



# INVESTIGATES:

## THE TROUBLE WITH... SEX IN SCHOOLS



# Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools.

*In Support of The Women & Equalities Committee*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our research with young people aged over 16 has found that sexualised behaviour is the new social norm in young people's daily lives and adults and institutions need to 'face up to it'.

In school corridors and playgrounds, sexually charged behaviour drives young people's physical interactions and permeates through to their 24-hour-a-day life online.

They're feeling pressurised into having sex otherwise they're branded 'frigid' by their peers; there is a sense that boys have an 'entitlement' to girls and some report being 'bullied for being a virgin.'

Young people told us that 'sexting', the sharing of sexualised images, is common-place. As long as it remains a private exchange and is not entered into before they are ready, young people do not question sexting as being part of a safe, healthy relationship.

Problems occur, they report, where they feel pushed into sending a sexual image too early in a relationship or when they're too young - or the image gets into the wrong hands and is used against them.

That can escalate to bullying – in the physical and digital world – and blackmail, dropping out of school and suicidal thoughts.

Such actions are invariably dismissed amongst young people 'as banter' and the consequences as having been 'brought on themselves'.



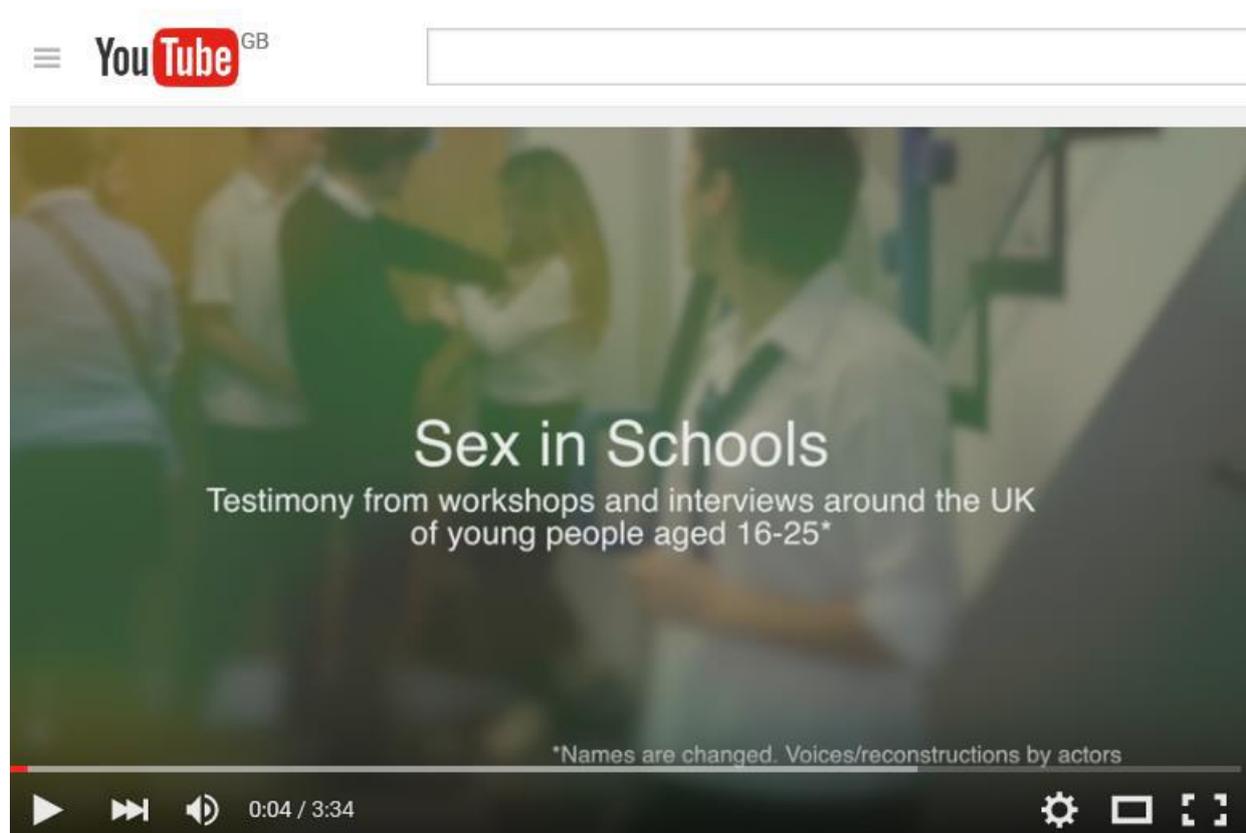
YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFY THEIR OWN PROBLEMS	YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFY THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS
<p>Exposure to 24 hour-a-day traditional and digital media has taught young people new sexual attitudes - 'sex with randoms is the norm'. It acts as a vehicle to spread sexual content, bullying and harassment and 'reinstalls' pornographic images on their brains daily without them even seeking them out.</p>	<p>They do not see the media landscape changing and say mind-sets need to be tackled to help them all cope with the pressures they are under and make better decisions about what they do and how they behave towards and with other young people.</p>
<p>They say their self-worth, self-respect and mental and emotional wellbeing are inextricably linked with sexual attitudes and the decisions and mistakes they make when it comes to matters of sex. Sex education is too simplistic and does not sufficiently explore different sexualities and genders. Being one-dimensional, sex education fosters 'lad culture and banter behaviour' and a sense of boys being 'entitled' to girls.</p>	<p>What would help them in schools, they say, is for earlier, more detailed and more wide ranging sex education to include the consequences of sexting, matters of consent and risk – for example drugs and alcohol – what constitutes a healthy relationship, sexual pleasure for men and women, gender and sexuality differences.</p>
<p>Young people are concerned that schools do not see their part to play in recognising the pressures they're under when dealing with matters of bullying and harassment in sexual contexts and they report that teachers can brush off incidents of sexual assaults or sexually threatening behaviour because of their relatively young age. Many incidents, they say, go unreported because they are worried about repercussions and victims being punished as well as perpetrators.</p>	<p>They acknowledge these issues can be hard for teachers to discuss with students and hard for students to raise with teachers. They suggest attitudes could be improved and self-respect strengthened if they could have two-way conversations with people with experiences to share and learn from. Young people would like to have a counsellor in schools to turn to when they need help dealing with the fall out of sexual threats and sexually aggressive behaviour. They would like to be personally equipped with more empathy and skills to understand why people might feel pressured into sexual behaviour and how to have a conversation about it.</p>

