



THE RISE REPORT

**Supporting young women facing
abuse in their intimate relationships**

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Foreword

I had the privilege of joining Young Women Rise in May 2021, when YWCA Scotland brought together 10 of us to research young women's understanding of domestic abuse and relationships. As someone with a passion for intersectional feminism, but little experience applying it, it was an amazing opportunity. It allowed me to learn about feminist research and make a meaningful impact on an issue that has touched my, and many of my peers', lives. The team at YWCA involved us from start to finish, from drafting the initial survey to analysing the results to nailing down the campaign branding. Our members have presented to Women's Aid, taken over the YWCA Instagram, and (as you can see) contributed to this final report.

Young Women Rise has given me more than a bit of research experience. It *empowered* me as a young woman. It reminded me that my voice and experiences matter *now*, and that young people *can* make a difference on a national scale. Relationships and abuse can feel like topics reserved for the "grown-ups", which couldn't be farther from the truth. Young Women Rise created a crucial space that uplifts young voices, prioritises our wellbeing, and works to ensure young women everywhere are heard and supported.

Our name was a suggestion by one of our members, Olivia. She mentioned that on her wall was a poem by Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise":

*... Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes spring high,
Still I'll rise. ...*



Foreword

Maya Angelou's words spoke against oppression (notably as a Black woman in America) and professed her persisting, unwavering strength. Despite having very different backgrounds, we found ourselves connected by her ideas of empowerment, perseverance, and active hope. Those of us who were survivors of domestic abuse found courage in her words. All of us were inspired by a vision of young women rising to create a better future for all.

We are just a small group representing the many ready to rise for social, feminist justice. It is our hope that by lending our voices this past year, we can ignite change; whether it's improved education in schools or greater inclusivity and accessibility in support services, there's a lot that we can do to create a safer Scotland. Now, with the hope that young voices remain integral to future work, we pass the torch onto you.

Monique Raranga - Young Women Rise Member



1. Rise National Research

This report details the findings of a national research project that investigates young women's experiences and understanding of unhealthy relationships, domestic abuse and access to support.

Scottish Women's Aid commissioned this work on behalf of the Women's Aid network, to inform accessible service development – so that Women's Aid are better able to welcome all young women who require support.

YWCA Scotland carried out this research alongside Young Women Rise, an advisory group consisting of 10 young women from across Scotland, some of whom have lived experience of unhealthy relationships.

Scottish Women's Aid and YWCA Scotland aim to use the findings of the research to better understand young women's needs from support services. Women's Aid will use the evidence from this research to develop services that better meet the needs of young women dealing with unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse.

2. Our Approach

This project was designed with **Young Women Rise**, a research design and campaign team, who were recruited through social media and Scottish Women's Aid outreach. The group met online, between June 2021 and June 2022. They supported the creation of the survey, tested the questions, supported the analysis of the data and designed the session plans for group discussions. They have supported in the presentation of preliminary findings to working groups within Women's Aid and signed off on briefing papers about the findings of this research to policy teams at the Scottish Government. They were compensated for their time, have supported this project throughout a tumultuous year, and this project would not have been possible without them.

The survey ran for three months between July-October 2021, and was promoted primarily through social media.

Survey responses were analysed through a thematic approach. We used the analysis to create session plans for group discussions, exploring certain themes in more depth and to reach groups who were not heavily represented in the survey.

Four group discussions took place in March and April 2022. These took place online and in person and were facilitated by YWCA Scotland. Data from the group discussions was analysed and presented to Young Women Rise who then supported the creation of this report structure.

Reflections from Young Women Rise

“ It was so beneficial to work on this project from beginning to end to gain an insight on how research projects come together and lead to change. This project allowed us to learn new skills and gain knowledge of the complexities of unhealthy relationships that young people experience which we will all take forward both professionally and within our personal lives - ensuring to raise awareness. ”

Ann-Marie Miles- Young Women Rise Member

“ A group of us helped analyse and draw main ideas from the initial survey responses. I absolutely loved being involved in this process - seeing the opinions and experiences of hundreds of young people across Scotland was inspiring and, at times, sobering. Working with YWCA Scotland on this made a lot of us feel valued as young people who aren't often involved in these discussions. ”

