



## Women and Equality Committee Inquiry: Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools - Girlguiding Response May 2016

### 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](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

### About Girlguiding's Evidence

2. Girlguiding welcomes this opportunity to participate in this inquiry and is pleased to see the focus of this debate on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Girls and young women tell us that anxiety about experiencing sexual harassment negatively affects many aspects of their lives and sexual harassment can quickly develop into sexual violence unless dealt with. Girlguiding would also like to use this response to draw attention to the wider, societal context of sexual harassment and sexual violence that girls in particular face, driven by gender inequality. Both of these are forms of violence against women and girls which must be confronted as part of a wider response to tackling this issue, and to acknowledge that this behaviour takes place beyond the school gates in our communities, workplaces and online.
3. Girlguiding's submission focuses on evidence from the Girls' Attitudes Surveys - our annual research into the opinions of girls and young women throughout the UK aged 7-21 and the personal testimony of young members. We also reference other research where outlined. Our young members would be keen to give oral evidence directly to the committee if invited. Recommendations follow at the end of this document.
4. The Girls' Attitudes Survey canvasses the opinions of over 1,500 girls and young women, inside and outside guiding across the UK each year. We commission expert child research agency Childwise to conduct this survey. For more information and data see [www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes)
5. Girlguiding's response is also influenced by the Girls Matter campaign - Girlguiding's pre-General Election campaign that profiles girls' and young women's calls for change <http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/report>
6. Girlguiding has long been concerned about the impact of sexual harassment and the normalisation of controlling behaviours in young people's relationships. In 2013 Girlguiding conducted qualitative research, which took place in schools entitled '*Care Versus Control: Healthy Relationships*'. This research found that too many girls see controlling behaviour as a normal part of a 'caring' relationship. The



research found that from a young age too many girls regularly feel they have to tolerate behaviour rooted in jealousy and lack of trust, and have a tendency to reframe it as genuine care and concern for their welfare.

7. Alongside this research, Girlguiding produced a peer education pack for girls and young women delivered by Peer Educators, to give girls the skills to understand what healthy/unhealthy relationships are, and equip them to recognise and end controlling and coercive relationships in the future. This research can be downloaded via [new.girlguiding.org.uk/documents/care-vs-control-2013](http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/documents/care-vs-control-2013)

### ***Establishing the scale of the problem***

#### ***How much sexual harassment currently occurs in primary and secondary schools?***

8. Girlguiding's Girls' Attitudes Survey has reported repeatedly high levels of sexual harassment taking place in schools. This harassment affects girls' behaviour and performance in class and their health and wellbeing.
9. The 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that 59% of girls and young women aged 13-21 had faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year. Of these:
  - 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% of those had experienced unwanted sexual attention.
  - 19% had experienced unwanted touching.
  - 18% had seen rude and obscene graffiti about girls and young women.
  - 15% of girls and young women had experienced sexual abuse on social media, or had been subjected to frequent unwanted attention (14%).
10. Girls of primary age reported similar experiences of sexual harassment, though to a lesser extent.
  - 22% of girls aged 7-12 had experienced jokes of a sexual nature from boys.
  - 12% of girls had seen rude pictures or rude graffiti about girls and women.
  - 10% had experienced unwanted touching.
11. Additional data from the 2013 Girls' Attitudes Survey, found that 60% of girls aged 11-21 had comments shouted at them about their appearance at school.

*'My first experience of sexual harassment was in school when I was 12. There were a few boys in my class who were constantly inappropriate, which made all of us girls really uncomfortable. We didn't want to tell a teacher because we didn't think they would do anything about it. One day in home economics, they were sitting together loudly deciding which girls were wearing padded bras and which weren't. Needless to say, we hated having our bodies stared at and then evaluated, yet the teacher did nothing to stop them. The worst time was in art. I had to share a table with two of the worst boys, and the materials cupboard was behind us. One day, they approached me and talked about dirty, disgusting things they would do to me. I started backing away because I thought they were going to touch me. Once again, the teacher did nothing.'* Girlguiding Advocate



12. It is an indication of how sexual harassment (and VAWG more broadly) has become so ingrained and normalised in society that, when asked in 2015, only 40% of girls and young women aged 13-21 agree with the statement 'I believe we can change society to be free from violence against women and girls in the future'.

