

# THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON CHILDREN

**Presentation to Department of Home Affairs and Film & Publications Board Conference Against Child Pornography, Port Elizabeth, June 2005 Authors: S.T.O.P.**

The title of this presentation is "**The Harmful Effects of Pornography on Children**" and here I must point out that this refers to ALL types of pornography and not specifically to child pornography. Much attention and, indeed, praiseworthy counteraction has been, and is being, focused on the universally recognised despicable child pornography whilst relatively scant attention has been paid in South Africa to the harmful effects of pornography in general, commonly referred to as Adult Porn. Possibly this "Adult" terminology has been misleading to the point that it has become disassociated with its harmful effects on children. Indeed it is probable that more harm is caused to children by the overall effects of porn in general than by child porn in particular, diabolical as this is. Please note that when we refer to children we use the Constitutional definition of "under 18 years of age".

## **DEFINITION**

Whilst considering definitions I will briefly define pornography. It is any material designed to sexually arouse the viewer - this is the calculated intent. Characteristically, it trivialises rape and teaches that "when a woman says 'no' she actually means 'yes'." The sex act is mechanical and devoid of intimacy. How many know that two Grand Juries in the USA determined that 90% of the hard-core porn traffic is controlled by organised crime (U.S.A. Attorney-General's Commission of Enquiry of 1986) - the same syndicates which deal in drugs, arms smuggling, child prostitution, child trafficking, etc? This being the case - why are we supporting this industry?

## **THE CONTENTS**

**SOFT-CORE PORNOGRAPHY (18)** contains nudity (focus usually on breasts and genitals); heterosexual, oral and anal sex, group sex, homosexual and bisexual behaviour, but with no penetration. This is legally sold anywhere.

**HARD-CORE (X18)** is sold only in adult shops and depicts the same but with penetration, usually in close-ups. It can also include violence (rape, torture); child pornography; simulated child porn; child porn in cartoon form; bestiality and other perversions, e.g. sex with the disabled. Women are often depicted enjoying violence and torture. It is only child pornography that is illegal. (**Note:** In the case of pornography addiction, progressive desensitisation may lead to men turning from what was initially shocking and perverted hard-core material to child pornography.)

## **AVAILABILITY**

Many argue that pornography is harmless (usually out of ignorance) and that it should be freely available to adults if that is their choice. The reality is that one of the largest groups of consumers is boys between 11 to 17 years, regardless of the age restrictions imposed by the Film & Publications Board. Because of the lack of law enforcement pornography is available everywhere in the form of magazines, books, films,

videos, DVDs, computer games, adverts, SMS adverts, cell phones, chat lines, the internet and, of course, television, the powerful and often insidious influence which comes right into our homes.

Outlets are: sex shops, car boot sales, street markets, bookshops and second-hand bookshops - and school recycling depots! Unrestricted men's magazines, e.g. FHM, GQ, MEN'S HEALTH are also becoming increasingly pornographic but in text rather than pictorially. The women's magazine Cosmopolitan is no exception! A shocking fact which has recently come to our notice is the sale of illegal porn DVDs and videos in the Argus Classifieds. The clients of these regular advertisers obviously include under-age young people who are not allowed entrance to adult shops. One question why the Argus has been allowed to continue this illegal activity. Another disturbing fact is that only ¼ of the sex shops in the Western Cape are legal. The remaining ¾ target children and poorer communities. All in all, our country is experiencing an ever-increasing deluge of what is visible and legal - reinforced by much that is illegally imported and distributed.

This preamble has been intended to convey the nature and extent of the threat to our children - ever present despite the good intention of the Film & Publication Act to restrict inappropriate material to "over 18's" only!! Is the time not already overdue for us to weigh up the interests of our children against the interests of the pornography industry which contributes nothing whatsoever to the upliftment of our peoples?

Now to the main content of this presentation, viz. the harmful effects on children. To simplify this we have summarised the seven most serious direct effects which result from age-inappropriate exposure to adult pornography. These effects are manifested emotionally and behaviourally - obviously with an overlap to a greater or lesser degree between the two.