Monique Raranga- Young Women Rise Member

3. What we found

- Over a third (36%) of young women had been in an intimate relationship with someone who was abusive or harmed them physically or emotionally and nearly three quarters knew someone who had.
- Young women understand what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like, but this learning does not happen at school; not one respondent felt supported to learn about relationships at school; learning about relationships happens through their own experiences and through sourcing information on social media.
- Young women understand the term domestic abuse, however there are some misconceptions about who is affected.
- The kind of support young women would seek if they were experiencing an unhealthy relationship or domestic abuse, depended on how 'serious' the abuse or unhealthy relationship was. It was clear that they would need validation that what they were experiencing was unhealthy and that they were entitled to support.
- Talking, emotional and therapeutic supports are the most important kinds of support to young women, who described that these should feel calm, patient, empathetic and non-judgmental.
- Evidence that services understand young women's life experience was really important. For example, race, LGBTQ+ relationships and gender identity. Respondents understood that they may not always be able to be supported by someone who shared their life experiences, but they would like to see evidence that workers had done training in anti-racism and understood LGBTQ+ experiences.
- Young women felt they needed to know what kinds of support are available to them, and what steps to expect when they make contact, before reaching out to a service.
- Campaign materials or information about a service should be representative; young women want to see themselves reflected in materials about the supports available to them. For example, showing people in LGBTQ+ relationships, people who are gender non-conforming, and young people of colour.
- Women's Aid needs to create services specifically to meet the needs of young women; and ensure young people in local areas are involved in the development of these services.
- There is a need for more and better education about unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse which is preventative and starts early in formal education settings.

- Services should have adequate funding and resources. Respondents understood that services are stretched and that many young people go without the support they need, in some cases this would put respondents off reaching out for support, because of the perception that others may need it more.
- Young women say that statutory services, for example; police and the justice system, are currently not accessible or supportive of them, and that there needed to be wider systemic changes to support young people dealing with abuse and unhealthy relationships.

4. Who took part

Young Women Rise advocated for the inclusion of all self-identifying young women, including trans women, and the inclusion of non-binary young people in this research. It was extremely important to the advisory group that these voices and experiences were reflected in this research. We did not collect information about gender identity as part of this study; but we did include LGBTQ+ young women and non-binary young people in this research. We refer to participants as young women throughout this report, while acknowledging that not all participants may identify as such. Quotes have remained anonymous throughout to protect participants.

A total of **479 participants** engaged with this research from across Scotland.

The survey

A national survey ran from August-October 2021, and gathered 454 complete responses, with representation from 31 local authorities:

- With Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Scottish Borders being the most heavily represented, each with 11% of respondents living there, 8% of respondents were in East Dunbartonshire, 7% in Shetland, 6% in Dumfries and Galloway and 4% in Midlothian.
- Most respondents were aged 19-25 (56%), with just over a quarter (26%) aged 16-18, the rest were aged 12-15.
- Over half identified as heterosexual (60%), 18% as bisexual, and 4% as lesbian.
- Just under a fifth (19%) had a disability or long-term condition.

- 82% of respondents were white Scottish, 7% were white British, the rest were African, African Scottish or African British (1%), Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (3%). Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British (1%), Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British (1%), Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British (1%), Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British (1%).
- Over two thirds of respondents (69%) said they belonged to no specific religion, 16% were Roman Catholic, 5% were Church of Scotland and 2% were Muslim.

Group Discussions

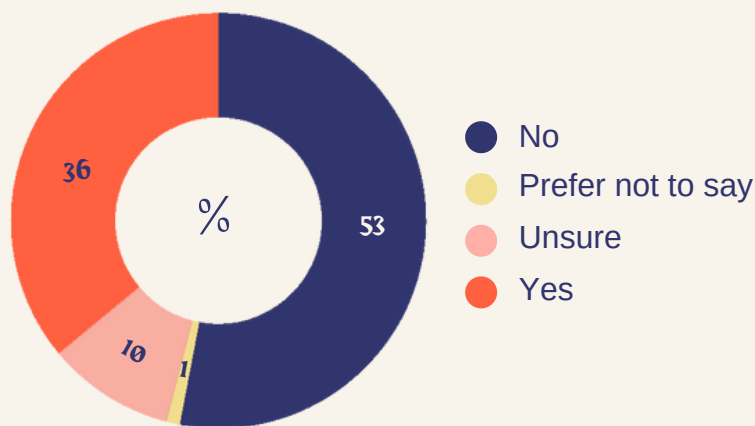
Four group discussions were held, both online and in person across March and April 2022 with a total of 25 participants.

