

Online pornography and condom use among young adults in Ireland

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Background I

- With widespread internet access and mobile phone use, pornography has become increasingly available, affordable, and easier to access anonymously (Hardy et al., 2019)
 - Why a concern for young adults, and adolescents in particular? (Children's Commissioner, 2023; Yu et al., 2021)
 - Young people lack the media literacy, experience, etc. to critically evaluate pornography content
 - Can impact on self-esteem, body image, wellbeing, etc.
 - Can promote gender imbalance in sexual relationships
 - Can lead to risky sexual health behaviours, e.g., condomless sex
- } **Sexual script theory**

Background II

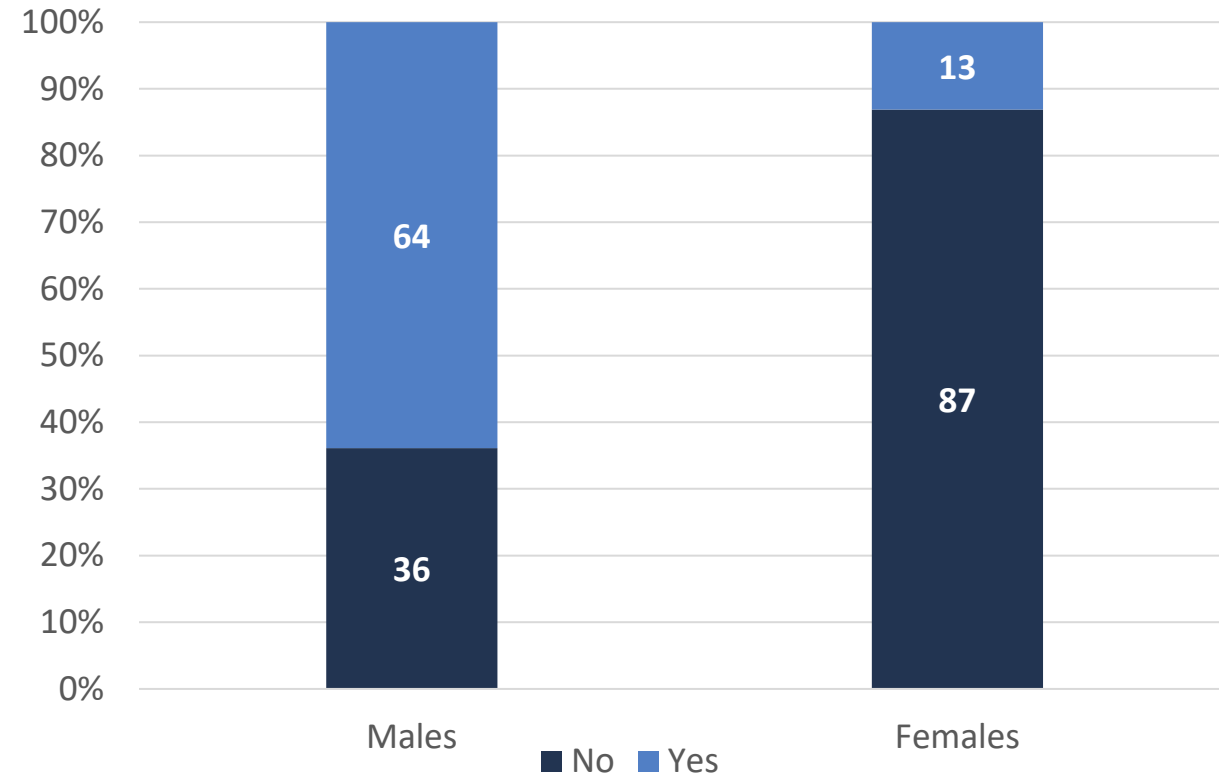
- Condoms, when used correctly and consistently, are safe and highly effective in preventing transmission of most sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies
- However, notifications of many STIs, particularly among young people, are higher than pre-pandemic (HPSC, 2025)
- In addition, recent research from HBSC show declining rates of condom use among young people across Europe (Gavin et al., 2024; Költő et al., 2024)
- In this paper, examine association between pornography and condom use in young people, i.e., test evidence for ‘sexual script’ theory

Data

- '98 Cohort of Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), the national longitudinal study of children and young people
- Focus primarily on data collected in 2018 when young people were aged 20
- Information on pornography and sexual health behaviours collected via the sensitive self-completion questionnaire (laptop-based)
- Analyses based on sample who have had sex, are sexually active and have non-missing data on key variables
 - stratified by sex (n=1,638 males and n=1,658 females)

