

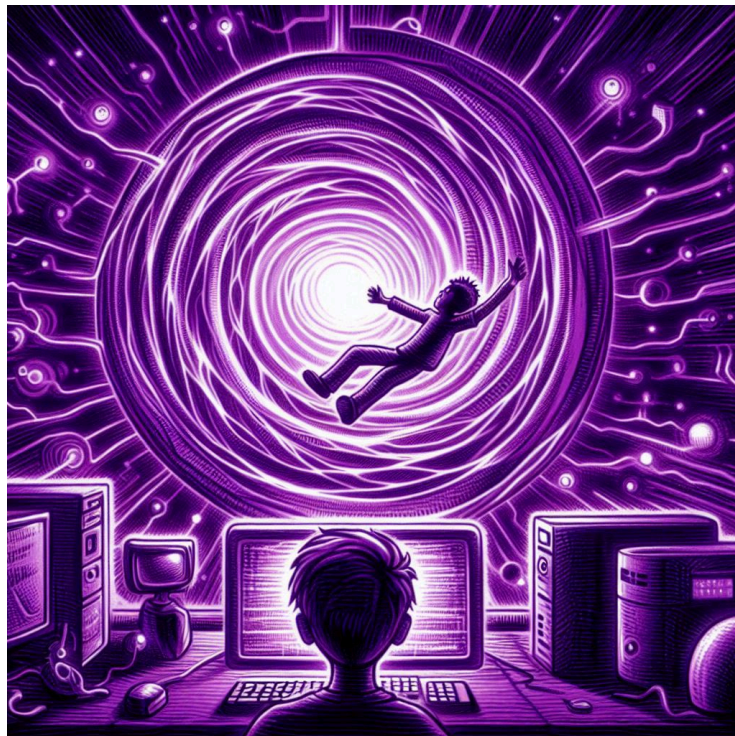
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Echo Chambers and Empty Spaces

Practitioners exploring digital inequality and misogyny

Insights from Co-design



Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a co-design session in February 2025, involving over 50 frontline practitioners from 20+ organisations, focusing on the critical role of digital inequality in driving young men and boys towards online misogyny and incel culture. The research demonstrates that unequal access to digital literacy and critical thinking skills, compounded by broader social and economic disparities, creates fertile ground for the spread of harmful ideologies. Participants consistently reported that feelings of disenfranchisement and powerlessness, exacerbated by digital exclusion, lead young men to seek validation and belonging within online echo chambers that promote misogynistic narratives.

Key findings underscore how digital inequality manifests: algorithmic manipulation, exploiting vulnerable "search engine starting points" (e.g., searches on relationships, mental health) to radicalise young men; the prevalence of harmful content within online gaming spaces, where digital access is often uncontrolled; and unequal access to media literacy education, leaving young people ill-equipped to critically evaluate online information. These factors contribute to the normalisation of victim-blaming, the influence of misogynistic figures like Andrew Tate, and the consumption of extreme online pornography, all of which distort young people's understanding of healthy relationships. The research also reveals a direct transfer of online threats to real-world abuse, particularly against female staff, and significant challenges in addressing these issues within educational settings due to staff overload and lack of consistent messaging.

The report emphasises the urgent need to address digital inequality through: improved media literacy, focusing on critical thinking and digital navigation; comprehensive support and training for frontline staff, carers, and parents, specifically addressing the impact of digital exclusion; and community-based, co-designed interventions with young people, prioritising prevention and positive online engagement. Recommendations include creating an online practitioner network to share resources and best practice, piloting co-designed workshops with young people to bridge digital literacy gaps, providing targeted training for male practitioners to address root causes of misogyny, developing community resources for parents and carers, mapping existing training provisions, and creating visual resources to explain algorithmic manipulation. This report calls for a multi-faceted approach to counteract online misogyny, rooted in addressing digital inequality and promoting gender equality.

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Introduction

In July 2024, Mhor Collective facilitated co-design sessions to explore the ways in which digital inequality impacts on women and girls who are victims of violence and what work is needed to support digital inclusion. In addition to other key recommendations, participants requested an exploration of digital inclusion support for young men and boys who may, through a lack of digital skills and understanding resulting from wider social inequality, end up participating in the so-called 'manosphere' and in 'incel culture' and online misogyny, drawn in through a lack of media literacy and algorithms manipulated by social media platforms and content creators.

