



Save the Children

Online pornography and its impacts on young people: A Pacific case study

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Key Definitions and Abbreviations

This paper acknowledges that the below terms are not static; their meanings are multifaceted and debated across academia. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to interrogate the significance, intricacies and contestations of each term. So, for the purposes of this report, the below definitions will inform how each term is understood and utilised in this paper.

Key definitions

Online pornography	Sexually explicit media, accessed via internet-connected devices, that depicts nudity and diverse sexual acts, to encourage sexual arousal and pleasure (Bridges 2019; Salmon 2012).* *Child sexual abuse materials (CSAM), meaning sexually explicit media depicting individuals under 18-years-old (International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children 2018), could be included within online pornography. However, this paper does not specifically delve into the age demographics of online pornography. It discusses sexually explicit media at a broader level.
Young people	Individuals under 18-years-old, including children and adolescents, yet excluding infants and toddlers aged approximately 0-3-years-old (UNICEF 2023).
Sexual violence	Non-consensual, aggressive or objectifying sexual acts and/or language (UNICEF et al. 2021; World Health Organisation 2023)
Civil-society organisations	Local, national or international faith- or community-based organisations that are not-for-profit and non-governmental actors (Hutter and O'Mahony 2004).
Community-led and participatory approaches	A method for research and development where locals are centralised as active participants in the design, implementation and dissemination of data production and decision-making (MacDonald 2012). Locals are placed at the heart of projects and initiatives concerning their community, to ensure cultural sensitivity, relevance and locals' self-determination (Makhoul and Torjman 2012).
Global North	A group of countries across the globe that are predominantly Western nations and have comparatively higher-income and industrialisation levels (Confraria et al. 2017).
Global South	A group of countries across the global that are predominantly non-Western nations and have comparatively lower-income and industrialisation levels (Confraria et al. 2017).

Abbreviations

OP	Online pornography
YP	Young people
SV	Sexual violence
CSOs	Civil-society organisations
CLP	Community-led and participatory
GN	Global North
GS	Global South
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UN Women	United Nations Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and any other emerging gender- or sexually-diverse identities/individuals.
SCA	Save the Children Australia
PNG	Papua New Guinea

Executive Summary

This report explores OP exposure amongst YP. Due to the proliferation of internet technology, pornography has become widely accessible online for people of all ages around the world. While not *all* OP is perilous, a significant portion of OP contains depictions of SV, predominantly enacted by men, towards women. YP's exposure to such content risks rewiring their brains to expect, desire and enact such misogynistic, violent behaviours witnessed. While there is extensive research around these potentially harmful impacts of OP on YP, there has been negligible action to address such harms. Hence, this paper seeks to centralise research around the nature of OP and its potential impacts on YP, to highlight the need for action to address YP's exposure to OP.

Investigations into OP and YP have been predominantly concentrated within GN contexts and have consequently excluded GS perspectives from dominant discourses and understandings on this topic. This research gap means current literature surrounding OP and YP arguably lacks nuance and generalisability beyond the GN, and reinforces the inequitable dominance of Western perspectives in research and academia. Thereby, to shift away from such Western research dominance, this report endeavours to elevate perspectives from, and analysis of, a GS region surrounding OP and YP.

The methodology for this report involves a case study approach, to focus on one GS region, given the scope of this study. The Pacific was chosen as a case study because there is more data available on this region compared to other GS areas. Additionally, the notion that SV is widespread across the Pacific makes it a pertinent location to explore OP amongst YP, as a potential influence exacerbating SV rates. A CLP-inspired approach is adopted to centralise locals' perspectives. This led to the primary research question of: *What do people in the Pacific say about OP and YP in their communities?* Fragments of secondary qualitative research that capture local Pacific perspectives on OP and YP are combined to answer this question.

In response to this primary research question, this report finds that YP in the Pacific are indeed exposed to OP, and that there is concern amongst locals about such exposure. These findings led to a secondary research question being: *Why is OP exposure amongst YP in the Pacific a key concern amongst locals?* To answer this enquiry, a socio-cultural analysis is conducted of the Pacific, to deduce potential reasons behind locals' concerns around their YP's exposure to OP. This methodology was adopted, as there is no primary or secondary data explicating why locals are concerned about their YP's OP exposure. However, this paper acknowledges that this socio-cultural analysis does not replace the need for unfeigned CLP and primary investigations, with Pacific and other GS locals, to genuinely deconstruct Western dominance within OP and YP research.

In response to this latter research question, this paper postulates four Pacific socio-cultural factors that may be elevating OP exposure amongst YP as a concern for locals. These include the rapid rise of internet technology, gender inequality and violence norms, religious, cultural taboos around sex and limited action to address YP's OP exposure.

While these findings indicate the need for action in the Pacific to address OP exposure amongst YP, this report does not propose specific solutions for the Pacific. Interventions to address OP exposure amongst YP in the Pacific, or any community, must be locally devised, designed and implemented, to ensure the cultural sensitivity, relevance and suitability of initiatives, as well as locals' self-determination.

However, this report offers recommendations from research to inspire and guide action to address OP exposure amongst YP, in the Pacific and beyond. Yet, these recommendations are subject to alteration or disregard, based on unique community needs and socio-cultural, religious, political, linguistic and economic dynamics.

