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DUTY OF CARE

Teachers' experiences of sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment in Australian schools

Final Report, August 2026



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We also wish to acknowledge the many victims and survivors of men and boys' violence in school settings whose experiences have gone unrecognised, and who have never received justice, accountability or adequate redress. **This report is dedicated to ensuring that these experiences are neither ignored nor forgotten, and to supporting meaningful action and reform to create safer schools for all who work and learn in them.**

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TERMINOLOGY

There is a need to establish clear, operational definitions for the gendered harm that occurs in school settings. In the survey on which this report is based, we used the terms sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment to encapsulate the range of gendered violence experienced by teachers. We defined behaviour of concern as follows:

Misogynist and sexist behaviour refers to actions, language, or attitudes that express contempt, dislike, or ingrained prejudice against women. It includes actions, comments, or decisions that marginalise, belittle, or unfairly treat someone because of their gender. Examples include:

- Making demeaning or hostile comments about women
- Dismissing women's opinions or achievements
- Jokes or remarks that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes
- Behaviours that intimidate, exclude, or undermine women because of their gender
- Sexual harassment
- Gender and sexual violence

For readability and consistency throughout this report, we use the term **gendered violence** to refer to the range of behaviours outlined above. We deploy the UN Women Australia (2024) definition of gender-based violence, which is 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.'

We use the term 'teachers' rather than 'research participants' or 'respondents' throughout the report to foreground teachers as education professionals with direct knowledge and experience of the issues examined. This terminology reflects the substantive focus of the research on teachers' experiences and perspectives, rather than their role as subjects of research.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gendered violence is a pervasive problem in Australian society, shaping women's and girls' experiences across almost every domain of public and private life. It occurs within intimate and family relationships and across institutions, including healthcare, education and the legal system, as well as in workplaces and public spaces. Although Australia has made progress towards gender equality and public awareness of gendered violence has increased, sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment remain both persistent and deeply embedded.

Research has long established that sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment are entrenched features of Australian school workplaces and classrooms. Decades of scholarship have documented gendered violence experienced by women and girls in education settings, while education union evidence has similarly pointed to the scale of the problem. An Australian Education Union (AEU) survey conducted in 2018 found that 51.7 per cent of respondents had witnessed or experienced sexual harassment, or supervised someone who had been sexually harassed during their education career, and 33.9 per cent had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment in their current workplace. This evidence demonstrates that gendered harms in schools are neither new nor exceptional, but part of a longstanding pattern of workplace safety, dignity and gender inequality concerns in education.

The importance of addressing sexism and misogyny within schools has been recognised within recent national policy frameworks aimed at preventing violence against women and girls. The Australian Government's *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* (Department of Social Services, 2022) identifies gender inequality as setting the underlying context for violence, driven by factors including rigid gender stereotypes and dominant forms of masculinity. It highlights the importance of prevention across multiple settings, including education. Indeed, while schools are increasingly recognised as places where harmful gender norms can be challenged, they are also environments in which sexism, sexual harassment and misogyny are widely experienced by students and staff.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONT.

There is growing recognition of this tension across education, research and the violence prevention sector: that schools are not peripheral to Australia's efforts to prevent violence against women and girls and that they are a critical institutional setting in which the drivers of gendered violence are reproduced and normalised.

More recently, research has pointed to a marked escalation in the visibility, frequency and severity of sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment directed towards women teachers and girls in schools. While not reducible to any single cause, this renewed visibility has coincided with the growth and influence of the online 'manosphere', whose misogynistic and anti-feminist ideas have infiltrated Australian classrooms. Teachers' accounts, alongside the growing body of scholarship on the manosphere, suggest that these online influences are shaping boys' attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls, including by legitimising, normalising and amplifying existing forms of sexism and misogyny.

Although extensive qualitative research has established a clear and troubling picture, Australia has until now lacked large scale quantitative data documenting the extent of teachers' experiences of sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment in schools. This report addresses that gap through a national survey of 2,668 AEU member teachers. To our knowledge, it is the largest Australian study to examine these issues in relation to the contemporary influence of manosphere logics, attitudes and behaviours in schools. By establishing the prevalence, nature and impacts of these experiences, the report provides critical evidence to inform policy, resourcing and gender-transformative interventions aimed at ensuring Australian schools are safe workplaces as well as safe learning environments.

The title of this report reflects its central argument and invokes the dual responsibilities at the heart of Australian schooling. The education system has a duty of care for children and young people, and it also has a duty of care for educators. This report argues that these responsibilities are inseparable. Preventing gendered violence is essential to fulfilling schools' obligations as both workplaces and places of learning, and to ensuring every member of the school community is safe, respected and able to flourish.

KEY FINDINGS

1

78% of teachers who completed the survey report observing or experiencing gendered violence in their schools. 1 in 2 report an increase in gendered violence among students. These patterns are consistent for both primary and secondary school teachers.

2

95% of teachers believe that at least some of their students access manosphere content. 1 in 4 teachers believe that 50% of their students access manosphere content. **87.5% have noticed the influence of manosphere ideas on student attitudes and behaviour in the past 12 months.** 1 in 4 say this is frequently the case.

3

46% of teachers say gendered violence causes them to frequently or occasionally consider leaving teaching. 16% say frequently, and 30% say occasionally.

4

The 3 factors that predict teachers being *more* likely to consider leaving the profession because of gendered violence are:

- How frequently they experience gendered violence from students
- The recent increase in gendered violence from colleagues
- Identifying as a woman

5

Women are *more likely than men* to report that gendered violence has made them consider leaving.

6

Teachers are *less likely* to consider leaving the profession if their school has clear policies outlining their responses to sexism and gender bias.

7

Early career teachers are *more likely* to report that they have frequently observed or experienced gendered violence in their schools.

8

77% of teachers report that gendered violence has a negative impact on teachers' wellbeing. 80% say it has a negative impact on student wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on these findings, the report identifies a set of recommendations for addressing the problems and harms raised by Australian teachers. These recommendations are intended as a foundation for dialogue between Australian Governments and other stakeholders to support the development of agreed priorities and next steps. These recommendations recognise that preventing and responding to gendered violence requires coordinated action across workplace health and safety, education policy and practice, school resourcing, and the broader digital environments in which young people are increasingly socialised. The report recommends the following overarching recommendation and the 6 specific actions that follow to address the ongoing and systemic harms identified in this report.

Overall recommendation:

Overall, AEU members' responses to the survey indicate the severity and breadth of gendered workplace hazards and harms in public education worksites. A significant and sustained response by government, with a preeminent emphasis on workers' rights to safe work, is required to address the concerns reported in this research.

6 further recommended areas for action are identified below:



Recommendation 1. That Australian Governments urgently address workplace health and safety (WHS) requirements and establish effective policy and protocols to support the education system



Recommendation 2. That Australian Governments act to strengthen the gender safety of the teaching profession by addressing structural sexism through fair pay and conditions, secure and flexible employment and greater gender equity in leadership



Recommendation 3. That Australian Governments strengthen the regulatory response to psychosocial hazards



Recommendation 4. That Australian Governments ensure adequate access to workers' compensation for teachers who have experienced workplace sexual and gender-based harassment and other forms of gendered occupational violence



Recommendation 5. That Australian Governments adequately resource whole-school implementation of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) that is embedded across curriculum, leadership, policy, professional learning and school culture



Recommendation 6. That Australian Governments must urgently and effectively regulate social media platforms to intervene in the significant harm that occurs as a result of their business models. This work should be undertaken in collaboration with the eSafety Commissioner to provide best practice advice and implementation tools to ensure online safety

01. BACKGROUND

GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

Education and sociological research have long documented gendered violence in school settings, including teachers' experiences of sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment. Foundational studies by Willis and Kenway (1986), Acker (1988), Robinson (2000, 2005) and Taylor et al. (1995) established that sexual harassment was pervasive within school contexts, demonstrating how it functions to normalise and reproduce harmful gendered hierarchies. Later scholarship continued to identify gendered violence as a significant challenge to gender justice, documenting how women's experiences of sexism and violence are frequently diminished, trivialised or rendered invisible within schools (Keddie, 2007). Together, these studies establish that structural gender inequalities in schools, and the harms they produce, have been documented for more than four decades.

Subsequent scholarship further shifted attention from individual acts of harassment to the structural, social and institutional power relations through which discrimination and violence against women are produced and sustained in education settings (Lahelma et al., 2000). This body of research illustrated that schools are not simply places where gendered violence occurs, but institutional environments in which gender norms are continually upheld, negotiated and reproduced through everyday interactions, behaviours and organisational practices (Higham, 2018; Little, 2025; Variyan & Wilkinson, 2021; Wescott & Roberts, 2025a). Other recent research has further exposed the deeply entrenched and dangerous normalisation of student-to-teacher violence and aggression across Australian schools. This situation creates conditions in which teachers and students become accustomed to violence as a routine feature of school life (Arnold et al., 2024; Blackmore et al., 2025; Dicke et al., 2024; Fogelgarn et al., 2019; Longmuir et al., 2025). This normalisation is significant because it can obscure the gendered dimensions of violence, diminish its seriousness, and constrain schools' capacity to recognise and respond to gender-based violence as a systemic problem.

Recent scholarship has also identified significant gaps and missed opportunities in education policymaking to advance gender equality and justice (Gannon et al., 2024; Wolfe, 2022), alongside the structural, relational and cultural mechanisms through which gender inequality and violence are normalised within school sites (Higham, 2018; Little, 2025). These concerns are also evident in school-level responses to women teachers' reports of gendered violence and sexual harassment, with Australian research identifying systemic, attitudinal and structural gaps including the absence of recording mechanisms, the use of euphemisms to categorise behaviours, and the undermining of women's experiences in their workplaces (Schulz et al., 2025; Wescott & Roberts, 2024; Wescott & Roberts, 2025a).

Sexual harassment of women staff can also be enabled by historical and contemporary school cultures and rendered invisible through institutional norms, with such patterns documented across private, public and Catholic school settings in Australia (Variyan & Wilkinson, 2021; Wescott & Roberts, 2026). Contemporary research has conceptualised these gendered differences in experiences of schooling and access to recognition of harm as a form of institutional gaslighting (Wescott & Roberts, 2025a), highlighting how teachers' differential experiences are not simply individual or interpersonal phenomena, but are produced and sustained by the institutional environments in which they work. This recent work has emphasised the structural nature of gendered violence in schools, pointing to the need for broad systemic reforms rather than individualised solutions (Wescott & Roberts, 2026).

GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL SETTINGS CONT.

This body of scholarship demonstrates that gendered violence in schools is neither a new nor isolated phenomenon. Rather, it is embedded within the institutional, cultural and relational structures through which gendered power is maintained in education settings. While research has attentively exposed the limitations of school-level responses to gendered violence and the gaps in policy-level responses, the emergence of communities of online misogynistic content creators necessitates a shift in attention from the boundaries of the school site to how the school and the digital world intersect.

NEW CHALLENGES: ONLINE MISOGYNY

Research undertaken since the return to in-person schooling following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic points to a sharp increase in what appears to be a markedly different and more brazen form of misogyny directed towards women teachers and girls in Australian schools (Roberts et al., 2026; Wescott et al., 2024). This emboldened misogyny is largely attributed to the emergence and growing influence of the 'manosphere'—a thematically connected network of content creators and online spaces united by anti-feminist and anti-women sentiments (Ging, 2019; Gerrand et al., 2025). The profound impacts of the manosphere on school climates and classroom dynamics are increasingly being documented as a global trend, including in China (Li et al., 2026), India (Hussain & Maloney, 2026), Mexico (Cala et al., 2026), South Korea (Lee, 2026), the UK (Schumacher et al., 2025) and Canada (Almanssori, 2025).

This 'new' landscape of intensified misogyny in schools must, however, be understood in relation to the historical conditions through which gendered violence has long been normalised and enabled within school systems (Wescott & Roberts, 2025b). Researchers have also drawn attention to the contribution of what remains unspoken or latent within school environments, including through the operation of a 'hidden curriculum' (Almanssori, 2025) and how these existing conditions can contribute to the intensification of gendered violence. These insights serve as an essential reminder that gendered violence is 'neither recent nor episodic, but enduring, systemic and deeply embedded within the social and institutional organisation of everyday life' (Roberts & Wescott, 2026, p. 570).

Collectively, recent research examining the contemporary nature, prevalence and manifestations of gendered violence in schools paints a troubling picture. Research indicates that expressions of masculine dominance among schoolboys have resurged, with problematic views about gender and women, and expressions of sexist attitudes and behaviours becoming more visible, more frequent and more extreme (e.g. Schulz et al., 2025). The teachings, ideologies, sayings and embodied behaviours of prominent manosphere figures have entered Australian classrooms (Wescott et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2026), while harmful manosphere messaging has influenced many boys' views and attitudes towards relationships, gender and the self (Haslop et al., 2024). Research also demonstrates that the adoption of manosphere perspectives is not homogeneous, with criticality and scepticism remaining present within boys' range of responses to harmful digital content (Bragg & Renold, 2026; Flood & Keddie, 2026; Milne & Baker, 2025). Importantly, though, concerns about and experiences of the influence of the manosphere are reported by teachers in private, religiously affiliated, and public schools, and across the socio-economic spectrum.

NEW CHALLENGES: ONLINE MISOGYNY CONT.

Understanding the logics and design of social media companies' recommender systems is central to comprehending the organised nature of online misogyny (Baker et al., 2024). Experiments examining algorithmic programming have consistently found that content coded as 'manosphere', including content that is toxic, hostile and dedicated to the denigration of women, can be recommended to accounts belonging to young men regardless of the nature of their searches and interests (Baker et al., 2024). The potential harms of this exposure are particularly significant given that researchers studying young people's digital lives increasingly argue that the distinction between what is online and what is 'offline' or 'real life' is no longer meaningful. For most young people, these worlds are blended and increasingly indistinguishable (Evans & Ringrose, 2025). The potential for online misogyny to translate into offline harm is further demonstrated by the identification of manosphere ideas among men participating in behaviour change programs, highlighting how manosphere content can intersect with and reinforce broader patterns of gendered violence in Australian society (Nicholas et al., 2026).

The consequences of this increasingly pervasive digital misogyny are now being documented across schools and among educators and students. For example, a 2024 survey of 1,000 Australian teachers by the activist organisation *Collective Shout* found that 48% of women teachers surveyed had been sexually harassed in their schools; 80% of those who had experienced sexual harassment at school had been harassed by a student; 80% of surveyed teachers had noticed a recent increase in sexualised behaviours in their schools; and 60% of teachers reported feeling unsafe in the classroom and on school grounds following experiences of sexual harassment (Mowle et al., 2024). Similarly, a 2024 survey undertaken by *Tomorrow Woman* and *YouGov* found that one in three young women in Australian schools reported that manosphere-influenced behaviour among their peers was having a negative impact on them. Evidence of these concerns also extends internationally. In the UK, a survey of 100 secondary teachers and 100 primary teachers found that 76% of secondary teachers and 60% of primary teachers were 'extremely concerned' about the presence of online misogyny in their school contexts (Over et al., 2025). Together, these findings point to a consistent pattern in which digitally mediated misogyny is increasingly shaping experiences of safety, behaviour and wellbeing within school communities, broadly aligning with the statistical findings of this survey.

