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Committee Secretariat
Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee
ETISBC
Parliament House
Brisbane 4000

To whom it may concern

Thank you for your invitation to Our Watch to provide a submission to the Queensland Parliament Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee's inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools.

Our Watch is an independent, not for profit organisation established by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments in 2013. All States and Territories have been invited to join, and since establishment the South Australian, Northern Territory, Tasmanian, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australian Governments have also become members.

Our Watch works to drive nation-wide change in the social norms, structures, attitudes and practices that underpin and support violence against women and their children.

I congratulate the Queensland Parliament for initiating this important inquiry, and its determination to assess how delivery of respectful relationships education in Queensland state Schools could be improved.

This intent aligns strongly with Our Watch's mandate, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Queensland Government in the years to come to prevent violence against women and their children before it starts.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Barry
Chief Executive Officer

OUR WATCH

SUBMISSION TO THE QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING THE DELIVERY OF RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION RELEVANT TO THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS

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About Our Watch

Our Watch is an independent, not for profit organisation established by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments in 2013. All States and Territories have been invited to join, and since establishment the South Australian, Northern Territory, Tasmanian, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australian Governments have become members.

Our vision is shared with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan), namely an Australian community free from violence against women and their children.

The specific mandate of Our Watch is to focus on the *prevention* of violence against women and their children. We aim to provide leadership at national, state, regional and local levels to drive change in the social norms, structures, attitudes and practices that underpin and support violence against women and their children. Our Watch has four key areas of work:

- Design and deliver public campaigns that engage and educate individuals and the community
- Promote a sustained and constructive public conversation
- Enable organisations, networks and communities to effect change
- Influence public policy, systems and institutions

As an organisation focused on *prevention*, Our Watch is extremely encouraged to see respectful relationships education, a well-recognised strategy for primary prevention of violence against women, as a part of this inquiry.

About this submission

Our Watch has identified children and young people as a key population to work with and for in the prevention of violence against women. This is in recognition of the important, powerful role that the younger generation can take in driving cultural change but also because of the violence that is experienced by young women and the exposure of children to violence experienced by their mothers. As such Our Watch has several areas of work that are of relevance to this inquiry including:

- a. Implementation of *Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women*, developed by Our Watch in partnership with Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, and launched in November 2015¹

¹ Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, *Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2015). The framework draws on substantial background research undertaken in 2015, including a detailed literature review exploring the evidence for what drives violence against women, and a series of specially commissioned 'think pieces'. *Change the Story*, and the two 'Framework Foundations' papers that contain this background research can all be found on the Our Watch website: [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework)

- b. Leading work on respectful relationships education in schools, both at an implementation level in Victoria, and as part of our engagement with policy development in several Australian jurisdictions²
- c. Research and policy development on young people and prevention of violence against women, including recent research on young people's relationships in the digital environment with the Alannah & Madeleine Foundation³
- d. Delivering (and conducting research and evaluation to inform) *The Line*, Our Watch's national evidence-based, social marketing and behaviour change campaign for young people aged 12 to 20 years and their influencers. A key part of the campaign is an active Facebook page which prompts discussions about sex, dating and relationships with the audience while challenging attitudes and behaviours that support violence.⁴

This submission covers all the issues outlined in the Inquiry's terms of reference and:

- provides an overview of respectful relationships education as an essential component of a broader effort to prevent gender-based violence,
- provides an overview of the delivery of respectful relationships education in Queensland,
- sets out the evidence regarding the prevalence of sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images and other sexualised use of technology by young people in Australia,
- outlines how respectful relationships education can equip young people to have equal, positive and respectful relationships using digital technology, and
- provides recommendations for the improvement of the delivery of respectful relationships education in Queensland.

² Our Watch's work on respectful relationships can be found online: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Respectful-relationships-education> including *Evidence paper: Respectful relationships education in schools* (2015) <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/4a61e08b-c958-40bc-8e02-30fde5f66a25/Evidence-paper-respectful-relationships-education-AA-updated.pdf.aspx>; *Respectful relationships education in schools: The beginnings of change. Final evaluation report* (2016) https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/634efd9c-dd7d-4e66-ba2c-5dc4780cff2f/RREiS_R3_Final_AA.pdf.aspx; *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit* <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Respectful-relationships-education/Whole-School-Approach-Toolkit>

³ See further: Our Watch, *Policy Brief: Working with Children and Young People* (2015), <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/MediaLibraries/OurWatch/our-publications/OurWatch-PolicyBrief5-Workingwithchildren.pdf>; Our Watch and Plan International Australia, *"Don't Send Me That Pic": Online sexual harassment and Australian girls* (2016), <https://www.plan.org.au/learn/who-we-are/blog/2016/03/02/dont-send-me-that-pic>

⁴ See further: *The Line* <http://www.theline.org.au/>; *Tracking Change: midterm snapshot evaluation findings for The Line campaign* (2017) <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/4aee829c-4478-42a4-83fc-b39781cfcdb8/The-Line-Tracking-Change-Midterm-Snapshot-Report-FINAL.pdf.aspx>

Note on language

Our Watch understands the Queensland Parliament relevant legislation focuses on ‘domestic and family violence’ however this submission consciously adopts the term ‘violence against women’ as a conceptualisation that overlaps with ‘domestic and family violence’ and other types of violence experienced by young women and pertinent to this inquiry, including image-based abuse and non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

‘Violence against women’ is at once a broader and narrower term than ‘domestic and family violence’. Broader, because it includes forms of violence against women that happen outside the ‘domestic and family’ context (such as non-partner sexual assault, or violence experienced in a ‘dating’ context, particularly by younger women), and narrower, because the term ‘family and domestic violence’ can be understood to include forms of intimate partner violence that are not defined by male perpetration and female victimisation, such as violence in same sex relationships and female-perpetrated partner violence (and sometimes non-partner violence that happens in a domestic context, such as elder abuse or adolescent violence against parents).

