



House of Commons  
Women and Equalities  
Committee

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**Sexual harassment of  
women and girls in  
public places**

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**Sixth Report of Session 2017–19**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 10 October 2018*

## Women and Equalities Committee

The Women and Equalities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

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### Powers

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### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities](http://www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Judith Boyce (Clerk), Luanne Middleton (Second Clerk), Holly Dustin, Tansy Hutchinson, and Shai Jacobs (Committee Specialists), Axell Kaubo (Inquiry Manager), Alexandra Hunter-Wainwright (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant), and Liz Parratt and Simon Horswell (Media Officers).

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## Summary

Sexual harassment pervades the lives of women and girls and is deeply ingrained in our culture. This report, which follows the Committee's reports on schools and workplaces, focuses on sexual harassment in public places: on public transport, in bars and clubs, in online spaces and at university, in parks and on the street; it is a routine and sometimes relentless experience for women and girls, many of whom first experience it at a young age.

The UK Government has a strong reputation for taking seriously the prevention of sexual abuse and violence overseas, but the domestic Violence Against Women and Girls strategy does not reflect the same focus at home in relation to sexual harassment. The #MeToo movement has helped to bring this problem out into the open in the UK, and women are glad that it is being more openly discussed. Research tells us that the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment is not recognised or understood in the same way by many men. The impact that sexual harassment has on women and girls is not routinely set out for men and boys to consider, and data is not routinely collected on its incidence. Laws and policy send inconsistent messages, Parliament permits pornography and prostitution to be legal in certain circumstances, and local councillors license sex shops and strip clubs in their communities, all of which routinely shows women in a sexualised and often vulnerable setting.

Sexual harassment can constitute sexual assault and other criminal offences, as well as behaviour that is not covered by any law but is nevertheless unwanted and harmful. We heard about a very wide range of experiences, from women—and even girls in school uniform—being shouted at and cat-called in the street, being routinely harassed in bars and clubs at night to the extent that it is the norm on a night out, being upskirted (photos or videos taken up their skirt without their consent) on public transport, to women students being sexually assaulted by their peers or women being masturbated at by men at night.

The damage is far-reaching. Experienced at a young age, sexual harassment becomes 'normalised' as girls move through life: it shapes the messages boys and girls receive about what is acceptable behaviour between men and women, and teaches girls to minimise their experiences of abuse. The memory or fear of it affects women's behaviour and choices and restricts their freedom to be in public spaces. It can make women and girls scared and stressed, avoid certain routes home at night or certain train carriages, wear headphones while out running; women feel the onus is put on them to avoid 'risky' situations. It has a wider effect on society, contributing to a culture in which sexual violence can be normalised or excused. All of this keeps women and girls unequal.

Sexual harassment is never acceptable, and women and girls should not be expected to endure it. It should matter to us that women and girls are respected, not forced to change the way they live to avoid daily sexual harassment and abuse. The Government has already pledged to tackle sexual harassment as an equality and human rights issue under its international obligations, including a commitment made in 2015 to eliminate sexual harassment of women and girls by 2030. We have not seen evidence of a programme

of work for achieving this goal. A cross-departmental strategy for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls is in place, but sexual harassment—the most common form of violence against women—is almost entirely absent in that document.

As with any social harm, prevention of sexual harassment should be the Government's aim. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand why it happens and this may involve confronting deeply uncomfortable truths about British society and the attitudes some men hold towards women.

The Government has said that its objective is to change social norms. From September 2020, primary schools will be required to teach Relationships Education and secondary schools will be required to teach Relationships and Sex Education—this is one important way to achieve such change. More widely than this, it is not clear to us what other specific actions the Government is taking to meet its objective. Opportunities to embed a preventative approach, for example through media regulation, public awareness campaigns and crime and licensing policy, are being missed.

Laws alone cannot address the cultural acceptability of sexual harassment, most of which is unreported, but they have an important part to play, including in responding to new forms of public sexual harassment facilitated by technology. We welcome legislation on 'upskirting' and 'revenge porn', but at present, the Government is too often racing to catch up with these developments.

There is significant research suggesting that there is a relationship between the consumption of pornography and sexist attitudes and sexually aggressive behaviours, including violence. The Government's approach to pornography is not consistent: it restricts adults' access to offline pornography to licensed premises and is introducing age verification of commercial pornography online to prevent children's exposure to it, but it has no plans to address adult men's use of mainstream online pornography.

Sexual harassment on public transport, including viewing pornography in what is not an age-restricted space, is a real concern, as is women and girls' lack of safety and equality at night, in bars and clubs and whilst at university. Some good work is taking place on these issues but there is far more that could be done and we have made recommendations to the Government on what some of this should entail.

Our key recommendations to the Government are as follows:

- We expect the refreshed Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, due later in 2018, to set out a comprehensive programme of work to make all public places safe for all women and girls. That programme must be informed by data collection on the extent and nature of sexual harassment in public places, which currently does not happen centrally.
- The Government must use the available research evidence, and commission further research, to inform its work on the causes of sexual harassment and how to prevent it. This work should include a long-term, evaluated programme of public campaigns to tackle the attitudes that underpin sexual harassment.

- A new law should be brought forward on image-based sexual abuse to criminalise all non-consensual creation and distribution of intimate sexual images, on the basis of the victim's lack of consent rather than perpetrator motivation.
- The Government should take an evidence-based approach to addressing the harms of pornography, similar to the huge investment there has been over many years in tackling road safety, or preventing public health problems caused by lawful behaviour such as smoking.
- Train operators should be required through Franchise Agreements to have a robust policy on preventing and tackling sexual harassment and to block access to pornography. Bus regulations should be amended to prohibit sexual harassment and viewing pornography on buses.
- Licensing Act 2003 guidance should be amended to ensure that licensees take action on sexual harassment. Local authorities must consult local women's groups and sexual violence specialists when deciding their policies on licensing strip clubs and lap-dancing clubs.
- Universities should have a legal obligation to have policies outlawing sexual harassment, including collecting and publishing data on the effectiveness of those policies.

# Introduction

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## Why an inquiry into sexual harassment of women and girls in public places?

1. The last five years have seen a growing public debate about sexual harassment and sexual assault of women and girls in the UK. Then, from October 2017, the global #MeToo movement put sexual harassment and abuse in the headlines and saw allegations rapidly emerging about sexual harassment in the UK, US and elsewhere in sectors ranging from the performing arts and film industry to the medical and legal professions. Political institutions around the UK, including the House of Commons, are also grappling with these issues amid concerns that their cultures have enabled the problem. While men may not recognise the level, impact and harm of sexual harassment in many women's lives, women are glad that it is at long last being openly discussed.

2. But this report provides evidence that sexual harassment is not only a workplace phenomenon, and not only seen in Hollywood and the corridors of power. Sexual harassment pervades women's and girls' lives and it is doing damage: perpetuating a culture where women are routinely undermined and their confidence damaged through school, university and into work. As such, there needs to be a wider policy response. A survey published by Ipsos Mori on International Women's Day in March 2018 showed that respondents in Britain thought that, from more than 20 options, sexual harassment and sexual violence were respectively the second and fourth most important issues facing women and girls in Britain today.<sup>1</sup>

3. Concerns about these issues are not new. Sexual harassment was developed as a concept by Lin Farley, Professor Catharine MacKinnon and others in the 1970s as a way of naming and understanding how some of men's routine behaviours towards women in the workplace functioned as a form of sex discrimination.<sup>2</sup> It is now widely recognised by experts as being part of the continuum of sexual violence<sup>3</sup> and, under international law, it sits within a broader framing of violence against women and girls.<sup>4</sup>

4. These are long-standing areas of focus for our work: in September 2016, we published a report on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools in which we raised serious concerns that these were widespread harms against girls in particular that were being accepted as a part of daily life.<sup>5</sup> In July 2018 we published a report on sexual harassment in the workplace which found that the Government, employers and regulators had failed to tackle the high incidence of unwanted sexual comments, sexual touching and assault, and other unlawful behaviours in the workplace. We called for a series of robust measures to ensure that sexual harassment was addressed in people's working lives.<sup>6</sup>

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1 [International Women's Day: Global misperceptions of equality and the need to Press for Progress](#), March 2018, Ipsos Mori

2 Catharine A. Mackinnon *Sexual harassment of working women*, Yale University Press 1979

3 L Kelly, *Surviving sexual violence*, Polity Press 1988

4 [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women \(General Recommendation 19\)](#), [Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)

5 [Women and Equalities Committee, Third Report of Session 2016–17, Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#), HC 91

6 [Women and Equalities Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2017–19, Sexual harassment in the workplace](#), HC 725

## About this inquiry

5. It is important to tackle workplace harassment but we will not prevent it in the future unless there is a proper understanding of sexual harassment in women's daily lives outside of work. In December 2017, we held an evidence session on Women's everyday experience of sexism and sexual harassment.<sup>7</sup> We took evidence from witnesses from different sectors about the legal framework, the workplace, street and online spaces, and about policing and community initiatives. It was clear to us that sexual harassment in public places was a pervasive issue, but one where there was very little coherent government focus. Often called 'street harassment', it in fact takes place far more widely: on buses and trains, in bars and clubs, in parks, online spaces and in educational settings. In particular, we wanted to know *why* sexual harassment happens in order to look at *how* it can be prevented. We know that sexual harassment in public places can happen to men and boys as well as women and girls. However, it was very clear from our other work in this area, and from all other available evidence, that sexual harassment, wherever it takes place, is overwhelmingly experienced by women and girls, has a particular impact on them, and is an issue of women's equality. We therefore focused the inquiry on their experiences.

6. We launched this inquiry in January 2018 with the aim of hearing about the harms that women and girls experience on a daily basis across different spaces and at different times in their lives. Our inquiry has taken place at a time when other countries have decided to introduce legislation on sexual harassment as a result of demands for change from survivors and activists. In 2018, France introduced on-the-spot fines for sexual harassment in the street or on public transport and, in the US, Washington DC introduced a Street Harassment Prevention Act. This legislation contains the first legal definition of street harassment in the US and has a focus on prevention through education rather than criminalisation.<sup>8</sup> UN Women's 'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces' initiative is a network of cities across the world, including London, which have signed up to a programme of work to make cities safe spaces for women and girls.<sup>9</sup> We hope that this report contributes to these important global debates as well as leading to change in the UK.

7. We received over 100 written submissions including from the Government, police bodies, women's organisations, unions, researchers and transport bodies. We took evidence in four oral evidence sessions about the prevalence, perpetration, scale and impact of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, the role of the media and culture, the UK's international and domestic obligations to tackle and prevent sexual harassment, and about sexual harassment of women and girls at night, at university and on public transport. We are very grateful to all who provided evidence, particularly those women who told us about their own experiences. We are also grateful for the advice and assistance throughout the inquiry of our specialist advisers, Dr Helen Mott and Dr Fiona Vera-Gray.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Women and Equalities Committee Oral evidence: [Women's everyday experience of sexism and sexual harassment](#), Wednesday 6 December 2017, HC 592

8 [DC's new law against street harassment](#), Stop Street Harassment website, accessed October 2018

9 [Q95](#)

10 Dr Helen Mott is a member of the Fawcett Society and the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW). Dr Fiona Vera-Gray is a trustee of EVAW.

8. In Chapter 1 we set out the nature and scale of the problem of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places. In Chapter 2 we explain why the Government must adopt a programme of work to address this problem more coherently and to make public places safe and enjoyable for all women and girls. Chapter 3 looks at the role of the media and culture (including online spaces) which are critical to understanding some of the underlying factors contributing to sexual harassment. Subsequent chapters focus on some of the interconnected issues we received evidence about in relation to women and girls' safety in specific contexts: on public transport (Chapter 4), at night (Chapter 5) and at university (Chapter 6). We have not considered each of these individual contexts in exhaustive depth. Instead, we have used these specific settings as examples to highlight the breadth of the issue, and to show where there are gaps and where solutions can be developed.

### Our research on sexual harassment in public places

9. Significant work has already been done on sexual harassment by researchers, civil society organisations, media organisations and some public bodies, but we are conscious that much of the focus of this has been on the experiences of victims and survivors. We wanted to supplement this body of research by bringing a fresh approach where we felt there were gaps of understanding in the UK, particularly on attitudes that underpin sexual harassment. To prevent sexual harassment, there needs to be an understanding of why it happens; girls and young women themselves say they are frustrated when adults focus more on their personal safety than on the behaviour of harassers and want more work to be done to prevent sexual harassment.<sup>11</sup>

10. We commissioned YouGov to carry out exploratory research on attitudes related to sexual harassment in public. The research employed mixed methods: a set of questions was included in a quantitative survey conducted with 1659 adults in Britain in July 2018, followed by two 90-minute online focus groups involving eight men and 10 women, recruited through the survey. Both groups were of mixed ages, geographical locations and social grade. We are conscious that this was a small project. Nevertheless, the findings help to build a picture and indicate where more research and policy attention could usefully be focused. We have drawn on the findings throughout our report and a summary is annexed.

11. This report confronts some deeply uncomfortable truths within British society that we cannot side step if we are to tackle the issues raised by #MeToo and broader sexual harassment in the long term. The truth is we have to question the attitudes some men hold towards women. These attitudes are damaging women's opportunity to be on an equal footing in society. These are not new problems but they are problems we cannot continue to ignore.

# 1 What is the nature of the problem?

## What is sexual harassment of women and girls in public places?

12. A range of definitions of sexual harassment are used by researchers and in law in different jurisdictions. The Equality Act 2010 defines it as “unwanted conduct of a sexual nature” which has the purpose or effect of “creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”.<sup>12</sup> Laws do not, however, necessarily reflect the full breadth of the problem. Women and girls experience a wide range of behaviours as sexual harassment, including behaviour that is unwanted but not necessarily unlawful as well as sexual assault and other criminal offences. In this inquiry we have considered all types of behaviour that women experience as sexual harassment, regardless of whether it could be considered an offence.

13. We heard about a wide range of behaviours including unwanted sexual comments in the street, rape threats on public transport, sexual assault in bars and clubs, racial abuse when sexual propositions were rejected, men exposing themselves in public, being masturbated at, sexual rubbing on a crowded train, and we heard from a group of women who had experienced sexual harassment in prison and elsewhere in the criminal justice system.<sup>13</sup> Being shouted at or ‘cat-called’ was the most common form of sexual harassment reported by girls and young women in research by Plan UK.<sup>14</sup> This woman’s evidence to us about her experiences was not uncommon:

I have been sexually harassed, and suffered physical assault too, many times over a 30-year period. The harassment ranges from whistles and ‘catcalls’ to my breasts, bottom, legs and groin being touched. These events have taken place on buses and trains, while walking or standing in public places during the day, in shops and bars—anywhere where men are present, in fact.<sup>15</sup>

These kinds of relentless, everyday experiences may not be visible to those who do not experience them. Sexual harassment of women and girls is so ingrained in our culture that it is often hidden in plain sight; it is not always recognised or understood by men in the same way as it is by women because it is, overwhelmingly, women and girls who are the victims of sexual harassment, not men. Our research showed that women are more aware of the frequency of public sexual harassment and its impact than men are.<sup>16</sup>

## What is known about victims of sexual harassment?

14. Sexual harassment in public places is overwhelmingly experienced by women and girls. Surveys show that sexual harassment is, in fact, the most common form of violence against women and girls and that young women are particularly targeted:

- A survey published by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in 2014 found that sexual harassment was the most common form of violence against women

12 [Equality Act 2010, section 26](#)

13 [Drake Hall Prison Reform Group \(SPP0094\)](#)

14 [Plan International UK \(SPP0071\)](#)

15 [A member of the public \(SPP0058\)](#)

16 See Annex

across the EU, with 68 per cent of women respondents in the UK saying they had experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15 and 25 per cent having been sexually harassed in the past 12 months;<sup>17</sup>

- 85 per cent of women aged 18–24 and 64 per cent of women of all ages reported that they had experienced unwanted sexual attention in public places and 35 per cent had experienced unwanted sexual touching, in a survey carried out by the End Violence Against Women coalition in 2016;<sup>18</sup>
- A survey of 14–21 year olds by Plan UK in 2018 found that 38 per cent of girls experience verbal harassment including sexual comments in public places at least once a month, while 15 per cent are being touched, groped or grabbed at least once a month;<sup>19</sup>
- 63 per cent of girls and young women aged 13–21 experience (or know someone who has experienced) not feeling safe walking home alone, according to the Girls Attitudes Survey 2018. A range of other findings from this survey indicates that girls feel less safe online than they did five years ago—25 per cent said they had had threatening things said about them on social media compared with 21 per cent in 2013, and 24 per cent had been sent photos or content by people they knew that they found upsetting, compared with 17 per cent in 2013; and<sup>20</sup>
- Recent research by Slater and Gordon shows that, in the last year alone, almost four in 10 women have experienced sexual harassment in a workplace context, showing that the warnings of #MeToo are not being heeded.<sup>21</sup>

15. Girls often first experience sexual harassment below the age of 18; we were particularly disturbed to hear from a number of women about the sexual harassment they experienced as a girl from men and boys.<sup>22</sup> One woman told us that her worst memories of sexual harassment were of walking home from school wearing school uniform. She said she had to walk down a busy road to get home and “it was normal for men to lean out of vans to wolf-whistle or to shout inappropriate things at me. I remember on one occasion, when I was [under 18 years of age], a man shouting ‘Great tits, can I have some pussy?’”<sup>23</sup>

16. Even more disturbingly, for some girls their first experience happens below the age of 10. One woman told us: “I have experienced sexual harassment in public since I was a young child. I remember the first time I was [under 12]. [ ... ] I continued to be sexually harassed almost daily throughout my childhood.”<sup>24</sup> Many girls in Plan UK’s 2016 research described witnessing or experiencing the harassment of girls aged eight and upwards, among whom girls in uniform appeared to be “a particular target, with girls describing feeling fetishised by ‘older men targeting school girls.’”<sup>25</sup> This experience then becomes

17 [Violence against women: An EU-wide survey](#), European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015

18 End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SPP0096](#))

19 [Street Harassment It’s Not Ok](#), Plan International UK, 2018

20 [We see the big picture: Girls Attitudes Survey 2018](#), Girlguiding UK, 2018

21 [One In Four Women Still Have A ‘Weinstein’ In Their Workplace – With More Than A Third Experiencing Sexual Harassment In The Last 12 Months, Study Shows](#), Slater and Gordon website, accessed October 2018

22 A member of the public ([SPP0005](#)), A member of the public ([SPP0006](#)), A member of the public ([SPP0016](#)), A member of the public ([SPP0042](#))

23 A member of the public ([SPP0064](#))

24 A member of the public ([SPP0009](#))

25 Plan International UK ([SPP0071](#))

‘normalised’ for girls and young women; it helps to shape the messages boys and girls receive about what is acceptable behaviour between men and women, and teaches girls to minimise experiences of harassment and abuse.<sup>26</sup>

17. Sexual harassment can intersect with other forms of abuse<sup>27</sup> such as disability-related harassment<sup>28</sup> and racialised sexual harassment.<sup>29</sup> Marai Larasi, Director of Imkaan, told us “we hear that a lot of black and minority ethnic women and girls are being victimised in ways that include racialised abuse—being called a black bitch, for example, might be one of the things that happens.”<sup>30</sup> The available evidence about these intersecting issues is limited in the UK and is an important area for future research.

