

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Victoria 2015

Pornography, problem sexual behaviour and sibling on sibling sexual violence.

Authors: Linette Etheredge B.A. Dip. Ed, M. Ed, PhD student

e) 

Janine Lemon, B.A. (Psych) Dip. Psych, M.A. (Psych)

Aim of submission:

The aim of this submission is to highlight the way online explicit sexualised material (pornography) impacts family violence in the form of sibling on sibling sexual violence. The authors believe that sibling on sibling sexual violence is an under reported aspect of the family violence issue.

The intention of this submission is to bring to the commissions' awareness the following issues. That:

- Intra-family (within family) sexual violence or sibling on sibling sexual violence is the most common assault pattern of children being treated for Problem Sexual Behaviours (**PSB**) identified in 2014 Australian researchⁱ.
- Australian research reveals that online pornography is regularly accessed by children treated for PSB each year in Victoriaⁱⁱ. (A definition of what constitutes PSB can be found in the appendix of this submission)
- Australian research findings highlight that 75% of 7-11 year old boys and 67% of 7-11 year old girls in treatment for PSB reported early sexualisation through online pornographyⁱⁱⁱ.
- Freely available online pornography is shaping the sexual conditioning of increasing numbers of young people (A definition of what is referred to as pornography can be found in the appendix of this submission^{iv}).

Research and Data used in this submission.

The majority of research data relating to PSB and sibling on sibling sexual violence cited in this submission has been obtained from a research study undertaken by a Victorian psychologist who worked with children and young people who present with PSB^v. To the authors' knowledge the research cited in this submission is the first to explore sexual

knowledge sources and Internet pornography usage in Australian young people presenting to programs in the community that treat PSB in children.

In brief, 2014 research reveals that young people with PSB typically target victims based on proximity and vulnerability, such as younger siblings and or peers. Of the young people whose cases were analysed in Lemon's research 63% most commonly engaged in PSB toward family members targeting intra family victims. 20% of the PSB was directed toward a combination of intra family and extra- family victims. The remaining 13% of young people in the sample were engaging in PSB toward extra-family victims. 50% of the Intra family victims were sexually assaulted by their siblings in the family home while 26% reported that sibling sexual abuse occurred both inside and outside the family home. The remaining 33% of victims indicated that the sexual abuse occurred most often outside the family home^{vi}.

The Authors

The authors of this submission are well placed to comment on the issues presented here as both have extensive experience working in the field with young people and postgraduate academic qualifications in the field. At present both authors are actively engaged in academic research and or discourse that relates to the way online pornography impacts young people's understanding of intimate and sexual relationships.

Linette Etheredge is an experienced educator and PhD student researching into the way young people aged 11-14 interpret the intimate relationships they see in digital spaces. She has delivered conference papers at both the Australasian Sexual Health Conference and the Gender and Education Conference discussing the link between misogynistic and degrading tropes of pornography and inequitable gender and sexual relationships. Linette is a member of the Partners in Prevention Primary School Subgroup which is a community of practice that meets to share knowledge and information as part of the DVRCV's primary prevention strategy.

Janine Lemon is a psychologist who has worked with young people in both community and forensic settings. She also has experience working with adult offenders of physical and sexual violence. Janine's 2014 research provides the clinical research data used in this submission. Her research focuses on young people outside the forensic or criminal justice system seeking treatment for PSB and is the first to examine pornography usage in this population. Janine's research identifies high levels of use of pornography in young people presenting with PSB and sibling on sibling sexual violence.

Submission Structure

This content of this submission will be presented in four sections for the commissions' consideration. These sections include research data and discussion points around the following areas:

- **Pornography in the lives of young people**
- **Pornography and children with PSB**
- **Pornography and sibling on sibling sexual violence**
- **Recommendation for the RCFV**

Pornography in the lives of young people

Today, pornography's influence is everywhere. It influences mainstream advertising, music videos, fashion and popular culture. Australian children are growing up in an online culture dominated by sexualised imagery that reinforces gender inequity, romanticises extreme sexual submission, eroticises violence and normalises the notion that women are objects to be controlled, managed, degraded and used as sexual playthings^{vii}.



L to R: magazine and billboard fashion Advertisement, Advertisement from the Age magazine, "Art" on the tray of a Ute seen in Townsville.

Flood and Hamilton undertook the first Australian academic research into adolescent use of pornography in 2003. Flood and Hamilton's research found that 73% of boys surveyed and 2% of girls aged 16, viewed pornography regularly^{viii}. Today figures around pornography usage from the UK suggest 80% of young men and women have accessed pornography by the age of 16. The vast majority of the 500 18 year olds surveyed in the UK study conducted in 2014 said that 13-15 years was the most common age for accessing online pornography^{ix}. As the volume of pornography users steadily increases, the age of users has fallen dramatically. At the same time, the nature and content of online pornography has become more degrading, violent and extreme.

