

Pornography: Its Harmful Influence and a Call for Parental Vigilance

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Abstract: This paper examines how Western-style slogans about extreme personal freedom—often expressed as “my body, my choice”—are understood in some Muslim societies, and how these ideas may influence the behaviour of young people in schools, colleges, and universities. Using a social and religious framework grounded in Islamic moral psychology, the paper argues that when “autonomy” is treated as freedom without moral responsibility, it can strengthen the influence of Nafs’e Ammarah (the inner self that pushes a person toward wrongdoing and impulsive desires). It may also weaken important safeguards such as modesty, accountability, and supportive family involvement. The paper also discusses ongoing disagreements about interaction between non-Mahram men and women. On many campuses, some students view unrestricted “friendship” across these boundaries as a sign of modernity and progress. Others believe that removing boundaries can harm learning, personal safety, and reputational dignity. Because these debates affect real students and institutions, they require careful, evidence-based guidance—not slogans or emotional reactions. The study then explores two connected institutional risks: substance use and pornography. Many educators and civil-society observers report increased access to drugs and intoxicants among students, including in private and English-medium institutions. They link this to status pressures, consumer culture, peer influence, and nightlife habits that can make experimentation seem normal. At the same time, digital technology has shifted sexually explicit material from shared family spaces (like a living-room TV) to private, always-available personal screens. This reduces informal supervision and can make repeated use easier. Interdisciplinary research suggests that frequent exposure to pornography may distort beliefs about intimacy and consent, increase sexual objectification, and encourage compulsive behaviour through reward-based reinforcement. It may also contribute to relationship dissatisfaction, shame, and anxiety among adolescents and married adults. However, the paper warns against moral panic and against “quick fixes” that ignore deeper injustices. Meaningful reform must also address long-standing harms that enable exploitation, including harassment, violence against women, and denial of legal rights such as inheritance. For these reasons, the paper proposes a combined approach: (i) values-based education that blends religious literacy, ethics, consent, empathy, and respect for women’s dignity; (ii) clear and enforceable institutional codes of conduct, confidential reporting, counselling, and referral systems; (iii) cooperation between parents and institutions on digital safety, mentoring, and early intervention; and (iv) balanced regulation and industry responsibility to reduce access to exploitative online content while protecting lawful expression. The paper concludes that lasting progress requires balancing freedom with self-discipline, justice, and strong institutional responsibility.

Keywords: Westernisation; moral autonomy; Nafs’e Ammarah; non-Mahram interaction; educational institutions; youth risk behaviour; substance use; pornography; digital privacy; character education; gender justice; campus governance; lust; “my body my will”.

Harmful Influence of Pornography: Shariah Perspective

This is an Islamic perspective grounded in the Qur'an, Nabawi Guidance, and the Ta'lim of the Ahl al-Bayt (as). Pornography is not merely "private viewing." In the Islamic moral universe, it is a deliberate opening of the senses to Fahishah (indecent). It trains the heart in lust and gradually makes shamelessness feel normal. It weakens Haya (modesty), softens the will, distorts intimacy, and quietly damages the moral ecology of the home. Islam does not treat chastity as a side issue. It is a protective wall around the dignity of persons, the stability of families, and the purity of the believing community. For this reason, the Qur'an does not only forbid major sins; it also teaches believers to shut the doors that lead to them. The first doorway is often the gaze, because what the eyes repeatedly take in shapes what the heart begins to desire.

i) The Qur'an: disciplining the gaze and blocking the pathways

The Qur'an ties chastity to lowering the gaze and guarding the private self:

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity..."

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity..."

Pornography directly contradicts this Qur'ani Ta'lim. It is not an accidental look; it is the intentional pursuit of what the gaze is commanded to restrain. Islam does not define righteousness only as "not committing Zina." It also requires that a person does not deliberately walk toward Zina by feeding desire through unlawful avenues. This is why the Qur'an says:

"Do not go near Zina/adultery. It is truly a shameful deed and an evil way."

Notice the wording: "Do not go near." The Qur'an forbids approaching the roads that lead to Zina, not only the final act. Pornography is part of the modern "approach" to Zina because it cultivates desire, makes fantasy habitual, and dulls moral resistance. When a person repeatedly crosses small boundaries, larger boundaries begin to feel less serious. Pornography is also not only a personal act; it is participation in an industry that spreads Fahishah. The Qur'an warns against those who want indecency to become socially ordinary:

"Those who love to see indecency spread among the believers will suffer a painful punishment..."

