RESEARCH REPORT
'Standing on my own two feet':

Disadvantaged Teenagers, Intimate Partner Violence and Coercive Control

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NSPCC ●

Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report from the University of Bristol and the NSPCC represents the first UK research to focus on disadvantaged young people's experiences of violence and control in their intimate relationships. The study builds on the authors' previous landmark school-based research (Barter et al 2009) which provided a detailed picture of the incidence and impact of teenage partner violence on the lives of young people. However, as this research was undertaken in schools, young people no longer attending mainstream education, such as teenage mothers or pupils who had been permanently excluded, were omitted. In addition, the experiences of some disadvantaged young people, for example young people living in foster or residential care, were not adequately represented. To overcome these limitations, the NSPCC in association with the University of Bristol conducted the current research project focussing specifically on intimate partner violence in the relationships of English *disadvantaged* teenagers.

The Research Project

The aims of this research were to develop a better understanding of the nature and dynamics of violence in vulnerable teenagers' intimate relationships; to examine the impact of physical, emotional and sexual violence on young people's well-being; and to identify appropriate responses. The study set out to explore if some disadvantaged groups experienced greater vulnerability to intimate partner violence than others, and if so, to develop a better understanding regarding the factors that may contribute to this susceptibility. The research aimed to contribute to the development of more appropriate prevention and intervention services for different groups of vulnerable young people.

Methodology

The research involved semi-structured interviews with 82 young people, 44 boys and 38 girls, from a range of agencies and organisations working with disadvantaged young people in the south of England. Young people were aged between 13 and 18 years-old, the majority of participants (80%) were aged 15 years-old or above.

FINDINGS

RECIPIENTS OF TEENAGE INTIMATE VIOLENCE AND CONTROL

Physical Violence

- Over half of the girls from the sample of disadvantaged youth reported that they had been a victim of physical violence in at least one of their partner relationships. In addition, a quarter of disadvantaged girls reported more severe forms of violence. Disadvantaged girls' experiences of severe violence included being: punched in the face, resulting in black eyes or having teeth knocked out, slapped hard across the face, pushed down the stairs, 'head-butted', dragged by their hair, and having earrings ripped out. The majority of girls reported a significant negative impact on their welfare.

  Sophie[1]:   He [her ex-boyfriend] used to beat me up.

  Interviewer: Really … what sort of things did he used to do?

  Sophie: Just punched my eyes out like … Black eyes just walking down the street.

  Jo: He only hit me in the face once, he used to like push me down the stairs and stuff though.

  Caitlin: But then through that time that he was hitting me I changed and I like … I lost weight and everything like that and I just went skinny and obviously then I was less confident

  Interviewer: So you didn't feel so good about yourself?

  Caitlin: No. Not at all … I couldn't eat or nothing like that.

- In comparison, just over a quarter of the boys in the disadvantage study reported that they had been a victim of physical violence in at least one of their relationships. Most stated it had little impact on their welfare.

  Owen: I thought it was funny (when his girlfriend punched him) … 'cos it don't really hurt.

  Simon: She used to try and whack me. I used to find it funny because it never really hurt. I just laughed.

- Girls from disadvantaged backgrounds were almost twice as likely to be recipients of physical partner violence in their relationships as girls in the schools survey. There was little overall difference for boys.

- More girls in the disadvantage study, compared to the school-based research, viewed physical partner violence as a normal, if unwanted, aspect of their relationships. The normalisation of violence in this way meant that girls often found it difficult to recognise the seriousness of their experiences.

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1   All names have been anonymised.

- Girls exhibited high levels of self-blame and many minimised the seriousness of the violence they experienced.

Emotional Violence

- Two-thirds of female participants and a third of male participants reported experiencing emotional violence, most often controlling behaviour.

> Lucy: With this one [new boyfriend], I've always got to answer to him, he always tells me what to do, and like stuff like that, and I know that he's only doing it 'cos he cares about me, a lot, and he does worry about me. But he's like, oh, you've got to be back at this certain time, and all this … but when I don't do it … we would get into an argument then, and it's just over stupid things … but I do have to answer to him quite a bit.

> Carla: Yes he's alright but he's on the phone to me, I might as well not go nowhere because he's just gonna be on the phone anyway.

- Girls were much more likely to report a negative impact compared to boys, who often said it had no effect other than to annoy them.

> Tim: I'd rather go and do what I want to do when I want to do it … and if you don't meet her she moans and stuff … she used to do my head in … so I just told her to do one.

- Around half of young women thought that control was an integral aspect of an intimate relationship and therefore normalised their partner's controlling behaviour. None of the boys reported this, most stated their female partner's attempts at control were unacceptable.

- Few girls said they felt able to challenge the control they experienced, due to fear of repercussions; none of the boys stated this.

Sexual Violence

- Disadvantaged young women were more likely to report sexual violence compared with those in the school-based study. Half of the disadvantaged girls reported they had experienced some form of sexual violence. A quarter stated this involved physical sexual violence. Only a small minority of boys reported sexual violence.

> Tara: I was going out with some people and that I didn't want to have sex with them and it was like they forced me to and stuff. Or they made me feel really shit about myself, made me feel like they were the only person out there for me … and I've ended up just doing anything that they want me to do.

> Ellie: He [boyfriend] was really persistent … he like held my hands up against the wall, and I was like, seriously get off, I don't like want to. And he was like "Oh no, come on, it'll be fun, it'll be like a laugh" and stuff. And so he did and I was just like … I don't know, 'cos it really hurt … it was horrible, and so I just laid there like crying, like tears running down my face

- Many girls reported feeling uncertain about what they wanted sexually from their relationship or what was 'expected' of them. It was a complex social encounter to negotiate.

- Many girls did not recognise, or normalised, the seriousness of their experiences of sexual violence and were therefore less likely to seek help.

> Emma: I've never said that I've been, I've never shouted rape or anything, I've never been able to say that I've been raped or anything, but it's not like I've given consent to sex in all that stuff that I haven't wanted to happen … in certain situations it has been pushed on me and it has been really horrible … I don't really know how to explain it, I don't like thinking about it … Obviously it might have been slightly violent because it was aggressive and kind of, but there was no like punching or hitting or kicking … it was more like forcing.

INSTIGATORS OF TEENAGE INTIMATE VIOLENCE AND CONTROL

Physical Violence

- A quarter of the young women in the disadvantage study reported being instigators of physical violence in their relationships. This finding is similar to the level found in the school-based survey.

- In comparison only six male participants (13%) in this study stated they had used physical violence against their partners. Again this finding reflects the school-based survey.

- The majority of young women reported using physical violence in relationships where they were themselves a victim of partner violence. Thus only rarely did female participants instigate physical violence when they had not themselves been victimised.

- The majority of male participants reported feeling that physical violence against women was unacceptable. However young men did not necessarily always perceive other acts of aggression with their partner, such as damaging belongings or property, as threatening. Female participants, however, reported feeling scared by such behaviour.

- Male partners were not always aware of the impact that their aggressive behaviour had on their partners.

Emotional Violence

- A quarter of both female and male participants reported instigating partner control in their relationships.

- The majority of young women who reported controlling behaviour stated that they acted this way due to jealousy and mistrust.

- Young men were less explicit about their controlling behaviour, often portraying it as care rather than control.

Sexual Violence

- Four male participants said they may have pressured their girlfriends to have sex, although they were unsure as they had not asked their partners how they felt about their actions.

- None of the female participants reported using sexual violence.

Reciprocal Violence

- In some interviews it was difficult to determine who had been the initial instigator of the violence and who was reciprocating or acting in self-defence.

- Young men who reported reciprocal violence in their relationships often described using significantly greater force than their girlfriends did.

ASSOCIATED FACTORS

Gender

- More girls than boys experienced intimate violence, and girls reported much greater negative impacts on their welfare, reflecting the school-based findings.

- Most female participants felt that young men were more likely to be controlling in relationships than young women; many related this to prescribed gender roles which dictate that males are supposed to be more dominant than females.

- Young men also felt that gender roles impacted on relationships, with many stating that females were more dependent on their partner than were males.

- Young women often felt that males were only interested in the sexual aspect of relationships and did not always value the emotional intimacy that relationships provide.

- In many interviews a gendered double sexual standard was clearly evident.

Age

- For some female interviewees violence occurred at a very young age; in a minority of cases this violence was severe. This shows that partner violence is not only a problem for teenagers but can begin earlier.

- Pre-teen relationships are often viewed as naïve and innocent and subsequently viewed as unimportant, making any disclosure of violence even more difficult.

Age of Partner

- The majority of female participants had relationships with older partners; in many instances these partners were adult men.

- Female participants who had older partners were much more likely to report higher levels of all forms of violence than those with same-age partners. This finding was repeated in the school-based study.

- Some of the young men with older girlfriends reported experiencing sexual pressure, showing how age as well as gender can be an associated factor.

Family Violence

- Twenty-one of the 82 participants reported witnessing domestic violence.

- Participants who experienced domestic violence stated they recognised the negative impact this had on the victim (mostly their mothers) and themselves.

- Although many participants stated that, due to their experiences of domestic violence, they would not remain in a violent relationship themselves, some still found themselves victimised in this way.

- Young people who experienced child abuse often found it difficult to recognise that violence was not an expression of love.

PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

- It is important to recognise that many of the young people who had experienced intimate partner violence also described a wide range of self-protective strategies and resourcefulness in dealing with these negative experiences.

- A few girls felt very strongly that they would be able to protect themselves against violent partners. Mostly these participants stated that their friends and family would support them.

PARTICULAR ISSUES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS

A number of issues emerged from the interviews which related to specific situations faced by particular groups of young people: pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers, and young people with care histories.

Pregnant Teenagers and Teenage Mothers

- One in three young mothers reported experiencing physical violence from their current partner; two-thirds had experienced physical violence in at least one of their relationships.

Michelle: Her (daughter) whole body would shake with this pure fear, like even if I hurt myself, and screamed out, whereas she'd seen me being hurt, she thinks it's the same thing and she'd just shake and cower in the corner … I knew I had to do something.

- Two in three reported sexual pressure or force in at least one of their relationships.

- Nearly all had experienced controlling behaviour, often directly associated with their pregnancy and motherhood. Many stated that the control and violence increased once they were pregnant or when the baby was born.

Sara: When I got pregnant he was really controlling … he thought he owned me … And he wouldn't let me do nothing. Everywhere I had to go, he had to come with me.

Lisa: It was alright at first, but then afterwards he changed. Like he always wanted to go out with his friends and I couldn't, I had to stay in and stuff like that … he'd say like 'You're pregnant, so don't go out, stay in'.

- Teenage mothers were concerned about the way they were stereotyped negatively within wider society. Some wished to avoid a further negative label of being a *single* teenage mother, which pressured some to stay in violent or unhappy relationships.

Emma: It's not that I don't want to be a single mum, it's that I don't want to have that stereotypical single mum thing … teenage single mum.

- Some young mothers felt they had few options but to return to violent partners or unhappy relationships as the alternative was to live in poverty and isolation. This was particularly the case for those with no, or little, family or friendship support.

- The vast majority of teenage mothers recognised that the violence they were experiencing also had a negative impact on their children's welfare. However many were apprehensive about accessing help from agencies, especially social services, fearing their child may be removed.

Michelle: … They say you do this, you do this, for your daughter, but they don't turn around and think like I'm sat there with a black eye, battered, and they're telling me I've got to do this, do this, when I haven't even got the strength to think straight, let alone, take action against him … I felt that I was being victimised, I was already a victim and I was being victimised by social services … 'Cos they were saying you have to do this, your child is gonna be on the at risk register … and it seemed to me that I was the one getting abused but I was getting all the blame, they didn't do nothing towards him.

Young People with Experiences of Being in Care

- Those with experiences of being in care had the most complex life experiences and family backgrounds of all disadvantaged groups.

- Many young people in care said their past experiences, especially of domestic violence and child abuse, negatively impacted on their current relationships. Some felt that their past experiences made

it difficult for them to form trusting, intimate relationships with their partners and made them vulnerable to relationships with controlling and violent partners.

> Tara: … with my mum and dad they used to hit me, and because they loved me I used to count it as that's the reason why they were hitting me … and he [ex-boyfriend] knew that my mum and dad had been violent to me in the past and that I'd let them [boyfriends] get away with it.

- Young women in care were especially vulnerable to sexual violence from partners.

> Sasha: [I] felt I had to do it … like a friend would say to me 'Just do it' and stuff like that … Sometimes the boy would say 'Oh just do it' and like go on and on. I'm just like 'Okay'.

- Many felt that residential workers and foster carers failed to adequately recognise, or take seriously, their relationship experience; only a minority of young people stated their carers had approached this issue with them.

- Young people who had left care and were living alone appeared particularly vulnerable to violence in their relationships due to isolation from support networks.

HELP-SEEKING AND SUPPORT

- Many of the young women reported that they did not want to tell anyone about their experiences of intimate partner violence. There were various reasons for this, but for most, the feeling that their experiences would not be believed, or minimised, was significant.

- For those that sought help from friends, some found that their experiences of violence were normalised within peer groups where experiences of intimate partner violence were common.

- Half of participants were known to have a social worker, although the majority had not told their social worker about the intimate violence. Over half stated that their social workers were only interested in their family issues and unconcerned about wider aspects of their lives, including their relationships.

- Several young people were concerned about the way they would be judged by professionals and this deterred them from talking about their experiences.

- For a minority however, talking to their social worker about their relationships was a positive and useful experience.

> Interviewer: So was it helpful talking to your social worker?
>
> Nikki: Yeah it was, she obviously chatted to loads of people in the same situation before, and she told me basically like, what to do and how to cope with things. And I just took to her really well, and, like I just got on with her. And it was ever since chatting to my social worker, that's when I like opened-up and told everyone my problems instead of keeping it all in. I like lets people know what I'm thinking and stuff … she did change my life really. If I wouldn't have had a social worker I probably would have been the same now, so it's good really.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy and practice developments need to recognise that teenage partner violence appears to represent an even more profound child welfare issue for disadvantaged young people, and especially young women, than for young people in the general population.

- Safeguarding polices need to challenge the perception of partner violence as a normal aspect of teenage relationships.

- Child welfare professionals need to routinely include an assessment of partner violence in work with young people.

- A failure to acknowledge and confront the unequal power dimensions contained in some teenage relationships, including sexual violence, will jeopardise governmental policies aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy.

- Policy and practice initiatives require a strengthened emphasis on supporting young mothers to protect both themselves, and their babies, from violent partners whilst ensuring that the responsibility for the violence is directed at the perpetrator.

- Policy and practice developments are required which seek to challenge the negative stereotype attached to teenage pregnancy.

- There is a clear need to develop specific programmes for young people in care concerning partner violence and control.

- Leaving care (aftercare) programmes need to include the issue of intimate violence as a central element.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION

Recent research by Barter et al (2009) has, for the first time in the UK, provided a detailed picture of the incidence and impact of teenage partner violence on the lives of young people. The research entailed a school-based survey and in-depth interviews with young people. Prior to this, little UK research existed on this form of intimate violence. The research findings were widely reported in the national media and have generated considerable policy and practice attention. The Home Office, in response to the research findings, launched a major public awareness campaign on the issue of abuse in teenage relationships (Home Office 2010). The government's review on the sexualisation of girls and women by Papadopolous (2010) drew heavily on the research. In response, the DCSF Violence Against Women and Girls Advisory Group Recommendations and Strategy (2010a, 2010b) also clearly identifies teenage relationship violence as a priority.

However, as the research was based in schools, young people no longer attending mainstream education, such as teenage mothers or pupils who had been permanently excluded, were omitted. In addition, the experiences of some disadvantaged young people, for example young people living in foster or residential care, were not adequately represented. To overcome these limitations, the NSPCC in association with the University of Bristol conducted a qualitative parallel research project focussing specifically on intimate partner violence in the relationships of English *disadvantaged* teenagers.

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

The definition of disadvantage used in this study was any young person who had experienced a particularly complex or disrupted childhood which may have disadvantaged their welfare. The terms 'young people', 'teenage' and 'adolescent' are used interchangeably in the report to refer to children over the age of 12 years-old and under the age of 19, unless otherwise stated. To aid clarity the term 'abuse' is restricted to abusive behaviour perpetrated by an adult against a child within a family context. The terms 'violence' and 'exploitation' are used in relation to intimate teenage partner relationships. Violence refers to a direct act or threat of physical, sexual or emotional harm, whereas exploitation refers to the manipulation or control of another person.

WHY FOCUS ON DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE?

It was decided that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds should be looked at in a separate study for a number of reasons. Firstly, US research indicates that a higher proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced violence in their relationships (Collin-Vézina et al 2006, Manseau et al 2008, Jonson-Reid 2007). Some non-school based US research (Collin-Vézina et al

2006, Manseau et al 2008, Jonson-Reid 2007) has suggested that certain groups of young people may be significantly more susceptible to both experiencing and perpetrating partner violence than other young people. Studies differ in relation to the risks involved, suggested associated factors include: past experiences of child abuse and domestic violence (Roscoe and Callahan 1985, O'Keefe et al 1986, Smith and Williams 1992, Wolfe et al 2001*a*, Simonelli et al 2002, Whitfield et al 2003); permanent school exclusion (Hand and Sanchez 2000); offending (O'Keefe and Treister 1998, Williams and Martinez 1999, Cleveland et al 2003, Chapple and Hope 2003); and teenage pregnancy (Parker et al 1994, Covington et al 2001, Silverman et al 2001, Silverman and Clements 2004, Manseau et al 2008, Jonson-Reid 2007).

Although research provides some possible 'explanations' regarding why some young people may be more at risk, few include young people's own explanations, experiences and solutions (Barter 2009). We also have very limited understanding regarding teenage assailants' motivations and attitudes to partner violence (Barter 2009). Consequently, one of the aims of this study was to investigate if UK disadvantaged young people were susceptible to this form of intimate violence. Secondly, it was considered important to capture the experiences and opinions of those who may be less likely to attend mainstream education and, therefore, would not be represented in the school-based study. Thirdly, it was thought important to look at the way that violent experiences in young people's relationships might be experienced differently for disparate disadvantaged groups – such as pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers, young people with public care experiences and young offenders. These groups are considered separately in section 5.

LINK TO SCHOOL-BASED STUDY

Barter et al's study (2009) was undertaken in eight schools across England, Scotland and Wales. It involved a survey with 1,353 young people, between 13 and 17 years-old. From these, 91 in-depth interviews were also undertaken with 62 girls and 29 boys. The findings clearly showed that physical, emotional and sexual violence in young people's intimate relationships should be viewed as a significant child welfare problem. The current study on disadvantaged young people ran in parallel to the school-based research. Findings from the disadvantage study will be placed in the context of those found in the previous study. It also, where appropriate, draws comparisons with adult domestic violence literature, for example through the work of Hester (2004, 2006, 2010) and Radford and Hester (2007).

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of this research were to develop a better understanding of the nature and dynamics of violence in vulnerable teenagers' intimate relationships; to examine the impact of violence on young people's well-being; and to identify appropriate responses. The study set out to explore if some disadvantaged groups experienced greater vulnerability to intimate partner violence than others, and if so, to develop a better understanding regarding the factors that may contribute to this susceptibility. The research aimed to contribute to the development of more appropriate prevention and intervention services for different groups of vulnerable young people. The research enabled adolescents' own perspectives to inform policy and practice developments.

This research explored with disadvantaged young people their experiences of physical, sexual and emotional forms of partner violence, including their coping strategies and views on intervention. The

research addresses young people's experiences as recipients and instigators of intimate violence. We decided to use the terms recipient and instigator rather than perhaps the more familiar terms of 'victim' and 'perpetrator', to reflect the fact that that young people may not necessarily view their experiences as constituting victimisation or be aware that they are perpetrating violence.

The more specific objectives of the research were similar to the school-based study, these included exploring:

- the nature, frequency and dynamics of different forms of violence in vulnerable teenager relationships and the contexts in which they occur and thrive

- young people's own understandings, attitudes to and evaluations of such violence

- the impact of violence on young people's well-being, the coping strategies they use, their effectiveness, as well as factors that enabled young people to leave violent relationships

- the 'reasons' why assailants use violence and their perceptions of its impact on their partners and themselves

- young people's views on prevention and how support services can best respond to this problem.

- identification of wider cultural or social processes that support such violence.

The research was undertaken to inform the development of policy and practice initiatives in this area of child welfare. A full understanding of the nature of the problem is crucial to the development of effective prevention services, and it is with a view to informing best practice in this area that the NSPCC and the University of Bristol undertook this project.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ADVISORY GROUP

The school-based research project recruited 12 young people from a local school to participate in a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG), which provided advice and feedback on all aspects of the research. The YPAG were influential in refining the research aims and objectives, ensuring that suitable terminology was being used and that young people's views were reflected in the research design. The YPAG helped to design and develop all of the data collection tools, including the semi-structured interview schedule used in both the research projects. They provided consultation on fieldwork issues, analysis and commented on findings and dissemination. Although the main focus of the YPAG was the school-based project, their input and contribution was invaluable for the disadvantaged study and we are extremely grateful for all their hard work.

ETHICS

The study involved the exploration of very sensitive and personal experiences and views. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Bristol, School for Policy Studies, Ethics Committee. The research team had extensive experience in undertaking research on sensitive child welfare issues,

including child abuse and wider forms of violence. Guidelines were developed, in collaboration with individual agencies and organisations, on informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and disclosure of information regarding significant harm. All young people were given information leaflets explaining the research, its aims, what would be involved, confidentiality and why we were doing it. In a number of instances, the researcher spent time in the setting before undertaking the interviews, generally between three and five days, to enable young people to ask questions informally and for the researcher to develop a rapport with the young service users.

Informed consent was sought from each young person. Before starting the interview the researcher discussed with participants what they were consenting to, including: their right not to answer a question or to stop the interview at any stage; confidentiality and the researcher's obligation to report a risk of serious harm; anonymity; storage of data; how their responses would be used in the final report and dissemination. Once the researcher was sure the young participant understood to what they were consenting, they were asked to sign a consent form. We worked in partnership with individual organisations to determine how best to introduce and implement the research. Demands on organisations, staff and young people were kept to a minimum. All researchers had police criminal background checks.

METHODS

The current research involved semi-structured interviews with 82 young people from a range of agencies and organisations working with disadvantaged young people. The majority of interviews were untaken by the first author. Unlike the school-based study, which used both survey and interview methodology, this study was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews and vignettes. All young people's names contained in the report have been changed to ensure responses remain anonymous. We matched the young people's names with equivalent pseudonyms, for example, only one young person in the study had a name which reflected a specific minority ethnic/cultural group and was therefore provided with a comparable replacement.

Interviews

In-depth interviews enabled young people to identify and contextualise their own experiences of partner violence. Within the interview, participants were given considerable freedom to introduce relevant areas and factors which they viewed as important in understanding these issues. Much methodological literature exists concerning the use of qualitative semi-structured interview techniques, which were drawn on within the research. We will not rehearse this here. Researchers used 'active listening' and 'non-directional stance' (Whyte 1984), and conveyed a non-judgemental attitude (Hill 1997). This was not always necessarily an easy stance to maintain in interviews, especially when participants discussed their own use of violence, often with little recognition of the impact of this on their partners; or when, usually female, participants spoke about their experiences of victimisation and self-blame.

Within the interview the researcher used her discretion to determine if the discussion was becoming too stressful for the young person. In these circumstances, the researcher would ask the young person if they wished to discuss a less sensitive area, take a break, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the young person's wishes.

The aim of this study was to explore in-depth the experience and impact of intimate partner violence in disadvantaged teenagers' relationships, and the associated issues underpinning these experiences, rather than to determine prevalence rates. Hence a qualitative approach was preferable.

Vignettes

The recognition and discussion of partner violence by young people was facilitated within the interviews by the introduction of vignettes, or stories, depicting different forms of intimate violence. The same vignettes were also used in the school-based study and were developed from real-life situations. Five vignettes were used, each depicting a different situation involving partner violence. A set of questions was developed for each vignette to explore participants' views associated with each scenario. The vignettes provided a range of benefits for the interviews. They enabled more subtle forms of partner control and manipulation to be recognised by young people as being appropriate for discussion. The vignettes also enabled young people to respond to sensitive issues without having to introduce the subject themselves, or needing to respond to a direct question regarding their own experience of violence. Thus vignettes provided a mechanism by which participants could choose when, and if, they wished to describe their own experiences rather than discuss the vignette scenario.

Although the vignettes provided a very useful tool with young people, they were not used within this research as an independent data collection technique. The researcher did not set out systematically to use each vignette within every interview. Indeed, once young people felt comfortable speaking about their own experiences, the use of vignettes barely became necessary. Thus, we have not analysed specifically young people's attitudinal responses to the vignette scenarios. A body of work has already testified to the worrying attitudes that young people hold towards the acceptability of relationship violence in certain contexts (see Lacasse and Mendelson 2007, Silverman et al 2006, McCarry 2009), and we did not wish to repeat this here. In contrast, much less work in the UK has looked at young people's *actual* experiences of partner violence in their own relationships, and it is this gap in knowledge which the research aimed to bridge.

ANALYSIS

Interviews were all digitally recorded with participants' permission and fully transcribed and anonyomised. NVivo7 and later NVivo8 software packages for qualitative analysis were used to facilitate analysis. A detailed coding frame representing the dominant themes and patterns was developed from initial reading of the transcripts. This coding frame was then refined and further built on in NVivo. The constant-comparative method (Boeije 2002) was used to interpret the qualitative findings. Analysis was informed by a standpoint analytical framework (Harding, 1993), which positions the young participant as the 'expert' in understanding her or his own experiences. However, wider social processes of which young people may not be fully aware, for example gender inequality, also shaped the analysis, enabling the interface between structure and agency to be explored.

