

Violence Against Women and Girls Factsheet

To support schools in England to prevent violence and abuse of girls



Why?

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is the term given to all forms of violence and abuse experienced disproportionately by women and girls, or experienced by them because of their gender, including rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, FGM and sexual harassment. VAWG is linked to women and girls' inequality and is neither acceptable nor inevitable.

In recognition of this, violence against women and girls is a core government strategy in which prevention is a priority.¹ Schools are a key site of prevention work and while they receive a great deal of guidance and advice from government and NGOs including on teaching Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), and policies on Safeguarding, Bullying and Behaviour, there is very little accurate and up to date information on VAWG or how to prevent it. A 2013 Ofsted report found that 40 per cent of schools had weak Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and that as a result pupils in these schools: "had gaps in their knowledge and skills, most commonly in the serious safeguarding areas of personal safety in relation to sex and relationships."² This Factsheet, and suggested resources, is therefore intended to help fill these gaps.

Who?

This Factsheet has been prepared by experts on the End Violence Against Women Coalition Prevention Network which holds a unique position in its breadth and depth of knowledge on all forms of abuse experienced by young women and girls, and on the role of schools in tackling VAWG.³

EVAW Prevention Network members include:

[Rape Crisis England and Wales](#), [Imkaan](#), [ATL](#), [Eaves](#), [Refuge](#), [The Nia Project](#), [Forward](#), [AVA](#), [Object](#), [Girlguiding UK](#), [Amnesty International UK](#), [Respect](#), [Young Women's Trust](#), [MsUnderstood](#), [NUS](#), [NUT](#), [NASUWT](#), [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#), [UK Feminista](#), [White Ribbon Campaign](#), [Southall Black Sisters](#), [Women's Aid England](#), [Rape Crisis South London](#), [Advance](#), [Womankind](#), [British Humanist Association](#), [Women's Resource Centre](#), [South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre](#), [Sex Education Forum](#), [Bristol University](#), [Manchester Metropolitan University](#), [University of Bedfordshire](#), [University of the West of England](#), and [Child And Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University](#).

Summary

Schools play a vital role in helping young people develop healthy relationships based on equality and respect. They do this in the context of a society in which gender inequality is the norm; women and girls are simultaneously pressured into and shamed for sexual activity;⁴ female sexual pleasure is rarely discussed; and girls and young women are subjected to high levels of harassment, abuse and violence - overwhelmingly from men and boys they know.

A whole school approach, including comprehensive SRE teaching as part of PSHE, is needed to support young people and prevent abuse through:

- Challenging notions of male sexual entitlement;
- Preventing abusive attitudes and behaviours being reproduced and taking root;
- Unpicking harmful stereotypes that place responsibility on girls to protect themselves from violence and abuse;
- Addressing the gendered environment in which young people form attitudes and behaviours and navigate relationships;
- And acknowledging the scale of violence against women and girls.

Following the recent exposure of rape and sexual assault of girls in Rotherham, schools will be aware of the importance of listening to, believing and supporting young survivors. Recognising, acknowledging and acting on girls' experiences of abuse are vital steps schools can make, as a toxic culture of denial and minimisation will miss opportunities to support young survivors, intervene with perpetrators and prevent further abuse.

Below we set out some of the main forms of violence and abuse that girls experience in the UK, evidence on how widely these are experienced, and details of some of the specialist VAWG organisations that can support young women and girls who have experienced abuse, provide in-depth knowledge and help schools deliver prevention work effectively.

