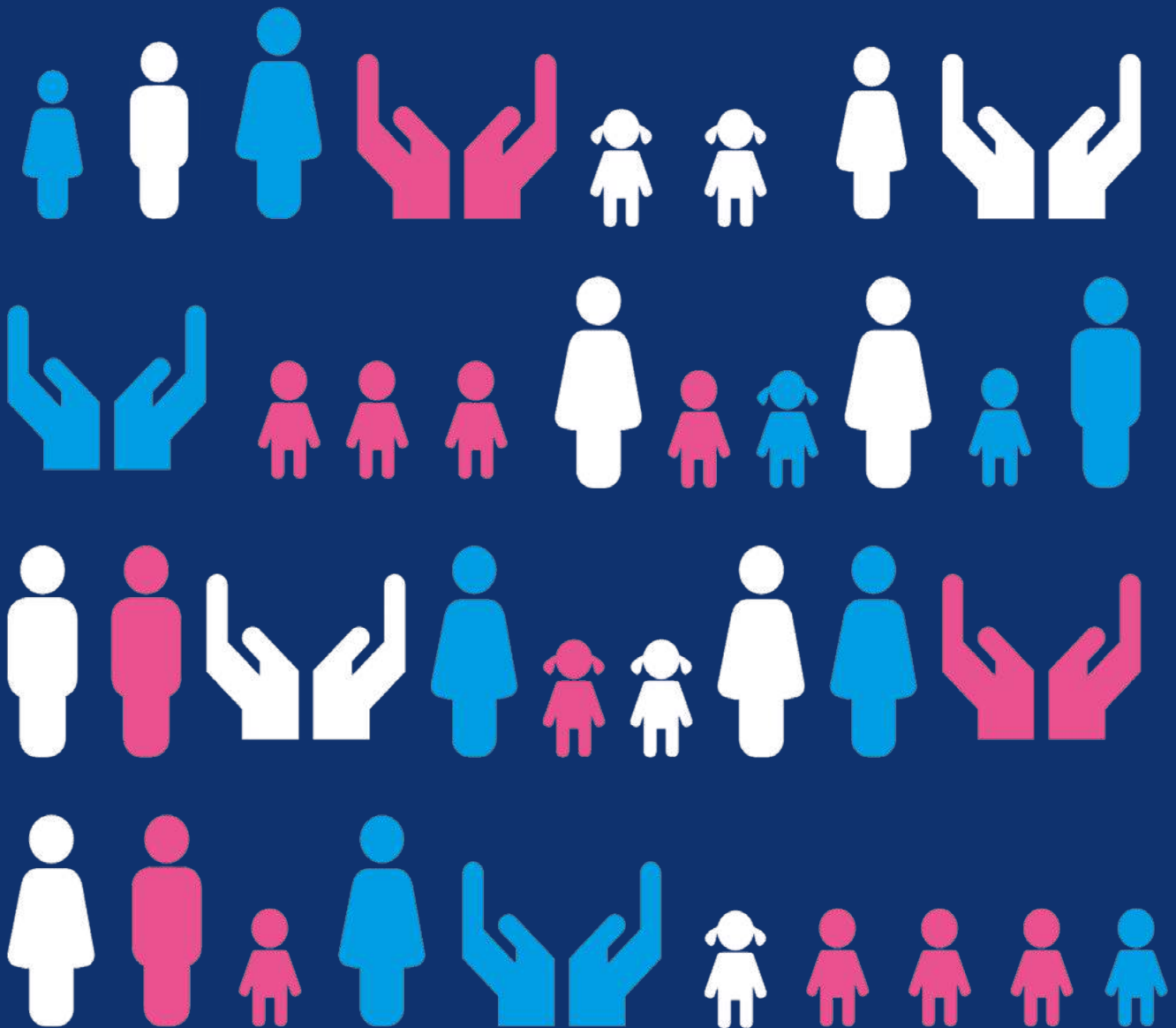

Safe Young Lives: Young People and domestic abuse



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About SafeLives

We are a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for good. We combine insight from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe, well and rebuild their lives. Since 2005, SafeLives has worked with organisations across the country to transform the response to domestic abuse, with over 60,000 victims at highest risk of murder or serious harm now receiving co-ordinated support annually.

No one should live in fear. It is not acceptable, not inevitable, and together – we can make it stop.

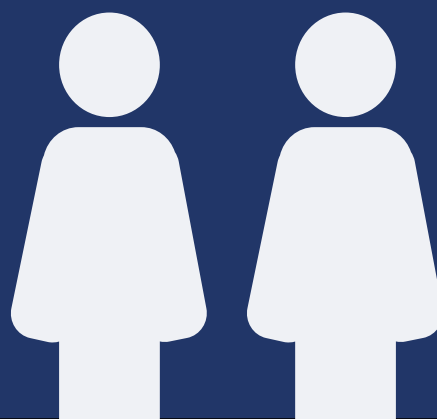
Every year, nearly two million people experience domestic abuse. For every person being abused, there is someone else responsible for that abuse: the perpetrator. And all too often, children are in the home and living with the impact.

Domestic abuse affects us all; it thrives on being hidden behind closed doors. We must make it everybody's business.

What would you want for your best friend?

- Early, consistent and tailored support that makes them safe and meets their needs.
- Help made available wherever they need it – whether from the police, their GP or hospital, or where they live.
- The choice to stay safely in their own home and community.
- The perpetrator challenged to change and held to account.
- A response that addresses the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people.
- Agencies working together to meet the practical needs that people have, providing help on areas such as housing, money and access to justice.

We want this for each and every person living with abuse. Wherever they live, whoever they are.



What we do

- Place people with lived experience at the heart of all we do and amplify their voices.
- Test innovative projects and replicate effective approaches that make more people safe and well.
- Combine data, research and frontline expertise to help services improve and to influence policy makers (locally and nationally).
- Offer support, knowledge and tools to frontline workers and professionals.

How we do it

- We are independent.
- We focus on the practical: we believe in showing people what they can do, not telling them they should do.
- We save time and money for local areas by solving common problems once and sharing the solutions.
- We are informed by evidence of what really works.
- We are informed by the lived experience and insight of survivors and amplify their voices in all we do.
- We learn from local provision and respect local circumstances, but show how national replication can be achieved.
- We work across organisational and sector boundaries.



About SafeLives' Insights service

Insights is a 'whole family' outcomes measurement programme specifically designed for specialist domestic abuse services supporting adults and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

Insights enables services to understand who is accessing their service and identify gaps, to tailor interventions and support to meet the needs of their clients and to evidence the impact of their work on improving safety and wellbeing. Frontline practitioners collect information about the people they support and submit it to SafeLives via online forms.

About this report

This report will discuss young people and domestic abuse. It is part of our 'Spotlight' series which focuses on 'hidden' groups of domestic abuse victims or those with unmet needs, and proposes recommendations for both practitioners and policy makers.

We would like to thank all the practitioners, professionals and academics who participated in this Spotlight.

Most of all, we would like to thank the young people and parents who spoke so honestly and bravely about their experiences. Without your insight, this report would not be possible.

Contact

For queries about this report please contact REA@safelives.org.uk

Executive Summary

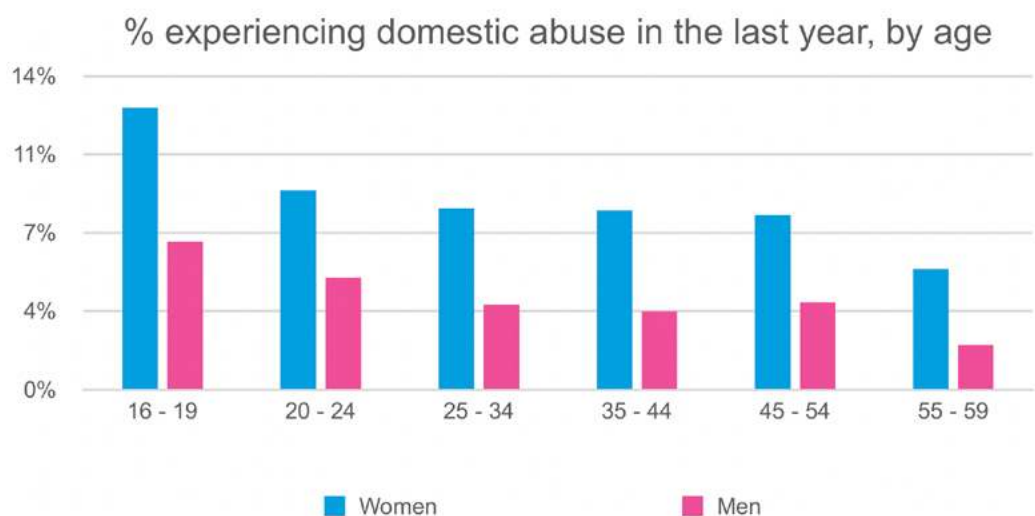
The third SafeLives Spotlight focuses on young people aged 13 to 17 who

- experience domestic abuse in an intimate partner relationship, or;
- demonstrate harmful behaviours towards a family member.

