

Written evidence submitted by DECIPHer, Cardiff University (VAWG0015)

Schools

The School Health Research Network is a network of all maintained secondary schools, and expanding to all primary schools in Wales who have joined together with Cardiff University researchers, the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to support young people's health. The aim of the School Health Research Network is to improve health and wellbeing. The network helps schools in Wales work with researchers to generate and use high quality evidence about health improvement. The network collects a variety of robust health and wellbeing data from students and schools in Wales, including on issues relating to violence against women and girls. In 2023/24 just under 130,000 11 to 16 year olds took part in the survey, from 201 schools, including 95.6% of maintained secondary schools. We report on these data via a biennial Welsh Government National Indicators Report which allows population monitoring of trends and an assessment of policy progress. We also provide tailored benchmarked reports and have a digital dashboard housed through Public Health Wales for regional stakeholders, as well as sharing bespoke data back, anonymously to schools across Wales to support health needs assessments, health action planning and monitoring and evaluation. More information about SHRN can be found here: <https://www.shrn.org.uk/> as well as our digital dashboard via Public Health Wales here: <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/observatory/data-and-analysis/shrn-data-dashboard/>

The following are unpublished data from the School Health Research Network which are of relevance to violence against women and girls.

The use of sexually offensive names at school

We collect a range of data on a variety of indicators relating to violence against women and girls. For example, our most recent survey indicates that 41.6% of students reported having been called sexually offensive names at school in the last year by boys, and 31.1% were called sexually offensive names at school by girls. These proportions can be broken down by gender to explore gendered violence; 37.1% of boys had ever been called sexually offensive names at school by boys, and 45.16% of girls had been called sexually offensive names at school by boys. This rose to 66.01% for gender minority youth. Similarly, 28.35% of boys reported being called sexually offensive names by girls, and 32.99% of girls reported being called sexually offensive names by girls. This rose to 54.5% for gender minority youth.

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Experience of unwanted touching or kissing in school

Data is also collected on students' experiences of being unwantedly touched or kissed in school by boys and by girls. In our most recent survey round,, depending on year group, between 11.56-24.81% of students report that they have ever been unwantedly touched or kissed at school by boys. This figure is between 9.46-13.19% for unwanted touching or kissing by girls. The figures can be broken down by gender to explore gendered harassment. A total of 21.48% of boys and 14.31% of girls reported being unwantedly touched or kissed at school by boys. This number rose to 44.13% for gender minority youth. A total of 12.26% of boys and 9.59% of girls reported being unwantedly touched or kissed in school by girls. This rose to 32.59% for gender minority youth.

Sending sexually explicit images and having these forwarded without consent

Figures from the 2023/24 survey indicate that between 0.94% (Year 7) and 10.14% (Year 11) of students had sent a sexually explicit image AND had it shared to someone else without their consent. The proportion of students who had an image shared without their consent amongst those who had sent a sexually explicit image

(n=9,306 / 8.18% of total 2023/24 survey sample) was 54.77%. The proportion of students who had never sent a sexually explicit image to someone else but reported that they had had an image shared (n=11,100 / 8.55% of total 2023/24 survey sample) was 10.82%.

Top three reasons for bullying in schools

Students are asked the most common reasons people in their year group are bullied. They are able to tick up to three responses. In our most recent survey round, between 29.82-41.14% students in years 7-11 reported that one of the top three reasons is because 'students are gay, lesbian or bisexual'. Between 8.03-25.04% reported a top three reason being because of their 'gender identity or expression'.

Staff action to support students

We also collect data on whether students believe their teachers take action when they hear pupils calling boys/girls sexually offensive names at school. In 2023/24, between 73.06% and 47.22% of pupils agreed staff took action if they heard pupils being called sexually offensive names by girls, decreasing with age. Between 68.38% and 32.56% of pupils agreed staff took action if they heard pupils being called sexually offensive names by boys, decreasing with age.

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Published data on dating and relationship violence

We have also published nationally representative evidence relating to experiences of dating and relationship violence among 11-16 year olds. From the 2017 SHRN survey using data from 74 908 students aged 11–16 from 193 schools across Wales, we found that more girls reported emotional victimization (28%) and perpetration (18%) than boys (20% and 16%, respectively). More girls (8%) than boys (7%) reported physical perpetration. However, boys (17%) reported more physical victimization than girls (12%). Age-related trajectories of DRV victimization and perpetration were stronger in girls than in boys. Students from single or step parent homes, those in care, and certain ethnic minority groups had increased odds of DRV. No association was found between socioeconomic status and DRV. Age-related trajectories and the lack of social patterning by socioeconomic status point to the value of early, universal interventions, while some evidence of ethnic patterning and family structure-related risk factors suggest areas for further research and targeted interventions. These findings are published here: <https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/article/43/1/111/5556310>

Using data from the 2019 SHRN student survey, with 91,084 students from 149 schools in Wales, we found that emotional DRV victimisation was the most common form reported, with 30.0% of girls and 23.6% of boys experiencing this form of DRV. Roughly the same proportion of boys and girls reported perpetrating emotional DRV (18.1% and 19.3% respectively). A larger proportion of boys than girls reported experiencing physical DRV (19.3% and 12.8% respectively), whereas similar proportions of boys and girls, around 8.3%, reported perpetrating physical DRV. Students who reported bullying, cyberbullying, sexting, and substance use, compared to those that had not, had significantly higher odds of experiencing and perpetrating emotional and physical DRV. The findings are published here: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/3/1192>

Further scope for analysis and monitoring

SHRN has data on young people's gender identity (including diverse gender self-report identities), dating experiences (same, both and opposite sex gender dating as well as emotional and physical dating and relationship violence) and sexual behaviour (asked to only students aged 15 years and older). There is scope to share data on these indicators as well as whether students believe their school teaches them about who to go to if they or someone they know experiences dating violence, and whether they would speak to a staff member of they/a friend experienced dating violence.