These recommendations include:

- Engaging extensive, CLP research to better understand dynamics around YP and OP in a given community, to then inform action and approaches taken.
- Embodying a youth-led approach to ensure interventions and initiatives are devised and implemented in ways that are suitable and relevant to the YP they aim to serve.
- Disseminating age-appropriate, inclusive in- and out-of-school education programs, to equip YP with skills and knowledge to mitigate the potential harms of OP.
- Fulfilling a whole-of-community approach, that implicates parents, carers, teachers, community leaders and youth workers to support YP to process and critically evaluate OP depictions.
- Increasing government funding to finance initiatives to mitigate OP harms amongst YP.
- Strengthening accountability of digital industry corporations to protect YP from OP harms, by such corporations collaborating with YP and entering partnerships with YP-affiliated CSOs.

Introduction

YP across the globe are being exposed to OP through digital devices and environments. Despite extensive research around the negative impacts of OP on YP, there has been insufficient action to mitigate these harms for YP. Hence, this report aims to foreground research around the nature of OP and its potential impacts on YP, to incite urgent action on behalf of youth wellbeing stakeholders, including CSOs, governments, schools, parents and carers. This report further intends to be solutions-focused, with the latter part of this paper divulging key recommendations to address the potential harms of OP on YP.

While it is known that YP are exposed to OP worldwide, studies exploring this topic have predominantly focused on GN contexts. There is a dearth of literature concerning OP and YP in GS contexts. This research gap is significant, as a colossal group of YP and YP wellbeing stakeholders are excluded from discourses and understandings around OP exposure and impacts amongst YP. Such exclusion means that current research on this topic arguably lacks nuance and findings may be skewed to merely represent GN contexts. This lack of GS engagement also reproduces the ineluctable dominance of Western perspectives in research and academia.

To address this research gap, this report aims to elevate perspectives from, and analysis of, the GS surrounding OP and YP. Given the scope of this study, a case study approach is adopted to explore one GS region in depth. This case study intends to catalyse further research on this topic in GS contexts. The Pacific was selected as a case study, and justification behind this choice is explained in this paper's methodology section.

To perform this case study, the following research question was posed: *What do people in the Pacific say about OP and YP in their communities?* Findings in response to this enquiry prompted this secondary research question: *Why is OP exposure amongst YP in the Pacific a key concern amongst locals?* These enquiries and findings aspire to move the dial for research on this topic, to better consider GS contexts.

This paper begins by reviewing literature on the history of pornography access, the evolution of pornography research, the nature and impacts of OP on YP and main approaches to OP exposure amongst YP. Next, the methodology used for this investigation is discussed. Findings in relation to the two aforementioned research questions are then explored. Finally, recommendations to address OP exposure amongst YP are presented to guide future action.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study necessary to acknowledge. Foremost, this report focuses on OP depictions of SV enacted by men, against women, given research available and that these portrayals are most prevalent across OP. However, there are multiple other inequalities depicted across OP that can influence YP's sexual expectations and behaviours. There are racist, homophobic and transphobic representations, and SV enacted towards men and LGBTIQ+ individuals (Corlett and Crabbe 2023; Fritz and Paul 2017). The nature and impacts of these multifaceted inequalities in OP on YP is a major, complex topic that requires further research, yet is beyond the scope of this report. Secondly, it is known that YP with cognitive disabilities are more vulnerable to the harmful impacts of OP (Acharya et al. 2020; Porn Is Not The Norm 2023). Yet, it is also beyond the scope of this study to discuss these heightened vulnerabilities and further research is needed in this area.

Literature Review

History of pornography access

Prior the 21st century, pornography access was somewhat limited. Until roughly 20 years ago, pornography had to be purchased at an in-person vendor, required proof-of-age and existed in the form of magazines, videos and later DVDs (Blanchard-et-al. 2019; Guggisberg-2020; Salmon-2012). Yet, with the proliferation of internet technology around the turn of the century, pornography became easily accessible online for people of all ages, worldwide, for free, without any in-person interaction needed (Braithwaite et al. 2015; Goldstein 2020; Guggisberg 2020). There are countless websites people use to access OP, such as PornHub, xHamster and RedTube, as well as social media platforms, like Facebook, Snapchat YouTube, Instagram and TikTok (Blanchard et al. 2019; Gittins Stone 2019). To view OP today, all one needs is access to an internet-connected device, like a computer, smart-phone-or-tablet (Parsons 2022).

The evolution of pornography research

Since the 1980s, researchers have studied the use and impacts of pornography. Prior to the explosion of the internet, research focused on pornography exposure amongst adults, as they were the main viewers, given in-person age-verification requirements (Briere et al. 1988; Check and Malamuth 1985; Linz 1989; Pines and Silbert 1984). Yet, pornography research has largely shifted to focus on exposure and impacts amongst YP (Blanchard et al. 2019). This transition can be explained by awareness that YP's pornography exposure has significantly expanded, given increased availability of OP, devoid of age-verification (Adler et al. 2016; Crabbe and Flood 2021; Office of Film and Literature Classification 2018). Some studies claim the average age of first OP viewing is 13-15-years-old (Guggisberg 2020), while others claim it is as young as 11-years-old (Blanchard et al. 2019; DeKeseredy and Corsianos 2016). YP have also been centralised in pornography research because their brains are still developing, which makes them especially impressionable to online media depictions (Hajela et al. 2015; Behun et al. 2012).

