

Violent and abusive online pornography

UK pornography users' exposure and attitudes

Research findings report
June 2025

Executive summary

Published by the Government in February 2025, Baroness Bertin's Independent Pornography Review has recommended reform to align the regulation of online pornography with existing offline standards to tackle the present availability of violent and abusive content on online platforms.

In light of this review, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) have commissioned a survey of 2,000 adult pornography users in the UK, to measure their exposure to and attitudes towards violent or abusive content in online pornography.

This report summarises key findings from the survey under the following sections:

Exposure to violent or abusive content in online pornography

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- A third of adult pornography users in the sample reported having been exposed to violent or abusive content in online pornography in the last three months.
- Of the four key categories of violent or abusive content, respondents most often reported having seen depictions of physical violence.
- Women were more likely to report having seen one or more types of violent or abusive content than men.

Attitudes towards violent or abusive content in online pornography

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- Over half of the sample reported being concerned about the levels of violence and abuse depicted in online pornography, with 1 in 5 indicating that they felt 'very concerned'.
- A majority of the sample (62%) thought that depictions of physical violence are normalised in online pornography.
- Two-thirds of the sample thought that violent or abusive pornography is contributing to the normalisation of violent sexual behaviour in the real world.

Attitudes towards regulation of violent or abusive content in online pornography

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- Almost 9 in 10 adult pornography users in the sample said that they would support new rules to ensure online platforms verify that all individuals shown in content are consenting adults.
- 4 in 5 adult pornography users in the sample would support new rules to prevent online platforms from publishing or distributing pornography that depicts violence or abuse.
- For both types of regulation, women were more likely to be in favour than men.

Introduction

Background to the project

This research was commissioned following Baroness Bertin's Independent Pornography Review¹, which recommended that offline standards relating to violent and abusive pornography should also be applied to online platforms.

Currently, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC)'s role in regulating pornography is limited to 'offline' content released on physical formats, such as DVDs, and does not extend to online pornography. This means that non-consensual, violent, abusive, and degrading content that the BBFC would refuse to classify offline is freely available online.

In this context, the BBFC has commissioned social research agency Revealing Reality to explore public awareness of, exposure to, and attitudes towards the availability of violent or abusive content in online pornography through a survey of 2,000 adults in the UK who watch online pornography.

This survey aimed to collect data on:

- Pornography users' exposure to violent or abusive content in online pornography, and to content which made them feel concerned or upset.
 - This includes content that respondents may have chosen not to watch, but that appeared in thumbnails, video titles, previews, on social media, or on the homepage of a pornographic website.
- Pornography users' opinions related to the normalisation of violent and abusive content in online pornography and its impact in the real world.
- Whether pornography users would support new regulation relating to the availability of violent and abusive online pornography and to ensuring that all performers featured in online pornography are consenting adults.

In the survey, the definition of 'violent or abusive' was based on the types of pornographic material that the BBFC would not classify in offline pornography on harm grounds. These are:

- Depictions of physical violence (e.g., strangulation, choking, or penetration by an object likely to cause physical harm).
- Depictions of non-consensual sexual activity (e.g., rape, sexual assault or other non-consensual activity – whether real or simulated).
- Depictions of incest between direct family members (not including step-relations).
- Adult performers role-playing as children (under-18s) (e.g., through the use of props such as teddy bears, locations such as a child's bedroom, or the performer behaving in a childlike way).

Pornography not classified by the BBFC is illegal to distribute offline, under the Video Recordings Act 1984, but there is no equivalent requirement online. The Online Safety Act does not require that providers remove this material from their services.

