

Submission
No 37

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

Organisation: NSW Council of Churches

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Rev Dr Ross Clifford
Executive Director, The NSW Council of Churches

Standing Committee on Social Issues
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Submitted via parliamentary website

Dear Committee,

SUBMISSION TO THE IMPACTS OF HARMFUL PORNOGRAPHY ON MENTAL, EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH INQUIRY

I write on behalf of the NSW Council of Churches regarding this significant inquiry.

The NSW Council of Churches is a joint peak body representing eight denominations: the Sydney Anglican Diocese, the NSW Presbyterian Church, the NSW Baptist Union, the Churches of Christ NSW, The Salvation Army, the Fellowship of Congregational Churches, the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Australia. Our members have had a substantial contribution to education in Australia from the advent of the modern era until now, and are therefore highly invested in advancing an effective, objective, and empirical State and National Curriculum.

We thoroughly endorse the extensive submission from Dr Marshall Ballantine-Jones, who is an eminent authority in the effects of, and solutions to, harmful pornography on young people.

In addition, we wish to add our concerns about the detrimental impact of early exposure to pornography and its implications for our youth. Research indicates that such exposure leads to increased usage, a tendency towards risky sexual behaviours, and a greater acceptance of casual encounters. Additionally, it can foster traits such as narcissism, reduced empathy, compulsivity, and deteriorating social skills.

The pervasive presence of pornography in mass media not only contributes to the sexualisation of young people but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and normalises aggressive sexual behaviour. This cultural climate has serious repercussions, including the objectification of women and the prevalence of abuse and trauma.

Furthermore, the pornography industry remains largely unregulated, prioritising profit over safety. Vulnerable individuals are often coerced into sharing explicit content, against their will and while living in poverty, jeopardising their mental health and wellbeing. The rise of deepfake and AI-generated pornography exacerbates these issues, as it allows for the creation of explicit content without consent, inflicting serious emotional distress, especially on young victims.

Mainstream pornography frequently features violent and misogynistic themes, which can distort young people's understanding of sex and undermine healthy sexual education. Unfortunately, current sex education programs often fail to address the significant influence of pornography, leaving a gap in knowledge and understanding that contributes to negative behaviours.

To mitigate these challenges, it is essential to promote comprehensive, evidence-based programs like *DigiHelp* by Dr Ballantine-Jones. Efforts should be made to enhance parental education regarding the risks of pornography and to improve access controls for youth. Comprehensive educational reform, alongside supportive measures for parents, is crucial in fostering healthier attitudes towards sex, respect, and consent.

I urge you to consider these research findings and the pressing need for action to protect our youth from the detrimental effects of pornography.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Dr Ross Clifford
Executive Director