INTERVIEW SAMPLE

The sample consisted of eight different organisations and agencies based in a city in the south of England, which worked with young people who were in some way disadvantaged. Eighty-two young people were interviewed from the eight sites, see table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Organisations working with disadvantaged young people

Organisation	Female	Male	Total
Education project for young people permanently excluded from mainstream schools	4	17	21
Young mothers' project	16	0	16
Young Offenders Institute	0	15	15
Family and community support project	9	0	9
Two residential children's homes	3	3	6
Project for young people at risk of sexual exploitation	6	0	6
Youth centre	0	5	5
Special education school	0	4	4
Total	**38**	**44**	**82**

The different research sites were chosen to ensure that a wide range of experiences were included in the study. An Education Project for excluded young people was chosen, again because this group would not be interviewed through the schools study and also because children excluded from school are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds (DCSF 2009). The young mothers' project was chosen because this group are less likely to attended mainstream school and, compared to other teenage girls, are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bunting 2005, Wilson and Huntington 2005, Harden et al 2009, Social Exclusion Unit 1999). A number of boys were also interviewed from a Young Offenders Institute. The family and community support project worked with teenage girls from disadvantaged areas who were having family or friendship problems. This group were, therefore, considered likely to have had more complex life experiences. Residential children's homes were selected in order to gain interviews with young people who had experience of the public care system and were likely to have had particularly complex life experiences. For similar reasons six young women were interviewed who attended a service for young people at risk of sexual exploitation. A number of interviews with young men were undertaken in a youth centre and a special education project, both services catered for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

It is important to acknowledge that, for resource and practical reasons, the study was based in one city in southern England and therefore obviously cannot capture regional or national variations in young people's attitudes or behaviours. Although we sought to explore a diverse range of experiences it would not be possible to represent all disadvantaged young people; consequently some groups, for example young asylum seekers, refugees, female young offenders and particular groups of young people with disabilities are, unfortunately, not included. The research was designed as an exploratory study therefore, due to the limited sample size, incidence rates cannot be derived from the findings.

Gender and Age

Slightly more boys than girls were interviewed: 44 males and 38 females. The majority of those interviewed were 15 years-old or older (n=66), see table 1.2. The age-range contained in this study is comparable to the school-based research where the majority of participants were also aged 15 years-old or older.

Table 1.2 Age of Sample

Age	No of young people
13	3
14	13
15	25
16	19
17	11
18	11
Total	**82**

Ethnicity and Religion

The majority of participants (n=71) were white English. In response to our questions, six young people described themselves as Black or Black British and five stated they were 'mixed race'. Three-quarters (n=61) said they had no religion. A fifth (n=17) of young people stated that they were Christians and four described themselves as Muslim. The majority of participants who identified themselves as Christians were located in a Young Offenders Institute, where religion seemed to correspond to different group-affiliations within the prison inmate sub-culture.

Disability

None of the young people interviewed stated they had a physical disability. A fifth (9 boys, 7 girls) however described themselves as having a behavioural disability, 10 (7 boys, 3 girls) of whom stated that they had attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Excluded from School

Twenty-nine participants (35%), 21 boys and eight girls, were permanently excluded from mainstream school. This reflected our sampling as we interviewed more boys than girls from an Education Project for excluded pupils. However, government statistics show that boys are three times more likely to be excluded from mainstream school than girls (DCSF 2009).

Family Composition

Over a third (n=31) of young people identified that they were from a single parent household. A fifth of participants (n=15) stated that they lived with both their biological parents. This is significantly lower than the proportion in the schools study, which was two-thirds. Twelve reported living in a reconstituted family. Nine were accommodated with kin and six were currently living in residential care. Nine young people were housed independently.

SECTION 2: RECIPIENTS OF TEENAGE PARTNER VIOLENCE

The following section looks at disadvantaged young people's experiences of intimate partner violence as recipients. Three different forms of violence will be examined: physical, emotional and sexual. The level of violence and its impact will be considered for each. Young women's and young men's responses are looked at separately. To provide a wider context in which to view the findings from this study, they will be compared to the findings of the earlier school-based survey.

RECIPIENTS OF PHYSICAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

Over half of the girls from the sample of disadvantaged youth reported that they had been a victim of physical violence in at least one of their partner relationships. This compares to just under a quarter of all girls from the larger school sample. In addition, a quarter of disadvantaged girls reported more severe forms of violence, versus 11 per cent of girls in the school-based study. Disadvantaged girls' experiences of severe violence included being: punched in the face, resulting in black eyes or having teeth knocked out; slapped hard across the face; pushed down the stairs; 'head-butted'; dragged by their hair; having earrings ripped out. The severity of the violence experienced is illustrated in the following extracts:

> Sophie: … he [her ex-boyfriend] used to beat me up.
>
> Interviewer: Really … what sort of things did he used to do?
>
> Sophie: Just punched my eyes out like … Black eyes just walking down the street and that … done things.
>
> Jo: He only hit me in the face once, he used to like push me down the stairs and stuff though.

In comparison, just over a quarter of the boys in the disadvantage study reported that they had been a victim of physical violence in at least one of their relationships. Overall, few differences existed in the victimisation rates for disadvantaged boys compared with the school-based survey. The boys in the disadvantage study were, however, slightly more likely to have experienced severe forms of physical violence from their partners compared with those in the schools study (1 in 7 compared with 1 in 25). These findings suggest that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more likely to experience severe physical violence than other young people. The issues which may help to explain these differences are explored in section 4.

Impact

The majority of the girls in the disadvantaged study spoke about the negative impact the physical violence had on their well-being. Many reported feeling scared, frightened, upset or worried. Some participants were made to feel guilty about their boyfriend's violent behaviour – as if they were responsible for

the harm they had experienced. A few described feeling embarrassed that it was happening to them. These negative feelings led some to lose confidence in themselves. One girl described how the violence impacted not only on her mental health, through a loss of confidence, but on her physical health as well:

Caitlin: But then through that time that he was hitting me I changed and I like … I lost weight and everything like that and I just went like all skinny and … and obviously then I was less confident because I was thinking like 'Ur … you're going skinny' and everything like that.

Interviewer: So you didn't feel so good about yourself?

Caitlin: No. Not at all … I couldn't eat or nothing like that.

Similarly, the school survey showed that three-quarters of girls who reported some form of physical partner violence also stated it had impacted on them negatively. Interestingly, however, a few of the girls from disadvantaged backgrounds responded to their victimisation by wanting to 'toughen-up' and by becoming more violent in their lives generally:

Sophie: … because before I was with him I was a bit of a wussy really. If people started on me I'll cry and that like. But now obviously where I took the beating and that if someone starts on me, you know what I mean, I've got more confident in banging someone out like now.

This response to victimisation was not found in the school-based interviews with girls. Perhaps young women from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to view violence as an acceptable self-protection response and adopt a more aggressive persona in their wider social interactions (Batchelor 2005) to try and to deter further victimisation. Indeed it was evident in many of the disadvantaged interviews that violence within peer groups, including what young people called 'gang' violence, was a prominent feature of their lives.

For some of the disadvantaged young women, violence was considered a normal aspect of their lives. Most stated that although they could see it was unacceptable, it was unavoidable. Many of the disadvantaged young women normalised the violence by blaming themselves.

Nikki: There was one time where um, I said something to him which really hurt him 'cos it was horrible and I really shouldn't have said it and well he did whack me for that … just slapped me across my face. It weren't hard but obviously that's not the point but I, well, I don't know, it was my own fault 'cos I said something which was out of order.

Some of the girls belittled their own experiences of violence by comparing it to that of their friends.

Interviewer: And that time he slapped you, how did that make you feel … about relationships?

Chloe: Um … not really him as such, but what I seen some of my friends go through isn't that nice … They've had worse than I've had.

Overall, it appears that more girls in the disadvantage study, compared to the school-based research, viewed physical partner violence as a normal, if unwanted, aspect of their relationships. The normalisation of violence in this way meant that young women were often unable to recognise the extent of the seriousness of their experiences. This process resulted in the perpetuation of relationship violence

through the minimisation of its impact and its importance. Furthermore, the normalisation of violence also inhibited their ability to approach others for support. This barrier to help-seeking was strengthened for some disadvantaged girls due to their peers perceiving the emotional impact of their victimisation as a weakness – 'they are not tough enough to take it' explained one young woman.

The majority of boys who had experienced physical violence from their partners said that it did not bother them and most thought it was amusing. Given the similar school-based findings, it seems that this may be a specific male response to girls' use of violence.

> Owen: I thought it was funny (when his girlfriend punched him) … 'cos it don't really hurt … It was funny.
>
> Simon: She used to try and whack me. I used to find it funny because it never really hurt. I just laughed.

It may be that males, and perhaps especially disadvantaged young men, are reluctant to admit that their girlfriend's use of violence had affected them due to not wanting to show any weakness in their masculinity. A few boys did say they were concerned about their girlfriend's violence and ended the relationship instantly. These boys often related this to their own experiences of family violence which had made them intolerant of any forms of violence in their relationships. However, even in these cases, none of the boys stated that the violence had frightened them. It may be helpful for future research to explore the factors which lead some boys who experience family violence to denounce it in their relationships, whilst for others it becomes a normative aspect of their intimate interactions. The impact of family violence is considered in more detail in section 5 of this report.

RECIPIENTS OF EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE

Two-thirds of the disadvantaged young women reported some form of emotional violence, which we define as non-physical behaviour aimed at intentionally harming or controlling another person emotionally (Barter et al 2004). This is comparable to the rate found in the school-based survey. However we need to be especially cautious in our comparisons of findings from the two studies in this area of partner violence. The school-based survey used eight specific survey questions to ascertain emotional violence. In an hour-long interview, which was often led by the young person's experiences, it was not always possible to systematically address each of these eight areas. In the disadvantaged interviews, young women mostly spoke about their experiences of coercive control by partners, although some mentioned other forms of emotional aggression such as shouting and name-calling.

Nearly a third of the male participants reported having girlfriends who had tried to control their behaviour in some way, most commonly through calling them excessively on their mobile phones. As shown in the school-based survey, the current study shows that the impact of emotional violence was clearly gendered.

Impact

The negative impacts of partner control reported by female participants included feeling: scared, angry, annoyed, upset and unhappy. Whilst some girls recognised the negative impact that this form of control had on their lives, for others control was experienced in a much more complicated and ambiguous manner.

Around half of the young women thought that partner control was an integral aspect of any relationship and associated it with having intimate feelings for another person and the subsequent, and habitual, jealousy this caused. Many therefore normalised the presence of mistrust, jealousy and control in their intimate relationships.

> Rachel: But that's what all people do. Because if you go out with your mates they think you're going to cheat on them … But that's what all people are like … they don't like you going out with your mates. Unless they know who your mates are.

> Lucy: With this one [new boyfriend], I've always got to answer to him, he always tells me what to do, and like stuff like that, and I know that he's only doing it 'cos he cares about me, a lot, and he does worry about me. But he's like, oh, you've got to be back at this certain time, and all this … but when I don't do it, he gets really really worried and then he gets, like we would get into an argument then, and it's just over stupid things. He knows nothing would happen to me if I'm with my mum or something, but I do have to answer to him quite a bit.

In fact, several of the young women described partner control as a positive and important part of their relationship, perceiving it as a sign that their partner cared for them. Some girls reported being pleased that their partner constantly sent text messages to ensure they knew where they were and who they were with as it made them feel loved and wanted.

> Nikki: Sometimes it feels good like to have them texting you, to make sure, you know that they're actually thinking about you and wondering if you're alright, sort of thing.

Rather than being seen as a form of control, such behaviour was considered a symbol of love. The fine line between care and control may make it difficult for young people to conceptualise what is meant by partner control or when caring concern becomes more about control (Kirkwood 1993). However, for a few of the girls, constant phone calls or texting were felt to be extremely oppressive. Some decided they would end the relationship due to their partner's behaviour.

> Paula: Just hated it and then he'd ring me up all the time, so there's not really much point in going out with my friends.

> Interviewer: 'cos he'd just always be ringing you up and stuff?

> Paula: Yeah. I ended it 'cos I had enough.

> Interviewer: Right. Just mainly because of that?

> Paula: Yeah I just had enough basically. Just getting to a point where it was just … enjoy your relationship, I just didn't enjoy it, I just felt trapped so I thought I can't do it.

Interviewer: And if you wanna like spend time with your mates, is he ok about that?

Carla: Yes he's alright but he's on the phone to me, I might as well not go nowhere because he's just gonna be on the phone anyway.

Interviewer: Really, does he call you a lot then?

Carla: Yes.

One female participant decided to stop carrying a mobile phone so that partners could not control her through it:

Jessica: I love not having a phone now … No one can contact me, nobody knows nothing … and I can do what I want.

Several of the young women reported that although their partners tried to stop them seeing their friends, they continued to do so without their boyfriends knowing. For these girls, although they were very displeased about their partner's attempts to control them, this covert form of resistance was the preferred, or perhaps the safest, alternative to openly confronting their partners about their controlling behaviour.

For many of the girls in the disadvantage study, partner control was not experienced separately from other forms of violence. Several reported that partner control led to, and was underpinned by, physical violence. The majority of these girls were concerned about the controlling behaviour they experienced, but the fear of a physically violent confrontation forced them to concede to their partners' demands. The following extract illustrates this:

Caitlin was 16 years-old at the time of interview and had been with her partner for three years. They were still together but he was currently in prison (for an unrelated offence):

Interviewer: And was one of the things you used to argue about 'where have you been?' and 'who are you seeing?'

Caitlin: Yeah. That's what it mainly used to be about …

Interviewer: … what did he used to do?

Caitlin: Used to just stop me from going out and I used to like sit in my house.

Interviewer: How did he stop you?

Caitlin: Well sometimes he did used to hit me. It was a relationship like that …

Interviewer: So he physically stopped you from going out?

Caitlin: Mm. And then if I go out he'll just go mad and then just basically I'll just end up crying and go back home. So I'd just rather stay in … Which was a mistake really because then he used to do that all the time then, and then obviously he had something over me.

Caitlin's example illustrates how her partner used physical violence to control her. If she disobeyed his demands he would respond by becoming very aggressive and physically violent to her until he achieved his aim of controlling her. To avoid the violent confrontation she stopped going out and seeing her

friends. However, once she had started to restrict her activities it quickly became the norm and there was an expectation that she would always behave this way in the relationship. Worryingly, some girls blamed themselves for the violence as is shown in the following example:

> Chloe: He did lose it one time. I can't remember … I think it might have been me pushed him into it … I don't know really, I think I wanted to do summat that he didn't want me to do … and he turned round and slapped me … it's summat like, probably going out with the girls or somewhere he didn't want me to go.

In some cases physical violence was linked to emotional manipulation. Jo described how her partner's use of physical violence was accompanied by emotional violence where he attempted to make her feel as though it was all her fault.

> Jo: And then after he used to hit me, it used to be weird, he used to start cuddling me and say 'oh see what you makes me do' an stuff like that, and I used to think, oh what are you on about.

Interventions aimed at challenging this form of intimate violence need to take into consideration the more subtle dimensions of partner control as well as the overtly violent forms of behaviour. There is a need to assist young people to recognise the difference between caring concern and coercive control – if they no longer feel in control of their own decision making capacity or freedom of movements, then this line of acceptability has been crossed.

Although issues concerning control were the most often reported form of emotional violence, girls also described other ways in which their partners would use emotional violence against them. Many of the girls described how their partners called them names. These names were nearly always sexually pejorative – such as 'slag' or 'slut'. A few of the girls described how their boyfriends would talk to them in a derogatory way when they were with their friends. One girl described how her partner did this to increase his status amongst his peer group:

> Georgia: … they kind of big themselves up in front of their friends, and make themselves look all big and mighty just because they can talk to you like crap … they think they have the power … kind of look like they're the ones calling the shots. They're really nice when you've got them on their own and it's not in front of their friends and everything.

It is worrying that peer groups, especially those of disadvantaged young people, may act to perpetuate and reinforce partner violence. For disadvantaged young people, especially those with no family support networks, peers can come to play an even more central role in their lives, compensating for their lack of family support, and thus their influence may be even greater. This influence, as we have seen, can be extremely harmful. The role of peers was found to be an important associated factor in the school-based research. Boys who reported that their wider peer group used aggression were also found to report higher levels of instigating violence in their intimate relationships than boys who did not have friends who used intimidation.

Several young women described experiencing other forms of emotional violence in their intimate relationships – a couple described how their partners had tried to control what clothes they wore when they went out. A few described how their partners had tried to keep their relationship hidden from their friends. This seemed more prominent amongst those with older partners:

Zoe: … Say I was in his house and he was in his front room with his friends, he wouldn't let me go in the room, like I'd have to stay in the bedroom … If I went in there to get a drink he'd be like 'No stay in there, I'll get you a drink' like. He wouldn't let me go in the room.

Boys who reported that their girlfriends tried to stop them spending time with their friends, or called them on the phone too often, responded in a swift and definitive way– they ended the relationship.

Interviewer: What were the reasons why they (relationships) ended?

Levi: I just couldn't be bothered. Having a girl call you 24/7 … like, I'm playing playstation and I get a phone call. I'll just be like 'Why are you calling me this time?' I just don't like that. And then they'll just send texts and dumb texts – no I just can't be bothered with that.

Tim: I'd rather go and do what I want to do when I want to do it … and if you don't meet her she moans and stuff … she used to do my head in … so I just told her to do one.

About half of the boys said that they would just switch their phone off if they did not want to speak to their partner.

Tyler: Sometimes it's too much I just turn off my phone.

None of the young men reported any fears around their partner's retaliation, a fear which stopped many of the female participants from acting in this way. Several male participants acknowledged that their girlfriends had genuine reasons for trying to stop them from spending time with their friends. This was often due to young men 'getting into trouble' when they were with their peers due to misusing alcohol or drugs:

Hassan: She says that she don't like my friends, she don't like the people that I'm being with, innit? That I'm doing no good with, and they ain't doing no good for me, that's what she's saying. Obviously I know she's doing it for my own good and that, but …

One participant thought that his partner's attempts to get him to spend less time with his friends were a positive thing:

Interviewer: Have you ever felt like she's tried to control you in any way?

Cameron: Yeah drugs … in a good way though, not bad ways … so which I respect her for … she won't let me do drugs which is a good thing really.

A few of the male participants also said that their partner's controlling behaviour was justified, although unwelcome, due to their past unfaithfulness.

A small number of the young men did not seem able to leave their relationships when their partner became controlling. This was generally when their partner was older than them. In two cases this was compounded by the fact that their older partner had moved into their family home. This added additional pressures on the relationships of some of the young people. Interestingly, none of the female participants reported that their male partners had moved into their family household.

RECIPIENTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Approximately half (20) of the disadvantaged young women reported that they had been victims of sexual pressure or force in their relationships. It is important to remember that six of these female participants were from a project specifically for young people at risk of sexual exploitation. If these six participants are removed from the analysis 40 per cent of the remaining young women reported some form of sexual violence. In comparison, a third of female respondents in the school-survey reported experiencing sexual partner violence. A quarter of young women (9) in the current study said that they had experienced physical sexual violence, although again three of these female participants were from a sexual exploitation project.

One participant described how, in her previous relationships, her partners had manipulated her emotionally so that she would do as they wished sexually. They did this by making her feel as though they were the only people that would want to be with her in order to make her sexually submissive:

> Tara: I was going out with some people and that I didn't want to have sex with them and it was like they forced me to and stuff. Or they made me feel really shit about myself, made me feel like they were the only person out there for me … and I've ended up just doing anything that they want me to do. Everything that they wanted me to do I'd do it because I'd think that I had to worship them. But after I went through that I kind of got myself out of it and I thought 'This isn't a relationship'. And I just started standing up for myself, making sure that no one takes the piss out of me again.

At the end of this extract Tara describes how she re-evaluated her experiences and recognised that she had the strength to leave the relationship and asserts that she will not put up with an abusive partner again.

Many of the young women's experiences of sexual violence were associated with their specific circumstances: especially teenage pregnancy and being in care. These will be explored in section 5, so will not be duplicated here. However, some common themes also emerged from the analyses regarding the impact of sexual violence which are addressed next.

As with the school-based study, males were much less likely to report being recipients of sexual violence than females. Three young men reported experiencing sexual pressure in their relationships. All these male participants reported that their girlfriends had encouraged them to have sex before they felt ready:

> Interviewer: … Have you ever felt pressured to do anything that you didn't want to in that way?
>
> Jack: I did the first time
>
> Interviewer: You felt pressured by the girl?
>
> Jack: Yeah … she was always on about it … it was a bit rushed.

One young man reported being forced to have sex by a group of older females.

Impact

Experiences of being pressurised into unwanted sexual acts, including intercourse, were understandably often difficult for young women to divulge in the interview.

One girl, from the sexual exploitation project, did talk more openly about her experiences, and described the physical and emotional pain she felt when being forced by an older man to have sexual intercourse:

Ellie: … he was really persistent … he like held my hands up against the wall, and I was like, seriously get off, I don't like want to. And he was like "Oh no, come on, it'll be fun, it'll be like a laugh" and stuff. And so he did and I was just like … I don't know, 'cos it really hurt … it was horrible, and so I just laid there like crying, like tears running down my face.

Another linked the very negative impact of her experience to her young age at the time:

Interviewer: So were you ever like forced into having sex?

Emma: Yeah, quite a few times … it's quite horrible, I was only young, well I wasn't really really young, I wasn't … like when I was 12, it was like when I was 13.

One girl, when recalling her experience of being grabbed and exposed to, described how hard she finds it to get the experience out of her mind. Often, however, when asked how the experience made them feel, the young women responded saying that they did not know, or that it was just something they wanted to forget.

Many young women were not only resistant to overtly acknowledging that their partners had treated them in this manner but were also uncertain about what they should want from their relationship with regards to sex. The following example illustrates the complexity of negotiating a sexual experience with a partner:

Georgia: … like you can't control anything … you can't control the way you feel, you can't control when you're ready, you can't control … the only thing you can control is when you do it and who with and what … well you can't even … sometimes you can control … well … it depends really. Obviously you can control to an extent. Like I'm not saying that you can control rape because you can't control it, but when it's your choice with your boyfriend obviously that isn't that, and it's like you can control that … but then you can't control how you feel, if you know what I mean. And it's like … when you're ready, sort of thing.

It is important to understand the complex dynamics involved in negotiating sexual encounters and the differential perceptions that males and female often hold regarding sexual encounters, for example how consent and non-consent are demonstrated (see Cameron 2007). Interventions which focus on raising awareness of the complexities around sexual negotiations, the uncertainty regarding what is expected and what each partner wants, and acknowledgment of the unacceptability of sexual pressure may help young people to understand the role of sexual coercion in their intimate encounters and relationships.

For young women the distinction between sexual negotiations to determine what each partner wishes and sexual exploitation, where one partner imposes their desires, was often blurred. Female participants frequently felt unsure how far they wanted to proceed sexually with their partner or changed their mind

about wanting to continue, but felt unable to say this to their partner. The difficulty young women face in negotiating their sexual experiences, and especially in their inability to control these encounters due to the need to portray a passive sexuality, has been widely reported elsewhere (see for example Holland et al 1998). Our research also indicates that many young women felt unable to convey directly their sexual wishes and desires to their partners. However, girls stated they did try to show their reluctance, or opposition, through non-verbal means, such as moving hands away. Girls commented that often these indications of non-consent were either missed by their partners or deliberately ignored. Thus girls were unsure if their unwanted sexual experiences were a result of a communication breakdown or exploitation.

For girls who had been physically forced into a sexual act, including intercourse, there was confusion about how to classify their experiences. There was a general reluctance to use terms such as rape. The following example shows how, although Emma felt she was forced into having sex, she did not define this as rape, perhaps because she felt she did not fight back enough against the force.

> Emma: I've never said that I've been, I've never shouted rape or anything, I've never been able to say that I've been raped or anything, but it's not like I've given consent to sex in all that stuff that I haven't wanted to happen … in certain situations it has been pushed on me and it has been really horrible … I don't really know how to explain it, I don't like thinking about it … Obviously it might have been slightly violent because it was aggressive and kind of, but there was no like punching or hitting or kicking … it was more like forcing.

This reflects wider commonly held cultural scripts surrounding victim-blaming for sexual violence (Brownmiller 1975, McCarry 2009). The minimisation of sexual violence in this way, through participants' internalisation of these 'rape myths', meant that young women were often unable to acknowledge the seriousness of their situations and are, therefore, less likely to seek help. As illustrated by Emma and in interviews with other female participants, these negative sexual experiences were difficult for them to talk about and many attempted to 'bury' them so they did not have to acknowledge their impact. Interestingly, it seemed that through the interview process, Emma began to recognise that her negative sexual experiences were having a long-term impact on her attitude towards sex in her current relationship, and for the first time acknowledged her need to address these issues through professional support.

Some of the disadvantaged young women were discouraged from recognising the seriousness of their negative sexual experiences because their family minimised the sexual violence. One young woman described how she was forced to have sex by a partner, yet when she tried to talk to her mother about her experience her mother laughed at her. This discouraged her from talking to any one else about what had happened. However, young people also reported that their friends sometimes undermined their experiences:

> Zoe: … and I pushed him off and ran, and that's been on my mind for like years … well from last summer. And just like I can't talk to anybody about that because they don't listen. They don't find it as a joke but they're like 'Well I've had a worse experience'. Like they don't listen, they just go on about their experiences as well. But they don't understand. Like that runs through my mind every day.

> Interviewer: Yeah.

> Zoe: I don't know, sometimes I sit in my room and like …

> Interviewer: You should really talk to someone about that though …

Zoe: Yeah I've spoke to my friends about it but they don't really listen … I can't really talk to anyone because I don't feel like I can talk to anyone.

Tara stated that in the past she had failed to take seriously some of her female friends' allegations of sexual violence. Through this process young people may mutually reinforce each others' inability to acknowledge sexual violence and to seek support for their negative sexual experiences. This illustrates the way sexual violence can become normalised in young women's relationships.

Interviewer: So when you say like you might have been forced, do you mean physically?

Tara: Yeah …

Interviewer: And how did that … leave you feeling?

Tara: It made me more streetwise and more aware of things that happen. I knew the person who it was and we were going out and that … like I didn't hold a grudge against them or anything, because if he wouldn't have done it, someone else would have. And I know it sounds horrible but like … I forgave him for it, we sorted ourselves out and that.

Interviewer: So at the time did you speak to any adult about it?

Tara: I told my mum but she kind of laughed at me. But that was it really. That's the only person I spoke to. Because my mum laughed at me I thought everyone was going to.

Interviewer: Did you actually see it as rape?

Tara: No I didn't. I didn't really, I just kind of … a lot of my friends have said that they got raped and stuff when they didn't … So I thought everyone else is saying this and they're going to think I'm trying to fit in and say 'I got done it.' So I just kind of kept it to myself … I just didn't say anything to them. And it's peer pressure like when you first have sex and stuff. So … and 'cos I was a virgin when it happened everyone was like 'Oh we've had sex' and stuff. So I just went and said I had sex, I didn't class it as rape.

