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MENTAL HEALTH OF UNIVERSITY MALE STUDENTS VIEWING INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: This research was carried out to explore psychosocial and mental health issues of adults viewing pornography on the internet. **Study Design:** For this purpose, a qualitative research design was used. **Method:** In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty five university male students to explore the psychosocial issues in cases of internet pornography. After gathering the data from participants, a software, NVivo11 Plus was used for data management and analysis. This was also used for labelling and themes and categories generation. **Results:** After data analysis, main three categories generated on psychosocial issues associated with viewing internet pornography which were psychological issues, social issues and mental illness. **Conclusion:** Findings of the study indicate that males viewing internet pornography can be affected with psychosocial and mental health issues.

KEYWORDS: Internet, pornography, psychological issues, social issues, mental illness.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is considered as the most challenging stage of life. With the passage of time as individuals grow up psychological, social and physical changes occur in the body and the adolescents may find it difficult to handle or manage these bodily changes in a proper way ⁽¹⁾. Sexual problems mainly occur when adolescents cross the teenage and puberty ⁽²⁾. Biologically, an adolescent's brain especially the prefrontal cortex that assist brain's executive functioning involving, critical thinking, managing impulses, planning and decision making isn't fully developed due to which they not able to make reasonable decisions and involve in pornography ⁽³⁾. To overcome the biological sexual need, the level of pleasure seeking neurotransmitter i.e. dopamine increases which results in internet pornography addiction ⁽⁴⁾. Internet pornography involves sensational material in the form of videos, photographs, literature, books, magazines etc available on internet ⁽⁵⁾. Researches showed that the most popular searching action among the adults is sexuality and it was estimated that about 4.2 million which is about 12% of all websites is related to sexual material or pornography. Adolescents spent six to

seven hours on internet in a day in their bedrooms ⁽⁶⁾. Studies showed that those individuals also adopt sexual activities as entertaining purposes whose peers are sexually active ⁽⁷⁾. Family issues in the form of lack of closeness and trust, harsh parenting, no guidance, no support and warmth and observing similar behaviour in the adolescent's family led to the risky sexual behaviour ⁽³⁾. It is seemed that symptoms and signs of pornography addiction are same as drug and the alcohol addiction in which the individual is preoccupied with the obsessions and feels the same craving as felt by the drug or alcohol addict which results in psychological distress in adults, couples, families, and society ⁽⁸⁾. The continuous obsessions of pornography led them towards the hostile, anger, frustration and other mental problems ⁽⁹⁾. The individuals resulted in loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, stress and guilt. A qualitative study was designed to explore the effects of viewing internet pornography in university male students.

RATIONALE OF PRESENT STUDY

As internet pornography is an addictive behavior which may lead to great deal of problems that the youth face personally, socially, academically and

related with inter and intrapersonal issue, so, there is a need to find out the psychosocial issues that the individuals face due to pornography addiction.

HYPOTHETICAL FRAME WORK

According to our hypothetical explanation, male who view internet pornography may have intrapersonal issue, sexual problems and mental health issues. This hypothetical model is shown in figure 1.

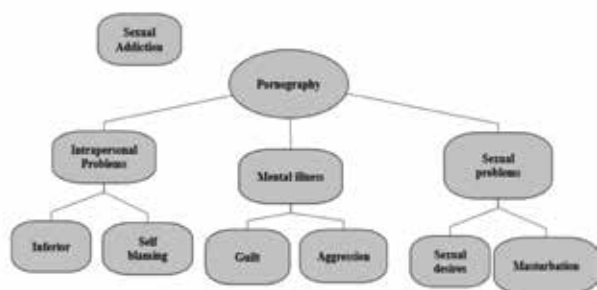


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the study.

METHOD

A qualitative research design using in depth interviews was used to explore the psychosocial issues associated with internet pornography.

