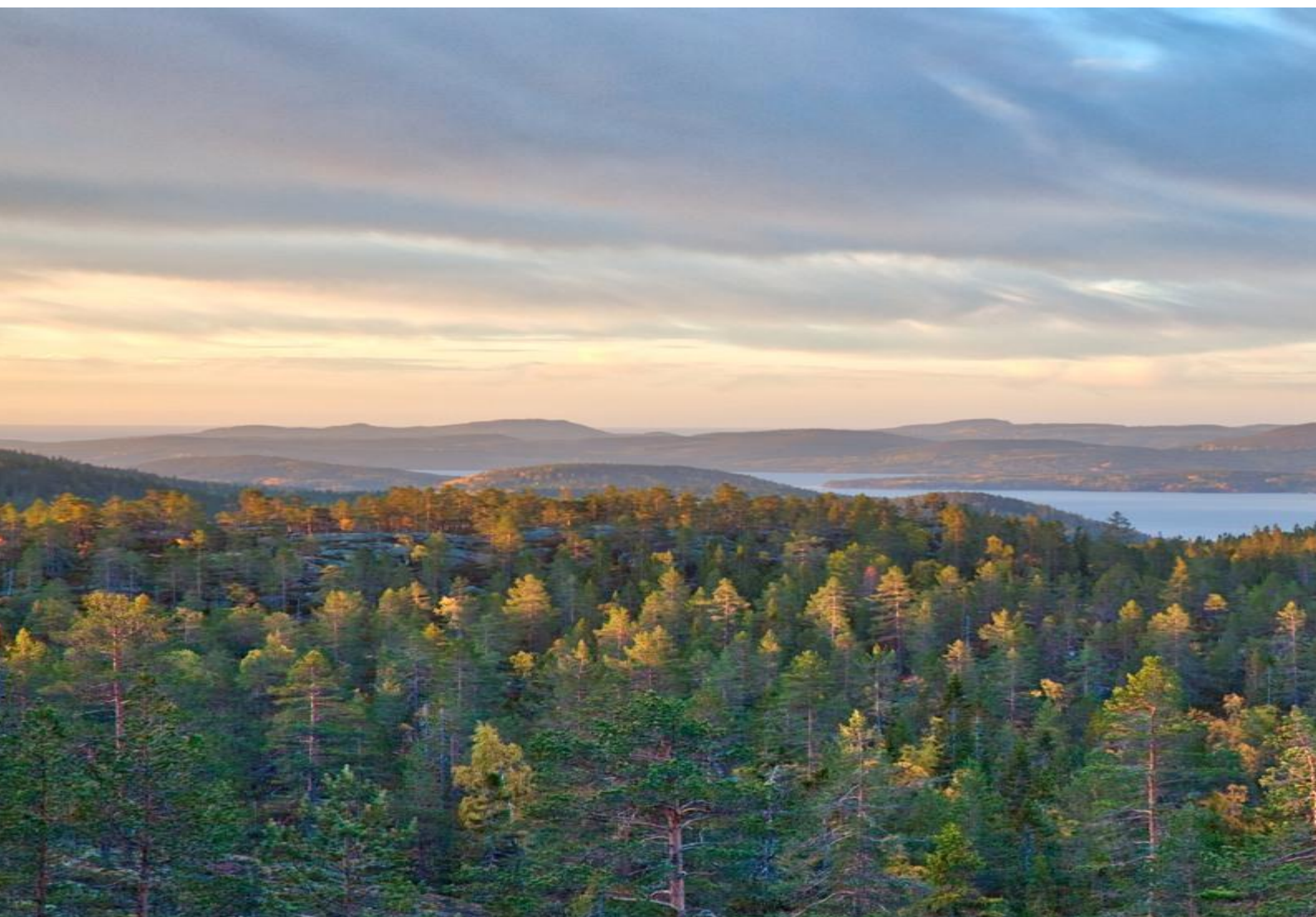


Young People's Mental Health and Exposure to Violence and Harassment

Report from a survey to students in grade
nine in a Swedish county

Katja Gillander Gådin, Albin Dahlström and Heléne Dahlqvist



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PREFACE

This report contains results from a survey study conducted during February – April 2023, targeting students in ninth grade in all seven municipalities of Västernorrland, a sparsely populated county in the northern part of Sweden.

The report is intended for students, parents, everyone working in schools or other environments where young people are present, as well as politicians and decision-makers who can influence the psychosocial school environment and the living conditions for young people in the county.

We know that mental ill-health is a problem among young people today, and we need more knowledge about how common it is in different groups of young people and about factors that can increase the risk of mental ill-health.

Exposure to violence and harassment are important causes of mental ill-health and insecurity among young people, but there is a lack of knowledge about how common it is among students in compulsory school, how common it is for different forms of violence to co-occur, and what consequences it can have.

The study was conducted by researchers at Mid Sweden University in collaboration with the County Administrative Board of Västernorrland and Region Västernorrland.

Researchers at Mid Sweden University will conduct in-depth statistical analyses of the material and publish the results in scientific journals.

The results from the study will be used by the County Administrative Board of Västernorrland and Västernorrland County Council for future efforts to promote young people's well-being and health, as well as to develop knowledge-based preventive methods.

We who conducted the study would like to thank all pupils who participated and extend a thank to all the schools and dedicated staff who made this study possible.

Sundsvall 2025-11-04

Katja Gillander Gådin, research leader at Mid Sweden University

Table of contents

Young People's Mental Health and	i
PREFACE	ii
SUMMARY	3
BACKGROUND	9
PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY STUDY	11
WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY?	11
HOW WAS THE STUDY CONDUCTED?	12
THE SURVEY QUESTIONS	12
RESULTS	14
Background data	14
Mental health, ill-health and worries	15
General health	15
Health and well-being	15
Body image	16
Psychosomatic complaints	17
Depressive symptoms	18
Deliberate self-harm	18
Worrying	19
Exposure to violence and harassment in various forms	22
Sexualised forms of exposure online, social media, text messages, or online games	23
Exposure online that is not sexualised (online bullying)	27
Offensive treatment (bullying) IRL	30
Honour-related violence and oppression	31
Youth intimate partner violence	32
Perpetrating violence and harassment in various forms	33
By whom have students been exposed to harassment?	35
Is self-reported ill-health higher among those who report exposure to violence and harassment?	37
Psychosomatic symptoms and exposure	37
Self-harming behaviour and victimisation	39
Time on social media and online gaming	40
Parental insight into young people's use of social media and online gaming	42
Pornography consumption	43
Physical activity	44
School absence	45
Social support	46
The student's psychosocial work environment	48
Safety	48

Peer relationships	49
School demands	50
Rowdy lessons.....	51
Discrimination at school.....	52
What do teachers do when a student is exposed to any form of harassment, abuse, or violence at school?	52
Participation and influence in the class.....	54
Has the survey affected the students' well-being?.....	57
DISCUSSION.....	59
Gender! Something We Do.....	64
Methodological considerations.....	66
Conclusions	67
REFERENCES	69

SUMMARY

Mental ill-health among young people is one of our major public health problems, and even though we know some of the causes, there is still a knowledge gap when it comes to exposure to violence and harassment. A large part of young people's everyday life takes place in the digital environment, and we therefore need more knowledge about what young people are exposed to in that arena.

The overall aim of the study was to gain deeper knowledge about risk and protective factors related to students' mental health and ill-health, with a particular focus on exposure to various forms and combinations of violence and harassment.

Twenty-four out of 41 of all schools with ninth-grade students in the county of Västernorrland participated in the study. The results in the report are based on survey responses from 1,211 students, corresponding to a response rate of 81 percent.

The survey includes questions about mental health, ill-health and anxiety, various forms of violence and harassment, as well as a variety of questions about the students' psychosocial work environment at school.

Mental health, ill-health and anxiety

The results show that many students have psychosomatic complaints, depressive symptoms, and engage in deliberate self-harm. Many students also reported that they worry about global problems, issues related to economy, work, and education, as well as being exposed to violence and harassment, especially sexual violence. There are large differences between how girls and boys responded, with girls consistently reporting more psychosomatic complaints, depressive symptoms, self-harm, and worries compared to boys.

When it comes to positively worded questions, it was mainly boys who responded that they are often happy, calm, energetic, rested when they wake up, and feel that everyday life is filled with things that interest them. Boys were also more positive about their bodies and appearance compared to girls.

Sexual harassment online

The results from the questions about violence and harassment show that sexualised forms of online harassment are common and affect girls to a much greater extent than boys. For example, just over half of all girls have received a dick pic in the past six months, and just over half have been exposed to someone asking for pictures or video clips with nudity or sexual content, against their will. The corresponding figures for boys are six and twelve percent, respectively.

Online bullying

The questions about online exposure that are not sexualised (online bullying) show that many students have been subjected to someone writing something mean or hurtful to or about them, and that someone has spread rumours or gossip about them in a mean or hurtful way. Girls are exposed to online bullying to a greater extent than boys. Exceptions are the question of whether someone has threatened them, which affected one in four students, and the question of whether they have experienced someone hacking their account to be mean or hurtful, which seven percent of students reported having been subjected to one or more times in the past six months.

Sexual harassment IRL

When it comes to sexualised forms of harassment in the physical world, In Real Life (IRL), these are divided into physical sexual harassment and verbal/non-verbal harassment, which occurred during the past six months. Examples of exposure to physical sexual harassment include being groped (girls 27 percent, boys 7 percent) and someone trying to kiss or hug them against their will (girls 27 percent, boys 13 percent).

For girls, verbal and non-verbal harassment includes, for example, that almost half have been called 'whore,' 'cunt,' or other gendered slurs in the past six months, that someone has given them comments, joked, or gestured in a sexual way against their will (41 percent), and that someone has looked at them in a sexual way (40 percent). For boys, it is mainly about being called gendered (29 percent) or homophobic (28 percent) slurs against their will.

Bullying IRL

The questions about exposure to offensive behaviour that is not sexualised (bullying IRL) show, for example, that just over half of the girls have been

teased or called things they found mean and/or hurtful, compared to one in three boys in the past six months. Just over half of the girls have experienced being left out of a group or ignored in a way they perceived as mean and/or hurtful, compared to one in five boys. A slightly higher proportion of girls have been hit, kicked, pushed, scratched, cut, had their hair pulled, or been violently shaken by someone compared to boys (23 and 18 percent, respectively).

There is a significant difference in exposure to bullying IRL between girls and boys for all questions except the last two. One in five students responded that they had been threatened, and about one in four have had things destroyed, damaged, or stolen at least once in the past six months.

Honor-related violence and oppression

The questions that can shed light on exposure to honour-related violence and oppression show that five percent of girls and three percent of boys are not allowed to have a girlfriend/boyfriend if they want, and that six percent of girls and four percent of boys stated that they need to keep track of what a family member or other relative does or who they are friends with.

Youth intimate partner violence

Violence in young people's relationships is an area that has not received much attention in Sweden, especially not among students in compulsory school. Almost half of the girls and boys in the study have had a romantic or sexual relationship lasting longer than a week since starting seventh grade. Both girls and boys have been subjected to control, threats, abuse, sexual violence, and physical violence by a partner, but girls have experienced this to a greater extent than boys. For example, one in four girls who have been in a relationship have been forced to do something sexual they did not want to, and one in three girls said they have agreed to something sexual even though they did not want to. The corresponding figures for boys are four and seven percent, respectively. One in seven girls and one in twelve boys who have had a romantic or sexual relationship since seventh grade said their partner had been physically violent towards them.

Perpetrating violence and harassment

The questions about what students have subjected others to showed that very few responded that they had subjected someone else to the sexualised forms. There are not more students who are exposed to offensive behaviour (bullying) compared to the sexualised forms, but it seems to be easier to

report having bullied someone than to have sexually harassed someone, especially those that occur IRL.

Just below one in four students responded that they have teased or called someone names in a mean or hurtful way. Girls responded to a greater extent than boys that they have spread rumours or gossip about someone and that they have left someone out or ignored someone in a mean or hurtful way. Boys, to a greater extent than girls, have been violent towards someone, threatened someone, or destroyed, damaged, or stolen someone else's things.

When those who have been exposed themselves answered by whom they have been exposed, it appears that both girls and boys are mainly exposed by other boys (at their own school, from another school, unknown boy), but also to some extent by girls (at their own school), especially when it comes to bullying IRL. The ability to identify who is exposing someone online is undermined by the potential for anonymity. Girls were more likely than boys to assume that some of the unknown people exposing them online are adults.

Correlation between violence, harassment, and ill-health

Those who report having been exposed to various forms of harassment also report more ill-health. The more forms of harassment students have been exposed to, the higher the likelihood that they also report psychosomatic complaints. The same applies to depressive symptoms and self-harming behaviour.

The more forms of exposure to harassment, the higher the likelihood that they have also reported self-harming one or more times.

Girls are more often exposed to several different forms of violence and harassment, so-called multi-exposed, compared to boys.

Time on social media, online gaming and screen time

A large part of young people's everyday life takes place on social media today. While boys engage in online gaming more frequently than girls, nearly one-third of boys spend over four hours on social media during weekdays, compared to 58 percent of girls.

According to the students, few have parents who have rules about screen time (six percent). Even though many students have parents who follow them on at least one of their accounts, almost one in three students has an

account that no parent knows about. About half of the students have parents who have talked to them about online safety, slightly more girls than boys.

Watching pornography

Although there are both girls and boys who consume pornography, it is mainly boys who do so. Just over one in three boys responded that they have watched pornography once a week or more often in the past six months. Many of those who have watched pornography did so for the first time when they were 12 years old or younger.

School absence

Being absent from school without being sick can have many different causes, but we wanted to know if exposure to violence and harassment is related to staying home. Nearly one in five girls responded that they have stayed home from school without being sick one day a week or more often in the past six months. The girls who stayed home had been exposed to violence and harassment to a greater extent compared to other girls. Few boys (four percent) reported that they have stayed home from school one day a week or more often, without being sick.

Social support

The vast majority responded that they have support from their family, but boys experience this to a greater extent than girls. Boys and girls experience to the same extent that they have support from their friends. When it comes to support from teachers, a higher proportion of boys responded that they always or often receive it compared to girls.

The school's psychosocial work environment

Boys feel safe at school to a greater extent than girls and are more satisfied with their peer relationships. Girls more often feel lonely and outside the peer group, are more often afraid of some students at school, and do not have as many friends as they would like, compared to boys.

Girls responded to a greater extent than boys that they experience high demands at school and that there are a high noise level and disorder during lessons.

A higher proportion of girls responded that discrimination has occurred at school during the past six months. Boys responded to a greater extent than girls that teachers both intervene and ensure it stops if a student has been offended, harassed, mistreated, or left out.

Participation in the class was measured with the three dimensions of communication, democratic competence, and ability to cooperate. Boys are more positive about these abilities in the class than girls.

Since the survey contains many questions that can be considered sensitive, a question was asked about whether they felt the survey had affected how they feel. Most students who answered the questions felt the same as before, and a few felt better. Thirteen percent of girls and nine percent of boys felt worse after answering the survey.

Comments from those who felt worse included, for example, that it brought up memories they wished they could have avoided, but also that it was still good to be asked the questions, despite the negative consequences.

Summary reflection

A conclusion from the results presented in the report is that the mental ill-health among ninth-grade students in Västernorrland is important to pay attention to and follow up on.

It is important to understand the causes of all students' mental health and ill-health. But the large differences that exist between girls' and boys' mental health are alarming. A starting point for future analyses is that there are strong correlations between mental ill-health and exposure to various forms of violence and harassment, and that this is an important explanation for why girls report more mental ill-health compared to boys.

The results show that there are large differences between girls' and boys' living conditions, both in and outside of school. This is especially true for girls' high exposure to sexualised forms of harassment online, sexualised forms IRL, and various forms of abuse and violence from a boyfriend.

Although not all instances of violence and harassment take place at school, the findings emphasize the importance of schools as key arenas for both preventive strategies and responsive actions when students subject others to such behaviors.

It is also important to pay attention to girls' and boys' different conditions.

The school has an important task in making visible the gender-related structures that increase the risk for boys to subject others to violence and harassment, and structures that contribute to girls being exposed to a greater extent than boys.

BACKGROUND

Although it is well known that mental ill-health among young people is a major problem and that it has worsened in recent decades, there are significant gaps in knowledge about underlying factors. There are no simple explanations for the causes behind mental ill-health, nor for its increase among young people in recent decades. There is also a lack of knowledge about why more girls than boys are affected by mental ill-health.

Previous studies show that socioeconomic factors, school-related factors, and individual factors are important for young people's health (Cosma et al., 2020; Löfstedt et al., 2020; Zetterström Dahlqvist et al., 2012). There are also previous studies that highlight the significance of the correlation between mental ill-health and exposure to offensive treatment (bullying) (Källmén & Hallgren, 2021; Friends, 2023), sexual harassment, threats of violence and physical violence, as well as sexual violence (Zetterström Dahlqvist & Gillander Gådin, 2018; Ståhl & Dennhag, 2021). But there is still a lack of knowledge about sexualised violence and harassment, especially what young people are exposed to in the digital environment. It is also important to note that it is common for children and young people to be exposed to several different forms of violence and harassment, so-called multi-exposed, and that we therefore cannot focus solely on a single form. It is common to ask about offensive treatment (bullying) in studies on children's health and health habits, but most are exposed to several forms of harassment and violence (Dahlqvist et al., 2022; Dahlqvist et al., 2025).

We know very little about the prevalence of exposure in various forms on digital platforms in a Swedish context among young people in elementary school. But we do know that the use of social media has increased explosively in the past 10–15 years. The use of social media has begun to be recognized as a mechanism that affects mental ill-health among young people (Riehm et al., 2019; Swedish Media Council, 2020). As digital contact surfaces increase, so does the risk of being exposed to threats, sexual harassment, harassment, and various forms of discrimination.

To understand differences in mental ill-health between boys and girls, we must highlight differences in their living conditions and what their everyday life looks like. Today, a large part of everyday life for many young people is connected to social media and other digital platforms, and

therefore there is reason to highlight exposure to violence and harassment in various forms in these environments.

We also need to increase our knowledge about what is called honour-related violence and oppression, as it has major consequences for those exposed. Honor-related violence and oppression have both similarities and differences with other forms of violence, even though it is often highlighted in relation to foreign background (Björktomta, 2019).

Another form of violence we need to know more about is violence in young people's relationships. This is an area that has long been recognized in international research (Wincentak, 2017), but which needs more attention in Sweden as well.

Mental health is an umbrella term for both positive and negative aspects of health (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2022). In this report, we include well-being as a measure of mental health, and psychosomatic complaints, depressive symptoms, self-harm, and anxiety as measures of mental ill-health.

The report will not focus on the opportunities and advantages that digitalization and various social media offer, but rather on some of the downsides that exist. We know that bullying, abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violence, as well as threats and physical violence are problems in general in schools and other environments where children and young people spend time. But social media has made it possible not only to expose others in physical places, i.e., In Real Life (IRL), but also 'online.' An additional risk is that adult perpetrators have gained a tool to seek out children to contact, so-called grooming (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2023).

We will use the term 'online' when writing about what happens on social media and in online games, regardless of which digital tool is used, and In Real Life (IRL) when the harassment occurs in physical places, e.g., school, home, leisure activities, and other places.

With this study, we want to increase knowledge about the mental health and ill-health among young people in Västernorrland, a county in the northern part of Sweden. We want to try to understand more about what distinguishes those who feel well from those who do not. We have therefore asked questions about leisure time, friends, family, use of social media, pornography consumption, the school's psychosocial work environment, and more. One area we wanted to know especially much about is exposure to violence and harassment, both online and IRL.

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY STUDY

The overall purpose of the study was to gain deeper knowledge about risk and protective factors related to students' mental health and ill-health, with a particular focus on exposure to various forms and combinations of violence and harassment.

