



The Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce

eChildhood Submission - June 8 2018

The eChildhood submission to the Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce outlines the evidence of how pornography is an underlying driver of Online Sexual Abuse - a subset of harms within cyberbullying. We provide suggestions on how to prevent and respond to this form of cyberbullying by adopting a whole-of-community, public health approach. By doing so, we bring the conversation of the impacts of pornography on children and young people out of the shadows.

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Executive Summary

Cyberbullying has become an increasing cause for concern amongst children and young people over recent years. This behaviour is a socio-cultural problem that is difficult to solve given it has complex and overlapping contributors, and many and varied expressions.

In relation to how to prevent cyberbullying, *eChildhood* refers to a subset of harms known as Online Sexual Abuse. *eChildhood* presents a case study as an example, and outlines evidence of how pornography normalises Online Sexual Abuse. Peer reviewed literature and survey reports provide insight into the ways in which children and young people's access to hardcore online pornography shapes attitudes and behaviours. This includes normalisation and acceptance of sexist and abusive attitudes; manipulation, threats and coercion to produce, obtain and exchange explicit images of minors; reenactment of trauma from viewing online pornography; and sexual cyber dating abuse. It is necessary to investigate pornography as underlying driver on children and young people's attitudes and behaviors in order to effectively understand what is contributing to the rise of Online Sexual Abuse.

In relation to how to respond to solving this subset of cyberbullying, *eChildhood* recommends an approach that draws on our extensive knowledge published in *The Porn Harms Kids Report: Protecting our kids from online pornography harms is everyone's business*¹. This report provides comprehensive opportunities to expand understanding of the scope of pornography's impact on children and young people.

eChildhood recommends legislative, policy, digital, education and therapeutic strategies to address the harms. Our solutions-focused Action Plan (further detailed on page 19) was developed to respond to children and young people's vulnerabilities to pornography (including Online Sexual Abuse), in consultation with experts around the world.

eChildhood recommends a whole-of-community public health approach to address this issue, including governments supporting solutions that relate to disrupting children and young people's access to pornography and provision of robust education. By doing so, we reshape the digital landscape and provide young people an opportunity to critique cultural norms around Online Sexual Abuse.

¹ Porn Harms Kids Report (2017)

Forms of Cyberbullying

According to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, cyberbullying² is defined as *the use of technology to bully a person or group with the intent to hurt them socially, psychologically or even physically*. It can occur in many ways, including:

- abusive texts and emails
- hurtful messages, images or videos
- imitating others online
- excluding others online
- humiliating others online
- nasty online gossip and chat

Within Cyberbullying is a subset of behaviours known as Online Sexual Abuse. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner outlines that Online Abuse³ contains a broad range of behaviours, many of which are sexual in nature. These include using any online or digital platform or device to make:

- abusive, degrading or hateful comments about a person
- threats of physical or sexual violence to a person
- repeated or unwanted sexual requests to a person
- controlling factors within relationships such as cyberstalking
- image-based abuse (sharing or threatening to share, intimate pictures of a person). This is also known as sexting, and is illegal for children under the age of 18 given it is deemed as child sexual exploitation material.
- pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations, otherwise referred to as grooming⁴

The Office notes that *women are particularly likely to experience online abuse in the form of sexual harassment or offensive or degrading comments about their gender*.

A UK Report titled *Young People, Sex & Relationships: The New Norms*⁵, outlines the transition from traditional forms of bullying to cyberbullying, compounded by access to adult content.

“...young people are revealing ever more information about themselves, and traditional ‘offline’ occurrences such as bullying, relationship breakups and social pressures are magnified and recorded online. Relationships can be more intensive, with more opportunities for contact and less visibility or moderation by adults, and relationships and friendships often create permanent digital content. Access to adult or extreme material is fundamentally different and much easier. And quality information, clear social norms, and opportunities for redress are less present in digital spaces than usually exists offline. These changes have left a widening gap between those who have a responsibility to educate and guide young people and the behaviours and norms created by rapidly evolving technology.”

² eSafety - Cyberbullying

³ eSafety - Online Abuse

⁴ NSPCC - Online Abuse

⁵ Young People, Sex & Relationships (2014)

Relying on international guidance from the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse⁶, exposure to harmful content is defined as children accessing or being exposed to, intentionally or incidentally, age-inappropriate sexual or violent content, or content otherwise considered harmful to their development. These guidelines state that exposure to harmful content can normalise harmful sexual behaviour for children as individuals or within their peer groups.

eChildhood believes it is of vital and urgent importance to minimise access to pornography as a way of reducing online harms in the form of online sexual abuse, a subset of cyberbullying. The following provides explanation of how pornography leads to online abuse and grooming, including pressure on young minors to send and receive sexually explicit images, and its contribution to sexual abuse and cyberbullying via digital devices and social media platforms.

Online Pornography and links to Online Sexual Abuse

Children in Queensland and Australia currently have unfettered access to hardcore pornography 24/7. Research is proving the harms of this access. The ease of children's access to hardcore pornography requires urgent attention as by its very nature, it normalises online (and offline) abuse.

What does this mean? Pornography has become an educator, grooming tool and a significant contributor to the scripting and programming of a child's sexual and relational development online; as well as a source of trauma for young children due to the nature of pornography. *Children having access to pornography is essentially, child sexual abuse via digital images.*⁷

It is important to understand what pornography is today, as it is very different from what it was 10 - 20 years ago. Mainstream hardcore porn regularly depicts choking, slapping, derogatory name-calling, incest, bondage, group and rough sex. Regular viewing is linked to sexually abusive behaviours and teaches young men to have an attitude of sexual entitlement, and young women struggle to recognise their own abuse. Kids having easy access to pornography is like steroids for the #MeToo women of tomorrow. We can't ignore the role it plays in normalising bullying, sexual abuse and harassment, and how we now have generations of children growing up with violence as the basis of their sexual scripting due to pornography being the main form of education.

