

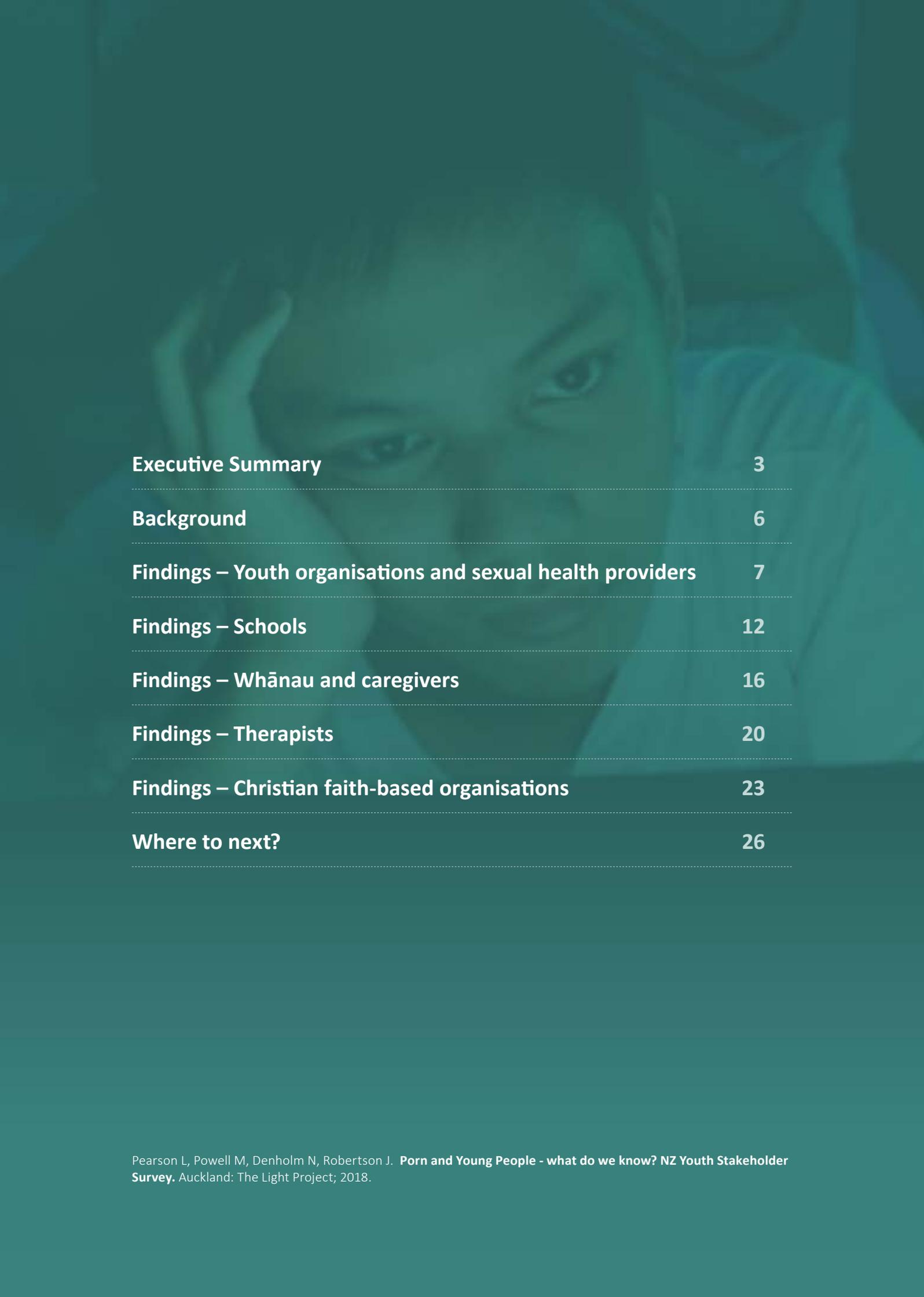
# PORN AND YOUNG PEOPLE — WHAT DO WE KNOW?

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NZ Youth Stakeholder Survey

THE  
LIGHT  
PROJECT





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent explosion of internet technology and unlimited, unregulated and free access to online pornography via mobile devices has dramatically changed the pornography landscape for young people in Aotearoa.

International data suggests that most young people are now exposed to or engaging with porn, often from a very young age and that online porn has become a primary form of sexual education<sup>(1,2)</sup>.

Young people are considered porn's most vulnerable audience – and with sexual violence prolific across mainstream online porn, it appears to be influencing youth culture in new and diverse ways<sup>(3)</sup>. There is now an increasing body of research that suggests porn is shaping young people's sexual beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and that it may be associated with potentially harmful sexual and mental health outcomes<sup>(4,5,6)</sup>.

In response to this, The Light Project was established in 2017 with the aim of helping equip youth, their whānau and their wider communities to positively navigate the new porn landscape. To better understand how porn may be affecting young people in New Zealand and to help inform The Light Project's service delivery, we recently undertook a Youth Stakeholder Survey entitled **Porn and Young People — What do we Know?** The purpose of the survey was to assess whether stakeholders thought porn was an issue for young people based on their experiences (and if so, why?) and to identify stakeholder knowledge gaps and resource/training needs.

622 stakeholders participated in the anonymous survey across five key groups: sexual health care providers and youth organisations, whānau and caregivers, schools, faith-based organisations and therapists. The stakeholders were asked six quantitative and three qualitative questions based on their experiences and observations whilst engaging with young people.

The findings suggested that the majority (94%) of stakeholders believe that porn is an issue for young people in Aotearoa. Most stakeholders (71%) are already engaging in conversations about porn with young people in their workplace, but of these, many (59%) feel unequipped, reporting a lack of porn knowledge and awareness.

The stakeholders also told us what, in their experience, has led them to think porn is an issue and specific concerns they have. These qualitative responses were grouped into key themes, and whilst there were a few cohort-specific themes, the following themes were universal across all five groups.

### Normalisation of porn

The majority of stakeholders told us that they believed watching porn has become normalised and is now embedded in the sexual culture of many young people in New Zealand. They noted that consuming porn is considered a social norm and that most young people have been exposed to it, some from as young as eight years old. Many are watching porn regularly, some high-users as frequently as several hours a day.

They told us that young people consume porn casually in public places such as at school on buses and in libraries and they openly talk and joke about porn with friends. They are 'porn savvy' – they know what it is, where to get it and what they think of it and feel that gaining sexual knowledge from porn is a healthy way to learn about sex. Stakeholders



**“PORN HAS BECOME THE NEW NORMAL FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE – THEY ARE SEEKING INFORMATION, AND PORN HAS FILLED THE GAP, NORMALISING THE SEXUAL PRACTICES THEY SEE IN PORN”**

SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPANT

also noted social exclusion for those that can't contribute to the porn conversation.

*“ We see young people knowing what porn is, what's in porn, and what their opinion of it is. They see it and talk about it with their peers. It has become a new normal.”*

– YOUTH/SEXUAL HEALTH SURVEY PARTICIPANT

## Porn access and ubiquity

Stakeholders told us that they believe porn is an issue amongst young people today because of the unrestricted availability of free, online porn and unsupervised access via personal devices such as cell phones. They told us that online porn is pervasive, appearing on social media platforms, pop-ups and spam emails. Some told us that even with filtering technology it was impossible to avoid. They also noted that many adults weren't equipped or aware of the ubiquity of porn and subsequently weren't providing guidance on young people's usage.

*“ All my students will be exposed to porn by 13 years of age. It is shaping their sexual beliefs as individuals and as a group.”*

– SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPANT

## Porn as a primary sex educator

Many stakeholders told us that they believed porn is now a primary sex educator for young New Zealanders and is re-defining sexual norms with 'porn sex' (i.e. sexual behaviours mimicking the sex viewed in porn) becoming both accepted and expected during sexual interactions amongst youth.

*“ The youth culture see porn as a healthy way to learn about sex and to experience for themselves, and for some they expect to share it in their sexual relationships.”*

– SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPANT

They were particularly concerned about the impacts of porn 'messaging' as youth turn to porn to educate themselves. They described the messages young people are receiving as problematic, and that porn normalises and sexualises sexual violence, sexual aggression, coercion, lack of consent, gender inequality and a lack of intimacy and mutual pleasure. They also identified that many young people lack the skills to critique this messaging and it isn't often countered with other positive sexual messaging at home or through the school sexual education curriculum.