To this end, Mhor Collective led a co-design in February 2025, inviting frontline practitioners from services directly supporting young men and boys to explore these issues and, in particular, to consider the impact of digital inequality in this space. Over twenty organisations participated in this work from across sectors. Data was gathered from over fifty participants using facilitated group work and participatory online tools, scribed conversation and semi-structured interviews. We then conducted a thematic analysis and now detail the insights from this for consideration.

Definitions used in the session

In the session, we used the following definitions, drawing on insights from the work by Zero Tolerance research 'Many Good Men' (Duffy et al, 2024).

'The "manosphere" refers broadly to the online space/network where men express misogynistic views. Online misogyny refers to the expression of hatred and prejudice against women in digital spaces, through abuse, harassment, threats of physical and digital, and derogatory language. Incels are a subculture within the manosphere who blame women for their lack of romantic and sexual success, sometimes advocating violence as a result.'

These definitions were used to broadly frame the session but were not explored in any depth as an exploration of the language is covered extensively in the aforementioned research.

How online misogyny 'shows up' in work with young men and boys

The vast majority of participants noted that online misogyny is very much present in their day-to-day engagement with young people, with only one participant noting that there was little in their own experience, but also recognising that:

' Maybe that means I'm very lucky, not working in relevant areas, or most concerningly that I am entirely oblivious.'

Participants noted the prevalence of 'everyday' sexism. This included an increase in conversations around 'traditional wife' (across genders); casual conversation and sharing

misogynistic views as ‘banter’ (including ‘jokes’ taken from online gaming environments) and men’s rights activism to catcalling, victim blaming and negation of women and girls. The data highlighting the everyday experience of female staff suggests an atmosphere of everyday abuse, compounded by both the absence of challenge from male colleagues, the pressure of peer groups (‘I feel there is theme with young boys that the more controversial they are in their views the more respect they get from their peers.’) and the need to try to maintain safe spaces (‘I have to balance letting boys express their beliefs so we can challenge them, but also keeping the classroom a safe space for the girls and others’)

It was clear that the wider socio-political context of misogyny contributes to an increased prevalence of online misogyny with participants citing numerous examples of the way this filters into both education and community spaces.

‘The digital world is consolidating male entitlement, and that mindset. It shows up in boys’ attitudes and treatment of women and girls. There’s a misogynist and dismissiveness of women and girls’ equality.’

‘The ‘hierarchy’ are bringing in things such as bans on abortions - taking women’s rights away of their own. The problem being that these are men making decisions on women. Young men see this and that’s why they’re acting this way’.

‘Following American politics, Donald Trump /Elon Musk and idolising them, kinda gives validation to these beliefs when those in power hold them’.

‘Globally the narrative (including the stuff coming from US and alt right in Europe) has shifted to be overtly anti-feminist so often negates what we may try to do at local / individual level’

This insight suggests that, to a certain extent, online misogyny is an immediate outcome of misogyny *in the real world*. However, further participant data offers a more detailed and nuanced discussion on the way in which the online world contributes to and entrenches offline misogyny.

‘You can’t really look at this issue in isolation - while it is a manifestation of wider cultural misogyny, there’s so much disinformation and use of online pornography etc. There’s such a prevalence of material promoting neoliberal values.’

Online gaming was also reflected as a harmful space, with Discord, Chat functions and YouTube gamers filtering misogynistic views directly into gaming, within closed and absorbed groups of young people, with Grand Theft Auto being a specific example.

The transfer of risk: offline becomes real-world threat

Perhaps most worryingly, the dataset clearly evidences the transfer of threat from the digital domain to the physical with numerous examples given of the way female staff are abused, belittled and threatened as part of their engagement with young men and boys, and the way women and young girls are treated by their male peers. This ranges from catcalling and whistling, to dismissive language (an example given was 'Go make a sandwich') to the sharing of non-consensual images, nudify apps, as well as verbal abuse and the threat of physical violence / intimidation.

'Violence in schools seems to be mainly boys to female teachers.'

Our [companion insight report](#), exploring the impact of violence against women and girls on digital inclusion work, adds significant weight to this discussion.

The challenge of 'challenging'

Numerous examples were given around the challenges of challenging young men and boys, particularly in schools. Participants cited the issue of dismissing female staff as a particular challenge:

'We see it a lot ... boys disrespecting or not listening to women teachers, where they give that respect and attention to men teachers.'