Defining Hardcore Pornography: Among the most travelled sites are Porn Hub, Red Tube and You Porn. Within these sites and others, the most readily available porn, is hardcore pornography. A new definition⁸ that was developed from observing the free online mainstream, hardcore sites that are major forms of distribution today: Illegal, unclassified, "gonzo" or hard-core XXX, "free online material that depicts individuals or groups engaging in sexual behaviours where inequity between the parties is clear, violence is observed or audible, where degradation, humiliation, punishment and extreme submission appear to be the general objective of the power dynamics or behaviour depicted.

⁶ Terminology Guidelines 2016

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸ Etheredge, L. (2015)

Hardcore pornography is classified as RC, X18+, and R18+ material; which, according to Federal Legislation, is both prohibited and unsuitable for minors to access⁹. However, as outlined in Figure 4, Appendix A of this submission, the current digital environment and failures of the regulatory measures means that prohibited content is accessible for everyone, including minors.

The Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse produced findings¹⁰ that seem to indicate that children who are harmed by violent pornography, are then expressing tendencies to perpetuate those harms upon others.

This view of the negative effect of pornography on children's sexual behaviours is consistent with evidence Australian treatment providers and academics have submitted to the Royal Commission and other government inquiries. One practitioner who treats children with harmful sexual behaviours told us at a private roundtable, 'I can't think of anything that is going to impact us or what is actually happening for our young kids as much as the easy access of quite hardcore pornography.'

A US study in 2012¹¹ found 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.” This is particularly concerning given that according to data¹² of young people viewing pornography in Australia (June 2017), eighty-four (84) per cent of young men and nineteen (19) per cent of young women watch pornography on a weekly or daily basis.

According to a former Queensland school teacher¹³, “51 per cent of children, mostly boys, had viewed pornography or other illicit material, while one-fifth of respondents admitted to bullying, trolling and stalking for fun.” At the same time that large numbers of young men are frequently watching pornography, young women report an increase in sexually abusive behaviours online.

According to a 2016 joint survey¹⁴ by Plan International Australia and Our Watch, seven out of ten Australian girls aged 15-19 believe online harassment and bullying is endemic. This survey offered some telling insight from young women about the impact of pornography on their online environment. “When asked what could improve girls' and young women's safety and intimate relationships, more than one third of young women called for more comprehensive education on sexuality and respectful relationships – several suggested this education should extend to 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.”

It is clear that young people themselves are making the links between access to pornography and the normalisation of Online Sexual Abuse online, a subset of cyberbullying.

⁹ National Classification Code as amended (May 2005)

¹⁰ Royal Commission, Final Report: Volume 10 (2017)

¹¹ Owens et. al. (2012)

¹² Lim et al. (2017)

¹³ Bartholomew, K., 2018,

¹⁴ Our Watch and Plan International. (2016).

A case study of how pornography leads to online sexual abuse and cyberbullying

The following is just one example¹⁵ of how access to pornography can directly contribute to sexually offending behaviours.

John is a 17-year-old high-school student. He lives with his parents. He has few friends in school, and according to his classmates he is a loner. John is under a lot of pressure. He wants to be successful on the junior basketball team. His ex-girlfriend recently broke up with him because she was in love with someone else. Since the breakup John has had recurring episodes of depressed mood, and he has begun to watch a lot of Internet pornography. With time, he finds most of the mainstream pornography artificial and boring. To get aroused he looks for more extreme pornographic material, such as child pornography and violent pornography, which he then downloads. A few weeks later, John creates a fake profile on a social media platform. He contacts peers and asks them for contact information and erotic pictures of girls. He receives a naked picture and mobile phone number of a 16-year-old girl. John contacts her by text message and asks her about intimate details of her sex life. She is completely surprised by the messages, which she finds disturbing, but she does not know how to respond. She feels ashamed and tries to stop John asking her about such intimate details. John sends her the nude picture he has of her and threatens to upload the picture to the Internet if she does not cooperate and tell him explicit details of her sex life. The girl feels scared and tells John some intimate details. John masturbates during their sexual texting. When the girl talks about the incident with her best friend, her friend advises her to go to the police. John is easily identified by the number of his cellphone and is arrested for sexual harassment and sexual coercion the next day. He confesses immediately and is referred for a forensic psychiatric assessment.

In this example we see compounding personal circumstances combined with ease of access to pornography (both hardcore and child sexual exploitation material) that leads to cyberbullying in the form of manipulation, threats and coercion to obtain sexually explicit images of a minor.

Normalisation of Child Sexual Exploitation Material

Within Australia, measures are in place to prevent access to child sexual exploitation material; however, 'teen' was the 10th most common search term¹⁶ on a well known porn site in Australia during 2017, up 5 places from the previous year. Young women (supposedly) over the age of 18 are dressed to look like young teens, thereby normalising online sexual behaviours of minors. This content is readily accessible to anyone with access to the internet.

The availability of this content contributes to normalization of abuse, openly advertised by the porn industry. By doing a simple search for 'teen sex' and 'anal sex' on google and clicking no further than the Google

¹⁵ Juveniles, the Internet, and Sexual Offending (2014)

¹⁶ PornHub, (2017)

search page, the degrading and hateful text normalising teen abuse is available for anyone to read, and links to an endless supply of videos that contain mainstream hardcore porn. Due to the nature of the text descriptions, an external link supplements the submission of *eChildhood* ([Appendix B](#)), and comes with a trigger warning.

