HOUSE OF COMMONS

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, HC 701

Wednesday 2 May 2018

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Philip Davies; Vicky Ford; Eddie Hughes; Mr Gavin Shuker; Tulip Siddiq.

Questions 1–41

Witnesses

I: David Alton, Hate Crime Manager, Nottinghamshire Police, Marai Larasi OBE, Director, Imkaan, and Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, Durham University.

II: Gary Barker, Chief Executive Officer, Promundo.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Dr Fiona Vera-Gray
- Nottinghamshire Police

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Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: David Alton, Marai Larasi OBE, and Dr Fiona Vera-Gray.

Chair: Welcome to our witnesses and everyone watching in the Public Gallery and online. This is the first evidence session of our inquiry on sexual harassment of women and girls in public places. We previously touched on these issues in a one-off session in December, when it became apparent that the public realm is an underexplored area in terms of policy to tackle and prevent sexual harassment, even though regrettably it seems to be a routine part of women's daily lives. We are publishing some of the written evidence that has been sent to us not only by organisations but by individual women who have told us about their experiences and the effect they had on them. We are hugely grateful to everybody who has taken the time to share those experiences.

We have two panels today to give us an overview and introduction to these important issues. Can I ask the witnesses to start the session by saying their name and the organisation they are from?

Marai Larasi: My name is Marai Larasi, and I work for an organisation called Imkaan.

Dr Vera-Gray: My name is Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, and I am from Durham Law School at Durham University.

David Alton: Good morning, Chair. My name is David Alton. I am here from Nottinghamshire police.

Chair: Great. Our first question is from Vicky.

Q1 **Vicky Ford:** How widespread is the type of harassment we see in public places? What forms does it take, and what data is available? In particular, has harassment increased or decreased over time, and are Government or other statistics helpful in understanding exactly what is happening?

David Alton: You will be aware that Nottinghamshire police have started recording misogyny as a specific form of hate crime. The definition that we are operating is again perception-based of any incident. It does not necessarily have to be criminal behaviour; it includes incidents as well.

We have been doing that for approaching two years, so I think it is reasonable to say that our database is still quite limited. The feedback that generated the decision to include misogyny as a form of hate crime locally was that it is a ubiquitous experience for women and girls in terms of sexual harassment. It is very much an everyday experience.

Q2 **Chair:** By that, you mean widespread.

David Alton: Yes, absolutely. The evidence that we are seeing supports that. In terms of reported incidents to Nottinghamshire, it is very much a matter of the public arena: public spaces, essentially where people meet.

The range of behaviours we are seeing reported is quite broad. It is verbal abuse, very sexualised language and very aggressively sexualised language. It includes sexual assault. It also includes behaviour that does not reach the criminal threshold of illegality. The conclusion we draw at this relatively early stage is that, as perhaps in other forms of hate crime in the past when people talked about the tip of the iceberg, this is similar and the parallel is very much there. That would be our experience.

Dr Vera-Gray: For me, summarising the research that is done internationally, the figure for women and girls who have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public spaces in their lifetime generally sits between 80% and 90%. One of the things that is really important when we think about that statistic that there is so much that women and girls are taught to doubt and not to be sure of. They are taught to think, "I'm not sure if that person—that man—is following me," "I'm not sure if he is staring at me" and "I'm not sure if he just said that." All of that is not included in that kind of statistic.

We also need to think about the way some men will choose particularly ambiguous spaces to commit this kind of offence. So things like, we are in London, where there are very packed tube carriages—they were very packed this morning—and it is very difficult to ascertain whether or not someone is, for example, pushing into your back in a sexual way or pushing because it is a very packed tube carriage. There is a lot of ambiguity and difficulty for women and girls in terms of really being able to claim authority in the fact that this has happened. When we look at statistics of 80% to 90%, you are looking at an underestimate—the tip of the iceberg—because there is so much in that that we cannot 100% say has happened.

In terms of forms, in the research I have done I broke it down into about six different categories. These categories shade into each other—one of the things around sexual violence in general is that it exists on a continuum, and the types will shade into something. So something that might begin with someone following you can turn into a sexual assault; those two things can be part of the same event.

The categories I looked were: something called ordinary interruptions, which is just the ordinary thing of being interrupted daily: whistles, catcalls, someone making noises and going, "Hello"—women walking through a public space and being interrupted for no reason by male strangers, with no way of being able to speak back to that. Often it is fleeting—the person has gone and you are not sure what has happened. There is also a concern about safety.

On verbal intrusion, as you mentioned, a lot of the time when people think about sexual harassment they think about a sexualised or "complimentary" type of harassment, but I found that there are actually a lot of insults. Women are being told randomly on the street that they are fat, ugly, sluts—all kinds of comments like that are in there as well, which starts to complicate the idea that such behaviour is complimentary or something that women should be enjoying. Quite a lot of women are being told randomly by strangers to "cheer up" or "smile", as if what is happening in their internal life and their world is not as important as them walking around in a public space looking as though they are happy and cheery. When we get on to impacts, that sends a particularly damaging message to women and girls about their worth.

If we are thinking about non-criminal forms of harassment, staring might sound like something that is never going to be criminalised—you cannot criminalise someone for looking at somebody else, but it can be particularly intimidating. I have heard women say that there is something particularly penetrating about sitting on public transport, when someone opposite is staring at them in a way that means they do not know what they are thinking or doing. Women don't know if they are going to be followed, and a lot of the time they have to move around public transport to get away from someone. Flashing and public masturbation is a huge and common experience for girls in adolescence who are under 18. Men are pulling out their penis in public and masturbating at young women they do not know. Women are followed through public spaces in a way that makes it difficult for them to ascertain whether that is exactly what the person is doing. A lot of the time women and girls then change what they are doing to stop what is happening. They will go into a shop or a house, or they will cross the road. Again, when we think about impacts, women and girls constantly have to evaluate their environment and change what they want to do based on that. Those are the six categories.

Are the data that we have helpful? There are problems with the data and with us being able to define this. This is such an extension of normal gendered behaviour and roles, in which women are there to be looked at and commented on, and men are there to act and do things. It is very difficult to capture that in data because it can be hard for women and girls to know exactly what is happening. This is something that happens from when women and girls start to enter into public space by themselves. Sometimes it happens when they are with their mothers. It can be hard—we are taught to normalise it or dismiss it, and in terms of research it is a difficult thing to define.

Q3 **Vicky Ford:** Do you have suggestions for how to improve that data?

Dr Vera-Gray: Yes. The suggestions, I guess, would turn into something that we might talk about later: we need massive public awareness work on what is and is not an acceptable interaction, and we need to start changing some of the narrative about the value of women and girls being based on how they look. We need broader work to help improve data collection.