### ***Who are the targets of harassment and who are the perpetrators?***

13. Girlguiding's research only focuses on the views of girls and young women but the evidence we receive from them would appear to reflect that in school and in society more generally, girls are the main targets of harassment and that this is more often perpetuated by their male peers. For example 67% of young women agree that popular culture tells boys that they are entitled to coerce or abuse their girlfriends.
14. We profile later in this response how girls tell us they are far more likely to see boys viewing pornography in school than they are girls. This suggests that boys behaviour is more likely to be influenced by the pornography they watch and encourage sexual harassment.

*'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

### ***How often are teachers the victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?***

We do not have evidence to comment on this.

### ***Are levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence increasing in schools?***

15. When Girlguiding first asked girls questions about sexual harassment in schools in 2012, 13% of girls aged 11-21 reported that they experienced unwanted sexual attention, 11% reported unwanted attention and gifts, and 9% reported stalking. In 2013 we began to ask girls about sexual harassment in schools, colleges and the work place more broadly and the number of girls aged 11-21 reporting experiences of harassment jumped to 70%. In 2014 we asked about experiences just in schools and colleges and this number remained high at 59%. In 2015, 75% of girls and young women said anxiety about potentially experiencing sexual harassment affects their lives in some way and the proportion of those aged 11-16 who worry about this is higher than amongst older girls (17-21) across almost all aspects of their lives.
16. This issue has clearly become much more of a concern for girls and young women in recent years. It should be noted that there is also still work to do around educating girls about what sexual harassment is. In 2015 64% of girls and young women aged 11-21 say they feel clear about what sexual harassment is, with 32% saying that they are uncertain.

### ***How well is the problem being recorded and monitored?***

17. The 2014 survey found that 69% of those aged 7-21 say that incidents of sexual harassment are reported to teachers or staff, either sometimes (49%) or always (20%). Younger girls are also keen to report the problem, 81% of 7-10-year-olds say



they would report incidents of sexual harassment, but among older girls (17-21) only 54% said they would report incidents of sexual harassment. If the first barrier is getting girls to report incidents, the next barrier is staff and teachers taking those reports seriously.

18. 64% of girls aged 11-16 say that teachers or staff, sometimes or always tell girls to ignore incidents of sexual harassment. When asked whether such incidents are taken seriously by teachers or staff, 42%, or less than half, say that they are always taken seriously and 31% say they are sometimes taken seriously and 8% they are never taken seriously.
19. The 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey also found that 61% of 11-16 year old girls say teachers and staff sometimes or always dismiss sexual harassment as just a bit of banter 'messaging around'.

*'The number of teenage girls I know who have been abused, assaulted, or simply made to feel uncomfortable in the presence of a teacher or other authority figure is too high. And what's worse is that they're expected to keep quiet about such "minor" things and not complain.'* Megan, 17, Stourbridge

#### **Understanding the impact of sexual harassment in schools**

#### **What impact does sexual harassment and sexual violence in school have on girls and young women; boys and young men; and teachers?**

20. The fear of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools impacts upon the way girls behave. The 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that:
  - 25% of 11-16-year-olds say worry over potential sexual harassment makes them consider whether or not to speak out in class.
  - 35% of 11-16-year-olds say the way they use social media is affected by fear of sexual harassment.
21. Findings from the same year show:
  - 55% of 11-16-year-olds say that their body confidence is affected by worry about sexual harassment.
  - 39% of 11-16-year-olds that their confidence in general is influenced by worry about sexual harassment.
  - 41% of 11-16-year-olds say fear of sexual harassment affects whether they go to places on their own.
  - 34% of 11-16-year-olds say fear of sexual harassment affects where they choose to go.
  - Of girls aged 11-16, 55% say it affects what they wear and this figure is 51% for all girls aged 11-21.

*'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



**What can be done to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?**

**What measures are currently in place to address this issue? How adequate are they?**

22. The School Standards and Framework Act (1998) gives a statutory duty to all schools and Educational Services to have clearly articulated policies and procedures to combat bullying. However, current guidance for schools on bullying is not statutory and does not cover sexual harassment or sexual bullying. Sexual harassment may take place outside a pattern of bullying. As seen from the evidence above, many girls do not think the response to sexual harassment in schools is adequate.

