

PORNOGRAPHY CONSUMPTION AS A FORM OF EXPLOITATION AND DIGITAL PROSTITUTION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS: A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

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“Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the Human Rights Council on prostitution and violence against women and girls”

Question 7: What links are there between pornography and/or other forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution?

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Access to pornography at an early age

In recent years, the consumption of pornography has become a common practice among adolescents (Pathmendra et al., 2023). Easy access to the Internet and the early availability of technological devices have favoured this practice among children and adolescents (Villena-Moya, 2023). This access is worrying and increasingly earlier. The first contact with pornography in Spain occurs between the ages of 9 and 11 (Ballester & Orte, 2019). This consumption becomes frequent and regular at the age of 14 for boys and 16 for girls (Ballester et al., 2022). A recent study shows that 97.3% of 16-year-old boys and 78.3% of 16-year-old girls have already searched for pornography on the Internet (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2023).

Situation of the pornography industry in relation to the exploitation of women and girls

Pornography is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that operates at the expense of exploiting women. The same company Aylo Holdings (Aylo, 2023), owner of numerous pornographic content websites such as the well-known Pornhub, has acknowledged hosting illegal content, including child sexual abuse videos and videos of women that had been recorded without their consent or under intimidation and threats. According to cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in the United States, pornography was the third most common form of sex trafficking (Polaris, 2020). And in the same vein, research with current and former porn actors suggests that exploitation and human trafficking are common experiences in the pornography industry (Donenvan, 2021). With the goal of holding the porn industry accountable for profiting from this exploitation came the Traffickinghub campaign, founded by Laila Mickelwait and driven by the anti-trafficking organization, Exodus Cry in 2020. At the beginning of 2023, Pornhub had to remove 10 million videos, as they did not have the verification of the users who had uploaded them.

There is also evidence that many women are subjected to coercion and violence during filming (Gutiérrez and Cuervo, 2023). The sexual, physical and verbal abuse visualized in pornography is not simulated, but real for the women being filmed (French Senate Report, 2022). However, even if laws regulate and punish crimes such as sexual exploitation, the digital footprint of these abuses has a devastating effect on the victims,

who often fail in having the videos removed, complicating the psychological sequelae suffered (anxiety, fear, loss of self-esteem...) because of their social implications.

Research on pornography use and sexual violence

Despite the need for further in-depth study of its possible associations, research to date shows various effects of pornography consumption in relation to different types of violence (Mestre-Bach et al., 2023):

1. **Nonsexual violence:** pornography use is related to nonsexual violence. It can normalize violence in non-sexual contexts and general tendencies toward aggression.
2. **Beliefs, myths, and attitudes:** the use of pornography favours the incorporation of gender stereotypes and hierarchical schemes in gender roles. It can also favour the objectification of women and the incorporation of rape myths.
3. **Sexual violence and coercion:** pornography use is associated with sexual aggression, intimate partner violence and victimization. Higher pornography consumption is associated with sexual coercion. In this regard, studies are limited, and further investigation of these associations is needed.

Research on pornography consumption and prostitution

Internet pornography could be defined in various ways, but most of the offer can be characterized by six criteria (Ballester et al., 2023; McKee, 2023):

- It shows practices of symbolic, physical or emotional sexual violence, including a denigrating treatment of women.
- Treatment of images is based on hierarchy of bodies, including racialization, eroticization of fragile bodies, eroticization of violence.
- Consensus of practices is ignored. It does not show negotiation of consent on screen.
- It is produced without guarantees of in contexts outside basic legal criteria, including images of Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, trafficked persons and other situations.
- It does not show the pleasure of all participants, it basically shows that of the man.

- It does not show safe sex in a very high proportion.

These characteristics make it possible to classify this product as particularly toxic, as recognized by the European Union (Directiva 2010/2018, art. 6bis) or the French administration itself (Pierre-Brossolette et al., 2023).

The industry distributes an easily accessible product, mostly free of charge, with no age controls, which is supported especially by the advertising of prostitution businesses, causing four connected effects:

- Changes on the supply side: reorganization of the prostitution system, facilitating delocalization, concealment on the web of pimp-companies distributing prostitution services:

- Changes in demand: through recruitment (advertisements) and training of the prostitute (behavioral modeling and stimulation of the passage to the act).

- Changes for women in prostitution situations: increased risk due to models of sexual violence that shape the demand.

- Changes in sexual exploitation. The supply of "teens" facilitates the normalization of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents (CSEC), stimulating the increase in the prevalence of CSEC and its varieties (Image-Based Sexual Exploitation) (Wahl, 2023). All these changes can develop because of the advantages of the connection of offers on the Internet, as well as processes of normalization of sexual violence and the disconnection of empathy (Kor et al., 2022).

Only fans and other phenomena of digital sexual violence

New Pornography Online is penetrating people's everyday lives is the colonisation of virtual social networks (Ballester et al., 2023). Thus, social networks, initially designed for connection and exchange of experiences, have become breeding grounds for the mass dissemination of explicit content (Bozzola et al., 2022; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2017); although there are already other networks, such as Onlyfans 3.0, which go beyond content exchange and communication and are used to "generate revenue" (Trenado, 2022). This social network is sustained by messages that offer mostly teenage girls and young women quick, easy and safe money (The Avery Center, 2021). This new social network offers a completely neoliberal vision of sexual commercialisation that whitewashes the underlying sexual exploitation by the sex industry, which maintains as

a common denominator the economic precariousness and vulnerability of its victims - women (Ryan, 2019). It is in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that a large part of the prostitution business shifted its modality to the online space. Its easy accessibility became popular on this social network-OnlyFans-even among the non-sex industry population (Hamilton et al., 2022).

Therefore, it can be said that Onlyfans has the same structure that underpins pornography and prostitution, where through an economic reward consumers, men, gain access to women's bodies, either physically or virtually (Rios-Castillo, 2022), turning women into commodities for male consumption (Cobo, 2020).

Conclusions

1. Pornography consumption is related to the increase in violence against adolescent girls, perpetuating gender hierarchies, objectification of women and rape myths.

2. There is scientific evidence on the link between pornography consumption and prostitution consumption.

3. The pornography industry lacks adequate controls as content creators and allows the violation of privacy, exploitation of minors and materials published without their consent on their web servers.

4. New activities such as only fans can be phenomena that perpetuate gender stereotypes and legitimize new forms of digital prostitution.

5. It is recommended that preventive measures be taken to prevent minors from accessing pornography.

6. National educational plans on pornography use and violence are recommended.

7. It is recommended to strengthen human rights measures for the protection of girls and women involved in any way in the pornography industry.

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