

Pornography Addiction in the Emerging Adults: The Role of Social Isolation, Self-Control and Stress Coping

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ABSTRACT: *Pornography is a dangerous activity that often eat deep into individual when they are deeply involved. It leads to many challenges and can affect the productivity and lifestyle of individuals. This study explored pornography addiction among emerging adults, focusing on the roles of self-control, social isolation, and stress coping on it. Using a cross-sectional study design, a total of 300 participants, consisting of 200 males and 100 females, with an average age of 22.5, were part of the study. The hypothesis posited that self-control, social isolation, and stress coping would significantly predict pornography addiction. The findings revealed a negative correlation between self-control ($r=-.41, p<.05$), stress coping ($r= -.10, p<.05$), and pornographic addiction. The paper concluded there is a significant positive relationship between pornography and social isolation while self-control and stress coping negatively correlated with pornographic addiction. The study recommends implementing self-control and stress coping workshops, fostering social connections, and enhancing mental health support services to effectively address and prevent pornography addiction among university students.*

KEYWORDS: pornography, addiction, self-control, social isolation, stress coping.

INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning phenomenon of pornography addiction among emerging adults has become a focal point of concern, prompting a nuanced exploration into the interconnected factors influencing its prevalence. Pornographic addiction, or compulsive and problematic engagement with pornography, can have significant consequences on individuals' mental, emotional, and social

well-being. Individuals struggling with pornographic addiction may experience negative effects on their relationships, as excessive consumption can lead to a distorted perception of intimacy and unrealistic expectations. Psychologically, it may contribute to feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety. The accessibility of explicit content on the internet further exacerbates the potential for addiction, impacting daily functioning and productivity. Additionally, research suggests that prolonged exposure to explicit materials may desensitize individuals, leading to the need for more extreme content to achieve the same level of arousal. This study delves into the intricate dynamics of pornography addiction, shedding light on the pivotal roles of social isolation, self-control, and stress coping mechanisms in shaping the behavioral patterns of emerging adults. As technology facilitates unprecedented access to explicit content, understanding how these individuals navigate social isolation, exercise self-control, and cope with stress is crucial for informing interventions and support systems. By unraveling the multifaceted interplay between these key variables, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the complex landscape of pornography addiction among emerging adults.

Pornography addiction is a sexual behavior that seems not obvious but is quite insidious and has the potential of thwarting and making the individual not have a healthy and positive attitude towards heterosexual relationships (Kirby, 2021). Again, student's preoccupation with pornography may take up a tremendous amount of time and may affect their attitude in school (Infante, 2021). There is, however, speculation by some authors and researchers who maintain that there is nothing harmful in the pornography (Pornhub, 2016; Rothman, 2021). With these conflicting signals, it becomes important to investigate the extent to which pornography addiction correlates with self-control, social isolation, and stress management in emerging adults.

The concept of self-control plays a pivotal role in understanding and addressing pornography addiction. Self-control, defined as the ability to regulate one's own behaviours, thoughts, and emotions, is a critical factor in navigating the allure of explicit content and managing impulses related to pornography consumption (Chiu, 2014). Individuals with higher levels of self-control demonstrate a greater capacity to resist immediate gratification and engage in more goal-directed behaviors (Büsche et al., 2022). In the context of pornography addiction, individuals with lower self-control may find it challenging to moderate their consumption, leading to compulsive behaviours and potential negative consequences (Hafizh, Firman, & Netrawati, 2022). Strengthening self-control mechanisms becomes essential in mitigating the risk of developing or perpetuating pornography addiction. Interventions aimed at enhancing self-control skills, such as cognitive-behavioural strategies or mindfulness techniques, can contribute to fostering healthier patterns of behaviour and reducing the impact of pornography addiction on individuals' well-being. Meanwhile, Social isolation, characterized by a lack of meaningful social connections and interactions, plays a significant role in the context of pornography addiction. When individuals experience social isolation, whether perceived or actual, they may turn to pornography as a coping mechanism to address feelings of loneliness, stress, or emotional distress (Cardoso et al., 2022). The accessibility and anonymity of online explicit content can be particularly enticing in such

