

A black and white photograph of several children from behind, walking away. They are wearing backpacks of various designs, including one with cartoon characters and another with stars. The image is slightly out of focus, emphasizing the text overlays.

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# **Let's Talk Education – The National Discussion Debate Briefing**

## **Gender inequality in Scottish schools**

Gender inequality is rife in Scottish schools.

- More girls than boys attained high levels at SCQF Level 5 and above [1], and more young men leave education without any qualifications [2].
- Despite high attainment, women hold few positions of power in Scotland [3].
- Girls in Scotland are the least likely in the UK to say they are happy with their lives [4].

Gender inequality is compounded by other inequalities such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and prejudice about disabled people.

- Girls and young women of colour are more likely than white girls to believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted their education [4].
- 1 in 5 girls believe that gender stereotypes hold them back in education; but this rises to 2 in 5 for LGBTQ+ girls [4].
- Disabled girls and girls of colour are more likely than white, non-disabled girls to be put off pursuing careers such as politics because of the harassment women leaders face online [4].



## Violence against girls in Scottish schools

Girls and young women face violence every day in Scottish schools.

- 64% of girls and young women have experienced sexual harassment at school in the past year [5].
- 37% of girls know another girl their age who has experienced rape or sexual assault [6].
- Around 1 in 5 girls and young women don't feel safe in school [4].

Multiply marginalised women and girls face higher rates of violence.

- Girls living in deprived areas are more likely to say that fear of sexual harassment holds them back at school [4].
- Girls of colour are less likely than white girls to feel safe at school [4].
- 83% of transgender women have experienced a hate crime at some point in their lives [7].
- Disabled women remain in abusive relationships for a year longer than their enabled counterparts before receiving support to leave [8].

Violence against women and girls is caused by gender inequality. In order to prevent this violence before it starts, we must embed a culture of equality in our schools.



## **An equal, preventative education**

Evidence shows that 'schools are...important sites where gender inequality is normalised unless it is challenged' [9]. The same is true of race, class, disability and LGBTQ+ inequalities, and their intersection with gender.

We need a whole-school approach to developing cultures of gender equality and non-violence. Every aspect of what the school does – its recruitment and induction of teachers; its policies; the way it treats its pupils – must be done in a way which works towards gender equality. Implementation relies on effectively supporting teachers and strong, gender-competent leadership.

Creating an equal education system means:

- Starting from a foundation of children's rights.
- Building governance systems where power is shared, a diverse range of women are equally represented at all levels, and inequality is challenged.
- Developing curricula with gender equality and rights at their core.
- Ensuring all children and young people learn about healthy relationships.
- Nurturing school cultures which model equality and the realisation of rights.

We need your support to build a Scotland where violence against women and girls is no longer tolerated. Read our [full contribution to the National Discussion on education](#).



## What is violence against women and girls?

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is defined by the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against women as:

'Any act of gender-based violence which causes or aims to cause physical, sexual, psychological harm, including threats and coercion, in public or private life.' [10]

The Scottish Government define it as violent and abusive behaviour, carried out predominantly by men, directed at women and girls because of their gender [11]. It stems from systemic, deep-rooted women's inequality and includes domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation, stalking, sexual harassment and so called 'honour-based' violence like female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women and girls, recognises that VAWG is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality [11]. We can end VAWG by challenging gender inequality through changing the social attitudes, values, and structures that underpin it.

## What does Zero Tolerance do?

Zero Tolerance is a national organisation working to end all forms of VAWG by tackling its root cause: gender inequality. We do this through raising public and political awareness of the causes of VAWG and promoting action on its prevention.

## References

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- [2] Scottish Government (2022) National Indicator Performance: National Performance Framework.
- [3] Engender (2020) Sex & Power in Scotland 2020.
- [4] Girlguiding (2022) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2022.
- [5] Girlguiding (2017) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2017.
- [6] Girlguiding Scotland (2018) Girls in Scotland.
- [7] Equality Network, Scottish Trans (2017) Scottish LGBTI Hate Crime Report Picture (disaggregated data provided by Equality Network via email: 07/08/2018).
- [8] Safe Lives (2017) 'Disabled Survivors Too: Disabled people and domestic abuse,' Spotlight Report: #HiddenVictims.

[9] Griffin, H., Redai, D. and Guerrini, V. (2021) 'A Whole-School Approach to Gender Equality: Rationale and Country Contexts' in M. Tsouroufli and D. Redai Gender Equality and Stereotyping in Secondary Schools in England, Hungary and Italy (London: Palgrave Macmillan) pp. 1-36.

[10] Assembly, United Nations General. A/RES/48/104 - Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women - UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements.

[11] Scottish Government (2018) Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women.

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