## What is the impact of sexual harassment in public places?

18. Sexual harassment has significant and widespread impacts, both on individuals as well as on society. Sexual harassment in public reduces women and girls’ freedom to enjoy public life, and can negatively affect feelings of safety, bodily autonomy and mental health. Being sexually harassed can be a degrading, humiliating, and harmful experience in itself, but the effects are damaging more widely. It helps to keep women and girls unequal by perpetuating a culture in which they are sexualised; it is the backdrop to a society in which sexual violence can be normalised or excused.<sup>31</sup>

19. Women and girls often fear and experience retaliation from men and boys perpetrating sexual harassment.<sup>32</sup> Plan UK told us that girls talked about the backlash they could receive if they ‘rejected’ unwanted approaches, with harassment often turning into verbal aggression: “They felt that harassers exploited the perceived vulnerability of younger women, thinking they could ‘get away with it’ more easily as girls were less likely to ‘fight back’ or report.”<sup>33</sup> It is notable that several women asked for their submissions of evidence to us not to be published because of fear of retaliation. One woman who was content for her submission to be published described how a group of men sitting behind her on a bus made sexualised comments, asking her to come and sit with them. She said she ignored them and put her headphones in: “Eventually a note landed in my lap which read: ‘when you get off this bus we will rape you.’ I got off at the busiest stop possible and went into a shop until I was sure they hadn’t followed me.”<sup>34</sup>

20. While some men and boys experience sexual harassment in public, harassment directed from unknown men to women and girls has a particular meaning given both the prevalence of sexual violence and the routine ways in which responsibility is put on women and girls themselves for preventing it.<sup>35</sup> Dr Fiona Vera-Gray told us about the habitual ‘safety work’ women perform, often unconsciously, such as taking particular routes or doing specific things such as wearing headphones or looking down.<sup>36</sup> This ‘safety work’ came up repeatedly in the evidence we received from individual women. One woman told

26 End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SPP0096](#))

27 Stonewall ([SPP0043](#)), Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#))

28 Equality and Human Rights Commission ([SPP0112](#))

29 Dame Vera Baird QC ([SPP0087](#)), Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#))

30 [Q3](#)

31 Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#))

32 A member of the public ([SPP0029](#))

33 Plan International UK ([SPP0071](#))

34 A member of the public ([SPP0029](#))

35 [Q12](#)

36 Dr Fiona Vera-Gray ([SPP0076](#))

us: “I’m hyper-aware of men when running, particularly when I’m on a street with no-one else around.”<sup>37</sup> A 2014 survey found that 87 per cent of women reported changing their route as a result of harassment and nearly 80 per cent chose different forms of transport, for example calling a cab instead of walking or taking a bus.<sup>38</sup> One woman in her forties said she still has vivid memories about being sexually harassed in her twenties and told us about the impact it had on her:

I was terrified of going home that night—convinced that I was being followed. I lived alone and was frightened of being home and frightened of going out too. I changed my behaviours and began walking beside or behind other women or families so that I wouldn’t be alone. [ ... ] I will never forget the fury and then the fear of what happened.<sup>39</sup>

21. Women also told us that they doubted themselves, questioning whether anything had happened, or blamed themselves.<sup>40</sup> Women’s self-doubt and self-blame, reflecting a culture of victim-blaming, was also highlighted in Sian Lewis’ research about sexual harassment on public transport: “women questioned their own behaviour and role in the incident—did they encourage it? Did it happen because they’d been drinking? Because they were wearing a short skirt? Because they smiled?”<sup>41</sup> ‘Unwritten rules’ for women and girls to keep themselves safe become accepted as ‘common sense’, meaning that society places the onus on them to avoid putting themselves in ‘risky’ situations.<sup>42</sup> When sexual harassment is trivialised or treated as no big deal, it can reinforce the problem. Victims do not want to speak out in case they are told that what they experienced is trivial, a joke, or a compliment.<sup>43</sup>

22. One of the effects of sexual harassment can be that girls feel that they do not control their bodies in public spaces and that they are seen as sexual objects, whether or not the experience is explicit.<sup>44</sup> Emma Renold, Professor of Childhood Studies at Cardiff University, told us that some of this experience is overt, such as being asked to be seen naked, whereas some is about the fear of being raped, if being followed.<sup>45</sup>

23. There is little evidence, however, about how boys experience being the perpetrators of sexual harassment.<sup>46</sup> Women have been told that they have to accept sexual harassment as part of their lives for generations—perhaps this is why it has not been adequately examined. The impact that sexual harassment has on women is not routinely set out for men and boys to consider. Laws and policy send inconsistent messages, Parliament permits pornography and prostitution to be legal in certain circumstances, and local councillors license sex shops and strip clubs in their communities, all of which routinely shows women in a sexualised and often vulnerable setting. Plan UK told us that much greater attention

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37 A member of the public (SPP0077)

38 [Hollaback! and Cornell University international survey on street harassment](#), UK data released in 2015

39 A member of the public (SPP0010)

40 A member of the public (SPP0010)

41 Ms Sian Lewis (SPP0026)

42 Mrs Hayley Crawshaw (SPP0052)

43 [Street Harassment It’s Not Ok](#), Plan International UK, 2018

44 Professor Emma Renold (SPP0078)

45 Professor Emma Renold (SPP0078)

46 Plan International UK (SPP0099)

should be devoted to male socialisation and “how practices of male dominance and sexual predatory behaviour are established.”<sup>47</sup> Our exploratory research showed that young men hold some concerning ideas about gender norms.<sup>48</sup>

## Who perpetrates sexual harassment and why does it happen?

24. In the UK, as elsewhere in the world, men and boys are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexual harassment in public places.<sup>49</sup> Promundo, a global organisation that works on masculinities and gender equality, has conducted one of the few studies to focus on perpetrators of sexual harassment in the UK. Its 2016 study of young men’s views about manhood (which included representative samples of more than 1,000 young men each in the UK, US and Mexico) found that perpetration of harassment starts young and takes many forms. Nearly one in three of the young men surveyed in the UK had made sexually harassing comments to a woman or girl they didn’t know in a public place—such as the street, their workplace, their school or university, or an online space—in the previous month.<sup>50</sup> One woman told us that it was the age of the perpetrators that had such an impact on her:

As the boys passed me one of them grabbed my left breast. They then ran off. The boys were [under 18]. The incident left me feeling very shaken and vulnerable. The thing I wouldn’t get over is that the boys were so young.<sup>51</sup>

25. Promundo found that young men who sexually harass come from all income levels, all educational backgrounds and all ages, but that the strongest factor in the perpetration of sexual harassment was attitudes about what it means to be a man. These were measured using attitude statements, including “guys should act strong even when they feel scared or nervous inside,” and “a real man would never say no to sex”. Young men who held the strongest beliefs in what Promundo refer to as ‘toxic’ norms of manhood were nearly 10 times as likely to have harassed, as young men who least believed in these norms.<sup>52</sup> Research in England for the Children’s Commissioner on young people’s attitudes to sexual consent found that, for some young men, collecting ‘man points’—rating from their peers—is dependent on persuading and often harassing young women to send ‘sexts’, and on sharing pornography with each other.<sup>53</sup> This is supported by other research.<sup>54</sup> NUS Women’s Officer Hareem Ghani commented that “what a lot of people are not talking about is gender norms—the way that constructions of masculinity and the way we often consume media that portrays a hyper-masculine image, feeds into sexual harassment.”<sup>55</sup>

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47 Plan International UK ([SPP0099](#))

48 See Annex

49 Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#)), End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SPP0096](#))

50 [Unmasking sexual harassment: How toxic masculinities drive men’s abuse in the US, UK and Mexico and what we can do to end it](#), Promundo research brief 2018

51 A member of the public ([SPP0006](#))

52 [Manbox: A study on being a young man in the US, UK and Mexico](#), Promundo, 2017

53 [“Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape”](#): How young people in England understand sexual consent, Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2013

54 Plan International UK ([SPP0099](#))

55 [Q139](#)

26. Given how little research has been done on this in the UK, we wanted to test further the factors underlying sexual harassment in public places. The exploratory research we commissioned suggested a significant relationship between belief in traditional male gender norms and acceptability of public sexual harassment.<sup>56</sup>

27. Understanding the factors that contribute to sexual harassment is an important prerequisite for developing effective policy solutions to the problem. Some work has been done internationally to identify these factors, including a framework developed for the European Commission in 2010.<sup>57</sup> This said that sexual harassment is more likely in societies that devalue women in all sorts of ways, and in societies where damaging gender stereotypes and ideas about what it means to be a man are ingrained. A sense of ‘entitlement’ on the part of men about their right to behave in certain ways is an important factor. Lack of sanctions for sexually harassing behaviour and the existence of opportunities to perpetrate also contribute.

**28. Sexual harassment affects the lives of nearly every woman in the UK. Most experience harassment at some point; many start to experience it when they are still children, and are harassed so frequently that it becomes a routine part of everyday life. Even when sexual harassment is not taking place directly, memory or fear of it affects women’s behaviour and choices and restricts their freedom to be in public spaces. This is not acceptable, and women and girls should not be expected to endure it. It should matter to us that women and girls are respected, not forced to change the way they live to avoid daily sexual harassment and abuse. The Government has a responsibility to show leadership in eradicating sexual harassment and making public places safe.**

**29. The damage done by sexual harassment needs to be better reflected in policy and law. There needs to be a consistent response in policy and law to sexual harassment, not putting the onus onto women and girls to modify their behaviour. The Government should use our findings and those of other available research as the basis for developing its own body of knowledge about the underlying factors contributing to perpetration of sexual harassment. This is essential for informing all policy that is relevant to women and girls’ safety in public places.** In the next chapter, we will examine the ways in which such policy should be made and co-ordinated.

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56 See Annex

57 [Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence](#), Human Consultancy website, accessed October 2018

## 2 Making public places safe for all women and girls

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30. From our focus groups, women in particular think that addressing sexual harassment should be a government priority, and the UK has signed a number of international agreements requiring it to tackle sexual harassment and the factors that underlie it. Government has many different levers at its disposal to address this problem and to make public spaces safe and enjoyable for all women and girls. These include data collection to gather evidence and inform policy, the development of laws and non-legislative policies, public campaigns, and enforcement action by regulators. The Government’s Violence Against Women and Girls strategy does not comprehensively tackle sexual harassment in public places despite the fact sexual harassment is the most common form of violence against women and girls. This chapter sets out how this could be more effectively addressed as part of this programme of work.

### Sexual harassment as an equality and human rights issue

#### *International obligations*

31. The UK has already pledged to tackle sexual harassment as an equality and human rights issue under its international obligations. The main international law on women’s equality, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), requires the UK to take action to eliminate sexual harassment and other violence against women as a form of discrimination and a human rights abuse. Dr Purna Sen, UN Women’s spokesperson on sexual harassment, told us that “domestication [of CEDAW] is a recommendation of that Committee”; however, as the UK has not taken this step, women do not have direct recourse to domestic courts to enforce their rights under the Convention.<sup>58</sup>

32. States are regularly examined for their compliance with CEDAW—the UK will next be examined in February 2019. The UK’s report to the CEDAW Committee in November 2017 made minimal reference to sexual harassment, using the term only once, in relation to universities. We asked the Minister for Women why this was. She responded that:

I am going to be asking questions as to why it was just that one reference [to sexual harassment ... ] because it seems to me there is much more to this than universities. Although there has been progression in universities, I certainly take the point that there is much more work to be done in this field in public places.<sup>59</sup>

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58 [Q110](#)

59 [Q228](#)

33. UK obligations under other UN Conventions are also relevant for tackling sexual harassment of women and girls of different ages and backgrounds. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>60</sup> the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination<sup>61</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>62</sup> Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention—which the UK Government signed in 2012 and is committed to ratifying—also sets out obligations on sexual harassment. It states:

Parties [to the Convention] shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction.<sup>63</sup>

34. Having signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UK is committed to meeting the SDG targets by 2030, domestically as well as abroad. This includes targets under Goal 5 that require all forms of discrimination against all women and girls to be ended, and all forms of violence against women and girls to be eliminated in the public and private spheres.<sup>64</sup>

### **Domestic obligations**

35. The Equality Act 2010 outlaws sexual harassment by service providers, amongst others, both in the public and private sector. This includes local authorities, hospitals, schools, shops, restaurants and bars, transport companies, building and trade companies, gyms and hotels.<sup>65</sup> A bar, transport company or other service provider can be held responsible for sexual harassment by their employees, and in some limited circumstances also by others (such as customers), for example if the service provider knew of a continuing course of sexual harassment occurring in a situation over which they had some control but did not take action to prevent it. An individual who wishes to make a claim of sexual harassment in relation to services would make it in a county court, but court data is not broken down to show how many such claims are made.<sup>66</sup>

36. In addition to the prohibition on sexual harassment which applies generally, the Equality Act 2010 places a particular duty on public bodies, including government departments and local authorities, to take steps to promote equality and eliminate discrimination and harassment. We asked discrimination lawyer Karon Monaghan QC whether there was a clear duty to keep people safe under the Public Sector Equality Duty, meaning that a case could be brought against a local authority if it failed to do so. Ms Monaghan said:

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60 [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

61 [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#)

62 [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

63 [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(Article 40\)](#)

64 [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

65 [Equality Act 2010: Summary Guidance on Services, Public Functions and Associations](#), Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2014

66 [Civil Justice Statistics Quarterly, England and Wales, October to December 2017 \(provisional\)](#), Ministry of Justice, March 2017

No, it does not go that far. I would want the Public Sector Equality Duty strengthened to have that sort of mandatory duty, but what it does do is require public authorities, when making any decisions, to have due regard—so to take account of—to the need to eliminate, among other things, sexual harassment. Whenever a public authority makes a decision on, for example, licensing a sex club, which might be the easiest example but also lighting, street arrangements, and so on, it is bound to consider how it can do this in a way that promotes the elimination of harassment, and so on.<sup>67</sup>

37. Karon Monaghan also told us that the Human Rights Act 1998 could be relevant to state obligations and a responsibility to protect against sexual harassment in public places, although it would not provide grounds for an individual to take action against another individual. Article 8 enshrines the right to respect for private life which includes a positive obligation on the part of the state to protect individuals from violations by other individuals or by private bodies. This could be achieved through effective enforcement of the law, legal or regulatory frameworks and the provision of resources. Ms Monaghan said:

The courts have recognised that private life is a broad concept, and it protects sexual and personal autonomy, so engaging in sexual harassment, on the face of it, violates that right, the right to respect for private life. There is a provision under the Act that does provide some protection. It is only as against the state.<sup>68</sup>

### ***The Equality and Human Rights Commission***

38. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is an independent statutory body with the role of monitoring and enforcing equality law and protecting human rights. It therefore has an important part to play in ensuring that women and girls are able to enjoy their right to be and feel safe in public places. The EHRC has a range of enforcement powers, including conducting inquiries and investigations, which are set out in the Equality Act 2006<sup>69</sup> and are explained in its compliance and enforcement policy.<sup>70</sup> The Commission has a number of other powers and levers at its disposal as part of its enforcement role including promoting human rights, carrying out publicity campaigns, and publishing guidance.