*“ Porn has become the new normal for our young people – they are seeking information, and porn has filled the gap, normalising the sexual practices they see in porn.”*

– SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPANT

## Porn shaping attitudes and behaviors

The majority of stakeholders told us they were seeing changing sexual attitudes and behaviours in young people and many attributed this, in part, to increased porn exposure and usage. Some of the stakeholder's observed changes in attitudes included new or increased degradation, objectification and disrespect of women and girls; normalising of sexual violence and coercion; a disregard for consent; a devaluing and transactional approach to sex; advanced sexual knowledge for development age; an erosion of mutual pleasure and the normalising of painful sex particularly for women and gay males.

*“ Porn is skewing the sexual norms of young people in a really unhealthy direction. The sex lots of young women in particular are experiencing is degrading, humiliating & painful & is creating a generation of young women who are not having positive sexual experiences as they are straight out of porn.”*

– YOUTH/SEXUAL HEALTH SURVEY PARTICIPANT



**“THE YOUTH CULTURE SEE PORN AS A HEALTHY WAY TO LEARN ABOUT SEX AND TO EXPERIENCE FOR THEMSELVES, AND FOR SOME THEY EXPECT TO SHARE IT IN THEIR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS.”**

SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Some of the key behavioural observations they noted included new or increased sexual aggression towards sexual partners such as hair pulling and choking, sexually coercive behaviours, increased child-on-child sexual assault and youth sexual assault incidents, young people re-enacting violent porn scenes, an expectation of anal or oral sex on the first sexual encounter, an increase in heterosexual anal sex and increased use of sexting. They also described observed changes in young people’s sexual health experiences including genital injury as a result of violent sex, an increase in unprotected sex and an increase in compulsive porn behaviours leading to erectile dysfunction and difficulty maintaining an erection.

*“ We are seeing an increase in non-consensual sex, a change in expectations of sexual performance and acts, and a sense of entitlement... it (porn) seems ‘normalised’.”*

– YOUTH/SEXUAL HEALTH SURVEY PARTICIPANT

## Impacts on mental health and relationships

Stakeholders were concerned that the normalisation of porn and its inherent messaging could potentially affect young people’s mental health and ability to form healthy relationships.

*“ What our youth clinic sees on a daily basis is very, very concerning. We see young people profoundly and negatively affected by pornography.”*

– YOUTH/SEXUAL HEALTH SURVEY PARTICIPANT

In particular, they were seeing shame, depression and isolation issues in youth with problematic porn use; self-esteem issues, particularly in girls, related to not meeting their partners’ sexual expectations and/or regret about doing something they weren’t comfortable with. Also noted were body image and sexual performance anxieties related to comparisons made to porn actors.

*“ Porn appears to be thought of as innocent fun and normal for young men, but we see the issues it causes*

*around body issues and self-esteem and young men searching out increasingly violent themes..”*

– YOUTH/SEXUAL HEALTH SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Stakeholders felt that porn messaging associated with gender inequality, dehumanisation and the normalising of sexual violence may also impact young people’s ability to form and maintain positive, respectful relationships. They were concerned about the erosion of relational intimacy between young people as porn sex is commonly depicted as transactional and separate to a relationship. They also noted increasing amounts of young people accessing help for problematic porn usage and related behaviours.

*“ We see the impacts of porn on young people’s view of norms related to intimacy, body image, relationships, roles within relationships and related expectations – and on the ability to connect intimately with another person.”*

– THERAPIST SURVEY PARTICIPANT

The following report provides a detailed account of the survey responses, categorised by cohort. Firstly, it includes summaries of the quantitative data relating to stakeholders’ current porn knowledge levels, resource and training needs and engagement with young people on this issue. Secondly, it summarises the qualitative feedback, reporting on the most common themes that emerged from each cohort.

It is difficult to fully understand or draw conclusions on the role porn plays and the exact implications of the observed behaviours and concerns outlined in the survey responses. However, the findings do clearly suggest that many youth stakeholders believe porn is an important issue and that it is influencing and shaping the sexual culture of young people in New Zealand.

**Above all, the report clearly points to the urgent need for New Zealand research to specifically determine the impact of porn on the young people of Aotearoa.**



# BACKGROUND

The Light Project undertook the Porn and Young People - What do we Know? Youth Stakeholder Survey primarily to help inform and underpin the development of training, resources and support for stakeholders engaging and working with young people - including whānau, schools and youth service providers.

The aims of the survey were to assess whether stakeholders thought porn was an issue for young people based on their experiences and to identify any knowledge gaps and resource/training needs.

Approximately 2000 stakeholders across five cohorts were invited to take part in the anonymous survey and 622 individuals responded. The five groups surveyed included: sexual health care providers and youth organisations (260 participants); whānau and caregivers (184); schools (87); faith-based providers (50) and therapists (41).

The survey consisted of six quantitative and three qualitative questions. Stakeholders were asked if they believed porn was an issue for youth and if so, in their experience, what had led them to think that? They were also asked to explain any concerns they had regarding porn and young people and to describe what assistance they require nationally and on a day-to-day level to equip them in their engagement with porn and young people. SurveyMonkey was used to collect and collate the data and a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken to identify concerns from the stakeholder groups and explore the reasons behind any concerns. Through thematic analysis, the main themes in the data have been identified, collated and conveyed. Quotes from participants have been used throughout the report to illustrate the findings.\*

Of note, eight of the 622 respondents expressed that they didn't think porn was an issue for young people; however, only one of the eight had spoken to a young person about porn. One of the eight respondents told us that they felt porn engagement during puberty was a normal part of sexual exploration and therefore should not be problematised. A further two respondents also wanted to know about ethical porn and if this was something to consider when developing a response. As these views were inconsistent with the overwhelming majority of respondents' observations or experiences regarding porn and young people in New Zealand, they were not reported on further.

We acknowledge that there are limitations to this survey. It is important to note that the survey was undertaken as a formative process with the primary purpose of assessing current concerns and needs of youth stakeholder groups to inform The Light Project service delivery. It was not undertaken as an academic research project. There were very significant budget and human resource constraints, and the software and processes utilised were undertaken within these constraints.

Specific limitations include a potential cohort bias within the whānau group as even though whānau from a wide range of ethnic, socio-economic and geographical backgrounds were invited to participate, many forwarded the survey link to other whānau members. No specific definitions of a young person or porn were included in the survey questions and the faith-based cohort was limited to leaders from a Christian faith only. Finally, as the survey was anonymous and no demographic information was collected regarding ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or which organisation the stakeholders were affiliated with, the findings will also not represent some stakeholder groups across Aotearoa.

*\*The stakeholder quotes in the report are abbreviated as follows:  
SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP) = Youth Organisations and Sexual Health Providers;  
(S) = Schools; (W) = Whānau and Caregivers; (T) = Therapists and (FB) = Faith-Based Organisations.*

# YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND SEXUAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

We invited providers from over 124 New Zealand youth and sexual health care services to participate in the survey.

This included (but is not limited to) sexual health medical and health promotion services, medical practices, public health youth services, Māori and Pacific youth organisations, sexual violence prevention services, police services, community youth services, adolescent health services, sexual education organisations, student health services, services for gender and sexually diverse youth, sexual assault services, youth support organisations and adolescent mental health services.

**A total of 260 New Zealand providers responded and participated. Their feedback indicated that:**

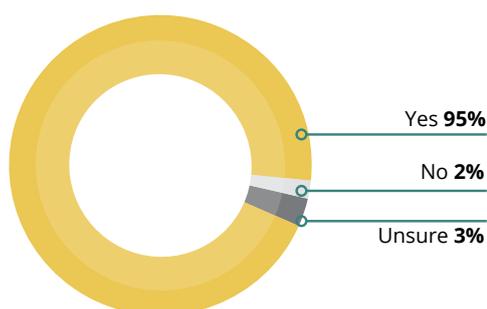
**95%** of the providers believe that porn is an issue for young people in Aotearoa

**59%** reported a lack of awareness and knowledge about porn

**70%** are already engaging in conversations about porn with youth in their workplaces

**35%** indicated they experience personal discomfort during these conversations

## DO YOU BELIEVE PORN IS AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?



YOUTH ORGANISATIONS & SEXUAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

The majority (87%) of these stakeholders requested more information about the new porn landscape. Specifically,

**89%** requested current information and data

**83%** wanted strategies for talking to young people about porn

**65%** requested information on compulsive porn related behaviours

**60%** wanted more information about support services.

These providers prefer to obtain this information from presentations and seminars (**50%**) and via a website (**30%**).

