

NSW Inquiry into Impacts of Harmful Pornography: Response to Question on Notice 1



Prepared by Our Watch

Transcript extract and question on notice 1
14 April 2025

Date 14 April 2025

The CHAIR: Thank you. If I could ask Our Watch, I was interested—because we're trying to gather as much evidence as is out there—you did mention and I noted that you have undertaken evaluation of primary prevention strategies in schools and online. I wondered if you could tell us more about the evaluations and what you found that works better or worse. That would be very helpful.

RENATA FIELD: Absolutely, and we can **certainly provide on notice some further details about the pilots that we've conducted.** There was a pilot conducted in 2017. Some of the findings around that demonstrated that people's understandings around attitudes were significantly improved due to the work that was done. The research certainly supports a whole-of-school approach. So that's not just working in a classroom, it's not just one off-programs, but ensuring that it's supported by a whole-of-school approach that includes teachers, it includes school staff, admin staff, and it includes parents and family members as well, so that the messages that are shared with young people and students are supported by families once they get into the home environment. That approach was supported by our research, but it's also very well supported by other international research.

EMMA PARTRIDGE: If I could just add, one of the other things the evaluation found is that teachers were reporting improvements in their relationships with students through delivering this material. That goes to some of the issues Ms Dolin is talking about, that relationships are key between young people and adults. Young people need those trusted adults who they feel are not embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about these topics, that they can really open up, that the kids can share what they've seen. Our evaluation did point to that as a benefit of this approach too, that it improves the rapport between students and adults in talking about these topics

Response to Question on Notice 1

Our Watch has been undertaking Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) as a key area of work since it was established in 2013. This reflects the critical importance of RRE as a strategy for the prevention of violence against women. RRE has a robust and established evidence base, which demonstrates its efficacy.

Our Watch has played a recognised leadership role in RRE in Australia, contributing to and developing the evidence base that supports RRE, supporting policy development and implementation in several jurisdictions, and facilitating information sharing and coordination of policy and practice. This work has included delivering two respectful relationships education pilots:

- **Respectful Relationships Education in Secondary Schools (RREiSS)** pilot, delivered in 19 Victorian secondary schools in 2015. This pilot formed the basis of the Victorian Government's current, system-wide approach, which is now implemented in over 2,000 Victorian schools from Foundation to Year 12.
- **Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools (RREiPS)** pilot, delivered in two jurisdictions - Queensland and Victoria – between 2016 and 2019.

Evaluations of these Australian RRE pilots have demonstrated that it is possible to implement a whole-of-school approach to RRE in both primary and secondary school settings, and to see early signs of change. For example, the Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools Pilot (RREinPS)ⁱ, demonstrated that after only six months of implementing a whole -of-school approach:

- Year 1 and 2 students showed signs of diminishing stereotypical gender attitudes regarding jobs and activities
- There was an increase in staff understanding of gender inequality and its impact on staff culture.

Findings from the pilot conducted in Victorian secondary schoolsⁱⁱ (RREinSS) included:

- Almost half the teachers (47%) indicated their teacher/student relationships had improved
- Students had an increased understanding of and positive attitudes towards discussing issues of domestic violence, gender equality and respectful relationships.

Such changes are early signals of success and should be viewed within a long-term commitment to whole-of-school change.

The findings from these pilots point to the importance of age-appropriate gendered curriculum, comprehensive professional learning, effective workforce support for schools, strong leadership support, guidelines, and support for responding to disclosures of violence, clear and proactive communication, a long-term approach to implementation and increasing take-up of programs within and across schools.

The full evaluation reports from both these Australian school-based pilots can be found at the following links:

- [**Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools – Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools \(2021\)**](#)
- [**Respectful Relationships in Schools, the beginnings of change \(2016\)**](#)

ⁱ Our Watch (2021). Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence: Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

ⁱⁱ Our Watch (2016). Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: The beginnings of change. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

NSW Inquiry into Impacts of Harmful Pornography: Response to Question on Notice 2

Prepared by Our Watch

Transcript extract and question on notice #2
14 April 2025

The CHAIR: I just want to ask, and it's a question that will cross over with NAPCAN as well—I'm pretty sure you mentioned that not all pornography is necessarily bad, but you have a particular focus on, I guess, misogynistic porn or porn that's harmful to women. That's key to my concerns. I wondered if you could talk a bit more about that and the research that supports that, I guess, would be helpful, and why that's of a particular concern.

