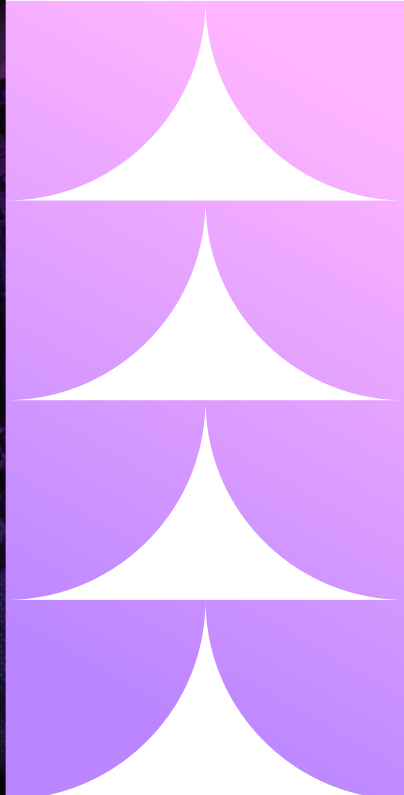


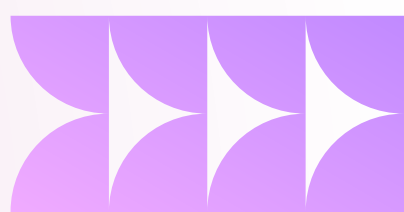


Adolescent Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women & Girls (TFVAWG):

A Practice Framework for Early Detection and Response

Project summary

This SPRITE+ RISE-funded project developed an evidence-informed practice framework to support earlier identification and response to adolescent technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG). Drawing on a rapid evidence review and interviews with practitioners across multiple sectors, the project identifies how online harms emerge and escalate, where opportunities for intervention are missed, and actions that can help prevent harm from becoming embedded.



Introduction

TFVAWG affecting young people often begins with behaviours that appear commonplace or are dismissed as part of everyday digital life. Repeated requests for intimate images, online monitoring, controlling behaviours, and peer abuse can become normalised, making it difficult for professionals and young people to recognise when harm is escalating. As a result, opportunities for early intervention are frequently missed.

This project brings together research evidence and practitioner expertise to understand how adolescent TFVAWG develops over time and support earlier, more effective responses across policing, education, healthcare, safeguarding, and specialist services.

Methodology

The project combined two complementary strands of research:

A rapid evidence review of 36 UK-based documents (22 peer-reviewed research articles & 12 reports/guidance documents) identified evidence on early signs, escalation pathways, drivers of harm, missed opportunities, and effective interventions for adolescent TFVAWG.

Evidence was analysed to identify:

- › Early signs and indicators
- › Key drivers of abuse
- › Escalation pathways
- › Missed opportunities for intervention
- › Suggested interventions and examples of good practice
- › Gaps in knowledge across the literature

10 semi-structured interviews with practitioners across charities, education, healthcare, local government, & policing discussed experiences of identifying, responding to, and preventing online harms affecting young people.

The interviews were analysed thematically, and topics included:

- › The nature of online harm in practice
- › Identification of harmful behaviours
- › Early warning signs and escalation
- › Current responses and interventions
- › Barriers and challenges to effective practice
- › Opportunities to improve early identification and response



Key thematic findings

Three themes were dominant across the rapid evidence review and interviews:

1. Abuse Hidden Behind Normality:

Young people often perceive harmful online and relationship behaviours as normal, caring, or expected, making abuse difficult to recognise until it escalates. Adults may also see these behaviours as less risky than offline behaviours and not define them as abuse, hindering intervention.

2. Institutional and System Failures:

Early intervention is hindered by gaps in safeguarding systems, inconsistent responses, high referral thresholds, limited specialist support, and adults seeing online behaviours as less risky. Few interventions are available for young people displaying harmful behaviours, limiting opportunities to prevent escalation.

3. Prevention Through Education and Culture Change:

Effective, positive prevention centres on healthy relationship education, digital literacy, parent engagement, and wider cultural change. To be most effective, these interventions should begin at a young age and be woven throughout a young person's education.



Almost all of these behaviours start and escalate online, well before any in person behaviours come up.



He won't stop texting me, but they're nice texts.



Technology-facilitated abuse, being online is just an extra layer... it just amplifies the fear.



The time when we find out about online harms is normally at the point where something has drastically gone wrong.



Young people just expect to be treated that way. It is the norm.

Practical Implications and Key Recommendations

1. Recognise harmful behaviours earlier

Many harmful online behaviours are viewed by young people as normal, caring, or expected. Adults may also see harmful online behaviours as less risky than offline ones. Professionals, parents, and schools should be supported to recognise early warning signs such as persistent contact, monitoring, password sharing, emotional manipulation, and image-based abuse before harm escalates.

Key takeaway: Early intervention should focus on emerging patterns rather than waiting for severe incidents or criminal thresholds to be reached. Teenage relationship abuse also needs to be better defined to aid intervention.

2. Invest in education, digital literacy, and healthy relationships

The evidence review and interviews consistently highlighted the importance of prevention. Young people, parents, and professionals need ongoing support to understand online risks, healthy relationships, consent, coercive control, and technology-facilitated abuse. Restriction, punishment, or crisis intervention alone are unlikely to be sufficient.

Key takeaway: Digital literacy, healthy relationship education, and parent engagement should be core components of early intervention. Young people should also have trusted disclosure pathways, as online abuse may remain hidden until disclosure.

3. Strengthen safeguarding and multi-agency responses

Practitioners described barriers including inconsistent recognition of risk, high thresholds for support, limited specialist provision, and few behaviour-change interventions for young people displaying harmful behaviours. Earlier recognition and accessible interventions for both victim-survivors and young people displaying harmful behaviours may help prevent abuse from escalating.

Key takeaway: Teenage relationship abuse should be recognised as a distinct safeguarding issue affecting young people, with clear pathways for early intervention and support for both victim-survivors and young people displaying harmful behaviours.

Further Information

This fact sheet has been produced as part of ongoing research exploring the escalation of technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG) among adolescents. This project is funded by RISE (ESRC grant reference UKRI4192)

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