Marai Larasi: Let me pick up on some of the things that Fiona pointed out. On the whole idea of name calling, there is an assumption that what women are subjected to has a "complimentary" dynamic, but we hear that a lot of black and minority ethnic women and girls are being victimised in ways that include racialised abuse—being called a black bitch, for example, might be one of the things that happens. Very often, a woman's body parts might be spoken about. Often that is not just something that feels like direct targeting; it can be groups of men sitting around and speaking about a woman, especially a young woman, in such a way that she hears what is being said about her. Again, those are comments on body size, body shape and so on.

There is also unwanted sexual touching or the way that particular groups of women are viewed as being "up for it". For example, African and Caribbean women are often treated as kind of a bit more animal-like—a bit more up for it and willing. South Asian women are often defined as a bit more exotic and subservient. We have seen that women who are covered might have their hijabs pulled off and so on, and those women are being targeted in quite specific ways that are a response to their social identity. So it is important, when we think about sexual harassment, that we think about the fact that for some women, this is not just about gender; it is also about race. It can also be about sexuality.

We have had women who are queer women of colour speaking about the fact that they look a particular way, and therefore the insults that come to them are very much focused on "Oh, you're a dyke"—and therefore this is what is happening. This is who you are: either you deserve this or what you need is this. So it is important that we don't have this response that is this blanket approach, and we think that it is important that we don't think that the same things are happening to every single woman, because different women are being targeted in different ways.

The thing that Fiona said about women being stared at: very often that is not understood in terms of what we might define as a lairy look, etc., but it could be somebody sitting on the tube just staring at a young woman, staring at an older woman, in a way that feels really intimidating but may be harder to actually legislate against. How do you say to people, actually, "Don't look at people"? So again, conversations that involve public awareness will be really critical.

I think we've got huge problems with what is defined as harassment, and I also want to say that for many women the boundary between the public space and the private space is not straightforward; but also the public space now is also the virtual space. For many women something like Twitter is also public space for them, and I understand the parameters of this particular hearing, but I think it is really important to get that in there from the outset—that it is not as straightforward as "public" is where you are physically. Public insults and public sexual harassment can happen on the online space.

Q4 **Vicky Ford:** I think a number of us have direct experience of that as well. To summarise, David said that since you started to collect the data it has

been very clear to you that this is as prevalent as you thought: Fiona, your description of six different categories and how also one can lead to another, and then Marai's description that there can be different racial issues within that as well—so different types and presumably, different age issues.

Marai Larasi: Absolutely. We know that younger women are targeted in quite specific ways, and we know that the figures tend to change; so everything from school age. I was at a school last week doing work with young women around the MeToo conversation, and young women were describing—we are talking about girls who are 11 or 12—the sexual harassment they were experiencing, not just in the school environment, but that they were experiencing on the streets. What was really alarming, despite everything that I know intellectually, was how many young girls, how many women, were nodding—the fact that actually, when we showed them the film, for them the information that was on the film was completely normal; and that is what they said. This is such a normal part of their everyday lives, to be harassed in that way.

Q5 **Vicky Ford:** There is a definition in the Equality Act of sexual harassment, but is there consensus about how it is defined? I suspect the answer is no. Is that a problem, or is it helpful to have a broad range of different definitions?

Dr Vera-Gray: Both. Definitions are useful. I am a researcher; you need definitions for research, so we need to find useful definitions, but also there is something really useful about having a broad range. As soon as you start to define something you start to include particular things and exclude other things. When you talk to women about what sexual harassment is, in public space, they know what it is. So it can be that it is more an experiential definition than something to lock down; or, actually, when you think about definitions, that we think about defining something based on its harm rather than defining it based on the particular things that it might include. With the online space, this wouldn't have been included in this conversation maybe 50 years ago, so we need to work with a definition that enables new forms and new contexts, but maybe keeps the harm.

Q6 **Vicky Ford:** How does that work from a policing point of view?

David Alton: Personally, I think it works very comfortably in the sense that if we approach it from the harm and the impact, and the perception base that doesn't necessarily concentrate on the strict illegality and the strict definition, it opens the door to the victim experience. Essentially that is what hate crime is about, going back to the Macpherson definition of a racist incident being based on perception of anything from that victim's life experience. Obviously, I cannot speak from personal experience, but from my conversations, the life experiences that inform sexual harassment are similar to those that inform racial harassment and so forth. There are some problems, analogous to racial harassment, where some things are within the civil boundaries and so on—as you said, how does one define staring?—and some things are very clearly illegal behaviours. If we go

down the road of trying to be very specific about defining it in a legalistic kind of way, we will probably struggle, whereas if we take the victim impact as the starting point, the door will be open to everything. That allows us to tailor our responses accordingly. That is why we chose that approach in Nottinghamshire.

Marai Larasi: It is useful to have some foundational ideas that focus on harm and inequality and take account of power and differences around power. If we think about the scenario of the stare, there is something about the fact that this guy feels that it is completely okay for him to do that, and that it is completely okay for him to do that in a way that operates within his own entitlement. That is about him and his relationship with power. There is also this context of inequality. Wherever we end up in terms of a definition, it really needs to be located in a strong violence against women and girls framework that actually thinks about inequality and about imbalances of power.

Q7 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Who are the victims of sexual harassment in public places?

David Alton: Our experience mirrors that of my colleague's research experience. Clearly, the numbers are somewhat less than full research databases. We have had reports from 12-year-old victims; we have had reports from women in their 60s. We have certainly seen a range of race and ethnicity, and certainly the issue of intersectionality in terms of the crossover into other areas of prejudice has been evident. Going back to the initial observation about it being ubiquitous, essentially, it can be any and every woman.

Q8 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Marai has also touched on this. Would you say that women and girls of different ages, ethnic backgrounds or socioeconomic groups are targeted in different ways, Fiona?

Dr Vera-Gray: Absolutely. Perhaps I will talk about age and others can talk about race. Adolescence seems to be a key stage where this happens a lot. Young girls going to and from school and starting to enter the public space by themselves and in groups start to be subjected to this kind of behaviour. One of the things that it is really important to think about when we think about impact is how this teaches young girls to view and value themselves, and to value the opinions of men on them, and how that starts to impact what they go on to achieve and where they go on to put their worth.

This is much worse than people thinking this is just some girls being wolf-whistled out and that that is fine and just something they will learn to manage. When they are in their teenage years, they will talk to mums or other women about this happening, and the message that they commonly get is, "It's annoying, but it's just going to happen. This is normal. This is just part of growing up." That becomes really damaging when experientially, as they get older, they start to tie some of this behaviour to other forms of sexual violence. They start to see that these things are connected: "Him wolf-whistling at me is connected to sexual assault."

