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Young people and porn – the real story

For many children and young people in Aotearoa today, porn can be as close as the nearest phone.

We now know over two thirds of 14 to 17-year-olds have been exposed to porn. One in four have seen porn before the age of 12 – mostly by accident, or by having it shown to them.

Seventy-two percent of teens who have viewed porn recently saw things that made them feel uncomfortable; and 42 percent of regular viewers would like to spend less time looking at porn – BUT they find this hard to do.

Seventy-one percent of young New Zealanders believe that children and teens' access to online porn should be restricted in some way.

We know this because the Office of Film and Literature Classification (under the Minds Over Media banner) has just surveyed more than 2,000 New Zealand teens aged 14-17 years old (nearly one percent of the national population within that cohort) for the major research project *NZ Youth and Porn: Research findings of a survey on how and why young New Zealanders view online pornography*.

Chief Censor David Shanks says that technological and social shifts have changed everything we knew or thought we knew about porn and young people.

“This survey has been an opportunity to get young people’s experiences on the table – to give them a voice to tell us how and why they are viewing pornography. We feel it is vital to put our young people front and centre in the debate around internet porn. Listening to what they have to say will give us the best chance to make a difference, and to help them.”

“Our research provides New Zealanders and decision-makers robust and up-to-date evidence about what is happening and what the issues are, which can in turn inform work in areas such as public policy, health, and education.”

“We now have evidence we can use to give educators, parents, guardians and young people the tools, information, and support they need.”

“This research presents both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge, because it puts beyond doubt porn is now a fact of life for young New Zealanders. They have told us in their own words about how conflicted they can feel about this. They sometimes see violent, aggressive, misogynistic and coercive behaviour. An opportunity, because many young NZ’ers have told us they think about what they see, are aware that much of it is not for them – and they are up for having some limits.”

The issues

Young people think porn is too easy to access

They overwhelmingly agree that porn isn't for children, and most agree that some form of online restriction is a good idea. Most young people were not seeking out pornography when they first saw it, but they came across it anyway.

Porn is informing young people's views about sex. And they think this can be a problem

Young people are learning about sex from porn, and it's influencing their sexual behaviour. Young people know this, and they told us it can be a problem – many young people worry about the false expectations that pornography raises about sex and relationships, and the sometimes unhealthy attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours that are depicted.

Porn is a complicated issue for young people, and they sometimes find it hard to manage

Young people's individual experiences with porn are complex and conflicted. They often see things that trouble them. Some young people feel reliant on porn, and many regular viewers would like to look at porn less often.

What can be done?

This research provides an opportunity to take a collaborative approach, incorporating regulation, education, and tools and information for New Zealanders.

Regulation: Strong support amongst young New Zealanders for some kind of online restrictions on porn suggests that a well-designed regulatory response may actually be welcomed by many teens – including those regular viewers who would like to spend less time looking at porn but find this hard to do. There is scope for solutions to be developed in collaborative ways with young people. Any technical or legal fixes are only ever going to be partial solutions – but regulation could provide some valuable protection for young people (especially children). We know that they are much more likely to see porn for the first time by accident, rather than looking for it themselves.

Tools and information: Too many young people do not have the information, support and tools to process and understand pornography, to deal with the sometimes negative consequences of exposure, or to avoid this material in the first place. Many parents would also appreciate support in this area. Some great resources are already out there. There is an opportunity now to promote these, make them easy to find, and work on what else may be needed.

Education: Young people tell us that they want more and better information on sex and sexuality. Education provides an opportunity for a vital counter-narrative to porn that could reach most young people. Whenever young people are learning about sex and relationships, porn education should form part of the discussion.

For education to be effective it requires a whole-of-community approach. We want to see a more informed, cohesive and collaborative approach to ensure progress is made.

As one young person said to us: *“Treating sex as a giant taboo won't help, you know.”*

NOTE TO MEDIA: To arrange an interview with the Chief Censor, please contact Office of Film & Literature Classification Communications & Research Manager Sue Hoyle, phone 021 740 730, sue.hoyle@classificationoffice.govt.nz | www.classificationoffice.govt.nz

Recommended links for help, support and information:

- [Parent Guide](https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/challenging-media/): Challenging media – talking with young people about what they’re watching [<https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/challenging-media/>]
- [Talking to young people – a video series](https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/public/information-for-parents-and-caregivers/#how-do-i-start-a-conversation-about-the-media-with-my-child) [<https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/public/information-for-parents-and-caregivers/#how-do-i-start-a-conversation-about-the-media-with-my-child>]
- [It’s not everyone’s fiction – be careful what you share](https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/its-not-everyones-fiction/) – a video made *by* young people, *for* young people [<https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/its-not-everyones-fiction/>]
- [The Light Project](https://thelightproject.co.nz/) helping youth, their whānau, schools and wider communities to positively navigate the new porn landscape in Aotearoa. Useful information and resources. [<https://thelightproject.co.nz/>]
- [1737 ‘Need to Talk’](https://1737.org.nz/) – feeling anxious, down, depressed or overwhelmed? Free call or text 1737. [<https://1737.org.nz/>]
- Lifeline Aotearoa – Want to speak to someone about how you’re feeling? Whether you’re stressed, lonely, depressed or unsure. Freephone 0800 543 354.
- [Aunty Dee](https://www.auntydee.co.nz/) – if your problems are getting you down, and you’re feeling confused, talk to Aunty Dee. [<https://www.auntydee.co.nz/>]
- [It’s Time We Talked](#) – resources about porn education for young people.
- [Family Planning](http://www.familyplanning.org.nz/) provides a range of services including sexual and reproductive health information, clinical services, education, training and research. [<http://www.familyplanning.org.nz/>]
- [Youthline](http://www.youthline.co.nz) works with young people, their families and those supporting young people. Free call 0800 376 633. [www.youthline.co.nz]
- [Netsafe](http://www.netsafe.org.nz) offers practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges. [www.netsafe.org.nz]
- [Outline](http://www.outline.org.nz) – Confidential, Free, LGBTIQ+ affirming support line and face-to-face counselling. Freephone 0800 6885463. [www.outline.org.nz]