



Inquiry into the harm done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet

A Submission to the
**Environment and Communications
References Committee**

Prepared by **yourtown**
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Authorised By:

Ms Tracy Adams
Chief Executive Officer
yourtown

Overview

At a recent national conference at the University of New South Wales (9/2/16), children's exposure to the harmful effects of pornography was repeatedly described by researchers as "a national health crisis". Contemporary literature indicates that exposure to pornography is associated with changes in sexual behaviours and attitudes, impacts intimate relationships, and potentially contributes to sexual violence in society.

These issues are confronted and responded to on a regular basis by **yourtown** staff. **yourtown** is a major provider of counselling, accommodation and employment services to Australian youth and families. Kids Helpline, a national service of **yourtown**, provides more than 200,000 responses to children and young people each year. Furthermore, Parentline a telephone counselling service for parents and carers from Queensland and the North Territory also provided by **yourtown** responded to approximately 9,500 calls from Australian parents in 2015. The impacts of pornography on children are frequently presented to both of these services by children, young people and their families.

In response to the invitation by the Environment and Communications References Committee to participate in this Inquiry we have distilled our experience in working with children, young people and parents to provide an informed response. This includes details on the ages and gender of children disclosing pornography consumption, how the exposure came about, and the impacts of exposure and commentary on what are likely to be fruitful intervention avenues to explore, as suggested by the data collected by yourtown.

In preparing this submission, an analysis of pornography exposure concerns reported by children and young people contacting Kids Helpline and parents/carers contacting Parentline during 2015 has been undertaken. In addition, insights have been drawn from focus groups with experienced **yourtown** counsellors relating to the experiences, impacts and perceptions of young people and parents who have reported concerns about their child's exposure to pornography.

Drawing from the above, yourtown makes three (3) recommendations to the Committee, which we believe will significantly improve the current responses and support being afforded to children and young people in relation to exposure to pornography. These recommendations are listed overleaf.

Recommendation 1:

That the Australian Government take a lead role in reviewing and developing community and educational awareness programs relating to sexuality and pornography to ensure that these programs are consistent with and promote:

- *Respectful relationship principles*
- *The formation of skills amongst children and young people that enables them to critically analyse sexualised media and that also empowers them to challenge damaging gender stereotypes typically displayed in this material*
- *Risks associated with sexting behaviour*
- *The important role of parents in establishing behavioural standards with children regarding their online activities and behaviour*
- *The positive modelling by males regarding respectful relationships towards women*
- *Practical strategies which parents and carers can use to initiate positive conversations with their children regarding gender, sexuality and pornography*

Recommendation 2:

That the Australian Government consult with States and the community sector in relation to the adequacy of current responses in supporting children who have been sexually abused by peers and others and/or in other ways have been adversely impacted by exposure to pornography

Recommendation 3:

That the Australian Government inquiries into the availability of perpetrator programs for young people who have sexually abused others where exposure to pornography has been a contributing factor to this abusive behaviour

Introduction

yourtown

yourtown (formally BoysTown) is a national organisation and registered charity which aims to tackle the issues affecting the lives of young people. Established in 1961, **yourtown's** mission is to *enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life.*

yourtown currently provides a range of 'face to face' and virtual services to young people and families seeking support. These services include:

- Kids Helpline, a national 24/7 telephone and on-line counselling and support service for five to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues;
- Accommodation responses to homeless families and women and children seeking refuge from Domestic/Family Violence;
- Parenting Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young parents and their children;
- Parentline, a telephone counselling service for parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory;
- Paid employment to more than 200 young people each year in supported enterprises as they transition to the mainstream workforce; and
- Employment programs which support approximately 11,000 young people each year, allowing them to re-engage with education and/or employment;

Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is Australia's only national 24/7, confidential support and counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. It offers counselling support via telephone, email and a real-time web platform. Since March 1991, young Australians have been contacting Kids Helpline about a diverse group of issues ranging from everyday topics such as family, friends and school to more serious issues of child abuse, bullying, mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, self-injury and suicide.

Children and young people have direct access to a counsellor and can choose to speak with either a male or female counsellor. They are also able to arrange to call back and speak with the same counsellor to work through their issues.

Professionally trained counsellors respond to the concerns of children and young people by gently building trusting relationships, conducting risk assessments, identifying existing supports, discussing possible referrals and liaising with those referral agencies on behalf of clients, offering ongoing counselling relationships with the same counsellor and conducting 'wrap-around care' in conjunction with other agencies in the young person's life. Often, extensive advocacy is carried out on behalf of young clients to ensure specialist mental health services become/ remain involved when it is clear either a mental illness exists or symptoms are emerging.

Kids Helpline has an extensive referral database of more than 9,500 support services such as suicide prevention, self-help resources and mental health information, as well as a variety of

programs specific to the needs of local communities. This database is used to assist children and young people to connect with local support services.

Parentline

Parentline is a confidential telephone service providing professional counselling, education and support to parents and others who care for children and young people. The service operates from 8am to 10pm seven days a week and is available to residents of Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The service provides a mix of assistance through counselling, information and referral that is tailored to meet individual client needs. Callers to Parentline can choose to speak with a male or female counsellor and arrange to speak with the same counsellor in the future.