In support of the proposed inquiry into sexual harassment and violence in schools, Fixers has

- a) Sought and gathered relevant evidence from school and college students aged 16 and above across the UK to help scope the Committee's terms of reference;
- b) Drafted this report on relevant evidence for the Committee's consideration;
- c) Created a new short film with relevant young voices to support the launch of the inquiry alongside a digital media campaign to encourage young people to directly engage in the inquiry.

Through using Fixer's unique model of collaborative workshops we have brought together 300 young people to explore and share experiences and practical solutions around the issues of sexual harassment and violence in schools.

This report summarises the findings from nine workshops held in Croydon, Castleford, Plymouth, Newcastle, Newport, Liverpool, Southampton, Birmingham and Stirling. Four more are to follow in April 2016.



As well as this report, evidence is articulated in this film [‘Sex in Schools’](#) to help raise awareness and support a ‘call for evidence’.

We asked young people what is happening in schools in relation to sexting, sexualised behaviour and sexual assaults, what has been the response, what would help them and what would enhance their wellbeing?

One in four (27%) confided they had felt pressured into sexting, sexual activity, drinking alcohol and taking drugs, including so called ‘legal highs’ in and around school.

Some 18% reported being sexually harassed once or more than once and 34% did not feel safe walking to and from school. Some 12% stated they had been sexually assaulted.

While 74% felt physically safe in class, only 27% felt emotionally safe in class.

Elsewhere in school, for example in canteens, corridors and common rooms, 67% felt physically safe while 28% felt emotionally safe.