**89%** OF YOUTH & SEXUAL HEALTH PROVIDERS REQUESTED CURRENT INFORMATION DATA ON PORN

## Key themes

Youth organisations and sexual health providers were asked why they thought porn was an issue and what their main concerns were regarding porn and young people. The key themes that emerged from the qualitative responses were as follows:

### Normalisation of porn and changing attitudes

Most of the providers told us that porn has become embedded in the sexual culture of young people in New Zealand – and believe that this is related to the unregulated access and availability of free online porn on phones and devices, social media platforms and pop-ups.



**“WE SEE YOUNG PEOPLE KNOWING WHAT PORN IS, WHAT’S IN PORN, AND WHAT THEIR OPINION OF IT IS. THEY SEE IT AND TALK ABOUT IT WITH THEIR PEERS. IT HAS BECOME A NEW NORMAL.”**

SCHOOL SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

**“ Porn has become much more accessible to young people, with the age lowering each year. I had an encounter at a school with ten-year old’s viewing porn.”**

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They told us that youth hold a permissive view of porn, they talk about it casually amongst peers and they are porn savvy – they know what’s in it, where to get it and what they think of it.

**“ We see young people knowing what porn is, what’s in porn, and what their opinion of it is. They see it and talk about it with their peers. It has become a new normal.”**

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

Providers noted that consuming porn is now a social norm for youth and that most young people are exposed to porn, some from as young as eight years. They told us young people consume porn in public places such as in libraries and on buses, and some are spending large amounts of time online watching it.

**“ We are hearing about and seeing teenage boys watching porn in public places such as classrooms and libraries. It shows how casual and normalised it has become.”**

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

## Changing sexual attitudes and behaviours

Many providers told us that they were seeing changes in young people’s sexual attitudes and behaviours, which they believe are influenced by the normalisation of porn and high porn usage.

**“ I’m concerned because of the warped understandings of sex, relationships and consent that young people voice today - as well as the increased behaviours that young people exhibit that mimic those displayed in pornography.”**

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

Specifically, providers are seeing an increase in sexual aggression and sexual violence including sexually coercive behaviours, increasing incidences of sexual assault (for boys and girls), an increase in sexually aggressive behaviours seen in younger children, sexual violence towards partners and increased incidences of child-on-child abuse including re-enacting porn scenes.

**“ We are seeing an increase in non-consensual sex, a change in expectations of sexual performance and acts, and a sense of entitlement... it (porn) seems ‘normalised’.”**

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

**They noted changing sexual attitudes and beliefs, particularly towards women and girls including:**

- a diminished respect for females
- sexism and objectification of women and girls
- gendered sexual expectations
- casual attitudes towards consent
- increased acceptance of coercion
- an acceptance of violence within sex
- casual attitudes towards rape culture

## Porn as first sex educator

They also noted increased poor sexual health outcomes for some youth; playing out of pornographic scenes leading to genital injury, lower libido for high porn users in real life relationships, erectile dysfunction including premature ejaculation in young males and difficulty maintaining an erection or having an orgasm from ‘normal’ sexual contact.

**“ There are increasing presentations of young men to Sexual Health Service with sexual dysfunction. These men are reporting problems with ‘normal’ sex not being as stimulating as pornography, causing difficulty reaching orgasm or maintaining an erection. They report feeling a great loss to not be able to enjoy intimacy with a partner as a result of past porn use.”**

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)



**“DURING SEXUAL HEALTH LESSONS YOUNG PEOPLE ALWAYS HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT PORN..... THESE QUESTIONS ARE SHOCKING BECAUSE MOST OF THESE KIDS ARE IN INTERMEDIATE.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

Some providers also noted personal experience with porn use to be a reason why they believe porn is an issue and influences sexual attitudes and behaviours.

## Porn as first sex educator

Most providers thought that pornography was the primary sexual educator for many young people and noted early exposure and poor critical analysis of porn as contributing to this.

*“ Porn is now the main sex educator for young people. It creates unhealthy views about sex & relationships.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They told us that many young people, particularly boys, believe porn is ‘real life’ and not harmful to them and that many youth now have sexual knowledge more advanced than their developmental age.

*“ During sexual health lessons young people always have questions about porn.....these questions are shocking because most of these kids are in Intermediate.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

## New sexual norms

Many providers told us they were observing new sex norms amongst young people that they believed were influenced by porn usage.

*“ I work as a doctor in sexual health. A number of sexual practices are becoming more common and normalised among young people, I believe as a result of watching porn. These include pubic hair shaving, anal sex, group sex etc.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

**They noted that these norms were becoming accepted and expected by young people, and included:**

- the view that sex is something transactional and separate to a relationship
- a lack of contentment with ‘normal’ sex

- an entitlement for sex amongst boys
- the expectation of oral and anal sex on first sexual encounter
- pressure to be more open sexually and engage in sex earlier
- increased heterosexual anal and group sex
- increased use of sexual aggression such as hair pulling
- an acceptance that pain and sexual violence during sex (especially for females) is normal
- the erosion of a female’s right to sexual pleasure
- poor knowledge of foreplay
- sending sexts, dick pics and porn links as a sexual tool

*“ Porn is skewing the sexual norms of young people in a really unhealthy direction. The sex lots of young women in particular are experiencing is degrading, humiliating & painful & is creating a generation of young women who are not having positive sexual experiences as they are straight out of porn.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

## Problematic messaging

Providers told us they were concerned about the problematic messaging of porn and that young people often lack the skills to critically engage with it.

*“ Young people are inadvertently educated that it’s normal to endure or inflict sexual pain.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They noted that porn normalised sexual violence and aggression, blurred the lines of consent, promoted sex without condoms and promoted objectification, degradation and sexist attitudes towards, but not limited to women.

*“ Porn is providing a normalisation of sexual violence; an erosion of knowledge regarding a female’s right to sexual pleasure; and blurred lines of what is consent.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)



**“WHAT OUR YOUTH CLINIC SEES ON A DAILY BASIS IS VERY, VERY CONCERNING. WE SEE YOUNG PEOPLE PROFOUNDLY AND NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY PORNOGRAPHY.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

## Mental health and body image concerns

Providers also told us they were concerned about the impact of porn consumption and porn messaging on young people’s mental health.

*“What our youth clinic sees on a daily basis is very, very concerning. We see young people profoundly and negatively affected by pornography.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

In particular, they were seeing shame, depression and isolation issues in youth with problematic porn use; self-esteem issues associated with not meeting their partners’ sexual expectations and/or regret about doing something they weren’t comfortable with.

*“Porn appears to be thought of as innocent, fun and normal for young men, but we see the issues it causes around body issues and self-esteem and young men searching out increasingly violent themes.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They observed young people with body image issues related to the appearance of their own genitals compared with those seen in porn and performance issues related to comparisons made to porn actors and porn sex.

*“I know porn is an issue as in my work - young people want to know from me if they are ‘normal’ physically.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

Providers also noted how young people with sexual abuse histories may have issues that are triggered by sexual behaviours that have become normalised in porn, and that specialist counselling needs to be considered for them.

## Impact on sexual relationships

Providers told us they were concerned about the impact of porn consumption and porn messaging on young peo-

ple’s ability to form healthy, intimate and positive sexual relationships.

*“It’s so prevalent. It is changing the way young people interact, almost to the point that they don’t need relationships anymore, and when they do have them they are totally unprepared.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They observed that communication through social media was eroding the ability for young people to have conversations with peers’ face to face, particularly important conversations about what makes a healthy sexual relationship. They noted that sex was becoming devalued and much more transactional amongst young people and had concerns about how this could impact on relational intimacy in future relationships.

*“I’m concerned at how porn may inform, and shape young people’s ideas of what sex is. It sets women up to unrealistic expectations in regard to performance and appearance. It places women as the object of sex - that sex is done to them and in some cases, they do not consent to it.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

## Gap in New Zealand services/ response

Providers called for a multi-faceted response to the changing porn landscape for young people in New Zealand.

*“There is a huge passive acceptance of pornography. There is a need for a national conversation and for a stand to be made at a community/political level - that pornography has an enormous cost to young people, individuals, relationships, families and society.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They highlighted the pressing need for strength-based and evidence-based solutions including resources and training suitable for the culturally diverse needs of young people in



**“IT’S SO PREVALENT. IT IS CHANGING THE WAY YOUNG PEOPLE INTERACT, ALMOST TO THE POINT THAT THEY DON’T NEED RELATIONSHIPS ANYMORE, AND WHEN THEY DO HAVE THEM THEY ARE TOTALLY UNPREPARED.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

Aotearoa. Specifically mentioned was the need for a Kaupapa Māori approach to resources, acknowledging that a one-size-fits-all model may have limited value in a New Zealand context.