PARTICIPANTS

For the present study, male students were approached from different universities through purposive and snow-ball sampling. Interviews were taking from participants until repetition in responses occurred. So, twenty-five male students were interviewed regarding psychosocial issues associated with internet pornography.

PROCEDURE

Interview method was utilized to explore the psychosocial issues due to viewing internet pornography. The interviews were first conducted from both male and female but due to unresponsiveness of the female regarding the topic they were rejected and interviews were conducted from the twenty five university male students. For this purpose a confession regarding the main purpose of the research with provided email was posted on the confession, department and hostel pages of different private and government universities. The participants who wanted to be a part of this research showed willingness by responding on the provided email. In this way, the participants were approached and the semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher following systematic ethical considerations including the

confidentiality. The verbatim of the individuals were written with their permission. The interviews were conducted individually by the researcher based on the open ended questions and participants responses were further probed for the clear identification of the problem.

DATA EXPLORATION, MANAGEMENT, AND ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to identify and highlight the patterns and sequence in a wide data set. Thematic analysis was done through six phases, involving becoming familiar with the data, code generation, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the categories through NVivo 11 plus.

RESULTS

CATEGORIES

After the labelling of the data through coding different themes generated. On 150 responses of the participates these themes were mainly grouped into three following categories on psychosocial issues associated with viewing internet pornography figure 2.



Figure 2. Hierarchy of identified categories map of discourse analysis in NVivo 11 plus.

The figure showed that the individuals suffered psychologically, socially and have mental illness that is related to emotions and thinking problems who view internet pornography.

Themes

By using NVivo 11 plus software, the themes were generated in order to organize a group of data like repeated words, attributes, and ideas by emerging them into their corresponding categories. Different themes belonging to respective categories are detailed below.

1. Psychological Issues

The individuals who view pornography on internet are affected psychologically which involve themes like sexual problems, cognitive problems and have

behavioural issues. The following figure indicated that the individuals after watching pornography on the internet have sexual obsessions related to the scenes or movies that they watch. These sexual obsessions led to the masturbation or they engage in sexual relationship. As the interviewees reported that: “Sexual things overcome me. Sexual thinking forces me to engage with girls, I want to be physical with them. I masturbated a lot and it’s necessary for me to do because without it I can’t satisfy myself etc.”

The individuals also didn’t concentrate on their daily task and not able to focus. Interviewees narrated that:

“I felt weird like, when am feeling sexual need and it’s not going to be full filled I knew nothing, my mind turn blank. I can’t focus on anything” etc.

Apart from this, viewing internet pornography also led to the low confidence and the low self-determination. Different themes generated under the category of psychological issues are demonstrated in the figure 3.

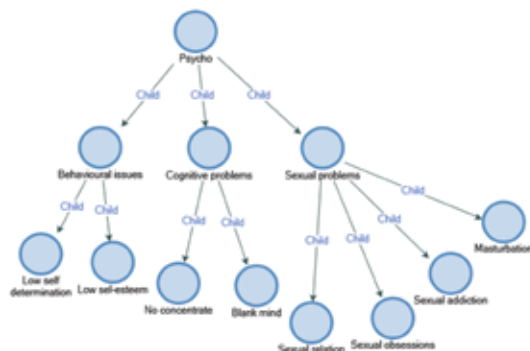


FIGURE 3. HIERARCHY OF IDENTIFIED THEMES OF CATEGORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES AFTER DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN NVIVO 11 PLUS.

2. SOCIAL ISSUES

From the responses, it has been depicted that they also suffered socially due to viewing internet pornography. The following figure 4 indicated that the individuals who watch pornography have inter and intra personal issues. Due to viewing pornography, they didn’t interact with the surrounding and spent their time alone. These individuals have no social interaction but after viewing they preferred to remain avoidant from the others. As the interviewees narrated that:

“After watching pornography, I isolate and become sexually active”. “Don’t want to interact with others nor want to enjoy with friends”. “Don’t want to interact with people, felt inferior among others”. “Don’t want to take interest in anything nor wanted to meet with others etc.”

