September 2023

# NWC Call For Inputs: Online Safety



# Introduction

The National Women's Council is the leading national representative organisation for women and women's groups in Ireland, founded in 1973. We have over 190 member groups and a large and growing community of individual supporters.

NWC chairs the National Observatory on Violence Against Women an independent network of over 24 grassroots and national organisations that convene quarterly to monitor progress on violence against women in Ireland. NWC established and chaired the National Advisory Committee supporting the Dept. of Higher Educations' Framework Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive – Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions, the work of this Committee is now mainstreamed into the Higher Education Authority.

NWC has welcomed the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 and the establishment of an Online Safety Commissioner to oversee the new regulatory framework. NWC also welcomes the opportunity to input in relation to the online safety codes for video-sharing platform services, especially the consultation's emphasis on the protection of children and the general public from online harms while upholding and promoting human rights, by requiring VSPS providers to introduce online safety features for their users and to moderate content more effectively. It will be crucial that this Code aligns with the Third National Strategy on Domestic Sexual Gender-Based Violence, as part of a whole of government approach to end violence against women and girls. Ireland is in a unique position as the EU HQ of many leading technology companies and video-sharing platform providers to contribute to making Europe safer for women and girls.

Alarmingly, 1 in 2 women who had suffered intimate relationship abuse experienced abuse online using digital technology<sup>1</sup>. Cyber violence against women is an increasing problem worldwide (including cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse, gender-based slurs and harassment, 'slut-shaming', pornography, 'sextortion', rape and death threats, 'doxing', and electronically enabled trafficking). Furthermore, the Department of Justice (2020)<sup>2</sup> Report on the Public Consultation - Hate Speech and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.toointoyou.ie/app/uploads/2022/10/one in five women report womens aid 2020.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Department of Justice (2020). Legislating for Hate Speech and Hate Crime in Ireland Report on the Public Consultation 2020. Available at <a href="https://assets.gov.ie/237922/07cb2005-2712-4808-9b48-348f224806b5.pdf">https://assets.gov.ie/237922/07cb2005-2712-4808-9b48-348f224806b5.pdf</a>

Hate Crime in Ireland shows that there is considerable disquiet at the use of media and online platforms by public figures to promote racist stereotypes and harmful myths in order to generate attention for their campaigns and that much of social media prejudice is expressed against Travellers. BelongTo revealed that a shocking 87% of LGBTQ+ young people have seen or experienced anti-LGBTQ+ hate and harassment on social media in the past year<sup>3</sup>. Actions must be taken against anti-LGBTQ+ content, as only 21% of LGBTQ+ youth who reported abusive or harmful LGBTQ+ content saw action from a social media platform<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, NWC has strongly stressed the importance of the inclusion of the harms of pornography in the SPHE<sup>5</sup> curricula and the Third National Strategy on DSGBV to address this issue<sup>6</sup>, and in its National Observatory Shadow Report to Grevio (2022)<sup>7</sup>. NWC, through the Beyond Exploitation Campaign (2020)<sup>8</sup> has highlighted the harms of pornography on children and young people, by influencing expectations, normalising sexual behaviour based on misogynistic, and often abusive and violent, models of sexual expectations. Pornography also has an impact on gender equality and is a form of sexual exploitation and violence against women.

Extensive research is now available about the harms of pornography on children and young people<sup>9</sup>, including how hardcore, explicit porn is widely available. 1 in 3 children say they've seen explicit, hardcore porn by age 12 and its misleading, degrading, and objectifying impact is profound (as it shapes children and young people's perception of consent, sexual violence, gender equality, sexuality, and intimate relationships at an extremely young age and without any context). In the UK, 44% of males ages 11–16 who saw hardcore porn said it gave them ideas about the type of sex they wanted to try<sup>10</sup>.