Of these participants:

- 40% were aged 16-18, 24% were aged 12-15 and the rest were 19-25.
- Nearly a third (32%) identified as heterosexual, nearly a quarter (24%) as bisexual and the rest identifying as lesbian (8%), queer (8%), pansexual (4%) and asexual (4%). A fifth (20%) preferred not to comment.
- 60% of participants were white Scottish, and 16% were African, African Scottish or African British.
- Twelve local authorities were represented in the group discussions, with a quarter (25%) located in Edinburgh, a fifth (20%) in Dundee, and 12% in West Lothian.
- Over a third (36%) of participants had a disability or long term condition.

5. Understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse

Have you been in or are you in what you would describe as an intimate relationship with someone who was abusive or harmed you physically or emotionally?



Over a third (36%) of young women had been in an intimate relationship with someone who was abusive or harmed them physically or emotionally. 10% were unsure.

Almost three quarters (74%) knew someone who had been in an intimate relationship with someone who was abusive or harmed them physically or emotionally.

We asked what participants to describe what a healthy and unhealthy relationship meant to them. These were the most common words used:



When describing a healthy relationship, people also talked about maintaining a sense of self and feeling free to have a life outside of the relationship.

“ I would describe a healthy relationship as being with someone that you can grow with, a person that brings out the best in you. Someone that you can trust, is loving and gentle and respects you. They bring joy to your life. ”



- “ *Being in an unhealthy relationship means... not being able to be your authentic self. Constantly having to make sure you are not over-stepping or crossing some invisible line and making sure you fit into exactly how they think you should be.* ”
- “ *A lot of the time you don't know you are in an unhealthy relationship until you are out of it or until you see an example of what a healthy relationship should be, then you have to go through a process of learning then what you are going to do about it. That can be difficult, especially if you don't have examples in your normal life of what a healthy relationship should look like.* ”
- “ *If you feel like you can't talk about it, and then that there isn't anyone to talk to, and feeling isolated, are probably signs you are in an unhealthy relationship.* ”

Respondents were also specifically asked about their understanding of Domestic Abuse. **Almost all (91%)** said they understood what was meant by the term, with the most common descriptions being **manipulative, controlling, violent and abusive**; similar to the words used when describing an unhealthy relationship.

There was variation in understanding of whether Domestic Abuse was a pattern of behaviour or a one off. Generally, there was agreement among respondents that the term encompasses different kinds of abuse, including emotional, financial and sexual abuse, not just physical.

While most respondents understood the term domestic abuse, **there were misconceptions about who domestic abuse can affect.** They described how domestic abuse is only when you live with your abuser, or that it can be any kind of abuse that happens in the home, or that perpetrators could be family members. Some also suggested domestic abuse happens when a couple has children or are married, that domestic abuse did not happen within young people's relationships.

I think you have to be living together for it to be domestic abuse, I think that's the difference between abuse and domestic abuse.

In the group discussions, participants described how unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse differ. Generally, it was agreed that in an unhealthy relationship, both partners could be displaying 'toxic' or harmful behaviours to each other, but that within domestic abuse, one partner harmed the other.

If there's a narrative that unhealthy isn't the same as abuse then women may not reach out to get that help. It's important to highlight the differences, but also that it's okay to get help not matter which one you are going through.

Learning about unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse

82% felt they would recognise an unhealthy relationship if they or someone they knew was in one.

57% of respondents did not learn about unhealthy relationships or domestic abuse in school.

School

Not one participant described having felt well supported to learn about relationships at school. Of those that did learn about unhealthy relationships or domestic abuse at school, they said the coverage was brief, limited or not very useful.

Some described one-off lessons about consent, but that this was not in depth or linked to relationships. Others said that physical abuse or 'severe' abuse was discussed at school, but that they wished they had been taught about emotional abuse or toxic behaviours as this would have helped them to recognise signs in their own relationships or the relationships of their friends earlier.

“I didn't ever learn about it in school apart from them talking about physical violence in a relationship. Generally, there's almost nothing mainstream that discusses teenage abusive relationships or where to get support.”

“We learned we could say no, but we were never taught what to do if they ignored that. We could get free condoms and that was it... there was a lot missing.”

A few did describe having lessons about unhealthy relationships taught by an external organisation. They said these were helpful to an extent but that they were 'not taken seriously' by classmates. A few young people described how lessons not inclusive of LGBTQ+ experiences and were from a heterosexual/straight lens, and they did not feel they could relate to them.

Social Media

The survey specifically asked about social media's influences on understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships.

There was an even split between those who thought it influenced their understanding positively (30%) and negatively (31%), with the qualitative comments highlighting the complexity of social media's influence on building understanding about unhealthy and healthy relationships.

