

POSTnote 750

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Violence against women and girls in schools and among children and young people

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Summary

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) refers to acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls. It includes rape, sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse and technology-facilitated abuse. VAWG is increasingly recognised as a public health crisis and human rights issue. In 2023, the Home Office identified VAWG as a national threat, and in 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council described it as an "epidemic". Girls aged 10–15 are particularly vulnerable, especially to online harms. This POSTnote focuses on VAWG among school-aged girls (5–18), with reference to wider youth experiences up to age 25.

Legislation and policy addressing VAWG have developed across several government departments. The Home Office has committed to halving VAWG by 2035 and is expected to publish a new cross-government strategy in 2025. It has invested in specialist services, police resourcing and perpetrator-focused initiatives. The Department for Education (DfE) updated statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in 2025, with new content on misogyny, incel culture and pornography. However, stakeholders have raised concerns about limited funding and inconsistent implementation. The Ministry of Justice has introduced new bills to strengthen victim protection and improve court processes. The Online Safety Act 2023 introduced age verification for pornography websites, and Ofcom has published guidance for tech companies on protecting women and girls online.

Data shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking. Girls are more likely than boys to experience sexual violence, especially online. Vulnerability to VAWG is associated with age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, migration status and geographic region. For example, Black girls are more likely to experience adultification and online abuse, and girls in care are at increased risk of intimate partner violence.

VAWG occurs across multiple environments. In schools, reports show widespread sexual harassment and normalisation of harmful behaviours. Ofsted found that 9 in 10 girls had experienced sexist name-calling or unsolicited sexual images. In further education, provision is fragmented and RSE is not compulsory. Online, girls face exposure to violent pornography, deepfake abuse and misogynistic content. The 'manosphere', a network of online communities promoting harmful gender norms has become more mainstream, with algorithms amplifying misogynistic content. Girls in social care and the criminal justice system are among the most vulnerable, often having experienced prior abuse. Public spaces, including transport, are also sites of risk.

Challenges to reducing VAWG include inconsistent terminology, underreporting, limited data on under-16s, and low trust in the police. Systemic inefficiencies, such as fragmented services and court delays, further

hinder prevention and support. Only 5% of domestic abuse-related crimes led to prosecution in 2023.

Interventions include primary prevention programmes in schools, such as whole-school approaches (WSAs) and RSE. Evaluations show that multi-method, long-term programmes can improve awareness and attitudes. Toolkits from organisations like the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Women's Aid and the National Education Union support schools in implementing WSAs. Programmes targeting girls, such as SafeLives' Changemakers and Advance's Maia and Lift, aim to build confidence and resilience. Initiatives engaging boys, such as Beyond Equality workshops, focus on challenging harmful behaviours. Parental involvement and digital literacy programmes also play a role in prevention.

Secondary and tertiary interventions include survivor services, police-based initiatives and court reforms. Operation Encompass supports children experiencing abuse at school, and Pathfinder courts aim to reduce re-traumatisation. Online tools such as 'Report Remove' and deterrence chatbots help prevent and rapidly respond to image-based abuse.

International case studies from Australia, the US and Sweden show the effectiveness of school-based education, bystander programmes and integrated services. Evaluations highlight the importance of training, sustained funding and cross-sector collaboration.

This briefing was produced in consultation with experts and stakeholders, who are listed at the end of the briefing. The briefing was co-funded by The Nuffield Foundation. POST would like to thank everyone who contributed their expertise to this briefing.

1.1

Disclaimer and content warning

This briefing contains references to violence against women and girls, including actions of sexual violence, abuse and harassment. Some readers may find this content distressing. Support is available via organisations such as Refuge (0808 2000 247) or Victim Support (0808 1689 111).

2

Background

The UK Government defines VAWG as “acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls”.^{a 1} In September 2024, the government committed to halving VAWG in the next decade as part of its ‘Safer Streets Mission’.^{b 4,5}

VAWG is increasingly recognised as a public health crisis and human rights issue.^{6–9} In 2023, the Home Office identified VAWG as a national threat.¹⁰ Plan UK’s^c 2024 The State of Girls’ Rights report describes VAWG as endemic in society.¹²

The 2024 national policing statement by the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) described VAWG as an “epidemic”, with a 37% increase in VAWG-related crimes between 2018/19 and 2022/23.¹³ It estimated that at least 1 in every 12 women will be a victim of VAWG every year. Although due to the often complex and under-reported nature of VAWG, police-recorded crime does not always capture the true scale of VAWG. See sections 3 and 5.2 for more.

Different forms of VAWG are prevalent in schools, with survey data showing a quarter of girls in mixed schools experiencing unwanted sexual touching.¹⁴ Although schools and colleges are traditionally where most young people interact, there are extensive interactions online.^{15–17} A 2021 survey of over 500 young people aged 13–18 found that 78% of all participants had experienced at least one type of digitally facilitated harm.^{d 18}

Girls under the age of 18 are particularly vulnerable to online harms. Girls aged 10–15 are the most common victims of online and tech-enabled VAWG.^e This age group is also overrepresented across rape offences.^{13,17,21}

^a It categorises rape, other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and ‘honour’ killings), revenge porn and upskirting under the term.

^b The ‘Safer Streets Mission’ is one of the five missions the government has committed to.² It aims to tackle antisocial behaviour, increase public confidence in policing and the criminal justice system, halve VAWG, halve knife crime and address child criminal exploitation.^{3,4}

^c Plan UK is the UK branch of the global charity Plan International, which works on achieving equality for children across over 80 countries.¹¹

^d This figure was from 2021, which was during the covid-19 pandemic, when online activity and interactions also increased due to lockdown restrictions.

^e Tech-enabled VAWG involves using technology to enact violence against women and girls.¹⁹ Some examples include online sexual harassment, image-based abuse (non-consensual sharing of intimate images or sending unsolicited sexual images), cyberstalking and online grooming.²⁰

Researchers have also discussed the inseparability of online and offline experiences of harm, especially in relation to sexual violence.¹⁸

Reports of misogyny and sexism being accelerated by the digital environment have become more frequent since the covid-19 pandemic.^{22–25} A 2024 report by Girlguiding found that as a result of sexism, 47% of 11-to-21-year-olds feel less safe compared with 10 years ago.²⁶

Research shows the most common effects associated with girls experiencing intimate partner violence include injuries, depression, anxiety, anti-social behaviour and adolescent pregnancy.^{27–29} Reports highlight VAWG among school-aged girls results in detrimental effects on their mental health, poor school attendance, lack of confidence in themselves and avoidance of male-dominated subjects and hobbies.^{12,26} A 2024 report by Hope Not Hate found 64% of young people agree young women are less likely to participate in online debates, games and platforms due to fear of online abuse by men.³⁰

This POSTnote primarily focuses on young women and girls in educational settings and online spaces, with reference to social care, justice settings and public spaces. It does not go into detail on the analysis of perpetrators and focuses instead on the preventions and outcomes of VAWG. It also does not cover evidence relating to forced marriages, trafficking, exploitation, child labour or female genital mutilation (FGM).

This briefing primarily discusses findings on school-aged young women and girls (5–18), although some cited studies include young women up to the age of 25. Box 1 displays terms commonly used in literature reporting on VAWG.