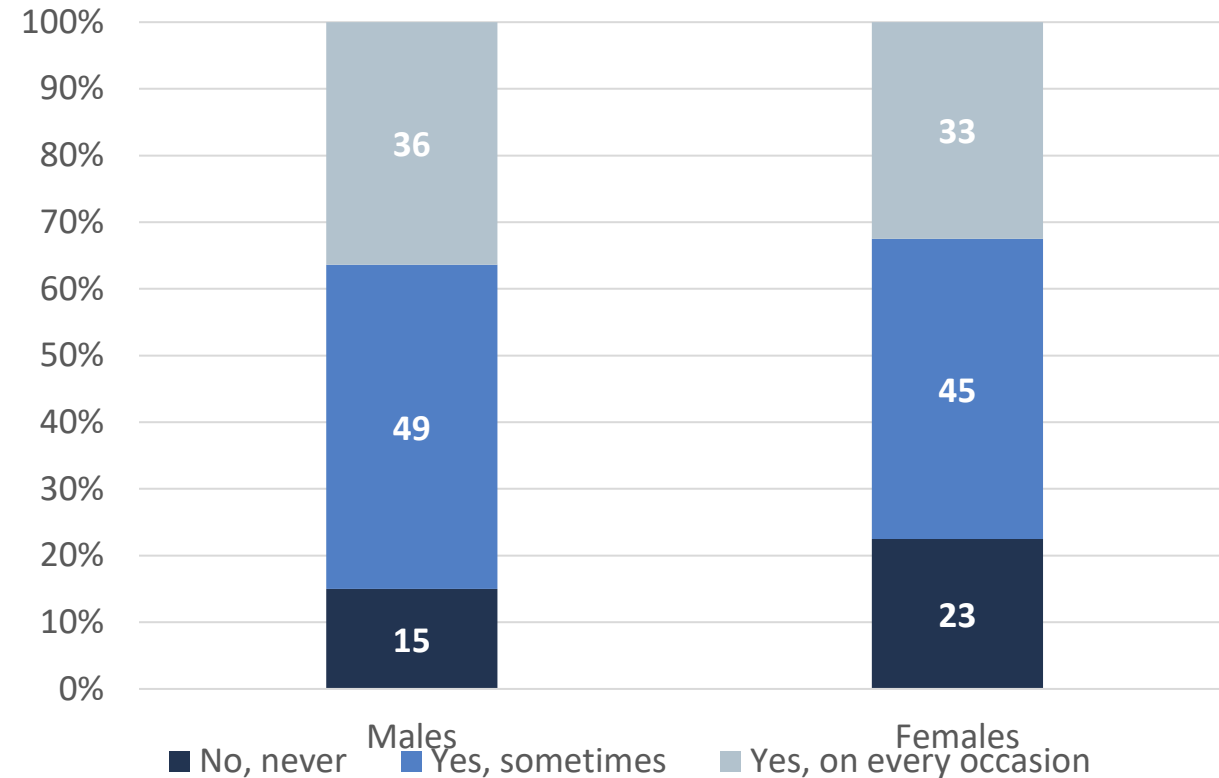
Online pornography use

- Pornography use captured as part of a module that asked about uses of the internet
- Significant gender difference in use
 - Males were also slightly more likely to use the internet overall than females



Condom use

- Condom use captured as part of a module that asked about sexual health and behaviours
 - Asked to record the frequency of condom use when they have sex (e.g., never, sometimes, etc.)
- Significant gender difference in use
 - Males more likely to use condoms



Ordered logit model results

	Males	Females
Pornography use		
- no, never	0.041 (0.019)**	0.080 (0.038)**
- yes, sometimes	0.033 (0.018)*	0.004 (0.005)
- yes, always	-0.075 (0.037)**	-0.084 (0.035)**
Other controls?	Y	Y
N	1,638	1,658

Notes:

Population weights are employed.

Control variables include age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic position, region of residence, willingness to take risks, current partnership status, main source of information on sex (age 13)

Results are presented as average marginal effects (with standard errors in parentheses)

*** p<0.001; ** p< .005; * p< .01

Other factors associated with condom use

■ Males:

- Negative relationship between condom use and **being in a steady partnership, increased tolerance for risk, and relying on internet** (rather than parents) for information on sex at age 13

■ Females:

- Negative relationship between condom use and **being in a steady partnership, younger age, and relying on friends** (rather than parents) for information on sex at age 13

Summary and conclusions

- Consistent with the ‘sexual script’ theory, we find statistically significant associations between pornography use and condom use among young adults in Ireland
 - magnitude of effect size slightly larger for women
- Some differences in other predictors between men and women, e.g., source of information on sex at age 13
- However, for both men and women, a consistently significant negative association between being in a current relationship (relative to being single or casually dating) and condom use is observed

Policy implications

- High rates of STIs among young people, along with findings from this research and from HBSC research (Gavin et al., 2024; Költő et al., 2024), reinforce the need for **renewed public health messaging** around condom use among young people
- Association between early parental sex education and condom use highlights **continued role for supports for parents in talking to their children about sex and relationships**
- Findings highlight need for further **policy coordination across multiple policy areas**, e.g., digital literacy skills and online media regulation

Acknowledgements

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Thank you

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