

---

# Whole Lives Scotland

---



## Area 3:

Domestic abuse and provision for young adults (16-25 years) in Aberdeen City

# Contents

- Contents ..... 2
- Introduction ..... 3
- Research Approach & Context ..... 4
- Aberdeen City Area Profile ..... 8
- Findings..... 9
  - Consultation with young adults in Aberdeen City ..... 9
  - Identification of younger victims and pathways to support..... 15
  - Service provision for younger victims in Aberdeen City ..... 21
- Recommendations ..... 24
- Appendix: Definitions ..... 27
- References..... 29

<http://www.safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/whole-lives-improving-response-domestic-abuse-scotland>

Scotland@safelives.org.uk

@safelives\_

Scottish charity reference number: SCO48291

# Introduction

## About 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.

Every year, nearly 130,000 people in Scotland experience domestic abuse. There are over 9,000 people at risk of being murdered or seriously harmed; over 12,000 children live in these households. For every person being abused, there is someone else responsible for that abuse: the perpetrator. And all too often, children are in the home and living with the impact. Domestic abuse affects us all; it thrives on being hidden behind closed doors. We must make it everybody’s business.

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

Since 2005, SafeLives has worked with organisations across the UK to transform the response to domestic abuse. In Scotland, we currently deliver three programmes supported by a team of associates who provide additional expertise to our work.

**Marac Development Programme:** We support the implementation of the Marac process, to promote a best practice, risk-led response to domestic abuse, by providing training, helpdesk support and through the development of Scotland specific resources and tools.

**Training & development:** We create bespoke learning packages about domestic abuse and coercive control for a wide range of organisations; to date this has included Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, NHS Health Scotland, and Wheatley Housing. We developed and deliver Domestic Abuse Matters Scotland in partnership with Police Scotland to support implementation of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. Following funding from Scottish Government, we released the Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool (DAART) in 2020, an online awareness-raising tool for all professionals.

**Whole Lives Scotland:** Following our 2017 research report, *Whole Lives*<sup>1</sup>, the National Lottery Community Fund in Scotland awarded SafeLives funding to carry out a three-year project working with four Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) in different local authority areas to:

- Support local services to maximise their impact in terms of accessibility, practice, multi-agency working and victim and survivor experience
- Establish strong, locally relevant evidence bases that have national significance
- Build the case for a more ambitious, deep-rooted, improved response to domestic abuse in Scotland in the longer term
- Amplify the voices of victims and survivors across Scotland

In conjunction with each VAWP, a focus is identified - victim and survivors for whom barriers to support access may be exacerbated. Through on-site data collection and consultation, SafeLives builds a picture of local domestic abuse provision and pathways to support. The research and corresponding thematic report provide a foundation from which the SafeLives Engagement Lead creates a bespoke practice response to any gaps and needs identified. Aberdeen City is the final area to participate in the project following Renfrewshire and Stirling.

## The National Lottery Community Fund

Thanks goes to our funder, The National Lottery Community Fund, a non-departmental public body and distributor of National Lottery funding. Their work is divided into five portfolios, covering projects across England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and the UK as a whole.

# Research Approach & Context

## Research approach

### Whole Lives research objectives

- Amplify the voice of victims and survivors across Scotland through consultation
- Identify potential improvements to local partnership working
- Highlight strengths and gaps in local practice
- Assist services to use their data and evidence more effectively

We partnered with Aberdeen City's Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) who chose to focus on victims and survivors aged 16-25 years who had experienced abuse within their own intimate relationships. Hereafter we often refer to this age group as 'young adults'. Initial discussions showed partners were keen to include younger teenagers. However, it was decided to keep the focus on over 16s in line with the aim of Whole Lives - to explore access to domestic abuse services, most of which operate with a threshold of over-16s. We recognise that the experiences of young adults vary greatly; they cannot be treated as one homogenous group, and have needs influenced by gender, race, sexuality, and socio-economic factors.

To ensure that we worked collaboratively with stakeholders, a small working group was set up at the start of the project which offered some steer as the research began. The group allowed us to foster positive relationships, and we were able to utilise local knowledge to build an understanding of provision. This became an invaluable and key element of Whole Lives Aberdeen City. We also worked closely with the Aberdeen City TEC Pathfinder<sup>i</sup> project whose findings are referenced throughout the report.

### Research questions

1. What do specialist domestic abuse services offer young adult survivors of domestic abuse in Aberdeen City?
2. How do services in Aberdeen City that work with young adults identify those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse?
3. Where do services in Aberdeen City refer young adults they have identified as experiencing domestic abuse?
4. Where do young adults in Aberdeen City go for help if they think they are experiencing abuse in an intimate relationship and why?

### Research activities

#### Consultation with professionals

- Mapping of service provision

The Engagement Lead met with 13 local agencies covering a range of specialisms, including statutory teams, third sector, youth work and health. This would normally involve a face-to-face meeting where a mapping tool would be completed to record service provision and information on referral pathways. Due to the pandemic, all engagement activities took place on Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The Engagement Lead was also able to attend a number of online team meetings to gather information and experiences.

- Multi-agency focus group

A focus group was held with eight professionals from various sectors, including domestic abuse, police, education, and Health Improvement. Two SafeLives facilitators asked questions about barriers to service access and provision in the area for victims and survivors aged 16-25 years.

---

<sup>i</sup> Part of the Technology Enabled Care in Scotland project. Four pathfinder areas have been selected to test this design-led approach in relation to an important aspect of system transformation across their health and social care partnerships. In Aberdeen City, the focus was on improving services for survivors of abuse.

- Practitioner/stakeholder online survey

A survey was created in order to gather the views and experiences of those working in the area. This was distributed to a range of multi-agency professionals, including local domestic abuse professionals, social work, health and third sector non-domestic abuse agencies. Content focused on training and competency on domestic abuse, views on multi-agency work, and identifying barriers to service access. Sixty-six practitioners responded, including a range of domestic abuse professionals (n=16) and non-domestic abuse professionals (n=50).

Sector	Respondents	Sector	Respondents
Health	11	Residential care	3
Domestic abuse	8	Housing	3
Health Visiting / Family Nurse Partnership	8	Youth work	3
Children & Families Social Work	6	Sexual abuse	2
Police	4	Community Mental Health	2
Education - Further / Higher	4	Through-care	2
Justice Social Work	4	Adult Social Work	1
Other	4	Education - Primary	1

### Consultation with young adults

In Aberdeen City, we decided to promote a survey for all young adults aged 16-25, not solely those who had experienced domestic abuse. Twenty-five respondents aged 16-25 answered the survey, five of whom considered themselves to have been in an abusive relationship.

As part of the wider project, we conducted a survivor survey with victims and survivors across Scotland to understand their experiences of seeking support. A total of 346 people responded from all local authorities in Scotland. There was a low response rate from under 25s (n=9) so results were not reported on by age in the report. However, some quotes from these survivors have been included in this report.

### Use of performance management data

Data collection across gender-based violence (GBV) services is variable. We were not able to access referral data through the VAWP or local domestic abuse services in Aberdeen City, sometimes because it was not collected and sometimes due to resources. This research was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic when frontline services were under great pressure and we are grateful to services for all the time we were afforded during the project. The report does not contain detail on referrals to DA services by age range, which limits our ability to consider the third research question on referral pathways.

Some outcomes data is included in the Research context section derived from the Insights dataset of services in England and Wales. The *Whole Lives*<sup>i</sup> report from 2017 included analysis of data from three Scottish domestic abuse services piloting the Insights outcomes measurement tool developed by SafeLives.<sup>ii</sup> The demographic and abuse profile of victims and survivors in the relatively small Scottish dataset<sup>iii</sup> was similar to the larger Insights dataset incorporating services from England and Wales. Considering these similarities, data from the current England and Wales dataset can be used to help consider the picture in Scotland, where no equivalent Scottish data is available.

### Structure of this report

The 'research context' section provides a summary of data on young adults (16-25 years) and domestic abuse. The report then splits our findings into three sections which align with the research questions. Findings from various data sources are merged within each section and organised by theme.

Throughout, we refer to specialist domestic abuse professionals as 'DA practitioners/professionals', and all other participating professionals as 'non-DA professionals' unless a more specific term is used.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.safelives.org.uk/practice-support/resources-domestic-abuse-and-idva-service-managers/insights>

<sup>iii</sup> 226 cases across three services

Key findings are highlighted at the start of each section. The report concludes with recommendations for our partners in Aberdeen City's VAWP. Implementation support from the SafeLives' Engagement Lead will be provided, as required, to work on the recommendations up until the project end date.

## Research context

The United Nations define "youth" as 15–24 years old.<sup>2</sup> During adolescence, young people experience complex transitions which impact on their behaviour and decision-making, and responses to the behaviour of others<sup>3</sup>; many also embark on their first relationships. In the UK, the definition of domestic abuse applies to victims and survivors from age 16, at which point they can access most adult domestic abuse services.

