

Addressing Pornography | Muslim Youth Issues

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Published by Young Muslims | www.youngmuslims.com | www.ymsisters.com

About Young Muslims

A Generation to Believe In: In the 1990s, Muslim youth leaders from across the nation met to discuss the future of a generation they believed in. Within weeks, Young Muslims (YM) was established. Today, YM is the largest Muslim youth organization in North America.

We are a grassroots movement that continues to develop the next generation of proactive American Muslims engaged in their communities at the local and national level. Our members mentor and facilitate the development of Muslim youth to become positive forces in society. This is done through leadership and spiritual development in the form of regular halaqat, study circles, retreats, conferences, tournaments, service events, overseas relief trips, and more.

Mission Statement:

Young Muslims seeks the pleasure of Allah (SWT) by empowering Muslim youth through companionship, mentorship, education, and service.

Vision Statement:

American Muslim youth collectively contributing to the betterment of society with God-consciousness and a firm understanding of their Muslim identity.

Introduction

With the growing presence of YM across the country, we realized the need to adapt our approach to the dynamic experiences of American Muslim youth in order to remain beneficial and relevant. One of the ways we plan to accomplish this is to address challenging contemporary issues through both of our local training efforts and national public platforms. We hope these efforts advance our long-term goal to educate, facilitate, and develop American Muslim youth to become religiously-grounded, intellectually balanced, and emotionally literate forces in society who work individually and collectively to establish Islam as the root of the way they understand and interact with the world. Ultimately, we seek Allah's (SWT) grace and pleasure.

In order to address this issue within our community, YM implemented the *Muslim Youth Issues: Addressing Pornography* initiative to:

1. Understand the issue of pornography and its prevalence in our communities and identify the barriers young Muslims face in getting help
2. Educate our communities about its prevalence and its dangers
3. Develop a response and resource list for Muslims to utilize

Through these goals, we aim to prepare the Muslim youth and community leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills to help themselves, their fellow Muslim youth, and their communities with overcoming pornography struggles.

We hope that by understanding the widespread nature of pornography within the Muslim population and the barriers to access care, we hope to developed a targeted strategy that can address this problem.

Methods

The study was conducted via a survey through Google Forms. The target audience was Muslim American youth, which was defined as Muslim-identifying individuals in the age range between 13 and 25. Demographic questions were first asked (i.e., gender, age, region, etc.) and then

questions on a Likert-type scale on religiosity (i.e., how regularly do you attend the masjid, etc.), attitude towards pornography and pornography use (i.e., do you believe viewing pornography is immoral), and sexual behavior (i.e., I use pornography to forget about the worries of daily life). Several qualitative questions were asked to allow participants the chance to explain their answers in more depth (i.e., in your opinion, what should the Muslim community be doing to address this issue). No identifying data was collected, so there is no need to anonymize the data. Participants were able to complete the survey on their own time in private, and the data has only been shared with professionals from Yaqeen Institute and Khalil Center in collaboration to conduct a deeper dive into the data. Participants for this project were Muslim American youth between the ages of 13 and 30 ($N = 350$). Using Young Muslims' social and professional network, we outreached to multiple NeighborNets (YM local chapters) and urged members to complete the survey. All participants were counted into the data, and no responses were deleted for any error.

For the purpose of this project, we are considering the following as pornography:

1. Mainstream (hardcore) pornography, which includes: videos of sexual activity accessed from a pornography source (ex: pornography website or video store); photos of sexual activity accessed from a pornography source (ex: pornography website or magazine); erotic literature; erotic art; animations/cartoons.
2. Softcore pornographic content such as: sexual scenes in movies, TV shows, books, or advertisements; sexually explicit lyrics and music videos; content labeled NSFW that does not come from a primarily pornographic source; sexually suggestive or explicit social media content.

Results

Total Responses: 350

Age breakdown of responses:

- 13-15: 7.4% (26)
- 16-18: 32.1% (112)
- 19-22: 42.1% (147)
- 23-25: 11.7% (41)
- 26+: 6.6% (23)

Gender Breakdown:

- Female: 30.7% (107)
- Male: 69.3% (242)

Responses (not exhaustive)

