



Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships (STIR) Connecting online and offline contexts and risks

Briefing Paper 4: Young People's Views on Intervention and Prevention for Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships

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This briefing paper presents the STIR study findings on what sources of help young people use if they experience interpersonal violence and abuse (IPVA) and their views on what forms of prevention and intervention would be relevant and accessible. The main findings are:

- **A quarter of the young people surveyed had not talked to anyone about the interpersonal violence and abuse (IPVA) they had experienced in their intimate relationships.**
- **Most young people talked to peers rather than adults about their experiences of IPVA.**
- **Young people's view of IPVA as a private matter, a lack of trust in others and the desire to protect the perpetrator or the relationship were all barriers to seeking help.**
- **Young people tended to see themselves and their peers as responsible for preventing IPVA.**
- **Most young people participating in the study were positive about the value of prevention work in relation to IPVA.**
- **School and home were identified as the most important settings for prevention of IPVA.**





AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The STIR project's aim was to document young people's own experiences of online and face-to-face forms of IPVA in five European countries: Bulgaria; Cyprus; England; Italy and Norway (www.stiritup.eu). The specific objectives included exploring:

- the incidence of online and offline physical, emotional and sexual forms of violence and abuse in young relationships
- sending and receiving of sexual images between intimate partner
- the subjective impact
- associated risk and protective factors
- help-seeking
- young people's experiences and perspectives on what would help.



METHODOLOGY

STIR was based on a four stage mixed-method approach:

- Stage 1: Expert workshops to map policy and practice in five European countries.
- Stage 2: School-based survey of 4,500 young people aged 14-17 year-olds.
- Stage 3: Interviews with 100 young people
- Stage 4: Development of an app resource for young people (www.stiritapp.eu)

A young people's advisory group was convened in each country to comment on all aspects of the study.



FINDINGS

The confidential STIR survey was completed by 4,564 young people aged between 14-17 years, in 45 schools in England, Norway, Italy, Bulgaria and Cyprus. IPVA incidence rates and its impact on young people are reported in STIR Briefing Paper 2. In the survey, those young people who reported experiencing IPVA were asked if they had told anyone about their experience. In the 91 interviews completed with young people who had experienced IPVA (see STIR Briefing Paper 5), young people were asked in more depth about sources of support following their experience of IPVA as well as for their views on prevention initiatives. These findings are also reported here.



Who do young people tell about their experiences of IPVA?

The vast majority of the young people in all five countries had told someone about their experience of IPVA violence and abuse. However, while 74% had done so, 26% had not talked to anyone.

Most young people, across the five countries, regardless of what form of violence they had experienced, chose to talk to peers rather than adults. A total of 64% chose to confide in a friend whilst only 17% spoke to an adult. More young women than young men, across all forms of violence and in all countries, were willing to seek support from others. Of the young women, 75% spoke to a friend about the violence, whilst 54% of the young men did the same. Only 18% of the young women and 15% of the young men spoke to an adult, usually a parent. Furthermore, we found no differences in the young people's willingness to reach out to others according to their age and exposure to family violence. However, a willingness to reach out to others did differ depending on the type of IPVA they had experienced. In total, 70% of those who had experienced online IPVA, 66% of those who were victims of face-to-face physical or emotional violence, and 55% of those who experienced sexual violence told someone about it. The most common responses to experiencing IPVA was to end the relationship (14%), delete any messages from the person (27%) and block him/her from contacting them (17%).



What are the barriers to seeking support?

The finding that about one quarter of the young people in this study did not talk to anyone about the violence and only about one in seven talked to an adult highlights the importance of investigating the barriers for seeking support. Through analyzing the young people's accounts, we identified three main reasons for refraining from seeking support from others:

IPVA was seen as a private issue

I think that in order to build my character, I have to sit, think about the situation and cope alone. (Sophia, 18, Bulgaria)

Those who felt that the violence was a private issue expressed this in two ways. On one hand, their experience of IPVA was seen as their own responsibility. Those who saw the violence as something they had to take care of themselves argued that they were at an age where they should be able to handle the issues on their own, that seeking help would be admitting that they weren't able to handle their problems or they simply stated that they liked to handle problems on their own. On the other

hand, some young people did not want to burden others with their problems. They felt that others probably had their own problems to deal with or that the violence was not yet significant enough to bother others about it.

A lack of trust in others

The school nurse, I have talked a little to her, but she knows nothing about this, I can't tell her, 'cos I feel like I can't trust her, she might tell someone else, I feel deep inside that she won't, but you never know, I have experienced school nurses telling before. (Tone, 17, Norway)

A common reason given for not seeking support was a lack of trust in the competence of adults and professionals. Some young people believed that adults gave inadequate advice because of a generation gap, stating that adults were 'old fashioned', or they overreacted and didn't understand the issues today's teenagers face. This was particularly emphasized in respect of online forms of IPVA. Others felt that professionals such as school nurses or teachers either lacked necessary knowledge about IPVA or didn't take it seriously enough. They were also afraid that adults would share information about their situation carelessly. However, this lack of trust in adults, also extended to peers. Many young people didn't feel that they could trust their friends to be able to see the situation from their point of view. A lack of trust in friends was often associated with previous experience of gossip and rumours which had made them hesitant about sharing such personal information.

