



YOUTH WELLBEING PROJECT

Educating for tricky conversations

Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

Submission by Youth Wellbeing Project

Youth Wellbeing Project is a social enterprise based in Brisbane Australia with a global vision to positively impact youth sexuality and wellbeing.

Youth Wellbeing Project supports schools and community with safety and wellbeing education to build online literacy and counter hypersexualised harms. Endorsed as a trusted eSafety provider, we provide classroom curriculum, professional training, student presentations and resources for schools and families. We aim to prevent porn and other sexual harms, enhance children and young people's online, social and emotional relationships, and fortify children and youth within our hypersexualised culture.

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Youth Wellbeing Project welcomes the Australian Government's inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.
- 1.2 As a youth-serving social enterprise, our focus for this submission is the prevention of porn-related sexual violence through education and other interventions.
- 1.3 Youth Wellbeing Project provides expertise specific to the role of pornography in contributing to harms on children and young people. These harms include porn's role:
 - i. in shaping sexual scripts, thereby influencing child and youth attitudes and behaviours and as such, their social environment.
 - ii. as a "how to" manual for children engaging in sexually abusive behaviours toward other children.
 - iii. as an influencer for youth sexual violence towards peers and children.
 - iv. in influencing sexual harassment, gender-based norms and other harmful social norms.
 - v. as a model for technology-facilitated abuse such as image-based abuse.
 - vi. as a grooming tool for use by sexual offenders and a tool in and of itself that grooms children and normalises abuses.
 - vii. in motivating sexual offences such as rape, sexual harassment, strangulation and other ("consensual" and non-consensual) sex acts that cause emotional and physical harm.
- 1.4 Today's children are tomorrow's adults. To fully realise the scope of this issue, we also provide research, statistics and case studies relevant to adults. Additional focus includes pornography's role in influencing men to digress to the consumption of child sexual exploitation material and abuses against children.
- 1.5 We note that this submission mainly focuses on male violence towards children (often girls) and women. We wish to acknowledge the incidents of sexual violence against men (often facilitated by other men) and hope that other submissions have included this lens of family, domestic and sexual violence for the committee's consideration.
- 1.6 Appendix 1 offers the perspective of a community service worker experiencing the impacts of pornography with both victims and perpetrators of family violence. Appendix 2 provides the experience of a male in viewing violent porn and then quitting.
- 1.7 While the increasing prevalence of predatory behaviours and the production of child sexual exploitation is a complex issue (often addressed in isolation from other sexual abuses), it is essential to acknowledge porn's role in this child protection issue.
- 1.8 Additionally, it is our opinion that we MUST address pornography as a vehicle that delivers gendered drivers of violence against women. Failure to do so will continue to result in children and women being subject to male violence modelled after porn themes.
- 1.9 It is evident to Youth Wellbeing Project that existing attempts to address sexual violence fails to acknowledge and "join the dots" with the role of pornography; as such, this submission places a strong focus on the research.

2 Terms of Reference

2.1 The House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs [Terms of Reference](#) inform the submission by Youth Wellbeing Project. Our position will (generally and specifically) address the following Terms of Reference:

- i. Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality.
- ii. Best practice and lessons learnt from international experience, ranging from prevention to early intervention and response, that could be considered in an Australian context.
- iii. The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non government and community organisations, and business.
- iv. Not addressed.
- v. All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse.
- vi. The adequacy of the qualitative and quantitative evidence base around the prevalence of domestic and family violence and how to overcome limitations in the collection of nationally consistent and timely qualitative and quantitative data including, but not limited to, court, police, hospitalisation and housing.
- vii. The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour.
- viii. Not addressed.
- ix. The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services.
- x. The views and experiences of frontline services, advocacy groups and others throughout this unprecedented time.
- xi. Not addressed.
- xii. Any other related matters.

3 The Problem: the role of pornography in influencing sexual violence

- 3.1 Rates of sexual violence in Australia are increasing. In 2016, an ABS press release¹ indicated reports of sexual violence had reached a six-year high, with 21,380 victims recorded by police during 2015. During 2018-19, the ABS² reported an estimate of 78,300 experiencing sexual assault, *of which 28% had the most recent incident reported to the police*. This is an increase of 544 reported rapes, keeping in mind that approximately 70% of sexual assault incidents are NOT reported³.
- 3.2 With these figures in mind, it is essential to consider how porn has normalised sexual violence to such an extent that it may not be recognised. Anecdotally, therapeutic professionals indicate⁴ that young women are often unable to recognise that they have been victims of sexual violence due to the ways that porn themes are deemed “normal”. In essence, many become convinced that acts such as strangulation, slapping and bruising are a normal and expected part of sexual relationships, or that porn-type performances are an expectation, even when these acts cause physical or emotional pain and trauma. The after-effects of engaging in these abusive acts may not become evident to individuals until they are at a point where they are ready to address lingering trauma or “blockages” to sexual responsiveness in their relationships.
- 3.3 There is a vast body of evidence^{5 6 7} confirming that pornography—more particularly, violent pornography—perpetuates negative attitudes towards girls and women, contributes to relationship inequalities and reinforces a cultural environment accepting of violence.
- 3.4 It is also well-established that violence in pornography plays a role in motivating sexual violence. This submission includes a cross-section of journal articles that affirm pornography’s role in this fact. It is important to note that countless articles identify the links, spanning more than forty years; as such, it was challenging to narrow down to these listed.

NOTE: *study findings noted in italics indicate the exact wording of the researchers.*

¹ ABS. Reports of sexual assault reach six-year high. 13 July, 2016. Media Release. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyCatalogue/A6BBD67AEFCD2264CA257FEE00144319?OpenDocument>

² ABS. 4530.0 - Crime Victimization, Australia, 2018-19. 18 February, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/4530.0>

³ AIC. Guilty outcomes in reported sexual assault and related offence incidents. (2007). Crime facts info no. 162. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Retrieved from: <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/cfi/cfi162>

⁴ Sprout, S. I'm an anti-porn therapist ... here's why. Online Article, November 17, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.stacispout.com/new-blog/2019/11/17/im-an-anti-porn-therapist-heres-why>

⁵ DeKeseredy, W. S. (2020). Understanding the Harms of Pornography: The Contributions of Social Scientific Knowledge. Prepared for Culture Reframed. Retrieved from: https://www.culturereframed.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CR_Harms_of_Porn_Report_2020.pdf

⁶ Antevska, A., & Gavey, N. (2015). 'Out of sight and out of mind': Detachment and men's consumption of male sexual dominance and female submission in pornography. *Men and Masculinities*, 18(5), 605-629. DOI: [10.1177/1097184X15574339](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15574339)

⁷ Quadara, A., El-Murr, A., Latham, J. (2017). The effects of pornography on children and young people. Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). Retrieved from: <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people>

The role of pornography influencing adult perpetration of sexual violence

3.5 Is pornography consumption correlated with committing actual acts of sexual aggression? This question was the focus of a 2016 meta-analysis⁸ spanning 22 studies from 7 different countries. The study considered verbal and physical aggression. Findings indicate that multiple factors can contribute to the likelihood of sexual aggression, and not all porn consumers are sexually aggressive. However, *the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently.* The authors also noted the “contention” in this field of study, advising that it is essential for a “weight of the evidence” approach to be accepted rather than expecting “consensus among scholars”. Additional context to understand these contentions is in section 3.7 (iv).

3.6 While pornography is defined in various ways by each researcher, the committee must understand the nature of the content featured in mainstream porn. Researcher, Linette Etheredge⁹, found that the often-used benign definitions were not adequate to describe the violent content readily available in online spaces. Etheredge proposes this definition is more fitting to help people understand that which is typical:

Illegal, unclassified, “gonzo” or hard-core XXX, “free online material that depicts individuals or groups engaging in sexual behaviours where inequity between the parties is clear, violence is observed or audible, where degradation, humiliation, punishment and extreme submission appear to be the general objective of the power dynamics or behaviour depicted.

3.7 Rates of violence in porn vary, depending on the study, defining terms, and researcher motives.

- i. Commonly cited research by Bridges et al., 2010¹⁰, indicates that among popular videos, 88% of scenes include physical aggression; 48% of scenes include verbal aggression; 94% of cases – including gagging, choking and slapping – are directed at females; and 95% of aggression was met with a neutral or positive response.
- ii. More recently, 2020 research¹¹ analyses content on popular sites, Pornhub and Xvideos:
 - 45% of Pornhub scenes included at least one act of physical aggression, while 35% of scenes from Xvideos contained aggression.
 - Spanking, gagging, slapping, hair pulling, and choking were the five most common forms of physical aggression.
 - *Women were the target of the aggression in 97% of the scenes, and their response to aggression was either neutral or positive and rarely negative.*
 - *Men were the perpetrators of aggression against women in 76% of scenes.*

⁸ Wright, P. J., Tokunaga, R. S., & Kraus, A. (2016). A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies. *Journal of Communication*, 66(1), 183–205. DOI: [10.1111/jcom.12201](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12201)

⁹ Etheredge, L. Is pornography colonizing young people’s sexuality and normalising inequity? Conference paper, December 9, 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/12476200/Conference_Paper_Is_pornography_colonizing_young_people_s_sexuality_and_normalising_q_inequity

¹⁰ Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C., & Liberman, R. (2010). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: a content analysis update. *Violence Against Women*, 16(10):1065-85. DOI: [10.1177/1077801210382866](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210382866)

¹¹ Fritz, N., Malic, V., Paul, B., & Zhou, Y. (2020). A Descriptive Analysis of the Types, Targets, and Relative Frequency of Aggression in Mainstream Pornography. *Archives of Sex Behavior*. DOI: [10.1007/s10508-020-01773-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01773-0)

- iii. Other research indicates meagre rates of violence—for example, Australian researcher Alan McKee¹² (2005) found rates as low as 1.6%. This study measured a narrow definition of “violence” as *nonconsensual behaviors where the target attempts to avoid or get away from the perpetrator* (as critiqued by Fritz et al.). This measurement obfuscates the actual rates of violence in porn.
 - iv. It should be noted that McKee is listed as a Real Your Brain on Porn Expert¹³. This site features proponents who are allies of the porn industry and known for their intention to dismiss and aggressively prevent research related to porn’s harms from becoming accepted universally. The motives of this group are heavily critiqued¹⁴ by those who have been victims of their harassment, with two instances resulting in defamation lawsuits. Unfortunately, this industry-influenced group dominates commentary in the media. As such, their tactics cast doubt on the extensive literature that verifies the negative impacts of pornography on interpersonal factors such as brain health, sexual conditioning, safety, and relational and sexual satisfaction.
- 3.8 A US 2016 study¹⁵ of 487 college men (ages 18-29 years), compares rates of porn use with sexual preferences and concerns. *Results showed the more pornography a man watches, the more likely he was to use it during sex, request particular pornographic sex acts of his partner, deliberately conjure images of pornography during sex to maintain arousal, and have concerns over his own sexual performance and body image. Further, higher pornography use was negatively associated with enjoying sexually intimate behaviors with a partner.*
- 3.9 A 2018 study¹⁶ of 19-30-year-old's considered the Relationship Among Online Sexually Explicit Material Exposure to, Desire for, and Participation in Rough Sex, defined “rough sex” as hair pulling, spanking, scratching, biting, bondage, fisting, and double penetration. Researchers found that it is common for those who have been exposed to rough sex in pornography to both desire and engage in those acts.
- i. Of those surveyed, 91.4% who had been exposed to sexually explicit material desired to engage in one or more of these behaviours.
 - ii. 81.7% had engaged in one or more behaviours
 - iii. Almost half of the study participants (49.5%) engaged in four or more rough sex behaviours.
 - iv. The authors noted the importance of ensuring that *individuals can distinguish between consensual rough sex and sexual violence*.
 - v. Additionally, we emphasise the importance of understanding the development of sexual scripts and sexual “conditioning”, which may reduce an individual’s ability to ascertain what acts are sexually violent—detailed in sections 3.43 to 3.47.