Examples of research questions answered in the study

- What proportion of ninth-grade students in Västernorrland report health, ill-health, and anxiety, and how does this differ between girls and boys?
- What proportion of ninth-grade students in Västernorrland report having been exposed to violence and harassment in various forms, and how does this differ between girls and boys?
- What proportion of ninth-grade students in Västernorrland report having subjected others to violence and harassment in various forms, and how does this differ between girls and boys?
- Are there differences in reported ill-health between those who answered that they have been exposed to various forms of violence and harassment compared to those who have not been exposed?
- How do girls and boys in ninth grade in Västernorrland respond to questions about family, leisure time, friends, school, and whether the survey has affected how they feel?

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY?

Ninth-grade students from 24 schools in Västernorrland County participated in the study. A total of 1,232 students answered the survey, but after excluding questionnaires that were clearly unserious and/or incompletely filled out, 1,211 questionnaires were used in the analyses. This gives a response rate of 81 percent. Only students who were fifteen years old at the time of data collection were included in the study.

The 24 schools included in the study were randomly selected from the 41 schools in the county that have ninth-grade students. Schools from all seven municipalities in the county are represented. Only one school's principal chose not to let their students answer the survey.

Of the 1,211 students who participated, 607 were girls and 604 were boys, according to the legal definition. In total, 22 students did not identify with their legal gender.

We have used the information on legal gender in the analyses. We are aware that those who identify differently (girl, boy, non-binary, or another gender identity) may have other experiences that are valuable to increase knowledge about, compared to those who identify with their legal gender. Since that group is relatively small, it is not possible to conduct separate statistical analyses in this study. They are therefore included in the analyses based on their legal gender.

HOW WAS THE STUDY CONDUCTED?

All principals in Västernorrland received information about the study, and an information letter directed to school staff with practical information was sent to all participating schools. The students answered the survey during school hours and received a web link sent to their own login on the same day the questions were answered. At least one of the teachers at the school and one from the project group (Mid Sweden University, County Administrative Board of Västernorrland, or Region Västernorrland) participated in the classroom when the survey was filled out, except for a few occasions when only school staff were present.

The students sat individually behind desk dividers or with distance between them so that no one could see what answers were being filled in.

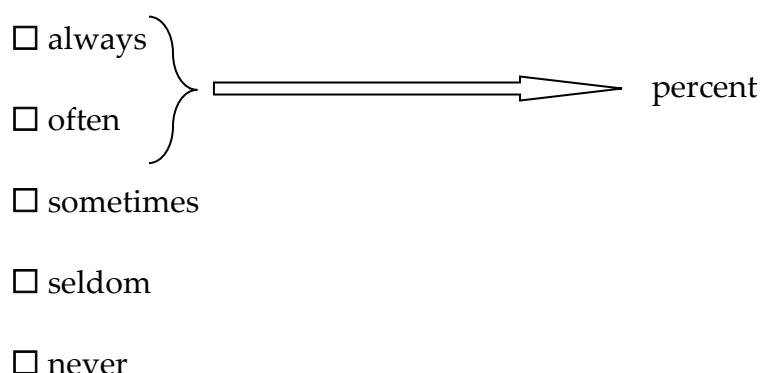
All students received an information sheet in advance stating that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and the information was repeated orally in the classroom to all students at the time of data collection.

The study is approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2022-05776-01).

THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Most of the questions asked in the survey come from previous studies and standardized instruments. Some have been developed specifically for this survey's purpose, where we used experiences from interviews with young people in this age group and where the focus has been exposure on digital platforms such as social media or online games (Gillander Gådin & Dahlqvist, 2020).

The questions are usually about how things have been during the past six months. Many of the questions in the survey have five response options, e.g., 'always,' 'often,' 'sometimes,' 'seldom,' and 'never.' To facilitate reporting and provide an overview of how students responded, the proportion who answered 'always' or 'often' has been combined. Analyses have then been conducted to compare different groups, such as differences between girls and boys.



For questions about exposure to violence and harassment, the response options were 'never,' 'once,' 'a few times,' 'many times.' When we report the results for exposure, we have combined the response options so that everyone who has been exposed once or more is in the same group. This is a simplified measure, but it still shows how many have been exposed at least once compared to those who answered 'never.'

The results are mainly reported as percentages, and when differences are reported between girls and boys, we have conducted statistical analyses in the form of chi-square tests. This allows us to state whether there are statistically significant differences between the group of girls and the group of boys.

We have assumed that p-values less than 0.05 are significant. Analyses of differences between the group of girls and the group of boys reported in this report yield significant results for almost all comparisons and have p-values < 0.001 . We have therefore chosen to only specifically report the p-values that **did not** yield significant differences between girls and boys, i.e., those greater than 0.05.

RESULTS

Background data

In this study, 63 percent of girls and 64 percent of boys answered that they live with both their parents in the same household. This is consistent with national data from Statistics Sweden (2022), which shows that 64 percent in the 15-year-old age group lived with their cohabiting original parents in 2022.

To the question of whether they themselves were born in Sweden, 88 percent of students answered yes. Most answered that they have a mother who was born in Sweden (80 percent) and 81 percent answered that they have a father who was born in Sweden. This is consistent with national data from 2022 for the population in Sweden, where 80 percent are born in Sweden according to Statistics Sweden (n.d.).

An important question when it comes to understanding what affects children's and young people's health concerns their economic situation. One question about the students' own finances was whether it has happened that they have not been able to buy and/or do the same things as their friends because they could not afford it, during the past six months. One in five students (20 percent of girls and 18 percent of boys) answered that this has often happened to them.

Regarding the family's economic situation, the question was whether they think their own family has more money than most other families, about the same amount of money, or less money than most other families. About one in ten students answered that they think their own family has less money than most other families (girls 10 percent, boys 8 percent). A report on low income standard in Sweden shows that 8.5 percent of children aged 0–17 are estimated to live in families where incomes are lower than the necessary expenses (Statistics Sweden, 2022) Even though our question about finances is relative and we therefore cannot comment on the family's actual standard of living, the information about the students' background data overall shows good agreement with national background data.

Mental health, ill-health and worries

General health

The first question we asked about the students' health concerns how they feel in general. This is a non-specific question but is assumed to encompass mental, physical, and social well-being. Figure 1 shows those who answered that they feel good or very good.

Figure 1. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they feel good or very good. Percent.

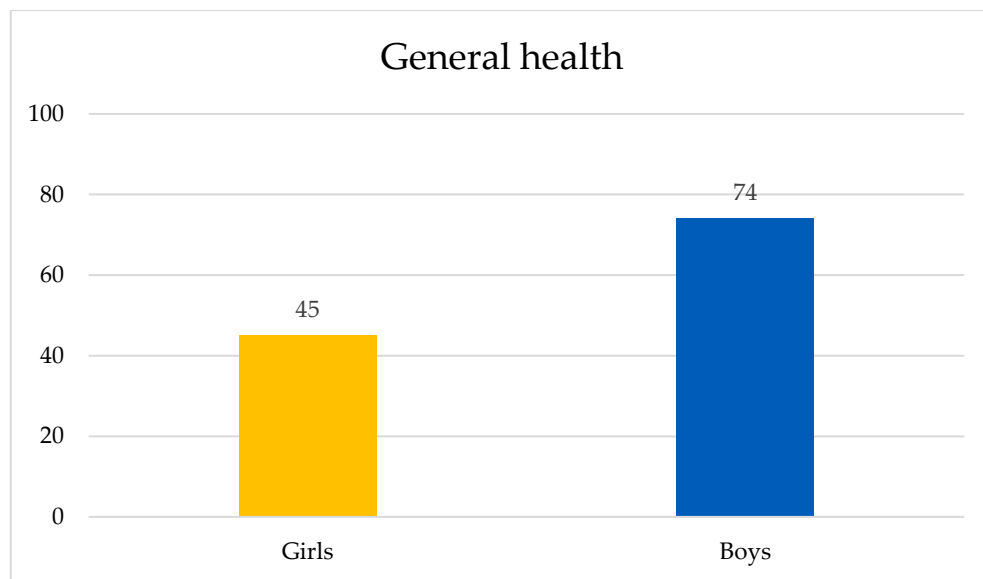


Figure 1 shows that just under half of the girls answered that they feel good or very good, compared to three-quarters of the boys. Regarding the negative response options, three times as many girls (17 percent) answered that they feel 'bad' or 'very bad' compared to boys (6 percent).

Health and well-being

The next question is designed to measure health and well-being with positively worded questions derived from WHO (2024). Figure 2 shows how they responded regarding their well-being over the past two weeks. The response options were always, often, sometimes, seldom, and never.

Figure 2. Proportion of girls and boys who reported 'always' or 'often' to the positively worded questions about well-being. Percent.

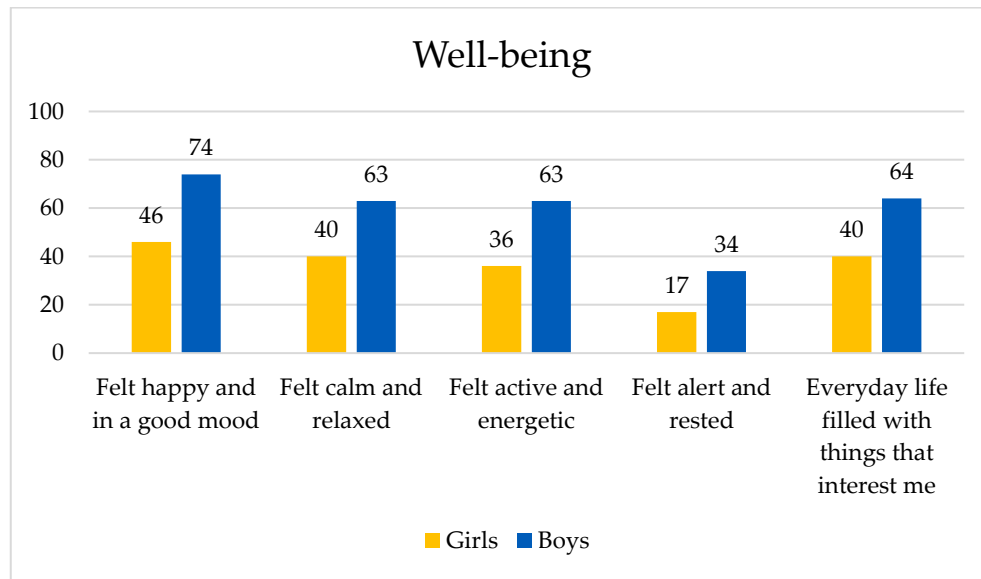
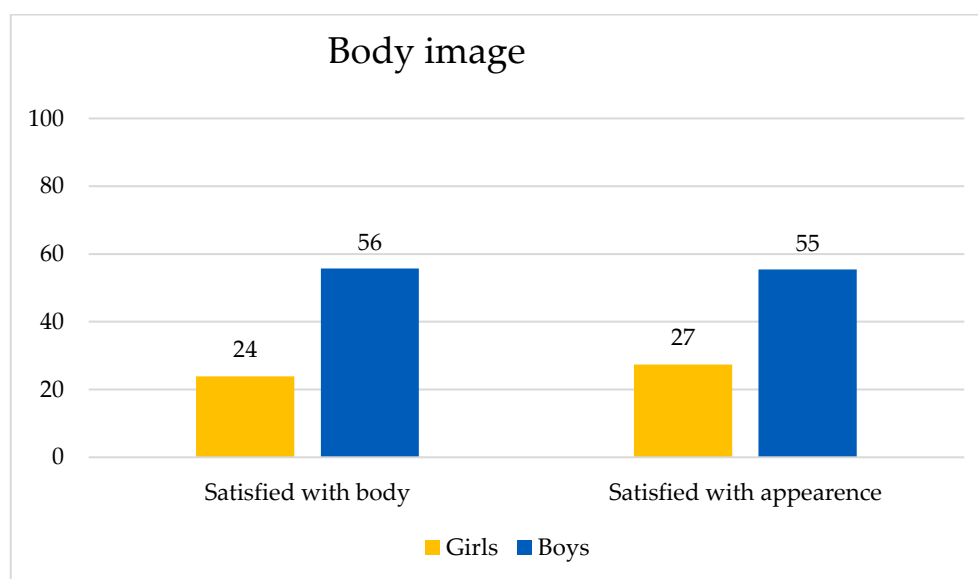


Figure 2 shows that there is a substantial difference between girls' and boys' well-being. Three out of four boys answered that they always or often felt happy and in a good mood, compared to just under half of the girls. Only 17 percent, i.e., one in six girls, always or often feel alert and rested when they wake up in the morning, compared to one in three boys.

Body image

Another question that can be a measure of health and well-being concerns being satisfied with one's body and appearance. Figure 3 shows the proportion of girls and boys who answered that they are 'always' or 'often' satisfied with their body and appearance. One in four girls answered that they are satisfied with their body and appearance compared to just over half of the boys. Not being satisfied with one's body or appearance is seen as a risk factor for developing eating disorders or methods to change one's body, such as cosmetic surgery or using steroids¹⁴. It is also common to highlight the importance of media in various forms for the risk of becoming dissatisfied with one's body.

Figure 3. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they are 'always' or 'often' satisfied with their body and appearance. Percent.

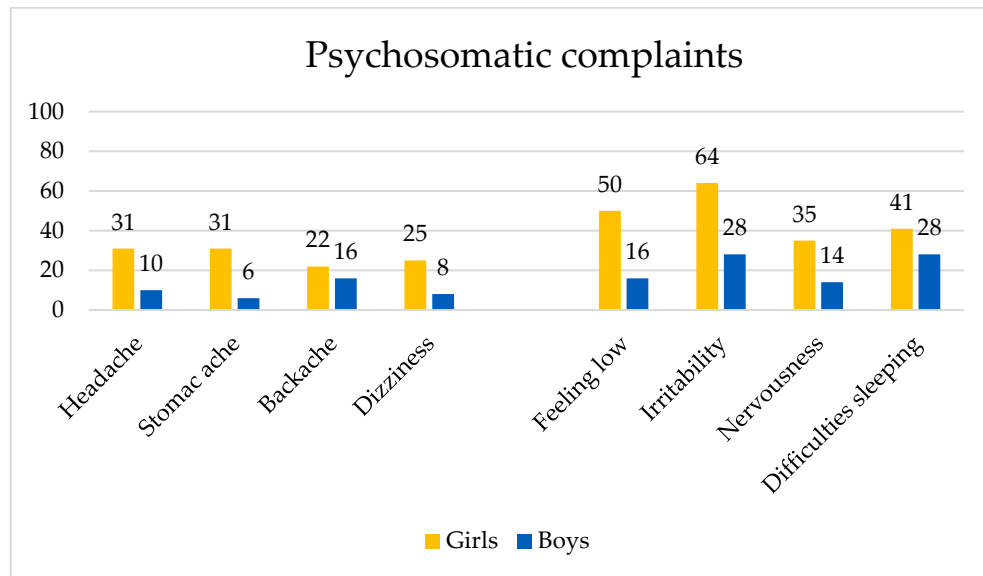


Psychosomatic complaints

The Public Health Agency of Sweden (2023) conducts a survey on school students' health every four years, targeting students in grades 5, 7, and 9. We asked the same questions about psychosomatic complaints as in that study. There are eight questions, four of which measure somatic complaints and four measure psychological complaints. The Public Health Agency (2023) reports the proportion of students who answered that they have had two or more complaints more than once a week in the past six months. In the most recent measurement in 2020/21, about 36 percent of boys and 77 percent of girls reported that in the national survey. The corresponding analysis of students' responses in Västernorrland 2023 shows that 30 percent of boys and 70 percent of girls reported two or more symptoms more often than once a week in the past six months.

Figure 4 shows how students in Västernorrland answered the eight individual questions. The figure shows that the most common psychosomatic complaint for both girls and boys is being irritable or in a bad mood, followed by feeling down for girls and having trouble falling asleep for boys. There is major difference between girls and boys in how often they have complaints, and this applies to both somatic and psychological complaints.

Figure 4. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they had psychosomatic complaints 'more than once a week' or 'almost every day' during the past six months. Percent.



Depressive symptoms

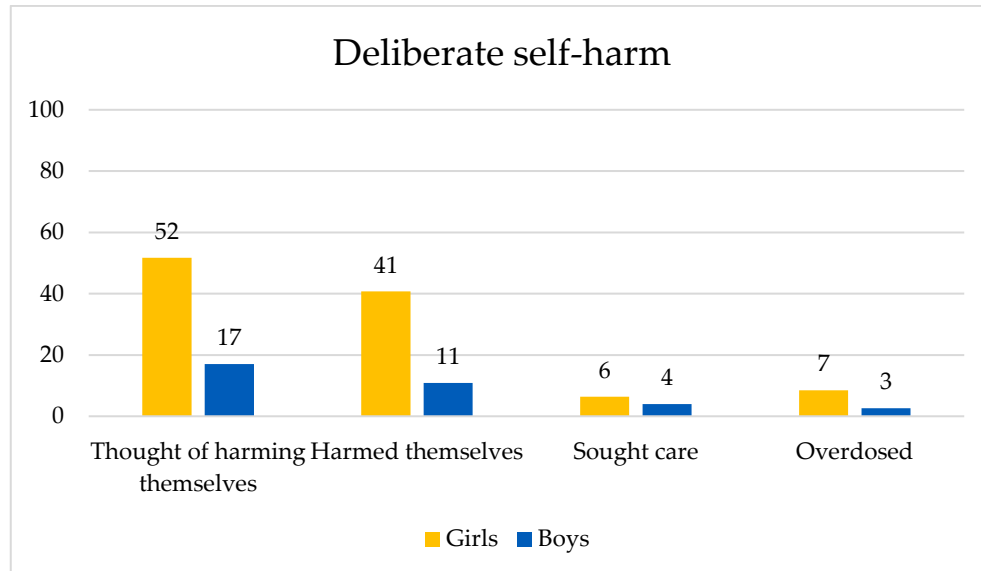
Regarding depressive symptoms, we asked ten questions about how things have been during the past week (Bradely et.al. 2010). For example, whether they had been bothered by things that usually do not bother them, had difficulty concentrating, or had trouble getting started with things. Two of the questions were positively worded, about whether they felt hopeful about the future and whether they had been happy. When categorizing respondents according to the instrument's criteria for high levels of depressive symptoms, 61 percent of girls and 26 percent of boys were classified within the group exhibiting elevated symptomatology.

Deliberate self-harm

The students were asked four questions about self-harming behaviour. It was clarified for the students that this refers to something they do to themselves, not injuries that happen by accident. The first question was whether, at any time during the past six months, they have thought about wanting to harm themselves by, for example, cutting, scratching, burning, or stabbing themselves, but have not done so. The other three questions were about whether they have actually harmed themselves, whether they have harmed themselves so much that they needed to seek medical care, and whether they have overdosed on medication or other substances in

order to harm themselves. Figure 5 shows the proportion of students who answered that they have done so once or more during the past six months.

Figure 5. Proportion of girls and boys who reported self-harming behaviour once or more often during the past six months. Percent.



Even if not everyone who thought about harming themselves had actually done so, 41 percent of girls and 11 percent of boys answered that they have harmed themselves, once or more, during the past six months. There are many ways to harm oneself, with overdosing on a substance to harm oneself being one of them. Seven percent of girls and three percent of boys answered that they had overdosed once or more during the past six months.

