

## Written evidence from Girlguiding UK [EOV0039]

### 1. Overview –

- 1.1. As the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with almost 300,000 young members, and over 100,000 volunteers, our submission is focused on contributing evidence to show the escalation of violence against women and girls, both in public and online.
- 1.2. Through Girlguiding, 300,000 girls, between the ages of 4-18, to meet as Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers. Girlguiding offers fun, friendship, challenge and adventure and we empower girls to find their voice, inspiring them to discover the best in themselves and to make a positive difference in their community.

### 2. Relevant evidence

- 2.1. The [Girls' Attitudes Survey](#) is Girlguiding's annual research project into the lives of girls and young women, aiming to build a comprehensive picture of the emerging needs, issues and priorities of girls and young women today. The survey provides a snapshot of the views of over 2,000 girls and young women from across the UK aged 7 to 21, within and outside Girlguiding. Since 2009, we have covered a range of issues affecting girls from education, wellbeing, aspirations, social action, and safety on- and off-line.
- 2.2. In 2022, we published results from our [Online Harms Poll](#). These results revealed that over three-quarters (79%) of young women have experienced online harm in 2021. The poll also showed the growth in sophistication of online abusers tactics, largely with the increased use of AI.
- 2.3. In 2021, Girlguiding published [research](#) on girls' and young women's experiences of sexual harassment. This research followed the tragic murder of Sarah Everard. In May 2021, Girlguiding surveyed over 400 girls and young women aged 13 to 18 across the UK to understand their experiences of sexual harassment, how it negatively affects their lives, and what urgently needs to be done to make sure all girls and women can live their lives freely and safely.

### 3. Our response –

- 3.1. How effective is (a) the police service and (b) the criminal justice system at responding to these behaviours and offences and how might those responses be improved?
  - 3.1.1. Girls and young women tell us they regularly experience harassment and abuse in public places, such as on the street and on public transport.

Our research with girls shows:

    - 53% aged 11 to 21 don't feel safe when they're outside on their own. This is highest in the North of England (58%) and Midlands (57%) compared to 51% in London and the South (Girls' Attitudes Survey 2022).
    - 45% aged 11-21 don't feel safe in public. Girls in Wales feel more unsafe in public (48%) compared to those in England (46%), Northern Ireland (35%) and Scotland (34%) (Girls' Attitudes Survey 2022).
    - 60% have experienced unwanted attention such as being whistled at on the street (Sexual harassment poll 2021).
  - 3.2. A [report by Ofsted](#) shows sexual harassment is normalised at school. Girls suffer disproportionately, complaining of sexist name-calling, online abuse, upskirting, unwanted touching in school corridors and rape jokes on the school bus.
    - 3.2.1. Many girls tell us that sexual harassment is a reality of school life. A place that should be a space for them to learn and thrive is instead somewhere they don't feel safe.
    - 3.2.2. Our research with girls shows:
      - 67% of girls and young women aged 13-18 had experienced sexual harassment at school (Sexual harassment poll 2021).

- 65% aged 17 and 18 say fear of sexual harassment makes them feel anxious, worried and scared (Sexual harassment poll 2021).
  - 19% aged 11-21 don't feel safe in school (Girls' Attitudes Survey 2022).
- 3.3. With these behaviours extensively prevalent in school, it is easy to see why girls and young women feel increasingly more worried about sexual harassment in public.
- 16% of girls aged 13 to 16 have experienced unwanted touching on public transport, rising to 30% of those aged 17 and 18.
  - Eight in ten (80%) of all girls and young women feel unsafe when they're out on their own, increasing to nearly all young women aged 17 and 18 (96%). A third (32%) of all girls and young women feel this way often or most of the time.
- 3.3.1. Almost half (45%) of girls aged 13 to 16 and three quarters (74%) aged 17 and 18 said they want public sexual harassment to be made a crime. A third (33%) aged 13 and 14, and 54% aged 15 to 18 would like more street lighting. 42% across all age groups want more visible police officers in public.

#### 4. Our recommendations –

Girlguiding submits the following recommendation to the Women and Equalities Commission.

- Public sexual harassment to be made a crime as there are currently gaps in the law.
- Girls' and young women's voices and ideas to be listened to and implemented in the designing and creation of safe public places and streets.
- Reporting of sexual harassment to be made easier, and girls' and young women's reports taken seriously.
- The Online Safety Bill to be strengthened to address online harassment and abuse towards women and girls.
- The Department for Education to renew its commitment to the delivery of RSHE and aim for 100% of young people to be learning about consent.

#### 5. Girlguiding activity

- 5.1. Our [Advocate panel](#) gives girls a platform to use their voices and seek change at the highest levels. Advocates are a group of Girlguiding members aged 14 to 25 who lead the direction of Girlguiding's advocacy and research. They act as media spokespeople for Girlguiding and speak at events. They are able to speak with decision makers including politicians about our evidence and what girls would like to see change.

#### 6. About us

- 6.1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK. Thanks to the dedication and support of our amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (4–7 years), Brownies (7–10 years), Guides (10–14 years) and Rangers (14–18 years). Registered Charity No. 306016.

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