



Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet

Submission to Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, 2015

Introduction

Collective Shout: for a world free of exploitation welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee's inquiry into harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet.

Collective Shout (www.collectiveshout.org) is a grassroots movement challenging the objectification of women and sexualisation of girls in the media and popular culture. We target corporations, advertisers, marketers and media that exploit the bodies of women and girls to sell products and services, and we campaign to change their behaviour. More broadly we also engage in issues relating to other forms of sexploitation, including the interconnected industries of pornography, prostitution and trafficking.

One of our core activities is speaking to children and young people at schools across Australia, which gives us the opportunity to hear directly about the experiences of young people, in regard to these issues.

In February 2015, Collective Shout hosted the first-ever Australian symposium on the harms of pornography to young people, at the University of New South Wales.¹ Academic and other authorities in the field who spoke at the symposium identified pornography as a public health crisis requiring urgent intervention.

Australian children are growing up in a digital, interactive, internet-enabled society and culture. While the benefits of such connectivity can be great, Collective Shout and our supporters are also very conscious of the potential for the internet to facilitate access by children to harmful material, including pornography. We share in the growing concern of experts about the risks to which children and young people are exposed online, and the consequences for their wellbeing and healthy development.

We also hold significant concerns for those responsible for the welfare of children, particularly (although not only) parents, as they attempt to maintain their children's online safety while helping them to navigate life in a digital world.

¹ See www.pornharmskids.org.au/.

In this submission we respond to the terms of reference for this inquiry into the harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet, and we call for effective measures to limit exposure to Internet pornography of children and young people.

1. Trends of online consumption of pornography by children

As the means of access to Internet content proliferate, children and young people can ever more readily access the full range of Internet content, including pornography. In particular, mobile devices (eg smart phones, tablets) now allow children access at any location and at any time. Pornography is more readily available than ever on the Internet, with an increasing proportion of it accessible freely rather than through paid sites requiring credit card payments or other forms of verification.

Children and young people may initially be inadvertently exposed to pornography through a variety of means – pop-ups, search results from innocuous searches, adults leaving a device open on a pornography site, etc. Intentional consumption of Internet pornography by children and young people may commence through an initial search on relevant terms; being introduced to it by peers, older siblings or, in some cases, adults; or following links after inadvertent exposure.

The 2012 report by the UK Office of the Children’s Commissioner, *Basically ... Porn is Everywhere: A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effects that Access and Exposure to Pornography Has on Children and Young People*, concluded on the basis of a thorough literature review that

A significant proportion of children and young people are exposed to or access pornography ... studies of exposure across the lifetime of children and young people report considerable exposure and access rates across time and countries, from approximately 43 per cent to 99 per cent.²

Young men and boys are more likely to be exposed to pornography than young women and female children ... Young men and boys are also more likely to access, seek or use pornography ... and are exposed to or access pornography more frequently.³

Along roughly similar lines, a recent Australian study of 800 people who watch pornography found that 43% of those surveyed began viewing pornography between the ages of 11 and 13, and that 47% spend between 30 minutes and 3 hours a day consuming pornography.⁴

These findings are similar to those of Sun et al. (2014) in their survey of US male college students:

- 48.7% of men had a first exposure to pornography earlier than the age of 13;

² Horvath MAH, Alys L, Massey K, Pina A, Scally M & Adler JR (2012) *Basically ... Porn is Everywhere: A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effects that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People*, Office of the Children’s Commissioner (UK), 21-12, https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Basically_porn_is_everywhere.pdf.

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ University of Sydney News (2012) ‘Study exposes secret world of porn addiction’ 10 May, <http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=9176>.

- 58.7% of men use pornography weekly, overwhelmingly over the Internet, with 13.2% viewing pornography daily or almost daily; and
- the younger age at which men were first exposed to pornography the higher their current use of pornography.⁵

A further outworking of pornography's shaping influence is seen in the demands from boys for sexual images of girls.

