

Misogyny in Scotland



The Scottish Women's Convention
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Contents:

3	Introduction
4	Executive Summary
5	The Proposed Misogyny Law
	<u>Misogyny Conference</u>
6	Speaker, Eileen Flanagan
7-8	Speaker, Mhairi MacLennan
9	Speaker, Pauline McNeill, MSP
	<u>Women's views on...</u>
11	The Proposed Misogyny Law
12-13	Education
14-15	Employment
16-17	Online
18-19	Sport and Exercise
20	Thank you



An Introduction from our Chair, Agnes Tolmie

I was once standing at a bus stop on the way to work when I was about 16 or 17, and a group of grown men started talking about me as if I wasn't there, comments about my body and sexual innuendo. That experience left a mark, and I do not believe that this story is an isolated incident. Women across Scotland are being continually violated and assaulted through continued misogynistic behaviour, whether that's men rubbing up against them on the train, sexist comments, men viewing pornography in public places, and the list goes on. It is these experiences that we hope to centre throughout this report, with the lived experience collected during our survey, roundtables and recent misogyny conference providing an insight into women in Scotland's lives.



The importance of misogyny has been picked up by the Scottish Government, with the 2021 report by Baroness Kennedy, KC, highlighting how common misogyny is across the country. This report has provided the basis for the creation of new misogyny law, with it being the focus of our recent conference – A Misogyny Law for Scotland: What are Women's Views? This conference aimed to understand women's concerns around the law, alongside how misogyny could be reduced. We had three guest speakers: Eileen Flanagan, Mhairi MacLennan and Pauline McNeill, MSP, who each gave their views on the misogyny law, and misogyny as a widescale issue. A summary of each speaker's contribution can be found below, followed by women's opinions on the new law, and also, four key areas of interest: education, employment, online and, sport and exercise. It is our hope at the SWC, that this report underlines the toxic nature of misogyny, and the real-life impact that it has on women across the country. While also, stressing the clear message from women that something must be done, that it must stop.

SWC Purpose

The Scottish Women's Convention (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.

Executive Summary

This report aims to highlight the major issue of misogyny across Scottish society through the lived experience of women, while concurrently assessing the validity of a new misogyny law. Women have stated that a new misogyny law is welcomed, believing that something must be done. However, there are concerns around the practicalities of such a law, with the current justice system acting as a facilitator for misogynistic behaviours. It was also asserted that the systemic nature of misogyny seen through the education system, across workplaces, online and in the sporting world, makes it a particularly difficult entity to tackle. Women, instead, believe that a cultural shift is needed, which can be achieved through improved education for young people and wider society.

Nevertheless, the four areas focused upon within this report are just the beginning, with misogyny entering all elements of society, requiring further investigation from Government bodies. It would also be highly useful to carry out research into how minority groups experience misogyny, with the intersecting aspects of their lives most likely contributing to further misogynistic harassment. Overall, however, we at the SWC hope that this report can contribute to the wider discussion around misogyny, placing women's lived experience at the foundation of decision-making.

6 Recommendations

1. Sufficient training for employees in the justice system is necessary to properly enforce new misogyny law, [page 11](#).
2. Those convicted of misogynistic crimes should have to complete a mandatory course surrounding misogyny, [page 11](#).
3. The creation of an education piece for children and young people is essential to reduce misogyny in Scotland. This education piece must incorporate the damaging effects of misogyny, alongside challenging gender stereotypes, [pages 12 and 13](#).
4. Boys' club mentalities must be confronted across workplaces, through the creation of toolkits for employers, as well as proper complaint procedures being outlined and adhered to, [pages 14 and 15](#).
5. Online misogyny requires further investigation, combined with changes to legislation, to adequately reduce its impact, [pages 16 and 17](#).
6. Improved regulation must be incorporated into sporting governing bodies, with increased involvement from the Scottish Government, [pages 18 and 19](#).

The Proposed Misogyny Law

Due to the prevalence of misogyny across society the Scottish Government established an Independent Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice in Scotland, chaired by Baroness Kennedy KC, in 2021 to understand how the criminal justice system handles this damaging behaviour¹. The Working Group examined oral and written evidence provided by women across Scotland, alongside existing research into women's experiences of misogynistic behaviour. The accounts gathered highlighted to the Working Group that misogyny was widespread across Scotland, with minority groups of women experiencing intersectional disadvantage. It was observed that the impact of this misogyny on all women and girls was corrosive, lowering their self-esteem and pushed them to actively change their behaviour. As a result, the Working Group concluded that it would require a 'gendered law' approach to turn the tide on misogynistic behaviours, rather than incorporating misogyny into the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021.

This begs the question however, what is 'gendered law'?

'Gendered law' goes against the standard assumptions made within the justice system that crimes are inherently gender neutral. Instead, Baroness Kennedy's report stated that action had to be taken to tackle behaviours that target women, simply because they are women. It was felt that the power dynamics which oppress women are so normalised and encouraged by large-scale systems, that it is necessary to create a separate offence to address conduct which contributes to this. This approach led the Working Group to make multiple recommendations, which have in turn been interpreted by the Scottish Government, and are as follows:

- The creation of an offence of misogynistic harassment.
- The creation of an offence of misogynistic behaviour.
- The creation of a statutory aggravation concerning misogyny.
- The creation of an offence of threatening or abusive communications to women and girls that reference rape, sexual assault or disfigurement.
- The creation of an offence of stirring up hatred against women and girls.

"The definition makes it clear that misogyny is not about seeking to exclude women from society; it is not about wanting to banish them from communities. **Misogyny, as defined, allows for women's inclusion, but on patriarchal terms"**

Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice in Scotland, 2021

¹ Kennedy, H. (2021). Misogyny – A Human Rights Issue. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2022/03/misogyny-human-rights-issue/documents/misogyny-human-rights-issue/misogyny-human-rights-issue/govscot%3Adocument/misogyny-human-rights-issue.pdf>

Our Misogyny Conference

EILEEN FLANAGAN, *Interim Strategic Lead for Gender Equality and Violence Against Women in the Scottish Government's Equality Division.*

Eileen joined the Equality Unit as it was, in 2004 and has worked in various policy roles, the majority of which have been focused on addressing the inequality faced by women and girls in Scotland. These include the development of the Scottish Government's work to address Forced Marriage, including the delivery and implementation of the Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011; work to include children and young people's experiences of domestic abuse into the government's strategic approach to violence against women; the development of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018, which made it a legal requirement that public boards subject to the Act take steps to ensure that 50% of their non-executive board members were women; supported the Minister for Equalities and Older People to raise awareness of and take action to address the lack of support for women experiencing the menopause; and the establishment of the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls.