Term of Reference I: Trends of online consumption of pornography by children and their impact on the development of healthy and respectful relationships

Trends of online consumption

Ten years ago, an Australian study reported that that 93% of boys and 61% of girls aged 13-16 years had seen pornography (Fleming et al. 2006). This data is now out of date and most likely grossly underestimates current levels of children's exposure to pornography having been produced at a time before children had widespread access to personal electronic devices such as smart phones and tablets. In addition, this research was collected before the act of sexting had become a prevalent phenomenon amongst young people.

Kids Helpline (KHL) contact notes reveal that children are exposed to online pornography through three main avenues: Deliberately (e.g., child seeking porn or child deliberately shown porn by a peer/partner/sibling/adult), accidentally (e.g., push marketing or online search returns for innocuous key word searches) and through negligence (e.g., child comes across parent's pornography viewing on a shared electronic device).

Although some may argue that 'sexting', (i.e., the self-production and/or distribution of naked or semi-naked images) is a fourth avenue of pornography exposure, this submission treats sexting as a separate (but highly related) issue, in line with the approach typically taken by empirical researchers. Sexting concerns present in KHL case notes were also reviewed for the purposes of this submission, but will be discussed separately.

Before proceeding with the analysis of these contacts it is important to understand the nature of data collection in Kids Helpline to best understand the strengths and limitations of the data.

Definition of 'pornography'. Pornography has been defined as "sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience" (Malamuth, 2001, p.11817, cited in Flood, 2007). This includes images of nudity, implied or actual sexual activity. Researchers also note that the intention of some pornography appears to be to 'shock' the audience (Crabbe, 2016). In the case of our data, it is often unclear (from the contact notes) exactly what the child had been exposed to (erotica, soft-core, hard-core, images, videos, etc) and we rely upon the child to identify whether the material was pornographic when they seek assistance from Kids Helpline.

The nature of Kids Helpline data. Kids Helpline records information about each contact made by a child or young person, including:

- the concerns raised by the young person
- demographic details
- case notes about the content of the contact.

It is important to note that these data sets are designed to give the child a voice; hence they provide a snapshot of information that children and young people chose to disclose to counsellors. The number of contacts coded as 'exposure to pornography as a minor' is a measure of how often children and young people contacting the service disclosed this issue to counsellors - and counsellors saw it relevant to capture in case notes. It is not a measure of how often young people experience this issue.

That is, Kids Helpline data cannot be used as an indication of the prevalence of a problem in the community. It is self-evident that the data set only includes contact by young people who actively seek help; there are likely to be many more young people who do not seek help. In addition, a low number of contacts about a particular problem type may mean that young people do not see Kids Helpline as an appropriate source of support for that problem type or that they tend to seek support for that problem elsewhere.

Similarly, we report age and gender to describe the nature of the group of children who have provided the data; however, these data cannot be used to compare prevalence between different groups. Figures reported are often numbers of contacts, not numbers of individuals.

Sample selection. Kids Helpline contact notes were examined for the six month period July-December 2015 using a key word search which flagged contacts containing relevant words (i.e. “porn”). It was found that eight (8) children under the age of 12, and 57 children between the ages 13-18 had contacted us regarding their concerns about being exposed to pornography. A further 11 clients between the ages of 18-25 had contacted us and disclosed having been exposed to pornography as a minor. Additionally, there were seven (7) contacts where the age of the client was unknown (but likely to be a child) creating a total of 83 contacts to KHL in the last six months of 2015 where childhood exposure to online pornography was a presenting issue. Note, that for some adult clients (18-25) where their contact notes gave no clear indication that exposure to pornography occurred before age 18 that these contacts were excluded from the analyses.

Twenty-three (28%) of these 83 contacts were from female clients, and 58 (72%) were from male clients. The age range of those clients contacting us between July-December 2015 who disclosed pornography exposure as a minor was 10-25 with a median age of 15. The youngest age of exposure noted by clients (disclosing exposure from years prior) was age 6.

Sample demographics (see Table 1). Kids Helpline counselling contacts who disclosed pornography exposure to counsellors over the last six months (July to December 2015) are represented from all states and territories in similar proportions to all counselling contacts received during the period. They may also be similar to all counselling contacts in terms of cultural background and remoteness classification, however high levels of missing data in these fields prevent reliable assessment.

However, those who disclosed consumption of pornography to counsellors differ from all counselling contacts received during the period in various ways. Compared with all counselling contacts, those who disclosed pornography consumption were:

- Considerably more likely to be male (72% c.f. 21% for all counselling contacts)
- Considerably more likely to be a first time contact (62% c.f. 38% for all counselling contacts)
- Moderately more likely to contact by web (39% c.f. 24%) and less likely to contact by phone (48% c.f. 61%)
- Moderately more likely to be identified by counsellors as requiring a referral for additional support (47% c.f. 31%) and twice as likely to be given a referral to a specific support service or professional (23% c.f. 11%)
- Half as likely to be assessed by a Kids Helpline counsellor to have a mental health disorder (16% c.f. 32%)
- Half as likely to disclose current thoughts of suicide (6% c.f. 11%), and
- One third as likely to disclose having issues with self-injury (5% c.f. 15%).