What was once called hardcore or fetish pornography is now considered mainstream with gonzo pornography making up the vast majority of pornography available on free websites like pornhub or redtube. In fact, Australian's classification agency would refuse to classify (RC) the majority of the pornography that is now freely accessible online as it is too violent and regularly depicts participants (mainly young women) in distressed situations or scenarios where they are being violently and inhumanly treated. In 2010 Australian researchers Maree Crabbe and Dr. David Corlett found a marked shift "toward rougher, more aggressive sex....porn producers say consumers want more extreme acts and violence"^x.



Clip from Britney Spear's music video "Work Bitch"

Access to pornography changed dramatically after the advent of the first web page in 1991^{xi}. Prior to on-line access, pornography was typically consumed via printed material or R 18+ or X 18+ rated videos purchased through adult stores.

Today unclassified, illegal pornography is available online to anyone who has Internet access. In Australia today most children by the age of 8 have free and unrestricted access to the net with 30% of children surveyed in 2011 reporting they had seen something online that upset or bothered them^{xii}. Compounding the issue of pornography access is the ownership of mobile technology by young people. ABS statistics from 2008-09 indicate that 76% of 12-14 year olds own a mobile phone^{xiii}. In data from 2013, 85.3% of secondary students surveyed accessed the Internet daily via a mobile phone while 94.7% access via a computer^{xiv}.

Given the alarming statistics around young people and pornography usage many educators, sexual assault workers, health and social service providers are desperate to find ways to address this issue. The question that many dedicated professionals working with young people are asking is:

"Do misogynistic and violent styles of pornography negatively impact young peoples' intimate behaviour and does it normalise sexual violence and gender inequity?"

Australian researcher Dr. Michael Flood reports that it does. In a 2009 journal article Flood suggests that pornography is a poor sexual educator and “for boys and young men, the use of pornography may exacerbate violence-supportive social norms and encourage their participation in sexual abuse”^{xv}. More recent data from young people in the UK indicates that 66% of young women and 49% of young men said it would be easier growing up if pornography was less easy to access for young people^{xvi}.

Lemon’s 2014 research study highlighted that international studies of adolescents have identified links between pornography use and attitude change, in particular more favourable attitudes toward sexually permissive behaviour and confusion about sex. In addition, the research noted that young people who used pornography reportedly experienced confusion around perceptions of pornography as reality and exhibited an increase in oppressive attitudes toward females. Most disturbingly, the international research found that young men unanimously considered males as dominant and females as submissive and were more likely to view females as ‘objects’ as a result of viewing pornography. Studies investigating pornography use and behaviour in children and adolescents identified that young people who reported viewing pornography were more likely to engage in sexual behaviour such as oral sex and sexual intercourse at an earlier age than their peers and more likely to engage in sexual harassment toward others. Young people with a predisposition for violence and who reported watching pornography were also found to be more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviour and six times more likely to be violent if exposed to violent forms of pornography than those who consumed regular forms of pornography^{xvii}.

Pornography usage and children with PSB

In response to the growing demand for treatment programs from adult populations and in recognition of research findings from adult sexual offender research, highlighting the benefits of early therapeutic intervention for sexual behaviours, the Victorian state government formally acknowledged the issue of children with PSB and provided funding specifically for treatment of problem sexual behaviours in young people in the Victorian Children Youth and Families Act [CYFA] (2005). Prior to the introduction of Therapeutic Treatment Orders (TTOs) in 2007, there were no legal options for managing problem sexual behaviours in young people. The purpose of the TTO legislation was to provide young people and their families with the opportunity to engage in treatment without intervention from the criminal justice system and ultimately to reduce the risk of further engagement in PSB^{xviii}. At the time that the new provisions were introduced in the Children, Youth and Families Act [CYFA] (2005), three specialist programs existed in Victoria for the treatment of problem sexual behaviours in young people.

In 2014, there are 12 programs providing specialist treatment. Demand for therapeutic intervention has grown significantly over the past decade with in excess of 500 young people now receiving treatment for PSB each year in Victoria. This growth in demand for therapeutic intervention for PSB highlights the need for specific programs for young people as well as the seriousness of the issue.

