

Study sees link between porn and sexual dysfunction

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(HealthDay)—Young men who prefer pornography to real-world sexual

encounters might find themselves caught in a trap, unable to perform sexually with other people when the opportunity presents itself, a new study reports.

Porn-addicted men are more likely to suffer from [erectile dysfunction](#) and are less likely to be satisfied with sexual intercourse, according to survey findings presented Friday at the American Urological Association's annual meeting, in Boston.

For the study, researchers surveyed 312 men, aged 20 to 40, who visited a San Diego urology clinic for treatment. Only 3.4 percent of the men said they preferred masturbating to pornography over [sexual intercourse](#), the survey found.

But the researchers found a statistical relationship between porn addiction and [sexual dysfunction](#), said lead researcher Dr. Matthew Christman. He is a staff urologist with the Naval Medical Center in San Diego.

"The rates of organic causes of erectile dysfunction in this age cohort are extremely low, so the increase in erectile dysfunction that we have seen over time for this group needs to be explained," Christman said. "We believe that pornography use may be one piece to that puzzle. Our data does not suggest that it is the only explanation, however."

Christman said the problem could be rooted in the biology of addiction.

"Sexual behavior activates the same 'reward system' circuitry in the brain as addictive drugs, such as cocaine and methamphetamines, which can result in self-reinforcing activity, or recurrent behaviors," Christman said.

"Internet pornography, specifically, has been shown to be a supernormal

stimulus of this circuitry, which may be due to the ability to continuously and instantaneously self-select novel and more sexually arousing images," he added.

Watching too much internet porn can increase a person's "tolerance," the same as with narcotics, Christman explained. Regular porn watchers are less likely to respond to regular, real-world sexual activity, and must increasingly rely on pornography for release, he said.

"Tolerance could explain the sexual dysfunction, and can explain our finding that associated preferences for pornography over partnered sex with statistically significantly higher sexual dysfunction in men," Christman said.

Pornography also could be setting up unrealistic expectations in young and inexperienced men, causing libido-sapping anxiety when real-world sex doesn't measure up to filmed fantasies, said Dr. Joseph Alukal. He is director of male reproductive health at New York University in New York City.

"They believe they're supposed to be able to do what goes on in these movies, and when they can't it causes a great deal of anxiety," Alukal said.

Pornography use varied widely across all the men surveyed. About 26 percent said they view pornography less than once a week, while 25 percent said one to two times a week, and 21 percent said three to five times weekly. At the other extreme, 5 percent said they use pornography six to 10 times a week, and 4 percent said more than 11 times a week.

The men most often used a computer (72 percent) or a smartphone (62 percent) for viewing pornography, the survey found.

A separate survey of 48 females found no association between pornography and sexual dysfunction, even though about 40 percent said they also watch pornography.

The findings about young men raise concerns that teenagers' sexuality could be affected if they're exposed to pornography, Christman said.

"There does appear to be some conditioning that can occur with exposure to [internet pornography](#)," Christman said. He recommends that parents spend time with their kids, stay tuned into their interests, and block their access to porn.

Men who are concerned that pornography might be affecting their sex life should seek counseling, Christman and Alukal said.

"Presently, mental health professionals and those with a focus on dealing with addictive behaviors may be best suited to help individuals with [pornography](#) addiction," Christman said. Some reports have shown that sexual function can improve if an affected man stops viewing porn, he added.

More information: Matthew Christman, M.D., staff urologist, Naval Medical Center, San Diego; Joseph Alukal, M.D., director, male reproductive health, New York University, New York City; May 12, 2017, presentation, American Urological Association annual meeting, Boston

For more on sexual dysfunction, visit the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

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