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To cite this article: Mohaddeseh Askari, Zohreh Ghorashi, Rasoul Roshan Chesli & Reza Vazirinejad (2021): Sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy in Iranian male pornography users, *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, DOI: [10.1080/14681994.2021.1981853](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.1981853)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.1981853>



Published online: 24 Sep 2021.



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Sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy in Iranian male pornography users

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ABSTRACT

In married men, the use of pornography is a concern associated with harms to marital life. Little is known regarding effect of pornography use on sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy. This study compared sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy between two groups of married men with and without a history of using pornography in Rafsanjan City (Kerman Province, Iran). This retrospective cohort study was performed on 267 married men in Rafsanjan City and selected by convenience sampling method in 2020. Data collection tools included demographic characteristics form, unidimensional relationship closeness scale (URCS), Hudson sexual satisfaction questionnaire, and sexual pornography questionnaire. Data were analyzed by Chi-Square, Two-Sample Independent t-test, and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) using SPSS software version 21. The mean age of participants was 35.97 and 63.3% had college education. Results showed that sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy were lower in male pornography users than non-users, but this difference was not statistically significant after removing the effect of demographic variables. Our findings revealed that in men, the use of pornography does not seem to reduce sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 May 2021
Accepted 9 September 2021

KEYWORDS

Sexual satisfaction;
marital intimacy;
pornography;
men;
Iran

Lay summary

Pornography using is a concern associated with harms to marital life. In this study we compared sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy between two groups of 267 married men with and without history of using pornography in Rafsanjan City (Kerman Province, Iran). Findings revealed that in men, using pornography does not seem to reduce sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy.

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Introduction

With the advent of mobile technology and Internet, the use of online pornography has become a major norm and widespread phenomenon among the current technology users (Böthe et al., 2018; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2018). It is estimated that 10–30% of the Internet bandwidth is dedicated to sexually explicit content and that 42.7% of Internet users view pornography products (Allen et al., 2017; Mulhauser et al., 2018; Potenza, 2018; Shor & Seida, 2019). Many factors, such as culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and social desirability can play a role in tendency to use pornography (Kohut et al., 2019).

The use of pornography may be associated with adverse effects, such as changes in men's feelings about women, decreased sexual satisfaction, lack of sexual attraction, increased intimate relationship problems, breaking the marital bond, and divorce (Minarcik et al., 2016; Resch & Alderson, 2014; Wright et al., 2019a, 2019b).

Although, the effects of pornography may not always be negative, some research has pointed to negative consequences of pornography use (Braithwaite et al., 2015). Men's use of pornography can negatively influence quality of their romantic relationship and sexual satisfaction (Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014). But if both partners use pornography, no difference will occur in intimacy and relationship satisfaction compared to lack of use of none of the partners (Minarcik et al., 2016). Also, Wright et al. (2019a) showed that low use of pornography had no effect on sexual satisfaction and its frequent use was associated with a decrease in sexual satisfaction (Wright et al., 2019a). Perry and Whitehead (2019) also demonstrated that the use of pornography does not necessarily have a negative effect on sexual satisfaction, but in more religious people, more frequent use of pornography was negatively associated with sexual satisfaction (Perry & Whitehead, 2019).

In Iran, with a young population and a traditional context and strong family bounds, the use of pornography is growing (Jafarzadeh Fadaki & Amani, 2015). Sexual concerns are high in the Iranian population (Haghi et al., 2018; Javadivala et al., 2018) and always the question in family counseling arises whether the use of pornography affects the quality of marital life. Given limited information and research on the effect of pornography use on various aspects of men's sexual life and unavailability of pornography studies in Iran, the present study was conducted to compare sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy between two groups of married men having children with and without a history of using pornography in Rafsanjan City in 2020.

Study setting

In Islamic teachings, pornography and display of obscene images are considered as an ugly behavior and the basis for being caught in sin and corruption, and man is forbidden from doing so (Fayyaz & Bakhtiyarvand, 2018; Khaleghian et al., 2020). The religion of Iran is Shia Islam and 99.59% of the people of this country are Muslims. Kerman Province is one of 31 provinces of Iran (one of the Middle Eastern countries). Kerman Province is located in southeast of Iran and Rafsanjan City is

among cities of this province. This city is located in center of Iran and northwest of Kerman Province. According to the 2017 census, population of Rafsanjan City was estimated by 311,214 people, of which 162,723 people are men (Statistical Center of Iran, 2017).