Many talked of social media's role in educating about relationships. They discussed learning about things like gaslighting, coercive control, emotional abuse and 'red flags' through social media. They also talked of learning about relationship 'green flags'; signs of a healthy relationship.

Many also said that it sets unrealistic expectations and ideas for healthy relationships; that it can glamourise unhealthy relationships and that social media content only shows the 'good parts' of relationships. Overall, people felt social media provided an important resource, making up for education missing from formal settings, but that it can also be damaging.

“ I do believe having a public platform where women can see what are red flags... and give them a better understanding of what to accept in their relationship. On the other hand, Instagram can show all the good, exciting, romantic parts of relationship which is very likely not to be a true reflection of any relationship. ”

In the group discussions, some participants talked about seeking out information or trying to learn about unhealthy relationships because they were worried about a friend or themselves, and that it was through their own independent research that they learned the most about unhealthy relationships.

Summary

A troubling amount of young women (36%) who responded to the survey had experienced an unhealthy relationship or domestic abuse in their own relationships. Nearly three quarters knew someone who had. Respondents really understood what healthy and unhealthy relationships might feel or look like; but this learning was not through formal education settings.

The term domestic abuse was understood, but there were some misconceptions about what domestic abuse actually looks like within an intimate relationship; which may influence young people's ability to identify whether they are experiencing abuse. Social media was used for support and resources for learning but respondents felt it could also be damaging to rely on social media for learning about unhealthy relationships.

They felt that their education at school was lacking, and focussed on physical abuse and heterosexual relationships, and called for better education about relationships in formal settings.

6. Seeking support with an unhealthy relationship or domestic abuse

Only 8% of survey respondents said support services and resources for unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse across Scotland were well catered to the needs of young women, 57% of respondents said they were somewhat catered to their needs.

Respondents observed that support services were more catered to women with children, or in co-habiting relationships. They often felt like services might not meet their needs, or be 'for them'. Many described that they were not sure if support services would support them if they were not in a heterosexual/straight relationship.



There needs to be more on offer for young women. There needs to be much more conversation and awareness in schools particularly and parents also desperately need to be educated.



The kind of support respondents would seek if they were experiencing an unhealthy relationship or domestic abuse, depended on how 'serious' the abuse or unhealthy relationship was.

This frequently came up as a reason that young women would struggle to reach out for support.

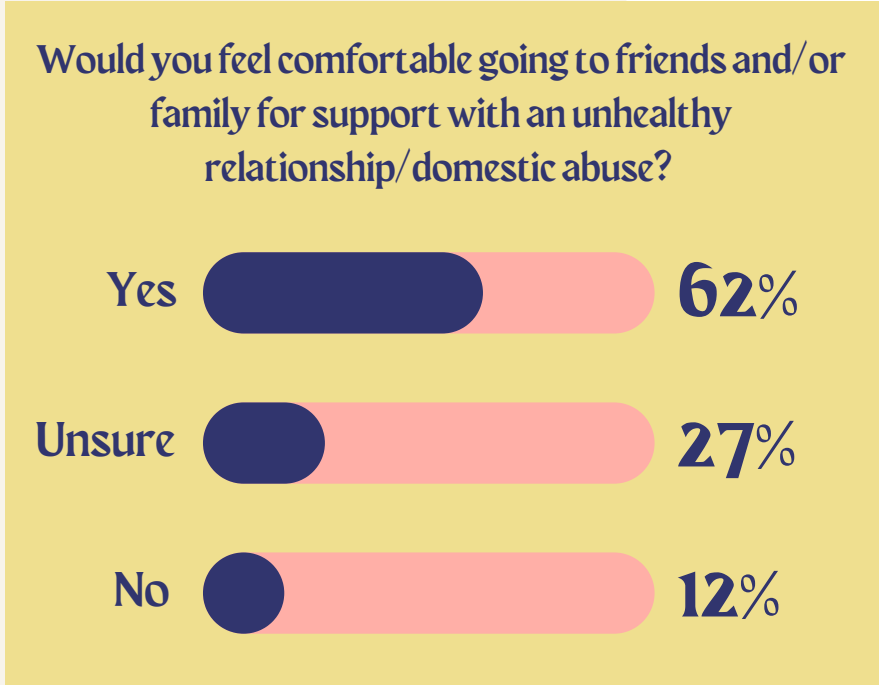


I'd feel like my problems weren't valid stood next to a 40-year-old mum with two kids and a story much worse than mine.