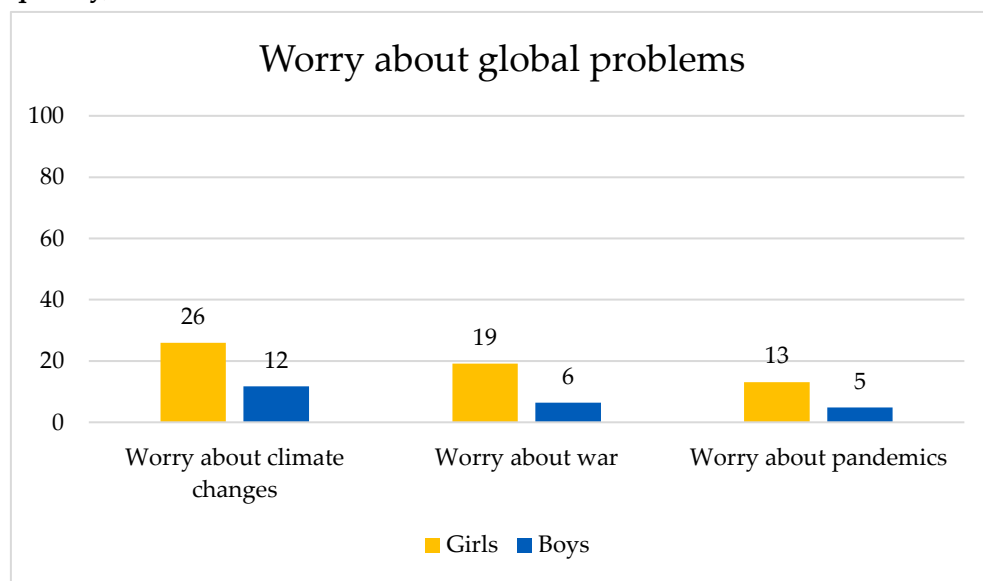
Self-harming is a behavior that can have many different causes, but it often serves as a way for young people to cope with anxiety or emotional distress (Edmonson et al., 2016). It's a serious issue that needs attention from everyone who interacts with youth in everyday settings.

Worrying

Being worried about things can be functional, if it is within reasonable limits, as it can mean that one engages in problem-solving strategies and prepares for future threats (Davey, 1994). But being worried for a long time can mean an increased risk of mental ill-health (Songco et.al., 2020). Today, there are both the same and different things to worry about compared to a few decades ago. This can include global concerns such as climate change, war, and pandemics, but there are also other things that young people may worry about. It concerns the economy and their own future, but also

anxiety about being exposed to violence and sexual abuse. We report how students answered the questions about worry based on three different areas: 1) worry about global problems, 2) worry about economy, education, work, 3) worry about violence and sexual abuse. Figure 6 shows the proportion estimated to be 'quite' or 'very worried' about climate change, war, and diseases that can spread quickly, such as covid-19. The other three response options were 'neither nor,' 'no, not particularly worried,' and 'no, not at all worried.'

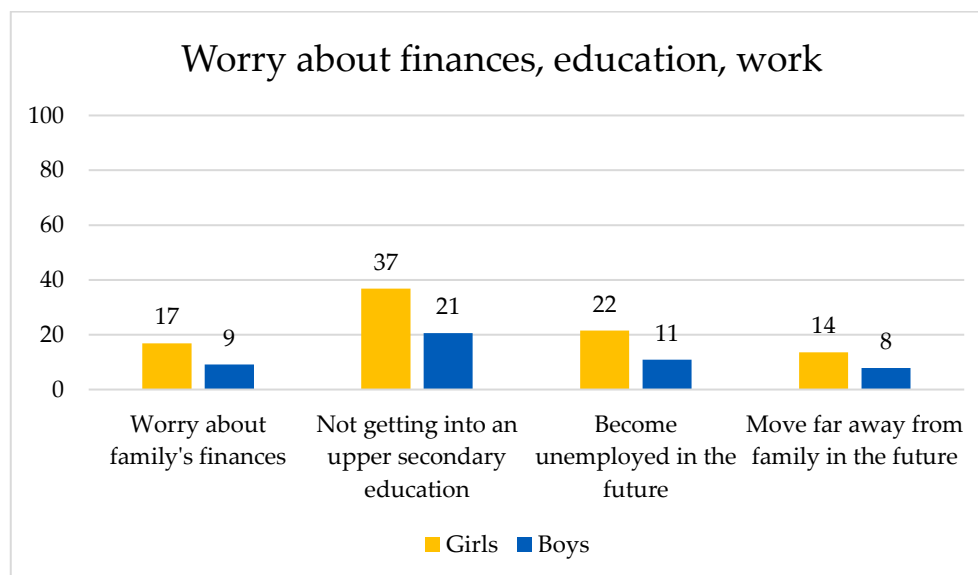
Figure 6. Proportion of girls and boys who are quite or very worried about climate change, the possibility of war in Sweden, and/or diseases that can spread quickly, such as covid-19. Percent.



When it comes to anxiety about global crises, climate change is the biggest concern, and twice as many girls as boys are worried about it. One in five girls answered that they are quite or very worried about war, and they are more than twice as worried about pandemics compared to boys.

Another area we asked about concerns anxiety about the family's finances and their own future. Figure 7 shows the proportion who answered that they are quite or very worried that their family does not have enough money, not getting into an upper secondary education, becoming unemployed in the future, and having to move far from family in the future.

Figure 7. Proportion of girls and boys who are quite or very worried about the family's finances, not getting into upper secondary education, becoming unemployed in the future, and having to move far from family in the future. Percent.

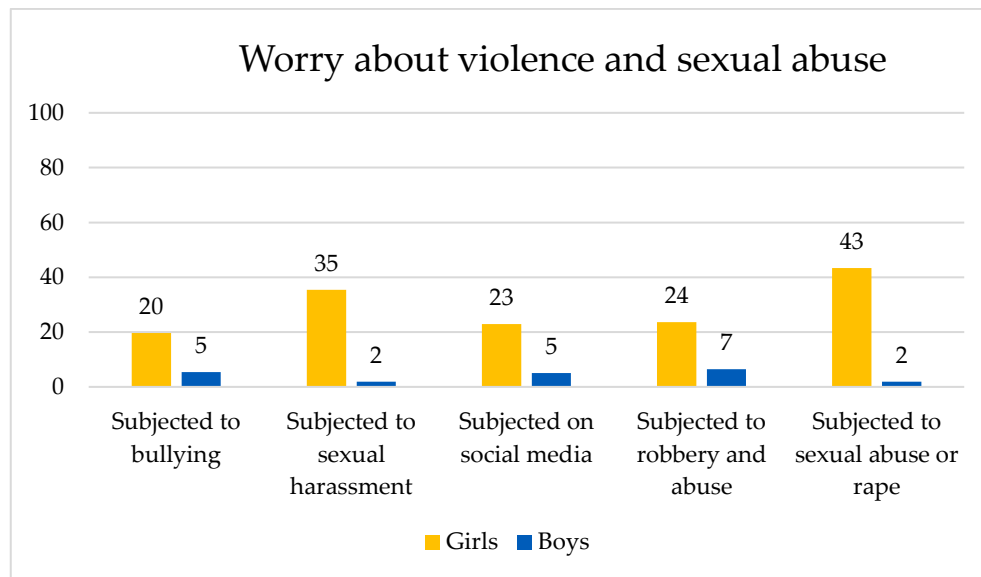


Almost twice as many girls as boys were worried that they will not get into an upper secondary education. This applies to one in five boys and almost four out of ten girls. Girls were also more worried about the family's finances, becoming unemployed, and having to move far from family in the future, compared to boys.

The area concerning worry about being exposed to various forms of violence (i.e., bullying, sexual harassment, exposure on social media, being subjected to crimes such as assault and robbery, as well as being subjected to sexual abuse or rape) is what worries girls the most and boys the least of the three areas we asked about. It is the area that differs the most between girls and boys. Figure 8 shows the proportion of students who answered that they are quite or very worried about violence and harassment in various forms.

Of all the questions about anxiety we asked, the question about being subjected to crimes such as sexual abuse or rape worried girls the most, even though they were also highly worried about violence and harassment in general. Just over four out of ten girls answered that they are quite or very worried about being subjected to sexual abuse or rape, compared to two percent of boys.

Figure 8. Proportion of girls and boys who are quite or very worried about being subjected to bullying, sexual harassment, something on social media, crimes such as assault or robbery, or being subjected to crimes such as sexual abuse or rape. Percent.



Being worried about something is not the same as it actually happening. However, the results below from the questions we asked about exposure in various forms show that there is a high degree of exposure to harassment and violence among ninth-grade students, especially for girls.

Exposure to violence and harassment in various forms

We asked a variety of questions about violence and harassment. We did this because it is important to show the extent of the problems but also because we know that there are strong links between being exposed and reporting ill-health.

The forms of violence and harassment reported below are: 1) Sexualised forms of exposure online, on social media, via SMS, or in online games 2) Exposure online that is not sexualised (online bullying) 3) Sexual harassment IRL 4) Offensive treatment (bullying) IRL 5) Honor-related violence and oppression 6) Violence in young people's relationships

Sexualised forms of exposure online, social media, text messages, or online games

We asked 14 different questions about exposure to sexualised forms of harassment that occurred on some form of digital platform during the past six months (internet, social media, texts, online games).

All questions clarified that it was about incidents that happened against their will. Those who answered that they had been exposed 'once,' 'a few times,' or 'many times' are included in the same group and compared with those who answered 'never' to the question.

All forms of exposure to sexual harassment are serious, but they are divided into three parts below, as they differ to some extent. **Figure 9** shows how students answered the first eight questions about exposure online, etc. This includes, for example, someone asking for pictures/videos of them with nudity or sexualised content, or someone threatening them if they did not want to send pictures/videos of themselves with nudity or sexualised content.

The figure shows that both girls and boys can be exposed to sexualised forms of harassment, but that it is much more common for girls. Half of all ninth-grade girls have been asked to send pictures/videos with nudity or sexualised content (nudes) in the past six months, and half have received a dick pic against their will.

One in seven girls has been threatened if she did not want to send pictures, four out of ten girls have received pictures with nudity or sexual content sent to them against their will, and four out of ten girls have been propositioned by a stranger to meet up.

One in three girls has been exposed to someone trying to talk sex with them against their will in the past six months.

The most common for boys is that someone has asked for pictures/videos of them with nudity or sexualised content and that someone has sent pictures/videos to them with nudity or sexualised content, against their will.

Figure 9. Proportion of girls and boys who have been exposed to sexualised harassment online in the past six months. Percent.

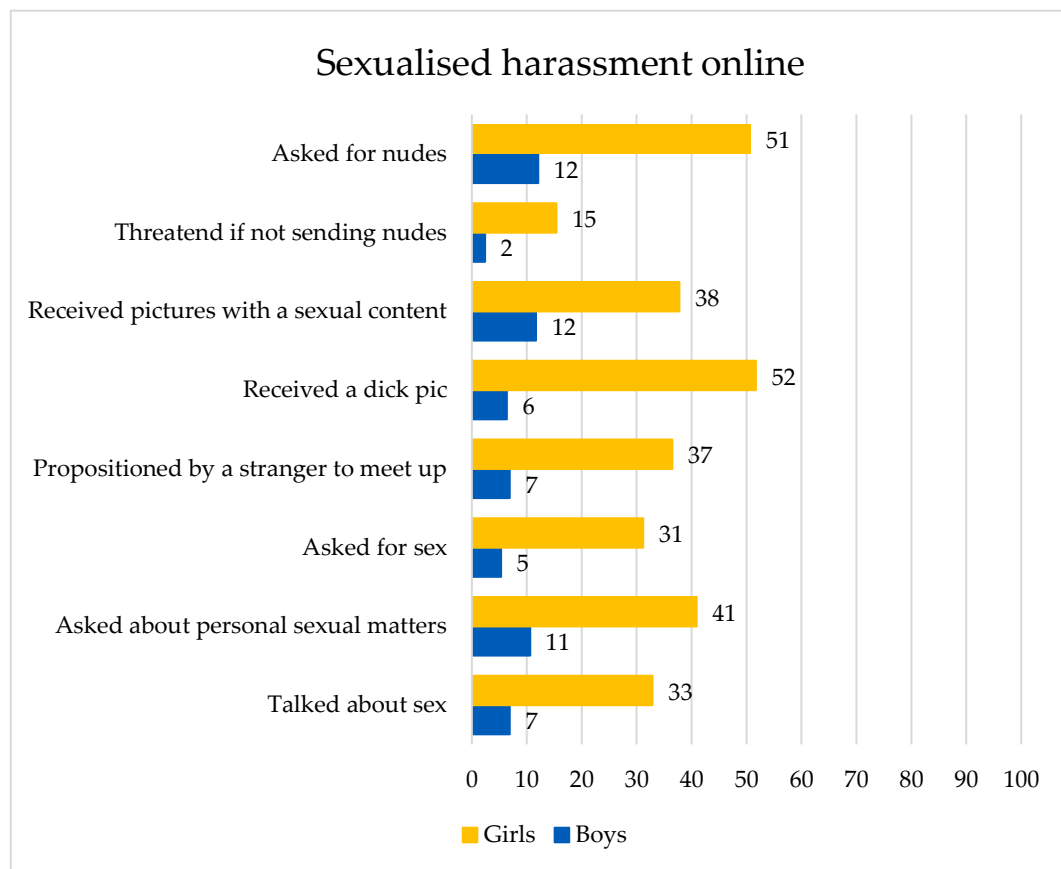


Figure 10 shows four additional types of online exposure. They are not as common as those described above in Figure 9 but can still have serious consequences for those exposed.

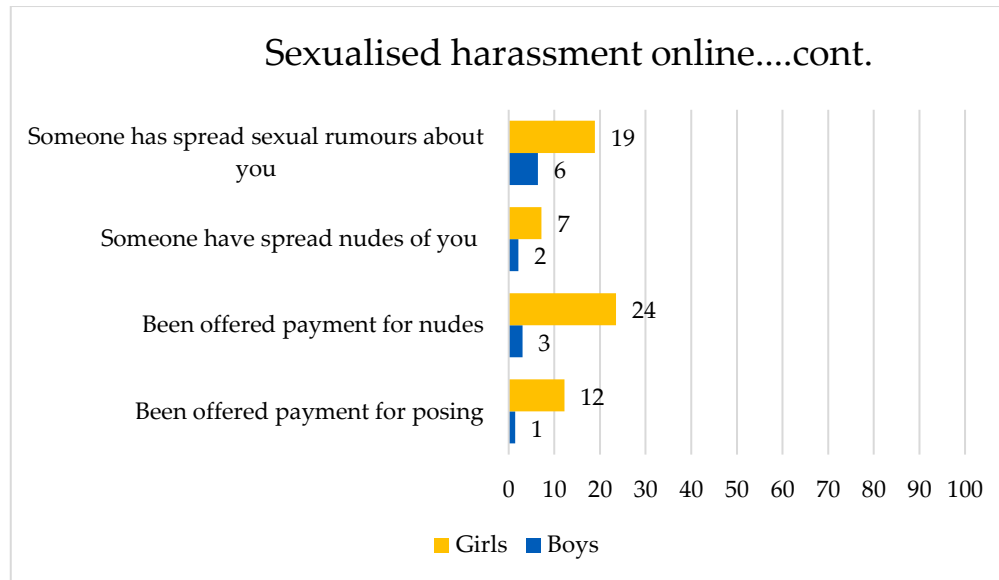
The figure shows that nearly one in five girls has been exposed to someone spreading rumours about their body in a sexual way, about their sexuality, or about their sexual experiences, compared to six percent of boys.

A problem often mentioned regarding especially girls' exposure on social media is that someone has spread pictures/videos of them with nudity or sexualised content, but this is not the most common form of exposure for ninth-grade girls. However, studies show that this type of exposure can have particularly negative consequences for girls' health and sense of security²².

One in four girls has been offered payment or other compensation to send pictures/videos of themselves with nudity or sexualised content. Just over one in ten girls has been exposed to someone offering them payment or other compensation to pose naked or half-naked and/or do something

sexual in front of a webcam, against their will, in the past six months. Although boys are also exposed to these forms of sexualised harassment, it is mainly girls who are affected.

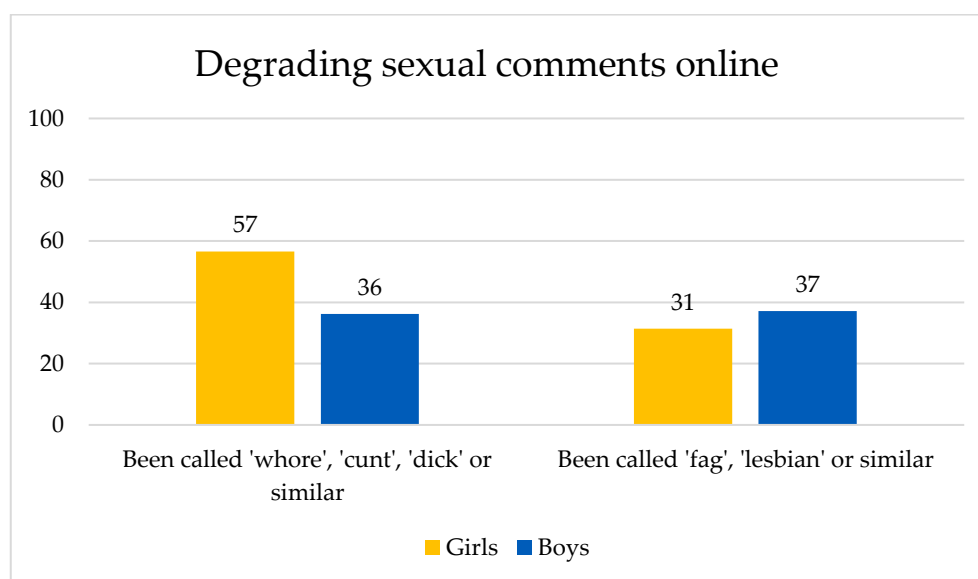
Figure 10. Proportion of girls and boys who have been exposed to more severe sexualised harassment online in the past six months. Percent.



Two of the fourteen questions about sexual harassment online concern a type of exposure that is common IRL, but also common online. We refer to them as degrading sexual comments online and is about being called 'whore/cunt/dick' or similar, and being called 'lesbian,' 'fag,' or similar, against their will.

Figure 11 shows that one in three boys and more than half of the girls have been called 'whore,' 'cunt,' or other gendered slurs online in the past six months. The only type of exposure where boys reported being exposed to a greater extent than girls is the question of whether they have been called 'lesbian,' 'fag,' or similar. Thirty-seven percent of boys answered that they had been called this once or more in the past six months, compared to 31 percent of girls ($p=0.044$).

Figure 11. Proportion of girls and boys who have been exposed to "verbal" sexualised harassment online in the past six months. Percent.



The three figures above, with a total of fourteen different questions, show that both girls and boys experience sexualised forms of online exposure, but girls are affected to a significantly greater extent than boys.

Overall, the most common sexualised form of harassment online for girls was being called 'whore,' 'cunt,' or other gendered slurs. The second most common was receiving a dick pic against their will. Just over half of the girls had received a dick pic in the past six months, compared to six percent of boys.

We followed up on one of the fourteen questions specifically to show that the risk of online harassment starts early for many students.

How old were you when you received a dick pic for the first time?

Those who answered that they had received a dick pic in the past six months were asked a follow-up question: How old were you when you received a dick pic for the first time? Of the girls who had received one or more dick pics in the past six months, one in three (thirty percent) received their first dick pic when they were twelve years old or younger. The figure is probably higher since many answered that they did not remember how old they were. One girl was only seven years old when she received a dick pic for the first time.

Many boys did not answer this question about age, and it was also not as common for them to have been exposed to it. Of those who answered the

question, a couple of boys said they received a dick pic when they were twelve years old or younger.

Exposure online that is not sexualised (online bullying)

The students were asked six questions about exposure to abusive behaviour (bullying) online, on social media, via SMS, or when playing games online, during the past six months. The questions clarified that it was about online exposure that was not sexualised. **Figure 12** shows the proportion of those who answered that they had been exposed one or more times.

Figure 12. Proportion of girls and boys who have been exposed to online bullying one or more times in the past six months. Percent.

