

Australian Government

Department of Education

Anti-Bullying Rapid Review

June 2025

Introduction

Collective Shout

Collective Shout: for a world free of exploitation (www.collectiveshout.org) is a grassroots campaigning movement against the objectification and sexualisation of women and girls in media, advertising and popular culture. We target corporations, advertisers, marketers and media which exploit the bodies of women and girls to sell products and services, and we campaign to change their behaviour. More broadly, we engage in issues relating to other forms of exploitation, including the interconnected industries of pornography, prostitution and trafficking as well as the growing market in the sale of children for Live Distant Child Abuse [LDCA], child sex abuse dolls and replica child body parts and AI-enabled Image Based Sexual Abuse [IBSA] and Deepfake Image Based Sexual Abuse [DIBSA]. We are also recognised for our research on the rise of Harmful Sexual Behaviours in schools,¹ along with documenting first-person experiences of young people subjected to these behaviours as curated by our Movement Director Melinda Tankard Reist.²

Young people are at unique risk of sexualisation, objectification and exploitation. They are vulnerable to cyberbullying, sexual harassment, image-based abuse, predatory behaviour, grooming, sextortion and exposure to pornography. Given their significant use of digital media and devices, they are at special risk of technology-facilitated abuse including emerging technologies such as AI-enabled deepfake image based sexual abuse/sexually explicit forgeries which are fuelling new forms of sexual bullying and intimidation. We believe these harms should be specifically addressed in any updated anti-bullying frameworks and responses.

We have documented growing harms to the physical, psychological, mental and emotional wellbeing of young people over the past decade facilitated through digital platforms, including in the following:

¹ Mowle, A., Ewing, S. & Perry, T. (2024). Sexual Harassment of Teachers in Schools. *Collective Shout*. www.collectiveshout.org/shot-report

² Tankard Reist, M. (Jul 2023). Porn's grooming starts young: MTR Eureka Street essay. *MTR Blog*. <https://melindatankardreist.com/2023/07/pms-grooming-starts-young-mtr-eureka-street-essay/>

- Submission on the impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional and physical health. Standing Committee on Social Issues, Parliament of New South Wales, 2025;³
- Submission to Inquiry on Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill, 2024;⁴
- Submission to Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society, 2024;⁵
- Submission to eSafety Consultation on the implementation roadmap for a mandatory age verification (AV) regime relating to online pornography, 2021;⁶
- Submission to the Inquiry into Law Enforcement Capabilities in Relation to Child Exploitation, 2021;⁷
- Submission to the United Nations' Review of Children's Rights in the Digital Environment, 2020;⁸
- Submission to the Inquiry into Age Verification for Online Wagering and Online Pornography, 2019;⁹
- Submission on Harm Being Done to Australian Children Through Access to Pornography on the Internet to the Senate Environment and Communication References Committee, 2016.¹⁰

We have also analysed the intersections between the commercial sex industry - including the global pornography industry - and violence against women, sexual harassment, coercive control and other harmful behaviours which negatively impact the status of women. Our critique can be found in the following:

- Submission to eSafety's Inquiry into a Restricted Access System, 2021;¹¹
- Submission to the Department of Social Services National Summit on Women's Safety, 2021;¹²

³ Collective Shout (7 Mar 2025). Submission on the impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional and physical health. Standing Committee on Social Issues, Parliament of New South Wales. *Collective Shout*. <https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission-impacts-prnography-nsw>

⁴ Collective Shout (25 Jul 2024). Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/inquiry_in_the_criminal_code_amendment_deepfake_sexual_material_bill_2024

⁵ Collective Shout (Jul 2024). Submission to Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/joint_select_committee_on_social_media_and_australian_society

⁶ Collective Shout (Sep 2021). Submission to eSafety Consultation on the implementation roadmap for a mandatory age verification (AV) regime relating to online pornography. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_restricted_access_system

⁷ Collective Shout (Sep 2021). Submission to the Inquiry into Law Enforcement Capabilities in Relation to Child Exploitation. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_law_enforcement_child_exploitation

⁸ Collective Shout (Nov 2020). Submission to the United Nations' review Children's Rights in the Digital Environment. *Collective Shout*. www.collectiveshout.org/un_sub_children_digital_rights

⁹ Collective Shout (Nov 2019). Submission to the Inquiry into Age Verification for Online Wagering and Online Pornography. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_to_inquiry_into_age_verification_for_online_pornography

¹⁰ Collective Shout (May 2016). Submission on Harm Being Done to Australian Children Through Access to Pornography on the Internet to the Senate Environment and Communication References Committee. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_inquiry_harm_to_children_internet_pornography

¹¹ Collective Shout (Sep 2021). Submission to eSafety's inquiry into a Restricted Access System *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_restricted_access_system

¹² Collective Shout (Oct 2021). Submission to the Department of Social Services National Summit on Women's Safety. *Collective Shout*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_womens_safety

- Submission to Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement: Law Enforcement Capabilities in Relation to Child Exploitation, 2021;¹³
- Submission to Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Inquiry, 2020;¹⁴
- Submission to Victorian Review into Decriminalisation of Sex Work, 2020;¹⁵
- Submission to the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery, 2020-2024;¹⁶
- Submission to Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism, 2020;¹⁷
- Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, 2019;¹⁸ and
- Submission to the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Bill, 2018.¹⁹

Sexual Harassment of Teachers Report

Summary

Much of this submission is based on original research conducted by Collective Shout and parenting expert and author Maggie Dent published in 2024 as the *Sexual Harassment of Teachers [SHoT] report*.²⁰ We have included a digital copy of the report as an attachment.

Between 2022 and 2023, we partnered in the design and launch of a national survey of teachers to gain better understanding of the prevalence of sexual harassment in Australian schools. More than 1000 teachers responded. Many reported being subjected to routine sexual harassment in the workplace. They were propositioned, threatened with rape, subjected to sexist slurs and mimicking of sex acts seen in pornography, sexually moaned, groaned, and grunted at, asked for nudes and intimidated. A significant number said they did not feel safe at work.²¹

In the majority of cases, survey responses stated it was male students engaging in these behaviours towards female teachers. Survey responses also indicated that teachers were dealing with widespread harmful sexual behaviours by male students directed at female

¹³ Collective Shout (Sep 2021). Submission to Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement: Law Enforcement Capabilities in Relation to Child Exploitation. *Collective Shout*.

https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_law_enforcement_child_exploitation

¹⁴ Collective Shout (Aug 2020). Submission to Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Inquiry.

Collective Shout. https://www.collectiveshout.org/family_violence_submission

¹⁵ Collective Shout (June 2020). Submission to Victorian Review into Decriminalisation of Sex Work.

Collective Shout. https://www.collectiveshout.org/decriminalisation_submission

¹⁶ Collective Shout (Jul 2020). Submission to the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-2024. *Collective Shout*.

https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_to_the_national_action_plan_to_combat_modern_slavery_2020_24

¹⁷ Collective Shout (June 2020). Submission to Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism.

Collective Shout. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_to_anti_money_laundering

¹⁸ Collective Shout (Feb 2019). Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces. *Collective Shout*.

https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_on_national_inquiry_into_workplace_sexual_harassment

¹⁹ Collective Shout (2018). Submission to the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Bill 2018 (Provisions). *Collective Shout*.

https://www.collectiveshout.org/collective_shouts_submission_to_the_modern_slavery_bill_2018_provisions

²⁰ Mowle, A., Ewing, S. & Perry, T. (2024). Sexual Harassment of Teachers in Schools. *Collective Shout*. www.collectiveshout.org/shot-report. See also Tankard Reist, M. (Apr 2025). Behind the Classroom Door, sexual harassment is becoming routine. *Eureka Street*.

<https://melindatankardreist.com/2025/05/behind-the-classroom-door-sexual-harassment-is-becoming-routine/>

²¹ Similar accounts were published earlier in Tankard Reist, M. (Jun 2025). "It makes my skin crawl": sexual moaning rise in schools. *MTR Blog*.

<https://melindatankardreist.com/2022/06/it-makes-my-skin-crawl-sexual-moaning-rise-in-schools/>

students. A number of teachers reported children in kindergarten displaying inappropriate sexual behaviours toward other children and even toward teachers.

Educators were dealing with multiple disclosures from students subjected to Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB), including Image Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA). They cited disclosures by girls in Years 5 and 6 coerced into sending sexual images and instances of children as young as Year 2 accessing and sharing pornographic content through personal devices or social media.

Teachers attributed the rapid rise of sexualised behaviours to early exposure to pornography, social media, the malign influence of social media influencers such as Andrew Tate, and broader societal sexist attitudes.

Educators expressed disappointment about the lack of appropriate action to address these behaviours in their schools. Many respondents reported that inappropriate behaviours were dismissed as “Just a joke,” “banter” and “boys will be boys.” Many also believed there was a lack of understanding of the legal definition of sexual harassment.

Many teachers identified major gaps in policies, procedures and codes of conduct and pointed out their schools lacked sexual harassment policies that applied student-to-student and student-to-teacher. Some observed that guidelines for responding were often ‘buried’ within broader anti-bullying policies, rather than being given focussed attention as sexual harassment and sexual bullying.

As a result, teachers felt their safety, and the safety of mostly female students, was under threat. As one respondent wrote:

“The safety of very large portions of the school community is at risk, not just physical safety but mental and emotional wellbeing.” [Teacher response]

A number reported significant mental health decline as a result. Many took long-term leave, some changed schools, others still decided to quit the profession. One teacher stated:

“[As a teacher I have] never felt so drained, mentally and emotionally, in the past two years dealing with the increase of this behaviour with no school supports in place.” [Teacher response]

This was consistent with sentiments expressed by teachers across the survey responses. Other reports confirm our SHoT findings: one teacher told *The Australian* that it is common for teachers at her school to say “another day of being paid to be abused.”²²

Our report recommended radical and urgent intervention to address the rise of Harmful Sexual Behaviours in schools.

