Verge of Harm[ing]

Understanding abuse in young people's relationships

Safe
Young
Lives

SafeLives

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SafeLives

We are SafeLives, the UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for everyone and for good.

We work with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. We want what you would want for your best friend. We listen to survivors, putting their voices at the heart of our thinking. We look at the whole picture for each individual and family to get the right help at the right time to make families everywhere safe and well. And we challenge perpetrators to change, asking 'why doesn't he stop?' rather than 'why doesn't she leave?' This applies whatever the gender of the victim or perpetrator and whatever the nature of their relationship.

Last year alone, 8,577 professionals received our training. Over 75,000 adults at risk of serious harm or murder and more than 95,000 children received support through dedicated multi-agency support designed by us and delivered with partners. In the last six years, almost 3,000 perpetrators have been challenged and supported to change by interventions we created with partners, and that's just the start.

Together we can end domestic abuse. Forever. For everyone.

Men and Boys Voices

The Verge of Harm[ing] research project originally started under the auspices of 'Men and Boys Voices', a SafeLives project which gathered the voices and perspectives of more than 1,000 men and boys aged 11 and over, asking them about abuse, masculinity and what a 'healthy' relationship looks like (SafeLives, 2019). The intention was for the current research to extend this work, focusing on young people who harm, and in particular boys and young men. In order to adapt and respond to emerging challenges and limitations, which will be explored in this report, this project has had to be fluid, which has shifted the focus from the original intention. The data discussed within the findings and discussion section therefore predominantly reflects the stories of young women who feel they have used harmful behaviour in their relationships. While these may not have been the stories we set out to tell, they are the stories we heard, and they have indeed expanded our understanding of abuse in young people's relationships, and the implications for support.
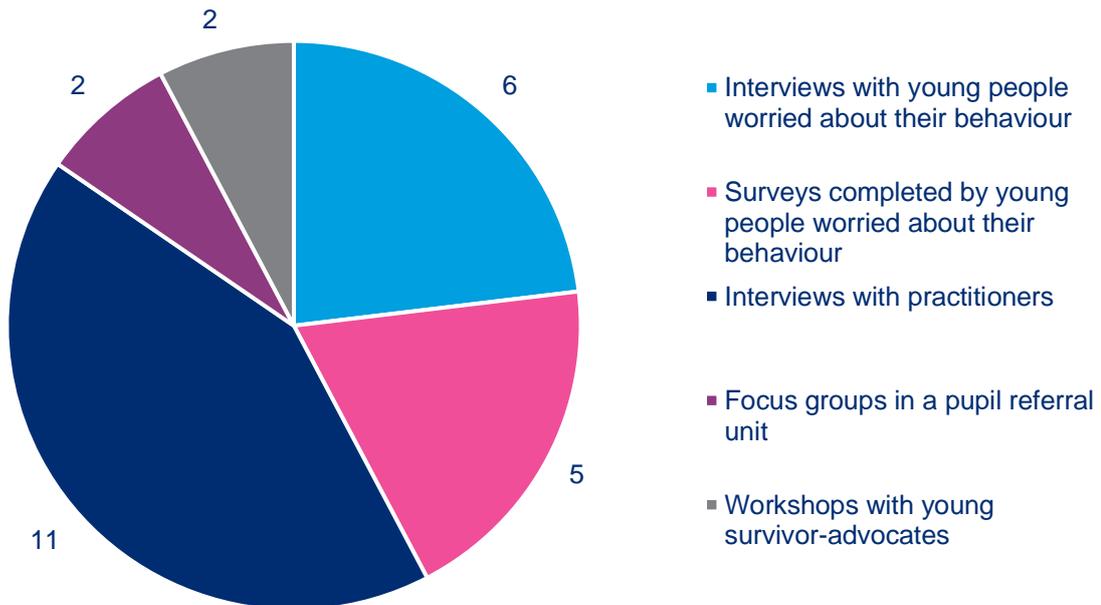
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Overview

The Verge of Harming research project is focused on developing understandings of abuse in young people's relationships, and the implications of this learning for prevention and intervention. It is led by the following research aims:

1. To explore why and how young people begin to use abusive behaviours in their relationships
2. To better understand what it means to be on the 'verge of harming'
3. To explore what support for young people who harm should look like

The following qualitative methods were undertaken to address these aims:

Thematic analysis of transcripts from the interviews, focus groups, workshops, and survey responses resulted in four themes, which are explored within this report:

Interconnectedness of Relationships

Normalisation of abuse began in the home for many of the young people in this study, and was then reinforced across their peer relationships, in their earliest dating relationships (where many who ended up instigating harm experienced victimisation) and by the media (which became a surrogate role model for some)

A Gendered Experience

Young people's relationships remain governed by a gender heirarchy which is based on the acceptance and expectation of male coercion, and female responsibilisation, which leads to the experience of relationships and of harm/harming being a gendered one

Improving Relationship Literacy

In order to ensure young people have the necessary knowledge and tools to have healthy happy relationships, relationships education needs to begin early and then be reinforced across the lifespan. Relationships education also needs to extend to wider society, to ensure young people can observe healthy models of relationships, and to improve responses to domestic abuse

The Four Pillars of Support

The **approach** to support for young people who harm should be holistic and tailored to the young person and their context. The **environment** in which support takes place should be a safe space to discuss difficult topics and process emotions. The **response** to young people who harm should be supportive rather than punitive, in order to facilitate engagement and behaviour change, and building a positive working **relationship** is key to successful support.

Literature review

This section includes a condensed version of a comprehensive literature review that was carried out at the beginning of the Verge of Harming project, between April and July 2021. The literature reviewed helped to shape the research design and inform the analysis.

Introduction

While the current definition of domestic abuse includes those aged 16+, and research has suggested that those aged 13-19 may experience the highest rates of abuse of any age group (Barter et al. 2009; SafeLives, 2018), abuse in adolescent relationships has been paid comparatively little attention in the literature. Historically, young people's relationships have been categorised as trivial and fleeting (Collins, 2003) and research exploring domestic abuse has solely focused on this phenomenon within adult relationships. Over recent decades, however, a growing body of researchers have begun to highlight the need for research specifically focusing on harmful behaviours in young people's relationships. Such research shows that young people's relationships do not significantly differ from adults in terms of commitment, companionship, passion and relationship satisfaction (Collins, 2003), therefore challenging the idea that they are superficial and do not meaningfully impact those experiencing them. It has also highlighted how the label of 'domestic abuse' often does not feel relevant to young people, who are unlikely to be living with their partners and often in different kinds of relationships than adults experiencing harm (Young et al. 2019) and therefore not in 'domestic' relationships. As a result, there is a call for further research expanding understandings of harm[ing] in young people's relationships. Not only is this critical in forming an understanding of adult partner violence (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004), but it is also fundamental when it comes to developing successful prevention and intervention programmes (Gomez et al. 2011).

The verge of harm[ing] research aims to respond to this identified gap, by exploring young people's attitudes to harm[ing] in their dating relationships. It also aims to speak specifically to the paucity of research focusing on young people who instigate harm (O'Brien, 2016), through qualitative methods which capture their voices.

Prevalence

Measuring the prevalence of young people using/experiencing harmful behaviours in their relationships is perhaps even more difficult than measuring the prevalence of domestic abuse (DA) in adult populations. While the rates of DA in adult populations can be informed by crime statistics (although these are not definitive and much DA goes unreported and/or unprosecuted), relationship abuse experienced/instigated by under 16s sits outside of the definition of DA and is therefore not included in these figures. Despite these difficulties, the school health research network recently conducted a survey of 74,908 students aged 11-16 across 193 schools in Wales. Their findings show that around half of the respondents had dating experience, and of this group, around 18% of girls and 16% of boys reported instigating emotional dating violence, and around 8% of girls and 7% of boys reported instigating physical dating violence (Young et al. 2019), highlighting the prevalence of abuse within this age range.

Risk Factors

Existing literature on this topic identifies a range of sometimes conflicting risk factors for using harmful behaviours in adolescent relationships, however, three factors which are repeated throughout the literature are peer and family relationships, and gender.

Peer and family relationships

Callaghan's (2015) research shifted thinking from viewing children exposed to domestic abuse as witnesses, to acknowledging them as victims. Since then, research around adverse childhood experiences, or 'ACEs', has explored the various impacts of experiencing DA in childhood, including the impact on later relationships. The World Health Organisation (2007) report 'The cycles of violence' synthesises such research and highlights how experiencing abuse as a child increases the risk of experiencing abuse in later relationships, both as a victim and as a perpetrator. Barter's (2009) UK-based research reinforces this argument, with its findings that experiences of family violence were associated with increased rates of experiencing emotional and sexual violence, as well as instigation of emotional and physical violence for the young people in their study. For girls in this study, Barter (2009)

found that family violence was one of the main predictor variables for victimisation, alongside age of partner. In contrast, however, Renner and Whitney (2012) found no link between seeing parents fight and argue, and intimate partner violence in later relationships. In addition, while Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found that interparental violence was a significant correlate of participant's own instigation or victimisation, and increased rates of dating violence by 50-60%; having friends who were experiencing or instigating harmful behaviours in their dating relationships was found to be more important.

Bossarte et al. (2008) also reported a link between adolescent relationship abuse and peer relationships, finding that those reporting the use of high levels of violence and/or psychological abuse in their study were using these behaviours in both dating relationships and same-sex peer relationships. They concluded that high-risk or violent behaviours that may co-occur with dating abuse, along with observed acts of violence, may be the most important factors in determining the type of violence that adolescents experience. More recently, Shorey et al's (2018) research with 15-18-year-olds in the US found that changes in perceptions of peers' instigation of 'teen dating violence' or 'TDV' predicted changes in an individual's own instigation. Specifically, their findings showed that 'decreases in the perception of peer engagement in TDV over time predicted decreases in self-reports of TDV perpetration' (Shorey et al. 2018, p.9). As with research exploring experiences of family violence as a risk factor, Shorey et al's (2018) research demonstrated how perceptions of peer TDV as a risk factor, were mitigated by gender. At age 15, perceptions of high levels of peer TDV predicted higher levels of self TDV for the males in their study, yet predicted lower self TDV for the females in their study. They conclude that deviant behaviour of peers is more influential on deviant behaviour for males than females.

Gender

Across the existing literature on this topic, the majority of studies report higher levels of both victimisation and perpetration for females than males, for example Young et al (2019) found that more girls reported emotional victimization and perpetration compared to boys and more girls reported physical perpetration than boys. Conversely, boys reported more physical victimization than girls (Young et al. 2019). While high rates of female victimisation reflect the vast body of research around domestic abuse, the high rates of female perpetration are surprising. One possible explanation suggested by the literature relates to Johnson's (2008) typologies of violence, which argue that a large proportion of the abuse girls report instigating is retaliatory, or done in self-defence (Bossarte et al. 2008; Francis & Pearson, 2019). If this is the case, then a proportion of the figures of female instigation may actually reflect violent resistance and should not come under the umbrella of perpetration.

Another possible explanation for the high levels of female instigation found in many studies, is the idea that abusive behaviour is appraised differently across genders. Francis and Pearson's (2019) research with 16-19 year olds in the UK found that boys defined abuse based on intent, while girls defined it based on impact. This led to abusive behaviours being described as more acceptable to the boys in their study, versus the girls. Barter's (2009) research adds further nuance to this. They found that boys didn't report experiencing emotional harm as a result of abuse, and were shocked that so many girls reported negative emotional impacts from behaviour they saw as normal. They went on to argue that 'if boys view the impact of their victimisation as negligible, they may also apply this understanding to their own actions. Thus, they may believe that their partners are also unaffected by their use of violence' (p.181). In other words, Barter's (2009) findings suggest that boys *may* appraise behaviour based on impact, but that they are wrongly assuming their abusive behaviours are having little-to-no impact, due to this being their own experience. As a result of assuming these behaviours are not having a negative impact, they are then not seeing them as abusive. This was supported by Zweig et al., (2014) who found that females aged 11-17 reported that their male partners were the primary perpetrators of intimate partner terrorism and that they were acting out of violent resistance, while the male respondents reported that their female partners were the primary perpetrators of intimate terrorism, and they were the ones acting out of violent resistance, suggesting that male and female youth must either differ in the truthfulness of their self-reporting; must fundamentally misinterpret the nature of violence/abuse, or both.

Whilst acknowledging the existence of female perpetration is important, it is also important to recognise that this often looks different to male perpetration. Multiple studies report differences in the prevalence and severity of incidents of abuse across genders, with girls more regularly experiencing severe behaviours and instigating moderate behaviours, whilst boys more regularly experience moderate behaviours and instigate severe behaviours (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). Girls are also more likely to report experiencing repeated incidents of abuse which either remain at the same level or worsen, as

well as experiencing more direct or overt forms of emotional abuse (Barter, 2009). Existing research also demonstrates a difference in impact across genders. In Barter's (2009) study, boys did not report experiencing emotional harm from abusive behaviours aside from being annoyed, whilst girls reported high levels of negative emotional impact. The fear present in girls accounts of experiencing abuse was also absent from boys' accounts, leading Barter (2009, p.181) to argue that 'the gender symmetry debate needs to respond to how violence impacts on welfare, rather than to focus exclusively on the physical act alone.'

The responsibilisation of women and girls is another thread running throughout literature exploring issues of gender and relationship dynamics. De Meyer's (2017) research explored the gendered nature of 'sexting' and sending sexual images or 'nudes'. Their findings showed that female images were usually requested, and the request often included their face being in the picture, while male images tended to be unsolicited 'dick pics'. Despite this, when the girls' images were shared by boys without their consent, which happened often, the girls were made responsible for this and were focused on managing their sexual reputation, rather than on consequences for the person who had breached their consent. This burden of responsibility came from both male and female participants, as well as their parents. Within the adult literature on domestic abuse, research has reflected on female survivor's experiences of social care involvement following disclosures of abuse, and found that victim-survivors are often made responsible for managing the abusive behaviour used by the perpetrator, as well as the safety of themselves and their children (Keeling & Wormer, 2012).

These narratives are key to understanding the instigation and maintenance of harm in adolescent relationships. Using abusive behaviour is a choice, but it does not take place in a vacuum, and research on the influence of gendered norms demonstrates how adolescent male instigation of abuse sits within discourses that frame this behaviour as normal and to be expected. When it comes to the implications of this for practice, Van Roosmalen (2000) argues that interventions must move away from further responsibilising girls under the banner of 'empowerment', and instead move towards carefully considering and responding to the complicated power relations at play during adolescence.

Intersectionality

In order to make sense of the conflicting research on which factors affect the risk of experiencing and/or instigating harmful behaviours in adolescent relationships, it is necessary to apply an intersectional lens. Such an approach allows for the recognition that each of the factors so far discussed interacts with a myriad of other factors to shape experiences of harm[ing]. McGregor (2018) describes how '...age, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, educational attainment and so on, interact to produce a context for abusive relationships to occur, and create the opportunity for older more powerful individuals to take advantage of … systems of oppression' (p.138).

Taking an intersectional approach also raises questions about the language used around abuse, both in research and in practice. As the 'public story' around intimate partner violence and domestic abuse is often narrow and limited in scope, due to focusing solely on factors such as gender, the terminology used is regularly hetero-and cis-normative and can fail to consider cultural implications (Wild, 2021). An example of this is the term perpetrator, which is not widely recognised in Black, Asian and racially minoritized communities, and can be seen as enforcing negative cultural stereotypes about race and community (Wild, 2021). Researching and responding to abuse in an intersectional way means challenging the dominant discourse, which regularly centres white, hetero-and cis-normative experiences (Wild, 2021). As summarised by Kwong-Lai Poon:

We need to explore how the experience of violence is mediated, not only through homophobia and hetero-sexism, but also through privilege (whiteness) and other forms of oppression; how meanings of violence, power, control, agency, strength, and resiliency intersect with social dimensions such as race, gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation within relationships (Kwong-Lai Poon, 2011, p.124).

Attitudes and motivations

Understanding the attitudes young people have towards harmful behaviours in relationships, and the motivations they have for using them, is key to effective prevention and intervention. While exerting/gaining power and control is one of the most commonly discussed motivations for the perpetration of abuse (see the Duluth Model), research with young people has shown a more complex pattern of motivations. Interviews with 30 young men aged 16-21 who had experienced domestic abuse

as a victim or a perpetrator identified five motivations for perpetration: a desire to 'win' fights with their partner; response to infidelity; response to separation; misogyny, and racism (Gadd et al., 2014). Further research has cited jealousy to be a more common motivator, with jealousy-invoking behaviours appearing as the most common form of abuse (Gomez et al., 2011; Korchmaros et al., 2013) in adolescent relationships. This variation in motivation highlights a need for tailored support for those who harm.

Prevention and intervention

Within the literature on young people's harming behaviours in relationships, there are various recommendations made for prevention and intervention. The need for early intervention is supported by research which states that young people's first episode of dating violence typically occurs by 15 (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). This was seen in Young et al's (2019) research with 15-year-olds, who frequently described significant acts of relationship violence that had occurred when they were several years younger. Recommendations for early intervention from previous research include long-term support that is not time-limited to a period of crisis (McGregor, 2018), and school-based support and education (Stanley et al., 2015).

When it comes to existing literature on prevention and early intervention, there appears to be some conflicting perspectives as to whether this should be supportive, or punitive (Gadd et al., 2014; McGregor, 2018; Young et al., 2019). While Young et al. (201) argue for a punitive approach which punishes and reforms perpetrators, Gadd et al. (2014) have previously critiqued such an approach. In their research on the attitudes and experiences of men and boys, they found that those who harmed continued to hold beliefs that were pro-violence and abuse, despite escalating punitive responses. They concluded that alternative tactics are needed, which look beyond punishment and the criminal justice system as a solution to harming behaviours in adolescence.

Existing research has also highlighted the need for support and interventions to be context-specific (O'Brien, 2016; Stanley et al. 2015). In Stanley et al's (2015) review of school-based interventions, context was defined as including the wider policy setting; the national or regional level, where the local culture shaped understandings of abuse and healthy relationships, and the readiness of an individual school. These findings highlight how in order to be effective, prevention and intervention initiatives must be tailored to the communities and societies in which they sit.

In addition to this, McGregor (2018) recommends a holistic approach. She argues that any preventative measures must include the education of those around the young people, as well as the young people themselves, and any interventions for those experiencing harm need to enable both the victim and those around them to recover together. Long-term change cannot be affected by working with young people separate to the context they exist within. Instead, interventions must consider this context and work holistically to positively affect anything within it which may increase the risk of experiencing or instigating abuse. Stanley et al. (2015) offer some recommendations for how interventions can work with a young person's wider context, as well as why this improves the efficacy of such work. At the macro-level, they argue that more consistent implementation could be achieved by framing prevention work as a statutory requirement. At the meso-level they suggest that home-grown interventions, which are culturally specific and developed with the input of those who will be delivering and receiving them, may be the most meaningful. At the micro-level of school, they argue that successful prevention and intervention work relies on a whole school approach, both in terms of support across the curriculum, and enthusiasm for delivery. At the core of their recommendations, Stanely et al. (2015) highlight how conceptualisations of abuse and healthy relationships are culturally shaped, and how levels of gender equality and awareness of gender-based violence differ between communities and societies. In order to be effective, prevention and intervention initiatives must be tailored to the communities and societies in which they sit.

Summary

Existing literature focusing on domestic abuse in young people's relationships highlights the high rates of abuse experienced by those aged 13-19 and some of the factors which influence the likelihood of experiencing or instigating abuse in adolescence. While peer and family relationships are discussed as important in influencing attitudes and behaviour in young people's dating/romantic relationships, there is some disagreement as to the level of influence and how one relationship shapes the other. Gender is another significant factor highlighted within the literature, with many studies reflecting higher levels of both victimisation and instigation reported by girls and young women. There are several explanations

given for this, including gender differences in the appraisal of behaviour, but further exploration is needed around exactly how gender shapes experiences of harm and harming. Existing research also suggests the need for any future research to take an intersectional approach, which considers how other factors intersect with gender to shape experiences of domestic abuse and support around it. When it comes to support for young people who harm, while there appears to be agreement on the need for a holistic approach which is context specific, there are conflicting perspectives on the response to harmful behaviour, and whether it should be supportive or solely punitive. This research aims to explore some of these issues through qualitative research with young people who harm and practitioners working with this group.

