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UK bans porn depicting act that has become a 'sexual norm'

The UK has banned pornography that depicts a violent act in a bid to stop the growing epidemic of violence against women and girls.



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The UK has banned pornography that depicts a violent act in a bid to stop the growing epidemic of violence against women and girls.

The government announced it will criminalise pornography that depicts acts of strangulation. This comes after the Independent Porn Review, which was conducted by Baroness Gabby Bertin.

The review found that pornography has effectively made strangulation a "sexual norm" and encouraged the belief that it is a "safe" act to engage in.

The amendment will be made to the Crime and Policing Bill.

Alex Davies-Jones, Minister for Victims and tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, said; "Depicting strangulation during sex is not only dangerous, but also degrading, with real life consequences for women.

"Cracking down on the appalling rise of strangulation pornography will protect women and send a clear signal to men and boys that misogyny will not be tolerated."



The UK has banned pornography depicting strangulation. Picture: iStock

Meanwhile Andrea Simon, the director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) said the organisation welcomed the government's decision after EVAW's years of campaigning.

"There is no such thing as safe strangulation; women cannot consent to the long-term harm it can cause, including impaired cognitive functioning and memory. Its widespread portrayal in porn is fuelling dangerous behaviours, particularly among young people," she said.

"This is a vital step towards recognising the role violent pornography plays in shaping attitudes to women and regulating an industry which promotes and profits from violence against women."

What is happening in Australia?

Last year, a study was released called [Prevalence of Sexual Strangulation/Choking Among Australian 18–35 Year-Olds](#) conducted by researchers from the University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland.

The study interviewed 4702 Australians in this age range to look at the prevalence of strangulation — also known as choking — during sex. It found that 57 per cent had reported being strangled during sex — this was 61 per cent of women, 79 per cent of trans and gender diverse people and 43 per cent of men.

Around 51 per cent had reported strangling a partner. The frequency of engaging in the act, the pressure to take part and how consent was given varied across the genders.

"These findings suggest strangulation is common during sex among young Australians," the study read.

"Non-stigmatising education strategies are needed to engage with young people so they have a better understanding of the risks involved and how to negotiate consent and safety regarding sexual strangulation."

This is despite the fact that strangulation has been criminalised in every Australian state and territory. [Respect Victoria](#) asserted that strangulation during sex is not always done with consent — and even when it is, 'there is no safe way' to engage in it with risk of oxygen deprivation and long term brain injury.

In Australia, [It Left No Marks](#) was established after Women's Health NSW recognised a need to support those who had been impacted by non-fatal strangulation during sexual assault.



Strangulation – or choking – has become a 'sexual norm'. Picture: iStock

Could the UK ban work in Australia?

Karen Bevan, the CEO of [Full Stop Australia](#), said strangulation doesn't have a safe limit.

"While we use a lot of different terms to describe this, whatever you call it — strangulation or sexual choking — the bottom line is that putting pressure on someone's neck so they struggle to breathe is extremely risky," she told news.com.au.

"There is pretty good research that shows us that there are serious impacts."

Full Stop Australia has always held the view that violent pornography is problematic and should be the focus of regulation — but this is complex and requires whole systems of surveillance, monitoring and follow up.

She said what is being done in the UK is an "end of the line" response. She said that while there are strong arguments to criminalise violent pornography, we need to understand effective prevention at all levels.

She said in Australia, conversations about violent pornography took place in the NSW Porn Harms Inquiry held last month. It's also being discussed in the context of domestic and sexual violence, focusing on people making sure it's understood how serious it is.

"We're definitely in this conversation — the question is, what is the effective response if you want real change? Violent pornography is a really problematic part of the big picture of sexual violence and we have consistently said we need to regulate violent pornography," she said.

"But what we don't want to see is harm to sex workers who are the easy end of police action and are often used in this as a pawn. It's the makers of pornography and the bigger picture drivers of this we need to attack. It's a complex issue but there are some definite indicators that the health impacts of strangulation are so serious that we have to take serious action. It has to include legal and criminal responses.

"But the first thing we need to do is that our community understands the seriousness of it and that health professionals are well equipped to act."

Anecdotally, strangulation has been widely normalised as part of a sexual encounter and has been going on for some time, Ms Bevan said.



Full Stop Australia CEO Karen Bevan.
Picture: Full Stop Australia



Teach Us Consent founder Chanel Contos.
Picture: Instagram

She said it hasn't always been the case, which is why it needs to be talked about and positive education around sex is needed to counteract the influence of pornography. She said that in the context of domestic violence, strangulation is seen as a "red flag for escalation of violence".

"When practitioners hear about strangulation as part of a broader campaign of control and abuse, they will see it as a real step for serious concerns for this woman's safety," she said.

"Strangulation is often seen in tandem with sexual violence in the context of domestic violence and it can be used as part of that coercive and controlling behaviours."

She said strangulation often doesn't leave marks, which is a misconception among the community. Ms Bevan said it needs to be clear that criminal responses are part of the conversation — but they should be used at the end of the picture and what is needed is positive conversations about what the community thinks is safe. She said criminal penalties need to target who have real accountability for them.

Chanel Contos, CEO and founder of [Teach Us Consent](#), told news.com.au that the normalisation of strangulation in pornography is "deeply concerning and incredibly dangerous".

"Traditionally, a sexual partner strangling you was one of the highest indicators that you were at risk of being murdered by them. Now, porn has normalised the act, with over half of all young people in Australia using strangulation during sex," Ms Contos said.

"This move to criminalise sexual strangulation in pornography by the UK Government acknowledges the harms that sexual strangulation in porn can pose, but fails to address the crux of the problem — that young people are using porn as a substitute for sex education and it is changing the way they are intimate."

She said people are viewing pornography at the average age of 13, before having the opportunity to explore sexuality themselves.

"Pornography is currently a primary form of sex education for young people, and much of the most popular content contains non-consensual behaviour and violent, misogynistic themes. It also does not show the nuances and full spectrum of sexual intimacy," she said.

"Young people deserve access to comprehensive sex education that helps them develop healthy, consensual intimate relationships. They also deserve safeguards that can reduce the accessibility of pornographic content online, including through the use of age verification technology".

"At the NSW Porn Harms Inquiry in May, Teach Us Consent called on Government to roll out a national campaign on porn and media literacy, the mandate of verification technology across porn sites, and for porn literacy to become part of Australia's comprehensive sex education. This action can't wait."

Where to find help

If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual abuse or family violence contact:

- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service 24-hour helpline [1800 RESPECT](#) on **1800 737 732**
- 24-hour Emergency Accommodation helpline on **1800 800 588**
- Safe At Home helpline on **1800 633 937**
- National Violence and Abuse Trauma Counselling and Recovery Service on **1800 FULLSTOP (1800 385 578)**. They also have a specific line for the LGBTIQ+ community called the Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline on **1800 497 212**
- SHE (free and confidential counselling and support) on **6278 9090**
- Sexual Assault Support Services on **6231 1811**, or after hours **6231 1817**

- Family Violence Crisis and Support Service on **1800 608 122**
- Bravehearts – Sexual Assault Support for Children on **1800 BRAVE 1**
- Kids Helpline is for young people aged 5 to 25 on **1800 551 800**

Don't go it alone. Please reach out for help by contacting [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**

- Men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues, should contact the [Men's Referral Service](#) on **1300 766 491** or the [Don't Become That Man](#) helpline on **1300 243 413**