

**THE STATE OF GIRLS'
RIGHTS IN THE UK
2019-2020**

WALES INSIGHTS REPORT

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL UK

Plan International UK strives to deliver and protect the rights of millions of children – especially girls – across Latin America, Africa, Asia and the UK. We work to give every child the same chance in life. But when you're a girl it is even harder to be safe, to be in school and to be in charge of your body.

We know that girls' rights are global; wherever in the world a girl is born or lives, she should be safe, free from abuse, and have equal rights. That is why, in 2016, we turned our attention to the UK; to play our role in ensuring girls' rights are realised here as well.

Through our research, advocacy and programmes, we advance transformative change to ensure that girls in the UK can learn, lead, decide and thrive in the process of realising their rights.

Report design by Hannah Moore www.hannahmoore.com
Photography by Joyce Nicholls www.joycenicholls.com
Cover photo: Poppy, 16, Newport

This report - and our work across the UK - is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

CONTENTS

Summary of Key Findings	5
Introduction	9
Section 1: what is it like to be a girl in Wales?	12
Learn	13
Educational Attainment	13
Gender and Subject Choice	14
Safety at School	15
Classroom Behaviour and Exclusions	16
Sports in School	17
Case Study: Street Games	18
Case Study: Sport Cardiff Wales	19
Lead	21
Representation and Participation	21
Activism and Collective Action	22
Being a Feminist	24
Case Study: Plan International UK	25
Decide	27
Menstrual Health and Period Poverty	27

Female Genital Mutilation	29
Child Marriage	30
Mental Health and Wellbeing	31
Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Media	34
Thrive	37
Gender-based Violence	37
Child Sexual Abuse	40
Girls with Care Experience	43
Case Study: National Youth Advocacy Service CYMRU	45
Gender Identity	46
Case Study: Youth CYMRU	47
Section 2: The Impact of Place: local authority index	48
England, Wales and Scotland Index	50
Wales Index	52
Conclusion	55
Methodology	56
Appendix	58
References	61



Esther, 20, Bangor

SUMMARY

OF KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH WITH GIRLS:

LEARN

Our conversations with girls before the pandemic showed that gender stereotypes, outdated gender norms and sexism are shaping girls' schooling experience, from the subjects they choose and the jobs they are encouraged towards, to their experience of school sports.

Many girls were critical of the content of their relationships and sex education, and it is evident there is much work to do on consistently delivering it across Wales. Coronavirus has significantly impacted girls' experience of and access to education and some girls told us they are concerned about their opportunities after education.

Girls' motivation and enjoyment of sport reduces throughout adolescence and often negative lifelong attitudes towards sport are formed. Our research with girls shows that sexism is clearly fuelling girls' frustration with school sports; girls across Wales told us numerous examples of sexism in their classes. The girls were also very critical of their sports kits, which they argued limit their ability to play sports and are not designed for girls' bodies.

LEAD

Girls care deeply about political issues and have more access to information than ever before.

Some of the girls we spoke to were engaging with social and political issues at a local level, from setting up their own podcast, to running a period poverty campaign in their school. Girls agree that seeing women in leadership positions and particularly in Government was important to normalise women in these roles.

The lower voting age in Wales will enable more girls to participate in the democratic process, however not all young people are clear on their rights or are willing to vote and this was particularly true for some of the care experienced girls we spoke to who felt disenfranchised.

DECIDE

A lack of access to period products, stigma surrounding periods and a lack of menstruation education have created a culture of silence that puts girls' health at risk. Our 2018 research showed that in Wales, 15% of girls aged 14-21 were unable to afford period products, while one in three said they had struggled to pay but ultimately managed.

The cultural pressure on girls' body image remains a key source of anxiety for girls. We found that girls have missed education, work and health appointments because they were too self-conscious about their appearance. Body image issues can have serious consequences for their mental and physical health.

The covid-19 pandemic has intensified mental health issues for young people and it has been reported that support is not meeting demand. Data on the mental health impact of the pandemic by both sex and age is very difficult to find, yet this report shows that mental ill-health is a highly gendered issue.

THRIVE

Public sexual harassment is a common form of violence against women and girls that has a damaging and deleterious impact on their lives.

In Wales, 52% of girls aged 14-21 have experienced public sexual harassment (compared to 66% UK-wide) (Plan International UK, 2018) and this statistic resonated strongly with the girls we spoke to across Wales. Public sexual harassment affects girls' mental health, self-esteem, sense of safety and seriously impinges on their right to equal access to public space. It is not criminalised effectively, which is a glaring gap in the protection the UK provides its girls and women.

The digitalisation of sexual harassment is also prevalent in girls' lives. Girls told us they are contacted by people they don't know through social media, and being asked for intimate photographs is commonplace for adolescent girls.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITY INDEX:

Where a girl lives shapes her experiences, life opportunities and human rights outcomes. While girls across the UK face challenges to their rights, our local authority index shows that girls in different areas have different needs. Scottish local authorities dominate the top performing places and Welsh local authorities are mostly distributed across the bottom half of the index. Yet there is a lower variation between local authority areas in Wales compared to variations within England and Scotland, suggesting lower levels of inequality in Wales based on the indicators used.

Local authorities in central Wales appear to outperform both those in the North and South of Wales, with the best results being achieved by Monmouthshire and Powys. All major Welsh cities (Cardiff, Swansea and Newport) occupy mid-ranking positions.

Local authorities were measured against child poverty, life expectancy, educational attainment, child obesity, teenage conception rates and not in education, employment or training (NEET) status. Critically, the study found significant data gaps on many other girls' rights indicators in different parts of the UK, such as violence against women and girls.



Jo-Ann, 18, Carmarthenshire



Maisy, 17, Newport

INTRODUCTION

We set out to deliver a report on girls' lives in Wales following the publication of 'The State of Girls' Rights in the UK' in January 2020. Wales, along with the rest of the world, has changed significantly since then.

As the first coronavirus lockdown was enforced in March 2020, we conducted early research into the impact of the pandemic on girls across the UK and provided a much needed platform for their voices to be heard. As the world around girls continued to change, it became clear that we needed to conduct new research in Wales in addition to drawing insights from the State of Girls' Rights in the UK research, to deliver a report that could more accurately reflect their lives.

Through more than 80 years' experience working internationally, we know that health crises can have a gendered impact. In the UK, there have been increased reports of violence against women and girls, increased unpaid care work shouldered by women, exacerbated economic gender inequity, reduced access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and gendered mental health issues. Furthermore, many issues girls were dealing with prior to the pandemic persist today, such as gender stereotypes in school subject choices,

sexual harassment in public - even throughout lockdown, and mental health issues.

Girls are a group that are frequently overlooked and left invisible, and all the more so during the pandemic. When girls are young, they tend to be gender neutralised in services, policy and data as 'children'. They are then subsumed into the adult-focused category of 'women' without consideration for the unique challenges they face, especially during adolescence. Improving both quantitative and qualitative data on girls and making it publicly available is paramount to fulfilling their rights.

Plan International's analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals* has concluded that they carry four main promises to girls: that girls everywhere should be able to learn, lead, decide and thrive in the process of realising their rights. **Plan International UK's new UK programmes strategy is therefore grounded in these four promises:**

* The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 aspirational goals with 169 targets. These were adopted in a United Nations Resolution on 25th September 2015, where 193 heads of state and government made a historic commitment to end the discrimination and rights violations facing girls.

LEARN

Every girl has the right to access the knowledge, skills and opportunities she needs to create a successful future. Girls should be able to learn in safe environments where outdated gender roles in education systems are removed.

LEAD

Girls should be able to participate in and influence the social, economic and political decisions that matter to them. They should be enabled and empowered to be agents of change at local, regional and national levels.

DECIDE

Girls should have control over their lives and bodies and make informed choices about their relationships and sexual and reproductive health.

THRIVE

Girls should be able to grow up in a safe society in which they can thrive.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a broad overview of girls' lives in Wales, both before and during the coronavirus pandemic. It encompasses Welsh findings from the State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020 report and additional, recent primary and secondary research and data from 2020. It also includes case studies of programmes or initiatives which have directly supported girls to realise some of their rights.

The report has two sections. **Section one** explores what it is like to be a girl in Wales. It is structured by four chapters: learn, lead, decide and thrive. Each chapter focusses on the near-universal issues facing girls in Wales, such as stigma and taboo around menstruation and social media, drawing from literature, statistics and our primary research with girls. In addition, the chapters include some of the more severe rights violations and protection issues, such as child sexual abuse and female genital mutilation, based on

insights from expert organisations, research and official statistics.

Section two presents an index of every local authority area in Wales based on specific girls' rights indicators, where comparable data was available. This index pulls out the Welsh data from the UK-wide index in the State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020 report and includes some additional, previously unpublished findings.

While we endeavoured to produce a broad insights report, the term 'girls' rights' encompasses a range of issues and there are some issues facing girls, or certain groups of girls, whereby we could not find Welsh data and research or which we have not covered in this report.

We hope this report will inform the work of practitioners and professionals around the country who work with and for girls.

WHAT ARE 'GIRLS' RIGHTS'?

Girls in Wales are protected by multiple international human rights frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW). These frameworks outline the specific rights of children and women respectively – covering areas such as education, health, violence and equality.

The UK has ratified both the UNCRC and CEDAW and is obliged by international law to take all appropriate legislative measures to implement both. There are different approaches to reflecting international

conventions across the UK. In Wales, the UNCRC has been incorporated into legislation.

In addition, the outcome documents of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo ¹ (1994) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action ² (BPfA) (1995) are also relevant, as well as the Istanbul Convention ³. The British Government also committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals ⁴ (SDGs) – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which applies across the whole of the UK and directly affects girls.

WHO IS A GIRL?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. For the purposes of this report, a girl is aged up to 18 and a young woman is aged up to 25.

The concept of gender (as opposed to biological 'sex') refers to the norms, expectations and beliefs about the roles, relations and values attributed to girls and boys, women and men. These gender norms are socially constructed; they are neither invariable nor are they biologically determined - they have changed throughout history and across cultures. They are learned from families and friends, in schools and communities, and from the media, government and religious organisations.

We recognise that most statistical data referred to in this report will be binary in nature, and therefore does not show the circumstances of transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming people. We strived to be inclusive by using a child rights lens and an intersectional lens in our research.

SECTION 1

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A GIRL IN WALES?



Shriyana, 16, Swansea

LEARN

Every girl has the right to access the knowledge, skills and opportunities she needs to create a successful future. Girls in Wales should be able to learn in safe environments where outdated gender roles in education systems are removed.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

“ I am quite nervous and anxious for the future and whether my degree will be taken seriously or not, because my last year was online and self-teaching. I’m scared that people might say ‘that’s more inferior’ than someone who graduated a year before me. ”

- Interview participant, 21

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly disrupted education. A survey by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales ⁵, published in June 2020, found that over half of 12-18 year olds (54%) were worried about falling behind with their learning and 52% were worried about the impact on their exam results. This survey highlighted variations in the quality of education and the learning experience between pupils, for example, access to devices at home was unequal with some children needing to share one device; some children could not receive the same level of parental support; and those with additional learning needs did not have the same level of support ⁶.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the report ‘Is Wales Fairer?’ ⁷ showed that certain groups of pupils consistently have lower educational outcomes, including a strong association between socio-economic status/ income poverty and educational attainment.

In addition, high educational outcomes do not always translate into labour market success for certain groups. Research by the Social Mobility Commission in 2016 ⁸ found that while white boys from lower socio - economic backgrounds did not achieve as well in school, Black and Asian Muslim young people, especially girls, had worse outcomes in the labour market. The research notes that attainment for Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils had improved at a more rapid rate than any other ethnic group in recent years, but female Bangladeshi graduates in particular were less likely to gain professional or managerial roles than male Bangladeshi graduates. The reasons for such discrepancies in outcomes are complex and differ across ethnic groups and class backgrounds.

In 2020, assessing and determining grades without examinations sparked much debate.

The initial decision to use algorithms to determine GCSE, AS and A Level results in line with previous years was overturned by the Welsh Parliament, following criticism from the media and the public. Instead, results were based on a standardisation of teacher assessments. Using this method, there was a significant increase in results for both boys and girls in 2020 in Wales. More than 40% of pupils achieved A* or A grade A levels in 2020,

compared to 27% in 2019⁹. Results for girls increased by more than results for boys at the top end of the grade distribution (A*-A) and there is no gender gap for A*. Similarly, 2020 GCSE results were substantially higher than results from 2015 to 2019: around a quarter of pupils were awarded A*-A in the revised 2020 results, compared to 18% in 2019. Just under three-quarters of learners were awarded A*-C, compared to 63% of learners in 2019¹⁰.

