

RESEARCH REPORT 2018

# **Pornography Addiction: An Epidemic**



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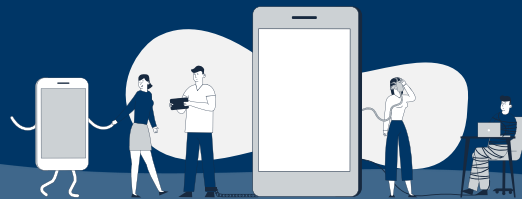


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# Introduction

## Pornographic Addiction: An 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 impacted 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 year old age group had viewed explicit material online*



*94% of them having viewed pornography by the age of 14*



*65% of the 15-16 year old age group view pornography*

Research participants also reported that 87% of biological boys and 77% of girls felt that viewing pornography did not help them understand the concept of 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 established with the intention of addressing 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 a vital need for more research and awareness of this issue, 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 develop highly inappropriate expectations of their sexual relationships by believing that online pornography is a realistic illustration of reality. This can lead to sexual partners feeling anxious and stressed when they are pressured to live up to these unrealistic, and at times non-consensual, depictions of sex. Research has also linked watching pornography to infidelity due to subliminal implicit internalisation of this behaviour as being more advantageous than having a single sexual partner (Vossler, 2016).

Modern pornographic consumption has been deemed a compulsive behaviour, similar to overeating and gambling. Pornographic consumption can also 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). Infact, a study by the University of Cambridge demonstrated consumption of pornographic material to trigger activity in the brain of sex addicts in a similar way that drugs trigger activity in the brain of drug addicts (Voon et al., 2014).

Additionally, 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 again, emulating the traits of an addiction.

# Methodology

## Our Purpose

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

To this extent, we published a "Pornography Addiction" anonymous questionnaire using Google Forms on Inspired Minds' newsletters and weekly articles to encourage research 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 to unsure to 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 qualitatively, 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 questions relating to the Islamic faith, such as their understanding of what Islam says about pornography and fornication, i.e. whether viewing pornography affects their faith, and if they have found any Islamic sources that were helpful with alleviating 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 existing findings obtained from the scientific literature within this space.

All these results are reported in section 2. [Findings & Discussion](#) of this report. From this information, helpful recommendations and vital conclusions were deduced regarding the trends and characteristics of pornographic addiction and methods of addressing this epidemic within the Muslim community. This can be found in section 3. [Conclusion & Recommendations](#).



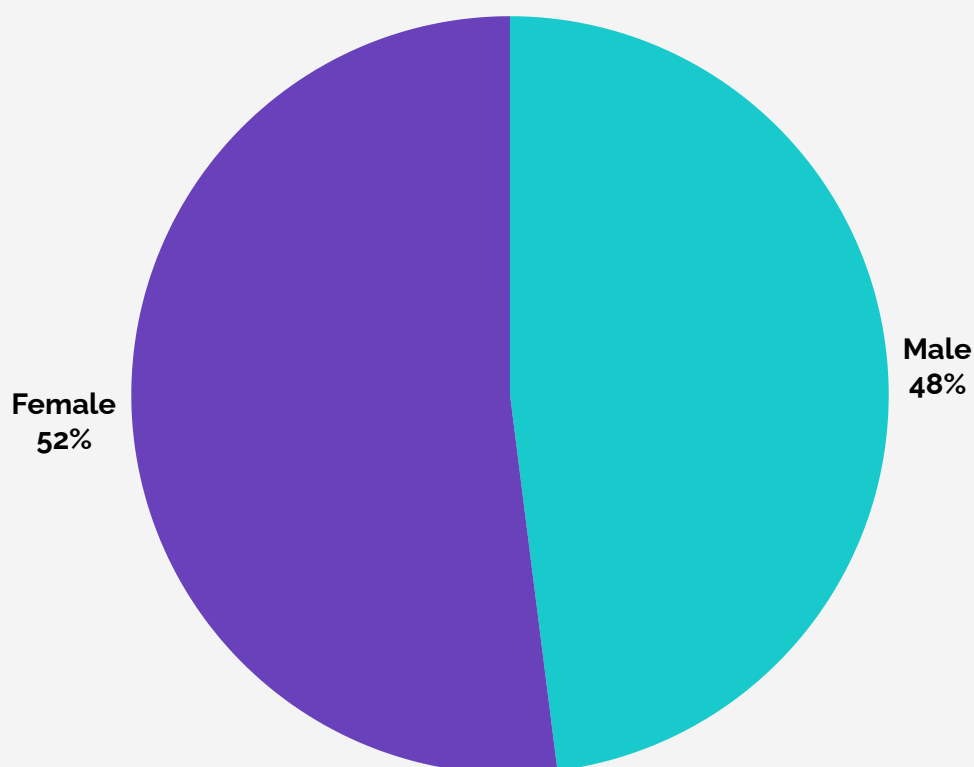
# Findings & Discussion

## Demographic Information

The collated results of the questionnaire on Pornography Addictions included responses from 25 participants in total, of which 2 were excluded from the final analysis. This was because 1 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 was unanticipated, considering research shows 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 relative to 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).