Of those who took part in the sample survey (118 respondents), 17% said there were no adults they could turn to at school when they had a problem, 27% had one person, 36% had two or three and 20% had more than three.

In addition, more than a third (37%) said students did not treat each other with respect.

Just over half (58%) were concerned that teachers did not understand the pressures of life outside of school and a third (34%) had caring responsibilities at home.

Some 32% stated they could not get emotional or practical support when they needed it.

The majority (59%) said they would be happier at school if they had more one-to-one support from teachers.

Combined with geographical spread, there was a natural mix of gender and ages of young people from 16 upwards, from all backgrounds. Some existing Fixers, who may be aged up to 25, participated to reflect back on their own experiences and support conversations with other young people, providing context and peer-led discussions facilitated appropriately.

This report is a summary of what they had to say. **(All names have been changed.)**

## SEX IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD



Young people who took part in the workshops said that they were under ‘massive pressure’ to have sex and behave in a sexualised way from 12 and sometimes younger.

“I got bullied for still being a virgin.” Natasha, 18.

“Lad culture is a big issue; it is really common. In my school lads would come up to girls and grab their ass, try and push them into the changing rooms and stuff and then say don’t get upset it’s just banter.” Gemma, 22.

“Boys would come up behind you, they’d try and grope you, they’d ping your bra. I had a few incidents of people undoing my bra and I was NOT happy about it!!” Rachel, 17.

“Undoing a girls bra...that happened, but I don’t think the girls went to the teachers about it.” Peter, 18.

## SEX IN THE DIGITAL WORLD



“There are two sides to being online. For one, the world we live in where it’s cool to lose your virginity. The other, where it’s all anonymous, it’s a perfect platform for bullies to start saying you’ve done stuff, sexual stuff, when you haven’t. Like slept with 20 men and you’re a slut.” Charlotte, 17.

“A girl in my school, she took pictures [intimate pictures] and sent them to a guy. He sent them to the whole school. Facebook was really hard for her. She was in my year and I could see she was having a tough time. I received the picture and I deleted it straight away. The headmaster got involved. At the time you think it will go on forever. But it did stop. I was interested to understand why the girl did it, so I asked her. She said she had learned from her mistake and that it wasn’t peer pressure, it was just that everyone was doing it. She thought it would make him love her.” Laura, 20.

“There were ‘dirt dishers’ in my school. An anonymous person who would use social media to spread malicious lies about pupils. It was very difficult to identify who was doing it but people would take time off school because of the lies about them online.” Samantha, 16.

“In year 9 one of the girls sent a naked picture to someone else and it got sent around the whole school.” Charley, 17.

## WHERE TWO WORLDS COLLIDE - PHYSICAL MEETS DIGITAL



“Everything you see on social media is reinforcing the worst things about lad culture. Pictures of women like porn stars with slogans like ‘what every lad wants his girl to look like’. So people do that, act like

that. My friend wanted his girlfriend to dress like a porn star and do what a porn star would do. Porn is so easily accessible. You see guys watching it in the classroom on their phones; on the bus.” Tom, 17.

“I know a girl who got raped and then got bullied online,” Claire, 17.

“You get called names, it starts in school, spreads to social media. Bullies end up hurting you physically too. There’s no rest. Bad jokes, vulgar language.” Beth, 17.

“Some people make mistakes and sleep around. They get called slags and sluts. They pay for it online. Sometimes for the rest of their life. One person finds out and they spread it. People need to be careful about what they do. Everything crosses from the real world onto online stuff. Bullying especially.” Callum, 16.

“People should be taught that everyone is different; it’s ok if you want to have sex and post pictures of yourself but if you don’t feel ready to do that it’s ok, it’s just that you are young and immature.” Lucy, 17.

“In year eight I went round to my friend’s house. At this stage I had not even had my first kiss yet. Things ended up happening on a web cam, which were recorded, and got into school. I felt disgusted with myself.” Grace, 22.



