

...says politicians have helped
...that police are not taking violence against
women and girls seriously enough



'Rape list' part of misogyny girls face
at school



BBC presenter Ashley Cain called
women 'slags', 'sluts' and 'bitches'

Nowhere to escape

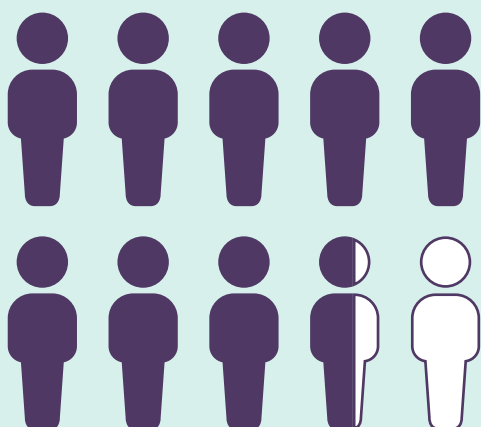
Young women's experiences
of sexism and misogyny

Executive summary

Sexism and misogyny are an everyday reality for young women. Our **2026 State of the Nation survey** shows that these experiences are widespread, frequent and often deeply consequential – shaping how young women feel, behave and participate in the world around them

Sexism is an everyday experience for young women

Almost **9 in 10** (87%) young women experienced some form of sexist behaviour in the last year



The most common experiences can easily be dismissed as minor or ‘normal’: being interrupted or talked over because of their gender (79%), assumptions being made about what they are capable of (74%), unwanted comments about their appearance (71%) and being treated with less respect than men (70%).

But these experiences are not occasional. 43% of young women are interrupted or talked over because of their gender at least weekly, while a third experience assumptions about their capabilities this often.

And more serious forms of sexism and misogyny are also worryingly common. 59% of young women experienced offensive or abusive comments because of their gender, 58% received unwanted sexual messages and 48% experienced threats or abusive behaviour in the last 12 months.

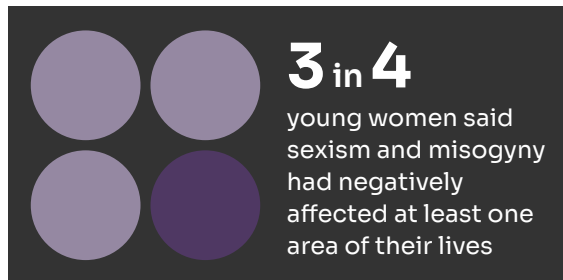
SEXISM IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE YOUNG WOMEN GO – SO THEY CAN’T ESCAPE IT

Young women encounter sexism across almost every part of their lives – online, on the street, on public transport, at work, in education, within their families and from customers, clients and service users.

This means that sexism cannot simply be avoided by staying away from one particular environment. It can follow young women from one part of their lives into another, including into digital spaces where misogynistic content can be amplified and encountered by young people who have not sought it out.

SEXISM CHANGES HOW YOUNG WOMEN LIVE THEIR LIVES

The impact of these experiences goes beyond the individual incident. Three quarters (75%) of young women said sexism and misogyny had negatively affected at least one area of their lives. This included their sense of safety in public (43%), confidence (41%), how they dress or behave (34%), mental health (31%) and willingness to speak up (25%).



At work, 22% had changed the way they dress or behave because of sexism or concerns about how women are treated, while 21% had avoided sharing their opinions.

FOR SOME YOUNG WOMEN, THE IMPACT IS EVEN GREATER

95% of trans young women experienced sexist behaviour in the last year and 94% said sexism and misogyny had negatively affected their lives. Neurodivergent young women and those with long-term health conditions also reported particularly high levels of negative impact.

WORK IS NO EXCEPTION

Young women continue to face significant barriers and discrimination at work. More than half (53%) experienced discrimination while working or looking for work, while 16% had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace at some point in their lives.

Importantly, employers are aware that this is happening. More than half (52%) of HR managers had witnessed young women experiencing sexist or discriminatory behaviour. Yet concerning attitudes persist among some HR professionals, suggesting that awareness of sexism does not necessarily mean that the cultures and assumptions underpinning it have disappeared.

YOUNG WOMEN ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE

These experiences are shaping how young women see the future of gender equality. 77% think sexist views are becoming more common, 74% think sexist comments are becoming more acceptable among young men, and 70% are worried that women's rights are going backwards.

77%
of young women think sexist views are becoming more common

At the same time, both young women and young men recognise a growing divide between them. Almost three quarters (72%) of young women and 65% of young men think that men and women are becoming more divided in their views and experiences. And the data suggests that this perception is grounded in real differences in attitudes towards gender equality. More than a third (37%) of young men agree that gender equality has 'gone too far'. And 36% of young men agree that society would be better if traditional gender roles were more common, compared with just 19% of young women.

YET THERE IS ALSO A CLEAR OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

81% of young women and 82% of young men agree that it is important to do more to bring young men and young women together.

This matters. Tackling sexism cannot mean asking young women to keep adapting to it. We need to change the environments and cultures that allow sexism and misogyny to persist, while creating opportunities for young people to listen to one another, challenge harmful gender norms and build a fairer future together.

"I shouldn't have to live in fear as a young woman being on my own. Boys and men know they can get away with it because they enable each other"

- Sophie*¹

¹ Name has been changed

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Our findings point to the need for action across every part of young women's lives

We are calling for:

- A national framework for preventing and tackling misogyny, bringing together action across education, workplaces, online spaces and public life.
- Stronger enforcement of women's existing rights, alongside clear information so young women know what protections are available to them.
- National principles for tackling everyday sexism at work, with employers expected to prevent sexism, challenge harmful cultures and hold leaders accountable.
- More opportunities for young women and men to challenge harmful gender norms together, in safe and facilitated spaces.
- Stronger networks and spaces for young women to build confidence, connection and power – without placing responsibility for solving misogyny on them.
- Action to tackle online misogyny and emerging forms of digital gender-based harm, including stronger safety-by-design requirements and effective regulation.
- Education that prevents misogyny, from schools through to further and higher education, youth services, workplaces and communities.

Young women should not have to spend their lives navigating around sexism. It is time to change the environments that allow it to thrive.

Background and Introduction

In recent years, public conversations about sexism, misogyny and gender equality have become increasingly prominent. Debates about online safety, misogynistic influencers, violence against women and girls, gender equality and women's rights have moved into mainstream political and cultural discussion.

At the same time, wider political shifts are contributing to uncertainty about the future of gender equality. Across many countries, support for populist and far-right political movements has grown, often alongside increased hostility towards feminist ideas, challenges to equality protections and more polarised debates about gender and identity. While these trends are not identical across contexts, they have contributed to concerns that progress towards gender equality cannot be taken for granted. In the UK, many young women are watching these developments unfold against a backdrop of growing online misogyny, political division and increasingly visible anti-equality narratives. Evidence suggests a growing sense that hard-won gains towards gender equality feel more fragile than they have for some time.

Importantly, this does not necessarily mean support for gender equality has collapsed. Much of the evidence points in the opposite direction. Surveys suggest that younger generations continue to hold broadly progressive views on

gender equality overall. However, there is also growing evidence that misogynistic narratives have become more visible, more accessible and more mainstream, particularly within digital spaces.

Against this backdrop, Young Women's Trust wanted to understand how sexism and misogyny are shaping young women's lives today.

