

Submission  
No 38

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

**Organisation:** Parish Marriage Resource Centre Australia

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## Submission to Senate Standing Committee

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### Impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional, and physical health

**PMRC Australia** assists couples to form lifelong successful marriages and is the largest provider of marriage preparation in Australia for couples marrying in the Catholic Church. It's [courses host over 8,000 participants annually](#) in Australia and overseas.

Direct interactions with participants and the study of the available research have formed the opinions below regarding the impact of pornography. They include considerations for Catholic marriage although most also apply to marriage in other religious traditions and to secular marriage and families.

#### All Pornography Harms

The title of the inquiry suggests that there are two categories of pornography – harmful and harmless. All pornography is harmful – harmful to the actors and producers, to the consumer, to partners and families, to the culture at large. There is simply no such thing as harmless pornography. It is a [factor in many social harms](#)<sup>1</sup> and is often the most substantial contributor. By design it has both escalating and addictive properties.

#### Marital fidelity

Pornography is rejected in all its forms by major religions as a form of infidelity. For example in Christian teaching pornography use (in whatever form – movies, photographs, music/auditory, written (e.g. fan fiction), animated or cartoon figures, or AI generated etc), is to 'commit adultery of the heart' ([Mt 5:27-28](#) also [Deu 5:21](#))<sup>2</sup>.

The teaching expresses a profound human truth; the origin of adultery 'of the body' is the indulgence of a sexual fantasy with one who is not one's spouse (adultery of the heart). And this applies not just to men, and not just to those who are married.

Within marriage, pornography use is [associated with a 300% increase in marital infidelity](#)<sup>3</sup> and [increased incidence of sexual dysfunction](#)<sup>4</sup>, particularly among male users.

While faith-based communities promote marital fidelity as a norm, even among many non-believers and secularists, [infidelity is seen and experienced as a hurtful betrayal](#)<sup>5</sup>.

#### Marital stability

Pornography use is frequently cited as a factor in marriage breakdown and research suggests it [increases the likelihood of divorce by two to three times](#)<sup>6</sup>.

Divorce is devastating for the spouses, and its [impact on the children can persist for decades](#)<sup>7</sup>. [Divorce trauma might manifest](#)<sup>8</sup> as hypersensitivity to perceived rejection, catastrophic thinking in relation to disagreements, extreme conflict avoidance, inordinate neediness, and other unhealthy relationship behaviours.

Many adult children of divorce manage their trauma by delaying marriage or avoiding committed relationships altogether. Others find the challenge of finding a partner with who to form a family increasingly difficult, as pornography and sexual licentiousness proliferates.

## Declining Fertility

The [decline in fertility rates in Australia](#)<sup>9</sup> and across the world has economic ramifications that governments are struggling to address.

Delayed marriage is a critical factor in the [rise in unplanned childlessness](#)<sup>10</sup> – a painful reality for an increasing number of couples ([approx. 1 in 6 couples are infertile](#)<sup>11</sup>).

A second contributor to infertility is Sexually Transmitted Infections. [STIs are increasing in the Australian community](#)<sup>12</sup> and are linked with sexual recklessness. Doctors report treating [patients with injuries](#)<sup>13</sup> to their reproductive and digestive systems incurred through violent sex acts that have become normalised in pornographic material.

## Validity of Marriage

For a marriage to be valid in the Catholic church, [both fiancés need to freely, and without reservation, consent to the union](#)<sup>14</sup> at the time of the wedding. [Consent is undermined by addiction and mental illness](#)<sup>15</sup> which diminish a person's capacity to give mature and free consent.

When such issues are not disclosed to the fiancé, [the fiancé's consent is also undermined](#)<sup>16</sup>.

The issues that pertain to being able to enter a valid marriage are relevant to all persons entering a committed relationship, not just those who marry in the Catholic church.

## Pornified culture

The [negative impact of pornography is not limited](#)<sup>17</sup> to those who are addicted or are partnered to an addict. Its pervasiveness means that the [objectification of others](#)<sup>18</sup> (particularly women and children) has become [normalised throughout the culture](#)<sup>19</sup> and attitudes that once were rejected, are frequently accepted as 'normal'.

Pornography use by young people is a major [channel of misinformation](#)<sup>20</sup> that creates false expectations and diminishes their sexual literacy.

Financial incentives in the [porn industry](#)<sup>21</sup> have resulted in a substantial increase in content, including non-consensual, violent, and criminal content. Providers advertise on social media and gaming sites [frequented by children and adolescents](#)<sup>22</sup> in violation of common decency and laws that prohibit grooming. It is an industry that shows no interest in self-regulation and cannot be trusted to do so.

Parents are ill-equipped to protect their children, and many are simply unaware of the dangers. Much of the mental health crisis is sourced in or exacerbated by pornography use and includes [body dysmorphia](#)<sup>23</sup>, [gender identity disorder](#)<sup>24</sup>, [depression and more](#).<sup>25</sup>

[Sexual violence](#)<sup>26</sup>, [coercion](#)<sup>27</sup>, hook ups, [image-based abuse](#) (revenge porn, deep fakes)<sup>28</sup>, paid sex, [trafficking and sexual slavery](#)<sup>29</sup> all become [regularised in a pornified culture](#)<sup>30</sup>. The increase in [child-on-child sexual abuse](#)<sup>31</sup> is a direct consequence and causes life-long trauma to the families and victims.