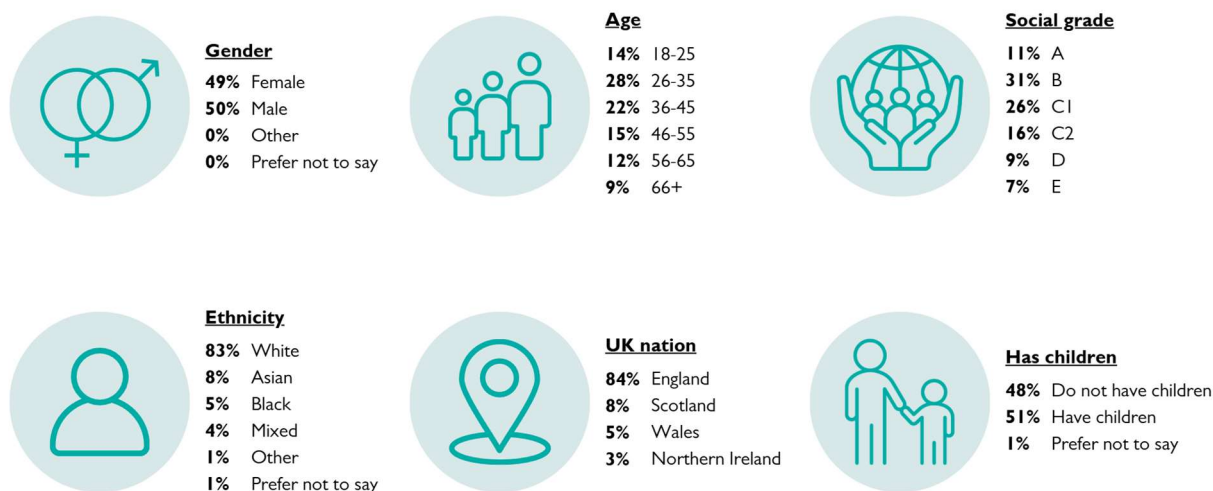
Methodology

Sample

The survey was completed by a total of 2,021 adults in the UK who reported having actively chosen to view online pornography in the last three months.

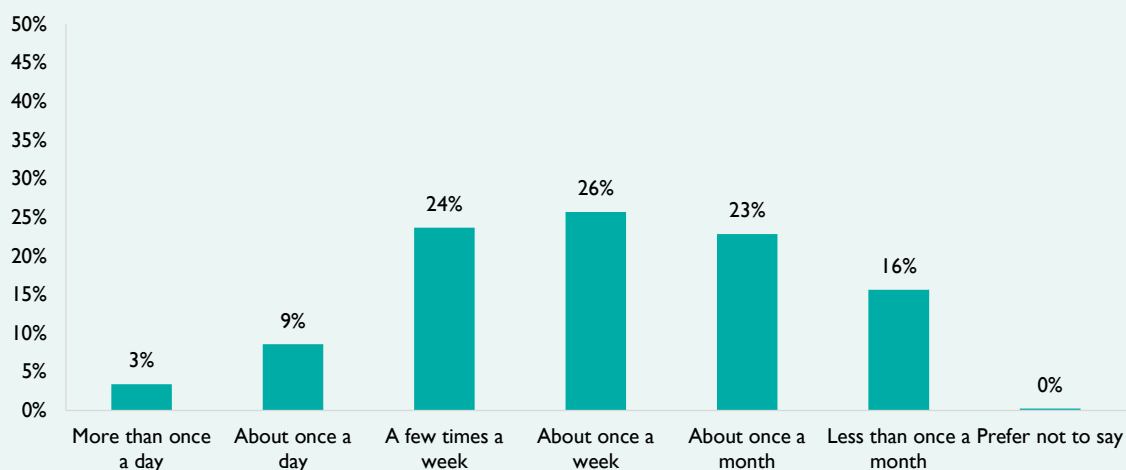
¹ Gov.uk, ['Creating a safer world: the challenge of regulating online pornography'](#)

The sample aimed for a roughly 50:50 split between male and female pornography users in the UK. The final sample included 997 women, 1014 men, and 10 people who identified as another gender. A spread across other demographic groups naturally fell out, resulting in a good spread across age, geographical location, ethnicity, social grade, and whether respondents had children.