In addition to viewing pornography that often depicts teens (which in turn, looks very similar to child sexual exploitation material), young people face pressures to create this material. In the above mentioned 2016 joint survey¹⁷ by Plan International Australia and Our Watch, they found:

- Australian females aged 15-19 do not want to share sexual photos of themselves online
- 81% of girls believe it's unacceptable for boyfriends to ask for explicit content although they believe pressure to do so is now commonplace

In a report by NSPCC in the UK, "Is this sexual abuse?", it was reported that:

*Boys who contacted Childline about online peer sexual abuse were also worried about the consequences of exchanging explicit messages and images. In some cases, boys were pressured by their friends to watch pornography, or had been sent pornographic material by their friends. They felt pressure to view the images and feared bullying if they refused.*¹⁸

The extent of this is far reaching and can lead to other cyber offences which have huge legal ramifications. According to Christopher Mulligan LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker):

*Without a coordinated and concerted effort to safeguard children from trauma through exposure to Internet pornography, the courts will be inundated with young men who are reenacting their trauma by viewing child pornography.*¹⁹

The ease of access to pornography can be traumatising for some young people to the point of them progressing to seeking out child sexual exploitation material. In addition, 'legal' adult pornography portrays 'teen sex' and normalises this content, as well as normalises sexting behaviours amongst minors. Whilst the issue of child sexual exploitation material is separate to cyberbullying, it is clear that young people are being pressured or bullied online to create, possess and share illegal content²⁰. Enacting legislation to reduce minors access to online pornography sends a clear societal message that this content is harmful to children and young people, and is not conducive to a harmonious society.

[Further Studies linking pornography to cyberbullying](#)

It is important to first have a clear understanding of how pornography impacts attitudes and behaviours more generally, to then understand how this is impacting online interactions. As outlined in *The Porn Harms Kids Report*²¹, rather than relying on a single research paper to draw conclusions, a meta-analysis synthesises data

¹⁷ Our Watch and Plan International. (2016).

¹⁸ NSPCC: Is this Sexual Abuse (2018)

¹⁹ Forensic Report, N.D.

²⁰ Australian Institute of Criminology (2017)

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 7.

from a range of studies and looks for common and consistent findings. A meta-analysis is the “gold star” of research papers.

Wright et al. (2016)²², carried out a Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies. Their findings stated that:

“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.”

This study also asked the question if consuming pornography was linked to both verbal and physical, and sexual aggression. The association was significantly stronger for verbal sexual aggression. Whilst this study did not measure online behaviours, it does indicate the ways in which pornography contributes to harmful means of communication.

A large scale study in Taiwan on Predictors of Unwanted Exposure to Online Pornography and Online Sexual Solicitation of Youth found that *“cyberbullying victimization/perpetration experiences and offline sexual harassment perpetration were associated with the occurrence of unwanted exposure to online pornography, online sexual solicitation victimization and perpetration.”* Further to this, this study also revealed that *“Internet risk behaviors predicted occurrence of youth unwanted exposure to online pornography and to online sexual solicitation and perpetration.”*²³

In Canada, a study²⁴ was conducted by a Master student as a requirement for a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts. 113 students who reported being in a romantic relationship (or within the last 12 months) were surveyed. The study set out to investigate the relationship between young people’s perpetration and experience of cyber sexual dating abuse and exposure to pornography.

This thesis established a clear foundation by outlining existing research that documents sexual violence perpetration with adolescent consumption of pornography, along with the exchange of nude sexual images of minors. This study found consistencies with existing research and also concurred that the majority of porn users were male. The study results highlighted:

- *the majority of porn-users were male and a relatively high proportion of youth (38%) in a current or recent dating relationship reported using pornography*
- *pornography and gender are risk factors for the perpetration of sexual cyber dating abuse*
- *gender moderates the relationship between pornography and perpetration*
- *violence-tolerant attitudes predicts cyber dating abuse victimization*
- *sexual cyber dating abuse experiences are common among youth*

²² Wright et. al. (2016)

²³ Chang et. al. (2014)

²⁴ Sciaraffa, J., (2015)

- *exposure to pornography can increase the risk of perpetration against a romantic partner*
- *pornography is implicated as an important risk factor for dating abuse perpetration*

A 2015 journal article²⁵ titled *Young people, peer-to-peer grooming and sexual offending: Understanding and responding to harmful sexual behaviour within a social media society*. This paper explored peer-to-peer grooming and sexual offending amongst young people and concludes that:

There is ample evidence that young people are using social media in grooming and bullying to abuse and exploit others sexually with enough frequency to make those behaviours important concerns for both society and care providers.

It goes on to state that:

Access to and use of pornographic materials has increased over the past few decades, as sexting has become almost a way of life among young people using smartphones and social media applications. These social media applications appear now to be the method-of-choice for grooming and sexual engagement.

Research confirms that hardcore pornography is readily available, many children do not wish to see this content, and it is used both directly and indirectly to 'groom' children, thereby normalising harmful sexual behaviours. Studies confirm that adolescents who consume pornography (primarily young men) have greater likelihood of perpetrating sexual cyber dating abuse. Children and young people are both using and being pressured to use social media and online spaces to groom and exploit other children and young people.

Based on available research, *eChildhood* believes it is imperative to consider pornography as being an underlying driver of Online Sexual Abuse, feeding into cyberbullying behaviours.

²⁵ Ashurst, L., McAlinden, A-M. (2015)

Preventing Online Sexual Abuse - a subset of cyberbullying

Based on the analysis of *eChildhood* on how access to pornography contributes to online sexual abuse, a key factor in preventing further escalation of this subset of cyberbullying is to disrupt the online environment by reducing access to online pornography. This measure sends a clear message that online sexual abuse will not be tolerated in a community that seeks to create a thriving and sustainable environment for raising children and young people.

The current legislative, law, policy, educational, digital and administrative measures of the Australian Government are not adequate for creating a safe online environment for children. *The Porn Harms Kids Report* provides a thorough investigation into current approaches, and details proposed solutions to these areas. *eChildhood* believes these foundational areas that must receive equal attention in order to effectively respond to this public health crisis that has remained in the shadows for too long. Sections 3,4,5 of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* critically analyse existing initiatives undertaken by the Australian government and offers recommended actions. We encourage the reader to review [The Porn Harms Kids Report](#) in full as a comprehensive analysis of how Australia is progressing and where focus in is required.

