

Survey-based study suggests abstinence reboot interventions result in increased mental problems

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A pair of clinical statisticians at Children's Hospital Los Angeles has found that abstinence reboot interventions promoted by some online groups can lead to mental health issues. In their paper published in the journal *Sexualities*, Nicole Prause and James Binnie describe the results of a survey-based study they conducted to learn more about the mental state of people who have participated in such interventions.

Over the past several years, [mental health professionals](#) have grown increasingly concerned about programs created by nonprofessional people to "treat" [mental health problems](#) that they deem troublesome. One such troublesome issue is the use of pornography, generally by men, as a means to masturbate. Such behavior, some have suggested, can lead to [erectile dysfunction](#), pornography addiction and in many cases, a diminished sense of one's desirability.

To address the problem, some sources (primarily on internet sites such as Reddit) have established what they call "abstinence reboot interventions." Such interventions, as their name implies, involve pledges to cease viewing pornography and to stop masturbating, generally for some predetermined length of time. The idea is that doing so will allow participants to reboot their sexual system back to a "normal" base position where they will no longer feel the need to abuse themselves. In this new effort, the researchers wondered if participating in such interventions offer participants any real benefits.

To find out, Prause and Binnie created an [online survey](#) designed to shed light on the experiences of adult men who had participated in an

abstinence reboot intervention. The researchers advertised their survey on sites such as Reddit and then waited for results. In all, 587 adult men responded to the survey, 74% of whom were heterosexual and 65% of whom were white.

The researchers found little to no evidence that the program benefited those who participated, and found many instances of harm. They found, for example, that 30% of those who responded reported having suicidal thoughts after completing the intervention. They also found that those who adhered most strictly to the program tended to feel the worst after. They also found that rather than curing erectile dysfunction, many found it had grown worse. And finally, they also found that participation in the intervention had led to increased levels of depression and anxiety in many of the men.

More information: Nicole Prause et al, Iatrogenic effects of Reboot/NoFap on public health: A preregistered survey study, *Sexualities* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/13634607231157070](https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607231157070)

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