## PROBLEMS

### 1. MEDIA: ATTITUDES, PRESSURE, HARASSMENT

Young people told us that exposure to 24 hour-a-day media has created new sexual attitudes - ‘sex with randoms is the norm’. It acts as a vehicle to spread sexual content, bullying and harassment and ‘reinstalls’ pornographic images on their brains daily without them even seeking them out.

#### Attitudes

“Underage sex is just seen as the norm. Programmes like Geordie Shore are making sex with randoms just seem normal.” Becky, 16.

“Kids get curious, and there is no warning in porn videos online that this is not real. I personally went searching and looking on the internet for sexually explicit stuff at school as any kid did.” Stacey, 22.

“Girls think they need to look perfect, like models we see in the media, even though we know it’s not achievable. Boys think they have to look like and act like porn stars too. There’s a pressure on them too. The exposure we have to media in general is causing the rise in everyone thinking about sex today in a different way. It’s not like you even have to go looking for porn to be influenced. You only have to scroll through Facebook to see these quotes telling you ‘what every lad wants...’ It’s just there, whether you click on it or not. It gets reinstalled in your mind every time you scroll past it.” Lucy, 17.

“What we see in the media makes us more sadistic, or at least some people. They see things and believe they can get pleasure from hurting people. They genuinely enjoy it. So they are unlikely to change.” Matthew, 16.

“My view of being a woman was so warped I kind of felt like I just had to accept it and give men what they want. At school I should have been taught about sex and relationships but obviously algebra was way more important.” Keira, 25.

“I was down a skate park and there was this 13 year old lad saying ‘aw, look at this photo my girlfriend just sent me’ and I saw it and I was like ‘what?!’ It shocked me. 13?!” Nathan, 18.



## Pressure

“Lad culture is a massive problem at university, but I think it is starting in schools. It starts with sexting and that’s about peer pressure and exposure to pornography online. Then there’s all the social media sites like the Lad Bible and ‘Spotted in...’. Spotted in encourages people to comment – good and bad – about others without knowing them. It can be quite comical. But it’s this culture of feeling like you can say what you like about people online. It translates into the real world too.” Linda, 22.

“I think sexting is about peer pressure. Nobody wants to send a photo of themselves. They feel they should. They’re seeking love, not thinking about how unprotected you are when you send sexting pictures. They’re trying to fit in.” Martina, 25.

“There are things called lad points. Lad points are when lads give themselves points for sleeping or getting with girls. The more disgusting the thing is the more lad points they get. I think people just have sex and that just to feel cool and fit in with their friends.” Cate, 17.

“If you were to go on a night out and kiss 10 girls as a lad you’d get lad points. If a girl was to do the same they’d get called names. But some girls are just as bad as lads.” Becky, 16.

“A girl in our school in year 8 didn’t have any friends and was getting bullied so me and my friends befriended her. Now she is very popular and she has changed her whole personality. She posts explicit photos on Facebook and I would never think she was the same girl. She was bullied so much I think she decided to change herself into the sort of person we see in the media as attractive to men. With the TV and media culture we have, if you keep yourself to yourself you are seen as frigid.” Lucy, 17.

## Harassment

“One of my friends, when she was 16, she sent a picture to a guy and he then sent it to everyone in the school. She was bullied for ages. It got so bad she even contemplated suicide.” Keira, 25.

“This girl was staying at my house. She took a photo of me in bath and put it on Facebook. I had like 100 and something friend requests, some people thinking it was a joke. I had one more exam but I ended up not going in. I didn’t leave the house for four months.” Dani, 21.

“People just talk rubbish about other people online. But then banter turns into something worse. Like photo-shopping certain people’s mothers into poses. Then the pictures go round the whole school. You’ve got no chance of stopping that. People just do it and the school has no authority over it because it’s what goes on in your personal time. Parents can’t stop it. That’s not realistic. They don’t know what’s going on so it doesn’t really matter to them.” William, 17.

“Some guy sent a video to the wrong person of him masturbating and it got sent around the whole school. Even the teachers saw it. He was so embarrassed, he couldn’t face school.” Ben, 18.

