



voices UNHEARD

PEER CONSULTATION 2022

**LGBTQ+ young people's experiences
of domestic abuse: in their own
relationships and within families**



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INTRODUCTION

VOICES UNHEARD

Voices Unheard is a youth participation project delivered by LGBT Youth Scotland.

Originally set up in 2009, we are a group of LGBTQ+ young people aged 16-25 from across Scotland who come together to deliver a programme of work focused on LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

The main aims of the project are:

- To raise awareness of LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence.
- To encourage LGBTQ+ young people who experience domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence, to access appropriate information and support.
- To support services related to gender-based violence to better respond to LGBTQ+ young people who experience domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence.

Within the Voices Unheard project, we use a co-development approach to our work where young people, staff, and volunteers are all seen as valued contributors.

BACKGROUND TO CONSULTATION

Voices Unheard project previously conducted peer research in 2011,¹ where they identified that LGBTQ+ young people experience high rates of domestic abuse within their own relationships and within their families but face multiple barriers to accessing support or reporting abuse.

Based on those findings, the group developed a range of resources to raise awareness, including content on the LGBT Domestic Abuse Project website,² a training video for professionals,³ an Educational Resource⁴ to support teachers to include LGBTQ+ young people in gender-based violence focused work, and workshops for young people.

To ensure our understanding of LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of domestic abuse is current and relevant to young people in Scotland today, Voices Unheard were funded by the Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe fund to deliver an updated peer consultation in 2022 to better understand LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of domestic abuse and to identify the additional needs, unique experiences, and barriers to accessing help that they face in Scotland today.

This consultation has been developed, designed, delivered, and analysed collaboratively with LGBTQ+ young people from the Voices Unheard project, many of whom have direct experience of domestic abuse and/or family-based abuse, and the staff and volunteers who support them.

1. Voices Unheard (2011). Domestic Abuse: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People's Perspectives. LGBT Youth Scotland. <https://lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk/media/1165/voices-unheard-report-2011.pdf> (Date Accessed 23.08.23)

2. <https://lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk/advice-and-info/>

3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWEn_czu8q4

4. lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk/media/1164/voices-unheard-educational-resource.pdf

LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

Below are some definitions and perspectives on some of the language and terminology used in this report in order to support your understanding.

LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ is intended to be considered a broadly inclusive term of the queer identities represented within this research. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning, and the positive '+' aims to represent and respect everyone within the LGBTQ+ community. We have previously described our community as 'LGBT' and 'LGBTI', and both are still valued acronyms. We welcome the full diversity of the LGBTQ+ community and include intersex, asexual and non-binary people within this umbrella, whilst also being mindful that people can have multiple identities that intersect.

TRANSGENDER

Transgender is how you feel about your own gender identity (like a woman, man, neither or both) and when it is different from what people expected from you when you were born. This definition is inclusive of non-binary identities and our use of the terms trans and transgender is inclusive of non-binary people.

CISGENDER

Cisgender is when your gender identity is the same as the gender you were assigned at birth.

SURVIVOR

Survivor is the term we use to describe anyone who has experienced domestic abuse, family-based abuse, or honour-based abuse (HBA).

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic Abuse – LGBT Youth Scotland and Voices Unheard support the Scottish Government's definition of domestic abuse, but we have amended the definition to take account of the specific experiences applicable to LGBTQ+ people.

Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour); sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate and are perpetrated against the person's will, including rape); mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, homophobic/biphobic/transphobic abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as 'outing' or the threat of 'outing' or enforced isolation from family and friends).

FAMILY BASED ABUSE

There is no recognised or legal definition of family-based abuse in Scotland. We define it as any form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or coercive control perpetrated by family members, including honour-based abuse.

HONOUR-BASED ABUSE

Honour-based abuse (HBA) includes any form of violence or abuse perpetrated to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community. Many people think of HBA as an issue that only affects black and minority ethnic communities, but it can happen in any community. LGBTQ+ people can face additional risks of HBA due to the perceived 'shame' that being an LGBTQ+ person brings on the family or community.

WITNESSING ABUSE IN FAMILIES

We understand that domestic abuse in families impacts children and young people even if they do not see or hear abuse happening, and we recognise them not just as witnesses to abuse, but as survivors in their own right.

We also understand that young people who witness, but do not directly experience abuse within their family, may not identify themselves as survivors in their own right. For this reason, we detail our findings about participants who have witnessed abuse in their family separately from those who have directly experienced abuse within their family throughout this report.



METHODOLOGY

CONSULTATION DEVELOPMENT

Between May and October 2022, young people from the Voices Unheard Project participated in workshops and development sessions to explore their understanding of domestic abuse, including current legislation and policy related to domestic abuse in Scotland.

We also reviewed different consultation approaches and research methods to identify an appropriate consultation approach. An online survey was chosen as our primary consultation method as it allowed us to reach a wide audience through LGBT Youth Scotland's groups, social media, and online community.

SURVEY DESIGN

The survey questions were co-developed by young people from the Voices Unheard project, and staff and volunteers from LGBT Youth Scotland, with input from professionals working within domestic abuse and/or gender-based violence services. Questions were divided into five thematic areas, some mandatory, and some optional:

LEARNING ABOUT LGBTQ+ RELATIONSHIPS (MANDATORY)

EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND DOMESTIC ABUSE (OPTIONAL)

WITNESSING DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE FAMILY (OPTIONAL)

EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE FAMILY (OPTIONAL)

ACCESS AND BARRIERS TO SUPPORT (MANDATORY)

We recognised that participating in the consultation could be re-traumatising or upsetting for young people, so included an outline of each theme and signposting information for relevant support services at the start of each section. All sections of the consultation focused on experiencing or witnessing abuse were optional, and participants could choose to skip the entire section.

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

All participants identified as LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 and 25 and were living in Scotland at the time of the consultation. The survey was open throughout November 2022, and was promoted through LGBT Youth Scotland's social media and website, including paid advertising on Instagram.

We received 77 responses, 19 of which were discounted as they did not meet age or geographical requirements. This findings report is based on responses from the remaining 58 participants.

Throughout this report, the total number of participants who responded to each question is represented within footnotes as n=number of responses.

A NOTE ON SAMPLING

The consultation findings are based on the responses of a convenience sample of LGBTQ+ young people who voluntarily engaged in the consultation survey and are therefore not representative of all LGBTQ+ young people's experiences.

Voices Unheard says...

Young people from the Voices Unheard project were directly involved in the analysis of the consultation responses, identification of key findings, and development of key recommendations.

Some of our reflections are highlighted throughout the report in these comment boxes.



KEY FINDINGS

LEARNING ABOUT LGBTQ+ RELATIONSHIPS

- ➔ Almost all participants reported being aware of LGBTQ+ identities and relationships by age 15, with almost half being aware by age 10.
- ➔ Participants were most likely to report having learned about LGBTQ+ identities and relationships from the internet, followed by friends.
- ➔ Only 7 (12%) participants⁵ felt that media representations of LGBTQ+ relationships are mostly healthy.
- ➔ Only 1 participant felt that media representations of LGBTQ+ relationships are accurate, while the rest felt that representations are rarely, or only sometimes accurate.
- ➔ 40 (70%) participants⁶ felt there are not enough resources about healthy relationships available for LGBTQ+ young people.

EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

- ➔ Over 75% of participants⁷ have been in an LGBTQ+ relationship, with the majority having entered their first LGBTQ+ relationship by age 15.
- ➔ 20 (37.5%) participants⁸ identified themselves as having experienced domestic abuse in a current or past relationship, however 33 (60%) participants indicated that they had experienced some form of abusive behaviour from a partner or ex-partner.
- ➔ Trans young people were more likely to experience domestic abuse than cisgender young people, with 74% of trans participants reporting having experienced one or more forms of abusive behaviour from a partner or ex-partner, compared to 40% of cisgender participants.
- ➔ Although 22 (67%) participants with experience of abuse⁹ believe the abuse they experienced was a crime, only 3 (9%) reported to the police. Only 5 (15%) of them spoke to a trusted professional about their experiences.
- ➔ Participants who experienced domestic abuse most commonly reported that the abuse had impacted their mental health and other relationships. 23 (70%) participants have considered suicide, and 13 (39%) have attempted suicide as a result of their experiences of domestic abuse.
- ➔ 45% have experienced negative feelings about being an LGBTQ+ person as a result of their partner or ex-partner's behaviour.

