

Scottish Women's Convention response  
to the Women and Equality Committee's  
Call for Evidence on:

# Misogyny – The Manosphere and Online Content



June 2025

## Premise

The 'manosphere' can be defined as a collection as websites, blogs and online forms promoting masculinity, misogyny, and opposition to feminism. This includes a range of groups, such as men's rights activists, incels, pick-up artists and others. Online communities such as these have grown in popularity over recent years, with increasingly right-wing views coming into the mainstream.

As a result, the Women and Equalities Committee at the UK Parliament has requested evidence surrounding the 'manosphere' and how online content is fuelling misogyny. Through this Call for Evidence, the Committee aims to understand how this behaviour impacts women and girls and how it can be reduced.



## **The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)**

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

## **Our Response**

### **How prevalent are misogynistic views, attitudes and behaviour among young people today, particularly in educational settings? What examples are there of these views, attitudes and behaviours? In what settings are such behaviours prevalent?**

Misogyny remains a pervasive element of modern society in Scotland, shaping the opportunities and experiences of women and girls. At the SWC, we have regularly promoted increased consideration of misogyny at decision-making levels, believing that underlying misogyny is largely responsible for women's continued disadvantage. In 2023, we carried out an assessment of the Scottish Government's proposed Misogyny Law with the women of Scotland. Through this work, we identified the widespread nature of misogyny, encompassing multiple sectors, including education, employment, online formats, and sporting environments<sup>1</sup>.

Firstly, to consider education, young women across Scotland face horrifying levels of misogyny and abuse within schools. Our work reported instances of sexual assault and bullying, resulting in poorer mental health outcomes for young women, as well as lower participation rates within classrooms. To understand this issue further, the SWC commissioned a specific investigation – finding that young women feel intimidated to raise their hands in spaces dominated by boys and have experienced direct sexist bullying<sup>2</sup>. Women and girls theorised that traditional gender stereotypes continue to influence misogyny, as do teachers and staff. They explained that through poor equal representation amongst senior leadership teams and discriminatory teaching practices, young people are provided with poor examples.

- “There was a stage at school where the boys would...scoop your breasts, it was everywhere you turned. The teachers did nothing about it.”
- “...a girl was shoved down the stairs by a boy. A PE teacher witnessed it, and he said that he was just being a boy, and sent him on to class, and then told her to stop reacting, like she was crying, but nothing was done about it”
- “Me and other girls received constant comments on our chest size and we always walked up the stairs holding on to our school skirts...with the fear of boys pulling them up.”
- “[Boys] think that they can do and say what they want. They don't have any sort of boundaries of what they say...It's quite misogynistic.”

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Women's Convention. (2023). Misogyny in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/misogyny-report-june-2023-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Women's Convention. (2025). Misogyny in Education. Available at: <https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/education-report.pdf>

- “A maths class that’s on, there are lots of boys in there, and girls in there have said that it’s really intimidating to speak out, and the boys will belittle you for having equivocal knowledge.”

While secondary schools have become hotbeds of abuse, women also identified universities and colleges as spaces for misogyny. Women spoke of misogynistic lecturers, and in extreme cases, rape and sexual assault. This was identified as a major issue within STEM subjects<sup>3</sup>. Women within STEM explained that while structural barriers, such as poor childcare provision and maternity leave, prevented them from remaining with STEM academia, many were pushed to leave as a result of direct misogyny. Women explained that the ‘boys’ club’ mentality often resulted in uncomfortable working environments.

- “Unfortunately, I was sexually assaulted in my first year of university...I feel that more needs to be done by universities to tackle rape culture and challenge the stigma around sexual harassment.”
- “...my maths professor told me that if he had his way, I wouldn’t have been allowed in the class because I was a woman.”
- “I have noticed [as a woman in STEM] that some men don’t like having to answer to women who are in a position of seniority”
- “I left the scientific community because of its failure to support me.”