This year, Plan Australia commissioned a survey of a random sample of 600 Australian women and girls aged 15-19.⁶ Key results:

- Seven out of ten young women surveyed agreed that girls are often bullied or harassed online.
- 58% agreed that girls often receive uninvited or unwanted indecent or sexually explicit material such as texts, video clips, and porn.
- 51% agreed girls are often pressured to take 'sexy' pictures of themselves and share them.
- 82% believe it is unacceptable for a boyfriend to ask their girlfriend to share naked photos of themselves.
- 44% do not feel comfortable reporting abusive online behaviour.

2. Impact of children's online consumption of pornography on the development of healthy and respectful relationships

Michael Flood (2009) set out the likely effects of the exposure of children and young people to pornography, based on a careful analysis of the available evidence, as follows:

- children and young people may be disturbed (sick, shocked, embarrassed, repulsed, upset) by unwanted exposure to Internet pornography;⁷
- girls are more likely than boys to be troubled by sexually explicit images, and boys are more likely to report sexual excitement;⁸
- children and young people exposed to pornography that features non-mainstream sexual practices (such as male-female anal intercourse) are more likely to engage in such practices;⁹
- children and young people who view pornography are more likely to have liberal attitudes towards, and to engage in, sex without love, one night stands, multiple sex partners, more frequent sex, and earlier sexual involvement;¹⁰

⁵ Sun C, Bridges A, Johnason J & Ezzell M (2014) 'Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations' *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 1-12, at 2.

⁶ Plan Australia. 2016. Don't send me that pic: Australian young women and girls report online abuse and harassment are endemic. March 2016. Accessed online at https://issuu.com/planaustralia/docs/plan_our_watch_report_final/1

⁷ Flood M (2009) 'The Harms of Pornography Exposure among Children and Young People' *Child Abuse Review* 18, 384-390 at 388-389.

⁸ Ibid., 389.

⁹ Ibid., 390.

¹⁰ Ibid., 391.

- pornography, much of which offers a decontextualised portrayal of sexual behaviour, a relentless focus on female bodies, and sexist and callous depictions of women, contributes to sexually objectifying understandings of and behaviours towards girls and women by boys and young men;¹¹
- exposure to pornography is related to male sexual aggression against women. This association is strongest for violent pornography but also holds for nonviolent pornography, particularly by frequent users. For example, Michael Flood notes, 'in a study of Canadian teenagers with an average age of 14, there was a correlation between boys' frequent consumption of pornography and their agreement with the idea that it is acceptable to hold a girl down and force her to have sex';¹²
- exposure of girls and young women to pornography may make them more vulnerable to submitting to sexist and sexually objectifying attitudes, including sexual violence;¹³ and
- partners of adult pornography users report decreased sexual intimacy, lowered esteem and demands that they participate in activities they find objectionable, so children and young people's exposure to pornography is making them less able to sustain genuine intimate relationships based on mutual respect.¹⁴

A systematic literature review by Owens et al. (2012), *The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research*, found that adolescent consumption of Internet pornography was linked to attitudinal changes such as

- more permissive sexual attitudes towards casual sex, including viewing sex as 'primarily physical and casual rather than affectionate and relational';¹⁵ and
- acceptance of male dominance and female submission as the primary sexual paradigm, with women viewed as 'sexual playthings eager to fulfill male sexual desires'.¹⁶

The review by Owens et al. also found that frequency of consumption of Internet pornography was linked to behaviour such as

- first oral sex at a younger age;
- first sexual intercourse at a younger age; and
- casual sex, group sex, male-female anal intercourse.¹⁷

Further, Owens et al. concluded that 'adolescents who are intentionally exposed to violent sexually explicit material were six times more likely to be sexually aggressive than those who were not exposed'.¹⁸

¹¹ Ibid., 391-392.

¹² Ibid., 392-393.

¹³ Ibid., 393.

¹⁴ Ibid., 394.