## 2. SELF-WORTH, SELF-RESPECT AND MISTAKES

Young people’s self-worth, self-respect and mental and emotional wellbeing are inextricably linked with sexual attitudes and the decisions and mistakes they make when it comes to matters of sex, they say.

“I remember being 14 and having the idea that boys sort of have an entitlement to you and it’s around that young age that’s when it can become a problem.” Rosie, 17.

“Sexting goes on but it’s a private thing and it doesn’t turn into problem unless someone says, ‘Hey, look at this screenshot I’ve got of this message you sent me.’ That person is left fully embarrassed. It’s complete humiliation if it goes round and that can lead on to all sorts of mental health problems,” Lee, 16.

“It’s hard at our age [17] because you’re going through lots of changes and if someone asks you to do something, even if you don’t know whether you want to do it, or you really don’t want to do it, you

worry about ending up alone. Loneliness is a big fear. You're scared, so you do it. If a man slept with 20 women, they'd get respect. Girls wouldn't. It's not as bad now as it was with previous generations, that reputation thing. But I think it still goes on. If someone has slept with lots of people they get called a slut. But no-one thinks about why they might have slept with lots of men because that would be too much effort. It might have been to impress them." Lucy, 17.



"I saw a lot of lad garage magazines just as I became 14. I was pressured into sex and my friend wanted to impress her boyfriend by having sex. You are pushed to do sex, drugs, skipping school, alcohol. It's all related." Sophie, 17.

"My first thought is that people posting pictures of themselves online have brought trouble on themselves." Annie, 16.

"At my school there were these two students who sent naughty images to each other. They got a real name for themselves at school. The boy was really smug about it all, but I don't think they realised the consequences when they sent them." Harriet, 16.

"Sexting can make people feel very embarrassed afterwards. It can make them feel very lonely." Luke, 17.

"My friend's boyfriend pressured her into having sex at 12. Her boyfriend was 12 too but my friend didn't really understand it." Siobhan, 17.

"A girl in my school took intimate pictures and sent them to a guy. He sent them to the whole school. It was just that everyone was doing it. She thought it would make him love her." Laura, 20.

"If it is someone you like in school asking for photos, you may feel pressured into doing that because you want them to like you. It's a bad culture. ... I have made quite a few mistakes. If I could change it I would but since I can't I hope to make others aware." Maisie, 22.



### 3. SCHOOLS BRUSH OFF INCIDENTS BECAUSE OF AGE

Young people are concerned that schools do not see their part to play in recognising the pressures they're under when dealing with matters of bullying and harassment in sexual contexts and they report that teachers can brush off incidents of sexual assaults or sexually threatening behaviour because of their relatively young age. Many incidents, they say, go unreported because they are worried about repercussions and victims being punished as well as perpetrators.

"Say, if your bra got undone they would give a warning and that would be the last of it. They wouldn't really bring it up, they'd tell them to 'sit down, stop messing around, do your work' and then it wouldn't get reported anywhere else." Ella, 17.

"People don't want to tell teachers because they don't want any repercussions." Becky, 16.

"My worst experience happened with another girl and that was I think kind of swept under the carpet a bit because she had problems and I was only 12 at the time and she touched me in private areas and held me against the wall. Although it was quite serious, it wasn't dealt with at all and it wasn't seen as an assault. I don't know why. When teachers don't do anything about it you feel like it is kind of all your fault or it is a bit of a joke." Rosie, 17.

"Adults, teachers at school, parents at home... all need to face up to it. Sex stuff is a bigger part of our lives today. Just because they think we're too young, doesn't mean we are." Jake, 17.

"At my school a girl was pressured into performing oral sex on an older boy in school. They were caught and both suspended for the same amount of time. I can see it is difficult for schools to get that right. They've got to be seen to be doing something, keeping the school's reputation in check and deciding what to do is a tricky business. Schools are not equipped to deal with emotional analysis." Charlotte, 18.

## SOLUTIONS

### 1. THE MEDIA WON'T CHANGE – WE HAVE TO

They do not see the media landscape changing and say mind-sets need to be tackled to help them all cope with the pressures they are under and make better decisions about what they do and how they behave towards and with other young people.

