

SOUNDS  
FAMILIAR?

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## About Us

The Fawcett Society is the leading national charity campaigning for women's rights and gender equality. We have been campaigning for 150 years and trace our origins back to 1866 and the petition for women's votes.

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to Jemima Olchawski and Kat Stark who carried out the qualitative research and Hannah Taaffe who wrote the report. But a special thank you to all the young people who participated in the qualitative work. Their contributions have made this report possible.

Cartoon images are stills taken from animations produced for the Fawcett Society by Summer Oxley.

# Executive Summary

Young women today face a different set of challenges compared to previous generations. Younger women feel more empowered to stand up for their rights and more young women are university educated than in previous generations.

But pervasive gender norms and stereotypes, and persistent harassment and lad culture, are holding young women back. Recent research from the Young Women's Trust showed that just one in five young women believe that gender discrimination in the UK will be a thing of the past by the time they are 40.<sup>1</sup>

This report sets out what young women told us about the challenges they face and provides new insights into the underlying attitudes which can be found in our society and which may explain why progress on gender equality is so painfully slow. But it also suggests that there is cause to be optimistic that young people themselves are eager to bring about the change that is so desperately needed.

Young women told us that they are exposed to gender norms from an early age and from a wide range of sources; from the media, within their families and at school, influencing their subject choices and with negative impacts on their everyday lives and life chances.

Intersectional identities, including ethnic and religious identities, influence gender norms and stereotypes. The young women we spoke to want feminist organisations to talk about how sexism is experienced in different communities.

The majority of the young women in our focus groups had experienced misogynistic harassment and the impact of lad culture. Our new data analysis shows the persistence of victim blaming and a core of younger men who hold hostile or negative views toward equality underlie these negative, everyday experiences.

To tackle lad culture, we are calling for statutory, good quality, age appropriate sex and relationships education in our schools. Young women don't want to blame or target young men, but schools need to teach boys and girls about consent and harassment.

To challenge misogyny in society and schools, we are calling for police forces and schools to record it – as misogynistic hate crime, and as gendered bullying and sexual harassment respectively – so that we can understand the scale of the problem and address it. We also call for social media platforms to develop technological solutions to address online misogyny.

In order to begin to challenge the limitations placed on girls and young women by gender norms and stereotypes, we are calling on government and schools to default young women in to STEM subjects when they have the grades, in order to send a message that 'girls like you do subjects like this'. We are also arguing that we must address and challenge gender norms and stereotypes from the early years into adulthood which are pervasive across education, retailing, in the media and within the family.

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<sup>1</sup> Young Women's Trust (2016) *No Country For Young Women*, September 2016 [http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/4258/No\\_country\\_for\\_young\\_women\\_\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/4258/No_country_for_young_women__final_report.pdf)

# What does the UK look like for young women?

The UK is slipping down the league table on gender equality internationally. In 2006, Britain was 9<sup>th</sup> in the World Economic Forum's gender equality league table, but we had moved down nine places to 18<sup>th</sup> in 2015, even dropping as far as 26<sup>th</sup> in 2014.<sup>2,3</sup> We currently rank 48<sup>th</sup> in the world for women's representation in parliament,<sup>4</sup> and at current rates of progress it will take 62 years to close the gender pay gap.<sup>5</sup>



The economic and social position of young women in the UK is proving slow to shift. The number of women graduating from university overtook the number of male graduates in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Girls out-perform boys at school and have done since 1988.<sup>7</sup> It is often argued that it is men and boys we should be concerned about, but look behind the headline statistics and what we see are stark inequalities facing young women in the UK today which have barely shifted in decades and are even getting worse.

Girls' educational attainment does not translate into progress and higher pay in the workplace. Over the last two decades, the gender pay gap has not been falling for women with A-levels or degrees.<sup>8</sup> Millennial women experience a gender pay gap of 5% rising to 9% by the time they are 30.<sup>9</sup> They are on the same trajectory as older generations of women and are likely to see the gender pay gap open up as they get older. The gender pay gap young apprentices face is £2,000 per year.<sup>10</sup>

There are more young women who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) than there are young men and they are more likely to be defined as economically inactive and to remain so for longer. There are currently 428,000 young women aged 18-24 who are NEET, of whom 280,000 are 'economically inactive'. There are 310,000 young men who are NEET, of whom 120,000 are inactive. 180,000 young women are caring yet defined as 'economically inactive' compared to just 10,000 young men in this group who are caring.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps most worrying of all is recent evidence on the mental health and wellbeing of young women, who are now identified as a high-risk group in terms of their likelihood of experiencing mental ill health. One NHS study found that 12.6% of women aged 16-24 screen positive for post-traumatic stress disorder, three times the incidence amongst young men, whilst 19.7% self-harm and 28.2% have a mental health condition.<sup>12</sup> Girlguiding also found that 69% of girls feel they are 'not good enough', that girls' reported happiness declines as they get older, and that 62% of girls say that they know a girl their own age with a mental health condition.<sup>13</sup>