¹⁵ Owens EJ, Behun RJ, Manning JC & Reid RC (2012) 'The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research' *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 19, 99-122 at 104-107.

¹⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107-108.

¹⁸ Ibid., 109-110.

In a very recent meta-analysis examining the link between pornography consumption and sexual violence (2016), Wright et al. found that:

- consumption of pornography was associated with an increased likelihood of committing actual acts of sexual aggression;¹⁹
- this association held for both adolescents and adults;²⁰
- the association held for both violent pornography and nonviolent pornography, although the link with violent pornography was stronger (but nonsignificant): ‘it appears most likely that (a) the level of violence, degradation, and objectification matters, but (b) the pornography consumed by the average individual contains enough of these elements that it is associated with an elevated likelihood of sexual aggression’;²¹
- there is an even stronger link for verbal sexual aggression than for physical sexual aggression;²² and
- the link between pornography consumption and sexually aggressive behaviour is not explained by ‘sexually aggressive individuals watching content that conforms to their already established aggressive sexual scripts’, but that ‘pornography consumption predicted boys’ later sexual aggression even after controlling for their earlier sexual aggression’.²³

Wright et al. conclude unequivocally on the link between pornography consumption and sexual aggression:

As with all behavior, sexual aggression is caused by a confluence of factors and many pornography consumers are not 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.²⁴

Sun et al.’s 2014 paper ‘Pornography and the Male Sexual Script’ describes the character of the majority of pornography currently available:

Nevertheless, with online mainstream pornography overwhelmingly centered on acts of violence and degradation toward women, the sexual behaviors exemplified in pornography skew away from intimacy and tenderness and typify patriarchal constructions of masculinity and femininity. Content analysis of best-selling pornographic videos, for example, reveals that over 88% of scenes involve acts of physical aggression, with 70% of the aggressive acts being perpetrated by men, and 87% of the acts being committed against women. Such acts stand in sharp relief against more intimate acts, which were relatively infrequent, such as issuing verbal compliments, embracing, kissing, and laughing.²⁵

¹⁹ Wright PJ, Tokunaga RS & 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, 192.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁵ Sun C et al. (2014) ‘Pornography and the Male Sexual Script’ *op. cit.*, 2.

Research by RMIT's Dr Meagan Tyler has similarly found, on the basis of analysis of the pornography industry's leading trade magazine, that 'mainstream' pornography is becoming markedly more extreme and more openly degrading to women.²⁶

The 2014 paper by Sun et al. examines pornography in the light of cognitive scripts theory, arguing that pornography provides a gendered heuristic sexual script that is internalised by frequent consumers of pornography in such a way that the script affects their cognitive processes and consequently their behaviour in dyadic (paired) sexual encounters.²⁷ Simply put, this means that using pornography has a deep and lasting effect on the sexual practices and perspectives of its consumers.

In addition to the findings on first age of exposure and frequency of use reported above, the survey by Sun et al. of US heterosexual male college students found that men who view pornography more frequently are:

- more likely to rely on pornography to become and remain sexually excited (reporting masturbation with pornography as more exciting than sex with a partner; and intentionally thinking about images from pornography during sex with a partner);
- more likely to integrate pornography into dyadic sexual encounters (viewing pornography with a sex partner or acting out activities or positions seen in pornography); and
- less likely to enjoy intimate behaviours such as cuddling, kissing and caressing with a partner.²⁸

Natasha Bitá writes in *The Australian* that "doctors and child abuse experts are warning that easy and accidental access to violent pornography is turning children into copycat sexual predators, with schools and parents often oblivious to the abuse."²⁹ Providing many examples of disturbing events and statistics over the past few years, Bitá also spoke to many professionals who are very concerned about children's access to pornography and the effect it has on them. Joe Tucci, a psychologist, social worker and CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation, says children's exposure to violent pornography is "a public health crisis in the making." Stephen Parnis, Australian Medical Association vice-president, says the increase in STIs and violent sexual practices are associated with the availability of porn, and that "many of the girls comply... because they think it is normal and they want to be a 'good girlfriend.'"

