

# THE SALVATION ARMY AND PORNOGRAPHY

**SERIES: TAKING A STAND**

**EXPLORING THE ARMY'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENTS**

*Members of the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) reflect on The Salvation Army's International Positional Statements.*

## STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army believes that all persons are created in God's image and affirms the sanctity of the human body and relationships, based on the teaching of Scripture. Pornography is seen as a violation of these. Therefore, its production, distribution and use should be discouraged.

The Salvation Army abhors the prevalence of and easy accessibility to all forms of pornography, and will make every reasonable effort to stop its production, distribution and use.

The Salvation Army particularly deplores child pornography of any type and strongly opposes the creation, distribution and use of images of children for sexual purposes.

Download the complete *International Positional Statement on The Salvation Army and Pornography* at [salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips](http://salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips)

## HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND YOUTH WORKERS

[youthscape.co.uk/store/themes/sex-relationships](http://youthscape.co.uk/store/themes/sex-relationships)

### **A Parent's Guide to Talking with Your Teenager About Sex (£5)**

Packed full of handy hints and practical pointers, this book will help parents and youth workers to cover all the important stuff as they start the conversations that matter.

### **A Parent's Guide to Young People and Porn (£5)**

A practical, realistic guide for parents and youth workers wanting to talk to their young people about explicit material.

[youthscape.co.uk/store/themes/youth-work-resources](http://youthscape.co.uk/store/themes/youth-work-resources)

### **Questions from 16–19-Year-Olds (free download)**

When prompted, older young people have remarkable and profound questions about faith and what it means to live as a Christian. The six topics covered in the 60-minute sessions are around faith, disagreements, emotions, sexuality, university and politics. The sessions are flexible enough to adapt to different contexts and time constraints. Every session has an icebreaker, questions for discussion, reflection including a biblical perspective, and an activity. They have been created for a multifaith context and are accessible for young people of all faiths and none.

The popular sitcom *Friends* from the mid-90s portrayed six twenty-something men and women living in New York. There is an episode where the men come across a free porn channel. They begin to watch, and one of the women comes into the room. She calls them out on their behaviour, and they discuss together that porn is not healthy. As she leaves the apartment, the men sit in silence contemplating the conversation. The final scene brings great laughter to the audience as the men look at each other and say, 'Shall we see if the channel is still free?' Today, with the normalising of pornography, people are caught in its grip as it is accepted as common practice in many homes and, on the surface, is seen as harmless fun. This perception needs to be challenged.

The Salvation Army International Positional Statement (IPS), approved by the General in 2014, highlights how pornography is sweeping through the world and is causing damage to individuals and the relationships people are engaged in. The impact can be seen through the self-critical approach to their own bodies, as well as the bodies of their partner. The IPS states, 'Pornography frequently denigrates and objectifies women in particular, and as a result devalues their humanity and equality with men.' This then often leads to disrespectful attitudes and behaviours towards women.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- \* Arrange a Bible study/time of prayer to consider how to build resilience and accountability particularly around the use of pornography.
- \* Consider preparing information for the corps/centre noticeboard on help and support that is available locally or online for anyone who is struggling with the use of pornography, making the first step to ask for help easier.
- \* How can we support child and youth workers in becoming competent confidants on issues of sexuality and media literacy? Are there proven training offers available?

## “Our Christian response requires education to those who are vulnerable to using pornography, pastoral care with grace and compassion for those who are affected ...”

Pornography is not a stand-alone problem; it is not just about one individual seeking pleasure from the images; it spills out into many aspects of life. According to the website [truthaboutporn.org](http://truthaboutporn.org) pornography can be harmful in three ways – to the individual, relationships and society.

**IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS**

Paula Hall writes in her book *Confronting Porn*,<sup>1</sup> ‘When you find yourself in a relationship with someone who watches porn, whether that’s recreational or compulsive viewing, it can create profound feelings of betrayal and insecurity. Many partners feel desperately hurt that what should have been a private and intimate act, discovered together through the bond of their love and marriage, has already been explored elsewhere.’

