

Violent Misogyny as an Extremist Ideology in the UK

A Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy Briefing

by Robyn Harris and Marissa Conway

The Issue

Violent misogyny is one of the most pervasive and poisonous issues in contemporary society that affects the everyday lives of women and girls all over the world. Misogyny refers to the hatred of women due to their gender identity; gender is, in fact, the most common cause of hate crime in the UK (Fawcett Society, 2019). Misogyny manifests in various forms including physical intimidation and abuse, sexual harassment and rape, and domestic abuse and femicide. It is embedded in societal structures and institutions as much as in individuals across the UK. Misogyny affects the decisions women make as well as influences the way that women think about themselves from childhood to adulthood (Engender, 2019). It is also seen in tandem with all other types of hate crime. Muslim women, for example, are more likely to be attacked than Muslim men, with both Islamophobia and misogyny cited as reasons why (Mason-Bish and Zempi, 2019; Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). Transmisogyny, defined as "the belief that maleness and masculinity are superior to femaleness and femininity" (Serano, 2016), means that trans women experience misogynistic violence both because they are women and because they are transgender.

Despite the continued rise of violent misogyny across the UK, misogyny is still not legally recognised as a hate crime (Blair, 2021; Hate Crime (Misogyny) Bill, 2021). What's more, there is growing evidence of the links between misogyny and extremist ideologies, exemplified by radical groups including the online incel (involuntary celibates) community, men's activist groups, and terrorist groups. In such a way, misogyny performs as a 'gateway' to normalise wider division and oppression in society, including the killing of women on the basis of sex or gender (Dias and Malji, 2019; Johnston and True, 2019). However, misogyny is not just a tool of violent extremism but is a form of violent extremism itself (ISD, 2021). In order for women to live freely and unconstrained by the fear of violence and harassment from men in the UK, misogyny must at minimum be made a hate crime and at best eliminated from society.

The Background

Incidents in the UK are legally classed as a hate crime where a person's race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or transgender identity is involved and has been the motivation for the crime, although the term 'hate crime' itself does not appear within UK legislation. In this way, hate crimes operate to reaffirm white supremacist and patriarchal social hierarchies (Perry, 2001). However, misogyny as a motivating factor is not currently included in this list, despite national campaigns from organisations such as Citizens UK and Women's Aid and support from politicians including UK Labour MP Stella Creasy, Liberal Democrat MP for Edinburgh Christine Jardine, and Home Office minister Baroness Williams. A Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice was set up in Scotland in early 2021 to investigate gaps in the law and to consider adding the characteristic of sex to the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) legislation at a future date. Meanwhile, the Hate Crime (Misogyny) Bill to make motivation by misogyny an aggravating factor in criminal sentencing and to require police forces to record hate crimes motivated by misogyny is currently under review in the House of Commons. As of March 2021, police are to record all crimes motivated by misogyny, although several police forces (including the Nottingham police force) have allowed women and girls to report cases of misogyny since 2014 (Samanani and Pope, 2020)

British feminist writer Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, recently published the book *Men Who Hate Women*, within which she delves deeply into the radical misogyny of the online networks, including 'alt-right' extremists, incels, men's rights activists, and pick up artists, that are having a profound impact on women's experiences of violence and harassment, particularly in the UK and the U.S. As Bates makes clear in a Channel 4 interview (2018), misogynistic crimes must be classified as hate crimes for two reasons: Firstly, because it will encourage wider reporting of misogyny-driven occurrences and secondly, because it will result in more data gathered about misogyny, thus enabling a wider understanding of where and why hate crimes occur. What the work of researchers such as Bates draws attention to is the fact that violent misogyny is an extremist ideology in and of itself (Johnston and True, 2019).

Key Recommendations

- The UK Government must develop robust hate crime legislation and classify misogyny as an extremist ideology. This includes passing the Hate Crime (Misogyny) Bill as well as implementing a statutory duty for schools, universities, public bodies, and public transportation providers to prevent, monitor, and report instances of misogyny and hate crime (Farhan and Sylvie, 2020).
- Schools and universities must develop programming to tackle sexism in educational institutions for staff, faculty, and students in order to ensure educational environments are free from misogyny.
- Legal definitions of misogyny must be comprehensive and intersectional so that policies and legislation adequately respond to how misogyny interacts with other motivations for hate crimes and violence.
- More research is needed on misogyny as an extremist ideology, including how misogyny intersects with disinformation, online harassment, and other types of hate crime. Data should be intersectionality disaggregated and any analysis must be trans-inclusive.
- Risk assessment tools for all forms of violent extremism need to consider issues of gender with an intersectional perspective and consciously look for underlying misogynistic attitudes and practices.
- The normalisation of misogyny must end. This includes taking individual responsibility to unlearn misogynistic beliefs and thought patterns as well as calling out instances of misogyny when it is safe to do so.