They start to connect the message that they got in childhood and adolescence that, "This is just what happens; you just need to deal with it—stay silent about it and just do some things to prevent it," to things like sexual assault and rape.

If we start to look at public sexual harassment and combat that, that is going to have a follow-on impact in terms of how able women feel to speak about things like rape, other forms of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse. We saw this with MeToo, which started around a conversation about workplace sexual harassment. We saw how the conversation just exploded. It is about creating a space for women to talk about their childhood experiences, and to validate them as legitimately negative experiences, rather than the common message to girls at that age, which is, "perhaps your skirt was a little bit too short. It's just men, don't worry about it. It's just part of growing up." We must start to work out how to change the message that we are giving young girls, because there really is an age when it first happens and they do not understand what it is, and the message that they receive at that point is, "It's normal; just deal with it."

Q9 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Do you think it is equally important to give boys that education and message about their behaviour?

Dr Vera-Gray: Absolutely. I am happy to talk about that. Stuff needs to happen with men and particularly boys. There needs to be some kind of work about empathy—challenging entitlement and challenging power, but developing empathy so that young boys understand what it is like for a young girl to be sitting in public, and the cumulative effect of that behaviour. It is not just one man saying, "Hello beautiful" to one woman once, and her feeling, "Oh my God! That is the worst thing that has ever happened." This is something that has been happening to her since she was 12 years old and will continue until she is 65: men and boys in a public space feel that they can interrupt, disrupt, talk to her, touch her, or do anything that they want to her when she is in public. It is about teaching young boys to develop some sense of empathy and understanding of what that is like, alongside teaching them to critique their own entitlement and relationship to power.

Q10 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What is known about who perpetuates sexual harassment?

Marai Larasi: I will say some stuff about race and ethnicity. The information we have is that men and boys are overwhelmingly the people who perpetrate sexual harassment, and there is disproportionality in that way. If we think both quantitatively and qualitatively about not just the numbers of people who are doing this, but the nature and type of harassment, we see that men and boys are over-represented. If we think about who this is being done to, it is overwhelmingly women and girls. That goes back to the point about which women and girls this affects, and how it happens, and that is one reason why it is important to talk about things like race. By the way, it is amazing to have a police officer use the

term "intersectionality" in that way—that wouldn't have happened 10 years ago.

One reason it is important to talk about issues such as race and disability is because we need to understand that, as young women will say, the way that a boy will come at them will depend on who they are, how they look and so on. I am not talking about what someone is wearing; I am talking about things like ethnicity and body. For example, a girl might be being sexually harassed and the boy is making monkey noises at the point where she is being rejected. We have seen that on football pitches. We cannot have a conversation about sexual harassment with that young girl without taking into account what the racism that was part of her experience meant.

If we are going to work with men and boys, we cannot not say, "This is not just about gender; this is also about how you view particular groups of girls". One thing about work that is focused on black and minority ethnic women and girls is that people inevitably talk to us about "our communities", as if there is always this thing happening within our communities. BME women and girls will say that they are routinely harassed by white men and boys, but nobody takes into account that the form of violence being enacted on them is racist and also gendered. We must think about how non-disabled men may harass women who are disabled, and how heterosexual men may target women who are lesbians or queer, or who they perceive as such. Such men might offer a "cure" to homosexuality, or say that the woman just needs the right kind of man to come along. We must think about different aspects of inequality when talking about who is doing what to whom and how.

Q11 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Do men and boys with different characteristics, ages, ethnic backgrounds or socio-economic groups carry out sexual harassment in different ways? Have you noticed that?

David Alton: I am not sure that I can comment on socioeconomics, because those data are not something that through police processes we are able to identify easily. We certainly are seeing in the offender profile a full range of ages, ethnicities, and so forth, so it is not limited, in our experience, to a particularly section of males. It might be easy to presume that it would be more group behaviour—laddish culture, for want of a better phrase. Although we have seen reports where there are multiple men and young men involved in the behaviour, equally we probably see more reports where the behaviour is sole men who act out.

Again, echoing my colleague's comments, this is across the full range really, in terms of men's behaviour. We do not know, certainly from our experiences, why it is that some men, young men and boys choose to behave this way and some do not. Clearly, from our point of view, it is relatively early days and the jury is out on that.

Dr Vera-Gray: There is limited research on men and boys in relation to public sexual harassment, but there are about three different studies. One is very old, from 1984, which found that men were doing it out of

boredom. That was the reason they gave most of the time—it was men on the street who were bored. That to me speaks of entitlement; it speaks of thinking that women are there just for you to interact with.

More recent research has shown that men use it as a form of social bonding, and as a way of proving their heterosexual masculinity to each other and to themselves, and that it comes out of entitlement. We need to challenge some of the norms around compulsory heterosexuality and some of the gender norms around masculinity, and we need to challenge men's entitlement.

Marai Larasi: I have a lot of anxiety about how we may end up categorising particular groups of men as "much more likely to". Even the language, for example, around lad culture tends to focus overwhelmingly on working-class men. There is something about recognising that women and girls are being harassed across the spectrum. We have BME men doing it; we have white men doing it; we have disabled men doing it; we have upper-middle-class men doing it. There is not one group of men, in my estimation, that are much more likely to do it than others.

We need to think about points of access, and where people are likely to do it—if you are travelling on the train, for example, at a particular time of day when you have a whole load of football supporters. I have had that experience on more than one occasion, where it is not just the thing that they are doing directly to a group of women or an individual woman; there is also the environment that they create—an environment that feels intimidating and hostile.

A lot of the young men I have encountered in those contexts are working-class men, but I do not see this as a specific problem associated with working-class men, because I have been in pubs with middle-class men who were behaving in exactly the same way and using similar language. Some scrutiny is needed about how you might use the environment, but I would not want to say that you have some groups of men that are much more likely to do this than others.

Q12 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Do men and boys experience sexual harassment in public places, and do women perpetrate it?

David Alton: Briefly, in terms of reporting to Nottinghamshire, we have not had any reports of hate crime where men have reported being sexually harassed and sexual violence. We got a number of challenges to the decision to adopt misogyny very specifically, as opposed to, say, more general gender-based hate crime, although we do have the capacity to identify and record incidents with men as victims. It is not because we can't, but certainly in the period that we have been recording we have not taken any reports where men have complained to us.

Dr Vera-Gray: There are two questions there. Do men and boys experience sexual harassment? Yes. Is it always women and girls who are the perpetrators? No. You have queer men and boys who absolutely will be subjected to sexual harassment by other men and boys, generally

heterosexual men and boys. That is trans men, gay men, bisexual men—any men who are seen to deviate in some way from the norms of heterosexual masculinity.