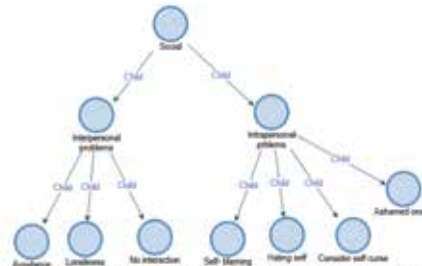


Figure 3. Hierarchy of identified themes of category of Psychological Issues after discourse analysis in NVivo 11 plus.

3. MENTAL ILLNESS

This involves two themes related to the behavioral and emotional issues associated with internet pornography. This category differs from the psychological on the basis of emotional issues that is linked with mental health and individual faced in the form of guilt, frustration, sad etc. The emotional problems associated with the “guilt”, frustration, helplessness and hopelessness. The individuals repent on watching and became depress. The respondents narrated that: “Watching pornography turns into frustration like, I am feeling hungry and in need of food, after watching pornography I become frustrated, aggressive, repent and become guilty”. “After this I felt guilt, sad and repent on watching”. “I am frustrated after watching pornography turned into guilt as I did sin and then I felt guilt and repent on watching etc.” On the other hand the behavioural problems involve their aggressive behaviour, lose their temper easily and became muted after watching. The viewing pornography led them muted that they remain silent and didn’t interact. For example the interviews described that “By watching I become aggressive and furious, I became lazy and frustrated on small things.” “While watching porn my emotions used to fire. I turn to furious”. “It makes me moody as well that I remain quiet and become muted.” “I became aggressive etc.”

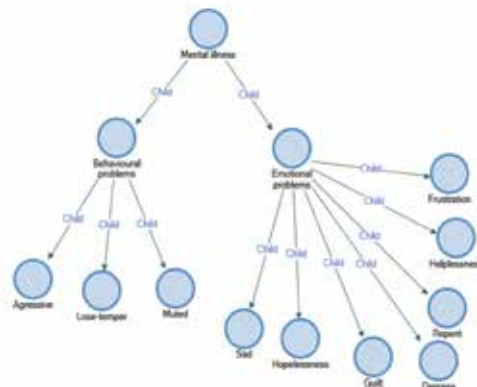


Figure 4. Hierarchy of identified themes of Social Issues after discourse analysis in NVivo 11 plus.

Theoretical Model

After discourse analysis, a theoretical model can be assumed. Theoretical model generated in this study shows that three main health issues can be observed in those who view internet pornography. Three main categories of issues generated from themes are: Psychological Issues, Social Issues and Mental health. The psychological issues involve sexual problems which led to the sexual obsessions and engaging in sexual relationships, concentration or focus problems. The individuals have low self-esteem and aren't self-determinant. Secondly, socially the individuals have inter and intra personal issues that they didn't want to interact with the surrounding or wanted to engage in any relationship which means they remain avoided. Also, they considered themselves curse and blame self for their suffering. Thirdly, they suffered with frustration, guilt after watching and repent on this. The individuals became helpless and hopeless in life. Also, they became aggressive and furious, lose temper easily or on the other hand became muted or silent after watching. This theoretical model is shown in figure 6.



Figure 6. Theoretical model showing three main categories of issues after discourse analysis in NVivo 11 plus.

Discussion

The study was aimed to explore the psychosocial issues associated with internet pornography in university male students. For this purpose, qualitative research design was used to explore the issues of the adults and the emerging adulthood regarding pornography. Interview method was used to explore the issue from the students and to gather data from the participants. This method helped in gathering data into their verbatim which was the genuine and unbiased data regarding the issues associated with internet pornography.