Pornography research has historically focused on the use and impacts amongst boys and men. This has been explained by the notion that males view pornography earlier and more frequently than females (Blanchard et al. 2019; DeKeseredy and Corsianos 2016; Guggisberg 2020). The majority of pornography is also notably created by and for men (Henricksen 2018). Additionally, a central concern around pornography is whether consumption increases SV rates (Crabbe and Corlett 2023; Crabbe and Flood 2021; Gittins-Stone et al. 2019; Parsons-2022). The notion that men are the main global perpetrators of SV makes them a key interest group, to assess whether pornography is influencing them to perpetrate SV (Guggisberg 2020; Henricksen 2018). There has been recent

investigation into pornography use and impacts amongst women, girls and LGBTQI+ individuals (Cheng et al. 2015; Fritz and Paul 2017; Whisnant 2016). However, this research is extremely scant compared to studies focusing on men and boys.

The nature of OP

OP is extremely varied. There are manifold genres that cater to heterosexual and LGBTQI+ audiences, across different age, racial and ethnic demographics (Blanchard et al. 2019; Fritz and Paul 2017). Human bodies represented are diverse to a degree, yet they are largely unrealistic, with body parts that have been modified and exaggerated through surgery, hair removal and film editing (Hald et al. 2012; Lemma 2021; Parsons 2022). There are depictions of mutually consenting adults engaging in sexual relations, free from SV, across OP (Ferguson and Hartley 2022). However, a large portion, arguably the majority, depicts SV, predominantly towards women, enacted by men (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Guggisberg 2020; Keene 2019). Bridges et al. (2010) found that 88% of OP scenes depict SV. Since this study was conducted, SV in mainstream OP has further increased (Parsons 2022).

Across OP, there are widespread depictions of choking, strangulation, slapping, hair-pulling and bondage (Bridges et al. 2010; Crabbe and Corlett 2023). While less mainstream, there are explicit rape scenes (Crabbe and Corlett 2023; DeKeseredy and Corsianos 2016; Gittins-Stone et al. 2019). Degrading, misogynistic language is ubiquitous, with regular utterances like “slut”, “whore”, “look at that bitch”, “cum-dumpster” and “she’ll get what she deserves” (Crabbe & Corlett 2018, 00:07:17). 97% of these SV portrayals are directed at women, with 76% perpetrated by men (Fritz et al. 2020). Thus, a gender binary is commonplace across OP, with men represented as violent female-dominators, and women as weak and compliant to such aggression (Blanchard et al. 2019; Parsons 2022; Sugiura and Tranchese 2021). There is also frequently no clear, verbal consent for sexual acts and relations depicted (Antevska and Gavey 2015; Parsons 2022). While such SV cannot be generalised to *all* OP, there is evidently a sizeable volume of OP that depicts SV.

The impacts of OP

While there is debate around the impacts of OP on YP, the majority of research highlights the harmful influences. There is extensive neuro-psychological research that demonstrates how OP, as a form of media, can rewire the brain to expect, desire and enact behaviours witnessed (Linz et al. 2010; Parsons 2022; Shrum 2002; Bridges et al. 2016). YP are particularly susceptible to this influence, given their heightened brain malleability (Hajela et al. 2015). Such cognitive impact becomes perilous considering how widespread SV is across mainstream OP, predominantly against women (Guggisberg 2020). Hence, YP’s exposure to SV in OP can reshape their minds to become accustomed to and desirous of SV (Bridges et al. 2016). Young boys are at higher risk of this cognitive impact, as they view OP earlier and more frequently (Blanchard et al. 2019). This neuro-psychological research has arguably buttressed further studies attesting the harmful impacts of OP on YP.

Substantial research shows a relationship between OP exposure and misogynistic beliefs and attitudes amongst young boys. Multiple large-scale surveys found that adolescent boys who regularly watch OP perceive women as inferior, sexual objects, compared to those who do not watch OP regularly or at all (Blanchard et al. 2019; Peter and Valkenburg 2016; Behun et al. 2012; Aghtaie et al. 2018). There is further research that detects ‘rape myth acceptance’ amongst adolescent boys who watch OP regularly, which denotes the perception that females enjoy or accept rape (Franco et al. 2018; Blanchard et al. 2019; Guggisberg 2020). Hence, there is purportedly an enlarged presence of misogynistic outlooks amongst boys who consume OP frequently.

There is evidence that YP are enacting what they see in OP. A large-scale study found that 59% of YP who watched OP in the last six months, attempted to perform something they viewed with a sexual partner (Harrison and

Ollis 2015). This high re-enactment rate becomes problematic when YP attempt to recreate SV, commonly directed at females. A correlational study found that boys who regularly watch OP were three times more likely to report SV perpetration towards female dating partners (Gittins-Stone et al. 2019). Another study showed that teenage boys who frequently watch OP, were twice as likely to admit using physical force against girls in sexual experiences (Aghtai et al. 2018). Various longitudinal studies assert how OP exposure amongst boys increases their chances of perpetuating SV later in life (Brown and L'Engle 2009; D'Abreu and Krahe 2014; Ybarra and Thompson 2018). One seven-year study with boys and men aged 10-21, found that participants frequently exposed to OP were four times as likely to enact SV towards women and girls in the future (Ybarra and Thompson 2018). Such research demonstrates the risk of OP influencing YP to enact SV.