Table 1. Characteristics of KHL counselling contacts known to have consumed pornography as a minor compared with all Kids Helpline counselling contacts aged 5-25 years, July-Dec 2015¹

Contact characteristics		All counselling contacts (N = 34,287)		Counselling contacts known to have consumed pornography when <18yrs (N = 83)	
		n	col. %	n	col. %
Gender					
	Female	26,121	78%	23	28%
	Male	6,929	21%	58	72%
	Intersex, Trans & Gender Diverse	283	1%	0	0%
	Total	33,333	100%	81	100%
	Unknown	954		2	
Age group					
	5-12 years	4,012	13%	8	11%
	13-18 years	18,549	59%	57	75%
	19-25 years	8,691	28%	11	14%
	Total	31,252	100%	76	100%
	<26 but age unknown	3,035		7	
Cultural background²					
	Aboriginal &/or TSI	395	3%	1	5% ³
	CALD	4,526	37%	9	47% ³
	Neither ATSI nor CALD	7,336	60%	9	47% ³
	Total	12,257	100%	19	100%
	Unknown	22,030		64	
State					
	ACT	706	2%	1	1%
	NSW	9,935	32%	21	30%
	NT	184	1%	1	1%
	QLD	6,098	20%	17	25%
	SA	2,164	7%	4	6%
	TAS	596	2%	-	0%
	VIC	8,392	27%	18	26%
	WA	2,535	8%	7	10%
	Total	30,610	100%	69	100%
	Unknown	3,677		14	
Remoteness					
	Major Cities	12,206	72%	30	81% ³
	Inner Regional	3,037	18%	5	14% ³
	Outer Regional/Remote	1,601	10%	2	5% ³
	Total	16,844	100%	37	100%
	Unknown	17,443		46	
Relationship with KHL					
	First contact	11,961	38%	43	62%
	Occasional/Ongoing support	19,506	62%	26	38%
	Total	31,467	100%	69	100%
	Unknown	2,820		14	
Medium of contact					
	Phone	21,038	61%	40	48%
	Web chat	8,097	24%	32	39%
	Email	5,152	15%	11	13%
	Total	34,287	100%	83	100%
Referral to further support					
	No referral required	23,757	69%	42	53%
	Unable to refer	2,004	6%	6	8%
	Non-specific referral	4,867	14%	13	16%
	Specific referral from database	3,659	11%	18	23%
	Total	34,287	100%	79	100%
	Unknown	0		4	
Counsellor assessments					
	Client has mental health disorder	10,849	32%	13	16%
	Client has current thoughts of suicide	3,821	11%	5	6%
	Client has issues with self-injury	4,980	15%	4	5%

1. Where column percentages sum to more or less than 100%, this is due to rounding.

2. TSI = Torres Strait Islander. CALD = culturally and linguistically diverse. ATSI = Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

3. High levels of missing data in the context of a small sample significantly undermine reliability of this statistic. Interpret with caution.

Avenue of exposure. Of these 83 contacts who disclosed pornography exposure, 61 (73%) acknowledged that they had been deliberately seeking pornography (of their own initiative) and nine (11%) reported that they had been accidentally exposed to pornography, most commonly through coming across a parent's online search history¹. A minority (n = 11; 13%) reported having been deliberately coerced into viewing pornography through peer bullying or potential grooming by an adult (in 100% (n = 7) of these cases this was by the child's father), shown material by a sibling, or exposed through unsolicited material sent to the child's phone/social media. In two cases, it was unclear if the child themselves had actually seen pornography – the primary purpose of their contact was information seeking regarding the use of pornography.

Deliberately seeking – problematic use. Of those children who had been deliberately seeking pornography, 35 (42% of total contacts) contacted us seeking support regarding what they perceived to be problematic pornography use, describing it as an addiction, compulsion, or reporting they were distressed about the amount of pornography they use (or in one case, a female reported they were concerned by the amount of pornography their male partner consumed). These contacts were more common by male clients (M = 25, 71%; F = 8; 23%, unknown = 2). This gender division is what would be suggested by the research literature which reports that young males consume pornography at a significantly higher rate than young females (Flood, 2007). As aforementioned, the majority of KHL contacts tend to come from female clients (generally 70%) so these findings highlight gender differences in help seeking via the nature of the issue. Table 2 reports the ages of children reporting 'porn addiction' or problematic use in the last six months of 2015.

Table 2. Number of cases and ages of KHL clients reporting problematic pornography use for July-Dec 2015 (n = 35).

Age	No. of contacts
Unknown	2
5-12 years	1
13-18 years	29
19-25 years	3

Clients reporting problematic pornography use typically expressed significant shame, embarrassment, and distress regarding their pornography use. They tended to be first time contacts and acknowledged that they had not previously disclosed their problem to anyone before. They also had a preference for less confrontational contact methods (online or web counselling over telephone). Self-reported problematic use was not typically associated with a mental health diagnosis² (n = 7; 20%), disclosure of recent experiences with self-harm³ (n = 2; 6%), disclosure of childhood abuse, or disclosure of other addictive behaviour⁴.