In this call for inputs, NWC will focus on the Online Harms and the issues that the Online Safety Code should address, in particular on the harms of pornography and the need to tackle it as a priority for children and young people, as well as for gender equality in general.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.belongto.org/87-of-lgbtq-youth-report-hate-and-harassment-online/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://www.belongto.org/87-of-lgbtq-youth-report-hate-and-harassment-online/

<sup>5</sup> https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC Submission on Senior Cycle SPHE Redevelopment.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Department of Justice (2022), Implementation Plan - Zero Tolerance Third Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Action 1.5 and actions 1.1.4 1.3.7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> National Observatory on Violence against Women and Girls, Shadow Report to GREVIO in respect of Ireland (2022)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Beyond Exploitation (2020), Submission to Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

<sup>9</sup> https://www.culturereframed.org/the-porn-crisis/

<sup>10</sup> https://www.mdx.ac.uk/ data/assets/pdf file/0021/223266/MDX-NSPCC-OCC-pornography-report.pdf

# Question 1: What do you think our main priorities and objectives should be in the first binding Online Safety Code for VSPS? What are the main online harms you would like to see it address and why

NWC's focus in this submission is on combatting harms to women and girls in line with the current whole of government Zero Tolerance strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, and we urge that the main priorities and objectives for the first binding Online Safety Code for VSPS should include the following specific area:

Combatting exposure of children to pornography, particularly in relation to the suspected link between such exposure and the increase in harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people

### 1. Pornography and the increase in harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people

Regular consumption of pornography is unfortunately commonplace among children, it has become normalised to the extent that in the words of the UK's Children Commissioner, children 'cannot opt-out'.<sup>11</sup> Inappropriate exposure to pornography (most of which is extreme, violent, and degrading to women) at a very young age is a complex, multi-faceted social problem. This inescapable digital environment of misogyny and brutality is where children and young people spend much of their online lives and it cannot but be a contributing factor to harmful attitudes to sex, relationships and gender, many believe it to be a driver of sexual violence.<sup>12</sup> The biggest determiner of when children first view pornography is the age at which they get a phone, and research by Irish charity *Cybersafe Kids* found that 95% of 8–12-year-olds owned their own smart device (an increase of 2% on the previous year's figure), with 87% of 8–12 year-olds having their own social media and/or instant messaging account (an increase of 3% on 2021)<sup>13</sup>.

Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATUs) in Ireland have seen a rise in the number of victims of peer-to-peer violence they treat. The SATU annual report for 2022 shows that 20.1% of victims attending their centres were 18 years or below. The SATU network provides care to anyone over the age of 14 who has been sexually assaulted. On occasion, the SATU service may care for children under the age of 14, when paediatric services are unavailable and there is an acute forensic need for attendance. The data presented in the 2022 report shows that adolescents are significantly represented in SATU attendances every year. Furthermore, between 2017 and 2022 SATUs noted an increase of 37% in the number of adolescents presenting to the network and refer to it as a 'key emerging theme'. Gardaí recorded 97 suspected sexual

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> 'A Lot Of It Is Actually Just Abuse'- Young People And Pornography | Children's Commissioner For England (no date) Children's Commissioner For England. Available at: <a href="https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography">https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography</a> (Accessed: 30 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Lally, C. (2018) 'Is pornography driving increased sexual violence in Ireland?', *The Irish Times*, 26 May. Available at: <a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/is-pornography-driving-increased-sexual-violence-in-ireland-1.3508313">https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/is-pornography-driving-increased-sexual-violence-in-ireland-1.3508313</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Cybersafe Kids (2023) *ACADEMIC YEAR IN REVIEW 2021–2022*. Cybersafe Kids. Available at: <a href="https://www.cybersafekids.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CSK">https://www.cybersafekids.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CSK</a> YearInReview 2021-2022 FINAL.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> National Women and Infants Health Programme (2023) SATU ANNUAL REPORT 2022. HSE. Available

at: <a href="https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/sexhealth/sexual-assault-treatment-units-resources-for-healthcare-professionals/satu-2022-annual-report.pdf">https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/sexhealth/sexual-assault-treatment-units-resources-for-healthcare-professionals/satu-2022-annual-report.pdf</a> (Accessed: 23 August 2023).

assault and rape offenders aged under 16 in 2019, and 79 in 2020.<sup>15</sup> If the extremely low reporting rates of such assaults are taken into account this is a sizeable number. The number of children under the age of 18 alleged to have abused other children the same age or younger increased by 18% in 2022, according to figures from Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI).<sup>16</sup> The CSO report that in one in seven (15%) cases of detected sexual violence in 2020, both the victim and suspected offender were under 18 years of age.<sup>17</sup> During the same period, Donegal Rape Crisis Centre had seen a 50% increase in victims under 16 seeking help with the youngest just 12 years old and they have also noted that the level of physical violence accompanying sexual violence has seriously escalated.<sup>18</sup>