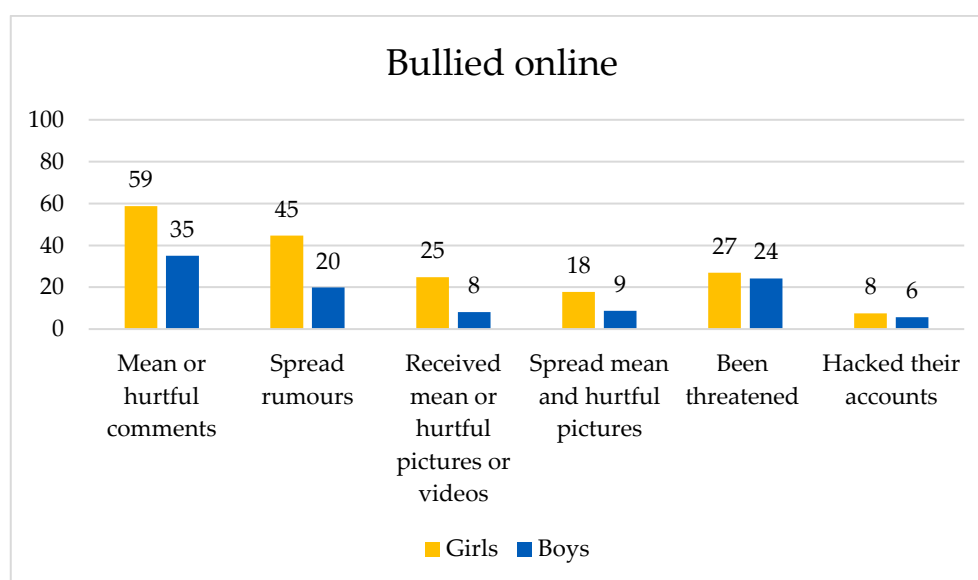


Figure 12 shows that even non-sexualised online harassment is common among ninth-grade students. Girls and boys have been threatened and have had their accounts hacked to about the same extent.

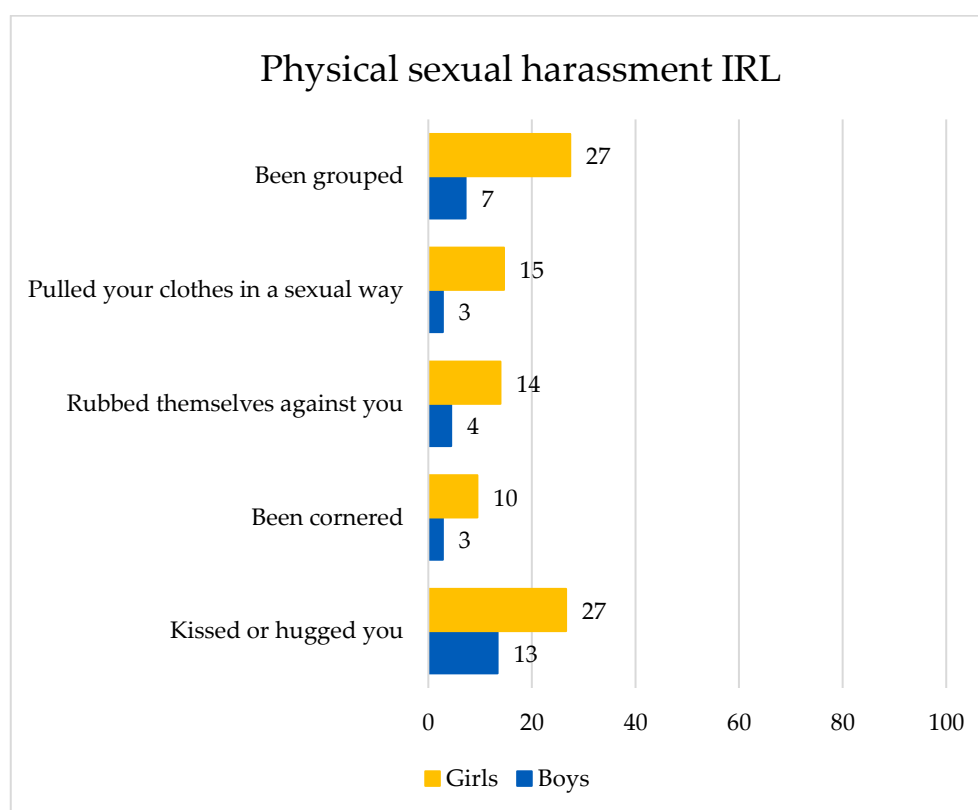
The other four questions show that girls are significantly more exposed than boys. Six out of ten girls and just over a third of all boys have been exposed to someone writing something mean or hurtful to or about them. Almost half of the girls and one in five boys have experienced someone spreading rumours or gossiping about them in a mean or hurtful way. One in four girls has experienced someone sending mean or hurtful pictures or videos to them, and one in five has been exposed to someone uploading/spreading pictures or videos that were mean or hurtful and directed at them.

Exposure to sexual harassment IRL

The students answered a total of twelve questions about sexual harassment that occurred IRL during the past six months. They were informed that these behaviours count as unwelcome even if they did not say anything or protest loudly. The twelve questions are divided into five about physical sexual harassment and seven about verbal/non-verbal sexual harassment.

Figure 13 shows the proportion of girls and boys who answered that they had been exposed to physical sexual harassment once, a few times, or several times during the past six months.

Figure 13. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they have been exposed to physical forms of sexual harassment once or more during the past six months. Percent.



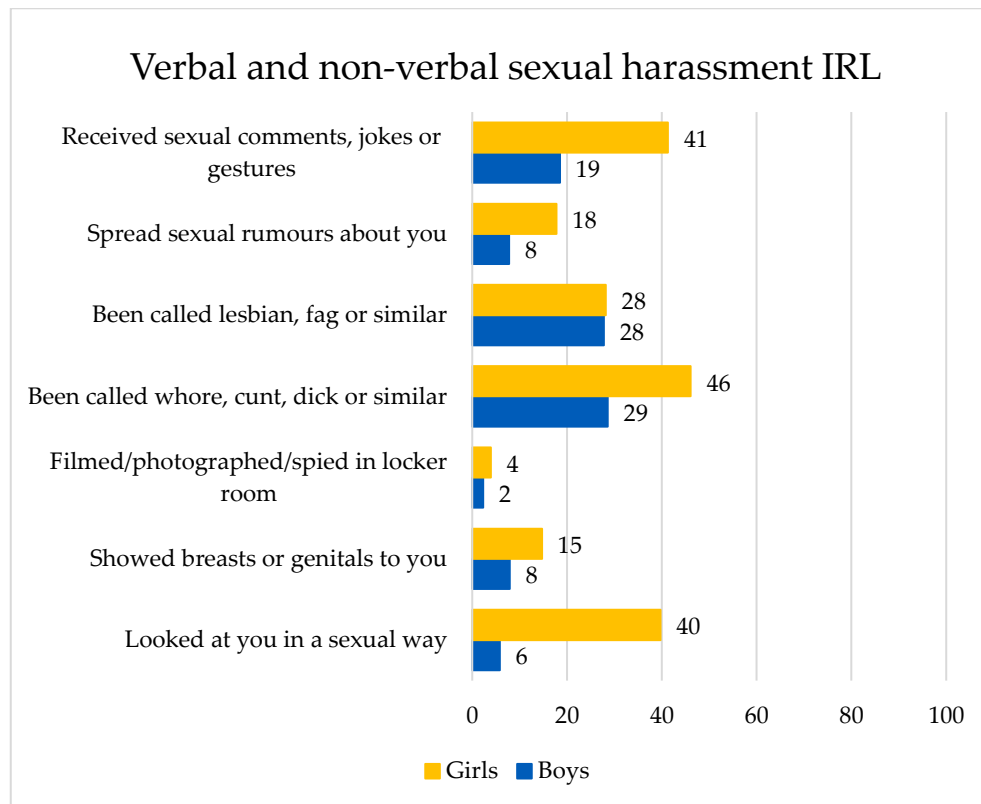
The figure shows that just over one in four girls have been groped in the past six months, compared to 7 percent of boys. Just over one in four girls have been subjected to someone trying to kiss or hug them against their will, compared to 13 percent of boys.

Although both girls and boys answered that they have been exposed to physical sexual harassment in the past six months, it is much more common for girls.

Figure 14 shows that girls are more exposed to verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment IRL compared to boys. Nearly half of the girls have been called gendered slurs compared to just under one in three boys, twice as many girls as boys have received unwanted sexual comments, and nearly seven times as many girls as boys have been looked at in a sexual way against their will.

The only exception is homophobic sexual harassment, where just over one in four boys and one in four girls have been exposed one or more times in the past six months.

Figure 14. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they have been exposed to verbal and/or non-verbal forms of sexual harassment one or more times in the past six months. Percent.

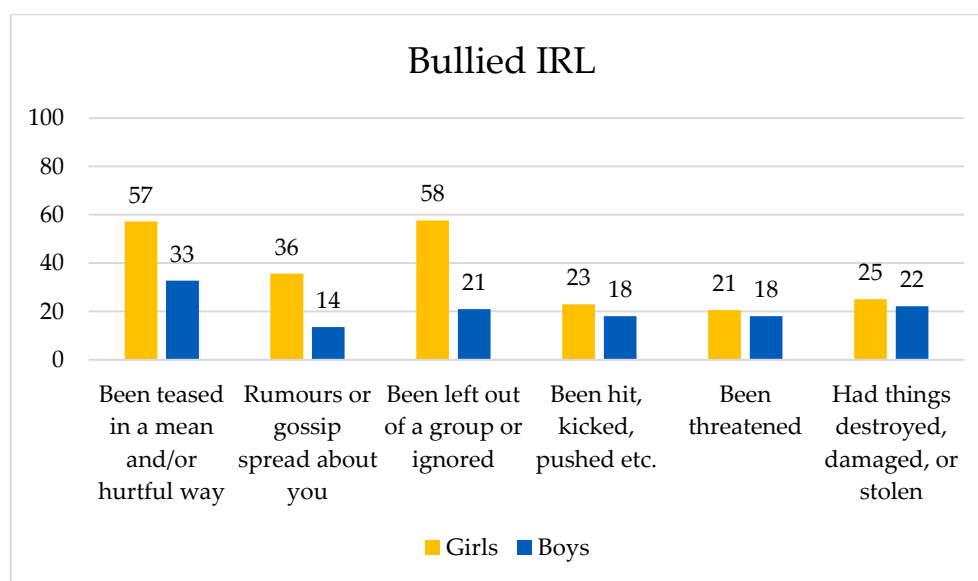


Offensive treatment (bullying) IRL

The students were asked six specific questions that show exposure to offensive treatment (bullying) IRL one or more times in the past six months.

Figure 15 shows the proportion of girls and boys who report having been exposed to these different forms of offensive treatment (bullied) IRL.

Figure 15. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they have been exposed to offensive treatment (bullied) once or more during the past six months. Percent.



Just over half of the girls have been teased or called things they found mean and/or hurtful compared to one in three boys. Just over one in three girls have experienced someone spreading rumours or gossiping about them in a way that was mean and/or hurtful compared to one in seven boys. Just over half of the girls have experienced being left out of a group or ignored in a way they perceived as mean and/or hurtful, compared to one in five boys. A slightly higher proportion of girls have been hit, kicked, pushed, scratched, cut, had their hair pulled, or been violently shaken by someone compared to boys.

There is a significant difference in exposure to bullying IRL between girls and boys for all questions asked except the last two. One in five students has been threatened and about one in four has had things destroyed, damaged, or stolen, one or more times during the past six months.

Honour-related violence and oppression

There is a form of violence called honour-based violence, which differs in some ways from other forms of violence. There is always a risk of stigmatizing certain groups when problems with honour-based violence are highlighted, but at the same time, it is important to make visible the norms around power and sexuality that mean some people are not given the same opportunities to have control over their own lives as others. Honor-related violence and oppression and the norms that are expected to be upheld can affect both girls and boys.

In the government's bill on increased protection against honour-related crime (2019:20/131, p. 122), there is a definition of honour-related violence and oppression.

The concept of honour-related violence and oppression is now clearly established and can generally be described as linked to so-called honour norms, which are based on strong patriarchal and heteronormative ideas. Characteristic is that the individual's interests are considered subordinate to the family's, that the individual's actions are considered to affect the entire family's reputation, and that the individual's sexuality is the concern of the whole family. The norms include, among other things, the idea that the family's or relatives' reputation and honour depend on the female family members' chastity and virginity, as well as their actual and alleged behaviour in relation to these ideals. Forced marriage, child marriage, and female genital mutilation are different expressions of honour-related violence and oppression.

The fact that such a large proportion of girls in grade nine are exposed to sexual harassment (see figures 9–11, 13–14) shows that there are strong norms around gender, power and sexuality for all groups of girls and boys in Sweden, not just for those who live in an honour context. However, there are certain forms of violence and harassment that can be highlighted, so as not to obscure the fact that some girls and boys live in a context that further complicates control over their own lives.

We asked five questions that can shed light on exposure to honour-related violence and oppression. Students could answer 'yes,' 'no,' or 'don't know' to the questions.

Five percent of girls and three percent of boys answered that they are not allowed to have a girlfriend/boyfriend if they want. Six percent of girls and four percent of boys stated that they need to keep track of what a family member or other relative does or who they are friends with. The other three questions, which were about being worried about traveling abroad because their family might force them to do something, needing to keep track of another family member's clothes and makeup, or being asked to punish someone in the family or another relative, were reported by few (between 0 – 1.5 percent).

Taken together, these five questions show that 12 percent of girls and seven percent of boys can be estimated to live in some form of honour context. Some of these students have parents who were both born abroad (37 percent of girls and 19 percent of boys), while some girls and boys in an honour context have parents who were both born in Sweden (8 and 5 percent, respectively).

Youth intimate partner violence

We asked questions about whether students have had a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner or another romantic/sexual relationship lasting longer than a week since they started seventh grade. It can also be a romantic and/or sexual relationship or someone they have sexted with.

Among the girls, 49 percent answered that they had had such a relationship and 45 percent of the boys. The relationship was usually with someone of the opposite sex, only a few answered that they had had such a relationship with someone of the same sex or 'other'.

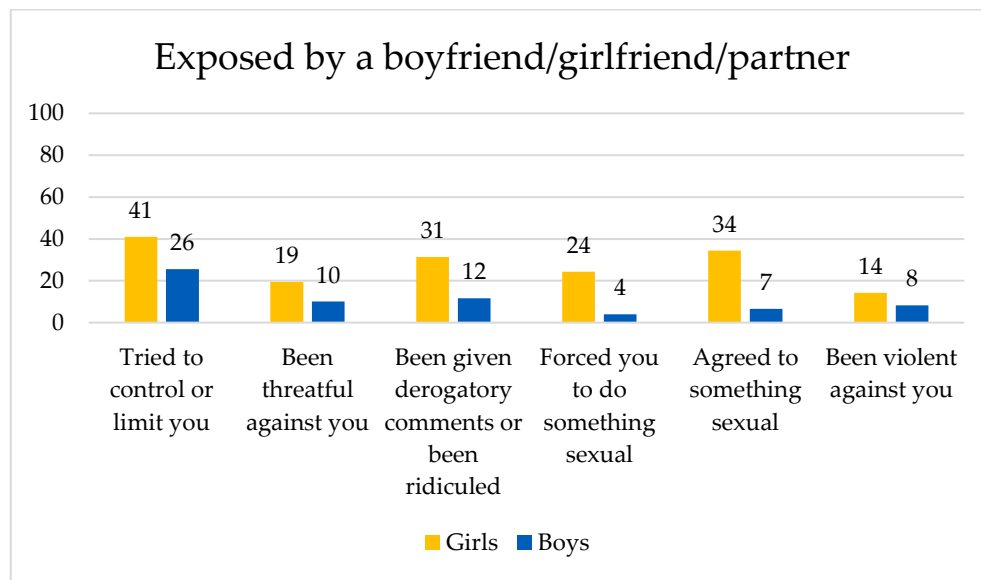
Those who answered that they had had such a relationship at some point since seventh grade received follow-up questions about whether that person had done something to them IRL, via SMS, social media, or similar.

Figure 16 shows the proportion of those who have had a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner who have been exposed to controlling behaviour, abuse, threats, sexual violence, and physical violence. The figure shows that this occurs to a high degree in relationships already at a young age.

For both boys and girls, the most common was that a partner tried to control or limit where they were or who they spent time with. Although both girls and boys have been exposed by a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner, a higher proportion of girls have been exposed. One in five girls states that a

boyfriend/partner has acted threateningly towards them and one in three girls reports that a boyfriend/partner has given them derogatory comments or ridiculed them.

Figure 16. Proportion of girls and boys who have been exposed to controlling and violent behaviour once or more by their boyfriend/girlfriend/partner since seventh grade. Percent.



One in four girls has been forced by a boyfriend/partner to do something sexual with them, and one in three girls has agreed to something sexual even though they did not want to. To the question of whether a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner has been violent towards them, 14 percent of girls and eight percent of boys answered that they had been exposed to this.

Perpetrating violence and harassment in various forms

For the four forms of violence concerning online and IRL exposure, students received the same questions, but instead of their own exposure, they were asked if they had exposed someone else.

We were aware that there could be underreporting, but we did not expect so few to report having exposed someone else. The differences in reporting

between those who have been exposed and those who have exposed someone else are greatest for the sexualised forms.

Most of the questions about the sexualised forms concerning what students have done to someone else yielded such low frequencies that it is difficult to perform any statistical analyses.

Only the two questions about calling someone 'whore/cunt/dick' or 'lesbian/fag' were reported by students as perpetrated against others to any significant extent. Otherwise, between 0.2 – 5.3 percent of students answered that they had subjected others to sexualised forms of harassment online, and between 0.2 – 8.3 percent had subjected someone else IRL.

Figure 17 shows how many have subjected others to sexualised forms of verbal harassment, online and IRL.

Figure 17. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they have subjected others to verbal sexual harassment, online and IRL, during the past six months. Percent.

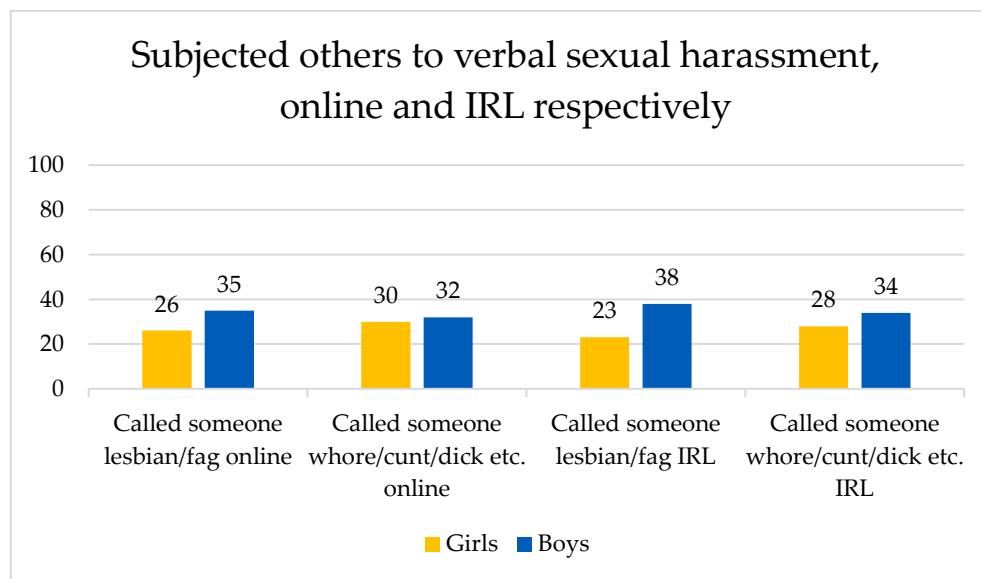


Figure 17 shows that about one in three boys has subjected someone else to verbal sexual harassment, online and/or IRL, in the past six months. There is no significant difference between girls and boys on the question of whether they have called someone 'whore/cunt/dick' or similar online. Otherwise, about one in four girls has subjected someone to verbal sexual harassment.

There are not more students who are exposed to offensive treatment (bullying) compared to the sexualised forms, but it seems to be easier to report having bullied someone than to have sexually harassed someone, especially those that occur IRL.

Figure 18 shows how students answered the questions about whether they have bullied someone IRL during the past six months.

Figure 18. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they have, one or more times, subjected someone else to offensive treatment (bullying) during the past six months. Percent.

