



April 2017

The Fawcett Society Sex Discrimination Law Review

Violence against Women and Girls

About Girlguiding

1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and The Senior Section (14-25 years). Registered Charity No 306016. www.girlguiding.org.uk

Key messages

- We are for all girls
- We give girls their own space
- We give girls a voice
- We change as the lives of girls change

About our evidence

2. Girlguiding's submission focuses on evidence from our annual Girls' Attitudes Survey - the largest survey of girls and young women in the UK - which gathers the views and opinions of over 1,600 girls and young women throughout the country aged 7 to 21, from inside and outside guiding. For more information and data on the latest and previous reports please see www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes.
3. Girlguiding's response is also influenced by the Girls Matter campaign - Girlguiding's member-led campaign that profiles girls' and young women's calls for change <http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/report>
4. We also made use of our qualitative research report, *Care versus Control - Healthy Relationships*, which explores girls' views on coercion.
5. In addition, our response includes quotes from members of our Girlguiding Advocate panel - a platform for girls to use their voices and seek change at the highest levels. Our Advocates are a group of 18 Girlguiding members aged 14 to 25 who lead the direction of Girlguiding's advocacy and research.

Overview

6. Girls and young women in the UK are already facing a number of unacceptable pressures, including sexist and abusive behaviour at school and in wider society.



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Girlguiding believes it is vital that girls and young women are not subject to further disadvantages when the UK exits the European Union. Within our response to this inquiry, we have outlined our research on violence against women and girls in the following areas:

- Sexual harassment at school
- Street harassment
- Online abuse and harassment
- The impact of pornography
- Girls' experiences and awareness of abuse

What works well now? What doesn't work well?

7. Girlguiding was delighted with the Government's decisions to make Sex and Relationship Education compulsory via the Children and Social Work Act and to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) compulsory in the future. We believe that SRE and PSHE are an essential part of preventing and tackling violence against women and girls as they help young people have a full understanding of issues such as gender equality and sexual consent.

In addition to quality PSHE and SRE, we believe schools must be supported to tackle sexual harassment and abuse and ensure learning environments are safe for all children and young people.

Our Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that girls continue to face a number of unacceptable pressures and challenges in their everyday lives:

Sexual Harassment in School

8. Our 2014 Survey showed that, of girls aged 13 to 21:
 - 59% have faced some form of sexual harassment at school/college in the past year

Of those that had faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college:

- 37% had experienced jokes or taunts of a sexual nature
- 26% had seen pictures or videos of girls or women that made them feel uncomfortable
- 25% had seen sexually explicit pictures or videos.
- 20% had experienced unwanted sexual attention.
- 19% had experienced unwanted touching
- 18% had seen rude or obscene graffiti about girls or women
- 15% had experienced sexual harassment and abuse on social media
- 22% of girls aged 7 to 12 has experienced jokes of a sexual nature from boys

Girls tell us that they often feel reluctant to report incidents of sexual harassment as they fear not being taken seriously:

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- Girls aged 11-16 are more likely to think that if they report incidents of sexual harassments they may be teased or bullied, with 70% of girls aged 13-16 and 56% of girls aged 13-21 agreeing. Only 9% believe this is always the case
- 7 to 21 - When asked whether incidents of sexual harassment are taken seriously by teachers or staff, 42% say always and 31% say sometimes
- 52% of girls aged 11 to 21 say that staff and teachers sometimes or always (13%) dismiss this behaviour as just a bit of banter - 'boys mucking around'. 61% of girls aged 11-16 say dismissal of sexual harassment as banter sometimes or always happens.

