

White Ribbon New Zealand

Background information to support 2016 campaign



As part of the White Ribbon Campaign in 2016, we aim to give Kiwi Dads the skills and confidence to talk about Respectful Relationships, and Respectful Sexual Relationships with their sons. When we do not provide this information, our children find alternative sources and one of those is pornography. This is a background paper to provide information.

The links between pornography and violence towards women, and White Ribbon's approach to pornography

Pornography is relevant to White Ribbon's respectful relationships campaign

White Ribbon prevents violence by promoting respectful relationships between men and women.

Respectful relationships are based on:

- Equality between women and men.
- The effective use of non-violent communication.
- Flexible gender behaviour for men and women.
- 'Consent' being a necessary requirement of all respectful sexual relationships.

Pornography intensifies sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours, so undermines respectful relationships and White Ribbon's campaign¹.

Information source

This information is based on a submission made by Dr Michael Flood, of the University of Wollongong, to an Australian government inquiry into the harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet, in March 2016. This is available from <http://www.xyonline.net/content/harms-pornography-exposure-among-children-and-young-people-0#attachments>

¹ Page 27, Flood.

Dr Michael Flood researches and actively promotes the prevention of men's violence towards women. He advises White Ribbon Australia and is an appropriate and robust source of information for White Ribbon New Zealand.

His submission highlights that "our task is to build a gender-just and sexually ethical society". This aligns perfectly with White Ribbon's respectful relationships campaign.

Defining pornography

Pornography is defined as sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience².

Patterns of pornography consumption

- Most everyday users of pornography are heterosexual men.
- Men are more likely than women to view pornography frequently, to be sexually aroused by it, and to have favourable attitudes towards it.
- Among boys and young men;
 - Significant proportions consume pornography;
 - They do so in greater numbers and with much greater frequency than their female peers.
 - Boys and men are more likely than girls and women to: use pornography for sexual excitement and masturbation; initiate its use; and view it alone and in same-sex groups.
 - Pornography is "a cornerstone of the autoerotic sexuality of males"³.
- There's an increase in overall rates in children's and young people's exposure to pornography; they're exposed at younger ages; there's more exposure via the internet and on mobile phones⁴.
- There's also a changing cultural context with an increasing normalisation of pornography use and the pornographication of mainstream culture⁵.
- There's potential exposure to increasingly violent content. If an individual watched the top 50 pornography titles in the US, they would see 3,375 aggressive acts, with close to 90% of scenes contained aggression, largely physical aggression (while only 10% of the scenes contained positive behaviours like kissing, laughing, embracing, etc.). 48.7% of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Aggression was primarily by males, and overwhelmingly against females⁶.

² Page 2, Ibid.

³ Page 2, Ibid.

⁴ Page 7, Ibid.

⁵ Page 8, Ibid.

⁶ Page 9, Ibid.

Note – Some men’s (and women’s) use of pornography is habitual, compulsive and has negative effects for them, such as social, occupational or financial difficulties. While this may be commonly called an addiction, it is more accurately described as impulse control disorders, akin to eating disorders or pathological gambling⁷.

The impact of pornography

There is now significant and robust research into the effect of pornography.

It is naïve or dishonest to claim the jury is still out or that research results are mixed⁸.

Note that the impact of pornography on an individual is influenced by:

- Their characteristics: e.g., age, gender, maturation, sexual experience, parental involvement.
- The viewer’s engagement with the material and how they interpret the form and content⁹.
- The character and context of exposure: the type of material involved, the duration and intensity of viewing, and the context¹⁰.

What is now clear, pornography has a series of demonstrated effects among children, young people and among adults.

It provides *sex education* and exposure to pornography is associated with changes in sexual knowledge and attitudes:

- Increased sexual knowledge, including about bodies and practices.
- Liberalised sexual attitudes.
- Greater acceptance of sexual relations.
- More positive attitudes towards casual and recreational sex, and premarital and extramarital sex.
- Acceptance of one’s own same-sex or other sexualities.
- Greater acceptance of pornography itself¹¹.

Pornography also provides education about sexual practices and relations:

- Pornography is prompting shifts particularly in heterosexual boys’ and young men’s sexual expectations, practices, and repertoires.

⁷ Page 14, Ibid.

⁸ Page 25, Ibid.

⁹ Page 19, Ibid.

¹⁰ Page 2-3, Ibid.

¹¹ Page 3, Ibid.

- Pornography is shaping young men's and women's sexual practices, for example, an increase in anal intercourse.

Pornography may also be shaping interest and participation in other sexual practices such as extra-vaginal ejaculation, deep fellatio, sex with multiple partners, etc.