Our conference opened with a contribution from Eileen Flanagan, who started by discussing the base to the proposed law: namely the National Advisory Council of Women and Girls' report from 2018 and the Hate Crime Public Order Scotland Act 2021. The former recommended that the criminalisation of misogynistic harassment would fill gaps in existing laws, while the latter consolidated Scots law on hate crime. The Hate Crime Act did not include gender hostility as an aggravator however, due to responses to the consultation process which stated that a specific, separate offence was preferred to properly tackle the problem. To assess the necessity of such a request, the Scottish Government tasked Helena Kennedy KC, with putting together a Working Group to understand the intricacies of the issue.

The Working Group aimed to establish the regularity of misogyny in Scotland through a survey, which found that only 4.6% of respondents had never experienced misogynistic behaviour. This survey also discovered that those aged 18-34 were far more likely than any other group to experience and witness misogyny across all spaces. Furthermore, ethnic minority respondents and gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents were more likely to experience misogyny than their white and heterosexual counterparts. These experiences contributed to the final report, which made four recommendations, and most importantly, suggested that a gendered approach to the law was taken

**“The experiences given were harrowing and unsettling to read, the examples included:
“I was shouted at in a pub by a man for not laughing at what he thought was funny”,
“I’ve been called a slut in a carpark because I accidentally moved my trolley close to a
man’s car”, and it goes on and on.”**

Therefore, from this report the Scottish Government have decided to create five new pieces of criminal law to address misogyny. The group had proposed the creation of a new offence of public misogynistic harassment, but this has been split by the Government; one of misogynistic harassment, and one of misogynistic behaviour. Misogynistic harassment can be described as behaviour, which is targeted at a specific woman or girl, while misogynistic behaviour isn't against a specific victim, but it may harm those that encounter it.

“...we absolutely understand that it's not just about legislation, it's about what happens once it passes, and the constant work across society to address the misogyny and cultural inequality that women face.”

Our Misogyny Conference

MHAIRI MACLENNAN, *Managing Director at Kyniska Advocacy and International GB Athlete*

Mhairi MacLennan is the Managing Director of Kyniska Advocacy, a non-profit who advocate, educate and offer support around stamping out sexual violence in sport through resources, campaigns, workshops and consulting. Mhairi is also an international GB athlete, specialising in 10k and cross country running. A survivor of abuse in sport, Mhairi's passion is to help evolve sport so that it is a safe and equitable place for women to participate. Her vision is for a world where women's sport is celebrated and respected in its own right, and where women can freely and fairly practise sports. Mhairi also sits on the UK Athletics Safeguarding Advisory Panel and is a Trustee at Scottish Women in Sport.



Our second speaker was Mhairi MacLennan, who discussed violence against women and girls and misogyny, linking this to her area of expertise – sport. Mhairi explained that she, and her co-founder Kate Seary, were increasingly frustrated by the lack of action to care for women athlete's welfare, contributing to a toxic culture across the sporting world. Despite the creation of their organisation, Kyniska Advocacy, Mhairi and Kate have experienced significant barriers, which she attributed to their age and gender, highlighting the misogyny and ageism engrained across decision-making processes. However, Mhairi stated that this has also worked in their favour, as they are able to work directly with athletes and have continuously spoken out against the consistent disadvantage women face across their lives.

“Being young co-founders is hard. We're too young, we're too inexperienced, or we're too outspoken. We're too often underestimated. And there have been times when our age and gender has been used against us”

In an attempt to tackle this disadvantage, the Kyniska Advocacy provide webinars and conferences to educate, alongside the creation of toolkits and campaigning. They work with parliamentarians and sport governing bodies to mould policy and procedure around the needs of sporting women, to encourage protection and respect. The Kyniska Advocacy also provide care networks for female athletes, offering advice and emotional support, while acting as a middle-woman between athletes and governing bodies.

Mhairi went on to give her views on the proposed law to criminalise misogyny, explaining that she believes it is a positive step, sending a message to perpetrators that this behaviour will no longer be tolerated in Scotland. However, she does emphasize that these measures require a broader approach, which encapsulate the misogynistic culture at the heart of our society. She believes that this could be achieved through improved education for all, with a wide-reaching awareness campaign and through schools

“For far too we've been tackling gender-based violence with reactive measures, but we need to tackle the culture that is leading to prevalent misogyny, that permeates the fabric of our society.”

“Educating the future generation on how to treat one another with respect and dignity, and evidence-based, lived experience awareness campaigns, must go hand in hand with this type of legislation.”

To clarify the value of policy changes, Mhairi highlighted that sport is a breeding ground for misogyny, due to the inherent nature of physical dominance associated with most sports. This is furthered by the constant objectification faced by athletes, with bodies being critiqued for how they perform and look, creating the perfect conditions for sexualisation and misogyny. Mhairi provided multiple examples of professional athletes, from Nastia Liukin to Gabby Douglas, who have experienced misogynistic comments at the hands of the media, the public and commentators. This clear misogyny has inevitable impacts on the safety and experiences of sporting professionals, with Mhairi quoting that 1 in 7 athletes will experience sexual violence in sport before the age of 18, with this jumping to 1 in 3 in elite sports.

These worrying statistics are worsened by the glaring issues across professional sport, with governing bodies in sport having self-regulatory systems in place, with a lack of supervision coming from UK Governments. She explained that by pushing for legislative change, organisations can have clear standards to work to and individuals could have clarity surrounding their rights and responsibilities.

“Objectification in sport is inherent...our performances and our bodies are inextricably linked, meaning that scrutinising...is commonplace, making the leap from legitimate comments...to misogynistic objectification and sexualisation that bit easier.”

“...national governing bodies are responsible for organising and regulating their own sport, and so this glaring and obvious conflict of interest only adds fuel to the fire.”

