Gender Differences and Socio-Cultural Factors Contributing to The Youth s Tendency towards Watching Pornography

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Abstract

The present study investigates the problem of youths tendency to watch pornography. The objective was to investigate the gender differences and some socio-cultural factors which contribute to the youth s tendency to watch pornographic films. The research method was a survey and the data of the study was gathered through administering a questionnaire. The target population was the youth aged between 15-25 in Gachsaran city, Iran. Using Cochran formula, we chose 384 participants as the sample. Clustering random sampling was carried out and the data was analyzed using SPSS software. For testing the hypotheses, t-tests and Pearson s Correlation Coefficient were used. According to the results of the t-test, there was a significant differences between men and women according to dependent varable, and there was significant relationship between friendly relationships (as independent variable) and the tendency to watch pornography (dependant variable). Based on the results of Pearson s Correlation Coefficient Test, there was a significant relationship between the variables of age, Internet use, religious beliefs, and leisure time as independent variables and the tendency to watch pornography as the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis showed that independent variables (Internet use, religious beliefs, age, friendly relationship, and leisure time), totally, determined 32.6 percent

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of dependent variable variances. This coefficient was 34.01 percent for men and 31.12 percent for women.

INTRODUCTION

Pornography refers to sexual or vulgar materials including sexual scenes or acts the purpose of which is to arouse sexual desire in the audience. Most often, watching pornography is a step towards satisfaction of sexual desire for the youth (Robertson, 2001).

Fornication, pornography, and extramarital relationships can bring about a lot of problems as the most important forms of social deviations. In indusial countries, especially the United States, watching pornographic products is on the rise. However, this problem is not restricted to industrial countries and has permeated the Third World nations as well. To give an example, in Thailand, fornication and extramarital sexual relationships are quite alarming. Pornography is considered as an outcome of culture and industrialization in the modern world. Iran is no exception (Sheikhi, 1984, 129-131).

The increased availability and spread of pornography and other vulgar materials such as provocative sexual pictures, portable vulgar clips on mobile phones and MP3 players, especially in less developed countries which lack the basic infrastructures of development and growth, could bring about serious consequences. These societies are in the immediate need of the active and constructive participation and involvement of the youth in economic, social, and cultural arenas. It seems that the proliferation and pervasiveness of pornography will have devastating effects on cultural norms and value systems of the youth, thus, depriving them of playing an active and dynamic role which the society expects them.

According to the National Bureau of Census of Iran, Gachsaran township had a population of over 136,064 in 2006. Located in the south of Kohgilouye-Boyerahmad province, it is regarded as a less developed area in the whole country. The youth aged 15-25 comprise a sizable portion of the population, about 20%. As the youth population could have a very important impact on the cultural and social assets of a society either

directly or indirectly, it seems that watching pornographic materials by teenager and young people in this township will bring about a multitude of harms and social deviations such as changes in sexual disposition, masturbation by the youth and teenagers, loss of mental and psychological balance, and more importantly, belittling women due to their exploitation as mere instruments for the satisfaction of sexual desires, the result of which is weakening of ethical foundations of a society and the eventual collapse of the family foundation. Given the specific conditions of the Iranian society, which is an Islamic one, the current study highlights the problem of watching pornographic films, which threatens to become an immense cultural and social problem and whose critical consequences does everyone know. Specifically, an attempt is made to investigate the cultural and social factors which influence the tendency of the youth to watch pornography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewing the related literature on the subject could serve as a valuable source for guiding the research and could introduce relevant theories for the purpose of testing and interpreting of the gathered data from a sociological standpoint. The topic of pornography is rather widely researched. In this section, we will touch upon those studies which are closely related to the present one.

Some studies conducted on the pornographic behavior of the youth suggest that the acceptance and use of pornography are correlated with dangerous sexual behaviors and desires on the part of the youth, their way of using pornographic materials, and the extent of extramarital relationships (e.g. Allen, 1955). Some other studies attribute a greater role to the impacts of socio-cultural milieu on individual s development and the ensuing social deviations. According to such studies, poverty-stricken and non-standard areas such as shanties and the like are breeding grounds for various social deviations (Sheikhi, 1984, p. 125). According to some other studies, some films are the root causes of deviation and delinquency and thus, conclude that the difference between delinquents and non-delinquents lies in the degree of watch such films. In other words, delinquents were more interested in watching these films (Sheikhavandi, 2006, p. 399).