2 2015, World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report 2015* <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/>

3 2014, World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2014* <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/>

4 2016, Women in National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union <http://www.ipu.org/WMN-e/classif.htm>

5 2016, Fawcett Society, 'Gender Pay Gap and Causes Briefing: Equal Pay Day, 10th November 2016', <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Equal-Pay-Day-2016-Briefing.pdf>

6 School enrolment, tertiary (gross); gender parity index (GPI), UNESCO Institute for Statistics/World Bank, accessed 11/01/2017 <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.TERT.FM.ZS?end=2014&locations=GB&start=1992&view=chart>

7 2007 Department for Education and Skills, *Gender and education: the evidence on pupils in England* <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090108131525/http://dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/rtp01-07.pdf>

8 Monica Costa Dias, William Elming, and Robert Joyce (2016), *The Gender Wage Gap*, Institute for Fiscal Studies

9 2017, Resolution Foundation, <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/blog/the-gender-pay-gap-has-almost-closed-for-millennial-women-but-it-comes-shooting-back-when-they-turn-30/>

10 2016, Young Women's Trust, *Making Apprenticeships Work for Young Women Work* [http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/2906/Making\\_Apprenticeships\\_Work\\_for\\_Young\\_Women.pdf](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/2906/Making_Apprenticeships_Work_for_Young_Women.pdf)

11 Accessed 2017, Youth Unemployment, Young Women's Trust [http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what\\_we\\_do/campaigning/youth\\_employment](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/campaigning/youth_employment)

12 2014, Mental Health and Wellbeing in England Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21748/apms-2014-full-rpt.pdf>

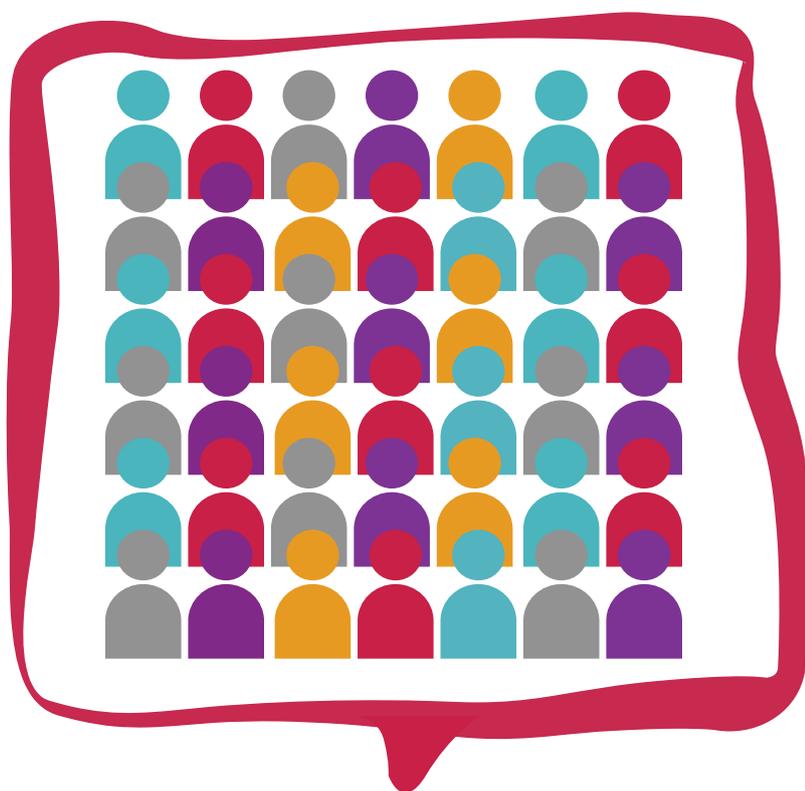
13 2016, Girlguiding, *Girls' Attitudes Survey 2016* <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2016.pdf>

## Our research

The Fawcett Society carried out qualitative focus groups and interviews with a diverse group of 72 young women and men aged 18 to 25 over spring/summer 2016; of the 42 who participated in focus groups, 93% identified as women (39) and 7% identified as men (3). This group included 45% who identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic; 15% who identified as Muslim; 12% who identified as gay or bisexual; and 32% who identified as disabled or experiencing mental ill health. We asked these young people about the particular challenges faced by young women within society.