Drawing on findings from our 2026 State of the Nation survey, the stories and experiences shared by young women, and a review of wider evidence on sexism and misogyny, this report explores:

- How young women are experiencing sexism and misogyny today.
- Where these experiences are taking place.
- The impact sexism and misogyny have on young women's lives, opportunities and wellbeing.
- How experiences differ across groups of young women.
- How young women and young men view gender equality and its future direction.
- The changes young women believe are needed to create a more equal society.

Our biennial 'State of the Nation' survey brings together three different perspectives to help us understand how young women's experiences of work, finances, sexism and inequality are shaping their lives and expectations for the future.

In our 2026 survey, we heard from a representative sample of:

- 4,004 young women and non-binary people² aged 18-30 across England and Wales
- 1,005 young men aged 18-30 – giving us a useful gender comparison
- 937 HR managers – allowing us to compare young women's experiences with the perspectives of people involved in workplace decision making.

*Fieldwork was carried out by **Yonder Data Solutions** between 30th July – 17th August 2026*

² For the sake of brevity, we will refer to this group as 'young women' throughout this report.



KEY FINDINGS

1. Sexism is an everyday experience for young women

Sexist behaviour directed at young women is shockingly commonplace. **Almost 9 in 10 (87%) young women reported experiencing some form of sexist behaviour within the last 12 months.**

In our survey, young women aged 18-24 were slightly more likely to report sexist experiences than those aged 25-30 – 90% of 18-24 year olds, compared to 85% of 25-30 year olds. However, the stories shared by young women suggest that these experiences often start much earlier.

Several young women spoke about learning gendered expectations in childhood:

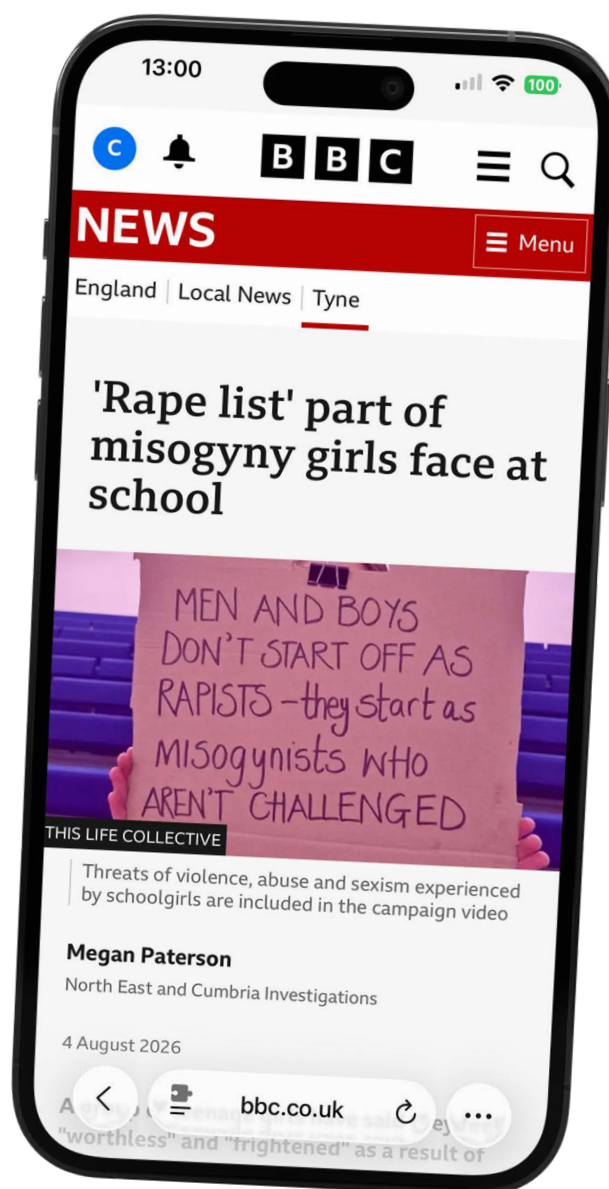
“I have always been told I can’t do certain jobs because I am a woman” – Safiya*³

Others described experiences of harassment and sexism during their teenage years:

“My first experience of sexual harassment happened at school and it left me feeling silenced and totally unsafe.” – Amy*⁴

This picture is consistent with wider evidence. Research published by Girlguiding in 2024 found that **85% of girls and young women experienced sexism in their daily lives.**⁵ And evidence from Ofsted has highlighted the extent to which sexist behaviour can become embedded from a young age: in 2025, it reported that **90% of girls had experienced sexist name-calling or unsolicited sexual images**, describing sexism in schools as “normalised”.⁶

For the overwhelming majority of young women, sexism is unfortunately not an unusual or exceptional experience; it is something they encounter as part of everyday life.



³ Name has been changed

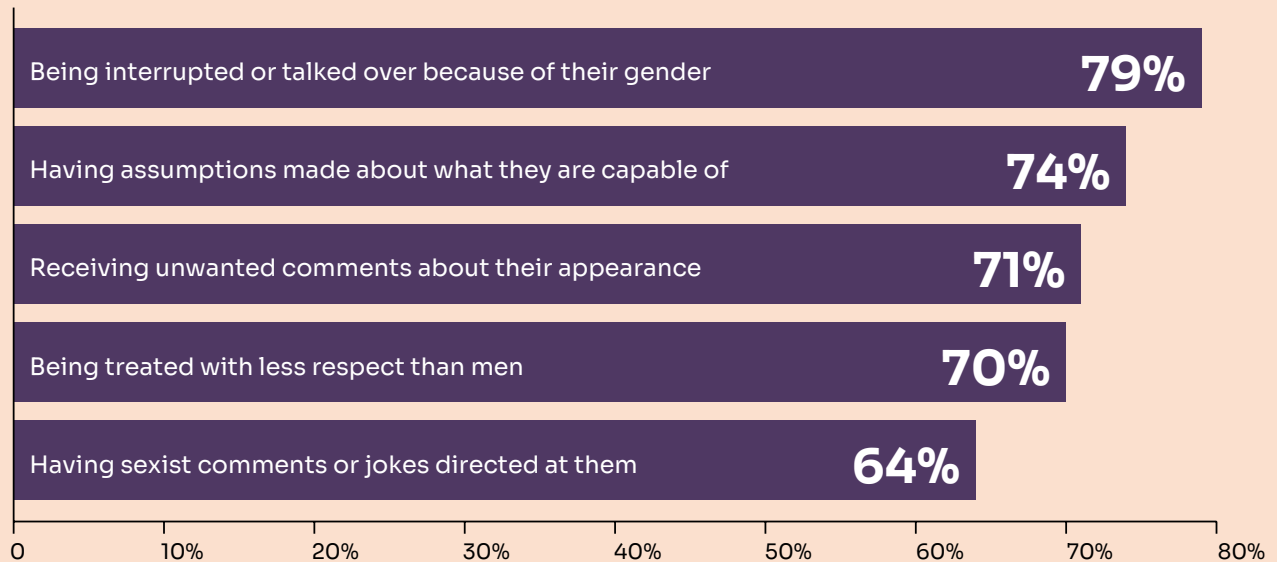
⁴ Name has been changed

⁵ Girlguiding (2024), [Campaign highlights gender stereotypes impact on girls' confidence](#)

⁶ UK Parliament (2025), [Violence against women and girls in schools and among children and young people - POST](#)

The most common experiences are often those that can be dismissed as minor or normal

FIGURE 1: The five most common types of sexist behaviour experienced by young women in the last 12 months, by %



But these experiences are not simply occasional annoyances. For many young women, they are happening regularly and across multiple areas of their lives.

