

## Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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1, The fundamental issue that must be addressed to reduce or eliminate domestic violence is pornography.

Pornography has a devastating anti-social effect on children and adolescents, and there is evidence available that boys in particular are being exposed to it as young as eight years of age. Porn distorts developing concepts of relationships and acceptable behaviour; it precludes the formation of respectful and caring relationships and this continues into adulthood.

A very experienced school counsellor told me that viewing porn is more harmful and has a longer-lasting (often life-long) negative effect than taking drugs. She said that while people can get off drugs, porn cannot be removed from people's minds; they cannot 'unlearn' the anti-social and dehumanising effects. At the school where she works, some adolescent boys develop impotence in their early teens and this is often associated with ongoing anti-social behaviours, suicidal ideation, and occasionally suicide. She said that in girls, it creates an expectation and long-lasting acceptance of bullying and abuse.

I do not believe that making penalties heavier and heavier will have any effect if the root causes – porn combined with drug-taking, alcohol and habitual disrespect – are not addressed at root. Australian society seems to be taking a 'drugs are okay – everyone does it' attitude. The same is true of porn. According to researchers, 100% of Australian males have viewed porn at least once between the ages of 15 and 29. Sadly, many Australian men now think porn is harmless and normal. No wonder there's a huge incidence of domestic and family violence. Porn is rarely mentioned but is a key factor. It is the elephant in the room.

There's hope. Ballina Rotary Club have run a successful campaign in schools and the community that has resulted in a very significantly reduced incidence of domestic and family violence in their area. Early education and community involvement have been key to this. If youngsters are taught to say a firm no to porn, and to drugs and anti-social behaviours, and *yes to respectful relationships*, society can begin to heal, as it has in Ballina.

I recommend that Government funding be provided for early (and continuing) education regarding respectful relationships, and that the Government adopt Ballina Rotary's successful strategy on DFV.

2. It is imperative that the Courts deal with cases of domestic and family violence and coercive control with the safety and happiness of children as their highest priority. Every child in Australia has the right to a safe and pleasant childhood, and it is disgraceful that this is not given the highest priority in every case.

I am aware of an ugly situation in Mackay, which is known to the Family Court and Child Welfare, where an 18 month old child is forced to spend two supervised sessions/week with her father despite the fact that he has threatened to kill her and her mother, and recently dislocated her elbow. The 'supervisor' initially lied about the injury, and a doctor appears to have altered and minimised the report of the initial doctor at the hospital where the dislocation was treated. This amounts to a crime against the child's human rights, and against the mother's rights in that she cannot adequately protect her daughter from violence. I am happy to provide details of this case to the appropriate person/s.

I recommend that the courts prioritise children's safety and wellbeing above all other matters, and that one-size-fits-all laws regarding parental 'rights' be urgently reviewed.