In addition, we have included new data on attitudes to gender equality from a survey of 8,165 adults in the UK conducted by Survation for the Fawcett Society, which formed the basis of our 'Sex Equality: State of the Nation 2016' report.<sup>14</sup>

This work has informed Fawcett's own engagement with younger women but also provides valuable insight into the issues and challenges they face.



### **42 young women and men aged 18 to 25 participated in focus groups**

**93%** identified as women and **7%** identified as men

**45%** identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic

**15%** identified as Muslim

**12%** identified as gay or bisexual

**32%** identified as disabled or experiencing mental ill health

<sup>14</sup> Jemima Olchawski, (2016), *Sex Equality: State of the Nation 2016*, Fawcett Society.

# Gender norms & stereotypes are holding young women back

- 73% of young women and 65% of young men are concerned about the impact on children of gender stereotypes in school or nursery.
- 63% of girls aged 11-21 believe that schools should do more to tackle gender stereotypes.<sup>15</sup>
- Only 33% of girls who take maths and science GCSEs progress into any form of Level 3 core Science, Technology, Engineering or Manufacturing (STEM) qualification. The figure for boys is 80%.<sup>16</sup>
- Fewer than one in 10 young girls choose engineer or architect (3%), scientist (6%), or lawyer (6%) in their top three potential careers.<sup>17</sup>

In our workshops, discussions around **gender norms and stereotypes** elicited the most personal stories and connections, and it became clear that gendered stereotyping is pervasive across all areas of young women's lives.

## It's everywhere – media, family, school

Young women told us that they are exposed to gender norms from a wide range of sources – from the media pressuring them to look or act a certain way, to family members in their own home expecting them to clean and cook for male members of their family, parents requiring them to come home earlier at night than their male siblings or even warning them not to become too rich or powerful in case their success “deter a potential husband”. Through our discussions with young women, it became clear that cultural identity and community can play a significant part in the gender norms to which they are expected to conform.

***“Even now...my parents expect me to be home safe after dark. But my way younger brother is allowed to do whatever he wants. It's this overprotection thing that girls face.”***



‘School for girls’ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1QHGo17F-o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1QHGo17F-o)

Occupational segregation was something that participants were highly aware of across all workshops. Many spoke about the ways in which boy and girls were channeled into stereotypically gendered subjects and career areas. This was particularly acute in vocational qualifications such as apprenticeships.

***“You don't necessarily realise what is happening at the time but you look back and see that girls aren't going into science and maths and by the time you realise you feel it's too late.”***

15 2016, Girlguiding, *Girls Attitudes Survey* <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2016.pdf>

16 WISE November 2016 <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/resources/2016/11/from-classroom-to-boardroom-the-stem-pipeline>

17 2015 Girlguiding, *Girls Attitudes Survey* <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2015.pdf>

## Some of their earliest memories

The common message is that boys and girls are treated differently, and this happens from their earliest childhood years. When asked if there were different expectations for boys and girls, the answer was a resounding 'yes' in all workshops. Participants shared childhood memories of being unable to play with certain toys or read certain books – and these gender barriers applied to boys as well as girls.

## And then we won the vote...

***“In the curriculum you hardly ever hear about any women and if a person of colour is mentioned it’s never a woman.”***

Girlguiding recently found that over half of girls aged 11-21 say that the role women have played in history is not represented as much as the role of men, and only 41% of them said that their school materials represented women equally to men.<sup>18</sup> Young women we spoke to told us that they felt let down by their school curriculum because of a lack of teaching about the achievements of women in history. They also felt angry at what they perceived as their misleading education because of the way that teachers discussed sexism and racism as if they were issues of the past, and did not relate it to the discrimination and inequality they experience today.



'School for girls' [www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1QHGo17F-o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1QHGo17F-o)

# Identity matters

- Low income Black and Asian women are paying the highest price for austerity, losing twice as much money as low income white men as a result of tax and benefit changes.<sup>19</sup>
- Economic disadvantage affects women from different ethnic and religious groups – for example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women face a large pay gap compared to white men and women, whilst Indian women face a large gender pay gap compared to Indian men.<sup>20</sup>
- It is not possible to bring a discrimination claim on the grounds of more than one aspect of your identity (eg as a Muslim woman or as an older woman) because section 14 of the Equality Act 2010 has not been commenced.

The most striking and consistent view expressed across all workshops was the importance of taking a genuinely intersectional approach. Participants viewed intersectionality as a minimum standard for all of us.