Pornography and its relationship to sibling on sibling sexual violence

Prior to the 1990s there was widespread ignorance regarding PSB in young people with society focusing on father- child sexual abuse rather than sibling on sibling sexual violence. Sibling on sibling sexual abuse has now been recognised to be far more common^{xix}.

Research indicates that young people with PSB typically target victims based on proximity and vulnerability, such as younger siblings or peers. However, some young people have been found to target adults. A recent study investigating sibling sexual abuse revealed that peer aged victims were more likely to be female however younger children who engaged in PSB were less likely to discriminate, apparently selecting their victims based on availability rather than gender.

Relationship to victim: Victims in the Australian research conducted by Lemon (2014) were categorised as intra-familial such as family members or relatives or extra-familial which included non-family members or strangers. The young people in the research were most commonly found to have engaged in PSB toward family members (63%). The remaining victims were either a combination of intra or extra-familial (20%) or extra-familial victims only (13%)^{xx}.

Where problem sexual behaviour occurred: Most of the PSB took place within the young person's home (50%), however, PSB also occurred outside the family home (33%). A number of young people reported engaging in PSB in both their family home and outside the home (26%).

Sexual knowledge source: When asked as to where they sourced their sexual knowledge, the most commonly identified source was the Internet with 70% of participants reporting deriving their knowledge about sex from the Internet. School health education programs (40%) and peers (27%) were also commonly reported sources of sexual knowledge, with family discussions less common with 20% reporting learning about sex from their family. A number of the young people reported being abused themselves as the source of their sexual knowledge.

Pornography use: The research revealed that pornography use was very common across the entire age range of 7 – 18 year olds in the study sample with the majority of young people reporting accessing pornography on the Internet (70%) including 75% of the 7-11 year^{xxi}.

Recommendations:

Due to historical and cultural taboos around children and sexual behaviours there has been a tendency to ignore, minimise or discount the PSB of children as harmless experimentation. Numerous clinicians and scholars have highlighted the long-term damage that sexual abuse in childhood causes victims. In relation to perpetrators who are themselves often victims of sexual abuse, there is clear evidence that if left untreated children with PSB are at risk of sexual offending in adulthood. Along with adverse and traumatic childhood experiences, early sexualisation through exposure to sexually explicit material such as pornography and sexual abuse are understood to be significant predisposing factors in the lives of children who present with PSB^{xxii}.

Research

- Research is needed to investigate the impact of pornography use amongst young people.
- Research is needed to investigate the impact of pornography use amongst young people with PSB.
- Research is needed to understand the relationship between PSB and pornography usage from an Australian perspective. This is necessary to inform those responsible for developing policy frameworks and making funding decisions regarding programs that provide treatment for young people with PSB.
- Longitudinal research of young people with PSB in the community in Australia is needed. Of the studies that have been conducted, most have investigated samples of incarcerated juvenile sexual offenders in forensic settings with a research focus on recidivism and risk factors rather than young people who present to community treatment programs.
- Research is needed that develops a better understanding of the characteristics of the young people attending Australian community treatment programs for PSB as an initial first step for establishing the appropriateness of current assessment and treatment models which have typically been based on international samples.
- Research to support the development of appropriate treatment programs for young people with PSB who have been exposed to high levels of pornography – particularly young children.

Programs

- Programs that address excessive or addictive pornography usage in young people and young people with PSB.
- Programs to educate parents and train educators around young peoples' access to and use of online pornography as sexual education.

Conclusion:

The relationship between exposure to family violence and violent behaviour in childhood has been well established. It has been suggested that this is due to many factors including social learning through modeling and learning that violent behaviour is acceptable. Given that the majority of young people in the current sample reported being exposed to violence in the home, it is likely that these experiences have contributed to the development of their PSB. In line with previous studies, family members were the most common victims of the young people presenting for treatment with PSB. This is consistent with wider research that has identified access to a victim to be the most prevailing factor for deciding who a young person with PSB will perpetrate sexual violence against. The proximity of family members, in particular younger female siblings, suggests that family members are the most likely targets of the sexual violence perpetrated by young people with PSB.

As previously mentioned, pornography use was found to be extremely common in the sample with 70% of the young people reporting accessing pornography on the Internet, including the youngest participants in the study. This figure was much higher than recorded in other previous Australian studies of adolescent sexual offenders and almost twice as high as findings from studies investigating pornography use in non-clinical samples of young people.

It is important to note that whilst the proportion of young people who reported accessing Internet pornography in the current study was high, it is also likely to be an underestimate given a possible disinclination to disclose such behaviours. Unfortunately, more detailed exploration of pornography use such as the young person's perception of its role in their problem sexual behaviours was not available, making any further analysis of links between pornography use and sexual behaviour impossible.

