

Pornography use at any level harms romantic relationships, suggests new study

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A BYU study found that pornography use by men or women at any level negatively impacted romantic relationships, with a pronounced negative impact on relationship stability. Credit: Jaren Wilkey/BYU Photo

Avoiding pornography is vital to developing a healthy and long-term romantic relationship, says a new study from BYU.

The research, recently published in the *Journal of Sex Research*,

leveraged data from over 3,500 people in [committed relationships](#) nationwide to examine pornography usage associations between gender, perceived addiction, and how religious an individual was. Researchers didn't expose participants to pornographic material but asked participants to answer specific questions about pornography viewing as well as questions that measured their sense of satisfaction and stability in their [relationship](#).

While there are complex factors between pornography use, gender, belief regarding addiction, and religion, the research found that pornography use by men or women at any level negatively impacted [romantic relationships](#)—with a pronounced negative impact on relationship stability.

"It's true that the type of pornographic content may have larger negative effects on relationship well-being than others, and that men who are religious appear to be more impacted by watching pornography due to feelings of being out of harmony with their moral beliefs, but the fact remains that relationship stability is weakened by pornography usage for both men and women," said Dr. Brian Willoughby, BYU School of Family Life professor and co-author of the study.

The findings hold important implications because prior to this study, pornography and its impact on relationship health had been a topic on which scholars and other experts seldom agreed. Many scholars argued that too many competing factors were at play to suggest that pornography use harms healthy relationships—making it difficult for the public and policymakers to get a clear sense of the impact pornography has on relationship health.

The research now arms agencies and policymakers with an overwhelming amount of evidence suggesting that regular pornography usage results in poor relational health. "As higher pornography use was

reported, lower relationship stability was also reported by men and women," said Willoughby.

"I think we need to start having a better conversation about pornography use being a risk factor for relationships," he said. "Most couples are probably unaware that their pornography use may be creating risk or harm in their relationship. I'm hoping that research like this can start conversations for policymakers and others about the need to educate the public about the potential harms of [pornography](#) and create better resources for individuals and couples on navigating this topic."

More information: Brian J. Willoughby et al, Context Matters: Moderating Effects in the Associations between Pornography Use, Perceived Addiction, and Relationship Well-being, *The Journal of Sex Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2022.2148155](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2022.2148155)

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