



**New Danish
findings** —
on how
*pornographic
digital content*
**affects Danish
children and
young people**
— **from**
*their
perspective*

Introduction

Online porn use is pervasive, and yet despite its colossal presence in the lives of young people often remains under adults' radar.

Much has changed since 1969, when pornographic images were legalized in Denmark. Unlike pre-internet "innocent" porn magazines, today's digital pornographic content has no responsible editor.

Online porn is a vast, lucrative, global industry, thoroughly integrated with the rest of the commercial online ecosystem. It's ubiquitous, and it imposes itself on all Danish children and young people.

Today porn is delivered to youth via algorithms both on social media and, of course, on porn sites. From the age of 6-7 years, it is no further away than the smartphones of children and young people.

This dramatic technological development has created a need for updated and accurate data describing how young people's consumption of digital porn affects their overall well-being and their physical and mental health.

Therefore "Media Health for Children and Youth" has taken the initiative of conducting a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of porn use today among young Danes: the amount consumed, the nature of the content and the perceived impact on Danish young people - from their perspective. We've given young people aged 15-18 years "a voice" and we gain insight into their reality. That youth are interested in sex is probably clear to every adult. Young people do want information at school, but it is currently not adequately available. Furthermore, no legislation or regulation obliges schools to apply web filters.

Action is needed, and here schools can play a major role in furthering facilitating norms of openness, healthy boundaries, and other aspects of sexuality that young people do not necessarily find on the internet or among their peers.

This is where parents and school staff come into the picture as the adults who help young people analyse sexuality thoughtfully. To prevent abuse but certainly also to promote the positive aspects of sex.

There is an urgent need to improve the skills of teachers and professionals, so they know what young people are experiencing and exposed to. They need teaching materials that take recent digital developments into account including the fact that hardcore porn, abuse, and more subtle pornographic content pervade the digital environment. Many young people have not yet learned the social skills necessary to read others' boundary signals or others' desire or lack of desire.

Who is behind the report?

The "Media health for children and youth" association sponsored and initiated this nation-wide analysis. The association has existed for more than 20 years, and contributes, among other things, advice, data and resources for professionals, politicians, and parents.

Find out more about the association at:
<https://mediesundhed.dk/>

Get free advice here:
<https://mediesundhed.dk/raadgivning/>

Download its latest report for free here:
<https://mediesundhed.dk/rapporten2021/>

Method

Danish teenagers need a public voice

The data in the report is based on 725 responses from 15–18-year-olds via a quantitative questionnaire with 48 questions about sexual experience and their relationship with porn. The questionnaire was developed based on interviews with 15-18-year-olds, in which they disclosed previously unknown yet relevant problems.

Sociologist and futurist Eva Steensig, has decades of experience with the behavioural and consumption habits of Danes. She has summarised the overall study, including both the qualitative and quantitative analyses, respectively “Analyse Danmark” and “MyResearch”. This booklet is an abbreviated version of the full report and contains excerpts of the data and statistics as well as Eva Steensig’s analysis.

You can find and read the full report here:

<https://mediesundhed.dk/rapporten2021/>

To the best of our knowledge, the analysis on which the full report is based is currently the largest and most comprehensive of its kind in Denmark. Its objective has been to reveal much needed insight and information arising from both young people’s own descriptions of their reality and representative data. This is a prerequisite for understanding and discussing the possible consequences of today’s pornographic content in the lives of young people. It also permits the development of expert, practical interventions for any challenges and problems that might be linked to children and young people’s exposure to porn.

Statistics from the report - Facts about young people's exposure to porn

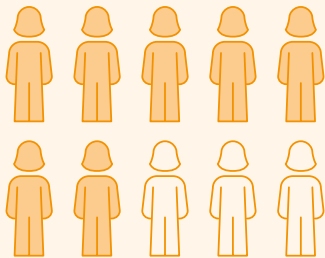
In Denmark, the sexual minimum age is 15, but results from the study show that the average age of onset for watching porn is 12.8 years. 71% of Danish youth under the age of 15 have watched porn and as many as 51% watched it often and regularly before they turned 15. Of the 71%, 15% report that they watch porn daily. About half (51%) report that curiosity first led them to watch porn. However, those who watch porn regularly indicate that pursuit of arousal or orgasm is their primary motivation, and that seeking stress-relief is a secondary impetus.

Besides giving us specific figures on how much and how early porn enters the lives of our young people, the results also show that the majority (77%) have unlimited access to porn. That is, access without parental controls or web filters.

