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Dignify

LET'S TALK ABOUT PORN

2024 Full Report

Children's experience of porn
and sexual harassment

Insights and recommendations from the Dignify School Survey,
and how we can work together to help our children thrive

**7,748 children
share their
experience
of porn,
social media,
and sexual
harassment**

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1. Introduction

Dignify champions healthy relationships for everyone and talks and educates about the harmful impacts of porn. Dignify seeks to challenge the culture of sexual harassment that has become normalised in secondary schools, along with the harmful impact that porn has on children's physical, mental, emotional and relational health. We want to work together with children, parents, carers and schools to build and share a new narrative for healthy relationships. We will also continue to advocate for children and young people to the Government. We campaign for changes to be made to prevent children being exposed to porn online and for improvements to be made to Relationships and Sex Education.

This report brings together the voices of all 7,748 students who participated in the Dignify School Survey in the 2023-24 academic year and summarises the collated findings from the 15 different schools who took part. More in-depth information on the methodology can be found at the end of this report. The Dignify School Survey is a core part of Dignify's research work strand and is a service we offer to schools to provide them with an audit of the sexually harmful behaviours

“these findings and the recommendations in this report are essential reading not only for schools, but also for parents, carers, the Government and others who care about protecting our children”

happening in their school (as recommended by [Ofsted's 2021 review](#)¹). It also gives schools a deeper understanding of their students' use of social media and exposure to nudes and porn. Following the analysis of survey responses, Dignify provides schools with recommendations for suggested changes or

interventions to address any identified areas of concern. Many schools invite us back to repeat the survey to enable them to monitor changes and the impact of any interventions. The Dignify School Survey is available to schools across the UK, with alternative versions

available for colleges and schools for students with special educational needs. If you would like your school to participate, or for more information, please visit the [Dignify website](#).

Not only is the Dignify School Survey extremely useful to those schools who participate, but the resulting dataset is also one of the largest in the UK collating children's views on nude sharing, porn and sexual harassment. Consequently, these findings and the recommendations in this report are essential reading not only

for schools, but also for parents, carers, the Government and others who care about protecting our children from the harms of porn and want to know how they can act.

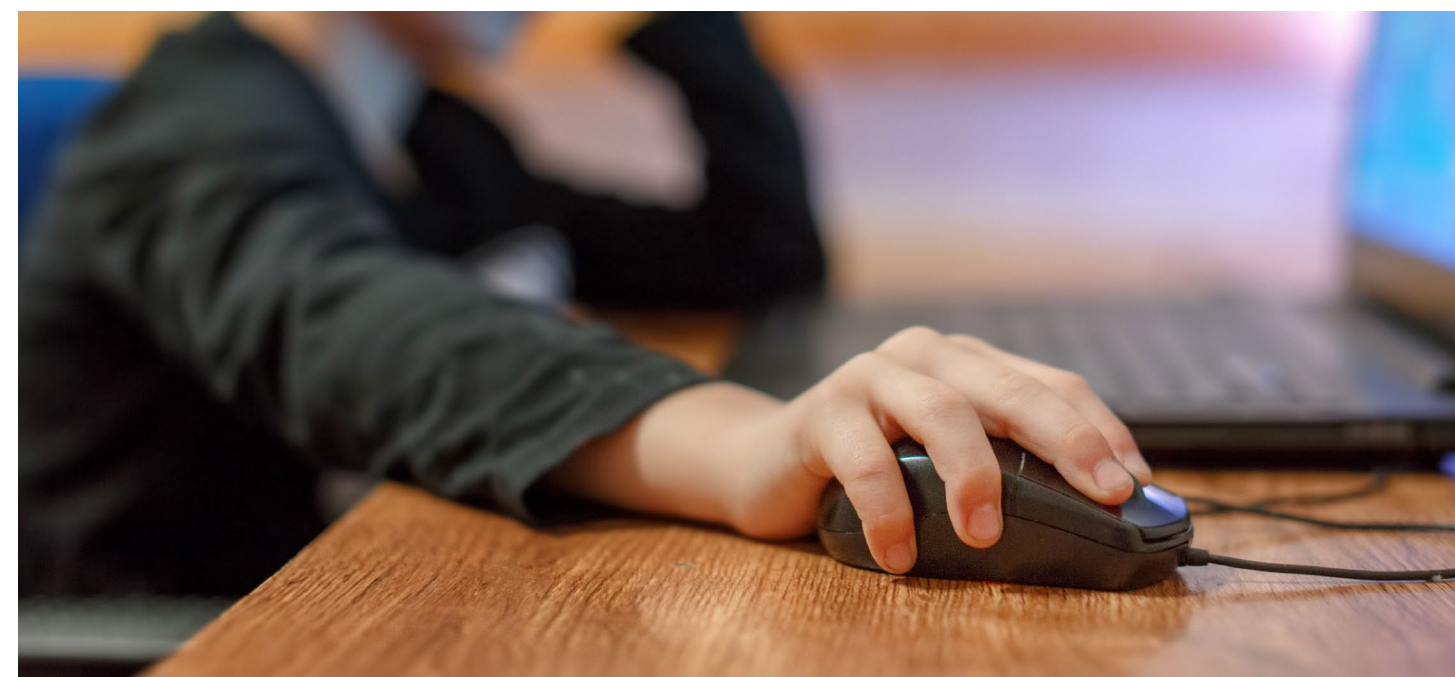
We want to support parents and carers in having conversations with their children about healthy relationships and the harms of porn. They have a vital role to play here, as most children are watching porn at home on their mobile phones and, often, they will first encounter porn unintentionally. This may be because someone else has shown them porn or because they've seen it on a social media feed or in a group chat. The findings in this report give parents a starting point to discuss these topics with their children and ask them about their own experiences. The Dignify website provides more resources to help parents have these conversations and decide how best to protect their child.

Whilst education is essential, Dignify strongly believes that the Government also needs to take action to protect children from the harms

they are facing from online porn. We strongly support the recommendations published in the recent [Independent Pornography Review by Baroness Bertin](#)² and would like to see the Government implement these measures. Dignify will also continue to campaign for the Government to allocate more budget to Relationships and Sex Education in Schools and ensure the curriculum champions healthy relationships and is relevant, timely, evidence-based, effective, delivered by trained professionals and engages the whole family.

It is widely acknowledged that healthy relationships are beneficial not only to mental wellbeing but also to physical wellbeing and provide support to help us [navigate life's challenges](#)³. We hope that this report, whilst highlighting some of the barriers to healthy relationships, also draws out clear recommendations for how these barriers can be overcome. Together we can overcome the harms of online porn and sexual objectification and champion healthy relationships for our children.

“Together we can overcome the harms of online porn and sexual objectification and champion healthy relationships for our children.”



¹ Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges

² Creating a safer world - The challenge of regulating online pornography

³ Maintaining healthy relationships and mental wellbeing - NHS

Executive Summary

7,748 children in years 9-13 told us:

32% of children
have seen porn

Average age of first
seeing porn is **12 years old**

86% who have
seen porn
once, go on to look again

27% of repeat porn users
report having a porn
habit or addiction

53% with high porn use
report low wellbeing

29% of repeat
porn users
have acted out porn

23% of children
have received
a nude image or video

73% of children
use social media
several times a day

ONLY 36% would tell their
school if they
experienced sexual harassment

ONLY 26% learn about
relationships
and sex from their
parent or carer

Children are being exposed to content they should legally be protected from, usually on their phones and in their homes

Around a third of those who have seen porn started in primary school

Many found this content by accident, through a friend or via social media, but then chose to view it again

The adolescent brain is more vulnerable to addiction. Many children are forming porn habits

High porn use correlates with low wellbeing, and many say porn has been harmful to them

Children are acting out what they see. We know that the majority of porn contains violence and non-consensual sex³

Porn normalises sexual objectification⁴, and children report high levels of illegal nude sharing and sexual harassment

Social media platforms are used regularly including to share nudes, access porn, and spread sexually harmful messages

Many children said teachers don't handle sexually harmful behaviour well, and that Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) isn't fit for purpose

Children are turning to social media, the Internet, TV and porn for their sex education

48% of children think more should be done to prevent people under the age of 18 from viewing porn

Our Recommendations

Children are telling us that there is a problem, and that they want us to do more. It is imperative that we listen and act.

