

CHALLENGING ATTITUDES AND NORMS TOWARDS DATING VIOLENCE - CHILDREN FIRST YOUTH LED E-GAME

NATIONAL REPORT- UNITED KINGDOM

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Executive Summary

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most prevalent human right violations in the world¹. It is of 'pandemic proportions' with women and girls encountering physical, sexual and psychological abuses such as coercion and deprivation in an array of environments including the home, school and society². Globally, the terms "Violence against women" and "Gender Based Violence" (GBV) are used interchangeably depending on the context in which violence occurs and who the perpetrators are. Examples of such violence include acts of domestic abuse, sexual violence, gang related violence, child sexual abuse, honour-based killing, stalking and female genital mutilation (FGM). Within the context of the United Kingdom, gender-based violence affects women, regardless of their age, race, religion, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, or marital status³. Although it is evident these acts of violence are disproportionately gendered towards women and girls, the UK government understands and acknowledges that men and boys can also be victims of violence and abuse. This is evident within the Home Office pledge to help men and boys who are victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence through Male Victims Position Statement⁴.

National Context

Within the UK it is widely recognised the GBV/VAWG is a manifestation of systemic and unique forms of discrimination which can occur in different stages of lives and among different communities such as the Black, Asian and Minority (BAME) and LGBT+ communities. Statistics from leading UK GBV and abuse charities such as "Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)"⁵ state that on a whole 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence in their lifetime, with 1 in 5 women experiencing stalking since the age of 16. Similarly, according to other UK based organisations such as Action Breaks Silence⁶, one fifth of young people are exposed to physical violence and experience as much abuse in relationships in their adult lives as when they are younger. In addition to this, half of all young people report emotional abuse, in the form of verbal abuse such as being shouted at or being catcalled⁷. Despite the concerning statistics, there has been real progress made in tackling and addressing gender-based violence in the UK. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) have shown the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence has dropped; with the total number of persecutions for VAWG reaching the highest level ever recorded⁸. This has been in result of the UK government setting out ambitious policies and provision relating to the elimination of all forms of GBV/VAWG in the UK. Examples of these have included legal provisions such as Modern Slavery Act⁹, Domestic Violence Protection Orders¹⁰, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme¹¹, the FGM Protection Orders and Duty report and the Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

¹ United Nations Population Fund. (2016) Gender-based violence. Retrieved from: <https://www.unfpa.org/>

² United Nations. (1995). The Beijing declaration and platform for action.

³ Home Office (2016) 'Violence against women and girls: National statement of expectations on Violence against Women and Girls. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-against-women-and-girls-national-statement-of-expectations>

⁴ Home Office (2019) 'Male Victims Position Statement'. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/783996/Male_Victims_Position_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf

⁵ Against Violence Action (AVA) 'AVA Project' Available at: <https://avaproject.org.uk/>.

⁶ Actions Break Silence (2020) Engage, Educate and Empower communities to End Gender Based Violence

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Crime Survey For England and Wales (CSEW). Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>

⁹ The Modern Slavery Act 2015. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>

¹⁰ Domestic Violence Protection Order. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575363/DVPO_guidance_FINAL_3.pd

¹¹ Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-pilot-guidance>

Act in Wales¹² to tackle offences such as stalking, forced marriage, FGM, revenge pornography, domestic abuse. Alongside these legislations, there have been a common consensus that “GBV/VAWG is everyone’s business” and that the only to tackle gender-based discrimination is through a strategy of collaboration between communities, organisations, schools and other agencies, and local and national governments working together. This strategy has been particularly important when addressing GBV on a localised level within schools and institutions which are under the obligation of both the 1998 Human Rights Act¹³ and 2010 Equality Act¹⁴ to protect the physical and psychological integrity of pupils and promote access to educational tools and services.

Early intervention and prevention have been key tools in addressing and tackling gender-based violence. It is common knowledge that one of the most important ways in tackling and addressing GBV involves preventing violence and abuses from happening in the first place. For many policymakers and activists, the education sector plays an important role in this, especially when trying to challenge the deep-rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate individual based on their genders. Examples of these strategies includes nationally acclaimed campaign such as *This is Abuse*¹⁵ campaign which ran from 2010 to 2014 and targeted 13 to 18-year-old boys and girls. Key facets of the campaign involved encouraging teenagers to rethink their views on violence, abuse, controlling behaviour and the meaning of consent which a common theme within teen relationships. Similarly, within Scotland campaigns such as *Equally Safe at School*¹⁶ were introduced to prevent GBV in schools through working with students and staff in identifying and responding to incidents of harassment and gender based violence and providing support to victims of such abuse.

Results of Primary Research

In the United Kingdom, there has been a growing amount of research and enquiry into the prevalence of Gender Based Violence in school. As recently as 2016, the Women’s and Equalities Parliamentary Committee (WEPC) launched an enquiry into sexual harassment in schools. The enquiry identified the prevalence of the different forms of violence such as unwanted sexual touching, sexual name calling and violence in teenage partner relationship¹⁷. As a result of this the IARS International Institute alongside the Diversity Development Group (Lithuania), Centre for Social Innovation (Cyprus), Symplexis (Greece) and CESIE European Centre of Studies Initiatives (Italy) and Harokopio University of Athens (Greece) have collaborated on the “Children First” project to address gender-based violence from a bottom-up approach. In order to understand the lived experiences of young people in relation to teen dating violence and overall gender-based violence, the research consisted of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in the form of surveys, interviews and focus groups. Participants for the research consisted of young people between the ages of 12-18 across different communities in and around London (England) and Cardiff (Wales). Access to these groups were provided through the services of local youth workers, IARS Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and social media dissemination. The findings of these research amplified the importance of this research regarding challenging the norms and attitudes young people have on GBV and the prevalence of GBV in their homes and schools.

¹² Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse (Wales) Act, 2015 Available at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/contents/enacted>

¹³ 1998 The Human Right Act. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/human-rights-act>

¹⁴ 2010 The Equality Act

¹⁵ *This is Abuse’ campaign 2010 to 2014* <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/this-is-abuse-campaign>

¹⁶ *Equally Safe in Schools: A whole school approach to Gender Based Violence*. Available at:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/research/mrccsosocialandpublichealthsciencesunit/programmes/relationships/fisr/genderbasedviolencewholeschoolsapproach/>

¹⁷ WEPC (2016) *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools*. Available at:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry1/>

Surveys

The surveys were constructed on Google Forms and were disseminated to youth groups on various social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. 81 surveys were completed with 83% of the participants being aged 16-18 and the rest being 12-15 years old. Among these results 61% of the participants identified themselves as Heterosexual, 11% as Bisexual and the rest of the 12% identified as Homosexual, Asexual, Pansexual and Queer. Most of the participants came from diverse backgrounds with 32% identifying as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, 21% Black or Black British African, 11% Arab and 4% Asian or Asian British Pakistani. The diversity represented in this survey meant that many of the young people faced unique obstacles which have reformed or distorted their views of society. Although, 54% of the participants marked that they did not face any obstacles, 18% came from low income families, 8 % came from single parents' households, 5.3 % had cultural disadvantages, 2% had health problems and rest had other disadvantages in relation to geography and education. This was interesting as when it came to their general understanding of whether they have been personally affected by GBV there were mixed results with 41.5% saying yes, 51% saying no with 7.5% who were unsure. This was no surprise as their collective experiences were mixed, with 67% stating that they had encountered GBV every now and then, in comparison to 16.3% saying every day and 6.1% saying never. Despite, these differences, there were three environments in which they young people felt GBV was prominent: 50% said schools, 11.9% said work and 23.8% mentioned that they have experienced GBV at home. Examples covered a wide range of themes including gender norms, stereotypes and discrimination. Examples of these comments included *"I am pigeonholed into the housewife role"* , *"I get called a female when I am not"* , and *"I get called a sket¹⁸ because of how many boys I talk to"*. Many agreed that that it is never okay for any gender to harm others. When asked to specify their understanding on GBV it was clear that they had limited understanding on what the phenomenon entails. A prominent view was that *"gender violence is when you hurt another person"*, some gave examples of GBV from past sex education lesson by highlighting actions such as *"domestic violence"*. What was clear from this question was the differences in responses between boys and girls, in which some of the girls understood what relationship violence entails from their own experiences of being catcalled and judged, whereas the boys acknowledged it from a discriminatory view in relation to feminism and equality. One of participants commented that *"Gender Violence is a counter effect; people talk about equality but if I hit someone can they hit me back. For example, if you "slap me, I can slap you back". It's a psychological or defence mechanism"*. This misunderstanding and detachment was once again not surprising as 72.5% of participants said they did not feel protected by society with 32.5% saying they do not feel protected by their families. This lack of access and support young people feel they have was telling, with 67% saying that they are not sure who to contact and where to get support.