Young people wanted to protect the perpetrator or the relationship

...I told him that he should be careful, I have... 'I could tell the police about you', but I would never do it, but I told him to make him feel a bit afraid... to be a little mean, since I was so tired of him being so angry. But... he knows I would never do that to him. (Lise, 18, Norway)

Some of the young people had chosen not to tell anyone about the IPVA they had experienced because they wanted to protect either the perpetrator or the relationship itself. The young people interviewed gave different explanations for this. Some were worried about the consequences it could have for the perpetrator, for instance, problems with their parents or problems with having to quit school or sports as a punishment might ensue. For others, the violence or abuse was not sufficient to make them want to end the relationship. They were afraid that others, often parents, would force them to end the relationship if they found out about the IPVA.



Preventing IPVA in Young People's Relationships

Role of Schools

The schools should talk about it more, take it more seriously. The teachers should be more involved (Tone, 17, Norway)

Most young people in the study expressed optimistic views about the value of prevention work. In all five countries, the school was the most frequently mentioned arena where young people thought violence prevention work should take place. Young people suggested a number of ways in which schools could engage in preventive activities. They argued that school counsellors should involve young people in discussion on issues such as setting limits in intimate relationships and the school nurse should be easily approachable and show an understanding of young people's realities. Several young people argued that school prevention work should include stricter, hands-on policies and practices such as not allowing the use of mobile phones and social networking sites during the school day.

Young people highlighted a particular need for information on what is legal and permitted or appropriate behaviour on digital media. Some young people considered messages addressing gender equality to be an important element of prevention work, but this was not the case in all countries. In Cyprus, Norway and England, young people pointed out how differences between the genders needs to be problematized when dealing with IPVA, whilst in Italy and Bulgaria, gender was less likely to be considered an important issue.

Young people also emphasized that the overall approach taken to prevention is crucial. The message conveyed was that young people want information from and dialogue with adults, but it needs to be done in a respectful and non-judgmental way.

Role of the family

I think parents should be good role models. If parents scream on the phone and post ugly messages, then you think it is ok, if they don't do it, it is a form of prevention. (Sofie, 16, Norway)

The family was identified as another important setting for violence prevention initiatives. It was suggested that parents should teach their children appropriate behaviour as well as providing positive role models. Young people in Norway thought that this role could include following and protecting them on digital media but this view was confined to those young people interviewed in Norway.

Role of the Peer Group

There are a lot of people who are stressed, and they blow off steam by being mean and hurtful to their partners. In this case [where Nikolaj intervened to protect his friend's partner] it was very important to intervene and say that this is not ok, so that he could calm down. (Nikolaj, 18, Bulgaria)

However, not all young people in all countries saw the school and the home as the main contexts for preventing IPVA in young people's relationships. In Bulgaria, most young people suggested that it was young people themselves who should prevent IPVA happening. This view was shared to some extent by interviewees from all five countries. Young people suggested that positive and negative experiences should be shared between friends and that it was important to learn from each other's mistakes. Peers were not only seen as responsible for passing on knowledge about how to prevent violence, they were also seen as having a role in physically intervening to prevent violence from taking place. Other young people felt that the only person who could prevent violence or abuse occurring was the individual him/herself.



IMPLICATIONS

1. Young people rely on their peers for support in responding to IPVA but many would welcome more involvement from adults. This requires teachers, counsellors, other professionals and also parents to have increased awareness of IPVA in young people's intimate relationships and access to relevant information and services. European and national awareness raising strategies should target these groups. In addition, services that can assist these frontline sources of support for young people to respond effectively should be developed.
2. Young people emphasized the importance of how violence prevention work is undertaken and delivered. Prevention initiatives addressing IPVA in young people's intimate relationships need to be creative, bottom-up and inclusive and should adopt respectful attitudes towards young people themselves.

3. Young people wanted schools to provide information on the law in respect of both online and offline IPVA. This requires national governments to clarify and summarise the law in this area and to provide information about the relevant legal framework to teachers, counsellors, criminal justice and health professionals as well as to parents and young people themselves.
4. Much education for young people on this issue is delivered in an ad-hoc way. Integrating teaching on this issue into national curricula would make for a more sustained and consistent approach to prevention.



Briefing Papers

1. *Policy and Practice Awareness in Europe on Teenage Intimate Relationships and New Technology*
2. *Incidence Rates and Impact of Experiencing Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships*
3. *Risk and Protective (Predictive) Factors for IPVA Victimisation and Instigation*
4. *Young People's Views on Prevention and Intervention for Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships*
5. *Young People's Perspectives on Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationships*



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The full project report will be available in Spring 2015, please contact Christine Barter at Christine.Barter@bristol.ac.uk or visit the STIR website for a copy.

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