



Why single-sex services matter: privacy, dignity, safety and choice

30-minute read

Full report and key findings

at sex-matters.org/single-sex-services-voices

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Sex Matters is a human rights organisation campaigning
for clarity about sex in law, policy and language

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Starting points

Hearing the missing voices

Over the past few years there has been an attack on single-sex services and spaces, and many organisations have become confused about whether they should provide them at all, or if they do whether they should allow some people to use spaces intended for the opposite sex. Without consultation, many single-sex facilities have been replaced with “gender-neutral” (mixed-sex) facilities, or facilities that are “inclusive” based on gender self-ID.

What have been absent are the voices of ordinary service users, particularly women. From 12th to 21st February 2022, Sex Matters ran an online survey, which had 7,062 responses – an extraordinary number in just over a week. This was not a representative sample of the population, but statements from people who value single-sex services – 97% of those who responded.

The respondents set out in detail the practical, emotional and safety reasons why single-sex services matter to them. Ninety percent of them were women, and nearly half shared experiences of sexual assault, exposure, voyeurism and harassment, and the lingering effects. Their stories were both shocking and commonplace. There were far too many to include them all.

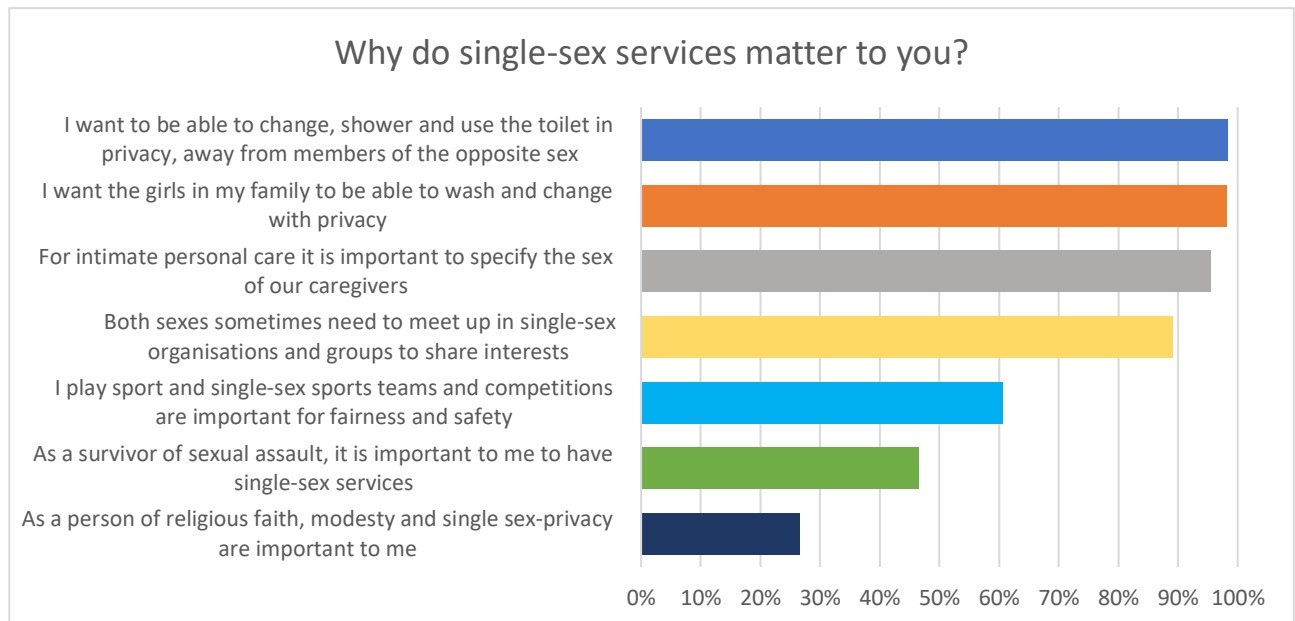
The survey reveals a crisis in inclusion for women and girls as single-sex facilities and clear policies are removed, without consultation or consideration, from public toilets; facilities in pubs, clubs, theatres, cafes, restaurants and gyms; changing rooms in shops and sports centres, and facilities in schools and hospital wards. Our respondents describe how the removal of female-only services and spaces creates a hostile environment for girls and women, damaging their privacy, dignity and safety, and excluding them from public life.

Single-sex services matter to women

Around 10 times as many UK women (5,559) as men (554) responded to the survey to say that single-sex services are important to them. (This analysis excludes the few respondents who were outside the UK or said single-sex services were not important to them.)

The most common reasons for valuing single-sex services were everyday privacy and dignity:

- I want to be able to change, shower and use the toilet in privacy, away from members of the opposite sex (98%)
- I want the girls in my family to be able to wash and change with privacy (98%)
- If I or a member of my family needed intimate personal care it would be important that we could specify the sex of our caregivers (95%).



Many respondents also had personal reasons why they valued specific single-sex services:

- Women and girls, and men and boys, sometimes need to meet up in single-sex organisations and groups to share interests (89%)
- I play sport and single-sex sports teams and competitions are important for fairness and safety (61%)
- As a survivor of sexual assault, it is important to me to have single-sex services (46%)
- As a person of religious faith, modesty and single sex-privacy are important to me (27%).

Single-sex services are already being lost

61% said they had already experienced male and female facilities being replaced by “gender neutral” unisex or mixed facilities. 57% had experienced only the female facilities being converted to “gender neutral”. 45% had experienced “trans inclusive” rules that allow males to use women’s services, and 35% had experienced an overall loss of support and funding for women’s services.

When we asked where people were most concerned about losing single-sex services, the top two answers were hospital wards and women’s services, followed by public toilets and schools, colleges and universities.

Sex matters

Sex means sex, not gender

In the course of their answers many respondents clarified that by sex – male and female, man and woman – they meant biological sex, not gender identity.

Those who mentioned “trans women” were not necessarily unsympathetic to their feelings or unsupportive of their rights, but simply and straightforwardly recognised that they are male.

Some with religious faiths mentioned that their religion states that nobody can change sex.

Any man is a threat

Statistically, males are a threat to females. Every single female I know has a lived experience of this. Protected spaces are a moment of refuge, a place of support and they can also be a hub of community. **Female, England, 25–34**

Why trust all men? – the ones who assaulted me weren't trustworthy. How do you tell who is not going to do so? They do not have a mark on their forehead. Trust has to be earned.