Collective Shout co-founder and public speaker Melinda Tankard Reist reports that medical professionals are increasingly relaying to her accounts of young women (many under-age) suffering from anal tearing as a result of pornography-inspired anal sex acts, including group acts. There is even some anecdotal evidence of girls rendered incontinent and needing colostomy bags, or contracting the HPV virus through oral sex.

London Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson has written about the implications of girls submitting to pornography-inspired sexual acts:

²⁶ Tyler M (2010) 'Now That's Pornography! Violence and Domination in *Adult Video News*' in *Everyday Pornography* ed Boyle K (London: Routledge).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ Bitá N. 2016. Online porn turns school-age kids into sexual predators. *The Australian* March 5, Accessed online at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/online-porn-turns-schoolaged-kids-into-sexual-predators/news-story/5d313098d7cbd50ad936ea86d6528ca0>

I was having dinner with a group of women when the conversation moved on to how we could raise happy, well-balanced sons and daughters who are capable of forming meaningful relationships when internet pornography has changed the landscape of adolescence beyond recognition...

A GP, let's call her Sue, said: 'I'm afraid things are much worse than people suspect.' In recent years, Sue had treated growing numbers of teenage girls with internal injuries caused by frequent anal sex; not, as Sue found out, because they wanted to, or because they enjoyed it, but because a boy expected them to. 'I'll spare you the gruesome details,' said Sue, 'but these girls are very young and slight and their bodies are simply not designed for that.'

... Anal sex was standard among teenagers now, even though the girls knew it hurt.

... The end result is what Sue sees as a GP. Young girls – children, really – who abase themselves to pass for normal in a grim, pornified culture. According to another study of British teenagers, most youngsters' first experience of anal sex occurred within a relationship, but it was 'rarely under circumstances of mutual exploration of sexual pleasure'. Instead, it was boys who pushed the girls to try it, with boys reporting that they felt 'expected' to take that role. Moreover, both genders expected males to find pleasure in the act whereas females were mostly expected to 'endure the negative aspects such as pain or a damaged reputation'.³⁰

Again, in the foreword to the 2012 report noted above, *Basically ... Porn is Everywhere*, Deputy Children's Commissioner for England Sue Berelowitz highlights violence done to girls by porn-influenced boys:

The first year of our Inquiry ... revealed shocking rates of sexual violation of children and young people... The Inquiry team heard children recount appalling stories about being raped by both older males and peers, often in extremely violent and sadistic circumstances, and in abusive situations that frequently continued for years... The use of and children's access to pornography emerged as a key theme... It was mentioned by boys in witness statements after being apprehended for the rape of a child, one of whom said it was 'like being in a porn movie'; we had frequent accounts of both girls' and boys' expectations of sex being drawn from pornography they had seen; and professionals told us troubling stories of the extent to which teenagers and younger children routinely access pornography, including extreme and violent images. We also found compelling evidence that too many boys believe that they have an absolute entitlement to sex at any time, in any place, in any way and with whomever they wish. Equally worryingly, we heard that too often girls feel they have no alternative but to submit to boys' demands, regardless of their own wishes.³¹

This porn-fuelled entitlement of boys to sex with girls unable to do much other than submit, is borne out by Collective Shout's experience in engaging young people in schools throughout the country. In a report for commissioned for the UK Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (2013), and in other research, Coy et al. have explored in depth the dissatisfaction of young girls with pornography and pornography-influenced sexual 'scripts'.³² At the same time, young girls frequently feel powerless to do anything about it.

³⁰ Tankard Reist M (2015) 'What No One Wants to Talk About: How Girls' Bodies are Injured by Porn-Using Boys' *MTR blog* 26 April, <http://melindatankardreist.com/2015/04/what-no-one-wants-to-talk-about-how-girls-bodies-are-injured-by-porn-using-boys/>.

