



Indiana Coalition to
End Sexual Assault
Engage. Educate. Empower.

*It has recently come to our attention that a group of pro-pornography/pro-prostitution activists are planning to protest ICESA's **The Harms of Pornography: A Feminist Framework** event, taking place October 24-25, 2017. In response, we are releasing the following statement, penned by our Director of Campus Initiatives, Dr. Mahri Irvine, on behalf of our organization.*

ICESA is an anti-exploitation, pro-empowerment organization, and the pornography industry is inherently exploitative, so we oppose it. We support individual people who are caught up in the industry, but we oppose the industry itself because of the various ways that it is misogynistic, racist, and classist, and promotes the sexual objectification of children. We recognize that some individual people, including women, financially benefit from this industry and therefore, they may believe that they have been empowered by it. However, the financial empowerment of a few individuals is not enough of a reason for us to support an industry that intentionally promotes violence and misogyny. We oppose exploitation, and the pornography industry is based on exploitation, violence, humiliation, degradation, and sexual objectification of all people, especially women and girls.

We fully support survivors of sexual violence and we recognize that many survivors have been harmed by the porn industry. We hope that this event will provide a solid educational foundation not just for professionals, but also for survivors who are interested in learning more about these topics. We are also excited that some students will be attending this event, because this training will give them a chance to learn from a variety of experts who have spent extensive amounts of time studying the negative social and health impacts of pornography. Often, students and people in younger generations get most of their "education" about pornography from social media, movies/TV, or porn itself. They don't always have an opportunity to directly learn from experts who have studied this topic extensively, so we are excited about, and proud of, this event.

ICESA is committed to preventing sexual violence and making Indiana a safer place, which means that we have decided to facilitate difficult conversations about the role that porn plays in sexual violence. We recognize that pornography has an extremely profound impact on our society, especially on younger generations of people who are now growing up in a "pornified" world, and accessing pornography as early as the ages of 11, or even younger. In addition to academic research on this topic, we have heard from colleagues as well as friends that porn has an extremely detrimental impact on intimate relationships. For example, many women and teen girls feel obligated to act out scenes from porn in order to please their male partners, or they feel pressured to watch porn with their male partners as a "normal" part of their relationships. Clearly, these are situations of sexual coercion and violence, because no one should be forced to engage in sexual activities when they have not given genuine consent. However, pornography has become such a normalized part of life that many women and teen girls feel pressured to engage with porn or behaviors that have been promoted in porn (like anal sex), and to publicly say that they enjoy porn, even if they do not. As an organization, we understand that identifying and challenging the exploitative nature of pornography is a "controversial" topic that might

make some people feel upset or even angry with us. However, genuine culture change can only occur when individuals and agencies are willing to take a stand and encourage others to engage in difficult, sometimes upsetting conversations. The ICESA team is extremely proud that our agency has decided to address such a "controversial" topic, because it would have been much easier for us, as an agency, to stay quiet about this issue and avoid any potential conflicts with people who disagree with us.

ICESA is an agency that takes a stand on issues based on research and international best practices for violence prevention and response, and there is a plethora of research that shows connections between the porn industry, social inequalities, and sexual violence. We strive to make sure that all our trainings and events are trauma-informed and research-based, and this event certainly is.

We have over 200 people registered for this event, including victim advocates, law enforcement, counselors, prevention educators, higher ed professionals, and students, so we are very excited about the amount of people who are interested in this topic. If a protest will be held, hopefully it will not distract our attendees from the educational goals of our event.

We welcome pro-porn industry activists at our training. Hopefully some of them will decide to attend so that we are all operating from the same evidence-based research when we engage in conversations with one another. We ask all of our attendees to engage with the presenters and other attendees in a professional and respectful manner, so that we can ensure a safe learning environment.

*Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault
October 17, 2017*