

Pornography Production Harm in Sweden: Filmed Prostitution is Inseparable from Non-Filmed Prostitution

October 17, 2023, Stockholm

Melissa Farley, Erica Bergkvist, Merly Asbogard, Johanna Pethrus, Mikaela Lannergren, Luba Fein, Nacima B.Jerari

Executive summary

In this report we present research evidence that pornography cannot be separated from prostitution or trafficking. We base our conclusion on 104 interviews of women and men in the sex trade most of whose prostitution was photographed, videotaped, or livestreamed.

We describe the parallels between prostitution, pornography production, and trafficking with respect to methods of recruitment, racism, economic inequality, sex inequality, specific harms perpetrated by pimps and by sex buyers, coercion, and childhood antecedents that increased vulnerability. We describe some legislation that could hold accountable these perpetrators of harm to those whose prostitution is filmed.

In our interviewees' lives, there was no clear differentiation between online advertising for pornography and advertising for prostitution, or between online trafficking and online pornography, or between the between the online and offline sex trade.

What we learned about pornography production harms from our research

50% of our interviewees identified as Swedish. The other half had multi-ethnic cultural backgrounds or identified as migrating from countries other than Sweden. A third of interviewees who were not ethnically Swedish experienced racist verbal abuse related to their skin color or cultural or religious backgrounds.

Interviewees had much sexual and other physical abuse in childhood. A third had been in out-of-home placements such as foster care. More than a third had sexualized photos taken of themselves as children.

What was (not) taught in schools' sex education classes?

Interviewees were taught about male sexual pleasure twice as often as female sexual pleasure. Information about consent in sexual relationships, prostitution, pornography, and sexual violence were not adequately addressed in sex education classes.

Where did prostitution and pornography take place?

Three quarters of our interviewees were prostituted online via webcams or live chats.

81% of the pornography was produced using cell phones

80% of all prostitution was perpetrated in private homes, hotels, or private parties.

Half of our interviewees had engaged in “transactional” or “survival” sex, reflecting their poverty and lack of alternatives.

How many of our interviewees had been raped?

84% of our interviewees had been raped while in the sex trade.

Rapists included sex buyers, boyfriends, pimps, pornography fans, pornography producers, pornography actors, and pornography directors.

27% had been prevented from using a condom during the production of pornography, an act that is considered a life-threatening assault by some courts.

What applications were used for advertising, communicating and doing business with pornography sex buyers?

Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Tinder, and Twitter were the most commonly used applications.

What websites were used for uploading nude photos and other pornography?

Rosa Sidan, dating websites such as Badoo, PornHub, OnlyFans, and SnapchatPremium were the most commonly used platforms.

Were women and men paid for their pornography?

Half of our research participants *were not paid* after sending their pornography to sex buyers, or weren't paid for uploads to websites. Pornography income is lower than non-filmed prostitution, and non-payment is a common scam.

Are pornpimps understood as individuals who engage in pimping, trafficking and coercive control?

No. Pornpimps tend to be named managers, producers, pornographers, account managers, club owners, protectors, friends. These corrupt businessmen often gave our interviewees a financial benefit for referring their friends.

Does coercion happen during the production of pornography?

Yes. Three quarters of our interviewees had been coerced to perform what a pornography sex buyer saw and demanded.

During their prostitution, 64% had been filmed or photographed *without consent*.

During pornography production, 71% were coerced into performing sex acts they did not want to perform.

Is organized crime involved in Swedish pornography production?

Yes. A fourth of our interviewees reported gang involvement. In her pornography production, a woman explained, “A violent man called the shots. He makes money on drugs, weapons, and prostitution. I have never seen *him* do anything but he has great influence over his running boys. He was OG [Original Gangsters].” Other criminal gangs operating in Sweden were Hell's Angels, Eastern European or Albanian Mafias, and Bandidos.

What methods were used to process payment for pornography?

Swish, bank-to-bank transfers, PayPal, Mastercard, and Visa.

What banks were involved in payments for sex acts in pornography and prostitution?

Swedbank, Nordea, Handelsbanken and Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken (SEB) - the four largest banks in Sweden- were entangled and implicated in the transfer of money from pornography and prostitution exploiters to the people whom they exploited.

Does torture take place in the production of pornography?

Yes. Sex acts described in the report that are perpetrated against women in prostitution and filmed as pornography *are the same* as the acts that legally define torture: verbal sexual harassment, unwanted sex acts, forced nudity, rape, sexual mocking, physical sexual harassment, and not permitting basic hygiene.

What are adverse health consequences of pornography and prostitution?

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

81% of our interviewees were diagnosed with PTSD, an extremely high rate even when compared to combat veterans, battered women, and torture survivors

Dissociation. Our interviewees had extremely high rates of dissociation, indicating that they felt emotionally and physically overwhelmed. Dissociation is a response to uncontrollable events in which the mind detaches from one's current emotional or physical state. Dissociation occurs during extreme stress among prisoners of war who are tortured, among children who are being sexually assaulted, and among women being battered, raped, prostituted, and when their prostitution is filmed.

Injuries from violence and poor physical health

77% of our interviewees suffered head injuries.

Many described lifelong violence, and had suffered extreme violence during prostitution and pornography production.

Are suicide attempts, non-suicidal self injury (NSSI), and dissociation connected?

Yes. Sex as a form of intentional self-harm, prostitution as self-harm, suicide attempts, and other intentional self-harm such as cutting or burning - clustered together. Our interviewees endorsed those harmful behaviors at rates of 63% to 71%. All of these self-harming behaviors were connected with dissociation.

Who are 'porn fans' or 'porn followers'?

An interviewee explained *"I would not call them followers, they are johns and a john is someone who, for example, buys cam."*

54% of our interviewees had been threatened via text and 39% had been doxed (personal information was released to family or employers).

What services did interviewees need?

Our interviewees who were involved in pornography and other prostitution told us they needed individual counseling, peer support, medical care, self-defense training, a home or safe place, legal help, and job training.

How did interviewees assess 9 different services available to them in Sweden?

Interviewees discussed the helpfulness or lack of helpfulness of substance abuse services, unemployment services, physical and mental health services, housing, social services, domestic violence services, and police. These women and men in pornography

and prostitution expressed a need for services that were less fragmented. They hoped for better inter-agency communication.

Are there legal actions that can be used to hold pornpimps and pornography sex buyers accountable for the harm described here?

Yes. We conclude our report with descriptions of criminal charges and legal actions against perpetrators that are ongoing in Canada, France, and the United States.

In this report, we learned from the experts - women and men who have experienced pornography production. Here are some examples of their words from our report:

You get money for having sex, it's as simple as that. The only difference is that one is documented and the other is not.

It eats you up from the inside. It's like cancer.

I'm a professional rape victim.

When it comes to porn, a lot of people think that there will be a studio. It could just as well be a filmed abuse. The viewer will never know. The viewer could never know if there is a consent. And, even if there was a consent, the consequences are still there.

The same person who sold me - he was also there to film me. So he was both a pimp and a porn producer, he was a sort of jack-of-all-trades.

Pornography can haunt you for years. Films can be made public and destroy everything - relationships and jobs.

Pornography is heartbreaking in many ways. You are nobody, a punching machine, a wank glove, but not a human being.

The gay world for guys is so extreme, selling and buying sex, there are no boundaries. It's laughed at if you get drugged into unconsciousness and then get fucked.

Everyone who buys sex is a rapist.

Prostitution taught me nothing about sex but plenty about violent men.