



PROFITS BEFORE PEOPLE

**How the pornography industry
is normalising and monetising
sexual violence**



Evidencing the individual, relational and social impact of the pornography industry.

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PART 1

FOREWORD BY DR LUCIE MOORE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF CEASE

About the author

Gemma Kelly is the Head of Policy and Public Affairs for CEASE. She has extensive experience in leading, developing and running advocacy, policy, research and campaign strategies and activities in national and international contexts. She has led coalitions bringing together charities, public bodies and campaigners to fight for justice for survivors of prostitution, human trafficking and pornography, and hold the commercial sex industry to account.

TRIGGER WARNING: This report includes mention of sexual violence, rape, grooming, incest, child sexual abuse, drug misuse and suicide.

The majority of the pornography referred to in this document refers to heterosexual pornography, unless otherwise stated. However, there is ample evidence that violence occurs across all genres of pornography.



1. Foreword by Dr Lucie Moore: Chief Executive of CEASE

We are living in a time of unprecedented access to pornography. Hardcore, violent, misogynistic and racist pornography is prolific on pornography sites, social media, gaming platforms, music apps and search engines. The pornography industry and its offshoots are everywhere, shaping our culture, driving abuse, and erasing the rights of women and girls to live free from exploitation, and violence.

In this report, you will read about how the business model of the industry puts profits before people, and how the normalisation of sexual violence is affecting our attitudes and behaviours.

This vast industry is estimated to be worth in the region of \$97 billion,¹ and is a global force, Pornhub was the fourth most visited website in the world, after Google, YouTube and Facebook in February 2024,² and viewed as the technology company with the third greatest impact on society in the twenty-first century.³

And it's not just adults watching.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1.4 million children were accessing pornography from a desktop each month in the UK.⁴ By 2023, 91% of 11 year olds in the UK owned a smartphone⁵ and the age of first viewing online pornography was just 13.⁶ So this figure is now likely to be significantly higher.

We know how damaging this is. Yet, unlike other global industries, online pornography has avoided virtually all regulation, scrutiny and accountability, which has allowed it to pursue profit without restraint. This is a multi-billion dollar, culture-shaping, norm-influencing, empathy-eroding industry – and one that many of us would prefer not to think about.

This report lays bare the reality of online pornography. It is a distressing read, covering exploitation, sexual violence, racism, incest, child sexual abuse and human trafficking. But it is vital that we don't look away. Now is the time to demand change.

My thanks go to Gemma Kelly, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at CEASE, for her dedication and expertise in writing this report, and to our policy intern, Anna McGuire, for her additional drafting support. Parts of this report were originally drafted for CEASE's submission to the UK Government's Pornography Review (2023) chaired by Baroness Gabby Bertin.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all those who know, first-hand, the damage that pornography can do. We hope we have done justice to your experience, and that this report helps to finally turn the tide.

Dr Lucie Moore
Chief Executive of CEASE

1 NBC News, 2021, Things Are Looking Up in America's Porn Industry: <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/things-are-looking-americas-porn-industry-n289431>

2 Datareportal, 2024, Digital 2024: Global Statshot Report: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-april-global-statshot>

3 Diggity Marketing, 2020, The Tech Companies That Have Had the Biggest Impact on Society in the 21st Century: <https://diggitymarketing.com/most-influential-tech-companies-2020/>

4 UK Government, Final Impact Assessment Age Verification, 2016: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a801bdaed915d74e622c843/2016-06-06_Age_verification_impact_assessment__1_.pdf

5 Ofcom, 2023, Children's Media Use and Attitudes: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens>

6 Ofcom, 2023, Implementing the Online Safety Act: Protecting children from online pornography: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/implementing-the-online-safety-act-protecting-children/>

PART 2

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY
AND POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS**



2. Executive summary and policy recommendations

This report examines the multiple harms of the pornography industry to both those in the industry and society as a whole. It shines a light on the abuse and exploitation that women and girls are subjected to within the pornography industry and the trafficking and coercion that often leads to their involvement. It details the damaging effects of pornography to both individuals and society, exploring how pornography shapes the sexual scripts of both adults and children, normalises violence against women and girls, grooms men and boys to perpetrate sexual violence, and has contributed to child-on-child sexual abuse. It also highlights the impact of consuming pornography on the human brain and how users can escalate to consuming more violent and deviant content, including child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and in some cases perpetrating child sexual abuse and exploitation.

It outlines the broad harms of pornography and the pornography industry, such as image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) including deepfake pornography, virtual reality pornography, and the growing threat of AI to women and children's safety, both online and offline.

This report situates pornography as a form of commercial sexual exploitation and as a form of violence against women and girls. It lays bare the role of the companies who profit from this exploitation and violence, and their wilful avoidance of regulation and accountability.

Informed by forty years of research on the harms of pornography, this report draws from peer reviewed research, survivor testimonies, grey literature, NGO reports and journalism. While it aims to be a comprehensive account of the substantial harms of the pornography industry, it is not exhaustive.

We are calling for immediate regulation of this harmful industry by government and for the harms of pornography to be viewed as a risk to public health.

2.1. Main findings

2.1.1 Harms within the pornography industry

CEASE views pornography production as a form of commercial sexual exploitation and pornographers as those profiting from pornography production and distribution. Regardless of the method of pornography production, exploitation and human trafficking are inherent. Women are often forced or coerced into this industry and once in it, even the most famous pornography 'performers'⁷ are exploited.⁸ This coercion meets the international definition of human trafficking.⁹

Pornography is, at its core, violence against women and girls. Women and girls are dehumanised, degraded, tortured, and stripped of all humanity within mainstream pornography. Multiple testimonies from survivors of the pornography industry highlight the extreme violence that women face in the industry.¹⁰

⁷ Pornography 'performers' will be used throughout this report with an acknowledgement that what happens in pornography is neither a performance nor acting, but includes filmed footage of rape, sexual assault, other forms of sexual violence and physical and verbal abuse

⁸ Exodus Cry, How Porn and Trafficking Are Undeniably Connected: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/porn-and-trafficking/> and Meagan Tyler, 2015, Harms of Production: Theorising Pornography as a Form of Prostitution: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.11.014>

⁹ UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ProtocolonTrafficking.pdf>

¹⁰ Exodus Cry, These Performers are Exposing Violent Abuse on Porn Sets: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/violent-abuse-porn/>

Online pornography sites are now ubiquitous with what is referred to as ‘gonzo’ pornography which depicts hardcore, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased.¹¹ Women are the targets of both physical and verbal aggression in 94.4% of scenes in pornographic content and most of the time the aggressors are men.¹² This violence is not fake or acting, it is real and the physical, psychological and emotional impacts of it last long after a woman has escaped the industry.

It is unsurprising therefore that many women who are or have been in the pornography industry suffer from premature deaths.¹³

2.1.2 Harms of pornography to society

Violent online pornography has caused immeasurable harm to society and individuals. Misogynistic, sexist and racist pornography is profoundly shaping the sexual scripts of both adults and children.¹⁴ Watching online pornography normalises sexual aggression, risky sexual practices and men’s violent sexual domination over women. It reduces women and girls to objects on whom acts of sex and violence are performed. Women, especially younger women, feel under pressure to play out the ‘scripts’ their male partners have learned from pornography and are pressured into painful and dangerous sex acts such as strangulation and anal sex¹⁵ which men and boys are groomed to want by pornography.¹⁶ Forty years of research shows that there is a clear and unambiguous link between the consumption of online pornography and violence against women and girls both online and offline.¹⁷ Further, through genres such as ‘barely legal’, ‘teen’ and ‘incest’, pornography is sexualising children and driving the demand for child sexual abuse material.¹⁸

Online pornography is also acting as sex education for children with disastrous results. Children’s consumption of online pornography has been associated with the dramatic increase in child-on-child sexual abuse, with children now committing half of all reported child sexual abuse offences in the UK. This has increased from a third in 2022.¹⁹

The public health impacts of pornography are wide ranging and include physical, psychological, emotional, behavioural and neurological implications for people within the industry and those outside of it. This requires a holistic public health approach.

2.1.3 The culpability of the pornography industry

The pornography industry is not neutral in the proliferation of sexual violence. Far from it, it is the basis of its business model. All internet platforms work off the basic principle of ‘content is king’ and increasing traffic is the ultimate goal. The more traffic a site has, the more profitable it is. So, the pornography industry markets sexual violence as entertainment and is now worth an estimated \$97 billion globally.²⁰

11 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

12 Ana J. Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Erica Scharrer, Chyng Sun, and Rachael Liberman, 2010, Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210382866>

13 Collective Shout, The Dark Reason Porn Stars Keep Dying: https://www.collectiveshout.org/the_dark_reason_porn_stars_keep_dying; Toronto Sun, 2024, DEATH IN PORNLAND: Starlets who met an early end in smut biz: <https://torontosun.com/news/world/death-in-pornland-starlets-who-met-an-early-end-in-smut-biz>; The New York Post, 2018, Porn stars keep dying and nobody knows why: <https://nypost.com/2018/01/22/porn-stars-keep-dying-and-nobody-knows-why/>

14 Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 2021, Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azab035>

15 CEASE, Shaping our Sexual Scripts: <https://cease.org.uk/facts/culture-the-air-we-breathe/shaping-our-sexual-scripts/>

16 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2023, Pornography Regulation: The case for Parliamentary Reform: <https://www.appg-cse.uk/inquiry/>

17 See Academic Library: <https://culturereframed.org/resources/academic-library/>

18 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

19 NSPCC Learning, 2018, “Is this sexual abuse?”: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2018/is-this-sexual-abuse/>

20 NBC News, 2021, Things Are Looking Up in America’s Porn Industry: <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/things-are-looking-americas-porn-industry-n289431>

Proponents of pornography may wax lyrical about freedom of expression, but the reality is, pornography is about money, not sex. It has shown time and again that it will not sacrifice profits for the protection of women and children. Aylo, owner of Pornhub, is, as of July 2024, facing 25 lawsuits in relation to human trafficking, image-based sexual abuse, profiting from child sexual abuse material, and more.²¹ Yet like other pornography companies, it is unrelenting in its avoidance of regulation.

We are calling on the UK government to implement the following recommendations as a matter of urgency to curb the harms of pornography:

Recommendation 1: Bring all regulation of pornographic content into one new UK-wide Act of Parliament

This Act should ensure that content common in pornography that meets the definition of torture by international standards would be illegal to possess, produce, or host online in the UK.

It should also close the current loophole in legislation that allows content such as ‘barely legal porn’, ‘incest porn’ and ‘teen porn’ to be prolific online.

The above should apply to dedicated pornography sites, social media sites, search engines and to all user-to-user platforms and applications.

Recommendation 2: Human trafficking must be recognised as a key feature of the pornography industry and mitigation strategies enacted to combat it

The new Pornography Act, or any other legislative change, should reflect that sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls are inherent in the pornography industry.

The Act must ensure that any illegal pornographic material that either depicts or is a direct result of human trafficking as defined by the UN Palermo Protocol must not be allowed to appear on any dedicated pornography site, social media site, search engine and relevant user-to-user platforms and applications. The Act must also mandate that all pornography and camming sites open up their sites to law enforcement and/or a dedicated anti-trafficking organisation so they can determine the level of risk that human trafficking and exploitation are taking place on their site, take proactive action to identify where these are happening, intercept perpetrators, and protect victims.

Recommendation 3: The creation and sharing of images without consent should be illegal and the removal of non-consensual content should be improved

It should be illegal to create, take, share, threaten to share, or solicit any intimate image without consent.

Applications that are solely created for the creation of AI-generated pornography of real people such as nudifying apps must be made illegal in the UK.

²¹ Newsweek, 2024, Pornhub Is Still a Crime Scene, Even After Its Rebrand: <https://www.newsweek.com/pornhub-still-crime-scene-even-after-its-rebrand-opinion-1927282>

Recommendation 4: Better guidance and training is needed to increase rates of prosecution

A new Act should be straightforward and easy to interpret and implement, simplifying the current convoluted and disparate legislation that governs pornography.

All parts of the criminal justice system must be trained in the impacts of pornography, specifically the harms to women and girls both within and outside of the industry.

Recommendation 5: The harms of pornography should be tackled through public health interventions

The public health impacts of pornography must be fully assessed, pornography named as a public health priority and treated as such by public health services.

This should include government sponsored information campaigns on the harms of pornography to individuals and society and appropriate behavioural interventions.

PART 3

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM WITH PORNOGRAPHY



3. Introduction: The problem with pornography

Pornography, regardless of where it is found online, is awash with content featuring sexual violence against women and girls, image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) also called ‘revenge porn’, child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and a litany of harmful content, some of which is legal and some of which is illegal.

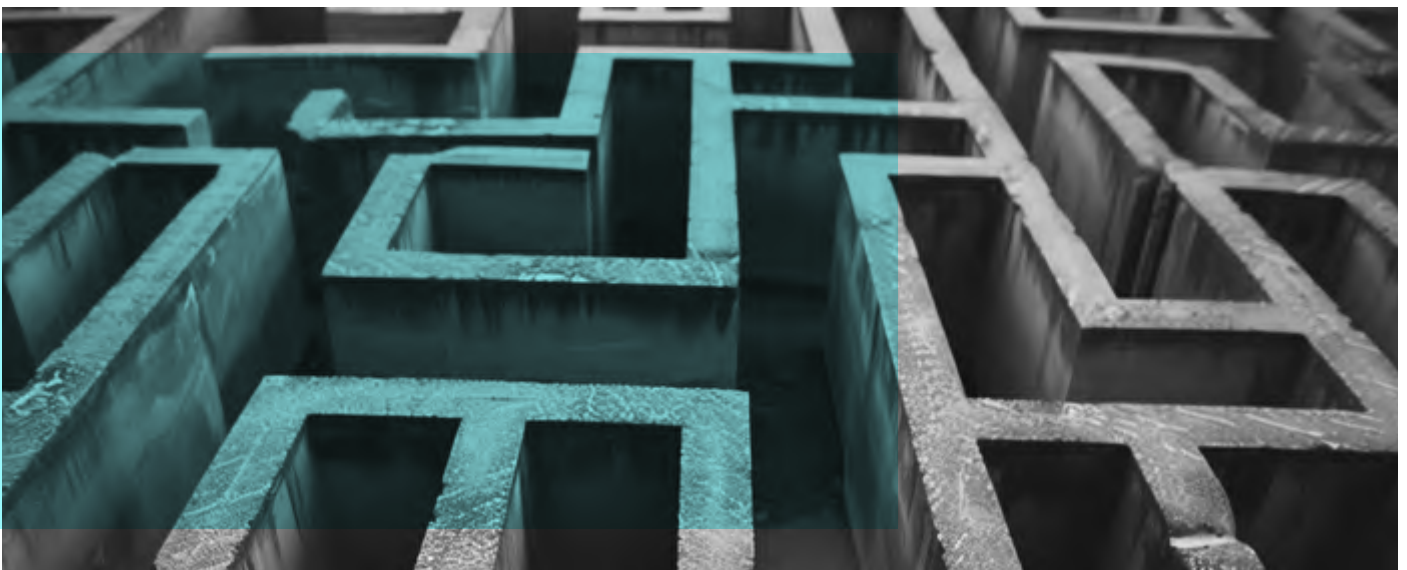
Now faced with the devastating fallout of this material being freely available to both adults and children for decades, governments around the world are seeking to curb the harms of this industry through various types of regulation, especially age verification laws.

In the United Kingdom, the Online Safety Act 2023²² introduced age verification to prevent children from accessing pornographic content on both dedicated pornography sites and social media. This is crucial in light of research by the Children’s Commissioner for England (2023), showing that teenagers who access pornography are doing so on X (formerly Twitter) more than dedicated pornography sites. Instagram and Snapchat are the third and fourth most common places for teenagers to access pornography.²³

Nonetheless, large gaps remain in pornography industry regulation, specifically around the issues of violence within the pornography industry itself, the influence of pornography on violence against women and girls, the impact of legal pornography on perpetration of child sexual abuse, both online and offline, as well as the physical and mental health implications for consumers.

As will be evidenced throughout this report, the pornography industry is big business. This is not an industry about sex positivity or sexual empowerment as proponents of pornography may claim. It is a business. Its only aim is to make money, and thus far, this has taken precedent over the safety of particularly women and girls, but also boys and men.

It is time we held the pornography industry to account for the violence and harm it causes to those both within the industry and those affected by it.



22 Online Safety Act, 2023: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/contents/enacted>

23 Children’s Commissioner for England, 2023, ‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’ - Young people and pornography: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography/>

The pornography industry at a glance:

- Globally, the pornography industry's revenue estimates are as high as \$97 billion.²⁴ For comparison, Netflix brings in around \$33 billion.²⁵
- Pornography sites received more website traffic in 2020 than Twitter, Instagram, Netflix, Zoom, Pinterest, and LinkedIn combined.²⁶
- Aylo (formerly MindGeek) is one of the biggest pornography companies in the world. It has over 100 pornographic websites, including Pornhub, and it collects more data than Netflix.²⁷
- In 2019, there were more than 42 billion site visits to Pornhub,²⁸ and during the COVID-19 pandemic Ofcom reported that Pornhub had a bigger audience than the BBC.²⁹
- In November 2023 alone, XVideos received 8.6 billion site visits.³⁰
- It is estimated that the world's most popular pornography websites receive approximately 2.4 million visits every 60 seconds.³¹
- The top three pornography sites in the world receive a combined total of 5.81 billion visits each month.³²

24 NBC News, 2021, Things Are Looking Up in America's Porn Industry: <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/things-are-looking-americas-porn-industry-n289431>

25 Statista, 2023, Netflix's annual revenue from 2002 to 2023: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272545/annual-revenue-of-netflix/>

26 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

27 Quartz, 2018, Porn sites collect more user data than Netflix or Hulu. This is what they do with it: <https://qz.com/1407235/porn-sites-collect-more-user-data-than-netflix-or-hulu-this-is-what-they-do-with-it>

28 Pornhub, 2019, The Year in Review: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>

29 The Guardian, 2021, Half of adults in UK watched porn during pandemic, says Ofcom: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/jun/09/half-british-adults-watched-porn-pandemic-ofcom#:~:text=Half%20the%20adult%20population%20of,adult%20material%20in%20September%202020>

30 Semrush, 2024, January 2024 Traffic Stats: <https://www.semrush.com/website/xvideos.com/overview/>

31 Fight the New Drug, 2020, How many people are on porn sites right now? (Hint: It's a lot.): <https://fightthenewdrug.org/by-the-numbers-see-how-many-people-are-watching-porn-today/>

32 Ibid

PART 4

**PROFIT IS THE FIRST
PRIORITY OF THE
PORNOGRAPHY
INDUSTRY**



4. Profit is the first priority of the pornography industry

To understand the harms of pornography it is important to understand the pornography industry's history and current business model.

Today's pornography industry found its beginnings in 1953 with Playboy, the first pornographic magazine to attract corporate advertising. Pornographic magazines were popular, and Playboy, Penthouse and Hustler soon became household names. But unlike the pornography of today, magazine images were static, so "the novelty and its arousal potential faded fairly quickly."³³

When pornography moved to videos, a new era dawned, but it was difficult to access, people had to go to specific sex stores or 'peep shows'. The content in pornography at the time, also had 'storylines', and a level of arousal and sexual build-up in the film. Even when dial up arrived, the early days of the internet were slow, it took time to download an image and it was mostly stills. Also, unlike today, children had very little access.³⁴

However, the advent of highspeed internet changed all of that. As Gary Wilson, author of *Your Brain on Porn*, explains, "In 2006, high-speed internet gave rise to a whole new creature: galleries of short porn clips of the hottest few minutes of an unending supply of streaming hardcore videos" and "the world of porn has never been the same since."³⁵

The pornography industry has often been at the cutting edge of technological advancements, as demonstrated by their early adoption of surveillance, SEO, algorithms, data analytics and digital advertising. By embracing and popularising the development of tube-style sites with user-uploaded content making it anonymous, accessible and affordable, the exponential growth of the pornography industry was assured.

4.1. Delivering users to advertisers and children to abusers

The business model of the pornography industry is built on gathering, storing, processing and analysing billions of data points to maximise revenue from advertising and subscriptions. Economies of scale underpin the effectiveness of this model so pornography sites are incentivised to make access to their content as easy as possible for all users, regardless of their age, and to simplify the video uploading process to minimise moderation.

The sophisticated algorithms of the online pornography industry are designed to 'mousetrap' users, surveying and manipulating their preferences and presenting them with ever more extreme content in order to keep them engaged.³⁶

This business model is inherently high risk and self-regulation efforts by the industry have proved woefully inadequate.

³³ Gary Wilson, 2017, *Your Brain on Porn*, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

PART 5

**QUESTIONABLE
CONTENT: VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS IS NOT
ENTERTAINMENT**



5. Questionable content: violence against women and girls is not entertainment

The facilitation of video uploads by users is critical to the pornography industry's business model. Video uploads appear on pornography sites instantaneously, and there are little to no controls or verification procedures in place to check that those on camera have willingly given their consent and are 18 years old or above.³⁷

Videos on pornography sites include:

- Commercially produced pornography, much of which is still produced by pornography studios in the US, namely Los Angeles and Las Vegas, as well as Hungary and the Czech Republic.³⁸
- 'Amateur' pornography which is a category of pornography that features models, actors or non-professionals 'performing' without pay, or actors for whom this material is not their only paid modelling work'.³⁹
- Reality pornography which is professionally made pornography that seeks to emulate the style of amateur pornography.⁴⁰
- Videos of both consensual and non-consensual sex and sex acts, uploaded by users.⁴¹

There is little to no moderation of any material that is uploaded to pornography sites regardless of where or how it was created. Mainstream pornography platforms therefore host vast, unknown quantities of illegal content including:⁴²

- Videos of trafficking victims, rape and other non-consensual sexual violence.
- Image-based sexual abuse ('revenge porn').
- Covertly filmed material ('spy-cam porn') showing footage from cameras hidden in women's bedrooms, toilets, locker rooms, gynaecology wards, etc.
- AI-generated pornography such as deepfake pornography of women and girls.
- Child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

Mainstream pornography sites also host increasingly hardcore content, which although it does not meet the narrow definition of illegal content in the UK, is nonetheless extremely harmful. Legal videos on pornography sites include depictions of:⁴³

- Sexual coercion, abuse and exploitation of vulnerable women and children.
- Intrafamilial rape ('incest porn').
- Humiliation, punishment, torture and pain.
- Child sexual abuse.

³⁷ The Washington Examiner, 2020, Time to Shut Pornhub Down: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/?p=1107444>

³⁸ French Senate, 2022, Report: "Porn: Hell behind the scenes": <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r21-900-1/r21-900-1.html>

³⁹ Wikipedia, 2024: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pornography>

⁴⁰ Wikipedia, 2024: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reality_pornography

⁴¹ The Washington Examiner, 2020, Time to Shut Pornhub Down: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/?p=1107444>

⁴² CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

⁴³ Ibid

With almost no controls or checks in place, illegal and legal material co-exist on pornography sites and social media sites that host pornography. Illegal material is camouflaged against legal material, and it is next to impossible to tell what is legal and what is not.⁴⁴ It is therefore extremely difficult to ascertain how much illegal material is intentionally or unintentionally sought out by consumers. Further, in the UK, the actual definition of illegal material or ‘extreme’ pornography under the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008,⁴⁵ is extremely narrow and does not capture a vast amount of violent content that is prolific on pornography sites and causes immeasurable harm to individuals and society.

While some pornography companies such as Aylo suggest they remove child sexual abuse material, this is limited at best. It is also unclear if they remove CSAM from all their 100+ sites. They also do nothing to remove content that sexualises children and drives the demand for CSAM: (see section on Harms to children: The sexualisation of childhood).

5.1 What was once hardcore is now mainstream

When surveyed in early 2024, the majority of the British public (69%) agreed that pornographic content is more extreme than it was in the past, and they are right.⁴⁶ As the internet and the pornography industry have evolved rapidly over the last twenty years, what used to be considered ‘hardcore’ material is now mainstream and sometimes deemed ‘vanilla’. As Dr Gail Dines, author of *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality*, stated in 2010, “[Sex] acts that are now commonplace in much of online porn were almost non-existent a decade ago.”⁴⁷ This increase in both extremity and volume has continued over the last fifteen years and we are now in a position whereby increasingly violent, misogynistic pornography is prolific online, and current legislation is no longer adequate.

Online pornography sites are therefore now ubiquitous with what is referred to as ‘gonzo’ pornography. ‘Gonzo’ pornography depicts hardcore, body punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased.⁴⁸ Common acts found in mainstream pornography include but are not limited to:⁴⁹

- Open hand slapping, hair pulling, spanking and hitting.
- ‘Choking’ and strangulation.⁵⁰
- Vaginal, anal and oral penetration of a woman by two, three or more men at the same time.
- Double anal, where a woman is penetrated anally by two men at the same time.
- Double vaginal, where a woman is penetrated vaginally by two men at the same time.
- Gagging, where a woman has a penis or another instrument pushed so far down her throat she gags, struggles to breathe and in some cases vomits.
- ‘Ass-to-mouth’ where a penis goes from a woman’s anus to her mouth without washing.
- Bukkake, where a number of men ejaculate at the same time or one after another onto a woman’s body, face, eyes, ears or mouth.
- Verbal abuse where women are called names such as ‘bitch’, ‘slut’ and ‘whore’.

44 Ibid

45 The current definition of ‘extreme pornography’ under the 2008 Act is an image which ‘in an explicit and realistic way, depicts any of the following— (a) an act which threatens a person’s life, (b) an act which results, or is likely to result, in serious injury to a person’s anus, breasts or genitals, (c) an act which involves sexual interference with a human corpse, or (d) a person performing an act of intercourse or oral sex with an animal (whether dead or alive), and a reasonable person looking at the image would think that any such person or animal was real

46 CEASE, 2024, British Public Attitudes towards Pornography: <https://cease.org.uk/british-public-attitudes-towards-pornography/>

47 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality*

48 Ibid

49 Ibid and Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 2021, Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azab035>

50 Pornography sites, social media sites and other mainstream media use the word “choke” to describe what is actually strangulation. Choking is an accidental internal obstruction of the airway, but strangulation is the manual external force by the hands, arms, legs, or ligature that results in restriction of oxygen intake and blood flow to the brain. Strangling is often used as a tactic of control and abuse. Words like “choking” or “breath play” are used by the pornography industry to obfuscate the reality of ‘strangulation porn’

Pornography sites offer images and videos of “young women with penises thrust deep into their throat.”

Some are gagging, others crying, and virtually all have faces, especially their eyes covered in semen.

The user is bombarded with images of mascara running, hair being pulled, throats in a vicelike grip, nostrils being pinched so the women can't breathe as the penis fills the mouth, and mouths that are distended by either hands pulling the lips apart or penises inserted sideways.”⁵¹

This analysis was written at least 14 years ago, and the content has become more rather than less extreme.

5.2 More extreme content sustains arousal and maintains traffic

These videos and images do not happen by accident. No one knows better than the pornography industry how pornography affects the brain (see section on Harms to society: Pornography is addictive by design). People who watch pornography become desensitised to the material they are consuming, their sexual tastes change, and they need increasingly more extreme material to maintain/reach arousal.⁵²

A 2016 review of research studies and clinical reports, including pertinent brain research, found that pornography consumption increases demand for more ‘novel’ and ‘extreme’ materials.⁵³ The pornography industry both creates and meets this demand, with many pornographers openly admitting that they need to make more violent, more hardcore material to stay ahead in the pornography market.⁵⁴

Pornography conglomerates such as Aylo which owns Pornhub, YouPorn, and Redtube, and WebGroup Czech Republic, owners of XVideos, must provide access to more and more extreme content to maintain their business model and sustain and increase traffic to their sites.⁵⁵ Put simply, pornography sites profit from the torture of women and girls.

51 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

52 Max Waltman, 2021, Pornography: The Politics of Legal Challenges

53 Brian Y. Park, Gary Wilson, Jonathan Berger, Matthew Christman, Bryn Reina, Frank Bishop, Warren P. Klam, and Andrew P. Doan, 2016, Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5039517/>

54 Sound Investigations, 2023: <https://soundinvestigations.com/>

55 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

5.3 Violence is normalised

One site studied in the early 2000s promoted ‘anal suffering’, offering its users the following: “Every week, we’ll bring you a new Suffering Slut. Weak, Destroyed, Agonizing in Anal Pain and Totally Fucked Up right in her ass. And you’ll have all the glory of watching them.”⁵⁶ Others described in more grotesque detail the physical ‘damage’ caused to women’s anuses.⁵⁷

These sites are not historic and they are not anomalies. A Google search for ‘anal suffering porn site’ on 25 February 2024, brought up 86,300,000 results in a matter of seconds. Major pornography websites also feature women being hung, strangled and suffocated,⁵⁸ with ‘choking’ content often featuring on the front page.⁵⁹

Analysis⁶⁰ undertaken by academics Dr Vera-Gray et al. of 131,738 titles of videos recommended to first-time users on Pornhub, XVideos, and XHamster, the three most popular pornography sites in the UK, found that:

- 1 in every 8 titles described sexual activities that constitute sexual violence as defined by the World Health Organization.
- The word ‘teen’ was the most frequently occurring word across the entire dataset.
- Sexual activity between family members was the most frequent form of sexual violence i.e. incest.
- The second most common category was that of physical aggression and sexual assault.