The results of the study described the three major categories from which the students suffered by

watching pornography. The categories were related to "Psychological Issues", "Social Issues" and "Mental Illness". Psychological issues were related to the cognitions or the sexual obsessions. The sexual thoughts and the sexual thinking hover on the mind of the individuals after they watch pornography. As the researcher Hall et al., (2004) identified in his research that the viewing pornography led to the obsessions and the compulsions. The individuals may be disturbed with obsessions of the images, scenes or the portrayals that they watch. These sexual thoughts make the individual to remind the sexual contact which disturbed the individual⁽¹⁰⁾.

The sexual obsessions have a negative impact on the life of the individuals that they engaged in socially unacceptable behaviors. The results indicated the unacceptable behavior that is masturbation. The individual became unable to stop the urge or to control the behaviors associated with pornography despite making useless attempts to stop. So, this inability to stop the urge led them to masturbate in order to relax themselves. In this regard, the study by Miller (2004) also showed that about 9% of individuals reported that they made unsuccessful attempts to stop the urges or sexual behaviors thus they masturbate to overcome the urge⁽¹¹⁾.

Pornography may also link to cognitive problems. Cognitive problems that are affected by the individuals is their concentration or the focus problems. A number of researchers described that this behavior of the individual led to concentration problems or even became jobless. Due to which the individuals considered their mind as blank after viewing the pornography. As, Laier and Brand (2017) explored that continuously viewing pornography led to the diminished working memory. The individual found it difficult to focus on the task and resulted in forgetting appointments⁽¹²⁾.

The results of a six-month longitudinal study depicted that the continuous viewing of pornography led to concentration problems which affected the academic performance of the students. The viewing of pornography also affected the individual's self-esteem as⁽¹⁾ indicated that those who were high on internet pornography have low self-esteem and high scores on anxiety and depression.

The social factors included the issues related to the self and with others. The individuals after watching the pornography remained isolated and showed avoidant behavior from others. Adolescents may suffer with social isolation after viewing pornography⁽¹³⁾.

Apart from these intrapersonal issues related to their own

self in terms of feeling ashamed on self in acting such behaviours. Viewing pornography has also a bad impact on their selves that the individuals felt embarrassment on buying such stuff and engaging in such act. Grant (2010) described in his study that if the porn addiction left untreated it led to the shame and guilt ⁽⁸⁾.

The third category involves the mental illness issues which indicated emotional and behavioural problems. Emotional problems associated with frustration, guilt, repent, hopeless and helplessness. Continuous exposure to pornography led the individuals towards the hostile, anger, frustration and other mental problems (9). Ownes, Behun, Manning and Reid (2012) also found out that internet Pornography exposure can lead to emotional disturbance, frustration, guilt, shame which affect their daily life activities ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Internet pornography also led to changing mood after viewing.

Exposure to pornography also affect the individuals behaviourally. The individual's temperament affected due to which they become aggressive. Pornography is designed to activate the sexual arousal and for the pleasurable feelings so, according to the Hierarchical Confluence Model of sexual aggression, pornography work as a "fuel to fire" by activating the sexual attitudes of the individual in the form of emotions, cognitions and

behaviour related to pornography. This fuel to fire made the individuals aggressive. Grant (2010) identified that pornography addiction led to the individual become hostile, angry and aggressive. Addiction cycle made them feel guilty, frustrated, dissatisfied, and out of control due to which they become furious ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Therefore, this study suggests that by exploring the perception of psychosocial issues associated with internet pornography and by becoming familiar with the authentic problems that the individuals described about the pornographic issues we can improve the mechanism of the internet in order to stop the viewers to visit that websites. So, it will create awareness in society about psychosocial issues due to internet pornography that may pose a threat for the development of mental health in adults. This study will help the psychologists in establishing management strategies like to overcome the adult issues regarding internet pornography. The findings of the study will enable the lawmakers to further improve the legislations by blocking such websites that show pornographic material. on such issue of viewing internet pornography in adults.

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Komal Razzaq; concept, data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript review

MUHAMMAD RAFIQ; concept, data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript review