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Komal Razzaq

*University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan*

Muhammad Rafiq

*University of Management and Technology, Lahore*

Fatima Sana

*University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan*

Zahid Mahmood

*Unique Group of Institutes, Wahdat Road, Lahore, Pakistan.*

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# PERSONALITY TRAITS AND MENTAL HEALTH OF UNIVERSITY MALE STUDENTS VIEWING INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

Komal Razzaq<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Rafiq PhD<sup>1</sup>, Fatima Sana<sup>1,2</sup>, Dr. Zahid Mahmood, PhD<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Unique Group of Institutes, Wahdat Road, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Correspondence to:** Dr. Muhammad Rafiq, Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, C-II, Johar Town, Lahore.  
E-mail: rafiqdar@hotmail.com ; muhammad.rafiq@umt.edu.pk

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## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Studies have indicated that viewing internet pornography is like addiction and has been implicated in the development of psychosocial issues leading to mental health. However, in view of Pakistani culture, psychosocial issues and mental health problems associated with viewing internet pornography especially in perspective to personality traits are not studied yet. **Objective:** Objective of the current study was to investigate any effect of personality traits on mental health of university male students viewing internet pornography.

**METHODS:** Correlation research design was used for quantitative method in the study. The data was collected from 200 non-marital male participants from the government and private universities and from the institutional and private hostels.

**RESULTS:** The results showed that personality traits, neuroticism was significant positive predictor of mental health and extroversion was significant negative predictor of mental health.

**CONCLUSION:** The results suggested that personality plays an important role in the development of mental health issues for those students who view internet pornography. Students with neuroticism personality traits are more prone for mental health issues who view internet pornography.

**KEYWORDS:** Internet pornography, personality traits, extroversion, neuroticism, mental health, male university students, Pakistan.

**INTRODUCTION:** The word “porn” came from Greek word which means “indecent pictures” (1) and pornography wasn’t invented but it was available from hundreds perhaps thousands of years (2). In the past, nobody had video player but they enjoyed pornography in the form of cave drawings, sculptures and sketches (3). Today, pornography considered as disgraceful act and it is available in the form of videos, magazines, literature that is available on internet (4). Internet pornography is considered as more harmful than pornography in its traditional form. Pornography is defined as, an exposure of genitals in inappropriate ways and sexual activities for sexual arousal (5). It is the representation of the sensational material or clear display of sexual organs or activities which stimulate sexual excitement in viewers (6). This phenomenon of pornography has a complicated relationship with adults which leads to the unrealistic expectations and

addiction (7). Nowadays, internet is the basic source that is being used widely and especially the adolescents are in its grip. Surprisingly, a survey indicated that adolescents spent maximum hours including six to seven hours on the internet (8). Internet or social media used for their recreational and entertaining purpose, but there is evolutionary shift of viewing of pornography on the internet in its various forms. The dysfunctional use of the internet has been observed in the emerging adulthood. It has been explored that adolescents also use the internet for exploring sexuality or pornography (9). Internet pornography is the availability of the porn material in the form of pictures, videos or literature (10). Due to the hormonal changes, the adults become more self-conscious, become sensitive to one-self and start concerning body changes and compared themselves with others or peers (Andersen, 2007).

Apart from the biological reasons, psychological factors also contribute in developing and maintaining internet sex addiction. Different issues related to psychological such as high level of stress, feeling isolated, low self-esteem, trauma abuse, childhood abuse, depression (11). This involves them to use internet as a new and safe way to view porn and thus makes them more at risk to develop internet sex addiction.

Apart from the bio psycho social factors for the development of internet pornography, personality played significant role in internet pornography. Personality is referred to broad characters particularly personal motives, needs, values, preferences and other personality attributes that remain stable over time and place. These attributions of personality make an important link to risky sexual behaviors (12). Personality traits are considered as useful explanation of the sexual behavior and attitudes (13). The big five factor model is broad classification of personality traits that separated the human personality in five dimensions (14). In the big five factor model, the factor neuroticism tends to experience psychological distress and associated with sensitivity to danger. The factor extraversion has tendency of outgoingness, is socially active and experience positive emotions (15). Personality traits, such as the 'big five', are considered as significant predictors of sexuality within individual and neuroticism and extraversion have tendencies of sexual desire (16, 17).

Briefly describing, the impact of internet pornography has been studied around the globe in different perspectives. However, there is no such data that show the impact of internet pornography on mental health in Pakistan especially in perspective to personality traits. So, the current study was aimed to investigate any effect of personality traits, the extroversion and neuroticism on mental health issue in university male students.

## METHODS

**Research design and settings,** correlational research design was used for quantitative and cross sectional study. The data was collected from 200 non-marital male participants with age range 18-30 years from the government and private universities and from the institutional and private hostels through purposive and snow ball sampling strategies.

**Measures, Depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21)** was used in order to quantify the mental health issues of the males viewing internet pornography. This scale consist of further three subscales: Depression, Stress and Anxiety with Cronbach alpha 0.94, 0.85 and 0.87 respectively (18).

**Big five inventory (BFI).** Big five inventory scale was used to check the personality traits and to find the relation between personality traits and mental health issues associated with internet pornography. For current study, only two traits out of five were used, namely Extroversion and Neuroticism. The scale has satisfactory internal consistency and validity (19).

**Demographic questionnaire.** Was constructed by the researcher with the help of literature review and considering the nature of the research. It included the items of age, residence, age introduced to pornography, age at which internet use to watch porn, time spent on internet, and others.

**Procedure.** The participants were approached online. For this purpose, a confession regarding the main purpose of the research with provided email was posted on the confession, department and hostel pages of different private and government universities of Lahore Pakistan. The participants who were involved in this activity and wanted to be a part of this research showed willingness by responding on the provided email. In this way the participant was approached and questionnaire were filled from them. Total 200 sample was targeted and students were informed about the study. All ethical considerations were kept in mind while conducting the study. The participants were ensured regarding the confidentiality of their name and identity.

## RESULTS

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Demographic variables of participants (N=200).

Variable	M	SD
Age	22.66	2.47
Age at which introduce to pornography	15.75	2.69
Age at which internet use to watch porn	16.84	2.83

Table 1 showed that the mean age of the participants is 22.6. Most of the participants introduced to pornography at mean age of 15 and started watching pornography on internet at mean age of 16.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentages of Demographic variables of Participants (N=200)

Variable	F	%
Residence		
Hostel	104	52%
Home	96	48%
How you were introduced to pornography?		
Through friends	132	66%
Through media	10	5%
By himself	9	4%
Through internet	49	24%
How frequently you watch porn movies on internet?		
Almost daily	54	27%
Within a week	86	43%
Within a month	50	25%
Within a year	10	5%
How much time do you spent in watching porn movies on internet?		94%
Half-6 hour	189	6%
7 hour-plus 12 hour		
How you watch porn movies on internet?		
Alone	173	86%
Watch in pair	6	3%
Watch in group	21	11%

Table 2, showed 104 (53%) participants were living in hostel. 132 (66%) of the participants introduced through friends, 54 (27%) individuals watch porn movies on the internet on daily basis. 189 or 94% individuals watch movies within half hour to six hour and 173 (86%) participants watch alone by self.

Table 3  
Linear Regression Analysis of Predictors of Mental Health in Students associated with Internet Pornography (N=200)

Variable	B	SEB	$\beta$
Extroversion	-.47	.16	-.18**
Neuroticism	1.04	.18	5.59***
R <sup>2</sup>		.18	
Fz		22.04***	
$\Delta R^2$		.17	

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Linear regression analysis showed a significant effect of personality traits on mental health of students viewing internet pornography. The results showed that both neuroticism and extrovert personality traits were significant predictors of mental health in students

associated with internet pornography. The .18 % variance explained by model comprising of two personality traits, mainly extroversion, and neuroticism ( $R^2 = .18$ ). The overall model was significant  $F(2, 197) = 22.04$ ,  $p < .001$ \*\*\*. The neuroticism ( $\beta = 3.63$ ,  $t(5.59)$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significant positive predictor of mental health and extroversion ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t(-2.83)$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was significant but negative predictor of mental health (Table 3).

Table 4  
Linear Regression Analysis of Predictors of Mental Health in Students associated with Internet Pornography (N=200)

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
ANX	.83	.11	.49***
SP	.30	.12	.16**
NEGLT	-.33	.15	-.13*
LSE	.36	.12	.20**
R <sup>2</sup>		.43	
F		37.14***	
$\Delta R^2$		.42	

Note. ANX= anxiousness, SP=sexual preoccupation, NEGLT=Neurotic guilt, LSE=low self-esteem. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Table 4, showed linear regression analysis of predictors of mental health in students viewing internet pornography. The results showed that psychosocial issues associated with internet pornography were significant predictors of mental health in students. The .43 % variance explained by model comprising of factors of psychosocial issues associated with internet pornography ( $R^2 = .43$ ). The overall model was highly significant  $F(4, 195) = 33.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . The anxiousness ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $t(7.36)$ ,  $p < .001$ ), sexual preoccupation ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $t(2.57)$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and low self-esteem ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $t(2.99)$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significant positive predictor of mental health and neurotic guilt ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t(-2.19)$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was significant but negative predictor of mental health. There was also seen an effect of some demographic variables like frequency of watching porn: the students who watch porn movies on daily basis have more mental health issues associated with internet pornography as compared to those who watch within week, month or a year ( $p < 0.05$ ). Some demographic variables have no significant effect like age: there was no significant difference in mental health issues of students belonging to different age groups.

