


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Patterns of pornography consumption among school-aged children: Intensity and motivation for viewing pornography

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ABSTRACT

The development of information technology and the ease of internet access have presented serious implications for the psychological and moral development of school-aged children. One emerging challenge is exposure to pornographic content, whether intentional or unintentional, which holds the potential to influence children's attitudes, values, and behavior. This study aimed to describe patterns of pornography consumption among elementary and junior high school-aged children, examining the aspects of usage intensity and motivation for viewing pornography. A quantitative survey method was employed with 696 primary and secondary school students. Data were analyzed descriptively using mean calculations and categorization. The results indicate that a portion of respondents reported a relatively high intensity of pornography viewing, characterized by a high frequency and duration of use and recency of exposure. In terms of motivation, the urge to access pornography generally arose spontaneously. These findings confirm that early-age exposure to pornography is not merely a technological issue but is also intrinsically linked to aspects of psychological development and moral education. Therefore, integrated preventive efforts are required through family education, school-based programs, and counseling guidance grounded in Islamic values.

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INTRODUCTION

The online pornography industry has experienced significant growth alongside the global expansion of internet access and advancements in digital technology. One consequence of this digital openness is the increased opportunity for adolescents to be exposed to pornography, both intentionally and unintentionally, through various online platforms (Paulus et al., 2024). The internet serves as a primary source for pornographic content, with its availability in Indonesia being notably high. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia recorded 233,552 reports related to pornographic content between October 2024 and March 2025 (komdigi.go.id, 2025). Innovations in streaming media allow users to access and view pornographic content continuously, particularly in video format, without the need for prior downloads (Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019). Consequently, explicit material is now ubiquitous and readily available online, making

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both intentional and unintentional exposure difficult to avoid (Zhang & Jemmott, as cited in Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019). Internet-connected devices have enabled individuals of all ages to consume sexual content such as pornography, and their accessibility has influenced and altered the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors of adolescents (Paulus et al., 2024). Pornographic material (online and/or offline) has become increasingly accessible across all age groups.

According to the American College of Pediatricians (2024), a 2022 survey on adolescents and pornography reported that 54% of teenagers had viewed pornography by age 13, with 15% having done so before age 11. Young internet users aged 10 to 17 have been exposed to online pornography (Wolak et al., as cited in Meyran Boniel-Nissim et al., 2019). Most students have been exposed to pornography, with the average age of first exposure being 14 years (Dwulit & Rzymiski, 2019). This trend has raised public concern regarding its potential impact on adolescent development (Alexandraki et al., 2018). Increased access to sexually explicit media among school-aged children has heightened worries about its effects on their attitudes and behaviors.

The development of digital technology and ease of internet access have transformed interaction patterns and information consumption among school-aged children, including access to content inappropriate for their developmental stage. The American College of Pediatricians (2024) explains that children under the age of twelve who have viewed pornography are statistically more vulnerable to negative effects. Children exposed to pornography are more likely to engage in sexual abuse against their peers and are at risk of developing various maladaptive behaviors and psychopathologies.

According to the developmental stages proposed by Steinberg, puberty typically emerges during middle childhood, around ages 6–11, and continues into early adolescence, spanning ages 11–14 (Steinberg et al., 2011). During this pubertal phase, children begin to experience sexual development characterized by the emergence of sexual feelings and urges. Sexual knowledge in children does not arise suddenly; rather, it is formed through various sources, such as observations of others, exposure to visual media, peer interactions, and social experiences (Lamb et al., 2019). This dynamic becomes particularly critical when school-aged children are exposed to pornography, as they lack the cognitive maturity and self-regulation necessary to process sexual content healthily at this developmental stage.

Therefore, exposure to pornography within this age range is a critical issue, making it essential to understand the patterns of pornography consumption more deeply. The pattern of pornography consumption among school-aged children is reflected not only in the frequency or intensity of exposure but also in the underlying motivations for such behavior, including curiosity, peer influence, and attempts to satisfy emerging sexual urges. Prior research has identified internal and external factors contributing to children's susceptibility to pornography addiction. Internal factors include individual developmental characteristics, such as gender, age, pubertal maturity, and sexual experience. Furthermore, the intensity of exposure to pornographic content and the motivations for accessing pornography also contribute to the risk of addiction. External factors relate to environmental conditions, specifically family dysfunction, parental upbringing styles, inadequate parental supervision, and significant peer influence (Mestre-Bach & Chiclana Actis, 2022; Farré et al., 2020; Ashraaf & Othman, 2019).