¹² McKee, A. (2005). The objectification of women in mainstream pornographic videos in Australia. *Journal of Sex Research*, 42(4), 277–290. DOI: [10.1080/00224490509552283](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490509552283)

¹³ Real Your Brain on Porn website: <https://www.realyourbrainonporn.com/experts>

¹⁴ Real Your Brain on Porn Exposed website: <https://realyourbrainonporn.exposed/>

¹⁵ Sun, C., Bridges, A., Johnson, J. A., & Ezzell, M. B. (2016). Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 45(4), 983–994. DOI: [10.1007/s10508-014-0391-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0391-2)

¹⁶ Vogels, E. A., & O'Sullivan, L. F. (2018). The Relationship Among Online Sexually Explicit Material Exposure to, Desire for, and Participation in Rough Sex. *Archives of Sex Behavior*. DOI: [10.1007/s10508-018-1290-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1290-8)

- 3.10 Related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), a 2008 study¹⁷ that set out to explore the use of the sex industry (i.e. porn and strip clubs) and its role with intimate partner violence, surveyed 2,135 women in a domestic violence shelter. They discovered that *male domestic violence offenders who utilize the sex industry use more controlling behaviors than male domestic violence offenders who do not.*
- 3.11 A 2018 study¹⁸ explored the role of Problematic Pornography Use (PPU) in IPV among men in an intervention program. It found that *after accounting for psychiatric symptomatology and substance use and problems, results revealed a positive association between PPU and both physical and sexual IPV perpetration.*
- 3.12 It is crucial to consider the “type” of person who is likely to sexually offend due to the influence of pornography. In 2018, Malamuth¹⁹ conducted a review of the literature and identified that:
- i. Particularly for adult cohorts, pornography alone is unlikely to “cause” someone to aggress sexually; other risk factors are usually present. Risk factors can include antisociality (impulsivity, grandiosity, irritability), family violence, delinquency, attitudes accepting of violence and holding hostility towards women, impersonal sex, hostile masculinity, alcohol (or drug) use, and sexual victimisation as a child.
 - ii. For high-risk men, exposure to either adult or child exploitation material (CEM) can add “fuel to the fire” in terms of risk of sexually offending. Additionally, those who consume porn more frequently are likely to sexually-offend more often.
 - iii. Young people, however, may not be exempt given the role of pornography in sexual conditioning. Additionally, Malamuth admitted that he was not aware of research relating to arousal-conditioning for non-consenting porn and CEM. Conditioning is discussed further in sections 3.43 to 3.47.
- 3.13 Attitudes that support hostility towards women, violence and impersonal sex are often formed during childhood and adolescence, reinforced by peer environments and the acceptance of cultural norms. The ways that young women interpret this cultural environment is summarised by researchers Lamb et al.²⁰:
- The consequences of exposure to sexualized media remain the same for adolescents and adult women. Sexualized media and marketing contribute to girls’ self-sexualization, which contributes to others’ objectifying them, and is correlated with higher self-surveillance and body shame. Exposure—sometimes even brief exposure—is associated with and can lead to sexist and stereotyped attitudes about women, greater objectification of women, and harmful beliefs about consent. A girl clad in sexy clothing may be seen by other girls as less smart, competent and moral. Yet a girl will choose a “sexy” look over a non-sexy one to depict her “ideal self.” Exposure to sexualizing material continues to be related to feelings of shame, appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depressed mood. There is evidence that for some adolescents, exposure to sexualized media is associated with greater sexual activity, although those who are sexually active also seek out more sexualized media. There has also been*

¹⁷ Simmons, C. A., Lehmann, P., & Collier-Tenison, S. (2008). Linking male use of the sex industry to controlling behaviors in violent relationships: an exploratory analysis. *Violence against women*, 14(4), 406–417. DOI: [10.1177/1077801208315066](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801208315066)

¹⁸ Brem, M. J., Garner, A. R., Grigorian, H., Florimbio, A. R., Wolford-Clevenger, C., Shorey, R. C., & Stuart, G. L. (2018). Problematic Pornography Use and Physical and Sexual Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration Among Men in Batterer Intervention Programs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. DOI: [10.1177/0886260518812806](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518812806)

¹⁹ Malamuth, N. (2018). "Adding fuel to the fire"? Does exposure to non-consenting adult or to child pornography increase risk of sexual aggression? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 41, 74-89. DOI: [10.1016/j.avb.2018.02.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.02.013)

²⁰ Lamb, S., & Koven, J. (2019). The Sexualization of Girls: An Update. Prepared for Culture Reframed. Retrieved from: <https://www.culturereframed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CultureReframed-SexualizationOfGirlsReport-2019.pdf>

support for increased tolerance of sexual violence following objectifying media exposure. This exposure has led to increased blaming of rape victims and decreased empathy for them.

The role of pornography influencing children and adolescents to engage in harmful sexual behaviours

- 3.14 Research^{21 22} indicates that children and young people are responsible for between a quarter and a third of sexual abuses against other children.
- 3.15 UK figures²³ show that reports of sexual abuses by children under the age of ten doubled between 2013 and 2017. The same media article reports that peer-on-peer sexual abuse (determined as those under the age of 18) rose by 71% in a similar period.
- 3.16 2020 research by ANROWS²⁴ identified that more than 40% of practitioners cite exposure to pornography as a common risk factor for displaying harmful sexual behaviours.
- 3.17 ANROWS also confirm that sibling sexual abuse is the most common form of intrafamilial sexual abuse. We offer an additional comment that incest is common on porn sites, with videos regularly incorporating themes of “step” brother, sister, dad or mum (not to suggest causality but to highlight the ways that porn normalises these acts).
- 3.18 A practitioner who treats children with harmful sexual behaviours commented to the Australia Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse²⁵: *“I can’t think of anything that is going to impact us or what is actually happening for our young kids as much as the easy access of quite hardcore pornography.”*
- 3.19 It appears that further research is required, relevant to the influence of pornography on children under the age of ten. Limitations to researching this cohort include²⁶ the ethical complications of asking children explicit questions about porn and sex—randomised control studies that compare groups of children exposed versus those that are not are impossible. That said, however, knowing the developmental vulnerabilities of this age-group²⁷, and that many react with a shock or trauma response²⁸, it is understandable for some children to attempt to make sense of what they have seen by reenacting through child-on-child sexual abuse.

²¹ Hackett, S., Phillips, J., Masson, H., & Balfe, M. (2013). Individual, Family and Abuse Characteristics of 700 British Child and Adolescent Sexual Abusers. *Child Abuse Review*, 22(4), 232–245. DOI: [10.1002/car.2246](https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2246)

²² Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., & Chaffin, M. (2009). Juveniles who commit sex offenses against minors. Washington, DC: Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19719027>

²³ Press Association. Child-on-child sexual assaults soar, figures reveal. Online article, *The Guardian*, October 9, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/oct/09/child-on-child-sexual-assaults-soar-police-figures-reveal>

²⁴ Quadara, A., O'Brien, W., Ball, O., Douglas, W., & Vu, L. (2020). Good practice in delivering and evaluating interventions for young people with harmful sexual behaviours (Research report, 18/2020). Sydney: ANROWS. Retrieved from: <https://d2rn9qnc7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/30105821/PI.17.07-Quadara-RR-YPHSB-FINAL.pdf>

²⁵ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Final Report (2017). Volume 10, Children with harmful sexual behaviours, p. 66. Retrieved from: https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_10_children_with_harmful_sexual_behaviours.pdf

²⁶ Nash, V., Adler, J. R., Horvath, M. A. H., Livingstone, S., Marston, C., Owen, G., & Wright, J. (2015). Identifying the routes by which children view pornography online: implications for future policy-makers seeking to limit viewing. Department for Culture, Media and Sport, London, UK. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/65450/>

²⁷ Skau, B. (2007). "Who Has Seen What When? Pornography's Contribution to the Social Construction of Sexuality During Childhood and Adolescence". *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. Paper 1044. Retrieved from: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/1044/>

²⁸ BBFC. Children see pornography as young as seven, new report finds. Press Release, 26 September, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-bbfc/media-centre/children-see-pornography-young-seven-new-report-finds>

- 3.20 US-based Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Heidi Olsen reports²⁹: *We are seeing a rise of juvenile sex offenders, kids under the age of 15, who are committing the assaults, and we are seeing that pornography is playing a huge role in that, which makes sense—kids imitate what they see ... What we have seen from 2016-2017 data [onwards] is that our biggest age range [of those sexually abusing children] are 11-15-year-olds ... We don't have a lot of data on kids who have assaulted younger than 10-years-old, [however looking over our patient records], I have found some stories of 7-year-olds who have assaulted [other children] ... We are seeing a rise of [children abusing other children] who have NO risk factors except for exposure to pornography—that alone, is causing them to act out what they are seeing ... Pornography is influencing children to sexually act out, assault, and hurt their peers like we've never seen ... there is a direct correlation between these two things.*
- 3.21 Olsen's observations are consistent with the police reports³⁰, suggesting that youth presenting to police for sex offences *increase sharply at age 12 and plateau after age 14. Early adolescence is the peak age for offences against younger children. Offences against teenagers surge during mid to late adolescence, while offences against victims under age 12 decline.* This report also indicates that females make up 7% of those who are juvenile offenders. Additionally, 69 per cent of offences occur in the home (note: this 2009 US research and statistics may now differ).
- 3.22 A review of the literature³¹ from 2005 to 2012 on the impact of internet pornography on adolescents indicated agreement among scholars that young people can learn sexual behaviours from what they observe in sexual content. Concluding comments suggest that *consistent findings have emerged linking adolescent use of pornography that depicts violence with increased degrees of sexually aggressive behaviour.*
- 3.23 A widely-cited longitudinal study by Ybarra et al. (2010)³² found that over time, *intentional exposure to violent x-rated material predicted an almost 6-fold increase in the odds of self-reported sexually aggressive behaviour.*
- 3.24 A US 2016 study³³ of the porn viewing habits of 16-17-year-olds revealed that:
- i. 56% of respondents had tried a sexual act because they saw it in porn.
 - ii. 54% viewed porn intending to learn how to do something sexual.
 - iii. Approximately 50% of dating violence victims and 32% of non-victims said that they had been asked to do a sexual act which a partner had seen in pornography; 58% were not happy with this request.
- 3.25 A 2014 UK longitudinal study³⁴ of 130 men and women aged 16-18 from diverse social backgrounds found that painful, risky, coercive heterosexual anal sex had been normalised. Despite the awareness that anal sex may be something that young women were reluctant to

²⁹ Olsen, H. The Rise of Child Sexual Assault and Juvenile Sex Offenders: A Look at the Role of Pornography. NCOSE (Presentation, April, 2018). Available from URL: <https://vimeo.com/272416719>

³⁰ Cited in section 3.14.

