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[OHCHR study on youth and human rights: Girlguiding response](#)

Introduction

About Girlguiding

1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and The Senior Section (14-25 years). Registered Charity No 306016. www.girlguiding.org.uk

Key messages

- We are for all girls
- We give girls their own space
- We give girls a voice
- We change as the lives of girls change

About our evidence

2. Girlguiding's submission focuses on evidence from our annual Girls' Attitudes Survey - the largest survey of girls and young women in the UK - which gathers the views and opinions of over 1,700 girls and young women throughout the country aged 7 to 21, from inside and outside guiding. For more information and data on the latest and previous reports please see www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes
3. Our response includes quotes from members of our youth panels. Our Advocates are a group of 18 Girlguiding members aged 14 to 25 who lead the direction of Girlguiding's advocacy and research. Our British Youth Council (BYC) delegation has 10 members aged 14 to 25, who work with other BYC delegates to campaign for change and improve young people's lives.

Our response

4. Girls have a right to good health and wellbeing, access to quality education, and opportunities for their future. However, as the following evidence documents, the challenges that girls and young women face in the UK act as a barrier to those rights. We believe we are in a good position to respond to this consultation because of our extensive research with girls and young women, in which girls tell us themselves the issues that they face. At Girlguiding, we also deliver programmes which aim to empower our young members to challenge these issues.



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Question 1: Challenges faced by young people in your country

Every day, girls experience significant challenges, just because they are girls. We know that thousands of girls and young women face a perfect storm of pressures growing up today - from everyday sexism, sexual harassment and violence, to constant scrutiny of their appearance, double standards around their sexuality and a lack of positive role models. Although we know that such challenges can affect people of all genders, we believe that a gendered approach must be taken to tackle the particular challenges faced by girls and women. We have identified six key challenges faced by girls and young women in the UK:

1. Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

Our Girls' Attitudes Survey shows that girls continue to face a number of unacceptable pressures and don't feel safe in their everyday lives. Many are aware of or have experienced VAWG in various different forms including online abuse and harassment, coercive and controlling behaviour within relationships and sexual harassment in school. They also say that they feel unsafe outside school, and frequently change their behaviour to avoid unwanted attention and intimidation by boys and men.

Our 2017 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed:

64% of girls and young women aged 13 to 21 have faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year. Of those that had...

- 41% of girls aged 13-21 had experienced jokes or taunts of a sexual nature
- 36% of girls aged 13-21 had experienced sexist comments on social media
- 22% of girls aged 13-21 had seen obscene graffiti about girls or women
- 24% of girls aged 13-21 had seen unwanted sexually explicit pictures or videos
- 19% of girls aged 13-21 had experienced unwanted touching
- 19% of girls aged 13-21 experienced frequent unwanted attention
- 39% of girls aged 11-21 said they had experienced having their bra straps pulled by boys in the past week

Our 2016 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed:

- 72% of girls aged 11-16 and 85% of girls aged 17-21, feel unsafe when they are out on their own some or most of the time. 67% change their behaviour to avoid this
- 41% of girls aged 17-21 have experienced unwanted touching at a nightclub some or most of the time. Half (51%) said they changed their behaviour to avoid this
- 27% of girls aged 11-21 said they had experienced their skirts being pulled up by boys at school in the past week

Our *Care versus Control, Healthy Relationships* report showed that coercion and control are significant issues for young women and girls. It is essential that schools reach young people, both boys and girls, at a crucial stage when they are developing their expectations



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around relationships. Without proper and adequate information, girls are in danger of believing that some unacceptable behaviours are normal.

- Two fifths of girls aged 11 to 21 believe it's acceptable for a partner to make them tell them where they are all the time (2012 Survey)
- 21% of girls aged 11 to 21 believe it's acceptable for a partner to shout and call them names (2012 Survey)
- 35% of girls aged 11 to 21 know girls their age who have experienced control or bullying from a partner (2014 Survey)

Our research shows that girls don't feel able to talk to parents or teachers about their relationships. Girls told us that they prefer to talk about relationships with others their own age in a girl-only environment (*Care versus Control: Healthy Relationships*, 2016). Our 2015 Survey showed that RSE provision in schools for girls aged 11 to 16 is out of touch with girls' expectations in key areas:

- 49% were taught about consent, rape and laws regarding sex (compared to 82% who wished to learn about this)
- 47% were taught about violence against women and girls (compared to 84% who wished to learn about this)
- 45% were taught about recognising good and bad behaviour in relationships (compared to 84% who wanted to learn this)

2. Exposure to harmful sexualised imagery

Since 2014, Girlguiding has called for an end to children's exposure to harmful sexualised content in mainstream media and online, including pornography. From an early age, girls are bombarded with sexualised images of women across different platforms and they tell us that this can make them feel disempowered. They say that the abundance of sexualised images - including via widely available pornographic films and images - has a negative impact on their body confidence and contributes to a culture in which women are valued more for their appearance than ability and in which sexism and harassment are frequently normalised.

Girls tell us that the rise of easily available pornography makes them feel disempowered, gives unrealistic expectations of women's bodies and has a range of negative effects on their lives and wider society.

Our 2016 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed:

- 75% of girls aged 11 to 21 thought women are too often shown as sex objects in the media and online, with 61% saying this makes them feel disempowered
- 75% of girls aged 13 to 21 agreed that pornographic sites should have age-verification controls



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Our 2015 Survey showed:

- 70% of girls aged 13 to 21 think the rise in online pornography contributes to women being treated less fairly and 80% of girls aged 17 to 21 think it encourages society to view women as sex objects
- 71% of girls aged 17 to 21 think pornography gives confusing messages about consent and makes aggressive and violent behaviour against women seem normal

As such, we were delighted that the Digital Economy Bill included provision around age-verification for online pornography.

3. Everyday sexism and gender stereotyping

Our evidence shows that sexism and gender stereotypes can impact on what girls see as possible for themselves and that from as young as seven, some girls hold gendered views on behaviour.

In 2017 we found of girls aged 7-10:

- 43% thought girls were better at putting their hand up in class (6% boys, 48% both same)
- 59% thought girls were better at being kind (2% boys, 38% both same)
- 42% thought boys were better at being strong (10% girls, 45% both same)
- 31% thought boys were better at taking risks and not worrying about failing (17% girls, 42% both same)

Of girls aged 11-21:

- 47% had seen stereotypic imaged of women and men in the media in the past week that made them feel less confident to do what they want (2017 survey)
- 80% of girls agreed that more should be done to tackle sexism and abuse online (2016 survey)
- 70% said sexism is so widespread it affects most of their lives (2016 survey)

4. Mental and emotional wellbeing

Our research shows that girls and young women face particular pressures that negatively impact on their wellbeing, and that girls' and young women's wellbeing has declined in recent years. It also shows that girls' wellbeing decreases as they get older. Worryingly, many girls do not feel able to talk about their feelings or ask for help.

Our 2017 Survey showed:

- 23% of girls aged 11-21 said gender stereotypes make them feel less confident in themselves and 19% said they made them feel anxious about their future



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Our 2016 Survey showed:

- From 2011 to 2016 the number of girls aged 7 to 21 who say they are unhappy has increased from 9% to 16%
- 52% of girls aged 7 to 21 said they wouldn't seek help because they feel uncomfortable talking about feelings, and 54% aged 11 to 21 because they feared being judged
- Girls can often dismiss or downplay pressures affecting their wellbeing - 33% of girls aged 11 to 21 wouldn't seek help because they think girls are 'just expected to cope'

Our 2015 Survey also showed:

- 37% of girls aged 11 to 21 had experienced a mental health problem. This rose to 46% among those aged 17 to 21

5. Inequalities in education

Gender inequality and gender stereotypes are present in girls' education in terms of what subjects they learn, their access to sport, and the life skills they gain. The choices available to girls at school have an impact on their futures and so it is important that non-gendered teaching and careers advice are made available in schools.