## **1.HARMFUL EFFECTS ON CHILDREN**

### **1.1 Imitation of sexually explicit material**

We all know that visual images have a powerful influence on children. Until 6 or 7 years they can not differentiate between fact and fantasy. Premature exposure to sex scenes shows children something they have no knowledge of and are unable to conceptualise. Children fantasise and imitate. "You need just one film to tickle their curiosity and make them want to try what they have seen. Until 7 years they are walking sponges without any filters. Between 7 and 14 years they model their behaviour on what they have seen on screen" (reported this year by Anne Marie Rencken Wentzel, Educational Psychologist on the West Rand). Joan Campbell, M.A. Family and Child Therapist in Cape Town, who has recently completed a Ph.D. thesis on pre-teen (ages 6-12) sexual offences, has encountered what has now become a common problem in primary - and even pre-primary schools - across all socioeconomic groups, that is sexual games involving oral sex and the insertion of foreign bodies into little girls' vaginas. This can be a result of previous abuse or imitating pornography (Fair Lady, June 2000). This inappropriate sexual behaviour was confirmed by a Safeline manager in an article in the Cape Times in 2002: "Five Cape Town children under the age of 12 who have perpetrated abuses against other children are said to have been exposed to an erotic TV series ... 'Emmanuel' on eTV was definitely one of the programs they watched."

### **1.2 Psychological trauma**

A danger of children being exposed to porn at an inappropriate age is that they become prematurely sexualised and that, even though they have not been molested, they can exhibit the symptoms of a sexually abused child (Joan Campbell).

### **1.3 Acceptance of promiscuous standards of behavior**

Pornography promotes sexual freedoms to the point of promiscuity. What youngsters see on our TV and cinema screens, in magazines, etc. gives the message that casual sex is "cool" and condoned by adults. It appears that for this generation porn is becoming accepted as normal sexual behaviour. In a study by psychologist Rebecca Collins in the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, September 2004, she writes, "This (survey) is the strongest evidence yet that the sexual content of television programmes encourages adolescents to imitate sexual intercourse and other sexual activities." The study also found that shows where sex was talked about, but not depicted, had just as much impact as the more explicit shows. "Both affect adolescents' perceptions of what is normal sexual behaviour and propel their own sexual behaviour," Collins reported. Need we say more? .All local T.V. stations please note ...

What about the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases? Our HIV incidence and teenage pregnancies statistics give us the answer. Note that porn never spells out consequences nor advocates precautions.

#### **1.4 Inability to form relationships with the opposite sex**

Pornography gives the message that instant self-gratification is more important than establishing a relationship. For example, young boys, instead of enjoying the heart and mind of the opposite sex may merely focus on her body, mentally undressing her and picturing sexual encounters. If they are repeatedly viewing pornography, they can become sexually aggressive to women later and feel uncomfortable in normal, healthy relationships. There is also a decrease in respect for women, in the valuation of faithfulness and a major increase in the importance of sex without attachment (Dolf Zillman, University of Indiana, and Jennings Bryant, University of Houston). A quote from American teenagers about internet and cable pornography is, "you get the message that that kind of sex is glamorous ... and that sex should be unemotional", "It's just entertainment now" (Los Angeles Times, 2005).

#### **1.5 Child-on-child sexual abuse**

The alarming increase of child-on-child abuse, with pornography being a causative factor, is confirmed by organisations such as the Teddy Bear Clinic, Gauteng. Luke Lambrecht, Manager, has said that "90% of young sexual offenders (7-14 years) have been exposed to pornography. This is a huge factor as the offenders act out what they have seen" (2004). The Durban Childline Sexual Abuse Treatment Centre Manager voiced concern by saying that "an alarming 42% of sexual assaults against children in the past year were committed by adolescents and children younger than 13. We are raising a society of rapists and child abusers ... Among the factors contributing to the increase of young child offenders was their exposure to pornographic material" (Cape Times, 2002). Another article in the Cape Argus, 2004, stated: "Social workers at Tygerbear Unit for traumatised children at Tygerberg Hospital say they have noticed a distinct increase in reports of child-on-child sexual abuse over the past 5 years. Social worker Sayeeda Dhansay cited, amongst other risk factors, "exposure to porn on TV and the Internet and access to sexually explicit adult reading and viewing material."

