



**Girlguiding Scotland submission for Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Violence against women and girls (VAWAG) and domestic violence thematic session.**

Girlguiding Scotland is the leading charity for girls and young women in Scotland, supporting 45,000 young members and 11,500 volunteers.

### **Overview**

As the leading charity for girls and young women in Scotland, our briefing is focused on the impact that VAWG has on girls (under 18).

### **Evidence**

In our submission we have referenced the [Girls in Scotland](#) survey our research into the lives of girls and young women. It builds a comprehensive picture of emerging needs, issues and priorities of girls and young women today. The survey provides a snapshot of the views of over 500 girls and young women from across Scotland aged 7 to 21, within and outwith Girlguiding Scotland.

### **Findings from Girls in Scotland Survey**

We know sadly, that many girls and young women first start experiencing harassment and violence within school. Therefore, we believe that preventing violence against women and girls needs to start within education and childcare settings/ all children from a young age, without this we don't think that the issue of violence against women and girls will be solved. With years of experience we have seen first-hand how girls' lives are changing.

For the Girls in Scotland Survey 2020 we asked the views of over 500 girls and young women aged 7-21 across Scotland. The results of this survey show that personal safety is a serious concern for girls, especially older girls and young women. Many are fearful about going out alone, going out in the dark and being harassed while they are out within their local area. Girls and young women strongly believe that they should feel safe in their own community and so do we.

### **In Public**

For young women aged 16-21, feeling unsafe outside is a significant issue. 37% say they are stared at and receive unwanted attention when they go outside, 56% feel worried when they're outside and it is dark and 53% said more should be done so that girls and young women feel safe in their local area.



## At School

In our 2018 survey, 84% of girls aged 13-25 said they had learned little to nothing about sexual harassment or abuse, not least how to protect themselves from it. For girls at school, feeling unsafe in the classroom is an important issue. From our 2018 survey, 33% of girls and young women aged 13-25, 21% said that they have experience sexual harassment while at school, college or university. Shockingly, 37% of girls aged 13-25 said that they knew another girl their age who had experienced rape or sexual assault.

Following the launch of the updated RSHP resource and the national approach to anti-bullying it was hoped that this would be a turning point for girls in schools across Scotland. From recent news events involving Crieff High School and testimony from our members we can see that this is clearly not the case.

## Our Policy Calls

Based on the information gained from our survey and also from the thoughts of our members we have a number of policy calls that we are campaigning for.

These are:

- Compulsory, high-quality Sex and Relationships Education covering consent, online abuse, gender equality and healthy relationships to be taught in **all** schools in Scotland
- Ensuring that all schools to have a duty to prevent and tackle sexual harassment and be held accountable.
- Calling on the Scottish Government to make national guidance to ensure schools know how to take a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment

As we have mentioned, we believe that eliminating violence against women and girls begins with education. The policy calls mentioned above are those which we and our members believe will help tackle violence against women and girls.

## Priorities for £100 to address violence against women and girls.

We believe that priorities for spending should be split between funding grassroots organisations and providing more education on the issue of violence against girls.

### Grass roots organisations

We believe that money should be funding local, accessible grass roots organisations, that provide a safe and empowering space for girls. 46% of girls in our survey say that



they speak up about things that are important to them if they are with girls only. Safe spaces are essential. We feel that this funding should be in addition to the £5million already received by frontline services across Scotland.

Additionally, our members feel that more money should be put into community care programme, to give women and girls a safe space that they know they can access.

*“money should be given to different refuges to help build special facilities and train support workers to help women and girls who have/are experiencing violence”*

Girlguiding Scotland member aged 17

We believe that a huge part of prevention comes from women and girls being able to share their experiences so that women feel more empowered to speak up at an earlier stage, thereby preventing violence and control of women. We believe that this can be done easily through sharing experiences and stories in a safe space, to all genders so that people can spot the signs of abuse or control and try to prevent it where possible.

*“Schools should be talking more about violence against women and girls to educate men and to make girls feel safer when sharing their stories.”*

Girlguiding Scotland member aged 17

## Education

Continuing from the priorities to provide safe spaces for girls, we believe that minimising the effects of, and solving the problem of violence against women and girls starts with education. As part of our ending sexual harassment in schools campaign we are calling for compulsory, high quality sex and relationships education which covers consent, online abuse, gender equality and healthy relationships. We also call on the Scottish Government to ensure that all schools have a **legal** duty to prevent and tackle sexual harassment and to be held accountable where they fail to act appropriately.

We believe that the Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education within schools must be revised to tailor to the changing state of our society which includes a bigger focus on; social media harassment and access to pornography from a younger age. In order to tackle this, funds should be diverted to school programmes, particularly those in high areas of deprivation and crime in order to help prevent the root causes of violence against women. This could include bringing in outside



organisations to deliver this part of the curriculum. It should however not stop at the curriculum but be an ongoing issue that schools must tackle seriously.

### **What our members say**

From our girls in Scotland Survey 2020, Hannah our Girl Voice Volunteer Lead shared some thoughts on how we at Girlguiding Scotland see education as integral to solving the issue of abuse and violence against women. We see this happening, in part, by tackling seriously the issue of sexual harassment in schools.

*“We are continuing our calls for training to help teachers recognise and tackle sexual harassment in the classroom. We also believe that by providing consistent and high quality personal and social education - which covers issues like consent, healthy relationships and online abuse- schools can not only stop sexual harassment but help create a fairer society.*

*Education plays such a huge role in our lives so it is important that every girl has the opportunity to feel safe and happy at school. By taking these further actions we can create a more equal and fair Scotland for everyone.”*

We see the issues identified by Hannah as those which are affecting the lives of women and girls and that need resolved with immediacy. It is unacceptable that harassment and violence against women continues to be prevalent within our schools and society.

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### **Work required to be done by men or boys on positive masculinity to prevent violence.**

We believe that early intervention is the key to preventing violence and harassment against girls, with a zero tolerance approach being adopted in all spheres of life to influence children positively from an early age.



We promote a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment in schools and call on the Scottish Government to ensure that all schools have a **legal** duty to prevent and tackle sexual harassment and to be held accountable where they fail to act appropriately. We believe that this approach should extend to all incidents of gender based violence or harassment at school. We see this as a preventative measure

From our 2020 survey, 47% of girls indicated that they only feel comfortable to be themselves when taking part in activity with girl only. 40% said they would gain more confidence taking part in an activity that is girls only. We believe that this is testament to the experiences that girls have in school of gender based harassment and violence.

### **What our members say**

We believe that our member's experiences highlight the urgency for a zero tolerance approach to be taken towards gender based violence and harassment within schools.

*“in school (violence and harassment of girls) is almost thought as “normal” as we are so desensitised to these kinds of incidents. WE cannot be turning a blind eye to the trauma that women and girls experience all through the country”* Girlguiding Scotland Member ages 16

We believe that violence and harassment against girls within school should not be seen as “normal”. We believe that a zero tolerance approach is key to preventing violence of girls, with appropriate reporting and support systems in place.

### **Final Comments**

We believe that a lot more must be done by the government to tackle to crisis of violence against women and girls. We will continue to campaign for the government to introduce these measures as described. We will also campaign until every young person has access to high quality sex and relationships education in school which covers consent, equality, harassment, online abuse and positive masculinity. In the community we will continue to campaign for our streets to become safer, with more street lighting and for more access to help services so that women and young girls can escape violence before it happens.