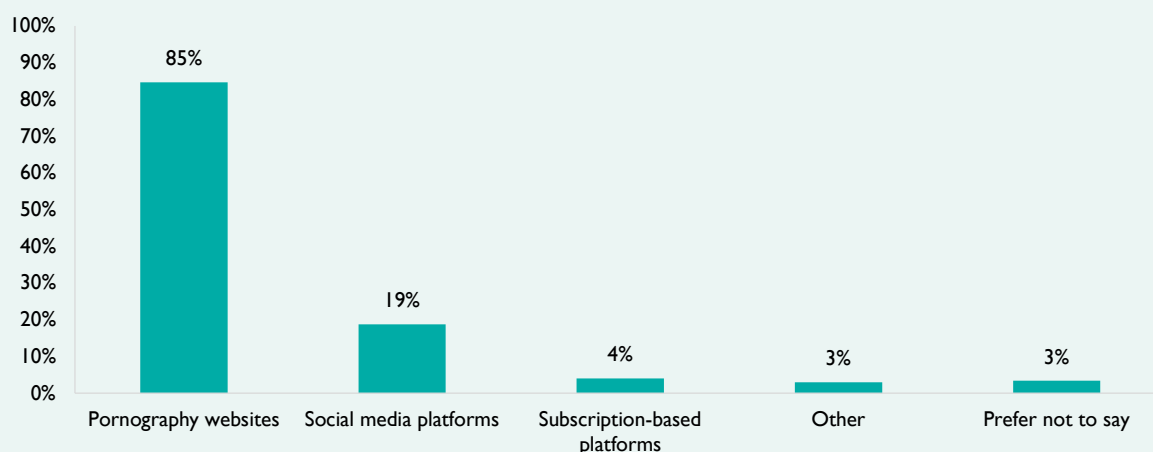
Respondents also varied in terms of their frequency of pornography use and how they reported typically accessing pornography, though they were only eligible to complete the survey if they had chosen to watch online pornography in the last three months.

How often, on average, respondents reported having watched pornography online in the last three months



Q2. "Thinking about the last three months, on average how often would you say you've watched pornography online?" Base n=2021

Where respondents usually access online pornographic content



Q13. "Where do you usually access online pornographic content?" Base n=2021

Data collection and analysis

This survey was disseminated online through Yonder Data Solutions, a survey panel provider with over 100,000 members across the UK, between 29th April and 6th May 2025. The data was processed and analysed throughout May 2025.

Note – throughout this report, when something is referred to as 'significant', this denotes a statistically significant finding at the 95% confidence interval.

In charts, statistically significant column comparisons are indicated using a lowercase or capital letter. For example, where a data point is marked with a lowercase 'a', this means it is significantly greater than the data point in column A at the 95% confidence interval. If the data is marked with an uppercase 'A', this indicates statistical significance at the 99% confidence interval.

Caveats / limitations

A 50:50 split between men and women was chosen for this sample to explore potential gender differences in exposure to and attitudes towards violent and abusive content in online pornography. This gender split is not representative of the gender makeup of online pornography users in the UK; according to recent research by Ofcom², men are more likely than women to access online pornography.

Although measures were taken during survey design to reduce the risk of response bias, the possibility remains that questions in the survey were interpreted subjectively depending on respondents' personal understanding or classification of violent and abusive pornographic content.

Note – all data from this survey is based on respondents self-reporting their exposure to pornographic material, meaning this survey is not an objective measure of respondents' actual viewing habits or their true level of exposure to different types of content.

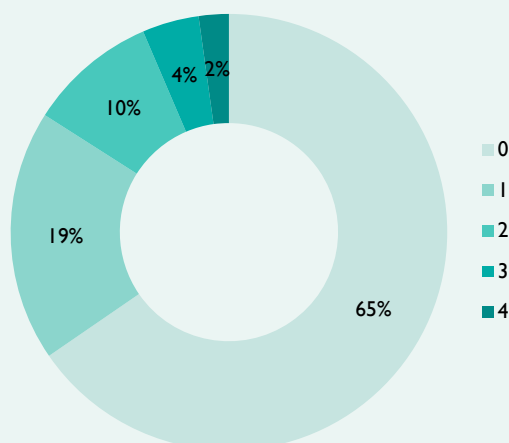
² Ofcom. (2024). Online Nation 2024. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/online-research/online-nation/2024/online-nation-2024-report.pdf?v=386238>

Exposure to violent or abusive content

1 in 3 adult pornography users in the sample reported having been exposed to violent or abusive content in the last three months

35% of the sample reported that they had seen at least one type of violent or abusive content in online pornography within the last three months.

