

EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: AN EMPIRICAL REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Pornography is a visual representation of sexuality which distorts an individual's concept of the nature of conjugal relations as ordained by God (Levert, 2007). This, in turn, alters both sexual attitudes and behaviour (1Corinthians 15:33). It is a major threat to marriage, children, individual happiness and family. In undermining marriage, it is one of the factors undermining social stability.

Sexual intercourse, like atomic energy, is a powerful agent for good, if channelled well but for ill if not (Genesis 1:22; 1Corinthians 7:2-3). Any sexual behaviour outside of marriage or unhealthy sexual behaviour within marriage is damaging because we are abusing sexuality for the gratification of personal lusts and desires, rather than to accomplish the divine purpose for which it was given. In so doing, we abuse our souls and that of other individuals. We initiate a natural drive within us that is designed to bond us together as one with our spouse and often leave in it no true object to bind us to, and we miss a profound opportunity for what many have described as a spiritual connection between ourselves, our spouse and God in exchange for the temporary gratification of our individual lusts and desires. Pornography use is a particularly stark example of this act because it is impossible to even approach the realization of this divine purpose.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this research paper is to compile the current empirical findings that examine the effects of pornography on Christian marriages.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To carry out this empirical review, the study employed secondary data. An emphasis was placed on recent empirical research, contained in peer-reviewed journals.

Limitations

This is a preliminary study to explore the issue of the effects of pornography on Christian marriages. The study relied on published secondary data. Primary data could not be collected due to time constraint.

PORNOGRAPHY AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

God's ideal for sex within Marriage

Marriage was the last institution God brought into being with the creation of Eve for Adam. When God at the end of the sixth day of creation, saw everything that He had made, and declared "it was very good", it was an all inclusive statement; it included marriage. God as the Sovereign Creator has the prerogative to set the parameters for the use and management of everything He made and created. God, therefore, gave Adam and Eve the gift of sex, an act during which the husband and wife unreservedly surrender themselves totally – body, mind, and spirit to each other. It is a special fellowship act during which each partner is drawn out and merged into the other, for "the two will become one flesh".

In marriage denying one partner sex for no good cause violates the commandments of God which forbids the denial of sex to one's partner (Nguando-Yamoah, 2012). Also just giving in to sex without participating is equally wrong. The sex act is the giving of our whole self to our spouse. Both must therefore actively participate in the act, otherwise it would be interpreted to mean denying your spouse of yourself. Additionally, any form of sexual expression outside of marriage such as masturbation, sexual fantasies, and pornography of different forms are all considered as wrong and defilement of the marriage bed.

The act of sexual intercourse brings humanity into existence and sets in motion the next generations of society. Sexual intercourse, like atomic energy, is a powerful agent for good if channeled well, but for ill if not. Healthy societies maintain their stability by channeling the sexual energies of young adults into marriage, an institution that legitimizes sexual intercourse, protects the children that are the fruit of intercourse, and channels the giving and receiving of sexual pleasure in a way that builds up rather than tears down society.

Definition of Pornography

According to O'Toole (1999: 1) pornography is "regulated, explicit depictions of bodies, sex organs and sexual activity specifically designed to arouse (or the fetishized stand-in: image of a stiletto on a white shiny plate, a submissive male licking a woman's ankle-length boot, a fleece quilted sleeping bag immersed in a steamy bath)." The Internet is the main source and medium for sale and procurement of pornographic materials (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2008). More often than not pornographic materials are used outside of the relationship, in private, and often without the knowledge of the romantic partner.

Clinical Consequences of Pornography

Pornography consumption has a lot of health ramifications which in turn affect Christian marriages. There are numerous clinical consequences to pornography use, including increased risk for significant physical and mental health problems and a greater likelihood of committing a sex-based crime.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Out-Of-Wedlock Pregnancies

Since pornography encourages sexually permissive attitudes and behaviour, users of pornography have a higher likelihood of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or fathering an out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Ariely & Loewenstein, 2010). The frequent depiction of intercourse without condoms—87 percent of the time (Ariely & Loewenstein, 2010)—in pornography is an invitation for the promiscuous to contract a sexually transmitted disease, to have a child out of wedlock and to have multiple sex partners. Pornography also promotes sexual compulsiveness, which doubles the likelihood of being infected with a sexually transmitted disease.