In 2023, after months of hearings and reviewing millions of videos on the biggest international pornography sites, France’s High Council for Equality between Women and Men found that “90% of pornographic content online features verbal, physical and sexual violence towards women, and a significant amount of violence shown is punishable under existing laws in France.”⁶¹

A 2023 study in Sweden emphasises that sex acts that are “perpetrated against women in prostitution and filmed as pornography are the same as the acts that legally define torture: verbal sexual harassment, unwanted sex acts, forced nudity, rape, sexual mocking, physical sexual harassment, and not permitting basic hygiene.”⁶²

Despite the levels of sexual violence present in online pornography, the British public remain largely unaware. Only a quarter (25%) of those surveyed in early 2024 believed sexual assault or rape can be easily found online for free.⁶³

⁵⁶ Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Suzanne Blac, 2022, Pornography as crime scene videos: Suzzan Blac discusses her Pornhub research: <https://nordicmodelnow.org/2022/08/13/pornography-as-crime-scene-videos-suz-zan-blac-discusses-her-pornhub-research/>

⁵⁹ We Can’t Consent to This, 2021, ‘I thought it was normal’: <https://wecantconsenttothis.uk/i-thought-it-was-normal-research>

⁶⁰ Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 2021, Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azab035>

⁶¹ The Guardian, 2023, French equality watchdog finds 90% of online pornography abuses women: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/27/online-pornography-breaks-french-law-equality-watchdog-france?CMP=share_btn_url

⁶² Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>

⁶³ CEASE, 2024, British Public Attitudes towards Pornography: <https://cease.org.uk/british-public-attitudes-towards-pornography/>

5.4 Titles and comments are as violent as the images

In 2021, CEASE undertook an analysis of video titles found on Pornhub. While Pornhub has banned certain search terms that suggest violence such as ‘hurt’, ‘kill’, ‘rape’ and ‘assault’, the terms they do permit include ‘sexually broken’, ‘pain’, ‘extreme choking’, ‘destruction’, ‘crying’, ‘stop’, ‘used like meat’ and others. Videos include titles such as: ‘Dazed 18 year old fuck-meat choked and degraded by 42 year old cock’, ‘Slave Tied Up in Filthy Mattress’, ‘Stupid slut gets beat and degraded in hotel room’, ‘bound gagged stripped whipped vibed machine-fucked’, ‘Oriental slave girl tortured’.⁶⁴ The comments beneath these videos from users are equally as violent and disparaging. As Suzanne Blac, a contemporary English artist and survivor of child sexual abuse, rape, pornography and prostitution, who also undertook research in 2021 into the pornography found on Pornhub explains, “Many of these videos have millions of views and endless derogatory comments underneath along the lines of ‘loving the torture’ and seeing ‘women suffer.’” She goes on to describe finding videos on Pornhub of “women being suffocated with plastic bags, water-boarded, strangled, manually and with ligatures. Women being hanged with ropes.”⁶⁵

5.5 Women are the primary targets of violence and coercion

Studies have found that in pornography, women are the targets of both physical and verbal aggression in 94.4% of scenes and most of the time the aggressors are men.⁶⁶ Other studies show that during these scenes of sexual violence, 95% of the time the women in the videos either respond positively or with indifference,⁶⁷ giving the impression that women either enjoy sexual violence or at the very least do not mind it. In other videos, women say no to a certain sex act to begin with, but eventually acquiesce and partake in whatever sex act the man wants. This promotes the idea that ‘no’ does not really mean ‘no’ and that women will eventually give in to the man’s desire if he persists. In other videos, such as ‘rape porn’ videos the ‘turn on’ is the fact that the woman does not want to have sex and is physically forced into it. Consent in these videos is completely absent, replaced instead by force or coercion. It should be noted that both male and female pornography ‘performers’ often turn to illicit drugs to numb the physical and psychological pain they experience while in the industry. Although our focus in this section is on the harms to female ‘performers’, it should be noted that male ‘performers’ are often coerced into taking performance enhancing drugs like Viagra and steroids which can have long term side effects.⁶⁸ Male ‘performers’ are not immune to the impact of violence within the pornography industry.

5.6 Racism is endemic

Racist narratives are also commonplace in pornography. The pornography industry fetishises race, sorting videos by categories based on race (among other ‘features’), which promote racial stereotypes and overt racism. A content analysis of more than 1,700 scenes from XVideos and Pornhub found that:

- Black women are more often the target of aggression when compared to white women.
- Black men are more often portrayed as the perpetrators of aggression against women and are depicted as significantly less intimate with their partners in comparison to white men.
- Depictions of aggression towards women are highest in scenes featuring black couples compared to all other racial pairings including interracial.⁶⁹

64 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

65 Suzanne Blac, 2022, Pornography as crime scene videos: Suzzan Blac discusses her Pornhub research: <https://nordicmodelnow.org/2022/08/13/pornography-as-crime-scene-videos-suz-zan-blac-discusses-her-pornhub-research/>

66 Ana J. Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Erica Scharrer, Chyng Sun, and Rachael Liberman, 2010, Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210382866>

67 Max Waltman, 2021, Pornography: The Politics of Legal Challenges

68 Fight the New Drug, 2022, 5 Male Ex-Performers Share What It’s Really Like to Do Porn: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/3-male-porn-stars-share-their-most-disturbing-experiences-doing-porn/>

69 N. Fritz, V. Malic, B. Paul, and Y. Zhou, 2021, Worse Than Objects: The Depiction of Black Women and Men and Their Sexual Relationship in Pornography: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12147-020-09255-2>

According to Pornhub’s own statistics, in 2023, ‘Japanese’ was the fourth most searched-for term on the site. ‘Pinay’ was fifth, ‘Asian’ was seventh, ‘Latina’ was eighth, and ‘Ebony’ was thirteenth. Of the most viewed categories, ‘Japanese’ was second, followed by ‘Ebony’. ‘Ebony’ was also deemed to be most popular in the United States,⁷⁰ a country currently facing a reckoning with its own racial history.

In fact, during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, internet searches for ‘racist porn’ tripled.⁷¹ According to an article written by Dr Gail Dines and Dr Carolyn M. West at the time, while Pornhub and other sites were advertising their commitment to racial equality and the Black Lives Matter movement, deplorably racist videos were appearing on their websites.⁷² One such video was titled “White Girl Moans Black Lives Matter While Getting Fucked #BLM.” Another was titled “Black Anal Matters.” Dines and West also highlighted that there was “a subcategory called BLM protest that mainly shows Black men penetrating white women during a supposed Black Lives Matter protest.”⁷³

In a February 2024 article for Fight the New Drug, Dr Carolyn M. West describes how thousands of uploads can be found on Pornhub containing the derogatory ‘n’ word, either in the title or comments, despite this being against Pornhub’s own terms and conditions.⁷⁴ She further explains how Black women are also most often portrayed as poor, disadvantaged and involved in prostitution. Video titles depicting this portrayal include: ‘Ebony Sex Workers’, ‘Black Girls Working the Streets’, ‘Black Ghetto Freaks’ and ‘Inner City Sluts’. Another video series called Ghetto Gaggers contains videos of Black women being choked, beaten, and humiliated with the website inviting people to “join to see White boys conquering Angry Black women.”

Dr West suggests that the combination of racism and classism “leaves Black women both sexualized and dehumanized in different ways than other ethnic groups.” Other ethnic groups such as Asian women are portrayed as submissive, weak and passive. A content analysis of XVideos found that while Asian women are treated less aggressively, they are portrayed as being docile and without any agency,⁷⁵ a common stereotype of Asian women. Even Asian women involved in the pornography industry have spoken out about the stereotypes they are forced to play out on screen, with one discussing how directors have asked her to speak in broken English, even though she is American, and to wear clothes that promote Asian stereotypes.⁷⁶ It is inconceivable that such blatant racism is not only permitted but celebrated. In most other contexts racism and related discrimination is rightly deemed abhorrent and race and ethnicity are protected characteristics under existing laws around the world. But as Hallie Lieberman, historian and journalist argues, “in the kink-is-king world of adult-film production, racism isn’t a terrible injustice or catalyst for a national reckoning. It’s a commodity. And one that’s exploding.”⁷⁷

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, there was a reported 300% increase between March and June 2022 in online searches for the terms ‘Ukrainian refugee porn’ and ‘Ukrainian rape’.⁷⁸ Valiant Richey, the then Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings said, “Our analysis shows that internet demand for derogatory material relating to Ukrainian refugees is driving traffickers to coerce, lure and groom women and children into exploitation.”⁷⁹

70 Pornhub, 2023, Year in Review: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2023-year-in-review>

71 CEASE, 2021, Racism in Porn: <https://cease.org.uk/facts/pornography/racism-in-porn/>

72 Slate Magazine, 2020, “White Girl Moans Black Lives Matter”: <https://slate.com/human-interest/2020/07/pornhub-black-lives-matter-genre-racism.html>

73 Ibid

74 Fight the New Drug, 2024, This is How the Porn Industry Profits from Blatantly Racist Portrayals of Black People: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/why-does-the-porn-industry-get-away-with-racist-portrayals-of-black-people/>

75 Y. Zhou and B. Paul, 2016, Lotus Blossom or Dragon Lady: A Content Analysis of “Asian Women” Online Pornography: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12119-016-9375-9>

76 Womens Health Magazine, 2022, Jade Kush: ‘I’m An Asian Porn Actress And I’m Sick Of Racist Roles—Here’s How I’m Fighting Back.’: <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/life/a39188036/asian-porn-jade-kush-racism-essay/>

77 Cosmopolitan, 2020, Black Performers Make Millions for Porn Sites—While Being Underpaid, Verbally Abused, and Subjected to Racism: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a34642666/racism-porn-industry/>

78 The Independent, 2022, Online searches for ‘Ukrainian refugee porn’ and ‘Ukrainian rape’ surge 300% as Russian war rages: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-refugee-porn-rape-search-b2132402.html>

79 Ibid

5.7 Sexual identities are fetishized

Pornography also fetishizes certain sexual identities, with a particular focus on members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially transpeople. It is often suggested that pornography can be a source of information and representation for LGBTQ+ people, and indeed some people do cite using pornography as a way to explore their sexual identity, especially in the absence of sufficient sex and relationships education. However, pornography containing LGBTQ+ people is just as harmful as the heterosexual pornography outlined above. It is still violent, while creating and reinforcing harmful stereotypes.⁸⁰

According to Fight the New Drug, pornography producers who “may try to create content that caters to the LGBTQ+ community, instead end up creating content that misrepresents those individuals and their relationships and ends up catering to the wrong audiences, who then fetishises the content.”⁸¹

For example, ‘lesbian sex’ is very often portrayed in an extremely objectifying way and is not intended for women who identify as lesbian but for heterosexual males to live out a concocted fantasy of how a ‘real man’ can change a woman’s sexual identity i.e. from lesbian to heterosexual. In gay pornography, very often gay men are portrayed as predatory, preying on vulnerable straight men until they eventually break them down and convince them to have sex with them.⁸²

One pornography user explains his experience:

“I copied what I had seen in porn, and it went a lot [further] than merely mimicking techniques.

What I saw in porn were damaging stereotypes, so naturally, I adopted these into my own sex life.

Too often, there was fem-shaming, disturbing daddy/son scenes, and the idea of gay men actively pursuing straight men until they gave in - all terms which Pornhub report as among the most searched terms within the gay porn genre.”⁸³

80 Fight the New Drug, 2023, How Porn Can Misrepresent and Fetishize LGBTQ+ Individuals and Relationships: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/porn-can-misrepresent-and-fetishize-lgbtq-individuals-and-relationships/>; A. Anzani, L. Lindley, G. Tognasso, MP Galupo and A. Prunas, 2021, “Being Talked to Like I Was a Sex Toy, Like Being Transgender Was Simply for the Enjoyment of Someone Else”: Fetishization and Sexualization of Transgender and Nonbinary Individuals: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-021-01935-8>

81 Ibid

82 Ibid

83 Fight the New Drug, 2023, How Porn Can Misrepresent and Fetishize LGBTQ+ Individuals and Relationships: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/porn-can-misrepresent-and-fetishize-lgbtq-individuals-and-relationships/>



Sexual violence also happens in gay pornography. Very often there will an aggressor and a vulnerable person forced into sex acts he does not want to partake in. Once again teaching people that consent does not matter, 'no' does not mean no and violence in sex is acceptable.

Finally, we see the same within transgender pornography where “many videos include belittling and humiliating behaviours focused on ‘punishing’ the actors with painful sex acts, often using offensive terms.”⁸⁴ This type of material is not empowering or educational, as is often argued by proponents of pornography. Rather it is exploitative and discriminatory; playing into myths and common stereotypical tropes that are damaging and derogatory, while fetishising violence.

84 Ibid

PART 6

**THE VIOLENCE
ONSCREEN IS REAL:
HOW PORNOGRAPHY
HARMS THE
'PERFORMERS'**



6. The violence onscreen is real: How pornography harms the ‘performers’

The landscape of pornography has changed, as outlined above, moving from big production companies to free tube-style sites where videos are uploaded by both pornography companies and site users. Some content is still commercially produced by large pornography studios containing professional ‘pornography performers’, but also includes smaller, low budget productions with fewer people involved.

Exploitation is common in the production of this type of pornography.

Women are often forced or coerced into this industry and once in it, even the most famous ‘pornography performers’⁸⁵ are exploited.⁸⁶ As will be detailed below, the coercion that is inherent in this type of pornography meets the international definition of human trafficking.

There is also significant evidence of women who are involved in prostitution/commercial sexual exploitation having their sexual acts with sex buyers recorded, either by the sex buying men, or the woman’s pimp, and that footage being uploaded to pornography sites.⁸⁷

Another large proportion of the pornography that is now produced, comes in the form of camming sites like OnlyFans, where ‘content creators’ usually women, will sell videos and images of themselves to the subscribers to their content or pages who are usually men. While always popular online, this type of pornography production exploded during the COVID-19 pandemic, with OnlyFans profits increasing by 540% between 2019 and November 2020.⁸⁸

These different forms of pornography production often overlap and intersect. They are not separate from each other, and combined they make up a large proportion of the pornographic content available online today.

CEASE views pornography production as a form of commercial sexual exploitation and pornographers as those profiting from pornography production and distribution.

Commercial sexual exploitation is itself a continuum, as women move from one form of prostitution to another.⁸⁹ For example, a woman may be involved in pornography production but move to selling sex in person or vice versa, and women often go from in-person stripping to online camming sites. While the location or act may change, what rarely changes are the vulnerabilities of the women involved.

⁸⁵ ‘Pornography performers’ will be used throughout this report with an acknowledgement that what happens in pornography is neither a performance nor acting, but includes filmed footage of rape, sexual assault, other forms of sexual violence and physical and verbal abuse

⁸⁶ Exodus Cry, How Porn and Trafficking Are Undeniably Connected: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/porn-and-trafficking/> and Meagan Tyler, 2015, Harms of Production: Theorising Pornography as a Form of Prostitution: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.11.014>

⁸⁷ Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari–, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>

⁸⁸ Collective Shout, 2022, New Report on OnlyFans: A Case Study of Exploitation in the Digital Age: https://www.collectiveshout.org/onlyfans_a_case_study_of_exploitation_in_the_digital_age

⁸⁹ M. Farley, A. Cotten, J. Lynne, S. Zumbeck, F. Spiwak, ME Reyes, D. Alvarez, and U. Sezgin, 2003, Prostitution and trafficking in nine countries: An update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder: <https://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdf/ProstitutingCountries.pdf>

Regardless of the method of pornography production, exploitation and human trafficking is inherent. According to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations' Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, known as the 'Palermo Protocol', which establishes the first common international definition of "trafficking in persons" and which the UK has ratified:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

The Protocol also states that the “consent of a victim of trafficking in persons” is irrelevant as one cannot consent to one’s own trafficking.⁹⁰ A large proportion of pornography found on mainstream pornography sites and social media sites meets this definition, whether produced by a large mainstream studio, a small run organisation, a pimp uploading videos of sex buying or the camming sites where images and videos are sold.

6.1 ‘Performers’ are pushed past their own boundaries

While large studio-produced pornography is much less common than it was in previous decades, there are still some large studios producing pornographic content. Larry Flynt Publications, famous for producing the magazine Hustler, owns pornography studios that produce films, as well as pornography sites such as ‘Hustler’s Taboo’ and ‘Anal Hookers’, as well as some strip clubs. Aylo, owner of Pornhub, is home to some of the world’s most famous pornography studios and pornography producers. WebGroup Czech Republic, owners of XVideos, operate a number of websites and also own Penthouse, which still makes studio produced pornography.⁹¹

⁹⁰ UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ProtocolonTrafficking.pdf>

⁹¹ Adultvisor, 2023, 12 Top Porn Companies in the World: Famous Adult Brands, Porn Industry Leaders: <https://adultvisor.com/biggest-adult-entertainment-companies/>

According to a report commissioned by the French Senate and hereafter referred to as the French Senate report, the “main shooting locations for pornographic films are located on the one hand, in North America, mainly in the United States where the main production centres are in Los Angeles, Las Vegas and southern Florida; on the other hand, in Eastern Europe, mainly in Budapest, capital of Hungary, and in the Czech Republic.”⁹² Whether these studios are located in the US, Hungary or elsewhere, the common theme is the exploitation that is inherent in the production of pornography. Multiple reports illustrate the coercion, exploitation and violence within the industry. As illustrated earlier, pornography has become more violent and extreme. What is often overlooked in debates about the pornography industry however, is that the violence on screen is real, it is happening to real women and girls.

While some so-called safeguards have been put in place, these often fall short and do little to protect women in the pornography industry.⁹³ In the US it is common practice for ‘performers’ involved in the production of pornography to sign contracts before filming a scene. However, they are not always informed what will be involved in the scene and what they will be expected to do. Pornography producers have admitted that they keep the information about a scene as vague as possible until the woman shows up to the shoot.⁹⁴ Once on set, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible for her to then say no to what she is being told to do, which are often extreme and violent sex acts.⁹⁵ The ‘performers’ then have to film a video after the scene saying that they consented to what has just taken place, the prerequisite being, if they don’t then they risk not getting paid.⁹⁶

In most cases the sets where pornography is filmed are in private houses or motel rooms, and there are often only men working on the set. Once the camera starts rolling, things can change very quickly from a ‘regular’ sex scene to something much more violent. Women are told that if they do not do what they are being told to do on set, then they will not get paid. They will also risk being blacklisted and not getting any other work. Women are therefore coerced and forced into doing more and more violent and extreme acts, and often for less money.⁹⁷

6.2 What was once hardcore is now mainstream

One former ‘performer’ described how she arrived for a ‘regular’ scene, but it became very violent. “I’m getting hit in the face, I’m getting spat on. I’m getting sperm in my eye...one of the guys was so hard that I was screaming so bad because it was so painful. I was ripped. I literally stopped the scene. I was bawling.” She then describes how, still bleeding, her agent collected her from that shoot and despite her insistence that she could not continue, he took her to the next shoot. She explains: “If I didn’t go, there was a cancellation fee that the agency usually has to pay.”⁹⁸

Another ‘performer’ has spoken up about being coerced into a ‘gangbang’ scene. The producer told her she did not have to sleep with all the men in the scene, but when she arrived there were 25 men and she had to have sex with all of them, including anal sex. She explains, “He offered me drugs and alcohol to coax me into doing the scene the way he wanted it done...it was four and a half hours long...after that I couldn’t urinate right, I couldn’t have a bowel movement the right way. I was just messed up. I stayed in bed for about a week.”⁹⁹

92 French Senate, 2022, Report: “Porn: Hell behind the scenes”: <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r21-900-1/r21-900-1.html>

93 Guidelines for enforcing laws (colloquially known as ‘2257 Regulations’ (C.F.R. Part 75), part of the United States Code of Federal Regulations, require producers of sexually explicit material to obtain proof of age for every model they shoot, and retain those records

94 Exodus Cry, These Performers are Exposing Violent Abuse on Porn Sets: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/violent-abuse-porn/>

95 Ibid

96 Ibid

97 Ibid; Fight the New Drug, How Porn can Fuel Sex Trafficking, 2022: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-fuel-sex-trafficking/>; Exodus Cry, How Porn and Trafficking Are Undeniably Connected: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/porn-and-trafficking/> and Meagan Tyler, 2015, Harms of Production: Theorising Pornography as a Form of Prostitution: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.11.014>

98 Exodus Cry, These Performers are Exposing Violent Abuse on Porn Sets: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/violent-abuse-porn/>

99 Ibid

Other testimonies¹⁰⁰ of women who have either previously performed in pornography or who currently still do, confirm that these are not isolated incidences:

“I got the s*** kicked out of me... most of the girls start crying because they’re hurting so bad... I couldn’t breathe. I was being hit and choked. I was really upset and they didn’t stop. They kept filming. [I asked them to turn the camera off] and they kept going.”

“I had to do whatever the producer pleased, and I had to accept it or else no pay. Sometimes you would get to a gig and the producer would change what the scene was supposed to be to something more intense and again if you didn’t like it, too bad, you did it or no pay.”

“People in the porn industry are numb to real life and are like zombies walking around. The abuse that goes on in this industry is completely ridiculous. The way these young ladies are treated is totally sick and brainwashing. I left due to the trauma I experienced even though I was there only a short time. I hung out with a lot of people in the adult industry, everybody from contract girls to gonzo actresses. Everybody has the same problems. Everybody is on drugs. It’s an empty lifestyle trying to fill up a void. I became horribly addicted to heroin and crack. I overdosed at least three times, had tricks pull knives on me, have been beaten half to death.”

“The abuse and degradation were rough. I sweated and was in deep pain. On top of the horrifying experience, my whole body ached, and I was irritable the whole day. The director didn’t really care how I felt; he only wanted to finish the video.”

“Rape is more common than anyone wants to acknowledge and one of the things that made me quit and get intense therapy was the knowledge of how many rape scenes are real. I experienced what was packaged as a “rough sex” scene, I had bruising, and tears and it was traumatizing. I cried in the scene because my partner (who had his own issues, to be fair) was too big for me and not acting his roughness. Our buyers enjoyed it, I was told.”

Another woman, who was filmed by kink.com describes how she “quickly dissociated during a 5 hour-torture session during which she was filmed being vaginally tortured and electrocuted. When she went to the bathroom afterwards, she saw other women who had also been bruised and who were bleeding from pornography productions.”¹⁰¹

“At first they threw me into crowd scenes, orgies. It wasn’t like a frat party, a rave or a love-in. It was sexual trauma from the front and the back by 10 different people in the first take. And somehow I felt lost in the oblivion of naked bodies, completely invisible, while I was being sexually violated so violently.” (Jewell Baraka, trafficked into pornography aged 14).¹⁰²

More than 20 ex-‘performers’, male and female, have come together to call on pornography producers, directors and agents to raise the age of ‘performing’ in pornography from 18 to 21, citing the abuse they experienced while in the industry’.¹⁰³ It is not just testimonies from female ‘performers’ in the pornography industry, but also male ‘performers’ and even directors who recognise the violence and exploitation inherent in the industry. A prominent mainstream pornography director, Jerome Tanner, stated back in 2003 that he was worried about the industry glorifying violence in sex and “if you’ve been on set where the guy is mouth-fucking her and the woman is throwing up, not voluntarily; involuntarily – she’s tearing, she’s convulsing...to me, that’s violence.”¹⁰⁴

100 Fight the New Drug, 10 Ex-Porn Performers Reveal the Brutal Truth Behind Their Most Popular Scenes: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/10-porn-stars-speak-openly-about-their-most-popular-scenes/> and Fight the New Drug: This Anonymous Performer’s Reddit Post About the Realities of the Porn Industry is Chilling: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/performer-online-reddit-confession-about-industry/>

101 Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari-, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>

102 Jewell Baraka, 2024, Coming of Age on a Porn Set: Trafficked in Porn at 14

103 Beyond Fantasy: <https://beyondfantasy.com/petition/#open-letter>

104 Meagan Tyler, 2015, Harms of Production: Theorising Pornography as a Form of Prostitution: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.11.014>

Others have acknowledged the coercion that is used by directors and producers to ensure women do what they want them to do when filming scenes. As one producer explains: “The producer/director knew what he’s doing in that situation when he didn’t spell out exactly what it was, she was going to be doing.”¹⁰⁵

6.3 Criminal exploitation is pervasive

The French Senate report into the pornography industry highlights that women in the pornography industry in the US have to “do a lot more things than in the past. They have to shoot more scenes than before, which is more tiring and stressful. Prices have also gone down. To be able to continue to work, these people, paid by the day, must broaden their spectrum of possibilities. An actress who refused certain practices – sodomy, for example – is now pushed to accept them.” The report also states that there is a trivialization of quite extreme practices, such as deep throats, within the industry.¹⁰⁶

Marie Maurisse, a French journalist who travelled to Budapest to investigate the growing industry in the capital, told the French Senate delegation that, “Producers and actors known for extreme practices go there [Budapest] because they know they will not be bothered. Typically, on these shoots, even when the girl knows she’s going to do porn, things get out of hand when she gets on set. She finds herself doing lots of things that she didn’t want to do, that she wasn’t aware of, including some pretty violent scenes. It is very traumatic for these women.”

She goes on to explain that many of these young women come from Eastern European countries, particularly Russia, and that, “The girls are brought back to Budapest where they sign some sort of contract. Technically, certain practices are prohibited but controls are very infrequent. Everything is done under the radar. I have collected quite extreme testimonies from young underage girls whose first sexual relationship took place in front of the camera.”¹⁰⁷

In relation to pornography production in France, the Senate report details the ‘French Bukkake’ and ‘Jacquie et Michel’ cases, which are currently going through the French legal system. In the ‘French Bukkake’ case, seventeen men, including the manager of the platform ‘French Bukkake’, are due to stand trial, accused of rape, gang rape, human trafficking and aggravated pimping, committed in the production of online pornography. Prosecutors assert that a ‘talent recruiter’ associated with the manager of the platform, knowingly coerced young, economically vulnerable women into partaking in filming of videos where they would be subjected to aggravated rape.¹⁰⁸ In the ‘Jacquie et Michel’ case, the CEO of one of France’s two biggest pornography empires Jacquie et Michel, was arrested alongside his wife and three other people, accused of rape and aggravated rape, pimping, human trafficking and sequestration.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Exodus Cry, These Performers are Exposing Violent Abuse on Porn Sets: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/violent-abuse-porn/>

¹⁰⁶ French Senate, 2022, Report: “Porn: Hell behind the scenes”: <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r21-900-1/r21-900-1.html>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Le Monde, 2023, ‘French Bukkake’ case: Porn violence suspects ordered to stand trial: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/08/31/french-bukkake-case-porn-violence-suspects-ordered-to-stand-trial_6117868_7.html

¹⁰⁹ Le Monde, 2024, ‘He can’t hide forever’: French porn empire Jacquie et Michel hit with sexual violence probe: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2022/06/16/he-can-t-hide-forever-french-porn-empire-jacquie-et-michel-hit-with-sexual-violence-probe_5987053_7.html

The report expresses that:

“The evidence gathered from witnesses [in both cases] highlights similarities in:

- methods of “recruitment”, which target fragile women in precarious circumstances;
- modus operandi: a first rape to put the woman in a position of “submission”, a process of dehumanisation, manipulation, blackmail, control, forced sex acts, imposition of multiple partners, rapes, etc.”

The report concludes that pornography producers “have no compunction in exploiting the economic and psychological vulnerability of young - even very young - women, and in shooting content in deplorable conditions...and that...Sexual, physical and verbal violence is massively widespread in porn, to the point of being systemic.”¹¹⁰

It is clear from multiple studies of the pornography industry¹¹¹ and from testimonies of those who have exited,¹¹² that coercion and force are regularly used to push ‘performers’ past their boundaries into violent and extreme sex acts. By international standards, this meets the definition of trafficking. As one UK frontline service for women involved in the sex industry puts it, “one common way trafficking occurs in the porn industry is through the coercion used by agents and producers, and even directors on set.”¹¹³ And as Catherine MacKinnon, author and law professor describes, the pornography industry, like other means of trafficking, remains at base an organised crime industry built on force, some physical, some not.¹¹⁴

While these examples highlight the level of coercion used against women already in the pornography industry, there are also many examples of women who have been tricked, kidnapped, and forced to produce pornographic content.

The now infamous, GirlsDoPorn trafficking case is one such example. GirlsDoPorn was a US federally-convicted sex trafficking ring that coerced young women into filming pornographic videos under the pretence of ‘modelling’ gigs. In some cases, the women were violently abused.¹¹⁵ One survivor explained that when she arrived at the airport for the so-called modelling job, she was met by several men. They took away her phone and then took her to a hotel room, where she was forced to sign a contract she was not allowed to read. She was given drugs and alcohol and told she would be making a pornography film.

She was then raped on camera for six hours. This abuse along with the abuse of the other victims was made into short films and distributed on every major pornography site, including Pornhub.¹¹⁶

At the time, GirlsDoPorn was an extremely popular pornography production company, receiving over a billion views and worth approximately \$17 million at the height of its popularity.¹¹⁷

It was a long-standing partner of Pornhub and the GirlsDoPorn videos accumulated millions of views on the site.¹¹⁸

110 French Senate, 2022: Report: “Porn: Hell behind the scenes” Information Report: https://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/import/files/fileadmin/Fichiers/Images/delegation/femmes/L_Essentiel_Porno_ENGLISH.pdf

111 Ibid; Meagan Tyler, 2015, Harms of Production: Theorising Pornography as a Form of Prostitution: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.11.014> and Catherine A. MacKinnon, 2005, Pornography as Trafficking: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1241&context=mjil>

112 Fight the New Drug, How Porn can Fuel Sex Trafficking, 2022: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-fuel-sex-trafficking/>; Exodus Cry, How Porn and Trafficking Are Undeniably Connected: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/porn-and-trafficking/>; Exodus Cry, These Performers are Exposing Violent Abuse on Porn Sets: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/violent-abuse-porn/>

113 Yada, How Pornography Can Fuel Sex Trafficking: https://www.yadauk.org/Groups/410166/How_Pornography_Can.aspx

114 Catherine A. MacKinnon, 2005, Pornography as Trafficking, <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1241&context=mjil>

115 United States Attorney’s Office Southern District of California, 2021, Twenty-Year Sentence in GirlsDoPorn Sex Trafficking Conspiracy: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/twenty-year-sentence-girlsdoporn-sex-trafficking-conspiracy>

116 Fight the New Drug, How Porn can Fuel Sex Trafficking, 2022: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-fuel-sex-trafficking/>

117 Fox5 News, 2022, SD fugitive on FBI’s ‘Most Wanted List’ captured in Spain: <https://fox5sandiego.com/news/local-news/sd-fugitive-on-fbis-most-wanted-list-captured-in-spain/>

118 Vice, 2019, Girls Do Porn Was a Crime Ring, Not a Porn Site, Industry Experts Say: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3kx483/girls-do-porn-sex-trafficking-fbi-indictment>

However, in 2019, a federal grand jury in the Southern District of California returned an indictment against the GirlsDoPorn Operators, for, among other charges, “sex trafficking offenses, for deceiving and coercing young women to appear in sex videos which were then posted online without the women’s consent” and “since then, several of the [GirlsDoPorn] Operators have been convicted in connection with that criminal prosecution.”¹¹⁹

Since the initial investigation, 120 women have now sued Aylo and its sites, for sex trafficking, racketeering, conspiracy to commit racketeering, and human trafficking¹²¹ in relation to the GirlsDoPorn case. Aylo has since admitted to sex trafficking in a federal investigation into the case and agreed to pay a \$1.8 million fine as well as provide compensation to the victims.¹²⁰

6.4 Trafficking and prostitution prop up the pornography industry

At its core, trafficking exploits vulnerabilities. Very often the women who enter the pornography industry and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation have multi-faceted and intersecting vulnerabilities. **These include but are not limited to:**

- History of child sexual abuse and neglect
- Homelessness
- Poverty
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Racial and ethnic inequalities

Members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially transpeople, are also disproportionality affected.

