

## Pornography harms kids.

### This is what you can do about it.

Pornography is not new, and it's not new to children. But in the age of the Internet it's increasingly accessible, affordable and anonymous.<sup>1</sup> Anyone - even a child - with a mobile device and a data plan can download and watch porn, quickly and covertly.

Presenters at the recent *Porn Harms Kids* symposium<sup>2</sup> agree: these days it's easier to find porn than it is to avoid it.

The symposium brought together 13 speakers and almost 400 delegates concerned about children's easy access to porn and the long-term impact of exposure. G,S&C Committee members Ben Greig and Nalini Pather, as well as our researcher Sheryl Sarkoezy, were amongst the delegates.

There is good reason to be concerned: the pornography viewing habits of children and young people are disturbing.

Susan McLean, author of *Sexts, Texts and Selfies*, says that *all* children who use the Internet will see porn eventually, even if only accidentally. By 15 years of age, 100% of boys and 80% of girls have seen porn. The average age of first exposure is 11 years - not even out of primary school.

Technology ownership amongst children is on the rise, and the age at which porn is regularly viewed is falling. Early exposure to sexualised media content has an impact on children's attitudes, values, behaviours and ability to establish healthy relationships. Young people who watch porn are more likely to engage in sex at an earlier age, and are more likely to



participate in dangerous sexual practices including unprotected sex.<sup>3</sup>

Some young people are producing their own porn - anything from sexting to revenge porn that's shared with malicious intent. The incidence of child-on-child sexual assaults is also increasing, and McLean says this behaviour is only learned through sexual abuse or watching on-line porn.

In the USA more than 10,000 new porn films are made every year. The trend is toward portrayal of sex in which women are more likely than men to be the target of physical and verbal violence. According to Maree Crabbe, producer of *Love and Sex in an Age of Pornography*, most of the women in porn films are portrayed as having a neutral or passive response to this violence. Male aggression toward women is eroticised, and actions that in the real world would be regarded as violent are rendered "invisible". The result? Boys who intentionally watch violent porn are more likely to engage in sexually aggressive acts.<sup>4</sup>

The message from this symposium is that Australia has a public health crisis ahead. If we don't protect our children from the harms of pornography the next generation of adults will be more prone to commit sexual violence, and less able to establish good, loving, intimate relationships with others.



## What you can do

The law as it stands has penalties against the procurement of children to be used in the production of porn, but it's not able to stop children accidentally or deliberately viewing sexualised media content.

Content filters and accountability services can be set up for use on mobile devices. See our papers on *Information and Communication Technology* for more information on ways to help children and young people manage their use of computers and phone and tablets.<sup>5</sup>

Sadly, these filters won't prevent children from viewing content on their friends' computers or phones if they are not similarly protected. What's needed is a whole-of-community response. There are good arguments for the introduction of ISP-level filtering similar to the model now operating in the UK.

The Australian Senate is conducting an Inquiry: *Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet*. The Terms of Reference are broad, allowing scope for professionals and concerned citizens alike to have their say on any, or all, of the following points:

- a *trends of online consumption of pornography by children and their impact on the development of healthy and respectful relationships;*
- b *current methods taken towards harm minimisation in other jurisdictions, and the effectiveness of those methods;*
- c *the identification of any measures with the potential for implementation in Australia; and*
- d *any other related matters.*

**The G,S&C Committee will be making a submission; we urge you to do the same.**

Visit the G,S&C website for more resources to help you write: links to helpful reports and other information that you might find useful. Personal stories often carry weight in Inquiries like this, and they can be submitted with a request for anonymity in the public report.

**The deadline for submissions is March 10th 2016.**

Submissions can be made online via secure upload to the Inquiry web page (see below), or by email directly to the Committee Secretary.

Contact details for this Inquiry are:

Committee Secretary  
*Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications*  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: +61 2 6277 3526

Fax: +61 2 6277 5818

Email: [ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Web page:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/Online\\_access\\_to\\_porn](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Online_access_to_porn)

General information about how to make a submission is available on the Parliament website:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/How\\_to\\_make\\_a\\_submission](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/How_to_make_a_submission)

Endnotes

1. <https://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2015/april/smith/>
2. <http://pornharmskids.nationbuilder.com>
3. <http://www.unc.edu/depts/jomc/teenmedia/pdf/xrated.pdf>
4. <http://public.psych.iastate.edu/caa/classes/487Readings/Ybarra11x-rated.pdf>
5. <http://www.gsandc.org.au/resources/information-technology.html>