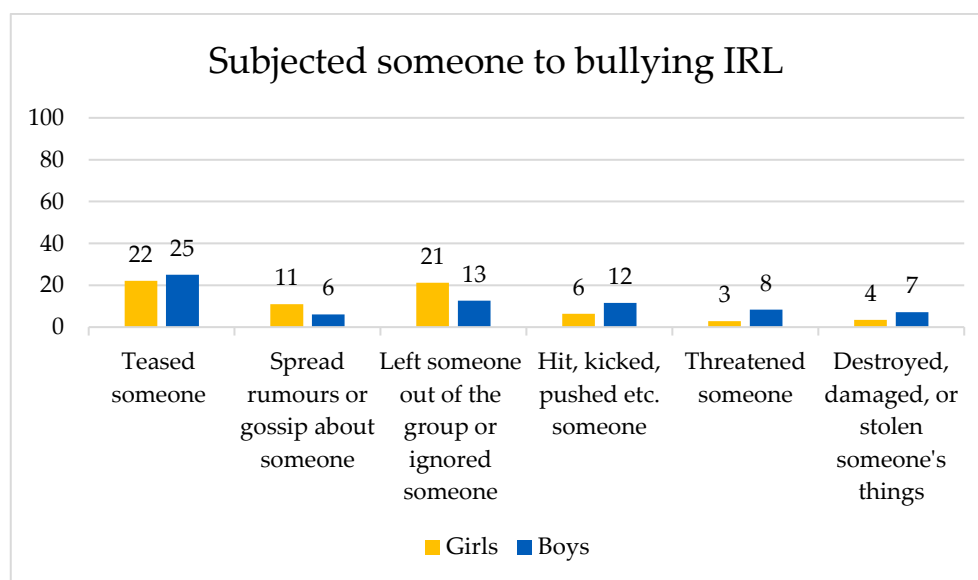


Figure 18 shows that just under one in four students answered that they have teased or called someone names in a mean or hurtful way, one or more times in the past six months (no significant difference between boys and girls). Girls answered to a greater extent than boys that they have spread rumours or gossip about someone and that they have left someone out or ignored someone in a mean or hurtful way. Although girls have been violent towards someone (hit, kicked, pushed, scratched, cut someone, pulled someone's hair, or shaken someone violently), threatened someone, or destroyed, damaged, or stolen someone's things, boys have done so to a significantly greater extent.

By whom have students been exposed to harassment?

To increase knowledge about who students have been victimised by, they were given follow-up questions about this. After each of the four forms of exposure (sexual harassment and bullying, online and IRL respectively), they were asked by whom they had been exposed. They had thirteen different options, and they could choose one or more of them. A clear

pattern emerges regarding by whom they are exposed, although there are some exceptions. **Table 1** shows the four most common answers for girls and boys, for the four forms.

Table 1. Distribution of the four most common answers to the question of by whom or whom students have been exposed, for each form of harassment. Percent.

	Sexual harassment online	Sexual harassment IRL	Bullying online	Bullying IRL
Girls				
Boy/boys at school	27	32	20	32
Unknown boy/boys	59	29	26	14
Boy/boys from another school	24	20		
Girl/girls at school			28	46
Girl/girls from another school				14
Unknown adult	21	15		
Do not know			31	
Boys				
Boy/boys at your school	37	30	27	45
Boy/boys from another school	12		14	11
Unknown boy/boys		7	19	14
Girl/girls at your school	13	13		11
Girl/girls from another school		8		
Do not know	30		40	

Table 1 shows that girls who are exposed to sexual harassment online and IRL are primarily exposed by boys, known or unknown. Girls who reported being bullied one or more times were primarily bullied by other girls at school, but also largely by boys at school. Girls also reported to a greater extent than boys that they had been exposed to sexual harassment, online and IRL, by unknown adults.

Boys have not been victimised to any of the four forms of harassment to the same extent as girls, but those who have been exposed have most often been exposed by other boys at their own school.

The table also highlights another type of problem regarding what happens online compared to IRL. The possibility of anonymity makes it difficult to know by whom they are victimised. Two out of three girls who have been victimised to sexual harassment online have been exposed by an unknown boy, and one in five girls by an unknown adult. One in three boys who have been victimised to sexual harassment online answered that they do not know by whom they were exposed. Not knowing who is victimising you creates uncertainty and insecurity in a different way than being exposed by someone you know.

Even if not all individual forms of harassment occur at school, it shows that the school is an important arena to pay attention to when it comes to exposure to harassment and also as an arena for preventive measures.

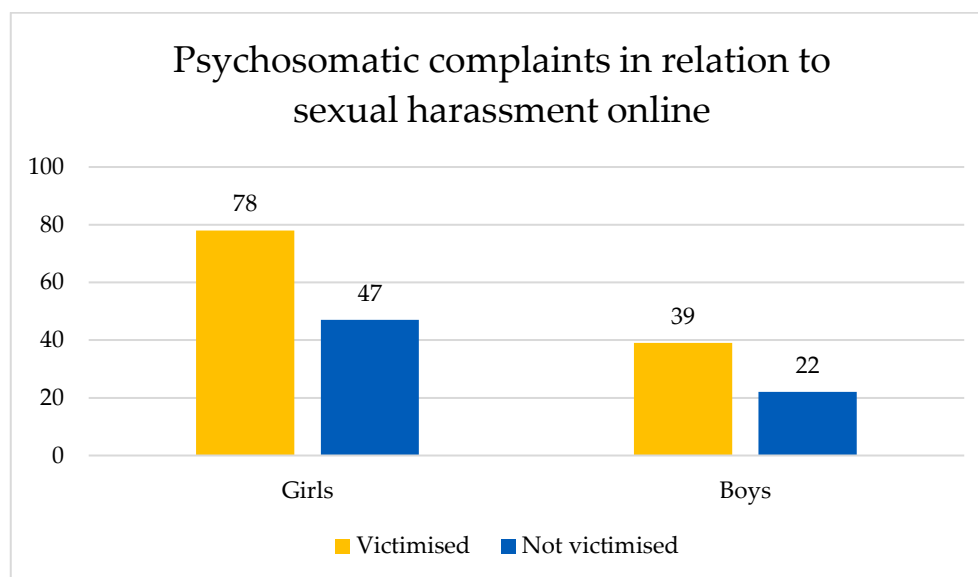
Is self-reported ill-health higher among those who report exposure to violence and harassment?

Psychosomatic symptoms and exposure

Although we cannot speak about causality, we can show whether those who report having been exposed to various forms of harassment also report more ill-health. **Figure 19** shows how many reporting a high degree of psychosomatic complaints (two or more complaints more than once a week) among those who have been exposed to sexual harassment online compared to those who have not. The measure of psychosomatic symptoms is the same as the Public Health Agency of Sweden (2023) uses in its reports on school children's health habits (HBSC).

The figure shows that girls and boys who have been exposed to sexual harassment online also report more psychosomatic complaints. Of the girls who have not been victimised to sexual harassment online, about half report psychosomatic complaints compared to almost eight out of ten girls who have been exposed. The proportion of boys who report psychosomatic symptoms is almost twice as high if they have been victimised to sexual harassment online compared to those who have not.

Figure 19. Proportion of girls and boys reporting a high degree of psychosomatic complaints among those who have been victimised to sexual harassment online compared to those who have not. Percent.



The same pattern is seen for the other three forms of harassment¹ reported in this study. Students who report having been exposed to any form of harassment also report psychosomatic complaints to a significantly higher degree than those who have not been exposed.

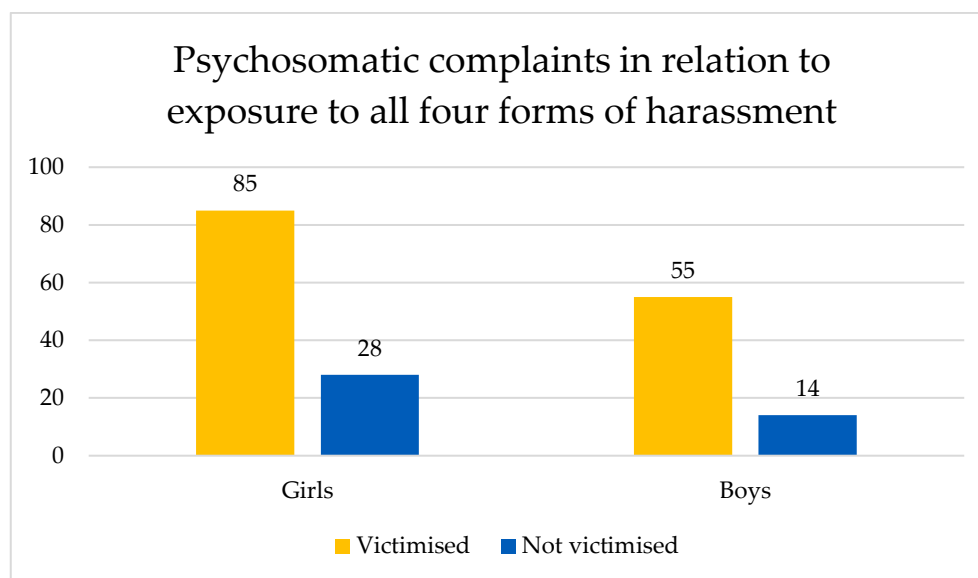
Unfortunately, it is uncommon to be exposed to only one form of harassment. Most report having been exposed to two, three, or even all four forms of harassment reported in this study. Nearly half of all girls (47 percent) and one in five boys (20 percent) have been exposed to all four forms of harassment in the past six months. Only 11 percent of girls and 26 percent of boys have not been exposed to any of the four forms.

Figure 20 shows the differences in self-reported psychosomatic complaints between those who have not been victimised to any form of the four forms in the past six months and those who have been exposed to all four forms.

The figure shows that it is three times more common for girls to report psychosomatic complaints among those who have been exposed to four forms of harassment compared to those who have not been exposed. For boys, it is four times more common among those who are exposed.

¹ The four forms of harassment refer to bullying online, bullying IRL, sexual harassment online and sexual harassment IRL.

Figure 20. Proportion of girls and boys reporting a high degree of psychosomatic symptoms among those who have been victimised to four forms of harassment compared to those who have not been exposed. Percent.

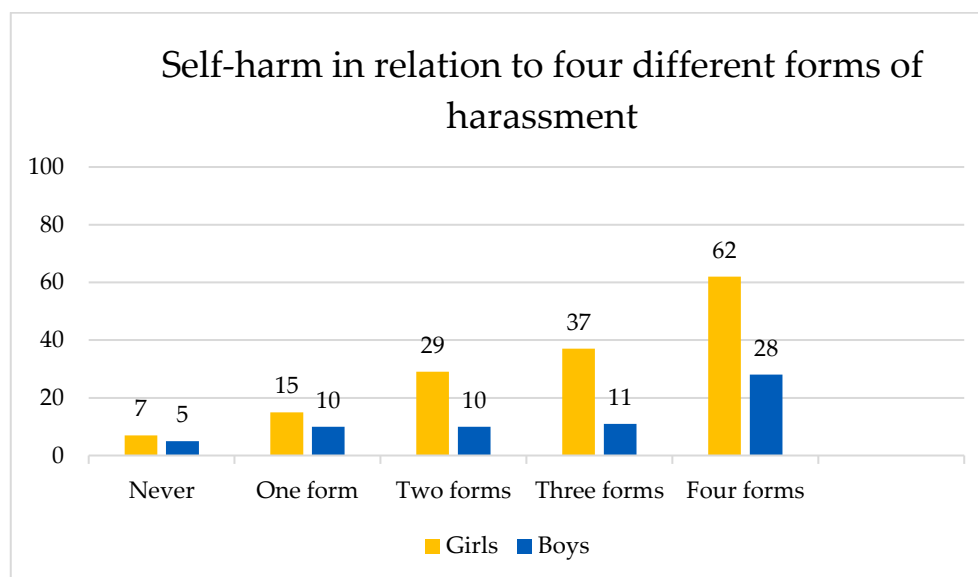


Self-harming behaviour and victimisation

Figure 4 shows that 41 percent of girls and 11 percent of boys answered that they have harmed themselves one or more times in the past six months. Although there may be many different explanations for why young people engage in self-harming behaviour, an analysis shows that the more forms of violence and harassment a student is exposed to, the greater the likelihood that he or she also reports having harmed themselves.

Figure 21 shows that there is a clear increase in those who report having harmed themselves in relation to the number of the four forms of harassment. We know that young people can be exposed to many more forms of violence and harassment than the four forms reported here, e.g., honour-related violence and violence from a boyfriend or girlfriend. But the figure still shows that the likelihood of students reporting having harmed themselves increases among those who report having been exposed to several different forms of harassment. The correlation seems to be clearer among girls than among boys, but this may possibly be explained by a lower frequency among boys.

Figure 21. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they have harmed themselves one or more times in the past six months in relation to four different forms of harassment. Percent.



We have chosen to show differences in exposure in relation to psychosomatic complaints and self-harm. Preliminary analyses show that the same pattern exists for other forms of mental ill-health such as depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms, but these are not reported in detail here.

In a discussion about the significance that violence and harassment can have for children's and young people's mental health, it is important to also include other forms of violence that young people can be exposed to, such as physical violence and threats, partner violence, honour-based violence, sexual abuse, rape, etc. These are different forms of violence that are not included in the four forms we have highlighted in relation to psychosomatic symptoms and self-harming behaviour in the figures above.

It is also important to remember that the division of students into those with psychosomatic complaints compared to those without is not absolute. Having at least two symptoms at least once a week is a problem, but it means that there may be students in the other group who have serious symptoms, but less often than once a week.

Time on social media and online gaming

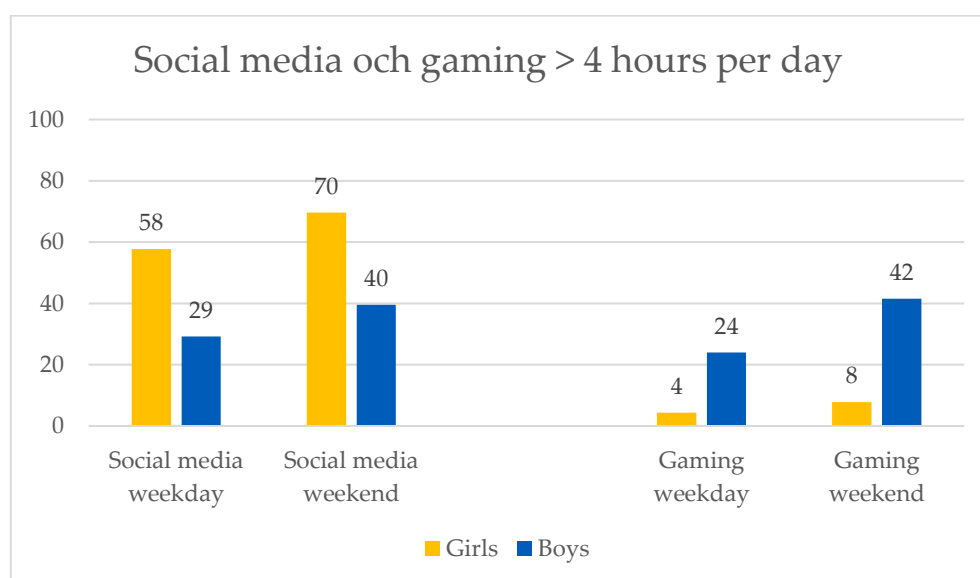
Since many young people today spend a large part of their time on social media, we asked questions about how many hours per day, on weekdays

and weekends, they spend on these activities. Only a few girls and boys answered that they never use social media (one percent and four percent, respectively). Only a few also answered that they do not use social media every day (girls two percent, boys five percent).

When it comes to gaming, many answered that they never play online games, but there are large differences between girls and boys. Just under two out of three girls answered that they never play online games (58 percent) compared to one in nine boys (11 percent).

Figure 22 shows the proportion of girls and boys who answered that they use social media or play online games more than four hours per day.

Figure 22. Proportion of girls and boys who spend more than four hours per day (weekday or weekend) on social media and/or online gaming. Percent.



The figure shows that there is a large difference between girls and boys in how much time they spend on social media versus gaming. In general, a high proportion of students use social media more than four hours per day compared to time spent gaming, but almost twice as many girls as boys do so. One in five girls (21 percent) and eight percent of boys answered that they use social media more than seven hours on weekdays.

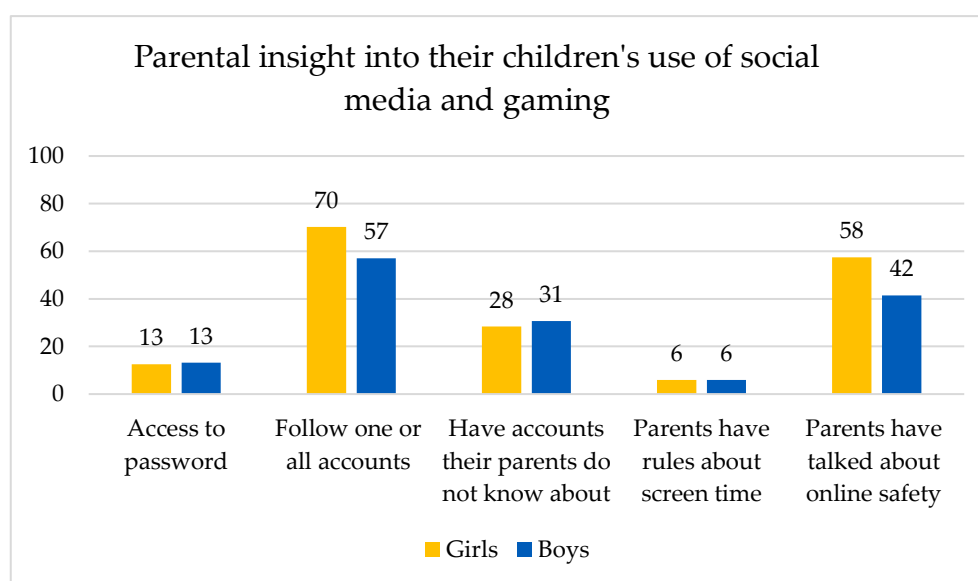
Few girls play online games more than four hours per day, while one in four boys do so on weekdays and 42 percent on weekends. Five percent of boys play online games more than seven hours on weekdays and 16 percent do so on weekends.

Parental insight into young people's use of social media and online gaming

To learn more about parental insight into young people's use of social media and online gaming, we asked some questions about parental rules regarding screen time, etc. The response options were 'agree,' 'neither agree nor disagree,' 'disagree,' and they also had the option to indicate 'not now, but when I was younger.'

Figure 23 shows the proportion of students who answered 'agree' to questions about parental insight into their children's use of social media and online gaming. Many have parents who follow them on social media, but one in three students answered that they have accounts their parents do not know about.

Figure 23. Proportion of girls and boys who answered 'agree' to questions about parental insight into their children's use of social media and online gaming. Percent.



Few students have rules at home regarding screen time, but half of the students have parents who have talked to them about online safety, with a slightly higher proportion among girls compared to boys.