In relation to Internet pornography use in young people with PSB, very little is known about the content young people engage with, the themes they access and how pornography affects this population emotionally, physically, behaviourally and neuropsychologically. More longitudinal research is urgently required, especially with younger children and early adolescents with PSB in order to better understand how Internet pornography is attended to, understood and incorporated into the sexual development of these young people.

Appendix:

Problem Sexual Behaviour (PSB)

Generally, sexual behaviour is considered to be problematic in young people if it falls outside what is considered developmentally appropriate and is likely to place the young person or others at risk of harm (Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers [ATSA], 2005). Sexual behaviours considered to be problematic consist of a broad range of behaviours that may include, but are not limited to, sexual abuse, rape, excessive masturbation, Internet offences, sex ting or acts of sexual harassment toward others. In contrast, normal childhood sexual play and exploration is behaviour that does not involve coercion or cause emotional distress rather, it is mutual and spontaneous and does not involve force or any abuse of power.

Definition of Pornography:

Pornography has been most commonly defined through the oxford dictionary as:

“Printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement”

Human beings throughout time have used visual imagery to understand their bodies and their natural interest in the mechanics of sexuality; this definition is today somewhat outdated when we consider the misogynistic and violent tropes that are common in the online space. Therefore, the following definition of what is commonly known as pornography in the online space is offered. In this paper pornography is broadly defined as: Illegal, unclassified, gonzo or hard-core XXX, free online material that depicts individuals or groups engaging in sexual behaviours where inequity between the parties is clear, violence is observed or audible, where degradation, humiliation, punishment and extreme submission appear to be the general objective of the power dynamics or behaviour depicted. This definition springs from analysing visual material observed in free online sites such as Porn hub, Red Tube, You porn or the most extreme teen porn \$0.00. This style of pornography appears to demand violence and inequity as its core script line^{xxiii}.

The Research Sample (Lemon 2014):

30 young people aged 8-18 years

Victim characteristics were included in the analysis and included victims within the young person's family (i.e., siblings, cousins) Intra – familial or extra-familial or unrelated victims (e.g. peers or those unknown to the young person).

Referral Source: The majority of referrals came from the Department of Human Services (60%) however parents also referred their children (17%) as well as other sources (17%)

including legal representatives of the young people and other professionals involved in the lives of the young person. A small number of young people were referred by their school (7%).

Place of Residence: At the time they engaged in the problematic sexual behaviour the majority of young people were living in the care of parents (54%) with a smaller number residing in step family situations (17%). Three young people lived away from their parents: Two resided with their maternal grandparents and one lived in out-of-home care.

References:

-
- ⁱLemon, J (2014) Unpublished Masters' Thesis: Characteristics of Young People Referred for Problem Sexual Behaviour: A thesis submitted to the faculty of Swinburne University of Technology Faculty of Life and Social Sciences
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Masters of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)
July 14, 2014
- ⁱⁱ Lemon, J. (2014)
- ⁱⁱⁱLemon, J. (2014)
- ^{iv}Rosewarne, L (2014), gender politics expert from the University of Melbourne
<http://www.smh.com.au/national/sex-education-needs-radical-overhaul-say-experts-20140322-35abm.html#ixzz32JH2YIPp>
- ^v Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{vi} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{vii} Etheredge, L (2014) <http://www.generationnext.com.au/2014/07/positive-sex-education-vs-online-porn/>
- ^{viii} Youth and Pornography in Australia. Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects, 2003 Flood and Hamilton
- ^{ix} Parker, Imogen. Young people, sex and relationships: the new norms (2014) Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR UK)
- ^x Crabbe, M & Corlett, D (2013) Love and sex in the age of pornography, Documentary SBS TV 2013
- ^{xi} 1991: First web page created, 20/5/15. 3.57 billion pages <http://www.worldwidewebsite.com/>
- ^{xii} Green et al: Risks and Safety for Australian children on the Internet, (2011)
- ^{xiii} <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features> 60Jun+2011.1
- ^{xiv} Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013 Anne Mitchell, Kent Patrick, Wendy Heywood, Pamela Blackman and Marian Pitts, April 2014.
- ^{xv} Dr. Michael Flood: 2009, The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people.
- ^{xvi} Parker, Imogen. Young people, sex and relationships: the new norms (2014)
- ^{xvii} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{xviii} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{xix} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{xx} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{xxi} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{xxii} Lemon, J. (2014)
- ^{xxiii} Etheredge, L (2014) Is pornography colonising young peoples' sexuality and normalising inequity? Conference paper, Gender and Education conference Melbourne 2014.