Female, England, 55–64

I was abused by a trans identified male. I've been abused by society for saying I was abused by a trans identified male. I would be afraid to seek help if I were sexually assaulted due to how I've been treated. **Female, 45–54**

Many women have been victims of sexual assault

Almost half of the women who responded said they had experienced sexual assault in their lifetime. As well as needing single-sex domestic and sexual-violence support services, they talked about the importance of everyday separate-sex facilities.

I was raped and get very stressed in small spaces with strange men. Even a lift is scary.

Female, Scotland, 55–64

I have anxiety attacks, due to rape, and need somewhere to feel safe in public, away from men. Men's behaviour often makes me feel uncomfortable, no matter how they present. **Female, 35–44**

As a survivor, I often struggle with knowing when I am entitled to have boundaries. I really need the law to be on my side in this matter. **Female, England, 45–54**

I have been raped twice, I have been flashed too many times to count. No man has a right to expose themselves to me, I have trauma related to male genitalia as do many women.

Female, England, 25–34

Why single-sex services matter

Everyday privacy

98% of the UK respondents who valued single-sex services agreed with the statement “I want to be able to change, shower and use the toilet in privacy, away from members of the opposite sex”.

More than 3,000 people wrote detailed comments on this one question.

Changing, showering and using the toilet are things that happen in private. Most people don't want to do any of those things in front of anyone, even people we know, let alone an unknown member of the opposite sex. **Female, England, 35–44**

Men and women should have their own spaces to shower and change. This is as equally important to men as it is women. A bit of privacy from the opposite sex is not a lot to ask for.

Female, England, 35–44

Being able to walk into a space and know there will only be other women in there, I can breathe out and get on with what I need to do – be it have a shower, change my clothes or do my female business – in peace and privacy. **Female, England, 25–34**

To be able to focus on what I need to do without needing to read the room for potential danger is extremely important to me. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

I don't like sharing a toilet with a person of the other sex even when there is more than one cubicle. **Female, England, 65 and over**

I work in a male dominated field, I would absolutely hate to be using the toilets at the same time as male co-workers/my bosses etc. **Female, England 35-45**

Inclusion

Without being able to change, shower and use the toilet away from the opposite sex it would stop me wanting to exercise, go out and try new things. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

I'm a Muslim woman and the thought of sharing female only spaces with the opposite sex just further alienates me and ensures that I spend less time in public spaces. It's unfair that the idea of inclusivity centres marginalised men feelings and safety over women. **Female, England, 25–34**

I'm an older woman. I just wouldn't be able to go anywhere where there was the possibility of a male person using the same bathing or toilet facilities. This would mean I'd be unable to go swimming or to a gym or even out to a pub if males were allowed in the ladies.

Female, Scotland, 55–64

Urinals and hygiene

Removing urinals makes toilet seats and floors unhygienic. Making toilets with urinals mixed-sex is humiliating for both men and women.

Speaking as a man, I miss the urinal. I doubt very much females enjoy sitting on a urine soaked toilet seat. **Male, England, 45–54**

Urine everywhere. **Female, England, 25–34**

I don't want to stand with my penis in my hand in the same space as women I don't know any more than they would want to share that space with me. **Male, England, 55–64**

It's not commonly discussed, but as a man I can't stand "gender neutral" toilets. Most of the time I want to go in, urinate, wash my hands, and be on my way. Men's toilets have urinals for a reason. It's grossly inefficient to have to go in, find a stall, more likely than not urinate all over everything, and then go out and wash in a crowd. **Male, England, 45–54**

Particular needs

I have had my first period in a public toilet, had to go to toilets to cry, had to go to toilets when pregnant and hormonal at work and needed space. I have helped a young girl who had her first period in a public toilet. Women support one another in these spaces. **Female, England, 35–44**

I have had two miscarriages at work and single sex provision was crucial. **Female, England, 35–44**

I have had a miscarriage a public toilet, had to breastfeed a baby in a public toilet, had to pump my breastmilk in a public toilet. **Female, England, 55–64**

I need to feel safe – I have had surgery after breast cancer. I feel vulnerable and unhappy to change with men. **Female, Wales, 45–54**

I have two small children. I have at times left the toilet door open to accommodate a toddler and a pram so we all have room to use the toilet. I do not want to leave my children unattended in a public toilet facility. **Female, Wales, 35–44**

My 21 year old daughter has learning disabilities and needs to have single sex spaces to keep her safe from predatory males. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

Once I was in a community building and was standing near the female toilets. A woman came out, who was visually impaired and she was very distressed, because she heard male voices and thought she had entered the male toilets instead. I went in to and two trans-identified males were just coming out looking "sheepish" and a bit bemused, and I may add did not try to allay her concerns. **Female, England, 55–64**

I have IBD [*inflammatory bowel disease*] and have had some embarrassing public toilet incidents. Women treated me with understanding and sympathy. Men who followed me into single stall toilets (for one) would often make rude comments about noises/odours. It made me feel more horrible than I already did. **Female, England, 55–64**

A place of safety

As a survivor of childhood sexual assault and rape, I never feel safe in changing rooms, showers, or toilets when men enter those spaces. Having endured extreme male violence I have every right to male free spaces. **Female, Wales, 55–64**

When I have had to use gender neutral facilities I feel more on guard, I scan the surroundings more and check for access, exit and points of visibility. I feel more inhibited. When I was younger and went to pubs and clubs more, the female toilets were able to be a place of refuge from men if necessary. **Female, England, 35–44**

I was sexually assaulted by a man at a club in my late teens, my place to run was a women's bathroom – please don't take them away. **Female, England, 25–34**

When women see a man in their single sex space we know immediately that he is there for nefarious reasons and we are probably the victim. We must be able to say 'No' to this without being labelled bigots or transphobes. **Female, England, 45–54**

My niece was followed into the ladies toilets of a nightclub by a man when she was 19, he tried to grab hold of her, luckily he was seen following her in by staff who ejected him as he should not have been in there. With self ID the risks to girls and women are increased.

Female, Scotland, 45–54

As a man I would not want to put any female in the position of having to share an intimate facility with males mainly for reasons of safety, privacy and peace of mind. **Male, Scotland, 35–44**

Fears are justified

I have been followed into a women's toilet by a man who went into the cubicle next to me. As I opened my door he stood just inside his cubicle and orgasmed over the floor looking at me.