Some forms of violence and abuse that girls and young women experience, such as rape and FGM are specific criminal offences, whilst other forms, such as abusive 'sexting', domestic violence and child sexual abuse, may constitute a range of different offences. Details on UK law can be found at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/> and specialist legal guidance around VAWG can be found at <http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/legal.php>

Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual abuse involves any form of sexual activity with a child under the age of consent and can be committed by adults or peers, most often by those who are in a position of trust and/or authority over the child (such as friends or family members).⁵ It can be a single incident or for many repeated years.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse based on an ongoing exploitative relationship between perpetrator and child. It ranges from 'relationships' where sexual activity is exchanged for gifts, 'protection' or accommodation, to trafficking and the organised abuse of children in ways linked to the sex industry. Gang-association is a particular context for girls' sexual exploitation by peers.⁶

- Nearly a quarter (24.1%) of young adults aged 18-24 report having experienced sexual abuse in childhood (31% of young women and 17.4% of young men); 90% are abused by someone they know and 66% are abused by other children or young people under 18.⁷
- In 2012-2013, 22,654 sexual offences against under-18s were reported to police in England and Wales with four out of five cases involving girls.⁸
- Police recorded at least 2,865 reports of sexual abuse of children in schools between 2011 and 2013 with more than half committed by other children.⁹
- The UK is a significant site of international and internal child trafficking. The vast majority of trafficked children in the UK are aged 14-17, with many girls trafficked for sexual abuse and exploitation.¹⁰

Domestic Violence and Teen Relationship Abuse

Domestic violence is the term applied to the varied forms of abuse experienced from a current or former partner. It is a pattern of control, coercion and threats and can involve physical abuse (such as assault), emotional abuse (such as intimidation), sexual abuse (such as rape), psychological abuse (such as isolating them from friends and family), and financial abuse (such as using money to control them). Domestic violence can also be inflicted alongside wider family violence involving multiple perpetrators, including in gang-associated relationships and where family or community 'honour' is perceived to be at stake.

As well as being affected by domestic violence within parent/carer relationships at home, young people can also experience abuse within their peer relationships. Teen relationship abuse was acknowledged formally in 2013 when the Home Office definition of Domestic Violence¹¹ was extended to include young people aged 16 and over and awareness of the issue has increased in part due to the Home Office's targeted campaign *This Is Abuse*.¹²

- At least 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence in their families.¹³
- On average, two women a week are killed each year by a current or former male partner.¹⁴
- 25% of young women (aged over 13) experience physical violence and 72% experience emotional abuse in their own relationships.¹⁵

- A 2013 survey found that around a quarter of education professionals had been approached by a young person about relationship abuse in the past two years.¹⁶

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is defined by the World Health Organisation as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons". FGM can have severe short and long term health consequences, including severe pain and shock, infection, fatal haemorrhaging, cysts, and complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Women and girls living with FGM can also experience long term effects on their physical, emotional and sexual health.¹⁷ The most common age for FGM to be carried out is between four and ten years old.

- Over 60,000 girls under the age of 15 are at high risk of FGM every year in England and Wales.¹⁸
- Over 137,000 women in England and Wales are already living with the consequences of FGM.¹⁹

Forced Marriage

Forced Marriage is a marriage performed without the full and free consent of one or both parties (children under 16 and people with some learning disabilities, for example, cannot legally consent).²⁰ Emotional, financial, physical and sexual threats and abuse, as well as notions of 'honour,' can all be used to force someone to marry²¹ and forced marriage can lead to physical violence, rape and even murder.²²

- In 2013, the Government's Forced Marriage unit gave advice of support to 1302 victims of Forced Marriage - the vast majority being girls and young women under 21 years of age.²³

Online Abuse

As a lot of young people's social interaction now occurs through social media, young women and girls can be exposed to online harassment and abuse from peers or adults which facilitates and amplifies the violence and abuse they experience offline.