GENDER AND SUBJECT CHOICE

Boys in Wales are more likely to choose the more highly valued and lucrative STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects than girls. They are significantly more likely to take A Levels in ICT, business studies, economics and STEM-related subjects, and girls are significantly more likely to choose the arts, languages (including Welsh), social studies and biological sciences¹¹. For example, girls account for 96.6% of Health and Social Care VQ, while boys account for 71.9% of Applied ICT VQ¹².

According to the girls we spoke to, entrenched gender norms and stereotypes are making it very difficult to choose subjects not traditionally aligned with their gender. One focus group participant told us: *“I really enjoy science and it’s my favourite subject, which everyone’s like... ‘Wow, that’s so impressive that you like science so much. That’s like, more of a boy thing to do’.”* They told us that schools’ efforts to encourage girls into STEM

subjects are often counteracted by peer pressure in the classroom: *“we had people come in and talk to us, trying to get women and girls more into cyber, so they wouldn’t be scared to do it,”* but back in class, *“It was, ‘Ahh, you’re doing cyber!’ from all the boys, and we were getting teased”* (Chepstow focus group participant).

Our conversations highlighted the impact that these decisions can have later on. One focus group participant told us: *“I wanted to do woodwork, but all of my friends were female and they always do food tech and I didn’t want to be on my own ... it’s one of those things that I always regret because I tried to go into carpentry when I was older and it was really hard, it’s really hard to try and get an apprenticeship and be taken seriously as a girl, especially if you didn’t even do it in school.”*

A 2017 review of STEM subject and career prospects in Wales called for action across

“ When I first researched what job I’d like to do, I got told ‘solicitor work’ and it’s like, why can’t I be a barrister? Why can’t I be a judge? It’s not just a man’s role! ”

- Interview participant, 21

education and routes to work ¹³ and the Welsh Government accepted all recommendations ¹⁴. While encouraging more girls into STEM is important, both boys and girls need to be shown the different options available to them and gender norms must be challenged in

order to achieve true gender equality. It is important to start talking to children about jobs and careers early on, as one young woman highlighted, “*There are so many jobs you don’t realise exist until you start studying a subject at university*” (Interview participant, 21).

SAFETY AT SCHOOL

Evidence shows that different forms of gender-based violence are occurring on school premises. Of female students at mixed-sex schools across England and Wales, 37% have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school and 24% have been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school ¹⁵. Furthermore, a BBC investigation in 2017 found there had been 2,625 police reported sexual offences, including 225 rapes, on school premises in the previous four years (across England and Wales). 74% of reports resulted in no further action ¹⁶.

Sexist language is common in schools; 60% of children in an annual survey reported hearing sexist language at school ¹⁷. Furthermore, a report by Stonewall Cymru found that 90% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) pupils in Wales regularly hear homophobic phrases such as ‘you’re so gay’ or ‘that’s so gay’ ¹⁸.

There is very little gender data on bullying in Wales. However, a small survey by Full Circle in 2016 found that more than 60% of the 614 girls surveyed (aged 11-21) had experienced bullying ¹⁹. Stonewall Cymru found that more than half of LGBT pupils are bullied at school for their sexual orientation or gender identity (44% of girls and 66% of boys). This bullying mostly includes verbal abuse, but some experienced physical violence and abuse, threats and having their belongings stolen. A report by WISERD ²⁰ for the Children’s Commissioner for Wales found that both children and professionals report high levels

of racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic language and bullying in schools, but there is no official monitoring data, and there is a major data gap on disabled children’s experience of bullying.

In England and Wales, only 1 in 5 secondary school teachers have received training in recognising and tackling sexism as part of their Initial Teacher Education ²¹. The girls we heard from tended to agree that the majority of their teachers were ill-equipped to deal with sexism and sexual assault in the classroom. One participant told us “*the behaviours of my teachers, if anything, is wrong actually. This whole time. And I’m kind of frustrated in a way, that it’s taken this long to realise and unpick it... I don’t think the school knows how important this is*” (Chepstow focus group participant). The barriers identified by teachers include insufficient capacity due to high workloads and a lack of prioritisation of these issues by school leadership ²².

Education for young people is crucial for tackling sexism, harassment and assault in schools, as well as broader community, policing and legal responses. The Welsh Parliament consulted in 2019 on revisions to its key guidance on relationships and sex education (which was published in 2012), including some new provisions on harassment and sexually harmful behaviours ²³. In Wales, this will be a statutory part of the new curriculum, which is being developed and due to be in place across Wales by 2022.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR AND EXCLUSIONS

Our survey of 1,000 girls and young women aged 14-21 in the UK found that six in 10 think men and boys are treated better than women and girls generally, and 41% of these said they notice this difference at school ²⁴. Gender stereotypes are pervasive throughout society and the school environment is not isolated from this; it is often a site where gender stereotypes and gendered behaviour are reinforced. The Fawcett Society found that school and nursery practitioners report they often unknowingly treat children differently, segregating both by task and through symbolic gestures such as groupings. It found boys are often paid more attention than girls in class, even when there are fewer of them, and that practitioners often reward 'gender appropriate behaviour' and use gendered language to refer to girls and boys in stereotypical ways ²⁵.

Evidence from the WISERD Education research shows that poor school behaviour is also a gendered issue. 39% of boys in Wales had been asked to leave the classroom due to poor behaviour – mostly for being disruptive – compared to 22% of girls. Furthermore, boys were nearly twice as likely to have received several detentions or more in the past year than girls ²⁶. This pattern is also visible in exclusion rates and the numbers of girls and boys educated in pupil referral units. In the year 2018/19 there were 820 enrolments at pupil referral units in Wales and boys were significantly overrepresented ²⁷.

A key theory is that young men tend to externalise mental distress through outward behaviour whereas young women tend to internalise mental distress and cause harm to themselves - as this report shows, girls are more likely to self-harm. Furthermore, it found that the behaviour of young men can be an outward demonstration of their confusion around what it meant to be 'masculine'; that struggles with their gender identity and sexuality might be expressed through challenging behaviour ²⁸.

The nature of exclusions appears to be different in Wales compared to England. Up to date, in-depth data seems difficult to find, but a report by WISERD Education in 2017 found that the exclusion rate is generally lower in Wales, however, it argues that it is possible some pupils are still on the school register despite being permanently educated in off-site facilities ²⁹.

According to a 2014 study by the University of California, having more girls in a disruptive class can help to calm behaviour as girls act as positive role models ³⁰ but there appears to be a research gap in whether and how girls are used to manage the poor behaviour of others, and how this impacts their own schooling experience and reinforces gender stereotypes.

SPORTS IN SCHOOL

Women in Sport's 2018 research found that puberty is a confusing time of significant physical, emotional and social change for girls. The research identified multiple reasons for girls' growing disconnection with sport. For adolescent girls, sport becomes an 'invisible stage' where they feel everyone is noticing them. A perception of needing to be good at sport to participate increases. Physical appearance becomes increasingly important to girls and becoming 'overly sporty' can conflict with girls' sense of attractiveness ³¹.

Our research with girls shows that sexism is clearly fuelling girls' frustration with school sports. As one interview participant pointed out, this affects boys too: *"Everyone should be able to play the sports they want to play ... There's no such thing as a sport just for boys or just for girls, as far as I know. Gymnastics is both for girls and boys, as you see on the TV, and in the Olympics. If you want to do it, just do it"* (Interview participant, 15).

Girls' motivation and enjoyment of sport reduces throughout adolescence and often negative attitudes towards sport are formed. By ages 13-15, only 8% of girls meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of an average of 60 minutes of physical activity every day for 5-18 year olds. This is problematic because lifelong habits for physical activity are laid down in youth.

The girls we spoke to identified numerous experiences of sexism in school sports lessons. A participant who had been playing badminton for over three years was asked to watch boys demonstrate how to play the game; she asked the teacher: *"can we go and play badminton, seeing as we've done it before? And he said, 'Oh no, best you let the boys show you how it's done'"* (Swansea

focus group participant). Another girl explained how during a rounders game, a teacher *"threw a ball at the girl and he was like, 'Oh girls can't catch'"* (Swansea focus group participant). Other examples included girls involved in national level sports not being allowed to play with the boys (for example, a footballer in Swansea). The Chepstow group told us how girls' outdoor sports fixtures would be cancelled when it was raining but boys were still able to play their games.

The impact of regular, casual sexism in school sports is that girls feel *"We constantly have to prove ourselves."* (Swansea focus group participant). If girls do take part in sports, the fear of being bullied for doing a 'boys' sport' forces some girls to do it in secret. *"I say in school that I'm stopping, but at home I still do it [skateboarding] 'cause I don't wanna be picked on"* (Chepstow focus group participant).

In contact or combat sports, this sexist provision and gender stereotyping can be pronounced. The girls we spoke to were very frustrated that they weren't allowed to play 'proper' rugby like the boys, only touch rugby - if they were offered any rugby at all. However, girls can develop positive attitudes towards sports if the provision appeals to them. The Welsh Rugby Union has found a "huge explosion of interest and participation" since expanding provision, with the number of girls playing rugby in one school increasing from less than 200 to almost 10,000 in a few years ³². Unfortunately, girls do not always have access to the sports they want to do outside of school either, *"I've looked into joining a football team again, there's only one woman's football team, but that's for ages 20 and above"* (interview participant, 18).

Sports kits were a source of real frustration for many of the girls. The design can limit their ability to play sports, particularly the skorts, which are “clearly designed by someone who doesn’t have a woman’s body”

and “if you’ve got a big bum, then you’re struggling, because the skort rides up but the shorts stay down, so you can see your bum,” and it “doesn’t cover up the bits you want it to cover up” (Chepstow focus group participant).

CASE STUDY: STREET GAMES US GIRLS

MOTIVATION:

Research by Street Games highlighted that girls and young women living in areas of deprivation face multiple barriers to participating in sport and physical activities as a result of their socio-economic background and gender.

ACTION:

In response, Street Games established the ‘US Girls’ programme. Through networking and influencing activities, the programme aimed to encourage and support community sports organisations to make girls’ participation in sport a core part of their work. Since 2015, Street Games has continued to provide guidance and support to local projects to help them sustain the activities that have been created. They have also provided opportunities to share learning through the Us Girls network.

Street Games has worked with many projects and partners who have utilised

the Us Girls learnings and ethos, the most recent example being the #TrustInUs Project in partnership with the Football Association of Wales Trust in 2019.

IMPACT:

By understanding the specific barriers that girls and young women living in poverty face, Us Girls has been able to effectively help girls in areas of deprivation try things they may never have had the opportunity to do elsewhere. Through working with organisations across Wales to listen to the girls and young women and tailoring offers to meet their needs, Us Girls has increased physical activity participation levels, thus contributing to Getting Wales Moving goals and the physical and mental health agenda in Wales.

CASE STUDY: SPORT CARDIFF #INNERSTRENGTH

MOTIVATION:

The #INNERSTRENGTH programme was established in response to concerns over the physical activity rates of girls in Cardiff. A survey by Sport Wales showed that the rate of participation for teenage girls was rapidly falling behind their male counterparts. In addition, Cardiff Youth Service identified that within East Cardiff, teenage girls were deterred from attending youth clubs, because they felt the sessions were dominated by boys. They felt unable to engage due to their fear of judgement and a lack of appropriate opportunities. Sport Cardiff ran a series of consultations with local high schools and found that low self-confidence and competence were the main barriers to girls' physical activity, alongside a lack of interest in the options available within the school curriculum.

ACTION:

The #INNERSTRENGTH programme includes a range of physical activities which are not available within the school curriculum, and a selection of wellbeing classes facilitated by specialist instructors, focussed on building confidence, self-esteem and feelings of empowerment. The programme operates as a closed

group, where young people are invited to book a space in order to participate. Both the physical activity and wellbeing workshops are held in one-hour back-to-back sessions and take place once a week at multiple locations across Cardiff, including youth clubs and community centres. The workshops run for approximately 12 weeks and during this time, participants are required to complete a 'pre', 'mid' and 'post' questionnaire to determine their levels of physical activity outside of school, and measure their confidence and self-esteem as a result of engaging with the programme. To ensure the programme supports those most in need, schools can refer girls as a priority group.

IMPACT:

The programme encourages girls to participate in more physical activities outside of their school routine, improve their levels of confidence and self-esteem and empower them to feel confident using their voice. In the programme's first year, completion of the course led to an 88% increase in self-confidence and a 100% increase in physical activity levels.



Annalise, 16, Neath Port Talbot



Girls should be able to participate in and influence the social, economic and political decisions that matter to them. They should be enabled and empowered to be agents of change at local, regional and national levels.

REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

The representation and visibility of women in positions of power is crucial for girls being able to realise their rights, because it sends a message to girls that they too can play an active role in public life and shape the legal and policy frameworks that affect them. Women make up 47% of the 60 Members of the Senedd (MS) which is a better gender balance than the House of Commons, in which (at the time of this research) only 220 of the 650 seats (34%) are held by women. Many girls that we spoke to agreed that having women in power was important, although some girls were critical about how it does not necessarily mean they would advocate for girls' rights issues.

All nations in the UK have separate arrangements for children to express themselves politically in youth-led organisations: UK Youth Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament, Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Welsh Youth Parliament. The issues that the Welsh Youth Parliament debate at national level are chosen by young people themselves. Election methods are democratic and enable diverse representation across different identity characteristics. However, two thirds of young people in Wales (66%) have not heard of the Welsh Youth Parliament ³³.

Outside of youth parliament, following devolution of voting age to Wales in 2017, the Assembly Commission introduced legislation to lower the voting age for the Senedd to 16. The law will take effect for any poll held on or after 5 April 2021 ³⁴. In addition, a new local government Bill lowered the voting age for local elections. As the voting age for UK Parliamentary elections is still 18, it is estimated that 69,029 Welsh people aged 16-17 are currently excluded from voting ³⁵.

A 2019 WISERD study found that some young people are unsure of how to vote or whether they are 'allowed' based on their locality or religion ³⁶. Furthermore, our interview with some care experienced young women highlighted the disenfranchisement some people feel: *"From my experience and the care experience young people I hang around with, we don't tend to go and vote because we don't see how our vote matters because if our voice doesn't matter, then why should our vote matter?"* (interview participant, 18); and, *"Why should we vote when nobody listens to our stories?"* (interview participant, 20). With those aged 16-17 now able to vote in Wales, ensuring participation of all young people from all sections of society will be crucial.

“ I feel like we’re being told that our opinions aren’t valid because we’re not allowed to make decisions. ”

- Swansea focus group participant

ACTIVISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The success of movements such as Extinction Rebellion in mobilising young people demonstrates that young people, including girls, do have a political voice and do want to be heard. Even during the covid-19 pandemic, young people have raised their voices on tremendous societal challenges. In particular, the Black Lives Matter movement has been empowering young people to speak out about institutional racism and discrimination and persuaded governments, businesses and institutions to take action to address deeply entrenched racial inequity.

Girl activists are becoming a staple on the British political landscape, from actors on a global scale such as Greta Thunberg, to national activists such as Amika George and Maya and Gemma Tutton of Our Streets Now. Our interviews with girls highlighted locally based activity, from setting up their own podcast to discuss social issues, to running a period poverty campaign in their school. In addition, young people living in a

post-industrial area of Wales came together to effect political change to get the streetlights working – an issue that particularly impacts the safety girls feel when in public at night ³⁷.

The covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures throughout 2020 forced many youth-led movements to operate online, but this is a double-edged sword. According to UNICEF ³⁸, the digitisation of civic action can provide more equitable access to adolescents and young people than traditional forms of activism, since it offers a relatively low-barrier entry to engagement. However, there are risks in the digital space, such as online harassment and bullying, the prevalence of disinformation and privacy challenges, as well as the lack of access and accessibility for some young people.

Whether online or offline, many young people, including girls, are working incredibly hard to take a stand on what matters to them and to society at large.



Esther, 20 and Muriel, 21, Bangor

BEING A FEMINIST

“ They [boys] are just like ‘I could never go out with anyone who’s a feminist’. Why not? We’re just standing up for ourselves and we want equality. I don’t see why they think that’s such a bad thing. ”

- Swansea focus group participant

While there is no statistical data on how many girls identify with feminism, many of the girls in our focus groups expressed knowledge of a range of feminist and gender inequality issues, and some felt strongly about women’s rights. One girl told us: *“I remember the first time I fully appreciated what feminism is ... was when I heard Emma Watson call herself a feminist. I was like, oh my god! I love Emma Watson, I need to google what this means,”* (interview participant, 16).

However, it was clear from the focus groups that openly identifying as a feminist is not always easy for girls. Participants in Swansea agreed that openly identifying as a feminist at school means ‘putting a target on their back’ or ‘putting yourself in the line of fire’. Participants in Chepstow talked about how girls are openly mocked and labelled a ‘feminazi’, or even referred to as a ‘disease’.

For many of the girls we spoke to, a silencing happened which led them to avoid talking about feminist politics or identifying with the label. A Swansea focus group participant demonstrated this when describing a classroom occurrence: *“he [male classmate] proceeded to ask everyone else on the table who were all girls, ‘Are you a feminist?’ and they were all like, ‘No’. Like straight away.”*

It is understandable why girls may opt to disidentify with the labels when we see the potential consequences of openly identifying as a feminist. The girls discussed how they do not believe the boys understand what feminism is; as one explained, *“I think it’s just lack of education on what a feminist is. Because I have approached the subject and the first thing that came up was like ‘Do you hate men?’”* (Swansea focus group participant).

CASE STUDY: PLAN INTERNATIONAL UK STAND WITH GIRLS - CARDIFF

MOTIVATION:

Plan International UK's research shows that girls are often left unheard and their needs unmet. To ensure that girls understood their rights and had the tools to affect change in their local communities, Plan International UK developed its first domestic programme, STAND With Girls, which was delivered between 2017 and 2019.

ACTION:

A structured learning programme was delivered to girls through four youth organisations and communities in Leeds, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Oxford. Participants explored key themes, including gender stereotypes, developing assertiveness, advocacy and campaigning. Girls were supported to engage with decision makers locally and nationally by developing their own campaigns, and to share their work with their peers and wider communities.

Fed up with a lack of positive and

quality period education for girls living in Wales, the Cardiff group decided to make their own education materials. They conducted a survey of young people in Cardiff. With over 170 responses, they found a wide range of misconceptions about menstruation and inconsistent quality of period education.

IMPACT:

Through their campaign, the Cardiff group met the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, and the education materials they developed have been added to the Welsh Education Hub, allowing them to be used by young people and educators across Wales.

STAND With Girls raised girls' voices and increased the profile of girls' rights locally and nationally, helping to ensure girls' voices are taken into account when decisions are being made that affect their lives.



Annie, 21, Bangor

DECIDE

Girls should have control over their lives and bodies and make informed choices about their relationships and sexual and reproductive health.

MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND PERIOD POVERTY

Period Poverty

Period poverty is a global problem, affecting adolescent girls in many different countries and contexts. Our analysis defines ‘period poverty’ as a lack of access to products, shame and stigma surrounding periods, and a lack of education about menstruation. These three elements combined have created a culture of silence that puts girls’ health at risk.

In Wales, our 2018 survey found that 15% of girls aged 14-21 were unable to afford period products, while one in three said they had struggled to pay but ultimately managed. In the past 12 months, 13% had to rely on friends to provide products ³⁹.

Menstrual education is also a key issue. The girls in our focus groups told us how primary schools were unprepared for girls who started menstruating earlier in life and suggested that children should be taught about periods “as soon as you start school,” because “it needs to be normalised,” (Swansea focus group participant). For most of the girls in the Swansea group, learning about periods in the last year of their primary school was too late. As one participant explained, “I started in Year 5 and ... in my school they didn’t actually have sanitary bins,” (Swansea focus group participant).

In addition, school toilet policies are not always working for girls menstruating at school. A Swansea-based participant explained how going to the toilet during class requires special permission from the teacher. In these instances, girls feel very self-conscious and told us they would often rather wait and risk leaking than ask to leave.

Period shame is further reinforced through the behaviour of peers at school. The girls told stories of boys going through girls’ bags and taking ‘selfies’ with their period products, being dismissed as being on their period if they showed emotion, and being bullied if they have not started menstruating yet; “this has happened to me so many times, when someone says in front of a group of other people, ‘I can’t believe you still haven’t started your period yet’” (Swansea focus group participant). While another girl told us: “girls are taking days off due to periods and I think they should normalise it more, because I think girls get ashamed and that they shouldn’t go to the office if they need Tampax,” (interview participant, 17).

The girls we spoke to want open and regular sex education classes that involve boys, and school facilities that support their needs.

In many of the focus groups and interviews girls discussed their frustration that boys are not taught anything related to girls' bodies, including menstruation. One girl in Swansea told us, *“when the nurse went to teach us about pads and tampons and how it flowed and how everything worked, they took the boys into a separate room down the corridor, so they wouldn't hear it. As if it's something to be embarrassed about.”* (Interview participant, 16). Another said *“They [boys] didn't understand what we had to go through every month or understand how we grew with our bodies. So, they didn't respect how we grew. They didn't respect it because they didn't understand it.”* (Interview participant, 16).

The Welsh Parliament provided £2.3 million in grants for councils to fund a period poverty

scheme in 2019. In early 2020, it committed to providing a further £3.1 million in new funding for every school and college in Wales from 2020-2021, to help tackle period poverty ⁴⁰. This funding should enable thousands of girls to access period products when they need them. With support from the Period Dignity in Schools Grant from Welsh Government councils across Wales have been able to continue providing products during lockdowns.

The method in which products are provided within the schools and other sites will determine the success of this scheme. Providing much needed menstrual education and information about different products available and addressing stigma will all be crucial.

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a common chronic condition affecting 10% of women and girls of reproductive age ⁴¹. Symptoms can include severe menstrual pain, irregular or heavy periods, painful sexual intercourse, bowel and bladder pain, female sub-fertility and chronic fatigue. The impact of these symptoms can be devastating; they can affect education and employment attainment, relationships and quality of life.

The Endometriosis Task and Finish Group found that provision of services to women and girls with endometriosis is not currently

meeting the need ⁴². According to their UK-wide survey ⁴³, patients treated by the Welsh NHS wait an average of eight years for a referral to a gynaecologist. This is one year longer than in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. Such significant delays are deemed to arise from patients not acting on their symptoms, and health professionals not responding appropriately to symptoms reported to them, resulting in a lack of diagnosis or patients being passed around to various different healthcare professionals before being diagnosed ⁴⁴.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

An estimated 137,000 girls and women are said to be living with the consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM) in England and Wales ⁴⁵ and 60,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk. It is estimated there are 140 victims of FGM a year in Wales ⁴⁶. While awareness of FGM continues to grow, statistics on the prevalence of girls at risk remain unreliable, resulting in likely underestimation ⁴⁷.

FGM comprises of “all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” ⁴⁸. According to Forward UK, FGM is justified by various different cultural, economic

and religious reasons, such as enhancing the girl’s beauty, maintaining her virginity, marriageability and bride price, and increasing her husband’s sexual pleasure ⁴⁹. It has no health benefits and can cause long-term physical, emotional and psychological trauma, and in some cases, death ⁵⁰.

The law has progressed in recent years to better protect girls in England and Wales. In April 2016, multi-agency statutory guidance on FGM was issued as part of the Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003) in England and Wales. In January 2019, updated sentencing guidelines for the offence of failing to protect girls and young women from the risk of FGM came into force in courts in England and Wales.

PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Preventing and responding to FGM requires a multi-pronged approach. Welsh Parliament and Welsh Women’s Aid published guidance for schools and school governors on taking a whole school approach to addressing violence against women and girls. While schools play a crucial role in addressing FGM, community-based work is also essential. Plan International UK’s interview * with Lisa Zimmerman of Integrate UK demonstrated how important peer-led work outside of school is, because girls feel more relaxed, have a higher level of trust, and are more likely to make a disclosure or engage in discussions about FGM ⁵¹.

* Interview conducted for The State of Girls’ Rights in the UK 2019-2020 report.

CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is a violation of human rights, robs children of their childhood and can destroy their chance of the future they want. Under international law, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18. Therefore, marriage under the age of 18 is classed as child marriage. In England and Wales, the legal age of marriage is 18, however, a provision allows people aged 16 and 17 to get married with parental consent. It is illegal to force marriage in England and Wales, which includes forcing a British national into marriage outside of the UK. Despite this, according to Girls Not Brides, some parents “use these legal loopholes to force the marriages of their children who are aged 16 or 17”⁵². At the time of writing, Conservative MP Pauline Latham had recently introduced a Bill to ban marriage before the age of 18 in England and Wales.

Child marriage and forced marriage are reported to affect every local authority area in Britain, however, a Freedom of Information request found that 56% of departments responsible for children’s social care in England and Wales were not recording the number of children at risk of child marriage, potentially leaving many children, particularly girls, at risk of falling under the radar⁵³.

The official number of people marrying at 16 and 17 in England and Wales is low and has been falling in recent years - there were 43 teenage boys and 140 teenage girls married with parental consent in 2017, however, this official number excludes religious and customary ceremonies which aren’t legally recognised, therefore the actual child marriage figure is likely to be higher.