circumstances. Conversely, excessive engagement with pornography can further isolate individuals by diverting their time and energy away from building real-world relationships (Tian, et al., 2018). This creates a cyclic relationship where social isolation may drive pornography use, and, in turn, excessive pornography consumption may reinforce social withdrawal. Addressing the interplay between social isolation and pornography addiction necessitates interventions that not only focus on reducing explicit content consumption but also prioritize fostering meaningful social connections and addressing underlying emotional needs that contribute to reliance on pornography as a coping mechanism. Efforts to promote social engagement, improve interpersonal skills, and establish support networks are crucial components of interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of social isolation on pornography addiction. This study therefore tries to investigate the relationship between isolation and pornographic addiction.

More so, stress coping involves the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals employ to manage or alleviate the impact of stressors in their lives. These strategies can be adaptive, such as problem-solving or seeking social support, or maladaptive, including avoidance or impulsive behaviors (Algorani, & Gupta, 2023). In the context of pornography addiction, stress coping becomes a crucial aspect as individuals may turn to explicit content as a way to cope with the challenges and negative emotions associated with stress (Privara, & Bob, 2023). The immediate accessibility and perceived pleasure offered by pornography can provide a temporary escape from stressors, creating a cycle where individuals increasingly rely on explicit content to soothe or distract themselves from discomfort (Burtäverde et al., 2021; Mauer-Vakil, & Bahji, 2020).

However, this reliance on pornography as a primary stress coping mechanism can lead to negative consequences, perpetuating the cycle of stress and excessive consumption (Mauer-Vakil, & Bahji, 2020). Breaking this cycle involves recognizing and promoting healthier stress coping strategies, such as engaging in physical activities, practicing mindfulness, or seeking support from others. Interventions aimed at addressing stress coping in the context of pornography addiction should focus on identifying and reinforcing adaptive coping mechanisms, empowering individuals to manage stressors effectively without resorting to problematic patterns of explicit content consumption.

The intricacy that exists between social isolation, stress coping strategies, self-control and pornographic addiction among university undergraduates are uninvestigated and this study intends to help unravel the relationship that exist between these variables. This will help individuals and researchers know the relationship and help in reducing its prevalence among Nigerian Students.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a cross-sectional design, this is because the design helps the researchers' collect data at once and can analyses the result to reach a conclusion.

Participants

Participants were 300 students from University of Nigeria, Nsukka Enugu Campus (Unec), and Godfrey Okoye University Thinkers Corner Enugu. Of the students 200 were males and 100 were females. The students were randomly approached by the researcher and trained research assistants. Participants were drawn using stratified sampling techniques because they were based on strata (second-year and Third-year students) of different departments and faculties. All participants from an initial pool of 350 students willingly agreed to participate in the study and provided informed consent. Twenty –seven (27) students failed to return the completed inventory, while Twenty-three (23) students failed to complete the inventory properly and were therefore excluded from the study the ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 29 years, with a mean age of 22.5 years. Participants were single. Christians made up 98.3%, while 1.7% identified themselves as members of another religious denomination. In terms of ethnicity, 98.3% of the sample were Igbo, 1.3% were Hausas, and 0.3 were Yoruba. All participants were literate; with 98.3% being undergraduates and 1.7% indicating that they were postgraduate students.

Instrument

Pornography Consumption Inventory

Pornography consumption inventory of Reid, et al., (2011) was used to gather data on pornography consumption, having a subscale measuring Emotional Avoidance, Sexual Curiosity, Excitement Seeking, and Sexual Pleasure, to validate the instrument, The present researchers conducted a pilot study to validate PCI for the present study on a sample of 100 students drawn from the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) (Females = 70, Males = 30; Mean age = 21.01, SD = 2.66). Mean scores for the items ranged from 1.89 (SD = 1.02) to 2.82 (SD = .97), with an overall mean score of 33.23 (SD = 9.16). The items yielded good internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .87. To establish the validity of the scale, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .80, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was 557.15 ($p < .001$), indicating that the sample was sufficient to test for factorial validity of the scale. A one-component factor structure of the scale was extracted and it accounted for 35.43% of the variance in the construct. Loading of the items ranged from .44 - .74. Samples items include: I use it to escape into a fantasy world (1) I use it to arouse myself (2) I use it to feel physical pleasure (3).