While we recognise the importance of addressing these other forms of violence, our reason for using the terminology of ‘violence against women’ is to align with and accurately reflect the international evidence base that we draw on. Globally, the bulk of individual studies in this field have examined factors correlated with *male intimate partner violence against women* and/or *male sexual assault of women* (partner and non-partner), and the effectiveness of strategies to prevent this kind of violence. The international analyses reviewing such literature have recognised the significant overlap between the factors found to drive men’s intimate partner violence and those found to drive, for example, non-intimate partner sexual assault, and frequently collated the evidence under the broader term of (men’s) violence against women.

Further, the vast majority acts that fall under the definition of ‘family and domestic violence’ are committed by men against their female partners (or former partners), meaning the use of the term ‘violence against women’, helps foreground the highly gendered patterns of perpetration and victimisation.

Finally, the scope of ‘violence against women’ aligns with that of COAG’s National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, which all Australian governments have committed to implement.

Key definitions

Sexting: Our Watch notes a range of definitions on sexting and a range of behaviours that can come under this term including:

1. Sending and receiving sexually explicit written text messages
2. Sending a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo/video of self (a 'nude pic' or 'nude')
3. Sending a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo/video of someone else
4. Receiving a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo/video of someone else

While various definitions exist, one of particular utility for the Committee is from the Victorian Law Reform Committee - "[sexting is] the creating, sharing, sending or posting of sexually explicit messages or images via the internet, mobile phones or other electronic devices by people, especially young people" (Victorian Parliamentary Law Reform Committee, *Inquiry into sexting* (May 2013)).

An image which has been sent consensually as a sext can become image-based abuse when it is distributed without the consent of the subject of the image.

Image-based abuse: In line with emerging evidence on the issue, Our Watch conceptualises image-based abuse to include the non-consensual creation of intimate or sexual photos or videos, in addition to the sharing of such images on social media or websites without consent. Image-based abuse may also include perpetrators threatening to share images. (Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley, 'Image-Based Sexual Abuse: More Than Just "Revenge Porn"' (2016) *Research Spotlight: University of Birmingham*; Nicola Henry, Anastasia Powell and Asher Flynn, 'Not Just "Revenge Pornography": Australians' Experiences of Image-Based Abuse – A Summary Report' (May 2017)).

Summary of Recommendations

Our Watch recommends the following for the Committee's consideration:

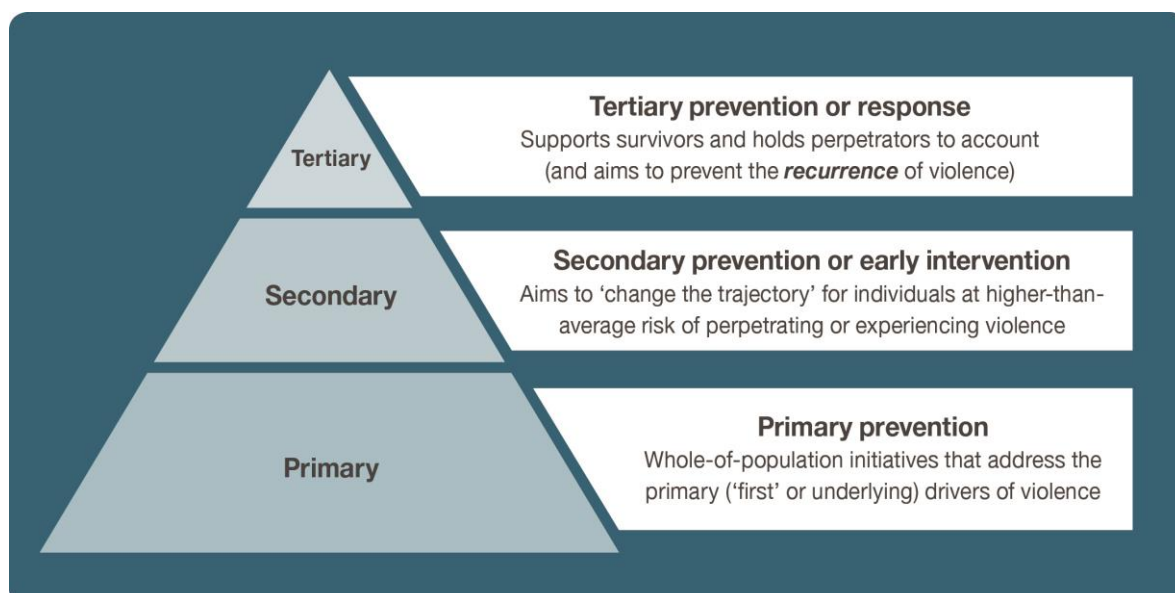
1. Rather than developing an independent program addressing young people's experiences in the digital environment, look to build and strengthen the current Respectful Relationships program developed by Queensland DET in a way that fully incorporates content on the specific issues relevant to the digital environment.
2. Ensure that content for students does not reproduce or perpetuate sex and gender norms that contribute to gender-based violence and that this risk is highlighted in the professional development and further resources for teachers and other school staff.
3. Recognising the significant data gap with regards to the experiences and needs of Queensland secondary school students with respect to sex and respectful relationships education, conduct a survey of Queensland secondary school students to gather data about their needs from sex and respectful relationships education, particularly in relation to their use of digital technology.
4. Recognising the need for further support for teachers and other school staff, provide and promote guidance and resources to schools and teachers to assist in the delivery of respectful relationships education, particularly content that is relevant to emerging issues such as young people's use of digital technology.
5. Recognising the need for further support for teachers, provide and promote further training, support and professional development to teachers to deliver respectful relationships education curriculum in classrooms, including content about young people's use of digital technology in their relationships.
6. Ensure that the Queensland respectful relationships program comprehensively addresses and incorporates the evidence base for this work including all seven core elements for respectful relationships education:
 - a. address drivers of gender-based violence;
 - b. have a long term vision, approach and funding;
 - c. take a whole school approach; establishing mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort;
 - d. ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement;
 - e. provide resources and support for teachers; and
 - f. use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum.