**What girls think they should learn at school:**

23. The 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that in some key areas - relationships, pornography, consent, and violence against women and girls - school provision is far out of touch with girls' expectations. Of girls aged 11-16:
- Only 49% say they are taught about consent, rape and laws regarding sex but 82% would like to be taught this.
  - Only 47% say they are taught about violence against women and girls but 84% say they would like to be taught this.
  - 45% say they are taught about understanding what is good and bad behaviour within relationships, but 84% say they would like to be taught this.
  - Only 25% say they are taught about pornography but 68% say they would like to be taught this.

*'My school has always taken claims of inappropriate touching very seriously which is good. While my school does deal with claims of sexual harassment well, it also never talks about the issue, never openly publicises the consequences of sexual harassment in its behaviour code either. I would like to see a poster campaign or assemblies on it, as there has been with LGBT rights for example, to show that sexual harassment is completely unacceptable and not tolerated.'* Girlguiding Advocate, 16

**What evidence is there of schemes proven to reduce levels of sexual harassment in schools in the UK or elsewhere?**

24. Girlguiding does not collect evidence on the measures and schemes currently in place to reduce levels of sexual harassment in schools, but is aware of various charities and initiatives that operate within schools to teach young people about sexual harassment and sexual violence. These initiatives should be encouraged. Girlguiding would add that these initiatives must be supported by the school once sessions have been delivered. There must be consistency of messaging and support from all staff so that once sessions on sexual harassment have been delivered the issue isn't just ignored or forgotten until the next time.

25. In May 2016, the PHSE Association publication<sup>1</sup> highlighted evidence from numerous studies showing that where pupils receive good quality lessons on sex, relationships, consent and online safety; young people were more likely to keep safe, it prevented exploitation, increased disclosures about abuse and exploitation, increased the age of first intercourse, and increased use of contraception, not to

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<sup>1</sup> A Curriculum for Life: The case for statutory Personal, Social and Health and Economic (PHSE) education' (p.5&6)



mention improved resilience and young people's abilities to deal with difficult experiences.

***Can schools tackle this problem individually or is national action needed to reduce levels of harassment?***

26. Girlguiding believes that national action is necessary to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and colleges. Girlguiding research carried out in 2015 found 90% of girls and young women aged 13-21, from across the UK agree that the government should make sure all schools are addressing sexual harassment and bullying in schools.

**Government**

27. There are clearly steps that schools can take to ensure they take a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, to create an atmosphere among staff and pupils that deters sexual harassment and sexual violence. However, leadership is needed from the government and the Department for Education in particular, to ensure this is considered a priority issue.
28. Girlguiding's Girls Matter campaign<sup>2</sup> demands that schools take a zero tolerance approach to sexual bullying and harassment. Girlguiding calls on the government to ensure this happens by promising to introduce guidance that all schools must use to tackle this issue. The Department for Education (DfE) should include sexual harassment and bullying within the current bullying and harassment guidance<sup>3</sup> as a key area, as this is currently not mentioned. There is also a need to develop detailed guidance on sexual harassment to provide clear information and support for schools.
29. The Girls Matter campaign also calls for DfE to make Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) a statutory entitlement and update the SRE curriculum to include healthy relationships, sexual consent, online safety, violence against women and girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. The DfE should also ensure that Brook's supplementary guidance on Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)<sup>4</sup>, endorsed by the department and supported by Girlguiding, is being properly utilised and promoted. Girlguiding contributed to the development of a Gold Standard for SRE. This is designed to change attitudes and behaviours that accept and normalise violence against women and girls, and intersecting forms of violence including racism and homophobia, whilst teaching skills for young people to build relationships based on mutual respect and equality.<sup>5</sup>

**Media Impact**

30. The media also has a large part to play in changing culture and helping to show that sexual harassment is not acceptable behaviour. When we asked girls (aged 11-21) about the impact of media in the 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey, we found that:
- 52% had seen women pictured in newspapers or magazines in a sexualised way that made them feel uncomfortable.

<sup>2</sup> <http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/girls-matter>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/444862/Preventing\\_and\\_tackling\\_bullying\\_advice.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444862/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> 'Sex and Relationship (SRE) Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/data/files/SRE\\_Gold\\_Standard.pdf](http://www.endviolenceagainstawomen.org.uk/data/files/SRE_Gold_Standard.pdf)



- 42% had read something in the media that trivialised violence or abuse towards women.
- 55% had seen the media talk about women's appearance before their achievements/job.
- 48% say they do not think women are portrayed fairly in the media, rising to 53% of those aged 17 to 21.

*'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*

31. To tackle harmful content in the media and its impact on girls, and young people's attitudes more widely, action is need to challenge the negative and stereotypical portrayals of women in the media, including in magazines, on TV and in music videos.