Key Findings

A total of 46.9% of survey respondents reported being sexually harassed at school, and 49.1% reported witnessing the sexual harassment of a colleague. Among those who reported being sexually harassed, 69.7% reported being sexually harassed by a student, 10.9% reported being sexually harassed by a colleague and a student, and 19.4% reported

²² Panagopoulos, J. (25 May 2025). Female teachers groped, sexually taunted by school boys. *The Australian*.

being sexually harassed by a colleague. Overall, 80.6% of teachers who had been sexually harassed at school were harassed by a student.

Women teachers were one-and-a-half times more likely to experience sexual harassment in the school setting than their male counterparts. A total of 47.9% of women indicated they had been sexually harassed at the school where they worked, compared to 35.6% of men.

Consistent with broader societal patterns of sexual harassment, the majority of those engaging in sexual harassment, as reported across all categories, were male. The survey results indicate that a total of 97.9% of sexual harassment is happening in the classroom and on school grounds. It is also taking place online and on school transport.

A total of 19.4% of survey respondents reported that they had been sexually harassed by a colleague, and 10.9% reported they had been sexually harassed by both a student and a colleague. In total, 30.3% of respondents who reported being sexually harassed at school have been sexually harassed by a colleague. Both male and female teachers reported being sexually harassed. The vast majority of perpetrators were reported as being male colleagues - 93.1%. The harassment included rape threats, rape 'jokes', sexual name calling, sexual propositions, sexual groaning noises made at them, receiving unwanted sexual images, sexually suggestive gestures, touching and groping.

Peer-to-peer sexual harassment

In line with this Review's observation, teachers are witnessing a considerable negative shift in the behaviors of students. An overwhelming majority of respondents – 79.9% – reported seeing more sexualised behaviour in schools.

A total of 66.6% of survey respondents reported that they had witnessed the sexual harassment of students by other students. One respondent said they heard Year 7 students "making rape 'jokes' towards girls." Others reported:

"Children showing other children pornography, sexual noises, children choking other children in the playground, children simulating sex from behind on other children from the age of 4." [Teacher response]

"I've had to deal with an increase in sexual assault threats online, sexual images being shown and girls being pushed to do sexual acts." [Teacher response]

In addition to witnessing these incidents, 57.4% reported receiving at least one disclosure of sexual harassment from a student; 39.1% reported receiving between one and five disclosures, and 10.4% reported receiving more than 10 disclosures. Some of the sexual harassment behaviours include:

"Groaning. Pressuring girls to send nudes, "accidental" touching of breasts during sport, commenting on appearance." [Teacher response]

"Becoming more covert, deviant and expressed digitally using graphically violent and pornographic videos on simple group chats that start as homework groups and descend as the year wears on." [Teacher response]

A total of 68.7% of respondents believe that peer-to-peer sexual harassment is happening at younger ages. A number of respondents reported that older children are teaching younger children sexually harassing behaviours. One reported:

“Groaning, grunting, watching inappropriate content, name-calling, exposure in younger years by older students about things such as porn and fisting.” [Teacher response]

Some teachers commented that “conversations about consent and appropriate talk are reducing prevalence of sexual harassment,” however, the majority indicated that consent education was not enough or was inadequate to combat the issue.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Harmful Sexual Behaviour is a term covering a broad spectrum of behaviours, as described by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. These can range from developmentally inappropriate behaviours that harm only the child exhibiting the behaviours (for example compulsive masturbation or inappropriate nudity), to criminal behaviours (such as sexual assault).²³

National and international research demonstrates that children and young people experience and display sexual behaviours in education settings.²⁴ Some of this sexual behaviour is developmentally normal and age appropriate; however, there is an increase in peer-to-peer sexual harassment, child sexual abuse by adolescents²⁵ and Harmful Sexual Behaviour in school settings.

A small-scale study of educators in Australian government, independent and Catholic schools, preschools and after-school-hours care found that 41% of educators reported they had observed children displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour.²⁶ Educators reported Harmful Sexual Behaviours such as, touching and mouthing others’ genitals, simulating intercourse and sending sexual images of themselves. Another Australian study found that between 30-60% of all experiences of childhood sexual abuse are carried out by other children and young people.²⁷

Harmful Sexual Behaviour is being observed globally. Clear et al. (2014) conducted research with 18,090 American students in Years 9-12 and found that 29.9% reported being a victim of sexual harassment. In the UK, End Violence Against Women (2024) reported that girls and young women are facing sexual harassment and assault on an alarming scale. Almost a third of the girls surveyed did not feel safe from sexual harassment in school. In 2022, police in England and Wales “received reports of 14,800 rapes and sexual assaults against children aged 10 to 17 where the suspect was classed as a child, the overwhelming majority being boys”.²⁸

²³ <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/children-harmful-sexual-behaviours>

²⁴ Ey, L.A., & McInnes, E. (2020). *Harmful Sexual Behaviour in Young Children and Pre-Teens: An Education Issue*. Routledge.

²⁵ Mathews, B., Finkelhor, D., Pacella, R., Scott, J.G., Higgins, D.J., Franziska, M., Holly, E.E., Thomas, H.J., Lawrence, D., Malacova, E., Haslam, D.M., & Collin-Vézina, D. (2024). Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrators: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106562>

²⁶ Ey, L.A., & McInnes, E. (2018). ‘Educators’ observations of children’s display of problematic sexual behaviours in educational settings, *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(1), 88-105.

²⁷ El-Murr, A. (2017). Problem sexual behaviours and sexually abusive behaviours in Australian children and young people: A review of available literature. *Australian Institute of Family Studies*. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/problem-sexual-behaviours-and-sexually-abusive-behaviours-australian-children>

²⁸ Taylor, L. (2024). Children now ‘biggest perpetrators of sexual abuse against children’. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/10/children-now-biggest-perpetrators-of-sexual-abuse-against-children?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_content=ap_qf09zbnvbm

Many teachers reported that students often frame sexual harassment as “jokes” or “banter,” failing to recognise that making sexual jokes is a form of sexual harassment.

“Too many times I’ve seen male students get away with a warning for really inappropriate sexual behaviour towards Female students because ‘they’re too young, just boys being boys...’” [Teacher response].

The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, a UK-based trade union, stated in a parliamentary inquiry submission that it had “evidence that strongly suggests sexual harassment of teachers and pupils in schools is commonplace and that the majority of incidents remain largely unchecked.”²⁹ Research also found that one in six female teachers had suffered sexist abuse at a school or college in the preceding two years, compared to one in 17 male teachers (NASUWT, 2018).

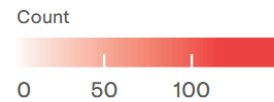
Australian teenagers average 49 hours a week on digital devices.³⁰ School principals say that children as young as six appear to be exposed to pornography, becoming common by Year 6, with increases in objectification of girls, sexual innuendos and noises.³¹ Below is a graph from our ShoT report showing harassment type and Year level of the young person engaging in it.

²⁹ National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT). (2018). *Written submission from NASUWT (SHW0054)*. Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Inquiry, UK Parliament, Women and Equalities Committee. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/88677/html>.

³⁰ Bitá, N. (15 May 2025). Australian teens spend 49 hours a week on digital devices. *The Australian*.

³¹ Panagopoulos, J. (19 May 2025). Students as young as Year 1 and Year 2 accessing pornography: Principal. *The Australian*.

Relationship between Year of Perpetrator and Type of Sexual Harassment



Harrassment type	Year of perpetrator				
	K-3	4-6	7-8	9-10	11-12
Touching	5	12	25	45	19
Sexually suggestive gestures	6	33	63	133	60
Sexual propositions	2	10	31	72	33
Sexual name calling	6	27	52	113	52
Sexual groaning noises made at you	7	40	73	145	54
Sexual behaviours	5	12	25	45	19
Receiving unwanted sexual images	1	1	4	15	3
Rape threats	2	2	10	15	6
Rape 'jokes'	1	8	38	74	27
Other	5	12	25	45	19
Groping	5	12	25	45	19
Demanding sexual images	0	1	3	7	4
Choking	5	12	25	45	19

From *Collective Shout (2024). Sexual Harassment of Teachers.*

What policies, models or practices (i.e. interventions) do you feel are not working, or what whole of school/education system changes do you think could help improve action on bullying?

Examples from a whole of school perspective

With few exceptions, we have not observed consistent, uniform examples of whole-of-school perspectives and responses to dealing with problematic and Harmful Sexual Behaviours. Responses from SHoT data, and as reported by our Movement Director Melinda Tankard Reist³² who partners with schools across the country, demonstrate a lack of uniform, consistent, agreed on policies, procedures, guidelines and remediation.

In the SHoT survey, when asked what school protocols exist when a student or teacher reports sexual harassment, these were some of the detailed responses:

“Again, same as with racism & bullying, the incident is ‘investigated’ which means parties are questioned by deputy/principal. Then warning is usually issued because the perpetrator often denies it. We’ve been told ‘there’s no evidence’ when we say we witnessed or experienced an incident. The teacher’s word or student’s word is not enough. It’s horrifying.” [Teacher response]

“Gosh, I think it’s just treated like bullying really. And for the kids it’s a behaviour management plan and they just follow that. Um and I have no idea what they do for teachers. If it’s a student doing it (like graphic innuendoes etc) they’d just action the behaviour plan (like for example, the student would be sent to buddy class of the office for doing the wrong thing, but the individual behaviour to start the process aren’t always addressed).” [Teacher response]

“For primary school students, the matter is investigated to ensure validity, parents are called in for interview and further action is taken as necessary. At my granddaughter’s high school, an incident involving year 7 students bullying another student using Snap Chat and nude photos was actioned immediately with the school calling in police who then accompanied the students home to their parents. I’m unsure as to what happened after that.” [Teacher response]

“In the above question [of our survey] on who did you report this to, it had no option for student services/admin. This, like any form of harassment is covered by the schools BMS policy and sanctions are applicable as with any other form of bullying. The principle comes in for reporting of sexual assault, abuse where this occurs and is disclosed it is part of the mandatory reporting. “Sexual Harassment” as a term is VERY broad, where the harassment is physical, sexual, inappropriate it would be covered under the mandatory reporting, otherwise it would be covered by the regular Behaviour management policy/strategies.” [Teacher response]

“We have training that explains the process but like any other code of conduct breaches eg teachers berating/yelling/bullying a student, leadership never take it seriously. They say “that’s just how such n such is”. It absolutely infuriates me.” [Teacher response]

³² Tankard Reist, Melinda (20 Jul 2020). When the moaning stops: How porn is damaging young people. *Eureka Street*.
<https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/when-the-moaning-stops--how-porn-is-damaging-young-people>

Examples from an education system perspective

When asked, “How would you describe the school’s response/action following your report of sexual harassment?”, all those who responded “no action at all” had reported the sexual harassment to their school principal. The issue of principals and executives not taking sexual harassment reports seriously, dismissing sexual harassment or contributing to the issue was highlighted in comments made by survey respondents:

“Independent schools have a significant number of males in leadership who think things are ‘just a joke’.” [Teacher response]

“Usually have to report to white male in a position of leadership who has never experienced such harassment, therefore will gaslight your experience.” [Teacher response]

“Like other issues such as racism & bullying, reports & accusations are often both under reported & not dealt with well by those whose job is to resolve such issues ie deputy principals & principals.” [Teacher response]

One female respondent who was subjected to sexual harassment from a male colleague, reported being subjected to sexual propositions, sexually suggestive gestures (i.e. oral sex gestures), sexual behaviours, touching and groping. After reporting the behaviour to the principal, she reported that no action at all was taken despite the severity of the behaviour. In fact, she reported that she “was blamed for it, he was totally excused.” She felt unsafe and uncomfortable in the school grounds following the harassment, but received no on-going support. As a result of the sexual harassment she ended up changing schools.

