

An

Inspired Minds

Research Report

Pornography Addiction: An Epidemic



Date: 27th March 2018

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About Inspired Minds

Inspired Minds is a faith-based, voluntary mental health grassroots charity located in London that launched in 2014 with the aim of raising awareness, combatting stigmas and providing professional, non-judgmental, and confidential support to those with mental health illnesses. Although Inspired Minds works predominantly with those from an Islamic faith, we do not disregard any persons of differing backgrounds.

Our initial research showed that many Muslims found it difficult to seek help as they felt they would not be understood by someone who did not understand their faith or culture, thus they chose to remain quiet and not seek help. We are here to change this and cater for this need from a faith and culturally sensitive perspective. We are passionate to build a society where people experiencing mental health challenges can receive understanding, recognition and are empowered to live a fulfilling life.

Charity No: 1155949

1. Introduction

1.1 Pornography: The Epidemic

Pornography consumption is an epidemic that is growing by the day. A British-wide survey on sexual attitudes and behaviours undertaken in 2014 found that 56% of Britons have watched pornography on the internet with the 25-34 age sub-group making up 74% of this statistic (Mann, 2014). The same survey reported that 28% of participants believed that watching pornography had an effect of their sex life. More recently, this number has skyrocketed to 71%, which is an additional 15% within the UK (International Andrology London, 2017). Research conducted by Middlesex University, commissioned by the NSPCC, into the impact of pornography on children and young people (Martellozzo et al., 2016) found:

- 28% of the 11-12 age group had viewed explicit material online
- 94% of them having viewed pornography by the age of 14
- 65% of the 15-16 age group view pornography

They also reported that 87% of boys and 77% of girls felt that viewing pornography did not help them understand about consent and that it presented a realistic depiction of sex for most of the boys (53%) and girls (34%). Moreover, a considerable proportion of 11-14 year olds (58%) reported that they wished to copy the behaviour they had observed online.

The statistics regarding pornography consumption are shocking and horrifying, but they only apply to the wider British community.

What about the Muslim community?

Islamic scholars have reported an increasing number of enquiries related to pornography consumption (Dawud, 2012) and multiple Islamic blogs have been trying to address this topic within Muslim communities (Mujahid, n.d.; Muslim Girl, 2017; Shaikh, 2007). However, there is no known published record of pornographic consumption within the Muslim community, even though it has become such a common behaviour and a widespread epidemic. There is vital need for this, especially considering the effects that viewing pornography has on an individual.

Pornography consumption is not only harmful to sexual relationships but also detrimental to one's mental health. Individuals can obtain highly

inappropriate expectations of their sexual relationships by believing that online pornography is a realistic illustration of it. This can lead to sexual partners feeling anxious and stressed when they are pressurized to live up to these unrealistic, and at times non-consensual, depictions of sex. Research has also linked watching pornography to infidelity due to subtle internalization of this behaviour being more advantageous than having a single sexual partner (Vossler, 2016).

Modern pornographic consumption has been deemed a compulsive behaviour, like over-eating and gambling, that can lead to erectile dysfunction in a normal sexual relationship due to a male's arousal threshold becoming unnaturally high, anti-social behaviour, and an unhealthy sex addiction (Gallagher, 2014). In fact, a study by the University of Cambridge demonstrated to trigger activity in the brain of sex addicts in a similar way that drugs trigger activity in brain of drug addicts (Voon et al., 2014).

A research article published in JAMA Psychiatry found that higher levels of pornography consumption was significantly associated with lower functional connectivity in the brain's prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for the feeling of motivation, reward and pleasure (Kühn & Gallinat, 2014). This implies that, due to an individual becoming desensitized, more and more consumption is required to feel reward and pleasure – just like with an addiction.

1.2 Purpose and Methodology of the study

Our main aim for undertaking this research was to find out attitudes around pornography consumption from a Muslim's perspectives, including the characteristics of their consumption, and the effects and consequences of acting upon their addiction.

To this extent, we published a "Pornography Addiction" anonymous questionnaire using Google Forms on our newsletters and weekly articles to encourage participation. The questionnaire included demographic questions, such as gender, and first-person porn-specific statements, asking the participants the nature of their consumption. These statements were presented alongside a 5-point likert scale, ranging from strongly agree – unsure – strongly disagree. Some of these statements included:

- Pornography has sometimes interfered with certain aspects of my life e.g. affected sleep, arriving late to university/work, low productivity etc

- I sometimes use pornography as a reward, a distraction or to procrastinate.
- When the opportunity arises to view pornography, I can avoid it.
- I hide certain content on digital devices when others are using it.
- I feel uncomfortable when pornography comes up in conversation.
- When I am unable to view pornography, there is a part of me that is relieved due to avoiding sin.

Other questions included were short-answer questions, which required participants to address the statement and explain their answer, for example:

- I have punished myself when I view pornography. If yes, please explain how. If not, please explain why.
- I can control my use of pornography. If so, please explain how. If not, please explain why.
- I fear that someone might discover the pornography I view. Please elaborate your answer.