Parents

- Have honest, open and informed conversations with children to allow them to share about sex, relationships and porn
- Raise the topic of porn in an age-appropriate way before your child starts secondary school, and as soon as they have a smartphone
- Set boundaries and monitoring in place with use of phones, computers and social media

Schools

- Improve teacher training on challenging misogyny and sexual harassment
- Set boundaries around mobile phone use during the school day
- Develop a comprehensive and relevant Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum
- Have RSE delivered by external professionals

Policy makers

- Ensure schools have the guidance and budget required to enact the recommendations outlined above
- Implement robust age verification to stop children being able to access porn
- Safeguard children from viewing porn and nude images on social media
- Acknowledge porn addiction as a public health issue and invest in support services for children with porn addiction

⁴'A lot of it is actually just abuse' - Young people and Pornography
⁵The relationship between pornography use and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours: literature review

The average age of children first seeing porn is 12

2.The challenges

Children's exposure to porn

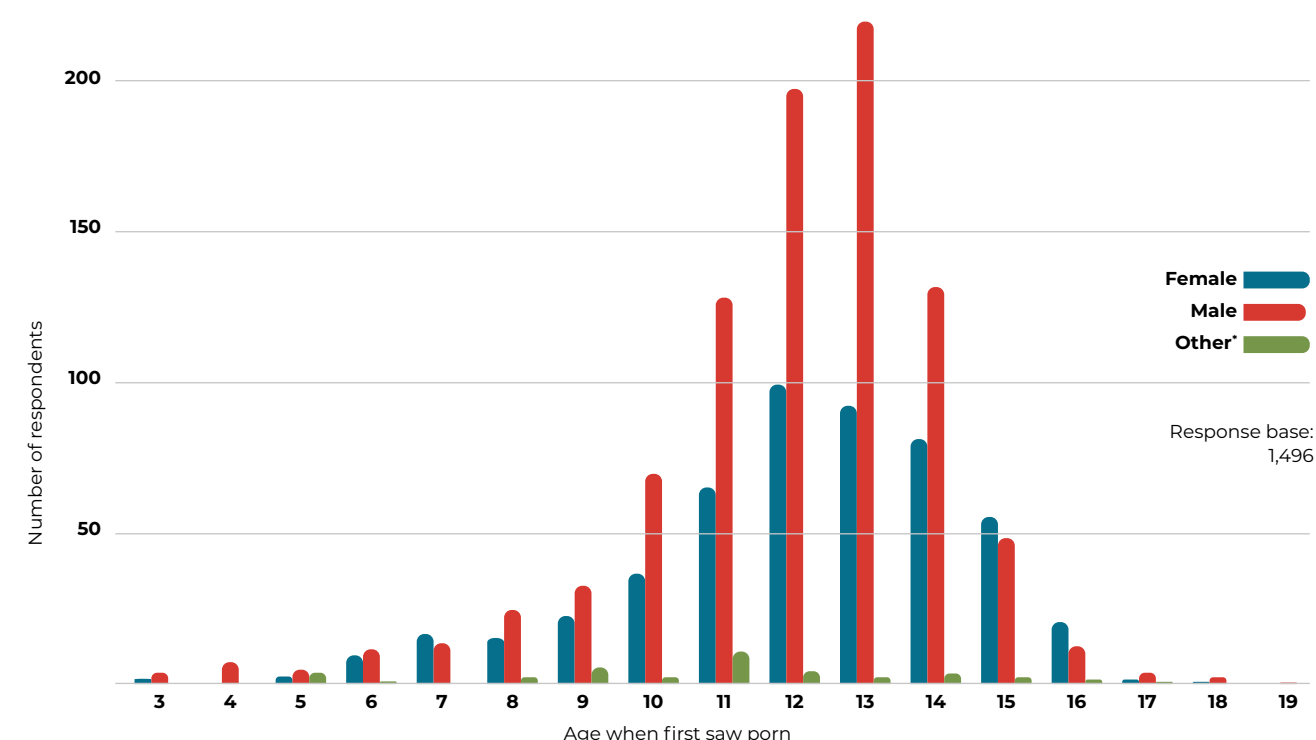
- ▶ **32% of children had seen porn**
- ▶ **Average age of first seeing porn is 12**
- ▶ **34% of those who had seen porn were aged 11 or younger**

2,101 children shared that they have been exposed to porn that they should legally be protected from.

Ninety-two per cent (970 respondents of the 1,059 who answered the question) watch porn at home and 80 per cent (835 respondents of the 1,042 who answered the question) on a mobile phone.

Age of first seeing porn

Graph 1: Age when first saw porn



Almost a third (32%, 2,101 respondents) of those who answered the question had seen porn, with an average age of first seeing porn of only 12. The average age of 12 was the same for both male and female students, with a third of both male respondents (300) and female respondents (174) having

seen porn before the age of 11. The average age was slightly lower at '11 years' for other gender students, with 61 per cent of these respondents (28) having seen porn before the age of 11. Graph 1 shows the full distribution of data on the ages at which respondents first saw porn.

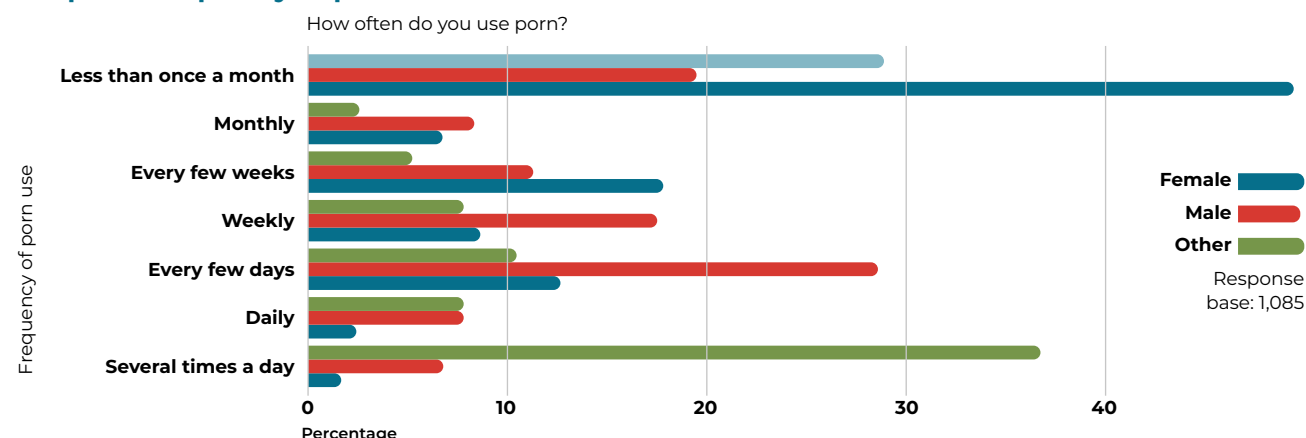
*Caution should be exercised when interpreting this finding due to the small sample size

Frequency of porn use

As Graph 2 shows, male respondents watch porn more frequently than female respondents. Only 26 per cent of female respondents (74) used porn at least weekly, compared with 61 per cent of male

respondents (462) and 63 per cent of other gender respondents (24). This is consistent with the findings below on those reporting porn habits and addictions.

Graph 2: Frequency of porn use



Reasons for viewing porn

- 31% first discovered porn by accident
- 29% were first shown porn by someone else
- 11% first saw porn on a social media feed

Many children first encounter porn unintentionally, without actively looking for it.

Almost half the respondents (48%, 712) had first accessed porn out of curiosity (see Graph 3). This was more the case for male respondents (56%, 511) than female respondents (35%, 184). However, the next three most frequently cited reasons for first viewing porn were by accident (31%, 459 respondents), because someone showed them (29%, 432 respondents), or because it popped up on their social media feed (11%, 164 respondents). It could be argued that these reasons are all largely out of the control of the individual. It is therefore vital that parents are aware of this and have conversations

with their children on the harms of porn, so that seeing it once does not lead to regular porn use. The qualitative comments in the survey shed more light on how easy it can be for children to find porn, including on social media platforms that we might usually consider to be safe, even messaging platforms.

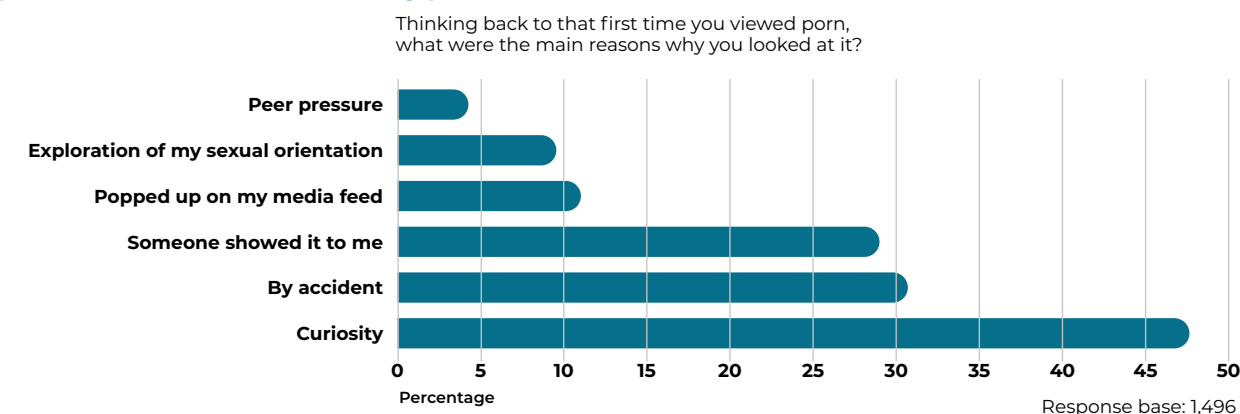
“It was sent to me on a groupchat (I didn't want to see it)”

Female, Year 12 student

“I came across it on a comment on youtube where the link took me to a pornographic [sic] website”

