

Written evidence submitted by Dignify (OSB0196)

Pornography has become a pervasive force in the lives of teenagers, according to our study into the way young people are being affected by today's highly-sexualised culture.

Dignify's Digital Relationship Survey was completed by 1,009 secondary school pupils and we have found that disturbingly high numbers of school children have viewed porn, acted out porn and feel addicted to porn.

The participants were aged between 14 and 18 and attending secondary schools in Southwest Hertfordshire between October 2020 and February 2021.

- 55% said they have viewed porn with 44% more than once.
- The average age that teenagers first viewed porn is 13 years old; 12 years in boys
- 13% said they viewed porn daily or several times a day.
- 6% said they feel porn has become a habit or an addiction with 7% in boys
- The majority of participants felt porn was an unwelcome influence:
- 60% think people who watch porn are more likely to act out porn they have viewed.
- 32% told Dignify they have already acted out what they viewed in pornography.
- 58% felt people who use porn are likely to objectify others.
- 56% disagreed with the statement 'Porn is helpful to me'.

Further evidencing the sexualized narrative that young people are navigating:

- 24% sending a sext to someone that they know with 8% reporting they have sent a sext to a stranger.
- 43% say they have received a sext from someone they know.
- 44% have received a 'sext' from a stranger

Dignify surveyed a smaller group of college students aged 16 – 19 years old in May 2021 and these statistics on sexting doubled.

Following on from the press reports triggered by the death of Sarah Everard, the number of testimonies on www.everyonesinvited.uk (a website and Instagram account aiming to eradicate rape culture) has soared and has encouraged the government to ask Ofsted to undertake a review into sexual abuse in schools. Ofsted reported in June 2021 that sexual harassment has been "normalised" in schools to such a degree that students assume to not report the abuse. Furthermore, boys are collecting nudges like gaming cards and "92% of girls, and 74% of boys, said sexist name-calling happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers. The frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal."

At Dignify, we have three main aims:

- Champion healthy relationships
- Challenge the normalising of pornography, particularly its harmful effects on children and young people
- Call out sexual objectification and all its negative consequences.

Schools in Watford and Southwest Hertfordshire are requesting the Dignify Digital Survey to be available every year. This survey explores five key areas:

- Mental wellbeing
- Social media habits

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- Digital relationships
- Perceptions about pornography
- Experience of pornography

This survey can be available widely across the UK and assist schools in understanding the situation their students are experiencing.

Dignify is working in partnership with a number of schools to ensure the whole-school approach is realised. However, it is, in our view, essential that the whole community participates in ending the toxic culture that has normalised sexual objectification and all its negative consequences. To that end we are introducing the Dignify Charter.

We thank the Online Safety Bill Committee for your engagement in this essential conversation and urge you to make bold and courageous steps to protect children and young people from online harms. This must include the introduction of Age Verification with ID for all online pornography.



Helen Roberts
Dignify CEO/Founder

28 September 2021

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