Adults or peers can also manipulate online relationships with young women and girls to initiate non-contact sexual abuse (e.g. via webcam) or to exploit them into sexually abusive or exploitative relationships offline through making them send self-generated photographs (which can then be used to threaten, coerce and control them), or introducing them to sexualised or pornographic material.^{24 25}

- In 2014, surveys found that girls aged 9-16 were almost three times as likely as boys to have been bothered, uncomfortable or upset by something online in the past year.²⁶
- In 2012, the Internet Watch Foundation found that 88% of self-generated sexually explicit online images and videos of young people had been taken from their original location and uploaded onto other websites.²⁷

- CEOP's 2013 report showed a 70% increase in the proliferation of online child abuse images of girls under 10 years old.²⁸

Pornography

Pornography has no exact definition but is generally acknowledged as material produced principally for the purpose of sexual arousal,²⁹ and is widely regarded as existing for a male audience and privileging male sexual pleasure.³⁰ Mainstream pornography, like much sexualised popular culture,³¹ commonly depicts grossly racist and sexist stereotypes, for example presenting black men as hyper-sexual and savage, and Asian women as sexually exotic and submissive.³²

There are clear gender differences in exposure and attitudes to pornography: young men and boys are more likely to deliberately access, seek or use pornography and view it more favourably, while young women and girls are more likely to experience unwelcome exposure to pornography and feel much more uncomfortable than young men and boys when viewing it.³³ Young people's exposure to pornography is also linked to unrealistic attitudes about sex, beliefs that women are sex objects, and less progressive attitudes to gender roles (e.g. male dominance and female submission).³⁴

- A 2014 BBC survey of 16-21 year-olds found that 60% of young people in the UK are first exposed to pornography aged 14 years or younger and 74% of young people believe it particularly affects young men's expectations of sex.³⁵
- Online interviews with 18 year olds found 70% think pornography can have a damaging impact on young people's views of sex or relationships; 72% think pornography leads to unrealistic attitudes to sex and 70% think pornography encourages society to view women as sex objects.³⁶
- Research into anal sex among 16-18 year old heterosexuals found it to be "painful, risky and coercive, particularly for women" with pornography frequently cited as an explanation for engaging in it.³⁷

Rape and Sexual Assault

Sexual violence, like most forms of VAWG, is perpetrated overwhelmingly by men and boys against women and girls they know.³⁸ Rape is a form of sexual violence involving the penetration of the vagina, mouth or anus using a penis performed without consent. To be able to consent, one must have both the freedom to consent (without, for example, pressure, coercion, threats or violence) and the capacity to consent (without, for example, excessive drink, drugs or a disability). Sexual assault is a form of sexual violence involving non-consensual sexual touching.³⁹

Far from being a result of 'miscommunication,' acts of sexual violence, such as rape and sexual assault, are used intentionally to exert power and control. This 'miscommunication' myth inaccurately blames women and girls for not saying 'no' clearly enough and dangerously overlooks the sexually harmful attitudes and behaviours of men and boys, which risk being normalised and accepted if they go unchallenged.⁴⁰ Meaningful sexual consent involves verbal or non-verbal, ongoing and enthusiastic 'yes' to all sexual activities taking place.

- One in five women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16, approximately 85,000 women are raped and over 400,000 women are sexually assaulted in England and Wales every year.⁴¹
- Sexual violence is even more prevalent for younger women as one in three teenage girls has experienced some form of sexual violence from a partner.⁴²
- Coercive control or pressure is used much more frequently by partners than physical force, as 16% of girls having been raped using pressure and coercion and 6% have been raped using physical force.⁴³
- Young women and girls affected by gangs experience high levels of sexual violence including sexual exploitation, sexual assault, individual rape and multiple perpetrator rape.⁴⁴ Rape can be carried out as an attack on a rival gang or as a method of gang initiation.⁴⁵
- In 2013, the police recorded at least 1,052 reports of sexual violence in schools, of which 134 were reported as rape.⁴⁶
- In a 2013 Joint Inspectorate study of young sex offenders almost half of the cases contained documented evidence of the young men and boys exhibiting previous “concerning sexualised behaviour” that was either not identified at the time or was subject to disbelief, minimisation and denial by professionals and families - crucially missing the opportunity to intervene and prevent abuse.⁴⁷

‘Sexting’

‘Sexting’ is the sending of sexually explicit messages via mobile phones or computers, typically involving self-generated images sent between peers. ‘Sexting’ is not a gender-neutral practice and is often coercive (with boys pressuring girls to send images of themselves) and is linked to sexual harassment, bullying and even violence.⁴⁸ Self-generated images from ‘sexting’ can also be used later as a form of harassment and abuse known as ‘revenge pornography’ which involves the distribution (or threat of distribution) of images, without the consent of those depicted, in order to threaten, control, bully, harm or humiliate them.