Hollie, 15, Merthyr Tydfil

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

“ It’s been a rollercoaster ... Usually I’m used to getting out and getting active and that really helps, and now all of a sudden, I couldn’t do all of those things that used to help [my mental health] a lot. So it’s been a struggle. ”

- Interview participant, 21

The prevalence of mental health issues amongst young people has been a growing concern in recent years, and the coronavirus pandemic has intensified this issue. Rethink Mental Illness experienced a surge in demand for mental health advice from the public, signalling an approaching mental health crisis. During the pandemic, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales undertook survey research⁵⁴ and found that only 50% of children aged 12-18 felt happy ‘most of the time’. Whilst the majority of this group felt safe most of the time (78%), 16% felt sad most of the time. Not being able to see friends and family members were common reasons. According to recent research by Young Minds, the pandemic “has put a huge strain on many young people who were already struggling with their mental health, because of traumatic experiences, social isolation, a loss of routine and a breakdown in formal and informal support.”

Earlier pandemic research found that some young people were experiencing positive effects of the first lockdown: spending more time with parents, learning new skills, enjoying the outdoors and getting respite from bullying at school. This is echoed by a girl we interviewed: “*myself and a lot of my peers became more confident throughout this lockdown and we became happier with who*

we are. Which I think is a little bit messed up! My confidence shouldn’t grow when I’m shut in a house by myself. It made me highlight all of the aspects of myself that I’ve been holding back because I’ve been worried about people around me and I’m going to be judged. I feel like I’ve become a lot more opinionated in this lockdown. ... I was almost scared to talk about my opinions, I was scared of someone thinking I was bossy. But throughout lockdown I realised that there is nothing wrong with that.” (Interview participant, 16).

Even before the pandemic, mental health provision was not meeting the need. In Wales, the 80% target for children and young people to be seen within four weeks from the referral date to the first outpatient appointment was not met. In August 2017, only 39.4% of patients were seen within four weeks, while in March 2018, 68.5% of patients were seen within the four-week period⁵⁵. A UK-wide survey found that three in four (76%) parents said that their child’s mental health had deteriorated while waiting for specialist mental health support⁵⁶.

During the pandemic, the Welsh Government created a Young Person’s Mental Health Toolkit which provides self-help information and advice through different mediums to people aged 11 to 25⁵⁷.

The gendered nature of mental health

Data about the mental health impact of coronavirus by both sex and age is very difficult to find, yet mental ill-health is a gendered issue that manifests differently for girls and boys. For example, the Children's Society's Good Childhood report shows girls across England, Wales and Scotland are more than twice as likely as boys to self-harm ⁵⁸.

Suicide is also a gendered issue. 2017 data shows it was the most common cause of death for both boys (16.2% of all deaths) and girls (13.3%) aged between five and 19 years in England and Wales ⁵⁹. Research suggests a 'gender paradox', whereby suicidal ideation and attempts are more common amongst women, but 'completed' suicides are more common amongst men, as a result of using more violent means ⁶⁰.

Depressive symptoms linked to social media use are higher among girls ⁶¹ and are connected to disrupted sleep (young people sleeping close to their phones, checking regularly throughout the night and screen exposure at night time affecting melatonin production and circadian rhythm). Harassment and bullying, particularly around the sharing of images, also contributes to depressive episodes ⁶².

The pressure from social media was explained by an interview participant: *"There's always been this pressure on girls to have so many likes, and if we don't get likes then you feel down, you genuinely do feel well no-one likes me. No-one really likes you as a person if you don't get likes. So, I reckon they should bring that [removing likes on Instagram] over because it'll change the way girls feel so much. It would have such an impact on young people. An amazing impact on us."* (Interview participant, 15).

The traditional gender role of girls and women as 'carers' is still entrenched in our culture and there are cultural expectations of them supporting others' mental health and wellbeing. This seems to be placing pressure on girls' own mental health and wellbeing; *"I ended up crying that night because I was seen as a very motherly figure to everyone."* (Chepstow focus group participant). The Chepstow focus group participants in particular said they would really appreciate being able to share this emotional labour that takes a toll on their own wellbeing with the boys in their lives.



Angel, 20 and Jo-Ann, 18, Carmarthenshire

BODY IMAGE, SELF ESTEEM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Body image issues can have serious consequences for girls' mental and physical health, as well as other areas of life such as access to education, sport and leisure time. In one focus group, the girls talked about being too self-conscious about their bodies to get cervical smear tests; *"I'm really self-conscious of my body and so I'm terrified of going."* Our recent survey found that 1 in 6 girls aged 14-21 have missed work or school due to worrying about their appearance ⁶³.

Whether online or offline, the cultural pressure to look a certain way remains a key source of anxiety in girls' lives – including throughout lockdowns. Aspirational and 'ideal' beauty and body shapes, that are perpetuated by the media, industry and influencers, have changed throughout the past century, with each decade bringing a new ideal. However, in the past few years, these 'trends' have been changing at an even faster pace and

“ You’ve got to have this perfect petite body, you’ve got to have a big chest, big backside, but you’ve also got to be this skinny little twig thing ... You’ve got to have like the perfect neck, perfect jawline, perfect shaped face. ”

- Interview participant, 16

putting tremendous pressure on girls to 'keep up'. This pressure is exacerbated by the exponential images girls are exposed to, both online and offline. The 'ideal' is also shaped by race, ethnicity and culture, and many girls of colour are affected by the internalisation of white European ideals.

Our research with girls highlighted the increasing normalisation of makeup, cosmetic procedures and even plastic surgery. One interview participant told us, *"a lot of the girls were like, 'Oh my God, if I had this done to my body, I would look so much better' and I find it, personally, quite stupid. ... It's been such a big issue recently of girls wanting to have plastic surgery and wanting to look like all these big stars."* (Interview participant, 15).

One participant succinctly explained that on social media, *"if they [girls] don't conform to the certain mould, then you'll be judged I guess, because either you show too much or you show too little, there's no in between. There's no right, there's only wrong."* (Swansea focus group participant). Another told us, *"it's like the world is against young girls, like you have to post certain pictures, wearing certain clothes, looking a certain way, you have to be skinny,"* (Swansea focus group participant). What is clear is the sheer amount of scrutiny girls are under.

Much of the content on social media is clearly exacerbating girls' body dissatisfaction and increasing the pressure to look a certain way. This includes the use of digital editing, filters

and body image trends such as the ‘thigh gap’* craze on Tumblr. A participant explained that *“It’s mostly fake, but it pressurises people, especially women,”* (Chepstow focus group participant), demonstrating that it’s not the case that girls are passive dupes to the images on social media but that the messages online nevertheless permeate girls’ sense of self-worth.

To attempt to manage this pressure, some participants explained that they use ‘spam’ pages - otherwise known as ‘finstas’ (fake insta), which are private, hidden accounts. One girl explained that *“people will follow a girl’s spam account to kind of reveal who she actually is,”* (Chepstow focus group participant) because she can regulate who is able to follow her account. On this account participants talked about posting ‘silly’ and ‘ugly’ photos of themselves.

It was clear from all our conversations with girls that their relationship to social media is complex. Some girls explained how they use it to find more information about art or political issues, but the pressure on girls’ public online

image is clear. One girl told us directly, *“I have a really conflicting relationship with social media, I think Instagram is something that can be really powerful but also really self-destructive. ... When I was in year 8 it really did kind of make me question myself, ‘Am I pretty?’ Over time, I’ve kind of changed my following on social media”* (interview participant, 16), highlighting the impact of content as opposed to simply the platform itself.

Another interview participant first told us, *“Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, pretty much everything you can think of ... Probably every hour I’ll go on my phone and go on them”*, yet also telling us, *“I wish I didn’t ever have social media”* (Interview participant, 15). However, the impact that it has on girls’ lives is most succinctly and powerfully put by a focus group participant who said, *“It just makes me so angry that an app, so basically lots of lines of code, can change the way that somebody feels about themselves and change decisions that they make in their lives.”* (Chepstow focus group participant).

* A thigh gap is a body shape where the inner thighs do not touch each other.



Leah, 17, Swansea



Girls should be able to grow up in a safe society in which they can thrive.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Public sexual harassment

Our 2018 survey found that amongst girls aged 14 to 21 in Wales, 52% had experienced unwanted sexual attention or harassment in a public place (compared to 66% UK-wide). A staggering 37% of girls in Wales said they had been followed in public. Public sexual harassment persisted even in lockdown: our survey of girls in the UK found that 19% had experienced public sexual harassment during lockdown in 2020 ⁶⁴.

Public sexual harassment is a form of violence against women and girls. Like other forms of gender-based violence, it is an expression of power and gender inequality. It is caused by, reproduces and reinforces the idea that girls' bodies are subject to men's desire, ownership, judgement, scrutiny and unwanted physical access, even in public spaces, whatever their age or wishes.

It encompasses a wide range of behaviours including: leering or persistent staring; following; sexually propositioning; sexual gestures; sexually explicit comments; intrusive persistent questioning; 'catcalling'; 'wolf-whistling'; non-consensual physical

contact such as kissing, groping, stroking etc.; non-contact technology-enabled sexual behaviour, such as 'Air Dropping' unwanted illicit images to someone's phone (also known as cyber-flashing); 'up-skirting'; and viewing or showing pornography in public.

It is usually directed towards women and girls. A person's race, disability, gender identity or sexuality can compound and intensify their experience, as perpetrators exploit the many vulnerabilities in a victim's identity. Our 2018 research found that Black, Asian and ethnic minority girls and LGBTIQ+ young people were more likely to experience public sexual harassment on a regular basis ⁶⁵.

Public sexual harassment affects girls' mental health, self-esteem, sense of safety and seriously impinges on their right to equal access to public space. As one girl told us: *"I wouldn't really walk around the streets on my own now because of the stories we hear, and people being harassed in the streets, and you know, all the different alleys in the streets. I wouldn't walk around here on my own, personally."* (Interview participant, 15).

“**When I was around 13/14, I was waiting at a bus stop after being at a friend’s house to go home and there was a drunk gentleman who started to talk to me, and he said he could do anything to me at that time, because I didn’t know who he was and he could just get away with it. And it’s one of the things has stuck with me, because as much as that instance scared me, he was right.**”

- Interview participant, 21

A study of young people in an area of Wales explained that a lack of investment in streetlights has ignited “strong feelings of fear, isolation and disconnection” amongst its young residents⁶⁶. In addition, the absence of people and a quiet street can invoke feelings of fear for girls and young women, as one participant explained, “*When I’m walking home from school, even though there’s no one on the road, that’s why I feel unsafe, because if someone wanted to come up that hill and kidnap me, then there’s no one around.*” (Chepstow focus group participant).

Girls are changing their behaviours to avoid being sexually harassed, such as not wearing certain clothes, not exercising outdoors, changing the time they travel, taking different routes, not going out alone or not going out at all. This restricts how they would otherwise wish to behave in public, where they go and when, and places the onus on girls to stay safe, rather than

addressing the actions of perpetrators. Incidents are rarely reported. 41% of girls in Wales who had been sexually harassed in public did not tell anyone about their experience, despite 90% saying they had been negatively affected by the harassment, including feeling unsafe (37%), anxious (40%) and degraded (25%). The girls we interviewed in Bangor relayed numerous personal experiences of sexual harassment and assault. They told us they think public sexual harassment should be criminalised and for the law to be made clear, not only to report, but to be able to receive support:

“If they do experience something like that, there could be a ‘go to’ number or someone to go. Not even just to report it, but more, ‘What do I do now? I don’t know how to feel?’ Because a lot of the time it’s shock. It’s like when the person reached into my jacket, I fully stopped dead in my tracks and I was like, ‘Wow! What just happened?’” (Interview participant, 20).

Online sexual harassment

A key topic of conversation in our focus groups was the digitalisation of sexual harassment. Girls told us they are contacted by people they don't know through social media relatively frequently; *"Oh, that happens a lot."* (Swansea focus group participant). One participant explained that *"It can be older people, but sometimes it's people we know, like boys in this school,"* (Swansea focus group participant).

Being asked for intimate photographs is commonplace for adolescent girls, and some boys start requesting this from as young as 11 and 12; *"Some of them are in Year 7, it*

starts in Year 7 for sure" (Swansea focus group participant). The girls we heard from described being 'banned' from social media by concerned parents or having to say 'no' over and over again. As one participant explained, *"Some of them are really forceful. Like, 'You have to. You have to send me pictures,'"* (Swansea focus group participant), while another described her friends' experiences: *"He messaged this girl every day for a week, asking her to send photos, and the same to this other girl. And one of the girls was telling me that ... she felt really under pressure because he was asking like every day"* (Swansea focus group participant).

Intimate partner violence

The negative impact of lockdown measures on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence has been widely reported. Agenda's research identified increases in domestic abuse, as well as an increase in homophobia from family members toward some girls⁶⁷. In addition, stalking was also identified as something enabled by the conditions of lockdown. The Welsh Government states that the need to socially distance or self-isolate can amplify an abuser's control and power, while reducing the support networks available for victims of abuse⁶⁸.