People also enter the pornography industry at a young age.¹²¹ According to a report on domestic minor trafficking in the US, the average age of someone trafficked into pornography production was 12.8 years¹²⁴. This is consistent with other studies and testimonies on the age of people being trafficked into sexual exploitation. Jewell Baraka, a survivor leader and author, documents in her book, ‘Coming of Age on a Porn Set’, how after years of sexual abuse, her father first trafficked her into a brothel at the age of 11 and then into what she refers to as “adult hardcore porn” at the age of 14.¹²²

Many pornographers prey on these vulnerabilities, using a woman’s often precarious economic situation, to coerce them into pornography and once in the industry to push them into producing increasingly extreme content. Given that this content is then immortalised on the internet, it is very difficult for women to leave the industry and lead a ‘normal life’. Studies show that rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are higher in women who have been involved in pornography in comparison to other forms of commercial sexual exploitation.¹²³

119 United States Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of New York, 2023, Pornhub Parent Company Admits to Receiving Proceeds of Sex Trafficking and Agrees to Three-Year Monitor: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/pornhub-parent-company-admits-receiving-proceeds-sex-trafficking-and-agrees-three-year#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20a%20ofederal%20grand,on%20line%20without%20the%20women’s%20consent>

120 Catherine A. MacKinnon, 2011, Trafficking, Prostitution and Inequality: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298497463_Trafficking_Prostitution_and_Inequality; Equality Now, 2019: <https://equalitynow.org/trafficking-for-sexual-exploitation/>; E. Schulze, SI Novo Canto, P. Mason, and M. Skalin, 2014, Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET\(2014\)493040_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf) and Rights for Girls, 2024, RACIAL & GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE SEX TRADE: <https://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Racial-Disparities-in-the-Sex-Trade-2024.pdf>

121 Thorn, 2018, Survivor Insights The Role of Technology in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Thorn_Survivor_Insights_012918.pdf

122 Jewell Baraka, 2024, Coming of Age on a Porn Set: Trafficked in Porn at 14

123 Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>; Melissa Farley, 2007, ‘Renting an Organ for Ten Minutes’: What Tricks Tell Us about Prostitution, Pornography, and Trafficking: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/FarleyRentinganOrgan11-06.pdf>; Max Waltman, 2021, Pornography: The Politics of Legal Challenges

As mentioned, CEASE views pornography as not separate to commercial sexual exploitation, but one form of sexual exploitation along a continuum. Studies of the commercial sex industry spanning decades show that pornography cannot be separated from prostitution or trafficking.¹²⁴

In some cases, women sell sex in person and then move into the pornography industry or vice versa, or in some cases women who are sold for sex have their abuse filmed and uploaded online as pornography. In one study of 105 people involved in the sex trade in Sweden, most of the interviewees had their prostitution photographed or videotaped.¹²⁵

As the internet has evolved and life has become more digitalised, so too has the sex industry which has predominantly moved online. As one sex industry survivor in Sweden explains: “the same person who sold me – he was also there to film me. So, he was both a pimp and a porn producer, he was a sort of jack-of-all-trades.”¹²⁶ In one case, a woman’s pimp ran a website where he sold images and films of prostitution buyers raping her – featured as ‘gangbang’ videos on the website.¹²⁷ Or as another survivor explains, “I meet my clients physically first and then we film what we do and then I sell it to them as porn afterwards.”¹²⁸

However, public awareness of this reality is significantly low, with only 26% of the British public believing that pornographic content is easily available involving women and girls who have been trafficked, coerced or forced into appearing.¹²⁹

6.5 Exploitation is hidden behind a paywall

Another feature of the changing nature of the pornography industry is the increase in camming sites, particularly OnlyFans. Camming sites are websites where someone is requested to perform certain activities, often sexual, in front of a webcam for paying clients. They come with their own specific dangers and types of exploitation. Women involved in camming face harassment, blackmail, or being subject to ‘revenge porn’ as well as the huge psychological and emotional labour of ‘chatting’ to men for hours and days on end, with no break.¹³⁰

Women involved in camming speak about how young girls are targeted by camming sites who recruit them via their social media accounts on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook.¹³¹ Given the nature of social media and the pressure on young people to frequently upload content, particularly sexualised content, as well as the normalisation of ‘sexting’, this is hardly surprising. As one report notes, “by concealing pornography production as blogging and modelling, pornographers are able to appeal to young women and girls, already burdened by the societal pressure to be seen, all the while disguising the exploitative nature of the industry.”¹³² In the same way as studio produced pornography, the women involved in camming need to produce more extreme content to keep earning money.¹³³

124 Ibid, Catherine A. MacKinnon, 2011, ‘Trafficking, Prostitution and Inequality’: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298497463_Trafficking_Prostitution_and_Inequality; Max Waltman, 2021, Pornography: The Politics of Legal Challenges; Fondation Scelles, 2019, Pornography: Still not a love story: Towards an understanding of pornography as a particularly violent form of prostitution: https://fondationscelles.org/pdf/RM5/ENG_PORNOGRAPHY_5th_Global_Report_Fondation%20SCELLES_2019.pdf

125 Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>

126 Ibid

127 Meghan Donevan, 2021, “In This Industry, You’re No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss3/1/>

128 Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>

129 CEASE, 2024, British Public Attitudes towards Pornography: <https://cease.org.uk/british-public-attitudes-towards-pornography/>

130 Meghan Donevan, 2021, “In This Industry, You’re No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss3/1/>

131 Ibid

132 Ibid

133 Ibid and Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein and Nacima B. Jerari, 2023, Pornography Production in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is inseparable from non-filmed prostitution: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PornographyProduction-Harm-Cover-merged.pdf>

The owners of the sites also avoid contracts or find ways to make them non-binding. They may refuse to disclose certain information, and many have requirements that are only made known to the women once they have already begun uploading and selling pornographic content.¹³⁴ Once the content is online, it is next to impossible to have it taken down, not only because it is uploaded to multiple sites, then downloaded and uploaded elsewhere, but because the owners of pornography sites refuse to remove the content. Or in the case of Aylo and XVideos, they ignore takedown requests, while also making it an extremely difficult process to undertake.¹³⁵

The most well-known camming site is OnlyFans, which is a UK-based online streaming platform and app created in 2016 where users can pay for private content (photos, videos, and live streams) with a monthly subscription. While OnlyFans purports to be a safe platform for uploading pornographic content, it has continued to face scrutiny from both anti-human trafficking agencies, agencies concerned with child sexual exploitation and abuse, and the media.

A report from the US based, Anti-Human Trafficking Intelligence Initiative (2022) found multiple examples of various OnlyFans accounts which likely indicate the individual is being trafficked. This was evaluated through a variety of mechanisms including language used on the account, quality of videos, availability of the woman, and other means. It also found that as the content is behind a paywall on OnlyFans it is easier for traffickers to hide while making it harder for law enforcement to track any potential trafficking on the site.¹³⁶ As Joseph Scaramucci, a Texas deputy sheriff who previously worked on a US Department of Homeland Security anti-human trafficking task force explains, the paywall “absolutely, unequivocally adds a barrier.” A barrier that does not exist on other sites or social media.

While OnlyFans insist that they report any content they have concerns about to law enforcement, we only have their word for it that they are using effective tracking tools.

This report also tracked multiple links between OnlyFans and frequently used dark-web escort sites and sites encouraging CSAM (child sexual abuse material) and child sexual abuse.¹³⁷ In 2022, OnlyFans made only 310 reports of possible CSAM on its site to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children’s (NCMEC) CyberTipline which is the US’ centralised reporting system for the online exploitation of children, including child sexual abuse material, child sex trafficking and online enticement.¹³⁸ With 3.1 million ‘content creators’ and 238.8 million ‘fans’,¹³⁹ this seems to be a very low number of potential cases of CSAM.

Furthermore, there have been numerous cases of sexual assaults being filmed and uploaded to OnlyFans as well as several arrests made in relation to human trafficking on the site.¹⁴⁰ An investigation by the Social Research Lab at the University of Northern Colorado found that OnlyFans provides new avenues for sex trafficking to occur – in their analysis, researchers Lundstrom and Henderson found that one trafficker generated over \$270,000 in the US alone over 30 months.¹⁴¹ An investigation by Reuters, published in March 2024 identified “128 cases in which women and men complained to U.S. law enforcement agencies that sexual content featuring them ended up on OnlyFans without their permission – and was often sold for

134 Meghan Donevan, 2021, “In This Industry, You’re No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss3/1/>

135 Fight the New Drug, xHamster Reportedly Uses an Unpaid, Untrained, Volunteer Team to Moderate Content: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/major-porn-site-unpaid-volunteer-moderation-team/>

136 Anti-Human Trafficking Intelligence Initiative in Consultation with Veteran Law Enforcement Officials, 2022, Expert Analysis of Open-Source Material relating to Child Sexual Abuse Material and Sex Trafficking occurring on OnlyFans.com: <https://followmoneyfightslavery.org/expert-analysis-ofopen-source-material-relating-to-child-sexual-abuse-material-and-sex-trafficking-occurring-on-onlyfans-com/>

137 Ibid

138 2022 CyberTipline Reports by Electronic Service Providers (ESP): <https://www.missingkids.org/content/dam/missingkids/pdfs/2022-reports-by-esp.pdf>

139 Financial Times, 2024, Keily Blair, OnlyFans: ‘We are an incredible UK tech success story’: <https://www.ft.com/content/500b97c8-b88b-4da4-a1b9-0d3db01aeed7>

140 NBC, 2022, Miami-Dade Man Accused of Sexually Assaulting Teen, Posting Footage to OnlyFans: <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/miami-dade-man-accused-of-sexually-assaulting-teen-posting-footage-to-onlyfans/2821517/>; Local10.com, 2023, Broward OnlyFans creator used site to get child sexual abuse material, deputies say: <https://www.local10.com/news/local/2023/03/30/broward-onlyfans-creator-used-site-to-get-child-sexual-abuse-material-deputies-say/> and Reuters, 2023, Insight: Sex, lies and video cams: Andrew Tate turned women into slaves, prosecutors say: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sex-lies-video-cams-andrew-tate-turned-women-into-slaves-prosecutors-say-2023-02-02/>

141 Megan Lundstrom and Dr. Angie Henderson, 2024, An In-Depth Financial Analysis of Sex Trafficking on OnlyFans: https://www.unco.edu/social-research-lab/pdf/of_report_1_19_24_final.pdf

profit – between January 2019 and November 2023.”¹⁴² Reuters identified another 17 cases in the UK. Most of these complaints were made by women whose former sex partners had shared consensually made content but who had not given permission for it to be shared. Sharing consensually or non-consensually created explicit material without permission is a form of image-based sexual abuse.

Some of the women who were affected by this form of IBSA on OnlyFans spoke to Reuters about how this has affected them. One woman has subsequently been stalked by people who saw her on OnlyFans. Another whose boyfriend was selling explicit content of her for \$15 on OnlyFans is afraid to leave her home. Yet another explained how her teenage daughter had to tell her that naked photos of her were on OnlyFans, uploaded by an ex-boyfriend.

In a devastating but unfortunately not an isolated incident in the pornography industry, content was also shared on OnlyFans of a young woman, Sammy, allegedly being raped by two men. The content, according to Reuters was then posted on OnlyFans as ‘train sex’ (multiple men having sex with one woman). The woman is now suing both men and OnlyFans, which as Reuters explains is the first case in the US taken against OnlyFans under “a federal sex trafficking law that prohibits companies from financially benefiting from commercial sex abuses.” Sammy, now 21, told Reuters that, “a whole company has made money off my biggest trauma.”¹⁴³

OnlyFans, who claims that 100% of the content on their site is moderated, declined to specifically comment to Reuters on how explicit content of non-consenting adults could have ended up on the site when OnlyFans says it moderates everything.

Since the publication of the Reuters article, OnlyFans has provided evidence to the UK government’s Women’s and Equality Committee in relation to the nonconsensual sharing of explicit content online, and affirming the need to tackle this online abuse.¹⁴⁴ Whether this is reality or rhetoric remains to be seen.

6.6 OnlyFans facilitates prostitution and trafficking

The harms of OnlyFans do not stop with the non-consensual sharing of explicit imagery and videos. As with other camming sites, OnlyFans ‘creators’ face harassment, stalking, nonconsensual distribution of their images and videos on other platforms, ongoing abuse from individuals who access their profiles, and pressure to meet ‘fans’ in real life.¹⁴⁵

As in other parts of the pornography industry, they are also constantly pressured to create more extreme content. One OnlyFans creator explains that since the rise in OnlyFans’ popularity, “creators are beginning to get manipulated by the customers because the customers can just move on to another girl. New girls are undercharging and doing more explicit content, more quickly for less money.” Another ex-‘creator’ explains, “I felt like I had to keep getting more extreme. I told myself that I was empowered and wanted to pretend that I was, but I felt horrible. I was smiling in those pictures, but I wasn’t there. I was doing things like a robot.”¹⁴⁶

Despite this, OnlyFans argues that it does not host ‘pornography’ as it is commonly understood, and actively avoids using what it calls the ‘p’ word.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Reuters, 2024, OnlyFans Exposed: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/onlyfans-sex-legal-cases/>

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Women and Equalities Committee, May 2024, Non-consensual intimate image abuse - Oral evidence: <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/20790/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>

¹⁴⁵ Meghan Donevan, 2021, “In This Industry, You’re No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol6/iss3/1/>

¹⁴⁶ The Times, 2020, How influencers are being talked into porn on OnlyFans: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/onlyfans-influencers-online-sex-workers-porn-sr55qhx9h>

¹⁴⁷ Financial Times, 2024, Keily Blair, OnlyFans: ‘We are an incredible UK tech success story’: <https://www.ft.com/content/500b97c8-b88b-4da4-a1b9-0d3db01aeeed7>

However, a quick search on OnlyFans brings up an endless supply of accounts offering hardcore pornographic content.

While OnlyFans may argue that they provide a safe platform for the sharing of pornographic images and videos, in reality, OnlyFans is no different to any other pornography site. In fact, by providing direct access to the young women who provide explicit content, OnlyFans is actively putting the physical and mental health of its 'creators' in jeopardy, while taking a 20% cut of the money made on the platform, including money made by the non-consensual sharing of images and videos.¹⁴⁸

Their corporate identity, marketing and limited engagement with government and child protection agencies may conceal it, but OnlyFans plays the role of the pimp in a commercial sexual exchange, while driving the creation of more 'middle men' and 'e-pimps' in the supply chain.¹⁴⁹

The prerequisites for creating an OnlyFans account and selling explicit content online is no different than entering any aspect of the commercial sex industry – it is a means to make money. This was never more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic when the number of people creating accounts on OnlyFans skyrocketed due to enforced lockdowns, work furloughs and a massive increase in unemployment.

However, research found that: “The top 1% of accounts make 33% of all the money. The top 10% of accounts make 73% of all the money” and “most accounts take home less than \$145 per month (after commission). The modal monthly revenue is \$0.00, and the next most common is \$4.99.”¹⁵⁰ As one creator explains, she will only breach her own boundaries for a substantial amount of money. When asked what that amount would be she said, “I’d probably start at about £50.”¹⁵¹

In 2022, OnlyFans pre-tax profit reached \$525 million, and its revenue reached more than \$1 billion.¹⁵²

148 The Times, 2020, How influencers are being talked into porn on OnlyFans: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/onlyfans-influencers-online-sex-workers-porn-sr55qhx9h>

149 The New York Times Magazine, 2023, The 'E-Pimps' of OnlyFans: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/magazine/e-pimps-onlyfans.html>

150 NCOSE, OnlyFans, A mainstream contributor to sexual exploitation: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/onlyfans/>

151 The Times, 2020, How influencers are being talked into porn on OnlyFans: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/onlyfans-influencers-online-sex-workers-porn-sr55qhx9h>

152 Medium, 2023, OnlyFans Owner made \$1M everyday last year: <https://medium.com/coinmonks/onlyfans-owner-made-1m-everyday-last-year-78faecd5f210>

PART 7

**THE PORNOGRAPHY
INDUSTRY HAS
ADMITTED CRIMINAL
BEHAVIOUR.
BUT NOTHING
HAS CHANGED**



7. The pornography industry has admitted criminal behaviour. But nothing has changed

The harms of the pornography industry are not only limited to the people involved in the industry itself. Its devastating and far-reaching harms include: the proliferation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM); illegal recordings of sexual assault and rape; and image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), including deepfake pornography and virtual reality pornography.

7.1 Children of Pornhub

The 2020 New York Times exposé, ‘The Children of Pornhub’, brought into sharp relief the amount and level of illegal material on Pornhub. The article highlighted shocking stories of abuse, including that of a 15 year old girl who went missing in Florida and was only found because 58 videos of her being sexually abused were uploaded onto Pornhub.¹⁵³

Other examples include videos of Rose Kalembo who was just 14 years of age when she was brutally raped at knifepoint by two men. Rose discovered a few months after the attack that a video of her assault had been shared on Pornhub and viewed hundreds of thousands of times. The titles of the videos were ‘teen crying and getting slapped around’, ‘teen getting destroyed’, and ‘passed out teen’. One had over 400,000 views.¹⁵⁴

While writing about this horrific assault for the BBC in 2020 Rose stated, “The worst videos were the ones where I was passed out. Seeing myself being attacked where I wasn’t even conscious was the worst.”¹⁵⁵ Rose sent take down requests to Pornhub explaining that she was a minor and she had been assaulted. These requests were ignored.¹⁵⁶

7.2 Pornography sites only act when threatened with legal action

These are not isolated incidents. As Nicolas Kristoff pointed out in 2020, Pornhub is “infested with rape videos. It monetizes child rapes, revenge pornography, spy cam videos of women showering, racist and misogynist content, and footage of women being asphyxiated in plastic bags. A search for “girls under18” (no space) or “14yo” leads in each case to more than 100,000 videos.”¹⁵⁷

In 2020, Pornhub did remove its infamous download button, deleted more than 10 million of its videos, and stopped allowing uploads from unverified users. However, it took this action only because it was backed into a corner by financial and corporate pressure from Visa and Mastercard who threatened to cut ties with Pornhub on the back of the public outcry following the “Children of Pornhub” article.¹⁵⁸

It was not for any ethical reason or concern for women’s or children’s welfare.

153 New York Times, 2020, The Children of Pornhub: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/sunday/pornhub-rape-trafficking.html?searchResultPosition=1>

154 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

155 BBC, 2020, ‘I was raped at 14, and the video ended up on a porn site’: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-51391981>

156 Ibid

157 New York Times, 2020, The Children of Pornhub: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/sunday/pornhub-rape-trafficking.html?searchResultPosition=1>

158 Forbes, 2020, Pornhub Takes Down All Content Uploaded By Unverified Users: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/siladityaray/2020/12/14/pornhub-takes-down-all-content-uploaded-by-unverified-uploaders/?sh=25b3ffe765ed>

Notably, the then-owners, MindGeek (now Aylo) did not make the same changes to its other pornography sites.¹⁵⁹ Nor did stopping uploads from unverified users make any real difference. Verification processes remained weak, as only the uploader needed to be verified. The people in the videos did not, leaving open a massive loophole to allow CSAM and other illegal material to be uploaded.

It is therefore not surprising that a research report from Finland released in 2024, exploring incidences of CSAM on the open web, found that “32% of respondents report that they have encountered CSAM on a pornography website. When asked on which platform they have encountered CSAM, Pornhub was the most cited platform.”¹⁶⁰ A separate study from the US found that almost a third of online adult content consumers have unintentionally come across CSAM.¹⁶¹

Another exposé in the form of undercover videos released at the end of 2023, revealed that adverts with ‘barely legal’ material that sexualises children are also allowed on Pornhub and other Aylo owned sites. Aylo employees admit that allowing this type of material makes huge amounts of money for them and thus is not removed.¹⁶² The same investigation revealed that advertisers who uploaded actual child sexual abuse material would not get their account suspended and would not be reported to the authorities.

In December 2023, after a federal investigation in the US, Aylo publicly admitted it had profited from sex trafficking, agreeing to pay a fine of \$1.8 million in order to avoid criminal prosecution for profiting from sex trafficking videos on its site.¹⁶³ The videos in question were from the pornography site GirlsDoPorn, the founder of which was on the FBI’s top ten most wanted list for allegedly committing a litany of federal crimes including sex trafficking, production of child sexual abuse images, sex trafficking of a minor, and conspiracy to launder monetary instruments.¹⁶⁴

Up to the printing of this report, the total number of lawsuits brought against Aylo is 25,¹⁶⁵ including numerous class action lawsuits on behalf of children. One of the class action lawsuits contain allegations of Aylo (Pornhub), “systematically participat[ing] in sex-trafficking ventures involving tens of thousands of children by receiving, distributing, and profiting from droves of child sexual abuse material (“CSAM”).”¹⁶⁶ The other lawsuits include allegations of profiting from sex trafficking, image-based sexual abuse, and uploaded videos of sexual assault.

These revelations, along with revelations of other nefarious acts, led to 26 US State Attorney Generals issuing a letter to Aylo demanding they implement monitoring processes as a matter of urgency.¹⁶⁷

7.3 The pornography industry profits from filmed crimes

It is important to note that while Aylo comes under the most public scrutiny, the wilful proliferation of illegal content and child sexual abuse material is endemic across most pornography sites.

159 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

160 Protect Children, 2024, Tech Platforms Used by Online Child Sexual Abuse Offenders: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/tech-platforms-child-sexual-abuse>

161 Ibid

162 Sound Investigations, 2023, MindGeek Porn Writer: Ads with “Guys That Look Like 15” Do Best, “Make a Lot of Money”: <https://soundinvestigations.com/successful-ads/>

163 The Independent, 2023, Pornhub parent company admits it made money off sex trafficking: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/crime/pornhub-sex-trafficking-girlsdo-porn-b2469901.html>

164 NBC, 2022, GirlsDoPorn Founder on FBI Most Wanted List Caught in Spain: San Diego FBI: <https://www.nbcсандiego.com/news/local/fbi-most-wanted-listee-girlsdoporn-founder-caught-in-spain-after-years-on-the-run/3128334/>

165 Newsweek, 2024, Pornhub Is Still a Crime Scene, Even After Its Rebrand: <https://www.newsweek.com/pornhub-still-crime-scene-even-after-its-rebrand-opinion-1927282>

166 NCOSE, 2023, The Latest on Pornhub: Class Action Lawsuit + Undercover Investigations: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/the-latest-on-pornhub-class-action-lawsuit-undercover-investigations/>

167 South Carolina Attorney General, 2023, Attorney General Alan Wilson leads 26 states in asking Pornhub to explain loophole that jeopardizes children: <https://www.scag.gov/about-the-office/news/attorney-general-alan-wilson-leads-26-states-in-asking-pornhub-to-explain-loophole-that-jeopardizes-children/>

One pornographer noted in the wake of Nicolas Kristoff's New York Times article, that Kristoff was like Santa Claus because his exposé of Pornhub, which led to the site's reforms, was a gift to Pornhub's competitors.¹⁶⁸ One such competitor is XVideos.

XVideos, owned by WebGroup Czech Republic, previously WGCZ Holdings, has potentially even fewer moderation and verification systems in place than Pornhub. It was reported in 2020 that Czech police were looking into the proliferation of child sexual abuse material and other illegal content, like that found on Pornhub in 2020.¹⁶⁹ In yet another New York Times exposé, Kristoff explains that "Under pressure, XVideos has removed some paedophile search terms in the last few months, but the cleanup doesn't go very far. A search for "twelve" on XVideos suggested "related searches" of "training bra," "7th grader" and "elementary." With video titles such as "This is not right, Daddy, stop, please."¹⁷⁰

XVideos was also one of the sites in the investigation of videos advertised to first time users, undertaken by Dr Vera-Gray et al. (2021). Some of the keywords that the academics searched for on XVideos, Pornhub and XHamster were 'torture', 'assault', 'punch', 'molest' and 'kidnap'.¹⁷¹ Far from removing content that suggests and potentially contains illegal activity, including CSAM, these sites promote it to their users. XVideos has also been accused of refusing to remove videos of sexual assault, rape and trafficking. In 2023, a class action lawsuit was filed against XVideos alleging that XVideos (and its parent company) distributed sexual content that featured a minor and made no attempts to verify identity or age.¹⁷²

168 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

169 Prague Morning, 2024, Xvideos, Pornhub's Largest Rival, Is Under Investigation in the Czech Republic: <https://pragemorning.cz/xvideos-investigation-czech/>

170 The New York Times, 2021, With help from Google, XVideos lets people leer at the worst moment in a child's life: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/opinion/sunday/companies-on-line-rape-videos.html>

171 Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 2021, Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azab035>

172 NCOSE, 2023, XVideos.com Parent Company Sued for Hosting Child Sexual Abuse, Sex Trafficking Videos in Class Action Lawsuit: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/statement-xvi-eos-com-parent-company-sued-for-hosting-child-sexual-abuse-sex-trafficking-videos-in-class-action-lawsuit/>

PART 8

**IMAGE-BASED
SEXUAL ABUSE: NEW
TECHNOLOGIES,
SAME EXPLOITATION**



8. Image-based sexual abuse: new technologies, same exploitation

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) or ‘revenge porn’ as it is colloquially referred to, is prolific on pornography sites and social media platforms. As explained by Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley (2016), IBSA is the:

“ non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private, sexual images – includes typical revenge porn, as well as consensually taken images that have been hacked or stolen and then shared. But it goes beyond distribution and also covers the non-consensual creation of sexual imagery: for example photos and videos created by means of upskirting, forms of voyeurism and sextortion, or recordings of sexual assaults.

It also covers perpetrators threatening to share images, commonly part of a pattern of coercive behaviour in abusive relationships. It can also include upskirting, downblousing, collector culture, non-consensual ‘deep fake pornography’ and many more forms of abuse.”¹⁷³

Often the sharing, or threat of sharing, these sexually explicit images is used to exploit victims in a process known as ‘sextortion’.¹⁷⁴ An overwhelming majority of victims of IBSA are women, with members of the LGBTQ+ community also disproportionately affected.¹⁷⁵ Boys and men are disproportionately targeted by ‘sextortion’.¹⁷⁶ The overwhelming majority of perpetrators are men.¹⁷⁷

Mainstream pornography sites are often where this egregious content is uploaded. The Revenge Porn Helpline, a UK service supporting adults aged 18+ who are experiencing image-based sexual abuse, has found that approximately 29% of reported IBSA content was found on general pornographic websites, including mainstream platforms.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley, 2016, Image-based Sexual Abuse: More than just ‘revenge porn’: https://www.claremcglynn.com/_files/ugd/e87dab_b46ef734678840eeab67949600d95afe.pdf

¹⁷⁴ Internet Watch Foundation: <https://www.iwf.org.uk/resources/sextortion/>

¹⁷⁵ NCOSE: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/issues/image-based-sexual-abuse/>

¹⁷⁶ Internet Watch Foundation, 2023, Hotline reports ‘shocking’ rise in the sextortion of boys <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/hotline-reports-shocking-rise-in-the-sextortion-of-boys/>

¹⁷⁷ NCOSE: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/issues/image-based-sexual-abuse/>

¹⁷⁸ Revenge Porn Helpline, 2023 Report: https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/assets/documents/revange-porn-helpline-report-2023.pdf?_=1714738699

This is hardly surprising given the lax controls and processes on most pornography sites, allowing users to upload IBSA in a virtually frictionless process. This, Clare McGlynn and Professor Lorna Woods (2022) argue, has added to the normalisation of image-based sexual abuse.¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, other research suggests that pornography consumers are more likely to share intimate images without consent.¹⁸⁰

During the COVID-19 pandemic, between 2019 and 2021, there was a doubling of victims of IBSA in the UK.¹⁸¹ In 2023, according to the Revenge Porn Helpline, there was a 106% increase in reports of image-based sexual abuse, compared to 2022 data. Sextortion cases increased by 54% and 93% were reported by men.¹⁸² The latter is consistent with overall reports of sextortion, and there have been many tragic cases of boys and men dying by suicide as a result.¹⁸³

In relation to intimate images shared without consent, which is a form of IBSA, 71% of reports to the Revenge Porn Helpline were made by women. In cases where the perpetrator was known, 81% were male, with 67% of the offenders being a current or former partner.¹⁸⁴ According to the Revenge Porn Helpline, women have approximately 28 times more images shared than men, and in 95% of cases of intimate image abuse that require content to be reported, the people reporting are female.¹⁸⁵

IBSA is a growing global problem. A review of published research undertaken by Clare McGlynn and Professor Lorna Woods (2022) found that:¹⁸⁶

- In Ireland, in 2020, over 100,000 sexual images of Irish women and girls were leaked online.
- Similar websites were uncovered in Italy with thousands of users sharing sexual images without consent.
- A survey by HateAid found that 30% of women across the EU fear that fake intimate images of them may be shared without their consent.
- In the US one in 12 (8%) adults reported having been victims of non-consensual pornography at some point in their lives.
- In Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, one in three survey participants had experienced at least one form of image-based sexual abuse and one in five (19%) experienced threats to share.
- Victimization rates are higher among younger people (aged 18-25), sexual minorities, disabled people and black and minority ethnic individuals.

A deeply concerning trend is the victimisation of children and young people, both by adults and other young people, the latter often known to the victim. In February 2024 in Australia, “more than 100 explicit private videos and photos of underage school students were found published on social media.