*“ We really need to be teaching kaimahi to talk about porn and liaising with youth in our service, especially vulnerable Māori and Pacific rangatahi.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

They asked for resources and responses that meet the unique needs of sexually diverse (LGBTQI) young people. They also highlighted the need for New Zealand based research on the impacts of porn on young people, the provision of best-practice guidelines to services, a public health approach to raise awareness, and referral services and supports.

*“ We need to be able to input into gay/bisexual male approaches and responses. To have conversations about the different HIV and STI prevention landscape, and how to talk about these issues with young people.”*

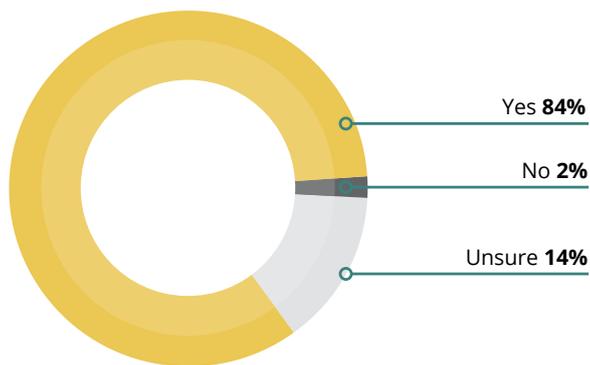
– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

# SCHOOLS

A total of 87 school staff members including school principals, teachers, guidance and wellbeing staff, counsellors and nurses across Aotearoa completed the online survey.

The majority of school staff (84%) told us they believe that porn is an issue for young people and many (74%) have started to talk about porn in their school environments. They identify the biggest barriers to talking about porn with young people are teen discomfort (62%) and their own lack of porn knowledge and awareness (58%).

## DO YOU BELIEVE PORN IS AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?



### SCHOOL TEACHERS AND GUIDANCE/HEALTH STAFF

**82% of school participants requested information relating to porn and young people in the form of seminars and presentations (56%) and a website (24%). Specifically:**

- **85%** requested strategies for talking to young people about porn
- **84%** wanted recent evidence-based data

- **65%** requested information on local support services
- **62%** wanted information on compulsive porn related behaviours

**74%** OF SCHOOL STAFF ARE ALREADY TALKING ABOUT PORN IN THEIR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

School teachers, guidance counsellors and nurses were asked why they thought porn was an issue and what their main concerns were regarding porn and young people in their school environment. The key themes that emerged from the qualitative responses were:

## Normalisation of porn

Most of the school staff told us that porn has become a normal part of young people's sexual exploration as they reach puberty or even earlier. They believe that easy access, availability and exposure to porn online and in the media has been a catalyst for this.

“*Porn has become the new normal for our young people – they are seeking information, and porn has filled the gap, normalising the sexual practices they see in porn.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

They observed that many students think gaining sexual knowledge from porn is a healthy way to learn about sex and that porn is an accurate representation of sex, rather than performed by actors. They told us that students are knowledgeable about what specific sites to go to in order to access porn and will discuss porn they have watched on social media and casually amongst peers at school.



**“ALL MY STUDENTS WILL BE EXPOSED TO PORN BY 13 YEARS OF AGE. IT IS SHAPING THEIR SEXUAL BELIEFS AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A GROUP.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

“The youth culture sees porn as a healthy way to learn about sex and to experience for themselves, and for some they expect to share it in their sexual relationships.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

## Porn ubiquity and access in schools

Many of the school staff told us they were concerned about how easily and readily children access porn at a very young age. They told us young students are becoming regular consumers, with some students watching porn daily.

“Many students, boys in particular, are watching porn, some every night, for several hours.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

They gave many accounts of students viewing porn on personal or school devices during school hours and noted some of the schools still had unrestricted internet access. They gave accounts of students requiring disciplinary action for watching and/or sharing porn, sending sexts and acting out harmful sexual behaviour at school. Some students had been referred to the school counsellor for compulsive porn use, concerns over other students' porn use, concerns about porn content they have been sent and the impact of having their personal images shared. Others had been referred to external services such as SAFE network for problematic porn use and harmful sexual behaviour.

“Some students are being seen by our guidance team, some students at SAFE Network and others are going through a discipline process due to viewing pornography at school.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

School staff were concerned that many parents lack knowledge on the impacts of porn, how often their children and friends are accessing it, or ways to filter porn on their home internet networks and on their children's devices.

## Changing sexual attitudes and behaviours - redefining sexual norms

Many of the school staff told us that they were seeing the normalisation of porn messaging in the 'ideas, norms and attitudes' of young people and some felt this could have far-reaching impacts on how young New Zealanders engage sexually with each other.

“I have seen significant impacts of porn consumption. I can already see a lot of these same harmful ideas, norms and attitudes among young people I work with, it makes me really worried for the future landscape of sex in New Zealand.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

Specifically, they were seeing changes in students' sexual attitudes and behaviours and an acceptance that 'porn sex' is what you give and receive with a partner.

“All my students will be exposed to porn by 13 years of age. It is shaping their sexual beliefs as individuals and as a group.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

**They noted examples of attitude changes based on their experience and conversations with young people at school, including:**

- increasing chauvinistic attitudes towards girls
- the belief amongst girls that 'sex is done to them'
- an acceptance of violence during sex
- increased objectification of girls
- a performance approach to sex
- increasing sexual entitlement amongst male students

“We see a warped understanding of sex, relationships and consent that young people are voicing - as well as the increased behaviours that mimic those in pornography.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)



## “WE SEE CHILDREN PROVIDING OTHER CHILDREN WITH INFORMATION ON PORN AND EXPERIMENTING ON OTHER CHILDREN”

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

### They also noted sexual behaviour changes amongst students including:

- pressure to perform sexual acts they are not comfortable with, including choking
- having sexual relationships at a much younger age
- increased sexting
- a lack of sexual enjoyment and pleasure amongst girls
- peer pressure to be sexually active, often from a young age
- a loss of sexual intimacy within relationships
- an increasing number of students with compulsive porn usage
- increased child sexual assault incidences as students experiment on other students

### Problematic porn messaging to young people

Schools told us they were also concerned about the ‘problematic messaging’ of porn and its impact on young people. They noted that porn was serving as a primary sex educator to young people, but students were unable to critically evaluate its messaging.

“*Pornography is now the main sex educator for young people – but it creates unhealthy views about sex and relationships.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

Of note, they were concerned about messaging related to the objectification and denigration of women and girls, misogynistic attitudes, the belief that ‘sex doesn’t need to be pleasurable for women’, misrepresentation of consent, coercive sexual behaviours, sexual violence and abuse, rape culture, power dynamics between partners, racism, anti LGBTQI attitudes, unsafe sex and sex being about performance.

“*Porn is normalising misogynistic, violent, rape culture, racist, anti LGBTQI sexual behaviour - leading to an expectation that this is okay behaviour.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

### Impacts on mental health and relationships

Schools were concerned that the normalisation of porn and its messaging could potentially affect young people’s mental health and ability to form healthy relationships. They were also concerned about the potentially addictive nature of porn usage, the associated shame and that it can become a life-long struggle for some young people.

“*The addictive aspect of porn is really concerning, and it can potentially be a lifetime thing, whereby relationships are injured/destroyed in the process.*”

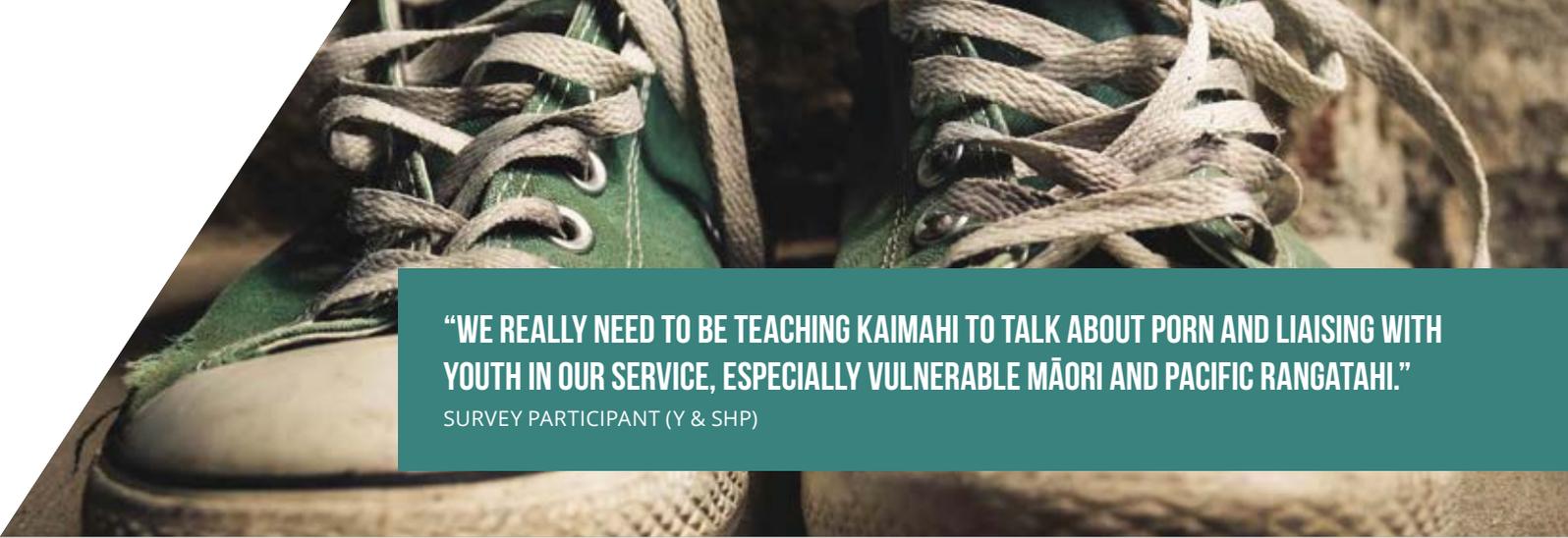
– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

