

## **Written submission from CARE (SPP0098)**

### **About CARE**

1. CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) is a well-established mainstream Christian charity providing resources and helping to bring Christian insight and experience to matters of public policy and practical caring initiatives across the UK.

### **Executive summary**

2. Evidence suggests that consumption of pornography, sexualised images in other media and paying for sex has a harmful impact in shaping attitudes, especially attitudes towards sex and relationships and that this impacts views of women as sexual objects.
3. CARE is concerned that social acceptance of these harmful attitudes can lead to acceptance or perpetuation of harmful behaviours including sexual harassment.
4. In the light of this evidence CARE recommends:
  - The age-verification regulator should be encouraged to take action under section 23(1)(a) of the Digital Economy Act to direct internet service providers (ISPs) to block sites that should have implemented age-verification to prevent children from accessing pornography, once this provision comes into effect.
  - The definitions in Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act, which allow violent pornography behind age verification, should be urgently reviewed before the review required by the Act.
  - Studies examining children's access to pornography have shown the negative affect pornography use can have on young people's social development and wellbeing in the development of their attitudes towards sex, relationships and themselves. Information on these studies should be sensitively included as part of the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum
  - The Government should commission research on the impact of pornography on adults as part of the wider Internet Safety Strategy so that there can be awareness and safety measures to protect adults who are at risk of the negative impacts of pornography.
  - England, Wales and Scotland should follow the example of Northern Ireland by creating a criminal offence of paying for sex establishing that women's bodies should not be viewed as sexual commodities that can be bought.

### **What are the factors (including social and cultural factors) that lead to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places?**

5. Our evidence below suggests that how the media portrays women is one of factors that can lead to sexual harassment.

### **How do men and boys learn what is acceptable behaviour?**

6. Our culture and the media give messages about what behaviour is acceptable.
7. There has recently been considerable evidence published about the impact of pornography on young people:
  - a. Analysis of 12- to 14-year-olds' media consumption and content showed "*a statistically significant association with adolescents' sexual activity and future intentions to be sexually active, with measures of movie and music exposure showing the strongest associations;*"<sup>i</sup>
  - b. "Adolescents' exposure to a sexualized media environment is associated with stronger notions of women as sex objects".<sup>ii</sup>
  - c. 70% of participants in research in 2014 said that "*pornography can have a damaging impact on young people's views of sex or relationships.*"<sup>iii</sup> A 2013 Rapid Evidence Assessment concluded that "*access and exposure to pornography affect children and young people's sexual beliefs...beliefs that women are sex objects; more frequent thoughts about sex... Pornography has been linked to sexually coercive behaviour among young people and, for young women, viewing pornography is linked with higher rates of sexual harassment and forced sex.*"<sup>iv</sup>
  - d. The harm to children and young people from pornography has been recognised in the Government's actions on age verification. In the document, Child Safety Online: Age-Verification for Pornography, February 2016, the Government said, "*Clearly, these images risk harming their ability to develop healthy personal relationships based on respect and consent*".<sup>v</sup> The Ending Violence against Women and Girls, Strategy 2016 – 2020 says, "*Research also demonstrates that viewing pornography at a young age can cause distress and have a harmful effect on sexual development, beliefs and relationship.*"<sup>vi</sup>
8. Research published on the **impact of so-called lad's mags** on men **over the age of 18** suggests:
  - a. There is a correlational (but not necessarily causal) relationship between reading lads' mags and "*permissive attitudes towards sex, as well as the belief that a wider variety of sexual behaviours is an expected part of a sexual relationship and a more aggressive sexual self-schema*".<sup>vii</sup>
  - b. "*Women are more likely than men to be portrayed as sex objects, such as the common practice of photographing them in contorting or demeaning positions.*"<sup>viii</sup>
  - c. "*...sexist jokes in lads' mags contexts makes them appear less hostile.*"<sup>ix</sup>
9. Relevant research has also been published on the **impact of music videos and video games**:
  - a. Content analysis of music videos has found that "*female artists were more sexually objectified than male artists*" from which the authors concluded "*contemporary music videos serve to reinforce the cultural notion that women are valued first and foremost for their bodies and their appearance*". The analysis also found that "*that male artists*

