

MAPPING OF EXISTING STRATEGIES AND POLICIES RELATED TO SCHOOL RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND ABUSE (WP3)

MAPPING REPORT- UNITED KINGDOM

Sundus Abdullahi and Aoife O' Mahony



Executive Summary

Within the United Kingdom (UK), the term Gender Based Violence (GBV) is used interchangeably with the term Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) depending on the context in which they occur. The gendered notion of GBV is relative to how society perceives GBV and the disproportionate number of women who are victims of it in comparison to men. Although it is widely recognised by the UK government that through their Male Victims Position Statement¹, GBV is acknowledged as a manifestation of system and unique forms of discrimination which presents and impediment to women's equality.

National Context

In the 2020 Gender Gap audit, the UK had fallen six places from 15th to 21st in global ranking for gender equality. This is despite an abundance of legislation and policies being implemented such as the 2010 Equality Act² which protects all citizens from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society and the 1998 Human Right Act which sets out the fundamental rights and freedom of everyone in the UK. Other policies relating to the gender equality centre around the elimination of all forms of GBV/VAWG in the UK. Examples of these have included legal provisions such as Modern Slavery Act³, Domestic Violence Protection Orders⁴, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme⁵, the FGM Protection Orders and Duty report and the Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Act in Wales⁶ to tackle offences such as stalking, forced marriage, FGM, revenge pornography, domestic abuse. One of the reasons why there has been a significant shift and focus on the eliminations of GBV from the UK government has been because of the lasting and damaging impact GBV has had on multiple generations particularly young people.

Over the years there has been a moral panic regarding the experiences of young people and influx on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prevalent in schools and in their social spheres. Research from the UK's leading children charity the NSPCC⁷ found that young people between the aged 13 to 18 years old encountered different forms of dating violence such as physical, emotional, manipulation and verbal. Within the research:

- Two-thirds of female participants and a third of male participants reported that they had experienced emotional violence
- 50% of the girls stated that they had experienced some form of sexual and physical violence in at least of one of their partner relationships
- Only a minority of young people told an adult about the violence

These statistics which have been consistent throughout the 2010s have indicated the severity of school related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and the importance of having measures in place that can prevent

¹ 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

² 2010 Equality Act. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

³ The Modern Slavery Act 2015. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>

⁴ 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

⁵ Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-pilot-guidance>

⁶ Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse (Wales) Act, 2015 Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/contents/enacted>

⁷ 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>

and intervene when these forms of discriminations occur. Section 175 of the Education Act (2002) ⁸ states that schools and colleges have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people at their educational establishment. Just like any other sector, educational institutions need to comply to the following to protect children from GBV:

- **The Equality Act (2010)**⁹-which prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimisation in education on the grounds of certain protected characteristics. Schools and colleges must not discriminate against sex, race, disability, religion/belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or sexual orientation
- **Gender Equality Duty (2007)**- ¹⁰schools have a legal responsibility to tackle sexual harassment and violence against women and girls
- **The Public Sector Equality Duty (2011)**- ¹¹all public bodies (schools and colleges) have a legal requirement to eliminate discrimination and harassment of girls, to advance equality and opportunity for girls.

As a result of this there have been various tools and key measures set out by governments to tackle GBV in schools and amongst young people. These have included campaigns and projects such as the

- **This is Abuse Campaign** ¹²- “This is Abuse” campaign which ran from 2010 to 2014 was targeted to 13 to 18 years old to help to prevent them from becoming victims and perpetrator of abusive relationships, The campaign which was nationwide effort with posters plastered all over bus stops, TV shows and radio encouraged teenagers to rethink their views of controlling behaviours, abuse, violence and 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 forced 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 discussion that would normally happen in classroom enter different arenas such as the home, the media and within friendship groups.
- **Equally Safe in Our Schools** ¹³- 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.
- **Disrespect NoBody** ¹⁴- The Disrespect Nobody Campaign helps young people to understand what a healthy relationship is to understand what consent means. The campaign was targeted to 12 to 18-year olds to prevent them from becoming perpetrators and victims of abusive relationships.

In addition, to this there has been a wide range of educational material and tools introduced to education young people and children about the different aspects of relationships as services and programmes of support.