Staff trying to navigate the space are often dismissed suggesting that there is an apparent lack of respect for female colleagues.

'I feel as a women they don't respect my stance when I'm trying to unpack toxic beliefs'

'I have found teachers have often pulled me for chats about an increased misogynistic attitude towards their peers and female teachers. I'm definitely seeing increases in harassment in schools'.

Though staff also articulated that:

'It's so hard... they're so often being defensive or not engaging or laughing at our workshops around consent and healthy relationships and chatting about sexual violence as if it's normal'

Further insights reflect the complexity that the internet brings. Although PSE in schools has always required the need to accommodate different levels of maturity, differing access to the internet significantly amplifies this disparity, leading to an increased challenge in supporting groups of young men and boys in understanding what healthy and respectful relationships look like.

'Varying maturity levels even within the same year group; trying to meet boys where they're at but some have been exposed to all sorts of porn & misogynistic content vs others haven't at all'

External staff attending schools to support PSE are also sometimes noticing an absence of support from teaching colleagues, where there is a failure both to set appropriate boundaries within the classroom and to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

'We see teachers being very blasé about boys who don't engage AT ALL in the workshops, not backing us up in setting expectations for participating and listening'

The constant exposure to extremist content, coupled with the emotional labour of challenging deeply ingrained misogynistic beliefs, is taking a significant toll. This is compounded by a lack of adequate support structures and training for staff to effectively counter these ideologies.

Victim blaming and shaming

One of the outcomes of an increased prevalence of gender-based harms through technology is the extent to which women and girls are blamed.

'We see victim-blaming attitudes across all genders of young people - first instinct when nudes are going around is to say "she shouldn't have sent it", "she should've just blocked him".'

'In our prevention work in schools, young people underestimate risk and harm. There's low recognition that sending or sharing nudes is harmful, blame tends to fall on the girl for sending it. It's normalised.'

The normalisation of victim-blaming, particularly against women and girls experiencing technology-facilitated gender-based violence, stems from a pervasive societal tendency to shift responsibility away from perpetrators and onto those harmed. This manifests in immediate judgments like "she shouldn't have sent it," which disregards the complex power dynamics, coercion, and breaches of trust often involved. This attitude, prevalent across genders, diminishes the severity of the harm, fosters a culture where such violations are seen as inevitable or even deserved, and ultimately discourages victims from seeking help, reinforcing a cycle of impunity for offenders and further marginalising those already victimised.

Social isolation, algorithms and the search-engine starting point

There was also significant recognition within the group that the prevalent setting of offline and online misogyny was leaving many young men and boys feeling extremely isolated and lonely, with algorithms 'preying on and amplifying' their feeling of rejection and loneliness.

'Many of the boys feel as though they are unable to make friends, let alone date.'

One participant noted that:

'Men's Rights Activism is mainly online and young people struggle with nuance. It can start with a boy just using google for genuine, important issues - like self harm or suicide or how do I get a date but suddenly they're targeted for stuff that goes into blaming women/feminism/misogyny'

This 'search engine starting point' was also highlighted by other participants:

'I think a lot of time boys are searching things like "how to get a girlfriend" and are being sucked into incel influencers in a vulnerable moment, so blaming women and pushing for 'alpha' status'

'We see boys being pulled in - a thirteen year old just looking how to body-build is suddenly down a rabbit hole.'

'The gender norms and the idea of being a "real man" still exist. Young men are looking to fit the gender stereotypes that still exist and they are looking on-line about how to achieve that.'

What this data demonstrates is that often the pathway into online misogynistic content often begins at commonplace, recognisable points in an adolescent journey: exploring relationships, sexuality, changes in physical appearance and mental health and wellbeing but algorithms draw young people into different, harmful content including pick-up artists, despite a more often innocent starting point.

This "search engine starting point" can quickly spiral, with boys seeking guidance on navigating social pressures or achieving an idealised masculinity being targeted by incel influencers and extremist content. The pressure to conform to rigid gender norms, coupled with the algorithmic amplification of toxic narratives, creates a digital environment where young men are susceptible to radicalisation, fostering a culture of blaming women and promoting harmful concepts of "alpha" dominance.

What this also reflects then, is the enormous challenge for staff in dealing with the *everyday* nature of the starting points into online misogyny, incel culture and the manosphere.