In the coming weeks, *eChildhood* is releasing an update to this report which includes an additional strategic measure of therapeutic solutions to support children and young people in dealing with the harms of online pornography. This approach encompasses a Harms Recognition Framework, treatment protocols, treatment provider support, offender restorative processes, and parent, carer & victim support. By ensuring there are support services to deal with the harms, be that conversations with children experiencing trauma, or wanting to enact sexual harms to make sense of what they saw online, implementing these measures will potentially reduce the likelihood long-term impact within communities.

It is the recommendation of *eChildhood* that the State of Queensland adopt a public health approach to legislation, digital and education solutions; in addition, put pressure on the Federal Government to implement measures that protect children online, thereby reducing the harmful normalisation of online abuse via access to pornography.

Section 3. Legislative Approaches

The current legislation and policies need urgent attention. Weak and convoluted laws mean that children have unfettered access to pornography from any device connected to the internet without a filtering service installed. There are major disparities in how the government manages prohibited content hosted domestically, versus that hosted overseas.

FIGURE 1.



We have laws in place to prevent children and young people accessing cigarettes, alcohol and in most cases, gambling services. It is imperative to update laws to place the onus of responsibility on the pornography industry to restrict their content from minors being able to access. Figure 5, Appendix A of this submission, proposes changes to the current digital environment, including the implementation of regulatory measures to ensure prohibited content is only accessible to adults.

In 2009, Australian researcher Dr Michael Flood, provided robust recommendations in *Journal of Child Abuse Review*. Relating to reducing children’s access to pornography, he comments: ‘*We must minimise exposure to sexist and violent sexual media and improve the kinds of sexual materials available to young people*’.²⁶

Young people themselves, agree with expert opinion. A UK survey²⁷ representative sample of 500 18-year-olds conducted from 19–27 June 2014, indicates that a large percentage of young people say it’s too easy to see pornography and it should be less easy to access:

- Eight out of 10 say it is too easy for young people to accidentally see pornography online.
- Seven out of 10 (72 percent) say ‘pornography leads to unrealistic attitudes to sex’ and that ‘pornography can have a damaging impact on young people’s views of sex or relationships’ (70 percent).
- Two-thirds of young women (66 per cent) and almost half of young men (49 per cent) agree that ‘it would be easier growing up if pornography was less easy to access for young people’.

²⁶ Flood, M. (2009)

²⁷ IPPR, (2014)

Section 4. Digital Approaches

It is estimated that globally²⁸, one in three of all Internet users are below the age of 18. Children are accessing or being exposed to, intentionally or incidentally, age-inappropriate sexual or violent content, or content otherwise considered harmful to their development. Under a public health lens, *eChildhood* calls for the Queensland Government to place demands on the Australian Federal Government to establish certain restrictions for their protection.

The regulation of the internet service provider (ISP) industry, including codes of conduct and policies, need radical overhaul to ensure that key stakeholders address the harms of pornography nationally. The potential for technological intervention requires a demand to be placed on carriers to implement flexible and robust filtering solutions that support families to block Prohibited URL Content. These changes must be underpinned by updated legislation.

Prohibited content hosted overseas is easily accessible by minors, and the current regulatory system is unjust. As illustrated in Figure 4 of Appendix A, If hosted overseas, “prohibited and potential prohibited content investigated is referred to accredited providers of optional end user (PC-based) Family Friendly Filters in accordance with the Industry Codes of Practice.”²⁹ It is unjust and infringes on children’s rights to be safe and protected from harmful materials, for prohibited content hosted overseas to be excluded from blocking in the same way that domestic content is blocked.

We see Age Verification Legislation as a fair and robust solution to ensure the safety of our children online. This is one solution that we support being explored further as an option in Australia, as we closely monitor its success in the UK.

However, in order to have a comprehensive approach to digital solutions, *eChildhood* has adopted the term *Digital Child Protection Buffers*. This refers to the various ways in which pornography harms can be prevented.

- Safeguarding homes with home filters, device apps and parental controls
- Internet Service Provider (ISP) level blocks
- Age-verification processes to access pornographic websites
- Mobile device restrictions through use of SIM cards that restrict access to adult content unless and until the account holder completes an age-verification procedure
- Safe public WiFi

In addition to Age Verification, implementing the full spectrum of Digital Child Protection Buffers (Figure 2), legislation / policy solutions, and robust education, means that our children will be protected in all environments from the harms of pornography and supported to heal in instances when harm occurs. The Proposed Digital Environment as a solution is illustrated in Figure 5 of Appendix A.

²⁸ Unicef, (2016)

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

FIGURE 2.



Responding to online sexual abuse - a subset of cyberbullying

As mentioned, a public health approach which ensures all stakeholders (whole-of-community) are resourced and supported to address this issue is essential to successfully respond to sexual abuse and harassment online. However, if our focus is purely on preventing access, we miss an essential component of children and young people's digital lives - turning to pornography for education. Coupled with easy access and the often-cited taboo of sexuality being discussed, it's no wonder our youth look online for answers. However, this information (pornography) is not based on creating a sustainable gender-equal community, and often depicts violence against women. Therefore, it is essential that our response includes robust education solutions on a national level so that every child has an opportunity to receive positive, age-appropriate sexuality information to learn how to build thriving relationships. In addition, it's crucial to provide children and young people opportunities to develop age-appropriate critical analysis skills, which enables them to comprehend how pornography can affect their development and impact relational interactions, both online and offline.

Section 5. Education Approaches

The current government focus is on further research and education efforts targeted towards parents, children and young people. Whilst families are one of many vitally important protective initiators in their child's life, it is a mistake to solely place education efforts here. There are many other sectors and stakeholders that surround and protect children, and support them to thrive within communities. It is imperative these entities are included in solutions that enable a public health approach. *eChildhood* calls for the Queensland Government to place priority on a public health approach to education in all sectors.