Organisations set up to support victims of abuse have seen increases in demand over lockdown⁶⁹, with many organisations unable to meet the need and others forced to innovate and adapt. For example, Women's Aid and the Rail Delivery Group launched the 'Rail to refuge' scheme in March 2020 to help people experiencing domestic abuse to travel to their refuge for free, recognising that survivors do not always have the money or control over money needed to travel⁷⁰.

Not all young people in relationships are cohabiting, however intimate partner violence is a serious issue amongst young people. A 2011 NSPCC study of young people in intimate relationships in Wales found that 25% of girls had experienced physical abuse (compared to 18% of boys), 75% of girls experienced emotional abuse (compared to 14% of boys) and 33% of girls experienced sexual abuse (compared to 16% of boys). The study also found that girls experience more severe abuse and more frequent abuse, and suffer more negative impacts on their welfare, compared to boys⁷¹.

Many young people are unclear about what constitutes gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, and whether it is acceptable. A 2013 study found that while most people aged 13 to 14 believed it is wrong to hit a partner, many could think of exceptions to this rule – and boys were more likely than girls to endorse these exceptions⁷². Worryingly, the study found that many young people did not see controlling behaviour or 'put

downs' as domestic abuse. Further, up to date research is needed.

Some of the issues surrounding gender-equal relationships, such as consent, are a consequence of easy access to pornographic material. Evidence suggests pornography consumption plays a significant role in violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse and sexual violence - amongst both adults and young people ⁷³. More data is needed to understand how pornography affects young people in Wales and their views on sex and relationships, but we do know that in England, by age 16 most have seen porn. Older boys are more likely to have seen pornography and to watch it more often than girls or younger boys, and boys are more likely to feel positive about it than girls ⁷⁴.

Real world, inclusive education is a crucial factor in girls realising their sexual and reproductive rights and challenging harmful

attitudes and ideas. However, young people are turning to informal sources of information, such as pornography and the media, instead of receiving quality sex and relationships education that teaches female pleasure, girls' bodies and consent. Some of the girls we spoke to in Wales were critical and frustrated with the sex education they did receive, including education on consent. One girl told us, *"In school, we learned about consent in about year 10, year 11. We had a police officer come in and show us some videos, but it wasn't taken seriously because boys don't care. Boys don't care about consent, they care about their enjoyment"* (interview participant, 16).

The Welsh Government has taken recent steps to fill this education gap; relationships and sex education will be a statutory part of the curriculum, due to be in place across Wales by 2022. After a consultation, it has been decided that parents will not have the right to withdraw their children ⁷⁵.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that women are around three times as likely as men to have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16 ⁷⁶. Sexual abuse has become the most common type of abuse counselled by Childline in recent years ⁷⁷. Furthermore, the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that in the year ending March 2019, there were 3.1 million people aged 18-74 (equivalent to 7.5%) who had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16.

NSPCC describe child sexual abuse as "when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This may involve physical contact or non-contact activities and can happen online or offline." ⁷⁸ Children do not

always know or understand that they are being sexually abused or may be too scared to tell someone.

The impact can last a lifetime. According to the NSPCC, those who have experienced child sexual abuse can suffer from poor mental health, post-traumatic stress, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, feelings of shame and guilt, drug and alcohol problems and relationship problems with friends, family and partners ⁷⁹.

Measuring the scale and nature of child sexual abuse is difficult because it is often hidden. There is not one source that records all cases of abuse and incidents may become known through different channels,

such as children's services or the police. However, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in March 2019, there

were 120 children in Wales on the child protection register for experience of risk of sexual abuse ⁸⁰.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse. According to the widely adopted and official definition, it occurs when "an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity" ⁸¹. The child may perform sexual activities or have sexual activities performed on them in exchange for gifts, drugs, money or affection. It can take place online or in person, or both.

CSE researcher, Dr Jessica Eaton, argues that framing CSE as an "exchange" between the perpetrator and victim "neutralises the power dynamic and harm done to girls by adult and peer perpetrators." She argues that it "positions rape and abuse as a 'sex act' that the girl engages in to get something she 'needs or wants'". In addition, Eaton's research found that "almost all the CSE risk toolkits used in the UK contain a marker for girls who 'dress provocatively or over-sexualised'". This conceptualisation of both

CSE and female victims as provocative young women has led to some female victims being missed by authorities ⁸².

Similarly, framing and researching CSE as a gender-neutral phenomenon hides the highly gendered nature of this form of abuse. Eaton draws attention to this: "the national repository holds 67 serious case reviews published between 2011-2018, following prolonged child sexual exploitation and murder or suicide following child sexual exploitation; 62 (93%) of those cases were about the death or abuse of girls."

The impact of child sexual exploitation on survivors is devastating and long-term. They can struggle with forming new relationships, become isolated from family and friends, suffer poor mental health and attempt suicide. They might become pregnant at a young age, take part in criminal activities, fail exams or leave school and experience unemployment ⁸³.



Alicia, 19, Swansea

GIRLS WITH CARE EXPERIENCE

Care-experienced children and young people often enter the system due to abuse or neglect and tend to experience poorer life outcomes across education, health, mental health, poverty, housing and employment. The care system includes different care arrangements and placements, including foster care, residential childcare settings or living with relatives. In Wales in 2019, there were 6,845 children growing up in care, including 3,695 boys and 3,150 girls ⁸⁴.

A 2018 survey by Coram Voice ⁸⁵ sought to understand the wellbeing and perspectives of looked after children. It found most respondents felt safe in their placement and trusted their carer. Gender differences were noted for both general wellbeing and experience of bullying. Girls were almost twice as likely as boys to have low wellbeing

“ Care experience young people don’t get their story or their voices heard as much as they would like to. And the changes they would like to make to the care system or to their lifestyle or whatever they want, they can’t make... ”

- Interview participant, 18

(23% and 13% respectively). Happiness with appearance was the most important factor in good wellbeing for girls, as well as trusting their social worker. In terms of bullying, 42% of girls aged 11-18 were afraid to go to school because of bullying, compared to 18% of boys of the same age.

We interviewed some young women with care experience about a range of topics, including their experience of being in care. They told us that it is harder to make friends when peers know that you are care experienced, due to judgement and stereotypical views, and they relayed numerous negative comments, such as, “*When I was in primary I used to get a lot of ‘Your mother doesn’t care about you. You don’t live with your parents because your parents don’t love you’*” (interview participant, 17). Another told us, “*A lot of people have said to me, ‘Oh, when you grow up, you’re going to be a horrible mother.’ ...Just because I’m in care, it doesn’t change you as a person*” (interview participant, 16).

A 2019 review by Care Inspectorate Wales found that the needs of care-experienced children are increasing in complexity. Most local authorities reviewed were struggling to find suitable placements, particularly for those with complex needs. The review found that a greater choice of placements and range of services was urgently needed. It highlighted significant pressures on the social work workforce and the sufficiency of foster carers, making it more difficult for children to secure their much-needed stable relationships ⁸⁶.

Young mums with care experience

Care-experienced young people are three times more likely to become mothers before the age of 18 compared to peers who have not experienced state care⁸⁷. Becoming a young mum without the security and protection of support networks and family can make these girls incredibly vulnerable. Young mums with care experience are often reliant on the welfare system for income, healthcare and housing, yet the system is extremely difficult for children and young people to navigate and care-experienced young mums are reported to feel scrutinised by professionals⁸⁸. Some research has found that caring for a child can be a positive and stabilising experience for care-experienced young people, but without sufficient formal and informal support, it can lead to a detrimental impact on girls' life outcomes, from education to housing and employment⁸⁹.

A 2015 research review found that factors which increase the likelihood of teenage

pregnancy in general are also factors related to care-experienced girls, including disrupted, neglectful or abusive family relationships, material deprivation, lower educational attainment, peer pressure to engage in sexual activity at a younger age (particularly in residential care settings), and barriers to sexual health advice and support - particularly for those who move between placements are more likely to miss out on vital sex education, which other children receive from school and/or at home⁹⁰. Some research also suggests a motivation to have a baby to address a lack of love and attachment from their own parents⁹¹.

The research review noted that the success of the long-term teenage pregnancy intervention in reducing the overall rate in England and Wales has not extended to care-experienced children, due to the lack of tailored interventions that can respond to this group's unique needs.

CASE STUDY: NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY SERVICE CYMRU PROJECT UNITY

MOTIVATION:

Project Unity emerged from the increasing number of advocacy cases of young women in crisis which NYAS Cymru were being asked to support. At the same time, Dr Louise Roberts at Cardiff University was undertaking research on the outcomes of young women who become pregnant in care. It became clear that this group needed intervention at an early stage, yet there was a clear gap in provision.

ACTION:

NYAS Cymru began to work with the girls and young women to coproduce a new and ambitious programme, Project Unity. The programme provides intensive support to care-experienced young women who were either pregnant or had children at risk of entering the care system. The aim is to keep families together; to break the cycle and uphold the rights and entitlements of young women and their

children. Alongside this, they created peer support networks for young women who are often isolated, in fear, scared and confused by the systems around them.

IMPACT:

Every young woman who gave feedback highlighted how support from Project Unity had increased their confidence – to speak out, attend meetings and represent herself and her children. Project Unity has been acknowledged as a pioneering piece of work in social care across Wales. NYAS Cymru were finalists in the Children and Young People Now Awards, Youth Work Excellence Awards and European Social Care Awards for Innovation. The Welsh Government recognised the impact of Project Unity and agreed to fund an expansion of the project (Phase 2) to support work across the whole of Wales until March 2023.

GENDER IDENTITY

A 2018 review highlighted that the UK, along with other developed countries, is seeing an increase in the number of young people who are questioning their gender and taking the decision to pursue social and medical transition in line with their identified gender. There has been a growth in children and young people referred to the gender identity services since 2011. This growth is higher amongst birth-registered females⁹², yet there appears to be a research gap on why this is.

Young people have an expanding vocabulary for gender identity, and it has been found that many young people see the rights of trans people and people from sexual minorities as simply 'modern' or 'twenty-first century'⁹³. However, the safety and wellbeing of trans young people is a key concern. More than two in five trans young people (41 per cent) have

tried to take their own life⁹⁴. Trans people are also more likely to be at risk of homelessness due to familial rejection and there are difficulties in accessing support⁹⁵.

Many trans people have reported negative reactions to transitioning from their schools. A large-scale government survey in the UK found that 35% of trans respondents had started transitioning before the age of 18 and of those, 69% said that they were transitioning while at school. Of those who were transitioning at school, 45% said their school was not very, or at all, supportive⁹⁶. A report by Stonewall Cymru found that three in five trans pupils (62 per cent) say that staff at their school are not familiar with the term 'trans' and what it means. The same report found two in five (42 per cent) are not able to be known by their preferred name at school⁹⁷.

CASE STUDY: YOUTH CYMRU TRANS*FORM CYMRU

MOTIVATION:

Through consultations with trans young people in Wales, it became increasingly clear to Youth Cymru that there was a significant gap in terms of services and support available to these young people.

ACTION:

In response, Youth Cymru developed the Trans*Form programme which supports trans young people to take action on their passions, concerns and aspirations. In addition, Youth Cymru worked in partnership with the Amber Project to create *Belong*; a series of workshops, social days, support and counselling for trans, non-binary and questioning young people.

Belong and Trans*Form provides young trans people in Wales with their own safe space to explore their experiences. The groups have showcased their work through the annual *Belong* showcase and the 'Humanequin' partnership project; a theatre and film collaboration

created to empower young trans people to support schools to become places where gender diversity is celebrated, not stigmatised.

During Trans*Form, young people had the opportunity to create performances and short films based on their experiences, lead trans awareness training sessions with young people and practitioners, attend the Stonewall Youth Brunch and Pride Cymru parade with 15000 people in attendance. They also met with the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to inform the Welsh Government Transgender Action Plan.

THE RESULTS:

The Trans*Form programme has enabled trans young people in Wales to meet and socialise with their peers, develop skills and confidence, and make a real difference to the lives of others.

SECTION 2

THE IMPACT OF PLACE: LOCAL AUTHORITY INDEX



Muriel, 21, Bangor

Where a girl lives shapes her experiences, life opportunities and human rights outcomes. To understand what it means to grow up as a girl in Wales, it is necessary to look at the impact of place-based inequality, therefore we created a local authority girls' rights index.

This index draws attention to the structural barriers to girls' rights. It illustrates substantial variation in girls' rights and quality of life both across the UK and within each home nation. It shows that while girls across the UK face challenges to their rights, girls in different areas have different needs.