Additionally, some multiple-choice questions were included in the questionnaire:

- When I am not watching pornography, I easily find myself drawn to it via (please select all those which are appropriate):
 - Adverts
 - Social media
 - Pop ups
 - Games
 - Peers
- I have participated in sexually related chats online.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
- Do you masturbate whilst looking at pornography?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
- How many hours per week do you view pornography?
 - 1-2 hours

- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- 10 hours or more
- Less than 1 hour

The final section of the questionnaire involved asking the participants about the effects of their addictions. These included a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions, such as:

- I feel ashamed after viewing pornography online.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe

Explain your answer

- I feel depressed after viewing pornography.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe

Explain your answer

- I feel sick after viewing pornography.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe

Explain your answer

Finally, we asked every participant Islam-centric questions, such as what they think Islam says about pornography and fornication, whether viewing pornography affects their faith, and if they have found any Islamic sources that were helpful with their pornography addictions. We were also curious about what three things people feel need to be addressed within the Muslim community regarding pornography, so we included a question about this as well. The complete published questionnaire can be found in the **Appendix** section of this report.

After collecting responses, all the multiple-choice related data were converted into statistics and percentages while the qualitative short-answers were collated and analysed for trends and patterns. From these

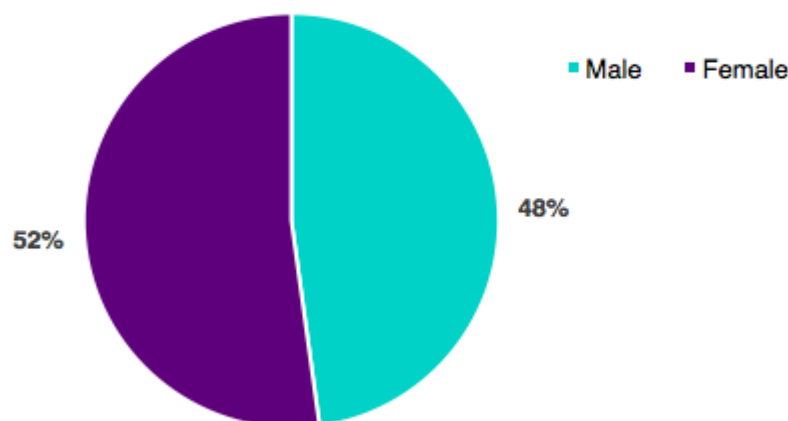
results, graphs and figures were generated, and discussed in-depth using common knowledge and information from the scientific literature. All these results are reported in the section **2. Findings & Discussion** of this report. From this information, helpful recommendations and vital conclusions are made regarding the trends and characteristics of pornographic addiction and methods of addressing this epidemic within the Muslim community. This can be found in the section **3. Conclusion & Recommendations**.

2 Findings & Discussion

2.1 Demographic Information

The collated results of the questionnaire on Pornography Addictions found 25 participants in total, of which two were excluded from the final analysis. This was because one participant was a duplicate and the other participant's responses indicated that they have never consumed pornography. Thus, the total number of 23 respondents are included in this analysis. The gender distribution (see Figure 1) of the sample was closely balanced, with just one more female participant ($n = 12$) than males ($n = 11$). This is unexpected, considering that men are more likely to become addicted to pornography than women (Watson, 2014). Recently, however, more and more younger females (76%), between the ages of 18-30, are consuming pornographic material than older females (16%), around the age of 50 (Blaszczynski, 2016). This has been explained by a heightened level of sexual curiosity and testosterone hormone levels (Wright, Bae & Funk, 2013).

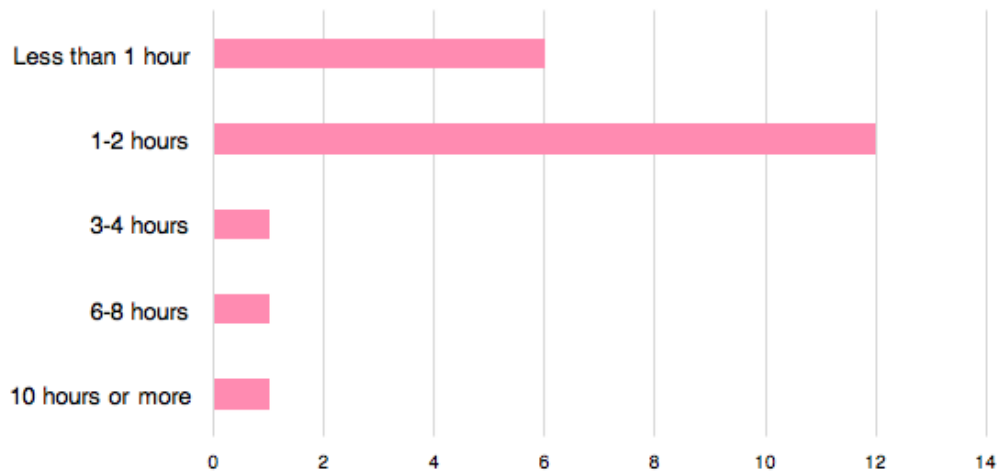
Figure 1: Gender Distribution



When asked the total hours a week of viewing pornography, majority of the participants (52%) responded with 1-2 hours a week, and 26% said they view less than 1 hour a week (see Figure 2). The International Andrology organisation in London published the results of their survey (2017) and found that 24.1% of participants responded as watching porn once a week. However, their total number of participants were more than those who took this questionnaire. Therefore, considering our sample size, this