Beyond these immediate impacts within schools, new Australian evidence raises further concerns about the relationship between online misogyny, youth radicalisation and extremist attitudes (Meger, 2026). This research, which also surveyed teachers about their views and experiences, identified a clear pathway from manosphere content to classroom behaviour; found that women teachers are primary targets of boys' misogyny; demonstrated that both primary and secondary teachers are concerned about misogynistic attitudes among students; and found that teachers consistently feel underprepared, under-resourced and under-supported to respond to the challenges they face in their work. The study also captured concerning attitudes among adolescent boys and young men in Australia, including adherence to misogynistic and anti-feminist ideas, as well as extremist attitudes, including support for ideas aligned with white supremacist, religious and incel violent extremism (Meger, 2026).

NEW CHALLENGES: ONLINE MISOGYNY CONT.

This rapidly growing body of literature provides compelling evidence that gendered violence in schools is both an enduring structural problem and a contemporary, intensifying concern. While the forms and visibility of misogyny have shifted, particularly in response to the growing influence of manosphere content, these developments are occurring within longstanding institutional conditions that have enabled sexism and gendered violence to persist. The consistency of findings across countries, research methods and school contexts is particularly significant: teachers are reporting increasingly emboldened misogyny; students are adopting harmful ideologies; girls and women are disproportionately harmed; and educators are struggling to respond within systems that remain under-resourced and poorly equipped. The findings presented in this report reinforce and extend the emerging evidence base, demonstrating that these concerns are not isolated or anecdotal, but part of an urgent and increasingly documented pattern of gendered violence in schools globally.

EFFECTS AND HARMS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

While sexual harassment and gendered discrimination can affect individuals of any gender, evidence consistently shows that women are disproportionately targeted by workplace gendered harassment and discrimination (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025). Women in leadership positions in schools are also more likely than their male principal colleagues to experience threats of violence (Blackmore et al., 2025). Although these experiences are often conceptualised along a continuum of severity, ranging from sexist discrimination to acts of sexual violence, frequent and unchallenged experiences of gendered harassment that may be perceived as less severe can be just as damaging to women's wellbeing as more overt and offensive incidents (Sojo et al., 2015). This finding highlights the cumulative harm associated with what Higham (2024) describes as 'slow violence' in schools—the incremental and often subtle or implicit forms of harm that accumulate over time to erode an individual's sense of power, agency and control over their environment.

The effects of adverse work experiences and challenging working conditions can have significant consequences for victims' psychosocial health and wellbeing and, in turn, their willingness to remain in the profession (Rahimi & Arnold, 2024). In exploring teacher experiences following the increased popularity of the notorious masculinity content creator, Andrew Tate, Wescott et al. (2024) highlight one participant's observation that these experiences contributed to a sense that 'schools are not a safe place for teachers, it's not physical ... it's mostly psychological' (p. 177). This is reflected in the symptoms reported by women teachers who have experienced sexualisation and/or gendered harassment by students and/or male colleagues, including mood disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety and panic attacks), nightmares and other sleep disturbances, difficulties in spousal or intimate relationships, and an overall loss of trust (Lahelma et al., 2000). Women teachers have also been reported to experience hypervigilance and self-policing around clothing choices (Variyan & Wilkinson, 2022), describing attempts to choose 'genderless' clothing in order not to 'provoke' students (Lahelma et al., 2000, p. 467). However, the continued use of euphemisms such as 'bullying' in reporting practices can obscure the gendered nature of these experiences, inhibiting the capacity of schools and systems to recognise and effectively address their distinctive impacts (Stein, 2007; Rawlings, 2017).

EFFECTS AND HARMS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS CONT.

Additionally, structural features of Australian education systems can entrench gender inequalities and create conditions in which gendered violence is more likely to occur and remain unaddressed. The school workforce is heavily feminised (72 per cent female; Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2025) but remains gender-segregated, with men disproportionately occupying senior leadership roles (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2026). This imbalance can create conditions in which perpetrators exploit women's perceived lack of institutional authority (Keddie, 2006; Variyan et al., 2022; Robinson, 2000; Wescott & Roberts, 2025; Zhao et al., 2025). Further, despite recent Fair Work reforms, 31 per cent of teachers—almost half of whom are early-career—rely on casual or fixed-term contracts (AITSL, 2026). Such employment precarity can create a disincentive to report gendered violence because of fears of reputational damage or jeopardising future employment (Australian Council of Trade Unions [ACTU], 2018; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019; Deredzai & Goronga, 2025; Reuter et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Gendered violence is not a new problem in schools, but one that is longstanding and not adequately addressed. While the current expression of this ongoing problem has been intensified by the digital circulation of violent misogyny, it is important to note that the emergence of the manosphere has not created these conditions anew; it has amplified them, accelerated them and made them more visible. With this recognition comes an opportunity to introduce sustained action across the systems that shape teachers' safety and young people's lives. Collectively, the current situation compels us to recognise that preventing gendered violence is not the responsibility of individual schools or teachers, but a shared institutional, regulatory and societal responsibility. The evidence in this report demands a response commensurate with the scale and persistence of the problem: gender safety must be treated as a fundamental condition of safe work, quality education and gender equality.





02. RESEARCH DESIGN



SURVEY DESIGN

This study employed a national survey design to examine the prevalence, experiences and impacts of sexism and misogyny within Australian school settings. The survey, titled *Sexism and Misogyny in Australian Schools National Survey*, was developed to capture the perspectives of educators working across diverse school contexts and jurisdictions. The survey was distributed nationally to members of the Australian Education Union (AEU), which represents teachers and education workers across Australia's primary, secondary and specialist education sectors. Data collection occurred over approximately 3 months in the second half of 2025, providing respondents with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of sexism and misogyny within their workplaces, as well as perceived changes over time.

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative questions examined the prevalence of sexism and misogyny, perceived changes in student, staff and parent behaviours, impacts on wellbeing and workforce intentions and the availability and effectiveness of school policies and responses. Qualitative open-ended questions enabled participants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, including examples of behaviours observed, impacts on educators and students and reflections on school and system-level responses. This approach allowed for analysis of both the scale of the issue and the complex ways in which sexism and misogyny are experienced and interpreted within educational settings.

By surveying a large national sample of AEU member educators that broadly reflects the public education workforce by state and gender, the study provides insight into how gendered violence is experienced across the education workforce and creates an opportunity to identify key policy, practice and resourcing levers to respond. The findings offer an evidence base for understanding gendered violence as an issue affecting not only individual students and staff, but also school climates, teacher wellbeing and the sustainability of the education workforce. Importantly, the study's national workforce scope also enables examination of how these experiences are shaped by organisational and institutional conditions, including the adequacy of school policies and institutional conditions.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The total number of participants available for analysis was 2668. There were initially 3150 respondents, of whom 482 were excluded from the analyses because they were not current members of the AEU or did not provide consent. Of those remaining participants, 1871 responded to at least 50% of the survey, with 1551 completing the full survey.

While the sampling frame included all current AEU members, participation in the present survey was voluntary and teachers self-selected to participate. Teachers who participated were broadly similar in terms of key demographics to the population of Australian government school teachers (ACARA, 2025). See Table 1 below for a direct comparison of these demographics. In particular, the number of participants from each state or territory closely followed that of the population (although teachers from WA and SA were noticeably less represented). However, there are some differences. For example, women teachers were overrepresented in the present survey relative to men teachers compared with the population, although this difference may be exaggerated because the AITSL statistics measured sex rather than gender. Moreover, the present survey contained a higher proportion of high school versus primary school teachers. Accordingly, our results may be more (although not exclusively) applicable to high school contexts.

Table 1. Comparison of demographics between teachers who participated in the present survey and the population of Australian government school teachers

	Present survey	AITSL statistics
Women*	81%	73%
Men*	15%	27%
Primary school	31%	56%
High school	61%	44%
ACT	8%	2%
NSW	35%	28%
NT	2%	1%
QLD	22%	22%
SA	2%	6%
TAS	4%	2%
VIC	23%	27%
WA	4%	11%

* Note. AITSL statistics refer to sex (e.g., male, female), whereas as the present survey refers to gender (e.g., man, women)

STUDY PARTICIPANTS CONT.

In addition to considering the demographic composition of the sample, the present survey had a sufficiently large sample to support adequately powered inferential analyses concerning the population of Australian government school teachers. Specifically, according to G*Power our sample size gave us at least 90% power to detect a small (i.e., $d = .2$) difference between men and women teachers, to find a small (i.e., $d = .2$) change in reported student misogyny within-participants, and to use a regression model that explained a small amount of the variance in teachers' intention to leave (i.e., $R^2 = .02$). In other words, we collected data from enough participants to make statistical inferences about even small effects in the broader population of Australian government school teachers.

Table 2. Demographic details

Gender

81% women
15% men
>1% non-binary
>1% preferred to not disclose

Teaching experience (years)

0 - 5: 12%
6 - 10: 18%
11 - 20: 30%
21+: 38%

Settings

Primary: 31%
Secondary: 61%
Early childhood: <1%
TAFE/Vocational: <1%
Alternative answer: 8%

Locations

Metropolitan: 52%
Regional: 32%
Rural: 12%
Remote: 3%
Very remote: <1%

*For the purposes of using 'school type' as a dichotomous numeric variable, we only included participants who indicated they taught in primary or high school in analyses involving school type.

Of the 1642 participants who responded to the optional question about whether they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Aboriginal: 3%
Torres Strait Islander: <1%
1589 (96.77%) indicated they were not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



03.

FINDINGS: THE PREVALENCE, NATURE AND IMPACTS OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

This section presents the key findings from the national survey. Findings are organised according to the major themes explored in the survey instrument and are further grouped into subthemes identified through thematic analysis of participants' responses. This approach enables both the reported prevalence and the lived experience of sexism and misogyny in Australian schools to be examined, providing insight into not only how frequently these issues occur, but also how they are experienced, understood and responded to by educators and school staff.

The findings sections draw on both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative findings provide an overview of the scale, frequency and distribution of experiences reported by participants, while qualitative responses offer important context and depth, illuminating the ways in which sexism and misogyny manifest in everyday school life. Throughout this section, direct quotations from survey participants are included to foreground the voices and experiences of educators and school staff and to illustrate the human impacts of what is reported in the survey statistics.

The findings provide a detailed national picture of the prevalence, nature and consequences of sexism and misogyny in Australian schools. They highlight not only individual experiences of discrimination, harassment and gendered harm, but also broader patterns relating to problematic and potentially unlawful work culture, institutional responses and the conditions under which educators and school staff undertake their professional roles.

Finding 1. Gendered violence is prevalent in Australian schools

The survey findings indicate that sexism and misogyny are common features of Australian school environments. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents reported that they had observed or experienced sexist and/or misogynistic comments or behaviours in schools, suggesting that these are neither isolated nor uncommon. This survey finding echoes the substantial existing body of literature documenting that this is an historical experience of women working in education settings. Participants described encountering sexism and misogyny across a range of interactions within school communities, including those involving students, colleagues and parents/carers. The findings point to a widespread perception that sexism and misogyny shape the everyday realities of education workplaces.

A notable finding is the extent to which respondents perceive these behaviours to be increasing, particularly among students. One in two respondents reported observing an increase in sexist or misogynistic behaviour among students, with around one-third indicating that they experience or observe such behaviours frequently. Among those reporting frequent exposure, perceptions of worsening trends were especially notable. Student misogyny was most commonly identified as having increased over the previous 12 months, while misogyny originating from parents was also perceived to have increased, albeit to a lesser extent. In contrast, respondents reported a slight reduction in sexism and misogyny among staff, though these experiences remain significant for many educators. All of these reported changes were statistically significant.

Together, these findings suggest that sexism and misogyny are pervasive concerns across Australian schools and that many educators perceive these issues to be worsening, particularly among students. The following sections explore these patterns in greater detail and examine how educators understand the sources, manifestations and impacts of sexism and misogyny within their school communities.

KEY STATISTICS

- 78% of teachers who completed the survey report observing or experiencing gendered violence in schools
- 1 in 2 teachers report **an increase** in sexist or misogynistic behaviour among students
- 1 in 3 observe or experience this **frequently**
- On average, teachers report that:
 - Student misogyny has significantly **increased** in the past 12 months
 - Parent misogyny has significantly **increased** in the past 12 months
 - Staff misogyny has significantly **reduced** in the past 12 months

By gender

- These patterns hold overall for both women and men teachers, although men teachers did not on average believe that parent misogyny has increased
- Women were **more likely** to report staff misogyny

By student age group

- These patterns are consistent for **both primary and high school teachers**, although high school teachers report lesser worsening in parents

By teacher level of experience

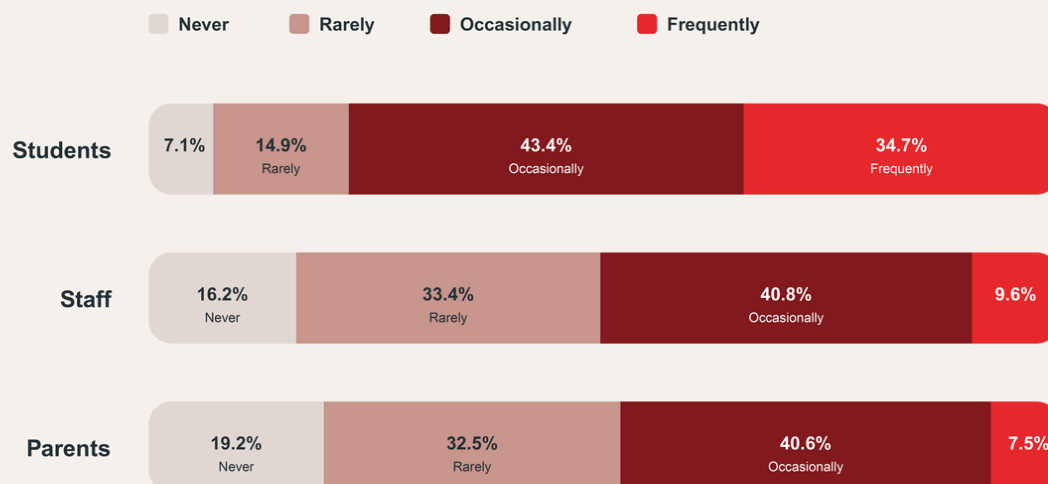
- Early career teachers are **more likely** to report that they have observed or experienced gendered violence with frequency

PERCEIVED SOURCE OF SEXISM AND MISOGYNY

Teachers who completed the survey identified students as the most frequent source of gendered violence in their workplaces. As per Figure 1, 78% of respondents reported that they had observed or experienced such behaviour from students either occasionally (43.4%) or frequently (34.7%). Teachers' colleagues and parents/carers of students are also sources of gendered violence. Around half of respondents reported observing or experiencing sexism and misogyny from staff (50.4%) and parents (48.4%). Exposure to gendered violence perpetrated by colleagues and/or parents or carers were more commonly described as occasional rather than frequent.

PERCEIVED SOURCE OF SEXISM AND MISOGYNY CONT.

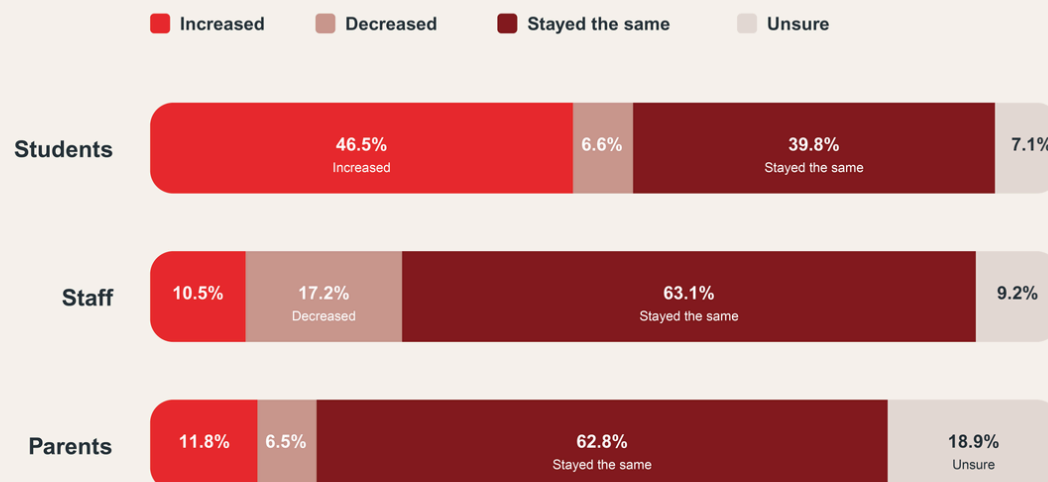
Figure 1. Over career, how often have you observed or experienced sexist and/or misogynistic comments or behaviour from students/ staff/ parents?