'Sexual harassment has always made me feel extremely uncomfortable, unsafe and upset when it happens in school, and school is somewhere that all pupils should be safe and should have a positive environment.' Girlguiding Advocate, 16

'My experience of sexual harassment made me feel terrified any time those boys (that had been involved in harassment) came near me. Girls shouldn't have to feel constantly scared, especially in school'. Girlguiding Advocate

Street Harassment

9. Girls also say that they feel unsafe outside school, and frequently change their behaviour to avoid unwanted attention and intimidation by boys and men. Our 2016 Survey showed that:
- 27% of girls aged 7 to 10 say their biggest fear was 'not being safe'
 - 16% of girls aged 11 to 21 say their biggest fear was of violence towards them
 - An alarming 72% of girls aged 11 to 16 and 85% of girls aged 17 to 21, say they feel unsafe when they are out on their own some or most of the time. 67% change their behaviour to avoid this.
 - 58% of girls aged 13 to 16 and 67% of girls aged 17 to 21 say they have experienced intimidation by a group of boys some or most of the time. 55% of girls change their behaviour to avoid this.
 - 41% of girls aged 17 to 21 have experienced unwanted touching at a nightclub some or most of the time. Half (51%) said they changed their behaviour to avoid this.
 - 41% of girls aged 11-16 and 57% of girls aged 17 to 21 have experienced unwanted sexual comments directed at them some or most of the time. 45% of girls change their behaviour to avoid this.
 - 37% of girls aged 11 to 16 and 63% of girls aged 17 to 21 have experienced street harassment some or most of the time. 44% change their behaviour to avoid this.
 - 17% of girls aged 13 to 21 have experienced unwanted touching on public transport some or most of the time. 31% change their behaviour to avoid this.

Online abuse and harassment

10. Girlguiding research from 2015 found girls are impacted by online bullying, with 45% of those aged 11 to 16 report experiencing bullying through social media. 28% say they have experienced bullying by someone via their mobile phone (such as abusive texts or calls), and again this is most common among girls at secondary school at 36%; and 24% say they have been bullied on websites or chat forums.



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The impact of cyberbullying is severe, with 69% of 11 to 21 year olds saying bullying made them less interested in their school/college work, and 49% say bullying led to them taking more risks than they usually would. 24% of 17 to 21 year olds say bullying made them feel pressured into having sex with someone.

Although it is less common among younger girls, a third of 7 to 10 year olds have also experienced cyberbullying despite social media platforms requiring users to be 13 or older.

- 13% have been bullied on social media.
- 12% have been bullied by mobile phone.
- 8% have been bullied on a website.

Impact of pornography

11. Many girls feel that the rise of online pornography contributes towards unfair and abusive behaviour towards girls and women. Our 2015 Survey revealed that:

- 70% of girls aged 13 to 21 thought the rise in online pornography contributes to women being treated less fairly.

Of girls aged 17 to 21:

- 80% thought it encourages society to view women as sex objects
- 78% felt it encourages gender stereotyping of girls/women and boys/men
- 71% thought it normalises aggressive or violent behaviour towards women
- 71% thought it gives confusing messages about sexual consent
- 66% thought it puts pressure on girls to have sex before they are ready
- 65% thought it increases hateful language used about/to women
- 53% thought it coerced girls into sex acts because boys are copying what they see in pornography.

'The media influences society hugely, so if the media presents women as being sex objects, there only to satisfy men and be judged on their appearance, ordinary people start to believe that as well. Sarah, 18, Birmingham

'We don't want to be objectified. It has a negative impact not only on women but also on men and young boys, and changing this could lead to a decrease in gender-based violence and rape.' Haley, 20, Carrickfergus, former Girlguiding Advocate

Girls' experiences and awareness of abuse

12. Girls are aware of the kinds of abuse that exist and many know someone who has been affected or have experienced it themselves. Our 2014 Survey showed that:

- 25% of girls aged 11 to 21 know someone who has experienced violence from a partner, and 17% know someone who has been threatened with sexual violence
- 35% of girls aged 11 to 21 know girls and young women their age who have experienced control or bullying from a partner
- 25% of girls aged 11 to 21 know someone who has experienced violence from a partner

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- 17% of girls aged 11 to 21 know someone who has been threatened with sexual violence

Girls are also aware of other serious forms of abuse experienced by girls and women in the UK and support efforts to stop these:

- 74% of girls aged 13 to 21 are aware that sexual exploitation happens to girls and young women their age in the UK
- 48% of girls aged 11 to 21 are aware that forced marriage happens to girls and young women in the UK.
- 32% of 11 to 21 year olds are aware of honour based violence and 28% had heard of FGM. 9% of girls aged 7 to 10 were aware of so-called honour-based violence and 4% had heard of FGM.
- 61% of girls aged 17 to 21 supported the campaign run by Fahma Mohamed in February 2014 that called on the Education Minister to ask all head teachers to inform children and parents about the risks of FGM. Only 14% disagreed.