They noted the impact on self-esteem for girls who felt unable to say no to the sexual expectations of porn sex and body image and performance anxieties related to comparisons made to the bodies (including genitals) and sexual repertoires of porn actors.

“*As a result (of porn), very young kids are experiencing pressure to have sex...and I saw how it impacted young girls’ self-esteem when they weren’t able to give a boy sex - or had done so and regretted it.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

Schools told us they had seen porn erode the need for relational intimacy as part of healthy sexuality amongst some students - particularly boys who can become dependent on visual triggers. They were also concerned that the negative and sexualised messaging about females could ‘rob’ heterosexual young men of developing the necessary skills to build mutual respect and ‘real’ intimacy with a partner.



**“WE REALLY NEED TO BE TEACHING KAIMAHI TO TALK ABOUT PORN AND LIAISING WITH YOUTH IN OUR SERVICE, ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE MĀORI AND PACIFIC RANGATAHI.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (Y & SHP)

*“ Pornography has become the new ‘normal’, but it denigrates females particularly and robs our young men of the potential to develop real intimacy. Parents and teachers are largely unaware.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

## Gap in education response in Aotearoa

The school staff told us they felt under-resourced and concerned about the wider impact of porn on society as a whole. They felt there was social apathy towards porn and a lack of awareness of the potential harms of porn messaging to young people. They highlighted the need for a community, political and educational response.

*“ There is a huge passive acceptance of pornography in the community. There is a need for a national conversation and for a stand to be made at a community/political level that pornography and young people has an enormous cost to individuals, relationships, families and society.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

Staff called for a three-pronged approach to the issue of porn unique to the school environment, including: professional training and resources for staff and the wider school community; technological solutions for whānau and caregivers and a specific teaching programme to be included in the school curriculum with lesson plans, multi-media resources, conversation starters and external speakers.

They noted the need for sexual education curriculum that includes current research on the impacts of porn; discussion on what “real sex” and relationships should be like; and information for young people on how to assess and hold a critical view of porn.

*“ We need sex education from year 8 that addresses the changes in sexual expectations brought about by pornography. It needs to be frank and empowering*

*education, leaving young people aware of what REAL sex should be like, with a focus on female enjoyment.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

A few staff raised concern about a prohibition approach to porn, believing it may make porn more desirable to some young people. They called for an educational approach that raises awareness of the impacts of porn on young people, then allows for open conversations to help reduce the harms.

*“ Because of the severe nature of this issue, people will have extreme reactions and not handle it well, with a ‘porn stopped and blocked at any cost’ route. All that will do is make it seem more illicit and more desired, and create more of an unregulated black market for porn. We need to have conversations with young people about this, make them aware of the fantastical nature of porn, that it isn’t realistic and that good and healthy sex doesn’t look like this. The reality is we cannot stop the consumption of porn, the best approach is to educate to reduce the impact it has on individuals who do consume it.’*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

Staff also told us they wanted resources and support for school guidance and wellbeing teams on how to best support young people with problematic porn usage. They also highlighted the importance of initiatives and resources needing to be reflective of the diverse cultural and religious needs of different school bodies.

*“ Kids need to access relevant information through technology platforms - website, apps etc, and we need information available for whānau to be able to communicate with their young people. For Māori this conversation will be uncomfortable – and assistance needs to be culturally appropriate and sensitive.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (S)

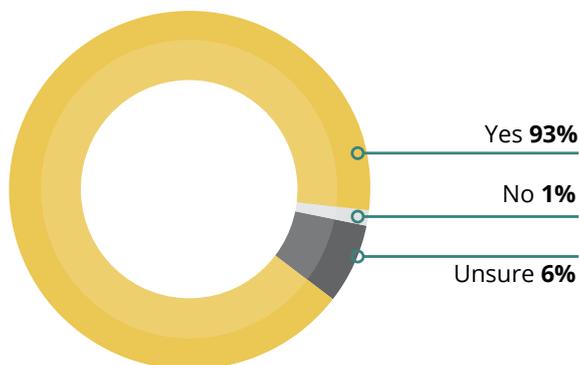
# WHĀNAU AND CAREGIVERS

A total of 184 parents, whānau and caregivers took part in the whānau and caregivers survey.

The majority of these participants (93%) believe porn is an issue for young people in Aotearoa, and 72% have had porn conversations with the young people in their life.

**They identified that barriers to discussing porn were teen discomfort (62%), personal discomfort (46%) and a lack of knowledge about the impacts of porn (43%). Their feedback showed that:**

## DO YOU BELIEVE PORN IS AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?



### PARENTS AND WHĀNAU OF TWEENS/TEENS

- 82%** wanted strategies to talk about porn with children
- 75%** requested information on filters and blocking porn on their home internet and devices
- 72%** wanted more information about porn and young people
- 86%** requested online resources via a website
- 48%** requested seminars and presentations

# 75%

**OF WHĀNAU WANT INFORMATION ON FILTERS & BLOCKING PORN ON THEIR HOME INTERNET & DEVICES**

Parents, guardians and whānau of young people were asked why they thought porn was an issue and what their main concerns were regarding porn and the young people in their lives. The key themes that emerged from the qualitative responses were:

## Normalisation of porn

Whānau and caregivers told us that exposure to porn is now a normal part of life for young people growing up in Aotearoa and is considered just 'another genre of entertainment on the internet'.

*“My children and all the teenagers I know talk about it (porn) being an issue in their lives - kids today mostly don't see it as harmful but more as another genre of entertainment on the internet.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

*“Boys and girls believe that what they see in porn is the 'norm'.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

**Many parents said their young people see porn as a normal and accepted part of growing up and noted examples of this in everyday life:**

- young people not believing porn is harmful or having a critical view of it
- young boys watching porn with friends at school or on the bus
- young people talking and joking with friends about watching porn



**“THE PORN INDUSTRY IS EDUCATING OUR YOUNGSTERS  
— AND NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT IT.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

- young people sharing porn images via text or social media platforms
- peer pressure amongst youth to watch and contribute to the porn conversation

## Access and ubiquity

Parents told us they were very concerned about the ease of accessibility to free online porn and the increasing amount of time young people spend on their personal devices. They believe that this, coupled with the overall sexualization of mainstream TV, movies and newsprint, has led to the normalisation of porn within youth culture.

“*Pornography pops up everywhere, search engines, social media applications, mobile games... the list goes on.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

Other parents told us how easy it was for young people to accidentally stumble across porn, especially young children, and how difficult it was to protect young people from sexually explicit pop-ups, links and spam emails. Parents had observed children as young as eight being exposed to porn and 12-year olds that were watching it regularly.

