

Pornography: A Public Health Crisis

Brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Health

Public Health Effects of Online Violent and Degrading Sexually Explicit Material on Children, Women and Men (M-47)

By Glendyne Gerrard, Director of Defend Dignity

Defend Dignity exists to end all forms of sexual exploitation in Canada. Commercial sexual exploitation includes pornography, strip clubs, escort services, massage parlors, prostitution and human sex trafficking. All involve the selling of sexual services which undermine the dignity of women, men, and children and are detrimental to a healthy society. Defend Dignity examines and addresses the root causes of sexual exploitation.

A. Pornography: Root Cause of Sexual Exploitation

The demand created by purchasers of sex results in the supply of children, women and men for sexual services. What causes a man to purchase another human being for his own sexual gratification? What shapes a man to become a buyer of sex? According to our research, pornography plays a dominant role in creating sex buyers; it is the catalyst for a man to purchase others in a live encounter. Pornography is a major factor in fueling the demand for sex trafficking. Pornography, increasingly normalized and accepted in our culture, reduces women to commodities, which is how prostituted women are seen in Canada. It creates a class of women viewed only for how they can meet the needs of their buyer. Dr. Susan McIntyre of Mount Royal University in Calgary says this in “The Role of Technology in Human Trafficking,” a white paper prepared for Microsoft in March, 2015:

The impetus behind this study was to explore the role of technology in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. As the literature indicates and our study agrees, viewing pornography is often the catalyst to further involvement as consumers. The men in our study [51 men from three western provinces in Canada who were attending a Prostitution Offender Program, meaning that they had been charged for the first time and were participating in a court diversion program] began viewing pornography at very young ages, in some cases younger than 11 years of age.¹

Catherine Mackinnon, a professor at Harvard Law School says “consuming pornography is an experience of bought sex,” creating a hunger to purchase and objectify women and to act out what has been viewed.² Victor Malarek says in *The Johns*: “The message is clear: if prostitution is the main act, porn is the dress rehearsal.”³

Along with fueling the demand for sexual exploitation, pornography itself is a form of sexual exploitation. Many women and children being filmed are trafficked. “Pornography may meet the legal definition of trafficking to the extent that the pornographer recruits, entices, or obtains the

¹ McIntyre, Susan, “The Role of Technology in Human Trafficking”, Microsoft White Paper, March, 2015

² Mackinnon, Catharine A. “Pornography as Trafficking.” *Pornography: Driving the Demand in International Sex Trafficking*. David E. Guinn and Julie DiCaro. [Los Angeles]: Captive Daughters Media, 2007. 31-42. Print, 34.

³ Malarek, Victor. *The Johns: Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It*. Toronto: Key Porter, 2009. Print, 196.

people depicted in pornography for the purpose of photographing commercial sex acts.”⁴ Traffickers also use these uploaded images as a method of control and blackmail because once on the internet, the images are there forever.

The survivors of sexual exploitation that work with Defend Dignity all share stories of being pressured to act out what the purchaser has seen on porn. They have also had pornography made of them and these images have been distributed.

“Cybersex trafficking is the devastating live-streamed sexual exploitation of children viewed over the internet. It is being fuelled by the behaviour of Canadians online. Of nearly 60 countries investigated by Cybertip.ca, Canada ranked in the top three for hosting websites, images or selling material containing child sexual abuse.”⁵ In today’s era of webcams and chat rooms, the lines between interactive pornography and virtual prostitution websites have been blurred.⁶

As a result of the link between pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation, Defend Dignity has studied the harms of pornography, now [educates](#) the public on these harms and responds to those who request help because they have been harmed. Doing this work has only added to our sense of urgency that pornography must be addressed for the harms it causes to children and adults alike. We are collecting stories of marriages destroyed by pornography; spouses and partners who are experiencing trauma as a result of psychological and physical harm from their porn addicted partners; lost employment because of porn use on the job; young children with porn addictions; harmful behaviour occurring on school grounds as young children act out what they are seeing in porn, etc. While we are able and willing to do this work, we believe that ultimately the key to addressing the societal harms of pornography in Canada and globally is to treat it as the public health crisis it is.

