



Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe



## Cronfa - Swansea University Open Access Repository

---

This is an author produced version of a paper published in:  
*Stopping the Traffick*

Cronfa URL for this paper:  
<http://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa44835>

---

### **Book chapter :**

Miles, G. (2014). *Why is addressing access of porn to youth so important to tackling demand?*. Stopping the Traffick, Oxford: Regnum.

---

This item is brought to you by Swansea University. Any person downloading material is agreeing to abide by the terms of the repository licence. Copies of full text items may be used or reproduced in any format or medium, without prior permission for personal research or study, educational or non-commercial purposes only. The copyright for any work remains with the original author unless otherwise specified. The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder.

Permission for multiple reproductions should be obtained from the original author.

Authors are personally responsible for adhering to copyright and publisher restrictions when uploading content to the repository.

<http://www.swansea.ac.uk/library/researchsupport/ris-support/>



# Stopping the Traffick:

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO  
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND  
TRAFFICKING

Edited by Glenn Miles and Christa Foster Crawford  
with Tania DoCarmo and Gundelina Velazco



## CHAPTER 15: WHY IS ADDRESSING ACCESS OF YOUTH TO PORNOGRAPHY SO IMPORTANT TO TACKLING DEMAND?

**Key Issues**, by Christa Foster Crawford  
and Glenn Miles<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen elsewhere in this chapter, it is essential to deal with pornography when tackling demand. The need to do so is even more urgent when it comes to children and youth who have unfettered access to pornography and therefore unlimited exposure to its harms.

As important as it is to protect children for their own sake, it is also vital to address the access of young people to pornography if we ever hope to stop demand. Other essays in this chapter have discussed ways in which Christians and the church can help end demand through changing attitudes and other means. By faith, we hope to make an impact on demand so that in generations to come, exploitation and trafficking will no longer be issues. How long will that take if the rate of demand remains constant? One generation? Two? More? And yet because of rapid changes in Internet and communications technology, more and more children are being exposed to pornography than ever before in history. How many generations will it take to address demand if the rate of pornography use increases exponentially? I fear that even by faith we could not stop that tide, unless we begin to do something to prevent the exposure of young people to pornography.

### **An Evolving Threat**

Pornography is not a new problem, but modern technology has changed its nature and reach. In the past pornography was available only in printed form to those adults who sought it out, usually for a price. Now it is freely available, even to children, at the click of a mouse. The pervasiveness of online pornography extends to all corners of the globe; even children in developing countries or remote villages can gain access through increasingly available “smart” mobile phones.

Not only is Internet pornography more accessible, it is also aggressive. Only last week my 13-year-old son and I were playing a family-friendly game that he had downloaded onto his mobile phone. We had been playing together in the car in offline mode but when we entered our driveway the phone picked up our

---

<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Ysrael Diloy of Stairway Foundation for his hard work on an earlier version of this essay.

Wi-Fi connection and an option box appeared. While I ordinarily avoid clicking, I didn't know how to navigate his phone and ended up doing so by mistake. I was assaulted by the graphic depiction that appeared – this was no “innocent” soft-porn image! And yet how many unsuspecting people – including innocent children – make the same mistake? Gaming companies seeking revenues are banking on it being the norm rather than the exception, even in games marketed to children and youth.

But it doesn't stop there. Pornography is not the only online threat that children face. The anonymity of the Internet makes children feel safer than they really are. This false sense of safety, coupled with changing modes of interacting with one another (screen-to-screen rather than face-to-face), has created new ways in which children can be harmed – and even cause harm to themselves or each other – via technology.

The posting or texting of nude and compromising images of oneself or others is a rising concern. “Sexting,” cyber-bullying and related practices take place not only by adults, but also by young people whose sense of judgment is not fully developed, and who are not fully aware of the permanent nature and potentially damaging consequences of their actions. They often do not realize that once the images are out there, they are out there *forever*, and therefore accessible to anyone. What was done to have fun in the moment can cause trauma that lasts for a lifetime, or worse. In some cases, young people whose pictures were posted without permission have even taken their own lives out of shame.