Interviews

The interviews conducted provided the opportunity to elaborate on some of the points that were raised in the survey. 11 semi structured interviews were conducted in which young people were asked to freely describe their views and attitudes relating to GBV. Among the 11 participants, 6 of them were between the ages 16-18 with the rest (5) belonging to 12-15 age groups. 7 of the participants were boys and 4 were girls. Within the themes derived from the interviews there were clear differences in understanding between the two ages groups particularly within their awareness and models of intervention. In regards to their understanding on GBV in general most of the participants aged 16-18 described GBV as something which is done by *"men to women"*. Many of young people concluded that men are unlikely to be believed and were not sure whether boys and men can be victims of sexual assault. This was also evident among the young people between the ages 12-15 who, due to their lack of romantic history, conceptualised it as only just domestic violence, or just simply harming someone. It is worth noting that the interview participants came from a local a youth club where many of them have encountered obstacles such as poverty, homelessness and social exclusion which can have a significant contribution toward their own understanding and distorted view of violence as being an appropriate form of action. The role of culture is

¹⁸ London Slang to describe a woman who is in a relationship with multiple partners.

an important driving force for this. One of the participants described their experience of being hit as a child and how it contributed to their understanding of what GBV entailed, and what forms of violence are deemed more acceptable than others. This was evident when participants from both groups normalised offences such as controlling behaviour and manipulation in comparison to physical forms of violence. An example of this is when the interviewer asked the participants *“Would you be comfortable with your partner spending time with members of the opposite sex?”* Most of the male participants indicated a degree of discomfort with this issue and expected the same treatment from their partner in comparison to the responses from female who stated that such demands were extremely bad signs in a relationship. This theme further filtered into understanding of gender norms as, once again, participants from both ages groups reinforced gender stereotypes and norms, for example the fact that *“boys are stronger than girls as they have greater muscle mass”* or that it expected of boys to ask the girl out as it is *“gentlemanly”*. Despite this when it came to conceptualising what the rules of dating entails, several of the male participants cited social rules such as *“never put your hands on a woman”* without completely understanding the origins and reason for it. From the interviews, it was clear that the young people were drawing on what they have seen or heard but not what they have been taught. When asked about whether healthy relationship was something taught or discussed in school, they all answered negatively. Similarly, when asked about whether they knew any support service they only mentioned one organisation - Childline¹⁹.

Focus Groups

Similar to the themes derived from the interview and surveys, focus groups were conducted online with young people between the ages 16 to 18 who identify themselves as being from Black, Asian and Minoirty Ethnic (BAME) communities. When asked about what they think GBV or gender discrimination entails, once again there was an array of answers which confirmed some of the points already raised. Responses to that particular question includes answers such as *“it is violence that is specifically done to a particular gender”*, *“you normally associate with the male being dominant and female being inferior”*. Among these responses the group understood these were stereotypes and were not universal definitions for what it entails. Within the discussion the group highlighted the evolution of domestic violence as not only something perpetrated by men but also women too, examples included issues such as mental manipulation and the struggles couples have in coming forward with their story. One of young people in the group stated how coming forward is not an easy thing due to feelings of *“embarrassment”* and *“mistrust”*. When the focus group members were asked if they have ever encountered GBV they all unanimously said no, but did agree they had encountered instances of *“toxic”* relationships. The term *“toxic”* was mentioned multiple times especially within the scenario they were provided in which all members were able identify to unhealthy traits of the relationship. Although they were informed of what it entailed, in one of the main discussions surrounding support for survivors many of them mentioned how they would not approach their parents due to cultural reasons, or approach their teachers and police because of the lack of trust. Apart from Childline they were not aware of where to seek support.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from the surveys, interviews and focus groups indicate the importance of education and school environment in terms of addressing GBV. From the research:

- Young peoples’ understanding of GBV did not include their own lived experiences but related to their perceptions of society. This was evident with the common gender stereotypes being used and explanation for why violence occurs.
- Despite being informed of what unhealthy relationships entail, young people showed a lack of trust for adults in their lives - this includes parents and teachers in whom they did not feel safe to disclose their concerns.
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¹⁹ ChildLine, UK based children protection organisations. Available at: <https://www.childline.org.uk/about/about-childline/>

- The role of teachers is important, as many of the young people within schools stated that they have never been taught about gender violence other than domestic violence, which made them presume action controlling behaviour and manipulation were normal facets of relationships.

With this understanding, the Children First project aims to challenge the attitudes and norms young people have towards gender-based violence, dating violence and gender stereotypes. As mentioned, although there have been campaigns to tackle this in school, the effectiveness of these campaigns can be questioned. Based on the conclusion, Children First aims to:

- Raise awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence through an intersectional lens which takes into consideration the cultural, social, and economic aspects of gender-based violence
- Support educators in developing educational tools, training materials, and cultivating holistic curricula that represent the diversity of the classroom and diversity of GBV
- Support schools, young people, and parents in accessing professionals such as psychologists, third sector and civil society actors in developing strategies to tackle GBV in schools and creating support systems for all individuals.

1. Introduction

1.1 Understanding the problem

We understand Gender Based Violence (GBV) as behaviours or attitudes that hurt, threaten or undermine people because of their gender or sexuality²⁰. The underpinning characteristics of GBV centres around the complexity of gender relations and the hierarchical constructions of gender and sexuality in society. This is evident, with most victims of GBV constituting women and girls, and perpetrators overwhelming being men²¹. Within numerous policy report and research²² in the UK, acts of GBV consists of a continuum of behaviours and attitudes such as domestic violence, sexual violence, sexist harassment in the streets, homophobic expressions, online abuse and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. The continuum nature of such behaviours are relative to how individuals - both victims and preparators - conceptualise violence and reinforces gendered power hierarchies within the structures of everyday life. This understanding of GBV as a continuum of behaviours provides us with an understanding that the nature of the GBV is a societal problem rooted in the persistent inequalities in society.

An effective way of responding to issues of GBV is by “problematizing”²³ GBV as a social problem and making it visible for the public. This provides researchers and policymakers the opportunity to critically examine how a social issue can be defined and what strategies for intervention are needed. Within the context of GBV this allows the opportunity to inhibit the problems and identify help-seeking solutions for victims, perpetrators and bystanders. In the case of young people this approach of “problematizing GBV”²⁴ can help them explore what the problem is through the lens of the victims or perpetrators and recognise the different manifestation of GBV in the form of teen dating violence, coercion and manipulation, emotional and online abuse. Thus, the REC funded [Children First](#)²⁵ project uses this methodology to help conceptualise and present GBV as a widespread problem among children and teenagers. The projects focuses on one prominent manifestation of GBV which is “dating violence” an under-researched and unaddressed social problem. As a result of this, the IARS international institute alongside 5 other European partners have collaborated on this transnational project to address GBV from a bottom-up approach through educating school children through preventing and addressing gender stereotypes and violence.

1.2 Aims and Scope of Research

Since the mid-2000s studies in the UK have documented a high prevalence of GBV in young people’s inmate relationships²⁶. Research by [Girlguiding](#) (a UK charity that works with women and girls) found that 59% of girls and young women aged 13-21 years olds have encountered some form of GBV at school²⁷. These statistics have been a common occurrence as data from other not-for-profit and non-governmental

²⁰ Anitha, S. and Lewis, R. eds., 2018. *Gender based violence in university communities: Policy, Prevention and educational initiatives*. Policy Press.

²¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2019) *Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019*. [Published online](#): ONS

²² CPS Violence Against Women and Girls Crime Report. Available at:

https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cps-vawg-report-2017_0.pdf. Accessed: 01/10/2020

²³ Bacchi, C. (2012). Why study problematizations? Making politics visible. *Open journal of political science*, 2(01), 1.

²⁴ Bacchi, C. (2012). Why study problematizations? Making politics visible. *Open journal of political science*, 2(01), 1.

²⁵ Children First (2019) Addressing Gender Based Violence from the bottom up. Available at: <https://childrenfirst.info/>.

Accessed:01/10/2020

²⁶ Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D., & Evans, K. (2009). *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. London: NSPCC.

²⁷ Girlguiding (2014) Girls attitude Survey (2014). Available at: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2014.pdf>. Accessed: 03/10/2020

organisations such as [AVA-Against Violence & Abuse](#)²⁸, [Action Breaks Silence](#)²⁹ and [the Mankind Initiative](#)³⁰ have highlighted that:

- 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence in their lifetime
- Sexual violence is even more prevalent for younger women as one in three teenage girls have experience form of sexual violence before they are 18
- One fifth of young people are exposed to physical violence (a greater proportion are female) and experience as much abuse in relationships as adults
- More than half a million men (2.5% men) and 1.2 million (4.8% women) were victims of partner abuse in 2018/2019.

Taking those statistics into consideration, the main objective of the Children First project is to contribute further to the existing literature on GBV with an emphasis on school-related gender-based violence and in particular “dating violence”. The project aims to tackle this issue from a child-centred approach by exploring the views of young people and increasing their awareness of issues relating to GBV. The scope of this report and research aims to challenge young people’s attitudes to dating violence by:

- Improving their understanding about the underlying social and cultural norms that reinforce gender inequalities and increase awareness on stereotypes
- Empowering teachers and educators to identify and tackle cases of gender-based dating violence
- Increase public awareness on the topic and showing how such phenomena promote intolerance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The National Context: GBV

Violence is a complex and multifaceted issue that transcends social, economic and geographical borders³¹. Regardless of how it is manifested, violence is a universal problem affecting individuals of different age groups, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and of different sexual orientation. Within the context of the UK it is widely recognised that GBV and Violence against Women and Girls is a manifestation of systemic and unique form of discrimination impacting individuals from all communities including those from the Black, Asian and Minoirty Ethnic Communities and LGBT+ communities. It is widely recognised and acknowledged in the UK that GBV is present in all localities across the country, with victims suffering in silence and crimes remaining hidden and unreported to authorities. To echo the terminologies set out in international bodies such as the United Nations, GBV is an issue of “pandemic proportion”³² with approximately 2 million adults experiencing domestic abuse. Although GBV is a disproportionately gendered act of violence towards women and girls within the UK it has widely been acknowledged that men and boys can also be victims of violence and abuse, as evident with the Home Office’s pledge to help men and boys through their Male Victims Position Statement ³³.