SHRN collects a wide variety of data on health and wellbeing topics, especially those related to sexual harassment, dating violence, bullying and other forms of violence against women. While we share these data via a biennial Welsh Government National

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Indicators Report and provide tailored benchmarked reports for regional stakeholders and secondary schools across Wales, we have not yet conducted detailed analysis on these topics. There is however scope to undertake analyses pertaining to the data detailed above, in relation to a variety of for example, mental health and wellbeing data, and especially among particular sub-groups. We would welcome the opportunity to share this data in other forms by request, where possible. Please do contact us for more information: SHRN@cardiff.ac.uk or decipher@cardiff.ac.uk

Further Education settings

As part of a Medical Research Council Public Health Intervention Development funded formative mixed methods study to inform the development of a safer sex and healthy relationships intervention for those aged 16–19 years studying in further education (FE) settings, six FE settings in England and Wales completed an online survey with 2105 students which examined a variety of intervention development topics as well as sexual health and dating violence outcomes, but also looked at experience of peer-on-peer harassment.

Unpublished figures on sexual harassment

A total of 29% of FE students reported being called sexually offensive names at FE by boys. This figure was 27% reporting being called sexually offensive names at FE by girls. A total of 13% of students reported that they had ever been unwantedly touched or kissed at their FE setting. A total of 10% of students reported that they had ever seen unwanted pornographic content while at FE and 6% of students reported that they had had a sexually explicit image shared without their consent. A total of 44% of students believed staff took action when they heard students being called sexually offensive names by other students. It is possible to explore these data in more detail (e.g. looking at experience in relation to gender/sexual minority groups etc.). These data are currently unpublished, please contact us for more information.

Published figures on dating and relationship violence

We have also published research findings from this study which focus on young people's experience of dating and relationship violence. Cross-sectional self-report data were collected from 1751 students aged 16–19 at six FE settings in England and Wales. DRV victimization clustered into two categories for girls, and three for boys. Among girls, 46.1% experienced controlling behaviours and 31.6% threatening behaviours; 49.9% of males experienced controlling behaviours, 27.1% threatening behaviours and 5.8% online sexual violence. The odds of DRV victimization were 2–8 times greater for boys and 2–4 times greater for girls who had ever sent a sexually

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explicit image. No consistent association was found between DRV and age, spending money per week, educational attainment or meeting partners online. The findings are reported here: <https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/article/40/4/738/4614416>

Subsequent research in Further Education

Subsequent to this MRC PHIND funded study, we secured NIHR PHR research funding to optimise and pilot the SaFE intervention. We have now completed a pilot randomised control trial of the sexual health and healthy relationships intervention in FE settings, which aims to impact gender based violence. We are currently planning a full scale Phase III randomised controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. More information can be found here: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/14/12/e091355>

Evidence of effective interventions

Schools

Led by Prof G.J. Melendez-Torres at Exeter University, a large international systematic review has been conducted looking at evidence for school-based interventions for dating and relationship violence and gender-based violence. We have looked at how effective these interventions are and what lessons have been learnt from putting them in place, to support schools that want to prevent these kinds of violence. We have conducted a systematic review; meaning that we have looked for published evidence about interventions for dating and relationship violence or gender-based violence, either separately or together, internationally. We have also looked for evidence of how those interventions were carried out, including interviews and focus groups with staff and pupils who were part of the intervention.

We carried out a comprehensive search and found 247 reports on school-based interventions to prevent dating and relationship violence or gender-based violence, most of which were conducted in North America.

Most interventions aimed to provide students with the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to prevent perpetration and victimisation. They varied in complexity; some had one activity, others had multiple activities, some were integrated into the existing school curricula and others were complex in that they sought to change how schools as a whole respond to dating and relationship violence or gender-based violence. We theorised that complex interventions would bring about greater and more sustainable change, but this was not supported by our findings. The implementation of interventions was affected by factors such as school organisation and leaders who

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believed in the importance of addressing dating and relationship violence/gender-based violence, along with time and resources to deliver the interventions. The ease with which the intervention could be delivered and modified was also important.

There was stronger evidence for intervention effectiveness in reducing dating and relationship violence than for gender-based violence, with significant long-term impacts on dating and relationship violence victimisation and perpetration. There was some evidence that interventions in high-income countries could be effective for reducing victimisation and perpetration of gender-based violence in the long-term. More complicated interventions were not more effective, and interventions tended to reduce dating and relationship violence perpetration in boys more than in girls. We have also been able to identify where there are gaps in available evidence, which may provide avenues for future research. The full study report can be found here: <https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr/KTWR6997#abstract>

Further Education

Although currently unpublished, we have conducted a systematic review of intervention evaluations addressing sexual health and gender-based violence in Further Education (FE) settings or their international counterparts. We searched a variety of databases in November 2018 for outcome evaluations involving randomized trials, controlled before-after studies, matched control studies or interrupted time-series analyses taking place within FE settings or their international analogues. Included studies included peer-reviewed literature which sought to improve sexual health outcomes, reduce gender-based violence, or prevent intimate partner violence. A total of 1,724 deduplicated articles were obtained; 553 were retained for the second and 178 for the third stage of screening. Ten full texts were reviewed and two were eligible for inclusion. Very limited high-quality evidence exists of interventions to addressing sexual health and gender-based violence in FE settings. Evidence is urgently needed as FE provides an optimal setting for health promotion.

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