A further barrier was fear of escalation, for example that they would have to make decisions about their relationship or have interventions from other services like the police, if they reached out for support.

“ I’ve never seen any of [Women’s Aid’s] stuff, not on social media, or at university, or places around my city, or in clubs and bars. I’d also worry that interaction with them would only escalate a situation rather providing a way out. Or an accessible way for those without transport, or who can’t change location for university, or who have a fear of strangers or who can’t wait till space become available. ”



When we explored this in the comments and in group discussions, young women said that they would most likely go to a trusted adult, for example a parent, teacher, or youth worker first, before seeking support from other services. It seems that young people need validation that what they are experiencing is unhealthy or abusive, and that they are deserving of support before reaching out.

What kind of support do young women want?



We explored what kind of support young women would like to receive from a service if they were dealing with an unhealthy relationship or domestic abuse.

I would like someone to listen to me and ask how I want be supported rather than someone deciding for me what support I need.

The world is not black and white; the right thing doesn't have a tidy arrow pointing to it. The right thing for one person isn't right for another, it's important to know that they have different options.

Many participants described that one kind of support does not fit every person or situation, and that support services should be able to offer support for each individual's circumstances and needs.

Talking, emotional and therapeutic supports were most frequently discussed as the most important, with descriptions of how this support should feel, most commonly; **calm, patient, empathetic and non-judgmental**. When connecting with a service, having one point of contact, and the opportunity to have regular check-ins were important too so that there is no need to repeat stories or build support relationships with new workers. Respondents described needing support with handling and understanding trauma within emotional and therapeutic supports too.

“ I would like to receive emotional support on a regular basis, be checked in on even when I haven't necessarily reached out. I think it's hard for people to make the first move and ask for help. ”

Practical support such as financial support was also discussed. Many young women suggested that to leave an unhealthy or abusive relationship, financial support would be needed. Many discussed the importance of having somewhere safe to go, both for support sessions and as refuge to leave an abusive relationship. They felt this needed to be warm and welcoming.

Access to healthcare, navigating police support and social work support was also described, but that they would need to be supported to do this, either through a support worker or advocate. A few people said they wouldn't contact the police or social work, because of a lack of trust due to their own bad experiences, or perceptions of these services.

“ Support to allow me to make my own informed choices, rather than more things being forced upon me or people giving their own opinions. Support to work through the trauma and move on to build positive relationships in the future. Practical support like sexual health, financial issues, mental health support. ”

Having access to support workers that are relatable to young women's life experience was really important

“ You should be able to choose to speak with someone who reflects your identity; race, or ethnicity, or gender identity or sexuality. ”

Some also said that even if a support worker was not relatable to them through their own direct life experience, they would like to see evidence that workers had done training in anti-racism and understood LGBTQ+ experiences.

Signposting, referral and information about other support services were mentioned too. Young women want to be given options about what other services are available to them, and what they can expect from these services. Choice was key here, and having different options explored and explained.

Group support was another option described as being potentially helpful as this would help them to feel less alone, and to feel validated in their experiences, also to support building relationships with others. Anonymity and confidentiality would be important in group support, a few said that they would only agree to group support if they didn't know the other young people involved.

“ Group support would need to be really well facilitated and you need to build up the trust. Once you have built up the trust, it would be valuable. But trust needs to happen first. ”

Accessing **timely support** was something respondents felt was really important. They described experiences of being on waiting lists for other services, like mental health services, and how this had been really difficult.

Text services, web chats and anonymous phone lines were suggestions for accessible supports that would work for young people. These services would offer them a chance to have their feelings validated and to talk about their experiences without necessarily committing to more involved support.

What do young women need to know about a service before accessing it?

In the group discussions we explored what information was needed for young people to feel comfortable reaching out for support. Most importantly, respondents felt they would need to know what kinds of support would be available to them, and what steps to expect when they make contact.

Campaign materials or information about a service should be representative; young people want to see themselves reflected in materials about the supports available to them. For example, showing people in LGBTQ relationships, people who are gender non-conforming, and young people of colour.

Respondents would also want to know that services or supports had been designed or had input from other young people.

“ I'd want to see diversity in their campaigns, people with different races and genders and body sizes but even with that, I would still be suspicious, I'd want to see if they were working with other organisations that have a track record of working with marginalised groups. Then I would feel more confident. ”

“ Younger people should be running the service or have input with how it's run... to make sure that it's the way it should be. Older people don't always know what we need. ”

“ Seeing younger faces puts me at ease... ”

Where do young women look for support?