The numbers

Young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group.

In March 2016, the Crime Survey for England and Wales identified that 6.6% of men and 12.9% of women aged 16 to 19 had experienced domestic abuse in the past year. For women this is dramatically higher (42%) than the next highest category (ages 20 – 24), and for men it is almost one third higher (32%).



Abuse can begin even earlier than age 16 for large numbers of young people. A survey of 13 to 17 year olds found that a quarter (25%) of girls and 18% of boys reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner.¹

“When I was 15 I got into a relationship that would change my life... One day I was on the phone to a male friend, and my partner decided that it wasn’t okay for me to do that. That was the first time he hit me. After that it kind of just becomes a blur.”

Chantelle, young survivor

Our data shows that young people, including those below 16, can experience all forms of domestic abuse² and the likelihood of experiencing high severity abuse is no different to adults. Indeed, the data suggests the levels of high severity abuse may be highest for the youngest age group.

Since 2013, 16 and 17 year olds have been entitled to access adult domestic abuse support as a result of their inclusion in the cross-governmental definition of domestic abuse. Despite the high prevalence of abuse for this age group, the rate of referrals into support services and multi-agency risk assessment conferences (Maracs) is lower than the percentage they make up of the population. Young people aged 16 and 17 represent 3.1% of the adult (16+) population³ while 1.7% of Marac referrals, 2% of referrals into Idva support and 1% of referrals into Outreach support are made for those aged 16 and 17 years old.

For victims younger than 16, who must rely on limited specialist services for young people, the visibility of victims is likely to be even lower.

Additional Vulnerability

Regardless of whether they can access adult support, the evidence suggests that young people need a different response to adults.

Young people experience a complex transition from childhood to adulthood, which impacts on behaviour and decision making. It may impact on the way that they respond to the abuse as well as the way that they engage with services. Additionally, they may be unequipped to deal with the practical problems such as moving home or finances. As a result, young people who experience domestic abuse do so at a particularly vulnerable point in their lives.

“I wanted to move out from my mam’s even though I was only 15 so I did, but my mam was not happy in the slightest. This was when stuff was starting to go different between us but I couldn’t see it as I was madly in love with him.”

Katie, young survivor

The abuse that young people experience may also look different to the abuse that adults experience. Young people commonly experience abuse through new technologies and social media, which can be used as a monitoring or harassment tool by the perpetrator. SafeLives data shows that young people are more likely than adult victims of abuse to be in a relationship with the perpetrator at the point at which they accessed support. And our Spotlight case studies highlight that they may not see themselves as a ‘victim’, especially when they too are demonstrating some forms of abusive behaviour.

Young people who demonstrate harmful behaviour

For some young people, the experience of domestic abuse includes causing harm to those closest to them, including partners, parents, siblings and other family members.

Adolescent to parent violence can encompass a range of abusive behaviour as severe and complex as that seen in partner abuse cases, and is different to isolated incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour from a young person. Our data shows that nearly a quarter (23%) of 13 to 17 year olds accessing specialist young people’s domestic abuse services are demonstrating harmful behaviour.

SafeLives Insights data shows that 61% of young people who were demonstrating harmful behaviour were doing so towards their mother. When parents are the victim of abuse from a young person, seeking help for their children and themselves is complex, and often the only options are through ‘criminalising’ the child’s behaviour.

We also know that the criminal justice response is often the only answer for young people demonstrating abuse towards their partners. These young people will often lack an understanding of healthy relationships, or need help to control behaviour that they know is wrong. Changing the attitude and response of these young people is as important as holding them accountable for their behaviour.

Understanding healthy relationships

Research indicates that both young men and women may not understand what constitutes a healthy relationship. The research project Boys to Men found that 49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13 – 14 thought that hitting a partner would be ‘okay’ in at least one of twelve scenarios they were presented with.⁴ There is evidence⁵ that educational programmes can help change the attitudes of young people towards domestic abuse and the recent announcement by government that Relationships and Sex Education will be made mandatory in schools is an important step.

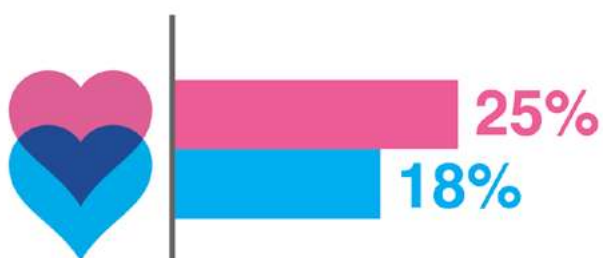
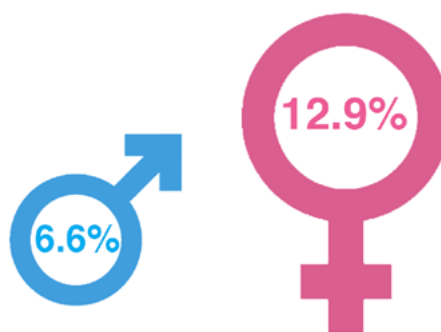
“I feel more confident to get into new relationships as I can use the work with the YPVA Service to see if the relationship I am in is healthy or unhealthy.”

Billie-Jo, Young survivor

This report draws on our evidence from the Safe Young Lives Spotlight, including SafeLives' own national dataset, to make recommendations about how we can increase the awareness and understanding of this issue, to provide better advocacy and support to help end domestic abuse for young people.

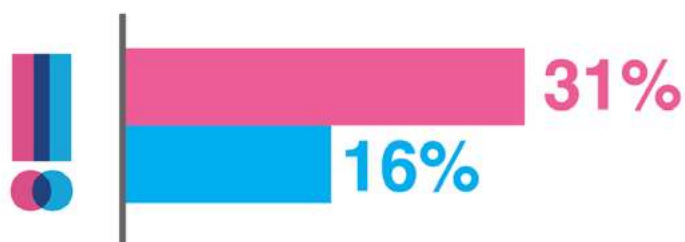
Key Findings

In March 2016, the Crime Survey for England and Wales identified that **6.6%** of men and **12.9%** of women aged 16 to 19 had experienced domestic abuse in the past year. For women this is dramatically higher (42%) than the next highest category (ages 20 – 24), and for men it is almost one third higher (32%).



A study of 13 to 17 year olds by NSPCC suggests this abuse can begin even earlier in adolescence for large numbers of young people. A quarter (**25%**) of girls and **18%** of boys in the study reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner.

Additionally one in three girls (**31%**) and **16%** of boys reported some form of sexual abuse within their relationships.

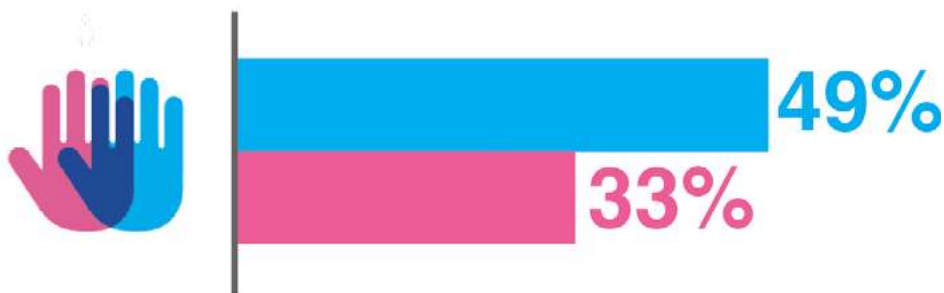
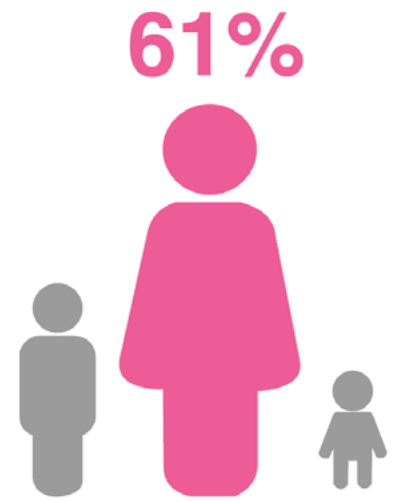


SafeLives Children's Insights data found that nearly all (**95%**) of young people experiencing intimate partner violence were female.