This chimes with the situation in the UK, where the Children's Commissioner commissioned research on an apparent similar surge in peer-to-peer sexual violence with aggravated physical violence using an innovative methodology to explore the link between exposure to pornography and sexual violence.<sup>19</sup> The research examined transcripts of interviews between medical personnel or police and children who were victims or perpetrators of sexual assault/abuse between 2012 and 2022. The results showed that in 50% of the cases the transcripts contained references to acts of sexual violence commonly portrayed in porn. The most frequently occurring categories of physical aggression were strangulation, choking or slapping, with name-calling also prevalent. An additional review of some of these cases found children themselves suggesting direct links between pornography exposure and the harmful sexual behaviour exhibited.

The really interesting part of this research is the longitudinal analysis which shows that a minority of the police transcripts (10%) overall mentioned pornography, although that had risen to nearly a quarter of cases between 2017 and 2022. This timeframe coincides with the growth in access to smart devices by adolescents and teens. The references were most often to: watching pornography; girls being seen as a porn star; specific types of porn; or porn sites. This is compelling evidence that abusive acts represented in pornography are occurring in sexual assaults and violence against girls. It's vital that similar research is conducted here in Ireland, replicating the UK methodology to shed more light on the link between the increase in the numbers of children presenting as victims and perpetrators of sexual violence, often with accompanying aggravated physical aggression, and exposure to pornography. The horrific sexual assault

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Edwards, R. (2022) 'Concern at rise in number of children alleged to have sexually abused the young', *The Independent*, 16 October. Available at: <a href="https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/concern-at-rise-in-number-of-children-alleged-to-have-sexually-abused-the-young/42069817.html">https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/concern-at-rise-in-number-of-children-alleged-to-have-sexually-abused-the-young/42069817.html</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Edwards, R. (2022) ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Central Statistics Office (no date) *Press Statement Recorded Crime Victims 2021 And Suspected Offenders 2020 - CSO - Central Statistics Office*. Available

at:  $\frac{https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2022 pressreleases/pressstatement recorded crime victims 2021 and suspected of fem \\ \frac{ders 2020}{(Accessed: 31 August 2023)}.$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Edwards, R. (2022) ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Children's Commissioner (2023) Evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children. Gov.UK. Available at: <a href="https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/05/Evidence-on-pornographys-influence-on-harmful-sexual-behaviour-among-children.pdf">https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/05/Evidence-on-pornographys-influence-on-harmful-sexual-behaviour-among-children.pdf</a> (Accessed: 23 August 2023).

and murder of Ana Kriégel in Dublin in 2018 is a tragic example of an outcome of disordered views on sexuality and gender as a result of repeated exposure to violent pornographic images among young boys. The details that emerged about the online life of one of the 13-year-olds convicted of the murder were very troubling. Boy A had 12,500 images on two devices that gardaí found in his bedroom, the vast majority of which were of a pornographic and brutal nature.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Problematic issues with specific VSPS and children's exposure to pornography

VSPS are where most children and young people first encounter porn, with the social media site X formerly known as *Twitter* the online platform where they report they were most likely to have initially encountered it<sup>21</sup> (this is certainly the case in the UK, there's no disaggregated age information available on social media use in Ireland, but we do know that Pornhub is very frequently used here, and in fact was the 12<sup>th</sup> most visited website in Ireland in July 2023<sup>22</sup> ). Ofcom's *Children's and Parents' Media Literacy 2021* study showed that use of video-sharing platforms was the most-cited online activity among all children aged 3-15 (94%). Use among children increases with age, with almost all (98%) 12-15-year-olds reporting they watch content on video-sharing platforms.<sup>23</sup> Amongst older teenagers, 15-17, Twitter is ranked number 4 in the top twenty video-sharing platforms by reach, with an online reach of 62%.<sup>24</sup> Many people encounter pornography on *Twitter* through the accounts of content creators using the platform to drive traffic to their *Onlyfans* page. As *Onlyfans* doesn't allow advertising, content creators there use other VSPS to promote their sites.