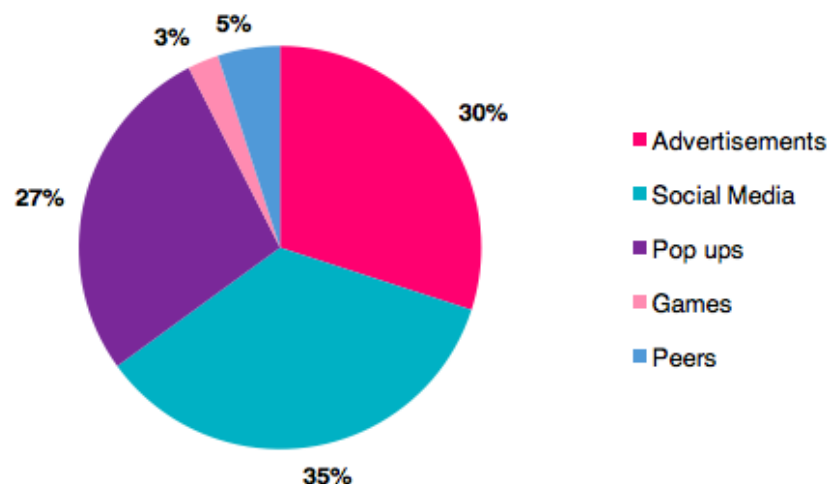
trend in the frequency of pornographic consumption is similar to the wider demographic.

Figure 2: How many hours a week do you view pornography?



When asked to select all the options that invites watching pornography, the majority (35%) of respondents chose social media, followed by advertisements (30%) and pop-ups (27%). This was in comparison to games (3%) and peers (5%), which respondents indicated did not influence them to consume pornography. Unpredictably, this highlights the fact that individuals do not actively seek out sources of pornography, but rather find it showcased more explicitly in the form of social media posts, adverts and pop-ups.

Figure 3: When I am not watching pornography, I easily find myself drawn to it via



2.2 Characteristics of Pornographic Consumption

The reasons that participants had for consuming pornography were several, but the majority (26%) said it was for reasons of pleasure or satisfaction, while other respondents explained that it helped them overcome sexual urges and prevent committing adultery/Zina (17%), or enabled them to feel empowered and release stress (17%). One respondent said it was in response to being “...lonely. Sad. I was sexually abused.”

Figure 4 summarises this information:

Figure 4: What do you gain from watching pornography?



When presented with a series of statements from the first-person perspective about pornographic consumption, the responses were varied and diverse (compiled in Figures 5 & 6). The most striking points to note are:

- 78% agreed that they watched pornography as a reward, distraction or to procrastinate, and masturbated while viewing it
- Majority of the participants (87%) were careful to clear their search history and cover their tracks
- 73% were relieved to avoid sinning when they were unable to view pornography
- 70% agreed to hiding explicit content on their digital devices, and that pornographic consumption interfered with certain life aspects
- About half of the respondents (52%) agreed to feeling helpless to stop and 47% responded as being unable to avoid viewing pornography
- Relatively fewer respondents (30%) have participated on sexually related online chats, and approximately the same proportion have actively declined attending social events/meeting friends to consume pornography