Number of types of violent or abusive content respondents reported having seen in online pornography in the last three months



Q3. "In the last three months, have you seen any online pornography containing the following behaviours? Remember, this includes things you may have seen in thumbnails, video titles, previews, on social media, or on the homepage of a pornographic website, even if you didn't choose to watch them.

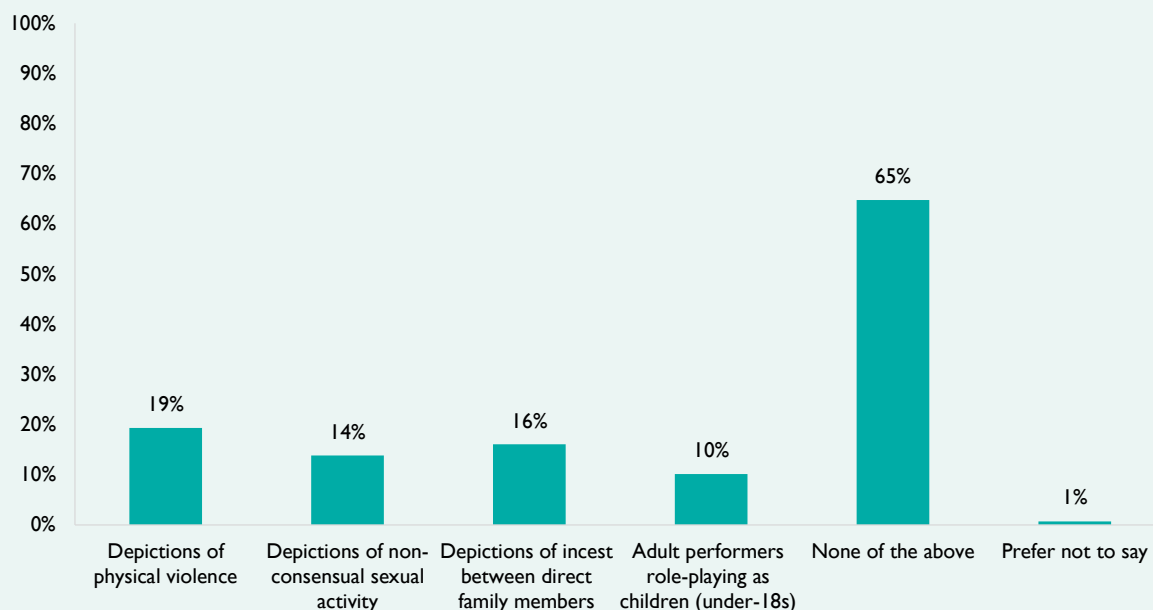
- a) Depictions of physical violence
- b) Depictions of non-consensual sexual activity
- c) Depictions of incest between direct family members
- d) Adult performers role-playing as children (under-18s)"

Coded to count the total number of types of content respondents indicated they had seen. Base n=2021

Respondents most often reported having seen depictions of physical violence

Of the four categories of violent or abusive content, the highest proportion of adult pornography users – around 1 in 5 – reported having seen depictions of physical violence in online pornography. On the other hand, adult performers role-playing as children was the type of content respondents least often reported having seen, with only 10% indicating this.

Types of violent or abusive content respondents reported having seen in online pornography in the last three months



Q3. "In the last three months, have you seen any online pornography containing the following behaviours? Remember, this includes things you may have seen in thumbnails, video titles, previews, on social media, or on the homepage of a pornographic website, even if you didn't choose to watch them." Base n=2021

Women reported more often that they had seen one or more types of violent or abusive content

Men were significantly more likely to report having seen none of these types of content. While this may have been due to differences in exposure to violent or abusive content in pornographic material online, it could also be due to women having a lower threshold for what they consider to be violent or abusive within pornography.

Note – participants' thresholds for whether content falls into one of these categories may have varied person-to-person. For example, women may have a lower threshold for what constitutes 'physical violence', leading to a higher proportion reporting to have seen such content. While examples were included to ensure that interpretations of these categories were as objective as possible, it is not possible to rule this possibility out.

