Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies

AIFS

Reducing the harms that pornography can cause to young people

Themes emerging from a literature scan

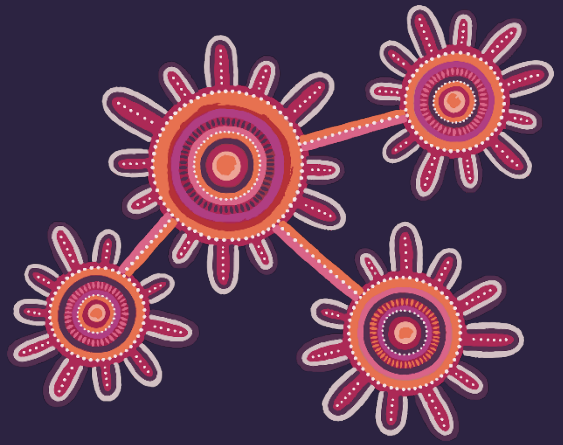
AIFS Conference 2026 | Melbourne, 9-11 September 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies

AIFS

Country



The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands and waters.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Sensitive content warning

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

The topics discussed in this presentation are sensitive and may be confronting or distressing

You can access Sexual Health Quarters (www.shq.org.au) for simple information about sexual health, or contact their helpline (Metro: (08) 9227 6178 | Country: 1800 198 205)

You can use the Sexual Reproductive Health Australia's service directory to find support in your state or territory

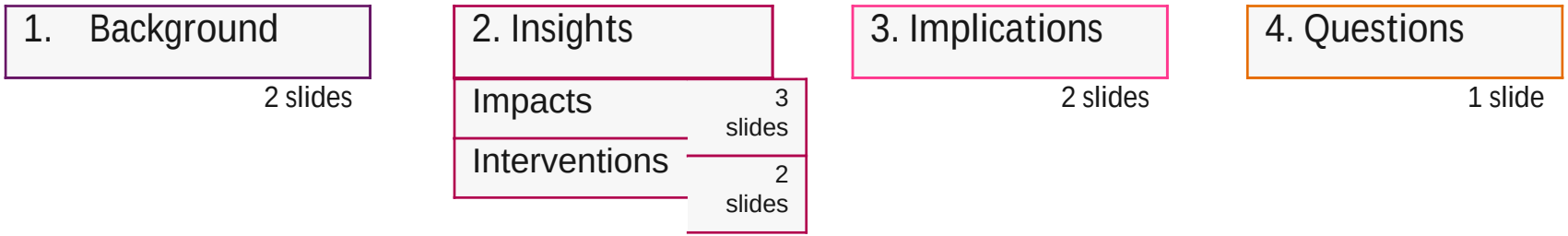
You might like to seek help and support to deal with feelings of distress

- Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800)
- Reach Out (www.about.au.reachout.com)
- Headspace (1800 650 890)
- Beyond Blue (1300 224 636)
- MensLine (1300 789 978)
- 13YARN (13 92 76)
- QLife (1800 184 527)
- Disability Gateway (www.disabilitygateway.gov.au)
- 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)
- ANROWS directory (wwww.anrows.org.au/support-directory)
- NASASV directory (www.nasasv.org.au/support-directory)
- AskIzzy directory (www.askizzy.org.au)

Introduction

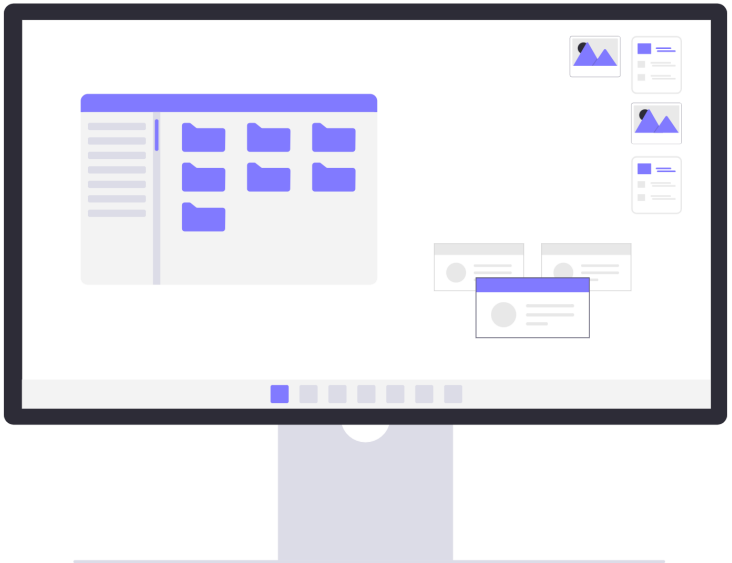
Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

