

Global study unveils 'problematic' use of porn

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A major international study led by a Canadian psychologist sheds light on a hidden phenomenon: how problematic use of pornography is affecting people in different parts of the world, across various genders

and sexual orientations.

[Published](#) in the journal *Addiction*, the research stands out because, among the 82,000 people in 42 countries studied, it looks at groups that were often overlooked in the past, including women and individuals who don't fit traditional gender categories.

In their findings, largely based on surveys and questionnaires, UdeM assistant professor of psychology Beáta Bóthe and her colleagues focus on what experts call "problematic pornography use" or PPU, where people can't control their use of pornography.

This misuse starts to have serious negative impacts on their lives, including losing jobs or feeling significant distress. Importantly, the study clarifies that feeling guilty for consuming pornography doesn't necessarily mean someone is actually a problematic user.

As many as 94% of adults

"A lot of people watch pornography," said Bóthe, whose 79 co-authors include members of the International Sex Survey consortium in the U.S., China, Europe and other parts of the globe.

"In North America, Europe and Australia, 70 to 94 percent of adults have used pornography at some point in their lives. Before, we knew that men can often become problematic pornography users, but there was little information about how women and people with diverse gender identities are affected, nor how this issue affects people based on their sexual orientation."

Hers is one of the first studies on pornography to include a wide range of people and to consider different genders and who they are attracted to. Delving into the data, Bóthe and her co-researchers used special

analytical tools designed to measure how serious these people's problem with pornography might be.

They discovered that just over 3% might have a real problem with pornography. Men seemed to have more issues compared to women, but the study didn't find big differences based on whether people were straight, gay, or bisexual, or reported other sexual orientations. Comparatively few people who might have a problem with pornography ever look for help.

"Our research shows that the problematic pornography use may be more common than many might think and affects a wide range of people," said Bőthe. "It highlights that while many are struggling, not many seek help. That's important because it suggests that more work needs to be done to understand and support those who are affected by it."

Many ways to consume

Online, there are all kinds of sexually explicit content available, most of it for free. These include:

- Videos and movies. These are perhaps the most common forms of pornography, involving various types of sexual activities portrayed in video format. These can range from amateur recordings to professional productions.
- Images and photographs. These include still images, which can be either photographs or digitally created artwork, depicting nudity or sexual acts.
- Erotic stories and literature. These written materials describe sexual scenarios and fantasies and are found on websites and in online forums.
- Live cam shows. These involve live streaming of sexual acts or erotic performances by individuals or groups, often allowing for

viewers to interact with the performers.

- Virtual reality (VR) and interactive content. Advanced technologies are now being used to create immersive and interactive pornographic experiences, often using VR headsets.
- Chat rooms and forums. These platforms facilitate sexually explicit conversations and exchanges, sometimes including the sharing of personal sexual content.
- Animated and hentai content. This includes animated pornography, often with fantasy or exaggerated scenarios, including a subgenre known as "hentai," which is a form of Japanese anime and manga pornography.

"We didn't measure what kind of porn people watch, so we don't know if the watched materials align with a person's [sexual orientation](#)," said Bóthe. "But we can say that there's no difference in PPU across people with different sexual orientations, and that men report PPU more frequently than women or gender-diverse individuals."

In some cultures, though widely consumed, porn is still considered taboo, and this can have the effect that women shy away from it more than men, she added.

Young people, particularly those who have grown up with easy internet access, generally consume more online porn than older generations who did not have such ready access in their formative years. While most people use porn for seek sexual gratification, others do so out of curiosity, for educational purposes, or as a means to explore their sexuality.

Influenced by other factors

People who identify as transgender or non-binary might have specific preferences that are different from cisgender individuals, the study

notes. For these people, how they consume porn can be influenced by factors like seeking representation or exploring gender and sexual identity.

"And even though sexual minority individuals may watch porn more frequently than their heterosexual peers—because it may be more challenging for them to find romantic or sexual partners or because they use porn to learn about their sexuality—they don't report more problems with their porn use than their heterosexual peers," Bóthe said.

Overall, she concluded, "it's important to acknowledge that these patterns are influenced by a complex interplay of personal, societal, and cultural factors and can vary widely within groups. And the perception and impact of [pornography](#) consumption can vary greatly among individuals within these groups."

More information: Beáta Bóthe et al, Problematic pornography use across countries, genders, and sexual orientations: Insights from the International Sex Survey and comparison of different assessment tools, *Addiction* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/add.16431](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.16431)

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