In the SHoT survey, when asked what changes need to be made to the school’s code of conduct, some teachers specifically mentioned bullying policy in their suggestions:

“Extend ‘Bullying’ to clearly include ‘Sexual Harassment’ and clearly outline the procedure to follow and consequences that will result.” [Teacher response]

“No specific policy but complaints policy is in place and a bullying and harassment policy also. Though this is focused around students not teachers.” [Teacher response]

“Normally pay off the bullying/harassment policy, nothing specific. Ask both parties for their sides and try to reconcile.” [Teacher response]

“Needs to be more explicit about exactly what behaviours constitute bullying, harassment, disruption etc. with clear processes outlined for each behaviour.” [Teacher response]

“Grievances submitted against certain protected bully leaders are poorly handled, We have a staff member known as mr teflon! Won his 5 year job back!” [Teacher response]

“Updated responses to bullying and sexual harassment.” [Teacher response]

“It needs to be more explicit around what constitutes sexual harassment and bullying and steps to support the victims.” [Teacher response]

“There needs to be consequences and action taken when things are breached, otherwise, what is the point? Probably just a document that allows the school and its board to tick a box, a bit like having a bullying policy of zero-tolerance but allowing all types of that.” [Teacher response]

What else would help build capability to support staff to prevent and manage bullying?

In our survey, we asked teachers: “What do you think needs to happen to change this harmful behaviour in schools?” Responses highlighted that a multi-faceted approach is required to combat sexual harassment of teachers in schools:

“More needs to be done about verbal harassment or requests. More needs to be done about bosses or colleagues harassing peers and a clear reporting path given where the victim is believed. Counselling offenders should be mandatory. Education of all from a young age needs to focus on what sexual bullying is, with a zero tolerance approach.” [Teacher response]

“Students that are witnessed engaging in these behaviours need to have interventions, counsellor sessions, outside agency assistance.” [Teacher response]

“Change teacher workload so they don’t feel outnumbered and ganged up on in the classroom. For example, a female teacher in a room of 30 plus young men can be a very threatening environment if they decide to turn on you. Mob mentality among young men is increasing, and a lack of moral upbringing influenced by porn culture and social media.” [Teacher response]

“The attitude around teaching being a profession and schools being a workplace needs to be driven home. It is unacceptable that we are exposed to this behaviour. We need protection from our workplaces.” [Teacher response]

“Understanding from all that is actually happening and for the consequences to be made clear and be REAL - not just a slap on the wrist and do this ‘training program’ or take a day off to think about your behaviour.” [Teacher response]

The following section is a condensed summary of responses that identify what needs to happen to change Harmful Sexual Behaviours in schools (please refer to the section on “What reporting is in place to support action on bullying” for our data on the lack of reporting of sexual harassment and explanations for this low reporting rate).

Take the issue seriously

Teachers want schools to be transparent about how they are dealing firmly and fairly with teacher-targeted sexual harassment and associated behaviours. School leadership needs to demonstrate how they are supporting teachers and students to be safe and able to focus on learning.

Our survey respondents highlighted that minimising sexual harassment leads to an environment where teachers (and female students) do not feel safe or valued in their schools. Some note that “low level” behaviours are indicative of a potential escalation of Harmful Sexualised Behaviour.

“Sexualised behaviour like making sexualised noises and gestures are often taken lightly by school administrators but in my experience many of those students end up continuing this behaviour and sometimes escalating to more physical forms of sexual abuse or explicit behaviours.” [Teacher response]

Minimising attitudes also mean that, as one teacher pointed out, female students are groomed into accepting these behaviours without realising that they are unlawful.

Respondents were of the view that taking sexually harassing behaviours seriously would have a deterrent effect:

“If students know that their behaviour will b [sic] dealt with (sure and swift), not only should we see a drop in this type of behaviour, but victims will not feel ashamed to report this behaviour. This behaviour will not be tolerated in schools and, therefore, not tolerated in the wider communities.” [Teacher response]

“Consequences” was the word used most often by respondents when asked what should be done. Teachers wanted students and staff to understand that sexual harassment was not acceptable, and they should not have to put up with it. Zero tolerance and a clear and direct policy driven from the top down were the preferences expressed by respondents.

“Students need to start having consequences for their actions like they would in general society. If they assault someone at school they ‘might’ get suspended - if they do it in public they can be charged. If they sexually harass someone at school they ‘might’ get put on a level or get a warning of suspension - if they do it at work they can get fired and charged. It needs to be made clearer that this behaviour has serious consequences for them, not just the other person.” [Teacher response]

Teachers desired that these behaviours be called out directly and immediately and addressed in accordance with applicable laws. They expressed a need for explicit processes and consequences for students who display these behaviours.

This response strongly suggests that many schools are failing to fulfil their positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984. Inclusion of specific mention of sexual harassment and its definition is needed in Codes of Conduct and school policies, followed by effective enforcement:

Harassment on the ground of sex (‘sex-based harassment’) involves unwelcome behaviour that is sexist and demeaning in nature, but that is not necessarily sexual. As with sexual harassment, sex-based harassment is unlawful when it occurs in circumstances in which a reasonable person, aware of those circumstances, would anticipate that the person being harassed might feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. It can happen when a person is degraded, put down or disrespected because of their sex, or a characteristic generally associated with people of that sex. Workplace cultures that foster sex-based harassment and everyday sexism also provide environments where sexual harassment can thrive.³³

³³ Australian Human Rights Commission (2023). Information Guide on the Positive Duty Under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth): Relevant Unlawful Conduct, Drivers, Risk Factors and Impacts. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/information_guide_on_the_positive_duty_2023.pdf

Education and training

Training for staff

Teachers expressed a need for education to explicitly define what constitutes sexual harassment. They called for expert training on what is developmentally appropriate/inappropriate behaviour and how to identify it. Teachers also requested help with language to respond to and report what is not appropriate.

“It’s never expected. It takes us off guard. In that moment of shocked, speechlessness and discomfort shown by the teacher, the students achieve their intention. Then comes the gaslighting; ‘I was just yawning, Miss - you’re over reacting’, etc...I would love for someone to please write a script - some kind of guideline of school appropriate responses for teachers that will have a significant and meaningful impact on the student then and there in the classroom. There are no Professional Learning Support opportunities that I’m aware of to address this behaviour.”

Teachers are in favour of ongoing, repeated, whole school education, including for parents, for students, and for teachers:

“Everyone needs to teach this every year.” [Teacher response]

Many teachers indicated they did not know what to do when faced with sexually harmful or harassing behaviours in the classroom or yard. They requested more training in understanding and responding to sexual harassment.

“More training for staff, especially graduates...It needs to be explicit rather than a few lines in a staff handbook. Also, clearer processes in independent sector re: follow through on both staff and student misconduct. [Currently it’s] Open to interpretation which can create/magnify issues. Too vague.” [Teacher response]

“More education and workshops on sexual behaviour - right and wrong and what to do when this happens to students or teachers.” [Teacher response]

Teachers requested professional training and resources to deal with sexual harassment effectively in the classroom and at the management level. Scripts are needed for addressing these behaviours as soon as they occur. Teachers recommended that training should include:

- How to clearly identify sexual harassment and its nuances
- How to handle situations in the moment
- How to report
- How to respond to a report

Education for students

Teachers see the curriculum itself as failing to adequately address these issues. Some teachers said that sex education and respectful relationship programs are insufficient or implemented too late to effectively counter the influences of social media and pornography. One teacher commented, “We are responding to problems, not providing education and preventative support.” Another teacher requested:

“Education of all from a young age... to focus on what sexual bullying is, with a zero tolerance approach.” [Teacher response]

Some teachers stated they wanted students to be taught positive behaviours beyond consent education. Topics such as “honour,” “kindness”, “empathy”, and “etiquette” were suggested. In addition, teachers expressed a desire that students be taught about “appropriate boundaries” and “acceptable behaviour.” They also wanted education that explicitly defines what constitutes sexual harassment, including perceived “low level” behaviours.

“Teach children the consequences and make them aware that their actions can be extremely detrimental to the person involved.” [Teacher response]

Teachers commented that this should be carried out in a way that doesn’t sexualise students too early, shame or scare them. They want students to know how to seek assistance and how to disclose information properly.

Outside experts were highly recommended to address these problems, with teachers wanting more education from those who are unafraid to tackle the issue.

“Educational packages created for schools for free, for every age bracket and easily accessible and a course not a single lesson... Without being “on trend” with terminology but focusing on the law, the consequences and the why morality matters.” [Teacher response]

Survey respondents pointed out that current education interventions almost never address sexual harassment directed at teachers, or peer-to-peer sexual harassment.