179 Image-Based Sexual Abuse, Pornography Platforms and the Digital Services Act Expert Opinion by Professor Clare McGlynn, Durham Law School, Durham University, UK and Professor Lorna Woods, School of Law, University of Essex, UK 2022: <https://hateaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ImageBasedAbuse-and-DSA-Expert-Opinion-McGlynn-and-Woods-17-Jan-2022.pdf>

180 Johanna M. F. van Oosten and Laura Vandenbosch, 2018, Predicting the Willingness to Engage in Non-Consensual Forwarding of Sexes: The Role of Pornography and Instrumental Notions of Sex: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-019-01580-2#citeas>

181 Sky News, 2021, Revenge porn victims have doubled in last two years, figures suggest: <https://news.sky.com/story/revenge-porn-victims-have-doubled-in-last-two-years-figures-suggest-12255933>

182 Revenge Porn Helpline, 2023 Report: https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/assets/documents/revenge-porn-helpline-report-2023.pdf?_=1714738699

183 BBC, 2024, Sextortion case: Two arrested in Nigeria after Australian boy's suicide: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-68720247>; The Guardian, 2024, 'It can happen to any child': parents of sextortion victim send out warning: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/29/it-can-happen-to-any-child-parents-of-sex-tortion-victim-fight-for-justice>; ABCNews, 2023, Parents of teenager who died by suicide after sextortion scam urge 'tough' conversations with children: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/parents-teenager-died-by-suicide-after-sex-tortion-scam-urge/story?id=99047305>; The Indian Express, 2024, After 'sex-tortion' calls demanding Rs 51 lakh, man commits suicide; probe on: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/after-sex-tortion-calls-demanding-rs-51-lakh-man-commits-suicide-9370168/>

184 Revenge Porn Helpline, 2023 Report: https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/assets/documents/revenge-porn-helpline-report-2023.pdf?_=1714738699

185 Ibid

186 Image-Based Sexual Abuse, Pornography Platforms and the Digital Services Act Expert Opinion by Professor Clare McGlynn, Durham Law School, Durham University, UK and Professor Lorna Woods, School of Law, University of Essex, UK 2022: <https://hateaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ImageBasedAbuse-and-DSA-Expert-Opinion-McGlynn-and-Woods-17-Jan-2022.pdf>

The footage and images were from both public and private schools and had been shared on several Instagram accounts without students' permission."¹⁸⁷ In the UK, in the four years between 2018 and 2021, nearly 2,000 victims who reported IBSA to the police were under the age of 18 at the time the reported incident occurred, and 19 were 10 years old or younger.¹⁸⁸

A 2023 survey by Internet Matters found that while the number of young people disclosing experiences of IBSA was low, "almost half (49%) of teenagers aged 13-16 are aware of a form of image-based sexual harassment or abuse being perpetrated against someone known to them."¹⁸⁹ Of those that did disclose experience of IBSA, in 55% of the cases, the perpetrator was another young person the victim knew and in 29% of cases the perpetrator was an unknown adult. Internet Matters also found that children and young people who experience vulnerability offline are at a higher risk of experiencing IBSA. These vulnerabilities include mental and physical health conditions as well as special educational needs and disabilities. Internet Matters conclude that "vulnerable children are significantly more likely to have experienced every form of image based abuse than non-vulnerable peers."¹⁹⁰

8.1 Content is never really removed

Content is often shared on one site (a pornography site, social media site or via a messaging app) and then reshared across multiple platforms, and often repeatedly. The sheer scale of the online world and the seemingly endless opportunities for resharing adds to the devastating impact of this abuse. For many survivors it can feel like a 'whack-a-mole' experience whereby they may be successful in having their non-consensually shared content removed from one site, only for it to be uploaded to another site.

In the Reuters investigation into the non-consensual sharing of explicit content on OnlyFans, in almost 40% of the police complaints, "the videos also appeared on other popular social media sites, usually as snippets to promote lengthier and more explicit material for sale on OnlyFans."¹⁹¹

8.2 Same sexual abuse, different search terms

Mainstream pornography sites, as well as sites dedicated to producing and sharing IBSA are often where non-consensually shared materials are uploaded. In the research undertaken by Dr Vera-Gray et al. (2021) on titles of videos promoted to first time users on three pornography sites, "titles identifying material as constituting image-based sexual abuse were [also] evident." These titles focused largely on videos created without consent, particularly voyeurism videos using hidden or 'spy' cameras and upskirting. Such as: 'Beach Spy Changing Room Two Girls'; 'Pharmacy Store Bathroom Hidden cam'; 'Upskirted in the train.'¹⁹²

Similarly, under permitted search terms on Pornhub, such as 'real hidden camera', 'spy', 'voyeur changing room', 'hiding', CEASE found titles such as: 'Freaky ob-gyn doctor records his mature female patient on hidden camera'; 'HIDDEN CAMERA IN THE WOMEN'S FITTING ROOM'; 'College freshman fucked from behind Onlyfans leak'; 'FCK News- Leaked Footage Of Doctor Fucking His Blonde Patient'.¹⁹³

187 Mail Online, 2024, Salesian College scandal: Melbourne student expelled after making explicit AI images of female teacher: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13517425/Salesian-College-scandal-Melbourne-student-expelled-making-explicit-AI-images-female-teacher.html>

188 Channel 4, 2022, Nearly 19,000 victims of so-called revenge porn in four years, investigation finds: <https://www.channel4.com/news/nearly-19000-victims-of-so-called-revenge-porn-in-four-years-investigation-finds-2#>

189 Internet Matters, 2023, "It's really easy to go down that path": Young people's experiences of online misogyny and image-based abuse: <https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Internet-Matters-Online-misogyny-and-image-based-abuse-report-Sep-2023-2.pdf>

190 Ibid

191 Reuters, 2024, OnlyFans Exposed: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/onlyfans-sex-legal-cases/>

192 Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 2021, Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azabo35>

193 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

As with other search terms that may be deemed socially unacceptable, Pornhub and others have simply barred words related to IBSA that could trigger investigation such as ‘revenge porn’ and have instead used and allowed terms that are slightly, though not wholly less obvious.

8.3 The terms and conditions of pornography sites are meaningless

In the UK, sharing intimate or explicit images of someone without their consent is illegal. While much more needs to be done to legislate for and protect women and children from image-based sexual abuse,¹⁹⁴ the Online Safety Act 2023¹⁹⁵ strengthened the law on IBSA by making the of sharing intimate images without consent a sexual offence, thus guaranteeing automatic anonymity for victims. It also removes the need to prove intent to cause distress, which was a legal barrier that victims continually faced when seeking justice for this crime. Further it criminalises the sharing of deepfake pornography.¹⁹⁶ Many pornography sites themselves also prohibit the non-consensual sharing of explicit content in their own terms and conditions, yet these images and videos are endemic on pornography sites and requests by victims to have them removed go largely ignored.¹⁹⁷ Pornography sites are still profiting from the trauma experienced by women and girls who have been subjected to IBSA.

“ Pornhub were very reluctant to assist with the police investigation. The officer received one very vague reply when he asked for the details of the account and the videos that had been uploaded. All other correspondence was ignored, although Pornhub dispute having received these emails as they were sent to ‘an old email address’ despite the fact that they had responded on that email address to the first contact.”

- Ellesha, survivor of Image-Based Sexual Abuse.¹⁹⁸

194 Clare McGlynn, 2024, Creating Sexually Explicit Deepfakes Without Consent: Options for Law Reform: https://e87dab74-be98-4bb1-83c5-05251d2bc6f4.usrfiles.com/ugd/e87dab_1676da13ec64bd08c34f9f7fb6845.pdf

195 Online Safety Act, 2023: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/enacted>

196 UK Safer Internet Centre, 2024, New intimate image abuse laws announced: <https://saferinternet.org.uk/blog/new-intimate-image-abuse-laws-announced>

197 The Guardian, 2020, Pornhub should forget the coronavirus and focus on its own pandemic: revenge porn: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/14/pornhub-forget-coronavirus-focus-on-pandemic-revenge-porn>

198 #NotYourPorn, Chayn, Dr Fiona Vera Gray, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), Faith & VAWG Coalition, Glitch, Imkaan, Professor Clare McGlynn, Rape Crisis England & Wales, Refuge, Welsh Women’s Aid, Women & Girls Network (WGN), Women’s Aid Federation England, 2021, VAWG Principles for the Online Safety Bill: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Online-Safety-Bill-Full-Brief-final.pdf>

In February 2024, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada released results of its investigation of a young woman's case of image-based sexual abuse on Pornhub.¹⁹⁹

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner found that:

“Having investigated the matter, we found that MindGeek [Aylo] had a legal obligation to obtain the complainant's consent and had failed to do so. We found that MindGeek's consent model, which relies on the uploader to attest that they have obtained consent from each individual whose highly sensitive personal information is depicted in uploaded content, does not constitute reasonable efforts to ensure that meaningful consent has been obtained from those individuals. We further found that changes to MindGeek's practices in 2020, and since, have not remedied this contravention.... MindGeek [Aylo] did not accept responsibility and take the necessary corrective measures to redress the significant privacy harms that we uncovered in our investigation, and has yet to offer any commitments in response to our recommendations.”²⁰⁰

Undercover videos released at the end of 2023 revealed that amongst other erroneous activities, Aylo know that illegal videos of image-based sexual abuse are ubiquitous on Pornhub. These revelations also include how pleas from women to have non-consensual videos and images of them taken down are wilfully ignored. It was also revealed that advertisers who upload pornographic content to Pornhub would not be asked if they had obtained consent of the individuals in pornographic videos.²⁰¹

In these undercover videos, Aylo employees admitted that allowing users and advertisers to upload content where it is not clear if there is consent, or if the person is even over 18, is highly profitable thus the incentive is to allow as many uploads as possible.²⁰² This is consistent with previous evidence from ex-moderators who have spoken out about the pressure they are under to pass as much content as possible and only remove it if it is 100% illegal.²⁰³

8.4 Image-based sexual abuse ruins lives

IBSA has detrimental long-term effects on victims' physical and emotional safety. Victims of IBSA experience high levels of anxiety, PTSD, depression, feelings of shame and humiliation, as well as loss of trust and sexual agency.²⁰⁴

199 Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2024, Investigation into Aylo (formerly MindGeek)'s Compliance with PIPEDA: <https://www.priv.gc.ca/en/opc-actions-and-decisions/investigations/investigations-into-businesses/2024/pipeda-2024-001/>

200 Ibid

201 Ibid

202 Sound Investigations, 2023, Pornhub Ad Network Engineer: “Revenge Porn: They Didn't Give a F**k”: <https://soundinvestigations.com/trafficjunky-reporting/>

203 Ibid

204 Samantha Bates, 2017, Revenge Porn and Mental Health: A Qualitative Analysis of the Mental Health Effects of Revenge Porn on Female Survivors: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085116654565>; Antoinette Huber, 2023, ‘A shadow of me old self’: The impact of image-based sexual abuse in a digital society: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/02697580211063659>; A. Murça, O. Cunha, and T.C. Almeida, 2023, Prevalence and Impact of Revenge Pornography on a Sample of Portuguese Women: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12119-023-10100-3>; C. McGlynn, K. Johnson, E. Rackley, N. Henry, N. Gavey, A. Flynn, and A. Powell, 2021, ‘It's Torture for the Soul’: The Harms of Image-Based Sexual Abuse: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0964663920947791>

The risk of suicide is also a very real issue for victims and there are many tragic incidences of young people dying by suicide as a result of this type of online abuse.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, victims of IBSA often also face ‘doxxing’, whereby their personal information is shared alongside their non-consensually shared images, such as their full name, home address, email and social media information.²⁰⁶ This further puts both their physical and psychological safety at risk, as they face harassment both online and offline.²⁰⁷ The constant sharing and resharing of their sexually explicit materials on various sites and platforms can be extremely traumatising for victims.

In their report, *Shattering Lives and Myths*,²⁰⁸ Clare McGlynn and colleagues detail the truly horrific scale of the impact that this abuse has on victims:

“ It’s a type of rape, it’s just the digital version.”

- *Deborah, survivor of image-based sexual abuse.*

“ It’s an abuse of me and my body. It feels like it’s sexual abuse.”

- *Lucy, survivor of image-based sexual abuse.*

In written evidence to a UK Government Committee, another survivor said:

“ Going through all of this has had a profound impact on my life. I will never have the ability to trust people in the same way and will always second guess their intentions towards me. My self-confidence is at an all-time low and although I have put a brave face on throughout this, it has had a detrimental effect on my mental health.”

- *Ellesha, survivor of image-based sexual abuse.*²⁰⁹

205 Taylor Linkous, 2014, It’s Time for Revenge Porn to Get a Taste of Its Own Medicine: An Argument for the Federal Criminalization of Revenge Porn: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=jolt>; The Image-Based Sexual Abuse Initiative, 2023, I DIDN’T CONSENT: A Global Landscape Report on Image-Based Sexual Abuse: <https://www.panoramaglobal.org/publications/image-based-abuse-initiative-landscape-report-2023>

206 Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2013, Revenge Porn Statistics: <https://www.cybercivilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RPStatistics.pdf>

207 Taylor Linkous, 2014, It’s Time for Revenge Porn to Get a Taste of Its Own Medicine: An Argument for the Federal Criminalization of Revenge Porn: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=jolt>

208 Clare McGlynn, Erika Rackley, Kelly Johnson, Nicola Henry, Asher Flynn, Anastasia Powell, Nicola Gavey, Dr Adrian J Scott, 2019, *Shattering Lives and Myths: A Report on Image-Based Sexual Abuse*: https://www.claremcglynn.com/_files/ugd/e87dab_c6100ce67079407394d4bb610e6bb937f.pdf

209 #NotYourPorn, Chayn, Dr Fiona Vera Gray, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), Faith & VAWG Coalition, Glitch, Imkaan, Professor Clare McGlynn, Rape Crisis England & Wales, Refuge, Welsh Women’s Aid, Women & Girls Network (WGN), Women’s Aid Federation England, 2021, VAWG Principles for the Online Safety Bill: <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Online-Safety-Bill-Full-Brief-final.pdf>

In a quote provided to the CEASE-hosted website Expose the Harm,²¹⁰ an adult victim of IBSA said:

“I am a victim of nonconsensual pornography. I now have PTSD and depression. I was suicidal. It ruined my life. Pornhub is the cause of my ongoing exploitation and will not remove the content. Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Facebook and all of the other platforms have also played a role in my exploitation and refuse to remove the naked images, fake profiles, etc. associated with my abuse and bullying by my abuser and other predators.”

8.5 Age and consent reforms remain inadequate

In response to the above, Aylo announced in January 2024, that it will require proof of consent from all individuals featured in videos.²¹¹ The responsibility for providing these details will be on the uploader. While a step forward, significant issues remain. This is not being enforced retrospectively, so there are still videos containing illegal content on the site. It is estimated at least 1.8 million unverified videos have been uploaded to Pornhub since 2020 and there is no way of knowing how much of this content is illegal content containing human trafficking, sexual assault and image-based sexual abuse.²¹²

This unverified content will remain on Pornhub unless they take steps to remove it. Swift removal of content is not difficult. In the wake of the New York Times exposé, Pornhub removed 10 million videos overnight that could not be verified. The only reason they will not do the same now is a lack of will.

Pornhub’s new age and consent policy only requires a proof of identity and signed consent form for ‘co-performers’. As admitted by Aylo employees, very often it is impossible to see the faces of people appearing in videos.²¹³ How therefore can Aylo ensure that the person who has given consent is in fact the person appearing in the video and is over 18 years old? As NCOSE points out, without automated tools and rigorous human moderation, these documents will be easily forged by those wishing to upload non-consensual pornography, and in the case of human trafficking and exploitation, content coercively obtained by sex traffickers and abusers.²¹⁴ Further, these types of consent checks are the bare minimum that the pornography industry should be implementing. For more on this, see the recommendations at the end of this report.

8.6 The exponential growth of AI-generated pornography and deepfakes

A further, deeply disturbing trend is the rise of AI-generated pornography, otherwise referred to as deepfake pornography. The Revenge Porn Helpline defines deepfake images as “an image where the face or voice is changed to replace the likeness of one person with another. Deepfake imagery is created using AI technology to import an image of a face, or the sound of a voice, onto someone else’s body, essentially swapping their faces or voices.”²¹⁵ Deepfake pornography therefore is where someone’s likeness is imposed into sexually explicit images using artificial intelligence.²¹⁶

210 Expose the Harm: <https://exposetheharm.com/experiences/>

211 Pornhub, 2024, Co-Performer Verification Updates: <https://www.pornhub.com/blog/co-performer-verification-updates>

212 Laila Mickelwait: <https://twitter.com/LailaMickelwait/status/1751680965875847637>

213 Sound Investigations, 2023, Pornhub Exec: Rapists, Traffickers Using Pornhub “Loophole” to “Make a Lot of Money”: <https://soundinvestigations.com/pornhub-loophole/>

214 NCOSE, 2024, Pornhub Bows to Pressure for Age & Consent Verification ... But Loopholes Abound: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/pornhub-bows-to-pressure-for-age-consent-verification-but-loopholes-abound/>

215 Revenge Porn Helpline, What is a deepfake?: <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/news/what-is-a-deepfake/>

216 Clare McGlynn, 2024, Deepfake porn: why we need to make it a crime to create it, not just share it: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/current/thought-leadership/2024/04/deep-fake-porn-why-we-need-to-make-it-a-crime-to-create-it-not-just-share-it/>

As AI technology has rapidly advanced, AI-generated pornography has become increasingly common online. Alongside this has been the creation of nudifying apps that are designed to undress women using AI. Perhaps unsurprisingly, almost all (99%) of the individuals targeted in deepfake pornography are women.²¹⁷ In fact, some AI software, like DeepNude, can only successfully operate when presented with images of female genitalia.²¹⁸

This generation of AI pornography has become increasingly accessible to the public. Online websites and forum pages offer tutorials on how to craft deepfakes of non-consenting third parties or offer to create deepfake pornography for a nominal fee.²¹⁹ As AI-technology has advanced, it has become increasingly easier to craft realistic pornographic images of non-consenting people with relatively few resources.²²⁰

The vast majority of AI-generated pornography currently circulating online is made using the likeness of non-consenting individuals.²²¹ Given the nature of the internet and the ubiquity of this type of content however, it is difficult to truly know how much deepfake pornography is actually online.

The United States' Department of Homeland Security reported that in 2020, researchers located over 100,000 computer-generated non-consensual pornographic images of women online.²²² In 2023 the total number of deepfake videos found online by online security experts, Home Security Heroes, was 95,820, a 550% increase from their analysis in 2019.²²³

Methodologies vary, but when the same measure is used over time, there is clear evidence of exponential growth. In 2021, researchers Kugler and Pace, reported that online deepfakes have grown exponentially, roughly doubling every six months since 2018.²²⁴

In a March 2024 survey with 2000 British people, ESET, a global leader in cybersecurity, found that one in 10, or 9% of people in the UK, reported either being a victim of deepfake pornography or knowing a victim, or both.²²⁵ As with all types of IBSA, women and young people are particularly worried about becoming a victim of deepfake pornography. The same survey from ESET found that 57% of under-18s and 61% of women are concerned about becoming a victim of deepfake pornography.²²⁶ Given that analysis conducted by Deeptrace (now Sensity), estimated that over 96% of AI-generated pornography online was produced without the consent of the supposed individual featured,²²⁷ this is a very real and legitimate concern.

AI software has also been used to generate child sexual abuse material. The Internet Watch Foundation (2022) reported that over 20,000 AI-generated CSAM images were posted to a dark-net forum in a one-month period, 416 of which were assessed as meeting criminal prohibition standards.²²⁸

With this over-representation of non-consensual AI pornography in mind, there are some performers who have begun intentionally granting their likeness to be used in AI-generated pornography.

217 Home Security Heroes, 2023 State of Deepfakes: Realities, Threats, and Impact: <https://www.homesecurityheroes.com/state-of-deepfakes/#key-findings>

218 Anne Pechenik Gieseke, 2020, "The New Weapon of Choice": Law's Current Inability to Properly Address Deepfake Pornography: <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr/vol73/iss5/4/>

219 Ibid

220 Matt Burgess, 2023, Deepfake Porn is Out of Control: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/deepfake-porn-is-out-of-control>

221 Tom Simonite, 2019, Most Deepfakes are Porn, and They're Multiplying Fast: <https://www.wired.com/story/deepfake-porn-is-out-of-control/>

222 The United States Department of Homeland Security, 2020, Increasing Threat of DeepFake Identities: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/increasing_threats_of_deep_fake_identities_0.pdf

223 Home Security Heroes, 2023 State of Deepfakes: Realities, Threats, and Impact: <https://www.homesecurityheroes.com/state-of-deepfakes/#key-findings>

224 Matthew Kugler and Carly Pace, 2021, Deepfake Privacy: Attitudes and Regulation: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1476&context=nulr>

225 ESET, 2024, Digital Security: Nearly two-thirds of women worry about being a victim of deepfake pornography, ESET UK Research reveals: <https://www.eset.com/uk/about/newsroom/press-releases/nearly-two-thirds-of-women-worry-about-being-a-victim-of-deepfake-pornography-eset-uk-research-reveals/>

226 Ibid

227 Emine Saner, 2023, Inside the Taylor Swift deepfake scandal: 'It's men telling a powerful woman to get back in her box': <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/jan/31/inside-the-taylor-swift-deepfake-scandal-its-men-telling-a-powerful-woman-to-get-back-in-her-box>

228 The Internet Watch Foundation, 2023, How AI is being abused to create child sexual abuse imagery: https://www.iwf.org.uk/media/q4zll2ya/iwf-ai-csam-report_public-oct23v1.pdf

While some individuals may initially consent to their likeness being used, researchers Wagner and Blewer (2019) point out that even when performers consent to their image being used in some capacity, they frequently lose the ability to control where content is distributed or control the ways in which their face may be used.²²⁹ Compounding this further is the frequently anonymous nature of deepfake postings—it may be difficult to track down all websites and avenues where a specific video has been shared. As researchers Kupriianova and Kupriianova (2023) explain, as with all pornographic material, it can be difficult to determine whether any sort of AI-generated image has been created using an individual who has consented to their likeness being used or not.²³⁰

Part of the recent proliferation of deepfake pornography may be attributed to the significantly reduced barriers to creating AI pornography online.

On the deep web, a market has emerged allowing individuals to purchase AI-generated pornographic images of real-life individuals. For a price as low as \$2.99 USD, individuals can have online users generate deepfake pornography of a non-consenting third party.²³¹ This non-consensual content can be generated in one of two ways. First, AI technology may be used to generate pornographic images or videos that intentionally appear to be a singular individual—this type of non-consensual deepfake has been featured prominently in the recent news after celebrities like Taylor Swift²³² had deepfake pornography featuring their likeness posted online. Second, individuals may also instruct AI-generators to create ‘new’ pornographic images, by inserting specific prompts. Through this generation process, AI databases draw from existing images, thus using images of real children to generate new CSAM images.²³³

8.7 Nudifying apps are increasingly accessible

Compounding this further, this increasingly accessible technology has been marketed to children. In various recent cases in the United States, after viewing advertisements on social media platforms like TikTok, teenagers began using online apps which purported to create nude images of a third-party to craft deepfakes of classmates.²³⁴ The recent dramatic increase in the number of these types of nudifying apps and websites, means the capacity for non-consensual pornography to be generated and shared at scale is even greater.

Nudifying apps can be used to easily generate supposed nude images of a non-consenting person. As with other types of deepfake pornography, people can very simply, upload a photo of anyone to a nudifying app or website, and it will then produce a nude depiction of that person. According to analysis by Graphika, in September 2023 alone, 24 million people visited these types of undressing websites.²³⁵ Additionally, since the beginning of 2023, the volume of referral link spam for these services has increased by more than 2,000% on platforms including X and Reddit.²³⁶

229 Travis Wagner and Ashley Blewer, 2019, “The Word Real is No Longer Real”: Deepfakes, Gender, and the Challenges of AI-Altered Video: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/opis-2019-0003/pdf>

230 Larysa Kupriianova and Daryna Kupriianova, 2023, The AI in the Porn Industry of Social Media: Human Replacement or Precursor for Growing the Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking Indicators?: <https://previous.scientia.report/index.php/archive/article/view/1236/1243>

231 Anne Pechenik Gieseke, 2020, “The New Weapon of Choice”: Law’s Current Inability to Properly Address Deepfake Pornography: <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4409&context=vlr>

232 The Guardian, 2024, Inside the Taylor Swift deepfake scandal: ‘It’s men telling a powerful woman to get back in her box’: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/jan/31/inside-the-taylor-swift-deepfake-scandal-its-men-telling-a-powerful-woman-to-get-back-in-her-box>

233 Dan Milmo, 2023, Paedophiles using open source AI to create child sexual abuse content, says watchdog: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/12/paedophiles-using-open-source-ai-to-create-child-sexual-abuse-content-says-watchdog>

234 Ken Tenbarge and Liz Kreutz, 2024, A Beverly Hills middle school is investigating students sharing AI-made nude photos of classmates: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/misinformation/beverly-hills-middle-school-ai-images-deepfakes-rcna140775>; Jason Koebler and Emanuel Maiberg, 2024, ‘What Was She Supposed to Report?’ Police Report Shows How a High School Deepfake Nightmare Unfolded: <https://www.404media.co/what-was-she-supposed-to-report-police-report-shows-how-a-high-school-deepfake-nightmare-unfolded/>

235 Graphika, 2023, A Revealing Picture, AI-Generated ‘Undressing’ Images Move from Niche Pornography Discussion Forums to a Scaled and Monetized Online Business: <https://rb.gy/aw94xi>

236 Ibid

In other words, these sites are using social media to market themselves and social media sites are allowing it. Graphika also found a set of 52 Telegram groups used to access this type of non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) services that contain at least one million users as of September 2023.²³⁷

As mentioned, nudifying apps and websites are increasingly being utilised by children and young people. It was reported in February 2024 that high school students in Seattle (US) used easily accessible mobile apps to generate supposedly nude images of their classmates.²³⁸

In November 2023, a similar case was reported in New Jersey (US)²³⁹ which, according to the Guardian Newspaper, “has prompted a civil lawsuit and helped fuel a bipartisan effort in the US Congress to ban the creation and spread of non-consensual deepfake images.”²⁴⁰ In September 2023, in a small town in Spain, dozens of nude images of schoolgirls had been generated by AI and sent around in a WhatsApp group set up by other school children.

The images circulated for weeks and the teenagers involved have since been sentenced to a year’s probation.²⁴¹ In June 2024, in Australia, a teenage boy was arrested and then released pending further investigation, after explicit fake images, described as ‘mutilated’ and ‘incredibly graphic’, were allegedly circulated on social media channels using the likenesses of about 50 female students from a private school in regional Victoria.²⁴²

Just before this incident, again in June 2024, a 15 year old boy was expelled for producing explicit images of a female teacher using AI, in Melbourne, Australia.²⁴³ In July 2024, it was reported in the UK that a twelve year old girl had a deepfake photo of her posted on social media by other school children.²⁴⁴

8.8 New forms of abusive pornography means increasing profits

Like other pornography sites, these types of nudifying apps and websites, and deepfake pornography websites, are now big business. ClothOff,²⁴⁵ a popular nudifying app, receives more than four million visits per month and charges £8.50 for 25 credits which can then be used to upload photographs of any woman or girl and receive in return the same image stripped of clothing. This is consistent with how other websites and apps work.

²³⁷ Ibid

²³⁸ 404 Media, 2024, ‘What Was She Supposed to Report?’ Police Report Shows How a High School Deepfake Nightmare Unfolded: <https://www.404media.co/what-was-she-supposed-to-report-police-report-shows-how-a-high-school-deepfake-nightmare-unfolded/>

²³⁹ CBS News, 2023, New Jersey high school students accused of making AI-generated pornographic images of classmates: <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/west-field-high-school-ai-pornographic-images-students/>

²⁴⁰ The Guardian, 2024, Revealed: the names linked to ClothOff, the deepfake pornography app: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/feb/29/clothoff-deepfake-ai-pornography-app-names-linked-revealed>

²⁴¹ The Guardian, 2024, Spain sentences 15 school children over AI-generated naked images: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/09/spain-sentences-15-school-children-over-ai-generated-naked-images>

²⁴² The Guardian, 2024, Bacchus Marsh Grammar: schoolboy arrested after 50 female students allegedly targeted in fake explicit AI photos scandal: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jun/12/schoolboy-arrested-after-allegedly-posting-fake-explicit-images-of-female-students-ntwnfb>

²⁴³ Mail Online, 2024, Salesian College scandal: Melbourne student expelled after making explicit AI images of female teacher: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13517425/Salesian-College-scandal-Melbourne-student-expelled-making-explicit-AI-images-female-teacher.html>

²⁴⁴ BBC News, 2024, Girl, 12, victim of ‘deepfake’ bullying porn image: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckvgez74kgo>

²⁴⁵ ClothOff has since ceased operating in the UK market

As Graphika explains:

“ Many of the synthetic NCII [non-consensual intimate imagery] services we identified operate on a freemium model, initially offering users a small number of free generations while keeping additional generations and enhanced services behind a paywall. Users are required to purchase additional ‘credits’ or ‘tokens’ to access features such as higher resolution exports, ‘age’ and ‘body trait’ customization, and inpainting - a feature where the AI model will replace a highlighted part of the image with requested content, such as removing clothing. Prices for generations range from \$1.99 for one credit to \$299 for API access and other added features.”²⁴⁶

Like other pornography sites, they also use payment platforms such as Stripe, PayPal and cryptocurrency platforms.²⁴⁷ It is also important to note that many nudifying apps are freely accessible to children and currently do not require any type of age verification.

Deepfake pornography sites also offer subscriptions where consumers can view an almost endless supply of deepfake pornography. According to Home Security Heroes, in 2023, the monthly traffic to the top ten specific deepfake pornography websites was 34,836,914 and the total cumulative video views was 303,640,207.²⁴⁸ In a world where content is king and website traffic the holy grail, these numbers alone speak to the immense amounts of money that can be made on these sites.