More than two in five (43%) young women are interrupted or talked over because of their gender **at least weekly**. A third (33%) have assumptions made about their capabilities at least weekly, while more than a quarter (27%) receive unwanted comments about their appearance at least weekly. One in five (20%) experience sexist comments or jokes at least weekly.

2 in 5

(43%) young women are interrupted or talked over because of their gender at least weekly

The fact that these experiences are so widespread matters. When something happens to the vast majority of young women, it becomes easy for it to be treated as simply part of being a woman; something to laugh off, put up with or work around.

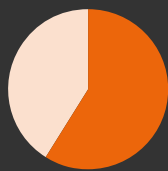
One young woman we spoke to described exactly this dynamic. Catharine works in an all-male team where sexist jokes are sometimes presented as a way of including her “as one of the boys”. But the jokes are often about women’s bodies or experiences, including jokes about her being on her period. As she explained:

“If I do feel worse about my period I’d rather die than tell my manager that... we just have to get on with it as women. It’s seen as part of life and part of fitting in.”
- Catherine

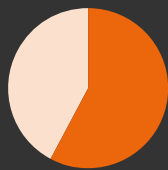
Because many of these experiences are so commonplace, they can be difficult to challenge. But these behaviours are not simply 'banter'. Taken together, they send a consistent message that, in 2026, young women are still being treated differently **because they are women**. And when these behaviours are dismissed as 'harmless', it can raise the threshold for what is considered unacceptable – creating an environment where more serious forms of sexism and misogyny are easier to dismiss, excuse or get away with.

And our research shows that young women are experiencing these more serious forms of sexism and misogyny in worryingly large numbers.

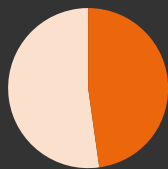
Young women told us that over the past 12 months:



Almost **3 in 5** (59%) had experienced offensive or abusive comments because of their gender



58% had received unwanted sexual messages



Almost **half** (48%) had experienced threats or abusive behaviour because of their gender

These experiences are not abstract. The stories young women shared with us give some insight into the range of behaviours sitting behind these figures.

For some, offensive comments are explicitly sexual or degrading. One young woman described an older, more senior colleague who would stand extremely close to her and make comments about her body:

"He would stand so close to me that I could feel his breath and he made comments about my body." – Osob

Another young woman described a male colleague making a bet with another man about whether they could sleep with a female coworker:

"Two male coworkers bet on whether they could sleep with a coworker and that behaviour was never called out, never addressed." – Jasmine

For others, the behaviour involves unwanted physical contact. One young woman described her boss smacking her on the bottom while she was working in a retail store:

"He smacked my bum... He touched me when I didn't want to be touched." – Millie

And sometimes the behaviour becomes actively threatening. Stephanie described an incident with a male boss in which he grabbed her wrist, pulled her into his office and subjected her to sexist and misogynistic comments.

Our findings show that sexism exists across a spectrum, from the everyday behaviours that are often dismissed as harmless through to sexual harassment, abuse and threats. The fact that almost half of young women have experienced threats or abusive behaviour because of their gender shows just how far along that spectrum many young women are being forced to navigate.

Sexism isn't something young women can simply opt out of. And, as the next section shows, it isn't confined to one part of their lives either.

2. Sexism is present everywhere young women go – so they can't escape it

The problem is not confined to one part of young women's lives. **Our survey found young women experiencing sexism online, in public spaces, on public transport, at work, in education, within their families and from customers, clients and service users.**

For every type of sexist behaviour we asked about, young women reported experiencing it in multiple settings.

The figures are particularly striking because there isn't one setting that stands out as the single source of sexism. Instead, young women encounter it across the different spaces that make up their everyday lives.

FIGURE 2: Where young women are experiencing sexist behaviour, by %

	On social media or online	From strangers on the street	From strangers on public transport	From customers, clients, service users or patients	From family	At work	At school, college or university
Threats or abusive behaviour	27%	25%	18%	14%	11%	9%	9%
Offensive or abusive comments	30%	30%	20%	15%	14%	11%	12%
Unwanted comments about their appearance	31%	34%	22%	14%	31%	17%	16%
Being treated with less respect than men	25%	25%	19%	20%	17%	25%	16%
Sexist comments or jokes	29%	29%	20%	15%	15%	17%	16%

2. SEXISM IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE YOUNG WOMEN GO – SO THEY CAN'T ESCAPE IT

Experiences of sexist behaviour online and in public spaces are particularly prominent. Around three in ten young women who experienced sexist comments or jokes said these came from people online or from strangers on the street (29% in each case). For offensive or abusive comments, the figures rise to 30% online and 30% on the street.

But the data also shows that there is no clear boundary between public and private life.

Almost a third (31%) of young women who experienced unwanted comments about their appearance said that these came from family members. One in four (25%) who had been treated with less respect than men, say that this happened on the street, online and at work. And young women also report sexist behaviour from customers — including 20% of those who say they have been treated with less respect than men.

The stories young women shared illustrate just how early and routinely these experiences can become part of everyday life.

“There is a barber that lives across the road from where I live, many times I will catch him harassing women who are walking past and he’s also done it to me as well.” – Vivienne

The breadth of the findings matters because each of these spaces serves a different purpose in young women’s lives.

Young women should be able to learn without being sexually harassed. They should be able to travel without being intimidated or sexualised. They should be able to work without having their authority or appearance judged differently because they are women. They should be able to participate online without receiving abuse or unwanted sexual attention. And they should be able to feel safe and respected in their own communities and families.

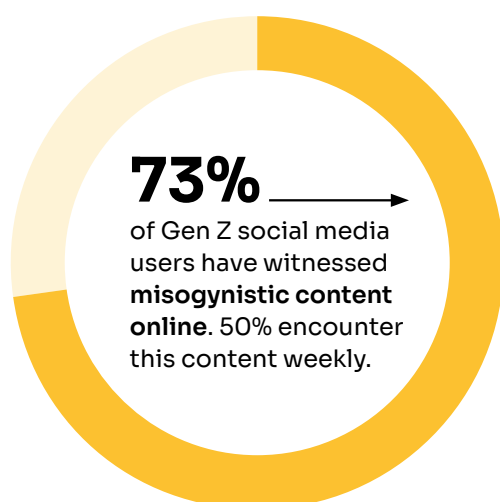
Instead, our findings suggest that sexism can follow young women from one part of their lives into another. And, particularly in a digital age, there are fewer places to escape it.



The digitalisation of sexism

Digital spaces have become an increasingly important part of young women's lives. Social media platforms are places where young people build relationships, access information, participate in public debate and express themselves. However, they are also increasingly spaces where sexist and misogynistic content circulates widely.

Digital spaces have created new ways for misogyny to reach young women, including unwanted sexual messages and images, threats, cyberstalking and other forms of abuse. Algorithms can make misogynistic content harder to avoid, while the burden of dealing with abuse can fall on women themselves — blocking users, making accounts private, posting less or leaving platforms.



Polling from Amnesty International found that an overwhelming **73% of Gen Z social media users had witnessed misogynistic content online**, with half encountering it on a weekly basis.⁷ In our survey, online spaces were the most commonly reported location for sexist comments, offensive or abusive comments, threats or abusive behaviour, and unwanted sexual messages. Amnesty's research also found that 44% of Gen Z women had received unsolicited explicit images on social media and over a quarter (27%) reported being a victim of online stalking.