“During personal development and health lessons students are made aware of unwanted touching or harassment by adults but not by other students or children. They need education so they understand it’s not acceptable from ANYONE at ANY AGE.” [Teacher response]

Teachers were conflicted about whether it would be effective for schools to address this in curriculum, but there was clear agreement that students need more help than they are currently receiving:

“It’s hard to say. How much more can we squeeze into our curriculum. When do we get to the point where we are no longer teaching the fundamentals (literacy and numeracy) well enough?” [Teacher response]

“The whole anti-bullying policies need to be re-written in a way that kids can respond to and relate to. Years ago, the only thing kids learned in Sex Education was ‘don’t do it’. Now we’re more aware... We need to teach much more explicitly about emotional intelligence, how to deal with petty conflict, how to de-escalate conflict, how to use self-control in positive ways.” [Teacher response]

Education for parents

“The children need to undergo education with parents present.” [Teacher response]

Teachers emphasised the crucial role of parental involvement in addressing sexual harassment in schools. Many teachers express frustration over what they perceive as

inaction or dismissiveness from some parents regarding their children's inappropriate conduct. One teacher observed:

“Students see sexualised behaviours online and in video games and movies and parents often seem to be oblivious or think it's ‘cute’ that their child is ‘so grown up’.”

Teachers highlighted the potential legal implications of some of the behaviours they were observing in their classrooms, with one respondent stating:

“Parents need to acknowledge their child's behaviour as it is by the law - sexual harassment. But they often ignore or excuse.” [Teacher response]

One teacher commented:

“The elephant in the room is parental supervision and parenting skills.”

This comment reflects broad agreement among respondents. With regard to sexually inappropriate behaviour, some teachers viewed parent engagement with their child as more important than providing education through the school. Prevention of inappropriate sexualised behaviours is a key target, but parents also have an extremely important role in helping change their child's inappropriate behaviour once incidents have occurred.

Teachers agreed on the necessity of integrated strategies in the curriculum that include media literacy, clear policies on digital conduct, and collaboration with parents to establish consistent messaging on these topics.

Many suggestions were made on how schools can help upskill parents:

“Run parent workshops on the behaviours that teachers are seeing, and what they are doing to combat it.” [Teacher response]

“Talk to parents about exposure to pornography and communicate clear expectations about acceptable behaviour in a school setting.” [Teacher response]

“Establish shared language and expectations between parents and schools... work together to create programs to address it.” [Teacher response]

“Provide parent education to fully understand the impacts on children when they are exposed to sexual content.” [Teacher response]

“Engage fathers to model positive behaviours – ‘Provide the role models our youth desperately crave’.” [Teacher response]

Make schools safer

Teachers stated they wanted more respect, training, and protection, and noted that community attitudes towards teachers need to improve. They desire a safe working environment and a culture of respect. This is one contributing factor to the high attrition rate of teachers.

School leadership

Teachers expressed a desire for school leaders to hold parents accountable and offer stronger responses to parents who don't believe their child had done anything wrong. They

sought support to stand firm when they are confronted by aggressive parents who fuel this behaviour and act in a confrontational manner with schools when their children are managed for inappropriate conduct.

“The leadership of schools and organisations need to take these reports seriously. The governing boards of schools need to act. They only seem to act if it is from one of ‘those families’ or the threat of legal or media involvement. Women and girls do not feel safe in their own schools from the ‘jokes’ and belittling behaviour that is supported by inaction by others. I have seen female colleagues indirectly bullied and lose promotion opportunities when they have tried to take a stand on this issue. If you want to advance your career as a woman in education, you don’t speak up!” [Teacher response]

“Leadership teams need to take things seriously. Many leaders have been out of the classroom for a significant period- they have no idea what a classroom is like now.” [Teacher response]

Policy and procedures

Teachers called for more effective policies, both preventative and responsive, at all levels that address the reality of their situation. They want:

“An acceptance and agreement within schools and departments of what sexual harassment is and that it is not tolerated at any level.” [Teacher response]

Teachers see a need for clear policies on how to investigate incidents and when to involve police. A number highlighted that incidents were not always investigated, instead being dealt with by various policies and procedures (if they existed), and sometimes only at the discretion of the principal or leadership. Several teachers advised that because of unclear policy on consequences for behaviour “students know there’s no real repercussions.” [Teacher response]

A common suggestion was the need for clearer reporting procedures. Teachers requested:

“instructions and clear steps to take (that don’t involve union involvement).”

“More detailed explanation of procedures. Can often be overwhelming or difficult to ascertain how to correctly follow procedures.” [Teacher response]

Social media policy

An overwhelming number of teachers want phones banned on school grounds at all times. This was widely recommended by teachers.

“Get phones and devices out of schools. It is an experiment gone awry.” [Teacher response]

“Total ban on devices on school grounds.” [Teacher response]

We commend all schools that have banned mobile devices. We agree with the recent comments of Senator Sarah Henderson who said:

“The dramatic deterioration in classroom behaviour builds the case for restricting access to laptops and other devices which are being used to facilitate cyber abuse. We cannot let Australian classrooms become sites of trauma.”³⁴

Social media was mentioned many times in our survey responses as the means by which students access sexually explicit content. Teachers also reported that sexual harassment was taking place via social media.

“Limit student’s access to social media and place stronger security measures on devices.” [Teacher response]

Codes of conduct

Teachers were asked if their school had a code of conduct, if they were satisfied with the code, and if any changes needed to be made. A total of 89.3% of respondents reported that their school had a code of conduct in place. It was not clear from these responses whether the code of conduct was one which addressed student conduct, staff conduct or both. However, only 48.1% were satisfied with their school’s code of conduct, 18.2% were not satisfied, and 33.7% were unsure or did not respond.

A total of 32.3% of teachers commented that their code of conduct needed changes, and from those respondents 30.3% highlighted that the code needed to be clearer and more explicit. Teachers also expressed a desire for inclusion of concrete examples of sexual harassment to facilitate a whole school community understanding, including the consequences of engaging in sexual harassment. They commented that addressing sexual harassment simply as “bullying” or “inappropriate behaviour” is inadequate.

“Explicitly [identify] types of sexual harassment and consequences including police involvement.” [Teacher response]

“Recognition of what gaslighting is, including what it looks like.” [Teacher response]

“Explicit acknowledgement of sexual harassment and the process of reporting it.” [Teacher response]

“Needs to be spelled out in black and white, the serious legal consequences made completely clear and an absolute zero tolerance policy for behaviour of this type.” [Teacher response]

Many teachers described problems associated with the current code of conduct, or with its execution. Some commented that it is not an “active document”, and it is not “enforced” or “implemented”.

“It needs to be followed! The school does not adhere to it or follow correct procedures.” [Teacher response]

“It’s not an active document. It has been created because it is something that has to be done...Not because it’s helpful in the workplace.” [Teacher response]

“Show that the Code is something the school values, and make sure teachers feel safe, particularly after a report is made.” [Teacher response]

³⁴ Bita, N. (27 May 2025). Schools ‘sites of female trauma.’ *The Australian*.

In some cases, the code of conduct was perceived as “useless” as staff and students were not held to account.

“It is a piece of paper. No action is ever followed unless the union steps in with a threat.” [Teacher response]

Many teachers recommended that student behaviour should be addressed by the code of conduct, and with language that is more accessible to students.

“There are no references to instances where students (particularly older students) are the perpetrators, or how to handle that situation.” [Teacher response]

“It’s not relevant to kids. It’s too policy based and not appealing to kids to take seriously.” [Teacher response]

Many teachers pointed out that parents are crucial in reinforcing healthy behaviours and should be included in a school’s code of conduct. It was noted that students with “difficult” parents can get away with more antisocial behaviours, and parents may even be intimidating, abusive, or enabling/reinforcing of their child’s behaviours.

“There needs to be a level of consultation and accountability of parents in the code of conduct.” [Teacher response]

“Parents need to understand and support the consequences for their children when they engage in these behaviours.” [Teacher response]

“The changes [need to be] more about how to manage parents that don’t want to hear it or deal with it...what happens is often the school is left with little options but to tell parents, who then are abusive or have no consequences.” [Teacher response]

Teachers reported that there needs to be more awareness and “visibility” of a code of conduct. They suggested that it could be posted on walls, so it is visible at all times and that at the least, it must be more accessible, with a training and education piece to accompany it.

“Include in induction for new staff or casual teachers.” [Teacher response]

Teachers acknowledged that barriers exist when it comes to writing an appropriate code. They cited time, resourcing, and the availability of qualified and informed personnel (such as trauma-informed psychologists and counsellors) as barriers.

Provide therapeutic responses

Teachers believe that students engaging in sexual harassment of teachers need counselling. In their survey responses, some teachers acknowledged that counselling was part of school protocols, but many suggested that counselling should be on-going and offered at critical points.

“Counselling of offenders should be mandatory.” [Teacher response]

“Counselling upon return to school - to prevent repeat behaviour, and possibly to make sure a student is not subject to abuse at home or is not being groomed.” [Teacher response]

Teachers agreed that a student engaging in sexual harassment is an indication that the student needs help, but they noted that assistance is not always forthcoming.

“More support for individual students with problematic sexual behaviours – most of our students don’t meet the criteria for referral to local health services for this concern.” [Teacher response]

“Students that are witnessed engaging in these behaviours need to have interventions, counsellor sessions, outside agency assistance.” [Teacher response]

Survey responses indicated that the impacts of sexual harassment are devastating to teachers. Some received ongoing support in the form of counselling; however, the vast majority are not receiving any ongoing support. When asked “What ongoing support have you received”, 83% of respondents said ‘nil’, ‘none’, or ‘nothing’.

“Better supports need to be put into place to support victims.” [Teacher response]

Teachers responded that support needs to go further than offering access to the Employee Assistance Programs. They said that they need access to counsellors and psychologists who understand the current school context and have experience providing therapy to clients who have been sexually harassed in schools.

How could a consistent national standard ensure that schools’ bullying prevention activities and responses are appropriately tailored, and accessible to all students including equity cohorts?

The following high-level recommendations are based on the SHoT survey data and research conducted as part of this Report.