39. We asked the Commission for information about any work it has undertaken on sexual harassment of women and girls in public places. It told us about a range of work it had undertaken on violence against women and girls more broadly.<sup>71</sup> However, when it comes to sexual harassment specifically, the Commission told us that its enforcement action has concentrated on sexual harassment in the workplace rather than public places. It said that:

Opportunities for enforcement action in relation to the harassment of women and girls in public spaces by other members of the public is much more limited [than in workplaces]. We would be unable to take action

67 [Q114](#)

68 [Q113](#)

69 [Equality Act 2006, Part 1](#)

70 [Compliance and enforcement policy](#), Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015

71 [Q112](#)

against the private and voluntary sectors in this regard. We would only be able to take action against public authorities in circumstances where we believe they may have failed to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Further, we can only take action where the public authority has failed to pay due regard to the need to, for example, foster good relations. If a public authority has paid due regard to the need to foster good relations but reaches a decision which we believe will not foster good relations, that will not provide us with grounds for enforcement action.<sup>72</sup>

40. We believe that the Commission is wrongly interpreting its powers in relation to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places and should take a wider view of its role in addressing this issue. The prohibition on sexual harassment in the Equality Act 2010 applies to clubs, bars, shops and other private service providers and the EHRC can enforce this. In relation to public bodies, we have heard evidence about a range of ways in which local authorities, police forces, universities and other public bodies can take measures to address sexual harassment, and these bodies should be held to account for their responsibilities for doing so as service providers as well as under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The EHRC should be far more proactive in enforcing those responsibilities.

41. We asked the Minister for Women if she knew whether the EHRC was taking action on sexual harassment outside of the workplace and she told us: “I have to confess I don’t. I have not had that conversation with the Commission’s chairman or chief executive.”<sup>73</sup>

42. The Commission can also work with other stakeholders. However, we have not seen evidence of good partnership working between the Commission and other regulators, for example the Office for Students, where they too have a regulatory responsibility to address sexual harassment in public places. We asked the Minister for Women how she would expect the Office for Students and the EHRC to work together as regulators ensuring women’s safety at university. She said: “I hope they would work together—very much so. The fact that the harassment takes place in a university should not preclude the Commission from looking into it and helping.”<sup>74</sup>

**43. A more robust and proactive approach is required by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to tackling the problem of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, in which it has a vital role. This includes using all tools at its disposal for the enforcement of equality legislation, and working with other regulators such as the Office for Students and transport regulators.**

**44. *The Equality and Human Rights Commission must set out a plan of action for working with other regulators such as the Office for Students and transport regulators to ensure that the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment, and the effectiveness of actions being taken to eliminate it, are transparent.***

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72 [Q112](#)

73 [Q253](#)

74 [Q311](#)

## Criminal laws

45. There is no specific criminal offence of sexual harassment in the UK, unlike in some other countries.<sup>75</sup> A range of different criminal offences are relevant, however. These include sexual assault and voyeurism under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, harassment and stalking under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, and ‘revenge porn’, where the distribution of a private sexual image of someone without their consent and with the intention of causing them distress is an offence under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015. The Public Order Act 1986 was also noted by the Minister for Women as relevant legislation if a victim felt harassment, alarm or distress as a consequence of sexual harassment in public.<sup>76</sup> The Government told us that it is “satisfied that the criminal law is already comprehensive in protecting against sexual harassment and assault but keeps this area of law under constant review.”<sup>77</sup>

46. Some victims of sexual harassment called for clearer laws.<sup>78</sup> Others, however, cautioned against criminalising sexual harassment or seeing the law as a ‘quick fix’.<sup>79</sup> Laws alone cannot address the cultural acceptability of sexual harassment. The everyday nature of much sexual harassment means that victims, particularly children, may be unlikely to report to the police, and criminal laws cannot cover much of the harassing behaviour experienced by women and girls.<sup>80</sup> One woman told us about multiple experiences of sexual harassment including being masturbated at by a man in a park as a child and being routinely sexually harassed whilst out running. She said: “I still don’t really know how much of this is criminal, if much of it. [ ... ] I would find it helpful for there to be a clear and widely publicised policy on reporting of public sexual harassment.”<sup>81</sup>

### *Image-based sexual abuse and the law*

47. Technology is facilitating new forms of public sexual harassment, and the law is often running to catch up. These forms include viewing pornography on smartphones in public, and a range of image-based sexual abuse including ‘revenge porn’, ‘upskirting’ (taking photos of videos up someone’s skirt without their consent), non-consensual sending of ‘dickpics’, and ‘deepfake’ or photo-shopped images. Professor Clare McGlynn is a legal expert in this area at Durham University; she told us that “our individual choices and privacy [are] being compromised and we are being subjected to non-consensual sexual activity” as a result of technological developments.<sup>82</sup> A 2018 YouGov poll found that 41 per cent of younger women had received unsolicited ‘dickpics’; of these, 23 per cent said they found it “distressing” and 17 per cent found it “threatening.” Almost half (46 per cent) of millennial women who had received a ‘dickpic’ were younger than 18 the first time it happened.<sup>83</sup>

48. Pre-internet era laws such as the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981—which criminalises the public display of “indecent matter”—are little-known and likely to be

75 [Portugal’s law against street harassment](#), Stop Street Harassment website, accessed October 2018

76 [Q232](#)

77 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

78 A member of the public ([SPP0073](#))

79 [Q25](#)

80 Plan International UK ([SPP0071](#))

81 A member of the public ([SPP0077](#))

82 Professor Clare McGlynn ([SPP0047](#))

83 [Four in ten female millennials have been sent an unsolicited penis photo](#), Yougov website, accessed October 2018

little-used.<sup>84</sup> Developments in law have started to take account of some new forms of technology-facilitated abuse. This was initially in relation to ‘revenge porn’: the distribution of a private sexual image of someone without their consent and with the intention of causing them distress, which was criminalised under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015. This law was criticised by campaigners, researchers and others for not encompassing a greater range of activity and motivations, and not providing victims with the anonymity provided for victims of other sexual offences.<sup>85</sup>

49. In June 2018 the Government introduced the Voyeurism (No. 2) Bill which aims to make ‘upskirting’ a specific criminal offence. DI Cooper of the Sexual Offences Coordination Unit in British Transport Police told us:

We do manage [upskirting] through other offence categories, such as outraging public decency, but that does not always quite fit the bill, so to speak. So one issue is legislation to basically catch up with the way that the times have moved on and with how people now have cameras on their phones and things like that, which is how this offence occurs.<sup>86</sup>

50. The Government recognises that much sexual harassment is motivated by notions of power and entitlement.<sup>87</sup> Laws on image-based sexual abuse, however, do not currently take account of this: by focusing on sexual motivations only, they limit the scope of the offence. The Government needs to be more forward-looking when tackling the ways in which technology is facilitating sexual harassment, rather than forever racing to catch up with changing ways in which perpetrators sexually harass women and girls.<sup>88</sup> These forms of abuse are on a continuum with other sexual harassment and sexual violence, and victims should be afforded the same support and protection of anonymity in the justice system.<sup>89</sup>

**51. The legal framework around sexual harassment in public places is piecemeal, and the Government has a tendency to react to problems such as ‘upskirting’ as they hit the headlines. Laws on image-based sexual abuse are not based on an understanding of power and entitlement as the factors behind perpetration of sexual harassment; they focus too narrowly on perpetrator motivations and do not provide the protection of anonymity for complainants.**

***52. The Government should introduce a new law on image-based sexual abuse which criminalises all non-consensual creation and distribution of intimate sexual images, including altered images, and threats to do so. This should be a sexual offence based on the victim’s lack of consent and not on perpetrator motivation, and include an automatic right to life-long anonymity for the complainant, as with other sexual offences.***

84 [Watching porn in public - a modern form of street harassment?](#), Huffington Post blog by Clare McGlynn, April 2017

85 [‘Revenge porn’ is a form of sexual assault](#), Huffington Post blog by Clare McGlynn, March 2018

86 [Q182](#)

87 [Q216](#)

88 Professor Clare McGlynn ([SPP0047](#))

89 Professor Clare McGlynn ([SPP0047](#)), Mr Luke Collins ([SPP0032](#)), Miss Zoe Tongue ([SPP0061](#))

## Policy on violence against women and girls

53. As noted above, sexual harassment cannot be tackled through laws alone. Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places is a cross-cutting policy issue which is relevant to a number of different agencies and departments including transport, local government, policing and education. The Home Office-led Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy 2016–2020 is a cross-government policy which sets out work on sexual and other violence against women and girls under four pillars: prevention, provision of services, partnership working and pursuing perpetrators.<sup>90</sup> Organisations such as Rape Crisis England and Wales and Plan UK told us that sexual harassment in public places should be understood as being on a continuum with other forms of violence against women and girls, and that it therefore should be embedded in the VAWG strategy.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, sexual harassment is the most common form of violence against women and girls.

54. The VAWG strategy document contains only two references to sexual harassment, however; these references are made in relation to specific initiatives involving universities and public transport, neither of which is currently driven by central government. We took evidence from the Minister for Women, Victoria Atkins MP, who is also the Home Office Minister with responsibility for violence against women and girls. We put it to her that sexual harassment is a significant gap in the strategy. She agreed, and told us that the strategy would be “refreshed” later in 2018.<sup>92</sup>

55. We asked the Minister whether there was any particular civil servant co-ordinating a strategy on sexual harassment in public places. She told us that, while there is a “wealth” of civil servants advising on violence against women and girls, she would be “cautious” about having one single person concentrating solely on sexual harassment because of the risk of “siloeing”. She explained:

What I am trying to do in all this work is draw together all of these different teams of civil servants, not just in the Home Office but across GEO, so that they are all thinking about sexual harassment when it comes to, for example, gangs and how we are tackling gang crime.<sup>93</sup>

However, it is not clear how this work is being drawn together. When we asked the Minister whether the Government should be asking the Office for Students for data on sexual harassment in a university setting, for example, she said that she would ask the universities Minister to write to us because “I do not know the intricacies of the relationship between the Department and the organisation”.<sup>94</sup> We asked the Minister whether there were officials in each government department who have policy on sexual harassment in their brief or job description. She told us that she was not familiar with job descriptions across Whitehall, but that work was drawn together at ministerial level and subjected to “peer on peer scrutiny” by the inter-ministerial group on violence against women and girls, at which sexual harassment was discussed.<sup>95</sup>

90 [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls strategy 2016 - 2020](#) HM Government, March 2016

91 Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#)), Plan International UK ([SPP0071](#))

92 [Q247](#)

93 [Q224](#)

94 [Q310](#)

95 [Q251,Q315](#)

56. When we asked the Minister if she thought we would feel that the Government had a coherent strategy on sexual harassment in public places she said:

I would hope that the Committee is reassured by our very clear intention to refresh the VAWG strategy. The fact that [the Department for Transport] and [the Department for Education] have done work in their own departments on this shows what can be done. However, I think there is room for improvement, if I am honest; I do think there is. I hope that frankness will encourage the Committee to give a full report and to give us ideas as to where you have identified, from the evidence you drawn together, that we should be improving.<sup>96</sup>

### **Community projects and support**

57. An essential part of an effective strategy is working with and supporting community groups and projects to tackle the problem. Community responses, such as specialist support for survivors and projects working with men and boys, are internationally recognised as a key part of the response to sexual harassment and the culture that underpins it.<sup>97</sup> There is a plethora of community responses to sexual harassment in public spaces in the UK, including the Everyday Sexism Project which started in 2012 as way of giving victims of sexual harassment a platform for sharing their experiences.

58. Valuable as these projects are, there is no central funding for community initiatives on sexual harassment and funding for specialist sexual violence services does not meet demand. The Government said it is committed to ensuring that every victim of sexual assault has access to the specialist support they need and says there are helplines and services for people who have experienced sexual abuse.<sup>98</sup> However, Rape Crisis England and Wales told us that that Rape Crisis centres are “increasingly operating at capacity and are underfunded.”<sup>99</sup> Central information is not kept about what individual Police and Crime Commissioners are doing in their areas to provide support for victims of sexual harassment, but the Minister told us she would write to them to obtain that information.<sup>100</sup>

59. **In signing up to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government has made a commitment to eliminate sexual harassment of women and girls by 2030. The Government was not, however, able to provide us with evidence of a comprehensive plan or programme of work for achieving this goal and making public places safe for all women and girls. While we agree with the Minister that a siloed approach to such work would not be effective and that it needs to be embedded across government, at present the foot appears to be almost entirely off the pedal. The Government has not caught up with the huge social changes reflected in the #MeToo movement. Instead it risks giving the impression that it thinks sexual harassment is either too trivial to address, or that the problem is immune to policy intervention.**

60. *The Government already has a well-regarded cross-departmental strategy for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. It is astonishing that the most common form of violence against women—sexual harassment—is currently almost entirely*

96 [Q316](#)

97 [Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)

98 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

99 Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#))

100 [Q278](#)

*overlooked in that strategy. We welcome the Minister's commitment to refreshing the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy later in 2018, and we expect to see specific actions to address sexual harassment, much of which is already prohibited in law, in the new document. Those actions need to be supported by dedicated funding and staffing, and developed in partnership with community organisations. The Government must exploit the full range of policy levers at its disposal, and must set out the milestones to be met on the way to fulfilling the 2030 goal. We expect the strategy to set out a comprehensive programme of work to make all public places safe for all women and girls.*

## Data collection on sexual harassment in public places

61. Robust information is a pre-requisite for developing effective policy. The Government does not collect data specifically on sexual harassment in public places, leaving it to others to build a picture. The Government told us:

Sexual harassment in public places is not centrally measured, and so we do not have evidence of prevalence, nor changes over time. Some incidents of sexual harassment may constitute criminal offences, but conviction data do not show which were a result of sexual harassment.<sup>101</sup>

62. A number of witnesses commented on the implications of this.<sup>102</sup> Dr Fiona Vera-Gray of Durham University suggested that the limited evidence base and absence of shared definitions and terminology around sexual harassment in public places may be part of the reason why this is an underdeveloped area of policy. Marai Larasi, Director of Imkaan, told us that the lack of data affects resourcing of services and support, because “we have ended up with a hierarchy of violence against women and girls with sexual harassment being seen as a low-level thing and other things seen as more extreme.”<sup>103</sup> The Minister for Women told us she had “a very open mind as to what more we should be doing to measure this in the future.”<sup>104</sup>

**63. The Government has left it to others to collect data on sexual harassment in public places. Even where there is data on specific criminal offences, such as indecent exposure, it is not brought together. This means that there is no central measurement of the problem upon which to develop policy, and no way of knowing whether the incidence of sexual harassment is increasing or decreasing, or whether women and girls of particular backgrounds are particularly targeted.**

*64. Data on sexual harassment in public places should be collected through the Crime Survey of England and Wales or brought together through other official data-gathering processes. It should be broken down so that the Government can start to build a picture about the particular ways that different groups of women and girls are targeted for abuse. This data should underpin the development of the comprehensive programme of work to tackle sexual harassment in public places.*

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101 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

102 Plan International UK ([SPP0071](#))

103 [Q21](#)

104 [Q218](#)

## Preventing sexual harassment in public places

65. As with other social harms, we would expect the Government's goal to be to prevent sexual harassment from happening. Indeed, the UK has clear international obligations to take action to prevent sexual harassment along with other forms of violence against women and girls.<sup>105</sup> Many of those making submissions to us called for far more work on preventing sexual harassment before it begins.<sup>106</sup> Plan UK argued that:

There is an urgent need to work with young men to improve their attitudes, knowledge and awareness about how unwelcome stranger harassment is and the impact it can have on girls' lives. [ ... ] exploring gender stereotypes, masculinity and mental health with boys could serve as an appropriate gateway to open up conversations about harassment.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, Professor Vanita Sundaram told us that:

If we can challenge current expectations for masculinity and femininity in early years settings, scaffolded by work with parents and communities, we can address the root causes of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in public places, and elsewhere.<sup>108</sup>

66. There are numerous models and theories of change for violence prevention which the Government could employ to address the causes of sexual harassment.<sup>109</sup> The UN's 2013 large-scale multi-country study 'Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it?' recommended that prevention work should focus on areas including: changing social norms related to the acceptability of violence and the subordination of women; promoting non-violent masculinities oriented towards equality and respect; working with young boys to address early ages of sexual violence perpetration; promoting healthy sexuality for men and addressing male sexual entitlement; and ending impunity for men who rape.<sup>110</sup> There have been evaluated programmes in the United States, supported by the federal government, that have been shown to result in a change in attitudes and behaviours around sexual harassment.<sup>111</sup>

67. The UK, too, undertakes work on prevention, but its focus is overseas. The Department for International Development's flagship 'What Works to Prevent Violence' programme focuses on research and innovation to produce evidence on prevention. The UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact reported in 2016 that "No other donor has invested comparable resources into VAWG research [ ... ] this is a highly respected initiative with the potential to make a major contribution to knowledge in the field."<sup>112</sup> The Government therefore already has some of the expertise that it needs to bring to bear in the UK context.