Figure 5: Characteristics of Pornographic Consumption

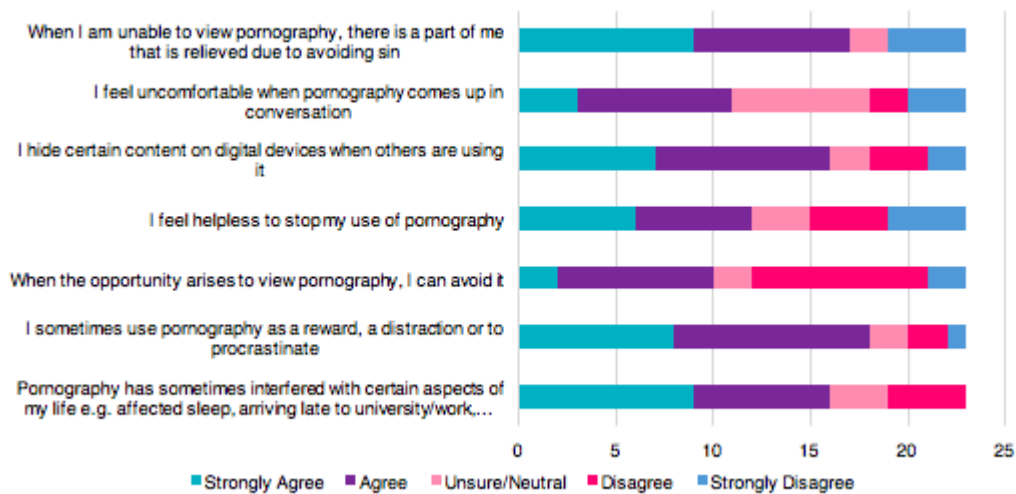
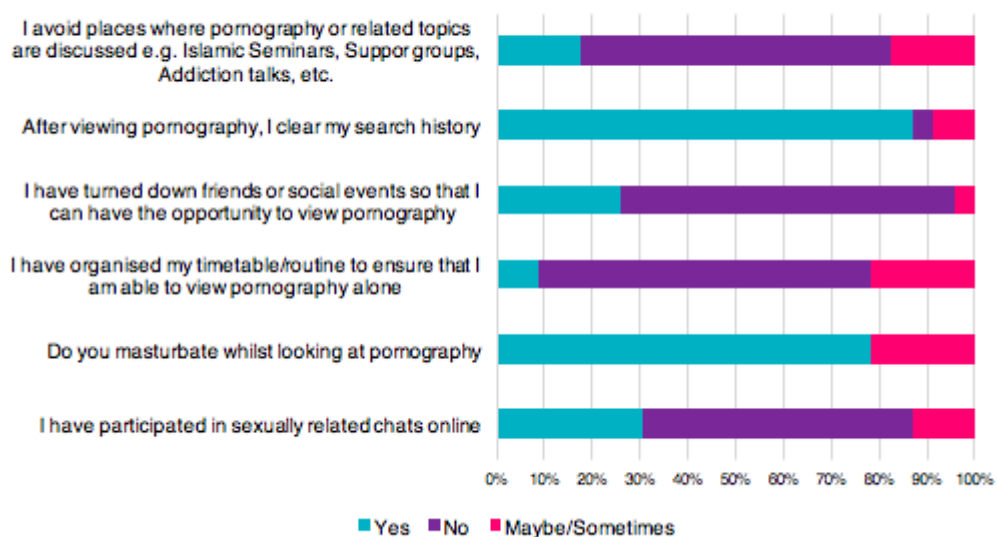


Figure 6: Characteristics of Pornographic Consumption



When asked to elaborate, 48% responded by saying they do not put off studying or other important priorities to view pornography, whereas 39% said that they did for various reasons:

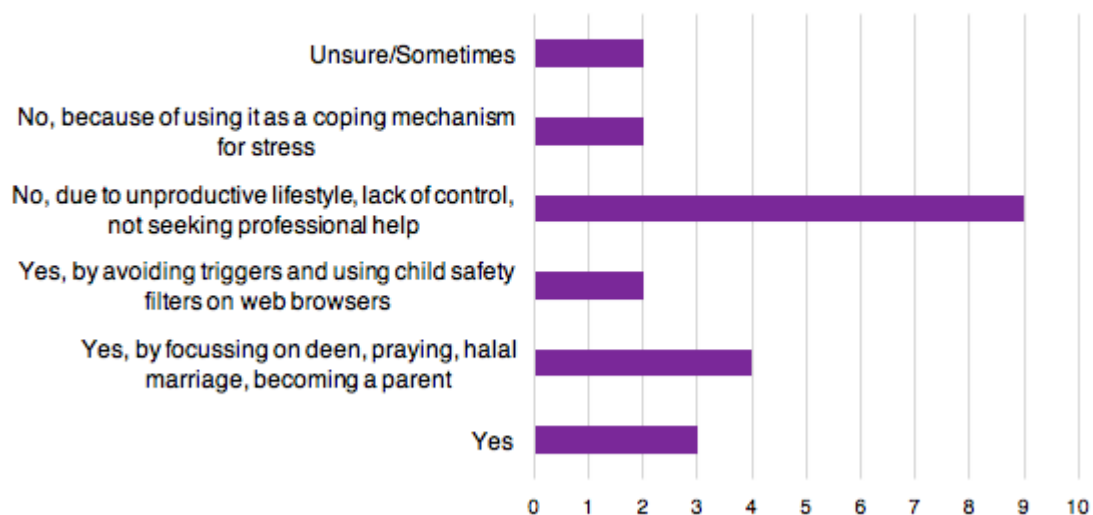
- Procrastinating, looking for distractions and avoiding work, assignments or family time
- Lack of concentration, or laziness
- Feeling triggered by waking up with access to mobile devices or watching an explicit television show/film

Most of the participants (52%) reported a lack of control in their use of pornography due to an unproductive lifestyle (39%) or using this as a

coping mechanism for stress or life problems (13%). See Figure 7 for more information.

