

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO IMPACTS OF HARMFUL PORNOGRAPHY ON MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Organisation: Association of Heads of Independent School (NSW)

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The Director
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Inquiry into the impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional, and physical health

AHISA Ltd is a professional association for Heads of Independent Schools. Nationally, AHISA has 480 members, of which around 145 pertain to AHISA NSW branch. The members of the NSW branch lead schools that account for approximately 148 000 students. AHISA has a longstanding interest in social issues affecting children and appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry by the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues into the impact of harmful pornography.

Studies conducted within Australia and internationally show that exposure to harmful pornography is widespread among young people¹. The widespread exposure and use of harmful pornography has been made possible because it is easy to access, anonymous and often free.

Pornography exposure has been linked to a number of harmful effects, such as: anxiety and maladaptive behaviours, risky sexual behaviour, distorted ideas about sexual relationships, sexual aggression and sexting². Schools are seeing the harmful effects of exposure to pornography playing out in student behaviour. This has been exacerbated by the ability to manipulate images through AI, as can be seen in the incident that occurred at Bacchus Marsh Grammar where a student posted fake explicit images of female students on social media.

A recent study that looked at the sexual harassment of teachers has shown an increase in sexualised behaviours of students in schools³. It revealed that teachers were being subjected to

¹ Maree Crabbe, Michael Flood, Kelsey Adams, [Pornography exposure and access among young Australians: a cross-sectional study](#), Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, Volume 48, Issue 3, 2024. See also eSafety Commissioner (2023) [Accidental, unsolicited and in your face](#). Young people's encounters with online pornography: a matter of platform responsibility, education and choice, Australian Government, Canberra.

² American College of Pediatricians, [The Impact of Pornography on Children](#), updated August 2024. See also Inquiry by The Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs into [age verification for online wagering and online pornography results](#).

³ Collective Shout and Maggie Dent, Sexual Harassment of Teachers, 2024

sexual harassment on a regular basis by their students. The report also mentioned that teachers are seeing inappropriate sexual behaviours even in Kindergarten students.

Given the widespread exposure and use of pornography among young people, it is important that this issue be addressed on multiple fronts, with government, tech companies, educational institutions, and parents contributing and taking responsibility pertinent to them.

We support the introduction of industry codes and standards that will make online services more accountable and protect young people from exposure to pornography.

Education plays an important role in giving young people the skills that will prevent them from engaging with harmful pornography. Many schools have made use of specific programs. The programs and speakers schools have used and about which they have received positive feedback include: [Your Choicez](#), [Pippin Girl](#), [Digihelp](#), [Tomorrow Man](#), [Daniel Principe](#), [Melinda Tankard Reist – Collective Shout](#). Financial support that could allow more schools to run these or similar programs would allow more students to benefit from them. Further study could also be conducted into the long-term benefits of these programs to see whether they have a lasting impact on the behaviour. Funding for counselling services could provide ongoing support for young people who are struggling with pornography addiction.

Schools recognise the role that they can play in educating their students. However, the primary responsibility for educating in this area lies with the parents, and the help that the schools can give would be ineffectual if parents fail to take on this responsibility. It would seem more attention needs to be focused on providing adequate resources for parents. Studies have shown that most exposure to pornography occurred when young people are alone and at home⁴. Parents are a protective factor against pornography use. Parent supervision of internet and social media use, as well as the ability to communicate with their children and discuss the issues that they are experiencing in this area are essential skills for all parents.

While there are resources available for parents⁵, such as those provided by the eSafety Commissioner, further studies could look into how effective these resources are, and whether they are reaching all parents. In particular, the study could examine how accessible and appealing these resources are for CALD parents, taking into account language and cultural barriers. Migrant families may be less aware of the easy accessibility of online pornography and how this can affect their children.

Yours Faithfully,

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⁴ Crabbe et al, Pornography exposure and access among young Australians, 2024; eSafety Commissioner, Accidental unsolicited and in your face, 2024.

⁵ For example: [Thorn for Parents](#)