Sexual Addiction

Pornography and “cybersex” are highly addictive and can lead to sexually compulsive behaviours (that decrease a person’s capacity to perform other major tasks in life). Over 90 percent of therapists surveyed in one study believed that a person could become addicted to “cybersex.” In an American survey, 57 percent of frequent viewers used online sexual activity to deal with stress. A 2006 Swedish study of regular Internet pornography users found that about six percent were compulsive users and that these compulsives also used much more non-Internet pornography as well (Ariely & Loewenstein, 2010).

Addictive pornography use leads to lower self-esteem and a weakened ability to carry out a meaningful social and work life. A survey of pornography addicts found that they disliked the “out of control” feeling and the time consumption that their pornography use engendered (Bauserman, 2006). All of the sexual compulsives reported they had felt distressed and experienced impairment in an important aspect of their lives as a result of their addiction. Almost half of the sexual compulsives said their behavior had significant negative results in their social lives, and a quarter reported negative effects on their job. In another survey, sexual compulsives and sexual addicts were 23 times more likely than those without a problem to state that discovering online sexual material was the worst thing that had ever happened in their life (Bergner & Bridges, 2007). No wonder then that severe clinical depression was reported twice as frequently among Internet pornography users compared to non-users.

Aggression and Abuse

Intense use of pornography is strongly related to sexual aggression, and among frequent viewers of pornography, there is a marked increase in sexual callousness, including the “rape myth acceptance” (Baron & Straus, 1984).

A significant portion of pornography is violent in content. In a study of different pornographic media, Loftus (2002) found violence in almost a quarter of magazine scenes, in more than a quarter of video scenes, and in almost half (over 42 percent) of online pornography. A second study by

Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg (2008) found that almost half of the violent internet scenes included nonconsensual sex. The data suggest “a modest connection between exposure to pornography and subsequent behavioral aggression (D’Alessio, Allen, & Brezgel, 1995: 258),” though when men consume *violent* pornography (i.e. depicting rape or torture), they are more likely to commit acts of sexual aggression (D’Alessio, Allen, & Brezgel, 1995: 258). Dangerously, pornography strongly affects psychotic men, who are more likely to act out their impulses.

Consumption of nonviolent pornography also increases men’s self-acknowledged willingness to force compliance with their particular sexual desires on reluctant partners (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2008). And though there are conflicting data on the relative effects of violent versus non-violent pornography, there is little doubt that the consumption of pornography leads to a significant increase in “rape myth acceptance,” which involves a reduction of sympathy with rape victims and a trivialization of rape as a criminal offense, a diminished concern about child sexual abuse, short of the rape of children, and an increased preparedness to resort to rape.

In a related study, Krafka, Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod (1997) interviewed 100 sexually abused women to determine whether pornography played a role in any past incidences of sexual abuse. While 58 percent could not say, 28 percent stated that their abuser had in fact used pornography. Of this 28 percent (women who were aware that their abuser used pornography), 40 percent (or 11 percent of the total group) reported that pornography actually played a role in the abusive incident they experienced. In some cases the abuser had watched pornography before abusing the woman, in one case he used pornography while committing the abuse, and in yet some other cases he forced his victim to participate in the making of a pornographic film.

Sex Offenders and Pornography

According to a report by the American Psychological Association (2007), pornography viewing and sexual offense are inextricably linked. One study of convicted Internet sexual offenders reported that they spent more than eleven hours per week viewing pornographic images of children on the Internet. The same report compared two groups of offenders: those convicted of Internet collection and distribution of child pornography images, and those who commit real life child sex abuse. The results showed that a majority of those who were convicted of only Internet-based offenses also had committed real life sexual abuse of children. Moreover the study also found that real life offenders had committed an average of over thirteen different child sex abuse offenses, irrespective of whether they had formally been convicted of any real life incident.

