

Porn in US 'a public health crisis'

16 May 2014, by Robert Macpherson

Pornography now is so widespread in the United States that it deserves to be addressed seriously as a major public health crisis, a panel of activists said Thursday.

On the eve of a two-day conference on [sexual exploitation](#), they suggested that [porn](#) be tackled in the same manner as teenage smoking or drunk driving.

"There's an untreated pandemic of harm from pornography," said Dawn Hawkins, executive director of Morality in Media, which has campaigned against pornography since 1962.

"There's a lot of science now proving that pornography is harmful," Hawkins told reporters at the National Press Club in Washington. "We know now that almost every family in America has been touched by the harm of pornography."

The Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation summit that opens Friday in the Washington suburb of Tysons Corner aims to look at pornography as a complex social problem that needs to be framed as a public health issue.

Participants include [health professionals](#), social workers, academics, feminists, faith leaders, campaigners against human trafficking and former members of the multibillion-dollar adult entertainment industry.

'Considerable political clout'

"This is a business with considerable political clout," said Gail Dines, a sociology and women's studies professor at Wheelock College in Boston and author of "Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality."

Porn sites get more visitors per month than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined, a third of all downloads contain porn and the Internet now hosts 4.2 million porn websites, said Dines, who is also president of the international feminist group Stop

Porn Culture.

"Porn is without doubt the most powerful form of sex education today, with studies showing that the average age of first viewing porn is between 11 and 14—and let me tell you, this is not your father's Playboy," she said.

"These degrading misogynist images have become the wallpaper of our lives and they are robbing young people of an authentic healthy sexuality that is a basic right of every human being."

Donny Pauling, a former adult film producer for Playboy and others who also ran a network of adult websites before quitting the business in 2006, said he has personally seen the ill effects of the porn business on the women who appear in front of the camera.

Doubts porn star is 'empowered'

He doubted that Miriam Weeks—a 19-year-old women's studies student at elite Duke University who caused a national stir recently when she came out as moonlighting Internet porn star Belle Knox—feels as "empowered" as she has claimed.

"I don't buy her story," Pauling said. "I recruited more than 500 first-timers into the business and there's never been one that came back and thanked me."

Mary Anne Layden of the University of Pennsylvania, who specializes in sexual trauma, said pornography has been a factor in every case of sexual violence that she has treated as a psychotherapist.

"The earlier males are exposed to pornography, the more likely they are to engage in non-consensual sex—and for females, the more pornography they use, the more likely they are to be victims of non-consensual sex," she said.

In an interview with Rolling Stone earlier this

month, Weeks revealed that she started watching [pornography](#) at the age of 12—and that she was once raped at a high school house party.

"There is going to have to be programs out there that get kids to understand how porn is manipulating them," Dines said.

And Layden suggested that if the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention got "interested in this as a [public health](#) issue, we can have success in the way that we had success with the issue of cigarette smoking."

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