Attitudes towards violent or abusive content in online pornography

Over half of the sample reported being concerned about the levels of violence and abuse depicted in online pornography, with 1 in 5 indicating that they felt 'very concerned'

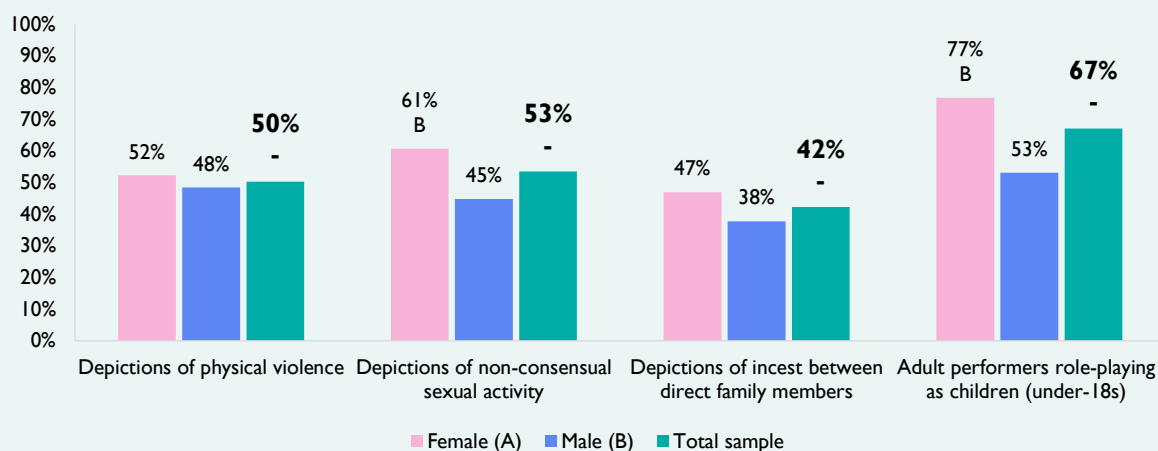
Across the whole sample, 58% of respondents reported feeling 'somewhat' or 'very concerned' about the levels of violent or abusive pornography they had come across online. Among those who said they had not seen any of the four categories of violent or abusive pornographic content, 48% still expressed concern. In contrast, a significantly higher proportion (78%) of those who had seen such content reported feeling concerned.

Among those who had reported seeing at least one of the four types of violent or abusive content, 54% reported having felt concerned or upset by one or more of these types of content. Respondents most often reported feeling concerned or upset by adult performers role-playing as children, with 67% of those who had come across this content being concerned or upset by it.

More women reported being concerned or upset by violent or abusive content than men across all four types of violent or abusive content

For those respondents who had come across the four categories of content, women in the sample reported more often than men that they had found them concerning or upsetting, though this was only a significant difference for depictions of non-consensual sexual activity and adult performers role-playing as children.

Proportion of respondents who found different types of violent or abusive content they had seen in online pornography concerning or upsetting

