

This is Abuse...? Young people's attitudes towards domestic abuse

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From Boys to Men Research Study

- The *From Boys to Men Project* explores why some young men become perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- It also seeks to establish what more could be done to reduce the number of young men who become perpetrators.

The study has involved three phases:

1. A survey of 1200 school children (aged 13-14), including an evaluation of a school-based domestic abuse prevention programme.
2. **Thirteen focus groups with young people (aged 13-19).**
3. Life history interviews with 30 young men (aged 16-20) who have experienced domestic violence as victims, perpetrators and/or witnesses.

Phase II: Method

- 13 focus groups were conducted with 69 young people aged 13-19.
- 3 focus groups were mixed sex and 10 were all male groups.
- 7 focus groups were conducted in educational settings and six focus groups were conducted in community-based settings.
- Commenced with inviting response to the 'Bedroom' film that featured in the *This is Abuse* campaign (www.thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk).
- Two further vignettes, one of a teenage couple where the young man is unhappy about his girlfriend's socialising and the way she is dressed; another about a schoolboy in trouble for pushing a girl in his class and calling her a 'slag'.

Phase II: Background

Previous research has found that 1 in 2 males and 1 in 3 females thought that violence/abuse against a woman was 'ok' in at least one of 16 circumstances (Burton & Kitinger, 1998).

Children's attitudes towards domestic violence tend to be highly contingent (Hilton, 2000).

- They are more likely to think hitting a woman is ok if that woman has hit her partner or been unfaithful (Burman & Cartmel, 2005; Burton & Kitinger, 1998).

Phase II of the *From Boys to Men Project* aimed to examine the situational contingencies through which young people deem domestic abuse acceptable and unacceptable.

"Shocking"
(James)



"Punch him in the face" (Ben)

"Knock him out" (Guy)

This is abuse...

Participants' reactions to scenes of domestic abuse were universally condemnatory.

"Just out of order innit? He's basically raped her hasn't he?... Forced her into doing something that she doesn't want to do, raping her" (Derek)

Explaining controlling behaviours

- Where low levels of trust are identified: *"It's always something to do with trust"* (Guy).
- Where there is past – or potential – infidelity: *"If someone's been cheating on you and you decide to stay with them then I think you've got a right to be more controlling over them"* (Blake).
- To protect naive young women from dangerous men: *"She might end up getting mugged"* (Guy).
- Linked to young men's insecurities (and paranoia): *"... the person's insecure who's committing it ... they're thinking that other person is better than them but they're just insecure about themselves so they take it out on the other person"* (Paul).

"Lads get a little thing in their head that they think is happening... Whether it's true or not, that's what they believe. They start accusing them and arguing".
(Sophie)

When does the term abuse not apply?

- When it's a 'one off'
- Verbal abuse: *"Verbal abuse is just normal anyway"* (Craig)
- Reciprocal – or 'exciting' – violence: being *"violent towards each other... might just work"* (Ryan)
- Female perpetrators: *"Women can hit men. Men can't hit women"* (Guy)
- Same sex partners.

"Where would the kid rather be? With his parents or with two people he's never met in life?... I'd prefer to be at home" (Sophie)

Some young men did 'see themselves'

"I think once you get to certain sexual desire you can't really stop it. I mean if you really want to have sex with someone it takes over your mind... You can't really control it. It makes you do things that you really wouldn't normally do." (Blake)

... but young people did not see abuse as a feature of teenage relationships

- Instead, domestic abuse involved repeated physical violence between adults, often struggling with work and family related issues.
- Controlling techniques were more also easily employed in adult relationships: *"When you live together and you're adults, they can try and cut you off from your family and friends easier and threaten you without no one else knowing."* (Will)

... and perpetrators were depicted as unlike themselves:

- as 'scumbags', 'mad men', 'chavs', men with psychological and substance misuse 'issues' and members of religious or ethnic minorities who they stereotyped as 'terrorising' women and tolerating violence.

"one of those psychotic guys"
(Nadir)

"Isn't it in their religion that they can tell their wives what to do... And if they cheat they're allowed to batter them in their religion." (Robert)

Intervening in abusive relationships

- Welcomed initiatives to provide domestic abuse education in schools – but fails to reach those whose *"attendance is 2%"* (Robert).
- Importance of 'specialist' advice and counselling: to *'talk about their problems'* (Luke)
- Cautious about social service intervention: *"Care homes are all right you know"* (Robert)
- Sceptical about whether criminal justice responses would achieve intended results: *"that doesn't mean he's going to stop... /That's just their way of living"* (Danny/Robert).