Background, aims and methodology

Background and aims

The Verge of Harm[ing] research project aims to explore the use of harm in young people's romantic/dating relationships and the implications for support. While there is a growing body of research in this area, this predominantly focuses on the experiences of young victim-survivors. SafeLives are a survivor-led organisation and seek to centre these perspectives at the heart and start of all we do; however, we also recognise that to better understand domestic abuse we need to include those who are responsible for causing harm in these conversations. This research therefore aims to focus on young people who are using/have used harmful behaviours in their dating/romantic relationships, and is guided by the following three aims:

- To explore why and how young people begin to use abusive behaviours in their relationships
- To better understand what it means to be on the 'verge of harming'
- To explore what support for young people who harm should look like

The Home office funded phase of this project was preceded by a mixed-methods survey funded by two philanthropic funders, which was responded to by 749 young people aged 11-25. The preliminary learning from this survey helped to shape and strengthen this phase of the research. This report covers the insights gained from conversations with young people and practitioners. Longer term, these findings, alongside the mixed-methods survey findings, will be used to create a set of best practice recommendations for support for young people who harm.

Methods

The data for this phase of the research was collected through a series of conversations with young people and practitioners. It was always the intention of the researchers to allow flexibility in how these conversations took place, in order to offer those sharing their experiences and views some autonomy over the process. This section will outline the recruitment process and the methods of data collection.
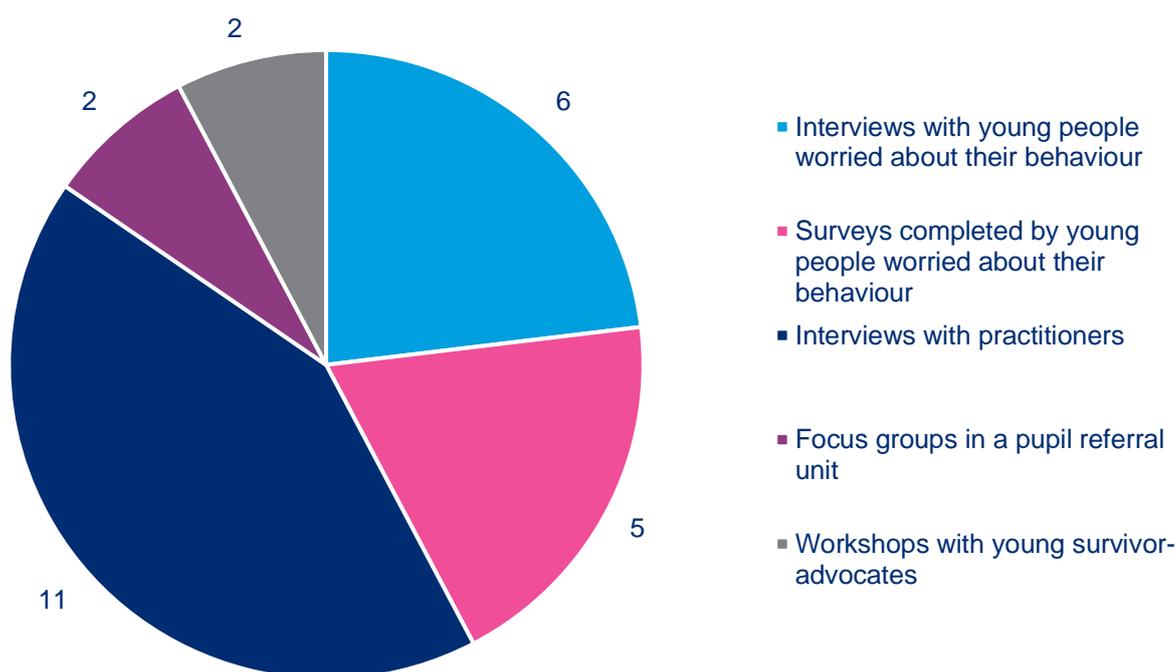
Recruitment

The research team took a four-pronged approach to recruiting people to take part in interviews. First, young people who had completed the mixed-methods survey and felt they had used harmful behaviours in their romantic/dating relationships were given the option to share their contact details if they wished to take part in an interview discussing this further. Additionally, within this phase of the research, emails focused on the recruitment of young people were shared with SafeLives' mailing list and network of contacts; this includes specialist organisations working with young people in some capacity as well as those working specifically with young people who harm. Furthermore, a series of paid social media campaigns were created to recruit young people who harm. These campaigns asked young people who were worried they had ever used toxic behaviour to share their contact details if they would like to take part in a research conversation. They were predominantly promoted on Instagram, but also on Facebook and Twitter and the only targeting criteria was to ensure they were only seen by those aged 25 and under. As these platforms do not allow targeting of under 18s, this meant they were set to be seen by 18-25 year olds. Visuals from the social media campaigns and details of the reach can be found in the appendices (p.61).

Practitioners working with young people and young people who harm were also recruited through the SafeLives' network of contacts, and the team reached out directly to a range of services/organisations doing specialist work in this area who are not already part of the SafeLives network.

It was the original intention of the researchers to have conversations with a number of adult perpetrators of domestic abuse, focusing on their earliest use of harmful behaviours in relationships. Recruitment of this group took place solely through specialist domestic abuse services and only those who were accessing specialist support around their behaviours (as well as those who had completed their support but were still in contact with services), were considered eligible. This group proved the most difficult to recruit and only one interview took place. As a result, this interview has not been included within the analysis due to the inability to maintain anonymity. We are grateful to the individual for taking part in this study and for sharing their experiences with us, and hope to include their data in future iterations of this research.

Data collection: conversations with young people and practitioners

Legend:
- Interviews with young people worried about their behaviour
- Surveys completed by young people worried about their behaviour
- Interviews with practitioners
- Focus groups in a pupil referral unit
- Workshops with young survivor-advocates

Pie chart values: 6, 5, 11, 2, 2

Interviews

Young people recruited through the social media campaigns either took part in an interview with the lead researcher or completed a digital survey asking the same questions from the interview schedule (see appendices), without the prompt questions. Six took part in interviews and five completed the interview-style survey. Eleven interviews took place with ten practitioners. All interview participants were given the choice between a narrative style interview and a semi-structured interview, as well as the choice between an in-person interview and a virtual interview. All 16 interview participants chose to be interviewed virtually using the semi-structured approach. Interviews took place over Zoom or Microsoft Teams, depending on the participant's preference.

Focus groups

While this research aimed to speak to an equal number of young people identifying as male and female, as well as being inclusive of those who identify outside of the gender binary, only one male was recruited through the initial recruitment approaches, and completed the interview-style survey. In order to ensure this research captured the voices of young men and boys, two focus groups were conducted in a pupil referral unit attended predominantly by males (with only two female pupils). These focus groups took place in person and were led by a member of the research team, with a teacher co-facilitating.

Workshops

Two virtual workshops took place with eight members of the WASSUP (women against sexual exploitation and violence speak up) volunteer panel. This panel is made up of young advocates, many of whom are experts-by-experience. These workshops focused on gaining reflections from the panel on the findings of the mixed-methods survey, as well as discussion around how the experience of being marginalised/racialised shapes the experience of harm and harming. Panel members shared their responses using Menti-meter, and any verbal discussions were recorded in note form on the Menti slides.

Participant demographics

Gender identity				
	Interview/Survey ppts.	**Focus group ppts.**	**WASSUP panel members**	**Practitioners**
	Count	Count	Count	Count
Male	1	18	-	4
Female	9	1	5	6
Non-binary/gender-queer	1	-	-	-
Gender non-conforming	-	-	1	-
Missing	-	-	2	-

Participants were asked to describe their gender identity using their preferred terminology. Four of the practitioners identified as male and six as female. Five of the WASSUP panel participating in the workshops described themselves as female, one as gender non-conforming and two did not answer. 18 of the participants from the focus groups in a pupil referral unit described themselves as male and one as female. Of the young people who took part in an interview or completed a survey about their own use of harmful behaviour, one described themselves as male, nine as female and one as non-binary/genderqueer.

Does the participant consider themselves to have a disability or long term health condition?				
	Interview/Survey ppts.	**Focus group ppts.**	**WASSUP panel members**	**Practitioners**
	Count	Count	Count	Count
Yes	5	15	1	-
No	5	3	5	10
Missing	1	1	2	-

Participants were asked whether they consider themselves to have a disability or long-term health condition (both mental and physical health). All ten practitioners said they did not have a disability or long-term health condition. One of the WASSUP panel members described themselves as having a disability or long-term health condition, five members answered no to this question and two did not answer. Fifteen of the focus group participants described themselves as having a disability or long-term health condition, two answered no to this question and one chose not to answer. Of the eleven young people that took part in interviews or complete a survey, five answered yes to this question, five answered no and one chose not to answer.

Sexual orientation				
	Interview/Survey ppts.	**Focus group ppts.**	**WASSUP panel members**	**Practitioners**
	Count	Count	Count	Count
Heterosexual	4	18	4	10
Bisexual	4	-	1	-
Gay	-	-	-	-
Lesbian	-	-	-	-
Pansexual	1	-	-	-
Asexual	-	-	1	-
Prefer not to say	-	-	-	-
Missing	1	1	2	-

Participants were asked to describe their sexual orientation. All ten of the practitioners interviewed described themselves as heterosexual. Four of the WASSUP panel described themselves as heterosexual, one as bisexual, one as asexual, and two chose not to disclose. 18 of the participants in the focus group described themselves as heterosexual, and one chose not to say. While this may reflect orientation, it may also reflect the difficulties with identifying outside of heteronormativity as a 13–15-year-old in a pupil referral unit attended by all males aside from two females. Of the eleven young people who took part interviews/completed surveys, four identified as heterosexual, four as bisexual, one as pansexual and one chose not to disclose.

Age of young people			
	Interview/Survey ppts.	Focus group ppts.	WASSUP panel members
	Count	Count	Count
13	-	9	-
14	-	7	-
15	-	3	-
16	-	-	-
17	2	-	3
18	2	-	1
19	1	-	-
20	1	-	2
21	1	-	-
22	1	-	-
23	2	-	-
Missing	1	-	2

The young people participating in this study were between 13 and 23 years old. While one survey participant did not disclose their exact age, they ticked to confirm they were between 16 and 24 before being allowed to complete the survey. Those participating in the focus groups in the PRU were between 13 and 15, those participating in interviews/surveys were between 17 and 24 and those participating in the WASSUP panel were between 17 and 20, though two did not give their exact age.

Age of practitioners	
	Practitioners
	Count
20-29	2
30-39	2
40-49	3
50-59	1
60-69	2

The practitioners interviewed were aged between 24 and 62 and the average age was 44.

Ethnicity				
	Interview/Survey ppts.	Focus group ppts.	WASSUP panel members	Practitioners
	Count	Count	Count	Count
White British	7	18	-	5
White Other	2	-	-	5
Mixed Ethnic Group	-	1	-	-
North African/Arabic	1	-	-	-
White and Black Caribbean	-	-	2	-
Ghanaian	-	-	1	-
Black African	-	-	3	-
Missing	1	-	2	-

Participants were asked to describe their ethnicity using their preferred terminology.

The practitioners interviewed for this study worked in the following fields:
• Specialist domestic abuse/sexual assault support
• Education
• Mental health/therapeutic support
• Juvenile justice system
• Youth services

The fact that all of the practitioners interviewed either described themselves as White or White Other reflects both the lack of diversity within the sector, but also some possible gaps in the SafeLives network. This is something we are already working to address through deep project work and new links with specialist/by and for organisations, but clearly represents a limitation of the current study and a gap which future research should aim to address. This will be central to any future phases of the verge of harm[ing] work.

Impact of participation in interviews

Data from the anonymous feedback survey completed by the six young people who took part in interviews also demonstrates their positive reflections on participation in the study. All six young people strongly agreed with the statement 'I am glad I took part in an interview', and all described the experience of being interviewed in positive terms, including one young person who felt the process was healing:

> *'A very healing and fulfilling experience even if it was just a small one'*

As well as another young person who felt that the experience had allowed them to reflect on their own harmful behaviour:

> *'I rethought things that had gone wrong in previous relationships and I'm hoping to improve the relationship I'm currently in'*

While de-briefs between the interviewer and participant following the interview had always been a planned part of the process, the need for support and guidance expressed by most of the young people interviewed, led the research team to expand this offer. Following internal conversations, it was agreed that all young people interviewed would be offered a free one hour clinical supervision/debrief session with a colleague who is a practicing psychotherapist with specialist knowledge of domestic abuse and young people. They could use this hour to further discuss their stories, to receive information about support, or to ask any questions they had about relationships and abuse. Four of the six young people interviewed chose to accept this offer.

Analysis

The research team used Nvivo qualitative analysis software to conduct Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model of thematic analysis. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed; survey responses downloaded, and workshop notes compiled into document, and all were imported into Nvivo for coding. Each file was annotated following familiarisation, then coded, and later the codes were grouped into higher level codes and themes. Due to time constraints, one member of the research team annotated and coded half of the transcripts, while another member of the researcher team annotated and coded the other half. To ensure the same approach was being taken, initially both researchers worked together to annotate and code a transcript from an interview with a young person, and a transcript from an interview with a practitioner. No grouping of the codes took place until all files had been annotated and coded. At this stage both researchers and the associate-expert-by experience met in person and spent a day together discussing and organising the codes. Variations of the team met a further eight times virtually to continue discussions and finalise themes. All grouping of the codes took place with at least two members of the research team, and the final themes were discussed with the associate expert-by-experience before being formalised.

Authentic voice

"We've walked through fire to get our voices back; we're not going to give them up now."
- Ursula, SafeLives Pioneer

SafeLives are committed to placing people with lived experience at the heart of all we do to end domestic abuse. We believe engaging the expertise of victim-survivors is fundamental in ending domestic abuse for everyone, and for good. We are committed to consulting survivors nationally to build a wide and diverse voice, while also providing a platform for their independent and authentic voice.

SafeLives works closely with a group of victim-survivor volunteers referred to as 'Pioneers' who influence and develop our work, representing us and their voice to the media, events, and Politicians etc. Pioneers chose this name to reflect their purpose as active pioneers for change. We also work with a larger group of victim-survivors who are contracted and reimbursed to deliver specific work and projects, referred to as 'associate experts by experience'.
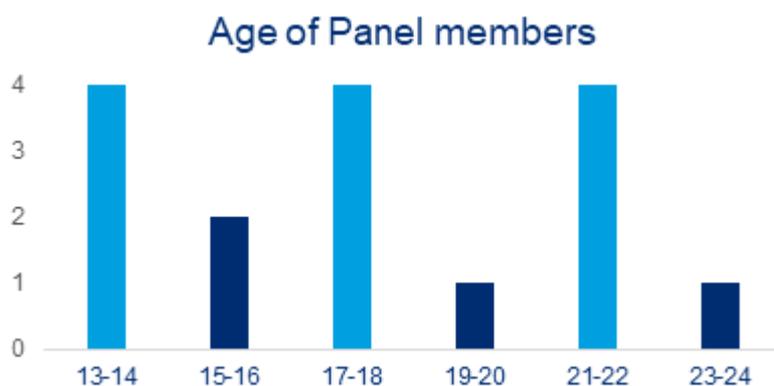
Associate expert by experience

In order to ensure that the Verge of Harm[ing] project was led by victim-survivor voice, a young associate expert by experience in the age range under study worked alongside the researchers throughout this project, she has chosen to be referred to as Zoey. Zoey's role was broad and involved consultation and co-creation at each stage, including co-creation of the mixed-methods survey during the previous phase of this research, co-creation of the interview schedules and other interview documents, and co-creation of social media campaigns. As an undergraduate researcher, she also carried out quantitative analysis of the survey data, qualitative analysis of workshop data, and worked with the researchers to create the themes presented in the findings section of this report.

It can sometimes be the case that victim-survivor's identities are reduced to solely that of a survivor, and we therefore feel it is important to acknowledge both the insight offered by Zoey as a survivor of abuse, as well her expertise as a qualifying researcher and academic. We are incredibly grateful to have had her input on this project and to consider her a member of the Verge of Harm[ing] team.

> Throughout this report there will be text boxes like this with reflections from Zoey's perspective, this is in addition to Zoey having edited the report itself, in order to ensure survivor voice remains centred.

'Have your say' panel

In addition to the input of the associate, the research team co-created with a group of young people referred to as the 'Have Your Say' panel. This group began with a smaller number of young people who had been involved in previous SafeLives' projects, and then grew through contacts within SafeLives' network and those on the panel inviting other young people to join. This resulted in 15 panel members plus the associate, who attended each panel meeting and fed in as well as co-facilitating.

Age of Panel members

Of the panel members, nine identified as female, six as male and one as preferring to describe their gender in another way, which they did not disclose. Ten described themselves as heterosexual, two as

bisexual, one as gay, two as other/queer and one as unsure. Eleven described their ethnicity as White British, two as Mixed – White and Asian, two as Mixed – White and Black and one as Mixed – Other. Three of the panel identified as disabled or having a long-term health condition. Four of the panel had experienced domestic abuse and a further four said they were unsure if they had.

The panel met four times via Microsoft Teams during the Home Office funding period and had met six times prior to this. These four meetings focused on co-creation of the interview schedules, co-creation of a series of social media campaigns, and discussion around dissemination of research findings.

Panel members were compensated with a voucher for each panel meeting they attended.

Impact of participation in the panel

In their guidance for involving children and young people as advisors in research, the National Institute for Health Research states involvement needs to be of benefit to the young people, and not solely the researchers (NIHR, 2021). Beyond the vouchers provided as compensation, feedback from the 'Have Your Say' panel members demonstrates the positive impact of participation.

One member of the 'Have Your Say' panel reflected on the process itself as positive, in terms of the researchers *'keeping us updated, guiding discussion, offering opportunities, explaining parts of the project'.* A number of panel members also highlighted the openness of the group as a positive:

> *'Very open space to discuss, and very kind people who are listening and caring'*

> *'I like how open it is/how everyone's opinions are listened to and are taken into account'*

> *'I think I've enjoyed how easy it is to talk without being judged'*

When asked if they felt they had gained anything from being part of the panel, young people talked about the things they had bought with their vouchers, as well as:

> *'Things to put on my CV'*

> *'Knowledge of how projects run, how research is gathered/presented, how services are created'*

> *'An interest in research strategies etc.'*

> *'It was nice to be involved in something I would never really be involved in'.*

It would also be remiss to talk about the benefits of the panel without mentioning Phil, a budgie owned by one of the panel members who became somewhat of a group mascot and featured heavily in the young people's feedback.

WASSUP panel

Women against sexual exploitation and violence speak up (WASSUP) is an award-winning youth social action project created and delivered by local young people since 2017 in Ipswich, Suffolk, expanding to Southend, Essex and more recently since 2021 in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, London.

Since the creation of the group in 2017, WASSUP have:
- Delivered 200 volunteer hours a month
- Delivered workshops and toolkits to over 6000 school children across Suffolk and over 200 in Greenwich
- Delivered community-based events including flash mobs and created 4 films and hosted 12 art installations/exhibitions
- Created a toolkit endorsed by Suffolk Safeguarding Board, which forms part of Suffolk Child Sexual Exploitation Plan
- Developed a new project focused on engaging boys in these issues called 'We are Patrick'.
- Submitted evidence to various Government departments and interviewed an MP for the BBC
- Received an accolade of nationally recognised awards, including the Third Sector Award
- Delivered professional workshops across Suffolk to social care practitioners

The Verge of Harm[ing] team reached out to the panel after hearing one of the group facilitators speak at an event, and two virtual workshops were arranged. The focus of these workshops was to obtain expert feedback from the group on some of the preliminary research findings, as well as to gain their insight on how experiences of marginalisation can shape harm and harming in the context of domestic abuse.

