



T | 604.872.8212 F | 604.876.8450 E | info@rapereliefshelter.bc.ca

www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca

PORNOGRAPHY HARMS WOMEN: Vancouver Rape Relief's Submission to Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics - House of Commons

By Sophia Hladik

February 17, 2021

Frontline perspective

Many women who call our crisis line are detrimentally impacted by pornography. Women tell us that former male partners blackmail them by threatening to distribute intimate photographs and videos. Taken consensually at the time, these images and videos are weaponized as an act of humiliation and control, unless she agrees to have sex with him again or resume their relationship. Women in our transition house tell us that the abusive husbands they are fleeing have profited off pornographic videos of them for years and continue to do so. Women tell us that their rape, as a child, was filmed and now continues to reappear on PornHub and other pornographic websites, no matter how many times it has been reported. We assist and support women in the process of requesting that these images and videos are removed, which we often have to do over and over again.

Some women tell us that they were raped and that the rapist filmed the attack. We support women who decide to use the police in reporting these acts of violence against them, and advocate for a serious and full investigation. The police often tell women that there is no proof that a video is distributed by the men they name because the men are doing it anonymously. Further, women have been told by police that they cannot access videos on men's phones because they lack the technology to search locked phones. We see this as an utter failure and even refusal of the police to protect women from having their rape videos being distributed online.

The impact of pornography on women

"Pornography is the theory -- rape is the practice" - Robin Morgan

It is important to emphasize that all women are harmed by the existence of pornography. Feminists have long been critical of pornography because it objectifies women, depicts and normalizes violence against women, and the women used and abused for the creation of pornography are harmed by the debasing, violent acts. Women tell us that their male partners who raped or beat them during sexual acts were frequent users of violent pornography. Also, these men "recreated" pornographic scenes with their women partners including acts of strangulation and anal rape. Women tell us that men explicitly say to them that the experience of violating and hurting them was "better than pornography."

In January of this year, it became public knowledge that Bradley Barton, the man who has been charged with the killing of Cindy Gladue, had searched for pornography focused on women's vaginas "getting ripped" or torn by "huge objects" just nine days prior to her death. Cindy Gladue died in Barton's hotel room due to the blood loss caused by an eleven-centimetre laceration to her vagina. Barton admitted he caused her wounds. Barton's behaviour exemplifies what we know from our frontline work: watching pornography that is inherently degrading and violent toward women influences men's real-life misogynist conduct toward women.

Profits first

Pornography is an immensely profitable industry and MindGeek has been making billions of dollars off the exploitation of women through rape videos, "revenge porn" and other violent pornography. MindGeek refused to act in response to women begging them to remove videos depicting them because these videos are a significant source of profit. MindGeek executives need to be held responsible and accountable for their active participation in the exploitation of women and girls.

Recommendations

We applaud Serena Fleites, Rose Kalemba and the many other women who, at great personal risk and cost, exposed MindGeek for continuously profiting off the crimes committed against women and girls. We applaud the House of Commons Ethics Committee for taking an important step to redress these harms.

We recommend that:

1. David Tassillo, Feras Antoon and other MindGeek owners and executives are held criminally responsible for knowingly hosting rape videos and "revenge porn."
2. MindGeek immediately release information about the individuals uploading this content, such as their IP addresses to the police, so that they can be held responsible under Canadian criminal law and the laws of the countries in which these individuals reside.
3. The Ethics Committee recommend that funding be invested in public education about the negative impacts of pornography, including in the school system for children, using age-appropriate curriculum. As well, that the sex education offered in the school systems is comprehensive and emphasizes healthy and mutually respectful sexual relationships.

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter was founded in 1973 and is the oldest rape crisis centre in Canada operating since 1973. Every year we respond to approximately 1200 new women who have experienced battering, sexual harassment, rape, incest and prostitution.