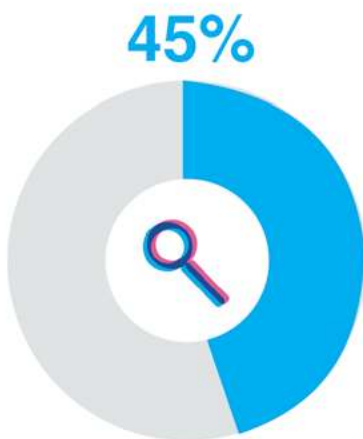


Our data shows that nearly 1 in 4 of 13 to 17 year olds accessing specialist young people's domestic abuse services demonstrate harmful behaviour

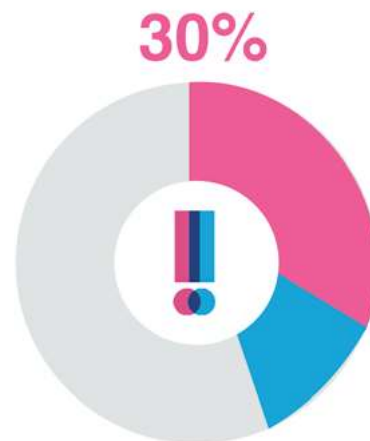
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49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13 – 14 thought that hitting a partner would be 'okay' in at least one of twelve scenarios they were presented with.



SafeLives' Children's Insights data shows that less than half (45%) of young people in an abusive intimate relationship were known to children's social services



Young people were more than twice as likely to self-harm compared to older victims (30% compared to 14%).



It is estimated that **1** in 5 children are exposed to domestic abuse⁷



Definitions

Domestic Abuse

In England and Wales the cross-governmental definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.

Young Person

For the purpose of this report, SafeLives has defined a young person as a child between the ages of 13 and 17. We chose this age range to capture the period between the onset of puberty and the point at which the young person legally becomes an adult.

Child Abuse

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015⁸ defines child abuse as:

A form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

There are four types of abuse defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

Witnessing domestic abuse is considered child abuse under the Children Act 1989, (through amendments in the Adoption and Children Act 2002) which now includes in its definition of harm ‘impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another’.

Adolescent to parent violence and abuse (APVA)

There is currently no legal or government definition of adolescent to parent violence and abuse. For the purpose of this report SafeLives has chosen to use the following description of APVA written by Criminologist and Psychologist Amanda Holt⁹:

A pattern of behaviour instigated by a child or young person, which involves using verbal, financial, physical, and/or emotional means to practice power and exert control over a parent... The power that is practised is, to some extent, intentional and the control that is exerted over a parent is achieved through fear, such that a parent unhealthily adapts his or her own behaviour to accommodate the child.

This report does not deal with the abuse of parents by older children. For more information about parent abuse by older children, please look at our first Spotlight on victims over sixty: <http://safelives.org.uk/spotlight-1-older-people-and-domestic-abuse>



Introduction

Young people can experience domestic abuse in a multitude of ways. They can:

- Witness domestic abuse in the family home and may be directly victimised by the perpetrator of that abuse.
- They can also experience domestic abuse in their own intimate partner relationships.
- They may demonstrate harmful behaviours themselves, towards partners or family members.

Often young people will experience domestic abuse in more than one of these ways. Our data shows that for those accessing specialist support who are in an abusive intimate relationship, 40% had also been a witness to domestic abuse, and 34% had been harmed as part of their exposure to domestic abuse.

This report will use SafeLives' Insights national datasets and our national Marac dataset to help demonstrate the extent of domestic abuse that young people suffer. Combined, this is the largest dataset in the UK on domestic abuse.

Our Children's Insights dataset is collected by specialist domestic abuse services that support children and young people who experience domestic abuse; the data used in this report is drawn from cases in which the young person was aged 13 -17 at the time of receiving support. Our Adults Insights dataset is collected by specialist domestic abuse services who support people aged 16 and over. Our Marac dataset provides a national picture of the number of victims experiencing abuse at the highest risk of harm or fatality.

In this report we also draw on wider evidence to help understand the experiences of young people, and the support that they need. This includes evidence from practitioners, experts and, most importantly, the views of young survivors and their parents. All names of survivors and family members have been changed.

The topic of young people and domestic abuse is complex and wide ranging. This report will focus on the evidence and themes highlighted by contributors, and use this evidence to make recommendations for change.



Policy context

Domestic abuse of young people is recognised, but gaps in support remain

In March 2013 the cross-governmental definition of domestic abuse changed to include young people aged 16-17 years old. The change in definition gave young people the right to access domestic abuse services, previously only available to those aged 18 or older, across England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

While this was an important step forward, the services available were historically designed for adult victims, whose needs and risks often differ to those of young people. Many providers did not feel equipped, prepared or trained to provide a service that responded to the needs and risks that are particular to a young person's experience of domestic abuse.

The domestic abuse sector has responded to this challenge. Between 2013 and 2015 SafeLives worked with several organisations to establish and deliver the Young People's Programme (funded by the Department for Education). The two year programme helped local areas provide a safe and supportive response for young people experiencing intimate partner abuse. It involved training specialist Young People's Violence Advisors (YpvAs, developing consistent care pathways between children's safeguarding and Maracs, and establishing the young people's dataset of domestic abuse cases which is used in this report.

Despite the change in definition and the efforts to embed this change in the response to domestic abuse, there are still gaps in the support for 16 and 17 year olds. While the Idva role is embedded in the Government's strategy to end Violence Against Women and Girls, there is no such formal support for the Ypva role. Many young people must still rely on services designed for adult victims. SafeLives' annual practitioner survey¹⁰ reveals that the commissioning of YpvAs within adult Idva services is patchy across the country. Many areas had only one Idva service with a specialist Ypva, and one area had none at all. While YpvAs may be based in other local services, such as specialist children's services, it is clear that there is no consistent pathway to specialist support for young people.

There are further gaps for those younger than 16, who are not entitled to support through the domestic abuse definition. SafeLives' data reveals that 16 and 17 year olds experienced abuse for an average of 1.5 years before accessing adult domestic abuse services, suggesting that in many cases the abuse began before they were able to access this support.

Before the age of 16, young people must rely on support from limited specialist young people's domestic abuse services. Legal remedies are also more limited: protection through a non-molestation order is harder to obtain for those under the age of 16, who will need permission from the high court before they can apply.

There are also gaps in effective support for those young people who cause harm towards a partner or family members. Traditional criminal justice remedies for domestic abuse perpetrators do not address the underlying behaviour, and specialist services are limited.

The identification of young people experiencing domestic abuse and the referral to specialist services should be aided by Local Authority Children's Services. Local Authorities have a duty (under the Children's Act 1989) to investigate the child's circumstances if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. In these circumstances they must make such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

However SafeLives' Children's Insights data shows that less than half (45%) of young people in an abusive intimate relationship were known to children's social services at intake to the service, with a Common Assessment Framework completed in just 8% of cases. In these cases it is also possible that other concerns have brought these young people to the attention of social services. There is still more to be done to join up these two responses and ensure domestic abuse of young people is recognised as a child protection concern.

For young people, an important response to domestic abuse is prevention through education. In March 2017 the Government announced that relationships education would be a compulsory subject in the national curriculum from the age of 4. This is a welcome development in the effort to eradicate domestic abuse. There are already many dedicated young people's and domestic abuse organisations that have been delivering relationships education for many years. These organisations have developed tried and tested education programmes for children and young people of school age, and it will be important that the Government and schools work with these organisations to develop the new curriculum.



Young victims of domestic abuse in intimate partner relationships

Young people experience the highest rates of domestic violence of any age group, but are not as visible to services

In March 2016 the Crime Survey of England and Wales identified that 6.6% of men and 12.9% of women aged 16 to 19 had experienced domestic abuse in the past year. This was the highest rate of any age group and markedly higher than the second highest group (ages 20 -24). Compared to the 20-24 age group, 16 – 19 year old women were dramatically more likely (42%) to experience domestic abuse, and men almost a third more likely (32%).

A study of 13 to 17 year olds by NSPCC¹¹ suggests this abuse can begin even earlier in adolescence for large numbers of young people. A quarter (25%) of girls and 18% of boys in the study reported having experienced some form of physical violence from an intimate partner. Additionally one in three girls (31%) and 16% of boys reported some form of sexual abuse within their relationships.

Girls are more likely than boys to have older partners, which puts them at even greater risk of abuse from a young age¹². Research by NSPCC¹³ found that severe physical violence was not reported by any of the girls in the study who had a younger partner and only 6% of girls with a same-age partner. This compared to 16% of girls with an older partner. Many of the young people in our Spotlight reported having older partners. Jenny and Natasha were both 14 when they met their partners of 18 years old. Carrie describes meeting her partner of 24 when she was 17:

“I was 17 when I met him at a house party. He was older than me, 24. I was full of drink and he was adamant I had to stay at his. We started to meet each other and within a couple of weeks he was very controlling, aggressive and demeaning.”