Female, England, 35–44

I was assaulted by a man in a swimming changing room when I was 11 years old. He was entitled to be in the mixed sex changing room. He followed me in and there wasn't another person around to help me or question why he was there. **Female, England, 35–44**

I was assaulted by a male co-worker, He also tried to enter the woman's toilet when women were in there. I don't want to feel threatened and scared again. **Female, England, 55–64**

I was attacked by a 6 foot 2 drag queen in high heels and his friend in a female toilet. They were both gay so just interested in intimidating me but can't say that helped much at the time.

Female, England, 55–64

The one and only time I ever used a mixed sex "changing village" a man lay on the floor and put his head under the side of my cubicle to watch me undress. By the time I had dressed enough to alert the staff and they had called the police, he was long gone. **Female, England, 45–54**

I have experienced men looking over loo cubicle walls, under doors and through ill-fitting changing room curtains with mixed facilities. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Health and personal care

95% agreed "If I or a member of my family needed intimate personal care it would be important that we could specify the sex of our caregivers". Professionals also recognised this need.

Every single person has the right to decide who looks and who touches their body, it is the first thing I have taught my young children! **Female, England, 35–44**

I want to see a female GP. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

My sister who passed away recently was forced to accept intimate care from a male carer. She was unable to verbalise, but we discovered that he was actually sexually assaulting and humiliating her. He still works in the care system because we have no video proof.

Female, Scotland, 45–54

A male nurse cared for my mother in hospital when she was close to death and it made her uncomfortable. She didn't have the strength to ask for a female nurse. **Female, England, 55–64**

I could never have a cervical smear test from a man. I just would rather risk cancer.

Female, England, 55–64

As a nurse I can say patients do not want intimate care from males, they just don't. They want dignity and privacy when they are vulnerable. **Female, England, 45–54**

As a doctor I know how important it is for women to be able to request women doctors or nurses for consultations and intimate procedures if they wish, for example gynaecological examination, smear tests, or even just discussions about deeply personal issues. Women should be able to ask for a woman professional to attend them without being labelled transphobic or bigoted.

Female, England, 55–64

As a social worker with many years' experience of working with older people and people with disabilities I can say that it is vital, to ensure safeguarding and dignity. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Hospital wards and intimate care

My 93 year old Nana was put on a mixed sex hospital ward and couldn't understand why she had to be in her nightie and have a catheter whilst men were in the ward in beds across from her.

Female, Scotland, 45–54

I spent time as an inpatient on a mixed sex psychiatric ward. I was uncomfortable at night and found it difficult to sleep as there were men wandering the ward and not many staff around. This had a direct impact on my mental health. **Female, Scotland, 35–44**

My mother in law was in a mixed sex ward in a geriatric hospital. A male dementia patient tried to get into bed with her, twice. She was terrified. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

I have experienced an intimate exam from a member of the opposite sex and found it traumatically reminiscent of the sexual assaults I've been subject to. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

Recently I had a hospital procedure and was placed in a room with a man. I was so scared that my vital signs caused concern and a nurse came to sit with me. **Female, England, 45–54**

It is taboo in my culture to receive personal care across sexes. **Female, England, 35–44**

As a deafblind Asperger I do need help and specify that help is female. **Female, England, 45–54**

Recovering from male violence

Nearly half of female respondents to our survey said they had experienced sexual assault in their lifetime. While recognising that not all men mean them harm, women cannot identify which men are dangerous.

I was sexually assaulted, from age 11 to 15, by a close family friend. I am still fearful of unknown men. **Female, England, 65 and over**

I was sexually assaulted in a hotel in Kings Cross by my manager. I was only 21 didn't speak English and was alone in this country. I tried to report it to general managers and they silenced me until 3 months later, when I could speak English, and reported it officially. **Female, England, 35–44**

I was sexually assaulted by a doctor while I was in hospital with pneumonia. The idea of a doctor 'presenting' as female while actually and obviously being male is liable to bring me out in a panic attack. **Female, Scotland, 65 and over**

I was raped by a male who regarded himself as gender fluid and who liked to wear woman's clothes. **Female, England, 55–64**

The police

After a traumatic experience I was lucky enough to speak to a female officer. Having to be questioned on the incident was humiliating, I would have struggled had I had to repeat this to a male. **Female, England, 45–54**

I was interviewed by 2 male policemen after I made a complaint about an assault. I got up and left as I felt humiliated. They did nothing really wrong it was just too much to discuss what had happened with men. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

I felt traumatised and did not trust or want to be around men or have to talk through what happened with them. **Female, England, 35–44**

Counselling

I was assaulted at 16, the female only services gave me the confidence and time to process and heal and rebuild my confidence. **Female, England, 25–34**

I would not have called the rape crisis line I eventually got courage to call if I'd thought there was the slightest risk of a biological male answering the phone. That one phone call I did make was key to my ability to carry on living. **Female, England, 55–64**

I visited rape crisis – I would NOT have gone if men had been there – I was suicidal, this makes the situation life threatening for women and girls. **Female, England, 45–54**

I received counselling for the rape from a female trauma counsellor, through the NHS: I saw the counsellor one-to-one. [...] You cannot recover from trauma in a setting where your trauma-response is being reactivated. You need to know you are in a place of complete physical safety. That means a female-only space. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

I would not have felt able to discuss what happened to me had my counsellor been male, or had there been a male in my support group. Without that support group, I would not have been able to recover. **Female, England, 65 and over**

Refuge

After experiencing domestic violence I did not want a strange biological man in my house. I had a panic attack when the plumber came round. I felt panic I cannot imagine it is never right to allow biological males into refuges or women's prisons. **Female, England, 35–44**

I used to work as a volunteer for Women's Aid. Women fleeing from domestic abuse are particularly vulnerable and need specialist care where they feel safe. Men in those spaces increases their trauma. **Female, England, 55–64**

As both a survivor myself and someone who works with survivors it is impossible to provide trauma-informed care to women who have experienced male violence if males are present.

Female, England, 45–54

I am a retired Detective Sergeant who worked in Sapphire units investigating rape / serious sexual assaults. I also worked extensively with domestic violence victims. Even I was not permitted to enter female only refuges – we had to meet refuge workers off site. If I'd ever told a female victim that intact males identifying as female were present in these locations they simply would not have entered – something that is happening today. The simple act of convincing a victim to reside in a refuge was a massive achievement. **Female, England, 55–64**

I was a police officer who dealt with the survivors; women and girls of sexual assault. At close proximity it was very clear that the last thing these people wanted to be exposed to were men. Even to the extent that exposure to a male doctor was not an appropriate response. **Female, England, 55–64**

Support and friendship

89% of respondents agreed with the statement “Women and girls, and men and boys, sometimes need to meet up in single-sex organisations and groups to share interests”.