5. n=57

6. n=57

7. n=56

8. n=56

9. n=33

WITNESSING AND EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC

ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

- ➔ 44 (60%) participants¹⁰ indicated having witnessed some form of abusive behaviour in their family, and 41 (74%) indicated that they experienced abuse within their family.¹¹
- ➔ Participants most commonly reported that their father/ step-father was the main perpetrator, followed by mother and step-parent. More than half of the consultation participants identified more than one perpetrator of abuse within their family.
- ➔ More than half of the young people who witnessed abuse in their family¹² believed the behaviour they witnessed within the family was a crime, however; only 12.5% reported it to the police. 42.5% told a trusted professional.
- ➔ Over 60% of those who experienced abuse in their family¹³ believed the behaviour they experienced was a crime, however; only 8% reported to the police, and 39% told a trusted professional.
- ➔ Participants described a range of experiences when reporting the abuse, they had witnessed or experienced in their family to the police or other professionals, however they were more likely to report negative or neutral responses than positive.
- ➔ Participants who witnessed or experienced abuse within their family most commonly reported that the abuse had impacted their mental health and other relationships.

55% of those who witnessed abuse, and 74% of those who experienced abuse in their family, experienced negative feelings about being an LGBTQ+ person as a result of their experiences.

ACCESS AND BARRIERS TO SUPPORT

- ➔ Participants reported that they would be most likely to seek support from friends, followed by a therapist/ counsellor, or online support, if they were to experience domestic abuse in their own relationships or witness or experience abuse within their family in the future.
- ➔ The most frequently reported barriers to accessing support included: concern that experiences are not bad enough; worry about not being taken seriously; and concern that services would contact the abuser or the police.
- ➔ More than half of consultation participants indicated that they would be unlikely to report domestic abuse to the police in future, whether they experienced domestic abuse in their own relationships, or if they witnessed or experienced abuse in their family.
- ➔ Participants felt they would be more likely to report abuse to the police if there was physical injury or immediate risk of harm, or if there was risk of harm to others.
- ➔ The mistrust of, and lack of confidence in the Police were commonly reported barriers to reporting.

10. n=54

11. n=53

12. n=39

13. n=38

DEMOGRAPHICS

A set of demographic questions appeared at the beginning of the survey. A response was required for each question in order to progress to subsequent pages, however each question included a 'Prefer not to say' option to allow participants to decline to give information if desired. Therefore, the statistics in this section are based on a response from all 58 participants.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

16 young people identified their sexual orientation as queer, while 14 identify as lesbian/gay and a further 14 as bisexual.

Those that provided a sexual orientation that was not listed were invited to tell us how they identified. Responses included: omnisexual, aroace, queer, demisexual, and on the ace spectrum.

Two participants identified with multiple sexual orientations; 'bisexual and demisexual'; and 'bisexual, queer, and pansexual'.

GENDER IDENTITY

12 (21%) participants identified as a man/boy, 18 (31%) identified as a woman/girl, 21 (36%) identified as non-binary, and 5 (9%) identified their gender in another way. 2 (3%) participants preferred not to say.

32 (55%) of participants were transgender. Of those, 28% identified as boys/men; 53% identified as non-binary; 16% identify their gender in another way; and 3% preferred not to say. None of the transgender participants identified as a girl/woman.

Those identifying their gender in another way were invited to tell us how they identified. Responses included: genderfluid and agender.

VARIATIONS IN SEX CHARACTERISTICS/INTERSEX STATUS

5 participants (9%) considered themselves to have a variation in sex characteristics/to be intersex.

AGE

Participants were aged between 14 and 25 years old, with an average age of 18.

ETHNICITY

49 participants (84%) described themselves as White Scottish, 4 (7%) described themselves as Other White British, and 2 (3%) as Other White, and 1 (2%) participant described themselves as Other Asian. 1 participant (2%) described themselves as White English and Scottish.

RELIGION/FAITH

41 participants (71%) stated that they do not have a religion or faith. 4 (7%) were Christian, 2 (3%) were Roman Catholic, 1 (2%) were Jewish, 5 (9%) were Pagan, and 5 (9%) had another religion or faith not listed in the question. Participants selecting this option were asked to tell us about their religion/faith. Responses included: Protestant, Quaker, Mormon, and Alternative Spirituality.

DISABILITY

44 participants (76%) considered themselves to have a disability or health condition, and 1 (2%) preferred not to say.

11 participants (20%) considered themselves to have a physical disability and 38 (70%) identified having a mental health condition. 30% consider themselves to have a learning disability or difficulty, 6 (11%) consider themselves to have a long-term health condition, and 9 (17%) have sensory processing issues.

31 participants (57%) identified as being neurodivergent (Autism/ ADHD/ OCD), however there was variation found in this area between transgender and cisgender participants, where 25% of the cisgender participants identified as neurodivergent as compared to 78% of transgender participants.

CARE EXPERIENCE

8 participants (14%) were Care Experienced.

YOUNG CARERS

13 participants (22%) were young carers.

Voices Unheard says...



We recognise that the backgrounds and characteristics of the consultation participants do not reflect the diversity of LGBTQ+ community. In particular we note the following gaps in our consultation group:

- No trans women or girls were represented in the consultation.
- Only 1 participant was a person of colour.
- Only 3 participants were cisgender men/boys.

Further research should be undertaken to better understand the experiences and needs of under-represented groups, including how intersecting identities impact access to support.

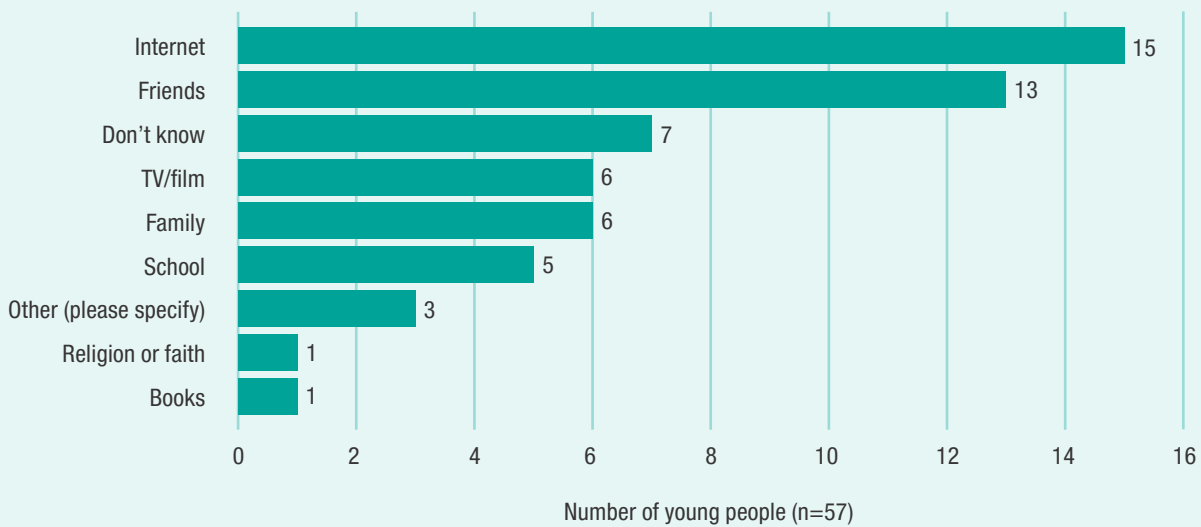


1. LEARNING ABOUT LGBT RELATIONSHIPS

LEARNING ABOUT LGBTQ+ RELATIONSHIPS

We asked participants¹⁴ about the age they first became aware of LGBTQ+ identities and relationships. 2 (4%) young people did not know when they first became aware of LGBTQ+ identities. The rest were all aware by age 15, with almost half being aware by age 10. Young people were most likely to report having learned about LGBTQ+ identities and relationships from the internet, followed by friends (see figure 1).

Figure 1: How did young people first become aware of LGBTQ+ relationships?



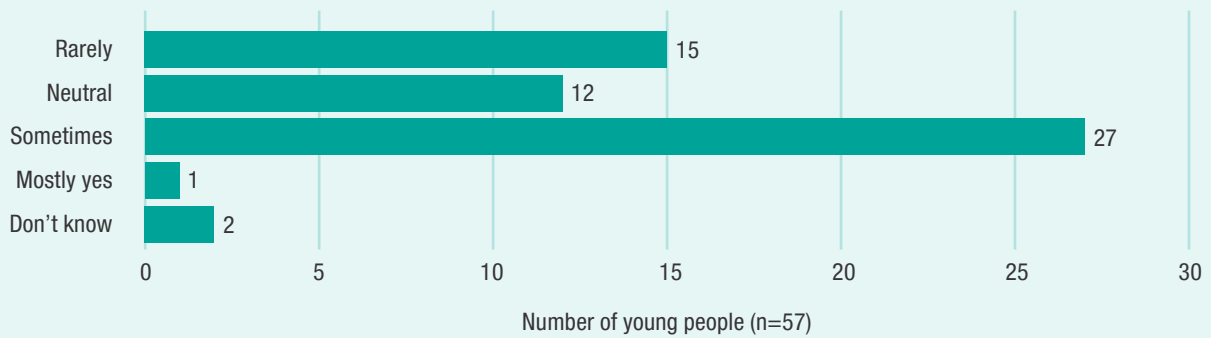
MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF LGBTQ+ RELATIONSHIPS

We asked young people¹⁵ whether they feel that representations they see of LGBTQ+ relationships in the media are mostly healthy or unhealthy representations? Only 7 (12%) participants feel that media representations of LGBTQ+ relationships are mostly healthy, while 27 (47%) feel representations are mostly unhealthy. 23 participants (43%) feel representations are neutral.

