

New research commissioned by the BBFC into the impact of pornography on children demonstrates significant support for age-verification

The BBFC is the designated Age-verification Regulator under the Digital Economy Act, responsible for ensuring age-verification is in place to prevent children accessing or stumbling across commercial online pornography. In preparation for entry into force, the BBFC has commissioned research by Revealing Reality to establish a benchmark against which the impact of age-verification can be assessed, and to inform our report back to Government on the effectiveness of the regime. Below are findings which we believe demonstrate the value of and support for the new regime. The full report will be launched in Parliament in November and posted on www.ageverificationregulator.com.

Most children and parents interviewed believed that age-verification would prevent children from accidentally seeing pornography at a young age.

This in turn would delay the age at which children start to actively watch pornography. Parents felt that age-verification was a positive development because currently pornography is too accessible to children online.

SURVEY RESULTS

- **83% of parents agreed with the statement “there should be robust age-verification controls in place to stop children (under 18s) seeing commercial pornography online”**
- **56% of 11 to 13-year-olds agreed with the statement “I want to be locked out of websites that are for 18-plus-year-olds”**

A significant proportion of children see pornography unintentionally.

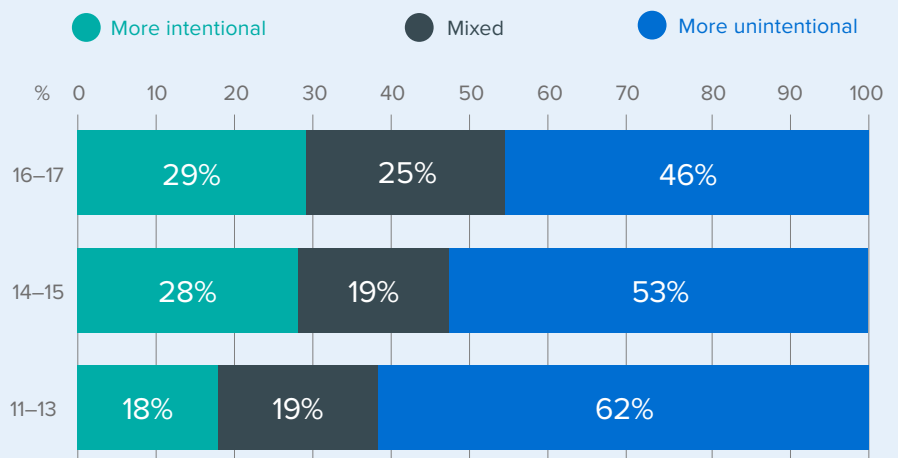
Those surveyed believed age-verification would reduce such accidental encounters.

SURVEY RESULTS

- **Over 60% of 11 to 13-year-olds said their viewing of pornography was mostly “unintentional”.**

Of all the pornography you’ve seen, how much did you see intentionally compared to seeing by accident?

Base = seen pornography (722)



Some children had seen pornography as young as 7 or 8 years old.

Most of these children, interviewed in the qualitative research, stumbled across pornography unintentionally at first, and it was often these children who felt they had been most negatively affected by pornography. Children described feeling “grossed out” and “confused” when they first saw pornography, particularly those who had seen it when they were under the age of 10.

CASE STUDY

- **April (18, London) described watching “violent, extreme pornography” from the age of 7, which she believes has affected her sexual preferences – something that she now feels contradicts her feminist views.**

Many had stumbled across “aggressive” or “violent” pornography, which they found upsetting or disturbing.

Often, they were first exposed to this content accidentally, through videos appearing on home pages of pornography sites, and some reported getting lost in “rabbit holes” of pornography where they saw increasingly graphic content.

Parents were worried about what they termed “extreme” pornography, identifying “gang bangs”, “violent or aggressive sex” and “bondage” as particular concerns. This was echoed by young people, some of whom referred to the potential “trauma” of seeing such content.

CASE STUDY

- **Lorna (18, Cardiff) – “I find that in straight porn the man can be really forceful and degrading... he’ll just shove her around.”**

Children believe pornography could influence sexual behaviour and attitudes towards consent.

Girls in particular were found to watch pornography to learn ‘what to do’ during sex and to meet the perceived expectations of boys, which they believed were influenced by pornography. Girls also spoke of their fear that the aggressive depictions of sex would be seen as “normal” by young male viewers of pornography, and accordingly copied in real-life sexual encounters.

Some young people felt pornography had actually affected their behaviour during sex; particularly in the copying of “rough” or “forceful” sex seen in pornography. Some also felt that pornography had affected their or their partner’s understanding of consent because consent was “implied” in pornography rather than openly discussed and spoken about by participants. Across the focus groups, parents expressed concern about their children being exposed to depictions of rough or aggressive sex, arguing that it created unrealistic expectations of sex and what happens in a “normal, loving relationship”.

SURVEY RESULTS

- **41% of young people (aged between 11 and 17) who knew about pornography agreed that watching pornography made people less respectful of the opposite sex. Only 13% disagreed.**

CASE STUDY

- **Calum (18, Manchester) – (Reflecting on his first time having sex) “I thought it was going to be a lot rougher and I wouldn’t have to worry about hurting the girl, but it was completely different, and I had to be more careful.” (Reflecting on a subsequent sexual experience) “I just thought as if it was like a porn video, and I was like okay I can do what I want with this girl because whatever I do she is enjoying it.”**
- **Lucy (17, Glasgow) – “If you look online you’re not going to find normal sex, you’ll find exaggerated sex and take that as normal... It [pornography] makes everyone so adventurous, like doing it outside and bizarre things that aren’t normal sex, but a boy or girl aged 13 who doesn’t know anything might think they are meant to do these things too.”**