X/ Twitter settings are organised in a particular way on these sexualised accounts to avoid being banned, the account owners fulfil the platform's requirement of tagging the profile as 'sensitive' (these accounts are commonly indicated on the platform in bios as NSFW- not safe for work). This can be done very simply within privacy/security setting to indicate that the posts from the account on the platform may contain 'sensitive' material. The NSFW search term can then be used as a way of accessing porn on the platform. These initial searches can lead children to other VSPS due to cross-posting on multiple accounts across Instagram, Facebook and TikTok in particular. While children or young people will not necessarily be successful in becoming Onlyfans consumers as their age verification procedures are relatively robust, they will simply by virtue of coming across Onlyfans 'teaser' videos and interacting with them, be fed more

Input in relation to the online safety codes for video-sharing platform services, September 2023

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Gallagher, C. (2019) 'Ana Kriegel murder trial: jury not told of porn found on Boy A's phone', *The Irish Times*, 1 January. Available at: <a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/ana-kriegel-murder-trial-jury-not-told-of-porn-found-on-boy-a-s-phone-1.3929624">https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/ana-kriegel-murder-trial-jury-not-told-of-porn-found-on-boy-a-s-phone-1.3929624</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Children's Commissioner (2023b) 'A lot of it is actually just abuse'- Young people and pornography. Gov.UK. Available at: <a href="https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf">https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Most visited websites Ireland July 2023 (no date). Available at: <a href="https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/ireland/#:~:text=google.com%20is%20ranked%20%231,in%20Ireland%20is%20independent.ie.">https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/ireland/#:~:text=google.com%20is%20ranked%20%231,in%20Ireland%20is%20independent.ie.</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ofcom (2022) *The VSP Landscape Understanding the video-sharing platform industry in the UK*. Ofcom. Available at: <a href="https://www.ofcom.org.uk/">https://www.ofcom.org.uk/</a> data/assets/pdf file/0030/245577/2022-vsp-landscape.pdf (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ofcom (2022) ibid

explicit content in their 'timeline' and seek more. The platforms may also lead the user to *Pornhub* as many content creators have accounts on that VSPS too (through their 'model program'). However, it's also simply, and very frequently the case that the child or young person uses hashtags to search, for example #porn #hardcoreporn #onlyfans which generates many results in *X/Twitter* and once searched, the algorithm will then populate the timeline with age-inappropriate and pornographic content. Many information sources are available to the *Onlyfans* creator helping them to use *X/Twitter* to boost the visitors to their camming site. One such resource points out

'many of the popular social media platforms restrict NSFW content or adult content, Twitter is very lenient in this regard. You can post any type of content for the promotion of your fan page. That's the primary reason for choosing Twitter to promote and advertise your content'.<sup>25</sup>

Tackling just this one issue on *X/Twitter* which facilitates the masking of pornographic material, would reduce significantly children's and young people's exposure to porn on that platform where most indicate they first encounter it. Also removing 'porn' as a searchable item would help, this has been done with *Instagram* and while there is hardcore pornography still on the VSPS it is less pervasive and less easy to find.

*TikTok* is listed number 6 in the top twenty video-sharing platforms by reach, with an online reach of 66% among 15 to 17 year olds in the UK.<sup>26</sup> Thirteen is the age at which children can officially open *TikTok* accounts although in practice children far younger use the VSPS. Again here, *TikTok* is used by *Onlyfans* content creators and others in the sex industry on *Pornhub* for example, to promote their explicit content without getting their videos removed, by using specific filters on their images, for example by modifying their adult images to look like paintings.<sup>27</sup> Another way of doing this is by using an explicit image or video as a profile picture which also circumvents moderation rules.<sup>28</sup>

Similar to the cross-fertilisation of porn between *X/Twitter* and *Onlyfans* and *Pornhub, TikTok*'s superior editing tools and an increasing demand for porn in a *TikTok* style on *Pornhub* is driving the rate at which *TikTok* videos are posted to other VSPS and this solidifies the connection between *Pornhub, Onlyfans* and *TikTok* as platforms that filter users towards each other. While nudity and sexual activity are not allowed according to *TikTok*'s rules, very many explicit videos get past the moderation system. Sex industry