In addition, only 1 participant felt that media representations of LGBTQ+ relationships are accurate, while the majority feel that representations are only sometimes, or rarely accurate (see figure 2).

14. n=57
15. n=57

Figure 2: Do you feel that media representations of LGBTQ+ relationships are accurate?



Voices Unheard says...



“If LGBTQ+ young people don’t see enough healthy, realistic depictions of LGBT relationships in the media, how are we supposed to know what healthy even looks like?”

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

We asked young people¹⁶ if they feel there are enough resources about healthy relationships available for LGBTQ+ young people. Only 4 (7%) young people felt there are enough resources available, while 40 (70%) of those asked, responded feeling that there are not enough resources about healthy relationships available for LGBTQ+ young people.

“While there have been improvements on resources available, many don’t actually provide a blueprint on what is healthy, they just kind of tell you what isn’t ok.”

29 young people elected to explain further, and their responses covered the following key themes:

- **There is not enough about LGBTQ+ relationships in schools/ education**

“Whilst it absolutely has got better, many people still simply don’t acknowledge that queer relationships even exist, particularly in my school. Everything I’ve learned about being a queer woman has been my own learning and experiences.”

16. n=57

- The internet can be a good resource, but is not always accessible

“Young people are able to seek it out but only seek it out. It doesn’t seem readily available for those that need it but don’t know how to find the support. The internet is the best place for this but not everyone is in a safe/easy place to reach that.”

- There is a need for targeted resources and messages for LGBTQ+ young people

“Resources aren’t clearly accessible, speaking as an LGBT young person I am unable to name a single resource for healthy relationships that are directed at us specifically.”

- Relationship dynamics can differ in LGBTQ+ relationships

“LGBT relationship are so different to straight ones so unhealthy patterns appear differently, it’s just not the same and there’s not enough (known) about the difference.”

- Negative, stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ+ relationships mean no healthy role models

“Quite often unrealistic and based on stereotypes.”

We also asked young people¹⁷ if they were aware of any resources about healthy relationships for LGBTQ+ young people; 13 (23%) said yes, while 43 (77%) said no. Only two organisations were highlighted by participants as sources of information/ resources for LGBTQ+ young people; LGBT Youth Scotland and Committed to Ending Abuse.

Voices Unheard says...



“A lot of information about relationships and domestic abuse we see is focused on men’s violence against women and girls and doesn’t have enough about what abuse looks like in LGBT relationships. We need targeted resources that not only outline the dynamics of abuse experienced by LGBTQ+ young people, but also offer advice on what healthy actually looks and feels like.”

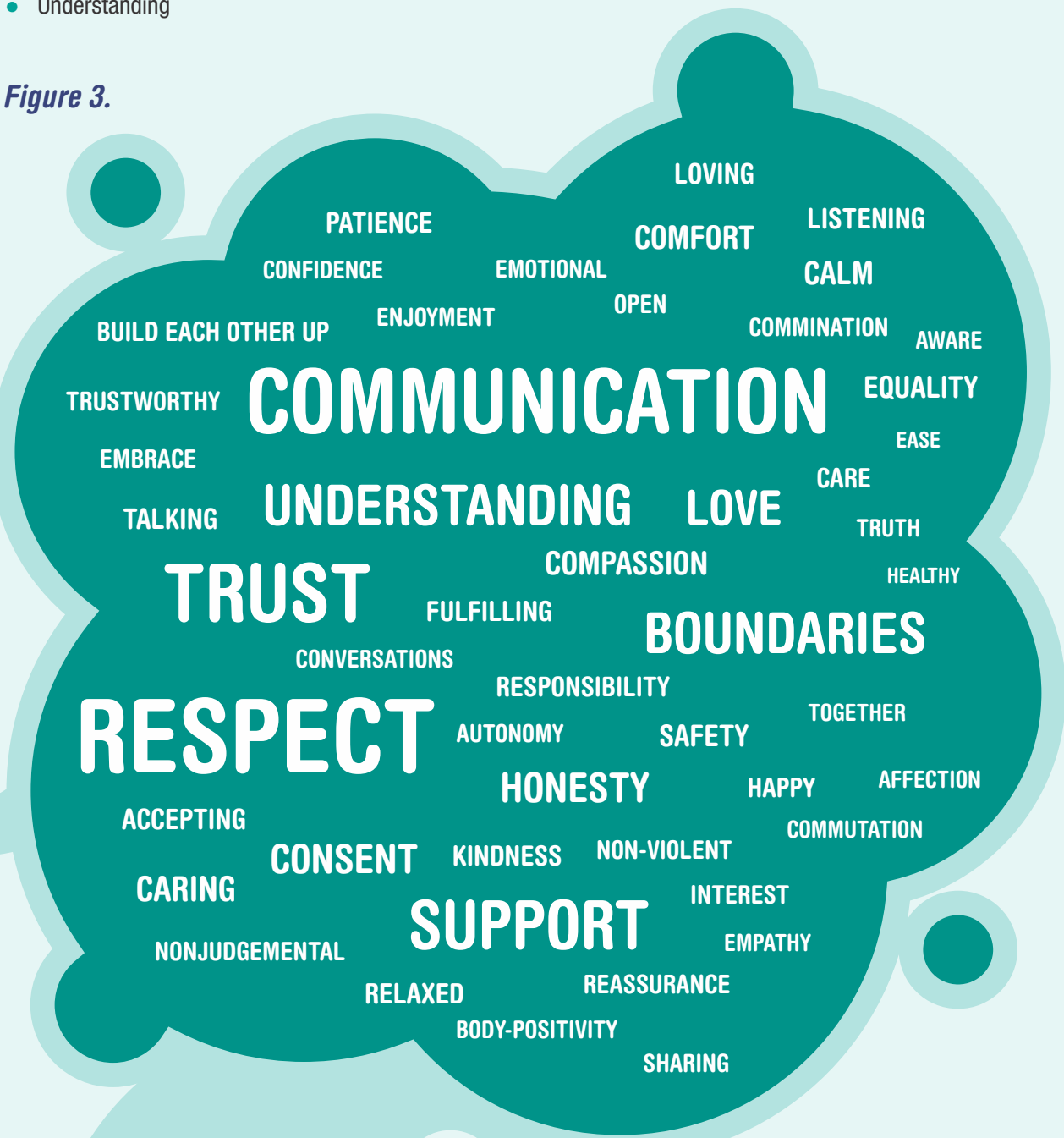
WHAT IS HEALTHY?

We wanted to understand what LGBTQ+ young people expect from a healthy relationship, so asked them to describe three or more behaviours they would expect to see in a healthy LGBTQ+ relationship. Their responses received are highlighted in the word cloud below (see figure 3).

The 5 most commonly described behaviours they would expect to see in a healthy LGBTQ+ relationship include:

- Respect
- Communication
- Trust
- Support
- Understanding

Figure 3.



2. EXPERIENCES IN RELATIONSHIPS



EXPERIENCES IN RELATIONSHIPS

We asked young people¹⁸ to tell us the age they entered their first LGBTQ+ relationship. 13 (23%) young people have never had an LGBTQ+ relationship. Of those who had, the majority had entered their first relationship aged 15 or under.

23 young people (41%) told us their longest LGBTQ+ relationship so far has been under 1 year. 11 (20%) said their longest relationship was between 1 and 2 years; 7 (13%) was between 3 and 4 years; and 2 (4%) reported relationships of 5+ years.

28 (50%) of the young people who participated¹⁹ told us that they are currently single. 8 (14%) were dating; 6 (11%) were living with a partner; 6 (11%) were in romantic relationships; and 5 (9%) were in sexual relationships. 3 (5%) young people were engaged; and none were married, in civil partnerships or divorced/separated.

Voices Unheard says...