Evidence shows that prevalence of domestic abuse among young people is high. The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) reveals that young people experience domestic abuse at the highest rate when compared to older age groups. The survey reports that 3.7% of women and 2.5% of men, overall, experience physical and/or psychological abuse from a partner each year. Prevalence amongst the 16-24 age group is much higher than the average at 10.2% for women and 8.4% for men.<sup>4</sup> A cross-country review of academic literature from the USA, Canada, the UK, Europe, and New Zealand estimated a prevalence range of 9-34% for young people using physical or violent harmful behaviours; psychological/emotional harmful behaviours ranged from 21-77%.<sup>5</sup>

Data also indicates that young people experience abuse at levels that are at least as high as older victims, as demonstrated by Insights outcomes data from domestic abuse services in England and Wales.<sup>6</sup> Findings showed that 16-25-year olds were more likely to have experienced physical violence at intake to a service (71% v 61%), and more likely to be assessed as high-risk (55% v 47%). A larger proportion of young adults were pregnant at intake to the service (13% v 4%).

Much of the age-specific research on younger victims of domestic abuse has focussed on teenage relationships up to the age of 19. Young adults aged 20-24 may have different needs due to their stage of development, but a summary of some of the research available on teenage relationships is a good starting point due to potential crossover in needs, experiences, and perceptions.

A commonly cited study published in 2009<sup>7</sup> found widespread intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst 13-17-year-olds surveyed. Girls were more likely to experience violence, especially if they had older partners, and also reported more experiences of emotional abuse. Girls were also much more likely to report negative impacts on their wellbeing compared to boys who had experienced violence. This indicates an early gender split in terms of intimate partner violence.

Research from Girlguiding in 2013 found substantial proportions of 11-17-year-olds surveyed found coercive and controlling behaviours, including checking-in and monitoring via the internet, an acceptable part of a relationship.<sup>8</sup> Further work on attitudes in the 2013 Boys to Men survey found that 49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13–14 thought that hitting a partner would be 'okay' in at least one of twelve scenarios they were presented with.<sup>9</sup> This study also found that it was more difficult to differentiate between younger teenagers who used and those who experienced harmful behaviours compared to adults, as most reported instigating a harmful behaviour as well as experiencing one.<sup>10</sup>

Perceptions of abuse are connected to the ways in which it is spoken about. Some evidence shows that young people are less likely to relate to the term 'domestic abuse' or to view certain behaviours as constituting 'domestic abuse'. A SafeLives survey of 507 teenagers aged 13-18 found they were much less likely to use the term 'domestic abuse' with more than three in five (69%) preferring to describe abusive relationships with partners as 'toxic'.<sup>11</sup>

Research has highlighted how technology-facilitated abuse often features highly in adolescent experiences with proportions of prevalence across studies ranging from 12-56%.<sup>12</sup> In 2016, the Women and Equalities Committee enquiry on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools identified technological advances, including online platforms, as one of the facilitators for harassment and violence.<sup>13</sup> SafeLives' Tech vs Abuse survey found that practitioners wanted more training on new technologies and abuse, and currently the safety planning response to victims was too focussed on cutting out social media and technology, which is not realistic for many young people for whom it can be a normal feature of daily life.<sup>14</sup>

How younger people engage in services is another vital thing for the domestic abuse sector to understand. Insights data tells us that young adults (16-25 years) are less likely to self-refer to services (15% v 22%).<sup>15</sup> Studies show that young people are more likely to tell friends about abuse rather than family or professionals<sup>16 17 18</sup>. Young people need time to build relationships and establish trust before they are likely to disclose abuse, and in some cases, trust may be affected by any trauma they have experienced.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, as well as the particular needs young people may have due to the transitions they are undergoing, they may also be more vulnerable when being abused due to being unequipped, through lack of experience or material security, to deal with practical problems such as moving home or finances.<sup>20</sup>

### National and local work in Scotland

*Equally Safe*<sup>21</sup>, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls, acknowledges the increased risk younger women are at from abusive partners. It outlines four priorities. The 'where, how and when' of provision is critical to Priority Three which focusses on the provision of early and effective interventions that prevent violence and maximise safety and wellbeing. Here, the strategy recognises the breadth of support needs victims and survivors and their families can have, highlighting the importance of diverse cross-sector provision.

In response to GBV and its impact within Scotland's university population, the charity EmilyTest has led a cross-sector consultation with young people, higher education and VAW professionals to produce a GBV Charter.<sup>22</sup> The Charter aims to drive better responses to students experiencing GBV, for example through improved safeguarding practices, awareness-raising amongst students and staff, policy and communications, and a learning culture. The Charter is due to be piloted in 2021.

In Aberdeen City itself, recent research undertaken by the TEC Pathfinder Project has explored local pathways to domestic abuse support as means of scoping how technology solutions could better enable access.<sup>23</sup> This research highlighted the 'myriad of different actors' involved in the service pathway with disclosures happening at different points in an individual's experience. Consultation with professionals in universal services revealed low confidence in identifying domestic abuse and limited awareness of how to refer to specialists. Domestic abuse professionals felt push back from other agencies over roles and responsibilities, and often felt left to address multi-faceted needs of survivors without appropriate support from local partners. These findings underline the importance of a multi-agency response to domestic abuse.

#### Online support and information for young people

**Your Best Friend** – A project funded by the Tampon Tax empowering young people (13–24) to provide peer support to their friends: <https://yourbestfriend.org.uk>

**Draw the Line** – An interactive mobile tool for young people (13-19) to explore boundaries in healthy relationships and hear other young people's stories: [drawtheline.uk](http://drawtheline.uk)

# Aberdeen City Area Profile



## Scotland

## Aberdeen City



**3.2%** people experienced partner abuse in last 12 months

- 3.7% women
- 2.6% men

(SCJS Partner Abuse 2018-2020)

Estimated female victims of partner abuse each year: **3550**

Estimated male victims of partner abuse each year: **2550<sup>v</sup>**

**16-25s**

**9.4%** people aged 16-24 years experienced partner abuse in last 12 months

- 10.2% women aged 16-24
- 8.4% men aged 16-24

(SCJS Partner Abuse 2018-2020)

Estimated female victims aged 16-24 each year: **1450**

Estimated male victims aged 16-24 each year: **1050<sup>v</sup>**



**62,907** domestic abuse incidents > 40% including a crime or offence

**115** incidents per 10,000 population

(Scottish Government, police data 2019-2020<sup>vi</sup>)

**2,566** domestic abuse incidents > 44% including a crime or offence

**112** incidents per 10,000 population

(Scottish Government, police data 2019-2020<sup>vi</sup>)

Domestic abuse support in Aberdeen City is provided across six local authority and third sector organisations. See Section 3 of the report for detail on services and young adult specific provision.

<sup>iv</sup> Scottish Crime & Justice Survey splits out partner abuse prevalence estimates by age (Table 6.07(i)a). Estimates for Aberdeen City calculated using SCJS Table 6.07(i)a estimates along with the local Aberdeen City population as given in National Records of Scotland 2018 (table mid-year-pop-est-19-time-series-1). Figures were rounded to nearest 50.

<sup>v</sup> Figures taken from [Domestic Abuse: Statistics 2019-2020](#) showing characteristics of victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police in Scotland.



# Findings

## Consultation with young adults in Aberdeen City

### Key findings

- Whilst many of our small group of respondents said they would use the term 'domestic abuse' to describe abuse, other terms such as 'toxic' were much more widely used amongst friends and peers.
- The small sample of young adults generally had good awareness of unhealthy relationship behaviours; the group largely perceived physical and psychologically harmful behaviours as unacceptable. They were less likely to consider some controlling behaviours as abusive, particularly technology-related monitoring.
- Respondents were most likely to seek support from friends in relation to domestic abuse and most did not answer the question asking them to name specific domestic abuse services in Aberdeen City or answered with names of generic children's services.
- Service access barriers which the respondents highlighted as relevant to their age group were strongly connected to shame and to a lack of knowledge about support options. Perceptions of services and professionals were also a factor.

### Practice recommendations

See Practice Recommendation 1 - Awareness Raising Resources

In Aberdeen City, we promoted a survey for all 16-25-year-olds, not solely for those who had experienced domestic abuse. We wanted to address a broad audience to explore awareness of domestic abuse amongst young adults, see what they knew about domestic abuse services, and find out where they would seek help if they were experiencing abuse. It was important to hear this from those who had not already accessed services for support, as well as those who had. To do this we promoted the survey via youth organisations and contacts in higher and further education, as well as the specialist domestic abuse services we were in touch with.

Twenty-five respondents aged 16-25 answered the survey. This provides interesting insight into their experiences in the local area, much of which reflects wider research, but is not to be taken as representative of all young adults in Aberdeen City.

### Education about abusive relationships

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence comprises a broad general education from the age of 3 up to the end of S3, followed by a senior phase of learning from S4 to S6 in school, or in a college or community setting. Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenting education (RSHP) sits within one of eight curriculum areas, *Health and Wellbeing*, and a national resource is available to support the delivery of these topics.

It should be noted that RSHP is not mandatory, and thus may vary between schools and education establishments. In addition to the curricular materials, some schools in Aberdeen City have implemented Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), a peer mentoring programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence (see Appendix: Definitions).

**"I feel I would love to go into local high schools to make kids aware of the signs. I was 14 when my abuse started. Easily influenced by an older boy and the charm he put on to me."** (National Survivor Survey respondent, aged 20-24)

We started our survey asking whether respondents had received any formal education or training, in school or another place of education or work, about harmful or abusive romantic relationships. Most respondents had received some form of education with one third (35%) saying they had received none.