In studying of sex offenders and non-offenders, Baron and Straus (1984) have revealed significant differences in adolescent pornography use as well as current use. Significant proportions of different types of rapists and molesters had used hard-core pornography (depictions of non-consensual acts) during their adolescence: 33 percent of heterosexual child molesters, 39 percent of homosexual child molesters, and 33 percent of rapists. The current use of hard core pornography was even greater for these groups: 67 percent of heterosexual child molesters, 67 percent of homosexual child molesters, and 83 percent of rapists, contrasted with 29 percent of non-offending

pornography viewers. About a third of the sex offenders reported using pornography as a deliberate stimulus to commit their sexual offenses.

Similarly, Bridges, Bergner, and Hesson-McInnis have examined the beliefs of three groups: real life, “contact-only” child sex offenders, Internet-only child sex offenders, and mixed offenders (contact and Internet). They found out that while all groups were more likely to minimize the gravity of their offense, the Internet-only group was more likely than the contact-only group to think that children could make their own decisions on sexual involvement and to believe that some children wanted, even eagerly wanted, sexual activity with an adult (2003: 29).

Effects of Pornography on Christian Marital Relationships

Although Internet pornography is commonly consumed by one household member in a solitary, secret fashion, the impact of sexually explicit material is being felt by entire family systems, not to mention whole communities and corporate circles (Bauserman, 2006). The marital relationship, in particular, is a logical point of impact to examine because it is the foundational familial and social unit, as well as a sexual union that can be easily destabilized by sexual pursuits outside the marital contract.

Research indicates that the majority of people struggling with sexual addictions and compulsiveness are married, heterosexual males (Bauserman, 2006).

Characteristics of Healthy, Stable Marriages

In order to put the impact of pornography into perspective, let us first consider the characteristics of strong, stable, and satisfying marriages. Highlighting these characteristics lays a foundation for understanding how pornography consumption can be incongruent with stable marital relationships. Although there are many ways to have a stable and satisfying marriage, some common factors are worth highlighting because of their empirical support and widespread applicability to diverse couples.

Research by Bergner and Bridges (2007) is useful in clarifying what romantic love entails from a social science perspective. They found that romantic love embodies the following characteristics: (a) investment in the well-being of the beloved, (b) respect, (c) admiration, (d) sexual desire, (e) intimacy, (f) commitment, (g) exclusivity, and (h) understanding. The researchers found that when these characteristics are present in a romantic relationship, people tend to feel fully loved. On the other hand, when there are violations to these characteristics and the violations are sufficient in magnitude, partners will commonly conclude that they are no longer loved as they once were and re-evaluate their place in their partners’ world. As Bergner and Bridges (2007) point out, many women who discover a partner’s intense involvement with pornography engage in just such a reappraisal of their relationship.

When we look at marriages from a holistic view and not just at romantic love, social science data helps us to understand the following characteristics as common factors in healthy, stable marital relationships.

Maurer's work also helps clarify what satisfying sexual relationships entail (Paul, 2005). Maurer found three common traits that distinguish sexually satisfied couples from unsatisfied couples: (1) acceptance of one's own sexuality, (2) listening to one's partner and being aware of a partner's likes and dislikes, and (3) open and honest communication.

From the Christian perspective, additional effects include:

- (1) Pornography turns Christian marriage upside down and makes them to turn away from God (Hosea 5:4).
- (2) It hinders God's mercy upon the children of the pornographer (Hosea 2:4).
- (3) No matter how much they involve in the act, sexual satisfaction will not be attained (Ezek 16:28, Job 31:1).
- (4) People who involved in pornography are always enhanced, so an attempt for a Christian couple to imitate the same act will cause both physical and internal damage. (I Thess. 4:3-6).
- (5) It can lead to break of marriage.
- (6) Those who indulge in it will be judge (Rev 17:1, Heb 13:4).