***“As a Muslim woman sometimes I feel like I only get included to comment on Muslim issues...don’t just call me about the hijab, call me about the pay gap!”***

Participants felt that their specific identity and community was linked to the types of gender stereotyping they experienced. Several participants started sentences with “if you’re a woman of colour...” or “as a Black girl growing up...” and “within my community there are really traditional views on gender...”. Many workshop participants felt that feminism had a reputation for being white and expressed a desire for that to change. Some participants wanted feminist organisations to be braver in enabling so-called difficult conversations to take place but stressed the importance of diversity in doing so.

***“Feminist organisations should find ways to talk about different ways that sexism is expressed in different communities. But it’s important that this is done in a way that doesn’t fuel negative stereotypes of those communities – particularly where ethnicity and religion is concerned.”***

19 <http://wbg.org.uk/news/new-research-shows-poverty-ethnicity-gender-magnify-impact-austerity-bme-women/> Women’s Budget Group & Runnymede Trust 2016

20 Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Gender Pay Gap Briefing Fawcett Society forthcoming 2017

# Sexual harassment and lad culture

- 59% of girls and young women aged 13-21 have faced some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year.<sup>21</sup> One third of women have experienced sexual assault on campus.<sup>22</sup>
- 63% of women aged 18-24 have experienced some form of sexual harassment at work compared to an average of 52% amongst women of all ages.<sup>23</sup>
- 49% of girls aged 11-21 say fear of abuse online makes them feel less able to share their views.<sup>24</sup>
- Muslim women are being disproportionately targeted with abuse and violence. One in 10 incidents reported to Tell MAMA took place in educational establishments.<sup>25</sup>



## An everyday occurrence

Sexual harassment and lad culture came up in all the workshops. The majority of our participants had experienced harassment or intimidation. Participants spoke about harassment as 'everyday' and there was a weariness in the tone of many who spoke on the subject. The most frequently cited experiences were examples of unwanted sexual advances in public situations, such as in bars or parks, at school or at work. If they did not manage the situation they knew that saying 'no' would not work and would lead to them being called 'slag' or 'bitch', and could escalate into violence.



***"I'm sick of dealing with harassment and having to make up excuses like 'I've got a boyfriend' or 'I'm married' to get them to leave you alone. Why doesn't anyone say or do anything when it's in public?"***

'The Chicken Shop' [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxqjCCdZ7oo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxqjCCdZ7oo)

21 Women and Equalities Select Committee 2016, *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools* <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2015/sexual-harassment-and-violence-in-schools-report-published-16-17/>

22 Daily Telegraph, 2015, One in three UK female students sexually assaulted or abused on campus (original research) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11343380/Sexually-assault-1-in-3-UK-female-students-victim-on-campus.html>

23 2016 TUC & Everyday Sexism, Still just a bit of banter? <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

24 2016 Girlguiding

25 2016, TellMAMA, We Fear or Our Lives <http://tellmamauk.org/we-fear-for-our-lives-offline-and-online-experiences-of-anti-muslim-hostility/>

But too little is currently done to record, or enable young women to report, the misogynistic harassment that they experience. The Women and Equalities Select Committee recently found that ‘there is currently no centralised data collection of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools’, and that schools lacked guidance on how to collect and report on the harassment that girls experience.<sup>26</sup> Sex is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act yet, unlike hate crimes based on other protected characteristics, misogynistic hate crimes are not routinely recorded. Nottinghamshire Police, in 2016, became the first force to commit to recording misogynistic hate crime, a step which we welcome and want to see other forces required to take.<sup>27</sup>

## But who is to blame?

The prevalence of sexual harassment is in part due to a persistent attitude of blame towards women amongst a large minority in society, placing the responsibility with them rather than the perpetrator. New data from our 2016 survey asked, “if a woman goes out late at night, wearing a short skirt, gets drunk and is then the victim of a sexual assault, is she totally or partly to blame?” 38% of all men and 34% of all women said that she is.

Older women (aged over 65) in particular were more likely to blame her, with 55% of women aged over 65 saying she is totally (5%) or partly (50%) to blame compare to 48% of older men. 30% of women aged 18-24 and 40% of young men agree. 14% of men aged 18-34 say she is “totally to blame”.

This is not the majority view, with 70% of young women and 59% of young men saying a woman in that situation is ‘never to blame’. But the view that women are partly or totally to blame if they are sexual assaulted is held by a large and stubborn minority in society, it is not changing fast between generations, and it feeds the hostility and legitimises the harassment that young women in particular face.