Self-Control Scale

The second instrument that was used in the study was the self-control scale (SCS) by Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, (2004). The instrument Comprises 10 items, this assessment evaluates self-control, with each item on the Self-Control Scale (SCS) being rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 'very much like me (1)' to 'not at all like me (4)'. Higher scores than the norm signify stronger self-control in the specific aspect measured, while lower scores indicate lower self-control. Sample items encompass statements such as "I get distracted easily (1)," "I refuse things that are bad for me, even if they are fun (2)," and "Sometimes I can't stop myself from doing

something, even if I know it is wrong (3). A pilot study to validate the Self-Control Scale for the present study on a sample of 100 students drawn from the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) (Females = 70, Males = 30; Mean age = 21.01, SD = 2.66). Mean scores for the items ranged from 2.06 (SD = 1.05) to 2.90 (SD = 1.09), with an overall mean score of 25.98 (4.98). The items yielded an acceptable internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .73. To establish the validity of the scale, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .75, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was 235.93 ($p < .001$), indicating that the sample was sufficient to test for factorial validity of the scale. A one-component factor structure of the scale was extracted and it accounted for 34.29% of the variance in the construct. Loading of the items ranged from .50 - .68.

University of Los Angeles Loneliness Scale (UCLA-LS)

The third instrument that was used in the study was (UCLA-LS) which was developed by Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, (1978). The UCLA-L scale is a widely used instrument designed to assess the subjective experience of loneliness. This scale comprises 20 items that capture different facets of loneliness, including social and emotional aspects. Respondents rate each item on a Likert scale, providing insight into the intensity and frequency of feelings associated with loneliness. The UCLA-LS has been recognized for its reliability and validity, making it a valuable tool in both research and clinical settings for understanding and measuring loneliness levels among individuals. The scale's comprehensive approach enables a nuanced examination of various dimensions of loneliness, contributing to a better understanding of its impact on mental health and well-being. To validate the UCLA Loneliness Scale for the present study on a sample of 100 students drawn from the University of Nigeria Nsukka (Females = 70, Males = 30; Mean age = 21.01, SD = 2.66). Mean scores for the items ranged from 2.47 (SD = .99) to 2.97 (SD = .89), with an overall mean score of 54.66 (SD = 5.38). The items yielded internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .78, which was considered to be acceptable. To validate the scale, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed, demonstrating satisfactory sampling adequacy with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of 0.77 and a significant Bartlett's test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 632.90$, $p < .001$). The one-component factor structure extracted from the analysis accounted for 27.59% of the variance in the construct. Item loadings ranged from .30 to .64, affirming the instrument's validity. Comprising 20 items, the UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA-LS) measures subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Respondents rate each item on a four-point Likert scale (Always to Never). Items marked with an asterisk are reverse-scored (i.e., 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20), and scores are summed, with higher totals indicating greater loneliness and lower scores indicating less loneliness. Sample items include inquiries like "How often do you feel lonely (1)" and "How often do you feel outgoing and friendly (3)."

Coping Scale

The fourth instrument used is the coping scale (CS) by Harnish, Aseltine, & Gore, (2000). The Coping Scale by Harnish is a tool designed to assess coping effectiveness in young adults by focusing on the resolution of stressful experiences. This scale aims to measure the efficacy of

coping mechanisms employed by individuals in response to challenging life events. Employing an event history analysis approach, the scale evaluates the ability of young adults to effectively manage and navigate stressful situations, providing valuable insights into their coping strategies and overall psychological resilience. This instrument is particularly relevant in understanding how individuals adapt and respond to stressors, contributing to the broader field of health and social behavior research. To validate it this study integrates 24 items from various scales, assessing four coping styles with mean scores ranging from 3.46 to 5.44 (SD = 1.63 to 1.76), resulting in a strong overall mean of 117.93 (SD = 22.76) and excellent internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .85). Principal Component Analysis (PCA) confirmed the scale's validity (KMO = .78, Bartlett's test $p < .001$), with a one-component factor structure explaining 30.41% of the variance. Items loaded between .34 and .69, capturing seeking social support, religious, bright-side, and wishful thinking coping styles. Participants rated strategies on a 7-point scale (1=a lot to 7=not at all). Sample questions included "Talk to people about the situation" and "Daydream or fantasize about other things."