⁸ The Education Act (2002). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents>

⁹ 2010 Equality Act. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

¹⁰ The Public Sector Equality Duty. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

¹¹ The Public Sector Equality Duty. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

¹² *This is Abuse’ campaign 2010 to 2014* <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/this-is-abuse-campaign>

¹³ *Equally Safe in Schools: A whole school approach to Gender Based Violence*. Available at: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/research/mrccsocialandpublichealthsciencesunit/programmes/relationships/fivr/genderbasedviolencewholeschoolsapproach/>

¹⁴ Disrespect Nobody. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disrespect-nobody-campaign>

- **The TEA video** ¹⁵- [The Tea Consent video](#) was an animation made to educate young people on what consent means and entails from a real-life perspective. The juxtaposition of using the analogy of a cup of tea is a clever way of getting young people to think and remember of their actions,
- **IT'S NOT OK** ¹⁶- Based on their research on teenage relationship abuse, the NSPCC developed training resources and safeguarding material to help children and young people recognise concerning behaviours and identify characteristics of positive relationships. The [IT'S NOT OK](#) work package consists of lesson plans, films and accompany activities which cover what behaviours to look out for and how to respond to it. The resources in this learning toll can form part of a school teaching for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). The lesson plan can be adapted for uses with other audience and can be used in schools and community settings.
- **SAFE4ME toolkit** ¹⁷- [The SAFE4ME](#) toolkit is web based education provides which gives parents resources to help educate, guide and support children and young people. The web program has a free educational resource library curated by the Hampshire police which tackles all issues in relation to keeping young people safe.

Research from Primary Research: Awareness, view, attitudes of educators and the broader community on SRGBV

Surveys

Surveys were created using Google Forms in order to obtain an overview of a diverse range of parents, teachers/educators, and other community members across the UK. The survey was disseminated to schools across the UK, relevant charities and organisations, community groups and youth groups, in addition to being posted on social media and online discussion forums.

i) Sample demographics

50 surveys were completed. A diverse range of participants took part, with the majority identifying as educators (30.2%), community members (30.2%) and parents or carers (20.8%). The remaining 17% of participants included youth workers, Relationships and Sex Education facilitators, independent domestic violence advocates or domestic abuse practitioners, representatives of relevant institutions, early years workers, and other relatives. 76% of respondents were female, and ages of respondents were diverse, ranging from 21 to 64 years.

ii) Gender Stereotypes

Respondents felt that gender stereotypes influenced young people's behaviours. The survey considered respondents' agreement with a range of statements reflecting traditional gender stereotypes, and demonstrated a progressive range of views, although responses to some items were more mixed.

Most respondents 78% felt that it was in the role of the teacher to promote gender equality, compared with only 20% who disagreed with this. However, they also acknowledged that this is not just the responsibility of the teacher but also of the family and other adults in the children's lives and cautioned placing sole or primary responsibility for such work on teachers. Furthermore, a range of barriers such as culture and curriculum were identified which hindered teachers' abilities to engage in this.

iii) Gender and Dating Violence

¹⁵ The TEA consent video. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrxVavnQ>

¹⁶ ITS NOT OK: teaching resources about positive relationship. Available at: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/schools/its-not-ok>

¹⁷ SAFE4ME. Available at: <https://www.safe4me.co.uk/>

Although responses showed some acknowledgement that any gender can experience gender-based violence, 68% did state that girls appear to be most at risk. A range of risk factors were highlighted, with gender, and witnessing GBV at home being the most reported risk factors for experiencing GBV (69.4% reported each of these factors), as well as substance abuse or addictions (49%). Other risk factors for experiencing GBV which were identified by a smaller proportion of the sample were poverty (38.8%), a history of anger management problems (38.8%), and unemployment (36.7%). Similar risk factors were identified for perpetrating GBV, primarily witnessing GBV at home which was identified by 81.6% of the sample, and a history of anger management problems identified by 49% of the sample, followed by gender (53.1%), substance abuse (51%), poverty (38.8%), and unemployment (32.7%).

Where participants reported having witnessed GBV among young people (44%), this was most commonly witnessed in school, followed by the community, and within the family setting. This was primarily thought to occur within young people's romantic relationships, followed by within their family, while experiencing it among their friends was considered least common.

iv) School Climate

Concerningly, many respondents felt that teachers did not listen to students when they discuss their problems (i.e. a total of 44.9% vs. 32.7% who somewhat felt that they did), and most felt that teachers did not treat boys and girls equally (66% in total compared with a total of only 12% who felt that they did). Findings also raised concerns about the school climate as most felt that girls did not feel safe in schools (a total of 58%, compared with only 20% who thought they did feel safe). Approximately a quarter of the sample was unsure or undecided for each of these questions, highlighting a considerable degree of uncertainty regarding such issues. Interestingly, most respondents were unsure whether boys felt safe in schools (42%), although 34% in total agreed that boys did feel safe in schools, compared with a total of 24% who somewhat disagreed with this statement.

A slight majority of the sample thought that young people usually report incidents of violence when they witness or experience it. However, findings show that respondents believed most young people did not know where to whom to report this. However, it is important to recognise that these are the views of adults, not of the young people themselves.

The vast majority of the sample (66% in total) agreed that teachers have a responsibility for educating students on gender equality and gender-based violence, while a total of only 18% disagreed with this and 6% were unsure.