“Legislative change and government intervention provides a skeleton structure, a backbone to hold up cultural views and behaviours. It’s a standard setter and a bar to be guided by.”

To conclude, Mhairi again stated that it is imperative that work is done with wider society alongside these new laws, pointing to the ‘Don’t be that Guy’ campaign. She explains that while supporting movements such as this, the impact has to be measured, with the Instagram followers of the campaign being mostly women. Instead work has to be done within schools, with young boys, to understand why they replicate the behaviour seen in the generations before them. Mhairi goes on to suggest that boys and men are therefore essential actors in these conversations, and that we must encourage them to be allies, rather than place the blame at their feet

“So, how do we reach those that we desperately need to get onside...My mind would go to the universities, to the schools, catch them while they’re young. We need to go into sports clubs, go into these environments, meet them where they’re at.”

“...we haven’t equipped men, we can hate them...and say that it’s all their fault, but ultimately, we all have a collective responsibility to help lift them up to our high standards, or well, basic standards.”

"We're unapologetically telling the story straight, as it should be – that women are not on a level playing field in sport, or anywhere else in society."



Our Misogyny Conference

PAULINE MCNEILL, *Labour MSP for Glasgow (Region) and Current Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Justice.*

Pauline McNeill was President of the National Union of Students in Scotland and was subsequently an organiser for GMB Scotland, representing NHS workers, hospitality and factory staff amongst many others. An active member of the Labour Party since her time in the student movement, McNeill was also an executive committee



member of the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly and a committed campaigner for devolution throughout the 1980s and 1990s. During her first term as the MSP for Glasgow Kelvin, she graduated from Strathclyde Law School, after a period combining legislating and night school.

Our final speaker was Pauline McNeill, MSP, who gave an alternative parliamentary view on the value of the proposed law. Pauline stated that it is imperative that the legal framework is improved in Scotland to properly protect women and girls and is currently running with Katy Clark, MSP, (at time of writing), a consultation on this topic, entitled: 'How to Change the Future for Women and Girls'. To understand the experiences of women and girls in Scotland, Pauline has also been carrying out conversations around the country, finding that misogyny is endemic, resulting in disadvantage and violence

“Every aspect of women’s life, not just in Scotland or the UK, but across the world, is affected by misogyny”

Pauline went on to explain that misogyny has evolved to include online spaces, with smartphones facilitating consistent threats to women and girls. She stated that during her conversations with young women, she was disheartened to hear that many experienced pressure to share intimate pictures of themselves with men and boys, and that porn culture is prevalent across schools. These trends have caused confusion and worry for parents, which she accredited to a complete lack of Scottish-centric data surrounding this issue. Pauline did however, reference data from England, which highlighted a worrying trend of girls experiencing sexual harassment across their lives.

“The advent of smartphones and social media has made teenage girls feel pressured to send nude photographs....and it is alarming that boys as young as nine or ten are viewing online pornography, affecting how they view girls and their understanding of relationships.”

The issue is not just prevalent across schools. Misogyny also interacts with the criminal justice system, with Pauline stating that 68% of High Court cases are sexual offences, and that despite the blatant requirement for societal and legislative change, victims of sexual violence are waiting many months, some even years, to achieve justice. She clarified that this does not align with a trauma-informed approach, as victims are being continuously retraumatised through interviews and the lengthy court process.

With regards to the proposed misogyny law, Pauline explained that she supports change to the justice system which works to make life safer for women and girls. She did state however, that it is key the legislation created is usable by prosecutors and that the development of new law should be carefully considered. Furthermore, Pauline believes that cultural change is needed, but pointed to her conversations with young women, stating that they referred to themselves as feminists, perhaps proof of a small victory for the wider feminist movement.

“...we have to do our bit in Scotland to ensure that our laws are right. We have to stand up for women, we have to challenge misogyny when we see it, we have to come up with good law and...we must stare in the face of boys and men and assist them...changing the way they view women in their lives”

Women's Views

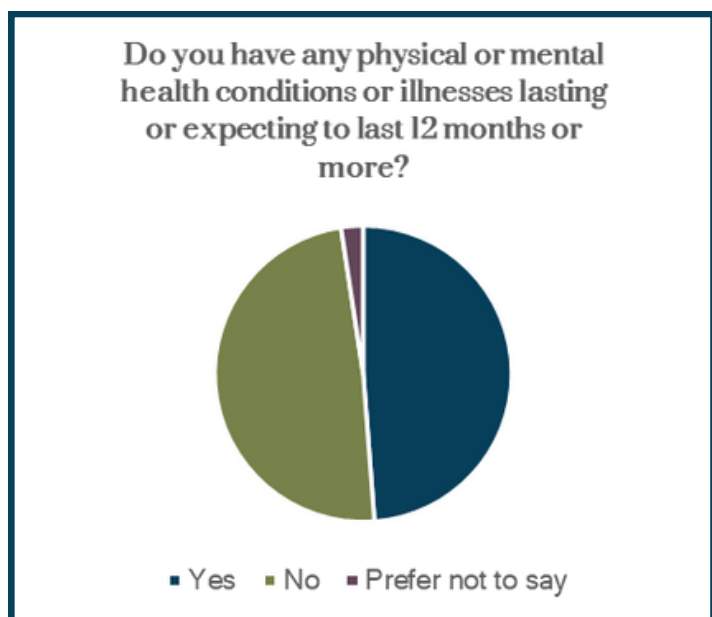
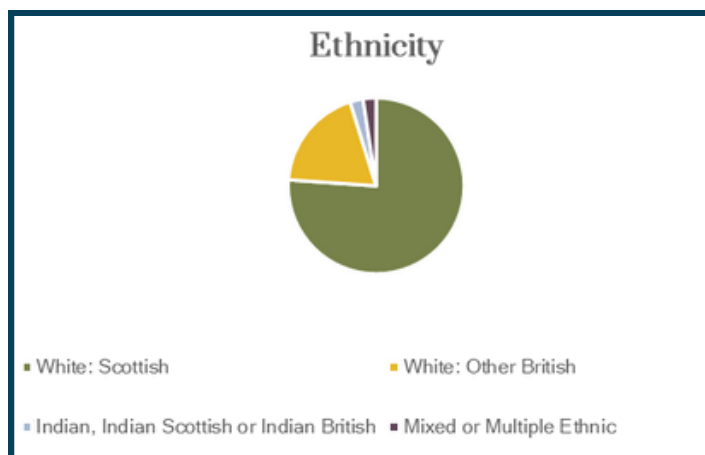
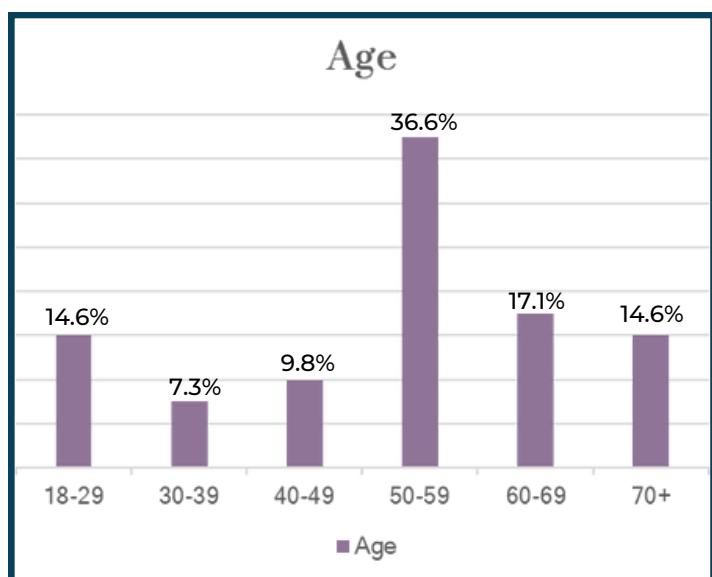
The following section is the culmination of multiple roundtables, our misogyny survey and our conference, and aims to highlight how women experience misogyny in Scotland. This section will open with women's views on the aforementioned misogyny law, asking whether women feel that this new law will reduce misogyny in Scotland.