Box 1 Related terms

UN Women^f and the World Bank summarise a list of terms that relate to VAWG, including, but not limited to:

- Gender-based violence: violence that is directed against a person based on their gender.²⁵
- Teenage relationship abuse: physical, psychological, sexual abuse, harassment or stalking of any person aged 12 to 18 in the context of a past or present relationship.³²
- Femicide: the intentional killing of a woman or a girl because she is a woman or a girl.²⁴
- Intimate partner violence: behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm.^{33,34}

^f UN Women is the United Nations establishment dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.³¹

- Sexual violence/assault/harassment: any sort of harmful or unwanted sexual behaviour that is imposed on someone.^{33,34}
- Technology-facilitated abuse: any harmful act that is committed or assisted by using digital tools.²⁴

3

Legislation, policy and guidance

As education and justice are devolved policy areas, this POSTnote focuses on education policy in England and justice policy in England and Wales. It also presents findings from across the UK and draws on international research evidence.

VAWG has been a policy priority since 2010.³⁵ Recent legislation and policy are summarised in table 1. For an overview of recent policy changes see the Commons Library Insight [Tackling violence against women and girls in 2025](#).

Table 1: Policy and legislation developments related to VAWG

Government department	Activity
Home Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In September 2025, the Home Office is expected to publish a new cross-governmental VAWG strategy to support its pledge to halve VAWG in the next decade.³⁶ In July 2025, the Home Office announced £53 million of investment over the next four years to pursue domestic abuse perpetrators.³⁷ In May 2025, the Home Office announced a £19.9 million investment in specialist services tackling VAWG.³⁸ This included £5.3 million specifically for services supporting children affected by domestic abuse. In February 2025, the government announced an investment of £13.1 million for a new National Police Centre for VAWG and Public Protection to transform the police response across England and Wales.³⁹ The National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) was commissioned by the government in January 2025, and formally launched in February 2025, carried out by Baroness Casey of Blackstock. In June 2025, the audit report was published and the government responded to and accepted all the 12 recommendations. Recommendations span across legislative reform, commissioned research, local authority interventions, police resourcing and reporting, including data collection of suspects' and victims' nationality and ethnicity. Between April 2021 and September 2024, the Home Office spent £149 million on addressing VAWG, while the National Audit Office (NAO) report 'Tackling VAWG' estimated that other government departments jointly spent around £979 million between and 2021–22 and 2023–24.^{5,40} The NAO report concluded that the Home

	<p>Office primarily focused on addressing re-offending rather than prevention.⁴⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2022, the Home Office launched the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan and the public awareness campaign 'Enough', focused on tackling VAWG in public spaces.^{41–43} • The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, recognised children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right for the first time, defining a child victim as any child who "sees or hears, or experiences the effects of the abuse".^{44,45} For more information on the act see the Commons Library research briefing Domestic abuse: Support for victims and survivors. • In 2021, the government published the third VAWG strategy.¹ A National Statement of Expectations was released the following year. The new strategy emphasised prevention-orientated approaches to tackling VAWG.⁴⁶ • Between 2010 and 2019, the Home Office published two VAWG strategies and a refresh following the viral⁹ #MeToo movement.^{35,48,49}
Department for Education (DfE)/Ofsted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In July 2025, the DfE published new statutory Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) guidance.⁵⁰ The guidance has a greater emphasis on misogyny with lessons on incel culture, AI, deepfakes and pornography.⁵¹ Age limits on certain topics have not been introduced and schools will not be restricted on talking about contested topics (for example, LGBT+ issues), but cannot endorse particular views.⁵² • In 2024, the Conservative government opened a consultation on draft RSE guidance, which aimed to address concerns about age-inappropriate material being taught.⁵³ The draft guidance was criticised by some children's charities and teaching unions for being politically motivated and anti-LGBT+.^{54,55} • The NAO report states the DfE spent approximately £0.52 million on activities related to the VAWG Strategy and Domestic Abuse Plan between 2021–22 and 2023–24.⁴⁰ The charity End Violence Against Women (EVAW) published a 2025 snapshot report which highlighted that the DfE had spent almost 300 times less than the Home Office. It highlighted that the majority of funds targeted victim support rather than a prevention approach.⁵⁶ • In 2021, Ofsted published a review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges.⁵⁷ • In 2019, the DfE published statutory guidance for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE).⁵⁸ It became compulsory to teach RSE in

⁹ The term viral describes something that has been quickly and widely spread and popularised over social media.⁴⁷

	<p>all secondary schools in 2020. Primary schools are expected to teach relationships education, but sex education is not statutory.⁵⁹ The guidance specifies tackling “everyday sexism, misogyny, homophobia and gender stereotypes.” For more information, see the Commons Library research briefing Relationships and Sex Education in Schools (England).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children and Social Work Act 2017 amended the Children Act 2004 with updated rules on the welfare of children.⁶⁰ For more information, see the Commons Library research briefing An overview of child protection legislation in England. • In 2015, the DfE published Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance.⁶¹ Recent updates include incorporating advice on sexual violence and harassment between children in schools, guidance for parents about children’s access to online sites outside of school and other general updates to safeguarding.^{62,63}
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In May 2025, the MOJ announced it would release new guidance for Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs)^h in 2026. The guidance will include information for advisors supporting child victims.⁶⁵ • The Crime and Policing Bill 2024-2025 aims to introduce stronger protection from stalking, multi-agency statutory guidance and new offences for the taking of intimate images without consent.^{66,67} For an overview of the bill, see the Commons Library research briefing Crime and Policing Bill 2024-25. • The Victims and Courts Bill 2024-2025 proposes measures to strengthen support and justice for victims of violent crime especially women and girls.⁶⁸ This includes prioritising child safety in family courts and improving communication between victims and courts.⁶⁹ For an overview of the bill, see the Commons Library research briefing Victims and Courts Bill 2024-2025.
Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)/Ofcom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In July 2025, age verification measures in the Online Safety Act 2023 were implemented for websites hosting pornography to reduce young people’s access to harmful content.⁷⁰ • In January 2025, Ofcom published industry guidance on effective age checks to stop children accessing online pornography.⁷¹ In February 2025, Ofcom also published ‘A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls, practical guidance for tech companies’.⁷²
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In November 2024, the government announced funding of £27 million for the Safe Online project to tackle technology-facilitated

^h IDVAs are specialist domestic violence professionals who support survivors of domestic abuse. They work across sectors including charities, councils, hospitals and courts.⁶⁴

gender-based violence globally.⁷³ The project aims to improve data collection, work with regulators and support survivors.

The government also announced a global partnership with Kenya and South Africa called the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Global Programme, funded by £67.5 millions of UK Aid.^{73,74} The programme involves scaling-up violence prevention strategies, such as school-based educational programmes, that have proven effective in countries such as Pakistan and Uganda.^{75,76}

4

Trends and demographic association

The 2024 VAWG strategic threat and risk assessment report found VAWG crime constitutes an estimated 20% of all crime recorded in England and Wales.²¹ The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported 72.5% of domestic abuse-related crimes had female victims in the year ending March 2024, showing women and girls are disproportionately affected.⁷⁷

Between May and July 2025, the ONS developed and published a new combined prevalence measure of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.⁷⁸ According to new measures, the ONS estimated that for the survey ending March 2024, one in four (26.1%) of people aged 16 and over have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16, (equivalent to 12.6 million people). Split by sex, the ONS estimated that 30.3% of women and 21.7% of men have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16.⁷⁹

A report by Youth Endowment Fund found that although boys experience violence, it is predominantly physical assault, robbery and weapons violence, whereas girls experience more sexual violence.⁸⁰

Studies have found a rapid increase in online and technology-facilitated VAWG in the last five years, which has overwhelmingly affected girls.^{81,82} A 2023 article by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) reported an 82% rise in online grooming crimes against children in the last five years, with 83% of cases being against girls (where gender was known).⁸³ Police-recorded child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) increased by 400% between 2013 and 2022, and in 2022, 79% of offences were against girls.^{21,84}

Vulnerability to VAWG is often associated to characteristics, such as:

- **Age:** people aged 16–24 are more likely to be victims of sexual assault than any other age groups, and victims were female in 86% of sexual offences.⁸⁵ Perpetrators of rape and serious sexual offences are most commonly in the 16–19 age group.⁸⁶ As data for under 16s is not recordedⁱ, this remains a significant data gap (see section 5.2).
- **Ethnicity:** Ofcom's 2022 'Online Nation' report found women from minority ethnic groups in the UK were three times more likely than white women to have seen or experienced sharing of intimate images without consent and four times more likely to have received an unsolicited sexual image or video.⁸⁷ Black women and girls are disproportionately

ⁱ Footnote: The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) does not collect data on individuals under the age of 16. This differs from police recorded crime data, which includes reports involving children and young people. CSEW is considered an official and robust source of national crime statistics because it captures experiences not always reported to the police, offering a broader picture of crime trends.

affected by online abuse and public sexual harassment^{j, 89,90} A National Education Union (NEU) roundtable shows Black girls experience adultification, where they are seen as more mature and less vulnerable, meaning they are often not taken seriously when reporting harms.⁹¹

- Sexual orientation and gender identity: numerous reports have found LGBT+ young people are more likely to experience sexism and are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, and their experiences can be overlooked.^{14,26,92,93} Research from Plan International highlighted that 90% of LGBT+ girls aged 12–21 in its study reported public sexual harassment compared with 75% overall.⁹⁴
- SEND status: children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are particularly vulnerable and may be more likely to face relationship violence than their peers.⁸⁰ Some stakeholders have expressed concern that SEND students may need additional support to understand the RSE curriculum and there is a lack of suitable resources ([Commons Library briefing 6103](#)).^{95,96} DfE guidance on RSE notes teaching and design of RSE may need to be adjusted for pupils who are more vulnerable due to the nature of their SEND.⁵⁸
- Migrant experiences: reports have found migrant girls, particularly unaccompanied asylum seekers, can face heightened risks of VAWG due to systemic inefficiencies such as inaccurate age assessments ([POSTnote 666](#)) that result in them being placed in adult accommodation where they are at risk of sexual harassment and abuse.^{97–99} Research also shows the lack of child-sensitive asylum procedures, distrust of authorities and limited appropriate support can silence survivors and enable harm.⁹⁸
- Region: a 2024 ONS report indicates that Wales, Yorkshire, the North East, and the North West of England had the highest rates of reported domestic abuse-related crimes.⁷⁷ This was also reflected in data from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), which showed lower child sexual abuse offences recorded in London compared with Durham and Cumbria.¹⁰⁰ The Children's Society 2020 report Missing the Mark described the recognition and response to people experiencing teenage relationship abuse as a "postcode lottery" across the country.¹⁰¹ Researchers have called for more data on the regional distribution of VAWG outcomes to better understand demand for services and interventions.¹⁰²

Other areas of vulnerability, such as girls in social care, are discussed in section 4.

^j A study by Amnesty International and Element AI found black women were 84% more likely to than white women to be mentioned in abusive posts on Twitter (now known as 'X').⁸⁸

5

Environments of elevated risk and mapping VAWG exposure

Evidence suggests that there is a correlation between attitudes towards gender inequality and VAWG.^{103–105} Many academics describe misogyny and sexism as being ingrained into society.^{106–108} The 2023 Commons Women and Equality Committee (WEC) report [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#) noted that misogynistic attitudes from boys around gender and masculinity enables sexual harassment and VAWG.¹⁰⁹

Research suggests schools often fail to challenge traditional ideas about gender and relationships, which can normalise harmful behaviour and leave teenage girls unable to identify their experiences as abusive.^{k 110,111} The intersectional^l nature of VAWG demonstrates how violence is experienced in different groups in different ways.¹¹⁴

5.1

Relationships

Children and young people are recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right as part of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#).^{44,45,115} However, under 16s facing abuse in their own peer-to-peer relationships are not covered by this definition and instead cases are treated as child abuse.¹¹⁶ Some charities are concerned the exclusion of under 16s “may not be recognising the severity and seriousness of the issue”.¹¹⁷ For more, see the Commons Library Insight on the [definition of domestic abuse](#).

Intimate relationships

Research has shown relationship abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV), is prevalent among girls.^{27,118} A report by the charity SafeLives found 95% of victims of IPV aged 13–17 were female.¹¹⁹ A review found girls were also more likely to report severe mental health outcomes than boys as a result of IPV.¹²⁰ The Home Office This is Abuse campaign (2010–2014) brought attention to teenage relationship abuse being as common as adult domestic abuse.^{121,122}

^k Studies emphasise abuse is often about unhealthy relationships, not just extreme cases like sexual violence. As there is often a stronger focus on the most serious forms of violence, the everyday signs of abuse can become overlooked.¹¹⁰

^l Intersectionality describes the complex way in which multiple forms of discrimination (gender, race, sexuality) combine and intersect.¹¹² Taking an intersectional approach in the context of VAWG means addressing how violence differs between groups of women and girls by understanding and collaborating with them.¹¹³

Research shows that coercive attitudes and controlling behaviours can begin in adolescent relationships, which can cause fear and isolation.^{123,124} Studies suggest girls may view coercive or controlling behaviour as signs of care, leading to its acceptance.^{125,126} Girls who experience maltreatment and loneliness during childhood and adolescence were more likely to experience IPV in their later relationships.¹²⁷

Evidence also suggests that persistent acceptance of gender-based violence among young people presents a fundamental barrier to tackling it.¹⁻³

Family relationships

Data suggests that abuse in the family environment accounts for almost half of all child sexual abuse offences reported in England and Wales.¹²⁸ Research has found girls who experience child abuse are more likely to suffer negative physical, mental and social health consequences later in their life.¹²⁹ Some researchers have suggested a link between parental maltreatment and becoming victims of peer-to-peer IPV.¹³⁰

5.2 Schools

The WEC reports [Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools](#) (2016) and [Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings](#) (2023) highlighted the normalisation of sexual violence in schools and online.^{131,109} The 2016 report found that, at the time, three peer-to-peer sexual assaults are reported to the police every school day in primary schools alone. For an overview of sexual harassment in schools see [Commons Library briefing CBP-08117](#).

Between 2020 and 2021, [Everyone's Invited](#) received over 50,000 testimonials, mostly from girls, on its website, involving 3000 schools and colleges.¹³² Ofsted's 2021 review of sexual abuse in schools corroborated findings of harmful sexual behaviours happening frequently, including unwanted sexual comments, pressure to provide sexual images and unwanted touching between peers.⁵⁷ The review highlighted 9 out of 10 girls had received either unsolicited images or been subject to sexist name calling.

Reports show girls have heard teachers use sexist language, experienced bias in their teachers' delivery of RSE, and have been dismissed or trivialised when disclosing sexual harassment, indicating schools are environments where misogyny can be facilitated.^{14,133,134,90} However, schools also provide an opportunity for prevention (see section 6).¹³⁵

Teachers have called for accessible and in-depth RSE training to improve their knowledge and confidence.¹³⁶⁻¹³⁸ A SafeLives survey of teachers found only 58% agreed that they had sufficient training to teach RSE effectively.¹³⁶ Students in alternative provision may require tailored provision; boys make up over two thirds of young people in alternative provisions and there is little research on girls' experiences in alternative provisions.¹³⁹

5.3 Further education

Stakeholders have emphasised the need to include further education (FE) settings when developing and implementing interventions.¹⁴⁰ Colleges across England educate nearly 700,000 16-to-17-year-old children each year. All regulated education providers must follow the DfE's Keeping children safe in education, and the Office for Students has issued guidance on sexual harassment. However, provision remains fragmented as implementing the guidance is not mandatory.¹⁴¹ For more information, see [Commons briefing 9438](#).

