

17 March 2021

Open letter to the Prime Minister

Re. Urgent Need for Introduction of Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act to safeguard women

Dear Prime Minister,

It may be too early to talk concretely about what exactly happened to Sarah Everard and to what extent the horrific attack on her was sexually motivated. What is clear, however, from the outpouring of stories from women across the country is that a large proportion of the epidemic of harassment and attacks on women are sexually motivated.

There is a considerable body of research – including two reports commissioned by the Government – demonstrating an association between pornography consumption and male violence towards women. [Evidence shows](#) that that 88% of the most popular pornography videos contain physical violence towards women.

With violence towards women being normalised every day via pornography, how can the Government expect to meaningfully tackle it without addressing this major root cause?

In this context, we call upon you urgently to implement Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act.

The Part 3 Regulator would be able to take robust action against any websites showing illegal, ‘extreme pornography’ which normalises violence against women (e.g. pornography including violence that is life threatening and which involves severe injury to the breast, anus or genitals).

We know you intend to introduce a Regulator via the Online Harms framework, but this has not been published yet. Even if it was published tomorrow it is very unlikely it would afford us any protection for three years.

We urge you to re-designate the BBFC as regulator (which would take 40 days), following which Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act could be implemented in just a few months. Women and children would be protected throughout the second half of 2021, 2022 and 2023.

The safety of women and children must surely be a greater priority than your preference for OFCOM as an online safety regulator.

By implementing Part 3 now, we could reap the benefits of vital enhanced protections this year, probably before the Online Harms Bill even gets to its Second Reading.

We salute the work of Baroness Benjamin of speaking up and showing real leadership on this matter. We would ask that when the Minister responds to Baroness Benjamin's amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill on Wednesday 17 March, if not before, the Government announces that it will implement Part 3 using the BBFC as Regulator. This need only be on an interim basis until the new Online Harms regime is ready. When it is, Part 3 can be stood down and the Online Harms Act and OFCOM can take over.

Violence against women does not occur in a vacuum. Your Government has a duty to address factors associated with violence against women, and pornography consumption is undoubtedly one of these.

Prime Minister, you have the opportunity today to demonstrate that you see the real-world violence pornography causes and that you will act to end it now. Our safety now matters, not just our safety in three years time when Online Harms comes into force.

We are copying this email into the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, the Chair of the DCMS Committee and to those speaking in the debate.

Your sincerely

Vanessa Morse, CEO, CEASE (Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation)

Co-signed by:

Women's Aid
Kate Isaacs, #notyourporn
Naked Truth
Nordic Model Now
OBJECT UK
Backed Technologies
Not Buying It
Prof. Kathleen Richardson, Campaign Against Sex Robots
Streetlight
You My Sisters
YES Matters UK
White Ribbon