Panel members were compensated with a voucher for each workshop they attended. While monetary compensation is frequently used as a thank you for experts' time, the Verge of Harming research team were keen to offer additional forms of reimbursement alongside this. In this case, some of the WASSUP panel members were considering undertaking a research project, so a session was arranged for the Verge of Harming research team to answer questions and offer some guidance around this.

Researcher positionality

Olukotun et al. (2021, p.1411) state that 'engaging in self-reflexive praxis allows researchers to identify areas of tension in the research process that need to be further deconstructed'. In considering our positions, both researchers acknowledged that while they do not consider themselves to be survivors of domestic abuse, both had relationships in their teenage years that involved unhealthy dynamics and elements of control. Central to these experiences was the issue of consent, and feeling that neither themselves nor their partners truly understood what consent looked like, with both researchers reflecting that they did not feel confident in what they were allowed to say no to. As the poet Blythe Baird (2019, p.25) writes 'you can't say no to a question you were never asked'. As adults, both researchers feel they are still deconstructing these experiences and recognise that they carry them into this research.

Beyond their relationship experiences, the researchers acknowledge the lens of white privilege they bring to the research. While efforts have been made to take an intersectional approach and to consult those with experience of being racialised, the researchers are aware this positioning may have impacted on both the research design, recruitment, and the process of analysis.

Overall the researchers are approaching this study as both 'insiders' and 'outsiders', with some shared experiences with participants, and some areas of limited experience and insight.

Findings and discussion

This section will present the four themes drawn out of thematic analysis of the interview, survey, focus group and workshop data. Each theme will include supporting data extracts, as well as discussion of these findings in the context of existing literature and research.

Thematic map of theme one:

<div>
Interconnectedness of relationships
</div>

| Home and Family | Peer relationships | Early romantic/dating relationships | Media as a surrogate role model |

Interconnectedness of relationships

Previous research exploring abuse within young people's romantic/dating relationships has sought to determine which other relationships influence the use of such behaviours, and whether some relationships are more influential than others. Our conversations with young people and practitioners built on this existing research and provide insight around *how* young people's relationships interconnect and shape their behaviour in romantic/dating relationships.

Home and family

The importance of our earliest attachments and the impact of adverse childhood experiences is well established within the literature (see Diamond et al, 2010; Felitti et al. 1998) and the field of domestic abuse and is clearly seen across conversations with both young people and practitioners within this study. Data from interviews and interview-style surveys demonstrates how relationships between parents/carers provide a framework for what relationships should look like. There were many examples within the data of an inter-generational cycle of abuse in which children who witnessed domestic abuse between parents/carers went on to use abusive behaviour themselves. When asked what he felt had led to him using toxic/harmful behaviour in his relationships, one young person responded:

'My abusive father' – YP37

Practitioners also reflected on seeing this cycle within families they were supporting:

'Very often, the parents have been, you know, if you want to use the word 'perpetrators' – the perpetrators are very abusive…which then get carried on, and sort of, you know, repeated' – Pr10

While some young people described this cycle in general terms, others described mirroring the specific behaviours they had witnessed in their parent's/carer's relationships, in their own dating/romantic relationships:

'[My parents would] argue quite a lot…and my Mum would…either pretend that something bad had happened to her – so, like throw herself on the floor – and like pretend that she was having some sort of medical issue, or, had died, so I always saw that – from like a really young age, from like 3, I think – so, I guess I thought that when something was going wrong, you had to, respond in a way to get someone's attention. So, on that night [with my first boyfriend] I think I said something similar to what my Mum had done, where, I don't know if I said I was going to kill myself, or that I'd had, like, some sort of medical issue' – YP2

The data suggests that when it comes to the influence of home and family relationships on the use of abusive behaviours in later romantic/dating relationships, there are some key missing pieces which make such behaviour more likely. A number of the practitioners interviewed reflected on the importance of stable boundaries and how many of the young people they supported had a lack of healthy boundaries modelled in the home:

'You want people to make their own minds up and things, and develop their own character, and all those sorts of things – but they need to be able to do it, but within, I think, quite wide, but very safe bounds. And a lot of these people aren't given that' – Pr10

In addition to a lack of boundaries, practitioners highlighted the impact of a lack of love and nurturing relationships on the way young people behave in their dating/romantic relationships:

'Growing up, fighting to be loved, I think; that behaviour then continues into adulthood, and fighting can turn into physical fighting for love, or, erm, put-downs, you know, as in retaliation…just to feel like someone's responding to them' – Pr3

The absence of these strong foundations in childhood was seen as having the potential to lead to a warped perception of relationships that had a long-term impact on people's values and behaviour:

'He was a looked-after child – but really, suffered, you know, quite strong neglect, I would say abuse, himself. And his ideas, his values, in relation to what was a normal, healthy relationship, was incredibly warped' – Pr10

It is important to note, that while there was evidence for an inter-generational cycle of abuse, there was also evidence of young people who had experienced abuse in childhood questioning their own behaviours out of a desire not to repeat this cycle or behave in the same way as their abusive parent/guardian:

'I found out that my Dad is a narcissist… and when I found that out…I wanted to distance myself from him like completely, and make sure that nothing I do resembles his behaviour. And I was like reading up on narcissism, and I found that some of the behaviours…were things that I felt I had used…and it just made me really think like 'Wow! In my next relationship, I want to make sure that I cut out these behaviours completely' and like, not really wanted to be labelled as a narcissist, or as 'abusive' – YP18

"The idea that your home/family environment impacts on your own romantic relationships is something I struggle with. Certainly, it is important that victims/survivors such as myself recognise, whether we like it or not, that experiencing abuse in childhood is a risk factor. However, I feel it is also important for society and professionals in the sector, and those working with young people, to acknowledge that it is not a determining factor for someone using harmful behaviours. In my case, as soon as the abuse I was experiencing was disclosed to my school, I immediately saw a change in the way teachers treated me. I was no longer viewed as the well-behaved student that I was (which was in part a self-protection strategy because I did not want trouble at home if I misbehaved at school), but I was now viewed as a problem student. While I acknowledge that experiencing unhealthy relationships at home normalises unhealthy behaviour, I feel that the response following a disclosure can also serve to continue the cycle of abuse, because young people are made to feel that we are no longer able to achieve our full potential and therefore may as well become what society expects of us. Thankfully I feel that being in a good place with my mental health acted as a protective factor and, like YP18, my experience has made me more aware of abusive behaviour and committed to avoiding it.

Young people should be seen as individuals, and not as their experiences."

Stories like YP18's, and that of the associate on this project, reflect some of the critiques of the ACEs framework and that which Edwards et al. (2017) refer to as 'early years determinism'. While the negative impacts of such experiences should not be minimised, suggesting a causal relationship can lead to 'stigmatisation of sections of the population whose social position or conditions of existence are identified as destined to create dysfunctional individuals' (Edwards et al. 2017, p.7). We must not reduce those who have experienced abuse in childhood to this experience and nothing more, and must recognise the nuance surrounding adverse childhood experiences and their impacts.

In other accounts, it was not childhood experiences of abuse that were discussed, but the impact of having parents/carers in unhappy relationships:

'I mean, it's possible that [the normalisation of toxic behaviours in relationships]...it comes from parents, maybe, just because that's what people have seen; we've seen that people are unhappy, but they've stuck with it' – YP1

For some of the young people interviewed, seeing parents/carers remain in unhappy relationships appeared to provide a framework that defines success as the continuation of a relationship, rather than by what the relationship is like or how it affects the people in it. In Brené Brown's book 'Atlas of the Heart' (2021) she draws on the Buddhist concept of 'near and far enemies' and the work of other emotion researchers in her theory of cultivating meaningful connection. While far enemies are described as the opposite of what we are trying to achieve, near enemies are described as states which seem similar to that which we are trying to achieve, but actually serve to undermine the desired state/outcome. Data from this study suggests that while abusive relationships are the far enemy of healthy relationships, unhappy relationships appear to be the near enemies. Having an unhappy relationship as our framework creates an expectation of discontent, which makes us less likely to question a relationship that is negatively impacting us.

Peer relationships

In addition to the importance of home and family relationships, data from young people and practitioners highlighted the interconnectedness of romantic/dating relationships and peer relationships.

When asked about warning signs they had observed across the young people they had supported, practitioners pointed to the dynamics in friendship groups as a precursor to the dynamics in romantic/dating relationships:

'Early things are looking at friendships, and what their attitudes are within friendship groups…in particular, I find jealousy, so, by that, I mean, is it a friendship group with a lot of friends, you know, where you might see a young person with a couple of friends, and later on you might see them with a couple of other different friends…do they have a lot of friends, or are they just with one person all the time?...for me, that's probably one of the key issues in romantic relationships, is that insecurities and jealousy' – Pr2

'If they don't really have good friendships – I think that's a kind of sign.' – Pr4

The data also demonstrated how the normalisation of toxicity that began in the home for some of the young people (both those interviewed and those supported by the practitioners interviewed), continued and was reinforced within their peer relationships:

'I feel like, a young person's like view of a relationship is like, "Oh, you can give them another chance" and it's almost like we accept that having, like, toxic traits or harmful traits in a relationship is normal' – YP1

A number of the young people interviewed about their own use of harmful behaviours described being open about these behaviours with peers, and in some cases raising concerns about these behaviours. For many of the young people, the response they received was the normalisation of toxicity through peers sharing they were behaving in the same way. When asked how her best friend had responded when she disclosed the use of harmful behaviours, one young person said:

'Erm, unfortunately, she uses the exact same ones' – YP18

While the idea of discussions around toxic behaviour no longer being 'taboo' may feel like a progressive step, many of the conversations had between the young people interviewed and their peers served to further normalise and minimise such behaviour:

'You're talking about all these things you're doing, but it's not seen as a bad thing, it is just seen as the norm, because I think when it's so common, that you don't realise what you're doing is actually doing more harm than good.' – YP42

This data expands on previous research, which found that young people are most likely to speak to their closest friends when they are experiencing abuse (SafeLives and On Our Radar, 2020) and demonstrates that young people are also having conversations with their peers about the instigation of abuse. It also raises questions about how we better equip and support young people to respond well and safely when a friend discloses that they are concerned/unsure about their own behaviour in a relationship.

> "The more people are aware of the early signs of abuse, the more people can then raise these issues with their peers, for example if a young person notices their friend using a behaviour which is harmful they can address this with their friend and help them to not use these behaviours. This is similar for situations such as cousins noticing each other using harmful behaviours, or older young people at youth groups talking to younger members of the youth group. The less that abuse is hidden the more we can do to stop it.'

Early romantic/dating relationships

Perhaps one of the most significant pieces of learning from this research was around the young people who responded to the interview recruitment campaign. Forty young people responded to adverts asking if they felt they had ever used toxic behaviour in relationships, and shared their contact details, and six of these engaged to the point of interview. A further five of the 40 chose to complete an interview-style survey. Of the six who were interviewed, five identified as female and one as non-binary/genderqueer. While all 11 young people responded to the advert due to feeling that they themselves had used toxic behaviour, five of the six young people interviewed discussed experiences of victimisation in their earliest dating/romantic relationships, though not all acknowledged them as such (this was not a direct

question asked and therefore there may be experiences of victimisation among the survey participants that were undisclosed).

One of the young women interviewed described a significant experience of victimisation in her first relationship when she was 14. While she initially referred her partner's behaviour as 'a bit unkind', she went on to share the following incident (this quote has intentionally not been cut down to accurately represent her experience):

> *'He used to I think be quite sort of like verbally abusive; he used to shout at me a lot, just over like little silly things. And he used to call me names, and just like say I'm stupid and stuff like that. And then there was an instance so, when it got to like 4 months, I used to really struggle with doing exams and everything, and I'd promised him that I would write something in an English exam, and I hadn't, because it had stressed me out; called him, and told him about it; went to his house, and he just got really angry at me and was shouting at me. He said that, you know, he's always trying to help me, and that I'm ungrateful, and, he basically like, it was very strange, and I don't know how I processed it, as a 14-year-old, but he like sat me down and, with like a pen and paper, and was like "Right – write your essay now" [laughs wryly] and just turned around and wouldn't talk to me. And I was just crying the entire time. And then he was like apologising to me, and said that we could watch a movie or something, so we were doing that, and then he basically, I don't know how to, so, we were in his room, and he, erm, was trying, like he was trying to instigate something, and I just was like "Well, I've been crying, like you've been shouting at me – like, I'm not interested", and he pinned me down and sort of said to me like "Oh, this is what happens when you don't do what I say" kind of thing. And I was like trying to get him off me, and started crying, and he got off – like he didn't do anything – he got off, and then he was like, "Why are you crying?" and I was like "Do you not see what just happened there? Like, I was scared." And he was like "Well, I wasn't going to do anything"'*
> *– YP1*

There were many impacts of victimisation evident in the five young people's accounts, including all five developing harmful behaviours themselves as a response to their experiences:

> *'I was 17 – and I got into a relationship that was quite toxic, he was very controlling…when he ended things, I started talking to another guy, and then it was like, all of a sudden, I had a different outlook on how I approached relationships, because I was very, very just like, completely stressed about them liking me, because I had that relationship where it was very difficult to receive validation. So, in that brief stage afterwards, I found that I was quite toxic, in that, because of my experiences before.'*
> *– YP42*

In some cases, as in the above quote, the young people were using harmful behaviours to try and protect themselves from having to endure the same experiences in subsequent relationships. In others, the young people described mirroring their partner's unhealthy behaviour and then going on to use the same behaviours in later relationships:

> *'Eventually, I learnt to kind of 'match' him, like, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!', but now, I've noticed that those behaviours I'm bringing into our relationship where I don't actually need to. I'm not responding to anything anymore, I'm instigating' – YP18*

These stories demonstrate the importance of an approach to domestic abuse that holds each individual accountable for the harmful behaviours they are using, including victims. This is not to punish victims, but to address this impact of abuse and provide them with the best chance of going on to have healthy, happy relationships. When it comes to what it looks like to be on the verge of harming, these stories also suggest we need to include young victims-survivors as those who may go on to use harmful behaviour without support, as well as highlighting some of the difficulties with applying the binary labels of perpetrator and victim to young people's relationships.

Media as a surrogate role model

Many of the young people interviewed described a lack of role models or examples of healthy relationships in their lives:

> *'I didn't really have an example of a healthy relationship from anyone' – YP2*

In the absence of these models and frameworks, data suggests young people may look to the media as a guide for relationships:

> *'if family dynamics and roles aren't necessarily, strong, or clear, or positive, they genuinely look to, like, soaps'* – Pr14

Some of those interviewed reflected on the unrealistic picture they felt the media painted of relationships, and the romanticisation of dynamics that in practice, are much more complicated:

> *'You're let to believe growing up that it's like a fairy tale like it is in movies and that is perfect. It isn't.'* – YP32

Members of the WASSUP panel focused on the role of social media, and the way in which unhealthy relationships and behaviours are 'glamourised':

> *'On social media, sometimes over protective and damaging behaviour is glamorised'* – WASSUP panel member

> *'There's quite a toxic culture around relationships especially because of social media, social media needs more regulation.'* - WASSUP panel member

> "The way in which abusive behaviour is glamorised in the media can reinforce for those growing up in abusive households that what they are seeing at home is a normal part of life. As such it can continue to facilitate the cycle of abuse, but not because young people are "bad" people or inherently cannot behave, which can be society's view, but rather they have no one else showing them what a healthy relationship looks like."

TikTok's, since removed, #365dayschallenge trend is a particularly clear example of the glamorisation of abuse across social media. This trend emerged quickly after the release of the Netflix film 365 days, which tells the story of a woman abducted by a mafia boss and forced to live with him for a year until she 'falls in love' with him or can make the choice to leave. The film contains repeated scenes of sexual assault and rape between the mafia boss and the woman he abducts, which are portrayed as 'rough sex' and part of a blossoming romance (Dening, 2020). Videos using the #365dayschallenge or #365days hashtags included boys and young men acting out scenes in which they put their hands around an imaginary partner's throat; girls and young women videoing themselves watching scenes from the film with captions like 'Massimo can kidnap me anytime', and a video which received over 30 million views and over 5.5 million likes of a girl who appeared to be school age recording bruising and injuries on her face, neck and body, with the caption 'Decided to watch 365 Days with my "guy friend"' (Aspinall, 2020; Murdock, 2020). The existence of such trends serves to both glamorise abuse, and make abusive relationships appear aspirational to the children and young people coming across this content.

Summary

Data presented within this theme demonstrates the interconnectedness of relationships across a young person's life, and the way in which the relationships had by the young people in this study reinforced the normalisation of abuse. Their narratives highlight how relationships within the home and family environment provide an initial framework for relationships that can lead to an intergenerational cycle of abuse, particularly when there is a lack of love and nurture, or healthy boundaries. However, they also provide examples of how young people who experience domestic abuse in childhood may have an increased level of awareness of abusive behaviour and its impacts, which leads them to a commitment to do no harm in relationships.

Following the normalisation of abuse in the home, many of the young people discussed the reinforcing of this normalisation across their peer relationships. Data presented within this theme suggests that even when young people are opening up about their own use of harmful behaviours to their friends, and in some cases seeking support and advice, the responses from peers serve to normalise and maintain these behaviours. This normalisation was also reinforced by the media, which data suggests young people turn to as a surrogate role model when this hasn't been available to them elsewhere.

For many of the young people in this study, their earliest romantic/dating relationships also reinforced the normalisation of abuse, and a number described their progression from victim to instigator, leading

to the conclusion that young victims need support to ensure they do not go on to either experience or instigate harm in later relationships.

A Gendered Experience

Relationships as a gendered experience	Intersectionality	Conflicting gendered responses to domestic abuse

Gendered motivations	Gender Roles	Misogyny and the Media		Trauma-informed perspective	Gendered consequences

A Gendered Experience

Data from both young people and practitioners highlighted how the experience of relationships, of harm/harming, and of support around this, was shaped by gender. In many cases gender was discussed as a significant factor in isolation, but there were also examples of intersecting identities such as gender and culture, or gender and ethnicity uniquely shaping young people's experiences.

Gendered experience of relationships

Gendered motivations

Interviews with young people highlighted how the meaning attributed to romantic/dating relationships was gendered, and how this shaped motivations for both entering and maintaining such relationships. The data demonstrates how these gendered motivations were linked to binary gender roles, and the need to 'perform' masculinity and femininity. For boys and young men, relationships with the 'opposite sex' were a way to gain status through being (or being perceived as) sexually active. For girls and young women, relationships with males were necessary for them to achieve validation and to be perceived as having worth:

> 'there's almost this need to be in a relationship at a young age – not necessarily a happy one, but just to be in a relationship – to have some kind of meaning, from my female friends, it was like, they needed that relationship, and they almost became a person with the person in the relationship – they weren't their own individual person, with my male friends, it's more like "Oh, I need to be in a relationship so that I can like sleep with a girl"' – YP1

These gendered motivations echo those found in much previous research studying heterosexual relationships and specifically adolescent heterosexual relationships. Tolman et al (2015) sought to explore why a gender hierarchy continues to exist in adolescent heterosexual relationships. They highlighted evidence of institutionalised heterosexuality within the accounts of the young people they spoke to, which they described as 'not merely a sexual orientation, but a system of beliefs, behaviours and relationships, of which gender hierarchy is a constituent part' (Tolman et al. (2015, p.5). Central to institutionalised heterosexuality and gender hierarchy is the 'belief that boys can and should be coercive in their relationships' and a 'broad array of conventions for girls to enact on their own behalf and in relation to boys' to ensure the maintenance of acceptable heterosexual relationships (Tolman et al. 2015, p.4). Their study demonstrated how adolescent women were responsible for managing both their performance of femininity and ensuring their partner was able to properly perform masculinity, while the adolescent men were solely focused on their own performance of masculinity. This is mirrored in the above quote and the idea that girls and young women become 'a person with the person in the relationship', while boys focus on sexual conquest.