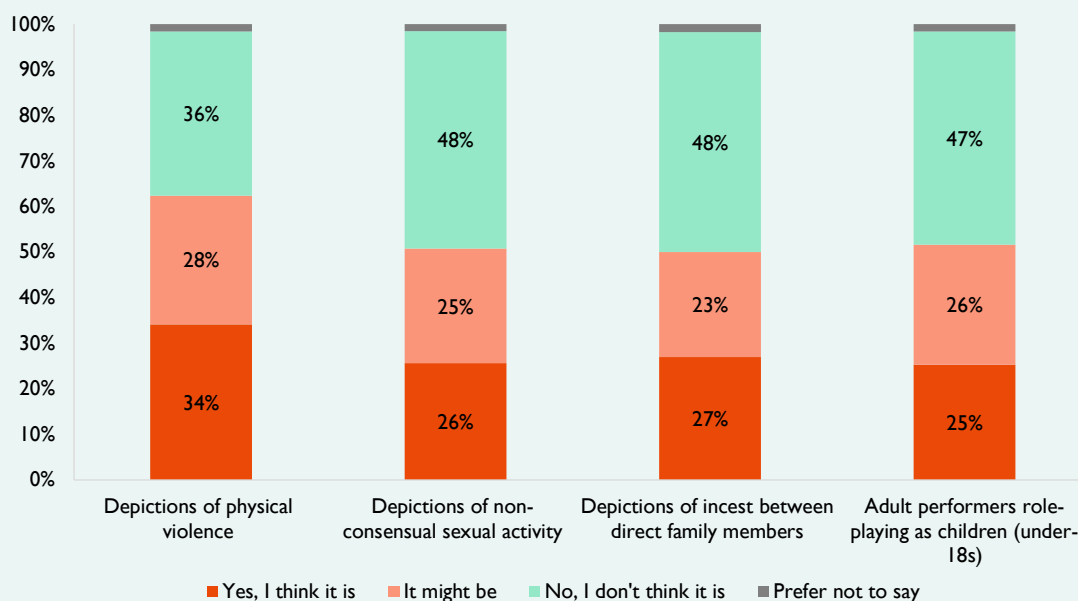


Q4 "Were there any occasions where you saw content that you personally found concerning or upsetting?" Chart shows only those who selected 'Yes'. Base n=203-387

62% of the sample thought that depictions of physical violence are normalised in online pornography

For each of the four types of violent or abusive content, at least half of respondents agreed that they are or might be common and accepted in online pornography – this ranged from 50% for depictions of incest to 62% for depictions of physical violence.

Proportion of respondents who thought that different types of violent or abusive content are or might be common and accepted in online pornography



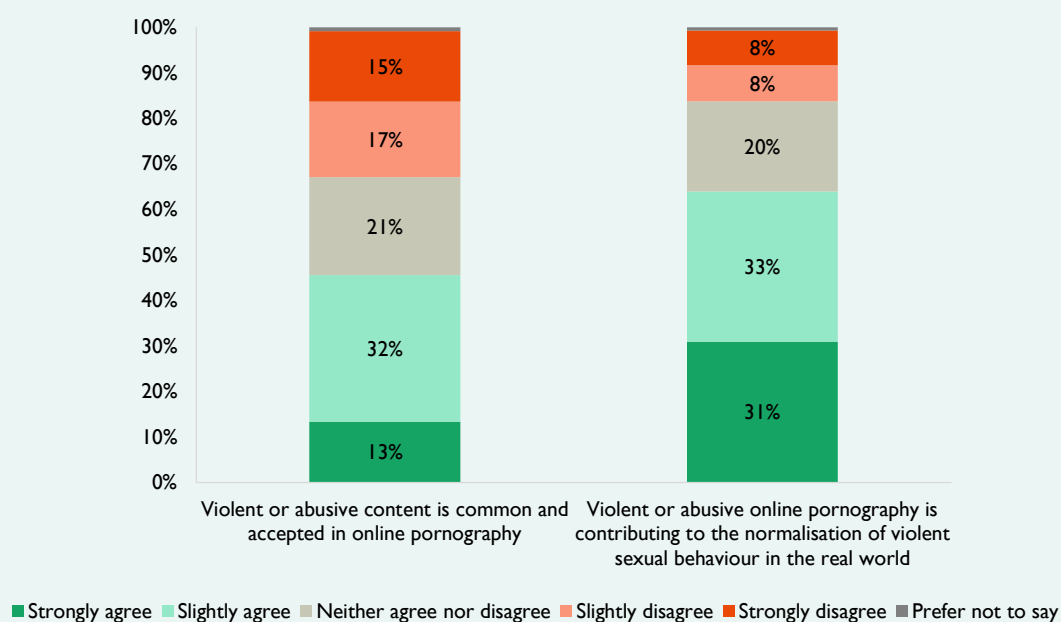
Q9 "Which, if any, of the following types of content do you think are common and accepted in online pornography?"
Base n=2021

Overall, when asked whether they agreed that violent or abusive content as a whole is common and accepted in online pornography, 46% indicated they 'slightly' or 'strongly' agreed. This lower proportion may be a result of differences in respondents' interpretations or classifications of 'violent or abusive content' – in other words, some respondents may not have considered some of the types of content listed in BBFC's classification as violent or abusive. Alternatively, this difference could be due to recall bias, whereby respondents were only prompted to consider whether specific types of violent or abusive behaviour were common or accepted, after being reminded of detailed descriptions and examples of what such content might look like.