A study found that 73.8% of online users consume porn to alleviate stress, while 70.8% do so because they are bored (Weiss. 2014). The same study reported that 94.4% of respondents used pornography for attaining sexual satisfaction, pleasure and seeking an orgasm. Therefore, it is very common to resort to consuming pornography when seeking pleasure, feeling bored and unproductive, or dealing with stress and problems in daily life.

Figure 7: I can control my use of pornography. If so, please explain how. If not, please explain why



2.3 Consequences of Viewing Pornography

Overall, the results of the questionnaire elucidated numerous after-effects and consequences of viewing pornography experienced by the participants. A striking 74% answered affirmatively to punishing themselves after viewing pornography in a myriad of ways (Figure 8). A major 26% of this group reported to punishing themselves emotionally – in the form of disgust, fear, and regret – while another 22% disclosed punishing themselves physically in the form of self-harm/ attempted suicide, and 13% did so financially by donating money to a good cause. Additionally, 78% agreed to being emotionally fearful of somebody discovering their behaviour. When asked to explain why, their reasons given included:

- Fear of family harming them
- Fear of it being wrongly judged/misinterpreted
- Fear over their reputation; they are considered as very spiritual

However, a strong 39% responded as not punishing themselves (Figure 8), but instead experienced only fear and disappointment in themselves. Many of the participants who responded 'no' to this question did not further explain why, but some did:

"I don't punish myself because I understand it is a long term psychological issue with a history attached to it from the past, so it is used as a mechanism to sooth those underlying issues. So, I try to deal with it by immediately trying to repent and recognising the signs which led me to commit the act and try to be accountable to a person, which are effective methods to help instead of punishing myself."

**Figure 8: I have punished myself when I view pornography.
If yes, please explain how. If not, please explain why**



Aside from experiencing fear, the participants responded to feeling shame (83%), depressed (69%), and sick (52%) after viewing pornography. The major 26% of participants who responded as feeling ashamed in the aftermath (Figure 9) explained it on not being able to curb their desires, or restrain their habits, while 18% said that their shame resulted from feeling emotionally disgusted and guilty in indulging in something they know to be wrong/haraam (prohibited in Islam). On the other hand, 17% said that their God-consciousness fueled their shame as they felt spiritually weak and hated by God.

"I feel spiritually weak and realise Allah was watching me while I was in a state of sin which brings about guilt and shame."

When asked whether they feel depressed after viewing pornography (Figure 10), 22% said it was due to feeling compelled to act in this way despite understanding that it is a sin, and 17% said it was due to feeling internally flawed, guilty and hypocritical. For one participant, committing this act fueled their self-loathing and feelings of negativity.

“Don't feel positive and feel darkness inside of me and I am not able to be myself with others.”

Figure 9: I feel ashamed after viewing pornography online

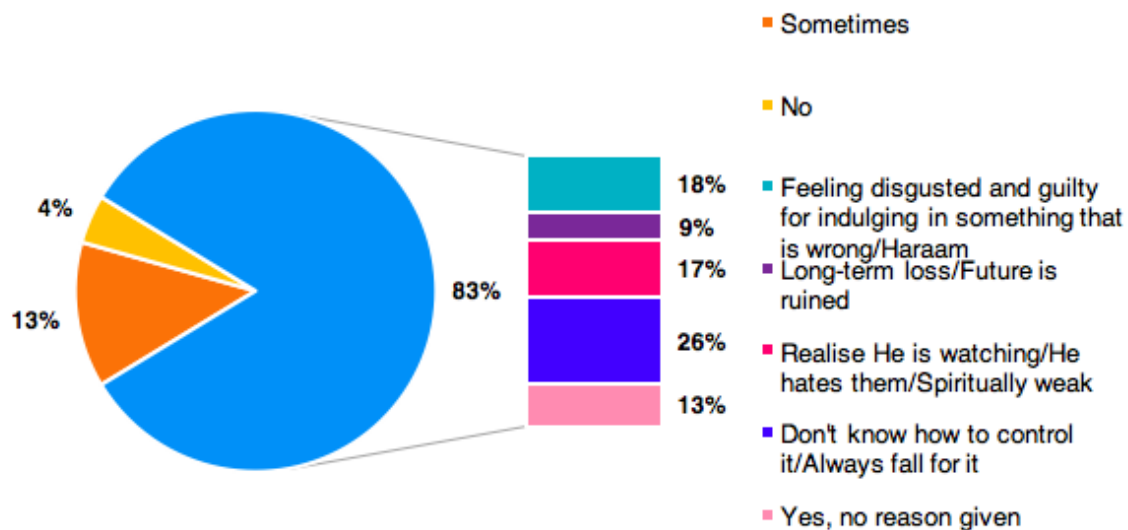
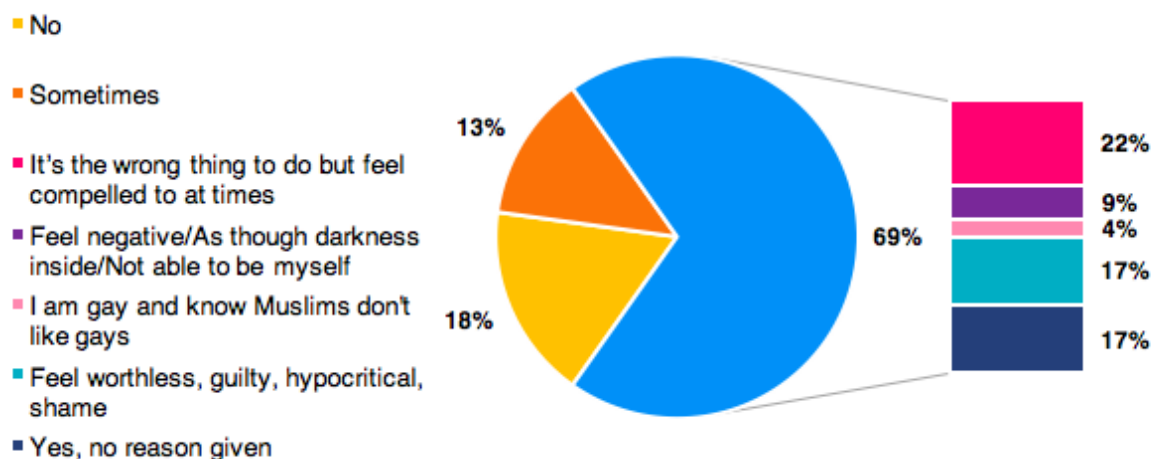