## DISCUSSION

The current study was aimed to investigate any effect of two important and personality traits on the mental health issues of the university students viewing internet pornography. For this, we selected adolescents, as it has been studied that adolescents' brain especially the prefrontal cortex that assisted the brain's executive functioning involving, critical thinking, managing emotional impulses, planning and decision making is not fully developed. The connections between the limbic system and neo-cortex are not fully developed in late adolescents. Due to which the adults may be unable to make reasonable decisions and may involve themselves in pornography consumption (20). Apart from this, the adolescence also lacks the emotional development for the healthy use of the internet. Due to inability of emotional development, the private or the isolated environment made them difficult to think which behavior is useful or harmful for them. On the other hand, when the individuals achieve the puberty, hormonal changes in the adulthood led to the feelings of the sex as it is biological need (21).

This study showed a correlation between personality traits and mental health issues of the university male students. For this, only male students were targeted, as during exploratory study, it was observed that females were not willing to participate in the study. Their avoidance was due to different factors: few were feeling shy, few were unaware of the internet pornography, however other were reluctant to participate in the study. So, to avoid any biasness, females were excluded from the study and only male participants were selected for data collection.

Our quantitative results investigated that personality traits are linked with mental health associated with viewing internet pornography. We use adolescents for the study, as this is transitional phase biological and is more prone for getting addiction. Researches have indicated that adolescence and adulthood period is the period of heightened risk, rates of depression, anxiety, alcohol/drug use and exposure to sexual explicit material are common at this period (24). This can be confirmed from the literature that majority of the individuals are exposed to the pornography around 18 years of their age which considered as the puberty age (25). This may be due to regular use of the internet pornography in their preteen years when they exposed to the pornography as well as they achieve the puberty. Puberty considers as the important factor in the development of sexual interest (26).

The descriptive part also described that the 66% individuals were introduced pornography from their friends. In Pakistani culture, the individuals in the

adolescents depend on the peers for their emotional support. Beside the emotional support the peer group also suggesting the individual for the experience of first dating and sexual relationships. The study suggested that the sexual related material or the gossip is clearly discussed in the group of peers that allow the individuals to become familiar with the pornography (27). Another study by the Lam and chan (2007) suggested that half of the individuals who engaged in sexual contact discussed it with their friends. So, the main source of the exposure to pornography in Pakistani culture is peers in the universities.

Our main results on the personality traits showed that the personality trait, "neuroticism" is a significant positive predictor of mental health. However, the other personality trait, "extrovert" is negative significant predictor of mental illness in students. Neuroticism which is also called negative affectivity is a constant and relentless personality dimension. It's a state portrayed by emotional instability, display of anxiety and low level of self-respect in individuals. Individuals who have high level of neuroticism score result in decreased adaptableness in challenging circumstances and they are more at risk to emotional distress as compared to those with low scores (28). They are able to experience a high level of distress even in comparatively gentle contexts (29). However, on the other side, extrovert represents to those who is friendly and is outgoing. The extrovert engaged himself with the surrounding while the neurotic people stay alone. Extroverts demonstrate high level of sensitivity towards variations in social support. In the situations of high level of social support, extroverts report less suffering than do introverts. More the individual is neurotic the more he engaged in risky sexual behaviors and have psychological issues (30). Mass (2010) also described that neurotic individual use internet in an unhealthy way and at dependence level.

The results also described that psychosocial issues is a positive significant predictor of mental illness. So, the individuals having sexual thinking's, low self-esteem and are anxious due to internet pornography are more depressive and remain in stress. The result also indicated that those who were high on the internet pornography have low self-esteem and have high scores on anxiety and depression (Mass, 2010). Internet pornography also led to changing mood after viewing. Researchers reported that adults tend to be more depress, angry or felt guilt after viewing. So, this is inconsistent with the literature.

In Pakistan perspective, the home environment influences the personality trait of the individual and the same way it determines the psychological suffering of the individuals. In Pakistan, the parents didn't allow

their children to go outside due to the safety concern. The individuals spent their maximum hours in the home on the internet (31). Due to which the neurotic individuals didn't find their recreational activities but they indulge themselves on the internet and the pornography. As our data is on male students, so our results cannot predict same findings in female students. In addition, our data is of cross sectional nature, so our results might not be generalized in other regions of the Pakistan.

Briefly concluding, the present study found that in our culture pornography and the mental health issues go side by side. On the whole current research reveals that there is a relation between "Personality traits" and "mental health issues" associated with internet pornography in university male students. So, pornography has negative impacts on social, psychological and mental health of the individuals. Neurotic personality traits and mental health issues associated with internet pornography were positive significant predictors of mental illness in our society which lead to the difficulties for the students. This study could be helpful in understanding the relationship between personality traits, mental health issues in adults who are exposed to internet pornography. Further, it would be useful in creating awareness in society related to psychosocial issues due to internet pornography that may pose a threat for the development of mental health in adults. In Pakistan, according to my knowledge no study conducted on this topic so far. So, this study could be served as a pioneer for developing different strategies and planning different interventions to minimize the sufferings of individuals related to the pornography.

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**Komal Razaq;** concept, data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing

**Muhammad Rafiq;** concept, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript review

**Fatima Sana;** data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript review

**Zahid Mahmood;** concept, manuscript review