Real world

Posters, flyers and stickers in places that young people access like gyms, café's, student unions, bars and community spaces and schools. Respondents described the *'Ask for Angela'* campaign as successful and suggested Women's Aid could learn from this.

Online

Instagram (76%), SnapChat (63%) and TikTok (62%) were survey respondents most used social media platforms. They suggested reels on Instagram, or easily sharable content as the most likely way they would come across a service on social media.

Summary

Young women know what they want from a support service; emotional support, help with signposting and to have choices about what support they receive; they want to feel understood by workers and to be supported by people they relate to; they want to understand what is on offer from different services and what to expect when they contact a service. They understand the importance of financial support, refuge, and safe spaces, advocacy and legal support.

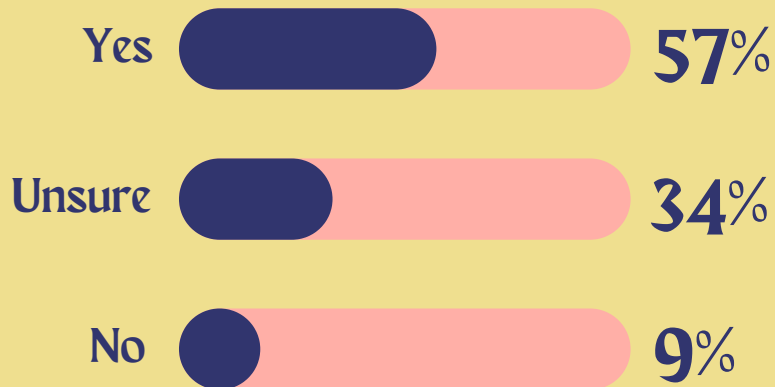
It seems that young women need validation that what they are experiencing is unhealthy or abusive, and that they are deserving of support before reaching out. This speaks to the need for better education about relationships in formal education settings.

7. Perceptions of Women's Aid

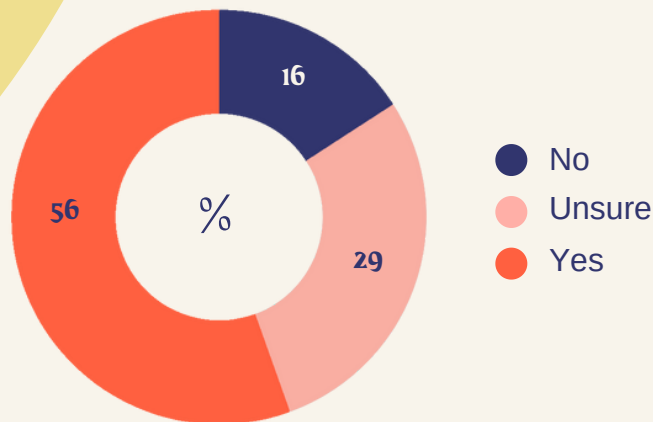
Nearly two thirds (62%) of respondents knew who Women's Aid were, but 69% did not know where their local Women's Aid was or how to get in touch with them.

This research investigated how young women felt about Women's Aid, so that services could evolve to better meet their needs.

Would you go to Women's Aid for support if you were in an unhealthy relationship / domestic abuse?



Would you be more likely to access Women's Aid services if they had some specifically for your age group?



Comments within the survey showed that many young women did understand what support Women's Aid provided, it is likely that survey respondents had interacted with Women's Aid previously as the survey was promoted through Women's Aid networks.

However, when exploring knowledge of Women's Aid services in group discussions, **most participants were not aware of what kinds of support were available through Women's Aid.** Based on their perceptions and the name of the service, participants thought that Women's Aid was for older women, women who were in cohabiting relationships or were married, a few also explicitly said they thought women's aid was a 'sex exclusive' service, meaning not inclusive of trans women or non-binary people. Most who described their perceptions of Women's Aid also discussed the word 'aid', that it suggested that Women's Aid was a crisis service, only supporting people in 'severe' or 'really bad' abusive relationships.

“I have heard of them that being said I don't actually know what they do and never really looked into it as I thought I would be excluded since I'm non-binary.”

“There is a stereotypical image I get in my head of a 30+ year old woman getting away from an abusive husband, if you are say a 15 year old non-binary kid who is in an abusive relationship at school then a not great home environment it doesn't come to mind to contact a women's charity.”

