

A Six-Year Longitudinal Study of Consumption of Pornographic Materials in Chinese Adolescents in Hong Kong



Daniel T.L. Shek PhD, FHKPS, BBS, SBS, JP^{1,2,3,4,*}, Cecilia M.S. Ma PhD¹

¹ Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, P.R. China

² Centre for Innovative Programmes for Adolescents and Families, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, P.R. China

³ Department of Social Work, East China Normal University, Shanghai, P.R. China

⁴ Kiang Wu Nursing College of Macau, Macau, P.R. China

ABSTRACT

Study Objective: Using longitudinal data collected over 6 years, consumption of pornographic materials in adolescents in Hong Kong and the related demographic and psychosocial correlates were examined in this study.

Design, Setting, Participants, Interventions, and Main Outcome Measures: A longitudinal research design with 6 waves of data was used to examine consumption of pornographic materials in high school students. A total of 3291 high school students from 28 schools responded to the questionnaire at wave 1.

Results: Consumption of online pornography was higher than traditional pornography. There was an increase in consumption of pornographic materials in the high school years. Gender, family functioning, and positive youth development were related to the initial status of pornography consumption. Besides, gender, family intactness and positive youth development predicted rates of change in consumption of pornographic material over time.

Conclusion: The present findings showed that gender, family functioning, and positive youth development are significant predictors for pornography consumption in Chinese adolescents.

Key Words: Chinese adolescent, Pornography consumption, Longitudinal study, Risk factors, Protective factors

Introduction

The prevalence of consumption of pornographic materials was studied in the past few decades.¹ Past studies examined the influence of sexually explicit materials on the development of adolescents with a focus on traditional media pornography, such as magazines,^{2,3} television,^{4,5} and movies.⁶ Available evidence showed that exposure to sexual content on television was associated with adolescent expectation about sex,⁷ perceptions of peer sexual behavior,⁸ and permissive sexual attitudes.¹

Researchers pointed out that more attention should be paid to the Internet.^{9,10} With the growing availability of inexpensive wireless broadband Internet service, the popularity of online pornography has grown tremendously. Compared with traditional pornography, children can access this online material more easily^{11,12} and anonymously at almost no cost.¹³ Nowadays, adolescents can access sexually explicit online materials through their personal computers, tablets, or even smartphones. Thus, they have a less embarrassing way to seek information about taboo topics and sexual identity when they have few other traditional sources of information.^{7,14,15} As pointed out by Brown and L'Engle,¹⁴ "appetite for (pornography) has been a primary driver for the success of the Internet" (pp 131). The Internet is also

considered a key "sexuality educator" among adolescents.^{1,7} Research findings showed that adolescents were likely to discuss and share such online sexual materials with their peers who were also consuming them.¹⁶ This is particularly important when individual interest in sex and romantic relationships are salient during adolescence.

Despite the proliferation of adolescent consumption of pornographic materials, several limitations are found in the literature. First, previous studies focused primarily on demographic correlates (such as gender and age) of consumption of pornography. Regarding gender, male individuals consumed more pornographic materials than their female counterparts in the United States,^{14,17} Czech Republic,¹⁸ Dutch country,¹⁹ Hong Kong,^{20–23} and Taiwanese²⁴ contexts. Furthermore, regardless of gender, older adolescents reported a higher level of pornography consumption than their younger counterparts.^{25,26} Apart from demographic variables, researchers from developmental psychology,¹ communication research,¹⁹ youth research,²⁷ and criminology⁹ suggest the adoption of an ecological approach to understand the concurrent effects of multiple contextual factors (eg, personal, family, and media) on adolescent consumption of pornography.

Some studies have shown that family intactness (eg, divorce and separation) was a significant factor to influence adolescent consumption of pornographic materials and extramarital sex.^{28,29} This is supported in a study by Wingood et al,³⁰ who found a relationship between family intactness and pornography consumption. Besides, socio-economic status was also associated with adolescents'

The authors indicate no conflicts of interest.

* Address correspondence to: Daniel T.L. Shek, PhD, FHKPS, BBS, SBS, JP, Department of Applied Social Sciences, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hungghom, Hong Kong

E-mail address: daniel.shek@polyu.edu.hk (D.T.L. Shek).

exposure to sexually explicit materials. In their study, Brown and L'Engle found that adolescents of low socioeconomic status were more frequent consumers of sexually explicit materials compared with those of high socioeconomic status.¹⁴ However, little is known about whether the relationship between economic disadvantage and consumption of pornographic materials might vary with the medium of consumption. Because of the increasing concern on “Net neutrality” as recently raised by President Obama,³¹ the present study attempted to explore whether consumption of pornographic materials differed in adolescents with different family background and socioeconomic status.