- Pornography use may also increase young people's practices of *unsafe* vaginal and anal intercourse (not using protection against disease transmission and pregnancy).
- Associations between pornography and involvement in particular sexual practices such as anal intercourse or multi-partner sex can involve *sexual coercion*¹².

Other impacts are:

- Premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content may be distressing for younger children.
- Much of heterosexual men's pornography use is likely to be hidden from their female partners, and when these partners become aware of their partners' use of pornography a substantial proportion experience hurt and distress¹³.

The impact of pornography on violence towards women

The consumption of pornography is intensifying sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours among children and adults alike¹⁴.

Pornography provides *sexist education* and influences children's and young people's adoption of:

- Sexist and stereotypical constructions of gender and sexuality.
- Sexually objectifying understandings of and behaviours towards girls and women¹⁵.

This is contrary to White Ribbon's promotion of respectful relationships based on equality and a shift away from traditional gender behaviour. Sexual objectifying women also compromises treating them respectfully as a whole human being.

Pornography is also *rape training*:

- Pornography is associated with significant strengthening of sexually aggressive and violence-supportive attitudes¹⁶.
- Pornography is associated with an increase in sexually aggressive behaviour. Exposure to nonviolent or violent depictions of sexual activity increases aggression, with a stronger effect from exposure to violent pornography¹⁷.

¹² Page 3, Ibid.

¹³ Page 3, Ibid.

¹⁴ Page 27, Ibid.

¹⁵ Page 4, Ibid.

¹⁶ Page 16, Ibid.

¹⁷ Page 16, Ibid.

This compromises White Ribbon's promotion of respectful sexual relationships, where all parties give their consent for all activities.

Note - Pornography consumption is one factor, which combines with others, to predict sexually aggressive behaviour. Pornography increases the risk of sexual violence perpetration for *some individuals* who already had a high risk of sexual aggression¹⁸. Pornography use is particularly dangerous for men who also show *other* risk factors for sexual aggression: they have hostile and distrustful attitudes towards women, they get sexual gratification from controlling or dominating women, they are callous and unemotional, and so on¹⁹.

Also, the effects of pornography are not uniform, and depend on individual, contextual, and cultural differences²⁰.

Minimising the harm of pornography

Social and educational strategies are among the most effective approaches to minimise the harm of pornography²¹. They encourage children's moral and ethical development and resilience, are more effective than technological solutions in the long term, as well as minimising the negative effects of exposure to inappropriate material if and when it does occur. If children's ethical maturity is nurtured, their internalisation of appropriate values and principles will guide their future choices and behaviour²². They can also be tailored to children's developmental needs and abilities²³.

- Sexuality education is a crucial strategy which would reduce the appeal of pornography, and the negative impacts of exposure.
- Pornography education is a second, overlapping strategy, which would teach critical skills in media literacy, so viewers are more resistant to sexist and violence-supportive themes in pornography²⁴.
- The best approach to protecting young people online is the attentive presence of a responsible parent, guardian, teacher, librarian or mentor. Parents should be encouraged to implement a number of practices for safer Internet use: they can develop a basic understanding of Internet content and uses; locate home computers in public areas of the home; discuss household rules and expectations regarding children's use of the Internet; provide guidance as to why the viewing of sexually explicit materials may be inappropriate; become aware of tools and programmes for Internet safety; and set good examples themselves for responsible Internet use²⁵.

¹⁸ Page 16, Ibid.

¹⁹ Page 18, Ibid.

²⁰ Page 18, Ibid.

²¹ Page 22, Ibid.

²² Page 23, Ibid.

²³ Page 23, Ibid.

²⁴ Page 21-22, Ibid.

²⁵ Page 23, Ibid.

- The creation of stimulating, compelling and educational Internet and other content, to provide sexual health and education. In fact, young people are already making widespread use of a range of responsible, informed and compassionate web sites which cover such topics as puberty, contraception and relationships, and include answers to frequently asked questions, articles and personal stories, interactive games and quizzes, and referral and advice. Providing sexuality-orientated venues and materials tailored to and preferred by young people will be a key factor in reducing the appeal of pornography²⁶.
- The provision of ethical pornography would eroticise consent, respect, and intimacy and be produced without participants' coercion or harm²⁷.

There's a need for more research, to understand the influence of pornography on boys' and young men's sexualities and gender; how pornography combines with other risk factors to shape the perpetration of sexual violence; and how to minimise the harms associated with pornography²⁸.

Dilemmas in addressing pornography

The general challenge is to prevent and reduce sexual harm without reinforcing a negativity towards sex, which involve assuming that sex and sexuality are essentially bad, immoral or dangerous. We should be anti-sexist, not anti-sex. We should protect sexual pleasure while challenging sexism and sexual inequalities by being sex-positive, respectful of sexual diversity, and responsive to sexual abuse and exploitation²⁹.