Kingston et al. (2008) had studied the impact of frequency and type of pornography use on recidivism among sexual offenders. In this study, they examined the unique contribution of pornography consumption to the longitudinal prediction of criminal recidivism in a sample of 341 child molesters. They specifically tested the hypothesis, based on predictions informed by the confluence model of sexual aggression that pornography will be a risk factor for recidivism only for those individuals classified as relatively high risk for re-offending. Pornography use (frequency and type) was assessed through self-report and recidivism was measured using data from a national database from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Indices of recidivism, which were assessed up to 15 years after release, included an overall criminal recidivism index, as well as subcategories focusing on violent (including sexual) recidivism and sexual recidivism alone. Results for both frequency and type of pornography use were generally consistent with their predictions. Most importantly, after controlling general and specific risk factors for sexual aggression, pornography added significantly to the prediction of recidivism. Statistical interactions indicated that frequency of pornography use was primarily a risk factor for higher-risk offenders, when compared with lower-risk offenders, and that content of pornography (i.e., pornography containing deviant content) was a risk factor for all groups.

Flood (2009) has studied the harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. He indicated that exposure to pornography is routine among children and young people, with a range of notable and often troubling effects. Particularly among younger children, exposure to pornography may be disturbing or upsetting. Exposure to pornography helps to sustain young people's adherence to sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships. In addition, especially for boys and young men who are the frequent consumers of pornography including more violent materials, the consumption of pornography intensifies attitudes supportive of sexual coercion and increases their likelihood of perpetrating assault. While children and young people are sexual beings and deserve age-appropriate materials on sex and sexuality, pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Luckman's Theory

Unlike traditional societies, in modern and contemporary societies, the coordination between social structure and the governing ideology is very shaky. Contrary to traditional societies, modern societies are not necessarily run on the basis of a single predetermined process, the integrity between the work environment and life, and a magical religious coherence. The world today is more than an artifact; it cannot be summed up in what humans artificially make. In such a society, ethics are not taken daily from uniform practices in work environment, family traditions, and a specific version of culture; rather, most ethical standards must be recreated and identified again. Nothing is taken for granted. Unlike the older generation, the youth do not follow clichés; rather, they themselves make the standards to be followed (Schiefer, 2005, pp. 114-115 cited in Luckman, 1981).

Stevenson's Theory

According to Stevenson, talking about culture today is the same as talking about the culture in mass media. Given this reasoning, mass media have penetrated the recent modern life so much that they have become an integral part of cultural fabric. Modern culture is mostly transferred through mass media. They provide musical programs and spread the latest new rumors about Hollywood stars all over the world. This has brought about a tremendous change in the phenomenological experience in modernity (Stevenson, 1995, p. 3, cited in Yent, 2007, p. 121).

It is possible to observe the representativeness power of mass media in different levels. For example, in the modern world, the predominate beliefs about national and cultural identity are formed in the way represented by mass media such as cinema and television. (For further information, see Robins, 1989; Marley and Bulck, 2001.)

Shultse Theory

By suggesting the notion of experimental society in sociology of cultural arena, Shultse has provided us with an essential category which enables us to comprehend more fully the modern society, which is a

consumer society and a communicational one. Some of Shultse s accomplishments will be reviewed as they help us with a better comprehension of the behavior of people in their free time, generally, and the behavior of the youth, particularly. He rightly holds that our lifestyle in experimental society has a bearing on our mental structure, forms of perception, seeking pleasure, and finally on our existence. Youths tend to separate from their parents. This provides them with more free time to spend with their age groups, subcultures, friends, and acquaintances. Youths feel that they are understood and accepted in such groups and have an independent identity. In their free time, they find the atmosphere in which they are most comfortable (Schiefer, 2007, p. 199).

