young activists

gender-based violence survey

inclusion as prevention

test of change
UPDATE
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What is Inclusion as prevention (IAP)

Inclusion as Prevention (IAP) is a five-year initiative funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. IAP is a partnership between South Lanarkshire Council, Action for Children, Dartington Service Design Lab and the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ). The focus of IAP is on co-production and collaboration with young people, communities and partners, testing out ways to improve how services can be provided to better meet the needs of children, young people and families.

This test of change looking at the impact of gender-based violence is one of ten tests of change being carried out with the support of Inclusion as Prevention.

This update report is focused on one aspect of the test, a survey to measure knowledge of and experience of gender-based violence in young people. These survey findings have been fed into a larger piece of work, creating an animation and a workshop that can be used within schools, colleges and youth groups to highlight gender-based violence, help young people recognise the signs, and hopefully result in a safer school, college and community space for children and young people. A later report will document the effectiveness of the workshop aspect of the test of change.

what is gender-based violence

The European Commission describes gender-based violence (GBV) as:
"…violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in-

Physical harm
Sexual harm
Psychological
or economic harm or suffering to women

It can include violence against women, domestic violence against women, men or children living in the same domestic unit. Although women and girls are the main victims of GBV, it also causes severe harm to families and communities".

context

Girls and women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence and abuse, although it is important to recognise that they are not the only victims. The Women and Equalities Select Committee (UK Government) in 2016 highlighted that young women and girls were experiencing high levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence online and in schools and colleges, while a further survey of children and young people in 2017 (UK Feminista and NEU) found that a third of female students at mixed-sex secondary schools had experienced some form of sexual harassment at school.

An Ofsted rapid review of sexual abuse in English schools and colleges, carried out in 2021 found that for the girls who completed their survey, various types of harmful sexual behaviours happened 'a lot' or 'sometimes' between people their age. The different forms these incidents took were face-to-face no-contact incidents, online or social media no-contact incidents and lastly, forms of contact incident, such as sexual assaults, unwanted touching or being pressured into sexual contact. The boys who responded to the questionnaire, however, were much less likely to think these incidents happened (Ofsted, 2021).

A specialist gender-based violence charity AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) surveyed students at higher education institutions across the UK; 62% of respondents reported experiencing sexual misconduct at their current or previous university; in 96% of cases this misconduct was by a male perpetrator and 82% of respondents believed their experience was linked to their gender. The vast majority of respondents (70%) did not tell anyone of their experience, or only told people outwith the university. The reasons for this included: thinking that nothing would be done; it was pointless; thinking the issue was not serious enough to disclose; not knowing who to tell; and feeling that they themselves would be blamed (AVA, 2022)

The Ofsted rapid review described previously also examined the processes by which young people in schools can report incidents or ask for support post-incident and found there were barriers to access. Whilst these safeguarding processes do exist, they are reliant on teachers and other professionals witnessing incidents or concerns and raising these appropriately. The Ofsted report found that this did not always happen; teachers often did not know of issues or did not think they happened within the school itself and the children did not feel that teachers understood their experiences.

Evidently the processes for supporting young people to make disclosures both within schools and university, or to reach out for help, are not always appropriate or functioning well.

background and aims

A group of eleven young people calling themselves the 'Young Activist' group within Healthy n' Happy, based in South Lanarkshire, were supported by Inclusion as Prevention to design a test of change. They were asked to consider a topic they found interesting, something they felt was important to young people, and that was otherwise lacking in their local area. This is how they have described themselves and their choice of topic, in their own words.

*"We are from Healthy 'n' Happy and Inclusion As Prevention, which are organisations that help bring issues in the community to light.
The issue we are currently bringing to light is Gender-Based Violence.
This issue became the thing we wanted to focus on because we had heard about the Sarah Everard situation and we realised that most of us didn't know what Gender Based Violence was, yet when we discovered the meaning we had realised many of us had been victim to this or seen something like this happen. This is why we are working on it, to bring the topic to light and ensure people understand it.
We are doing this through a survey, and through the survey results we are creating a workshop and a video, to spread awareness further than just the community."*

The aim of this first stage of the test of change was to explore the understanding and prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) among young people in South Lanarkshire.