We will then go on to discuss **four key topics: education, employment, online and, sport and exercise**. These were selected due to their continued occurrence throughout conversations with women and as they encapsulate significant areas of interest in women's lives.



Survey Demographics:

We spoke to women from a range of backgrounds in an attempt to create a representative picture, however, this in no way characterises all women in Scotland.



The Proposed Misogyny Law

Our discussions with women about the misogyny law were highly dictated by the questions included within the consultation surrounding the formation of new law. We asked women whether they supported the creation of new law and if they believed these changes would result in a reduction in misogyny in Scotland.

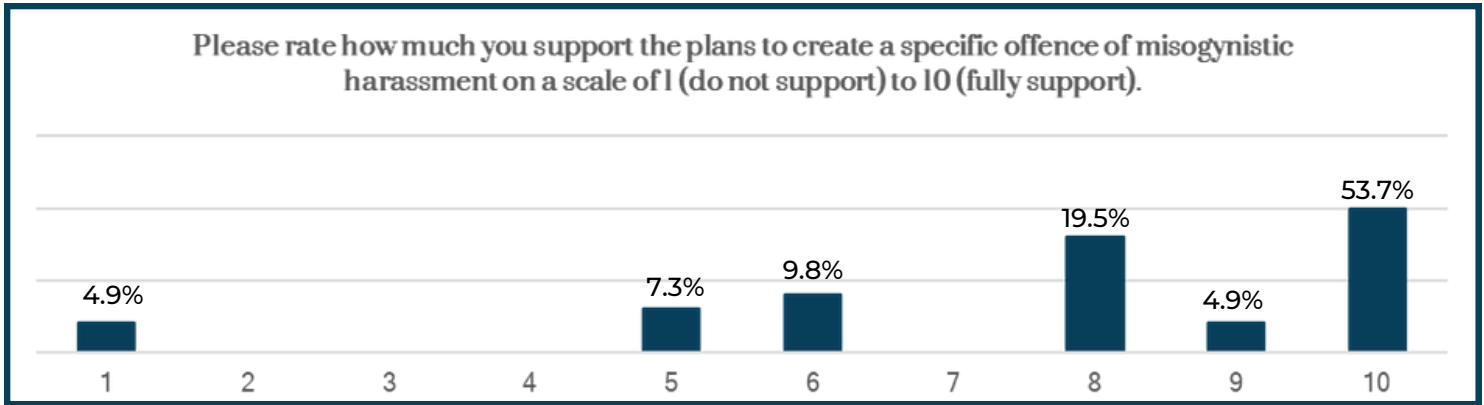


Figure 1

Do women support the new misogyny law?

As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of respondents to our misogyny survey fully supported the plans to create specific offences to deal with misogynistic harassment (53.7%). This aligns with women’s views during our roundtables and conference, where most women stated that they agreed something had to be done to reduce misogyny in Scotland. Some stated that these new laws would advertise to misogynists that misogyny will be taken more seriously, and that the more general approach taken – in that a specific victim is not always required – will go some way in tackling large-scale misogyny. Women were also relieved to see that online communications were included within the law, as the rise in online misogyny was of great concern. Women who were more sceptical around the proposed changes, cited that the current justice system does not adequately protect women, and as such, were unsure how increased powers for the police would work to reduce misogyny. They pointed to long waiting times for those seeking justice around sexually motivated crimes, and recent reports of engrained misogyny, racism and homophobia across police forces in the UK. The combination of these factors has resulted in a lack of trust between women and the justice system, and therefore, new law was not seen by some as sufficient in reducing misogyny.

Do women think the new laws will reduce misogyny in Scotland?

Figure 2 highlights that women were undecided whether the new law will reduce misogyny in Scotland, with 33.4% saying ‘yes’, 28.6% saying ‘no’ and 38% stating that they were ‘unsure’. This again aligned with women spoken with in-person at the conference and during roundtables, who were unsure that legislative change would be enough to prevent misogyny, and instead believed that a cultural shift, facilitated through improved education was necessary to pave the way for a less misogynistic Scotland. This education would need to be carried out in schools with young children, but also with those convicted of misogyny to prevent reoffending.