Figure 10: I feel depressed after viewing pornography



Regarding feeling sick as an after-effect of pornographic viewing, a greater proportion of individuals (31%) responded as not feeling sick, but from the 52% who said they do feel sick, 30% attributed it to negative emotions such as disgust, while 9% said they felt sickened at the way women were being treated in the videos.

“I am disgusted with myself and I fear I won’t ever be able to control myself or ever have a healthy marriage in the future, I don’t know when this will end or how.”

The common underlying reasons for feeling ashamed, depressed or sick after consuming pornography centre around feeling negative emotions – such as guilt and disgust, a decreased self-worth, and a lack of control at committing an act that is wrong. Research has found that becoming addicted to pornographic consumption, via an increase in its use, is often due to moderate to severe emotional discomfort – in the form of anxiety, depression, fear, shame and guilt, and life problems, such as family issues or financial problems. This has been found to contribute to the development of even worse problems and conditions, such as declining physical health and sexual dysfunction, anxiety, depression, damaged relationships, and decreased self-worth (Weiss, 2014). Infact, a study published in July of 2017 found that across England and Germany sexual satisfaction begins to decrease exponentially after a month of regular increased pornographic consumption (Wright, Steffen & Sun, 2017).

Figure 11: I feel sick after viewing pornography

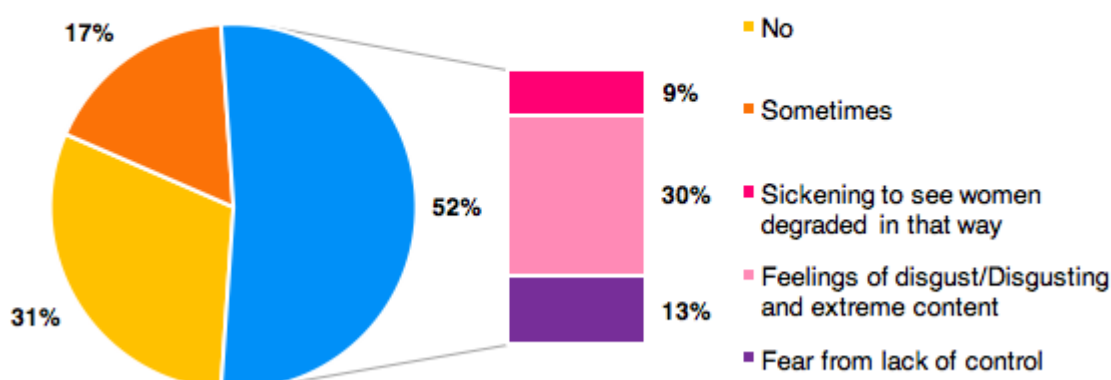
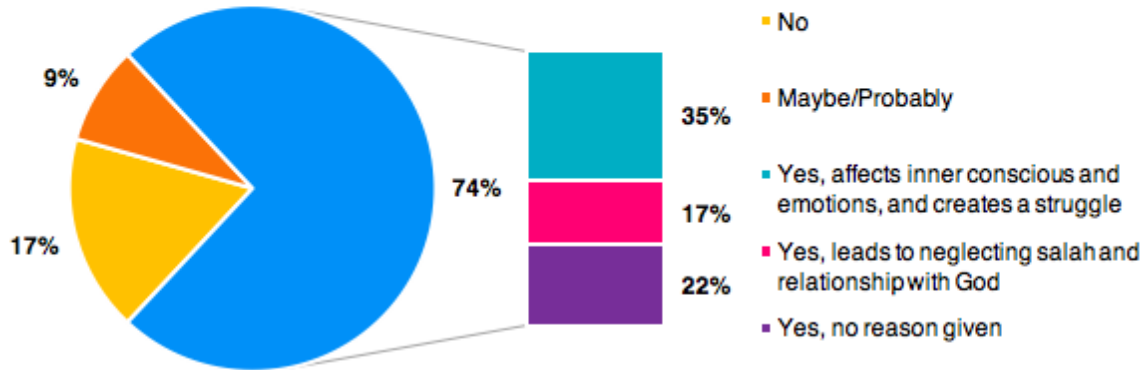


