

Sexual strangulation is derailing a generation of girls

Debra Soh

The Globe & Mail (Canada) 9 Sept 2026

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-sexual-strangulation-is-derailing-a-generation-of-girls/>

Gen Z women, who were exposed to pornography through their smartphones at such a tender age, have been groomed into emulating sexual choking as empowerment and liberation. Manuel Ausloos/Reuters

What was once considered aggravated assault is now an accepted part of modern dating. Last week, a 16-year-old Sydney girl was reported dead after her boyfriend “consensually” choked her during sex. It is believed that asphyxiation led to her having a seizure and losing consciousness.

Her tragic death exemplifies how deadly the choking trend is, and how disturbingly common it has become among the young. Sexual choking – or sexual strangulation – is ubiquitous among Gen Z (aged 14 to 29). More than half of female university students report being sexually choked. The average young person learns about choking by the age of 15, and a quarter of women experience it by age 17.

Sexual choking has become so normalized, I’ve yet to speak to a Gen Zer who hasn’t taken part. Both sexes believe the practice is benign, which is a myth that pornography, social media and sex educators promote.

The average child is 12 years old the first time they see porn. Much of this content is light years away from magazine centrefolds – including women with expressions of fear, frozen on their faces, struggling to breathe, eyes watering, falling in and out of consciousness.

Unfortunately, within society’s current push for “sex positivity” and acceptance of kink, frowning upon fringe sexual practices invites accusations of prudishness, closed-mindedness and “kink-shaming.”

While some women choke men, this phenomenon primarily features men choking women. Although it has also disconcertingly bled into Millennial women’s dating lives, we were lucky to have experienced adolescence without online porn infiltrating our minds. We grew up knowing that choking someone you care about isn’t normal.

Gen Z women, however, were exposed to pornography through their smartphones at such a tender age, they’ve been groomed into emulating this behaviour as empowerment and liberation. There is no safe way to partake in choking, because it doesn’t require much pressure on a person’s neck for unwanted side effects to happen, including memory loss, headaches, stroke and

brain damage. Adding drugs or alcohol to the mix amplifies this risk.

The consequences can be cumulative, meaning they add up over time, as opposed to happening immediately after a single event. Those who engage in choking and feel fine afterward may inaccurately believe it is harmless.

Neuroscientific studies show that being choked frequently is linked to differences in brain structure and function. In my opinion, this has stark implications for adolescents' and young adults' healthy development. People who engage in choking are not typically choked once or twice, but an average of 25 times.

Strangulation is also associated with developing mental health issues later in life, including anxiety, depression and dissociation. I'm willing to bet that choking explains, at least in part, the devastating rise in mental health conditions documented in Gen Z women.

The reality is, few taking part in choking actually enjoy it. From my conversations with Zoomers, men choke women, and women ask to be choked, under the false belief that their partners want to do it. When someone responds positively in hopes of pleasing the other person, both parties have their erroneous beliefs confirmed – that this is what the opposite sex likes, and it is something they should continue doing.

Some women know that sexual choking is dangerous, but fear that they'll be considered bad in bed for refusing, or that a man will lose interest in them because another woman is willing to. But is it worth risking your life? Choking is dicey for all who take part. If a woman initiates it and something goes wrong, she may indeed lose her life, and her male partner could be held criminally responsible.

If someone does genuinely enjoy choking or being choked, this is just as worrisome. Research I've conducted shows that interest in sado-masochism (harming oneself and/or one's partner) is associated with severe physical abuse in childhood and sexual trauma. For others, choking can be a form of self-harm.

Instead of encouraging people with adverse histories to heal, our culture glamorizes sexual pathology as sexy and worthy of exploring. My advice, having worked in research and clinical settings with forensic populations, is to stay away from anyone – male or female – who is turned on by violence.

Strangling someone during sex isn't sexy, it's horrific. It's never acceptable to put your hands on someone's neck, even if they ask you to. Young people – especially our girls – will continue suffering needlessly until we reject sex-positive messaging saying it's okay. We need to tell them to say no.