³¹ Owens, E. W., Behun, R. J., Manning, J. C., & Reid, R. C. (2012). The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research, Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: *The Journal of Treatment & Prevention*, 19:1-2, 99-122, DOI: [10.1080/10720162.2012.660431](https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2012.660431)

³² Ybarra, M. L., Mitchell, K. J., Hamburger, M., Diener-West, M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). X-Rated Material and Perpetration of Sexually Aggressive Behavior Among Children and Adolescents: Is There a Link? *Aggressive Behavior*, 37, 1-18. DOI: [10.1002/ab.20367](https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20367)

³³ Rothman, E.F., & Adhia, A. (2016). Adolescent Pornography Use and Dating Violence among a Sample of Primarily Black and Hispanic, Urban-Residing, Underage Youth. *Behavioral Sciences*, 6, 1. DOI: [10.3390/bs6010001](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs6010001)

³⁴ Marston, C., & Lewis, R. (2014). Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study. *BMJ Open*, 4(8). DOI: [10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004996](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004996)

engage in due to it being unpleasurable or painful, key themes emerged to support this troubling narrative: *competition between men; the claim that 'people must like it if they do it' (alongside the seemingly contradictory expectation that it will be painful for women); and—crucially—normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration.*

- 3.26 A 2018 study³⁵ on sexual violence perpetration collected six waves of data from 2006-2012 among youth aged 10-21. The sexual violence behaviours examined were sexual harassment, sexual assault, coercive sex, attempted rape, and rape. The average age of the first instance of sexual violence was between 15 and 16 years, with the most influential characteristics found to be prior exposure to parental abuse and current exposure to violent pornography.
- 3.27 In 2019, researchers³⁶ questioned 1694 students in grade 10 who had been in a relationship within the past 12 months about teen dating violence. After adjusting for demographics, substance use, history of suspension/expulsion, gender-equitable attitudes, and tolerance of rape myths, they found that exposure to violent porn was associated with all types of teen dating violence. Boys were 2–3 times more likely to report instigating sexual violence and victimization after violent porn exposure. Girls exposed were over 1.5 times more likely to instigate physical and threatening teen dating violence compared to those non-exposed.
- 3.28 A Swedish study³⁷ of 946 mixed-gender 18-year-olds found that violent and extreme porn was viewed more often by frequent users, and correspondingly, they were more likely to try sexual acts they had seen in porn. Frequent users also found themselves thinking about sex most of the time and fantasising several times a week about trying what they had viewed. The authors propose that watching hardcore porn reinforces problematic fantasies and potentially increases the likelihood of manifesting sexual aggression. One-third of frequent users admitted that they watch porn more than they would like to.
- 3.29 In knowing the risk factors of children and young people “most likely” to engage in sexually abusive behaviours due to the influence of porn, it is essential that we do not become complacent and presume that only those with “typical profiles” are at risk. A case in point is the 2018 torturous murder of 14-year-old Ana Kriégel in Ireland by two 13-year-old teen boys. Nothing in either boys’ psychiatric assessment suggested that they were capable of committing such a heinous crime. There was no evidence of a mental or developmental disorder, patterns of high-risk behaviour, antisocial behaviour, difficulty with impulsivity, memory deficit, panic-attack disorder or psychotic or depressive disorder. Both boys were from loving and stable families. The investigative journalist interpretation said that “*Although it was not mentioned in sentencing, perhaps the only thing that was out of the ordinary was the extent of his appetite for extreme and violent pornography.*”

³⁵ Ybarra, M. L., & Thompson, R. E. (2018). Predicting the Emergence of Sexual Violence in Adolescence. *Prevention science : the official journal of the Society for Prevention Research*, 19(4), 403–415. DOI: [10.1007/s11121-017-0810-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-017-0810-4)

³⁶ Rostad, W.L., Gittins-Stone, D., Huntington, C., Rizzo, C. J., Pearlman, D., & Orchowski, L. (2019). The Association Between Exposure to Violent Pornography and Teen Dating Violence in Grade 10 High School Students. *Archives of Sex Behavior*, 48, 2137–2147. DOI: [10.1007/s10508-019-1435-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-1435-4)

³⁷ Donevan, M., & Mattebo, M. (2017). The relationship between frequent pornography consumption, behaviours, and sexual preoccupation among male adolescents in Sweden. *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare*, 12, 82-87. DOI: [10.1016/j.srhc.2017.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2017.03.002)

The role of pornography influencing adults to digress to child sexual exploitation material and abuses against children

- 3.30 A 2013 researcher³⁸ who authored a paper on Internet pornography and paedophilia, proposes: *clinical experience and now research evidence are accumulating to suggest that the Internet is not simply drawing attention to those with existing paedophilic interests, but is contributing to the crystallisation of those interests in people with no explicit prior sexual interest in children.*
- 3.31 A 2015 study³⁹ of 18-year-old Swedish males found that users who frequently watched porn viewed all forms of porn more often. **One-third of frequent users** viewed *more deviant forms of pornography such as violent pornography, animal pornography and child pornography*. 3.1% of frequent users reported viewing child sexual exploitation material, and 10.2% viewed sex with animals.
- i. A frequent user is defined as someone who is watching porn, more or less daily.
 - ii. Frequent users held significantly more positive or liberal attitudes towards porn and believed that this content should be easily accessible, it is entertaining, and a positive stimulus for people's sex lives.
 - iii. *Almost 70% of the frequent users reported that pornography made them want to try what they had seen.* 52% of frequent users had tried something they had seen.
 - iv. Frequent user traits may include earlier sexual debut; buying or selling sex; perpetrate (coercive) penetrative sexual abuse, and have heightened sexual desire. They were also more likely to have conduct problems (stealing and truancy) and significantly less parental care.
- 3.32 In terms of what this could mean for the numbers of Australian adult males digressing to more deviant forms of pornography such as child sexual exploitation material, we must consider the findings of Lim et al. (2017)⁴⁰. This study of over 800 Victorians aged 15 to 29 years found that eighty-four per cent of young men watched porn on a weekly or daily basis. If we apply the above findings of one-third digressing to extreme content, significant numbers of men are regularly accessing more deviant forms of porn, including child sexual exploitation material.
- 3.33 "Teen" is one of the most popular categories on Pornhub, the most frequently visited porn site in the world. Every year, Pornhub reports which genres are most viewed. In 2019, they claimed⁴¹ that "Japanese" was the most viewed category and "teen" was the 12th most searched. However, a review of this site by our team regarding the most popular videos reveals that "teen" features prominently and has 269,540 videos in this category (compared to Japanese, which has 52,754 videos). Young women in the teen category are often portrayed as younger teens - hair in pigtails, flat chested, long socks pulled up and underwear typically designed for tweens or very young teens. This information is essential to understand given the following two sections, 3.34 and 3.35.

³⁸ Wood, H. (2013). Internet pornography and paedophilia, *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, 27:4, 319-338, DOI: [10.1080/02668734.2013.847851](https://doi.org/10.1080/02668734.2013.847851)

³⁹ Svedin, C., Åkerman, I., & Priebe, G. (2011). Frequent users of pornography. A population based epidemiological study of Swedish male adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 34(4), 779–788. DOI: [10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.04.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.04.010)

⁴⁰ Lim, M., Agius, P. A., Carrotte, E. R., Vella, A. M., & Hellard, M. E. (2017). Young Australians' use of pornography and associations with sexual risk behaviours. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 41(4), 438–443. DOI: [10.1111/1753-6405.12678](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12678)

⁴¹ Pornhub Insights. Pornhub's 2019 Year in Review. Online article, December 11, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>

- 3.34 It is debatable whether those depicted in the “teen” category are of legal age. In a backflip ruling⁴² after the Free Speech coalition invested more than \$1 million from 2005 to fight measures to protect children, U.S. Code Title 18 Section 2257 was overturned. This law *required porn producers to keep stringent records on the ages of performers and allowed federal agents to inspect them at any time*. Now, with no legislation in place to verify the age of performers, and sites such as Pornhub failing⁴³ to implement measures to verify the age and consent of those in the videos, increasingly, child sexual exploitation material is normalised and readily accessible on this site.
- 3.35 This fact is concerning, given a 2019 study⁴⁴ on viewing child sexual exploitation material found that the most prevalent pattern of consumers was a *progressive decrease in the age of the person depicted, and a progressive increase in the severity of the sexual acts*. The authors indicate that existing literature confirms their finding: *habituation to pornographic content leads to boredom, which in turn impels the pornography consumer to seek out new content that is more severe*. This line of thinking relies on the science of sexual conditioning - to maintain sexual arousal interest, the stimulus to which one masturbates to must shift to more extreme or novel content—detailed further in sections 3.43 to 3.47.
- 3.36 Dr Gail Dines offers a clear warning about the role of pornography in normalising offender behaviour in her book: *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*⁴⁵. Dines offers the following analysis:

- i. *In this hypersexualized culture, we are socializing girls into seeing themselves as legitimate sex objects who are deserving of sexual use (and abuse). The person who best explained this to me was not an expert in women's studies but an incarcerated child rapist. During an interview in a Connecticut prison, John told me how he carefully and strategically groomed his ten-year-old stepdaughter into "consenting" to have sex with him, and then causally mentioned that his job was made easy because "the culture did a lot of the grooming for me."*

As John has been through many years of therapy in prison, he had the lingo down pat, and in his eagerness to show off his knowledge to me, he used the word "groom" many times. This is a term psychologists use to describe the way perpetrators socialize, seduce, and manipulate their victims into accepting and often "agreeing" to sexual abuse. John explained how, in his "conscious desire to desensitize her," he used the questions she would ask (What is a blow job? What does a penis taste like?) as an entree to introducing her first to adult porn and then to child porn. John was very clear that the sexualized pop culture images his stepdaughter had been exposed to from an early age, as well as the sexualized conversations that such images generated in her peer group, had developed a precocious sexual curiosity that "made grooming her easy."