Recommendation One

School leaders and school governing authorities should ensure that their schools have effective policies and procedures in place that:

- a. Clearly define sexual harassment, including with reference to applicable laws.
- b. Explicitly identify the sexual harassment of teachers as a form of sexual harassment.
- c. Provide clear direction and guidance for the prevention of sexual harassment of teachers.
- d. Provide clear direction on the process for reporting the sexual harassment of teachers, including when to involve police.
- e. Provide clear direction and guidance for responses to allegations and incidents of sexual harassment of teachers, including safety plans, punitive measures and therapeutic responses.

Recommendation Two

School leaders and school governing authorities should ensure that their schools have a student code of conduct endorsed by the school principal and signed by students (and their parents). The student code of conduct should outline:

- a. A zero-tolerance policy for the sexual harassment of teachers.
- b. Behaviours that constitute sexual harassment.
- c. The therapeutic and disciplinary response to violations of the code of conduct.
- d. Relevant laws and policies that inform the overall student discipline procedure.

Recommendation Three

School principals should roll out a comprehensive education and training program for school staff and students that is mandatory and conducted on a yearly basis. The education and training should address:

- a. Issues of sex and stereotypes and how this can lead to sexual harassment.
- b. What constitutes sexual harassment, including definition and examples.
- c. Key aspects of relevant laws applying to sexual harassment in school settings.
- d. Rights and responsibilities in a school setting.
- e. How to address sexual harassment as soon as it takes place, with confidence.
- f. How to report sexual harassment (for teachers and for students).
- g. How to respond to a report of sexual harassment (for teachers).

Recommendation Four

School principals should seek specialist advice on how to engage parents/guardians and the wider school community in addressing the issue of sexual harassment, including:

- a. Issues of sex and stereotypes and how this can lead to sexual harassment.
- b. The impacts of social media, internet influencers and pornography.
- c. The prevalence of sexual harassment against teachers.
- d. The prevalence of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and abuse.
- e. How to address and respond to concerning sexualised behaviours.

Recommendation Five

School leaders and school governing authorities should ensure provision of ongoing, funded and trauma-informed therapeutic responses for:

- a. Teachers who have been subject to sexual harassment.
- b. Students who have been subject to sexual harassment and abuse.
- c. Students who have engaged in the sexual harassment/abuse of a teacher or student.

If schools do not provide internal therapeutic responses, school leaders and school governing authorities should provide clear and up-to-date information about providers and how to access their services.

Recommendation Six

State/territory departments of education and other school governing authorities should:

(1) support and fund further research into:

- a. The prevalence and nature of sexual harassment across school types (for example, public, independent, faith-based, single sex), including how the sexual harassment of teachers may intersect with the sexual harassment of students.
- b. The contributory and risk factors for sexual harassment in school settings.
- c. The impacts of sexual harassment experienced by teachers, including the financial impacts (for example, lost productivity, medical costs and criminal justice activities).
- d. The preventative strategies and frameworks that schools are implementing, and should implement, to address the sexual harassment of teachers.
- e. Whether school policies and codes of conduct accurately define sexual harassment and explicitly address the sexual harassment of teachers.
- f. Whether the sexual harassment of teachers is being correctly identified, reported, and addressed in accordance with relevant legal and ethical obligations.
- g. Whether educational programs, for students and staff, about sexual harassment in schools are appropriate and effective.
- h. Whether parents are appropriately engaged in addressing the problem of sexual harassment against teachers.
- i. The quality of school leadership responses to sexual harassment of teachers.

(2) Implement evidence-based measures to improve responses to the sexual harassment of teachers, considering existing research, data from the SHoT survey, and further research as recommended in recommendation 6(1).

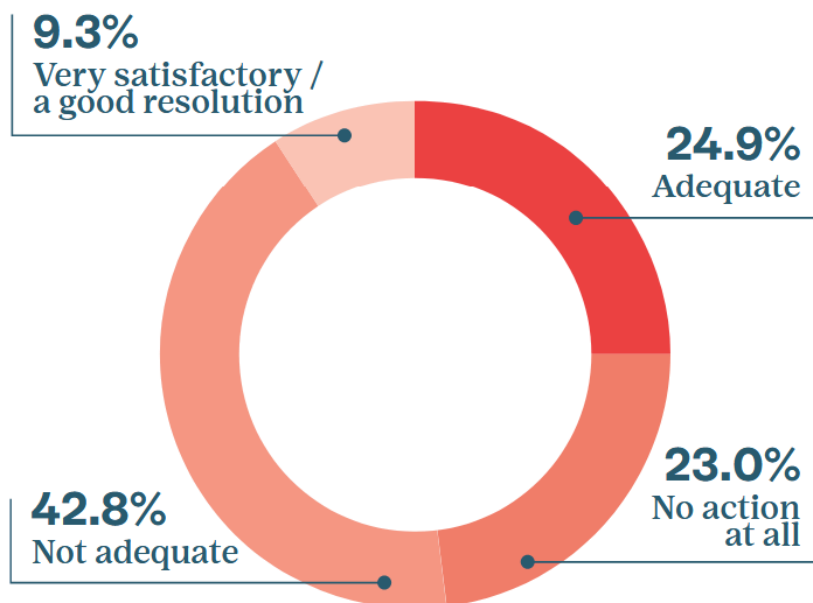
What reporting is in place to support action on bullying?

For teachers who said they had personally experienced sexual harassment, 54.1% reported it while 45.9% did not report it. Most commonly, teachers reported to the principal, followed by fellow teachers or colleagues. All but two teachers reported that there was no ongoing support after the experience of sexual harassment.

Teachers were much more likely to report sexual harassment of students by other students, with 60% reporting such events. Most reported to the principal (34.5%), followed by fellow teachers and colleagues (19.7%). Less commonly, school counsellors were informed, sometimes police, and occasionally the school nurse.

The chart below shows how teachers describe their school's response to reports of student-to-student sexual harassment:

How would you describe the school's response/action following your report of sexual harassment?



Sexual harassment is mostly unreported in school settings

In their submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, the AEU highlighted that the majority of teachers do not report experiences of sexual harassment in their workplace.³⁵ The AEU submission did not identify whether those engaging in sexual harassment were students or colleagues, however it did provide information about barriers to reporting in a broader sense.

The AEU noted that the primary reason respondents to its survey cited for not reporting was that they "did not feel comfortable", followed by "worried it would make the situation worse". A total of 10% reported "fear of not being believed". The AEU also noted that teachers who did report sexual harassment said that reporting resulted in adverse impacts to their employment conditions, including reduced hours or non-renewal of contracts. The majority (78%) of those who reported felt the matter was not resolved to their satisfaction.

³⁵ Australian Education Union. (2019). *Submission to the Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Australian Human Rights Commission. https://defence.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/submission_332_-_australian_education_union.pdf

The sexual harassment of teachers by students is complicated by conventional understandings of power and authority that characterise this relationship.³⁶ For some teachers, experiences of sexual harassment can rouse feelings of failure or disempowerment and concerns that the broader school community will perceive them as a 'bad teacher'.³⁷ Robinson suggests that: "For some women teachers, the experience [of sexual harassment] is internalised as their failure to adequately deal with boys' behaviours and their inability to maintain their culturally legitimised and expected position of power."³⁸ The demeaning nature of sexual harassment, paired with the compromised authority of the teacher by a student, can not only lead to a deep sense of humiliation and shame for victims.³⁹ It can also lead to avoiding filing a report or taking disciplinary action out of fear or embarrassment.⁴⁰

For some female teachers, physical and verbal aggression of male students was seen to represent a considerable barrier to speaking up about sexual harassment.⁴¹ Insufficient training as to what constitutes sexual harassment has also been identified as a barrier to reporting.⁴² For women teachers, the issue is often dismissed by other adults accepting boys' excuses that 'it's a joke', or staff believing it's just 'boys being boys'.⁴³ Evidence around teacher-targeted sexual harassment remains limited in part due to limitations in sexual harassment data collection and reporting within schools. This includes a minimisation of reporting due to concerns about damaging a school's reputation, or teachers fearful for their own safety.⁴⁴

Evidence suggests that in some cases, experiences of sexual harassment may be misclassified or misreported as something less serious. For example, Astor and colleagues, in examining teacher victimisation, classified the experience of receiving obscene remarks and gestures (experienced by over two-thirds of respondents) separately from sexual harassment (experienced by around 7%).⁴⁵

Barriers to reporting

Survey respondents reported that incidents of sexual harassment of teachers are typically "swept under the rug", while "harassment festers in silence." Sexual harassment is a taboo topic - teachers are generally not comfortable talking about it. When asked the question "If you did not report the sexual harassment, can you say why not?", 19.0% of respondents said

³⁶ Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, B., & Trysnes, I. (2020). #MeToo in school: teachers' and young learners' lived experience of verbal sexual harassment as a pedagogical opportunity. *Human Rights Education Review*, 3(2). <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3720>; Robinson, K. (2012). Gender and School Violence. In S. Saltmarsh, K.H Robinson & C. Davies (Eds.) *Rethinking School Violence: Theory, Gender, Context*. Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Robinson (2012) *op cit.*

³⁹ Lahelma, E., Palmu, T., & Tuula, G. (2000). Intersecting Power Relations in Teachers' Experiences of Being Sexualized or Harassed by Students. *Sexualities*, 3(4), 463-481.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/136346000003004006>

⁴⁰ National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT). (2018) *op cit.*

⁴¹ Kor, K., Simpson, H., & Fabrianesi, B. (2023). Strengthening Schools' Responses to Students' Harmful Sexual Behaviors: A Scoping Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(4), 2726-2742.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221111483>

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Sparrow, B. (2024). Teenage boys are being 'bombarded' with misogynistic content online. It's making its way into the classroom. *ABC News*.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-04/bec-sparrow-teen-misogyny-and-andrew-tate-manosphere-influencers/104029346>

⁴⁴ Kor, Simpson, & Fabrianesi (2023) *op cit.*

⁴⁵ Astor, R. A., Benbenishty, R., & Capp, G.P. (2023). How school policies, strategies, and relational factors contribute to teacher victimization and school safety. *J Community Psychol*, 1-19.

they “did not think any action would be taken.” A total of 4.8% said they were “unsure how to report/who to report to.”