Our bodies, our lives

I work in a secondary school. Every time we survey pupils about sex education they request single-sex assemblies and lessons as this is an issue where they are most comfortable amongst single-sex peers with a teacher who matches their sex. **Female, England, 25–34**

As a middle aged women, I have accessed menopause support groups as well as social events for women. The atmosphere and feeling of openness is very different from that of normal social situations in a very positive way. **Female, England, 45–54**

As a breastfeeding counsellor, I have seen the difference in mother to mother support and discussion in a female only space compared to mixed. Women open up more, share more and make themselves vulnerable when not in a male presence. This enables so much support and healing and this is lost in a mixed sex space. **Female, England, 35–44**

Support groups

As a survivor of an abusive relationship with a male I have found it incredibly helpful to discuss the issue with other women, many of whom have experienced the same. I would have felt uncomfortable discussing this if a male was present. **Female, Scotland, 35–44**

I volunteer in a migrant charity where I noticed migrant women often talked about things like domestic violence, Immigration issues, childbirth, abuse exploitation, reproductive health when we were doing a women only event or activity. **Female, England, 35–44**

I am in recovery from alcohol misuse and attend some women’s recovery groups. These are safe spaces where women can relax without worries about predatory behaviour which can be dangerous for women in early recovery, risking relapse. **Female, England, 45–54**

I run groups for Muslim women who would not be able to participate in mixed groups it would be culturally unacceptable for them and these groups are crucial for their health education and mental health and are a critical route into spreading health information through isolated communities. **Female, England, 65 and over**

I was a rape crisis volunteer in the 80s. Women wouldn’t have come to us for help if they thought men were present. **Female, England, 55–64**

I work as a social worker in MH [mental health] and having single sex groups to do some group work is important. Both sexes may have the experience of being traumatised by the opposite sex

leading them to have a fear of all members of that sex. This fear can be so intense that they would avoid a group offering treatment that they needed if it were mixed sex. **Female, England, 35–44**

I work for a refuge service, this is the bare minimum of safeguarding and care we can provide to our women. I have seen women scream on sight of a male builder in a refuge, it is totally unreasonable for a woman who has faced cycles of abuse to facilitate the needs of a man. **Female, England, 25–34**

Girl guides and other youth groups

Girl guides was a safe haven for me growing up, a place away from boys and men who sexualised me. A place just to be a girl away from male judgement. **Female, England, 35–44**

Girl Guides was a very important organisation for my daughter at a sensitive and sometimes difficult time during her teens at a mixed school. She needed and greatly benefitted from what was then a single sex group. **Female, England, 65 and over**

Women at work

Being in women-only societies at university or at work has made a difference to me professionally – when the training is targeted for women and addressed specific sex-based barriers – it really helps to be in a single sex environment. **Female, England, 45–54**

I am active in all-female groups in my industry (film) which is male dominated and notorious for predatory behaviour, sexism and exclusion. **Female, England, 45–54**

I work in a male dominated industry and have been discriminated against on the basis of my sex. The support of other women has been crucial for me. **Female, England, 35–44**

Lesbians

In the 70s I went to many women's liberation meetings, there were always men outside demanding 'the right' to come in. Lesbians also get harassment from men falsely claiming to be lesbians. **Female, England, 65 and over**

As a lesbian the single sex spaces, that allowed me to meet with my women friends and lovers, was a safe space for me. There should still be single sex spaces where women aren't threatened by men in any shape or form. **Female, England, 55–64**

Religion

A significant minority said that single-sex spaces were important to them because of their faith. 27% agreed “As a person of religious faith, modesty and single sex-privacy are important to me”.

As a religious person, my beliefs are protected. My faith requires that I would NOT undress in front of males. Including men who say they are women. **Muslim, Female, England, 35–44**

My faith is fundamental to who I am, it has become my nature to respect my body as a Temple and treat it with respect and this involves giving it the privacy it deserves.

Sikh, Female, England, 35–44

My Christian faith teaches me that my modesty is important and that nakedness is something revealed to only very few people. I feel uncomfortable being forced into situations of intimacy with strangers of the opposite sex. **Christian, Female, England, 45–54**

I am Jewish and I do not expose myself to any other male except my husband.

Jewish, Female, England, 35–44

If my abusive ex-husband had known I was going out to places where there were men, he would have completely banned me from ever leaving my house at all. **Muslim, Female, England, 45–54**

Religious rules proscribe physical contact with the opposite sex. **Buddhist, Male, England, 45–54**

Losing single-sex services

More than 2,000 people gave detailed comments about their experience of loss of clear single-sex services and how this was affecting their quality of life. These are just a fraction of them.

Going gender neutral

Public toilets

Toilets that are gender “neutral” i.e. unisex, are generally filthy. **Female, England, 55–64**

I won't use a public toilet that is mixed sex. So I have had to hold myself because I cannot use dual sex toilets. Which is painful and difficult particularly because I have chronic health issues which affects my toilet needs. **Female, England, 55–64**

In the mixed facilities at a club, men were queue jumping to pee in the sinks as they are totally unused to queueing. **Female, England, 45–54**

Male and female toilets replaced with unisex facilities. Men lose urinals and women lose the ability to come out of the stall confident that there isn't a man 'adjusting' himself in the communal area. **Male, England, 35–44**

Hospitals and healthcare

My local NHS mental health trust cannot keep women safe in hospital. Men are admitted to women's wards because they are trans-identified. A mental health nurse tells me that she and other colleagues put their jobs at risk if they complain. Women patients have been assaulted and feel unsafe. This is not reported to the board or the police. **Female, England, 55–64**

Working in a hospital where a trans-ID male was admitted to a stroke ward where elderly, cognitively impaired and religiously-observant women were housed. Nobody asked or informed the women and staff were not permitted to talk about it. **Female, England, 35–44**

My worst experience has been in a mixed hospital ward in Scotland where an elderly man exposed himself through the night. Not much chance of a peaceful recovery! **Female, Scotland, 65 and over**

I work in mental health. When working in England, I have seen a high risk trans woman admitted to a female ward, creating risk for staff and other patients. I have also seen a very vulnerable trans man being “trialled” on a male acute ward, which is extremely risky. **Female, Scotland, 25–34**

Schools

I'm a teacher. I see it first hand and young girls aren't happy but are scared to speak up because they are told they are transphobic. **Female, Scotland, 25–34**