7. Support schools, teachers and other staff to implement a whole of school approach to respectful relationships education, including in meaningfully engaging with the school community, through access to policies, resources and training and professional development.
8. Monitor and evaluate the take up and impact of current approaches to respectful relationships education in Queensland to identify strengths and challenges in terms of sustainability, addressing the gendered drivers, attitudinal and behavioural change, and the efficacy of the whole school approach.

Respectful relationships education as primary prevention of gender-based violence

The term 'primary prevention' draws from public health and refers to changing attitudes, behaviours, norms and practices to prevent an undesirable consequence. Just like other major social and health issues such as smoking and drink driving, gender-based violence can be prevented by working in many different ways, and using different strategies to address key drivers and stop violence before it starts. Figure 1 shows how primary prevention relates to other areas of work (termed 'secondary prevention', otherwise known as 'early intervention', and 'tertiary prevention' or 'response').

Figure 1: Prevention Triangle



Primary prevention requires changing the social conditions that excuse, justify or even promote violence against women and their children. A primary prevention approach works across the whole population to address the attitudes, practices and power differentials that drive violence against women and their children.¹

The education system offers powerful leverage for primary prevention work. In conjunction with a comprehensive program of activity across other settings, evidence-based and properly funded respectful relationships education throughout the school system could create the generational change needed to free Australia from gender-based violence.²

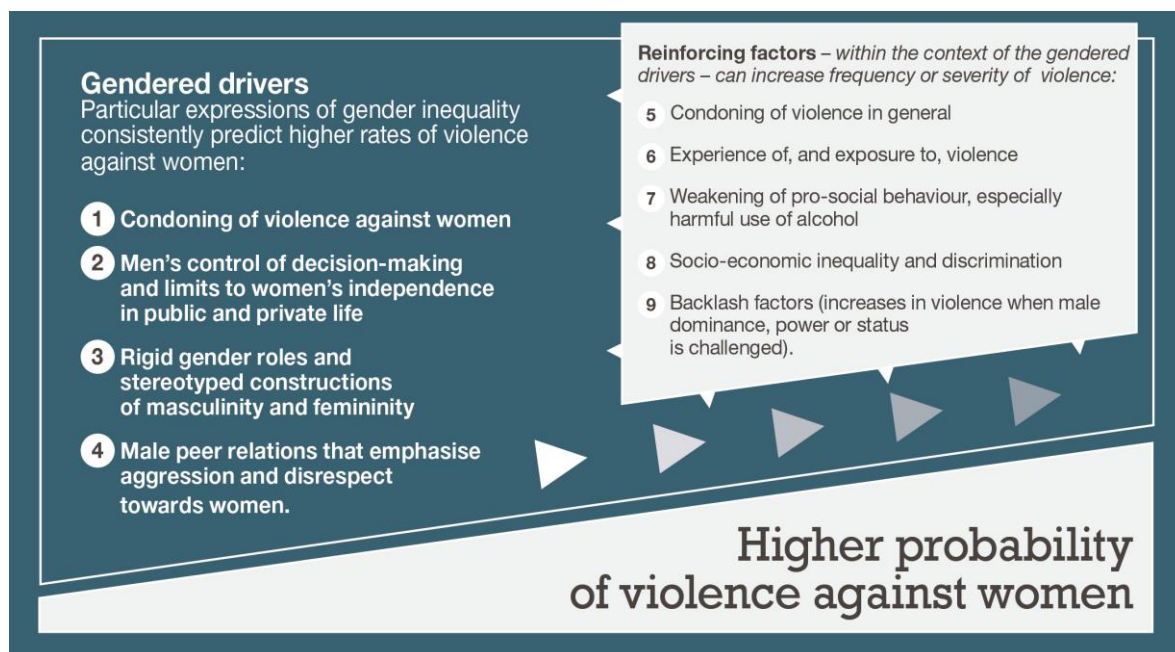
Research has found that factors associated with gender inequality are the most consistent predictors of violence against women, and explain its gendered patterns. There are four particular expressions of gender inequality which have been shown to be most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women, called the gendered drivers of violence against women:³

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence
- Rigid gender roles and identities
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women

Initiatives and approaches seeking to prevent violence against women, including respectful relationships education, are fundamentally about addressing these gendered drivers of violence.⁴

Change the Story recognises that there are also a range of reinforcing factors (see image 2 below) that within the context of gendered drivers can increase the frequency and severity of violence. However alone they do not drive violence against women.