However, women and girls are still victims of violence, with many encountering an array of violent acts such as sexual violence, honour-based killings, online and physical stalking and Female Genital

²⁸ Against Violence Action (2020) (AVA) ‘AVA Project’ Available at: <https://avaproject.org.uk/>

²⁹ Actions break Silence (2020) Engage, Educate and Empower communities to End Gender Based Violence. Available at: <http://www.actionbreaksilence.org/>. Accessed

³⁰ The Mankind Initiative (2020) ‘Statistics and Research’. Available at: <https://www.mankind.org.uk/>. Accessed: 03/10/2020

³¹ Farrington, D. P., & Ttofi, M. M. (2020). Advancing Knowledge about Youth Violence: Child Maltreatment, Bullying, Dating Violence, and Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 1-7.

³² United Nations. (1995). The Beijing declaration and platform for action. Available at:

https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf. Accessed: 29/08/2020

³³ HM Government “ Position statement on male victims of crimes considered in the cross- Governmental Stetgegy on ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Avaiablae at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/783996/Male_Victims_Position_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf. Accessed: 01/09/2020

Mutualisation (FGM). Despite these concerns from a policy and governmental level there has been some progress in tackling and addressing gender-based violence. Recent data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has shown how the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence has reduced with the number of persecutions increasing³⁴. At face value this might seem to be a notable achievement, but on a localised and grassroot level the prevalence of GBV in the UK is still high; especially with the limited access victims have to provisions, the restriction of outreach workers, and the lack of acknowledgment and recognition of such behaviours in communities. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is an example of this with many countries including the United Kingdom seeing a rise in GBV levels in the form of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline³⁵ received a 25% increase in calls during the national lockdown with women calling to access support and seek refuge. It is worth noting that GBV does not only constitute being a victim of perpetrator, but also could be a bystander or witness. The 2011 research report from the NSPCC³⁶ reported that one in seven children and young people under the age of 18 would have witnessed domestic violence at some point in their childhood with the likelihood of replicating such behaviours in adults relationships increasing (*see the theory of learning*).

On a national level this has always been on the radar of government with the 2016-2020 strategy report publishing the government’s commitment to that no woman should live in fear” and “ that every girl should be growing up in an environment that is safe for everyone”³⁷. Within this strategy report numerous legislative frameworks have been strengthened and promoted to change attitudes and prevent violence. Examples of these legislations include:

- Protection from Harassment Act³⁸
- The Equality Act ³⁹
- The Modern Slavery Act ⁴⁰
- The Domestic Violence Protection Orders ⁴¹
- The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme ⁴²
- The FGM Protection Orders Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Act in Wales⁴³

As mentioned above, this abundance of legislation can only be effective through collaborative actions and mediation between national and local governments, local partners and agencies such as NGOs and schools, and every community working together under the idea that “*Tackling VAWG is everybody’s business*”. The main pillars of addressing and challenging GBV is through the development of preventative frameworks. It is common knowledge that preventing violence and abuse from happening through measures such as

³⁴ Crime Survey For England and Wales (CSEW). Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>

³⁵ The National Domestic Abuse Helpline. Available at: <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

³⁶ NSPCC (2011) Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London. Available at: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/meeting-needs-children-living-domestic-violence-london-report.pdf>

³⁷ VAWG Strategy report (2016-2020). Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522166/VAWG_Strategy_FINAL_PUBLICATION_MASTER_vRB.PDF

³⁸ House of Commons Library, (2017), The Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Available: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06648/>

³⁹ The Equality Act (2010) . Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

⁴⁰ The Modern Slavery Act 2015. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>

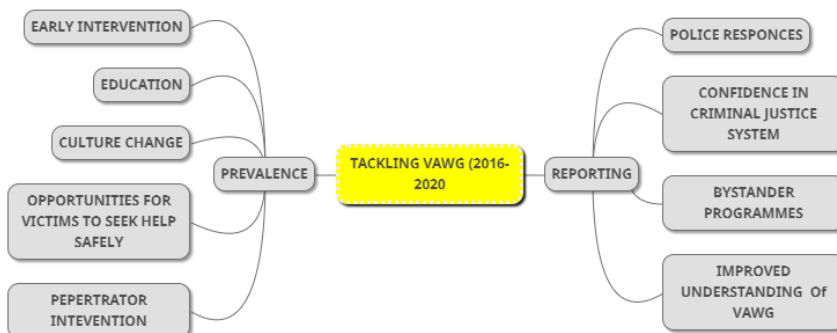
⁴¹ Domestic Violence Protection Order. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575363/DVPO_guidance_FINAL_3.pdf

⁴² Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-pilotguidance>

⁴³ The FGM Protection Orders Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Act in Wales. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/national-strategy-2016-to-2021.pdf>

education, perpetrator interventions, culture change and bystander programmes can have a significant impact in challenging and dismantling the deep-rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that lead to GBV.

Thus, schools play a prominent and effective role in preventing GBV and promoting effective perpetrator intervention. By educating young people and helping them understand what constitutes a healthy relationship and the signs of violence it can help challenge attitudes, behaviours and norms towards GBV, dating violence and youth violence in general.



References: VAWG strategy report (2016-2020)

2.2 School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV): Dating Violence

Schools are reflections of society in the sense that they are breeding grounds for social learning and intellectual development. Schools are also key sites of socialisation, where societal norms are reproduced and occasionally left unchallenged. This has been particularly evident in the case of gender norms where schools have become settings in which significant amounts of gender-based harassment, dating and relationship violence occur⁴⁴.

2.3 Dating Violence

Within research, dating violence among young people is an underdeveloped area in GBV research, even though young people experience the highest rate of domestic abuse in comparison to any other groups⁴⁵. Dating violence which is often referred to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) consists of a wide range of violent acts such as threats, emotional abuse, physical violence, controlling behaviours, coercion and non-consensual sexual activities⁴⁶. The implication of experiencing such violent acts is that young people are more likely to be victims or perpetrators of GBV in their adulthood⁴⁷. The acts of violence can be multifactorial and can be associated with many other behaviours such as substance abuse, anti-social behaviour and mental health problems⁴⁸. Despite the underreported nature of dating violence, there has been some significant research on teen dating violence and the impact it has on young people. The first landmark research relating to violence in teenage relationships was published by the University of Bristol and the NSPCC⁴⁹. The main aim of this research was to develop a better understanding of the nature, extent

⁴⁴ Jamal, F., Bonell, C., Wooder, K., & Blake, S. (2015). Let’s talk about sex: gender norms and sexual health in English schools.

⁴⁵ Oxfordshire Youth, (2019), Young people experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group, Available: <https://oxfordshireyouth.org/blog/young-people-experience-the-highest-rates-of-domestic-abuse-of-any-age-group/>

⁴⁶ Meiksin, R., Campbell, R., Crichton, J., Morgan, G. S., Williams, P., Willmott, M., ... & Taylor, B. (2020). Implementing a whole-school relationships and sex education intervention to prevent dating and relationship violence: evidence from a pilot trial in English secondary schools. *Sex Education*, 1-17.

⁴⁷ Exner-Cortens, D., Eckenrode, J., & Rothman, E. (2013). Longitudinal associations between teen dating violence victimization and adverse health outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 131(1), 71-78.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ University of Bristol and NSPCC, (2009), Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships,

Available: http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/userfiles/file/partner_exploitation_and_violence_report_wdf70129.pdf

and dynamics of teenage relationship abuse and to examine the impact that physical, emotional and sexual violence has on the wellbeing of young people. The key finding of this research included the following:

- 33% of girls and 16% of boys reported sexual partner violence
- 25% of girls (the same proportionate as adult women) and 18% of boys reported some form of physical relationship abuse
- Around 75% of girls and 50% of boys reported some form of emotional abuse
- The majority of girls reported that violence had adversely affected their welfare
- Most young people either told a friend or no-one about violence.

A second research project called “Standing on my own two feet” published by the NSPCC⁵⁰ indicated similar findings in which:

- Two-thirds of female participants and a third of male participants reported experiencing emotional violence
- Half of the girls reported they had experienced some form of sexual violence. Only a small minority of boys reported sexual violence
- Only a small minority of the participants told an adult about the violence they had encountered.

Following on from these significant pieces of research, SRGBV in the UK has become an increasing phenomenon with various media outlets and reports stating that within the years 2012-2015 there has been more than 5,500 sexual offences recorded in schools⁵¹. The 2017 survey from Girlguiding⁵² stated 64% of girls aged 13-21 years old had experienced sexual harassment in comparison to 59% in 2014. Furthermore:

- 41% had experiences jokes or taunts of a sexual nature compared to 37% in 2014
- 36% had experienced sexist comments on social media compared to 15% in 2014
- 24% had seen unwanted sexually explicit pictures or videos compared to 25% in 2014
- 19% had experienced unwanted sexual touching compared to 19% in 2014.