My daughter is forced to share her bathroom at school with a boy who identifies as a trans girl. She came home and asked me about the boy's penis and things that no child should have to confront at that age. **Female, Scotland, 25–34**

This has had a devastating impact on many women and girls. My nieces are going to a school where the toilets are now gender neutral. They hold their wee in all day as boys are going around shaming girls, shouting out, shitter, pissers or bleeder. Some boys wait for specific girls to go to the toilet, intimidating them. **Female, England, 45–54**

My son's school has replaced the toilets with one large mixed sex toilet block. The girls often avoid going in there and some parents have reported their child getting UTI [urinary tract infections]. **Female, England, 35–44**

Universities

The women's toilets in the University have largely become gender neutral and are used almost exclusively by young men. Women avoid them. There are no urinals and quite a lot of urine on the seats. I pity the cleaners (almost all women) too. **Female, England, 55–64**

Northampton University changed the disability toilet to a free for all mixed gender space. There is a shortage of disabled facilities, this was an appalling decision. **Female, England, 45–54**

My son attends university in London and when he uses the loo, he has to travel a long distance to avoid the gender neutral loos as he feels embarrassed in there. **Female, England, 55–64**

Sports and exercise

Man in mixed sex (gender neutral) changing area was taking photographs of girls getting changed in the next cubicle by holding this phone under the gap at the bottom of the cubicle partition. **Female, England, 55–64**

My Muslim friend no longer comes swimming at the women's session as transwomen also use the pool and changing room which is contrary to her religious beliefs. **Female, England, 45–54**

My local swimming pool is threatening to stop the one night a week of women-only swimming and sauna, that is relied on by me and many other local women, including some very religious Jewish and Muslim women, so we would have to stop going to swim and sauna. **Female, England, 25–34**

One male teenager saying he self identifies as female at our canoe club and has a semi erect penis when in our female changing rooms. He has mental health issues but his social worker has not accepted the club offer of a separate changing room for him/her although there is one on offer.

Female, England, 55–64

I can no longer go swimming because the changing rooms and pools are mixed sex (ladies night session cancelled) so me (a victim of SA [sexual assault]) and my friend (a Muslim woman) can no longer attend. **Female, Scotland, 25–34**

Workplaces

Work female cubicles now mixed. Men's toilet still remains. No female only toilets now. The disabled toilet is now used more by women as a result. **Female, England, 45–54**

As Scottish Government workers, the vast majority of women chose to go up or downstairs to a remaining women's loo, rather than use the female loo that became neutral gender loo on our floor. This loo became, in effect, a male loo as women didn't like using it. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

I am a teacher in a girls' school. I've stopped using the staff toilets at work now male visitors can go in. It's embarrassing for them and women staff. I use the sixth form female toilets instead.

Female, England, 45–54

I recently visited number 11 Downing Street and had to change my underwear and menstrual cup in a gender neutral facility with two men taking right outside the cubicle door. My heart was racing, I was afraid the cubicle door would be opened. **Female, England, 35–44**

Shopping

I stopped shopping for clothes at M&S when they changed their ladies changing rooms to gender neutral. **Female, England, 55–64**

I need to get my 13 year old daughter measured for a bra but I can't take her to John Lewis or M&S any more. I don't want her to be trying on bras next to adult males. **Female, England, 45–54**

I no longer visit some places such as shops and bars where the changing rooms or toilets are mixed sex. **Female, England, 45–54**

Going out

I now have a long list of bars and restaurants I cannot use due to gender neutral loos that do not follow the floor to ceiling' enclosed space with sink rules. These facilities are not suitable for me due to being the victim of voyeurism. **Female, England, 45–54**

I was in a pub on holiday where there was one toilet for males & females – I felt too vulnerable to use it so left the pub rather than put myself at risk. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Everyman Cinema (the irony is not lost on me) moved to mixed sex loos. I visited them and a man in front of me looked back and smirked, on my way there. No way was I going in an enclosed space with him after that. I have never used that cinema again. **Female, England, 45–54**

My local Town Hall is being refurbished and is removing single sex toilets and replacing them with gender neutral toilets. This was decided with no consultation with any faith groups or women's groups. There was also no consultation with the Police regarding the possibility of an increase in sexual assault and crimes such as voyeurism. **Female, Scotland, 65 and over**

Shared accommodation

We previously used Youth Hostels for much of our travel but their policy of allowing males in female dorms (with the possibility – but not the guarantee – of a private room if you are willing to disclose details of your sexual trauma to the desk clerk, who does not get paid or trained to deal with it) is unacceptable. **Female, England, 45–54**

My teenage daughter will be sharing a bedroom with a trans girl on a forthcoming school trip. While we have been offered the opportunity to veto the arrangement, in practice this is pretty much impossible: the children have agreed to the arrangement, and it is clear we would be pilloried across the school and community as transphobes. **Female, Wales, 45–54**

My daughter was 16 and went to work for YHA [the Youth Hostel Association] – they had changed the dormitories to “same gender” rather than same sex so worried for a week she could be sharing with a male. **Female, England, 45–54**

“Trans inclusion”

Workplace allows self id. We now have a male using the previously female toilets. I have been told it is against the law and discrimination to stop them. **Female, England, 25–34**

My 14 year old daughter is made to change in open changing room with a boy who says he is a girl. He is on the netball team. Two boys are using the girls' toilets in her year group. They no longer have single sex spaces. **Female, England, 45–54**

I have encountered a man of about 23 wearing a swimsuit at our gym in the women's changing room. I complained to management. He was clearly a man. He was over 6 ft tall with male genitals. **Female, England, 45–54**

Yesterday, I was confronted by a man in Female toilets in a hospital. His behaviour towards me was peculiar and hostile. It shocked and distressed me. **Female, England, 55–64**

I was in Marks and Spencer changing rooms in my underwear. A man walked in carrying 3 bras and demanded the shop assistant helped him with the fitting. The whole area went silent. You could feel the fear of the woman who had no choice due to company policy. **Female, England, 45–54**

During a recent hospital stay there was a transwoman on the ward. They were surrounded by elderly vulnerable female patients. They all expressed their discomfort privately and felt their privacy was denied. **Female, England, 55–64**

Even if a space has not been designated trans inclusive, it is no longer possible to feel safe in single sex spaces because men are already entering those spaces. It only has to happen once for the concept of single sex spaces to be null and void. **Female, England, 55–64**

Inappropriate behaviour

My daughter when she was in her late teens was confronted by a male bodied trans woman or transvestite who insisted on lifting her skirt by the washbasins in a female-only toilets. This was at a restaurant. **Female, England, 65 and over**