Methodology

This retrospective cohort study was conducted in 2020 in a sample of men in Rafsanjan City, Iran. The target population included men with children covered by comprehensive health centers in Rafsanjan City. In this study, a group of married men whose marriage date was from 2010 to 2016 were selected.

Inclusion criteria included being Iranian, willingness to participate in the project, having a smartphone, literacy, not having a known mental disease, not using psychiatric drugs and narcotics, not having a child under 6 months of age, living with a spouse, and not having acute problems in interpersonal relationships with a spouse. Participation in the study was voluntary and an informed consent was obtained from all the participants before conduction of the study. If the subjects did not want to participate, they were excluded from the study.

According to the pilot study conducted on 20 men, the minimum sample size for each group was calculated to be 100 people, which was determined according to the possible drop-out by 120 people in each group and a total of 240 men.

Progressive and convenience sampling was performed from three centers out of eight urban centers. Given that these three comprehensive health centers were located in the same area, the subjects were culturally and socially similar to each other. Initially, the project was approved by the Research Council of Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences and permission was obtained from the University Ethics Committee with the Ethics code of IR.RUMS.REC.1398.211.

Firstly, the family health unit provided the contact numbers of the subjects to the researcher through the integrated health system without publishing any personal information. Then, the researcher called the married men who had one to three children to express objectives of the research, obtain oral consent to participate in the study, and how to complete online questionnaires.

For ensuring about participation of the subjects and validating the data, the questionnaires were designed online and the link was sent to the subjects through the WhatsApp application. There was also a possibility for the subjects to share their questions and ambiguities related to the questionnaires with the researcher through WhatsApp application. Data collection tools included demographic characteristics form, unidimensional relationship closeness scale (URCS), Hudson sexual satisfaction questionnaire, and sexual pornography questionnaire. Demographic characteristics included information on age, level of education, religion, number of children, level of religiosity, employment status, year of marriage, type of marriage, residence status after marriage, and relationship satisfaction. For measuring religiosity variable, the subjects were asked to assign a score from 0 to 10 to a visual analog scale, which scored their commitment to religious affairs and their religious practice. Increased numbers means increased commitment and practice.

Research tools

Sexual satisfaction questionnaire

The Hudson sexual satisfaction questionnaire was developed in 1981 by Hudson, Harrison, and Crosscup and has 25 questions. The subject's response to each test item is rated from 0 to 6 on a 7-point Likert scale. The minimum and maximum score of this questionnaire is equal to 0 and 150, respectively (Hudson et al., 1981; Rezaeifar et al., 2019). A high score reflects greater sexual satisfaction (Nekounam et al., 2019). Reliability of this questionnaire was reported as 0.91 using Cronbach's alpha and validity of the scale was calculated by test-retest method 0.93 (Khamse et al., 2015). Reliability of the questionnaire in this study was calculated to be 0.91.

Unidimensional relationship closeness scale

URCS was created by Dibble et al., and includes 12 items measuring the extent of closeness of the people to each other. The options on this scale are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale with a minimum and maximum score of 12 and 84, respectively so that, a higher score indicates a greater sense of intimacy with the spouse (Dibble et al., 2012; Rajabi et al., 2015). Reliability of this scale was reported as 0.88 using Cronbach's alpha. Its retest reliability coefficient was obtained as 0.91 at 2-week interval (Alimoradi et al., 2019). Reliability of this scale in the present study was calculated to be 0.93.

Sexual pornography questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed by Jafarzadeh Fadaki et al., and includes 17 questions related to the use of various types' pornography products. The questions are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from never = 1 to more often = 5. Jafarzadeh Fadaki et al., obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.75 in their study (Jafarzadeh Fadaki & Amani, 2015). Reliability of the questionnaire in this study was calculated to be 0.91.

Out of 798 male-headed households introduced from comprehensive health centers, 525 households were willing to participate and a link was sent to them. A total of 304 people completed the questionnaires, of which 37 people were excluded from the study due to having a child under 6 months of age, use of drugs influencing sexual function, and substance abuse. Finally, 267 people were included in the study. Due to the fact that questions 2, 5 and 7 of the pornography questionnaire cover the various types of pornography products and the rate of use of pornography, so people were divided into two groups of exposed and non-exposed based on these three questions. These three factor questions asked: How often do you use your cell phone to view sex photos and videos? How often do you watch sex videos, even short ones, on your cell phone? To what extent have you repeated watching sex movies on mobile phones, CDs, etc.?

The collected data were entered into SPSS software version 21 and Chi-Square, Two-Sample Independent t-test, and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) were used for their analysis at a significance level of 0.05.