These concerning figures have led to a growing amount of research and enquiry into the prevalence of Gender Based Violence in schools. As recently as 2016, the Women’s and Equalities Parliamentary Committee (WEPC)⁵³ launched an enquiry into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. The enquiry identified the prevalence of the different forms of violence such as unwanted sexual touching, name calling and violence in teenage partner relationship. The enquiry highlighted the need for a whole school approach to tackle GBV among youth through teaching children, young people, teacher and parents about domestic abuse and sexual violence⁵⁴. This strategy has been particularly important when addressing GBV on a localised level within schools and institutions which are under the obligation of both the 1998 Human Rights Act⁵⁵ and 2010 Equality Act⁵⁶ to protect the physical and psychological integrity of pupils and promote access to educational tool and services.

⁵⁰ NSPCC, (2011), RESEARCH REPORT ‘Standing on my own two feet’: Disadvantaged Teenagers, Intimate Partner Violence and Coercive Control, Available: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/standing-own-two-feet-report.pdf>

⁵¹ BBC News, (2015), School sex crime reports in UK top 5,500 in three years, Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34138287>

⁵² Girlguiding, (2018), Girlguiding response to the Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry on sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, Available: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and->

⁵³ WEPC (2016) Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry1/>

⁵⁴ Parliament UK, (2016), The scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, Available: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeg/91/9105.htm>

⁵⁵ 1998 *The Human Rights Act*. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/human-rights-act>. Accessed: 20/08/2020

⁵⁶ 2010 *The Equality Act*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

2.4 Campaigns and Strategies

For many policymakers and activists, the education sector plays an important role in challenging the deep rooted social norms, attitudes and behaviours that discriminate individual based on their gender.

Examples of these strategies include nationally acclaimed campaigns and projects such as:

2.4.1 This is Abuse Campaign (2010-2014)⁵⁷

The “This is Abuse” campaign which ran from 2010 to 2014 targeted 13 to 18 year olds to help to prevent them from becoming victims and preparator of abusive relationships. The campaign, which was a nationwide effort with posters plastered all over bus stops, TV shows and radio, encouraged teenagers to rethink their views of controlling behaviours, abuse and violence and to understand what consent meant within their relationships. Most of the educational tools attached to this campaign consisted of facilitated lesson plans and campaign materials which fostered in-depth discussion with young people about the dynamics of teenage relationships and what the next stages are for them in seeking help. The significance of this campaign was that it led to discussions that would normally happen in the classroom to enter different arenas such as the home, the media and friendship groups. Although this was deemed as a successful campaign at governmental level, many grassroots organisations questioned the sustainability of these measures and whether they reached the targeted audience.

2.4.2 Equally Safe in schools Project (2017)⁵⁸

The “Equally Safe in Schools” project was implemented under the Scottish Government’s Zero Tolerance Policy. The aims of the project consisted of developing strategies that prioritise primary prevention and challenge the notions that violence is inevitable or acceptable. With the idea of creating a whole school approach, the project focussed on mapping the area or subjects in school where GBV was most prevalent and developing strategies where students and staff are able to identify and respond to incidents of harassment and violent abuse.

3. Research Results

To further understand the experiences of young people in relation to GBV and dating violence, the IARS International Institute carried out mixed methodology research focussing on young people’s understandings of GBV and how they think it should be addressed. Young people in the UK participated in surveys, interviews and focus groups giving their opinion and contributing to the projects ss members of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and Women’s Advisory Board (WAB). Participants of the research consisted of young people between the ages 12 to 18 years old living in London (England) and Cardiff (Wales). Access to these groups were provided through the services of local youth clubs, the YAB and social media dissemination. The finding of this research amplified the importance of this research and how norms and attitudes towards GBV can be challenged.

3.1 Surveys

Mixed method surveys were collected using Google Forms and disseminated to youth groups across London and Cardiff. The surveys were also disseminated on various social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Snapchat. A total of 82 surveys were collected with 82% belonging to the 16 to 18 age groups and 18% belonging to the 12-25 age group.

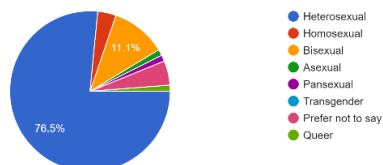
⁵⁷ This is Abuse’ campaign 2010 to 2014 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/this-is-abuse-campaign>

⁵⁸ Equally Safe in Schools: A whole school approach to Gender Based Violence. Available at: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/research/mrccsosocialandpublichealthsciencesunit/programmes/relationships/fisr/genderbasedviolencewholeschoolsapproach/>

3.1.1 Demographic

51% of the participants were female, with 45% being male and the rest preferring not to share their gender identity. This was particularly interesting as the gender identity and sexual orientations of the participants were diverse as well.

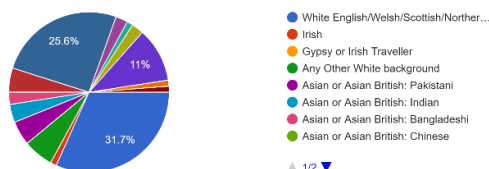
5. Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity
81 responses



- 76.5% identified themselves as heterosexual
- 11.1% identified themselves as bisexual
- 3.7% identified themselves as homosexual
- 3.6% identified themselves as Queer, Asexual and Pansexual.

The rest of the participants preferred not to state their sexual orientation in this survey. Furthermore, the participants of the survey came from diverse ethnic backgrounds with many of them representing communities who are not necessarily the usual focus of research relating to gender.

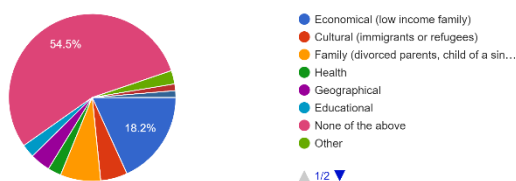
6. Ethnicity
82 responses



The cultural makeup of the participants consisted of 31.7% White English, Welsh, Scottish/Northern Irish; 25.6% Black British: African; 11% Arab; 4.9% Asian or British Asian; 2.4% Asian Bangladeshi; 3.7% Asian Indian; with the rest of the cohort identifying themselves as mixed heritage and other.

The diversity of the targeted demographic also meant many of the participants encountered unique obstacles in their lives relating to their identity or socio-economic status. 77 out of the 82 participants responded to this question. 54.5% of the participants marked that they did not encounter any social, economic or geographical barrier. However, 18.2% did state that they came from low income families and had economic disadvantages. Similarly, 5.3% stated that their ethnic and cultural background was an obstacle that they faced.

7. What kind of obstacle do you and your family face? Mark the ones that apply to you
77 responses



This was also the case for participants who came from “broken” homes or families, in which 7.8% stated that their family circumstance was also a factor that needs to be considered. The rest of the 5.2% highlighted factors such as health, education and geography and social barriers.

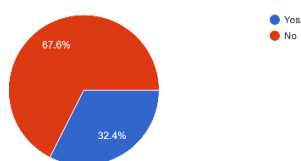
3.1.2 General Context of GBV

To gain insight into their understanding of GBV, participants were asked numerous questions on their experiences and knowledge of the question. One of the first questions in the survey related to their own gender identity and how they were perceived by others. When asked if they had ever been treated differently because of their gender, 51.2% stated NO, 41.5% stated YES and 7.3% were unsure on how to answer that question. The 41.5% who marked YES were then asked to identify how often they experience differential treatment among their peers based on their gender. 68% stated every now and then, 16%

stated everyday whereas 2% stated every week. The rest stated that they were either not sure or have never experienced it. To further understand exactly the environments in which they had encountered discrimination or differential treatment, 51.2% marked school as the environment in which they have encountered discrimination. This was closely followed by 23.3% stating the home and 11.6% marking work as an environment. Interestingly, romantic relationships were not marked by any of the participants which leads to concerns on whether young people understand the concept of dating violence, or if they are masking their experiences.

Furthermore, when participants were asked the questions if they have ever been made fun of by a relative because of their gender, 67.6% stated NO but 32.4% stated YES. When asked to elaborate on this further some of the participants made these points:

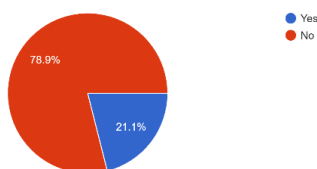
11. Have you ever been made fun of by a relative because of your gender?
74 responses



- *"I get called words such as "sket" because of how many boys I talk to"*
- *"Certain male members have always acted in a way that implied that just because I am girl, I am less capable my male cousins - despite being older than them by a fair bit and "traditionally smarter"*
- *"General belittling of ambitions"*

This was interesting to analyse as the answers to that question portrayed the difference of home/school and social environment. When asked if they ever felt ashamed or restrained about their gender, 78.9% stated NO whereas 21.1% stated YES. Some of the explanations, participants gave highlighted the level of discrimination prevalent in our schools and in society.