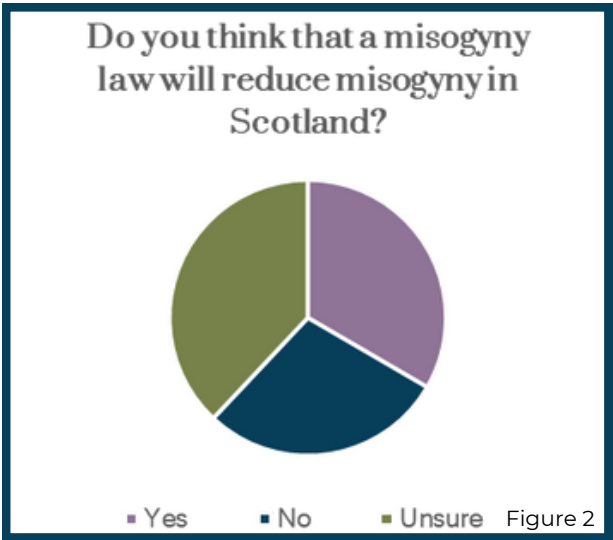


Figure 2

[You can view our full consultation response on the proposed misogyny law here.](#)

Education

Young women are consistently outperforming their male counterparts at school, making up 45.2% of those achieving an A grade at Higher in comparison to 37.2% of boys in 2022². Despite consistent good marks, girls are experiencing worrying levels of sexual harassment and misogyny while at school, with it becoming an unavoidable aspect of their schooling experience. We have heard reports of assault and sexist bullying, which has a significant impact on the emotional and physical wellbeing of young women in Scotland, resulting in young women less likely to participate in classroom debates. This has lasting impacts on young women's self-perception, with many feeling less confident to openly give their views or actively take part in society-wide discussions. Women have stated that the key issues across educational establishments which impact young women, from primary school to university, are sexual harassment, a lack of good quality sex and relationship education and judgments around appearance.

Sexual Harassment in Schools

“There was a stage at school, where the boys would...scoop your breasts and it was everywhere we turned, the teachers did nothing about it.”

When we spoke with women about their experiences of school and were concerned to hear of regular reports of sexual assault and harassment. This behaviour would be tied to sexual language and imagery, with boys regularly referring to girls as ‘sluts’, ‘slags’ and other derogatory terms. Young women stated that they believed this language was used to silence women, and as a way of controlling their sexuality. To worsen instances of sexual assault and harassment, young women stated that it was unusual for teachers or staff to condemn assaults or misogynistic language. Young women explained that this further silenced them, as they did not think it was likely their complaints would be taken seriously. In fact, it was even stated by one young woman that when she was assaulted on a school bus in front of a teacher, her reaction was deemed as warranting reprimanding rather than the original assault. It is therefore vital that sexual assault within high schools is further investigated so that the Scottish Government can grasp the enormity of the problem.

“When I was at school, it was even worse...I was sexually harassed and sometimes groped on a regular basis, my sister was raped, and the teachers started treating her like she was a slut.”

“A group of boys from school walking behind me, then one of them ran forwards and lifted up my skirt while the rest laughed.”

Uniforms and Appearance

“Uniform rules and how they were enforced was sexist.”

Young women stated that their appearance and clothing was another way in which misogynistic ideals are upheld. They stated that strict regulations surrounding uniform allowed teachers to be overtly sexist, with school rules being used as tools of control. This varied from skirts being mandatory to even the kind of bra a pupil was wearing being under scrutiny. As the below quote states, these regulations were justified through men and boys' feelings, with their concentration being placed above the comfort and choice of young women. Young women also stated that this obvious objectification led to feelings of self-consciousness which, when combined with continued pressure from wider media, resulted in issues surrounding their body image and self-confidence.

“School was obsessed with what we wore. At one point, they tried to ban push-up bras because it was making the male teachers ‘uncomfortable’.”

“...you were shamed for wearing bras to support you, and the colour of them. Or the girls were publicly reprimanded for wearing some make-up and told to wipe it off

²SQA. (2022). Official Statistics: Attainment Statistics – December 2022. Available at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/attainment-statistics-december-2022-summary.pdf

University/College Education

“...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.”

As well as secondary school, women stated that misogyny continues into university and college education. They gave reports of openly misogynistic educators, particularly within STEM subjects, where a culture of misogyny was continually propagated by a powerful few. Fighting these mentalities was emotionally draining for women, with some actively disengaging with education, lowering their opportunities for advancement. Furthermore, it was felt that the onus to remove these attitudes was placed on women, with their being an emphasis on ‘proving themselves’ to their male colleagues. On occasion, women stated that despite their attempts, men were unfriendly and offensive, which was labelled as bullying techniques to silence women from participating in classes. Another major issue across higher education establishments was the prevalence of sexual assault, with the university campus lifestyle tolerating such behaviour. Young women proposed that a rape culture has become the norm and that current reporting guidelines are sub-par, putting the safety of women at risk.

“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.”

“I think the problem with universities...is that lack of reporting policies and procedures.”

Sex and Relationship Education

“...if there was a law, and that was taught in schools, and about consent, and about how to treat women with respect. It’s about making sure that boys see it as a serious issue”

Women in general believed that the key to reducing misogyny in education was comprehensive sex and relationship education. They explained that current offerings are simply not good enough across Scottish schools, as they lack up-to-date information around online platforms. Women felt that this is resulting in young men entering the online world with poor knowledge, becoming victim to dangerous online influencers where attractive, materialistic lifestyles, paid for through women’s continued subjugation, are seen as ‘cool’. Boys are also engaging with online pornography from young ages, skewing their views on relationships and sex. Currently, porn is not included within relationship education, however some women believed that including it would have a significant impact in reducing sexist ideals from prevailing.

“Our nine and ten year olds sons know about Andrew Tate, they’re already starting that programming, it needs to be younger, it needs to be infiltrated across the board.”

Women also felt that the poor sex education in Scotland has caused the issue of misogyny to become more prevalent, with young men absorbing wider messaging which comes from media and familial influences. This misogyny unfortunately can have violent results, as well as contribute to structural issues across all areas of life, as stressed in the following sections. Through good sex and relationship education, the Scottish education system can effectively fight the worrying influence of misogyny to create a Scotland that works for all individuals. However, women have also explained that these changes must be accompanied by specialist trainers, with classroom teachers currently lack the resourcing to provide it.