In this way a lack of, or loss of, relationship has a far heavier cost for girls and young women, whose very personhood depends on being in relationship with a male. Reflections on this from the young women interviewed show how this can lead to the maintenance of unhealthy and abusive relationships, because the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs. For many young women and girls, relationships feel like a necessity rather than a choice, and this can lead to an unhealthy or abusive relationship being perceived as preferable to singleness:

> 'I was trying to hold onto something, where I felt like somebody else was giving me love, because I wasn't giving myself enough love' – YP1

> 'My best friend, she was in a relationship for like 2 or 3 years, and he was just, horrendous, he was very controlling, but she kind of went with "Well, I'm not going to find anyone better"' – YP1

Spielman et al. (2013) highlight how a fear of singleness correlates with 'settling' for a lower standard of relationship and how it can produce a dependence on relationships that causes us to remain committed even when the relationship is unsatisfactory or damaging. Rusbultz and Martz (1995) previously considered this concept in relation to domestic abuse and found that commitment was the key predictor of victim-survivors returning to their perpetrator immediately after leaving refuge. While we must be careful not to shift focus back from asking 'why didn't he/they stop' to 'why didn't she/they leave', it is important to recognise the role a fear of singleness plays in the maintenance of dissatisfying and damaging relationships, and how institutionalised heterosexuality and gender hierarchy create and reinforce this fear in girls and young women.

> "The gendered motivations highlighted in the interviews definitely echo my own thoughts and feelings as a young female adult. I always felt a pressure, and still do, especially in school, that the girls who were noticed were those who had a boyfriend and those of us who were single were left out of conversations which included boys, and even conversations that involved other girls who were in relationships. This made it feel that your opinions and voice only mattered to your peers if you were in a relationship and if you were not then, to me at least, it felt as though you did not hold the same weight to your opinions."

Within the interviews with young women, there were also examples of how their gender interacted with the gender of their prospective partner to shape the motivation for engaging in a relationship. The following interview excerpt highlights how the young person's choice to date her first partner, a female, was based on the existence of attraction, while her choice to date a male partner was based on the absence of fear:

'my first relationship...I felt like I actually had a crush, like I actually really liked her, and, that was the reason why I went into that relationship...then, after that, it's like something switched off in my brain, and it wasn't like, a crush, or like emotion so much; it felt like a fixation, and it was mostly with guys...I think with guys, as well, it's a bit more uncomfortable [I'm] always worried about what their intentions are, and stuff like that, it scares me, like, a lot, but with [him] I didn't worry about that' – YP17

While it may also be true for boys and young men that the gender of their prospective partner shapes the reasons they enter into relationships, these were not reflections raised by the boys and young men within this study.

Gender Roles

As the above quotes suggest, traditional views of masculinity and femininity were prevalent throughout the interview data, though they were often discussed by the young women and non-binary/gender-queer young person as problematic rather than being the views that they themselves held:

'I feel like the traditional dynamic of a more 'manly' man, and a more 'feminine' girl is still really looked up to' – YP18

The young women interviewed felt these gender roles still impacted on attitudes and behaviours within relationships. Most notably, and further supporting the findings from Tolman et al's (2015) study, gendered beliefs around males 'needing' and being entitled to sex and it being the 'role' of the female partner to fulfil this 'need', which was associated with coercive behaviour and issues around consent:

'If I didn't want to sleep with them, they would, like compare me to all their friends' girlfriends and things, and make that a really big issue. In another one, if I didn't and then he was going to go on a night out, he'd be like 'Well, I'm go to go on a night out wanting it' and basically insinuating that he was going to cheat, so that made it difficult. And then there was times that I felt very pressured, so did things that I didn't really want to do – didn't really enjoy it – and then afterwards felt horrible about it.' – YP2

During a de-brief conversation with one of the young women interviewed, she discussed the way in which traditional gender roles lead to gender differences in the appraisal of abusive behaviour (only the reflections she consented to being included within the report will be discussed). When discussing the issue of boys and young men possibly underreporting their use of abusive behaviour, and girls and young women overreporting (see Barter, 2009; Francis and Pearson, 2019; Gadd et al, 2014; Le Franc et al, 2008; Young et al, 2019), she asked the question:

'Do women feel like they aren't entitled to power in a relationship?' – YP18

She went on to discuss whether the power-imbalance associated with relationships governed by traditional gender roles, leads women who feel some level of agency in their relationship to question if they are abusive:

'Are there some women who are concerned they're using harmful behaviour because they aren't in a traditional submissive role, but they actually aren't using harmful behaviours they just aren't used to feeling dominance/power in a relationship?' – YP18

In their study exploring gender and power in heterosexual relationships, Traeder and Zeigler-Hill (2019; 2020) found that when women reported a desire for more power in a relationship, this relationship was perceived negatively by both themselves and their male partner. However, when men reported a desire for more power, this was only associated with their own negative perception of the relationship. If YP18's suggestion is accurate, it may reflect an internalisation of negative perceptions of female power in heterosexual relationships. Her suggestion also raises interesting questions around whether there may be an internalised cognitive bias that causes women to perceive having agency in a relationship as harmful levels of dominance/power.

> "Having grown up in an abusive heterosexual household in which my father was the perpetrator and my mother was the victim, I can see how these traditional gender roles were at play in my home. These dynamics were reinforced every day and I didn't see any alternative for what a healthy relationship should look like. Once we (me, my mum, and my sister) left the abusive family home, I then learnt about domestic abuse and how what I was witnessing at home wasn't normal. As a result, I now feel empowered and recognise that women can (and should) have healthy amounts of power in their relationships, but I still feel that this isn't socially desirable. The disconnect between what I see as healthy and what I feel society expects from me is something I've thought about a lot recently, particularly because I don't want to fall victim to the cycle of abuse."

Misogyny and the media

Many of the young women interviewed felt that the media played a significant role in perpetuating, and in some cases creating, damaging narratives around gender roles. While this language may not have been something they adopted until later, they reflected on their awareness from a young age of gendered beauty standards focused on appeasing the male gaze:

'There was always like this image, like this portrayal in the media of like, some kind of like 'femme fatale' and like, just boys falling over, and I knew that when you were like coming to the end of primary school, most things that girls start doing – like shaving, or wearing makeup, or whatever – I knew that the reason for that was like mainly male attention. So, I think being surrounded by that made me want to fit in' – YP18

They also discussed the objectification and sexualisation of women across both mainstream media and pornography, and how both arenas reinforce the narrative that a woman's role is to satisfy men's sexual 'needs', with neither typically acknowledging the existence of female pleasure:

'the way that women are shown in the media, I think, has an influence...women are sort of – I think – quite sexualised in the media, and then I think that makes it seem - I guess - to… a lot of men, it's kind of ingrained in their heads, like, "Oh, well, this is what a woman should be, and that's what I'm going to get out of a relationship, because that's what a woman stands for"' – YP1

'things like porn have a massive influence in what people think is normal, well, a lot of things in the media… will focus around, like, male pleasure, and not really focus on female satisfaction, and things like that, so I think that's really important in shaping how… both men and women think a normal relationship should look like – what is and what isn't ok' – YP2

> "When a woman declines a man's invitation to dinner on a film or in a series, we see him continuing to ask until she eventually says yes. This kind of media portrayal reinforces the gendered stereotype that a woman needs to be submissive to a man, and it also teaches young and adult men that this behaviour is acceptable, as no one is calling it out. These behaviours can be seen as early indicators of abuse, and portraying them as acceptable reinforces that it is only the traditionally violent/extreme behaviours that are abusive. When these 'lower level' harmful behaviours are not labelled as abusive, it perpetuates the idea that only "monsters" are abusive."

While the influence of the media was predominantly discussed as damaging and unhelpful, some young people gave examples of the potential for the media to positively influence views on topics such as sex and relationships:

> '*Like sex education – the TV series – that probably positively impacted how people view relationships*' – YP2

Overall the discussion of the media within interviews demonstrated an awareness of gendered double standards among the young people included within this study, particularly the young women and non-binary/gender-queer young person. Tolman et al. (2015) noted similar levels of awareness across some of the young people in their study and reflected on the existence of this awareness alongside the reproduction of gender hierarchy, stating that even as young people ''move away' from gendered practices, they remain tethered to them' (Tolman et al. 2015, p.22). Despite this, the researchers go on to argue that if we can build on the questioning attitudes of this generation, and begin to expand what it means to be male and female, we may open the door for them to move beyond damaging gender binaries and reshape relationships.

Conflicting gendered approaches to domestic abuse

Across interviews with practitioners, two conflicting perspectives in relation to gender and domestic abuse support were evident.

Trauma-informed perspective

On the one hand practitioner accounts demonstrated the existence of a trauma-informed perspective/approach, which recognised the varied and complex reasons people may use harmful behaviours:

> *'I think this happens with men as well, but I think that I more readily see with females that they've been bullied – and it could be in the home, but it could be outside the home – and so they've kind of their aggressive stance – because both of the two people I'm thinking of were the kind of people that they frighten other people!... they would both directly relate it to that was a defence mechanism against being bullied'* – Pr4

As part of this perspective, practitioners acknowledged the increased likelihood of women using harmful behaviours in violent resistance, a typology defined by Johnson (2008) as victims using harm as a means of self-protection in abusive relationships:

> *'if you use physical abuse, as a female, quite rightly it sort of gets highlighted as wrong, but quite often, it could be that there are some men that can be really abusive, and not use physical abuse, but be so abusive that the female using abuse can be a reaction to some of that...and that doesn't excuse it, but it is sort of reactive'* – Pr4

Some practitioner accounts seemed to reflect concerns with applying this approach in practice, and a desire to avoid stereotyping women as having reasons for abuse and men as not having reasons:

> *'my instinct was to be like that we need to understand victims who harm more, there's so much more to what's going on, but, it's such a fine line, because I would not say that to my survivor/client about the perpetrator; I would say 'We don't need to understand his/their abusive behaviour, we need to be, they don't have any excuses that they're abusing you'. I wouldn't just be like 'men have no excuse' [chuckles] and then 'Women do have excuses!' so, I think that's, that's on me'* – Pr3

> *'I think if we stereotype I think, you know, this whole idea that "Oh, yeah, females who are violent are victims of trauma, but men aren't" – well, it's not true, because men who are violent are victims of trauma too'* – Pr4

Gendered consequences

Despite evidence for a trauma-informed approach, which in some cases afforded women more recognition of reasons for abuse than men, examples from cases discussed in practitioner accounts demonstrate that the consequences for using abusive behaviour can be worse for women than for men:

'For the woman, I think, there is, a lot more danger in abusing than there is a man, because she often – in society – is held as responsible for the children. I've absolutely been in cases where he's pulled out evidence of her threatening to kill him, or threatening to hurt him, and then the Family Courts, and it is just completely taken out on her, in a way that it wouldn't be taken out on a man at all. So, she is at risk of losing contact with the children, in that sense, when a man often wouldn't get that response' – Pr3

In some cases, practitioners described the consequences for male perpetrators seeming to be non-existent, as was the case for this practitioner who was also a victim-survivor of abuse:

'I've had the Police involved, constantly, to no avail. I've got a non-molestation order that is broken whenever, and, and nothing, nothing happens. He's also a teacher, it's not touched his job, there's CCTV, there's this, there's that – there's all sorts – it doesn't matter.' – Pr14

While research has found that male perpetrators of abuse are perceived more harshly than female perpetrators for the same behaviours (Capezza et al. 2021), the United Nations (2015) suggests that female offenders are still likely to face harsher treatment and punishment within the criminal justice system for offences that 'conflict' with the performance of femininity, including assault.

While the examples provided by practitioners in the current study appear to be from adult domestic abuse cases, rather than young people's, they speak to abusive relationships being a gendered experience. From the narratives that shape motivations for relationships and behaviour in them, to the perspectives of abusive behaviour when they are used, to the consequences given for abusive behaviour, gender appears to be a significant defining factor for both adults and young people.

Intersectionality

In addition to many of the examples of gender shaping experiences of relationships and harm/harming, one of the young people's stories clearly demonstrates the ways in which gender intersects with other aspects of identity and forms of discrimination to shape experiences. While awareness of traditional gender roles was a shared thread across many of the young women's and non-binary/gender-queer young person's accounts, YP18 described how her experience of growing up in the Middle East provided a specific perspective on gender roles that she carried with her into her early romantic/dating relationships:

'I'd say the Middle East has like a really weird culture around relationships, and like how to treat women, and how to treat men. So, I think that kind of like warped my view, slightly, of what a relationship should look like...men in the Middle East are really 'entitled', I would say, to women...women are basically expected to be very pure, like, virgins, who are modest, but at the same time have, like, giant boobs and a giant butt, and like [giggles]…that's what I kind of thought most men wanted' – YP18

The WASSUP panel of young survivor-advocates also reflected on the ways in which cultural perspectives of gender may lead to the acceptance of abuse and to internalised misogyny:

'There are different levels of abusive behaviour that are accepted in culture groups cause of up bringing' – WASSUP panel member

'An individual could have internalised misogyny because of their cultures' outlook on masculinity' - WASSUP panel member

It is important to note that when discussing culture and the acceptance of misogyny and abuse, the assumption can be that we are talking about 'non-white' cultures. This may be due to white privilege meaning whiteness and the culture it produces are rarely acknowledged or considered (Smithsonian, 2014), but it is fundamental that when considering the way different cultures shape acceptance of misogyny and abuse, we include whiteness and white culture in this discussion. After all, patriarchy and the subjugation of women has been argued to be one of the core expressions of whiteness (Torres & Pace, 2005).

While previous sections of this theme have already explored the pressure girls and young women feel to subscribe to the male gaze and establish relationships with men in order to have worth and receive

validation, YP18's account describes the extra layer of discrimination and pressure felt around this by girls and young women of colour:

> *'I was one of the only people of colour, really, at my primary school, which made me feel like not as pretty as other girls, or not as desired – especially by boys who were like white. So, I think it kind of made me more obsessed with the idea, because I thought I could get validation through like someone having a crush on me, or someone thinking that I'm pretty'* – YP18

This experience reflects the internalisation of Eurocentric beauty standards centred around colourism, which Jackson-Lowman (2014, p.156-157) describe as 'one of the most debilitating aspects of the globalization of white supremacy…conflation of power and what is defined as beautiful'. Jackson-Lowman (2014, p.155) highlights how these Eurocentric standards impact every area of the lives of women of colour, and particularly Black women; their 'education, occupation, income, family relationships, male-female relationships, female-female relationships, mate selection processes, mental health, physical health, and self-esteem'. YP18's story demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach to understanding the dynamics in young people's relationships and how different forms of marginalisation and discrimination intersect to shape young people's experiences of harm and harming.

When it comes to forms of discrimination other than gender, and the way they shape experiences of harm and harming, members of the WASSUP panel also reflected on the impact of generational trauma on the normalisation of abuse during their discussions around those that harm:

> *'Generational trauma can create an internal monologue where abuse is normalised because you're subjected to it so often'* – WASSUP panel member

They also discussed the impact of culture and discrimination on help-seeking, and some of the additional barriers experienced by marginalised and racialised groups and individuals:

> *'Culture - bringing shame to the family, we don't talk to the police'* – WASSUP panel member

> *'In certain communities DA is still very much a taboo topic and language barriers may stop people from accessing support or even knowing that there is support available'* - WASSUP panel member

> *'If you're used to never being heard the likelihood you reach out is slim to none'* – WASSUP panel member

While later themes will address the implications of our findings for support, these reflections highlight the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to support for victims and young people who harm, which recognises the additional barriers faced by marginalised individuals and works to address and remove these barriers.

Summary

Overall, data discussed in this theme demonstrates the importance of gender in shaping young people's experiences of relationships, of harm/harming, and of consequences for abuse. When it comes to relationships being a gendered experience, this data evidences the continued existence of institutionalised heterosexuality and the way in which a gender hierarchy, built on acceptance and expectation of male violence and female responsibilisation, continues to shape young people's relationships. For the girls and young women interviewed, this gender hierarchy framed relationships with males as a necessity, and therefore led to the maintenance of unhealthy and abusive relationships by positioning singleness as a worse fate than victimisation. This theme has also discussed the way in which gender intersects with culture to shape attitudes to abuse, and with ethnicity/race to shape experiences of relationships and harm, demonstrating the need for an intersectional approach to understanding the dynamics of abuse, and to support for those experiencing and instigating harm.

It is important to acknowledge that, aside from practitioner data, data discussed within this theme comes from interviews with young women and a non-binary/gender-queer young person. Though none of the schedules (interview, focus group or survey questions) directly asked about gender, the majority of young women and the non-binary/gender-queer young person chose to discuss issues such as gender hierarchy in detail, while the topic did not feature at all in the survey responses of, or focus group discussions with, young men included in this study. This gendered pattern mirrors that seen in Tolman et al's (2015) research, already discussed, in which there was an absence of coercion and

overt dominance in boys' accounts about their own and other boys' relationships with girls, yet coercion was a dominant theme in the girls' accounts. They reflect on this pattern as:

> Consistent with feminist and critical race theories, which describe how those in positions of less power in a hierarchical system need to understand how those with more power act and think, while those in positions of greater power are not compelled to comprehend the outcomes of their own dominating behaviour (Tolman et al. 2015, p.22).

While no boys or young men took part in semi-structured interviews for this study, something which the next phase of this research aims to focus on, feminist and critical race theory suggest that even if they had participated in interviews, narratives of gender hierarchy and coercion are likely to have been absent, and therefore the data presented within this theme may have remained the same.

The following themes will explore data relating to support for young people who harm.

Improving Relationship Literacy

| Early intervention gaps | Education across the lifespan | Education across society | Addressing the support bottleneck |

Introduction to Support-focused themes

Past research has highlighted the importance of support for victims of domestic abuse (Bates & Douglas, 2020; Eckhardt et al., 2013; Howarth et al., 2009). More recently, attention has focused on those who harm. The recent domestic abuse act (UK Legislation, 2021) is an example of the perspective change from asking why the victim doesn't leave to focusing on why the perpetrator doesn't stop (Talk Listen Change, 2020). The previous themes have demonstrated the complex nature of abuse in young people's relationships. The following themes explore current support provision and gaps, as well as key elements for providing support to young people who harm.

Improving relationship literacy

This theme details the conversations that young people and practitioners had around the importance of early intervention and education in support. The role of education as well as early interventions were frequently referenced throughout the conversations with young people and practitioners as an important step in aiding future healthy relationships. Within this theme, there are four subthemes; early intervention gaps, education across the lifespan, education across society, and addressing the support bottleneck. Together these themes highlight why early intervention and increased education is important, where the gaps are currently perceived to be, suggestions for how to address these gaps, and some of the challenges in the domestic abuse sector which may be addressed by early intervention and increased education.