*were less likely to use their own sexuality, but they were more likely than female artists to have extras dancing in sexually suggestive ways, and they were more likely than female artists to have women in their music videos play purely decorative roles.”* Concluding that *“this supports the idea that for male artists, the display of attractive women’s bodies is seen as self-promotion of the artists.”*<sup>x</sup>

- b. In another study male college students who watched highly sexual hip-hop music videos *“expressed the higher levels of objectification of women, stereotyped gender attitudes, and acceptance of rape myths.”*<sup>xi</sup>
- c. A study to investigate the impact of viewing the stereotypical sexualised images from video games on attitudes to sexual harassment found that *“males who saw the sex-typed images were most tolerant of sexual harassment when judging a real-life case of sexual harassment between a female college student and her male professor.”*<sup>xii</sup>
- d. Another empirical study found *“clear evidence that playing a sexually-oriented video game primes sex-related thoughts and increases accessibility to a negative gender schema of females as sex objects.”*<sup>xiii</sup>

**What evidence, if any, is there of links between harmful attitudes and other behaviours such as paying for sex or using pornography?**

- 10. Research suggests clear links between paying for sex and harmful attitudes towards women. For instance:
  - a. A variety of international studies indicate that notions of men having a biological imperative or a right to sex as a ‘consumer’ underpin motivations for purchasing sex.<sup>xiv</sup> Researchers write that *“the motivations offered by men who pay for sex demonstrate a relationship between the sexualization of everyday lived experience and demand for commercial sex.”*<sup>xv</sup>
  - b. Research with men who buy sex has also indicated many show low levels of empathy for women in prostitution, and often view women in prostitution as fundamentally different from other women.<sup>xvi</sup>
  - c. Other data suggests that men who buy sex are more likely to share characteristics with men at risk of committing sexual aggression than men who do not buy sex.<sup>xvii</sup>
  - d. A European Parliament resolution from 2014 describes prostitution as *“a cause and a consequence of gender inequality,”* and says it *“perpetuat[es] gendered stereotypes and stereotypical thinking about women selling sex, such as the idea that women’s and under-age females’ bodies are for sale to satisfy male demand for sex”*.<sup>xviii</sup>
- 11. Research suggests links between consumption of pornography and sexual aggression and other harmful attitudes and behaviours including:
  - a. The results of a meta-analysis of pornography consumption, which concluded *“As with all behaviour, sexual aggression is caused by a confluence of factors and many pornography consumers are not sexually aggressive. However, the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more*

*frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently”<sup>xxix</sup> and other studies which found that “men who viewed [women] as sex objects had attitudes more supportive of violence against women.”<sup>xxx</sup>*

- b. Interestingly one study found *“Pornography consumption was associated with both verbal and physical sexual aggression, but the association was stronger for verbal sexual aggression. It is important to emphasize, however, that sexual harassment can be extremely damaging and verbal coercion to obtain sex, even without the threat of physical force, is still an act of sexual violence.”<sup>xxxi</sup>*
- c. A report for the NSPCC argues that, because of the influence of pornography and sexting, children and young people have become normalised to acts of sexual aggression and sexual exploitation with such behaviour having become intricately embedded in their peer culture.<sup>xxii</sup>
- d. A US study with adolescents also found that those who used sexual explicit media perpetrated more sexual harassment activities compared to their peers.<sup>xxiii</sup> They also found that *“more than three fourths (76%) of the males who reported committing at least some form of sexual harassment also reported having used some sexually explicit media.”* (Note that this study was quoted in the Government’s paper on Age Verification.)<sup>xxiv</sup>
- e. Other studies have shown that adolescents’ exposure to a sexualized media environment is associated with stronger notions of women as sex objects and that this increased with exposure to more explicit material in audio-visual formats.<sup>xxv</sup>