The Qur'an also warns that moral collapse often comes step by step, not all at once:

"Do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān... he surely bids to immorality and wickedness."

Pornography reflects this "footsteps of Shayṭān" dynamic: first curiosity, then repetition, then normalization, then compulsion. A person does not usually start with addiction; they start with a door being opened and then left open. Islam also frames the senses as an Amanah (trust). The eyes and ears are not meaningless tools; they are part of what we will answer for:

"Hearing, sight, and inner perception-each will be questioned."

So the Shariah approach is not simply "avoid a bad habit." It is: guard an Amanah, protect your heart, and preserve the moral health of the home and community.

ii) Nabawi Hidayah and the moral chain reaction

Nabawi Hidayah explains the spiritual psychology behind the Qur'ani commands. When the eyes are allowed illicit indulgence, the body and heart follow. Rasulullah (S) is reported to have described the "Zina of the eyes" as the unlawful lustful look, and that further stages follow it. This is not only a legal classification; it is a warning about the human heart: what the eyes repeatedly consume, the heart learns to crave. That is why Islamic ethics treats the first look as extremely important. If the beginning is not controlled, the end becomes much harder to control.

Pornography is therefore especially dangerous because it is not a passing glance; it is sustained, repeated exposure. It multiplies what the Shariah warns against and strengthens the habit of disobedience in the most sensitive inner space of a person.

iii) Ta'lim of the Ahl al-Bayt (as): discipline of the gaze, dignity of the self

The Ta'lim of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) deepens the issue by showing that the gaze is part of a person's spiritual health. A well-known narration, transmitted in Shi'i sources, from Al Imam al-Ṣadiq (as) warns about the spiritual injury caused by illicit looking while also giving hope to the one who restrains himself for Allah:

"A glance (at what is forbidden) is a poisoned arrow from the arrows of Iblis..."

This narration is powerful because it describes illicit looking as harm, not "fun." A poisoned arrow does not only hurt once; it leaves a wound inside. The narration also teaches that restraint for Allah is not loss; it is a path to sweetness of faith. Pornography, however, is not one arrow-it is repeated arrows. It turns what should be resisted into a routine, and that routine shapes the soul. Al Imam Ali Zayn al-Abideen (as) places the gaze within the framework of rights and responsibility: *"The right of sight is that you lower it before everything which is unlawful..."*

This shows the Islamic project clearly. It is not shame-based repression. It is rights-based moral formation: training the eye to serve the soul, not enslave it. The gaze is not meant to be a weapon against one's own heart.

iv) What pornography does to Haya, Karamah, and intimacy

Pornography weakens Haya and normalizes violation.

Pornography trains a person to look at what should be protected. It turns the human body into a product and reduces people to consumable images. In Islamic ethics, this is a direct assault on Karamah (dignity) and Haya. Even if the viewer tells himself it is "private," the inner self is being shaped by what it repeatedly consumes. Pornography distorts intimacy and harms marital contentment. Islam honours desire, but places it inside covenant, mercy, and responsibility. Pornography relocates desire into fantasy, secrecy, comparison, and performance. It can create dissatisfaction with one's spouse, harm trust, and weaken emotional safety. It also trains the mind to seek excitement without responsibility, which is the opposite of the Islamic model of affection grounded in Rahmah (mercy). Pornography breeds secrecy, isolation, and compulsion. Repeated sin that is hidden often grows roots. Secrecy becomes habit, guilt becomes despair, and despair becomes relapse. This is how a person can feel trapped even when they still believe and still want to stop. Islam breaks this cycle by pairing accountability with hope, and by making Tawbah a living door, not a one-time event. Pornography contributes to the spread of Fahishah. Even when viewed alone, it participates in an economy that circulates indecency-precisely what the Qur'an warns against. It supports a culture where shamelessness is normal and where the sacred limits of the body are treated lightly.

v) Protecting the family: a Qur'ani duty, not an optional style

The Qur'an makes protection of the family a religious obligation:

"O believers! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire..."