The index was created in 2019 for the 'State of Girls' Rights in the UK' report, published in January 2020. This report provides further index data from Wales. The index is based on these indicators (further details about each indicator can be found in the Appendix and in Plan International UK's 'State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020' report):

- Child poverty
- Life expectancy *
- Educational attainment
- Child obesity
- Teenage conception rates
- Not in education, employment or training (NEET) status

A note on methodology

We identified potential indicators aligned to each domain in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Equality Measurement Framework. Where possible, we collected data on each indicator that could be disaggregated by gender, age and local authority area. Due to inconsistent or non-existent data collection in some parts of the UK, we were unable to include some girls' rights indicators.

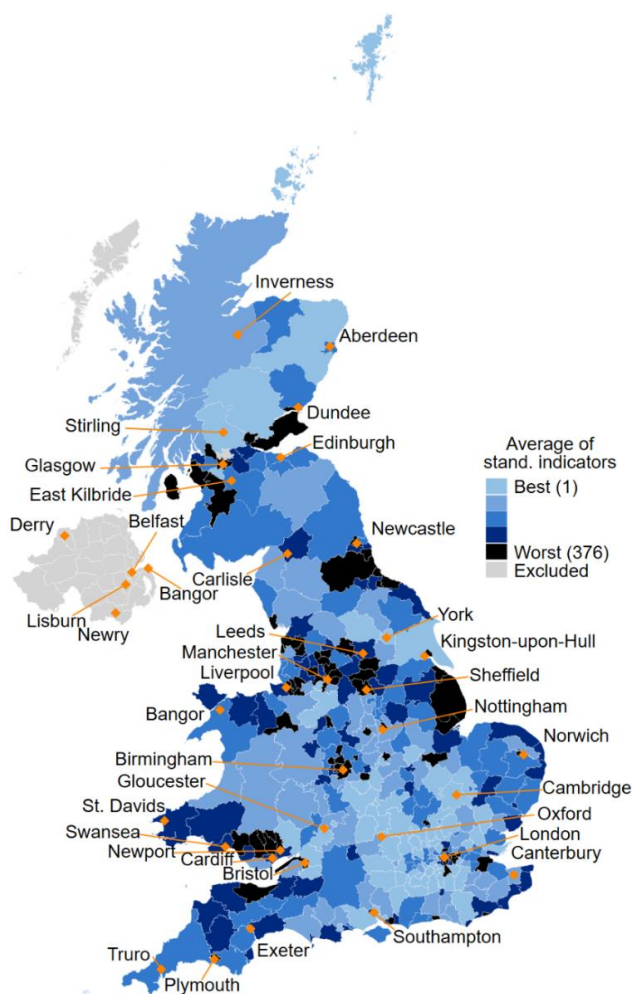
The overall index for England, Scotland and Wales, as well as the Wales-only index, only includes local authorities with full data or at most one indicator with missing data. As such, the whole of Northern Ireland and two Scottish local authorities are excluded from the overall index.

* Three measures of life expectancy are included: life-expectancy, healthy-life-expectancy and disability-free-life-expectancy.

ENGLAND, WALES AND SCOTLAND INDEX

Figure 1 compares the performance of English, Welsh and Scottish local authorities on the full set of indicators. The top performing places are dominated by Scottish local authorities, with Orkney Islands and East Renfrewshire ranking first and second respectively and Shetland Islands ranking fourth. Considering the bottom 10 local authorities, two are located in Wales, one is located in Scotland and the remaining seven are located in England.

Figure 1. Composite Indicator (England, Scotland and Wales) by Local Authority



Top 10

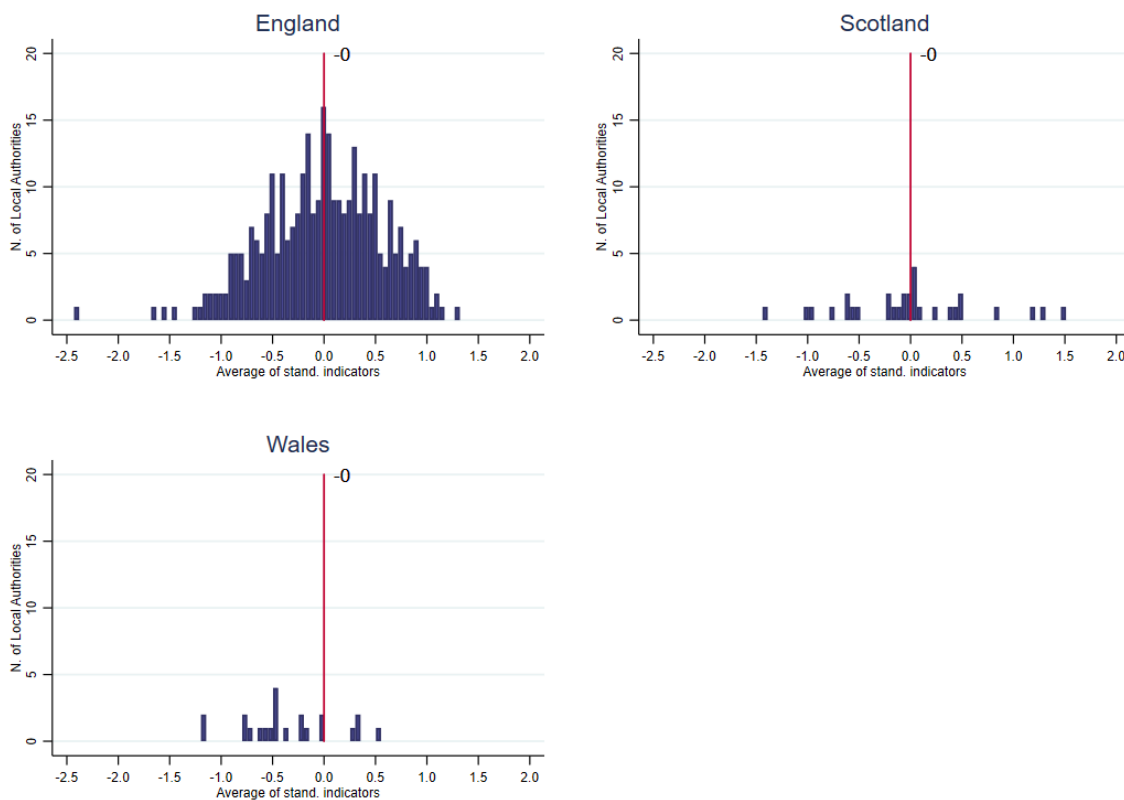
1	Orkney Islands	1.48
2	E. Renfrewshire	1.31
3	Wokingham	1.29
4	Shetland Islands	1.19
5	Richmond up. T.	1.15
6	West Berkshire	1.10
7	Waverley	1.09
8	S. Cambridgeshire	1.03
9	Hart	1.00
10	Kingston up. T.	1.00

Bottom 10

367	Hyndburn	-1.18
368	Merthyr Tydfil	-1.18
369	Blaenau Gwent	-1.20
370	Knowsley	-1.23
371	Liverpool	-1.23
372	Dundee City	-1.44
373	Kingston up. H.	-1.45
374	Hartlepool	-1.54
375	Nottingham	-1.68
376	Blackpool	-2.43

The Welsh local authorities are mostly distributed across the bottom half of the index, as shown in figure 2. This means local authorities in Wales are generally placed lower than local authorities in Scotland and England. Interestingly, there is a lower variation between local authority areas within Wales compared to variations within England and Scotland, suggesting lower levels of inequality within Wales (based on the indicators used).

Figure 2. Distribution of Local Authorities across Composite Indicator (England, Scotland and Wales)



Note: Data refers to the average rank score achieved by a given Local Authority across all indicators with non-missing values. East Dunbartonshire and Eileanan an Iar have not been mapped due to the extent of data gaps.

WALES INDEX

Overall, local authorities in central Wales appear to outperform both those in the North and South of Wales, with the best results being achieved by Monmouthshire and Powys. Considering Monmouthshire specifically, the positive result is mainly driven by the low teenage conception rate registered in the area. All major Welsh cities (Cardiff, Swansea and Newport) occupy mid-ranking positions.

Figure 3. Composite Indicator (Wales) by Local Authority

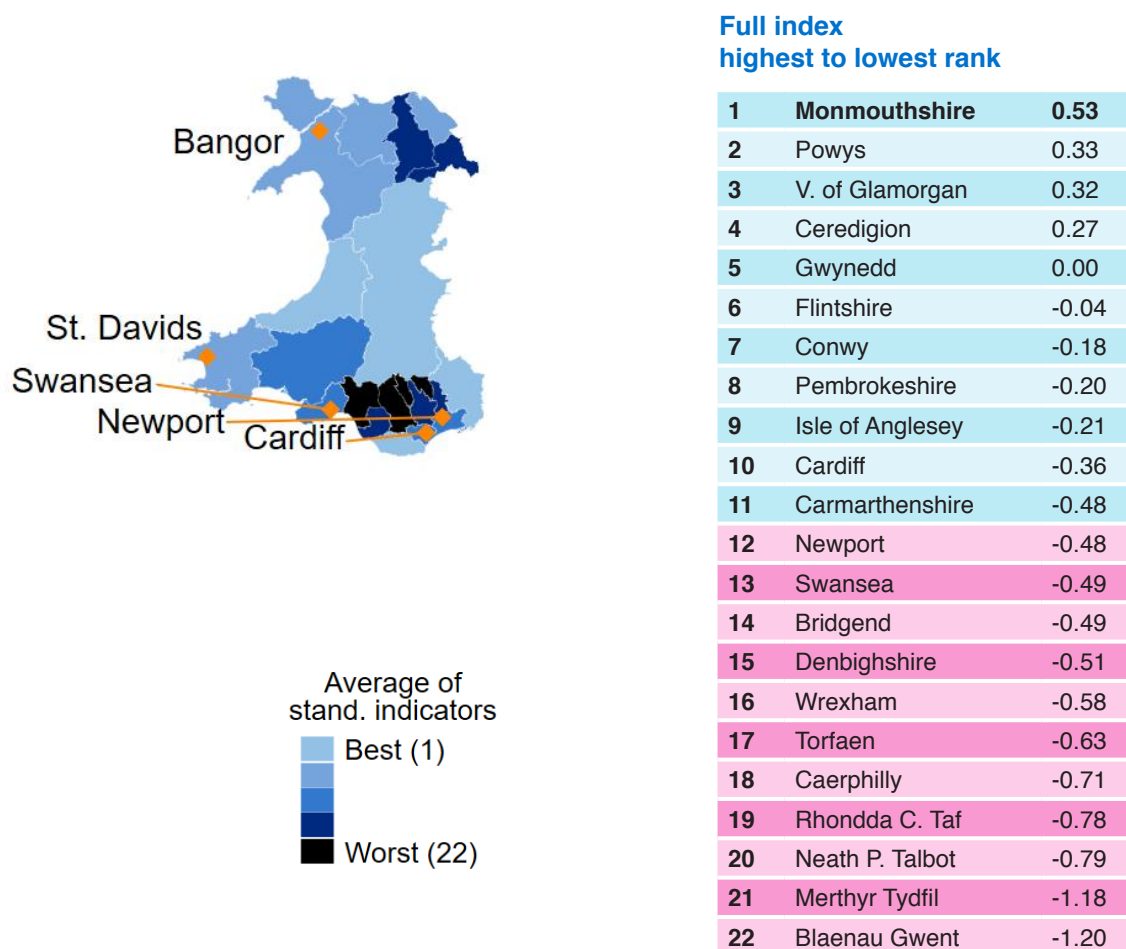
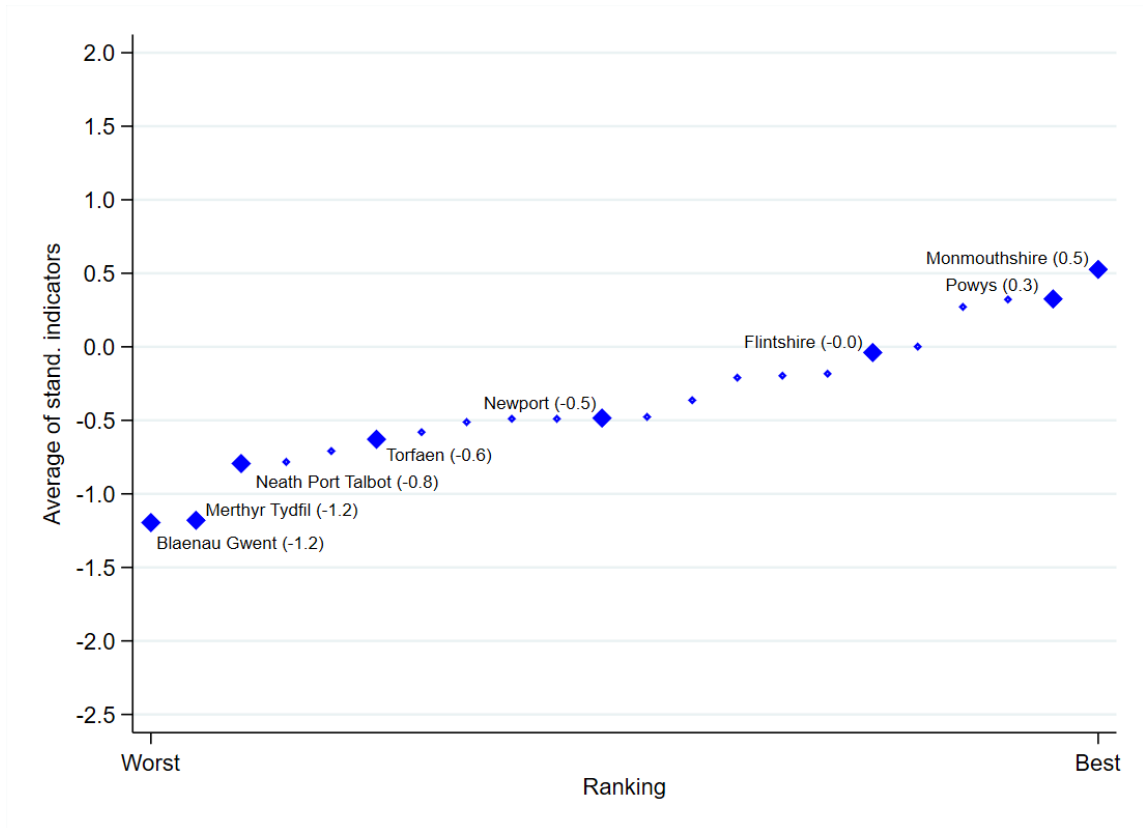