13. Have you ever felt ashamed or restrained by your gender?
76 responses

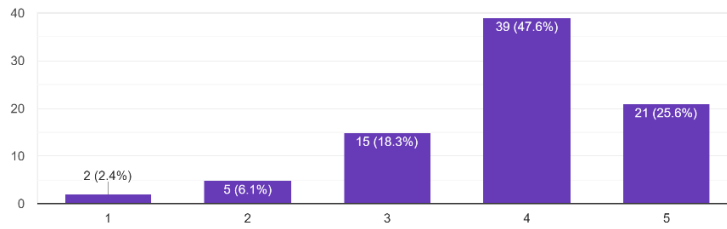


- *"a lot of girls were shamed in school for having their periods, getting emotional, even teacher would label girls as "drama queens" if they were upset about something.*
- *"The feeling of not being able to do certain things because you are a woman"*

3.1.3 Gender Stereotypes

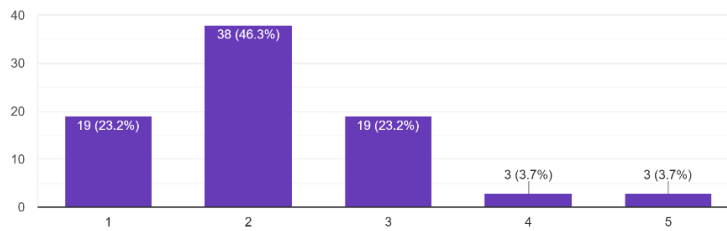
Throughout the questionnaire, participants were asked to react to scenarios relating to gender stereotypes. The responses of the participants were measured on five-point LIKERT scale with 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. Within the analysis of this research some of the responses on the social habits of girls and boys are girls aligned with general gender stereotypes and views. For example, the two responses to the question on whether *"they agreed or disagreed that gossiping is more usual to girls than boys"* and *vice versa*, there were stark difference on how the participants from different genders responded to these scenarios.

15. From a scale 1-5 (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). Gossiping is more usual to girls than boys
82 responses



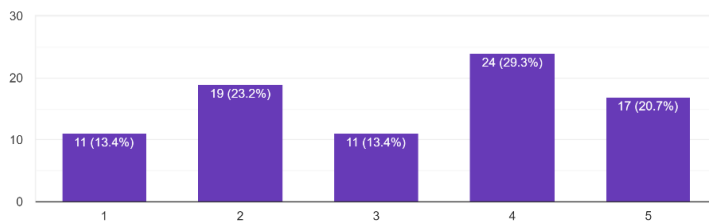
From these graphs you can clearly see the difference in response and how most of the participants perceived that girls are more likely to gossip than boys

Gossiping is more usual to boys than girls
82 responses



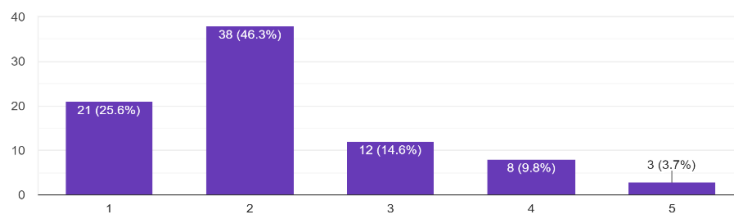
A similar trend was present when participants were asked the questions “Are boys less sensitive than girls/girls are less sensitive than boys”. These trends were also replicated when respondent were asked about the vulnerability of boys and girls with 76.8% of them agreeing that girls are more vulnerable than boys, and 74% disagreeing in the next question that boys are more vulnerable than girls. The double standards in regarding to the role and actions between boys and girls were clear to see within the responses of the participants.

Boys are less sensitive than girls
82 responses



Like the questions on gossiping. It can be inferred that most of the participants that girls are more sensitive than boys.

Girls are less sensitive than boys
82 responses



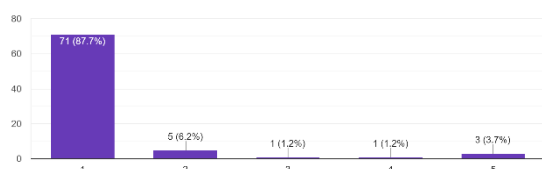
A prime example of these “double standards” was evident within the context of dating and sexual relationships. When asked if it is acceptable for a boy to have more than one sexual partner than for a girl, 41.5% agreed and 32.9% strongly agreed.

This reinforcement of gender norms also filtered through into their gendered understanding on dating etiquettes. 24% of participants strongly agreed and 28% agreed that boys are supposed to ask girls out, and 31.7% strongly disagreed that girls should ask boys out. This section of the questionnaire indicated the internalisation of discrimination within young people and the lack of acknowledgment for it. The idea that most young people think that boys should ask girls out indicates to us, how they view relationships and the roles of the different gender within relationships. Previous research⁵⁹ echo this finding by insisting that this is how gender norms emerge in romantic heterosexual relationships.

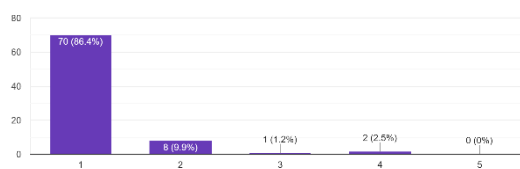
3.1.4 Dating GBV

In addition to exploring the young people’s views on gender stereotypes, as with the the previous section, young people were asked to respond on a five point scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree), with their opinion of certain scenarios relating to dating violence. Questions in this section related to behaviours and themes identified in the desk-based research. The participants were asked question such as whether “it was acceptable for a boy to be verbally violent towards their partner”. 87.7% of the participants marked strongly disagree. Similarly, when the question was reversed, and the participants were asked whether it was acceptable for “girls to be verbally violent towards her partner “86.4% also stated that they strongly disagree with this statement.

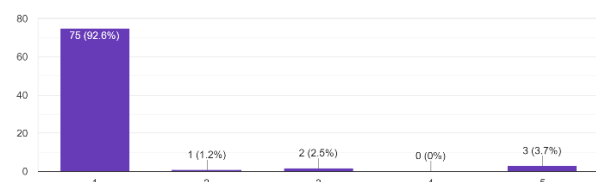
17. From a scale from 1-5 (1=never and 5= always), please indicate your opinion on the following statements: It is OK for a boy to be verbally violent...ner in a relationship (insults, shouting, naming etc)
81 responses



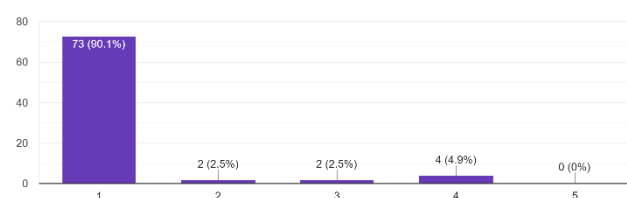
It is OK for a girl to be verbally violent towards her partner in a relationship (insults, shouting, naming etc)
81 responses



It is OK for a boy to hit his girlfriend if she has been unfaithful
81 responses



It is OK for a girl to hit her boyfriend if he has been unfaithful
81 responses



Similar trends were evident in questions relating to whether it was acceptable for “a boy to hit his girlfriend”

⁵⁹ De Meyer, S., Kågesten, A., Mmari, K., McEachran, J., Chilet-Rosell, E., Kabiru, C. W., ... & Michielsen, K. (2017). “Boys should have the courage to ask a girl out”: Gender norms in early adolescent romantic relationships. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 61*(4), S42-S47.

Or for “a girl to hit her boyfriend” in which 92.6% and 90.1% respectively marked strongly disagree.

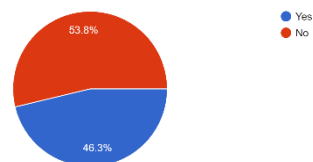
It was clear from the responses, that young people’s moral understanding of what is right and wrong was relative to their knowledge about what is socially acceptable, and the consequences associated with it. When they were asked how they understood GBV, many of them referred to what they have seen in the media and general societal norms. When asked to elaborate on this further this, these were some of the comments young people gave:

- “We have had a couple domestic abuse lessons and lessons on relationships in school before but I think it’s quite minimal and it should be something that is taught at least 3 times a year (in assembly’s etc) especially in high school as that’s when people are most vulnerable and still quite clueless about what’s right and wrong in relationships.”
- “I understand gender violence as when one gender is at a disadvantage compared to another”
- “Just from what I have watched and seen on TV and the news”

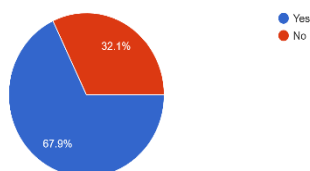
3.1.5 Wider social and cultural process

Despite their understanding, when young people were asked if they felt safe in relationships, 35% stated NO with 65% saying that they do feel safe in relationships. This was an interesting find as when young people were asked if they felt safe within their environments there were difference in responses. Within the school environment, 53.8% stated that they did not feel safe in schools.

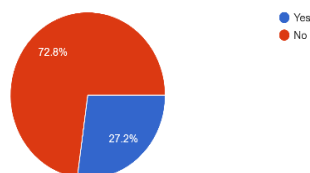
20. Do you feel protected by your school ?
80 responses



21. Do you feel protected by your family?
81 responses



22. Do you feel protected by society?
81 responses

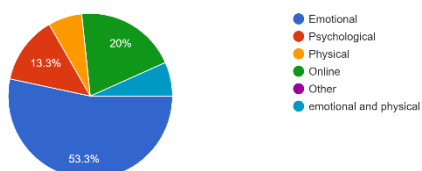


When asked if they felt safe within their family environment 67.9% stated that they did feel safe. Despite many of the respondents earlier on saying that they feel objectified by their relatives it is worth taking into consideration the private nature of the family environment and the dichotomy between “public vs private”. It is important to acknowledge the principle of “culture” and how the term “safe” can be interpreted in different ways within these spheres.