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105 [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women \(General Recommendation 19\)](#), [Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)

106 Professor Vanita Sundaram ([SPP0059](#)), Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#)), End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SPP0096](#))

107 Plan International UK ([SPP0071](#))

108 Professor Vanita Sundaram ([SPP0059](#))

109 [A Framework to underpin action to prevent violence against women](#), UN Women, 2015, [A Theory of Change for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls](#), Action Aid, 2012

110 [Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it?](#) UN Partners for Prevention, 2013

111 [Q37](#)

112 [DFID's efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls: A learning review](#), Independent Commission for Aid Impact, May 2016

68. The Government recognises that prevention needs to be part of its work to tackle violence against women and girls. The VAWG strategy states that:

Preventing violence and abuse from happening in the first place will make a significant difference to overall prevalence of these crimes. We will continue to challenge the deep-rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate against and limit women and girls across all communities.<sup>113</sup>

In its response to our report on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, the Government made commitments to establishing a programme of qualitative research into the attitudes and behaviours of young people in order to better understand the underlying drivers of inequality and harassment among young people, and providing more in-depth information about so-called “low-level” behaviours.<sup>114</sup>

69. In the course of the present inquiry, the Government affirmed that it is committed to challenging myths and stereotypes around harassment and sexual misconduct to ensure that the impact of sexual harassment is properly understood:

We understand that sexual harassment of women in public places is the result of harmful social norms that can perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women, and create an environment in which sexual harassment can occur.<sup>115</sup>

We were told that the Government Equalities Office (GEO) is taking forward a programme of work to address harmful social norms. This entails “mapping the evidence base and initiatives that engage men, boys and bystanders in violence against women and girls prevention, as well as meeting with stakeholders working in this area”.<sup>116</sup>

70. In response to our question about the UK’s commitment under the Sustainable Development Goals to eliminating all sexual and other violence by 2030, the Minister told us:

It is our objective, and we are working hard to make it happen. We have, as you know, a great deal of work to do in terms of changing social norms, educating boys and young men that it is not acceptable to shout the sorts of things you have just referred to, but that is absolutely our objective.<sup>117</sup>

The Minister did not, however, set out how this objective was going to be achieved. We have not seen any further details of the programme of work the GEO says it is undertaking, such as timescales, funding or the outcomes of meetings with stakeholders. It is not clear to us, therefore, how the Government is fulfilling its responsibility for sending clear messages to men and boys that they are not entitled to sexually harass women and girls.

113 [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls strategy 2016–2020](#), HM Government, March 2016

114 Women and Equalities Committee, [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools: Government response to the Committee’s Third Report of Session 2016–17](#), First Special Report of Session 2016–17, HC 826

115 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

116 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

117 [Q237](#)

## Education

71. Our inquiry on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools in 2016 demonstrated the importance of education for preventing sexual harassment. To be effective, work with young people needs to be informed by a gendered approach to understanding both perpetration and victimisation. In line with findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey, our research found some concerning trends in relation to young people's belief in traditional gender norms which are connected to acceptability of sexual harassment. For example, 18–24 year olds are most likely (20 per cent compared with a national average of 14 per cent) to think that men deserve to know where a girlfriend is at all times.<sup>118</sup> While more research is needed, such beliefs appear to endorse a sense of male entitlement which other research shows is strongly related to perpetration.<sup>119</sup> Our own research suggests that this belief is related to acceptability of sexual harassment in public places.

72. Our research shows clear public support, particularly amongst women, for educative work with young people on sexual harassment in public places. One woman said “we need to educate people that is for sure” whilst another said “I think it needs to be made clear to boys in school about what is and isn't harassment”. As a universal service for young people, school is a prime site for work to prevent sexual harassment and yet has been overlooked by central government until recently.

73. The Government told us that it is “working to engage with young people about respect and equality in order to prevent sexual harassment from happening in the first place” and that this is why it is making Relationships Education mandatory in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) mandatory in all secondary schools:

Through Relationships Education and RSE, we expect young people to be taught about what constitutes a positive, healthy relationship, as well as providing young people with an understanding of consent and boundaries.<sup>120</sup>

The original intention was for this to be introduced in 2019, but the statutory guidance will not now come into force until September 2020.

74. The Government also told us that younger children can be exposed to and influenced by negative gender stereotypes, so it has “updated our Media Smart resources (with the Advertising Association) to help teachers and parents improve primary school children's understanding of how gender is represented in the media and their resilience to negative content.”<sup>121</sup>

***75. The introduction of Relationships Education in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education in all secondary schools provides a welcome opportunity to ensure that concepts such as healthy relationships, consent and boundaries are communicated to children. It is disappointing that the statutory guidance will not come into force until September 2020, and we urge schools not to wait until then to review their policies and practices to ensure they are taking every possible action to prevent sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence.***

118 See Annex

119 [Why do some men use violence against women and how can we prevent it?](#) UN Partners for Prevention, 2013

120 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

121 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

## Public campaigns

76. Public campaigns and awareness-raising are key features of international obligations on prevention, based on studies about effective ways of tackling social norms that underpin violence and harassment, and were widely supported in the evidence we received.<sup>122</sup> Article 13 of the Istanbul Convention requires Parties who have ratified the Convention to regularly promote or conduct awareness-raising campaigns, with women's organisations and others, to increase public understanding of sexual and other violence against women and the need for prevention.<sup>123</sup> The Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee in the UK's last reporting cycle in 2013 included a recommendation to "continue public campaigns to raise awareness of all forms of violence against women, including black and ethnic minority women."<sup>124</sup>

77. Some work of this sort has been undertaken in the UK. The Home Office's 'Disrespect Nobody' campaign (initially called 'This Is Abuse') is targeted at 12–18 year olds. It aims to prevent young people becoming perpetrators or victims by "helping them understand healthy relationships and encouraging them to re-think their views of controlling behaviour, violence, abuse, sexual abuse and what consent means."<sup>125</sup> However, it is not embedded in a wider programme of work on preventing sexual harassment. Those working in the field also criticise the Government for the relative lack of investment and ambition in such campaigns. Dr Fiona Vera-Gray told us that the Government should "invest in long-term, multi-platform attitudinal change campaigns, including working with media on 'edutainment' programming, in order to change gender norms and prevent public sexual harassment."<sup>126</sup> Marai Larasi, Director of Imkaan, made a comparison to the Government's long-running road safety campaigns:<sup>127</sup>

We have the evidence of work on drink-drive and seatbelts. It is not like we have not had a history in this country of doing far-reaching public campaigns. We need to do some work around this, because at the moment it is inconsistent and dependent on individual champions in local authorities and local areas and great caseworkers to pick this up. The Government need to create a framework located in the violence against women and girls agenda to deal with this.<sup>128</sup>

**78. *As with any social harm, prevention should be the Government's aim. Prevention must therefore be the foundation of the new programme of work to eliminate sexual harassment. The Government has previously committed to tackling harmful social norms that underpin sexual harassment, but we have seen little evidence of specific or comprehensive work underway to do this. Opportunities to embed a preventative approach in schools, through media regulation, through public awareness campaigns and through crime policy (such as the Modern Crime Strategy), for example, are being missed. The Government must show leadership in seeking to change the cultural***

122 [Q119](#), Safer Streets Sheffield- Know the Line ([SPP0048](#)), Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#)), Dr Fiona Vera-Gray ([SPP0076](#)), End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SPP0096](#))

123 [Council of Europe Convention on prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)

124 [Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), Committee on the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, 2013

125 [Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence \(Istanbul Convention\) – Report on Progress](#), Home Office, 2017

126 Dr Fiona Vera-Gray ([SPP0076](#))

127 [Story of THINK!](#), THINK! website, accessed October 2018

128 [Q21](#)

*acceptability of sexual harassment. It should develop a long-term, evaluated programme of public campaigns to tackle the attitudes that underpin sexual harassment, targeted at both adults and children.*

79. In order to prevent sexual harassment, the Government needs a robust understanding of why it happens, who perpetrates it, and how men and women differ in their understandings and experiences of the problem. It must understand the cultural attitudes and social norms that lead to or enable sexual harassment, and how to go about challenging and changing them. Without understanding these factors, it is not possible to design and implement effective policy solutions.

80. *The Government’s preventative work should be clearly based on the available research evidence—from the UK and elsewhere—about the cultural factors, attitudes and norms that lead to or enable sexual harassment to take place and how these can be effectively challenged. The available research is not sufficient, however. The Government must also commission ongoing, large-scale research into these factors in the UK to inform its programme over the longer term.*

## Hate crime

81. One policy option for responding to sexual harassment that has been the subject of recent debate is to categorise misogyny as a hate crime. The National Police Chiefs’ Council definition of ‘hate crimes’ is “any crimes that are targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice towards that person’s identity.” This currently includes disability, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender identity, but not sex or gender. Those who support tackling sexual harassment as part of policing of hate crime say that it would send a message that this behaviour is unacceptable, recognise that it is motivated by hostile attitudes towards women, and give victims more confidence to report. The policy is supported by women’s organisations including Women’s Aid, the Fawcett Society and the Everyday Sexism Project.<sup>129</sup>

82. Others point out that not all forms of sexual harassment constitute a criminal offence and that, because it is usually perpetrated by strangers there would be little prospect of justice for victims.<sup>130</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria Vera Baird QC argued for those reasons that the benefit for victims of a hate crime categorisation would be debateable, and that the categorisation would simply be a recording tool for the police.<sup>131</sup> The idea has also been criticised for removing sexual harassment from the context of other forms of violence against women and girls.

83. In April 2016, Nottinghamshire Police began classifying ‘misogyny’ as a hate crime or incident.<sup>132</sup> The force told us that misogyny may be understood as “incidents against women that are motivated by the attitude of men towards women, and includes behaviour

129 Fawcett Society (SPP0074), [Six things we’ve learned about misogyny as a hate crime](#), Guardian, 2016, [Misogynist abuse is a hate crime: Women’s Aid calls on other police forces to follow Nottinghamshire’s lead](#), Women’s Aid website, accessed October 2018

130 Dame Vera Baird QC (SPP0087)

131 Dame Vera Baird QC (SPP0087)

132 Susannah Fish ([SPP0056](#))

targeted at women by men simply because they are women.” This could include unwanted sexual advances, physical or verbal assaults, or use of mobile devices to send unwanted messages or take photographs without consent or permission.<sup>133</sup>

84. Between April 2016 and March 2018, 174 women reported misogynistic hate crime to Nottinghamshire Police, of which reports 73 were classified as ‘crimes’, and 101 were classified as non-criminal ‘incidents’. There was one conviction during this period. An evaluation of the policy published in June 2018 found that, while there was high public support for the policy once it was explained, there was little awareness of it and it had not improved the generally low rate of reporting by victims. This suggests the need for policies such as this to be backed up by public awareness campaigns and promotion if they are to be effective.<sup>134</sup> Some other police forces also now include ‘misogyny’ or ‘gender’ in their hate crime policies although it is not national police policy to do so.

85. Nottingham Women’s Centre, which has driven the change in Nottinghamshire, told us that women in the area said they felt safer and more confident as a result of the new policy, and that women “know they can report it, they will be listened to and that they will be taken seriously. Nottinghamshire has sent the message that this behaviour is not acceptable.”<sup>135</sup> Since giving evidence to us, the Government has announced that it will be asking the Law Commission to review hate crime legislation. It has said that this review “will include how the protective characteristics, including sex and gender, should be considered by new or existing hate crime law.”<sup>136</sup>

**86. *We support the Government’s approach of asking the Law Commission to review hate crime legislation. That review should consider whether categorising sexual harassment of women and girls in public places as a hate crime would bring substantive advantages to victims and achieve a reduction in the incidence of such harassment.***

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133 Nottinghamshire police ([SPP0049](#))

134 [Misogyny Hate Crime Evaluation Report](#), Professor Louise Mullany and Dr. Loretta Trickett, June 2018

135 Nottingham Women’s Centre ([SPP0063](#))

136 HC Deb, 5 September 2018, [col 253](#) [commons chamber]

## 3 Creating a healthier media and culture

### The relationship between media culture, and sexual harassment

87. The UK's international obligations to tackle sexual harassment include specific commitments to address the culture which enables it. In 2013 the CEDAW Committee recommended that the UK “continue to engage with the media to eliminate stereotypical imaging of women and their objectification in the media, especially in advertising.”<sup>137</sup>

88. There are very deep concerns about the relationship between the media, culture and sexual harassment, including the portrayal and representation of women and men and the way in which the media facilitates sexual harassment.<sup>138</sup> When we refer to the media we are including mainstream media and advertising, as well as social media, digital media and online pornography. Women in our focus group told us that “media and particularly social media plays a massive role in the stereotypes we have for men” and “the media has a lot to answer for”. One woman who made a written submission told us that she believed that media messaging deprioritises consent and portrays a restrictive stereotype of how a woman should look. She described some of the damaging messages sent out by the media, such as:

if men stalk, pester and persist the woman will give in, women are objects, women should perform sexualized femininity for men, women should dress provocatively in order to feel accepted by society but if they do they are labelled sluts and are not respected.<sup>139</sup>

89. In a 2015 survey for Girlguiding UK, girls and young women aged 11–21 said that in the previous week alone over half had seen women's pictures in newspapers or magazines that were sexualised in a way that made them feel uncomfortable, and 42 per cent had read something in the media that had trivialised violence and abuse against women.<sup>140</sup> Three quarters of young women in a small survey by the Young Women's Trust said that mainstream media portrayals of women (as well as pornography) contribute to sexual harassment.<sup>141</sup>

90. Women who had experienced sexual harassment told us that they believed that a sexualised culture was a contributory factor to the problem.<sup>142</sup> There is evidence of wider public concern about these issues. Respondents to Ipsos Mori's 2018 International Women's Day survey said that sexualisation of women and girls in the media was the third most important issue facing women and girls in Britain today, after equal pay and sexual harassment.<sup>143</sup> The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) classifies films, hard copy and online videos, and has a wide remit in relation to the regulation of pornographic content in film and delivered via UK mobile networks. Research it conducted in 2014

137 [Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), Committee on the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, 2013

138 Not Buying It ([SPP0085](#)), Tom Farr ([SPP0069](#)), Welsh Women's Aid ([SPP0091](#)), Dr Matthew Hall and Jeff Hearn ([SPP0100](#))

139 A member of the public ([SPP0042](#))

140 Girlguiding ([SPP0035](#))

141 Young Women's Trust ([SPP0075](#))

142 A member of the public ([SPP0006](#)), A member of the public ([SPP0042](#))

143 [International Women's Day: Global misperceptions of equality and the need to Press for Progress](#), Ipsos Mori, March 2018,

demonstrated public concern about children and young people accessing ‘glamour’ content, and about the cumulative impact of images that objectify women which are primarily about sexual arousal, because of concern about exploitation and inequality of women and girls.<sup>144</sup>

91. There has been growing focus on sexualisation in government policy, including the Bailey review, ‘Letting children be children’, which led to a series of actions to tackle sexualisation in retail, the media and advertising.<sup>145</sup> Following the Advertising Standard Authority’s inquiry into gender stereotyping in advertising in 2016, there has been consultation on a new advertising code stipulating that “advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence.”<sup>146</sup> The outcome of the consultation is expected by the end of 2018.