The unrealistic portrayals of human bodies across OP can impact YP's self-esteem around their own bodies. Researchers have argued that YP may compare their own bodies to those modified bodies present in OP, and consequently feel anxious or inadequate, as theirs do not appear the same (Crabbe and Corlett 2011; Parsons 2022). However, further research is needed to determine the concrete impacts of OP body portrayals on YP's perceptions.

There are conversely studies that challenge the harmful impacts of OP on YP altogether. Multiple qualitative studies report YP's value of OP, as a source of sexual exploration, inspiration, pleasure and education (Hald and Malamuth 2008; McKee 2007; Caruana et al. 2017). Some studies argue that OP encourages egalitarian gender roles that embrace women's sexual liberation, including their right to pre-marital sex and multiple sex partners (Baer et al. 2016; Ferguson and Hartley 2022; McKinley et al. 2015). Some investigations have found that OP has no effect on YP's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Bae and Wright 2015; Benz et al. 2009; Peter and Valkenburg 2011). Thereby, this research suggests OP's harmful impacts on YP have been overemphasised.

Many key researchers propose it is not OP alone that causes deleterious impacts amongst YP. There are individual and socio-cultural factors that can moderate or mediate the influence of misogynistic, violent OP on YP's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Blanchard et al. 2019; Crabbe and Flood 2021; Ferguson and Hartley 2022; Addison et al. 2000). These scholars propose individual factors that may influence the impact of such OP on YP include the consumer's personality traits, whether the consumer has experienced physical violence or SV, how violent the OP selected is and how frequently violent OP is watched. Socio-cultural factors include whether in the consumer's community, physical violence or SV is tolerated, discussion around sex and sexuality is open or repressed and the level of gender equality.

A call to action

Although research on the impacts of OP is nuanced and contested, the large body of literature highlighting the harmful impacts cannot be ignored. SV is globally rife, with women, girls, men, boys and LGBTQI+ people surviving incidents. Yet women, girls and LGBTQI+ individuals are the most common survivors (Hogg et al. 2020). SV can have extreme physical and psychological consequences, including insomnia, gut issues, weakened memory and concentration, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, stigmatisation and suicide (Burnay et al. 2019; UN Women 2020). This global prevalence of SV and its damaging outcomes arguably justifies caution around YP's OP exposure, as a potential influence on SV perpetration. We know that YP are exposed to OP, SV is widespread across OP and YP are highly impressionable to such depictions (Bridges et al. 2010; Crabbe and Flood 2021; Hajela et al. 2015). This knowledge arguably rationalises the need to urgently address OP exposure amongst YP. Otherwise the risk of exacerbating global SV is apparent.

Approaches to OP exposure amongst YP

Two main approaches to address YP's exposure to OP have prevailed. Firstly, regulation to prevent YP's exposure. Regulation can involve technological means, such as blocking certain websites, legislative means, like mandating stronger age-verification on pornography websites, or restrictive means with parents or carers prohibiting YP's access to technological devices (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Lala et al. 2020). Regulation can successfully protect YP from viewing harmful OP (Chandra et al. 2022; eSafety Commissioner 2022). Yet, this approach has weaknesses. YP may find creative ways to access technological devices or websites despite regulations. They also may unintentionally be exposed to OP through peers or family members. Additionally, prohibiting YP's access to internet devices prevents them from using online spaces in meaningful ways, such as to make creative content, engage in socio-political issues and maintain social connections (Chandra et al. 2022). Correspondingly, the education approach has emerged, to equip YP with knowledge and skills to curtail potential OP harms (Crabbe and Flood 2021). This approach entails critical thinking, media literacy, consent, healthy relationships and gender equality lessons for YP (Crabbe and Flood 2021). Such an approach is both rights- and strengths-based that posits YP have agency to make ethical, just decisions. Recommendations around this education approach will be further elaborated later in this paper.

Methodology

Case study approach

As noted in the introduction, this report adopts a GS case study, to depart from Western discourses that currently dominate OP and YP research. The Pacific was selected as a case study, because there is more data about OP and YP in this region, compared to other GS regions. However, research on this topic is negligible across all GS countries. So, the Pacific was chosen, instead of a specific Pacific country, to broaden research available for analysis. SV, particularly against women and girls, is distinctly rampant across the Pacific (Butler and Hill 2021). This also makes the Pacific pertinent to explore OP amongst YP, as an influence possibly intensifying SV. Moreover, this case study aims to commence wider inclusion of the GS within OP and YP research.

CLP-inspired approach

This study is inspired by CLP approaches to research and development. Given the time constraints and scope of this study, embodying a complete CLP approach was not feasible. Yet, CLP approaches informed this paper's primary research question of '*What do people in the Pacific say about OP and YP in their communities?*', as this enquiry aims to centralise local Pacific perspectives around OP and YP in their communities.

To elevate local Pacific voices around OP and YP, this investigation combines fragments of secondary qualitative research that capture local Pacific perspectives. Qualitative research is invoked, as it best engages and explores peoples' perspectives, through methods such as interviews and focus groups (FGs) (Adjrah et al. 2022; Hennick 2014). This methodology utilises secondary data because it was not possible to conduct primary research with overseas participants given project time constraints, financial restrictions and limited availabilities of Pacific contacts. Moreover, secondary qualitative research on OP and YP in the Pacific is still restricted; there are merely snippets of data across the literature. So, this report seeks to combine this limited research, to form a more complete picture of local Pacific outlooks on OP and YP in their communities.

