



CALL IT

WHAT IT IS!

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE MISOGYNY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

BARNARD'S

Changing childhoods. Changing lives.

Our new campaign

Barnardo's have launched a new campaign, titled *Call It What It Is*, working alongside children and young people to counter dangerous narratives about misogyny and harmful notions of masculinity.

Despite conversations on this issue playing out in the media and Parliament, children and young people's voices are too often missing from the debate. Without them, we cannot address the problems as children and young people experience them.

The Changing Attitudes Group comprises of 12 young people representing the four nations of the UK. Together they believe society can reverse the tide. We will work with them to mobilise other children and young people, including children that have used Barnardo's services, to make sure that children and young people's views are heard by governments across the UK to help drive the change that will keep children and young people safer and healthier. This includes helping to challenge misinformation and harmful content online, offline behaviour, and also listening to children and young people in the design and delivery of own services at Barnardo's.

Why?

When children and young people see and hear misogynistic content online, it quietly normalises attitudes and harmful behaviours that no child should ever learn to accept. That's why **we are starting this campaign with a focus on online harm.**

Misogyny isn't new, but the way children and young people encounter it is. For children and young people, online and offline life are one and the same: harmful misogynistic content is everywhere. Many face a constant stream of extreme, degrading messages about women and girls, alongside damaging myths about masculinity. Algorithms amplify it, influencers glamorise it and new technologies worsen it. For some children, it's background noise in their daily lives, shaping how they perceive themselves and the world around them.

At Barnardo's we've supported children and young people facing all forms of harm for 160 years. Again and again, misogyny sits at the root of what they experience – not just in visible behaviours, but also in the constant, often nameless and insidious behaviours that shape their lives. These harms affect girls and boys alike, from humiliating and sexist comments, to feelings of loneliness and isolation that many boys face. As online spaces become more chaotic and less safe, these harms are escalating, becoming harder for young people to recognise or escape.

That's why we're raising the alarm – it doesn't have to be this way. We need to name the real problems to find solutions that work. That's why we think it's time to call it what it is. Children and young people's voices and experiences must be at the heart of conversations about online misogyny. If adults only talk to other adults, solutions will never reflect what children and young people are facing – or meet their needs.

Together we can act on what children and young people tell us is important, and push for stronger protections in online spaces to build a safer digital world. **That's why we are asking the Government to commit to upgrading Ofcom's VAWG guidance to a mandatory VAWG Code of Practice to ensure greater accountability and strengthened protections for children and young people.**

The data

We commissioned Censuswide to poll 4,000 young people aged 13-20, across all four nations of the UK. The findings were stark and paint a picture of a distressing online environment for young people.

Key findings from the polling include:

- **Around two thirds (65%)¹** of young people report witnessing or coming across harmful gender expectations online. One in four girls (25%) report being called degrading names online, with over a third of 13-year-olds (34%) saying they have seen this happen to someone else.
- **Nearly one in five girls (18%)** report receiving repeated unwanted messages after asking the sender to stop or ignoring them.
- **Just over one in seven young people aged 13-15 (15%)** have been asked to send a nude image of themselves, and one in eight girls (12%) report being threatened with the sharing of nude images.
- **A quarter of respondents (25%)** report seeing nude images that were originally shared privately being redistributed without consent.

Looking specifically at girl's experiences, girls are disproportionately exposed to harassment, sexualised abuse, and victim-blaming narratives online. Attitudinal data shows that:

- **Just over a quarter (26%)²** of young people believe that a girl's sexual reputation makes her less credible if she reports unwanted sexual contact.
- **Nearly one third (30%)²** believe girls make false accusations against boys just to get them in trouble, a view shared by nearly a quarter (23%) of girls themselves and more than a third (37%) of boys.

These beliefs risk undermining safeguarding systems and discouraging disclosure of harm.

And for boys, the findings show that boys experience significant peer pressure to conform to narrow, stereotypical models of masculinity:

- **59%² of boys** believe they are expected to act tough and suppress emotion.
- **57%² report** that failure to join in with peer behaviour risks people thinking they're boring.
- **21%³ say** their friends would not support them if they challenged sexist comments.

This culture discourages empathy, emotional expression, and bystander intervention.

This situation is unacceptable – children and young people are being negatively shaped by exposure to harmful online content, with clear consequences for their attitudes and behaviour.



What is the answer?

Our polling shows that misogyny is not an abstract issue but a daily reality for children and young people – one they are asking adults and technology companies to address. The children and young people advising *Call It What It Is* told us they want to see tech companies do more to prevent harm and have stronger protections in place, rather than respond after the fact. This is why we are calling for Ofcom's guidance to be strengthened into a mandatory Code of Practice joining a growing list of campaigners across the women and children's sectors.

Evidence shows the normalisation of misogyny is being amplified by platform design, algorithms, and weak moderation, meaning harmful content is not only widespread, but often actively promoted.⁴ By departing from guidance and moving to a mandatory Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Code of Practice, it would fundamentally change how platforms respond to risk.

Current guidance leaves significant discretion to companies, resulting in inconsistent and reactive approaches to harmful content. A statutory code would require platforms to take proactive, preventative action by embedding safety into the design of their services. This should include robust risk assessments on how misogynistic content is created and amplified to young users; clear expectations to limit how algorithms promote harmful misogynistic content, strengthened moderation processes and improved reporting, signposting and support for children and young people. Crucially, our recommendation would enable Ofcom to hold companies accountable where they fail to meet these standards, embedding more consistent protection across platforms, rather than relying on voluntary compliance.

But this recommendation cannot stand alone. There is no single solution to misogyny. To meet the ambition set out in the current guidance, a suite of regulatory measures must sit alongside education, prevention and work with young people to challenge harmful attitudes. Together, our findings, the voices of young people, and the wider evidence base all point to the same conclusion: without stronger, systemic action from government and technology companies, the harms children and young people are facing online will continue to grow.

Call to action



That is why we are making a difference. We are only beginning our efforts to tackle misogyny. Barnardo's will continue to work with young people to raise awareness and understand the extent of the problem. To help us on this journey, please share our content, start conversations and stand with us to make a change.

The research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 4000 Nat Rep UK Respondents, aged 13-20. The data was collected between 09/03/2026 – 20/03/2026. Censuswide is a member of the Market Research Society (MRS) and the British Polling Council (BPC), and a signatory of the Global Data Quality Pledge. We adhere to the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles.

1. "Comedy or meme content about differences between men and women", "Influencers discussing how boys/men and girls/women "should behave", "Videos about "traditional" gender roles (e.g., men as providers, women as homemakers)", "Content that you think is sexist or misogynistic (e.g. disrespectful or hateful towards women or girls)" and "Content where women are shown mostly in domestic or family roles" responses combined.
2. 'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined
3. 'Strongly disagree' and 'Somewhat disagree' responses combined
4. McGlynn, C. and Woods, L. (2022): Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Code of Practice.

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