It is important to note that young people were only able to select one option from the above, but we recognise that young people may define their relationships in multiple ways, for example, as being in both romantic and sexual relationships, or being both single and dating.

AGE GAPS

We asked young people²⁰ about their experiences of being in relationships where there is an age gap. 18 participants identified themselves as having been in relationships with a significant age gap and reported age differences ranging from 2 to 25 years. Of those, 15 (83%) believed that the age difference between them and their partner impacted on their relationship; all responses suggested this effect was negative. Examples of this negative effect included:

- Lack of control or agency
- Power imbalance based on how long they have been 'out'
- A sense of being treated as a child within the relationship
- Being pressured to do things they weren't comfortable with
- Feeling that they should hide the relationship from others
- Recognition, in hindsight, that they had been taken advantage of

18. n=56

19. n=56

20. n=56

“I expected him to know better than me and being manipulated by him was easier due to the age difference power imbalance. He was also more experienced and had been out for longer meaning I relied on his perspective a lot.”

POLYAMOROUS AND NON-MONO GAMOUS RELATIONSHIPS

We asked young people²¹ about their experiences of polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships.

The consultation identified that polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships can be common amongst LGBTQ+ young people, with 18 (32%) participants stated that they have been or are currently in a non-monogamous or polyamorous relationship, and a further 10 (18%) stated that, while they have not yet been in a polyamorous or non-monogamous relationship, they would consider it.

28 (50%) young people have not been in a polyamorous or non-monogamous relationship.

Of those who have been in polyamorous or non-monogamous relationships;²² 10 (56%) reported having felt pressured to have a monogamous relationship, and 10 (56%) reported having felt pressure to have a polyamorous or non-monogamous relationship.

Of those who have not been in polyamorous or non-monogamous relationships;²³ 5 (13%) reported having felt pressured to have a monogamous relationship, and 2 (5%) reported having felt pressure to have a polyamorous or non-monogamous relationship.

Voices Unheard says...



“We know from previous research, our own experiences, and what we see in our peer groups, that LGBTQ+ young people can be particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse in their first LGBT relationship. This can be due to a physical age difference, or because of the power imbalance created when one partner has more experience of being ‘out’ and therefore is seen as being ‘the expert’ in the relationship.

We also know that polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships can be quite common amongst LGBTQ+ young people, but there is very little information available to support young people to develop healthy polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships. We feel that young people would face additional barriers to accessing support if they experienced abuse within these relationships due to stigma and misunderstanding surrounding polyamory and non-monogamy.”

21. n=56

22. n=18

23. n=38

EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN OWN RELATIONSHIPS

We asked consultation participants²⁴ about their experiences of domestic abuse in their own relationships. We did not provide a definition of domestic abuse and instead allowed young people to identify for themselves whether they had experienced it.

21 (37.5%) participants told us they had experienced domestic abuse in a current or past relationship.

Of the participants who identified as having experienced domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner, 14 told us more about their experience, reporting emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. In particular, multiple examples were given by participants of manipulation, gaslighting, and sexual boundaries being crossed.

Four young people highlighted that they had experienced abuse from more than one partner or ex-partner.

“I had one ex-partner (my first relationships) who displayed all of these behaviours towards me. At the time I didn’t realise what was going on and it wasn’t until we split that I realised that was not normal or healthy. However, I ended up in 3 further unhealthy relationships that displayed a range of these behaviours because that is what I believe I deserved, if it hadn’t been for my friends I never would have broken the cycle.”

RECOGNITION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

We recognise that young people may not identify with the language of 'domestic abuse', and that some may not identify experiences of abusive behaviour as being abuse, particularly where there is no obvious power imbalance, or in the absence of physical violence or sexual abuse.

To capture the experiences of those who do not identify with having experienced domestic abuse, we asked consultation participants²⁵ to select from a list, any abusive or unhealthy behaviours they had experienced in their own relationships (see figure 4).

Although 21 participants had previously identified themselves as having experienced domestic abuse from a partner, 33 (60%) participants reported having experienced some form of abusive behaviour from a partner or ex-partner, indicating that some did not recognise their experience as domestic abuse.

One young person told us:

“I was physically and verbally abused as well as manipulated. She was much smaller than me, so it didn’t strike me as abuse until I realised, I had started flinching more and more around her, and getting genuinely scared of what she would do. I’ll admit the manipulation was far worse than anything else, but the abuse still happened.”

24. n=56

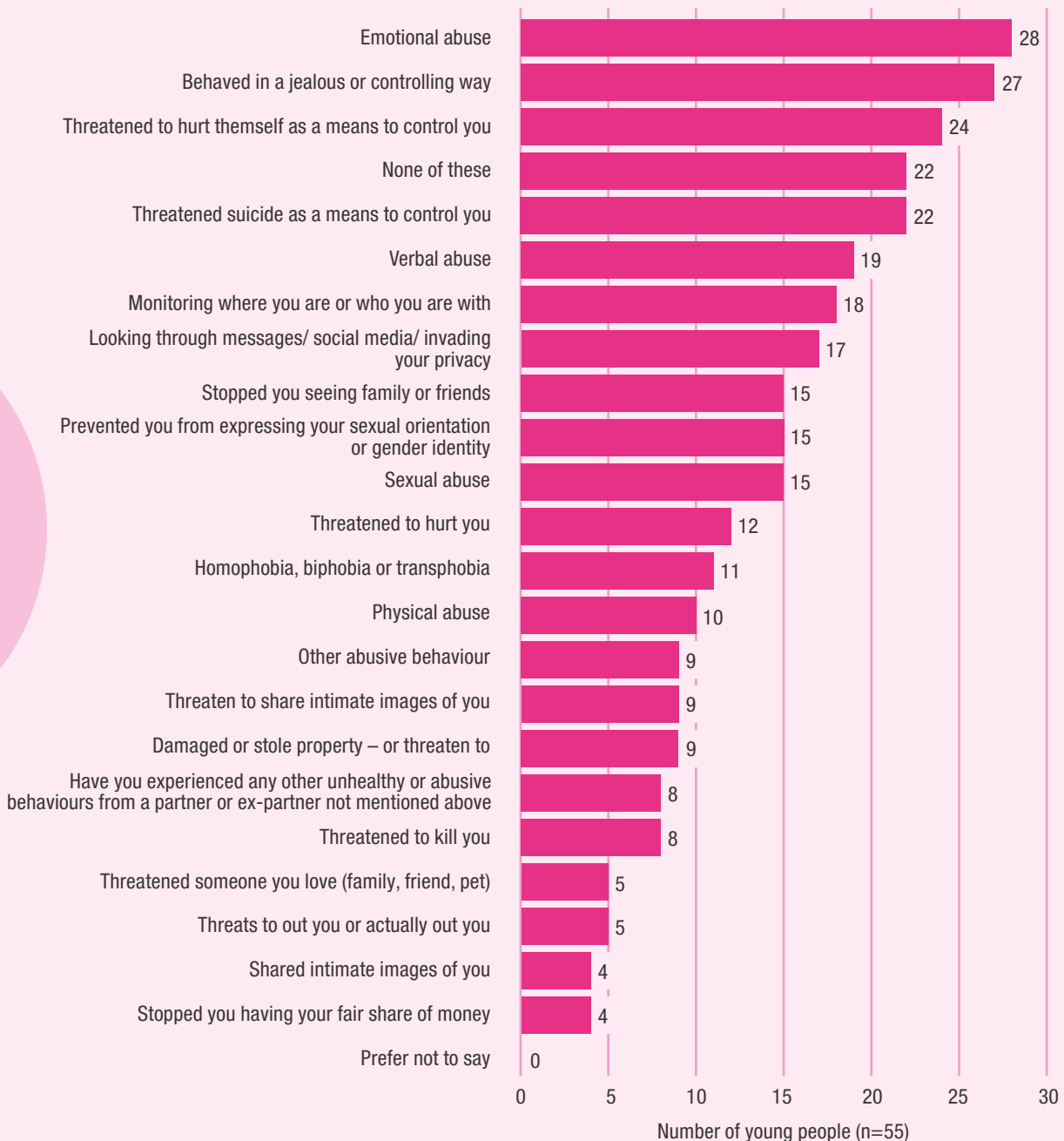
25. n=55

There was variation found between transgender²⁶ and cisgender²⁷ participants, with **74%** of trans young people reporting having experienced one or more forms of abusive behaviour in their own relationships, compared to **40%** of cisgender young people.