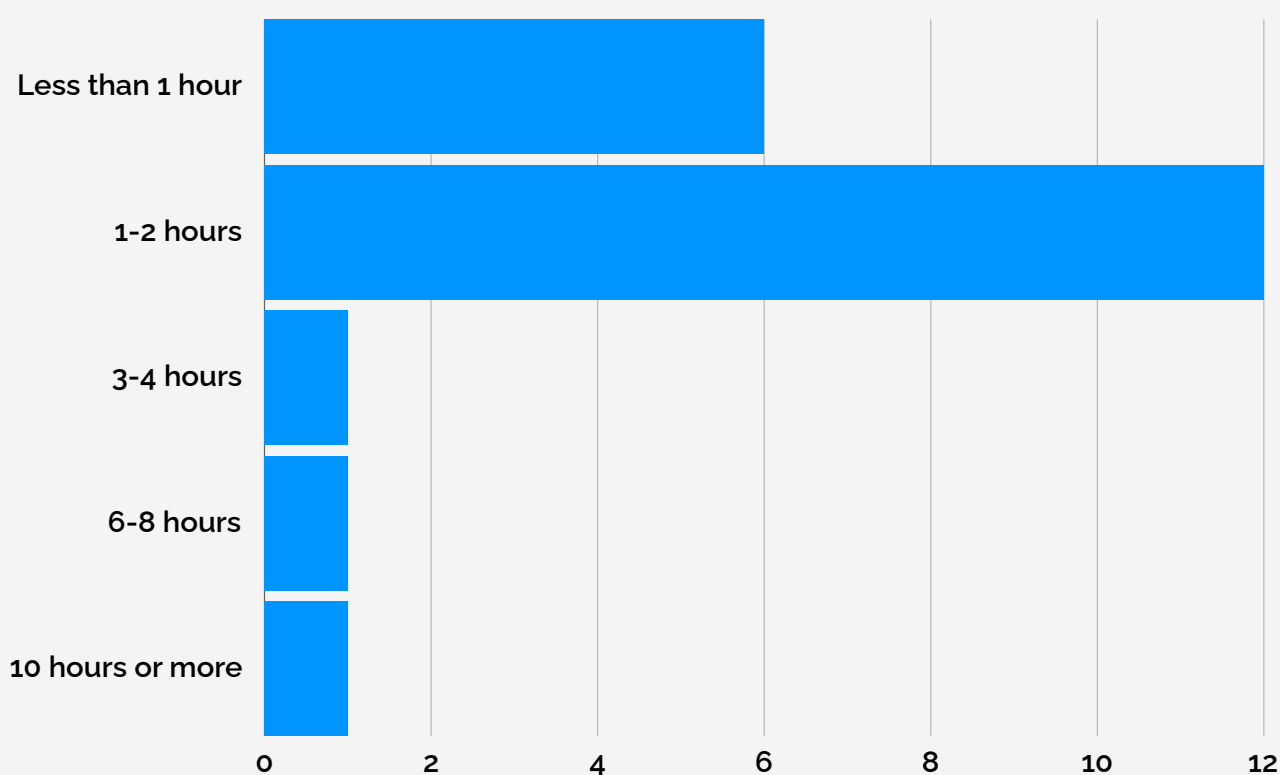
**Figure 1: Gender Distribution**





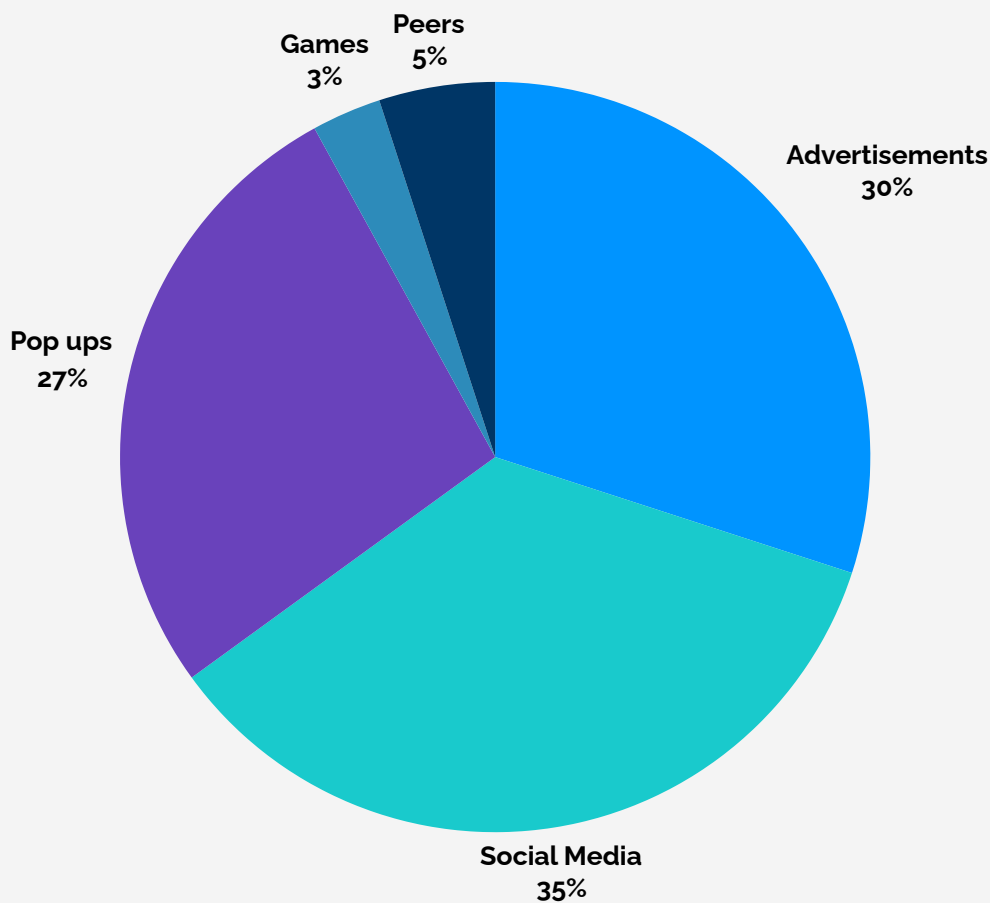
When asked the total hours a week of viewing pornography, the majority of participants (52%) responded with 1-2 hours a week, whilst 26% reported they view less than 1 hour a week (see Figure 2). The International Andrology organisation in London published the results of their survey (2017) and found that 24.1% of participants responded as watching porn once a week. However, their total number of participants were greater than those who completed this questionnaire. Therefore, considering our sample size, and the nature of the additional study mentioned, we deduce this trend in the frequency of pornographic consumption is similar to the wider demographic.

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



When asked to select all the options of how pornography is consumed, 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:**