Interviewer: Right. So you actually in a way … you sort of 'Well I have had sex, so I can tell people, at least that's one thing I can do.'

Tara: Yeah

Interviewer: But now when you sort of think about it do you class if as being raped? Or do you not really think about it?

Tara: I've just kind of forgot about it now. It's not really … if it was rape I would have told people, I would have said 'This is what happened', but I just class it as … I didn't want to do it, but in the end I ended up giving in and just saying 'All right' … well after he'd started and stuff. But it's just part of my past, not really that important to me. Forgot about it.

It is worrying that Tara justifies her ex-boyfriend's actions through recourse to the inevitability of sexual violence: 'I didn't hold a grudge … because if he wouldn't have done it, someone else would have'. We cannot determine where this perception has arisen: family, peers or wider social scripts on male sexuality.

Tara's extract also indicates a further dimension to the normalisation of sexual violence. She describes how she minimised her experience of rape because it resulted in her loss of virginity. This may reflect an attempt to reframe a negative sexual experience as a positive event in the only acceptable way open to her. However this type of reinterpretation may come at a price. The following example also demonstrates this dimension. Ellie had gone to sleep at a party alone in one of the beds, when a boy got into the bed and pressured her to have sex with him until she acceded. He was very drunk and the next day said he could not remember what had happened. Although Ellie did not enjoy the experience, she describes feeling proud that she had lost her virginity to one of the more popular boys in her school.

Ellie:	It's like, okay, well, I don't know, 'cos I have like a crush on him because he's actually quite good-looking.
Interviewer:	Oh right.
Ellie:	Like around the area he's like you know quite well known.
Interviewer:	Right okay.
Ellie:	So it's quite like 'Oh yeah he took my virginity'. I was quite like …
Interviewer:	Right.
Ellie:	Proud maybe. I don't know, just 'cos he's like respected … a lot of girls fancy him sort of thing.

Even though Ellie had not wanted to have sex, and the boy's apparent inability to recall events, Ellie was still able to reconcile her experience of sexual violence through allusion to the boy's high-status in the peer group. A few of the girls who had experienced being forced, or attempts to be forced, into a sexual act they were unhappy with, normalised their experiences by saying that they expected it to happen again.

Interviewer:	… so has that ever happened to you (forced sexual contact) ?
Alicia:	Well not fight really, but like he's tried doing that and I'd push him away …
Interviewer:	Has it happened once, or has it happened more than once?
Alicia:	Once, it'll obviously happen again some day.

Some of the girls spoke about their wider experiences of sexual harassment from boys generally. Many of these girls felt unsure about how to classify their negative sexual experiences and sometimes felt confused about the attention they received from the boys around them.

Sasha:	At school they like try and touch me in the hallways and stuff … I just push them off … in a way it kinds of boosts up my confidence, like thinking yeah the boys want me. But then I feel like 'Oh just stop, go away' sometimes.

On one level, the attention made her feel more attractive, yet she was uncomfortable with their actions

SUMMARY POINTS

Physical Violence

- Girls from disadvantaged backgrounds were almost twice as likely to be recipients of physical partner violence in their relationships as girls in the schools survey. There was little overall difference for boys.

- However, both boys and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to experience severe forms of physical violence in their relationships compared to the school-based participants.

- More girls in the disadvantage study, compared to the school-based research, viewed physical partner violence as a normal, if unwanted, aspect of their relationships. The normalisation of violence in this way meant that girls were unable to recognise the seriousness of their experiences.

- Girls reported significant impacts on their welfare, whereas most boys stated that the violence did not affect them.

- Girls exhibited high levels of self-blame and many minimised the seriousness of the violence they experienced.

- Disadvantaged girls more often reported responding to their victimisation by increasing their use of violence both in their intimate relationships and in their wider peer interactions.

Emotional Violence

- Two-thirds of female participants and a third of male participants reported some form of emotional violence, most often controlling behaviour.

- Young women were much more likely to report a negative impact compared to boys, who often said it had no effect other than to annoy them.

- Around half of young women thought that control was an integral aspect of an intimate relationship and therefore normalised their partner's controlling behaviour. None of the boys reported this, most stated their female partner's attempts at control were unacceptable.

- Few girls said they felt able to challenge the control they experienced, due to fear of repercussions; none of the boys stated this.

Sexual Violence

- Disadvantaged young women were more likely to report sexual violence compared to those in the school-based study. Half of the disadvantaged girls reported they had experienced some form of sexual violence. A quarter stated this involved physical sexual violence. Only a small minority of boys reported sexual violence.

- Many girls reported feeling uncertain about what they wanted sexually from their relationship or what was 'expected' of them. It was a complex social encounter to negotiate.

- Many girls did not recognise, or normalised, the seriousness of their experiences of sexual violence and were therefore less likely to seek help.

SECTION 3: INSTIGATORS OF TEENAGE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Having looked at disadvantaged young people's experiences as recipients of partner violence, we now consider their instigation of intimate violence. As with the previous section we will explore young people's use of physical, emotional and sexual forms of violence and their 'reasons' for using violence in their relationships.

INSTIGATORS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

About a quarter of the young women in the disadvantage study reported being instigators of physical violence in their relationships. This finding is similar to the level found in the school-based survey. In comparison, only six young men in this study stated they had used physical violence against their partners. Given the findings on female victimisation it is unclear how this disparity can be accounted for. It may be that although young women feel that they can acknowledge their own use of violence, young men feel reluctant to admit to such behaviour due to social attitudes regarding the unacceptability of male violence against women. Although social taboos surrounding male violence against women may prohibit its reporting it does not, however, stop male violence occurring, as evidenced in many adult studies on domestic violence (Mullender et al 2002, Hester et al 2006) and the earlier study by Barter et al (2009). Alternatively, or perhaps in conjunction, ideas of 'girl power' may make certain forms of female violence seem more socially acceptable by framing it in terms of female empowerment (Harris 2004).

Reasons

It is important to note that the majority of young women who used physical partner violence had themselves been a victim of physical violence in at least one of their relationships. In many instances, female participants reported using violence mainly in relationships where they were themselves a victim of partner violence. Thus, only rarely did young women instigate physical violence when they had not themselves been victimised.

The reasons young women gave for perpetrating physical violence towards their partners were varied. Some described a build-up of anger, which they could not really explain, which was then released as an act of physical violence towards their partner. For some, these feelings of anger may have been linked to their complex family backgrounds. Interestingly, nearly all of the female participants who had been instigators of physical violence in their relationships had experience of being in local authority care – this will be considered in more detail in section 5.

Some acts of violence were a response to a specific situation. For example, one female participant described how she hit her partner because she found out that he had repeatedly cheated on her with other women. Only a minority of young women stated they used physical violence as a mechanism to exert power over their partners:

Interviewer: Have you ever hit your boyfriend?

Leah: Well yeah, I hit him today … Like 'cos I could rag him, 'cos obviously he's smaller than me … He's skinnier than me if you know what I mean.

The minority of young men who reported using violence mostly referred to one-off incidents against their partners. In a few accounts the violence was conceptualised as play-fighting, although it often seemed uncertain if this description reflected the reality of the situation.

Ben: I've hit her once. That was when I really went mad but … I regretted it after. It was an accident, I didn't mean to do it. Just like clipped her and caught her. I was just mucking about play-fighting …

Interviewer: … and how did she react to that?

Ben: Nothing. She ran out of my house and then ran to her house. I chased after her and said sorry, sorry, and that was it.

In the case of play-fighting it was sometimes unclear if male partners had intentionally or 'accidentally' caused harm. Although the majority of boys felt that it was unacceptable to be directly physically violent towards their female partners, other acts of aggression were considered by some to be reasonable and not recognised as constituting threatening behaviour. However they may have been experienced as such by their partner, as illustrated below:

John: I've punched holes in the walls … punched whatever's closest, or smashed summat up. Depends how serious the argument is … 'cos you can't hit her and you just wants to do summat.

This finding was reinforced in some of the girls' interviews, when they described their partners venting their anger on their surroundings and their feelings about this:

Emma: … He used to have tantrums and smash holes through his walls and stuff … the first time he tried to tell me he loved me he ended up smashing up his room and then telling me he loved me … I was really scared, not knowing what to do, there was nothing towards me, there was no aggression towards me there was just like total confusion on his part … there was one time that I felt a bit like, kind of maybe it was coming, like maybe his aggression was towards me. But obviously it was about stuff that I've said or whatever.

Male partners acting in this way seemed unaware of the impact that their aggressive behaviour had on their partners. This lack of awareness was reflected in the school-based study, in which male participants often felt that their behaviour had little, if any, negative consequence for their partner's welfare.

Many of the young men were aware of the physical power imbalance between men and women in relation to physical violence and felt that it was unacceptable to instigate violence against a female partner. For some, there was a feeling that they would have liked to hit their partner, but could not because it was considered unacceptable. Leon, in the example below, wanted to respond with violence to his girlfriend's attack but felt unable to:

Leon: It made me feel like, small, I'm the biggest in the class and my girlfriend turns around and just knocks your tooth out.

Interviewer: So were you like angry … ?

Leon: Yeah, I wanted to punch her head in.

Interviewer: But as you say, you couldn't.

Leon: Yeah, I really wanted to get her, and punch the crap out of her.

Interviewer: Hmmm.

Leon: But you can't can you?

There were a couple of male participants who talked more openly about their use of physical violence against their partners. One young man thought that it was acceptable to hit a woman if they had hit you first, and indicated that if he wanted to hit his girlfriend he would provoke them first to hit him, so that he would have an excuse to retaliate physically.

Interviewer: So if a girl hit …

Lucas: He'd have every right to smash her in the face.

Interviewer: … I've spoken to some people where they would go and beat up the guy, rather than the …

Lucas: No, I'd do both of them in … if I was strongly attached to her … I'd get her so pissed off that she will hit me and then I'd have the excuse to hit her back … I think most boys think, oh you can't hit a girl. But at the end of the day if the girl hits you, you have every right to hit them back.

None of the girls we spoke to sought to provoke their partner in this way. Indeed, as most stated, their victimisation left them feeling scared and upset, there would be no advantage in provoking such a response. This disparity illustrates the very different power imbalances which exist in young people's relationships.

Some young men spoke about physically restraining their partners to protect themselves against the physical violence:

Liam: She tried lamping [hitting] me in the face but it was like no, you're not getting away with this, I just grabbed her wrist as she was trying to hit me and that was it, stopped her and held her back like that.

Again, this shows how intimate violence is a gendered experienced. Whilst boys had the ability to restrain their partner to protect themselves, this was not an option for most girls due to differences in strength or to the fear of reprisals.

INSTIGATORS OF EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE

Approximately a quarter of both female and male participants in the disadvantage study reported being instigators of partner control in their relationships. This reflects findings from the school-based project, which also identifies partner coercive control as a significant issue for many young people.

Reasons

The majority of girls who were instigators of partner control in their relationships stated they acted in this way due to jealousy and mistrust. Sometimes, these feelings were found to be understandable as their partners had been cheating on them. Indeed, several of the boys interviewed acknowledged that their partner's attempts at control had been a response to their own unfaithfulness:

Interviewer: Okay, and do you think they ever had any reason to be paranoid or …

Tyler: Um, I would think so, yeah.

Only a minority of girls openly described wanting to be in full control of their partners:

Tessa: I like rule them (male partners).

As with physical violence, it may be more socially acceptable for girls to talk in this way due to the positive perceptions of girl power and domination held in some female peer groups. Boys were less explicit about their controlling behaviours than girls. A few, however, were open about their behaviours:

Mark: Like she rings me up saying 'can I go out with my friends?' I said, 'who's coming', and the boy she likes and I said 'no you're not going'.

Jon: If she goes to one of her friend's school, I like tell him to keep an eye on her or I'll just sometimes follow her (laughs).

A number of male participants in the Young Offenders Institute were also more explicit about their surveillance of their partners, and justified these acts by their frustration of being separated from their partners because they were locked-up (see section 5).

Alex: She's being watched like a hawk. Anywhere she's gone, I know she's been there.

However, some of the young men in this study used more obvious means of controlling their partners. Around a quarter of the male participants said that they would respond to their girlfriend's infidelity by inflicting physical violence on the new partner. Although this response was also found in the school-based study, it was not present to such a high degree. In a few cases, the young men reported assaulting other males just for being seen with their partners. This, it seemed, was done to send a message to their partners that it was unacceptable for them to have male acquaintances:

Jon: … we seen them [his girlfriend and her friends] come out [of a nightclub] with some boys and that's fucked so we go over and beat the boys up.

Many of these young men used violence in this way to 'save face' in front of their male peers and to reaffirm power within their relationships. For those boys who stayed in the relationships, it sent a message to their partners that someone would pay for their behaviour – in some cases this extended to any males their girlfriends knew. Some of these boys were clearly operating with double standards as they themselves admitted to having been unfaithful. The acceptance of violence as a legitimate response may reflect the wider cultures of violence and intimidation some disadvantaged young people, and especially boys, experience both as victims and instigators. Around three-quarters of the young men had peer groups which used intimidation and aggression routinely with others. For many, violence was viewed as a necessary survival strategy (see Barter and Berridge [2011], for a wider discussion).

However, some of the boys did not recognise that their behaviour was controlling but justified it as being caring:

> Interviewer: How do you think the girls feel … [about the control]?

> Tyler: They should feel happy because the guy cares about them.

As shown in the analysis of the interviews with female participants, perceptions of control as care were reinforced by the girls themselves, who were unsure if their partner's behaviour was due to a concern for their safety or a wish to exert control. Sometimes young men were influenced by the rumours spread by peers about their girlfriends, and this led them to mistrust their partners:

> Ben: When I'm not with her I just get paranoid about what's she going to do, what's she done. I've got to trust her but I don't. I don't know … 'cos of what I've heard she's like as well … that she just likes the attention basically … proper flirting as well.

In some cases, these reputations led young men to try to control their partners. This process happened with both sexes, but young women seemed to be more likely to suffer from negative stereotypes about their sexualised behaviour. This issue will be explored more in section 4.

INSTIGATORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Four of the boys interviewed mentioned that they *may* have pressured their girlfriends to have sex. However they were unsure if they had, as they had not asked how their partners felt about the situation.

> Marcus: I do it sometimes like. Girls are pushing my hands away and that.

> Interviewer: Oh right.

> Marcus: They're just shy

> Interviewer: Oh right.

> Marcus: Girls are like that.

> Interviewer: So some girls can be a little bit like …

> Marcus: Scared.

> Interviewer: … scared …

> Marcus: If it's the first time, yeah.

It is possible that some young people may not always be aware that they are pressuring their partners into sex and therefore may not necessarily be 'knowing' instigators of sexual violence. As discussed in the previous section, girls talked about the complex process of deciding when they were ready for sex, their difficulty in recognising and expressing their own sexual wishes, and the problems they faced in negotiating sexual encounters especially if they changed their mind. As with earlier research in this area, this suggests the existence of a lack of communication around the negotiation of sex in teenage relationships (Seig 2007, Banister et al 2003, Holland et al 1998). However, it must be remembered

that these sexual 'negotiations' often take place within a relationship based on unequal gendered power (Holland et al 1998, Barter et al 2009).

None of the girls reported being instigators of sexual partner violence.

RECIPROCAL INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

In some of the interviews it was difficult to determine who had been the initial instigator of the violence and who was acting in self-defence. It was also often difficult to establish what was meant by 'reciprocal' violence when one partner, generally the male, was stronger than the other:

> Becky: I just slapped him … and he slapped me back. But obviously he's got a harder hand. I didn't like it … you know. I got really upset.

One participant described how she was violent to her partner and he retaliated in a similar manner. She said she always started the violence (due to him obtaining other girls' phone numbers) and that she felt it was important that he was violent back in order to balance the argument and to make her feel better about her own aggression. She made a distinction between the use of violence as control, and violence as two-way expressions of anger and frustration:

> Sasha: … if I was to hit him and he didn't hit me back, I don't think it's all right, but if it feels like someone just being violent to control you, I don't think it is right.

The following example shows how reciprocal violence can be very complex. Alex states that he is not hurt physically by the violence from his partner. However her violence bothers him as he feels that it makes her look 'stupid', and he fears that she may act this way in public and he would feel embarrassed. To control her violence Alex feels as though he has to retaliate physically. His partner is scared of his violence because she is much smaller than him and he says he can not control his violence sometimes because he has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This raises the question of what is meant by physical violence when power differences are taken into consideration.

> Alex: I'd never full-on fist a woman. I'd just give her a little slap round the face to say 'Calm down', so she knows herself and puts her in her place … I mean yeah I've slapped my girlfriends once before, I mean I'm not going to lie, I've got nothing to hide. She's quite a violent girl, she hits her mum and she did start kicking me in certain areas … And I sort of grabbed her, put her down and I was hurting her, and I was like 'I suggest you stop, otherwise I'm going to have to do something'. And she started trying to knock me and throw punches, so I just sort of slapped her across the face. Not hard … didn't leave a mark but just sort of a … so she felt it … And she sort of … she looked at me in shock and I sort like 'Told you' and then I walked off.

> Interviewer: But how have you felt when she's been like that to you? Have you felt physically hurt? Or have you felt scared yourself or anything?

> Alex: No no, I just feel she's getting on a bit stupid … Do you know what I mean, I'm supposed to be her man and she's getting violent with me and I sort of think if she did that in public she would look like such an idiot … And if I was to slap her in public, it would make me feel bad because I've had to take it to that extent … she's very small … obviously when I slap her she sort of looks at me and she realises

> 'Like okay, I don't want to push him too far', so she backs off … Which I think's quite a clever idea, 'cos I've got ADHD and if I lose it, I lose it … I can't control it … I can control it to a certain extent now, but if she was to push me so far that I lose it like proper, I wouldn't be able to … I'd probably end up hitting her which I don't want to do … I can control it to the fact that I'd give her a little slap, but I don't think she'd make me go any further than that.

Reciprocal violence also seemed to be related to the double standards that young people had regarding their relationships. This particularly seemed to be the case in relation to partner control, where boys would often say that they were annoyed that their partners were trying to put constraints on their movements but at the same time they acted in a similar manner, although they felt that their behaviour was acceptable.

SUMMARY POINTS

Physical Violence

- A quarter of the young women in the disadvantage study reported being instigators of physical violence in their relationships. This finding is similar to the level found in the school-based survey.

- In comparison only six male participants (13%) in this study stated they had used physical violence against their partners. Again this finding reflects the school-based survey.

- The majority of young women reported using physical violence in relationships where they were themselves a victim of partner violence. Thus only rarely did female participants instigate physical violence when they had not themselves been victimised.

- Female participants also reported using violence due to a 'build-up' of anger and frustration or a response to a specific situation, most often their partner's unfaithfulness.

- Male participants reported that their use of violence was a one-off incident and not a regular aspect of their relationships.

- The majority of male participants reported feeling that physical violence against women was unacceptable. However young men did not necessarily always perceive other acts of aggression with their partner, such as damaging belongings or property, as threatening. Female participants, however, reported feeling scared by such behaviour.

- Male partners were not always aware of the impact that their aggressive behaviour had on their partners.

Emotional Violence

- A quarter of both female and male participants reported instigating partner control in their relationships.

- The majority of young women who reported controlling behaviour stated that they acted this way due to jealousy and mistrust.

- Young men were less explicit about their controlling behaviour, often portraying it as care rather than control.

Sexual Violence

- Four male participants said they may have pressured their girlfriends to have sex, although they were unsure as they had not asked their partners how they felt about their actions.

- None of the female participants reported using sexual violence.

Reciprocal Violence

- In some interviews it was difficult to determine who had been the initial instigator of the violence and who was reciprocating or acting in self-defence.

- Young men who reported reciprocal violence in their relationships often described using significantly greater force than their girlfriends did.

SECTION 4: INFLUENCING FACTORS

Having looked at the different forms of partner violence in disadvantaged young people's relationships, this section now considers some of the associated factors which were linked with young people's experiences. A number of factors are explored; however it is important to recognise that although these factors are looked at separately, in the interviews they were often seen as inter-linked.

GENDER

The majority of male participants stated that they thought that it was less acceptable for a boy to be physically violent towards a girl than it was for a girl to be physically violent towards a boy – even if a girl had initiated the physical violence. This may indicate that these young men showed some awareness of the power imbalance between boys and girls in relation to physical violence, or it may be that they were simply repeating a prevalent double standard. Nearly all of the girls thought that a boy should not be violent towards a girl. However, some of the girls failed to take into consideration the gendered impact of violence. Female participants reported that it was acceptable for a boy to physically retaliate if their partner was being violent towards them. Their justification stemmed from an egalitarian standpoint, which discounted any power differences based on physical strength. Jo for example said the following:

> Jo: If you can give a beating you can take one … there's more boys that hits girls, but if the girls, like, think they can hit boys and the boys are, like, 'I ain't hitting her back,' then I thinks, 'Why?' Hit her back … she's hitting you … 'cos if a girl's hitting a boy and he just sits there and takes it you're mad.

In the above extract, Jo argues that gender should not influence how violence is perceived, but in her own relationship she described how she had been unable to fight back against her violent partner due to fear of the consequences. This indicates that, although personal experiences of violence may be gendered, this does not necessarily inform wider attitudes towards intimate violence.

Most of the girls thought that boys were more likely to be controlling in relationships. Female participants generally related this to the way that boys perceived gender differences: stating that boys acted this way because they think males are supposed to be more dominant than females and that these general attitudes influence how they act in their own relationships:

> Tara: I think that's the main problem. Men think that just because they think that they're the stronger species that they should take control of their relationship.

Male participants also spoke about their beliefs in gender roles whereby they stereotyped females as being more dependent on their partners than were males. One young man was very explicit about his expectations of maintaining power over his female partners. His behaviour seemed to be strongly linked to his position as a leader of a 'crew' (group of local young males) and his need to maintain his power and status amongst this peer group.

Case Study: Jon

Jon lived at home with his parents and siblings with whom he had an 'okay' relationship. Jon was permanently excluded from school. He stated he had his first girlfriend at the age of 11. At the time of the interview he was going out with two girls at the same time. He said he managed to do this by having two separate mobile phones. Jon is the leader of a 'crew'. He says that the only reason that he has girlfriends is for the sex:

… mainly I go out with my girlfriends for the shag and like most of my friends as well.

Jon was also very controlling of his girlfriends. Jon stated he did not like his girlfriends wearing short skirts as it encouraged other boys to look at them. He thought that most males are controlling of their girlfriends because they do not want to get cheated on. He thought that the girls should be happy about this behaviour as it showed that their partner cared about them. For Jon it seemed that his controlling behaviour was related to his need to maintain his power and status amongst his 'crew'. Having a girlfriend added to his status, but for her to be unfaithful would mean a loss of standing. If he became suspicious that his girlfriend had cheated, Jon and his crew would physically assault the boy implicated.

To physically attack his girlfriend in public would jeopardise his status, however to beat-up her male companion added to his status and compensated for any potential loss of credibility amongst his crew. His violence also acted as a warning to his female partner not to associate with male peers and consequently strengthened his dominance in the relationship.

Many of the female interviewees, in common with those participating in the school-based research, generalised that boys and young men were interested only in the sexual aspect of relationships:

Hannah   All boys call girls one (a slag) … Boys are just boys though innit? Most boys are just dumb, got issues … You know what boys are like, they only think of one thing really … I reckon boys, yeah more than girls definitely.

Alisha: Boys don't care who they do it with … they just do it for the fun of it.

Most of the young women referred to the unequal way that males and females are represented in relation to sexuality, with boys and young men being commended for having many sexual partners, whilst girls and young women are labelled as 'sluts' or 'slags':

Hannah: It's like basically, say, if a boy sleeps with five girls in a night and a girl sleeps with like two, she's getting called a slut straight away and the boys are like … to their boy mates would be like 'Yeah, fair play, you did it!'.

Leah: … you'll never catch a woman raping a boy, yeah, just 'cos she can't get sex. But you get men doing that to women yeah? And yet again women get called the slags. You know what I mean? I really don't understand it.

Jessica: Like if my boyfriend calls me a slag and things like that, I don't like that … 'cos I know I'm not … like he's slept with so many people … but they don't think like that, do they, boys? It's 'cos l think girls, they're supposed to look after their self … which I do. I don't go around sleeping with people.

These findings are similar to other research on teenage perceptions of sexuality (Stanley 2005, Holland et al 1998). This double standard of sexuality was confirmed in the male interviews:

Andrew: Slut … that's the common name … because they shag anything that walks.

At the same time, some young women reinforced this inequality in the way they themselves referred to gendered sexual practices:

Georgia: It's basically like boys move faster than girls. It's not all boys. Like some girls they're pretty loose with it, but a lot of boys they're kind of sexually ready for girls.

In the above quote Georgia reinforces this inequality by describing females as 'loose' if they are sexually active, whereas she describes males as 'sexually ready'. A few of the young women also sought to excuse their partner's sexualised verbal violence:

Leah: Oh yeah, he's called me like 'You silly bitch' or stuff like that. Nothing bad … I know he knows I'm not a slag so … that's why like … I allow him.

Some of the female participants described how their boyfriends generalised 'all boys' as being only interested in sex and therefore were untrustworthy as friends or acquaintances. This labelling acted to reinforce gendered positions and justified male control over their female partner's movements and interactions:

Alex: … obviously I trust her, but I don't trust other boys. Because I mean being a lad myself …

AGE

For some young women, the violence occurred at a very young age, in some cases this violence was severe. Mia was aged 10 and in relationship with a 13 year-old, who used to be severely violent to her over the course of half a year:

Mia: … he broke my nose and gave me a black eye … 'cos I used to wear like … medium sized hoops [earrings], and he ripped all of them out … it happened all the time … he'd make sure his mum and dad were out and then he'd do it … and he pushed me down the stairs, I had a bleeding nose, I'd knocked four of my teeth out at the back.

Mia felt that she could not disclose the violence she experienced at the time because people would not believe her or take her seriously due to her age:

Mia: 'cos like my age and like … you know when you get a little girl or a little boy saying 'Oh yeah I get beaten up', it's like 'No you're not'. And like you think that they're joking.

The experiences of younger girls emphasise the fact that partner violence is not only a problem for teenagers but for some begins much earlier in their childhoods. However some female interviewees also dismissed their early relationships as being trivial:

Megan: When I was in year 7 [age 11] I had my first proper relationship … I was in it for about a year as well … but I was like only young then, didn't really know anything.