As well as dedicated deepfake pornography websites, mainstream pornography sites are also monetising this form of sexual abuse, with seven of the ten most popular pornographic websites found to be hosting deepfake pornography.²⁴⁹ Today, sexual deepfake videos continue to be hosted and advertised on mainstream pornography platforms such as Pornhub, XVideos, xHamster, and Xnxx, accumulating tens of millions of views.²⁵⁰

Despite some sites like Pornhub banning this type of content in 2018, it, and others, continues to profit from deepfake pornography. Research by NCOSE found that while Pornhub has removed some of the deepfake pornography that was prolific on their website, they have found other ways to monetise this content. Pornhub are allowing inactive links to deepfake pornography to stay on their website, so that they can then use them to drive traffic to their site. For example, if someone types ‘deepfake pornography’ into a search engine, they will be shown the inactive links that Pornhub has left online.

²⁴⁶ Graphika, 2023, A Revealing Picture, AI-Generated ‘Undressing’ Images Move from Niche Pornography Discussion Forums to a Scaled and Monetized Online Business: <https://rb.gy/aw94xi>

²⁴⁷ Ibid

²⁴⁸ Home Security Heroes, 2023 State of Deepfakes: Realities, Threats, and Impact: <https://www.homesecurityheroes.com/state-of-deepfakes/#key-findings>

²⁴⁹ Victoria Rousay, 2023, Sexual Deepfakes and Image-Based Sexual Abuse: Victim-Survivor Experiences and Embodied Harms: <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/37374909>

²⁵⁰ Ibid

If the person clicks on the link, they will not be able to view the link, but they will land on Pornhub's homepage, where similar content will be suggested to them.²⁵¹

NCOSE researchers have been repeatedly recommended deepfake pornography on Pornhub, as well as other adverts to other sites promoting personalised deepfake content and tutorials on how to create deepfake pornography. TrafficJunky, the advertising site of Pornhub, also advertises deepfake pornography sites. In fact, Pornhub is in the top ten referral sites to Mr.DeepFakes.com, the biggest deepfake pornography site online.²⁵² It is interesting to note that this website blocked UK users accessing the site in April 2024 when the UK government announced measures to strengthen the law around deepfake pornography.²⁵³

Pornhub also advertises nudifying apps. An article published in May 2024 highlighted that “the #1 most popular adult content creator on Pornhub with almost 2 million subscribers, is promoting a well-known ‘nudify’ or ‘undress’ app.”²⁵⁴ The app in question is once again, ClothOff and according to the article, it appeared on Pornhub's first page and at the time of writing had over 2 million views. This is despite Pornhub's self-imposed ban on such material and Aylo's ongoing PR campaign to brand themselves as the only pornography site taking measures to prevent abusive content from appearing on their site.

And of course, mainstream pornography sites provide the material to be used in deepfake pornography. As already outlined, pornographic material is sexually violent, increasingly hardcore and features filmed abuse and rape, other forms of image-based sexual abuse, and child sexual abuse material. It is no surprise therefore that another New York Times investigation in 2024, found examples of deepfake videos that are: “graphic and sometimes sadistic, depicting women tied up as they are raped or urinated on, for example. One site offers categories including ‘rape’ (472 items), ‘crying’ (655) and ‘degradation’ (822).” These are all categories commonly found on mainstream pornography sites.²⁵⁵

8.9 The physical and psychological trauma of deepfake victims

As noted, deepfake pornography targets already vulnerable groups. The majority of deepfakes feature women and deepfake technology can be used to generate CSAM.²⁵⁶ As with other forms of image-based sexual abuse, the impact for those affected by deepfake pornography can be devastating and long-lasting. Victims of deepfake pornography live in constant fear of facing professional consequences, harassment, social isolation and physical violence.²⁵⁷

Victims may also feel out of control. Beyond the difficulty of controlling the spread of videos, deepfake pornography fundamentally removes the ability for individuals to consent, forcing their likeness to participate in various, frequently degrading, sexual acts. As a result, Kugler and Pace (2021) note victims of deepfake pornography may suffer from several negative psychological impacts, including anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.²⁵⁸

251 NCOSE, 2023, Pornhub's Deepfake Deception: Yet Another Way the Porn Giant Profits from Abuse: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/pornhubs-deepfake-deception-yet-another-way-the-porn-giant-profits-from-abuse/>

252 Ibid

253 Wired, 2024, The Biggest Deepfake Porn Website Is Now Blocked in the UK: <https://www.wired.com/story/the-biggest-deepfake-porn-website-is-now-blocked-in-the-uk/>

254 NCOSE, 2023, Pornhub's Deepfake Deception: Yet Another Way the Porn Giant Profits from Abuse: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/pornhubs-deepfake-deception-yet-another-way-the-porn-giant-profits-from-abuse/>

255 New York Times, 2024, The Online Degradation of Women and Girls That We Meet With a Shrug: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/23/opinion/deepfake-sex-videos.html?pgtype=Article&action=click&module=RelatedLinks>

256 Ibid; Larysa Kupriianova and Daryna Kupriianova, 2023, The AI in the Porn Industry of Social Media: Human Replacement or Precursor for Growing the Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking Indicators?: <https://previous.scientia.report/index.php/archive/article/view/1236/1243>

257 Anne Pechenik Gieseke, 2020, “The New Weapon of Choice”: Law's Current Inability to Properly Address Deepfake Pornography: <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4409&context=vlr>

258 Matthew Kugler and Carly Pace, 2021, Deepfake Privacy: Attitudes and Regulation: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1476&context=nulr>

Equality Now describes the harm that this type of abuse can cause:²⁵⁹

“ Deepfake image-based sexual abuse has the potential to harm individuals personally, professionally, and emotionally. Victims/survivors may face reputational damage, harassment, and emotional distress, as well as legal consequences arising from the dissemination of manipulated content without their consent.”

Testimony from victims and survivors of this type of abuse confirm the devastating impact it can have on a person’s life.

Laura Bates, author of *Men Who Hate Women*, explained to the Guardian newspaper how: “There’s something really visceral about seeing an incredibly hyper-realistic image of yourself in somebody’s extreme misogynistic fantasy of you,” she says. “There’s something really degrading about that, very humiliating. It stays with you.” And that image can be shared with potentially millions of people, she adds.²⁶⁰

Helen Mort a poet and lecturer, told Glamour magazine, that when she discovered deepfake pornography in her likeness was on a pornography site, it was profoundly disturbing and unsettling, and she felt unsafe as a result.²⁶¹

In an interview with United States Homeland Security, a survivor of deepfake pornography explains its lifelong impacts on an individual’s reputation, dignity, employability, and interpersonal relationships. The interview notes that the survivor was unable to obtain a job in her field of work and that the survivor believes the difficulty she has faced in her employment search was due to the deepfake pornographic images and videos of her.²⁶²

Children and young people who are victims of deepfakes also suffer severe psychological and social impacts, including isolation in school, bullying, and harassment. Some of the girls targeted in the case of deepfake pornography in a school in Spain were unable to go to school, suffered panic attacks, bullying and blackmail.²⁶³ This has a profound impact on their physical, emotional and mental health.

Furthermore, given the frequent anonymity afforded to those who create and post deepfake pornography, as with other types of IBSA, it can be difficult to fully remove content from the internet and content can spread quickly. For instance, when a deepfake video of celebrity Bobbi Althoff ‘masturbating’ was posted to X (formally Twitter) in February 2024, this deepfake received over 4.5 million views within nine hours. Over 30 hours later, popular posts directing users to the deepfake still existed on the platform.²⁶⁴

259 Equality Now, 2023, Briefing paper: Deepfake image-based sexual abuse, tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and the law: <https://audri.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EN-AUDRI-Briefing-paper-deepfake-06.pdf>

260 The Guardian, 2024, Inside the Taylor Swift deepfake scandal: ‘It’s men telling a powerful woman to get back in her box’: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/jan/31/inside-the-taylor-swift-deepfake-scandal-its-men-telling-a-powerful-woman-to-get-back-in-her-box>

261 Glamour Magazine, 2024, Deepfake technology is a threat to all women – not just celebrities: <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/deepfake-women-risk-social-media#:~:text=At%20the%20height%20of%20the,%E2%80%9Cof%20felt%20unsafe.%E2%80%9D>

262 United States, Homeland Security, Increasing Threats of Deepfake Identities: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/increasing_threats_of_deepfake_identities_o.pdf

263 The Guardian, 2024, Revealed: the names linked to ClothOff, the deepfake pornography app: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/feb/29/clothoff-deepfake-ai-pornography-app-names-linked-revealed>

264 The Washington Post, 2024, Bobbi Althoff deepfake spotlights X’s role as top source of AI porn: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/02/22/x-twitter-bobbi-althoff-deep-fake-porn-viral/>

Victims of deepfake pornography also have little legal support, further limiting their ability to seek justice. Moreover, because many of these deepfakes are hosted on third-party websites, it has also not been possible to prosecute the deepfakes under other regulatory mechanisms, like malicious communications.²⁶⁵ Thus, victims of deepfake pornography currently have little ability to seek justice or have content which features their likeness removed. In response, some survivors have created their own tools and websites to support others in their fight to have content removed.²⁶⁶

External regulators are also largely ill-equipped to respond to victims of deepfake pornography. As it stands, despite widespread public opposition to the posting of non-consensual deepfake pornography,²⁶⁷ the US, the UK and the EU have implemented few regulations designed to limit the spread of deepfake pornography.²⁶⁸ The UK's Online Safety Act 2023 does bring in new regulations relating to deepfake pornography, but these are limited (for more on this, see the section Regulation: The pornography industry must be held to account).

8.10 Sexual scripts are being rewritten by AI-generated pornography

While pornography generally presents several harms to both users and society broadly, AI-generated pornography builds upon many of these harms, posing a unique and significant threat.

Deepfake pornography allows for extreme, abusive, and physically impossible sexual behaviours to be depicted, shifting users' perspectives of what normal sexual behaviours might look like and exposing viewers to deeply harmful and abusive content. While some AI generators have implemented prompt restrictions designed to prevent users from generating harmful content, users may still find ways to circumvent these barriers.²⁶⁹ As a result, users can generate AI pornography that goes past the typical physical barriers limiting sexual interaction, generating content depicting extreme physical abuse, rape, or impossible sexual situations.²⁷⁰

Consistent exposure to these types of extreme acts may encourage viewers to adopt more harmful sexual attitudes. In a study of consistent viewers of 'hentai' pornography—a sub-genre of animated pornography which similarly subverts typical physical constraints and embraces extreme sexual acts—viewers were more likely to adopt harmful rape acceptance myths and more likely to subsequently adopt sexually aggressive strategies.²⁷¹

This type of escalation pathway requires further research and interrogation, but as AI-generated pornography allows for the creation of increasingly violent content, with no limits, the implications for how that content will shape sexual scripts is deeply concerning. Alongside the harm caused to victims and survivors of deepfake pornography and the ever-present threat of IBSA, women and girls may now face another deeply harmful impact of AI-generated pornography.

265 The Guardian, 2023, My Blonde GF: the experience of being deepfaked for pornography: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxP7lm29YuE>

266 New York Times, 2024, The Online Degradation of Women and Girls That We Meet With a Shrug: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/23/opinion/deepfake-sex-videos.html?pgtype=Article&action=click&module=RelatedLinks>

267 Matthew Kugler and Carly Pace, 2021, Deepfake Privacy: Attitudes and Regulation: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1476&context=nulr>

268 Ibid; Karolina Mania, 2022, Legal Protections of Revenge and Deepfake Porn Victims in the European Union: Findings from a Comparative Legal Study: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366572283_Legal_Protection_of_Revenge_and_Deepfake_Porn_Victims_in_the_European_Union_Findings_From_a_Comparative_Legal_Study

269 Victor Tangermann, 2024, Man Running AI-Powered Porn Site Horrified by What Users Are Asking For: <https://futurism.com/the-byte/man-ai-powered-porn-site-horrified>; Ben Weiss, 2024, Can AI porn be ethical?: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/feb/18/ethics-ai-porn>; The Internet Watch Foundation, 2023, How AI is being abused to create child sexual abuse imagery: https://www.iwf.org.uk/media/q4zll2ya/iwf-ai-csam-report_public-oct23v1.pdf

270 Madison McQueen, 2023, AI Porn Is Here and It's Dangerous: <https://exodusery.com/articles/ai-porn/>

271 Beatriz Azevedo Almeida, 2023, The mediating role of rape myths in the relationship between the use of hentai pornography and sexually aggressive strategies: A study with college students: <https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/150710/2/632838.pdf>

Sexual script theory holds that an individual's sexuality is informed and developed by their social environment, including family environment, peers, faith, media, music, what they watch, and experiences of abuse.

Sexual scripts are templates which inform an individual's understanding of what constitutes 'normal' and 'acceptable' sexual behaviour, and where the boundaries of 'inappropriate' sexual conduct lie.²⁷²

8.11 AI is being used to generated child sexual abuse material

Barriers can also be bypassed to generate CSAM.²⁷³ Users can either create CSAM using AI-generator's pre-programmed images of children, or like with adult deepfakes, can superimpose images of real children onto pornographic videos.²⁷⁴ This AI-generated CSAM has become prolific online, with the Internet Watch Foundation (2022) reporting that over 20,000 AI-generated CSAM images were posted to a dark-net forum in a one-month period, 416 of which were assessed as meeting criminal prohibition standards.²⁷⁵ Again, even when these AI-generated images are discovered by authorities, it may be difficult to fully scrub images online. PBS NewsHour (2023) reported that over 3,200 images of CSAM were located in the AI-database LAION. Content moderators attempted to track all images, but some had already been downloaded on individual devices, making it impossible to fully remove.²⁷⁶

8.12 Virtual reality pornography has 'real life' consequences

Pornography is one of the largest sectors in the emerging virtual reality and augmented reality environment market. As virtual reality became increasingly publicly available in the late 2010s, VR pornography became similarly accessible.

²⁷² Children's Commissioner for England, 2023, 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' Young people and pornography: <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf>

²⁷³ Dan Milmo, 2023, Paedophiles using open source AI to create child sexual abuse content, says watchdog: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/12/paedophiles-using-open-source-ai-to-create-child-sexual-abuse-content-says-watchdog>

²⁷⁴ Ibid; The Internet Watch Foundation, 2023, How AI is being abused to create child sexual abuse imagery: https://www.iwf.org.uk/media/q4zll2ya/iwf-ai-csam-report_public-oct23v1.pdf

²⁷⁵ The Internet Watch Foundation, 2023, How AI is being abused to create child sexual abuse imagery: https://www.iwf.org.uk/media/q4zll2ya/iwf-ai-csam-report_public-oct23v1.pdf

²⁷⁶ Matt O'Brien and Haleluya Hadero, 2023, Study shows AI image-generators are being trained on explicit photos of children: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/study-shows-ai-image-generators-are-being-trained-on-explicit-photos-of-children>

A 2017 self-generated report by Pornhub noted that VR pornography videos were watched over 500,000 times a day.²⁷⁷

Unlike ‘regular’ online pornography, virtual reality (VR) pornography can:

“ Offer the feeling of ‘being there’: an increased sense of immersion and presence in a mediated experience thanks to the sensory affordances of the medium. In an effective VR environment, the user is immersed in the experience itself, feeling an embodied presence in the world presented to them and able to interact with the environment and others in the environment in ways that cannot be achieved in other media.”²⁷⁸

In 2017, the New York Times predicted that pornography would be the third-largest sector in the VR market by 2025.²⁷⁹ Research conducted by BedBible in 2022 found that 15% of adult American men had watched VR pornography and that the VR pornography industry had experienced massive growth over the past decade, currently representing over 10% of the total virtual reality market.²⁸⁰ The emergence of VR pornography is particularly troubling given the number of adults and young people that use virtual reality or the ‘metaverse’ on a regular basis. The Institution of Engineering and Technology (2022) found that one in 20 adults and one in 14 young people use VR weekly, meaning that VR pornography is increasingly accessible, including to particularly vulnerable groups.²⁸¹

Some academics have noted potential limitations to the widespread production and access of VR pornography. For instance, specialised cameras and equipment may be required to film VR pornography,²⁸² and certain companies—most recently Apple—have prohibited VR pornography from being accessed on certain VR headsets.²⁸³ However, despite these apparent limitations, VR pornography has continued to flourish. Many individuals have found ways to circumvent any apparent headset restrictions on VR pornography, with how-to guides existing online.²⁸⁴ The large market for VR pornography also means that many individuals are willing to pay for specialised equipment, with new pornography ‘performers’ and studios focusing on creating VR pornography specifically.²⁸⁵ As it stands, VR pornography will continue to grow.

²⁷⁷ Pornhub Insights, 2017, Virtual Reality Porn: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/virtual-reality>

²⁷⁸ Leighton Evans, Virtual Reality Pornography: a Review of Health-Related Opportunities and Challenges: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9684871/>

²⁷⁹ Alyson Kreuger, 2017, Virtual Reality Gets Naughty: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/28/style/virtual-reality-porn.html>

²⁸⁰ BedBible.com, 2023, VR Porn Industry Statistics – Revenue, User stats, and more: <https://bedbible.com/vr-porn-industry-statistics/>

²⁸¹ The Institute of Engineering and Technology, 2022, Safeguarding the metaverse: <https://www.theiet.org/media/9836/safeguarding-the-metaverse.pdf>

²⁸² Leighton Evans, 2022, Virtual Reality Pornography: a Review of Health-Related Opportunities and Challenges: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11930-022-00352-9.pdf>

²⁸³ Lucas Ropek, 2024, Apple Vision Pro Users Have Discovered a Fatal Flaw: No VR Porn: <https://gizmodo.com/apple-vision-pro-users-have-discovered-a-fatal-flaw-no-1851226935>

²⁸⁴ Stephen Johnson, 2023, How to Watch Augmented Reality Porn on a Meta Quest 3: <https://liferhacker.com/tech/how-to-watch-augmented-reality-porn-on-meta-quest-3>

²⁸⁵ Hallie Lieberman, 2023, Inside the Emerging World of VR Porn for Women (And Anyone Who’s Not A Dude): <https://www.vice.com/en/article/epvqwk/inside-the-emerging-world-of-vr-porn-for-women-and-anyone-whos-not-a-dude>

VR pornography negatively impacts both individual viewers and society more broadly. For individual viewers, consistent access to VR pornography may make it more difficult to find pleasure in offline sexual encounters. In a study conducted by Wood et al. (2017), participants asked to envision their feelings when using VR pornography described becoming increasingly reliant on the technology, due to the easily accessible “intense sexual pleasure,” which was “better” than in-person sex.²⁸⁶ Accordingly, it is possible that VR pornography viewers may become increasingly reliant on VR stimulation.

VR pornography also has detrimental impacts on broader society. As is the case with ‘regular’ online pornography, the bulk of content available on VR pornography contains harmful heterosexual, racialised and gendered hierarchies and stereotypes.²⁸⁷ VR users can also access ‘specialised’ pornography which allows them to access extreme content. For instance, one of the most popular VR pornography platforms is ‘After School Girlfriend’ where users ‘virtually’ have sex with a ‘schoolgirl.’²⁸⁸ Like other forms of ‘regular’ pornography, this type of exposure legitimises harmful sexual practices and exposes users to increasingly hardcore sexual content, while legitimising children as objects of sexual desire.

286 Matthew Wood, Gavin Wood, and Madeline Balaam, 2017, “They’re Just Tixel Pits, Man”: Disputing the ‘Reality’ of Virtual Reality Pornography through the Story Completion Method: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3025453.3025762>

287 Leighton Evans, 2022, Virtual Reality Pornography: a Review of Health-Related Opportunities and Challenges: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11930-022-00352-9.pdf>

288 The Institute of Engineering and Technology, 2022, Safeguarding the metaverse: <https://www.theiet.org/media/9836/safeguarding-the-metaverse.pdf>

PART 9

**THE HARMS TO
SOCIETY: ABUSE
IS BECOMING
THE NORM**



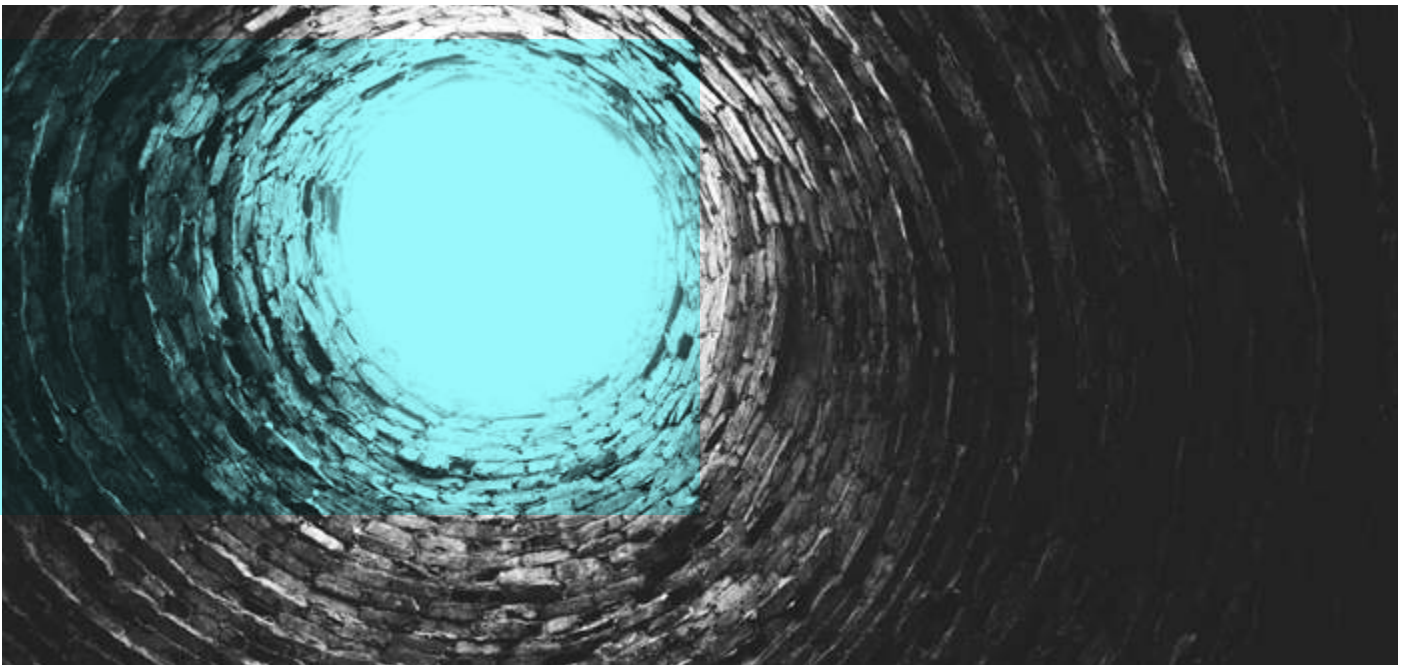
9. The harms to society: abuse is becoming the norm

9.1 Violent pornography normalises violent sex

Violent, online pornography, that has been freely available for decades, has caused immeasurable harm to society and individuals. This misogynistic, sexist and racist pornography is profoundly shaping the sexual scripts of both adults and children and is influencing consumers' behaviours and attitudes towards violence against women and girls.

McGlynn (2021) argues that the sexually violent content ubiquitous in pornography, “sustains a culture in which violence against women and girls is endemic, by minimising the harms of sexual violence and normalising coercion, nonconsent, and physical aggression in sex ... [and that] the prevalence of sexually violent content on mainstream sites is a form of cultural harm which adversely impacts on all members of society.”²⁸⁹

Culture Reframed further explains: “Extensive research has shown that porn undermines the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical health of individuals, families, and communities. These studies also demonstrate that porn shapes how we think about gender, sexuality, relationships, intimacy, sexual violence, and gender equality.”²⁹⁰ According to Dr Helen Mott, Research Consultant with Bristol Women's Commission, “a startlingly large number of the freely, readily available and more frequently viewed porn on our mainstream sites is violent, depicts criminal acts and normalises that violence in sexual relationships.”²⁹¹



²⁸⁹ Clare McGlynn, 2021, Evidence Submission to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Sub-Committee on Online Harms, Online Safety and Online Harms Inquiry: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/39012/pdf/>

²⁹⁰ Culture Reframed in CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

²⁹¹ Women and Equalities Committee Oral evidence: Changing cultures underpinning male violence against women, HC 1335, Wednesday 28 April 2021: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/2147/default/>

Reem Alsalem, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) states in her 2024 report on VAWG and prostitution, for the UN Human Rights Council that:

“ Digital platforms facilitating pornography like Pornhub normalize and promote male domination over women and enforce patriarchal gender roles... Many women and girls feel that pornography makes them feel uncomfortable and distressed by their “pornification” and sexualization.

As men and boys feel a greater sense of entitlement due to consuming pornography, girls feel compelled to submit... “Pornified” visual landscape indoctrinates girls and women into a patriarchal mindset that the only way to be visible – in fact valuable – is to be sexually desired, “hot” and “pornified” .”²⁹²

In other words, online pornography is teaching both adults and children that violent sex is normal, and that women and girls are nothing more than disposable sex objects. This is having devastating consequences on women and girls, and men and boys, across the UK.

9.2 Sexual violence is increasing

Between 2021 and 2022, a record number of rapes were reported in England and Wales.²⁹³ In Scotland, the reporting of sexual crimes has increased by 96% over the last decade.²⁹⁴ One in two women aged 16 to 34 years have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment and 80% of girls and young women have seen or experienced sexism online.²⁹⁵ A Victim Focus UK sample of 22,419 women in 2021 found 99.7% had been repeatedly subjected to violence including assaults, harassment and rape.²⁹⁶

Harassment, sexual assault and ‘rape culture’ is now so common on school, college and university campuses that in 2021, Soma Sara, a university student, set up a website called ‘Everyone’s Invited’. This provided a space for young people, particularly young women, to share their testimonies and experiences of the violence, abuse and harassment they face daily on campuses around the UK. The website has received over 50,000 submissions and counting.²⁹⁷

²⁹² Prostitution and violence against women and girls Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem report, May 2024: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4049148?ln=fr&v=pdf>

²⁹³ The latest statistics for England and Wales from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in End Violence Against Women and Girls, 2022, Snapshot Report: Violence Against Women and Girls: <https://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Snapshot-2022-23-final-140223.pdf>

²⁹⁴ Scottish Government, 2022, Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2022/06/recorded-crime-scotland-2021-2022/documents/recorded-crime-scotland-2021-22/recorded-crime-scotland-2021-22/govscot%3Adocument/recorded-crime-scotland-2021-22.pdf>

²⁹⁵ End Violence Against Women and Girls, 2022, Snapshot Report: Violence Against Women and Girls: <https://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Snapshot-2022-23-final-140223.pdf>

²⁹⁶ Jessica Taylor and Jaimi Shrive, 2021, ‘I thought it was just a part of life’: Understanding Violence Committed Against Women in the UK Since Birth: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355174881_‘I_thought_it_was_just_a_part_of_life’_Understanding_Violence_Committed_Against_Women_in_the_UK_Since_Birth

²⁹⁷ Everyone’s Invited: <https://www.everyonesinvited.uk/>

Making the link between pornography and the abuse young women experience, Soma Sara stated that pornography “can have incredibly damaging impacts on young minds and their understanding of sex and relationships” and that “consent is practically non-existent in porn.”²⁹⁸ The last few years have also seen high profile and extremely tragic cases of the rape and murder of young women, and direct links to the accused being a consumer of violent pornography.²⁹⁹

While we cannot attribute all of this to the increase in violent pornography consumption, a literature review produced by the Government Equalities Office (2020) concluded that pornography is a driver of sexual violence both inside and outside of consensual sexual relationships and encounters.³⁰⁰

9.3 Pornography normalises sexually harmful attitudes and behaviours

Watching online pornography normalises sexual aggression, risky sexual practices and men’s violent sexual domination over women. It reduces women and girls to objects on whom acts of sex and violence are acted out. Women and girls are dehumanised, degraded, tortured, and stripped of all humanity within mainstream pornography. Forty years of research shows that there is a clear and unambiguous link between the consumption of online pornography and violence against women and girls both online and offline.³⁰¹

Indeed, a UK government report, released in 2020, recognised that “there is substantial evidence of an association between the use of pornography and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours towards women.”³⁰² The authors identify four ways that pornography use was associated with harmful sexual attitudes, including viewing women as sex objects, shaping men’s sexual expectations of women, acceptance of sexual aggression towards women, and perpetration of sexual aggression. The report found that most people agree that “an increase in violent pornography has led to more people being asked to agree to violent sex acts ...and to more people being sexually assaulted.” It also found that “pornography use had a statistically significant association with attitudes supporting violence against women (with violent pornography showing an even stronger association).”³⁰³

A 2010 meta-analysis confirms that there is a significant positive correlation between the consumption of sexually violent pornography and attitudes supporting gender-based sexual violence.³⁰⁴

A 2015 meta-analysis which examined the links between pornography and sexually aggressive behaviour, found that exposure to violent and non-violent pornography results in increases in both attitudes supporting aggression and in actual aggression.³⁰⁵ Other research outlines how pornography erodes empathy³⁰⁶ and that pornography users are more likely to believe rape myths.³⁰⁷

298 The Standard, 2021, Everyone’s Invited: Founder Soma Sara says parents must teach children about danger of online pornography: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/everyones-invited-founder-teach-kids-dangers-online-pornography-b927497.html>

299 The Angiolini Inquiry, 2024, An independent inquiry into how an off-duty Metropolitan police officer was able to abduct, rape and murder a member of the public: <https://www.angiolini.independent-inquiry.uk/>; <https://www.guardian.com/world/2023/jan/17/first-edition-pc-david-carrick-met-police>

300 UK Government, 2020, The relationship between pornography use and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661d1266c8225636d5bd3e25/The_Relationship_between_Pornography_use_and_Harmful_Sexual_Attitudes_and_Behaviours_literature_review_v1.pdf

301 See Academic Library: <https://culturereframed.org/resources/academic-library/>

302 UK Government, 2020, The relationship between pornography use and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-relationship-between-pornography-use-and-harmful-sexual-behaviours/the-relationship-between-pornography-use-and-harmful-sexual-behaviours>

303 Ibid

304 Gert Martin Hald, Neil M Malamuth and Carlin Yuen, 2010, Pornography and attitudes supporting violence against women: revisiting the relationship in nonexperimental studies: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19862768/>

305 Paul J. Wright, Robert Tokunaga and Ashley Kraus, 2015, A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288905229_A_Meta-Analysis_of_Pornography_Consumption_and_Actual_Acts_of_Sexual_Aggression_in_General_Population_Studies

306 Fight the New Drug, How Porn Can Hurt Consumers’ Empathy and Compassion: <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-hurt-consumers-empathy-and-compassion/>

307 John D. Foubert, Matthew W. Brosi and R. Sean Bannon, 2011, Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance and Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault, Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: DOI: 10.1080/10720162.2011.625552

As Michael Flood, an internationally recognised researcher on men, masculinities, and violence prevention and professor at the University of Queensland, explained to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Commercial Sexual Exploitation's Inquiry into pornography:

“ Pornography teaches sexually aggressive and violent supportive attitudes and behaviours. So, we start with correlational studies. Correlational studies find associations between pornography use and sexually aggressive, and violent supportive attitudes in both meta-analyses, so in statistical aggregations of multiple studies, and various recent studies. They also find associations between pornography use and actual violent behaviour... Experimental studies find that people shown pornography then show increases in their sexually violent attitudes and behaviours. Finally, the most powerful form of evidence comes from longitudinal studies that collect data from people over time. They find that pornography use predicts later sexually violent attitudes and behaviours.”³⁰⁸

The same APPG inquiry also points to a study of college men aged 18-29 years old that found that the more pornography men watched the more likely they were to ask their partner for pornographic sex acts, use pornography during sex, and intentionally conjure images of pornography to maintain arousal during sex.³⁰⁹

A separate study on college men in the US found that men who had seen pornography were more likely to say they would commit rape or sexual assault if they knew they could get away with it, than men who had not seen pornography in the past 12 months.³¹⁰ Men who frequently consume pornography are also the most common users of women in prostitution,³¹¹ and the ability to force women in prostitution to carry out sex acts commonly seen in pornography is one of the reasons men give for buying sex.³¹²

In the UK, Ofsted's 2021 review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges found that sexual harassment, including online sexual abuse, is now 'normalised' for children and young people.³¹³ It highlighted how easy access to pornography had set unhealthy expectations of sexual relationships and shaped perceptions about women and girls.