Early intervention gaps

While the need for prevention and early intervention is already established within the literature (McGregor, 2018; O'Brien, 2016a; Young et al., 2019), it was evident from the conversations that practitioners and young people felt that there is still a lack of early support for young people who are starting to use harmful behaviours:

> *'I just think there's not enough support out there; there's not enough open-ended support for the young people that are doing the harming'* – Pr14

Young people echoed this view as they reflected on the lack of guidance which they received or had access to:

> *'I would say that young people need more education on relationships in general, because the only guidance I had was like the internet, and my parents – which wasn't great.'* – YP18

And how the support which is available is expensive and feels like it is not tailored towards early intervention:

> *'the kind of formal support that I imagined there being is like relationship counselling or something, which, I guess, is like you know, quite serious – expensive – that kind of thing… so, I don't know if there's like other stuff available that is similar but not as like yeah, intense, or expensive.'* – YP12

When talking to practitioners and young people, conflicting perspectives on the responsibility for prevention and early intervention were evident. Many of the young people and the practitioners working outside of education saw the school system as the primary arena for prevention:

> *'I think getting into primary schools, and teaching it in like obviously, at age-level friendly way, but teaching how to have healthy relationships.'* – YP42

> *'trying to set up with the school, that there's something more available to them, because when you think you know obviously, they're at school between 9 and 3… so, there's a 6½ hour window there, where they can go and they can talk to somebody.'* – Pr10

This is in line with a scoping review which explored a number of interventions and concluded that long term school-based interventions led by teachers may provide the best results (Stanley et al., 2015). However, one of the practitioners working within the education setting reflected uncertainty around this responsibility sitting with schools, and a sense of confusion about where this responsibility should sit:

'See, it's really tricky, because I'm not sure that that is a school's responsibility … Yeah. Yeah. I'm not sure it is. But then, whose responsibility is it?...It's like we're missing a whole section of support for children in society, where they are taught how to be human beings' – Pr14

This practitioner went on to explain how schools are already expected to provide more education than they have time or capacity for, and therefore adding additional curriculum topics would be difficult:

'And even though we have RSE, and we have these things no, I've got I've got them doing 10 GCSE's – where, where are we supposed to find the time for that? – Pr14

This highlights how recommendations for healthy relationship education and interventions need to go beyond positioning schools/education settings as the solution, to offering practical solutions for how to make this work without overburdening teachers.

In addition to this, young people reflected their experience that support is often hidden or not easily accessible for those using harmful behaviours in their relationship

'when someone's sort of in like a an abusive relationship, a lot of the time, like the person who's being abused, I think, gets – well, hopefully gets – a lot of support, and can go to counselling and stuff, and I don't know how much access there is for people who are actually like the abuser' – YP1

'Didn't realise it was offered' – YP33

'Wouldn't know where to go for it' – YP36

It is clear that the young people within this study were not unwilling to access support around their use of harm, but rather they were either unaware such supported existed, or unsure how to access it. For those who are aware of support and want to access it, there are also additional challenges to face as a young person:

'it still needs that sort of adult – whether that's parent, or carer, or school – whoever it is – sort of backing the referral.' – Pr6

With a lack of access to appropriate support, young people are left to try and self-regulate their behaviours

'I wrote a lot of music [chuckles] but other than that, like I just kind of pulled myself out of it, in the summer, and just like again, just did a lot of thinking, and a lot of processing, allowed me to move past it' – YP42

'I have quite a few friends who are like… the only thing that they can figure out what to do is just not get into relationships' – YP17

Although the conversations with young people highlighted that they are finding ways to manage their own behaviours, this support should be available to them from specialist adults.

'we decided, like, whenever he thinks I'm reacting in a way that is too whatever [laughs] you know, he could just say 'egg', and then… I'll we'll not talk for like 10, 20 minutes, and then we'll come back and finish the conversation. And I found that really helpful, because right before I do it, my emotions feel so like 'big', but then after I wait a while, and I listen to some music or even him just saying 'egg', it's like funny in the situation, so it kind of really quickly just brings it down… and my feelings feel 'smaller', so my reaction also becomes smaller, or less intense – less toxic.' – YP18

If their initial support is well informed, not only can young people learn how to have healthier and more fulfilling relationships earlier on, but so they are also able to understand why they may be using abusive behaviours, helping with long-term management.

Education across the lifespan

This subtheme discusses how young people and practitioners advocated for a model of healthy relationships education across the lifespan. The current conversations with young people and practitioners suggested the need to move from a reactive approach to domestic abuse, which intervenes in adult relationships once abuse is already occurring, to a proactive and preventative approach that begins healthy relationship education from a young age. The data suggested that young people are currently navigating relationships without much context for what a healthy relationship looks like, which increases the likelihood of harmful behaviour being used:

> *'Intensely wanting them but not understanding how to healthily have a relationship long term.'* – YP36

> *'the younger people, maybe like early teens, they have no idea what they're doing…like 11 to 14/15, just like you're not thinking about whether things are healthy, you're just doing stuff…I feel like everyone has like chaos years, like 16 to 18, because it's hard for most people…I think they don't really understand, but like maybe this is where like people are suspecting that things are wrong'* – YP17

However, neither young people nor practitioners felt like this reflected young peoples' intentions, instead, it was suggested that often young people who display harmful behaviours in their relationships are unaware of how else to act:

> *'it isn't just about anger; people behave like that – people decide – I mean, but they, they behave they choose to do that ... Because they haven't got another they don't know what else to do"* – Pr4

> *'And then what I notice a lot of, from around my age, is like and it kind of makes me a little bit sad, like emotional, like – including myself – a lot of people want to be better, but they don't know how'* – YP17

This highlights the need to provide young people with a framework for what a healthy relationship looks like, and what behaviours are healthy and unhealthy, so that young people have this context before engaging in romantic/dating relationships. When talking about this, interviewees suggested that this education needs to start early on in life:

> *'by the time they get to about 14 or 15, they can be very ingrained in the way they are going to act and it becomes a lot harder to mould them as a teacher'* – Pr8

> *'So, I think it starts really, really young. I don't think, when it comes to 11 to 25-year-olds getting support, I don't think it can start there, because I think all of the issues start far before age 11. So, I think getting into primary schools, and teaching it in like obviously, at age-level friendly way, but teaching how to have healthy relationships.'* – YP42

This supports past research which has found that young people's first episode of dating violence typically occurs by 15 years (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Young et al., 2019) reiterating the importance of starting education around healthy and abusive relationships prior to this age.

While the need for education to start young was widely emphasised, both practitioners and young people also made clear that this education could not be a one-off, and had to continue so that individuals are frequently reminded of these messages and do not fall back into previous habits:

> *'Education and reducation. You can fall back into bad habits and behaviour'* – WASSUP panel member

> *'But at the same time, like, you can tell people a thousand times that something is unhealthy, but if they're getting that validation from there, that they need, they're going to keep going back to it.'* – YP42

These narratives expand on previous reviews of interventions for children and young people which highlighted two approaches to domestic abuse education within school; the ecological approach, where classroom learning is reinforced across the curriculum and across subjects, and the spiral approach, where learning is extended across time and throughout a child's educational journey. Within the latter approach, learning around abuse and healthy relationships is reinforced by different parts of the

curriculum at different times (Stanley et al., 2015). Data from this study highlights support from young people for models such as the ecological approach and spiral approach, which advocate for ongoing age-appropriate relationships education throughout childhood and adolescence.

Young people also reflected the need for healthy relationships education to be specific and practical, highlighting what abusive behaviours look like, as well as the impact of these behaviours, to improve understandings of what behaviours are not acceptable in a relationship:

'Education on why these behaviours exist and how they could have formed, as well as how they impact others' – WASSUP panel member

'I also think a lot of behaviours that are normalised have to be like explained, as to why they're not normal… because I didn't know that like calling someone names is like 'verbal abuse' – I didn't know that like you know ignoring someone for a long period of time, with no explanation, could like hurt them. And it sounds obvious, but like [laughs awkwardly] I had no clue!' – YP18

Interviews with practitioners working with adult perpetrators of abuse demonstrate that this education around abusive behaviours and their impact is already a core part of adult behaviour change programmes:

'through both programmes, there's a lot about just teaching about what abuse is, and looking at power and control, and you know how there's that sort of pattern of behaviours.' – Pr4

However, data from these interviews demonstrates that this education needs to take place before young people engage in relationships, in order to work towards preventing and ending domestic abuse. For the young people in this study, the lack of early education and intervention meant many of them were reliant on self-reflection and seeking out their own education, a process which usually followed their own use of harmful behaviours:

'I think I had a lot of time by myself, just to like think about everything I'd gone through; think about my whole high school experience – because I graduated, and that makes you think – moving to a different country makes you think about everything that happened at home, and I think just a lot of time processing everything…just kind of allowed me to see maybe that wasn't very healthy – maybe I shouldn't do that next time – and just being able to like look at it from a different perspective.' – YP42

'Reflected upon my behaviour after instances' – YP36

'I didn't realise till after the relationship ended and educating myself' – YP33

In some cases, this would include accessing support from sources that could be unreliable:

'So, most of the help that I've gotten has been online, like I'll watch videos about like what healthy relationships should look like, and kind of learning about what toxic behaviours even are…because I actually wasn't really aware that some of the things I was doing were not right. And yeah, most of the help I've gotten has been online, and me and my friend have kind of been doing that together; like, we call each other and just update each other on how we're doing, and some things that we did that we wish we didn't, or things we did that we're like proud about' – YP18

> "I feel it's important to recognise that even if other measures such as healthy relationships education improves, young people are still likely to access content around this online, because often it can feel embarrassing to admit the behaviours that you are using and therefore being able to view something and self-reflect on it in private (where you can put headphones in and no one can listen) is often appealing. As such digital engagement should not be shunned, but instead embraced and developed so that those who wish to access this content online have a place that they can go to that is accurate in the content that it is sharing."

Although this highlights young people's desire to avoid harmful relationships and ensure they are not causing harm to others, it also suggests that they do not know where to turn to access support around this. In withholding this information and a safe environment where young people can learn and ask questions, we are doing a disservice to our younger generations. A lack of support and education does

not stop young people from entering into relationships, instead it prevents them from experiencing healthy and fulfilling ones.

Education across society

In addition to the need for relationship education to take place across the individuals' lifespan, conversations also suggested that education needs to occur across society. Young people reflected that they are not the only ones in society who do not know how to have a healthy relationship:

'So many people that are just like terrible in relationships [laughs] and they just don't know what to do about it' – YP17

If young people are looking to others to model their relationships on, as they do with a wide range of behaviours (Ciranka & van den Bos, 2021; Dickie et al., 2018), it is important that they see models of healthy relationships reflected:

'I think I said before, about like modelling relationships, I mean you might give emphasis on that, like erm like modelling different types of relationships is so important, like maybe for queer people, as well, like being like LGBT… I think they can look differently, and there's so many like tropes and stuff like that, like… erm I think just emphasis on that, because like maybe it's a lot of people and like polyamory – it's not going to be for everyone, or people use it as an excuse, whatever, but like erm just showing, like maybe people's relationships aren't working out because they're trying to make it look a certain way, as well' – YP17

These quotes highlight the need to provide models for healthy relationships beyond heteronormative dynamics, so that all young people have a framework that is relevant to them. This can only be achieved if wider society is teaching and demonstrating these models.

Additionally, conversations also centred around a narrow view of what an abusive relationship looks like. Much of the conversations around abusive behaviours focused on acknowledgement of physical harm as abuse, but a lack of awareness of other forms of abuse

'I think maybe like being taught the importance of sort of like, we get taught about like assault and stuff in school, but being taught that it's still serious, even if they haven't actually like assaulted you – or you don't think it's assault.' – YP1

'But I feel like it should still be it should be spoken about, that actually there can be like abusive behaviours in a relationship that can still affect you – it doesn't just have to be like a physical assault.' – YP1

This view was evident in the focus group with predominantly boys and young men in a pupil referral unit. When asked what abusive behaviour looks like, the first answer given was *'violent'*. Young people reflected on how the lack of awareness around different types of abuse may be a barrier in people recognising their own behaviours:

"There needs to be a lot more education on gaslighting, narcissism, manipulation etc as the biggest problem is the victim and perpetrator not realising they're abusive/ being abused" – WASSUP panel member

As well as preventing young people from recognising their behaviour as problematic, a narrow view of what abusive behaviours look like can lead to victims feeling like their response is unjustified if the behaviours used against them do not fit this narrow view. This was seen in an interview with one of the young people whose experience of abuse was shared in the theme 'interconnectedness of relationships'. While she experienced many abusive behaviours including being pinned to the bed, she expressed uncertainty about whether her reaction was valid:

'even if they haven't actually like assaulted you – or you don't think it's assault… I was confused; I didn't really understand, like, what how I didn't know if it was a serious thing or not, or if I should be like as upset as I was about it.' – YP1

This was reflected in the conversations with practitioners as they felt that individuals are more aware of physical abuse as a form of abuse, over other types of abusive behaviours:

'I think it's very much today, it's very much it's unacceptable to hurt another person, so it wouldn't I think, usually with young people now, they'd be like 'No, no-no, I wouldn't hurt I'd never hit a woman' or 'I'd never hit another person', but there's other things that you can do to harm people, isn't there? It's not just physical abuse, it's other harming behaviour.' – Pr2

Furthermore, practitioners reflected on how societal education around forms of abuse may allow abusive behaviours to be recognised by non-professionals:

'everybody knows you shouldn't hit somebody – people do hit people – but I think it's about a broader, real education around what controlling behaviour is, would be really helpful, if it was just kind of part of our general understanding of what's not right, because then then you know people could even identify it in themselves. So, when they're doing it, it's like "Oh, yeah", and other people might recognise it too' – Pr4

In addition to widening the perception of abusive relationships, data from young people and practitioners suggests that society also needs to widen their view on what a perpetrator 'looks like'. A number of the young people interviewed reflected on difficulty recognising themselves as using harmful behaviours due to not fitting the perceived stereotype:

'when people talk about abusive behaviours in relationships, their mind usually goes to like some big, drunk man, beating his wife… and like I'd look at myself, and I'm like, "I'm not exactly that, but I know I've done something wrong"' – YP18

Practitioners also reflected on how this dissonance can hinder young peoples' awareness of their own abusive behaviours. A teacher in a boarding school described a male student being caught sharing nude images of female students and not recognising this as image-based sexual abuse, despite having received education on this topic:

'they've got this idea of a paedophile in a corner, that looks like a particular stereotype; they don't see their own behaviour as problematic. They see their behaviour as part of growing up' – Pr14

Young people and practitioners felt that a wider education around domestic abuse is needed across society, to help individuals to recognise their own behaviours, and to work towards dismantling unhelpful stereotypes of both perpetrators and victims.

Practitioners also reflected on how wider society, and in some cases even those that work within the domestic abuse sector, have a lack of depth in their knowledge around domestic abuse, which can lead to further harm:

'And even like the the Youth Justice people, who are in there, they wanted visits – Dad wanted to keep visiting – and they were like, "Well, Dad should be able to carry on visiting, because he's got PR" and it's like "No! And actually, if you look at the history, he shouldn't"… I just feel like yeah, our understanding of domestic abuse as a society is really simplistic… I feel like there needs to be – I don't know how you do it – but a broader education about what this is.' – Pr4

Outside of the domestic abuse sector, a number of practitioners discussed the need for further domestic abuse training and education for the Police. One practitioner reflected on their own experience of domestic abuse and the response of the police:

'when the non-molestation order was broken on New Year's Eve, and the Police came to take a statement, they said to me, 'What would you like us to do about this?' like well, seeing as I have a non-molestation order in place – and here's the order – here's what's been breached – why don't you suggest what you're, why am I always making the suggestions on what should happen, when it's not me that's doing anything wrong?' – Pr14

A lack of confidence in the police response to domestic abuse cases is reflected in past research (Millar et al., 2019), and highlights the need for increased education around this topic. If the population does not feel that the police is a safe place to go to access immediate support, our police force is unable to deliver the support intended. In addition to this, one practitioner also expressed their experience around police response to domestic abuse in a same-sex couple:

'I think there is a lot around that – just the way that they're perceived by police, and you know it might be that maybe police think 'Oh, it's two women having a scrap'… and it's only when a child is involved that maybe it's sort of seen more as domestic abuse – I don't know.' – Pr4

The Domestic Abuse Matters Change Programme, developed by SafeLives at the request of the Royal College of Policing, works towards addressing this issue by providing training for police forces on how to better respond to domestic abuse incidents. This training has been delivered to over 30,000 first responders so far, with 78% feeling the training would help them to respond to victims in a more informed way, and 94% reporting a greater understanding of the tactics used by perpetrators when coercively controlling their victims (SafeLives, 2022).

The prevalence of domestic abuse amongst same-sex couples is scantly researched, however research which has been conducted has suggested that rates of abuse are equal to or higher than abuse in heterosexual relationships, specifically rates of emotional and sexual abuse (Barter et al., 2009; Donovan et al., 2006). This highlights the need to have a wider knowledge of domestic abuse, so that this knowledge can be applied to different relationships and dynamics. This was reflected in the conversations with the focus group:

'It's the only way you're going to solve it though, isn't it, is to talk about it?... If you just be quiet about it, it's just going to carry on, and on, and on' – YP focus group 2

Only by talking openly and educating wider society about domestic abuse can we hope to progress our knowledge and help people to recognise their own abusive behaviours, to identify when they are being victimised, and to understand what support for those who harm should look like.

"As a victim/survivor education across society is something which I am very passionate about. Just like we say we need to not have domestic abuse as a taboo so that more victims will feel confident in coming forward and more people will have an understanding on how to help individuals, I think the same needs to be true for using harmful behaviours. Whilst we need to be careful that these conversations do not in turn result in normalise behaviour, it may be useful for young people to be able to voice in safe spaces, where there is a trained facilitator, maybe in RSE lessons or special workshops in schools, that young people can say the behaviours they are using and together peer support can be used where others may share methods they used to stop using those behaviours."

Addressing the support bottleneck

In discussing the need for prevention and early relationships education, practitioners highlighted the necessity of such an approach as part of the solution to some of the current issues within domestic abuse support, namely the high demand and the resulting bottleneck. Both practitioners and young people discussed how an approach focused on prevention through early, and ongoing, relationships education would address the lack of understanding of healthy relationships already explored within this theme, and equip children and young people with the tools they need *before* they enter into romantic/dating relationships:

'like the behaviours start when you're younger… it should be picked up when you're younger… because I feel like it might be easier to fix, in a way, when you're of a younger age, because you can be shown like a different way of behaving.' – YP1

'as a society, we need to accept that young people are getting into relationships very young… we need to be equipping them with the right 'armour', almost, to be wearing to go into these relationships' – Pr2

As a result, this approach would reduce the number of young people using/experience harm, and therefore reduce the demand for specialist domestic abuse support, which practitioners discussed as resulting in long waiting times that sometimes meant escalation in behaviour:

'And my experience in that role is when young people need, are being referred because they're displaying these harmful behaviours, they need support, like there and then… And there's no good them being on a waiting list for another 6 months, because by the time we do come to support them, either that behaviour's escalated; maybe they've started using weapons; maybe they've… you know… they're not going to school anymore; maybe they've been… now involved in some low-level

antisocial behaviour in the community and they're beyond… what my role has passed as early intervention' – Pr2

A reduced demand may also address the need for practitioners to stick to short-term support plans, which many described as unable to meet the needs of the young people or affect behaviour change:

'And my work that I was doing was 6 weeks of half-an-hour, and it barely even scratched the surface.' – Pr2

'if you think about it, domestic abuse like doesn't start in the relationship, necessarily, it starts with her upbringing and how her parents spoke to her, and her self-esteem – and that doesn't reverse in 6 weeks of case work.' – Pr3

Abuse in relationships is often complex. Understanding and unpicking the individual experiences and foundations of abuse requires more than the standard six weeks of support. Currently, domestic abuse support for both victims and those who harm is unable to take the time to deliver the support that is needed when it is needed. Practitioners are doing their best with the time and resources they have available to them, however, to allow specialists to deliver the appropriate support, more education around healthy and unhealthy relationships is needed earlier on, so that fewer people are requiring specialist domestic abuse interventions.

Summary

Data discussed within this theme highlights the perspectives of practitioners and young people on the existing gaps within education and support provision. Many of the young people who participated in this project expressed a desire to experience healthy and happy relationships, and discomfort when this wasn't the case. The data suggested that young people's lack of knowledge around what a healthy relationship looks like was often a barrier to them experiencing healthy relationships, both as a victim and as someone causing harm. Practitioners reflected on the challenges around providing support for young people, and why attention needs to be focused on increased education. Overall, both practitioners and young people felt like more education around domestic abuse and healthy relationships was needed to be aimed, both for young people and across society, as well as ensuring that specialist interventions are available for young people who need them.