Carla: when I was younger … obviously I was innocent back then.

Ideas of naïvety and innocence regarding pre-teen relationships may act to reinforce younger girls' powerlessness when they are in such relationships. Younger girls, and their peers, may use such concepts to minimise negative relationship experiences by attributing them to immaturity. We need to focus on assisting young people to recognise the inappropriateness of partner violence, at whatever age it occurs.

AGE OF PARTNER

Many of the young women interviewed said that they thought it was better to go out with someone older than them because they would be more respectful and mature. Most participants reported that a gap of more than two years constituted an older partner, although for many the age gap was much greater. They thought that older male partners were less likely to be physically violent towards them in a relationship. However, those who had actually experienced relationships with older partners were much more likely to report higher levels of violence in those relationships than those with same-age or younger partners. This finding also arose in the school-based survey.

Other forms of control were directly influenced by power imbalances in relation to gender and age. In a few cases, young women felt that their partner's controlling behaviour was a direct result of having a much younger girlfriend and not wanting to be seen in public with them.

Older partners were also considered to be more mature in respect of intimate relationships. Some female participants thought that older partners would be less likely to pressurise them into having sex because they would be more committed to the relationship itself; unlike younger boys who they perceived as being keen to have sex early in their relationship to impress their peers.

Alicia: Most older people, there's a couple of them out there that just want to get girls' clothes off, but most of them want a relationship.

Interviewer: … what do you think with young boys then?

Alicia: They think they're all bad 'cos everyone else does it and they think they'll be popular … And then they go round saying 'oh yeah this slag done so and so'.

One female participant saw infidelity as a feature of being young:

Paula: I've had a few people cheat on me before … who doesn't when you're young I suppose?

These perceptions reinforce the idolisation of older male partners. However both this research and the school-based research showed that sexual violence was more likely to occur with an older partner and especially a much-older partner. Thus there appears to be a disparity between young women's positive perceptions of older males and the reality of actually having an older partner. It may be that the status attributed in some peer groups to much older boyfriends overshadows the reality of having one.

In contrast, some of the male participants with much older girlfriends found their partner's independence from them frustrating. Although many of these young men had attempted to exert some control over their girlfriends, this had mostly been unsuccessful. Age can act to dissipate gendered power (if it is the girlfriend who is older). This is explained by a male interviewee who stated that, although a gendered power imbalance is inevitable, its influence can be reduced if the male partner is younger:

Alex: I mean I was controlling when I went out with younger girls … so I think when the men are older they've got more control over you … whereas if you're the younger bloke, obviously you've still got as much … you've got probably a bit more power than the woman but she likes … women … I mean I'm not talking for all women but I think most women like a certain bit of control from their man … 'cos it's a man figure … I think the younger bloke, they still stand their ground and come across as the dominant figure, but I think they obviously give into a lot of things as well, do you know what I mean? So we're [the younger male partners] more understanding … it's a lot more balanced.

Some male interviewees reported that going out with a younger partner was no different to going out with someone their own age. However, others reported that having a younger partner was problematic because she was more interested in going out with her friends, while they wanted to do other things:

Ben: 'Cos she's still young and she wants to go out and all that with her mates and get drunk and stuff, walk the streets … wants to go out all the time.

Mark: It's crap [going out with someone younger] … she was immature … just like 'Oh yeah, lets go out to the park'.

A few of the male participants reported feeling pressurised by older partners to have sex before they were ready, showing how age, not just gender, can be important factors in experiences of sexual pressure or force:

Adam: She kept bugging me … for about five months … I just wasn't really ready to do it with her … Just because she was 15 and I was 13 and she just kept wanting to do it.

WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THEIR FAMILIES OF ORIGIN

A quarter of participants (14 girls and 7 boys) reported witnessing domestic violence in their family. Sometimes this violence was very severe and in all cases a female family member was the victim, most commonly a mother, but sometimes grandmother or aunt. All perpetrators were male.

Janet: He [her stepfather] went out for a drink and my mum come home and my sister was like two or three-days old. My mum had her in her hands making her bottle and as she turned around he head butted her and she dropped my sister.

Ali: He [his father] was an alcoholic and he broke my mum's jaw.

In one instance the domestic violence had been fatal.

Marcus: My mum's dead, my dad's the one who killed her.

The majority of these participants said that they would never accept violence towards themselves because of what they had witnessed between their parents.

Carla: … because I've seen it like so much. Like my cousins and my mum's friend told me that her boyfriend used to beat her all the time, she's come to my house with black eyes and I just think 'Why are you still there?' It's just I couldn't let somebody do that to me if you get what I mean. Yes, it's just like I see it so much I just think, no God that couldn't be me.

Many of the young men who had seen their fathers being violent towards their mothers said that they would not want to act like this due to what their mothers had gone through.

Ali: … he was beating my mum again. So I just don't like … I just don't like that kind of thing … a man really has got like sometimes a lot more power over a woman, say if they've had something to drink, really aggressive and stuff … and I just don't like things like that. Yeah I never ever, ever want to do that. I wouldn't want to put a woman in the position where she's scared of me. 'Cos I just don't think that's right. A woman should never actually be scared of someone.

Cameron: I've seen my mum get like beat up … well not beat up, but hit by my stepdads and stuff … So I've been brought up round that and I just don't like it.

A few of the female participants described how their mothers had told them never to accept violence from a partner:

Janet: My mum had most of her boyfriends, my dad and the two kids' dad, she got beaten by them … And it was quite bad but she has always told me, if a bloke raises his fist to you, he's never gonna change; don't give him a second chance … my mum said even if they goes to hit you and they don't do it, they really want to.

Janet was very determined that she would never accept any kind of intimate partner violence. She said she had never experienced any physical or sexual violence in her own relationships – one boyfriend had attempted to control her by stopping her going out and she ended the relationship for this reason. Her mother was no longer in a violent relationship. Perhaps having direct discussions with her mother about her experiences, and seeing her mother successfully leave two violent relationships, enabled Janet to develop very strong beliefs about the unacceptability of intimate control and violence.

Although other young people did not directly receive such messages, they still developed a strong sense of what was acceptable within a relationship:

Interviewer: How do you think you've learnt like just to say that's enough, that's it?

Megan: Because I dealt with it for 10 years with my nan and granddad?

Interviewer: Really? So did you live with your nan and granddad?

Megan: On and off for 10 years. And my nan took a lot of it off my granddad.

Interviewer: Right.

Megan: She always ran back to him after and that's something I won't do because he'll say 'oh he won't never do it again', whereas he does. So I know for a fact that if they say they're not gonna do it again, you can't be too sure, 'cos they might not do it again, but you don't know if they're gonna do it again or not. But I won't stick around. I won't give them the chance.

Interviewer: Did you get any advice from your nan, did she ever tell you about …

Megan: It was me giving her the advice, she wouldn't listen though!

Megan had developed a good understanding of intimate partner violence from what she had witnessed. She strongly believed that once someone had been violent, they were likely to behave this way again, even if they said they apologised. She stated she would never want to live with this kind of uncertainty.

These experiences show that young people do not necessarily replicate the physical violence they have witnessed at home in their own intimate relationships. Most said that they did not see the domestic violence as normal or acceptable. For many, what they witnessed was so disturbing they were determined not to let the same things happen to them, either as recipients or instigators. Sometimes, the young people articulated their feelings about not wanting to repeat their parent's experiences of family violence by relating this to how their own children might feel:

Caitlin: Like obviously I used to see my mum upset and stuff like that. So I don't think … like, say I had a kid I don't think they would want to see me like that. So obviously I'd have to think about how they felt, if you know what I mean.

The reality however was not quite so simple. Despite recognising the damage that domestic violence had done to their lives, and assurances that they would not remain in a violent relationship, some still found themselves victimised in this way, as in the case of Caitlin above. This dilemma is also illustrated below:

Interviewer: How did it make you feel after [her partner had hit her].

Lisa: I don't know. I think 'cos my dad used to hit my mum … it's kind of nothing, not really … but like I always said if a man hits me then they're going straight away, there's no excuse … I kind of expected it coming though really, 'cos he was that type of person. Like he just acts like he's big, so he was that kind of person.

A few of the female interviewees who had reported experiencing direct child abuse in their families also experienced violence in their own relationships – as victims or instigators. Ellie described how she was physically abused as a child by her mother and her stepfather. Ellie had experienced a great deal of sexual exploitation in her relationships, and felt that this may be due to her lack of self-esteem resulting from her earlier experiences of child abuse. Tara had also experienced abuse from her parents as well as physical violence from her ex-partner which, at the time, left her feeling confused and emotionally distressed. She explained that, for some time, she thought that violence was an expression of love due to the child abuse she had experienced and her parents' 'explanations' of why they acted in this way towards her. This led her to accept the violence in her own intimate partner relationships. Young people who have experienced parental child abuse may be more likely to experience confusion about their own experiences of intimate violence. Alongside this confusion their low self-esteem, associated with the previous abuse, may increase their susceptibility and acceptance of violence in their own relationships.

Some girls spoke about their own use of violence. One girl interviewed spoke about how she had hit her partner because she was angry that he had repeatedly cheated on her. She later felt annoyed with herself for doing this because she had witnessed her father doing this to her mother and felt as though she was repeating his behaviour.

> Interviewer: So how did you feel after you hit him?
>
> Georgia:　　Um, even worse.
>
> Interviewer: Oh right, you felt worse did you?
>
> Georgia:　　Yeah. I was like 'Ooh'.
>
> Interviewer: Oh right, did it shock you that you'd done that?
>
> Georgia:　　Yeah, 'cos like that's the sort of thing where my dad was always hitting my mum sort of thing … So it was kind of a big thing. I was like 'Oh no, don't do that'.

Carla's mother had used physical violence as a form of control throughout her childhood and this may help to explain why Carla felt violence is an inevitable, if unacceptable, aspect of intimate relationships. She explained the reason for her own violence as being because of anger:

> Carla:　　When you're angry, it's just your rage isn't it, it's just different so yes, you just do it. And then after obviously you think why did I do that but, like I said, anger takes over.

Carla normalised her actions, seeing them as an unavoidable part of life.

> Carla:　　It's not alright for anyone to hit anyone really but it happens.

One participant described how she was very 'clingy' with her ex-partner, disliked him spending time with his friends and used to ring him all the time, which annoyed him. She explained this behaviour by saying she had always felt pushed out of her family and received little positive attention. She felt she had transferred these feelings onto her partner, who ended the relationship.

In some cases, partner violence was attributed directly to previous family violence; this acted to minimise their partner's responsibility for their actions. Mia said she understood that her boyfriend's behaviour was due to witnessing violence in his family:

> Interviewer: Why do you think that guy was like that?
>
> Mia:　　Because his dad used to beat up his mum … and he thought it was right to do it to other girls … 'cos I was his first girlfriend, he thought it was right to do it to me … he just thought it was okay, that's how you treat women … but I didn't know that until afterwards. I just thought 'Oh yeah he's beating me up for no reason'.

Some of the young people had experienced severe parental abuse or neglect resulting in them entering care. The way these experiences impacted on young people's relationships will be considered in more detail in section 5 of this report.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Young people's perceptions of how alcohol and illegal drug-taking contributed to teenage partner violence instigation varied by gender. Male participants did not associate alcohol or drug-taking with their partner's use of violence, whereas this was a factor in young women's evaluations of their boyfriend's violence.

Several of the female participants who were victims of physical violence in their relationships stated that their partner's use of alcohol or drugs affected their behaviour. In the majority of these cases young women stated that, although their partner had been violent towards them when they were sober, the severity of the violence increased when their boyfriends had been drinking alcohol. Two participants commented that the violence was always worse at the weekend because this was when their partners drank heavily. Only a minority of young women viewed alcohol as directly attributing to their partner's use of violence. One female interviewee described how their relationship was enjoyable for a year, but when her partner started drinking he became very violent towards her. This pattern lasted for three months.

> Jo: ... he never used to do it 'cos when he wasn't drinking he used to be like 'ah sorry for that last night', and then as soon as he started drinking again he just used to [be violent] ...

Jo continued that when she was 'drinking' she used physical violence in self-defence:

> Jo: ... If I was drunk as well I used to hit him back, but if I was like normal I just used to just sit there and take it.

Often female participants stated that if they used violence in self-defence their male partner responded to this by becoming even more violent. It seemed from interviews that this escalation increased when alcohol was also a factor. Jo's detrimental experience had a long-term effect on how she felt about her future relationships:

> Jo: When I get with someone now, when they start drinking I don't like it, I like get scared, I'm like, oh my God.

Although male participants did not associate alcohol with their partner's use of violence, some girls reported that alcohol influenced their own behaviour. For example, Tamsin described how she became violent towards her partner due to drinking. She explains that the reasons she was drinking were because of the stresses she was experiencing in her life:

> Tamsin It [the relationship] used to be quite violent. It's all right now 'cos I don't drink any more, so we're fine ... I'd lash out at him ... 'cos I was drinking cider ... violent drink that ... that was going back about two years ago now at the beginning of our relationship. And I was in quite a bad patch, like I was living with my friends [due to being homeless] and that, so that's why I was drinking ... I stopped drinking when I was stable in my own flat.

Some of the young men mentioned that they thought that drinking alcohol rather than the use of illegal drugs contributed to violence. Even though many of the male interviewees reported beliefs around the unacceptability of male violence towards women, some acknowledged that violence can still happen when people are under the influence of alcohol.

Jack: It's just wrong … we're all the same [friends], we all disagree with it … My mate does as well, but he was a bit drunk [when he hit his girlfriend].

In these accounts it is not felt that it is the actual instigator of the violence who is responsible for their violent actions, but the alcohol. In contrast, in most of the young women's accounts, alcohol increased the severity of violence rather than being seen as an explanation for its actual occurrence. However some female participants did report a more direct link between their boyfriends' drinking and their controlling behaviour:

Jo: When he did used to drink, he never used to let me go out with any of my mates, he used to be like 'no you're staying in with me' … and stuff like that … Yeah, and I lost all my mates because he used to make me stay in when he was drunk and all that. All my mates was like, 'oh, you're choosing him over us' and all that.

A few of the female participants described how their partners became paranoid and jealous when they were smoking cannabis. The paranoia made their boyfriends more controlling over their movements and whom they saw. In some instances this led to continual accusations of cheating and physical violence. One female interviewee described how her partner's dependence on cannabis and his subsequent violent behaviour trapped her in a cycle of having to fund his habit to avoid being physically attacked:

Caitlin: … he used to say to me 'oh can I borrow a tenner like to get the smoke, I'll give it you back'. And I used to say, 'yeah', but I knew he wasn't going to give it me back. But then I know if I didn't give him it he would get worse and worse because he wouldn't have nothing to smoke. So he'd start taking that out on me.

However the use of cannabis and the associated excessive jealousy was not restricted to males. Tara described how she became obsessed about her partner's behaviour due to her drug use:

Tara: But I mean I was smoking weed as well, so I was really paranoid, but then once someone cheats on you and you're smoking weed, you're like - has he cheated on me again? - … that's all I was ever thinking.

A few of the young men reported that their girlfriends did not like it when they were drunk or smoking cannabis. Some stated they found this annoying and saw it as their girlfriend trying to control them. Others, however, thought that it was positive that their partners were trying to restrict their substance misuse.

Cameron   … she won't let me do drugs … which is a good thing for me really … that was another reason why I stopped because she said she wouldn't give me the chance unless I stopped.

For young women, alcohol was commonly linked to their experiences of sexual pressure or force. Generally female participants described being pressurised to drink by males, and being made to feel like they were being a killjoy if they did not. Teenagers may be particular vulnerable to social pressures based on their social image:

Georgia   I was like 'I'm not drinking'. And he was saying 'No you've got to drink. Drink, drink, don't be miserable'.

Some young women described experiencing sexual pressure or force by boys or men who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. For this reason female participants often felt that they needed to be careful with males whom they knew had been drinking:

> Chloe: … So I dance with them but then take nothing further. But they say to me oh like 'Oh I really like you' and stuff, but I'm like 'Yeah, you're drunk, I'm drunk, nothing's going to happen'.

Some female participants described how being drunk made them more vulnerable to having sex when they did not really want to. One participant (Leah) described being drunk when she lost her virginity. She said she was not pressured by her partner but did not think she would have had sex with him if she had not been drunk. She regretted it the next day. For some, drinking made them more vulnerable to having casual sex which they later regretted:

> Chantelle: 'Cos you just don't know what your doing, 'cos you just get like too drunk and stuff … and then you don't know what's happened.

A few girls described not wanting to drink alcohol again as they were unhappy about having sexual experiences when they were drunk. Two girls experienced having their drinks spiked and subsequently being unable to remember their sexual exploitation.

Many of the female interviewees were aware of how drinking could make them vulnerable. Consequently some were very careful about how much they drank and had a range of protection strategies in place, for example by making sure that at least one of their friends stayed sober when they went out.

> Chloe: I know if I do [go off with a boy when they are drunk] then my mates are there to say 'Look Chloe, you're going too far now' … Like 'Stop it'. And I'd do exactly the same for them … yeah, we look out for each other when we're out.
>
> Georgia: … I was like 'I'm not going to drink, 'cos I'm sleeping at my friend's house, I'm looking after my friend, 'cos she's drinking … when somebody's drinking you can't all drink 'cos … someone's got to look after [them].

Beliefs about young women's sexual behaviour and alcohol were reflected in some of the male interviews:

> Marcus: … the girls love it when they're drunk 'cos they don't have to do nothing, they just lie there innit … girls enjoy it loads … 'cos it's girls innit.
>
> Simon: A normal girl, she ain't gonna let some kid come up to her and put an arm around her straight away … a lot of girls when they're drunk they do certain things.

Several boys said that they knew other boys who had taken advantage sexually of girls when drunk. One male participant said that he could not be sure whether he had pressured a girl into anything sexual when he was drunk.

> Interviewer: … do you ever feel you've influenced girls to do anything?
>
> Tim: Don't know. Don't know but when I'm drunk I don't know … I'm a bit dopey and that, I'm a bit of a dickhead innit.

There were exceptions. One young man said that he would never want to do anything sexually with a girl that had been drinking because he wanted to be sure that she had consented.

> Liam: I never go out with a girl, or touch a girl that's been drinking. I have to do it when she's sober … Completely sober, she knows exactly what she's doing.

Some participants also spoke about how the use of illegal drugs affected a person's propensity to be violent. One girl (Emma) had experienced having several relationships with partners who were heavily using drugs. At the time she had recently entered care and was 'hanging around' on the streets with drug dealers and using crack cocaine and cannabis. At this point in her life she experienced a great deal of sexual exploitation. It seems that her use of drugs, combined with her complex life situation, amplified her vulnerability to these negative sexual experiences.

Section 5 will address some of the specific issues that certain disadvantaged groups faced, including young people in care.

ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

Although only a few young people in this study discussed issues concerning ethnicity and religion, these areas merit future research attention. A minority of the participants expressed negative stereotypes about people from minority ethnic backgrounds based on their own relationship experiences. As we did not routinely ask young people their partners' ethnicity, it is unknown how many had partners from a different ethnic background but did not mention this in the interview and did not hold prejudiced views.

Sophie described how being in a violent relationships with one black partner had influenced her attitudes to all black men:

> Interviewer: Do you think it [violent experience] has made you sort of not want to be with someone who's like that? …
>
> Sophie: Yeah. Well he is (whispers) black.
>
> Interviewer: Oh right – have you been out with other black men?
>
> Sophie: No, that was the only one.
>
> Interviewer: Oh right, but you think that it's black people that do that?
>
> Sophie: Mm … [black men are] all the same.

It is concerning that, in this case, the violence is attributed directly to her partner's colour, a racist perception. Commentators have identified that a prevalent racist stereotype depicts black men as embodying an uncontrolled violent hypersexuality (Blaount and Cunnigham 1996, Dines 2006).

Emma said that she was confused about how she felt towards people from certain minority ethnic backgrounds, due to her negative relationship experiences with minority boys. In particular she spoke about being sexually exploited when she used to socialise with a group she described as 'Jamaican gangster boys'. Emma also talked about her experience of going out with an Asian boy. Emma generalised that all Asian boys saw white girls as 'slags', and treated them in a disrespectful manner. We did not interview any Asian young people in this study to explore this concept. Emma also described how she was more assertive in her relationships with white boys than she was with black partners:

> Emma: I was really like, aggressive towards white people … and white boys, I was a lot more like no, fuck off, or really quite offensive and stuff because to me they were really only white teenage boys … They weren't big scary drug dealers.

It seems that Emma's perception of her black partners as 'scary drug dealers', whether this was based on fact or not, made Emma feel less able to challenge the violence she experienced in these relationships. Again, wider racist stereotypes associated with drugs may have influenced Emma's perceptions. Nevertheless their 'hard' status or reputation made it easier for those partners to exploit Emma.

The proposition that some young people may be less assertive in their relationships with partners from different backgrounds may also be associated with issues of religion and culture. If one partner is less aware of the other's religious or cultural background then that partner may use that to their advantage. For example, a white female participant had a partner who was Muslim and they had a child together. When the child was born she converted to become a Muslim. After she converted, she became suspicious that he was using his religious or cultural beliefs to control her. For example, he would not let her or the baby sit in the same room when other men came round and he restricted her movements outside the home. She attempted to follow these rules because she wanted to counter the negative stereotypes that his friends held of non-Muslim women, and wished to avoid the resulting confrontations if she disobeyed. However she also reported feeling frustrated about the changes that he was imposing on her life. She found that, although her partner applied strict religious beliefs to control her lifestyle, he did not apply such beliefs to his own and, for example, regularly consumed large quantities of alcohol. It seems that her partner exploited her lack of confidence in being able to challenge his cultural beliefs as a means of control.

For a minority of the young people, racism from their families or friends towards their ethnic minority partner caused them to become isolated and more dependent on them.

> Becky: She [her mother] didn't like it – he's from a different country … she thought he'd be like a shoe bomber or something.

Some felt pressured to stay in an unfulfilling relationship as they felt they needed to demonstrate to those who were disapproving of their partners that they could make it work. Further research is necessary on this area to provide a more accurate picture of how ethnicity influences young people's relationship experiences. There appears to be a danger that negative relationship experiences may serve to perpetuate racism in peer cultures.

LOCALITY

There was a sense from the interviews that gender roles and expectations vary significantly from one location to another, depending on the culture of gendered behaviour present within different areas.

> Caitlin: Round here I see things as it's more the boys, like where I live there's more the boys come onto the girls than the girls come onto the boy.

> Jack: My mates get proper beaten up by their missus … they're all hard nuts … round my area.

> Leon: … the place I live … it's like they're [girls] all rough innit … they just don't care … they're like tom boys up there mind … they're built bigger than us … they're animals up there.

It was obviously not possible to gauge the extent to which these generalisations had any justification. We need to be aware, as Holloway (2001) reminds us, of the purpose of accounts. It may be that local reputations are being used as a way to legitimate violence, in the same way as masculinity can be used. In addition our sample was drawn primarily from a single city and, thus, we were unable to explore attitudes and experiences outside this specific location including other parts of the UK and rural areas.

PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

It is important to recognise that many of the young people who had experienced intimate partner violence also described a wide range of self-protective strategies and resourcefulness in dealing with these negative experiences.

Some of the young people drew on their previous negative relationship experiences to make judgements concerning the important factors in their new relationships. Lisa, for example, had experienced two negative relationships before her current one. The first one was with the father of her baby. He had lied about his age and told her he was 18 when he was actually 30. When she had her baby, he lost interest in her. Her second relationship was with someone who hit her because he suspected she was seeing someone else. These previous negative relationship experiences provided Lisa with a measure by which to judge the strengths of her new relationship. When talking about her new relationship one of the main things she valued was her partner's sensitivity:

> Interviewer: … So is this a good relationship then?
>
> Lisa: Yeah yeah.
>
> Interviewer; What makes it a good relationship?
>
> Lisa: It's just different. Like people … I've seen like even my sister's relationships and stuff, he's just so different.
>
> Interviewer: Mm.
>
> Lisa: He's like a woman but he's not.
>
> Interviewer: Oh right.
>
> Lisa: He's just like he's got feelings, proper feelings. He's got more feelings than what I have I think.

Similarly Chloe reflected on her previous relationships with controlling partners in judging how she would act if this happened again in a future relationship. For Chloe, an important factor in judging potential future partners was that they would allow her to spend time with her friends:

> Chloe: … and now I've learnt when like another relationship comes along don't listen to what he says. If he don't let me see my friends then he like ain't good enough really, 'cos friends are always there for you and boys ain't.

Some of the young women who had controlling partners simply did not tell their partners that they were seeing their friends:

Paula: Yeah I just wouldn't tell him. I'm not going to stop seeing my friends, just 'cos he didn't want me to.

Interviewer: Right, so you just didn't tell him.

Paula :   Mm. 'Cos it's not fair on my friends is it?

For Paula, as soon as her partner found out and tried to stop her doing this, she ended the relationship as she did not like the feeling of being controlled. One female participant described how she talked to her partner about his previous use of physical violence against her, and made him promise that if she got back together with him, he must never be violent again. This was difficult for her to do as she felt scared of him, yet she found the courage to do so. At the time of the interview he had not been violent to her again:

Caitlin: Yeah. It's like at first like when he … because he rang me up and like was saying oh like 'I want to get back with you' and stuff like that. Then I said to him 'Well like meet me tomorrow and then we'll talk' and he said 'All right.' So I went to his house. And then like at first I was scared like, because obviously from before. But then I just started talking to him and then he was all right about it. And I said 'serious, if you do it again then I'm never coming back.' And he said 'All right.' Then he's never done it.

Some female participants exhibited a 'tough' attitude to the violence they experienced in their relationships and were confident that they would be able to protect themselves through their own determination, strength and confidence to fight back.

Megan, however, recognised that not everyone was able to respond in this way, and linked her ability to do so to her experiences of growing-up:

Interviewer: Have you ever felt you've been pressured to do something you haven't wanted to do?

Megan: Plenty of times … I'm brave enough to say 'no'. Whereas I know a few people that aren't.

Interviewer: What do you think's given you that sort of … ?

Megan: The way I was brought up I guess … boys can get violent if you say no and that as I've experienced. But I don't know, I've always been brave enough to accept the consequences. Whether they can take it or not is up to them, but if someone hits me they just tend to know that they're gonna get a smack back to be honest. 'Cos I ain't just gonna sit there and take it.

