

THE INFLUENCE OF PORNOGRAPHY EXPOSURE ON YOUNG PEOPLE LIVES: QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS

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Background: Most young Australians are exposed to online pornography by the age of 16. Little is known of the impact of this on their sexual socialisation. In this study we explore how young people make sense of pornographic images in the context of their developing sexual identities and its influence on their health.

Method: 1029 young Australians (15-29 years) were recruited via Facebook to an online survey. Respondents were asked 10 questions related to pornography, those who had ever viewed pornography (n856) were asked in an open-ended question 'How has pornography influenced your life?'. Qualitative responses (n734) were thematically analysed.

Results: Results showed some participants saw pornography as a form of sexual education, by providing the opportunity to "see genitals" and the "mechanics of sex" for the first time. Some found this education "helpful" and "liberating"; others noted a problematic understanding of what "sex should be like".

Viewing pornography had an impact on body image. For some females this occurred as a result of a sexual partner's expectation of ideal body types, for others this was due to their own exposure to the images. Normalisation of particular representations of female body hair and breast size and shape were highlighted; genital shape was not specifically mentioned. For males, penis size and body shape were mentioned, although less frequently.

Problematic pornography usage was identified by males and females. Males reported that uncontrollable usage of pornography had negatively impacted on sexual function, arousal and relationships. Conversely, many identified pornography usage as a positive form of "stress relief".

Conclusion: The data illustrate the variant and complex ways in which pornography influences the lives of young people. The findings provide insights into the positive and negative impacts of pornography and how these manifest in the real sexual relationships and social lives of young Australians.

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