Note. Percentages are of valid responses to each item ($n=3,150$). Observed data.

Teachers perceived that the worsening of misogyny was most concentrated among students—almost one in two (46.5%) teachers reported that student misogyny had increased over the previous 12 months, compared with 10.5% for staff and 11.8% for parents (Figure 2). More teachers reported a decrease (17.2%) rather than an increase in gendered violence among staff, while responses regarding parents were characterised by the highest level of uncertainty (18.9% unsure).

Figure 2. Observed change in misogyny in the past 12 months

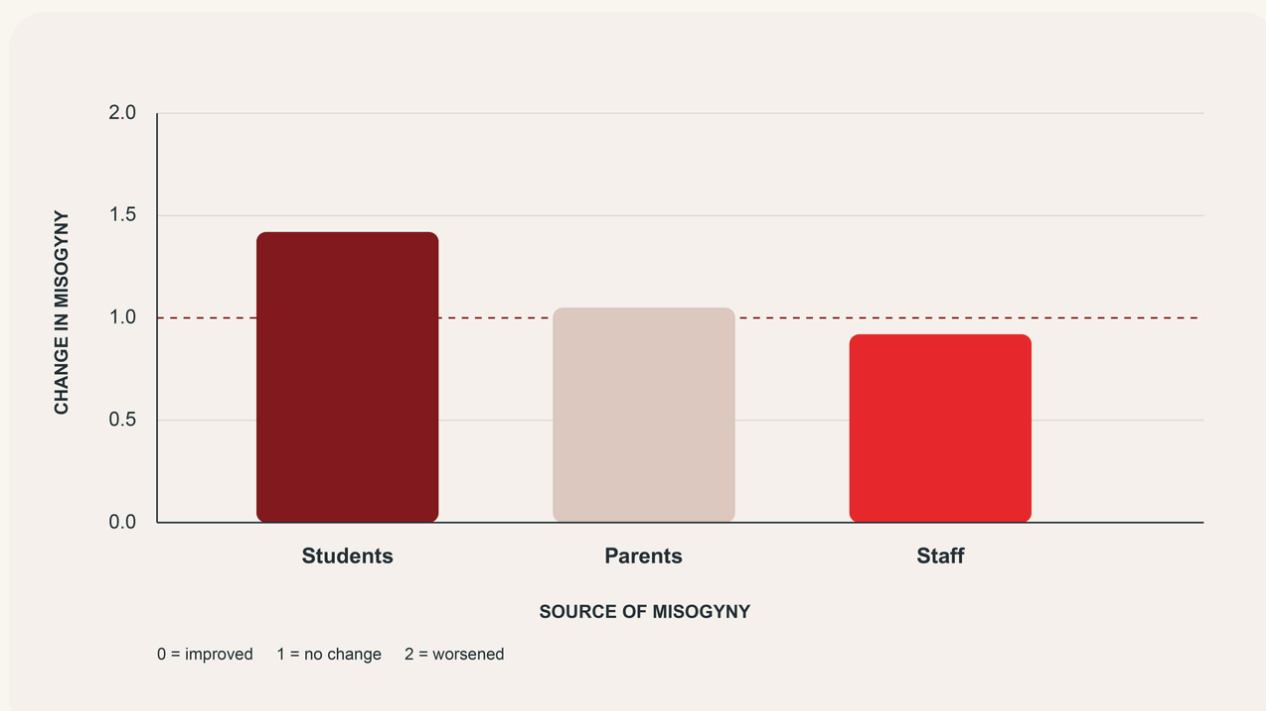


Note. Percentages are of valid responses to each item. Observed data.

PERCEIVED SOURCE OF SEXISM AND MISOGYNY CONT.

On average, teachers perceived the greatest increase in misogyny as being among students, a smaller increase among parents, and a slight reduction among staff over the previous 12 months (Figure 3). All these reported changes were statistically significant. These average ratings reinforce the descriptive findings presented above, indicating that perceptions of worsening were concentrated among students, while changes relating to parents and staff were comparatively modest.

Figure 3. Change in student misogyny according to teachers



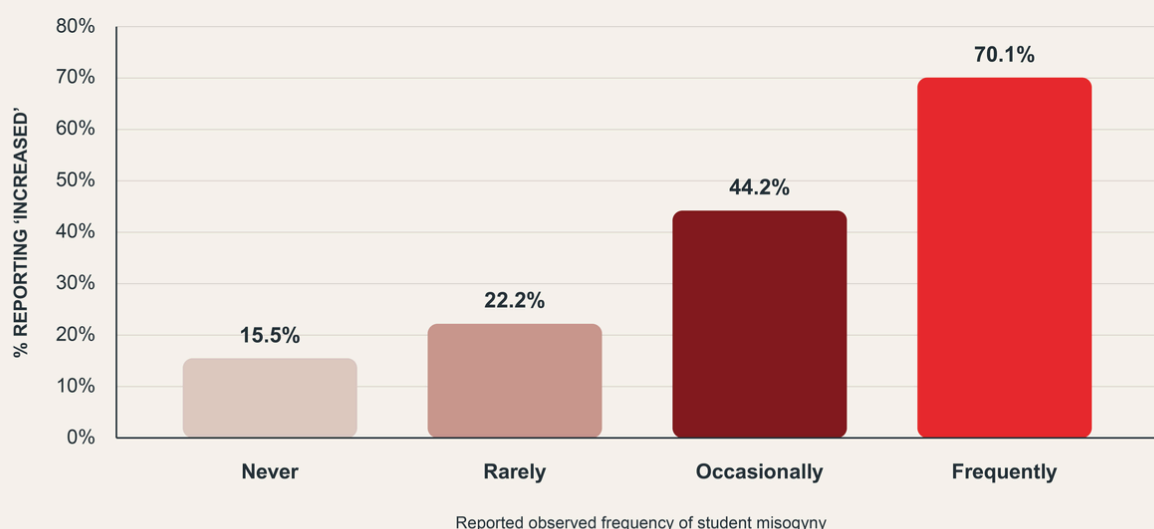
Note. Change coded as 0 = decreased/improved, 1 = no change, 2 = increased/worsened; 'unsure' responses excluded. Change in misogyny was significantly different to 1 (no change) at $p < .05$ for all kinds of misogyny (pooled estimates). Scores above the line indicate worsened misogyny; scores below the line indicate improved misogyny.

To further understand these perceptions, the relationship between educators' reported exposure to gendered violence and their perceptions of change over time was also examined (Figure 4). This revealed that teachers who most frequently observed sexism and misogyny were also the most likely to perceive it as increasing. Perceptions that student gendered violence is increasing were concentrated among the teachers most exposed to it. In all, 15.5% of those who had never observed such behaviour perceived an increase, rising to 22.2% among those who reported rarely observing. Those who occasionally (44.2%) and frequently (70.1%) observe or experience gendered violence are far more likely to report an increase in its frequency.

PERCEIVED SOURCE OF SEXISM AND MISOGYNY CONT.

This association between perceptions of exposure and change over time is descriptive by nature but does point to important questions about how exposure and perceived change are related. Teachers working in environments where these behaviours are most prevalent may simply be best placed to detect their escalation, or sustained exposure may heighten attentiveness to change. Regardless of the underlying mechanism, reports of worsening came disproportionately from educators most frequently exposed to gendered violence, indicating that reports of worsening were concentrated among educators who were most frequently exposed to gendered violence

Figure 4. Percentage reporting increased student misogyny, by exposure frequency



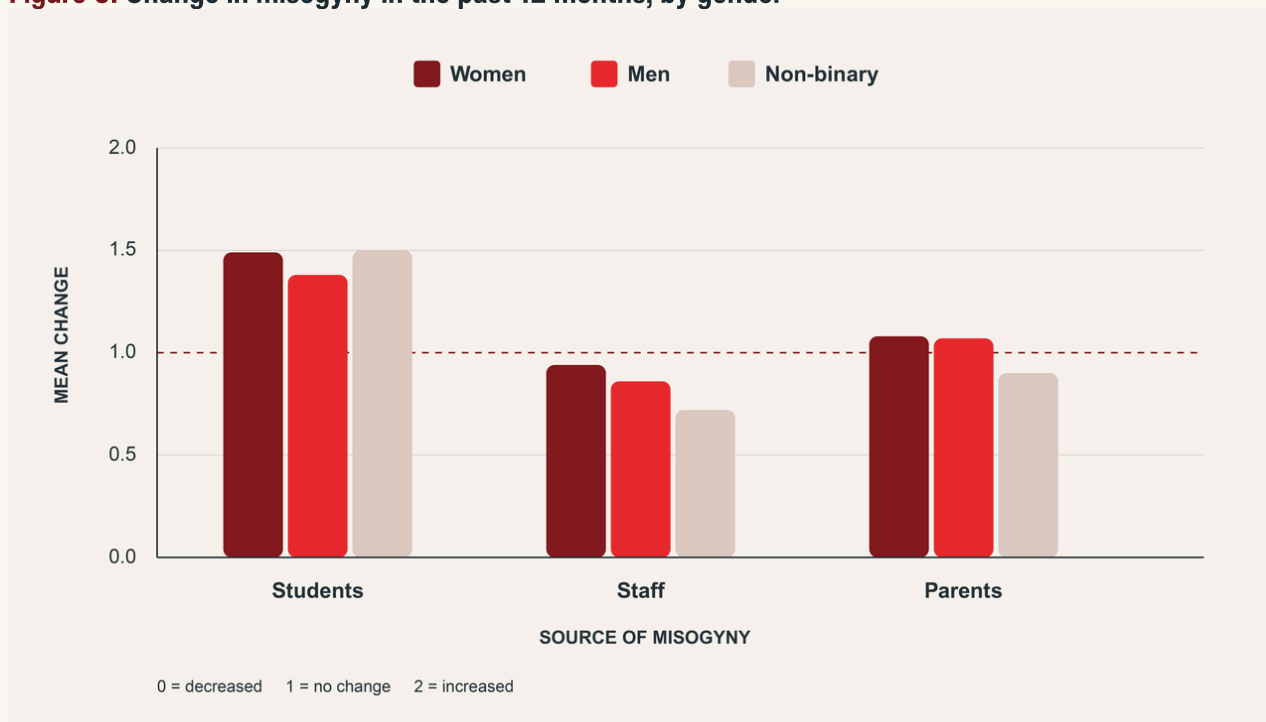
Note. % of each exposure group perceiving an increase (observed; 'unsure' excluded from denominators).

PERCEIVED CHANGE IN MISOGYNY ACCORDING TO TEACHER GENDER

Women and men teachers reported broadly similar perceptions of changes in misogyny over time (Figure 5). The overall pattern held for both women and men teachers. For both groups, average perceived change sat above the no-change midpoint for student misogyny (women $M = 1.49$; men $M = 1.39$, both significant at $p < .001$) and below the midpoint for staff misogyny (women $M = 0.94$; men $M = 0.86$, both significant at $p < .001$). For parent misogyny, women's average perceived change ($M = 1.08$) was significantly above the midpoint, $p < .001$, while men's ($M = 1.07$) was about the midpoint but this was not statistically significant, $p = .191$. Non-binary respondents' averages (student $M = 1.50$; staff $M = 0.73$; parent $M = 0.90$) followed a broadly similar pattern but rest on very small bases so inferential statistics were not calculated. These findings indicate broad agreement between women and men teachers that student misogyny has increased.

PERCEIVED CHANGE IN MISOGYNY ACCORDING TO TEACHER GENDER CONT.

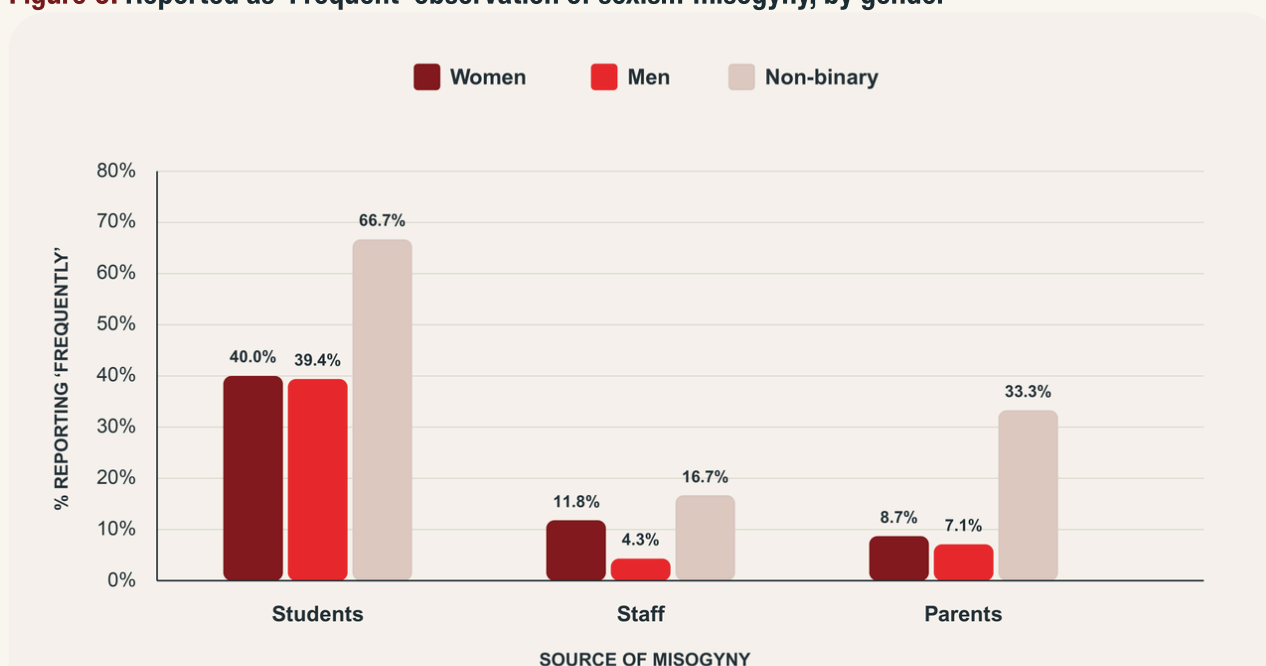
Figure 5. Change in misogyny in the past 12 months, by gender



Note. Observed means; 'unsure' excluded; reference line = no change. The non-binary series is presented descriptively given the very small sample size.

While women and men teachers reported similar perceptions of changes in gendered violence over time, women were more likely than men to report frequent exposure to staff gendered violence (Figure 6). Women were more likely than men to report frequently observing or experiencing gendered violence from staff (11.8% compared to 4.3%), while frequent student-sourced behaviour was reported at similar rates across women (40.0%) and men (39.4%). Among the small number of non-binary respondents, 8 of 12 (66.7%) reported frequently observing or experiencing student-sourced behaviour.