The Four Pillars of Support

Approach	Environment	Response	Relationship

| Whole Family | Whole person | | | Expertise | Boundaries & Role | Consistency | Respect |

Four pillars of support

Data from practitioner's and young people's reflections on their experiences of providing and accessing support highlighted some shared perspectives on the elements needed to create a strong foundation for support for young people who harm. This theme will explore the four core elements that were frequently discussed as essential to effective support, as well as the views of practitioners and young people on how these elements should be shaped. These four elements, which we are referring to as the four pillars of support are: Approach, Environment, Response and Relationship.

Approach

Conversations with young people and practitioners reflected the importance of the approach taken to support for young people who harm, and the need for a holistic approach that is both 'whole person' and tailored to individual needs and context, as well as 'whole family'; recognising the influence of home and family relationships and also working with those around the young person alongside direct work with the young person themselves.

Whole family approach

The concept of a whole family approach is already advocated for when it comes to support for families affected by domestic abuse where a parent/carer is the perpetrator. This approach highlights the limitations with supporting one person and one concern at a time, and instead argues for a joined-up approach that recognises that *'family members and their vulnerabilities interconnect'* (SafeLives, 2019). Data from participants in the current study demonstrates a need for this whole family approach to be applied to support for young people who harm.

The theme 'Interconnectedness of relationships' has already reflected on the cycle of abuse seen in the stories of some of the young people interviewed, and many of the practitioner narratives also included discussion of this cycle, and of childhood trauma, in the lives of the young people they have supported:

> *'a lot of them have had what I consider to be very, very traumatic experiences – very traumatic upbringings.'* – Pr10

> *'think a lot of the families we work with have had abusive relationships in the household at some point… And I think an even bigger number than that, the parents have been abused themselves, when they were younger – whether that's you know a boyfriend, before they met, whoever's – do you know what I mean? – the family. It could have been as a child themselves.'* – Pr6

The 'Interconnectedness of Relationships' theme outlined practitioner's reflections on how trauma, both that directly experienced by the young person and generational trauma passed down through the family, can be a barrier to experiencing healthy relationships. Considering the known influence of trauma on behaviour (Barr, 2018), data from this study suggests that support for young people who harm must be trauma informed in order to affect change. This reflects the thoughts shared by Denise Johnson, a survivor who worked on the 'American Indians Against Abuse Project':

> I didn't know what trauma was when I was younger, much less historical or generational trauma. How are youth who can't give a name to the problems, or to the causes or the roots of these issues, going to move beyond them and learn to overcome and to heal?" (Roach & Manager, 2018, p.11).

Practitioners also reflected the importance of understanding the current family context in order to fully understand the motivations for the young persons' abusive behaviour:

> *'what potentially could be happening at home for that child to be coming in with you know ripped trainers on, not with the right clothes on, and putting them in isolation for those kind of things. And I was finding that, when I actually started the support, building that relationship up with young people, there's a substance misuse problem happening at home, and that child gets sent home on purpose, because they're scared of what they're going to get when they get home, if they don't go home early… or you know maybe they're caring for a family member, and they have some shame attached to that – there's always a lot more that's happening behind the scenes.'* – Pr2

In this vein, practitioners discussed the importance of working with the family to provide comprehensive support for the young person, which focuses on the context and motivation for their abuse, rather than focusing solely on the abusive behaviours:

'It's about trying to – I try to, anyway – to try and leave them in a position where they've got somebody they can go and talk to. It might be bringing a parent in, and try and improve that relationship, because very often that relationship's flawed' – Pr10

The importance of taking a whole family approach was not limited to understanding the young person's abusive behaviour. Practitioners also highlighted the need to work with parents/carers in order to for support to be effective and some of the barriers to this. In some cases, parent's/carer's denial of their child's harmful behaviours acted as a barrier to engagement:

'with parents, they do not want to engage with the fact that their children could be doing – or at the receiving end of – harmful behaviours, or actually creating those.' – Pr14

Refusal to acknowledge their child's behaviour as harmful/abusive may lead to the young person using these behaviours being unable or unwilling to acknowledge this themselves, and therefore may contribute to the maintenance of harmful behaviour.

In addition to denial, practitioners reflected on parent/carer lack of engagement as a common barrier to effective support:

'I went to a school the other day, and the amount of young people that were brought into this meeting – the multi-agency meeting – that had concerns and problems, parents had disengaged a long, long time ago' – Pr2

In cases when parents/carers were engaged and open to acknowledging their child's behaviour as harmful/abusive, practitioners described their work with parents/carers as direct support rather than solely engaging with them around the child's support:

'"Well, how has she got herself into this situation? Have I not done enough?" Like I have a lot of crying Mums; "Have I not done enough – have I not showed her how to behave – should I not…?" and it's… that's very difficult to deal with, sometimes, when you're basically having to coach through the parent, when really your focus wants to be on the child.' – Pr14

This kind of whole family approach, which doesn't just engage the parents/carers in their child's support, but in some cases works with them directly, reflects the approach advocated for in McGregor's (2018) research on support for victims, which works with both the victim and those around them to support their collective recovery. Data from the current research project suggests that this kind of whole family approach also needs to be applied to support with young people who are instigating harm, in order to ensure change is sustained once formal support has ended.

Whole person

In addition to a whole family approach, conversations with young people and practitioners also emphasised the importance of a tailored approach to support that works with the whole person, recognising the complexity of their experiences and needs and how this shapes harmful behaviour.

Several of the young people in this study discussed issues with their mental health, which they were navigating alongside their use of abusive behaviour, highlighting the need for an approach which does not look at the issue of abusive behaviour in isolation:

'Erm I think where I so, I'd like I think I started going to counselling when I was like 12, for anxiety and self-harm and stuff' – YP1

A number of the young people who felt they'd used harmful behaviour, also discussed struggling with eating disorders. One of these young people's accounts reflected how her eating disorder and harmful behaviour in relationships intersected around issues of anxiety and control:

'I was just feeling very anxious, and like "Does he still like me; does he still want to talk to me; am I doing enough? Am I enough?" I'd check things' – YP42

Her story highlights the importance of a whole person approach to support for young people who harm, which recognises the various needs that may overlap with the issue of harming and works holistically to address these needs.

The importance of understanding the young person's personal background was also reflected in the conversations with practitioners, who highlighted the need to understand the young person in order to tailor support to them:

'And I think if you understand… the child, and you understand the circumstances, you're much better informed' – Pr10

'so, it's not as simple as putting a young person through a domestic abuse course; it's actually trying to work out what's going on for them, and giving them sort of a space to be able to talk about that, in a sort of contained way.' – Pr4

Despite practitioners' awareness of this, there were multiple examples across the young people's accounts of generic support, which was not at all tailored to them as individuals, and ultimately resulted in a negative experience for the young people:

'I hated it. I just don't feel like they saw me, and they had like this book, and they'd be like; 'Ok, that's what you're experiencing – kind of sounds like this – I'll just give you this advice, and see… like hope for the best'' – YP17

'I did go to therapy briefly, but it was just… she was not very… good at her job. And it just kind of wasn't… it just felt very impersonal, so I just stopped going there. And I think it just kind of turned me off, almost bored – I just kind of gave up with that situation.' – YP42

In addition to being tailored to their specific needs, young people also highlighted the importance of support being tailored to their age. As adolescents and young adults, they reflected on the majority of support either being tailored to adults, as is true for most perpetrator programmes, or for children. One of the young people described experiencing infantalisation in support, and how this discouraged her from talking about her experiences of harm and harming:

'I just kind of went to a couple of sessions at university…and it was quite patronising, like, they got an animal box out, and asked me to pick out which ones were each family member, and stuff like that, but I was like 19, and I felt like…treating me as if I was about 7… I didn't really know how you went from picking out of animal boxes to talking about something like your Mum' – YP2

In light of the invisibility and inaccessibility of support for young people who harm (discussed in 'improving relationship literacy'), it is particularly important that when young people do manage to access support, the support they receive feels relevant and helpful to them. The long-term consequences of negative experiences of support could be detrimental. Past research highlighted that young people reported previous negative experiences of help-seeking as a barrier to accessing future mental health support (Gulliver et al., 2012; Wilson & Deane, 2001). With this in mind, early negative experiences of support around harmful behaviours could deter young people from accessing support in the future, something which could not only impact on their own life, but their future relationships and families too.

While there were examples of generic and unhelpful support, both young people and practitioners did reflect on times when support was well tailored, and the benefits that young people experienced because of this:

'Therapy has helped me understand why I am like this and how I can deal with it' – YP32

'[support] wasn't working – there was nothing changing in that relationship – and it wasn't until I went away, and I started looking at the support for both of them, and I started to do some group work with them together to help them understand the dynamics of the relationship, but also talk about the background and what it is that they've grown up with… by helping them to understand each other's

history and why they were feeling the way that they were feeling, and that helped to ultimately help grow that relationship.' – Pr2

Overall, the narratives highlighted the importance of understanding the whole of the young person when providing them with support and ensuring that support is tailored to their experiences and needs, and recognises how this shapes their abusive behaviour. Although this research has been conducted with young people, it is important to reflect on the fact that those who are perpetrating abuse as adults, are likely to have once been these young people, and this holistic approach may be relevant for adult perpetrators as well.

Environment

In addition to the importance of the approach to delivering support, young people and practitioners discussed the significance of the environment in which support is delivered. The data highlights the need to create an environment where young people feel safe and secure enough to explore their own feelings and emotions without judgement:

'having a safe place where they can come to and talk' – WASSUP panel member

'I think having like people in schools, that you can know that you can talk to, and just say anything – as long as it's not, like, actively hurting people, like putting their lives in danger. I think it should just be a more open conversation' – YP18

Practitioners reflected on how they have facilitated this safe environment in the past and emphasised the importance of showing a level of understanding around the young person's behaviour, as well as creating a space that was free of judgement:

'it's about not disliking them as a person, and actually making sure that they feel kind of accepted, and comfortable, and that it isn't a space where you're just going to get judged, and "We don't hate you because you're abusive' – Pr4

'I really understand why you've done what you've done, and I'm not blaming you or judging you whatsoever for what you have done; but let's work together to try and see what other options there are for you.' – Pr3

This kind of approach to creating a safe environment mirrors the concept of unconditional positive regard found in humanistic therapies such as the client-centered approach and motivational interviewing (Mearns & Thorne, 1988; Rogers, 1957), which highlights the importance of respect and acceptance (Assor & Tal, 2012; Wilkins, 2000).

In addition to acceptance of the young person, practitioners in this study also highlighted the importance of recognising their potential for change:

'us accepting that people can change, if they want to. So, I think that goes a long way towards engaging perpetrators' – Pr5

Previous research has already evidenced the efficacy of approaches based on a belief that change is possible, such as motivational interviewing, when working with perpetrators of abuse (Musser & Murphy, 2009). Data from this study suggests that the same kind of approach is also needed when working with young people using harmful behaviour.

One practitioner reflected on the additional challenges in creating a safe space for those whose relationship dynamics are not heteronormative, in a sector that is largely modelled on heteronormative relationships, and suggested some simple changes which could make this environment feel safer for a wider variety of young people using harmful behaviours:

'I think there is a kind of view that these services are for abusive men…and so, like, it would be almost like scary, I mean, certainly, they can't access groups – like for us, we run groups, which are for men – so, they access one-to-one work, but you know maybe if they knew there was a group, that might be better – that would be an option.' – Pr4

'even the assessment forms – a lot of the paperwork – is still kind of 'he/she'… and I think, even in the manuals, it's kind of, it's very much like, yeah, there's, and I know it's an abuse of 'he/she', but I just you know maybe if there was some more inclusive language?' – Pr4

The narratives suggested that creating a space where young people can feel safe to have open conversations and learn without judgement is key when supporting young people who harm. Although it is important for practitioners to facilitate this environment, it is also important to recognise the challenges that they may face when trying to create a safe environment for all young people.

Response

As was discussed within the literature review, there are conflicting perspectives within the existing literature on the appropriate response to young people's use of harmful behaviour, with some researchers arguing for a punitive approach focused on accountability and punishment (Young et al., 2019), and others advocating for a more supportive approach to accountability and behaviour reform (Gadd et al., 2014). These two perspectives were also evident within the data for the current study, with both of the teachers sharing examples of adopting a punitive response to students who were using harmful behaviour:

'We have to make it real for them, we have to make it there's real impact as to what they are doing they have to realise that what they are doing is wrong and there have to be consequences that they see as real that mean something to them if they display those behaviours.' – Pr8

While at least one of the teachers appeared to advocate for a punitive response, the examples they discussed suggested this response led to a lack of engagement. When asked how the young people responded to confrontational conversations around their behaviour, the teacher responded:

'They don't. They absolutely don't. Completely closed down.' – Pr14

She also recounted an incident where she confronted a young boy about behaviour she perceived to be harmful, and he *'immediately began to throw up'*.

While a punitive response appeared to illicit fear, which led to disengagement, for some young people, it also appeared ineffective for young people who did not have this fear response:

'they're not bothered about the consequence. I mean, what's the consequence going to be? They're going to get excluded from school – "Well, happy days! Exclude me!"' – Pr10

These examples provide support for Gadd et al's (2014) finding that a punitive response centred on punishment and consequence does not alter attitudes or affect behaviour change.

In another example, one of the practitioners described how a solely punitive approach led to the escalation of a young person's harmful behaviour:

'there was a boy that I met in custody… he was a bit problematic at school, but he was managing…and the Head Teacher excluded him. Not only that, he did Jiu-Jitsu – this martial art – his Jiu Jitsu teacher excluded him. He ended up online, because he was so isolated – he lived in Hampshire, in some sort of leafy part of Hampshire – he ended up linking up with a kid in London, and committing a crime, and came into custody. And his parents were so kind of horrified that all of this happened, and both him and the parents said, "That was the fact that that happened in school, it created this kind of escalation"' – Pr4

In contrast, most of the practitioners advocated for a more supportive approach:

'Because often, that's what they need – they need help, they don't need punishing' – Pr10

'I ultimately feel like it's not a young person's, we can't blame a young person for displaying harmful behaviours; we have to support them to help them either not to behave like that, or how to create and evolve the healthy relationships in the first place' – Pr2

Practitioners were clear in their discussion that a supportive response did not mean the complete absence of accountability or consequence:

'they have to take responsibility for their behaviours' – Pr6

Instead, a supportive response was framed as an opportunity to educate young people around abuse and healthy relationships, and offer the necessary support and guidance to facilitate long-term behaviour change:

'and think about you know educate about different ways that they could have dealt with that situation you know kind of unpicking it; "Ok, what triggered that? What were your thoughts and feelings at the time?" you know "Why do you think you did what you did? What could he have done differently?" and kind of helping people as they go along in life, to kind of unpick what they're doing…and not in a kind of because I think what quite often happens is it's quite punitive, and you know I suppose a sort of typical thing that happens is that a kid might be excluded for punching another child, but it's like "Actually, let's use this as an opportunity to teach"' – Pr4

While accountability and consequence remain an important part of the response to young people's use of harm, data discussed within this subtheme highlights the limitations of a solely punitive response and the increased potential of a supportive response for facilitating long-term behaviour change. Finding the balance for this within schools, who are managing behaviour in a fast-paced environment and are responsible for safeguarding the rest of their pupils, appears to be a challenging but important part of improving responses to young people's use of harm.

Relationship

Conversations with young people and practitioners highlighted the significant role of those providing support and the importance of the working relationship between support-providers and young people who harm. The data demonstrates how building a positive working relationship was seen as fundamental to being able to provide support, and therefore as the first step:

'you've got to build a relationship, I think, with the young person first, for them to be able to even open their mind to going into those areas where they may have traumatic experiences or some kind of adverse challenges' – Pr2

This reflects literature exploring adult patients relationships with their therapist, which has highlighted how positive feelings towards one's therapists are associated with positive and consistent outcomes from therapy (Fitzpatrick et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2000).

While this theme has already highlighted the importance of tailoring support to individual differences, the following features were shared across accounts as core to a positive working relationship and therefore successful support: expertise, boundaries and role, consistency, and respect.

Expertise

In order to offer effective support to young people who harm, data from practitioners and young people makes clear support-providers need to have expertise and experience:

'So, I think you have to there isn't a set early warning time for any child that's harming; I think you have to look at the bigger picture, and it takes time, and it takes people that know what they're looking for' – Pr2

'the people delivering it, you know, you have to have people delivering it who are aware that you need to adapt the material to suit the person… I don't think you can get someone who hasn't got much experience and teach them a manual, and then get them to go and deliver it' – Pr4

When asked who should deliver support for young people who harm, the young people in this study suggested a range of practitioners and settings, including:

'Trained therapist' – WASSUP panel member
'School' – YP38
'Helpline' – YP37

While there was not a consensus around who should deliver support, the young people placed more emphasis on support being provided by *'someone with experience' (WASSUP Panel member),* whether this was a practitioner or someone offering informal support. A number of the young people reflected on their own experiences of receiving support from those without expertise or awareness of domestic abuse, and how this can render support ineffective, and in some cases, damaging:

'I feel like it helps a little bit, in some ways, they focus more on me though… my relationship theories were kind of cast aside, and seen as like, like, "Oh, you're young – everyone has relationship problems" and I'm like "I don't want to hurt anyone, though!"' – YP17

'I had spoken to two therapists too, however they both said I was being gaslighted, so I have left the situation incredibly confused and without closure' – YP37

Specialist domestic abuse practitioners discussed the complexities of abuse, and the lack of expertise that can exist outside of the DA sector:

'I also think that in terms of like harm, women, the victims I work with being harmful in relationships, that it's so nuanced, and there's so many dynamics to that, and like there's also just millions of studies about that, and it is like a well-researched topic, and it's none of that has ever been discussed outside of the domestic abuse sector; like Housing, I don't think understand that – Police definitely don't – I don't think even Mental Health Practitioners normally really kind of understand the dynamics of kind of situational couple violence, or retaliation – that sort of thing.' – Pr3

Like the young peoples' reflection, practitioners also highlighted how this lack of understanding could have negative repercussions for young people who harm:

'And I think you know I'm sure schools do try that, as well, but it needs to be and I think it's for the kids at the sharp end – so the kids who are using physical violence, or intimidation – that we need to be give the most attention to, and it's like they're the ones who just get excluded... and it hasn't helped anyone, you know.' – Pr4

This data demonstrates that experience and expertise is more important to young people than the kind of person or practitioner delivering support, but also suggests that this expertise is most likely to be found within the domestic abuse sector.