## Pornography

92. There is specific concern about the role of pornography in contributing to harmful attitudes to women and girls and providing a context in which sexual harassment takes place,<sup>147</sup> and that it is increasingly being used by young people as a source of sex education, with negative consequences.<sup>148</sup> One man who participated in our focus groups said, “I think the problem is that not only has [pornography] become normalised, it is also considered acceptable, even expected.” This was worrying, as the research also showed that men in particular—who are far more likely to be regular users of pornography than women<sup>149</sup>—believed that pornography was harmful because it engendered unrealistic expectations of sex.<sup>150</sup>

93. Our research did not find a strong relationship between attitudes towards pornography and attitudes towards sexual harassment, although it did suggest some clear trends that need exploring in further research. For example, people who find legal pornography acceptable are generally more likely to find sexual harassment acceptable than people who find legal pornography unacceptable. However, our research asked about attitudes rather than behaviours (for example, use of pornography or sexual harassment perpetration), and research both internationally and in the UK suggests that there is a relationship between the consumption of pornography and sexist attitudes and sexually aggressive behaviours, including violence.<sup>151</sup> We asked Dr Maddy Coy whether there is a link between men viewing pornography and the likelihood of them sexually harassing women and girls. Dr Coy told us:

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144 [Public acceptability of glamour images on mobile devices: The BBFC’s policy response](#), BBFC website, accessed October 2018

145 [Letting Children Be Children: Progress Report](#), Department for Education, 2013

146 [Consulting on a new rule to tackle harmful gender stereotypes](#), ASA website, accessed October 2018

147 Dame Vera Baird QC ([SPP0087](#)), Dr Jane Meyrick and Dr Kieran McCartan ([SPP0041](#)), Tom Farr ([SPP0069](#))

148 Tom Farr ([SPP0069](#))

149 [Sex Uncovered: austerity-hit Britons have sex less than once a week, poll finds](#), The Guardian website, accessed October 2018

150 See Annex

151 Dr Jane Meyrick and Dr Kieran McCartan ([SPP0041](#)); [Pornography, Sexual Coercion and Abuse and Sexting in Young People’s Intimate Relationships: A European Study](#), N Stanley et al, March 2016; [A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies](#), Wright et al, December 2015

There is a meta-analysis of research that shows that. It was pornography consumption associated with higher levels of attitudes that support violence, which includes things like acceptance of violence, rape myth acceptance and sexual harassment, yes. [ ... ] The basis of some of those studies can be critiqued [ ... ] but the findings are consistent across individual studies and the meta-analysis that pulled them together that there is a relationship between pornography consumption, attitudes that support sexual violence and likelihood of committing sexual violence.<sup>152</sup>

94. The BBFC told us that it knows through its work with charities that children report that exposure to pornography, much of which is accidental, is impacting on their attitudes and their behaviours. A rapid evidence assessment for the Children’s Commissioner for England in 2016 found that children’s exposure to pornography was linked to unrealistic attitudes about sex, belief that women are sex objects and less progressive gender role attitudes.<sup>153</sup>

95. One woman told us that the Government should recognise pornography, sexism and objectification as a public health risk and use the media to inform society of the harms associated with them: “This could be done in the same way the amazing effort by the Government worked in turning people’s attitudes around regarding smoking.”<sup>154</sup> Our research suggested that, whilst men may believe that pornography can be harmful, this does not necessarily lead them to think it is socially unacceptable. This has implications for how the Government develops policy to tackle the harms associated with pornography; focusing messaging solely on harms may not be the most effective approach with men and boys. More research is needed to develop policies that address these issues.

96. The Government is not consistent in its understanding of the research suggesting a relationship between pornography and sexually harmful behaviour. On the one hand, in a range of ways government policies and media regulation already assume that some media content is sexually harmful. For example, in introducing the new policy of age verification for online pornography the Government says: “We will help make sure children aren’t exposed to harmful sexualised content online by requiring age verification for access to commercial sites containing pornographic material.”<sup>155</sup> The Minister told us that she very much hoped that the policy would have an impact on attitudes towards women and sexual harassment.<sup>156</sup> The draft consultation on the new statutory guidance on Relationships and Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education states that: “Some pupils are [ ... ] exposed to harmful behaviours online, and via other forms of media, which may normalise violent sexual behaviours.”<sup>157</sup> Chief Executive David Austin told us that, as a regulator, the BBFC takes into account research evidence about the effect of men viewing violent pornography when determining classifications:

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152 [Qq56–57](#)

153 [“Basically... porn is everywhere”: A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effects that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People](#), Children’s Commissioner and Middlesex University, 2013

154 A member of the public ([SPP0042](#))

155 [Digital Economy Bill Factsheet – Age Verification for Online Pornography \(clauses 15–25\)](#), Department for Culture Media and Sport

156 [Q281](#)

157 [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education Guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers Draft for consultation: July 2018](#), Department for Education

For example, we will not classify depictions of pornography that feature real or simulated lack of consent, encourage an interest in abusive relationships, such as sex with children or incest, that kind of content. We definitely take that into account.<sup>158</sup>

The Government also restricts adults' access to hard copy pornographic films to licensed sex shops and licensed cinemas.<sup>159</sup> It is therefore clear that government policy and media regulation is already based on an understanding that pornographic content can be harmful.

97. It is odd, therefore, that the Government's written evidence to us expressed doubt about the strength of research suggesting a relationship between the consumption of pornography and sexually harmful behaviours. It stated that "there is currently limited evidence to suggest a link between the consumption of pornography and sexual violence".<sup>160</sup> The Minister for Women told us that she was commissioning research on the impact of online pornography on attitudes towards women and girls, saying that:

We have to be careful about the research, which is why I have commissioned this research over and above everything that has gone before. We have to acknowledge the fact that the Crime Survey for England & Wales has shown a reduction in sexual violence since 2004–05, while online pornography has exploded exponentially. I have to bear that in mind in terms of what we are doing, which is why I want thorough research looking not just at gang criminality, frankly, but also at how this affects people forming healthy relationships in adult life. [ ... ] I know the Children's Commissioner did some research in 2014 that showed some evidence, but I do not think it could be described as being unequivocal in the links between these things. I would like to be entirely clear on that.<sup>161</sup>

**98. The Government's approach to pornography is not consistent. It restricts adults' access to offline pornography to licensed premises and is introducing age verification of commercial pornography online to prevent children's exposure to it. But the Government has no plans to address adult men's use of mainstream online pornography, despite research suggesting that men who use pornography are more likely to hold sexist attitudes and be sexually aggressive towards women.**

**99. *There are examples of lawful behaviours which the Government recognises as harmful, such as smoking, which are addressed through public health campaigns and huge investment designed to reduce and prevent those harms. The Government should take a similar, evidence-based approach to addressing the harms of pornography.***

100. The BBFC, the regulator for age verification, believes that, as a result of the new policy, "accidental stumbling across commercial pornography by children online will largely become a thing of the past."<sup>162</sup> However, writer and commentator Melanie Phillips told us she was more sceptical about pornography websites abiding by the new law because the

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158 [Q61](#)

159 British Board of Film Classification ([SPP0101](#))

160 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

161 [Q261](#)

162 [Q71](#)

“commercial impulse is so enormous.”<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, pornography accessed through social media is not part of the new regime, because it does not come within the definition of ‘commercial pornography’ under the draft regulations published in 2017, though not consulted upon. As pornography is also accessed through social media, this gap could undermine the effectiveness of the policy.<sup>164</sup>

**101. *The definition of ‘commercial pornography services’ for the Government’s policy on age verification of pornography websites should be amended to include social media, to ensure that this policy is as effective and comprehensive as possible.***

102. BBFC classification guidelines address content related to discrimination: “Potentially offensive content relating to matters such as race, gender, religion, disability or sexuality may arise in a wide range of works, and the classification decision will take account of the strength or impact of their inclusion.” The BBFC told us that preliminary research to inform new classification guidelines suggests increased public concern about sexual violence. We believe that the new guidelines provide an opportunity to be clearer about normalised sexism as discrimination, and to name sexual harassment as a form of sexual violence in order to be clear about the regulation of its depiction.

**103. *British Board of Film Classification policies and guidelines should be explicit about categorising normalised sexism as discrimination. The policies and guidelines should name sexual harassment as a form of sexual violence in order to be clearer about regulation of its depiction.***

## Social media

104. Social media is a ‘public place’ which has been left largely unregulated, and women and girls are subject to high levels of abuse in online spaces.<sup>165</sup> We touched on some of the issues around social media and sexual harassment in this inquiry, but have not duplicated work going on elsewhere by examining the particular features of online harassment in depth.<sup>166</sup>

105. In research conducted in 2017 by Amnesty International, one in five women said they had experienced abuse or harassment through social media, with young women aged between 18 and 24 particularly affected; 37 per cent of them had experienced online violence or abuse. Of the women who said they had experienced some form of online violence or abuse more than a quarter (27 per cent) had received direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence and almost half (47 per cent) had experienced sexist or misogynistic abuse. Fifty-nine per cent said the perpetrator was a stranger, compared with 27 per cent who personally knew the offender. One third (36 per cent) felt their physical safety had been threatened and more than half (55 per cent) suffered stress, anxiety or panic attacks.<sup>167</sup> Abuse and harassment, including on social media, can impact on women’s willingness to run for political office and so restrict their participation in democratic processes.<sup>168</sup> It can

163 [Q73](#)

164 [The Online Pornography \(Commercial Basis\) Regulations 2018](#)

165 Dr Kim Barker and Dr Olga Jurasz ([SPP0057](#)), Professor Clare McGlynn ([SPP0047](#)), Amnesty International UK ([SPP0055](#)), Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#))

166 See for example the Law Commission Review on [Offensive Online Communications](#)

167 Amnesty International UK ([SPP0055](#))

168 Fawcett Society ([SPP0074](#))

also intersect with other forms of harassment, including racialised sexual harassment.<sup>169</sup> Professor Clare McGlynn told us that public sexual harassment can result in some women feeling they have to remove themselves from social media: “That means they are removing themselves from public debate, from participation in social life. Regulation enables them to participate in social life. It enables them to exercise their freedom of speech.”<sup>170</sup>

106. The Government told us that the law is clear that what is illegal off-line is also illegal online and that there is also “robust” legislation in place to deal with harassment and stalking.<sup>171</sup> This includes Section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 which creates an offence of sending, or causing to be sent, by means of a public electronic communications network, “a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character.”<sup>172</sup> The Crown Prosecution Service has published guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent by social media which includes cases related to violence against women and girls and disclosing private sexual images without consent—often referred to as ‘revenge porn’.<sup>173</sup> The Law Commission is conducting an analysis of laws relating to offensive online communications and we are keen to see how sexual harassment of women and girls will be addressed when it publishes this analysis later in 2018.

107. We heard calls for social media companies to take more robust action against sexual harassment and abuse of women on their platforms.<sup>174</sup> Welsh women’s organisation Chwarae Teg called in its submission for social media platforms to take a zero tolerance attitude towards such behaviour and to encourage users to report content they believe constitutes harassment.<sup>175</sup> The Government’s Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper, published in October 2017, includes a commitment to introducing a voluntary social media code of practice which will specifically consider how harmful conduct impacts on female users.<sup>176</sup> This is an opportunity to address the harms of sexual harassment targeted at women and girls in online spaces.

**108. *Online spaces are public places where sexual harassment of women and girls is rife. This has damaging effects on their health, and their ability to have their voices heard in public. The internet safety strategy and social media code of practice should include specific, robust and proportionate action to prevent and address sexual harassment and abuse of women and girls online. There must be clear consequences for those organisations that fail to effectively address sexual harassment—consequences that hurt their bottom line.***

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169 Rape Crisis England & Wales ([SPP0088](#))

170 [Q68](#)

171 Home Office ([SPP0104](#))

172 [Communications Act 2003](#)

173 [Social Media - Guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media](#), Crown Prosecution Service website, Revised: August 2018

174 Dr Kim Barker and Dr Olga Jurasz ([SPP0057](#))

175 Chwarae Teg ([SPP0070](#))

176 [Internet Safety Strategy Green paper](#), HM Government, 2017

## 4 Women and girls' safety on public transport

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### Victimisation and perpetration on public transport

109. A survey by Transport for London in 2013 found that 15 per cent of women had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour while travelling on public transport in London over the previous 12 months, and that 90 per cent had not reported it to the police. The most commonly experienced types of unwanted sexual behaviour were groping or touching, staring, sexual comments and body rubbing. Transport for London noted that the “overwhelming majority” of these offences took place during the rush hour peaks.<sup>177</sup> As with sexual violence elsewhere, sexual offences on the transport network are significantly under-reported.<sup>178</sup>

110. Women relayed accounts of a wide range of disturbing experiences of men groping and frotteuring (rubbing against them with an erection) in rush hour. More common at off-peak times were men masturbating or flashing, and late in the evening or at night on public transport women said they were grabbed and kissed, propositioned, or verbally abused. Women also experienced ‘upskirting’ (photos being taken of their legs or up their skirts), stalking and being ejaculated on.<sup>179</sup> Viewing pornography while on public transport is another form of harassment that has been facilitated by the ubiquity of mobile devices. Professor Clare McGlynn told us: “While the porn-viewer is entitled to privacy and freedom, as members of the public, we too are entitled to privacy in public and to feel safe (and porn watching in public can be threatening).”<sup>180</sup>

111. Young women are particularly targeted.<sup>181</sup> Sian Lewis has carried out research on women’s experiences of sexual harassment on the London Underground. One of her research participants said she was 12 when a man put his hand up her skirt and that it was “the first time I was looked at like that, in a sexual way”. The incident made her fearful and she is uncomfortable travelling on the tube to this day. Another participant was 14 and in her school uniform when she was trapped in a carriage alone with a man who was masturbating. Neither of these women had told anyone about the experience until they were in their thirties; they had not fully understood what was happening to them at the time and had partly blamed themselves.<sup>182</sup>

### The specific context of sexual harassment on public transport

112. Public transport systems around the world are known to be ‘crime attractors’ for sex offenders. Sexual harassment on public transport has specific features and impacts because it takes place in a transitory environment and in particular kinds of spaces. Women may

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177 Transport for London ([SPP0092](#))

178 [Q174](#)

179 Transport for London ([SPP0092](#)), Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

180 Professor Clare McGlynn ([SPP0047](#))

181 Dr Jackie Gray ([SPP0103](#)), Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

182 Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

not know who has assaulted them, particularly in rush hour, and may not react because they are trapped, or fear the situation escalating or feel embarrassed to say anything.<sup>183</sup> Transport for London told us:

Motivated offenders will target public transport as a place to commit offences because of the opportunity it provides. Crowded trains and buses allow offenders to touch or rub other passengers and evade detection, as they can claim it was accidental or a result of the movement of the vehicle. For a sex offender, public transport is a ‘target rich’ environment. [ ... ] There are also factors about the transport environment, as with other public spaces, that can make it more appealing to perpetrators. These include anonymity; using crowded spaces and the movement of the vehicle to conceal unwanted sexual behaviour; the perceived likelihood of getting away with it and the perceived lack of capable guardianship.<sup>184</sup>

DI Cooper of British Transport Police told us that the railway environment particularly lends itself to the perpetration of ‘upskirting’ as women walk up stairs and escalators.<sup>185</sup>

## Impact and ‘safety work’

113. Women and girls can experience a range of negative consequences of sexual harassment on public transport including mental health problems, reduced self-esteem, anxiety and feeling trapped and vulnerable.<sup>186</sup> In research for Plan UK with girls and young women, 14 per cent of respondents said that, to avoid sexual harassment, they would not sit on the top of a bus or in an empty train or tube carriage.<sup>187</sup> Dr Jackie Gray of Middlesex University gave us examples of women and girls only travelling at certain times, not travelling alone, being aware of where they sit or stand and trying to place barriers between them and other travellers: “Where such limits on behaviour are not available, women and girls may have to use public transport whilst being fearful of it.”<sup>188</sup> According to one survey, almost half of women do conscious “safety planning” when they go out in the evenings, such as avoiding public transport and paying for taxis, leaving early or taking a different route.<sup>189</sup> Sian Lewis found that even where women did not change their travel patterns, “[sexual harassment] made them more aware of the potential risks, and reminded them that they were women in a public space, and took away their sense of ownership of the city.”<sup>190</sup>

## Project Guardian and Report It to Stop It

114. In 2013, Project Guardian—a partnership initiative between Transport for London, British Transport Police, the Metropolitan Police Service and the City of London Police—was launched to tackle unwanted sexual behaviour on London’s public transport network. Its three main strands of activity were enhanced enforcement and investigation, improving victim support and communication activities.<sup>191</sup> The number of sexual offences on London

183 Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

184 Transport for London ([SPP0092](#))

185 [Q182](#)

186 [Q103](#), Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

187 [Street Harassment It’s Not Ok](#), Plan International UK, 2018

188 Dr Jackie Gray ([SPP0103](#))

189 End Violence Against Women Coalition ([SPP0096](#))

190 Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

191 Transport for London ([SPP0092](#))

public transport that were reported to the police more than doubled between 2012–13 and 2016–17, with the most significant increase coming after the April 2015 launch of the ‘Report it to Stop it’ campaign, the successor to Project Guardian. This involved an enhanced policing effort, making it easier for victims to report offences by text message, and publicising those results in the media. In line with international obligations to work with civil society on sexual harassment, women’s organisations and others with expertise on women’s safety advised on the development of the initiative.<sup>192</sup> Notably, Report It to Stop It achieved results without making people more fearful of travelling.<sup>193</sup> Barriers to reporting remain, however.<sup>194</sup>

115. Report It To Stop It was rolled out in March 2018 across the national rail network.<sup>195</sup> It is not clear whether there is consistent action on women and girls’ safety across other forms of public transport in the UK. DI Cooper told us that “some train operators have staff training on this kind of issue—looking not necessarily just at sex offences but at wider vulnerability issues, and looking out for that kind of thing. Some are perhaps more willing to engage in that process than others.”<sup>196</sup>

## Preventing sexual harassment on public transport

116. Prevention of sexual harassment has been an important part of the response by some transport authorities internationally, including through publicity campaigns. As with sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence elsewhere,<sup>197</sup> researchers warn that an important consideration in developing initiatives and public awareness campaigns on public transport is to avoid either explicitly or implicitly blaming victims for their harassment.<sup>198</sup> Suggestions of introducing women-only carriages as a way of keeping women safe on trains have been criticised as further limiting women’s freedom, not being effective and not tackling the reasons why sexual harassment on public transport (or elsewhere) occurs in the first place.<sup>199</sup> Dr Jackie Gray gave us one example of a more effective approach:

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority had a poster campaign that was very clearly not victim-blaming—it was clear that these behaviours are not acceptable. Associated with that—it is not clear that it is the reason for it—was greater reporting and a greater cleanup rate afterwards. If we were to want to get greater public awareness of these issues—the public includes potential victims and potential perpetrators—that is a way of speaking to people. We have seen campaigns in the past that have made behaviours become normative—drink-driving and wearing seatbelts are

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192 Transport for London ([SPP0092](#))

193 [Q202](#)

194 Ms Sian Lewis ([SPP0026](#))

195 [Q205](#)

196 [Q207](#)

197 [Merseyside Police And Liverpool City Council Apologise After Appearing To ‘Victim Blame’ In Sexual Assault Campaign](#), Huffington Post, August, 2018

198 [Q103](#)

199 [Actually, No: Women-only transportation won’t end harassment](#), by Holly Kearl, takepart website, accessed October 2018

classic examples—so certainly that kind of thing, although not just by itself, but in concert with a variety of other interventions, such as staffing and all the rest of it.<sup>200</sup>

117. We asked DI Cooper about preventing sexual harassment and other sexual violence on public transport. He told us that part of prevention is about “catching people”. He also said that:

We have a number of plain-clothes teams, undercover teams if you like, that work on the tube and rail networks. [ ... ] High profile police officers in uniform on the network is helpful in terms of reassurance, and there are immediate deterrents for an offender committing an offence there and then, but the undercover plain-clothes officers that they can't see coming is what really seems to be effective at deterring people.<sup>201</sup>

118. As in other areas, we have seen little evidence of work taking place to prevent sexual harassment on public transport before it happens, known as ‘primary prevention’. We asked DI Cooper why train operators do not feel it is appropriate to set out a set of social rules for travelling. He said:

this is about not wanting to create an environment that makes people feel unsafe. What I mean by that is that train operators feel that it would create a feeling of insecurity to have a poster campaign on train carriages and in stations that talked about looking out for sex offenders, people acting in a sexually predatory way or people causing sexual harassment. [ ... ] People are comfortable with campaigns like ‘Report it to stop it’ where we ask them to come forward and let us know.<sup>202</sup>

119. International evidence suggests that the most effective interventions on public transport adopt a combination of different approaches which make it harder for potential offenders to offend, give victims the means and confidence to report, and create a culture where sexual harassment is not tolerated.<sup>203</sup> Dr Jackie Gray identified priorities for further action, including research into how to encourage safe bystander intervention, public awareness campaigns, rigorous evaluation of interventions, and research into the decision-making of offenders in order to develop prevention initiatives.<sup>204</sup>

**120. Some good work is taking place to address sexual harassment on public transport, but there is no central direction to ensure that it is both consistent and comprehensive across the whole transport network. It is also focused on reporting and prosecutions rather than preventing sexual harassment from happening and changing beliefs about the kind of behaviour that is acceptable.**

**121. *The good work that Transport for London and British Transport Police have taken to address sexual misconduct under the Project Guardian and Report It to Stop It campaigns should be supported across the national rail network. The Department for Transport should require train operators in their Franchise Agreements to have a robust***

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200 [Q204](#)

201 [Q203](#)

202 [Q212](#)

203 [Q103](#)

204 [Q103](#)

*policy on sexual misconduct which should include action to prevent all forms of sexual violence including sexual harassment happening on their services in the first place, as well as tackling it when it happens. The Department for Transport should issue guidance to local authorities who let public transport contracts to ensure that bus operators, light rail, tram and other transport providers to whom they let contracts are required to have a robust policy on sexual harassment.*

*122. Technological developments and widespread use of mobile devices means that viewing pornography on public transport has developed as a new form of sexual harassment in public. Policy needs to take account that public transport is not an age-restricted space; any pornographic material viewed in this space is therefore potentially seen by children. The Government should use rail Franchise Agreements to require train operators to block pornography through public WiFi on public transport and prohibit this activity through individual internet connection so that all passengers can travel comfortably and safely. The Department for Transport should direct bus companies to fulfil their obligations on passenger safety by bringing forward amendments to the Public Service Vehicles Regulations 1990 to specifically prohibit sexual harassment as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and to prohibit viewing pornography on buses.*

## 5 Women and girls' safety at night

### Women and girls' experiences of sexual harassment at night

123. Evidence demonstrates that sexual harassment is the norm in the night-time economy. Kent Union, the students' union at the University of Kent, told us that "harassment isn't just expected, it's accepted. It is a cultural norm and women are no longer surprised to be hassled, harassed or assaulted. Many never report it, they just see it as a normal part of a night out."<sup>205</sup> According to a Drinkaware study in 2014, nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of women and a quarter of men (26 per cent) aged 18–24 who regularly drink in clubs, bars or pubs said that they had experienced sexual harassment on a night out.<sup>206</sup> Our own research shows that sexual harassment is regarded as more socially acceptable when it takes place in a bar than in the street or in public generally, with one participant describing it as "part of the unwritten rules of a bar". Despite the Minister agreeing that there is no place for sexual harassment in public places, there are no clear messages coming from Government or other sources that sexual harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, even in regulated and licensed settings such as pubs and clubs.

### The context and impact of sexual harassment at night

124. Sexual harassment at night can be particularly frightening, and it is sometimes perpetrated or enabled by people who are in positions of trust. One woman told us:

I was followed home by a man wanking late into the night after a shift finished close by. I was very frightened, as he got closer, I turned around and bellowed FUCK OFF at him, spun around and ran off and managed to get home ok. The following night, I got a taxi home. Unfortunately I sat in the front seat, where the taxi driver touched my leg and knee, and tried to grope me when we stopped for me to pay and exit the taxi.<sup>207</sup>

One woman who had experienced repeated sexual harassment in her life told us that she was thrown out of a bar for defending herself against a man who sexually assaulted her. The bouncer told her: "He's had a few too many, doesn't excuse you using violence."<sup>208</sup>

125. Sexual harassment affects women's freedom to enjoy being out at night. One participant in research by the Young Women's Trust in 2018 said: "I don't like to travel on public transport alone, or walk anywhere alone when dark. I have avoided clubs entirely for a few years now as the harassment is not worth the night out for me."<sup>209</sup> These limitations on women and girls' freedom start at a young age.<sup>210</sup> Kent Union noted that "reports are often hard to prove, as more often than not the assault has happened in a crowd, out of sight from CCTV or staff. This leads to victims being reluctant to report, as nothing will come of it."<sup>211</sup>

205 Kent Union ([SPP0062](#))

206 Drinkaware ([SPP0050](#))

207 A member of the public ([SPP0082](#))

208 A member of the public ([SPP0030](#))

209 Young Women's Trust ([SPP0075](#))

210 Dr Sara Bragg, Professor Emma Renold, Professor Jessica Ringrose and Professor Carolyn Jackson ([SPP0083](#))

211 Kent Union ([SPP0062](#))

126. Alcohol is known to be utilised by perpetrators of sexual offences, both to target victims they believe to be vulnerable through drink, but also to disinhibit and reduce accountability for their own behaviour.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, victims are often blamed for what has happened to them because of their alcohol intake.<sup>213</sup> Kent Union stated that “reports aren’t always believed from drunk victims, and there is an expectation that if they are drunk and have come out on a night out then they are looking for physical sexual attention, which is not the case.”<sup>214</sup> The ‘policing’ of women’s behaviour in society is highlighted in a number of surveys which show that a significant minority of people believe that women are at least partly to blame for being sexually assaulted if they go out late at night, wear certain types of clothes and get drunk.<sup>215</sup>

## Where does responsibility lie for women and girls’ safety at night?

### Central government

127. The Minister for Women told us that the Government was doing “a great deal of work” on the night-time economy, including through development of a new alcohol strategy, local alcohol area partnerships and the modern crime prevention strategy. We pressed the Minister on whether sexual harassment will be explicitly addressed in the new alcohol strategy. She said:

I don’t know, because I have not seen an early draft of it, but in terms of the work [that] has been going on into the safety of the night-time economy, certainly my officials are thinking along those lines.<sup>216</sup>

We asked the Minister if there is a reference to sexual harassment in the modern crime prevention strategy. She said that this issue is dealt with as part of references to “preventing alcohol-related crime and disorder in the night-time economy”.<sup>217</sup> The strategy addresses child sexual abuse and other sexual violence, but not sexual harassment specifically.<sup>218</sup>

**128. Sexual harassment is the norm in the night-time economy, marring women and girls’ enjoyment of going out at night. The Government should be active in tackling the social norms that lead to acceptance of sexual harassment in venues like bars and clubs as a regular feature of a night out, but it is missing opportunities to do so through policies such as the modern crime prevention strategy.**

**129. *Tackling sexual harassment should be overtly embedded into the new alcohol strategy and the modern crime strategy. Action should be focused on tackling the social norms that mean that sexual harassment of women and girls is allowed to be an accepted part of a night out.***

212 [The Role of Drugs and Alcohol in Rape](#), M Horvath and J Brown, 2016

213 [Not worth reporting: women’s experiences of alcohol, drugs and sexual violence](#), AVA, 2014

214 Kent Union ([SPP0062](#))

215 Fawcett Society ([SPP0074](#))

216 [Q297](#)

217 [Q298](#)

218 [Modern crime prevention strategy](#), March 2016

## Local initiatives

130. A range of initiatives to tackle sexual harassment of women and girls at night have developed in local areas but very little, if any, of this work is driven by central government. We heard from the Minister for Women about the London Mayor’s Women’s Safety Charter “whereby clubs and bars sign up to it and their treatment of sexual harassment is part of that charter.”<sup>219</sup> Seventy towns and cities in the UK and Ireland are accredited by the Association of Town Centre Management with Purple Flag status as having a “safe and vibrant night-time economy”. The Purple Flag core standards include destinations being “safe and welcoming” and people being able to get home safely. The scheme provides a vehicle for the wide range of actors involved in the night-time economy—councils, police, venues, taxi operators and so on—to work together, and to address all of the issues that affect people from before they start their evening out to arriving home afterwards. We are not aware of any evaluation of the scheme for its specific effect on preventing or tackling sexual harassment; this would be worthy of further exploration. Drinkaware, a charity funded by the alcohol industry and retailers which works to reduce alcohol-related harm, has developed a number of initiatives to tackle sexual harassment including an awareness-raising campaign (“You Wouldn’t Sober, You Shouldn’t Drunk”) and Drinkaware crews in Nottingham (trained staff in large venues who aim to keep young people safe on a night out).<sup>220</sup> Other initiatives include student and women’s groups working with venues and training for night-time economy workers such as bar staff and taxi drivers.

131. Action is sometimes driven by particular incidents. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria and Northumbria Police have delivered safeguarding training to bar staff, taxi drivers and hotel staff. This followed the case of a young woman who was thrown out of a club for being drunk and was then picked up by men who repeatedly raped her.<sup>221</sup> Evidence that we received from women with direct experiences of sexual harassment at night suggests that such training for staff is vital.

## Licensing of bars and clubs

132. Some local areas are proactively using licensing laws to ensure that women are safe in bars, clubs, in taxis and elsewhere in the night time economy. We took evidence from the Licensing Officer for Canterbury City Council, Anton Walden, about that council’s use of licensing laws to tackle sexual harassment. It has worked together with Kent Union to develop a ‘Zero tolerance premises guide’ for venues which licensees are required to sign up to. This includes a model policy, requirements for staff training, materials and posters and providing students with maps of ‘safe’ routes home.<sup>222</sup> Mr Walden told us that venues are expected to ensure that they do everything they can to make their premises safer, not only inside the venues but in the immediate vicinity as well. Canterbury City Council has included taxis as well as premises within this work, and requires all drivers to attend safeguarding and bystander training. Anton Walden told us:

We do not have any statistical data as yet, but we have had feedback from drivers who have noticed situations that they were not aware of, such as grooming, and now they report them. We have had feedback particularly

219 [Pledge to improve women’s safety at night in London](#), Mayor of London, 2018

220 Drinkaware (SPP0050)

221 Dame Vera Baird QC (SPP0087)

222 [Zero tolerance premises guide](#), Canterbury City Council

from parents that they are very pleased that the taxi driver or the private hire driver has got their young person home safely. We have never had that feedback before.<sup>223</sup>

133. Mr Walden proposed that Home Office guidance on the Licensing Act 2003 should make it compulsory for all licensed premises to address sexual harassment by putting in place policies and training. This would set a basic expectation and introduce some consistency: at present there are different approaches with some local authorities taking proactive steps, but little evidence that women and girl’s safety is addressed consistently throughout the country.<sup>224</sup>

134. We asked the Minister for Women, who is also the Home Office Minister with responsibility for crime prevention, violence against women and girls and anti-social behaviour, whether venues should be liable to lose their licence if they fail to take steps to prevent sexual harassment occurring on their premises. She responded:

I would have to say that my instinct would be yes. These licence holders need to understand that they are operating within the law and with the consent of the public. If they are abusing that, I would be very sympathetic to action being taken against them. They have a duty to the people they employ and to the people in the wider community.<sup>225</sup>

### *Licensing of sexual entertainment venues*

135. When licensing lap-dancing clubs and other sexual entertainment venues (SEVs), local authorities can decide to have a policy on licensing SEVs, including on the number of venues to license. The policy needs to reflect the basis on which a license application can be refused. Policies on sexual entertainment venues have been the focus of activity in some local areas because, as Karon Monaghan QC told us, such venues “have an impact on the wider community because they promote the idea that sexual objectification of women and sexual harassment commonly in those environments is lawful and acceptable.” Ms Monaghan continued: “How are we doing that in the 21st century? We are not going to get rid of sexual violence if we mandate the sexual objectification of women in licensed venues.”<sup>226</sup>

136. Some local areas already take account of women’s safety when deciding their cap on sexual entertainment venues (SEVs). Avon and Somerset Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner’s office support a policy of having no SEVs in Bristol to advance women’s equality. Martin Rowland, Bristol’s City Centre Neighbourhood Manager for Avon and Somerset Police expressed the view that the industry exemplifies men’s objectification and entitlement of women. He told us that: “The licensing of sex entertainment venues, and in particular lap dancing clubs, sends a clear message that authorities support and license activities that encourage these anachronistic attitudes.”<sup>227</sup>

137. Sheffield City Council has been subject to two legal challenges under the Public Sector Equality Duty by a group of local campaigners for failing to consider the impact

223 [Q179](#)

224 [Qq182–183](#)

225 [Q305](#)

226 [Q111](#)

227 Avon and Somerset Police ([SPP0106](#)), Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner ([SPP0102](#))

on gender equality in the community when it licensed a branch of the Spearmint Rhino strip club and subsequently when it published a new policy on SEVs. The Council was forced to settle both cases on the basis that they had failed to comply with the PSED and is now consulting afresh on their policy. The case has potential ramifications for other local authorities who fail to consider these issues when licensing SEVs. Karon Monaghan QC told us:

The power to take action lies in the hands of individuals. One can issue what is called judicial review proceedings in the High Court and say, ‘My local authority has failed to have regard to the need to eliminate harassment when it licensed this club’ or licensed a pub that is known to sexually harass customers, and so on.<sup>228</sup>

However, it should not be up to local campaigners to force local authorities to make decisions that properly take account of women’s safety and gender equality. The licensing regime in Scotland requires local authorities who adopt the relevant legislation on SEVs to consider the impact specifically with regard to the objective of reducing violence against women when preparing an SEV policy statement. They are also required to consult appropriate bodies, such as women’s organisations or experts in prevention of violence against women.<sup>229</sup>

**138. Ensuring that women and girls have the freedom to enjoy being out at night, to go to bars and clubs and travel home safely without being sexually harassed or assaulted is the responsibility of everybody including central government, the police, local authorities, bars and venues and transport agencies.**

**139. *Local community safety partnerships should be required to include sexual harassment, including in public places, in their violence against women and girls strategies.***

**140. *The Government should evaluate the impact of the Purple Flag scheme, whether it is effective at reducing sexual harassment in Purple Flag areas and whether the scheme should be extended.***

**141. *Licensing Act guidance (section 10) should be amended to require all licensed premises to have a policy to respond to and eliminate sexual harassment including training for licensees and taxi drivers.***

**142. *Local authorities should consult with local stakeholders including sexual violence specialists and women’s groups to conduct a gender equality impact assessment before setting their policy on sexual entertainment venues and when considering licence applications and renewals. They should consider adopting stringent zero tolerance conditions for any existing sexual entertainment venues. These conditions should make it clear that they will withdraw licenses following evidence of harm to women in and around sexual entertainment venues and following evidence of any failure to follow conditions designed to keep women safe within venues.***

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228 [Q115](#)

229 [Air weapons and Licensing \(Scotland\) Act 2015: Consultation on guidance on the provisions for licensing of sexual entertainment venues and changes to licensing theatres](#), Scottish Government 2017

## 6 Women's safety at university

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### Sexual harassment at university: context and impact

143. During our inquiry into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools we heard that sexually harmful behaviour perpetrated by boys can escalate when left unaddressed and continues to be a problem at college, university, work and in later life. The Government has taken a number of important measures since then, such as publishing guidance for schools specifically on how to deal with sexual harassment and sexual violence between students<sup>230</sup> and legislating for compulsory Relationships and Sex Education, partly in order to address these problems.<sup>231</sup>