Relationships at risk

What was clear from the dataset is the extent to which access to online materials which demean women also put the potential for healthy relationships, both sexual and non-sexual, at risk. Participants indicated not only the well-documented prevalence of online pornography accessed by children but also that conversations around extreme / violent pornography are commonplace (one example given was non-fatal strangulation, and one participant noted that:

'I have loads of examples of S3 boys knowing words like BDSM, whips, safe words and talking about Bonnie Blue.'

'Young people see depictions of sex and relationships in TV/films/porn/tiktok and assume that it's an accurate representation of what it's like in real life, and "what girls want" '

'This all shows up in relationships (romantic and not) and in the expectations boys have around relationships (sex when they want) and around consent

Unsurprisingly, research also evidenced the prevalence of the rhetoric of Andrew Tate, a British-American social media personality who gained notoriety for promoting controversial and misogynistic views and who is currently facing legal investigations in multiple countries regarding allegations of human trafficking, rape, and organised crime. His misogynistic, 'red pill' beliefs, his men's rights activism and his active promotion of violence against women and girls have fed into a wide range of social media platforms, spawning new creators and remains an ongoing algorithmic draw for men and boys.

'Schools requesting us to come in and deliver tailored sessions for year groups where they've heard a lot of Andrew Tate parroting from the boys'

All of this data highlights the ongoing need for comprehensive support for girls and young women, and for boys and young men to explore online and offline relationships rooted in connection, respect, consent and boundaries.

Common online spaces

While it is clear that the internet is vast, and the opportunities for engagement with misogynistic content is infinite, it is helpful to understand those spaces most common among school-age young people. The following insights around online spaces contribute to existing extensive research by [Zero Tolerance Scotland's Many Good Men](#) and [OfCom](#).

What apps and websites are young people using where they might access this content?

25 responses



These online communities and groups often reinforce harmful stereotypes and narratives, creating echo chambers where hateful beliefs are normalised and validated.

Digital inequality / online misogyny

One of the primary objectives of this research was to start to explore the relationship between social inequality, digital inequality and online/offline misogyny. What was clear is that this is a highly complex space where frontline staff are seeing young men and boys from across all socio-economic grounds participate in misogynistic behaviour amplified by the online space. As one participant noted 'I don't think boys from Eton are immune to this.' A further insight highlighted that 'Men who experience discrimination (racism, ableism, etc) may feel less connected to the idea of patriarchy because they benefit less.'

The core insight however, is that feelings of powerlessness and disenfranchisement among young men and boys, driven by social, digital and economic inequalities, create a fertile ground for the adoption of misogynistic ideologies, both online and offline. This is not a simple cause-and-effect relationship, but a complex, multi-layered interaction.

'Is this linked to inequality? 100%. If young men and boys feel they have no power, experience poverty, no chance of home ownership, they want a better future. Men's Rights Activists encourage rejecting the status quo and returning to a better time.'

'Prospects are poor, poverty is increasing, and life is less fair than ever and harder, young people are looking for someone to blame. It's so easy to reject the idea of men having privilege when you don't have it'

'Unless nurtured and critical thinking developed in safe spaces, it's easy for young people to be sucked into the misogynistic culture'

‘I feel when boys and men feel powerless in some areas of their lives, they are desperate to grasp at the power offered to them by the patriarchy’

These examples from the data gathered demonstrate the impact of systemic injustice, of the impact of poverty. In such contexts, it can be easy to reject the notion of male privilege. When daily life is a struggle, the concept of inherent advantage feels abstract and irrelevant. Instead, there is a search for scapegoats and explanations for their perceived lack of opportunity. The manosphere and its accusation of women, despite being based on a false premise, suggest agency and power to those who feel they lack both. It is the seductive power of both.

Our wider experience in this space also requires us to consider the way in which intersectionality can fuel online hate and misogyny. Online misogyny is not a monolithic entity existing in a vacuum but instead adapts and mutates based on the target's intersecting identities, creating vectors for specific forms of hate, making the online experience exponentially more hostile. Online misogyny often serves to reinforce existing social hierarchies. Intersectional hate reinforces multiple hierarchies at once.

For instance, the intersection of race and gender can be used to justify the sexualisation and dehumanisation of women of colour, perpetuating historical power imbalances.

These online attacks are not just individual acts of hate; they reflect and perpetuate systemic inequalities, further silencing marginalised groups and reinforcing the dominance of privileged groups.