Predictor of Marital Distress, Separation, and Divorce

According to research and professional observations, the impact of pornography consumption on marriages is slowly coming into focus. For example, survey research conducted by Bridges, Bergner, and Hesson-McInnis (2003) found married women are significantly more distressed by a partner's online pornography consumption than women in dating relationships, and that Internet pornography consumption is viewed as a threat to the relationship. This study included a non-clinical sample (N = 100) who were 18 years of age or older and who had a partner involved in Internet pornography. The distress reported by the women increased according to the perceived frequency of online sexual activities and, surprisingly, was not as strongly influenced by religious beliefs. Therefore, married women who perceived greater levels of Internet pornography consumption tended to have the greatest levels of distress than any other group of women. Bridges, Bergner, and Hesson-McInnis' (2003) research is significant because it supports the assertion that married women generally are distressed by their husbands use of sexually explicit material and that this may threaten the stability of the marital bond.

Looking to more extreme situations, a study by Schneider (2000) found that cybersex addiction was a major contributing factor to separation and divorce for affected couples. This study analyzed survey responses from 94 individuals (91 women, 3 men) who (a) ranged in age from 24 to 57, (b) had been in a relationship for an average of 12.6 years (range of 0.5 to 39 years), and (c) were seeking therapy to cope with a partner's Internet involvement. The sample was recruited through 20 therapists who were treating sex addicts and who were aware of individuals who would be interested in participating in this research. Although a range of online sexual activities were listed, viewing and/or downloading pornography accompanied by masturbation was present in 100 percent of the cases.

Although not a formal study, important survey data collected by Bauserman (2006) reported that 62 percent of 1,600 divorce and matrimonial lawyers said that Internet pornography had been a significant factor in divorces they had handled during the last year.

Decreased Sexual Satisfaction

Prior to Internet pornography becoming readily available, Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (1988) conducted a study that looked at the impact of consuming common, nonviolent pornographic material on male and female participants (Häggström-Nordin, Hanson, & Tydén, 2005). The participants represented college and non-student populations from a Midwestern city (N = 160). As part of the study, participants were exposed to either pornographic or innocuous, non-pornographic content in hourly sessions over six consecutive weeks. In the seventh week, participants were asked to rate their personal happiness regarding various domains of experience and the relative importance of gratifying experiences.

Results showed that exposure to pornography negatively impacted self-assessment of sexual experience, while other aspects of life (e.g., professional satisfaction) remained constant. Participants reported less satisfaction with their intimate partner and specifically with their partner's affection, physical appearance, sexual curiosity, and sexual performance. Additionally, participants who were repeatedly exposed to pornographic material assigned increased importance to sexual relations without emotional involvement. Furthermore, all of these effects were uniform across male and female participants. Although the authors point out that pornography is unlikely to be the only genre of entertainment to affect aesthetic dissatisfaction with self and/or one's partner, it appears from the research that pornography is the only genre that impacts sexual dissatisfaction specifically. Because Internet pornography tends to be more immediate and powerful than other mediums due to its interactive and consumer-driven nature (e.g., viewers can select exactly who and what they want to see and can interact with real people via video cameras), it is reasonable to assume Zillman and Bryant's 1988 findings have at least similar, if not greater applicability to Internet pornography. In fact, data from more current research on the impact of Internet pornography and online sexual pursuits on sexual satisfaction is congruent with previous findings (Kenrick & Gutierrez, 1989).

For example, Bergner and Bridges' 2007 study revealed two distinct themes related to sexual desire and satisfaction. The two themes, along with other characteristics, emerged out of analyzing 100 letters posted online to four different message boards created for spouses, fiancés and girlfriends of men perceived to be heavily involved in pornography. The male partners did not necessarily meet the criteria for cybersex or sexual addiction. The first theme these women voiced was that of decreased sexual desire by their partners. As one participant stated, "I am no longer sexually attractive or desirable to him. He's more attracted to the women depicted in his movies, magazines, and websites than he is to me, and I feel completely unable to compete with these women."

Secondly, it was common for pornography users to continue sexual relations with their female partner, but the sexual advances conveyed a message of objectification as opposed to meaningful interaction (Bergner & Bridges, 2007). For example, one woman stated, "I am no longer a sexual *person* or partner to him, but a sexual *object*. He is not really with *me*, not really making love to *me*.... He seems to be thinking about something or someone else—likely those porn women.... He is just using me as a warm body."

