



New research highlights the challenges entrenched into the daily lives of UK girls

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Sand art by Plan International UK Girls Won't Be Further Ahead in Time

One in five girls say they first experienced unwanted physical or sexual harassment before age 12. That's the finding of new research from girls' rights charity Plan International UK.

It sits alongside [another recent report](#) which focussed on the pervasive impact of [online misogyny](#)

Opinium Research polled 1,000 nationally representative girls and women in the UK aged 16-24. The findings highlight the vast majority (87%) have received unwanted comments about their appearance, such as catcalling and intrusive remarks.

As a result, many young women say they are adapting their behaviour, with nearly three in five (58%) saying they change how they dress in order to feel safe when they are out in public.

UK girls and young women face hidden inequalities

The alarming findings come as [Plan International UK launches its new campaign, The Fine Print](#) which highlights the hidden inequalities and expectations girls and young women face.

As part of the campaign, the charity is unveiling a giant clothesline created in collaboration with artist Annie Frost Nicholson: oversized clothing hanging from a monumental washing line above the Thames, with each garment symbolising the inequalities stitched into girls' lives.

Plan International UK previously commissioned a sand artwork on Blackpool beach, illustrating the lack of progress on gender equality.

Ealaf, 17, member of Plan International's Youth Advisory Panel, said:

I first was followed by a boy at the age of 10. And because he was one of my peers it wasn't taken very seriously unfortunately. I honestly can't remember a time where I did not experience unwanted comments about my appearance, which is really disheartening to look back on my experiences, especially at institutions like school.

I study 'Women in Literature' for my A-Level topic and a lot of the themes that come up from texts from over 200 years ago aren't too dissimilar from what I experience or see today!

The rise of far-right and anti-female rhetoric has actually begun to scare me in terms of the accomplishment for gender equality. It is really disheartening to see when so much work has been put into achieving so many of the freedoms we as women have begun to achieve today.

Girls surveyed also cited the 'unwritten rules' they are being expected to accept, including:

- Being polite or likable and conflict (54%).
- Being more mature than boys (46%).
- Accepting unwanted comments or behaviour as 'normal' (46%).

Concern is also hitting across generations. Nearly two-thirds (67%) of parents say they are worried about raising a daughter in today's climate, pointing to wider anxieties about safety, equality, and the environment girls are growing up in.

Rose Caldwell, CEO at Plan International UK, said:

Girls are often told that gender equality has been achieved, or even gone too far. Today's findings tell a very different story, exposing the daily reality of inequality that girls and young women still face.

What is particularly concerning is how normalised this has become. Many girls told us harassment begins as early as primary school, which shapes how they dress, behave and move through the world from a young age.

There has been important progress, including the criminalisation of public sexual harassment which came into force this year after years of campaigning. But far more must be done to protect girls and young women, particularly from online harm.

Against a backdrop of political uncertainty, we are facing a perfect storm that threatens to stall, or even reverse, hard-won gains. Together we can change the conditions girls are born into. It's time to take gender inequality seriously and ensure we don't lose the progress that has already been made.

Challenges facing UK girls and young women are impacting attitudes towards the future, with more than half (56%) aged 16-24 saying they do not believe gender equality will arrive in their lifetime. One in five also say they feel they have had to lower their ambitions because of their gender.

Featured image via Christopher Furlong / Getty Images

By [The Canary](#)

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