The experiences of women in STEM closely align with women in the workplace more generally. When considering women’s experiences of misogyny in Scotland, we asked women to tell us about employment. Women provided numerous examples where they had been overlooked for promotions as a result of ‘boys’ clubs’ and overt misogyny. They explained that they were often considered as incapable due to domestic caring responsibilities. Interestingly, this is reflected within the workplace, where women are designated as office “mums”, carrying out administrative and hospitality tasks. With women’s professional time taken up by trivial duties such as these, they are provided with less opportunity to carry out training and seek promotion, further entrenching gender differences.

- “I’ve also had the experience of male colleagues patronisingly explain technical documents to me, often in cases where I wrote the document.”
- “There was a refusal to move the time of an early morning meeting where I couldn’t arrange childcare, but they managed to move it to accommodate lunch time football training.”
- “There’s an expectation that if an administrative task arrives in our team of professionals, one of the women will do it.”
- I wasn’t deemed as capable as my male peers and was never put up for promotions.”

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<sup>3</sup> Scottish Women’s Convention. (2023). STEMinism: What Needs to Change to Keep Women in STEM? Available at: <https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/stem-conference-report-2023.pdf>

Moving on to the online sector, it is impossible to overemphasise the role online platforms play in the creation and maintenance of modern misogyny. Online platforms have become essential environments for the performance of social interaction, including elements such as friendship, sexual relationships, and debate. Unfortunately, these platforms are steeped in misogyny and prejudice, with algorithms actively shaping discourse. Women in Scotland were highly aware of the issues the online world presents, providing examples where they had experienced abuse and harassment – usually at the hands of anonymised actors. Additionally, women cited their concerns surrounding ‘incel’ groups, a relatively new term to describe ‘involuntary celibacy’ – a sub-group of misogynistic men who encourage violence against women and girls and a return to traditional gender roles. Unfortunately, women and girls explained to the SWC that the continued risk of abuse had pushed them offline, limiting their ability to participate in public life.

- “I am constantly harassed and have even been stalked online by incels and their like. Me being a queer woman upsets them the most; they’ve sent me very detailed death threats.”
- “I have become an observer, I just retweet rather than put my own stuff out there, because I don’t want to be on the receiving end of those comments.”
- “I have seen some people who go offline to recover, from what is basically an attack. It may not be happening in person, but it’s happening mentally.”

Finally, when considering women’s experiences of sport and exercise, misogyny acted as a barrier to their participation. Young girls highlighted school PE classes, explaining that they were regularly objectified and sexualised by fellow classmates, as well as teachers. This objectification continued into adulthood – women who exercise in public spaces recalled being shouted at and made to feel uncomfortable. Women were therefore prevented from participating in essential exercise, worsening their overall health. They explained that this was often degraded by the lack of sports facilities for women, stating that due to ineffective changing rooms and toilets, they were prevented at a structural level from participating. This latter issue highlights that while misogynistic abuse is generally carried out by individuals, institutions also play a role in the furthering of misogyny – disadvantaging women and girls at an organisational level.

- “I’ve been yelled at while cycling, things like ‘enjoying the ride darling?’”
- “...literally every time I go for a run, particularly if I choose to wear shorts, I’ll get cat-called, hurled abuse at, etc.”
- “I used to attend the gym, but due to sexual comments I stopped attending.”
- “I play for a football club, and our changing room facilities are nowhere near as good as the men’s.”

**How are social media influencers shaping attitudes towards women and girls?**

When discussing online abuse with women, many are quick to cite influencers such as Andrew Tate. We hold some concern over the usage of the term 'influencer' to describe such individuals, suggesting that this contributes to a sense of legitimacy. Many individuals work online as 'influencers', promoting a lifestyle and/or product. This form of work largely does not victimise a specific group of peoples or promote harm. Individuals such as Andrew Tate can be described as 'influential', however we would instead recommend government bodies clearly define similar peoples as misogynists.

Additionally, while these 'influencers' play a significant role in promoting outdated ideals and ultimately dangerous behaviours, it is imperative that government bodies consider the hidden effect of incel individuals. Incel communities thrive on online platforms designed to obscure personal details, including names and profile pictures – such as Reddit and 4Chan. Both sites are designed to facilitate online conversations on a specific topic, holding a large capacity for ideology building. It has been estimated that the format of these sites, actively discourages open debate, instead enveloping users in an echo chamber of ideas<sup>4</sup>. Also, anonymity online often facilitates abusive behaviour, removing personal attachment and visibility from upsetting comments. Through the continued anonymous element of online sites, men will continue to use them to abuse and harass women. So, while social media 'influencers' play a role in shaping wider attitudes towards women and girls, it is vital that the deeper level of misogyny is focused upon, bringing dangerous views to the light.