#### **1.6 Addiction**

Repeated exposure to soft or hard-core porn in childhood can lead to full scale porn and sex addiction in later life. Our own hands-on experience with porn addicts (as well as research) has shown that the common denominator in most cases had been their initial exposure to porn in childhood.

#### **1.7 Carry-over from childhood to adulthood**

Adult child abusers frequently relate their behaviour to inappropriate exposure to pornographic material at an early age - in fact, it is a known strong predictor of sexual deviance in adulthood.

## **2. INDIRECT EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY USAGE ON CHILDREN**

**2.1** The most noteworthy of these is the trauma of family breakdown/divorce resulting from the father's use of, or addiction to, porn. Our Group is receiving nationwide calls for help from men and women, usually from a wife who has been driven to contemplate divorce as a result of her husband's addiction. Financial problems also play a part in family disintegration - the husband who has moved on to visit strip clubs and prostitutes can spell ruin to especially low-income families with the consequent neglect of the children.

## **2.2 Vulnerability to sexual predators**

Adult pornography is often shown to children by paedophiles and child abusers to "groom" their victims.

The correlation between the use of pornography and the commission of sexual crime has been much debated. A significant statement has been made by the Police Officer coordinating the Gauteng Sexual and Family Violence and Child Protection Units that, in 98% of the cases where the home of a suspected sexual offender has been searched, evidence of the regular use of pornography has been found (2004).

Time constraints have dictated that the harmful effects of pornography on children have been no more than outlined here. This has also precluded reference to additional scientific publications on the subject. However, we trust that it will show that, if we are serious about protecting the rights of our children, we have to look at the WHOLE spectrum of pornography. Indeed, we have to be vigilant if we are to live up to the maxim of the year "Your Child is My Child".

This presentation would be incomplete if no solutions were offered. But let it be said that, in S.T.O.P.'s opinion, the only solution would be to remove ALL pornography from our society. However we acknowledge that, at the present time, practical considerations rule ..... Again, time dictates that the following suggestions can only be summarised in point form:

1. TV must be "cleaned up" (incidentally this applies to violence as well as sexually explicit material). Possible interventions could be via the Broadcasters Code of Conduct; expanding the function of the Film & Publications Board (F. & P.B.) to include TV material; appointing advisory behavioural psychologists to all channels, and setting up a toll-free phone line which will empower all our citizens to voice their complaints. The latter would enable Government to gauge the level of public tolerance (a function which the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, which requires formal complaints in writing, has been unable to fulfil).
2. The licensing procedure for "sex-shops" (the legal source of hard-core porn) should as a matter of urgency be adequately regulated by an amendment to the Business Act of 1993.
3. Porn Education/Awareness programmes should be instituted in schools for educators and learners. This is vital given the Education Department's intention to provide computers/Internet access for all schools and the increasing use of laptops in the classroom.
4. Public "education" on porn should be provided by the F. & P.B. This, together with parental guidance and classification parameters, should be widely disseminated in the media.
5. The F. & P.B. should be expanded to include a Law Enforcement Arm.
6. The public should be clearly informed about contraventions of the Film & Publications Act and on what action to take for reporting same.
7. More vigorous policing is currently necessary to deal with contraventions.
8. Customs officials must be informed and vigilant in preventing illegal importation of porn.
9. Intervention measures involving electronic technology should be urgently investigated. These will be discussed by other delegates at this Conference.

It can be anticipated that putting on the brakes will not be easy as a challenge from the freedom of speech lobbyists is inevitable. However, we simply have to carry the point that freedom of expression is subject to limitations whilst the Constitutional rights of the child to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation are non-derogable. If we adults fail to act will we ourselves not be guilty of stripping children of their innocence, making childhood a thing of the past? Should our legislators once

again be derided with the term "Nanny Government" we should wear the badge with pride remembering that a Nanny is a person who protects and looks after the children in her care. As Nelson Mandela said in 1998 - "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."