Although many of the girls felt they had little option but to comply with their boyfriend's controlling behaviour, often fearing retaliation if they did not, some resisted their attempts. Some would still see their friends despite their partner's attempts to stop them. One girl simply stopped all contact with her boyfriend after he had tried to stop her going out. This was quite early in their relationship so perhaps the lack of emotional investment made it easier.

Case Study: Georgia

Georgia was 14 and living in residential care for a few months. Her parents split up when she was two years-old and she spent several years living with both parents separately before she lived with her mother full-time. Her mother had experienced domestic violence.

Georgia had had many relationships since she was a young age. Georgia had learnt from her relationships and adopted a range of self-protection strategies. For example, Georgia described how she would never stay in a relationship if she felt that a partner was pressurising her to have sex. She said that this was often a reason that she ended relationships.

"and also if you're with somebody they'll expect stuff after like a certain amount of time. And if anybody ever like tries pressuring you, then I'm like (inaudible) I'll move at my own pace … and not at your pace … It's like if you really want to be with me then you'll wait, sort of thing, when I'm ready. So when I'm ready … yeah."

Georgia also stated that she hated it when her partners became disrespectful to her. She described how previous boyfriends had put her down in public in order to look powerful to their peers. She was very aware that this was the motivation behind their behaviour and described situations where she finished the relationship in front of their friends in order to re-gain her respect and power in these situations:

"No it's just like … they kind of big theirselves up in front of their friends, and make theirself look all big and mighty just because they can talk to you like crap … And they think that you're not going to do anything back. Like 'cos a lot of the times like … before my last one, I remember he started talking to me … and then the next second he sees this boy that we know. And he was just talking to me and the next second (inaudible) talk down to me. So straight away in front of him I said 'You're dumped'. It was like … that shut him up straight away in front of the boy. I was like … you don't do that do you? It's like all to do with respect and like … yeah."

Georgia demonstrated a strong awareness of intimate violence and control, such as being pressured into sex, or being publically disrespected by a partner, which meant that she was able to protect herself from experiencing any further harm in her relationships.

Kyra experienced a controlling relationship when she was only 13 years-old but was adamant that she would not let a partner stop her spending time with her friends:

Interviewer: Have you ever been in a situation where the guy has tried to sort of stop you spending time with your mates or anything?

Kyra: Yeah … like that person's always wanting me to go out with them instead of my mates. But they know that I won't because I don't just … 'cos my friends are like forever, boys are just like a fling, and I just stay with … I just go out with my mates, enjoy myself. I say to them if you ever come with me I said you could bring your mates as well, 'cos my mates are bound to mess around with them as well.

Kyra felt that at this point in her life, her friendships meant more to her than her relationships. She also had support from relatives and described how this helped her to stand her ground in relationships.

Interviewer: Has a guy ever tried to kind of influence you, even if not force, but tried to sort of encourage you?

Kyra: Probably said like 'Oh go on, don't be shy' … but I don't care 'cos I stand my ground … I can stick up for myself. But some girls (inaudible) they just think 'Oh now, I wonder what he's going to do' … but me I've got loads of family and that … there's loads of people I'm related to … 'cos everyone knows I've got a big family.

Interviewer: So people tend not to push their luck?

Kyra: Yeah 'cos my brother, he's really protective of me as well.

In this case it seems that it is not just that she has a supportive family that protects her, but that she is known in her area to have a wide supportive family network. This shows the significance of both immediate and wider family support. It also shows how a young person's resistance to intimate violence can be affected by external factors and the important role that peer networks play.

One participant was emphatic that she would not take any violence from a partner, yet when she thought about it, she was not so sure how she would react if she actually found herself in that situation. Another young woman described how she learnt martial arts and this gave her the power to fight back when her boyfriend was violent. For Mia, learning how to be physically powerful herself was the only way she could reduce the impact of the physical violence in her relationship:

Mia: It got worse 'cos he started hitting harder. And it was like … well I can't hit you 'cos I can't fight … but then I went to [name of martial arts centre] with my friend's brother, so I learnt martial arts with him … So I ended up breaking his arm … and then got thrown off the course. I was like 'It's self defence'.

SUMMARY POINTS

Gender

- The majority of participants thought it was less acceptable for a male to be violent towards a female than it was for a female to be violent towards a male.

- Some young women thought it was acceptable for men to physically retaliate if their partner was being violent towards them.

- Most female participants felt that young men were more likely to be controlling in relationships than young women; many related this to prescribed gender roles which dictate that males are supposed to be more dominant than females.

- Young men also felt that gender roles impacted on relationships, with many stating that females were more dependent on their partner than males were.

- Young women often felt that males were only interested in the sexual aspect of relationships and did not always value the emotional intimacy that relationships provide.

- In many interviews a gendered double sexual standard was clearly evident.

Age

- For some female interviewees violence occurred at a very young age; in a minority of cases this violence was severe. This shows that partner violence is not only a problem for teenagers but can begin earlier.

- Pre-teen relationships are often viewed as naïve and innocent and subsequently viewed as unimportant, making any disclosure of violence even more difficult.

Age of Partner

- The majority of female participants had relationships with older partners; in many instances these partners were adult men.

- Female participants who had older partners were much more likely to report higher levels of all forms of violence than those with same-age partners. This finding was repeated in the school-based study. However, female participants often stated that they felt older male partner were more likely to be mature and les likely to use violence.

- Some of the young men with older girlfriends reported experiencing sexual pressure, showing how age as well as gender can be an associated factor.

- Male participants with older girlfriends found their attempts at control were mostly unsuccessful, showing that age can act to dissipate intimate power based on gender.

Family Violence

- Twenty-one of the 82 participants reported witnessing domestic violence.

- Participants who experienced domestic violence stated they recognised the negative impact this had on the victim (mostly their mothers) and themselves.

- Although many participants stated that, due to their experiences of domestic violence, they would not remain in a violent relationship themselves, some still found themselves victimised in this way.

- Young people who experienced child abuse often found it difficult to recognise that violence was not an expression of love.

- Interviews showed that young people do not necessarily replicate the physical violence they have witnessed at home in their own intimate relationships.

Alcohol and Drugs

- The majority of female participants who experienced partner physical violence stated that, although their partners were violent towards them when they were sober, the severity of the violence increased when their boyfriends had been drinking alcohol.

- Male participants did not associate their partner's violence with alcohol, although some female participants reported an increase in their own instigation of physical violence when they were drunk.

- Many female participants and some male participants reported that drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis were associated with increased levels of partner control.

- Young women commonly linked their experiences of sexual pressure or force to alcohol. Many felt that their own use of alcohol made them vulnerable to sexual violence and that boys who were drinking were more likely to use sexual violence.

- Due to this heightened vulnerability, some young women had developed a range of protective strategies to ensure they remained safe when they were out with their friends.

Ethnicity and Religion

- A few participants held negative stereotypes about people from minority ethnic backgrounds based on their own relationships experiences.

- Some female participants reported that their families' or friends' racism towards their partner had caused them to sever contact, leaving them isolated and dependent on their partners, who then used this to extend control over their lives.

Locality

- Gender roles and expectations seemed to vary from one location to another depending on the culture of gendered behaviour present within different areas.

Protective Strategies

- It is important to recognise that many of the young people who had experienced intimate partner violence also described a wide range of self-protective strategies and resourcefulness in dealing with these negative experiences.

- A few girls felt very strongly that they would be able to protect themselves against violent partners. Mostly these participants stated that their friends and family would support them.

SECTION 5: PARTICULAR ISSUES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS

A number of issues emerged from the interviews which related to specific situations faced by particular groups of young people: pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers, young people with care histories and young offenders.

PREGNANT TEENAGERS AND TEENAGE MOTHERS

The violence experienced by these teenagers also directly impacts on their children, in a similar way to how domestic violence affects the children of adult mothers, although being a teenage mother is associated with additional pressures and vulnerabilities. Much UK research confirms the profound impact that domestic violence has on children (see Radford and Hester 2007, Mullender et al 2002, McGee 2000). Domestic violence during- and post-pregnancy has been shown to have extremely negative effects for both mothers and babies, including: low birth weight (Jasinski, 2004); increased foetal and maternal mortality (Kady et al 2005); greater risk for miscarriage (Morland et al 2008); and maternal and postpartum depression (Martin *et al* 2006). These studies were all based on samples of women over the age of 18. Evidence about the specific issue of teenage mothers' experiences of partner violence is scarce, although some exploratory UK (see Brown et al 2006, Include 2007) and US studies provide insights.

Pregnant Teenagers' and Young Mothers' Experiences of Physical Violence

Our research showed that 11 of the 16 (just under three-quarters) of the pregnant teenagers and young mothers interviewed reported that they had experienced physical violence in at least one of their intimate partner relationships. This is a higher proportion than those interviewed in the disadvantage study who were not pregnant or mothers, and it can be compared to approximately a third of girls in the school-based survey who had experienced physical violence from a partner. About one in three pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers reported experiencing physical violence from their present partner during their pregnancy or after the birth of their child. This may, however, be an under-representation as many of the young mothers interviewed were unwilling to talk about problems in their current relationship. This reluctance may have been linked to fears that a disclosure of current violence in the research interview may have resulted in children's services being informed.

A small number of UK studies, alongside US-based findings, indicate that intimate violence is heightened with teenage pregnancy (Coker et al 2000, Brown at al 2006, Include 2007, Gazmararian et al 2003, Roberts et al 2005, Silverman et al 2001). Include's (2007) UK survey of 25 pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers showed that half knew another teenage mother who had experienced domestic violence. Manseau et al (2008) found in their study of Canadian adolescent girls that being pregnant increased the odds of severe physical violence more than threefold. Although US research in this area of domestic violence is relatively new, findings imply that teenage mothers are in fact more likely than older

women to have experienced partner violence during and after pregnancy (Harrykisson 2002, Wiemann et al 2000, Parker at al 1994, Covington et al 2001).

In explanation, some have identified that the risk factors associated with teenage pregnancy and partner violence are shared including early sexual activity, number of partners, family violence, low income and low academic achievement (Gazmararian et al 2000, Silverman et al 2004). These US commentators conclude that, given these shared risk factors, it is unsurprising that partner violence and adolescent pregnancy are associated, and that pregnant teenagers may be particularly vulnerable to partner violence.

The teenage mothers in the current study who were willing to talk about their current relationships identified a range of factors which influenced their experiences and choices. In a number of cases, young mothers stated that they remained in a violent relationship due to their perceptions regarding the importance of sustaining parental relationships.

> Michelle … I thought if a man even threw something in my direction, he'd be out the door, but obviously when it did happen we'd already had our daughter and she was eight months-old so it was completely different.

Some of the pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers described having a strong desire to protect their child from witnessing physical violence and for this reason they would not retaliate when confronted by their partners or others:

> Tara: She gives me the strength to not fight back but just to walk away and be the bigger person.

In the following example, Jessica minimises the impact of violence on herself whilst focusing on her concern for her daughter:

> Jessica: We were always fighting … me and him, and it was around my kid and that and I didn't like it … It's not that I was scared, it was like I don't want all the arguments and that round my daughter, I didn't want her seeing that.

Jessica and her partner's arguments often became violent with her partner damaging the house and smashing windows. As in her example, nearly all the young mothers' primary concern was for the welfare of their children, before their own.

For some of the young women their concern for their children's well-being was the catalyst for them to leave a violent relationship. Some of the teenage mothers reported leaving a violent or controlling relationship because they recognised that they could no longer hide it from their children:

> Michelle: … her whole body would shake with this pure fear, like even if I hurt myself, and screamed out, whereas she'd seen me being hurt, she thinks it's the same thing and she'd just shake and cower in the corner … I knew I had to do something.

Some mothers were able to leave violent partners as they wanted to protect their children from going through what they had experienced in their own childhoods.

> Becky: And it's just like the shouting and the arguing … and I just thought 'I'm not having that', 'cos I remember what it was like from a really young age, and I just don't want that for him [her son].

As will be seen later, a range of factors and pressures inhibited this process, or created a risk of young mothers returning to their partners. For some of the young mothers, even after the relationship had finished they continued to experience intimidation and violence from their ex-partner. Research on adult women's experiences of domestic violence also shows that post-relationship violence is a major danger for women (Radford and Hester 2007). The school-based study concluded that violence often continued, and in some cases intensified, once a relationship ended. The continued presence of a violent ex-partner left young mothers feeling vulnerable and fearful that their partners may return:

> Lisa: When I was living in the same place then obviously he [ex-partner] knew where I lived. That's what made me kind of scared as well … because obviously he could have come back at any time. Anybody could have let him in.

Pregnant Teenagers' and Young Mothers' Experiences of Emotional Violence

Nearly all the pregnant teenagers or young mothers stated that their partners had acted in a controlling way. They were twice as likely as girls who were not mothers to report that their partners had tried somehow to control them. Additionally, young mothers were much more likely than those who were not mothers to have experienced surveillance from their partners. Few other studies have addressed this form of violence in the lives of teenage mothers, although Brown et al's (2006) study reported similar findings.

The majority of young mothers stated that when they became pregnant, or when they became mothers, their partners expected them to act differently. Many spoke about how their partners sought to restrict their contact with friends, arguing that they should be at home looking after their baby, even though their boyfriends continued to see their friends unabated. For some, these changing expectations started as soon as they became pregnant:

> Sara: … and when I got pregnant he was really controlling … he thought he owned me … And he wouldn't let me do nothing. Everywhere I had to go, he had to come with me.

> Lisa: … it was alright at first, but then afterwards he changed. Like he always wanted to go out with his friends and I couldn't, I had to stay in and stuff like that … he'd say like 'oh you're pregnant, so don't go out, stay in'.

Girls also found that most male partners presumed that childcare was primarily, or in many cases exclusively, a female responsibility. Michelle described how her partner held preconceived ideas of how 'a mother' should behave and expected her to meet these expectations:

> Michelle: Now I am the mother of his child I'm meant to be sensible, even though I am 10 years younger than him, he didn't see that, he seen me as meant to be acting like a mother.

It was not always clear from the girls' interviews whether partners were using their girlfriend's status as an 'excuse' for their controlling behaviour, or whether they genuinely believed that mothers should not have *any* of the freedom they had previously experienced.

Some of the girls said they did not mind that their partner restricted their contact with friends when they were pregnant, as they did not to socialise. Others stated that as they wanted to stay at home while they were pregnant, their partners' controlling behaviour diminished.

Nevertheless, for some pregnant teenagers, it was difficult to determine if their partner's behaviour was due to their heightened concern for their welfare or a form of control. This dilemma was also present for many of the girls in the school-based study; however pregnancy and motherhood made this distinction even harder to determine. Many of the girls expressed anxieties concerning their pregnancy or parenthood. Often these anxieties seemed to intensify their need to view their partner's behaviour as an indication of their concern for their welfare rather than as a desire to control their lives.

However, many found that their partners became more controlling once their babies were born, or possibly their awareness of the control increased. For some, it seemed that their partner's behaviour was a response to their wish to regain some freedoms after the containments they felt during pregnancy. Michelle described how her partner became more controlling and physically violent when their baby was eight months-old because she wanted to start socialising with her friends again:

> Michelle: So I started to recover from that [emergency caesarean] and obviously feel more awake and you can actually hold a conversation for once. So I got my independence back a bit, and wanted to go out more, wanted to do this, do that, whereas he seen me as rebelling against him, 'cos all of a sudden I want to go out on a night time; whereas for eight months I'd been doting on a child I wouldn't put down. Then all of a sudden I can move about and I want to go out and he seen me as rebelling,

For others this control extended to their ability to access services for teenage mothers.

> Becky: It was really nice for ages until the baby was about six months. It was ok, we were getting along well, and he was really happy. And then we just fell apart really … he just started arguing with me, saying I couldn't do things. And then I was just like … I didn't like it because I was stuck inside all the time. So I didn't go to college, I didn't come here [to the education centre] until my baby was about six months.

Only one female participant spoke about how her own controlling behaviour started when she became pregnant. Emma described how being pregnant made her feel less in control of her life. She also spoke about experiencing high levels of stress due to her partner's uncertainty about keeping the baby. This led to her feeling very vulnerable and concerned about her partner's feelings for her, which was manifested in her becoming jealous and controlling:

> Emma: I was constantly ringing him up and shouting at him and arguing with him when he was at his friends and wanting to know where he was and what he was doing and stuff … I did turn into a bit of a psycho pregnant bitch.

Pregnant Teenagers' and Young Mothers' Experiences of Sexual Violence

Some three-quarters of the young mothers reported that they had experienced sexual pressure in their relationships. Four stated they had also experienced sexual force. Fewer female participants in this study who were not mothers reported experiencing sexual violence, and one-third of girls in the school-survey

reported some form of sexual victimisation. Thus, it appears that sexual violence from a partner may be a particular issue for teenage mothers.

Interviewer: … what have been the not so good things [in your relationship]?

Grace: Having sex when I don't want to … when I don't really feel like it … just like when I'm not really in the mood … but I end up doing it anyway.

Interviewer: What sort of things do you think they might do?

Grace: Call you names … or sometimes if you don't have sex with them they might find someone else.

Interviewer: Right, so that's been a reason why you've had sex then?

Grace: Yeah.

Other studies have also highlighted an association between sexual violence and teenage pregnancy (see for example Amu and Appiah 2006, Knight et al 2006). US research with teenage mothers raises a range of issues in relation to sexual violence. This work has identified: that unplanned pregnancy is more common in violent teenage relationships (Amaro et al 1990, Gazmararian et al 1995); the high rate of teenage pregnancies resulting from forced sexual intercourse by partners (Moore 1998, Bradford et al 1997); and that partner violence is associated with rapid repeat teenage pregnancy (Jacoby et al 1999).

These findings have important implications for current policies aimed at reducing teenage pregnancies in the UK. Governmental policy in the United Kingdom has aimed, firstly, to halve the conception rate of the under 18s and set a downward trend in the rate for under 16s by 2010; and, secondly, to achieve a reduction in the risk of long-term social exclusion of teenage parents and their children (Hills et al 2002). Lawlor and Shaw (2002), alongside others, have argued that teenage pregnancy is not a public health problem in itself, but that the inequality and stigma that young mothers face represent a legitimate concern. They maintain that although the second of the above goals represents an appropriate public health aim, most action is geared towards the first. Despite this, conception rates for girls aged 15 to 17 years rose from 40.9 per 1000 in 2006 to 41.9 per 1000 in 2007. The number of conceptions per 1,000 for girls aged 12-15 has also risen from 7.8 in 2006 to 8.3 in 2007. This is however the first rise since 2002. Around 8,196 girls under the age of 16 are estimated to have become pregnant in 2007 (ONS 2009). Brown et al (2006) argue that little attention is given to the gendered situation and life contexts of girls and young women making choices about sexuality, contraception and reproduction in their teenage years (Aapola et al 2005).

Previous research has shown that becoming a parent at a young age can be a positive life choice, especially against the limited alternatives available for some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cater and Coleman 2006). However our research, alongside others, indicates that for some teenage girls becoming pregnant may not have been a personal choice or even an irresponsible 'accident' but something over which they held little control. Motherhood for these teenagers may still be a positive experience; nevertheless it is imperative to recognise the role that sexual violence may play in teenage pregnancy. A failure to acknowledge the unequal power dimensions contained in some teenage relationships, including sexual violence, can jeopardise governmental policies aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy; although, as previously stated, we need to question the positioning of teenage motherhood as a public health problem (Lawlor and Shaw 2002).

Teenage mothers are often stereotyped within wider society as being 'sexually promiscuous' (Daguerre and Nativel 2006, Stanley 2005). Girls in this study, however, described how they had resisted a great deal of sexual pressure before their pregnancy. One girl spoke about 'hanging around' with a group of boys, due to the bullying or 'bitchiness' she had experienced from girls. However she experienced a great deal of sexual pressure from these boys, some of whom she had relationships with:

> Yasmin: They just kept asking for sex and I just sort of let them.

One girl described how she had felt pressured or forced by her baby's father to have sex before she was ready. Sara described how her boyfriend attempted to have sex with her on the first night they went out.

> Sara: The first time I went out with my baby's dad he wanted to but I never … And he was trying his hardest but then my parents came back.

Further research is needed that considers the role that sexual coercion and physical sexual violence play in teenage pregnancy. This will enable a more complex understanding of teenage pregnancy to be developed and will challenge stereotypes of sexual promiscuity that surround this group.

Some girls who had experienced sexual violence in their own relationships described how this made them feel very protective of their own child:

> Emma: I'm gonna wrap them up in cotton wool [Emma had experienced extreme sexual pressure].

> Jessica: Don't let it bother me no more. Just look after my kid and keep her safe [talking about when she was raped].

It was clear in the interviews with young mothers that their major concern was to safeguard their child's welfare. Many recognised the damage that living with a violent or controlling partner may hold both for themselves and their children. However the young mothers also spoke about a range of factors which restricted their choices and options. These are discussed next.

Social Stigma and Partner Dependence

One of the key factors which increased pregnant teenagers' and teenage mothers' dependence on, or barriers to leaving, a violent partner was their concerns about how they were viewed by wider society. All were acutely aware of the negative perceptions surrounding teenage motherhood:

> Tara: I was called a 'slut' for having my baby so young … and like a 'whore' and a 'slag' and all these different names.

Some described remaining in harmful relationships due to wanting to avoid the double stigmatisation of being a *single* teenage mother.

> Emma: It's not that I don't want to be a single mum, it's that I don't want to have that stereotypical single mum thing … teenage single mum.

Similarly, Brown at al's (2006) study found that young mothers' experiences of partner power and control were compounded by the stigma of teenage pregnancy. Lawlor et al (2001) and Whitley at al (2010)

both argue that this stigmatisation is due to the construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem when it is a reflection of what is considered to be 'socially, culturally and economically acceptable' (Lawlor et al 2001, p 1428). Lawlor and colleagues assert that it is increasingly common in western societies for women to delay childbearing until their 30's and 40's, despite the associated increase in chromosomal abnormalities and complications in pregnancy, yet this group is not stigmatised nor labelled a public heath problem. However, and perhaps as a consequence of this rising childbearing age, young motherhood (not only teenage) is now increasingly being viewed as a stigma and an unacceptable economic and social burden. If, as Whitley et al's (2008) US study reports, mothers in their early 20's are now experiencing stigmatisation, the implications for teenage mothers are profound.

> Lucy: He (partner) was like, how are you gonna cope, what's everyone gonna say, everyone's gonna be calling you names and everything.

The need to prove to others that they were not social 'failures' and were in successful and stable relationships was extremely important for our sample. This was especially pertinent for those with little or no family support, or for those whose families held negative views of their relationship.

> Michelle 'Cos you're teenage parents they never see you … I wanted to make it work … to show … that I didn't do something stupid, that this is a commitment, this is a relationship, we just done it a few years earlier, but it didn't work in the end.

In the above quote Michelle is talking about a relationship where her partner and father of her baby had been physically and emotionally violent to her. To compound the situation Michelle's family had rejected her as the child's father was black and her family held negative views regarding mixed ethnicity relationships.

Thus for some of the pregnant teenagers or young mothers, their situations were compounded by their complex lives, lack of consistent support and isolation from peers. In addition some of the young women had grown up in care and had little if any support from their own families. Many of these (10) had also experienced multiple foster or residential care placements, which meant that they had little consistent support from previous carers. Research has shown that girls who have experienced care have an increased incidence of teenage pregnancy compared to teenage girls in the general population (Knight 2006, SCIE 2005, Social Exclusion Unit 1999). The specific issues for participants with care histories will be explored in detail later in this section.

Poverty and Partner Dependence

Some girls described other means by which they felt a power imbalance was present in their relationships; leaving them feeling a loss of control or unable to leave violent partners. It is well documented that teenage pregnancy is more likely to occur amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bunting 2005, Wilson and Huntington 2005, Harden et al 2009). Poverty and deprivation are central factors which can leave pregnant teenagers or young mothers dependent on violent partners, or at risk of returning to them. This was particularly the case for those with little or no family support.

> Becky: I mean he didn't treat me bad, he used to look after me and stuff like that … he used to make sure I had everything for the baby and stuff … he wouldn't let me pay for anything. He thought it was his job to do it … I don't really mind that but sometimes I did in a way. Because I felt it was more control for him … I don't really like that very much, but I just got used to it really.

Becky ended the relationship when he became very controlling, yet she also felt that she may return to him due to the poverty, poor housing and isolation she was now experiencing as a single mother. Similarly, many of the teenage mothers we interviewed felt they had very limited alternatives. It may be that given these difficult choices, some may feel it is preferable to live with a controlling partner than to live alone in poverty with their child.

Emotional Dependence

Some of the pregnant teenagers and young mothers described becoming emotionally dependent on their partner's approval. Many of these girls stated that changes in their appearance due to pregnancy and childbirth had resulted in low self-esteem. This negative reaction to such changes may be especially pertinent for teenagers due to the heightened media and peer pressure which exists around teenage body image (Grogan 2008, Kichler and Crother 2009). For these girls, their reduced confidence may make them less likely to leave violent or unhappy relationships for fear that they would be viewed as unattractive by other partners.

Interviewer: And has being pregnant changed your relationship in any way?

Sasha: Um … he's like not so … so like … I can't explain it. He's not all like all over me and that.

Interviewer: Oh right okay.

Sasha: Yeah, like before.

Interviewer: Right. Do you mean sort of in a sexual way?

Sasha: Yeah … It makes me feel unattractive.

It may also be that some males purposely seek to reduce their partner's confidence in this way as a method of control. For some of the young women, being pregnant at a young age caused them to become isolated from their friends due to having less in common. For others, their friendships broke down due to their friends' negative reactions to their pregnancy, leaving them more dependent on their partners for emotional support:

Yasmin: Well I've got one close friend … and that's it. 'Cos most of the girls from my school I thought they was my friends, but they're not because they've been chatting about me … about being pregnant and stuff.

Leaving Partners – Mixed messages: love and violence

For some teenage mothers, making a decision to leave a violent partner was complicated by their partner's changing behaviour towards them and their children. It is important to remember that partners were not constantly violent; many stated that their partners could be caring and loving towards them and their children. Other commentators have argued that an essential dimension of domestic violence, love and emotion, have been largely ignored (Donovan and Hester 2010). Love for their partner and hope that their behaviour will change are key reasons why adult women remain in, or return to, violent relationships

(Donovan et al 2006). Donovan and Hester (2010) have argued that many domestic violent relationships, irrespective of sexuality or gender, share similar practices of love from perpetrators, which ensures that their partners remain emotionally invested in the relationship. Strategies of love and emotion used by perpetrators include, according to Donovan and Hester (2010), declarations of love by the perpetrator, especially at the point at which their partner threatens or attempts to leave. They conclude that practices of love constitute emotional violence in domestically violent relationships.