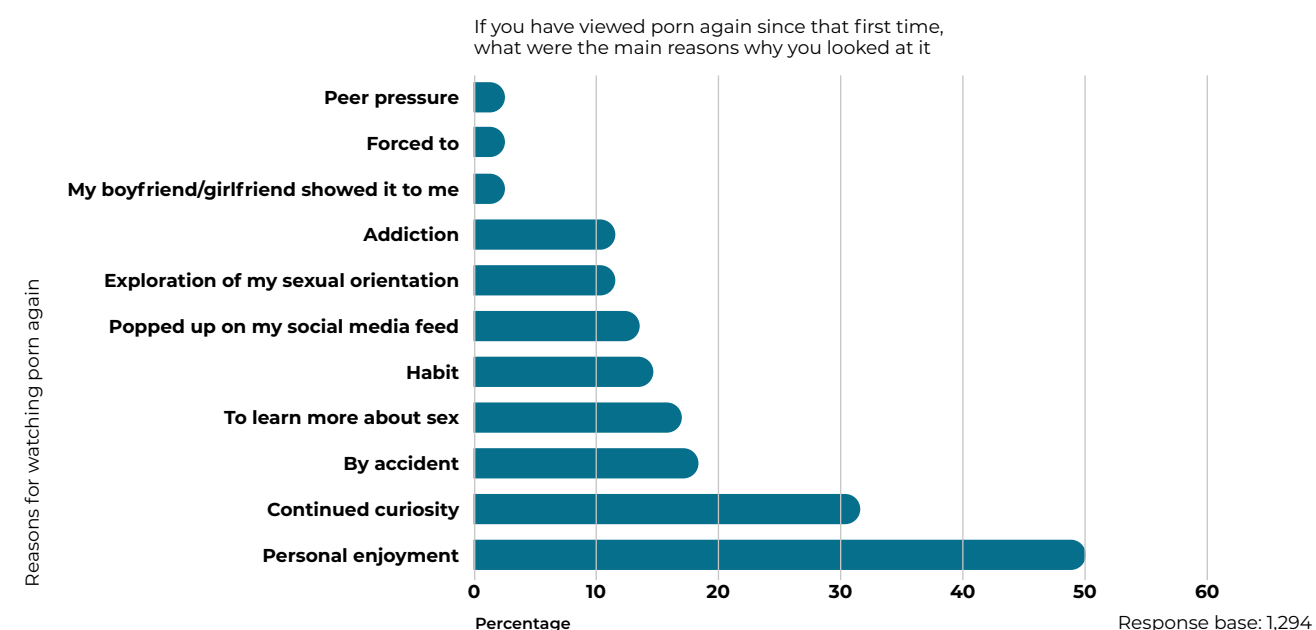
Female, Year 10 student

Graph 3: Reasons for first viewing porn



- 86% of children who first see porn go on to look at it again

Graph 4: Reasons for viewing porn again



Graph 4 shows personal enjoyment (50%, 650 respondents) and continued curiosity (32%, 410 respondents) were the main reasons for watching porn again.

- 18% found porn again by accident
- 14% accessed porn again from their social media feed

There are still a notable number of respondents encountering porn again by accident (18%, 236) or from their social media feed (14%, 178 respondents). This highlights how easy it is for children to access porn. It is vital that the age verification measures in the [Online Safety Act 2023](#)⁶ are implemented in a robust way to ensure that children are unable to access porn in future.

⁶Online Safety Act 2023

Impact of porn

Addiction

- **12% of repeat porn users reported having a porn addiction**
- **15% of repeat porn users reported having a porn habit**

More than one in ten repeat porn users (12%, 152 respondents) reported having a porn addiction and 15 per cent (192 respondents) reported having a porn habit, with male and other gender respondents more likely to report an addiction or habit⁷.

Wellbeing

- **Over half of those reporting a porn addiction (53%) had low wellbeing scores**

Over half of those reporting a porn addiction (53%, 75 respondents) and the same proportion of those reporting a porn habit (53%, 98 respondents) had low wellbeing scores, compared with 39 per cent of the sample who had low wellbeing overall. This shows how harmful porn can be to mental health.

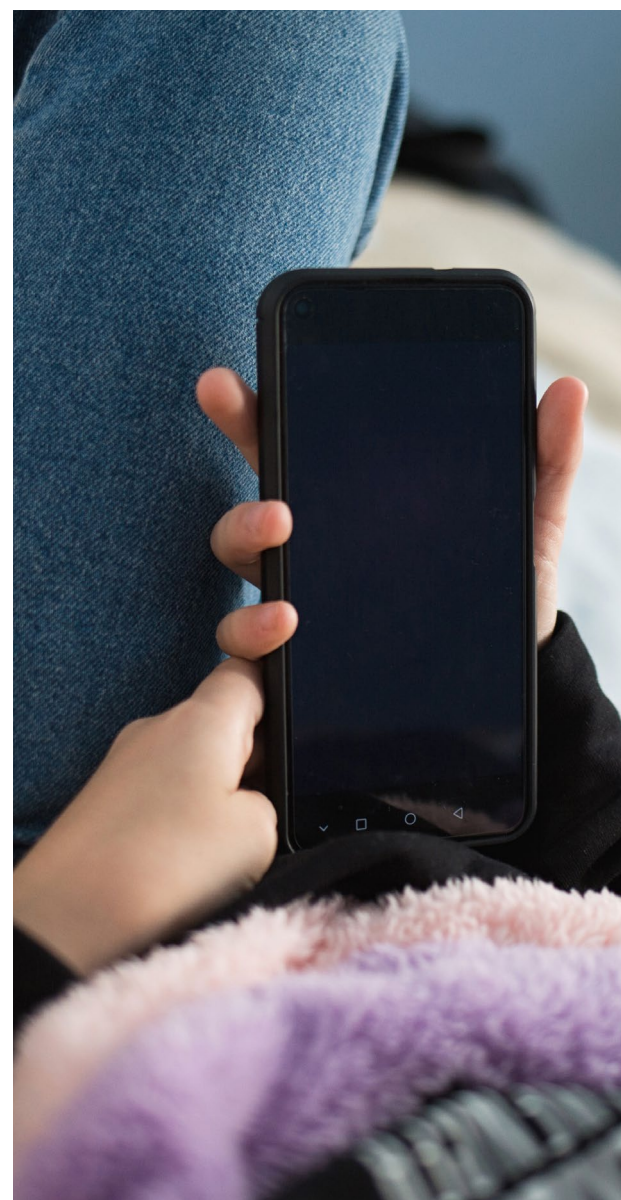
⁷3% of female respondents (13), 15% of male respondents (128) and 25% of other gender respondents (10) reported having a porn addiction and 7% of female respondents (28), 18% of male respondents (151) and 30% of other gender respondents (12) reported having a porn habit.

⁸A lot of it is actually just abuse' Young people and pornography

Normalising sexual violence

- **17% watched porn to learn about sex**

Seventeen per cent of repeat porn users (220 respondents) watched porn to learn more about sex. Research published by the Children's Commissioner found that the majority of porn included violence against women and that the sex shown is often non-consensual and can glamourise [unsafe sexual practices](#)⁸. This report also revealed that exposure to violent porn led young people to believe that violence was an expected part of sexual relationships.



Acting out porn

- **29% of repeat porn users had acted out something seen in porn**

Forty per cent (2,617 respondents of the 6,513 who answered the question) thought it was quite or very likely that those who use porn will act out what they have seen. The survey findings showed that 29 per cent of those who had watched porn more than once (370 respondents) acted out something they had seen in porn. For these 370 respondents, this was generally for mutual enjoyment (46%), out of curiosity (43%), or for personal enjoyment (28%). However, eight per cent felt pressured to do so.



Perceptions of harm

Twenty-three per cent (337 respondents) said porn had been harmful to them and 14 per cent (202 respondents) said it had been helpful. Male respondents (16%, 143) were more likely to state that it had been helpful than female respondents (9%, 48). However, a large number of respondents overall still seemed quite indecisive, stating that porn had been both helpful and harmful (16%, 225 respondents) or neither helpful nor harmful (31%, 454 respondents).

Almost half (48%, 3,151 respondents) think more should be done to prevent people under the age of 18 from viewing porn.

- **48% think more should be done to prevent children from viewing porn**

“People don't feel able to come to teachers about situations of this matter as they have seen others come forward in the past and have nothing happen from it. People hear stories of other girls going to teachers and being told “boys will be boys”