Repeated pornography access can be understood as a form of consumption with the potential to develop into addiction. Mulya and Hald (2014) developed a comprehensive measurement for estimating the level of pornography consumption based on four main indicators: the recency of access, frequency of use, duration of consumption, and involvement in sexual activities accompanying the behavior. High scores on these indicators suggest a high level of pornography consumption. Consistent with these findings, research by Tan et al. (2022) demonstrated a positive correlation

between pornography consumption, pornography addiction, and the perceived realism of pornographic material. In other words, higher levels of pornography consumption, coupled with the belief that such content represents reality, increase an individual's tendency toward addiction. These findings underscore that high-intensity pornography consumption can foster addiction, subsequently influencing an individual's behavior and perception of sexuality.

In the context of children and adolescents, motivations for using pornography are influenced by several developmental drivers, including curiosity about sexual changes and functions (sexual curiosity), a tendency to avoid or escape emotional distress (emotional avoidance), the need to seek new experiences or sensations (sensation seeking), and the pursuit of sexual pleasure accompanying developing biological urges (sexual pleasure) (Kor et al., 2014). At this developmental stage, limited self-regulatory capacity and immature sexual understanding render children and adolescents more vulnerable to problematic pornography use. Therefore, this study aims to describe the pattern of pornography consumption among elementary and junior high school-aged children, examined from the aspects of intensity and motivation for viewing pornography.

METHOD

This study employed a cross-sectional research design, collecting data at a single point in time and location. The study population consisted of children aged 10–15 residing in the Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Jabodetabek) metropolitan area. Eligible participants were students in grades IV–VI of elementary school or equivalent, and junior high school students or equivalent, who had experience using the internet. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. Participants were selected based on accessibility: specifically, students who met the inclusion criteria and were from classes with available time during school hours. Class selection was determined by the school administration. Data collection was conducted by directly distributing questionnaires to students in the approved classrooms. Data were analyzed descriptively using mean calculations and categorization.

The variable of pornography consumption patterns was measured using an instrument developed by Wijaya Mulya and Hald (2014). This instrument assesses pornography consumption through several quantitative indicators: recency of last access, frequency of access, and duration of use. The indicator concerning sexual activities accompanying pornography consumption was not included in this study, as the participants were children from a non-clinical population.

The variable of motivation for viewing pornography was measured using an instrument adapted from Kor et al. (2014). This instrument consists of 10 items measuring five motivational dimensions: intention to access pornography, sexual curiosity, emotional avoidance, sensation seeking, and sexual pleasure. Each dimension is represented by two items. Each item was presented in a dichotomous (yes/no) format. Responses were subsequently analyzed quantitatively to describe respondents' motivational tendencies.

RESULT

The results consist of a description of the respondents based on categorization and mean comparison. Data were collected from 12 schools, including elementary and junior high schools, in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, South Tangerang, and Bekasi. The total number of respondents was 696 students, comprising 334 males (48%) and 362 females (52%), indicating a slightly higher proportion of female participants.

Table 1. Intensity in accessing pornographic content (*n* = 696)

Accessing pornographic content	n (%)
Last year	39 (5.6)
Six months ago	28 (4.0)
A month ago	104 (14.9)
A week ago	150 (21.6)
Two days ago	117 (16.8)
A day ago	258 (37.1)

As shown in Table 1, the most common recency of pornography viewing was "within the last 24 hours," reported by 258 participants (37.1%) out of 696. The least common category was "within the last six months," reported by 28 participants (4.0%). From Table 2, regarding the frequency of pornography viewing in the past six months, the highest proportion was "more than 5 times per week," reported by 309 participants (44.4%). The "within the last 24 hours" category remained the most frequent for this timeframe, reported by 258 participants (37%). The smallest proportion was in the "never in the past six months" category, reported by 22 participants (3.2%).

Table 2. Frequency in pornographic content (*n* = 696)

Frequency in accessing pornographic content	n (%)
Never in 6 month	22 (3.2)
Less than 1 time per month	35 (5.0)
1-2 times per month	78 (11.2)
1-2 times per week	100 (14.4)
3-5 times per week	152 (21.8)
More than 5 times per week	309 (44.4)

As presented in Table 3, the duration of pornography viewing in the past six months was predominantly "more than 10 hours per week," reported by 464 participants (66.7%). The lowest frequency was "1-3 hours per week," reported by 9 participants (1.3%).