64% of the sample thought that violent or abusive online pornography is contributing to the normalisation of violent sexual behaviour in the real world

Across the sample, 64% agreed that violent or abusive pornography is contributing to the normalisation of violent sexual behaviour in the real world, with almost half of respondents feeling that this type of content in general is common and accepted in online pornography.

Proportion of respondents that agreed or disagreed with different statements about the normalisation of violent or abusive content



Q8. "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements..." Base n=2021

Women were significantly more likely to think that violent or abusive content is becoming normalised

When looking at differences by gender, women were significantly more likely to agree with both of these statements. That is, they were more likely than men to think that violent or abusive content is common and accepted in online pornography, and to think that it is contributing to the normalisation of violent sexual behaviour in the real world.

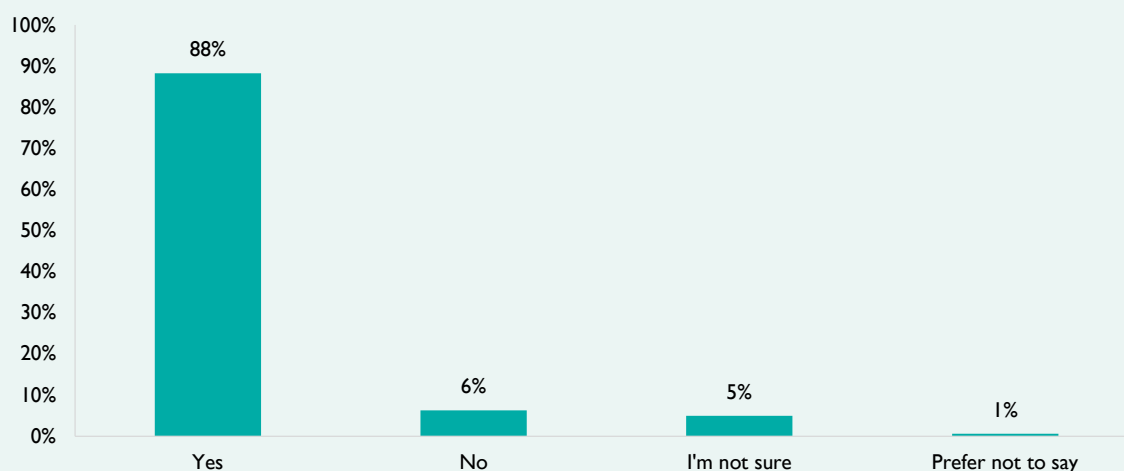
Additionally, those who had seen content that had made them feel concerned or upset in the last three months were significantly more likely to agree with these statements than those who did not report feeling concerned or upset by this content.

Attitudes towards regulation of violent or abusive content in online pornography

Almost 9 in 10 adult pornography users in the sample said that they would support new rules to ensure online platforms verify that all individuals shown in content are consenting adults

88% of respondents indicated they were in favour of new regulation to require that online platforms must verify that all individuals shown in online pornography are consenting adults.