This includes spiritual protection, moral protection, and practical protection. The solution is not only “don’t do it.” The solution is building a household environment where Haya is honoured, questions can be asked, and pathways to sin are blocked before they become habits.

vi) Building a culture of Haya, not a culture of silence

A home should not treat this topic as unspeakable. Children who cannot ask questions inside the home will search for answers elsewhere, often in the worst places. Speak early, calmly, and age-appropriately about modesty, boundaries, and digital danger. Frame it as dignity and obedience to Allah, not merely “rules.” Practical steps matter, and Islam does not oppose practical prevention. It encourages closing doors to harm.

Keep devices in shared spaces when children are young.

Use filtering and accountability tools as “seatbelts,” not as a replacement for Tarbiyah.

Set bedtime device curfews. Isolation + late hours is a common doorway.

Make lowering the gaze a household virtue for boys and girls alike, linked to Qur’an 24:30–31, and presented as strength, not deprivation.

Curate what enters the home: entertainment, social media, “influencer” culture, and casual immodesty can soften resistance slowly-this is exactly the “footsteps of Shayṭan” dynamic the Qur’an warns about.

Invest in emotional security: a child who feels seen, guided, and safe is less likely to escape into secret consumption.

Pair discipline with warmth. Moral authority becomes strongest when the relationship is safe.

If exposure happens, respond with seriousness but without humiliation. Shame can entrench the problem. Islam’s way is: acknowledge sin, close pathways, increase supports, and keep hope open.

vii) Tawbah and recovery: seriousness with hope

If a person falls into this sin, the door is not closed. The Islamic response is not despair. It is Tawbah-immediately and repeatedly-through regret, stopping, and firm resolve, while rebuilding safeguards. A key spiritual therapy of the gaze is to cut the look early. The first seconds matter most. Many people lose the battle not after ten minutes, but in the first moment when they allow the mind to entertain the idea. Act early, block quickly, and redirect immediately. If compulsive patterns exist, seek qualified help (trusted scholar + competent therapist). Needing help is not moral disqualification; it is responsibility. Islam does not glorify silent suffering. It calls people to action, support, and sincere reform.

Evil Slogan “My body my will”

Western culture-influenced slogans like “my body my will” have influenced how many young people understand personal freedom. Some children begin to believe from an early age that they can do whatever they want, and that no one-parents, teachers, elders-has any right to advise them or interfere. In this mindset, sincere guidance is labelled “oppression.” Moral boundaries are seen as backward. Even when adults speak out of concern, youth may call it “judgement” or “control.” This thinking also affects attitudes toward relationships and public morality. Some people claim there is no harm in friendship between non-Mahram men and women, and that unrestricted mixing is simply “progress.” In many educational institutions, “boyfriend and

girlfriend” culture is increasingly visible and treated as normal campus life. This does not only affect the individuals involved. It affects the learning environment, the safety of students, and the moral climate of the institution. When boundaries collapse, distraction increases, exploitation becomes easier, and dignity is weakened. That is why the intelligentsia, educators, and responsible members of society must work to remove harmful influences from educational spaces and restore a clean and dignified environment. Schools, colleges, and universities should be places of learning and character building, not centres of moral confusion. The Islamic model is not “control for control’s sake.” It is guidance for protection, dignity, and the health of society. Freedom in Islam is not the freedom to follow every impulse. It is the freedom to obey Allah, to master the Nafs, and to live with Haya, Karamah, and integrity.

Alongside this, drug use in educational institutions has also increased. People who create disorder often hide their actions behind appealing slogans such as “freedom,” “equality,” and “development.” According to various NGO reports and many social observations, student involvement in drugs and other intoxicants is rising in several Muslim countries, especially in English-medium and private institutions. This problem is not limited to boys; many girls are also being affected in large numbers. Parents must clearly understand that when their children go to school, college, or university, they go for education. Families cannot remain indifferent to these risks simply because an institution has a good reputation, a modern campus, or an expensive fee structure. A prestigious name does not automatically guarantee a safe environment. In fact, sometimes the pressure to “fit in” within such spaces makes harmful habits spread faster, because students fear being judged if they refuse. Islam recognises a central reality about human nature: within the human being there is a strong pull toward wrongdoing. The Nafs’e Ammarah can become attracted to harmful desires and quick pleasures, especially when temptation is easy and consequences feel distant. But Allah did not leave humanity without guidance. Allah sent Rasulullah (S) to educate and train us so that we can control these impulses, avoid sin, build restraint, and turn to Allah through Ibadah. The aim is not to deny human feelings or pretend temptation does not exist. Rather, the goal is to discipline desire, set limits, and direct the heart and body toward what is lawful, beneficial, and dignified.