Regarding the way in which people spend their time, it could be said that society is fragmented into different age groups. This phenomenon is observed at all levels in the society. However, the best example is the way in which youths spend their free time. Those aged 17-18 tend to travel with people of the same age. Tourist agencies have adapted themselves to the new situation (Schiefer, 2007, p. 193).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The design of the study is based on the theories proposed by Luckman, Stevenson and Shultse. According to Luckman, the foundations of religious socialization have become quite shaky in families, youths, and young adolescents. This has resulted in weaker religious faith in youths. Luckman s theory is a fitting basis for the present study as the tendency towards viewing pornographic materials could be attributed to weakening of religious faith among youths. Based on this reasoning, when the foundations of religious beliefs of adolescents and youths are weakened, every deviant behavior is possible. As Dostoyevsky (in his famous novel Crime and Punishment) states, When God is absent from the scene of life, any [deviant] act is permissible.

Given Stevenson s account of the impact of mass media on culture, change of attitudes and cultural behaviors, and transfer of modern culture through mass media, it is possible to formulate a hypothesis regarding the relationship between television programs and the tendency of the youth towards watching pornographic materials and the relationship between the use of Internet and tendency towards viewing pornography.

In addition, we have drawn on Shultse s Theory to suggest that there could be a possible correlation between the degrees of friendly relationships among youths and their tendency towards watching pornographic materials and that there is possibly a relationship between the amount of leisure time and the tendency towards pornography. In other words, in order to fill up their leisure time, youths, in the company of friends, get involved in different types of entertainment one of which could be watching pornographic materials. They do this without necessarily being aware of the serious consequences awaiting them. In addition, whether they want it or not, they are faced with the publicity of other ordinary films produced by film-producing companies. Naturally, they are attracted to such films some of which may contain sex-related materials.

The conceptual model of the study

Socio-cultural factors:
Viewing television or radio programs
Religious beliefs
Friendly relationships
The amount of leisure time
The degree of Internet use

Tendency of the youth towards pornography

Demographic Factors:
Age
Gender
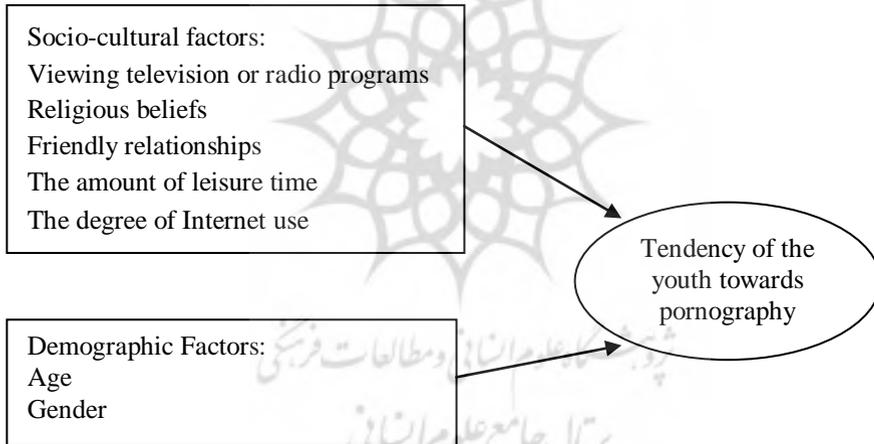
DATA AND METHOD

Research method: Given the nature of the present study, the research method was the survey method.

Statistical society: In the present study, the statistical society was the youths aged 15-25 residing in the township of Gachsaran.

Statistical unit: Statistical unit was a single person aged between 15-25 residing in Gachsaran city.

Sampling method and sample size: Given the nature of the research project and the statistical society under study, the most practical method of sampling was random clustering sampling. Using Cochran formula, the sample size was calculated to 384 participants.

Research technique: The data of the study was gathered by administering a questionnaire which contained 30 items providing data on dependent and independent variables.

DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

Tendency is defined as an internal state in which the likelihood of occurrence of behaviors is very high or in which behaviors could easily be learned (Poorafkari, 1997, p. 1492).