However, while girls are aware of the different kinds of abuse that exist - and have, in some cases, experienced it - our 2012 Survey reveals that their understanding of it can be blurred. Although the vast majority of girls were clear in their condemnation of violence, threats and sexual coercion, their responses were much more uncertain when asked about so-called 'low-level abuse' - the slow drip-drip of control.

As our *Care Versus Control, Healthy Relationships* report showed that coercion and control are significant issues for young women and girls. It is essential that schools reach young people, both boys and girls, at a crucial stage of development when they are developing their expectations around relationships. Without proper and adequate guidance, girls are in danger of believing that some unacceptable behaviour is normal.

Of girls aged 11 to 21:

- 23% had a full understanding of what an abusive relationship is
- 39% felt it was acceptable for a partner to make you tell them where you are all the time
- 22% felt it was acceptable for a partner to check up on you/ read your phone
- 21% felt it was acceptable for a partner to shout at you or call you names
- 21% felt it was acceptable for a partner to tell you what you can/can't wear

What do we need to put in place for the future?

13. Girlguiding believes statutory Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) is essential to equip young people with the tools to make informed decisions and stay safe. We believe it is vital that all schools teach modern and age-appropriate SRE.

We are delighted that the Government's amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill have made SRE a statutory duty for schools in England. We hope that the associated guidance will ensure that SRE both helps girls to cope with the pressures they face and addresses the unacceptable behaviours which cause and contribute to

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these by ensuring that all young people have a full understanding of issues such as gender equality and consent.

14. We also believe the curriculum must be updated to include sexual consent, online safety, tackling violence against women and girls and LGBTQ and healthy relationships and were pleased to hear that PSHE will become statutory in the future. As part of the whole school approach, Girlguiding calls for the introduction of PSHE which includes lessons on gender equality and body confidence. This would provide girls with an education that enables them to better challenge inequality, gender stereotypes and incidents of VAWG when they encounter them.

Work carried out by Against Violence and Abuse (AVA) and the End Violence Against women Coalition (EVAW) identified key aspects of work that schools can do to prevent VAWG which includes:

- a. guidance, ongoing training and support to staff to identify the signs of all forms of VAWG, including how to respond to disclosures and harmful behaviour;
- b. tackling all forms of VAWG and gender inequality through the curriculum;
- c. Specialist support for students and staff who experience VAWG, whether current, recent or historic - regardless of whether they report to police;
- d. School policies on behaviour, bullying and safeguarding that specifically address VAWG.”¹

15. In addition, Girlguiding supports age-verification of online pornography and believes it is a vital step towards preventing the scale of exposure to pornography young people experience today. We also support greater regulation of social media sites, and were pleased to see both age verification and a code designed to help site providers tackle online abuse included within the Digital Economy Bill.

16. Girlguiding is a proud supporter of the IC Change campaign and was delighted when the IC Bill passed, meaning a much stronger framework of laws on violence against women and girls will come into force when the Istanbul Convention is ratified.

17. More generally, Girlguiding believes that there must be clear mechanisms available for young people to have their say in the many decisions being made about Brexit which will affect their lives. It is crucial that decision makers listen to and include girls’ and young women’s voices so that the particular challenges they face are considered and represented within the discussions that are to come.

18. We also believe that all rights and protections that women and girls have gained through EU legislation must be protected and that efforts must be made to ensure that the impact of Brexit does not disproportionately affect girls and young women, young people and women more generally.

¹ <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/71/EVAW-Coalition-Schools-Guide.pdf> (p.15)



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