Most respondents did not know if programmes existed to educate students about gender-based violence (40%), although almost equal proportions of the remaining sample agreed that there were (22% in total) and that there were not (38% in total). 40% were not aware on whether individual assistance and psychological counselling were available to students when needed. Mixed findings were reported regarding whether teachers work closely with parents to resolve students' problems.

v) Wider social and cultural Context

Most of the sample reported that they had never been informed about gender-based violence (61.2% compared with 34.7%). Few respondents were aware of any specific laws, national schemes or policies protecting children from gender-based violence although the highest proportion of responses that did list any strategies highlighted safeguarding laws (27%). Most did not appear to be aware of any institutional tools or measures to prevent gender-based violence in their school or organisation.

The need for training for teachers was highlighted in open responses both to inform teachers and to support them in communicating with students around this topic. The need for presentations, talks and external speakers in schools was also suggested.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholder including teachers/educators, representatives of relevant organisations (referred to henceforth as experts), and parents. Participants were recruited via email through contacting a range of organisations, community groups, schools, and online advertising. Interviews were conducted via videoconferencing and most lasted one hours or less. In total 7 experts were interviewed, along with 11 teachers/educators, and 7 parents.

Interviews first explored participants' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of gender-based violence generally, before focusing on specific interventions, strategies and approaches used to address gender-based violence.

i) Attitudes, Beliefs and Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence

Participants agreed that gender-based violence was very prevalent, although acknowledged that it could be difficult to detect as much of it is hidden, and often exists in more subtle forms than people might expect. Types of behaviour thought to constitute GBV included physical behaviours, emotional or verbal abuse, psychological abuse or controlling behaviours, and sexual violence.

Risk factors perceived to contribute to GBV included cultural and religious background, financial or economic factors, family background and upbringing, witnessing or experiencing violence at home and other adverse childhood experiences, lack of psychological support for those at risk of perpetrating violence, beliefs about gender roles and relationships, and lack of education. The perpetrator's temperament and personality was also highlighted as a contributing factor, as well as any significant tensions or imbalances in the relationship. Specific populations were identified as having increased prevalence of GBV, such as Muslim communities, although respondents acknowledged that GBV could occur among people from any community or background. Younger people in their first relationships and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds were also identified as being at increased risk. Although it was widely acknowledged that women seemed to be the primary victims of GBV, some participants also acknowledged that men could be victims, while a small number of participants acknowledged the increased risk of GBV for LGBTQ+ people, particularly for transgender people.

i) Barriers to leaving Abusive Relationship

All participants acknowledged the difficulty of leaving relationships where violence was occurring, due to a wide range of factors. These included the person's perception of the situation as normal, and their perception of what constitutes a healthy or abusive relationship, as well as the complexity of leaving a relationship they still perceived as loving or beneficial to them (e.g. through a sense of safety, or dependence on their partner). Furthermore, being in a controlling or coercive relationship could also be a barrier to leaving, as could a lack of self-esteem on the part of the victim. In longer term relationships, women not wanting to break up the family unit was highlighted, as well as victims not wanting to leave their family, friends and support networks was highlighted, and reluctance to uproot other aspects of their lives such as having to leave their workplace or take their children out of school in order to move far away from the perpetrator. The lack of spaces available in shelters was acknowledged by some participants as a barrier to leaving, as was a lack of social support. Finally, the need to conceptualise the exiting of an abusive relationship as a process towards a route out, rather than 'just leaving', was considered important. In young people specifically, the lack of control that young people have over their environment was reported by one expert participant to limit their freedom to effectively escape abusive relationships. This included not being in a position to move away from the geographical area, being enrolled in school in the area, and not being able to access refuges/shelters when under 18, as well as younger people often not being taken seriously when disclosing GBV.

ii) Gender Based Violence in the School Context

Views on the prevalence of gender-based violence among young people were mixed, but it was generally considered to be relatively prevalent. The difficulties of detecting it were reported by many participants,

due to the language used around such behaviours, the often hidden nature of this type of violence, and the likelihood that many behaviours in the young people's relationships may occur more outside of the school itself. An important insight arising from these interviews was the difficulty in differentiating gender-based

violence from bullying, and the often-overlapping nature of these types of harmful behaviours. Manifestations of gender-based violence within school settings focused more on non-physical behaviours, such as teasing, harassment and catcalling; microaggressions including LGBT harassment and homophobia; controlling behaviours and jealousy; sexual harassment; sharing of nude photos and revenge porn.