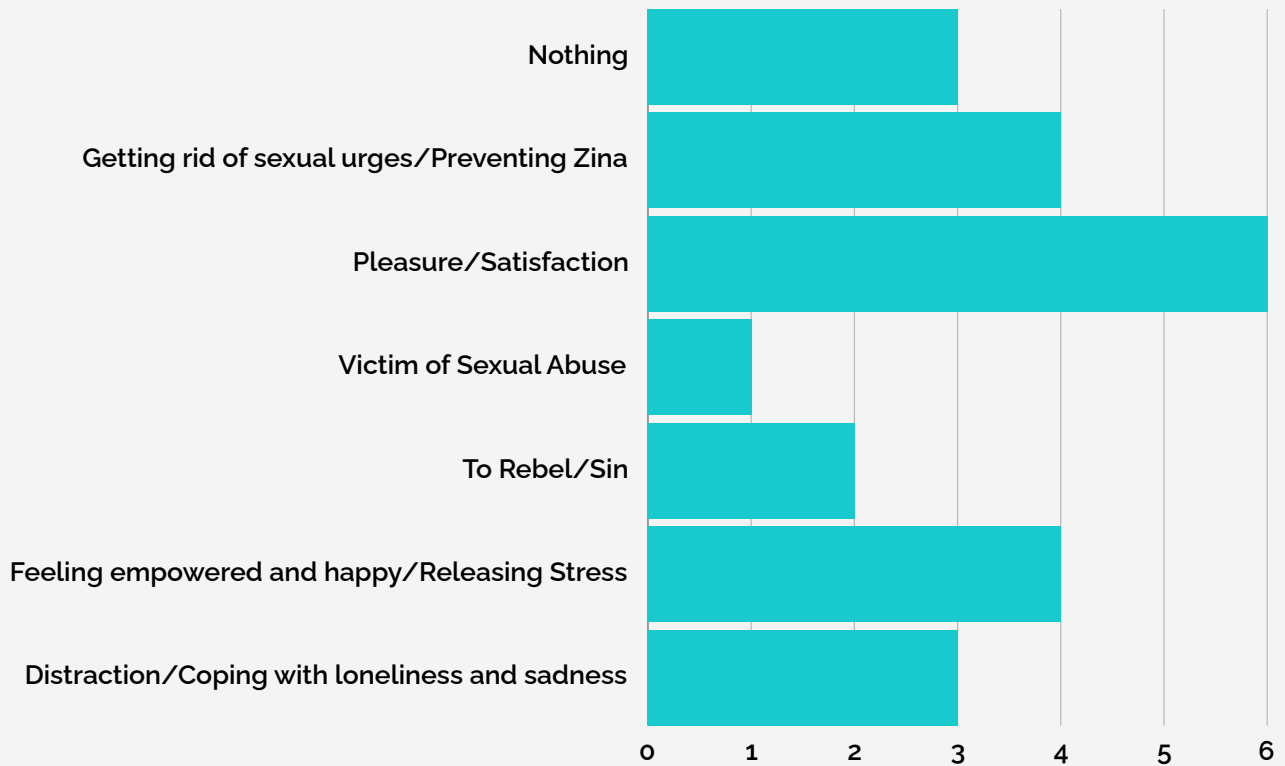


## Characteristics of Pornographic Consumption

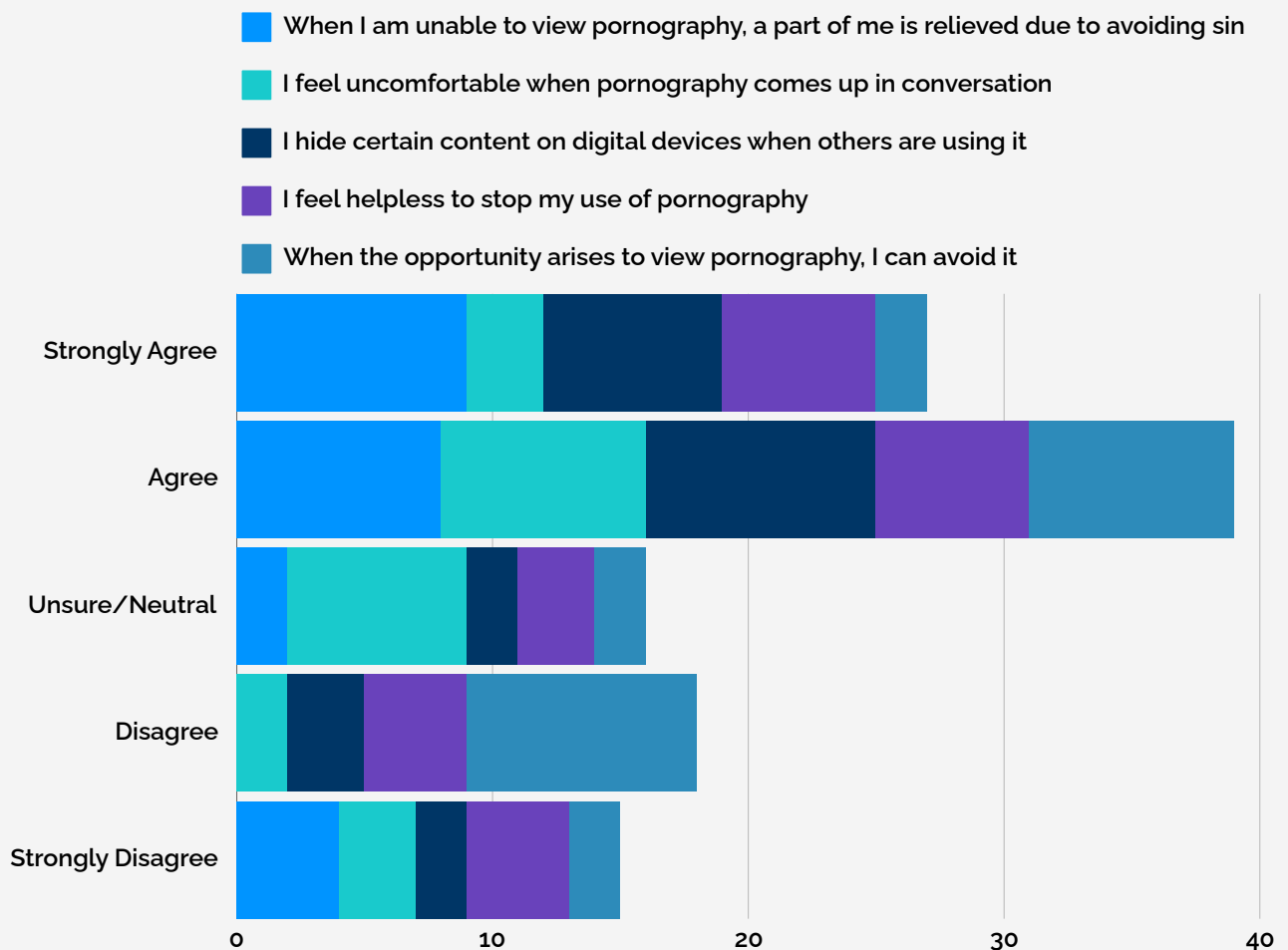
The reasons that participants had for consuming pornography were several, but the majority (26%) stated it was for reasons of pleasure or satisfaction, while other respondents explained that it helped them overcome sexual urges and prevent committing Zina (sexual relations outside wedlock) (17%), or 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. 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).

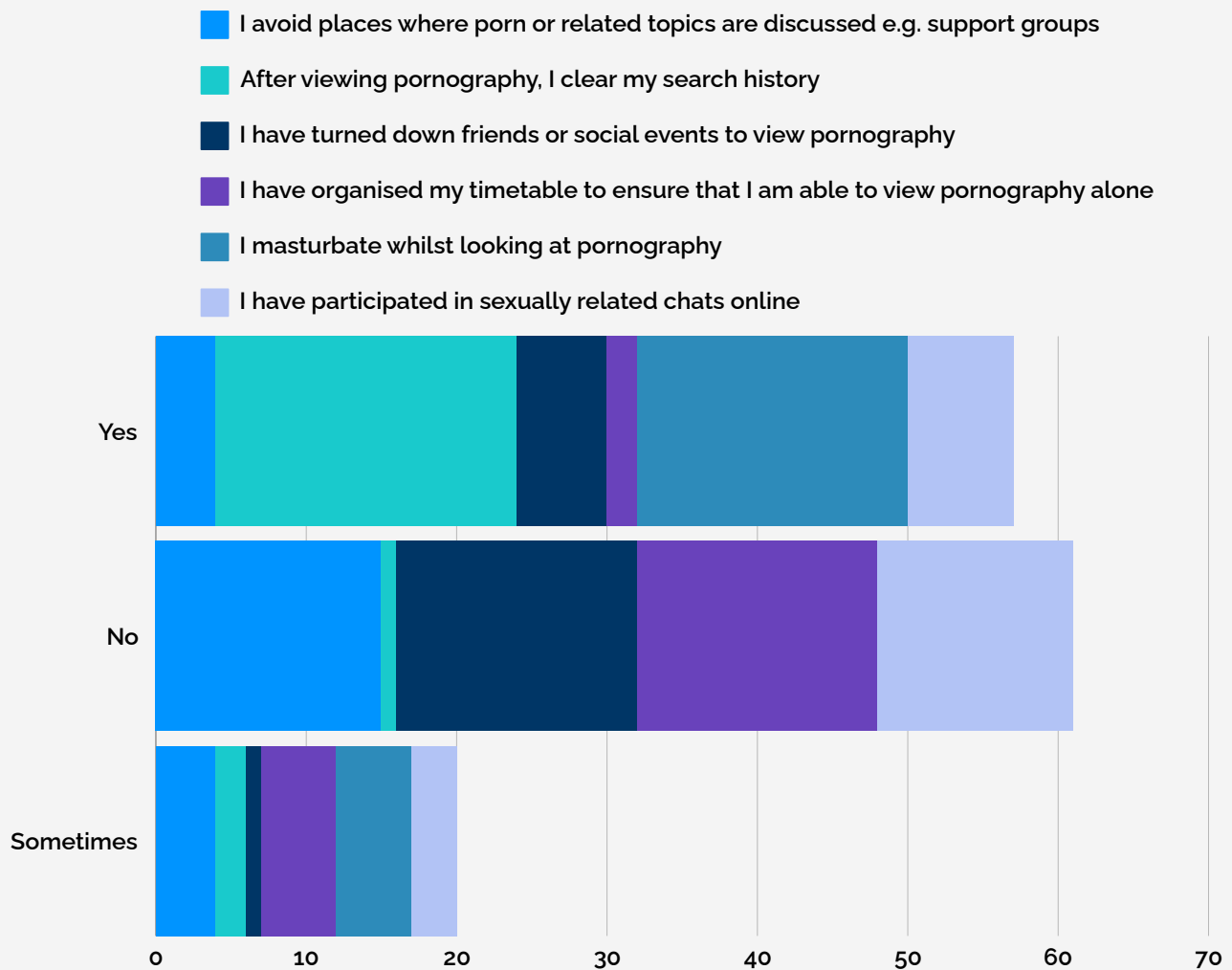
**Figure 4: What do you gain from watching pornography?**