Beyond the link to sexual exploitation, other harms of pornography are addressed below.

B. Pornography is Violent

“Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update” from 2010 concludes:

Of the 304 scenes analyzed, 88.2% contained physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping, while 48.7% of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Perpetrators of aggression were usually male, whereas targets of aggression were overwhelmingly female. Targets most often showed pleasure or responded neutrally to the aggression.⁷

Porn viewers soon begin to absorb the images into their belief systems. They become not only consumers of these violent images, but their own sexual behaviour becomes violent towards women due to the normalization of this kind of pornography.

Dr. Mary Anne Layden, Director, Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program Center for Cognitive Therapy, University of Pennsylvania, has researched the violent nature of today’s pornography and concludes that the adult use of pornography leads to the following beliefs and practices⁸:

⁴ Farley, Melissa; Golding, Jacqueline M.; Matthews, Emily Schuckman; Malamuth, Neil; Jarrett, Laura; “*Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Do Not Buy Sex: New Data on Prostitution and Trafficking.*” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, (2015)

⁵ <https://www.ijm.ca/not-on-my-screen-canada>

⁶ Malarek, pg 203

⁷ <http://pornharmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/Violence-Against-Women-2010-Bridges-1065-85.pdf>

⁸ <http://pornharmresearch.com/2013/12/talking-points-porn-sexual-violence-research/>

- More acceptance of violence against women
- Increasing their estimates of how often people engage in sex with violence
- Engaging in more sexual harassment behaviors
- Using physical and verbal coercion to have sex

C. Pornography is Misogynistic

Today's pornography is based on the domination and hatred of women. Prominent themes are the humiliation and degradation of women. Women are referred to with derogatory terms and always reduced only to sexual objects. It's important in the world of pornography that women are to be used and abused by men. "[Pornographers] offer men sexual gymnastics and circus acts that are saturated with cruelty toward women; they sexualize the degradation of women."⁹

D. Pornography Fuels Rape Culture

Pornography portrays women deriving pleasure from physical abuse and therefore enables men to develop attitudes that allow for violence against women. Men become increasingly more comfortable with the idea of rape.

A common image in pornography is that of the woman saying "no," but really meaning "yes." It blurs the lines around consent. Particularly with children, it influences young boys to falsely believe that girls want to be raped, that they are meant to be sexually objectified and used. Pornography users think that women are 'rape-ready' because the domination of men and degradation of women is a common theme. It influences girls to believe that their sexuality exists only for the benefit of men. Pornography normalizes rape.

Rape and sexual violence reporting is rapidly escalating in high schools and colleges. There is a direct correlation between that and the viewing of pornography. The 2014 reporting of a group of Dalhousie University students using misogynistic and rape culture language on social media is indicative of the reality of pornography outcomes.¹⁰

A 2011 study published in *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* analyzed the effects of pornography use on sexual attitudes and behaviors of fraternity college men. It found that 83% of those who used "mainstream" pornography expressed greater intent to commit rape, should they be assured they wouldn't get caught. This change in attitude towards rape among college-aged men remained consistent across *all* genres of pornography. Men who used sadomasochistic- and rape-themed pornography were significantly more likely to report belief in rape myths."

In the compilation of research on sexual violence and pornography, Dr. Mary Anne Layden finds that porn consumers develop the following beliefs and practises¹¹:

- Believing a rape victim enjoyed rape
- Believing women in general enjoy rape
- Believing a rape victim experienced pleasure and "got what she wanted"
- Believing women make false accusations of rape
- More likelihood of future rape
- Having engaged in rape

⁹ Jensen, Robert "The Cruel Boredom of Pornography", Last Exit, September 24, 2008, <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/freelance/boredom.htm> (accessed January 2, 2009).