We also need to think about whether men and boys experience some forms of sexual harassment from women and girls. We could see that. You could see a group of girls doing something that might be perceived as a behaviour that is sexually harassing towards a young boy as he walks past. But when we think about power and inequality and the impact and harm—this is why it is more important to focus on the harm than it is to focus on the acts themselves—it means something different. A man or boy is not going to be immediately at threat of sexual violence from a woman or girl perpetrating some of this kind of behaviour, whereas from my research, one of the very first things that women and girls are thinking is that they are evaluating what is happening in relationship to the possibility of rape. If they are being followed, they are immediately thinking, "Is he following me to rape me?" If he is staring at them, "Is he staring at me and going to come off the train and rape me?" It means something different, because it connects experientially along that continuum. When we focus on harm, that is when we start to see that there is a gender difference. Even though the acts may be the same, they mean something very different.

Marai Larasi: Men and boys can be sexually harassed. I have witnessed, for example, young black men being targeted for sexual harassment by older white women, who can feel a certain entitlement to touch their bodies and describe their bodies in particular ways, which can be experienced in that moment as degrading. In having conversations with those young men, what they didn't describe is a fear or a sense of anxiety or a worry about being followed or being further harmed. What they experienced was, "This doesn't feel okay. Nobody is going to intervene," and so on, but they didn't feel threatened outside of that immediate experience.

Again, we have to talk about how power and inequality work. If we are going to talk about something like race, or something like sexuality, then we do need to think about the ways that particular groups of men might be targeted as well, but it is important to recognise that this is quantitatively and qualitatively different. It doesn't mean that harm can't be caused or that there can't be experiences of feeling degraded and so on, but we also need to think about what the consequences are for the individual. That is very often the thing that a girl or a woman is navigating—what are the consequences for me, on an ongoing basis and beyond this moment, for example, "This feels bad in this moment, but I am also terrified of what next. And I am living with this as a routine part of my reality on a day-to-day basis and it affects the way that I go through spaces." For those young men, as horrible as that was—it wasn't acceptable—they wouldn't say that it was impacting the way that they navigated space on a day-to-day basis. Those distinctions are important to make.

Q13 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What tactics do perpetrators use? Does the location of the harassment, for example, street, bar or train, impact on tactics used to harass women and girls? Do you see any patterns?

David Alton: I am not sure that I do see any particular patterns. "Random" is perhaps the wrong word, but going back to ubiquitous—forgive me for keeping using this word—I think it is the fact that it can be anywhere anytime anyplace. For that victim, for that woman, it is literally being in the wrong place at the wrong time. There are not precursors. We are not talking in some way about an interaction going wrong. These are completely out of the blue—the sense of entitlement we have talked about is apparent in the behaviours. Yes, there may then be on some occasions a ratcheting of behaviour. Perhaps the desired response was not forthcoming and that is followed by much, much more aggressive, violent, sexualised language and so forth, but my take on it is that that was inherent in the first place really.

There are some locations—nightclubs and so forth—where there is almost a sense of presumed consent to sexual assault. It clearly is not there, but there is some evidence that that is people's experience. But otherwise, no: harassment can happen when people are in the car, running, shopping, in a car park, walking down the high street—literally anywhere.

Dr Vera-Gray: I would add that this will not show up in reports, but particular men will use ambiguous or difficult-to-determine spaces to do it, so it becomes difficult to say that that is what someone is doing. In a club, when you are dancing and it's quite hard to tell who is pressing up against you, or on crowded transport, they may do it just as they walk past you, so you are not entirely sure whether someone did just say something to you or not. That is something that some will choose to do, but again, if we are thinking about this being based on boredom, a sense of entitlement and social bonding, it can happen at any point, at any time.

Marai Larasi: I do not have anything to add.

Q14 **Tulip Siddiq:** What strategies do you think women and girls use to avoid dealing with sexual harassment in public places? David?

David Alton: I am sure that there will be some very specific strategies that women and girls learn, but certainly I would not profess to be an expert on that experience. What I will say is that, again, I see a lot of crossover, in terms of other forms of hate crime, prejudice and inequality, whereby people very much learn to manage their situation and the behaviour.

In the case of some forms of hate crime, people's home is problematic, so either they do not go out or they avoid coming home and so forth. I suspect that that is not as prevalent in terms of sexual violence and harassment, because it is, from our experience, more of a public arena issue rather than necessarily being to do with your home.

If that is the case, we ask a number of questions. We go through a risk-assessment process with people who report hate crime to us, and a

number of the questions in terms of the impact are based on how the person manages their experiences. Women will say to us that they avoid using certain routes, certain locations. They may avoid using certain forms of transport and so forth. They will stop going to a particular gym, clearly, if that is where it is happening. There are a range of tactics to deal with it, which include complaining, but I think that from a lot of the experiences, victims have learned to remove the risk. That is essentially what people do.

Q15 **Tulip Siddiq:** Fiona, you have touched on this already, but what are the wider impacts on women's lives and on society generally?

Dr Vera-Gray: I think, mirroring what David said, that one of the wider impacts is that women learn to reduce the risk, and that means reducing themselves. They reduce their possible exposure by limiting the amount of time they are in the public space or by doing certain things such as making sure, when they are in the public space, they have sunglasses, headphones, a book—something to distract themselves. This is about being unable to have an internal world. For so many women particularly, when you get home you have caretaking responsibilities or house responsibilities. Home is sometimes not the most peaceful place for women. Then they are going to and from work—somewhere else, where it's very busy. Sometimes the public space is the only space that women have where they are able to just sit and think. That that is constantly being interrupted has a massive impact on women's quality of life and on women's capabilities. I'm talking about the fact that we are not allowed to prepare—for example, in coming to this meeting—in the same way as a man can occupy public space without fear of what is going to happen.

So this has a big impact in terms of that and also in terms of the body and women's relationships to our bodies. It is not alone; we need to think about this in terms of a culture that promotes the beauty industry and fashion and diet, and all of that being always targeted at women—sometimes at men as well, but definitely at women. It teaches women to have an external experience of their body, to think about what they look like from the outside. To be walking through public space, thinking, "I'm going to this meeting, I'm going to do this thing," and then to have someone comment immediately on what you are wearing, what you look like, your skin colour or your sexuality immediately pulls you outside yourself.

Again, that has a massive impact on women. Research has shown an increase in things such as self-objectification and a feeling of body alienation, of not wanting to be in your body or feeling uncomfortable in your body. From my research, one thing I found that ties into the safety work women are doing in relationship to this is the fact that the safety work conflicts with women's freedom a lot of the time. Safety and freedom are lived in tension. To feel safer, women are doing things to restrict their freedom, so they feel less free but they feel safer. We always need to look at those two things together and move away from a focus that is just about safety and thinking, "If we put some more street lights here, will that make women feel safer?" We need to think about how we help

women to feel freer to catch the bus they want to catch, to wear the clothes they want to wear or to sit in public space without headphones.