[WEC's 2023 report recommended extending RSE to post-16 education](#) as it is currently not compulsory, despite evidence of harm affecting young people aged 16–18.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, Ofsted does not routinely assess RSE provision in FE.¹⁴² Some colleges have implemented evidence-based interventions, showing additional opportunities for the further education settings.¹⁴³

5.4 Online and digital

A British Medical Journal (BMJ) study has shown that engaging with online spaces can have negative effects on young people, including exposure to disturbing content, threats and harmful stereotypes. These experiences were more prevalent among girls.¹⁴⁴

Pornography

Research suggests youth access to pornography can be particularly harmful, an issue also raised in [WEC's 2023 report](#).¹⁰⁹ A 2023 report by Women's Aid discussed the problematic relationship between young people viewing pornography and the dynamics of their own relationships.¹⁴⁵ The Children's Commissioner led a government-commissioned review into online safety between 2021 and 2022, which concluded that harmful behaviour is directly influenced by violent pornography.¹⁴⁶ A 2023 Children's Commissioner report found that the average age at which children first see pornography is 13, with 79% being exposed to violent pornography before the age of 18.¹⁴⁷

In February 2025, Baroness Bertin's independent pornography review highlighted strangulation depictions in pornography to be particularly harmful.¹⁴⁸ Reports from teachers mention boys as young as fourteen are asking how to choke girls during sex.¹⁴⁹

Police transcripts of interviews with children who reported sexual abuse carried out by another child, found that 50% contained at least one phrase referring to an act of sexual violence commonly portrayed in pornography.¹⁵⁰ Key provisions of the [Online Safety Act \(2021\)](#) aim to improve the issue, although they are yet to be evaluated.

Generative artificial intelligence and emerging technologies

A 2023 Ofcom study on online use found 79% of young people aged 13–17 used generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), compared with 31% of users aged 16 and above, suggesting young people are particularly open to adopting GenAI ([see POST AI glossary](#)).¹⁵¹ Data has also shown GenAI can be used as a tool to perpetrate VAWG.^{19,152}

The organisation Internet Matters discussed “the new face of digital abuse” in its 2024 report on AI-generated sexual imagery. The report called the issue an “epidemic” and cited 13% of teenagers who had reported an experience with nude deepfakes^m in British schools.¹⁵⁵ Once created, these images are never wholly removed from the internet, and are out of both the victim and perpetrator’s control.

The 2025 Children’s Commissioner report on sexually explicit deepfakes found that girls feel unsafe online and are hesitant to post their (innocent) images online.¹⁵⁶ An NSPCC report suggested the design featuresⁿ of online platforms can enable the sexual abuse and harassment of girls by putting the responsibility of safety onto them rather than technology companies.¹⁵⁷

In 2024, media reports emerged of police investigations into a case of ‘virtual rape’, where a young girl’s digital persona was sexually attacked in an immersive video game.¹⁵⁸

Social media and the ‘manosphere’

Researchers have found social media platforms provide opportunities for exposure to violent pornography, image-based abuse^o and harmful ideologies and behaviours (such as sexual harassment and stalking).^{82,160} The NSPCC reported that 73% of 34,000 online grooming crimes against children involved Snapchat or Meta.⁸³

The ‘manosphere’ describes a group of online communities and influencers associated with topics of masculinity, relationships and gender.¹⁶¹ A 2025 Ofcom report ‘Experiences of engaging with the manosphere’ noted the manosphere is not a unified community and comprises conflicting perspectives, including extreme misogyny.¹⁶²

Researchers have emphasised the manosphere is becoming more mainstream and can radicalise young men through algorithm mechanisms on

^m The term ‘deepfake’ usually refers to AI-generated video or imagery that is created to mimic a real-life person or scene.¹⁵³ They can cause harm and abuse to victim-survivors, mostly women and girls, by falsely depicting them in non-consensual sexual ways.¹⁵⁴

ⁿ Some examples of these design features include permanent visibility of basic identifiable information about the user, highly gendered avatars, the ability for adult users to send connection requests to child users, the ability to send or receive messages between adults and children, access to live video chats, and under-powered privacy safety settings.¹⁵⁷

^o Image-based abuse is when someone shares or threatens to share a sexually explicit image or video of a person without their consent. It is also known as revenge porn or sextortion.¹⁵⁹

social media.^{163,164} A 2024 research study^p found that after five days of TikTok usage, the algorithm had a fourfold increase in showing misogynistic content on its "For you"^q page. within just five days.¹⁶⁴ Girlguiding reported 60% of boys see manosphere content through algorithms.¹⁶⁵

Women's Aid's 2023 Influencers and Attitudes report found children and young people exposed to misogynistic social media content were almost five times more likely to "view hurting someone physically as acceptable if you say sorry afterwards" than those not exposed.¹⁴⁵

In May 2025, WEC launched the inquiry [Misogyny: the manosphere and online content](#) to understand the prevalence and effects of misogynistic views among young men and boys.¹⁶⁶ Oral evidence to date has outlined the need for content moderation, education and regulation.¹⁶⁷

In August 2024, the Home Office announced extreme misogyny will be treated as a form of extremism^r.¹⁷¹ In May 2025, the Commons Home Affairs Committee opened an inquiry on [Combating new forms of extremism](#).¹⁷²

5.5

Social care

Evidence suggests young people in care are likely to be exposed to increased levels of harms and are often the most vulnerable in society.^{173,174} Multiple studies have found that young people who experience care may be at an increased risk of intimate partner violence (IPV).^{175–177} However, there is limited evidence on the known correlation between being in care and people's experiences of IPV.^{130,173}

Research shows children who are exposed to domestic abuse can be victims of trauma and may be at risk of replicating patterns of violence.^{178–180} Stakeholders in the social care sector are calling for more evidence and understanding of the connection between social care and VAWG outcomes.^{181–183}

^p The methodology behind the study involved "Archetype Modelling" where four different archetypes were investigated on TikTok for seven days each, on factory-rest iPads, consecutively. Qualitative data was also taken from long form interviews with young people and roundtables and interviews with experts.¹⁶⁴

^q The TikTok 'For You' page shows personalised content for each individual account based on the individuals' inferred interests. Data on an individuals' interest is collected by the algorithm and based on various metrics.¹⁶⁴

^r Some stakeholders recognise misogyny as a warning sign and driver of violent extremism. Research shows many individuals involved in extremist acts express strong misogynistic views. These views are often shared and amplified online which escalate into broader hate and violence.^{168–170}

5.6

Criminal justice system

Data suggests girls in the justice system are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and are likely to have been in harmful environments or experienced systemic failures from public services.^{184,185} According to a report by the charity Shift UK, 52% of girls in custody have been in care.¹⁸⁶

Reports estimate girls make up 15% of the youth justice system, but their needs are often overlooked.^{187,188} A report by the Youth Justice Board discussed how the arrival of girls in custodial settings can retraumatise them, as most girls have experienced physical and sexual abuse.¹⁸⁹ This is particularly true for girls of minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁹⁰

As of March 2025, the MOJ announced that girls aged 10–17 will no longer be placed in young offender institutions (YOIs) and instead will only be placed in secure facilities, such as secure schools, as YOIs do not offer the trauma-informed^s support girls need.¹⁹²

5.7

Public spaces

In Plan UK's 2024 survey of girls, 93% of girls and young women did not feel "completely safe" in public spaces.¹²

Transport for London (TfL) and the Mayor of London have highlighted initiatives targeted towards school-aged young people to raise awareness of and report sexual harassment and violence on public transport.^{193,194}

WEC's report on [Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places](#) (2018) covers the heightened risk for girls on public transport. The government's response to a parliamentary question has said its [upcoming VAWG strategy refresh includes an evidence-based programme to tackle VAWG on public transport, including the Bus Services Bill](#).

