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Violence in Scottish Schools Briefing

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. [1]

The Scottish Government define it as violent and abusive behaviour, carried out predominantly by men, directed at women and girls because of their gender [2]. 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 [2]. We can end VAWG by challenging gender inequality through changing the social attitudes, values, and structures that underpin it.



Violence against women and girls in Scottish schools

Girls and young women are at disproportionate risk of violence, and many face violence on an everyday basis in Scottish schools. Girlguiding research has found that more girls are experiencing violence in school than learning about it:

- 64% of girls and young women aged 13-21 experienced sexual harassment at school in the past year [3]
- 37% of girls aged 13-25 knew another girl their age who had experienced rape or sexual assault [4]
- 84% of girls aged 13-25 learnt little or nothing about sexual harassment or abuse in personal and social education [4]

Girlguiding also found that girls and young women do not feel safe in Scottish schools:

- Around 1 in 5 girls and young women aged 11 to 21 don't feel safe in school [5]
- Girls of colour aged 11 to 16 are less likely than girls who are White to feel safe at school [5]

Cultures of misogyny and violence also make women teachers unsafe, with many experiencing VAWG at the hands of pupils [6].

A gender sensitive approach

We need your support to build a Scotland where violence against women and girls is no longer tolerated. For girls to grow up safe and all young people to learn that VAWG is unacceptable, we need a gender-sensitive approach to tackling violence in schools.

A gender-sensitive approach to ending violence in Scottish schools means:

- Making sure violence against women and girls is a specific part of the discussion about violence in Scottish schools.
- An approach which aligns with Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women and girls.
- Taking a primary prevention approach to tackling all violence by engaging with gender stereotypes and ideas of masculinity.
- Specifically considering the human rights of girls and young women when designing approaches to tackling violence.
- Having a strong, rights-based approach to accountability for boys and young men who carry out violence against women and girls.



What does Zero Tolerance do?

Zero Tolerance is a national organisation working to prevent 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.

Our policy and campaign work focuses on mainstreaming gender equality specifically with children and young people; and in the media. We work directly with key sectors, organisations, and individuals to develop their skills, capacity, and understanding of how to prevent VAWG.

Primary prevention

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) can cause severe and long-lasting physical and mental health problems, reduced participation in the workforce, substance abuse and death. It costs Scotland £6.6 billion per year. This makes preventing VAWG a more efficient use of resources than dealing with its impact. Primary prevention requires a long-term strategy as short-term programmes are ineffective at sustaining significant change.

Primary prevention is more important than ever. The cost of living crisis and the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic are causing immense harm to women. These crises have a disproportionate impact on marginalised women and risk further embedding gender and other inequalities in Scotland. This is likely to increase VAWG which is fundamentally caused by gender inequality.



References

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

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

[3] Girlguiding (2017) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2017.

[4] Girlguiding Scotland (2018) Girls in Scotland.

[5] Girlguiding (2022) Girls' Attitudes Survey 2022.

[6] NASUWT (2018) NASUWT Teacher's Union Statement on Sexual Harassment

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