¹ It may well be that children's accidental exposure to online pornography is actually most commonly arrived through key word searching or push marketing, but the majority of KHL calls for accidental exposure appears to be when the child has discovered a parent's consumption. It may well be that children are typically not distressed enough by the first situation to contact KHL, but do find the later situation distressing.

² Counsellors record whether or not the client has a mental health disorder (this includes clients known to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder AND those clients that do not yet have a diagnosis but are assessed by a KHL counsellor to be experiencing or describing symptoms indicative of a mental health disorder).

³ This record reflects if the client has recently self-harmed (in the last few days or weeks) or is still struggling with the urge to injure themselves and are calling for support not to do it.

⁴ Neither childhood abuse nor alternate addictive behaviours are routinely asked about by counsellors, therefore it is possible low records of these issues is an artefact of the data collection method.

KHL counsellors who participated in focus groups suggested that impacts of addictive childhood use of porn include obscure or socially inappropriate fetishes which can affect intimate relationships, and difficulties with knowing how to have a 'normal' intimate relationship. Counsellors reported that female partners of young males 'addicted' to pornography at times contact Kids Helpline for support and describe being pressured by their partners to perform sex acts they do not wish to engage in or experience rough and abusive sex from their partner. Counsellors also report that in cases of pornography addiction they refer the client to a clinical psychologist, which may account for the higher proportion of specific referrals made for this sample as compared to general counselling contacts (see Table 1).

Case Study⁵ – Deliberate exposure relating to problematic pornography use

Steven (17, Male) was a first time caller to KHL and spoke about his concern about his 'porn addiction' – he said that over the past 6 months since leaving school to work he has been watching porn for about 2 hours a day and masturbates 2-3 times a day. He said he has developed particular sexual fetishes and is concerned how this might impact his relationship with his girlfriend if she were ever to find out.

Chloe (16, Female) called to discuss her concerns about her boyfriend. She said he watches porn 'all the time' and has begun to pressure her to perform specific sexual acts she does not want to do and at times has behaved violently and abusively towards her. She is thinking about breaking up with him but is scared about how he might behave if she does this.

Deliberate exposure

Although Scott (12, Male) was told in sexual education class that looking at pornography was bad, the discussion left him feeling really curious so he deliberately downloaded pornographic material on his computer that night to satisfy his urge. Later he became very distressed and full of shame and also afraid his parents would discover what he had done.

Deliberately seeking – exposure to online scams. Another observed trend amongst those children who had contacted us disclosing that they had *deliberately* sought out online pornography was distress about a message that had appeared on their screen stating that their IP address had been tracked and they would be reported to law enforcement unless they paid a fee. In all cases the descriptions provided by the client indicated they had been exposed to a scam. These clients (n = 14; 10%) had been viewing an adult or teen pornography site when the message appeared. For some of these clients, they had been redirected to a child pornography image when the message appeared. Of note, these clients were not distressed or concerned about their pornography viewing (although rattled to have seen a child pornography picture), but were contacting KHL for reassurance that their actions would not be reported to police. In 79% (n = 11) of these cases the clients were male (F = 3; 21%). The age range for children presenting with this issue was 13 to 18 years.

Deliberately seeking – sexuality exploration. Other deliberate, child-initiated consumption of pornography involved sexuality exploration, where the child was seeking confirmation or

⁵ The case studies presented in this submission are based on combinations of actual scenarios recorded in contact notes with identifying information altered to protect client anonymity.

reassurance that they were gay, lesbian or bi-sexual (n = 9, 6%). The majority of these contacts were male (n = 6, 67%; F = 3, 33%). Although this could potentially be a liberating experience for the child (i.e., to feel normalised by others who share their minority perspective), researchers nevertheless note that mainstream gay pornography still shares concerning features prevalent in mainstream heterosexual pornography such as violence, power imbalances, poor sexual health messages, and coerced consent.

Deliberately shown by another. Although a minority, there appeared to be the greatest amount of distress present for those children who had been exposed to pornography deliberately by someone else in their life. Deliberate exposure by another arose in 11 contacts (13%) during the last six months of 2015. Children were exposed to pornography by either same-sex peers, a sibling, or, in seven cases, by their father. In some cases, the clients reported that this exposure had occurred years earlier (for example, two young adult females reported the exposure occurred for them at approximately age 6-10). Amongst this group who were exposed at very young ages (i.e., below age 10) were some cases of self-reported problematic sexual behaviours (i.e., excessive promiscuity or reckless sexting).

Wilful exposure of a child to pornographic material by an adult is a criminal offence and typical in cases of 'grooming', wherein an adult is looking to coerce a child into being compliant with sexual abuse. It is unclear from the case notes in the seven cases where the client identified their father as having exposed them to pornography if this was a grooming behaviour, a misguided action (such as sexual education) or gross negligence.

Case Study – Deliberate (coerced) exposure by another

Jacob (11, Male) reports being bullied by a group of boys in his class at school into watching porn; some of these videos have depicted the rape of a young girl. He says they physically pin him to a wall and don't let him go until he watches the videos. They also show him naked pictures of girls in his class. Jacob has told a parent by they just said to ignore them and walk away. He also told one of his teachers who reportedly only advised him to contact KHL. He finds the images very disturbing and feels 'very affected by them'.

