A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls: Call for Evidence

This submission has been prepared by Kyle Beadle and Dr Marie Vasek on behalf of the Information Security Research Group in the Department of Computer Science at University College London.

This submission is based on research findings presented in the paper, "Toward inclusive online safety: evaluating the role of intersectionality on online abuse in the United Kingdom," published on 17 August 2026 and led by UCL researchers Kyle Beadle, Dr Enrico Mariconti, Dr Leonie Tanzcer and Dr Marie Vasek. The R and python code used to conduct our analysis is openly available at the Open Science Foundation and can be re-used with attribution (https://osf.io/9d4mu/).

Submitted 4 November 2026

What is different for women and girls online?

What evidence is available on women and girls' experiences of the online gender-based harms identified in the Guidance since its publication in November 2025?

- **We find that, from 2023 to 2025, no offline events, such as new regulation, social movements, or technical changes, have changed women's experiences of online harm.** The Guidance suggests that service providers audit and address risks to women and girls in ways that ignore offline power inequalities, such as racism and misogyny. For example, the Guidance suggests that service providers should "enable users who experience online gender-based harms to make reports" (Action Area 8) while also asking service providers to account for "mass false reports to target women and girls" (§5.23). These suggestions do not address the systemic issues with online reporting, such as a lack of transparency, communication, and redress for women and girls impacted by online gender-based harms. To make the Internet safer for women and girls, our findings indicate that the Guidance must drive proactive, structural transformations in how platforms are designed and governed.

Are online harms changing for women and girls?

What new evidence is available on the online gender-based harms identified in the Guidance since its publication in November 2025?

- **The current Guidance overlooks several gender-based harms that are the result of offline gender inequalities.** Our research finds that women disproportionately experience online harms which are excluded from Ofcom's current Guidance. For example, experiences of unwelcome friend/follow requests are more prevalent among women (30.61%) than men (25.91%). More women (10.23%) than men (5.96%) also report seeing content relating to eating disorders. These harms are deeply embedded in offline misogyny; online offenders typically evade detection due to the current technical limitations of automated content moderation systems. As a result, the Guidance must be updated to include these harms, unwelcome friend/follow requests and content relating to eating disorders, and regularly updated as research exposes new harms experienced by women and girls.
- **The Guidance minimally addresses the role of intersectionality in women and girl's experiences of online harm, or how combinations of gender, race, and sexuality shape who is targeted and how protection is distributed.** There are considerations for Black and Asian women in the Guidance, which our findings support. But we also find a high prevalence of online harm experienced by Arab women whose intersectionality is not considered. Furthermore, LGB+ women at every age and race are more likely to experience online harm than any heterosexual women. Our findings suggest that the Guidance should more directly address how online platforms enable these harm disparities to better protect women and girls.

- **The Guidance largely excludes non-binary people despite their increased risk of online harms.** We find that 93% of non-binary people experience online harm compared to 66.89% of women and 69.73% of men. This elevated level of harm still stands when we statistically controlled for other confounding characteristics (age, race, income, etc). The gender-based harms outlined in the Guidance are also more prevalent among non-binary people, with non-binary people experiencing overloading harms (65%) more than women (39.50%) and men (36.92%), which includes the following harms: (1) unwelcome friend or follow requests, or messages, (2) persistent bullying online, (3) pressure to send sexual or nude images or videos, (4) **group shaming, boycotting, or excluding someone based on their views, opinions or, actions, including online 'pile-ons',** and (5) receiving unrequested gifts or in-game gifts from someone you've had brief, or no communication with, online or offline. We acknowledge that currently there are limited data points from non-binary people in the UK. However, our findings demonstrate that there is sufficient evidence to make stronger claims to better protect people from online gender-based harm. If future Guidance wishes exhaustively tackle gender-based harms, it must acknowledge that non-binary people are more likely than both women and men to experience a higher volume of harm and more severe harms because of their gender.