Online platforms can **amplify misogyny**, as algorithms are designed to promote engaging and attention-grabbing content – including content that provokes strong emotional reactions such as outrage or anger. As a result, misogynistic ideas can receive disproportionate visibility and enter mainstream online culture, rather than remaining within explicitly misogynistic spaces. Recommendation systems on social media can introduce manosphere content extremely quickly, including to young users who have not deliberately searched for it. Research from Dublin City University found that generic 16-year-old and 18-year-old accounts can be recommended manosphere content after less than 9 minutes and 15 minutes respectively.⁸

At the same time, it is important not to suggest that online spaces are inherently harmful. Digital networks can provide solidarity, information and support, and can help women connect with others who have had similar experiences. The problem is when women are expected to bear the responsibility for managing the harmful behaviour they encounter.

“I experience misogyny and disrespectful comments [on social media] all the time. I get a lot of hate, criticism and insults.”
– Hattie

⁷ Amnesty International UK (2025), *Toxic Tech: How Misogyny is Shaping Gen Z's Online Experience*.

⁸ Dublin City University (2024), *Recommending Toxicity: The role of algorithmic recommender functions on YouTube Shorts and TikTok in promoting male supremacist influencers*

SPOTLIGHT ON

Sexism at work

Sadly, work is no exception to the sexism young women experience elsewhere in their lives, and power dynamics, particularly in sectors where young women are working in low-paid or insecure roles, can intensify experiences of sexism, misogyny and discrimination.

Over the years, our research has consistently shown that young women face high levels of discrimination in workplace settings, and this shows no sign of slowing down. This year, over half (53%) of young women told us that they had experienced discrimination while working or looking for work – a figure that has increased year on year.

Sexism at work is often experienced through the same everyday behaviours that young women encounter elsewhere: being talked over, having assumptions made about their capabilities, receiving comments about their appearance or being treated with less respect than men. But our data also shows that **almost a fifth (16%) of young women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace at some point in their lives**, including **more than one in 10 (11%)** who experienced it in the last year.

AND EMPLOYERS KNOW THIS IS HAPPENING

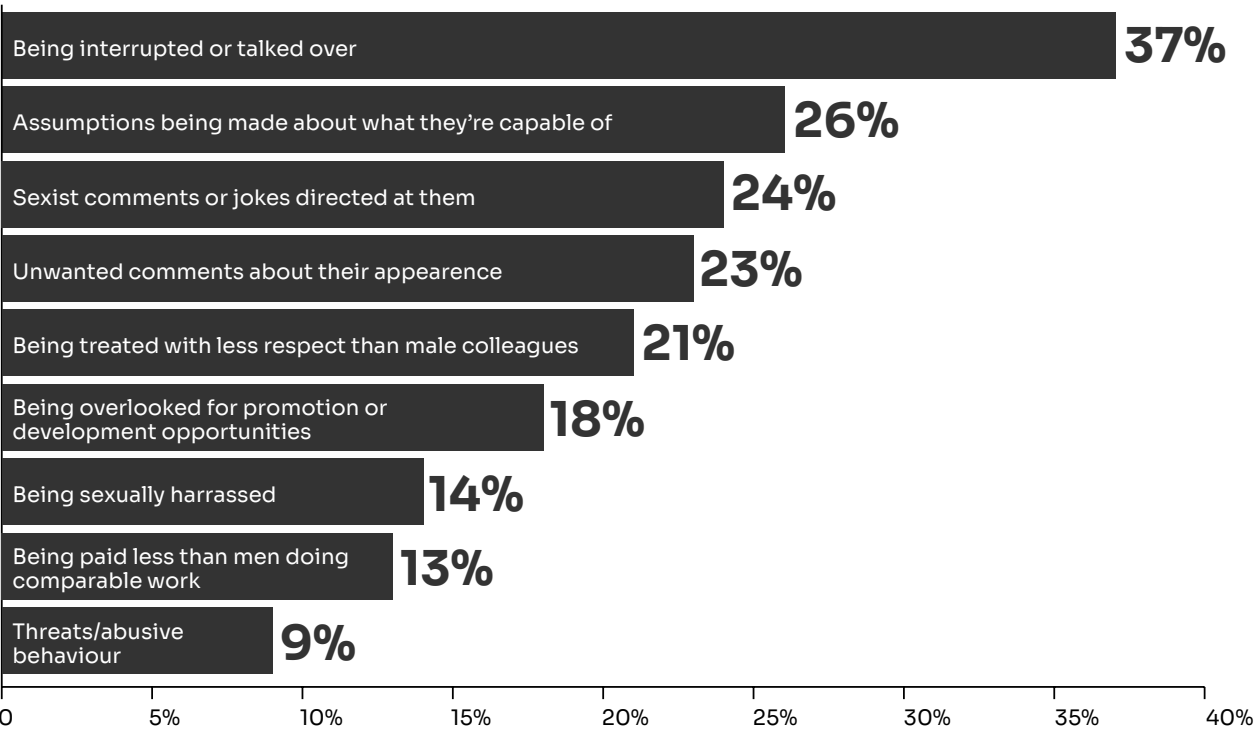
Almost two fifths (38%) of HR managers agreed that sexist behaviour still exists in their organisation. Among HR managers aged 18–30, this rose to 60%. More than half (52%) of HR managers told us they were aware of young women in their organisations experiencing sexist or discriminatory behaviour in the previous 12 months.

Reflecting young women’s experiences, the most common types of sexist behaviour HR managers told us they had witnessed were:

- Young women being interrupted or talked over (37%)
- Young women having assumptions being made about what they’re capable of (26%)
- Sexist comments and jokes directed at young women (24%)

They were also aware of young women being overlooked for promotion or development opportunities (18%), experiencing sexual harassment (14%), being paid less than comparable male colleagues (13%) and experiencing threats or abusive behaviour (9%).

FIGURE 3: % of HR managers aware of young women in their organisations experiencing the following types of sexist behaviour in the last 12 months

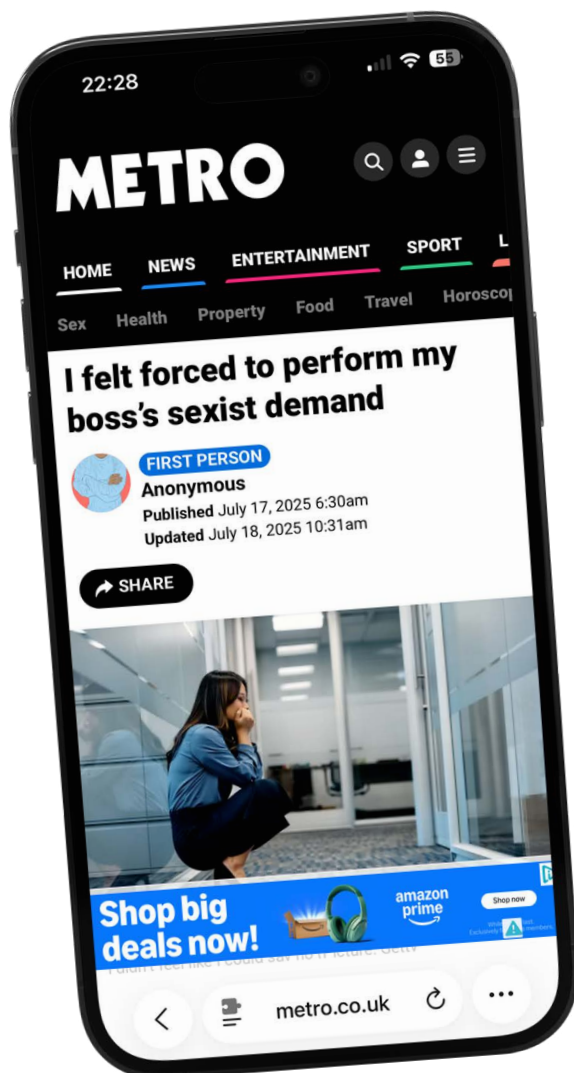


Concerningly, HR managers told us these behaviours were often directed at young women by their managers. Of those who were aware of young women being interrupted or talked over because of their gender, 40% said managers were responsible. Among those who were aware of young women experiencing sexual harassment at work, more than a fifth (21%) said that their manager was the perpetrator.