Design/Statistics

The study adopted a cross-sectional design. Multiple regression was used to examine the relationship between several dependent variables and an independent variable. Multiple regressions were used because of their ability to determine the relative influence of one or more predictor variables on the criterion value. It is also used to identify outliers, or anomalies that is, those variables that deviate from the normal rule of multiple regression. The independent variables are pornography addiction in emerging adults, while the dependent variable is self-control, social isolation, and coping. Statistically, to investigate the role of self-control, social isolation, and coping, hierarchical multiple regressions were used to find out the joint effect. The result of the data gathered from the field was analyzed using SPSS 23.0

RESULTS

This section presents the results of this study. The correlations of the demographic variables and study variables are shown the table below

Table 2: Correlations of Age, Self-Control, Social Isolation, Stress Coping, and Pornography Addiction

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 Gender	-				
2 Age	-.05	-			
3 Self-Control	.23***	.07	-		
4 Social Isolation	.16**	-.04	-.18**	-	
5 Coping	.12*	.31***	.16**	.06	-
6 Pornography addiction	-.18**	.12*	-.41***	.17**	-.10

Note *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; Gender (0 = male; 1 = females)

Table two above shows the relationship between the variables, the result indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between pornography and age ($r=.12, p<.05$), and social isolation ($r=.17, p<.05$) on another hand. There was a significant negative relationship between self-control ($r=-.41, p<.05$) and coping ($r= -.10, p<.05$) with pornographic addiction.

DISCUSSION

The result shows that age positively correlated to pornographic addiction. This shows that as the young adults increased in age, there is likelihood, that the level of pornographic addiction increases. Goin by this result, 21 years old youth might not have the same level of addiction with 27 years of youth. This is more likely as a result of the higher experience and exposure to different pornographic contents that must have increased their appetite and quest for more consumption of pornographic content. This result however might be limited in scope since the age bracket was below 30 years. So, we cannot tell, if when the same youths get older and probably get married, what may happen at that point. However, the result of this study is strongly indicating that age has a positive correlation with the pornographic addiction among university students in Enugu state, Nigeria. This result is in line with the findings of Adarsh & Sahoo (2023).

Further, the result indicates that social isolation has a positive relationship with pornographic addiction among university students in Enugu, Nigeria. The result indicates that the higher the level of isolation the more likely the young adult might be exposed or tempted to consume sexual content. This can be explained from the view point, that when they are isolated, they think that no one like them and want to relate with them. They may also experience the fear of being turned down by others and then want to be alone and eventually exposing them to more lone times, that might make them consume more sexual contents. Additionally, the fear of being turned down can lead them to being more personal and conservative and might not express their feelings to the opposite sex, which could eventually lead to pornography and masturbation at long run. On the other hand, it is possible that the continuous consumption and addiction toward pornographic product is what is driving the young adult to loneliness and being alone. This is because the individual may seem to spend more time being alone to be able to enjoy the product, thereby cutting people off and spending ore lone time. This finding is in line with the findings of Butler (2018) who noted that pornographic could be driving individual to loneliness.

On the other side of the coin is self-control, which has a negative relationship with pornographic addiction. This result indicates that the higher the level of self-control a young adult has the lesser they are to engage the consumption of pornographic contents. This can be explained from the view point that individuals who have control over their emotion, feelings and urge are more likely to be able to control how they consume sexual contents. This is from the point that, such people have control over what they will do and what they will not do, therefore they tend to decide what they consume at every point in time. More so, the self-control they have, is a product of the environment they grew up in, and as such if they grow up in an environment where decency is promoted and

respected, they are more likely to develop high moral values and standard and they will be able to avoid things that the society frowns at such as consumption of sexual contents. This result is in line with the findings of Hardani, & Hastuti (2018).

