



USE OF PORNOGRAPHY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN IRELAND

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VENUE

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AUTHORS

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BACKGROUND

- With widespread internet access and mobile phone use, pornography has become increasingly available, affordable, and easier to access anonymously (Hardy et al., 2019)
- Estimates of prevalence of pornography use vary widely in literature, due to differences in study setting, sampling methods, definition of pornography, etc. (Peter and Valkenburg, 2016)
 - In Ireland, MyWorld2 survey of senior cycle students found that 86 per cent of young men and 24 per cent of young women had ever watched pornography (Dooley et al., 2019)
- Why a concern for young adults, and adolescents in particular? (Children's Commissioner, 2023; Yu et al., 2021)
 - Young people lack the media literacy, experience, etc. to critically evaluate pornography content
 - Can promote gender imbalance in sexual relationships
 - Can promote risky sexual health behaviours
 - Can impact on self-esteem, body image, wellbeing, etc.

POLICY CONTEXT

- National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020
 - notes that adolescents and young people receive messages about sex and relationships from a variety of sources, including from pornography, and that the early sexualisation of children, adolescents and young people requires public policy attention
- Related strategies focused on children and young people (e.g., National Youth Strategy)
- Curriculum developments at primary, junior cycle and senior cycle
 - New junior cycle SPHE curriculum implemented in September 2023, and senior cycle SPHE curriculum being developed
- Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence

PREVIOUS LITERATURE

- Systematic review of 57 studies of pornography use (PU) in adolescents aged 12-18 years of age noted that most previous research has focused on individual-level correlates of PU (e.g., age, gender, religiosity, pubertal timing, personality traits, etc.) (Alexandraki et al., 2018)
 - Comparatively little research on contextual factors (e.g., family and peer relationships) (Nieh et al., 2020) as well as ‘pull’ factors (e.g., internet use, availability, etc.)
- Growing evidence base on the ‘consequences’ of PU for various outcomes
 - Sexual health behaviours, beliefs and attitudes (Matkovic et al., 2018; Owens et al., 2012; Pathmendra et al., 2023; Peter and Valkenburg, 2016)
 - Mental health and wellbeing (Paslakis et al., 2022)
 - Although concerns over causality (Peter and Valkenburg, 2016; Owens et al., 2012)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

- Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006)
 - Outcomes the result of a complex interplay between factors including the biology and makeup of the young person, their immediate environment such as home, family and school, and wider influences such as the community and society
- In context on online pornography use, useful also to consider the ‘differential susceptibility to media effects’ model (Peter and Valkenburg, 2016)
 - Three types of variables (i.e., dispositional, developmental, and social) predict media use
- For ‘consequences’ of pornography use, additional frameworks include:
 - Sexual script model (Koletić et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021)
 - Selective exposure model (Dawson et al., 2019)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the individual- and family-level factors at earlier ages (9, 13, 17) that are associated with use of pornography at age 20?
 - Individual-level, peer, family, sex education, internet use, post-education pathway, etc.
- How does use of pornography at age 20 interact with sexual health behaviours at age 20?
- What are the consequences of pornography use at age 20 for mental health and wellbeing?

DATA AND METHODS

■ Data

- Main source of data is wave 4 of '98 Cohort of GUI (collected in 2018 at age 20)
- Information on pornography use is collected in the self-completion questionnaire in a module on internet and technology use
- Also use information collected in earlier waves at ages 9, 13 and 17
- Final sample size is approx. 4,500 (observed in all four waves)



