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Response to the article by Sara Jay

By Dr Afroditi Pina

As Sara Jay states, “porn films are intended to be viewed by adults”, but there is evidence that they are not solely viewed by adults. Children and young people are accidentally exposed or willingly access (to a lesser degree) pornography online and offline. Whether the content glorifies "risky sexual behaviour" is no longer irrelevant, not when we are potentially talking about 10 year old children that are exposed to it without wanting to be, whether it is by a pop up on the internet or by a video on someone's smartphone. We rate movies because we want to give parents the ability to make decisions concerning their children's welfare and safety. With purchased DVDs and movies parents have some option and choice. With the internet, that choice is somewhat more limited. The availability and accessibility of pornography on the internet is undeniable, and home is not the only space where children and young people can access it.

While there may be some safety features installed for some sites, there are numerous other sites where streamed or digitally downloaded adult movies (or snippets of them) are fully accessible. Recently, Playboy was fined by Ofcom for not having safety features to prevent its content from being widely accessible to children.

I agree that a crucial part of parenting is to educate children, to instill morals and values and help them make the right judgments, however, I also feel that we are placing all responsibility on parents. We are presuming that all parents have the same capabilities and opportunities. There may be some parents that are in great need of education concerning internet safety themselves.

Furthermore, we are presuming that children and young people would wish to have those discussions and education with their parents. Focus groups with young people, in fact, inform us that they want to have a more realistic idea about sex and relationships, but they also wish to have a safe forum including peers and adults (both teachers and parents) where they could discuss their curiosities and queries and learn about sexual practices that are relevant to them.

Undeniably parents should take personal responsibility, but the government needs to work in partnership with them to ensure that relationship and sex education is widely accessible and offered to all children in a consistent, realistic, healthy and relevant way. Pornographers may be in the business of creating fantasies for adults, but our government's business needs to be educating children and young people about the realities of sex and healthy sexual relationships.

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