Figure 4. Distribution of Local Authorities across the UK composite indicator (showing Wales local authorities only)





Annalise, 16, Neath Port Talbot

CONCLUSION

An overwhelming feeling from the girls and young women we spoke to across Wales was frustration: at not being heard, not being taken seriously and not being able to fully realise their rights.

This report shows that girls' lived realities and the way they experience their rights is often very different from the vision of equality embodied in human rights law. Issues such as access to period products, relentless sexual harassment in public and gender stereotyping in schools show that too many girls in Wales are still facing barriers to their rights.

While girls are growing up in a culture that still undermines their right to equity, some girls are experiencing severe challenges that are constraining them and impacting their life outcomes, such as young mums with care experience and girls at risk of Female Genital Mutilation. In addition, the local authority index brings to attention the substantial variation in the experiences of girls in different parts of Wales, across a number of girls' rights indicators. It is important that all girls benefit from efforts to improve girls' rights and gender equality, that their unique needs are met and that some girls are not left behind.

Notably, this research and the broader report found significant data gaps on girls and their rights as well as data on girls by their race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. Too often, girls' experiences are hidden in the gender-neutral category of 'children' and excluded from the category of 'women'. This must change.

Girls must be treated as a priority group. The unique needs and the challenges they face as a result of their age and gender must be addressed. From classrooms, to community spaces, and in Parliament, their voices must be championed and heard. There has been much progress on girls' rights in Wales since we published the first 'State of Girls' Rights in the UK' report in 2016, but these latest insights from girls across the nation show that much more needs to be done. We hope this report will inform people who work with and for girls across Wales.

METHODOLOGY

SECTION 1: WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A GIRL IN WALES?

This project combines primary and secondary research. Some data is from the 'State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020' research. Further research was conducted later in 2020 in order to more deeply understand the challenges in girls' lives in Wales and to fill gaps where possible, particularly in light of Covid-19.

Focus groups and zine making sessions were used with girls between the ages of 10-25 in summer 2019. They were held by an experienced youth researcher with girls in Swansea and Chepstow. A diverse group of girls were consulted, in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation, location (rural and urban) and class background. Recruitment was open to all those who identify as girls and was therefore trans-inclusive, however no participants openly identified themselves as trans. None of the girls disclosed any physical disabilities.

Focus groups were largely unstructured and led by the girls, the role of the researcher in these contexts was to moderate and facilitate the group and not to dictate the topic of conversation.

In addition, in-depth individual and small group interviews were conducted with girls, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted by an experienced youth researcher. Some interviews were conducted online to adhere to restrictions.

Ethical research and child safeguarding processes were adhered to in all research with the children and young people. All participants were given information sheets, consent forms and parental/guardian consent forms (if relevant).

SECTION 2: THE IMPACT OF PLACE

Building on the first local authority index in the 2016 report, we extended the composite measure to cover Scotland as well as England and Wales. Northern Ireland was excluded from the composite indicator due to data gaps on two indicators: NEET rate and teenage conception rates; however we created a separate index for Northern Ireland. We only rank local authorities with full data or at most one indicator with missing data (among the included indicators). As a result, the local authorities of East Dunbartonshire and Eileanan an Iar in Scotland were excluded from the ranking.

Data was evaluated in terms of geographical coverage, temporal coverage (datasets more than three years old were considered too

dated, unless there was sufficient reason to believe that there would not have been a significant change in this variable since the period of observation), gender and age disaggregation, missing observations.

The index was generated by taking the average of standardised indicators and ranking the resultant variable. Standardising is a commonly used approach to rescale a variable so that it has a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Standardisation maps all the indicators on a common scale and has the advantage of keeping the relative distances among local authorities for each indicator unchanged. Information about each indicator's importance and data source is included in the appendix.

APPENDIX 1

Indicators used in the local authority index: relevance of indicator and data source.

- 1 **Child poverty:** Growing up in relative poverty is associated with worse outcomes on a number of dimensions beyond the evident lack of household income, including health, mental health, education and extracurricular activities. Using the most recently available UK-wide data from the Child Poverty Action Group, child poverty is reported as the percentage of children living in poverty in a given local authority.
- 2 **Life expectancy:** Regional discrepancies between and within nations suggest that life expectancy may be affected by environmental and socioeconomic factors. Our indicator includes three separate measures – life expectancy at birth, healthy life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy, all sourced from the Office for National Statistics.
- 3 **Teenage conceptions:** While some adolescent mothers might make informed choices to start a family and do not face significant barriers, for most, teenage parenting is reflective of structural deprivation and gender inequality. Conception statistics for England and Wales were taken from the Office for National Statistics.
- 4 **Educational attainment:** Education aims to not only provide young people with the required levels of numeracy and literacy to get by in society, but also to provide a minimum level of basic skills to allow them to pursue life's opportunities. We used the Regulated Qualification Framework to ensure comparability in the level of attainment across the four nations. In Wales, this measure was defined as the percentage of girls who achieved Level 2 including English/Welsh and Maths. The data was taken from StatsWales.
- 5 **NEET:** Health and wellbeing is negatively affected by being NEET, and the implications of a period of unemployment or inactivity at a young age on future outcomes are potentially long-lasting. Data for Wales relates to individuals who completed Year 11 and was provided by Careers Wales, who collect information on NEET status on behalf of the Welsh Government.
- 6 **Child obesity:** The impact of childhood obesity can extend far beyond the period of childhood and cause increased risks of obesity and its associated health conditions during adulthood, as well as premature death. The child obesity data is taken from NHS Wales.

APPENDIX 2

INDIVIDUAL INDICATOR INDEXES

This index shows local authority areas ranked according to their scores for each individual indicator. This includes the most up to date data at the time the research was carried out in 2019.

Child Poverty

1	Monmouthshire
2	V. of Glamorgan
3	Flintshire
4	Powys
5	Conwy
6	Gwynedd
7	Swansea
8	Isle of Anglesey
9	Denbighshire
10	Bridgend
11	Wrexham, Wreccsam
12	Carmarthenshire
13	Ceredigion
14	Neath Port Talbot
15	Cardiff
16	Pembrokeshire
17	Torfaen
18	Caerphilly
19	Newport
20	Rhondda Cynon Taf
21	Merthyr Tydfil
22	Blaenau Gwent

Life Expectancy *

1	Ceredigion
2	Powys
3	Monmouthshire
4	V. of Glamorgan
5	Gwynedd
6	Pembrokeshire
7	Isle of Anglesey
8	Conwy
9	Cardiff
10	Flintshire
11	Carmarthenshire
12	Torfaen
13	Swansea
14	Denbighshire
15	Newport
16	Wrexham, Wreccsam
17	Bridgend
18	Caerphilly
19	Rhondda Cynon Taf
20	Neath P. Talbot
21	Merthyr Tydfil
22	Blaenau Gwent

Teenage Conceptions

1	Monmouthshire
2	Ceredigion
3	Powys
4	V. of Glamorgan
5	Blaenau Gwent
6	Gwynedd
7	Denbighshire
8	Caerphilly
9	Carmarthenshire
10	Pembrokeshire
11	Wrexham, Wreccsam
12	Cardiff
13	Newport
14	Conwy
15	Bridgend
16	Torfaen
17	Neath Port Talbot
18	Merthyr Tydfil
19	Swansea
20	Rhondda Cynon Taf
21	Flintshire
22	Isle of Anglesey

* (excl. healthy life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy.)

Educational Attainment

1	Monmouthshire
2	Ceredigion
3	Powys
4	V. of Glamorgan
5	Gwynedd
6	Flintshire
7	Cardiff
8	Carmarthenshire
9	Newport
10	Swansea
11	Pembrokeshire
12	Neath Port Talbot
13	Isle of Anglesey
14	Bridgend
15	Conwy
16	Caerphilly
17	Torfaen
18	Rhondda Cynon Taf
19	Denbighshire
20	Wrexham, Wreccsam
21	Blaenau Gwent
22	Merthyr Tydfil

NEET Percentage

1	Bridgend
2	Conwy
3	V. of Glamorgan
4	Cardiff
5	Ceredigion
6	Isle of Anglesey
7	Flintshire
8	Pembrokeshire
9	Powys
10	Denbighshire
11	Newport
12	Merthyr Tydfil
13	Rhondda Cynon Taf
14	Monmouthshire
15	Gwynedd
16	Blaenau Gwent
17	Torfaen
18	Swansea
19	Wrexham, Wreccsam
20	Caerphilly
21	Carmarthenshire
22	Neath Port Talbot

Child Obesity

1	V. of Glamorgan
2	Monmouthshire
3	Powys
4	Ceredigion
5	Cardiff
6	Newport
7	Pembrokeshire
8	Flintshire
9	Neath Port Talbot
10	Bridgend
11	Wrexham, Wreccsam
12	Gwynedd
13	Conwy
14	Blaenau Gwent
15	Caerphilly
16	Denbighshire
17	Swansea
18	Carmarthenshire
19	Isle of Anglesey
20	Torfaen
21	Rhondda Cynon Taf
22	Merthyr Tydfil

REFERENCES

- 1 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo: <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/international-conference-population-and-development-programme-action>
 - 2 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action outcome document: https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~/_media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf
 - 3 The Istanbul Convention: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home>
 - 4 Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
 - 5 Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) *Coronavirus and Me*. https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRep_EN.pdf
 - 6 Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) *Coronavirus and Me*. https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRep_EN.pdf
 - 7 EHRC (2018) *Is Wales Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2018*.
 - 8 Social Mobility Commission (2016) Press Release. *Asian Muslims and black people do better in school, worse in work*. Published 28th December 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/asian-muslims-and-black-people-do-better-in-school-worse-in-work>
 - 9 Qualification Wales (Aug 2020) *Results for A level, AS, GCSE and the Skills Challenge Certificate in Wales – Summer 2020*.
 - 10 Qualification Wales (Aug 2020) *Results for A level, AS, GCSE and the Skills Challenge Certificate in Wales – Summer 2020*.
 - 11 Plan International UK analysis of StatsWales. A level entries and results (pupils aged 17 only) by subject group and gender. Welsh Government.
 - 12 Plan International UK analysis of StatsWales. A level entries and results (pupils aged 17 only) by subject group and gender. Welsh Government.
 - 13 Holford, K. and Lappin-Scott, H (2017) *Talented Women for a Successful Wales a report on the education; recruitment; retention and promotion of women in STEM-related study and careers* Welsh Assembly Government.
 - 14 Welsh Government (27 January 2017) *Welsh Government accepts all Talented Women for a Successful Wales report recommendations and marks the occasion with planned Royal visit*.
 - 15 UK Feminista / National Education Union (2017) "It's just everywhere" *A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it* <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>
 - 16 The Guardian (2017) *Child-on-child sexual assaults soar, police figures reveal*. Published 9th Oct 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/oct/09/child-on-child-sexual-assaults-soar-police-figures-reveal>
 - 17 Barrance, R. (2018) *The Human Rights of Children in Wales: An Evidence Review* Children's Commissioner for Wales / Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EvidenceReview_ENG_060619.pdf
 - 18 Stonewall (2017) *School Report Cymru* <https://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/schoolreportcymru>
 - 19 Full Circle Wales. 2016. *Fundamental Rights. From feminism to fashion, sex to stereotypes. The voices of girls in Wales*. Available at: <http://fullcircleeducation.dropmark.com/150934/8572989>
 - 20 Barrance, R. (2019). *The Human Rights of Children in Wales: An Evidence Review*. WISERD and Children's Commissioner for Wales. https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EvidenceReview_ENG_060619.pdf
 - 21 UK Feminista and National Education Union (2017) "It's just everywhere" *A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it*. <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>
- 61 The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020, Wales Insights Report