EMMA PARTRIDGE: Yes, we do have a focus on that. In some ways it's like any form of media that portrays misogynistic representations of relationships between men and women, non-consensual relationships that normalise violence. Now, that can be in a mainstream movie, and it can also be in pornography. That's our focus, because we know that it has an impact on young people's developing ideas about sex and gender and relationships, but particularly around gendered power relationships. Particularly for young men around their development of ideas about what it means to be a man, what masculinity is and how you relate to women, it can be not the most healthiest ways when they're getting those ideas from pornography because so much of it is containing those representations—not all of it, and that's why we say it's not all harmful. LGBTQ young people find particular benefits, some of them, in accessing porn that they can see themselves in, so we wouldn't say all porn, but you're absolutely correct that that's our reason for focusing on pornography, because of those misogynistic representations that are fairly common in it. Young people will continue to see those, as they see them in the broader world around them. So Our Watch is focused on giving young people the tools to critically engage with those messages, whether they're seeing them in pornography or in a movie or in the attitudes of their friends. That's why we work across the whole society to address those misogynistic ideas and representations.

The CHAIR: If you have any academic papers or research, particularly with regard to that area, if you could provide them on notice, that would be appreciated.

Report on proceedings before standing committee on social issues inquiry into impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional, and physical health uncorrected at Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, on Monday 24 March 2025, page 23

Response to Question on Notice 2

We recommend to the Committee two Our Watch reports that refer to academic research relevant to this question. These are summarised below, with full PDFs also attached.

First Our Watch's paper, [Pornography, young people and preventing violence against women \(2020\)](#), discusses how pornography reinforces each of the gendered drivers of violence against women. The background paper brings together findings from the academic literature, as well as Our Watch's research with almost 2,000 young people aged 15-20 from around Australia.

Second, in November 2024, Our Watch released the [Impact of pornography on young people survey report summary](#). This report includes data not previously released from an online survey Our Watch commissioned. The survey involved 832 young Australians aged 16 to 20 years and asked them about the topics of gender roles, sex, dating and relationships, including their attitudes towards pornography.

Some of the key findings from these papers that are of particular relevance to the Chair's question are as follows (with relevant Australian and international literature referenced at the end of this document):

- Pornography is not inherently problematic; but a specific concern is that **some pornography depicts criminal and harmful acts, most commonly perpetrated against women**¹
- **A significant amount of online pornography features verbal, physical and sexual violence towards women.**²
- **Children are frequently exposed to violent pornography.**³
- While some research emphasises the positive impact pornography has on young people's sexual socialisation and experiences, the large majority identifies that **early exposure to pornography can have a significant negative impact on the development of young people's attitudes and practices about gender roles, identities and relationships.**⁴

Findings from Our Watch's online survey research with young people⁵ include:

- **Young people, particularly young men, are seeking out porn as a source of education about sex and sexual relationships.**
- Young people are seeing pornography years before having their first sexual relationship, meaning that pornography can be highly influential in shaping their perceptions of sex and sexual relationships.
- **Young men are more likely than young women to hold problematic views about pornography and the messages it conveys.** Young men are less concerned about what they see in porn. Around half report 'never' seeing violence against a woman that appears non-consensual. As violence is often portrayed in pornography as consensual or pleasurable to women, young men are not recognising these behaviours as problematic or violent.
- **Young people's views about pornography are connected to their attitudes towards women and violence.** The research highlighted consistent relationships between use and views of pornography and the gendered drivers of violence.

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- **Some parents are ill-equipped and unprepared to talk to young people about pornography.** Some parents acknowledge the likelihood of their children being exposed to pornography but say they would tend to avoid discussing pornography with their child, unless triggered by 'catching' their child watching pornography.

¹ The High Council for Equality between Women and Men. (2023). Report – Pornocrime: let's put an end to the impunity of the pornography industry. Accessed 16 October 2024 Children's Commissioner. (2023). 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' – Young people and pornography. Accessed 15 October 2024

² Angelique Chrisafis. (2023). 'French equality watchdog finds that 90% of online pornography abuses women.' The Guardian Accessed 15 October

³ UK Children's Commissioner. (2023). 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' – Young people and pornography. Accessed 15 October 2024

⁴ Crabbe, M., Flood, M., & Adams, K. (2024). Pornography exposure and access among young Australians: a cross-sectional study, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, Vol. 48, No. 3, p. 1.

⁵ This included 1) a 2018 Our Watch survey of nearly 2,000 Australian young people aged 15-20; and 2) online research commissioned by Our Watch in 2022 and undertaken by Quantum Market Research, with Human Research Ethics Committee approval through Victoria University. This research recruited participants through an online panel with parental consent obtained for those aged 16-17. The data was weighted for age and gender.