SafeLives Children's Insights data found that nearly all (95%) of young people experiencing intimate partner violence were female, and that the majority of those perpetrating the abuse were male (94%). This may reflect the gender asymmetry at the most severe end of abuse; the NSPCC study found that girls were three times as likely as boys to report repeated severe physical violence. However this could also suggest that boys who experience intimate partner abuse are less visible to services.

Despite the high prevalence of abuse for this age group, the rate of referrals into support services and Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (Maracs) is lower than the percentage they make up of the population. Young people aged 16 and 17 make up 3.1% of the adult population¹⁴ while 1.7% of Marac referrals, 2% of referrals into Idva support and 1% of referrals into Outreach support are made for those aged 16 and 17 years old.

The lack of access to specialist services for those under 16 suggests the number of younger victims who are not receiving support is likely to be even higher.

Recommendation: Raise awareness of domestic abuse of young people in local areas

- **Children's and Youth Services** should ensure they understand how to refer into Marac.
- **Local Safeguarding Children's Boards** should use the data provided by SafeLives to monitor the number of children and young people being discussed at Marac and give details of the outcomes of these cases in their annual report.
- **Local Safeguarding Children's Boards** should ensure training for children's social workers and youth workers provides an understanding the dynamics of domestic abuse for young victims and those who harm.
- **Local domestic abuse strategies** should ensure that awareness raising and signposting to services specifically targets young people and uses communication techniques which will reach young people.

The abuse that young people experience is no less severe than older victims.

"At sixteen I lost the choice in whether or not we had sex, it became a need for him rather than a want and even when I didn't want to, he found a way to get it."

Chantelle, young survivor

We know from SafeLives' data that young victims can experience all forms of domestic abuse and the likelihood of experiencing high severity abuse is no different to adults. Examining those who accessed adult services, where the data can be directly compared, suggests the levels of high severity abuse¹⁵ may in fact be higher for the youngest age group.

Abuse Type	Total percentage experiencing abuse		Percentage experiencing high severity abuse	
	Ages 16 - 17	Ages 18+	Ages 16 - 17	Ages 18+
Physical	69%	57%	42%	32%
Sexual	26%	22%	12%	7%
Harassment and stalking	67%	65%	38%	31%
Jealous & Controlling behaviour	80%	80%	49%	38%

For the 13 -17 year old age group accessing specialist children's services, the rates of high severity abuse are similar. Thirty per cent had experienced high severity physical abuse, 15% sexual abuse, 38% harassment and stalking and 53% jealous and controlling behaviour. However the lack of entitlement to support or clear referral pathways for those under sixteen may mean that services are more likely to see those young people at the highest risk, and these rates cannot be directly compared to adult victims.

In her Spotlights blog, Dr Christine Barter discusses two serious case reviews into the murders of young female victims, Lucy and Jayden. These reviews provide examples of the high severity abuse that young people may experience, even before the age of 16. They describe very high levels of coercive control alongside other forms of intimate violence, including physical violence, with the severity of the abuse rapidly increasing over the length of the relationship.

“The review into the death of Lucy, who was pregnant at the time, documented a relationship which started when she was 15 and quickly became controlling and abusive, with her teenage partner banning her from going out alone or seeing friends and family, stopping her wearing make-up and telling her how to dress, accompanied by incidents of physical violence.”

The two serious case reviews also highlight that, just as in adult relationships, attempts to leave the perpetrator can heighten the risk of serious harm or murder. At the time of their deaths Lucy was attempting to leave the relationship and Jayden had recently separated from her abusive partner.

Through the Spotlight, 17 year old Carrie shared her experience of intimate partner violence from her 24 year old boyfriend. Despite realising that the relationship was abusive and her desire to leave, her partner's violent reaction to her attempts to separate made her feel it was more dangerous to leave than stay:

“I continued meeting him and my friend could see I was not happy, she told me to delete his number, I tried but he threatened to go to the door where we were and take the door down. He said I was with other lads. He told me to get to his and I went because I was scared, but also because I was scared he would tell my mam I was seeing him. He said my mam would put me back into care for being with him. This went on for a couple of months, during which time the abuse was getting worse.”

The danger of leaving the relationship is particularly relevant to young people, who are likely to be in the relationship with the perpetrator when they access domestic abuse support; SafeLives’ data indicates that young people were twice as likely to still be in the relationship at the point at which they accessed services (68% experienced abuse from a current partner, compared to 31% experiencing abuse from an ex-partner. This differs to adult victims, who are more likely to have ended the relationship at the point at which they seek support.

The difference seen here may be because young people are less likely to have reported the abuse themselves (and therefore may be less likely to have made a decision to leave the relationship. While adults are most likely to be referred to services by the police (44%, which will often be following a decision to report the abuse, or through self-referral (22%) young people were referred by a broader range of professionals such as health and Children and Young People's (CYP) services, who may have identified the abuse before the young person has chosen to disclose it. For 13 to 17 year olds only 9% of referrals were from criminal justice (including police) and 11% from self or family referrals.

The severity of the abuse experienced by young people emphasises how important it is that they receive specialist support, providing them with the same level of dedicated help to stop the abuse that adults receive.

Young people are experiencing abuse in new ways, through new technologies and social media

An evidence synthesis by Stonard et al (2014)¹⁶⁾ found that the percentage of young people reporting to have experienced some form of abuse from a partner through new technologies ranged from 12 to 56% across studies. The Women and Equalities Committee enquiry¹⁷⁾ on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools identified technological advances, including online platforms, as one of the facilitators for harassment and violence.

In her Spotlights interview with SafeLives, Ypva Hollie Pearson highlights how control of the victim’s phone and social media can often be a monitoring tool for the abusive partner. And young survivor Jill spoke to SafeLives about how easily this monitoring can begin:

“After a few months of being together we ended up with each other’s Facebook passwords but at that time I thought this was a normal thing to do. Not long after, he began to go on my Facebook quite often until it turned into him being on it every day”

Lora, another young survivor, spoke to SafeLives about the jealous and controlling behaviour from her intimate partner through the use of technology:

“He ended up getting us a new phone in his name. So the contract was in his name, so he could see like everything I went on. He could see who I’d been texting, what numbers I’d been texting, what numbers I’d been phoning.”

Helping young people will often require a detailed understanding of these new methods of abuse, in order to provide advice such as how the victim can safely manage their online presence. Our recent Tech vs Abuse project, which focused on how technology could play a positive role in a victim’s abilities to stay safe from domestic abuse, concluded that perpetrators currently remain one step ahead of both victims and professionals in re-purposing technology to their advantage.¹⁸

Practitioners in the Tech vs Abuse study were keen to receive training and education on how perpetrators manipulate their victims through technology, and on the best ways they could use it to support victims and survivors. The study found that currently, the response to victims unsure of what to do about these problems is ‘turn it off’ or ‘get offline’. Given how much of all of our lives, but particularly young people’s lives, are now lived online, this is not an effective or helpful response.

Recommendation: Increase knowledge of new technologies in the domestic abuse sector, and use these technologies to help victims

- **Domestic Abuse Services** should ensure that effective training is provided for those responding to people experiencing abuse, to equip them to deal confidently with online abuse.
- **Commissioners** should ensure they fund local services to provide ways of supporting young victims of domestic abuse which reflect their preferences – for example online support such as specialist chat-bots or online peer-to-peer support.

Young people have vulnerabilities and risks which are unique to their age group

Young people experience a complex transition from childhood to adulthood. This transition impacts on the social, emotional, psychological, physical and biological development of the young person. As a result, young people who experience domestic abuse do so at a particularly vulnerable point in their lives.

There are also aspects of a young person's development that are likely to directly influence their response to abusive behaviour. Growth models¹⁹ suggest that adolescence is when a young person starts to establish their own philosophy of the world, and to grapple with their own moral and ethical boundaries and beliefs, alongside redefining relationships with those around them.

Research by the National Institute of Mental Health has identified changes in the adolescent brain that alter behaviour. Studies²⁰ suggest that, during teenage years, the frontal lobe (associated with rational thinking) experiences an excess production of grey matter; which in turn affects decision making, the ability to organise, self-control, emotional and impulse regulation and risk taking behaviours.

These physical and psychological changes in adolescence will impact a young person's own behaviour and response to the behaviour of others. SafeLives' data shows that for those young people accessing specialist domestic abuse services (for any reason), the case worker had severe concerns about the young person's risk taking behaviour in approximately one in eight cases (12%) and identified minor or moderate concerns in a further 39% of cases. In one in ten cases (11%) there were severe concerns about behaviour generally, and minor or moderate concerns in a further half (51%) of cases.

