

Pornography and Sex Trafficking: How They Are Inextricably Linked

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The Trafficking Victims Protection Act defines sex trafficking as a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or involving a person under age 18.¹

Pornography and sex trafficking are often treated as separate issues, but they are deeply connected. Trafficking occurs within pornography, pornography can influence sex buyer behavior, and pornography can be used in the grooming and exploitation of children.

1. Pornography and Sex Trafficking: Mutually Reinforcing Systems

People can be trafficked into pornography, while abuse of people trafficked in prostitution may also be recorded and distributed on pornography sites.² Pornography can also shape sex buyers' expectations and the acts they seek to replicate on prostituted people.

- In 2021, **pornography was the #2 venue where trafficking cases were reported in the U.S.**³
- **80% of prostitution survivors** said sex buyers used pornography to show sexual activities they wanted to engage in, and **52% said it taught them what was expected in the sex trade.**⁴
- Men who buy sex are more likely to masturbate to pornography, imitate it with partners, and receive their sex education from it.⁵

2. Pornography, Violence, and Objectification

Pornography frequently depicts sexual violence and aggression, most often directed at women, while also reinforcing racist stereotypes and the hypersexualization of marginalized people.⁶ Exposure to this content can normalize and desensitize viewers to violence and degradation.

- **97% of the targets of violence and/or aggression were women** in an analysis of Pornhub and XVideos.⁷
- A study of 4,009 heterosexual scenes found physical aggression in **45% of Pornhub scenes and 35% of XVideos scenes.**⁸
- A majority of teens who viewed pornography have been exposed to aggression and violence, including rape.⁹
- Porn consumers are more likely to forward sexts without consent, commit acts of sexual violence, and express an intent to rape.¹⁰

3. Pornography Grooms and Exploits Children

Children are exposed to pornography at young ages and may come to view its depictions of sex, violence, and objectification as “normal.”¹¹ At the same time, minors themselves are exploited in pornography, and predators can use pornography and child sexual abuse material (CSAM) as grooming tools.

- Among those reporting being forced into pornography production, **the average age was 12.8 years old.**¹²
- **79% of teens** who have viewed pornography reported learning about sex from it, while many are exposed to pornography depicting aggression, violence, and rape.¹³
- Predators use pornography and/or CSAM to groom victims and pressure or coerce children into sending explicit imagery of themselves.¹⁴
- **In 80% of child sexual abuse arrests, the offender also possessed child sexual abuse material.** Research raises concerns that, for some individuals, pornography consumption may escalate toward increasingly extreme content, including CSAM, and potentially sexual abuse of children.¹⁵

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