144. The school environment is formative and has long-lasting effects. Universities UK, the representative organisation for UK universities, says that some students come to university and progress through higher education demonstrating 'wholly unacceptable' behaviours. It told us:

Evidence from the US suggests that university student perpetrators are likely to have begun offending while at school and that intervention efforts to prevent sexual violence may be maximally effective when targeted at adolescents. [ ... ] In the long-term, effective school-based initiatives will ultimately result in a more positive experience for those who go on to enter higher education.<sup>232</sup>

145. There is no centrally-collected data about sexual harassment at university. A picture built up by stakeholders such as the NUS shows that women students experience high levels of sexual harassment, sexual violence and other unwanted behaviour.<sup>233</sup> In one survey, 17 per cent of respondents stated that they had been victims of some form of sexual harassment during their first week of term, with 59 per cent of these incidents reported to have happened at social events or night clubs.<sup>234</sup>

146. A five-country EU study which included the UK found that the majority of incidents go unreported and undisclosed due to a range of factors including fear of not being believed, and a reluctance on the part of students to be thought of or to acknowledge themselves as victims. The research also highlighted the 'cultural messages' that underpin the sexual harassment and violence that women students experience: male students who consumed alcohol, had a peer network that supported sexist and violent perceptions of women and used pornography were more than nine times more likely to report committing sexually victimising acts against women, compared to men who had none of these characteristics.<sup>235</sup>

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230 [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#), Department for Education, December 2017

231 Home Office (SPP0104)

232 Universities UK (SPP0086)

233 [Hidden Marks: A study of women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault](#), NUS, 2010, [It Stops Now: Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level Education](#), European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017

234 [Two thirds of freshers not aware of sexual harassment reporting procedures at university](#), NUS website, accessed October 2018

235 [It Stops Now: Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level Education](#), European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017

147. Sexual harassment at university takes place in a particular context. Universities are not only learning environments but places where students socialise, develop relationships and live, so sexual harassment can permeate a woman's entire environment. Unlike some other public sexual harassment, women who experience sexual harassment at university may well live and study in close proximity to the perpetrator.<sup>236</sup> In the NUS survey, 33 per cent of the incidents of harassment were reported to have occurred in halls of residence.<sup>237</sup>

148. As with sexual harassment in other environments, sexual harassment experienced at university can lead to psychological, emotional and physical harm, as well as negatively impacting victims' studies. In one study, of those students who had experienced sexual violence, 27 per cent contemplated suicide or self-harm, 15 per cent developed an eating disorder and 15 per cent abused alcohol or drugs. Fifty per cent experienced a negative impact on their academic performance and 11 per cent indicated that the progress of their studies was delayed.<sup>238</sup>

### Who perpetrates sexual harassment of women at university?

149. In the multi-country EU study, women students identified between 40 and 60 per cent of the perpetrators of the sexual harassment and other violence they experienced as being associated with their institution. Only a small proportion of assaults—most often in the form of sexual harassment—were committed by university staff compared with those committed by (male) fellow students. Much of the recent focus in the UK has been on sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by other students, but there is now a growing focus on harassment or abuse by university staff. One survey found that four in 10 respondents who were current students had experienced at least one experience of sexualised behaviour from staff.<sup>239</sup>

### The Universities UK Taskforce

150. In 2015 the Minister for Universities asked Universities UK to establish a taskforce “to help reduce violence against women and girls on university campuses.”<sup>240</sup> A number of institutions were facing claims that they had mishandled allegations of sexual assault and there was widespread concern that the ‘Zellick guidelines’ published in 1994 for dealing with cases where a student's alleged misconduct could also constitute a criminal offence were out of date and did not afford complainants a fair hearing. In 2016, the Taskforce reported and made a number of recommendations to support universities. These included taking an institution-wide approach to tackling these issues, adopting an evidence-based bystander intervention programme, building partnerships with local specialist services, local police and the NHS, developing a response to disclosures of incidents of sexual violence and rape, and a centralised reporting system and a training strategy for staff.<sup>241</sup>

236 [Spotted: Obligations to protect women students' safety and equality](#), L Whitfield and H Dustin, 2015

237 [Two thirds of freshers not aware of sexual harassment reporting procedures at university](#), NUS website, accessed October 2018

238 [Girlguiding \(SPP0035\)](#)

239 [Our report into staff-student conduct](#), NUS website, accessed October 2018

240 [Business Secretary calls on universities to tackle violence against women on campus](#), 2015

241 [Changing the Culture: Report of the Universities UK Taskforce examining violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students](#), Universities UK, 2016

## Who is responsible for women's safety at university?

### Universities

151. Universities are autonomous organisations in the UK and a number of individual institutions are taking a range of actions including developing training and support for staff who receive complaints and new policies on sexual harassment.<sup>242</sup> However, the current voluntary approach has not worked well and there is a great deal of variation in the approach institutions take to students' welfare. A progress report on the Universities UK Taskforce found that implementation of the Taskforce's recommendations had been very variable. This was particularly the case in respect of developing prevention strategies and systems for collecting and recording data.<sup>243</sup> Nottinghamshire Sexual Violence Support Service told us:

It is wrong that some universities are putting in a lot of work around this, while others appear to be doing very little. There should be a minimum standard that all universities should meet in respect of this, to include trained support staff, consent being a mandatory subject in the first year, information in freshers' packs and adequate referral mechanisms in place.

Institutions may not be getting the support they need to take all possible steps to ensure that women students are safe. For example, legal guidance prepared by Pinsent Masons and issued by Universities UK for universities investigating student misconduct which may also constitute a criminal offence<sup>244</sup> has been criticised as being too cautious.<sup>245</sup>

152. Bystander intervention programmes have been a key part of the response to sexual harassment at universities in the US. A key recommendation of the Universities UK Taskforce was that institutions in the UK should develop similar evidence-based programmes. The Intervention Initiative, funded by Public Health England and developed by a team at the University of the West of England including Dr Helen Mott and Dr Rachel Fenton, is an evidence-based bystander intervention programme to prevent sexual coercion and domestic abuse in university settings in the UK.<sup>246</sup> An evaluation at a large university in the south west of England showed significant and marked decreases in risk factors such as students' acceptance of rape and domestic violence myths, and significant and marked increases in protective factors such as taking responsibility and readiness to help.<sup>247</sup>

### Office for Students

153. The Office for Students (OfS) is the regulator of higher education in England and has statutory duties under the Higher Education and Regulatory Act 2017. It is a public body subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Office for Students told us it is funding

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242 [Q145](#)

243 [Changing the Culture: One year on](#), Universities UK, March 2018

244 [Guidance For Higher Education Institutions: How To Handle Alleged Student Misconduct Which May Also Constitute A Criminal Offence](#), Universities UK and Pinsent Masons, 2016

245 [Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme Delivery Report](#), Annex E, UK Parliament 2018, [Q105](#)

246 [The Intervention Initiative](#), University of Exeter

247 [Evaluation of the Intervention Initiative: A Bystander Intervention Program to Prevent Violence Against Women in Universities](#), Dr Rachel Fenton and Dr Helen Mott, Article in *Violence and Victims* 33(4):645–662 · August 2018

more than 100 new projects, However, the OfS is not collecting data on sanctions that universities may have put in place in relation to sexual harassment, nor is it monitoring outcomes related to sexual harassment. Yvonne Hawkins, the OfS's Director of Teaching Excellence and Student Experience, told us that "There isn't a mechanism in place to link that to students who have made a declaration of any type of harassment." For the first time in 2018 a national student survey is being carried out of all final-year students across the UK; this survey will ask about safety on campus. It is not clear, however, whether this will provide data on prevalence of sexual harassment, or gather information about institutions' policies.

154. We asked whether the Office for Students would be able to carry out its regulatory role on sexual harassment and other issues of students' safety. Yvonne Hawkins responded:

In this area, the Office for Students has been charged with having a duty to have regard to promote equality and diversity across the whole of the student lifecycle—prospective students, students on a course and students completing successfully. When the Department for Education consulted on our new regulatory framework, it concluded that the Office for Students could be most effective in relation to student welfare and safeguarding issues if it took a sector regulatory approach. We will be active with the mechanisms I have described to you on promoting innovation, galvanising a culture change, evaluating what works and what doesn't, et cetera. We haven't got legal duties; they reside with the [Equality and Human Rights Commission].

155. We do not agree that the Office for Students does not have legal duties in respect of women's safety at university. It is a public body with obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty as well as the Human Rights Act 1998 and taking action on the safety and equality of women students should be a priority.

156. We informed the Minister for Women that the Office for Students was not collecting data on sexual harassment or on universities' actions in this area, and asked whether she felt it would therefore be able to carry out its role effectively. The Minister said:

It comes back again to the point about data collection, doesn't it? Data collection helps us understand the scale of a problem—the nature of a problem. I would hope that individual universities themselves would take a great interest in this because although, obviously, students are adults, none the less, it is a learning environment and an environment in which female students should feel safe and be treated equally.<sup>248</sup>

Asked whether universities should be collecting this data, the Minister responded "I believe so, yes."<sup>249</sup>

157. The Minister for Universities subsequently wrote to us at the request of the Minister for Women and told us that the responsibility for collecting data lies with individual institutions. He said that the Office for Students plays a "pivotal" role in addressing sexual harassment in higher education at the sector level. The letter said:

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248 [Q308](#)

249 [Q309](#)

In its Ministerial Guidance to the OfS, Government has requested that the OfS promote providers' continued positive engagement with work to counter harassment and hate crime in higher education. [ ... ] Government has also asked the OfS to work with providers, on equalities issues and support them in meeting their obligations under the Equality Act 2010, working with the Equality and Human Rights Commissions and other key organisations, as appropriate. [ ... ] The responsibility for data collection relating to reported instances of sexual harassment is for individual providers. Underreporting of sexual harassment and sexual violence is common and it is important that providers recognise the value in collecting good and accurate data on harassment incidents. They should also continue to break down barriers to reporting so that students feel confident and able to report any issues.<sup>250</sup>

### Central government

158. Whilst universities are public bodies with clear legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998 to ensure that women are free from sexual harassment, central government has not placed specific legal obligations on them to deal with sexual harassment. This has been done in certain other countries.<sup>251</sup> Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is a federal law in the US that ties federal funding to universities to a prohibition on sex discrimination and harassment, and the Clery Act of 1990 requires federally-funded US universities to report their crime statistics in order to provide transparency about student safety.<sup>252</sup> Hareem Ghani, then NUS Women's Officer, told us she supported the model in the United States because it puts the onus on the university to make sure there are guidelines in place, and to have a Title IX coordinator, provide survivor support services and take preventative measures.<sup>253</sup>

159. We asked the Minister for Women what she thought the impact on women students' safety would be if the UK introduced legal obligations on universities to collect data, similar to federal laws in the US. The Minister said that she could see that "there may be considerable benefits to it" and undertook to look into it.<sup>254</sup>

**160. Sexual harassment and other violence against women is blighting women's experiences of university. As a place where young people learn and develop their ideas this is particularly concerning. Before the #MeToo campaign, higher education was the sector in which the most significant action to prevent sexual harassment was taking place. There are promising initiatives in the universities sector, particularly involving bystander programmes, which could be embedded elsewhere. However, even here, the prevention work is piecemeal and there is no overarching co-ordinating body or monitoring system. Between the Government, regulators and institutions, we have been left with a strong impression of passing the buck on who is responsible for women's safety at university. A voluntary approach has not proven to ensure that women's safety is prioritised consistently across the higher education sector and it is now time for the Government to consider legislation.**

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250 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ([SPP0113](#))

251 [Qq148-149](#)

252 [Clery Act Policy](#), Clery Centre website, accessed October 2018

253 [Q148](#)

254 [Q314](#)

**161. *The Government should put in place legal obligations that mirror provisions in the US to link state funding with a requirement to prohibit sex discrimination and sexual harassment, and to collect and publish data on the effectiveness of institutional policies. This could be done by introducing Regulations under s.153 of the Equality Act 2010.***

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### What is the nature of the problem?

1. Sexual harassment affects the lives of nearly every woman in the UK. Most experience harassment at some point; many start to experience it when they are still children, and are harassed so frequently that it becomes a routine part of everyday life. Even when sexual harassment is not taking place directly, memory or fear of it affects women's behaviour and choices and restricts their freedom to be in public spaces. This is not acceptable, and women and girls should not be expected to endure it. It should matter to us that women and girls are respected, not forced to change the way they live to avoid daily sexual harassment and abuse. The Government has a responsibility to show leadership in eradicating sexual harassment and making public places safe. (Paragraph 28)
2. The damage done by sexual harassment needs to be better reflected in policy and law. There needs to be a consistent response in policy and law to sexual harassment, not putting the onus onto women and girls to modify their behaviour. The Government should use our findings and those of other available research as the basis for developing its own body of knowledge about the underlying factors contributing to perpetration of sexual harassment. This is essential for informing all policy that is relevant to women and girls' safety in public places. (Paragraph 29)

### Making public places safe for all women and girls

3. A more robust and proactive approach is required by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to tackling the problem of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, in which it has a vital role. This includes using all tools at its disposal for the enforcement of equality legislation, and working with other regulators such as the Office for Students and transport regulators. (Paragraph 43)
4. *The Equality and Human Rights Commission must set out a plan of action for working with other regulators such as the Office for Students and transport regulators to ensure that the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment, and the effectiveness of actions being taken to eliminate it, are transparent.* (Paragraph 44)

### Criminal laws

5. The legal framework around sexual harassment in public places is piecemeal, and the Government has a tendency to react to problems such as 'upskirting' as they hit the headlines. Laws on image-based sexual abuse are not based on an understanding of power and entitlement as the factors behind perpetration of sexual harassment; they focus too narrowly on perpetrator motivations and do not provide the protection of anonymity for complainants. (Paragraph 51)
6. *The Government should introduce a new law on image-based sexual abuse which criminalises all non-consensual creation and distribution of intimate sexual images, including altered images, and threats to do so. This should be a sexual offence based*

*on the victim's lack of consent and not on perpetrator motivation, and include an automatic right to life-long anonymity for the complainant, as with other sexual offences. (Paragraph 52)*

### Policy on violence against women and girls

7. In signing up to the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government has made a commitment to eliminate sexual harassment of women and girls by 2030. The Government was not, however, able to provide us with evidence of a comprehensive plan or programme of work for achieving this goal and making public places safe for all women and girls. While we agree with the Minister that a siloed approach to such work would not be effective and that it needs to be embedded across government, at present the foot appears to be almost entirely off the pedal. The Government has not caught up with the huge social changes reflected in the #MeToo movement. Instead it risks giving the impression that it thinks sexual harassment is either too trivial to address, or that the problem is immune to policy intervention. (Paragraph 59)
8. *The Government already has a well-regarded cross-departmental strategy for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. It is astonishing that the most common form of violence against women—sexual harassment—is currently almost entirely overlooked in that strategy. We welcome the Minister's commitment to refreshing the Violence Against Women and Girls strategy later in 2018, and we expect to see specific actions to address sexual harassment, much of which is already prohibited in law, in the new document. Those actions need to be supported by dedicated funding and staffing, and developed in partnership with community organisations. The Government must exploit the full range of policy levers at its disposal, and must set out the milestones to be met on the way to fulfilling the 2030 goal. We expect the strategy to set out a comprehensive programme of work to make all public places safe for all women and girls. (Paragraph 60)*

### Data collection on sexual harassment in public places

9. The Government has left it to others to collect data on sexual harassment in public places. Even where there is data on specific criminal offences, such as indecent exposure, it is not brought together. This means that there is no central measurement of the problem upon which to develop policy, and no way of knowing whether the incidence of sexual harassment is increasing or decreasing, or whether women and girls of particular backgrounds are particularly targeted. (Paragraph 63)
10. *Data on sexual harassment in public places should be collected through the Crime Survey of England and Wales or brought together through other official data-gathering processes. It should be broken down so that the Government can start to build a picture about the particular ways that different groups of women and girls are targeted for abuse. This data should underpin the development of the comprehensive programme of work to tackle sexual harassment in public places. (Paragraph 64)*

### Preventing sexual harassment in public places

11. *The introduction of Relationships Education in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education in all secondary schools provides a welcome opportunity to ensure that concepts such as healthy relationships, consent and boundaries are communicated to children. It is disappointing that the statutory guidance will not come into force until September 2020, and we urge schools not to wait until then to review their policies and practices to ensure they are taking every possible action to prevent sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. (Paragraph 75)*
12. *As with any social harm, prevention should be the Government's aim. Prevention must therefore be the foundation of the new programme of work to eliminate sexual harassment. The Government has previously committed to tackling harmful social norms that underpin sexual harassment, but we have seen little evidence of specific or comprehensive work underway to do this. Opportunities to embed a preventative approach in schools, through media regulation, through public awareness campaigns and through crime policy (such as the Modern Crime Strategy), for example, are being missed. The Government must show leadership in seeking to change the cultural acceptability of sexual harassment. It should develop a long-term, evaluated programme of public campaigns to tackle the attitudes that underpin sexual harassment, targeted at both adults and children. (Paragraph 78)*
13. *In order to prevent sexual harassment, the Government needs a robust understanding of why it happens, who perpetrates it, and how men and women differ in their understandings and experiences of the problem. It must understand the cultural attitudes and social norms that lead to or enable sexual harassment, and how to go about challenging and changing them. Without understanding these factors, it is not possible to design and implement effective policy solutions. (Paragraph 79)*
14. *The Government's preventative work should be clearly based on the available research evidence—from the UK and elsewhere—about the cultural factors, attitudes and norms that lead to or enable sexual harassment to take place and how these can be effectively challenged. The available research is not sufficient, however. The Government must also commission ongoing, large-scale research into these factors in the UK to inform its programme over the longer term. (Paragraph 80)*