One young woman who shared her story with us described a manager who was supposed to mentor her but instead made repeated comments about women's appearance and what he thought they should wear:

"He would make so many uncomfortable remarks. He would talk to me about women's appearance, what he thought women should be wearing, tight jeans and stilettos. He would make comments about my appearance, telling me that I would dress like a boy." – Vivienne

These experiences can affect more than how young women feel about their jobs. **They can change how they participate in the workplace itself.**



More than one in five (22%) young women told us that experiences of sexism, or concerns about how women are treated, had led them to change the way they dress or behave at work. A similar proportion (21%) said they avoid sharing their opinions at work because of concerns about sexism and misogyny. This is even higher amongst young women working in insecure sectors such as hospitality and retail, in which [our previous research](#) tells us young women are particularly susceptible to unfair treatment and particularly powerless to challenge it.

Whilst HR managers recognise the consequences of gender inequality, there are still some concerning attitudes amongst those who are at least partly responsible for the direction of young women's futures. 35% said young women face the biggest barriers to career progression, compared with 7% who said the same of young men. And 41% thought young women face the biggest barriers to reaching senior roles, compared with 6% who thought this of young men.

But almost 3 in 10 (29%) think that 'efforts to promote gender equality have gone too far', while a fifth (20%) agreed that sexist workplace "banter" is harmless. And almost a fifth (17%) told us that they would be reluctant to hire a woman who they thought might go on to start a family. Worryingly, these attitudes appear to be more common amongst younger HR managers. 47% of HR managers aged 18–30 agreed that gender equality has gone too far, and 37% agreed that sexist workplace "banter" is harmless. A staggering 37% said they would be reluctant to hire a woman they thought might go on to start a family.

37%

of HR managers aged 18–30 said they would be reluctant to hire a woman they thought might go on to start a family

The picture that emerges is complicated. Employers and HR professionals are aware that young women face barriers and experience sexism at work. But awareness does not necessarily mean that the culture and attitudes that underpin those experiences have disappeared. These findings suggest that sexist attitudes and assumptions continue to shape working life for many young women – with tangible consequences.

3. Sexism changes how young women live their lives

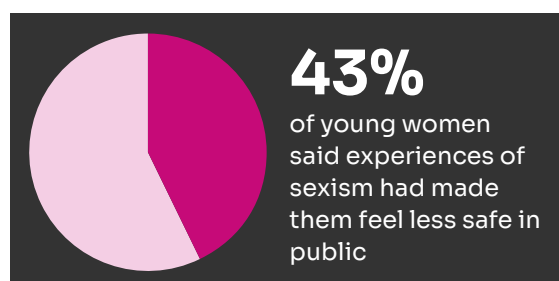
Our evidence shows that prolonged exposure to sexist and misogynistic narratives and behaviour affects how young women think, feel and act.

For many young women, repeated experiences of being undermined, harassed or made to feel unsafe shape how they move through the world – affecting their confidence, their behaviour, their mental health and what they feel able to say or do.

Three quarters (75%) of young women told us that experiences of sexism had negatively affected at least one area of their lives. Among young women aged 18–24, this rose to 79%.

The most common impact was on young women's sense of safety. 43% said experiences of sexism had made them feel less safe in public, while 41% said they had affected their confidence. More than a third (34%) said sexism had changed the way they dressed or behaved, and almost a third (31%) said it had affected their mental health.

These findings show that young women are not simply experiencing sexism and then moving on. They are adapting their behaviour in response to it.

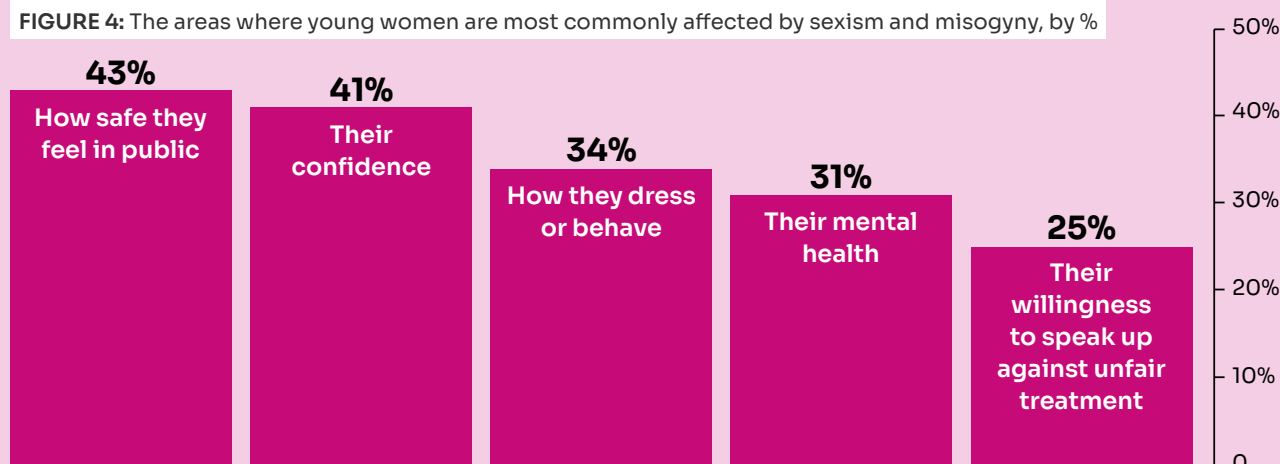


This is reflected in wider research, and in the stories we heard from young women. Girlguiding found in 2025 that 68% of girls and young women had changed their behaviour to avoid sexual harassment, while 54% agreed that they had to be careful about appearing too self-confident for fear of abuse.⁹

“I feel like I have to police myself every time I go out of the house, especially in the summer. I know I’m going to get stared at or looked at, so I’m constantly surveilling myself to make sure that I’m safe.” – Hattie

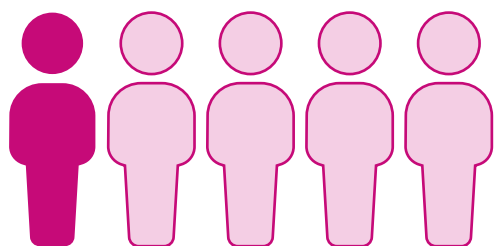
“It [sexism and misogyny] stops me from doing a lot, and that doesn’t feel great because there are things I want to do, places I want to go. When you have to do that over and over again, it starts to build up, and it starts to feel like self-sacrifice in a way that is harmful.” – Vivienne

FIGURE 4: The areas where young women are most commonly affected by sexism and misogyny, by %



⁹ Girlguiding (2025), *Girls Attitudes Survey 2025*

For some young women, these adaptations can mean becoming less visible, less vocal or less willing to take up space. A quarter (25%) of young women told us that experiences of sexism had affected their willingness to speak up, while one in five 18–24-year-olds had withdrawn from social or community groups or activities because of sexism and/or misogyny.