TYPES OF ABUSE EXPERIENCED

10 (**18%**) participants²⁸ had experienced physical abuse, 15 (**27%**) had experienced sexual abuse, 19 (**35%**) reported experiencing verbal abuse, and 28 (**50%**) experienced emotional abuse. 11 (**20%**) young people also reported experiencing homophobia, biphobia and/ or transphobia in their relationships, and 15 (**27%**) had been prevented from expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity by a partner or ex-partner. 5 (**9%**) had a partner or ex-partner threaten to, or actually 'out' them.

Figure 4: Behaviours experienced from a partner or ex-partner



26. n=31

27. n=23

28. N=55

REPORTING AND DISCLOSING DOMESTIC ABUSE

We recognise there can be many barriers to reporting crime, and domestic abuse is no different.

We asked the participants who had indicated having experienced one or more forms of abuse from their partner or ex-partner,²⁹ whether they thought any of the abusive behaviours they experienced to be a crime. 22 (67%) said yes, and a further 7 (21%) said they don't know.

Although 22 (67%) of those with experience of abuse believed the abuse they experienced was a crime, only 3 (9%) reported to the police.

5 (15%) of them spoke to a trusted professional, and 12 (36%) told someone else, such as friends or family.

Participants reported a range of experiences relating to reporting abuse to the police or other professionals. Experiences included: feeling better having shared their experience; a general sense that nothing was done about the abuse even when reported; and that their reports had been brushed off/not taken seriously by others.

“They told me that I had done the right thing, and that they would press charges. It helped, a lot. Things steadily got better over time.”

“They came across really supportive of me and then did nothing.”

“When I told one of my (at the time) teachers I had been raped, they told me I was being dramatic and that if I wanted to be a boy (I had just come out as trans) I couldn't consider it rape because ‘only girls get raped’.”

“I so wish abuse from another woman was taken seriously. People will either brush it off or say they're ‘acting like a man’. We need to stop saying this. It takes away from the fact that women can be abusive too.”

Voices Unheard says...

Most of the messages we see in society about domestic abuse focus on men's abuse of women, which can lead people to think that domestic abuse only happens in cis-het relationships, or to believe that only men can perpetrate abuse and only women experience it. This simply isn't true. It's important that police and professionals are aware of this and take steps to ensure that LGBTQ+ survivors get the same quality of response as others.

IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

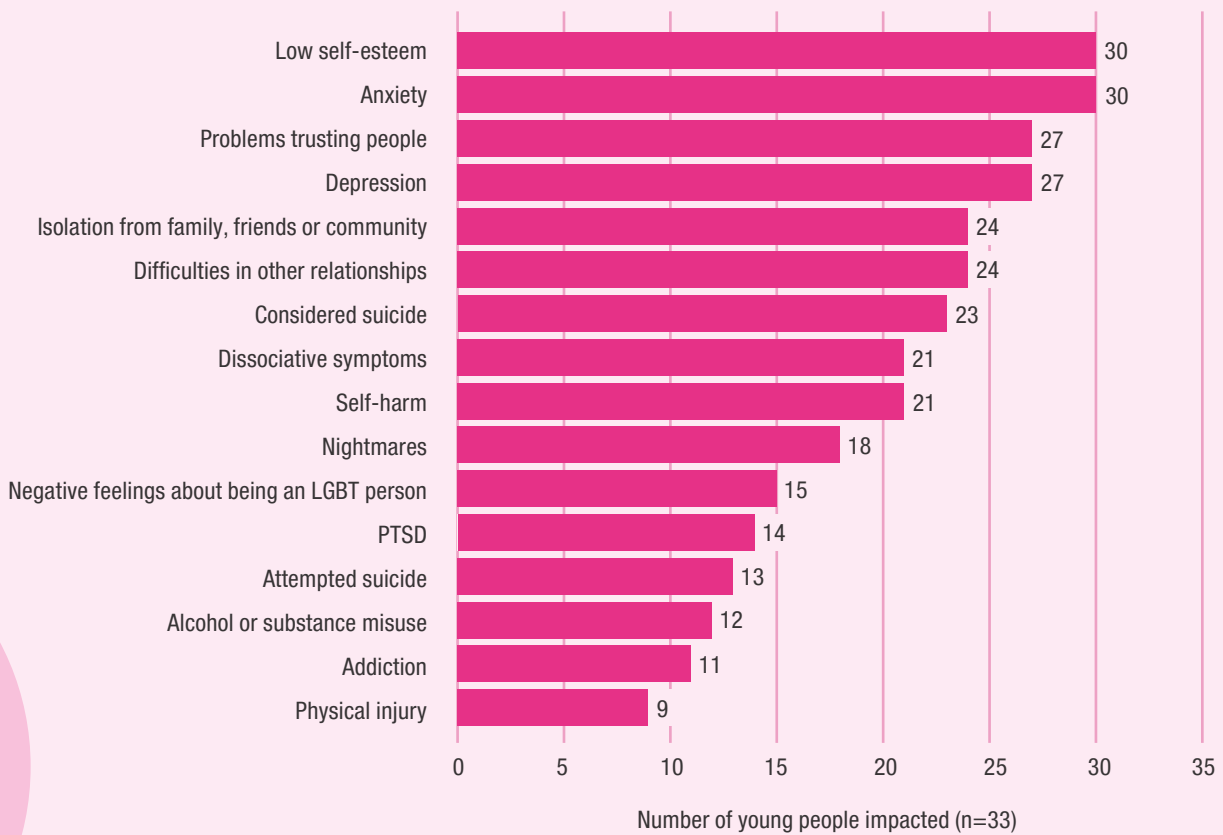
In order to understand how experiences of domestic abuse within relationships affect LGBTQ+ young people, we asked participants who had indicated they had experienced some form of abuse from a partner or ex-partner³⁰ to select from a list, any impacts they had experienced as a result of their partner's behaviour (see figure 5).

Participants were most likely to report that experiences of domestic abuse had impacted negatively on their mental health, with 30 (91%) indicating they had experienced low self-esteem, 30 (91%), indicated that they had experienced anxiety, and 27 (82%) stated that they had experienced depression. 23 (70%) have considered suicide, and 13 (39%) have attempted suicide as a result of their experiences of domestic abuse.

Participants also indicated that their experiences of abuse had impacted on other relationships, with 27 (82%) having problems trusting people, 24 (73%) reporting difficulties in other relationships, and 24 (73%) reporting that they felt isolated from friends, family or community.

45% have experienced negative feelings about being an LGBTQ+ person as a result of their partner or ex-partner's behaviour.

Figure 5: Impacts of domestic abuse



30. n=33

3. WITNESSING AND EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

We did not provide any definition of abuse in the family, and instead allowed participants to decide for themselves whether any behaviours they witnessed or experienced are abuse.

WITNESSING ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

We asked young people³¹ if they ever witnessed abuse between parents/carers or siblings when growing up. 29 (52%) reported that they had witnessed such abuse at home, while 8 (14%) were not sure. 17 (30%) indicated they had never witnessed abuse at home, and 2 (4%) preferred not to say.

Voices Unheard says...

We recognise that young people do not always resonate with the language of 'abuse', and that some may not identify behaviours as being abusive due to it being normalised in their life, and particularly if there is an absence of physical violence or sexual abuse.

31. n=55

To capture the experiences of young people who may have witnessed abuse in the family but do not recognise it as such, we asked young people to select from a list, any abusive or unhealthy behaviours that they had witnessed in their family.

Of the young people who responded,³² 44 (**60%**) indicated having witnessed some form of abusive behaviour in their family; 24 (**44%**) had witnessed physical abuse; 4 (**7%**) had witnessed sexual abuse; 32 (**59%**) witnessed verbal abuse; and 36 (**67%**) had witnessed emotional abuse. 25 (**46%**) reported that they had witnessed homophobia, biphobia and/ or transphobia within their family (see figure 6).

Only 10 (**19%**) participants had not witnessed any of these behaviours in their family.

Figure 6.

Abuse/ behaviour	Witnessed in the family (n=55)		Experienced in the family (n=53)	
	Number of Young People	%	Number of Young People	%
Physical abuse	24	44%	24	45%
Sexual abuse	4	7%	11	21%
Verbal abuse	32	59%	28	53%
Emotional abuse	36	67%	33	62%
Homophobia, biphobia, and/ or transphobia	25	46%	32	60%
None of the above	10	19%	12	23%

EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY-BASED ABUSE

We asked young people to select from a list, any abusive or unhealthy behaviours that they had experienced in their family. Of the young people who responded,³³ 39 (**74%**) participants indicated that they had experienced some form of abusive behaviour in their family; 24 (**45%**) had experienced physical abuse; 11 (**21%**) had experienced sexual abuse; 28 (**53%**) experienced verbal abuse; and 33 (**62%**) had experienced emotional abuse within their family (see figure 6).