***What role can Ofsted play in monitoring and enforcing action on reducing sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?***

32. Ofsted is responsible for monitoring the quality of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) taught in schools. By ensuring that the quality of PSHE and SRE in schools is high and including in its grade descriptors specific references (available online)<sup>6</sup> - for the need to teach healthy relationships, sexual consent, online safety and violence against women and girls, Ofsted can encourage these topics to be taught to an outstanding standard and help prevent, reduce and respond appropriately to occurrences of sexual harassment and violence in school. Compulsory PSHE assessed by Ofsted, would encourage schools to put time and resources into teaching these topics.
33. Ofsted should take into consideration the approach of a school or college when it comes to tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence when assessing a schools performance and include this in their assessment framework. For example, assessing whether they have a specific sexual harassment and sexual bullying policy; training staff are encouraged to take; student initiatives designed to highlight the issue; and other innovations that show an institutional commitment.
34. Ofsted's most recent report on PHSE<sup>7</sup> highlighted the need for major improvements in the provision of PHSE in 40% of schools with lessons too often delivered by teachers with insufficient training and curriculum time. This evidence is important in understanding the gap in meeting needs of young people, and will continue to be useful in monitoring how well schools are doing in providing vital information to young people.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/sites/default/files/Ofsted%20Grade%20Descriptors%20for%20PSHE%20education%20Dec%2013.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> 'Not Yet Good Enough' (2013)



**What role can other stakeholders, including teacher training providers, teaching unions, governors and parents, play in tackling this problem?**

### **Youth Sector**

35. Girlguiding believes the youth sector has an important part in tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence through its extracurricular programmes. Charities, such as Girlguiding, can provide additional support to young people.
36. Girls that took part in our *Care Versus Control* research told us that they might be reluctant to talk about these types of issues with their parents or teachers, unless as a last resort, but they would like to talk to their peers. Girlguiding provides girls with a safe space outside of school where they can have fun, learn new skills and explore issues without embarrassment or fear of repercussions. Girlguiding provides resources and a space where girls can reflect on the complexities of relationships - through resources such as the peer education resource, Healthy Relationships.
37. Girlguiding has also worked on other resources such as the Girls in Action project work with the charity Against Violence and Abuse (AVA) to highlight violence against women through a project entitled 'Change the Story' designed for girls of Rainbow, Brownie and Guide age to explore what makes a healthy, or unhealthy, relationship and what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. We've also combined with WAGGGS (the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts), on their Stop the Violence Campaign - a global campaign designed to end violence against girls and launched the Voices Against Violence Badge which taught girls to speak out against violence.<sup>8</sup>

### **Parents**

38. Girlguiding research has often found that girls and young women find it hard to talk to their parents about issues such as sexual harassment and that parents do not understand the types of pressure they are under.
39. When it comes to online abuse, Girlguiding research carried out in 2013 found that girls have a range of tactics for dealing with online abuse but the majority deal with it alone. For those aged 11 upwards, their reaction to rude or abusive messages is generally to deal with it informally - 56% tend to delete the message or block the sender, 39% said they tend to ignore it, and 30% tell their friend or sibling. They are less likely to approach someone of authority, for example only 22% would tell their parents. Younger girls are more likely to talk to parents with 69% of 7-11-year-olds saying they would do this, but falling sharply to 31% of 11-16-year-olds. Parents need to be confident in navigating the online world and, when necessary, engaging with and challenging the use of technology by their children.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.waggs.org/en/resources/resource-listing/voices-against-violence-leaders-handbook/>





**What action would be most effective in reducing levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?**

**A whole school approach to preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG)<sup>9</sup>**

40. Adequately and sustainably tackling sexual harassment in schools requires a whole school approach to tackling violence against women and girls. This is: “an approach that addresses the needs of pupils, staff and the wider community across the entire school environment, from the curriculum or learning environment to addressing the school’s physical environment and what actions are taken to prevent VAWG and ensure safety for both pupils and staff.”<sup>10</sup>
41. Girls’ experiences of sexual harassment are one form of VAWG and are linked to girls and women’s inequality. The End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) has designed a guide to support school leaders in tackling violence against women and girls and we suggest this is the basis for addressing VAWG.<sup>11</sup>
42. Work carried out by Against Violence and Abuse (AVA) and 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.”<sup>12</sup>

More information about this approach can be found on AVAs Prevention Platform website <http://avaproject.org.uk/ava-services-2/children-young-people/whole-schools-approach/>

43. As part of the whole school approach, Girlguiding calls for the introduction of PSHE as a statutory entitlement 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.