Teachers noted that students see sexual harassment as “funny” or “jokes” and do not understand how serious it is, even when explained to them. Survey respondents were sometimes “laughed at” when they called it out. In line with research, survey respondents described a range of attitudes that excuse, minimise, or ignore sexual harassment.

“It’s just a joke.”

“It’s a rite of passage.”

“Boys will be boys.”

“Don’t you have a sense of humour?”

“That’s what kids are like these days.”

“The younger generation of teachers can’t take a joke.”

Insufficient training about what constitutes sexual harassment is leading to behaviour being normalised and therefore not reported or taken seriously. Survey respondents reported that teachers and students are “dismissed” or “insulted” for being upset by or reporting the behaviours. Typical comments from students, parents, other teachers and leaders include: “It’s just poor behaviour choice”, “It’s a phase”, “You’re overreacting”, and “There’s not enough proof.”

Almost 60% of teacher respondents indicated feeling unsafe after reporting sexual harassment. This data highlights the pervasive impact of sexual harassment on teachers’ sense of security in their work environment. Among those who did not report their experience, almost half still felt unsafe after the incident.

Among those who did report internally, an adequate response was generally lacking. For example, it was reported that “no action at all” was taken in 23.0% of cases where a respondent reported being sexually harassed. A total of 42.8% of respondents described the school’s response as “not adequate”, while only 9.3% felt the response was “a good resolution.”

Another barrier to reporting was that survey respondents were unsure of their school’s reporting processes. When asked the question, “what measures are currently in place to ensure students and teachers are aware of reporting processes?” a total of 36.4% answered either “unsure”, “none” or “not sure.” One survey respondent highlighted the barrier to reporting for relief teachers. They reported “probably a number of [measures] but as I work across multiple schools, I’m not always familiar with the processes.”

What guiding principles or other elements could be helpful in developing a consistent national standard for responding to bullying?

Addressing pornography as a driver of HSB: Age verification

We have been advocating for many years for age verification for online pornography to help protect children from exposure to sexually explicit content. In an Australian study of 15–29-year-olds, 100% of boys and young men and 82% of girls and young women reported

that they had viewed pornography. The median age for first exposure to pornography was 13 years for boys and 16 for girls. Male participants were much more frequent consumers, with 39% reporting viewing pornography daily in the last 12 months and a further 46% weekly, compared with 4% and 19% of female participants reporting daily and weekly viewing respectively.⁴⁶ For young people whose first exposure to pornography was unintentional, the most common exposure method was via an internet pop-up or web search. The harms are now well documented.

Melinda Tankard Reist writes:

*“There is a growing body of literature testifying to the way that boys who take their sexual cues from porn develop sexist attitudes and aggressive behaviours, which then have ‘trickle down’ effects on women and girls”.*⁴⁷

Children who are exposed to pornography acquire information about sexual activity which may normalise violent or coercive behaviours as part of sexual expression.⁴⁸ Exposure to pornography is widely associated with acceptance of rape myths and increased risk of committing or becoming a victim of sexual offences. Most popular genres include common themes of male aggression and degradation of females.⁴⁹ Mainstream pornography involves a “fairly homogeneous script involving violence and female degradation”.⁵⁰

Pornography consumption “is associated with a range of harmful attitudes, behaviours, and experiences, including risky sexual behaviours, more sexually objectifying and stereotypic gender views of women, rape myth acceptance, sexual coercion, and aggression, and sexual and dating violence victimisation”.⁵¹ The role of pornography in fuelling attitudes which drive violence against women is acknowledged by Our Watch⁵² and in the National Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children.⁵³

Frontline service providers have observed a rise in pornography-fuelled injuries in women and girls seeking help. In correspondence to Collective Shout Movement Director Melinda Tankard Reist, Di McLeod, Director of the Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence (GCCASV), shared what she was witnessing:⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Lim, M. S. C., Agius, P. A., Carrotte, E. R., Vella, A. M., & Hellard, M. E. (2017). Young Australians' use of pornography and associations with sexual risk behaviours. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 41(4), 438–443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12678>

⁴⁷ Tankard Reist, M. (2018). Never Again? Addressing Sexual Violence Must Include Pornography. *ABC Religion & Ethics*. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/never-again-addressing-sexual-violence-must-include-pornography/10094568>

⁴⁸ Ey & McInnes (2020). Op cit.

⁴⁹ Tankard Reist, M. (9 Mar 2021). Why “consent” doesn’t stand a chance against porn culture. *ABC Religion and Ethics*. www.abc.net.au/religion/consent-education-does-not-stand-a-chance-against-pornography/13231364

⁵⁰ Sun, C., Bridges, A., Johnson, J. A. & Ezzell, M. B. (2016). ‘Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations’. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45, 983–94.

⁵¹ Crabbe, M. Flood, M., & Adams, K. (2024). Pornography exposure and access among young Australians: a cross-sectional study, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 48(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anzjph.2024.100135>

⁵² Our Watch (Nov 2024). *Impact of pornography on young people survey report summary*. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/pornography-young-people-and-preventing-violence-against-women#impacts-of-pornography-on-young-people-summary-2024>

⁵³ Commonwealth of Australia (2022). *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-gender-based-violence/resource/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032

⁵⁴ Tankard Reist (2018) op cit.

“In the past few years, we have had a huge increase in intimate partner rape of women from 14 to 80+. The biggest common denominator is consumption of porn by the offender. With offenders not able to differentiate between fantasy and reality, believing women are ‘up for it’ 24/7, ascribing to the myth that ‘no means yes and yes means anal’, oblivious to injuries caused and never ever considering consent. We have seen a huge increase in deprivation of liberty, physical injuries, torture, drugging, filming and sharing footage without consent.

“There is a cost in the trickle-down effect that some of us bear witness to every day ... GCCASV has experienced a 56% increase in referrals from emergency departments of local public hospitals in the past year. Women have been hurt, sustained vaginal, anogenital and other physical injuries in the perpetration of forced sexual contact ... It is rare for us to have a recent rape presentation that involves only vaginal penetration. Porn inspired sex signature acts of anal, deep throating, the money shot accompanied by choking and strangulation are the new ‘norm’.”

It is for these reasons that, in September 2023, women’s safety and child protection experts called on the Australian Government to reverse an earlier decision and trial a system of age verification to help prevent children’s exposure to pornography online.⁵⁵ Preliminary findings were announced June 20 with complete findings due to be announced in a month.⁵⁶

Relationship and consent education is widespread across Australia, however even the best programs struggle to compete with the power and influence of the global pornography industry. As lead author of the Victorian Education Department’s respectful relationship curriculum states:

“This kind of normalisation of violence [in pornography] is teaching storylines around entitlement, about who women are, what they’re there for and what real men do”.⁵⁷

Research has established that one in eight titles seen by first-time visitors to pornographic sites depicts sexual activity that constitutes criminal sexual violence - relating to incest, physical aggression, sexual assault, image-based sexual abuse and depictions of coercion and exploitation.⁵⁸ Commercial sexual exploitation material normalises sexual violence towards women and girls along with refugees, racial minorities and people with disabilities.

The role of pornography in fuelling Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Australia was documented almost a decade ago. In 2016, child protection advocate (the late) Professor Freda Briggs AO described the child-on-child abuse attributed to children’s exposure to pornography in her submission to the Inquiry, reporting that preschool-aged children are “acting out what they have seen and experienced, sexually abusing others in schools, kindergartens and child care settings.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Collective Shout (19 Sep 2023). Open Letter: Women’s safety and child protection experts call for age verification pilot. https://www.collectiveshout.org/open_letter_age_verification

⁵⁶ Age Assurance (20 June 2025). Age Assurance Technology Trial publishes twelve preliminary findings ahead of full report. News Release. <https://ageassurance.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/News-Release-Preliminary-Findings-for-publication-20250620.pdf>

⁵⁷ Sanders, O. & Kendall, J. (2024, July 31). Concerns student sexism towards teachers contributes to gendered violence. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-01/what-can-be-done-about-sexism-by-students-towards-teachers/104141858>

⁵⁸ Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. and Butterby, K. (2021). Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography. *British Journal of Criminology* 61(5):1243-1260.

⁵⁹ Briggs, F. (2016). *Submission to Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, Inquiry into harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet*,

- Pornography is frequently an influencing factor for children who initiate invasive sexual behaviours against other children.⁶⁰
- A meta-analysis of 59 different studies comparing adolescent male sex offenders to male non-sex offenders found that adolescents who had sexually offended were significantly more likely to have had early exposure to pornography and to report higher rates of exposure to pornography.⁶¹
- In a US study of 472 boys and young men (aged 12-20 years; mean age 16 years) with criminal offenses, researchers evaluated and compared the self-reported childhood traumatic experiences of three groups: sexually victimised boys/young men with sexual offenses, nonsexually victimised boys/young men with sexual offenses, and nonsexually victimised boys/young men with general criminal offenses (e.g. assault, theft). They found that persons who were sexually victimised and who had committed sexual offences showed greater developmental antecedents including early exposure to pornography and pornography use.

SHoT survey responses point to a deeply concerning trend of early exposure to pornographic material. Teachers reported children as young as Year 2 accessing and sharing pornographic content through personal devices or social media. One teacher commented:

“I’ve had boys in Year 7 confess to me they are addicted to pornography.” [Teacher response]

In line with research that pornography is a primary source of sexual education for young people, one teacher indicated they were aware of “students accessing pornhub to ‘learn about sex’.” Teachers reported students mimicking sexual acts they’ve seen in pornographic content, using explicit language inappropriate for their age, and developing unrealistic and potentially harmful expectations about sexual relationships.

“Children [are] showing other children pornography, sexual noises, children choking other children in the playground, children simulating sex from behind on other children from the age of 4.” [Teacher response]

Teachers also reported that children are accessing pornography on their “school iPad” and on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X. Survey data indicates that sexual groaning has become a widespread and deeply concerning issue in schools. Teachers reported this behaviour as one of the most frequently occurring forms of sexual harassment witnessed in their classrooms.

A total of 53.5% of survey respondents who had personally been sexually harassed at school said they experienced sexual groaning noises made at them.