Key Considerations:

It is essential that practitioners in this space develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the relationship between social inequality, digital inequality, and misogyny.

- **Intersectionality:** It is essential to recognise that these issues are further complicated by factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability as in the examples above.
- **Preventative measures:** Focusing on early intervention at a community level, as well as in educational settings, is crucial to preventing the spread of misogynistic ideologies and will root such work in trusted spaces, with trusted intermediaries who are better equipped to both challenge and support.
- **Complex Causality:** This is a complex issue with many contributing factors. It is important to avoid simplistic explanations and recognise the need for nuanced solutions.

Media Literacy and Online Misogyny

OfCom has identified [5 key areas](#) to support and improve media literacy, and offers the Outcomes Bank as a framework to explore these. The outcomes bank includes 24 outcomes structured around five areas, each corresponding with a different aspect of media literacy in the online world.

The following table indicates example data from participants in the identified priority areas.

Priority Area	Data example from participants
<p>Area 1: Access, use and content creation. Accessing media and getting online, using technology and creating content</p>	<p>‘Content created = deep fake imagery. We see young people’s use of tools like Google’s new picture editing tool, sharing and rating of intimate images’</p>
<p>Area 2: Online safety, privacy and protection from harm. Managing risk, safeguarding privacy and spotting and avoiding harms</p>	<p>‘You could just be watching a Minecraft video but the language and rhetoric that the youtuber uses while playing is harmful and inappropriate’</p> <p>‘The prevalence of the consumption of phonography at a younger age, impacting on what young women are being told is normal in a sexual relationship. Non-fatal strangulation is prevalent.’</p>
<p>Area 3: Critical thinking about content. Actively questioning and challenging online information</p>	<p>‘Young people seem to have a high digital ability in terms of technical skills, but low digital literacy in terms of critical thinking and discerning between messages - what’s true and what’s not’</p> <p>‘Young people often think they are more able to tell truth from fake than they really are.’</p> <p>‘It’s not digital skills so much as navigating a digital world with no single source of truth or obvious difference between real/fake statistics, news, info. Young people rely on peers to adjudicate/decide.’</p>
<p>Area 4: Digital and media savvy. Understanding how the online world and media work</p>	<p>‘I think many people don’t understand how social media algorithms are pushing their online engagement towards misogynist and other far right content. It’s scary, really.’</p>

Area 5: Digital citizenship and media engagement. Making the most of online opportunities

'I think if boys truly understood the outcomes of their actions and how this affected others, then this would change. But with anonymity and constant 'validation' for their actions is too addicting'

While the dataset indicated discussion in all five areas, there was a greater insight into needs around areas three, four and five specifically, with area five a specific space to both challenge and empower young people to take greater control of their online environment. Area 3, the ability to think critically about online content, can be particularly difficult to challenge, due to the ever-increasing volume of content accessible to young men and boys and the platforms' abilities to target specific demographics. Area 5 offers a potentially creative space to encourage thinking about issues such as making more considered decisions about media engagement, behaving more respectfully online (and therefore, hopefully offline); achieving personal goals and contributing positively to wider civic participation.

Supporting staff, carers and parents

What the research highlights is that despite the fact that frontline staff are not only seeing both the growth and immediate impact of the rise in incel culture and online misogyny on both women and girls and young boys and men, they are also experiencing harm themselves as a spin-off but are too overwhelmed to counteract this, and also lack meaningful support themselves to do so. One staff member noted that

'All these comments about Andrew Tate, all the time, how boys know what women want, what they think about what girls need and how girls should feel/think/behave. We need to challenge more in classrooms than ever before'

But this pressing, urgent need is incredibly challenging for staff.

'Staff are busy doing their job - they just can't deal with the bombardment of this content. They're also often in politically bound posts and can't react to it all'

'We need stronger partnership between parents, teachers, and third sector so that young boys are receiving consistent messaging across spaces in their lives. '

'I think training male teachers could be really useful as those with misogynistic beliefs won't hear women, whereas they respect mens opinions'

Participants also noted the challenges in both working with and in supporting parents and carers, with a perceived lack of understanding both of the action and the consequence of online misogyny in everyday interactions between young people.

'In some cases - parents fully believing that their children would never look at this stuff online and defending their children's behaviour'

'Parents are way behind on tech and not aware of what young people are consuming and when. Even if parents *are* controlling digital access, they are in a minority, limited ability to control outside home.'