⁴² Dines, G. & Levy, D. Child pornography may make a comeback after court ruling guts regulations protecting minors. Online article, The Conversation, August 23, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/child-pornography-may-make-a-comeback-after-court-ruling-guts-regulations-protecting-minors-101763>

⁴³ Traffickinghub. Retrieved from: <https://traffickinghub.com/>

⁴⁴ Fortin, F., & Proulx, J. (2019). Sexual Interests of Child Sexual Exploitation Material (CSEM) Consumers: Four Patterns of Severity Over Time. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(1), 55–76. DOI: [10.1177/0306624X18794135](https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X18794135)

⁴⁵ Dines, G. *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Kindle Locations 1785-1793). 2010. Kindle Edition.

- ii. This warning is one that we must heed. Children, due to ease of access to online porn and the ways that porn culture desensitises them to sexual themes puts them at significant risk of being victims of grooming and sexual abuses by adults, teens and other children. These risks are more prevalent when preventative measures are absent, such as parental controls, protective behaviours education and sexuality education underpinned by a Critical Porn Analysis (see section 4.4).

The role of pornography influencing technology-facilitated abuse

- 3.37 Image-based abuse includes but is not limited to: non-consensual pornography, cyber harassment and stalking, unsolicited pornography, sexual extortion and electronically enabled trafficking.
- 3.38 Terminology is essential in the context of image-based abuse as it allows the appropriate legal and policy redress. 'Technology facilitated coercive control (TFCC)⁴⁶ accurately outlines the nature of image-based abuse, which is incorrectly colloquialised as "revenge porn". It emphasises the role of technology in cyber-sexual abuse while simultaneously giving that abuse a more appropriate label. "Revenge porn" implies a reciprocal response by the abuser as a result of harm inflicted upon themselves. This behaviour should be understood as coercive control rather than mere revenge and is inextricable from the broader context of gendered violence.
- 3.39 The influence of pornography in image-based abuse is founded in its normalisation. Gendered roles inform the scripts of pornography, and its oversaturation in media and advertising create parallels in real-life relationships. With the development of technology, there is a blurred delineation between private and public displays of sexual acts. A European study⁴⁷ provides a qualitative finding in adolescents, of the link between viewing porn and sending and receiving explicit photos:
- i. School-based surveys and individual interviews were held in five different countries (Bulgaria, England, Cyprus, Italy and Norway), including a single-sex boys school. Questions were asked according to a 4-point, Likert-type scale on the consumption of pornography and exchange of sexually explicit content.
 - ii. Regular consumption of pornography was reported between 19%-30% of all participants. Additionally, between 6%-44% of young women, and 15-32% of young men had sent sexually explicit images. Although the statistical findings provide some understanding, the impact of the study is in the results of the interviews.
 - iii. Upon the question of why they had or would send sexually explicit images, the participant quotes include '*sexual frustration...or they're bored of watching porn*'. When females gave their view on the exchange of sexually explicit images, one stated: '*to punish someone or get even in some inappropriate way - for example, a guy can try to punish a girl for breaking up with him by sharing her naked photos*'.
 - iv. NB: this study was only aimed at identifying causal impacts of watching pornography amongst adolescents.

⁴⁶ Dragiewicz, M., Burgess, J., Matamoros-Fernandez, A., Salter, M., Suzor, N., Woodlock, D., & Harris, B. (2018). Technology facilitated coercive control: domestic violence and the competing roles of digital media platforms. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 609-625. DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2018.1447341](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447341)

⁴⁷ Stanley, N., Barter, C., Wood, M., Agathie, N., Larkins, C. (2018). Pornography, Sexual Coercion and Abuse and Sexting in Young People's Intimate Relationships: A European Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(19), 2920. DOI: [10.1177/0886260516633204](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516633204)

3.40 In Australia, a 2017 survey of 4,122 Australians⁴⁸ found that one in ten participants experienced non-consensual distribution of their sexually explicit or intimate images. Additionally, the findings reported that:

- i. *Women are twice as likely to have their nude/sexual images shared without consent than men;*
- ii. *Women are more likely to experience image-based abuse at the hands of a former intimate partner than men;*
- iii. *Women are considerably more likely to report negative personal impacts as a result of image-based abuse;*
- iv. *Experiences of stalking or threatening behaviour are higher amongst women than men, especially amongst young women aged 18-34.*

3.41 Accessibility and reach of communication are inescapable within our current digital era, and this provides a perfectly imperfect platform for image-based abuse. Perpetrators are now able to stalk, threaten and harass victims without the need for physical proximity. Research has shown that the harms of image-based abuse can impact a victim's sexual autonomy, physical and mental health which are markedly similar to other experiences of sexual violence⁴⁹.

3.42 Although the non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit content is criminalised in most states and territories⁵⁰, there is a greater need to identify and address the causal effect that starts with pornography.

The role of pornography with the development of sexual scripts and conditioning

3.43 Leonhardt et al.⁵¹ (2019) propose that:

- i. The stories or "scripts" told by porn are more likely to be applied when they are:
 - exclusive (a predominant exposure shaping sexual scripts in the comparative absence of countervailing scripting sources);
 - formative (early age of exposure or the first source of information);
 - resonant (are congruent with real-life experience); and/or are
 - reinforced (the viewer receives positive reinforcement from enacting the script).
- ii. **Exclusivity:** this research suggests that a child's family, peers, romantic partners and media are the main factors that form the basis for them to understand and develop their sexuality.
- iii. **Formativeness:** the researchers discuss the literature relating to the "first source" of information about sexuality, confirming that the "imprinting" process of a sexual script is more profound for younger children. As such, early information provided in a positive way can be a strong protective factor against the messages portrayed in pornography.

⁴⁸ Office of the eSafety Commissioner. Image Based Abuse National Survey: Summary Report. (October 2017). Australian Government. Retrieved from: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/Image-based-abuse-national-survey-summary-report-2017.pdf>

⁴⁹ McGlynn, C., Rackley, E., & Houghton, R. (2017). Beyond 'Revenge Porn': The continuum of image-based sexual abuse. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 25, 25-46. DOI: [10.1007/s10691-017-9343-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-017-9343-2)

⁵⁰ Currently only in NSW, ACT, QLD, WA, VIC, NT.

⁵¹ Leonhardt, N. D., Spencer, T. J., Butler, M. H., & Theobald, A. C. (2019). An Organizational Framework for Sexual Media's Influence on Short-Term Versus Long-Term Sexual Quality. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 48(8), 2233–2249. DOI: [10.1007/s10508-018-1209-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1209-4)

- They also note that the triple-A engine of pornography first detailed by the late sex researcher Alvin Cooper, PhD—affordability, availability and anonymity—means that pornography increasingly serves as a formative sexual script—due to both pervasiveness and early access.

- iv. **Resonance:** when pornography messages are confirmed in cultural surroundings and interpersonal relationships, its impacts may be amplified. For instance, when peers normalise the consumption of porn, or when partners are accepting of porn-influenced behaviours. Conversely, when porn scripts contradict other influences in a young person's life (family, peers and romantic partners), sexual media scripts are more likely to be rejected.
- v. **Reinforcement:** when porn's messages are rewarded—for instance, through the pleasure response of masturbation or when porn is mutually used within a partnered relationship—they are more likely to be accepted.
- vi. It's important to note a summary comment by the authors of this framework: *those who begin using sexual media at a later age and have alternative sources to inform them about sexuality, may have sexual media's script so attenuated that an empirical effect is difficult to detect.*

3.44 Given the profound impacts of pornography on the developmental years, it is essential to note that in Australia, statistics indicate⁵² that 69% of boys and 23% of girls have seen porn in their formative years - by age 13 or younger.

3.45 A new Spanish study⁵³ (August 2020) found that one of the most significant risk factors for sex offending during adolescence is sexual development and behaviour in childhood. The researchers explain that "inadequate sexualisation" pertains to the presence of the following variables:

- Sexual victimization during childhood
 - Early consensual sexual intercourse with a similar-age partner (before age 13)
 - Exposure to inappropriate sexual behaviour within the family environment during childhood
 - Beginning of pornography consumption at an early age (before age 12)
 - First sexual intercourse through the use of prostitution at an early age, and
 - The presence of deviant sexual fantasies (if fantasies implied violence or children more than 4-years younger)
- ii. The study involved 73 male sex offenders between the ages of 14-18. They found that *seventy per cent began pornography consumption before 12 years old, 26% lived in a sexualized family environment, the age of their first consensual sexual intercourse was lower than in the general population—usually before 13 years old, and 21% had deviant sexual fantasies.*
 - iii. NOTE: *this study does not address causal determinations for sex offending, but findings are consistent with the key risk factors of juvenile sexual offending.*

⁵² Cited in section 3.32.

⁵³ Siria, S., Echeburúa, E., & Amor, P. J. (2020). Characteristics and risk factors in juvenile sexual offenders. *Psicothema*, 32(3), 314–321. DOI: [10.7334/psicothema2019.349](https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2019.349)

- 3.46 Relating to adult studies on conditioning, Your Brain on Porn⁵⁴ collates peer-reviewed journal articles and self-reports of compulsive porn users. This site describes the escalation of porn use that takes the form of more time spent viewing, or seeking new genres of porn. These commentaries are worth reading for a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomena. <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/>
- 3.47 One such account detailed on Your Brain on Porn⁵⁵ describes a large (n = 6463) study of young people – Prevalence, Patterns and Self-Perceived Effects of Pornography Consumption in Polish University Students: A Cross-Sectional Study (2019)⁵⁶. They reported tolerance/habituation, escalation of use, needing more extreme genres to be sexually aroused, withdrawal symptoms when quitting, porn-induced sexual problems, porn addiction, and more. A few excerpts relating to tolerance/habituation/escalation:
- i. The most common self-perceived adverse effects of pornography use included: the need for longer stimulation (12.0%) and more sexual stimuli (17.6%) to reach orgasm, and a decrease in sexual satisfaction (24.5%).
 - ii. The present study also suggests that earlier exposure may be associated with potential desensitization to sexual stimuli as indicated by a need for longer stimulation and more sexual stimuli required to reach orgasm when consuming explicit material, and an overall decrease in sexual satisfaction.
 - iii. Various changes of the pattern of pornography use occurring in the course of the exposure period were reported: switching to a novel genre of explicit material (46.0%), use of materials that do not match sexual orientation (60.9%) and need to use more extreme (violent) material (32.0%). The latter was more frequently reported by females considering themselves as curious compared to those regarding themselves as uninquisitive.
 - iv. The present study found that a need to use more extreme pornography material was more frequently reported by males describing themselves as aggressive.