Decreased Sexual Intimacy

Schneider's (2000) study involving the spouses of cybersex addicts is another study that supports Zillman and Bryant's (1988) findings regarding decreased sexual satisfaction. Schneider's work revealed that compulsive cybersex has several adverse effects on the conjugal sexual relationship, including decreased sexual intimacy. Schneider collected data from respondents who were in different types of committed relationships to individuals struggling with cybersex addictions. Two-thirds (68 percent) of the respondents experienced decreased sexual intimacy with their partners (Zillman & Bryant, 1988). Moreover, the participants reported that these difficulties coincided with the *beginning* of the cybersex activities—a point that is important to highlight for those who wish to limit the findings to those who have dealt with chronic sexually addictive or compulsive behavior.

More than half (52.1 percent) of the cybersex users had lost interest in relational sex, as had one-third of the partners. Furthermore, in 18.1 percent of the relationships surveyed, *both* partners had decreased interest in sex. Schneider also points out that spouses of pornography users often report being repulsed by the user's sexual pursuits. For the cybersex users who have already substituted online sexual activity for relational sexual intimacy, their partner's repulsion and loss of interest is not as problematic or distressing.

Schneider (2000) outlined the following recurrent themes in the survey data:

- The user makes excuses to avoid sexual intimacy with the partner (e.g., not in the mood or too tired).
- The partner feels hurt, angry, sexually rejected, inadequate, and unable to compete with computer images and sexy online women (or men) who are willing to do “anything.”
- During relational sex, the cybersex user appears distant, emotionally detached, and interested only in his/her pleasure.
- The partner ends up doing most or all of the initiating, either to get her/his own needs met or as an attempt to get the user to decrease the online activities.
- The user blames the partner for their sexual problems.
- The user wants the partner to participate in sexual activities that she or he finds objectionable.

Bergner and Bridges' (2007) study also supports the fact that women in relationships (married, engaged, or dating) with men perceived as heavy pornography consumers report decreased and altered sexual intimacy as a common symptom. An example of what the researchers categorized as decreased intimacy included statements such as, “I have been excluded, isolated, barred from intimacy with him. I have lost someone whom I thought was my best friend and most intimate companion in life. He now has a whole secret life from which I am completely excluded and about which he continually lies to me.”

From a male perspective, Cooper, Galbreath, and Becker's (2008) study of men with online sexual problems revealed two important subgroups with regard to the impact on sexual activity with a committed partner. The researchers found that sexual activity with a partner increased for men who used the Internet to: (a) educate themselves, (b) meet people to date and/or with whom to have offline sexual relations, and (c) socialize as compared to men who do not go online for these reasons. In contrast, participants who turned to online sexual activity to deal with stress had

increased problems in their real-time relationships and received complaints from others about this involvement. These findings corroborate earlier research and support Schneider's claim that the emotional distance online sexual problems foster can be just as damaging to the relationship as real-life sexual infidelity (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2008: 429).

Those who engaged in online pornographic activity to deal with stress also reported having increased masturbatory activity, "thus engaging in what might be a long-term pattern of turning inward and away from others as a primary coping strategy" of which decreased marital intimacy would be a part.

A Form of Infidelity

In virtually all marital contracts or agreements, fidelity is implied or specifically declared. Infidelity, on the other hand, is commonly understood as a violation of the marital agreement, a betrayal of one's trust, and a threat to the marital bond. Ariely and Loewenstein (2010) found individuals who had had an extramarital affair were 3.18 times more likely to have used pornography than individuals who had not had an affair (N = 531). The same study also revealed that people who have engaged in paid sex (i.e., prostitution) were 3.7 more apt to use pornography than those who had not used pornography. What these statistics indicate is that pornography is associated with activities that undermine marital exclusivity and fidelity. What cannot be determined, however, is what comes first. Does pornography influence unfaithful behavior or does unfaithful behavior coincide with pre-existing traits that predispose someone to normalize pornography viewing? Either way, this cluster of behaviors may be understood to validate and legitimize each another.