1 in 5

18–24-year-old women
had withdrawn from social
or community groups or
activities because of sexism
and/or misogyny

For young women, then, avoiding sexism can mean changing what they wear, what they say, where they go, who they work with or whether they choose to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

And the impact can go deeper still. **Almost a third (31%) of young women told us that concerns about sexism and misogyny had negatively affected their mental health.** This isn't a new problem. Previous [research](#) carried out by Young Women's Trust found a clear relationship between experiences of sexism and young women's mental health. Young women who had experienced sexism were five times more likely to experience clinical depression, and those who had experienced sexism reported greater psychological distress even four years later.

These findings highlight how the effects of sexism and misogyny can accumulate or intensify over time. Multiple young women we spoke to described their confidence as being gradually eroded by repeated sexist experiences:

"At one workplace there was an older man who was more senior than me and he made me feel super uncomfortable..... In the end I couldn't take it anymore and I was signed off sick and eventually left the job altogether. I had no confidence and my mental health really suffered"
- Osob

"A male chef appeared to have a problem taking direction from me... I also experienced unwanted physical contact from male colleagues in the same role... Over the years these experiences affected my confidence and wellbeing. I eventually got out of the hospitality industry but was left in a pretty bad way with poor mental health. I spent 6 months hiding away and didn't want to see anyone." - Amy*¹⁰

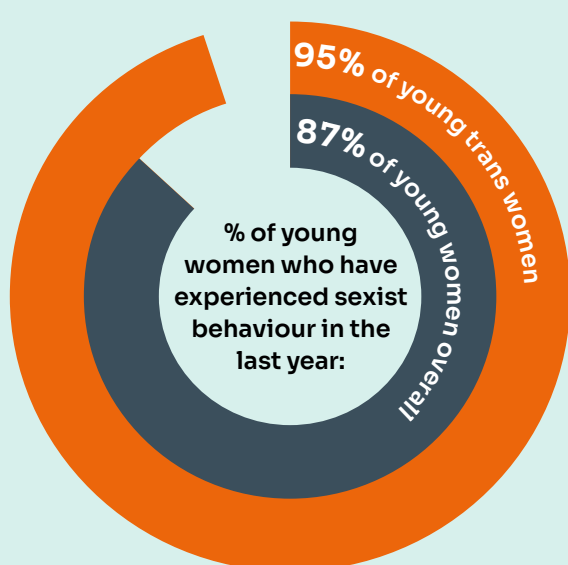
When sexism is a constant feature of young women's lives, the burden is not only the behaviour they experience, it is the work of navigating around it. Young women are having to anticipate what might happen, modify their behaviour and make decisions about where they feel safe, what they feel comfortable saying and how visible they are prepared to be.

And this happens at a stage of life when young women should be able to build confidence, form relationships, take risks and establish their careers. Instead, sexism can narrow their choices and make the world feel like something they have to navigate carefully.

¹⁰ Name has been changed

4. Sexism intersects with other aspects of young women's identities

Sexism does not affect all young women equally. For some groups, sexism intersects with racism, ableism, transphobia and other forms of discrimination. Our findings show that these overlapping inequalities can shape both the extent to which young women experience sexism and the impact it has on their lives.



Disabled and neurodivergent young women can also experience the impact of sexism and misogyny particularly acutely.

Almost nine in ten (87%) neurodivergent young women said that experiences of sexism and misogyny had negatively affected at least one area of their lives, compared with three quarters (75%) of young women overall. And almost a third (31%) said sexism or concerns about how women are treated had led them to change the way they dress or behave at work, compared with 22% overall.

The pattern is similar for young women with long-term health conditions. Among young women with a long-term mental health condition, 87% said sexism and misogyny had negatively affected their lives, while 84% of those with a long-term physical health condition said the same.

Trans young women reported some of the highest levels of sexist experiences across the survey.

95% had experienced sexist behaviour in the last year, compared with 87% of young women overall, and 91% said sexism and misogyny made their lives harder. Trans young women were also substantially more likely to experience some of the most serious forms of gendered abuse: 81% had experienced threats or abusive behaviour because of their gender, and 81% had experienced offensive or abusive comments. Almost half (45%) had experienced threats or abusive behaviour **at least weekly**.

Research from Girlguiding has also found evidence that disabled and neurodivergent girls are more likely to change their behaviour to avoid sexual harassment. Disabled and neurodivergent girls aged 11–16 are more likely than girls overall to have missed or avoided school to avoid sexual harassment, and more likely to say that the impact of sexism and misogyny was a reason more girls their age were experiencing mental health and wellbeing challenges.¹¹

% of trans women experiencing gendered abuse:

81% experienced threats or abusive behaviour

81% experienced offensive or abusive comments

45% experienced this behaviour **at least weekly**

¹¹ Girlguiding (2025), *Girls Attitudes Survey 2025*

Stories from racially minoritised young women also demonstrate the complex ways that sexism and racism can interact, and can lead young women to question their own experiences:

"I had a colleague who kept outsourcing a lot of manual tasks that he didn't want to do, and I didn't realise it was a part of my job description to not do it... I just kept thinking why do you keep asking me to do this? Is it because of who I am? At that point, I remember it was mainly a white team as well. So, it was the question – is this about race or is this about my sex as well?" – Emanuella

"In the food and beverage and hospitality business, you talk to a lot of coworkers and customers who will make direct microaggressions or just straight up inappropriate comments about my race, sexist misogynistic comments."
– Jasmine

"I see misogyny online towards female politicians, especially Black female politicians like Diane Abbott. Misogyny is an underlying part of our British culture, I feel that it is embedded everywhere." – Chloe*¹²

A review of the external evidence highlights similar patterns, pointing to the gendered nature of racism, Islamophobia and online abuse directed towards women from racially minoritised communities. For example, research from Ofcom found that women from racially minoritised groups were three times as likely as white women to see or experience the sharing of intimate images without consent, and four times as likely to receive an unwanted or unsolicited sexual image or video.¹³

It is important to emphasise that these experiences also take place within a wider public and political environment in which some groups of women are targeted by hostile narratives. These narratives do not exist separately from young women's everyday experiences: they can shape the attitudes and behaviours directed towards young women online, in public spaces and in their workplaces – and consequently how they think, feel and act.

For trans young women in particular, debates about who is entitled to use women's spaces can make gender identity itself a site of hostility. For racially minoritised young women, racism and misogyny can similarly become intertwined, with women targeted not only because they are women, but because of their race, ethnicity, religion or perceived immigration status.

This wider context matters because sexism does not happen in a vacuum. The messages young women encounter in politics, the media and online can reinforce ideas about whose voices, bodies and identities are legitimate – and can shape the hostility that some young women experience in their everyday lives.