The last point I wanted to make is that one of the biggest forms of safety work I found from women was trying to make themselves invisible, or trying to reduce how visible they were, in public space. That can be easy enough for a woman like myself. I am white, so I am invisible on the basis of that, and I am in a particular age bracket, so I am a bit invisible because of that, but some women and girls cannot be invisible because of their skin colour, sexuality or disability. They are unable to use this form of safety work that a lot of other women and girls are using. That has a disproportionate impact on them in terms of feeling more visible and thus more vulnerable when walking around in public space.

Q16 **Tulip Siddiq:** Thank you. Marai, is there anything you want to add to that?

Marai Larasi: Women describe not looking up, and that is really interesting; you have whole groups of women navigating the world, and navigating public spaces, never making eye contact. Young women have told us that for them, making eye contact feels really dangerous; it feels like an invitation. They describe thinking about where they walk, run, play—just live and breathe—and a lot of anxiety, as Fiona said, about what to wear. Young women also describe silencing themselves when they experience harassment. The fear of escalation means not just that you have this thing happen to you, but that you think if you speak out it will get worse and you will be punished, re-victimised, further harmed or followed. That even impacts how you feel you are able to respond to that injustice or harmful experience.

So many women describe how, in open spaces, they do not feel that sense of open space but a sense of claustrophobia. Very often, people describe a sense of that having impact on their mental health and general wellbeing. Thinking about intersectionality, there is also something about what that might mean, or does mean, for a lesbian couple walking down the street, for example, and whether they feel they can hold hands or whether they feel they will be targeted or that the targeting will involve a whole conversation about what should happen to them. Essentially, what this is doing is reducing women. It is making women small. It is silencing women and literally forcing us to police ourselves as well as to cope with all the things that are being thrown at us.

Q17 **Mr Shuker:** Can I ask about the various forms of sexual harassment in public spaces, with a particular emphasis on any forms that are particularly prevalent in the UK, as a result of our culture, that perhaps would not be present in some other cultures or countries?

Marai Larasi: I described the experience of being on the train and the football supporter dynamic. Loads of different countries have sports and sporting cultures, but there is a way that that plays out here, in terms of what fan behaviour is supposed to look like, that can facilitate or encourage particular types of behaviours. That is such a part of who we

are as British people, in terms of our relationship with something such as football. That feels like quite a difficult one for me, but I don't think that is unique to this country. I say this as a football fan. It is about looking at something such as how we disrupt those kinds of behaviours, which are not about the support, but about how people engage with the sport.

Dr Vera-Gray: The only thing that comes to mind for me was thinking not about what was happening, but about what everyone's response is. In London there is a head-down attitude—don't intervene with what is going on for somebody else. That impacts how much support a vulnerable girl feels she will receive if something happens to her and how entitled a man or boy feels to do it. They are well aware that even if there is a packed crowd, if she turns around and says something, everyone is more likely to look at her like, "Sssh, we don't talk on the tube," than they are to step in. That is not unique, but it is particular to the cultural context here.

David Alton: In all honesty, I don't think this is something that I can comment on. I would very quickly get into dangerous territory on racial stereotyping, commenting on how different men around the world behave.

Q18 **Mr Shuker:** That is really helpful. Let's move on to the role of commercial sexual exploitation and what signals that sends about the acceptability of men's entitlement. Any thoughts on that before I ask a couple of specific questions?

Dr Vera-Gray: Thinking about gender norms, one of the main things that this does is show that men and boys can act on women and girls' bodies, and it teaches women and girls that what is important or valuable about us is the value that it has for men and boys to act on our bodies. There are links between that and the same kind of messages that come out in commercial sexual products and the sexual side of things. Pornography is something that we need to start thinking about in terms of a broader conducive context and the context that exists. I have been doing research at Durham Law School with a colleague, Professor Clare McGlynn, and Dr Ibad Kureshi from the advanced computing side of things, on the content of mainstream pornography. We have started to analyse 150,000 videos taken off the mainstream porn sites and the most common word used in the captions is "teen". That is the most common of 150,000 porn videos taken from the most mainstream sites. That is more than the name of any sex act or any body part. There is that on the one side, and on the other this is happening in adolescence to teenage girls. It is not causal. It is not even correlational. It is just that both of those things exist in a cultural context. I want to put that in, so that we start thinking about how we start to challenge the message that the bodies of young girls are there for older men and boys to comment on, interact with and masturbate to.

Marai Larasi: There are a couple of things to add to that. Those spaces give stereotypical views of who women are and of who particular groups of women are, and even of who some men are. I did some work a few years ago looking at racism and racialisation in pornography. There is very specific language used to describe particular groups of women and men. One of the interesting and challenging things about how pornography is

sold is this idea of calling men out, as if to say, "Are you man enough?" That is particularly since pornography has become much more violent as time has gone by. What we once described as Gonzo-type pornography is designed primarily to talk about inflicting harm. "Are you man enough to engage with this kind of material?" That is what pornography is calling you to do. It is really important for us to see that it is not just young people engaging in this. There is a way we put this narrative always on young people. Loads of adults are engaged with pornographic material. That is having an influence. It might not be influencing in the same way, but it certainly will have influence on perception.

That is who we are as a society and as human beings. If you are consuming that, what are you understanding about women's bodies, or about some women's bodies? If you are a man, what are you understanding about who you are as a man? Actually, if you are also being called out to evidence that you are man enough by demonstrating entitlement to women's bodies, that is something we need to think about how we disrupt. I do not want those to be the kind of messages that boys get, or that adult men get.

Q19 **Mr Shuker:** Very specifically, it is entirely possible for me to go and purchase consent and access to women's bodies through prostitution without committing a crime. What signal do you think that sends about men's entitlement to women's bodies? Do you think that plays out in the debate we are having here around sexual harassment in public places?

David Alton: Again, I would not profess to be an expert in terms of prostitution and related matters, but it appears to me, as someone involved in the world of equality from the police's point of view, and from the context of sexual harassment in the continuum, that all those things build together to form that bigger picture. To consider them in isolation is unhelpful, albeit that, tactically, we need to address them individually at times. For me, it certainly forms another piece of the jigsaw, in the same way that equality and inequality in employment in terms of gender, race and so forth are all parts of the process. To assume that it would not be a factor in terms of socialisation and the bigger picture of women's inequality would be rather naive.

