IS PORNOGRAPHY HARMFUL AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT? A SURVEY OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES

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Background: There is ongoing debate about the extent and nature of harm caused by viewing pornography. Policy makers are already considering a range of approaches to reducing potential harms of pornography, including educational and legislative approaches. In determining the appropriateness of responses, it is important to consider community attitudes to pornography and pornography policies. We surveyed young people aged 15-29 years to ascertain their opinions on pornography harm and acceptable harm reduction strategies.

Methods: We administered an online survey with a convenience sample of 1272 young people, recruited via social media. Participants were 70% female and 36% watched pornography at least weekly. Participants were asked whether they perceive pornography to be harmful, and whether they supported or opposed five different hypothetical policies.

Results: Most participants (65%) believed that pornography is 'harmful for some people but not everyone,' 17% believed it is not harmful, and 11% believed it is 'harmful for everyone.' Overall, 85% supported school-based pornography education, 57% supported national education campaigns about pornography, 22% supported a national filter to block all access to pornography, 63% supported requiring condom use in all pornography, and 66% supported banning violence in pornography. People who watched porn frequently were less supportive of all policies, including production-level policies such as banning violence (supported by 48% of this group) and requiring condom use (supported by 44%). Qualitative responses demonstrated that despite general support of policies, many participants were concerned about how they would be implemented, for example, the content of education and the definitions of violence.

Conclusion: Support for different policies was fairly high overall, with the exception of filtering to block pornography, which only a minority supported. Substantial further work is still needed to determine how policies would be implemented and whether they would be effective in reducing harms associated with pornography.