

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

In our socially aware region we often see someone wearing a colored ribbon to support the issues which people struggle with. There are red ribbons to support those with HIV/AIDS, yellow ribbons to support our military, blue ribbons to increase awareness of child abuse, and – of course – pink ribbons to fight against breast cancer.

Every October another color of ribbon appears, usually attached to earnest souls who are happy to answer questions but don't do much to call attention to their issue of choice. That's because October is White Ribbon Against Pornography month.

Now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, WRAP month is a reminder about the dangers and increasing presence of sexually-explicit materials in our community. Wearing the ribbon is a pledge to not spend any time, talent, or treasure on pornography during WRAP. For some that's just a week, for others the full month, and for some of us, it's a lifetime promise.

Many people don't realize how pervasive porn has become. Recent studies indicate that over 80 percent of all males access sexually explicit material regularly. The number of female users is just behind with 3 in 4 engaged at least monthly. One out of every six computer-based internet searches and one out of five smartphone searches is a hunt for pornographic material. But is this a sign of trouble or just consenting adults expanding their horizons in the information age?

Here are a couple of thoughts which might give you pause as you consider that question. A child's first exposure to pornographic material these days happens when they are between seven and nine years old. The US Department of Justice has declared that never before "in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions." A 2010 study showed 81% of youth between 14 and 16 years of age look at porn online at home and 75% say their parents have never discussed Internet pornography with them.

I know I'm throwing a lot of numbers around, but the data are too shocking to discuss any other way. It's long been known that repeated use or exposure is addictive, rewiring neural pathways in a manner similar to that of methamphetamine addicts. Repeated use is desensitizing – it gets harder to reach the high a user is seeking without finding novel and increasingly extreme material. As you might expect, this happens quicker with adolescents than with adults.

The largest porn web site reports that last year their subscribers watched the equivalent of 11 full length movies for every person in the United States and that 40% of their searches involved the words “teen,” “child,” or “young”.

The more you examine the information around pornography, the more frightening its impact becomes. This isn't some easy or innocent thrill with no victims. It's a pervasive and addicting substance which damages relationships, changes the function of the brain, and desensitizes individuals to the pain and suffering of others.

You're not sure? Try this: Give porn up for the rest of this month. Count how many times you think about it or have urges to use it. You might find there's a lot more to what I say than you'd like to believe.

This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment.

*\* Statistics taken from Harmful Effects of Pornography 2016 Reference Guide (Available at [fightthenewdrug.org](http://fightthenewdrug.org)) and from Covenant Eyes Pornography Statistics 2015 Edition (available from [covenanteyes.com](http://covenanteyes.com)). Both reports contain significantly more detail and link to dozens of recent studies concerning the effects of pornography on both regular and irregular users.*