

Research backs visual therapy to reduce harmful sexual fantasies

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Dr. Andrew Allen. Credit: University of the Sunshine Coast

A psychology therapy that uses visual imagery to desensitize people from traumatic memories can also reduce the impacts of harmful sexual fantasies, according to UniSC Ph.D. research.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Andrew Allen said the results of his University of the Sunshine Coast Ph.D. research could potentially inform both forensic criminology and therapeutic psychology.

"Fantasies represent a common aspect of human sexuality that can support sexual well-being but also contribute to psychopathology," said Dr. Allen.

"These results could be applied in forensic settings to reduce the risk of sexual violence stemming from perpetrators' harmful fantasies, as well as in [clinical settings](#) to help people cope with distressing sexual memories."

His most recent [study](#), published in the *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* and co-authored by Professor Mary Katsikitis of Flinders University, found that EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) could reduce the vividness, physical sensations, pleasure and [sexual arousal](#) associated with [sexual fantasies](#).

The process involved using a computer to facilitate eye movements while participants practiced mental imagery.

Ph.D. co-supervisor Dr. Nadine McKillop, of UniSC's Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit, said the findings were particularly important following October's Sexual Violence Awareness Month in Queensland.

Dr. Allen said his studies were based on the premise that [sexual dysfunction](#) could stem from problematic memories (like PTSD) and that sexual fantasies could be derived from previous sexual experiences.

"This latest study supported the notion that eye movement therapy could impair the characteristics of the sexual fantasies and impact behavioral

intention," he said.

"This is novel research producing very interesting results," said UniSC co-supervisor Senior Lecturer in Psychology Dr. Prudence Millear.

More information: Andrew Allen et al, The effects of bilateral stimulation using eye movements on sexual fantasies with follow-up, *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* (2022). DOI: [10.1016/j.jbtep.2022.101826](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbtep.2022.101826)

Provided by University of the Sunshine Coast

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