## Don't blame the girls

The blame culture is also visible in the norms we apply to what young women wear. Fawcett’s **#Dontblameitonthegirls** campaign has been highlighting the different standards of uniform applied to girls when compared with boys, with girls often told to change their clothing to manage the reaction of male students or teachers.

This experience also came up through our workshops. One participant said she had been told off by teachers because they said her uniform was too revealing and she was distracting the boys and male teachers. This woman felt that the school had sexualised her uniform and pointed out that boys in shorts were not told off for showing their legs or any other part of their body. This story received a strong reaction from the rest of the workshop as most participants had a personal experience of something similar happening in their schools.



<sup>26</sup> Women and Equalities Select Committee, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> BBC, ‘Nottinghamshire Police records misogyny as hate crime’, 13 July 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-36775398>

# The underlying attitudes of some remain negative or hostile

**We wanted to explore the reasons for the residual hostility towards women and identify those groups who are more likely to display attitudes which are resistant to change. New analysis of our national survey data reveals that some groups of younger men (those aged 18-24 and 25-34), in particular, are more likely to hold hostile or negative views.**

- ▶ 14% of men aged 18-24 and 18% of men aged 25-34 say “I do not want the women in my life to have equality of opportunity with men”.
- ▶ 42% of men and 25% of women aged 18-24 think women and men are equal now. This falls to 25% for men over 65 (17% for women aged over 65).
- ▶ 17% of men aged 25-34 say they would be disadvantaged if women and men were more equal and 20% of men aged 25-34 say women’s equality has “gone too far”.
- ▶ 24% of men aged 18-24 and 33% of men aged 25-34 say they oppose feminism, feel excluded by feminism, or think feminism is irrelevant.

## **While others give us reason to be optimistic**

- ▶ 48% of men aged 18-24 say they would benefit if we had a society where men and women are more equal. This falls to 33% for over 65s.
- ▶ Although lower than other age groups, 75% of men aged 25-34 and 79% of those aged 18-24 do want the women in their lives to have equality of opportunity with men.
- ▶ 75% of women aged 18-24 say they would benefit from a more equal society.
- ▶ 19% of women aged 18-24 and 11% of men aged 18-24 describe themselves as a feminist. This is significantly higher than the incidence in the wider female population (9%) or male population (4%).
- ▶ 65% of young women and 62% of young men say that when they think about their career choices they think about whether a job is likely to allow them to balance work and family.

These findings suggest that younger generations of men are polarised. The majority want more equality for women and recognise the need for change, and are more likely than older men to hold progressive views. But a significant minority are hostile to the idea of change.

It shows us where young men can be allies for change, but also why we must address the underlying causes of sexism, discrimination and harassment. Young men also share the view with young women that balancing work and family is an issue for their career choices, with 33% of men aged 25-34 saying that fathers are not supported at work compared with 22% of the total population of men.

# Recommendations

***“Boys should be taught about consent and harassment but for it to work it needs to be about education not blame.”***

Drawing from the insights in this report, we have identified key priorities for change which would improve outcomes for girls and young women.

**Statutory, good quality, age appropriate sex and relationships education in our schools.** 84% of young women agree.<sup>28</sup> This also came through very clearly in our focus groups. But the young women we spoke to don't want to blame or target young men, they just want their behaviour to change. This would improve the quality of their relationships and help to tackle the prevalence of mental ill health and poor wellbeing amongst young women.

**Record misogyny as a hate crime.** The Government should require all police authorities to record misogyny as a hate crime and ensure that training is provided to police officers to recognise incidents appropriately. For the first time this would give us an indication of the scale of misogyny in our society.

**Record and tackle gendered bullying and sexual harassment in schools** alongside other incidents of bullying. Treat it as a safeguarding issue and develop policies and procedures for addressing gendered bullying and sexual harassment so that young women do not feel that they are left alone to deal with it and that all the responsibility is on them.

**Require digital and social media platforms to develop technological solutions** to address online harassment and misogyny in the same way as they are doing to tackle terrorism.

**Address and challenge gender norms and stereotypes from the early years into adulthood** which are pervasive across education, retailing, in the media and within the family.

**Default young women into maths and science subject choices at school** with an opt out, rather than relying on them to opt in, sending a clear message that 'girls like you do subjects like this', and increasing take up. The quality of careers information and advice must also be improved. Participants in our focus groups felt strongly that government and educational institutions should proactively tackle occupational segregation and that people should have the opportunity to pursue whatever pathways they wanted, regardless of their gender. Teachers themselves were seen as key agents for change.

28 Girlguiding 2016, Girls' Attitudes Survey 2016 <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2016.pdf>