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> How To Promote the Onlyfans Page on Twitter? (2022) Medium. Available at: <a href="https://medium.com/betteronlyfans/how-to-promote-the-onlyfans-page-on-twitter-7d4451aa48f4">https://medium.com/betteronlyfans/how-to-promote-the-onlyfans-page-on-twitter-7d4451aa48f4</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ofcom (2022) ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Some OnlyFans Creators Have Found A Loophole To Put Their Nudes On TikTok (2022) NBC News. Available

at: https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/viral/onlyfans-creators-loophole-nudes-tiktok-ai-filter-rcna56484 (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> TikTok Loophole Sees Users Post Pornographic And Violent Videos (2021) BBC News. Available

at: <a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56821882">https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56821882</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

performers use TikTok video production tools to create a video, then screen record it and upload it directly to *Onlyfans* without ever posting to *TikTok*. *TikTok* is effectively operating as a marketing tool for some content creators in the sex industry.<sup>29</sup> Issues relating to VSPS use by the Tate brothers in their alleged sextrafficking operation and enforced sexual exploitation of women on *TikTok* and *Onlyfans* is likely to be admitted as evidence in the case being taken by the Romanian Government.<sup>30</sup> While most *Onlyfans* content is of a sexual nature, much of it is not in the extreme category, though there is also a quantity of hardcore, degrading and deeply misogynistic material on it. The issue is primarily the filtering of consumers of porn from one VSPs to another in particular those like *Pornhub* and *Redtube* which are free and contain a really dizzying array of extremely violent and brutal pornography.

*TikTok*'s use for the production and dissemination of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) is also widely acknowledged in the wake of a *Forbes* investigation into this issue.<sup>31</sup> This distribution of pornographic materials involved the sharing of passwords to single accounts so multiple users could log in privately (anonymously) and predators could 'meet' there and share images of minors. Forbes found that there was a huge volume of these post-in-private accounts and that new ones popped up as quickly as they were banned or shut down. While this specific investigation related to CSAM there's no reason to believe that this strategy is not also being used for other kinds of pornography

Question 3: Do you have reports, academic studies or other relevant independent research that would support your views? If you do, please share them with us with links to relevant reports, studies or research.

Some relevant links are mentioned in the introduction and in response to question 1 above. In this section we would like to highlight other relevant research that support our concerns and recommendations.

The Children's Commissioner (2023)<sup>32</sup> published research conducted in the UK. This report draws together research from focus groups with teenagers aged 13-19 and a survey of 1,000 young people aged 16-21. Of the 64% who said that they had ever seen online pornography, the report shows that pornography exposure is widespread and normalised – to the extent children cannot 'opt-out' and that the average age

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Schofield, D. (2021) *TikTok Has Accidentally Conquered The Porn Industry, WIRED UK*. Available

at: <a href="https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tiktok-nsfw">https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tiktok-nsfw</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Andrew Tate Prosecution Files Reveal Graphic Claims Of Coercion Ahead Of Trial (2023) BBC News. Available

at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66581218 (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Levine, A. (2022) 'These TikTok Accounts Are Hiding Child Sexual Abuse Material In Plain Sight', *Forbes*, 14 November. Available at: <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2022/11/11/tiktok-private-csam-child-sexual-abuse-material/?sh=5fa2b8ed3ad9">https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2022/11/11/tiktok-private-csam-child-sexual-abuse-material/?sh=5fa2b8ed3ad9</a> (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Children's Commissioner (2023). 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' Young people and pornography. Available at <a href="https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf">https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf</a>

at which children first see pornography is 13, but by age nine, 10% had seen pornography, 27% had seen it by age 11. It also shows that young people are frequently exposed to violent pornography, depicting coercive, degrading or pain-inducing sex acts and 79% had encountered violent pornography before the age of 18. Young people expressed concern about the implications of violent pornography on their understanding of the difference between sexual pleasure and harm. Indeed, this report finds that frequent users of pornography are more likely to engage in physically aggressive sex acts. Moreover, pornography is not confined to dedicated adult sites, as it found that Twitter was the online platform where young people were most likely to have seen pornography, followed by Instagram and Snapchat ranking closely after dedicated pornography sites.