Sexual Violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

- 3.48 The Australian Institute of Criminology⁵⁷ reports that *two-thirds of women who experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former cohabiting partner since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic said the violence had started or escalated in the three months prior to the survey.*
- 3.49 We recognise that these higher rates of men's violence against women are influenced by many complex factors, including job loss, financial strain and more time spent together in confined spaces. That said, it is also worth mentioning that on March 24, Pornhub widely promoted⁵⁸ the

⁵⁴ Your Brain on Porn. (n.d.). Studies reporting findings consistent with escalation of porn use (tolerance), habituation to porn, and withdrawal symptoms. Retrieved from: <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/relevant-research-and-articles-about-the-studies/porn-use-sex-addiction-studies/studies-find-escalation-and-habituation-in-porn-users-tolerance/>

⁵⁵ Your Brain on Porn. (n.d.). Is my fetish porn-induced? Retrieved from: <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/rebooting-porn-use-faqs/is-my-fetish-porn-induced/>

⁵⁶ Dwulit, A. D., & Rzymiski, P. (2019). Prevalence, Patterns and Self-Perceived Effects of Pornography Consumption in Polish University Students: A Cross-Sectional Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(10), 1861; DOI: [10.3390/ijerph16101861](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16101861)

⁵⁷ Boxall, H., Morgan, A., & Brown, R. (2020). The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Retrieved from: <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb28>

⁵⁸ Mashable. Pornhub Premium is now free for everyone to encourage you to stay at home. Online article, March 25, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://mashable.com/article/free-pornhub-premium-coronavirus-social-distancing/>

availability of free premium content, and there was an increase in viewership during these months. This targeted marketing campaign which generated further normalisation and increased accessibility of porn (which is most often, hardcore), may have potentially translated to an increase in violence against women during this time.

- 3.50 **Ongoing work in this space:** *Monash Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) Centre, Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Centre for Global and Women's Health and the XYX Lab have come together to explore the issues of the 'Shadow Pandemic,' practitioner wellbeing and support, and gender equality and safety during COVID-19. Bringing together cross-disciplinary expertise, the collection will examine the gendered impact of the pandemic from all angles, addressing policy challenges, and providing gender-sensitive analysis on peace and security, humanitarian settings and women's rights, gender-based violence, the economy, caring and social reproduction responsibilities, and health and wellbeing*⁵⁹.
- 3.51 During the period of COVID-19, children and young people have spent more time at home and potentially on their devices for longer; as such, the risks have increased. The Australian [eSafety Commissioner](#), New Zealand [Netsafe](#), Canada [Cybertip](#), UK [Barnado's](#), and the U.S. [FBI](#), have all issued urgent warnings to parents about the likely rise in victims of online child sexual exploitation. During this time, the AFP and the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) have intensified our outreach, prevention and deterrence initiatives⁶⁰.

4 Generational prevention: interventions for current and potential sex offenders

- 4.1 Youth Wellbeing Project provides education as opposed to rehabilitation services. We help "join the dots" with how porn harms, and the ways it impacts the attitudes and behaviours that schools and community services may address. To date, many people-helpers have not readily identified porn as a significant contributing factor to sexual violence. As such, in sections 4 and 5, we propose solutions that could be adopted by experts already working in the field.
- 4.2 These recommendations include prevention efforts directed at children and young people and also extend to incorporate responses directed at adult cohorts negatively impacted by porn-related sexual violence. In many instances, this is not about "reinventing the wheel". Instead, when implementing education and intervention responses, a "critical porn analysis lens" should be applied to existing practices.

A public health framework as a vehicle for change

- 4.3 According to Perrin et al.⁶¹ (2008), *social issues are detectable when responsibility is shifted from individuals being able to adequately make changes themselves, toward holding external social causes or influences accountable*. The information presented in these submissions is not new. Perrin et al. framed porn as a public health issue in 2008 and claimed this framing had been present for 20 years. At that time, he noted the polarising views (see section 3.5 and 3.7(iv)) of pornography as an individual right versus pornography as a social issue.

⁵⁹ True, J., & Fitz-Gibbon, K. The 'Shadow Pandemic' of COVID-19. Online article, n.d. Retrieved from: <https://www.monash.edu/research/better-governance-and-policy/policy-insights/gendered-impacts-of-covid-19/news/the-gendered-impacts-of-covid-19>

⁶⁰ Newsletter - May 2020. ACCCE quarterly. Retrieved from: <https://www.accce.gov.au/news-and-media/newsletters/newsletter-may-2020>

⁶¹ Perrin, P.C., Madanat, H.N., Barnes, M.D., Carolan A., Clark, R.B., Ivins, N., Tuttle, S.R., Vogeler, H.A., & Williams, P.N. (2008). Health education's role in framing pornography as a public health issue: local and national strategies with international implications. *Journal of Promotion & Education*, XV, No. 1.;15(1):11-8. DOI: [10.1177/1025382307088093](https://doi.org/10.1177/1025382307088093)

In the journal article, Health education's role in framing pornography as a public health issue: local and national strategies with international implications, Perrin et al. affirm that *pornography has potential adverse effects on more than just the user*. They outline porn's adverse effects as impacting three groups: the user, women, and children.

- i. **User:** *sexual addiction, sexually acting out, deviant sexual behaviour, and predisposes or intensifies the predisposition to rape women.*
- ii. **Women:** *higher likelihood to be described in sexualized terms, forced to participate in violent sexual acts such as rape, more likely to be categorized in traditional gender roles, more likely to experience sex without emotional involvement, and broken marriages.*
- iii. **Children:** *become objects of sexual interest, victims of sexual maltreatment and fantasies, and accessibility increases the use of pornography as a source of sex education, which creates future unrealistic and harmful attitudes toward sex and relationships.*

Since these findings, the evidence has accumulated to understand these harms further, and the primary model for porn dissemination switched to “free” tube sites. Additionally, the gross negligence by the industry to put any barriers in place has resulted in disproportionate harm to minors who have ready access via hand-held devices.

In order to effectively remedy the fallout of porn harms—(which extend beyond the content of these submissions to include an extensive body of literature on addiction, brain changes and sexual dysfunctions)—external causes and influences must be held accountable—discussed further in section 3.5.

- 4.4 eChildhood⁶² is an Australian charity with the mission to connect the community to protect, support and equip children, and young people, to be free from pornography harms, through the promotion of Digital Child Protection Buffers and mobilising a Public Health Response (note: the lead author of these submissions, Liz Walker, was a co-founder and key contributor to these works). eChildhood leverages a public health approach and recommends prioritising primary, secondary and tertiary education strategies for pornography harms prevention. Primary prevention to address the whole population would occur through widespread marketing efforts *that highlight the harms to children and young people; the links between pornography and attitudes and behaviours that support violence against women; and the impacts on mental health, wellbeing and relationships*. From a child-focussed lens, eChildhood recommends that secondary prevention to support specific sub-groups with risk factors should occur among the following groups: *parents and carers, industry & decision-makers, people who serve children and youth, educators, and children and young people themselves*. Additionally, tertiary efforts are required to support those harmed by porn through therapeutic services.

Policy to steer youth and child-focussed organisations

- 4.5 Every organisation that has direct contact with children and young people is obligated (in most instances by statute) to address pornography as a matter of child protection due to the potential harms. For many organisations, however, this does not happen. Additionally, an updated policy is an avenue to enact effective responses to porn's role in sexual violence within all people-helping sectors, e.g. community and child-safety services, the educational sector (including universities), legal and justice services, health and allied health services (including sexual health clinics), and digital service providers. We strongly recommend that as a starting

⁶² Walker, L., & Newlands, T. Kids and Pornography in Australia: Mobilising a Public Health Response. Report, November 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.echildhood.org/report_2019

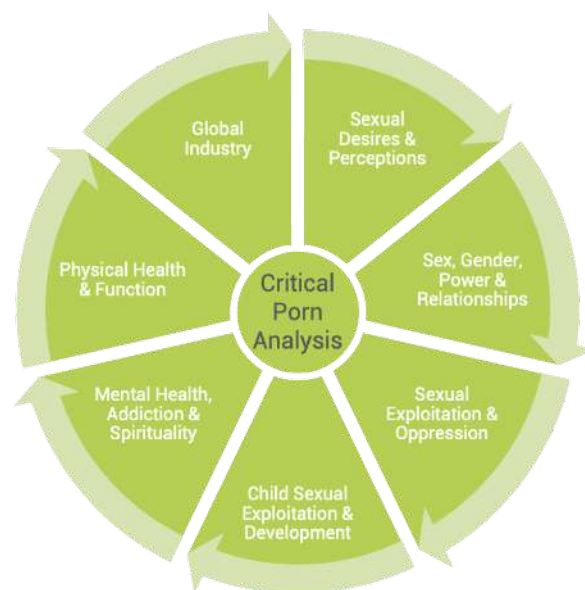
point, policies in all people-helping sectors be updated to respond to porn harms. It is often the case that when policies are changed, education and processes for staff and clients follow suit.

Prevention education solutions for children and youth

- 4.6 Protective Behaviours Education from early childhood is essential. In some cases, this already occurs. As such, we make a recommendation to include a pornography lens into this work, helping children respond protectively (looking away, telling someone, and being aware of how porn can impact the brain, attitudes and behaviours). Protective Behaviours Education⁶³ encourages self-empowerment, empathy, connection and responsibility for the rights of others, and responsibility for an individual's right to feel safe all the time. Protective Behaviours develops awareness and connection to others, teaches skills and strategies to avoid victimisation, and promotes healthy relationships that do not victimise. Protective Behaviours personal safety education includes recognising when someone is feeling unsafe (early warning signs), body boundaries, consent and the creation of safety networks.
- 4.7 Porn is now a significant sex educator. As such, relationships and sexuality education must adjust to provide a critical lens to counter its impacts. We suggest that it is not just a matter of “taking on” a focus on porn, but rather, delivering sex education with an increased awareness of how porn alters the way that young people understand many aspects of sexual relationships. Some forms of porn education or “porn literacy” seek to normalise porn consumption⁶⁴, and dismiss the weight of the body of evidence related to harms (as detailed in section 3.7 (d)). As an alternative, Critical Porn Analysis (displayed below as Figure 1) provides a more suitable critique to ensure that safety, mental and relational wellbeing are at the fore of porn education outcomes.

Critical Porn Analysis⁶⁵ is an educational framework that responds to the researched harms of porn as a public health crisis. Critical Porn Analysis moves beyond the micro focus of how individuals interact with porn, to comprehensively consider its effect on the health and wellbeing of individuals, relationships, families, communities and cultures.

Critical Porn Analysis provides critique through seven interconnected lenses: sexual desires and perceptions; sex, gender, power and relationships; sexual exploitation and oppression; child sexual exploitation and development; mental health, addiction and spirituality; physical health and function, and global industry. Critical Porn Analysis provides educators, decision-makers, and community with a greater understanding of the scope of impacts, and frames the discussion to respond to pornography as the public health crisis of the digital age.