Pornography is taken from Latin origin and has the literal meaning of writing about prostitutes . Although there is no single agreed-upon definition for this word, what is common in all definitions is the exposure to sexual activity.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Leisure time: According to Dumazedier (1974), spending one s leisure time means being involved in a range of affairs on one s own volition after being freed from the requirements of one s job, family life, or social obligations. The intention behind the way in which leisure time is spent is not important: it could be for the purpose of relaxation, creating variety in one s life, spreading information, self-teaching- without taking into account the material benefits associated with it- or with the intention of voluntary social participation (Birou, 2001, pp. 202-203).

Mass media: This word covers a range of impersonal means which transmit audio and/or visual messages to a great number of people far away. The characteristic feature of these means is their conveying information to a group of people. Thus, it could be said that mass media are means which connect one group to another, or one individual to a group (Sarookhani, 2001, p. 470).

Religious affiliations: In order to clarify human behavior, religious affiliation can serve as a proper individual or social variable. Even in case of perfect observation of religious practices and rites, religious affiliation might be partial and incomplete (Sarookhani, 2001, p. 680).

Religion: Religion is the manifestation of man s attention to a divine being, metaphysical forces, or at least a simple feeling of attachment which helps one to gain an interpretation and meaning of his/her existence in this world. Thus, it could be said that religion is a measure for our beliefs. Religious beliefs are one of the universal intellectual propensities of human beings. Through these beliefs, man tried to arrive at an interpretation of the world around him. He considered the things beyond his grasp to be lying in the area of religious beliefs. In this way, he could regulate his social life (Sarookhani, 2001, p. 681).

Friendship: Friendship is defined as the appearance of specific relationship which is formed among people at certain times or on certain occasions. Friendship has the connotations of company, companionship and talking with somebody whom one loves (Bahrami, 2002, p. 19). In Dehkhoda s Dictionary, friendship is defined as liking, amity, benevolence, camaraderie, and compassion. In the Dictionary of Behavioral Sciences, it is defined as a reinforcing social relationship between two people who interact and cooperate with each other. This term is usually used for relationships not based on sexual matters (Shaarinezhad, 1996: 32).

Gender: The classification of the sex of a person into either male or female.

Age: The length of time that one has lived in this world; duration of life.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

Gender: The classification of the sex of a person into male or female that is measured by a nominal scale (male or female).

Age: The length of time that one has lived in this world measured by a ratio scale.

Amount of leisure time: means the amount of time which on spends for amusement and recreation, that is measured by a ratio scale.

Mass media use time: In this study, mass media use time involves the time of using TV, Radio and internet programs which is measured by a ratio scale.

Religious beliefs: Involves the faith and commitment to religious values. This is measured by some items which are developed by the authors. These items included the degree of religiosity, implementing religiosity

to social relations, trusting religious people, and participating in public prayers.

Friendly relationships: means the degree of relationship and association with friends which is measured by some items by an ordinal scale developed by the authors. These items included the degree of relationship, trusting, consulting, and interacting with friends.

Tendency towards pornography: This variable is measured by 13 ordinal items which are related to various dimensions of respondents' tendency towards porno films. The items are measured through five scales including completely disagree (1), disagree (2), no idea (3), agree (4), and completely agree (5).

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability of the items related to the dependent variable was measured through Cronbach s alpha (alpha = .78). Validity of the measure was approved via experts' consultation (Face validity).

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive data of the respondents

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	217	56%
	Female	167	44%
Age	15-20 years	249	65%
	21-25 years	135	35%
Internet use	yes	237	62%
	no	147	38%
Internet use time (Hours per one day & night)	Through 3 hours	166	70%
	4.1-7 hours	25	11%
	7.1 hours through highest	10	4%
	missing	36	15%
TV watch time (Hours per one day & night)	No watch	15	4%
	Through 2 hours	109	28%
	2.1-4 hours	125	33%
	4.1 hours through highest	123	32%
	missing	12	3%
Radio use time (Hours per one day & night)	No use	170	44%
	Through 2 hours	94	24%
	2.1-4 hours	15	4%
	4.1 hours through highest	14	4%
	missing	91	24%

In the next part, the findings of the study will be discussed from the viewpoint of inferential statistics.