“*Porn is everywhere – and even with filters it’s almost impossible for teenagers to avoid it.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

## Changing sexual attitudes and behaviours

Many parents told us about changing sexual attitudes they have observed in their children and their children’s friends, which they believe could be influenced by the normalisation of porn amongst youth. These observations included:

- objectifying and misogynistic attitudes towards girls
- the belief that it’s ‘no big deal’ to treat others how actors are treated in porn

- advanced sexual knowledge for developmental age and stage
- young people believing sexual relationships are like porn
- ‘porn sex’ becoming normal and expected amongst young people
- young people not valuing sex as an intimate experience

“*There’s a feeling that it’s ‘no big deal’ to treat others in the same way as seen in pornography... and younger and younger children are being exposed to it.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

**They also told us they had observed changes in their children and their peers’ sexual behaviours. These observations included:**

- more sexualised behaviours at a young age – particularly amongst girls
- engaging in social media in a more sexualised way by uploading ‘sexy’ selfies
- young people creating and sharing porn with dick pics, bra shots and masturbation videos
- the increased use of sexual aggression during sex
- young people ‘sexually violating’ other young people at school
- pressure to perform sexual acts seen in porn
- young people pushing the boundaries of acceptable touch

“*Too many young kids (aged at 9 or 10) get exposed and some are violating other kids at school. Parents are not aware their kids are exposed.*”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

Some parents and whānau also noted personal porn use to be a reason why they believe porn is an issue and influences sexual attitudes and behaviours.



**“VERY YOUNG GIRLS I KNOW FEEL THE ONLY WAY THEY CAN GET ATTENTION IS BY UPLOADING ‘SEXY’ IMAGES OF THEMSELVES. IT’S WHAT THEY KNOW BOYS/GIRLS THEIR AGE ARE LOOKING AT AND WANTING.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

## Porn as the new sex educator

Whānau were concerned that as porn has become accepted and expected by young people, it is now their main reference and educator for engaging in sexual intimacy.

They indicated specific concern about the messaging in porn to their young people, in particular messaging around: lack of consent, dehumanizing people and objectifying females, the normalising of sexual aggression and sexual violence, the normalising of coercion and a lack of intimacy and mutual pleasure.

*“ Young girls I have talked to are getting abused during intercourse and there is a real divide with sex and intimacy.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

They identified that young people often lack the skills to critique this messaging and it often isn’t countered with other positive sexual messaging from the adults in their lives.

*“ Kids are the innocents and we are allowing this content (gender inequality, misogyny, dehumanizing and sexual violence) to be totally available to them without any road marks to say this isn’t real or acceptable.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

## Adolescent mental health

Whānau raised concerns for their children’s mental health and were concerned their children could potentially develop problematic porn behaviours or a ‘porn addiction’.

Some parents disclosed personal experiences of their own children receiving treatment for problematic porn use.

*“ Our son struggled with it, beginning at age 12 or 13, for one to two years. He’s choosing not to watch now, but he admits it is a daily battle.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

Other parents told us about how their daughters’ self-esteems were linked to ‘sexualised’ online profiles and the attention these images received. They felt that pornography provided problematic and unattainable body image messaging to girls that can be damaging to their mental health.

*“ Very young girls I know feel the only way they can get attention is by uploading ‘sexy’ images of themselves. It’s what they know boys/girls their age are looking at and wanting.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

Some parents were also concerned about young people with sexual abuse histories and how seeing sexually violent pornographic imagery might trigger this – and highlighted the need for specialist counselling for these youth.

*“ Pornography often associates violence with sexuality and degrades women. I am concerned about children who already experience trauma in their lives and how exposure to pornography interacts with this history.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

## Porn and relationships

Many whānau and caregivers told us they were concerned about the influence of porn on their children’s present and future relationships.

*“ Porn can lead to a lack of realistic and fulfilling ideas around sex – and an inability to make good positive relationships....The portrayal of more brutal, sadistic and degrading sex as something everyone enjoys is confusing.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

Specifically, they felt porn normalised and sexualised misogynistic attitudes, gender inequality and sexual violence and were concerned about the impacts of this messaging on their children’s ability to form and maintain respectful, healthy relationships.



**“PORN CAN LEAD TO A LACK OF REALISTIC AND FULFILLING IDEAS AROUND SEX AND AN INABILITY TO MAKE GOOD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS. THE PORTRAYAL OF MORE BRUTAL, SADISTIC AND DEGRADING SEX AS SOMETHING EVERYONE ENJOYS IS CONFUSING.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

Some parents also noted that their children lacked the confidence to have face to face sexual intimacy and that online sexual relationships had become both normal and transactional – and were concerned about the impact of this on children’s long-term sexual intimacy with future partners.

*“ I am concerned that some children may only have porn as a reference for intimacy - and that they may have a distorted view of love and what a loving relationship looks and feels like.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

## **Need for solutions and assistance**

Whānau and caregivers told us they needed help with navigating porn issues with their children. There was a sense of urgency in the requests specifically for strategies on how to deal with the potential impact of porn on their children and other young people. Parents called for a wider community, political and educational response. They wanted information about the impacts of porn on child and adolescent development, filters for home internet networks and children’s personal devices, and a New Zealand children’s rights-based approach to restricting porn exposure and legislative change.

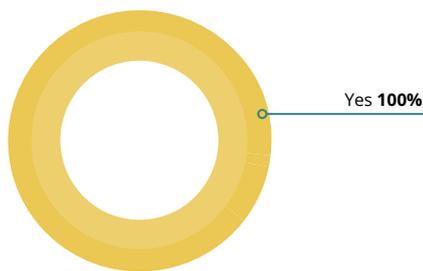
*“ We need acknowledgement that exposure to pornography affects the brain development of young people in an adverse way. Acknowledgement that access should be restricted to protect our children and young people. The rights of children and young people override the rights of adults to freedom of information.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (W)

# THERAPISTS

A total of 41 therapists with experience working with young people including counsellors, psychologists, and psychotherapists across New Zealand participated in the survey. Their feedback showed that:

## DO YOU BELIEVE PORNOGRAPHY IS AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?



### THERAPISTS

**100%** of therapists believe porn is an issue for young people in Aotearoa

**78%** have had conversations about porn with young people in their therapeutic practice, yet:

**79%** report they have a lack of knowledge on the subject

**88%** requested more information about the new porn landscape

**92%** requested current data and literature on porn

**79%** wanted strategies for talking to young people

**82%** requested information on available services

# 59%

**OF THERAPISTS  
FEEL UNEQUIPPED,  
REPORTING A LACK  
OF PORN AWARENESS  
AND KNOWLEDGE**

Therapists were asked why they thought porn was an issue and what their main concerns were based on their experience with young people. The key themes that emerged from the qualitative responses were as follows.

## Changing sexual attitudes and behaviours

Therapists told us they have observed a change in sexual attitudes and behaviours in their young clients, which they contribute in part to porn usage. The changes include:

- increased sexualised behaviour – often in inappropriate contexts
- unrealistic sexual expectations of sexual partners
- males sexually dominating females in relationships
- peer pressure amongst young clients to take and send nude photos
- the expectation that use of sexual aggression during sex is okay

“ I have experience working with clients whom have been negatively affected by watching porn... unrealistic expectations around sexual performance and an increasing desire to engage in more violent or risky sex.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

Therapists noted that many young gay male clients felt violent or aggressive sex was now acceptable and expected of them. They indicated that young people felt peer pressure to watch porn with their friends or partners and that ‘porn sex’ is often expected. They also noted an increase in sexting, revenge porn, and incidences of sexual violence against women including incidences of perpetrators playing out porn fantasy scenes with victims.

“ Young gay men in particular are thinking violent or risky sexual behaviour is okay or expected of them. There are unrealistic expectations around their sexual performance and a lack of exposure to intimacy and care.”

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

**“I HAVE EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH CLIENTS WHOM HAVE BEEN NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY WATCHING PORN... UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AROUND SEXUAL PERFORMANCE AND AN INCREASING DESIRE TO ENGAGE IN MORE VIOLENT OR RISKY SEX.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

## Poor sexual health outcomes and problematic porn usage

Therapists told us they have observed an increase in young people seeking help for problematic porn usage and young people who are distressed about their own compulsive use of porn to regulate negative emotions. They noted the effect of this on the sexual health outcomes of young men accessing their services.

*“ Addictive porn use has devastating effects - it impacts on their social skills; adolescent girls are being affected and damaged; there are health issues like erectile dysfunction; compulsive behaviours like lying and cheating; secretive behaviours; no respect for females - rape culture; revenge porn; adopting the behaviours in porn; anger; violence and many more.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

They have also observed an interruption in ‘normal sexual arousal responses’ in some young men, resulting in increasing erectile dysfunction. They noted these young men experience a lack of sexual arousal from ‘real’ sex compared to the heightened arousal they experience from watching porn.

*“ We are seeing young people with an anxiety around their own performance sexually, and an increasing lack of sexual arousal from real people as opposed to the heightened arousal when watching porn.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

They also told us that the sex some young people are having is more ‘risky’, which they relate in part to increasing porn messaging that promotes unprotected vaginal and anal sex. They are concerned about the long-term sexual health outcomes for these young people, including the increased risk of STIs.