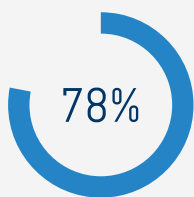
**Figure 5: Characteristics of Pornographic Consumption I**



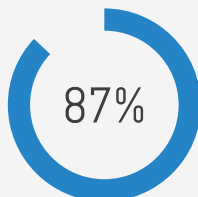
## Figure 6: Characteristics of Pornographic Consumption II



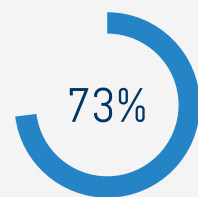
The most striking points to note are:



watched pornography as a reward, distraction or to procrastinate, and masturbated while viewing it.

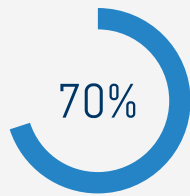


were careful to clear their search history and cover their tracks after consuming material.



were relieved to avoid sinning when they were unable to view pornography.





hid explicit content on their digital devices, and pornographic consumption interfered with certain life aspects.



agreed to feeling helpless to stop and 47% responded as being unable to avoid viewing pornography.



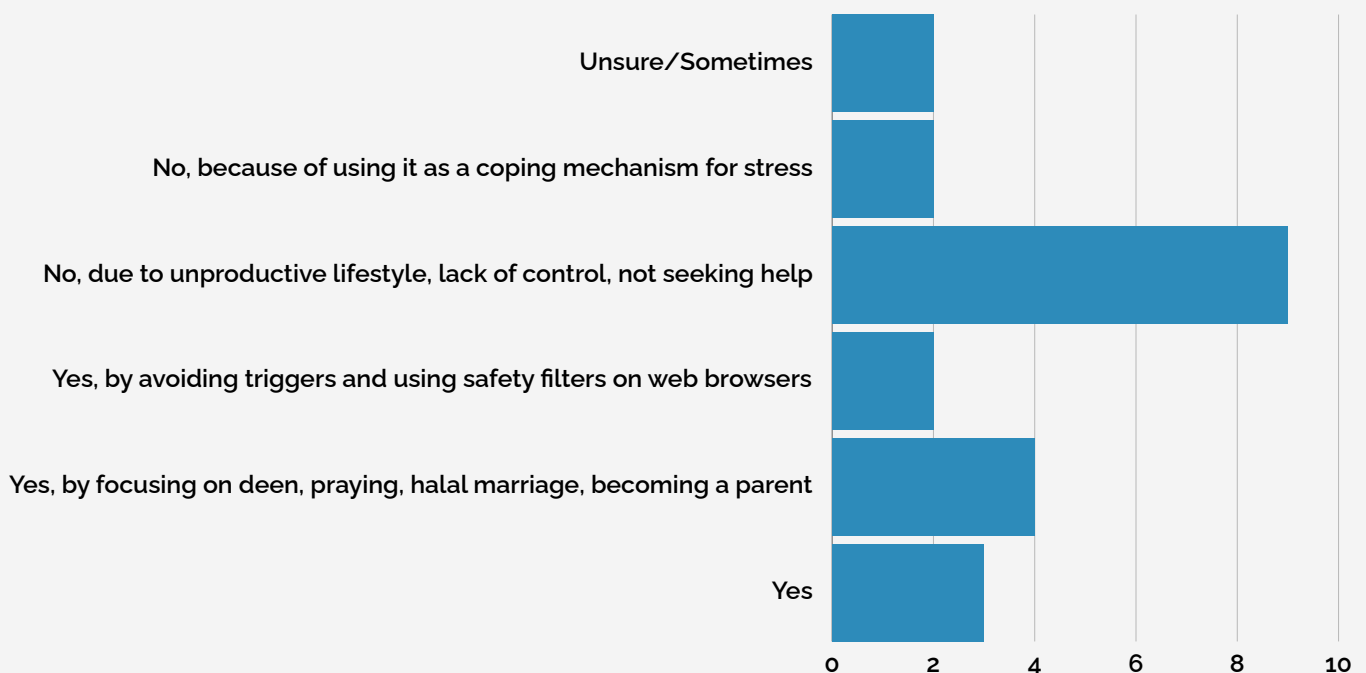
have participated in sexually related online chats, and have actively declined attending social events/meeting friends to consume pornography instead.

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

- *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.

**Figure 7: I can control my use of pornography**



A study found that 74% of online users consume porn to alleviate stress, while 71% do so because they are bored (Weiss. 2014). The same study reported that 94% 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.

## Consequences of Pornographic Consumption

Overall, the results of the questionnaire demonstrated 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 variety of ways (Figure 8). 26% of this group reported to punishing themselves emotionally – in the form of disgust, fear, and regret – whilst 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:

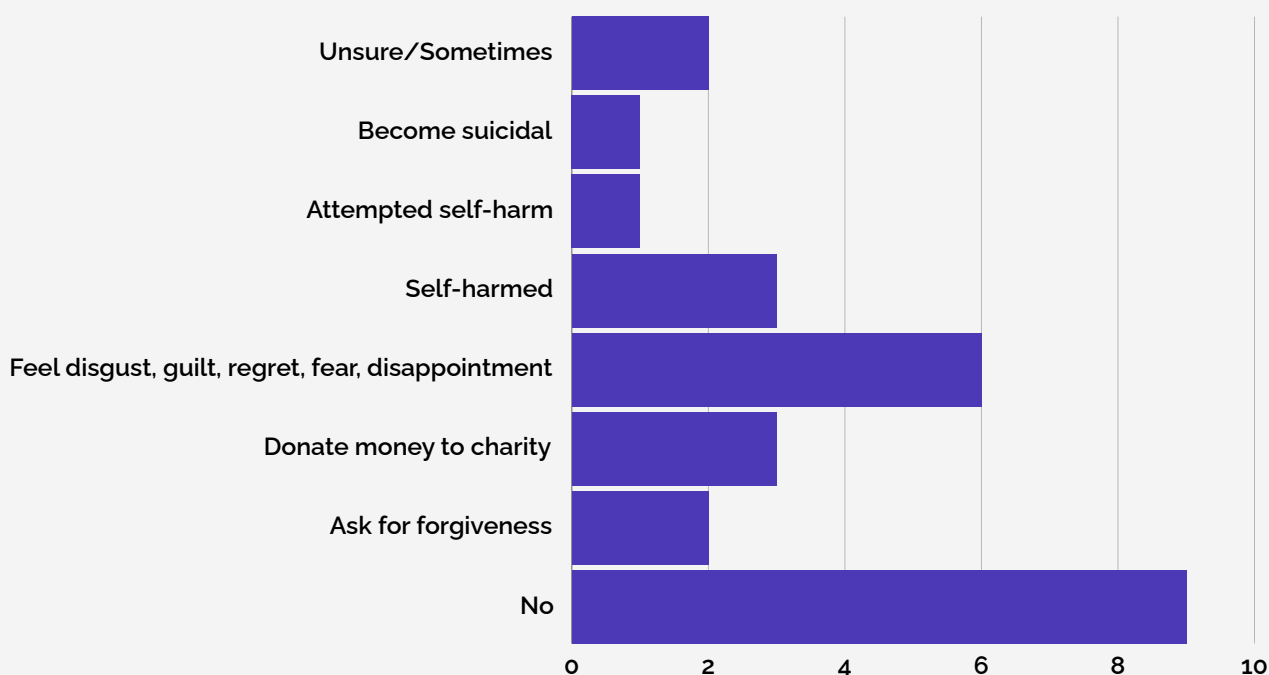
- *Fear of family harming them*
- *Fear of it being wrongly judged/misinterpreted*
- *Fear over their reputation; they are considered as very spiritual*