Test of Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between gender and the tendency of youths towards pornography.

Table 2: Tendency of youths towards pornography in terms of gender

Gender	Frequency	Mean of tendency	S.D.	T-value	df	Sig.
Male	210	32.89	10.82	3.55	372	0.00001
Female	164	28.94	10.53			

According to this table, the average of the tendency of male respondents towards pornography was 32.89 which is clearly higher than that for women (28.94). According to the results of the t-test, the difference between the two means with the T value of 3.55 and at the level of 99% is significant (p<0.01).

Test of Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between age and the tendency of youths towards pornography.

Table 3: Results of Pearson Coefficient, tendency of youths towards pornography in terms of age

Variable (age)	Frequency	Pearson R.	Sig.
Total	374	0.20	0.000
Male	210	0.21	0.000
Female	164	0.19	0.000

Given the level of significance of 0.000 and Pearson correlation (0.20), there is a positive relationship between age and tendency towards pornographic materials. As the table suggests, the relationship is significant for males and females; however, the correlation coefficient r for males is slightly more than that of females.

Test of Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between Internet use and the tendency of youth towards pornography.

Table 4: Results of Pearson Coefficient, Internet use and tendency towards pornography

Internet use	Frequency	Pearson R.	Sig.
Total	158	0.374	0.000
Male	107	0.44	0.000
Female	51	0.32	0.000

As the table suggests, given the level of significance (sig.=0.000) and Person Coefficient (0.374), there is a significant relationship between Internet use and tendency towards watching pornography for males and females, but Pearson r is slightly more for males than for females.

Test of Hypothesis 4: There is a relationship between radio and television programs and the tendency of youths towards pornography.

Table 5: Results of Pearson Coefficient, viewing degree of radio and television programs and tendency towards pornography

viewing degree of radio and television programs	Frequency	Pearson R.	Sig.
Male	173	- 0.019	0.64
Female	111	-0.021	0.60
Total	284	-0.020	0.62

The table above suggests that the relationship between radio and television programs and tendency towards watching pornography is not significant (level of significance, 0.62 and Pearson Coefficient= -0.02). Pearson r obtained for females is slightly more than the one obtained for males.

Test of Hypothesis 5: There is a relationship between religious beliefs and the tendency of youths towards pornography.

Table 6: Results of Correlation Coefficient Test, religious beliefs and tendency towards pornography

Religious beliefs	Frequency	Pearson R.	Sig.
Male	210	-0.22	0.000
Female	164	-0.26	0.000
Total	374	-0.24	0.000

Table 6 suggests that given the level of significance (0.000) and Pearson Coefficient (-0.24), there is a significant relationship between religious beliefs and tendency towards watching pornography. It must be noted that the relationship is negative in this case. In other words, as religious beliefs become stronger, the likelihood of watching pornographic materials decreases. Pearson r for females is slightly more than r obtained for males. This situation shows the different degree of religiosity impact on the male and female's tendency towards watching pornography.

Test of Hypothesis 6: There is a relationship between friendly relationships and the tendency of youths towards pornography.

Table 7: Results of T-test, friendly relationships and tendency towards pornography

Friendly relationship		Frequency	Mean of tendency	S.D.	T-value	d.f.	Sig.
Male	Low	23	40.12	13.01	2.21	132	0.000
	high	111	32.65	10.58			
Female	Low	10	31.36	12.34	2.06	99	0.011
	high	91	26.04	9.96			
Total	Low	33	38.36	13.35	2.84	233	0.005
	high	202	32.26	11.09			

Table 7 suggests that the mean value of the tendency of those youths who have very few friendly relationships with their friends is 6.10 times more than those who have friendly relationships with their friends. According to the t-test and the given value of 2.84, the difference between the two mean values is significant (0.005) at the level of 99%, for all respondents, but for females, the difference between the two mean values is significant (0.011) at the level of 95% which shows different degrees of the impact of friendly relationships for males' and females' tendency towards pornography.

Test of Hypothesis 7: There is relationship between leisure time and the tendency of youths towards pornography.