- "...I think that social media is elevating misogynistic voices, making them more and more difficult to ignore. The way social media works prevents nuance being added to arguments, making complex issues black and white...I do think it's important that social media isn't fully blamed for misogyny, it's just a reflection of wider societal views"
- "I think the fact that it's anonymous...they don't have to face up to the consequences...they're not answerable to the things that they're saying"

### **How is content on social media and online, such as violent pornography, contributing to sexist and misogynistic attitudes and behaviours and violence against women and girls both online and offline?**

Social media and online content actively contribute to sexist and misogynistic attitudes and behaviours in Scotland. In particular, young men are at significant risk of consuming inappropriate and dangerous materials, such as pornography and extreme videos/photos of violence. There are reports from young women and teaching professionals that men and boys' viewing habits are becoming increasingly public, with many stating that they have witnessed boys from primary school age sharing sexual videos amongst friends. Girls also explained that in some situations, they had been forced to watch pornography by boy classmates and have felt significant pressure to "play along". The viewing of pornography by young men and boys has been shown to

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<sup>4</sup> Krendal, A. (2021). From Sexism to Misogyny: Can Online Echo Chambers Stay Quarantined. In: Zempli, I. and Smith, J. Misogyny as Hate Crime, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: Routledge, pp. 99-118.

cause an increase in violent behaviour and dehumanising sexual behaviour against women and girls<sup>5</sup>. We would therefore argue that the accessible nature of pornography and its acceptance within mainstream society has resulted in an increase in violence against women and girls, particularly within school establishments.

- “Over the years I have observed a range of abusive behaviour, the incidence of this is increasing in frequency...Pupils making and sharing videos, including sexual or violent content in order to intimidate others.”
- “Unfettered sexism and easy access to pornography on social media are seriously compounding the extent of misogyny amongst boys”
- “Yeah, at my primary school [the boys] would show you porn websites from when you were about primary three or primary four.”
- “...when [boys] show you [porn], you have to go along with it and pretend it's funny or whatever, otherwise they'll make fun of you.”

Girls went on to explain that through online formats, fellow pupils were enabled to practice bullying and harassment. For example, one survey respondent explained that her school had a “slags page” on Instagram, where sexualised images of classmates would be shared online. It can be argued that abuses such as these act to strictly control young women. Through these behaviours, women's actions are policed and threatened with ridicule at the hands of classmates. With the increase in online technologies such as AI and deepfakes, young women are at further risk of sexual harassment. The role of online mockery significantly worsens young women's mental health and can result in their resignation from school activities.

- “...there's a bit of a trend in some schools, there are fake accounts set up to abuse other pupils...some of those accounts I was able to report because my daughter was included in some of them, and it was the Little Miss characters, but they turn them into nasty things like 'Little Miss Blowjob', like horrible things that they had put kids' photos with as well.”
- “Even if you have protections on your internet provider, people can still access these images through like Facebook and Twitter or Reddit or that. So, you can get around the parental controls really easily. There are a lot of websites where someone can upload a photo of a girl at their school and ask if someone can digitally undress her...lots of girls aren't wanting to upload photos of themselves anymore.”

Additionally, a rising issue is that of strangulation. Strangulation and non-fatal strangulation have remained common methods of abuse by men against women. Strangulation is the obstruction or compression of blood vessels and/or airways by external pressure to the neck, while non-fatal strangulation can be defined as strangulation which has not directly caused the death of a victim. As of 2025,