An example of how young peoples' behaviour and responses may differ to adults' can be seen in the coping mechanisms of young people. Looking at our Insights data from adult services, where measures can be directly compared, we see a different presentation of mental health difficulties for 16 and 17 year olds compared to older victims. A third (34%) of 16 and 17 year olds were identified as having mental health problems, which is slightly lower than those aged 18 and older (40%), however young people were more than twice as likely to self-harm compared to older victims (30% compared to 14%).

The challenges for young people are unique to their age group and services supporting young people must recognise this in order to most effectively respond.

Young people can have strong ties to the perpetrator that lead to fragile living circumstances and increased risk

It should not be assumed that young people do not have the longstanding ties to the perpetrator that could make it difficult to leave-such as sharing a home or children. Many of the young people we spoke to did have these connections. At 15, Katie, who has learning disabilities, left her family home to move in with the perpetrator. And Kyla, the parent of a young survivor, explained that her daughter had just had her first child after one terminated pregnancy with a previous abusive boyfriend.

If a young person chooses to live with a partner, they may not always have a family home to return to. Research²¹ identifies many reasons that may lead young people to leave home at a young age, including conflict or family changes at home, as well as the young person's own behaviour or a clash of values or expectations between the young person and their parents.

Young victims of domestic abuse are less likely to be equipped to deal with these more practical challenges that domestic abuse can bring. Claire Amans, Coordinator of the South Tyneside Ypva service, talks about the difficulties a young person had to overcome when she was moved to supported accommodation at the age of 16 because of domestic abuse:

“She’d not had to do any household chores like that prior to becoming homeless – even putting food in the freezer was something she didn’t know about. With adults you might be able to rely on them to understand basic things like shopping, managing money and so on. But for many young people, on top of dealing with an abusive relationship, this may be their first experience of the real world and it can be a very worrying and overwhelming time for them.”

In addition to these challenges, research into those who ‘run away’ from home or are homeless at a young age²² highlights related risks including Child Sexual Exploitation, substance misuse issues, mental and physical health problems and social deprivation. These risks will require an expert response.



Young people who harm family members

Adolescent to parent violence is common and under-reported

For some young people, the experience of domestic abuse includes causing harm to those closest to them, including parents, siblings and other family members. Nearly a quarter (23%) of 13 to 17 year olds accessing specialist young people's domestic abuse services demonstrated harmful behaviour. In some cases (13%) this was the primary issue that the service addressed with the young person, but more often it was addressed alongside other experiences of domestic abuse. It is important to acknowledge that young people who harm are often victims themselves. This report does not deal with the abuse of parents by older children. For more information about parent abuse by older children, please look at our first Spotlight on victims over sixty: <http://safelives.org.uk/spotlight-1-older-people-and-domestic-abuse>

SafeLives data found that young people who demonstrate harmful behaviour are more likely to be male (62%) than female (37%). In the majority of cases, the harm is directed towards the mother (61%) and following that a sibling (42%), with the harm sometimes directed to more than one person.

Studies²³ of Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (APVA) have suggested that it is predominantly a son to mother phenomenon. For instance, a review of police incidents found that the majority of reported cases of adolescent to parent violence involved a son-mother relationship (67%). However in SafeLives' Spotlight interview with Dr Caroline Miles, author of research on adolescent to parent violence, Dr Miles highlights potential under-reporting of young women causing harm. Cases reviewed as part of her own study presented more of a gender balance and in her interview she discusses possible reasons behind this trend:

"It might be that parents are less likely to report their daughters to the police compared to their sons. They might feel less frightened of a daughter or they might feel that it's less socially acceptable to phone the police in response to violence from a daughter."

Promoting a greater awareness and understanding of adolescent to parent violence is an important step in ensuring the abuse is recognised and stopped.

Adolescent to parent violence can encompass the full range of abusive behaviour

Adolescent to parent violence is different to isolated incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour from a young person. In her interview, social worker and APVA expert Helen Bonnick explains that APVA is a pattern of abusive behaviour that may cause a parent to adapt their behaviour out of fear.

We spoke to Sarah, who is a victim of APVA from her teenage daughter. Sarah explains that the abusive behaviour began as emotional and verbal. From there, the abuse escalated to threats of physical violence, and threats with knives.

“You know, she’s pulled knives on me in the past and been really aggressive. Sometimes she can still be abusive if she’s not getting her own way, and the name calling will start.”

We know from SafeLives Insights data that young people who cause harm to family members can do so through the same broad categories of behaviour seen in other forms of domestic abuse.

Our data found that physical violence was the most prevalent, with 57% of young people causing physical harm. Nearly a quarter (24%) demonstrated jealous and controlling behaviour, and a small minority were exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours (2%) or abusing through harassment and stalking (4%). It should be noted that the dynamics and motivations behind these behaviours will be different to partner abuse.

While the occurrence of sexual violence towards parents is relatively small, Helen Bonnick emphasises in her podcast interview that it is an occurrence that is being increasingly disclosed and recognised:

“There’s limited documentation about sexual abuse but it is happening and perhaps less documented because it’s more difficult to talk about for parents.”

The range and severity of behaviours the young people demonstrate towards family members highlights the importance of a response that both addresses their behaviour and protects the victim.

Recommendation: Promote a better understanding of APVA

- **The Government** should fund research to understand the prevalence of APVA, in particular across genders and the occurrence of sexual violence



The influence of childhood experiences

For many, experiences of domestic abuse begin in the childhood home

It is estimated that 1 in 5 children are exposed to domestic abuse²⁴. This means that for many young people their experience of domestic violence does not begin in their own intimate relationship or by demonstrating harming behaviour themselves, but in the childhood home. Young survivor Carrie described how her own experience of abuse followed witnessing her mother's abusive relationship:

"I suppose although I knew the signs from seeing my mam go through abuse, the signs were different for me and more importantly I didn't think it would happen to me."

In our interviews with parents and young people who were either demonstrating harmful behaviour or being harmed by an intimate partner, many of their experiences began in childhood.

Sarah tells us how her daughter's experience of domestic abuse began when she witnessed and even intervened in the violence perpetrated by her father towards Sarah. Following this, her daughter began to demonstrate abusive behaviours towards her, and experienced abuse within an intimate relationship. In reference to her daughter's exposure to the domestic abuse, Sarah explains:

"So my daughter's seen quite a bit and she was, she's sort of been witness to him being arrested on occasions. On one occasion she called the police on him for smashing my car up... It's definitely had an impact on her. It's had an impact on her friendships, her relationship with me."

While there is no evidence to suggest that experiencing domestic abuse in childhood or adolescence is a straightforward or inevitable cause of domestic abuse in later relationships, where it does take place the impact should be recognised alongside the impact of other adverse childhood experiences.

Domestic abuse at adolescence is likely to follow other adverse childhood experiences

Research has suggested that there is a link between wider Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and experiences of violence in adulthood. Public Health Wales²⁵ found that, compared to those with no ACEs, people with four or more ACEs were 14 times more likely to have been a victim of violence over the last 12 months, and 15 times more likely to have committed violence against another person in the last 12 months. This includes but is not limited to domestic violence.

Dr Caroline Miles explains in her Spotlights interview that within her own study the majority of young people who harmed were suffering other adverse experiences that could in part be related to the harmful behaviour. These included parental conflict and parental drug or alcohol use, as well as complex needs for the young person themselves including mental health problems or misuse of drugs or alcohol. In our interview with Dr. Miles, she commented:

“With the exception of a few cases, where there appeared to be a history of no violence or other familial problems, the majority of young people that we spoke to that were violent towards their parent, had experienced or were experiencing difficulties in their family life”

Public Health Wales found that witnessing domestic violence was a common form of ACE, with just under half of adults having experienced any form of ACE, and 16% having witnessed domestic abuse.

In her Spotlight blog Jo Sharpen, Policy Manager at Against Violence and Abuse (AVA), explains how the effects of trauma can manifest in young people affected by domestic abuse:

“Young people who have experienced abuse are making complex, daily decisions about risk and safety. Due to the trauma response, they may be living mainly in the ‘survival’ part of the brain, constantly hyper-vigilant and scanning for threats and danger. This may come at the expense of higher reasoning, problem solving and logical reasoning.”

SafeLives Children’s Insights data shows that of those young people accessing domestic abuse support (for any reason), nearly half (49%) felt they had difficulty controlling their emotions and a quarter (25%) said that they do things they know are dangerous.