Relating to children and young people, Dr Flood's 2009 recommendations highlight the need for improved resources and sexuality education for children and young people:

Exposure to pornography is routine among children and young people, with a range of notable and often troubling effects. Particularly among younger children, exposure to pornography may be disturbing or upsetting. Exposure to pornography helps to sustain young people's adherence to sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships. And, especially among boys and young men who are frequent consumers of pornography, including of more violent materials, consumption intensifies attitudes supportive of sexual coercion and increases their likelihood of perpetrating assault. While children and young people are sexual beings and deserve age-appropriate materials on sex and sexuality, pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator.³⁰

³⁰ *ibid.* (Flood)

The above mentioned UK survey³¹ also found that young people want sex and relationships to be taught in schools:

- More than eight out of 10 (86 per cent) agree that sex and relationship advice should be taught in schools.
- More than a third (37 per cent) say sex and relationship advice should be taught from the beginning of primary school and almost half (49 per cent) from the beginning of secondary school.

As outlined in *The Porn Harms Kids Report*, currently the harms of pornography are incorrectly presumed to be addressed under an online safety lens. Through this lens alone, pornography harms are not encompassed within the context of child development, more specially relating to a child's healthy social, sexual, emotional, physical and relational development. Creating a robust education requires pairing the harms of exposure to pornography with a mandatory holistic sex education curriculum. This creates a buffer for when a child is exposed to pornography, enabling them to reflect on accurate information and discredit what is viewed. It also sets the harms of pornography in the correct space to discuss why its harmful from a critical porn analysis framework, and provide alternatives to children and young people for which lay the foundation for healthy development. This can be further broken down into age appropriate content; focusing on preventative behaviours for children within primary education; and critical porn analysis discourse for secondary, college, university and all professional and community bodies supporting children.

We call on the State Government of Queensland to further take up the mandate to protect children and equip professional care providers with the policies and education needed to prevent harms in all environments, and call on the Federal Government to do the same.

FIGURE 3.

³¹ *ibid.* (IPPR)



Conclusion

In summary, an underlying driver of cyberbullying is a subset of harms known as Online Sexual Abuse, fuelled by unfettered access to online pornography. Compounding this issue is a lack of alternative, accessible, relevant and age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education for children and young people. In addition, there's a lack of awareness, resources and education for parents, schools, child carers and professionals; and limited therapeutic solutions to address harms effectively once they have occurred. This leaves our children vulnerable to navigating an issue that must be addressed and supported via the adults, carers and governing bodies of our country, whose role it is to ensure their healthy development.

By minimising access to pornography and providing support and education, we can significantly reduce the underlying drivers of sexual harassment and abuse online. To effectively disrupt the normalisation of Online Sexual Abuse, it is the view of *eChildhood* that by implementing legislative and digital solutions at a Federal level to reduce children and young people's access to hardcore pornography, not just Queensland, but all Australian children will rightfully benefit by accessing a safer, less toxic online environment.

The Porn Harms Kids Report sections 3, 4, 5 provides an analysis of the government's current legislative, digital and educational approaches in addressing and disseminating information relating to this public health issue. In conjunction with this submission, *eChildhood* strongly encourages the reader to consider [The Porn Harms Kids Report](#) in its entirety, and promote the adoption of key recommendations to the Australian Government in order to prevent the normalisation of Online Sexual Abuse, a subset of cyberbullying.

eCHILDHOOD

bringing the conversation out of the shadows

In addition, *eChildhood* calls on the Queensland Government to implement a public health approach which ensures all key stakeholders (whole-of-community) are resourced and equipped to address this issue effectively. *eChildhood* will stand in full support of solutions outlined in this submission and our report, and the development of strategies to execute these in Queensland and nationwide.

eChildhood welcomes the opportunity to further support the Queensland Government in addressing this issue, with research, consultation and expert advice.

As clearly stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *all adults should do what is best for children*³².

³² Unicef. FACT SHEET

About *eChildhood* - The Problem We Address

eChildhood Vision

We envision a world where children grow up free from the harms of pornography, confidently building thriving relationships.

eChildhood Mission

eChildhood is a registered health promotion charity dedicated to mobilising responses that reduce the harmful effects of pornography on children and young people.

- We take a public health approach through implementing digital, legislative and education solutions across Australia and New Zealand.
- We unlock silos, activate research and empower key stakeholders to build collaborative responses.
- We foster awareness and provide education and training to parents, professionals and the public.
- We advocate for measures that improve children and young people's mental and physical health outcomes, and decrease vulnerabilities to exploitation.
- As a global thought leader, we collaborate, influence and consult internationally as a part of a worldwide movement addressing the harms of pornography on children and young people.

eChildhood Statement of Research description

The *eChildhood* Statement of Research relating to pornography harms to children is endorsed by child youth advocates, anti-violence workers and key academics, including Dr Gail Dines, Founder of Culture Reframed, Dr Michael Flood, Dr John D. Foubert, Dr Donald Hilton, Dr Caroline Norma, Dr Heather Brunskell-Evans, Dr Meagan Tyler, Maree Crabbe, Tom Meagher and others. Our Statement of Research highlights current studies, and identify significant areas that require action to prevent harms in children and young people's health, mental-health, physical safety, and wellbeing, and as a part of broader societal effects to prevent violence against women. The Statement of Research and reference list is included as Appendix C to this document.

eChildhood approach

Prevention of access to pornography is a vital component of reducing the incidence of harms upon children and young people. *eChildhood* has adopted a public health approach to inform a three-pronged framework. Each prong is supported by the implementation of legislation and policy, digital solutions, and education.