<sup>5</sup> Fight the New Drug. (2025). How Porn Can Promote Sexual Violence. Available at: [https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-promote-sexual-violence/?\\_gl=1\\*1m54ct\\*up\\*MQ.\\*\\_ga\\*MTk1Mjg5NzMwNi4xNzQ4NTIwOTQ2\\*\\_ga\\_3VF64E6XBN\\*cze3NDg1MjA5NDYkbzEkZzEkdDE3NDg1MjExMDckajYwJGwwJGgw](https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-promote-sexual-violence/?_gl=1*1m54ct*up*MQ.*_ga*MTk1Mjg5NzMwNi4xNzQ4NTIwOTQ2*_ga_3VF64E6XBN*cze3NDg1MjA5NDYkbzEkZzEkdDE3NDg1MjExMDckajYwJGwwJGgw)



strangulation accounted for 27% of femicides<sup>6</sup> and one in four women accessing community and refuge services in the UK have experienced strangulation or suffocation<sup>7</sup>. Many have argued that pornography is largely responsible for continued high levels of non-fatal strangulation, as has the overt sexualisation and commodification of women's bodies across media formats<sup>8</sup>.

Non-fatal strangulation and suffocation are regarded as a criminal offence in England and Wales through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. However, current law does not effectively consider this behaviour within pornography, resulting in continual representation of dangerous behaviour. We would therefore invoke the recommendations made by Baroness Bertin in her review of pornography regulation; that strangulation or 'choking' pornography be included in the 'extreme (illegal)' category within pornography legislation<sup>9</sup>. It can be argued that non-fatal strangulation is covered by Scot Law, with the Scottish offence stating that extreme (illegal) pornography is that which causes or promotes severe injury to any part of the body – however, this is not explicit. As such, a UK-wide approach is required regarding non-fatal strangulation, which condemns these behaviours as dangerous to women.

### **What role are social media companies and online platforms playing in the promotion of misogynistic content?**

Online platforms and social media companies play a significant role in the promotion of misogynistic content. It can be argued that through their continued inaction to effectively police and limit misogynistic content, they allow abusive behaviour to continue. Women have expressed their frustration surrounding reporting mechanisms on such sites, explaining that they often feel "pointless". They have explained that abusive or upsetting posts must meet strict guidelines, meaning that many reports are unsuccessful. This has pushed women to stop reporting offensive material, instead they are electing to withdraw from sites. The unfortunate impact of this, is the worsening of abusive posts, with alternative viewpoints becoming fewer in number, contributing to an echo chamber effect. Therefore, online platforms and social media companies are widely complicit in the production of misogyny.

- "I work in tech myself. We all know that there are algorithms that [social media companies] could put in place, that could pick up on some of this [misogynistic] stuff...But they have no intention of doing that...[The Scottish Government] are going to put all this work into this, and you've got these big tech companies. It's like fighting a losing battle."

<sup>6</sup> Femicide Census. (2025). 2000 Women: Every Dead Women is One Too Many. Available at: <https://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2000-Women-full-report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Addressing Strangulation. (2025). What are the Differences Between Strangulation, Non-Fatal and Fatal Strangulation and Suffocation. Available at: <https://ifas.org.uk/what-is-strangulation/>

<sup>8</sup> Woodley, G. and Jaunzems, K. (2024). Minimising the Risk: Teen Perspectives on Sexual Choking in Pornography. M/C Journal, 27(4). Doi: 10.5204/mcj.3088.

<sup>9</sup> Bertin. (2025). Creating a Safer World – The Challenge of Regulating Online Pornography. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bf014ca0f0c95a498d1f9a/The\\_Challenge\\_of\\_Regulating\\_Online\\_Pornography\\_A.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bf014ca0f0c95a498d1f9a/The_Challenge_of_Regulating_Online_Pornography_A.pdf)



- “...you have to go through all these steps [to report misogynistic abuse], and I don't think it's particularly easy all-round”
- “...my biggest concern is that after a certain point in time, I would get a bit tired of reporting [misogyny]...the social media companies don't care, they don't want to take responsibility”

Alternatively, online platforms and social media companies can be viewed as active contributors to misogynistic abuse. Through online algorithms, stored data is used to make assumptions on an individual's interests. While algorithms can be used relatively harmlessly, such as to promote a particular product or media output, dangerous mentalities can be quickly pushed to the forefront. This occurs when a social media outlet assesses the individual characteristics of a user and uses information which is steeped in gendered stereotypes. Women have pointed to algorithms as significant contributors to the issue of online abuse, suggesting that young boys and teens lack sufficient understanding of complex issues to challenge arguments made.

