



Sexism, Feminism & Equality: What Teens in Canada Really Think



**Girl
Guides**



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Introduction

By listening to teens in Canada and seeking to understand their everyday experiences, Girl Guides of Canada (GGC) has identified how young people feel about gender inequality and how this inequality impacts their lives. Overwhelmingly, teens support gender equality in principle and acknowledge that gender inequality persists in Canada. At the same time, many young people still hold harmful stereotypes about gender. These findings are based on a nationwide Ipsos survey of girls and boys primarilyⁱ aged 12-17 in September 2018 which asked key questions about attitudes and behaviours related to gender inequality, sexism and feminism.

GGC commissioned this survey because girls told us that sexism isn't just an issue that adults face. Given how quickly the world is changing for girls today, it is more important than ever to actively listen to girls' voices and understand their perspectives. At the same time, it is important to evaluate the extent to which these issues are gendered, and to understand the broader context in which girls' experiences are taking place. For these reasons, this research was conducted with both girls and boys. As the leading organization for girls and women in Canada, we need to understand what girls experience so that we can support girls to become everything they want to be. Society needs to make meaningful space for girls and actively listen to girls' voices, so that decision-makers, service providers and institutions can be responsive to girls' needs. We challenge adults in Canada – parents, teachers, coaches, family members, and neighbours – to listen to what girls are saying so that they can play their part, too.

This report focuses on findings related to young people's current experiences of inequality and sexism. Knowing that different identities like gender, race, class, ability, etc., overlap and lead to different experiences of inequality, the survey was distributed to a diverse group of young people. Survey respondents included a range of ethnicities, household incomes, and geographic regions and communities to reflect the overall population and a range of lived experiences. We asked these young people where and how gender inequality takes place in their lives. In the process, we uncovered a disconnect between support for gender equality in principle and the persistence of harmful gendered stereotypes.

ⁱ The majority of statistics cited in this report are based on research with 12- to 17-year-olds in Canada. However, some research on teens' summer jobs is also referenced, from a survey of 12- to 18-year-olds.





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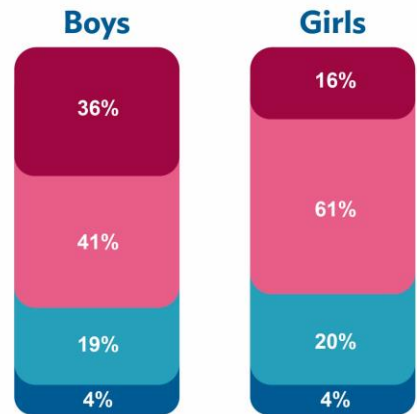
Yes, Sexism Exists – And It Starts Early

Girls are more likely than boys to report feeling the impact of gender inequality: girls are twice as likely as boys (43% vs. 21%) to report **experiencing sexism**, and to say that **gender inequality has impacted their life** (35% vs. 20%). One in three girls (35%) also say they have been **treated unequally or unfairly because of their gender** (vs. 21% of boys).

For girls who report unequal treatment, these discriminatory experiences are unfortunately all too common. Among girls who say they've been treated unequally or unfairly because of their gender, one in four (23%) say it **happens regularly**. While boys do report unequal treatment, they are significantly more likely to say they are **rarely treated unequally or unfairly** because of their gender (36% vs. 16% of girls). When asked

How often do you feel that you are treated unequally or unfairly because of your gender?

- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Regularly
- Frequently - nearly every day



to express the impact of inequality in their own words, girls spoke about having fewer opportunities and not being taken seriously. For example, one respondent said, *“I have felt that my opinions aren’t often taken as seriously because I am not a boy.”* Another said, *“Girls [are] forced to re-do things in school because [the] teacher didn’t believe they did it better/faster than the boys. [They] thought the girls had cheated because there was no way the girls could do better than the boys.”*

Experiences of inequality appear to start early: teens report **noticing gender inequality in their lives for the first time** around 11 years of age on average, with more than half of girls (54%) saying they first noticed it between the ages of 10 and 13. Regrettably, many young people notice inequality in their lives before they are even a teenager.

