

A Study of Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving Among Indian Men

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ABSTRACT

Pornography has become an issue that Indians consider taboo and refuse to generally acknowledge, yet statistics by popular porn sites project India as the third largest viewer of porn with 70% of the viewers being men. With the increase in the viewership of pornography amidst the lockdown, it was important to study the relationship between different aspects of mental wellbeing and pornographic craving. The study was conducted to study the relationship between depression, stress, anxiety, and pornographic craving among married and unmarried Indian men (N= 98). It was found that there is a significant relationship between depression, anxiety, stress, and pornography craving in men. It was also found that anxiety and pornographic craving were correlated in married men.

Keywords: *Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving*

The increased affordability of smartphones and data usage has caused a drastic change in the online behavior of Indian men as well as women. According to a new report by adult website Pornhub, 89%, Indians watched porn via mobile devices in 2019, which is three percent more than the figure in 2017, when the number was at 86%. This is despite India banning pornographic sites in 2015, citing women and child safety. Research studies reflect the negative impact of cybersex and pornographic viewing on the psychological wellbeing of men in particular (Philaretou, Andreas, Mahfouz, Ahmed, Allen & Katherein, 2005).

Even though the present Indian society is considered more open than before, people tend to keep privacy in the matter of sexual urges, doubts about sexuality, sexual curiosities, physical attraction, etc. Going a step ahead, it is considered immoral and taboo to discuss these issues out in the open. This has led people to reach out to the internet to both satisfy their sexual curiosity and urges. As the content in most porn videos is Western, more than a clarification of their doubts, watching pornography can further create over-thinking about one's physical appearances, sexual abilities, urges, etc. which in turn could lead to causing negative emotions in people, especially adolescents and younger men.

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And, in other way, people with negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, or stress might depend on pornography which gives pleasure and entertainment without anybody's help. The quality of immorality attached to watching pornography could have contributed to this problem. Also, people might go for pornography to release their sexual tensions and sexual urges when they have no time for sexual activities which could give rise to a feeling of cheating on the partner.

This study focuses on the relationship between those negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, stress, and pornography craving among Indian men. It also tries to understand whether the marital status in men has an impact on depression, anxiety, stress, and pornography craving. The findings of this study can be helpful to do further studies on the same topic by adding more variables such as body image, self-esteem, sexual satisfaction, self-confidence, etc. along with gender.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Duggan and McCreary in 2008, studied 101 heterosexual and gay men, to examine the relationship between consumption of muscle and fitness magazines and various indices of pornography and body satisfaction. It was found that Pornography exposure was positively correlated with social physique anxiety for both gay men and heterosexual men. Similar results were found by Tylka (2015), Owen, Behun, Manning, and Reid (2012), and other researchers who indicated that Pornographic viewing contributed to appearance-related pressure, negative self-concept, and body image.

Though men tend to use pornography as a means of recreation and education, it is seen to have negative intrapersonal ramifications in terms of depression, anxiety, and problems related to intimacy with their real-life partners (Philaretou, Manhfouz, & Allen, 2005). Similar results have been reported by Bradley (2017), where it was seen that perceived pornographic addiction was correlated to psychological distress in American men (N=713). Religiosity and morality have played an important role in the psychological wellbeing of adults who viewed porn. Perry (2015), reported that male porn users who morally reject pornography, predicted depressive symptoms at low frequencies, likely stemming from cognitive stress or dissonance. Depressed men likely view higher levels of pornography as a coping aid, especially when they do not view it as immoral. Similarly, Bradley (2017), reported that nonbelievers may be less likely overall to experience psychological distress related to perceived pornographic addiction.

Married and unmarried Indian men have shown marked differences in online infidelity. In their research on Understanding Attribution Bias and Reasons Behind Internet Infidelity in India, Garima and Sahni (2018), state that strong Moral Values, religious principles, not wanting to cheat on one's partner, and situational factors like fear of being caught, lack of knowledge, internet inaccessibility have been the main components of online infidelity. The main causes contributing to this in married men are lack of sexual satisfaction, lack of emotional support in the marriage, frustration, and boredom. On the other hand, for unmarried men, it is predominantly peer pressure and desire to explore.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 98 Indian males aged between 20 and 40 years. Married and unmarried men who watched pornography for a minimum of one year, irrespective of the frequency and length of exposure to pornography were selected for the study. The method was a double-blind study as it was found in the pilot study that the participants hesitated to

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answer the questions when their identity was to be shared. It was also found that men hesitated to answer when they found that the investigator was a woman. The questionnaires along with basic demographic details were sent out through social media and mails using snowball sampling on electronic forms. The data was first screened for participants who were not watchers of pornography. Consent was taken from all the participants and the participants who were ready to share their qualitative views in the form of telephonic interviews were asked to share their numbers.