The adverse childhood experiences of young people, whether related to domestic abuse or otherwise, are important in understanding their behaviour and informing the support that is provided. This militates for a response to vulnerability in families which takes a ‘whole picture, whole family’ approach, recognising the strength and importance of links between parent and child.



The response to domestic abuse for young people

Adult domestic abuse support is not equipped to meet the needs of young people

Young survivor Holly told SafeLives of her experience attending an adult support group:

“I didn’t think this was helpful to me at all, it was all older women. Most of them had been referred there from social workers and had children so I felt like my problems weren’t as bad as theirs. I also couldn’t speak much and didn’t want everyone knowing in the group.”

We know from speaking to young survivors and Ypvas that young people require time to build relationships. They will need to establish a rapport with professionals before they are able to disclose the extent of the abuse they are experiencing and trust them to provide support.

In her blog Jo Sharpen from Against Violence and Abuse explains that the time required to establish a rapport may be linked to the trauma that the young person has experienced. A young person’s experience of trauma may affect their ability to build relationships, to engage with others (especially adults), or to take on new information, and maintain a schedule of appointments or phone calls.

Adult (Idva) services are designed to provide an urgent response and many services can only conduct initial assessments by phone. This response may not suit young people who take time to build a relationship and feel comfortable to disclose abuse. It may also not suit the young person’s preferred communication methods. A study of American teens found that almost half of teens (49%) say that texting is the most common way they get in touch with their closest friend, followed by social media (20%), with phone calls only chosen by 13%.²⁶ This has been recognised by other services for young people, for instance NSPCC has launched an app to counsel young people through their smart phone.²⁷ NSPCC have previously highlighted that the number of young people accessing their online counselling has outnumbered telephone counselling.²⁸

Idva services usually only have capacity for short term support until the risks are reduced. Following this the client will often be referred to 'outreach' or stepdown services, however this will involve developing a new relationship with another professional. For young people, establishing relationships over a longer period is necessary.

Good practice example

Through our Spotlight we had the opportunity to interview the Ypvas and young people who have been supported by the South Tyneside Ypva Service. The service has been established for three years and provides intensive support to young people experiencing high risk domestic abuse, through three dedicated Ypvas.

Like traditional Idva services, South Tyneside Ypva service provides safety planning and advocacy, but the support they provide is adapted to the needs of young people. Examples of these adaptations include:

- Time is available to engage with the young person in the way they feel most comfortable, for instance meeting them at their place of education, their home, or even out and about in a car.
- The support recognises that young people may not have a basic understanding of healthy or unhealthy relationships. The Ypvas work with the young people to understand domestic and sexual abuse, and their rights within relationships.
- The support provided is holistic, meaning it does not tackle the domestic abuse in isolation but considers the young person's other adverse circumstances, experiences and coping mechanisms.
- The role and responsibility of the parent is considered; the Ypva works both with the young person and the parent to safety plan, risk assess, and work on sharing information appropriately within the family. This sometimes includes helping the young person respond to their relationship with and behaviour towards their parent.
- The Ypvas have knowledge and experience of how to maintain a young person's confidentiality alongside considering the needs and responsibilities of the parents and safeguarding agencies.
- The Ypvas understand the related risks for young people, such as child sexual exploitation and internet safety.

In her blog Claire Amans, Ypva Services Coordinator for South Tyneside, explains how the role of the Ypva differs to working with adults:

“Weekly sessions are offered to all young people and can sometimes last for 2-3 hours per session depending on the intervention offered. What we offer is very intensive, but it's necessary at times to help the young person holistically. Spending that much time with them can also mean they're more likely to open up to you around personal issues such as sexual health or substance use.”

There are also additional safeguarding matters to consider, such as information sharing with the young person's parent or carer. Hollie Pearson, a Ypva in South Tyneside, explains that working with young people must take account of and support the parents in their responsibilities to keep their child safe:

“In terms of our safety plan we always ask the young people who’s going to get a copy of this because ultimately parents have parental responsibility... But it’s getting that balance right of confidentiality and consent to share information and things like that as well. We also do interventions with parents as well if needed.”

In working with young people the caseworker also needs to have knowledge of the unique issues for young people, as well as knowledge of child protection issues such as child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. Previous research by SafeLives²⁹ has found that almost one in three (30%) of the young people supported by young people’s violence advisors or other specialist practitioners were identified as either experiencing or at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation (CSE).

Finally, the support provided by a Ypva is often holistic, providing a breadth of supportive advice and guidance which may be considered outside of the remit of an Idva. Young survivor, Holly, describes how one-to-one specialist support with Ypva Claire worked for her:

“When I look back at when I first met Claire and to where I am at now I am quite proud of the way things have changed and so grateful for all her help. The first memory is mine and Claire’s first visit together, we got a milkshake and talked through things slowly, I didn’t feel pushed and over the next couple of weeks we done a lot of work, not just relationship advice etc but Claire helped me with family situations, housing, work, college, c.v. and more.”

It is important that the support for young people is delivered in a way that is responsive to their needs and specific issues for young victims of domestic abuse are expertly addressed.

Recommendation: A tailored response to young people experiencing domestic abuse should be embedded in strategies at national and local level

- **The Government** should embed the Ypva role into the national response to domestic abuse by recognising its importance in any future revisions to the Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls as well as emphasising the need for services for young victims of domestic abuse and young people who harm.
- **Local commissioners** should make funding available for Ypvas and long-term support for young people experiencing domestic abuse, alongside the funding of Idva provision and outreach services.
- **Commissioners** should ensure appropriate referral pathways are available for young people below 16 who experience domestic abuse
- **Domestic abuse services**, whether primarily supporting children or adults, should ensure, where feasible that support for young people is delivered by a specially trained practitioner.

There is a lack of effective challenge for young people who harm their partners

We know from our ongoing work to develop a response to perpetrators of domestic abuse that there is a lack of specialist services responding to young people who harm their partners, leaving only a criminal justice response in many cases. In July 2017, SafeLives will publish new data about perpetrators of abuse. This will be in conjunction with our partners in the pilot for Drive³⁰, Respect and Social Finance. Marianne Hester of the University of Bristol is leading the independent evaluation of Drive, and will also publish initial findings in July.

Professor David Gadd explored the behaviour and attitudes of young men who harm in intimate relationships as part of his study Boys to Men. He highlights that for young men who are concerned about their abusive behaviour, self-referring to services usually means the young person must incriminate themselves. He explains the difficulty this creates in providing a response which young people will choose to access:

“We interviewed a young man whose very first sexual experience was having sex with a woman who was too drunk to know, and too unconscious to know, he was doing it but he wasn’t going to turn himself into the police and say ‘I’ve got a problem here’, so we do need to find a way in which young men who can see themselves and have a problem can seek some support for that.”

The Boys to Men project identified that young men who were abusive often had an understanding that the abuse was wrong, but still found themselves demonstrating this behaviour. One young man in the project said:

“I think that you should never hit a woman but I know I’ve experienced it in the past when I’ve been cheated on and at the time you’re that upset, you don’t really think...you just want to go round and smash someone’s face in.”

Gadd suggests that talking to young people about issues of love, vulnerability and trust is important in tackling abusive behaviour of young people, and notes that the young people in the study said that no one had spoken to them about these things. He also highlights that young perpetrators of IPV are often victims themselves through other circumstances, sometimes from growing up with domestic violence; like victims this will affect their behaviour and responses. The recommendations from the project highlight the importance of listening to what young men say about their relationships and providing a response which is built on trust and grasps the dynamics of related issues such as gang violence and family dynamics.

It will be important that the Youth Justice response is adequately equipped to respond to young perpetrators of domestic abuse in an effective way. This means changing the attitudes and behaviour of these young people as well as providing protection and justice for the victim.

There are already programmes that support young people to manage conflict and violent behaviour, such as Leap Confronting Conflict. This programme works with young people who are at risk of exclusion from school, demonstrating violent behaviour or already in the criminal justice system. Although not targeted at perpetrators of domestic abuse the programme has shown success in teaching young people how to deescalate a conflict situation and reduce their involvement in conflict, as well as improve relationships with friends and family.³¹ Those responding to young perpetrators of abuse must learn from the success of such programmes in identifying effective responses that address the behaviour of these young people in the longer term.

Recommendation: Responses to young people who harm their partners should aim to change attitudes and behaviour

- **The Youth Justice Board** should ensure that all youth justice practitioners receive training and guidance on effective responses to young people who harm their partners.
- **Local Commissioners** should consider funding interventions that address young people's violent behaviour towards their partners. Links should be made between such services and the Youth Justice system to ensure these options are available as part of the criminal justice response.
- **The Government** should fund research to understand effective responses to young people who harm in intimate partner relationships.

