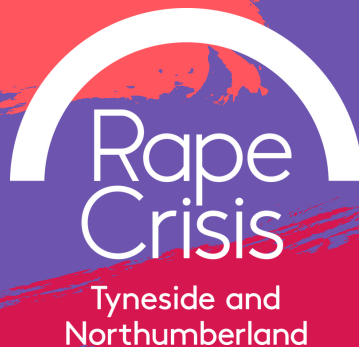




Executive Summary

"Roll down your skirt"

**How schools teach victim-blaming and
rape culture through uniform checks**



We have been informed that young women and girls in schools across Tyneside and Northumberland are having their school uniforms 'policed' in a sexist and sexualised manner. So we established a Young Women's Steering Group to research the issue. We have gathered the experiences of young people across the North East, through interviews and a survey.

We, as a group of young women and girls and Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland activists and staff, are concerned to hear the experiences of young women and girls whose uniforms are frequently 'policed' in a sexist and/or sexualised way.

What do we mean when we say 'policed'?

We mean when somebody in a position of power comments on a person's school uniform in a negative way. This can be for many reasons, such as they think it is not in line with their interpretation of uniform policy. Sometimes young women and girls might be asked to change, sometimes they will receive a punishment/consequence.

35% of young women and girls told us that the last time their uniform was 'policed', they were told that they are distracting boys in school. 24% were told that they were distracting male teachers.

24% of these young women and girls were placed into isolation. 6% were sent home to change.

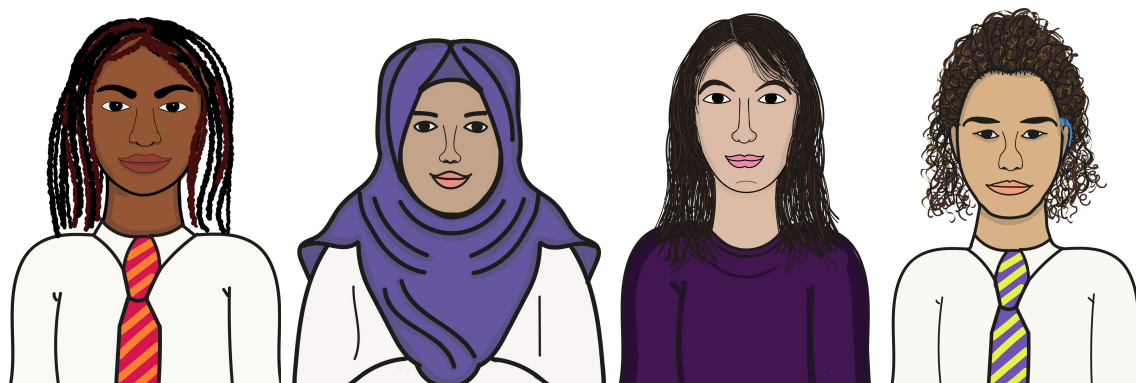


We propose that there are three key, interlinking concerns with regards to policing young women and girls' uniforms in a sexist and/or sexualised way:

1. The impact on girls' education
2. The impact on mental health and self-consciousness, in the short and long term
3. The links to rape culture.

We know that schools do not have uniform policies that are intended to be sexist or aimed at sexualising young women and girls. We also know that teachers, like most people in our society, have internalised rape culture and this can at times leak into how school uniforms are policed.

We want to help schools to make changes that will have a positive impact on the young people in their schools. We will run a reporting/flagging system which will ask young women and girls to tell us about any incidents of sexist and/or sexualised school uniform policing that they experience.



The experiences of some young women and girls who have had their uniforms policed in schools across the North East are concerning. There is clearly a hidden curriculum in schools, and part of this teaches young women and girls that they must dress in a traditionally 'modest' way to avoid blame for any sexual harassment or assault from others (men). This continues despite it being known that around 1 in 3 women and girls will experience sexual violence at some point in their lives, and that this sexual violence is not caused by somebody's skirt, but a perpetrator seeking power and control over (usually) his victim.

We are concerned at the casual and pervasive manner in which young women and girls' uniforms are policed in schools, which is impacting on their mental health and education, as well as their thoughts about who they are as a woman in the world. As is always the case, women of colour and non-majority religions will also face additional barriers to those they face as a woman, even in school.

We propose that school leaders must take note of the experiences of and impact on young women and girls caused by school uniform policing. These experiences and the unwritten rules being enforced in schools are all the more concerning given the upcoming changes to sex and relationships education in schools. We question whether educating young people on healthy relationships and consent is not futile, if gendered expectations and punishments are thrust upon students as soon as they leave the lesson and enter the corridors where their appearance will be judged.



"Roll Down Your Skirt!"

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