



Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation: Facts for Prevention

Impact of Exposure to Sexually Explicit and Exploitative Materials

Exposure to sexually explicit material

- Studies have found that adolescents commonly stumble upon sexually explicit material while searching for different information. In one study, 42% of adolescents reported exposure to pornography online with 66% of those teens describing such exposure as unwanted.¹
- The Internet is only one source of exposure to sexual content. A study of random selected youth showed that music contained the most sexual content (40%) followed by movies (12%) and television (11%).²
- The pornography industry does not deny access to young consumers despite the legal ramifications of advertising sexually explicit material to minors:
 - 75% of pornographic websites display visual teasers on the homepages before asking if the viewers are of legal age
 - Only 3% of these websites require proof-of-age before granting access to sexually explicit material

- 66% of pornographic websites don't have any adult-content warnings, and smartphones and iPods do not have filtering systems for Internet access.^{3, 4}

Sexual exploitation

- Prolonged and increased exposure to sexually explicit materials “can lead to exaggerated beliefs of sexual activity among peers, sexually permissible attitudes, and sexual callousness, including more negative attitudes toward sexual partners.”⁵
- Recent research suggests that male youth who use sexually explicit material may develop unrealistic sexual values and beliefs and demonstrate sexual preoccupation. Female youth reported feeling physically inferior.⁶
- Adolescents are normalizing sexual abuse done to them because of pornographic exposure. Females are especially prone to the normalization of sexual promiscuity, which heightens their risk of being victims of unwanted sexual violence and of sexually transmitted diseases.⁷

- The content of today’s media sexualizes and objectifies girls. The effects of self-objectification include eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and depressed moods. Far from leading to a healthy sexual development, sexual objectification leads to diminished sexual understanding.⁸
- A study of sexually abusive children in Australia showed 25% of the participants accessed sexually explicit material from an older sibling or a friend, emphasizing the unawareness of parents. In the same group almost all parents “reported that they doubted their child would access pornography on the Internet.”⁴
- The more teens listened to degrading sexual music content, the more likely they were to subsequently initiate intercourse. Unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections are more common among those who initiate sexual activity earlier.⁹

References

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- ⁷ Layden, M. A. (2010). *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Statement of Findings and Recommendations, 36*. New York: The Witherspoon Institute, Inc. <http://www.internetsafety101.org/upload/file/Social%20Costs%20of%20Pornography%20Report.pdf>
- ⁸ American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2010). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*. <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>
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