The last time I was in a ladies changing room with my niece, a transwoman was in there who walked up to my teenaged niece, grabbed her breast and squeezed it saying “My boobies are better than yours” then kicked off calling us terfs and transphobes for objecting to ‘normal girlie stuff’. **Female, England, 45–54**

I worked at a helpline for men & women suffering DV – a male colleague decided to “identify” as a woman, and started going into the female toilets, and just sitting in a stall and listening and spying on the women, and I suspect, masturbating, so I left that job, I was very scared by him. **Female, England, 65 and over**

My autistic daughter (13 at the time) walked into the toilet at the cinema to find a man in a dress and lipstick, and she was terrified, she ran out visibly and audibly distressed, shouting that there was a man in the toilet and that she wouldn’t go in until he was gone. I ran in to see what was going on, to find the trans person in there who was huge, over 6ft and did not look anything like a woman. **Female, England, 35–44**

I received abuse from a trans women for my involuntary reaction (as a survivor of male sexual violence) when seeing them in the toilet. **Female, England, 25–34**

Services for abused women

I work with migrant women, most of whom have no interest in or understanding of transgenderism. They just want safe, supportive services and for them, that means female-only

spaces. These women are engaged in transactional sex to get food and housing. Most are survivors of sexual violence. **Female, Wales, 55–64**

I work in a women's therapy service. Trans women frighten many clients due to their history of physical and sexual abuse from men. **Female, England, 45–54**

I was unable to access 'by women for women' support locally when needed a few years ago as it included trans identified males. The female manager of one of the 2 services I was referred to by police told me she would not employ any staff who did not believe men are women if they say so. This excluded me and other women like me. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

I stayed in an abusive situation until it was resolved in another way because there are no single-sex services left in my county. **Female, England, 45–54**

Not only am I a survivor but I have worked with survivors in a Rape Crisis Centre, I remember having to walk around the centre with women to prove there were no men there it was hard to watch these women in such distress and not believe there were no men until they could see it with their own eyes. The same would happen when women called, we had to promise them no men would be around and they would ask lots of questions and ask for proof before coming for their first appointment. **Female, England, 45–54**

I self-exclude from my local rape crisis service as the women's groups welcome any males who identify as women. In practice the women's groups are centred around trans women and female rape survivors are expected to make sure any males feel especially welcome, comfortable, validated and included. This doesn't help me and my recovery so I don't go. There are no single sex alternatives. **Female, England, 35–44**

Specialist women's services

My local rape crisis centre (Edinburgh) is run by a man and so feel anxious and upset for any woman who will need to use such a service. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

I would not go to a rape crisis centre headed up by a man, who lied about his sex to get a woman-only position, who tells rape victims that they're 'bigots' and need to "reframe their trauma" if women rape victims legally request a female person to counsel them. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Pressure to be trans-inclusive

Our local, hugely respected, women's domestic abuse service lost council funding last year. They are continuing but greatly reduced. Lost the contract to giant, non-specialist, gender neutral orgs. Service locally from those orgs is substandard and understaffed. **Female, England, 45–54**

My local rape survivors service offers specialist LGBT groups, a men's group but the women's service is open to all who 'identify as women'. Women who have been raped have no dedicated single sex service. **Female, England, 45–54**

Working in a large LGBT organisation, I can say that services exclusively for women do not exist. **Female, England, 35–44**

I worked in a Women's Centre for 25yrs and eventually funding was withdrawn because it was not deemed inclusive. The funding went to a Centre that included men. Women from South Wales lost a successful, vital, well established service that cannot be found anywhere. **Female, Wales, 55–64**

The amazing domestic violence service in my city lost its funding for not offering services for men (they were already trans-inclusive). **Female, England, 55–64**

Rape crisis centres and women's refuges have often lost funding because they don't include trans identified men. I worked in a women's refuge for 23 years and lost my job because I argued against men in refuges. **Female, England, 65 and over**

Losing a place of our own

As well as services and facilities, many people wrote about the loss of single-sex groups and associations.

Lesbians

I used to go to women only groups and lesbian only groups for my social life but now I daren't go because I am too scared to go. I feel threatened and harassed by men saying they are women. I have nothing in common with these aggressive people. **Female, England, 45–54**

As a homosexual female, I've found groups for women like myself have been taken over by trans identified males who then divert any and all conversations to being centred around trans issues, trans identity and often conversations demanding you validate "women with penises".

Female, England, 25–34

I attended an event supposedly for Lesbians, i.e. women only, but there were multiple men there who made me feel very uncomfortable, who made sexual comments and were very vocal about the fact that we should sleep with them to avoid being transphobic. **Female, Scotland, 16–24**

I have been removed from lesbian groups for saying that a male who identifies as a woman and lesbian (the latter, same sex attracted not same gender attracted) is not a lesbian. Lesbian venues and events are no longer same sex because they've been called transphobic. As a lesbian – I feel VERY UNSAFE. **Female, England, 55–64**

Workplace groups

Women's networking group (workplace) being changed to be inclusive of anyone.

Female, England, 45–54

The menopause group at work has let trans identified men join. Women complained and were told to be kind. **Female, England, 45–54**

I work in a heavily male dominated academic field. We have historically had many campaigns, opportunities, and support groups to encourage and help women to engage in the field. These are now almost exclusively open to "those who identify as women". **Female, England, 45–54**

My work union says women are not allowed to organise politically in any way in the interests of women without including any men (who identify as women). It prohibits women's meetings and discussions if men (who identify as women) and excluded. **Female, Northern Ireland, 55–64**

Women's groups

Feminist Library, trans inclusive, refuses to accommodate women-only groups that might once have met there. **Female, England, 65 and over**

I work in a university and there is an alarming trend in universities across the UK of single sex interest or support groups being replaced by unisex or disappearing entirely. Female staff or students who attempt to meet to discuss sex-specific issues such as male violence against women are often publicly vilified, harassed or driven out of the university altogether.

