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ZERO

TOLERANCE

CAMPAIGNING FOR 30 YEARS

Gender inequality and violence against women and girls in Scottish schools

Girls are experiencing violence in Scottish schools

- Almost 70% of pupils in Scotland experienced sexual harassment in the 3 months prior to being asked. 34% experienced unwanted sexual touching. [1]
- In over 70% of cases, pupils don't report sexual harassment, even if it is severe and includes unwanted sexual touching. [1]
- Six times as many women have experienced serious sexual assault compared to men. [2]
- 55% of survivors experienced their first sexual assault between ages 16 and 20. [2]
- Around 1 in 5 girls and young women don't feel safe in school. Girls of colour are less likely than white girls to feel safe at school. [3]
- 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%). [4]

“

[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 [5]

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“

Santa could tell every boy and girl in the world not to be sexist and could make sure everyone had gender neutral toys.

- Primary girl [5]

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Teachers need support to deal with misogyny and violence against girls

Teachers are telling us that violence against women and girls and misogyny is happening to girls in schools.

- 1 in 3 secondary school teachers have witnessed sexual harassment in their school on at least a weekly basis. [6]
- 17% of primary school teachers have witnessed sexual harassment in their school. [6]
- 64% of secondary teachers hear sexist language in school on at least a weekly basis. [6]
- Over a third of primary school teachers witness gender stereotyping on at least a weekly basis. [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 [6]

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Boys touch girls inappropriately in corridors and at lunch/break times. They all seem to find this normal.

– Secondary school teacher [6]

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“

It's so awful we have to worry about all these things when we are only 12 and 13.

- S1/S2 girl [5]

”

Teachers also experience this violence.

- 1 in 4 female secondary school teachers were sexually harassed or abused over the previous 12 months. [7]

“

Reflecting back, the treatment of my female teachers (especially new teachers to the school) was awful. Younger boys would make sexist comments or rude remarks towards many of them under the excuse of 'banter'. Obviously, this made me feel uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe. The teachers would often not respond and would ignore them. It made me wonder, if this happens to my teacher, what hope have I got of avoiding it...?

- Young person [8]

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“

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 [6]

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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 [6]

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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 [6]

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Children are desperate for adults' and teachers' help to stop boys being violent to them.

“

I was walking in front of the group of boys who used to bully me when three of them caught up to me and began groping my bum. when I turned around to tell them to stop, they just winked at me and laughed. I told a teacher and she did nothing.

– Everyone's Invited, Scotland [9]

”

“

Wherever we go guys stare us down and intimidate us and no one does anything about that.

- S1/S2 girl [5]

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“

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 [5]

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Teachers can be part of positive change, but we need to support them to be able to do it.

- Over half (58%) of primary and secondary school teachers have never received any training to recognise and tackle sexism. [6]

“

Teachers do not know what to do. Teachers desperately need training on how to respond to sexism and sexual negativity. I repeatedly see teachers simply ignore extremely negative language or class everything as 'inappropriate' without being able to give the young person any insight. I have seen boys mime raping girls and just been kept back at lunch for a detention, no explanation given to them other than when I made myself involved.

– Secondary school teacher [6]

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Boy's violence makes girls feel unsafe and affects their school attendance and learning

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

- Fear of sexual harassment prevents a quarter of girls from speaking out in class. [4]
- Fear of being raped, followed home and/or kidnapped affects girls' sleep, concentration and ability to participate fully in learning. [5]
- Girls living in deprived areas are more likely to say that fear of sexual harassment holds them back at school. [3]

“The worst thing about being a girl is always being in fear of being raped or drawing the wrong attention.

- Girl, age 18 [10]

“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 [5]

Experiencing violence has a significant impact on girls' mental health.

“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 [5]

“I would LOVE it if I could have a day without boys bullying me because I'm a girl.

- Primary girl [5]



Schools' responses can worsen the impact of VAWG on girls' ability to heal and keep learning.

“

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 [9]

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“

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 [6]

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“

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 [6]

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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 [6]

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The solution? Gender equality

Violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. We can end it by challenging the social attitudes, values, and structures that allow it to thrive.

Gender equality in education tackles violence against women and girls, as well as other forms of violence, bullying, issues with school attendance, and educational attainment.

We need:

- The Scottish Government to recognise and prioritise violence against women and girls in discussions about behaviour and violence in schools.
- Strong leadership on embedding consistent, long-term approaches to gender equality and preventing violence against women and girls throughout school policies and practices (whole-school approach).
- A gender transformative approach to Education Reform, meaning an approach that actively challenges gender norms and establishes equality.

“ We will have space in the WORLD.
- Primary girl [5] ”

“ We all grew up with it, just get on with it, or it won't change.
- Primary girl [5] ”

“ If there was gender equality in schools, boys would be less angry as there would be less peer pressure on them to be a “big guy”.
- S1/S2 girl [5] ”

References

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