The primary analysis involved comparing the means of the married and unmarried men of the four primary variables: Pornographic craving, Stress, Anxiety, and depression. Subsequently, the relationship across the variables in the whole sample, married men and unmarried men were computed to find underlying patterns if any. To additionally reinforce the finding, qualitative interviews were carried out on 15 participants who had given consent to discuss the topic provided confidentiality was maintained. Telephonic interviews with open ended questions were conducted on 29 participants. (12 married and 17 unmarried participants). The questions posed to the participants in the interviews included, “How did you get introduced to porn?”, “Why do you watch Porn?”, “How do you think watching port effects you?” and to those who answer that porn either “troubles them” or “gets them anxious” the question “why?” was posed.

The main dependent variables that were used in the study were Pornographic craving and elements of psychological wellbeing namely, depression, anxiety, and stress.

The tools that were used in the study were, The Pornography Craving Questionnaire (PCQ), developed by Shane Kraus and Harold Rosenberg in 2014 with a total number of 12 items and Test-Retest Reliability of 0.82 and Predictive Validity with of 0.48. Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS21), developed by Lovibond and Lovibond in 1995 with three dimensions Depression, Anxiety and Stress with internal Consistency using Cronbach's Alpha with scores for Depression (0.85), for Anxiety (0.85), and Stress (0.87) was used to evaluate Depression, Anxiety and Stress.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The inferential statistical test, that is the Independent samples t-test and the Pearson correlation tests, were conducted to test the null hypothesis in the study and also to determine the relationship between the variables.

Table 1 Independent Sample t-test for Marital Status difference in Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving

	Marital Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	p(Sig.)
Depression	Married	32	8.40	5.49	1.29	56.36	0.19
	Unmarried	66	6.96	4.98			
Anxiety	Married	32	6.90	4.82	0.46	54.06	0.64
	Unmarried	66	6.46	4.16			
Stress	Married	32	9.00	4.61	1.37	63.86	0.17
	Unmarried	66	7.59	4.81			
Pornography Craving	Married	32	35.87	20.90	1.01	53.32	0.31
	Unmarried	66	31.74	17.74			

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Table 1 shows the means in the Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving among men. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was conducted to find whether there is any relation between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving among men.

Table 2 Correlation results showing the relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving in overall sample of men (N=98)

		Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Pornography Craving
Pornography Craving	Pearson Correlation	0.27**	0.38**	0.28**	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.005	0.000	0.005	
Depression	Pearson Correlation		0.68**	0.74**	0.27**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.007
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation			0.74**	0.38**
	Sig.(2-tailed)			0.000	0.000
Stress	Pearson Correlation				0.28**
	Sig.(2-tailed)				0.005

Note: **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 indicates the Correlation test results to determine whether there is a significant relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving among the sample of men (N=98).

Table 3 Correlation results showing the relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving in Unmarried sample (N=66)

		Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Pornography Craving
Pornography Craving	Pearson Correlation	0.44**	0.35**	0.34**	
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.004	0.005	
Depression	Pearson Correlation		0.78**	0.71**	0.44**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation			0.82**	0.35**
	Sig.(2-tailed)			0.000	0.004
Stress	Pearson Correlation				0.34**
	Sig.(2-tailed)				0.005

Note: **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the Correlation test results to determine whether there is a significant relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving among the sample of Unmarried men (N=66).

Table 4 Correlation results showing the relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving in Married sample (N=32)

		Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Pornography Craving
Pornography Craving	Pearson Correlation	-0.39	0.42**	0.15	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.834	0.018	0.411	
Depression	Pearson Correlation		0.54**	0.78**	-0.04
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.001	0.000	0.834
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation			0.62**	0.42*
	Sig.(2-tailed)			0.000	0.018
Stress	Pearson Correlation				0.15
	Sig.(2-tailed)				0.411

Note: **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the Correlation test results to determine whether there is a significant relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Pornography Craving among the sample of Married men (N=32).