¹⁰ <http://www.metronews.ca/news/halifax/2014/12/16/allegations-of-sexually-charged-comments-at-dalhousie-university-disturbing-not-surprising-expert.html>

¹¹ <http://pornharmresearch.com/2013/12/talking-points-porn-sexual-violence-research/>

E. Pornography is Addictive

Added to the above harms is the fact that pornography is addictive. Dr. Donald Hilton, Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery of the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at San Antonio, says:

Pornography is a biologically addictive medium that alters brain reward and motivation systems in a negative way.... Virtually every study looking at addiction has shown shrinkage and abnormality in the reward areas and in judgment centers [of the brain]. These include addictions to drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and opiates, and to behavioural addictions such as to food, sex, the internet, and as we have discussed, pornography.¹²

“Continued use of pornography carves neural pathways in the brain,” according to Dr. William Struthers in Wired for Intimacy.¹³ “Repetition matters. But because sexual activity launches such an amazing fireworks show in our brains, it takes less repetition to build these porn pathways than it would for us to engrain cravings for other activities.”¹⁴

This addiction can cause erectile dysfunction in young male users.

In one study, 58% of male pornography users (average age twenty-five) had erectile dysfunction with women but not with pornography. Internet pornography is making a generation of men who can only have sex with pixels but not with people. They may have a greater desire for sex but they have a reduced ability to engage in sex in a healthy way.¹⁵

F. Recommendations

In order to stem the tide of sexually exploited people and to address the multiple, societal harms of porn, we strongly encourage that a public health response be enacted by the Federal Ministry of Health. “Porn is a social issue because the harm it creates affects individuals or groups beyond their capacity to correct it.”¹⁶

A public health response to porn should follow other public health initiatives already in place in Canada such as [The Family Violence Initiative](#), a 15 department federal initiative led by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Another excellent example of a public health response is that of the response to [tobacco](#).

¹² Hilton, Don, *Pornography and the Brain Public Health Considerations*, US Congress Symposium, July 14, 2015

¹³ Struthers, William, *Wired for Intimacy. How pornography hijacks the male brain*, 2009, pgs 86, 106

¹⁴ Black, Sam, *The Porn Circuit*, Covenant Eyes, 2013, pg. 16

¹⁵ Leyden, Mary-Anne, *Sexual obesity: Research on the Public Health Crisis of Pornography*, Collection of papers from Symposium at US Capitol, July, 2015, pg. 37

¹⁶ Anderson, Cordelia “Why Pornography is a Public Health Issue, Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation Summit, 2014

We encourage the Federal Health Minister to suggest that pornography's harms be a focus of the next Federal/Provincial/Territorial Health Ministers meeting so that work can begin on developing a public health strategy. This strategy should include the following:

- Research studies undertaken on the correlation between the increased consumption of sexually violent online images and the health risks among children, youth and adults.
- Research studies undertaken on the link between sexual exploitation and adult pornography use.
- Research studies undertaken on the link between pornography use and violence against women.
- Research studies undertaken on the neurological effects of pornography use and subsequent behaviours.
- Systematic data collection from intake forms on the use of pornography and exposure for sex buyers in prostitution offender programs, victims of sexual assault, child and adult sex offenders.
- Develop curricula for all health care professionals on the harmful effects of pornography on the viewer and on those being harmed by porn consumers.
- Develop and fund treatment programs for those impacted by pornography addiction including spousal/partner trauma.
- Develop and require curricula for schools so that there is education on the harms of pornography and media literacy in every school in Canada.
- Require all schools and libraries in Canada have rigorous filtering in place so that children are protected from violent, sexual online images.
- Require all public Wi-Fi locations to have rigorous filtering in place which blocks pornography in order to protect children.
- Public education campaign on the harms of porn similar to that used with tobacco.
- Put advertising standards in place that prohibit the use of hyper-sexualized or pornographic images
- Put warning labels on all pornography – digital and print, just as there are health warnings on tobacco products. Pornography is harmful and addictive and the public should be informed.
- Require age verification on all pornography whether digital or print. This is being implemented in the United Kingdom¹⁷ and would provide a good model for Canada.
- Require all internet service providers to block pornography unless the consumer opts in. This is also being implemented in the United Kingdom.
- Work with the Justice Minister to ensure that Canada's current obscenity laws are being enforced.

Defend Dignity exists to end all sexual exploitation in Canada. Our work includes awareness and education, advocacy for law and policy reform, aid to individuals and agencies.

www.defenddignity.ca

We are part of The Christian and Missionary Alliance