Table 8: Results of Pearson Coefficient, leisure time and tendency towards pornography

leisure time	Frequency	Pearson R.	Sig.
Male	185	0.17	0.009
Female	130	0.11	0.04
Total	325	0.14	0.01

As can be seen from Table 8, given the level of significance of 0.01 and Pearson Coefficient of 0.14, leisure time and tendency towards watching pornographic materials are significantly related. The relationship is positive, suggesting that those respondents who have more leisure time tend to spend more time on watching pornographic materials. Relation between leisure time and tendency towards pornography is significant at the level of 99% for all respondents; however, for females, Pearson r is 0.11 (significant r   is 0.04) at the level of 95% that shows different degrees of the impact of friendly relationships for males' and females' tendency towards pornography

Multiple regressions showed that independent variables such as Internet use, religious beliefs, age, friendly relationship, and leisure time had the most impact on the dependent variable respectively. Multiple regression analysis showed that independent variables (Internet use, religious beliefs, age, friendly relationship, and leisure time), totally, had determined 32.6 percent of dependent variable variances. This coefficient for men was 34.01 percent and for women was 31.12 percent.

Table 9: Multiple Regression for men

Determinant variables	β	R	R2	T	Sig. T
Internet use	0.210	0.328	0.108	8.951	0.000
religious beliefs	0.208	0.434	0.189	5.278	0.000
friendly relationship	0.194	0.514	0.265	2.235	0.000
age	0.187	0.549	0.302	2.288	0.000
leisure time	0.170	0.5709	0.3401	6.731	0.000

Table 10: Multiple Regression for women

Determinant variables	β	R	R2	T	Sig. T
Internet use	0.204	0.340	0.115	8.014	0.000
religious beliefs	0.190	0.430	0.184	4.809	0.000
age	0.182	0.505	0.255	3.321	0.000
friendly relationship	0.173	0.520	0.270	2.891	0.000
leisure time	0.157	0.5578	0.3112	5.412	0.000

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The hypotheses tested in the current study were the relationship between gender, age, watching and listening time for television and radio programs, Internet use, leisure time, friendly relationships, religious beliefs (as the independent variables) and tendency towards watching pornographic materials (as the dependent variable). As the findings of the study suggest, the hypotheses of the study are proven. The only exception was that there was no relationship between Iranian television and radio programs and tendency towards watching pornography. The findings of the study are consistent with the theories touched upon in Section 3. However, in one case, i.e. the relationship between television and radio programs and tendency towards pornography, there was no relationship. This is not in line with Stevenson s Theory. The reason is that the

filtering and censorship of foreign programs broadcasting in Iran as well as the careful supervision of domestically produced radio and television programs make the programs broadcasted in Iran qualitatively different from the programs in most Western countries.

The significant relationship between the variable of age and the tendency towards watching pornography suggests that each age group has its own idiosyncratic personality and social characteristics. This finding is significant for families because it enables them to gain insights into the age-related characteristics of their children, allowing them to help their children to promote the quality of their lives with proper planning. Given the significant relationship between gender and tendency towards watching pornography and also given that this tendency among boys was higher than girls, it is possible to draw the conclusion that generally speaking, boys are more prone to deviant behaviors. It must be noted that this tendency paves the way for various social problems such as lack of security for children and girls living in the same society.

Regarding the significant relationship between Internet use and the tendency towards pornography, the findings suggest that technological advancements, including Internet, are not put into good use. This is rooted in cultural poverty of the society. To put it in different terms, youths are not properly advised to make use of technology in a healthy and constructive way. Instead of using technology to one s advantage, it has become a tool for self-destruction.

The significant relationship between religious beliefs and the tendency towards watching pornographic materials is indicative of the fact that religious values and beliefs have an important role in preventing social deviations and can safeguard youths against much cultural and social harm. This finding also suggests that increased reinforcement of religious and ideological foundations in a society keeps people, especially the young generation, away from corruption and deviation.

Results also showed that there is a difference between young men and women in terms of the impact of some independent variables (such as religiosity, friendly relationship, and leisure time) on the tendency towards pornography.

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