- How regularly do you attend the Masjid?
 - Very Regularly (Everyday or multiple times per week): 27.8% (97)
 - Somewhat Regularly (Weekly): 40.4% (141)
 - Occasionally (Every few weeks): 18.9% (66)
 - Rarely (Eid, Major events only): 11.5% (40)
 - Never: 1.4% (5)
- How would you describe your level of religiosity?
 - Not practicing: 1.1% (4)
 - Somewhat practicing (on and off): 20.3% (70)
 - Regularly practicing (consistent): 20.6% (72)
 - Very practicing: 57.9 (202)
- 92.8% (324) of participants believe viewing pornography to be immoral
- 34.4% (120) reported that quarantine has increased their consumption of pornography
- 64.2% (224) feel ashamed after viewing pornography
- 31.2% (109) view pornography to forget the worries of daily life
- 58.2% (203) consume pornography knowing it is against their beliefs
- 39.71% (138) stated, "I view pornography and I am concerned about being sexually addicted"

- 16.17% (56) stated, "I view pornography and I am concerned about being sexually addicted" and "Somewhat Regularly (Weekly) attends the masjid"
- 23.71% (82) stated, "I do not view pornography" and "Somewhat Regularly (weekly) and Very Regularly (everyday or multiple times per week) attend the masjid"
- 79.9% (279) are comfortable with seeking professional/spiritual help [therapist (Muslim or Non-Muslim)]

Results Commentary

While the consumption of pornography is not limited to one gender or age group, individuals between the ages of 16-22 seem to be the most at risk. Twice as many men engage in pornography compared to women. However, it is important to recognize that the issue of pornography seems to be prevalent among women too. Further exploration of their triggers and how their experiences differ from men is warranted to provide more targeted strategies to help them.

Furthermore, sexual content is easily accessible and pervasive in our society — it is right at our fingertips and just a click away. This easy access may cause people to look through it frequently, possibly leading to a preoccupation with it. It may be used impulsively or compulsively, leading to more consequences and negative feelings. Some of the reasons for widespread consumption of pornography include:

- Pornography releases excessive amounts of dopamine (the pleasurable chemical response)
- Online pornography allows for almost complete anonymity
- Online pornography is free and inexhaustible

Overall, the data shows that this issue is an existing challenge among Muslim youth that needs to be addressed, and we at Young Muslims are hoping to be a part of that conversation.

Spiritual Advice

As Muslim youth, members, and leaders of organizations such as Young Muslims alongside other groups in the Muslim community, we are blessed to have a sisterhood and brotherhood in a day and age of social disconnect. Bonds like these are unlike any other, and many of us are or know individuals across the nation who are bettering their communities by dedicating countless hours of their personal time. These young men and women are not seeking any type of reward, except the pleasure of Allah (SWT). However, despite all of the work we put into being the best versions of ourselves, we never know what another person may be experiencing. Outwardly, we may have a good reputation and standing in society, but what about the condition of our hearts when we are in private? Only Allah (SWT) knows the struggle we face. Pornography is just one of the many potential issues that a young Muslim leader may face alone.

Watching pornography, though it may hurt one's heart immensely, can be easily done while maintaining one's outward reputation. There is no public record that displays one's level of Iman (faith) and relationship with Allah (SWT) to others, which makes it even more important to recognize and accept that although there are amazing Muslim youth both inside and outside Young Muslims that aim to follow the Prophet's (SAW) path and teachings, we may never know the internal struggles they battle.

Pornography is a prevalent danger in the American Muslim community, and there is an evergrowing need to come together and combat it. Viewing pornography can lead to an addiction towards it, which can cause depression, anxiety, or a tendency towards other debilitating acts. Within a marital relationship, pornography can also affect a user in many ways, including but not limited to difficulty experiencing sexual satisfaction, a spouse viewing their partner's pornography as marital betrayal and weakening the trust in a relationship from dishonesty about pornography use. Furthermore, the monumental effect of pornography consumption that is not considered in most resources addressing this topic is the effect on our relationship with our Creator. Allah (SWT) states, "Do not even go close to fornication. It is indeed a shameful act and an evil way to follow" (Surah Al-Isra: 32). Engaging in forbidden acts causes a decline in our relationship with Allah (SWT), which can take away His barakah (blessings) from our rizq (sustenance) and livelihood, subsequently leading to an overall negativity in many aspects of our lives. However, although the severity of engaging in, or even nearing, impermissible sexual acts,

including watching or listening to explicit content, is evident throughout the Quran, Allah's (SWT) mercy is just as clear and infinite. "For those it is expected that Allah will pardon them, and Allah is ever pardoning, ever forgiving" (Surah An-Nisa: 99). There will always be hope and mercy for those among us who are genuinely working towards overcoming this struggle while turning back to Allah (SWT) every step of the way.