This methodology does not substitute the need for genuine CLP and primary research that centralises Pacific people and perspectives on OP and YP in their communities. To genuinely dismantle dominant Western discourses on OP and YP, future research on this topic must be led by Pacific and other GS peoples, and engage these individuals first-hand through primary methods, like surveys or interviews. However, using a CLP-inspired approach that draws upon secondary qualitative data was the best means available for this study to commence centralisation of GS perspectives surrounding OP and YP.

Socio-cultural analysis

To better understand Pacific perspectives around OP and YP, this report conducts an analysis of Pacific socio-cultural dynamics. The use of secondary qualitative research elucidated what people in the Pacific say about OP and YP. Yet, there is no data explicating their perspectives on *why* they hold these views. Ideally, this information would be captured via primary or secondary qualitative research, to truly represent Pacific perspectives. However, a more postulating, analytical approach was needed to discern potential reasons behind Pacific perspectives on OP and YP. Therefore, this study uses qualitative and quantitative research to analyse key socio-cultural factors that might be influencing Pacific viewpoints on OP exposure amongst YP in their communities. However, reasons explicated from this socio-cultural analysis are hypothetical and subject to further qualitative research with Pacific locals.

Pacific case study findings

Local Pacific perspectives on OP and YP

Local perspectives affirm that YP in the Pacific are exposed to OP. One study that interviewed 898 university students and 64 university professors in PNG found that YP aged roughly 13 are watching OP (Kolodziejczyk 2015). An interactive workshop study with 96 YP aged 10-18, 58 parents and carers and 50 representatives from schools, government, CSOs, across Kiribati, PNG and Solomon Islands, yielded responses that confirmed YP in these regions are viewing OP (Lala et al. 2020). FGs with Pacific Island parents and carers, uncovered that participants' children are encountering violent OP (Dixon et al. 2010). 5,753 YP aged 10-25 engaged in surveys and FGs, across Fiji, Cook Islands, PNG, Kiribati, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Samoa, corroborated that OP is accessed and shared amongst Pacific YP (Butler and Hill 2021). Together, these local perspectives confirm Pacific YP's exposure to OP.

Local Pacific perspectives also indicate concern around OP exposure amongst YP. In the aforementioned study with PNG university students and professors, participants assert parents' deep worry about their children's easy access to OP (Kolodziejczyk 2015). Similarly, in the above-mentioned interactive study with YP and diverse YP wellbeing stakeholders across Kiribati, PNG and Solomon Islands, 82% of participants named sexually explicit and violent online materials, like OP, the greatest threat to YP online (Lala et al. 2020). Parents and carers in this study specified their concerns that OP is teaching YP to condone SV. YP from the above survey and FG study across Fiji, Cook Islands, PNG, Kiribati, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Samoa, contend that online media, including OP, is affecting the sexual lives of Pacific YP and needs urgent attention (Butler and Hill 2021). Uniting these local Pacific perspectives reveals trepidation across this region about YP's exposure to OP.

Speculative reasons OP amongst YP is a concern for Pacific locals

Analysing Pacific socio-cultural dynamics, there are four factors that are arguably elevating YP's exposure to OP as a concern for locals. These factors are explored below.

1. The rise of internet technology

Access to internet technology is rapidly expanding across the Pacific. Cable internet systems are being steadily rolled out to increase the affordability, speed and strength of internet connectivity (Butler and Hill 2021; Lala et al. 2020). Even for regional Pacific Islands, there are mounting upgrades to submarine, fibre-optic cable systems that enable higher-speed digital connectivity for remote regions separated by ocean (Lala et al. 2020). Ownership and use of internet-connected devices, like laptops, computers, tablets and smartphones is also increasing (Lala et al. 2020). This internet technology amplification is notably being experienced amongst Pacific YP, as they frequently have access to online devices either at home, at school or both (Bellerose et al. 2017; Butler and Hill 2021; Lala et al. 2020). The expansion of Pacific internet technology is set to continue, as Pacific governments have made strengthening digital connectivity a main priority within 2050 strategies (Lala et al. 2020).

This rise of internet technology across the Pacific is arguably one factor fuelling locals' concern around YP and OP. As digital expansion increases, so too does the likelihood of YP encountering harmful, inappropriate online content, including OP. Pacific locals may be alarmed by the rapidity of internet technology expansion, as it makes the potential of YP viewing such harmful content seem somewhat uncontrollable, without sufficient measures to keep pace and moderate what they see. Therefore, such rapid internet technology advances in the Pacific could be increasing concern amongst locals about their YP's exposure to OP.

2. Gender inequality and violence norms

Across many Pacific nations, gender inequality is deeply entrenched. Pacific societies commonly assume patriarchal order, with women perceived as inferior to men (Ali 2006; UNICEF et al. 2021). Women are frequently assumed to occupy the same status as children (Elliot et al. 2022), and girls are correspondingly presumed to occupy the lowest possible rung of the social hierarchy (Ali 2006). Such patriarchal standards are epitomised in norms that posit men as the powerful, breadwinners and women as subordinate, expected to stay home tending to child-rearing and housework (Elliot et al. 2022).

