



## **Family Digest 24**

**June 2019**

### **The impact on psycho-social development of children exposed to pornography**

The South African Law Reform Commission recently invited public comment on its recommendation that “legislation should comprehensively criminalise all acts of exposing children to pornography and content not suitable for children, in whatever manner, including through advertisement and enticement or by making use of misleading techniques”.<sup>1</sup> At about the same time, the Sunday Times published an article announcing that from next year the life orientation textbooks in grades 4-12 will reflect “curricula that treats masturbation, gender-nonconformity and single-parent families as mainstream.”<sup>2</sup> Responding to the concerns of parents, the Department of Basic Education has since stated that the new curriculum would be targeted at grade 4 to 12 pupils, and would cover a variety of subjects ranging from healthy lifestyles to sex education. It said that grade 4 pupils would be taught in the most appropriate and sensitive way about how babies are conceived, amongst other related topics.<sup>3</sup>

While parents would ideally want children to learn about sexuality and reproduction at home, in a loving and secure environment, the harsh reality is that nearly half of children between the ages of 9 and 16 experience regular exposure to sexual images. Researcher Chantelle Blokdyk observes that “we are the first generation to have the conversation about internet pornography with our children.”<sup>4</sup> The vulnerability of children in the age of social media cannot be overestimated, and the children most affected may well be the younger ones. Research shows that media has a tremendous capacity to teach. However, what it teaches is the concern. Exposure to media online, on cell phones, through games and in movies, particularly where the content is violent, gender-stereotyped, and/or sexually explicit, skews children’s world view, increases high-risk behaviours, and alters their capacity for successful and sustained human relationships.

Blokdyk emphasises that parents need to start the conversation with their children as soon as they can, as “establishing healthy sexual boundaries and values from a young age is essential to prepare them for protecting their minds and bodies.”<sup>5</sup> Children need to develop a strong sense of the corporal integrity of both themselves and others.

Furthermore, children may enable their own vulnerability. One of the basic principles of the internet is that nothing posted goes away. Texting/sexting and posting inappropriate language and photos on the internet is also classified as child pornography, if it involves minors. Attorney and social media expert Emma Sadleir says that the harsh reality is that the “minute it has been shared or seen, it exists in cyberspace and may come back to bite you...it is impossible to delete content once it has landed online or on social media. Even if you delete the content from your Instagram account, many people may have taken a screenshot of it or downloaded your images.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise peddlers of child pornography have access to these images and there is nothing preventing them from using these images for their own exploitative and nefarious purposes.

In another context, but painfully apposite, Representative Council of Learners president, Nobuhle Mashinini, speaking in Turffontein after the killing of 16-year old Daniel Bakwela, poignantly pleaded: "Parents, are you truly doing your job as you claim to? Do you sit down with your child from a young age and teach them the wrong and right or do you let them grow and allow the world to teach them?"<sup>7</sup>

The following links explore these issues in greater detail:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/real-healing/201208/overexposed-and-under-prepared-the-effects-early-exposure-sexual-content>

<https://www.fin24.com/Tech/Mobile/your-teens-and-their-phones-20171105-2>

<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Sexting-among-kids-happens-daily-and-they-can-be-prosecuted-for-it-20150529>

<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people-snapshot>

<https://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/306266-proposed-internet-porn-block-for-south-africa.html>

<https://preventchildabuse.org/resource/understanding-the-effects-of-pornography-on-children/>

<https://www.netnanny.com/blog/the-detrimental-effects-of-pornography-on-small-children/>

<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people>

<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/knowledge-and-resource-hub/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people-evidence-scan>

<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/knowledge-and-resource-hub/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people-evidence-scan>

The next Family Digest will focus on the pornographic abuse of children.

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<sup>1</sup> SA Law Reform Commission Report

<sup>2</sup> Sunday Times, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019

<sup>3</sup> Sunday Times, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019

<sup>4</sup> 'The Harmful Effects of Pornography', presentation by Chantelle Blokdyk at UWC Conference n 'Strengthening Families Through Parenting', 2017

<sup>5</sup> See 4 above

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Sexting-among-kids-happens-daily-and-they-can-be-prosecuted-for-it-20150529>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/forest-high-stabbing-our-parents-have-failed-us?utm\\_source=Politicsweb+Daily+Headlines&utm\\_campaign=095a31d76](https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/forest-high-stabbing-our-parents-have-failed-us?utm_source=Politicsweb+Daily+Headlines&utm_campaign=095a31d76)