Figure 12: Does viewing pornography affect your faith?

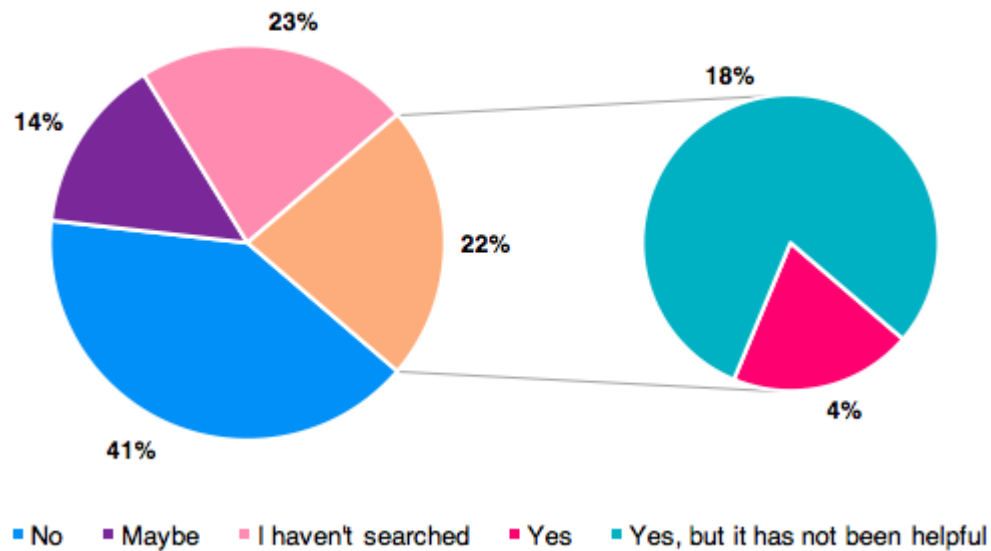


When asked whether pornographic consumption affects faith (Figure 12), a significant 74% agreed that it does because it creates an internal conflict with one's emotions and conscious (35%) and leads to neglecting performing religious acts and building one's relationship with God (17%). The participants who responded by saying it does not affect their faith explained that it stops them from committing adultery/Zina, and it can easily be remedied by praying more often.

"Yes, the shame makes me feel unworthy, I see it as such a bad thing even psychologically overexposure has such bad affects but also it affects your heart. It desensitises you to nudity and sexual activity and this has major impacts on your faith"

The results of this questionnaire imply that for Muslims, consuming pornography is different in some respects, especially when it comes to the aftermath of the act. Therefore, it is interesting to note that when asked whether they had found any Islamic sources to help with this behaviour, majority of the participants (41%) said that they had not, while 22% had said that they had found a source, but a significant 18% of this subset reported that the source they had found had not been helpful (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Have you found any Islamic sources that can help with pornography addictions?



When asked what Islam says about porn and fornication, all the participants were in consensus about the fact that Islam says it is haram, forbidden and that one should not consume pornography or commit fornication. One participant also highlighted that the body parts will speak up on the day of Judgement and confess everything. This elucidates that all the respondents are aware of what Islam says about these topics and yet they indulge in pornographic consumption.

“That it lulls one’s spirituality and negatively affects the heart, builds a barrier between oneself and God just like all sin”

3 Conclusions & Recommendations

The results of this questionnaire highlight a few keen details regarding the consumption of pornography within the Muslim community:

- A) In spite of knowing that this is forbidden within Islam, individuals are still resorting to viewing porn for at least 1-2 hours a week, if not less. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that once an individual starts to consume pornography, it is very difficult to stop and some feel helpless and unable to avoid it.
- B) Our demographic results indicate that this is not just a male centred problem, but a similar number of women experience it as well.
- C) The main reasons that lead to the viewing of pornographic material include watching sexually explicit adverts, boredom/laziness, coping with daily problems or stress, to feel pleasure, get rid of sexual desires and urges and avoiding family issues.
- D) Most individuals who view pornography are very careful to hide it and clear their search history. However, they also punish themselves in several unhealthy ways, including self-harming and emotionally distressing themselves.
- E) The consequences of pornography addiction are tied to feeling intense shame and sickness, developing depression and a significant reduction in one's faith
- F) There are very few, if any, helpful resources available for Muslims on how to deal with pornography addictions

Here are some noteworthy recommendations suggested by the participants of the questionnaire and members of the Inspired Minds team, in response to these results:

- More effort needs to be placed into educational programmes for people seeking pornography, focusing on the youth, including educational outreach materials, presentations and workshops on pornographic consumption, why individuals seek it, how to spot it, what are the harms of it and efficacious preventative measures that can be taken by the individual and their friends/family.