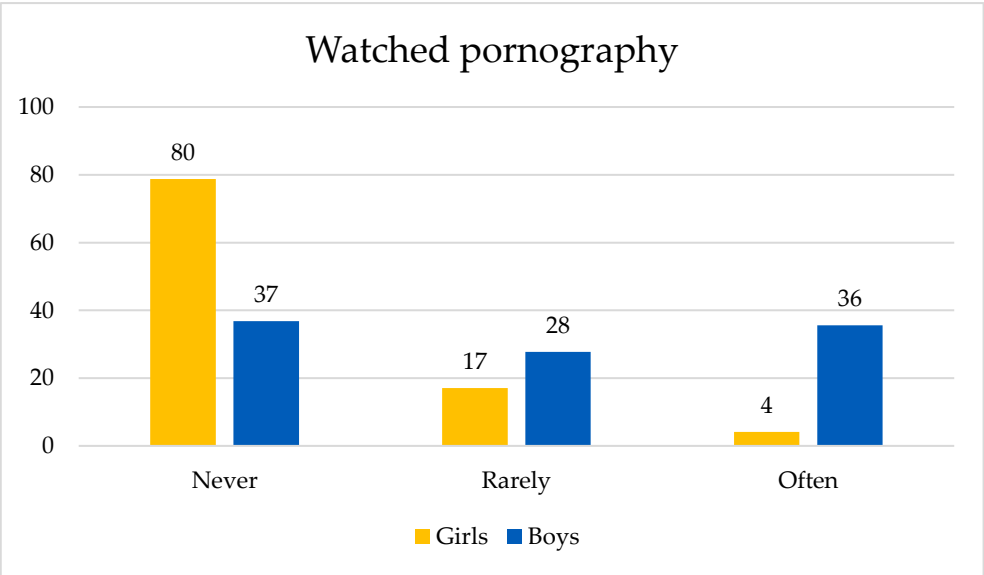
To the question where they could answer 'not now, but when I was younger,' one in three students (girls 36 percent, boys 32 percent) answered that their parents had access to their passwords when they were younger. Few students answered that their parents followed them on social media when they were younger (4.5 percent). One in five students had rules about their screen time earlier, and 12 percent of girls and 17 percent of boys

answered that one or both of their parents had talked to them about online safety when they were younger, but not now.

Pornography consumption

Some of the risks of spending a large part of one's time on social media and being online concern what happens there. Some of the time is spent searching for information and doing schoolwork, while other activities are more problematic. One activity that has begun to be recognised as risky for young people is extensive and early consumption of pornography.

Figure 24. Proportion of girls and boys who have never, rarely, or often watched pornography in the past six months. Percent.



The pornography that young people watch today is easily accessible, more violent, and creates problems in ways that differ from a few decades ago (Ombudsman for Children, 2020).

We asked how often they had watched pornography in the past six months. There are seven response options, and the answers have been divided into three groups. The 'often' group includes those who answered that they watched pornography once a week or more often.

Figure 24 shows that there are large differences in pornography consumption between girls and boys. Just over one in three boys has consumed pornography once a week or more often in the past six months, compared to four percent of girls.

Four out of five girls never watch pornography, compared to just over one in three boys. A further analysis shows that eight percent of boys answered that they have watched pornography every day in the past six months.

A follow-up question was how old they were when they watched pornography for the first time. Of those who answered that they had ever watched pornography (124 girls and 364 boys), 44 percent of the girls had done so when they were 12 years old or younger, and 18 percent of the girls did not remember how old they were the first time they watched pornography. Of the boys, about 35 percent had done so when they were 12 years old or younger, and 26 percent did not remember how old they were.

A comment from a girl who watched pornography for the first time when she was seven years old was that she was forced to do so. We assume that many of those who watched pornography for the first time at a very young age did not do so voluntarily or on their own initiative.

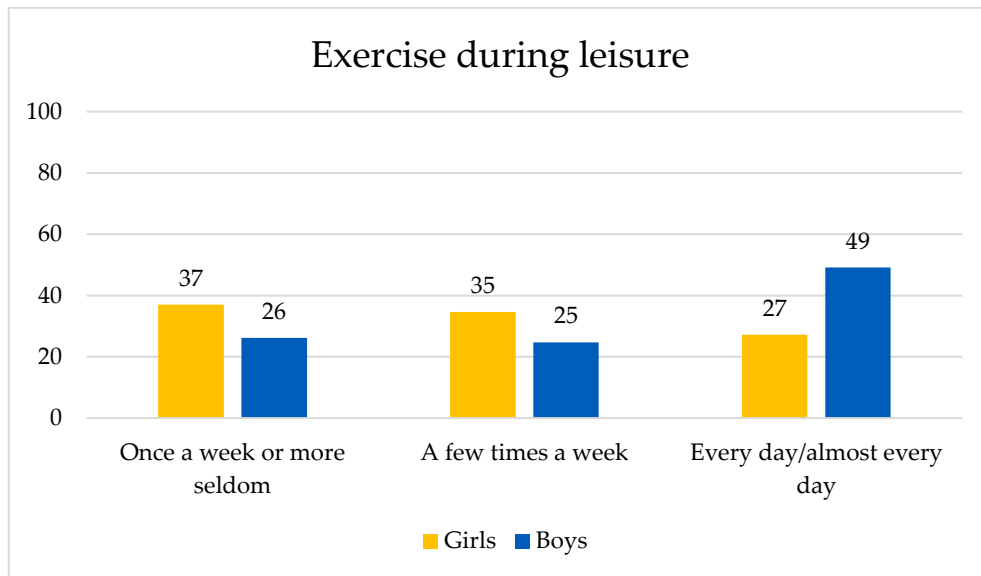
Physical activity

One of the concerns raised regarding screen time is that children and young people become sedentary, with problems that can entail, but there do not seem to be any strong links between screen time and physical activity (Dahlgren et al. 2021). Research shows that physical activity is good for cognitive functions and self-confidence in children and young people, while the importance of physical activity for young people's mental health is more uncertain (Lubans et al. 2016).

We asked how often they usually exercise in their free time outside of school so much that they become out of breath and sweaty.

Figure 25 shows that half of the boys exercise every or almost every day compared to just over a quarter of the girls. One in three girls and one in four boys exercise a few times a week. Ten percent of girls and five percent of boys answered that they never exercise in their free time to the point of sweating.

Figure 25. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they usually exercise in their free time outside of school so much that they become out of breath or sweaty. Percent.



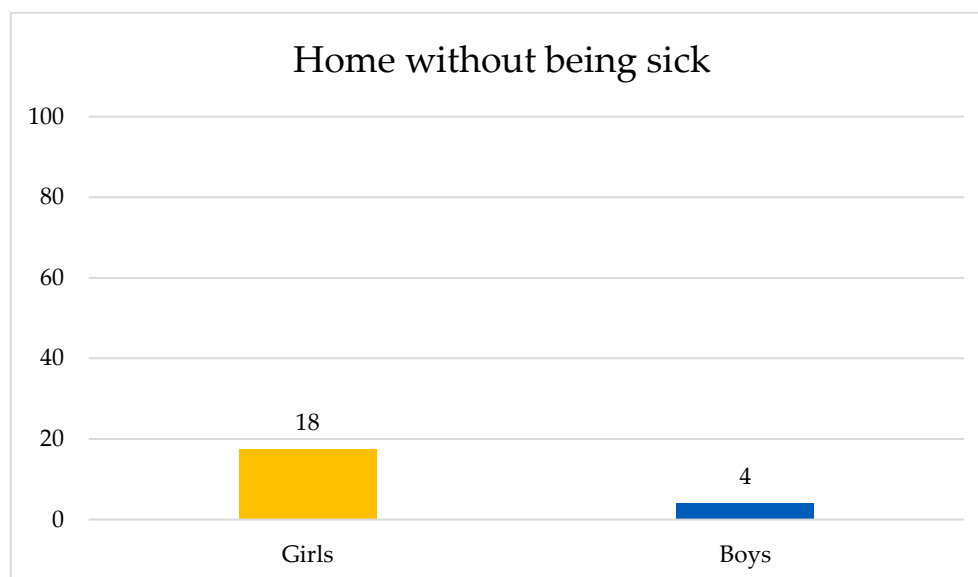
School absence

Being at home from school without being sick can have many different explanations. But regardless of whether it is due to chronic illness, problems in the school environment, harassment, or something else, it can have negative consequences for grades, future opportunities, social relationships, and health (Allen et al. 2018). We asked how often they had stayed home from school without being sick during the past six months.

Figure 26 shows that almost one in five ninth-grade girls had stayed home from school one day a week or more often without being sick.

Since the proportion of boys who stayed home without being sick is so low, it is difficult to make any in-depth analyses of relationships to other factors.

Figure 26. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they stayed home from school without being sick once a week or more often during the past six months. Percent.



An analysis of differences between the group of girls who stayed home once a week or more often and other girls shows that those who stayed home were more likely to have been exposed to violence and harassment. Of the girls who stayed home, 74 percent had been exposed to four forms of harassment, compared to 5 percent of those who did not stay home.

Social support

Social support is important for young people's well-being and can be provided by, for example, parents/guardians, teachers, and friends. Social support can be emotional, instrumental, and informal (Hombrados-Mendieta et al. 2012).

We asked twelve questions about social support, mainly capturing emotional support from family, friends, and teachers. A comparison between the different sources of support shows that more students answered that they always or often feel they have support from family compared to support from friends or teachers. **Figure 27** shows how students answered questions about social support from family.

Most students feel that their family really tries to help them. Boys answered to a significantly higher degree than girls that they receive support from family. When it comes to the question of whether they can talk about their

problems with their family, four out of five boys answered that this often applies to them compared to just under two out of three girls.

Figure 27. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they 'always' or 'often' have support from family. Percent.

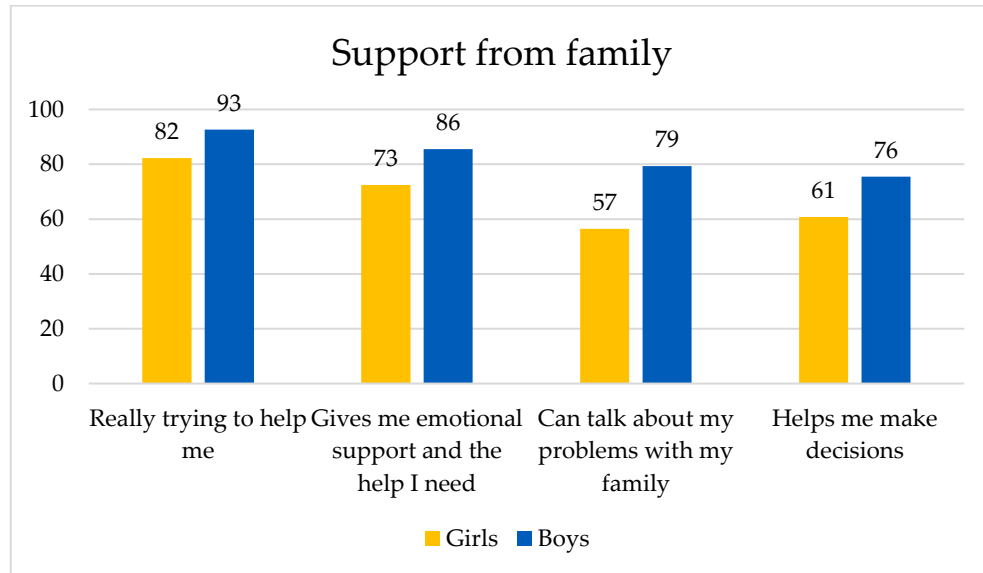
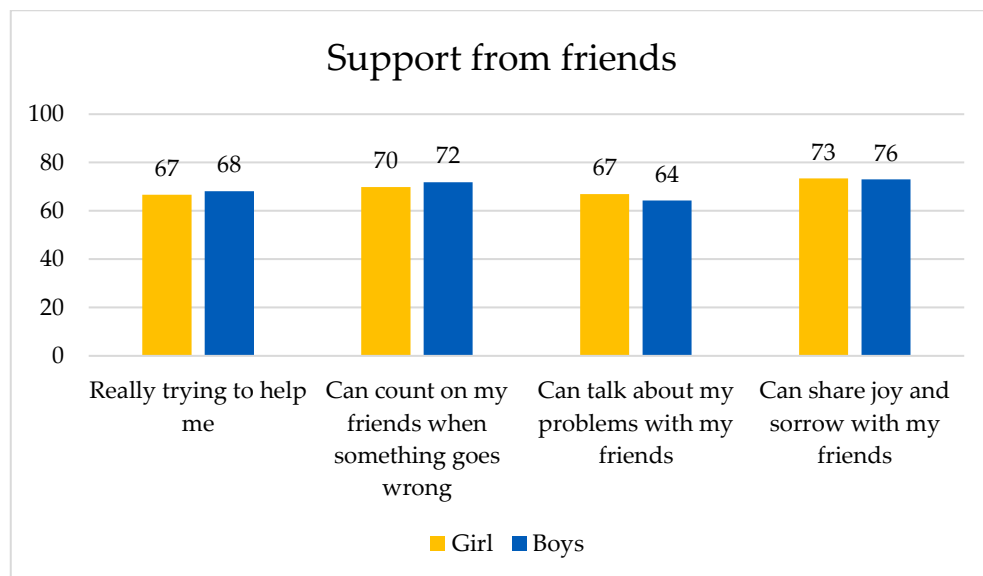


Figure 28. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they 'always' or 'often' experience support from friends. Percent.



Students were asked four questions about support from friends, see **Figure 28**. About three out of four girls and boys feel that they always or often have support from their friends. There is no significant difference between girls and boys for any of the four questions regarding support from friends. Students also received four questions about support from teachers.

Figure 29. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they 'always' or 'often' receive support from their teachers. Percent.

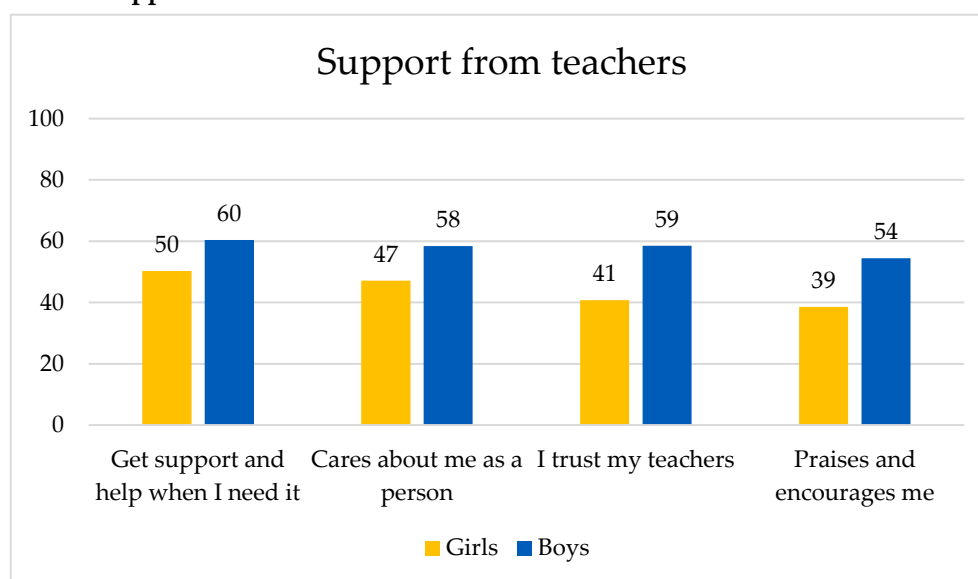


Figure 29 shows that about half of all students feel that they always or often receive support from their teachers, but boys experience this significantly more often than girls. Boys are more likely than girls to feel that they receive support and help when they need it, that teachers care about them as individuals, that they trust their teachers, and that they receive praise and encouragement.

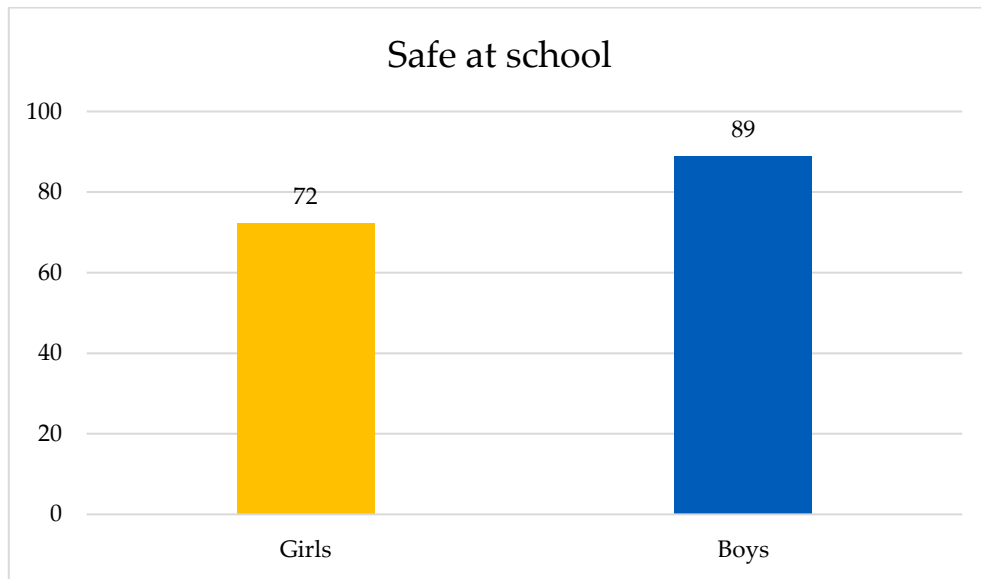
The student's psychosocial work environment

The questions about harassment described above partly concern the students' psychosocial work environment, since school is one of the places where they are exposed. Here we report how students answered questions about safety, demands at school, peer relationships, experiences of disorder in the classroom, discrimination, and participation.

Safety

Students were asked whether they feel safe at school, and **Figure 30** shows that most students feel safe at school.

Figure 30. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they 'always' or 'often' felt safe at school during the past six months. Percent.



Although most students feel safe at school, significantly more boys than girls reported feeling this way. The proportion of boys who answered that they always feel safe is 59 percent, compared to 28 percent of girls.

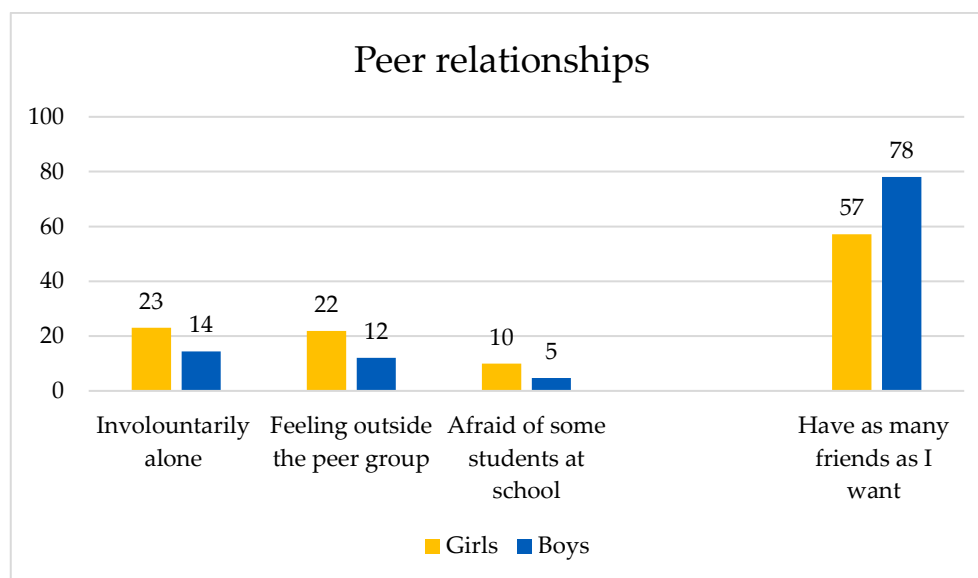
Peer relationships

Students answered questions about peer relationships, three negative and one positive. **Figure 31** shows the proportion who answered 'always' or 'often' to the questions.

Figure 31 shows that there are problematic peer relationships that are not covered by the concept of offensive treatment or bullying. Nearly one in four girls answered that they often feel lonely even though they do not want to be, and just over one in five often feel left out of the peer group, compared to one in eight boys. One in ten girls and one in twenty boys are often afraid of some students at school. Four out of five boys have as many friends as they want compared to just under two-thirds of girls.

Feeling lonely and isolated increases the risk of both mental and somatic ill-health (Christiansen et al. 2021).

Figure 31. Proportion of girls and boys who reported 'always' or 'often' to questions about peer relationships (loneliness, feeling left out of the peer group, being afraid of some students at school) and whether they have as many friends as they want. Percent.



