

Pornography exposure at a young age can lead to early sexual behaviour

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People who view sexually explicit material at a young age are more likely to engage in sexual behaviour at an earlier age. That is the key finding of research by Elysia Walker and Dr Emily Doe from the University of Buckingham being presented today at the annual conference of the British Psychological Society's Division of *Health Psychology*.

Elysia said: "Our study examined how exposure to sexually explicit material, defined as any media depicting uncensored [sexual behaviour](#), can influence the adoption of sexually risky behaviour. Sexually risky behaviour was defined as behaviour that puts people at high risk of contracting a [sexually transmitted infection](#). For this research, these behaviours referred to a lack of contraceptive use and having multiple sexual partners."

A total of 73 adults aged 18-25, 42 women and 31 men, from the UK took part in the study, answering an online questionnaire on their pornography-viewing habits and sexual behaviour.

Analysis showed that the age participants were when they first looked for sexually explicit material predicted the likelihood to engage in sexual behaviour at a younger age for both men and women. Responses revealed that exposure to sexually explicit material started on average at twelve years old, with initiation of sexual behaviour happening around a year later.

Ongoing active exposure to pornography was also found to predict a higher number of sexual partners in females, although this was not the case for male participants.

Inactive behaviour – viewing sexually explicit material accidentally, such as in a television show – was not found to have a relationship with sexually risky behaviour. The quantity of both active and inactive exposure to sexually explicit material was

also unrelated to the frequency of sexually risky [behaviour](#). From this, it was concluded that the age at exposure is a more significant factor in influencing viewers, as opposed to the quantity that is viewed.

Elysia Walker said:

"The rates of sexually transmitted infections in the UK continue to rise, and this research shows that the standard of sex education is not currently sufficient to prevent risky sexual activity.

"With the 15-24 age group accounting for over half of the reported sexually transmitted infections reported in the UK, it is crucial that this education takes place at a younger age, particularly when our findings on the age of sexual initiation are taken into account.

"Without appropriate sex education at an age when [exposure](#) to sexual material begins to occur, children are at risk of turning to unreliable sources, such as sexually explicit material, and are at risk of adopting unhealthy sexual habits in the future."

Provided by British Psychological Society

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