Engagement with young people must respect their views and developing identities

Young people's experience of seeking support highlights that caseworkers will need to carefully balance their advice and safeguarding response with an approach that ensures the young person feels they are listened to and respected.

The survivors we spoke to as part of the Spotlight highlighted that the concept of one partner perpetrating the abuse and the other being the victim of the abuse was not always how they saw the relationship. Some of the survivors stated that they didn't see themselves as a 'vulnerable victim' within the relationships, but said that they too demonstrated harmful behaviour that they felt they should take responsibility for.

One such young survivor, Hollie, spoke about her experience of attending a domestic abuse workshop for older women, when she was 17:

“I was saying that this one night I had retaliated and I had pulled the blanket off him and then I had bit him on the back of his shoulder after he had smacked us ...they [the support group] were saying ‘no because he shouldn’t have done that in the first place’ and I say, ‘so if it’s not acceptable in the first place for his behaviour, how would it be acceptable for mine?’ And no matter what you said it was always, in the eyes of them, the other person’s fault. That was the last time I went, I couldn’t even stand to go to the place.”

In many cases this violent behaviour will be a response to the pattern of power and control, and not equal to the abuse the victim has experienced. However the approach to supporting young people must recognise and explore these views in a respectful way.

In our interviews with young survivors, many were in the abusive relationship when they accessed Ypva support, and some decided to remain in the relationships after fully engaging in the interventions. Some of these young people stated that if the initial offer of support had been based on the ultimatum that they would eventually leave the relationship, they would not have engaged with the service.

When the abuse that a young person is experiencing meets the threshold for child protection, the response will need to separate the young person from their abusive partner as part of the safeguarding process. However for other young people the level of harm will not meet this threshold and there will be no such statutory response. For these young people, ensuring they remain engaged with services and have access to help and advice will be the best way to keep them safe. This means it is important that the topic of leaving the relationship is approached in a way that does not discourage the young person from engaging in the service.

When discussing her decision to remain in the relationship with her partner, Hollie told SafeLives:

“I didn’t want anyone to say to me, this is what he’s done, and this is how he’s done it and this is how he’s saying it, or he’s making excuses or anything like that, because I wanted to find that out for myself and I wanted to make decisions for myself”

SafeLives data reveals that young people are more likely than adult victims to be in the abusive relationship at the point they seek support. Children’s Insights data shows that the majority (68%) of the 13 to 17 year olds in abusive partner relationships were experiencing abuse from a current boyfriend or girlfriend. For those aged 18 and over who were experiencing partner abuse, half this many (34%) were in a current (or intermittent) relationship.

Young people who are still in a relationship with the abuser may be in an earlier stage of change within the relationship, when they may not wish take certain actions to respond to the abuse, such as ending the relationship. Hollie’s testimony highlights the importance of exploring these views carefully alongside the young person.

It should also be remembered that many young victims stay in the relationship because they fear the consequences of leaving. Ypvas will need to balance the actions required to keep the young person safe with ensuring the young person feels they are able to be open about their views and intentions regarding the relationship, and that these will be discussed in a respectful way.

Recommendation: Invest in person-focused support for young people

- **Domestic abuse services** should ensure that interventions for young people include time to explore the young person's understanding of domestic abuse and views about the relationship.
- **Domestic abuse services** should ensure that training for those supporting young people explores scenarios in which the young person does not leave the relationship, and related responses including safeguarding as well as how to approach these views.

Those best placed to spot abuse need to know how to respond

Those agencies that work closely with young people are best placed to be able to identify signs of abuse. This may be education, youth services, or groups such as sports clubs, Guides and Scouts. These organisations have a duty to respond to concerns about a child's welfare. They will have child protection policies and staff will receive safeguarding training. However this may not equip these organisations to identify or respond to the specific issue of domestic abuse.

The necessary response from these organisations can be challenging, for instance when the abuse may be occurring on site. In 2016 a Government inquiry conducted by the Women and Equalities committee³² concluded that 'sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is a significant issue which affects a large number of children and young people, particularly girls, across the country.' This highlights the importance of ensuring education and other organisations are supported to respond appropriately.

In her Spotlight interview the mother of a 15 year old experiencing domestic abuse from another pupil explained her frustrations with the school response:

'But the schools didn't help. I went down and explained everything at school. They didn't help. They were supposed to be putting, giving her mentors, because I was going to take her out of school then... She went back to school and they just did nothing. She was stuck back in the middle of it with him.'

Testimony to the Women and Equalities committee highlighted that 'schools lack the guidance, training and structures to deal with incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence.'

It is likely that including healthy relationships in the curriculum will lead to more disclosures of domestic abuse to teachers. Previous research³³ has identified a need for these programmes to be linked to services for young people who disclose abuse in their own or their parents' relationships. Our data shows that just 9% of referrals for those in abusive intimate partner relationships were from education. While concerns about any form of abuse must be referred to children social care, it will be helpful for schools to understand the specialist help available in order to make direct referrals in addition to their usual safeguarding procedures.

Maracs, PCCs and Local Authorities must play a role in increasing the referrals from these organisations, by ensuring referral pathways are clear. For instance, in Dorset³⁴ a campaign to increase the awareness of teenage domestic abuse involved training for youth workers as well as a poster campaign and awareness raising events. Girlguiding UK leaders found that talking about ‘abuse’ with girls elicited little response, but when they talked to girls about body image³⁵, a conversation started that led to disclosures about abuse in their relationships. Organisations that play a role in the lives of young people should think creatively about how to open up conversations about these issues.

Schools and other youth organisations may also become aware of adolescent to parent violence through their relationship with the parents of young people. As well as responding to any safeguarding concerns, for instance for other children in the household, these organisations should be made aware of the support available for both the young person and the parent. For young people who demonstrate abusive behaviour, 20% of referrals were from education, the second most common route after children and young person services, suggesting these links are beginning to be established.

Recommendation: Promote greater awareness of domestic abuse in the young person’s sector

- **Local Safeguarding Children Boards** should ensure that safeguarding training for schools and other youth agencies adequately addresses the full range of domestic abuse that young people may experience.
- **School governing bodies** should consider including specific guidance on abusive intimate partner relationships in their child protection policies.
- **Local Authorities** should ensure that local agencies who work with young people are aware of the available support for domestic abuse and referral pathways.
- **National Youth Agency** should ensure that an understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse is included in youth workers’ training.
- **Organisations** that play a role in the lives of young people should think creatively about how to open up conversations about these issues.

Parents need more options to help their children and protect themselves

Through this Spotlight SafeLives has had the opportunity to interview three parents whose children were experiencing high severity intimate partner violence. Each parent stated that they felt equally responsible yet powerless to safeguard their child from abuse.

In her interview with SafeLives, Kelly, whose daughter experienced domestic abuse, described her difficulties in seeking effective support:

“I was seeking help from everywhere, but nobody seemed to be helping us really...I’d ring the police to get her from [his] house, and they’d say “well what do you want us to do, but now she’s 16 if she refuses to come home there is nothing we can do.”

There must also be accessible options for those who harm. For parents of abusive young people, who may be the victim of that abuse, seeking help for their children becomes even harder.

In her interview with SafeLives Dr Caroline Miles highlights that in many circumstances the only option given to parents is to contact the police and support criminal proceedings against their children. Parents may wish to protect their children from criminalisation, which can leave them at further risk of harm and further isolated from support.

Researchers have explored this conflict. Nixon (2012)³⁶ concludes ‘Typically, in cases involving physical violence, social workers advised parents not to retaliate but to contact the police, whilst the police and youth justice agencies held the view that criminal action was neither an effective nor appropriate response; rather what was needed was intensive family support.’

In the research discussed by Dr. Miles, some parents who are victims of abuse reported that they themselves were penalised for their child’s behaviour, for instance left to pay their child’s court fees and attend parenting classes as a part of the sentencing.

In responding to APVA, the options available to both the victim and the young person must recognise the differences to domestic abuse between intimate partners, and the different approach needed. Condry and Miles (2016)³⁷ note that ‘the parent has an ongoing responsibility to the child and is unlikely to be counselled to leave the family home. There are few escape routes for a parent experiencing violence from their adolescent child.’ However, Idva services are not resourced or designed to work with the perpetrator to respond to their behaviour.

Specialist services for APVA often offer a dual service to both the parent-victim and the young person causing harm. One such programme is SetUp, developed by a team in America in response to adolescent domestic violence/abuse against their parents and siblings. Where the programme has been used and evaluated in the UK³⁸, it has been shown that rates of reoffending and domestic violence referrals decreased and there were fewer incidents of domestic violence and anti-social behaviour as well as positive educational outcomes.

