



## MEDIA RELEASE

# PORNOGRAPHY SHAPING YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

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Just under half of all Australian children aged 9-16 years old have viewed pornography, with potentially negative impacts on their attitudes to sex, sexuality and relationships, according to a discussion paper released today by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

*The effects of pornography on children and young people* found a growing evidence base showing that adolescents' use of pornography can negatively influence their knowledge about sex, safe sex practices, gender roles, and could lead them to have unrealistic expectations about sex.

"In Australia, 44 per cent of children aged 9 to 16 years old had encountered sexual images in a 12-month period. Of these, 16 per cent had seen images of someone having sex," Institute Director Anne Hollonds said.

"The exposure to online pornography can be inadvertent, as young people search online for information on sexual health, relationships or medical information, or intentional, such as being sent links to follow.

"The research shows that attitudes and responses to exposure varied by gender, with females having more negative views and responses, such as shock or distress, compared to males who are more likely to find pornography amusing or exciting.

"Parents also tended to underestimate the extent of exposure to pornography for adolescents, and overestimate the risk for younger children, despite the fact that adolescents are more likely to view sexually explicit material."

In the absence of quality sex education, viewing pornography can be a major source of sex education for adolescents, with research finding that young people may try performing the practices seen in online pornography. The content of pornography may reinforce double standards of an active male sexuality and a passive female receptacle.

"Exposure to pornography can shape young people's expectations about sex, for example about what men find pleasurable, what they expect their partners to do and how consent is negotiated. It also depicts sex that undermines public health messages about safe sex and condom use," AIFS Senior Research Fellow, Dr Antonia Quadara, said.

Recent research also shows an association between consuming pornography and boys perpetrating sexual harassment.

"Male adolescents who view pornography frequently were more likely to view women as sex objects, strengthening attitudes supporting sexual violence against women.

"Research also suggests that adolescents who consumed violent pornography were six times more likely to be sexually aggressive compared to those who viewed non-violent pornography or no pornography," Dr Quadara said.

Dr Quadara said the research found quality sex education programs in schools and parental guidance for safe internet use, backed up by crime prevention, legal and regulatory strategies, could help address the negative effects of pornography and build respectful relationships.

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