Our research showed that this changing behaviour, and especially when this was combined with instigators being a 'good' father, made it difficult for young mothers to make decisions about leaving abusive relationships, especially as they feared this may affect their partner's relationship with their child.

This dilemma is illustrated by the following example. Jessica was unhappy in her relationship due to her partner's controlling behaviour, heavy drinking and drug-use in their home. This often resulted in him throwing objects, including a coffee table, although not necessarily directly at her. His behaviour caused regular arguments. Eventually Jessica secured an occupation order (as they had a joint-tenancy) against him. However, when he left, she described how their daughter missed her father:

> Jessica: … and like when he was gone … 'cos he's always been there, that's when … she was like 10 months-old, that's when she liked stopped sleeping through the night and started getting in the bed with me and that.

She then allowed him to return because his behaviour improved:

> Jessica: He plays with her, he reads her stories and that. It's better now. Since like … 'cos I think that frightened him, me getting the occupational order out on him.

Pregnant Teenagers, Young Mothers and Support

As we have identified, for many young mothers or pregnant teenagers, key factors in their lives inhibited their ability to permanently leave violent partners or unhappy relationships. Mothers who did successfully leave violent relationships tended to be those with higher levels of support, primarily family support. However, many of the young women interviewed stated that their family relationships were often difficult. Wiemann et al (2000) found that 40 per cent of teenage mothers who reported partner violence also experienced violence from family members during the same period. Similarly Brown et al (2006) reported that family relationships of teenage mothers often involved abuse of power and control.

The ability to leave such relationships was also influenced by other external support networks: especially projects specifically designed for teenage mothers. For example, one girl described how attending an education project for young mothers, where she saw other teenage mothers bringing-up their children alone, changed her attitude about being a single mother and helped her to realise that she did not need to be with her violent partner just because she was having his baby:

> Sara: … I didn't want to be on my own through the pregnancy, but then I come here and there was girls that's like done it on their own … like there was one girl here, she was younger than me and she did it on her own … But with her family's support … and then she just told me that she ended it with her boyfriend, and it was the best thing that she ever done … and meeting the friends here, it gave me

enough courage to do it. 'Cos I thought that I've got a life now. It's just my baby and my friends.

For Sara, having the opportunity to make new friends, who were mothers themselves, was crucial. This enabled young mothers to build new peer support networks which compensated for the loss of their previous friendships since their pregnancy. Even girls who remained in contact with friends stated that they did not see them regularly. For some, this was due to their partner's increased control; for others it was because they no longer felt that socialising was as important as before; and for some, their financial position meant they could no longer afford to go out.

There exists a significant risk of young mothers becoming isolated from their friendship groups, and if they have little or no family backing, losing their only source of support. However young mothers' groups and education centres can play a valuable role in providing new support networks for young mothers who may otherwise become isolated. Disconcertingly, education workers at the young mothers centre which participated in this study described how some pregnant teenagers and young mothers were prevented from attending the centre by their controlling partners. This obviously has significant welfare implications. It also has relevance for future research: if young mothers who are most at risk of violent and controlling relationships are stopped from attending services, then research based on such services alone will exclude these experiences.

Recently there has been a growing concern in research, policy and practice to acknowledge and support teenage fathers, although not all partners of teenage mothers are themselves teenagers (Bunting and McAuley 2004). Indeed, both this research and other studies indicate that having a 'much older partner' represents a risk factor for teenage mothers (Harner 2004). While we recognise the importance of supporting fathers, and an emphasis on their role and responsibility is welcomed, we must be cautious in extending this uncritically to fathers who are acting in a violent or controlling manner. Violent partners would initially require support through, for example, a perpetrator intervention programme, and demonstrate a positive change in their violent behaviour, before they can be supported to establish and maintain contact with their children (see also Ferguson and Hogan [2004], Ashley et al [2005] and Featherstone et al [2007]).

Support from Social Work Services

The provision of social work services support for this group is a complex and challenging area. Teenage mothers were very aware of the potential damage that abusive relationships could hold for their children. For most, this was their overriding concern. However, as reported earlier, young mothers also experienced profound barriers to leaving violent relationships. The key dilemma for social work is how to support and protect these mothers, without compromising the protection of their babies. We have argued previously that teenage mothers in violent relationships require recognition as constituting a child in need of safeguarding in their own right, as do their children. In practice this is a difficult balance for social workers to achieve. One participant described her experience with social work services;

Michelle: … They say you do this, you do this, for your daughter, but they don't turn around and think like I'm sat there with a black eye, battered, and they're telling me I've got to do this, do this, when I haven't even got the strength to think straight, let alone, take action against him. And they're saying get an injunction on him, get this, get that, when an incident happened in broad daylight, on CCTV, he wasn't

> even bothered then … do you know what I mean? And they're saying get certain things against him and I'm saying that won't phase him, he's not scared.

Interviewer: … how did that make you feel?

Michelle: Bad, I felt that I was being victimised, I was already a victim and I was being victimised by social services … 'Cos they were saying you have to do this, your child is gonna be on the at risk register and I thought that's obviously gonna go from school to school, it's not gonna be, show what happened, it's just gonna say, she's on the at risk register. And obviously if I had any more children, and it seemed to me that I was the one getting abused but I was getting all the blame, they didn't do nothing towards him.

Michelle felt overwhelmed by the pressure being placed on her to take actions against her partner, and unsupported by her social workers even though she was experiencing profound emotional and physical violence from her partner. She also felt frustrated by the unrealistic expectations that were being made of her. She was concerned for the safety of her child, and felt that if she was the one to be responsible for her partner going to prison, then this would lead to severe repercussions for her when he was released or through his other contacts. She was frustrated by the lack of direct action towards her partner and the continued blame she perceived social work services were placing on her. Similar experiences were reported by other participants in the study, and indeed adult survivors of domestic violence (Radford and Hester 2007). Other studies also identify that teenage mothers hold a number of fears regarding disclosure, especially in relation to social work services (Brown et al 2006).

Mothers being made to feel they are to blame for their inability to protect their child's welfare, due to male domestic violence, are not restricted to teenagers (Hester 2010). However, the dynamics are intensified when the mother held accountable for her partner violence, and her child's protection, is a minor herself. It was not that mothers in our study did not want to protect their children, indeed this was overwhelmingly their overriding concern, but many did not have the strategies, support or resources available to do this. This undoubtedly represents a dilemma for social work practice but is unjust and unacceptable as it stands.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCES OF BEING LOOKED AFTER

Overall 24 young people interviewed were either currently in care, or had some experience of being in care. This includes 10 young people who were living with, or had experience of living with, kin. Six were accommodated in residential care and five were with kin at the time of the interview. Three young people had lived in a wide range of different care placements and were now living independently. None of the young people were currently living in unrelated foster care.

Those with experiences of being in care had the most complex life experiences and family backgrounds of all disadvantaged groups in our sample. Predictably, they were also more likely to have experienced family violence, which is often associated with separation (DCSF, DoH 2009). Nearly twice as many with care experiences reported experiences of family violence compared with others in the study. All of the young people (9) with experiences of living in care and who reported some form of family violence were no longer living in their family homes. It is possible that some young people whose parents are still in violent relationships did not feel able to disclose this information in the interview.

Seven of the nine young people who reported family violence said they had witnessed domestic violence towards their mothers from their fathers or step-fathers. For one of this group this led to the death of their mother. One girl reported that her grandfather used to be physically violent towards her grandmother when she was living with them. Another female participant stated that both of her parents physically abused her as a young child.

Some specific issues emerged for this group from the research. Although these were less clear than those found for the pregnant teenagers or young mothers group, some important issues emerged which require specific attention.

Impact of Family Violence on Relationships

All of the young people with care experiences who had witnessed their father's domestic violence reported that this made them want to avoid such violence in their own relationships. Some felt very strongly about this. One male participant (Cameron) reported that he 'wouldn't be able to do it' because of what he had seen happen to his mother. Many girls felt very strongly that they would leave a relationship if their partner was violent towards them – some reported that their mothers had told them to do this.

For some, however, their negative family experiences made it difficult for them to enter intimate relationships. Many reported difficulties forming trusting relationships. Emma did not talk much in the interview about her experiences of growing-up but it was clear that she had experienced a highly damaging relationship with her mother, which resulted in her entering care. She made the link between her past experience and her difficultly of entering into relationships:

> Emma: … 'cos like where I was with my mum or whatever, I didn't really understand the whole love concept, and all the kind of feelings and stuff.

Emma was unused to building relationships with men who respected her as she found the emotional aspect of intimacy difficult to cope with. In response, Emma spent a great deal of time with older men who used her for sex. Emma felt this was unrecognised by her carers.

Another female participant who had been in care felt that her partners were able to be violent to her because she had come to believe that the physical violence she experienced from her parents was a sign of love.

> Tara: … with my mum and dad they used to hit me, and because they loved me I used to count it as that's the reason why they were hitting me … and he [ex-boyfriend] knew that my mum and dad had been violent to me in the past and that I'd let them [boyfriends] get away with it.

However, unlike Emma, Tara described her time in care as a very positive experience. She stated that when she moved to a 'good' foster care placement the family helped her to realise that violence was not an expression of love:

> Tara: It's kind of when I went into my full-time foster placement just after my mum had beat me up and I had bruises and everything, and everyone was treating me really nicely and I didn't know why … usually I'm used to people treating me really

> horribly and telling me I was crap and stuff, and it just felt like I was a queen, everyone was being really nice to me. Like washing my hair for me, you know, making me cups of tea before I even woke up, bringing them up to me and stuff. And I'd never had that before.

Tara also considered the reasons why some people are violent in their relationships based on her own experiences of abuse and the emotional trauma this caused.

> Tara: I think a lot of people use violence as a way of making them feel better. Like hurting people because they're hurting, 'cos that's what I used to do when I was younger.

Although many young people with experiences of child abuse and domestic violence require some form of specialist support, the above illustrates that the everyday 'normal' routine of caring experiences can also be therapeutic (Ward 2004), whether through foster or residential care settings.

These examples demonstrate how young people who have witnessed parental abuse or domestic violence may be more vulnerable to experiencing violence in their own relationships through the choices that they make about the types of relationships they enter, poorly developed self-protection skills, a lack of knowledge regarding appropriate behaviour or an understanding of how to resolve conflicts. This research did not find that young people purposely sought to replicate the domestic violence they experienced at home in their own relationships.

Many of these issues affect young people who have experienced family violence regardless of whether they are in care or not; however those in care should receive appropriate support and intervention in this crucial area. Foster carers and residential workers require training in the most appropriate ways to offer support in this sensitive area of child welfare.

Care Experiences and Sexual Violence

Just over half (6) of the girls with experiences of being in care reported in the interviews that they had been victims of sexual pressure or force in their relationships. It was unclear from the interviews why this group may be especially vulnerable to sexual violence. In one of the few other studies to look at this issue Manseau et al (2008) in their study of 196 adolescent girls in the Canadian child protection system also found that the majority of girls had experienced some type of victimisation in their intimate relationships. Just over half reported severe physical violence, 70 per cent reported 'minor' sexual coercion and a third revealed severe sexual violence, such as being forced into intercourse. A study by Jonson-Reid and Bivens (1999) of 85 adolescents in public care in the US found that just under half had experienced some form of partner violence. Females reported a higher level of victimisation and a lower level of perpetration than males. In a later study by the same authors (2007) based on 339 17 year-olds in care or custody, 21 per cent of females and 12 per cent of males reported some form of partner violence. The researchers suggest that the variation in rates between the two studies was possibly due to the initial study being administered following a presentation on 'dating violence', which may have raised young people's awareness and recognition of the issue.

Previous UK research indicates that girls in care are often denied the opportunity to develop control over their own sexuality (Carlen 1987, Barter 2006, Green 2005) and, compared to young people living in

their birth families, lacked sexual knowledge and understandings regarding sexual pressure and sexual feelings. (Carlyon and McGuire 1999).

Other studies have shown that peer sexual violence within residential homes is a major concern for girls (Barter et al 2004, Sinclair and Gibbs 2000, Farmer and Pollock 1998). Barter et al (2004) documented reluctance by residential staff to discuss issues of sexuality and sexual exploitation with young people in their care. This unwillingness to address issues of sexuality resonates with other research findings (Farmer and Pollock 1998, Gibbs and Sinclair 2000).

These findings may shed some light on the reasons why young women in, or leaving, public care are more vulnerable to partner violence than their counterparts in the general population.

Sasha had been placed in care in her early teens because she had been rejected by her family. She described how she felt pressured by her partners to have sex before she was ready. However, she also thought that having sex would make her feel wanted and loved, something she did not feel from her family or care setting. In reality she experienced sexual coercion and further rejection through having sex early in her relationships with non-committed partners:

> Sasha: [I] felt I had to do it … like a friend would say to me 'Just do it' and stuff like that … Sometimes the boy would say 'Oh just do it' and like go on and on. I'm just like 'Okay'.
>
> Interviewer: So afterwards, after that's happened how did you feel?
>
> Sasha: I just felt used … horrible … I used to do it just to feel wanted … So afterwards I wasn't … I didn't really feel wanted … I felt the opposite.

Another possible explanation for the level of sexual violence experienced may be the lack of parental supervision experienced by those in care. This factor was mentioned by a number of participants. For example, one interviewee described how her foster carers had not collected her one evening which left her in a vulnerable situation:

> Jessica: I was supposed to be staying at my friend's house and she was living with her boyfriend at the time … and um … I was really drunk anyway. And it was the first time I've ever been in that area before as well, and I was like sort of a bit lost. And she said well you can't sleep there now because of his mum … and my foster carers couldn't pick me up or anything … and I don't know … his mate was there and he said you can go back to his house if you want to. I'd like never met him, he was a lot older than me. I was like 12. And then I just went back to his house and everything. And it was all right when we got there, he was like 'Do you want a drink?'. And then everything just went wrong from there … that was like the first person I ever slept with like, especially as I was so young. Well I didn't really sleep with him, I got forced into it.

In another instance, Becky was trapped by her boyfriend at his home for two days until she managed to escape. Becky implied that if the foster carers had been more vigilant over her whereabouts this may not have occurred.

It was not possible to ascertain within the interviews, and not our intention, whether any of these girls had entered care for reasons of sexual abuse. This may have been an additional risk factor as child sexual abuse is considered by some to be associated with sexual exploitation in relationships (Silverman et al 2001, Smith et al 2003, Wekerle et al 2001, Cry et al 2006).

Nearly all the young women who had been in care reported that their partners were much older than them. The school-based study found that having a 'much older partner' was a significant risk factor for experiencing all forms of partner violence. One young woman (Emma) in the current study described when her relationship with her mother broke down and she entered foster care. She started spending her time on the streets and became involved with a group of older men who sexually exploited her:

> Emma: … when things went bad with my mum I stopped going to school and stuff and obviously went into foster care … and then I was hanging round on the streets kind of thing … and there were these pervy paedophile guys trying to get with me and stuff … trying to molest me and stuff … really badly some of them, like really trying to. And then there would the ones that were trying to like groom you, they would try to be all nice to you and everything and they're older men and stuff, it's horrible. It's disgusting like how they can treat little kids like that.

Vulnerability to older men may be heightened by ineffective supervision of young people outside the immediate care setting. The breakdown of family relationships alongside the subsequent move into care, which represents a traumatic life event (Kendrick 2005), may leave young people, especially girls, open to alternative parental figures who may exploit this position.

Moving placements and leaving care also held risks:

> Tara: I was a complete state. I was moving from foster placements and stuff and … I was moving from one of my best ever foster placements. And that just completely mucked me up. And then he was treating me like that [being physically violent to her] and that mucked me up. And then I had to move again.

Young people who have recently left care placements and were living 'independently' seemed especially vulnerable to partner violence due to their isolation from support networks and having to cope with living alone at a relatively young age (Stein 2006, Stein and Munro 2008).

For some who had grown-up with unstable or complex lives, relationship problems were often particularly difficult to cope with. Ben had learnt to use self-harm as a means of coping with his family life, especially his difficult relationships with his mother's different partners, and his bullying at school. He continued to use used self-harm to cope with problems in his own relationships:

> Ben: When you go like mad … when you're proper in love and you like do stuff to … like make yourself … if you're angry and then do … I used to cut my arms … It's 'cos of loads of stuff, I used to … getting bullied and getting … shit life really.

YOUNG MALE OFFENDERS

Interviews took place with 15 male participants from a Young Offenders Institution. Although we tried to include an institution for female young offenders we were unsuccessful. This is unfortunate given that previous research indicates that that female offenders experience high levels of domestic violence (Douglas and Plugge 2006, Hamilton et al 2002, Hooper 2010). Many of the young men were very reluctant to talk about their behaviour in their relationships; some interesting issues did nevertheless emerge from the interviews.

Reflection on Relationships

Several mentioned that many of their previous relationships had been quite 'argumentative'. The central causes of these disagreements with their partners concerned their use of illegal drugs, their alcohol use and their involvement in criminal activities due to their involvement in deviant peer networks.

Interestingly a few of the participants stated that their time in the young offender institution was a contributory factor to the longevity of their relationship as they were no longer faced with the problem of balancing their relationship commitments with wanting to spend time with their (anti-social) friends. This highlights the problems young people can encounter when attempting to negotiate the stresses and demands of their social worlds. It may be that some disadvantaged young people's relationships are especially problematic due to the external pressures they experience, especially pressure from deviant peer networks.

Some young inmates reported that their time away from these factors, due to being incarcerated, enabled them to reflect on how their behaviour contributed to their relationship problems. The recognition of these factors was also linked to their changing attitudes towards relationships generally. Many said they recognised, for the first time, how important their relationships were to them. For several of the young men, their time in prison was said to have altered their attitude towards having a girlfriend. Whereas in their previous relationships they criticised their partners for being too controlling and interfering, especially concerning the amount time they spent with friends, they now missed the support they had received from their partners. For some, the enforced separation from intimate relationships made them recognise how important it was to have a healthy relationship, and due to this recognition they argued they would treat future girlfriends differently:

> Interviewer: You talked a bit about going out with your mates and stuff. So would you tend to like prioritise that over your relationships? Or did you always put your girlfriend first?
>
> Robert: Well … now I'd like put my girlfriend first
>
> Interviewer: Is that something you feel like from being in here?
>
> Robert: Yeah … [I'd] really put that bit of my life first.

It is hoped that these positive attitudes last. Those participants who had a partner often spoke very positively about their relationship and viewed them as very serious. This, however, led some to become preoccupied with the importance of their relationships which caused some to have particularly controlling attitudes towards their partners, as is illustrated in the following section.

Surveillance of Partners

A few of the young offenders acknowledged the surveillance they placed on their girlfriends whilst they were in prison. Most justified these actions because of the frustration they felt from the enforced separation, and the anxiety of not knowing what their partners were doing. Many of the boys said that they had friends on the outside who were checking up on their girlfriends for them:

> Dominic: When you're in here it's worse … you don't know what they're doing … like two of my mates are watching her … like to see what she's up to and that.
>
> Alex: She's being watched like a hawk. Anywhere she's gone I know she's been there.

Most of the young men were located far from home and their partners often had to make long journeys to visit them. Yet there was little evidence provided of relationships breaking down due to a boy's incarceration. This is perhaps explained, if true, by the reduced pressure on the relationship, as discussed earlier; their girlfriend's loyalty to them; or perhaps due to the glorification of men in prison present in some peer groups (Dowler et al 2006).

Young Fathers in Prison

Four of the participants in the Young Offenders Institute (YOI) were teenage fathers of young children: two of whom had become fathers whilst in prison. These fathers were engaged with a fathers group at the YOI. The two young men who became fathers before they were imprisoned talked of the strain this had added to their relationship:

> Alex: When you have a kid it's sort of … it's much more heavy on your relationship. Money gets involved, money's a big problem … the love that you have for each other goes to the child. Which means you end up in rows, because … like me, I'm one of the dads that … probably one of the very few dads that was actually doing a lot for my son. I'd get up in the middle of the night to change the nappy and feed him … I was hallucinating I was that tired … so I was doing everything I could, and it just caused arguments.

Once Alex had entered the YOI, he said he became more protective over his child and described how he would use his child to control his girlfriend if she ever tried to end their relationship. He justified his attitudes by reference to his own experiences of childhood physical abuse perpetrated by one of his mother's partners and her failure to take his allegations seriously.

Alex also described how his relationship with his partner and child had become strained because he had been made to move to a different YOI due to overcrowding. This YOI was too far for his partner and child to visit regularly. This time apart created what Alex described as 'awkwardness in the relationship'. They found it more difficult to talk properly when they did see each other, which led to increased infrequency of his partner's visits, and therefore his opportunities to see his child.

Further research is necessary to explore young fathers' perspectives on the impact of parenthood on relationships and the specific issues for young fathers in prison. Having explored the specific experiences of three groups of disadvantaged young people, in the next section we return to the wider sample to consider their support needs.

SUMMARY POINTS

Pregnant Teenagers and Teenage Mothers

- One third of young mothers reported experiencing physical violence from their current partner; two-thirds had experienced physical violence in at least one of their relationships.

- Two-thirds reported sexual pressure or force in at least one of their relationships.

- Nearly all had experienced controlling behaviour, often directly associated with their pregnancy and motherhood. Many stated that the control and violence increased once they were pregnant or when the baby was born.

- Teenage mothers were concerned about the way they were stereotyped negatively within wider society. Some wished to avoid a further negative label of being a *single* teenage mother, which pressured some to stay in violent or unhappy relationships.

- Some young mothers felt they had few options but to return to violent partners or unhappy relationships as the alternative was to live in poverty and isolation. This was particularly the case for those with no, or little, family or friendship support.

- The vast majority of teenage mothers recognised that the violence they were experiencing also had a negative impact on their children's welfare. However many were apprehensive about accessing help from agencies, especially social services, fearing their child may be removed.

Young People with Experiences of Being in Care

- Those with experiences of being in care had the most complex life experiences and family backgrounds of all disadvantaged groups.

- Many young people in care said their past experiences, especially of domestic violence and child abuse, negatively impacted on their current relationships. Some felt that their past experiences made it difficult for them to form trusting intimate relationships with their partners and made them vulnerable to relationships with controlling and violent partners.

- Young women in care were especially vulnerable to sexual violence.

- Many felt that residential workers or foster carers failed to adequately recognise, or take seriously, their relationship experience; a minority of young people stated their carers had approached this issue with them.

- Young people who had left care and were living alone appeared particularly vulnerable to violence in their relationships due to isolation from support networks.

Young Male Offenders

- Most of the young male offenders were very reluctant to discuss any negative aspects of their previous or current relationships.

- Many stated that their relationships often involved high levels of conflict and arguments due to their partner's dislike of their behaviour, especially their criminal activities.

- Most held optimistic views about how they would behave differently in these relationships once they were released.

- Some reported that their male peers kept their girlfriends under constant surveillance so that they could continue to control their movements whilst in prison.

Young Male Offenders

SECTION 6: HELP-SEEKING AND SUPPORT

Many of the findings in this section mirror the findings contained in the school-based study: especially in relation to the low level of help-seeking and the use of peers as support. However, unlike the school-based research where contact with professionals outside the education sector was limited, interviews with disadvantaged young people contained insights into professional involvement.

LACK OF HELP-SEEKING

Most female participants reported that they did not want to tell anyone about their violent experiences. Many worried that, if their partner found out they had told someone, the violence would worsen. Other explanations varied, but the most common theme was their concern that people would disbelieve them or would minimise the seriousness of their experiences. One girl who had experienced severe partner physical violence at the age of 10 years said she did not inform anyone about the violence as she felt they would not believe her because she was so young:

> Interviewer: Why do you think you couldn't tell ..?
>
> Mia: I don't know, I just had a feeling like that they wouldn't believe me enough … 'cos like my age … you know when you get a little girl or a little boy saying 'Oh yeah I got beaten up', it's like 'No you're not.' And like you think that they're joking but really they aren't.

Other reasons were also given by young people that prohibited their help-seeking. Some young women did not tell anyone because they wanted to remain with their partners. Most stated that they would be worried about how their partners would be perceived and that they may be pressured to end the relationship.

> Interviewer: So were you worried about how people might have viewed him?
>
> Zoe: Yeah, 'cos obviously I wanted to be with him and that, I kept my mouth shut.

Others felt inhibited due to reservations about how their peers would respond. For example, Jo feared that her partner's violence may increase if others found out, and was concerned how they would view her situation and blame her for the violence.

> Jo: I didn't want to tell anyone, people would ask me, they would say 'did he hit you?' and I would just be like 'no'. I didn't want to believe it like he did kind of thing, I don't know it was weird … it would get worse 'cos he would start finding out … They [other people] might think like obviously you're doing something that's making him hit you and stuff.

Sometimes girls compared their injuries to those of their friends, which led them to minimise their own experiences and acted as a barrier to seeking help:

> Nikki: … but like, he did hit me but it weren't really assault, 'cos all it was was a red mark on my cheek, it weren't really a bruise or nothing like that, my mates have been

> through a lot worse. My mate, I've known her for years, and there was a point she was with a boy for over a year, I think it was a year and half and he used to hit her, like hit her bad.

It may be that Nikki, alongside other participants, undertake such comparisons which minimise their own experiences as it also serves to make them feel less victimised and therefore more empowered - at least in relation to their friends' experiences. In their view they are not as serious a victim as someone else.

One participant's previous experience of trying to help a friend who was being sexually exploited impacted on her own help-seeking behaviour:

> Emma: … what would have helped me to tell someone, I don't know 'cos even if I told someone, what could they have done you know? I told the police where this girl was, this girl was 14 and I told the police where the pimp was living and where she was, she'd been missing for months. I told the police exactly what was going on and nothing was done.

Some of the young women were reluctant to perceive their sexual experience as negative. This was due to a range of reasons including adherence to wider cultural beliefs about victim-blaming; feeling under social pressure from peers to 'lose' their virginity; to be seen as independent; and in the belief that any such experiences would be minimised by their peers. Interventions need to take into account peer group dynamics and seek to address the barriers which inhibit young people from seeking help.