Overall, the results of the questionnaire demonstrated 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 variety of ways (Figure 8). 26% of this group reported to punishing themselves emotionally – in the form of disgust, fear, and regret – whilst 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.

However, 39% responded as not punishing themselves (Figure 8), but instead experienced only fear and disappointment in their actions. Many of the participants who responded 'no' to this question did not further explain why, though the responses that were provided included the following:

*"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**



Aside from experiencing fear, the participants responded to feeling shame (83%), depressed (69%), and sick (52%) after viewing pornography. 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% stated that their shame resulted from feeling emotionally disgusted and guilty in indulging in something they know to be 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.

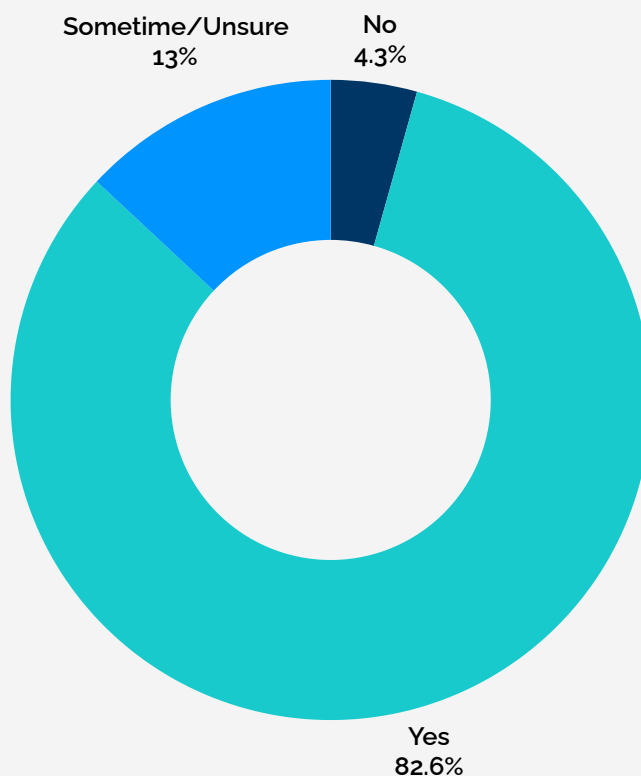
*"I feel spiritually weak and realise Allah was watching me while I was in a state of sin which brings about guilt and shame."*

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."*

Regarding feeling sick as an after-effect of pornographic viewing, a notable 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.