A related danger is to assume our task is to protect children from sex. Instead, we want to protect children from sexual harm³⁰.

Young people need to be engaged as sexual subjects with the capacity to act, rather than being passive and innocent of sex. They need the facts, along with stories of consent, love, romance and desire. They deserve appropriate information on sex and sexualities, which pornography does not provide³¹.

A blanket condemnations of sexual speech does not foster the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Minimising their exposure to pornography, and to sexist and violent materials in particular, should not be at the expense of sexual speech in general. We can provide them with better sexual material, which affirms sexual diversity, and acknowledges the ways in lives are structured not only by gender inequalities but by heterosexism³².

²⁶ Page 23-24, Ibid.

²⁷ Page 25, Ibid.

²⁸ Page 25-26, Ibid.

²⁹ Page 26, Ibid.

³⁰ Page 26, Ibid.

³¹ Page 27, Ibid.

³² Page 27, Ibid.

White Ribbon's approach to pornography

To effectively promote respectful relationships White Ribbon needs to address pornography.

Here's how White Ribbon ambassadors and spokespeople can do this effectively:

- Be clear that pornography intensifies sexist and violence-supporting attitudes and behaviour, so undermines respectful relationships.

For example, say: The vast majority of porn involves men being violent to women, and relies on men having power over women. This reinforces that violence towards women is OK.

Or: 90% of scenes in the most popular porn videos involve physical aggression and nearly 50% involve verbal aggression. No wonder men watching pornography are more sexist and support violence more than those that don't.

- Men are the main users of pornography, and White Ribbon focuses on changing men's behaviour, so be clear that it is appropriate for the campaign to respond to pornography.

For example, say: Men are the main users of porn, and they also commit the most family and sexual violence; there's a link.

- Focus on the harm that pornography causes, rather than pornography itself. Ensure that messages are anti-sexism and anti-violence, rather than anti-pornography, per se.

For example, say: Our concern is the damage porn causes. It strengthens a man's sexist attitudes and belief that violence towards women is OK, which makes for a more violent society.

- Promote respectful, consensual sexual relationships between equals, be it in pornography, erotica and real life. This is what White Ribbon' wants, instead of the relationships typically portrayed in pornography.

For example, say: So much of porn involves women being coerced into having sex and men behaving disrespectfully. We want everyone to be treated fairly and to be able to consent to respectful sex relationships.

- Avoid assumptions about men being more interested in sex and being the initiator, and women being passive. Promote both men and women having diverse behaviour to reflect their individual identity.

For example, say: A respectful community is where everyone, regardless of their sex or gender, are able to reflect and act on their sexual identity with respectful, consensual sex.

- Ensure messages are positive, especially about individuals choosing and expressing their sexuality. This includes women being interested in sex and initiating sexual activities, and affirming the diversity of sexual identities in our communities.

For example, say: *Porn shows limited sexual behaviour, whereas respectful relationships involve either partner being free to initiate sex or expressing their sexuality.*

- Talk about women's distress at their partner's use of pornography, to appeal to men's empathy. Promote honesty between partners as respectful behaviour.

For example, say: *Porn undermines respectful relationships, with women usually feeling hurt if their partner uses porn.*

Or: *If a man is hiding his use of porn from his partner, he is being dishonest, which undermines any respectful relationship.*

- Identify that many men do not use pornography and do not support the violence it portrays. Men typically think there's more support for violence among their peers than actually does exist. This would also include an assumption that using pornography is more common than it actually is³³.

For example, say: *Most men do not use porn and most men certainly do not agree with the violence it portrays.*

- Encourage men to influence other men to not use pornography. Having men present pornography as harmful and not something a 'good', ethical or respectful man does will discourage their peers to be more confident in not using pornography, or to reduce their use.

For example, say: *Speak up if your friends are using porn and say 'hey, porn harms women; you're better than that'.*

- Promote open, public discussion about the harmful effects of pornography as part of a wider promotion of respectful sexual relationships.

For example, say: *Think about how sex is portrayed in porn. Compare it with the respectful relationships you want your children to have with future partners. We need to do more to promote more respectful sexual relationships.*

- Encourage parents to actively manage their children's sexual development with accurate information, guidance for understanding pornography, clear guidelines about using the internet and the development of positive ethics and respect behaviour. Note - This is a new theme in White Ribbon's 2016 campaign, with a parenting resource available.

³³ Page 15, Baker.

For example, say: *Parents, give your children accurate info about sex, including helpful guidance about understanding porn, and develop their respectful values. This is the best way you can keep them safe.*

Bibliography

- Flood, M. (March 2016). *Submission to the Australian government inquiry into the harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet*. University of Wollongong. From <http://www.xyonline.net/content/harms-pornography-exposure-among-children-and-young-people-0#attachments>
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