*“ I’m concerned about the link between porn use and intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, homophobia, bare backing and body image issues for boys.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

## Concern about porn messaging

Therapists told us they were concerned about the messaging in porn and the potential influences of this on young people’s sexual development, attitudes and behaviours, particularly as they are turning to porn to educate themselves.

*“ We are concerned about the influence of porn on young people’s belief systems, value systems, behaviour - and the normal sexual development of children.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

They noted the following porn messaging to be problematic: negative attitudes towards women and girls such as sexism and that girls should look, do and act in a certain way, unhealthy portrayals of sex and relationships, normalisation of violence during sex and intimate partner abuse, homophobia and the normalisation of unprotected sex.

*“ Porn encourages destructive and even violent views of women and children which seriously affects relationships and the capacity for healthy intimacy.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

## Younger clientele with problematic sexual behaviours

Many therapists told us they believed that the normalisation of porn was a contributing factor towards an increase in violent and problematic sexual behaviours amongst young clients. They noted that much younger children are presenting at their practices (such as ten years old) with compulsive and problematic porn behaviours. They also are observing an increasing number of children who have been recipients of sexual violence with older children ‘experimenting’ and performing ‘porn like’ sexual acts on them.

*“ I work with children with harmful sexual behaviour and we are having children coming in at 10 and 12 years who come from good homes but have been watching porn and have now overstepped boundaries, sexually harming*



**“THERE IS AN IGNORANCE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE... AN IGNORANCE OF HOW PORN IS AFFECTING THEM FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES... FATHERS DON'T REALIZE HOW VITAL IT IS TO TALK TO THEIR BOYS ABOUT IT. THEY THINK IT IS ACCEPTABLE, A FAD OR JUST A 'FACT OF LIFE'.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

*family members younger than themselves as a result of the material they have been viewing.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

## Client wellbeing

The therapists raised concerns about how porn exposure was impacting their young clients' physical, emotional, spiritual and whānau health.

*“ We see the impacts of porn on young people's view of (sexual) norm's related to intimacy, body image, relationships, roles within relationships and related expectations, and on the ability to connect intimately with another person.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

They noted that the dehumanising messaging inherent in porn that separates intimacy from sex can have implications for young people 'separating body, mind and spirit' and how this, in turn, can impact on individuals' wellbeing and the wellbeing of the wider community.

*“ There is a dehumanization aspect of pornography - separation of body, mind and spirit.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

Specific concerns raised by therapists related to wellbeing were that porn usage can potentially impact young people's sense of identity and self-worth, their ability to form and maintain intimate and healthy relationships, their ability to focus on education and/or employment, their notions of intimacy and care due to aggressive sexual expectations – particularly for young gay men and their body image and performance expectations. Therapists also noted that impacts on wellbeing were more evident amongst high-users of porn.

*“ I'm concerned about the effect that exposure to pornography has on the young person - their mental*

*health and well-being, building positive relationships, how young people view women, building healthy long-term relationships, having a family, their own identity, long term addiction and the effect on their education and employment opportunities and our community.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

## Lack of parental knowledge

Therapists noted that many parents lack information and awareness of the potential impact of porn on their child's development and are not equipped to prevent their children from accessing porn, or to help them critically view its messaging. They felt parents needed to take a proactive approach to understanding the impacts of porn and discussing them with their children, limiting access to porn in homes and on devices and taking measures to prevent young children from accidentally viewing porn.

Therapists also told us there was an increasing demand for their services in New Zealand. They said there was a scarcity of qualified child and adolescent sex therapists equipped to address the complexities of porn and young people and the problematic sexual behaviours young clients are currently presenting with.

*“ There is an ignorance about young people... An ignorance of how porn is affecting them for the rest of their lives... Fathers don't realize how vital it is to talk to their boys about it. They think it is acceptable, a fad or just a 'fact of life'.”*

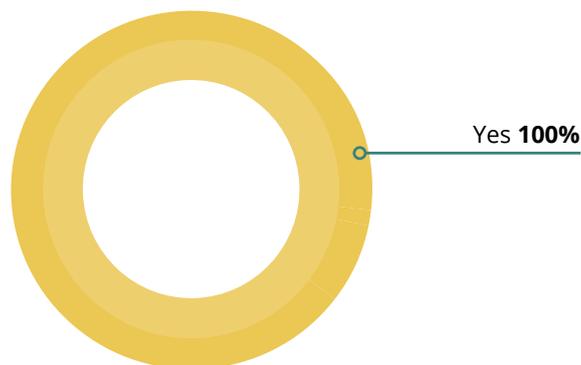
– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (T)

# CHRISTIAN FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS

A total of 50 faith-based leaders working with young people within churches across New Zealand completed the survey.

18 were youth workers and 32 were senior leaders. Their feedback showed:

## DO YOU BELIEVE PORN IS AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?



### YOUTH LEADERS OF FAITH BASED ORGS

**100%** of the youth workers believe that porn is an issue for young people today

**97%** of the senior leaders believe that porn is an issue for members of their faith communities

**85%** of the total leaders have talked to people (adults and youth) about porn

**76%** wanted information on problematic porn behaviour.

**69%** OF FAITH BASED LEADERS WANT STRATEGIES FOR COUPLES

The identified barriers to discussing porn included leaders' own personal discomfort (48%) and a lack of porn knowledge and awareness (39%).

The data from this group is different to the other groups because it includes senior pastoral staff that work with both youth and adults. After thorough analysis of the qualitative data, it was evident that a few of the senior pastors included some observations of adults in their faith communities, not just young people in their survey responses. As this cohort was small (32 senior leaders in total), we have kept the qualitative data in this analysis as it provides some insight into what the leaders are observing as young people move into long-term sexual relationships in adulthood. Key themes are as follows:

## Normalisation of porn

The faith-based leaders told us that porn was very normalised now amongst the young people they care for. Youth as young as 12 years old were viewing porn regularly and casual porn conversations amongst youth were now a normal part of youth culture.

*“I know a group of students as young as 12 who watch it on a regular basis.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

They noted that young people feel pressure to watch porn, that it's often socially unacceptable not to watch porn and young people may be at risk of social isolation if they can't contribute to the porn conversation.

*“I've been a part of student environments where it's so socially appropriate to have casual conversations about porn that I've been considered “weird” if I don't watch it.”*

- SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)



**“WE SEE HOW PORN IS CHANGING HOW PEOPLE ARE EXPECTED TO RELATE TO EACH OTHER - IN MORE VIOLENT AND DEGRADING WAYS TO WOMEN AND UNHEALTHY AND ISOLATING WAYS FOR MEN.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

## Changing attitudes and behaviours

Many of the leaders told us they have observed changes in sexual attitudes and behaviours in the young people they work with, which they believe could be influenced by the normalisation of porn.

Changing sexual attitudes noted by the leaders included: increased sexualised attitudes towards young women, de-sensitisation to explicit imagery, minimising of sexual violence, changing sexual expectations including increased ‘violent’ and ‘degrading’ sexual behaviours towards females and changing gender roles influencing how girls should look and behave.

*“ We see how porn is changing how people are expected to relate to each other - in more violent and degrading ways to women and unhealthy and isolating ways for men.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

### Changing behaviours observed by the leaders amongst the young people they work with include:

- increasing number of people accessing pastoral care for problematic porn use
- high levels of shame and isolation related to compulsive porn usage
- sexual dysfunction amongst young couples related to porn use of one partner
- increased relationship breakdowns related to porn usage
- increasing ‘unhealthy’ sexual relationships amongst teens and adults

*“ I work with young men who have struggled and are addicted to porn. Porn has also changed expectations about how women should look and behave.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

Also in this cohort, some senior and youth leaders noted personal experience with porn to be a reason why they believe porn is an issue and influences sexual attitudes and behaviours.

*“ I know porn is an issue for young people, because of my own dealings with it. It has impacted me since I was a child and it caused me to have horrible expectations of sex.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

## Shame and isolation

Many of the leaders told us they were concerned about the increasing number of young people accessing pastoral care for problematic porn usage and the impact it was having on them personally and in their relationships. They noted the young people also experienced high levels of shame, guilt and low self-worth associated with this. They are concerned that young men may become isolated from their churches and wider communities due to problematic porn use and the toll it takes on them.

*“ I know porn is an issue because of my experience working with teenagers and seeing the effects. There are multiple factors that come into play - physical, emotional and spiritual.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

## Relationships

Some of the leaders were concerned about the impact of porn on relationships. They are seeing marriage and relationship breakdowns in young couples due to compulsive porn use by one partner and sexual dysfunction as a result of preference for porn over a real partner and/or differing sexual expectations. They also told us that they were concerned that the normalisation of sexual aggression in porn has led to sexual violence being normalised in some young adult relationships.