Figure 2: Gendered drivers and reinforcing factors



Respectful relationships education is a well established strategy of primary prevention and is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence.⁵

To be able to achieve its aim, respectful relationships education must incorporate the following core elements of best practice:

- Address drivers of gender-based violence
- Have a long term vision, approach and funding
- Take a whole school approach
- Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated efforts
- Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement
- Provide resources and support for teachers
- Use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum⁶

Respectful relationships education in Queensland

Respectful relationships education is now embedded in the Australian curriculum. In the Third Action Plan 2016-19 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (the National Plan), the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments agreed to:

Support schools and teachers to deliver age-appropriate and evidence-based respectful relationships education to all school children covering sexual violence, gender equality issues and a range of other relationships issues and tailored to vulnerable cohorts (Key Action 1.3).

The *Not Now Not Ever* report recommends that Queensland Government leads and facilitates the introduction of programs in state schools to embed through the school life of all secondary and primary state schools a culture that emphasises developing and maintaining respectful relationships, respecting self and gender equality (recommendation 24).

In responding to the report, the Queensland Government Department of Education and Training has developed a respectful relationships education program for Prep to Year 12 students. We understand that the Prep to Year 10 materials were built on the Australian Curriculum Health and Physical education focus area and note that this approach can be limited in drawing on a gendered analysis to the issue that respect relationships education is setting out to address. Our Watch acknowledges that through the *Queensland Second Action Plan of the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy* there is a commitment to maintain and promote the respectful relationships education program website and conduct an annual review of the program to ensure best practice and current research is reflected in the program.⁷ This is alongside a commitment to “promote a whole school approach to develop respectful relationships that utilises curriculum materials and resources, school pastoral care opportunities and specialised evidence informed programs by non-government organisations”.

Our Watch encourages the Queensland Department of Education and Training, through the annual review to seek input from key stakeholders and academics to continue to build the approach to meet all seven core elements of best practice respectful relationships education.

The Queensland Department of Education and Training has provided access to an online module to provide foundational information about domestic and family violence to its staff. It is now rolling out professional development to all Managers and Principals to build their knowledge regarding domestic and family violence and develop their skills in responding to employees who may be victims or perpetrators.

The Queensland Government Department of Education and Training is a member of the National Respectful Relationships Education Expert Group, which is convened by Our Watch. The Group brings together governments, education stakeholders, non-government organisations and organisations working with and for young people, to share knowledge and work towards the vision of every Australian child receiving best practice respectful relationships education.

How prevalent is sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images, and other sexualised use of technology in Queensland state schools?

Currently there is no available prevalence data on sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images or other sexualised use of technology in Queensland state schools. This is not atypical. Australian based and international research on prevalence of sexting behaviours among young people is limited by a number of factors including:

- sensitivities about asking young people (in particular minors) about their sexual behaviour
- legal issues with asking young people (in particular minors) to disclose what is in many cases considered creation and/or possession of child pornography
- lack of or nonspecific definitions of 'sexting' and conflation between consensual and non-consensual activity
- the rapid development of technology used by young people and the community more broadly makes it difficult for research to keep up with emerging practices

Sexting

While there are no datasets that speak solely to the Queensland state school student population, two recent studies (2013 and 2015) suggest that around half of the young people surveyed have participated in some form of sexting behaviour. This shows that a range of sexting practices can now be considered normal sexual behaviour for Australian young people.⁸

The prevalence studies have also revealed key themes about young people's engagement in sexting practices:⁵

⁵ See key definitions on page 7.

1. Older teenagers are significantly more likely engage in sexting behaviours (such as sending or receiving explicit images) than those who are younger
2. Young people who are sexually active are more likely to report sexting behaviours, suggesting that they can be considered normal sexual behaviour for young people
3. Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are more likely to send sexual pictures or videos of themselves than heterosexual young people
4. Young people who were in some kind of relationship, particularly those in a long-term relationship, are more likely to have sent a sexual image or video of themselves than those who were not in a relationship or those who had 'just started seeing someone'

The Fifth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health, conducted with over 2,000 Year 10, 11 and 12 students in 2013, provides insight into the broad range of sexting practices including found that:

- ***sending and receiving of sexually explicit written text messages*** were the most common sexting behaviours for both males (46% had sent and 55% had received) and females (41% had sent and 54% had received).
- ***Receiving a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo/video of someone else*** was the next most common sexting behaviour (males 45% and females 40%).
- ***Sending a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo/video of self*** (males 27% and females 25%)
- ***Sending a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo/video of someone else*** (males 14% and females 5%) were less common.⁹

The next iteration of the Survey will be conducted in 2018, and it is expected that further information will be available about students' use of the Internet, technology and social media related to sexual health and relationships.

A 2015 study of over 2,000 young people asked less specific questions, and found that 49% of all respondents (largely aged 13-18, with some aged 19 and above) reported having sent a sexual picture or video of themselves. This is similar to the total 43% of total respondents in the 2013 National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health who reported the same behaviour. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents in the 2015 study reported having received a sexual picture or video (which is much higher than the 42% who reported this behaviour in the 2013 study).¹⁰

Image-based abuse and non-consensual sharing of sexual images

The note on definitions on page seven provides foundational information about Our Watch's conceptualisation of image-based abuse.

