



Education and skills committee - RSHPE roundtable 22 February 2017

Zero Tolerance welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education and Skills committee's evidence review of Relationships, Sexual health and Parenting education (RSHPE) in Scotland. We are a Scottish charity working to end men's violence against women and girls (VAWG) by challenging the attitudes which normalise violence. We work with a variety of stakeholders to enable change and have worked with young people and educators for 25 years.

Young people in Scotland report that RSHPE is inadequate and of poor quality. Over half (61%) of young people receive RSHPE just once a year or less; with half describing the experience as either 'poor' or 'terrible'¹. There is extremely limited RSHPE taking place at primary school, and that which does lacks comprehension or structure². At secondary level, there are as few as 20% of teachers able to deliver the lessons young people need³. This led NHS Health Scotland to remark that in Scotland there was no need to *"do more than a bare minimum, mostly work around friendships"* when administering RSHPE⁴.

Young people are growing up in sexualised, misogynistic cultures which supply mixed signals about healthy relationships inherently linked with society's ideas around gender⁵. Gender inequality, misogyny and violence within young people's relationships and the wider school system is therefore a major barrier to young people's health and attainment. High quality RSHPE would offer an opportunity to counteract behaviours that foster discrimination in relationships.

It has been found that;

- Young people are turning to pornography as much as they do formal education to learn about sexual relationships⁶. They report a connection between boys' greater

¹ <http://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/detail/?news=1123>

² <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/healthy-relationships-early-primary-settings?destination=node%2F333>

³ <http://sexpression.org.uk/press-release/2014/9/30/our-petition-is-heard-in-parliament>

⁴ http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/65047.aspx#_ftnref183

⁵ <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/5613/briefing%2054.pdf?sequence=1> - studies continue to link belief in traditional gender roles with attitudes which condone violence against women

⁶ <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/node/294?destination=node%2F335%3Fpage%3D3> - for example, Zero Tolerance research has shown that 77% of young people we asked selected sex education in school as a source of information on sex and relationships, followed by 'friends' at 71%, 'in sexual relationships' at 70% and pornography at 62%

consumption of sexual media and their subsequent attitudes and behaviour towards women⁷.

- Young people are enduring abusive and coercive relationships and have been shown to be unable to spot signs of violence⁸. There can be a poor understanding of consent⁹, which is often justified through the lens of gendered patterns of power.
- Young women report that they are objectified and pressured to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and sexual behaviour imposed on them in comparison with young men¹⁰. Often, this is displayed through casual and vindictive use of derogatory language - 'slut', and 'whore' are widely used against girls or women staff¹¹.
- Young men experience pressure to conform to heterosexual male 'norms' of approving of pornography, sexualising women and girls, pursuing sex or risk being labelled 'gay'.
- There is a lack of clarity over what language, behaviour and culture is acceptable and what must be tolerated as 'normal' in schools and staff can unwittingly reinforce gendered divisions; in subject choices, in spaces, and in responses to actual violence¹².
- There is a lack of resources and capacity in place within schools to tackle these issues despite requests from young people¹³ and appetite from parents for more action to be taken to discuss gender stereotyping from the early years upwards¹⁴.

Now is an excellent opportunity for the Education and Skills committee to make recommendations to Government and educational bodies on RSHPE. We recommend that:

- RSHPE should contain a focus on emotional literacy, consent, dealing with pornography and improving attitudes towards gender equality and gendered abuse.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems should be set in place to ensure that all schools are offering high quality RSHPE.
- RSHPE should be viewed as a first step towards obtaining gender equality within the Scottish education system; gender equality should be embedded across teacher training, the curriculum, school management and policies in a 'whole schools' approach.

For more information or to discuss further, please contact Amy Marshall at amy.marshall@zerotolerance.org.uk or 0131-556-7365

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/pdf/GAS_15_website.pdf Data published in September 2015 showed that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three year period, including 600 rapes⁹. A 2010 YouGov poll of 16-18 year olds found 29% of girls experienced unwanted sexual touching at school

¹⁰ <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/node/294?destination=node%2F335%3Fpage%3D3>

¹¹ <http://www.eis.org.uk/images/equality/Gender/Get%20it%20Right%20for%20Girls%202016%20WEB.pdf>

¹² There is a gender divide in what is considered acceptable behaviour reinforced either through explicit policy or through reinforced codes of practice at school (e.g. lining up boys and girls separately, giving girls Barbie/Disney themed items in the early years, gendered uniform policies, implicit ideas about who can take up playground and classroom time and space and who can play with who) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002443/244349e.pdf>

¹³ Further evidence of most of these bullet point findings together with this final one, were found within exploratory research that Zero Tolerance recently conducted in Scottish schools in partnership with Rape Crisis Scotland and the Glasgow University Public and Social Health and Wellbeing Unit. Contact Zero Tolerance for more details.

¹⁴ <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/default-setting-what-parents-say-about-gender-stereotyping-their-children%E2%80%99s-early-years?destination=node%2F333>