Image credit: Chi Wai Cheung

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Extreme misogyny is rife in Scottish schools

School boys are being radicalised online

The internet has made it possible for communities of **extreme misogyny to spread rapidly across borders on an unprecedented scale**.

These communities use online spaces to spread messages that justify and incite violence against women and girls. They create content targeted to young men, seeking to radicalise them into these extreme misogynistic beliefs. Many young men consuming this content then perpetrate harm against their young women peers at school.

This phenomenon is spreading amongst school aged boys and affecting children's learning.

- Zero Tolerance's recent research showed that boys are absorbing 'incel' attitudes and beliefs without knowing. **All the boys who participated in the study used 'incel' language and perceived Andrew Tate as a role model.** [1]
- In February 2023, **83% of secondary school teachers agreed that they are worried that Andrew Tate's views**, or influencers with similar views, are directly having a **negative effect on male pupils' behaviour**. [2]
- In February 2024, **41% of secondary teachers reported having seen aggressive misogyny** from students in their school since the start of the school year in September [2]

More evidence is avaliable in the appendix of this document.

> Andrew Tate, the boys are copying everything he says, they shout it in the corridors. That Andrew Tate is a GOAT [Greatest of All Time].
>
> ~ Girl, Cupar [3]

Girls experience violence and abuse at school

The rise of extreme misogyny amongst boys is contributing to violence in schools.

- **Twice as many girls feel unsafe** due to sexism in 2024 **compared to ten years ago** [4]
- **Only 19%** of all girls and young women **feel completely safe in educational settings**. [3]
- 1 in 3 secondary school teachers have **witnessed sexual harassment** in their school on at least a **weekly basis**. [5]
- **17% of primary school teachers have witnessed sexual harassment** in their school. [5]

> Boys touch girls inappropriately in corridors and at lunch/break times. **They all seem to find this normal.**
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [5]

> I really wanted to take GDM (Graphic Design and Manufacturing), but I would have been the only girl and **I couldn't take the boys treating me badly**, so I just thought no.
>
> ~ S1/S2 girl [6]

This culture of violence impacts girls' ability to participate fully in education.

- **Fear** of sexual harassment **prevents a quarter of girls from speaking out** in class. [7]
- **Fear** of being raped, followed home and/or kidnapped affects girls' **sleep, concentration, and ability to participate** fully in learning. [6]
- Girls living in **deprived areas** are **more likely** to say that **fear of sexual harassment holds them back** at school. [8]

The solution? Gender equality.

Extreme misogyny in school does not exist in a vacuum. Incel influencers' definitions of masculinity align with the wider gender stereotypes we have in our society. **The rise of incel extremism must be understood as a symptom of the wider patriarchal attitudes and rigid gender norms that permeate society.**

When a school boy comes across misogynistic content online, **he is already primed to believe it**. As he continues to consume this content he may, through a process of desensitisation, become ready to take part in violent expressions and even violent actions towards women.

Through tackling gender stereotypes, inequality, and everyday sexism, together we can curb the tide of radicalisation in Scottish schools.

We are calling on the Scottish Government to:

1. Make it **compulsory and statutory to provide comprehensive, gender-equal, culturally sensitive education in relationships, sexual health, and parenthood (RSHP)**, to empower young people with correct and clear information.
2. **Strengthen ties between the youth work and education sectors**, so that every young person in Scotland has a youth worker they can talk to and ask for information. Youth workers' skills in relationship building and creating safe, non-judgemental relationships are vital.
3. **Collaborate with UK and international partners to regulate online platforms**, reducing the amount of harmful content and stopping algorithms from promoting it.

