**Commons committee to study health effects of violent online pornography**

**Motion introduced by Alberta MP received all-party approval in vote late last week**

By Elizabeth Thompson, [CBC News](http://www.cbc.ca/news/cbc-news-online-news-staff-list-1.1294364) Posted: Dec 13, 2016 5:00 AM ET Last Updated: Dec 13, 2016 5:00 AM ET

Parliament has voted to hold hearings into the effect of viewing violent online sexually explicit material. (Virginia Mayo/AP)



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Does watching violent, sexually explicit movies and pornographic images online affect your health? That's the question the standing committee on health will be looking at in the coming weeks after a motion calling for the study received all-party approval in the House of Commons.

The study will mark the first time in 30 years that Parliament has looked at the question of pornography in Canada.

* [**Mountie sues, alleges PTSD from exposure to child porn in sex-offences unit**](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/surrey-mountie-ptsd-child-porn-1.3891306)

Conservative MP Arnold Viersen, who introduced the motion, said he hopes the study will lead to action on the part of the federal government. "There's a wide range of things that we can do, including legislation," Viersen said in an interview with CBC News. "But I would say that legislation is only one of about five different tools that we have at our disposal." Conservative Arnold Viersen is MP for the Alberta riding of Peace River-Westlock. (Twitter)

Other options include public health initiatives and regulations for government employees.

Liberal MP Bill Casey, who chairs the health committee, said while he thinks it is an important question, it is too soon to know just how deep MPs will delve into the issue. "I am sure we will have interesting presenters who will take us in directions that we hadn't imagined and tell us things we had no idea of." However, Casey said the committee currently has three studies already in the works and is unlikely to get to this study before the new year. The motion gives the committee until July 2017 to report back to the House of Commons. The House of Commons voted last week to adopt M-47, which specifically instructs the health committee "to examine the public health effects of the ease of access and viewing of online violent and degrading sexually explicit material on children, women and men."

Viersen dismisses any suggestion that the study will be an excuse for MPs to peruse porn while on the public payroll.

"It's not an excuse to look at this material — it is an excuse to look at the impacts of it," he said. "So you don't have to look at the images and I would highly recommend not looking at the images."

**First porn study since 1985**

Viersen said "the scientific evidence is piling up" that viewing violent, sexually explicit material has an effect. "We have mental illness that is being caused — both to men and to women — due to addiction issues, but also due to abuse issues that go unresolved. We have erectile dysfunction that is happening. Brain structures of individuals being altered because of prolonged use of these kinds of images. We don't know what the impacts of all of these things are." Liberal MP Bill Casey chairs the committee that will look at the health effects of viewing violent online pornography. Viersen said the hearings sparked by his motion will mark the first time MPs have held hearings into sexually explicit material since 1985, when Parliament looked at the question of pornography as well as prostitution. "The last time anything like this was studied in the House of Commons was 1985 and that was before the internet existed. Now this stuff is prolific everywhere. This is readily available. What kinds of impact is it having?" Viersen said the motion had the backing of an estimated 50 groups. Among those who supported it during last week's debate was Rachael Harder, the Conservative MP for Lethbridge.

"The worldwide revenue from porn is estimated at $57 billion, which is more than Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo or Apple," Harder told the Commons. "The mainstreaming of pornography increases daily. This is having a significant impact on how boys grow up perceiving woman and thus treat them during adulthood.

"One in three women will experience sexual assault in their lifetime. One in three women will be harassed, inappropriately touched, taken advantage of, or forced into sexual acts against their will."

* **Alberta schools must teach kids about dangers of online porn: trustees**

During the first debate on the motion in November, NDP MP Brigitte Sansoucy urged the committee to conduct a full study of the issue. "We must take action to ensure that violent and sexually explicit content is not readily accessible by children," she told the Commons at the time. "We must do something about this."We believe that action must be taken and access to this type of content must be controlled on several levels and in a concerted manner. We want to protect our children from sexually explicit content that could impact their health."