308 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2023, Pornography Regulation: The case for Parliamentary Reform: <https://www.appg-cse.uk/inquiry/>

309 Ibid

310 John D. Foubert, Matthew W. Brosi and R. Sean Bannon, 2011, Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance and Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault, Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: DOI: 10.1080/10720162.2011.625552

311 Prostitution and violence against women and girls Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem report, May 2024: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4049148?ln=fr&v=pdf>

312 M. Farley, E. Schuckman, JM Golding, K. Houser, L. Jarrett, P. Qualliotine, and M. Decker, 2011, Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex: "You can have a good time with the servitude" vs. "You're supporting a system of degradation": <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Farleyetal2011ComparingSexBuyers.pdf>;

313 Ofsted, 2021, Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

Pornography is now so normalised in our Western culture that Pornhub releases an annual ‘Year In Review: Insights Report’ which covers everything from ‘Most Viewed Categories’ of the previous year; ‘Most Searched For’ terms; viewing habits of different age groups, genders, and sexual orientations; most popular ‘Porn Stars’; viewing times; and length of views amongst others. It takes several of the aforementioned violent sex acts and outlines how popular they were in any given year, for example, ‘anal’, ‘gangbang’, ‘ass to mouth’, ‘double penetration’ etc.³¹⁴

9.4 Women are coerced to accept violent sex

This shaping of sexual scripts and normalisation of violence is having devastating consequences on women and girls. Women, especially younger women, feel under pressure to play out the ‘scripts’ their male partners have learned from pornography and are pressured into painful and dangerous sex acts such as anal sex and strangulation.³¹⁵

According to the campaign group, We Can’t Consent To This, there is now widespread violent assault of women during sex.³¹⁶ A 2019 survey by Savanta ComRes on behalf of the BBC, which questioned a representative sample of 2,002 UK women between the ages of 18 and 39, found that 38% had been subjected to slapping, choking, gagging or spitting during sex, all acts commonly found in pornography. The research also found that 42% felt pressured, coerced or forced into these violent sex acts and 20% of the respondents said the incidents had left them feeling upset or frightened.³¹⁷

On the release of this survey, a spokesperson for the Centre for Women’s Justice said, there was “growing pressure on young women to consent to violent, dangerous and demeaning acts... [and that] this is likely to be due to the widespread availability, normalisation and use of extreme pornography.”³¹⁸

9.5 Pornography has made strangulation mainstream

Research with 82 women, undertaken by We Can’t Consent To This and Lucy Snow of London Metropolitan University, found that 45 women had experienced non-consensual choking, strangulation, or pressure on her neck from a partner or ex-partner during sex. In this sample, 32 women had experienced it from someone they were dating, 11 experienced it from someone they had met that day, and five experienced it from someone they had planned to meet for consensual BDSM activities.³¹⁹ A 2021 US study found that 58% of female college students had experienced being choked during sex.³²⁰ Another study from 2022 found that one in three female college students stated that they had been choked during their last sexual encounter.³²¹

314 CEASE, 2023, The Real Pornhub Insights: <https://cease.org.uk/the-real-pornhub-insights/>

315 CEASE, Shaping our Sexual Scripts: <https://cease.org.uk/facts/culture-the-air-we-breathe/shaping-our-sexual-scripts/>

316 We Can’t Consent to This, 2021, ‘I thought it was normal’: <https://wecantconsenttothis.uk/i-thought-it-was-normal-research>

317 BBC, 2019, ‘A man tried to choke me during sex without warning’: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50546184>

318 Ibid

319 We Can’t Consent to This, 2021, ‘I thought it was normal’: <https://wecantconsenttothis.uk/i-thought-it-was-normal-research>

320 Debby Herbenick, Tsung-chieh Fu, Callie Patterson, Yael R. Rosenstock Gonzalez, Maya Luetke, Dubravka Svetina Valdivia, Heather Eastman-Mueller, Lucia Guerra-Reyes and Molly Rosenberg, 2023, Prevalence and characteristics of choking/strangulation during sex: Findings from a probability survey of undergraduate students: DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2021.1920599

321 Debby Herbenick, Tsungchieh Fu, Heather Eastman Mueller, Sally Thomas, Dubravka Svetina Valdivia, Molly Rosenberg, Lucia Guerra Reyes, Paul J. Wright, Keisuke Kawata, John R. Feiner, 2022, Frequency, Method, Intensity, and Health Sequelae of Sexual Choking Among U.S. Undergraduate and Graduate Students: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-022-02347-y#citeas>

Debby Herbenick, a prominent researcher on sexual behaviour in the US, Director of the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University, and author of the book ‘Yes, Your Kid’, has been researching the rise of ‘rough sex’ among college students for four years. Her work was highlighted in a New York Times article which stated that Dr Herbenick’s study found:

“ Nearly two-thirds of women in her most recent campus-representative survey of 5,000 students at an anonymized “major Midwestern university” said a partner had choked them during sex (one-third in their most recent encounter). The rate of those women who said they were between the ages 12 and 17 the first time that happened had shot up to 40 percent from one in four.”³²²

The same article also highlighted that of the mostly heterosexual and bisexual women who reported being strangled during sex:

“ Most say that their partners never or only sometimes asked before grabbing their necks. For many, there had been moments when they couldn’t breathe or speak, compromising the ability to withdraw consent, if they’d given it. No wonder that, in a separate study by Dr. Herbenick, choking was among the most frequently listed sex acts young women said had scared them, reporting that it sometimes made them worry whether they’d survive.”

Dr Herbenick further explains, “Personally, my hypothesis is that this is one of the reasons young people are delaying or having less sex ... Because it’s uncomfortable and weird and scary. At times some of them literally think someone is assaulting them but they don’t know. Those are the only sexual experiences for some people. And it’s not just once they’ve gotten naked. They’ll say things like, ‘I’ve only tried to make out with someone once because he started choking and hitting me.’”

The research undertaken by Dr Herbenick also highlights that some women who have experienced strangulation have consented to the act. Other research among Generation Z on BDSM and rough sex found that twice as many young women as men said that BDSM and rough sex is something they prefer watching.³²³

³²² New York Times, 2024, The Troubling Trend in Teenage Sex: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/choking-teen-sex-brain-damage.html>

³²³ Mary Sharpe and Darry Mead, 2021, Problematic Pornography Use: Legal and Health Policy Considerations: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40429-021-00390-8>

The Reward Foundation raises the concern that if women are watching this activity in pornography, they can be influenced to copy this behaviour in real life and that this is an example of the impact of the normalisation of pornography use by women.³²⁴

Others, as Dr Herbenick points out, do not want or enjoy strangulation but see it as a normal and expected part of a sexual encounter.³²⁵ This is confirmed by research by the Children’s Commissioner for England (2023) which found that 47% of 16-21 year olds surveyed stated that girls expect sex to involve physical aggression, and 42% of respondents stating that girls enjoy physically aggressive sex acts.³²⁶

A representative survey (2021) by Savanta Comres of British men under the age of 40, found that “more than a third surveyed said they’d choked women during sex. The same proportion said they’d gagged women, and just under a quarter of men admitted to criminal assault - choking, gagging, slapping or spitting on women - without prior discussion.”³²⁷ In this survey, most (57%) of the men who had violently assaulted women in sex said pornography influenced them to do this.³²⁸ 2020 research from We Can’t Consent To This also highlights that of the ten most recent killings of women that defendants claimed to be ‘rough sex’, four involved men who viewed pornography both before and after the killing, that featured violence, strangulation and the killing of women.³²⁹

9.6 There is no safe way to “choke” your partner

Violent sexual acts like strangulation can have devastating physical consequences. Though strangulation in sex is often referred to as ‘breath play’ in an effort to minimise the perception of its dangers, in reality what medical practitioners refer to as non-fatal strangulation can result in a range of health conditions including cardiac arrest, stroke, miscarriage, incontinence, seizures, paralysis, speech disorders, and other forms of long-term brain injury.³³⁰

Dr Helen Bichard, a leading UK-based neuropsychologist and expert on non-fatal strangulation, estimates in a paper published with colleagues, that strangulation during sex is the second most common cause of stroke in women under 42.³³¹ Strangulation stops the blood supply to the brain, which can cause damage within just four seconds of it being cut off. As the Reward Foundation notes, it takes less pressure to cause brain injury than it does to open a can of fizzy drink. It also notes that the psychological outcomes of non-fatal strangulation include depression, PTSD, suicidality, and dissociation.³³²

Yet, pornography has completely normalised strangulation and “choking” during sex. Dr Gail Dines (2018) writes that choking is one of the most frequently found acts across all categories on pornography sites and that anything from a penis to a fist is used to choke women to the point of gagging, and in some cases almost passing out. The victim obviously can’t speak during these acts because she is choking, so it is typically not until the end of the scene that she says, often in a hoarse voice, how much she enjoyed it.³³³ A Google search undertaken by CEASE in February 2024 for ‘choke her porn’ brought up 30,600,000 results in 0.24 seconds.

³²⁴ Ibid

³²⁵ New York Times, 2024, The Troubling Trend in Teenage Sex: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/choking-teen-sex-brain-damage.html>

³²⁶ Children’s Commissioner for England, 2023, ‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’ Young people and pornography: <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf>

³²⁷ We Can’t Consent to This, 2021, ‘I thought it was normal’: <https://wecantconsenttothis.uk/i-thought-it-was-normal-research>

³²⁸ Ibid; We Can’t Consent to This, 2020, What can be consented to? Briefing on the use of “rough sex” defences to violence: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c49b798e749409bfb9b66f2/t/5e4da72920c08f54b94d91e4/1582147383202/WCCTT+briefing+sheet+2020+February.pdf>

³²⁹ We Can’t Consent to This, 2020, Consent Defences and the Criminal Justice System Research Briefing – England and Wales: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c49b798e749409bfb9b66f2/t/5ee12c4d1cdc3e7c573e43a6/1591815261033/WCCTT+Criminal+Justice+System+and+Consent+Defences.pdf>

³³⁰ Helen Bichard, Christopher Byrne, Christopher W. N. Saville and Rudi Coetzer, The neuropsychological outcomes of non-fatal strangulation in domestic and sexual violence: A systematic review: <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/c6zvb>

³³¹ Ibid

³³² The Reward Foundation, ‘Breath Play’ aka Strangulation rising fast: <https://rewardfoundation.org/breath-play-aka-strangulation-rising-fast/>

³³³ The Guardian, 2018, Choking women is all the rage. It’s branded as fun, sexy ‘breath play’: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/13/choking-women-me-too-breath-play>

Research of college men who have participated in sexual choking found that “consuming pornography more frequently leads to more exposure to pornographic depictions of sexual choking, which in turn predicts a higher likelihood of choking sexual partners through the belief that sexual choking is pleasurable, the belief that sexual choking is safe, and the disbelief that sexual choking requires consent from the person being choked.”³³⁴ In other qualitative interviews with young adults who had engaged in “choking” during sex, men commonly described first learning about “choking” from pornography as well as from peers and mainstream media.³³⁵

Research undertaken by Sharman et al (2024) with 18 to 35 year olds in Australia, found that participants had been exposed to information or depictions of “sexual choking” primarily through pornography (61.3%). Movies (40.3%), friends (31.9%), social media (31.3%), and discussions with potential partners (29.2%) made up the other sources that men were exposed to the practice of “sexual choking”.³³⁶

Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr and other social media platforms have all come under recent scrutiny for permitting this type of dangerous content on their platforms.³³⁷ In a study of popular memes depicting or describing ‘sexual choking’ on social media sites, Herbenick and colleagues (2022) found that:

“ Many of the memes we analysed depicted gendered power imbalances between those doing the choking (typically men) and those being choked (typically women). Even when a woman was shown as asking a man to choke her (e.g. “choke me daddy”), he would sometimes seek to belittle, threaten, overpower, control, or harm her. Sometimes this was framed as him seeking revenge, expressing anger, or killing her.”³³⁸

Herbenick et al. (2022) go on to say that even though many memes recognised “choking” as potentially fatal or dangerous, it was rare for memes to challenge the mainstreaming of “choking” or feature fact-based information related to harm reduction. Social media is therefore playing a pivotal role in the normalisation of “choking” during sex. Not only is this extremely dangerous, especially given the number of children who are using social media, but it is a clear example of how violent pornography has seeped into mainstream media and normalised potentially fatal acts during sex.

334 PJ Wright, D. Herbenick, RS. Tokunaga, 2023, Pornography Consumption and Sexual Choking: An Evaluation of Theoretical Mechanisms: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34696638/>

335 D. Herbenick, L. Guerra-Reyes, C. Patterson, J. Wilson, YR Rosenstock Gonzalez, E. Voorheis, M. Whitcomb, R. Kump, E. Theis, EF Rothman, KM Nelson, MK Maas, 2022, #ChokeMeDaddy: A Content Analysis of Memes Related to Choking/Strangulation During Sex: DOI: [10.1007/s10508-022-02502-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02502-5)

336 L.S. Sharman, R. Fitzgerald, and H. Douglas, 2024, Prevalence of Sexual Strangulation/Choking Among Australian 18–35 Year-Olds: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-024-02937-y>

337 The Times, 2020, Social media make girls think choking during sex is ‘normal’: <https://www.thetimes.com/business-money/technology/article/social-media-make-girls-think-choking-during-sex-is-normal-ojlrqf2bo> and The New York Times, 2024: The Troubling Trend in Teenage Sex: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/choking-teen-sex-brain-damage.html>

338 D. Herbenick, L. Guerra-Reyes, C. Patterson, et al., 2023, #ChokeMeDaddy: A Content Analysis of Memes Related to Choking/Strangulation During Sex: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02502-5>

9.7 Heterosexual anal sex can lead to serious problems

Another dangerous sex act that has been normalised by pornography is anal sex within heterosexual relationships and sexual encounters. According to the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyle (2017), participation in heterosexual anal intercourse among 16 to 24 year olds in the UK, rose from 12.5% to 28.5% over the past few decades.³³⁹ Similar trends are seen in the US, where 30-44% of heterosexual men and women report experience of anal sex.³⁴⁰

Despite its rise in popularity, an editorial³⁴¹ by Tabitha Gana and Lesley Hunt in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) (2022) summarises the risks and physical implications of anal sex within heterosexual sex:

- Up to 25% of women with experience of anal sex report they have been pressured into it at least once.
- Increased rates of faecal incontinence and anal sphincter injury have been reported in women who have anal intercourse.
- Women are at a higher risk of incontinence than men because of their different anatomy and the effects of hormones, pregnancy, and childbirth on the pelvic floor.
- Women have less robust anal sphincters and lower anal canal pressures than men and damage caused by anal penetration is therefore more consequential.
- The pain and bleeding women report after anal sex is indicative of trauma, and risks may be increased if anal sex is coerced.

9.8 Pornography is addictive by design

Online pornography affects the brain in very specific ways as a consequence of its malleability, or 'plasticity'. The term 'neuroplasticity' refers to the capacity of nerve cells, which are the building blocks of the brain and nervous system, to change or adjust. It is an umbrella term referring to the brain's ability to reorganise, or grow neural networks, in response to experience. This can involve functional changes due to brain damage or structural changes due to learning.³⁴²

This is vitally important as it means the human brain can change and shape itself as it responds to experiences and outside forces. Our brains create neural pathways and the more we engage in an activity, the stronger the pathways associated with that activity become. Hence the phrase, 'practice makes perfect'.

9.8.1 The reward system

The two important systems to understand are the reward system or limbic system, and the pre-frontal cortex. The latter is responsible for problem-solving and complex thinking, while the reward system is focused on identifying what brings us pleasure. The reward centre releases a pleasure chemical called dopamine into our brains in response to behaviours that we perceive as positive, like eating tasty food, exercising and, of course, sex. The brain then becomes hardwired to seek activities that trigger the release of dopamine.³⁴³

339 R. Lewis, C. Tanton, CH Mercer, et al. 2017, Heterosexual practices among young people in Britain: evidence from three national surveys of sexual attitudes and lifestyles: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29169520/>

340 KL Hess, E. DiNenno, C. Sionean, W. Ivy, GN Paz-Bailey, 2016, Prevalence and correlates of heterosexual anal intercourse among men and women: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-016-1295-z>

341 Tabitha Gana and Lesley Hunt, 2022, Young women and anal sex: <https://www.bmj.com/content/378/bmj.01975>

342 Kendra Cherry, 2024, How Neuroplasticity Works: Your experiences can change how you brain functions: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-brain-plasticity-2794886>; N. Volkow and M. Morales, 2015, The Brain On Drugs: From Reward To Addiction: 10.1016/j.cell.2015.07.046; Norman Doidge, 2008, The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science

343 B. Dresp-Langley, 2023, From Reward to Anhedonia-Dopamine Function in the Global Mental Health Context: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10525914/>

During sex, as people orgasm, the reward centre releases a flood of dopamine and other feel-good chemicals.³⁴⁴ Watching pornography gives people the same kind of chemical ‘hit’ as having sex, but without the reality of the sexual encounter. Pornography triggers an unnaturally high and long-lasting release of dopamine in the brain compared with natural, real-life sexual experiences. Dopamine then stimulates the brain to produce DeltaFosB. DeltaFosB is a chemical that creates neural “pathways” — which help neurons communicate more quickly and efficiently.³⁴⁵

These neural pathways are strengthened or lost through use or neglect. Like other addictive substances, pornography is very effective at forming new, long-lasting neural pathways that are able to overpower others.³⁴⁶ As Gary Wilson (2017), explains, “deep in a primitive part of the brain, surfing [pornographic] tube sites registers as really valuable because of all the sexual novelty. The extra excitement strengthens brain circuits that urge you to seek porn again and again.”³⁴⁷ A build-up of too much DeltaFosB can therefore become a ‘molecular switch for addiction’.³⁴⁸

9.8.2 Pornography as a ‘supernormal stimulus’

Dopamine is also released in response to other emotions and stimuli, including those often found in online pornography such as shock, surprise, violation of expectations, anxiety and seeking/searching.³⁴⁹

Gary Wilson (2017) notes that:

“ Many of these same emotional states (anxiety, shame, shock, surprise) not only elevate dopamine, but also boost stress hormones and neurotransmitters (norepinephrine, epinephrine, cortisol). These stress neurochemicals increase excitement, amplifying dopamine’s already powerful effects. Over time a porn user’s brain can mistake feelings of anxiety or riskiness for feelings of sexual arousal. This may explain why some porn users escalate into ever more extreme porn. They need that extra neurochemical jolt to orgasm.”

This is why online pornography is referred to as supernormal stimulus. Supernormal stimuli are exaggerated versions of everyday stimuli that emphasise qualities we find especially compelling such as sexual novelty. Internet pornography is awash with supernormal stimuli, from the way it is designed to the constant sexual novelty it offers up. The anticipation of reward and novelty amplify one another to increase excitement and rewire the reward circuitry of the brain.

344 K. Berridge and T. Robinson, 2016, Wanting, And The Incentive-Sensitization Theory Of Addiction: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5171207/> K Berridge & L Kringelbach, 2015, Pleasure Systems In The Brain: DOI: 10.1016/j.neuron.2015.02.018; P Paul, 2005, Pornified: How Pornography Is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, And Our Families; SE Hyman, 2005, Addiction: a disease of learning and memory: doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.162.8.1414

345 S. Negash, N. Van Ness Sheppard, N Lambertand and F. Fincham, 2016, Trading Later Rewards For Current Pleasure: Pornography Consumption And Delay Discounting: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00224499.2015.1025123> and E. Nestler, 2008, Transcriptional Mechanisms Of Addiction: Role Of DeltaFosB: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2008.0067>

346 Ibid

347 Gary Wilson, 2017, Your Brain on Porn, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

348 T. Love, C. Laier, M. Brand, L. Hatch, and R. Hajela, 2015, Neuroscience Of Internet Pornography Addiction: A Review And Update, Behavioral Sciences: Doi: 10.3390/Bs5030388; E. Nestler, 2008, Transcriptional Mechanisms Of Addiction: Role Of DeltaFosB: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2008.0067>; Norman Doidge, 2008, The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science

349 Gary Wilson, 2017, Your Brain on Porn, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

As Normal Doidge, psychiatrist and author of the *Brain that Changes Itself*, explains, the content of what habitual pornography users find exciting changes as pornography sites introduce themes and scripts that alter their brains without their knowing. Doidge, who treated men who were habitual users of pornography and who had lost interest in their ‘real life’ partners concluded that pornography has an addictive power. People (often men) develop a tolerance to pornographic content and seek out progressively higher levels of stimulation for satisfaction.

Dozens of neuroscientific studies support the notion that the way online pornography is designed and used matches the addiction framework and shares similar basic mechanisms with substance addiction.³⁵⁰ Reviewing one study conducted by researchers at the University of Cambridge, the authors describe “changes to brain structure and function in compulsive pornography users. Subjects’ brains responded to images of pornography in the same way as cocaine addicts’ brains do to images of cocaine.”³⁵¹ Pornography’s addictive potential is also amplified by pornography sites’ design and layout.³⁵²

In fact, research has found that of all internet-based activities, searching for pornography has the highest risk of compulsive use.³⁵³ And this fact seems to be playing out in people’s lived experience. The number of men seeking help for pornography addiction has soared in recent years.³⁵⁴ Like any compulsive habit, watching a lot of pornography is associated with poor physical, mental and emotional health. Instead of making people feel good, pornography addiction leaves them feeling empty, isolated and depressed. It also leads to reduced self-esteem, poor body image, anxiety in relationships, poor working memory and concentration, and impulsivity.³⁵⁵ This is true for both adults and children.

9.8.3 Erectile dysfunction

The effect of pornography on consumers is not limited to mental and psychological health, but physical health as well. One such issue that has garnered attention since the rapid increase of easily accessible online pornography is Porn-Induced Erectile Dysfunction or PIED.

PIED is the name for a form of erectile dysfunction that results from excessive internet pornography consumption. Gary Wilson, stated in 2017 that: “Between 1948 and 2002, historical rates of ED [erectile dysfunction] for men under 40 were consistently 2% - 3% and did not begin to rise steeply until after age 40. However, since 2010, six studies have found ED rates of 14% - 33% in young men, a 1000% increase in the last fifteen years.”

Multiple studies have since found that younger and younger men are experiencing erectile dysfunction and at much higher rates than previous years. This is deeply concerning and highlights the physical impacts on men who consume pornography. While of course, not every man who consumes pornography will develop PIED, a 2015 study found that, “71% of men who masturbated to porn more than seven hours a week reported sexual functioning problems, with 33% reporting delayed ejaculation.”³⁵⁶

Mary Sharpe and Darryl Mead of The Reward Foundation state that “A proportion of men with PPU [problematic pornography use] can no longer become aroused, even with pornography.

350 Ibid and Your Brain On Porn: Studies Find Escalation and Habituation in Porn Users (Tolerance): <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/relevant-research-and-articles-about-the-studies/porn-use-sex-addiction-studies/studies-find-escalation-and-habituation-in-porn-users-tolerance/>

351 Mary Sharpe and Darryl Mead, 2021, Problematic Pornography Use: Legal and Health Policy Considerations: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40429-021-00390-8>

352 Gary Wilson, 2017, Your Brain on Porn, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

353 G. Meerkerk, R. Eijnden, and H.F.L. Garresten, 2006, Predicting Compulsive Internet Use: It’s All about Sex!: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/190>

354 LadBible, 2019, Number Of People Seeking Treatment For Porn Addiction Skyrockets: <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/miscellaneous-resources/interesting-articles/number-of-people-seeking-treatment-for-porn-addiction-skyrockets-ladbible/>, The Sun, 2024, ESCAPE REALITY Telltale signs of porn addiction revealed by experts after huge surge in x-rated addicts: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/health/27193843/porn-addiction-surge-warning-signs/>

355 Your Brain on Porn, Studies linking porn use to poorer mental-emotional health & poorer cognitive outcomes: <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/relevant-research-and-articles-about-the-studies/porn-use-sex-addiction-studies/studies-linking-porn-use-to-poorer-mental-emotional-health-poorer-cognitive-outcomes/>

356 Gary Wilson, 2017, Your Brain on Porn, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

On the pornography recovery websites, some men have reported that having developed erectile dysfunction, they needed the potent stimulus of extreme or perhaps illegal pornography such as CSAM in order to become aroused at all.”

The need for more extreme content to maintain arousal has devastating consequences for women and children, and indeed the men themselves. It also affects relationships and sexual encounters, as men find it difficult to become and stay aroused by sexual partners, often needing to use pornography during sex or avoiding sex in real life altogether.³⁵⁷

Not all pornography consumers develop full blown addictions, however. Much depends on other factors such as an individual’s personal history and circumstances. Nonetheless, the risk is always present. In light of this evidence, it is unsurprising, that Culture Reframed has labelled the impacts of online pornography “the public health crisis of the digital age.”³⁵⁸

Thankfully, the impact of consuming pornography can be reversed because of the brain’s ability to change and adapt. There are multiple dedicated support services and online communities where people testify to the benefits of giving up online pornography.³⁵⁹

“ When I was [using internet porn] I had brain fog or a constant hung-over-like feeling, which made it hard for me to concentrate, talk to people or just do my everyday tasks. After 7–10 days without porn this feeling went away. My mind became very clear, thoughts easily controllable, and I became much more relaxed in general.”

“ I’m finding I experience depression and feelings of worthlessness far less often. I’m able to get up more easily in the morning and find the motivation to do the bloody dishes more often before going to bed.”³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ Ibid; Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality and V. Voon, TB Mole, P. Banca, L. Porter, L. Morris, S. Mitchell, TR Lapa, J. Karr, NA Harrison, MN Potenza, and M. Irvine, 2014, Neural correlates of sexual cue reactivity in individuals with and without compulsive sexual behaviours: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0102419>

³⁵⁸ Gail Dines: <https://www.gaildines.com/the-porn-crisis/>

³⁵⁹ Naked Truth: <https://nakedtruthproject.com/>; NoFap: <https://nofap.com/>; The Reward Foundation: <https://rewardfoundation.org/>

³⁶⁰ Gary Wilson, 2017, Your Brain on Porn, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

PART 10

**THE HARMS TO
CHILDREN: THE
SEXUALISATION
OF CHILDHOOD**



10. The harms to children: The sexualisation of childhood

The impact of the normalisation of sexual violence due to mainstream pornography is not limited to adults. Pornography is used by child sex offenders to groom children and sexualise a relationship,³⁶¹ but millions of children can now access it directly themselves online. The UK government estimated that online pornography was accessed by 1.4 million UK children on their desktop each month before the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁶² This number is likely to be much higher now, not just because of the increase in online activity due to the pandemic but because 96% of 12-15 year olds used a smartphone to go online in 2023 compared to 52% in 2013.³⁶³

As in other countries, children in the UK are accessing pornography on social media sites. X (previously Twitter) is where children are most likely to access pornography, then dedicated pornography sites, with Instagram and Snapchat ranking closely after that.³⁶⁴ This is consistent with a survey undertaken in 2021 of more than 1,000 teenagers aged 16 and 17, conducted by City University of London, which showed that almost two thirds of respondents had seen explicit material on messaging and social networking apps. The study also found 51% of respondents had found pornography on search engines.³⁶⁵

The pornography that children are watching is not different to the pornography described above in this report. Children as young as seven are accessing hardcore, violent, abusive, degrading and exploitative pornography online.³⁶⁶ Children's unfettered access to this content has devastating consequences, and while the Online Safety Act 2023 does mandate that pornography sites and social media sites that host pornographic content must implement age verification, this is not a silver bullet. As will be discussed in the section on regulation, the plans for implementation of this law are weak and not fit for purpose.

Furthermore, generations of children have already accessed violent pornography online, as evidenced by the UK government's estimations and this is having real-life consequences for them.