Case Study – Deliberate (coerced) exposure by another

Emma (23, Female) wants to stop sending nude photos of herself to men. She wants to study to be a nurse one day and knows that her behaviour could compromise her future. She said she has trouble saying no. This also applies to sleeping with men – she wishes she could just say no. Emma says she has had poor relationships with men her whole life. Her father used to expose her to pornography videos as a 6 year old.

Accidental exposure. A small subgroup within the sample had been exposed to pornography through accidental or negligent pathways (n = 9; M = 5; F = 4; age 12-18). Primarily this was unintentional exposure to pornographic material belonging to parents (predominantly their father's). Two themes apparent in these cases were the child feeling afraid that their parents

would divorce if their mother found out about the pornography usage, and (in the case of females) distrust of their fathers as a result of learning about their porn consumption.

Case Study – Accidental or negligent exposure

Rachel (17, Female) is having trouble making eye contact with her father after she discovered a pornography site in a browser tab when she borrowed his ipad. She can't believe he would look at something that depicts women that way, some of them not much older than her!

Adrian (12, Male) was distressed after having accidentally viewed what he thought was child pornography on the internet. He described having seen a "young girl, maybe 6 years of age, naked, in chains, and looking very sad". Adrian was significantly distressed and feared he would "go to jail" if he told the police.

Impacts on the development of healthy and respectful relationships

Flood (2016) suggests there are seven known impacts from pornography exposure on healthy and respectful relationships, summarised in Figure 1. Although most of the research into these impacts has come from studies with adults or adolescents, the effect of pornography exposure is believed to be greater the younger and therefore the more impressionable the viewer (Flood, 2016).



From examining the KHL data and speaking with KHL counsellors, we found cases that corroborated most of these known impacts, or data that, with inference, aligns to these reported findings (some of these having already been noted, i.e., affirmation of same sex preferences, addiction etc.).

Ruptured relationships. KHL data reveals an additional impact not identified in the research literature to date (most related to outcome no.4 – usage seen as a betrayal) – that of a ruptured relationship within the family unit. For example, the child who withdraws from their parent after discovering their porn consumption, or the parent who feels differently about their child after learning they have been a frequent consumer of pornography. KHL data reveals that there is often conflict between parents and the child when the child's pornography viewing is discovered.

Rape training. One of the most concerning outcomes noted by Flood (2016) is pornography as 'rape training'. A content analysis study (Bridges et al., 2010) has revealed that 88% of mainstream pornography contains violence, 94% of which is directed towards women. Researchers explain that pornography 'eroticises violence' (Crabbe, 2016) and suggest that consumers form powerful neural pathways associating sexual arousal with aggression (Flood, 2016). Furthermore, researchers claim pornography promotes poor messages about consent, teaching children that 'no' actually means 'yes' if pressure or persistence is applied (Crabbe, 2016) and that men are taught that their needs come first (Tucci, 2016).

Examination of the last six months of 2015 contact notes revealed some examples of the perpetuation of violent attitudes and behaviours associated with childhood exposure to pornography. The following case studies illustrate this, including an example of the phenomenon of 'sexual play' or 'child-on-child sexual abuse' wherein children mimic, often using coercion, what they have seen in pornography videos:

Case Study – Impacts of exposure – 'Rape Training'

Michael (21, Male) says he has had a porn addiction for a very long time, maybe about 7 years. He's worried he may be a paedophile as he touched his 15 year neighbour in a sexual way on her leg. He said he fantasises about forcing himself upon her and is worried the urges may get the better of him even though he knows it is wrong and is distressed by the situation. He finds himself very aroused by the thought of violence towards women.

Justin (12, Male) is presenting with suicidal ideation and self-harm behaviours. He recalls that when he was 8 years old he found his father's pornography collection on his computer and became enthralled with it. He coerced his younger sister (who was aged 5 at the time) to act out the scenes he had seen which were highly explicit. He now feels tormented and deeply ashamed by what he has done and thinks his sister's problematic behaviours at school may be his fault. He has no idea how to move past this experience.

Rape training – deep dive analysis. To investigate this disturbing outcome of pornography exposure ('rape training') in more depth, relevant contact notes for the four year period 2012-2015 were examined by searching for times when counsellors had classified the contact as including themes such as sexual offending, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual abuse, or physical abuse, and had recorded relevant key words (i.e., "porn") in the contact notes.

Analysis of these contact notes suggests that pornography has a *causal role* in child-on-child sexual abuse, with offenders describing having been powerfully influenced by the explicit images they viewed and claiming to be mimicking what they had observed. This 'mimicking' was also noted by the child victims, most often a younger sibling, in some cases described having been shown the pornography by the perpetrator and coerced into performing sexual acts including vaginal and anal penetration. Eight cases of child-on-child sexual abuse (both victim and perpetrator under the age of 16) and a further four cases of sexual assault (victim aged 16-19; age of perpetrator not always known but likely to be 16-25yrs) where exposure to pornography appeared to have played a key role in the perpetrator's actions were recorded by KHL counsellors for the four year period 2012-2015. Across age groups, perpetrators were most commonly male (aged 8-25yrs) and victims most commonly female (aged 3-23yrs) although this was not always the case (see Table 2).