As the #MeToo movement has revealed, sexual harassment and violence are critical issues impacting gender equality. [Past GGC research](#) has found that sexual harassment and violence are far from being adult-only issues: in 2017, 41% of girls ages 15-17 said that they knew a girl who reported being harassed but wasn’t believed.¹





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It's worth noting that external research tells us that some girls might experience sexism but not register or name it as such.² Sexism may be invisible, but it still has a very real impact on girls' lives – it is crucial that we keep pushing to understand and name the problem so that we can solve it, together.

Where Gender Inequality Takes Place

When asked whether they are personally treated the same as people of other genders in places like the home, at school, at work, and in sports or clubs, most young people feel they are treated the same. However, among those who see a difference, **boys are more likely to say they're treated better**, while **girls are more likely to say they're treated worse**. This is particularly evident in two key areas: in sports and online. One quarter (27%) of girls say they're treated worse than boys in **sports or gym**, while 15% of boys say they're treated better. One quarter of girls (24%) also say they're treated worse than boys on the **internet, including over social media**, while 14% of boys say they're treated better online. This is unsurprising, given that it is well-documented that young women face significant abuse and harassment online,³ which is often sexist or misogynist in nature.⁴

Notably, inequality in sport seems particularly upsetting to girls. When asked to share how gender inequality has impacted their life, one in five girl respondents (20%) chose to speak about fewer opportunities for girls to play or compete in sports. For example, one respondent said, **“Boys who couldn't play hockey as good as me got picked for better teams,”** while another reported, **“I do not have the same opportunity to attend competitive swimming meets as the boys on our swim team.”** These unfair experiences in sports are something [we've heard from girls](#) in the past as well.⁵

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Inequality also shows up in the workplace. New Girl Guides of Canada research on young people's **experiences in summer jobs** in 2018 suggests there may be a gender **wage gap** as early as adolescence between teen girls and boys, ages 12 to 18. In full-time summer work environments, girls appear to have earned about \$3.00 per hour less than boys: while boys earned an average of \$18.01 per hour, girls earned only \$15.26. This is consistent with Statistics Canada data which indicates that girls as young as 15 are already making as much as \$3.00 per hour less than boys across most industries and jobs,⁶ and with a recent study in the United States that indicates that the gender earnings gap starts by age 14 or 15.⁷

When asked to share how inequality impacts their lives, many girls said that the gender wage gap is affecting them now – and they are also worried about how it will impact their future, because they're well aware it's an issue for adult women.⁸

Equality Supported – Yet Stereotypes Persist

Teens in Canada are nearly unanimous in their support for gender equality: 96% of 12- to 17-year-olds **believe in equal rights** for women and men – that women should be treated equally to men in all areas based on their competency, not their gender. Most teens believe that gender inequality exists: two in three teens (65%) agree **there is currently an inequality** between women and men in Canada, and a majority (56%) are **concerned about gender inequality today**.

On the issue of gender-based violence, teens also hold views that reinforce their support for gender equality; three quarters of teens (75%) agree that the **#MeToo movement** is a positive development in society. Notably, girls are



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more likely than boys to observe gender inequality in Canadian society (69% vs. 60%), to express concern about this inequality (64% vs. 49%), and to view the #MeToo movement positively (80% vs. 71%). This suggests that the personal experiences of inequality that girls report may influence their likelihood to notice systemic discrimination around them.

It is important to note how age, race and household income can affect girls' experiences and attitudes. In addition to increasing with age, **concern for gender inequality** is significantly higher among girls who identify as Asian, Indigenous or Black (75% vs. 62% of girls who identify as white), and girls whose annual household income is less than \$40K are less likely to agree that the #MeToo movement is a positive development in society (67% vs. 80% overall).

Despite this overwhelming support for gender equality in principle, and acknowledgment that inequality persists, many young people still hold harmful stereotypes about gender. For example, one quarter (24%) of young people agree that **boys are more capable than girls** of doing things in society such as learning math and science, playing sports, and taking on leadership roles. Nearly two in ten (16%) **believe that girls are inferior to boys**. And two in ten (19%) **believe that girls should aspire to get married, stay at home, and have kids** – an aspiration that may be an empowering choice for some girls and women, but that can be considered constraining and disempowering when it's an expectation of *all* girls.