- Similar educational programmes should be held for married couples and focus on the mental strain of porn, how it affects current/future marriage life and how it develops unrealistic expectations of spouses.
- There should also be a focus on preventative programmes, and alternatives for consuming pornography that are not haraam; such as active sporting events and other extra-curricular activities held within the community.
- An interface needs to be created on this topic between members of the community, both male and female, with a focus on why not to shy away from this or label it as 'taboo'. This can serve as a preventative forum for certain individuals as well as encourage others to come forward and seek help. Parents and Guardians should be encouraged and empowered to speak to their children about these things and understand all the reasons that a child can fall into viewing pornography, including practical approaches on how to deal with this problem instead of shaming the youth, silencing the issue and creating further stigma.
- Large-scale ethical research should be undertaken within Muslim communities, upto the psychological human research standards, to understand the reasons for consuming pornography and examine methods of dealing with them in a safe, healthy and respectful way.
- Personal stories and examples can be used to achieve this, including what symptoms and signs are presented when one consumes pornography – to pick it out early – and how previous users dealt with it.
- Informative content and materials needs to be disseminated on where and who to go to for help other than family/friends. This includes Muslim organisations providing support and signposting appropriate available services an individual can use if they come forward seeking help.
- Muslim communities and organisations should delve into this topic and present clearly the laws in Islam about what is/is not allowed, and what Islam says about pornography, but also how to deal with it from an Islamic perspective.

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Appendix

Pornography Addiction Questionnaire

A'slaamualaykum, and Jazakamullahu Khairan for participating in this questionnaire. This has been set up by a few members at Inspired Minds in order to understand sexual health issues affecting Muslims in relation to pornography. This research will be utilised to create sexual health leaflets specifically for a Muslim audience, conduct workshops and events and supply useful information for leaders to create an open space for dialogue.

All responses are completely anonymous, and if you feel distressed at any point, you do not have to complete the questionnaire. If you would like more information, have any questions or need support, please email meanha.begum@inspiredminds.org.uk

Again, JazakAllah Khair for participating and may Allah reward you for your efforts to make change within this Ummah.

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Pornography has sometimes interfered with certain aspects of my life e.g. affected sleep, arriving late to university/work, low productivity etc.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I sometimes use pornography as a reward, a distraction or to procrastinate.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Disagree

- ☐ Strongly Disagree

What do you gain from watching pornography?

When the opportunity arises to view pornography, I can avoid it.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I have punished myself when I view pornography. If yes, please explain how. If not, please explain why.

When I am not watching pornography, I easily find myself drawn to it via (please select all those which are appropriate):

- ☐ Adverts
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Pop Ups
- ☐ Games
- ☐ Peers

I feel helpless to stop my use of pornography.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

I can control my use of pornography. If so, please explain how. If not, please explain why.

I have participated in sexually related chats online.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

I hide certain content on digital devices when others are using it.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Do you masturbate whilst looking at pornography?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

If not, please explain why and what you use pornography for?

How many hours per week do you view pornography?

- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 3-5 hours
- ☐ 6-8 hours
- ☐ 10 hours or more
- ☐ Less than 1 hour

I have organised my timetable/routine to ensure that I am able to view pornography alone.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

I have turned down friends or social events so that I can have the opportunity to view pornography.

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

I have put off studying or other important priorities to view pornography, please elaborate.

I feel uncomfortable when pornography comes up in conversation.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

After viewing pornography, I clear my search history.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

I fear that someone might discover the pornography I view. Please elaborate your answer.

I avoid places where pornography or related topics are discussed e.g. Islamic Seminars, Support Groups, Addiction talks etc.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

I feel ashamed after viewing pornography online.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Explain your answer.

I feel depressed after viewing pornography.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Explain your answer.

I feel sick after viewing pornography.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

Explain your answer.

When I am unable to view pornography, there is a part of me that is relieved due to avoiding sin.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Does viewing pornography affect your faith? Please elaborate your answer.

What do you think Islam says about pornography and fornication?

Have you found any Islamic sources that can help with pornography addictions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

- Maybe
- Yes, but it has not been helpful
- I haven't searched

What are 3 things you feel need to be spoken about or addressed regarding pornography within the Muslim community?

Do you have any other comments?