A wide range of studies show that children's viewing of pornography can profoundly impact their psychological, social, emotional, neurological and sexual wellbeing and impede their ability to form healthy intimate relationships.³⁶⁷ Adolescent pornography consumption is associated with more permissive sexual attitudes, more sexual intercourse and more casual sex, along with stronger gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs, the tendency to support 'rape myths' and the perception of women as sex objects (among both boys and girls).³⁶⁸

361 Barnardo's, 2019, Why grooming victims think they love their abuser: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/why-grooming-victims-think-they-love-abuser>

362 UK Government, Final Impact Assessment Age Verification, 2016: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a801bdaed915d74e622c843/2016-06-06_Age_verification_impact_assessment__1_.pdf

363 Ofcom, 2023, Children's Media Use and Attitudes: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens>

364 Children's Commissioner for England, 2023, 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' Young people and pornography: <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf>

365 The Telegraph, 2021, Majority of teenagers 'now watching pornography on social media': <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/05/05/majority-teenagers-now-watching-pornography-social-media/>

366 BBFC, 2019, Children see pornography as young as seven, new report finds: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/children-see-pornography-as-young-as-seven-new-report-finds>

367 A.Baxter, 2014, How Pornography Harms Children: The Advocate's Role: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-33/may-2014/how-pornography-harms-children--the-advocate-s-role/ and Dr Elly Hanson, 2020, What is the impact of pornography on young people? Research briefing for educators: https://sexualhealth.chnhs.uk/fileadmin/sexualHealth/contentUploads/Documents/What_is_the_impact_of_pornography_on_young_people_-_A_research_briefing_for_educators.pdf

368 Children's Commissioner for England and Middlesex University, 2017, "Basically...Porn is Everywhere": https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2017/07/Basically_porn_is_everywhere.pdf

A report³⁶⁹ by the Children’s Commissioner for England in 2023, found that:

- 79% of 16-21 year olds surveyed had encountered violent pornography before the age of 18.
- 50% of those who had seen pornography had seen it by age 13.
- 47% of respondents stated that girls expect sex to involve physical aggression.
- A further 42% of respondents stated that girls enjoy physically aggressive sex acts.
- Among respondents, 39% stated that boys expect sex to involve aggression.

The young people surveyed for this report voiced concerns about the implications that violent pornography could have on their understanding of the difference between sexual pleasure and harm. The report also found that frequent pornography users are more likely to engage in physically aggressive sex acts.³⁷⁰

On publication of the report, the Children’s Commissioner for England stated that she truly believes “that we will look back in 20 years and be shocked by the content to which children were exposed.”³⁷¹

10.1 Pornography is not sex education

Big Talk Education, an independent organisation that specialises in sex and relationship education (SRE), report that, for many boys they encounter, pornography is the main source of information about sex and sexual behaviour: “Questions like, “Is it ok for me to cum over my girlfriend’s face?” are not unusual, as is the apparent normalisation of anal sex.”³⁷² A survey by the NSPCC and Children’s Commissioner for England in 2017, found that 44% of boys aged between 11 and 16 who regularly viewed pornography reported that it gave them ideas about the type of sex they wanted to try.³⁷³

A study undertaken by the BBFC in 2020, found that “some young people felt pornography had actually affected their expectations of, and behaviour during, sex, particularly in the copying of “rough” or “forceful” sex seen in pornography.” One girl spoke about how her boyfriend who she began dating at 14, “had been pulling her hair and ‘yanking’ her head back during sex. She said that when discussing it with her, he’d told her, ‘I thought you might like it. The girls in porn like it.’”³⁷⁴ The BBFC also reported that “other behaviours that some young people reported seeing in pornography and trying in real life included: replicating sex positions and copying the different parts of a woman’s body on which they had seen male porn stars ejaculating, such as the face, breasts or mouth.”³⁷⁵

Similarly to adults, young people are partaking in dangerous sex acts such as “choking” or strangulation and anal sex. A qualitative study of 130 males and females aged 16–18 from diverse social backgrounds in three areas of the UK reported on the normalisation of coercive, unsafe and painful anal heterosex. The authors reported that interviewees frequently cited pornography as the main explanation for anal sex but that other key elements included competition between men and the normalisation of coercion and ‘accidental’ penetration.³⁷⁶

369 Children’s Commissioner for England, 2023, ‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’ Young people and pornography: <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf>

370 Ibid

371 Ibid

372 Big Talk Education, 2016, Written Evidence to the Women’s and Equality and Committee: <https://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/women-and-equalities-committee/sexual-harassment-and-sexual-violence-in-schools/written/33503.html>

373 NSPCC, 2017, “...I wasn’t sure it was normal to watch it...”: https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/_I_wasn_t_sure_it_was_normal_to_watch_it_/3382393?file=8443241 and https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/_I_wasn_t_sure_it_was_normal_to_watch_it_/3382393?file=8652163

374 BBFC and Revealing Reality, 2020, Young people, Pornography & Age-verification: <https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BBFC-Young-people-and-pornography-Final-report-2401.pdf>

375 Ibid

376 C. Marston and R. Lewis, 2014, Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/4/8/e004996.full.pdf>

In a BBC article³⁷⁷ in June 2024, Dr Tamasine Preece, the curriculum lead for health and wellbeing at Bryntirion Comprehensive School in Bridgend, said that, “some children now felt it [strangulation] was a normal part of sex and asked if ‘a soft squeeze on the neck is OK.’” Dr Preece went to say that in her interactions with students there had been questions “creeping in, such as ‘how can I choke someone safely?’” She added, “I’ve certainly been told by some children that they think that girls really want to be choked - with one saying girls are mad for it.”

In that same article, Dr Kate Howells, an associate specialist in sexual health, states that she believes more people think strangulation is expected in sex, with many young women telling her they had experienced it. She believes the quick and easy access to pornography for anyone with a phone is a key driver. She says:

“ People are watching it from a very young age and, for a lot of young people, it is their first sexual experience and therefore they’re almost looking to porn to learn about sex and what to do to be good at sex. If young people are seeing that kind of messaging from pornography rather than loving or caring, respectful messages then they’ll think that’s what they need to do - whether they feel comfortable with it or not.”

Other negative impacts of pornography for both boys and girls include the unrealistic expectations that pornography sets around body image.³⁷⁸ Pornography promotes harmful gender stereotypes and self-objectification. It creates unhealthy pressures for both boys and girls to look like ‘porn stars’ i.e. women with big breasts and men with large penises. Both boys and girls have spoken about the harmful expectations pornography places on them; expectations that cannot be met.

10.2 Pornography’s impact on child-on-child sexual abuse

Children’s consumption of online pornography has also been associated with the dramatic increase in child-on-child sexual abuse. Children are now committing half of all reported child sexual abuse offences in the UK. This has increased from a third in 2022.³⁷⁹

The National Policing Lead for Child Abuse Protection and Investigation in the UK stated that the rise of child-on-child sexual abuse is fuelled by access to violent pornography.³⁸⁰ This is consistent with research carried out by The Children’s Commissioner for England (2023) into case files of child-on-child sexual abuse which found that 50% of cases contained at least one term referring to an act of sexual violence commonly portrayed in pornography.³⁸¹

377 BBC News, 2024, Boys asking teachers how to choke girls during sex: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnkkqyek17zo>

378 DN Stewart and DM Szymanski, 2012, Young Adult Women’s Reports of Their Male Romantic Partner’s Pornography Use as a Correlate of Their Self-Esteem, Relationship Quality, and Sexual Satisfaction: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0164-0> and NSPCC, 2017, “...I wasn’t sure it was normal to watch it...”: https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/_I_wasn_t_sure_it_was_normal_to_watch_it_/3382393?file=8443241 and https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/_I_wasn_t_sure_it_was_normal_to_watch_it_/3382393?file=8652163

379 NSPCC Learning, 2018, “Is this sexual abuse?”: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2018/is-this-sexual-abuse/>

380 Sky News, 2023, Children committing half of reported child sexual abuse offences, new figures reveal: <https://news.sky.com/story/half-of-recorded-child-sexual-abuse-offences-committed-by-other-children-new-figures-reveal-13044814>

381 Children’s Commissioner for England, 2023, Evidence on pornography’s influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children: <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/05/Evidence-on-pornography-s-influence-on-harmful-sexual-behaviour-among-children.pdf>

According to the Children’s Commissioner, “additional review of some of these cases found children [themselves] suggesting direct links between pornography exposure and the harmful sexual behaviour exhibited.”³⁸²

Louise Barraclough, Lead Nurse and Safeguarding Lead at Devon and Cornwall Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), undertook deep dive research into 87 cases of children presenting with harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) to the SARC.³⁸³ She found that 23 of the harmers were 12 years old and under, 63 were 13 years old and over, and one age was unknown. In the younger age group, 72% of the HSB involved sibling abuse and age differences were more pronounced. In the older age group, 80% of the cases involved a partner, friend or peer and the age difference was insignificant. Of the entire 87 deep dive accounts, “acts commonly seen in pornography (slapping, NFS [non-fatal strangulation]/choking, gagging, hair pulling, name calling, where the victim uses the word rough, unwanted anal penetration and penetration of both the vagina and anus with objects) were identified.”

Investigations of HSB from the older age group include examples such as, “... asked her if she would ‘do anal’ and she said ‘no’, he told her she needed to just relax and then forced her to have anal sex. She said she was crying all the time and he knew she was crying.” As well as, “... used one of his hands to force her mouth open. He put his penis into her mouth and violently pushed her head until he ejaculated inside her mouth. She was crying all the time.” These examples are straight from the pornography scripts outlined in previous chapters of this report.

As Louise Barraclough explains, “the accounts of the older age group are different in that they have much more in common with the forms of pressure and coercion documented in adult sexual violence and DA [domestic abuse]: there are clear themes of entitlement, coercive control, physical violence and gaslighting. These are themes that are regularly promoted and displayed in online pornography.” As Michael Flood, researcher and professor explains, “Porn shuts down a boy’s natural feeling, as it places little value on intimacy, empathy or respect of partners in pornography material.”³⁸⁴

10.3 Desensitisation paves the way to more extreme content

Heavy pornography use can lead consumers to become dependent on repeated overloads of dopamine, without which they struggle to feel normal and no longer able to take pleasure in other things. Spending increasing time alone watching pornography, men testify to the devastating impact pornography addiction has on their family, social and work life.³⁸⁵

Tolerance is part of any addiction or problematic behaviour and helps to explain why some users of pornography become gradually desensitised to tamer ‘vanilla’ sex acts and require more novel, extreme and violent content to achieve the same level of arousal, as highlighted above.³⁸⁶

Although most users start out watching pornography that is aligned to their ethics and sexual tastes, over time they can become habituated to watching material they would have once found unethical or inappropriate. This is known as ‘blunting’; it’s a strong effect that is not limited to men, and it tends to happen without the user even realising.³⁸⁷

³⁸² Ibid

³⁸³ This research is currently awaiting publication. Permission has been granted by the author to reference it here

³⁸⁴ Dr Michael Flood, 2009, The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/car.1092>

³⁸⁵ Gary Wilson, 2017, Your Brain on Porn, Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction

³⁸⁶ Brian Y. Park, Gary Wilson, Jonathan Berger, Matthew Christman, Bryn Reina, Frank Bishop, Warren P. Klam, and Andrew P. Doan, 2016, Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5039517/>

³⁸⁷ Ibid and P. Paul, 2010, From Pornography To Porno To Porn: How Porn Became The Norm

“ The combination of hyper-realistic imagery, moving pictures, and rapid-fire bombardment of images appears to mean also that chronic consumers both become visually desensitized, and find themselves viewing depictions they themselves would once have regarded as taboo or off-limits.”³⁸⁸

This explains why the growth of online pornography has corresponded with content becoming so much more hardcore and extreme: it has done so to meet the demand of consumers who are desensitised to softer pornography. Though as already mentioned, this is an addictive process that the pornography industry has capitalised on and uses to its advantage by creating that very demand: pushing users to more and more extreme content via algorithms, data analytics and advertising, ‘mouse trapping’ users into vicious cycles.

Heavy consumers often feel ashamed of the kind of pornography they watch, as Dr Gail Dines has observed: “Some of the worst stories I hear are from men who have become so desensitized that they have started using harder porn and end up masturbating to images that had previously disgusted them. Many of these men are deeply ashamed and frightened as they know where all this will end. Phil told me, “Sometimes I can’t believe the porn I like. I feel like a freak.”³⁸⁹

10.4 Children should not be objects of sexual desire

As we have seen, sexual tastes and interests are not fixed and static, but malleable. Our brains are hard-wired for novelty, and research has demonstrated that high pornography consumption can result in an escalation of users’ tastes and preferences, so that they require more extreme or novel material to maintain arousal. Users both seek out and are fed more and more extreme content. As demonstrated, this content includes material that is increasingly violent and degrading towards women and girls. It also includes content that depicts sexual activity with children. This content is extremely harmful, sexualising children and driving the demand for ‘real’ child sexual abuse material.

Known as ‘barely legal’ or ‘teen porn’ or ‘incest porn’, this content, which is prolific online, contains petite young looking ‘performers’ made to look underage through props such as stuffed toys, lollipops and school uniforms. It also includes content which depicts sexual activity between family members, both nuclear and step-families.³⁹⁰ Less than half the British public (48%) think ‘teen porn’ can be found easily online for free, and just over a third (35%) believe that is true of incest-themed porn.

These are significant underestimates. In 2019, 39 billion searches were made on Pornhub, with one of the most frequent search terms being ‘teen’.³⁹¹ In 2021, ‘step mom’ was the seventh most searched-for term on Pornhub worldwide.³⁹²

³⁸⁸ Mary Eberstadt and Mary Anne Layden, 2010, The Social Costs of Pornography: <https://analyseeconomique.wordpress.com/2013/06/07/the-social-costs-of-pornography/> and https://www.academia.edu/31540075/EBERSTADT_The_social_costs_of_pornography_pdf

³⁸⁹ Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

³⁹⁰ CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

³⁹¹ The Police Foundation, 2022, Turning the Tide Against Online Child Sexual Abuse: <https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/publication/turning-the-tide-against-online-child-sexual-abuse/>

³⁹² Pornhub, 2021, The Year in Review: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/yir-2021>

Although commercial pornography sites such as Pornhub have banned certain search tags and descriptors that overtly suggest underage sexual activity, such as ‘children’, ‘underage’ and ‘child young’, CEASE has found that content which clearly suggests underage sexual activity remains prevalent. Pornhub search tags including ‘babysitter’, ‘classroom teacher’, ‘young’, ‘virgin’, ‘little’, ‘tiny’, ‘exxxtrasmall’ and ‘barely legal’ are still permitted.³⁹³ Examples of titles of hosted videos on the site include ‘F***ing my cute stepdaughter while she studies for a test’, ‘Cute schoolgirl gets f***ed by her English teacher’, and ‘Daddy F**** Me Hard Before School’.³⁹⁴ Often these videos take place in a room staged to look like a child’s bedroom and the narration makes it very clear that the video is depicting sex with a child.

Depictions of sexual activity with the title ‘teen’ are often particularly violent. According to the study by Dr Vera-Gray et al. (2021) which analysed the content of the three most accessed pornographic websites in the UK (Pornhub, XHamster and XVideos), the three most common words in videos which contained coercion and exploitation were ‘schoolgirl’, ‘girl’ and ‘teen’.³⁹⁵ Although ‘teen’ could legitimately refer to those over 18, much of the content found in the study did suggest sexual activity with underage girls. Titles included terms such as ‘pigtails’, ‘homework’, and ‘braces’.³⁹⁶

In May 2024, Dr Elly Hanson, Clinical Psychologist and researcher, presented to the International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI) Conference (formally PIER). In her talk ‘Into view: How does online porn contribute to pathways to child sexual abuse?’ she detailed how, in May 2024, of the first 27 videos on Pornhub’s homepage, over one third were incest-themed. The titles of the videos included: ‘Seduced my stepbro to creampie my teen pussy’, (video shows choking), ‘Cumming inside British step daughter - family therapy’, ‘Little step brother penis examination’, ‘Step-daughter - I always wanted to fuck my stepdad. Now I’ve got a chance’ (shows a young female in a school uniform), ‘Petite young nerdy girl with glasses gets fucked by old cock’ (shows girl with pigtails who looks 14 naked on old man’s lap).

The videos also showed violence against women, degradation and humiliation as well as racism.³⁹⁷

Again, this material is not an accident, no one understands how pornography affects its users more than the pornography industry itself. As Dr Gail Dines explains, from the pornographer’s point of view, “the physical and emotional immaturity of teens makes space for a whole range of scenarios that heighten and intensify the violence, since they can easily be manipulated into doing just about anything, no matter how painful or cruel.”³⁹⁸

This can feed the consumers’ need for more and more extreme content. One famous pornographer referred to his films as ‘instructional videos’ on how to get a young girl to do whatever you want: “He told the Sick & Wrong Podcast, ‘We’d use tiny little girls, maybe 80 or 90 pounds. If you see a girl who looks like she’s 14 years old and she’s takin’ it up the ass and havin’ a good time, that’s great!’. He continued: ‘In real life, you’re not gonna meet a 12-year-old girl on the street and be f*ckin’ her in a filthy bathroom at the public park. But it can happen with the magic of cinema!’”³⁹⁹

While this is particularly disturbing, it is far from the exception in the pornography industry. As highlighted earlier, the more extreme the content, the more views, the more money the industry makes. There are no lines that will not be crossed, including the sexualisation of children. Alongside the images and videos of content such as ‘teen porn’ and ‘barely legal porn’, are accompanying narratives which can range from young girls being innocent ‘virgins’ who need to be taught and groomed by older men to learn about sex, to the image of a teen who appears to be ‘sexually innocent’ but really wants to have sex with men, often sex that is violent and rough.

393 CEASE, 2021, Expose Big Porn: https://cease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210607_CEASE_Expose_Big_Porn_Report.pdf

394 Ibid

395 Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 2021, Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azabo35>

396 Ibid

397 Dr Elly Hanson, 2024, Into view: How does online porn contribute to pathways to child sexual abuse?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlPoUuro5Yw>

398 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

399 Exodus Cry, 2023, Exposing Max Hardcore, the Father of Violent Abuse Porn: <https://exoduscry.com/articles/max-hardcore/>

The script in many incest-themed scenarios is that of a ‘teen’ or ‘child seducing their father, uncle, step-uncle, brother etc. The underlying message being that children want to have sex with adults.’⁴⁰⁰

10.5 If it is illegal offline it should be illegal online

Alarming, this material is not illegal or prohibited online in the UK. The pornography industry has evolved without any real regulatory oversight and there is currently a loophole in UK legislation which means that this type of material would be illegal or prohibited offline but the same does not apply online. Since 1984, legislation has existed to specifically prohibit offline content that the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) would find unsuitable for classification, including in the R18 category, on videos, DVDs and Blu-Ray. This includes pornographic content which depicts illegal activity such as rape or incest, and any material that is potentially harmful, for example because it depicts and/or promotes child sexual abuse, trafficking, or violent sexual acts.⁴⁰¹

There is no equivalent standard to the BBFC’s regulation for online pornographic content.

10.6 Violent pornography can create a pathway to committing child sexual offences

This is particularly concerning, as the impact of consuming pornography that depicts sex with children, sexualising them and thus promoting children as sexual objects, is deeply harmful. As Dr Gail Dines says, through this type of pornography, “the user is bombarded, through images and words, with an internally consistent ideology that legitimises, condones and celebrates a sexual desire for children.”⁴⁰²

While more empirical studies are needed on this particular type of pornography and how it affects the consumer, it is clear that as increasingly extreme pornography becomes available on mainstream sites – including pornography which depicts sexual activity with ‘child-like’ performers – the threshold of what is ‘acceptable’ is lowered, legitimising looking at more and more extreme and abusive content. A user may spiral, seeking more and more extreme pornography to fulfil them meaning that the next click could be illegal child sexual abuse material.⁴⁰³

The evidence we do have however, shows that the excessive consumption of content which sexualises children can result in pornography consumers viewing illegal child sexual abuse material. As two sociologists who have analysed the empirical literature available on this issue, state, this type of pornography can act like a bridge between adult pornography and child pornography.⁴⁰⁴

In the UK, Former Chief Constable, Simon Bailey, told the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse that the pornography industry is “creating a group of men who will look at pornography and the pornography gets harder and harder and harder, to the point where they are simply getting no sexual stimulation from it at all, so the next click is child abuse imagery. This is a real problem.”⁴⁰⁵

400 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

401 BBFC Classification Guidelines: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-classification/classification-guidelines>

402 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

403 Irish Examiner, 2007, Adult images can act as a gateway to child abuse: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20036653.html>

404 Diana E. H. Russell and Natalie J. Purcell, 2005, Exposure to pornography as a cause of child sexual victimization: https://www.dianarussell.com/exposure_to_porn_cause_child_sexual_victimization.html

405 The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, 2022: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/final-report>

In interviews in the US with seven men who had been convicted of possessing child sexual abuse materials, all seven stated that they preferred “sex with an adult woman but had become bored with regular pornography. Five of them had looked at PCP (pseudo child pornography)⁴⁰⁶ sites first and then moved into actual child porn.”⁴⁰⁷

In a study of 20 men in the UK who had viewed IIOC (indecent images of children) online and been investigated by the police, participants identified that “frequent access to AP (adult pornography) contributed to a desensitisation to the type and amount of sexual material needed to achieve similar levels of arousal.” Of the twenty participants,

“ Eight participants noted becoming ‘bored’ of general AP and pushing boundaries to access more extreme content e.g.: “I got bored with it... [so I started] looking for a little bit for variety I guess” and “[The content of the AP I was looking at became] more extreme probably.” Eighteen participants stated they accessed AP (adult pornography) prior to IIOC (indecent images of children).”

One of the conclusions of the study was that adult pornography can act as a ‘gateway’ to initially viewing indecent images of children, and ‘trigger’ to continued viewing.⁴⁰⁸

This is consistent with the experience of others who work with men who have been convicted of possession of child sexual abuse materials. As one psychotherapist puts it, “after looking at adult porn for a long time, they (the men) get bored. They want something different. They start looking at children. Then, they can’t get enough of it.”⁴⁰⁹

Another specialist practitioner working in support services for offenders said: “The majority [of offenders], not all, get there from adult pornography use ... otherwise they might not have gone there. [The internet] enables this bad behaviour to happen, it almost provokes this behaviour, not only facilitates it, there’s a dynamism ... there’s all kinds of stuff [online] that you could never have imagined was even there.”⁴¹⁰

Other interviews with offenders who viewed child sexual abuse material in the UK indicate that most had not intentionally sought out child sexual abuse material, but it was the result of “entrenched pornography use” and “spiralling online behaviour.”⁴¹¹ Their initial engagement with child sexual abuse material was often incidental rather than purposeful, and nine out of 10 offenders said that they initially found child sexual abuse material through online pop-ups and linked material while looking at pornographic material.⁴¹²

406 The term ‘child pornography’ is still regularly used in the US where the study is based

407 Dr Gail Dines, 2010, Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality

408 Alexandra Bailey, Lucy Allen, Eleanor Stevens, Rebekah Dervley, Donald Findlater and Sarah Wefers, 2022, Pathways and Prevention for Indecent Images of Children Offending: A Qualitative Study: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/33099/1/Pathways%20and%20Prevention%20for%20IIOC%20offending.pdf>

409 The Buffalo News, 2009, The Child Porn Pipeline: https://buffalonews.com/news/digging-into-the-roots-of-child-pornography-the-news-is-telling-this-important-story-with/article_04cfd1-7575-5b88-8a4b-b3c52275a022.html

410 The Police Foundation, 2022, Turning the tide against online child sexual abuse: https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/turning_the_tide_FINAL-.pdf

411 Ibid

412 Internet Watch Foundation, 2013, New research shows action needed to stop people seeing indecent images of children for the first time: <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/new-research-shows-action-needed-to-stop-people-seeing-indecent-images-of-children-for-the-first-time/>

The largest ever survey on the thoughts and behaviours of people who watched child sexual abuse material online has found significant evidence that those who watch illegal material are at high risk of going on to contact or abuse a child directly.⁴¹³ Almost half (42%) of respondents to the survey said that they had sought direct contact with children through online platforms after viewing child sexual abuse material, and 58% reported feeling afraid that viewing child sexual abuse material might lead them to committing abuse in person.⁴¹⁴

According to child protection experts, viewing violent pornography is therefore a key risk factor for men committing child sexual offences. Men who offend are over eleven times more likely to watch violent pornography than men who don't.⁴¹⁵ Michael Sheath, Principal Practitioner at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a UK-wide charity dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse, reported that, "what we are seeing on a daily basis is the conflation of easy access to hardcore and deviant pornography and an interest in child molestation. The link is unambiguous."⁴¹⁶ Their data shows that the consumption of online legal adult pornography increased during the pandemic. This increase led some people to look for 'riskier' material and begin viewing child sexual abuse material. In addition, contact with the Stop It Now! Helpline and online self-help modules to stop viewing sexual images of children also increased by 107%.⁴¹⁷

Research⁴¹⁸ undertaken with 1,500 British men, released in 2023, found that:

- 10% of men admitted they had engaged in child sexual offending, either online or offline.
- Nearly one in twenty said they had had sexual contact with a child when they themselves were aged 18 or older.
- 5% admitted they had sexual feelings towards children and had acted upon those feelings, while an additional 7% admitted to having sexual feelings towards children but not acting on them.

The author of this study, Dr Michael Salter, stated that "Men who are sexually offending against children are watching a lot more online pornography but also the type of content they are consuming is very deviant."⁴¹⁹

10.7 Children are viewing child sexual abuse material

It is also important to note that it is not just adults who are affected by this type of pornography. There are concerns from both charities and the police that teenagers are accessing child sexual abuse material after first consuming adult pornography. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation in 2023 reported a 30% increase in under-18s contacting them, and a 26% rise in adults contacting them because they were concerned about the behaviour of a young person.⁴²⁰ This led the Lucy Faithfull Foundation to create a service solely for teenagers who are worried about their own sexual thoughts and behaviours.⁴²¹

413 Tegan Insoll, Anna Katriina Ovaska, Juha Nurmi, Mikko Aaltonen and Nina Vaaranen-Valkonen, 2022, Risk Factors for Child Sexual Abuse Material Users Contacting Children Online: Results of an Anonymous Multilingual Survey on the Dark Web: <https://tsjournal.org/index.php/jots/article/view/29>

414 Ibid

415 Australian Human Rights Institute, 2023, Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men: <https://www.humanrights.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/Identifying%20and%20understanding%20child%20sexual%20offending%20behaviour%20and%20attitudes%20among%20Australian%20men.pdf>

416 The Guardian, 2020, How extreme porn has become a gateway drug into child abuse: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/15/how-extreme-porn-has-become-a-gateway-drug-into-child-abuse>

417 The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2022, Isolation, unemployment and escalating pornography habits contribute to a record rise in people seeking help to stop viewing sexual images of children: <https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/featured-news/isolation-unemployment-and-escalating-pornography-habits-contribute-to-a-record-rise-in-people-seeking-help-to-stop-viewing-sexual-images-of-children.htm>

418 ChildLight, 2023: <https://www.childlight.org/nature-online-offending-against-children-population-based-data-australia-uk-and-usa>

419 The Times, 2023, One in ten men have carried out sex offences against children, says survey: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/one-in-ten-men-have-carried-out-sex-offences-against-children-says-survey-fjhd59fnh>

420 The Guardian, 2023, Pornography driving UK teens towards child abuse material, say experts: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/26/pornography-driving-teens-child-abuse-material-charities-police>

421 Ibid

DCI Tony Garner who leads a specialist online child sexual exploitation team at West Mercia Police Force said:

“ Quite often when we go through a door following intelligence on someone watching or sharing child sexual abuse, we find a teenager. There is a crisis here and it’s being driven by young people having access to very extreme pornography that is changing their brains.”⁴²²

According to the Internet Watch Foundation, sexual abuse imagery of primary school children has increased by 1,000% since the COVID-19 lockdowns.⁴²³

⁴²² Ibid

⁴²³ Internet Watch Foundation, 2023, Sexual abuse imagery of primary school children 1,000 per cent worse since lockdown: <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/sexual-abuse-imagery-of-primary-school-children-1-000-per-cent-worse-since-lockdown/>

PART 11

**REGULATION:
THE PORNOGRAPHY
INDUSTRY MUST BE
HELD TO ACCOUNT**



11. Regulation: The pornography industry must be held to account

Since its inception, the online pornography industry, like the technology industry, has been left to regulate itself, with disastrous consequences. This report goes some way to outline the damaging impacts of this industry on adults and children both within and outside of the pornography industry, and across society more broadly, but it is far from exhaustive. In truth, the pornography industry has caused, and continues to cause, unknown levels of harm.

Despite this, and despite decades of research and campaigning by women's rights organisations and child protection charities and activists, it is only recently that governments and regulators around the world are really starting to take heed and attempts have been made to regulate this harmful industry.

11.1 Green shoots of regulation around the world

To date, and perhaps not unsurprisingly, attempts to regulate the pornography industry have focused on protecting children from accessing pornography sites.

In 2020, France introduced a law which requires pornography sites to implement age verification, while giving Arcom, the French regulator, powers to issue formal notices and, where necessary, to block sites that do not comply.⁴²⁴

Again in 2020, the German government introduced changes to the Youth Protection Act (JMStV) requiring video sharing services to introduce processes such as age verification and parental access controls to protect minors from accessing pornography and other illegal content. Enforcement measures include blocking access to sites that do not comply with the new laws, as well as financial penalties.⁴²⁵

The European Union's 2022 Digital Services Act (DSA)⁴²⁶ also includes provisions on age verification for pornography. It was announced in December 2023 that Pornhub, XVideos and the camming site Stripchat will be forced to adhere to age verification regulations, as well as other mitigation measures to address risks linked to the dissemination of illegal content online, under the DSA.⁴²⁷

In the Philippines, the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act passed in July 2022. It mandated that all providers of online adult content are required to adopt an anonymous age verification process before allowing access to adult content.⁴²⁸

424 Ashurst, 2024, Passing of the French Law SREN: <https://www.ashurst.com/en/insights/passing-of-the-french-law-sren/#:~:text=The%20French%20law%20on%20securing,and%20online%20spaces%20in%20France>. Numerama, 2023, Porn sites are powerless in court to prevent age control in France: <https://www.numerama.com/tech/1230502-les-sites-porno-sont-impuissants-en-justice-pour-empêcher-le-contrôle-de-l'âge-en-france.html>

425 VerifyMy, 2021, German Age Verification Law: <https://verifymy.io/blog/german-age-verification-law/#:~:text=German%20law%20states%20that%20providers,only%20made%20accessible%20to%20adults>

426 EU Digital Services Act 2022: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act/#:~:text=The%20Council%20adopted%20the%20DSA,and%20protect%20users%20fundamental%20rights>

427 European Commission, 2023, Commission designates second set of Very Large Online Platforms under the Digital Services Act: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_6763

428 Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act 2022: https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2022/ra_11930_2022.html

In May 2024, the Australian government announced it would be trialling age verification and age estimation processes for pornography sites. It also committed to legislation to ban deepfake pornography, making it a criminal offence to make and share non-consensual explicit images and videos created using AI technology.⁴²⁹

As of June 2024, a total of nineteen states in the US have passed or are soon to pass laws on age verification for pornography. Similarly, a Bill introducing age verification for pornography is going through the Canadian parliament.