By contrast, many elements of Western consumer culture operate with profit-driven motives. A profitable culture benefits when the Nafs’e Ammarah is constantly stimulated and never satisfied. When people are trained to believe “my body my will,” they are encouraged to do whatever they want, without thinking about accountability, consequences, or the rights of others. This can create a repeating cycle: desire is ignited, boundaries are mocked, and people keep chasing pleasure until the harm becomes undeniable-like a bubble of lava that eventually bursts. Today, some people present alcohol, late-night parties, and reckless socialising as signs of a “modern” life. They claim this is the “need” and “tradition” of the so-called civilised world. In the name of progress and freedom, some individuals organise parties where non-Mahram boys and girls mix freely, where liquor is served, and where other intoxicants may also be available. Such spaces are not harmless entertainment. They often become environments where young people are pressured, exploited, or pushed into behaviour they later regret. What begins as “fun” can end in addiction, trauma, blackmail, damaged reputations, and long-term emotional harm. At the same time, it is important to be honest about our own social flaws. Many Muslim societies have serious injustices.

Women are abused. Violence against women is increasing in many places. Weak and helpless women are exploited. In some families, women are denied their lawful share in inheritance. If a society speaks loudly against obscenity but stays silent about injustice, it loses credibility. Moral reform cannot be selective. It must include justice, protection, and lawful rights, otherwise the call for morality becomes hollow and people stop trusting it.

Slipping into Pornography

Contemporary Western culture has gradually shifted private consumption from shared family spaces to isolated personal spaces. First, entertainment entered through television in the living room, where family presence created informal oversight. Then it moved into private bedrooms through personal computers. Now it sits in the palm of the hand through mobile phones and tablets. This shift has created a new lifestyle: people can consume content alone, secretly, and without limits. In this environment, an attitude like “my mobile, my will” becomes normal. A person can now access almost any type of content, including pornography, without family knowledge and often in complete isolation. Many parents, due to security concerns, give smartphones to under-aged children so they can be contacted easily. But unintentionally, this can expose children to content they are not emotionally, psychologically, or morally mature enough to handle. The privacy of the screen can become a hidden doorway to serious harm, because the child’s mind may absorb images and ideas that distort values, damage innocence, and create addiction patterns before the child even understands what is happening. The responsibility to address these harms is not on individuals alone. It is shared by the state, society, families, and communities. There is a strong need to improve regulation and strengthen moral education so that women are safer and social harms like exploitation, abuse, and crime are reduced. The pornography industry earns massive profits by selling obscenity through vulgar digital platforms. This often happens at the cost of social cohesion, family stability, and human dignity.

At the same time, one problem should not be presented as the cure for another. Some people promote permissiveness as “liberation,” but in many Western contexts this has existed alongside continued insecurity for women and the normalisation of sexual objectification. Slogans of absolute freedom, total equality, or certain strands of feminism can sound attractive. Yet when these slogans are separated from ethical accountability, they can become tools that expose women to new forms of exploitation rather than genuine empowerment. A society may claim to be “free,” but if women still feel unsafe, pressured, or treated as objects, then that freedom is not delivering dignity. Parents must especially understand that children are often misled under the banner of freedom. Guidance is not the same as oppression. Care and oversight are not the same as control. Education should not be limited to technical learning only. It must also include moral formation: teaching respect, restraint, justice, and responsibility, along with religious and human values. Young people must learn not to violate the dignity or rights of others, to maintain modesty, and to behave responsibly and transparently in public life.

Effects of Pornography

The digital revolution has improved communication, productivity, and access to information. But pornographic industries have used the same technologies to grow quickly and profit massively, with serious social costs. Over time, the result can include weakened families, damaged

relationships, and harm to individual wellbeing. This is not a small issue; it deserves serious public concern. Social science research supports many of these concerns. Pornography is a visual distortion of sexuality. It often presents sexuality without dignity, without responsibility, and without a real understanding of emotional or moral consequences. It can train the viewer to see people as objects for consumption rather than as human beings with honour, rights, and moral agency. This change in thinking can influence attitudes, expectations, and behaviour in ways that harm marriage, family stability, childhood development, and personal happiness. Researchers from many fields-social sciences, clinical psychology, biology, and increasingly neuroscience-have described wide effects of pornography. These effects are not limited to one area; they can affect the mind, the body, and the heart.