32 (**60%**) young people reported having experienced homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia in their family. 25 (**47%**) young people reporting that they were prevented from expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity, and 9 (**17%**) stating they have experienced threats to out, or actually been outed by family members.

Only 12 (**23%**) had not experienced any of these behaviours in their family and 2 (**4%**) preferred not to say.

32. n=55

33. n=53

PERPETRATORS OF ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

We asked participants, who was or is mostly responsible for perpetrating the abuse they witnessed or experienced in their families. Young people most commonly reported that their father/stepfather was the main perpetrator, followed by mother and step-parent.

More than half of the young people identified more than one perpetrator of abuse in the family.

Voices Unheard says...



The definition of domestic abuse in Scotland only includes abuse perpetrated by partners or ex-partners, so the laws, services, and public protections in place in Scotland only respond to partner abuse; they do not include family-based abuse.

74% of the LGBTQ+ young people who participated in our consultation experienced family-based abuse, but due to a lack of recognition of family-based abuse in Scotland, there are very few appropriate services, and no specific protections in place, to support them.

REPORTING AND DISCLOSING ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

More than half of the young people who witnessed domestic abuse at home³⁴ believed the behaviour they witnessed within the family was a crime, however; only 5 (12.5%) reported to the police, and 17 (42.5%) told a trusted professional. 2 (5%) participants selected 'prefer not to say' and 2 (5%) indicated they told friends or family.

We saw similar trends in responses from young people who experienced abuse within their family,³⁵ where over 60% of young people believed the behaviour, they experienced was a crime, however; only 3 (8%) reported to the police, and 15 (39%) told a trusted professional. 1 (3%) participant selected 'prefer not to say' and 6 (16%) indicated they told friends or family.

Participants reported a range of experiences relating to reporting abuse they had witnessed or experienced in their family to the police or other professionals. They felt more likely to report negative or neutral responses or outcomes including having their experienced minimised; not being taken seriously; a sense that nothing was done; and making the situation worse.

34. n=39

35. n=38

“They told me that I was being a dramatic teenager and everyone fights with parents during adolescence, they also excused their transphobia as them mourning the loss of their daughter/granddaughter and as it being because of their generation.”

“No-one acted. If anything, I was told it couldn’t be that bad or I should forgive them because they are my parents.”

Some young people reported positive experiences of reporting abuse in the family, although they were more likely to report positive responses when reporting or disclosing domestic abuse they witness within the family, than when reporting direct experiences of familial abuse. Positive outcomes included; feeling validated; increased safety; and being able to access further support.

“As before, they were surprised but supportive. They helped make spaces safe for me, provided resources and helped me get out of the situation.”

“I felt validated. Which made me realize that the feelings that something wasn’t right were not just in my own head. It helped to have someone to talk to, but at the time I was still living with my family. In the end, I ended up leaving home and becoming homeless to become who I am now.”

IMPACT OF WITNESSING AND EXPERIENCING ABUSE IN THE FAMILY

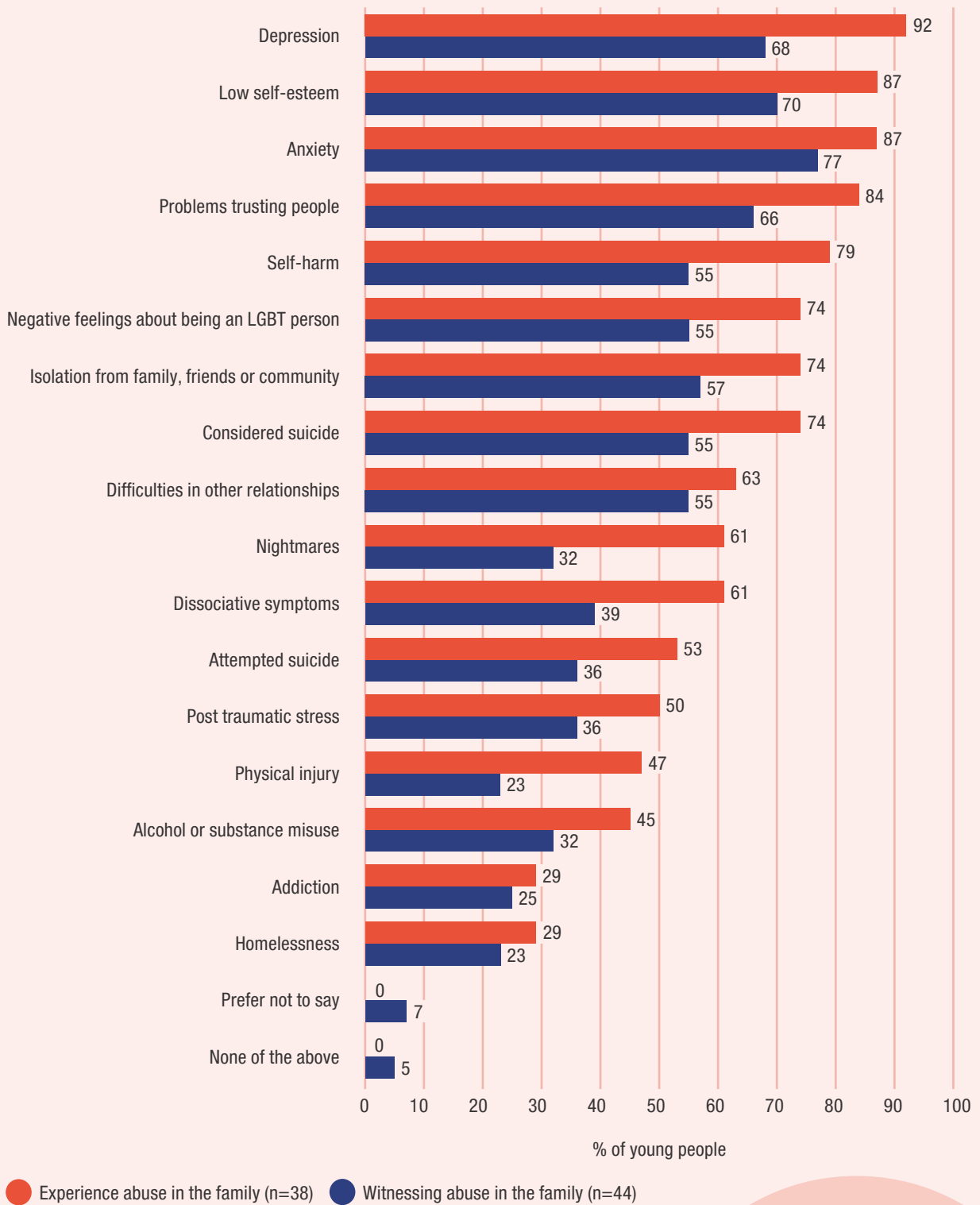
In order to understand how experiencing abuse in the family impacts LGBTQ+ young people, we asked participants to select from a list, any impacts they had experienced as a result of witnessing or experiencing abuse in their family (see figure 7).

Participants were most likely to report that family-based abuse had impacted negatively on their mental health, and on other relationships.

24 (55%) participants who witnessed abuse in their family,³⁶ and 28 (74%) who experienced abuse in the family,³⁷ had negative feelings about being an LGBTQ+ person as a result of their experiences.