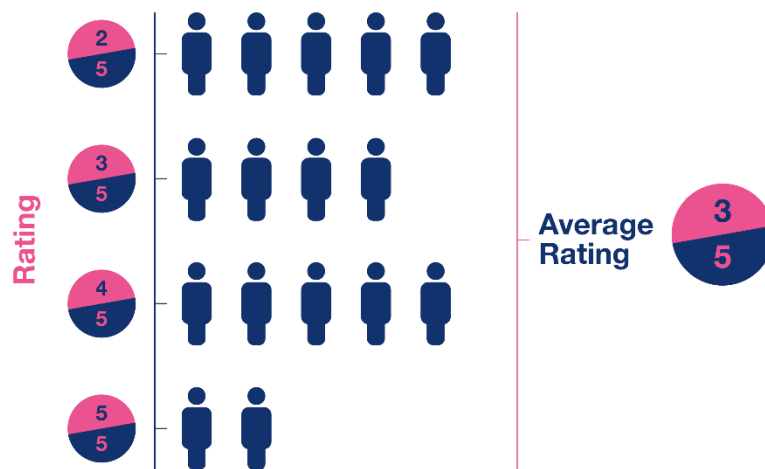
**16-25s survey**

- Three in five (61%) of the young adults who answered the question had received education in **school**
- Two respondents had received some in a **work** setting, one at a **youth group**, and one at **university**

**“It was the education that kept me from going back, the next time he tried to suck me in I seen the patterns of behaviour and stopped it before it happened again.”**  
 (National Survivor Survey respondent, aged 20-24)

There was variation among responses rating how useful the training had been, as shown in Figure 1, below.

**Figure 1: How useful respondents rated education they had about abusive relationships (out of 5).**



### Defining domestic abuse

We asked respondents what words they were likely to use to talk about harmful romantic relationships with their friends. Twenty-three respondents answered the question. Whilst more than half (57%) said they would use the term ‘domestic abuse’ with friends, other terms were more commonly used.

As shown below in the table, the terms ‘toxic’, ‘abusive’, ‘controlling’ and ‘unhealthy’ were all selected by more respondents than said they would use ‘domestic abuse’. One respondent selected ‘other’ and wrote the term ‘gaslighting’.

#### Terms used to discuss harmful relationships with friends

<b>Toxic</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>Abusive</b>	<b>83%</b>
<b>Controlling</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Unhealthy</b>	<b>74%</b>
Domestic violence	35%
Harmful	30%
Unsafe	30%
Relationship abuse	22%
Intimate partner violence	4%
Other	4%

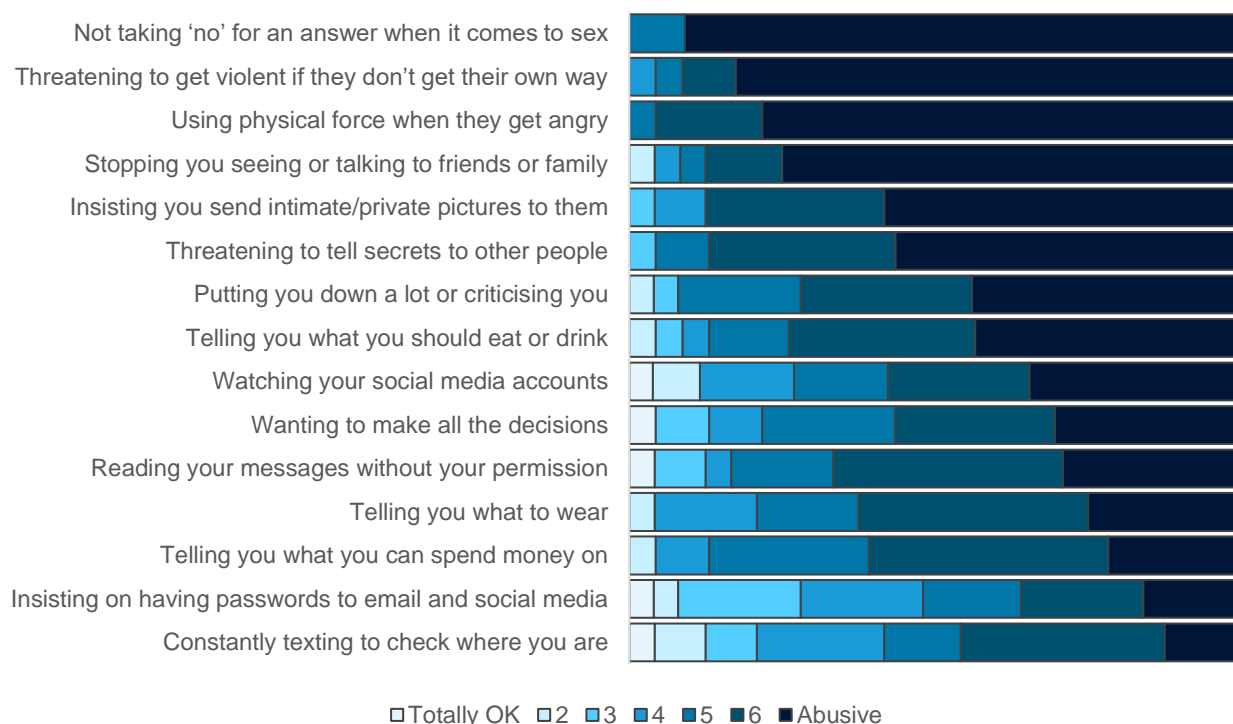


**16-25s survey**

These findings reflect those of a 2020 survey by SafeLives to which 507 respondents aged 13-18 discussed their experiences of abuse in intimate relationships. The most common terms respondents said they would use to talk about harmful relationships were toxic (69%), controlling (61%) and manipulative (55%) with domestic violence (36%) selected much less frequently<sup>24</sup>.

As well as use of language, we asked respondents about a series of abusive and coercively controlling behaviours. We asked them to rate each behaviour in terms of its acceptability in a relationship on a scale of 1-7, with 7 being 'abusive' and one being 'totally OK'. The chart below, Figure 2, gives a breakdown of the responses. Each bar shows the range of responses to each behaviour, with 'abusive' coloured the darkest blue and 'totally OK', the lightest. Not all respondents rated each; the percentages discussed below the chart are out of the number of respondents for each question which ranged from 22 to 25.

**Figure 2: How acceptable survey respondents considered certain behaviours on a scale of 1-7**



The large proportion of dark colour in the chart shows that, as a whole, the group could identify negative and abusive behaviours. Some behaviours were more likely to be labelled abusive than others. Respondents were most likely to say that not taking no for an answer regarding sex was abusive (91%). They were also very likely to consider threatening violence (83%), using physical force (78%) or stopping you seeing friends and family (75%) abusive. They were least likely to think the potentially controlling behaviours were abusive: constantly texting to check where you are (13%), insisting on having your passwords (16%), telling you what you can spend money on (22%), telling you what you can wear (25%), wanting to make all the decisions (30%).

**“Only today have I really noticed I've been through abuse myself. It's so normalised for me to go through some things that were classed as abuse through previous relationships, that I didn't think twice. I suppose I've opened my eyes.”**

(Local survey respondent, aged 16)

Over 18 respondents rated every behaviour as a 5 or above, apart from the two involving communication: constantly texting to check where you are (n=14) and insisting on having passwords (n=13). This indicates that among this small group of young adults, overtly physical, sexual, or psychological elements of abusive behaviour were likely to be considered unacceptable. However, potentially controlling elements of behaviour, such as technology-facilitated monitoring, were regarded with a more mixed response.

Eight respondents (35%) said they had experienced at least one of the behaviours themselves within a romantic relationship. Only two of these eight respondents then said they considered themselves to have been in an abusive relationship when asked. Overall, five respondents (23%) said they considered themselves to have been in an abusive relationship, including three respondents who were not sure if they had experienced any of the behaviours listed or chose not to answer.

**“School teacher didn't care and told me to simply just 'not worry'”**

(Local survey respondent, aged 16)

Out of the five respondents who said they had been in an abusive relationship, two had never told anyone. Two had told friends along with some other family members, a schoolteacher, and a colleague. One respondent didn't answer the question about who they had told. None of the five survivors had received support from a professional to address the abuse at the time.

### Help-seeking and barriers to accessing services

We asked all respondents where they were most likely to go for support if they, or someone they cared about, were being harmed in a relationship. Respondents were most likely to go to friends out of all the options provided (see table to the right). Again, this finding reflects the 2020 Talk about Toxic survey of 13-18-year-olds undertaken by SafeLives<sup>25</sup>.