Dr Vera-Gray: There are a couple of things. I was thinking about the research that I did. Two of the women whom I did research with were sex workers or had experience of being involved in prostitution. When they were talking about sexual harassment, they said things like, when they were in sex work and prostitution—and these were particular women, who were absolutely not trafficked, chose to do it and all that stuff—they felt a level of control that, in terms of sexual harassment on the street, they did not feel. There, they were not choosing anything. It was just something that was happening to them. If I am thinking about them, they put the two things as being quite different.

I think we need to talk about the way women and girls who are involved in prostitution are going to be targeted for exactly those kinds of behaviour, and how the fact that they are involved in prostitution will mean that they

feel less able to speak about forms of sexual harassment, because we exist in a world where people will think, "If you do that, you kind of expect it", or, "You're the kind of women who it should just be fine for". There are connections there.

There are also connections around thinking about prostitution as just being an extension of the gender norms and the idea of heterosexuality that we have, which is focused very much on men's sexual release, men's sexual pleasure and men's sexual desires, not on women as sexually desiring.

Again, around the continuum, rather than singling out particular things, we need to think about how all those exist in a broader system, particularly with sexual harassment. That is the one that is really hard to pin down, because it really is the output of all that gendered stuff that we throw in at one end, and that is what comes out the other side. To challenge that, we need to challenge the gender norms, which will involve challenging some of the norms that are involved in prostitution and sex work.

Marai Larasi: On what Fiona just said in that last bit, there is something about thinking, "What kind of messages are we routinely deploying into the broader space?" As a society, we have a huge amount of hypocrisy around prostitution. Men routinely purchase power over bodies in different ways. Prostitution is one space, but some men believe that they have purchased power over a body by marrying someone. There is something around how we interrupt the idea that you can simply purchase entitlement and power over a body and that you can routinely exploit. If we deal with gender stereotyping and the things that connect it, pornography, for example, influences men's and women's view of the world. Prostitution will as well. There is a constant flow between both things. There is something about how we interrupt those ideas and values so that at no point in time is a man going to feel like he is entitled to touch a woman's body and entitled to simply "purchase" a woman's body in that way. On public space, a lot of men feel that by buying a railcard they have purchased entitlement to a woman's body.

Chair: We are very short on time. Eddie, can I ask you to do 12 and 16 and I will come in on 14 after that? We will just have to end. We have a separate session after this. Is that okay?

Q20 **Eddie Hughes:** Indeed. There appears to be little central Government focus on sexual harassment in public places. Is that the case, do you think?

Dr Vera-Gray: Yes.

Q21 **Eddie Hughes:** So if we accept that is the case, what should central Government do to focus on this?

Marai Larasi: I think we have ended up with a message that domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women and girls, and actually it is likely to be sexual harassment, so there are some basic things around how we collect data, get information, start to resource

services, and around support. We have ended up with a hierarchy of violence against women and girls with sexual harassment being seen as a low-level thing and other things seen as more extreme. Because services are under pressure, very often women's specialist services are not resourced to do work around sexual harassment. But when they do work around rape and domestic violence, then they deal with women disclosing sexual harassment as a routine part of that casework, so some of it is how do we make sure that diverse specialist services are appropriately supported to respond to survivors and how do we build this in to all prevention work?

At the moment all prevention work in the community is poor. We have not been great at doing work in schools. We have not done serious work around campaigns. We have the evidence of work on drink-drive and seatbelts. It is not like we have not had a history in this country of doing far-reaching public campaigns. We need to do some work around this, because at the moment it is inconsistent and dependent on individual champions in local authorities and local areas and great caseworkers to pick this up. The Government need to create a framework located in the violence against women and girls agenda to deal with this.

Q22 **Eddie Hughes:** But those specialist services that you are talking about are much more likely to be regional or local government funded—

Marai Larasi: Or not.

Q23 **Eddie Hughes:** Or not, of course. So in terms of the role of local government or other agencies, do they have a greater role to play than central Government or an equal role?

Marai Larasi: Let me frame it this way: irrespective of who is doing some of the work, and that is important, the state has accountability to ensure that women and girls are safe and free. That is a matter for the state in terms of responsibility. We have got human rights obligations that are not being fully met at this precise moment. That is the context. Then when you start to think about who should deliver that work, ending violence against women and girls specialist services have proven track records around responding to these issues. We need to make sure that those services are appropriately resourced, but we also need to think about our health agencies and transport providers. There should be no space in our society where we say that violence against women and girls and sexual harassment is okay. On everything from our media spaces all the way through to our schools we need to think about how we can intervene and create and shift the context.

In terms of support to survivors, I want specialist services to be appropriately resourced to be able to deliver on that. It does not mean I am saying that I want the health providers to not do their work and it does not mean I want transport police no longer to have responsibility, because this is the responsibility of all of us.

Q24 **Eddie Hughes:** But it can be prevented. There is demonstrable proof that the Government are doing something, or not?

Marai Larasi: We have not had any serious investment in prevention work across our countries, across these islands.

Q25 **Eddie Hughes:** So there are no examples?

Marai Larasi: Well, you have got small programmes, and internationally—

Dr Vera-Gray: Internationally, what is coming out is that the key to ending violence against women is changing gender norms. That is what is coming out of all of the work that is happening, some of which our Government is funding internationally. So we are funding work internationally, working on edutainment: using and involving media to tell different stories about gender and set out different gender norms. The UK is funding that in other countries, but we are not doing that work here.

We are not investing in long-term attitudinal change; we seem to want quick fixes. That is my concern. Sometimes, the quick fix is always going to the law—doing hate crime framing, "do this" and "do something"—rather than investing in long-term attitudinal change work. The literature on prevention has not been around for that long, but it is starting to show that over 10 or 15 years you can change attitudes. We know already from seatbelts and drink-driving that we can change public attitudes, but we need to invest. It needs to be long-term, consistent and across different channels. It is not enough to have it just in one channel; it needs to be coming out from all different Government channels. It needs to go through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

We had the "This girl can" campaign—I don't know if you saw it—and I thought: that is a fantastic campaign about sport, but why is it "girl"? Why isn't it women? This is women. Why are we infantilising women again, even in a campaign about getting women to be able to use their bodies?"

Q26 **Eddie Hughes:** Can I just say, we went to New York, and when I was walking back through the airport with Jess Phillips there was this poster of "This girl can" and Jess said, "That's a great poster, a powerful message. Why do they have to put this young woman in a bra top?" As a man, to be completely candid, I walked past the poster and didn't think about it that way. I thought, "This is an empowering poster," but it is clearly an empowering poster with particular overtones.