ZERO TOLERANCE

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Appendix

A summary of the evidence of VAWG and misogyny in Scottish schools

Misogynistic attitudes are increasing amongst boys

- **Only 45% of young men** think that **feminism is still important** because women remain disadvantaged in society, compared to **78% of young women**. [2]
- **Andrew Tate** is a divisive character: he is **liked** by **41% of young men** but **only 12% of young women**. [2]
- **39% of young men think that women cry rape after sex they regret**. [2]
- **Misogyny** can be an **entry-point** through which young men are exposed to wider hateful views, including **antisemitism, neo-Nazism, anti-migrant activism** and more. [2]
- Unsurprisingly, those who are impressed by Tate are more likely to hold misogynistic views than other young people, and are twice as likely to have a negative opinion of feminists (42% vs 23%). [2]
- Zero Tolerance's recent research showed that boys are absorbing 'incel' attitudes and beliefs without knowing. **All the boys who participated in the study used 'incel' language** and **perceived Andrew Tate as a role model**. [1]
- 56% of girls said they felt that "education to change the attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards women" would help them feel safer and more protected. [3]

> **Frequent serious violently misogynistic language** used by a number of boys about and towards female staff and pupils. Very worrying sense of entitlement to belittle and make sexually unacceptable/ threatening comments to females.
>
> ~ Teacher at Pupil Referral Unit [5]

> The worst thing about being a girl is always being in **fear of being raped** or drawing the wrong attention.
>
> ~ Girl, age 18 [9]

Men and boys are harrassing and abusing girls

- Only **5% of girls** feel **completely safe in public** spaces. [3]
- Scottish Government research revealed a **rise in sexist, misogynistic and explicitly sexualised language among** male pupils, particularly related to the popularity of influencers. School staff expressed great concern about this growing trend and its impact on girls, young women and female school staff members. [10]
- **55%** of survivors experienced their **first sexual assault between ages 16 and 20.** [11]
- Around **4 in 5 young women agree that girls are coerced into sex** acts because they are frightened their boyfriend will leave if they don't comply (85%), or that they will be bullied for being 'frigid' (79%). [7]
- Girls from the most **deprived areas, LGBTQ+ girls and disabled girls** are **more likely to see or experience sexism** across all areas of their lives. [4]
- Only **8-11% of disabled girls, neurodivergent girls, LGBT girls and girls who are mentally ill feel completely safe at school.** [3]
- **64% of secondary teachers hear sexist language** in school on at least a **weekly basis**. [5]
- **Twice as many girls feel unsafe due to sexism** in 2024 **compared to ten years ago.** [4]
- Only **19% of all girls and young women feel completely safe in educational settings.** [3]
- **1 in 3 secondary school teachers have witnessed sexual harassment** in their school on at least a weekly basis. [5]
- **17% of primary school teachers have witnessed sexual harassment** in their school. [5]

> The teachers say they'll keep an eye on boys that frighten and hassle us, but they never do. **The boys just know they can get away with it.**
>
> ~ Primary girl [6]

> [Boys] say a lot of things, just really inappropriate then he looks at me and smiles and it makes me feel really weird.
>
> ~ Primary girl [6]

Girls are subjected to violence at school

> I would LOVE it if I could have a day without boys bullying me because I'm a girl.
>
> ~ Primary girl [6]

> Yeah, sometimes boys follow girls around in the playground teasing them about their periods. My friend in P7 had said **she felt like killing herself** because of that and her parents had to speak to the school.
>
> ~ Primary girl [6]

> In class **boys talk about girls' bodies and what they 'would do to them'**, make female sex noises at the teachers and at girls, ask girls in class if a particular photo was them, have they got it shaved, what it looks like. Girls have cried in class several times due to abuse of intimate photos.
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [5]

> He would **choke me grope me** and on one occasion made sexual threats towards my infant younger brother... The school however did practically nothing. I was told to "ignore him" as he continued to try to intimidate me. He was in a majority of my classes... and the school offered to have ME removed from classes and put into different classes which would add even more pressure to adjust to the other teachers so close to my exams... **I was made to feel as if it was MY problem** and was told, "we aren't going to be messing around chopping and changing," when I said I would try the changes of my classes as I was desperate to escape his constant harassment.
>
> ~ Everyone's Invited, Scotland [12]