So what can we do about these natural yet harmful desires? The following are some tips we have found, corroborating with scholars and professionals, to combat pornography addiction:

- **Seek Allah's Help**
 - He is The Most Merciful and Forgiving.
 - Increase prayer and supplication. It will be difficult initially, but let it come to the tongue and eventually it will reach the heart.
- **Identify your triggers**
 - Notice what causes you to watch pornography, whether that be explicit scenes in tv shows or scrolling through social media alone in your room, and circumvent them.
- **Urge Surfing (bit.ly/urge-surfing)**
 - A technique that can be used to avoid acting on any behavior that you want to reduce or stop
 - Focus on your physical self and your interactions with the environment around you.
 - Imagine gently "riding out" the urge to watch pornography by shifting your attention to the physical world.
- **Change your Environment**
 - Change your environment to avoid moments of susceptibility.
 - For example: if you watch pornographic content in your room, go to the living room, or even the local library, for the day to do work.
- **Have a Routine**
 - Plan your day according to your patterns.
 - For example: if you have moments of weakness before bed while on your phone, plan to go to sleep immediately after Isha prayer.

- Make plans for other moments of weaknesses throughout the day and stick to those routines like a robot.
- **Fill your free time with a hobby**
 - These desires are fulfilled in moments of solitude. Fill your time with a good hobby and surround yourself with good friends.
- **Call a friend/Keep good company**
 - During moments of weakness, call a trusted friend. Occupying your time with family and good friends helps to stave off addicting behaviors.
- **Go cold-turkey**
 - It diminishes the intense need for a chemical release (dopamine).
- **Workout regularly but especially during intense moments of desire**
 - Being able to release energy in the form of physical exercise can release endorphins that can cause a feeling of euphoria which reduces sexual desire.
- **Do not touch yourself sexually or watch sexually implicit content**
- **If comfortable and willing, tell a trusted friend or family member**
 - It is difficult for one to hold themselves accountable for persisting behavior alone. Telling someone to hold you accountable too can help.
- **It will be a struggle, but do not quit trying to break free from your struggle**
 - This battle is constant. Success requires keeping consistency and trying again if you give in
 - Develop a growth mindset by figuring out what caused you to relapse and eliminating that from your life.
 - If you do remain porn-free for a few months, that does not mean the behavior will not return. Keep up the habits that prevent you from consuming porn.
- **Tie your sins to an immediate consequence**
 - Doing a good deed, like donating, and increasing the amount each time you commit the sin will make you less likely to do it in the future.
- **A strong desire is NOT a justification for sinning**
 - It's okay to have strong desires. We all do. However, a sin is a sin.
- **See a therapist if you think your addiction warrants it**

- There is no shame in seeking professional help. It shows strength and courage to admit that you need help and there are amazing individuals who can assist.
- **You are not your addiction**
 - The fact that you are trying to break this habit is proof of your commitment to Allah (SWT). Do not relegate yourself to being a sinful person. YOU are a Muslim who has made a mistake. We all make mistakes. What defines us is what we do after.

Through our work with other organizations, we hope to equip Muslim youth with this toolkit to help our young leaders to take steps to free themselves of their negative habits and become better versions of themselves. Though this is only the beginning, we pray that this is an opportunity to open the uncomfortable, yet necessary, doors of conversations on taboo topics, such as addiction, in our homes, so that we may educate and protect ourselves and our families against its dangers.

Resources

The following is a running list of resources to help with overcoming pornography, approved by Khalil Center and Yaqeen Institute:

- Purify Your Gaze
 - www.purifyyourgaze.com
 - Personalized self-study or instructor-led courses designed to break addiction to pornography
- My Tazkiyah
 - www.mytazkiyah.com
 - Anonymous support group comprised of people with sex/porn addiction. Offers different programs designed to help break porn addiction
- Covenant Eyes
 - www.covenanteyes.com
 - Secured, anonymous program that blocks all pornographic material from your internet so you do not have access to them
- BlockerX

- Free Chrome extension that blocks all pornographic websites

Conclusion

Pornography in American Muslim society has increased dramatically over the years. Through the statistics, we see it affects Muslim youth of various ages, regions, and on multiple levels of religiosity and spirituality. Through this report, we hope to help Muslim youth with any level of pornography struggles and help guide community leaders on giving them a toolkit to directly support them wherever they may be.

Stay up to date with this report by following the link: bit.ly/myi-addiction. Be on the lookout for more Muslim Youth Issues reports, and check out our previous report on Judgment Stigma in the American Muslim community!

For Further Inquiries

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