

As an educator and parent, I have encountered endless incidents of young people – children and young teenagers - being harmed by exposure to online pornography. The most recent incident that came to my attention occurred in a library where a nine-year-old girl – a family friend – was playing with her mother’s phone on a bean bag, while her mother looked around the library. Some thirteen-year-old boys approached her and told her to look up porn on the phone. She had no idea what porn was, but did as they told her. In the ten minutes that her mother and looking at books this little girl’s innocence was taken from her. She’s been so upset by what she saw that she’s been having nightmares and doesn’t want to go to school.

Pornography today is no longer the seductive nudes in a magazine that it was twenty years ago. At the click of a button children of any age can access the most brutal, violent and misogynistic sexual imagery. It is heartbreaking to imagine the impact it will have on this generation of children.

I was with Collective Shout for a while and the stories you hear from school-aged girls about the effect that online pornography is having on the behaviour of their male peers is just harrowing. What’s worse is that it’s gone from being a high school issue to something that is now happening in primary school. Boys harassing girls for nude photos, boys talking to girls about that pornography they saw last night, boys asking girls to perform vulgar acts. This behaviour is being reported in boys as young as eight years.

We live in a post-“metoo” world where respect for women is one of our main talking points. Many organisations now are very vocal about stamping out violence against women. Yet no one ever mentions porn, arguably the single biggest perpetrator of misogyny that exists.

In an ideal world no-one would be able to access online porn, but what’s most important is that children be safe from it. Passing a law that ensures that no one under 18 can access pornography is crucial (not to mention well over-due) for the well-being of our young people.

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