

Abstracts for the VISION Adolescent Domestic Abuse conference

Opening session

Rapid evidence review on domestic abuse in teenage relationships

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As a phenomenon, abusive behaviour between adolescents in intimate relationships remains relatively invisible, due in part to the persistent yet unfounded assumption that domestic abuse is something that occurs between adults. This presentation investigates adolescent domestic abuse (ADA) by examining the terminology and related terminology used in the literature and its associations. We focus on the victimisation and those using harmful behaviours in adolescent relationships, especially those under 16 years old, and the factors that act as protective and recovery mechanisms for young people experiencing ADA.

We present evidence from a systematic rapid review conducted as part of the Violence, Health and Society (VISION) Consortium research programme. The findings are themed around definitional issues, demographics, social and cultural factors, school and neighbourhoods, health and wellbeing and bullying and parental intimate partner violence. The review found a focus on quantitative studies, a concentration of studies in the US, and a lack of intersectional analysis with little differentiation by ethnicity, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics. Many of the studies report on school-based settings, limiting understanding of the role of neighbourhood factors in acting as protective and recovery mechanisms.

Learning from lived experience

SafeLives Changemakers

We are a group of young people who are passionate about amplifying the voices of survivors of domestic abuse. We work alongside SafeLives – a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse for everyone, for good, as ‘Changemakers’. This role involves providing a young person’s expertise on all of SafeLives’ work, conducting research, and working to influence policy change. In this presentation we will be reflecting on a project we have partnered on with City of London University, which we refer to as ‘Too soon, too late’. Our role in this project was to develop and co-facilitate a focus group with young adults who had experienced toxic and abusive relationships between the ages of 13 and 16. We will be guiding you through the process of co-creation undertaken for this project, and sharing tips for making the research experience more friendly for young people as participants and as co-researchers. We will be reflecting on our involvement in this project and what we have learnt about engaging young people in research, as well as sharing our learning around being young people in the domestic abuse sector. We believe that if you are going

to do research about young people, then young people need to be involved in the process. We'll be talking about why this matters, and the impact it has, as well as sharing some practical guidance on elements like remuneration and support. We hope this presentation will inspire you to build on your participatory practice, or even to begin to work in more participatory ways for the first time.

**Researching abuse within teenage relationships:
A critique of a decade's work and what we could do better.**

Christine Barter

Professor of Interpersonal Violence Prevention

Co-Director of the Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm
University of Central Lancashire

This presentation will provide an overview of the research I have completed, alongside colleagues, over the past 15 years exploring the prevalence, subjective impact and risk factors associated with abuse in young people's relationships, alongside young people's own views and experiences. This mixed-method body of work has addressed both victimisation and perpetration for young people aged 13 to 17. The first UK (England, Scotland and Wales) cross-sectional survey, undertaken in 2008, focused on physical, emotional, including aspects of coercive control, and sexual forms of abuse. This was subsequently built on in 2012 with a five country European study (England, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Norway) which extended the original questionnaire to include abuse through technologies, again alongside impact and risk factors and young people's own views. The survey was again modified for a mixed method longitudinal study where we included questions on both victimisation and perpetration in the ALSPAC birth cohort longitudinal data set. This explored abuse in young people's relationships before the age of 18 and 18 to 21, the measure was later validated (see Yakubovich et al 2019). Lastly, several other countries have also implemented the questionnaire, for example Slovakia, Sweden and Finland. Others have used specific questions from the survey, for example Young et al (2021), used a small number of questions on physical and emotional aspects of abuse, excluding questions on sexual abuse. In my presentation I will critique the work we have undertaken, highlight some of the methodological issues raised, including issues around the perceived prevalence of 'reciprocal' or 'mutual' forms of abuse for this age group and highlight what we need to do better in the future.

Panel 1: Teenage relationships and abuse: What the research says, chaired by Professor Sally McManus, Director of the Violence and Society Centre and Deputy Director of the VISION research project

Step up, Speak Out: Amplifying young people's voices in understanding and responding to adolescent domestic abuse

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Adolescent domestic abuse remains a vital concern, marked by a seeming normalisation of violence in young people's relationships. My study engaged 29 young people (13-18 years old) from a school and youth club in North East England. Employing a participatory approach through a series of workshops, we aimed to address the gaps in understanding young people's perspectives on adolescent domestic abuse and their recommendations to combatting it.