School demands

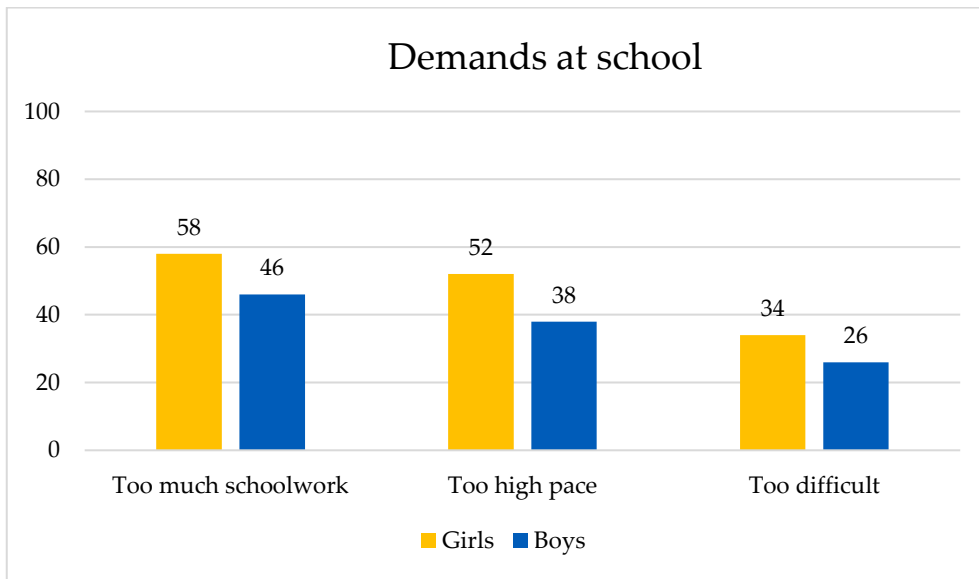
We asked three questions about perceived demands at school. These concern quantitative demands, such as feeling that there is too much schoolwork and that the pace is too high. The third question addresses qualitative demands and concerns whether they feel schoolwork is too difficult.

Figure 32 shows how many answered that they always or often experience high demands. It is more common for students to experience quantitative demands than to find the schoolwork difficult.

Girls report to a greater extent than boys that there is too much schoolwork, that the pace is too high, and that they find the schoolwork difficult.

One in three girls answered that they often find the schoolwork difficult compared to one in four boys.

Figure 32. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they 'always' or 'often' think the demands at school are too high. Percent.



Rowdy lessons

Students were asked whether, during the past six months, they have experienced high noise levels and disorder during lessons. The response options were 'never or almost never,' 'some lessons,' 'most lessons,' and 'every lesson.' **Figure 33** shows the proportion of students who experienced this in most or every lesson.

Figure 33. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that there were high noise and disorder during every or almost every lesson in the past six months. Percent.

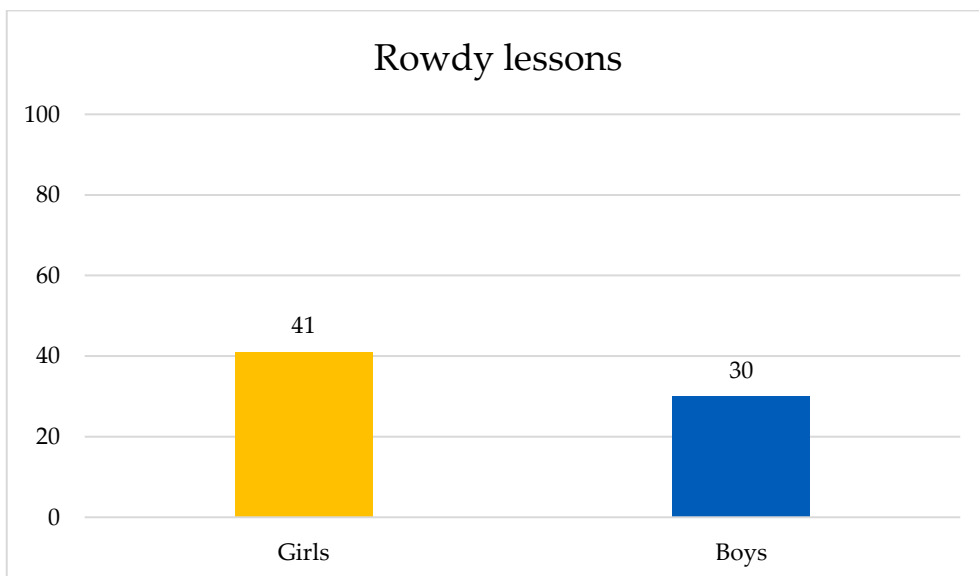


Figure 33 shows that a higher proportion of girls compared to boys experience high noise levels and disorder during lessons. Twelve percent of girls and 14 percent of boys answered that there is never or almost never high noise or disorder during lessons.

Discrimination at school

Students answered the question of whether there had been abuse or discrimination at school for reasons related to forms of discrimination according to the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567).

Figure 34. Proportion of girls and boys who reported that they always or often perceived that someone was discriminated against at school during the past six months. Percent.

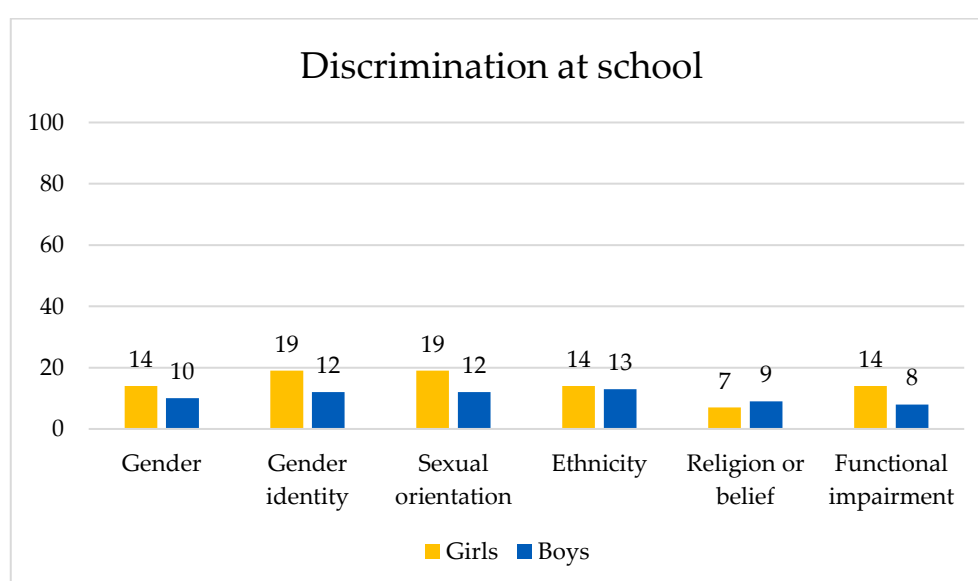


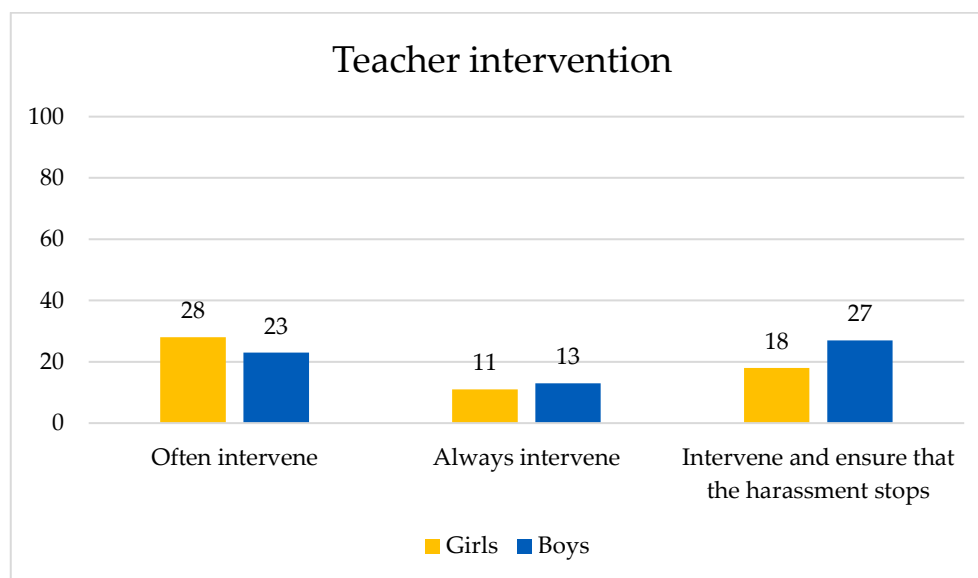
Figure 34 shows the proportion of students who perceived that there had been discrimination at school during the past six months and how it is distributed among different forms of discrimination. This does not concern their own exposure at school, although it is possible that some included themselves in the reporting. Girls perceive to a greater extent than boys that there has been discrimination at school due to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and functional impairment. When it comes to ethnicity and religion or belief, the differences between girls and boys are not significant.

What do teachers do when a student is exposed to any form of harassment, abuse, or violence at school?

The question of what teachers do when someone is exposed to any form of violence or harassment can be difficult to answer because students do not always know what actions have been taken. **Figure 35** shows the

proportion of students who perceive that teachers 'often' or 'always' intervene or that teachers 'always or usually intervene and ensure it stops.'

Figure 35. Proportion of girls and boys who reported the question of whether teachers intervene if a student has been offended, harassed, mistreated, or left out. Percent.



The perception students have regarding whether teachers intervene if they learn that a student has been offended, harassed, mistreated, or left out is that the majority of teachers do so, in total 57 percent of girls and 63 percent of boys. Boys are more likely than girls to perceive that teachers both intervene and ensure that the harassment stops.

According to the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567), there should be preventive work against discrimination in all schools, and the school should cooperate with students in this work.

After the question about whether there has been discrimination at school and what teachers do when they learn that such has occurred, students were asked if they know what the school's plan/rules to prevent mistreatment entail. **Figure 36** shows the proportion of students who answered 'yes,' 'no,' 'unsure,' or 'my school has no such rules'.

Figure 36. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they know what the school's plan/rules to prevent harassment entail. Percent.

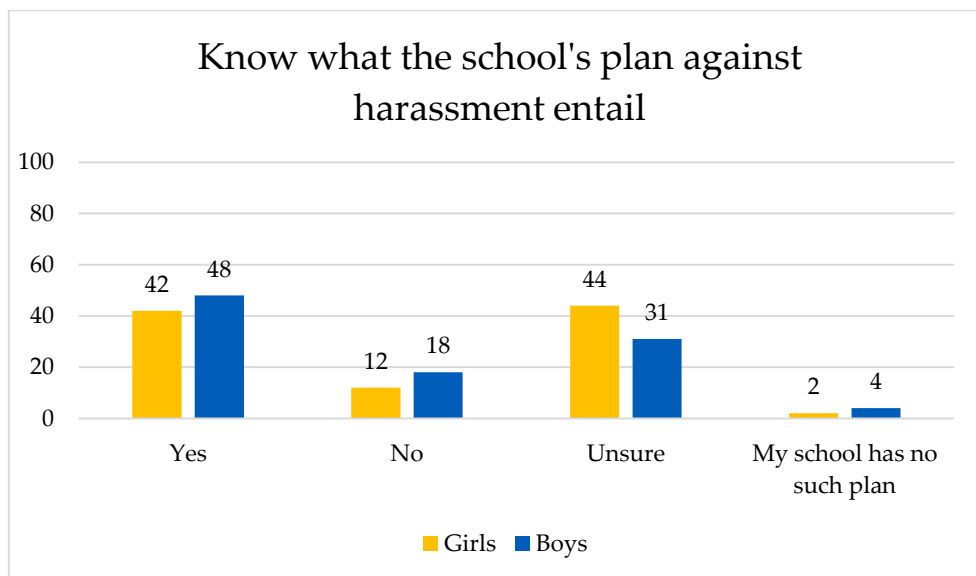


Figure 36 shows that just under half of the students answered that they know the school's plan/rules for how harassment should be prevented. Only a few students believe that their school does not have such a plan.

Participation and influence in the class

The curriculum for compulsory school and preschool class (LGR 22) discusses the school's values and mission. A fundamental value is that the school system should be based on democratic principles. This means that all students should be able to influence, take responsibility, and participate, and also that students should have influence over their education. The school should also convey the values and rights derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF Sweden 2020). Previous studies have shown that a high degree of participation, measured as democratic competence, how cooperation occurs in the class, and how communication takes place in the class, is related to school success and a low degree of bullying (Ahlström, 2010) as well as students' health (Carlerby et al., 2012; Warne et al., 2017). We therefore asked questions about participation and report below how girls and boys answered eleven questions covering these three areas. The first question concerns how students perceive communication in their class. The response options were 'yes, absolutely,' 'yes, to a large extent,' 'neither yes nor no,' 'no, to a small extent,' 'no, not at all,' and 'don't know.' **Figure 37** shows the proportion of students who answered 'Yes, absolutely' or 'Yes, to a large extent' to the questions.

Figure 37. Proportion of girls and boys who reported 'yes, absolutely' or 'yes, to a large extent' to questions about how they think communication works in the class. Percent.

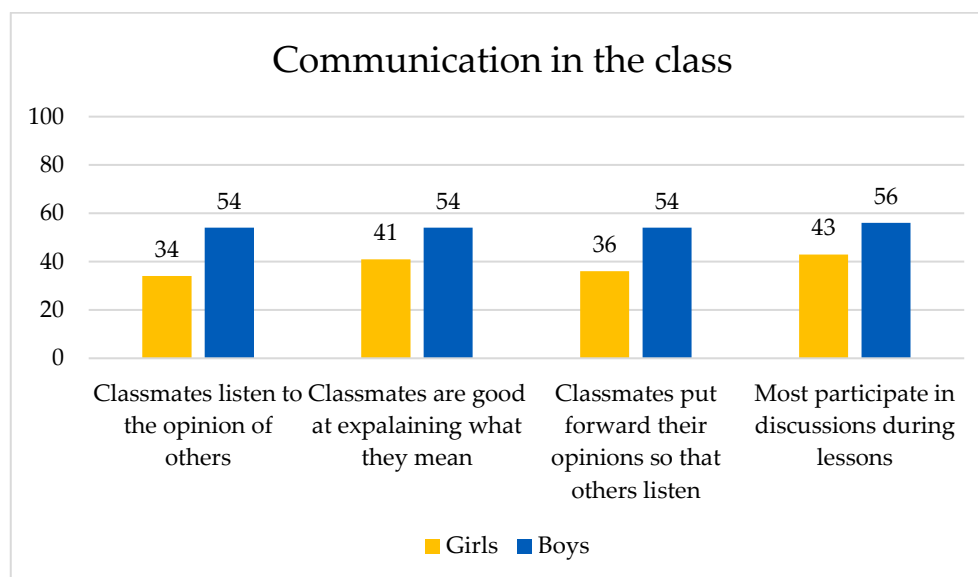


Figure 37 shows that just over half of the boys think communication works well in the class, while girls do not think so to the same extent.

The second question about participation concerns democratic competence.

Figure 38 shows how students answered three questions about how they perceive their class and the proportion of students who answered 'yes, absolutely' or 'yes, to a large extent' to the questions. The figure shows that about half of the students think their classmates dare to stand up for their opinions, but boys have a more positive view. Half of the boys think classmates respect each other's opinions compared to one in three girls. One in three students think classmates are able to critically review facts, but boys think so to a greater extent than girls.

The third question about participation concerns cooperation in the class.

Figure 39 shows how students answered four questions about how they perceive their class. The figure shows the proportion of students who answered 'yes, absolutely' or 'yes, to a large extent' to the questions.

Figure 38. Proportion of girls and boys who answered 'yes, absolutely' or 'yes, to a large extent' to questions about how they think democratic competence works in the class. Percent.

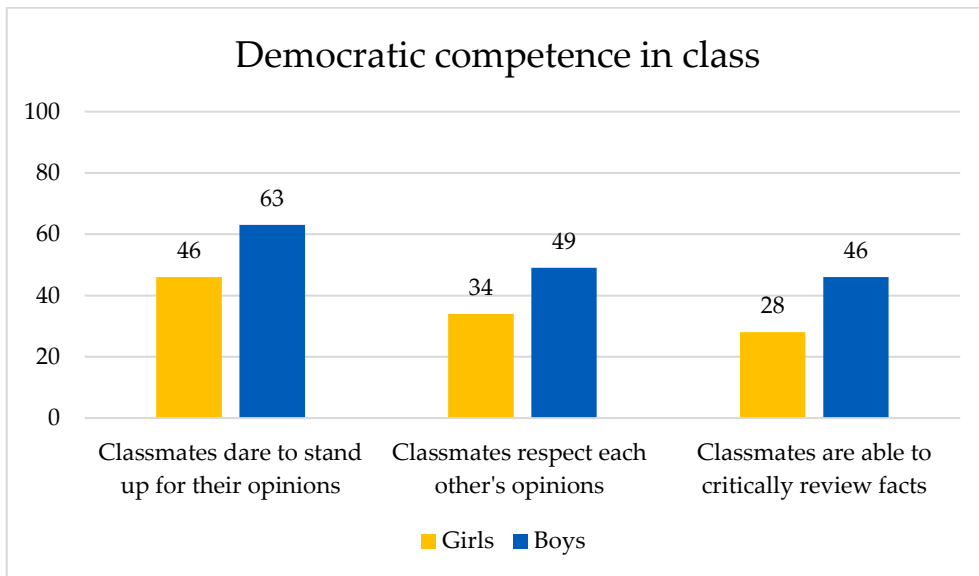
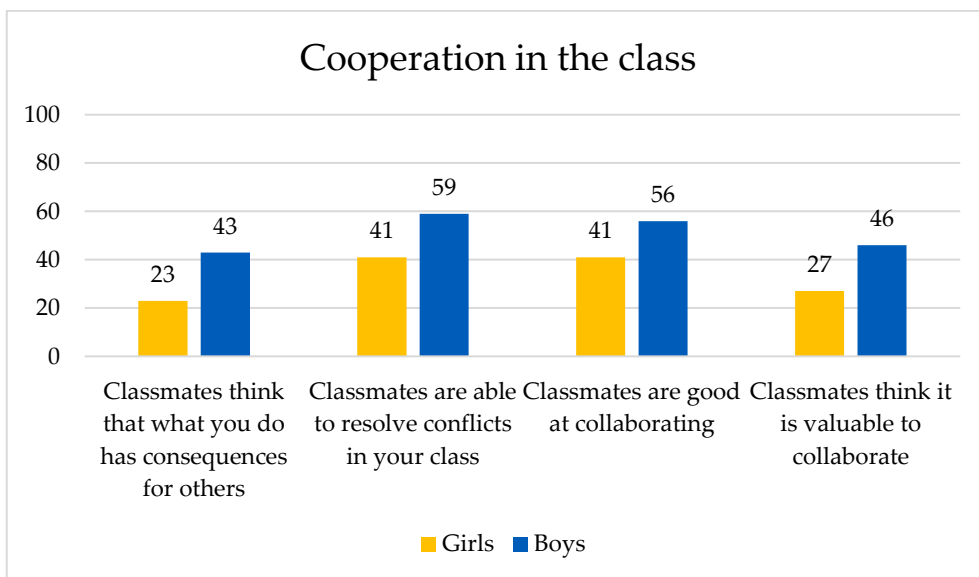


Figure 39. Proportion of girls and boys who answered 'yes, absolutely' or 'yes, to a large extent' to questions about how they think cooperation works in the class. Percent.



The question about how they perceive cooperation in the class also shows large differences between how girls and boys perceive its functioning. Only one in four girls thinks their classmates consider that what they do has consequences for others and that their classmates think it is valuable to cooperate, compared to almost half of the boys.

Has the survey affected the students' well-being?

We know from previous studies that many students have mental ill-health of varying severity. Since the survey also asked many questions that may be perceived as sensitive, e.g., questions about being exposed to violence and harassment, we ended the questionnaire by asking whether they felt that the questions had affected how they feel. **Figure 40** shows the proportion who answered that they 'feel worse,' 'the same as before the survey,' or 'feel better'.