...you know, boys drawing penises on buses? These are boys at like 11...it starts really young, this idea that they can expose themselves...that’s where the education comes in”

“Another part of it is about teacher training...they don’t have the resources...they don’t have the tools to deal with this”

Employment

Structural inequality exists across all levels of the workplace for women, with women earning 11.6% less than men in median hourly earnings in Scotland, in 2021³, and are also more likely to work part-time, with Close the Gap reporting that 76% of all part-time workers in the same year in Scotland were women.⁴

Women have cited a lack of opportunity, alongside poor family-friendly policies and inflexible working conditions as continued barriers to their activity across the workplace. When these factors are combined with continued societal pressure to retain women within unpaid domestic labour, they are left with little to no manoeuvrability to improve their economic welfare. It can be said that this structural inequality is highly influenced by misogynistic behaviour and ideals, which consistently undervalue and downplay women. How this misogyny impacts women's working lives is highlighted below, with it becoming clear from our conversations with women that they feel that there is a prevalent 'boys' club' across workplaces, which encourages themes of sexual inference and harassment, alongside limited opportunities and gendered roles.

Boys' Club

"I think what's still really prevalent is the boys' club in workplaces. I work in politics and it's notoriously a space where men converse over their pints, and that's where decisions are made"

The concept of a boys' club came up regularly in our discussions with women, with some stating that they were left out of decision-making and struggled to be taken seriously as professionals. Women explained that this boys' club mentality also reared itself when women asked for reasonable adjustments to be made to cater to period pain, the menopause and childcare. These issues were viewed as unimportant by male colleagues, and women felt that they were pressured to alter their lifestyle to cater to such needs. However, some felt that when men were unwell or helping with caring responsibilities, they were heralded as inspirational figures within the workplace. Due to this culture, women highlighted that misogynistic behaviours were then carried out by some women in positions of power. It was theorised that this was a 'self-preservation' tactic and as a way of assimilating with their male co-workers.

"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."

"I worked in a boys' club and...women bosses...absolutely have to conform, or well some of them conform to get up the ranks, and they just put out all those bad behaviours."

Sexual Harassment

"In my previous workplace I was subjected to sexual 'jokes' and harassment...there was constant locker room chat"

Unfortunately, women also recounted experiences of sexual harassment and innuendo within the workplace, from both fellow employees, management and members of the public. The aforementioned boys' club integrates with sexual harassment, with inappropriate touching and comments referred to as 'jokes'. Women have explained that these 'jokes' tend to play an important social role across workplaces, acting as a unifying factor for men to belittle women, while simultaneously singling out women who 'aren't game'.

³UK Government. (2021). Gender Pay Gap Reporting. Available at: <https://www.deliveringforscotland.gov.uk/business/gender-pay-gap-reporting/>

⁴Close the Gap. (2021). Statistics: The Pay Gap. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/gap-statistics/#:~:text=42%25%20of%20women%20employed%20in%20Scotland%20work%20part-time,for%2076%25%20of%20all%20part-time%20workers%20in%20Scotland.>

Those who do call out such behaviour are then more likely to experience concerted bullying and can be excluded from social and professional activities. Furthermore, this behaviour causes women significant distress at work, with some choosing to leave workplaces rather than report inappropriate behaviour, as they feel it is unlikely there will be appropriate consequences. It is also important to highlight that this behaviour was not always directly towards an individual woman, and instead would be more general, or about women outside of the workplace. This inappropriate and sexist language made an uncomfortable environment for women, contributing to an overall misogynistic culture across the Scottish workplace.

"There was always inappropriate touching, derogatory comments about what I was wearing, the use of degrading vocabulary. When I challenged it, it was "just a joke"."

"I've had male customers flirting, leering or calling me condescending or inappropriate pet names, and it's never taken seriously by colleagues."

"...I was having my lunch...and one of the male team members walks in...he was showing something on his phone screen, flicking through pages and saying, "Banged her, banged her, nearly banged her, might bang her"."

Gendered Roles

"I've been asked to make the tea or other domestic duties despite my senior role in the organisation."

A further misogynistic behaviour experienced by women in the workplace was the perseverance of gendered roles. These roles were placed upon women either through unspoken behaviour or direct comments from male colleagues. Women were expected to carry out administrative tasks or chores, such as making teas and coffees, as well as providing emotional support for other employees. One woman likened this to being the workplace 'mum', with younger men assuming that she would care for them and their belongings. The domestic duties placed upon women highlights a continued expectation that women should remain within the private sphere of home, and women regularly experienced scenarios which pushed this agenda. The prevalence of these traditional roles across professional workplaces disadvantages women, as they are not taken seriously within work and have less time to concentrate on their own workload. It was felt that this has had serious implications for women, and rather than being a 'few bad eggs', it is a structural issue that requires large-scale solutions.

"There's an expectation that if an administrative task arrives in our team of professionals, one of the women will do it."

"I receive multiple emails addressed to 'dear sir', which frustrates me."

Lack of Promotion

"I applied for a promoted post...and was not successful because the interviewing manager...openly told me that he did not think a woman could do the job, and especially not a younger woman."

The combination of the above components, the evidence of engrained misogyny, results in a lack of opportunity and promotion for women. Those we have spoken with discussed continued disadvantage and a total lack of consideration for their ability. Despite being rampant in male-dominated industries, it was also evidenced in women-led sectors, hinting at a widespread issue. Women also witnessed other women being overlooked for promotion, and stated experience and ability didn't seem to factor into decision-making. It can therefore be stated that the current situation across workplaces in Scotland is dire for women, with a misogynistic mentality dictating women's professional development and economic circumstance.

"I wasn't deemed as capable as my male peers and was never put up for promotions."

"You always see men being promoted above women, despite the fact that I work in a female dominated field."