Among young people who have limited access to porn, 25% watch porn at least weekly. By comparison, 41% of those with unrestricted access to porn watch it weekly at a minimum.

Porn is never further away than their smartphones. Even if young people are not actively searching for it, porn appears in their social media feeds. 67% involuntarily come across pornographic material on social media. This includes popular platforms such as Instagram (23%), Snapchat (23%) and TikTok (17%). Porn is thus a part of young people's lives whether they want it or not.

"You might not think about it, but on Instagram or Tiktok you can easily see a "naughty" image. You can also just google it. There are also many fake profiles who write to you on Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Then they write that they want a boy to snuggle with. You often see that." (Male, 18 years)



7 out of 10

report that their boundaries are exceeded when receiving “dickpics”

The consequences of online porn for young people

Other research shows that especially early and frequent exposure to porn affects the consumer’s sexual behaviour and can cause mental and physical problems such as addiction and sexual dysfunction.

74% of the young people in the survey who watch porn also self-report that their use of porn affects their sexual behaviour to a high degree (23%), considerably (24%) or partly (27%).

For example, 47% feel that their use of porn has changed the way they want to be with people they are attracted to, and a further 47% find that porn affects them negatively in relation to their own body image. 41% of the girls feel negatively pressured by the stereotypical female body ideals of the porn world.

Expectations of sexual performance

32%

boys aged 17-18

find that porn negatively affects their expectations for their own

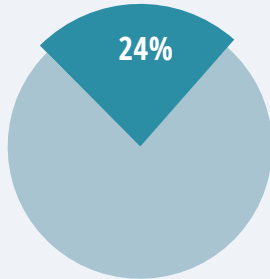
sexual performance

Likewise, 32% of the boys age 17-18 feel that their porn consumption has resulted in negative pressure in relation to their own sexual performance. At the same time, 40% of young people believe that porn has made them more confident in their thoughts about their sexuality. In addition to the fact that young people feel that porn use affects them negatively, 49% of young people who watch porn report that they feel irresistible urges to watch porn, and as many as 43% feel to some extent addicted to porn. Almost a quarter (24%) of the 17-18-year old boys report that they watch more porn than they want to.

When porn becomes sex and sex becomes porn

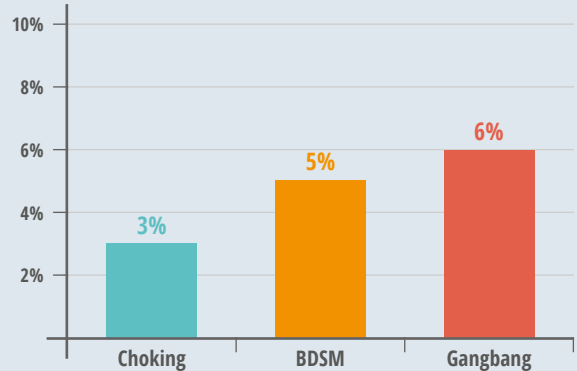
In the initial qualitative interviews, the young people described their perception of sex and porn, respectively. Their answers show that they have no doubt that porn is staged, fake and unrealistic.

Worries and nervousness



find that watching porn makes them more anxious about having sex with others

Feel worried about seeing



Young people's perception of sex and porn

What is sex?

- Two or more people having sex.
- Occurs in a romantic/loving relationship
- Very intimate
- Voluntary
- It is something private
- Something that just happens spontaneously.
- It's healthy.
- It is normal – a natural thing.
- Exploring each other's bodies
- An acknowledgment that someone likes you and that you are attractive (girls).
- Something you can be judged by. You are judged differently depending on whether you are a girl or a boy. Girls with many partners are cheap; boys with many partners are cool.

What is porn?

- Something that is filmed – a whole film crew is involved, and it is produced, filmed and dramatized.
- Planned – staged
- Inauthentic and superficial
- Unrealistic – things happen in porn that do not happen when having normal sex. Often more extreme than sex.
- It's something with nudity, very explicit.
- Anyone can access it – it's not private, but public.
- Voluntary, but in a different way than sex. You know what is going to happen because it is written in a script
- Sex for the sake of sex, it is not romantic.
- It is stereotypical in relation to ideals of beauty.
- Money is involved, and there are actors who make a lot of money from it.
- It is associated with the Internet.