Figure 40. Proportion of girls and boys who answered that they 'feel worse,' 'the same as before the survey,' or 'feel better' after answering the questions in the survey. Percent.

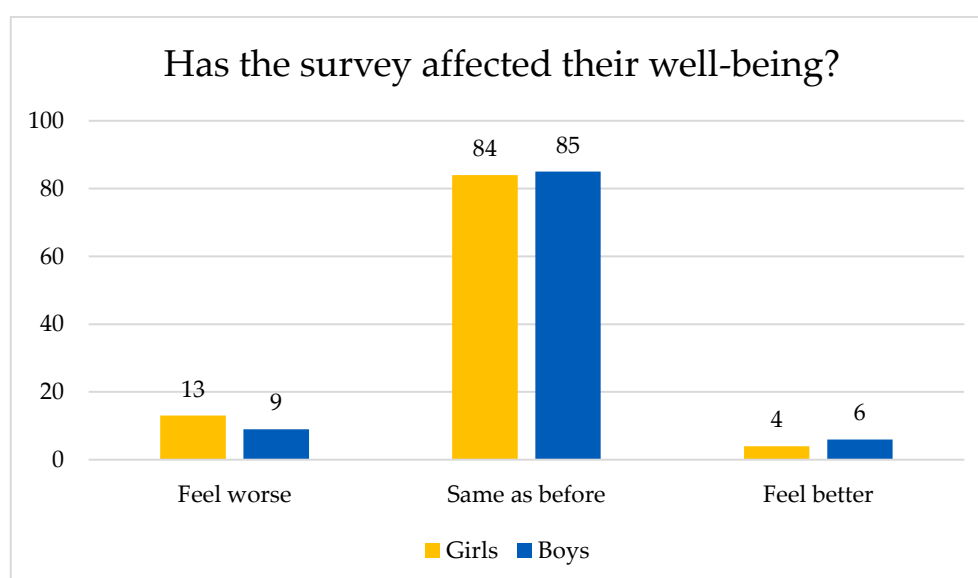


Figure 40 shows that most students feel the same as before or feel better. About one in ten students answered that they feel worse after answering the survey, a slightly higher proportion among girls. Since we know these are sensitive questions, all students who participated were informed that they could contact the school nurse, school counsellor, or other named support organizations if they needed to after completing the survey. We do not know if anyone did so, but everyone responsible for the students' health at school (teachers, school nurses, school counsellors, etc.) was informed about the survey.

To learn a little more about what students thought of the survey and understand how it affected their well-being, they were able to provide their own comments and opinions. Eighty-two girls and 143 boys wrote something on the open-ended answer option. Many wrote that they

thought the questions were good and important, especially the girls. Some commented that there were many questions and some that they were boring. More boys than girls were negative about the survey in general.

Comments from girls who answered that they felt worse included, for example, "It brings up memories you wish you could have avoided" or "When you actually get asked, you realize what is happening. Tough, but at the same time good to have it asked".

Although some boys were clearly provoked by the survey and wrote things like "this sucked ass, so fuck off" or "damn fucking gay survey," there were many positive responses from boys too. A survey is not usually used as an intervention, but some of the responses show that it can still have some significance to ask questions that make certain things visible, even if they are sensitive topics.

"I feel worse, but it feels better to vent feelings and to have them heard".
(boy, 15 years)

"I had to think a bit [more on this topic than I usually do]". (boy, 15 years)
"It's tough to talk about these things, but I think they still need to come out". (boy, 15 years)

"It felt good to let out what you feel. It actually felt good to get questions about yourself, instead of talking to someone face to face, you know". (boy, 15 years)

"It really made me think". (boy, 15 years)

"I think this survey is good, but it makes you think about your own actions and what you do to those around you". (girl, 15 years)

It is also possible in a survey to gain perspective on one's own life and realise that "I'm glad I have a functioning class and a nice group of friends, not everyone has that". (boy, 15 years)

DISCUSSION

The results in the report provide a clear picture that the mental health of ninth-grade students needs attention. The results also show how common it is for ninth-grade students to be exposed to various forms of violence and harassment. It is especially important to note that girls not only have worse mental health compared to boys but are also much more often exposed than boys to sexualised forms of harassment online, sexualised forms of harassment IRL, online bullying, and bullying IRL. Girls are more exposed to honour-related violence and oppression and more exposed to violence from someone they have had a romantic or sexual relationship with, compared to boys. They are also more often than boys exposed to several forms of violence and harassment, so-called multi-exposure.

The report includes only four forms of exposure in the group we call multi-exposed, but many may be exposed to more types of violence than that.

Previous research shows that exposure to violence and harassment is strongly associated with also reporting mental ill-health (Landstedt & Gillander Gådin, 2011; Zetterström Dahlqvist & Gillander Gådin, 2018). One factor that distinguishes young people's reality today from the past is the rapid development of social media and the endless opportunities it provides for those who want to exploit, harass, and/or harm someone.

Digital platforms mean that those who previously harassed and threatened someone in the physical world, for example at school, now have an additional arena to use (Zetterström Dahlqvist & Gillander Gådin, 2018). Social media and online games are also arenas for adults who are looking for children to contact, so-called grooming, where the purpose is to gain a child's trust in order to exploit them sexually.

Some of the questions in the survey about sexualised exposure online show how often students have been exposed to attempts at what is called commercial sexual exploitation. One in four girls has been offered payment or other compensation to send pictures or videos of themselves with nudity or sexual content. They are also offered payment to pose in front of a webcam. A report from four of the northern counties in Sweden shows that many who work with young people miss those who have been exposed to this type of violence (Ahlqvist, 2023). Some of the conclusions from that report are that it is important to pay attention to the problem, not to blame the victim, to educate those who work with children about how to talk

about boundaries and sexual abuse, and that children and young people themselves need to gain knowledge about what is criminal.

The analysis of the questions about self-harm shows a high frequency, but a much higher proportion of girls answered that they had harmed themselves one or more times in the past six months compared to boys. The National Board of Health and Welfare (2022) has found that there has been a sharp increase in self-harm among young people aged 12–17 since 2020, especially among girls. The causes are not known, but since the increase has largely occurred among a broad group of young people who were not previously diagnosed within psychiatry, they assume that the causes are found in the environments where most young people spend time.

Analyses in this study show that those who have been exposed to violence and harassment to a greater extent also reported more psychosomatic complaints, more depressive symptoms, more self-harming behaviour, and were more often at home from school without being sick. The analysis of self-harming behaviour also shows a dose-response relationship, i.e., the more exposure to violence and harassment, the more report having harmed themselves. The clearest correlation is seen among the group of girls.

Although exposure to violence and harassment is not the sole explanation for self-harming behaviour, it is important to pay attention to young people's exposure, especially that of girls. A previous study among high school students in the same county in Sweden as the present study, also showed strong correlations between exposure to bullying, sexual harassment, physical violence, and sexual violence and the risk of self-harm (Landstedt & Gillander Gådin, 2011).

Being exposed to sexualised forms of violence and harassment affects one's identity and self-esteem on a deeper level compared to non-sexualised forms, which may explain the strong links to mental ill-health and self-harm (Schnittker, 2022).

Sexual harassment not only has consequences for mental health but also increases the risk of school absence, feeling unsafe at school, and developing a negative body image (Ormerod et al., 2008).

This report shows some of the various forms of exposure that exist for girls and boys online. Experiences from interviews with young people are that they rarely tell what they are exposed to, not to their parents and not even to their friends (Gillander Gådin & Dahlqvist, 2020). It may be that they are afraid of not being believed, that it will get worse if they tell, and that they

feel guilt and shame for being exposed, even though that is not where the guilt or shame belongs. Violence and harassment online can mean uncertainty about whether a picture has been spread further, worry about who has seen it, lack of control over what is sent to them, uncertainty about who the perpetrator is, a sense of betrayal if they have been on a platform they are not allowed to be on, and guilt and shame if they think they are responsible for being exposed (Svedin & Johansson, 2017).

It is important never to blame the victim, but instead to focus attention on those who harass.

Although violence in young people's relationships has begun to receive attention in Sweden (Korkmaz et al., 2022), there is a lack of knowledge about those who are 15 years or younger. The results from this study show that the same pattern applies to those in compulsory school as to those in upper secondary school. Girls are more often exposed to sexual and physical violence by their partner, while boys mainly report that their girlfriends have tried to control and limit who they associate with.

When it comes to honour-related violence and oppression, it is important to pay attention to those who live in contexts where they are controlled by relatives or others close to them. Even though few in our study reported the most serious forms of control and fear of traveling abroad, it has major consequences for those who live in such a context. Extensive support is also required for those who want to break free (Olsson, 2022).

We included many questions about perpetrating harassment in various forms, but we assess that the low frequency of perpetrating someone else is an underreporting and that it is therefore difficult to make in-depth analyses. Exceptions are the questions about bullying, where more reported that they have bullied others, even though the sexualised forms of exposure are much more extensive, especially for girls. Research on bullying has shown that even those who are perpetrators, and especially those who are both victims and perpetrators, have an increased risk of ill-health (Mark et al. 2019). It is important to increase knowledge about those who perpetrate others from several aspects, for example because it has been shown that boys who bully other students at school have an increased risk of committing violence as adults and of abusing future partners (Falb et al., 2011).

Even though very few boys answered that they had sent a dick pic in the past six months, just over half of the girls had received one at least once

during the same period. This could be because a few boys send to many different girls, or that it is boys who are either younger or older than the ninth-grade girls who send them. It could also be because those who sent a dick pic know it is wrong. Some may know that it can be considered sexual molestation and is equivalent to indecent exposure and therefore answered that they never sent one.

When we asked the students themselves by whom or whom they had been exposed, a clear pattern emerged. Both girls and boys have most often been exposed by boys at their own school, boys from another school, or by an unknown boy. This means that there is a gender pattern, both in terms of exposure and in terms of perpetrating others.

Both gaming and the use of social media can serve an important function for young people and promote health in various ways, but both platforms have been shown to increase the risk of ill-health, especially if you are online many hours per day (Burén et al. 2023).

Links between the use of social media and gaming to mental ill-health can partly be about indirect effects by taking time from sleep, exercise, socializing, and schoolwork (Nutley & Thorell, 2021). The direct effects are about what they are actually exposed to and what can affect them negatively, such as threats, harassment, and exposure to beauty ideals.

According to ninth-grade students, many have parents who follow them on one or more accounts and half of the parents have talked to them about online safety. The importance of parental involvement and insight into their children's online activities has begun to receive attention, partly because it is difficult for young people to control their own screen time (Nutley & Thorell, 2021).

Young people themselves want parents and other adults to have more knowledge about social media and what can happen there, to be more aware of what their children are doing (that they are not harassing others), to learn to listen to their children, and to guide them so that they can handle problems that arise (Gillander Gådin & Dahlqvist, 2020). They also want adults to be able to receive stories of exposure without getting angry, exaggerating, or acting in ways that make things worse.

The question of how often students watch pornography is an example of an activity that has increasingly been recognized as risky behaviour. There are no strong links between watching pornography and mental ill-health, except when the pornography contains violence, child pornography, or sex

with animals, which has been shown to be linked to mental ill-health for boys (Svedin et al., 2022). However, there is evidence that high consumption of pornography increases the risk for boys of forcing someone to do something sexual, being violent towards a girlfriend, sending sexualised images, and having a derogatory view of girls/women (Stanley et al., 2018).

We know that social support is important for well-being, and the results in our study show that many students feel they receive support from family, friends, and teachers, although boys reported this to a greater extent than girls. Sometimes social support and its importance as a buffer are discussed, for example, that a high degree of social support could reduce the risk of mental ill-health for students exposed to various forms of harassment, online and IRL. Research shows that neither support from parents, friends, nor teachers reduces the risk of ill-health for those exposed to harassment (Noret et al., 2020). This does not mean that social support is unimportant, but that it is better to work for an environment free from harassment than to use social support as a buffer to reduce its negative consequences.

School is an important arena for young people's health in many different aspects. The psychosocial work environment is important for students' health in the same way as for adults, i.e., that both qualitative and quantitative demands are reasonably high, that there is support from teachers, that it is a safe place, that it is not noisy and chaotic, and that one has friends (Brolin Låftman et al., 2023).

Feeling participation and having influence are important for health and well-being (Warne et al., 2017), but also for success in school. A measure of participation and influence used in this study concerns how students perceive cooperation, communication, and democratic competence in the class. Studies show that classes with a high degree of participation in these three dimensions also have better grades and lower levels of bullying (Ahlström, 2010), students experience less discrimination at school (Carlerby et al., 2012, and they report a lower incidence of sexual harassment, both online and IRL (Dahlström et al., 2023).

Working to increase cooperation, communication, and democratic competence aligns well with the school's core values and mission. Efforts to deepen these abilities in the class could mean that the school's value-based mission can be strengthened and that work for a safe environment, which

also benefits learning, could be sustainable and not an activity beyond what is included in the curriculum.

Teaching about sexuality, consent, relationships, gender equality, norms, reproductive health, and value-based work against discrimination is also part of the curriculum and important for promoting good relationships. It is also an important part of increasing students' knowledge about violence and harassment. Unfortunately, problems with violence and harassment cannot be solved by information alone. Teaching needs to be complemented with active measures where everyone who is exposed knows where to turn, that there are clear signals that violence and harassment are not accepted, and that there are consequences for those who harass others (Taylor et al., 2013).

A multilevel analysis from a survey study in Swedish schools shows that there is a lower degree of bullying in classes where many students are aware of the school's rules and where students state that teachers intervene against bullying (Brolin Låftman et al., 2023).

Although the examples above cannot solve all problems with violence and harassment among students, they still show opportunities for the school to work preventively, focusing on strengthening what is already written into the curriculum, the Education Act, and the Discrimination Act.

Efforts to reduce young people's exposure to violence and harassment cannot, of course, rest solely with the school. Long-term preventive work is also needed in other contexts where young people are present.

We also hope that many parents read the report and gain increased knowledge and understanding of what young people, especially girls, may be exposed to. It is also important to talk to your children about not exposing others. Although this applies to both girls and boys, there is reason to have a particular focus on boys.

Gender! Something We Do

It is not possible to understand the large differences in exposure to sexualised violence and harassment between girls and boys without a gender perspective. It is also needed to understand why boys, to a greater extent than girls, expose others to sexualised violence and harassment.

The gender perspective in this study means that we assume that it is norms and values that govern the frameworks for gender. A gender perspective

also means always assuming that within the group of girls/women and within the group of boys/men, there are hierarchies based on age, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, and other power structures.

Gender is something we 'do', something that is part of our daily lives and not something we 'are' (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is something that is constantly negotiated and is linked to how power and resources are distributed between women/girls and men/boys and to constructions of femininities and masculinities (Connell, 1987). Based on the gender we identify as, which most often coincides with biological sex, we position ourselves and act based on what we perceive is expected of us. If we start from the frameworks that exist in society and what is usually called the heterosexual matrix, we understand constructions of masculinities and femininities as part of negotiating power (Butler 1990).

Even though gender is not always binary, it is about how we develop our identity as humans and how we relate, consciously or unconsciously, to society's norms for what is expected of us as girls and boys.

Heterosexuality is one of the norms we relate to, but it has different meanings for girls and boys. The norms for gender are not static, but they influence what clothes we wear, how we speak, act, what attitudes we have, and how we treat each other.

The social norms for heterosexuality mean that girls must balance between being a sexual subject and being a sexual object. In an ideal world, girls would have the right to express their own sexuality and develop it without being subjected to violence and sexual harassment (Tolman et al., 2016). In reality, there are narrow frameworks for girls where their sexuality is constantly controlled, either by being called a 'slut' if they are considered 'too much', or not sufficiently subordinate, or by being made invisible if they are not considered sexy enough (Dines, 2010).

For boys, it means relating to what is called hegemonic masculinity, which is a strongly heteronormative ideology and requires boys to position themselves in the male hierarchy. There are many ways to gain high status in the hierarchy, but some of them involve devaluing girls, distancing from things perceived as feminine, distancing from homosexuality, being sexually active, aggressive, and (sexually) dominant (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Exercising violence and harassing girls becomes a way for boys and men to position themselves in relation to each other and to maintain a dominant position in relation to girls and women. Even though this does not apply to all boys, it means that inequalities are maintained and that it can benefit

even those who are not violent but who also do not challenge the prevailing order. Even girls who harass other girls can become part of maintaining an unequal gender order (Connell, 1987).

Since 2017, there has been a national strategy to prevent men's violence against women, which means that preventive work should be intensified (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Working preventively against violence, promoting mental health, and working for a more equal and equitable society is also in line with Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

The results from this report highlight important areas to work on to promote both young people's mental health and their right to a life free from violence and sexual harassment.

Methodological considerations

Since the background data regarding economy, immigrant background, and who the students live with are well in line with Statistics Sweden (2022), we assess that the results in this report can be generalized to students outside our county.

Even though the response rate is high, it still means that certain groups of students are not represented in the material, for example, those who are often at home without being sick and those who have various forms of ill-health.

We chose to include the same questions about psychosomatic complaints as the Public Health Agency of Sweden (2022) uses in its studies on Health Behaviour in School-aged Children. Our analyses show the importance of asking questions about violence and harassment to increase knowledge about factors associated with mental ill-health.

Since the survey study is a cross-sectional study, it is not possible to comment on causality or the direction of any possible association. When the results are compared with longitudinal studies and these show the same results, the possibilities of commenting on possible causal relationships are strengthened. When it comes to exposure to sexual harassment, a longitudinal study has shown that the direction for girls goes both ways. This means that sexual harassment increases the risk of depressive symptoms, but also that girls with depressive symptoms have an increased risk of being exposed to sexual harassment (Zetterström

Dahlqvist et al., 2016). Above all, that study shows that girls are more often exposed repeatedly over time, while boys are more often exposed during a limited period.

When we have analysed exposure to violence and harassment, we have used a rough measure. We have compared those who have been exposed one or more times with those who have not been exposed at all. If we had instead compared those who have been exposed several times, the differences between girls and boys would be even greater than we have shown in this report. Girls are not only exposed to multiple forms of violence and harassment, but they are also exposed on several occasions compared to boys.

Alarm reports about mental ill-health among young people are constantly recurring, and even though it is important to highlight a problem, there are also certain risks. One risk that has been noted regarding psychosomatic complaints is that the problems are individualized instead of highlighting the social and structural problems that exist and that can explain why one group feels worse than another (Wickström & Kvist Lindholm, 2020). Another risk may be that normal problems associated with being young are pathologized. Since exposure to violence and harassment in various forms cannot be considered a normal problem that must be accepted, it is important to highlight both mental ill-health and exposure.

To understand more about whether the survey negatively affected the students, they were asked such a question and given the opportunity to comment freely. Even though there were some who answered that they felt worse after completing the survey, especially girls, there were still many who thought these were important questions to ask.

Our starting point has been to highlight factors that can increase the risk of mental ill-health—social, organizational, and structural. We hope that the results presented in the report lead to continued discussions and activities that counteract violence and harassment and promote good health for children and young people.

Conclusions

- Students in grade nine report a high degree of psychosomatic complaints, depressive symptoms, self-harming behaviour, a high degree of worry, and negative body image. Girls report this to a much greater extent than boys.

- A large proportion of students report having been exposed to violence, sexual harassment online and IRL, bullying online and IRL, and most have been exposed to more than one form. Girls report this to a much greater extent than boys.
- A large proportion of those who have had a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner have been exposed to insults, threats of violence, sexual violence, and physical violence. Girls report this to a much greater extent than boys.
- Boys experience a higher degree of support from their family and from teachers compared to girls.
- Boys are more positive about school compared to girls, for example regarding school demands, rowdiness, friends, discrimination, and the degree of participation in the class.

It is highly likely that an important explanation for why girls report more mental ill-health, more self-harming behaviour, and more negative body image compared to boys is due to a higher degree of exposure to violence and harassment, especially the sexualised forms.

Further, more advanced statistical analyses will be conducted to test this hypothesis.

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