Young people who participated are interested in taking responsibility for their own actions but say they can only do it if adults and institutions recognise the influences and pressures they are under.

“Sexual harassment goes on online all the time but that’s not going to change. It is just about people. Social media is just the vessel for whatever people want to do. Ok, it opens up more opportunities to do it.” Joe, 16.

“You can’t stop social media, or any of the other media we watch. You can only stop a certain mind-set. If people think it is acceptable to treat people in a sleazy way or even sexually aggressive, they will do it wherever. Online or not.” Tony, 17.

“We can’t make the internet go away, and porn existed long before that anyway. We need to have conversations with each other, understand ideas, hear from new people with things to share. Then we go away and talk about these ideas with our friends.” Adam, 16.

“The modern world relies heavily on peer communication. We learn things, tell our friends, we become adults and we all know we don’t have to hide away and put people in boxes.” Lucy, 17.



### 2. SEX EDUCATION

What would help them in schools, they say, is for earlier and more detailed and wide ranging sex education to include the consequences of sexting, matters of consent and risk – for example online safety, drugs and alcohol – and what constitutes a healthy relationship.

“Online safety and sexting needs to be a whole lesson or few lessons in PSHE. There needs to be lots more education about sexting and the dangers of it because it’s part of relationships now.” Meg, 18.

“In teenage culture today, it is seen as normal to have sex young. No-one talks about the emotional side, how sex can affect you mentally if you have sex with someone you don’t love. It might make you feel dirty and less confident.” Lucy, 17.

“Why are we teaching children of 12 and 13 how to have sex? Sex education like that should be banned. They will learn about it anyway. Isn’t that the point of porn? It’s only our generation that are doing it – having sex young.” Jack, 17.

“Sex education should teach about the emotional side of having sex, not just about STIs and pregnancy. People don’t realise that others are not going to think badly of you for saying no.” Tom, 17.

“Consent was spoken about but never delved into. It was more about the mechanics.” Nick, 19.

“We learnt about the basics of safe sex but we never learnt what is consensual. We don’t learn about sexual harassment or sexual assault, having sex when someone’s drunk... you know, all that never came into conversation.” Rosie, 17.

“Too little is taught to boys about how women function sexually in terms of contraception and pleasure. A lack of appreciation of sex as a complex act makes it easy for us to morph into simple ‘lad culture’ ideas.” Charlotte, 18.



### 3. WORKSHOPS AND CONVERSATIONS

Young people acknowledge issues around sex, sexual harassment and assaults can be hard for teachers to discuss with students and hard for students to raise with teachers. They suggest attitudes could be improved and self-respect strengthened if they could have two-way conversations with people with experiences to share and learn from. They particularly state conversations rather than just presentations.

They would also like to have a counsellor in schools to turn to when they need help in dealing with the fall out of sexual threats and sexually aggressive behaviour. They would like to be personally equipped with more empathy and skills to understand why people might feel pressured into sexual behaviour and how to have a conversation about it.

“I was sexually assaulted at school and it was only talking to someone in confidence, a counsellor, and them being able to give advice back, I was kind of able to get my head around it.” Rosie, 17.

“To be honest, we don’t think about why people might be being pressured to do sexual stuff. I’d have no idea how to have a conversation about it. I’d like to know more ways I could do that because it might help that person.” Jade, 17.

“Sexting happens because guys and girls don’t know the value of themselves. To know your value you need to empower people around you. This is where people have to value themselves. Empowering people to say no is important. We need to raise awareness of healthy relationships through workshops in schools.” Laura, 20.

“The Samaritans come to school to do a presentation once a year. I suppose they could help. I don’t know of any others. We need a counsellor in every school.” James, 16.

“If we could have workshops where people tell us ways of thinking about sex, we could have conversations which would really help. I don’t think the teachers would want to do this difficult stuff though. It’s just hard to talk about. But that would help change attitudes so people know they shouldn’t act in a sexually threatening way.” Alex, 17.