*‘Every day, many girls’ lives are made a misery by an onslaught of sexist comments, sexual harassment and abuse at school. These girls don’t feel safe, which affects their education. By ensuring schools take a no-tolerance approach to this kind of behaviour, the government would be improving the day-to-day lives of these girls, as well as*

<sup>9</sup>EVAW define VAWG as the following “Violence Against Women and Girls (hereafter VAWG) is the term given to all forms of violence and abuse experienced disproportionately by women and girls, or experienced by them because of their gender, including rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, ‘honour’ based violence, FGM and sexual harassment. VAWG is linked to women and girls’ inequality and is neither acceptable nor inevitable.” <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/71/EVAW-Coalition-Schools-Guide.pdf> (p.2)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/71/EVAW-Coalition-Schools-Guide.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/71/EVAW-Coalition-Schools-Guide.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/resources/71/EVAW-Coalition-Schools-Guide.pdf> (p.15)



*reducing sexual harassment and violence in the future.*’ Amy, 16, Glasgow, Former Girlguiding Advocate

44. Safeguarding is important because it sets a standard for what is appropriate behaviour. Schools should ensure that safeguarding is focused on prevention and precaution and that it covers elements such as quality assurance, risk assessment and communications.
45. As part of the whole school approach to tackling VAWG, a gendered approach to safeguarding is necessary in order to tackle the gendered nature of sexual harassment and sexual violence and keep children safe.
46. Delivery of safeguarding must be consistent and embedded in all aspects and processes of the institution reinforced across school policies, staff training and behaviour in lessons. Safeguarding in schools should include good referral policies and an awareness of the link between sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is important that youth engagement is built into the development of these policies.

*‘I think the message that it is completely unacceptable just needs to be reiterated constantly, so that people feel able to come forward about it. Also in my school we had an anonymous bullying questionnaire which allowed us to report bullying anonymously, and something like this about sexual harassment would be good I think.’* Girlguiding Advocate, 16

*‘With sexual harassment, prevention is key. The boundaries need to be taught, and boys need to know that they do not have any entitlement whatsoever to girls’ bodies. A clear cut, zero tolerance policy in all schools would also be really helpful as it gets the message across that this is totally unacceptable. Schools also need to have systems in place to get victims of sexual harassment the support they need, and to ensure that they feel comfortable coming forward.’* Girlguiding Advocate

*‘Having open conversations allows people to realise that certain things are wrong when they previously didn’t realise, such as micro-aggressions of sexual harassment that can all too often go unnoticed and, therefore, develop a mind-set that this type of behaviour and that more serious cases of sexual harassment are acceptable. I believe that the most effective method to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools would be to include things like consent in PSHE and making this compulsory to ensure that all young people are aware of these issues.’* Girlguiding Advocate, 17

## Teaching

47. Quality PSHE and SRE that is modern and relevant can help tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Our 2015 research found that 90% of girls and young women aged 13-21 agree that the government should make sure all schools are addressing sexual harassment and bullying in schools. Girlguiding’s Girls Matter campaign called for the government to modernise sex and relationships education so that lessons included healthy relationships, sexual consent, online safety, violence against women and girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships.



48. The Girls Matter campaign also called on the government to ensure that schools take a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment by introducing guidance that all schools must use to help tackle the issue.
49. As our Care Versus Control, Healthy Relationships research showed 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.
50. A teacher's reaction will have an impact on a young person and their response, including whether they seek help again in the future. As a role model and filter on what is deemed appropriate behaviour, this should be carefully considered to prevent a reaction which may prevent a girl from speaking to adults in the future for fear of being blamed or getting into trouble. Training programmes for all staff should ensure that all staff, no matter their role, are aware of the part that they play in tackling sexual harassment and violence.
51. In order to implement a whole school approach to tackling VAWG, all staff need to be adequately trained and prepared to deal with instances of sexual harassment and sexual violence to ensure it is dealt with appropriately.  
Training should include:
  - Training in delivering high quality SRE lessons.
  - Training in understanding gender inequality and stereotypes.
  - Training in safeguarding and how reporting processes work, with reference to VAWG.
  - Training in how to prevent, respond and increase awareness of VAWG.