[Australian schools have become places of sexual intimidation](#) for students and [teachers are routinely exposed to sexual harassment](#)<sup>32</sup>.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Wright, P. J., Tokunaga, R. S., Kraus, A., (2015), [A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies](#). *Journal of Communication*, Vol 66, Issue 1, p 183-205
- <sup>2</sup> 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' [Matthew 5:27-28](#)  
'Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife.' [Deuteronomy 5:21](#)
- <sup>3</sup> Stack, S., Wasserman, I., Kern, R., [Adult Social Bonds and Use of Internet Pornography](#), *Social Science Quarterly* 85 (2004): 75-88.
- <sup>4</sup> Park, B., Wilson, G., Berger, J., Christman, M., Reina, B., Bishop, F., Klam, W.P., Doan, A.P., (2016) [Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports](#). *Behavioral Sciences (Basel, Switzerland)*, 6(3), 17.
- <sup>5</sup> Aslanian, A., [Betrayal Trauma in Addiction](#), The Gottman Institute Blog, Published October 21, 2019, Updated: June 24, 2024
- <sup>6</sup> Perry, S. L., & Schleifer, C. (2017). Till Porn Do Us Part? [A Longitudinal Examination of Pornography Use and Divorce](#). *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(3), 284–296.
- <sup>7</sup> Miller, L., [The Adult Children of Divorce Find their Voice](#). Institute of Family Studies, July 17, 2017
- <sup>8</sup> McKenzie, D., [The Trauma of Separation and Divorce](#). Australian Childhood Foundation. April 17, 2019
- <sup>9</sup> Boymal, J., De Silva, A., Sinclair, S., [Australia's fertility rate has reached a record low. What might that mean for the economy?](#) The Conversation, October 21, 2024
- <sup>10</sup> March, L., [The Invisible Pandemic: Unplanned Childlessness](#). Mercatornet, March 05, 2024
- <sup>11</sup> Editor, [What is Infertility?](#) Billings LIFE website
- <sup>12</sup> Media Release, [Sexually transmissible infections are on the rise in Australia, with syphilis rates tripling over the decade](#). UNSW Kirby Institute.
- <sup>13</sup> Tankard Reist, M., [Porn's grooming starts young](#). MTR website, July 5, 2023
- <sup>14</sup> A valid Catholic marriage results from four elements: (1) the spouses are free to marry; (2) they freely exchange their consent; (3) in consenting to marry, they have the intention to marry for life, to be faithful to one another and be open to children; and (4) their consent is given in the presence of two witnesses and before a properly authorized Church minister. Exceptions to the last requirement must be approved by church authority. [For Your Marriage website](#).
- <sup>15</sup> Tribunal, Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota. [Description of the Grounds](#)
- <sup>16</sup> Pirola, F., Pirola, B., [Sexual Integrity in a Messed-Up World](#), SmartLoving blog
- <sup>17</sup> Webroot, [Internet Pornography by the Numbers](#).

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<sup>18</sup> Tylka, T. L., & Kroon Van Diest, A. M. (2015). [You Looking at Her “Hot” Body May Not be “Cool” for Me: Integrating Male Partners’ Pornography Use into Objectification Theory for Women.](#) *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(1), 67-84.

<sup>19</sup> Koletić G. [Longitudinal associations between the use of sexually explicit material and adolescents' attitudes and behaviors: A narrative review of studies.](#) *J Adolesc.* 2017 Jun;57:119-133. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.04.006. Epub 2017 Apr 20. PMID: 28433892.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, P. J., Tokunaga, R. S., Herbenick, D., & Paul, B. (2021). [Pornography vs. sexual science: The role of pornography use and dependency in U.S. teenagers’ sexual illiteracy.](#), 1-22. doi:10.1080/03637751.2021.1987486

<sup>21</sup> [Trafficking Hub](#)

<sup>22</sup> Elijah Rising Website: [Why Does the Sex Industry Target Children?](#) Nov 10, 2022

<sup>23</sup> International Andrology, London. [The Porn Hypothesis – Findings Prove Porn Consumption fuels the desire for Penis Enlargement Surgery in the UK.](#)

<sup>24</sup> Nadrowski, K. (2024). [A new flight from womanhood? The importance of working through experiences related to exposure to pornographic content in girls affected by gender dysphoria.](#) *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 50(3), 293–302.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, C., Durtschi, J.A., Carroll, J.S., Willoughby, B. J., [Understanding and predicting classes of college students who use pornography.](#) *Computers in Human Behaviour*, Vol 66, January 2017, p 11-121.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, P. J., Tokunaga, R. S., Kraus, A., (2015), [A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies.](#) *Journal of Communication*, Vol 66, Issue 1, p 183-205

<sup>27</sup> Ruvalcaba, Y., Eaton, A., [Nonconsensual Pornography Among U.S. Adults: A Sexual Scripts Framework on Victimization, Perpetration, and Health Correlates for Women and Men.](#) *Psychology of Violence*, 2019

<sup>28</sup> van Oosten, Johanna M. F., & Vandenbosch, L. (2020). [Predicting the willingness to engage in non-consensual forwarding of sexts: The role of pornography and instrumental notions of sex.](#) *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(4), 1121-1132. doi:10.1007/s10508-019-01580-2

<sup>29</sup> Polaris Project. [Human Trafficking Report.](#) 2019

<sup>30</sup> Tankard Reist, M., [Porn’s grooming starts young.](#) MTR website, July 5, 2023

<sup>31</sup> Queensland Government, Child Safety Practice Manual. [When a child is sexually abused by another child or a sibling.](#)

<sup>32</sup> Bitá. N., [Traumatized teachers reveal schoolboy rape threats and pornography abuse.](#) *The Australian*, October 29, 2024

Collective Shout. [Sexual Harassment of Teachers Report.](#) October 28, 2024

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