

Friday, August 19, 2016

Schoolgirl porn sites highlight urgent need for respectful relationships education for young people

Early education for young people about respectful relationships is urgently needed to create safe communities for women and challenge the normalisation of pornography.

Kids Helpline (KHL) is greatly concerned about recent reports of thousands of graphic images of school aged girls posted and traded on the internet because it highlights the impact the increased availability of pornography is having on young people and the objectification of women.

According to **yourtown/KHL** CEO Tracy Adams, the 24/7 helpline often receives contacts from children and young people concerned about peer relationships, including coerced sexting and pornography.

"KHL Counsellors all too often hear young people talk about threats and coercion in relation to 'sexting', that is the self-production or distribution of naked or semi naked images," Ms Adams said.

"A report of KHL contacts between July and December 2015, revealed 95 were about sexting. Of these, 38% discussed significant coercion associated with sexting and 83% reporting significant concern were female.

"Perhaps most worrying is that the average age of those contacting us was only 13 years, suggesting the objectification of girls and women begins at a much earlier age than many imagined.

"It's concerning that we may be creating a generation of young men, or women, that think this type of exploitation is OK. Pornography is now readily accessible and society has normalised it without necessarily considering the implications this is having on young children."

Ms Adams said that Kids Helpline shared the Australian Psychological Society's concern that the consumption of this type of pornography was most likely linked to violence against women.

"Research shows that mainstream pornography has changed. What used to be considered 'hard core' is now typical. It routinely shows aggression and disregards consent. It's also available any time and anywhere via the internet," she said.

"Objectification and violence are clearly both symptoms of a lack of respect of the personal rights of individuals to be safe from harm.

"If we are serious about doing something about behaviours that lead to exploitation and violence, the Australian community needs to work together to educate our children at an early age about what it means to respect each other. It is everyone's responsibility to challenge the negative messages in sexualised media and the role it delegates for women."¹

Kids Helpline recommends that community and educational awareness programs about sexuality and pornography be developed to promote:

- Respectful relationship principles

¹ Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun C., & Liberman, R. (2010). Aggression and sexual behaviour in best-selling pornography videos: A content analysis update. 'Violence against Women', 16, 1065-85.

- Skills development in children and young people that helps them critically analyse sexualised media and empowers them to challenge gender stereotypes
- Awareness of the risks associated with sexting
- Importance of the role of parents in establishing behavioural standards regarding online activities and behaviour
- Positive modelling by males about respectful relationships towards women
- Practical strategies which parents and carers can use to initiate positive conversations with their children regarding gender, sexuality and pornography.

Ms Adams said Governments also need to take responsibility by enforcing better controls around the inappropriate use of pornography.

“While it’s important to ensure that young people engaging in a consensual behaviour are not criminalised, more needs to be done to prosecute adults who distribute sexts without the consent of the originator and/or where there is intent to harass, intimidate or embarrass through non-consensual distribution,” she said.

“Harsh penalties should also be imposed on adults that intimidate children and young people into sexting behaviour.”

Tips and information for children and young people about respectful relationships and bullying can be found at www.kidshelpline.com.au

More information about pornography related contacts to KHL can be found at <https://www.yourtown.com.au/insights/advocacy>

KHL gives children and young people choices, support and someone to listen. It is Australia’s only national 24/7 counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call **1800 55 1800** or **www.kidshelpline.com.au**.

Parents or carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory looking for support can contact Parentline on **1300 30 1300** or **parentline.com.au**

ENDS

INTERVIEW/PHOTO/FILMING OPPORTUNITIES

- Tracy Adams, yourtown CEO
- Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Centre Manager
- John Dalglish, Head of Strategy and Research
- VNR footage available of Kids Helpline call centre and interviews with counsellors

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