



Getting real about the impacts of online pornography on young people

OUR RESEARCH IS HELPING CHANGE THE CONVERSATION ON PORN

Three years ago there was no comprehensive understanding of the issues that online pornography presented for rangatahi and tamariki in New Zealand. Since then:

- We have completed a series of three research reports that provide a strong evidence base on young New Zealanders' exposure to commercial porn online and their perspective on the issues it presents for them.
- Alongside this research, we established a Pornography Working Party with the agencies that hold levers that can make a difference for young people in this space.
- We engage internationally through this group, sharing insights and keeping up-to-date on new interventions, including world-leading age verification technology.
- Together with our partners in the Pornography Working Party, we have used the research findings to develop a suite of practical solutions including:
 - Practical resources for parents on our website.
 - Training materials for New Zealand teachers and input into the Government's Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum guidelines – which talk about porn for the first time.
 - Workforce development content for health services and service providers.
 - Support for the development of the DIA-led national information campaign 'Keep It Real Online' that has received international media attention.
- This work has brought young people's use of online porn out into the open, making it 'OK' to talk about for the first time, and creating an opportunity to address the harmful issues – without the shame.

Why this work matters

- Online porn is easily accessible for young people and even children in New Zealand – on their smartphones and other devices. Right now there is no comprehensive mechanism in place to prevent access in New Zealand.
- Our research shows that one in four New Zealanders first see porn by age 12, and most are not seeking it out when they first see it. Most young people (75%) have seen porn by age 17.
- Research demonstrates this is a problem, with some children being disturbed or traumatised by these exposures.
- Porn has become a default learning tool for young people: an unofficial form of sex education.
- There has traditionally been a high level of public concern around porn but a lack of awareness of where to find good information and support.



"It's just so easy to get your hands on it. I think where it stands is it's a big part of our generation at the moment, I guess."

FEMALE, 17, MĀORI & PACIFIC

We can do more: Key opportunities this term

New Zealand has the potential to be world-leading in every aspect of our response to online pornography – from our regulatory settings through to public resources. We are already doing well, but there are opportunities to do more including:

- **Consistent and comprehensive education in schools:** Real progress has been made in substantially improving the national curriculum guidelines for relationships and sexuality education. But we know that in order to ensure young people aren't missing out on in-school learning about porn and issues like consent, relationships and sexual violence, we need to improve the consistency of delivery of this material across New Zealand.
- **Continued development of up-to-date information and resources:** for parents, educators, health professionals, and frontline services – supporting them to provide appropriate help and information to young people.
- **Improved public awareness of illegal pornography:** Websites that specialise in extreme, illegal pornography are freely available on the internet. There is already clear public awareness that child sexual abuse material is illegal, but a much lower understanding of the similar illegality of other extreme and objectionable types of content – for example extremely violent and degrading material, rape, and bestiality.
- **Blocking sites that specialise in objectionable content:** This can help with the problem of extreme and illegal content being easy to access, but requires careful consideration and a transparent framework.
- **Regulatory change to prevent access by children:** New Zealand has an opportunity to lead in implementing measures to prevent children accessing online porn. Available options include introducing an effective "opt-out" family filter on ISP connections, and development of a digital age-verification framework – which could also serve to limit access by children to other adult products online.

These issues can be wrapped into the broader review of New Zealand's media regulation, but given the pace of change it's important that we continue the momentum we have by acting now.