**“Having full access to helpful information is fine but sometimes someone close to the person, a best friend, forcefully saying "you HAVE to do something, look at what they are f\*\*\*ing doing to you!" can be a good wake-up call”**

(Local survey respondent, aged 24)

Where respondents would seek support / advice		
Friend	16	70%
Parent	10	43%
Helpline	10	43%
Domestic abuse service	8	35%
Brother/Sister	4	17%
School teacher	4	17%
Youth worker	4	17%
Support worker	3	13%
Other family member	2	9%
Social worker	2	9%
Work colleague	2	9%
College	1	4%
University	1	4%
Other	1	4%

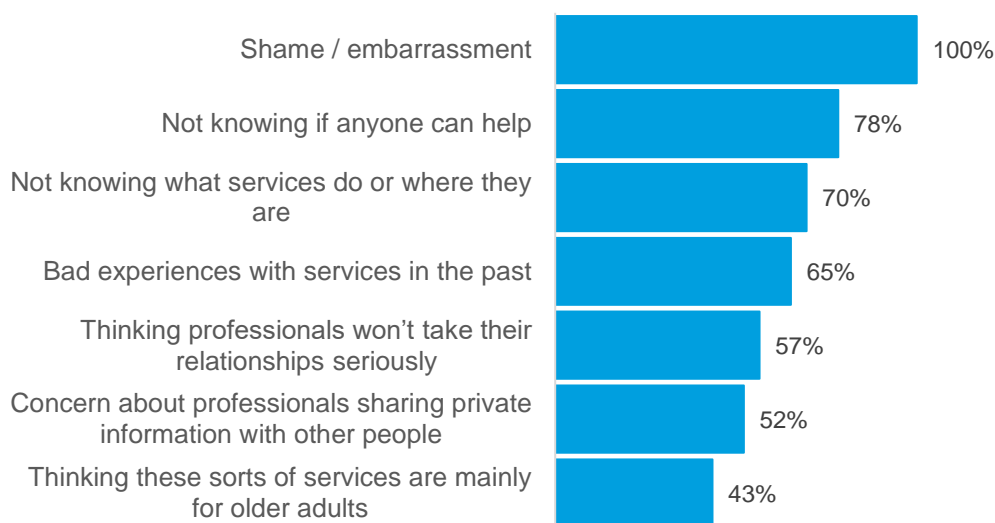
We also asked if they could name any local organisations that provided support specifically in relation to domestic abuse. Seven respondents provided names and four of these wrote Childline. The other organisations named were Aberdeen Cyrenians, Aberdeen Foyer, Peunumbra, the Samaritans and Rape Crisis. This would indicate that this small group of young adults did not have much knowledge of local domestic abuse services. This is not a unique situation; the Whole Lives national survivor survey published in 2020 found that half (51%) the survivors who had never accessed support said they did not know support was available.<sup>26</sup> However, it is interesting to consider that whilst over a third of respondents to the young adults survey said they would go to a helpline or domestic abuse service for support, few could name local options. This underlines the importance of awareness-raising of local support options alongside education.

Not knowing about services is a clear barrier to accessing support, but there are many others. Shame is a common inhibitor amongst survivors of domestic abuse – 89% of survivors answering the Whole Lives national survivor survey said they felt shame or embarrassment when they disclosed abuse<sup>vi</sup>.

We asked young adults what factors respondents thought might stop people their age from going to an organisation for support if they were in a harmful relationship. As shown in Figure 3 overleaf, all respondents thought shame and/or embarrassment was likely to be a factor. A lack of knowledge of options was next most frequent barrier identified after shame. Categories related to perceptions of services and professionals' approach followed.

<sup>vi</sup> 279 survivors had disclosed to someone about the abuse and 89% felt shame in doing so: <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Whole%20Lives%20Survivor%20Survey.pdf>

**Figure 3: What factors survey respondents thought might stop other young adults from going to an organisation for support if they were in a harmful relationship**



We ended the survey with a question about what good support for young adults in harmful relationships looks like. Two key themes stood out from the responses. The importance of respectful understanding from professionals who are not condescending was one clear theme. Appropriate safety and protection options and advice for young adults was the second theme in the responses. See Figure 4 on the following page for all responses.

### Consultation with young adults – conclusion

Respondents to our survey of young adults generally had good awareness of unhealthy relationship behaviours. The small sample largely perceived physical and psychologically harmful behaviours as unacceptable. However, they were less likely to consider some controlling behaviours to be abusive, particularly technology-related monitoring. Considering the language used to describe abuse, over half of the respondents said they would use the term 'domestic abuse' with friends. However, the terms 'toxic', 'abusive', 'unhealthy' and 'controlling' were much more widely used amongst friends and peers. These findings reflect findings from other research with young people and may have implications for awareness-raising content and engagement approaches for younger victims.

Respondents to our survey of young adults were most likely to seek support from friends if concerned about abusive behaviours within a relationship. Most did not answer the question asking them to name specific domestic abuse services in Aberdeen City or responded with names of generic children's services. When asked about barriers to services access, not knowing who could help or what services do was key, which reflects the lack of responses to the service name question.

As with many survivors, shame was a huge factor in why respondents thought young people might not access services. Qualitative responses indicate that a non-judgemental approach from professionals is particularly important to young people considering accessing a service. Ongoing awareness-raising activities should consider how to raise the profile of services among younger age groups.

Having full access to helpful information is fine but sometimes someone close to the person, a best friend, forcefully saying "you HAVE to do something, look at what they are f\*\*\*ing doing to you!" can be a good wake up call

Open to everyone, no matter their gender or how they sexually identify. They make sure that the young person feels safe and comfortable sharing and they don't feel pressured. It is clear what services are provided and what they can do to help the young person. The people speaking to the young person are well trained and know how to help the young person in the best way possible.

Options to get away safely or if the safer option for them is to stay then information on how to do that safely, monitoring and checking in using code in a way that the abuser would not catch on easily, letting them know that they are valid and they decide where they draw the line for abuse and feeling unsafe not society

Reassurance, mainly. That what they're going through, no matter how normalised in friend groups or social media it is, that is isn't okay. Showing how to learn from it. To not fear relationships beyond it. Someone who loves you will show you true love and not abuse.

## What do you think **good support** for **young adults** who are in harmful relationships should be like?

Understanding and not undermining them by being insincere and looking down on them

Trying to get them out of their situation asap

Understanding not condescending

**Non stressful**

Getting them to a safe place, future protection and advice about relationships

Advice and counselling on there relationship along with help and support and protection from the abuser

A confidential, non-judgemental, safe space

More support available in the form of organisations and actually knowing where to go to get this help

Listening properly and giving realistic suggestions on how to help

Figure 4: Survey answers - 'What do you think good support for young adults who are in harmful relationships should be like?'

## Identification of younger victims and pathways to support

### Key findings

- Non-DA professionals who answered our survey were confident understanding domestic abuse and its impact, but less confident in the actions around identifying and referring victims to domestic abuse services for support.
- Practitioners identified awareness amongst younger people as the biggest factor influencing whether they access specialist services, specifically that young adults may not define their experiences as domestic abuse and they may not know what specialist services offer.
- Professionals considered awareness-raising with a focus on young people's specific needs as key in enabling service access. Proactive outreach to build relationships with young people and age-appropriate engagement methods are also seen as solutions to building young people's understanding of the support available and developing trust in it.

### Practice recommendations

See Practice Recommendation 1 - Awareness Raising Resources

See Practice Recommendation 2 - Identification and Referrals

To understand how younger victims of domestic abuse are identified in Aberdeen City we undertook a mapping exercise with local non-domestic abuse agencies, alongside our practitioner survey. A focus group explored the emerging themes in more detail. Three issues emerged from analysis of these sources of data: defining domestic abuse, age-appropriate engagement, and help-seeking. Findings will be explored in this section and linked to those from the young adults' consultation discussed in the previous section. After considering how younger victims are identified, the final section of the report will look at what local domestic abuse services provide them when they are referred for support.

**“I am now many years with no abuse and a very supportive partner. I couldn't have done it without the police and the domestic abuse helpline. I am forever grateful.”**

(National Survivor Survey respondent, aged 20-24)

### Non-domestic abuse professionals – capacity and skills

Most non-DA practitioners (66%) who answered our survey had received training on domestic abuse within their current roles. The majority were confident understanding the impact of domestic abuse on victims and children (80%) and understanding of coercive controlling behaviours (78%). Confidence was lower, as has been the case in other local areas we have worked in, when it came to the more pro-active elements of the domestic abuse response. For example, three in five (60%) were confident talking to individuals about domestic abuse and half (50%) felt confident in their ability to identify it. Half (48%) the non-DA professionals were aware of local specialist services and how to refer survivors.



#### Practitioner survey – Key finding

Two thirds (66%) of non-DA professionals had **received domestic abuse training**, in-house or from an external specialist

The above reflects findings from the Aberdeen TEC Pathfinder project that reported many professionals from universal services were not confident enquiring about domestic abuse, were unsure if discussing it was within their remit, and were not clear of referral processes to specialist services.<sup>27</sup>

**“Because I think there's still that fear of putting people off asking questions, because if we ask the question, they don't know where to then go and what to do with that, so I think it's really important that there's that continual awareness raising.”** (Domestic abuse service)

Confidence was lowest around responding to perpetrators (38%) of domestic abuse and using the Dash risk assessment tool (See Appendix: Definitions) to assess risk (16%); two thirds (68%) were not confident using this tool. The vast majority (92%) had never used the Young People's Dash (See Appendix: Definitions). Non-DA practitioners were also less confident in elements of domestic abuse more particularly related to young adults.