Though there is further research on VAWG in public spaces and transport, it is beyond the scope of this POSTnote.^{195–198}

^s Trauma-informed refers to strategies that increase practitioners' awareness of how trauma can negatively affect individuals. It aims to create culturally sensitive and safe spaces which people can trust and want to use, without undergoing re-traumatisation.¹⁹¹

6 Challenges in reducing and preventing VAWG

6.1 Terminology

The NAO's 2025 report and the Home Affairs Committee's [Tackling violence against women and girls: funding](#) report suggest the difference in definitions of VAWG between the Home Office, the third sector and police forces in the UK contributes to difficulty in measuring the scale of VAWG crimes and progress in tackling it in a consistent way.^{40,199}

Some stakeholders suggested the term 'Violence Against Women and Girls' may be alienating boys who can feel blamed and defensive.^{200,201} However, others choose to use the phrase 'male violence against women and girls' to highlight that the majority of perpetrators are male.^{202–204}

Discussions with young people have shown they do not generally associate their experiences of abuse with more formal terms such as 'adolescent domestic abuse' and instead use language like 'toxic relationships'.²⁰⁵ Practitioners from the Children's Society reported those terms lead to preconceptions about what domestic abuse may look like, which young people may not recognise.¹⁰¹

Researchers have expressed the need for new terminology to effectively address sexual violence occurring in online virtual environments.^{206,207} They emphasise current terms such as 'virtual rape' do not convey the seriousness of technology-facilitated experiences.²⁰⁶

6.2 Data collection

The NPCC has highlighted the significant underreporting of VAWG, which means police-recorded VAWG may not be an accurate reflection of the scale.²⁰⁸ An increase in police-recorded VAWG can also mean more individuals are coming forward to report crimes, and not just an increase in prevalence.²⁰⁹

The Home Office collects data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), though this does not include children under the age of 16^t, despite them being included in the Home Office's strategy.²¹⁰ This suggests the true scale of VAWG-related crimes for young people is not accurately captured by police recorded data or the CSEW, and they often fall between adult domestic abuse services and child protection systems, creating a systemic blind spot.²⁰⁵

Stakeholders including Baroness Casey's audit highlight the limited data and a lack of large enough sample sizes of data collected for different demographics of victims, which leads to difficulty in supporting those with protected characteristics.^{12,208} This also applies to gaps in demographic data collected on perpetrators of VAWG.^{208,211,212}

6.3 Trust in the police

A lack of trust in the police can be a barrier to reporting crime, with a 2022 Ipsos MORI survey indicating women have less confidence than men that policing is taking VAWG seriously.²¹³ Plan UK's research report shows that 20% of girls and young women, aged 12–21, do not trust the police at all to help them if they are in difficulty. This percentage declines for older age groups¹² and is higher for girls from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.²¹¹ Girls also feel that they would be shamed, not be believed or even get in trouble themselves if they reported their experiences.^{214,215} For more, see the POSTnote [Trust in the Police](#).

6.4 Systemic inefficiencies

Systemic gaps, including fragmented coordination across government departments and support services, can undermine protection for young people and contribute to failures in prevention.¹⁹⁹

A 2025 Home Office policy paper highlighted shortcomings in the criminal justice system, including slow court response times and a lack of bringing offenders to justice.²¹⁶ For example, MOJ data shows a 30% increase in child rape cases waiting to go to court between 2022 and 2024.^{217–219} In 2024, the charity Advance highlighted concerns about justice for victims, signposting 2023 ONS data which reported only 5% of domestic abuse-related crimes (890,000) led to a prosecution.²²⁰

^t Footnote: The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) does not collect data on individuals under the age of 16. This differs from police recorded crime data, which includes reports involving children and young people. CSEW is considered an official and robust source of national crime statistics because it captures experiences not always reported to the police, offering a broader picture of crime trends. However, its exclusion of under-16s means it may underrepresent the full extent of violence against women and girls, particularly among younger age groups.

The Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales emphasised high victim attrition rates^u and court backlogs in rape cases, despite the previous government's End-to-End Rape Review Report (2021).²²² Police data between October 2021 and March 2022 revealed that 507,872 VAWG crimes were recorded, but that only 6% resulted in a suspect being charged.²²³

The 2025 London Assembly Police and Crime Committee Impact of VAWG on young people report highlighted the lack of services to support young victims and survivors of VAWG, and that specialised and tailored support networks for survivors are a priority area for the Mayor of London.²²⁴ Multiple VAWG charities have reported that available services have a funding crisis.^{225,226}

^u 'Victim attrition rate' describes the rate at which victims drop out of a case before it reaches a conclusion.²²¹

7

Opportunities: Interventions and evaluations

The World Health Organisation (WHO) categorises interventions to address violence as primary, secondary or tertiary^v.²³⁰ The next section discusses processes, evaluations and impact studies of interventions targeting VAWG in schools and among CYP.

7.1

Primary preventions and Whole-School Approaches (WSAs)

Robust studies of preventions of gender-based violence among young people have highlighted that programmes targeting attitudes and developing skills across a long time period with multiple methods have the most positive and long-lasting effects.^{135,231,232}

WSAs are defined as interventions that understand the whole school community as the 'unit of change'.^{233,234} The 2021 Ofsted report recommended implementing a WSA, involving training for teachers and staff as well as transforming school culture and policy.⁵⁷ Research has also emphasised the importance of schools and communities due to young people being more likely to experience abuse outside of the home.²⁰⁵

Charities and organisations have produced guidance on what WSAs are and how to implement them.^{14,235–239} However, some stakeholders emphasise that although WSAs are widely referenced in relation to VAWG, they are poorly defined and inconsistent in their implementation across schools due to the lack of a standard model.^{14,234} This was reiterated by the children participants of Internet Matter's survey, which ranked the effectiveness of WSAs as low.⁹⁶

Relationship and Sex Education (RSE)

The [2023 WEC report](#) advocated for improved RSE as a tool for increasing awareness about VAWG, although it did not explicitly state what the content should be.¹⁰⁹

A 2023 study by the NSPCC found that 54% of young people said that teaching in school "rarely" or "never" covers what they want to know, and

^v This concept originates from public health strategies applied to violence prevention. In the context of VAWG, there is no single international definition of a primary prevention.²²⁷ Primary preventions for VAWG aim to address the underlying causes through whole-of-population initiatives.²²⁸ Secondary prevention focuses on early intervention including violence detection and progression prevention.²²⁹ Tertiary prevention aims to support victim-survivors and hold perpetrators accountable after violence has occurred.^{227,228}

40% had to educate themselves.²⁴⁰ Plan UK said that without appropriate RSE, young people are at risk of learning from inaccurate and inappropriate sources.¹² The Sex Education Forum emphasised the importance of progressive, evidence-led and young people-focused learning.²⁴¹

In September 2024, the DfE published a rapid evidence analysis report Teaching relationships education to prevent sexual abuse, to inform support for schools in teaching on VAWG, including sexual harassment and violence. Research identified key interventions, including, but not limited to, using external facilitators, and adopting evidence-based best practice on teaching uncomfortable topics.²⁴²

See table 2 for evaluations of programmes and toolkits.