- As many as 40% of young people engage in ‘sexting’, with a sexual double standard very apparent in expectations and responses to it (with sexually active young men admired, and sexually active young women denigrated).⁴⁹

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can be verbal (including making indecent remarks about someone’s appearance, sexual orientation or sex life, or making requests or demands for sexual favours), non-verbal (including staring, displaying sexually explicit material or sending indecent messages) or physical (including touching, pinching, and sexual assault). It can be a one-off incident or a persistent pattern of behaviour, and can occur in the street, on public transport to or from school and within school itself.⁵⁰

- In a poll of 16-18 year olds: 29% of girls say they experienced ‘groping’ or other unwanted sexual touching at school; 71% say they have heard sexual name-calling such as “slut” or “slag” towards girls at school daily or a few times per

week; 28% say they have seen sexual pictures on mobile phones at school a few times a month or more.⁵¹

- In a 2012 survey, 43% of young women in London (aged 18-24) reported having experienced sexual harassment in public places (such as in the street, in a parks or on public transport) in the previous year, and almost twice as many women as men reported feeling unsafe on public transport.⁵²

Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of abusive behaviour designed to incite fear and curtail freedom, such as watching or monitoring someone or forcing contact with them through any means (including via social media). Young women can be particularly at risk of stalking as school and social media can provide a backdrop of monitoring and surveillance which others can easily abuse.

- Stalking often escalates to and is perpetrated alongside other forms of abuse. For example, 56% of women who have experienced stalking will also have experienced another form of abuse, such as sexual or domestic violence.⁵³

Specialist VAWG support services:

As both pupils and staff will have been affected by various forms of VAWG, it is important for schools to make links with their local specialist VAWG services for advice, referrals and support. Such support services, including specialist services for Black and Minority Ethnic women, can be found by searching your area at:

Rape Crisis	http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/
Women's Aid	http://www.womensaid.org.uk/

VAWG prevention resources:

For teaching materials that support a whole school approach to VAWG prevention, AVA (a member of the EVAW Prevention Network) has launched the AVA Prevention Platform (www.preventionplatform.co.uk), an online hub of educational tools and resources. The Prevention Platform contains a comprehensive toolkit looking at all forms of VAWG and how to create a whole school approach to challenging VAWG. Anyone working with young people can also access the free e-learning course to help them recognise warning signs of abuse and to learn how to respond appropriately.