Online

It is hard to ignore the impact that the online sphere has had on women's lives in Scotland, with the meteoric rise of social media companies over the past ten years changing how we share information, maintain relationships, how we are educated and our work habits. However, despite the many advantages of technological advancement, the web has become a 'wild west' of ideas and behaviours, with misogynistic content being integral to this. Glitch and End Violence Against Women (EVAW) carried out a study focusing on online abuse against women during the Covid-19 pandemic, finding that 46% of respondents had experienced online abuse during the pandemic, with this figure increasing to 50% for black and minority women⁵. From our conversations with women, we are saddened to say that these figures are not surprising, with many experiencing direct online abuse, particularly on Twitter and from a growing 'incel' movement. This behaviour resulted in women feeling unsafe online, driving them to withdraw their participation, however, due to the increasingly online nature of our lives, it is unlikely that this is a suitable response, meaning that more must be done to make significant change for women and girls.

Online Abuse

"I feel that I'm more careful than ever, especially Twitter, which doesn't feel like a safe space for women at the moment...I often observe things being posted...it's so hideous."

As stated above, women explained to us that they had experienced or witnessed online abuse regularly. When we asked women if they believed online misogyny was a major issue in Scotland, 61.9% felt that it was (Figure 3). This abuse ranged from physical threats of violence to sexually explicit comments. The abuse appeared to be more prevalent amongst younger women, with the combination of in-person bullying with online elements, creating particularly difficult conditions for girls. This online abuse quickly becomes sexual in nature, with explicit photos being shared, contributing to a wider porn culture and shame surrounding women's sexuality. It is key to

Do you believe online misogyny
is a major issue in Scotland?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure ■ Prefer not to say

Figure 3

highlight that despite men being the most common culprits, women experienced it from other women, with the anonymity and screen providing protection for those carrying out harassment.

"I've had men commenting on feminist posts that I've shared with nasty, vicious remarks."

"Our school had a 'slags page' on Instagram, where photos of girls nearly naked...would be posted with their name in the caption."

"...if you talk about women's equality...random men, or sometimes women, will just respond with extreme sexism."

Incels

"Incel culture is becoming more prevalent, and I believe that all women, regardless of how they identify, are in more danger now than ever."

A surprising development during discussions with women was the regular use of the phrase 'incels'. The word incel was originally coined by a female student in Canada to reference 'involuntary celibacy' on an online forum.

⁵ Glitch and EVAW. (2020). The Ripple Effect: Covid-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse. Available at: <https://glitchcharity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Glitch-The-Ripple-Effect-Report-COVID-19-online-abuse.pdf>

She had hoped this provide a support space for those struggling to meet sexual partners⁶. However, the phrase is now widely associated with a sub-group of extremely misogynistic men, who encourage violence against women and girls, alongside a return to traditional gender roles. Women in Scotland are concerned with the rise in this group, with their behaviour becoming more overt, and due to recent changes at Twitter, rather than remaining within the dark recesses of the web, the likelihood of women experiencing this abuse is increasing. The surge of incel mentalities has also been accounted to influencers such as Andrew Tate, with women expressing deep concern about their sons engaging with this content. This content shows a glamorous, materialistic lifestyle, which young boys aspire to, while simultaneously pushing rigid masculinity and gender roles. As a result, women hold serious concern over the regulation of influencers and misogynistic content that they share.

"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."

"...you see it rife on forums like Twitter, Reddit, etc...the rise of incel culture and misogynistic podcasters and presenters pushing misogynistic tropes, like Piers Morgan, Andrew Tate, etc."

Withdrawn Participation

"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."

Due to an increase in online abuse, women and girls have felt little choice but to self-exclude from online sites. Those women we spoke with who had left social media platforms, explained that it was Twitter where they had experienced the highest level of abuse, and so, no longer had an account or tweeted. The result of this, is that online spaces which were already breeding grounds for misogyny, are becoming increasingly toxic and unfriendly for women and girls. Furthermore, due to the technologically led times we live in, it is unlikely women's removal from these spaces will slow the rate at which social media platforms are growing. Women highlighted that it is more difficult to not have an online presence, either through the constant pressure to have social media accounts to stay in contact with friends or to keep track of goings-on at community centres and schools. It is therefore key, that women are not discouraged from using social media, but instead the platforms are increasingly controlled.

"I deliberately don't have a social presence on Twitter to avoid abuse"

"...I actually self-censor and don't give my opinion online as I don't want to open myself up to abuse."

Increased Control and Legislation

"...it's totally unpoliced, not controlled, not regulated, so yeah, I absolutely think there should be consequences for what people say when they're being a keyboard wizard"

Women were in general agreement of how online misogyny could be reduced: increased control and legislation for big tech companies. It was consistently stated that they felt that current reporting procedures were inadequate, and that anonymous accounts made this more difficult. Women also explained that although it is unlikely to be actioned due to the powerful force that is social media, they felt that the UK Governments had to enforce safeguarding practice, with fines being the most appropriate way in which to do this. Some also stated that any legislation put in place had to remain dynamic, so that it was future proofed against new technologies.

"you have to go through all these steps, and I don't think it [reporting] is easy all round."

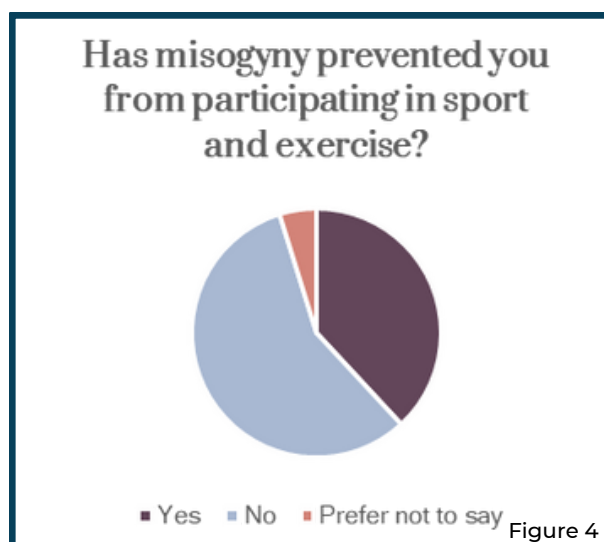
"I think the fact that it's anonymous...they don't have to face up to the consequences."

⁶ Bates, L. (2020). Men Who Hate Women: From Incels to Pick-up Artists, the Truth about Extreme Misogyny and How it Affects Us All. London: Simon & Schuster UK.