Female, Year 12 student

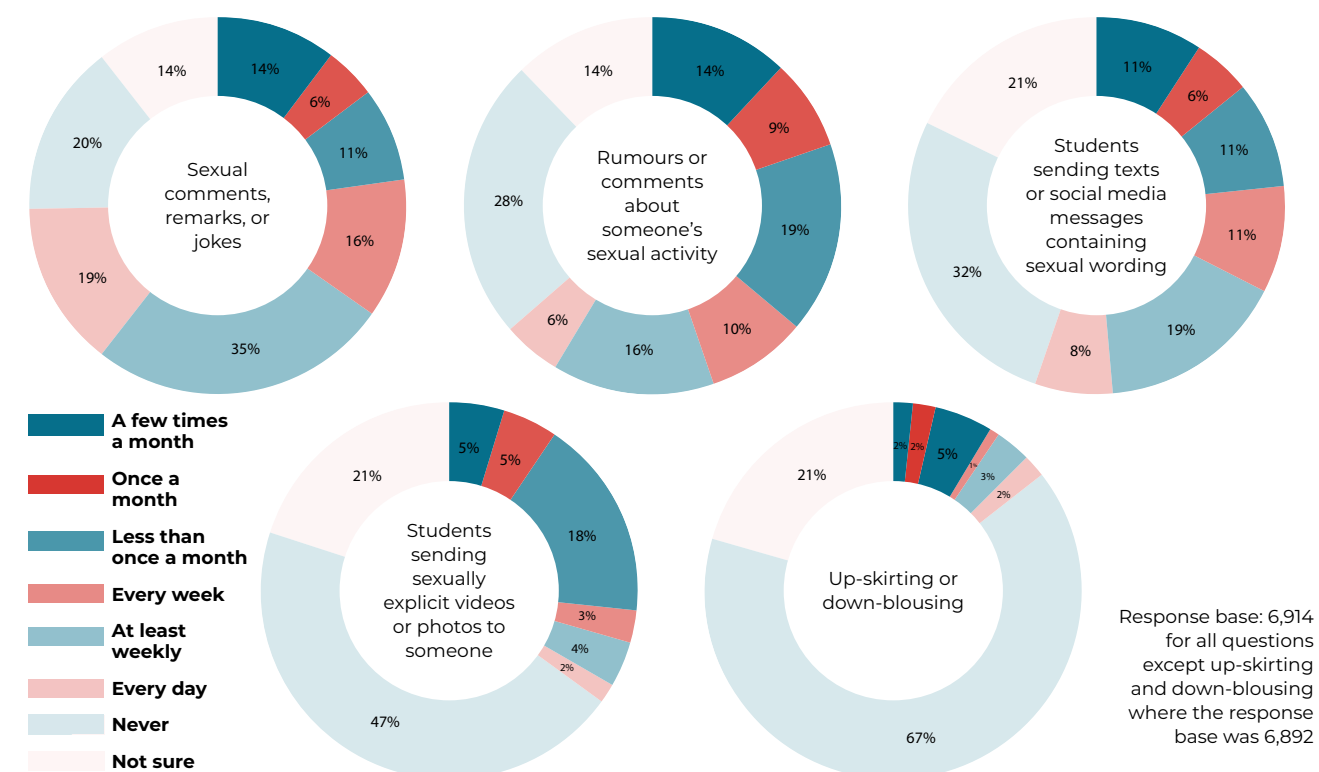
Sexual harassment and objectification

- **35% report hearing sexual comments, remarks or jokes at least weekly at school**
- **19% see students sending texts or social media messages containing sexual wording at least weekly**

Sexual harassment is still prevalent in schools following [Ofsted's 2021 review](#)⁹. More recent research suggests that misogyny is on the increase in UK schools and is posing a significant [challenge for teachers](#)¹⁰. This has been attributed to an increase in pupils viewing porn and other sexist content online which often shows women being dominated and abused. Graph 5 shows the frequency with which different behaviours are being observed at school.

What are children experiencing?

Graph 5: Frequency of sexually harmful behaviours at school



Our findings show that sexually harmful behaviours are most likely to be directed at other gender students, followed by female students. Other gender students were in all cases most likely to admit to being the perpetrator of these behaviours, followed by male students.

Qualitative survey responses suggest that many students view sexual comments

and remarks as 'harmless' or just banter. Responses suggested that teachers often don't challenge sexual comments, reinforcing this view.

⁹ Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges

¹⁰ Sexism in schools survey 2024

How well are schools dealing with sexual harassment?

How schools respond to these behaviours is crucial in creating a culture where all students feel safe and able to raise any concerns.

While 55% (3,765 respondents) agreed or strongly agreed that their school always took complaints of sexual harassment seriously, 45% (3,434 respondents) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Half the respondents (50%, 3,441) in the 2023-24 survey agreed or strongly agreed they would feel confident telling a teacher or other member of school staff if they saw sexually harmful behaviour happening to someone else, a slight improvement from 48 per cent (3,220 respondents) the previous academic year. Only 36 per cent (2,514 respondents) agreed or agreed strongly they would feel confident reporting behaviour when they had been the victim, a slight increase from 32 per cent (2,167 respondents) in 2022-23. Just over half (57%, 3,956 respondents) agreed or agreed strongly that they would feel confident telling a parent or carer if they had been the victim of sexually harmful behaviour. In the survey, 38 per cent (2,652 respondents) agreed or agreed strongly they would feel confident reporting if a sexual image or video of another student had been shared, down from 60 per cent (4,003 respondents) in the 2022-23 academic year.

One of the key themes identified in the qualitative responses was that teachers don't deal well with these behaviours, which puts students off reporting them. Teachers were also mentioned as being complicit in dismissing sexual comments and remarks as just 'banter'.

- **Only 36% agreed or agreed strongly that they would feel confident telling staff at school if they had personally experienced sexually harmful behaviour**
- **55% agreed or agreed strongly that their school always took complaints of sexual harassment seriously**

“There's lots of jokes about things like this - mostly about women and sexism. School never seems to take it seriously or do anything about it.”
Male, Year 10 student



“In my opinion, people don't feel able to come to teachers about situations of this matter as they have seen others come forward in the past and have nothing happen from it due to no evidence and punishment not being able to [be ensured] without said evidence as it becomes a 'he said she said' scenario so why tell a teacher when little can come from it[?] Also even if punishment doesn't ensue, support isn't really sufficiently provided. People hear stories of other girls going to teachers and being told “boys will be boys” so it creates a herd mindset of why bother telling teachers when that's the reaction you'll be met with[?]”

Female, Year 12 student

“Most behaviours do not get handled even after being reported, and as such reporting seems fruitless. Many students do not bother reporting, and even if they do report nothing happens to the people reported”

Female, Year 12 student

Overall, only four per cent of respondents (275 out of 6,873) said they saw sexual harassment more often in school, with 27 per cent (1,889 out of 6,873 respondents) reporting seeing it more often online and 16 per cent (1,127 out of 6,873 respondents) more often outside of school. Given the prevalence of sexual harassment seen in school, this raises serious concerns about the amount of sexually harmful behaviour that students must be encountering online and outside of school.

“It's not explicitly said, but I'm pretty sure our school has a 'boys will be boys' attitude towards a lot of the things that happen”

Male, Year 10 student

“It doesn't really happen in our school as it is a single gender school, however I am more aware of this happening in other schools. Personally for me it actively happens online or outside of school in public”

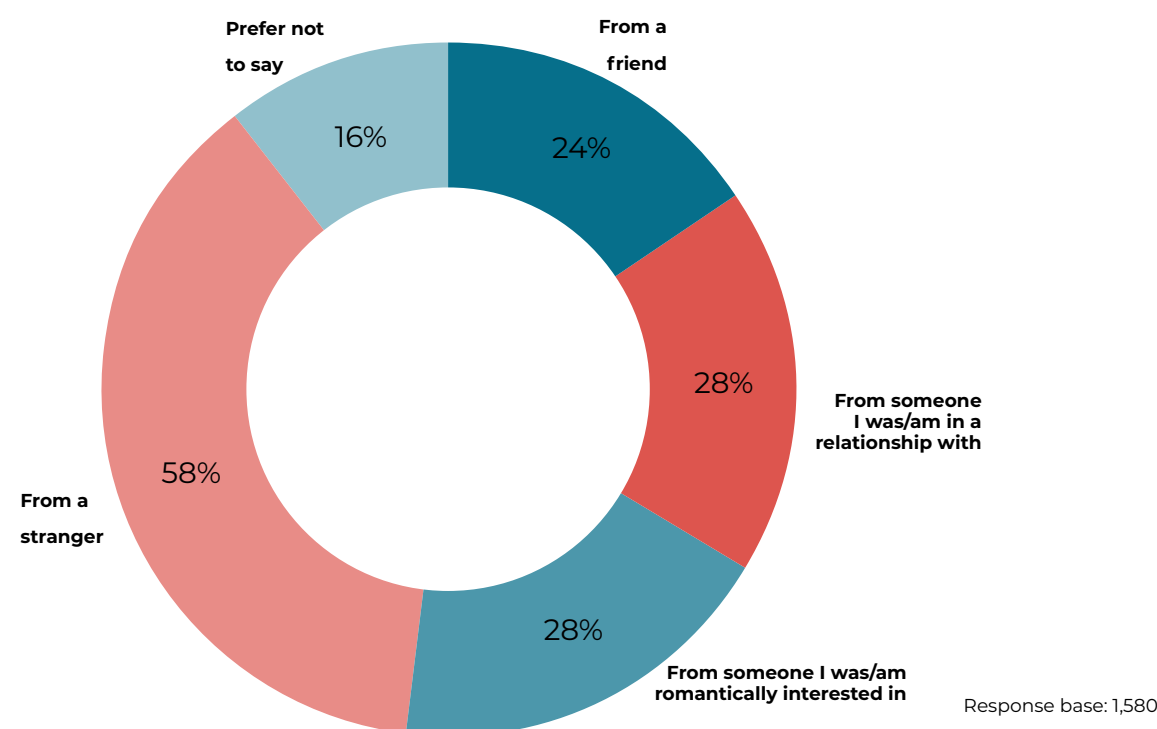
Female, Year 9 student

Nude sharing

► **Of the 23% who had received a nude, well over half (58%) had received a nude from a stranger**

Ofsted's 2021 review highlighted the issue of nudes being shared like trading cards. Four per cent of respondents (301 out of 6,914) in the 2023-24 survey reported seeing sexually explicit videos or photos being shared at least weekly at school.

Graph 6:
Who have you received a nude from?



In the qualitative focus groups Dignify conducted in 2024, respondents suggested that nude images were most often received from strangers via social media apps such as Snapchat. As seen in the qualitative

comments earlier, other social media platforms, including messaging apps, were also mentioned as being used to send explicit images and links to porn.

“In a lot of people's experiences, I know it's usually off the 'Quick Add' feature on snap[chat] where someone will add you, you add them back, and then they send you something and it's like... unsolicited.”

