

Study exposes secret world of porn addiction

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(Medical Xpress) -- A major study from the University of Sydney has shed light on the secret world of excessive porn viewing and the devastating effect it has on users and their families.

Dr Gomathi Sitharthan of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Professor Raj Sitharthan from the Department of [Psychiatry](#) of the University of Sydney conducted an online study of 800 people who watch [porn](#) to gain an unprecedented insight into who suffers from porn addiction and how their addiction affects them.

Preliminary results from the study have revealed that 43 percent of those surveyed started to view porn between the ages of 11 and 13, 47 percent spend between 30 minutes and three hours a day watching porn. More than half of porn users surveyed were married or in de-facto relationships and 85 percent were male.

The researchers found excessive users had severe social and [relationship problems](#) and had often lost their jobs or been in trouble with the law as a result of their addiction. Some users escalated their viewing to more extreme and often illegal material.

"We all know what porn is, but until now we haven't known much about its impact," says Dr Gomathi Sitharthan.

"Gone are the days when you had to go to a shop, pay for the merchandise, and come out with a magazine in a brown paper bag. You can now download anything, anytime, anywhere - at home, in your bedroom, in your office, in the car, in the park, on the way to work."

The survey also shed light on extreme cases. For example, about 20 percent of participants said that they preferred the excitement of watching porn to being sexually intimate with their partner. About 14 percent had formed a relationship with other online

users, 30 percent acknowledged that their [work performance](#) suffered due to excessive viewing, and about 18 percent were preoccupied with fantasising when they were not online.

"The reality is that porn is here to stay. What we need is a balanced view of the potential dangers of porn [addiction](#), supported by good evidence," says Professor Raj Sitharthan. In the last five years, he has seen an increase in people presenting with problems associated with excessive porn viewing in his clinical practice.

Tellingly, 88 percent of those surveyed reported they were willing to seek professional help, but would prefer to seek it online. Dr Gomathi Sitharthan and Professor Raj Sitharthan are currently preparing a treatment program that can be offered online.

"Watching porn is a learned behaviour and we believe it can be unlearned. We are finding that people do understand that their excessive porn viewing is impacting on their lives and they want to change," Dr Sitharthan says.

Provided by University of Sydney

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