1. PREVENT access to pornography through advocacy for 'Digital Child Protection Buffers'.
2. EQUIP with education through advocacy and provision of 'clearinghouse partnerships' to other providers.
3. RESTORE children and young people harmed by pornography through advocacy and links to specialist support services.

eChildhood was formerly known as ‘Porn Harms Kids’. [The Porn Harms Kids Report: Protecting our kids from online pornography harms is everyone’s business](#) was published in September 2017. The views and content of *The Porn Harms Kids Report* are those of *eChildhood*.

eChildhood Action Plan - Solution

The *eChildhood* strategy and consequential objectives are designed to build long-term solutions that empower all key stakeholders, support children and young people, and ensure safety for our current and future generations.



Underpinned by a public health approach, research and expert advice, our objectives are based on three key solutions as identified in our report: Legislation and policy solutions, Digital solutions, and Education solutions.

1. Legislation and policy - in the instance of pornography, the loss is first and foremost to our children, and the cost burdens (mental, physical, emotional, relational, social and financial) are rapidly accumulating. The mechanism that facilitates this ongoing burden is failed legislation and policy; changes in this area underpin digital and education solutions, to ensure no child or youth is left behind and all key stakeholders are empowered to support children and youth.
2. Digital / Technological - in the best interests of child safety, health and wellbeing, actions to implement Digital Child Protection Buffers are of vital importance. The online environment is complex, however to ensure children’s online childhood is protected on multiple levels for a positive experience, technological solutions must be put in place nationally. A key component of this measure is to ensure the commercial providers of this content, the pornography industry, secure their platforms so that adult content is not easily accessible by children.
3. Education - from a public health perspective, education involves drawing in key stakeholders from a wide range of government, non-government, health professions, ‘people helping’ services and community organisations. Prevention of pornography harms needs to be addressed both within sectors, and collectively – with a common goal of breaking down the ‘silo’ situation that currently presents itself. The first step is creating awareness.

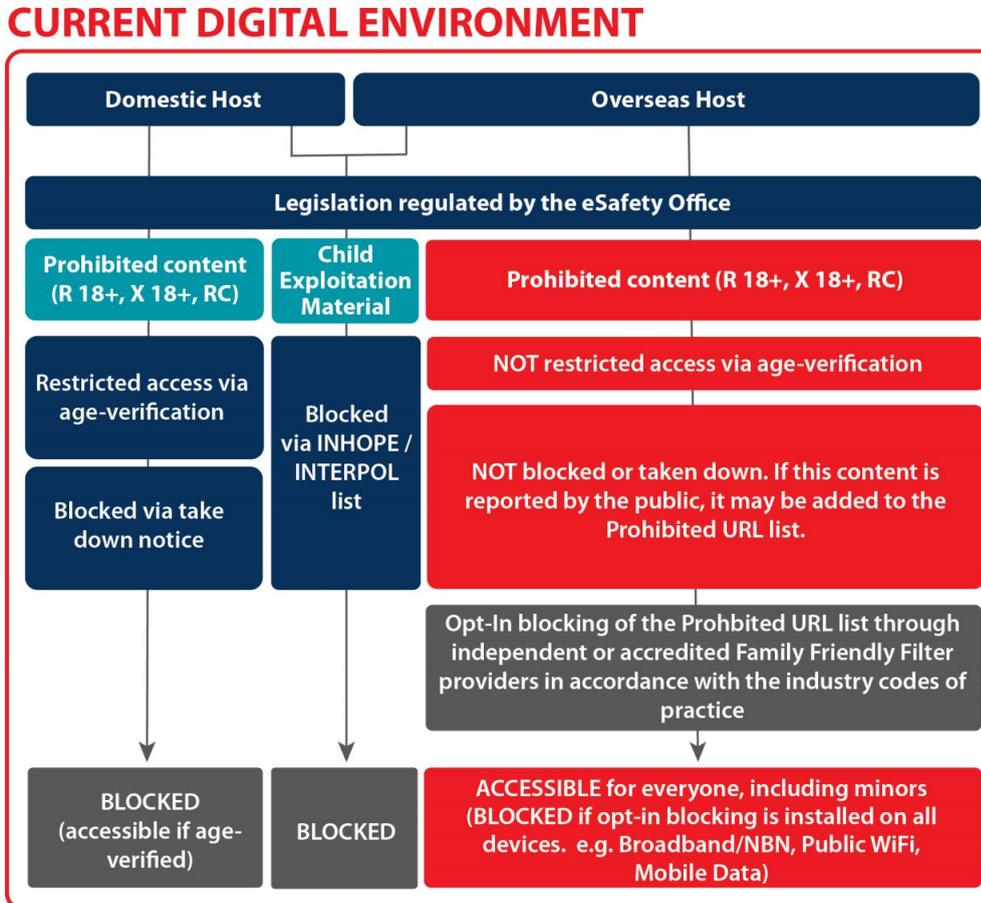
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Appendix A – Current Online Digital Environment and Recommendations

