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Online pornography exposure causes multiple types of harm to young people – new survey

More than 60 per cent of women and 50 per cent of men believe that online exposure to pornography causes young people multiple types of harm, according to a new online survey conducted by Relationships Australia.

Indeed, a substantial proportion of survey respondents (45% of women and 27% of men) were of the view that a single exposure to online pornography could cause harm.

“Recent research indicates that increased ease of access to online pornography due to increased internet speeds and the availability of hand held devices has contributed to the likelihood of children’s accidental exposure to such material,” said Relationships Australia Executive Officer Alison Brook.

“With up to 12 per cent of all websites now estimated to be pornographic sites and 25 per cent of all search engine requests for pornography it is increasingly likely that children and young people are being accidentally exposed to online pornography,” Ms Brook said.

“Available evidence suggests that exposure to online pornography by children and young people increases harmful gender stereotypes, unhealthy and sexist views of women and sex, higher rates of acceptance of violence against women, sexually coercive behaviour by young men and contributes to unrealistic understandings of sex and sexuality.

“Relationships Australia sought to increase our understanding of the impacts of exposure to online pornography for young people aged 11 to 16 years through our monthly online survey in February 2018.

“We asked visitors to our website to report on their understanding of young people’s exposure to pornography, potential harm and where they would go for assistance if they had concerns about a young person,” Ms Brooks said.

The survey of over 1000 people found that men (29%) were more likely than women (20%) to report that young people’s online exposure to pornography leads to unrealistic expectations of sex, while 8 per cent of women and men reported that young people’s exposure to online pornography increased risky behaviour such as sex at younger ages and unprotected sex.

More than 80 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men reported that everyone has responsibility for protecting young adolescents against the potential harm of online pornography, including parents, extended family, schools, and state and commonwealth government.

Chief Executive of Relationships Australia in NSW, Elisabeth Shaw said that parents regularly seek advice from professionals as to what degree online pornography is dangerous or risky, yet can feel helpless about how to stop it, given its easy access.

“As other media, such as TV and film allow a higher level of ‘adult themes’ to be explored, many parents might be wondering what components are simply part of living in the world right now, and what even might be ‘educational’.

“We often talk a lot about the extreme end of very gratuitous pornography, about which many adults are in agreement: this can be problematic. What is much more difficult is how to manage the ‘soft porn’ gradient.

“Building resilience as a family means that sex is a topic that can be explored. Rather than try and shut the topic down, given the inevitability of some online exposure, what is most important is building openness and trust so that any disturbing material can be discussed and alternative perspectives explored,” Ms Shaw said.

You can read the complete survey results [here](#).

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