Table 2 Primary prevention programmes and toolkits

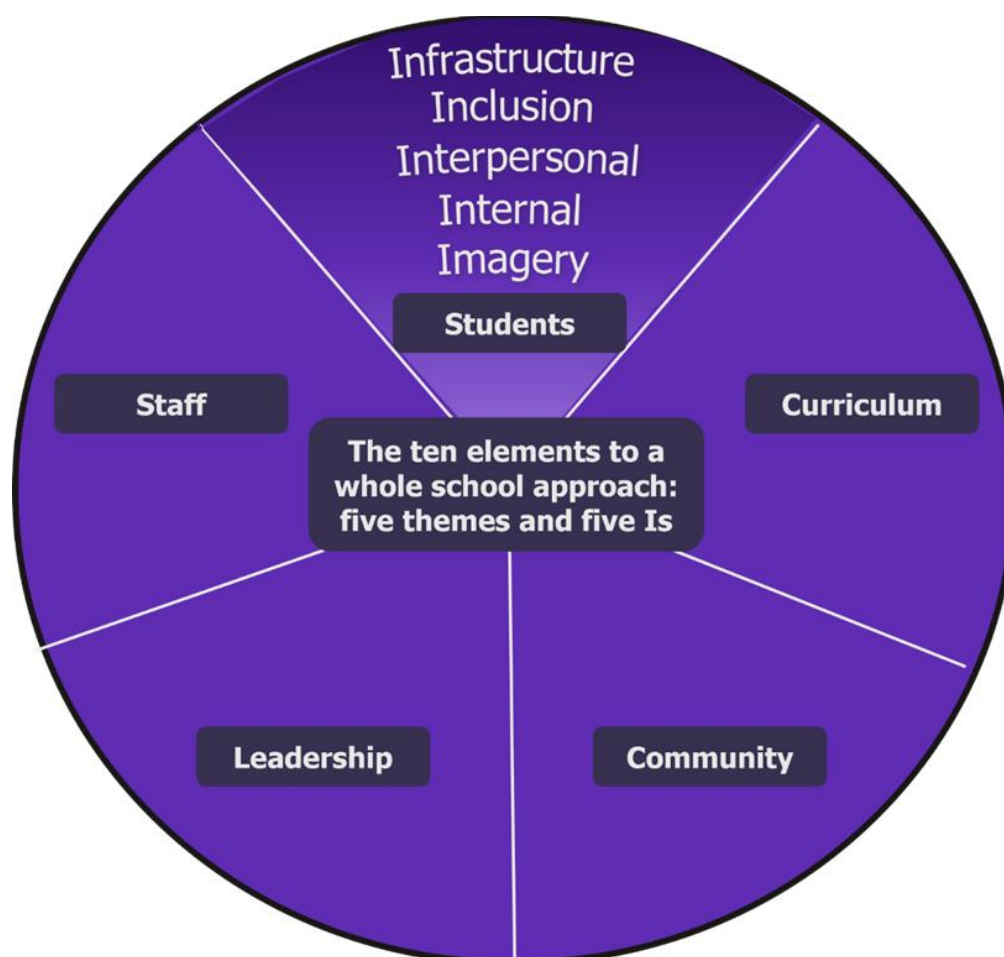
Programme and toolkits	Evaluation
NSPCC's Keeping Safe	The programme taught young people with SEND how to recognise abusive behaviour across five schools in Northern Ireland in a two-year period. ²⁴³ A qualitative evaluation using focus groups and semi-structured interviews of adult stakeholders involved in the programme found children were more comfortable disclosing personal experiences and improved teacher confidence, but highlighted difficulties in adapting resources to suit SEND young people and engaging parents. ²⁴³
The Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit	The toolkit evaluates research evidence on different violence prevention strategies involving children and young people. ⁸⁶ Relationship violence prevention lessons and activities were found to have a moderate effect on violent crime, with an average reduction in violence of 17%. ²⁴⁴ Uptake was better when programme facilitators had high confidence and created interactive sessions.
NSPCC's Speak out Stay Safe (SOSS)	The programme aimed to help primary school children understand abuse in all forms. ²⁴⁵ An evaluation based on surveys, observations, interviews and focus groups with children, teachers and facilitators found it improved understanding among children aged 7–11 of different forms of abuse. ²⁴⁶ It also helped children identify trusted adults. The work highlighted a lack of readiness by teachers in some schools to receive SOSS.
The Mayor's VAWG Strategy for London 2022-2025: Toolkit to Tackle VAWG	The Mayor of London and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) VAWG Strategy for

	<p>London 2022-2025 focuses on primary prevention to stop VAWG before it starts.²⁴⁷ The Mayor's Toolkit to Tackle VAWG sits within this broader VAWG Strategy.²⁴⁸ The toolkit is co-developed by charity Tender to support education professionals in facilitating conversations with young people to understand gender-based abuse.²⁴⁹ Data between April and June 2024 showed that 80% of teachers using the toolkit felt more confident to support children and young people.²⁵⁰ Consequently, the toolkit is now being rolled out in primary schools following.</p>
NEU It's Not Okay Toolkit	<p>The NEU has created the 'It's Not Okay' campaign with various information toolkits to prevent sexism and sexual harassment through a WSA.²⁵¹ Figure 1 below breaks down key components of a WSA. The toolkits consist of different tools and resources for schools to use.</p> <p>One of the tools was created with Beyond Equality and was designed specifically to help educators include and engage boys and young men with this work.²⁵² See more on engaging boys below.</p> <p>Another tool provides tips on using a bystander intervention model^w to manage problematic attitudes and behaviours around sexism involving every member of the school community.²⁵⁵</p> <p>The full toolkit has not yet been evaluated.</p>
Women's Aid Expect Respect	<p>Funded by the Home Office, the programme follows a WSA with sessions for staff covering safeguarding processes and trauma-informed classroom management.²⁵⁶ It also delivers lessons to children across all Key Stages, including post-16, to challenge gender stereotypes and help CYP recognise unhealthy behaviours in relationships.²⁵⁷</p> <p>The programme also offers sessions tailored for SEND needs. Women's Aid provides schools with the tools for evaluation through surveys.²⁵⁶ A preliminary evaluation of the programme found it was successful in achieving attitude change, but</p>

^w 'Bystander intervention' refers to someone witnessing a problematic situation and choosing to intervene.²⁵³ Public Health England reviewed evidence for bystander intervention programmes in universities and found them to be useful for primary prevention against sexual and domestic violence.^{254,255}

the effect of cumulative year-on-year sessions has not yet been measured.²⁵⁸

Figure 1. The components of a whole-school approach, NEU, It's not OK ⁵⁹



Engagement with girls

Various organisations, such as Girlguiding, provide specific support for all girls, providing knowledge to build self-esteem and empower healthy relationships.^{259–262}

SafeLives supports a group of young girls aged 13–21 across the UK, known as Changemakers, to help tackle domestic abuse and social challenges facing today's youth.²⁶¹ The SafeLives 'Sound of Silence' report highlights the Changemakers' actions on RSE, toxic relationships, police response, men and boys, and domestic abuse.²¹⁴ An example of one of their projects is the co-creation and facilitation of a listening-room workshop for young adults (18–24) who experienced domestic abuse when they were aged 13–16, partnered with the VISION Consortium.¹¹⁶ The workshops found a need for earlier recognition of domestic abuse, despite it not being easily recognisable

in those aged 13–16. Comments from girls taking part in the program emphasised how the programme had been lifechanging.²¹⁴

The charity Advance leads the Maia and Lift programme (2022/23), funded by London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), to provide peer mentoring, advocacy and group work for girls and young women aged 9–25 who have experienced, or are at risk of, violence and domestic abuse.²⁶³ A short qualitative evaluation of the pilot found initial positive outcomes such as improved mental health and self-confidence, but some challenges in communication and bringing data together across the programme.²⁶⁴ The VRU has commissioned a second iteration of this programme with a longer evaluation.²⁶³