¹² Name has been changed

¹³ Ofcom (2022), Online Nation report, Online Nation 2022 Report

5. Young women are worried about the direction of gender equality

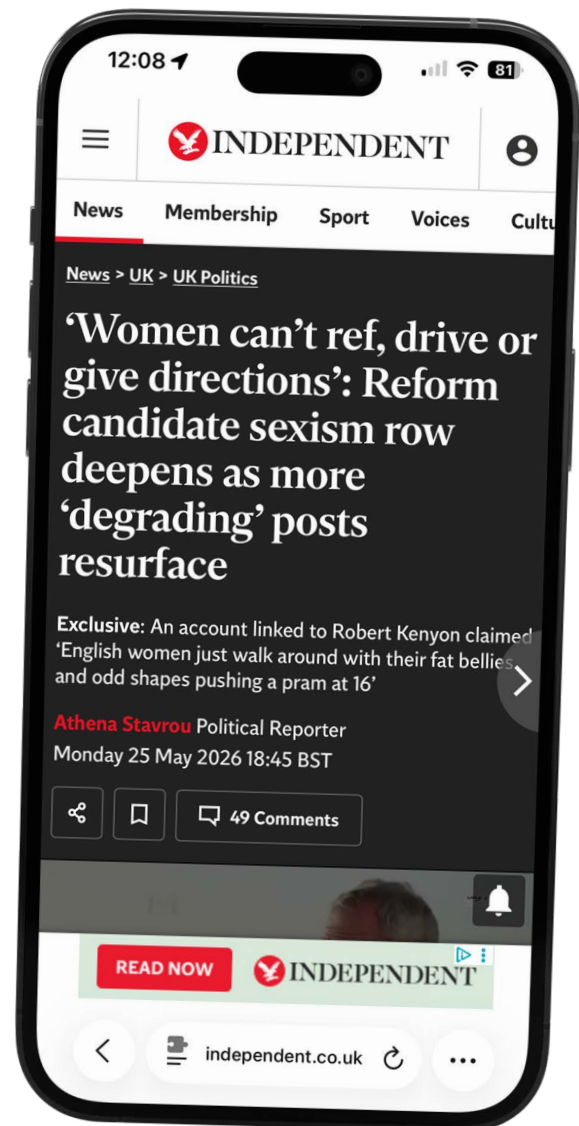
Sexism and misogyny are not new. Generations of women have experienced them in different forms throughout their lives. **But many young women are concerned about what the future holds for gender equality.** These concerns are rooted both in their personal experiences and in wider social trends and developments.

7 in 10

(70%) of young women are worried that women's rights are going backwards

More than three quarters (77%) of young women think sexist views are becoming more common. Nearly three quarters (74%) think sexist comments are becoming more acceptable among young men, while **seven in ten (70%) are worried that women's rights are going backwards.**

These concerns sit alongside wider evidence about the growing visibility of misogyny online and in public discourse. Whilst evidence suggests that, broadly speaking, support for gender equality is relatively strong, misogynistic narratives have become more visible and increasingly mainstream. Young men and young women are navigating a period of economic insecurity, political uncertainty and social change. Such conditions can create fertile ground for backlash narratives and anti-equality movements.



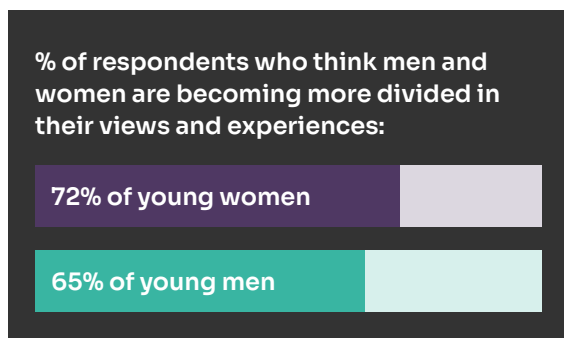
There is a growing sense that young men are at a cross-roads between progressive ideas about gender, and regressive concepts of masculinity. Equipundo's [State of UK Men](#) report clearly illustrates how young men can hold both progressive ideas and so called 'red pill' ideologies at the same time.¹⁴ On the flip side, there is evidence that young women are becoming consistently more progressive over time, with Gen Z women most likely to define themselves as a 'feminist'.¹⁵

¹⁴ Equipundo (2025), [State of UK Men 2025](#)

¹⁵ King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership (2025), [International Women's Day Survey](#)

5. YOUNG WOMEN ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

The findings from our survey certainly point to a growing divide that both young women and young men are all too aware of. **Almost three quarters (72%) of young women and 65% of young men think that men and women are becoming more divided in their views and experiences.** Just 13% of young women and 21% of young men disagree.



This divide is reflected in young people's differing attitudes towards gender equality. More than a third (37%) of young men agree that gender equality has 'gone too far'. And 36% of young men agree that society would be better if traditional gender roles were more common, compared with just 19% of young women.

Whether sexism itself is increasing or becoming more visible, many young women feel increasingly surrounded by it.

"I can be walking down the street and the hostile environment I face from men is sickening – I honestly think in my 29 years, it's the worst it's ever been."

– Osob

"I'm not very hopeful about the future, especially because there seems to be a rise in misogyny among younger generations." – Hattie



FIGURE 5: % of respondents who agree with the following statements

Young women Young men

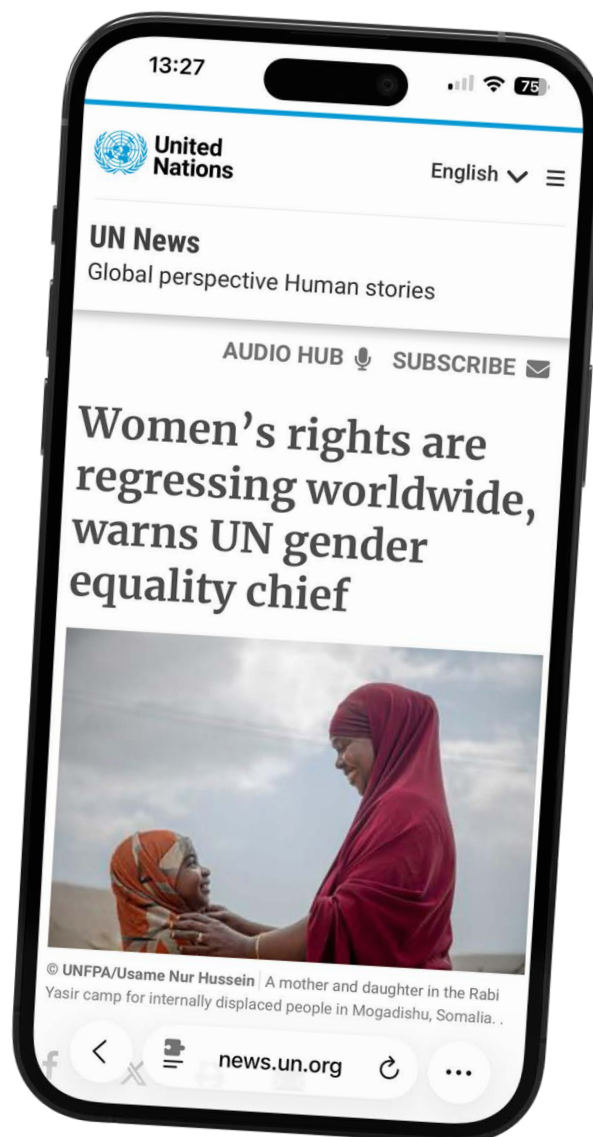


There is also a striking lack of confidence in the role of politics in tackling sexism. Almost two thirds (66%) of young women think that sexism is becoming more common in politics and **just 21% of young women think politicians are taking sexism and misogyny seriously**. The fact that 40% of young men agree that this is the case only serves to further highlight the scale of the disconnect.

just
21%
of young women think
politicians are taking sexism
and misogyny seriously

Taken together, these findings paint a picture of a generation of young women who are deeply concerned about the direction of gender equality. They are seeing and experiencing sexism in their everyday lives, while also witnessing wider debates about women's rights and gender equality that can feel increasingly hostile and divisive.