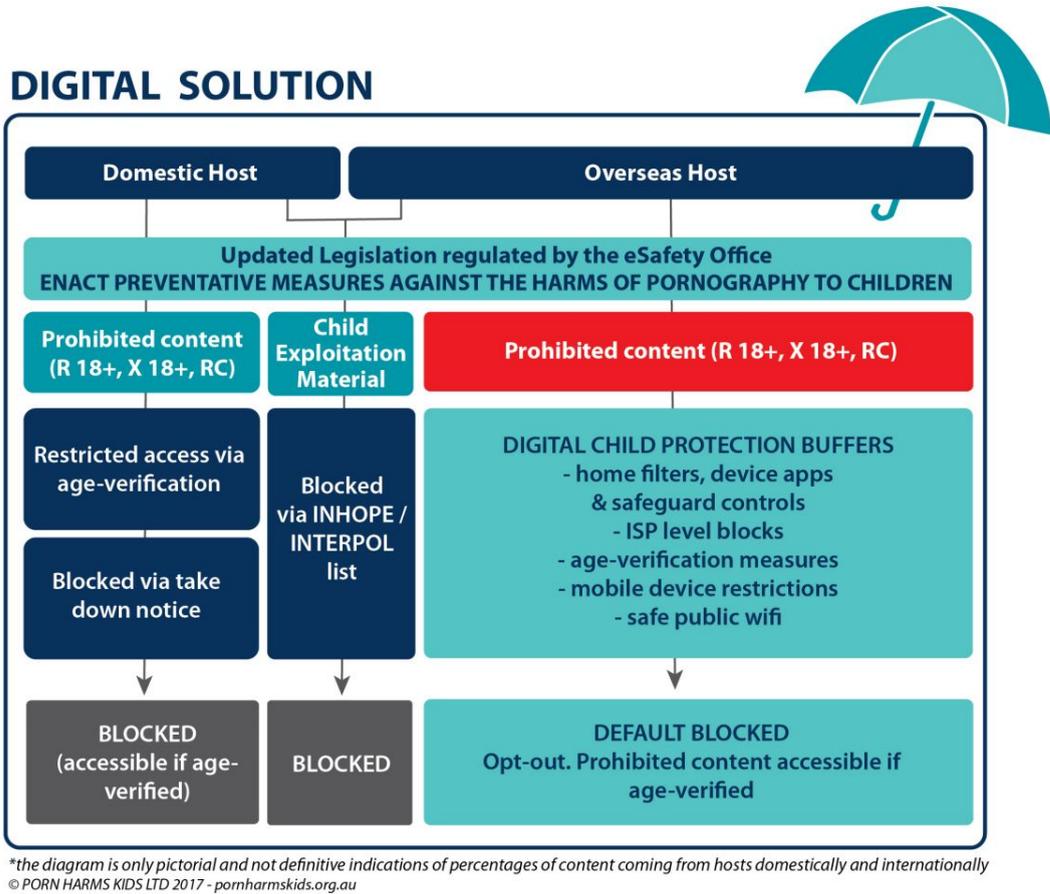
FIGURE 4.



**the diagram is only pictorial and not definitive indications of percentages of content coming from hosts domestically and internationally*
 © PORN HARMS KIDS LTD 2017 - pomharmskids.org.au

FIGURE 5.

PROPOSED DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT



Appendix B – Search Terms on Google

Due to the nature of the text descriptions, an [EXTERNAL LINK](#) supplements the submission of *eChildhood* and comes with a trigger warning.

Appendix C – Statement of Research

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH RELATING TO PORNOGRAPHY HARMS TO CHILDREN

The harms of pornography to children and young people are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Messages that children and young people learn from pornography, shape themselves and the culture we live in. [Worldwide](#), pornography is now being framed as a [Public Health Crisis](#) by many governments, health, violence prevention and advocacy organisations. Given there is significant evidence indicating that pornography is linked to negative mental health outcomes for young people, sexist attitudes, sexual aggression and violence, child-on-child sexual abuse, and high risk sexual behaviours, this issue has not received adequate public attention.

This statement of research is endorsed by child youth advocates, anti-violence workers and key academics, including Dr Gail Dines, Founder of [Culture Reframed](#), Dr Michael Flood, Dr Caroline Norma, Dr Heather Brunskell-Evans, Dr Meagan Tyler and others.

Areas of pornography's impact on children and young people include:

- Poor mental health
- Sexism and objectification
- Sexual aggression and violence
- Child-on-child sexual abuse
- Shaping sexual behaviours

Rates of exposure

Trends in children and young people accessing online pornography show an increase.

- In 2011, it was reported that over two in five (44%) Australian 9-16 year olds had seen sexual images in the past 12 months. This is much greater than the 25-country average of 23%. ([Green et al. 2011](#))
- Between 2008 and 2011, exposure to porn among boys under the age of 13 jumped from 14% to 49%. Boys' daily use more than doubled. ([Sun et al. 2016](#))
- In 2016, a study of 1565 18-19-year-old Italian students ([Pizzol et al. 2015](#)), 4 out of 5 stated they consumed pornography. Almost 22 per cent (21.9%) reported that it became habitual, 10% stated that it reduced their sexual interest towards potential real-life partners, and 9.1% reported a kind of addiction.
- In 2017, a Swedish study reported that nearly all respondents (98%) had watched pornography, although to different extents. Eleven per cent were found to be frequent users (watched pornography one or more times per day), 69 per cent average users (at least once a month up to several times a week, but less than once per day), and 20 per cent infrequent users (less than once a month). ([Donevan and Mattebo 2017](#))
- In 2006, 35 per cent of Dutch children aged 8 to 12 had had a negative Internet experience in the home, involving an encounter with pornography. ([Soeters and van Schaik 2006](#))
- Well over two-thirds of 15-17-year-old adolescents have seen porn websites when they did not intend to access them, with 45% being 'very' or 'somewhat' upset by it. ([Kaiser Family Foundation 2001](#))

For the purposes of the following research, adolescents are defined as primarily between the ages of 13-18. The rise in rates of child-on-child sexual abuse indicates younger children are inadvertently exposed to pornography.

Poor mental health

In a research review by [Owens et al. \(2012\)](#), the authors stated that:

The structural deficits in brain maturation of adolescents, and theories such as the picture-superiority effect, offer insights into the ways adolescents may be disproportionately vulnerable to negative consequences when exposed to sexually explicit material.