The response to the question on whether participants felt protected by society is an example of the dichotomy between the “public and private” in which 72.9% of the respondent stated that they did not feel safe in society. This is a concerning statistic as it presumed that the participants did not only assume issues GBV but how they felt about society in general.

One of the factors for why 72.9% of the participants stated they felt unsafe in society can be do the lack of awareness on the support mechanisms available to them. When asked if they knew of any support mechanisms 65.8% stated that they were unsure, with 22.8% saying NO and 11.4% saying YES. Interestingly the 11.4% who stated YES followed up on this question by sharing some of their own experiences.

26. If Yes, please mark the following violence you have experienced?
15 responses



When asked if they had experienced any violence themselves personally, 53.3% of the 11.4% stated that they encountered emotional abuse, 20% stated that some of the abuse they encountered was online, 13.3% mentioned psychological abuse and 6.7% stated it was physical.

Not all participants felt like they wanted to share their experiences but those who did provided some heart-breaking stories about the of violence has had on their wellbeing. One of the participants shared their story:

“I was in an emotionally abusive relationship and I did not see it as such until we spilt up and I was reflecting upon what I’d been through, it was tough realising he had not been as kind or as long as I thought but I am glad I got out when I did. It continues to impact my mental health and has brought up many difficult issues and conversation in my new relationships.”

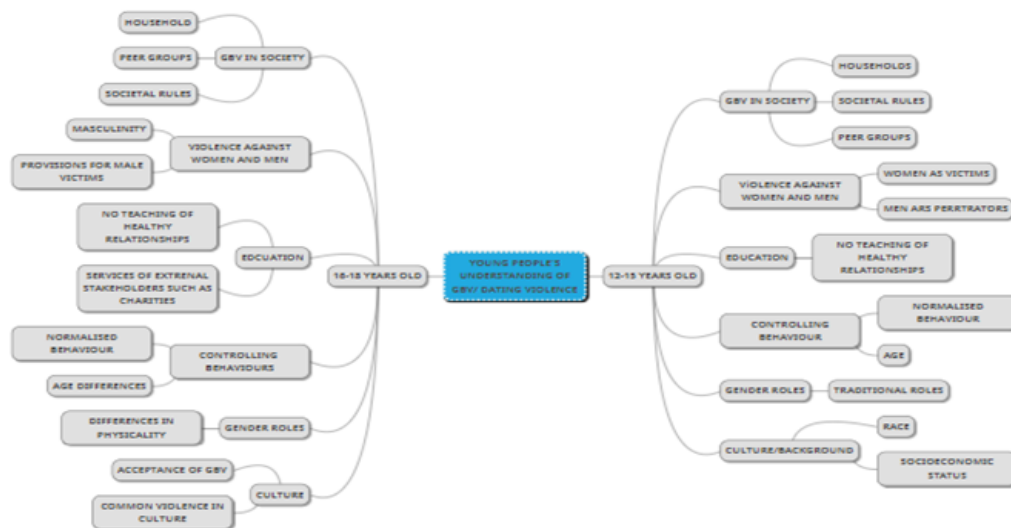
This was one of the many stories young people had and, although the statistics might not have shown what is going on explicitly, the underlying problem here is the hidden stories and experiences of young people. One of the factors relative to this was the lack of education young people have on issues relating to GBV and the lack of acknowledgement support services.

3.2 Interviews

With the support from a youth worker IARS interviewed 11 young people between the ages 12 to 18 from a local youth club in London. Among the 11 participants, 6 of them were between the ages 16-18 with the rest (5) belonging to 12-15 age group. 7 of the participants were boys and 4 were girls. The reason for interviewing these participants was because of the impact youth clubs have in cultivating and promoting “a culture of participation and engagement”⁶⁰ particularly within youth development and policy. Due to the diversity of the participants, interviews were conducted within a semi-structured interview format and amended based on the needs of the young person. It is worth noting that many of the young people we interviewed came from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds where they have been exposed to different forms of violence. As a result of this, some of the participants’ conceptualisation of GBV is relative to their own internalisation of what violence is and whether such acts can be deemed right and wrong. The interviews took place in an environment that was familiar to the young person (i.e. the youth club) and a place where they can speak freely. All safeguarding polices were implemented at the time of interviews, where consent was sought, youth workers were present and research regulations were presented to the young people. All participants were informed that they were being recorded and that their identity would be protected under a false name. Interviews were conducted through a free flow conversation, where the young people were reassured that there was no such thing as a right and wrong answer.

⁶⁰ Nolas, S.M., 2014. Exploring young people's and youth workers' experiences of spaces for ‘youth development’: creating cultures of participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(1), pp.26-41.

All interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed based on the age groups of the young people (12-15 years old and 16-18 years old). Despite these age differences, 6 common themes were identified which includes their general understanding of GBV, the differentiation of violence against women and men, gender stereotypes and roles, education, manipulation, age and culture. The mind map below provides an overview of these themes and the subtopics associated with it:



3.2.1 GBV in Society

When participants from both age groups were asked to describe and define GBV in general, most of them discussed the topic conceptually from what they have seen or heard from the media, household and among their peer groups. Most of the participants described GBV as something which is done by “men to women”. One of the participants (Male, 16) provided a particular and common stereotypical depiction on what GBV entailed by referencing images they had seen or heard from the media:

“there is a stereotypical image of a big man beating his wife or girlfriend, usually often of they are drunk and they come home, and since he is bigger than her, he is intoxicated. He might lash out.” (Male, 16)

The participant continued to define his understanding on what GBV is by stating statistics and facts such as:

“hundreds of thousand suffer from it every year...I think I have even heard once every day a woman dies from domestic violence...so I guess it is a pretty common.” (Male, 16-18 years old)

In addition to this, many of the participants within the 12-15 age group referred to their own lived experiences and what they have seen from their parents to define what GBV is. One young people mentioned the principle of equality and how society needs to treat women equally:

“my mum has always said to treat women right, like the way I love her, and I wouldn't hurt her, she wouldn't want me to hurt anyone else's daughter the same way. For example, if I had a daughter and another man mistreats her, then I would not like it. So she often said don't hit women, don't mistreat women.” (Male, 16-18 years old)

This was not the case for all the young people we interviewed as many of them mentioned that their understanding of GBV was underpinned by elements of sexism and their experiences of living in household where they have witnessed domestic abuse. One young people stated that they saw their “dad hit their

mum” and that there was screaming. When they were asked how they dealt with witnessing domestic abuse, the young person stated that:

“I spoke about things with my sister, and well, she’s five years older than me, but as a kid you just don’t care...not that you don’t care, you just move on with your life, as a six year old I didn’t just sit there and ponder that my aunt or uncle just hit the other but you just move on with life.” (Male 12-15 years old)

This concerning quote highlights how many young people internalise traumatic incidents in their lives and almost become conditioned to it because of how normalised these acts of violence become. As mentioned previously in this report, one of the causal factors for adolescent dating violence is witnessing violence from a young age, and so hearing that many young people witnessed and got no support was concerning to hear. Furthermore, the participants view on gender-based violence as something done to women by men was not strictly limited to dating or domestic violence but also corporal punishment in relation to youth and gang violence. The issues of gangs continuously came up with the interviews with many stating how despite the gendered nature of gang activities the victims of such violence whether it be physical, emotional or verbal were male and less likely female.

3.2.2 Violence against Women/Men and Gender Roles

As stated, all participants initially describe dating and gender-based violence as something which primarily occurs to women as opposed to be men. This is not surprising as research has shown that the vast amount of cases of GBV or dating violence are committed by male partner on female partners. Once again, age played an important role when trying to conceptualise violence against women and men, with the participants within the 12-15 age range stating that they did not believe men can be victims of violence. This view aligned with what many of the participants from the older groups suggested on why acts of violence against men and boys are not really prioritised. Participants raised two key interesting point when discussing the possibility of men and boys being the victims of GBV:

“ it is less spoken about.” (Male 16-18 years old)

“Male Victims are less likely to be believed and more likely to be embarrassed to speak up.” (Male 16-18 years old)

Within the context of young people, peer pressure and societal gender norms play a significant role in the way male victims are perceived. The labels attached to it, the lack of inclusive provisions in health and school services as well as the reinforcement of gender norms in relation to masculinity also play a role in the way heterosexual relationships are imagined. An example of this was when one of the participants stated that fighting and any form of physical violence was something associated with boys than with girls:

“Fighting is a male thing, you fight. You fight... as an alpha male. You don’t fight for no reason.” (Male 16-18 years old)

These dangerous and concerning explanations are further evidence of the influence gender roles and gender stereotypes have on relationships. The normative and traditional idea of men being the “breadwinners” have perpetuated the stereotypical norms and ideas on the dynamics of relationship. When trying to discuss the principle of “power” with the young people, most of them focussed on the physical difference between men and women and how the physical actions committed by a man or a boy can do more harm than women and girls can.

3.2.3 Education

It was evident from the themes identified that these concerning opinions of young people were due to a severe lack of knowledge and effective sex education in school. When asked about whether healthy relationships were something that they learnt in school, some of them answered negatively whereas others stated that they did have education on healthy relationships but only in a limited capacity.