Difficulties of measuring or monitoring gender-based violence within the school setting were also mainly due to the difficulty in detecting signs of violence and particularly more subtle forms of violence or abuse, as well as reliance on victims being willing to disclose their experience, potential issues regarding the accuracy of reporting, potential for miscommunication due to the specific types of language used by young people around this issue, and stigma.

iii) Need for clear strategy and collaboration

Participants were often unaware of specific strategies, policies or approaches to support young people in schools in relation to GBV particularly from a policy and legislation perspective. Several highlighted the recent changes to legislation in the UK regarding relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in the school curriculum. Local authorities, charities, and mental health education and support were all highlighted as being important in addressing these issues generally. However, challenges of providing education around GBV in schools were highlighted

Educators and representatives of organisations working in the area of gender-based violence described the need for greater collaboration with a range of organisations, institutions and experts, including the need more support from the government; more clinical psychologists, counsellors and other mental health support in schools; multi-agency safeguarding hubs and other wider networks to address childhood adversity; social services; police; community or youth workers; parents, and communities, including faith communities. The value of external speakers visiting schools was highlighted by many participants, with examples given of the benefits of having speakers with lived experience, particularly younger people with lived experience of GBV. The need for young people to have an input in this collaborative approach to addressing GBV was also noted, to ensure interventions are appropriate and relevant. Challenges were noted by one expert informant who described difficulties in engaging non-statutory stakeholders such as GPs.

Where teachers reported that they were aware of strategies or processes for responding to gender-based violence in the school, this involved safeguarding officers, child protection policies and training. As in the survey responses, there was general consensus from the interviews with teachers and educators that it was important for teachers to instruct young people about gender equality, and that they have a responsibility to explicitly address gender-based violence.

iv) GBV Education For young people

The need to facilitate discussion about GBV was acknowledged by some informants, but it was felt that such efforts should be embedded into the curriculum across subjects rather than being one-off lessons or talks. Some mentioned specific opportunities for young people to be instructed about GBV within the school such as through PSE or RSE lessons or external speakers visiting the school. Another suggestion included incentivising action on GBV by creating a national award scheme for schools. However, the competing demands on teachers' time and their existing workload were acknowledged as significant barriers to them being able to engage in proactive activities around GBV.

Other barriers included parents not wanting their children to be taught about such sensitive or controversial topics, the challenge of teaching about such issues in faith schools and the need for teachers to have more training in recognising signs of GBV, as well as in how to discuss such topics with young people in an effective and constructive manner. Some respondents also felt that teachers needed much more support in addressing such issues, and that other staff were needed in schools as well, such as more counsellors or clinical psychologists. This appears to be in line with the caution that many participants expressed about putting all of the responsibility for this issue on to teachers, and that addressing this issue and educating young people about it is everyone's responsibility.

v) Need for teacher training

Suggestions for the creation of effective training materials for teachers on the topic of GBV mainly highlighted the need for training to be interactive and involve reflective discussion, as well as practical aspects such as case examples and role plays. Teachers also wanted training materials to clarify the signs of GBV that they needed to be aware of, particularly the more subtle signs that they may otherwise miss. It

was also suggested that training should clarify the steps and pathways they needed to take to report and address GBV if they came across it. Suggestions for content included the need to emphasise the intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour and therefore, the need to consider the young person's personal and family background when dealing with suspected GBV perpetrators. Furthermore, the need for explicit training content on trauma-informed approaches was reported by several experts and educators. Finally, the need for training to equip teachers in how to talk to young people about gender-based violence in an open and constructive way was acknowledged. The need for protected time to undertake training was identified.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research demonstrate to us the multidisciplinary nature of GBV and how tackling GBV entails a multi stakeholder approach. The views of the educators, parents and community members highlighted the needs for sustainable, equal and accessible provision to support young people. There was a consensus that many of the manifestation of GBV is not only relative to a lack of education, but the way society functions. When trying to develop and create tool to eradicate inequalities developing strategies and tools that focus on lived experiences and empowering victims is an important start in starting the cycle for change.

Recommendations

- Training for teachers should involve reflective work and discussion, as well as enabling teachers to understand and address their own biases in relation to gender equality and gender-based violence topics.
- Training should clarify signs to look out for and how to distinguish gender-based violence from other forms of abuse or bullying.
- Training needs to demonstrate clear steps or pathways to follow once gender-based violence has been identified or suspected.
- Awareness is needed regarding culture specific factors, and support or acknowledgement of the challenges of working on the issue of gender-based violence within faith schools
- Greater clarity and awareness is needed around relevant strategies and legislation.
- Some form of guidance on working collaboratively with parents in relation to gender equality issues may be helpful to enable teachers to address parents' concerns in relation to sensitive topics.
- Development of the training materials should include some content on the need for trauma informed approaches to teaching due to the significant role of trauma in contributing to gender-based violence.
- There is a clear need for content to be embedded in the curriculum across subject areas, and for the topic to be discussed authentically, rather than just being covered as content from a book. Support is therefore needed for teachers in achieving this.
- Communication training is needed to equip teachers to discuss sensitive topics in a clear, effective and age-appropriate manner
- Multi-modal training programmes were suggested for teachers, including different delivery methods such as videos, case studies and discussion, and interactive elements