But concern about division does not mean young people want to remain divided.



6. Young people want more opportunities to come together

Despite the differences in how young women and young men understand gender equality, **more than four in five young men (82%) and young women (81%) agree that it is important to bring young men and women together.**

This is an important finding. It suggests that, alongside the growing sense of division, there is a strong appetite among young people for greater understanding and connection.

But bringing young people together cannot mean glossing over the differences in their experiences. Our research has shown that young women are already carrying much of the burden of navigating sexism and misogyny – changing how they dress and behave, holding back their opinions and altering the way they participate in public, social and working life. Some of the young women we spoke to shared concerns about the time and energy required to tackle misogyny in an already crowded landscape:

“It kind of feels like we’re running out of space to deal with misogyny because there’s so many other issues... So when I think about the future, it’s almost like I don’t even know if we can make steps because people are so occupied in their minds.” – Catherine

The answer is not to ask young women to adapt further. It must be to create spaces where young women can be heard, their experiences are taken seriously, and young men can engage with those experiences and reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours.

The opportunity is to move beyond a conversation about men versus women and towards a shared understanding of what a more equitable future looks like.

“When I think about the future, I choose to look at it from the brighter side... If you have one bad interaction with someone, that does not mean everyone who shares something with that person is the same... We need to hear more stories that encourage people to remain open-minded.” Akosua



4 in 5 (82%) young men



and **4 in 5** (81%) young women

**agree it's important to bring
young women and men together**

RECOMMENDATIONS

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PREVENTING AND TACKLING MISOGYNY

Young women experience misogyny and sexism across every aspect of their lives – at school and university, in workplaces and public spaces, online and in their families and relationships. Action to tackle it must reflect this.

Equally, evidence from attitude and behaviour change interventions on other social issues shows that the most effective approaches operate at multiple levels, combining education and communications with changes to social norms, workplace and community-based interventions.

The Government should establish a national framework for preventing and tackling misogyny and sexism, bringing together coordinated action across education, workplaces, online spaces, communities and public life.

This should be based on evidence of what works. There are already numerous international, national and local programmes, but these can be piecemeal and the evidence fragmented. The Government should commission and publish a comprehensive review of interventions to prevent and tackle misogyny and sexism, identifying what works, where evidence is strongest and where there are gaps.

ENFORCE WOMEN'S EXISTING RIGHTS

The Government must strengthen enforcement of existing protections and ensure young women know and can exercise their rights.

The UK already has laws protecting women from discrimination, unequal pay, harassment and violence. Yet Young Women's Trust research has shown that these protections are not routinely enforced and many young women do not know what rights they have or what to do when those rights are violated. Many say they feel left to identify and challenge sexism and discrimination alone.

The Government should ensure that enforcement bodies, including the EHRC, have the resources and powers they need to enforce women's rights effectively.

Every young woman should be able to access clear, accessible information about her rights, how to recognise when they have been violated, and what action she can take.

ESTABLISH NATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR TACKLING EVERYDAY SEXISM AT WORK

The Government should establish clear national principles for preventing and tackling everyday sexism in the workplace. These principles should be included alongside the existing guidance for employers on closing gender pay gaps and supporting employees experiencing menopause.

Work is a significant site where young women encounter sexism, yet action often focuses on gender pay gaps on the one hand, and on the most serious forms of harassment and discrimination on the other. These are necessary – but so is addressing the everyday behaviours and cultures that enable them.

The principles should set clear expectations for employers around recognising and preventing everyday sexism; leadership responsibility and organisational culture; safe routes to raise concerns and report inappropriate behaviour; bystander action; tackling sexist jokes, "banter", stereotyping and sexualised behaviour; monitoring and accountability; and ensuring young women workers understand their rights.

Create more opportunities for young women and men to challenge harmful gender norms together

Our research found that both young women and young men want more opportunities to talk openly and constructively together about issues, including gender, on which they are becoming increasingly polarised.

Youth organisations, education providers,

community organisations, and employers should create more safe, facilitated opportunities for young women and men to come together to discuss gender, relationships, equality and other contested issues.

STRENGTHEN THE NETWORKS AND SPACES THAT ENABLE YOUNG WOMEN TO BUILD CONFIDENCE, CONNECTION AND POWER

Young women need spaces where they can build confidence and community, share experiences, and build collective power to tackle the challenges they face. Peer networks can be vital in helping young women recognise that experiences of sexism are not individual failings but part of wider patterns.

Charities, funders, and community groups should strengthen the networks, services and spaces that enable young women to connect, organise and participate.

However, young women should not be responsible for solving misogyny themselves. Investment in their confidence and collective power must sit alongside action to change the institutions, cultures and systems that enable sexism and misogyny.

CREATE A NEW LAW AGAINST INCITEMENT OF HATRED OF WOMEN

Parliament should examine the case for a specific offence of intentionally stirring up hatred based on sex, mirroring current legislation that criminalises stirring up hatred based on race, religion or sexual orientation.

The purpose of this legal change would not be to criminalise misogynistic views generally, nor to criminalise young men who encounter, consume or engage with sexist or misogynistic content online. Instead, the focus should be on tackling those individuals who deliberately produce, promote or coordinate material intended to stir up hatred against women.

MAKE ONLINE PLATFORMS SAFER BY DESIGN, AND KEEP REGULATION AHEAD OF EMERGING HARMS

Online misogyny and digital abuse are evolving rapidly. Tackling them cannot rely on women protecting themselves after harm has occurred.

Technology companies should commit to safety by design. This means assessing risks before launching products, testing how systems may expose women to harm, and involving women

and relevant experts in product development.

Young women highlight the need for better digital literacy, for example demystifying algorithms and making platform data transparent, to uncover how young people are fed extreme content. There should be requirements on tech platforms to publish this information.

As with other areas where laws exist on paper but not in practice, enforcement must be strengthened. Ofcom should have the powers and resources to take robust enforcement action when platforms fail to meet their obligations to keep women safe.

To support this, the Government should ensure it has a permanent, well-funded, national centre of expertise for identifying emerging methods of digital gender-based harms and the action needed to stop it. This should be led by academics, researchers and other experts in the field. It should feed insight into Ofcom to ensure standards keep pace with changing technology.

INVEST IN EDUCATION THAT PREVENTS MISOGYNY – AND THAT GOES BEYOND SCHOOLS TOO

The Government should fully fund, implement and evaluate its proposed whole-school anti-misogyny programme.

Young women overwhelmingly call for more education on gender equality. But they also call for this to take an intersectional approach, recognising that sexism interacts with racism, ableism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination.

And the Government should also develop an anti-misogyny approach beyond schools, reaching young people who have left school through further and higher education, apprenticeships, youth services, workplaces and community settings.

Education on sexism should define concepts such as misogyny and sexism, give young people recognisable examples of how it appears in everyday life, and provide practical tools for responding to it and challenging it safely.



RESEARCH CENTRE

Young Women's Trust champions young women on low or no pay. We're here to create a more equal world of work and raise young women's incomes. We offer coaching and support to build young women's knowledge, networks and self-belief. We carry out research into what young women's lives are really like and use this evidence to campaign for equality.

Young Women's Trust,
Unit 1.01, Wenlock Studios, 50-52 Wharf Road, London N1 7EU

youngwomenstrust.org email: **fundraising@youngwomenstrust.org**

f **facebook.com/youngwomenstrust** **@** **[@youngwomenstrust](https://twitter.com/youngwomenstrust)**