“Moaning is a big problem. Even ‘good’ kids are doing it to win favour with others.” [Teacher response]

P20.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Onlineaccesstoporn45/Report/c02#c02f77

⁶⁰ De Lago, C., Schroder, C. M., Cooper, B., Deblinger, E., Dudek, E., Yu, R. and Finkel, M. A. (2020). Children who engaged in interpersonal problematic sexual behaviors. *Child Abuse Negl.* 105:104260.

⁶¹ Seto, M.C. and Lalumière, M. L. (2010). What is so special about male adolescent sexual offending? A review and test of explanations through meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(4), 526-575.

The extent of the issue of sexual groaning and moaning in schools represents a significant challenge for teachers. Respondents described how this behaviour disrupts the learning environment, normalises inappropriate sexual behaviour, and often goes unchecked due to inadequate responses from school leadership.

“The sexualised noises are the worst because nobody seems to take it seriously! Yet my classes are constantly interrupted by moaning/ groaning/ choking/ gagging noises.” [Teacher response]

“The moaning I’ve heard was from boys... The worst recent event was when one student paired their device to another student’s Bluetooth headphones and sent a sound clip of explicit moaning to the headphones at full volume. The headphones were confiscated, and the student referred to the Dean.” [Teacher response]

Professor Dale Tolliday, Head of a Sydney clinical advisory unit for harmful sexual behaviours in children, says early exposure to pornography has a clear impact on local health services, contributing to high demand for treatments for problematic and harmful sexual behaviours, as well as sexual assault services.⁶²

Forensic psychologist Russ Pratt, working with child protection services around Australia, says very young children are now presenting with “serious penetrative behaviours,” acting out what they have witnessed in online pornography.⁶³

Addressing Image Based Sexual Abuse/Deepfake Image Based Sexual Abuse

Multiple teachers observed an increasing trend of male students pressuring female peers for sexual images. This was linked to the normalisation of and overexposure to sexual imagery on social media platforms. Research suggests that the sharing of sexually explicit images online has become so pervasive that teachers and students are becoming desensitised to the issue.⁶⁴ One Year 7 teacher observed this happening at younger ages:

*“Students in grade 7 are coercing girls into sending child exploitation material.”
[Teacher response]*

The pressure to share sexual images isn’t confined to secondary schools. One primary school teacher reported:

“Year 5 and 6 students sending nudes after being continually asked to do so - photos then being passed around to other boys.”

Another respondent who described an increase in reports that involve “image-based abuse e.g. revenge porn, threatening to share nudes.” One respondent commented that

“Kids in ‘relationships’ (including female friendships) ... these then turn bad so they ‘expose’ each other with bad/embarrassing/sexually explicit pictures they have of each other.”

Another teacher commented:

⁶² Panagopoulos (19 May 2025) op cit.

⁶³ Bitá, N. and Panagopoulos, J. (26 May 2025). Violent pornography and online misogyny are ‘damaging kids’ brains’: Experts. The Australian.

⁶⁴ Kor, Simpson, & Fabrianesi (2023) op cit.

“It is definitely happening at a younger age more and more! They have access to anything on the Internet now, and if they are curious, they just look it up.” [Teacher response]

An emerging threat which creates new means of sexualised bullying is the development and marketing of AI-enabled deepfake tools including nudifying, undressing and face swap tech platforms. For free, or for as little as \$2, these tools are being utilized to turn the images of women and girls - scraped from social media or official school photos - into various types of pornography.⁶⁵ Movement Director Melinda Tankard Reist told Kelly Humphries:

“AI is being weaponised against women and girls... It is acting, essentially, as an accelerant for more sexual harassment, more intimidation, more control of women... We are seeing this emerge with even Australian school boys creating so-called deep fake, nudifying images of their female peers at school... this is happening across the country.”⁶⁶

In a recent interview with The Australian, Tankard Reist said:

“With teen boys selling and swapping these images of female classmates and teachers, female teachers are fleeing the profession while terrorised girls are refusing to go to school.”⁶⁷

In a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024, we highlighted that “the growing popularity of deepfake sexually explicit images/forges provides new ways of degrading, debasing and intimidating women” and stated “they normalise non-consensual sexual activity.”⁶⁸

“AI-generated pornography, nudifying/undressing apps and face swap apps contribute to harmful sexual socialisation especially in adolescent males contributing to more peer-to-peer abuse and sexual harassment of female teachers.”⁶⁹

We note the eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman-Grant has urged schools to report the criminal creation and sharing of intimate AI deepfakes to local police as a priority. The Australian reported:

“The watchdog has become increasingly aware of sexual deepfake incidents at schools, including nude images of female students created from formal or year book photos and traded for money among boys in the playground...students posting

⁶⁵ Panagopoulos, J. and Bitá, N. (23 May 2025). Teenagers selling nude deepfakes made from class photos: new frontier of bullying and abuse. *The Australian*; Panagopoulos, J. (27 Jun 2025). School ‘sex deepfake’ shock. *The Australian*.

⁶⁶ Humphries, K. (2024a). *Off the Cuff - Digital Dangers: AI Weaponization and Online Exploitation [Audio podcast]*.
https://kellyhumphries.com/podcast_episodes/digital-dangers-ai-weaponization-and-online-exploitation

⁶⁷ Panagopoulos and Bitá (23 May 2025) op cit.

⁶⁸ Collective Shout (25 Jul 2024). Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024. *Collective Shout*.
https://www.collectiveshout.org/inquiry_in_the_criminal_code_amendment_deepfake_sexual_material_bill_2024

⁶⁹ Collective Shout (Jul 2024). Submission to Inquiry into Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024, Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. *Collective Shout*.
https://www.collectiveshout.org/inquiry_in_the_criminal_code_amendment_deepfake_sexual_material_bill_2024

*deepfakes on fake social media accounts to damage the reputation of other students...*⁷⁰

Reports to the eSafety Commission of deepfakes and other digitally altered sexual images from people under 18 had more than doubled in the past 18 months and were likely under-reported. The Commissioner called on schools to report allegations of a criminal nature, including deepfake abuse of under-aged students, to police. We commend eSafety for its proactive approach on DIBSA in schools, as described in the Commissioner's recent address to the National Press Club:

"eSafety has been actively engaging with educators, police, and the app makers and apps stores themselves, and will be releasing deepfake incident management plans for schools this week as these harmful practices become more frequent and normalised.

What is important to underscore is that when either real or synthetic image-based abuse is reported to us, eSafety has a 98% success rate in getting this content down – and our investigators act quickly.

*Our mandatory Phase 1 standards - which require the tech industry to do more to tackle the highest-harm online content like child sexual abuse material, will take effect this week, and will help us to force the purveyors and profiteers of these AI-powered nudifying models to prevent them being misused against children.*⁷¹

The Commission has since released a guide for schools on how to manage deepfake incidents "which strongly encourages educators to prioritise the 'wellbeing' of targeted students and staff if they are distressed or need support, and not make 'organisation's reputation' the focus of the response."⁷²

In the aforementioned submission to the Inquiry on Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024,⁷³ while we supported criminal penalties for the creation and dissemination of deepfake sexual abuse forgeries, we have called on States to also criminalise creation as a stand-alone offence, as there is harm done to women and girls from creation alone, whether shared online or not. Currently only Victoria has specific provisions to criminalise creation as a stand-alone offence.

Delaying social media age of access

While not making platforms 'safe', we believe delaying age of access to 16 would limit some of the harms to children and young people, including delayed access to sexualised media which fuels Harmful and Problematic Sexual Behaviours in schools and decreasing risk of online sexual bullying, threats and intimidation along with other forms of bullying relevant to the Review.

⁷⁰ Panagopoulos, J. (Jun 27 2025). School rule on nude deepfakes: tell cops. *The Australian*

⁷¹ Inman Grant, J. (24 Jun 2025). Swimming between the digital flags: helping young Australians navigate social media's dangerous currents. *eSafety Commissioner*.
https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/blogs/swimming-between-the-digital-flags-helping-young-australians-navigate-social-medias-dangerous-currents?utm_campaign=2406_commissioner_update_stkhld&utm_id=efecafb458b6bbd0d5bc09d2b7cb646f&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eSafety_edm

⁷² Panagopoulos, J. (Jun 27 2025). School rule on nude deepfakes: tell cops. *The Australian*

⁷³ Collective Shout (25 Jul 2024). Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024. *Collective Shout*.
https://www.collectiveshout.org/inquiry_in_the_criminal_code_amendment_deepfake_sexual_material_bill_2024

In our Submission to the Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety in January 2022, we made the following recommendations:⁷⁴

1. Continue online safety reform, National Classification reform, privacy reform, and strengthening of the Basic Online Safety Expectations to achieve safer digital services for everyone.

Under the current Basic Online Safety Expectations (BOSE), eSafety does not have sufficient powers to ensure that social media platforms are safe for children. Currently its power is limited to making companies report on what steps they are taking to fulfil the requirements of the BOSE. See our previous submissions on these matters.⁷⁵

2. Raise the minimum age of social media access to 16 and hold social media companies responsible for age verification to ensure that children under 16 cannot access their platforms.

While this is not a single solution to the problems associated with social media, raising the age would help to protect children from exposure to harmful content and online predators on these platforms. Age verification requirements should be extended to all websites, messaging apps, gaming and dating apps which expose or direct minors to dangerous content, systems, or connections. We supported legislation to achieve this outcome which takes effect at the end of the year.

3. Introduce an overarching statutory Duty of Care for all digital services, including social media.

We commend the suggestions in Carnegie UK's submission to the Social Media Inquiry.⁷⁶

We also support Reset Tech Australia's recommendations in the present inquiry for a systemic regulatory model including five building blocks of duty of care, risk assessment, risk mitigation, transparency, and enforceability.⁷⁷

4. Introduce strong penalties to hold social media platforms accountable.

This includes holding company directors and executives personally liable where appropriate.

5. Implement other recommendations prioritising children's safety.

We support the following recommendations made by Professor Selena Bartlett in her submission to the Social Media inquiry:⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Collective Shout (Jul 2024). Submission to Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society. *Collective Shout*.

https://www.collectiveshout.org/joint_select_committee_on_social_media_and_australian_society

⁷⁵ <https://www.collectiveshout.org/submissions>

⁷⁶ Carnegie UK (Jan 2022). *Submission to the Australian House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety*.