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- ¹ [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in the UK](#), Home Office, 2014
 - ² [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools](#), Ofsted, 2013
 - ³ A good example of such work is in Bristol where [the Bristol Ideal](#) acknowledges the crucial role schools play in preventing VAWG and has created a set of standards for schools to aspire to.
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 - ⁵ [Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), CEOP, 2012
 - ⁶ [Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence - Interim findings](#), University of Bedfordshire for the OCC, 2012
 - ⁷ [Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK today](#), NSPCC, 2011
 - ⁸ [Sexual abuse of under-11s: reports to police rise 16% in 2012-13](#), NSPCC, 2014
 - ⁹ [More than 300 rapes reported in schools in past three years](#), The Independent, 22 August 2014
 - ¹⁰ [Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK](#), CEOP, 2009
 - ¹¹ [Information for Local Areas on the change to the Definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse](#), Home Office, 2013
 - ¹² [This Is Abuse campaign](#), Home Office, 2013-14
 - ¹³ [Women's Mental Health: Into the Mainstream](#), Department of Health, 2002
 - ¹⁴ [Focus on: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences](#), ONS, 2011-12
 - ¹⁵ [Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships](#), NSPCC, 2009
 - ¹⁶ [Relationship abuse between young people: Information for schools](#), NSPCC and ATL, 2013
 - ¹⁷ [Living With FGM](#), Daughters of Eve
 - ¹⁸ [Report shows 137,000 Women and Girls with FGM in England and Wales](#), City University, 2014
 - ¹⁹ [Report shows 137,000 Women and Girls with FGM in England and Wales](#), City University, 2014
 - ²⁰ <http://www.avaproject.org.uk/news/2014/august/our-girl--film-and-resource-on-forced-marriage.aspx>
 - ²¹ [The Missing Link: a joined up approach to addressing harmful practices in London](#), Imkaan for GLA, 2011
 - ²² [IKWRO welcomes Government plans to make forced marriage a crime](#), IKWRO, 2012
 - ²³ [Forced Marriage Unit: Statistics January to December 2013](#), Home Office and FCO, 2013
 - ²⁴ [The Process of Grooming](#), Rape Crisis South London, 2014
 - ²⁵ [Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), CEOP, 2012
 - ²⁶ [Net Children Go Mobile: The UK Report, A comparative report with findings from the UK 2010 survey by EU Kids Online](#), 2014
 - ²⁷ [Internet Watch Foundation Annual and Charity Report 2012](#), IWF, 2012
 - ²⁸ [Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), CEOP, 2013
 - ²⁹ [Criminal Justice and Immigration Act](#), 2008
 - ³⁰ ["Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape": How young people in England understand sexual consent](#), CWASU for the OCC, 2013
 - ³¹ [Pornographic Performances: A review of research on sexualisation and racism in music videos](#), Dr Maddy Coy for EVAW, Imkaan and Object, 2014
 - ³² [Racy Sex, Sexy Racism](#), Gail Dines, 2010
 - ³³ ["Basically... porn is everywhere" A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People](#), Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC), 2013
 - ³⁴ ["Basically... porn is everywhere" A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People](#), Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC), 2013
 - ³⁵ [BBC Three survey reveals one in four young people first view porn at age 12 or under](#), BBC, 2014
 - ³⁶ [500 Online Interviews amongst UK adults aged 18](#), Opinion Research for IPPR, 2014
 - ³⁷ [Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK](#), Faculty of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 2014
 - ³⁸ [An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales](#), Ministry of Justice and Home Office, 2013
 - ³⁹ [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#)
 - ⁴⁰ [Professionals failing children who sexually harm, finds chief inspector](#), Community Care, 2013
 - ⁴¹ [An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales](#), Ministry of Justice, Home Office & the ONS, 2013
 - ⁴² [Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships](#), University of Bristol for NSPCC, 2009
 - ⁴³ [Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships](#), University of Bristol for NSPCC, 2009
 - ⁴⁴ ["It's wrong... but you get used to it" A qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of young people in England](#), University of Bedfordshire for the OCC, 2013
 - ⁴⁵ [Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence: Interim report](#), University of Bedfordshire for the OCC, 2012
 - ⁴⁶ [More than 300 rapes reported in schools in past three years](#), The Independent, 22 August 2014
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 - ⁴⁸ [A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting'](#), IoE, KCL and LSE for NSPCC, 2012
 - ⁴⁹ [A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting'](#), IoE, KCL and LSE for NSPCC, 2012
 - ⁵⁰ [Hollaback!](#), 2014
 - ⁵¹ [Sexual Harassment in Schools: a YouGov poll for EVAW](#), End Violence Against Women, 2010
 - ⁵² [Sexual Harassment Survey](#), EVAW/YouGov, 2012
 - ⁵³ [Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey](#), Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 2004