**Practitioner survey – Key finding**

- Two in five (36%) non-DA professionals were confident **understanding the specific dynamics** of domestic abuse for survivors aged **16-25**
- Two in five (42%) non-DA professionals were confident in their awareness of **technology-facilitated abuse**

Many services said they did have processes in place for talking about sex and relationships with young adults (42%) and asking about domestic abuse (58%). However, our data does not reveal whether these were specific processes for young adults or, more likely, standard processes for all age groups - a third of the survey respondents worked within health settings where routine enquiry about domestic abuse is likely to be a standardised policy. Clear referral pathways were said to be in place in the majority (68%) of services if/when disclosures of domestic abuse occurred. Whilst this is positive, only half of individual practitioners were confident in their awareness of services to refer to, as discussed above.

One third (36%) of respondents to the survey did think a lack of established referral pathways between services was a barrier to younger survivors reaching specialist support and two in five (44%) stated that non-specialist services were not identifying young victims. Again, the latter reflects findings from the Aberdeen TEC Pathfinder project, which found self-referral or referral through the police were the most common routes to specialist services according to local survivors they consulted with.<sup>28</sup> Local Marac data also shows that the majority of referrals to Marac in Aberdeen City are made by the Police and in 2020, 30% of referrals were for victims aged 16-25.<sup>vii</sup>

**“I think specialised training should be made more widely available to those who may encounter those affected by domestic abuse in their job roles. I also wonder whether those specialist services could engage more with other community-based organisations, as I don't generally hear any updates about what they have available (except maybe if I look on their social media).”** (Young people’s community service)

Lack of established referral pathways was not the most prominent barrier identified in our consultation. However, lower confidence around identifying abuse and referring to specialists means this is worth exploring further in order to establish whether there is more to do to raise non-DA professionals’ confidence around referrals. Focus group discussions underlined that awareness-raising and training with non-DA professionals should emphasise that identifying abuse in young people’s relationships is “everyone’s business” and that younger people need to feel their relationships are taken seriously.



**Practitioner survey – Key finding**

- Two thirds (65%) felt that **multi-agency working** for victims of domestic abuse was good in Aberdeen City, slightly less agreed for **children** (58%) and victims aged **16-25** (52%)
- A fifth (19%) of professionals had made an enquiry to the **Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland**

**Defining domestic abuse**

By far the barrier most highlighted by practitioner survey respondents was that younger victims don’t perceive their experiences to be domestic abuse (85%), as shown below in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Barriers to domestic abuse support access for victims and survivors aged 16-25**  
(Bricks show proportion of practitioner survey respondents identifying each barrier)



In free-text comments, a quarter of survey respondents talked about how continued and increased focus on awareness-raising among younger people could help address this. Awareness-raising should explore

<sup>vii</sup> Information provided to SafeLives by Aberdeen City Marac Coordinators showed that the Police are the largest referrer of cases to Marac accounting for approximately 80-90% of referrals in 2019 and 2020. In 2020, 30% of victims discussed at Marac were aged 16-25 and in 2019, this was 33%.



what abusive relationships can look like for young people in terms that are relevant to them, and address perceptions of services.

**“I think outreach and awareness-raising are where our energy would be best spent, in terms of how can young people access services”** (Domestic abuse service)

Various elements of how younger victims define abuse were discussed by focus group attendees. A sense that abusive behaviours are normalised within some younger people’s relationships, and how this acts as a barrier to recognising and reporting abuse, was central. Professionals discussed how inexperience in relationships can sometimes lead to unhealthy behaviours being initially accepted and then normalised. The misidentification of psychological abuse as a display of romantic love is widely recognised by domestic abuse practitioners<sup>29</sup>, and is not unique to younger victims. However, practitioners discussed how inexperience with relationships could interact with it.

**“Emotional and controlling behaviour can be particularly hard to recognise, I think in particular for young people, and I think a lot of that is, you know, round those types of abuse can be hidden under what can look like caring at the beginning of a relationship. And I think purely because of, you know, their age and lack of experience within relationships, it can be very hard to recognise as abusive.”** (Domestic abuse service)

The difference in gendered perceptions of abuse among young people was also discussed. A health practitioner working on relationships education described young girls’ acceptance of unhealthy behaviours as “just the way that men behave”. Another school-based professional described different perspectives among boys and girls on the MVP programme, in terms of whether they had ever modified their behaviour to avoid abuse. How young people perceive and define violence was also seen as relevant in terms of how they regard their experiences in relation to conventional norms.

**“In relation to sexual violence, so because of the prevalence of these among young people, both men and women, people of all genders, if their experiences don’t relate to what is perceived as conventional violence, so either leaving bruising, occurring at night, and perpetrated by a stranger with a weapon, for example, then they won’t almost legitimise their own experiences as constituting violence. So, there are these very narrowed and myth-based understandings of what violence actually is, rather than seeing it as a continuum or a spectrum.”** (Education)

Particularly noted was how normalised high levels of contact and communication can be among younger people. This reflects the findings from our consultation with young adults in Aberdeen City; these behaviours were more likely to be regarded as acceptable.

**“Something else that feels very much normalised within that age group is...the use of...messaging and social media, you know, it’s normal to get 80 messages a day from somebody you’re seeing whereas...a person of older years would realise that that wasn’t healthy.”** (Domestic abuse service)

How young people define relationships themselves was also highlighted. If an intimate connection is not seen as a relationship, but in another way, ‘domestic abuse’ may not be relatable as a term, or concept.

**“I think so many young people resonate with the term toxic relationship, but to say domestic abuse, kind of, puts it on this thing that’s maybe for people who are in more serious relationships, or it fits into a very specific definition, whereas actually, what they’re experiencing is definitely domestic abuse. And I think that if there was maybe, kind of, more ‘young people friendly’ language, they would be much more able to identity their experience for what it is and get the right support.”** (Domestic abuse service)

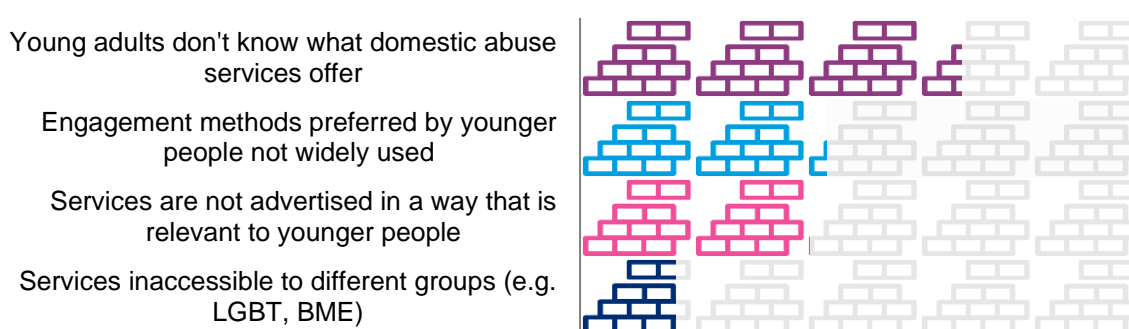
The language professionals use to talk about abuse, and the mismatch with younger victims’ perceptions, was a key theme and one that connects to the young adults’ consultation findings around terminology.

**“I think kids are aware, or can identify a lot of these things, but maybe not quite the definition of violence, so it’s, kind of, getting the perception to change somewhat, to then include that within their definition of violence.”** (Education)

### Age-appropriate engagement

Reflective of findings from the young adults’ consultation, the second biggest barrier identified by practitioners answering our survey (68%) was a lack of knowledge of what domestic abuse services offer. (See Figure 6, below) The majority of young adults in our small consultation felt that not knowing who could help or what services do would be a barrier to seeking help; few could name domestic abuse services in the area. Related issues highlighted by practitioners were appropriate engagement methods (44%) and how services are advertised (41%) – see Figure 6. A quarter of free-text comments about improving services for young people considered developing better engagement methods important.

**Figure 6: Barriers to domestic abuse support access for victims and survivors aged 16-25**  
(Bricks show proportion of practitioner survey respondents identifying each barrier)



In the focus group, age-appropriate engagement was connected to messaging, language, the ‘demystification’ of services, and digitalisation. Targeted and clear messaging that emphasises the non-judgemental approach of professionals is vital for young survivors. Diversity is at the heart of this; language is important to show young people that their identities are respected within services, whether that be their sexuality, disability, or communication-related needs.

**“Open to everyone, no matter their gender or how they sexually identify... It is clear what services are provided and what they can do to help the young person.”**  
(Local survey respondent, aged 16, in response to ‘What does good support for young adults look like?’)

Professionals recognised that young people need to be involved in developing appropriate messaging that would make services feel more relevant to their age groups. Our small consultation with young adults supported other research showing that younger victims may not relate to the terminology used to discuss domestic abuse.

**“Specific targeted messaging that’s not just the kind of messaging that a young person might have seen as only for only older people, you know. Something that’s in their language with the, kind of, imagery that would resonate with young people.”**  
(Domestic abuse service)

Professionals highlighted that the multiple, interchangeable terms used to describe domestic abuse can leave young people unsure where their experience fits. Therefore, simplified, and relatable language must be at the heart of messaging.

**“...they fear being wrong. And in just their internet searches in trying to find the right policy, or the right place to turn, these different words are causing, it’s causing them to be lost.”** (Education)

‘Demystifying’ support was a key theme connected to engagement. Making personal connections through outreach can help remove the mystery surrounding services. Aids that help people visualise reporting processes, as well as how services work, where they are, and how to reach them, were described with

some examples of such approaches being used in other settings such as with autistic young people and new school starters.