Engagement with boys

Stakeholders report engaging boys as important in tackling VAWG, as boys were significantly less likely to understand what is meant by 'healthy relationships' or 'controlling behaviour'.^{145,265,266} Approximately 56% of the 2,963 girls surveyed by Plan International said "education to change the attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards women" would help them feel safer and more protected.¹² Research suggests some girls feel interventions are not as effective when boys opt out due to feeling like the message should be targeted towards boys.²⁶⁷

The UK charity Beyond Equality delivers group workshops aimed at young boys to start transformative conversations to address gender-based violence.²⁶⁸ In 2023, it implemented a whole-school approach across schools in Derbyshire, which included pupil workshops and one-to-one coaching sessions for staff. 80% of workshop participants agreed it helped them learn more, and teachers said it helped build relationships with students, which helps to improve long-term attitudes and behaviours.²⁶⁹

White Ribbon UK works with boys and men to prevent VAWG.²⁷⁰ The White Ribbon campaign engages men and boys, and helps them to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours. White Ribbon Day is an international campaign observed on 25 November each year to raise awareness on acting against VAWG. It consists of educational workshops, marches, rallies and fundraising to support survivors of domestic abuse.²⁷¹

Data suggests boys benefit from positive role models, which can be facilitated through mentoring.²²⁴ In total, 82% of pupil referral units and alternative educational provision settings have reported improved relationships with peers and teaching sources because of mentoring funded by the London Mayor's VRU.²⁷²

Parental and informal support

Stakeholders emphasise the need to include parents in interventions against gender-based violence.^{273,274} Many organisations offer online toolkits and resources to advise parents how to support and inform their child on the topic.^{275,276}

Evidence shows young people are more likely to disclose abuse to their informal network, such as friends and family, instead of formal

authorities.^{277,278} However, this group is often ill-equipped to respond effectively and can be difficult to engage.²⁷⁹ Research has concluded that training and educational activities tailored towards parents and informal supporters are effective in improving their knowledge of domestic abuse.²⁸⁰ The Bright Sky app^x is an example of an intervention aimed at informal networks, although there is no published data evaluating its effectiveness.²⁸¹

Digital literacy

Various projects across academia and the third sector aim to improve girls' digital literacy to reduce risk of harm online.^{262,282–285}

In 2022/23, researchers produced a series of workshops^y to convey what constitutes technology-facilitated sexual offences to empower victims and inform perpetrators who are not aware they are committing an offence.^{267,286} The workshops used creative and participatory methods. Evaluation of these workshops found 88.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that workshop 1 (Sexual and Gender Based Violence) improved their knowledge and left them feeling empowered.²⁸⁶ One key finding across both workshops was that some boys were resistant to them, and felt it was "uncool" and unfair the focus was on women and girls.²⁶⁷

The UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC) launched ProjectEVOLVE in 2019 to provide children with progressive digital skills using content tailored to their age group.²⁸⁷ A 2024 evaluation interviewing educators and young people concluded the project was easily integrated into the curriculum and improved knowledge of online safety in engaging ways.²⁸⁸ The report found engagement predominantly came from primary schools, highlighting the gap in targeting older children.

Internet Matters partnered with Samsung Electronics UK to produce the 'Online together project', involving an interactive quiz. It allows young people (aged six and up) to explore online topics (tackling online hate and gender stereotypes) and prepare them for experiences they may encounter.²⁸⁹ Feedback in 2024 from 250 parents found over 80% felt the tool helped their child feel more confident and capable when addressing online hate and gender stereotypes.²⁸⁹

7.2

Secondary and tertiary preventions

Survivor services

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) requires local authorities to provide support for children who have experienced abuse.¹¹⁵ The NSPCC says 77% of local authorities in the UK offer no specialist support for children who have experienced sexual abuse.²⁹⁰ Women's Aid's 2025 National Audit found that

^x The Bright Sky app provides practical support and information on how to respond to domestic abuse.²⁸¹

^y The workshops were explored in schools in England, Ireland and Canada.

over a third of services were running a CYP service with no dedicated funding.²⁹¹

The Children's Society 2020 'Missing the Mark' report highlighted young people find it difficult engaging with adult services, and only around a third of IDVAs (table 1) provide children-specific services.¹⁰¹ SafeLives' Young Person's Violence Advisors (YPVAs)^z provide specialist support to young people aged 13–18 experiencing domestic abuse and IPV.²⁹³

The DfE supported the initial evaluation of YPVAs and found the intervention to "effectively secure" victim's safety and wellbeing.^{294,295} Women's Aid highlighted that YPVAs provide support over longer periods than IDVAs, making them more impactful for young people.²⁹² However, additional funding to train YPVAs was not provided, and the model was not rolled out like IDVAs.²⁹⁴ SafeLives currently offers YPVA specialist training courses.²⁹⁶

Police-based initiatives

In 2021, the College of Policing and the NPCC published a framework on the police approach to tackling VAWG.²⁹⁷ It included "improving trust and confidence in policing, relentlessly pursuing perpetrators and creating safer spaces".¹⁰

In 2021, Operation Soteria^{aa} was established to transform the policing response to rape and sexual offending.²⁹⁹ In 2023, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) evaluated early adoptions of the programme and found the programme was helping investigators understand victims and their response to trauma.³⁰⁰ The report also suggested improvements in funding and closing data gaps such as missing information on gender and ethnicity.

In May 2024, Operation Encompass became a legal requirement for all police forces in England and Wales as part of the [Victims and Prisoners Act 2024](#). Operation Encompass consists of a combined police and school information-sharing partnership to better support children experiencing domestic violence and abuse, particularly at school.^{302bb} Ofsted described the operation as well designed and implemented and a good example of information being shared readily and efficiently.³⁰⁴ Qualitative evaluations of Operation Encompass have been conducted. Reports found that schools acknowledged its critical role in supporting children, but police force investigators required more specialist knowledge about sexual offending.^{305,306}

In 2023, the College of Policing launched an investigation into the effect of direct police input in teaching sexual consent and the law among CYP in

^z YPVAs operate similarly to IDVAs in that they support victims of domestic abuse across different ages. However, YPVAs work exclusively with young people and often in children support services.²⁹²

^{aa} Operation Soteria involves victim-orientated support by police, use of analysis and digital forensics to support cases, and targeting of repeat suspects.²⁹⁸

^{bb} Police must inform a 'key adult' at the relevant local school if they have been called to an incident of domestic abuse at a child's home so that schools are able to provide support.³⁰³

schools. Results of this intervention are due to be published in 2025.³⁰⁷ A 2025 academic review into the policing of technology-facilitated and online VAWG in England and Wales identified a number of police forces that have launched digital investigation strategies, though this is not routinely used across all VAWG investigations.³⁰⁸

Pathfinder courts

In 2022, the MOJ launched Pathfinder court pilots in North Wales and Dorset.³⁰⁹ These bring together local authorities, police and support services to improve how family courts support victims of domestic abuse (especially children).³¹⁰ For more, see the POSTnote [Problem-solving courts](#) (PN700).

Data published in February 2025 by the MOJ showed that, on average, cases were resolved 11 weeks earlier and family court backlogs reduced by over 50%.³¹¹ A 2025 MOJ process evaluation report suggested improved communication and earlier information collection resulted in faster case conclusions and a reduced number of hearings.³¹² The report also found Pathfinder courts reduced re-traumatisation for child victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Pathfinder courts were extended to parts of England and Wales in 2024, following the initial positive evaluation^{cc, 313}

Online

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Internet Matters developed a child sexual abuse material (CSAM) deterrence chatbot operating on Pornhub UK between March 2022 and August 2023 to stop people seeking CSAM and divert them to support services.^{148,314} Evaluation of the project showed 82% of users stopped their search after just one message, and over the 18-month programme the number of searches for illegal sexual material decreased.³¹⁵

The Internet Watch Foundation and NSPCC's Childline 'Report Remove' tool has been recognised as vital in providing children with a secure and anonymous way to report sexual images or videos of themselves online.^{316,317}

^{cc} From March 2025, the model was operating across the whole of Wales. The government has supplied a £12.5 million funding boost and aims to expand the pilot until March 2026.^{311,313}

8

Policy priorities and considerations

Stakeholders have suggested several future policy priorities and considerations for reducing VAWG among school-aged populations. Some of these are outlined in table 3 below.