Furthermore, old-fashioned predators use newly popular online media to groom and exploit their victims. Social media, online games and other applications encourage children to post personal information, giving pedophiles the very information they need to build intimacy and gain access. Once a connection has been established, predators may exploit children virtually (though sexually-explicit conversations or the use of a webcam) or in person (through meetings arranged through online conversations, often where the predator was posing as a fellow child.) Predators also use child pornography to groom children into believing that it is normal for adults to have sex with children.

Finally, pornography is a problem that is exacerbated by the Internet, but not limited by it. Even offline forms of pornography such as DVDs are finding wider distribution among children, especially in developing countries where pirated videos are for sale cheaply and without any restriction on who buys them. Moreover, in the shops where these DVDs are sold, hard-core and soft-core versions are often mixed together and children as well as adults may be seen rummaging through the selection with little if any understanding of the dangers posed. Once purchased, DVDs are easily shared. For example, children exchange pornography DVDs for minimal “rent” in some school playgrounds in Cambodia. Furthermore, in some parts of the world pornographic DVDs are shown publically on buses or in waiting areas, even when children are present.



### Understanding the Nature of Harm

So why does access of young people to pornography matter? Is it true that pornography, especially in “softer” forms, is really “no big deal” as some would have us believe?

Studies show that pornography can cause documented harm, not just to children but also to adults. These findings are being confirmed by advances in neuroscience that can actually show how pornography changes our brains, which in turn impacts our behavior.

Pornography harms people in a myriad of ways. This is even more so the case with children and young people because of their incomplete stage of development. Repeated exposure to pornography can cause damage to every part of a child’s being, including mental and emotional development, emotional health and relationships, views about themselves and others, attitudes about sex and sexuality, and even neurophysiology. While all of these areas are important, this essay will focus on the last two effects because of their direct relationship to demand.

#### *Effects on Views of Sex and Sexuality*

Pornography shapes how children think about sex. But it does so in a way that distorts developing values and perceptions about human sexuality. Far from being a good method of teaching children about sex as some may claim, pornography “teaches without supervision or guidance, inundating children’s minds with graphic messages about their bodies, their own sexuality, and those of adults and children around them.”<sup>2</sup>

The messages that pornography imparts are false. It teaches about body parts and sexual acts, rather than integrated beings and relational intimacy. It teaches dehumanization and self-gratification rather than that the inherent value of others and self-sacrificial love. Children who learn about sex from pornography will be led to believe that sex is an entitlement, in which the man is dominant and the woman is there only to satisfy his needs. They may learn a variety of sexual positions, but what will they comprehend about the unique beauty of true commitment and love?

#### *Effects on the Brain*

Not only does pornography change how we think about sex, pornography *also changes the brain itself*. This is an important realization when it comes to adults (and understanding addiction to pornography), but it is an even more critical fact when it comes to children whose brains are still developing and won’t be completely developed until their early twenties.

---

<sup>2</sup> Gary R. Brooks, *The Centerfold Syndrome: How Men Can Overcome Objectification and Achieve Intimacy with Women* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).



New developments in neuroscience reveal exactly how pornography changes our brain. Morgan Bennett's article, "The New Narcotic," clearly distills the findings of science into laymen's terms.

First, pornography affects the brain in the same way as other addictions.<sup>3</sup> Bennett explains the process as follows:

While the term "drug addiction" typically has been reserved for chemical substances physically ingested (or inhaled or injected) into the body, internet pornography – taken in through the eyes – affects the brain chemically and physically in a manner similar to that of illegal chemical substances. William M. Struthers, Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College, explains in his book *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* that pornography works "through the same neural circuit, has the same effects with respect to tolerance and withdrawal, and has every other hallmark of an addiction." This is because the same parts of the brain react to both illegal substances and sexual arousal. Dopamine, the chemical triggered by sexual arousal and orgasm, is also the chemical that triggers addiction pathways in the brain.<sup>4</sup>

Second, pornography changes the actual wiring of the brain. Again, Bennett explains:

[Neuroscientist Donald L. Hilton] argues that sexual images are "unique among natural rewards" because sexual rewards, unlike food or other natural rewards, cause "persistent change in synaptic plasticity." In other words, internet pornography does *more* than just spike the level of dopamine in the brain for a pleasure sensation. It literally *changes the physical matter* within the brain so that new neurological pathways require pornographic material in order to trigger the desired reward sensation.<sup>5</sup>

The reason that pornography changes the brain is because of a phenomenon called "neuroplasticity," which Bennett explains through an analogy:

Think of the brain as a forest where trails are worn down by hikers who walk along the same path over and over again, day after day. The exposure to pornographic images creates similar neural pathways that, over time, become more and more "well-paved" as they are repeatedly traveled with each exposure to pornography. Those neurological pathways eventually become the trail in the brain's forest by which sexual interactions are routed. Thus, a pornography user has "unknowingly created a neurological circuit" that makes his or her default

---

<sup>3</sup> In fact, pornography affects the brain in *worse* ways than other addictions. Because it simultaneously stimulates and relaxes the brain unlike other drugs that do only one or the other, pornography "is a type of polydrug that triggers both types of addictive brain chemicals in one punch, enhancing its addictive propensity as well as its power to instigate a pattern of increasing tolerance. Tolerance in pornography's case requires not necessarily greater quantities of pornography but more novel pornographic content like more taboo sexual acts, child pornography, or sadomasochistic pornography." Morgan Bennett, "The New Narcotic," *Public Discourse* (The Witherspoon Institute, October 9, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Morgan Bennett, "The New Narcotic."

<sup>5</sup> Morgan Bennett, "The New Narcotic," citing Donald L. Hilton, Jr., "Pornography Addiction: A Supranormal Stimulus Considered in the Context of Neuroplasticity," *Socioaffective Neuroscience & Psychology* 3 (2013).



perspective toward sexual matters ruled by the norms and expectations of pornography.

These “brain trails” are able to be initiated and “paved” because of the plasticity of brain tissue. Norman Doidge, MD – a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and author of the New York Times and international bestseller, *The Brain That Changes Itself* – explores the impact of neuroplasticity on sexual attraction in an essay in *The Social Costs of Pornography*. Dr. Doidge notes that brain tissue involved with sexual preferences (i.e., what “turns us on”) is especially malleable. Thus, outside stimuli – like pornographic images – that link previously unrelated things (e.g., physical torture and sexual arousal) can cause previously unrelated neurons within the brain to learn to “fire” in tandem so that the next time around, physical torture actually does trigger sexual arousal in the brain. This in-tandem firing of neurons creates “links” or associations that result in powerful new brain pathways that remain even after the instigating outside stimuli are taken away.<sup>6</sup>

Thus neuroplasticity is not only important to understand in terms of the process of addiction, it is also vital to understand in terms of how profoundly pornography affects and harms children.

Finally, pornography’s re-wiring of the brain has lifelong effects:

Another aspect of pornography addiction that surpasses the addictive and harmful characteristics of chemical substance abuse is its permanence. While substances can be metabolized out of the body, pornographic images cannot be metabolized out of the brain because pornographic images are stored in the brain’s memory. While substance abusers may cause permanent harm to their bodies or brains from drug use, the substance itself does not remain in the body after it has metabolized out of the body. But with pornography, there is no timeframe of abstinence that can erase the pornographic “reels” of images in the brain that can continue to fuel the addictive cycle.<sup>7</sup>

This means that the pornography viewed by children will, in a very real sense, stay with them for the rest of their lives. Even as the specific images fade over time, their impact will become ingrained. What better reason is there to protect children from harm?

### Stopping the Tide of Demand

We must protect children from the harm of pornography for their own sake. But we must also protect children for the sake of stopping demand.

Demand is built upon unhealthy attitudes about sex and gender. Pornography amplifies these attitudes and rehearses them in graphic detail. Not only that, the harmful attitudes instilled by pornography are actually installed through permanent pathways in their brains.

Neuroplasticity means that pornography not only influences *what* children think about sex now, but it also determines *how* they are able to think about sex for the rest of their lives. This has profound impacts, not only on the child’s own health, development and relationships, but also when it comes to the wider issue of demand. We are unwittingly programing an entire generation to have

<sup>6</sup> Morgan Bennett, “The New Narcotic.”