**Figure 9a: I feel **ashamed** after viewing pornography online**



**Figure 9b: Why I feel **ashamed** after viewing pornography online**

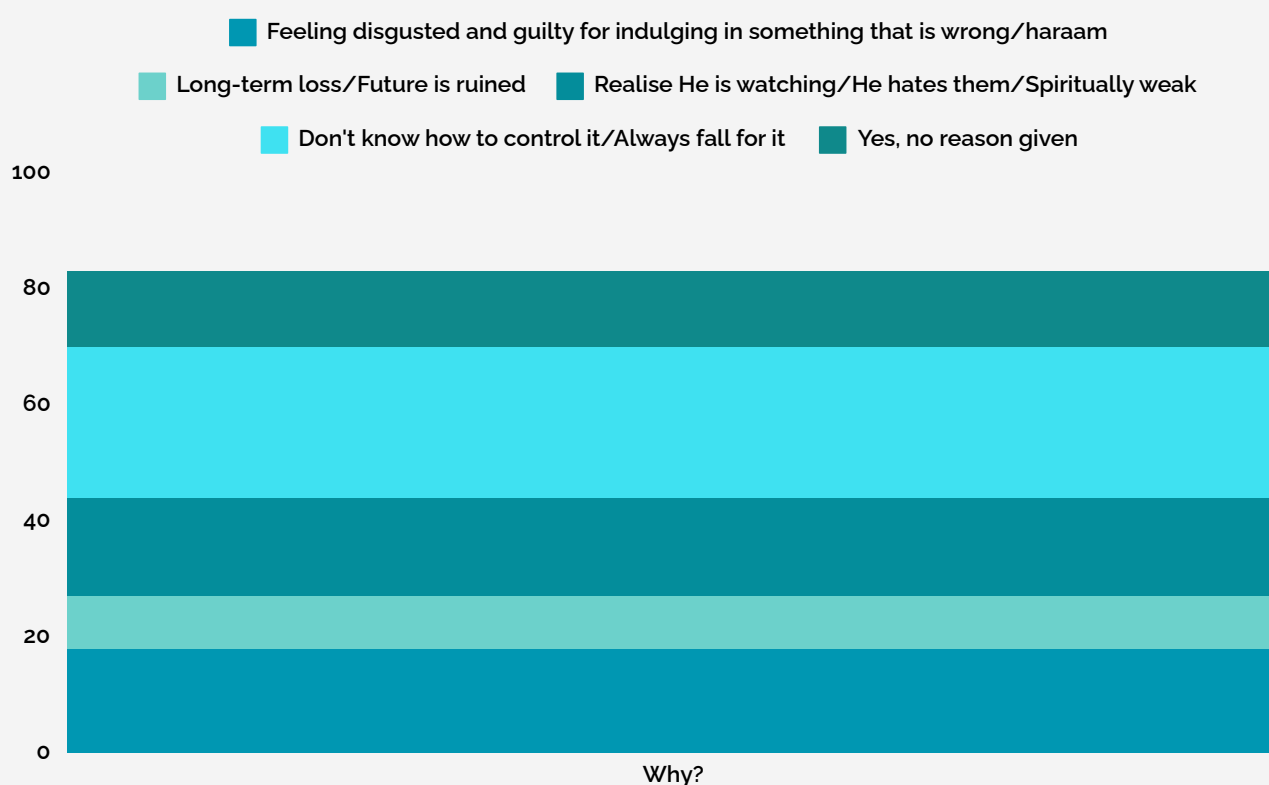




Figure 10a: I feel depressed after viewing pornography

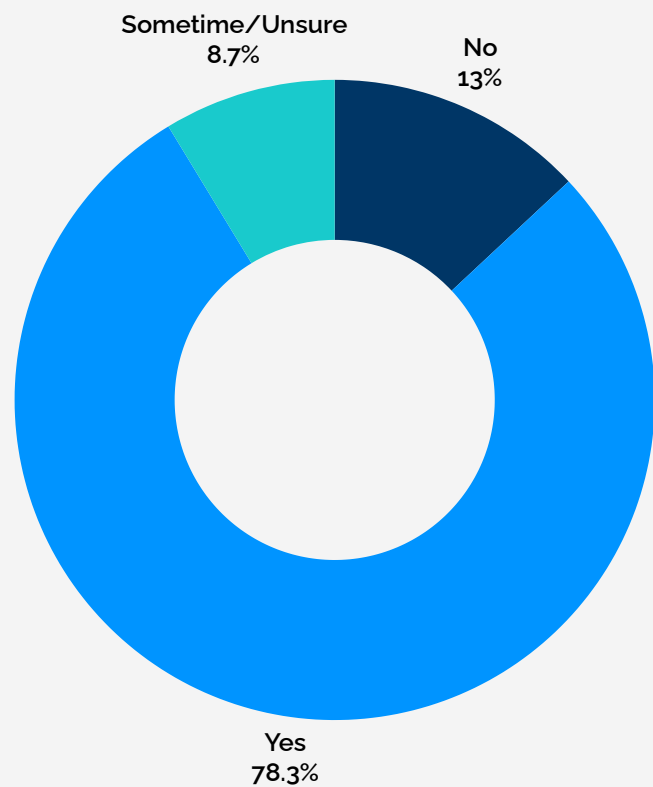
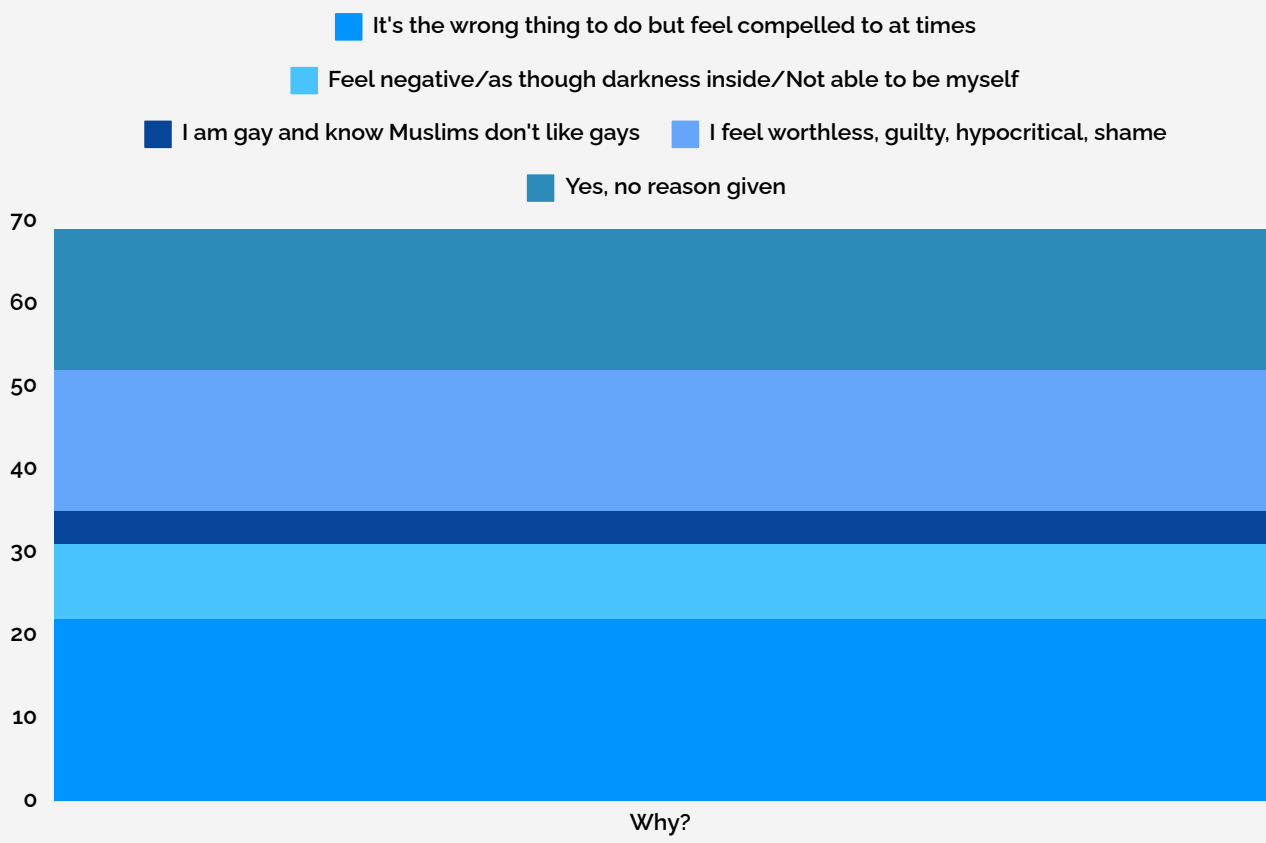


Figure 10b: Why I feel depressed after viewing pornography



***"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 center around feeling negative emotions – such as guilt and disgust, decreased self-worth, and a lack of control at committing an inappropriate act. 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 issues. This has been found to contribute to the development of greater 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).

When asked whether pornographic consumption affects faith (Figure 12), a significant 74% agreed as it creates an internal conflict with one's emotions and conscience (35%) and leads to neglecting 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 Zina (sexual relations outside of wedlock), 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 relative to the greater population, 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, a large proportion of participants (41%) said that they had not, while 22% had said that they had found a source, but a notable 18% of this subset reported that the source they had found had not been helpful (see Figure 13).

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 partake in fornication. One participant also highlighted the Islamic belief that one's body parts will provide an account of an individual's actions on the Day of Judgement. This demonstrates 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"***

