



Submission to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

BILL C-11: An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts

SUBMITTED BY: Defend Dignity

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[Defend Dignity](#) exists to end all forms of sexual exploitation in Canada. As a national organization, we have worked with Canadian survivors of sexual exploitation since 2010. We focus on awareness, aid, and advocacy and we partner with local and global survivor-led agencies, service providers, and non-profit organizations. We have co-developed a youth training curriculum and hosted numerous events – including a [Canadian Sexual Exploitation Summit in May 2021](#) - to educate over 10,000 people on relevant topics such as online safety, the impact of pornography exposure, and preventing exploitation. One of our advocacy campaigns, [Choose Change](#), allows us to dialogue with executives from companies such as Instagram and TikTok about the need to protect children from being exposed to pornography and predators.

Our work supporting individuals who have been sexually exploited through pornography and interacting with communities to strengthen prevention efforts gives us insight into the harmful impact sexually explicit material has on children, coercive content has on victimized individuals, and sexually violent material has on society. We fully support Mr. Viersen’s proposed amendment to section 3 of the *Broadcasting Act* and ask that all committee members vote to protect children and communities from the detrimental effects caused by the broadcasting of harmful and coercive sexually explicit material.

Part A: Protecting Children from Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material

1) Children are spending more time online

In October 2020 Statistics Canada reported that 64% of parents were very concerned about the amount of time their children were spending online since the pandemic started¹. Acting to protect children in online spaces is more urgent than ever before as they use the internet more frequently for school, socialization, and entertainment.

2) Exposure to sexually explicit material is detrimental to children’s well-being

We interact with a lot of parents during our education initiatives. Their most common concern is how to protect their children from the harms of viewing sexually explicit material. On May 11th 120 parents and other concerned citizens registered for a webinar we hosted on how to talk to kids about pornography. Equipping caregivers is essential, but the crisis of youth exposure to pornography requires a well-rounded approach and the government has a vital role to play.

Numerous studies have shown the negative impact that exposure to pornography and hyper-sexualized media can have on children. These include:

- Mental health issues such as depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem
- Increased likelihood of accepting sexual violence and “rape myths”
- Increased risk of girls being sexually harassed and boys committing sexual harassment²

Pornography exposure has also been identified as a contributing factor to child-on-child sexual abuse, a tragic occurrence that is increasing.³ Another risk of exposure to sexually explicit material is that predators often use it to groom children. It normalizes sexual abuse. Protecting children from viewing this content can also prevent them from being easy targets to potential abusers.

3) The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) recently adopted General Comment 25

General Comment 25 affirms children’s rights in the digital space. The CRC advises:

“States parties should take all appropriate measures to protect children from risks to their right to life, survival and development. Risks relating to content, contact, conduct and contract encompass, among other things, violent and sexual content, cyberaggression and harassment, gambling, exploitation and abuse, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and the promotion of or incitement to suicide or life-

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/2020004/s8-eng.htm>

² <https://www.gaidines.com/the-porn-crisis/>

³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40429-021-00390-8>

threatening activities, including by criminals or armed groups designated as terrorist or violent extremist⁴”

Adopting Mr. Viersen’s amendment is a step that the government can take in compliance with the CRC’s guidance to protect children from viewing sexual content online and from becoming more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Part B: Preventing the Broadcasting of Sexually Violent and/or Coercive Material

1) Sexually violent material perpetuates discrimination and abuse

The Canadian government condemns horrendous crimes such as rape, incest, and child sexual abuse, and yet videos depicting these very crimes are being broadcasted widely on the internet. The British Journal of Criminology recently published a study⁵ that found sexual violence was frequently depicted on mainstream pornography sites. The Times commented on the findings of the study:

“An analysis of 131,738 titles on the homepages of Pornhub, XHamster and XVideos found that one in eight showed non-consensual or incestuous acts, including where the subjects were described as drugged, unconscious or “very young”. More than 8,000 titles referred to physical aggression or forced sexual activity, even when the researchers excluded representations of consensual bondage, discipline and sadomasochism (BDSM) practices.⁶”

The study also found that the word “teen” was the most frequently occurring word, making it “a more common way to describe pornography than any description of a sex act or body part.” Furthermore, pornography often perpetuates racism. A 2020 study found that black women were more likely to be the targets of sexual aggression than white women. Similarly, black men were more likely to be violent and less intimate with their partners than white men⁷.

2) Connection between sexually explicit material and sexual exploitation

Some people who consume sexually explicit material that depicts violence or other harmful practices later want to try what they have watched, which can create a demand for sexual

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/GCChildrensRightsRelationDigitalEnvironment.aspx>

⁵ <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/advance-article/doi/10.1093/bjc/azab035/6208896>

⁶ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/porn-sites-used-by-children-show-criminal-sex-acts-zsl5x6rjd>

⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341354859_Worse_Than_Objects_The_Depiction_of_Black_Women_and_Men_and_Their_Sexual_Relationship_in_Pornography

exploitation. Many of the survivors of exploitation we work with share that the men who buy sex will show them pornography and want them to replicate it. They are often disturbed by the buyer's demands. Another concerning trend they share is the prevalence of sexually explicit material being distributed online without their consent. Last year the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics uncovered evidence of illegal material such as sexual abuse, CSAM, rape, sex trafficking, and non-consensually shared materials being distributed by Pornhub⁸. Their investigation has revealed how it is hard to verify the consent and age of individuals featured in sexually explicit content online and their report⁹ called on the government to take actions including holding online platforms liable for hosting content depicting non-consensual activity and requiring online platforms to ensure the age and consent of all individuals depicted in pornographic content before it can be distributed. Coercion is also commonplace in pornography studios. Producers will use tactics such as threats, withholding pay, black mail, and deception to coerce individuals to comply in degrading and violent scenes¹⁰. Popular producers can also be charged with sex trafficking, as was the case of *GirlsDoPorn*, who streamed their criminal content all over the internet for millions to view¹¹. The online broadcasting of violent and degrading sexual material is harmful to the individuals who are exploited in the content and to other members of society, most often women, as some viewers seek to replicate what they have watched.

Protecting children from the harms of sexually explicit material and society from the dangerous impact of violent and coercive pornography must be a priority. As an organization working to end sexual exploitation in Canada, we call on all members of the committee to adopt Mr. Viersen's proposed amendment to section 3 of the *Broadcasting Act*.

Thank you for your work to ensure broadcasting contributes to a healthy and thriving Canadian society.

Defend Dignity

<https://defenddignity.ca/>

101- 2580 Matheson Blvd. E.

Mississauga, ON,

L4W 4J1

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⁸ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ETHI/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=11088039>

⁹ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/ETHI/report-3/>

¹⁰ <https://fightthenewdrug.org/10-porn-stars-speak-openly-about-their-most-popular-scenes/>

¹¹ <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-fuel-sex-trafficking/>