Female, Scotland, 55–64

There used to be women's bars, discos, clubs and festivals etc. And women's centres. Now there are almost none which don't include trans identified males. And any which remain are criticised or attacked. This means lots of women are missing out on having the experience and support of women only space – so they don't know what they're missing. **Female, England, 55–64**

Women's Institute is important to me. We occasionally have speakers on delicate matters. I think our members would be intimidated from participating if male-bodied people were allowed in those sessions. **Female, England, 65 and over**

Support groups

Our local women's drug rehabilitation group is now 'inclusive' i.e. allows men who say they are women to join. One man (who says he is a woman) has definitely joined. So now it is no longer single-sex. **Female, England, 55–64**

Many women's 12 step recovery meetings are now mixed sex. Profoundly vulnerable and traumatized women are excluding themselves. **Female, England, 45–54**

I was a member of a local menopause help group but discontinued using the service when trans women were allowed to attend. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

Online groups

Online menopause group of all places! Stifled genuine sharing of experiences and normal conversation. Became ridiculous. Most women left. **Female, England, 55–64**

I was in an online Facebook breastfeeding support group that changed to allow males in if they identified as female. Before that it was a strictly female private group. It was an intimate group, people shared photos of themselves breastfeeding, of their anatomy to ask for advice.

Female, Scotland, 35–44

At this point it is basically impossible to find single sex online groups for women. Even if people would like them, the minute a group is deemed not “inclusive” of biological men, it is subject to vicious and persistent harassment, malicious reporting, etc. **Female, England, 25–34**

A hostile environment for women

That there has been no thinking, discussion or understanding of the impact and potentially unintended consequences of these decisions is extremely sad and depressing. Why are women so unimportant? I support trans rights but not at the expense of the safety and rights of women.

Female, England, 35–44

I feel immense anger at raped or abused women not allowed any private healing space away from men. It is as if they are being punished for being victims. To call a rapist she is a travesty of justice adding to the victim’s trauma. **Female, England, 55–64**

I know women opting out of using facilities because they are now mixed sex, I’ve spoken to women running charities who hate this but daren’t speak out because their services will lose funding and it is all placing women at increased risk of male violence. It’s intolerable. **Female, England, 25–34**

It gives the message that females are not important. Most sexual crimes are committed by males against females. We females have many untold stories of sexual assault. I don’t want males in single sex facilities. I believe most men would prefer single sex facilities also.

Female, Northern Ireland, 55–64

It makes me furious. Especially when it is brushed aside as “inclusive” It is not. It excludes me and many others. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

It is genuinely frightening and disempowering to have single sex spaces removed on the basis of an unscientific, culturally tone deaf and ideologically driven phenomenon. **Female, England, 45–54**

No consultation

My workplace has opened up the showers and toilets to anyone who claims to feel like that gender. There were no risk assessments and nobody was asked if they were concerned. It was not advertised and people would only find out if they read the trans policy. **Female, England, 55–64**

I had an email to say that the women’s public toilets in the woods where I walk in London were going to be open to anyone who identifies as a woman – they’re run by the City of London. There was a consultation of sorts and I objected but I found out that most of the objections were ignored. I’m sorry to say I burst into tears when I read the first email as walking in these woods are my exercise and key to my wellbeing. **Female, England, 55–64**

Speaking up or staying silent

Locally women campaigned against male and female toilets being replaced with gender neutral by the City Council and were berated for being “transphobic”. Their campaign was condemned as being about “hate”. **Female, England, 65 and over**

Our daughter’s special school changed their same sex intimate care policy to a “cross gender one” to support the diversity in the staff workforce’. It took a lawyer to get the policy changed back to being same sex. **Female, England, 45–54**

My previous employer made the toilets gender neutral. Many women, for religious, modesty, or other reasons avoided using the toilets at all, or would go in groups. The toilets had to be segregated after approx a year due to complaints from both sexes. **Female, England, 45–54**

I was not consulted, and I felt intimidated by the “equality and diversity” group to the extent that I felt unsafe speaking up about this. **Female, England, 45–54**

Any employee unhappy with opposite sex colleagues sharing the facilities, will get a chat with their manager and be told to find alternative facilities. **Female, Scotland, 35–44**

Not only losing access to Survivor Network but being monstered BY them for speaking up for other rape survivors with female specific rape trauma.

Female, England, 55–64

I work for a chain that has mixed sex fitting rooms but doesn’t announce this to customers. However if a customer knows and objects, it is them who have to be removed.

Female, England, 55–64

I can’t say anything or I will lose my job. **Female, England, 55–64**

Messages to the EHRC

95% of respondents agreed with the statement “The EHRC, the UK’s official equality watchdog, should provide guidance for service providers to help them follow the law”.

1,723 people wrote individual messages to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (this was before the EHRC released its new guidance on single-sex services).

Guidance is needed

Provide clarity

Service providers need reassurance that it is legal to provide and enforce single-sex services. Many have been poorly advised in recent years. **Female, England, 35–44**

I worked in the NHS and witnessed frequently the erosion of women’s rights because of poor understanding of the law coupled with nervousness from managers about causing offence. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

This guidance is so overdue. A vacuum where it should have been has been filled by lobby groups pushing their own political agendas. We need clear instruction on the actual law. **Female, England, 35–44**

Since the law is not being interpreted correctly by service providers at the moment, the EHRC should give clear unambiguous guidance. **Female, England, 55–64**

Recognise women’s needs

I want it to base its guidance on ****why**** the law has picked out sex as something that matters, not just the fact that it has. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Women’s rights are human rights. Women and especially girls are among the most vulnerable members of society and our rights to single sex spaces should be respected. **Female, England, 35–44**

Women need their rights protecting and it seems that only the EHRC care enough to fight for them or at least get our voices heard. **Female, England, 55–64**

Balance competing rights

There are 9 protected characteristics. They should all be respected. **Female, England, 45–54**

The new chair is listening to ALL those who have a protected characteristic, which is a refreshing change, after a few years where the EHRC appeared to have a hierarchy, with sex at the bottom,

and 'gender reassignment' (far too vague a term) at the top. Hardly surprising that the previous chair was from Stonewall. Equality feels like oppression when you are used to privilege.