⁶³ Association of Professional Protective Behaviours Practitioners <http://www.appbp.com.au/>

⁶⁴ Dawson, K., Gabhainn, S. N., & MacNeela, P. (2020). Toward a Model of Porn Literacy: Core Concepts, Rationales, and Approaches, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 57:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/00224499.2018.1556238](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1556238)

⁶⁵ Walker, L. (2016). Critical Porn Analysis: beyond porn literacy. Online article, retrieved from: <https://www.youthwellbeingproject.com.au/critical-analysis/>

Critical Porn Analysis provides a reflective opportunity to consider how personal porn consumption—facilitated and promoted by the porn industry—contributes to public health outcomes for society.

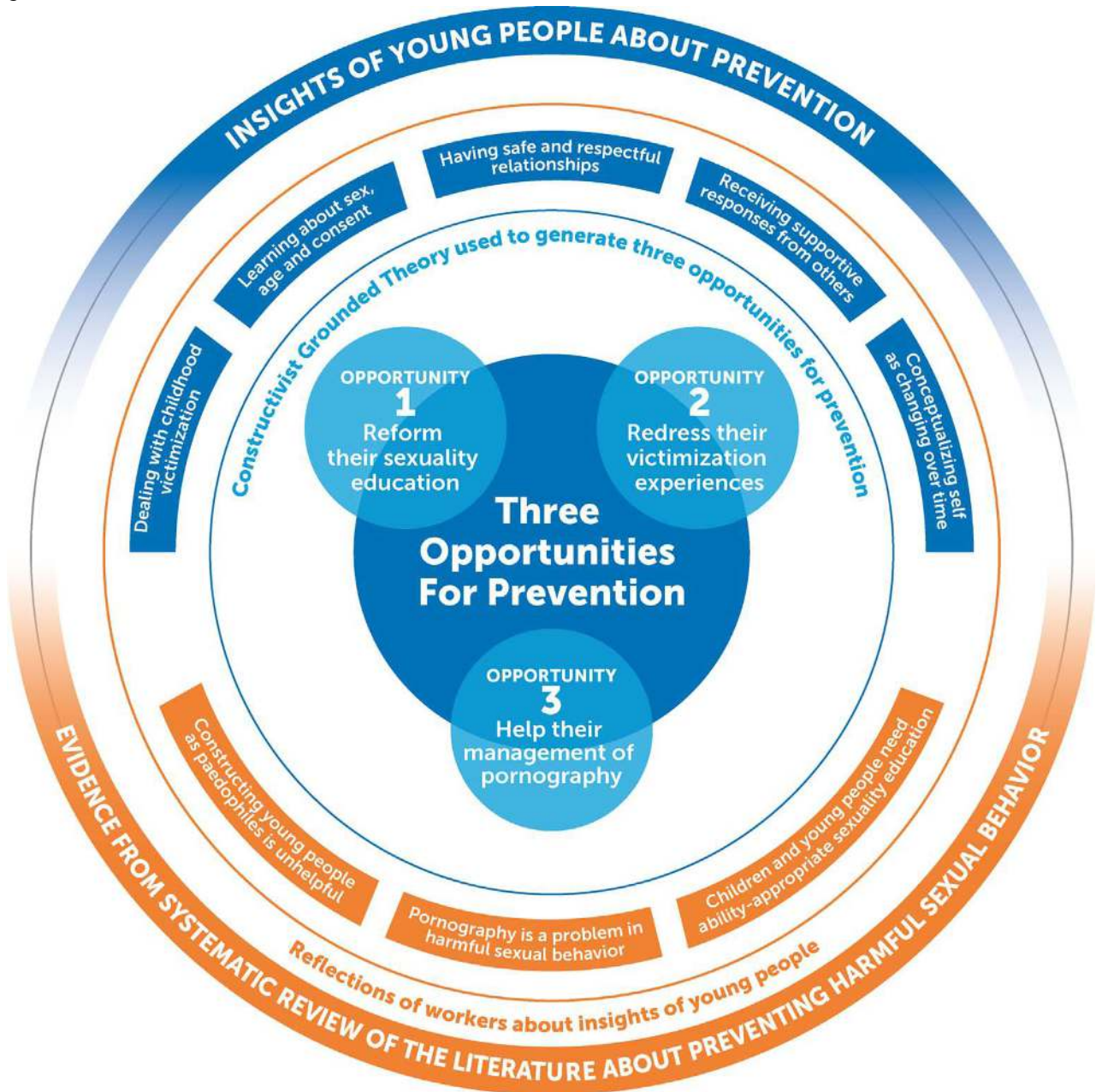
- 4.8 The researchers who explored teen dating violence previously mentioned in section 3.27, recommended that prevention efforts by schools and communities should:
- i. be framed with the knowledge of how the viewing of violent porn can impact dating relationships and influence sexual violence.
 - ii. provide education on healthy sexual behaviour and skills for healthy relationships.
 - iii. incorporate influential adults and peers to promote social norms conducive to safe and healthy relationships.
 - iv. support parents to discuss critical thinking skills with their children related to interpersonal behaviour and the unhealthy scripts of porn.
- 4.9 A two-wave survey⁶⁶ that explored rape-attitudes of fourteen-year-olds prior to and after sexuality education found that as knowledge on sexuality increases, attitudes supportive of rape decreases. The authors propose that prevention programs that teach *a broader sexual knowledge construct could enhance adolescents' empathy toward hypothetical sexual partners and thereby decrease their propensity for forced sex.*
- 4.10 The authors of a previously mentioned study in section 3.26, specifically note that malleable factors among youth need to be targeted—in particular, scripts modelled *by abusive parents in youths' homes and also reinforced by violent pornography.* They propose that well prior to the age of 15 years, universal and holistic prevention education should target aggressive behaviours and violent scripts in interpersonal relationships.
- 4.11 Recommendations in sections 4.6 to 4.10 are supported with the findings of Australian researcher, Gemma McKibbin⁶⁷. When interviewing young people who sexually abuse (and their workers) and asking them to reflect on preventing harmful sexual behaviour, McKibbin proposes three opportunities, displayed as Figure 2.
- i. Reform their sexuality education. These young people want sexuality education delivered earlier (before puberty onset), and to include messages about sexually abusive behaviours. *Most of the young people indicated that improving the quality and delivery of sexuality education in both mainstream and specialised schools for children with intellectual disabilities could have helped prevent their harmful sexual behaviour. The workers' reflections were consistent with this insight. Sexuality education may potentially act as a primary prevention strategy regarding the display of harmful sexual behaviour by children and young people.*
 - ii. Redress their victim experience. *Overall, young people strongly considered that if their own experiences of victimization through adult-perpetrated child sexual abuse and living with intimate partner violence and child abuse had been responded to more supportively, then they would have been less likely to develop harmful sexual behaviour.*

⁶⁶ Herbé, Dominique. (2011). Does Knowledge about Sexuality Prevent Adolescents from Developing Rape-Supportive Beliefs?. *Journal of sex research*, 48, 372-80. DOI: [10.1080/00224491003794048](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224491003794048)

⁶⁷ McKibbin, G., Humphreys, C., & Hamilton, B. (2017). "Talking about child sexual abuse would have helped me": Young people who sexually abused reflect on preventing harmful sexual behavior. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 70, 210–221. DOI: [10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.06.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.06.017)

- iii. Help their management of pornography. The availability of pornography was found to be a trigger for harmful sexual behaviour. *One worker spoke about how young people are learning to associate sex with aggression through viewing pornography. She suggested that most mainstream pornography represents violence against women and teaches young people that they do not need to seek girls' consent before perpetrating sexual violence against them. Additionally, pornography may be a particular problem for children and young people with learning difficulties, who do not necessarily have the capacity to differentiate the representations from socially appropriate sexual behaviour.*

Figure 2.



Porn awareness education in counselling and sexual violence intervention services

- 4.12 The Swedish researchers of frequent porn viewers (section 3.30) recommended for clinicians to be aware that *most of their male adolescent clients do use pornography and that there might be risks associated with frequent use of pornography that should be addressed in therapy.*
- 4.13 The researchers who explored intimate partner violence in domestic violence shelters (section 3.10) recommended that:
- i. addressing perpetrator use of the sex industry (strip clubs and porn) would assist domestic violence workers to understand better the behaviours of offenders and the related risks to intimate partners;
 - ii. helping women affected by violence to understand the systemic nature of their partner's abuse. These acts are not limited to the violent act perpetrated against them (instead, engaging with the sex industry normalises this abuse).
- 4.14 A critical porn analysis lens is required for programs directed towards male perpetrators, including family and sexual violence intervention services, community education and incarcerated males. It is essential they are supported to make values-based changes to their life and lifestyle, thereby (ideally), leading to healthier relationships.
- i. Values-based learning and behaviour change programs (following Prochaska's Transtheoretical Stages of Change model⁶⁸) address readiness for change. Through addressing adverse childhood events and traumas such as their own experiences of sexual abuse, violence and family norms, rehabilitation is more likely to occur. Rehabilitation is needed in order to rewire the brain to a different way of approaching relationships and patterns of relationship formulating and norming⁶⁹.
 - ii. The impacts of pornography consumption is a required focus for values-based changes, alongside addressing problematic use of alcohol, substances and gambling. By including reflection on how porn reinforces men's violence in domestic situations, values-based cognitive behavioural therapies could lead towards changing thoughts which impact feelings, healthier decision making, and the behaviour changes required for successful rehabilitation.
 - iii. During this process, we recommend including reflection on the ways that porn—much of which is violent or power-imbalanced in intent—shapes attitudes and resulting relational behaviours. We also recommend assisting men (and their partners) to understand how the brain responds to the sexual conditioning of porn, and the typical progression to more extreme content that reinforces violent attitudes. It is our view that supporting perpetrators to understand porn's role in "adding fuel to the fire" for both adult and child sex offences is an essential component of rehabilitation.
 - iv. Developing empathy is a big part of successful recovery for those with addictive and abusive behaviours. A licensed psychologist and clinical sexologist, Dr Omar Minwalla⁷⁰

⁶⁸ LaMorte, W. W. (2019). The Transtheoretical Model (Stages of Change). Behavioral Model Changes. Boston University School of Public Health. Retrieved from:

<https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/BehavioralChangeTheories/BehavioralChangeTheories6.html>

⁶⁹ Kobir. Tuckman's Model: Five Stages of Group and Team Development Theory. Online Article, November 7, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://newsroom.com/tuckmans-model-five-stages-of-group-and-team-development-theory>

⁷⁰ The Institute of Sexual Health. (n.d). Dr. Omar Minwalla, Psy.D., Licensed Psychologist. Retrieved from: <https://theinstituteforsexualhealth.com/dr-omar-minwalla-psy-d-licensed-psychologist/>

recognises the limitations of traditional treatment models for compulsive sexual behavior and sexual addiction. In 2009, Dr Minwalla founded The Institute for Sexual Health (ISH) ... and developed the innovative Compulsive-Abusive Sexual-Relational Disorders (CASRD) and Trauma Model, which has led to a critical paradigm shift in the treatment of problematic sexual behaviors.

