

EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF PORNOGRAPHY – FACT SHEET

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This fact sheet is based on a discussion paper by Dr Monica Campo. Scan the QR code to read the full paper.



About us

Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic) is the peak body for specialist sexual assault and harmful sexual behaviour services in Victoria. Our members provide support to 20,000 survivors and young people a year. Together, we work to promote rights, recovery and respect for survivors and other people impacted by sexual violence.

What is pornography?

Pornography is defined as sexually explicit media (usually online images and videos) designed to arouse the viewer. When we talk about pornography, we are referring to commonly accessed pornography featuring adults and not child sexual abuse material (CSAM), although CSAM can feature illegally on pornography platforms. The nature, volume and ease of access to online pornography has transformed the way people consume it, as well as its impacts on society, relationships and intimacy.

What is tech-facilitated sexual abuse?

Tech-facilitated sexual abuse refers to a range of behaviours where digital technologies are used to facilitate both virtual and face-to-face sexual harm. It can include online sexual harassment, online stalking, image-based abuse, sextortion and sexual coercion communicated via digital technologies. It can also include recording, broadcasting or sharing sexual acts via digital technologies without consent, and threatening to broadcast or share images or videos of sexual acts that were made with or without consent. Creating non-consensual “deepfakes” is also tech-facilitated sexual abuse.

What are the key issues?

- Mainstream pornography features high levels of gendered aggression and violence. It reinforces many of the gendered drivers of violence against women, including condoning violence and stereotypical views about gender roles (e.g. men as dominant, controlling and aggressive, and women as submissive and eager to please their male partners).
- Pornography often reinforces (and even fetishises) broader social stereotypes and social inequalities including racism, homophobia and transphobia (e.g. categories like ‘Asian,’ ‘ebony,’ ‘lesbian,’ ‘crip,’ ‘refugee’). These depictions reflect the higher levels of violence, including sexual violence, experienced by people in the real world.
- Research clearly demonstrates that regular pornography consumption can contribute to attitudes supportive of violence against women, greater acceptance of rape myths, and attitudes that support gender inequality.
- Research shows that for some men, consumption of pornography is a risk factor for perpetration of sexual violence.

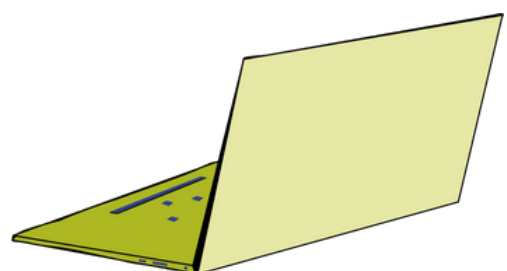
- Pornography consumption can also be a risk factor for child sexual abuse offending. The 'Identifying child sexual offending attitudes and behaviours among Australian men' study found that men who had sexual feelings and/or offending with children were significantly more likely to watch violent pornography than men who had no sexual feelings or offending with children.
- Some people report that they use pornography to enhance sexual intimacy or affirm their sexuality. However, pornography use has been linked to negative body image, lack of intimacy, and problems with sexual performance and lack of sexual satisfaction.
- Children and young people encounter and consume pornography frequently, with the average age of exposure being 13 for boys and 14 for girls. When pornography is the only or primary source of sex education, this has the potential to skew young people's understanding of intimacy, relationships and consent.
- Generative AI is increasingly used to perpetrate image-based sexual abuse. Deepfakes are digital images, videos or sounds created via AI of real people that have been manipulated and edited to create realistic but false depictions of people. The vast majority of deepfakes online are pornographic in nature. Deepfake pornography is often used by a partner or ex-partner to humiliate victim survivors. The eSafety Commissioner has the power to provide removal notices to websites. However, victim survivors have identified barriers to reporting abuse to the police, including shame and victim-blaming.

What about ethical or feminist pornography?

Ethical or feminist pornography is often made by women, gender diverse, disabled and LGBTIQ+ creators in response to the void of diverse representation in mainstream pornography. Researchers say pornography is ethical when it includes:

- a negotiation of consent onscreen
- depictions of safe sex
- ethical production
- a focus on pleasure for all participants
- a variety of sexual practices
- a variety of body types, genders, and races.

However, we know that most mainstream pornography that is free on the internet doesn't fall into these criteria, and that the majority of people who consume pornography, including children and young people, generally do not watch pornography that can be reasonably described as ethical, largely because it's harder to access, not free and a miniscule portion of the pornography available online.



Why are we discussing it now?

Victoria's specialist sexual assault services are increasingly seeing the impacts of pornography both in our work with survivors of sexual assault and with children and young people who use harmful sexual behaviour.

This includes increases in:

- sexual strangulation (colloquially known as choking)
- image-based sexual abuse, including recording and distribution of sexual assaults
- the harmful use of pornography within the context of family violence and coercive control
- the impact of pornography on children and young people, including in relation to harmful sexual behaviours, understandings of consent and displays of misogynistic attitudes.

The impact of pornography needs to be meaningfully addressed by our sector including the ways regulatory approaches can prevent and respond to technology-facilitated sexual violence and child sex abuse material (CSAM). SASVic will continue to advocate for policy and practice responses that address the widespread effects of pornography.

Getting support

If you have experienced a recent sexual assault and are in Victoria, you can call the Sexual Assault Crisis Line on [1800 806 292](tel:1800806292) or find your local specialist sexual assault service, you can [search your postcode or suburb on our map](#). If you live outside of Victoria, you can call 1800 RESPECT on [1800 737 732](tel:1800737732).

You can report image-based sexual abuse to the eSafety commissioner at <https://www.esafety.gov.au/report/forms>

If you're a parent wondering how to talk to your children about these issues, the eSafety Commissioner has resources like this one: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/issues-and-advice/hard-to-have-conversations>

Further reading

Our Watch (2020) Pornography, young people and preventing violence against women background paper: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/pornography-young-people-and-preventing-violence-against-women-background-paper-2020>

M. Crabbe, M. Flood & K. Adams (2024) 'Pornography exposure and access among young Australians: a cross-sectional study', Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1326020024000104?via%3Dihub>

M. Salter et al (2023) Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviour and attitudes among Australian men Australian Human Rights Institute, University of Sydney: <https://www.humanrights.unsw.edu.au/research/currentresearch/understanding-online-child-exploitation-practices>

eSafety Commissioner (2023b) Technology-facilitated abuse: family, domestic and sexual violence literature scan, Canberra: Australian Government: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/literature-scan-of-tech-based-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>