Literature on adult experiences of intimate partner violence shows that women resist perceiving themselves as a 'victim', due to connotations of passivity and weakness, and for this reason do not fully recognise that their experiences constitute domestic violence (Kelly and Radford 1990). Feminists working in the field of domestic violence often use the term 'survivor' rather than victim, to reinforce the many ways in which individuals facing domestic violence actively seek to address, resist, prevent and cope with their experiences (Campbell et al 1998, Campbell and Soeken 1999, Donovan and Hester 2010). Hester (2006) uses the term 'victimised' to convey the power and control that the person experiencing domestic violence is subject to, while still being able to exert agency within the relationship.

PEER SUPPORT

Friendship groups were a very important source of help and support for young people dealing with issues of violence in their intimate relationships. Some girls described how their friends provided invaluable help in enabling them to leave violent partners. One participant described the protection strategy that she had agreed with her friends to try and safeguard her from extreme physical violence:

> Michelle: I told my friends and we done like um, if I text them a certain letter and things like that for them to call the police. If I call them and where they can't get hold of me so many times, to call the police. I done that to protect myself, before I got involved with workers.

Some girls, however, felt responsible when others stepped-in to protect them from their violent partner as they perceived that the resulting confrontation was their fault.

> Caitlin: He [perpetrator's stepbrother] tried helping once and then they started fighting. And then after like … I thought it was my fault. But then people used to say 'it's not your fault', but then I'd say 'well it is because they're fighting over me'.

As seen earlier in section 2, some of the young women minimised the impact of their own experiences of violence due to their friends not taking their experiences seriously, or perceiving violence as a normal aspect of intimate relationships. This acted as a deterrent to seeking other forms of help, and left the young women dealing unsupported with the emotional impact of the violence.

Sometimes participants reported mixed feelings over trying to support their friends who were experiencing violence in their relationship.

> Sophie: Well she can't get away from him really.

> Interviewer: Because he'll just beat her up?

> Sophie: Mmm … Well she's come up my house saying 'Oh get me away from him' and that, like crying and that … and I used to do it … and then five minutes later she used to walk out the house and she'd be in his bedroom. So I give up on that … I just give up on that.

On one level, Sophie understood that her friend could not escape from her violent partner but at the same time she felt frustrated. Sophie was also receiving mixed messages from others about her involvement in the situation, especially her mother who had told her to leave her friend to make her own decisions.

One female participant described how her partner's friends routinely failed to intervene when he was violent towards her, because he was seen as the leader of their group and therefore unchallengeable.

> Caitlin   Because he was kind of the main one if you know what I mean. So all the boys used to just be … back down from him. Once he's angry they won't go like near him or anything. So none of the boys would ever help …

This situation was confirmed in one of the interviews where Jon, who described himself as a leader of a 'crew', was never challenged by his peers for his extremely controlling behaviour towards his girlfriends. His friends or 'crew members' even supported his behaviour by watching his girlfriends and assaulting any males they were observed with.

Some said that their friends reacted negatively to their relationship when they began spending time with their partner rather than their friends. This caused some to have disagreements with their friends and to become isolated.

Interestingly, many of the boys said that if they had a problem concerning violence or control in their relationship, they would talk to their girlfriend about it; whereas very few female participants reported that they would talk to their boyfriend. This is perhaps indicative of the power differential contained in heterosexual relationships, whereby boys feel confident to raise the issue of their partner's behaviour with them knowing it will not result in retaliation or an escalation in violence. In contrast girls fear their partner's reaction to their accusations.

> Interviewer: Say … if your girlfriend started hitting you or something … who would you talk to about it?

Robert: Well if she started hitting me I'd talk to her about it.

Many of the young men said that they would talk to their friends if they had relationship problems, although the majority added that they had not needed to do. A few of the boys however stated that they would be reluctant to talk to their male friends fearing they would not be taken seriously:

Scott: I can't chat to my mates about it because they just take the mick out of me.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Many of the boys thought that they would talk to their parents if they had relationships difficulties, although as with friends, they had not needed to do so. A few of the girls had very positive relationships with their mothers and described being able to talk to them about anything regarding their relationships.

Nikki: I told my ma … [she] wanted me to get him done for assault.

These participants said that, as their mothers had complex life experiences (none mentioned fathers in this way), this made it easier for them to discuss their own problems:

Jessica: … my mum, I could talk to her about everything, my mum always helped me … because my mum's been through so much as well. She knows the answer to everything.

For a minority, support from family members had been a crucial element in enabling them to leave a violent partner.

Sara: When I felt lonely [thought about going back to partner] … but my parents were there to support me.

Interviewer : So … did you talk to them quite a lot throughout … ?

Sara: Yeah … Well I told my dad that I split up with him and my dad was fine about it.

Some families acted as a safeguard against violence occurring in their relationships. A few participants spoke about living in families where everyone knew what was happening in each others' lives and, therefore, it would be difficult to disguise a violent relationship:

Chantelle: … 'cos where I live … he lives in the same village as me, and like if any boy hit me, my uncles would find out anyway and they'll just go after him. 'cos they're … really close to me.

Others felt they had to be much more selective about what they told their parents. Some found that their parents did not take their situations seriously, nor had the time to speak to them because they had problems of their own:

Zoe: I've got nobody to talk to. 'Cos my mum … she doesn't really … she's too interested in her boyfriends. She's got six kids but she can barely look after herself besides her kids … like she's got too much on her plate and she can't handle it.

Perhaps young people with particularly complex family situations may experience limited opportunity to discuss problems with their parents. For several, concerns about how their family would react if they found out about their boyfriend's violence prevented them from revealing what was happening. Some of the young women reported that their family members would physically retaliate against their partners.

Some participants reported that their parents had disapproved of their relationships with a much older partner. This caused problems and contributed to a relationship breakdown.

> Becky: She [her mother] hated him … she thought he was too old for me. He was 20 I think when I started going out with him.

As findings from the school-based research shows, having a 'much older' partner is a frequent cause of concern for girls' welfare, representing a significant risk factor for relationship violence. A worry here is that these young women may feel pressurised to stay in unhappy relationships to prove to their parents that their relationships are successful, as indicated by some participants in this study.

Interviews with boys also indicated that there appeared to be a gender difference in the way that adults responded to boys' relationships; it is feasible that these adult perceptions affected the boys' views. Some male participants described how their parents discouraged them from entering into long-term relationships because they were too young to be 'tied down':

> Scott: … they reckon I have got my whole life ahead of me … Well my mum says to me 'oh you are going to look back and think oh I shouldn't have thought like that'. But I love that girl and everything to bits yeah and my mum reckons when I am older I am not going to feel the same … she reckons I am going to grow out of it and that … and get other girlfriends.

Kai had a similar situation – although he had been involved in a number of long-term relationships, he felt pressure from his parents to act in a different way with girls:

> Kai: … I haven't really been in a short relationship … it's crazy. My ma says to me and my dad says to me 'Oh you shouldn't narrow down now … you should be growing up … seeing all different birds' … But it's … you can't do that … I can't just go out with a bird for a day and say 'Oh no, that's it now' … you can't just treat them like shit I suppose.

Scott had some concerns about his relationship but felt that he could not talk to his parents because they did not take it seriously; they saw it as something he would leave behind as he matured. Such attitudes imply to boys that the emotional element of relationships is unimportant at this stage in their lives. Interventions need to be aware of these links between age and gender and how they can affect attitudes towards help-seeking regarding relationships.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Around half of the young people interviewed were known to have a social worker. The majority of the young people who were allocated a social worker stated that they received little help from them regarding their relationships and most did not view their social worker as someone they could rely on for support on personal issues. Some young people were disinclined to reveal experiences of violence to

professionals, due to their fears of how the information would be handled and specifically confidentiality issues:

> Interviewer: … and what about like people, professionals. Is there anyone you can talk to?
>
> Chloe: Um, yeah, but when you tell them things like that they usually want to get your parents and stuff involved … which you feel like 'Yeah, but I'm telling you this out of confidence, and now you want to go and tell other people'.
>
> Andrew: I don't really like chatting to them [project staff] 'cos I don't know if they would keep it safe with them like … don't know if I could trust them that well.

Several were concerned about the way they would be judged by professionals and this deterred them from talking about their experiences. Over half of young people stated that their social worker was interested only in issues about their family, and unconcerned about wider aspects of their lives:

> Mark: She [social worker] just goes on about my family … going on about how long my dad's been living without us … gets on my nerves … they just want to know about your family …

One girl described how she did not want to disclose her experience of sexual violence because of her previous negative experiences of talking about intimate issues with social workers. She reported that she had learnt not to tell people important information because when she had in the past they had left her.

> Chantelle: When I open up to people they always leave, that's why I don't do it … so I don't open up to no one, not even my own mum …
>
> Interviewer: Is that like … your friends or family that in the past?
>
> Chantelle: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: Is that what's made you feel that way?
>
> Chantelle: All my social workers and stuff.
>
> Interviewer: Your social workers? Oh right. So they've always changed?
>
> Chantelle: Yeah, changed and left and stuff. So I just don't bother … I don't talk to no one anymore.
>
> Interviewer: So was there a time in the past when you might have talked to your social worker?
>
> Chantelle: Yeah, I told them everything and like the next day she leaves.

Chantelle's experience highlights the importance of both consistency and continuity in support, something recognised in both policy and practice as an essential consideration in the planning of services, but seemingly difficult to deliver (Berridge et al 2008). For some, their previous negative experience with children's services led them to view all social workers with mistrust:

> Andrew: I don't like social workers
>
> Interviewer: You don't like them?
>
> Andrew: No they are cruel … they just like to take you away from your parents.

For a minority however, talking to their social worker about their relationships was a positive and useful experience:

> Interviewer: So was it helpful talking to your social worker?
>
> Nikki: Yeah it was, she obviously chatted to loads of people in the same situation before, and she told me basically like, what to do and how to cope with things. And I just took to her really well, and, like I just got on with her. And it was ever since chatting to my social worker, that's when I like opened-up and told everyone my problems instead of keeping it all in. I like lets people know what I'm thinking and stuff … she did change my life really. If I wouldn't have had a social worker I probably would have been the same now, so it's good really.

This shows that effective social workers can provide an important role in helping young people to understand the complex issues they are facing in their relationships and providing safety strategies to leave them. Another girl who experienced severe partner violence spoke about the support she received from workers at a project for young people at risk of sexual exploitation:

> Ellie: I mean friends are good to an extent but sometimes it is just nice to like break-out to someone who's a bit more mature. And you know probably more understanding. It's about you, not like 'Oh well, I did this … take my advice'. You know, it can get a bit grating.

These examples indicate that given a suitable approach to talking with young people about intimate issues, professionals can provide valuable support. This finding was also reflected in the school-based research project. Therefore, it is not so much that young people do not want support from professionals, but that this support has to be appropriate to their needs. This finding also upheld in recent research by Rees et al (2011), who focused on the needs of maltreated teenagers and conclude that the social work response they received was often inadequate, inconsistent and minimised the risks involved.

We have already seen in section 5 the support that pregnant teenagers and young mothers received from an education project they attended, so this will not be repeated again here. One participant spoke about how workers from a family project helped her to reassess a relationship and to realise that the violence she was experiencing was not her fault. She also found that talking to another girl who was involved in the project helped her:

> Caitlin: [project worker's name] definitely helped me. But like I still talk to [other girl at the project] … I can still talk to her more … better than I could talk to anyone else. I don't know why. But yeah like … I think when I talk to people about it more, it helps me realise that … yeah it just helps me realise things, like and that actually wasn't my fault.

For some, therefore, it was not just the project itself that was important but also having the opportunity to associate with others their own age who could relate to their experiences.

However many of the young people added that they did not know where they could obtain professional support.

> Jo: There weren't really nothing, like nowhere to go to chat to people or nothing like that.

Robert: It's like obviously older people know [where to go] yeah, but like … from back then and now are two different times really. So … obviously I will feel more comfortable talking to someone my own age.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Many of the young women reported that they did not want to tell anyone about their experiences of intimate partner violence. There were various reasons for this, but for most, the feeling that their experiences would not be believed, or minimised, was significant.

- For those that sought help from friends, some found that their experiences of violence were normalised within peer groups where experiences of intimate partner violence were common. Interventions need to take account of this barrier to help-seeking.

- Several young people were concerned about the way they would be judged by professionals and this deterred them from talking about their experiences.

- For a minority however, talking to their social worker about their relationships was a positive and useful experience.

SECTION 7: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory study represents the first UK research to look specifically at the issue of teenage partner violence across a range of disadvantaged groups. In the US, where the majority of research on 'dating violence' has occurred, inclusion of disadvantaged groups is still relatively scarce (Jonson-Reid et al 2007). The current research builds on an earlier study, undertaken by two of the current authors with other colleagues, which addressed the problem of teenage partner violence in a school-based sample.

Overall, the findings from this disadvantaged study appear consistent with the results of the school-based project, endorsing the original research findings and recommendations. Clear similarities exist between the two studies in a number of important areas including: the gendered nature of violence; the forms of partner violence experienced; the central role of coercive control; impact of violence; and the factors associated with victimisation or instigation of relationship violence, especially family violence, peer violence and older partners.

Yet differences also emerged from the studies, which require addressing in prevention and intervention programmes aimed at disadvantaged young people. The most noticeable differences concerned the severity and frequency of partner violence experienced by disadvantaged teenagers, the very high level of tolerance or acceptance of intimate violence and the coping strategies young people used. Two additional factors also appeared more prominent in the current research compared with the school-based study: poverty (although some limitations were noted in how this was measured in the school research); and alcohol and illegal drug use. In addition the specific issues relating to pregnant teenagers, young mothers and young people who have experience of living in care present major challenges for current policy and practice.

The current study strengthens the evidence base concerning this form of intimate violence and reinforces the need to develop more effective safeguards in this area of child welfare. Although universal programmes aimed at teenage partner violence prevention and intervention in the general population will impact on all young people, disadvantaged young people, and especially those in the most vulnerable populations, will require more targeted interventions. How specific programmes may respond to the needs of disadvantaged young people is discussed later in this section.

It is important to acknowledged that this is a quite modest study based in a single city in Southern England and obviously cannot capture regional or national variations in young people's attitudes or behaviours. However, despite this, the findings of the research have important implications for the safety and welfare of disadvantaged young people.

We will now consider the main similarities between the two research studies before moving on to consider the differences which arose, and the implications of these for policy, practice and research.

SIMILARITIES IN THE RESEARCH STUDIES: PROVIDING VALIDATION

The major themes derived from the school-based evidence also emerged from the interviews with disadvantaged young people. Although both studies used a similar semi-structured interview schedule, more flexibility was given to participants in the disadvantaged study to influence the nature and context of the interviews due to their disparate circumstances. Specific experiences of disadvantage were included in the interviews, especially concerning issues of being in care, pregnancy, motherhood and custody. These interviews were undertaken by the first author, who was uninvolved in the fieldwork for the school-based study. We are, therefore, confident that the data we gathered, and themes which emerged from our analysis, were unbiased by the original school-based study. We do nonetheless acknowledge that research of this nature, undertaken by collaborative research teams, cannot be totally separate.

RECOGNITION OF TEENAGE PARTNER VIOLENCE AS A SIGNIFICANT CHILD WELFARE CONCERN

The findings from the current study clearly show that this form of intimate violence represents a significant concern for disadvantaged young people's well-being. The impact of the school-based research was demonstrated through the previous Government's decision to undertake a £2 million awareness campaign on relationships violence and the extensive media, policy and practice interest the research finding generated. Due to this, alongside campaigning from other voluntary sector organisations such as Women's Aid, teenage partner violence has now begun to be recognised as an important child welfare concern for the first time in the UK, requiring policy and practice developments. For example *Working Together* (HM Government 2010) now contains a strengthened section on teenage partner relationships, but we do not know how this is being interpreted and applied, and to what effect.

The levels of victimisation found in the initial research were worrying. However, findings from the current study suggest that *even greater* levels of violence, both in frequency and severity, were experienced by disadvantaged young women. It can be concluded from this finding that intimate partner violence represents an even more profound child welfare issue for disadvantaged young people than for those in the general population. It is imperative that the issue of teenage partner violence remains a key child welfare issue, and that the current policy and practice focus, as indicated in *Working Together*, incorporate the specific requirements of disadvantaged young people. At the present time it is unclear if and how the coalition government will build on these developments.

THE GENDERED IMPACT AND INITIATION OF TEENAGE PARTNER VIOLENCE

One of the central findings of this study was the recognition of how gender impacts on young people's experiences of intimate partner violence. In all three forms of violence, young women reported much greater levels of negative impact than did males. Indeed the impact on young men was often negligible. This finding shows that the gendered nature of violence and its impact need to be central considerations in the development of prevention and intervention programmes aimed at both the general population and specifically designed interventions for disadvantaged young people.

The current findings strengthen the argument that viewing incidence rates for violence, without also placing them in the wider context of how this affects the recipient, is misleading and will result in ineffective interventions. As argued previously (Barter 2009), most research in this area has ignored impact and instead focused almost exclusively on incidence (although for example see Banister et al 2003, Chund 2005, Hird 2000, Silverman et al 2006). This decontextualisation of violence leads to a gender-neutral stance, where female and male victimisation and instigation of violence are viewed as equally problematic and harmful. Reed et al (2010), reviewing all US studies on teenage 'dating violence' since 2008, concluded that 95 per cent used a gender-neutral framework where dating violence is positioned as an issue of mutual conflict. They conclude that this model now dominates US intervention programmes in this area and is becoming more prevalent in other countries.

Clearly violence is undesirable. However to equate an act of initial aggression against a partner with using violence in self-defence is unjustified. We recognise that some boys did experience a negative impact due to the violence they experienced in their relationships. As we stated in the previous report, the influence that certain forms of masculinity may have on a boy's or a young man's ability to recognise and admit vulnerability, both physical and emotional, needs to be acknowledged. Boys may feel resistant to showing feelings, especially emotional vulnerability due to female violence, as this may jeopardise their prescribed masculinity. Reflecting the school-based study we explored in interviews with disadvantaged young men this dilemma concerning masculinity. Many recognised that they were expected to emulate certain gendered roles, and some provided examples of the difficulties this could entail. However, even with this recognition, and acknowledging that showing vulnerability was sometimes problematic in other areas of their lives, the majority still stated that they were unaffected by the violence and control, other than to be annoyed by it.

If we are to develop interventions which reflect young people's own realities and lived experiences then gender, and especially challenging gender norms that promote male domination and control, need to be at the forefront of interventions. As Reed et al (2010) conclude in their review of dating violence research;

> '[T]he relevance of gender to the prevalence and public health impact of IPV [Inter-Personal Violence] has been documented across a tremendous and consistent body of international research, leading to a global consensus on the framing of such violence as gender based … If we fail to consider the gender inequities that support and maintain such violence, we will without doubt, fail in attempts to develop programmes, policies, and educational campaigns to address this highly prevalent and debilitating public health threat (p 351).

As our research shows, interventions need to explore how gender, and especially gendered-power, influences how violence is experienced and legitimised (also see Stanley et al 2011). This does not mean denying male victimisation, or legitimising girls' use of violence. Nevertheless for interventions to be effective they need to reflect young people's own experiences, and in respect to intimate violence these are without doubt highly gendered. Young men inflict much more serious violence on their partners than do young women.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF PARTNER VIOLENCE

It emerged from this study that young people experience a range of abusive experiences in their relationships: physical, emotional and sexual. Interviews clearly showed that different forms of violence often co-existed and were mutually reinforcing. Thus, one form of violence rarely occurred in isolation. To focus on one aspect of violence, to the detriment of others, would be ineffective. We cannot adequately confront physical and sexual forms of violence unless we also challenge the coercive control that one partner, mostly male, has over the other.

Although young people in the disadvantaged study often stated that the emotional violence, most generally in the form of coercive control, was a normal aspect of any intimate relationship and that it did not affect their well-being, it was clear from the interviews, especially with girls, that this was rarely the case. It was often during the interviews that young women were able to recognise, some for the first time, the negative effect that their partner's use of control had over their lives.

We would argue, based on the findings of this study and our previous research, that coercive control plays a central role in violent relationships. In much of the US literature, which tends to focus almost exclusively on physical and to a lesser extent sexual violence, control is rarely included. This means that much of the extensive North American research fails to adequately conceptualise the complexity of teenage partner violence.

Others, such as Stark (2007), have recognised that coercive control plays a pivotal role in adult experiences of domestic violence. He conceptualises coercive control as a model of abuse that attempts to encompass a range of strategies employed to dominate individual women in personal life. Alternately referred to as 'coerced persuasion', 'intimate terrorism' or 'emotional torture', it describes an ongoing pattern of domination by which abusive partners, almost exclusively males, use three equally important tactics: intimidation, isolation, and control. In the coercive control model, what men do *to* women is less important than what they prevent women from doing for themselves.

Another useful framework to understand why disadvantaged young people, and perhaps especially young men, perpetrate partner violence is suggested through the work of Gadd and Jefferson (2007) on psychosocial criminology. They seek to explore the subjectivities of violent offenders by linking their inner and outer worlds and thereby develop a deeper understanding of the links between emotions, morality and culture. They argue that violence can often be viewed as emerging from disordered social relationships. In order to understand why perpetrators use violence, and subsequently how to intervene in this process, we need to explore the emotional worlds of those individuals to understand how morality, crime and violence stem from feelings of anger, shame and guilt that develop in relation to others. It is hoped that the findings of this research, alongside other studies, will enable this recognition to be transferred to teenage relationships.

NORMALISATION OF VIOLENCE

More girls in the disadvantage study, compared with the school-based research, viewed partner violence as a 'normal', if unwanted, aspect of their relationships. This impeded participants' ability to recognise the psychological damage such violence can have on victims. Female participants also normalised their partners' high levels of control as an expression of protection and love – indeed many argued that this

validated their relationships as it showed how much their partners cared for them. Conversely boys did not share this conceptualisation, and instead, stated they would not tolerate any level of control from their female partners, even though some admitted it was sometimes warranted due to their behaviour. This confusion in girls' perceptions of care and control was clearly evident in the school study, although it seemed to be even greater for disadvantaged young women. This perhaps reflects their own family situations, where opportunities to learn how loving, trusting and supportive relationships are developed and sustained were often limited. When boyfriends then excused their own use of control, through narratives of care and protection, young women had little to compare this with.

As with the school-based study, young women were resistant to recognising their experiences of physical sexual victimisation, including rape, as violence. In relation to sexual coercion, many female participants felt unsure what constituted sexual negotiations and when this became sexual exploitation. Most felt they had limited control over their sexuality, and often felt uncertain about the role of sex in relationships generally. Most female participants displayed a 'disembodied sexuality', where female sexual feelings and desires were largely absent (Holland et al 1998) and sexual pleasure was rarely articulated (Stanley 2005).

The normalisation of violence, through adherence to wider cultural scripts, often meant that girls were unable to recognise the impact of their experiences. As with the school-based interviews, many young women in the current study blamed themselves for the violence they experienced. Donovan and Hester (2010) argue in relation to adult experiences:

> ' … the ability to recognise and name domestic violence, and simultaneously understand the implications of that naming, is crucial – literally life-saving for too many - and consequently emancipating' (p 279).

Many of the young women spoke about the need to adopt a more aggressive stance in response to continued physical victimisation. The adoption of this coping, or survival, strategy seemed more prevalent in the disadvantaged interviews than those from the school-based study. Although this enabled some girls to feel less victimised in certain areas of their lives, this response occurred at considerable price as it often resulted in an escalation of violence, especially in their relationships.

AGE

Although more work is needed in this area, it appeared from our study that disadvantaged young people entered into intimate relationships at an earlier age than those in the general population. This meant that, in a number of cases, children as young as 10 and 11 were experiencing partner violence, including sexual violence. These pre-teen relationships were generally viewed by outsiders as innocent, unimportant or not serious. These perceptions of very young relationships meant it was more difficult for pre-adolescent recipients of violence to feel their problems would be taken seriously.

AGE OF PARTNER

The majority (three-quarters) of disadvantaged female participants had relationships with older partners; in many instances these partners were adult men. Female participants who had older partners were more likely to report higher levels of all forms of violence than those with same-age partners. This finding was also confirmed in the school-based study.

Having a much older male partner, defined in the original school-based study as being at least two-years older (although most of the much older male partners in the disadvantaged study were significantly older than this), should be recognised as constituting a significant risk to a young person's welfare. A minority (around a third) of boys had older partners. Some of these boys reported experiencing sexual pressure, showing how age as well as gender can be an associated factor. The development of appropriate professional responses in this area is important.

FAMILY AND PEER VIOLENCE

In the current study we purposively sampled for young people who may have experienced family violence, for example, through a family intervention service. In addition young people in care have often experienced high levels of family abuse. It is therefore not surprising that a high percentage of our sample reported domestic violence, physical abuse or neglect in their childhoods and we need to take account of their loss.

The school-based analysis showed that family violence was strongly associated with all forms of partner violence for girls. For boys, although family violence was a risk factor, peer violence was found to have a stronger link with partner violence instigation. The current research builds on these findings to provide a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which family violence and abuse are associated with vulnerability to partner violence in teenage relationships. As with the school-based results, it was clear that the majority of young people viewed the violence in their families as unacceptable. Both female and male participants held very strong views about the damage that domestic violence and child abuse had on their lives and the lives of those around them.

The accounts young people shared with us of these experiences were often very distressing and we recognise how difficult this was for many. From the outset of this study we decided not to ask young people directly about their family situations, and especially violence. We were aware that disadvantaged young people, and especially those in care, often complain that they have to retell their 'stories', whilst they perceive little benefit. We did not want to worsen this. The interview was therefore focused on the young people's relationship experiences, and the associated factors which they felt influenced these experiences. We allowed young participants to decide if family violence was a factor they wished to discuss. In many cases, young people volunteered to talk about their family situations, whilst some remained silent on this aspect of their lives. Consequently it may be that more young people experienced family violence than is reflected in our findings.

The aim of the current qualitative research was to explore with young people their experiences and views, not produce causal explanations. Nevertheless, young people's narratives about family violence and their experiences of intimate partner violence provided valuable insights into how one form of violence or abuse may influence susceptibility to another.

Young women's accounts often associated their low-self esteem, stemming from their earlier experiences of abuse, with their later experiences of intimate violence from boyfriends. In some cases, mostly when child abuse had occurred, young women found it very difficult to separate violence from love – mainly due to the abusers justifying their actions as 'love'.