***What can schools do to support students to deal better with the online elements of this problem?***

***Evidence from our pre-consultation work shows sexting, online bullying and the normalisation of pornography are all issues for students and they want more support in dealing with them.***

**Pornography**

52. Girlguiding research from 2015 shows that girls feel very strongly about the negative impact of pornography. 14% of girls aged 13-21 years old include the influence of pornography on relationships in their list of top concerns and 60% of girls aged 11-21 say that they see boys their age viewing pornography on mobile devices such as phones or tablets.
53. Girls also felt that pornography has a wider impact on them - 87% of girls aged 17-21 agree online pornography creates unrealistic expectations of what women's bodies should look like and 73% agree it creates unrealistic expectations of what men's bodies should look like.
54. Girls are also concerned by the normalising effect pornography has on their relationships, including on the use of sexual harassment and violence. We found that 71% of girls aged 17-21 agree online pornography makes aggressive and violent



behaviour towards women seem normal, and 65% agree online pornography increases hateful language used about/to women.

*'Pornography is definitely being used in a way to intimidate people in schools, especially with the way people can access it on their phones now. I think schools need to make clear that this is not tolerated in any way and make it easier for people to come forward and report it.'* Girlguiding Advocate, 16

55. A report published by the National Union of Students (NUS) found that 60% of students surveyed use porn to find out more about sex.<sup>13</sup> This would suggest that schools play a crucial role in providing a quality education to young people about sex and relationships as there are current gaps in accessing information.

### **Cyberbullying**

56. Girlguiding research from 2015 found girls are impacted by online bullying - 45% of those aged 11-16 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.
57. The impact of cyberbullying is severe, with 69% of 11-21-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 17-21-year-olds say bullying made them feel pressured into having sex with someone.
58. Although it is less common among younger girls, a third of 7-10-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.
59. Girlguiding's 2013 Care Versus Control report found that most girls that took part in the research, conducted with girls aged 11-17, have experienced the unsavoury side to social media of intimate pictures and videos. Often these images come from others outside of their immediate circle, such as people in other year groups or at different schools. The content does not often involve people they know personally and is more likely to be material found online. Girls that do end up participating in this behaviour are often left isolated, stigmatised and unable to ask for help.<sup>14</sup>

### ***How adequate are schools' current responses to sexting and online sexual harassment?***

*'Sexual harassment is a severe issue for girls, made even worse by social-media-based violence. Violence should not be commonplace for the vulnerable young generation.'*  
Michaela, 17, Bexley, Former Girlguiding Advocate

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/students-turn-to-porn-to-fill-the-gaps-in-their-sex-education/>

<sup>14</sup> [new.girlguiding.org.uk/documents/care-vs-control-2013](http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/documents/care-vs-control-2013) (p.9-10)



***What can schools do better to support their students to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence online?***

60. Mobile smart phones, social media and the Internet mean that sexual harassment in school no longer stops at the school gates or young people's front door, but reaches into their living rooms and bedrooms, which is why a school's response must be swift and reporting policies must be clear to staff and pupils.
61. Girlguiding reiterates its call to introduce compulsory SRE that includes lessons on online safety. Young people need to be taught how to stay safe online through Age appropriate safeguarding which is relevant, modern and addresses the concerns of young people, not just adults. Schools need to be aware that although sexual harassment often also takes place outside of school, it has an impact upon them in terms of student behaviour and ability to learn.
62. As previously mentioned, young people do not always feel comfortable reporting an incident of sexual harassment or violence to an authority figure. Therefore schools should provide young people with a safe person to contact, or an online process by which they can report incidents without fear of judgement.
63. Schools must ensure that young people receive guidance on how to cope with receiving sexual harassment online, staying safe and building resilience to support them in their daily lives at the same time as strategically tackling the issue across the school.

***What impact is pornography having on levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?***

64. Girls worry that as an increasing number of young people are left to learn about sex and relationships through the prism of pornography, it is impacting upon their lives and relationships.
  - 70% of girls aged 13-21 feel the increase in online pornography contributes to women being treated less fairly than men.
  - 80% of 17-21-year-olds feel that pornography encourages society to view women as sex objects.
  - 71% of girls aged 17-21 think that pornography gives out confusing messages about sexual consent.
  - 71% of girls aged 17-21 think that pornography makes aggressive or violent behaviour towards women seem normal.
  - 73% of girls and young women aged 13-21 think that online pornography is damaging young people's views of what sexual relationships are like.
  - 66% of young women agree that pornography puts pressure on girls to have sex before they are ready.
65. Of the 60% of girls that say that they see boys their age viewing pornography on mobile devices such as phones or tablets:
  - 15% of girls report seeing boys looking at pornography most days.
  - 13% who see this happen most weeks.
  - 32% who see this occasionally.
  - 31% say they never see this.