At least three studies support the fact that women view cybersex and/or pornography consumption as a form of infidelity that reduces the exclusivity of the relationship. Levert (2007) also found that both men and women perceive online sexual activity as an act of betrayal that is as authentic and real as offline acts and that pornography use correlated significantly with emotional infidelity (N = 1,117; 468 males and 649 females).

Women commonly report feelings of betrayal, loss, mistrust, devastation, and anger as responses to the discovery or disclosure of a partner's pornography use and/or online sexual activity. Schneider's 2000 study concluded that women "overwhelmingly" felt cyber affairs were as emotionally painful to them as live or offline affairs, and many viewed the online sexual activity to be just as much adultery or cheating as live affairs.

Additionally, Bergner and Bridges' (2007) qualitative research found that the majority of women in their study used the words "betrayal," "cheating," and "affair" to describe the significance their partner's pornography use had for them. Bergner and Bridges analyzed 100 letters posted online by women in relationships with men perceived to be heavily involved with pornography. Even though the male partners were not in actual contact with other females, the female participants viewed pornographic activities as a form of infidelity and breach of the relationship's exclusivity. As the researchers describe, a consistent theme surfaces in these women's experiences, in that their

partner “has taken the most intimate aspect of the relationship, sexuality, which is supposed to express the bond of love between the couple and be confined exclusively to the relationship, and shared it with countless fantasy women.” Understandably, a wife’s experience of the marital relationship, as well as her own sense of self, is deeply impacted by a husband who finds fantasy women more desirable than herself.

Overspending and Debt

The affordability of sexually explicit material online is a major draw for many consumers. Although there is a plethora of pornographic material that is free, many websites require a pay per-view charge or membership fee. With global profits for sexually explicit material estimated at \$57 billion dollars and Internet pornography generating approximately \$2.5 billion alone, it is an understatement to say that a lot of pornography is being purchased in addition to cost-free material. Consequently, overspending and pornography-related debt are common symptoms of online sexual activity, especially if it has reached compulsive or addictive levels (Paul, 2005). Financial debt of any kind can become a marital and familial hardship depending on individual, couple, and familial circumstances. In fact, according to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, financial stress is considered one of the most common causes of marital conflict and divorce, and this observation is also supported by social science data (Paul, 2005).

Decreased Job Security

Job security is also jeopardized when online sexual activity is occurring in the workplace or excessive computer usage elsewhere is affecting daytime productivity. When one considers that approximately 70 percent of all adult content traffic occurs during the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday, the risk of financial and employment ramifications becomes more apparent. In one of the first large-scale studies of online sexual pursuits, (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2008) found that 5.8 percent of respondents admitted using an office computer for sexual pursuits, and 12.7 percent said they use both home and work computers for this (N =9,177). Furthermore, a survey conducted by Clark and Wiederman (2000) revealed 59 percent of Internet use at the office is not work related, and Goldberg’s work (1998) revealed adult content websites were the fourth most visited category on the Internet while at work during the month of April 1998 (Clark & Wiederman, 2000). Many companies, like Xerox, have begun to enforce Internet abuse policies by firing employees who violate them. As more employers worldwide implement sophisticated ways of monitoring Internet abuse and clarify related policies, those who engage in online pornography will be at greater risk for job loss and/or disciplinary action of some kind.

Marital Dissatisfaction

Pornography use undermines marital relations and distresses wives (Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003). Husbands report loving their spouses less after long periods of looking at (and desiring) women depicted in pornography. In many cases, the wives of pornography users also develop deep psychological wounds, commonly reporting feelings of betrayal, loss, mistrust, devastation, and anger in responses to the discovery or disclosure of a partner’s pornographic online sexual activity (Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003). Wives can begin to feel

unattractive or sexually inadequate and may become severely depressed when they realize their husbands view pornography. The distress level in wives may be so high as to require clinical treatment for trauma, not mere discomfort.