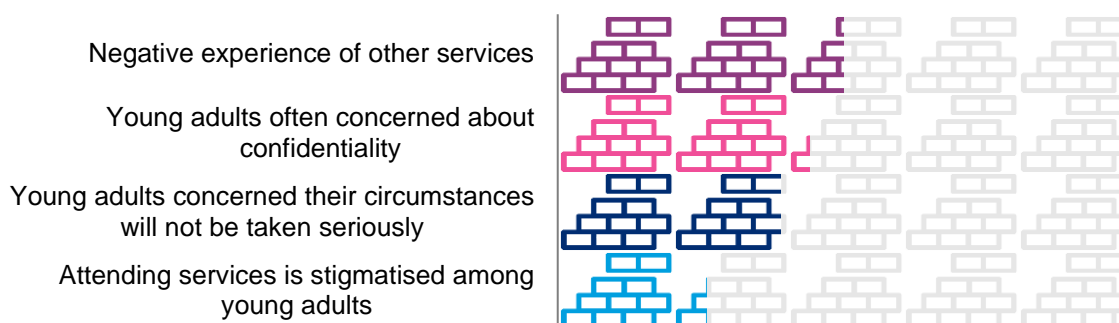
**“...if there was something that demystified the whole process of reporting concerns they have or explaining, this is what happens in a step by step process, that would be really beneficial for us...”Right class, today’s focus is going to be violence and what we consider to be violence, and what other definitions are. If you’ve been affected by any of this, by the end of the lesson, we’ll show you a quick video that shows the reporting process and how that is then taken forward and so on.”** (Education)

Digital options are often seen as a good way of engaging young people in services and many have made progress in their digital capabilities as a result of Covid-19. Professionals touched on some pros and cons of digital service delivery, however, cautioning on the ‘power’ of face-to-face work being lost. Some professionals felt that young people’s lives can be saturated with different forms of online engagement which can feel overwhelming. In other cases, risk assessment and in-depth support may be hindered by the online dynamic. An example was offered of a young person who did not have a safe private environment at home to engage vocally in an online support group, but who would type responses in the chat. The worker had a ‘hunch’ from the written responses that things were not ok, but only through arranging an in-person meeting was the young person able to open up.

### Help-seeking

Who younger victims seek support from was an important conversation throughout the research. Data from our consultation, along with wider research outlined in the context section of this report, shows younger victims are more likely to talk to friends about abuse in relationships. Not knowing what domestic services do could be one factor in this, as discussed. As shown in Figure 7 below, some practitioners answering our survey considered young adults’ perceptions of services to be a potential factor affecting access.

**Figure 7: Barriers to domestic abuse support access for victims and survivors aged 16-25**  
(Bricks show proportion of practitioner survey respondents identifying each barrier)



Negative perceptions of services were less prominent amongst the small group of young adults we consulted with, compared to not knowing what services do and feelings of shame. However, about half did select these types of barriers (see Figure 2 on page 12). In their feedback about what good support looks like, professionals’ approaches were really important, particularly a non-judgemental attitude.

**“I think it is important for domestic abuse to be openly discussed throughout the education system/ work places and for support/ resources to be visible. In my experience, younger generations are less inclined to view domestic abuse as only the "battered wife" stereotype, however I think many young people do not feel their concerns will be taken seriously unless abuse had escalated to physical violence.”**  
(Domestic abuse service)

Focus group attendees recognised that for some young people, fear of reprimand or judgement may influence whether they seek support from professionals. It was recognised that trusting relationships are necessary for disclosures from young people to happen, so proactively creating space in young people’s worlds is important.

**“What we’ve found is that young people don’t always want to dive into the story right away, you know, maybe take a little bit longer to, kind of, build up that trust.”**  
(Domestic abuse service)

Professionals felt that approaches to engaging young people through outreach were therefore imperative. Examples of local health initiatives were offered, such as outreach stands at sports events.

**“It’s not necessarily just going to be about relationships though, it’s creating the space to talk about life.”** (Health Improvement)

### **Identification and pathways – conclusion**

Non-DA professionals in Aberdeen City are well-trained around domestic abuse and levels of confidence understanding its impact on victims amongst survey respondents were high. As we have found in other areas, practitioners were less confident in actions around identifying domestic abuse and referring victims for support. They were also less sure of specific dynamics for younger victims.

While a lack of established referral pathways was not considered a significant barrier by most of our survey respondents, lower levels of confidence around identifying abuse and referring to specialists means this is worth exploring further in order to establish whether there is more to do to raise non-DA professionals’ confidence around referrals. Focus group discussions underlined that awareness-raising with non-DA professionals should emphasise that identifying abuse in young people’s relationships is “everyone’s business” and that younger people need to feel their relationships are taken seriously.

Non-DA professionals identified awareness-related issues as the biggest factors influencing whether younger victims access specialist services, specifically that young adults may not define their experiences as ‘domestic abuse’ and they may not know what specialist services offer. These findings reflect some of those from our small consultation with young adults in the area. Professionals considered awareness-raising, with a focus on young people’s specific needs, as key in enabling and promoting service access.

As well as awareness-raising, proactive outreach to build relationships with young people and age-appropriate engagement methods are seen as solutions to building young people’s understanding of the support available and developing trust in it.

## Service provision for younger victims in Aberdeen City

### Key findings

- Domestic Abuse professionals in Aberdeen City are confident and skilled in providing support to younger victims of domestic abuse.
- Dedicated age-targeted provision was not the biggest barrier identified by practitioners in the area to young adults getting appropriate support, though two in five practitioners did think there should be more.
- Feedback from DA professionals and non-DA professionals suggests that there is an appetite for resourced, age-focussed workers integrated within existing services who can engage young survivors in the way they need.

### Practice recommendations

See points for specialist services within Practice Recommendations 1 and 2

As well as exploring pathways to specialist services – how young adults are identified as experiencing abuse and referred to services, and what delays that process – we considered what is available for younger adults when they do domestic abuse services in Aberdeen City.

**“I felt comfort from them. They understood and listened and made me realise the abusive relationship wasn’t normal and I had something to fight for. My son and my life.”**

(National Survivor Survey respondent, aged 20-24)

### Overview of provision

Specialist support for domestic abuse and gender-based violence is provided by several agencies in Aberdeen City. Aberdeen City Domestic Abuse Team and Justice Social Work operate within the local authority. Third sector provision is delivered by Grampian Women’s Aid, Ending Violence and Abuse Aberdeen (previously Aberdeen Cyrenians and Violence Against Women), Fear Free (SACRO) and Rape Crisis Grampian. The Advocacy Service Aberdeen has one Idaa (See Appendix: Definitions) who supports Marac cases.



#### Mapping exercise – Key finding

There are **no dedicated domestic abuse services or workers** specifically for young adults (16-25 years) experiencing intimate partner violence in Aberdeen City



#### Mapping exercise – Key finding

Rape Crisis Grampian run a specialist young person’s service with two dedicated workers for **survivors of sexual abuse aged 13-25** and support 85 young people each year

As well as the more traditional specialist domestic abuse agencies, a number of other organisations support survivors either directly or indirectly. The Family Nurse Partnership have a Grampian-wide remit to work with anyone who is pregnant, under the age of 20, offering support covering a range of topics, including attachment and parenthood skills. This includes young parents who are experiencing domestic abuse and the team adopts a variety of tools including Duluth wheels and Freedom Project materials.

There was also evidence of ad hoc support happening within non specialist groups such as Youth Services, Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC) projects and other community organisations.



#### Practice example

The Family Nurse Partnership employs **language that reduces stigma and emphasises choice** with young parents, such as ‘referral notification’, as well as using technology like WhatsApp and Facetime to engage



#### Mapping exercise – Key finding

NHS Grampian Sexual Health Services follow Sensitive Routine Enquiry processes to **routinely ask young adults** about their experience of domestic abuse

## Domestic abuse professionals - capacity and skills

The majority of DA professionals who answered our survey responded positively when asked how well equipped their services were to provide support to victims and survivors aged 16-25. Some referenced relationships with professional partners, such as child protection specialists and youth services, as enhancing the support they could offer. Multiple comments from different respondents indicated a view that there was no difference in approach required to support this age group, that the fundamentals were the same across age groups or the expertise was collectively available across teams to provide the necessary support.

**“We deal with that age group as we would others and ensure all safety planning is in place.”** (Domestic abuse service)

Though the majority of DA professionals had not received targeted training in this area, the majority were highly confident in the aspects of working with younger victims that we enquired about.



### Practitioner survey – Key finding

One third (31%) of domestic abuse professionals in Aberdeen City had received **specific training** on working with victims aged 16-25

All DA professionals (100%) who responded said they were completely or moderately confident understanding the specific dynamics of abuse for 16-25-year-olds, as well as in awareness of technology-facilitated abuse. The majority (94%) were also confident assessing risk to younger victims and providing direct support to younger victims. Compared to these elements of work, respondents were less confident in using the Young People’s Dash (See Appendix: Definitions) to assess risk, though the majority (69%) still were.