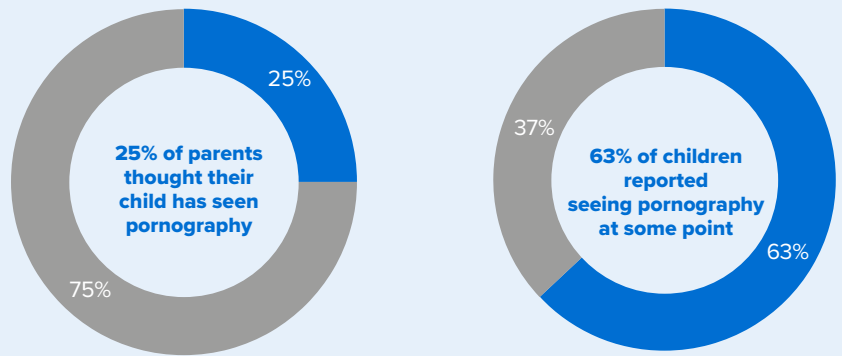
Parents are unaware of their children’s access to pornography, particularly with regard to their daughters.

There was a conflict between parents’ perceptions of their children’s pornography viewing practices and the reality.

SURVEY RESULTS

- **75% of parents in the survey thought their child hadn’t seen pornography online, but in reality 53% of their children reported that they had in fact seen it.**
- **60% of parents claimed to have discussed pornography with their child. However, very few children interviewed in the qualitative work said they had had such a conversation.**
- **Parents were more likely to think their sons had seen pornography than their daughters. 17% of parents answering about their daughter thought their child would have seen pornography, compared to 32% answering about their son. In reality, 58% of girls in the survey actually reported having seen pornography at some point compared to 68% of boys. Fathers were also more likely to think their child had seen pornography, regardless of their child’s gender (34%) compared to mothers (19%).**

Parents’ thoughts on whether their child had seen pornography compared with children’s reported levels of seeing pornography



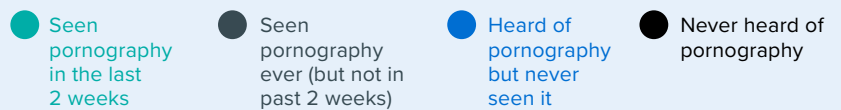
Pornography has become normalised among young people.

Most of the boys interviewed reported watching pornography daily for a period of their lives, often between the ages of 14 and 16. Similarly, some of the girls interviewed reported watching pornography around four times a week between the ages of 14 and 16.

SURVEY RESULTS

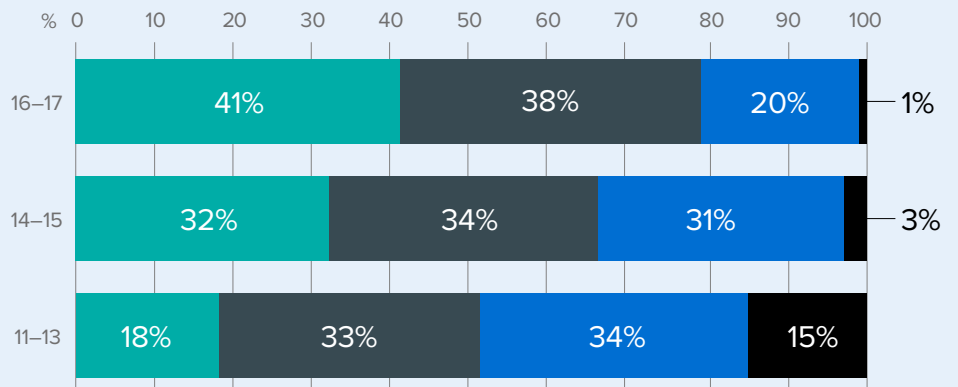
- **51% of 11 to 13-year-olds reported that they had seen pornography at some point.**
- **66% of 14 to 15-year-olds reported that they had seen pornography at some point.**

Children’s reported exposure to pornography by age-group



This includes the entire sample of 1142. It is based on a combination of questions (Q23, 25, 35)

- Have you heard of pornography (porn) before?
- In the last couple of weeks, have you seen any pictures or videos that would count as pornography?
- Have you ever seen any pictures or videos that would count as pornography?



Most interviewees would usually search for pornography on dedicated pornography sites.

The most popular site for accessing pornography mentioned in the qualitative interviews was Pornhub. Other sites such as xHamster, xVideos and RedTube were also mentioned. Such services will be required to carry age-verification once regulation under the Digital Economy Act enters into force.

Background to the research

This research by Revealing Reality was commissioned by the BBFC in its role as the designated Age-verification Regulator to provide context to the current online pornography landscape and young people's interactions with and attitudes towards pornography. The research was designed to explore what children and parents think about the effects of pornography and their expectations of the new age-verification regime. The full report will be published in November with a launch in Parliament.

Revealing Reality adopted a mixed-methods approach to include a wide range of views. This comprised a combination of qualitative and quantitative work with children and adults from May to August 2019.

- **Children's qualitative research** – 36 one-on-one depth interviews with 16 to 18-year-olds across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- **Adults qualitative research** – 4 parent focus groups each with 6 participants – mothers and fathers
- **Online survey** completed by a parent and a child with a combined total of 2,284 respondents (1,142 parents, and 1,142 children 11-17). The survey was representative of children aged 11-17 in the UK. This comprised a ten-minute questionnaire with parents, followed by a 15-minute online survey with the child. The questions given to children were shown to the parents in advance and permission was granted accordingly. By having both a parent and child section, we were in some cases able to compare the perceptions of parents with their own child's reported behaviour.

Across both strands of qualitative research, all names used in this report are pseudonyms and all personal details, with the exception of ages, have been altered and the welfare of all participants was protected.