

Young people make a link between pornography and their harmful sexual behaviour

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Credit: University of Melbourne

Young people who had sexually abused other children said that helping them to manage pornography and improving their sexuality education

could have helped prevent their abusive behaviour. The findings represent the rarely-captured voices of young people who sexually abuse, in a policy briefing paper released today by the University of Melbourne.

Researchers asked 14 young people what could have been different in their lives so that they did not develop harmful sexual behaviour. They also asked six treatment-providing workers to reflect on the insights of the young people. Three main opportunities for prevention emerged, including taking action in the lives of young people to:

- make their home and school relationships safe
- reform their sexuality education
- help their management of [pornography](#)

The study's lead author Gemma McKibbin, PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne said that the findings made it clear that more needed to be done in sexual health policy for vulnerable groups of children, and to restrict young people's access to pornography.

"The access that young people are having to pornography, as well as our collective 'turning a blind eye,' is akin to a kind of cultural grooming of children," Ms McKibbin added.

Sexually abusive behaviour occurs when a child or young person sexually abuses another child or young person. Previous studies have shown that about half the victims of child-on-child sexual abuse are under the age of six, while the children who abuse are themselves likely to be aged just 12.

Of the young people who participated in the study, 12 said they had been exposed to pornography, while three of the boys directly attributed their sexually abusive behaviour to their pornography consumption.

"We can't on the one hand say we don't want to talk with young children about sexuality, while on the other hand do nothing about the multi-billion-dollar pornography industry and the [telecommunications industry](#) that is enabling access," Ms McKibbin added.

"It may be that government needs to intervene at this point. Pornography can't be seen as the sole responsibility of parents or schools because it has gone way beyond that. We probably need to engage directly with the pornography industry and the telecommunications industry," she said.

The study participants also highlighted the need to improve [sex education](#) as a way to promote respectful sexual relationships and counter the distorted messages they received from pornography.

"Consistent, protective sex education needed to be introduced as soon as children started school, if not before, Ms McKibbin said.

Study co-authors also included Professor Cathy Humphreys and Dr Bridget Hamilton from the University of Melbourne.

"The effects of child-on-child sexual abuse are negative and far-reaching for the victims as well as the young people who abuse," Prof Humphreys said.

"We have a great opportunity with the introduction of [Respectful Relationships Education](#) in Victorian schools to address sexually abusive behaviour.

"This report makes a significant contribution to curriculum messages that could be specifically designed to prevent such behaviour, and protect our vulnerable [young people](#)."

Provided by University of Melbourne

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