'Think support needs to be around interpreting/understanding sources/verifying info. If your parents/adults are not digital natives, where are you getting these skills from?'

Reflecting differing cultures and attitudes was also considered to be a priority, with a need for greater attention to this issue.

'When seeking help, the resources and support don't always accommodate culture at home - some young people are almost living contradicting lives with such a difference between home and college'

The data evidences a need for meaningful, community-based, co-designed resources, training and support for staff, parents and carers.

Current available training and support for frontline staff related specifically to supporting young people

Frontline staff highlighted a number of organisations offering training in this space, including those detailed below. This list is unlikely to be exhaustive and it would be useful to understand the training landscape here to share opportunities across networks and to avoid duplication. It is also essential that such services are appropriately resourced to both consolidate their work in this space and to ensure longevity and avoid the loss of expertise.

- [Shameless Youths](#)
- [Listen Up, Speak Up](#)
- [YMCA Wise](#)
- [Zero Tolerance: Under Pressure](#)
- [Emily Test](#)
- RASAC PK and Rape Crisis Scotland - both organisations are skilling up staff in colleges and schools to deliver Consent Workshops
- Shetland Rape Crisis and Shetland Women's Aid
- [Prevention Network at affiliated Rape Crisis Scotland](#)

Resources highlighted

- [Cool2talk](#)
- [Bish UK](#)

- [Brook](#)
- [Scarlateen](#)
- Alternative voices e.g. Drew Afualo has a book and audiobook for young girls unpacking internalised misogyny to compliment their TikTok presence
- [Many Good Men \(Zero Tolerance Scotland\) Podcast](#)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this report highlights the pervasive and concerning impact of online misogyny on young men and boys, and its spillover into real-world interactions. The findings reveal a complex interplay between digital inequality, social isolation, and the amplification of harmful ideologies through algorithms and online spaces. Participants consistently noted the transfer of online threats into tangible abuse and harassment, particularly against female staff. The challenge of effectively addressing these issues is compounded by victim-blaming attitudes, the normalisation of misogynistic behaviour in online gaming and social media, and the influence of prominent figures who promote harmful narratives.

The report underscores the urgent need for comprehensive community-based interventions that address both the online and offline manifestations of misogyny as well as considering layers of social inequality. This includes enhancing media literacy, providing targeted support for frontline staff, carers, and parents, and developing resources that challenge harmful ideologies while fostering healthy relationships. Furthermore, acknowledging and addressing the intersectional nature of online hate is crucial for creating inclusive and safe digital environments. The recommendations outlined in this report aim to provide a foundation for developing effective strategies to counter online misogyny and promote gender equality.

Recommendations

- The creation of an online network for frontline staff. Such a network would allow for peer support, critical conversations, sharing resources, insights on emerging harms and training, Such a space should also recognise and contribute to wider work on technology-facilitated abuse.
- Pilot test-and-learn, co-designed workshops with young people in communities facing wider social inequality specifically exploring areas 3,4 and 5 of the OfCom Media Literacy Outcomes Framework. Such sessions should also be co-designed by young people. 'We need to involve young people directly, especially boys. That's so much more powerful to young people than adults saying 'this is what you should listen to' Such an approach (led and supported by staff trained as below) would offer real world relevance, a sense of empowerment and control, developing and embedding helpful counter-narratives. From our experience, such iterative approaches are also scaleable.
- Specific training and support for male practitioners to develop positive community role models who can address root causes of misogyny, explore the impact of gender stereotypes, and the ways in which these issues manifest online. Staff must be

equipped to recognise and challenge victim-blaming attitudes and understand the complexities (and starting points) of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Such staff would also be able to identify mental health and vulnerabilities in young people which would make them more susceptible and develop effective intervention and support, within a wider context of safeguarding.

- Community-based co-designed resources, training and support for carers and parents, including shared, inclusive language and resources which can be used in multiple physical spaces
- Map existing training and support. While we have listed examples above, many of these are regional examples (e.g. Shetland Women's Aid). As noted above, it is also essential that such services are appropriately resourced to both consolidate their work in this space and to ensure longevity and avoid the loss of expertise.
- Create new visual resources which can be used in different contexts to help people understand the complexity of algorithms eg 'A training online to show practitioners examples of what can happen on a young person's phone and how it can escalate, but one training with a case scenario to show different gender's experiences'