The findings underscore the urgent need for improved discussions on adolescent domestic abuse in sex education lessons. The young people expressed challenges in recognising acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. By responding to vignettes, they articulated nuanced understandings of concern and control. For instance, they drew the line depending on the increased frequency of texting of their partner that implies surveillance of their whereabouts and the response of the person when they express their discomfort about the frequency. Through the workshops, we co-created a young people-informed model for addressing adolescent domestic abuse and sexual violence. This model encompasses prevention through comprehensive relationship and sex education, protection by ensuring appropriate actions upon reporting or disclosure, and progression by providing sustained support for victim-survivors. This young people-informed model aims to enhance existing interventions by offering consistent support across a timeline—before, during, and after incidents, including mental health services. It notably highlights the clamour for values such as empathy, care, and trust, which young people hope to see practiced by adults.

The implications of these findings extend to policy and practice initiatives such as the UK Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (2022) by providing young people-informed insights on recognising domestic abuse and enhancing agency responses to domestic abuse, particularly in schools. Overall, this study offers an innovative and participatory model to meaningfully engage young people in shaping research, policy, and intervention programs aimed at tackling adolescent domestic abuse.

'In practice it can be so much harder': Young people's approaches and experiences of supporting friends experiencing domestic abuse

Jen Daw (Senior Research Analyst) and Sally Steadman South (Senior Innovation Lead – Safe Young Lives Programme Lead)
SafeLives

Background

Young people are more likely to seek help about abusive relationships from friends, rather than adults or professionals, irrespective of gender, age or ethnic group. However, friends may be unequipped to deal with relationship problems and unable to provide adequate emotional or practical support.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to explore how young people would support friends if they were seeking help or shared experiences of abuse.

Methods

Qualitative findings drawn from a larger UK mixed-methods study are used to explicate this. Data was gathered using 16 focus groups and one interview with girls, young women and non-binary young people aged 13 to 24 years. Thematic analysis provided six themes pertaining to supporting friends and help-seeking around relationship abuse.

Findings

Findings showed young people recommended supporting friends in a non-judgemental way to keep conversations open and help them recognise unhealthy behaviours. However, young people confirmed this is a difficult topic and many would feel fearful, helpless and under pressure. Conversations illustrated the need for more awareness of non-physical abuse and resources specifically aimed at young people to enable them to help friends and know where and when to seek professional support.

Conclusion

It is essential young people can access relevant guidance and information to improve their knowledge and confidence on the subject, as well as self-care resources for themselves. Young people need tools to be able to talk to their friends with the aim of de-normalising these behaviours in their social circles. However, in addition to available information, there is a critical need for groups and societies who have associations with young people to be trained in domestic abuse to enable them to respond appropriately to young people and support this invisible frontline in managing disclosures from friends.

Healthy relationships: children and young people attitudes and influences

Hannah Williams and Sarah Davidge
Women's Aid

Our presentation will discuss the report: *Influencers and Attitudes: How will the next generation understand domestic abuse?* (Women's Aid, 2023). The purpose of this research was to further the evidence base on relationships for children and young people (CYP), highlighting the positive influence that well-structured Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) programmes can have and to ultimately investigate 'what works well'.

The research drew on the findings from two surveys, one with CYP aged 7-18 years and the other with young people aged 18-25 years. The research found that important aspects of RSHE were missing from the educational experiences of young people. Whilst the majority of CYP held healthy attitudes towards relationships, this was not the case for everybody and some CYP agreed with statements that fell into gender stereotyping and displayed inequality between partners within relationships.

Crucially, the findings of this research showed a direct correlation between potentially harmful social media content and unhealthy attitudes towards relationships, particularly around coercive control. CYP who reported being exposed to misogynistic content on social media were significantly more

likely to agree with all the surveyed statements that reflected unhealthy perceptions of relationships compared with those who had not seen this content. At the same time, this research found that CYP are also viewing 'positive' content on social media and participants in the survey with young adults (18-25-years-old) highlighted the powerful effect that positive social media content can have on shaping attitudes and increasing knowledge on issues related to violence against women and girls (VAWG), domestic abuse and patriarchy.

Intimate partner femicide against young women - Topic: Domestic Homicides

Dr Shilan Caman
Karolinska Institutet
Sweden

Femicide at the hands of an intimate partner is the most extreme form of intimate partner violence. Research on intimate partner femicide (IPF) within the European context has grown in recent years. Yet, research on IPF against young victims is limited, why little is known about the context and factors associated with IPF affecting young women (IPF-Y). The objective of the current study is to examine rates and characteristics of IPF-Y (15-25 years), and to analyze similarities and differences between IPF against young vs. adult victims (IPF-A; 26 years and older).