Boundaries and role

Practitioners delivering support with young people who harm reflected on the complexities of their role and the boundaries around it, suggesting that the practitioner-client dynamic is more flexible with young people than with adults:

'You have to take more of a kind of I guess like more of a teacher, or kind of almost like parent type of approach with them. And I guess I know with some of the young people I work with, I have to be more kind of nurturing, with them' – Pr4

While the boundaries around their role were seen as different for different young people, practitioners emphasised the need to establish and clearly communicate what these boundaries were when first starting work with a young person, and the damage caused when this wasn't the case:

'I think having those – not rigid – but having kind of clear boundaries in place, so they know straight away, "Right, this is my role" and you know what I've seen with some agencies is there's that kind of blurring of the boundaries, where they blur between 'work professional' and 'friend'…and then when, invariably, the professional has got to do something that the Service User doesn't like…the young person will often see that as a betrayal…and that can damage the relationship irrevocably.' – Pr9

Consistency

A number of practitioners reflected on the difficulties in building a relationship with young people who harm, whose previous experiences are likely to have led to trust issues:

'I think they struggle with that because you try and get a relationship – professional relationship – going with them, and they just don't quite get it, sometimes. And yeah, you can see the confusion on

their face, occasionally, when you, you say you're trying to be friendly with them, and they there's nothing really there – they can't really form that relationship, and it does take a long, long time to form them, to where so they actually believe that you're not going to hurt them as well.' – Pr11

Other practitioners highlighted how some young people will already have had contact with a myriad of professionals, and may still have multiple other professionals involved:

'She'd been involved with CAMHS, she had an individual therapist, and then she had a family therapist. She'd had a family support worker, she had a drug intervention worker, she had a homeless – not homeless – running away from home worker – can't remember the exact name… And then she had the pastoral staff at school' – Pr6

In order to overcome these obstacles and build a relationship with these young people, practitioners highlighted the need for consistency:

'just continuously make contact, continuously show that we're not going anywhere; the support is remaining. And that way, then, we've got engagement from young people who, historically, have never engaged with anybody. That's probably the key thing that I've found, in terms of gaining engagement from this client group, is just yeah, showing consistency.' – Pr9

Where reducing the number of professionals involved is not possible, practitioners in this study advocate for multi-agency communication which promotes information sharing and enables a consistent approach between professionals:

'it's got to be everybody involved, you know, school pastoral team… it's family support workers, it's counsellors… if they go to a boxing club, it's a guy down at the boxing gym… I think, we need to be much, much, much more joined up in trying to work and help these young people' – Pr10.

'the Child in Need meetings online, and I'm going to – I can't remember the names of all the meetings – but, you know, with Social Services I would be there, as the counsellor; there'd be somebody there from the school; there'd be the foster parents, the social worker, the child support worker, and that I found really healthy, and really helpful… because you get everybody together.' – Pr10

Respect

The importance of respect was emphasised across practitioner accounts with discussions highlighting the need for the young person to respect the person providing support, as well as the need for the person providing support to show the young person respect, and in doing so, model healthy relationship dynamics.

Practitioners reflected on the need for the young person to respect them, in order for them to listen and engage in support:

'it's that respect, as well, because a lot of, for example, that young person, he genuinely didn't respect, I don't think, anyone, and so, he's never going to listen to anyone.' – Pr6

'nobody is going to want to emulate the behaviour of somebody they've got no time or respect for.' – Pr9

To gain this respect, practitioners discussed trying to lessen the power imbalance by avoiding positioning themselves as an expert or authority figure:

'It's incredibly important…that you're not meeting them at a place where I'm some sort of expert, or I'm you know, some sort of figure in authority, or a teacher, or whatever' – Pr10

Where relationships of respect with professionals already existed, practitioners suggested these people might be best placed to offer support:

'if they've already got that respect, whether it's for a teacher, mentor – I don't know – then I think that would help, definitely.' – Pr6

This expands past research around mental health support which has highlighted that a previous relationship with a practitioner is a key facilitator in accessing mental health support (Gulliver et al., 2012), reiterating the importance of education across wider society, so that more individuals are well placed to offer support to young people.

Practitioners emphasised the need for respect to go both ways, with practitioners also showing respect to the young people they are working with. Some practitioners provided examples of doing this through the way they interacted with the young people:

'especially young people involved with CAMHS, they do quite a lot of… sort of perhaps techniques, and it's sort of saying, 'Well, you already know this', so… and not deeming them as sort of… stupid' – Pr6

One practitioner, who worked on adult and youth behaviour change programmes, gave an example of showing programme participants respect through providing a positive physical environment:

'And interestingly, we used to do our work in really small room… we would, kind of pack a lot of men into this room [chuckles] …during Covid, actually, because of social distancing regulations, we moved to a much bigger space, and it's a really nice room, and it's made a difference, because I think, the men kind of feel…you do feel that it would be natural to be humiliated, to go on a course like that, and for it to be in a nice place, you know, really makes a difference.' – Pr4

While this example was with adult perpetrators, the practitioner went on to reflect how showing respect is just as important when supporting young people who harm:

'I mean, you have to be held to account for what you've done, but a bit like when I was talking to you about the men in the room, and feeling respected, I think you have to do that with young people' – Pr4

As is shown in the above quote, showing respect was not about avoiding challenge or accountability, but treating those who harm with consideration. An approach that practitioner accounts suggested was more successful in facilitating engagement and behaviour change than a solely punitive approach.

Summary

The data in this theme highlights four elements of support that practitioners and young people felt were fundamental to successful support with young people who harm.
The conversations highlighted the importance of the approach practitioners took to support, and how this needed to be holistic, working with the 'whole person' as well as the whole family. The data also highlighted that support must occur in safe environment for the young person, in order for them to open up and engage. The importance of the practitioner's response to the young person's behaviour was also discussed, with conversations highlighting the possible damage which could be caused by a solely punitive approach, and instead calling for a supportive approach which facilitates accountability rather than forcing it. Finally, the relationship between the young person and the practitioner was emphasised as an important foundation for support, especially for those with complex or limited support networks. It is clear from previous themes that young people who harm face numerous barriers to support, in some cases despite a desire to engage and address their behaviour. Therefore, when they do access support we need to ensure that their first experience of support is right for them, both for the benefit of the young person and their future relationships.

> "The findings from the interviews reflect my own views on how support should be delivered and that it should centre around the young person. While this study is focused on support for those who harm, I believe the four pillars described in this theme are also vital in support for young victims and this model for support should be implemented with both young people using and experiencing harm."

Conclusions and reflections

Limitations

Before beginning to outline the key findings from this research, it is important to highlight whose stories were told as part of this work, and whose stories were not, in order to be clear about which young people these conclusions are most relevant to.

As stated at the beginning of this report, this research came from the Men and Boys voices project undertaken by SafeLives (SafeLives, 2019) and originally intended to focus on gathering the voices of boys and young men who harm. Of the 40 young people recruited for the current study through social media campaigns asking if they were worried they had ever used toxic behaviour, only four were male. Of these four, one withdrew from the study before being interviewed, two disengaged, and the one who participated chose to complete a survey rather than being interviewed. Previous literature already highlighted within this report provides some possible explanations for this lack of male response. Firstly, Young et al's (2019) research suggests it may be due to the internalisation of narratives around male violence and female oppression, which leads to boys underreporting their use of harm due to a recognition of male violence as socially undesirable. Secondly, there is the argument that behaviour is appraised differently across genders, with boys defining abuse based on intent and girls defining abuse based on impact (Barter, 2009; Francis and Pearson, 2019; Gadd et al. 2014). This argument would suggest that fewer males saw the social media advert as relevant to them, due to fewer appraising their behaviour as 'toxic', compared to the females who saw the advert. Finally, feminist and critical race theories would suggest fewer males saw the advert as relevant, due to their position of power and privilege meaning they are not obliged to acknowledge or understand their own dominating behaviour (Tolman et al. 2015). Whether for one or a combination of these reasons, this research was only able to include the voice of one young male who felt he had used harmful behaviours in relationships. While boys' voices were gathered through the focus groups in a pupil referral unit, and indirectly through narratives from practitioners who had supported boys and young men who harm, their insights were most relevant to considerations around support. As a result, the learning from this research around the first two research aims has predominantly come from the stories of girls and young women worried about their behaviour, as well as one young male, one young non-binary/genderqueer person, and practitioner's stories about young people they have supported. As is discussed in the theme 'Interconnectedness of Relationships', five of the six young people who took part in interviews described a cycle from victim to instigator of harm, and disclosed experiences of victimisation in their earliest romantic/dating relationships. The learning from this research around young people's use of harm therefore draws heavily on stories of young female victims who went on to use harmful behaviour themselves.

Key findings

Research aim one – exploring why and how young people begin to use abusive behaviour in their relationships

The analysis presented in the findings and discussions section of this report provides insight around both why young people begin to use abusive behaviour in their relationships, and also how and why these relationships and this behaviour is maintained.

For the young people in this study, their use of abusive behaviour appeared to be in part due to a lack of modelling of healthy relationships, and the normalisation of abuse in the relationships they were observing. Adolescence is a time when most people first 'try out' romantic/dating relationships, and these are likely to be modelled on the behaviours they have seen used in relationships around them, meaning young people who observe unhealthy behaviour may be more likely to use this in their early romantic/dating relationships. This normalisation of abuse was also compounded by gaps in the young people's education around healthy relationships and abuse, and a lack of relationship literacy. For a number of the young women and the non-binary/genderqueer young person, their use of harmful behaviour appeared to be an impact of experiencing abuse in their earliest romantic/dating relationships, with their harmful behaviours either mirroring those used against them or being developed as a self-protection mechanism to try and prevent further experiences of abuse.

Once young people began to use harmful behaviours, a range of factors led to the maintenance of these behaviours and of the relationships they were being used in. Contrary to likely expectations,

conversations with the young people in this study show that they *are* opening up about their behaviour and their concerns around it, however they also highlighted how the response to these disclosures often led to the maintenance of their behaviour. There were multiple examples across young people's accounts of disclosing their behaviour to friends, and even asking for guidance as to whether it was acceptable, only for friends to share their own use of similar behaviours and normalise using harm. Young people also described seeking out and accessing formal support around their harmful behaviour, alongside other issues, and gave examples of practitioners minimising their concerns or providing support that was not relevant or helpful. For some of the young people, these negative experiences of help-seeking acted as a barrier to seeking further support.

In addition to exploring how and why abusive *behaviours* are maintained, data from this study adds to understandings around the maintenance of unhealthy and abusive *relationships*. The pressure felt by the young people to enter into and maintain romantic/dating relationships was clear and tied to the need to fulfil their 'role' within a gender hierarchy, still very much at the heart of their relationships. This pressure was particularly strong for young women and girls, whose very personhood depended on being in relationship with a male, and even stronger for young women of colour. As a result, the young women in this study described remaining in relationships they knew to be unhealthy or abusive, due to the impact of these relationships being perceived as preferable to the consequences of singleness. These stories highlight how institutionalised heterosexuality centred around gender hierarchy, intersects with tactics used by those that harm, resulting in the maintenance of unhealthy and abusive relationships.

Research aim two – understanding what it means to be on the verge of harming

Data from this study supports much previous research highlighting experiences of abuse and unhealthy family and peer relationships as a risk factor for using harm. However, it also provides examples of young people's experiences of abuse increasing their awareness of abusive behaviour and it's impacts, and therefore seeking to behave in healthy ways through self-reflection, education, and self-regulation.

Young people in this study frequently reflected on a lack of modelling of healthy relationships as an important factor in their own use of harm, which may provide an explanation for higher rates of instigation and victimisation reported in research on domestic abuse in LGBTQ+ relationships (Barter et al., 2009; Donovan et al., 2006). While there were some examples in the data of education and modelling of healthy relationships, these were always focused on heteronormative relationship dynamics, and both the young people and practitioners reflected on the need for modelling of more diverse relationships in order that *all* young people have a framework for how to have healthy relationships.

As has already been discussed earlier in this section, interviews with young women and the non-binary/genderqueer young person described their trajectory from victim to instigator of harm and suggest that when we are thinking about those on the verge of harming, we need to ensure we are not excluding young victims. Previous research has outlined the many long-term impacts of victimisation, and data from this study highlights the need to recognise the use of harm in subsequent relationships as a potential long-term impact if appropriate support is not offered and accessible. While this does not mean replacing trauma-recovery support with behaviour change work, it does mean addressing any harmful behaviours or beliefs that young victims may use/hold as part of a whole person approach to victim support.

Research aim three – exploring what support for young people who harm should look like

Conversations with both young people and practitioners emphasised some core elements of support for young people who harm, but also reflected on the need to focus attention on prevention, in order to reduce the need for such support. They advocated for a prevention model in which healthy relationships education begins early, prior to the on-set of romantic/dating relationships and is reinforced across the lifespan. It was clear from the data, however, that practitioners feel uncertainty about who holds the responsibility for preventative education. While most practitioners described this as sitting within the school setting, those in education did not agree but felt unable to offer alternative suggestions. Notably, there was little discussion of parental responsibility around healthy relationships education within the interviews.

In addition to advocating for healthy relationships education across the lifespan, practitioners and young people also advocated for the education of wider society. This approach would both improve responses

to domestic abuse, but may also encourage those outside of the domestic abuse sector to see preventative education as their responsibility, and to have confidence in fulfilling this role.

For young people who are using harmful behaviour in their relationships, data from practitioners and young people highlights the following four elements of support as the most important: Approach, Environment, Response, and Relationship.

Across the data, participants advocated for a holistic approach to support for young people who harm, which is both whole person and whole family; tailored to their individual needs as well as working with those in their immediate network and responding to their upbringing and current context. They also emphasised the need for those working with young people who harm to create a safe environment in which they can disclose harmful behaviour as well as possible trauma, and work through difficult emotions. When it comes to the most appropriate and effective response to young people using harm, data from this study adds to existing research and highlights the limitations of a punitive response solely focused on accountability and consequence. Instead, it demonstrates the need for a supportive response that encourages accountability but also provides guidance and support in order to affect long-term change. Finally, participants in this study emphasised the importance of the working relationship between practitioners and young people who harm, and the need for practitioners with expertise who take a consistent approach and are clear about the boundaries around their role, as well as both being respected and showing respect. Without a strong working relationship, practitioners and young people were clear that support was likely to be ineffective and unable to address harmful behaviour.

Recommendations for future research

This report has already discussed some of the limitations of the current research, namely the lack of diversity of the young people taking part in interviews/surveys and the practitioners, and the resulting focus on the stories of young (predominantly white) women. While steps were taken to include a range of voices, the focus of this research was on young people who harm, and further research is therefore needed which speaks to a more diverse range of young people who have used harmful behaviour. Our aim is for a future phase of this research to begin to do this by speaking with a small number of boys and young men who harm, using the learning from the current project to adapt the approach to recruitment. Phase four of the Men and Boys work currently underway at SafeLives is also looking to address this head on by forming alliances with cross-sector organisations as part of a coalition which can operate credibly in spaces populated primarily by boys and men. Through this work SafeLives aims to stimulate a broader discussion about gendered violence, bringing men and boys into the spotlight and exploring their responsibility in ending domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Beyond this work, further research is needed which focuses on harming behaviour in adolescent LGBTQ+ relationships, and harming behaviour used by racialised young people.

The current research has outlined the importance of improving relationship literacy through preventative education. An ongoing RSE review being conducted as part of the SafeYoungLives program of work will expand on this finding and explore what preventative education should look like, as well as the current gaps.

In addition to seeking to build on the current project and speak with boys and young men who harm, it is also the aim for the next steps of the Verge of Harm[ing] research to include further exploration of the four pillars of support with a range of stakeholders, in order to better understand what these concepts should look like in practice.

The immediate next phase of this work will involve the creation of a discovery report bringing together the findings from the current research and the findings from the mixed-methods survey completed by 749 young people aged 11-25.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this report have demonstrated the juxtaposition of a generation who is both more aware of issues of inequality and abuse than the generations before them, whilst also remaining influenced by the same gender roles and hierarchy that have long governed romantic/dating relationships. While it is clear that there is a long way to go in addressing the norms that create and maintain harmful behaviour in relationships, it is also clear that there is hope and an opportunity to respond to this increased awareness with effective guidance and support. In order to achieve this, preventative education needs to be on the agenda of all those working with children and young people,

and work needs to be done to emphasise this as everyone's responsibility. For those young people who do go on to harm, this research suggests there are some core elements that need to underpin support in order for it to be effective and to create long-term change, an outcome that must be our focus if we are to end domestic abuse for everyone, for good.

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Appendices

Recruitment email for SafeLives' network

Thank you from SafeLives to everyone who shared our 'Have Your Say' survey as part of the Verge of Harm[ing] project. Thanks to your support, the voices and views of 749 young people were captured by the survey. These responses are currently being analysed to provide insight into young people's harming behaviours in relationships, and what support for young people who harm should look like.

Since we last spoke, we have received some extra funding from the Home Office to expand this project and speak to people from the following three groups:

Young people who harm
- This includes those aged 11-25 accessing support for using harmful behaviours in relationships, as well as those in this age range who are worried that they might have used harmful behaviours
- These will be non-judgemental conversations exploring the behaviours used, as well any support offered
- These conversations can be conducted by a member of our research team, or by a professional with a pre-existing relationship with the young person, who will be supported by our team

Practitioners working with young people who harm
- This might be within a domestic abuse service, a service working with young people, or other professionals who work with the above group (including mental health professionals, teachers, social workers etc.)
- These conversations will focus on practitioner's experiences of delivering support with this group, and what they feel works and doesn't work

Adult perpetrators
- Over 25s who are currently accessing support for using abusive behaviours, or who have completed their support but are still in contact with the service
- These will be non-judgmental conversations focusing on their younger relationships and exploring if and how the use of harmful behaviour changes across someone's life, as well as where the opportunities for prevention and intervention might sit

All participants will receive a £15 Love2shop voucher for taking part in the research (with the exception of practitioners who are taking part in the research within their paid working hours).
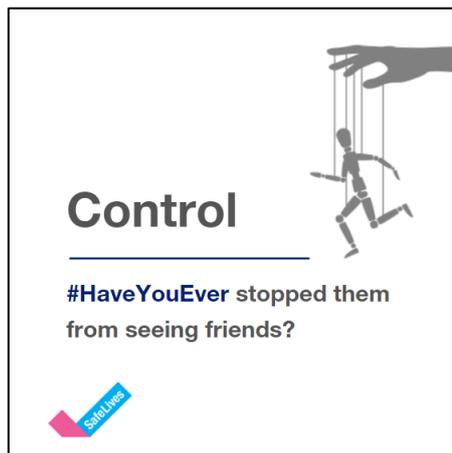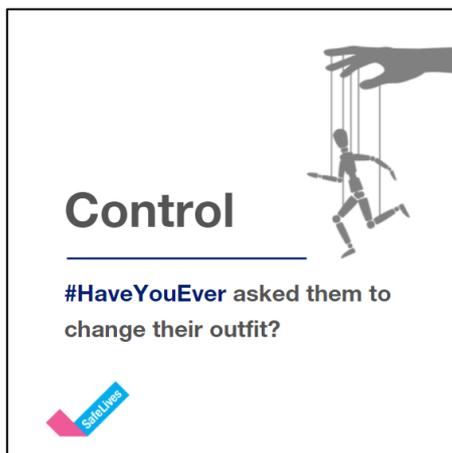
To arrange an interview for yourself or someone you are working with (or to discuss what this would involve) please contact the lead researcher, Bethan, on bethan.taylor@safelives.org.uk

Social media recruitment campaigns

SafeLives campaign (stills from videos)

Co-created campaign

Reach of Instagram Ads (combined):
- Total reach (The number of people who saw the ad at least once): 166,588 People
- Total unique link clicks (the number of people who performed a link click): 32,928
- Total impressions (number of times the ad is seen on screen): 996,777

Age and Gender distribution of reach:
- 19% men aged 18-24
- 67% women aged 18-24
- 3% men aged 25-34
- 11% women aged 25-34

Interview schedule for young people

Introduction

Research shows that young people experience the highest rates of abuse of any age group[1], and by early adolescence, some young people have already experienced significant levels of violence and abuse in their relationships[2].

We want to end domestic abuse for everyone, and for good, and in order to do this we need to act before someone harms or is harmed. The Verge of Harm[ing] project aims to work towards this by addressing the following research aims:

- To explore why and how young people begin to use abusive behaviours in their relationships
- To better understand what it means for young people to be on the verge of harming
- To explore what support for young people who harm should look like; both prevention and intervention

These aims will be met through a literature review, a survey, and interviews.

Aims of the interview

We have already conducted a survey that has asked 11-25 year olds about their views on relationships and support for young people. The interview questions will build on the topics that arose in the survey, and the interview schedule has been co-created with a panel of 11-25 year olds.

The aim of the interview is to give young people space to expand on the topics the survey explored and to explore their use of harmful behaviours in order to address the first two research aims. The young person will also be given space to share their views on support for young people who harm, in order to address the third research aim.

Ethical and safety considerations

There are a number of considerations that need to be taken in order for this work to be carried out in a safe and ethical manner.