*2021 Qualitative study of young people's exposure to pornographic content and online porn media and the impact of this, page 16

Young people are aware that money is involved and that behind the camera there is an entire film crew that directs and edits the final product. Despite this understanding, 40% of those who have a boy/girl-friend and 38% of those who have had sex report that they have been asked to do things that they believe originated from porn. 2 out of 10 have asked their girl/boy-friend or sex partner to do something they have seen in porn. Half of those who watch porn also report that the content they seek has become more violent, aggressive and extreme over time. And as many as 7 out of 10 young people believe that porn can encourage consumers to overstep their own or others' boundaries.

Young people who watch porn at least weekly typically watch multiple types or genres. These include choking 17%, underage/minor 4%, BDSM 19%, gangbang 30%, bondage 23%, step-family porn 47%. At the same time the more porn young people see the more porn scenarios they want to try out. For example, choking during sex 16%, ejaculating on the face 19%, lack of contraception 19%, sex with several people at the same time 15%, and face-slapping 8%.

*"If it had been someone else than oneself, it would probably seem violent. There is a lot of choking or strangling girls. It is very normal. It wasn't that he asked permission to do it, but I haven't experienced anything boundary-crossing yet."
(Female, 17 years old)*

The young people describe their porn-inspired sexual experiences as both transgressive (35%) and offensive (21%), but also as "ok" (31%) and exciting (30%).

It is primarily the girls who find it transgressive (53%), while 41% of the boys primarily find it exciting. Porn therefore affects young people's perception of what is normal and acceptable sexual behaviour. Worst case, this results in compromising, disregarding, or exceeding/transgressing their own and/or a partner's boundaries. Almost 1 in 3 young people (28%) experience that they involuntarily receive, or appear in, images or other media that is shared between people via social media. This is especially true for girls, among whom 42% of the 15-16-year-olds and 44% of the 17-18-year olds have experienced this. So, it's not just a question of informing young people about what porn is, but also educating them and helping them to understand why and how it can sometimes lead to problematic use, addiction, negative body image or altered and sometimes offensive sexual behaviour.

*"I personally had sex at a party, where one of his good friends kept an eye on the door while three other friends crept in and made a sound recording, which they shared at my school. This affected me a lot. I didn't go to school. He also shared it himself. Since that, I have not had sex just to have sex."
(Female, 16 years)*

Sex objects

18%

find that watching porn has
made them perceive persons they like as

sex objects

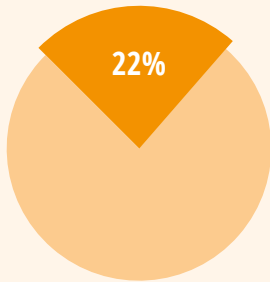
"My boyfriend and I watched porn together. Then we saw something with handcuffs, and we bought some ourselves. It looked normal and so we thought let's just give it a try." (Female, 16 years)

Porn for sale

8% of the young people stated that they have thought about earning money by sending a nude picture of themselves. The number is 12% among 17-18-year-old girls.

22% of young people know someone who has an 'OnlyFans' profile. Among 15-16-year-old girls, the figure is 30%.

Porn for sale



know someone who has an 'OnlyFans' profile.
Among girls aged 15-16, the figure rises to 30%.

8%

of the young people have thought about making
money by sending a nude picture of themselves.
12% among girls aged 17-18

3%

have a profile on 'OnlyFans' or similar platform.
6% among boys aged 17-18

Gray areas

Opinions may differ about whether something is pornographic material or not. An example is a challenge on TikTok (the Arch Challenge) where girls especially film how much they can sway their back while kneeling with their chest on the floor. Even though the challenge demonstrates the person's sexual skills and is therefore strongly sexually suggestive, young people do not perceive it as porn because the people have clothes on. However, they recognize that this kind of content tends toward porn, as it is staged and not private.

Porn and the sexual debut

Young people's answers in the report show that the average sexual debut is 15 years irrespective of porn use and gender. 26% of young people had sex before the sexual minimum age, that is before they turned 15, and among those who watch porn weekly, 32% had sex before the sexual minimum age. This indicates a correlation between frequent porn use and early sexual debut, which is also supported by the young people's own perception: 25% of young people who have had sex believe that porn influenced them to pursue an earlier sexual debut. Among those who watch porn weekly, 39% believe that porn influenced them to pursue an earlier sex debut.

"For me, it had a negative impact because I thought it would be something else. Because porn is so staged, I was actually disappointed." (Male, 18 years)

The young people also talk about crushed expectations of what it would be like to have sex for the first time. It didn't turn out like sex in porn videos or even romantic movies for that matter. Young people often have sex for the first time under the influence of alcohol during/or after a party. As a consequence, girls may engage in more extreme things to make their partners happy, and the experience is not very good. Furthermore, the study shows that 4% of all participants, and 6% of the girls have sex their first time involuntarily.