**“We use Ric’s [Dash] specifically for this age group and also power and control wheels. We can discuss social media safety also and how to block and secure sites.”**

(Justice Social Work)

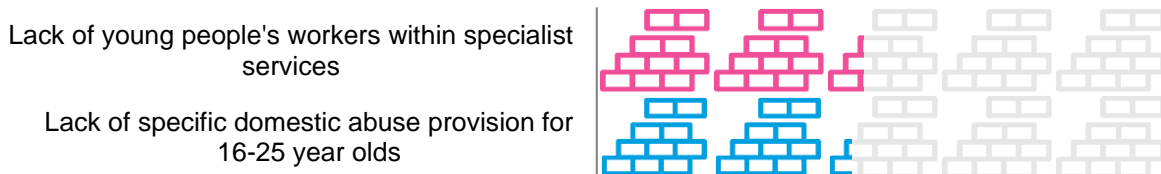
**“We do feel quite confident in having those discussions with young people...we’re aware of the language that we’re using and trying to make it your own words, sort of, service user friendly for the age group of people that we’re having conversations with.”**

(Domestic abuse service)

The above indicates that DA specialists in the area largely consider their services well equipped to work with young survivors. In the practitioner survey, we asked whether a lack of specialist services or workers specifically for younger victims was a barrier to them reaching services. Practitioners did not identify this as one of the biggest barriers for younger victims and survivors, though it was considered a barrier by a substantial proportion. As shown below in Figure 8, just under half of the respondents thought that a lack of age-specific provision (45%) or workers (47%) a key barrier for younger victims.

**Figure 8: Barriers to domestic abuse support access for victims and survivors aged 16-25**

(Bricks show proportion of practitioner survey respondents identifying each barrier)



**“Access to DA support that is relational in practice and more age appropriate”**

(Through-care)

The question of dedicated workers for young adults, or altogether separate service provision, was discussed in the professionals’ focus group. There was a shared view that DA services are under-resourced and staff work over capacity. With proper resourcing, professionals felt that existing DA

services, potentially through dedicated young people's workers with the skills to engage young adults, could meet the need. Rape Crisis Grampian have had great success implementing dedicated young people's provision within their existing service and commented on the value it has brought to young survivors.

**“We recently introduced a young person’s service specifically...working at the young persons’ level, communicating with them in ways that are beneficial to them, that they like, that they’re happy with, and actually there’s been a massive uptake in that service since we did that, since we made that change.”** (Sexual abuse service)

Other professionals highlighted the importance of dedicated provision for children experiencing domestic abuse in the home between their parents. Fully resourced support for children, with preventative aspects, was seen as vital in stopping children from going on to experience abusive relationships themselves.

**“I feel that funding for more children’s workers within...third sector organisations would be so beneficial, and there are so many children who, you know, live within households where domestic abuse is prevalent...but they’re not in social work radar, they don’t meet the criteria for social work intervention. And we know that these are...young people who are...likely to grow up and have normalised this behaviour and may find themselves in...abusive relationships themselves.”** (Health Improvement)

Also discussed was the large gap in provision for younger people demonstrating abusive behaviours or displaying negative gender-based attitudes. Professionals highlighted a lack of resource or places to go to address such red flags among younger people.

**“I feel that it could be taken more seriously, especially when young males have witnessed domestic abuse whilst in the family home. There have been times when some of our young males, especially under 16yr olds, play out what they may have witnessed but not directly towards specific individuals but gender. e.g., female police officers. Language used by them toward or to describe woman can often be aggressive.”**  
(Residential care)

### **Service provision - conclusion**

Domestic abuse support in Aberdeen City is provided by a range of local authority and third sector organisations. Whilst there are no dedicated services for young adult victims of domestic abuse, DA professionals are confident and skilled in providing support to younger victims. They share skills across teams and services to support younger victims. Whilst many practitioners contributing to our consultation thought existing services were equipped to meet the need of younger victims, there were a range of views on this.

A lack of dedicated and age-specific provision was not seen as the biggest barrier to young adults getting appropriate support, though almost half of the survey respondents did consider this a barrier. Feedback from DA professionals and non-DA professionals through the survey and focus group suggests that there is an appetite for properly resourced, focussed workers integrated within existing services who can engage young survivors in the way they need.

# Recommendations

Based on the research findings, we are making two recommendations for consideration by Aberdeen City's VAWP which we think reflect the findings in the reports.

- 1. Awareness Raising Resources: Help-Seeking Options for Young Adults**
- 2. Identification and Referrals: Responding to Abuse in Young Relationships**

The detail of each and advice on implementation follows on pages 24-25.

We are also making the following suggestions regarding data collection and victim/survivor involvement in service development.



Data	Voice
<p>Domestic abuse services should gather as much information as possible on client demographics, including age, and needs at intake. This allows analysis of outcomes, a focus on referral pathways, and ensures services can adapt to the needs of different groups.</p> <p>Without age profile information, it is difficult to fully consider how accessible domestic abuse services in Aberdeen City are to younger victims. Aberdeen City VAWP are working towards submitting the Equally Safe framework which breaks down referrals to GBV services by age and referral route, and this will be a positive step.</p>	<p>Aberdeen City's VAWP, and wider sectors, should involve people with lived experience wherever possible in the development of services for victims and survivors and in training for professionals. This should include ensuring survivor voice is incorporated throughout policy design and action planning processes.</p> <p>It may be possible to utilise existing young adults' groups in such consultations. This should always be done in a supportive and considered way.</p>

We know that our findings and recommendations will have value to other local authority areas and to practitioners across Scotland. Later this year, we will work to amplify local findings, speaking to change makers at a national level to showcase and embed best practice based on lived experience and robust evidence.



# 1. Awareness Raising Resources: Help-Seeking Options for Young Adults

- Co-produced materials (e.g., video, animation) that enable young adults to develop their understanding of domestic abuse and how it may manifest in their own relationships, particularly emotional and technology-facilitated abuse
- Accessible and clear co-produced tools, containing information on local DA support options, tailored to young adults - what specialist services do, how to get to them and what support may look like when engaging with them.
- Specialist DA services to consider the development of an outreach element to their provision, provided direct to young adults' organisations/groups, which would include dissemination of the awareness-raising resources.

## We heard:



Young adults were most likely to seek support from friends if concerned about their relationships and could identify some, but not all, abusive behaviours. Professionals felt that young adults did not always recognise abusive behaviours and that was the biggest element to them not seeking support. When asked about barriers to services access, not knowing who could help or what services do was key for young adults, who could not name many local domestic abuse services.

## We think the resources will:



Provide young adults who may be victims and survivors of domestic abuse with guidance and information that is relevant, local and that supports access to specialist domestic abuse organisations



Challenge the notion that experiencing domestic abuse is shameful for the victim



De-mystify the help-seeking process and suitability of services for young adults

## How to make it work:

Set up a co-production group / workshop, involving both young adults and specialist services, where young adults can lead on resource design and create awareness-raising materials in a trauma-informed way	Ensure resources are 'future proofed' for changes to local service information
Provide a mechanism through the co-production group for young adults to provide constructive feedback to local DA services on their messaging and accessibility to young adults	Communications plan for distribution of resources produced to ensure maximum visibility to both young adults and local non- DA organisations
Consider the creation of an Equality, Equity & Diversity plan to accompany any resources, to ensure accessibility for potential audiences	Specialist DA services are given the necessary resources to deliver outreach activities to young adults' groups

## 2. Identification and Referrals: Responding to Abuse in Young Relationships

- Training for non-specialist organisations on the dynamics of abuse in young people's relationships, including asking the question and making referrals. Inclusion of young adult specific information in existing training provision.
- A Domestic Abuse champions model for non-DA services, providing a mechanism by which professionals can access up to date information and guidance within their own organisation to enable better awareness of DA and improved identification of younger victims.
- Specialist DA services to consider allocating young adult referrals to dedicated internal staff members who will embed best practice, build links with non-DA organisations, and deliver any outreach to young adults in the community.

### We heard:



Non-DA professionals in Aberdeen City are well-trained around domestic abuse and levels of confidence understanding its impact is high. They are less confident in actions around identifying domestic abuse and referring victims for specialist support, as well as understanding the dynamics of abuse in young people's relationships.

Whilst DA professionals in Aberdeen City feel well-equipped to work with younger victims, some feel that dedicated workers who can engage younger victims in the most appropriate ways would be beneficial. There was recognition that increased outreach to young adults in the community could raise awareness of DA services.

### We think the training and champions model will:



Ensure that a wide range of professionals have a basic understanding of the needs of young survivors and recognise how to facilitate access to appropriate help



Provide non-domestic abuse practitioners with a mechanism by which they can get advice and information



Promote best practice in methods of working with young victims and survivors and increase awareness of local specialist provision

### How to make it work:

Ensure that any training is co-developed and delivered by local domestic abuse experts and young adults

Provide training to identified members of staff within non-DA organisations to become Champions

Integrate training into existing training calendars for statutory and third sector agencies to ensure uptake

Specialist DA services are given the necessary resources to allow dedicated staff members to work flexibly with young adult survivors and deliver outreach to relevant organisations

## Appendix: Definitions

### Dash and Young People's Dash

The Dash Risk Identification Checklist is used to understand the risk posed to victims of domestic abuse and is based on extensive research. Dash stands for domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence. The purpose of the Dash is to give a consistent and simple tool for practitioners who work with adult victims of domestic abuse in order to help them identify those who are at high risk of harm and whose cases should be referred to a Marac meeting in order to manage their risk.