Viewers of pornography assign increased importance to sexual relations without emotional involvement, and consequently, wives experience decreased intimacy from their husbands (Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003). The emotional distance fostered by pornography and “cybersex” (interactive computer contact with another regarding pornographic sexual issues) can often be just as damaging to the relationship as real-life infidelity, and both men and women tend to put online sexual activity in the same category as having an affair. The estrangement between spouses wrought by pornography can have tangible consequences as well: when the viewing of pornography rises to the level of addiction, 40 percent of “sex addicts” lose their spouses, 58 percent suffer considerable financial losses, and about a third lose their jobs.

In a study on the effects of “cybersex”—a form of sexually explicit interaction between two people on the Internet—Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg (2008: 429) found that more than half of those engaged in “cybersex” had lost interest in sexual intercourse, while one-third of their partners had lost interest as well, while in one-fifth of the couples both husband and wife or both partners had a significantly decreased interest in sexual intercourse. Stated differently, this study showed that only one-third of couples maintained an interest in sexual relations with one another when one partner was engaged in “cybersex.”

Prolonged exposure to pornography also fosters dissatisfaction with, and even distaste for, a spouse’s affection (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2008: 429). Cynical attitudes regarding love begin to emerge, and “superior sexual pleasures are thought attainable without affection toward partners.” These consequences hold for both men and women who have had prolonged exposure to pornography, with the decline in sexual happiness being primarily due to the growing dissatisfaction with the spouse’s normal sexual behavior.

Finally, pornography users increasingly see the institution of marriage as sexually confining, have diminished belief in the importance of marital faithfulness, and have increasing doubts about the value of marriage as an essential social institution and further doubts about its future viability. All this naturally diminishes the importance for them of having good family relations in their own families (Paul, 2005).

Increased Infidelity

Dolf Zillman of the University of Alabama, in one study of adolescents, shows that the steady use of pornography frequently leads to abandonment of fidelity to their girlfriends. Steven Stack of Wayne State University and colleagues later showed that pornography use increased the marital infidelity rate by more than 300 percent. Another study found a strong correlation between viewing pornography and sexually permissive behavior. Stack’s study found that Internet pornography use is 3.7 times greater among those who procure sexual relations with a prostitute than among those

who do not (Paul, 2005). Pornography also leads to much higher levels of infidelity among women. Women who engaged in “cybersex” had about 40 percent more offline sexual partners than women who did not engage in cybersex (Paul, 2005).

Separation and Divorce

Given the research already cited, it is not surprising that addiction to pornography is a contributor to separation and divorce. In the best study to date (a very rudimentary opportunity study of reports by divorce lawyers on the most salient factors present in the divorce cases they handled), 68 percent of divorce cases involved one party meeting a new paramour over the Internet, 56 percent involved “one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites,” 47 percent involved “spending excessive time on the computer,” and 33 percent involved spending excessive time in chat rooms (a commonly sexualized forum). Cybersex, which often takes place in these chat rooms, was a major factor in separation and divorce: In over 22 percent of the couples observed the spouse was no longer living with the “cybersex” addict, and in many of the other cases spouses were seriously considering leaving the marriage or relationship.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

The key findings of this paper are that:

- Married men who are involved in pornography feel less satisfied with their conjugal relations and less emotionally attached to their wives. Wives notice and are upset by the difference.
- Pornography use is a pathway to infidelity and divorce, and is frequently a major factor in these family disasters.
- Among couples affected by one spouse’s addiction, two-thirds experience a loss of interest in sexual intercourse.
- Both spouses perceive pornography viewing as tantamount to infidelity.
- Pornography viewing leads to a loss of interest in good family relations.
- Pornography is one of the factors undermining social stability. Pornography is addictive and addicts tend to become desensitized. It has also been observed that men who view pornography regularly have a higher tolerance for abnormal sexual behaviour including rape, sexual aggression and sexual promiscuity and also produces stronger notion of women as commodities or “sex objects”.
- Pornography is a social ill because it encourages impersonal desire and recreational sex, thereby worsening the relationship between men and women and undermining Christian marriage.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the main defenses against pornography are closer personal relationship with God, close family life, a good marriage and self discipline.

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