Table 2. Age and gender of KHL sexual abuse victims and perpetrators 2012-2015 where pornography appears to have played a key role in the perpetrator's behaviour (n=12).

Age of victim	Gender of victim	Age of perpetrator	Gender of perpetrator	Relationship
5	F	8	F	Siblings
20	F	Likely to be 20	M	Acquaintance
Unknown but likely to be <15	F	15	M	Sibling
Unknown but likely to be <16	M	Unknown but likely to be <16	M	Sibling
16	F	Unknown but likely to be 16-25	M	Acquaintance
23	F	Unknown but likely to be 23-25	M	Acquaintance
7	F	8	M	Cousin
3	F	15	M	Uncle
13	F	13	F	Most likely school based
19	F	Unknown but likely to be 15-18	M	Sibling
9; 12*	M	8; 12	M	Most likely school based
4	M	9	F	Sibling

*This child reported two separate cases of child-on-child abuse by two different perpetrators.

However, these figures may underestimate the link between pornography exposure and violence as contacts reporting sexual violence, aggression, and coercion are rarely, if ever, by the offender. Victims may not be aware of their perpetrator's exposure to pornography.

A sample of KHL counsellors were asked if they have experience with KHL cases linking pornography exposure to 'rape training' outcomes such violence, aggression, or coerced consent. Counsellors reported that they do receive contacts relating to aggressive sexual behaviours and sexual offending, but most typically it is not known if the perpetrator/coercer had consumed pornography as a child.

Sexting. Counsellors report that they quite commonly see threats and coercion in relation to 'sexting', i.e., the self-production or distribution of naked or semi naked images, which they propose could be an outcome of the consumption of sexualised media including pornography. Counsellors feel that the threats and coercion typically directed towards females in sexting cases reported to KHL and the consumption of pornography may be linked, as they both speak to a sexist attitude and disregard for consent.

In response to this claim, we explored contact notes where the word 'sex' or related key words had been recorded by counsellors in the contact notes. Between July and December 2015, there were 95 contact notes where the client was seeking support in relation to a sexting issue (female = 76, 80%; male = 19, 20%; average age 13 years). Of these 95 contacts, 36 (38%) contacts discussed significant coercion associated with sexting, such as to participate in sexting or sexual behaviours (female = 30, 83.3%; male = 6, 16.7%; average age = 13 years). The following case example illustrates a typical sexting case reported to KHL involving threats and sexual coercion. It also highlights the barrier that criminalisation of sexting under the age of 16 can have on child help-seeking and protection.

Case Study – Coercion relating to 'sexting'

Bonnie (13, F), is highly distressed and reports that she wants to end her life. She sent a couple of pictures of herself with her breasts exposed to an older boy after he asked her to, (15, M). He has now told her that he will post the pictures on Facebook and send them to her parents if she does not have sex with him. She is seriously considering meeting his request as she would 'die' if her friends or family saw these images. She is too scared to go to the police as she has heard of a similar case where the girl ended up getting charged for distribution of child pornography. Plus she fears the police would tell her parents.

Desire to rape. Another theme that emerged through the examination of the four years of KHL contact notes relating to the potential impact 'rape training' was the reporting of the desire to rape. There were four contacts between the years 2012-2015 where males were seeking help in relation to strong urges they had to assault younger women (typically underage girls) where it appeared childhood exposure and ongoing use of pornography had played a role in fostering this urge. These clients were aged 15-25 and reported being distressed by these urges and what actions they would like to take but admitted to regularly viewing child pornography and/or rape pornography. Repeated exposure to these images accompanied by masturbation is likely to build strong neural pathways associating arousal and violence (Flood, 2009; Tucci, 2016). In addition, sexual arousal deactivates the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain associated with self-control (Brizendine, 2010) suggesting that, when sexually aroused, people may have less control over their actions.

Parentline data

Trends of online consumption

Parentline data for the 12 months of 2015 was examined and revealed that there were 40 cases where parents had contacted us and noted that their child had been exposed to online pornography (for the purposes of this analysis, we excluded child sexting behaviour). This data set was identified by running a key word search on Parentline client contact notes and reviewing the files for evidence of childhood exposure to online pornography. Of note, the same caveats that exist for KHL data are also applicable to Parentline data.

Sample demographics. Children who had viewed the pornography and were the focus of the parent's call were typically male (29; 73%) with an average age of 11 years (range 7-16yrs, SD = 2.36). Female children who had viewed pornography (n = 11; 27%) had an average age of 9 years (range 6-12yrs, SD = 2).

Avenue of exposure. In the majority of cases (21; 53%) it appeared the child had been deliberately seeking the pornography of their own initiative. In five cases it appeared the child had been deliberately shown the pornography by a parent (in four cases by the father) with the motivation for this exposure not always clear. In a further two cases, the child's father had watched the pornography in a shared space which had been observed by the child, and in three cases the child accidentally came across their father's pornography collection/viewing history. In the remaining nine cases it was unclear from the contact notes how exposure had occurred.

