

# Young people experiencing or at risk of online abuse

## Research briefing for professionals working with young people

One in three (38%) of the young people supported by young people’s violence advisors (YPVAs) or other specialist practitioners were identified as experiencing at risk of online intimate partner abuse. Many of these young people were experiencing current intimate partner violence and almost half were at risk of child sexual exploitation. Depression and anxiety was an additional cause of difficulty to the majority (70%) of young people at risk on online abuse.

In the year to January 2015, caseholders supported 128 young people who were either experiencing or at risk of online intimate partner abuse.

72 young people (56%) were identified as at risk and 56 young people (44%) were currently experiencing online intimate partner abuse. The vast majority (96%) of those identified were female and 4% were male. They ranged in age from 12 to 20 years old.

Where online intimate partner abuse was identified, the majority (81%) of risk assessed young people were at high risk of serious harm. More than half (54%) of the young people were referred to Marac.

The vast majority (88%) of the young people were referred to the caseholder as a result of intimate partner violence.

The vast majority (95%) of the young people were experiencing current abuse, most frequently perpetrated by a current or ex-boyfriend. The vast majority were experiencing emotional abuse (84%), jealous and controlling behaviour (79%) and harassment and stalking (67%). The abuse they were experiencing was not just online – more than half (58%) were experiencing current physical abuse.

Young people at risk of online abuse are vulnerable and have a wide range of complex needs.

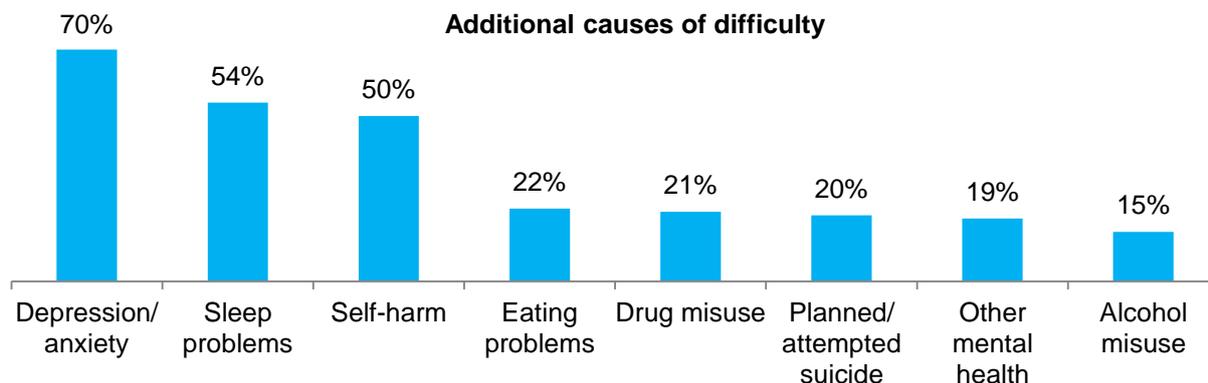
Young people at risk on online intimate partner abuse were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. One in five (20%) of the young people were experiencing current sexual abuse. Almost half (45%) were experiencing or at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation (45%). Gang violence was also prevalent, affecting one in four (26%) young people.

| Additional risks          | n= | 128 |
|---------------------------|----|-----|
| Child sexual exploitation | 57 | 45% |
| Gang violence             | 33 | 26% |
| Female genital mutilation | 2  | 2%  |
| 'Honour'-based violence   | 1  | 1%  |

Mental health issues were particularly prevalent amongst these young people, and many had been exposed to additional risks in the family home.

Two-thirds (70%) of the young people identified were experiencing difficulties as a result of depression and/or anxiety. More than half (54%) were experiencing sleep problems, which is compared to 28% of young people who were not experiencing online intimate partner abuse. Half (50%) of the young people had self-harmed. In the majority (81%) of cases, caseholders recorded concerns about the young person’s emotional wellbeing.

In addition to their own mental ill-health, almost a third (30%) of the young people supported were at increased risk as a result of parental mental health issues. More than half (54%) had been exposed to domestic abuse in the family home.



**Caseholder supported the young people to improve their understanding of abusive relationships.**

The vast majority (88%) of the young people were supported with their health and wellbeing, including helping them to improve their understanding of abusive relationships.

At case closure, caseholders recorded considerable improvements in every measure of young parents' health and wellbeing. In particular, there were fewer concerns about young peoples' feelings of blame and/or responsibility.

For around a third (38%) of the young people, the caseholder recorded ongoing concerns about their emotional wellbeing at case closure.

| Support and interventions            | n= | 74  |
|--------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Wellbeing advice and support         | 65 | 88% |
| Criminal and civil justice process   | 51 | 69% |
| Health advice and support            | 48 | 65% |
| Support with housing                 | 32 | 43% |
| Support with education               | 21 | 28% |
| Financial and benefits advice        | 12 | 16% |
| Support with training and employment | 12 | 16% |

**Young people who received support reported positive changes in their safety and wellbeing.**

More than half (54%) of the young people reported that they were not experiencing any abuse at case closure. At case closure, caseholders reported that there was a reduction in risk for 82% of the young people.

Almost all (96%) young people reported that they felt safer at case closure and that their quality of life had improved. They were all confident in accessing support in the future, should they need to.