They wanted to understand:

- What young people understood GBV to be
- Whether young people had experienced incidents of GBV
- If young people made use of strategies to reduce the risk of GBV
- If views about, and experiences of, GBV varied by gender (as they were a group of young women, they were acutely aware that they might not be capturing the views of young men and boys)

As a group they decided that a survey across schools, colleges and youth groups would be the best way to measure knowledge and experience of gender-based violence. Once this baseline information had been identified, the intention was to design a workshop exploring gender-based violence, which they hoped to share across schools, colleges and youth groups.

The group of young people developed the aim and purpose of the survey, created the design and questions contained in the survey and analysed the findings. Permission to carry out this survey within schools and colleges in South Lanarkshire came from The University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee and the Educational Psychology Service, South Lanarkshire.

young people as researchers

This survey was conceived, designed, and, to a large extent, analysed by the young people involved in the test of change. They were supported and guided in this by the evaluator for Inclusion as Prevention (IAP). Time constraints and capacity limitations meant that the choice was made not to allocate a great deal of time to learning research skills, but instead there were working sessions with the evaluator at various points through the process; additional feedback and communication was shared via the engagement lead who worked with the group on a fortnightly basis.

Design

In the first 'research session' the bulk of the survey was written; questions and themes to cover were chosen by the young people as a group and individually. Time was also devoted to considering who the survey was for, how it should be distributed and where. The young people were cognisant of some of the pitfalls of completing surveys in classroom settings, for example, being seen by peers to write 'too much' or 'too little', lack of privacy and the importance of providing support to young people who might be emotionally affected by taking part. After some discussion, the young people created a survey design with two pathways of questions, one pathway designed for young people who were comfortable sharing their personal experiences and the other pathway for those who did not wish to share this information. These pathway options would look very similar to an observer, containing both tick-box and longer answer sections; this was intended to provide a level of privacy for young people as it would not be clear to others in the class who had chosen to provide personal experiences and who had not.

The young people provided comments on draft versions of the survey until they were happy and this final version received permission from the University of Strathclyde ethics committee and the Educational Psychology Services from South Lanarkshire, prior to being distributed.

Analyis

Once the survey was closed the evaluator completed some standard frequencies of responses for those questions requiring a tick box response, while the text responses were printed in full but split by gender. This was felt to be the most straightforward way for the group and evaluator to look at responses and develop themes. The analysis session with the young people consisted of time spent discussing the quantitative results and a broader discussion about how to explore the longer responses. Each young person took 2-3 questions to read, evaluate, summarise and identify potential quotes. As a group we fed back our thinking and shared what we had found. This update report on the survey responses is therefore based on the work of the young people.

method

The survey was hosted by Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The survey introduction contained the information required to support informed consent e.g., ethics, reason for the survey, anonymity, safe storage of data and a brief overview of the test of change. The survey was accessible through a link or a QR code and could be completed using computer or mobile phone. Respondents could stop taking part in the survey at any time. Both prior to asking for consent and after completing the survey individuals were signposted on screen to relevant sources of support.

The survey was distributed in four ways:

Via youth groups in the South Lanarkshire area
Via South Lanarkshire College
Via training organisations e.g., Employability
Via secondary schools

The survey was designed to be appropriate for use by any young person aged 12 to 25.

In each location, guidance teachers, pastoral care or equivalent were primed in advance of the survey in case any young person sought support after taking part in the survey.

Information sheets were provided to all of the professionals being asked to circulate the survey.

Young people were informed that their information would remain anonymous and reassured that they would not be recognised from any final output.

respondents

The survey was open for 5 weeks and during this time 51 individuals completed the survey.