Table 3. Duration in pornographic content (*n* = 696)

Duration in accessing pornographic content	n (%)
0 hour per week	13 (1.9)
1-3 hours per week	9 (1.3)
4-6 hours per week	14 (2.0)
7-10 hours per week	196 (28.2)
More than 10 hours per week	464 (66.7)

The frequency distribution from the 10 items assessing motivation for viewing pornography revealed the following dichotomous (yes/no) responses: When alone, the desire to access pornographic pictures/videos/films/reading materials was affirmed by 121 children and denied by 575; the desire to access such materials arises spontaneously, affirmed by 204 children and denied by 492; feeling curious about everything related to sex, affirmed by 202 children and denied by 494; seeking sexual information by viewing pornographic materials, affirmed by 91 children and denied by 605; viewing pornographic materials when bored, affirmed by 77 children and denied by 619; viewing such materials relieves feelings of fatigue, affirmed by 38 children and denied by 658; curiosity about more diverse pornographic materials, affirmed by 88 children and denied by 608; searching for unusual pornographic content, affirmed by 44 children and denied by 652; viewing pornographic materials for enjoyment, affirmed by 66 children and denied by 630; and viewing pornographic materials for comfort, affirmed by 50 children and denied by 646.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that exposure to pornography among children and adolescents is highly plausible, occurring either inadvertently or through deliberate search behaviors (Mesch, 2009). While pornography can be accessed incidentally, internet browsing accompanied by specific searches reflects intentional behavior driven by a specific need to attain gratification (Paul & Shim,

2008). The research findings show that a portion of respondents reported exposure to pornography within the last 24 hours at a relatively high intensity, whether through planned or unplanned access. Consistent with prior research, adolescents' exposure to pornography can occur through active searching or passively, such as via advertisements or pop-ups (Boniel-Nissim et al., 2019). This situation becomes maladaptive when exposure frequency reaches 3 or more times per week, as it can negatively impact adolescent development (Malki et al., 2019).

Ownership of internet-connected digital devices and use of social media increase the vulnerability of children and adolescents to become passive consumers of pornographic content, which can subsequently trigger the desire to access such content repeatedly (Mesch, 2009). This finding suggests that pornography is more easily accessible to minors through digital media compared to conventional media, a phenomenon facilitated by the internet's characteristics of ease of access, affordability, and anonymity (Kastleman, 2015). In addition to academic purposes, the internet is also used for recreational activities, thereby broadening the opportunities for exposure to pornographic content (Shek & Ma, 2012). Conversely, the massive expansion of the pornography industry across various digital platforms further increases the risk of early exposure, which has the potential to lead to negative consequences and elevate the risk of problematic pornography use (Mead, 2023). Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding and effective interventions are required to prevent and address adolescent pornography viewing behavior (Testa et al., 2023).

Regarding motivational aspects, the results indicate that the majority of respondents tended to give negative responses to most items concerning motivation for viewing pornography. However, one statement, referring to sudden urges to access pornographic content, received the highest proportion of positive responses. This finding indicates cognitive and affective changes toward sexual stimuli resulting from exposure to pornography via the internet (Setyawati et al., 2020). The use of pornography not only directly influences sexual motivation but is also linked to other factors such as curiosity, information-seeking needs, and emotional states like boredom (Grubbs et al., 2019). Overall, the motivation for viewing pornography can be understood as intentional, goal-oriented behavior influenced by an individual's needs, drives, and cognitive processes.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that exposure to pornography among children and adolescents constitutes a tangible and often unavoidable risk in daily internet use, occurring through both unintentional access and deliberate searching. The repeated intensity of exposure indicates a consumption pattern with the potential to become maladaptive and negatively impact adolescent psychological and sexual development. Ease of access to digital devices, the anonymous and accessible nature of the internet, and the massive distribution of pornographic content in digital spaces collectively heighten the vulnerability of children and adolescents to early exposure. The practical implications of these findings demand active engagement from multiple stakeholders. Parents play a strategic role in supervising technology use through consistent monitoring, proportional access restrictions, and open communication about internet use and age-appropriate sexual development. Schools need to strengthen their role by integrating digital literacy, reproductive health education, and self-regulation development into the curriculum, while simultaneously fostering a safe learning environment that addresses the risks of exposure to pornographic content. Concurrently, policymakers are urged to formulate and enforce regulations to protect children in digital spaces. This includes providing effective content filtering systems, monitoring the distribution and advertising of pornography, and supporting family- and school-based prevention and intervention programs. Therefore, preventing and addressing pornography consumption among children and adolescents requires a collaborative

and sustainable approach involving families, educational institutions, and public policy. This multi-sectoral effort is essential to create a safer digital ecosystem that supports the healthy growth and development of children.

DECLARATION

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Author contribution statement

Sitti Evangeline Imelda Suaidy was fully responsible for all stages of the research process, including the conceptualization and design of the study, development of the theoretical framework, and formulation of research questions.

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The data described in this article can be accessed by contacting the author.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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