The CASRD and Trauma Model advocates for professionals and clients to recognize the importance of treating the abusive aspects of sexual acting out as well as the trauma experienced by partners. The CASRD and Trauma Model has expanded treatment to consider and work with abuse-victim-trauma consciousness and has helped many partners, couples, children, families, and society impacted by compartmentalized deceptive patterns of sexual-relational entitlement and sexual acting-out behaviors.

The CASRD and Trauma Model comes highly recommended by a friend of Youth Wellbeing Project, who credits Dr Minwalla for their successful recovery after enduring porn-related violence. At their urging, we make a recommendation that this model be considered by clinicians working in the sexual violence prevention field:

<https://theinstituteforsexualhealth.com/the-casrd-and-trauma-model-explained/>

5 The role of government and non-government agencies to respond

- 5.1 It is our observation that the role of pornography in promoting violence and mental health concerns are not yet receiving the priority that these harms demand (see section 5.3). Decision-makers must urgently heed the research and respond by adopting a public health approach.
- 5.2 According to the World Health Organisation⁷¹, *A public health approach aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people. A public health approach includes the care of individuals and focuses on preventing health problems in a way that extends better care and safety to entire populations.*
- 5.3 With so many entities requiring coordination so that users, women and children receive adequate responses, we recommend that the role of pornography in promoting violence and mental health concerns be raised for discussion nationally. There exists an opportunity for the National Cabinet⁷² to respond under the new National Federation Reform Council (NFRC) that replaces the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meetings.
- i. We note that in February 2018, COAG⁷³ *tasked the Education Council to establish a Bullying and Cyberbullying Senior Officials Working Group to consider existing strategies and potential initiatives to help reduce bullying and cyberbullying and keep Australia's children safe.* Adopting a unified approach such as this would elevate this issue to one of utmost importance, and would be conducive to widespread systemic changes.
 - ii. Also noteworthy, Queensland furthered this COAG focus via the Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce Inquiry and Report - 'Adjust Our Settings: A community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland'. As evidence of

⁷¹ World Health Organization. (2002). World report on violence and health. Geneva: WHO. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/

⁷² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. COAG becomes National Cabinet. Press Release, June 2, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://pmc.gov.au/news-centre/government/coag-becomes-national-cabinet>

⁷³ COAG. Enhancing community responses to student bullying, including cyberbullying: Report and Work Program Bullying and Cyberbullying Senior Officials Working Group. As Endorsed at the Twentieth Education Council Meeting, 14 September 2018, Adelaide. Retrieved from: <https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/communique/bcsowg-report-work-program.pdf>

decision-makers ignoring pornography's role in cyberbullying, lead author of these submissions, Liz Walker, (as part of the eChildhood team) submitted extensive evidence to the QLD inquiry. The submissions put forward by eChildhood⁷⁴ presented *solid arguments as to why children have a right to be protected from hardcore pornography and how it is contributing to a range of significant harms, including Online Sexual Abuse, a subset of cyberbullying*. Despite these submissions, we note the Queensland government failed to acknowledge porn as a contributor to online sexual abuse.

- 5.4 We are of the opinion that successful changes will only be achieved through targeted coordination of policy responses and education framing recommendations across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business.
- 5.5 Support for smaller agencies must be provided so they can adequately understand the issues resulting from pornography's influence. Some agencies are putting children and youth at risk by not understanding these harms. For example, family planning clinics are known⁷⁵ to normalise masturbation to porn without understanding how this activity can contribute to brain changes, sexual conditioning, and normalised violence themes.

Data collection to underpin research and inform policy

We make recommendations for data to be collected and training to occur in the following fields:

- 5.6 Police and court data collection pertaining to pornography's role in motivating sexual violence. For example, in instances of family, domestic and sexual violence, including sexual abuses against children, offenders should be asked about their pornography use, including preferred genres and frequency. Ascertaining this type of information would assist researchers, policymakers and rehabilitation services. Additionally, justice services would benefit from training so they can more effectively liaise with sexual violence perpetrators and victims, frame questions and understand porn's role in these circumstances.
- 5.7 Data collection in hospitals, general practice and domestic violence shelters. For instance, a specialist in Sexual Medicine and Sex Therapy, Dr Anita Elias⁷⁶, was interviewed by the Australian researcher, Maree Crabbe, *about how she believes pornography is playing a role in the increase in young women presenting with painful sexual conditions*. Anecdotal reports also indicate an increasing number of young women presenting with internal injuries motivated by porn, yet these instances are not documented. Collecting data would assist with widespread awareness of porn's role in these injuries, achieving best-practice responses, and informing follow-up support. Additionally, health clinics require training and educational materials to understand porn's contribution to sexual violence, dysfunctions, and compulsive sexual behaviour disorders⁷⁷.
- 5.8 Mental health data collection. Similar to above, mental health professionals require training on this issue, including organisations such as Headspace and Reachout. Our team offers our observation that youth-facing and people-helping organisations often provide advice on

⁷⁴ The Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce eChildhood Submission. June 8 2018. Retrieved from: https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/pornharmskids/pages/505/attachments/original/1531958524/eChildhood_Anti-Cyberbullying_QLD_Submission_8.6.2018_%281%29.pdf?1531958524

⁷⁵ Family Planning NSW All About Sex fact sheet. Pornography. v1.0 February 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.fpnsw.org.au/sites/default/files/assets/FactSheet_24_Pornography_20170221.pdf

⁷⁶ Crabbe, M., & Elias, A. Dr Anita Elias interviewed for The Porn Factor. YouTube, December 11, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/dnYiHufVJEk>

⁷⁷ ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics (Version : 04 / 2019). 6C72 Compulsive sexual behaviour disorder. Retrieved from: <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2fcd%2fentfity%2f1630268048>

pornography impacts that normalise harmful behaviours and fail to meet best-practice. This is potentially due to unfamiliarity with the role of pornography in sexual conditioning, its influence with violent attitudes and behaviours, and the ways it contributes to mental health conditions. As such, widespread education in this sector is essential.

- 5.9 Child Safety services data collection and corresponding clinician education and client support. Pressing questions are being raised relating to child safety issues and reporting requirements for clinicians. It is recommended that a review process be undertaken of three areas in particular: children disclosing they are watching adult pornography; adult clients, children and youth disclosing they are watching CEM.

Factors for consideration include scenarios such as: when an adult is watching pornography (CEM or adult), and they are caring for children, are the children exposed or at significant risk of harm? Each government agency and NGO must respond to this issue of child protection by investigating current awareness and response requirements

eSafety: an avenue for ensuring change within school policy and educational approaches

- 5.10 There exists an opportunity for the eSafety Commissioner to address pornography harms within the Best Practice Framework for Online Safety Education⁷⁸. This framework is in stage 1, with consultation opportunities now open. We recommend that greater focus be placed on the role of pornography with influencing technology-facilitated abuse. Additionally, given eSafety oversees the Trusted eSafety Provider initiative and disseminates toolkits for schools and universities, eSafety is well-positioned to make strong recommendations regarding education sector policies and processes related to pornography harms. Also, comprehensive campaigns are required for primary prevention. This video created by Age Verification for Porn is an excellent example of an engaging resource: <https://ageverification.org.uk/>

ACCCE: an avenue for creating awareness of the links

- 5.11 There exists an opportunity for the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation to create awareness of the role of adult porn in influencing interest in child sexual abuse material. ACCCE aims to Prevent, Prepare, Pursue and Protect children against online exploitation⁷⁹. In addition to making recommendations to parents regarding risks to children, efforts could extend to targeting (primarily) youth and men with education campaigns to prevent unintentional digression to illegal content and contact offending.

Our Watch: an avenue for creating public awareness about porn and sexual violence

- 5.12 [Our Watch](#) identifies four gendered drivers of violence against women. Three of these four are delivered directly via the vehicle of pornography. These are:
1. Condoning of violence against women;
 2. Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity; and
 3. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.
- 5.13 According to Our Watch, essential and supporting actions to address the gendered drivers of violence against women include:
- i. Challenge condoning of violence against women.
 - ii. Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles.

⁷⁸ eSafety. Best Practice Framework for Online Safety Education. Online article, n.d. Retrieved from: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research/best-practice-framework-for-online-safety-education>

⁷⁹ The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE). Retrieved from: <https://www.accce.gov.au/>

- iii. Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys.
- iv. Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.
- v. Challenge the normalisation of violence as an expression of masculinity or male dominance.
- vi. Prevent exposure to violence and support those affected to reduce its consequences.
- vii. Reduce backlash by engaging men and boys in gender equality, building relationship skills and social connections.
- viii. Promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage.

5.14 Pornography is opposed to each of these action areas intended to address sexual violence. Porn is now the primary sex educator of youth; as such, implementing broad social change to address violence against girls and women is impossible without directly addressing the role of pornography. We note that in 2015, Our Watch mentioned pornography as a factor that needs to be considered, yet it appears that follow-through has not occurred. There exists an opportunity for Our Watch to add to its public-facing communications information about the ways that porn is a vehicle that delivers the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Australia's International obligations

- 5.15 Australia is committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child^{80 81} and is internationally obligated to ensure children are protected from harms. Australia is obligated to:
- i. ensure that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration;
 - ii. support families in the rearing of children
 - iii. ensure to the maximum extent possible the healthy development of the child; and
 - iv. take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse; and
 - v. uphold a child's right to quality education, including education directed to the development of respect for human rights and 'the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society'.
- 5.16 Additionally, the Australian government has affirmed⁸² *"that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online"* and that Australia must foster *"an enabling online environment that is safe and conducive to engagement by all"*.

While there is an awareness that the *"rapid development and expansion of ICTs have generated new opportunities for the realization of children's rights as well as significant challenges for the protection of children"*⁸³, limited action has been taken to respond to these challenges when protecting children from online pornography.

⁸⁰ Convention on the Rights of the Child, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990), art 3(1); art 18(2); art 6(2); art 24(1); art 19(1); art 28(1); art 29(1); and see UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 13 (2011): The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/13 (18 April 2011) [4].

⁸¹ Australian Human Rights Commission. The UN Children's Convention and Australia (1991). (AHRC Publication). Retrieved from URL: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/publications/un-childrens-convention-and-australia-1991>

⁸² UN. Human Rights Council. *The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council on 5 July 2018*, GA Res 38/7, UN Doc A/HRC/RES/38/7 (17 July 2018). Available from URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1639840?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>

⁸³ Marta Santos Pais, *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children*, UN Human Rights Council, 35th sess, Agenda Item 3, UN Doc A/HRC/31/20 (5 January 2016) [99].

Technological solutions

- 5.17 Australian researcher, Gemma McKibbin (cited in section 4.11 for her work with young people who engage in harmful sexual behaviours) says the following⁸⁴:

"It may be that government needs to intervene at this point. Pornography can't be seen as the sole responsibility of parents or schools because it has gone way beyond that. We probably need to engage directly with the pornography industry and the telecommunications industry."