“You’ve got to be ready to speak out because if you’re not ready and you don’t feel comfortable it can knock you a bit. But if they speak out it wouldn’t just benefit that one person but it could benefit loads of victims.” Rosie, 17.



## Case study: Rosie, 17, Cardiff

This Fixer was stalked, harassed and assaulted. She ended up leaving school and is now trying to help others.

### **What constitutes bad sexual behaviour?**

"I think bad sexual behaviour – especially in schools – is when boys feel that they have a right to touch you even when you don't want to be touched. I've had problems with not just boys but girls as well where, you know, they'd forcibly grab you and touch you in intimate places. I think bad sexual behaviour would be even if you say 'no' they still carry on with no consent there, especially in a school environment."

### **Is it common?**

"I think it is common. There's different levels of it. Even the little things go unnoticed. And they're just kind of excused by 'boys will be boys' or 'it's just what happens' kind of thing."

### **Is it just banter?**

"It could really affect someone in a way where they have been hurt and they blame themselves and especially when teachers don't do anything about it you feel like it is kind of all your fault or it is a bit of a joke. But when you're being touched by someone you don't want to be that's, you know, rape or assault."

### **What are your experiences?**

"Usually it's just boys. I've heard about boys touching girls. That's just on a regular basis but I think... My worst experience happened with another girl and that was I think kind of swept under the carpet a bit because she had problems and I was only 12 at the time and she touched me in private areas and held me against the wall. Although it was quite serious, it wasn't dealt with at all and it wasn't seen as an assault. I don't know why. I've come to terms with it now but at the time I was quite confused because I was quite young, I was quite embarrassed about it."

### **Did you speak out?**

"Yeah, I spoke out. I spoke out later. At the time, I kind of didn't know how to tell anyone but I think when I was coming to terms with it and could describe what happened and I was getting counselling then that kind of helped me come to terms with it. Talking to someone in confidence and them being able to give advice back, I was kind of able to get my head around it."

### **Are teachers and counsellors helpful?**

"I think at the time teachers were the least helpful and counsellors were probably the most helpful. I think because it's hard to speak out sometimes, I think if you can talk to someone you trust it doesn't have to be a teacher because I know teachers are hard to talk to but, you know, even if it's a helpline or your parents or a friend, someone you can trust, if you get the confidence to do that things can get better and you can sort it out. Whatever has happened can be spoken out about and it can potentially help other people in that situation."

### **At what age does sexual behaviour become a problem?**

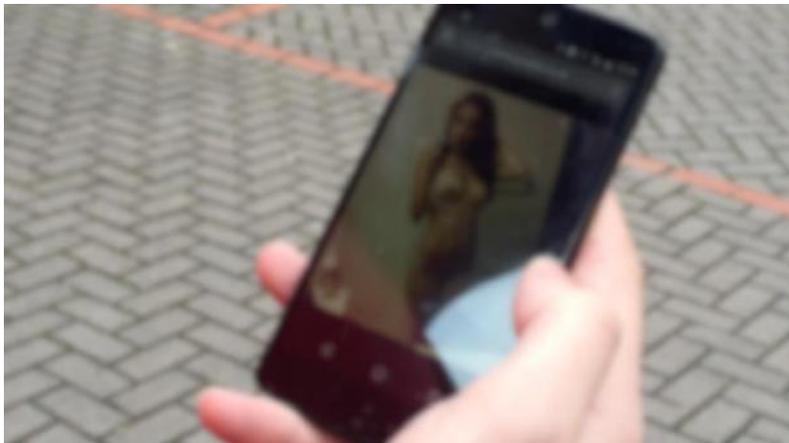
"I think early teens. I think 14 is an age where things kind of... it's more noticeable at that point. You're young, you're figuring out things about yourself as well as other people and it's just at that age where boys get this idea about 'sex' and 'girls' and girls feel that boys have this entitlement... I remember being 14 and having the idea that boys sort of have an entitlement to you and it's around that young age that's when it can become a problem."