Year 12, focus group participant

► **5% had sent a nude and 22% of these had sent a nude to a stranger**

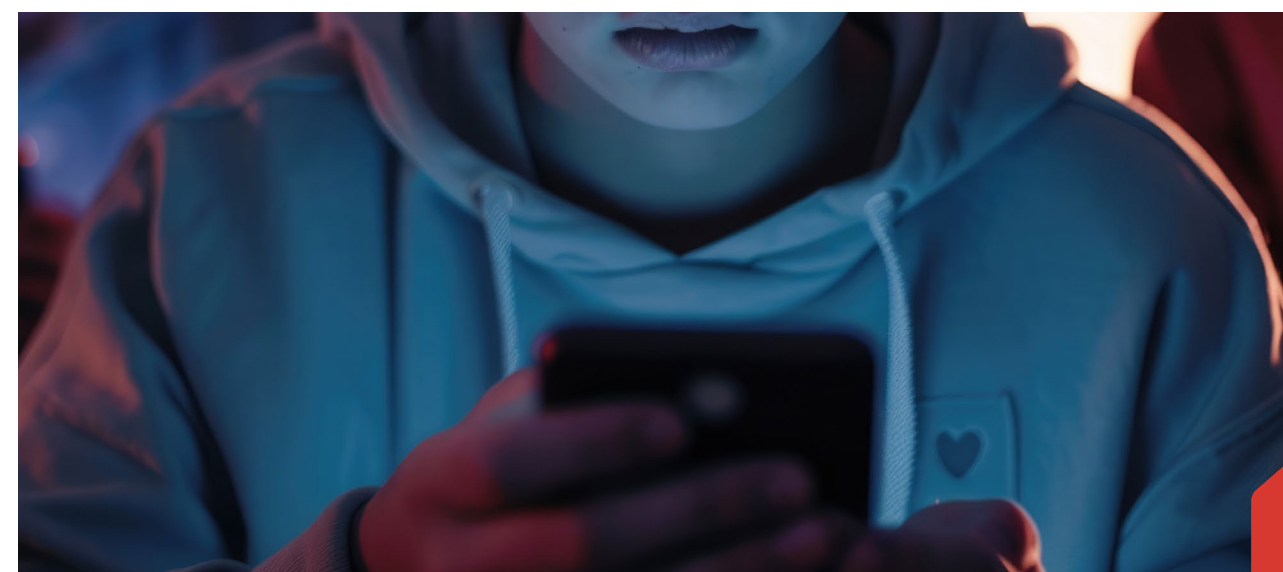
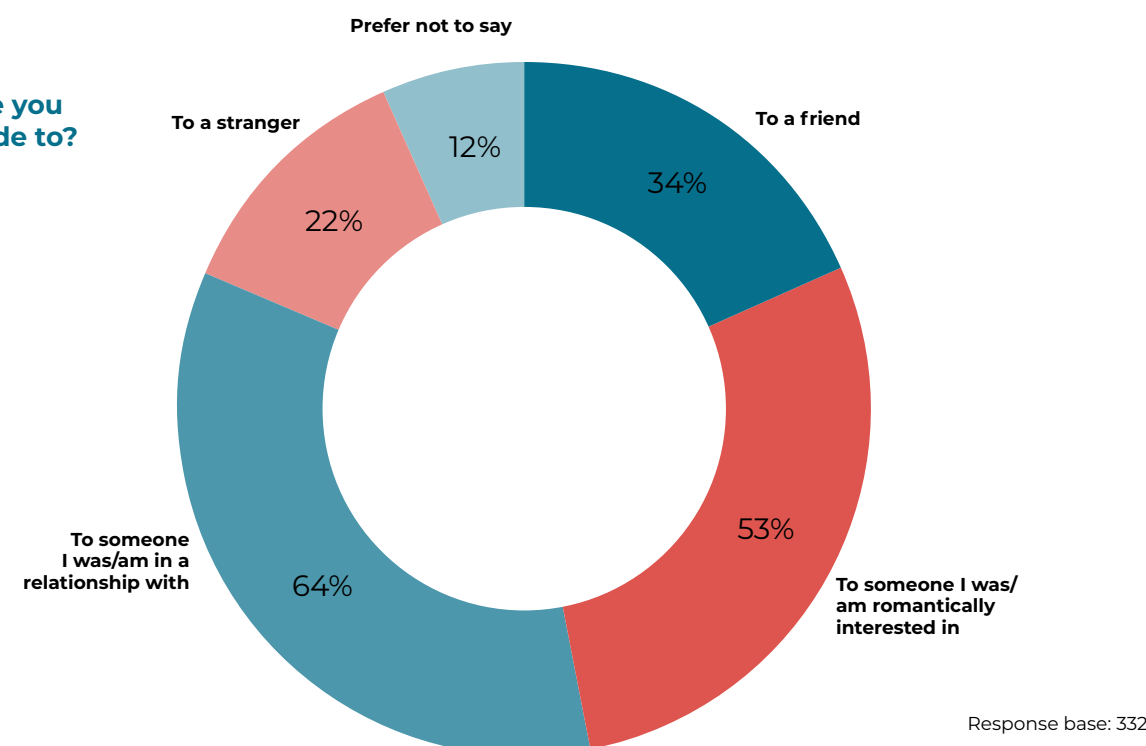
Only five per cent (317 out of 6,106 respondents) admitted to having sent a nude, a decrease from nine per cent (572 out of 6,656 respondents) 2022-23. Of these, just over one in five (22%, 73 out of 332 respondents) had sent a nude to a stranger. Graph 7 provides a full breakdown of findings. Two per cent of respondents (114 out of 6,798) had had a nude of themselves shared without their consent and more than one in ten (11%, 748 out of 6,798 respondents) had

received a naked photo or video that had been intended for someone else. Our data therefore demonstrates how, once a child shares a nude of themselves, they no longer have control of that image.

It is illegal to take, distribute, possess or show a naked photo or video of anyone under the age of 18, even if the content was made by or with the consent of that young person.

Overall, 86 per cent (5,427 out of 6,336 respondents) knew this was true.

Graph 7:
Who have you sent a nude to?

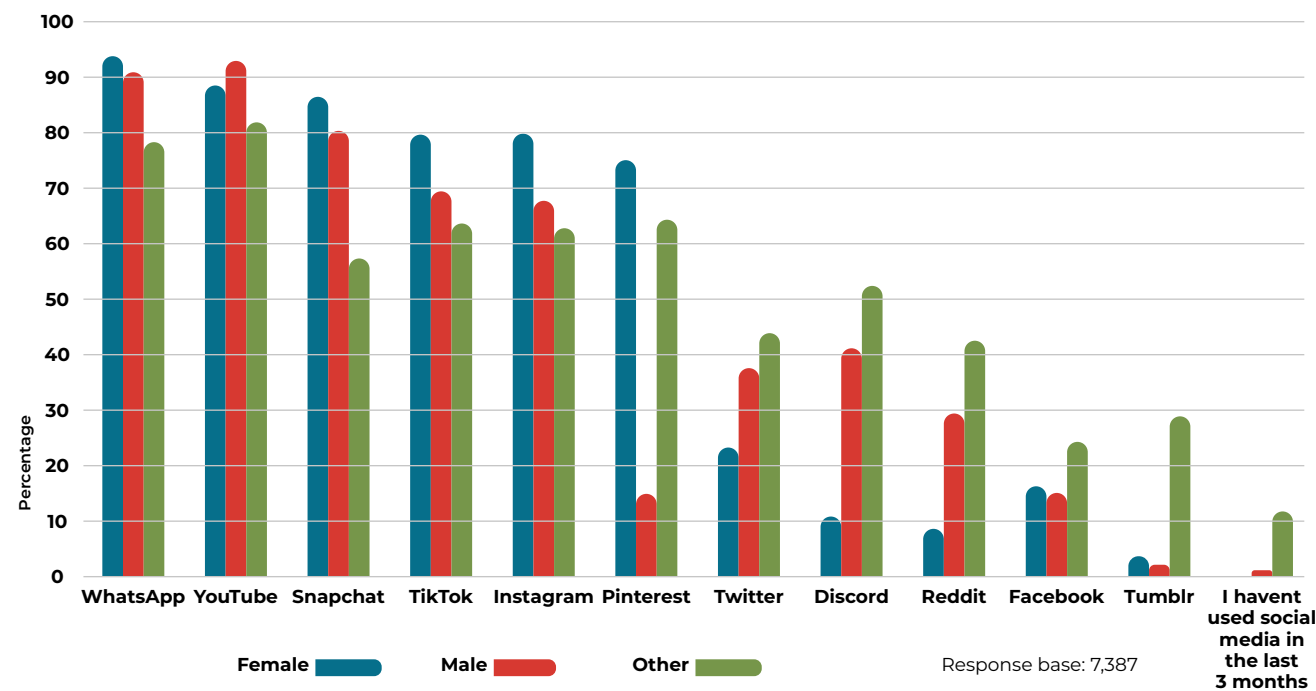


Social Media

Social media has been mentioned throughout this report in the context of platforms being used by students to access porn, share nudes, as well as being a way that sexually harmful messages can be spread. Almost three-quarters of respondents (73%, 5,214 out of 7,150) used social media several times a day. There has been little change in the most popular social media platforms among children over the last few academic years, with WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram remaining the top five

platforms. Whilst these platforms are popular across genders, TikTok and Instagram were slightly more popular with female than male respondents, as Graph 8 shows. Looking at less popular platforms, Pinterest is significantly more likely to be used by female respondents than male respondents, whereas both Discord and Reddit are more popular with male respondents.

Graph 8: Social media platform use by gender



Social media companies have admitted that they designed their [platforms to be addictive](#)¹¹. The frequency with which many children are using the platforms is likely to reduce the time they have available for both schoolwork and activities that encourage genuine social connection, such as meeting face-to-face or spending time with family.