Numbers and Figures

- In a July 2021 CFFP poll, 66.4% of respondents who were students or recently graduated university¹⁰ said they or someone they knew had experienced misogyny at university. 81% said they were worried about experiencing or being in an environment with misogyny in their forthcoming career.
- 71% of women in Britain have taken precautions in order to avoid street harassment; this figure rises to 88% for women aged 18-24 (ActionAid, 2019).
- Only 1.7% of reported rapes in the UK lead to prosecution (Home Office, 2019).
- 53% of women aged 18-29 have been sent unsolicited images of a sexual nature, and 83% of women in the same age group consider online harassment as a great concern (Duggan, 2017).
- Hate motivated by gender occurs in 33.5% of all existing hate crimes (Samanani and Pope, 2020).
- 67.7% of trans people or nonbinary persons have said that they don't report hate crime where it occurs (Samanani and Pope, 2020).

Further Resources

Citizens UK was the first UK organisation to start campaigning for misogyny to be recognised as a hate crime campaign. View their work and resources [here](#).

Engender is Scotland's feminist foreign policy and advocacy organisation, and have played a crucial role in the Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice in Scotland. View their work and resources [here](#).

The Fawcett Society is dedicated to eliminating gender inequality and has campaigned in favour of the Hate Crime (Misogyny) Bill. View their work and resources [here](#).

References

ActionAid UK. (2019) 'Nearly Three in Four Women Were Harassed in Past Month'. ActionAid UK. <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/latest-news/three-in-four-women-uk-world-harassed-in-last-month>.

Bills.parliament.uk., (2021). Hate Crime (Misogyny) Bill. [online] Available at: <<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2718>> [Accessed 26 July 2021].

Channel 4 News, (2019). Sexism debate: Should misogyny be a hate crime?, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryxKuag1nEg&ab_channel=Channel4News

Díaz, P.C. and Valji, N., (2019). Symbiosis of Misogyny and Violent Extremism. *Journal of International Affairs*, 72(2), pp.37-56.

Duggan, Maeve. (2017) Online Harassment 2017. Pew Research Center.

Engender (2019). 16 Days of Action Hate Crime Briefing. [online] www.engender.org.uk. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-16-Days-of-Action-Hate-Crime-Briefing-26-11-2019.pdf>.

Farhan, S. and Sylvie, P., (2020). Overcoming everyday hate in the UK: Hate crime, oppression and the law. [online] Citizens UK. Available at: <https://citizensuk.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Academic_Report_V.6.pdf> [Accessed 26 July 2021].

Fawcett Society., (2019). New Fawcett data reveals gender is most common cause of hate crime for women. [online] Available at: <<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/new-fawcett-data-reveals-gender-is-most-common-cause-of-hate-crime-for-women>> [Accessed 26 July 2021].

Home Office (2020). Crime outcomes in England and Wales 2019 to 2020. [online] www.gov.uk. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/901028/crime-outcomes-1920-hosb1720.pdf.

ISD., (2021). Misogyny. [online] Available at: <<https://www.isdglobal.org/polarisation/misogyny/>> [Accessed 26 July 2021].

Johnston, M., and True, J., (2019). Misogyny & Violent Extremism: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism. [online] Monash University. Available at: <https://arts.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2003389/Policy-Brief_VE_and_VAW_V7t.pdf> [Accessed 26 July 2021].

Mason-Bish, H. and Zempi, I., (2019). Misogyny, racism, and Islamophobia: Street harassment at the intersections. *Feminist criminology*, 14(5), pp.540-559.

Perry, Barbara. (2001) *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes*. 1st Edition. New York: Routledge.

Samanani, D.F., Pope, S., (2020). Overcoming everyday hate in the UK: Hate crime, oppression and the law, Citizens UK.

Serano, J., (2016). *Whipping girl: A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Hachette UK.

Zempi, I. and Chakraborti, N., (2014). *Islamophobia, victimisation and the veil*. Springer.