The majority of respondents described themselves as female (n=29), eleven described themselves as male, one did not wish to say, and one described themselves as gender fluid. This information was missing in nine cases.

The majority of respondents were aged 16 to 18 years, six were aged from 12 to 15 years and four were aged 19 to 25 years. This information was not provided in nine cases.

The majority of young people heard about the survey from their school or college class (n=22), being told about it (n=11) or through a group they attend (n=7); this information was not provided in 11 cases.

findings

Experience of and understanding of GBV

Although the majority (n=29) of respondents stated they were aware of what gender-based violence is, eleven stated they were unsure and two indicated they did not know. When asked to describe what gender-based violence was, respondents often referred to violent or criminal acts, most often physical acts, but some also indicated that they felt negative descriptions about another gender, being harsh or aggressive towards another gender, or being targeted either physically or mentally fell within their understanding of gender-based violence.

> *"I would personally say that gender-based violence is violent acts committed due to inequalities regarding someone's gender" (Female respondent)*

> *"Violence inflicted on someone because of their gender, most commonly a man towards a woman (Female respondent)*

> *"People being aggressive or harsh to people of a different gender"*
> *(Male respondent)*

In some answers respondents described a belief, held either by themselves or others, that men would be more likely to be perpetrators and women more likely to be the victims of GBV.

Is GBV a problem?

In this sample, 48% (n=20) of respondents knew of someone else or had themselves experienced GBV.

63% (n=32) of respondents agreed with the statement that they believed GBV is a problem in today's society; when asked to indicate why they felt this way most highlighted their belief that it was still visible in society, and that statistics show an increase in GBV. Although the majority of the responses focused on women frequently being the victim of GBV, some respondents also referred to other genders. Several also made mention of the issue of toxic masculinity.

> *"Because it's not just disappeared, women are still attacked and men still suffer with trying to prove their masculinity" (Female respondent)*

Just under half of the respondents (47%) agreed with the statement that GBV is a problem in their own local areas. The reason for believing this to be the case tended to be specific, and relate to what individuals have seen themselves or experienced. Of these, respondents often referred to individuals they knew who had experienced GBV or incidents of GBV they have been told about in their local areas. However, seven respondents (3 female and 4 male) stated they had not heard of any incidents in their area. One respondent felt that their school was 'very on top of things' and felt that people would all be seen and treated as equals. Another mentioned that in their area there are more likely to be fights between males but that combined with this there could sometimes be aggression towards females.

A couple of respondents touched on the issue of stereotypes, with one pointing out 'there's a lot of people who go out to certain places where things can happen' and another saying that 'people will cross the road if they see a big scary man but never a woman'.

Gender more broadly was also raised in the responses, with two respondents highlighting different gender identities, suggesting there is judgment or criticism of different gender identities across society, and that these views might be linked to how people have been brought up.

> "… the opinions people have on individuals that have a different gender are ones of disgust and hatred. This is not just an issue with my local area but across the country" (Male respondent)

> "… there are a lot of young people who don't identify as male or female and a couple have spoke about how they have been targeted and misgendered a lot and say the wrong pronouns etc., all verbal abuse" (Female respondent)

Fears about GBV and precautions

Within this sample 57% (n=24) had anxiety that they might experience GBV themselves. This included 69% of female respondents, 18% of male respondents and both of the respondents who described their gender differently.

50% (n=21) of respondents stated they would feel more comfortable if the taxi or uber driver they were with was the same gender as them. This was made up of 69% of female respondents to this question, and one of the male respondents, although 10 of the eleven male respondents and both of those who described their gender differently felt it made no difference to them what gender their taxi or uber driver was.

Nearly half of respondents (48%, n=20) stated they always take precautions when walking alone in order to keep safe, with a further 21% (n=9) stating they sometimes do, a further 19% (n=8) stated they didn't take precautions often and 12% (n=5) stated that was something they never did.

72% of female respondents stated they always or sometimes take precautions compared with 55% of male respondents.