Although, as noted throughout this report, there are significant risks associated with social media, most students were positive about their use of it. Sixty-five per cent of

respondents (4,775 out of 7,390) agreed or strongly agreed that social media makes them feel more connected to their friends and 47 per cent (3,508 out of 7,390) agreed or strongly agreed that social media makes them feel like they have friends to support them. This view isn't universal, however, as more than one in ten respondents (11%, 785 out of 7,390) agreed or agreed strongly that social media makes them feel lonely and isolated.

¹¹ 'Never get high on your own supply' – why social media bosses don't use social media

► **Two-thirds of those who strongly agreed that social media makes them compare themselves to others reported low wellbeing**

Thirty-five per cent of all respondents (2,617 out of 7,390) and 45 per cent of female respondents (1,615 out of 3,600) agreed or strongly agreed that social media makes them compare themselves to others. Forty-five per cent of those who agreed (781 out of 1,726 respondents) and 66 per cent of

those who strongly agreed (305 out of 463 respondents) that social media makes them compare themselves to others reported low wellbeing scores. Only 39 per cent of respondents overall reported low wellbeing (2,363 out of 6,074), suggesting that social media had a notable impact on wellbeing among these respondents. For some, social media may be a positive way to connect with others. However, the impact on different individuals varies and there are some significant risks that need to be considered, both by parents and children, when deciding whether to use these platforms.



3. Education

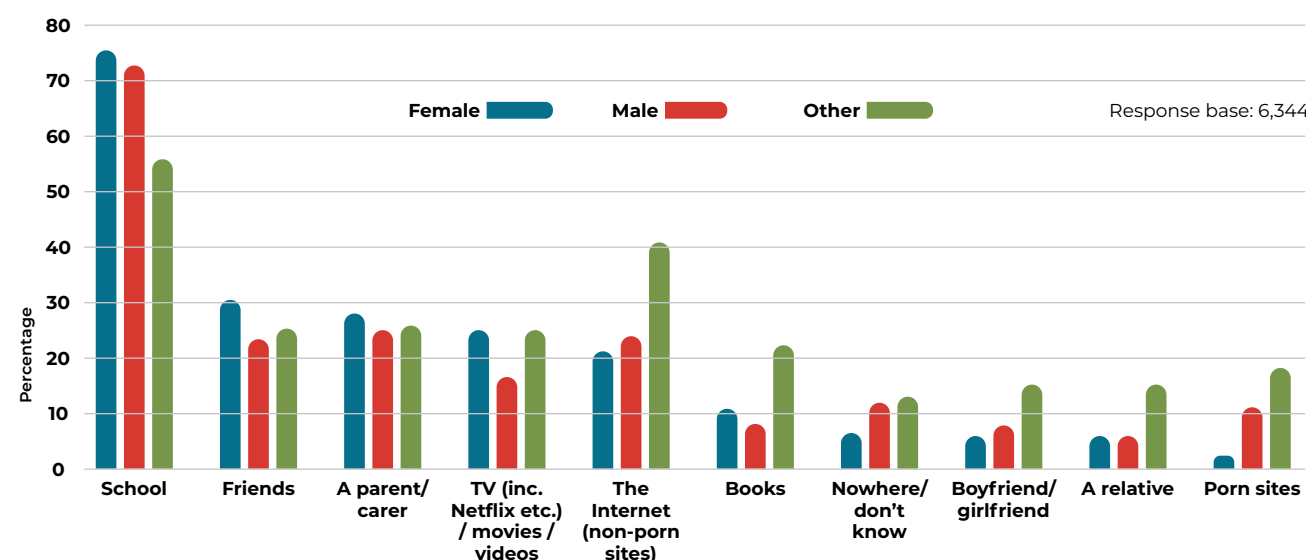
Relationships and Sex Education - Is it fit for purpose?

► **Only 26% say their parent or carer is a source of Relationships and Sex Education**

As Graph 9 shows, school remains the primary source of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for most children. Only around a quarter (26%, 1,676) of those who responded said that their parent or carer was a source of RSE. It was more likely that they had turned to a friend (27%, 1,705). Non-porn internet content (which could include social media) was mentioned as a source

of information by just under a quarter of respondents (23%, 1,451), followed by TV (21%, 1,324 respondents). Whilst some content on the internet and TV could be educational and helpful, there is a significant amount of content which is unrealistic, incorrect or harmful, particularly on social media. The only way to ensure that children are getting sound advice on these topics is to have a comprehensive and relevant RSE curriculum taught in schools and to ensure that parents are also equipped to discuss these topics with their children at home.

Graph 9: Sources of RSE



When given the opportunity to comment further on their school's RSE, although one of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis was that the school's RSE

was generally good, most themes were less positive. Many comments suggested that the lessons were poor and didn't cover what was needed.

“We don't learn much about aspects of sex apart from contraception and consent”

Male, Year 10 student

“Its bad and doesn't tell us anything about our bodies”

Female, Year 12 student

There was also a clear sense from some comments that the lessons weren't relevant,

with others commenting specifically that the timing of the teaching was wrong.

“They tell us too much about the science behind sex and not actually what it is. But then they also tell us that porn is not real sex so its all a bit confusing”

Female, Year 10 student

“It is a couple years behind. Most people know the stuff being taught before it is being taught”

Male, Year 9 student

A large group of comments noted the heteronormative nature of the current RSE curriculum and suggested that changes

needed to be made to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all students.

“Very centred on heterosexual sex. If it isn't then it's only gay men. Lesbians, intersex people, trans people etc completely excluded from conversation. [I] never learnt anything about sex that was relevant to me”

Other gender Year 13 student

Students were very constructive and suggested a number of topics they thought should be included in the curriculum, including:

- Porn - the harms of it, including porn addiction
- Consent and the moral and legal implications of violating it
- Male and female contraception
- Sexual abuse within relationships
- The act of sex and sexual pleasure
- Sexual harassment

It was clear that RSE lessons could be awkward for some, particularly as lessons were often taught by form tutors or other teachers. Having RSE lessons taught by professionals may help this as they will be trained to address topics in a more comfortable way and won't be embarrassed to answer any questions students may have.

“Form tutor makes HIS opinions correct and ridicules ideas or people”

Male, Year 9 student

“School makes it such a taboo subject and make the topic feel uncomfortable”

Female, Year 11 student

**48% of
respondents
think more
should be
done to
prevent
children from
viewing porn**

4. Recommendations

Many children are telling us that there is a problem and that they want us to do more. It is imperative that we listen and act. In this next section, we share key messages for parents, schools and policy makers, which centre around the following recommendations:

- 1. Protect children from being exposed to porn**
- 2. Equip parents, carers, teachers and youth workers to have informed conversations with children about relationships, sex, porn and social media**
- 3. Improve the curriculum and delivery of RSE in schools, and the approach to challenging sexual harassment**

Together we can build and share a new narrative for healthy relationships, where our children can truly thrive free from the harms of porn.



Key messages for parents

“It is vital that parents and carers have open conversations with children about sex and relationships, including the harms of porn and social media.”

A lot of advice for parents online focuses on online safety in terms of installing parental controls and using technical approaches to restrict access. However, to ensure children are equipped to stay safe online and go on to have healthy relationships, it is vital that parents and carers have open conversations with children about sex and relationships,

including the harms of porn and social media. We hope the findings in this report will help you to discuss these topics with your children and make informed decisions on your children's digital access. Please visit our website for more information and resources. Our recommendations for parents are outlined further below.

Raise the topic of porn in an age-appropriate way before your child starts secondary school, and as soon as they have a smartphone

the average age of first seeing porn is 12 and 34% of those who have seen porn saw it aged 11 or younger

Have honest, open and informed conversations with your children about sex, relationships and porn

31% per cent first saw porn by accident and 29 per cent because someone else showed them

23% had received a nude image from someone

- Be non-judgmental- make sure your child knows they can come to you if they've seen something inappropriate without getting into trouble.
- Make sure your child knows they can ask you questions about sex and relationships. Maybe suggest another trusted adult they could also go to with questions.

4. Recommendations

- 35% of all respondents and 45% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media makes them compare themselves to others**
- 11% first saw porn on their social media feed and 14% accessed it again from their social media feed**

- Try and talk about what your child has been doing online as part of everyday conversation so they're more likely to open up
- Talk to your child about why they want social media. If they are using social media, ask what they like looking at and how it makes them feel

Set boundaries and monitoring in place with use of phones, computers and social media

92% watch porn at home and 80% on a mobile phone

You may like to involve your child / children in developing a household agreement with the boundaries that work best for your family. Be ready to model what you want your children to replicate.

Set boundaries on phone use from the outset.

Here are some ideas that parents and carers have found useful in our Family Workshops:

- Loan the phone. Rather than giving your child their own phone, make it clear that it's your phone – they can use it but it's yours.
- Check the phone. Create expectations at the outset that you will look at their phone.
- Set up parental controls / content blockers and filters
- Go through privacy and safety settings on apps
- Device-free space, place, time and days. For example, keeping mobile phone and device use in family areas of the house. Not allowing phones in bedrooms or bathrooms where there is natural nudity. Not having phones during specified family times, or no phones after 8pm.