Most common parental concerns. The most common reason why parents were calling (n = 11) was to seek help for how to respond to their child, having just discovered that they have been viewing pornography (typically mothers discovering a young boy's usage, age range 8-13yrs, average age 11 years). In a further four cases (three male, one female, average age 12 years), parents were calling to seek additional strategies, reporting that they had already discussed and made their expectations around the viewing of pornography clear to their child, but they could not get the child to cease the behaviour, in some cases with the child circumventing parental locks/filtering, and parents suspecting their children had formed a pornography addiction.

Location of exposure and use of filters. In the majority of contacts the consumption of pornography appeared to have occurred within a home environment, with only two cases citing that the exposure occurred on school I-pads/computers. In four cases it was confirmed that the parent had not been using an internet filter although this figure may be under representative as this detail may not have been recorded in the contact notes or acknowledged by the parent.

Role of supervision. A commonality amongst these 40 cases appears to be a lack of adult supervision of the child when they are using electronic devices.

Male Carer's roles in pornography consumption. There appeared to be a trend in Parentline data where pornography exposure occurred under the father's care or evidence to suggest that fathers appeared to have a more 'relaxed' attitude towards the child's exposure to pornography. Focus groups with KHL counsellors revealed that in some instances, young males report that their father had recommended they view pornography to learn about sex. Researchers are united in their message that pornography is a poor sex educator (Flood, 2016), as it promotes negative

messages about body image, sexual health practices, lack of mutual pleasure, coerced consent, gender-power-aggression, and unrealistic understanding of sexual performance (Crabbe, 2016).

It may be that male carers are not aware of the changing nature of popular pornography which is now more degrading and violent towards women than it has been in the past (Crabbe, 2016). In addition, exposure is now more likely to be graphic videos sourced through the internet, which is likely to have a much greater impact upon a child compared to a previous generation's more typical exposure to centrefold magazine photographs.

Impact on healthy and respectful relationships

Three key outcomes on healthy and respectful relationships from childhood exposure to pornography were evident in the 2015 Parentline contact notes: Child-on-child sexual abuse, sexualised behaviours, and rude, aggressive, or violent behaviour.

Child-on-child sexual abuse. As identified in the KHL data, childhood exposure to pornography appears to have a *causal impact* on child-on-child sexual abuse. Seven cases were also identified in 2015 Parentline contact notes where a child sexually abused a younger child after viewing pornography.

In five of these seven cases, the abuse was between an older and a younger sibling, suggesting that access plays a key role. The older child was typically labelled as the coercer, was male in all cases, with an average age of 11.5 years (range 7-14 years). The 'victim' child was female in four cases, with an average age of 7.5 years (range 3-11 years). There was only one case where the coercive child in these child-on-child sexual abuse instances had a learning disability, and no evidence that these children had themselves been the victim of child abuse.

Child-on-child sexual abuse is a serious outcome of childhood exposure to pornography. Counsellors report that short term outcomes for both offender and victim include shame and guilt; long term outcomes can include breach of sexual boundaries later in life including potential sex offending in adult hood, or (particularly in victims) other symptoms typically associated with sexual abuse such as self-harm, suicidal thoughts, depression, and poor performance at school. However, Parentline data suggests that parents, in particular fathers, are not aware of the harm that can be produced through childhood exposure to pornography. The following case study illustrates this point:

Case Study – Pornography leading to child-on-child sexual abuse and the role of the father

Mick has discovered that his 12 year old son has been engaged in ongoing sexual abuse with his 6 year old female cousin. Mick is shocked and feels full of shame. A few months ago he became aware that his son had been watching porn on his computer, but he recalls looking at penthouse magazines when he himself was young and figured it didn't do him any harm so choose not to mention it to his son or the child's mother. His son admits to having been influenced by the pornography and mimicked the explicit acts he had seen online.

Staff at **yourtown** also report that they have observed a gap in service provision for children (especially male children) involved in child-on-child sexual abuse or sexual assault, and that some existing services do not work from sensitive or empowering frameworks.

Sexualised behaviours. A second impact parents observed in their children who have been exposed to pornography separate or in conjunction to child-on-child sexual abuse is sexualised behaviour (n = 14). This may include behaviours such as performing sex acts on toys, simulating sexual moves, persistently using coarse sexual language, under-age sexting or under-age sexual activity. The majority of parents who contacted Parentline concerned about the sexualised behaviour of their child as an outcome of having consumed pornography mostly concerned male children (n = 13; average age 11yrs; age range 7-16 yrs) compared to female children (n = 1; aged 10yrs).

Sexting. Similarly, sexting under the age of 16 is a concern recorded by Parentline clients. In the 12 month data set examined for this submission (i.e., where case notes contained key words such as “porn” and “sext”), in only a minority of cases was sexting under the age of 16 linked by parents to online pornography consumption. As noted before with the KHL data, it is possible that a stronger link does exist between exposure to pornography and the act of sexting, but that this is just not evident in the data to which we have access.

Rude, aggressive, or violent behaviours. The final trend in impacts on the development of healthy and respectful relationships reported by parents in 2015 who disclosed their child has been consuming pornography is rude, aggressive, or violent behaviours (n = 5). These behaviours were directed towards siblings, other children at school, or the parents themselves. In all cases this associated behaviour was reported in male children with an average age of 13 years (age range 9-15yrs). However, what is not known in these cases is if the exposure to pornography has caused this behaviour or moreover reinforced a pattern that was already there.