Lastly, the result indicated a negative relationship between stress coping pornographic consumption. The result indicates that the better coping skills an individual possesses, the lesser they will partake in the consumption of sexual contents. This can be explained from the view point that the individual who have a good coping skill, will know how to handle life challenges and stress, other than running to use pornography when overwhelmed. Consequently, an individual who has a poor coping skill is more likely to run to use sexual contents and try to calm the tension and stress they may be experiencing. Therefore, the more stressed they are, the more they are likely to use sexual content, leading to addiction at long run. Eventually, they could get to the point where they are so addicted and little stress can trigger them into consuming pornography every now and then, explaining their addictive nature. This finding is in line with the results of Mellor & Duff (2019).

Summary

The study investigated the relationship between age, social isolation, self-control, stress coping, and pornographic addiction among university students in Enugu state, Nigeria. The findings revealed a positive correlation between age and pornographic addiction, suggesting that as young adults age, their likelihood of being addicted to pornography increases, possibly due to heightened exposure and experience with diverse sexual content. Social isolation was found to positively relate to pornographic addiction, indicating that higher levels of isolation may expose individuals to increased consumption of sexual content, driven by loneliness and fear of rejection. Conversely, self-control demonstrated a negative relationship with pornographic addiction, suggesting that individuals with better self-control are less likely to engage in such content consumption. The study also identified a negative association between stress coping and pornographic consumption, implying that individuals with effective coping skills are less prone to using sexual content as a stress reliever. These findings align with previous research, such as the work of Adarsh & Sahoo (2023), Butler (2018), and Hardani & Hastuti (2018), highlighting the complex interplay of age, social factors, self-control, and stress coping in influencing pornographic addiction among university students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics influencing pornographic addiction among university students in Enugu state, Nigeria. The results underscore the significant role of self-control and stress coping skills in mitigating the likelihood of engaging in pornographic content. Individuals with higher self-control exhibit a decreased inclination toward pornography consumption, emphasizing the importance of fostering emotional regulation and decision-making abilities in interventions aimed at curbing pornographic addiction. Moreover, the negative

relationship between stress coping and pornographic consumption suggests that effective stress management strategies can serve as a protective factor against succumbing to the allure of sexual content as a coping mechanism. Recognizing the interplay of these factors is crucial for designing targeted interventions to promote healthy coping mechanisms and enhance self-control, thereby contributing to the prevention and reduction of pornographic addiction among young adults. The findings from this study contribute to a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationships between psychological factors and pornography consumption, providing valuable insights for future research and intervention strategies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations if followed will help in reducing the prevalence of pornographic consumption among university students

1. **Promotion of Self-Control Education:** Implement educational programs that focus on the development of self-control skills among university students. These programs should address emotional regulation, decision-making, and impulse control, aiming to empower students with the ability to resist the allure of pornography and make healthier choices.
2. **Stress Coping Workshops and Support Services:** Establish stress coping workshops and support services on campuses to assist students in developing effective stress management skills. Providing resources for students to cope with stressors in healthy ways can reduce the reliance on pornography as a stress-relief mechanism.
3. **Social Connection Initiatives:** Develop initiatives to foster social connections and reduce feelings of isolation among university students. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment can mitigate the loneliness factor associated with pornography consumption. Peer support groups, social events, and mentorship programs could be effective in this regard.
4. **Integration of Moral and Ethical Values:** Incorporate moral and ethical discussions into educational curricula to instill high moral values and standards in students. A values-based approach may influence attitudes toward pornography, especially if students are brought up in an environment that promotes decency and respect for societal norms.
5. **Enhanced Mental Health Support:** Strengthen mental health services on campuses, providing accessible resources for students dealing with emotional challenges and stress. Counseling services should be readily available to address underlying psychological issues that may contribute to the consumption of pornographic content.
6. **Parental and Community Involvement:** Engage parents and the community in awareness campaigns and educational programs addressing the potential negative effects of pornography. Collaboration with families and communities can contribute to a comprehensive approach to tackling the issue, extending the impact of interventions beyond the university setting.

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