Find tools & resources for parents on our website

Key messages for schools

Improve teacher training on challenging misogyny and sexual harassment

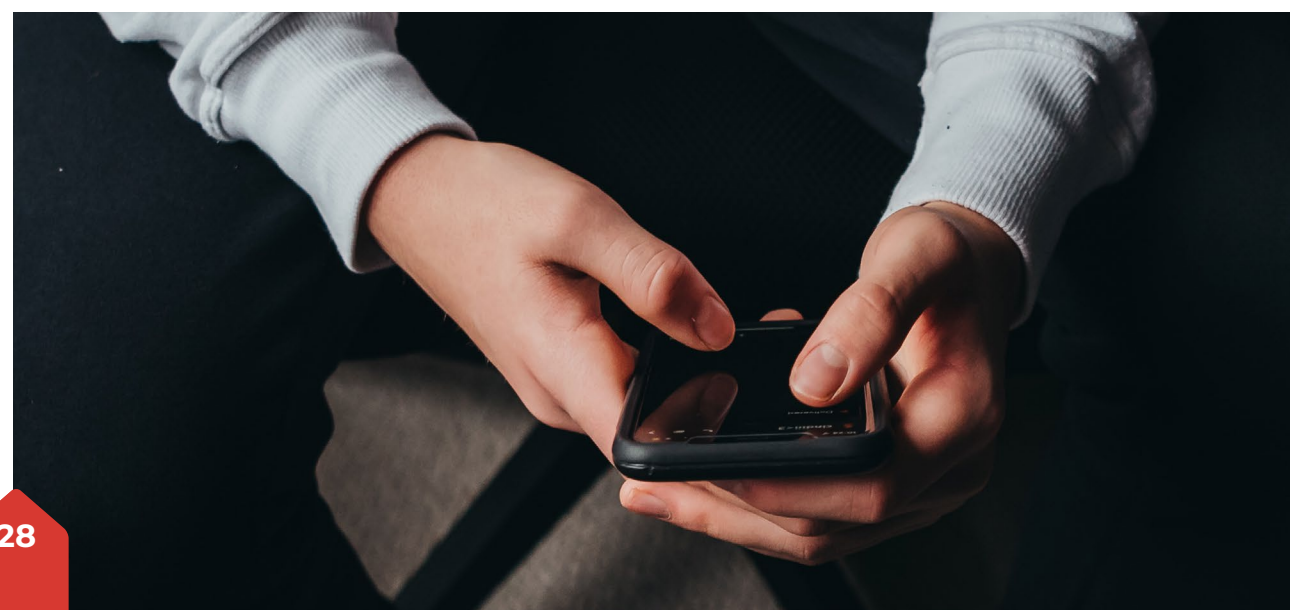
► **Only 21% of students agreed or agreed strongly that their school took complaints of sexually harmful behaviour seriously**

Tackling these issues requires schools working together with parents and carers to best support students. Students spend a lot of time at school, and both the teaching and the culture of the school play an important role in preparing the child for their future as an adult. This is why it is vital that teachers are given further support and training to help them challenge sexual harassment and misogyny in the classroom and that schools establish cultures where these behaviours are not tolerated.

Set boundaries around mobile phone use during the school day

► **19% see students sending texts or social media messages containing sexual wording at least weekly**

Some of the sexually harmful behaviours reported in the Dignify School Survey such as the sharing of nudes, explicit images, videos or explicitly worded messages required the use of a mobile phone during school hours. Where mobile phones are not needed to be turned on during school hours for educational purposes, having a ban on their use, for example, during break and lunchtime, will prevent these behaviours occurring and restrict students from accessing porn or other harmful content on their phones.



Deliver a more comprehensive and relevant curriculum

► **17% of repeat porn users watched porn again to learn about sex**

► **The average age of first seeing porn is 12**

The findings of the Dignify School Survey should also be used to inform the content of the RSE curriculum and the timing of its delivery. As the report has outlined, students have highlighted several topics where further

teaching is needed. Knowing that the average age children first see porn is only 12, also strongly makes the case for ensuring that the harms of porn are included in the RSE curriculum from the latter year of primary school and certainly an emphasis should be put on this from Year 7. Greater consideration needs to be given to ensuring that topics are taught early enough to be relevant so that students don't turn to porn for information. Criticisms that the curriculum is too heteronormative also need to be addressed and safe educational resources need to be provided for other gender students to ensure their needs are also met.

Have RSE delivered by external professionals

Ideally, teachers should be fully trained to deliver RSE lessons and have expertise in this area as they would in other subjects. We would recommend bringing in external professionals wherever possible to teach RSE or to ensure proper professional training and accreditation for teachers delivering this topic.

The Dignify School Survey is a valuable tool which provides schools with an audit of the sexually harmful behaviours happening in their school and gives a deeper understanding of their students' use of social media and exposure to nudes and pornography. It can highlight specific topics that should be covered in RSE lessons or even specific year groups that need interventions.

Versions of the survey are also available for colleges and schools for students with special educational needs.



Find school lesson plans, survey tools, and support with RSE delivery here



Key messages for policy makers

Robust age verification to stop children being able to access porn

Dignify looks forward to the Government taking strong action in its implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023 to put in place robust age verification to prevent children being able to access porn online. Dignify also

supports the recommendations put forward in Baroness Bertin's review 'Creating a Safer World – the Challenge of Regulating Online Pornography'¹⁹ and hopes the Government seeks to implement these.

Develop a comprehensive and relevant RSE curriculum, and increase budget allocated to schools for RSE

A loving, meaningful relationship is a core need for most adults as reflected in many psychological models such as [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#)¹². In this model, the need for such a relationship is above the need for education or career. Yet, as a subject, RSE is generally considered low priority, allocated minimal budget and taught by staff with little, if any, [training in the subject](#)¹³. Given the importance of healthy relationships to adults' health and wellbeing, RSE should be given greater importance within the curriculum. RSE should also be allocated sufficient budget to enable it to be taught by trained professionals in line with other subjects, enabling students to leave school with a comprehensive awareness of the harms of porn and sexual health issues and the tools

to have a healthy relationship. The following recommendations from [Baroness Bertin's review](#) are a good starting point in addressing this, but we would like to see more done to support teaching on the harms of porn in schools. **"Ensuring resources and funding are funnelled into school and community programmes specifically for boys and young men in order to encourage healthy discussions about positive masculinity and relationships, and to counter misogynistic culture"**¹⁴

We would like the Government to work with expert charities and other third sector organisations, with input from students, to develop a comprehensive and relevant RSE curriculum that meets the needs of students.

Clear guidance should be given to schools on the role of teachers and staff in preventing harmful sexual behaviours

► **Only 21% agreed that their school took complaints of sexually harmful behaviour seriously**

Our data shows that sexual harassment is still prevalent in secondary schools and that students perceptions are that schools are not effectively taking complaints of sexually harmful behaviour seriously and in some cases are complicit in allowing behaviours

such as making sexual comments, remarks and jokes to happen in the classroom. The Government needs to provide schools with clear guidance on the role of teachers and staff in managing and preventing harmful

sexual behaviours and should also provide advice on measures that could be put in place to change the culture and narrative in schools so these behaviours are not tolerated.

Safeguard children from viewing porn and nude images on social media

- **73% use social media at least several times a day with 27% using it several times an hour**
- **35% of all respondents and 45% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media makes them compare themselves to others**
- **11% first saw porn on their social media feed and 14% accessed it again from their social media feed**

Social media is not safe for children. Our research shows it causes anxiety for some children as well as serving as a platform for them to receive unsolicited nude images and access porn. Content being seen on social media, particularly by boys, is also driving the increase in misogyny and sexual harassment in our schools, along with the violence they are seeing in online porn.

Dignify recommends that the Government conducts a review to evaluate the evidence on the harms of social media, with a view to increasing safeguarding measures or limiting access for under 16s.

Invest into support services for children with porn addiction

- **Of those who watched porn again, 15% reported having a porn habit and 12% reported a porn addiction**

As our report notes, we have seen notable levels of porn addiction among children. Whilst we are able to signpost general counselling services to schools, there is a lack

of specialist porn addiction therapy services for those aged under 18. Porn addiction has a significant adverse impact on mental health and wellbeing and investment is needed in support services for children struggling with porn addiction. We would be strongly supportive of the recommendation in Baroness Bertin's review that 'The mental and physical health impacts of pornography should be recognised and represented in existing health strategies (i.e. more funding for those affected by addiction)' to enable porn addiction to be recognised and support accessed for those who need it.

5. Conclusions

► Children need to be stopped from being able to access porn

It is clear from the findings of the Dignify School Survey that it is far too easy for children to access porn. The Government needs to take tough action on tech companies to ensure robust measures are put in place to stop children being able to access explicit content, not only on porn sites but also on social media. The Government also needs to tackle the rise in deepfake porn.

► Children need to be taught about the harms of porn, both at home and at school from the age of 11

There needs to be a greater awareness of children's exposure to porn and more done to teach children about the harms of porn. Parents and schools need to be aware that children often see porn unintentionally, being shown it by others or encountering it on social media. The average age of first seeing porn is only 12 and the vast majority of those who see porn once will go on to look at it again. Teaching and conversations about the harms of porn therefore need to take place when children are coming up to the end of primary school or approaching secondary school age so they know what porn is when they see it and understand the harms of porn; hopefully, this will help to break the cycle. It is crucial that the teaching is not just left to schools, but that parents are also having conversations with their children about porn and what they are seeing online. We must acknowledge in today's digital world that our children have information at their fingertips and if they want to know something they will go and search for it. We need to be more open with our children about sex and relationships and teach them what they

need to know in a safe way, so they don't go looking for information on porn sites or social media, which is what the Dignify School Survey has shown students are doing.