References

- 22 UK Feminista and National Education Union (2017) *"It's just everywhere" A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it.* <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>
- 23 Welsh Assembly Government (2019) Draft keeping learners safe guidance The role of local authorities, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools under the Education Act 2002.
- 24 Plan International UK (2020), *The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020.* <https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/girls-rights-in-the-uk>
- 25 <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/gender-stereotypes-in-early-childhood-a-literature-review>
- 26 Power, S, Barrance, R & Taylor, C. (2019) *Growing Up in Wales: school students' perspectives and experiences.* Evidence from the WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study. WISERD https://wiserd.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WISERD%20-%20PostcardsLR_0.pdf
- 27 Welsh Government (2019) *Statistical First Release: Pupils educated other than at school, 2018/19.* Published 1st August 2019. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/pupils-educated-other-school-september-2018-august-2019-644.pdf>
- 28 Graham, B. White, C. Edwards, A. Potter, S and Street, C. (2019) School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children. Department for Education.
- 29 Barrance, R. (2019). *The Human Rights of Children in Wales: An Evidence Review.* WISERD and Children's Commissioner for Wales. https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EvidenceReview_ENG_060619.pdf
- 30 The Conversation (2014) *Do disruptive classes really get better if they include more girls?* Published 24th June 2014. <https://theconversation.com/do-disruptive-classes-really-get-better-if-they-include-more-girls-27773>
- 31 Women in Sport (2018) *Puberty & Sport: An Invisible Stage.* <https://www.womeninsport.org/research-and-advice/our-publications/puberty-sport-an-invisible-stage/>
- 32 Get involved in girls' rugby <https://community.wru.wales/womens-and-girls-rugby/get-involved-in-girls-rugby/>
- 33 Power, S, Barrance, R & Taylor, C. (2019) *Growing Up in Wales: school students' perspectives and experiences.* Evidence from the WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study. WISERD https://wiserd.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WISERD%20-%20PostcardsLR_0.pdf
- 34 Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill.
- 35 Based on analysis of the mid-2017 UK population estimates (England and Wales): June 2018 Source: ONS (2019) Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: time-series Filtered dataset.
- 36 Power, S, Barrance, R & Taylor, C. (2019) *Growing Up in Wales: school students' perspectives and experiences.* Evidence from the WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study. WISERD https://wiserd.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WISERD%20-%20PostcardsLR_0.pdf
- 36 Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill.
- 37 Thomas, G., Elliott, E., Exeley, E., Ivinson, G. and Emma R. (2018) 'Light, connectivity and place: young people living in a post-industrial town' *Cultural Geographies*, 25 (4) 537-551
- 38 Pelter, Z. (2020) 'Pandemic participation: youth activism online in the covid-19 crisis' UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/stories/pandemic-participation-youth-activism-online-covid-19-crisis>
- 39 Plan International UK (2018) Period Poverty survey.
- 40 (2020) 'Period poverty: £3.3m for free sanitary products in Wales' BBC News. 3rd January 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-50975035>
- 41 Endometriosis UK (no date) *Endometriosis Facts and Figures.* <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/endometriosis-facts-and-figures>
- 62 The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020, Wales Insights Report

References

- 42 Endometriosis Task and Finish Group (2018) Endometriosis care in Wales: Provision, care pathway, workforce planning and quality and outcome measures <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/endometriosis-care-in-wales-provision-care-pathway-workforce-planning-and-quality-and-outcome-measures.pdf>
- 43 Endometriosis Task and Finish Group (2018) Endometriosis care in Wales: Provision, care pathway, workforce planning and quality and outcome measures <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/endometriosis-care-in-wales-provision-care-pathway-workforce-planning-and-quality-and-outcome-measures.pdf>
- 44 Endometriosis Task and Finish Group (2018) Endometriosis care in Wales: Provision, care pathway, workforce planning and quality and outcome measures <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/endometriosis-care-in-wales-provision-care-pathway-workforce-planning-and-quality-and-outcome-measures.pdf>
- 45 Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales: Updated statistical estimates of the numbers of affected women living in England and Wales and girls at risk - Interim report on provisional estimates.
- 46 Welsh Government (2016) *Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Guidance for Governors*. https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/guidance-for-governors_0.pdf
- 47 Orchid Project (2012) *Report of a Research Methodological Workshop on Estimating the Prevalence of FGM in England and Wales*: https://www.orchidproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Prevalence_workshop.pdf
- 48 World Health Organisation (2020) published February 2020.
- 49 Forward UK <https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/violence-against-women-and-girls/female-genital-mutilation/#>
- 50 Forward UK <https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/violence-against-women-and-girls/female-genital-mutilation/#>
- 51 Paraphrased from interview with Lisa Zimmerman (Director of Integrate UK), 23/05/2019
- 52 Girls Not Brides. *Child Marriage Atlas – United Kingdom* <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/atlas/united-kingdom>
- 53 Hannah Summers (2020) 'Girls at risk of child marriage as half of local authorities fail to keep records' *The Guardian*. Published 18th May 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/18/girls-at-risk-of-child-marriage-as-half-of-local-authorities-fail-to-keep-records>
- 54 Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) *Coronavirus and Me*. https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRRep_EN.pdf
- 55 Statistics for Wales (2018) *NHS Wales Referral to Treatment Times: 2017-18* <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-01/referral-to-treatment-times-financial-year-2017-to-2018.pdf>
- 56 YoungMinds (2018) *A new era for young people's mental health*.
- 57 Welsh Government Young People's Mental Health Toolkit available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/discovery/resource/e53adf44-76cb-4635-b6c2-62116bb63a9a/en?_ga=2.1483569.1008709169.1603902293-1212868610.1560246616
- 58 The Children's Society (2018) *The Good Childhood Report* <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood-report>.
- 59 University of Manchester and Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (2017) *Suicide by children and young people (National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness.)*
- 60 Roh BR, Jung EH, Hong HJ. (2018) A Comparative Study of Suicide Rates among 10-19-Year-Olds in 29 OECD Countries. *Psychiatry Investigation*. 15 (4) 376–383
- 61 Kelly, Y. Zilanawala, A., Booker, C., Sacker, A. (2018) 'Social Media Use and Adolescent Mental Health: Findings From the UK Millennium Cohort Study' *EClinical Medicine* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2018.12.005>
- 63 The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020, Wales Insights Report

References

- 62 Kelly, Y. Zilanawala, A., Booker, C., Sacker, A. (2018) Social Media Use and Adolescent Mental Health: Findings From the UK Millennium Cohort Study *EClinical Medicine*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2018.12.005>
- 63 Plan International UK (2019) *Society needs a makeover* <https://plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/society-needs-a-makeover>
- 64 Plan International UK (2020) *The State of Girls' Rights in the UK: Early insights into the coronavirus pandemic on girls*. <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-coronavirus-reportpdf/download?token=gddEAziz>
- 65 Plan International UK (2018) *Street Harassment: Its Not Ok*. <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-street-harassment-reportpdf/download?token=CyKwYGSJ>
- 66 *ibid.*
- 67 Agenda (2020) *Voices from lockdown: A chance for change. Interim findings report*. <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AGD-A-Chance-For-Change-Summary-v4-p2.pdf>
- 68 Welsh Government (2020) *Guidance for providers of accommodation for survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: coronavirus (COVID-19)* <https://gov.wales/guidance-providers-accommodation-survivors-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual#section-39510>
- 69 Agenda (2020) *Voices from lockdown: A chance for change. Interim findings report*. <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AGD-A-Chance-For-Change-Summary-v4-p2.pdf>
- 70 Women's Aid (5th May 2020) *Rail to refuge FAQs* <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/rail-to-refuge-faqs/>
- 71 Radford, L. et al (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. NSPCC.
- 72 Fox, C.L. et al. (2013) *From Boys to Men: Phase One Key Findings* <http://www.boystomenproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Key-Findings-Phase-1.pdf>
- 73 EVAW (2014) *EVAW Briefing on Pornography and Violence Against Women and Girls* <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EVAW-Briefing-on-Porn-and-VAWG-2014.pdf>
- 74 Children's Commissioner, NSPCC and Middlesex University (2017) *Online Pornography: Young people's experiences of seeing online porn and the impact this has on them* <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MDX-NSPCC-OCC-Online-Pornography-CYP-Version-16.5.17.pdf>
- 75 (2020) *'Sex and religious education to be compulsory in Wales'* BBC Wales. 21st January 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-51177649>
- 76 ONS (2020) *Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articleschildsexualabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>
- 77 ONS (2020) *Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childsexualabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>
- 78 NSPCC (19 Aug 2020) *Protecting children from sexual abuse* <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse>
- 79 NSPCC 'Effects of Sexual Abuse' *Sexual Abuse* <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/#types>
- 80 ONS (2020) *Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childsexualabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>
- 81 NSPCC Learning (07 Aug 2020) *Protecting children from sexual exploitation* <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation>

References

- 82 J. Eaton (2019) *The Human Rights of Girls Subjected to Child Sexual Exploitation in the UK*.
- 83 NSPCC Learning (07 Aug 2020) *Protecting children from sexual exploitation* <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation>
- 84 StatsWales (2020) *Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age Welsh Government*.
- 85 Selwyn, J. et al. (2018) *Our Lives, Our Care Wales 2018 Looked after children's views on their well-being*. Coram Voice.
- 86 Care Inspectorate Wales (2019) *National overview report in relation to care experienced children and young people in Wales*.
- 87 Fallon. D & Broadhurst. K. (2015) *Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Improving Preparation for Parenthood for Care-Experienced Young People*. Coram. https://www.coram.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource_files/Preventing%20unplanned%20pregnancy%20and%20improving%20preparation%20for%20parenthood%20for%20care-experienced%20young%20people.pdf
- 88 Fallon. D & Broadhurst. K. (2015) *Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Improving Preparation for Parenthood for Care-Experienced Young People*. Coram. https://www.coram.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource_files/Preventing%20unplanned%20pregnancy%20and%20improving%20preparation%20for%20parenthood%20for%20care-experienced%20young%20people.pdf
- 89 Connolly et al. (2012) cited in Fallon. D & Broadhurst. K. (2015) *Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Improving Preparation for Parenthood for Care-Experienced Young People*. Coram. https://www.coram.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource_files/Preventing%20unplanned%20pregnancy%20and%20improving%20preparation%20for%20parenthood%20for%20care-experienced%20young%20people.pdf
- 90 Fallon. D & Broadhurst. K. (2015) *Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Improving Preparation for Parenthood for Care-Experienced Young People*. Coram. https://www.coram.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource_files/Preventing%20unplanned%20pregnancy%20and%20improving%20preparation%20for%20parenthood%20for%20care-experienced%20young%20people.pdf
- 91 Fallon. D & Broadhurst. K. (2015) *Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Improving Preparation for Parenthood for Care-Experienced Young People*. Coram. https://www.coram.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource_files/Preventing%20unplanned%20pregnancy%20and%20improving%20preparation%20for%20parenthood%20for%20care-experienced%20young%20people.pdf
- 92 Butler G, De Graaf N, Wren B, et al (2018) 'Assessment and support of children and adolescents with gender dysphoria' *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 103:631-636
- 93 Bragg, S. Renold, E. Ringrose, J. and Jackson, C. (2018) 'More than boy, girl, male, female': exploring young people's views on gender diversity within and beyond school contexts' *Sex Education*, 18 (4) 420-434 p.423
- 94 Stonewall Cymru (2017) *School report Cymru* https://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/system/files/stonewall_cymru_school_report_2017.pdf
- 95 Shelter Cymru (2019) *Homelessness among trans people in Wales* https://sheltercymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Homelessness-among-trans-people-in-Wales_Website.pdf
- 96 Government Equalities Office (2018) *National LGBT Survey Research Report* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721704/LGBT-survey-research-report.pdf
- 97 Stonewall Cymru (2017) *School report Cymru* https://www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/system/files/stonewall_cymru_school_report_2017.pdf



Plan International UK
Finsgate,
5-7 Cranwood Street,
London,
EC1V 9LH

www.plan-uk.org
T: 0300 777 9777

No part of this publication can be reproduced without
the permission of Plan International UK.

Registered charity no: 276035