- “Algorithms that are designed to capture attentions are leading to people seeing a constant stream of advertising and self-opinionated comment. This means adults and children are not hearing alternative points of view”

### **Who is gaining financially from the marketisation of misogyny online, and how? What policies do social media companies have in place for deplatforming or demonetising this content and are they enforced?**

It can be said that misogyny has been an ever-present contributor to organisational profit on a global scale. The continued oppression and sexualisation of women across media outlets, including online formats, has resulted in increased earnings for many large companies<sup>10</sup>. It is naïve to ignore the constant subjugation of women's bodies in modern media, through sensational headlines and paparazzi-gained shots. Women continue to be critiqued for their personal appearance to a higher degree than men, with their actions often being a source of ridicule.

When discussing the influence of media with women in Scotland, they are quick to point out these issues, explaining that the media is key in the maintenance of women's oppression. Women have explained that this includes online media, but also traditional print and televisual formats. Social media is particularly pervasive due to its far-reaching capabilities. However, a wider acceptance of general media's role in the creation of misogyny in modern discourse must be made. We would therefore argue that it is difficult to pinpoint individual actors who gain financially from the marketisation of misogyny online. Instead, the issue of misogyny can be viewed as a form of profit creation used by multinational organisations.

### **What strategies and interventions are needed to address misogyny among young people?**

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<sup>10</sup> Aybike, S. et al. (2023). Sexism and the Commodification of Women in Media: A Critical Analysis. *Media Literacy and Gender Studies*, 12(25), pp. 80-93.

Women have provided a range of solutions to address misogyny amongst young people. Much focus has centred around the role of educational establishments, with women suggesting that misogyny should be included throughout classes from a young age. They have explained that often discussions surrounding misogyny, and other discriminatory behaviour, are reserved for older children, but this limits impact. Women called for education to begin from early primary school which included the impact of misogyny on women and girls. It was suggested that peer-led education could be valuable, particularly amongst boys, with older students steering conversations. Furthermore, women explained that any education must include online influences, focusing on online safety and the debunking of common incel talking points. Through improved learning resources, a preventative approach to misogyny can be taken.

- “Male students and staff to receive more education and training on misogyny and its impact...Young boys are impressionable; they take lead from older role models”
- “We need to teach young people how to be safe online, focusing on incel behaviours. I think as well, it would be helpful to teach young men to call out their friend's/family's poor behaviour.”
- “Educate people from a young age to reject misogynistic myths and attitudes, teach children to respect one another and take swift and appropriate action where misogyny occurs.”

We would also like to highlight that online misogyny remains an issue that is perpetuated by a range of peoples, not just young people. Focusing efforts to reduce misogyny amongst young people are to be commended, however, a society-wide approach is required to limit misogyny's negative effects. It is at this point that increased regulatory controls across social media and online platforms are required. The Online Safety Bill will go some way to limit the impact of dangerous ideologies on young people; however, women were strong in their belief that media companies must be held to certain standards. They likened current approaches to the ‘wild west’, explaining that the total lack of legislation enables organisations to promote misogyny with impunity. Women suggested an economic approach, putting in fines for those found to be in breach of regulations. Also, as stated, online anonymity plays a significant role in the furthering of abusive behaviour. To counter this issue, women proposed specific rulings surrounding online anonymity, explaining that through clear online identification, upsetting behaviour may be limited.

- “...social media, in the last 20 years, I can remember when my kids got their first computer and had to plug it into the telephone cable. I don't think any of us thought for a moment that we would be where we are right now. It all developed with no rules, and that's why we're in this mess; we need clear rules.
- “In order for social media to be fixed, mandatory, functional identification should be made available on all platforms.”

## Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- Act on recommendations made by Baroness Bertin, including strangulation or 'choking' as forms of extreme (illegal) pornography.
- Embed online safety and positive behaviours across education platforms.
- Reduce the use of online anonymity through identity verification.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Women and Equalities Committee's Call for Evidence on **Misogyny - The Manosphere and Online Content**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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