### **Where does the idea of entitlement come from?**

“There’s a lot on the internet, especially pornography. I think, you know, because a lot of boys watch that at such a young age and the way... how graphic it can be means boys seem to get the idea that that’s how you treat a girl and that’s what real life is like and then it sort of just spreads and girls get this idea that ‘it’s on the Internet so that must be true’ and it spreads.”

### **How could sex education help?**

“We learnt about the basics of safe sex but we never learnt what is consensual. We don’t learn about sexual harassment or sexual assault, having sex when someone’s drunk... you know, all that never came into conversation. It was all about the human body and that was it. If people learnt from a young age what’s right and what isn’t, there would be an improvement because I think when there are allegations where someone’s been drunk I think people overlook it because it wasn’t really the other person’s fault because she shouldn’t have drunk so much and she didn’t say ‘no’. People have this idea that sexual assaults or rapes only happen within dark alleyways never in another situation and I think that’s a big issue because rape victims are left to feel like it’s their fault.”



## **CONCLUSION**

Young people are calling for adults and institutions to accept young people’s lives are more heavily influenced by sex than ever before and they acknowledge media exposure as an influencing factor.

Where they have been victim of sexually aggressive behaviour or they have witnessed it, they would like more support for their mental wellbeing in the form of counsellors in schools. In addition, they recognise they could help their peers who may be acting in a promiscuous way by learning to understand the pressures or issues which are contributing.

They are also calling for sex education from a younger age and less focus on the physical act and more on issues concerning the risks and dangers of 'sexting and matters of consent, pleasure and differing sexualities.

They suggest workshops and conversations led by 'experts by experience' would help them increase their understanding and grow their empathy skills, to help themselves and others. Counsellors in schools could help them deal better with issues of sexual harassment and aggression.

In testing the basis of the proposed inquiry, define its remit and initial line of questions, they hope their evidence will be considered and their voices valued.

Fixers will support the call for evidence across its extended networks with young people's voices at the forefront.

Appendix

### **1. Background: What is Fixers?**

Since 2008 Fixers has worked with over 18,000 young people from all backgrounds in every local authority area across the UK. Most Fixers use a personal experience to create a project to stop what happened to them, happening to someone else. They work on all issues including, abuse, prejudice, racism, hate crime, eating disorders and homelessness [www.fixers.org.uk/whatisfixers](http://www.fixers.org.uk/whatisfixers).

We have learned a lot about how young people engaging in public communication can create transformational changes in themselves and their communities. In 2015 we invested time in scaling young people's voices for the benefit of society through large-scale events and exploratory research programmes, including [the Feel Happy Fix on Mental Health](#) and [the Feel Happy \[Eating\] Fix](#). Both programmes of work have generated interest, enthusiasm and action from practitioners, policymakers, and politicians.

Through Fixers' unique model young people are able to use their individual experiences as a source of valid and valuable contributions to society. They set the agenda for change within their own framework of meaning and decide on what and how to deliver their personal narrative. We've found this works particularly well in institutional settings with marginalised young people who are supported to work with leaders and decision makers to shape and enhance the settings in which they live their lives.

### **2. Staffing and safeguarding**

Each workshop was facilitated by Young Person's Coordinators who are fully trained in safeguarding and mentoring young Fixers. The workshops were held in schools and colleges with support of staff. Should any young person's own situation or experience need appropriate support, their needs would have been assessed immediately and addressed. No such issues arose.

Fixers' researchers acted as note-takers and another staff member support administratively to collect data.

### **3. Methodology**

Our methodology to gather the evidence is action research; a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by the young people and working with others as part of a 'community of practice' to address issues and solve problems, often within public service delivery. Data is analysed using thematic analysis.

Qualitative data was analysed and presented with the voices of young people front and centre to be of the greatest practical use.

#### 4. Shared learning

We recommend shared learning from this approach is used to show innovative new methods and model of engaging young people and others, in particular marginalised and vulnerable groups, in Parliamentary and Select Committee work. Please see our Voice as Value reports.

<http://www.fixers.org.uk/UserFiles/Files/GSA.pdf>

<http://www.fixers.org.uk/UserFiles/Files/Voicereport.pdf>

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Young People using their Past to Fix the Future