Whilst the literature varies in its ability to show if pornography directly causes mental health issues or instead, conditions are correlational (existed prior to viewing), or a combination of both, studies indicate that porn users experience:

- higher incidence of depressive symptoms
- lower degrees of social integration
- decreased emotional bonding with caregivers
- increases in conduct problems
- higher levels of delinquent behaviour

Research suggests links between mental health issues and problematic porn use, such as low self-esteem and depressive traits ([Doornwaard et al. 2016](#)), and impacts to academic performance ([Beyens et al. 2014](#)). Almost 22 per cent (21.9%) of young people report habitual use ([Pizzol et al. 2015](#)), 9 – 11% report frequent use or a kind of addiction, and a further 10% indicate that pornography reduces sexual interest towards potential real-life partners ([Donevan and Mattebo 2017](#)). The Swedish authors stated, it is striking that one-third of frequent users admitted they watch pornography more than they want to. Since adolescents' brains are still in their development phase, young people may be especially vulnerable to problematic pornography use. The adolescent brain is highly impressionable and vulnerable to forming addictions ([Chein et al. 2011](#); [Crews et al. 2007](#)).

Studies also indicate that pornography impacts self-image; for girls, this relates to feelings of physical inferiority, and for boys, fear of not measuring up, with both virility and performance. ([Owens et al. 2012](#), [Sun et al. 2016](#)).

In addition, adult cohort studies have identified that pornography use and associated sexual arousal patterns have been found to interfere with decision making ([Laier et al. 2014](#)); is linked to diminishing working-memory ([Laier et al. 2013](#)); and decreased ability to delay gratification ([Negash et al. 2016](#)). Adult users of pornographic material also report greater depressive symptoms, poorer quality of life, more mental- and physical-health diminished days, and lower health status than compared to nonusers. ([Weaver et al. 2011](#))

Sexism and objectification

The relationship between pornography, sexual coercion, abuse and sexting was explored in a large European survey of 4,564 young people aged 14-17 ([Stanley et al. 2016](#)). The authors of this study argued that pornography is both underpinned by and perpetuates gender inequality, and that boys who regularly watched online pornography were significantly more likely to hold negative gender attitudes.

Other studies show that sexual arousal to online pornography by adolescents leads to sexist attitudes and notions that women are sex objects ([Peter and Valkenburg 2007](#), [Hald et al. 2013](#)) These findings are consistent with a review of 20 years of research that found pornography use was associated with more permissive sexual attitudes and tended to be linked with stronger gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs. ([Peter and Valkenburg. 2016](#))

Sexual aggression and violence

Consistently, findings link the viewing of violent pornography to increased tendencies for sexually aggressive behaviour ([Owens et al. 2012](#), [Sun et al. 2016](#)).

- there is a clear association between regular viewing of online pornography and perpetration of sexual coercion and abuse by boys. ([Stanley et al. 2016](#))
- both regularly watching pornography and sending or receiving sexual images or messages were associated with increased probability of being a perpetrator of sexual coercion. ([Stanley et al. 2016](#))

In a 2017 mixed-gender Swedish study of 946 students ([Donevan and Mattebo 2017](#)), frequent users watched hard core and violent pornography to a higher extent, were more likely to have engaged in a wider range of sexual activities, fantasised about trying sexual activities seen in hard core pornography, and showed signs of sexual preoccupation and problematic pornography use.

Rather than relying on a single research paper to draw conclusions, a meta-analysis synthesises data from a range of studies and looks for common and consistent findings. A meta-analysis is the “gold star” of research papers. [Wright et al. \(2016\)](#), carried out a Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies. Their findings stated that:

“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.”

Child-on-child sexual abuse

Freely available online pornography is shaping the sexual conditioning of increasing numbers of young people. Australian research findings ([Etheredge, 2015, citing Lemon, 2014](#)), highlight that 75% of 7-11-year-old boys and 67% of 7-11-year-old girls in treatment for Problem Sexualised Behaviours (PSBs) reported early sexualisation through online pornography.

Between 2013 and 2016, police figures in the UK show a rise of child-on-child sexual offences by almost 80% ([Barnado's, 2016](#)). Australian practitioner, [Russell Pratt](#) says:

One thing seems clear: pornography provides a “how to” manual, showing every possible angle of what goes where and who can do what to whom, as well as providing sexual stimulation and shaping patterns of sexual arousal. When coupled with other risk factors present in the young person’s life, pairing the “how to” with the sexual stimulation provided by pornography both equips and primes youth to undertake more advanced sexual practices earlier than they otherwise might or earlier than those who have not accessed pornography, simply because they have just that – a template for what to do, based on the graphic nature of pornography.

Shaping sexual behaviours

Exposure to sexually explicit Internet material directly predicts adolescents’ willingness to engage in casual sex ([van Oosten et al. 2016](#)). A review of the research also identified that it is connected to higher levels of permissive sexual attitudes, sexual preoccupation and earlier sexual experimentation ([Owens et al. 2012](#)), including younger ages for first oral sex and sexual intercourse ([Kraus and Russell, 2008](#)).

The ways in which pornography is influencing young people’s sexual experiences is reflected in research by [Marston and Lewis \(2014\)](#). Their qualitative, longitudinal study of 130 men and women aged 16-18 from diverse social backgrounds in the UK, found a normalisation of painful, risky, coercive heterosexual anal sex. Interviewees frequently cited pornography as the explanation for anal sex, a practice they expected to be painful for young women but pleasurable for young men. Participants described an expectation that young men would persuade or coerce a reluctant female partner.

Amongst college students, research has also demonstrated that higher frequency porn viewing correlates with an increased number of sexual partners and higher incidence of hooking up ([Braithwaite et al. 2015](#)).

In addition to these studies, another meta-analysis asked the question: Is sexual content in new media linked to sexual risk behaviour in young people? ([Smith et al. 2016](#)). Exposure to sexually explicit websites was correlated with condomless sexual intercourse; and sexting was correlated with ever having had sexual intercourse, recent sexual activity, alcohol and other drug use before sexual intercourse, and multiple sexual partners. The authors stated:

“Cross-sectional studies show a strong association between self-reported exposure to sexual content in new media and sexual behaviours in young people.”

These studies identify significant areas that require action to prevent harms in children and young people’s health, mental-health, physical safety, and wellbeing, and as a part of broader societal effects to prevent violence against women.