

## **Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health**

**“The public health effects of the ease of access and viewing of online violent and degrading sexually explicit material on children, women and men, recognizing and respecting the provincial and territorial jurisdictions in this regard.”**

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It is an honour and a privilege to be asked to submit a brief related to the above-noted motion. In addition to being the Chair of two organizations, and an author, I am considered a computer and network specialist. I have managed computer networks for youth (file server, proxy server and email server), the largest having 250 work stations.

For the duration of this brief, it should be understood that any reference to “child” or “children” falls under the Canadian Criminal Code definition of a child, which is anyone under the age of 18.

My research related to the crime of child pornography and its effects on children and families, was conducted for two and a half years in preparation for the writing of my book “Digital Sexual Victims: True Cases” (nominated for an international award of excellence). In the book is my theory of digital supervision©, prepared so that parents, caregivers and professional allies would have guidance as to the magnitude of this crime and methods of supervision on digital devices.

The Internet and digital devices are light years ahead of parenting and adult supervision. Children are left unsupervised while they use digital devices. This situation is contributing to children adopting behaviours that are in contravention of the Canadian Criminal Code through self/peer exploitation. They can become victims of their own words and actions. They take “nudes” of themselves and then distribute the pictures over email, social media, and the like. Nudes of children, who are under the age of 18, can be considered child pornography. The parents, caregivers and professional allies often lack the knowledge of their full responsibilities in providing the gateway to the Internet and digital devices. Adults, who are the providers of the Internet and devices, are responsible for the resulting pictures and content on the devices for which they pay. Many adults are unaware of this.

Where do children get the ideas for these self/peer exploitive behaviours? It is suggested through peers, predator involvement online, and early exposure to

pornography. Parents and caregivers should consider filtering access of information as a necessity. However, after a child becomes seven or eight years old, they can usually work around filters, which causes a problematic situation because children are able to view any material online in spite of filters.

Grooming is defined as a predator providing sexually explicit material so that children might begin to trust the predator and engage in sexual activity (providing nudes, meeting the predator, etc.) The predator also engages in online chats (verbal and written) to gain trust. This is being done on children's online games as young as five. If children are violated in this manner, their innocence is gone. Predators often use violent and degrading pictures as a form of intimidation so that the children will conform to any request.

The average age at which a child first sees porn online is arguable. Some sources say seven, others ten, and others eleven. This exposure scares a child and often parents are unaware of the exposure. Because of this, data can be inaccurate. There are children as young as eight and nine addicted to pornography. The police have had to deal with children as young as ten producing and distributing child pornography. The crime of child pornography has increased by 5,000% since 2007 (Warethorne, U.S.A.).

"70% of children aged 7 to 18 years old have accidentally encountered online pornography.....". "90% of children ages 8 to 16 have seen online pornography."

This is a growing issue and one that needs to be addressed by all adults. The actions of children have to be supervised, not just with rules, but also with digital supervision©.

Because pornography and violent imagery is so accessible online, it is important that there be measures taken to reduce or eliminate such content. The challenge within homes is monumental because of the activities of children, but also because of the availability of violent pornographic imagery. Many children have developed a warped sense of their own sexuality because of what they are viewing online. Children need to be protected.

Acceptance and implementation of Motion M-47 would provide some restrictions while parents, caregivers and professional allies attempt to provide digital supervision© in their private environments. It should be viewed as necessary that limitations of accessibility and availability to violent and degrading pornographic material be put into place.

Because this is a fairly new phenomenon, it is "ethically difficult to effectively measure" the effects of children's exposure to pornography.

Possible effects of frequent and routine viewing of violent and degrading sexually explicit material/pornography:

- Development and/or reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes;
- Contribute to youth forming unhealthy and sexist views of women and sex;
- Contribute to condoning and/or engaging in violence against women;
- Correlation between frequent viewing of online pornography and sexually coercive and/or persuasive behaviour by young men. This is particularly evident with peer to peer grooming by young men toward young women. Too often females are asked to provide nude pictures in provocative positions. Unfortunately, these pictures can eventually be distributed through a school, resulting in the depression of the victim and suicide or suicidal thoughts. The Ontario Provincial Police have stated that within a school of 1,000 students, and with today's digital devices, a picture can circulate to the entire student body within one hour.
- Viewing of such violent and degrading material can normalize sexual violence with desensitizing the person engaging in violent activity to the harmful effects on the victim. This can contribute to a warped understanding of sex and sexuality.
- Over 50% of young girls believe there is a social pressure to produce nude photos to be shared online.

It is well known that children and young people are naturally curious about sex and their own sexuality. To be introduced to violent and degrading material at such young ages is causing this generation to have ideas and activities that degrade what should be the natural maturity process.

### **Recommendations:**

We need to do everything possible to save this generation and future generations. Availability of violent and degrading sexually explicit material to our children is detrimental to normal development and can be catastrophic. Education related to sex and relationships could have little effect on an already damaged conception.

This type of material should be eliminated or made difficult for access. Children are particularly vulnerable and at greater risk than the population of adults. As adults, choices can be made. The innocence, lack of life experiences and lack of knowledge of children cause them to be silent victims in a digital world that is lacking in necessary controls. If the government finds such action to be too problematic, I suggest that a credit card number be necessary for access, whether payment is required or not. Such a digital dialogue with a user, would eliminate the issue of children accessing such damaging content because they cannot obtain a credit card until the age of 18.

Doak-Gebauer, Charlene, "Digital Sexual Victims: True Cases", July 27, 2016, Tellwell, Canada.

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