Recent research shows one in five Australians has experienced image-based abuse.¹¹ Across the life course, young people aged 16 to 29 are at a higher risk of image-based abuse (for example, one in three aged 16-19 experiencing this type of abuse). Young people are more likely to experience image-based abuse from known people such as friends or family members than from intimate partners or ex-partners (30% of image-based abuse experienced by 16-19 year olds is perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, and 64% perpetrated by another known person). Image-based abuse

victimisation was also higher for a number of other groups including lesbian, gay and bisexual Australians, Australians with disability and Indigenous Australians. This is consistent with the higher rate of other types of violence that these groups face and represents the intersection of structural inequalities and discrimination experienced by these groups.

Image-based abuse risk is higher for those who share their own sexual selfies, however they are not the only victims. Participants who disclosed engaging in consensual sexual self-image behaviours were significantly more likely to have been victimised (37%) than those who had not ever sent a sexual selfie (10%). Respondents who were pressured to create a sexual selfie were significantly more likely to be victimised (46%) than those who had not reported pressure or unwanted images (13%). One in 10 respondents who reported never consensually sending, or being pressured to send, someone a sexual selfie were still victims of image-based abuse.¹² These respondents could have had their image taken without consent, or be subjects of doctored images such as their face being superimposed onto a pornographic image.

Research shows that showing an image to someone in person is the most common practice when sharing a sexual picture/video with someone who wasn't meant to see it (20% of 13-15 year olds and 22% of 16-18 year olds).¹³ One in four males surveyed and 16% of females surveyed reported that they had shared an image in this way. This behaviour may not amount to image-based abuse, which in emerging legal definitions is generally understood to be 'digital' distribution, but almost certainly amounts to a breach of the subject of the image's trust and may have a negative impact on their wellbeing.

Digital distribution, the sharing of images online, or forwarding by MMS or email without consent, appears to be significantly less common behaviours. Males reported higher rates of these behaviours than female respondents (7% of males had shared a sexual picture/video with someone who wasn't meant to see it online compared to 4% of females; 9% of males had forwarded by MMS or email compared to 5% of females).

Pornography

Similar to sexting and image-based abuse, there is no recent data on the rate and the means that Australian children and young people are exposed to pornography. In a 2003 Australian study, 73% of male respondents aged 16-17 and 11% of females in the same age group reported that they had watched an X-rated video.¹⁴ A 2006 Australian study found that 93% of 13-16 year old male school students and 62% of females in the cohort reported being exposed to pornography online.¹⁵ The most recent study of pornography access and exposure for Australian young people found that the typical age for boys to view pornography for the first time was 13, and 16 for girls.¹⁶

The rate at which young people are accessing pornography intentionally, and the rate that they are being exposed to it accidentally online is unknown. In 2010-11, 76% of Australian children and young people aged 9-16 went online daily and this increased to 99% for 15-16 year old group. The likelihood of children and young people being unintentionally exposed to pornography online is increasing with the frequency of their internet use and the prevalence of pornography on the internet.

While specific rates are unknown, the research shows that young people are accessing pornography at the time in their lives that they are forming ideas about relationships, sexuality and gender, thus sexually explicit content is likely to influence these ideas. Pornography, like other forms of media, reproduces gender norms held in society more broadly. However, unlike other forms of media, pornography is likely to be particularly powerful in influencing ideas about relationships and sexuality because it specifically represents these things.

The ability of young people to critically engage with this material should not be discounted. For example, The Line evaluation survey has found that approximately 18 per cent of young people surveyed think that the statement 'porn helps people understand what to do when it comes to sex' is true, 56 per cent think that the statement is untrue.¹⁷

Delivery of sex education, respectful relationships education and education about at-risk behaviour and the use of digital technologies

Critiques and challenges of current educational approaches

Over recent years there has been an increase in the education approaches to address and protect young people from harm in the digital environment. While many of these are well intentioned there does exist published critiques on the effectiveness and the, perhaps unintentional, negative impact of current approaches.

At present, many education and risk prevention approaches are tied to the technology rather than offline relationships and behaviours that show up in technology use. (Teresa Swist, Philippa Collin, Jane McCormack and Amanda Third, *Social Media and the Wellbeing of Children and Young People: A Literature Review* (2015), report for the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, 57.)

In particular, a key recurrent theme is the risk that current approaches reproduce broader norms about sex and gender which create issues such as the non-consensual distribution of images.

Victim blaming

Another recurrent theme is the blaming of the victim of image-based abuse due to perceived risky behavior. This is further reinforced by the sexual double standard (where young men achieve social status by receiving nude images of young women, while young women are labelled 'sluts' for engaging in the practice). This double standard has influenced educational approaches to the issue. Internationally, the predominant approach taken in education campaigns regarding 'sexting' has been one of 'anti-sexting', warning young people of the dangers, particularly for girls, with the aim of preventing sexting, a 'just don't do it' approach. (Amy Shields Dobson and Jessica Ringrose, 'Sext education: pedagogies of sex, gender and shame in the schoolyards of Tagged and Exposed' (2016) *Sex Education* 16(1), 9.)