Sport and Exercise

During the last months of 2022, we held roundtables focusing on the topics of education and sport as a result of Scottish Government⁷ and Scottish Parliament⁸ consultations. During these conversations it became apparent that misogyny was a significant aspect of sport for most women; our recent misogyny survey found that 38.1% of respondents had been prevented from participating in sport and exercise due to misogyny (Figure 4). On further investigation it is clear that misogyny is a pervasive entity across all sport, from professional sport to PE lessons. The result of the continued tolerance of misogynistic behaviour has ultimately violent consequences, with the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment being consistent across sporting arenas. As stated above, our conference speaker Mhairi MacLennan,

from the Kyniska Advocacy, quoted the figure of 1 in 3 elite athletes experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. Furthermore, STV highlighted that despite these figures, only 1 of 42 SPFL teams have specific sexual misconduct policies in place⁹. It is, therefore, imperative to understand women's lived experience of sport and how it interlinks with misogyny through objectification, a lack of facilities and professional sporting bodies.



Objectification

“...years ago, when I was competing...guys would line up to make comments and say things, coaches would make inappropriate comments...and there was some touching”

Women explained that they regularly suffered from objectification and overt sexualisation when taking part in sport and exercise. This was experienced from a young age, with comments made during PE at high school having long-lasting impacts into adulthood. When this was coupled with continued comments made at gyms, and in public places, while running or cycling, some women were reluctant to take part in physical exercise. Fundamentally, exercise is a key aspect of a healthy lifestyle, with the NHS stating that it is major in reducing an individual's risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer¹⁰. The Women's Health Plan has outlined that women's coronary health is a key target, with women less likely than men to be given sufficient medical treatment for their heart health.¹¹ It is therefore concerning that women are being prevented from taking part in exercise due to factors out with their control, significantly impacting their overall health and wellbeing.

“...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've been yelled at while cycling, things like ‘enjoying the ride darling?’.”

“I used to attend the gym but due to sexual comments I stopped attending.”

It was also argued by some women that this behaviour was carried out to actively discourage women from taking part in public life, and to ultimately silence women through the use of fear tactics. Women also believed that this was seen in the media, with high-profile sporting stars, such as Serena Williams and the English Lionesses, facing significant scrutiny over their appearance and views.

⁷Scottish Government. (2022). National Discussion on Scottish Education Survey. Available at: <https://consult.gov.scot/learning-directorate/national-discussion-on-education/>

⁸Scottish Parliament. (2022). Inquiry into Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity. Available at: <https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/femaleparticipation/>

⁹STV News. (2023). Only Four Scottish Football Clubs Show Sexual Misconduct Policy Proof. Available at: <https://news.stv.tv/sport/only-four-professional-scottish-football-clubs-show-evidence-of-sexual-misconduct-policy>

¹⁰NHS. (2023). Benefits of Exercise. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-health-benefits/>

¹¹Scottish Government. (2021). Women's Health Plan: A Plan for 2021-24. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2021/08/womens-health-plan/documents/womens-health-plan-plan-2021-2024/womens-health-plan-plan-2021-2024/govscot%3Adocument/womens-health-plan-plan-2021-2024.pdf>

Some felt that the continued policing of women in the public and private spheres resulted in a reduction in women's voices across the sporting narrative. Therefore, major work has to be done to reduce the continual objectification of women across sports and public areas, to increase participation and health.

"I mean yeah, that female tennis player that was told she was too ugly to be a professional. She's a good athlete, shut up."

"It's the same with the lionesses and the fact they're allowed to wear shorts...why are we feminising women even when they're doing sport"

Lack of Facilities

"...talking about facilities, sometimes there weren't toilets at games, and if I was on my period, I couldn't change my tampon or whatever."

A further barrier to women's participation in sport was the consistent lack of facilities for women and girls within sporting clubs and schools. We were told of many women's exercise experiences where they were unable to use utilities due to a lack of infrastructure. This issue is the result of a continued underfunding of community groups, preventing local sports teams from making necessary changes to incorporate women and girls properly. The lack of funds for these groups is related to harsh local government budget cuts, but also an historical absence of support for women and girls in this area which can be traced to long-standing misogyny. Women also went on to explain that these budgetary decisions were apparent at professional levels, with women and girls teams' being more likely to be dropped than the men's teams.

"I play for a football club, and our changing room facilities are nowhere near as good as the men's."

"...we're still in a place where, those that are seen as female sports, don't get the same investment from the councils and things, and there aren't the same facilities available."

The Role of Professional Sports Clubs

"In sport, misogyny is so pervasive from top to bottom, almost every sport is run by men, whether that's the admin side or the coaching...and whether you're looking at participation of women or sexual harassment, they do not value it"

Professional clubs and athletes came up throughout conversations around sport, with the consensus largely being that not enough is being done by prominent players to prevent misogyny and violence in sport. Women with experience of the professional sporting world highlighted a misogynistic culture that has been engrained by an unchecked boys' club approach. This has made elements of the sporting world incredibly toxic for women and girls, including reporting misogynistic behaviour and/or sexual harassment, with women stating they were unsure that their claims would be taken seriously. As stated above, the lack of funding for women's sports also has unspoken consequences, with the women's game being seen as less valuable than the equivalent men's game. It is therefore the responsibility of large sporting associations to work to reduce misogynistic behaviour within their sports, and to begin to properly value women's contributions.

"....in the team I play for, we've got doctors, lawyers, people with full-time jobs...And it's like, why aren't we there yet? Why aren't women getting paid the same level as the men? And well, there's arguments that that's because women aren't as good. But I'm sorry, women's football is phenomenal."

"...it goes all the way through, it's the value we put on women. There was that thing recently on the news about rugby clubs that stopped funding their female team because they were short of cash, and so who are you funding between the men and the women?"

Thank You!

The Scottish Women's Convention would like to thank all of those who attended our conference and roundtables, as well as those who completed our misogyny survey, to provide their lived experience. We would also like to thank our conference speakers for providing their wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as brilliantly contributing to the broader discussion.

SWC CONTACT DETAILS

2nd Floor, The Albany Centre
44 Ashley Street, Glasgow
G3 6DS

Tel: 0141 339 4797

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Facebook, Instagram & Twitter: @SWCWomen



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