There is an element of finding that the enhanced bodies in porn become more attractive to the eye of the viewers, and when they see themselves or those with whom they are in an intimate relationship, it can create a level of dissatisfaction. As porn viewing is often in secret, this can impact the satisfaction of the sexual relationship and in turn damage the relationship between the couple. When a person finds that their spouse has been using pornography, they can have a sense of being betrayed which impacts

trust, integrity, honesty and respect in the relationship.

**IMPACT ON SOCIETY**

As the porn industry continues to grow and the demands increase, the hunger for more and the impact on the viewer will in turn infiltrate into the mind and thinking. The development of any conviction that women are seen as less than men, the normalising of sexual violence and the acceptance of degrading acts, in time, impact the respect of women in any role in society.

Not all ‘actors’ in a porn movie have consented to be used in this way. The website *Truth About Porn* also speaks of how there is enough evidence to validate the concern that pornography is tied to global issues such as sexual violence and human sex trafficking. These are serious crimes against women, and as the demand for porn continues to rise, it exposes to us the underworld of sexual abuse that is taking advantage of the most vulnerable and making the perpetrators of the sex industry very rich.

As partner abuse is prevalent around the world, could it be argued that – as pornography degrades women and teaches by perception that it is acceptable and normal for women to be violated – the rise in pornography impacts society by bringing more sexual violence in the home, the workplace and onto our streets?

Our Christian response requires education to those who are vulnerable to using pornography, pastoral care with grace and compassion for those who are affected, and a wider concern for victims of sexual violence and human sex trafficking.

In the following personal reflections, we will focus on three areas – the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of pornography, the impact of pornography on our spiritual life, and on youth and children.

**ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Paula Hall, *Confronting Porn: A Comprehensive Guide for Christians Struggling with Porn and Churches Wanting to Help Them*, Naked Truth Resources, an imprint of McKnight & Bishop Ltd, Salford, UK, 2016.



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## PERSONAL REFLECTION

### HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTED THE USE OF PORNOGRAPHY?

The *Let's Talk About... Pornography* facilitators resource provided by IHQ states, 'Anxiety, depression, relationship issues and loneliness are all examples of triggers to people accessing pornography'. It also reminds us that pornography can be found accidentally, but even the first exposure can fuel a desire for more.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt globally for several years to come! Other than the significant loss of life and illness, our world is affected by poverty, mental health issues, unemployment and the changing scene of the economy. During lockdown, studies have revealed that the strain on relationships has led to more marriage break-ups, increased incidents of partner abuse and significant changes in the use of pornography.

Kasia Uzieblo and David Prescott wrote in April 2020<sup>2</sup> that websites such as *Pornhub* saw a significant increase in usage since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, up to 61 per cent in some countries. The first lockdown experience in many parts of the world showed also an increase in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, relationship issues and loneliness – the exact triggers of pornography use. People who became very vulnerable during the lockdown experience found themselves visiting websites that under normal circumstances they would not have used. There is a cycle to using porn that means that the viewer can be left with significant

feelings of guilt and shame. As we are now more than a year into the pandemic, it is likely that there are new pornography users who are struggling not only with the isolation issues, but also with these feelings of guilt and shame.

It is important to be aware that, as a result of the pandemic and lockdown, there may be those who attend our corps and centres who have found themselves engaging with pornography as a short release from loneliness and stress. If they choose to share, we need to be able to listen with compassion and assist them to find the level of support they require.

There are several support groups, where you can meet in person or online, that offer help to people who find themselves using pornography for recreational use or are struggling with addiction. It would be helpful to research what is available locally to support people with this issue.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Let's Talk About... Pornography*, facilitator's resource, IHQ, 2018, see also Julie Forrest, 'Let's Talk About... Tools for the Conversation on Human Sexuality', *The Officer*, January-March 2021, pp 37-39, [sar.my/officerracialjustice](http://sar.my/officerracialjustice)

<sup>2</sup> Kasia Uzieblo and David Prescott, 'Online Pornography Use during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Should We Worry?', *Journal of Sexual Abuse* (formerly *SAJRT*), 15 April 2020, [blog.atsa.com/2020/04/online-pornography-use-during-covid-19.html](http://blog.atsa.com/2020/04/online-pornography-use-during-covid-19.html) and part two, [blog.atsa.com/2020/04/](http://blog.atsa.com/2020/04/)

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

### PORN IMPACTS OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

I remember when I was a teenager, I went wild camping with a group of schoolmates. One night, inside our tents, one of my classmates showed us a book of pornography. As curious teenagers, we all were excited to catch a glimpse, especially as there was no proper sex education in school. This was the first time I engaged in pornography.