i. Effect on the Mind

Pornography can gradually change how people think about sexuality and intimacy. Habitual exposure is linked with greater tolerance for abnormal sexual behaviour, increased acceptance of aggression, casual promiscuity, and coercive attitudes. In some cases, it can reduce sensitivity toward sexual harm and contribute to the trivialisation of rape. Over time, women-and sometimes children-may be viewed as sexual commodities rather than persons with dignity, boundaries, and rights. This shift is dangerous because once the mind normalises disrespect, harmful behaviour becomes easier to justify.

ii. Effect on the Body

Pornography can also show addiction-like patterns. Pleasure-reward chemicals such as dopamine can reinforce the habit, making the user seek more content, more frequently, and sometimes more extreme material to achieve the same effect. This can increase dependency and compulsive behaviour. Alongside this, a culture shaped by pornography and permissiveness can also increase risky sexual behaviour, which in turn can raise the likelihood of sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies outside stable family structures. Even when people try to treat pornography as “private,” the effects often spill into real life.

iii. Effect on the Heart

Pornography can harm emotional and relational health. Many married men who consume pornography report reduced satisfaction with marital intimacy and weakened emotional attachment. Women married to men who are addicted often experience betrayal, mistrust, anger, and deep insecurity. These patterns can increase the risk of infidelity and divorce. Among adolescents, pornography use is linked with shame, reduced self-esteem, confusion about sexuality, and emotional distress. The heart becomes restless: pleasure is chased, but peace is lost.

Precautionary Action

Preventive steps should be educational, ethical, and protective-not only punitive. Sons must be taught to respect women in every public space, regardless of appearance, and never to degrade, harass, or exploit them. Daughters should be taught that while the home can be a safer space, public life also requires transparency, responsibility, and communication with family. Both sons and daughters should learn that unrestricted intimacy between non-Mahram men and women

contradicts religious and social ethics, and that interaction should remain purposeful, modest, and restrained. Educational institutions must be treated as places of learning and development. They should not become arenas for sexualisation, exploitation, or moral confusion. Administrators and teachers must recognise pornography as a hidden but serious threat to the younger generation-some argue it is even more damaging than narcotics because of its psychological reach and its normalisation through digital life.

Internet service providers should be required to block exploitative content, and regulatory bodies must not ignore digital harm for the sake of profit. Parents should remain actively involved with their children's educational environments and cooperate with school and university leadership so that campuses remain spaces of learning rather than centres of moral erosion. This involvement should not be driven by suspicion alone, but by responsibility: knowing a child's peer group, monitoring changes in behaviour, maintaining open conversation, and building enough trust that the child can speak before a problem becomes severe.

Conclusion:

Western slogans of autonomy, when imported as absolute permission rather than ethically limited freedom, can recast self-restraint as "interference" and normalise conduct that corrodes education, wellbeing, and social trust. The response, however, should avoid crude "civilisation versus civilisation" binaries; the real questions are governance, ethics, justice, and institutional responsibility. A principled framework rests on three points. First, freedom without accountability produces vulnerability: adolescents need developmentally appropriate guidance that builds self-control and self-regulation, not merely harsh prohibition. Second, institutional "neutrality" is not harmless: schools and universities must set clear behavioural standards, enforce protections against harassment, and provide confidential support for addiction and mental-health risks. Third, moral reform must be joined to women's rights: it is incoherent to denounce obscenity while tolerating violence, harassment, or denial of lawful entitlements such as inheritance. Responsibility is shared. Parents should sustain open communication, apply wise digital oversight, and model restraint. Educational leadership should treat pornography-related harms as student welfare and public safety issues through prevention, counselling, credible discipline, and safe reporting pathways. Policymakers and regulators should act proportionately against exploitative online ecosystems while strengthening child protection, campus safety, and access to rehabilitation. Only an integrated approach can protect youth, preserve educational integrity, and uphold a just and humane moral order. Pornography thrives where the gaze is untrained, the heart is lonely, the home is silent, and the internet is unguarded. The Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt (as) offer a coherent cure: discipline of the senses, protection of pathways, cultivation of Haya, and family responsibility-held together by hope, not despair.

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