Female, England, 55–64

Trans rights have been privileged over those of women, older people and children, those with a religious faith and people with a disability. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Where there is an apparent conflict of rights (as in this case) there should be open and robust discussion about how this can be best resolved. **Female, England, 45–54**

We cannot allow the rights of one group to erode the rights of another. **Female, Scotland, 45–54**

No “case by case”

Guidance needs to be practical and not let policing access to services fall to the case by case judgement of front-line staff. It's unfair on staff as they will bear the brunt of objections, and is unfair on service users who will not know whether a service is available. **Female, England, 45–54**

Sex seems to have morphed into gender in so many areas by stealth. I would like to see a total ban on males entering female only spaces. None of this case by case malarkey. The EHRC needs to be firm. **Female, Scotland, 55–64**

Emphasise single-sex requirements

The EHRC should be actively encouraging service providers to provide single sex provision otherwise they are failing in their duty to protect the sex class of women from discrimination and putting them at risk of harm. **Female, England, 35–44**

The EHRC simply permitting single-sex spaces is not enough. Single-sex spaces need to be legally mandated in all public services. Such a declaration would restore equity to funding opportunities for these single-sex services. **Male, England, 25–34**

The EHRC needs to right the wrongs of the past in relation to advice given to organisations by corrupt lobby groups. It needs to reiterate that single sex provision is essential for women and girls and that mixed facilities are detrimental for women and girls. The EHRC needs to be very clear that biological men are not and can never be female and that sex matters. **Female, England, 45–54**

Take up legal cases

It's outrageous that women like me have had to pay to support legal action to enforce our existing legal rights. Our public services have the time and the expertise to give guidance and support on matters of public services and they should be using their power to help the groups recognised in law as needing help or specific provision. **Female, England, 55–64**

I would go further. EHRC should take up the legal challenge. It is so unfair that ordinary women are having to fund legal challenges while Scottish Government or Scottish Government funded organisations have access to unlimited public funds. **Female, Scotland, 65 and over**

There need to be consequences for discriminating against women that don't rely on each individual case being funded to go through the courts – most women don't have the money, time or public profile to be able to push for their legal rights, and so are mostly just doing without. It's impacting our ability to participate in public life, having a negative effect on accessing basic healthcare and education. **Female, England, 45–54**

Provide guidance to schools

The guidance for schools must be informed by safeguarding. It needs to be made clear to schools and the public at large that inclusion, diversity, equality must never ever be allowed to undermine safeguarding. All children have a right to be kept safe. No child or their parent should be able to opt them out of safeguarding. **Female, England, 35–44**

There is widespread misunderstanding of the Equality Act 2010 in school settings, and what the implications of it should be for school policies. Clear, explicit guidance on single sex spaces is very much needed. Also teaching materials to counter the inaccurate resources peddled by unregulated external providers like Stonewall and No Outsiders are crucial. **Female, England, 45–54**

Set the agenda

Dispel misinformation

Without clearly worded guidance organisations will continue to be influenced by the deliberate misinformation produced by organisations such as Stonewall. **Male, England, 45–54**

With even police forces issuing guidance which is wrong about the protected characteristics it's clear that the EHRC needs to be more proactive in dispelling the misinformation from the likes of Stonewall and their satellite lobbying groups in the rest of the UK. **Female, Northern Ireland, 45–54**

Counter the bullying

The EHRC needs to do more to safeguard women's rights, and also stamp out this idea that anyone who wants to protect single-sex spaces is 'transphobic'. **Female, England, 45–54**

Who else is standing against the erosion of rights to free speech, being able to rightly express your belief in biology and scientific fact, to demand the right to be safe, have privacy?

Female, Scotland, 55–64

They need to uphold the law, especially the exemption for single-sex services, and not bow down to misogynistic bullying. **Female, England, 25–34**

The EHRC needs to continue working to win back women's trust after spending several years prioritising and advocating for groups which privilege men. **Female, England, 35–44**

Take the lead

We need independent, sensible oversight of life changing political policies.

Female, England, 45–54

The whole purpose of the EHRC is to address areas where the rights of one group clash with those of another. Gender reassignment is a protected characteristic not gender identity. Sex is a protected characteristic not gender. Organisations who behave as though the law protects gender identity must be held to account and prevented from doing this. **Female, England, 55–64**

The issue is that we shouldn't be allowing those with these or any other anti-science, anti-reality belief to make the law and rules that apply to society as a whole. **Female, England, 45–54**

Be brave

The fact that the EHRC has taken a position and the group that don't like that position are trying to undermine the body itself is terrifying and also demonstrable of the power and entitlement of this group. **Female, England, 35–44**

They have been late in coming forward but I pray they hold their nerve and uphold single-sex services. **Female, England, 45–54**

The EHRC have been subjected to abuse which highlights even more how needed they are now. **Female, England, 65 and over**

Annexes

Other research

Our research provides rich qualitative data: thousands of individual perspectives about the impact of the loss of single-sex services, from those who value them. It confirms what representative surveys also show: that many people value separate facilities for women and men, and expect them to be provided on the basis of sex, not gender identity.

For example, a YouGov poll on 27th January 2022¹ showed that 52% of people wanted separate toilets for men and women, and 35% of people wanted gender-neutral toilets in addition to separate toilets for men and women.

Only 7% wanted gender-neutral only. 45% of people say they generally feel uncomfortable using a gender-neutral toilet in a public place.

A recent survey by More in Common² found that while 43% of people were willing to agree with the statement that “A transgender woman is a woman”, only 29% thought that someone who identifies as a transgender woman should be allowed to use women’s toilets, and only 19% thought they should be allowed to compete in women’s sports.

Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission³ showed that 95% of women using women’s services preferred to receive them from a female only-organisation. A survey by the sexual violence counselling organisation Aurora New Dawn of 629 of their service users⁴ found that 100% of them wanted to retain single-sex peer support groups and 95% of female victims prefer a female member of staff for one-to-one counselling.

¹ YouGov (2022). [Support for separate toilets for men and women, and gender neutral toilets in public spaces.](#)

² More in Common (2022). [Britons and Gender Identity: Navigating Common Ground and Division.](#)

³ Hirst, A. and Rinne, S. (2012). [The Impact of Changes in Commissioning of Women-only Services. Equality and Human Rights Commission.](#)

⁴ Aurora New Dawn (2022) [By and for women.](#)

Analysis of respondents

Respondents covered the full age range but were commonly over 35:

- 16–24: 1%
- 25–34: 7%
- 35–44: 19%
- 45–54: 32%
- 55–64: 26%
- 65 and over: 14%.

90% of respondents were female.

Of those who voted, those in England mostly supported the Labour Party (56%), followed by the Conservatives (21%), Liberal Democrats 11%, Green Party 6%, Others 6%.

In Wales, Labour was also the most strongly represented party with 50%; then Conservatives 17%, Plaid Cymru 17%, Liberal Democrats 5%, Green Party 3%, Others 8%.

In Scotland, the SNP had the most support at 58%, followed by Labour 17%, Alba 7%, Liberal Democrat 3%, Green Party 1%, Others 4%.

71% of respondents said they were not religious or that religion was not important to them. 10% said their religion was very important to them and 19% said it was somewhat important to them.

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