Many educational resources which are currently available portray girls who make 'bad choices' by sending an image of themselves to a peer as ultimately responsible for their victimisation by the non-consensual sharing of that image by others. This approach is similar to the way that women have been held responsible for protecting themselves from sexual assault (Michael Salter, Thomas Crofts and Murray Lee, 'Beyond criminalisation and responsabilisation: Sexting, gender and young people' (2013) *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 24 (3), 312).

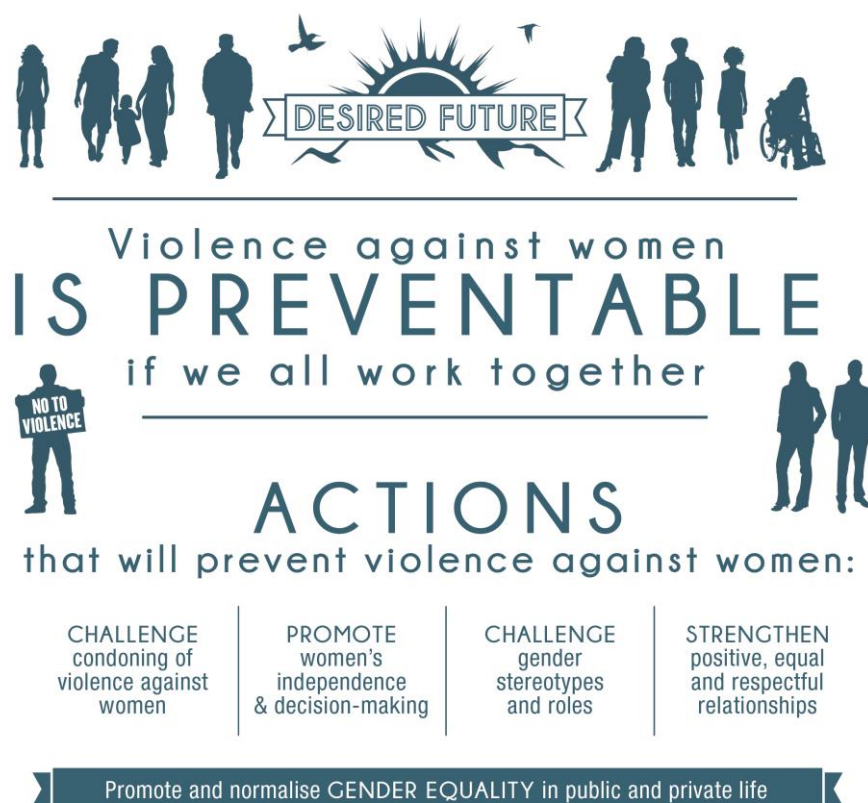
By focusing on the potential consequences for the victim of a privacy violation, education campaigns divert attention away from the perpetrator and indirectly authorise the victim-blaming that survivors of all types of sexual violations often experience (Kath Albury, Amy Adele Hasinoff, and Theresa Senft, 'From Media Abstinence to Media Production: Sexting, Young People and Education' in Louisa Allen and Mary Lou Rasmussen (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education* (2017), 529).

How can respectful relationships education equip young people to have equal, positive and respectful relationships using digital technology?

Best practice respectful relationships education supports young people to have equal, positive, safe and respectful relationships throughout the areas of the life, where they learn, work, rest and play. While the use of digital technology has increased exponentially in the last decade, young people use digital technology as part of, rather than separate to, their everyday lives. Given this new reality, approaches to discussions about respectful relationships online must be connected to, not divorced from, discussions about respectful relationships in all other aspects of a young person's life.

As with all other areas of education, the integration of the experience of increased use of digital technology in respectful relationships education is critical. Respectful relationships education provides an opportunity to equip young people to engage with digital technology in a safe and positive manner, by building an understanding of the integration of technology in young people's relationships and the ways that the gendered drivers of violence against women are expressed in the digital environment.

Figure 3: Essential actions to address the gendered drivers of violence against women



As shown in Figure 3, strengthening positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys, is identified as an essential action to address the gendered drivers of violence against women in *Change the Story*.¹⁸ Work with children and young people can counter the early development of negative peer relationships and promote respect and gender equality in all aspects of their lives, including in their use of digital technology. Likewise, a whole of school respectful relationships education approach can address concerns about negative consequences of young people's exposure and access to pornography.

Our Watch recommends an educational approach which focuses the promotion of equality, respect, and concepts such as consent and communication. This can be integrated into a whole of school respectful relationships education approach, providing children and young people with the knowledge and skills to navigate relationships on and offline.

Recommendation 1: Rather than developing an independent program addressing young people's experiences in the digital environment, look to build and strengthen the current Respectful Relationships program developed by Queensland DET in a way that fully incorporates content on the specific issues relevant to the digital environment.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that content for students does not reproduce or perpetuate sex and gender norms that contribute to gender-based violence and that this risk is highlighted in the professional development and further resources for teachers and other school staff.

Does the Queensland Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum meet students' needs, help students to make safe and healthy choices and help students understand respectful relationships?

Respectful relationships education, alongside comprehensive sexuality education, is crucial to ensure that young people have the information that they need to manage their sexual health and wellbeing and intimate relationships.

