

Young Teenagers' Experiences of Domestic Abuse

Claire L. Fox, Mary-Louise Corr, David Gadd, Ian Butler

Email: c.fox@keele.ac.uk

From Boys to Men Research Study

- The *From Boys to Men Project* explores why some young men become perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- It seeks also 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).
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 I: Background and Aims

Three quarters of domestic abuse incidents occur when children are in the house (Solomon and Fraser, 2009) and 17.5% of 11-17 year olds and 26% of 18-24 year olds have witnessed physical violence abuse at home (Radford et al., 2011).

There has been increasing recognition that the problem of domestic abuse affects young people as much as it does adults – yet we still know far less about abuse in young people's relationships. A recent survey of young people in the UK, aged 13-17, suggests quite high levels of victimisation and perpetration of abuse in teenage relationships (Barter et al., 2009).

We also know that teenagers are more likely to turn to peers than adults for help (Ocampo et al., 2007).

Our research set out to explore how common the experience of violence is among younger teenagers – those aged 13-14. We aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the rates of domestic abuse among young teenagers – those aged 13-14 years?
2. What is the nature of the abuse at this age - is there any overlap between being a victim, witnessing abuse at home and perpetrating it against a partner?
3. What percentage of young people would seek help from an adult if it happened to them?
4. In what ways do gender and experiences of abuse impact on the willingness to seek help?

Results – Help-seeking

More likely to seek help from an adult in relation to witnessing abuse than abuse in their own relationship.

Abuse in their own relationships

Boys, victims, female perpetrators and those who had witnessed abuse at home were less likely to seek help if they experienced abuse in their own relationship.

Witnessing Abuse

Girls who had witnessed abuse were less likely to seek help than girls who had not if they witnessed abuse at home.

Phase I: Method

A questionnaire was administered to 1200 Year 9 pupils (aged 13-14) in 13 schools in Staffordshire. They were asked to think about people they 'have dated, and past or current boyfriends/girlfriends' and to answer questions on physical, sexual and emotional victimisation and perpetration in their dating relationships.

They were asked about witnessing abuse at home between 'e.g. your parents, stepparents, guardians or foster carers', answering questions about physical and emotional abuse.

They were also asked two questions about help seeking if they, or an adult they knew, had been hit by a partner.

The questions below are very sensitive and personal (about you). You do not have to answer the questions if you do not want to and you can stop answering the questions at any time. **Think about people you have dated, and past or current boyfriends or girlfriends. Have THEY:**
If you have NEVER been on a date or had a boyfriend/girlfriend please circle 'Never' for each of the 10 questions

	(Please circle one)	If you ticked once or more than once did this happen in the last 12 months?
1) Ever pushed, slapped or grabbed you?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
2) Ever punched, kicked or choked you, or beaten you up?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
3) Ever threatened to physically hurt you?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
4) Ever pressured or forced you to have sex?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
5) Ever pressured or forced you to do anything else sexual, including kissing, hugging and touching?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
6) Ever called you nasty names to put you down?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
7) Ever stopped you from seeing your friends or family?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
8) Ever told you who you can't speak to?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
9) Ever checked up on who you have phoned or sent messages to?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No
10) Ever damaged something of yours on purpose?	Never/Once/More than once	Yes/No

Results – Experiences

83% of young people had been in a dating relationship

45% of pupils had been victims of at least one type of abuse

- Emotional abuse/controlling behaviours: 38%
- Physical abuse: 17%
- Sexual abuse: 14%

25% of pupils perpetrated at least one type of abuse

- Emotional abuse/controlling behaviours: 20%
- Physical abuse: 7%
- Sexual abuse: 4%

34% of all pupils witnessed at least one type of abuse.

- Emotional abuse/controlling behaviours: 27%
- Physical abuse: 19%

Gender Differences

- Girls were more likely than boys to experience sexual victimisation (but not other types of victimisation).
- Girls were as likely as boys to perpetrate domestic abuse.
- Girls were more likely to witness abuse in adult relationships than boys.

Associations Between Victimisation, Perpetration and Witnessing

- 51.2% of victims also admitted to having been abusive.
- 92.3% of perpetrators reported that they had been victimised.
- 67% of witnesses abuse had also been a victim in their own relationships.
- Witnesses were also more likely to report having perpetrated it (42% compared to 15% of non-witnesses).

Conclusions and Implications

- 52.5% of participants had at least one experience of domestic abuse (victimisation, perpetration or witnessing).
- Abuse in relationships starts much earlier than previously recognised.
- Few 'pure' perpetrators – many were victims and had witnessed abuse.
- Interventions need to target young people before age 13.
- Interventions need to be responsive to the experiences young people already have.
- Presenting the problem in terms of male perpetrators and female victims may alienate boys.
- Polarising the issue in terms of perpetrators and victims could deter some from seeking help.