**“I KNOW PORN IS AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, BECAUSE OF MY OWN DEALINGS WITH IT. IT HAS IMPACTED ME SINCE I WAS A CHILD AND IT CAUSED ME TO HAVE HORRIBLE EXPECTATIONS OF SEX.”**

SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

*“ I see the hugely damaging effects it has on one’s sexuality – that in turn affects marriage and relationships.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

## Sexuality and the Church

Church leaders were concerned that sexual topics such as porn weren’t discussed ‘openly or appropriately’ within churches and that young people were not receiving adequate, positive counter-porn messaging from church communities.

*“ There is an increasing broken view of sexuality in the church; perhaps an unknowing perpetuation of objectification of women and rape culture; continued judgmental attitudes which prevent people from opening up; sex in general not being something that is openly or appropriately discussed.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)

They were also concerned that the ‘taboo’ nature of porn within the church would serve as a barrier to young people seeking help if they needed it. They identified resources, leadership training and expert speakers as key steps in helping equip church environments to engage with the new porn landscape.

*“ It is getting out of control very quickly and we are not keeping up with how quickly this is becoming a major problem.”*

– SURVEY PARTICIPANT (FB)



## WHERE TO NEXT?

The Porn and Young People - What do we know? Youth Stakeholder Survey has provided a platform for youth stakeholders to voice their concerns and needs in relation to the new porn landscape based on their engagement with young people in New Zealand.

It has provided a window into what stakeholders know, and possibly more importantly, what they don't know about porn and young people.

Whilst it is difficult to fully understand the role porn plays and the implications of the observed behaviours and concerns outlined in stakeholder's responses, the findings have clearly indicated stakeholders believe porn is influencing and shaping the sexual culture of young people in New Zealand.

The findings have also highlighted the need for a multi-faceted response to equip New Zealand stakeholders in their engagement with young people. The majority (84%) of stakeholders have identified there is a large gap in any porn service provision or response in Aotearoa and have told us they want more information about the new porn landscape. Specifically, they have requested current information and data, strategies for talking to young people about porn, information regarding compulsive porn behaviours, and information on local New Zealand services.

At a legislative level, many stakeholders have recommended that restrictions be put in place that limit access to explicit material: for example, that internet service providers be required to implement age verification measures to access sexually explicit content. At a public health and educational level, they have recommended education in schools, including porn literacy in the school sexual health curriculum, information on internet filtering software and strategies, and resources and seminars for whānau, youth service providers, faith-based providers, therapists and schools. They have asked for research on porn and young people in New Zealand, and that resources and responses meet the diverse cultural, sexual and religious needs of young people in Aotearoa.

**Overall, the strongest message from the stakeholders is that porn is an important and concerning issue for youth in Aotearoa, potentially shaping young New Zealander's sexual culture in unprecedented ways. There is an urgent call for intervening measures that equip, educate and support New Zealand young people, their whānau and the youth stakeholders that work alongside them.**

**1** Hooley EM. **The Relationship Between Transmission of Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Attitude, and Culture.** Andrews University; 2018.

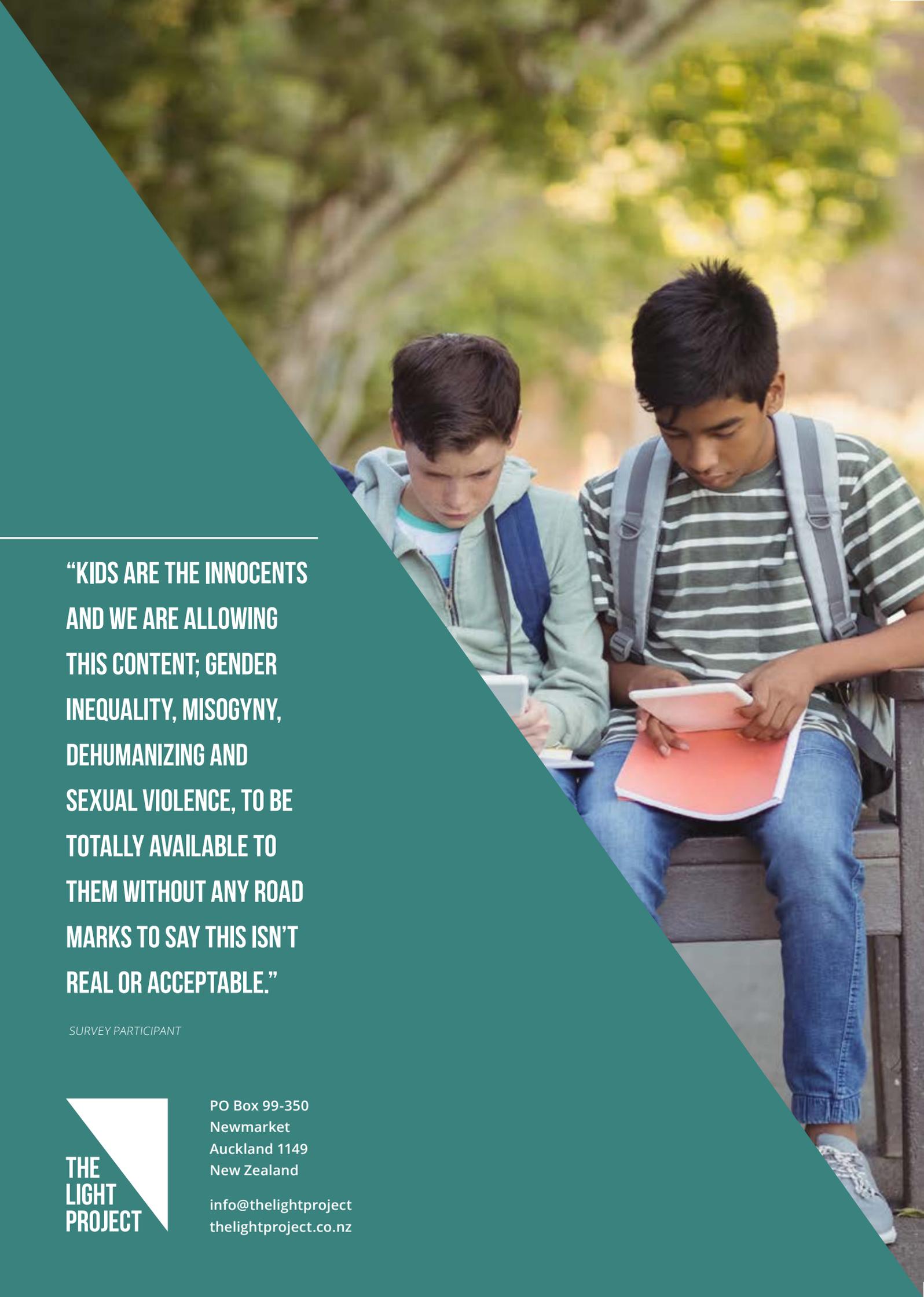
**2** Martellozzo, E., Monaghan, A., Adler, J.R., Davidson, J., Leyva, R. and Horvath, M.A.H. ) **I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it.** London: NSPCC ; 2016

**3** Lim MS, Carrotte ER, Hellard ME. **The impact of pornography on gender-based violence, sexual health and well-being: what do we know?** J Epidemiol Community Health. 2016 Jan 1;70(1):3-5.

**4** Smith LW, Liu B, Degenhardt L, Richters J, Patton G, Wand H, Cross D, Hocking JS, Skinner SR, Cooper S, Lumby C. **Is sexual content in new media linked to sexual risk behaviour in young people? A systematic review and meta-analysis.** Sexual health. 2016 Nov 1;13(6):501-15.

**5** Quadara, A., El-Murr, A. & Latham, J. **The effects of pornography on children and young people: An evidence scan. (Research Report).** Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies; 2017.

**6** Doornwaard SM, van Den Eijnden RJ, Baams L, Vanwesenbeeck I, Ter Bogt TF. **Lower psychological well-being and excessive sexual interest predict symptoms of compulsive use of sexually explicit internet material among adolescent boys.** Journal of youth and adolescence. 2016 Jan 1;45(1):73-84



**“KIDS ARE THE INNOCENTS  
AND WE ARE ALLOWING  
THIS CONTENT; GENDER  
INEQUALITY, MISOGYNY,  
DEHUMANIZING AND  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE, TO BE  
TOTALLY AVAILABLE TO  
THEM WITHOUT ANY ROAD  
MARKS TO SAY THIS ISN'T  
REAL OR ACCEPTABLE.”**

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