Our Girls' Attitudes Survey showed:

- 30% of girls aged 11 to 16 think computing is more for boys (2017 survey)
- 24% aged 17 to 21 think Physics is more for boys (2017 survey)
- 52% of girls aged 11 to 21 think STEM subjects have the image of being more for boys (15% of girls aged 7 to 10 thought this) (2016 Survey)
- Only 43% aged 11 to 21 say they have the same choices as boys at their school in sports and exercise (2016 survey)
- 27% aged 11 to 21 said football was only offered to boys at their school (2017 survey)
- 38% aged 11 to 21 said their opportunities in the future would be better if there were no gender stereotypes (2017 survey)
- 32% aged 11 to 21 say that girls and boys tend to get different careers advice, even when their interests and abilities are similar (2014 survey)

6. Body confidence

Girls are subject to intense appearance pressures, including from gender stereotypes, sexualised portrayals of women in the media and criticism about their bodies from others. In addition, anxiety about experiencing sexual harassment can seriously undermine girls' body confidence. Body confidence can also be affected by girls feeling they need to compare themselves to celebrities and/or their friends' most glamorous photos on social media. We believe girls should be supported to manage such unacceptable pressures and that more should be done to tackle this.



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Our Girls' Attitudes Survey shows that:

- The number of girls aged 7 to 21 that are happy with how they look has fallen from 73% to 61% in five years from 2011 to 2016 (2016 Survey)
- 37% of girls aged 11 to 21 compare themselves to celebrities most of the time or often (2016 Survey)
- 49% of girls aged 11 to 21 said that anxiety about sexual harassment affects their body confidence (2015 Survey)

In 2016, girls told us that their fear of others criticising their body stopped them from:

- Wearing the clothes they like (53% aged 11 to 16 and 63% aged 17 to 21)
- Having their picture taken (49% aged 11 to 16 and 55% aged 17 to 21)
- Taking part in sport and exercise (41% aged 11 to 16 and 37% aged 17 to 21)
- Speaking up in class (39% aged 11 to 16 and 32% aged 17 to 21)
- Going to certain places (36% aged 11 to 16 and 30% aged 17 to 21)
- Socialising (24% aged 11 to 16 and 26% aged 17 to 21)
- Using social media (25% aged 11 to 16 and 24% aged 17 to 21)
- Having fun with friends (18% aged 11 to 16 and 24% aged 17 to 21)

Question 2: Examples of discrimination against young people in the exercise of their rights

Young women in the UK may face discrimination based on their sex. The four types of sex discrimination are: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

An example of direct sex discrimination is the gender pay gap. In our 2013 Girls' Attitudes Survey, half of girls aged 11 to 21 were worried about the pay gap between men and women. In 2016, 45% of girls aged 11 to 16 and 64% aged 17 to 21 agree that employers prefer to employ men than women.

Examples of indirect sex discrimination include the impact that gender stereotypes and sexism can have on girls' and young women's lives. For example, in 2011 30% of girls aged 11 to 21 said their fears of sexism in the workplace puts them off a career in STEM. Additionally, only 38% of girls aged 11-21 agree having children will not affect their future career.

We believe that the Government should work with employers to ensure that gender discrimination and sexism in the workplace is addressed and that policies such as shared parental leave and quality part-time opportunities are accessible to all workers.



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It is also important to note the intersectionality of the protected characteristics. Young women and girls may face gendered experiences and discrimination in relation to their age, disability, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation, and/or gender reassignment.

Question 3: Are you aware of policies and programmes aimed at supporting young people in the exercise of their rights? If so, please describe them

At Girlguiding, we empower girls and young women to be the change by enabling them to tell their stories and share their experiences of some of the tough issues they face and by offering girls the skills they need to make change happen across all areas of their lives.

We promote the voices of girls and young women through:

- Our Advocate Panel which consists of 18 young women, aged between 14 and 25. They are our national youth panel who influence the direction of our research and advocacy work, and speak out and get girls heard at the highest levels of government and by the media.
- Our British Youth Council delegation which consists of ten young girls, aim to improve all girls' and young people's lives by ensuring the British Youth Council listens to girls' voices.
- Action for Change which is a year-long journey for participants to run their own social action project. Projects have included LGBTQ+ awareness, mental health, disability, poverty, and gender inequality.
- We also encourage our young members to speak out and share their views and experiences in the media, and create opportunities for them to meet and talk to people in power.