Figure 6. Reported as 'Frequent' observation of sexism-misogyny, by gender



Note. % responding 'frequently' (observed).

VARIATION OF FINDINGS BY SCHOOL TYPE

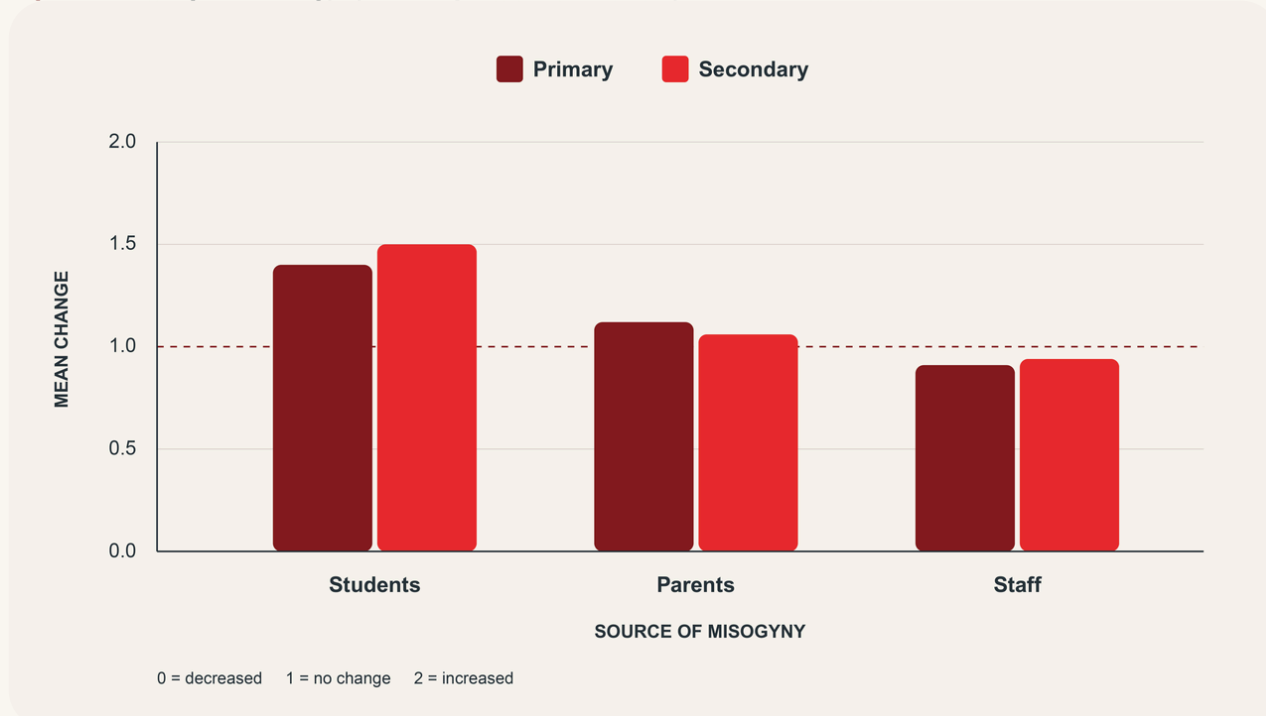
These patterns of both change in gendered violence and frequency of observation were also examined according to school type, comparing responses from primary and secondary teachers. This analysis found that primary and secondary teachers reported broadly similar perceptions of changes in gendered violence over time. Patterns of perceived change were broadly consistent across primary and high school teachers (Figure 7).

Both primary and secondary teachers, on average, perceived student gendered violence to have increased (primary $M = 1.40$; secondary $M = 1.51$, both significant at $p < .001$) and staff gendered violence to have slightly reduced (primary $M = 0.91$; secondary $M = 0.94$, both significant at $p < .001$).

For parent gendered violence towards teachers, primary teachers' average ($M = 1.12$) sat further above the no-change midpoint than secondary teachers' ($M = 1.06$), $p = .031$, consistent with high school teachers reporting lesser worsening among parents.

Overall, the two groups agreed on the direction of change across all three sources of gendered violence, with differences reflecting magnitude rather than fundamentally different perceptions.

Figure 7. Change in misogyny in the past 12 months, by school level



Note. Observed means; primary vs high school only, per report convention; 'unsure' excluded; reference line 1.0 = no change.

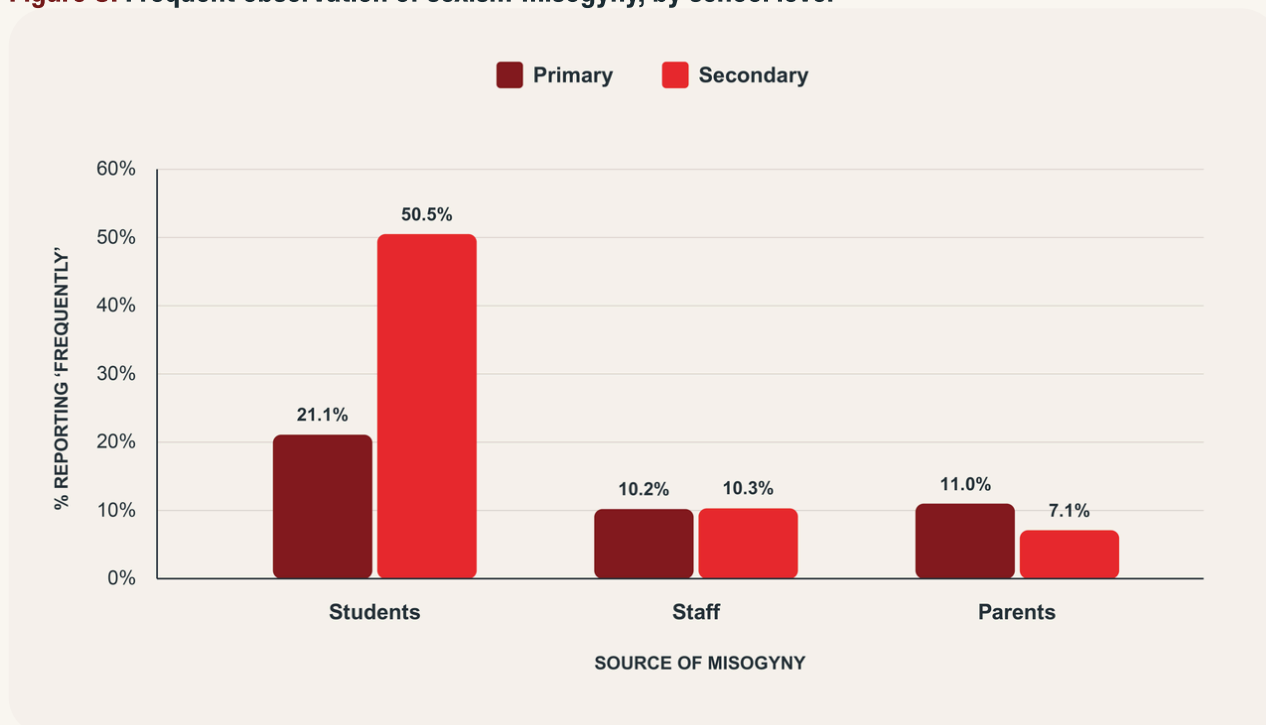
On the other hand, the frequency of student-sourced behaviour differed markedly by school level (Figure 8). High school teachers were substantially more likely than primary school teachers to report frequent exposure to student sexism and misogyny.

VARIATION OF FINDINGS BY SCHOOL TYPE CONT.

Among secondary school teachers, one in two (50.5%) reported frequently observing or experiencing gendered violence from students, compared with one in five (21.1%) primary teachers.

Staff-sourced gendered violence was reported at near-identical rates across levels (10.2% for primary and 10.3% for secondary), while frequent parent-sourced behaviour was somewhat more common among primary teachers (11.0% compared to 7.1%). The greatest difference between school settings therefore related to student behaviour, whereas reports of staff- and parent-sourced misogyny were comparatively similar across primary and secondary schools.

Figure 8. Frequent observation of sexism-misogyny, by school level



Note. % reporting 'frequently' (observed; primary vs high school only).

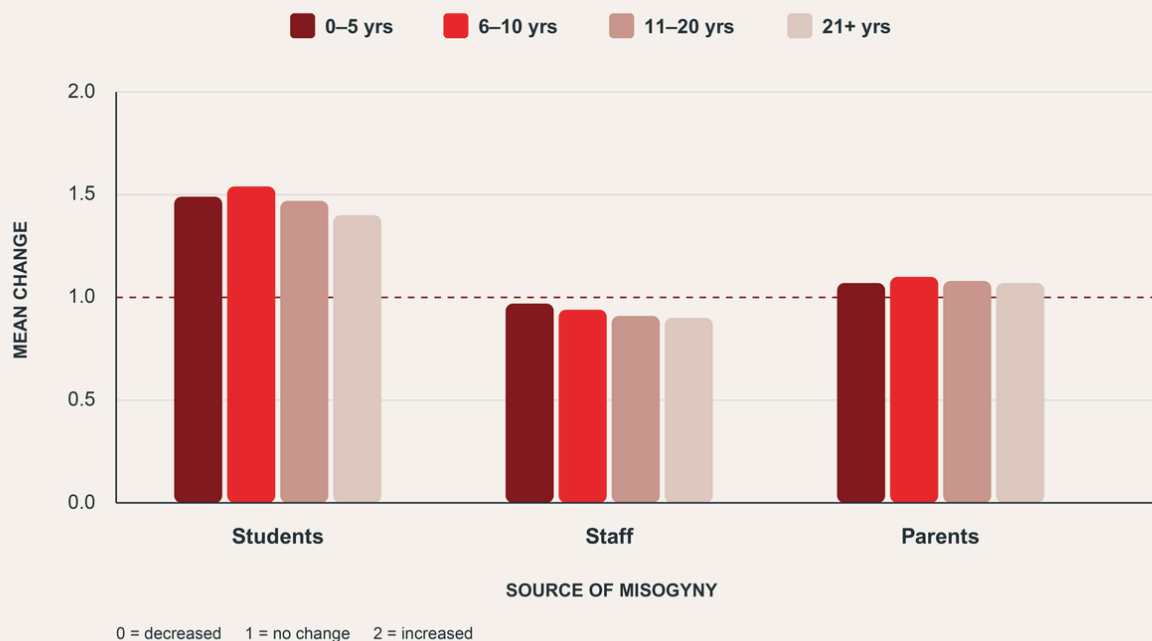
VARIATION BY TEACHER CAREER STAGE

Patterns of perceived change and reported exposure were also examined according to teachers' career stage. Teachers across all career stages perceived student misogyny to have increased over the previous 12 months (Figure 9).

Average perceived change in student misogyny sat above the no-change midpoint at every career stage ($M = 1.49, 1.54, 1.48$ and 1.41 for 0–5, 6–10, 11–20 and 21+ years respectively). Although perceptions varied slightly by career stage, all groups reported a similar overall pattern of worsening student misogyny.

VARIATION BY TEACHER CAREER STAGE CONT.

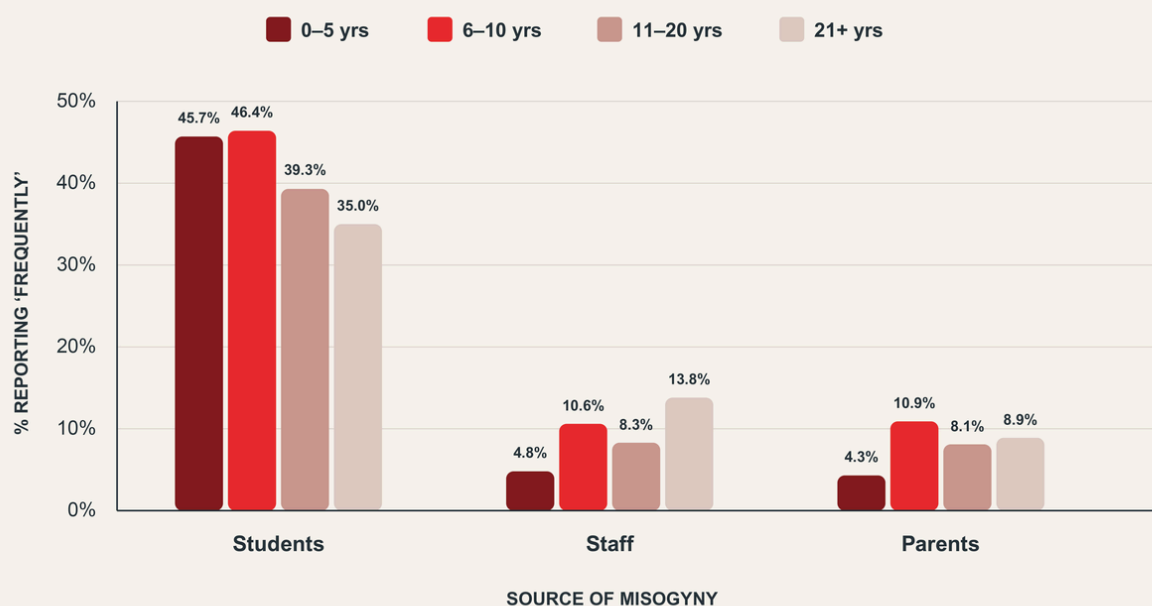
Figure 9. Change in source of misogyny in the past 12 months, by years teaching



Note. Observed means; 'unsure' excluded; reference line = no change.

Early career teachers were more likely to report frequent exposure to student sexism and misogyny (Figure 10). Teachers earlier in their careers were more likely to report frequently observing or experiencing student-sourced sexism and misogyny.

Figure 10. Reported as 'Frequent' observation of sexism-misogyny, by years teaching



Note. % reporting 'frequently' (observed).

The data reveal that 45.7% of teachers in their first five years and 46.4% of those teaching for 6–10 years observe or experience this behaviour frequently among students. This compares with 39.3% of those who had taught for 11–20 years and 35.0% of those who had taught for 21 years or more. No comparable early-career elevation was evident for staff or parent-sourced frequent misogynistic behaviour.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE PREVALENCE OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

“Government initiatives to address domestic violence will have no impact if school if sexism and misogyny are tolerated in schools. I am not afforded the right to feel safe in my workplace. It is particularly distressing that we are teaching our young women that they are not valued members of our school or wider community.”

OVERVIEW

This section provides direct quotes and reflections from teachers on their experiences of gendered violence in schools. It categorises these experiences according to three themes: 1. Gender-based discrimination, where women report differences in opportunities, recognition and respect that are normalised within the school culture; 2. Structural sexism, where sexism appears as a norm of the organisation of the school as a workplace or system; and 3. Students, which details experiences of sexism perpetrated by students. These responses clearly emphasise that teachers experience sexism not as isolated incidents, but as a continuum of gendered harms operating across interpersonal interactions, organisational structures and of course, student behaviour.

Sexism and gender-based discrimination

Teachers described everyday forms of sex-based discrimination, including being overlooked for leadership opportunities, having their professional expertise undermined, being held to different behavioural standards than colleagues, and encountering assumptions that male teachers possess greater authority or competence. Many women reflected that while overt sexism has become less socially acceptable, more subtle forms of discrimination remain pervasive, manifesting through the devaluation of women's ideas, differential allocation of opportunities and the normalisation of attitudes that excuse discriminatory behaviour rather than hold it to account.

Sexism and gender-based discrimination cont.

Some teachers reported that sexism within their schools undermined their professional credibility and authority, diminishing the respect afforded to their expertise, knowledge and intellectual capacity. For example:

“

“Although I have studied senior mathematics at university level, male teachers allocate senior classes to each other far too often.”