Results

Out of 267 subjects, 161 (60.3%) subjects had a history of using pornography and 106 (39.7%) of them had no history of using pornography. Most people in the group with a history of using pornography rarely (42.7%) used pornography products. The results of Chi-Square test showed that more than half of the subjects (63.3%) had college education and there was no statistically significant difference between the two study groups. Also, in the two groups with and without a history of pornography use, 54 and 48.1% of the subjects were self-employed and employees, respectively and in terms of post-marital residence status, in both groups, they started living together completely independently (85%). These differences were not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$). Furthermore, the results of study showed that in both groups with and without a history of pornography use, 72.7 and 87.7% of the subjects expressed a good relationship with their spouse, respectively which was statistically significant ($P = 0.003$). Regarding the type of marriage in both groups with and without a history of pornography use, 50.9 and 54.7% of the subjects reported that their marriage was done through self-selection and family companionship, respectively, which showed a statistically significant difference ($P = 0.037$).

The results presented in [Table 1](#), based on the Two-Sample Independent t-test showed a statistically significant difference in the mean age of men with and without a history of pornography use by 36.32 and 35.45 years old, respectively while no significant difference was found in the mean number of children and duration of marriage in the two groups ($P > 0.05$), but there was a statistically significant difference in mean score of religiosity, marital intimacy, and sexual satisfaction in the two groups ($P < 0.001$, $P = 0.042$, $P = 0.007$, respectively).

[Table 2](#) shows the results obtained from two groups, after controlling the effect of the variables of "education level, employment status, relationship satisfaction, type of marriage, post-marital residence status, men's age, and religiosity", where the mean score of marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction in the group with a history of pornography use was equal to 0.443 and 2.611, respectively (due to the negative coefficient) compared to mean score of marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction in the group without a history of pornography use with a value of $P = 0.719$ for marital intimacy and $P = 0.354$ for sexual satisfaction, which is not statistically significant. The p-values of 0.110 and 0.100 show that 11 and 10% of the observed differences in the mean score of sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy in the two groups are due to the effect of pornography use. ([Table 2](#))

Discussion

This study was done to compare sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy in male pornography users and non-users in Rafsanjan City. According to the results of the present study, 39.7% of men did not have a history of using pornography and 60.3% of them had a history of using pornography products. Findings of several studies have indicated an increase in men's use of pornography too (Huntington et al., 2020; Kohut et al., 2017; Poulsen et al., 2013; Sun et al., 2016; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2018).

In the present study, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of education level, employment, post-marital residence status,

Table 1. Comparison of the mean scores of quantitative variables under study in men with and without a history of using pornography in Rafsanjan City in 2020.

Variables Group	men with history of using pornography N = 161	men with no history of using pornography N = 106	Independent two-sample t-test		
	Mean ± Standard deviation	Mean ± Standard deviation	T	DF	p-value
religiosity	2.66 ± 6.02	2.05 ± 8.03	-6.566	265	0.001>
Number of children	0.45 ± 1.80	0.46 ± 1.84	-0.786	265	0.433
Age (years)	4.76 ± 36.32	4.65 ± 35.45	1.475	265	0.141
Number of years of marriage	3.69 ± 9.26	3.95 ± 9.70	-0.920	265	0.358
Total score of sexual satisfaction	24.18 ± 109.04	20.87 ± 116.90	-2.741	265	0.007
Total score of marital intimacy	11.93 ± 68.87	9.01 ± 71.49	-1.928	265	0.042

Table 2. Results of MANCOVA obtained from comparing the mean of the total scores of sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy in male pornography users and non-users in Rafsanjan City in 2020.

Variables		Total squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	Statistics F	P-value	Squared Eta	Test power
sexual satisfaction	Group	349.805	1	349.805	0.862	0.354	0.110	0.252
	Error	103124.849	254	406.003				
	Total	3501850.000	267					
Marital intimacy	Group	10.052	1	10.052	0.130	0.719	0.100	0.165
	Error	19709.898	254	77.598				
	Total	1336690.000	267					

duration of marriage, age, and number of children. Consistent with our results, some studies have shown no significant relationship between education level, age, and duration of relationship in men using pornography (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Perry & Whitehead, 2019). But other studies have indicated that years of marriage, number of children, and education level play a role in the use of pornography and the use of pornography was lower with the increase in age (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Gaber et al., 2019; Wright, 2013). It seems that the lack of relationship between age and use of pornography in the present study was due to the fact that men with young children were included in the present study and mean age of the participants was mostly low and age range was not wide.