<https://carnegieuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Submission-to-the-House-Select-Committee-on-Social-Media-and-Online-Safety-2.pdf>

⁷⁷ Submission 16 at

https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Social_Media/SocialMedia/Submissions

⁷⁸ Submission 29 at

- Develop smartphones and social media platforms tailored to children and upgrade with age, strictly prohibiting addictive features, advertisements, and multi-layer marketing tactics, with regulated age-appropriate content and strictly preventing access by criminals, predators, and advertisers.
- Carefully regulate digital content, as we have also recommended in our submissions to the National Classification Scheme and Online Safety inquiries.⁷⁹
- Age verification for social media platforms and internet-enabled smartphones, ensuring safety while respecting privacy concerns.

At United States Congressional hearings in October 2021, Facebook whistleblower and former data scientist Frances Haugen revealed that Facebook (now Meta) had routinely put profit over user safety.⁸⁰ This has since been echoed by another Meta whistleblower, Sarah Wynn-Williams, in her book *Careless People: A story of where I used to work*.⁸¹ Big Tech has shown itself unwilling to regulate itself in the interests of consumers, especially young people. We note that eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman-Grant, in announcing three new industry codes this week, stated that if digital platforms didn't comply and implement appropriate community safeguards and protections, she would look at moving to mandatory enforceable codes.⁸²

McHale and colleagues argue that young people engage with media as part of their daily activities in learning and practicing skills, identity development, and building social connections.⁸³ Social psychologist Jon Haidt has documented how the transition to a smart phone-based childhood in recent years has disrupted the healthy development of children.⁸⁴ As a flow on, the internet and social media have a profound impact on the sexual attitudes and behaviours of young people.

The SHoT data revealed teachers were fully aware of the effects of social media on their students. This influence emerged as a dominant theme across survey responses. Many educators drew a connection between increased sexual behaviours in schools and students' social media usage. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram were often cited as having a major influence in shaping unhealthy and often developmentally inappropriate sexual norms, behaviours and expectations observed among students. Teachers reported:

“Social media is our number 1 behavioural issue at Year 7.” [Teacher response]

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Social_Media/SocialMedia/Submissions

⁷⁹ Collective Shout (March 2020). *Submission to the Review of Australian Classification Regulation*. https://www.collectiveshout.org/submission_to_review_of_australian_classification_regulation; Collective Shout (Feb 2024). *Submission: Amendment to the Online Safety (Basic Online Safety Expectations) Determination 2023*.

https://www.collectiveshout.org/amendment_to_the_online_safety_bose

⁸⁰ National Center on Sexual Exploitation (5 Oct 2021). *Statement: Congress must hold Big Tech to Account*.

https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/facebook-chooses-profit-over-child-safety/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=ncose

⁸¹ Wynn-Williams, S. (2025). *Careless People: A Story of Where I Used to Work*. Macmillan.

⁸²

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/esafetyoffice_esafety-has-registered-3-of-the-9-industry-activity-7345332129448214528-ZQ3n?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAAgZH9wBtisSSOQC0jX0wisB4k2PIFots_Y

⁸³ McHale, S.M., Dotterer, A., & Kim, J.Y. (2009). An ecological perspective on the media and youth development, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(1), 78-91.

⁸⁴ Haidt, J. (2024). *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Griffin Press.

“Social media appears to play a prolific part in this harmful behaviour... The links between social media and a myriad of social issues - bullying, youth suicide, sexual harassment, body shaming etc cannot be underestimated.” [Teacher response]

“... Social media is playing a huge role in corroding the quality of interactions and systematically undermining the attention of our young people. I believe there is an increasing disconnect between women as human beings, and women as objects.” [Teacher response]

Addressing misogyny as a driver of HSB

Survey respondents reported displays of misogynistic attitudes from male students and staff. One said, “The misogyny has gotten so much worse”, another that male students were “becoming increasingly misogynistic”.

A total of 14 survey respondents named online influencer Andrew Tate as influencing or being very popular among male students. One commented that Tate “has definitely caused a rise in toxic masculinity in schools.” Another said students “often quote Andrew Tate’s views of women,” and another respondent that “a lot of the sexual behaviour comes from the same students who openly praise and defend anti-women public figures like Andrew Tate.”⁸⁵

Survey respondents reported displays of misogynistic attitudes from male students and male staff. One said, “The misogyny has gotten so much worse”, another that male students were “becoming increasingly misogynistic”.

“Often women are spoken over, overruled etc. when it comes to disciplining the boys. I believe that this then allows the boys to think that it is okay to behave inappropriately to women educators because we are constantly undermined (sic) by male staff... In our school, the boys wouldn’t dare moan or make inappropriate comments to male staff it is 99% of the time targeted to women.” [Teacher response]

“To be honest, the culture in our school is revolting. Women are treated with disrespect by male leaders, male staff and many male students. I hear how students talk about female students from other schools.” [Teacher response]

The use of degrading language towards female students was frequently raised, with boys employing sexist slurs and objectifying remarks. One respondent observed a “male pack mentality,” indicating these behaviours are often reinforced within peer groups. Some teachers saw the rise in misogynistic behaviour as a result of a broader school culture of disrespect towards women.

In a 2023 study by Westcott and Roberts, teachers described “an escalating culture not only of sexual harassment, but of language and behaviours expressing a belief in male superiority and other misogynistic views among boys”.⁸⁶

An unpublished study of teachers in South Australia found:

⁸⁵ For more on the beliefs and teachings of Tate see <https://www.collectiveshout.org/andrew-tate-in-his-own-words>

⁸⁶ Westcott, S. & Roberts, S. (2023, July 28). Investigating the growing culture of misogyny in Australian schools. *AEU News*. <https://news.aeuvic.asn.au/in-depth/investigating-the-growing-culture-of-misogyny-in-australian-school>

“an alarming increase in misogynistic, homophobic, racist, and sexist language and behaviours, mostly by boys and young men targeting girls and young female teachers.”⁸⁷

Teachers have reported remorseless attitudes that correlate with boys’ emotions, particularly hostility towards women and girls.⁸⁸ Boys’ hostility has manifested in their disrespectful behaviours and attitudes and the use of sexually aggressive languages.⁸⁹ Dr Helen Cahill, lead author of the Victorian Education Department’s respectful relationships curriculum, believes that boys are:

“partly using teachers as a prop...to really up the ante of the power play because they’re showing they can do it against an adult who’s an authority over them.”⁹⁰

In response to the question, “What do you think needs to happen to change this harmful behaviour in schools?” teachers made the following recommendations in survey responses:

“Leadership to take a stand, and for all students to be vigilant on reporting it. Doing an individual bully interview will take time, but it would be the best way to get a picture of what is happening and the main offenders. Girls do not know the law and are “groomed” into accepting the behaviour.” [Teacher response]

“More needs to be done about verbal harassment or requests. More needs to be done about bosses or colleagues harassing peers and a clear reporting path given where the victim is believed. Counselling of offenders should be mandatory. Education of all from a young age needs to focus on what sexual bullying is, with a zero tolerance approach. This survey needed to allow multiple selections on some answers.” [Teacher response]

“The whole anti-bullying policies need to be re-written in a way that kids can respond to and relate to. Years ago, the only thing kids learned in Sex Education was “don’t do it”. Now we’re more aware. We still teach far too much about the mechanics of the sexual act(s) but at least now we also talk about relationships as well. Bullying and harassment seem to be at the ‘just don’t do it’ stage. We need to teach much more explicitly about emotional intelligence, how to deal with petty conflict, how to de-escalate conflict, how to use self control in positive ways. It’s an up-hill battle because people have an in-built negativity bias, our tv shows and humour are based on put-downs and sarcasm, and an increasing lack of respect for others, especially those in authority.” [Teacher response]

“Start off at home, between the ages of 1-5. Communicate with parents during the developmental stage the importance of instilling values and educate the parents on the importance of modelling appropriate behaviour. Unfortunately, schools already do a huge effort in educating students on inappropriate behaviours, also appropriate behaviours such as Please and Thank-yous and expectations. We teach also on Cyber security to try and reduce the impact from social media. This, however, needs

⁸⁷ Ketchell, M. (2024). ‘Not my boy.’ When teachers are harassed by students, some schools and parents fail to help. *The Conversation*.

⁸⁸ Connell, R. (2005). Advancing Gender Reform in Large-Scale Organisations: A New Approach for Practitioners and Researchers. *Policy and Society*, 24(4), 5-24. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035\(05\)70066-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035(05)70066-7)

⁸⁹ Zhao, X., Roberts, S. & Wescott, S. (2024). Institutional Responses to Sexual Harassment and Misogyny Towards Women Teachers from Boys in Australian Schools in the Post-#MeToo Era. *J Educational Administration and History*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2024.2316620>

⁹⁰ Sanders & Kendall (2024, July 31) op cit.

to be monitored and modelled by parents as well at home. With that said, bullying online that occurs outside of school hours, does get dealt with inside our school as well. Teach parents to respect each other, even if they are experiencing hardship between each other. It is not the child's responsibility to be the psychologist. That creates relational issues between how that student then relates to other students, teachers and adults. I understand that it is easier to tell a school they need to focus on something else. Maybe we need to look at the reality that it is easier to control schools, rather than addressing the lack of parental direction, as you cannot educate each person in every household. Start looking at the schools out there, they are doing amazing things. Look at the after school programs, look at the small groups to assist in wellbeing and teaching trauma students how to communicate effectively without punching each other, look at the classes that are run without extra funding because schools have identified a need and fitted it into their timetables. They don't need to do anything more. They need to be recognised and supported in the great work they are already doing." [Teacher response]

"More conversations and calling out bullying and consent at every age level." [Teacher response]

"Individual gender year group meetings. Programs that specifically target not only sexual harassment but also cyber bullying etc. This has been difficult for 3 years due to COVID." [Teacher response]

This data suggests even greater resources need to be invested in the positive formation of young men, to ameliorate the combined harms of early pornography exposure, harmful social media content, and the malign role of high profile online influencers in the lives of large numbers of boys.

We hope our data, observations and recommendations are of assistance to the Review.

July 1, 2025