Within the survey responses, there were descriptions about why they would not go to Women's Aid for support. Some respondents described feeling shame or stigma of seeking support from Women's Aid and suggested they would prefer to talk to someone they trusted or already knew. Some said that they would be scared that if they reached out, they would have to make decisions about their situations or escalate the support they were receiving. A few said they would not go because they did not feel their local Women's Aid was accessible, either through location or contact method.

**40% of young women
would feel more comfortable seeking
support from Women's Aid specifically, if
they had a support service for young women.**

For this group, they said they would feel safer and more comfortable sharing experiences with people of a similar age, and that it would be easier to relate to a service that had been developed to support their age group.

“ I feel like younger women might feel as though their relationships are not as "serious" as older relationships, and therefore the abuse would not be taken as seriously - especially for emotional abuse. Also, I think it's important for people to tailor help depending on whether it's one of the first relationships someone has had as this could affect them in different ways. ”

“ There needs to be a more modern, radical, educated and accessible service for young women... ”

Summary

Although nearly two thirds of survey respondents knew who Women's Aid were, there was a lack of understanding of the services Women's Aid provided, and how young women could be supported. The majority of respondents to the survey would go to Women's Aid if they needed support, however they would be more likely to reach out if there were services specifically designed for young women.

YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement
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8. The Bigger Picture

The survey offered space for respondents to leave final comments. Most frequently, respondents described what needs to change within services, for young women and in general to tackle unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse. We expanded on this in group discussions and asked participants to think big; about what needed to change in society to tackle unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse.

Education

There is a need for more and better education about unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse which is preventative and starts early in formal education settings.

- “ I know support services are trying to create space for young women but I don't think they're well known about and I don't think effort is made to teach young people about healthy relationships and encourage critical thinking in relationships. ”**
- “ Start young! You can be a baby to learn about consent, like that it's okay to say no to being hugged... kids are never too young to know how they should be treated, bring them up confident. ”**
- “ If you are old enough to ask questions you can be taught, it helps you to learn younger because you feel more comfortable talking about it, if you grow up with it it's more normal. ”**
- “ These issues should it be brought into curriculum! If teachers can't teach, third party organisations should go in to have workshops... bystander training should be available for everyone. ”**
- “ I think we need to be investing more time in teaching young people how to navigate emotionally difficult and complex situations so they have the resources and capacity to be able to articulate when stuff that isn't okay is happening. ”**
- “ I think the problem with our PSE classes is that they're always just behind what we really need, the SQA know how much potential PSE classes have and that they need to be utilised when addressing issues like this, but they don't listen... ”**

“ We need to be educating boys on ‘lad culture’ and the connotations it has to abuse... we have never talked about systemic problems, or toxic masculinity...”

“ We need lessons on the roots of abuse, patriarchy, personal insecurities, and its different forms, physical, emotional, financial and where to access the support.”

Funding and resources

Comments described the need for more funding and resources for services, young people understood that services are stretched and that there is not enough available support to reach the young women who need it. This can be a barrier to accessing support because they view their situation as not ‘serious’ enough to seek support; taking vital services away from those who are more ‘in need’. If there was more funding and resources available to tackle unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse young women would want to see:

- Relationship counsellors in schools
- More widely accessible services
- More public services training
- Reduced waiting times for mental health support
- Changes in the justice system so it better supports young women dealing with domestic abuse

Changes within services

Comments centred around the need for more awareness about services and more accessible and intersectional services.

There needs to be more awareness raising of unhealthy relationships in all kinds of relationships and different types of abuse, some described how currently the focus of campaigns are on older cohabiting couples.

There were comments about how public services like the police, social work and formal education have a long way to go to be fully supportive of young women and that there needed to be wider systemic changes to support those dealing with abuse and unhealthy relationships.

9. Recommendations

This research highlighted many ways that services could be more supportive, accessible and inclusive. It showed the wider changes needed to support young women to deal with unhealthy relationships, and to educate young people about relationships and how to get support. Based on the findings of this research, Young Women Rise and YWCA Scotland suggest the following recommendations for support services to consider:

- Young women should be involved in the development of services; whether through consultation, participation or design. Services should reflect the needs of young people in the local area.
- Services should aim to have workers that are representative of their local community, or they should undergo training to ensure they understand the life experiences of the young women they are supporting. This representation and training should be made explicit in the descriptions of the supports available on websites and promotional materials.
- Support services should be inclusive of all self-identifying young women, including trans women, and non-binary young people comfortable in women centred spaces.
- Supports available and what to expect should be clearly explained in any promotional materials. For example, who they will talk to, what type of support is offered, confidentiality and information relating to escalation, Who support is for should also be explained clearly, for example, non-binary young people or self-identifying young women including trans women.
- Campaigns and services should represent young people from diverse backgrounds, who are gender non-conforming and within LGBTQ relationships.
- Awareness raising campaigns about unhealthy relationships, domestic abuse and support services should be targeted at trusted adults, such as parents, teachers your youth work professionals, as well as young women themselves.
- Education about domestic abuse and unhealthy relationships should be part of the national curriculum or should be brought into all schools and education settings by external expert organisations, such as Scottish Women's Aid.
- Education should start early and focus on dismantling the root causes of abuse, supporting young people to recognise the signs of unhealthy relationships and supports that are available. They should be expansive and inclusive, ensuring young people with varied experiences are represented and LGBTQ+ relationships are included.

10. Thank you!

Thank you to every young person who took part in this research, and shared honestly and vulnerably, without you this work would not have been possible.

Young Women Rise

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Organisations who supported groups discussions:

LGBT Youth Scotland

Intercultural Youth Scotland

Scottish Youth Parliament

Graphic design and illustration:

Eve Gardiner

Scottish Women's Aid Young Women's Services working group:

who guided and developed this work

YWCA Scotland:

who led this research and supported participation of Young Women Rise

11. Further support and reading

if you are a young person facing abuse or unhealthy behaviour in your own relationship, or if you are concerned about a friend, peer or loved one, please get in touch with our helpline at [0800 027 1234](tel:08000271234) or get in touch via our chat <https://sdafmh-chat.devsoc.org/#/>

Our helpline is here to support anyone experiencing abuse in their relationships, or forced marriage, as well as their family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who support them. We provide a confidential, sensitive service to anyone who calls us.

Here are some other contacts that you might find useful:

Crisis Support Breathing Space

0800 83 85 87 (6pm-2am Monday-Thursday, Friday-Monday 6pm-6am)

Edinburgh Crisis Centre freephone

0808 801 0414 (24 hours), Text 07974429075,
crisis@edinburghcrisiscentre.org.uk

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline freephone

08088 01 0 302 (6pm – midnight everyday)

Samaritans

116 123 (24 hours) - jo@samaritans.org - www.samaritans.org

Saneline

0300 304 7000 everyday 4.30pm – 10.30pm

Here are some other resources that you might find useful:

If you are concerned about a friend you think is experiencing an unhealthy relationship; here is a toolkit that might help you to have a conversation with them about it:

[Oor Fierce Girls Toolkit – Young People](#)

If you would like more information about the research, or to give feedback about this report, please contact rhianna@ywcascotland.org.

12. Appendix - Glossary of terms

Abuse

We refer to abuse within a romantic or intimate relationship. Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, manipulating, threatening, emotional and verbal abuse, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. It doesn't matter how old someone is, what race or ethnicity they are, what class they are, whether or not they are disabled, or whether they have children – anyone can experience abuse.

Intimate or romantic partner

A relationship involving both or either emotional and physical intimacy

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is a broad term which applies to any form of sexual violence, ranging from unwanted touching or kissing to being forced to perform sexual acts.

Service or organisation

In the context of this survey, this would be a service or organisation that supports people who have experienced abuse, harm or sexual assault or violence. A relationship involving both or either emotional and physical intimacy
Sexual assault is a broad term which applies to any form of sexual violence, ranging from unwanted touching or kissing to being forced to perform sexual acts. In the context of this survey, this would be a service or organisation that supports people who have experienced abuse, harm or sexual assault or violence.

Intersectional

Intersectionality is a way of thinking about power, privilege, and oppression that takes into account a person's combination of social identities (like gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and more) rather than considering each of them separately. For example, instead of isolating a woman's oppression based on sexism alone, or a Black person's oppression based on racism alone, or an LGBTQIA person's oppression based on homophobia or transphobia alone, intersectionality looks at how those identities intersect, as in how a bisexual, Latina woman is affected by the overlapping oppressive forces of sexism, racism, and homophobia/biphobia all at once rather than separately.

Intersectionality originates from the work of Black feminist scholars examining the dual forces of race and gender on the lives of Black women, and has since been used to better understand the intersections of many different identities.

To put it simply, intersectionality considers the ways that multiple identities together form a person's experiences of power, privilege, and oppression in any given situation. (<https://www.mykidisgay.com/blog/defining-intersectionality>)