³¹ Horvath et al. (2012) op. cit.

³² Coy M, Kelly L, Elvines F, Garner M & Kanyeredzi A (2013) *'Sex without Consent, I Suppose That is Rape': How Young People in England Understand Sexual Consent*, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU),

In addition, we hear from front-line service providers about the way pornography has contributed to the nature and types of injuries to women. The Director of the Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence Di Macleod writes:

In the past few years we have had a huge increase in intimate partner rape of women from 14 to 80+. The biggest common denominator is consumption of porn by the offender. With offenders not able to differentiate between fantasy and reality, believing women are 'up for it' 24/7, ascribing to the myth that 'no means yes and yes means anal', oblivious to injuries caused and never ever considering consent. We have seen a huge increase in deprivation of liberty, physical injuries, torture, drugging, filming and sharing footage without consent. I founded the centre 25 years ago and what is now considered to be the norm in 2015 is frightening. I wonder where we will be in another 10 years!³³

The Australian Psychological Society reports adolescent boys are estimated to be responsible for about a fifth of rapes of adult women and between a third and a half of all reported sexual assaults of children.³⁴ Offences by school-aged children have quadrupled in Australia in only four years according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

A related trend that is extremely disturbing is a rise in the making and use of child pornography by young people themselves. In a 2009 child pornography case involving a student at the University of New South Wales, the student was in possession of materials including 'videos of a baby bound and sexually assaulted, a two year old girl subjected to anal intercourse, numerous images of young girls apparently heavily sedated being sexually assaulted and a girl under ten bound and subjected to an act of anal intercourse while crying with the pain'.³⁵ A more recent case involved Matthew David Graham ('Lux') who in his final year of secondary college became a principal figure in a ring of child pornography so extreme that the sentencing judge remarked, 'It is as if he is from another planet.'³⁶

The Australian Medical Association says there is a strong relationship between exposure to sexually explicit material and sexual behaviour that predisposes young people to adverse sexual and mental health outcomes.³⁷ The proliferation and globalisation of hypersexualised imagery and pornographic themes has led to destructive ideas about sex and makes healthy sexual exploration almost impossible.

London Metropolitan University, report commissioned for the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups.

³³ Di Macleod, Director of the Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence, personal correspondence to Melinda Tankard Reist, 7 April 2015.

³⁴ Nisbet I (2010) 'Adolescent Sex Offenders: A Life Sentence?' *InPsych* August, <http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2010/august/nisbet/>.

³⁵ *Puhakka v R* [2009] NSWCCA 290, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/nsw/NWCCA/2009/290.html>, discussed in Pringle H (2011) 'Civil Justice for Victims of Child Pornography' in *Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global Pornography Industry* ed. Tankard Reist M & Bray A (Melbourne: Spinifex Press), 212.

³⁶ Johnston C (2016) 'Shocked Judge Says It Seems Pornographer Matthew Graham is 'From another Planet' *Age* 18 February, <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/shocked-judge-says-it-seems-as-if-child-pornographer-matthew-graham-is-from-another-planet-20160218-gmxhwh.html#ixzz41Z2m8HHL>, and Johnston C (2016) 'Judge Asked to Peer into the Abyss as 'Hurtcore' Paedophile Matthew Graham Fronts Court' *Age* 3 February, <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/judge-asked-to-peer-into-the-abyss-as-hurtcore-pedophile-matthew-graham-fronts-court-20160203-gmkm6u.html#ixzz41Z3VcvCB>.

³⁷ Guy RJ, Patton GC & Kaldor JM (2012) 'Internet Pornography and Adolescent Health' *Medical Journal of Australia* 196.9, 546-547.

The desensitising of children and young people to cruelty and degradation through exposure to pornography, and in particular desensitisation to sexual cruelty, is increasingly evident in such cases as those of Marcus Puhakka and Matthew Graham. These are of course extreme cases, but the extreme is now not so far from the mainstream. Popular culture reflects and celebrates pornographic themes in everyday life, with commercial advertising in particular regularly drawing on those themes to sell products.