Most Christians are aware that pornography is not right. But still both men and women are likely to be driven to pornography for many reasons. Some might be overwhelmed by the work pressure. Some might have emotional wounds from childhood. Some might feel frustration in relationships. Some might suffer from loneliness. However, pornography does not meet any of these needs. A survey finds that most Christians feel ashamed (82 per cent of men and 63 per cent of women), guilty (77 per cent men and 70 per cent women), dirty, disgusted, angry or even depressed after using pornography.<sup>1</sup>

Our sexual desire is a natural aspect of being human. The Bible also affirms the sanctity of sexual relationships (Genesis 2:23-24). However, pornography not only damages our relationships with people, but also our relationship with God. It is hard to admit if someone is addicted to pornography. Especially in Asian countries, it is even more difficult for Christians to talk about sexual topics as this is a very private issue. Nevertheless, we want to affirm two powerful truths from the Bible.

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God provides grace and forgiveness. There is no sin that God cannot forgive. God calls us to turn to Jesus and seek his forgiveness. If we are willing to repent, God will forgive us (1 John 1:9). We must firmly believe that he does forgive us and listens to our prayer.

The Holy Spirit can bring about change and victory. Long-term addiction to pornography damages our self-esteem and makes us a slave to sin (Romans 6:16). The Bible clearly states that the Spirit of Christ seeks to renew our minds and hearts, so we become more like Jesus. It doesn't promise to remove temptations from our life, but that Jesus will walk with us through the process of change (Ephesians 4:22-24).

The Internet is full of easily accessible pornography. We are not fighting against human enemies but against 'the powers of this dark world' (Ephesians 6:12), but we can be brave and at peace because Jesus assures that he is with us and has overcome the world (John 16:33).

**ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Sum, 'Survey Findings: Why Christians Use Porn and How to Break Free', *Teaching Humble Hearts*, 7 May 2020, [teachinghumblehearts.com/en/](https://teachinghumblehearts.com/en/)

**PERSONAL REFLECTION  
GENERATION PORN?**

Flirting, falling in love, watching porn – curiosity about sexuality is part of becoming an adult. Very often, adolescents educate themselves with the help of the Internet. They also look for new acquaintances on social media and exchange erotic messages. However, this natural curiosity also becomes a risk: pornographic content can be disturbing or convey a false image of sexuality. Chat forums and social networks also provide a platform for sexual assault. The Internet is primarily a world of images, and the exchange of photos and films is very popular among minors. An erotic selfie can quickly be spread on the Net.

In our society, more than 90 per cent of adolescents and more than 70 per cent of 7 to 10-year-olds use the Internet regularly. Due to the constant accessibility via smartphones, a flood of media images of previously unknown proportions dominates the lives of children and young people. Thus, whether we like it or not, the Internet plays a significant role in the sexual socialisation of children.

Today, it is possible for every reasonably experienced Internet user to click into all imaginable sexual fantasy worlds from the comfort of their own living room or children's room without any real age restriction. Younger children in particular consider what they see to be realistic. From the perspective of developmental psychology, this easy access, especially to violent pornographic content, is worrying. Cognitive

and emotional immaturity do not allow the child to process this content appropriately which, in the worst case, can lead to irreversible damage in terms of sexual development. For boys, regular consumption of pornography can lead to pressure for sexual performance. For girls, there is more pressure to have a perfect body and to always be sexually available.

In rare cases, mostly in connection with other relevant psychological problems (depression, anxiety disorders or low self-esteem), pornography use can also be addictive. In situations like this, the involvement of professionals is always indicated.

All these dangers should not be downplayed. On the other hand, it can be noted that the vast majority of young people master their sexual development without any major problems. The demonisation of the Internet and the heated discourse in the media about a supposedly sexually depraved porn generation are of no help, but it is of immense importance for adolescents to have competent confidants to whom they can talk and ask their questions about all sexual topics without embarrassment and who can help them learn to deal competently with social media. Do our children and young people find spaces at home, at school, but also in our corps and centres where this is possible? Let's not leave the sex education of our children to the porn industry!