“I have had my work undermined, disregarded, changed, had credit stolen for, dismissed and ignored. I have watched my idea presented by a male colleague and just accepted. This isn't to say that things haven't changed. Sexist behaviour can now be called out where it couldn't have been in the past. However, the subtle sexism that is displayed daily by many is insidious and difficult to change.”

“I think that often men's voices are listened to more and women have to work harder and longer to get their voices equally listened to.”

“Many times have had male students blatantly not listen to me but then a male teacher will say the exact same thing and be listened to.”

Teachers also described sexism as shaping expectations of authority, professionalism and respect, with boy students and men staff often afforded greater latitude for poor behaviour while female teachers were required to work harder to establish and maintain their authority:

“

“Male and female students and staff are often held to different standards with the ‘boys will be boys’ attitude excusing poor behaviour of both male students and staff.”

“Innocent parent comments such as, ‘you've been great, but we are hoping for a male teacher next year’ reflect deeper sexism and misogyny.”

“A few male staff appear to maintain outdated expectations of authority and respect, without upholding the same standards of professionalism or respect for female colleagues.”

“Over the years, I've had quite a lot of boys tell me they're 'not scared of me,' so they don't have to do what I say. I tell them it's sad they have to be scared of someone to respect them. Again, I don't feel like they would say this to a male teacher.”

Sexism and gender-based discrimination cont.

One participant also noted how demonstrations of sexism and gendered discrimination created an enabling culture within the school, granting permission for students to emulate what they observe in staff culture:

“

“If male staff show misogyny, this has the biggest impact on the school. This gives licence for the students to behave in the same way.”

Students

Respondents also highlighted the increasingly concerning nature of student-perpetrated gendered violence. Accounts ranged from persistent undermining of women's authority to explicit threats of sexual and physical violence directed towards women and girls. Teachers frequently described these incidents being minimised because they were 'low-level'; a label that tends to ignore the broader systemic patterns and the accumulative effects of this behaviour. These findings suggest that sexism in schools is not confined to individual incidents but is embedded across multiple levels of the education system. They reinforce the need for responses that move beyond behaviour management towards systemic, gender-transformative approaches that address the organisational and cultural conditions in which sexism and misogyny are produced and sustained.

We include a few examples of student-perpetrated gendered violence below, noting that there are *many hundreds* of comments that also represent the same experiences. Of note, too, is the frequent reference to boys' adopting a 'pack mentality' in their interactions with women staff:

“

“Jokes about gender roles e.g. the kitchen; inappropriate sexualised remarks about female bodies, including specifically about peers and/or staff; making sexual noises in the classroom, particularly those of female staff including during explicit whole class instruction; calling out or making noises repeatedly over teachers whilst they are talking in 1:1 or small group situations, especially when addressing behaviour; standing over and emphasising their height in an attempt to intimidate or make staff uncomfortable; references to Andrew Tate; stalking, intimidation and harassment of female staff, both in and out of school; gaslighting comments when behaviour is addressed; pack mentality when behaviour is addressed.”

Students cont.

“

“Casual sexism. Male students intimidating female teachers. Hostile attitudes toward discussions of women's rights and social equity. Increase in behaviour concerns directed especially at young female staff.”

“There have been incidents involving male students in years 5 and 6 threatening female students with sexual violence and speaking to them in sexist/misogynistic ways.”

“Pack mentality. Derogatory comments toward females focusing on appearance and worth.”

“There has been a definite increase. So many male students think nothing of speaking about women in a derogatory way in front of another female. The language and intent and profanity, misogyny has risen to a horrific level among male students at my workplace.”



Finding 2. The manosphere has influenced student behaviour in Australian schools

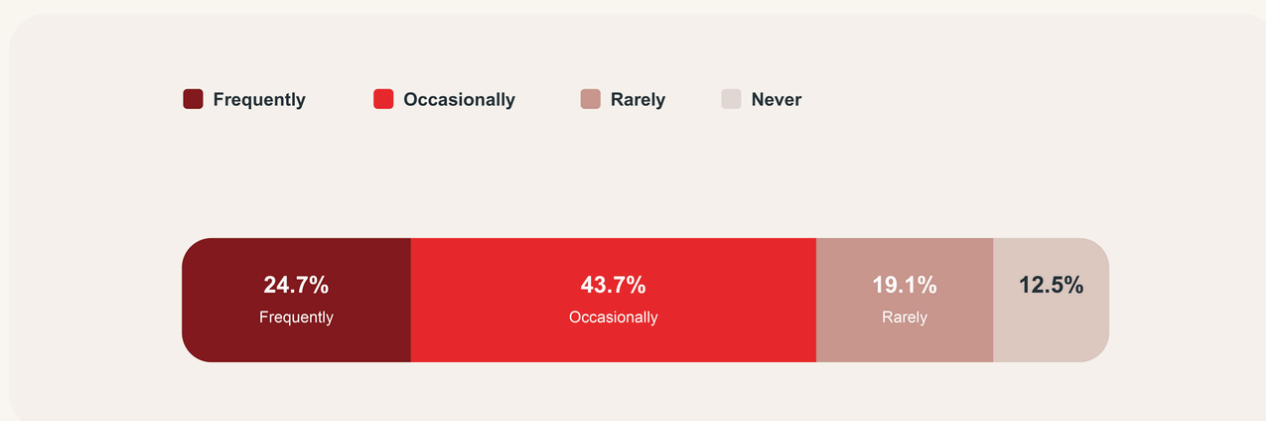
The manosphere has become a pervasive influence in Australian schools. An overwhelming 95% of teachers who completed the survey reported that they believe their students view manosphere content, demonstrating clear perceptions of the widespread reach of online misogynistic content and highlighting the extent to which these digital influences are entering school environments. Across the thousands of responses, teachers consistently described shifts in the nature, frequency and intensity of students' gendered behaviours, with many explicitly linking these changes to students' exposure to online misogyny and, specifically, content emerging from the manosphere. These findings align with a growing body of international research documenting the influence of manosphere content on young people's attitudes and behaviours.

KEY STATISTICS

- **95% of teachers** believe that at least some of their students access manosphere content
- 1 in 4 believe above **50% of their students** access manosphere content
- In the past 12 months, **87.5%** of teachers have **noticed the influence of manosphere ideas** on student attitudes and behaviour.
- 1 in 4 teachers have **frequently** noticed the manosphere's influence on students' attitudes and behaviour.

Teachers' observations on the prevalence of young people's access to manosphere content revolve around the following broad themes: First, they described manifestations of 'new forms' of sexism and misogyny, which they attributed to online and digital cultures and exposure to right-wing political figures. Second, the sexism is observed in two modes of delivery: explicit, overt behaviours (such as e.g., physical intimidation of female teachers, arguing with female teacher authority, gendered slurs) and implicit, subtle behaviours (e.g., ignoring female teachers, dismissing female teacher authority, sexist jokes). Third, teachers perceived that the behaviours are reinforced by parental attitudes (e.g. perceived permissive parenting or the modelling of sexist attitudes at home) and inadequate institutional responses.

Figure 11 shows how frequently teachers reported noticing the influence of manosphere content on their students' attitudes and behaviour over the past 12 months. The manosphere's influence was widely observed: more than two-thirds of teachers (68.4%) reported noticing it either frequently (24.7%) or occasionally (43.7%). A further 19.1% reported rarely noticing its influence, while only 12.5% said they had never observed it. This means that almost nine in ten teachers (87.5%) had noticed the influence of manosphere content on student attitudes and behaviour to some degree in the previous year.

FINDING 2 CONT.**Figure 11.** In the past 12 months, how often have you noticed the influence of 'manosphere' content in your students' attitudes and behaviour?**IN THEIR OWN WORDS: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE INFLUENCE ON THE MANOSPHERE ON STUDENT BEHAVIOUR**

"If we are seeing an increase in distress caused to our female students (and staff) via the influence of the 'manosphere' at school, I can only imagine how bad it is for our girls when they are not at school. We can only control what we can see and hear at school, I'm very concerned about what they are subjected to outside of our gates. I'm also concerned for the overall influence this will have on both our boys and girls and the acceptance by many families that this is ok or just a phase."

OVERVIEW

The teacher data in this section reveal an extraordinary degree of consistency in their accounts of changing student behaviour, with respondents across jurisdictions, school sectors and career stages describing an escalation in both the frequency and severity of sexist and misogynistic attitudes. While many teachers emphasised that sexism had long been present in schools, they identified a marked shift in recent years towards more overt expressions of misogyny, increasingly linked to students' engagement with online influencers, manosphere content and broader digital cultures.

OVERVIEW CONT.

Across the data, teachers described behaviours ranging from the normalisation of abusive and degrading language, challenges to women's authority and expressions of misogynistic political beliefs, through to threats of sexual and physical violence directed at women and students.

Importantly, respondents repeatedly observed that these behaviours were gendered: women were disproportionately targeted, men were afforded greater authority and respect, and girls were increasingly subjected to sexist abuse and harassment. Collectively, these findings suggest that teachers are witnessing the expression of committed misogynistic beliefs, with profound implications for teacher safety, student wellbeing and school cultures.

Shifts in behaviour

Teachers' accounts identified an escalation in the frequency, visibility and intensity of sexist and misogynistic behaviours among students, as well as changes in the age range, with many reporting that these behaviours are becoming more frequent among younger students. Teachers also described more collective, confident and openly expressed forms of hostility directed at women teachers and peers. These accounts suggest that misogynistic language and behaviours are increasingly normalised within some student peer cultures, with teachers reporting that students appear less concerned about social and/or disciplinary responses. Several teachers also described gendered challenges to their authority, including attempts by boys to undermine, control or question their legitimacy as educators. These incidents were described as leading to distress, burnout and teachers considering leaving the profession:

“

“As a teacher, I've noticed a real shift in the attitudes of some boys at school — there's a growing sense of disrespect towards women and girls that feels different from what I've seen before. It's not just teasing or immaturity; it's often fuelled by online influencers and social media messages that normalise misogyny and dismiss women's voices. I see it in the way some boys speak to female teachers or classmates, and in how they react when challenged. It's worrying and exhausting.”

“Junior secondary school students' classroom behaviour has gotten much worse. As a woman myself, I've had male students (in recent years) direct where I was allowed to stand in the classroom (when I was pregnant). After 18 years the behaviour of boys is too much for me to handle and I am burnt out and have left mainstream with no plans to return.”

“This issue is only getting worse in schools. There has been a big shift in the last 4/5 years in particular with the way female staff are spoken to by male students. It is confronting.”

Shifts in behaviour cont.

“

“Collective language and phrases that they all rally behind. There seems to be a real group mentality behind it and it is violent and hostile and explosive.”

“Sexist remarks are more brazenly stated. Students seem confident to voice sexist (usually misogynistic) remarks towards staff and peers without any fear of consequences.”

Recent accelerations

Teachers' accounts frequently located changes in student sexism and misogyny within a recent period of acceleration, with many respondents identifying the past four to five years as a significant turning point. Rather than describing misogynistic attitudes as entirely new, participants characterised this period as one in which beliefs and behaviours have become more visible, emboldened and openly expressed within school environments. Respondents linked these shifts to broader social and cultural changes, including the increased visibility of online influencers, political figures and manosphere narratives that have provided new languages and frameworks through which some students articulate hostility towards women and feminism.

Teachers also emphasised that these behaviours were increasingly enacted collectively, with groups of boys displaying shared language, performances and resistances towards women. Importantly, teachers' accounts also positioned these challenges within a broader context of gender backlash. Some teachers reflected on decades of progress towards gender equality, expressing concern that previously established social norms discouraging public expressions of misogyny appear to have dissolved or weakened. Others highlighted the role of digital cultures in accelerating these shifts, noting that online misogynistic figures and narratives can be encountered by students from a young age, while educators may lack the knowledge or resources to recognise their influences. Broadly, across the survey, teachers identify contemporary school-based sexism not simply as a continuation of longstanding gender inequalities, but as a rapidly evolving form of gendered harm shaped by wider cultural and technological formations.

The accounts below provide some examples of teachers' reflections on shifts in attitudes and behaviours in recent years, while others reflect on current levels of hostility in comparison to the beginning of their careers:

“

“In my 35 years of teaching things for women were getting better - now they are getting worse. It was already getting worse, but then Covid really marked an acceleration in problems for women.”

Recent accelerations cont.

“

“The shift in respect for female teachers feels marked. Having taught for over two decades you can see the shift in attitudes, but also the lack of connection young people have with an optimistic future. In an attempt to feel connected and gain control in their lives the scapegoat for young men has become women through their connection to male influencers. Anti-feminism can also be part of young women's rhetoric as they are indoctrinated in ultra-conservative agendas including the manosphere and anti-woke propaganda.”

“We have regressed a long way as far as respect for women is concerned- I've been teaching for 45 years and the progress we made with regards to at least it was seen as inappropriate to be misogynistic in public has now regressed-I didn't think this would happen in Australia.”

“Verbal comments and opinions have gotten worse over 12 months - political and influencer figures coming to the media.”

“The influence of Andrew Tate and manosphere content is real. Many teachers don't recognise it when it happens because they don't know that it is a thing. They might dismiss it as ‘bad behaviour’ but not understand that it is coming from online influences. Students at primary school make the Andrew Tate hand signal thinking it is a ‘cool thing’ and primary school teachers don't recognise it because they don't realise that the influence is there in primary school. Boys are being blatant, but teachers don't see what they are doing is a reflection of what they are being taught, because they don't know about it.”

Teachers also employed language that indicates things are worsening, increasing in frequency but also in severity and brazenness:

“

“More rampant sexual harassment, refusal to follow female teachers' instructions, belittling of both female staff and students.”

“Students are bolder in saying certain things and don't care because there are little to no consequences.”

“Increasing number of students believe that overt behaviours are acceptable, supported by many parents.”

“More students are now making comments more regularly particularly boys.”

Recent accelerations cont.

Teachers also often perceived that boys who demonstrate this behaviour have clear intent and awareness of what they are doing, both in the manner in which it is perpetrated and to whom. This is reflected in the finding of this survey that early career teachers, who are also more likely to be young women, are more likely to report frequently encountering gendered violence in their school:

“

“More of the male students move around the school in packs and yell or talk over female staff when they attempt to talk to them. This has happened in the past but it is now to the point where female staff do not engage with them and may walk past behaviour that should be corrected because it is not worth dealing with them.”

“Complete lack of respect for female teachers from both male and female students. Male teachers fare much better from my observation”

“In my experience, mostly boys are showing misogynistic attitudes, and I have seen an increase in poor behaviour and sexist and inappropriate comments towards female teachers.”

Abusive and misogynistic language

Teachers' accounts highlighted the central role of gendered and misogynistic language in shaping their experiences of sexism in schools. Respondents described a pattern of male students using derogatory terms, sexualised insults and language intended to demean, intimidate or undermine women and girls, including women teachers and peers. Teachers described the routine use of misogynistic expressions and gendered forms of disrespect as part of broader emergent cultures of rejecting women's authority. Some teachers also reported more overt forms of threatening and sexually aggressive language, including references to sexual violence, suggesting that misogynistic discourse can operate along a continuum from everyday verbal harassment in the classroom through to creating feelings of intimidation and a lack of safety:

“

“I had male students threatening to rape the female students consistently. They would play ‘rape marry kill’ and used my own name frequently in their ‘game.’”

“Undermining and ignoring female staff of yard duty. Language towards women as ‘crazy’ and ‘screaming’ when setting behaviour expectations.”

Abusive and misogynistic language cont.

“

“Students saying ‘good girl’ to teachers.”