Taken together, the weight of evidence about the trends in online consumption of pornography by children and young people, and the harms associated with online consumption of pornography, point to the urgent need to find effective means to limit or reduce children's access to online pornography.

To fail to take action would be to betray a whole generation of girls and boys by ceding their formation in sex and relationships to the hands of a pornography industry and culture that teaches boys and young men to view women as sex objects, to be used in a degrading and even violent way, and that teaches girls and young women to view their worth as conditioned upon their valuation by porn-saturated boys and men as fit for the purpose of an objectified sex instrument.

3. Current methods taken towards harm minimisation in other jurisdictions, and the effectiveness of those methods

The 2012 (UK) Independent Parliamentary Inquiry into Online Child Protection addressed the oddness and inconsistency of failing to regulate children's access to inappropriate content on the Internet when such regulation is largely accepted for all other media. The Inquiry report noted:

In other media industries, consumers, governments and content generation and distribution companies work together to regulate content delivery and to ensure that the younger members of society are shielded from inappropriate material. Very few would argue that the watershed guidelines for TV viewing, the application of film ratings, sensible advertising standards, or top-shelf placement agreements for pornographic magazines represent inappropriate forms of censorship but in the internet world, any attempt to regulate content before the point of delivery can be attacked as censorship unless (but not always) the content is deemed illegal.³⁸

The 2012 Inquiry report found that then-current approaches to protecting children from inappropriate content on the Internet, which relied heavily on parents implementing device level controls on each device on which children might access the Internet, were inadequate: at least 6 out of 10 children still had easy access to unlimited Internet content. The report noted that parents find device filters difficult to install and maintain, as well as lacking in internet safety education and up-to-date information.³⁹

The Inquiry report included the following recommendations:

³⁸ Perry C (2012) *Independent Parliamentary Inquiry into Online Child Protection: Findings and Recommendations* (UK) April 2012, 4, <http://www.safermedia.org.uk/Images/final-report.pdf>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

- ISPs should be tasked with rolling out single account network filters for domestic broadband customers that can provide one click filtering for all devices connected to a home internet connection within 12 months;
- The government should launch a formal consultation on the introduction of an Opt-In content filtering system for all internet accounts in the UK. The most effective way to reduce overall development cost and create the most flexible solution would be for ISPs to work together to develop a self-regulated solution;
- Public wi-fi provision should also be filtered in this way otherwise home-based controls will be easily circumvented; and
- The government should also seek backstop legal powers to intervene should the ISPs fail to implement an appropriate solution.⁴⁰

On 22 July 2013, British Prime Minister David Cameron gave a significant speech to the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children in which he laid out the significant cultural challenge posed by ‘the fact that many children are viewing online pornography and other damaging material at a very early age and that the nature of that pornography is so extreme it is distorting their view of sex and relationships’. Mr Cameron pointed out that ‘the internet is not a side-line to real life or an escape from real life, it is real life. It has an impact on the children who view things that harm them, on the vile images of abuse that pollute minds and cause crime, on the very values that underpin our society.’

Prime Minister Cameron explained the need for the whole community to support parents in protecting children from harmful material on the Internet:

... when it comes to internet pornography, parents have been left too much on their own. And I’m determined to put that right. We all need to work together, both to prevent children from accessing pornography and educate them about keeping safe online. This is about access and it’s about education.