According to the results of the present study, male non-users of pornography compared to the users expressed more relationship satisfaction with their wives. The results of other studies have shown a negative and significant relationship between the use of pornography and relationship satisfaction (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2013; Huntington et al., 2020; Maddox et al., 2011; Minarcik et al., 2016). People who are dissatisfied with their relationships may seek to use pornography alone. On the other hand, viewing sexual content alone can be a risk factor for poor relationships (Maddox et al., 2011). However, results of one study showed that in men who were more likely to accept pornography, more use was associated with better relationship satisfaction and vice versa (Maas et al., 2018). Therefore, people's attitudes toward pornography and its acceptance may play a role in relationship satisfaction.

In terms of marriage, male non-users of pornography had a greater role in spouse selection than users and the differences between the two groups were significant. It can be said that men who have chosen their wives according to their sexual schemas are more likely to experience sexual satisfaction in their sexual lives and are less likely to use pornography products.

According to the findings of this study, there was a statistically significant difference in the mean score of religiosity between the two groups, and men who had more religiosity reported less history of using pornography. The results of other studies have also indicated a negative and significant relationship between religiosity and use of pornography (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Hardy et al., 2013; Maas et al., 2018; Maddox et al., 2011; Patterson & Price, 2012; Perry, 2015, 2016; Poulsen et al., 2013; Sun et al., 2016; Wright, 2013). In fact, sexual limitations imposed by religions have led religious people to have more negative attitudes toward pornography and reduced its use (Khaleghian et al., 2020).

According to our results, mean score of sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy was significantly higher in male non-users of pornography than users. Perhaps the couple's sexual satisfaction and intimacy has made men less likely to engage in pornography, or vice versa, and men who use less pornography have more sexual satisfaction and intimacy. But after controlling for the effect of variables of "education level, employment status, relationship satisfaction, type of marriage, post-marital residence status, men's age, and religiosity", there was no statistically significant difference in the mean score of sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy in two groups, which can be said that majority of men rarely used pornography. While frequency of pornography use can influence consequences in users (Minarcik et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2019b), Minarcik et al., (Minarcik et al., 2016) and Charig et al., found no relationship between the use of pornography and sexual satisfaction (Charig et al., 2020).

In a previous study, in men who attended more religious services, a negative correlation was more pronounced between frequent use of pornography and sexual satisfaction, probably due to the fact that religious people feel guilty while using pornography (Wright et al., 2019b). Another study showed that the use of pornography is not significantly associated with sexual satisfaction, but the frequent use and moral rejection of pornography is associated with a decrease in sexual satisfaction (Floyd et al., 2020). Also, Wright et al., stated that low use of pornography had no effect on sexual satisfaction and when pornography was used once a month, this relationship was negative and significant (Wright et al., 2019a). The results of other studies have shown a negative and significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and the use of pornography, which is inconsistent with the findings of the present study (Maddox et al., 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2020; Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2018; Wright et al., 2018, 2019b).

Jafarzadeh Fadaki et al. showed no significant relationship between intimacy and pornography (Jafarzadeh Fadaki & Amani, 2015). While, Minarcik et al., reported that mean score of intimacy in non-users of pornography was significantly higher than other groups (Minarcik et al., 2016). Other research has shown that increasing the use of pornography over time is associated with a decrease in emotional and sexual intimacy for men and makes them less likely to enjoy intimate sexual

behaviors (kissing, caressing, etc.) with their partner (Huntington et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2016; Weinstein et al., 2015).

Our study provided new and unique information about the use of pornography in the married Iranian men, although this study was performed on a small sample of married men in Rafsanjan City, limiting the possibility of generalizing the results. In this study, only the use of pornography in married men was evaluated. Therefore, there are limitations in generalizing the results to other groups, such as married women, single women, and single men. Possibly, due to relevance of the research topic to sexuality, some respondents may not disclose complete information, despite assuring participants about confidentiality of information.

Conclusion

Our findings revealed no statistically significant difference in the mean score of sexual satisfaction and marital intimacy between the two groups of male users and non-users of pornography. It seems that the use of pornography is related to other factors, such as religious beliefs, type of marriage, and relationship satisfaction.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to highly appreciate all the men who participated in this study and the Vice Chancellor for Research and Health and all the staff of the Comprehensive Health Service Centers in the Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences who cooperated in collecting information.

Funding

This project funded by Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences.

No declared

Conflict of interest

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