

# Pornography 'warping' teenagers' views on sex

By Carmen Hall

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A generation that had used internet pornography aged 22 or 23 were seeking therapy.

Teens are viewing violent and edgier pornography which is warping their views of relationships and sexual activity, health experts say.

Sex Therapy New Zealand, Tauranga sex therapist Mary Hodson said the biggest problem was children having access to pornography at a young age.

The youngest client Ms Hodson had provided therapy for was 13.

"They don't have any knowledge or framework, to hang what they are viewing on so they don't make the right sense of it.

"It is giving them unrealistic expectations of sex and relationships."

Parents were naive, she said.

A conversation about pornography should follow a talk about sex, which generally most people found difficult to tackle, she said.

"A parent that is not naive will know that these kids are getting together in groups out of school and after school looking at porn.

"If you are worldly wise and know that, then you can talk to your child and prepare them.

"You can tell them what is not realistic about porn and how to handle it."

Now a generation that had used internet pornography aged 22 or 23 were seeking therapy.

Usually it was men with sexual problems, she said.

Family Planning NZ health promotion director Frances Bird said pornography had become "edgier and a lot more violent".

Its clinical experience and work in the classroom showed there was pressure on women to engage in certain activities that look appealing on screen but "not be quite so appealing in real life".

International research revealed there was "this sense of entitlement and expectation about what they want", she said.

Young people were accessing material through hand-held devices because they were curious and saw it as exciting.

Perceptions had also changed about what was considered to be normal body types, she said.

"We are seeing the impacts. We had the big period of hair removal for girls and woman, that seemingly there is a slight reversal around, that was largely thought to be influenced by sexually explicit material.

"While there is this pressure on this idea on how a male has to perform, because they are not using the average bloke in the street and have techniques that make body parts look bigger."

Some parents also felt uncomfortable talking about it because of their own pornography use, whether it was current or historic, she said.

"Lots of people go through a bit of a phase when they are checking stuff out, it's part of growing up, and then they get on with their lives. But for some people it is still a big part of their lives and parents should consider their own values around it."

Normalising conversations about body parts, sex and relationships from a young age meant "then it's quite not so weird and scary as a parent and for the young person" to talk about pornography.

Tauranga Police Detective Sergeant Darryl Brazier and officer in charge of the Western Bay of Plenty Child Protection Team said he had seen instances of younger children being exposed to pornography.

"That appears to carry over to an increase in the instances of sexualised behaviour by and between younger children," Mr Brazier said.

"Most of these matters are dealt with through intervention and education by police and partner agencies such as Child Youth and Family."

But Mr Brazier said he would not suggest it was a "problem issue" at this time.

However it was the parents' responsibility to keep their children safe, and they needed to be aware of which internet sites their children viewed and what communications they had (and with whom) on their phones, he said.

Child Youth and Family spokeswoman Sue Critchley said it was unhealthy for children to be exposed to explicit sexual media.

Exposure to pornography was a form of sexual abuse, she said.

The help the agency might provide would depend on the level of need.

"This could involve a referral to counselling and for support and working with the family to ensure the child is safe," she said.

"Exposure to pornography at a young age is often indicative of wider problems."

C3 Church Tauranga pastor and father-of-four Tamati Cameron said people now lived in an overly sexualised world but parents should be involved in all aspects of their children's lives.

He was aware some children had exposure to pornography at a young age.

"Parents should try to make themselves aware of what their kids are viewing."

Pornography and even music videos set boys up to think girls were just objects that they could undervalue, he said.

"I don't think it's healthy."

## **Minimising the risk**

### **The Law**

Any person over 16 years of age, who intentionally exposes any person under 16 years of age to indecent material (written/spoken/visual/or otherwise) is liable to a term of imprisonment for up to three years. (Section 124A of the Crimes Act).

It includes internet access and things like photo texting.

This covers the instances of adults intentionally exposing young children to pornography, and if/when these come to our attention we will deal with these appropriately. - Tauranga Police Detective Sergeant Darryl Brazier

### **Blocking website access**

Parents can install blocking programmes on their computer, says Tauranga sex therapist Mary Hodson. Nowadays sites such as porn chat rooms were full of people who were there to meet people to have sex with, or to get the person to commit sexual acts in front of a web camera. Those kind of experiences could come back to haunt kids later, she said, so it was important parents installed appropriate software. She recommended [www.accountable2you.com](http://www.accountable2you.com) and [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com) that sent reports to the nominated person if there was a breach.

### **Help**

Exposure to pornography at a young age is often indicative of wider problems. We urge anyone who knows or fears that children are living in homes where they are exposed to pornography to take action and notify the police or Child, Youth and Family.