Mr Cameron outlined progress to date (as at July 2013) and plans for further action:

- all mobile phone network providers to have automatic adult content filters in place which can only be turned off with age verification;
- the six largest companies which provide 90% of public wi-fi to apply family-friendly filters wherever children are likely to be present;
- the four big internet service providers to have a default family-friendly filter on all new broadband accounts, with the filter operating across all access devices and only able to be switched off by the (adult) account holder; and
- ISPs to contact all existing customers and obtain a decision from the adult account holder as to whether a family-friendly filter should be put in place on the account.⁴¹

On 30 July 2015, Prime Minister Cameron announced plans to get adult content providers to voluntarily implement effective age verification procedures or face new regulations that would

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ Cameron D (2013) *The Internet and Pornography: Prime Minister Calls for Action*, Speech from Cabinet Office, London, 22 July, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-internet-and-pornography-prime-minister-calls-for-action>.

make it an offence to offer adult content over the Internet without effective age verification procedures in place.⁴²

Ofcom has reported, as of 30 June 2015, the following take-up rates for customers of the big four ISPs:

- BT said that by the end of the June 2015 data collection period, 8% of new customers and 5% of existing customers had taken up the offer of parental controls. It indicated that only around 25% of its customers were in households with children, and that 24% of that group were using network-level filters or parental control software.
- By the end of June 2015, 6% of new Sky customers had taken up Broadband Shield. At the end of December 2014, only around 3% of Sky's existing customers had made an active choice. Sky therefore decided to engineer further processes to encourage adoption of family-friendly network-level filtering by existing customers. This it described as a 'default on' system, so that if a customer did not make a choice the filters turned on automatically. Sky said that at the end of the roll-out 62% of customers within Sky's total customer base (other than new customers from November 2013 onwards) had accepted Broadband Shield's parental controls (61% at '13' and 1% activating the higher level of protection at 'PG'). A further 8% chose the 18 category. The 'default on' setting was actively switched off by 30% of customers. Sky intends, following the high levels of engagement and take up of Broadband Shield while implementing 'Default On' to its existing customers, to extend this to all other customers in 2016.
- TalkTalk indicated that take-up by the end of the data collection period in June 2015 remained at 33% among new customers; broadly in proportion to the number of households with children in its customer base. Take-up by existing customers when presented with the unavoidable choice was 5%.
- Virgin Media said that between the launch of its service and the end of June 2015, 24.12% of new customers had chosen to switch on parental controls, and 10.5% of existing customers. Virgin Media confirmed that in September 2014 it had introduced an account-holder verification system for changes made to its Web Safe settings, similar to those already in place with the other ISPs' services.⁴³

One frequent criticism of filtering systems is the possibility of over-blocking through miscategorisation of a site. Significant efforts have been made in Britain to establish an efficient mechanism for unblocking or correctly categorising any site that is affected by over-blocking or miscategorisation. There is now a single port of call – Internet Matters – where any website owner can check the status of their site on all four filtering systems. Turn around times are improving with most queries handled within 24 hours.⁴⁴

These measures indicate that it is possible to address children's access to pornography in sensible ways without undue interference in the freedom of speech.

⁴² Prime Minister's Office (2015) *Curbing Access to Pornographic Websites for Under 18s*, Press Release, 30 July, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/curbing-access-to-pornographic-websites-for-under-18s>.

⁴³ Ofcom (2015) *Ofcom Report on Internet Safety Measure: Strategies of Parental Protection for Children Online*, 16 December, <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/internet/internet-safety-measures.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

4. The identification of any measures with the potential for implementation in Australia

Collective Shout believes that urgent action is needed to halt the proliferation of pornography that harmfully shapes and conditions boys and young men and that poses a serious threat to the wellbeing, and in some cases the physical health and life, of girls and women.

In particular, the evidence we have cited above shows that:

- age of first exposure to pornography on the Internet is trending younger with a greater percentage of boys and girls first being exposed at age 11 to 13;
- earlier age of first exposure is linked to ongoing more frequent use into young adulthood;
- frequent use of pornography, both violent and nonviolent but degrading (as in the majority of mainstream Internet pornography), is linked with an increased propensity to engage in both verbal and physical sexual aggression;
- frequent use of pornography has harmful effects on consumers' capacity to engage in respectful, equal, intimate relationships; and
- effective default filtering systems at the ISP level can be implemented.