"I also think that people who want to start having sex are a little cheated. The actors look like it's great, they have to sell it all. It's always exaggerated when it comes to the positions and how nice it looks. But maybe it's not nice in reality. Maybe the girl says yes because she wants to be nice to her boyfriend, and she doesn't want to lose him." (Male, 16 years)

Porn at school

14% of young people have "stumbled across", are currently watching, or have in the past seen porn, on a device they borrowed from school. Among them, 28% watch porn weekly. Porn is also used to tease each other during school hours. It is typically 10-12-year-old boys who share porn during recess, where it is especially fun to tease the girls. Another example the young people describe is opening pornographic films on someone else's PC so that both sound and image start when the person opens his or her PC in class. Almost a fifth (19%) were first introduced to porn at school or after-school day-care when someone showed it to them.

"I remember it because we got scolded quite a lot. There was a boy who had found it. I think I was in 3rd or 4th grade; 9-10 years old. I got quite confused about that for a while" (Male, 17 years)

“There was a lot going on at my old school, where the boys would just run after you and with their phones show it straight up in your face. It wasn’t because we had done anything. They just thought it was fun. It was at the end of 8th grade or the start of 9th grade. It also shows up on Instagram and Snapchat. On Snapchat it has been like “swipe-up”, and there’s a naked woman.” (Female, 16 years)

Experience with web filters in Sweden

In Sweden, several regions, municipalities, and schools have designed guidelines to address and prevent children from being exposed to digital porn. This has led to the installation of web filters in schools, as well as other places where children and young people gather. 7 out of 8 political parties (in Sweden) favour digital porn filters in schools, and they want porn-critical conversations in schools. Swedish political parties C, KD and M are working to have mandatory sexual and relationship education/training for teachers.

KD will work to ensure that internet providers have an obligation to offer porn filters at no extra cost to institutions that want to exclude porn. In the full report can you also read about restriction efforts in Germany, Canada, Australia, and Great Britain.

Recommendations

Young people's recommendations

Liability, restriction, and legislation

Young people themselves desire that porn should be addressed publicly. According to them, this could happen through publicity campaigns. They don't want "anti-campaigns". Instead, they suggest evidence-based information advocating a responsible approach to porn use. They want evidence-based information that includes potential consequences of watching porn. In general, they want more and better information about porn available in society, so it becomes common to talk about it openly.

51% of young people and 68% of those who watch porn weekly think that porn should be a subject/topic in school sex education. They would like more and better sexual education or education by/information from trained experts and professionals with

a focus on the differences between porn and partnered sex. They want to see other young people sharing their personal experiences and advice on how to deal with porn and sex, or prevent things from going wrong. So, in fact young people want help adjusting their expectations to reality, i.e. with respect to distorted images of girls/women, unrealistic sexual positions and notions of what constitute healthy expectations for sex.

Young people want providers such as Instagram, Snapchat and various porn sites to take responsibility regarding the risk of porn addiction. They themselves propose disclaimers, banner ads with information about help for addiction treatment and on-site information on porn sites about the risk of addiction and other negative consequences of porn.

They equate porn's risks with gambling addiction and point to solutions such as those at 'Danske Spil' (Danish Betting Association) and online casinos. In response to the question in the survey about whether to legislate an age limit for access to online porn,

there is disagreement among young people. 35% think it is a good idea, and almost just as many,

34% think it is a bad idea (24% answer 'don't know', and 7% 'don't want to answer'). Significantly more girls (44.5%) think legislation is a good idea. Girls' greater desire for legislation is possibly connected to the fact that boys on average watch more porn than girls, and that girls on average experience more negative consequences from porn's influence.

Current initiatives in Denmark

- ▶ In 2020, Djøf's Tech Commission* recommended a law on digital child protection. At the end of 2020 MP Karina Dehnfeldt Lorentzen (SF) followed up with a proposal for a parliamentary resolution for a new act on digital child protection. The proposal was not adopted.

- ▶ In June 2020, the Decree on Video Sharing Platform Services (AVMS Directive) took effect, with the goal of better protecting minors on audiovisual media services. This arose from the EU directive that Member States must establish a system to protect minors from harmful content, such as violence and pornography. But it does not apply to services headquartered in countries other than Denmark.
- ▶ In June 2021, the government published a white paper regarding so called tech giants, with nine principles to promote a more responsible and fairer society. The first two principles state: 1) the business models of the tech giants are subject to democratic control, and 2) children and young people are entitled to a safe childhood with a good balance between the digital and physical worlds.