“Making comments about female teachers/staff and language like ‘bitch’, ‘witch’ and ‘slut.’ Also threatening behaviour, getting in the face of female staff, refusing to follow directions from female staff but listen when a male teacher intervenes.”

“Students actively not responding to any women teachers. Actively calling women names, abusive language, and misogyny. i.e. calling women ‘trans bitch’ or other names.”

“Boys in particular ages 12-15 will ignore, confront or intimidate female staff.”

“As a female teacher I have noticed an increase in disrespectful behaviour from male students, presenting as not listening to my instructions, responses such as ‘I don't need to listen to you’, ‘bitch’ being said as I walk away or under their breath etc.”

Airing problematic views

Teachers described an increase in students openly expressing misogynistic and gender-conservative beliefs in classroom discussions and everyday interactions. Respondents reported that boys were increasingly willing to voice opinions about women's perceived inferiority, traditional gender roles and ‘men's rights’, often drawing on the language and narratives of online influencers and broader political and cultural debates. These accounts included references to concepts such as ‘alpha males’ and ‘tradwives’ and other manosphere-adjacent terminology, suggesting that students are not only adopting the vocabulary of online misogynistic cultures but also using it to legitimise discriminatory attitudes towards women, LGBTQIA+ people and gender equality. Several teachers also observed that these views were expressed with increasing confidence and normality, indicating a shift from private attitudes to public performances of misogynistic identity. Collectively, these responses suggest that schools are becoming sites where broader online and political gender discourses are reproduced, contested and enacted through students' everyday conversations and interactions.

“

“Increase in verbal misogyny and transphobia, as well as homophobia. Increase in ‘tradwife’ speak amongst male students. Increase in sexual touch ‘as a joke’ between males, and then refusal to separate because they aren't gay and they're ‘allowed to touch their friends.’”

Airing problematic views cont.

“

“Talk from them and airing views from them about influencers, political figures and other spokespeople who denigrate women. One student threatened to punch me in the face.”

“In past years, misogynistic behaviour increased. It's at a similar level now to what it was post-Andrew Tate. Making comments about women's opinions not mattering, or their unsuitability for certain tasks, or suggesting prejudice because of someone's female sex.”

“Male students are far more vocal about their beliefs and 'men's rights', which are steeped in misogyny and sexism.”

“I teach year 4 and I have noticed this year students, particularly boys, believe women should be the ones responsible for cleaning, cooking, raising their children while holding a full time role.”

“Students are more prone to believing they are the alpha male by using and comparing themselves to sigma and saying they have rizz. Making comments about others not being the sigma or the top dog depending on their social status at school created by the students' hierarchy.”

Targeting teachers by gender

Teachers consistently described gender as a significant factor shaping students' interactions with staff, with women reporting they were more likely than their male colleagues to experience defiance, dismissal and hostility from boys. This was also captured in Finding 1, where women teachers described greater barriers to receiving respect and recognition from colleagues, students and parents. Respondents recounted students ignoring instructions from women while readily complying with identical requests from men, openly rejecting women's authority, and engaging in behaviours intended to undermine women's legitimacy as educators. Several teachers interpreted these actions as reflecting broader misogynistic beliefs rather than general behavioural issues. Alongside this differential treatment, respondents reported that women teachers were disproportionately subjected to sexist language, sexualised comments and coordinated harassment by groups of boys, often accompanied by the use of misogynistic rhetoric encountered online. These accounts suggest that women teachers are not simply experiencing more challenging student behaviour; rather, they are being targeted:

“

“Male students are speaking to female staff in an aggressive tone, often ignoring reasonable requests - they then do not show this same behaviour to male staff members”

Targeting teachers by gender cont.

“

“Less respect for female staff vs male in behaviour- even with the same approaches they instantly listen to males more. More inappropriate jokes- racism, homophobic and sexist jokes with little consequences. Visible audible dismissal/rejection of female staff to their faces when they appear to take classes.”

“Some male high school students have been behaving more respectfully towards male teaching colleagues than female teachers, doing things like misbehaving once male staff have left the room, turning their backs on female staff when given an instruction while lining up for class, or ignoring female staff when greeted by them out in public. When confronted about this behaviour, a group of male students agreed that they didn't behave that way around male teachers because the men were bigger and stronger than them, whereas the female teachers tended to be smaller. This seemed to have increased compared to 12 months earlier when they were still smaller than their female teacher.”

“Students feeling more confident when quoting misogynistic rhetoric they find online, such as beliefs that women don't deserve rights or control over their own bodies. Male students ignoring female teacher instructions but following when a male teacher gets involved. Male students forming groups and harassing female teachers about their disciplinary action. When the female or male teacher attempts to address it, the student dismisses the consequences.”

“Male students do not follow the instructions given by me (a female) and other female teachers but they do for male teachers. Increased discussions in front of girls, women and fem presenting people about sex, masturbation and pornography, including making moaning sounds to simulate sexual pleasure - usually more prevalent in young teens (11-14 years old). Using denigrating language such as bitch, slut.”

Towards girls

Teachers also described girls, as classmates and peers, as frequent targets of sexist and misogynistic behaviours and reported that gendered harassment had become increasingly normalised within students' everyday interactions. Respondents recounted boys directing derogatory and sexualised insults towards girl classmates, making casual references to sexual violence, threatening girls and using misogynistic language to demean and humiliate them. Several teachers expressed concern that these behaviours reflected not only hostility towards individuals in their classrooms but also broader beliefs about women's inferiority and the acceptability of targeting them for abuse, with some explicitly linking these attitudes to manosphere content. Participants also observed that casual misogyny was becoming embedded within peer cultures, shaping how boys interacted with girls and contributing to growing social divisions between boys and girls in schools.

Towards girls cont.

“

“Younger students are comfortable using misogynistic language without thought e.g. calling girls in class a ‘slut’ ‘whore’ because they won't share a highlighter.”

“Sexist remarks to female students eg 'slut. whore, bitch' and reference to boys regarding female traits being less than eg 'throw like a girl.’”

“With the rise of manosphere podcasts, more male students have felt empowered to voice their disdain for women and female peers.”

“They use sexist terms and casually talk about abuse against women. They threaten female peers.”

“Misogynist and sexist behaviour has become more common and embedded into culture. The way male students speak to female students has become increasingly demeaning even as they progress into the upper grades of high school. I am noticing more and more a lack of friendships between males and females because of this increase in casual misogyny in the classroom.”



Finding 3. Gendered violence profoundly harms teachers and students in Australian schools

Beyond documenting the prevalence of sexism and misogyny in schools, respondents identified substantial consequences for teacher wellbeing and workforce sustainability. Survey findings indicate that sexism and misogyny are experienced not only as interpersonal and behavioural issues but as significant psychosocial harms that affect educators' and school leaders' psychological wellbeing, professional confidence and intentions to remain in the profession. While the impacts extend to men participants as well, women teachers reported disproportionately greater effects on their work experiences and career intentions. Importantly, the findings also suggest that these outcomes are not inevitable. Alongside factors associated with greater intentions to leave, such as frequent experiences of student and staff misogyny and the perceived influence of the manosphere, clear organisational policies emerged as a protective factor, highlighting the critical role that school leadership and policy environments play in supporting teacher safety, wellbeing and retention.

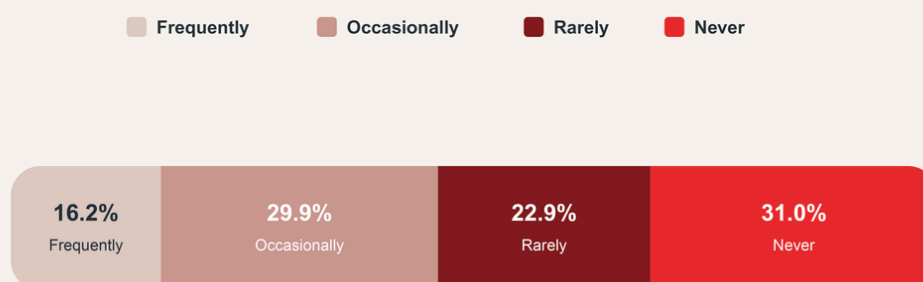
KEY STATISTICS

- **80% of respondents** say sexism or misogyny has a negative impact on students' wellbeing
- 77% report a negative impact on staff wellbeing
- 1 in 3 respondents say this behaviour causes them to ***occasionally consider leaving the profession***
- 16% of respondents say they ***frequently consider leaving*** because of this issue
- **Women are significantly *more likely* than men** to report that sexism or misogyny has made them consider leaving the profession
- Factors that uniquely predict teachers being more likely to consider leaving the profession because of misogyny are:
 - student misogyny frequency
 - staff misogyny frequency
 - increased staff misogyny
 - manosphere influence
 - and identifying as a woman teacher
- **Policy clarity uniquely predicts teachers being *less likely* to consider leaving** the profession because of misogyny

The impacts of sexism and misogyny are felt across school communities, with 80% of respondents reporting negative or very negative impacts on student wellbeing and 77% reporting negative or very negative impacts on staff wellbeing. Sexism and misogyny are also contributing to teachers considering leaving the profession. As per Figure 12, almost one in three respondents reported that these behaviours cause them to occasionally consider leaving teaching, while 16% said they frequently consider leaving because of the issue.

FINDING 3 CONT.

Figure 12. Considered leaving the profession because of sexism/misogyny

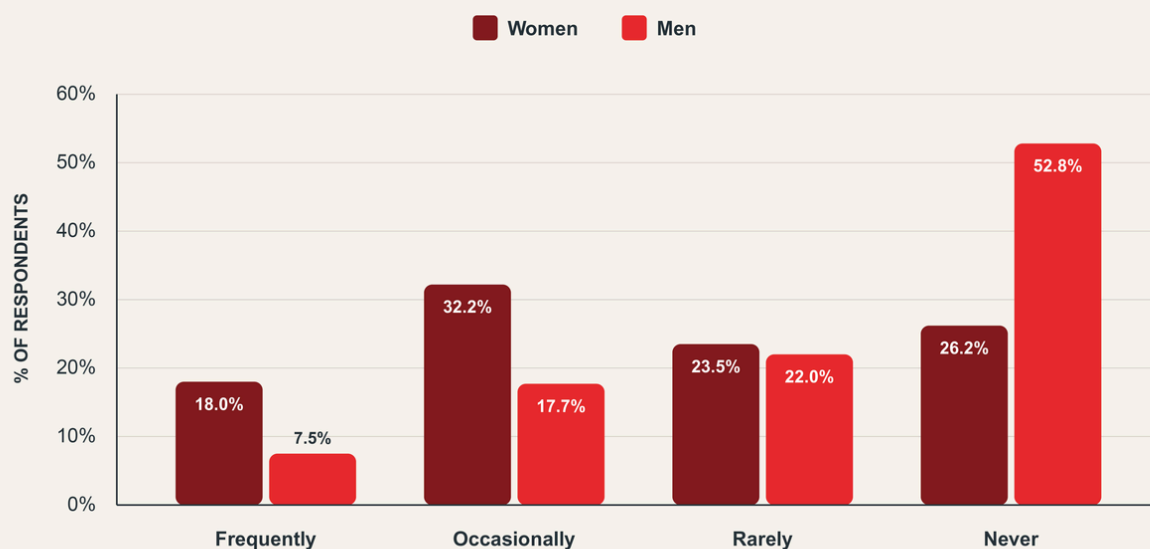


KEY STAT:

46% report frequently or occasionally thinking about leaving profession

The reported impact of sexism and misogyny on intentions to remain in the teaching profession was strongly gendered (Figure 13). Half of women respondents (50.2%) reported that sexism and/or misogyny in schools had made them consider leaving the profession either frequently (18.0%) or occasionally (32.2%). This compares with one quarter of men respondents (25.2%), including 7.5% who had frequently considered leaving and 17.7% who had occasionally done so. Conversely, more than half of men (52.8%) reported that sexism and misogyny had never made them consider leaving the profession, compared with just over one quarter of women (26.2%).

Figure 13. How often has sexism and/or misogyny in school made you consider leaving the profession? (by gender)



FINDING 3 CONT.

Further, as shown in Figure 14, women recorded an average frequency score of approximately 2.4 on the four-point scale (1 = never; 4 = frequently), compared with approximately 1.8 for men. Together, these findings suggest that sexism and misogyny have implications not only for teachers' experiences at work, but potentially for workforce retention, with this impact more pronounced among women.

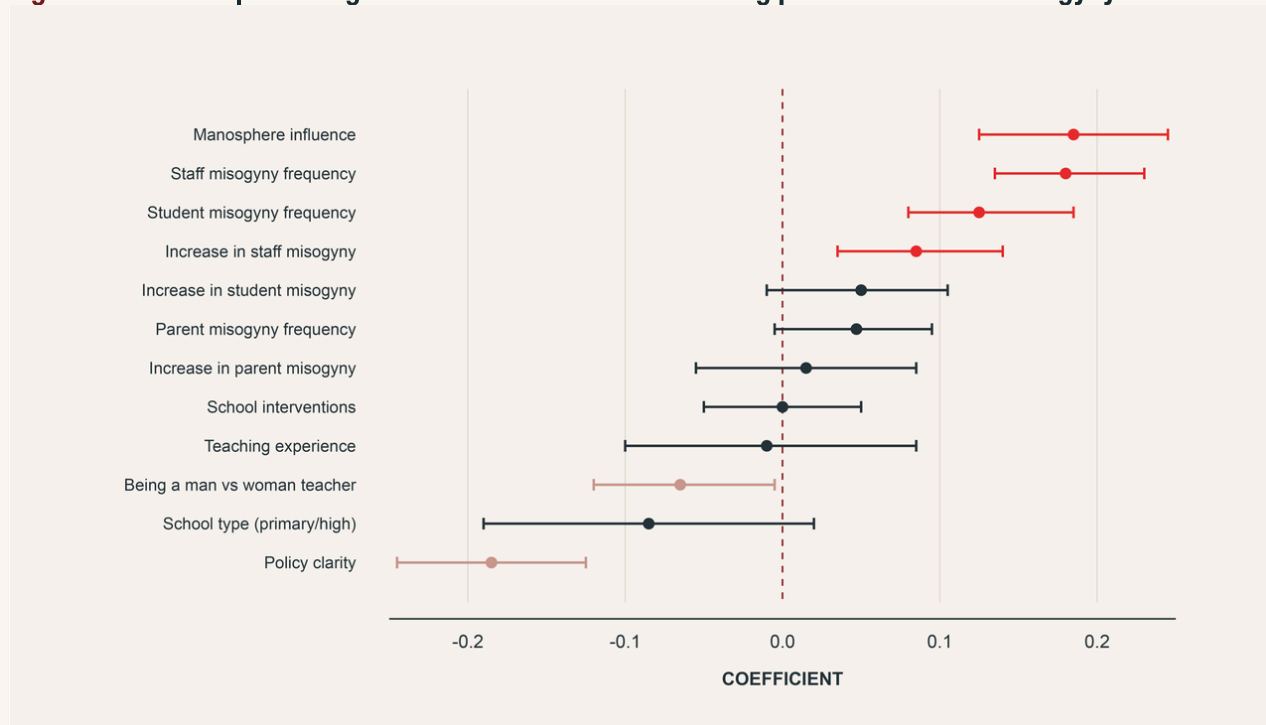
Figure 14. Considered leaving the profession because of sexism/misogyny, avg. score by gender



Note. Differences between men and women teachers on intention to leave the profession due to sexism/misogyny are significant, $p = .007$.