Figure 11a: I feel sick after viewing pornography

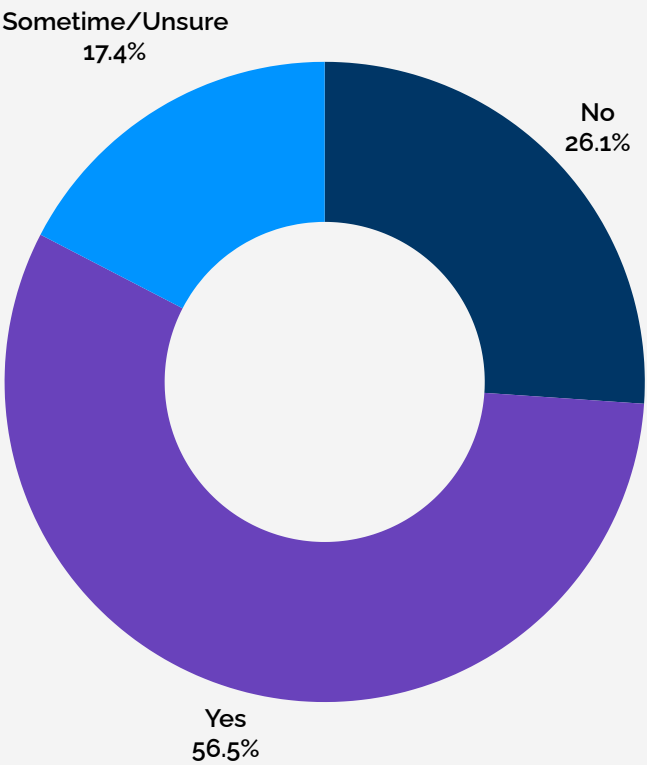


Figure 11b: Why I feel sick after viewing pornography

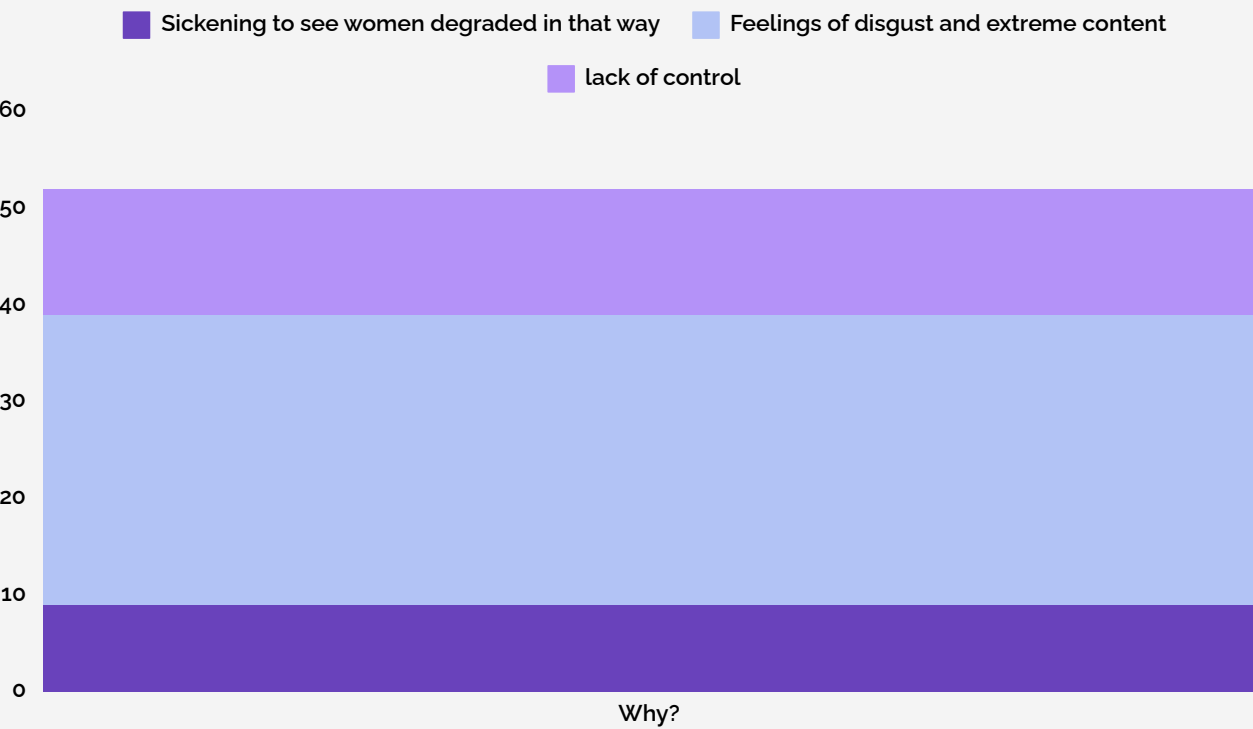


Figure 12a: Does viewing pornography affect your faith?