The study is population-based and involves all solved homicides in Sweden, between January 1st 1990 and December 31st 2017, in which the victim and offender were or had been in an intimate relationship. The dataset holds systematically coded information from police files, court verdicts and forensic psychiatric reports. Poisson regression was conducted in order to analyze rates over time, and chi-square tests and logistic regressions were conducted in order to compare characteristics between IPF-Y and IPF-A.

Our preliminary findings demonstrate that while there has been a significant decrease in rates of IPF involving adult victims, rates of IPF involving young victims have remained stable. Our findings further elucidate significant differences, for example, offenders of IPF-Y are less likely to commit suicide, but more likely to be motivated by separation. Moreover, IPF-Y victims are more likely to be killed by strangulation. As IPF-Y remains stable over time, our findings suggest that more consideration needs to be taken to young intimate relationships when developing policies and strategies to combat IPV and IPF. In order to improve risk assessments and management of IPF affecting young females, more research is needed on context and factors associated with these incidents.

Panel 2: Sexual violence in teenage relationships, chaired by Katy Barrow-Grint, Thames Valley Police

“Always the rule that you can’t say no”: Adolescent women’s experiences of sexual violence in dating relationships

Dr Kirsty McGregor
Loughborough University

This presentation draws on interviews with 17 young women who experienced adolescent domestic abuse [ADA] in England. The project was designed to elicit narratives of young women’s experiences of ADA between the ages of 10-25 years using the Free Association Narrative Interview method (Hollway and Jefferson, 2012). Utilising Weiss’s typology of victims’ non-reporting accounts (2011), this paper demonstrates the role of shame, stigma, and self-blame in adolescent women’s narratives of sexual violence in abusive relationships. The findings suggest that sexual violence within ADA is characterised by denial and invisibility. It is challenging to identify as it is entangled in other forms of violence and abuse, exacerbated by the sexualisation of adolescence, emerging sexual identities, and gendered conceptions of sexuality and violence. The findings from this study can help to inform policy and practice regarding the additional challenges adolescent victim-survivors face in identifying sexual violence in their relationships.

Empowering Youth: Addressing Online Pornography and Adolescent Domestic Abuse – Insights from the CONSENT Project

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The CONSENT project was funded by the European Commission, and it involves institutions in Spain, Sweden, Italy, and Germany. Consent aims to empower adolescents to develop healthier relationships and become critical agents against gender-based violence in intimate relationships. It focuses on preventing adolescent sexualized violence and minimizing the negative impacts of early access online pornography consumption among children and youth. Additionally, it aims to empower parents and educators to embrace a positive approach to sexuality, challenge gender stereotypes, and emphasize the importance of consent. Mainstream pornography normalizes violent and abusive attitudes, usually directed toward women in sexual contexts and shaping adolescents' perceptions of sexuality and consent. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation, as increased online activity made children and adolescents more susceptible to age-inappropriate content, including online pornography. Despite this, effective measures to address its effects on children and youth remain limited. Consent project has developed and implemented a training program for parents, educators, and adolescents. Manuals, toolkits and materials have been produced. The project also provided institutional recommendations to enhance online safety and support gender-equal

and non-violent emotional and sexual education among youngsters.

To assess the current state of parents' and teachers' awareness and preparedness to tackle this issue, a needs assessment was conducted in Spain and Italy. It involved examining the awareness, attitudes, and readiness of parents and educators regarding young people's internet use and associated risks, including pornography consumption. The study also analyzed the levels of pornography consumption and violent behaviors among minors aged 10 to 16 years old. Affective-sexual communication between parents and children was also assessed before and after implementing the trainings. The study highlights the need for improving parental and teacher capacity to discuss sexuality and related topics with children, addressing existing gaps in sexuality education. Detailed results will be provided in the presentation.

Image-Based Sexual Abuse as a Facet of Domestic Abuse in Young People's Relationships

Dr Alishya Dhir
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Durham University

Abuse within young people's relationships is an emerging research field, as is youth image-based sexual abuse, and the two cannot be entirely separated. In a time where methods of abuse are constantly evolving, it is imperative that domestic abuse within young people's relationships is assessed in its differing forms. Drawing on findings from a doctoral project, this research identifies image-based sexual abuse as a facet of domestic abuse in young people's relationships. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, evidence will be presented demonstrating that in cases of youth image-based sexual abuse; a) the victim and suspect are commonly known to each other; b) it can be a part of a wider pattern of abuse that the victim is experiencing; c) it is not a singular experience and should be considered as part of the continuum of sexual violence. Understanding the wider context of youth image-based sexual abuse, particularly the dynamics of young people's intimate relationships, allows for a deeper understanding of how this abuse can be facilitated and enabled by broader influences in their lives. Holistically, this research aims to present a more detailed comprehension of the experiences of young people, which is integral for establishing effective responses and policies addressing the abuse.