Due to their negative family backgrounds many felt that they had little experience of how positive, committed relationships were built; how to show love and commitment without jealousy or mistrust;

and how to resolve conflict. These factors need to be reflected in intervention programmes aimed at young people with experiences of family abuse.

We encountered high levels of peer violence generally in the lives of disadvantaged young people. For young men having to uphold a violent and powerful public image often also affected their intimate relationships, where violence was routinely and publicly used both to control their partners and demonstrate their power. As already discussed, disadvantaged young women also reported greater involvement in wider peer violence than those in the general population, although not to the extent of male participants.

Research is needed to understand the complex way in which different aspects of violence such as offending, intimate violence and bullying interconnect. Such research would require collaboration between traditionally separate areas of violence research and theory (see Barter and Berridge 2011).

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

The majority of female participants who experienced partner physical violence stated that although their partners were violent towards them when sober, the severity of the violence increased when their boyfriends had been drinking alcohol. Interventions surrounding teenage alcohol and drug-use need to acknowledge this link with partner violence. However, it is clear from our research that although alcohol and drug use are associated with an increase in the severity of partner violence, they are not necessarily the cause of violence, as this occurred irrespectively.

HELP-SEEKING

As with the school-based research, the majority of disadvantaged young people who sought help spoke to a friend. Only a minority went to an adult or professional for assistance. Social workers, foster careers and residential workers were rarely approached. This reflects previous research findings, which show that the majority of victims and instigators do not seek help, and if they do they mainly go to peers (Black et al 2008). Another factor relating to adolescent help-seeking generally is gender (Boldero and Fullows 1995, Schonert-Reichl and Muller 1996): females are more likely to seek help than males.

Many disadvantaged participants in our study felt that help-seeking was an indication of weakness and signified a lack of self-reliance. Young people often stated that, due to their previous experiences, they had to rely on themselves without assistance from other people. Black et al (2008) postulate that the reason why so few young victims of relationship violence tell someone is due to the psychological 'cost' that help-seeking entails, such as feeling dependent and inferior and the consequences of this on their self-worth. Similarly, Tishby et al (2001) argued that adolescents' general lack of help-seeking can be understood as a consequence of the unacceptably high psychological 'cost' this involves, which may threaten their fragile self-esteem and feelings of independence. Young people need to weight-up the benefits of help-seeking such as coping and recovery, with the costs to social stigma and self-esteem (Raviv 2000). For teenage partner violence, the 'costs' seem for some too high, especially if their self-esteem is already damaged due to their earlier experiences of family violence. Adolescents' resistance to help-seeking in this area is a reflection of their wider reluctance and not specific to partner violence.

Black at al (2008) looked at factors which influenced help-seeking, an area neglected in much of the partner violence literature, which mostly concentrates on why recipients do not seek help or from whom it is sought. They found that having a bystander witness the violence, or the recipient perceive the violence as being due to anger or jealousy, made it more likely that a young victim would talk to someone. It is however unclear in relation to the first factor if this is because the bystander directly intervened to stop the violence, if the witness approached the victim after the incident, or if the victim felt they had to explain to the bystander what had happened. US research, primarily involving college students, has looked at strengthening the role of bystanders in this area and may provide some important messages for the development of UK intervention programmes (Banyard 2009).

In our research, those who did tell someone reported a range of responses and outcomes, although many felt that their experiences were not taken seriously, especially by peers. Young women who spoke to peers also stated that their friends often viewed the emotional impact of victimisation as a weakness and something they had to 'get over'.

Interventions need to take account of the barriers to adolescent help-seeking and should challenge the perception of help-seeking as a sign of weakness. Young people need to understand that both the emotional and physical impact of partner violence needs to be acknowledged. This may be most effectively achieved through the provision of peer-led services for young people.

Although the concept of self-reliance is very important to adolescent development, this needs to be accompanied by an understanding of the role and importance of social support, alongside recognition of how problem-sharing is a positive aspect of social interactions. Unfortunately these changes are unlikely to be easily attained through interventions. Jaff et al (1992), for example, found that participating in a teenage dating violence programme had little bearing on adolescents' willingness to seek support.

The need for social workers, alongside other professionals, to respond to partner violence within young people's relationships is indisputable. Child welfare practitioners generally work with young people who have a heightened vulnerability both to instigating and experiencing partner violence due to their previous experiences of parental domestic violence and child abuse. Given that research consistently shows that teenage partner violence is rarely spontaneously reported to adults, including professionals, it is imperative that social workers routinely include this area in their overall assessment frameworks of young people's needs.

However, we know very little about the degree to which this form of violence is recognised within practice; what assessments are being undertaken to determine the extent of the problem in at-risk groups; and what multi-agency responses are being enacted. We know from the work of Rees et al (2011) that the welfare needs of adolescents are often poorly recognised and that social work response for this older group of young people are inadequate, inconsistent and often minimised the risks involved. We fear, given the evidence in this report, that this is an area of policy and practice which requires urgent attention.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCES OF BEING IN CARE

Our research showed that young people with experiences of being in care had the most complex life experiences and family backgrounds of all disadvantaged groups. Many young people in care said their past experiences, especially of domestic violence and child abuse, negatively impacted on their current relationships. Some felt that their past experiences made it difficult for them to form trusting intimate relationships with their partners and made them vulnerable to relationships with controlling and violent partners.

A wide range of US studies on 'dating' violence have reported on community or school-based samples but few have explored the potential risk factors for teenagers under the care of children's services. Adolescents in care represent a group at high risk of partner violence, especially given that violence in the family is one of the reasons for removing children from their home environment and that such factors are associated with later victimisation. The small number of studies undertaken with this group supports this presumption (Jonson-Reid and Bivens 1999, Werkerle et al 2001).

Professional Support and Help

Many of the young people in care did not speak to a professional about their experiences of partner violence, indeed most felt very resistant to doing so. Reflecting this, Jonson-Reid et al (2007) identified that only a very small minority of young people in their foster care sample told a child welfare worker or a foster carer about their experiences. Encouragingly, they found that three-quarters of those who did tell a professional said they received help. Our research also found evidence of good practice in this area. Some participants in foster care stated that their carers had helped them to understand that violence or control were not an indication of love. This recognition occurred not only through direct discussions about relationships but from young people observing how loving, committed and respectful intimate relationships were maintained. In addition, some spoke about the importance of the 'everyday' physical and emotional care they received from their foster carers and how this enabled them to begin to question their own perceptions regarding what care and love mean.

However this process, especially the opportunity to witness how intimate relationships based on mutual respect are maintained, may be more limited in residential children's homes. Indeed the dual role of residential care as both a 'home' and a setting for social welfare intervention can be conflicting (Green 2005). The position of children's residential care as a quasi-domestic setting for *daily* life can create unique vulnerabilities due to the combination of public and private spheres. Ward (2004), in recognition of this dilemma, argued for the need to contain ordinary caring practices found in family contexts whilst at the same time acknowledge that many of the children in placement, including those who experience violence, may need specialist assistance. Children's homes need to respond to young people's struggle to achieve 'a sense of normality' (Anglin 2002), whilst ensuring that children's complex needs are met. This is not an easy balance for homes to achieve, especially as previous research indicates that many residential workers feel unsure about how to approach issues of sexuality and sexual violence with young people in their care (Green 2005, Barter 2006).

Interventions

There is a clear need to develop specific programmes for young people in care concerning partner violence and control. Programmes need to recognise that many young people in care have faced multiple-victimisation, have childhoods characterised by chaotic and unstable environments, and lack an understanding of how respectful and loving relationships are developed and maintained. Young people need to understand how their previous experiences of violence may impact on their perceptions and susceptibility to partner violence. However the lack of information regarding this group hampers the development of specific programmes. Maseru et al (2007) argue that there have been few attempts in the US to design specific programmes, or adapt existing universal interventions, for the needs of this group.

Young people leaving care have been found to be at higher risk for many adverse outcomes (Stein 2006). We found that young people who had left care, and were living alone, appeared particularly vulnerable to violence in their relationships. Leaving care programmes need to include the issue of intimate violence as a central element.

PREGNANT TEENAGERS AND TEENAGE MOTHERS

The findings associated with pregnant teenagers' and young mothers' experiences of partner violence were particularly disconcerting, especially as many stated the control and violence increased once they were pregnant or when the baby was born. Few UK studies on teenage pregnancy have directly addressed, or indeed recognised, the problem of partner violence in the lives of young mothers. The role of sexual violence is more often unacknowledged (although see Coy et al 2010). Some studies report that pressure from older partners can be a risk factor associated with teen pregnancy (Amu and Appiah, 2006, Knight et al 2006). To date, only two UK studies (Brown et al 2006, Include 2007) have been undertaken on the issue of intimate violence in the lives of teenage mothers, although both rely on very small samples: their findings indicate, as do ours, that this represents a substantial problem.

A number of studies however have reported on the role that partner support can play in the lives of teenage mothers (Bunting and McAuley 2004a), providing an important emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of young fathers. Bunting and McAuley (2004b) also report that many young fathers want more involvement and contact with their children, yet little research addresses the potential dangers that this may raise for some young mothers and their children if these partners are violent or controlling. Research with older mothers post-separation shows that children often continue to be abused (Abrahams, 1994; Hester and Radford, 1996; Hester and Pearson, 1998). Given the findings of this research, this constitutes a significant safeguarding omission.

Theories on gender-identity construction are central in understanding power dimensions within relationships; for example, notions of masculinity may put pressure on young men for early sexual activity and a lack of responsibility for using contraception (Knight 2006). We recognise that young fathers may themselves be trying to cope with social difficulties in their lives, fatherhood at a young age adds to these stresses (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). We cannot know from this research how these stresses add to young men's use of violence. The minority of young fathers interviewed, all from a young offender institution, did discuss some of the stresses that fatherhood involved. Some sought to explain how being a father had made them more controlling of the mothers of their children. However, and probably

because these fathers were in custody, many were reluctant to openly discuss any negative aspects of their intimate relationships. Instead they portrayed an optimistic view of how their relationships will be upon their release.

Policy and Practice Aimed at Teenage Pregnancy and Motherhood

Previous Government policy makes some reference to the need to consider relationship dynamics in understanding teenage pregnancy, stating that these relationships are often 'fragile' or 'volatile' (DCSF 2007). However, no mention is made of how teenage mothers negotiate violent relationships, or the impact of this violence on their child's welfare. The focus of the SEU report (1999) is on how teenagers need to take responsibility for their 'risk taking' actions. This may be very difficult for teenage women in a violent relationship, who may be negotiating their relationship on a very different level to other teenagers. There is a danger that through government strategies 'young people will be blamed … for their failure to take opportunities offered to them and for their failure to make the "right" decisions' (Carabine 2007, p 964) without an examination of the wider factors which may inhibit their decision-making capacities. The DCSF (2007) report emphasises the need to engage more effectively with young fathers to strengthen their relationships with their children. Whilst this is important, the report fails to consider the potential difficulties that may arise where fathers are also perpetrators of partner control and violence.

There is a common perception within western societies that teenage mothers are a social problem (Daguerre and Nativel 2006), have reduced life chances, and are ultimately represented as 'tragic lost opportunities' (Beverley Hughes [MP], quoted in Bunting 2005). We have previously argued in this report that it is important to recognise that teenage motherhood is not a universally negative experience. It is necessary to acknowledge that the emphasis on reducing teenage pregnancy is essentially a top-down government policy as young people themselves are not demanding a reduction in rates of teenage pregnancy, nor are many of their parents (Stanley 2005). Babies born to teenage mothers may be more likely to have adverse health outcomes; however if these negative outcome are all due to age, or more related to the wider social context in which teenage mothers live, remains unclear (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Research shows how motherhood can be a positive experience by providing teenagers with a reason to exit 'risky' lifestyles, or to improve their life chances though education (Duncan et al 2010). However, these positive effects for both mothers and their babies may be mitigated if violence and control are present. Thus practice needs to recognise the vulnerable position such mothers are in and ensure that potential benefits are not lost.

Our findings also have important implications for current policies on teenage pregnancy. For young women, becoming a parent at a young age may be a positive life choice, especially against the limited alternatives available due to their disadvantaged position. However, our research clearly indicates that that for some young women, pregnancy was not a personal choice due to their experiences of sexual violence and coercion. A failure to acknowledge the unequal power dimensions contained in some teenage relationships, including sexual violence, will inevitably mean that policies aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy may only be partially successful.

NEGATIVE STEREOTYPING AND TEENAGE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Many teenagers who become pregnant, although not all (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009), are from socially and economically deprived groups. Stanley (2005) argues that teenage motherhood may be culturally embedded in some communities, particularly in those where other opportunities for young people to achieve the symbols of independence and adult status are restricted. In these accounts, teenage pregnancy and motherhood are represented as an opportunity for young women, with limited alternatives, to achieve adult social status otherwise denied to them. Luker (1997) claims that it is 'the discouraged among the disadvantaged' who become teenage mothers (p 180). Although this conceptualisation is persuasive, it still fails to take into account the role that sexual violence plays in teenage pregnancy – as our research indicates teenage pregnancy is not always a choice, or necessarily, in the control of girls and young women.

However, what all teenage mothers do share is the negative social stereotype which accompanies young motherhood (Stanley 2005). Research has shown how teenage mothers are stereotyped and labelled as sexually deviant, or promiscuous, and are therefore viewed as 'failing' to adhere to prescribed gender scripts (Holland et al 1998, Stanley 2005). It has been argued that traditional gender role expectations compel girls and boys to act in prescribed ways, where boys are compelled to display a dominant, knowing sexuality while girls are juxtaposed as passive and naïve (Holland et al 1998, Sieg 2007). Such binary distinction sets the scene for intimate violence to exist (Sigelman 1984). This is a highly gendered process, whereby boys and men enhance their social status and reputations through sexual activity, while girls and women risk losing theirs (Stanley 2005, Mitchell et al 2001) with pregnancy being an obvious indicator of deviation.

As the importance of 'protecting' sexual reputations is at its most influential during adolescence, these forces place additional pressures on young mothers to stay in abusive relationships to avoid additional damage to their already *disputed*, or as described in Hillier et al's (1998) Australian research, *sullied* reputations. Brown et al (2006) also conclude from their pilot study that young women's experiences of power and control are compounded by the stigma of teenage pregnancy, as evidenced in our research.

Stereotypes are also created at a structural level with a focus on women in the workplace, and the negative connotations that prevail for mothers who stay at home, especially those who rely on welfare benefits. The reality is that most teenage mothers are from poor backgrounds and the opportunities available to them in an extremely unequal labour market offer them little economic advantage through employment (Bunting, 2005; Wilson and Huntington, 2005). Single mothers also experience negative labelling as they defy the social norm, encouraged by the State, of the two-parent family (McDermott and Graham 2005, Daguerre and Nativel 2006). Thus, and as our research indicates, some young mothers may respond to this by remaining in abusive relationships to counter the additional stereotype of being a *single* parent.

We do not want to reinforce the social stigma of teenage pregnancy. Nor do we seek to add to the problematising of young motherhood. It is important to remember that incidence rates for domestic violence also *increase* for adult women in pregnancy and post-natally (Bacchus et al 2004a, Bacchus et al 2004b). Accordingly, an increased risk of domestic violence, in both pregnancy and after birth, is something universally experienced by women, irrespective of age or disadvantage. However, a young mother's age, alongside the social stigma associated with teenage pregnancy, profoundly impacts on young women's ability to protect both themselves and their children. Yet, it is important to note that

US research shows that, for some teenage women, becoming pregnant was the catalyst for leaving an abusive relationship (Rosen 2004). This is also supported through our interviews. It would however be a distortion to use incidence of partner violence as yet another indicator to denounce teenage motherhood.

Professionals should not underestimate the powerful and insidious influence social stigma can play in mediating and reinforcing intimate violence. Thus, Stanley (2005) states that sexual health services and health promotion strategies need to acknowledge the relevance of factors such as gender and stigma for young people. Sexual health policy and promotion, especially concerning teenage pregnancy, emphasise the need to inform young people about their options and to allow them to make educated choices (House of Commons Heath Committee 2003). Such rhetoric presupposes that these choices are free and take place in a neutral context (Stanley 2005). As we have seen in this study, this is not necessarily the case. Sexual heath services need to acknowledge more explicitly the impact of gender inequalities.

Protecting Pregnant Teenagers, Teenage Mothers and their Children

It is necessary that policies to support and protect pregnant teenagers or young mothers in violent relationships recognise the complexity of the issues they face in order to help them, and their children, most effectively.

Our findings, alongside others (Include 2007), indicated a range of reasons why teenage mothers are perhaps especially reluctant to seek help from welfare agencies. Many worried, as already discussed, that reporting may lead to an escalation in violence from their partners. Many also felt that they would not be taken seriously or their ability to adequately parent their child would be questioned, rather than the focus being placed on the abusers' actions. The fear that their child may be removed was evident in many of the discussions, especially with young women who had been in care themselves.

The young mothers in our study who were in contact with social work services often described feeling victimised by social workers. Social workers were seen as focusing mainly on the mother's responsibility to protect their child, and more specifically their inability to do so, while neglecting the fact that the mother was herself a minor, experiencing perhaps severe forms of violence, and was therefore also in need of protection. It is clear from research on adult domestic violence that if mothers are not supported appropriately, their ability to protect themselves and their children is diminished (Radford and Hester 2007).

This dilemma is not restricted to teenage mothers, but a reflection, and possibly an amplification, of wider issues relating to domestic violence and child protection. Hester's (2004) 'three planet model' provides analysis of the links and contradictions between approaches to domestic violence, child protection and child contact, demonstrating how each is underpinned by specific historical, cultural practices and outcomes (planetary conditions) which inhibit multi-agency working. Similarly, Humphreys (2010) refers to the great divide. Perhaps this disparity is even greater when the mother is herself a minor.

As is evidenced through this research, the young mothers' primary concern was to protect their child. According to McDermott and Graham (2005), young mothers routinely prioritise their relationships with their babies over those with partners.

Our research highlighted that for many young mothers, especially those isolated from their family and peer support systems, the very high levels of partner control and violence experienced, and the fear of repercussions, made leaving seem almost impossible. We know from previous research that intimate violence often escalates when a women attempts to leave a violent relationship (Radford and Hester 2007, Barter et al 2009). For some young mothers, disadvantage led them to be dependent on violent partners, whilst the alternative of poverty, poor or unsuitable accommodation, loneliness and uncertainty, especially if they lacked family support, were daunting. It is important to remember, as we have stated earlier in the report, that young women's feelings of love for their partners, whose violence was also often interspersed with acts of love and caring, made leaving even more difficult. The influence of tenderness, and the hope of change, should not be underestimated in domestically violent relationships (Donovan and Hester 2010).

Family Support

Many of the young women we spoke to had complex and difficult relationships with their families. Some experienced further rejection and violence once they became pregnant. Similarly, Brown et al (2006) found that there was often conflict in the relationships between young mothers and their parents. In this research nearly all of the young mothers, at various times, felt that the support they received from their families was oppressive, undermining of their ability to parent and unhelpful; many felt they lacked control and were forced to accept support and advice. Brown et al argued that this demonstrates the difficulty parents may have mediating between young mothers' different identities as daughters, teenagers and mothers. Include (2007), in their research, also highlight the need to work with families in the community to ensure they are able to support their pregnant daughters.

Supporting Help-Seeking

Many of the young mothers in our research, and previous studies (Include 2007), were doubtful about informing anyone about their experiences of violence. The development of a confidential help-line for pregnant teenagers and young mothers may provide an accessible form of advice and support. Previous UK research argues that young women are less likely to access services than are adult women and have fewer resources available to help them terminate violent relationships (Include 2007). This needs to be taken into account in the design and planning of services for young mothers and domestic violence.

Often the young mothers we spoke with held very positive views regarding the education project workers they had contact with; although many were wary about what they told these workers in case this information had to be passed on to social work colleagues. There is a pressing need for social welfare professionals to consider how they can overcome the overwhelmingly negative perceptions that pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers hold regarding their role, and especially in relation to child protection (Brown et al 2006). However, this will be of limited value unless an emphasis is placed on working with young women in an appropriate and open manner which supports them, recognises their status as a minor, protects their children and apportions blame onto the perpetrator.

This is not an easy task, and we are aware that many of the major inquiry reports into children's deaths highlight a lack of early intervention to protect a child from an abusive parent. However, unless

professionals can develop with young women a sense of trust and empowerment, underpinned by an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of partner violence and control, there seems little possibility of change.

Pre-natal Screening and Post-natal Support

Include (2007) in their recommendations state that, as the majority of young mothers in their research were happy to be screened for domestic violence by maternity services, this should be routinely incorporated into all health screening programmes for young mothers. It is unclear to what extent this is occurring, and we did not ask young mothers about their experiences of maternity services. Include found that only four of the 25 young women surveyed had been asked if they had experienced domestic violence during pregnancy. Maternity workers would need specific training to develop the skills to raise this issue with young women in an appropriate and accessible manner. Include adds importantly that that this discussion is best undertaken once a trusting relationship has had time to develop. The governments Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) (Department of Health 2010) offers such an opportunity. FNP's, currently been piloted, involves intensive and structured home visits to teenage mothers by a specially trained nurses (Family Nurses) from early pregnancy until the child is two years-old.

Interventions for Abusive Partners

Interventions need to be developed for fathers who perpetrate violence against teenage mothers and their children. It is important to recognise that these fathers are often considerably older than the teenage mothers of their children. Domestic violence perpetrator programmes, mainly designed for adult men, would therefore be appropriate for many older partners of teenage mothers. However, the specific dynamics contained in these relationships would need to be included. Male partners who are themselves teenagers would require more specific programmes, which are appropriate and accessible for young people. Programmes aimed at supporting young fathers also need to directly address issues of control and violence.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that disadvantaged young people are particularly prone to both experiencing and instigating violence in their intimate partner relationships. The factors which influence this are, as this research shows, multi-faceted.

Many of the young people in this study had come to view violence as a normal aspect of intimate relationships. Violence for some was present in nearly all areas of their lives, including families, peer groups and in their intimate partner relationships, as recipients, instigators or both. For several, violence had become so ingrained in their childhoods that to acknowledge the emotional or physical impact of violence, including intimate forms, was viewed as an indication of weakness. This severely restricted their ability to seek help.

The impact that gender had on experiences of intimate violence, as shown in the school-based survey, is clearly evident in this current research. Young women were more likely to experience partner violence

compared with young men, especially severe forms, and to report a negative impact. However, compared with the school-based study, disadvantaged female participants more frequently reported that they used violence in self-defence and as protection, although these strategies often resulted in increased levels of female victimisation. The research also showed that many young women had a range of positive protection and survival strategies which they used in response to violence.

Our research highlights that work with instigators must be viewed as a priority. Interventions with young instigators are now being developed and a number of initiatives are currently being evaluated. It appears that young people, and especially young men, who use violence in one aspect of their lives, with peers or against other family members, are also likely to use violence in their intimate relationships. This link needs to be recognised routinely in work with young people, including young offenders, young people exhibiting bullying behaviour and those who hold entrenched attitudes which belittle and objectify girls and young women. We also need to recognise that instigators are not a homogenous group: differences in gender; age; type of violence or control used; awareness of impact; and reasons for instigation all need to be reflected in the development of intervention programmes. Unfortunately due to the lack of longitudinal research it is unclear which young people continue to use violence in their adult relationships and which do not. It may seem reasonable to surmise that many young people, especially young men, who use violence knowingly and who gain status and respect through intimidation and control may be resistant to changing their behaviour and likely to continue to use intimate violence in their adult lives. We require more robust data on the long-term effectiveness of different interventions.

Although many of the disadvantaged young people felt that professionals had been uninterested or disregarded their relationship experiences, some described very positive experiences and outcomes. It is evident from this research that child welfare policy and practice need to respond to this aspect of young people's lives. This form of intimate violence can no longer be ignored or viewed as unimportant but should constitute a central policy and practice component in all work with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy and practice developments need to recognise that teenage partner violence appears to represent an even more profound child welfare issue for disadvantaged young people, and especially young women, than for young people in the general population. More effective safeguards need to be developed in this area of child welfare. Although universal programmes aimed at the prevention of teenage partner violence in the general population will impact on all young people, disadvantaged young people, and especially those in the most vulnerable populations, require more targeted interventions. All interventions need to reflect young people's own experiences.

- Safeguarding polices need to challenge the perception of partner violence as a normal aspect of teenage relationships. Interventions also need to assist young people to recognise the difference between caring concern and coercive control.

- Child welfare professionals need to routinely include an assessment of partner violence in work with young people. Teenage partner violence is rarely spontaneously reported to adults, including professionals. It is therefore imperative that welfare professionals routinely include this area in their overall assessment frameworks of young people's needs.

- A failure to acknowledge the unequal power dimensions contained in some teenage relationships, including sexual violence, will jeopardise governmental policies aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy. This research, alongside others, indicates that for some teenage girls becoming pregnant may not have been a personal choice or even an irresponsible 'accident' but something which they held little control over.

- Policy and practice initiatives require a strengthened emphasis on supporting young mothers to protect both themselves, and their babies, from violent partners whilst ensuring that the responsibility for the violence is directed at the perpetrator. Teenage mothers need to be recognised as a child in need in her own right. It is imperative that professions working with young mothers recognise their heightened vulnerability to intimate violence, both during pregnancy and afterwards. Practice initiatives are required which emphasise the importance of forming trusting professional relationships, which seek to break down the negative views young mothers often hold regarding welfare professions.

- Policy and practice developments are required which seek to challenge the negative stereotype attached to teenage pregnancy. The labelling of teenage motherhood as a public heath issue, rather than an inequality issue, perpetuates the stigma associated with young motherhood and impacts on young women's ability to make informed decisions regarding their relationships. Additionally the impact of poverty, which meant many of the young mothers felt unable to leave their violent partners, requires addressing.

- There is a clear need to develop specific programmes for young people in care concerning partner violence and control. Programmes need to recognise that many young people in care have faced multiple-victimisation; have childhoods characterised by chaotic and unstable environments; and lack an understanding of how respectful and loving relationships are developed and maintained. Young people need help to gain understanding of how their previous experiences of violence may impact on their perceptions and susceptibility to partner violence.

- Leaving care (aftercare) programmes need to include the issue of intimate violence as a central element. Young people who had left care, and were living alone, appeared particularly vulnerable to violence in their relationships and often lacked wider support systems.

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