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In many cases, boys were more likely than girls to express these stereotypes: 31% of boys believe boys are more capable (vs. 18% of girls). A similar proportion of boys and girls believe that girls should aspire to marriage and staying home (21% and 18%, respectively) and believe that girls are inferior (18% of boys and 13% of girls, respectively). The existence of these gendered stereotypes is consistent with [GGC's previous research](#),⁹ which found that girls continue to feel pressure from society to meet certain expectations of what it means to be a girl. For instance, 59% of teenage girls in Canada feel pressure from society to conform to unrealistic expectations of what it means to be a girl, not only in terms of how they should look and dress, but also in terms of how they should act or which interests they should pursue.





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Proudly Feminist – But Some Girls are Scared to Speak Out

When it comes to speaking out about gender equality, 43% of young people say they would **describe themselves as feminists** – this includes half (51%) of girls and one in three boys (34%). For girls specifically, this increases with age: 45% of 12- to 14-year-old vs. 56% of 15- to 17-year-olds. While nearly the same proportion of girls (50%) say they are **comfortable calling themselves feminists in public** (which also increases with age – 43% of 12- to 14-year-olds vs. 56% of 15- to 17-year-olds), barriers seem to exist for others: 30% of girls say they are **scared or hesitant to speak out and advocate** for the equal rights of girls and women because of what might happen to them. Interestingly, this figure is significantly lower among Canadian adult women, only 16% of whom expressed this fear or hesitation in another Ipsos poll in 2017.¹⁰ The hesitation to speak out is echoed by Sophie, a Girl Guides National Youth Council Member, who recently shared, *“Although I advocate for women’s rights, I sometimes find it difficult to do this openly in a public setting because people will often make comments such as: ‘men matter too,’ etc. and give loads of backlash. I am afraid of being criticized for advocating for women’s rights or called names by men who believe in double standards and by boys who do not value girls. I hope to one day see the change in society where I will be comfortable calling myself a feminist in public.”*

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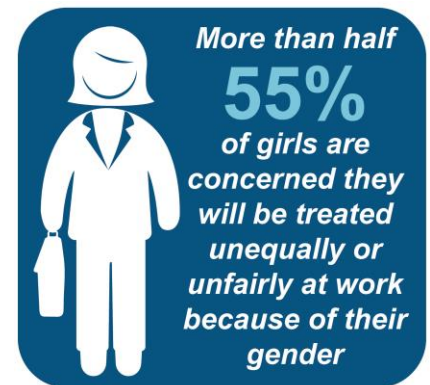


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Concerns for the Future

In general, concern about gender inequality in the future was significantly higher among young people who have personally been impacted by gender inequality, those who have been treated unfairly because of their gender, and those who have experienced sexism or regular incidents of gender inequality – all of which are more common experiences for girls.

Looking to the future, girls in particular are worried about how they will be treated as adults because of their gender. Thinking ahead to when they're 25 years old, more than half (55%) of girls are **concerned they will be treated unequally or unfairly at work because of their gender** (vs. 27% of boys). Girls are also concerned they will receive unequal treatment in the interests or activities they pursue (47% vs. 29% of boys), in romantic relationships (36% vs. 25% of boys), and by the public in general (42% vs. 29% of boys).



Concluding Thoughts: Importance of Empowering Spaces

Despite the many ways inequality seems to manifest in girls' lives – seemingly as early as age 10 – most girls still feel a sense of control over their lives. Almost all girls (96%) agree that they have the **power to make decisions about their lives and their future**, including where they will live and what career they will pursue.

Nonetheless, it is important to listen to girls as the experts on their own needs and lived experiences. We need to address the ways discrimination and sexism pervade girls' lives and how it influences their outlook on the future. As we know from past research, expectations about future discrimination and inequality can dissuade girls from following through on their aspirations. For example, a [2017 GGC-commissioned Ipsos poll](#) found one in four (24%) girls aged 15 to 17 do not feel motivated to pursue their dream career because they are concerned they will be compensated less than their male counterparts.¹¹





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Given the persistence of inequality, stereotypes, and barriers to speaking out, it is more important than ever for girls to have safe spaces where they are empowered to explore and grow. In fact, eight in ten girls (81%) agree that it is **important for girls to have access to spaces dedicated to girls and women** – rising to nine in ten (88%) among girls who identify as Asian, Indigenous or Black (vs. 79% of girls who identify as white). In addition, [GGC has learned](#) that because issues related to experiences of inequality have gender-specific barriers, it is important to offer programs and services that address these gendered issues.¹² Interestingly, on the issue of gender-based violence, an overwhelming majority of both girls (92%) and boys (93%) believe that it is **important for students to learn about consent in school**.

