

Boys who see porn more likely to harass girls Maurice Chittenden and Matthew Holehouse

BOYS exposed to porn are more likely to indulge in casual sex and less likely to form successful relationships when they grow older, according to research carried out in a dozen countries. The report, *Harms of Pornography Exposure Among Children and Young People*, also found that young boys who see pornography are more inclined to believe there is nothing wrong with pinning down or sexually harassing a girl.

Michael Flood, who carried out the study at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, said: "There is compelling evidence from around the world that pornography has negative effects on individuals and communities. We know it is shaping sexual knowledge. Some people may think that is good. But porn is a very poor sex educator because it shows sex in unrealistic ways and fails to address intimacy, love, connection or romance. Often it is quite callous and hostile in its depictions of women. It doesn't mean that every young person is going out to rape somebody but it does increase the likelihood that will happen."

Research in the UK suggests that 60% of boys under 16 have been exposed to pornography, accidentally or deliberately. The average age at which they first saw porn has dropped from 15 to 11 in less than a decade. The average amount of time they watch porn on the internet is 90 minutes a week.

John Carr, an adviser to the government and secretary of the Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS), said: "We had a case in west London where a boy in the first year of primary school was bringing pictures to school and was acting them out in the playground during the break. When they did a home visit the dad was downloading it and it was all over the house. It is not an argument for banning it but it is an argument to find better ways to make it harder for kids to get hold of it."

Such is the international spread of porn through the internet that youngsters in Asian and African countries see blonde white women on screen and then regard tourists with the same attributes as sex objects, Flood says. However, Thaddeus Birchard, a psychotherapist who runs a sex addiction practice in London, said: "We are entering a period of moral panic and this is part of it. Children are not receiving sex education at home. Sexually explicit material on the net can even help educate them. The internet is a way of being sexually addicted but it does not cause the addiction. What causes it is the relationship between the child and their parents. Almost always they are maternally deprived."

Petra Boynton, a psychologist, said: "Children are not necessarily looking at porn for gratification. They are doing so because they are bored and not supervised. Often when children look at more extreme porn it is done for bravado so they can laugh and say how disgusting it is."