“yes, but I can’t remember if we ever spoke about healthy relationships” (Female, 16-18 years old)”

One of the participants stated that they did have lessons but not necessarily focused on gender-based violence but on other issues such as online safety and bullying. The participants also mentioned about how “uncomfortable” they felt about talking to their class teacher about these issues and how they did not feel teachers took them seriously. It is worth noting that all of the young people we interviewed were in secondary school and that many of the educational experiences that they were referring to was topics they learnt while they were in primary school. This was evident when they were asked to mention any services, they know they can seek support from, most of them only referenced Childline⁶¹ which is a confidential helpline supporting anyone under the age of 19:

*“Childline, that’s really the only thing I can think of, because everyone remembers their number”
(Female 16-18 years old)*

The lack of educational provision and support of issues relating to GBV in relationship highlights the need for more consistent education on healthy relationships and dating violence.

3.2.4 Controlling behaviours

The dangers of having limited education, knowledge and understanding of the topic can lead to the normalisation of behaviours such as coercion and manipulation. Most participants seemed to suggest that being controlling in a relationship is common, although many admitted that it was slightly problematic:

“no controlling behaviour, you can’t tell a girl what to wear, what to do, who’s her friend, but that’s only to a limit. If that’s your girlfriend, you can’t tell her to wear some bootie, flipping wear fucking bikinis on a normal day. You can wear to a certain extent, you can wear shorts, but not really short shorts.” (Male, 16-18 years old)

From the quotes it is evident that young people found that controlling behaviour to be a slightly permissible act

“Oh yeah, in this generation that’s a little bit normal though, not mad like controlling not super controlling as in you can’t go like...umm, what am I trying to say, when it comes to controlling relationships these days, that’s sort of normal these days as in a lot of people, like for example cheating is normal these days.” (Male, 16-18 years old)

Although these were normalised, many of the female participants were aware of the dangers of these behaviours in comparison to their male counterparts. One female participant drew on her own experiences of her being in a relationship where her partner was possessive

“he never used to check my phone but he used to make weird assumptions in his head, and once he had an assumption he would stick with it, even if it was not true, that was true... He would pester me for silly thing and always belittle me and I would say to him “leave me alone!” and he didn’t listen.” (Female 16-18 years old)

Although the participant did mention she left the relationship, she mentioned the impact this had on her as she was still being harassed even after she left her relationship.

“till this day. He texts me till this day and when I delete the texts he says he’s going to turn up at my house, they’re going to knock on my door and I told them that they’re going to cause problems with my family and stuff.” (Female 16-18 years old)

Within research and education, the implications of leaving relationships are not really explored or acknowledged. On many occasions, individuals are encouraged to leave relationships but with limited support afterwards. This is particularly rife in schools with young people who must see their former

⁶¹ Childline. Available at: <https://www.childline.org.uk/about/about-childline/>

partners in class after breaking up with them, in which the limited support during the aftermath of the relationship can do more harm than good.

3.2.5 Culture and Background

When trying to find ways of tackling dating violence or GBV in general, acknowledging culture as well as the intersectionality of culture, race and socioeconomic status is important. Many of the young people we interviewed came from minority communities and live in economically deprived areas across London. For many of them violence has always been a normal thing, regardless of whether it was growing being hit by their parents, living in domestic abuse households, or seeing violence in the streets and many of them were unfazed to share their stories. Within the interviews the influence of culture subtly came up in some of the responses as participants mentioned how their background contributed to how they viewed violence:

“my dad never touched me or laid hands on me but it was my mum surprisingly...I come from a Nigerian background....and I don’t want to generalise as the Nigerian culture is different but parental violence is a common part of the culture.” (Male 16-18 years old),

Culture is something to be aware, particularly within the context of GBV in which principles such as cultural values, honour and patriarchy all play a role in reinforcing gender violence and becoming justification for incidents. In many of the major forms of GBV globally, crimes such as honour based violence FGM and forced marriages stem from the values and behaviours found in households.

3.3 Focus Groups

Similar to the themes derived from the interview and surveys, focus groups were conducted online with young people between the ages 16 to 18 years olds from London. Most of these young people identified themselves as being from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and showed interest in relations to issues focussing on discrimination and equality. Although most of the participants were female (8) and 1 male, there was still a balanced discussion within this focus group and all participants had an opportunity to speak freely

3.3.1 Defining GBV

The first part was to identify what their understanding of GBV and what example they can give. Participants understood GBV as:

“Violence done on one gender to the other.... Normally associated with the male being more dominant and the female more inferior.” (Participant 1 and 2- Females)

Despite this stereotypical perspective, there was a clear understanding from the groups that this *“is not always the case”*. When asked to elaborate on this further, most of them agreed it was *“contextual”* and

“depends on what type of violence we are talking about as the female is not necessarily portrayed as a victim.” (Participant 5 - Female)

Within the group there was a clear acknowledgment that men were victims of violence and that is not portrayed properly within the context of GBV. One of the participants mentioned the idea that anyone *“can be vulnerable to violence and that it doesn’t have to be gendered”*. It was also mentioned within that discussion that many of these violent acts are hidden and that *“mental acts of violence”* are more severe than physical ones because of the impacts it has later on, for example in the rise of mental health problems and suicides. This brought up another important discussion point on mental health and taboo around it in many BAME communities. Participants mentioned how hard it is for people to speak out when they are struggling and how difficult it is for a victims of GBV to seek help. Comments such as *“people might feel embarrassed”* and *“others might not understand what they are going through”* provided insight in why young people want to talk about their issues and the importance of having inclusive services. This was an interesting point, especially when participants started talking about the mental strength that you need to be in a relationship.

One participant stated:

"I feel like when you are going in a relationship you have to be strongminded. If you are weak, that person can really use that....obviously this is where it started." (Participant 4 - Female)

In this context the idea of being strongminded was relative to how relationships are depicted and the idea of a dominant partner in all relationships. Many of the participants states how they felt that not all relationships are equal:

"I feel like a lot of people are not equal without even realising. Like people will get threatened very badly and they won't even realise and that that's normal and they get used to it, and I feel like that where abuse and violence startsit moves from emotional, verbal to physical." (Participant 5 - Female)

There was a general understanding that GBV and dating violence is a systematic problem which stems from the idea of inequalities and power. Participants also mentioned how the media also plays a role in how we see gender and how we see inequalities, especially with the recent #BlackLivesMatter movement and how it has opened to individuals that are problematic with the nature of systematic racism and sexism.

3.3.2 Addressing GBV

When looking at ways to address GBV, participants were asked what they think should be happening to tackle issues such as discrimination and violence one of ten first things mentioned was:

"Teaching children, you shouldn't put your hands on each other." (Participant 9 - Male)

This made some of the participants reflect on their own education and how they only had "one day a year" to talk about these issues. When asked what would happen if they missed that day they unanimously mentioned how they had catch up lessons available for them but that was not enough. Participants also agreed that that more should be done apart from education but is hard to achieve this especially when involving other individuals such as parents:

"Its hard to get parents involved...with their upbringing and cultures." (Participant 5 and 6 - Females)

"Different generations have different views on the role for women... In our generation women are more educated on what they should do." (Participant 2 - Female)

"Parents are too stubborn to new ideas and new interpretations" (Participant 4 - Female)

Just like the interviews the one theme that stood out was "the role of culture" and the impact it has when addressing GBV or any incidents relating to dating violence:

"Some cultures do not believe in it.....they should understand it and teach it to their children."

These challenges of managing parental cultural norms and societal norms creates even more issues in seeking help. When participants were asked who the first port of call would be if they were ever in a violent relationship, most of them said "the police", although two participants had differing views:

"I would actually take them to an aid place....I don't know any right now but I know if I search google, I can find someone because going to the police that is not their job" (Participant 4 - Female)

Another participant stated:

"For incidents of violence you need to talk about it first, you need to understand what it is. Let the expert tell you that is happening to you and then you go explain to the police."

When asked if they can identify any experts, once again just like interviews Childline was mentioned with other participants stating that they would have to search on the internet support services available to them.

It was surprising to see that none of the participants mentioned their schools and their teachers; once again indicating the gap between teachers and pupils in relation to finding effective ways of tackling GBV.

3.3.3 Response to Scenarios

As a final task, within this focus groups participants were given unique scenarios based on an example of dating and violence and were asked to respond to it (See Appendix III). The scenario covered themes such as emotional abuse, manipulation and coercion. The initial response from participants focussed on the “toxic” nature of the relationship. However, there were gender differences within the participants as all the female participants felt that

“Christian is very insecure and when I say insecure is what made him act in that way. Obviously as you been talking about already, she’s not aware of this and she lets him do that to him on and on.” (Participant 1 and 8 - Females)

There was a difference from the male participants who found Christian action’s justifiable:

“Christian needs to know, maybe that’s all he knows. People do what they think they should be doing. He could be doing this because that what he knows, do you know what I mean? Some people need help..... I that is probably all that he knows.” (Participant 9 - Male)

There was a reaction to this statement as many disagreed that he was born this way and that he “chose to behave like this”. When asked if this was a familiar situation to them many of them sated YES as this was a familiar story they have seen or heard. It was interesting to hear their views when they were talking about how they would react if they were in that situation, as many of them stated how that they would react straight away as they know what is happening. However, they do acknowledge that this is not the case for everyone as:

“not everyone has the knowledge, I can say that I will never do that because I am of these situations. It comes from a personal background... school background that didn’t help her to understand, someone should help her, she’s not aware of this. If I were in her position, I probably do the same thing, but the in my position I am today. I’m more aware of this, I won’t let that happen to me.” (Participant 1 - Female)

This statement shows the impact that lack of education and support has on the needs of individuals; it highlights the importance of raising awareness on GBV but also the importance of outreach in supporting individuals.

