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Calling a halt to pornography

BY RODNEY VICTOR

A campaign against pornography started six months ago by a Johannesburg woman has escalated to national level and has led to a number of South Africa's largest chain stores removing pornographic magazines from their check-out counters.

The success of the campaign shows that even one woman can make a difference if she is prepared to take a stand on an issue, says Charmaine Talbot of Mondeor.

Talbot, who is the wife of the minister of the Mondeor Baptist Church, started her campaign against pornography in October last year.

At the time she and her husband were counselling a couple whose marriage was under severe stress because of the effects of pornography. The counselling made her realise how damaging pornography can be, she says.

Shortly after this a woman she knew handed her a pornographic magazine that she'd found in the possession of her 15-year-old son.

The woman asked Talbot if she knew what sort of material was available on the supermarket shelves, and Talbot replied that she preferred not to know.

Nevertheless she paged through the magazine to see if it was as bad as the woman had claimed.

"I couldn't sleep that night," Talbot says.

"I was outraged that that kind of thing can be allowed, and specially that it's available in our local cafes and supermarkets for the children to pick up.

"It's not normal to want to look at pictures of a woman on a toilet, and it's not normal to



No to pornography . . . Charmaine Talbot with Jared Talbot, Brandon Milner, Lisa Adams, Kelly Adams and Leanda Talbot. Looking on is cafe owner Ario Hatziharaoumbous.

PICTURE: CHRIS ADLAM

ing to us as women," Talbot says.

"No wonder women break down and become distraught when they find out that their men have been looking at this sort of thing.

"It takes away the intimate sensual relationship

in Mondeor for church leaders, Talbot decided to start a letter-writing campaign and also to encourage people who felt as she did to write to various influential individuals and organisations.

These included a task force set up by the Direc-

Minister of Home Affairs and a number of national chain stores which were openly displaying pornographic magazines on

their shelves.

Talbot's campaign against pornography in the chain stores has met with a fair degree of success. Three chains have removed pornographic material from their shelves and a fourth has agreed to place them in a special "adult" section where they should, theoretically at least, be out of the reach of children.

A fifth chain has not yet reached a decision on the matter, and negotiations with a sixth have been complicated by the fact that the group's stores are franchise operations and can make their decisions independently of head office.

The campaign to influence government appears to have been less successful, however. Despite members of the public having sent thousands of letters protesting against pornography to the Directorate of Publications and to the Minister of Home Affairs, Talbot is still not convinced that the country's leadership is prepared to listen to their opinions.

"In spite of all these letters of protest, the government has gone ahead anyway and published the draft Bill which will legalise pornography.

"They keep telling us that we're the ones who are writing the new Constitution, but when the public gives its opinion, it's just ignored.

"Why are they not prepared to listen to the silent majority?" she asks.

The editor of one local pornographic magazine

likes to point out that the combined sales of these magazines total 700 000 a month in South Africa, Talbot says.

He ignored the fact that the readership of these magazines is outweighed by the membership of the Dutch Reformed Church alone, which has 1.5 million adherents.

Other churches have millions of other members who also feel strongly about the issue, and the Jewish, Muslim and Hindu communities also oppose pornography.

The people promoting these magazines defend them by saying that South Africa's Bill of Rights gives everyone the right to freedom of expression, Talbot says.

Yet that same Bill also gives people the right not to see pornographic materials if they don't want to.

Talbot believes there has to be control over the availability of pornography, specially at cafes and supermarkets. Often these outlets display their pornographic magazines at kiddie level.

She herself has watched an obviously embarrassed young female cashier ring up the sale of a pornographic magazine for a boy of about 15. "How can we protect our children if we find this stuff staring us in the face every time we go to the cafe to buy milk or bread? If these things have to be legal in South Africa, then they should be available only at special sex shops — and not at the local cafe."