"It is not the safest thing to travel or go somewhere alone, especially at night"
(Female respondent)

The types of precautions people took included behaviour that was 'avoidant', such as choosing well-lit busy areas, or sticking to roads that they know, 'awareness protection' steps such as texting friends or family to let them know when to expect them, not wearing earphones (or choosing to only wear one earphone), carrying a fully charged phone, and 'self-protection' measures such as carrying a key between their fingers (particularly identified by the female respondents), carrying other items of protection such as pepper spray or a small knife, or learning self-defence.

"I always ensure to text a parent when I leave and arrive at my destination, I never wear two of my air pods, I constantly turn around and check my surroundings and I am usually on the phone to someone" (female respondent)

Although fewer male respondents described the steps they use to keep themselves safe it was striking that those that did made reference to steps that could be described as self-protection, such as self-defence, pepper spray and carrying a weapon themselves with another saying they carry a first aid kit; these seemed to reflect **the fact that** they might be preparing to defend themselves against a violent attack.

Conversely, the female precautions often related more to increased awareness, making different route choices, and being alert to the positions of others around them.

"Always hold my keys between my fingers, ensure my phone is charged, make sure that someone always knows where i'm going and always have 999 dialed on my phone when alone at night" (Female respondent)

The majority 88% (n=37) also stated they would look out for their friends if they were travelling alone; this was 97% of female respondents and 73% of male respondents. This would generally take the form of making sure they 'get home safely' by texting or phoning them; two respondents mentioned the use of tracking apps they could use to ensure people got to their destinations and six others described sticking in a larger group or walking with friends to ensure people got home safe.

Respondents were asked to rate from 1 to 10 how comfortable they would be in different situations, with 1 suggesting very comfortable and 10 denoting very uncomfortable. Table 1 shows the averages when examined by gender (NB: as a result of low numbers, only those who designated themselves male or female were included in this analysis).

The mean ratings when looked at by gender show that female respondents report being less comfortable than male respondents in each of the scenarios but particularly so while walking alone at night and while travelling alone by taxi or uber.

Table 1: Comfort rating from 1 (high comfort) to 10 (low comfort) by gender

	Number	Female mean rating	Male mean rating
Walking alone outside during the day	28/9	4.57	4.11
Walking alone at night	29/11	7.24	4.36
Travelling on public transport alone	28/9	4.89	4.00
Getting an uber/taxi alone	28/11	6.07	3.18

When asked for ways they could make others feel more comfortable, the majority of female respondents described ways of keeping in touch with people while they are out and about - this could mean checking in with friends or offering to walk with people, reaching out and being friendly - whilst others pointed out that giving people space was also important, so keeping a distance (male respondents).

"Smile to let them know they can come to me if they need anything, and if someone is in an unsafe situation make my presence aware" (Female respondent)

"Give people their space or keep distance to them" (Male respondent)

Experience of GBV

26% (n=10) of those who responded said they had experienced GBV; of those who gave more information, one stated it had happened on one occasion, and eight that it had happened more than once.

Six went on to describe what form this took: in the majority of cases it included sexual assault in the form of touching while another described both physical incidents and also verbal incidents. Eight also stated that this/these incident(s) had affected their life.

>*"sometimes it makes me uneasy around men I don't know because you don't know what they want to do with you (Female respondent)*

The impact following incidents of gender based violence could be situational, in that it made young people scared of some places or spaces or larger crowds of people, or made them more anxious in situations where they felt alone. Other respondents described how it had made them more uneasy or fearful around men or other genders.

>*"Not a day goes by where I don't remember what has happened to me, the situation I was in is a part of me mentally and will be forever …" (Male respondent)*

>*"… because I am now wary when alone at night and I get nervous in big crowds etc. especially when there are men" (Female respondent)*

Two respondents stated they had disclosed what had happened to a trusted adult (e.g. a teacher or parent), six told a friend, and two said they had told nobody about it.