When girls can come together to discuss their unique experiences, they can develop personal strategies to improve their circumstances. And when girls have the opportunity to support and empower each other in a safe space, they are better equipped to thrive – now and in the future.

About Girl Guides of Canada

At Girl Guides of Canada, we provide a safe, all-girl space where girls from 5-17 feel welcome, listened to and respected, and where they can talk about life's challenges while supporting each other. In Guiding, girls are supported in overcoming barriers and exploring their interests in a non-judgmental way, as well as challenging stereotypes of what someone can and cannot do. With programming options ranging from innovative STEM activities to outdoor adventures and discussions on mental health, healthy relationships and more, girls in Guiding can customize their experience to dive into the topics relevant to them. For more information about how GGC's approach drives gender equity for girls, see [Girls Empowering Girls](#).¹³

About the Survey

The survey was commissioned by Girl Guides of Canada through Ipsos as an online poll of 1,203 girls and boys in Canada aged 12-18 between September 5 and 17, 2018. Participants were able to self-identify as girls or boys. Weighting was employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the population of girls and boys aged 12-18 according to the most recent Census data. A sample of this size yields a margin of error of ± 3.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error will be larger for data that is based on sub-groups of the total sample.





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- ¹ Girl Guides of Canada, *International Day of the Girl 2017: Nationwide Survey of Teenage Girls in Canada* (2017), https://girlguides.ca/WEB/GGC/Media/Thought_Leadership/Day_of_the_Girl_Survey/GGC/Media/Thought_Leadership/IDG_Nationwide_Survey.aspx.
- ² Shauna Pomerantz and Rebecca Raby, *Smart Girls: Success, School, and the Myth of Post-Feminism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).
- ³ Maeve Duggan, *Online Harassment*, Pew Research Center (2014), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>.
- ⁴ Amnesty International, “Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women” (2017), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/>.
- ⁵ Girl Guides of Canada, *Women in the Workforce: Impact on Girls* (2018), https://girlguides.ca/WEB/GGC/Media/Thought_Leadership/Women_in_the_Workforce/GGC/Media/Thought_Leadership/Women_in_the_Workforce_Impact_on_Girls.aspx.
- ⁶ Statistics Canada, *Table 282-0072 - Labour Force Survey estimates (LFS), wages of employees by type of work, North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), sex and age group, annual (current dollars unless otherwise noted) (CANSIM database, 2018)*, <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=2820072&pattern=&csid=>. See also: Statistics Canada, *Table 282-0152 - Labour Force Survey estimates (LFS), wages of employees by type of work, National Occupational Classification (NOC), sex, and age group, annual (current dollars unless otherwise noted) (CANSIM database, 2018)*, <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=2820152&pattern=&csid=>.
- ⁷ Yasemin Besen-Cassino, *The Cost of Being a Girl: Working Teens and the Origins of the Gender Wage Gap* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2018).
- ⁸ Girl Guides of Canada, *Women in the Workforce*.
- ⁹ Girl Guides of Canada, *International Day of the Girl 2017*.
- ¹⁰ Ipsos, “Seven in ten Canadians (69%) believe there are unequal rights for women in Canada” (2017), <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/seven-ten-canadians-69-believe-there-are-unequal-rights-women-canada>.
- ¹¹ Girl Guides of Canada, *Women in the Workforce: Impact on Girls*.
- ¹² Girl Guides of Canada, *Girls Empowering Girls: A girl-driven approach to gender equity* (2018), https://www.girlguides.ca/web/GGC/Parents/Thought_Leadership/Girls_Empowering_Girls/GGC/Media/Thought_Leadership/Girls_Empowering_Girls_Page.aspx.
- ¹³ Girl Guides of Canada, *Girls Empowering Girls*.