Second, although there are studies on risk factors for adolescent consumption of pornographic materials, few studies have focused on protective factors (eg, positive youth development [PYD] and family functioning qualities). Researchers argued that instead of “fixing” problems, provision of contextual and individual assets would better protect youth from risk and aid them to have a successful transition to adulthood.^{32,33} This supports the idea that adolescent risky behavior would decrease when individual strengths are aligned with contextual assets.³⁴

The negative association between positive youth qualities and problem behavior has been supported in Western³⁵ and Chinese³⁶ contexts. Besides PYD, family is also very important for healthy adolescent development.^{1,19} For example, there has been increasing attention paid to how observed ecological assets in the family and peers influence developmental outcomes during adolescence.³⁷ Although previous studies show the linkages among PYD, family functioning qualities, and adolescent consumption of pornography, the results were mixed.^{20–23} Therefore, in the present study we investigated the effects of these protective factors on adolescent pornography consumption.

Third, few studies have been done to assess the pattern of adolescent pornography consumption and its correlates across time. Previous research on exposure to pornography were mostly cross-sectional in nature^{19,38} or on the basis of a specific age group.⁷ For example, Pardun and colleagues³⁹ found positive associations among exposure to pornographic materials, sexual activity, and intentions to be sexually active among junior high school students. However, the temporal relationships among these variables is not clear. Developmental theories also contended that adolescent behavior is the result of multiple factors that interact with each other.⁹ As pointed out by Zabin et al,⁴⁰ “treating adolescence and youth as a single period not only poses the usual hazards of minimizing individual developmental change but also carries the risk of overgeneralization when behaviors associated with near-in-age cohorts vary considerably amid rapid social change” (pp 10–11). This view was also upheld in the cross-sectional studies conducted in the Western⁴¹ and Chinese⁴² contexts.

The prolonged effects of pornography consumption have been recently explored. Some studies have revealed that early exposure to pornography was associated with subsequent sexual attitudes (eg, permissive sexual norms) and behaviors (eg, oral sex, deviant sexual activity, and sexual intercourse).^{14,43–47} In the study of Brown and L'Engle,¹⁴ exposure to sexually explicit materials was the strongest

predictor of sexual outcomes after controlling for demographic characteristics and other factors. Similar findings were shown in three recent longitudinal studies.^{8,40,48} However, only two time points were assessed.^{40,48} As commented by Ward,¹ “assessments capturing levels at only one point in time may not fully represent the nature and quantity of exposure over the years” (pp 375).

Researchers argued that at least three waves of data would help clarify the causal sequence.¹⁴ Using a 4-wave longitudinal study of early Chinese high school students, Shek and colleagues²³ found that the prevalence of pornography consumption increased steadily across time. Besides, younger viewers (ages 5–12 years) might be more vulnerable to this exposure compared with older viewers^{1,49} because of growing accessibility of the Internet and inescapable involuntary exposure.⁵⁰ It is likely that the influence of different ecological factors on sexual outcomes changes over time¹ and the effects of pornography consumption might also be more pronounced among young adolescents compared with older adolescents.^{19,38} Hence, it is important to ask what individual, family, peer, and social factors are related to trajectories of adolescent consumption of pornographic materials. With reference to this question, we analyzed the relationships between ecological factors and online exposure across six waves of data (grades 7–12) in the present study.

Fourth, very few studies have been conducted in non-Western contexts, where people have conservative attitudes toward sex. On the basis of a national representative survey, approximately 90% of adolescents (ages older than 14) were exposed to pornographic materials in the United States.⁴³ Similar results were found in other Western studies.^{14,26,38,51} However, the prevalence of pornography consumption was lower, and ranged 6%–40% in non-Western contexts, such as Korea,⁵² Taiwan,⁵³ and Hong Kong.^{20–23} On the basis of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, the authors found that the prevalence of online pornography among early adolescents increased steadily over time from 5% in grade seven to 15% in Grade 10.^{20–23}

Although the level of exposure of pornography consumption found in previous Chinese studies^{20–23} were lower than those found in other countries,^{40,42,54} the rate of exposure increased sharply when they reached young adulthood⁵⁵ (ie, more than 80%). Peter and Valkenburg¹⁹ noted that “within-country differences regarding issues of adolescent sexuality may be bigger than between-country differences” (pp 180). Recent studies showed that the influence of Confucian cultural norms on adolescents' sexual behavior,⁵⁶ gender role attitudes,⁵⁷ and premarital sexual permissiveness,⁵⁸ differed in three Asian cities, including Hanoi, Shanghai, and Taipei.^{57,59}

According to the statistics of Hong Kong Census,⁶⁰ the rates of Internet use among early adolescents (aged 10–14 years) have remarkably increased (ie, 73% in 2000 to 99% in 2009). The rapid growth of Internet usage was also supported by the increasing amount of online hours per week among Chinese adolescents.^{36,61} As use of the Internet becomes more pervasive among adolescents, identifying factors related to pornographic materials in the Internet would help reduce its effect among Hong Kong adolescents

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3962642>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3962642>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)