<sup>7</sup> Morgan Bennett, “The New Narcotic.”



brains that are permanently rewired to have views about sex and sexuality that are the very same attitudes that underlie demand and exploitation.

Furthermore, it is not just attitudes underlying demand that are at issue. Pornography can also generate demand for actual sex and exploitation. Although the porn industry might tell us otherwise, people who watch pornography – including violent forms – want to try out what they see.<sup>8</sup> Pornography shapes people's expectations for sex and what they expect from their partner (and, for some, what they expect from prostitution). What was "normal" for them ten years ago is different than now. What is normal in a few years time may be very different than what it is normal for them now. Will it be more violent? More selfish? More bizarre? It is yet to be seen.

But one thing is clear: Unless we stop the tide of demand through protecting children from pornography, exploitation will continue to occur for generations to come.

### **Protecting Children from Harm**

So how do we protect children and young people from the harms of pornography and online threats? What is the best way to do so without scaring them and causing further damage?

#### *Teach Healthy Sexuality*

First, we must teach children about healthy sexuality. Parents need to talk to children about pornography but first they need to talk to them about sex. They should not just leave it to others, and they should certainly not leave it to pornography, which is where children will learn from if no one else teaches them.

The best place for children to learn about sex is the home, but this is not always possible. If parents don't feel comfortable talking to their children about sex or if children are embarrassed to hear it from their parents then realistically teachers and youth leaders may be the best people to talk to children about what is good healthy sex, about the dangers of pornography and about the things they can do to protect themselves against sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

There are a number of resources that can be used to teach children. Programs such as "Good Touch, Bad Touch"<sup>9</sup> developed by Love146/Chab Dai provide information in a narrative style to girls and boys to protect them from sexual abuse. Stairway Foundation uses a series of animated videos to teach children and young people about the risks of incest/sexual abuse, pedophilia

---

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Graham Fordham, *"Wise" Before Their Time: Young People, Gender-Based Violence and Pornography in Kandal Stung District* (Phnom Penh: World Vision Cambodia, 2005) and Deirdre O'Shea, *A Preliminary Study into the Accessibility by Minors of Pornography in Cambodia: Briefing Paper No. 1* (Phnom Penh: Child Welfare Group, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> [www.good-touch-bad-touch-asia.org](http://www.good-touch-bad-touch-asia.org)



and sex trafficking as well as how to protect themselves.<sup>10</sup> In the US, "Tell Your Friends"<sup>11</sup> developed by Fair Girls covers topics such as human trafficking, pimp culture, the use of language and victim blaming. "My Life, My Choice" is a more in depth curriculum for at-risk girls developed by Justice Resource Institute.<sup>12</sup>

When teaching children about sexuality, we must rid ourselves of misassumptions about vulnerability that are based on faulty views about gender. Girls look at porn. Boys are sexually abused. Both girls and boys can be sexually exploited, pimped and trafficked. Both boys and girls need protection and care. It is also good for boys and girls to learn together and to hear each other's perspectives in a safe way, led by trainers who have been adequately briefed in child protection.

Parents and others must also be aware of what messages they are teaching children about sex and sexuality, especially the ones communicated without using words.

Picture this: A mother comes into her son's bedroom and he quickly switches the screen to what looks like homework. But the mother is not fooled; she saw enough of the previous screen to know he has been looking at porn. She leaves the room upset and her son is left alone in shame. When the mother tells her husband what happened he smiles wryly and says, "Don't worry about it. Boys will be boys!" Rather than talking to his son he silently condones it (perhaps conveniently forgetting the way in which porn negatively affected him in his youth).

Now picture a similar scene, but this time it is the father who catches his daughter viewing porn (as more and more girls are doing). The father is upset and goes to his wife. How will they react in this situation? Most likely the wife will not say, "Don't worry about it. Girls will be girls!" Instead, as concerned parents they will likely sit down and work out how they are going to talk to their daughter and try to discern why she feels the need to look at pornography. Hopefully they will seek to create an environment where uncomfortable questions can be asked without the fear of judgment or shame. Ideally they will seek to impart Biblical views about gender and sexuality, model godly male-female relationships, and instill healthy views about body image and self-esteem.