Of those who had told someone about the incident(s) only one did not feel hesitant about doing so; four stated they did feel hesitant and four stated they felt a little bit hesitant.

Reasons for hesitancy in telling someone centered mostly on fear that it wouldn't be taken seriously - that it was an over-reaction or that they were being over-dramatic. Two others identified that they felt there was a stigma in relation to it and this had made them hesitant to talk about it. In only one case did a respondent describe an outcome where the individual apologised and was told to stay away from them. In two other cases it seems as though it was handled informally, and the disclosure resulted in the perpetrator being threatened afterwards.

>*"I trusted in my friends to personally handle the situation as the police or trusted adults do not take certain situations seriously …" (Male respondent)*

The majority of respondents (54%, n=22) stated they felt safest around their own gender, (this included 72% of female respondents and 10% of male respondents); one male respondent stated they felt safer around another gender and 18 respondents indicated that they don't really think about it. When asked if they had a trusted adult, within school or elsewhere, **with whom they felt** comfortable discussing any concerns they had, 40% (n=17) stated that they did, a further 48% (n=20) stated that it would depend on the concern they had, while 12% (n=5) said that they had no trusted adult they could talk to.

Other people's experience of GBV

90% (n=35) felt that different genders experience GBV in different ways. This was described generally as women experiencing more sexual or physical abuse and men experiencing more emotional abuse and violence. Women were often described as 'bigger targets' with respondents stating that it is well known, or statistically known, that they experience GBV more than males.

"Males are more emotionally abused whereas for females it is more sexual or physical"
(Female respondent)

"I feel like females are more targeted for sexual crimes and men are more targeted in physical crimes" (Female respondent)

"I think the reaction to the violence is different and the help they are given differs"
(Female respondent)

When asked to identify who they thought was more at risk of GBV the majority felt it was women with 23 of 29 female respondents and six of eleven male respondents concurring. Two respondents did make the point that they felt 'non-binary' or 'any non-traditional gender' individuals would experience GBV the most. Pressures, stereotypes and society were identified by some respondents as potentially playing a role in this:

"… as men feel pressured to be strong and masculine, whereas women are objectified"
(Female respondent)

"[different genders experience GBV in different ways] due to the expectations placed on us by society" (Female respondent)

"It is more than likely that a man is the perpetrator of any crime relating to a woman and I believe this will never change as human nature cannot be altered" (Male respondent)

34% (n=12) of those who responded said they knew another person who had carried out gender-based violence. Six described the form this took; verbal abuse or slurs were described by three respondents and a further three described both verbal and physical abuse of others.

Talking about GBV

Around two-thirds (67%) of respondents stated gender-based violence was something they are concerned about with 30% saying that they discuss it with their friends.

Although 90% (n=36) of the respondents felt schools should teach students about GBV,

this had only happened in 53% (n=21) cases. When asked to rate how schools handle the topic of gender-based violence 31% (n=12) felt it was handled 'well' by schools. **However**, 28% (n=11) felt it was handled badly or very badly.

Those who believed that school was an appropriate place to learn about GBV stated it was important to raise awareness and knowledge in young people. **However**, a number of respondents also felt it would be helpful for young people to recognise the signs, to help break the stigma, and possibly even prevent it from happening.

> *"It is good to educate people on gender-based violence, past and present, everyone should know about these things to stop people from doing it" (Male respondent)*

> *"We should learn it so we can prevent it" (Male respondent)*

> *"It educates people and breaks the stigma of talking, it can make someone feel comfortable enough to come forward and talk about their experience" (Female respondent)*

When asked at what age children and young people **should** be taught about GBV, most respondents felt it should be around secondary/high school age, so twelve years old and over.

> *"12 as it makes them aware of the issue at a young age and if they are taught young then maybe it will teach young people that this is wrong and shouldn't be done. (Female respondent)*

Some respondents felt that it was important to learn about the issue at a young age; some children might already be experiencing it, and they should learn that it is wrong as early as possible. **Others** made the point that it needed to be handled in a developmentally appropriate way with young children, and that as young people grow and mature then the education around it should be more in-depth.