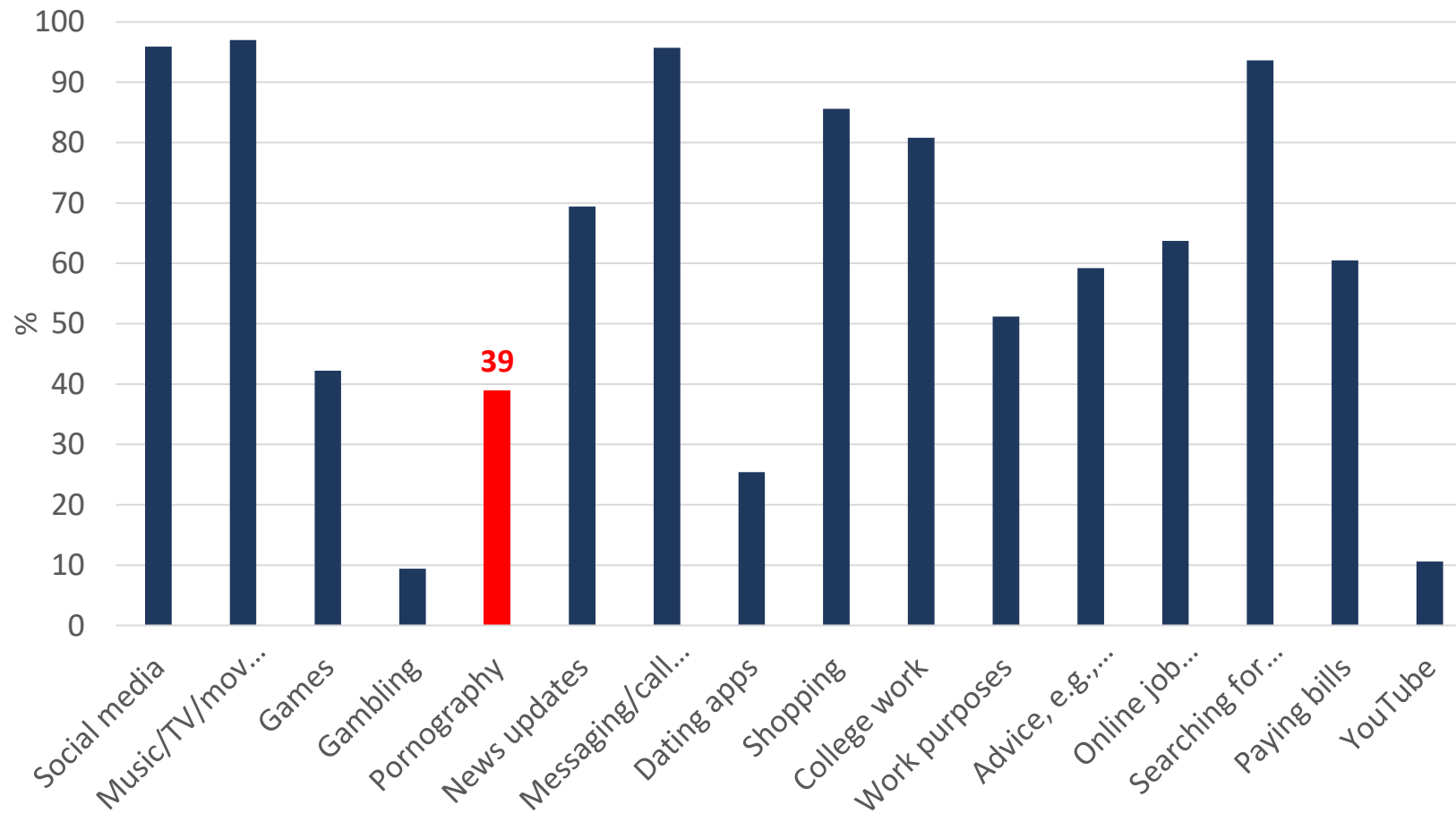
■ Methods

- Separate models for males and females
- Modelling approach depends on format of the dependent variable (in most cases, binary probit)
- Cross-sectional analyses

PREVALENCE OF ONLINE PORNOGRAPHY USE

- Use of pornography derived from question on internet use:

Do you use the internet for the following? (up to 16 options listed)



Males: 64 per cent (average uses = 10)

Females: 13 per cent (average uses = 9)

Q1: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH USE OF PORNOGRAPHY

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL FACTORS

	Males	Females
Age	+ (p<0.10)	
Household social class	+	
Lone parent	-	+ (p<0.10)
Migrant	- (p<0.10)	
SEN		
Urban	+ (p<0.10)	
Early puberty		+ (p<0.10) but only in unadjusted model
Religion	+ (no religion) + (religion, and practice occasionally)	

Controls for sexual orientation, having a partner at 20, diversity of internet use at 20, and spending 3+ hours online on a weekday at 17

Q2: USE OF PORNOGRAPHY AND SEXUAL HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

EFFECT OF PORNOGRAPHY ON SEXUAL HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

	Males	Females
Early sexual initiation (by age 17)	+	+ (p<0.10)
Timing regret (too soon)		+ (p<0.10)
Number of partners in last year		+
Use of contraception		
Use of condoms	-	-

Controls for age, social class, lone parent, migrant, SEN, urban, early puberty, sexual orientation, internet as main source of information about sex at age 13 and 17, diversity of internet use at 20, and spending 3+ hours online on a weekday at 17

Q3: USE OF PORNOGRAPHY AND WELLBEING

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

	Males	Females
Depression	+	+ (but mediated by prior depression)
Life satisfaction	-	- (but mediated by prior life satisfaction)
Self-image	- (but mediated by prior self-image)	-
Aggression	+	+
Avoidance strategies	+	+ (p<0.10)

Controls for age, social class, lone parent, migrant, SEN, urban, early puberty, sexual orientation, internet as main source of information about sex at age 13 and 17, diversity of internet use at 20, and spending 3+ hours online on a weekday at 17

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Gender
 - Strong gendered patterns in prevalence of pornography use, and in risk/protective factors
- Early exposure
 - Points to greater controls on internet providers, but questions over effectiveness?
- Formal and informal RSE/parental discussions
 - New developments at primary, junior cycle and senior cycle (+ HSE resources for parents)
- Public health messaging around use of condoms
- Mental health promotion (including for post-education pathway)
 - Building on existing programmes around consent

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Fás Aníos in Éirinn
Growing Up in Ireland



An
Phríomh-Oifig
Staidrimh

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