36. n=44
37. n=38

Figure 7: Impact of witnessing/experiencing abuse in the family



4. ACCESSING SUPPORT AND REPORTING DOMESTIC ABUSE

SEEKING SUPPORT

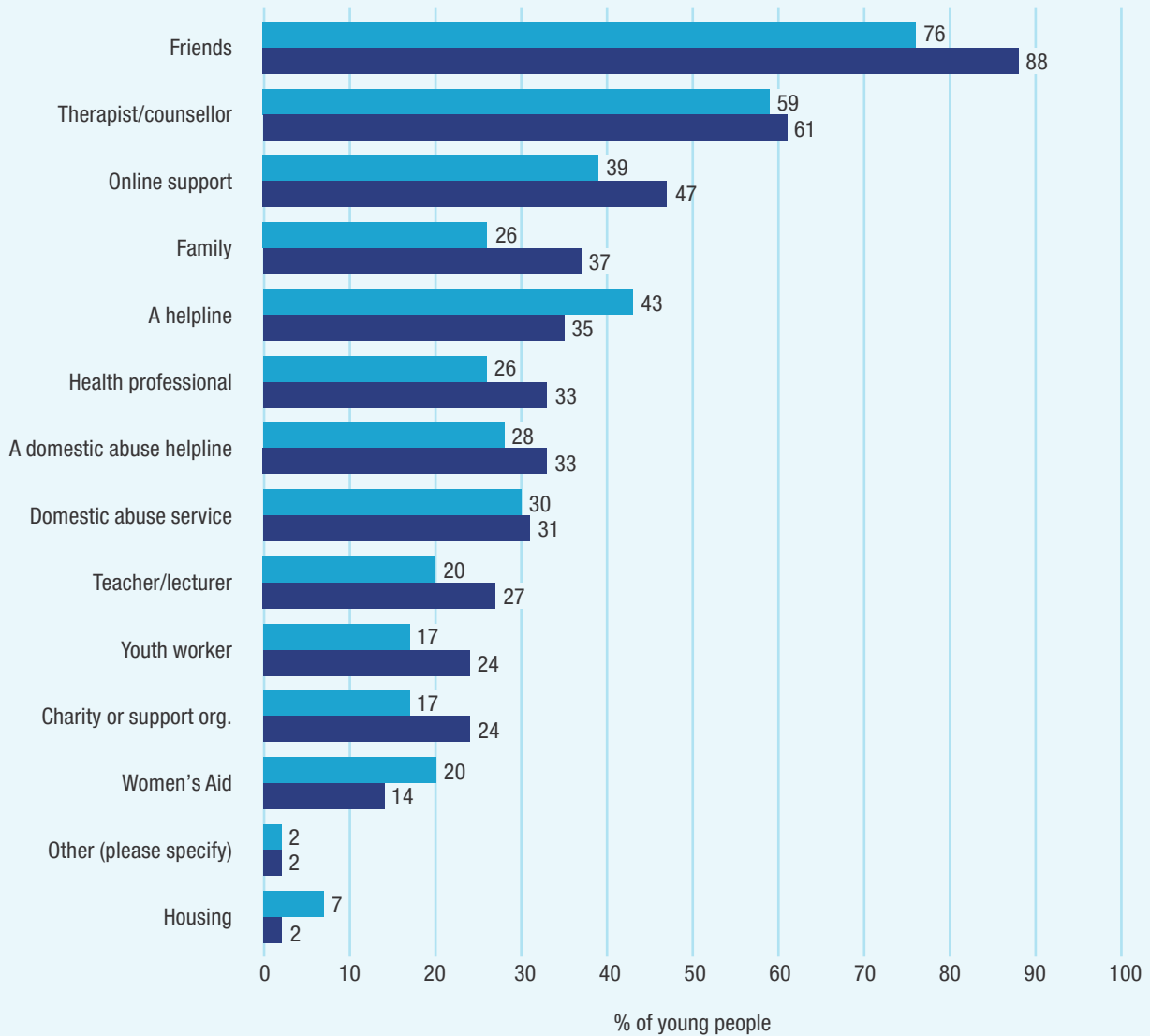
In earlier sections of the consultation, we identified that LGBTQ+ young people experience high levels of domestic abuse in their own relationships and/or within their families, but they often do not recognise these experiences as abuse. Although many of the young people who experienced or witnessed abuse felt that the behaviour was criminal, only a small number ever reported this to police or disclosed this to a trusted professional.

The earlier sections of the consultation provided insight into the support seeking behaviour of LGBTQ+ young people who had experienced or witnessed domestic abuse, but we also want to know where young people might access support in the future.

Young people reported that they would be most likely to seek support from friends, followed by a therapist/counsellor, and online support if needed in the future (see figure 8).



Figure 8: Where would LGBTQ+ young people seek support in the future?



● Witness or experience abuse in the family (n=46) ● Experience abuse in own relationships (n=49)

Voices Unheard says...



LGBTQ+ young people told us they are most likely to seek support from their friends, but it is unlikely that a friend can keep you safe from abuse. It is really important that we make sure those friends have an understanding of domestic abuse and are able to signpost to relevant resources and support.

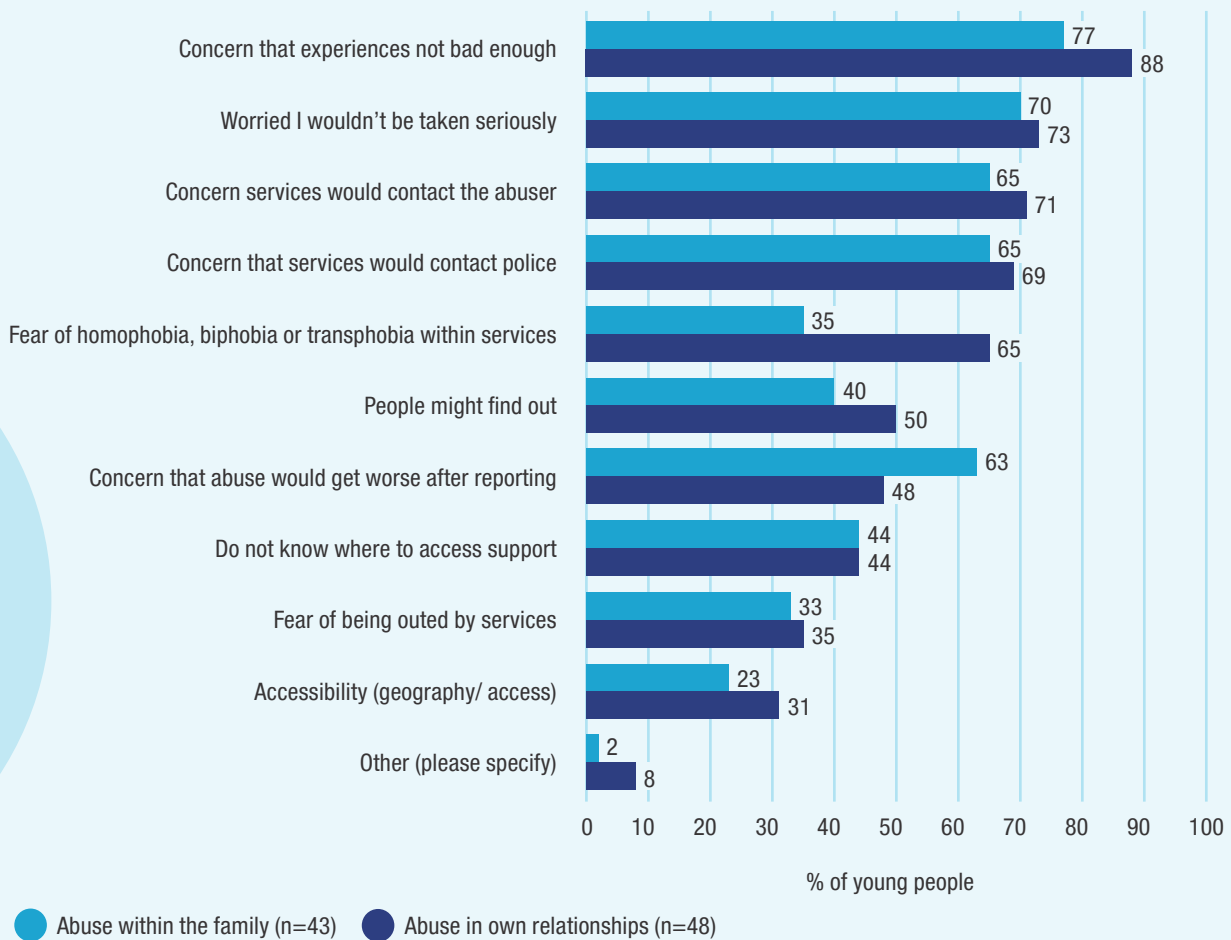


BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SUPPORT

We asked young people to select from a list (see figure 9), any barriers that might prevent them from accessing support in the future if they were to experience domestic abuse in their own relationships,³⁸ or witness or experience abuse in their family in the future.³⁹

The most frequently reported barriers for both included concern that experiences are not bad enough; worry about not being taken seriously; and concern that services would contact the abuser or police.

Figure 9: Barriers to accessing support



5 young people provided feedback on other barriers they feel would prevent them accessing support in the future. These include accessibility of services in relation to disability; concern that services could not help or that nothing would change; and abuse being normalised.

38. n=48
39. n=43



Voices Unheard says...

Young people indicated that homophobia, biphobia and/ or transphobia within services was more of a concern when experiencing abuse from a partner or ex-partner than abuse within the family. This may be because young people could more easily be outed by discussing their LGBT relationship with a partner or ex-partner, than discussing abuse within their family.