### Hate crime

15. *We support the Government's approach of asking the Law Commission to review hate crime legislation. That review should consider whether categorising sexual harassment of women and girls in public places as a hate crime would bring substantive advantages to victims and achieve a reduction in the incidence of such harassment. (Paragraph 86)*

### Creating a healthier media and culture

16. *The Government's approach to pornography is not consistent. It restricts adults' access to offline pornography to licensed premises and is introducing age verification of commercial pornography online to prevent children's exposure to it. But the Government has no plans to address adult men's use of mainstream*

online pornography, despite research suggesting that men who use pornography are more likely to hold sexist attitudes and be sexually aggressive towards women. (Paragraph 98)

17. *There are examples of lawful behaviours which the Government recognises as harmful, such as smoking, which are addressed through public health campaigns and huge investment designed to reduce and prevent those harms. The Government should take a similar, evidence-based approach to addressing the harms of pornography.* (Paragraph 99)
18. *The definition of ‘commercial pornography services’ for the Government’s policy on age verification of pornography websites should be amended to include social media, to ensure that this policy is as effective and comprehensive as possible.* (Paragraph 101)
19. *British Board of Film Classification policies and guidelines should be explicit about categorising normalised sexism as discrimination. The policies and guidelines should name sexual harassment as a form of sexual violence in order to be clearer about regulation of its depiction.* (Paragraph 103)
20. *Online spaces are public places where sexual harassment of women and girls is rife. This has damaging effects on their health, and their ability to have their voices heard in public. Online spaces are public places where sexual harassment of women and girls is rife. This has damaging effects on their health, and their ability to have their voices heard in public. The internet safety strategy and social media code of practice should include specific, robust and proportionate action to prevent and address sexual harassment and abuse of women and girls online. There must be clear consequences for those organisations that fail to effectively address sexual harassment—consequences that hurt their bottom line.* (Paragraph 108)

### Women and girls’ safety on public transport

21. *Some good work is taking place to address sexual harassment on public transport, but there is no central direction to ensure that it is both consistent and comprehensive across the whole transport network. It is also focused on reporting and prosecutions rather than preventing sexual harassment from happening and changing beliefs about the kind of behaviour that is acceptable.* (Paragraph 120)
22. *The good work that Transport for London and British Transport Police have taken to address sexual misconduct under the Project Guardian and Report It to Stop It campaigns should be supported across the national rail network. The Department for Transport should require train operators in their Franchise Agreements to have a robust policy on sexual misconduct which should include action to prevent all forms of sexual violence including sexual harassment happening on their services in the first place, as well as tackling it when it happens. The Department for Transport should issue guidance to local authorities who let public transport contracts to ensure that bus operators, light rail, tram and other transport providers to whom they let contracts are required to have a robust policy on sexual harassment.* (Paragraph 121)
23. *Technological developments and widespread use of mobile devices means that viewing pornography on public transport has developed as a new form of sexual harassment*

*in public. Policy needs to take account that public transport is not an age-restricted space; any pornographic material viewed in this space is therefore potentially seen by children. The Government should use rail Franchise Agreements to require train operators to block pornography through public WiFi on public transport and prohibit this activity through individual internet connection so that all passengers can travel comfortably and safely. The Department for Transport should direct bus companies to fulfil their obligations on passenger safety by bringing forward amendments to the Public Service Vehicles Regulations 1990 to specifically prohibit sexual harassment as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and to prohibit viewing pornography on buses. (Paragraph 122)*

### Women and girls' safety at night

24. Sexual harassment is the norm in the night-time economy, marred by women and girls' enjoyment of going out at night. The Government should be active in tackling the social norms that lead to acceptance of sexual harassment in venues like bars and clubs as a regular feature of a night out, but it is missing opportunities to do so through policies such as the modern crime prevention strategy. (Paragraph 128)
25. *Tackling sexual harassment should be overtly embedded into the new alcohol strategy and the modern crime strategy. Action should be focused on tackling the social norms that mean that sexual harassment of women and girls is allowed to be an accepted part of a night out. (Paragraph 129)*
26. Ensuring that women and girls have the freedom to enjoy being out at night, to go to bars and clubs and travel home safely without being sexually harassed or assaulted is the responsibility of everybody including central government, the police, local authorities, bars and venues and transport agencies. (Paragraph 138)
27. *Local community safety partnerships should be required to include sexual harassment, including in public places, in their violence against women and girls strategies. (Paragraph 139)*
28. *The Government should evaluate the impact of the Purple Flag scheme, whether it is effective at reducing sexual harassment in Purple Flag areas and whether the scheme should be extended. (Paragraph 140)*
29. *Licensing Act guidance (section 10) should be amended to require all licensed premises to have a policy to respond to and eliminate sexual harassment including training for licensees and taxi drivers. (Paragraph 141)*
30. *Local authorities should consult with local stakeholders including sexual violence specialists and women's groups to conduct a gender equality impact assessment before setting their policy on sexual entertainment venues and when considering licence applications and renewals. They should consider adopting stringent zero tolerance conditions for any existing sexual entertainment venues. These conditions should make it clear that they will withdraw licenses following evidence of harm to women in and around sexual entertainment venues and following evidence of any failure to follow conditions designed to keep women safe within venues. (Paragraph 142)*

## Women's safety at university

31. Sexual harassment and other violence against women is blighting women's experiences of university. As a place where young people learn and develop their ideas this is particularly concerning. Before the #MeToo campaign, higher education was the sector in which the most significant action to prevent sexual harassment was taking place. There are promising initiatives in the universities sector, particularly involving bystander programmes, which could be embedded elsewhere. However, even here, the prevention work is piecemeal and there is no overarching co-ordinating body or monitoring system. Between the Government, regulators and institutions, we have been left with a strong impression of passing the buck on who is responsible for women's safety at university. A voluntary approach has not proven to ensure that women's safety is prioritised consistently across the higher education sector and it is now time for the Government to consider legislation. (Paragraph 160)
32. *The Government should put in place legal obligations that mirror provisions in the US to link state funding with a requirement to prohibit sex discrimination and sexual harassment, and to collect and publish data on the effectiveness of institutional policies. This could be done by introducing Regulations under s.153 of the Equality Act 2010.* (Paragraph 161)

## Annex A: Summary of YouGov research on sexual harassment

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This is a short summary prepared by Dr Helen Mott and Dr Fiona Vera-Gray of the key findings and analysis of the polling and focus group research on sexual harassment that YouGov carried out for the Women and Equalities Committee in 2018.<sup>255</sup> More detail, and some implications of the findings, are discussed in the body of this report. The research did not ask direct questions about behaviour, such as perpetration of sexual harassment, or use (consumption) of pornography, but it did ask about attitudes towards sexual harassment and wider social policy issues that have been linked in the research literature to sexual harassment.

### Overall

- Most people think that public sexual harassment is unacceptable.
- Women are more aware of the frequency of public sexual harassment and of its impact than men are.
- Women in particular say addressing public sexual harassment should be a government priority.
- There is a significant relationship between belief in traditional gender norms and acceptability of public sexual harassment.
- Young people show some concerning trends in relation to traditional gender norms.
- The acceptability of public sexual harassment is generally higher among people who find paying for sex (whether legal or illegal) acceptable and among those who find legal pornography acceptable.

**Most people think that public sexual harassment is unacceptable, however there are significant gender differences depending on the form and context of harassment.**

More men (60%) than women (51%) believe it is acceptable for a man to start talking to a woman he doesn't know in public.

- More women (26%) than men (14%) believe it is acceptable for a man to wolf-whistle at a woman in public. Women's responses on this in the focus groups were mixed. Some think it is "unacceptable because the women might not want it. It might be a woman who has been harassed or raped etc in the past and it might make them feel scared. Men should check first" (J). While others say "I don't see it as being rude. I take it as a compliment that I look good" (T). Age differences are pronounced, with wolf-whistling being acceptable to only 5% of those aged 18–24 but 38% of those aged 65+.

**Women are more aware of the frequency of public sexual harassment and of its impact than men are.**

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255 [YouGov research on sexual harassment - main data table](#)  
[YouGov research on sexual harassment - significance tested table](#)

- Most men in the focus groups claimed to believe that unsolicited sexual comments against women in public are not common, while women varied between thinking it is “extremely common” (D) to “not that common” (R).
- Most people think that women have to change their behaviour to avoid sexual harassment in public, but women are much more aware of this (80%) than men (64%).
- Saying that women ‘never’ change their behaviour to avoid harassment is strongly related to beliefs about masculinity (that a man is entitled to know where his girlfriend is all the time; that men should act strong) and to the acceptability of sexual harassment.
- Women in particular say that addressing public sexual harassment should be a government priority. “[Government addressing this is] very important, it would save lives, it would give women the confidence to go out” (L).

**There is a significant relationship between belief in traditional masculine gender norms and acceptability of public sexual harassment.**

- The small group of men (and smaller group of women) who believe that public sexual harassment is very acceptable, show a higher level of agreement with traditional masculine gender norms such as that men should be the provider or men should act strong even when they don’t feel it. Although the numbers of people finding various forms of sexual harassment ‘very’ acceptable are too small for robust statistical analysis, the trends are indicative. For example only 9% of those polled overall say that men should be responsible for bringing home money and providing for their family but this rises to 27% of those who find it ‘very acceptable’ for a man to make a sexual comment to a woman he doesn’t know.
- Overall, 14% of those polled agree that a man deserves to know where his wife or girlfriend is all the time, while 70% disagree. However, 27% of those who think wolf-whistling is ‘very’ acceptable think a man deserves to know where his girlfriend is all the time, almost double the proportion of those who think wolf-whistling is generally unacceptable (14%) or very unacceptable (13%).
- Belief in the stereotype that men need sex more than women is not as strongly related to acceptability of sexual harassment as other beliefs about masculinity.
- Men are more likely than women to support male gender norms—agreeing that men should ‘act strong’ (18%) vs women who think this (5%), and women identify stronger social pressure on women to maintain the home—(67%) versus (49%) of men.

**In line with findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey, overall belief in traditional gender norms is lessening, however young people show some concerning trends in relation to traditional gender norms.**

- There is a concerning finding that young people (18–24) tend to see more pressure on women to conform with feminine norms than older people. For example 73% say society tells us it is important for women to maintain the home, compared with a national average of 59%.
- However, they are no different from others in their agreement with most masculine norms and are less likely (19%) than the overall average (27%) to think that men need sex more than women.
- The social pressure on women to look physically attractive in public is most acutely felt by young women aged 18–24 at 87% (male average is 64%). Nevertheless this group is far less likely than older women (5% vs 18–47%) to find wolf-whistling acceptable.
- 18–24 year olds are most likely (20% vs national average of 14%) to think that men deserve to know where a girlfriend is. This presents as a measure of male entitlement which we know is generally strongly related to men's perpetration as well as specifically to acceptability of sexual harassment in this survey.

**The acceptability of illegal prostitution is connected to acceptability of sexual harassment. In addition, the law operates as a key marker for acceptability of prostitution. Prostitution is understood as generally unacceptable when it is illegal, and generally acceptable when it is legal.**

- The acceptability of paying for illegal sex is 13% but is much higher (24–48%) among those who find forms of sexual harassment 'very' acceptable.
- The proportion of people who think that men paying for sex is unacceptable more than doubles (32% to 68%) depending on whether prostitution is presented as legal or illegal.
- There is confusion among both men and women as to what constitutes illegal prostitution, with men in the focus groups claiming mostly to understand illegality as related only to non-consent.
- Generally speaking, those who find it acceptable for men to pay for sex or to use legal pornography also tend to find public sexual harassment more acceptable. The acceptability of all forms of public sexual harassment is generally higher, and in some cases considerably higher, for the groups of people who consider that paying for sex (whether legal or illegal) is acceptable versus those who find paying for sex unacceptable. This trend is particularly marked, reaching statistical significance, between the people who say paying for sex even when it is illegal is acceptable versus those who say it is unacceptable. There is a similar but less strong trend between people who find legal pornography acceptable, who also tend to find most forms of sexual harassment more acceptable than those who say it is unacceptable for men to use legal pornography.

**Acceptability of wolf-whistling did not follow this trend, with those who find legal pornography unacceptable being more likely to think wolf-whistling is acceptable—this appears to be related to age.**

While the acceptability of men's use of legal pornography varies significantly between men (75%) and women (48%), men in focus groups were able to claim that pornography is both acceptable, and harmful to men and women. This suggests that men are not persuaded that harm is a sufficient condition to affect the acceptability of pornography: "Well it's legal and regulated then fair game" (L).

## Formal minutes

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**Wednesday 10 October 2018**

Members present:

Mrs Maria Miller, in the Chair

Tonia Antoniazzi      Eddie Hughes

Vicky Ford              Tulip Siddiq

Draft Report (*Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 161 read and agreed to.

Annex and Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Wednesday 17 October 2018]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Wednesday 2 May 2018

*Question number*

**David Alton**, Hate Crime Manager, Nottinghamshire Police, **Marai Larasi OBE**, Director, Imkaan, and **Dr Fiona Vera-Gray**, Durham University. [Q1–34](#)

**Gary Barker**, Chief Executive Officer, Promundo. [Q35–41](#)

### Wednesday 6 June 2018

**David Austin**, Chief Executive Officer, British Board of Film Classification, **Dr Maddy Coy**, University of Florida, **Professor Clare McGlynn**, University of Durham, and **Melanie Phillips**, Commentator, The Times. [Q42–89](#)

### Wednesday 13 June 2018

**Karon Monaghan QC**, Matrix Chambers, and **Dr Purna Sen**, Director of Policy, UN Women. [Q90–125](#)

### Wednesday 27 June 2018

**Dr Geetanjali Gangoli**, Senior Lecturer, University of Bristol, **Hareem Ghani**, Women's Officer, National Union of Students, and **Yvonne Hawkins**, Director of teaching excellence and student experience, Office for Students. [Q126–169](#)

**Detective Inspector Ash Cooper**, British Transport Police, **Dr Jackie Gray**, Associate Professor in Forensic Psychology, Middlesex University, **Elaine Hindal**, Chief Executive, Drinkaware, and **Anton Walden**, Licensing Officer, Canterbury City Council. [Q170–214](#)

### Wednesday 4 July 2018

**Victoria Atkins MP**, Minister for Women. [Q214–317](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SPP numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 A member of the public ([SPP0003](#))
- 2 A member of the public ([SPP0005](#))
- 3 A member of the public ([SPP0006](#))
- 4 A member of the public ([SPP0007](#))
- 5 A member of the public ([SPP0008](#))
- 6 A member of the public ([SPP0009](#))
- 7 A member of the public ([SPP0010](#))
- 8 A member of the public ([SPP0013](#))
- 9 A member of the public ([SPP0015](#))
- 10 A member of the public ([SPP0016](#))
- 11 A member of the public ([SPP0017](#))
- 12 A member of the public ([SPP0019](#))
- 13 A member of the public ([SPP0027](#))
- 14 A member of the public ([SPP0029](#))
- 15 A member of the public ([SPP0030](#))
- 16 A member of the public ([SPP0031](#))
- 17 A member of the public ([SPP0033](#))
- 18 A member of the public ([SPP0039](#))
- 19 A member of the public ([SPP0042](#))
- 20 A member of the public ([SPP0053](#))
- 21 A member of the public ([SPP0054](#))
- 22 A member of the public ([SPP0058](#))
- 23 A member of the public ([SPP0064](#))
- 24 A member of the public ([SPP0073](#))
- 25 A member of the public ([SPP0077](#))
- 26 A member of the public ([SPP0082](#))
- 27 A member of the public ([SPP0089](#))
- 28 A Women's Aid refuge ([SPP0067](#))
- 29 Amnesty International UK ([SPP0055](#))
- 30 ASLEF ([SPP0068](#))
- 31 Avon and Somerset Police ([SPP0106](#))
- 32 Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner ([SPP0102](#))
- 33 Bristol Women's Voice/Bristol Zero Tolerance ([SPP0045](#))

- 34 British Board of Film Classification ([SPP0101](#))
- 35 British Pregnancy Advisory Service ([SPP0080](#))
- 36 British Transport Police ([SPP0090](#), [SPP0110](#))
- 37 CARE ([SPP0098](#))
- 38 Chwarae Teg ([SPP0070](#))
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