

Olympic star Nick Willis on the real victims of his pornography addiction - Women

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Fresh from breaking his silence about his pornography addiction, Olympian Nick Willis now wants to shift the public's focus to the sexual exploitation of women.

In a post on his Facebook page, Willis said: "Traffickers force girls into pornography for psychological control.

"I think it is extremely important to shift the focus of this issue to the real victims, the women and girls who are being exploited because of the high demand for porn.

"Even if someone thinks there's no harm for themselves in viewing a little porn here and there (despite the extensive research that refutes this), there are real victims being exploited to provide that viewing content."

Yesterday Willis took to Facebook to react to the publicity around his revelation that he was addicted to pornography, which he posted on his page several days ago.

"I guess I never realised how much interest the media would have in my Facebook post but I want to affirm that breaking the silence is worth it if even only one person succeeds in winning his/her battle," he said.

Friends and family commented, commending him on his admission.

One person wrote: "Good on you... takes a lot of courage. Doesn't change my view on you. Go hard and keep chasing your dreams."

Another person wrote: "Very brave and I'm sure it will make an impact in more than one life".

"They're actually bringing a reality check to what pornography is really about and I think that as a society, we're starting to go down that track finally."

Mr McCoskrie said it's very brave of a sports star to admit to a porn addiction and he commended Mr Willis for speaking out.

"His relationships and his family will be better for the fact he's fronted up to the problem and wants to see it solved."

Willis says the strength of his wife helped him beat the addiction threatening their relationship and his ability to be a father.

In an exclusive interview with the *Herald on Sunday*, the champion 32-year-old middle distance runner opened up on his obsession with pornography and his shame in dealing with it.

Talking last night, the Rio Olympics-bound runner credited his wife of eight years, Sierra, for beating his dependence.

"Sierra showed a great amount of grace with me," Willis said.

Family First director and anti-pornography advocate Bob McCoskrie said people who admit and talk about a harmful addiction could actually help others who may be going through a similar struggle.

"We decided to beat it together. We talked openly about the issues of sex trafficking, abuse of women, objectification of women and accessibility of pornography for young people on cellphones.

"Getting this topic out of my secret life into the open, and talking, talking, talking has been the biggest impact in breaking the cycle."

Willis, a medallist at Olympic and Commonwealth Games, lives in Michigan with Sierra and their 2-year-old son, Lachlan.

A proud Christian, he recalled the pain coming clean about his addiction had on his loving wife.

"The hurt she felt was something I never wanted to make her experience again," he said.

"Before I focused on how my addiction affected me, but it wasn't until I realised the effect it had on others, especially my wife that I committed to change."

Willis has been porn-free for two-and-a-half years.

This week he marked the milestone by posting on Facebook that his addiction to pornography, which had started as a teen, had been a "roller coaster ride of shame and justification".

He told the *Herald on Sunday*, his addiction began when he was a young, lonely teenager trying to figure out his place in the world.

"I was exposed to magazines and videos at a young age and the objectification of the women on these media forms became an outlet for me to gain some form of intimacy that I severely lacked."

It took him years to figure out that what he was regarded as "sexy and appealing" was a false reality.

"My understanding of how to form real relationships with the opposite sex became hijacked."

In fact it wasn't until Willis was in his early 20s that it dawned on him his attraction to pornography was an addiction.

"I felt convinced about its harmful effects on women, on men and on marriages," he said.

"Despite my convictions, I kept falling back to my secret life every couple of weeks or months.

"I was counting the days and weeks of how long it had been, so it became clear to me that it was not something I could easily shrug off."

Now two and a half years on from breaking the cycle, Willis said he felt "amazing". Referencing the article *What it means to be pro-sex and anti-porn* he shared on Facebook, he took pains to make a distinction between porn and acts of love.

"Porn makes you think you are having sexual needs met. But really, they are hollow and leave you feeling empty and lonelier than before.

"Basically, pornography is a very unnatural (and very temporary) solution that people use to satisfy a natural desire.

"Pornography will not and cannot love you back."

Willis and his wife decided it was time to make a public stance on the growing problem of easily accessible pornography in our society.

"Sharing a small personal testimony of my journey with pornography was important to give my public stance authenticity and let others know it's possible to go without."

Director of the University of Otago's National Addiction Centre, Professor Doug Sellman, said there was an impression in his field that porn addiction was on the rise because of easily accessed electronic porn. Sellman said the key to an addict's recovery was learning new ways of behaving.

"The old patterns will always be there, but the more a person practises the new behaviour it will trump the old addictive responses.

"However, new accountabilities to other people in the person's life can be very motivating."

Willis' decision to go public with his personal experiences was one way of helping him put an end to his addiction, the top athlete said.

He said prior to speaking out he'd spent sleepless nights wrestling with images he couldn't get out of his head.

"I sleep so well now. The freedom I experience now allows me to walk tall."

He urged others in the same position to do the same.

"Don't believe the lie that this is a natural and fine thing for men to participate in. It will affect everything in your life, especially your ability to experience true intimacy.

"Bring your secret life out into the open ... say never again and walk away."

He has now learned pornography is not healthy.

"My eyes have now become truly open to the lies of pornography, that it is a completely fake distortion of sex and women. It is not sexy nor appealing. I am no longer duped by a false reality."

Nick Willis

- Born April 25, 1983 in Lower Hutt.
- Married to Sierra and father of Lachlan (born 2013).
- Living in Michigan, United States.
- Is a Christian.
- New Zealand record holder in the 1500m, at 3m 29.66s.
- Won gold medal at the 2004 Commonwealth Games in the 1500m.
- Won an Olympics silver medal in the 1500m at Beijing.
- Won bronze medals in the 1500m at the 2010 and 2014 Commonwealth Games.
- Is a staunch advocate for strong bans for drug cheats.

Where to get help:

Addiction to pornography can endanger relationships, mental health and employment. Those addicted to PPV websites can also be left with huge bills.

A list of counsellors who specialise in the area is at: aucklandtherapy.co.nz/index.htm

Sex Therapy New Zealand offers help for pornography addicts, see: www.sextherapy.co.nz/what-is-stnz.html

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