Summary of findings – KHL and Parentline data

Trend of online consumption

Kids Helpline:

- KHL had 83 contacts during the six month period July-December 2015 wherein clients disclosed exposure to pornography as a minor
- The youngest age of exposure recorded was age 6. The median age of these contacts was 15 years. The majority of contacts were from male clients.
- Children appear to be exposed through three pathways, deliberate exposure (self or other initiated), accidental (e.g., push marketing) or negligence (adult fails to conceal their consumption).
- Clients contacted KHL relating to a number of concerns with their exposure to pornography including potential addiction, involvement in a scam, sexuality exploration, distress over the explicit images they had seen as coerced by others, or distress at having discovered a parent's pornography consumption.
- KHL received 95 contacts during the six month period July-December 2015 wherein clients (predominately young girls) were contacting us for support in relation to sexting. In 36 (38%) of these contacts there was coercion described by the client, such as pressure to participate in sexting or sexual acts.

Parentline:

- Parentline received 40 contacts during 2015 wherein parents disclosed their child had been exposed to online pornography (excluding sexting behaviours).

- Boys were more commonly the focus of the call (29; 73%) with an average age of 11 years (range 7-16yrs). Female children who had viewed pornography (n = 11; 27%) had an average age of 9 years (range 6-12yrs).
- The majority of exposure appeared to have been a deliberate initiative by the child, occurred within the home environment, and was associated with a lack of adult supervision while using electronic devices.
- There was evidence to suggest that exposure is more typical while under the father's care, and that father's may not perceive the potential harm to children that can result from pornography exposure.

Impacts on the development of healthy and respectful relationships

Kids Helpline:

- We found cases that corroborated most of the known impacts of pornography exposure i.e., (1) shaping sexual knowledge and attitudes, (2) sexual practices and expectations, (3) affirmation of same sex preferences, (4) partner's use seen as a betrayal, (5) addiction, (6) sexist outcomes, (7) rape training.
- An additional impact prevalent in our data was disrupted family relationships
- A deep-dive analysis investigating 'rape training' outcomes 2012-2015 revealed cases of child-on-child sexual abuse or sexual assault where the consumption of pornography as a minor appeared to have a causal role on the perpetrators' behaviour.
- There were also cases of clients reporting distress due to their desire to rape or a sexual attraction to violence

Parentline:

- Parents reported 3 main behaviours in their children who were known to have consumed pornography: Child-on-child sexual abuse, sexualised behaviours, and rude, aggressive or violent behaviours.
- As with the KHL data, pornography appeared to play a causal role in the cases of child-on-child sexual abuse, with perpetrators acknowledging to their parents that they were mimicking what they had seen online.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the following considerations:

- The limited legislative options the Australian Government has in acting against the producers and distributors of pornography given that most pornography sites are hosted in other national jurisdictions (Sandifer, 2016)
- The lack of evidence to date concerning the effectiveness of filters in reducing children's access to pornography (McLean, 2016)
- The harms to children exposed to pornography as outlined in Kids Helpline and Parentline data

Consequently based on these matters it is our belief that the Australian Government may be more effective in reducing harms to children through exposure to pornography by taking a national leadership role in raising awareness about this issue and in providing practical strategies to the community in relation to the support of children.

In this context **yourtown** makes three recommendations which we believe will provide greater protection to children being impacted by pornography in our community.

Recommendation 1:

That the Australian Government take a lead role in reviewing and developing community and educational awareness programs relating to sexuality and pornography to ensure that these programs are consistent with and promote:

- Respectful relationship principles
- The formation of skills amongst children and young people that enables them to critically analyse sexualised media and that also empowers them to challenge damaging gender stereotypes typically displayed in this material
- Risks associated with sexting behaviour
- The important role of parents in establishing behavioural standards with children regarding their online activities and behaviour
- The positive modelling by males regarding respectful relationships towards women
- Practical strategies which parents and carers can use to initiate positive conversations with their children regarding gender, sexuality and pornography

Recommendation 2:

That the Australian Government consult with States and the community sector in relation to the adequacy of current responses in supporting children who have been sexually abused by peers and others and/or in other ways have been adversely impacted by exposure to pornography

Recommendation 3:

That the Australian Government inquiries into the availability of perpetrator programs for young people who have sexually abused others where exposure to pornography has been a contributing factor to this abusive behaviour

Conclusion

yourtown's experiences of working with children, young people and parents has proved to us that there are significant harms that can occur to children through exposure to pornography.

To minimize the impact of pornography on children will take "a balanced mix of legislation, regulation, community norms, formal education, upbringing and, for the especially vulnerable, welfare intervention as needed" (Livingstone, 2015).

What may be most within the Australian government's control is the implementation of awareness campaigns and high quality education aimed at children, young people, parents, educators, and service providers about this issue.

Finally, as noted by a community of Australian researchers and practitioners advocating for change, as part of its duty of care to children, we feel that the federal government must take the lead in addressing this crisis comprehensively ("Governments should protect [children] from violence, abuse and neglect", UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19).

yourtown is committed to doing what it can to minimise harm to young people through exposure to pornography.

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