## **How can negative attitudes and behaviours be changed?**

12. Parents and schools should be made aware of the impact of these images on their children. Age-verification processes and family friendly filters can protect children under 18 years old from accessing pornography and thus help prevent them developing harmful attitudes.
  - a. Parents should be made aware of age appropriate online safety tools.
  - b. The Government should reconsider its position on **not** making internet family friendly filters mandatory. These filters should be default on and include robust age verification checks prior to filters being lifted. There should be a transparent, consistent approach between all ISPs in the level of filtering provided. All of these actions were recommended in *Growing up with the Internet*.<sup>xxvi</sup>
  - c. The age-verification regulator should be encouraged to take action under section 23(1)(a) of the Digital Economy Act to direct internet service providers (ISPs) to block sites that should have implemented age-verification to prevent children from accessing pornography, once this provision comes into effect.

- d. Studies examining children's access to pornography have shown the affect pornography use can have on young people's social development and wellbeing in the development of their attitudes towards sex, relationships and themselves. Information on these studies should be sensitively included as part of the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum.
13. There needs to be a much wider debate about the impact of pornography on adults. For instance, in 2017 Relate reported "*Pornography and the impact it has on the relationship is an increasingly common problem seen in the counselling room.*"<sup>xxvii</sup> The Government should commission research on the impact of pornography on adults as part of the wider Internet Safety Strategy so that there can be awareness and safety measures to protect adults who are at risk of the negative impacts of pornography.
14. Given the evidence of links between viewing of pornography and sexual aggression, CARE is concerned about provisions in the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) which allow access to violent pornography online behind age-verification (AV) that is not prohibited in an off-line context.
  - a. The DEA only allows the age-verification regulator to act against a small part of what is prohibited material in other media: extreme pornography, which is defined very narrowly:<sup>xxviii</sup> any image has to be considered to portray real and violent acts that threaten a person's life or result in serious injury to a person's anus, breasts or genitals; or involve non-consensual acts of penetration; material described by the Government as "grotesque".<sup>xxix</sup> The change allows access behind AV mechanisms to other sexually violent material that does not focus on serious injury to a person's breasts, genitals or anus<sup>xxx</sup> and material containing acts that would be within scope of extreme pornography. but the images are not "explicit and realistic".
  - b. CARE is concerned about the long term impact this change will have **on women** and **recommends that the definitions in Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 should be urgently reviewed before the review required by the Act; Our recommendation is that the original definition be reinstated.**
15. Research suggests that the legal framework for prostitution impacts attitudes towards paying for sex and towards women in prostitution:
  - a. In Sweden where paying for sex has been illegal since 1999 a comparison of population surveys demonstrates a reduction in the number of men reporting having paid for sex thought to be a result of a change in attitudes: in 2014 just 0.8% of men had purchased sexual services in the past year, compared with 1.3% in 1996,<sup>xxxi</sup> and another set of surveys indicates a reduction of the number of men reporting ever having bought sex from 13.6% in 1996 to 8% in 2008.<sup>xxxii</sup>
  - b. Conversely in Germany where prostitution has been legalised Dr Ingeborg Kraus, a German psychologist has said "*Since the law [legalising prostitution] destroyed any questioning of the harm in men buying women for sex, the acts are becoming increasingly dangerous, violent and degrading. Buyers pick from a long list of sexual*

acts, most of which could easily be defined as torture.[...] These acts cause extremely deep, enduring and traumatizing harm to the women.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

- c. **CARE recommends that England, Wales and Scotland should follow the example of Northern Ireland by creating a criminal offence of paying for sex establishing that women’s bodies should not be viewed as sexual commodities that can be bought.**

## Conclusion

16. The research evidence calls for policy action to improve the environment where sexual harassment has been so prevalent. Policy actions need to address children, young people and adults.

April 2018

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