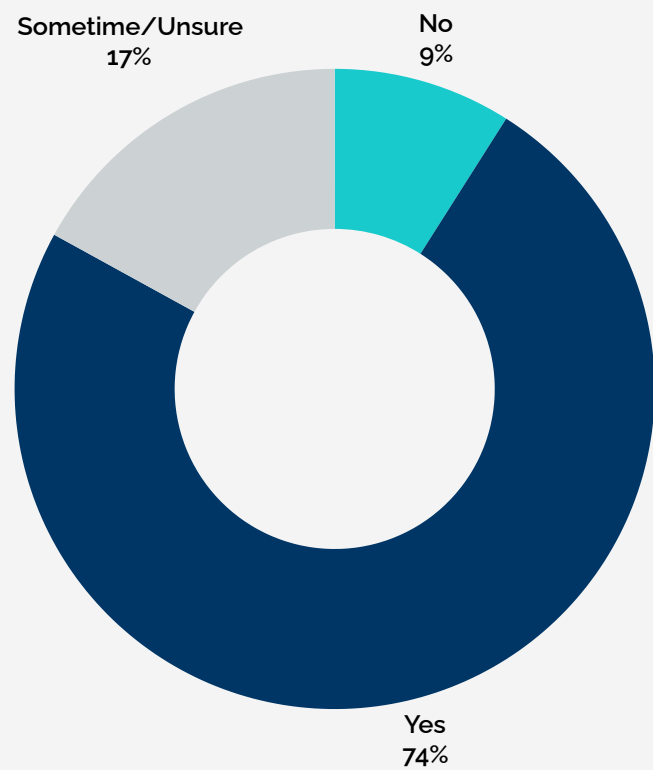
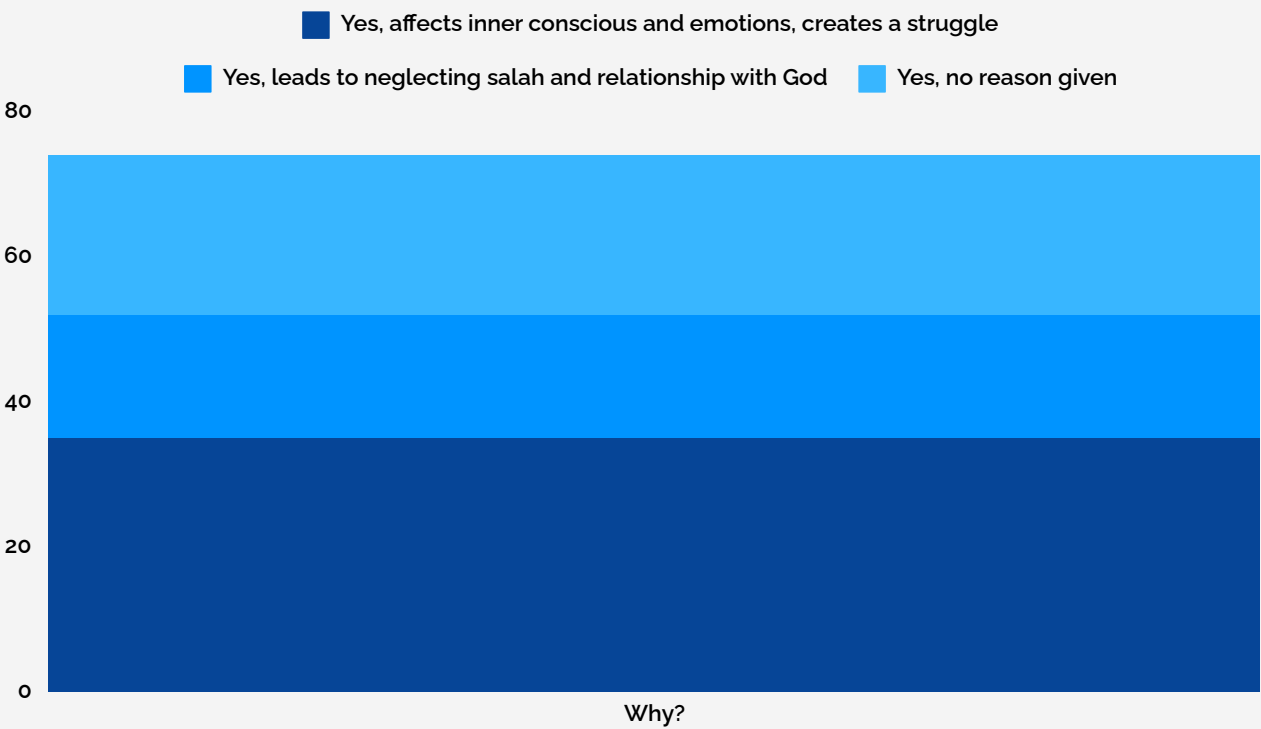
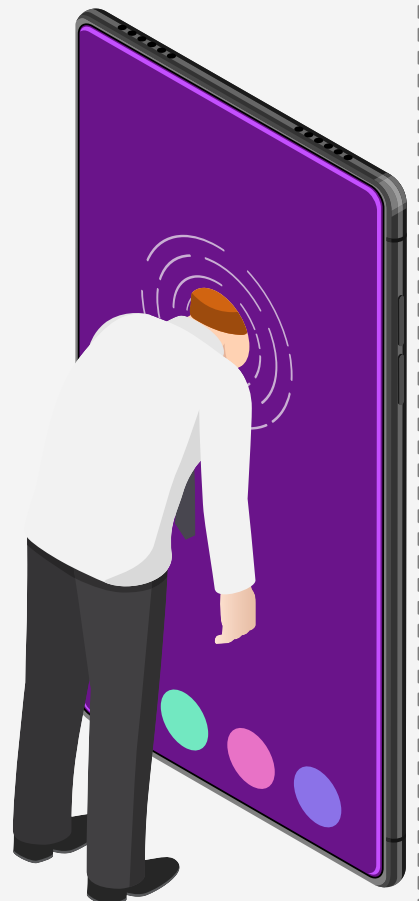
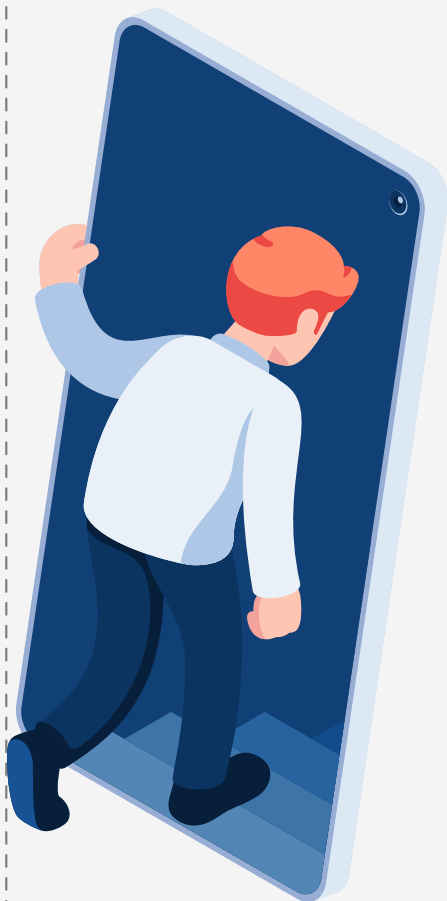
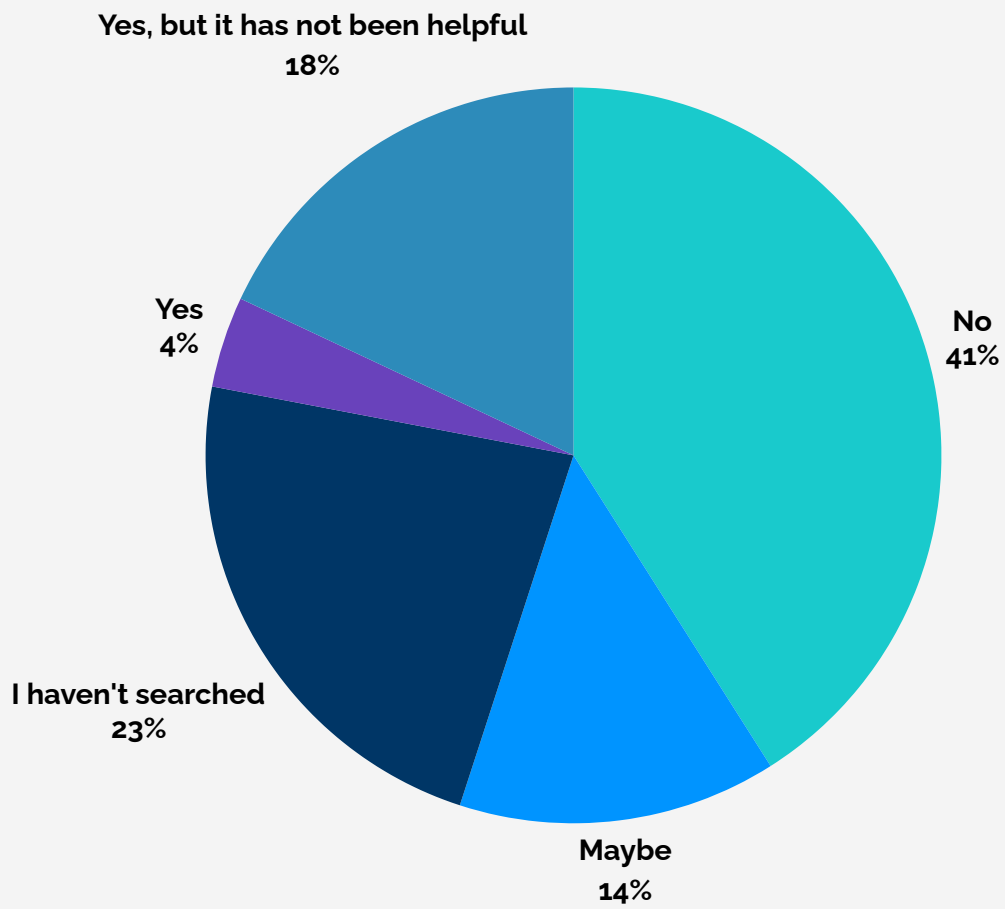


Figure 12b: Does viewing pornography affect your faith?





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



# Conclusion & Recommendations

The results of this questionnaire highlight a few key takeaway points 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-centric 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, to 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 once consuming pornographic material. However, they also punish themselves in several unhealthy ways, including self-harming and emotionally distressing themselves.

E

The consequences of pornographic 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 pornographic addictions

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

*"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 should be encouraged and empowered to speak to their children about these things, including practical approaches on how to deal with this problem instead of shaming the youth, silencing the issue and creating further stigma."*

*"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 Haram; such as active sporting events and other extra-curricular activities held within the community."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

*"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](mailto: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?

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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.

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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.

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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?

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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?



# About Inspired Minds

Inspired Minds (IM) is an Islamic grassroots charity that raises awareness and provides support, from a faith-based and culturally-sensitive perspective, to those affected by mental health challenges.

Anchored to our organisation is our vision of a society where people experiencing mental health challenges are validated and empowered to live fulfilling lives.

To bridge the gap in the understanding of mental health within and between our communities, we:

- Provide vital support and counselling services for both Muslim and non-Muslim clientele alike; recognising cultural, spiritual and Islamic needs
- Actively raise awareness on a variety of issues experienced within our communities, which is informed by the field-based research that we conduct to further our understanding

You can find out more about us via our website and social media links.

**We hope that together we can  
Prioritise Mental Health and Wellbeing.**