From youth based surveys, it appears that sex and relationships education has not kept pace with the rapid uptake of digital technology, and the way that young people have integrated digital technology into their social, romantic and sexual relationships. Around a quarter of students surveyed in Victoria and South Australia strongly agreed that 'having more say about content', 'having more say about teaching methods' and 'having fewer secrets about sexuality' would improve their sexuality and relationships education.¹⁹ Young people have reported that they want to be more involved in the development of content and see information technology and pornography included as topics in their school based sex education.²⁰ Pornography was also identified in this survey as something that 32% of boys and 14% of girls wanted further information about.²¹ In a survey of 1,000 young Australian women, 76% of respondents reported that they had not learnt anything from their sex education classes in school that had helped them when dealing with sex and respectful relationships.²²

This is evident in the many young people who turn to pornography for information about sex in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education.²³ Studies have found that pornography is a

significant source of information about sex and sexualities, and formative sexual knowledge, for boys and young men in particular.²⁴ A 2012 survey by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and Youth Empowerment Against HIV/AIDS (YEAH) found that porn was a common source of information about sex, with 64 per cent of respondents identifying it as where they had received sexual health information from in the past.²⁵

There are many reasons why young people seek out pornography and sexually explicit materials including curiosity, interest in information that may benefit their sexual and reproductive health or relations, and a desire for sexual stimulation.²⁶ The influence of peers is another reason; both male and female young people report that they access pornography because they have friends who want to watch it. Some young people report that they have been pressured to access pornography, most commonly girls and young women by male partners and peers.²⁷

The provision of information and education about pornography has been identified as a key action for mediating its negative impacts on young people, their wellbeing and relationships. Evaluation surveys conducted as part of Our Watch's *The Line* campaign have revealed that parents believe that their children should receive education about pornography, but may lack confidence to have these conversations. Schools can play a role in discussing healthy relationships and pornography with young people.

Recommendation 3: Recognising the significant data gap with regards to the experiences and needs of Queensland secondary school students with respect to sex and respectful relationships education, conduct a survey of Queensland secondary school students to gather data about their needs from sex and respectful relationships education, particularly in relation to their use of digital technology.

Recommendation 4: Recognising the need for further support for teachers and other school staff, provide and promote guidance and resources to schools and teachers to assist in the delivery of respectful relationships education, particularly content that is relevant to emerging issues such as young people's use of digital technology.

Recommendation 5: Recognising the need for further support for teachers, provide and promote further training, support and professional development to teachers to deliver respectful relationships education curriculum in classrooms, including content about young people's use of digital technology in their relationships.

In what ways could the delivery of respectful relationships education and sex education in Queensland state schools be improved?

Curriculum

As discussed in this submission, the Queensland respectful relationships education curriculum can be strengthened to comprehensively address the gendered drivers of gender-based violence.

Further, the curriculum should be situated within the seven criteria for best practice identified in Our Watch's 2015 evidence paper.⁶

Recommendation 6: Ensure that the Queensland respectful relationships program comprehensively addresses and incorporates the evidence base for this work including all seven core elements for respectful relationships education:

- a. address drivers of gender-based violence;
- b. have a long term vision, approach and funding;
- c. take a whole school approach; establishing mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort;
- d. ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement;
- e. provide resources and support for teachers; and
- f. use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum.

Community involvement

Community and parent engagement are key elements of the whole school approach. The whole school approach is a core element of good practice respectful relationships education; international and Australian-based evaluations of violence prevention and sexuality/relationships education have concluded that more than classroom learning is needed to produce sustained and positive cultural change.

A whole school approach means providing students with multiple exposure to key messages across the curriculum and in different areas of the school and community [because this] is more likely to result in sustained changes at the individual level. It involves engaging not just students, but school staff and the wider school community in the process of cultural change. For example, school staff, including non-teaching staff, might undergo professional learning and development around the drivers of gender-based violence and their role in prevention. Strategies to engage parents and families in supporting their children to promote equality and respect can help reinforce and maintain the skills students build at school.²⁸

It is crucial that meaningful consultation and engagement with parents and the broader school community takes place when schools implement respectful relationships education. Enlisting the support of parents will assist schools to undertake this work, and provide opportunities to reinforce messages taught at school in the home. Schools should also seek to meaningfully consult and engage with their student population in an age appropriate way about the implementation of respectful relationships education.

⁶ See further: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/4a61e08b-c958-40bc-8e02-30fde5f66a25/Evidence-paper-respectful-relationships-education-AA-updated.pdf.aspx>

Our Watch has developed a whole school approach toolkit which can be accessed online.⁷ As part of our partnership with Queensland Department of Education and Training we are updating and adapting the toolkit to the Queensland context.

Recommendation 7: Support schools, teachers and other staff to implement a whole of school approach to respectful relationships education, including in meaningfully engaging with the school community, through access to policies, resources and training and professional development.

State policy

State policy should provide avenues for the realisation of staff capacity building as part of the whole school approach. Quality curriculum materials cannot alone guarantee the success of respectful relationships education. A large-school workforce capability package will be required to reach the large number of teachers in Queensland. This is particularly important for teachers who will need to meet learning outcomes specific to respectful relationships education.

Our Watch also emphasises the importance of training for teachers who will not directly deliver curriculum as part of the whole school approach:

In line with the whole school approach, professional learning to support deeper understandings should not be limited to staff delivering respectful relationships education curriculum. All teachers, regardless of their subject areas, should be supported to promote gender equality in teaching and interactions with students. Teachers need sufficient time to explore the in-depth notions of gender, power and violence required for respectful relationships education and to prepare for potentially challenging conversations with students and others on topics such as sexuality, violence and consent.²⁹

Ongoing teacher training and professional development on emerging issues, such as pornography and young people's use of digital technology in their relationships, should be made available regularly and evaluated. This can be categorised into two groups: services to support appropriate responses to disclosures from students and staff, and second, services to support primary prevention activity.