Such a response is needed for both boys and girls, but unspoken assumptions about gender and sexuality often speak louder than the words we actually say.

### *Teach Young People to Be Safe*

Second, we must teach children and young people how to be safe. We have seen how changes in technology have increased vulnerability to pornography and online threats. Do we unplug children from the Internet? No, we must remember that the increasing reach of the Internet can be a good thing,

---

<sup>10</sup> [www.stairwayfoundation.org](http://www.stairwayfoundation.org)

<sup>11</sup> [www.fairgirls.org](http://www.fairgirls.org)

<sup>12</sup> [www.jri.org](http://www.jri.org)



empowering more and more people, including young people, to have better access to good information and resources. But unfortunately those same highways for good can also lead to bad.

So how do we keep young people safe online? There are a number of tools available, including online safety tips and Internet filtering software. A few of these tools are listed in the Recommended Resources but there are many others out there, and more are being developed all the time.

But even the best tool will not have optimal effectiveness if we have not first prepared ourselves. We must be willing to talk to children at their own level, and not in a way that causes them to feel fear, punishment or shame. We must also not be afraid of honestly talking to them about the threats. The threats will not go away simply because we are embarrassed to talk about them. In fact, Stairway Foundation, which has trained hundreds of children to be safe online, has found that most often young people are more concerned about what their parents' reactions will be than they are bothered about the content of online-safety material itself.

### **Conclusion**

While pornography and online threats pose very real risks to children and raise very sobering implications for the perpetuation of demand, there is hope for the future. By recognizing the importance of these issues, addressing the underlying dynamics, and availing ourselves of effective tools, we can begin to make a difference in the next generation – one child at a time.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the particular harms that can happen to children who watch porn and how are these compounded by age?
2. What are the realistic ways that we can protect children from these effects without inciting or alarming them?
3. What action can you take in your organization to ensure that children are protected as much as possible and encouraged to make the right choices?



# Stop the traffick?

How do we even begin addressing such an important – and yet overwhelming – task? If you are a practitioner striving to assist victims or a faith-based organization wondering how to get involved you may be wrestling with questions like: How should we go about working with exploited people? Where should we focus our response? How do we deal with the challenges?

This cutting-edge book brings together practical advice and strategic insight from more than 40 global experts and experienced practitioners who thoughtfully explore how best to answer these questions and more. *Stopping the Traffick* is for everyone who wants to go beyond merely knowing that something must be done to a deeper understanding of how we can more effectively bring an end to exploitation.

**Glenn Miles, Ph.D.**, is the Asia Capacity Building Director for Love146. His research and outreach currently focuses on exploitation of males and transgender people as well as male clients.

**Christa Foster Crawford, J.D.**, is an author and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Children at Risk at Fuller Theological Seminary. She also advises and equips ministries in Thailand and the region.

**Tania DoCarmo, M.S.**, is the Program Director for Chab Dai International where she works to enhance collaboration among organizations and helped develop Freedom Collaborative.

**Gundelina Velazco, Ph.D.**, is CEO of Love146 Philippines where she has designed and established award-winning aftercare programs.

*This volume is an excellent collection of Christian thought on sex trafficking and the topics related to it.*

Donna M. Hughes, Professor & Carlson  
Endowed Chair at the University of  
Rhode Island, USA

*Here is a tool of training for the next generation of Christian response to sexual exploitation.*

Andrew J. Schmutzer, Professor of  
Biblical Studies, Moody Bible  
Institute, Chicago, IL, USA

*This volume asks and responds to the deep and often awkward questions that many people want to hear but struggle to bring into the light.*

Helen Sworn, International Director &  
Founder, Chab Dai, Cambodia

*This book is a gift from God, the One who created all human beings-equal and free.*

Nativity A. Petallar, Program Director, Holistic  
Child Development, Asia-Pacific Nazarene  
Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines



ISBN 978-1-908355-51-5



9 781908 355515 >