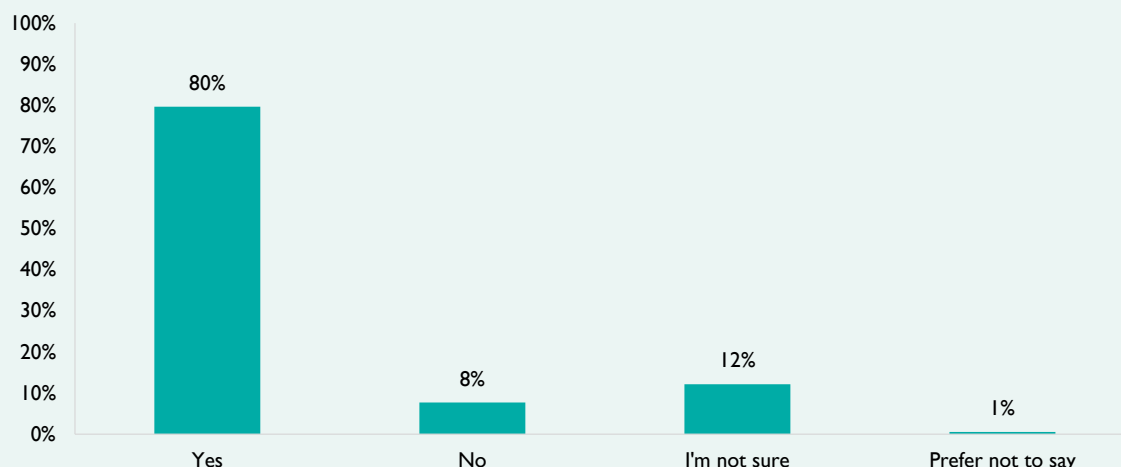
Proportion of respondents that reported whether they would support new rules to ensure online platforms verify that all individuals shown are consenting adults



Q11. "Would you support new rules to ensure online platforms verify that all individuals shown are consenting adults?" Base n=2021

4 in 5 adult pornography users in the sample would support new rules to prevent online platforms from publishing or distributing pornography that depicts violence or abuse

A majority of the sample also reported being in favour of regulation to prevent online platforms from publishing or distributing pornographic content that depicts violence or abuse.

Proportion of respondents that reported whether they would support new rules to prevent online platforms from publishing or distributing pornography that depicts violence or abuse

Q10. "Would you support new rules to prevent online platforms from publishing or distributing pornography that depicts violence or abuse?" Base n=2021

For both types of regulation, women were more likely than men to be in favour

Women in the sample were significantly more likely to indicate that they would support both types of new rules than men. For instance, while 84% of men indicated they would support new rules to ensure online platforms verify that all individuals shown are consenting adults, the proportion of women who reported this was 93%.

For both men and women, however, frequency of pornography use was a driver of support, with high-frequency users – who watch online pornography at least once a day – being significantly less likely to support these regulations than those who were mid- or low-frequency users.

Conclusion

Among a sample of UK adults who had accessed online pornography in the last three months, over half expressed concern about the levels of violent or abusive content in online pornography, with around one-third reporting that they had encountered such content.

Despite variation in individual exposure and concern, a large majority agreed they would support new regulation – both to verify that all individuals depicted are consenting adults and to limit the publication or distribution of violent or abusive content online.

Gender differences were fairly consistent throughout the findings: women were more likely than men to say they had been exposed to, and felt concerned about, violent or abusive content, and were also more likely to report being supportive of new regulations.

Overall, this research suggests that there is broad support among adult pornography users in the UK for aligning the regulation of violent or abusive online pornography with the standards already applied offline, echoing recommendations from the Independent Pornography Review.

Please note, however, that these findings are based on self-reported data from a sample which is not wholly representative of the population of pornography users in the UK and therefore should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

About Revealing Reality

Revealing Reality is an independent social research agency with a strong track record of working with regulators, government bodies and charities to deliver high-quality, evidence-based insight into complex and sensitive social issues.

We specialise in understanding real experiences, including those of people that are hard to reach or of topics that are hard to talk about. Our work regularly involves exploring people's attitudes and behaviours around subjects such as sexual content, online safety, and harmful or illegal material.

Visit <https://revealingreality.co.uk/> to find out more about our work or to get in touch.

About the British Board of Film Classification

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is the independent film and video regulator for the UK. Through widely recognised and trusted age ratings and content advice, the BBFC works to protect children and vulnerable adults from potentially harmful content and to empower audiences to make informed viewing decisions. All BBFC classification decisions are based on our Classification Guidelines, which are updated every four to five years to ensure our standards continue to reflect the expectations and values of people across the UK.

Additionally, the BBFC is the UK's foremost authority in the regulation of pornographic content. For 40 years, we have had statutory responsibility for classifying pornography released on physical media formats, such as DVD and Blu-ray (under the Video Recordings Act 1984).

Please visit <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/> to find out more about our work.