

Parliamentary inquiry on pornography launched as concerns grow about its role in fuelling violence against women and girls

A cross-party group of MPs led by Dame Diana Johnson MP will tomorrow (2/11/21) launch an inquiry into the pornography industry in response to growing concerns that online pornography is fuelling violence against women and girls (1). The inquiry, launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, follows reports during the trial of Wayne Couzens that the murderer of Sarah Everard was attracted to “brutal, sexual pornography” (2). Meanwhile, earlier this year the national police lead for child protection warned that young men are being drawn to child abuse imagery after becoming “desensitised” to legal pornography (3).

- In April 2021, a study by researchers at Durham University revealed that one in eight pornography films on the front page of the UK’s most popular pornography websites were labelled with titles describing sexual violence (4).
- Following the publication of Ofsted’s review into sexual abuse in schools, Children’s Commissioner Rachel de Souza called for pornography websites to be required to verify the age of their users, stating: “Viewing hardcore pornography from a young age can warp boys’ views of what they can expect from girls, and normalise behaviour from girls to do things they don’t want to do.” (5)
- In December 2020, Pornhub removed millions of videos from its site that had been uploaded by unverified users following revelations the videos included footage of real-life rapes and child abuse (6).

The six-month inquiry will take evidence from a range of international experts, with MPs set to assess how the modern-day pornography industry operates, harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography, and the adequacy of existing laws to address these harms. Witnesses at the inquiry’s first oral evidence session will be Dr Gail Dines – scholar and author of ‘Pornland’, Emeritus Professor Robert Jensen – author of ‘Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity’, Professor Clare McGlynn QC (Hon) from Durham University, and Laila Mickelwait, founder of the Traffickinghub movement.

Dame Diana Johnson MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, said:

“It’s time for MPs to confront the role of pornography in fuelling violence against women. The intolerable level of sexual violence that is perpetrated day in day out in

this country is not inevitable. There is nothing 'natural' about it. So the question is, what in our culture is fuelling men's violence against women – and what do we do about it? No answer to that critical question is complete without addressing the role of online pornography.

"We know that mainstream pornography is replete with violence and degradation, that the majority of users are men, and that currently children are able to access porn companies' websites. International pornography companies generate huge profits, but what price are we all paying for this?"

"This landmark cross-party inquiry will investigate what part the pornography industry is playing in fuelling men's violence against women – and what Parliament should do about it."

ENDS

Notes to editors

1) The Inquiry on Pornography has been launched by the UK Parliament's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, chaired by Dame Diane Johnson MP. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation brings together parliamentarians to work for an end to all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. The All-Party Parliamentary Group's website is www.appg-cse.uk.

The objectives of the Inquiry on Pornography are to:

1. Assess the scale and nature of the contemporary pornography industry;
2. Identify the types and severity of harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography; and
3. Establish what legal framework is needed in the UK to prevent and address the harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography.

The six-month inquiry will involve a series of evidence hearings, with a report of the inquiry findings and recommendations published in 2022.

2) Source: 'Sarah Everard murder: Wayne Couzens' secret life of prostitutes, cheating and debts', the Times, 30/9/21: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sarah-everard-murder-wayne-couzens-secret-life-of-prostitutes-cheating-and-debts-62scntxgc>

3) Source: 'More young British men 'exploring' online paedophilia, police warn', Sky News, 13/4/21: <https://news.sky.com/story/more-young-british-men-exploring-online-paedophilia-police-warn-11972571>

4) Source: 'Online porn websites promote 'sexually violent' videos', BBC News, 5/4/21: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-56640178>

5) Source: ' Porn is warping how boys treat girls – big tech must do more to keep our kids safe', the Sun, 10/6/21: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/15230003/rachel-de-souza-protect-kids-from-porn/>

6) Source: 'Pornhub removes all user-uploaded videos amid legality row', BBC News, 14/12/20: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-55304115>