The Young People's Dash was amended from the original Dash, designed for use with adults, in 2009. It allows practitioners to apply the wide-ranging research available on risk in adult cases of domestic abuse, combined with the more limited evidence base that relates to young people experiencing intimate partner abuse, and use it to begin the risk assessment process with a young person who is being harmed within a relationship.

The checklist formed part of SafeLives' Young People's Programme and was piloted during 2013 and 2014 alongside the collection of data through the work of Young People's Violence Advisors (YPVAs) and other practitioners trained to work with young people and/or domestic abuse.

The Checklist can be downloaded for free with accompanying guidance on the SafeLives website: <https://safelives.org.uk/taxonomy/term/454>

### Joint definition of Idaa

The following definition was jointly decided by SafeLives, Scottish Women's Aid and ASSIST, who co-deliver accredited Idaa training in Scotland:

The main purpose of Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates (Idaa) is to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners or ex-partners to secure their safety and the safety of their children. In some services, particularly specialist black and minority ethnic (BME) services they may also work with clients who are at risk from extended family members. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, Idaas normally work with their clients from the point of crisis to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

They are proactive in implementing the plans which address immediate safety, including practical steps to protect their clients and their children, as well as longer-term solutions. These plans will include actions from the Marac as well as sanctions and remedies available through the criminal and civil courts, housing options and services available through other organisations. Idaas work over the short to medium-term to put clients on the path to long-term safety. They receive specialist training and hold an SQA qualification.

Since they work with the highest risk cases, Idaas are most effective as part of an Idaa service and within a multi-agency framework. The Idaa's role in all multi-agency settings is to keep the client's perspective and safety at the centre of proceedings.

Idaas will sit within a spectrum of domestic abuse organisations, and their specific role is to take on the intensive high risk-led work at the beginning of the client's journey. Once that risk is managed to point where the client is no longer high risk, the Idaa will refer on to other domestic abuse services to meet their long-term safety and support needs.

## Mentors in Violence Prevention

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is a peer mentoring programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence.

It addresses a range of behaviours including name-calling, sexting, controlling behaviour and harassment, and uses a 'by-stander' approach where individuals are not looked on as potential victims or perpetrators but as empowered and active bystanders with the ability to support and challenge their peers in a safe way.

The MVP programme aims to support young people to positively influence the attitudes and behaviour of their peers. Following a pilot programme in Edinburgh and Inverclyde councils in 2012, it has since been introduced in 28 local authorities across Scotland.

Definition taken from: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/mentors-for-violence-prevention-mvp-an-overview/>

## References

- <sup>1</sup> SafeLives (2017) *Whole Lives – Improving the response to domestic abuse in Scotland* [Online] Available at: [http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Whole%20Lives\\_Improving%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse%20in%20Scotland.pdf](http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Whole%20Lives_Improving%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse%20in%20Scotland.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> United Nations, n.d. *Youth*. [Online] Un.org. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/>> [Accessed 27 January 2021].
- <sup>3</sup> Blakemore, S. J. & Choudhury, S. (2006) *Development of the adolescent brain: Implications for executive function and social cognition*. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 47:3, 296-312
- <sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Scottish Crime & Justice Survey 2018/20 Data Tables – Volume 6 - Partner Abuse. Table 6.07a: Summary: Psychological or physical partner abuse experienced in the last 12 months* [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2019-20-datasets/>
- <sup>5</sup> Stonard, K., Bowen, E., Lawrence, T. and Price, S. A. (2014) *The relevance of technology to the nature, prevalence and impact of Adolescent Dating Violence and Abuse: A research synthesis*. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19 (4), pp.390–417
- <sup>6</sup> SafeLives (2021) Unpublished analysis of the Insights dataset. Not tested for statistical significance.
- <sup>7</sup> Barter et al (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. NSPCC [Online] Available at: <https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/filetransfer/2009PartnerExploitationViolenceTeenageIntimateRelationshipsReport.pdf?filename=AA58F75CEDE68892A73FB681FE246B8371684F102172D08A780A14959D3BCE5747137B3B2A935011CB8EC3068664FF481AA6D2524E357BAB96C006752CCD756759AD77BD1E389823A55CFAAE74B2EE64F46C611AD1724BE1AC500B025490CCB1CD8D9D26B00674E723A731951BB13FBE2977BB14838E6BBB08A5EC5CB9756236CE19B4C97C9DCEE BB9BA0B260910F7A09C463EE47EDF62F9D4E83CF8F2477E0FEF58BD64661540279BE0995CB1BDB50F505D6A6FE37B8942C6099FD1271CD36ABE4881F071AB08257BC126ACD901012AF3BEA7&DataSetName=LIVEDATA>
- <sup>8</sup> Girlguiding (2013) *Care vs Control: Healthy Relationships* [Online] Available at: [https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/carevscontrol\\_2013.pdf](https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/carevscontrol_2013.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> Fox, C, Corr, M, Gadd, D and Butler I (2013) *From Boys to Men: phase one key findings* [Online] Available at: <http://www.boystomenproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Key-Findings-Phase-1.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> Fox, C, Corr, M, Gadd, D and Butler I (2013) *From Boys to Men: phase one key findings* [Online] Available at: <http://www.boystomenproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Key-Findings-Phase-1.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> SafeLives (2020) *My Story Matters - Talk about Toxic Survey Results* [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Talk%20about%20toxic%20survey%20results%20Report.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> Stonard, K., Bowen, E., Lawrence, T. and Price, S. A. (2014) *The relevance of technology to the nature, prevalence and impact of Adolescent Dating Violence and Abuse: A research synthesis*. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19 (4), pp.390–417.
- <sup>13</sup> House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2016) *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools* [Online] Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/9102.htm>
- <sup>14</sup> SafeLives (2017) *Whole Lives – Improving the response to domestic abuse in Scotland* [Online] Available at:

---

[http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Whole%20Lives\\_Improving%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse%20in%20Scotland.pdf](http://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Whole%20Lives_Improving%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse%20in%20Scotland.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> SafeLives (2021) Unpublished analysis of the Insights dataset.

<sup>16</sup> Barter et al (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. NSPCC [Online] Available at: <https://library.nspcc.org.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/filetransfer/2009PartnerExploitationViolenceTeenageIntimateRelationshipsReport.pdf?filename=AA58F75CEDE68892A73FB681FE246B8371684F102172D08A780A14959D3BCE5747137B3B2A935011CB8EC3068664FF481AA6D2524E357BAB96C006752CCD756759AD77BD1E389823A55CFAAE74B2EE64F46C611AD1724BE1AC500B025490CCB1CD8D9D26B00674E723A731951BB13FBE2977BB14838E6BBB08A5EC5CB9756236CE19B4C97C9DCEE BB9BA0B260910F7A09C463EE47EDF62F9D4E83CF8F2477E0FEF58BD64661540279BE0995CB1BDB50F505D6A6FE37B8942C6099FD1271CD36ABE4881F071AB08257BC126ACD901012AF3BEA7&DataSetName=LIVEDATA>

<sup>17</sup> SafeLives (2020) *My Story Matters - Talk about Toxic Survey Results* [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Talk%20about%20toxic%20survey%20results%20Report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Girlguiding (2013) *Care vs Control: Healthy Relationships* [Online] Available at: [https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/carevscontrol\\_2013.pdf](https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/carevscontrol_2013.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> SafeLives (2017) *Safe Young Lives: Young people and domestic abuse* [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-3-young-people-and-domestic-abuse>

<sup>20</sup> SafeLives (2017) *Safe Young Lives: Young people and domestic abuse* [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub/spotlights/spotlight-3-young-people-and-domestic-abuse>

<sup>21</sup> Scottish Government & COSLA (2018) *Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy to Eradicate Violence Against Women & Girls* [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/pages/5/>

<sup>22</sup> Drouet, F. & Gerrad-Abbott, P. (2021) *Response to consultation feedback*. EmilyTest, Gender-Based Violence Charter [Online] Available at: <http://emilytest.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EmilyTest-GBV-Charter-consultation-response-2021-1.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Aberdeen TEC Pathfinder Project (January 2021) *Define Stage Review*.

<sup>24</sup> SafeLives (2020) *My Story Matters - Talk about Toxic Survey Results* [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Talk%20about%20toxic%20survey%20results%20Report.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> SafeLives (2020) *My Story Matters - Talk about Toxic Survey Results* [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Talk%20about%20toxic%20survey%20results%20Report.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> SafeLives (2020) *Whole Lives Scotland. National survivor survey*. [Online] Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/whole-lives-improving-response-domestic-abuse-scotland>

<sup>27</sup> Aberdeen TEC Pathfinder Project (January 2021) *Define Stage Review*, pg. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Aberdeen TEC Pathfinder Project (January 2021) *Define Stage Review*, pg. 42.

<sup>29</sup> SafeLives (2019) *Psychological Violence*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.safelivesresearch.org.uk/Comms/Psychological%20Violence%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>