Table 3: Policy priorities and considerations

Issue	Description
Legislative reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently, young people experiencing domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships is described as a form of child-on-child abuse.¹¹⁷ Some stakeholders are calling for a change in the definition of domestic abuse, so it applies to under-16s.^{167,318} However, the VISION Consortium's roundtables found that other stakeholders believe changing the law alone will not make a difference without systemic change.³¹⁹ In 2021, an amendment to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 to include misogyny as a hate crime was suggested by the House of Lords but was not implemented.³²⁰ There has been continuous discussion between government and the VAWG sector about whether making misogyny a hate crime or treating it as extremism would actually lead to successful prosecutions and benefit women and girls.^{321–324} The NSPCC has called for processes to be implemented to protect children in any future AI legislation, including the upcoming Artificial Intelligence (Regulation) Bill.³²⁵
Whole-school approaches and improvements to the curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2021, Ofsted recommended the WSA to reduce VAWG in schools.⁵⁷ Stakeholders have emphasised the need for an intersectional approach and to integrate consent, online safety, gender norms and healthy relationships into RSE across all schools beyond just single lessons.^{5,14,145,234} Researchers have called for young people's voices to be included in policy decision making.³²⁶ Researchers and practitioners plan to co-develop WSA models with schools to evaluate over 18–24 months to identify which components of WSA are effective.^{327,328} This includes leadership, teachers, classroom practices and parents.^{14,328–330} The organisation Make It Mandatory, partnered with other stakeholders across the education and VAWG sectors, campaigned for RSE to be extended to 16-to-18-year-

	<p>olds.^{331,332} Contributors to the 2025 oral evidence session of the WEC inquiry on misogyny and the manosphere also called for RSE to be extended to 16-to-18-year-olds.¹⁶⁷</p>
Teacher and specialist training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple reports have found teachers do not feel prepared to effectively teach RSE, especially topics on sexual health and LGBT+. ^{136,333–335} The Sex Education Forum’s 2024 Young People RSE Poll showed 57% of 16-to-17-year-olds chose ‘training for teachers as a means of improving their RSE’ as their number one priority.³³⁶ The Youth Endowment Fund has called on the government to invest in implementing a dedicated lead to prevent VAWG in all secondary schools, colleges and secondary alternative provision settings, modelled on existing Mental Health Leads.³³⁷ Women’s Aid has called for specialist training across the justice system to be designed and delivered by specialist VAWG organisations.³³⁸
Improved government response and multi-agency collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2025 ‘Tackling Violence against Women and Girls’ report by the Public Accounts Committee calls for the Home Office to improve its collaboration and oversight with other government departments that work on VAWG.⁵ The 2025 NAO report also recommended that the Home Office establish a cross-governmental team to lead on implementing the new strategy.⁴⁰ Stakeholders say there is a need for improved coordination between schools, social services and police to support victims and prevent violence while actively involving girls in the process.^{12,56,101,209}
Online safety measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girlguiding’s survey of 2000 boys and girls aged 13–18 reported 42% think more needs to be done to ensure online safety.¹⁶⁵ The Department of Science Innovation and Technology’s 2025 report on online VAWG emphasised the need for adjusted design approaches to mitigate online VAWG arising from emerging technologies.³³⁹ A spokesperson from the NSPCC said that “tech companies are rolling out products at pace without prioritising the safety of children”.³⁴⁰ Experts suggest moving away from banning digital devices and advocate for rights-respecting digital environments instead.^{145,341} Internet Matters’ 2024 research into teenage girls and online harms found that they considered the online world vital for social connection and that it encouraged their creativity.¹⁷ Baroness Bertin’s report emphasised calls from VAWG sector stakeholders to “adequately resource training and

	digital equipment for police, CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] and judiciary to improve the investigation and prosecution of online offending – namely non-consensual image abuse, coercion, exploitation and trafficking.” ¹⁴⁸
Data, monitoring and evidence-based evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews of interventions have emphasised the gaps in interventions targeted towards girls, especially those with other protected characteristics.³⁴² Researchers have highlighted that many interventions are targeted towards perpetrators despite evidence of their failure to lower VAWG.³⁴² A 2020 Scottish Government report on preventing VAWG found the need for more longitudinal research into prevention interventions to understand the effects over time.³⁴³ A 2025 VAWG sector-endorsed briefing recommended improved data gathering on CYP and disaggregation of victim and perpetrator data.³⁴⁴ More rigorous evaluations using robust methods and longitudinal data are needed to support the implementation of effective interventions.^{56,212,345} Everyone’s Invited is collaborating with researchers at the University of Cambridge on a study to understand and improve mental health treatment for CYP with experiences of sexual threat or assault.²⁶²
Targeted funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In June 2025, HM Treasury published the 2025 Spending Review.³⁴⁶ The review included increased police spending and efforts to tackle the court backlog, but did not mention VAWG or domestic abuse. Criticism from Refuge emphasised “without adequate, sustained funding, the Government risks failing the millions who are impacted by VAWG every year.”³⁴⁷ The Public Accounts Committee report Tackling Violence against Women and Girls called for the Home Office to coordinate all spending on VAWG-related activities across government and to provide long-term funding stability to the sector.⁵ In February 2025, the Home Affairs Committee launched an inquiry Tackling violence against women and girls: Funding to understand the funding and outcomes associated.³⁴⁸ VAWG organisations have called for government-funded research into Black and minority ethnic women to understand where “inequalities manifest across the protected characteristics”.³⁴⁹

9

International case studies

Across international research, there have been domestic and cross-border projects focusing on both intervention and prevention approaches to VAWG.

Australia's National Plans to reduce Violence against Women and Children (2010–22, 2022–2023), launched the RESPECT initiative.^{350,351} It combines school-based respectful relationships education interventions, such as Resilience Rights & Respectful Relationships (RRRR), reducing bullying and harassment, community social-norms work, and integration with the justice sector.³⁵⁰ It embeds early prevention in curriculums from primary to high schools and trains police to respond appropriately via co-located specialist services in police stations. Evaluations found significant drops in harassment; RRRR led the sexual harassment rate to fall from 8.7% to 5.9%, and pilot co-location models improved response coordination and survivor outcomes.^{352,353}

The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme originated in the US and uses a bystander approach to tackle gender-based violence.³⁵⁴ Evaluations of implementations across the US were mostly positive and MVP has been rolled out in other countries.^{355,356} In Scotland, a qualitative evaluation of the programme delivery in schools concluded positive attitudinal and behavioural changes.³⁵⁷ However, it also noted less pronounced effects on boys, and suggested more resources would be required in future. MVP has also been delivered across the UK, with some positive quantifiable effects noted, but stakeholders suggest more evaluation is needed.^{358,359}

MVP was modified for Swedish primary and secondary schools by the non-profit MÄN.³⁶⁰ It consists of seven lessons raising awareness about violence, questioning gender norms, generating dialogue and inspiring leadership.³⁶¹ The evaluated impacts were mixed, with concerns that a lack of training for teachers was hindering the potential positives.^{232,361}

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