With the rates of porn addiction we have seen among children in the survey, it is clear that porn is impacting children's mental health and services aren't there to support children struggling with porn addiction. The Government needs to acknowledge that this is an issue and put funding in place to develop services to support these children. The behaviours modelled in porn are also increasing misogynistic behaviour and violence against women. This is being seen in our schools and is an issue which teachers are increasingly having to address.

► National action needs to be taken to safeguard children from seeing porn and nude images on social media

The Dignify School Survey findings show that while there are positives to social media, the harms are significant and need to be considered carefully. Our qualitative research and the survey responses have shown that children are receiving unsolicited nude images from strangers through these platforms, as well as accessing porn directly on social media or being directed to porn sites from these platforms. Alongside online porn, social media content is driving the increase in misogyny and sexual harassment which our survey shows is still prevalent in UK schools. This will potentially only get worse if Meta remove fact checkers from their platforms in the UK, as they have done in the U.S. For some, our data is already showing the negative impact social media is having on their wellbeing, leading to self-comparison and feelings of loneliness and isolation.

► Teachers need more training on how to address sexual harassment in schools

Things do not appear to have changed significantly since Ofsted's review in 2021 and sexual harassment continues to be prevalent in UK secondary schools. Findings from the Dignify School Survey showed that students lack confidence in reporting harmful behaviours to school staff, particularly if they have personally experienced these behaviours, with responses suggesting this may be because teachers are perceived as not dealing well with these behaviours or even as being complicit in them. The suggestion that sexual comments are dismissed by teachers, as well as students, as 'banter' shows how these behaviours have been normalised in schools and how urgently training is needed for teachers to challenge this perception. Teachers need to be equipped to change the culture in the classroom to one where these behaviours are not tolerated and students feel confident in reporting them.

► RSE needs to be taken seriously as a subject and to be allocated funding to enable it to be taught professionally

For most adults, a loving meaningful relationship of some form is a core need and having intimate, supportive relationships are beneficial for mental health. Whilst we prepare our children academically for life, there is a strong argument that more focus should be given to teaching them how to have healthy relationships which will provide them with the love and support they need to help them thrive in other areas of life. Yet, the Dignify School Survey has shown that the current RSE taught in schools is not fit for purpose. Unlike other subjects,

it is often taught by teachers not properly trained to deliver the subject, delivered too late and is generally no longer relevant to the needs of students in our modern digital society. The RSE Curriculum provision from the Department of Education, delivered through Oak National Academy, also doesn't go far enough in talking comprehensively about the harms of porn when this is such a big and important issue which needs to be addressed. The curriculum needs to be reviewed to ensure it covers the topics needed. As a subject, RSE should be prioritised and given the budget needed to enable it to be taught by trained professionals in line with other subjects, so that students leave school aware of the harms of porn and sexual health issues so they can go on to form healthy relationships. This could either involve getting professionals into schools to teach RSE, which would avoid some of the awkwardness students mention of teachers covering these topics, or developing a proper training programme for teachers to equip them to teach these topics comprehensively in a sensitive way.



6. Methodology

The Dignify School Survey is a paid service which Dignify offers schools and colleges. The schools that are included within the sample are therefore self-selected. It might be suggested that these schools could therefore be more proactive than other schools in wanting to audit and act on these issues. Whilst the survey was originally designed for Years 10 and above, it is now also used widely with Year 9 as schools are seeing students exposed to sexual harassment, nude sharing and porn at younger ages.

Research design

This report presents collated data from all Dignify School Surveys carried out in the 2023-24 academic year. The survey was initially conducted in the 2021-22 academic year and so, where available and relevant, comparison data from previous academic years is also reported. The report presents unweighted data.

Quantitative online survey

The Dignify Survey is an anonymous quantitative online survey. The survey asks students about their views and experiences of social media, sexual harassment, nude sharing, porn and Relationships and Sex Education. Quantitative analysis was conducted using Survey Monkey analytical tools and Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions was analysed using open thematic coding. Anonymous quotes are used in the report to help illustrate the points raised.

Qualitative focus groups

In Summer 2024 Dignify conducted three qualitative focus groups with Year 10 and 12 students to explore some of the topics from the Dignify School Survey in more depth and seek clarification on some of the findings we were seeing consistently from schools. Two different schools participated in these

focus groups, with two groups taking place at one school and one group at another. Each focus group included between six and ten students, with both male and female students participating. This report does not include a full qualitative analysis of these focus groups but, where relevant to provide clarification to questions raised by these collated findings, key themes and quotations from the focus groups may be used. Dignify will seek to publish a full analysis of this qualitative research later.

Demographics

In total 7,748 students from 15 different schools took part in the survey. The sample included state and independent schools, faith schools and secular schools, single sex and co-educational schools and grammar and non-grammar schools. The majority of these schools were in Hertfordshire or London with one school in Cheshire.

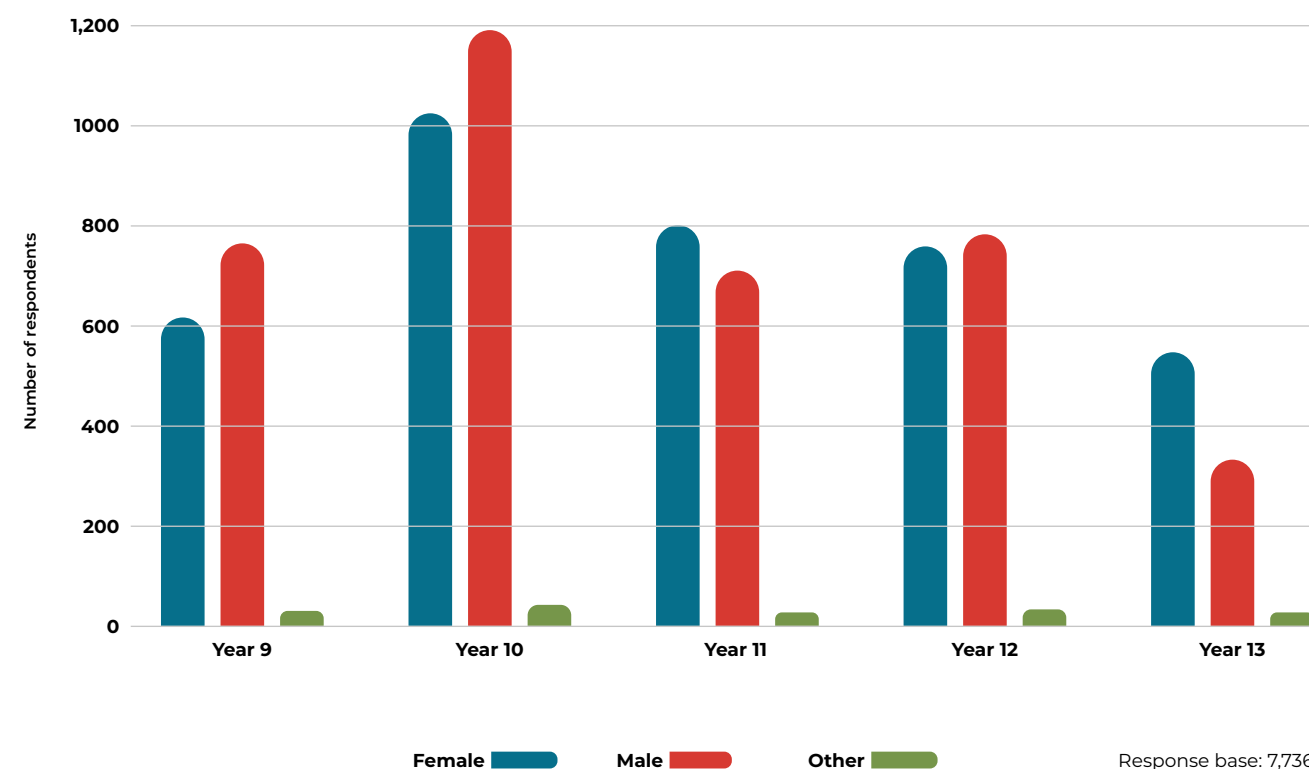
Ninety-five per cent of the sample (7,369 respondents) were under 18 and therefore legally children. The sample was 49 per cent male (3,797 respondents) and 49 per cent female (3,763) respondents, with the remaining two per cent (174 respondents) identifying as another gender. Forty-eight per cent of respondents (3,682) identified as being White: English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British. The only other ethnic groups comprising more than five per cent of the sample were Indian (12%, 884 respondents), any other White background

(8%, 596 respondents) and Pakistani (5%, 352 respondents).

As Graph 10 shows, Year 10 were slightly more represented than other year groups, with 29 per cent of respondents (2,267) from this year group. Year 13 were least represented, comprising only 12 per cent of the sample (915

respondents) which is likely to be in part due to survey fatigue as many of these students will have completed the survey before. The remaining sample was spread fairly evenly between Year 9 (18%, 1,422 respondents), Year 11 (20%, 1,547 respondents) and Year 12 (20%, 1,585 respondents).

Graph 10: Year groups and genders of respondents





Dignify's vision is for children to thrive in healthy relationships, free from the harmful effects of pornography and empowered to defy the social norms of sexual objectification.

We conduct research into the reach and impact of pornography amongst children in the UK, using an evidence-based approach to create and deliver bespoke resources for schools, youth groups and parents. We advocate for positive change both locally and nationally, believing that together we can build and share a new narrative for healthy relationships.



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