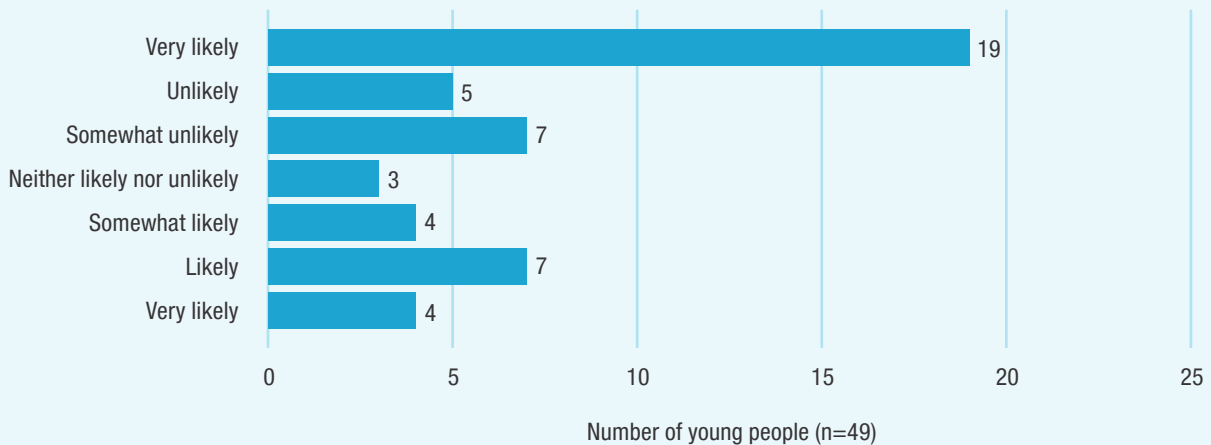
REPORTING AND DISCLOSING DOMESTIC ABUSE

We asked participants how likely they would be to report domestic abuse to the police if they were to experience it in future (see figure 10).

More than half indicated that they would be unlikely to report domestic abuse, whether in their own relationships,⁴⁰ or if they witnessed or experienced abuse in their family.⁴¹

Less than 10% indicated they would be very likely to report any experiences of abuse in future.

Figure 10: How likely are LGBTQ+ young people to report experiences of abuse to the police?



40. n=49
41. n=46



BARRIERS TO REPORTING DOMESTIC ABUSE TO POLICE

In order to understand what might motivate or prevent LGBTQ+ young people from reporting domestic abuse, we asked young people what might make them more or less likely to report experiences of domestic abuse in their future relationships,⁴² or if they ever witness or experience abuse in their family.⁴³

Responses identified the severity of abuse and risk to other people, especially children or pets, were key considerations for young people when thinking of reporting abuse, with many highlighting that they would be more likely to report abuse if there was physical injury or immediate risk of harm, or if there was risk of harm to others.

“Probably whether it was physical or not. I feel like if I was physically abused, I would be more likely to report it.”

Responses also indicated that the likelihood of reporting abuse to the police was dependent on their level of confidence and their perception of the police and the wider criminal justice system. Young people reported that mistrust of the police and previous negative experiences of reporting, whether their own or those of people they know, could prevent them from reporting.

“I do not trust the police after witnessing friends reporting abuse.”

Voices Unheard says...

It is important to recognise that LGBTQ+ young people are facing a ‘double barrier’ to seeking help and support when we are experiencing domestic abuse. We have the same barriers to accessing a service as the rest of our peers, but also have the added fear and anxiety that services will not understand LGBTQ+ experiences, concerns about coming out, and fear of receiving homophobic, biphobic and or transphobic responses.

42. n=25

43. n=15

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this report and the collective views of LGBTQ+ young people, staff, and volunteers involved in the Voices Unheard Project.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

- ➔ The Scottish Government must increase representation of LGBTQ+ survivors in the Equally Safe refresh, including targeted actions to raise awareness and address gaps in service provision within the Equally Safe Delivery Plan.
- ➔ Fund specialist domestic abuse services to respond to LGBTQ+ survivors, particularly those who face additional barriers to accessing support, such as gay, bi, and trans men, and non-binary people. This should be provided in addition to funding for women's services, rather than in place of.
- ➔ Develop legislation and social policy to address the specific dynamics, impacts, and risks of family-based abuse in Scotland, similar to those in place to respond to domestic abuse from partners or ex-partners.
- ➔ Develop inclusive services to respond to family-based abuse and honour-based abuse, including appropriate risk assessment, safety planning, refuge provision, and advocacy services.
- ➔ Include LGBTQ+ people with lived experience of domestic abuse and / or family based in the development of government policy, strategic planning, and legislation.
- ➔ Raise awareness of LGBTQ+ people's experiences of domestic abuse through public campaigns and targeted messaging.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICE SCOTLAND

- ➔ Police Scotland must raise awareness of LGBTQ+ experiences of domestic abuse and other forms of violence through targeted public campaigns and messaging.
- ➔ Take steps to improve relations with the LGBTQ+ community, to build trust, and encourage LGBTQ+ people to report domestic abuse and other crime experienced.
- ➔ Provide LGBTQ+ Domestic Abuse training to all public facing police staff including Domestic Abuse Liaison Officers.
- ➔ Provide clear information for survivors, outlining what happens when a report is made, how they will be kept up to date with the case as it progresses, and any additional support available.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- ➔ Local Authorities must ensure that LGBTQ+ people can access specialist support when they experience domestic abuse, including safe accommodation, Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates (IDAAs), Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), and court advocacy services. Gender inclusive service provision should be provided in addition to women's services; rather than in place of them.
- ➔ Map service provision within Local Authority areas and develop domestic abuse support pathways to respond LGBTQ+ young people, particularly gay and bi men, and trans and non-binary people.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND

PREVENTION WORKERS

- ➔ Education and prevention workers must participate in training and learning to ensure they are knowledgeable and feel confident discussing LGBTQ+ identities and issues.
- ➔ Include LGBTQ+ experiences of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence in domestic abuse/ GBV education and primary prevention.
- ➔ Develop targeted resources for LGBTQ+ young people that demonstrate healthy, as well as unhealthy or abusive behaviour in relationships.
- ➔ Develop resources to support young people to recognise domestic abuse, and guidance on how to support a friend who is being abused.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DOMESTIC ABUSE

SERVICE PROVIDERS

- ➔ Domestic abuse service providers should seek to provide inclusive services for LGBTQ+ survivors, children, and young people who experience domestic abuse.
- ➔ Offer clarity about what support services offer to LGBTQ+ people, with specific information for young people.
- ➔ Provide clear examples of LGBTQ+ domestic abuse in case studies, stories on websites, in literature, and promotional materials.
- ➔ Ensure staff receive training on LGBTQ+ experiences of domestic abuse and other forms of GBV.
- ➔ Make links and develop referral routes with local and/ or national LGBTQ+ organisations and services.
- ➔ Consult with LGBTQ+ people with lived experience of domestic abuse and GBV to inform development of organisational policy and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- ➔ Further research is needed to better understand the specific dynamics of domestic abuse experienced by LGBTQ+ young people, and to identify support needs of young LGBTQ+ survivors.
- ➔ Map service provision for LGBTQ+ survivors across Scotland to identify gaps and inform development of support pathways, with particular focus on young people; gay, bi and trans men; and non-binary people.
- ➔ Research is needed on LGBTQ+ young people's experiences and the impact of family-based abuse, including links to honour-based abuse.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU VOICES UNHEARD

LGBT Youth Scotland would like to thank the young people from the Voices Unheard Project who dedicated their time to designing and delivering this peer consultation. They have shown true courage in sharing their own experiences and insights as LGBTQ+ young people, or as survivors.

Max McDonald Quentin Wallace
Shaun Horne A. Winter
Levi Richards Orla

And one young person who wishes to remain anonymous.

The young people currently engaged in Voices Unheard would also like to acknowledge and thank everyone who has been involved in the project over the last 14 years. We are proud to continue the work you started.

THANK YOU TO OUR CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

Voices Unheard would like to thank the LGBTQ+ young people from across Scotland who responded to our consultation and shared their thoughts, reflections, and personal stories of domestic abuse and family-based abuse.

We commend your bravery and resilience, and we thank you for supporting our mission to raise awareness and ensure LGBTQ+ young people have access to better support, information, and resources in the future.

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

We would like to thank our team of volunteers, Cait, Emma and Jay, who have supported Voices Unheard over the last year.

THANK YOU SUPPORTERS

Voices Unheard and LGBT Youth Scotland would like to thank the domestic abuse and gender-based violence professionals who supported development of the consultation.

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“LGBT relationship are so different to straight ones so unhealthy patterns appear differently, it’s just not the same and there’s not enough (known) about the difference.”

“When I told one of my (at the time) teachers I had been raped, they told me I was being dramatic and that if I wanted to be a boy (I had just came out as trans) I couldn’t consider it rape because ‘only girls get raped’.”

“No-one acted. If anything, I was told it couldn’t be that bad or I should forgive them because they are my parents.”

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