This gender inequality is fortified through norms of violence against women and girls. Violence is generally tolerated in the Pacific, especially to discipline children and resolve conflicts (Ali 2006; Elliot et al. 2022; Lala et al. 2020; UNICEF et al. 2021). Yet, due to patriarchal hierarchies, women and girls are more vulnerable to violence (Ali 2006). Such violence may be physical, such as hitting or beating, or sexual, including non-consensual touching, coercion or rape (UNICEF et al. 2021). From data available, 58.3% of women in PNG (National Statistical Office PNG 2019), 60% in Vanuatu (Vanuatu Women's Centre 2011), 64.1% in Fiji (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 2013) and 61% in Kiribati (Kiribati National Statistics Office 2019) have been physically and/or sexually abused by a male partner in their lifetimes. Further, for Pacific men to successfully perform masculinity and be perceived as a 'real' man by their community, they are often expected to demonstrate aggressive control of their wives and children (Elliot et al. 2022; UNICEF and UNFPA 2021). If men do not comply with this violent masculinity, they risk ridicule and stigmatisation (Elliot et al. 2022; UNICEF et al. 2021).

Such pervasive gender inequality and violence across the Pacific is arguably another factor stimulating concern amongst locals about YP's OP exposure. As discussed earlier, a large volume of OP depicts SV against women, by men (Bridges et al. 2010; Crabbe and Corlett 2023). So, perhaps Pacific locals are wary that YP will encounter this violent OP and become further conditioned to such male-perpetrated SV. Locals may fear that such violent, misogynistic OP will shape the next generation's beliefs, desires and behaviours, hence directly exacerbate female subordination and instances of SV against women and girls in the Pacific. Thereby, there might be concern in the Pacific that OP exposure amongst YP will reinforce their pre-existing issues of gender inequality and violence and inhibit progress to deconstruct these norms.

3. Religious, cultural taboos around sex

There are engrained religious, cultural taboos around sex in the Pacific. Traditional, Christian values, beliefs and institutions are widespread, guiding many peoples' practices and behaviours (Naz 2014). Such Christian outlooks denote sex as a private, sacred occurrence between husband and wife (Burke 2014). They correspondingly denounce open discussion of sex, as it may encourage deviance from this conservative, heterosexual norm (Butler and Hill 2021). These religious ideals are inextricably linked to cultural norms across the Pacific, given the extensiveness of the Christian tradition (Butler and Hill 2021; Naz 2014). Hence, a "culture of silence" around sex pervades Pacific schools, homes, religious and community environments (Butler and Hill 2021; New Zealand Parliamentary Group on Populations and Development 2012, p. 13). SCA programmatic staff that work across online and offline child abuse prevention in the Pacific likewise confirm these deep-seated religious, cultural taboos around sex.

These entrenched religious, cultural taboos around sex in the Pacific may also be elevating locals' concerns around YP and OP. Perhaps locals are troubled that the restricted space for YP to discuss sex with trusted adults will prompt YP to turn to OP to learn about sex, without being confined or punished by taboos. This becomes problematic, as when YP likely encounter SV in OP, there is no room for them to discuss such content with adults. Hence, they will likely come to perceive SV as normal and acceptable to enact, with no means to learn otherwise. Thus, locals may fear that the reduced capacity to discuss sex in the Pacific risks OP educating YP in line with commonplace SV depicted.

4. Limited action to address YP's exposure to OP

There is negligible action to address YP's exposure to OP in the Pacific. However, there are some recent initiatives attempting to enhance YP's online safety. There is legislative action underway in Fiji, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands to strengthen online security and protection for children (Lala et al. 2020). An Online Safety Commission was developed in 2018 in Fiji to enhance Fijians online safety, with a focus on protecting YP from online abuse and predation (Online Safety Commission 2023). There is a PNG Safer Internet Day Committee who run a campaign, in collaboration with the PNG government's National Information and Communications Technology department, to raise awareness around online harm mitigation, with key messages for parents to protect children online (Safer Internet Day 2023). Yet, there has been no specific action in response to OP exposure amongst YP. An extensive review of both in- and out-of-school sex education initiatives highlights an absence of discussion around YP's use of online media, including OP (Butler and Hill 2021). Additionally, YP engaged across Fiji, Cook Islands, PNG, Kiribati, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Samoa stated their yearning for more information and support to process and respond to sexually explicit online media (Butler and Hill 2021). This implies that Pacific YP currently lack adequate information or support in this area.

Such deficient action is another potential justification behind Pacific locals' concern around OP and YP in their communities. As discussed earlier, Pacific perspectives confirm awareness that their YP are exposed to OP. So, there might be unease amongst locals that despite this known exposure, nothing is being done to mitigate the potential harms of OP on YP. Locals may fret that there is insufficient action to protect and support YP when they inevitably encounter OP.

Findings implications

These findings indicate the need for action to address OP exposure amongst YP in the Pacific. The expressed concern amongst locals about YP's OP exposure implies necessity to develop initiatives to tackle this issue. Yet, this paper cannot propose specific solutions to address OP exposure amongst Pacific YP. Given the unique socio-cultural, religious, political, linguistic and economic dynamics in the Pacific, and any other community context, initiatives need to be locally devised, designed and implemented (MacDonald 2012). Otherwise, initiatives imposed can disrupt and disregard local needs and dynamics, and deny locals of agency and dignity to support themselves (Makhoul and Torjman 2012).