The results of the study indicate that married and unmarried Indian men indulge in pornographic cravings equally. Besides, the pornographic craving was significantly associated with anxiety, stress, and depression in men in general and the same pattern is true in unmarried men. However, in married men, the pornographic craving was more associated with anxiety rather than depression or stress.

Analysis of the interview responses of the 29 participants revealed 70% of the unmarried men shared that they resorted to porn watching to release their sexual energy which resulted in either them not having a sexual partner or not having opportunities to have sexual contact with their partners. These participants also shared having feelings of loneliness after coming home after their long days at work. 64% shared their apprehensions about their sexual performance when compared to what they watch on the pornographic videos. They shared that they had apprehensions about them being able to satisfy their partners adequately even when their partners have not made any explicit comment on the same. 76 % of the married participants in the interview shared that though they use pornography as a distressed, it often makes them anxious as they are always apprehensive of their wife, children or parents “catching them in the act” and making things awkward.

To understand the pattern, it is important to look into the concept of morality associated with online sexual activities in India. Though research across cultures states that men indulge in pornography for sexual gratification and to some extent, sexual education, the expression of sex in general be it within or outside the marriage is more conservative and discreet. Any sexual activity that is not between a husband and a wife, which could include, masturbation, sexual voyeurism which could include pornography and sexting, and sex chatting are considered highly morally corrupt (Grubbs, Wilt, Exline and Pargament, 2018). Also, pornographic viewing is widely considered as infidelity in Indian marriages (Madathil and

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Sandhu, 2008). And as suggested by Jain and Sahni, in married Indian men it is strongly associated with mortality and fear of being caught.

As the contents in porn are mostly Western, pornography addiction in Indian men can lead to body image questioning and can create doubts about their sexuality. This might give rise to stress, depression, or anxiety in people when they have doubts about themselves. In other way, people who have depression, anxiety, or stress might go for pornography which gives pleasure and entertainment without anyone in their life. Also, people might go for pornography to release their sexual tensions and sexual urges when they have either there an absence of a sexual partner, no time for sexual activity, or even sexual incompatibility with the partner.

This is in concurrence with available research from the west. Men when compared with women, find something to distract themselves from a situation, while they are going through any negative emotions rather than expressing it out. This could be the reason it showed a highly significant relationship between negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and stress with pornography craving. According to studies, lonely men, who are craving for intimacy, motives for mood regulation, overall lower sexual satisfaction, loneliness, obsessive passion, neuroticism, etc. are said to be more prone to porn watching.

Unmarried men showed that depression, anxiety, and stress have a strong relationship with pornographic craving. Contributing factors like loneliness, sharing of accommodation with other males, staying away from their sexual partners or unavailability of sexual partners, repressed sexuality, work stress, tensions about future-life settlements, relationship break-up issues, body-image issues in men with high weight, fatigue, boredom, anxiety, and curiosity related to sexual performance were some of the reasons that participants said that made them watch porn. Anxiety related to erectile dysfunction, low self-esteem, social physique anxiety, premature ejaculation, suicidal ideation or behavior related to their sexual dysfunction, etc which are directly related to pornographic viewing, associated with negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and stress.

It was interesting to note that pornographic craving correlated highly only with anxiety in married men. This could be because of the morality attached to Indian society concerning sex. In early April 2013, lawyer Kamlesh Vaswani filed a Public Interest Litigation petition to the Supreme Court of India calling for a ban against the consumption of pornography. In her petition, she quoted that, "Pornography is worse than Hitler, worse than AIDS, cancer or any other epidemic. It is more catastrophic than the nuclear holocaust, and it must be stopped". Also, this anxiety could be related to being caught watching porn by the spouse or other members of the family, especially children, taboo attached to watching porn, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained in this study have thus indicated that there is a strong relationship exists between depression, anxiety, stress, and pornography craving in men. The results could be used to develop psycho-social research involving other factors like self-concept, body image, self-esteem, sexual satisfaction, marital satisfaction, gender difference, and interpersonal relationships, etc. as other factors.

Implications of the Study

The findings in the study can be utilized in the formulation of better counseling and other strategies for people who are going through emotional problems. It can be helpful to do

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further studies on the same topic by adding more variables such as body image, self-esteem, sexual satisfaction, self-confidence, etc. along with gender. Findings will help in providing better sexual education in men as well as women from their early age itself and be used in clinical setup to understand the behavior, thoughts, and activities of men who are going through emotional problems.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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