



Working with boys and young men to reduce sexual and gender based violence, misogyny, and harmful sexual behaviours

Executive summary

Research strongly indicates a need for sexual violence prevention strategies that directly engage with young men and boys, and facilitate the inclusion of their voices. Working with young men and boys appears to be the solution when working to reduce sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and the challenges of misogyny and harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people (CYP).

Toxic influencers have gained traction over the past five years – negatively influencing young men and boys. This high-profile rise of ‘misogyny influencers’ has led to a proliferation of questioning around the role of toxic ideals of masculinity in young men’s treatment of women and girls.

Ascertaining the exact scale of this problem is challenging due to the persistent under-reporting of sexual and gender-based violence.

The Ofsted (2021) review of sexual harassment in schools found that nearly 9 in 10 girls said that they or their peers were sent unwanted explicit pictures or videos they did not want to see "a lot" or "sometimes", with nearly 50 per cent of boys reporting the same.

92 per cent of girls and 74 per cent of boys said that sexist name-calling happened a lot or sometimes to them or their peers.

Since March 2021, over 50,000 testimonials of young people's experiences of sexual harassment and violence in schools have been shared on the Everyone's Invited website. The majority of these reports have been from girls about boys.

The Women and Equalities Committee (2023) report suggests an urgent need to directly engage young men and boys.

Blame culture is detrimental to the effort and blaming boys is counter-productive. Young men and boys need to be supported and empowered to be part of the solution.

Policy recommendations

1. A co-produced approach. Asking young men and boys what they know, what they want to know, and creating plans and strategies with them will have a profound effect.
2. Male mental health and masculinity needs to feature in dialogue on violence against women and girls.

Department for Education

3. More training for teaching staff is needed in relation to direct work with young men and boys in regards to relationships, sex and health education, socialisation, sexual behaviours and an understanding of gender and equality.
4. A harm reduction approach is needed in relation to the access and usage of pornography in young men and boys. Teachers and support workers need to help them to make sense of it.
5. More working groups with young men and boys – driven and led by them are needed to inform policy and work in RSE sessions.

About the research

These recommendations stem from four research projects carried out by Dr King-Hill. These projects allowed better understanding of what is needed when approaching young men and boys about the issues that surround them.

Project One: [The voice of boys projects: We're in this together](#)

This consists of three joined projects that explore the importance of the voice of boys when considering sexual harassment in schools. These studies help to identify ways in which the voices of young men articulating their views of sex and sexuality, masculinity, gender and rape culture can be captured and represented in an effective manner that at the same time protects their safety/anonymity.

Project Two: [RSHE resource project](#)

Dr King-Hill worked with 14 young people to design a resource for those teaching relationships and sex education (RSE). This collaboration produced a top tips guide for school leadership teams and teachers titled '[A students' guide to what you don't know](#)'. This resource provides insight as to what young people need from their RSE sessions from young people themselves.

Project Three : [Sibling Sexual Behaviour project](#)

Dr King-Hill has worked on two projects in the area of sibling sexual behaviour and abuse. She led half of the National Sibling Sexual Abuse Project funded by the Home Office. She also produced a [mapping tool](#) for frontline workers to use when working with children and their families. The study found that good RSHE with all genders can support children and young people in this situation to recognise earlier when they are being sexually harmed – resulting in earlier reporting leading to more positive life-long outcomes.

Project Four: [Youth Voice Project](#)

Dr King-Hill worked with young people to design a piece of graffiti that represents listening to young people and why this is vitally important when considering issues that surround them. This highlighted why participatory research with young people is key to co-designing positive interventions and support.

Conclusion

Research by King-Hill indicates that dialogic, bespoke and co-produced approaches are a key feature of effective RSE and sexual violence interventions for young men and boys. Asking young men and boys what they know, what they want to know and creating plans and strategies with them is more effective at changing attitudes towards women and girls, sexual health and conduct, and masculinity. Blaming men and boys, rather than supporting them to be part of the solution, marginalises them and is counterproductive. Sensitive and co-produced Relationship and Sex Education needs to take a leading role in this effort, with teachers receiving more training to work effectively with young men and boys to reduce harms to themselves and others.

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