- 5.18 McKibbin's recommendations are consistent with the findings of the Protecting the Age of Innocence Report, handed down in February 2020 by The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs⁸⁵. The committee made six recommendations, all in support of implementing age verification as a measure to protect children from online wagering and online pornography.

Since the onset of COVID-19, there have been no further announcements by the Federal Government in relation to following through with the committee's recommendations. Liz Walker, (the lead author in this submission), made extensive contributions to the submission by eChildhood⁸⁶ and presented at the hearing in Canberra on December 6, 2019. We hope that given the gravity of the issues raised in this current submission relating to pornography and sexual violence, that necessary actions to implement age verification would be an urgent priority.

6 Summary of recommended approaches and concluding remarks

- 6.1 Youth Wellbeing Project urges acknowledgement of the normalising and motivating effects that pornography has on sexual violence. In particular, we submit that pornography perpetuates negative gendered attitudes, impacts upon relationships and reinforces a culture of acceptance towards violence against women and children.
- i. We recommend that pornography is a more significant risk factor in children and adolescents as the studies mentioned above in this submission reflect its deleterious impact in formative years.
 - ii. Additionally, we recommend acknowledging the sexual conditioning of pornography as a risk factor for viewers digressing to materials previously inconceivable, including illegal materials such as child sexual exploitation material.
- 6.2 Along with identifying the causal effects of pornography, there needs to be greater recognition of the role of pornography in promoting violence; the gravity of this public health concern should be matched in national discussions.
- i. To protect children and provide young people with opportunities to develop without pornography's influence, we suggest that there needs to be greater enforcement, through policy and law, of age verification on porn websites. This suggestion lies external to the submission, however, is not unrelated to the subject matter.

⁸⁴ Trounson, A. PORNOGRAPHY: EXHIBIT A. Online article, 2 May 2016. University of Melbourne. Retrieved from: <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/pornography-exhibit-a>

⁸⁵ Parliamentary Business, Protecting the age of innocence. Inquiry into age verification for online wagering and online pornography. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. Retrieved from: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/Onlineageverification/Report

⁸⁶ eChildhood Submission - November 8, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.echildhood.org/submissions>

- 6.3 The Critical Porn Analysis framework utilised throughout these submissions underpins a public health approach that urges education and preventative measures; i.e. parental controls, protective behaviour education, and comprehensive sexuality education in schooling.
- i. Additionally, we recommend that tertiary efforts via targeted therapeutic services are required to support those harmed by pornography.
 - ii. We also urge for updated sex education that includes an increased awareness on how porn alters the way that young people understand the dynamics of sexual relationships.
- 6.4 We recommend that policies and practices be updated in all people-facing sectors (particularly the medical and educational sectors) to reflect pornography's contribution to high rates of family, domestic and sexual violence.
- i. We propose that larger government and non-government organisations extend their scope of work to include best-practice responses that respond to pornography harms; and
 - ii. Through these changes, larger entities offer support for smaller agencies so that they can receive adequate resourcing to tackle this issue.

Exposure to pornography is routine among children and young people, with a range of notable and often troubling effects. Particularly among younger children, exposure to pornography may be disturbing or upsetting. Exposure to pornography helps to sustain young people's adherence to sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships.

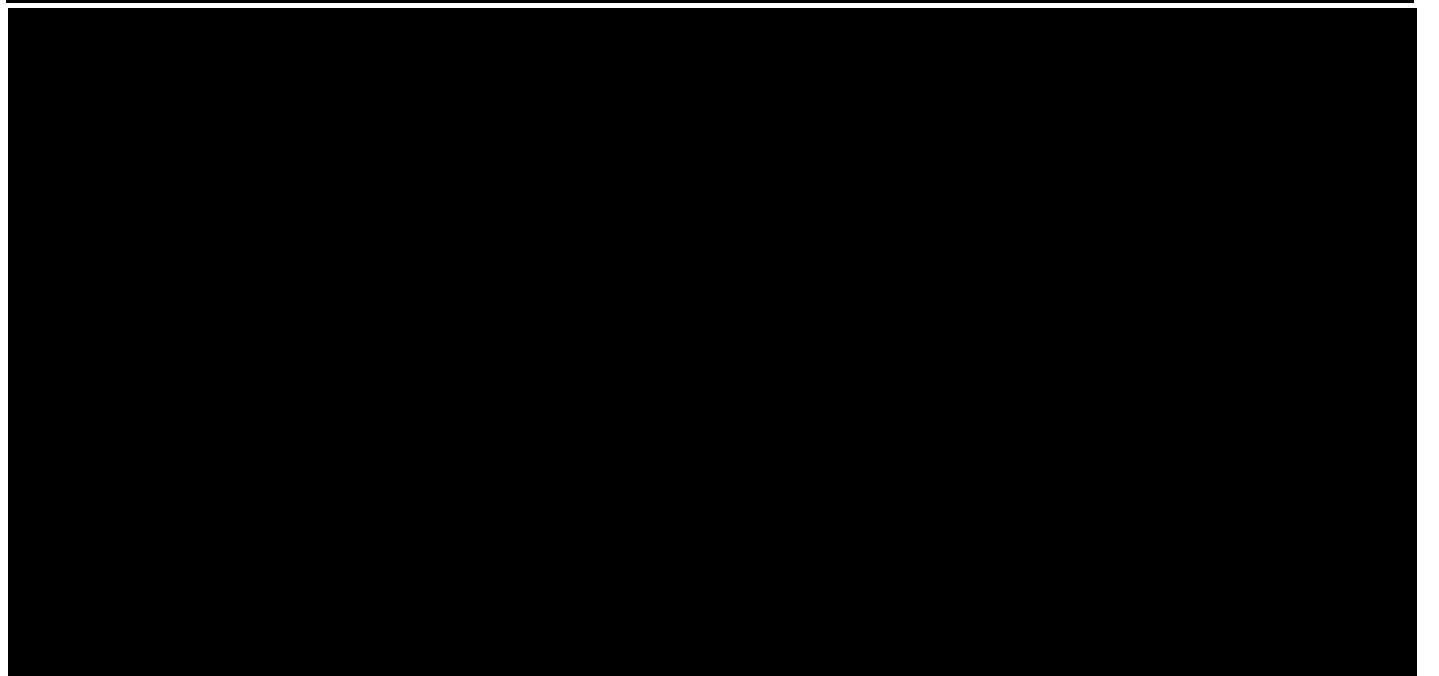
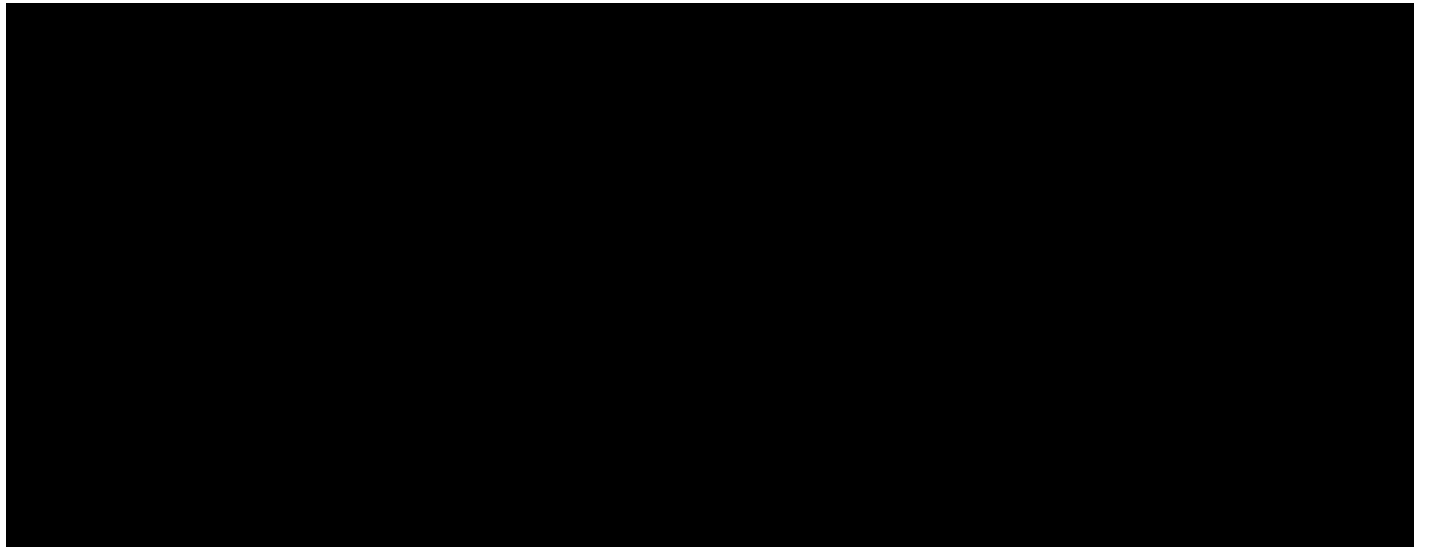
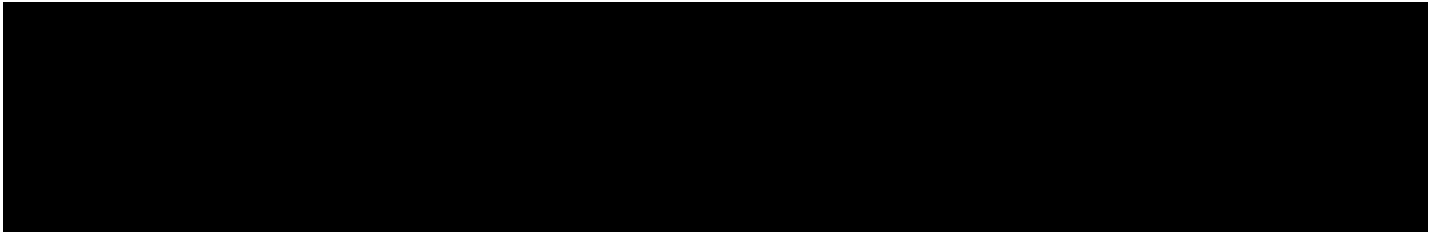
And, especially among boys and young men who are frequent consumers of pornography, including of more violent materials, consumption intensifies attitudes supportive of sexual coercion and increases their likelihood of perpetrating assault. While children and young people are sexual beings and deserve age-appropriate materials on sex and sexuality, pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator.

~ Dr Michael Flood⁸⁷, 2009

This submission to the Parliament of Australia House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence was authored by Youth Wellbeing Project Managing Director, Liz Walker, with the assistance of Louise Chung, Ruth Devereux and Carmen Layton-Bennett. 18.8.2020

⁸⁷ Flood, M. (2009). The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. *Child Abuse Review*, 18: 384-400. DOI: [10.1002/car.1092](https://doi.org/10.1002/car.1092)

Appendix 1





Appendix 2