Safety of the interviewer

- Only ever give out work contact details (phone, email address) rather than personal details, and only ever use first name
- Give a named colleague details of the interview prior to it taking place. Check in with the same colleague just before the interview and check out after.
- Interviews will be held in a safe space for both the interviewer and participant. This means either at a neutral (but private) location, such as a room in a support service, or over Zoom/Teams where it is not possible/accessible for the young person to meet in person (including COVID-19 restrictions).

Wellbeing of the interviewer

It is important to consider how the interview topic may impact upon the interviewer's wellbeing, and the potential for vicarious trauma and emotional distress. In order to proactively safeguard the interviewer, the following steps will be taken:
- The interviewer will debrief with a member of the research team following each interview, if needed
- The interview will have access to regular supervision, and may request clinical supervision if needed.
- The interviewer will keep a research journal to encourage reflexive practice.

Data protection

- Ensure that all personal details of interviewees are stored securely on the server.
- All information is confidential, except where someone is at risk of harm. Instigate safeguarding procedure where necessary.

Ethical issues

- Informed consent must be given before the interview can begin. An information sheet should be given before the interview outlining details of the project, the theme of the questions, why we are asking them and what we will do with the information given.
- The young person should be given the right to withdraw at any time before, during and up to two weeks after the interview
- The language used by the interviewer should be considered. Sector terminology should be avoided. Language should be neutral and non-judgemental. The interviewer should be descriptive and human (not too formal). The interviewer should avoid 'dumbing down' and patronising
- The interviewer should be aware of the signs of trauma and be reactive to it
- A de-brief sheet will be prepared with contact details of relevant support agencies, how to contact the project team and how to raise a concern or make a complaint
- The limits of confidentiality should be made very clear for the young person, and the process of sharing information should be explained prior to the interview, so that the young person knows exactly what will happen if they may a disclosure/share information that is of significant concern. If this happens during the interview, the interview will make the young person aware immediately, so that they have a choice about whether they wish to continue the interview or not

Demographic questions

Before starting the interview, we want to ask you a few demographic questions (questions that tell us a bit more about you). We ask these questions to help us understand whose stories are being told within our research:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Sexual orientation:

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or long-term health condition (mental or physical health)?

The interview

Ideally the interviews would be face-to-face, however due to constraints such as time and location of interviewee (as well as COVID-19), some interviews will be conducted either by telephone or using Zoom/Teams. Potential interviewees will be given the option of how the interview is conducted beforehand and allowed to give their preference based on what they would find most comfortable. The interview will be audio recorded where consent has been given.

Potential interviewees will be provided with the information sheet in advance of the interview and asked to provide potential dates/times if they still wish to take part. Interviewees will again be contacted a week prior to interview to confirm participation, and finally 24 hours before to confirm time and location.

At interview, before the interview begins the interviewer will confirm with the interviewee if the information sheet has been read and understood. Go through consent options and ensure signed off before continuing.

We understand that everyone communicates in different ways, so we want to give you a choice about the style of the interview.

Narrative interview style

A narrative interview would involve fewer questions and would give you the chance to tell your story in the way you would like to tell it. The interviewer will ask you to start from the beginning and to talk

through the relationship(s) you feel you may have used toxic behaviours in. They may ask some questions to help them understand something you've shared, but you will be given lots of space to talk without interruption. If at any point you feel you're struggling and need a bit more direction, the interviewer can ask some questions from the semi-structured interview schedule to help guide you.

Narrative interview schedule

- We would like to give you the choice of the language we use throughout this interview to refer to unhealthy behaviours in a relationship– what language would you like me to use during the interview?
    - Such as harmful, abusive or toxic

- Think about the relationship(s) you feel you may have used toxic/abusive/harmful behaviours in. Starting wherever you feel is the beginning, I'd like you to talk me through the story of that relationship; the beginning, the middle, and the end. You can take your time and talk about whatever comes to mind. If you feel stuck at any point, let me know and I can ask a question to help guide you
    - Clarifying questions and prompts if needed

Semi-structured interview style

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer will have some general themes and questions they will ask, as well as some prompt questions to help guide you. They will pay attention to the topics you discuss and will let the interview be guided by what you talk about, but they will also be guided by the topics on the schedule.

Semi-structure interview schedule

Introduction – including confidentiality, withdrawing, data treatment and the following question:

- We would like to give you the choice of the language we use throughout this interview to refer to unhealthy behaviours in a relationship – what language would you like me to use during the interview?
    - Such as harmful, abusive or toxic
    - Give a fuller definition of 'unhealthy behaviours' if needed

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your experience of relationships?
    a. Is there a particular relationship you would like to focus on today?
        i. Was this your first experience of a relationship?

2. Could you tell me a bit about the relationship?
    a. Who was the relationship with?
    b. When was it and how long did it last?
        i. How old were you both when the relationship started?
    c. What were the reasons you started the relationship?

3. You responded to our advert asking if you had ever been worried that you had used toxic behaviours in a relationship, can you tell me about that?
    a. In which of your relationships did this happen?
    b. At what stage of the relationship did this happen?
    c. How did you become aware that you were using toxic/abusive/harmful behaviours?
        i. Did anyone else talk to you about this?
        ii. Did you start to notice them yourself?
    d. What do you think led to you using these behaviours?
    e. How did you feel during these times?
        i. Before
        ii. During
        iii. After
    f. Was anyone outside of the relationship aware this was happening?
        i. What was their response?
    g. What do you think leads to toxic/abusive/harmful relationships continuing?

4. Did you get any kind of support around using toxic/abusive/harmful behaviours?
    a. If so, what kind of support?
        i. Formal/informal
    b. When did you receive the support?
        i. Before
        ii. During
        iii. after
    c. What was the impact of the support (if any)?
    d. Would you change anything about the support you received?
        i. Did you experience any barriers to accessing support?
    e. If you didn't access any support, can you explain why?
        i. Were there any barriers?

5. What do you think support for young people who harm should look like?
    a. Topics/content?
    b. Style of delivery?
    c. When do you think support should take place?
        i. At what stage of someone's relationship/use of behaviours?
            • Before/during/after?

6. How would you describe young people's views on relationships?
    a. Are they seen as important?
        i. Why/why not?
    b. What do you think young people want their relationships to be like?
    c. What do you think influences young people's views on relationships?
    d. What role do you think social media plays in young people's relationships?

7. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of relationships, or young people's relationships in general?

Grounding question to close: what are your plans for the rest of the day?

Closing – thanks, next steps

Analysis plan

A thematic analysis of the interview scripts will be completed.

Interview-style survey questions

Thank you for your interest in this project. The aim of this survey is to give those aged 11-25 the opportunity to explore their use of toxic behaviours in dating relationships, and to share their views on what support for young people who harm should look like. The information gathered from these surveys will help SafeLives to make some recommendations around supporting young people's first and continuing relationships to be healthy and happy.

We will never use any names or identifying details, so all of your answers will remain anonymous, but if you don't feel comfortable answering a question, please skip it and continue on to the next question.

1. Please could you tell us how you prefer to identify your gender
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe

2. We would like to give you the opportunity to either take part in a confidential interview, or complete the survey. If you would like to take part in the interview please leave a phone number and / or an email address you are happy for us to contact you on

3. Please tell us if you prefer to complete the online survey, or take part in a confidential interview?
- I would like to complete the survey
- I would like to take part in the interview

4. Everything you share with us will be anonymous, as we won't ask for your name, but we would like to know if you are happy for us to use your quotes in the work we produce from this project.
- Yes
- No

You responded to our advert asking if you had ever been worried that you had used toxic behaviours in a relationship. The next four questions will ask you about these behaviours

5. Please could you tell us a bit about the toxic behaviours you feel you have used in relationships:

6. What do you think led to you using these behaviours?

7. Please could you tell us how you became aware that you were using toxic behaviours?

The next questions will ask you about the support (if any) you accessed around these behaviours

8. Did you get any kind of support around using toxic behaviours?
- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer this

9. Please could you tell us a bit about the support you received?

For example, what kind of support did you receive? What did you like about the support? What didn't you like about the support?

___

10. What difference do you think the support made (if any)?

___

11. If you didn't access any support, can you tell us why?

___

12. Thinking about support in general, what do you think support for young people who harm should look like?

For example, think about the topics you think are important, how support is offered, or when it should take place.

___

13. How would you describe young people's views on relationships?

___

14. What do you think influences young people's views on relationships?

___

15. Please could you share your age with us

___

16. How would you describe your ethnicity?

___

17. How would you identify?

___

18. Do you consider yourself to have a disability or long-term health condition (mental or physical health)
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

19. Would you be willing to have a follow up conversation with one of our research team to share your views and experiences in more detail?
- No
- Yes (please leave an email address or phone number you are happy for us to contact you on)

___

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill in the survey. Here is a list of online resources which you may want to have a look at.

If you have any questions or worries about anything to do with this project, or the answers you gave, please feel free to contact our research team on REA@safelives.org.uk

If you are worried about your own safety, you can contact:

The National domestic abuse helpline for immediate support (phone: 0808 2000 247, website: https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/)

Next link for dedicated black and ethnic minority, and South Asian support (phone: 0800 4700 280, text: 07407 895 620 website: https://nextlinkhousing.co.uk/services/)

Galop supports LGBTQ+ people experiencing domestic abuse (phone: 0800 999 5428, website: https://galop.org.uk/, email: help@galop.org.uk)

If you feel like you need someone to talk to, you can contact:

Young Minds to talk to someone about what you're going through (text: 'YM' to 85258, website: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/)

Muslim Youth Helpline for free and confidential faith and culturally sensitive support services (phone: 0808 808 2008, website: https://myh.org.uk/)

Childline for online support of to chat one-to-one to a counsellor online (phone: 0800 1111, website: https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/)

The Mix for essential one-to-one or forum based support for under 25s (phone: 0808 808 4994, website: https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support)

Women's Aid for one-to-one or forum based support for adults (online chat: https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/, survivors forum: https://survivorsforum.womensaid.org.uk/)

Samaritans to talk to someone who will listen (phone: 116 123, website: https://www.samaritans.org/)

Shout to confidentially talk to someone over text if you need support (text: 85258, website: https://giveusashout.org/about-us/about-shout/)

If your concerns are about your own behaviours, you can access support from:

Respect to access support to help you change your actions (phone: 0808 802404, website: https://www.respect.uk.net/pages/42-work-with-perpetrators)

Reach to find out more about prevention programmes (phone: 800-899-4000, website: https://reachma.org/)

Focus group schedule for young people in PRU

Verge of harm[ing]

Focus group schedule

Welcome and introduction

- Introduce yourself and any facilitator with your pronouns – explain you will be leading the focus group and the facilitator will be helping with the running and taking brief notes.
- Re-state purpose of focus group / affirm confidentiality / check consent and that everyone happy to be recorded and transcribed.
- Explain the format – we have three main questions about young people's relationships and support around harmful behaviour
- This is a discussion and we want everyone to join in, there are no right or wrong answers and it's OK to disagree.
- We want to hear your views and opinions on these topics and there is no expectation for anyone to share their own experiences, unless you wish to
- Set up values and ground rules of the focus group:
  - Values for the group - LGBTQ+ inclusion, anti-racist, disability inclusive
  - If we disagree with others while we are discussing, we will challenge someone's views, not the people that state that view
- So the recording picks up everything you all say, can we try not to interrupt while another person is speaking – the researcher/facilitator may interrupt you to ensure everyone has a chance to share
- Sexual pressure
-
- Invite people to introduce themselves
- Ask if everyone is OK with that? If no questions, tell participants from now you will start recording

Activity 1 – influences

Hand out some paper and pens and ask the young people to write down who and what they think influences how young people view relationships and how they behave in them.

Once they have written these things down, place the pieces of paper around the room and ask them to go and stand next to the thing they think has the most influence on how young people view relationships and behave in them.

Go round each piece of paper in turn and ask the young people standing next to it to explain why and how they think this thing influences young people's relationships. If there is no one stood next to that piece of paper, open the question out to the whole group.

Follow-up question:

1. Do you feel there are any gender differences in how young people view relationships and how they behave in them?

Activity 2 – behaviours

Remind the young people that this project is focused on young people aged 11-25 and how they behave in their romantic/dating relationships.

Start by asking them to describe what they see as a healthy relationship

Hand out some paper and pens and ask the young people to write down behaviours they feel young people use in their relationships that are toxic/harmful/abusive

Once they have several written on separate pieces of paper, ask them to take it in turns to order them from those they feel most confident are abusive, to those they feel least confident/least sure are abusive. Each time they move a behaviour, ask them to explain why they are choosing to move it.

Follow-up questions:

1. How do you think you people feel when they are using these behaviours?
   a. Before/in the lead up to using them
   b. During
   c. After
2. Why do you think young people use these behaviours?
3. How do you think young people become aware that they are using these behaviours?

Activity 3 – Vignette

Talk the young people through the vignette on the next page.

Before you ask the follow-up questions, ask them if they have any initial thoughts about the example that they'd like to share, or any questions they want to ask.

Ask the young people to imagine Frankie (the instigator of harm) was a real young person – what support do they think Frankie needs around the behaviours they used?
- Who should deliver the support?
- What topics/content?
- Is there anything you think might get in the way of Frankie accessing/engaging in support for their harmful behaviours?

Follow-up questions:
1. We've just thought about support for Frankie, but thinking young people in general; yourself and others your age, what do you think support for young people who harm should look like?
   o Who should deliver the support?
   o What topics/content?
   o Is there anything you think might get in the way?
2. Is there anything else you think is important for us to know about young people's relationships and use of harmful behaviours that we haven't talked about today?

Interview schedule for practitioners

Interview schedule

Introduction

Research shows that young people experience the highest rates of abuse of any age group[1], and by early adolescence, some young people have already experienced significant levels of violence and abuse in their relationships[2].

We want to end domestic abuse for everyone, and for good, and in order to do this we need to act before someone harms or is harmed. The Verge of Harm[ing] project aims to work towards this by addressing the following research aims:

- To explore why and how young people begin to use abusive behaviours in their relationships
- To better understand what it means for young people to be on the verge of harming
- To explore what support for young people who harm should look like; both prevention and intervention

These aims will be met through a literature review, a survey, and interviews.

Aims of the interview

We have already conducted a survey that has asked 11-25 year olds about their views on relationships and support for young people. The interview questions will build on the topics that arose in the survey, and the interview schedule has been co-created with a panel of 11-25 year olds.

The aim of this interview is to give practitioners who have supported young people who harm a space to talk about their experience(s) of working with this group, and to reflect on their views around what support should look like.

Ethical and safety considerations

There are a number of considerations that need to be taken in order for this work to be carried out in a safe and ethical manner.

Safety of the interviewer

- Only ever give out work contact details (phone, email address) rather than personal details, and only ever use first name
- Give a named colleague details of the interview prior to it taking place. Check in with the same colleague just before the interview and check out after.
- Interviews will be held in a safe space for both the interviewer and participant. This means either at a neutral (but private) location, such as a room in a support service, or over Zoom/Teams where it is not possible/accessible for the praciticner to meet in person (including due to COVID-19 restrictions).

Wellbeing of the interviewer

It is important to consider how the interview topic may impact upon the interviewer's wellbeing, and the potential for vicarious trauma and emotional distress. In order to proactively safeguard the interviewer, the following steps will be taken:
- The interviewer will debrief with a member of the research team following each interview, if needed
- The interview will have access to regular supervision, and may request clinical supervision if needed.
- The interviewer will keep a research journal to encourage reflexive practice.

Data protection

- Ensure that all personal details of interviewees are stored securely on the server.

- All information is confidential, except where someone is at risk of harm. Instigate safeguarding procedure where necessary.

Ethical issues

- Informed consent must be given before the interview can begin. An information sheet should be given before the interview outlining details of the project, the theme of the questions, why we are asking them and what we will do with the information given.
- The practitioner should be given the right to withdraw at any time before, during and up to two weeks after the interview
- The language used by the interviewer should be considered. Sector terminology should be avoided. Language should be neutral and non-judgemental. The interviewer should be descriptive and human (not too formal). The interviewer should avoid 'dumbing down' or patronising
- The interviewer should be aware of the signs of trauma and be reactive to it
- A de-brief sheet will be prepared with contact details of relevant support agencies, how to contact the project team and how to raise a concern or make a complaint
- The limits of confidentiality should be made very clear for the practitioner, and the process of sharing information should be explained prior to the interview, so that the practitioner knows exactly what will happen if they make a disclosure/share information that is of significant concern. If this happens during the interview, the interviewer will make the practitioner aware immediately, so that they have a choice about whether they wish to continue the interview or not

Demographic questions

Before starting the interview, we want to ask you a few demographic questions (questions that tell us a bit more about you). We ask these questions to help us understand whose stories are being told within our research:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Sexual orientation:

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or long-term health condition (mental or physical health)?

The interview

Ideally the interviews would be face-to-face, however due to constraints such as time and location of interviewee (as well as COVID-19 restrictions) some interviews will be conducted either by telephone or using Zoom/Teams. Potential interviewees will be given the option of how the interview is conducted beforehand and allowed to give their preference based on what they would find most comfortable. The interview will be recorded where consent has been given.

Potential interviewees will be provided with the information sheet in advance of the interview and asked to provide potential dates/times if they still wish to take part. Interviewees will again be contacted a week prior to interview to confirm participation, and finally 24 hours before to confirm time and location.

At interview, before the interview begins the interviewer will confirm with the interviewee if the information sheet has been read and understood. Go through consent options and ensure signed off before continuing.

We understand that everyone communicates in different ways, so we want to give you a choice about the style of the interview.

Narrative interview style

A narrative interview would involve fewer questions and would give you the chance to talk about your experiences in the order you would like. The interviewer will ask you to start wherever you would like, and to talk about your experiences of working with young people who use harmful behaviours in their relationships. They may ask some questions to help them understand something you've shared, but you will be given lots of space to talk without interruption. If at any point you feel you're struggling and need a bit more direction, the interviewer can ask some questions from the semi-structured interview schedule to help guide you.

Narrative interview schedule

- Starting from wherever you would like to, tell me about your experience of working with young people who use harmful behaviours in their relationships, and what you've learnt about young people who harm
  o Clarifying questions and prompts if needed

Semi-structured interview style

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer will have some general themes and questions they will ask, as well as some prompt questions to help guide you. They will pay attention to the topics you discuss and will let the interview be guided by what you talk about, but they will also be guided by the topics on the schedule.

Semi-structure interview schedule

Introduction – including confidentiality, withdrawing, data treatment and the following question:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role and the work you do with those aged 11-25?
   a. Describe the service/organisation you work for
   b. What support does your workplace offer to young people who use harmful behaviours in their relationships?
   c. What are the possible ways young people can access this support?
      i. Formal and informal referral pathways

2. Can you tell me about your experience of working with young people who use harmful behaviours in their relationships?
      i. Romantic relationships?
   b. What works well
   c. What doesn't work
   d. Challenges in your role

3. Thinking about the young people you have worked with; how would you describe their engagement in support around using harmful behaviours?
   a. Receptiveness to these behaviours being acknowledged?
   b. What's important in engaging young people in support?

4. From your experience, what are the early signs that a young person is on the verge of using harmful behaviours?
   a. Any changes to look out for?
   b. Presentation/demeanour
   c. Language

5. Do you feel there are any patterns to the harmful behaviours young people use in relationships?
   a. Earliest harmful behaviours
   b. Progression – cumulative?
   c. Cyclical?

6. From your experience, why do you feel young people start to use harmful behaviours in their relationships?
   a. Risk/protective factors?

7. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of working with this group, or about young people's use of harmful behaviours in general?

WASSUP Workshop 2 discussion topics

- Share visual model created of support for young people who harm based on survey results
    - Anything you disagree with?
    - Anything you agree with?
    - Anything missing?
- How is the experience of harming or being harmed shaped by marginilisation?