuals can help block their entry into pornographic spaces. Implementing Article 25 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes protecting children in digital environments, is essential. For example, introducing access locks for pornographic websites using facial recognition and age verification—recently implemented in some jurisdictions—represents situational prevention (Gjerlow, 2025). While temporarily effective, this approach should be complemented by deeper social prevention strategies discussed below.

In the United States, advertising, production, distribution, and possession of child pornography in online and other media are federally prohibited and punishable by imprisonment of up to 30 years. Under the Child Protection and Obscenity Enforcement Act of 1988, producers and directors of sexual content must verify and document that all performers are at least 18 years old (Rostam Ali Zadeh, 2020). Federal law also allows the blocking of websites if child sexual exploitation is detected (Rostam Ali Zadeh, 2020). The Children’s Internet Protection Act of 2003 requires schools and public libraries receiving federal funds to implement internet filtering (Rostam Ali Zadeh, 2020). Moreover, thirteen U.S. states have mandated filtering measures in schools and libraries to protect minors (Rostam Ali Zadeh, 2020). Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and Google have also adopted policies to remove content that violates U.S. standards regarding obscene or exploitative material (Rostam Ali Zadeh, 2020).

These measures can be useful in preventing exposure to harmful online environments. Similar strategies exist for other addictions; for example, individuals recovering from substance use are advised to avoid places where drugs are used, and minors are discouraged from environments where nicotine or illicit substances are present. In sexual addiction contexts, behavioral cues are also addressed—someone struggling with compulsive sexual behavior may be advised to avoid driving alone through areas associated with sexual solicitation or temporarily stop using a personal car if it is a trigger.

4.2. *Social Prevention*

Social prevention addresses deeper psychological and cultural roots. It aims to strengthen emotional health, increase awareness, and build life skills to reduce vulnerability to pornography and sexual addiction. Key risk factors include lack of affection, chronic anxiety or stress, and poor life-skill development. Educational and cultural interventions at critical social institutions can help mitigate these risks.

4.2.1. *Universities*

A study on cyber deviance among students in Tehran found that strengthening family, community, and peer relationships—by fostering secure attachments and healthy dependencies—can reduce cyber-related deviance, including pornography-related

behaviors (Sedighian Bidgoli, 2022). Active engagement in social and daily routines promotes positive moral and psychological stimulation, discouraging deviation from healthy norms. Although the prevalence of severe cyber deviance among university students was only 14.2%, the study stressed that prevention efforts should target younger students in lower educational levels, who are more vulnerable to pornography exposure and related harm (Sedighian Bidgoli, 2022).

Another Iranian study of adult men found that shame, self-disgust, and low self-compassion are significant contributors to pornography addiction and other sexual deviations (Esmaeili, 2022). These individuals often experience profound self-hatred and seek temporary relief in pornography. Additionally, the study revealed a significant correlation between narcissistic traits and pornography consumption: narcissistic individuals imagine themselves as dominant and successful in all sexual encounters and use pornography to escape real-life humiliation—even when that humiliation is self-imposed (Esmaeili, 2022).

Therefore, while addressing narcissistic traits can be challenging, most cases of pornography addiction may benefit from interventions aimed at improving self-esteem, self-compassion, and emotional well-being. Universities can organize specialized workshops with mental health professionals to teach students emotional expression, healthy coping mechanisms, and relationship skills. Training students in self-respect, positive self-expression, and psychological resilience can greatly reduce the risk of pornography addiction and its long-term consequences (Mirkhan, 2024).

4.2.2. Schools

On International Women's Day (March 8, 2024), the Norwegian Commission on Sexual Assault submitted a report titled "*Sexual Assault: An Unresolved Social Problem*" to the Ministry of Justice of Norway, concluding that national authorities have not adequately addressed the prevalence of sexual assault. Similarly, in a report published by the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza shared her observations on youth behavior: "During my time as a headteacher, I have witnessed firsthand the harmful impact of pornography on young people. I will never forget when a girl described her first kiss with her boyfriend at age twelve; she said he put his hands around her throat because he had seen it in pornography and thought it was normal" (Gjerlow, 2025).

Because children and adolescents spend substantial time in schools and view teachers as role models, schools can play a critical role in educating students about the harms of pornography. Many countries, including Canada, have adopted early prevention programs in schools to address various forms of deviance and criminal behavior. Such interventions are cost-effective compared to the long-term mental health and judicial expenses caused by the psychological damage pornography inflicts on young learners (Mirkhan, 2024).

4.2.3. Positive and Informational Platforms (e.g., NOFAP)

Research shows that a considerable portion of children and adolescents have been exposed to pornography. According to the annual media survey conducted by the Norwegian Media Authority, exposure among Norwegian adolescents is striking: nearly 50% of those aged 13 to 18 reported having viewed pornography, with boys' exposure rates about twice as high as girls'. An international survey among adolescents aged 14 to 17 in Greece, Spain, Romania, the Netherlands, and Iceland found that 59% had viewed pornography within the past 12 months, and 42% watched at least once a week (Gjerlow, 2025).

Given the strong negative influence of cyberspace on young people's sexual perceptions, there is a clear need to create and expand platforms that have a positive impact. NOFAP is an example of such a platform. Designed to support individuals struggling with pornography addiction, NOFAP has attracted users worldwide and provided significant resources for awareness and recovery. However, compared to the massive reach of the pornography industry, the influence of such platforms remains limited (Lewczuk, 2020). The porn industry, driven by enormous financial incentives, continues to expand daily, making it essential to strengthen and scale positive educational and support websites.

Implementing similar digital awareness and intervention initiatives in Iran could reduce pornography involvement and provide accessible guidance for individuals seeking recovery. Expanding these resources would help counterbalance the negative influence of online pornography and offer practical tools for prevention and exit strategies (Esmaeili, 2022).

5. Conclusion

It appears that the issue at hand is not insurmountably complex, but neglecting it can turn it into a serious social and health crisis. Mental health is vital and, in many respects, even more important than physical health because failure to address psychological conditions properly can lead to severe physical consequences. The problem of pornography and sexual addiction is simultaneously a social, legal, and psychological matter that requires a coordinated, multi-level response.

From the legal perspective, clear and enforceable regulations regarding pornographic websites and harmful digital content are essential. Socially, expanding the role of community-based organizations and support networks that can help affected individuals—such as recovery groups and peer-support programs—plays an important role. Psychologically, there must be effective structures to ensure accessible mental health services, including specialized psychiatrists and therapists who can provide both cognitive and pharmacological interventions.

Changing societal attitudes is another key step. Pornography addiction should be recognized and taken as seriously as substance addiction, rather than being dismissed or ignored due to cultural taboos or misplaced shame. Many individuals who have overcome substance addiction later fall into the cycle of sexual addiction because of a lack of awareness and support systems. In other countries, specialized rehabilitation camps and treatment centers for sexual addiction—similar to those for substance use disorders—have proven helpful. Considering such options domestically could be valuable.

In light of the key questions raised at the beginning, this analysis shows that pornography addiction shares many similarities with substance addiction, and several strategies used in substance use treatment can be applied here as well. However, success requires both specialized professionals and supportive community networks that offer group therapy and structured recovery programs. Finally, keeping silent about this issue in society due to religious or cultural discomfort can be far more dangerous. Responsible media, schools, and universities must raise awareness while respecting cultural and ethical boundaries. Only by openly acknowledging and addressing the problem can meaningful prevention and recovery be achieved.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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