A Women's Aid (2022)<sup>33</sup> study shows that the Irish public is concerned about the pervasiveness and harm of pornography in Irish society, particularly how the exposure to and consumption of pornography is negatively impacting children and young people. The majority believe that it is contributing to gender inequality, sexist double standards, unrealistic sexual expectations, normalisation of requests for sexual images including among children, and directly contributing to coercion and violence against women and girls, including image-based sexual abuse. This study indicates that there is a majority view across all ages that both the government and tech companies need to do more to protect children and young people from exposure to pornography and to do far more, faster, to support victims/survivors of image-based sexual abuse. There is strong support for age-appropriate education for children and young people about sex, relationships, mutuality, consent, and respect as part of school SPHE and RSE curriculum. The research was conducted in October 2022 using the Red Line (a representative sample of the adult population, 18+) and data was weighted across gender, age, region, social class and ethnicity. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has finalised an updated SPHE curriculum that is being rolled out for Junior Cycle students from Sept 2023. The new course provides 100 hours of learning (an increase from 70) over the three years of the cycle. The new curriculum will address issues such as consent, the concept of gender identity and the effects of pornography. Schools must be supported to deliver the curriculum in full which would include the appropriate training of teachers in the new course specification. A consultation is currently underway as part of the process of similarly updating the senior cycle SPHE curriculum.

Wheatley's (2022)<sup>34</sup> research conducted in partnership with the NWC, focuses on Social media and online experiences of women in Irish journalism. Drawing on interviews with 36 national-level female journalists, the research explores the emotional and professional burden, as well as the impact on the functioning of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Women's Aid (2022). It's time to talk about porn Irish attitudes on the links between pornography, sexual development, gender inequality and violence against women and girls. Available at

https://www.womensaid.ie/app/uploads/2023/05/its time to talk about porn report womens aid november 2022.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> WHEATLEY (2023). SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE HOSTILITY: EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN IRISH JOURNALISM. Available at <a href="https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Social media">https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Social media</a> and online hostility Experiences of women in Irish journalism.pdf

democratic governance, the lack of female representation in decision-making roles, and online abuse as an increasing barrier to women's equality in politics. It is particularly shown in the report that journalists could clearly identify the particular topics that would always attract negative online engagement. Some participants singled out Traveller issues and others remarked on migration as a topic that attracted consistently hostile online responses. The report makes recommendations to social media companies to handle content that they deem to be untrue or abusive, to prevent harmful content and to better monitor and verify users. It also provides recommendations for employers to proactively and effectively prepare journalists, handle incidents and ensure there are clear pathways and supports in place. Finally, in terms of policy and legislation, it recommends ensuring meaningful implementation of the objectives and aims of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act, with a pro-active and sensitive manner to the particular challenges for journalists, and apply pressure on social media platforms to make changes and address the safety of their users and consider penalties.

Ringrose's (2021)<sup>35</sup> research on image-based sexual harassment and abuse focusing on young people presents findings from qualitative and quantitative work on digital image-sharing practices with 480 young people aged 12 to 18 years from across the UK. The findings show that non-consensual image-sharing practices were particularly pervasive and consequently normalised and accepted among youth (including unwanted sexual images such as cyberflashing or unsolicited 'dick pics', as well as unwanted solicitation for sexual images such as pressured sexting, and the non-consensual recording, distribution, and/or threat of distribution of sexual images). The aim of the research was to improve the support available for young people by helping parents, teachers, and policymakers to identify and respond to diverse young people's experiences with image-based sexual harassment and abuse. Based on the findings, recommendations are provided for schools, parents and carers, tech companies, and welfare professionals as well as for future research.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Ringrose, J. et al (2021). Understanding and Combatting Youth Experiences of Image-Based Sexual Harassment and Abuse. Available at <a href="https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Campaigns/Understanding-and-combatting-youth-experiences-of-image-based-sexual-harassment-and-abuse-full-report.pdf">https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Our%20view/Campaigns/Understanding-and-combatting-youth-experiences-of-image-based-sexual-harassment-and-abuse-full-report.pdf</a>