Girlguiding's programme for girls and young women includes activities and resources that help them to be confident in themselves and to challenge the gender stereotypes that our evidence shows influence girls' decisions about their future aspirations. For example, it also includes specific focus on STEM subjects. Girlguiding believes it is important that girls and young women are given the support, encouragement and opportunities to access STEM subjects and careers and that the barriers which often prevent them from doing so, are addressed. We believe that Government, schools, industry and other partners should provide targeted programmes for girls on STEM (including developing skills and confidence) and opportunities such as taster days and school trips to STEM workplaces. They should also support organisations like Girlguiding which offer girls the space to safely be themselves and develop their own interests, including around STEM.

Through Peer Education, Girlguiding also delivers programmes that enable girls to think and talk about issues that are important to them with other young women:

- Think Resilient builds girls' wellbeing through resilience-building techniques and planning how to manage difficulties and recognise and apply positive coping strategies and support. This is developed with YoungMinds.



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- Free Being Me helps girls grow body confidence and self-esteem and challenges unrealistic beauty ideals. Developed with WAGGGS and the Dove Self-Esteem Project.
- Healthy Relationships which helps to ensure girls can develop and identify safe and healthy relationships. This is developed with AVA and Women's Aid.
- Youth Health empowers Guides and members of The Senior Section to make their own decisions about alcohol, smoking, drugs and sex, developed with the Department of Health.

Question 4: How are youth organisations or youth-led structures involved in developing, implementing, monitoring and/or evaluating policies and programmes on youth in your country?

At Girlguiding, we regularly contact MPs and Ministers to encourage them to involve girls in their work. We support members of our Advocate panel and BYC delegation to meet with MPs, speak at events at Parliament, contribute to consultations on issues that matter to them and attend and speak at party conferences. Our leaders play an important role in supporting girls to take an interest in politics and democracy and we're keen to provide them with the support they need to do this. For example, we provide politics and democracy-themed unit activities and support leaders to host their local MPs at their units.

[Consultations](#) we have responded to include:

- DCMS - Internet Safety Strategy green paper
- DCMS - Full-time social action review
- HM Government - Industrial Strategy white paper
- Women and Equalities Select Committee - Inquiry into fathers and the workplace
- Fawcett Society - Sex Discrimination Law review
- CAP and BCAP - Consultation on the sexual portrayal of under 18s in advertising
- Health Select Committee - Inquiry into children and young people's mental health - the role of education
- House of Lords - Citizenship and civic engagement
- ONS - Approach to measuring and reporting SDGs in the UK
- DfE - Safeguarding children

Since our 2014 Girls Matter campaign, Girlguiding has campaigned for statutory sex and relationship education. This became a reality in 2017, with the passage of the Children and Families Act - to help young people realise sexual and reproductive health and rights, VAWG, LGBTQ+, as well as their rights online.

In our Girls Matter campaign we also demanded schools to take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual bullying and harassment. In 2017, the bullying guidance to schools was updated to include sexual harassment and sexist bullying in schools.



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Additionally, girls in guiding contributed their views to the Digital Economy Bill process that made age-verification law in April 2017. Girlguiding believes this is an important step towards preventing the scale of exposure to pornography that children and young people experience today.

Question 5: What measures at international level would facilitate/support the realisation of young people's rights?

Girlguiding is a member of World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) - the largest women's organisation in the world. WAGGGS supports girls and young women to develop their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world, develop leadership skills, and bring about change in their communities. Girlguiding is proud to be part of this diverse movement with ten million members across 145 countries in five regions worldwide.

When we launched our Girls Matter campaign in 2014, we called for the Department for International Development to focus on equality for girls, including advocating for girls' rights to be central to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. This was a success, and we would like the Government to ensure that they are working towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

Girlguiding is a proud supporter of the IC Change campaign and was delighted when the Istanbul Convention Bill passed, meaning a much stronger framework of laws on violence against women and girls will come into force when the Istanbul Convention is ratified. We urge the Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention to make this a reality sooner.

Girlguiding also supports the recommendations on tackling VAWG produced by Against Violence and Abuse (AVA) and the End Violence Against women Coalition (EVAW).

Question: Any other issue you would like to share with OHCHR

In our 2014 Girls' Attitudes Survey, 55% of girls aged 11 to 21 said they support more political education in schools and 54% said they support mandatory teaching about citizenship, democracy and human rights.

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