11.2 The UK and the Online Safety Act 2023

After years of campaigning for robust regulation of the pornography industry in the UK, the Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA) was finally enacted in October 2023. The Act mandates that dedicated pornography sites and social media sites that allow pornography on their sites must implement ‘highly effective’ age verification. This is a most welcome and hard-fought victory for child protection. However, concerns remain about how this legislation will be implemented by the regulator, Ofcom.

The Online Safety Act 2023 mandates that any service that hosts pornographic content must implement age verification to prevent children from accessing such content, and that the “age verification or age estimation must be of such a kind, and used in such a way, that it is highly effective at correctly determining whether or not a particular user is a child.”⁴³⁰

When introducing this amendment to the OSA in the House of Lords, the Under Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport stated:

“ **[Content providers] will need to be highly effective at correctly determining whether a particular user is a child. This new bar will achieve the intended outcome behind the amendments which we looked at in Committee, seeking to introduce a standard of “beyond reasonable doubt” for age assurance for pornography, while avoiding the risk of legal challenge or inadvertent loopholes.** ”⁴³¹

The mandate to Ofcom by Parliament was clear. ‘Beyond reasonable doubt’ is an outcome-focused test in criminal law where a jury must be satisfied, to a high degree of certainty, that the outcome of the case should result in the guilt of the accused. In terms of age verification, ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ means, a high degree of certainty, that no children are accessing pornographic content online. It is clear Parliament was seeking an outcome-based measure for age verification, something that CEASE, other concerned charities and parliamentarians had long campaigned for.

429 Information Age, 2024, Govt to ban deepfakes, trial age verification: <https://ia.acs.org.au/article/2024/govt-to-ban-deepfakes--trial-age-verification.html>

430 Online Safety Act, 2023: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/enacted>

431 Hansard HL Debate vol 831 no 189 col 1430 6th July 2023: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-07-06/debates/35CCD1845828-4C47-AA19-D19D8AF44938/OnlineSafetyBill>

Yet, in Ofcom's Draft Guidance on Age Assurance and other Part 5 Duties for Service Providers Publishing Pornographic Content on Online Services,⁴³² there is no definition of 'highly effective' age verification. There is a mediocre attempt to rectify this in Ofcom's Protecting Children from Online Harms consultation,⁴³³ by asserting that the criteria outlined by Ofcom that services must meet to reach age assurance standards, such as technical accuracy, robustness, reliability and fairness, counts as a definition of highly effective age assurance.⁴³⁴ It does not.

There is still no set standard for content providers to attain. This leaves both content providers and Ofcom in a quandary. If no standard is set by the guidance as to what meets the statutory bar of 'highly effective' then there is no way to judge whether the content provider has met their obligations. Instead, Ofcom focuses on the method and process of age verification, which while important, is not a definitive way of ensuring that services are implementing highly effective age verification and preventing children from accessing pornography. Age verification technology is now of such a standard that age verification providers are confident of its accuracy to 99% for identifying those under 16 years and 95% for 16-18 years. So, it is unclear why Ofcom is so reluctant to define 'highly effective' age verification, particularly when it has been mandated by Parliament to do so.

For Ofcom's Guidance and the Online Safety Act to be meaningfully implemented and enforced, the term 'highly effective' needs to be defined and a percentage applied (CEASE suggests 99%) to the age assurance method whereby a content provider can prove that the method and process employed prevents 99% of children accessing the content.

This is even more important given the likely noncompliance of the pornography industry with age verification regulation. As stated, pornography sites are commercially incentivised to resist or ignore age verification, since their business model depends on maximising the number of visitors to the site. Previously, pornography companies have poured their energies into creating their own VPNs for savvy underage users to use to bypass controls put in by Internet Service Providers.⁴³⁵ Research by the BBFC (2022) found that pornography is specifically targeted at children, with 6-12 year olds disproportionately exposed to pornography sites hosting content featuring cartoons likely to appeal to children such as superheroes and Disney characters.⁴³⁶ This is not an industry that cares about children's safety.

When the age verification law was introduced in France, Pornhub, YouPorn and RedTube (all owned by Aylo), challenged the law in two of France's highest courts using freedom of expression as an argument.⁴³⁷ They lost, but it highlights how far the pornography industry will go to avoid regulation. Similarly, Aylo is currently fighting the age verification laws in several states across the US.⁴³⁸ In some states, where age verification legislation remains in force, Aylo has responded by blocking all user access to their content, in what can only be assumed is an attempt to pressure legislators into repealing age verification laws.

In Texas, Aylo, XVideos and the Free Speech Coalition (the lobbying arm of the pornography industry), among others, sued the state of Texas over their age verification law. However, the Attorney General of Texas appealed and was granted a stay, allowing him to enforce the law.⁴³⁹

432 Ofcom, 2023, Draft Guidance on Age Assurance and other Part 5 Duties for Service Providers Publishing Pornographic Content on Online Services: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/272600/consultation-part-5-guidance.pdf

433 Ofcom, 2024, Protecting Children from Online Harms: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-1-10-weeks/284469-consultation-protecting-children-from-harms-online/associated-documents/a10-15-other-annexes.pdf>

434 Ibid

435 The Telegraph, 2019, Porn sites offer loopholes to get around web ban as BBFC admits it is powerless to stop tech savvy teens: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/18/porn-sites-of-fer-loopholes-get-around-web-ban-bbfc-admits-powerless/>

436 BBFC, 2022, New BBFC research reveals children are more exposed to sites specialising in non-photographic pornography, compared to adults: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/new-bbfc-research-reveals-children-are-more-exposed-to-sites-specialising-in-non-photographic-pornography-compared-to-adults>

437 Numerama, 2023, Porn sites are powerless in court to prevent age control in France: <https://www.numerama.com/tech/1230502-les-sites-porno-sont-impuissants-en-justice-pour-empêcher-le-contrôle-de-l'âge-en-france.html>

438 Techcrunch, 2023, Pornhub blocks access in Mississippi, Virginia and Utah amid changing laws: <https://techcrunch.com/2023/07/03/pornhub-blocks-access-in-mississippi-virginia-and-utah-amid-changing-laws/>

439 Ken Paxton Attorney Press Release, 2024, Attorney General Ken Paxton Wins After Pornography Companies Sued Texas Over Age Verification Requirements: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/attorney-general-ken-paxton-wins-after-pornography-companies-sued-texas-over-age-verification>

Pornography sites then attempted to take their case to the Supreme Court who declined to hear their challenge to the age verification law.⁴⁴⁰ In response, Aylo blocked access to its content across the state. The Free Speech Coalition have committed to continue to fight the age verification law in Texas,⁴⁴¹ as well as fighting hard to undo other age verification laws across the US and prevent any more from being introduced.⁴⁴²

The lesson here is that the pornography industry will fight, and is fighting, age verification laws across the globe and will do all it can to overturn them or ignore them. If Ofcom remains vague on what highly effective age verification actually is and implements weak regulation, it is very likely that the pornography industry will leverage this uncertainty and implement the weakest method of age verification allowable, if they implement age verification at all.

Enforcement of age verification for pornography is already likely to be difficult. Enforcement without clearly set, high standards by the regulator itself, will render it impossible.

11.3 Existing legislation is under-used

To date, the criminal justice response to tackling illegal pornographic content has been minimal. Despite a new criminal offence of possessing extreme pornography being introduced in the UK in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008,⁴⁴³ research suggests that this legislation has been little utilised to prosecute possession of extreme pornography that “portrays, in an explicit and realistic way; acts which are life-threatening or result, or are likely to result, in serious injury to a person’s anus, breasts or genitals, or portrays rape or other forms of non-consensual sexual penetration.”

11.4 Limited prosecution of possession of extreme pornography offences

Research undertaken by Clare McGlynn and Hannah Bows in 2019⁴⁴⁴ sought to investigate who is being charged with extreme pornography offences and the type of pornography these charges related to. Through FOI requests sent to 44 forces across England and Wales for the years 2009 to 2014, they were able to ascertain that:

- Of the 405 defendants found guilty of possessing extreme pornography, 86% related to images containing bestiality.
- Of the total charged cases where data on the nature of the pornography were available, the vast majority, 85% related to bestiality images, 7% related to images of serious injury to the anus, breasts or genitals with a similar proportion of 6% for images that are life-threatening.

The researchers argue that this large discrepancy between charged cases for bestiality and those of images related to sexual abuse imagery of people, is because of the nuances involved in images of people.

For example, it can be difficult to ascertain whether a pornographic image is consensual or not whereas the presence of an animal in a sexual context with a human is immediately identifiable as bestiality.

440 National Review, 2024, Supreme Court Rejects Emergency Appeal of Texas Age-Verification Law: <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/supreme-court-rejects-emergency-appeal-of-texas-age-verification-law/>

441 Ibid

442 Free Speech Coalition: <https://action.freespeechcoalition.com/age-verification-bills/>

443 Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/contents>

444 Clare McGlynn and Hannah Bows, 2019, Possessing Extreme Pornography: policing, prosecutions and the need for reform: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022018319877783>

In investigating data between 2015 and 2017, (after specific offences on rape pornography were introduced) the researchers found that few cases of possessing rape pornography are recorded with even fewer cases being charged. According to the research, of all the extreme pornography prosecutions carried out by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) during this time period, only 1.7% were for rape pornography.

The researchers suggest that the lack of prosecutions for this type of material is again related to the difficulty in the interpretation of the images, as well as the potential that police and prosecutors are interpreting the law too narrowly. It is also worth noting that when the law on extreme pornography was introduced, the police guidance stated that police officers should not proactively investigate potential illegal pornography offences. This also likely explains why extreme pornography offences that are prosecuted, are very often prosecuted alongside other sexual offences. In research of 16 extreme pornography cases, undertaken by Antoniou and Akrivos (2017) only four of the 16 cases were stand-alone offences for extreme pornography, 11 were charged alongside offences relating to indecent images of children.⁴⁴⁵

McGlynn and Bows surmise that extreme pornographic material is therefore often found by chance. They explain that “most often, the images were discovered while executing a warrant under different legislation, though also while entering registered sex offenders’ homes for the purpose of risk assessment or from a tip off.” This is consistent with anecdotal evidence gathered by CEASE from police officers investigating sexual offences.

11.5 People do not know what constitutes illegal pornography

It is also likely that these offences are not regularly reported to the police, though further research and FOI requests would need to be undertaken to fully ascertain this. However, given the legislation is scattered across different Acts and is often difficult to interpret even for those working in criminal justice, it is likely that most people do not know what constitutes illegal or legal pornography, and/or how these laws apply online versus offline.

Similarly, it is unlikely that most people know the levels of real violence, human trafficking and modern slavery that are endemic in the pornography industry. CEASE’s public attitudes survey (2024) found that only 26% of respondents believed that content involving women and girls who have been trafficked, coerced or forced into appearing, could be easily found online for free, 26% thought it could not be easily found online for free and 48% did not know.⁴⁴⁶

However, what we do know from multiple studies and research of men that buy sex, is that when sex buyers buy women for sex, they rarely report to anyone if they have concerns that the woman may have been trafficked. It is likely the same applies to pornography users.⁴⁴⁷ That said, like all types of crime, if more arrests and prosecutions were carried out for the possession of extreme pornography, it would inevitably give those interested in deviant forms of pornography pause for thought. As research demonstrates, and international standards on human trafficking dictate, tackling demand for any type of commercial sexual exploitation is one of the best ways to curb supply.

445 Antoniou and Akrivos in Clare McGlynn and Hannah Bows, 2019, Possessing Extreme Pornography: policing, prosecutions and the need for reform: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022018319877783>

446 CEASE, 2024, British Public Attitudes towards Pornography: <https://cease.org.uk/british-public-attitudes-towards-pornography/>

447 E. Schulze, SI Novo Canto, P. Mason, and M. Skalin, 2014, Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET\(2014\)493040_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf); M. Farley, E. Schuckman, JM Golding, K. Houser, L. Jarrett, P. Qualliotine, and M. Decker, 2011, Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don’t Buy Sex: “You can have a good time with the servitude” vs. “You’re supporting a system of degradation”: <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Farleyetal2011ComparingSexBuyers.pdf>; Demand Abolition, 2018, Who Buys Sex? Understanding and Disrupting Illicit Market Demand: <https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf> and N. Yonkova, N. and E. Keegan, 2014, Stop Traffick! Tackling Demand for Sexual Services of Trafficked Women and Girls: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/stoptraffick_full_report_1.pdf

11.6 The UK Government's Independent Pornography Review

The introduction of age verification laws is a welcome step in moving towards the regulation of pornography, and if implemented correctly and robustly, will help to protect children from accessing hardcore, violent pornography online. However, age verification alone is not enough to curb the harms of the pornography industry.

In 2024 the UK government therefore announced the creation of an Independent Pornography Review to advise the government on ways to tackle the harmful impact of pornography on viewers and how abuse and exploitation within the industry is addressed. It is also assessing law enforcement for online pornography and discussing whether more needs to be done to tackle illegal pornography.⁴⁴⁸

This review is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fully assess the widespread harms of the pornography industry and to recommend robust regulation that could finally hold the industry to account. CEASE has strongly urged the review team to recommend robust legislation and regulation of the pornography industry.

⁴⁴⁸ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, 2024, Pornography regulation, legislation and enforcement: <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/pornography-regulation-legislation-and-enforcement#:~:text=The%20Independent%20Pornography%20Review%20involves,Lead%20Reviewer%20Baroness%20Gabby%20Bertin>

PART 12

**RECOMMENDATIONS:
POLICY REFORM CAN
PROTECT FUTURE
GENERATIONS**



12. Recommendations: Policy reform can protect future generations

Legislation and related regulation of pornography in the UK is disparate, out of date and often difficult to interpret even for those working in the criminal justice system. Despite a new criminal offence of possessing extreme pornography being introduced in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008,⁴⁴⁹ research suggests that this legislation has been little utilised to prosecute possession of extreme pornography.

The Online Safety Act 2023, while mandating robust regulation around age verification for pornography, has fallen short in other aspects. The government presiding over the Act had the opportunity to close current legislative loopholes around the types of pornographic content that are permitted online, as well as an opportunity to curb the exploitation within the industry but chose not to. Provisions on image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), including deepfake pornography, while welcome, also do not go far enough. The Act fails to criminalise the creation of deepfake pornography or the creation and proliferation of nudify apps. A deeper analysis of the Act undertaken by Dr Lorna Woods, Clare McGlynn and Alexandros Antoniou (2024), reveals that eight separate categories of pornographic content emerge from the structure of the new regime under the Act. The researchers go on to say, “the boundaries between these categories are uncertain and subject to considerable interpretation and potential controversy. Further, these categories arise from a patchwork of existing legal regimes, with OSA requirements layered on top.”⁴⁵⁰

The Act that promised so much has not only fallen short but is adding to the already complicated legislative landscape in the UK when it comes to regulation of pornography.

CEASE is therefore calling for a series of legislative reforms as a matter of urgency:

12.1 Recommendation 1: Bring all regulation of pornographic content into one new UK-wide Act of Parliament

Create legislation that would bring all regulation of pornographic content together in one, new Act of Parliament that is UK-wide, (inclusive of devolved nations).

This Act should either expand or replace the current definition of illegal, ‘extreme pornography’ and bring it in line with the definition of prohibited content as defined by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in its Classification Guidelines for offline pornographic material. Prohibited material is classified as more extreme than R18, and would be prohibited offline or on UK-based video on demand services.

449 Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/contents>

450 C. McGlynn, L. Woods and A. Antoniou, 2024, Pornography, the Online Safety Act 2023 and the need for further reform: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17577632.2024.2357421#d1e825>

Specifically, the pornographic content below should be illegal to possess, produce, or host online, on either dedicated pornography sites or social media sites:

- Material which is judged to be obscene under the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959.
- Material (including dialogue) likely to encourage an interest in sexually abusive activity which may include adults role-playing as non-adults.
- The portrayal of sexual activity which involves real or apparent lack of consent. Any form of physical restraint which prevents participants from indicating a withdrawal of consent.
- The infliction of pain or acts which are likely to cause serious physical harm, whether real or (in a sexual context) simulated. Some allowance may be made for non-abusive, consensual activity (it would be incumbent upon pornography sites to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this activity is actually consensual).
- Penetration by any object likely to cause physical harm.
- Sexual threats, humiliation or abuse which do not form part of a clearly consenting role-playing game (it would be incumbent upon pornography sites to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this activity is actually consensual).

This would ensure that content containing the following would be illegal online:

- Hair pulling, spanking and hitting
- “Choking” and strangulation
- Simultaneous vaginal, anal and oral penetration of a woman by two, three or more men at the same time
- Double anal penetration
- Double vaginal penetration
- Gagging (where a woman has a penis or another instrument pushed so far down her throat she gags, struggles to breathe and in some cases vomits).
- Ass-to-mouth
- Bukkake
- Verbal abuse

In other words, the acts common in pornography that meet the definition of torture by international standards would be illegal to possess, produce, or host online in the UK.

This would close the current loophole in legislation that allows content such as ‘barely legal porn’, ‘incest porn’ and ‘teen porn’ to be prolific online. CEASE further recommends that prohibited material as it pertains to content such as that mentioned above is widened both online and offline, to include material that includes step-relations of people over the age of 18 where it is likely a power imbalance would exist. For example, step-father and step-daughter/son, step-grandfather and step-daughter/son, step-mother and step-son/daughter and step-grandmother and step-grandson/daughter etc.

Online pornography, social media platforms, and other relevant user-to-user platforms and apps that host any of this type of deeply harmful material must be subject to the same laws, as is the case for age verification.

This Act should also outline that enforcement action against services that do not comply should be swift and robust, allowing for immediate business disruption measures, including blocking sites’ access in the UK. This Act should also create a Pornography Commission which can oversee the implementation of this Act in its entirety and hold to account the regulator assigned to regulate its implementation, the Crown Prosecution Service, the National Crime Agency, the Police and any other statutory or non-statutory body assigned to its implementation.

12.2 Recommendation 2: Human trafficking must be recognised as a key feature of the pornography industry and mitigation strategies enacted to combat it

The new Pornography Act or any other legislative change should reflect that sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls are inherent in the pornography industry.

As above, the definition of ‘extreme content’ must be widened either by a new Act or a reworking of current legislation to ensure that all harmful content, as listed above, comes under the definition of illegal content.

Therefore, the Act must ensure that any illegal pornographic material that either depicts or is a direct result of human trafficking as defined by the UN Palermo Protocol must not be allowed to appear on any dedicated pornography site or social media site.

At an absolute minimum, any platform that hosts pornographic content must ensure that they have processes in place to prove that any person appearing in pornographic content online is over the age of 21 and has given their consent. They must be able to prove age and consent via a combination of automated tools and rigorous human moderation to beyond a reasonable doubt. If this is not possible then the material should not be uploaded. In relation to offline content, the same need for rigorous age and consent checks of anyone appearing in pornographic content must be undertaken.

Further, the government, National Crime Agency, National Police Chiefs Council and the wider criminal justice system must therefore acknowledge and accept that sexual exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery exist within the pornography industry including on camming sites such as OnlyFans.

They must also recognise that there are people living in the UK who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation within the pornography industry. Any new Act on pornography must compel these agencies to act in the best interest of the victim in such cases, by focusing the criminal sanctions on the pornography producers and pimps who exploit vulnerable people.

The Act must also mandate that all pornography and camming sites open up their sites to law enforcement and/or a dedicated anti-trafficking organisation so they can determine the level of risk that human trafficking and exploitation are taking place on their site, take proactive action to identify where these are happening, intercept perpetrators and protect victims.

As above, this Act should also outline that enforcement action against services that do not comply should be swift and robust, allowing for immediate business disruption measures, including blocking sites’ access in the UK.

12.3 Recommendation 3: The creation and sharing of images without consent should be illegal and the removal of non-consensual content should be improved

It should be illegal to create, take, share, threaten to share, or solicit any intimate image without consent. This includes sexually explicit deepfake content. CEASE fully supports campaigns calling for these measures.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ Glamour Magazine in partnership with End Violence Against Women Coalition, Not Your Porn, and Professor Clare McGlynn, 2024, We’re calling on the next government to protect women and girls from image-based abuse: https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/image-based-abuse-act-campaign?utm_campaign=dashhudson&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=instagram

We also support the need to “improve civil laws for survivors to take action against perpetrators and tech companies. This means forcing platforms and perpetrators to take down and delete abusive content, seek damages and apply for protective orders against perpetrators.”⁴⁵²

All take down requests that are submitted to either dedicated pornography sites or social media sites, must be dealt with immediately and proactively. Take down measure must be victim centred and not business centred.

Applications (apps) that are solely created for the creation of AI-generated pornography of real people such as nudifying apps must be made illegal in the UK.

12.4 Recommendation 4: Better guidance and training is needed to increase rates of prosecution

A new Act should be straightforward and easy to interpret and implement, simplifying the current convoluted and disparate legislation that governs pornography.

The criminal justice system would benefit from changes which makes it easier to make arrests and prosecute offences. Further, police guidance should remove the stipulation that these offences are not proactively investigated, but instead they should be actively pursued. It would also be vital that all parts of the criminal justice system are trained in the impacts of pornography specifically the harms to women and girls. Anecdotally it is CEASE’s understanding that police forces are not trained in how pornography can impact violence against women and girls, sexual assault and domestic violence. Further, pornography usage is rarely ascertained in policing interviews pertaining to sexual assault and in many cases domestic violence. This knowledge and procedural gap should be closed, and appropriate training provided to all police officers.

12.5 Recommendation 5: The harms of pornography should also be tackled through public health interventions

CEASE recommends that the public health impacts of pornography are fully assessed, pornography named as a public health priority and treated as such by public health services.

A public health response is necessary, in light of the impacts of pornography on women’s, men’s, and children’s physical, mental, neurological, emotional and psychological health and wellbeing, and the devastating impacts to people involved in the production of pornography.

This should include government sponsored information campaigns on the harms of pornography to women and girls, both those within and outside of the pornography industry. Information campaigns should also include the addictive nature of pornography, the potential physical impacts on libido and real-life sex, including issues such as erectile dysfunction and other sexual dysfunctions as well as mental health impacts.

⁴⁵² Ibid

PART 13

CONCLUSION



13. Conclusion

The pornography industry profits from the sexual oppression of mainly women and girls. It perpetuates dangerous racial and ethnic stereotypes, fetishises sexual identities, destroys empathy and normalises sexual violence. It has done this for decades, while hiding behind a self-created veneer of legitimacy. However, this veneer is beginning to fade, as more long-lasting and egregious harms come to light.

13.1 Pornography is commercial sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls

Pornography is not entertainment; it is abuse and violence against women and girls. It is a form of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking is inherent in the industry. Women and girls, who are already marginalised and vulnerable because of economic instability, experience of childhood sexual abuse, being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, their race or ethnicity, are coerced and forced into the industry.

Once in the industry they are pushed passed their boundaries and pressured to take part in dangerous, violent, and humiliating sex acts that meet the international definition of torture. Testimonies from survivors highlight the real life abuse that women and girls face and the complicity and culpability of the pornography directors, producers and companies who are no more than traffickers and pimps masquerading as legitimate entrepreneurs.

The physical, psychological and emotional ramifications for those who have exited the industry and those still in it are long lasting. Many pornography 'performers' struggle with drug and alcohol abuse when they are in the industry and when they have left, and many succumb to premature deaths.

13.2 Pornography normalises sexual violence and shapes sexual scripts

Yet this filmed sexual violence is packaged and sold as entertainment. It is estimated that the world's most popular pornography websites receive approximately 2.4 million visits every 60 seconds and the top three pornography sites in the world receive a combined total of 5.81 billion visits each month. The mass consumption of this violent material is having devastating consequences for individuals and society. Violent, racist, misogynistic pornography is profoundly shaping sexual scripts.

It has seeped into the fabric of society. Forty years of research has confirmed that there is a clear and unambiguous link between the consumption of online pornography and violence against women and girls both online and offline. There is a significant positive correlation between the consumption of sexually violent pornography and attitudes supporting gender-based sexual violence. Studies show that exposure to violent and non-violent pornography results in increases in both attitudes supporting aggression and in actual aggression towards women and girls.

Pornography erodes the empathy of the consumer and pornography users are more likely to believe rape myths. This is having profound impacts on violence against women and girls both online and offline. In pornography, women and girls are nothing more than objects on which sex acts, regardless of how violent, are carried out. Pornography is grooming men and boys to objectify women and to believe that they are entitled to sex, however extreme.

It is also teaching boys and men that girls and women enjoy violent sex, and teaching women and girls that they should. This has resulted in women and girls engaging in dangerous sex acts that their sexual partners have learned from pornography.

13.3 Pornography is sex education for children

These sexual scripts are what children are internalising as they consume pornography from as young as seven years old. The increase in children's access to mobile phones as well as the lack of age verification on pornography sites and social media has resulted in millions of UK children accessing violent pornography online. This has had devastating consequences. Viewing pornography can profoundly impact children's psychological, social, emotional, neurological and sexual wellbeing and impede their ability to form healthy intimate relationships. Adolescent pornography consumption is associated with more permissive sexual attitudes, more sexual intercourse and more casual sex, along with stronger gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs, the tendency to support rape myths and the perception of women as sex objects (among both boys and girls).

As the 2023 report by the Children's Commissioner for England so starkly highlights, children and young people believe that violence and aggression are normal, expected and enjoyed in sex. Thus, young people are taking part in violent and dangerous sex acts such as strangulation and anal sex. These norms are also reinforced by other media such as social media, memes, streaming platforms and films. There is evidence of children watching pornography in the school playground, being sent unsolicited pornographic images and videos, and accessing pornography on social media platforms, namely X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and Snapchat, despite many social media platforms assertions that pornography is not allowed on their sites.

Children's consumption of online pornography has also been associated with the dramatic increase in child-on-child sexual abuse. The former National Policing Lead for Child Abuse Protection and Investigation in the UK stated that the rise of child-on-child sexual abuse is fuelled by access to violent pornography. Children are now committing half of all reported child sexual abuse offences in the UK. This has increased from a third in 2022.

13.4 Pornography sexualises children

A further deeply disturbing trend is the rise in adolescents accessing child sexual abuse material. This follows the similar trend in adults. Online pornography affects the brain in such a way that consumers become tolerant to the pornography they are consuming, and to maintain arousal they seek out more extreme content, including child sexual abuse material. In many cases, the extreme and often illegal material consumers spiral to consuming does not align with their own values or ethics, but the escalation feels out of their control.

The pornography industry, well aware of how its product affects its consumers, pushes people towards more extreme and illegal content. Through genres such as 'barely legal', 'teen' and 'incest' pornography, the pornography industry wilfully and knowingly sexualises children. The research undertaken by Dr Vera Gray et al. in 2021 clearly highlights that the word 'teen' was frequently advertised to first time users across the three of the biggest pornography sites and that sexual activity between family members was the most frequently advertised form of sexual violence i.e. incest. 'Teen' is also the most popular search term generally. It is unsurprising therefore that multiple studies with child sex offenders highlight that those offenders started consuming 'legal adult' pornography but escalated to child sexual abuse material and in some cases to perpetrating child sexual abuse.

Pornography companies are not only complicit in the sexualisation of children but also profit substantially from it.

13.5 Pornography has public health implications

Pornography acts like a drug and multiple studies have concluded that the way online pornography is designed and used matches the addiction framework and shares similar basic mechanisms with substance addiction. Like other substance addictions, online pornography addiction has serious physical, psychological, neurological and emotional implications.

The public health impacts of pornography are widespread and multifaceted, ranging from the physical and psychological harms to people within the industry to the physical, psychological and behavioural harms to consumers and wider society, particularly violence against women and girls. Behavioural interventions and other public health strategies require further analysis and understanding.

13.6 Regulation of pornography is long overdue

Governments across the world are beginning to wake up to the need for pornography regulation to address some of the damage caused to the countless people exploited within the industry, and to the generations who have been exposed to its horrific content. However, there is much more to be done.

The Online Safety Act 2023 in the UK is a good first step in regulating pornography by mandating age verification for pornography wherever it is found online. However, this legislation needs to be implemented fully and robustly for it to have any legitimate impact. Current regulation does not go far enough to curb the harms of the pornography industry.

It is no longer a question of whether pornography is harmful: the evidence is overwhelming. Yet, some governments and indeed regulators are reluctant to act with measures that are proportionate to the harms of the industry. **This is a mistake.**

The pornography industry is not an industry to be negotiated with. It is an industry where exploitation, human trafficking and the cruellest forms of violence against women and girls are inherent. It is unfathomable that titles of pornography videos such as these are so normalised and accepted: 'Dazed 18 year old fuck-meat choked and degraded by 42 year old cock', 'Slave Tied Up in Filthy Mattress', 'Stupid slut gets beat and degraded in hotel room', 'bound gagged stripped whipped vibed machine-fucked', 'Oriental slave girl tortured'.

Pornography is awash with sexual violence, filmed rape and abuse. Putting a camera in a room and calling it entertainment should not make rape and torture immune from prosecution. Yet, regulation is minimal and criminal sanctions next to non-existent.

This cannot continue. If the UK is a country that cares about the safety of women and children, then the government must act now. Impunity for the pornography industry must end.

We are calling on the UK government to implement the following recommendations as a matter of urgency:

1. Bring all regulation of pornographic content into one new UK-wide Act of Parliament.
2. Human trafficking must be recognised as a key feature of the pornography industry and mitigation strategies enacted to combat it.
3. The creation and sharing of images without consent should be illegal and the removal of non-consensual content should be improved.
4. Better guidance and training is needed to increase rates of prosecution
5. The harms of pornography should be tackled through public health interventions.



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