- Presenter: Rachel Moody
  (Principal Research Officer, Australian Institute of Family Studies)
- Co-author: Dr Mandy Truong
  (Senior Research Fellow, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health)
- Format of this presentation:



Background

- This presentation is drawing on a paper titled ‘Reducing harms related to pornography for young people’ (publication pending)
- We did a scoping review of literature from the last 10 years, to determine what evidence exists in relation to interventions to address young people’s pornography use
- **The evidence base is complex and limited**



Background

- Pornography is easily, anonymously and freely accessible online

  (Binnie & Reavey, 2020a; Standing Committee on Social Issues, NSW Parliament, 2025).

- **Most young Australians have encountered pornography at some stage in their lifetime – on average, by early-mid adolescence**

  (Crabbe et al., 2024; Power et al., 2022)

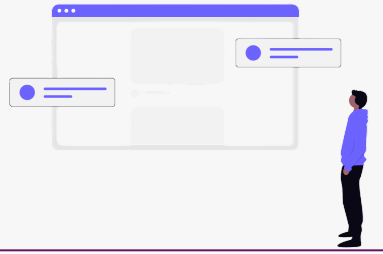
- Pornography and social media sites are the most common places young Australians encounter pornography – intentionally or not

  (eSafety Commissioner, 2023)

Young Australians may look at pornography for a range of reasons, including:

- curiosity
- education
- representation

(Flory & Shor, 2025; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2019; Power et al., 2022; Stone et al., 2025; Woodley et al., 2025)



Insights: **Impacts**

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

Young people consider pornography beneficial for:

- exploration
- inspiration
- entertainment
- gratification and pleasure
- a sense of control
- breaking taboos or shame around sex

(Doornwaard et al., 2017; eSafety Commissioner, 2023)

Pornography exposure has also been associated with higher engagement in offline social activity and sports

(Andrie et al., 2021)

Insights: **Impacts**

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

Potentially harmful attitudes and behaviours that have been linked to young people's pornography exposure include:

- issues with self-esteem and body satisfaction
- unrealistic expectations or anxieties around sex
- mistaken beliefs about sex
- lower romantic relationship skills
- lower refusal skills
- greater sexual permissiveness
- higher externalising behaviour problems
- higher levels of internet addiction
- mental health problems
- risky sexual behaviours
- unwanted sexual behaviours
- sexual aggression, coercion and abuse
- other harmful sexual behaviours
- dominant sexual behaviours, such as choking
- dating violence
- willingness to forward sexts from a stranger
- stereotypically gendered or sexist attitudes
- tolerance towards violence and discrimination

(Alexandraki et al., 2018; Andrie et al., 2021; Cerbara et al., 2023; Children's Commissioner, 2023b; Hollis & Belton, 2017; Huntington et al., 2024; Laporte et al., 2024; Lim et al, 2017; Nelson et al., 2019; Rostad et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2018; The Men's Project, 2025; van Oosten & Vandenbosch, 2020; Warren & Swami, 2018; Waterman et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2022; Wright, Herbenick et al., 2021; Wright, Paul et al., 2021)

Insights: **Impacts**

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

- Pornography can provide young people with ‘scripts’ for sexual behaviours

  (Martellozzo et al., 2020; Scarcelli, 2025; Vertongen et al., 2025)

- **Some young people know the scripts in pornography are unrealistic and can be harmful**

  (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2020; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2024a; Lim et al., 2021).