Teachers and school leaders will also require ongoing support from services that specialise in responding to gender-based violence to ensure that they are responding appropriately to staff and students who disclose the experience of, witnessing or perpetrating violence. The Department of Education and Training should work closely with specialist services, as well as other parts of government, to address the gaps in guidelines for schools in responding to disclosures from staff and students including how to address student disclosures which fall outside of mandatory reporting guidelines.

Respectful relationships education through a whole school approach is a complex cultural change activity that requires particular technical expertise on the gendered actions to prevent gender-based violence. Schools, staff and community groups support schools require ongoing support from

⁷ See further: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Respectful-relationships-education/Whole-School-Approach-Toolkit>

services that specialise in gender equality and primary prevention provides the opportunity to have a ‘sounding board’ and technical resource to discuss challenges and barriers that emerge in this reflective work.

Ongoing support and expertise can be made available to schools either through the Queensland Department of Education and Training, where specialised skills and capacity may need to be assured, or through the violence prevention sector resourced by the Department. Policy and procedure reviews, coordinated by the Department, will provide the opportunity for schools to reflect and incorporate new material.

Recommendation 8: Monitor and evaluate the take up and impact of current approaches to respectful relationships education in Queensland to identify strengths and challenges in terms of sustainability, addressing the gendered drivers, attitudinal and behavioural change, and the efficacy of the whole school approach.

Conclusion

Our Watch congratulates the Queensland Parliamentary committee on its inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Government to progress effective approaches to respectful relationships education in Queensland.

¹ Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015), *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*.

² Our Watch, *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper* (December 2015).

³ Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015), *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*.

⁴ Our Watch, *Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to Change the story* (2017)

⁵ Our Watch, *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper* (December 2015)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Queensland Government, *Queensland Says: Not Now, Not Ever. Second Action Plan of the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-17 to 2018-19*.

⁸ For example: Kent Patrick, Wendy Heywood, Marian K Pitts and Anne Mitchell, ‘Demographic and behavioural correlates of six sexting behaviours among Australian secondary school students’ (2015) *Sexual Health* 12, 486.

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- ⁹ Anne Mitchell, Kent Patrick, Wendy Heywood, Pamela Blackman and Marian Pitts, *National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013: Results of the 5th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (April 2014).
- ¹⁰ Murray Lee, Thomas Crofts, Alyce McGovern and Sanja Milivojevic, *Sexting and Young People* (2015).
- ¹¹ Dr Nicola Henry, Dr Anastasia Powell and Dr Asher Flynn, *Not Just "Revenge Pornography": Australians' Experiences of Image-Based Abuse. A Summary Report* (May 2017).
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Murray Lee, Thomas Crofts, Alyce McGovern and Sanja Milivojevic, *Sexting and Young People* (2015), 43.
- ¹⁴ Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, 'Youth and Pornography in Australia: Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects' (February 2003), The Australia Institute, Discussion Paper Number 53.
- ¹⁵ M.J Fleming, S Greentree, D Cocotti-Muller, K.A Elias and S Morrison, 'Safety in cyberspace: Adolescents' safety and exposure online' (2006), *Youth and Society* 38 (2), 135-54.
- ¹⁶ Research by Dr Megan Lim at the Burnet Institute referenced in Sophie Scott and Rebecca Armitage, 'Porn use on the rise among teens, researchers find link with mental health problems' (30 June 2017), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-30/teenagers-porn-use-on-the-rise-research-says/8664842>
- ¹⁷ Unpublished findings from *The Line* evaluation surveys (Our Watch).
- ¹⁸ Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015), *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*.
- ¹⁹ Bruce Johnson, Lyn Harrison, Deb Ollis, Jane Flentje, Peter Arnold & Clare Bartholomaeus, *'It is not all about sex': Young people's views about sexuality and relationships education* (2016), 6.
- ²⁰ Youth Empowerment against HIV/AIDS (YEAH) and Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), *Let's Talk About Sex: Young people's views on sex and sexual health information in Australia* (June 2012), 22.
- ²¹ Ibid, 44.
- ²² Equality Rights Alliance Young Women's Advisory Group, *Let's Talk: Young Women's Views on Sex Education* (2015).
- ²³ Miranda Horvath, Llian Alysa, Kristina Massey, Pina Afroditi, Mia Scally and Joanna Adler, 'Basically...porn is everywhere: a rapid evidence assessment on the effects that access and exposure to pornography has on children and young people' (2013) Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, 39.
- ²⁴ Michael Flood, Submission to Senate Environment and Communications References Committee inquiry into harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet (November 2016), 10.
- ²⁵ Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) and Youth Empowerment Against HIV/AIDS (YEAH), 'Let's Talk About Sex: Young people's views on sex and sexual health information in Australia' (June 2012), 17.
- ²⁶ Michael Flood, *Exposure to pornography among youth in Australia* (2007), *Journal of Sociology* 43 (1), 47.
- ²⁷ Miranda Horvath, Llian Alysa, Kristina Massey, Pina Afroditi, Mia Scally and Joanna Adler, 'Basically...porn is everywhere: a rapid evidence assessment on the effects that access and exposure to pornography has on children and young people' (2013) Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, 26
- ²⁸ Our Watch, *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper* (December 2015), 19.

²⁹ Ibid, 26.