(*Djøf >the influential Danish trade union representing economics, business and legal professionals. The commission is to discuss the massive impact of technological developments on Danish society and societal values, and to suggest strategies for regulation and ways to meet the challenges presented by these developments. It has also recommended a law on digital child protection.)

- ▶ In January 2021, the government presented a bill requiring tech giants to remove illegal content within 24 hours.
- ▶ In February 2021, the Danish association 'Digital Responsibility' in collaboration with Mie Oehlenschläger/Tech&Childhood followed up with a green book, sketching concrete initiatives for online protection of children – including among other things, age verification and requirements for "Safety by Design".
- ▶ In February 2022, the Police Unit for Special Crime (NSK) announced that they had experienced several cases where Danish children as young as 6 years of age had voluntarily, and completely on their own, made sexual videos of themselves and uploaded them to platforms such as YouTube, Instagram TikTok, etc.

The police wrote that: "Some of what we have seen a child could not have come up with by themselves, and we therefore have a theory, that in some cases the children are

simply copying something they have seen on porn sites. In one of the recordings, three underage boys warn that "this video is only for adults over 18", and in another the children speak directly to the camera about what is going to happen".

In connection with this case, both the Police and other child protection organizations therefore came up with several recommendations in relation to children's use of digital devices and online pornography.

Our Recommendations

The results from the survey and the young people's own recommendations leave no doubt that efforts must be made to limit, prevent, and treat the negative consequences porn can have for some young people. Despite the spread of porn among young

people, as many as 30% do not want to talk about it at all, and only 3% would choose to talk to their parents about porn. It is not necessarily because the young people expect that their parents will not be understanding. As many as 30% suspect that their parents will react neutrally to knowing that they watch porn. 24% of young people are aware that they can get help to talk to someone about their use of porn, and 12% would consider getting help to stop or reduce their usage/consumption. It is therefore the task of adults to accommodate the wishes of young people and start this important conversation. It requires, among other things, that parents and other important adults in young people's lives have enough knowledge to be able to guide and support them when it comes to digital porn's potential effects.

Based on the results of the qualitative and quantitative findings of the report, and the experiences of and recommendations from other countries, organizations and researchers, "Media health for children and youth" proposes the following three primary recommendations:

1. Age appropriate and porn-critical classes/education throughout the entire school curriculum

Age-appropriate and porn-critical education must be introduced throughout the entire school system from primary school to upper secondary school and should be woven together with an understanding of technology. Denmark can profit from considering the efforts of countries that are further along in the process, e.g., New Zealand and Australia.

2. Enhancing teacher and pedagogy educational programs

Teaching materials must be developed in connection with training teachers and early childhood educators, so that the future teachers and educators feel properly prepared to address the crucial discussions about online porn, healthy sexuality, and unhealthy sexuality. There is a need for the educational institutions to update teaching materials so that the individual teacher, school psychologist can spot and help students who either feel addicted to porn or otherwise are negatively affected by encounters with porn.

3. More knowledge about the effects of porn, especially in relation to children

Money must be allocated to enable Danish research concerning the effects of online porn in regard to several parameters. Media health for children and youth's own helpline as well as those of other organizations indicate that many children - including children under the sexual minimum age - "feel distress" because of online porn. We need to know more about this! Areas to research and study to learn more about the potential effects of porn on children include, e.g., ADHD vulnerability in relation to porn, the importance of online porn in connection with gender-based violence, and addiction risk. In our opinion all of the above-mentioned recommendations for action can be best achieved by incorporating the New Zealand model, which calls for a broad interdisciplinary and cross-political working group. In autumn 2021 Denmark's sitting government appointed a working group, but we question whether this group is interdisciplinary enough.



Finally

For education and information to be effective, it requires a holistic approach. Any effort in this area will work best if supported by everyone - teachers, parents, politicians etc.

This report has lifted the veil on young Danes' use of online porn. It's a good start, but if we're going to tackle the challenges of online porn, there's a lot more we need to learn. And the young people need us to listen.

In the future Media health for children and young people intends to expand and build on the results from this report, as well as work to ensure that there is more qualitative research that can fill the knowledge gaps. A primary focus will be education and information for professionals, parents and politicians, and the development of useful resources.

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- en del af Userneeds

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for børn og unge