66. By contrast, only 27% say that they see girls their age viewing pornography on mobile devices.

- 9% say they see this at least most weeks.
- 18% see this occasionally.
- 61% say they never see this.

*'It [pornography] creates unrealistic expectations and puts pressure on girls and boys. Porn is too violent and there are genres of porn like rape fantasies that make young boys think this is normal when it isn't.'* Girlguiding member

*'Boys are expecting sexual relationships to be like in pornographic films. They "learn" from them and think girls would want to be treated how they are in them type of films.'* Girlguiding member

*'We need tighter controls on access to internet porn, changes in advertising and the media to stop sexualising women, and more about consent covered from a younger age.'* Girlguiding member

### **What can be done by schools and other stakeholders to tackle the impact of pornography?**

67. Schools should teach young people that the behaviour portrayed in pornography is very often a distorted approach to sex and that the way women are treated and featured in pornography is not the norm. Schools and other stakeholders can aid this by introducing easily accessible educational programmes to act as counterpoints to pornography.

68. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) has done some excellent work in recent years in working towards limiting young people's exposure to sexualised imagery<sup>15</sup>, particularly around age verification for pornography to make it less accessible to children and in challenging the normalisation of access to pornography. They have also worked with schools to provide education to young people to discuss and better understand the issues they face in their exposure to harmful content.<sup>16</sup>

69. Although work has been done in this area, notably by the BBFC, efforts to reduce access to adult sexual and violent online content by children needs to be considered across a range of media<sup>17</sup> and on social media.

*'I think that pornography has a huge impact on sexual harassment in schools. In this, the digital age, porn is very easily accessible online. This means that it's not uncommon for boys to view porn on their phones - in school. A lot of porn is hugely inappropriate, objectifies women and is not an accurate representation of what sex should be like. Many young people get their sex education from porn. With the internet, there is no point in trying to curb the accessibility of porn. Instead we need to teach about porn in PSHE and*

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-bbfc/media-centre/bbfc-publish-new-research-public-attitudes-glamour-content-mobile-devices>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/education-resources/education-news/bbfc-discusses-online-music-video-age-ratings-pilot-girlguiding>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/what-classification/online-music-videos>



*explain to young people what elements of porn are real or not real, and what elements are acceptable or unacceptable in real sex.’ Girlguiding Advocate*

### **Recommendations**

70. Schools should be places where girls feel safe and are free to learn, but Girlguiding research finds that girls often face daily sexual harassment in their classrooms which is having a real impact upon their confidence, their behaviour and their ability to learn. There are steps that the government, schools and other stakeholders can take to help tackle the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence.
71. As part of a whole school approach to tackling VAWG, government and schools should:
  - a. Take a zero tolerance approach to sexual bullying and harassment and the government should introduce guidance that all schools must use to tackle this issue.
  - b. Make Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) compulsory and urge schools to include lessons on body confidence and gender equality. By providing this education girls will be better placed to challenge the inequality and objectification that they face.
  - c. Make Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) compulsory in all schools and update the curriculum to include healthy relationships, sexual consent, online safety, violence against women and girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. This will allow young people to recognise when behaviour is not acceptable.
  - d. Engage young people in the development, delivery and review of education tools to tackle sexual harassment to ensure they are effective in meeting their needs.
  - e. Ensure adequate training for staff so that they have the tools, knowledge and clear processes to deal with incidents of sexual harassment when they take place.
72. Take action to stop children’s exposure to harmful sexualised content in mainstream media, including TV, magazines, music videos and online. In conjunction with statutory PSHE, this approach will make it possible to better educate young people on how to interpret and respond when they do see harmful sexualised content.
73. Encourage Ofsted to include sexual harassment and violence in its assessment and inspection of schools.
74. Girlguiding and its partners would look forward to working with the committee and government to ensure guidance is brought up-to-date and includes the principles of the Gold Standard SRE produced by EVAW. Girlguiding recognises that the current Brook guidance is endorsed by the DfE but recommends the department go further and create official guidance.



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