Dr Vera-Gray: Exactly. It shows the importance of the Government involving and funding specialist women and girls agencies to do some of this work. Now we have got mandated relationships and sex education—the Department for Education is going to consult soon on what will be in it—we need specialist women and girls agencies to be funded to give their information and expertise around public sexual harassment so that what goes into the curriculum when it gets rolled out is right. Little mistakes can be missed if you haven't had decades of experience in this area.

In this country, it is great that violence against women and girls organisations have been here for decades. There are so many specialist black and minority ethnic women's organisations and specialist sexual violence agencies. They know what they are doing, and what they need

now is for Government to fund them to tell Government how to do this right.

Q27 **Chair:** Why is it that some boys don't get it wrong and some boys do get it wrong? We have been talking an awful lot about boys and men who get it wrong, but it has got to be that the vast majority of men do not get it wrong—or is that wrong?

Dr Vera-Gray: I don't think I would say that the vast majority don't get it wrong. Boys, what they do within—you would need someone here who works on critical masculinities to talk to you about the way that men and boys, even when it is not being expressed to women—

Q28 **Chair:** We are talking about that next. But you have to acknowledge that there will be large numbers of men in this country who do not get this wrong. Why is it that they get it right? What is it in their upbringing and their socialisation that has got it right, when others get it so wrong?

David Alton: An observation would be that, again, in analogy terms, in the same way as with racism and how we think about race, we talk about people having reconstructed language and some of the ideological stuff and there is a whole spectrum of thinking and behaviours, including unconscious bias in more recent times. My suggestion would be that all men are essentially on the continuum somewhere, and it is about at what point that turns into overt behaviours. I guess that as a society we are not particularly encouraged to self-reflect and self-criticise that well across the range of our attitudes and behaviours, and for me we face the same sort of issues with other forms—

Q29 **Chair:** Presumably, it is about teaching respect. A lot of the behaviours you have talked about are nothing to do with sexual harassment; they are to do with personal respect for each other as human beings. Are we as a society not teaching respect?

Marai Larasi: Yes, conversations about respect are critical. Conversations that encourage that particular kind of reflective behaviour are incredibly important. We talk about 90% of women and girls being subjected to sexual harassment. They are not being subjected to sexual harassment by the same men all the time, so we are talking about something that is a lot more widespread. Because we also have a hierarchy that focuses on the extreme case, which might be unwanted sexual touching, the lower-level forms of sexual harassment are sometimes passed by and we do not have discussions about those issues. Actually, a huge number of men will engage in those issues as a routine part of their everyday life, but we do not call them out. This is much broader than an intervention with a small group of badly behaving men. This really is about how we change our social norms, and respect is a critical part of that.

Q30 **Philip Davies:** Can you tell us what you define as the low-level sexual harassment that is not called out but you think should be called out?

Marai Larasi: Somebody might be sitting on the tube, for example, and staring at a woman for an extended period of time. She might find that completely intimidating, but for him that might be completely normal

behaviour. For me, that might not be low level in terms of an experience—it might be really problematic and harmful in terms of the woman's experience—but it might be hugely difficult to think about as a crime.

Q31 **Chair:** Aggressive behaviour that may not be sexual harassment.

Marai Larasi: Yes.

Chair: Sorry, we are running late.

David Alton: May I make one observation about Mr Davies's question?

Chair: Yes.

David Alton: I think that, as men, it is quite difficult for us to understand the perspective of women on this. One of the things I have found very interesting as a man, in conversations and when doing training around equality work and other forms of hate crime, is asking women in groups how often they have been made to feel uncomfortable by a man without any overt behaviour or language. Almost invariably, every woman in the room says in response, "Yes I have." I think that is quite a difficult concept for a lot of men to understand—that we do that without even intending to.

Q32 **Chair:** May I put a very quick final question to David? We are obviously very interested in the work you have been doing on tackling sexual harassment as a hate crime. Some people have criticised that as simply being for collecting police data. How would you respond to that?

David Alton: I would strongly refute the suggestion that that is the motivation for us doing this. We have touched on the relationship to other forms of inequality, discrimination and prejudice. For me, this sits alongside those comfortably, and it has the same driver as other forms of hate crime. It is about impact—understanding the impact on individuals and how they see their life and their interactions, and therefore what we need to do to ensure that they are able to live as freely as possible without those hindrances.

Q33 **Chair:** Some women who have sent us evidence have said they are not sure what types of behaviour they can report. Many do not report sexual harassment to the police because they do not believe that anything can be done. How would you respond to that?

David Alton: Again, for me, that is exactly the same issue that we face with other strands of hate crime, where people will say, "I don't know whether this is serious enough or important enough to report." The framework that Macpherson gave us in terms of race—it being any incident, based on perception—would be my starting point for saying, "If it's important enough for you to want to report, it's important enough for the authorities to recognise and to do something with."

For a lot of people, the criminal justice process is not particularly the most effective or desired outcome. We need to identify effective responses and challenges that take into account what that particular person wants as an outcome, and look to be as creative as possible in terms of how we

challenge it. Sometimes it is literally about speaking to somebody and saying, "Do you realise how you have made that person feel through your behaviour?" That may well be enough to satisfy the person who has made the complaint. They are not necessarily looking for criminal justice, punitive measures.

Q34 **Chair:** Finally, do you think this has got worse, or has it just got more unacceptable?

Dr Vera-Gray: I think it is a different question. It is not even about whether it has got worse; it is about whether we are starting to be able to hear when women are talking about it. I think we are in a particular moment post-MeToo—Marai Larasi can talk about this a lot—where women are starting to feel it is legitimate to say it, and we are starting to treat it as legitimate to hear it. It is very difficult to know whether that is because it is happening more, or because finally we are in a space where we are having a Government inquiry on this. It is something that has always been trivial and dismissed, and is starting to become something that is a valid form of violence against women.

Marai Larasi: May I add one tiny thing? I think it has become more complicated because we have that interface between physical space and online spaces, and so on. We need to recognise that that has changed the dynamic. If you are filmed and that is then distributed online, that changes what is done to you, your experience of that, and the ongoing nature of that—the public shaming and so on.

Chair: That is a very good point. I cannot thank you enough. I am sorry; it feels like we did not have enough time, although we have had lots of time, and there is much more we could have covered. Thank you for your time.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Gary Barker, Chief Executive Officer, Promundo.

Chair: Can I thank you, Gary, for joining us today—from Brazil, I understand.

Gary Barker: From the US. I changed my travel plans.

Chair: Okay, brilliant. We are very grateful to you for joining us. This is a relatively new way of communicating for the Committee, so please bear with us. We have a relatively short session with you today. I apologise for that—our previous session overran. I am going to hand to my colleague Gavin to start.