Panel 3: Specialist services and local government, *chaired by Dr Olumide Adisa, University of Suffolk*

The role and value of Early Intervention Workers in supporting children and young people aged 11–18 in a domestic abuse service context

Elaha Walizadeh (Children's Programme Lead) and Leonor Capelier (Early Intervention Worker)
Refuge

As the largest specialist provider of domestic abuse services in the UK, Refuge supports thousands of children and young people affected by domestic abuse every year. The objective of this presentation is to provide an overview of the role and value of Early Intervention Workers in supporting children and young people affected by, or at risk of, gender-based abuse, including but not limited to teenage relationship abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, child sexual exploitation (CSE), female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and so-called 'honour-based abuse'. Early Intervention Workers provide one-to-one emotional and practical support to children and young people from the point of crisis, informing them of the full range of civil, criminal and practical support options. They facilitate access to relevant community services such as counselling, health, legal, training, education, volunteering and employment services. The goal of the Early Intervention Workers is to help ensure children and young people's short-term and long-term safety, reduce risk, enable them to access community support services and achieve their life goals. In addition, Early Intervention Workers work in close partnership with schools, social services, and other agencies to raise awareness, foster community engagement, and facilitate referrals. This presentation will share outcome data from Refuge's detailed casework database system and qualitative findings from consultations with professionals, feedback from survivors, and case studies.

About Refuge:

Refuge is the largest specialist provider of domestic abuse (DA) services in the UK. Refuge supports women and children experiencing DA and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence through refuges, several community outreach services, child support services and a specialist service for complex technology-facilitated and economic abuse cases. Refuge also operates the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (NDAH). For more information, please visit: <https://refuge.org.uk/>

Prevention, Identification, Intervention and Protection: Learning on teenage domestic abuse from a multi-agency model in the London Borough of Islington

Aisling Barker
VAWG Workforce Development and Practice Manager
Islington Council, VAWG and Youth Safety Commissioning Services

Islington has worked to transform its VAWG services over the last 5 years, including commissioning and creating specialist services such as the Children's IDVA and the VAWG workforce development team.

By supporting professionals through training, awareness raising and case consultations the VAWG workforce development team has developed a deeper understanding in the specific area of teenage domestic abuse. Specific issues that have arisen include: a concerning increase in disclosures of non-fatal strangulation; the difficulties professionals have in working with boys who are using abusive behaviours; how utilising a multi-agency model can help assess and reduce risk; and how young people's consumption of extreme pornography is impacting on their relationships.

Tackling adolescent domestic abuse in Lambeth

Rose Parker - Head of Commissioning – Safer Communities

Erika Pavely - Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Workstream Lead - Children and young people

Ariana Markowitz - Community Safety Engagement Manager

Siofra Peeren – Research Practitioner, Lambeth Health Inequalities Research and Evaluation Network

Lambeth Council

Tackling adolescent domestic abuse is a priority in Lambeth Council's violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy. Practitioners and victims and survivors have described Lambeth Council as forward-thinking in our VAWG work because of our strong coordination, partnership working and good investment in specialist services. In this presentation, Lambeth's Community Safety team will share insights, learning and reflections from practice and policy initiatives related to adolescent domestic abuse and make recommendations for research, practice, and policy.

We start by presenting data on the reach of adolescent domestic abuse services in Lambeth, including a specialist domestic abuse service for girls and non-binary children and young people aged 13 – 17 and an early intervention service for children and young people of all gender identities aged 11 – 17. We discuss gaps in evidence and service provision – particularly around supporting young people who use violence in relationships.

We then consider how strategic governance structures at Lambeth address overlaps between serious youth violence and VAWG. Unspoken presumptions around who is affected by serious youth violence have led to a focus on supporting adolescent boys, rendering experiences of adolescent domestic abuse, which disproportionately affect girls, invisible. We make recommendations for a coordinated approach that acknowledges these overlaps and creates better opportunities to tackle root causes and risks.

Finally, we reflect on how policy and practice initiatives must centre young people's expertise in preventing the violence that affects their lives. We will present content related to adolescent domestic abuse from Lambeth's soon-to-be-launched Sensory Archive, a living and participatory evidence base that documents what violence affecting young people looks, sounds and feels like through art. As a module in Lambeth's archives, it aims to prevent violence affecting young people in our community, spark challenging conversations, create inclusive spaces, and amplify marginalised voices.