> I have been whistled at whilst trying to teach, and one extreme case where a boy pushed his crotch up against my back to intimidate me. The boy was removed from my lesson once and then I was asked to accept him back in.
>
> ~ Female secondary school teacher [5]

Teachers are witnessing misogyny at school

- In February 2023, **83% of secondary school teachers agreed that they are worried that Andrew Tate's views, or influencers with similar views a**re directly having a **negative effect on male pupils' behaviour.** [2]
- in February 2024, **41% of secondary teachers reported having seen aggressive misogyny from students** in their school since the start of the school year in September. [2]
- **19% of female teachers in Scotland said they have experienced physical abuse or violence from pupils** s**everal times a week** in the previous 12 months, compared to just 3% of male teachers. [13]
- While the figures show male teachers are more likely to face verbal threats from pupils, **female teachers are more likely to have experienced actual physical violence**. [13]
- **22% of female teachers said they experienced verbal abuse from pupils daily** in the previous 12 months, compared to 11% of male teachers. [13]
- **1 in 4 female secondary school teachers were sexually harassed or abused** over the previous 12 months. [14]
- **Over half (58%)** of primary and secondary school **teachers** have **never received any training to recognise and tackle sexism**. [5]

> I work in a secondary school and there is an increase of female teachers being harassed by male students.
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [15]

> In a staff briefing, staff as a whole were told to take 'Man Up Pills' in regards to high levels of staff sickness and staff feeling tired.
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [5]

Teachers face harassment and sexism at work

> I would feel like I'm raising an issue that others don't care about as they have too much to do. I think people would be angry with me for giving them more behavioural issues to deal with.
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [5]

> I would like to pull the pupils up on their behaviour but don't feel as though this would be backed up by SLT.
>
> ~ Teacher [5]

> Included in the school policies and a lot of lip service is paid but the certificates are still blue for boys and pink for girls.
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [5]

> Purely as a result of **male pupils** and their derogatory remarks towards women. They **have very little respect for women.**
>
> ~ Secondary school teacher [15]

> They have a real issue with female members of staff. **They will blatantly ignore female members of staff's instructions** but whenever a male member of staff speaks to them, it is absolutely fine, they did it [follow the instruction].
>
> ~ Male secondary school teacher [2]

> Last night, **I had a really disgusting experience** where like it was like 5 minutes past twelve in the morning… some random boy with Snapchat added me and randomly just like started asking me to show stuff and my mum was in the room next door and I thought OK, I need to tell her about it. I still did not tell her but, but also I'm sure that's what they like.
>
> ~ Girl, Cupar [3]

Girls experience harm and harassment online

- **77% of girls and young women aged 7-21 have experienced online harm** in the last year. [4]
- **57% of 17-21-year-olds know a girl their age who has experienced sexual harassment online**. [4]
- **Over 1 in 5 girls aged 7-10 have seen rude images online**. This has doubled since 2021. [4]
- Girls are more likely to experience a range of online harms compared to just 3 years ago. **There's been a rise in the number of 11-21-year-old girls who've experienced cyberstalking, seeing unwanted sexual images, and seeing people pretending to be someone they're not.** [4]
- Girls and young women aged 11-21 are also **concerned that artificial intelligence may be used to create fake images of them or impersonate them online** (59%). [4]
- **Girls as young as 7 tell us they're seeing harmful content online**. They're more likely to say they've seen rude pictures or mean comments than they were just 3 years ago. [4]
- Girls from **marginalised groups are even more likely** to say they've seen **hate speech** online. [4]
- 64% of young people agree that **young women are less likely to participate in online debates, platforms and games because of fear** of online abuse by men. [2]
- Almost 3 out of 4 girls aged 11-16 see or experience sexism (74%). This increases to 95% for young women aged 17-21. They **most commonly face sexism online (73%)**. [4]
- More than **half of girls** and young women aged **11-21 say they've seen sexist comments or 'jokes' (53%) or hate speech (53%) online**. [4]
- **Half of girls** and young women aged **11-21 want online platforms to remove harmful content** to make them **feel safer online**. [4]

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