Recommendations: A way forward to protect YP

While approaches to address OP exposure amongst YP need to be context-specific and locally-led, there are recommendations from research that can inspire and guide practice to protect YP from OP harms, for the Pacific and beyond. However, these recommendations are subject to alteration or disregard, based on the unique community dynamics and needs.

These recommendations move beyond regulation approaches that prohibit YP's access to internet devices. They aim to protect YP's rights in the age of digital connectivity, to access and use online devices and environments (Livingstone and Third 2016). Internet technology provides a range of important opportunities for YP to learn, be entertained, make creative content, attain emotional, psychological support, strengthen or make new friendships, participate in civic or political conversations and access health information that might be taboo (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Chigona et al. 2021; Khazbak et al. 2021). YP have the right to reap the benefits of such online opportunities (Livingstone and Third 2016). Hence, to meet these rights, more innovative, adaptive approaches are needed to address OP exposure amongst YP, than simply occluding YP from accessing internet devices.

Extensive research to guide action

Comprehensive research is needed to inform action to address OP exposure amongst YP. Such research intends to better understand dynamics around YP and OP in a given community, so suitable approaches can be taken (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Guggisberg 2020). Research could investigate topics such as whether YP are exposed to OP, how frequently and what types of OP are consumed amongst YP, what demographics of YP are most exposed to OP, what types of OP are watched amongst different YP demographics, whether OP exposure amongst YP is deemed an issue by community members and why, whether initiatives exist to address YP's OP exposure and whether YP want support in this area. To ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance, such research should also be conducted in a CLP way (MacDonald 2012). Moreover, garnering such evidence can then appropriately guide what action needs to be taken, if any.

Youth-led approach

To effectively address OP exposure amongst YP, a youth-led approach is needed. This approach involves full participation of YP to devise and execute initiatives intended to serve and support YP (Ozer 2016). This accomplishes more relevant, suitable interventions for YP (Ballard et al. 2019; Bruhn et al. 2014). To fulfil this youth-led approach, a youth advisory group could be recruited to represent YP across diverse ages, gender-identifications, sexualities, abilities, races, ethnicities and religions (Mueller and Roholt 2013). This group would then work with government and other stakeholders to influence policies and initiatives (Richards-Schuster 2012) to address OP exposure amongst YP. YP should also be centralised in the deployment of initiatives. For instance, YP aged 10-25 from diverse Pacific nations stated their desire for sex and online media education to be led by peers and other YP they can relate to (Butler and Hill 2021). Hence, diverse YP from the community in question should also be recruited to facilitate initiatives to address OP exposure amongst YP.

Education to mitigate OP harms for YP

As OP exposure is somewhat inevitable amongst YP (Crabbe and Flood 2021), it is important to equip YP with knowledge and skills to mitigate the potential harms of OP. This can be achieved through early intervention education programs that support YP to critically evaluate and discuss inequalities and misinformation perpetuated by certain OP (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Parsons 2022; Rogers 2017; Adler et al. 2020). Such programs should also

include teachings about safe sex, consent, mutual pleasure and healthy relationships that are commonly absent in OP (Crabbe and Flood 2021).

To ensure such education programs are age-appropriate, they should be sequentially delivered and tailored to different age groups. Crabbe and Flood (2021) denote three stages for delivering age-appropriate lessons to mitigate OP harms for YP. Firstly, 'foundational learning' for younger, primary-school aged children, which includes more general teachings around gender equality, online safety, media influence, respectful relationships, and some critical-thinking, communication skills. Secondly, 'integrated learning' for late-primary to early-high-school aged YP, which invokes OP as part of broader sex education. For example, in sexual consent lessons, a scenario of OP being used to pressure someone into sex might be utilised, or in identity formation and sexual desire lessons, OP might be discussed as a powerful influence. Thirdly, 'specific learning' for mid- to late-high-school aged YP, where OP and its influences are explicitly discussed.

There are manifold considerations to ensure YP feel safe and respected in these education programs. Foremost, they should be sex-positive in regarding all consensual sexual activities as normal (Parsons 2022). This avoids shaming or stigmatising YP for any experiences, questions or comments raised and increases their comfortability to participate. They should also be inclusive of YP across different gender-identifications, sexualities, abilities, races, ethnicities and religions to avoid exclusion or discrimination (Crabbe and Flood 2021). Moreover, education programs in single-gender environments may enable girls and boys to more comfortably share views and experiences (Crabbe and Flood 2021). However, these environments are not inclusive of gender-fluid or non-binary YP (Devis-Devis 2018). So, while YP might be less inclined to share in mixed gender environments, these settings better include non-gender conforming YP, foster cross-gender dialogue and may enhance understanding and respect across genders (Ball et al. 2009; Crabbe and Flood 2021; Devis-Devis 2018).

These education programs should be delivered both in- and out-of-school. Crabbe and Flood (2021) divulge the significance of school-based education to address OP harms amongst YP. They suggest that because YP spend extensive time at school, this is an ideal location to reach a broad audience of YP. They also consider it schools' responsibility to protect students from foreseeable risks, which includes OP exposure. They propose such education programs can be easily combined with pre-existing school programs around violence prevention, health promotion, sexuality education and online safety. While such education programs should be delivered in schools, there are certain global regions and demographics where school enrolment and attendance are extremely low (Butler and Hill 2021). So, if these education programs are only deployed in schools, countless YP will be excluded from key learnings to mitigate OP harms. Therefore, these education programs also need to be delivered in out-of-school contexts, such as community centres or local government or CSO facilities, to reach non-school attending YP. Mobile outreach of such programs is also essential to include YP living in rural, remote areas.