While survey findings first show the scale and pattern of the problem of gendered violence in schools, these results only tell part of the story. Many of these factors overlap. For example, women and men may be exposed to different forms of sexism and misogyny; primary and secondary teachers may report different sources of behaviour; and early career teachers may experience workplace pressures differently from more experienced teachers. Looking at one factor at a time can show important patterns, but it cannot tell us which factors remain associated with the outcome when the others are taken into account.

For this reason, we also used regression analysis (Figure 15). This allows us to examine which factors are most strongly associated with educators considering leaving the profession because of sexism or misogyny, while accounting for other relevant factors at the same time. In practical terms, this helps identify which aspects of the problem are have the strongest independent associations with educators considering leaving the profession. This matters because it moves the analysis beyond describing the prevalence of sexism and misogyny. It helps identify where intervention may be most needed. If some factors remain strongly associated with educators being more likely to have considered leaving even after other factors are taken into account, these factors should be treated as especially important warning signs for schools, systems and policymakers. Similarly, factors that remain associated with educators being less likely to consider leaving after accounting for other factors may indicate that these are key protective factors.

FINDING 3 CONT.**Figure 15. Factors predicting teacher consideration of leaving profession due to misogyny/sexism**

Note. Uniquely significant predictors of lower intention to leave are highlighted in tan, while uniquely significant predictors of higher intention to leave are highlighted in red. Predictors highlighted in black are non-significant in the model. Coefficients further away from '0' indicate a larger unique effect. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Model $R^2 = 0.33$. For more details see statistical analysis notes on pg 65-66.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: HARMS TO TEACHERS, HARMS TO THE PROFESSION

"I should be able to come to work and have a safe working environment. The increase in sexism and misogyny in schools has made many schools increasingly unhealthy and toxic workplaces. I would not be expected to put up with this behaviour in any other profession however because we work with children, we are expected to put up with it and just "Teach them its not appropriate." If I worked in another job, there would be consequences for these actions and I would feel safe."

Unsafe at work and unable to fulfil duties

Teachers described sexism and misogyny as having profound consequences for their sense of safety, wellbeing and capacity to perform their professional roles. Respondents reported feeling intimidated, demeaned and fearful at work, with some recounting experiences of sexual harassment, threats of sexual violence and persistent gender-based abuse that contributed to anxiety, panic attacks and declining mental health. Teachers also emphasised that the impacts extended beyond individual wellbeing, affecting their confidence to exercise authority, supervise students and engage fully in teaching and learning. Several respondents linked these experiences to burnout, workforce attrition and the broader teacher shortage, arguing that the highly gendered nature of the profession makes sexism and misogyny a significant occupational health and safety issue. Together, these accounts suggest that sexism and misogyny are not only harmful interpersonal behaviours but also undermine educators' ability to fulfil their professional responsibilities, compromising both staff wellbeing and the foundational educational work of schools.

Teachers frequently described feeling 'unsafe' or 'scared' when prompted to add additional comments to their survey responses:

“

“I am scared of male students harassing me.”

“Female staff feel unsafe on yard duty.”

“Women feeling demeaned, unsafe or incredibly self-conscious.”

Teachers also described encounters with students that they were expected to endure but considered beyond the realm of reasonable professional responsibility. They also argued that their core work, to teach their students, is compromised by their experiences of gendered violence:

“

“I cannot continue to fight against the double standard to protect my own rights or the rights of the male students I teach. I wish all my students to be able to learn and succeed without gendered bias at a personal and systemic level or harassment; however, this is no longer feasible in the current institution.”

“When you have students asking you if you want to be cuckolded, what can prepare you for having to then be served by that student on their shift at IGA that afternoon? Deplorable.”

“If our core business is teaching and learning, this is severely impacted by this kind of behaviour.”

“Definitely affects the level of respect and ability to teach.”

Unsafe at work and unable to fulfil duties cont.

Teachers also made frequent references to the impacts of this behaviour on teachers' physical and psychological wellbeing, as well as to their decisions to stay in the profession:

“

“Serious, considered & consistent action needs to be taken to address this situation. At best staff are uncomfortable or leave the profession, at worst it results in negative physical and mental impacts.”

“The rise of sexism and misogyny among men and boys is clearly contributing to teacher shortage, burnout and mental health issues. Due to teaching being a female dominated profession, the connection cannot be ignored.”

“Female staff have been sexually harassed by students and are starting to not want to come into work. Female students are also starting to avoid school based on how male students have been treating them.”

For me personally, I am having panic attacks and my anxiety has worsened significantly.”

Effects on mental and emotional health and wellbeing

Teachers described sexism and misogyny as having substantial impacts on their mental and emotional wellbeing, with many characterising these experiences as cumulative, exhausting and psychologically harmful. Respondents reported stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion and feelings of both betrayal and devaluation, with some requiring stress leave or reducing their workload as a result. Several participants reflected on the emotional toll of working in environments where caring, collaborative and nurturing approaches, qualities they associated with both their professional identity and effective teaching, are devalued in favour of more dominant or traditionally masculine expressions of authority. Others situated their experiences within broader patterns of systemic gender inequality, pointing to the persistent undervaluation of a workforce composed predominantly of women and to gendered barriers to recognition and leadership.

Collectively, these accounts suggest that the impacts of sexism and misogyny may extend beyond individual experiences, contributing to chronic psychological strain, diminished professional fulfilment and a sense of disconnection from a profession many respondents described as one they had once loved:

“

“Being the front line and bearing the brunt of misogyny is exhausting and erodes self worth.”

Effects on mental and emotional health and wellbeing cont.

“

“I am currently on stress leave and this is one of the many reasons why I will not return to work on a full-time basis.”

“There seems a significant lack of respect for teachers with more 'feminine' qualities such as being gentle, kind and nurturing. This makes behaviour management of some students exhausting and frustrating, and has ultimately made me decide to leave the classroom as my mental and physical health are being significantly impacted through the stress and mental and physical exhaustion of attempting to manage behaviours.”

“Teenage boys seem to behave best for 'dominant' male teachers and female teachers who take on a more masculine stance with more aggressive mannerisms. I didn't get into teaching to spend my days yelling at and trying to alpha teenagers, and to adopt such a facade would be both exhausting and insincere.”

“Please use this research to help the profession. We are drowning and it's impacting our kids.”

Harms to students

Teachers consistently described sexism and misogyny as having significant educational, social and emotional consequences for students, particularly girls. Respondents reported that girls were increasingly reluctant to participate in classroom discussions, ask questions or express opinions due to intimidation, harassment and fear of being mocked or challenged by boys in their classes. Many teachers observed declines in girls' confidence, sense of empowerment and willingness to engage publicly in learning, while others expressed concern that disrespectful and controlling behaviours from boys were becoming normalised within peer and dating relationships. Several accounts suggested that girls were internalising misogynistic treatment, withdrawing from school interactions, or accepting unhealthy relationship dynamics as ordinary. Teachers also highlighted broader educational impacts, noting that misogynistic disruptions could derail classroom discussions, discourage the teaching of gender equality and feminist topics, and create environments in which both students and staff felt constrained in what they could say or do. Overall, teachers' responses indicate that sexism and misogyny are not only harming individual students' wellbeing and safety but are also undermining girls' participation, voice and educational opportunities within school environments.

In particular, teachers reported that girls were becoming afraid or unwilling to participate in classroom learning or withdrawing from attending school altogether:

Harms to students cont.

“

“Girls unwilling to put their hands up in class.”

“Female students are intimidated and harassed. They are often afraid to participate in lessons.”

“Female students may withdraw from interactions or class discussions.”

“Girls are less likely to participate now and if they do they have to use strong language to tell the male students to stay quiet and let them speak. Women teachers know behaviour is wrong from male students but say nothing will be done so need to put up with it.”

“Female students are scared to speak out and express their opinions in class with males who chastise them. I am noticing students are very hesitant to participate in discussion these days whereas it used to be female students being quite eager to share ideas and answer questions. Female students appear angrier than in the past as well.”

“When discussing issues regarding female contribution to society or feminist ideas as a teacher you have to be very careful about how you word things so as not to provoke students to make Manosphere style commentary. This can create the desire to shy away from these topics altogether because of the potential past experiences where discussing them have disrupted classes significantly and created incidents requiring reporting.”

“Some female students are taking extended time away from school because of the initial behaviour.”

Teachers also reported concerns about girls' complacency in relation to their encounters with misogyny in their schools, as well as concerns about controlling relationship dynamics between young people in their schools:

“

“Girls accepting possessiveness from boyfriends.”

“Women/girls in class are okay with being treated with misogyny as this is seen as "normal" now. They do not retaliate and internalise making emotional regulation hard.”

“Girls are more likely to accept disrespectful or unhealthy relationship dynamics.”

Leaving teaching

Teachers' accounts revealed that experiences of gendered violence are contributing to decisions to leave, or consider leaving, the education profession. This was also an experience of some school principals and leaders. Respondents described a sense of exhaustion or disillusionment, with some indicating that the behaviours they experienced or witnessed had fundamentally altered their relationship with teaching. Several participants connected workforce attrition to the cumulative impact of misogynistic abuse, a perceived lack of consequences, and inadequate support. Importantly, respondents highlighted that this issue intersects with pressures on the profession, including workload and occupational violence, creating additional barriers to teacher retention. Some teachers reported changing careers, seeking alternative qualifications, or bringing forward retirement plans because they no longer felt able to continue in education. These accounts demonstrate that sexism and misogyny are not only affecting individual wellbeing but also contributing to broader workforce challenges by pushing experienced educators away from the profession and undermining the retention of skilled teachers:

“

“Please make the government do something to fix this. It makes me want to quit, and I used to love my job.”

“Thanks for looking into this very important issue. We are losing teachers and I don't think they understand the gravity of the misogyny and impacts of the abuse.”

“The lack of consequences for students and staff engaging in this behaviour is driving female teachers out of teaching on top of workload and occupational violence issues.”

“I am 18 months from retirement. I don't have the energy to return to education. I see a psychologist fortnightly. I am on anti-depressants. I am currently applying for invalidity retirement to avoid returning to being a school principal.”

“I am now studying psychology so I can leave the profession.”

Finding 4. More support, training and resourcing is required to respond to gendered violence in schools

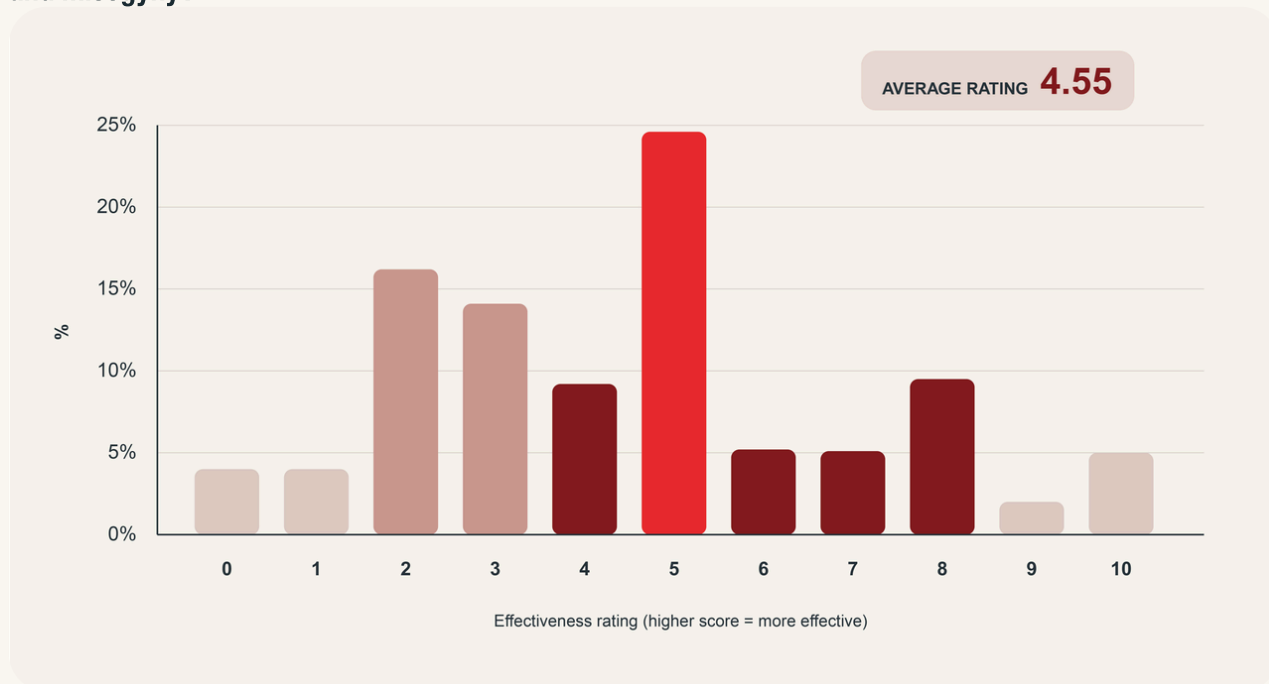
Teachers reported considerable variability in how sexism and misogyny were recognised and addressed when raised in the workplace, indicating that concerted efforts towards strengthening systems-level responses is required. Teachers' accounts suggest that system-level responses often fail to keep pace with the changing nature and severity of gendered violence, with many describing uncertainties about policies, inconsistent responses to incidents, and the systems' lack of capacity to effectively prevent and respond to sexism and misogyny. Importantly, the data highlight that system responses must acknowledge that gendered violence is perpetrated by people across the school community, not only by students: around half of respondents reported observing or experiencing sexism and misogyny from staff (50.4%) and parents (48.4%). Notably, exposure to gendered violence perpetrated by colleagues and parents/carers was more commonly described as occasional rather than frequent.

Importantly, policy clarity emerged as a potential protective factor within the regression analysis, with teachers working in schools with clearer policies being significantly less likely to consider leaving the profession because of sexism and misogyny. These findings suggest that organisational policy is not merely an administrative mechanism but may be critical component of teacher wellbeing, workforce retention and schools' capacity to respond effectively to gendered violence.

KEY STATISTICS

- 40% of teachers report their schools **don't have clear policies** on responding to sexism and gender bias
- Women **more likely than men** to say policies are *unclear* (45% of women say clear, 50% of men say clear)
 - Women are significantly *less likely* than men to report that policies addressing sexism and gender bias are clear
- Policy clarity is associated with teachers being *less likely* to consider leaving, and therefore, is a protective factor for retaining teachers in the profession.

Figure 16 shows considerable variation in teachers' assessments of the effectiveness of school interventions addressing sexism and misogyny, with responses spread across the full rating scale. The average effectiveness rating was 4.55 out of 10, with 5 out of 10 the most common individual response. This is a low average, and as the graph shows, despite variation, a substantial majority of teachers rated their school's interventions as 5 or less out of 10, indicating relatively low confidence in the effectiveness of existing responses. Ratings at the higher end of the scale were less common.

FINDING 4 CONT.**Figure 16.** How effective do you believe your school's interventions have been in addressing sexism and misogyny?**IN THEIR OWN WORDS: SCHOOLS' RESPONSES TO GENDERED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SCHOOLS**

"There is no respect, and proper consequences for sexist and misogynist behaviour are lacking. Many times, my boundaries at school are pushed so hard, and the students who were responsible did not take any responsibility/accountability for their actions. I love teaching. I have no other option/s or courage to try. But I will be happy to leave if given a choice. It is not worth it. Multiple times in this profession, I had to end up going to my GP, and being referred to psychologists, counsellors and specialists due to the very serious nature of this profession, which is becoming more and more sinister every day."

Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) implementation

Teachers generally viewed Respectful Relationships Education as an important component of preventing gendered violence in their schools, but expressed widespread concern about the quality, consistency and resourcing of its implementation. While many respondents described examples of schools introducing RRE lessons, external presenters, healthy masculinities initiatives or targeted programs, these efforts were frequently categorised as fragmented, one-off or insufficient to address the scale of contemporary misogyny. Participants emphasised that they felt students' continual exposure to online misogyny content often outweighed the impact of occasional school-based interventions, particularly where programs were not embedded across the curriculum or reinforced through broader school culture. Many teachers also reported lacking the confidence, professional learning, support and resourcing required to deliver RRE effectively, with some noting that the allocated implementation time or resources had not been used for their intended purposes. Others questioned whether students genuinely internalised program messages, or whether they were able to adopt a 'code-switching' position: appearing to endorse appropriate messages outwardly or in the classroom but expressing problematic views elsewhere.

Respondents highlighted examples of promising whole-school approaches that combined curriculum, leadership and community engagement, suggesting that RRE can contribute meaningfully to prevention when it is comprehensive, adequately resourced and supported by clear behavioural expectations and consequences. Teachers' accounts indicate that teachers see RRE as necessary, but requiring sustained commitment, support for their professional learning, as well as a whole-of-school implementation approach to effectively respond to contemporary sexism and misogyny. Teachers identified that piecemeal interventions or one-off engagements were not adequate responses to the profound impacts of the manosphere in their schools. Further, teachers also identified that whole-school engagement and willingness to provide comprehensive professional development to staff were essential:

“

“As well implemented as they may be, one-off interventions, such as a single day of education around respectful relationships, do not seem adequate to counteract the volume and extent of manosphere-type content students are exposed to on a daily basis.”

“We have presenters come in to speak to the students, but I am not convinced that this is having a long-term effect on student behaviours. We do have some Respectful Relationships lessons as part of our Homegroup program but many staff do not feel confident in teaching this material due to lack of training and support.”

“Whilst the majority of staff have had at least one hour of PD around Respectful relationships and the reason the curriculum resources and topics are so important I think that the quality of delivery is not there. We need PD on how to deliver this curriculum properly.”

Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) implementation cont.

“

“While I have advocated for RRE at my school and the DoE funded reasonable release time for professional development for teachers, sadly this release time wasn't used for other purposes and there is NO RRE program happening at this almost 1000 students state school.”

“Respectful Relationships has been administered on a piecemeal basis, but I have no data regarding its effectiveness.”

Teachers also identified that students learn to ‘comply’ with what is required of them in Respectful Relationships classes, as well as the need to address misogyny comprehensively at a whole-school level and ensure that consequences for misogyny are adequate:

“

“Students learn a language that complies with Respectful Relationships or similar programs but their use of the language is not genuine or is not reflected in subsequent actions.”

“School interventions and educational programs such as Respectful Relationships are important, but it is equally important that there are consequences for students who continue to demonstrate misogynistic behaviour.”

“Respectful Relationships and other programs have been running however outside influences seem to dominate student thinking and male students have ridiculed and ignored initiatives. Staff have set up a working group to look at misogyny in the school.”

“Male students are still accessing the redpill manosphere content. They do not take respectful relationships seriously outside of the classroom. They still pander to their other mates and do not understand the seriousness of misogyny and sexism.”

Structural failures

Teachers' accounts also highlighted that responses to sexism and misogyny are shaped by broader policy and structural conditions that can limit schools' capacity to both prevent and address gendered violence. Respondents described a gap between the seriousness of behaviours experienced and the organisational mechanisms available to respond, with many reporting that incidents were treated as isolated behavioural issues rather than recognised as organised manifestations of sexism, misogyny and workplace harm.

Structural failures cont.

Teachers expressed frustration that existing processes placed responsibility on individual staff members to manage repeated incidents through classroom-level interventions, documentation and informal escalation, without corresponding systemic action or accountability. Teachers also disclosed that gender-based harms were often minimised and normalised, unlike other common behavioural issues within their schools.

These accounts indicate that addressing sexism and misogyny requires more than individual teacher resilience or isolated programs. Instead, it becomes clear that this problem requires structural reforms and clearer policy frameworks:

“

“This is an endemic issue. No-one should be legally and repeatedly sexually harassed in the workplace and students should not be exposed to the normalisation of this treatment of women.”

“I am leaving at the end of this year for a position in a girls only Catholic school. It breaks my heart to leave public education I have championed for two decades...”

“I have only once felt overwhelmed by the sexist/misogynistic attitudes and behaviours of students. I logged the incident on Edusafe recognising the potential for psychological harm and needing to send a clear message about what behaviours/actions I was not going to ignore/allow.”

Conclusion

Across these findings, teachers' perspectives demonstrate that gendered violence is experienced as a pervasive issue within school communities, with student-perpetrated sexism and misogyny widely perceived to be escalating, and harms extending across staff and student wellbeing, educational participation and workforce sustainability. Respondents described a shift towards more visible, collective and emboldened expressions of gendered violence, including abusive language, the targeting of women, the denigration of girls and the public expression of manosphere-influenced ideas. These behaviours are identified not as isolated incidents but as part of broader cultural shifts shaped by online misogynistic content, gender backlash and changing norms around acceptable expression of ideas and views.

Conclusion cont.

Importantly, teachers' experiences highlight that the harms of sexism and misogyny are compounded by a perceived lack clear policies and adequate support structures. While Respectful Relationships Education and prevention initiatives were viewed as essential, teachers consistently emphasised that sustained support, investment and commitment were required. The findings position gendered violence in Australian schools as an area of urgent policy attention, requiring systemic responses that recognise the experiences of teachers, leaders and education support personnel, protect student safety, and support the retention of women in teaching.

Gendered violence in Australian schools continues to be treated as isolated and rare occurrences within separate schools. This positioning obscures its systemic nature, its embeddedness in school cultures, as well as the opaqueness of policies designed to support staff safety. Both the scale and consistency of teachers' experiences, taken alongside the extensive body of scholarly literature, reveal a critical gap between the realities teachers face in their classrooms daily, and the systems that are designed to respond and protect. It is unreasonable to expect schools to respond to these harms through the efforts of individual teachers or through isolated programs. The data in this survey compel a stronger and more transformative response: addressing gendered violence in schools must be treated as a core responsibility of education systems and a national priority for preventing violence before it occurs.



04.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on these findings, the report identifies a set of recommendations for addressing the problems and harms raised by Australian teachers. **These recommendations are intended as a foundation for dialogue between Australian Governments and other stakeholders to support the development of agreed priorities and next steps.** These recommendations recognise that preventing and responding to gendered violence requires coordinated action across workplace health and safety, education policy and practice, school resourcing, and the broader digital environments in which young people are increasingly socialised.

The report makes the following overarching recommendation, supported by six specific actions addressing the ongoing and systemic harms identified in this research.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION

Overall, AEU members' responses to the survey indicate the severity and breadth of gendered workplace hazards and harms in public education workplaces. A significant and sustained response by government, with a preeminent emphasis on workers' right to safe work, is required to address the concerns reported in this research.

6 further recommended areas for action are identified below:

Recommendation 1. That Australian Governments urgently address workplace health and safety (WHS) requirements and establish effective policy and protocols to support the education system.

Recommendation 2. That Australian Governments act to strengthen the gender safety of the teaching profession by addressing structural sexism through fair pay and conditions, secure and flexible employment and greater gender equity in leadership

Recommendation 3. That Australian Governments strengthen the regulatory response to psychosocial hazards

Recommendation 4. That Australian Governments ensure adequate access to workers' compensation for teachers who have experienced workplace sexual and gender-based harassment and other forms of gendered occupational violence.

Recommendation 5. That Australian Governments adequately resource whole-school implementation of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) that is embedded across curriculum, hip, policy, professional learning and school culture.

Recommendation 6. That Australian Governments must urgently and effectively regulate social media platforms to intervene in the significant harm that occurs as a result of their business models. This work should be undertaken in collaboration with the eSafety Commissioner to provide best practice advice and implementation tools to ensure online safety.



RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.



Recommendation 1. That Australian Governments urgently address workplace health and safety (WHS) requirements and establish effective policy and protocols to support the education system.



Recommendation 2. That Australian Governments act to strengthen the gender safety of the teaching profession by addressing structural sexism through fair pay and conditions, secure and flexible employment and greater gender equity in leadership.

Women workers' capacity to respond to gendered hazards and harms is strengthened by fair pay and conditions, and secure and flexible employment. Teachers' diminishing relative wages and increasing employment precarity are intensifying gendered harms and hazards experienced at work.

The composition of the teaching profession shows a feminised workforce with a vastly disproportionately male leadership, which indicates issues within the profession relating to structural sexism. Addressing the gender gap in educational leadership is a supportive action towards advancing gender equality, challenging structural sexism and strengthening gender safety across the teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.***Recommendation 3. That Australian Governments strengthen the regulatory response to psychosocial hazards.***

Recent reforms that recognise psychosocial hazards including gender-based and sexual harassment and gendered violence must be supported by appropriate regulatory action including increased enforcement activity for non-compliant employers. Workers, health and safety representatives, and their unions must be supported and empowered to investigate, prosecute and stop work in response to gendered hazards and harms.

***Recommendation 4. That Australian Governments ensure adequate access to workers' compensation for teachers who have experienced workplace sexual and gender-based harassment and other forms of gendered occupational violence.***

This should include:

- Enhancing support services available to teachers that have suffered a psychological injury to enable them to understand and navigate workers' compensation schemes.
- Improving the capacity of workers' compensation frameworks to respond to gendered occupational violence.

Workers' compensation bodies must have specialist capacity to process claims relating to gendered occupational violence in a victim-centric and trauma-informed manner. Further, compensation must accurately and adequately reflect the harms and impacts of gendered occupational violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.

Recommendation 5. That Australian Governments adequately resource whole-school implementation of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) that is embedded across curriculum, leadership, policy, professional learning and school culture.

The Australian Government should invest in strengthening the education workforce to deliver high-quality RRE as a core feature of schooling, acknowledging it as a key prevention strategy. Teachers should be properly supported via initial teacher education and workload management to have foundational knowledge of RRE and support its implementation alongside appropriately resourced support and specialist staff.

There is also a need for the creation of a nationally consistent quality assurance framework to ensure that programs delivered in schools are evidence-informed, aligned with best practice violence prevention and consistent with schools' legal obligations under child safety, anti-discrimination and occupational health and safety legislation. This includes the need to require any external providers to offer a quality and independently evaluated evidence base for their work with young people.



Recommendation 6. That Australian Governments must urgently and effectively regulate social media platforms to intervene in the significant harm that occurs as a result of their business models. This work should be undertaken in collaboration with the eSafety Commissioner to provide best practice advice and implementation tools to ensure online safety.

This regulation must work towards reducing and preventing young people's exposure to misogynistic, violent and extremist content online. Reforms should include stronger accountability for the design and recommendation of harmful content through platforms' recommender systems and algorithms.



NOTES

NOTES ON STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Observed statistics

Descriptive statistics are reported as observed values from the original (non-imputed) dataset. For categorical survey items, we report frequencies and valid percentages; for items measured on continuous 0-10 scales (for example, policy clarity and intervention effectiveness), we report means (M) and standard deviations (SD). Because respondents could leave individual questions unanswered, percentages are calculated on the number of valid responses to each item. The base (n) therefore varies from item to item and is reported alongside the relevant statistics; where results are broken down by respondent characteristics, group bases reflect respondents who answered both items.

Initial descriptive analyses were conducted within Qualtrics, the platform through which the survey was administered. Responses to each item were first tabulated to produce frequency distributions and summary statistics, establishing an overall profile of the sample. Key to this profile were the frequency and perceived change of sexist or misogynistic behaviour which were then examined for differences across key respondent characteristics. Patterns identified at this stage informed the selection of the group comparisons presented in this report and formally tested in the inferential analyses described below.

Items measuring how often respondents had observed or experienced sexist or misogynistic behaviour were rated on a four-point scale (never, rarely, occasionally, frequently). Items measuring perceived change over the previous 12 months offered four response options (increased, decreased, stayed the same, unsure); where these items are summarised numerically, responses were coded 0 = decreased, 1 = stayed the same and 2 = increased, with 'unsure' responses excluded. Descriptive statistics throughout this report represent observed values, while inferential statistics, described below, represent pooled values from the multiply imputed datasets.

NOTES ON STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CONT.

Inferential statistics

Intercept-only regression analyses were used to compare the average reported change in misogyny (in students, staff, and parents) to a value representing 'no change' (i.e., the middle of the scale).

Bivariate regression analyses were used to compare the means of groups against each other (e.g., women teachers versus men teachers) on a given variable (e.g., student misogyny frequency), and also to test the relationship between continuous variables (e.g., teaching experience predicting student misogyny change).

Multiple regression analyses were used to test whether scores on outcome variables (e.g., teachers having considered leaving the profession because of misogyny), can be predicted based on scores on predictor variables (e.g., policy clarity, manosphere influence, and binary gender). This analysis provides two important pieces of information: the amount of variance explained in the outcome variable by all the predictor variables together, and whether each predictor variable is uniquely related to the outcome variable when controlling the other predictor variables.

The effect sizes we provide are 'd' (for intercept-only and bivariate regression), which can be conventionally interpreted (Cohen, 1988) as 0.2 = small effect, 0.5 = medium effect, and 0.8 = large effect; ' R^2 ', which tells us how much variance in the outcome variable is explained by all the predictor variables in a regression model together; and ' β ', which tells us the relative importance of the individual predictor variables in a regression.

Handling of missing data for inferential statistics

A significant Little's test suggested that data were not MCAR. Survey progress predicted missingness for several variables, suggesting that missing data were MAR. Accordingly, missing data were handled for all inferential analyses by employing multiple imputation using chained equations (MICE, 20 imputations). Results were compared to those using listwise deletion. Findings were generally consistent across approaches in terms of direction and significance, suggesting that results are robust to the handling of missing data. Descriptive statistics reported for these analyses (M, SD, d) represent observed values in the original dataset, while reported inferential statistics represent pooled values from the imputed datasets.

NOTES ON STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CONT.

Regression model: Teacher considering leaving the profession because of misogyny

- Linear multiple regression
 - Predictor variables:
 - Student misogyny frequency
 - Staff misogyny frequency
 - Parent misogyny frequency
 - Student misogyny change
 - Staff misogyny change
 - Parent misogyny change
 - Manosphere influence
 - Policy clarity
 - Intervention effectiveness
 - Binary gender
 - Primary/High School
 - Teaching experience
 - Model fit
 - $R^2 = 0.33$ (large effect size), $F(12, 348.99) = 27.68$, $p < .001$
 - Significant predictors:
 - Student misogyny frequency (predicts significantly higher intention to leave, $\beta = 0.13$, $p < .001$)
 - Staff misogyny frequency (predicts significantly higher intention to leave, $\beta = 0.18$, $p < .001$)
 - Increased staff misogyny (predicts significantly higher intention to leave, $\beta = 0.09$, $p = .002$)
 - Manosphere influence (predicts significantly higher intention to leave, $\beta = 0.19$, $p < .001$)
 - Being a man rather than a woman teacher (predicts significantly lower intention to leave, $\beta = -0.06$, $p = .041$)
 - Policy clarity (predicts significantly lower intention to leave, $\beta = -0.18$, $p < .001$)
 - Non-significant predictors:
 - Parent misogyny frequency ($p = .073$)
 - Student misogyny change ($p = .117$)
 - Parent misogyny change ($p = .669$)
 - Perceived intervention effectiveness ($p = .348$)
 - Primary/High school ($p = .136$)
 - Teaching experience ($p = .860$)

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