Q35 **Mr Shuker:** Gary, thank you so much. Your research found that nearly one in three young men in the UK and, I also note, one in three in the US and one in five in Mexico, have made sexually harassing comments to a woman or girl that they didn't know, in a public place. Does your research also tell us why?

Gary Barker: Yes, I think, as some of your previous witnesses said, what we find is the single largest driver is how much boys believe in a tough guy version of manhood—what we have called the "man box". What we find is how widespread this set of views about what it means to be men is, and across race and across income levels, and even across educational levels, the single aspect was that you believe in a version of manhood that you are in charge, you have to show you are tough and, particularly with the issue of homophobia—there is a huge aspect of that as well. So that is the single issue that we found.

Q36 **Mr Shuker:** Some people have referred to that as a model of toxic masculinity. How helpful is that language?

Gary Barker: The challenge with calling it toxic is that we push men away from the conversation, and we know how important it is that they need to be part of this conversation. Men are certainly producing other men's behaviours all the time, so the challenge of how we get men into the conversation—it is not very helpful when we call it toxic. So we are trying to figure out how we build it. In fact most young men that we talk to also want to speak out on it, but they are fearful to do so because of retaliation from other men.

Q37 **Mr Shuker:** Have you identified any strategies that enable men who are demonstrating really positive behaviours to extend that more widely and encourage that best practice?

Gary Barker: Yes, I think what we are pushing a lot—we were also encouraged by another study that we have just done. It is only in the US but I think it would hold up in the UK as well. Two thirds of young men tell us they would not speak out when they see bullying or harassment, and that what keeps them from doing it, as I said before, is retaliation. So there is a deep well of empathy with a lot of young men.

What we are trying to do is figure out ways that we bring it out. There are two ways. One: we are talking a lot about bystander intervention programmes. These are where we train young men, and young women, to react when they see these incidents—not to become sort of glorified bouncers but to do so in ways that don't provoke more violence. We are finding that we can get that to happen with young men and young women who will speak out. Others do what we call critical masculinities education or gender-transformative group education. That is group education, discussions in classrooms, and after-school programming with coaches in sports settings. We get a critical reflection on what it means to be men and women, and we get young men saying, "Well, I feel like I'm performing all the time. How can I step away from that?" How can we be conscious of how these norms play out around us all the time?

We are doing a large impact and evaluation study supported by the US Government at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Pittsburgh. We find that if we can get young men to go through about eight sessions with those activities, we see a measurable change in their attitudes, a decrease in sexual harassment, and an increase in positive

bystander interventions. As one of your previous witnesses said, there is a growing evidence base out there, and this is about a critical reflection of what it means to be men, and about men and women as part of that.

Mr Shuker: I feel that leads into some of Eddie's questions, so I will pass over to him.

Q38 **Eddie Hughes:** What interventions are, or should be, available for perpetrators or would-be perpetrators of harassment? It feels like you have touched on some of them, but one thing we heard in a previous evidence session is that no specific cohort of men is more or less likely to be involved in sexual harassment than others, although the interventions you mention certainly seem to be targeted at young people. Is it the case that we need those interventions early because they are less effective later in life, or would a different intervention be appropriate for older or different cohorts of men?

Gary Barker: On the last thing that you said, we like to think that those of us over a certain age are not that changeable, but in fact we are. We know that across relationships and in workplace cultures, men continue to be valuable, and we particularly respond to the cultural setting around us. If we peek into the heads of men, we are performing versions of manhood in different settings. We are performing before other male peers to look a certain way. In the US we hear a lot the expression, "That is so gay", and we know as men that our behaviour is often influenced by other men. That could be in the workplace, or in a sports or school setting. We believe that youth-focused programming gives the most. First, it is easier to reach young people—we know the spaces where we can find them and it is easier to get into those spaces. We believe that if we do that it pays forward.

We know that workplace-based approaches can also work, and they have to do with bystanders as well, and making people know that we have changed the culture. It is not a one-off talk; it is building standards and someone showing the corporation and other workers how seriously they are taking accounts of sexual harassment. Yes, if you have limited resources, I would focus on youth, but I would not give up on adult men.

Q39 **Chair:** That's good news. Finally, are there risks with work to prevent sexual harassment—we might start to get into more victim blaming, and that becomes a problem in its own right? Do you think there are continuing problems with talking about male violence in general?

Gary Barker: Yes, the challenge goes back to your question of whether we should call it toxic masculinity. We end up with a lot of defensive men trolling, in real life or in the virtual world, if we make it seem that all men are perpetrators. Our research is also quite hopeful in that some men say, "When I see something that causes harm to others, I feel bad about it." There is a deep well of empathy in most of our sons, brothers, fathers, coaches and so on, and it is about what we do to bring that out or repress it.

One of the challenges is also that the bystander work can often be "I'm the good guy, you're the bad guy. I'm going to call you out". We know that doesn't work with bullying programmes or with the prevention of sexual assault and harassment work. It must be more of a collective approach. Clearly, individual men must be held accountable. This is not letting men off the hook for their own actions, but it is saying that this is a collective construction of this thing we call manhood. This is collectively made every day, and we must be part of the solution together. The risk is that we push men further into that lonely box. David, you said you are seeing in the UK just how lonely and isolated many young men are. I worry that the discussion of "We think you're bad from the go" pushes young men into spending more time by themselves in front of computer screens, and not in the real world where we think they should be.

Let's make sure in this work that we don't socially isolate boys even more. That can play, as one of your previous witnesses said as well, in terms of race and class. In the US, the programmes that are funded for us to do this focus on minority boys. We send this message that there is a problem with minority boys' manhood—Latino boys, African American boys—but somehow for the majority of white males, we have got this under control. So the other issue is that we don't make this about some men and some boys.

Q40 **Chair:** I know you were watching the earlier session. Is there anything else you would like to reflect on in terms of what we heard?

Gary Barker: Fiona made lots of references to just how common and widespread these norms about masculinities are. For many teachers or parents or educators, that can feel like something squishy and untouchable and unchangeable. It is important to say that as we say that is the driver, we know something about how to change those norms, with group education, the kind of entertainment she mentioned plus opportunities for reflection about it and promoting critical media skills—a critical media literacy, where young people reflect on how the images in porn and elsewhere are not the way that real life happens necessarily. How do we get a critical reflection of that that actually works? As we keep calling this, it is about manhood. This is not something immutable.

I do want to get across to teachers and parents and coaches that we know how to have open conversations with our sons and daughters about these issues. It is not something big and amorphous that we can't act on.

Q41 **Chair:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for your time today. I am sorry that it was a slightly briefer session than we hoped. If there is anything else that on reflection you feel you want to talk to the Committee about, please do drop us a line. We would be most grateful. Thank you again for your time.

Gary Barker: Thank you for having me and thanks for taking on this topic.