- Some young people exercise cautious around their pornography use, proactively resisting harmful content or scripts

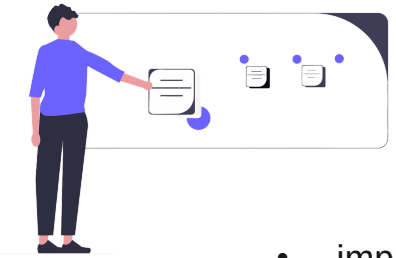
  (Attwood et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2024a; Healy-Cullen et al., 2024b; Woodley et al., 2025a; Woodley et al., 2025b).

Young people may not always recognise potentially harmful components of pornography use, and may not be able to use self-regulation tactics or self-protective mechanisms

(Vertongen et al., 2025)



Insights: **Interventions**



Programs

Identified outcomes include:

- better knowledge around pornography
  (Dawson et al., 2025; Nelson et al., 2022, 2025; Rothman et al., 2018)
- reduction in beliefs that pornography includes realistic or accurate depictions of sex
  (Dawson et al., 2025; Nelson et al., 2022)
- reduction in beliefs that pornography is a good source of education or model behaviour
  (Rothman et al., 2018)
- improved capability to address consent and make positive sexual decisions (e.g. resisting pressure)
  (Dawson et al., 2025)
- improvements in their genital self-image
  (Dawson et al., 2025)
- reduction in pornography use
  (Ashley et al., 2024)
- greater likelihood of knowing where to ask for advice about pornography use
  (Rothman et al., 2018)

Insights: **Interventions**

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

Education and conversations

- Many parents, caregivers and young people are supportive of more school-based education

  (Baker, 2016; Bruke et al., 2023; Davis et al., 2021; eSafety Commissioner et al., 2018; Giunta et al., 2025; Lim et al., 2021; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Woodley et al., 2025b)

- Many parents, caregivers and young people are also supportive of more open conversations

  (Davis et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2024)

- Important components include:
  - evidence-based
  - leverage existing skills
  - positive, strengths-based
  - open and honest
  - non-judgmental
  - participatory

  (Ballester et al., 2022; Balliet & Ford, 2025; Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Davis et al., 2021; Giunta et al., 2025; Lim et al., 2021; Vrankovich et al., 2025)

Regulations

- Some young people support more regulation around pornography

  (Lim et al., 2021)

- Australia introduced its Age-Restricted Material (ARM) Codes on 9 March 2026

Stakeholders suggest a combination of regulations, education and conversations may work well

(Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Turvey et al., 2024)

Implications

- Build awareness and knowledge about pornography and its influence on young people
- Support parents, caregivers and young people to understand that pornography exposure is common and normal
- Encourage age-appropriate, calm, respectful and non-judgmental conversations about pornography and related topics
- Facilitate access to trusted referral pathways and resources

More research is needed to support best practice

(Standing Committee on Social Issues, NSW Parliament, 2025; Quadara et al., 2017)

It is still important to be open to learning, and monitor evolutions in this space

Questions?

Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIFS

Further reading:

The Gist
(www.thegist.org.au) resource produced by the Burnet and University of Melbourne

Talking about Pornography
(www.esafekids.com.au/pornography-education)
resource produced by eSafeKids

It's Time We Talked
(www.itstimewetalked.com/) resource produced by Maree Crabbe and David Corlett

Porn – What You Should Know
(www.lovesexrelationships.edu.au/) teaching resource produced by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University

Talking With Teenagers About Pornography
(www.raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/pornography-sexting/pornography-talking-with-teens)
resource produced by Raising Children Network

What to Do If Your Child Discovers Porn Online
(www.esafety.gov.au/parents/issues-and-advice/what-to-do-if-your-child-discovers-porn-online) resource produced by the eSafety Commissioner

Shades of Pornography
(www.interrelate.org.au/relationships-and-sexuality-education/high-school-programs/shades-of-pornography/) fee-based program delivered by Interrelate

'Pornography use among adolescents and the role of primary care', a free article by US-based authors Grace B Jhe, Jessica Addison, Jessica Lin and Emily Pluhar