4. Conclusion

This report has highlighted the complex nature of GBV within the UK context. Despite the abundance of research from governmental and non-governmental organisation within the last decade, the nuanced and complex nature of GBV has not really been explored. The findings in this research has highlighted the need for a whole school approach with external support to tackle dating violence. As mentioned above, simultaneously raising awareness, prevention and reporting programmes can be an effective way to challenge the attitudes and norms young people have towards dating violence.

From the research:

- Young people’s understanding of GBV did not include their own lived experiences but their perceptions of society. This was evident with the common gender stereotypes being used as an explanation for why violence occurs.
- The social sphere of the young person such as household, peer groups, schools and wider society all contribute to the manifestation of GBV in which culture and societal norms play a massive role in the way young people see the world.

- Despite being informed of what unhealthy relationships entail, young people showed a lack of trust for adults in their lives this includes parents and teachers in which they did not feel safe to disclose their concerns.
- The role of teachers is an important point as many of the young people within schools stated how they have never been taught gender violence other than domestic violence, which made them presume action controlling behaviour and manipulation were normal facets of relationships.

5. **Recommendations**

With this understanding, the Children First project aims to challenge the attitudes and norms young people have towards gender-based violence, dating violence and gender stereotypes. As mentioned, although there have been campaigns to tackle this in school, the effectiveness of these campaigns can be brought into question. Based on the conclusion Children First aims to:

- Raise awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence through an intersectional lens which takes into consideration the cultural, social, and economic all aspects of gender-based violence
- Support educators in developing educational tools, training materials, and cultivating holistic curricula that represent the diversity of the classroom and diversity of GBV
- Cultivate an inclusive environment where young people feel comfortable enough to talk about their issues
- Support schools, young people, and parents in accessing professionals such as psychologists, third sector and civil society actors in developing strategies to tackle GBV in schools and creating support systems for all individuals.

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Appendix I: Survey Questions

Profile

- 1.1. Country: a) Greece b) Cyprus c) UK d) Lithuania e) Italy 1.
- 1.2. Age group: a) 12-14 b) 16-18
- 1.3. Sex: a) Male b) Female c) Other _____
- 1.4. Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity: a) Heterosexual b) Homosexual c) Bisexual d) Asexual e) Pansexual f) Transgender/transsexual g) Other _____
- 1.5. Nationality: a) What is your nationality?
- 1.6. What kind of obstacles do you and/or your family face? Please mark the ones that apply to you. a) Economical (low income family) b) Cultural (immigrants or refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families) c) Family (divorced parents, child of a single parent, etc) d) Disability (mental, physical, sensory, etc) e) Health problems (chronic health problems, mental illness, etc) f) Geographical (Remote/rural areas) g) Educational (Early dropouts, poor school performance, etc) h) None of the above i) Other (Specify)___

General context of GBV

- 2.1. Have you ever been treated in any way that you perceived as unfair because of your gender? a) Yes b) No
- 2.2. If yes, how often do you feel that feeling? a) Every day b) Every week c) Every month d) Every now and then
- 2.3. If yes, in which environment did this happen? a) School b) Home c) Romantic relationships d) Work
- 2.4. Have you ever been made fun of by your peers because of your gender? a) Yes b) No
- 2.5. If yes, could you tell us more about it? _____
- 2.6. Have you ever been made fun of by a relative because of your gender? a) Yes b) No
- 2.7. Have you ever felt ashamed or restrained by your gender? a) Yes b) No
- 2.8. Could you please tell us a bit more about your experience? Ex: Under what circumstances this has happened) _____

Gender stereotypes

- 3.1. From a scale 1-5 (1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree), please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither disagree nor agree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Gossiping is more usual to girls than boys | | | | | |
| Gossiping is more usual to boys than girls | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Boys are less sensitive than girls | | | | | |
| Girls are less sensitive than boys | | | | | |
| It is more accepted for a boy to have more than one sexual partner than for a girl | | | | | |
| It is more accepted for a girl to have more than one sexual partner than a boy | | | | | |
| Boys are more powerful than girls | | | | | |
| Girls are more powerful than boys | | | | | |
| Girls are more vulnerable than boys | | | | | |
| Boys are more vulnerable than girls | | | | | |
| Boys are supposed to ask girls out | | | | | |
| Girls are supposed to ask boys out | | | | | |
| Boys are generally more aggressive than girls | | | | | |
| Girls are generally more aggressive than boys | | | | | |
| Girls are more dependent on others than boys | | | | | |
| Boys are more dependent on others than girls | | | | | |

4. Dating GBV

| "It is OK...." | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|
| For a boy to be verbally violent towards his partner in a relationship (insults, shouting, naming, etc) | | | | | |
| For a girl to be verbally violent towards her partner in a relationship (insults, shouting, naming, etc) | | | | | |
| For a boy to force a girl into having sex if they have been dating | | | | | |
| For a girl to force a boy into intimate touching or having sex if they have been dating | | | | | |
| For a boy to be jealous and obsessive during the relationship | | | | | |
| For a girl to be jealous and obsessive during the relationship | | | | | |
| For a boy to stalk on his girlfriend (taking her phone to check messages, asking friends about her night out, etc) | | | | | |
| For a girl to stalk on her boyfriend (taking his phone to check messages, asking friends about his night out, etc) | | | | | |
| For the boy to make the girl feel ashamed of her body or/and personality | | | | | |
| For the girl to make the boy feel ashamed of his body or/and personality | | | | | |
| For a boy to threaten the girl during the relationship (that he will hurt her or himself if she does ...) | | | | | |
| For a girl to threaten the boy during the relationship (that she will hurt him or herself if he does...) | | | | | |
| For a boy to hit his girlfriend if she has been unfaithful | | | | | |
| For a girl to hit her boyfriend if he has been unfaithful | | | | | |
| For a boy to set limits on how his girlfriend dresses | | | | | |
| For a girl to set limits on how her boyfriend dresses | | | | | |

4.1. Have you ever had a romantic relationship up until now? a) Yes b) No

4.2. From a scale 1-5 (1= never and 5= always), please indicate your opinion on the following state statements:

5. Wider social and cultural processes

5.1. Do you feel safe in your relationships in general? a) Yes b) No

5.2. How do you understand and evaluate any form of violence based on one's gender? Have you ever been informed about it? _____

5.3. Do you feel protected by your: a) School (yes/no) b) Family (yes/no) c) Society (yes/no)

5.4. If you are a student, do you have any classes in your school related to the issue of gender-based violence? a) Yes b) No

5.5. Is there any support mechanism (organisation) available to your environment (either in school or in your community) to get support in cases of gender-based violence? a) Yes b) No c) I don't know

5.6. Have you ever experienced any kind of violence in your life based on your gender by your partner? a) Yes (If yes, please see question 5.7) b) No "

5.7. Please mark the form of violence you have experienced: a) Emotional b) Psychological c) Physical d) Online e) Other: _____

5.8. Feel free to share your story here. What happened, how did you react, how do you perceive this incident, has this incident impacted you in any way? _____

6 Closing

6.1. Do you have any concern/comment/clarification you would like to share regarding the questionnaire and/or the topic at stake

Appendix II: Interview Questions (Semi-structured)

1. What the nature of GBV in your opinion?
2. How often do you or people around you experience GBV?
3. In what context do they occur and persist?
4. How do you understand GBV?
5. How do you evaluate GBV in relationships?
6. Do you think that GBV is affecting someone wellbeing?
7. What should be done in your opinion to prevent GBV?
8. What support services could best respond to prevent violence in your everyday life (Work, school, family, peer and romantic environments)?
9. Could you please share a story where you experienced and/or witnessed GBV in your surrounding?

Appendix III: Focus Group Questions

1. What the nature of GBV in your opinion?
2. How often do you or people around you experience GBV?
3. In what context do they occur and persist?
4. How do you understand GBV?
5. How do you evaluate GBV in relationships?
6. Do you think that GBV is affecting someone wellbeing?
7. What should be done in your opinion to prevent GBV?
8. What support services could best respond to prevent violence in your everyday life (Work, school, family, peer and romantic environments)?
9. Could you please share a story where you experienced and/or witnessed GBV in your surroundings

EXAMPLE:**Scenario:**

Maria is a 16 years old girl from Cyprus. For the past one years, she is in a romantic relationship with Christos, an 18 years old boy. Christos is usually jealous when Maria is going out with her male friends and he comments on what she wears, often telling her "Why are you dressed like that? Do you want to provoke men? No man is ever a friend with woman without secretly wanting something out of her". Maria is hence ashamed about her body and insecure towards other men. Maria has attempted several times to break up with him, however, he cries and begs her not to do it, saying that he is going to kill himself if she does that because he cannot live without her. Filled with guilt, Maria decides to give one more chance to their relationship and she believes that she will never find someone loving her more than he does.