Whole-of-community approach

To sufficiently mitigate OP harms for YP, a whole-of-community approach is needed. This approach implicates parents, carers, teachers, community and religious leaders and youth workers to support YP to process and critically evaluate depictions in OP (Chandra et al. 2022; Lala et al. 2020). Otherwise YP are left alone to digest potentially harmful content.

YP engaged across research note the heightened importance of parents and carers in providing such support surrounding online media (Butler and Hill 2021; Chandra et al. 2022; Lala et al. 2020). Parents and carers arguably play the most fundamental role in child development and are commonly central confidants and sources of support in YP's lives, especially for younger children (Chandra et al. 2022). So, parents and carers in particular must feel comfortable discussing OP with their YP to adequately support them and help mitigate potential harms. Yet, they

commonly report feeling discomfort, apprehension and ineptitude to discuss this topic with their children (Crabbe and Flood 2021; eSafety Commissioner 2022; Lala et al. 2020).

Thereby, there is a need for government, school or CSO-run trainings and workshops to equip parents and carers with sufficient knowledge and skills to appropriately and confidently discuss OP with YP, to diminish its potential harms (Crabbe and Flood 2021; Chandra et al. 2022). Such trainings are similarly important for other community members, including teachers, community leaders and youth workers, so that these individuals likewise feel prepared to discuss OP with YP (Butler and Hill 2021; Crabbe and Flood 2021; Guggisberg 2020). Ultimately, this whole-of-community approach, facilitated through specified trainings, will ensure that YP can turn to trusted adults in their lives when encountering harmful OP. This will allow YP to gain essential support through critical conversation, instead of being punished with device removal.

Increased government funding

Government funding is essential to address OP exposure amongst YP. Without sufficient financial support, initiatives to mitigate OP harms amongst YP, such as recommendations discussed above, cannot be realised (eSafety Commissioner 2022; Lala et al. 2020). Thereby, national governments need to consider YP's OP exposure a priority societal issue. This prioritisation will then lead national governments to allocate necessary finances to YP-affiliated entities, such as certain CSOs and government departments, to deploy urgently needed initiatives in this area.

Greater accountability of digital industry

Digital industry corporations must play an active role in addressing YP's exposure to OP, as YP are currently using their diverse digital platforms to access such harmful content in the first place. Therefore, digital corporations arguably have an ethical responsibility to improve YP's safety while using their platforms. To take greater accountability to protect YP from harmful content online, digital corporations commonly introduce stricter age-verification, or attempt to delete harmful content as it arises (Chandra et al. 2022). However, these age-verification measures can arguably be easily overcome and attempting to remove all harmful content is a seemingly cumbersome approach.

Safety by Design has been suggested as a divergent approach for digital corporations to protect YP online. This approach entails extensive consultation of and collaboration with YP to inform safer, more appropriate digital platform design and monitoring for YP (Chandra et al. 2022; eSafety Commissioner 2022). This approach is favourable, as it enables digital corporations to take greater accountability for YP's safety, in accordance with YP's perspectives and needs. Such active participation of YP will likewise benefit digital corporations. It will enable them to ultimately devise more creative, meaningful solutions to improve the standard and safety of their platforms for YP, as a principal demographic of digital consumers.

Further, digital corporations ought to enter partnerships with CSOs that work in the child safety and protection space, such as SCA. YP-affiliated CSOs maintain key access to YP and expert knowledge on ways to protect and collaborate with YP. Whereas digital corporations maintain greatly influential power as a multibillion-dollar industry, widely used by YP, and expert understandings of digital environments. Hence, such CSOs and digital corporations should work together to share knowledge, expertise, resources and experience, to deploy multifaceted initiatives for early intervention and prevention of OP harms for YP.

Conclusion

This report discussed the nature of OP and the associated harms of YP's exposure to this media. While not *all* OP is lethal for YP, mainstream portrayals of misogynistic SV can influence YP to expect, desire and enact such behaviours. At a time when SV is globally rife, OP exposure amongst YP must be addressed, as a potentially contributing influence on future SV perpetration.

To shift away from dominant Western discourses surrounding OP and YP, this paper conducted a case study of the Pacific regarding this topic. Correspondingly, this report enquired: *What do people in the Pacific say about OP exposure amongst YP in their communities?* In response to this question, this report found that OP exposure is prevalent amongst Pacific YP and locals are concerned about this exposure. From these findings, the secondary question was posed: *Why is OP exposure amongst YP in the Pacific a key concern amongst locals?* This paper postulated four factors that may be fuelling locals' concern around OP exposure amongst their YP including: the rise of internet technology, gender inequality and violence norms, religious, cultural taboos around sex and limited action to address YP's OP exposure.

Initiatives to address OP exposure amongst YP must be locally-led to ensure suitability of interventions and locals' self-determination. However, this report suggested recommendations to protect YP from OP harms, for the Pacific and beyond, that are subject to adaptation or disregard as per unique community needs and dynamics. These recommendations include engaging further research to inform action, adopting a youth-led approach, administering education programs to mitigate OP harms, embracing a whole-of-community approach, increasing government funding for initiatives in this area and strengthening accountability on behalf of digital corporations to protect YP's safety online.

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