Recommendation: Domestic abuse support for young people should respond to the role of the parent

- **Domestic abuse services** working with young people should ensure training is available for staff on the role of the parent, including information sharing.
- **Commissioners** should fund services which appropriately recognise and respond to the links between parents and their children.

Recommendation: Ensure institutional advocacy for victims and perpetrators of APVA

- **Commissioners** should fund specialist support for victims experiencing APVA, which offer dual support to the parent and young person.
- **Police and specialist services for APVA** should make links with each other in order to offer victims of APVA alternatives to a criminal justice response.

Prevention and early intervention

Many young people do not recognise abusive behaviour; education can help to prevent domestic abuse

Research indicates that both young men and women may not understand what constitutes a healthy relationship. The research project Boys to Men found that 49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13 – 14 thought that hitting a partner would be ‘okay’ in at least one of twelve scenarios they were presented with.³⁹

Evidence provided to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools highlighted a ‘normalisation’ of sexual harassment and abuse among young people. The report concludes ‘Research with 13–18 year olds suggests that young people trivialise and justify violence against women and girls, view some forms of sexual harassment as normal and even inevitable and excuse rape.’⁴⁰ This is particularly impactful as research suggests that when young people experiencing abuse do seek advice and support, this is usually from other young people.⁴¹

In her interview with SafeLives, young survivor Lora notes that before receiving Ypva support she had little understanding of healthy relationships:

“Well, obviously I went into here not knowing what was right and wrong in a relationship. ...so everything he once said to me I thought ‘well yeah, that’s ok, he’s allowed to say that’... And ‘oh he’s done this’, I took it because we’re together and stuff like that.”

The Boys to Men project further explored the attitudes of young men through focus groups. This research found that all participants in the diverse range of groups (which included young men who were violent), wanted a ‘trusting relationship’.

In his interview with SafeLives, Professor David Gadd explains:

“Nobody wanted to be in a relationship where there was no trust. The difficulty is that most people don’t actually have a sense of ‘how’ to establish trust in a relationship”

The evidence suggests that a better understanding of healthy relationships could help both the abusive young person and their partner. In her interview with SafeLives, Lora discusses how the support she received helped her to question her partner's behaviour and how she shared her learning with her partner:

“She’s helped us realise that obviously sometimes the way he speaks to us isn’t right, the way he’d be kind of controlling, asking where I’m going, where I am, who I’m with, comments about who I’m with, and obviously that’s wrong... I went through everything I spoke to Jamilla about with him and he’s kind of like changed, surprisingly he’s changed a lot from when I started working with her.”

In addition to responding to domestic abuse, education can play a preventative role. Research⁴² suggests that relationships education during adolescence is effective in changing attitudes towards domestic violence. An example can be found in Relationships without Fear, a six-week healthy relationships and domestic abuse prevention programme delivered to groups ranging from ages 8 – 9 to 15 – 16. The evaluation⁴³ demonstrated that attitudes toward domestic violence became less accepting, both for boys and girls and those who had experienced abuse and had not. Another example is CRUSH, a group support and empowerment programme for young people who are at risk of, or affected by domestic abuse. The programme evaluation found that participants believed they were better equipped not only to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships but to deal with abusive relationships in the future.⁴⁴ The Government's Disrespect No Body campaign⁴⁵, which aims to help young people understand a healthy relationship, is helping to bring this type of education to a wide audience of young people through the internet.

Both parents and young people involved in the Spotlight stated that they felt that schools played a key role in helping young people to understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships. Previous research has also found that both parents⁴⁶ and pupils⁴⁷ want sex and relationships education in schools.

The Government announcement⁴⁸ that relationships education will become statutory in schools from the age of four is a key step in the prevention of domestic abuse. It will be important that this is delivered by those with the expertise to speak to young people about this complex subject. The guidance and training provided to support teachers to deliver this subject should draw on experts in the field.

Research⁴⁹ and guidance⁵⁰ on discussing or addressing sexual violence in schools highlights the importance of a 'whole school approach', suggesting schools should not rely on external experts to deliver the curriculum. After its introduction, the quality of new SRE teaching should be monitored.

Education is important both as a preventative measure, and as part of the response for those who cause harm and those who are experiencing abuse, and the careful planning and implementation of the new school curriculum will be vital.

Recommendation: Educating young people should be central to the response to domestic abuse

- **Domestic abuse services** should incorporate education about healthy relationships into their response to young victims and young people who harm.
- **Local Commissioners** should fund education programmes for those who are vulnerable to domestic abuse or demonstrating harmful behaviour. This could include making materials available that young people can share with their friends if they think they are in an abusive relationship.

Recommendation: Schools should be supported to develop appropriate expertise to deliver Relationships and Sex Education

- **Government and schools** should draw on the expertise of specialist domestic abuse education providers when developing the new RSE guidance and school curriculums.
- **Government** should fund and make available specialist training for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) leads in schools prior to implementation of the new SRE curriculum. This should be delivered by specialists in the fields of domestic abuse and sexual relationships who can also apply their knowledge to the specific experiences of young people – as shown above, directly transposing adult provision is not suitable.
- **The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL)** should consider establishing a specialist PSHE route into teaching.
- **The Department for Education** should appoint an independent body to monitor the delivery of RSE after its introduction. This body should be asked to provide an annual report, to be made public, for each of the three years after RSE is introduced.



Conclusion

The high prevalence of domestic abuse for young people and the severity of that abuse emphasises the importance that they receive the same level of dedicated support that adults receive.

Further, many of the challenges for young people experiencing domestic abuse are unique to their age group and services supporting young people must be able to provide a specialist response which takes account of their different needs.

Those supporting young people will also need to have specialist knowledge of child protection issues such as child abuse and child sexual exploitation. They should also be seeking to build their skills, knowledge and confidence about newer ways in which young people are being abused, such as the use of social media as a controlling tool. Working with young people must take account of and support parents in their responsibilities to keep their child(ren) safe.

For young people demonstrating harmful behaviour, and for those they are harming, there is an equally great need for specialist support. The range and severity of behaviours the young people demonstrate towards family members emphasises the need for a response that both addresses the young person's behaviour and protects the victim.

Promoting a greater awareness and understanding of adolescent to parent violence is an important step in ensuring the abuse is recognised and stopped. In responding to APVA, the options available to both the victim and the young person must recognise the differences to domestic abuse between intimate partners, and offer wider options than a criminal justice response. The response to young people who harm their partners should also go beyond traditional criminal justice remedies, and seek to change the attitudes and behaviour of these young people.

The adverse childhood experiences of young people, whether related to domestic abuse or otherwise, are important in understanding the behaviour of young people experiencing domestic abuse and informing the support that is provided. While there is no evidence to suggest that experiencing domestic abuse in childhood or adolescence is a straightforward or inevitable cause of domestic abuse in later relationships, where it does take place the impact should be recognised alongside the impact of other adverse childhood experiences. A 'whole family, whole picture' approach is vital.

For both young victims and those demonstrating harmful behaviour, the role of services that work with young people, such as schools, youth services, clubs and other activities, will be important in aiding identification and support.

Wider than the role of schools alone, the role of education in the prevention of domestic abuse is clear. It is important both as a preventative measure and as part of the response for those who cause harm and those who are experiencing abuse. There must be time for education built into the support for young people, and the new relationships curriculum in schools will be an important step in shaping attitudes at a young age.

“I’m happy now and I thank everyone who supported me during the times I went through, I could’ve been seriously hurt and lived a life of the same thing going on, meeting that first time with Claire has changed me forever.”

Holly, young survivor



Notes

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Appendix: Insights data

The sample size and method of data collection places a number of limitations on the conclusions we can draw from Insights data, as set out below. Care has been taken to use this data alongside other sources of information when producing the findings set out in this report.

Sample Size

The datasets used within this report are comprised of the following sample sizes:

- Children's Insights (13 – 17 year olds): **510**
- Children's Insights (13 – 17 year olds in intimate partner relationships): **53**
- Children's Insights (13 – 17 year olds who demonstrate abusive behaviour): **138**
- Adult Insights (16 – 17 year olds): **156**
- Adult Insights (ages 18+): **10,519**

The small size of the children's datasets mean that caution should be taken in generalising findings to the wider population.

Cases

Insights data is collected from victims at the point at which they are accessing services. This means it is not representative of victims who are not accessing services.

Data collection

Data collection is completed at two points on the client journey within a support service: intake and exit. Data is anonymous only and collected from clients who consent to their data being used for monitoring and research purposes.

The Insights data used in this report is collected by services using the SafeLives Insights tool during the reporting period (12 months to January 2017). The number of services is as follows:

- Children's Insights: 10
- Adult Insights: 38

This means that the nature (eg support offered) and location of services will not be representative of all domestic abuse services nationally.