Accordingly, as a significant step towards protecting Australian children from being swallowed whole by a destructive and inhuman porn culture, Collective Shout recommends that the Australian government work with Internet Service Providers to establish a scheme for all existing and new customers to be provided with a default family-friendly (no pornography) setting, with opt-out only permitted by account holders who can establish that they are aged 18 years or over. Regulations to impose this requirement should be considered as a backup if, after 12 months, insufficient progress has been made by ISPs towards this goal. New education programs should also be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency.⁴⁵

Evidence suggests that Australian girls and young women believe that education is a key to improving their safety and intimate relationships. In Plan Australia's 2016 survey of girls and young women aged 15-19 previously cited, more than one third of respondents called for more comprehensive education on sexuality and respectful relationships.⁴⁶ Several suggested this should include the critique and discussion of pornography recognition and how violent and degrading pornography was negatively impacting on young Australians' relationships and boys' and young men's attitudes towards sex in general.

Here are some quotes from young Australian women regarding building healthy intimate relationships for young people:⁴⁷

- "[I want] better education regarding sex for both boys [and] information about pornography, and the way it influences harmful sexual practices."
- "[Schools should] introduce [discussion of] pornography as part of the education as young boys are increasingly accessing it and thinking this is normal in relationships."

⁴⁵ We commend the secondary school resource *In The Picture: Supporting Young People in an Era of Explicit Sexual Imagery*, a comprehensive guide to help schools respond to the influence of explicit sexual imagery by providing guidelines, suggested strategies and practical resources.

⁴⁶ Plan Australia 2016, op cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

- “We need some sort of crack down on the violent pornography that is currently accessible to boy and men. This violent pornography should be illegal to make or view in Australia as we clearly have a problem with violence and boys are watching a lot of pornography which can be very violent... This is influencing men’s attitudes towards women and what they think is acceptable. Violent pornography is infiltrating Australian relationships.”

Recommendations⁴⁸

- **The Australian Government should work with Internet Service Providers to establish a scheme for all existing and new customers to be provided with a default family-friendly setting (no pornography) with opt-out only permitted by account holders who can establish that they are aged 18 years or over. Regulations to impose this requirement should be considered as a backup if after 12 months insufficient progress has been made by ISPs towards this goal.**
- **New programs should be designed with respectful and mutual relationships as the starting point, not just ‘sex education’. Young people want content based on their real lives and experiences – information that empowers and equips them to make healthy decisions about their sexuality.**
- **All children and young people should have access to comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality and relationships education that promotes respectful and mutual relationships.**
- **The school curriculum should, in an age-appropriate manner, specifically address the influence of media, including the influence of pornography and the sex industry more broadly. We believe it is not enough to adopt a public health perspective, but that a gender equality perspective is also crucial in understanding these problems.**
- **School communities – including teachers, wellbeing staff and school leaders – should have access to quality professional learning, support and resources, to support them in implementing comprehensive relationships and sexuality education. This should include specialist support to address the influence of pornography.**
- **Pre-service teacher training should include learning about the influence of pornography and how to address it through respectful relationships and sexuality curricula, and in other relevant learning areas.**
- **Parents and carers should have access to information and resources to support them to parent effectively in this relatively new context of easy and anonymous access to pornography. This should include support to understand the issues, and practical advice about how to manage technology to minimise exposure and how to support their children’s reflective and critical thinking.**

⁴⁸ These recommendations draw from discussion at the Pornograph and Harms to Children and Young People Symposium at UNSW on 9 February 2016. The specific recommendations relating to education were proposed by Maree Crabbe, author of the education resource *Reality & Risk: Pornography, young people and sexuality*.

- **Other adults involved in children and young people’s care and education – such as youth workers, doctors, counsellors and health promotion staff – should have access to relevant professional learning and resources addressing the influence of pornography.**

Contact: Coralie Alison
Director of Operations
Collective Shout
PO Box 781, Neutral Bay, NSW, 2089
www.collectiveshout.org
7 March 2016