> *"The earlier we teach how wrong it is the less likely it will happen" (Male respondent)*

> *"Gender-based violence should be taught to everyone of all ages, of course it should be age appropriate for the individual and taught frequently" (Male respondent)*

> *"about 14 as that is the age young people tend to go out more where they are at more risk also it gives them time to learn before they start going to places such as town at night" (Female respondent)*

How is GBV portrayed in the media?

Around half of the respondents reported seeing examples of GBV in various forms of media, e.g. on television (n=25, 49%), on social media (n=21, 41%) or online more generally (n=24, 47%). Nine respondents (18%) stated they had not seen examples of GBV in these places.

The vast majority of respondents said that seeing incidents of gender-based violence on television or online made them feel 'disgusted' (nine respondents used this description). Others described feeling sad, horrified, scared, uneasy and upset.

"This made me feel frightened for my future as a female and pressured to keep guarded around fellow males" (Female respondent)

"it made me feel disgusted as the television programmes are making it out as if these crimes are ok to do since one of your favourite characters do it" (Female respondent)

Respondents were asked to rate how they felt the subject of gender based violence is handled by various forms of media, and their responses are shown in table 2 with the most common responses highlighted. In general, all forms of media were viewed poorly by the majority of respondents but they were particularly critical of the way online media and social media handle the topic of GBV.

Table 2: How well do these media handle GBV as a subject?

	Well or very well	Neither well or badly	Badly or very badly	Total responses
Television	9	16	14	39
Online	5	12	22	39
Social media	6	10	23	39

One individual however, did make the point that the context of the media could make a difference saying:

"It depends on the form, some of them are good and effective and teach people about gender-based violence whereas others are degrading and not informational at all" (Female respondent)

discussion / conclusions

The responses from this South Lanarkshire survey, although limited in size, reflect the findings from other research on the experience of gender-based violence in young people, carried out across the UK.

The responses indicate a great deal of anxiety around the potential to experience gender-based violence, and that a large proportion of respondents make conscious decisions and choices with regard to their social lives and their behaviour in the community in order to reduce this risk.

Although more females have experienced GBV and continue to have anxieties about GBV, many male respondents also expressed awareness of, and worry about, GBV.

Nearly two-thirds indicated that GBV is a problem in today's society and nearly half felt it was a problem in their own local community.

Although women and girls were identified as being often at the greatest risk, people with different gender identities were also identified by respondents as being at risk of GBV.

There were small numbers in the sample but analysis of the survey responses suggested there were differences in the type of GBV incidents felt by males and females, and also in the steps they took to limit incidents or indeed protect themselves in the case of an incident. The responses suggested that males more proactively considered self-protection from violence, while females tended to adopt avoidance strategies by considering their routes and informing peers and family members of their plans and locations. Females rated their comfort levels in various locations as poor, particularly when taking taxis alone or walking alone outside at night.

Respondents generally felt that various forms of media did not handle the topic of gender-based violence very well, particularly social media.

School was considered by respondents to be an appropriate place for children and young people to learn about gender-based violence in the hope that they could recognise the signs, and in the hope that this might reduce the stigma of experiencing it.

next steps

This survey was only the first step of a larger test of change being carried out by the group of young people. The findings from the survey have fed into the design of an animation that they have created with the help of partner organisation Women's Aid, and a skilled facilitator/illustrator. The creation of a two-minute animation highlighting aspects of gender-based violence and its impact will then feed into a workshop that will be initially piloted in schools.

The aim of the test of change is: to raise awareness of GBV; reduce stigma; highlight ways that GBV can be discussed in spaces such as schools and colleges; and create space for young people to come together safely to talk about barriers to disclosure and ways they could be supported. The precise format of the workshop is still currently under discussion.

The next IAP output will focus on the findings of these next stages of the Activist Group gender-based violence test of change.

references

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