A REVIEW OF RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IN WORCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS

University of Worcester

National Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence and Abuse

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CONTENTS

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Jane has conducted research and consultancy on prevention work in schools for voluntary organisations and government, and was a member of the DCSF/DfE Advisory Group on Violence Against Women and Girls. She has been involved in the PEACH Project, a scoping review of evidence on preventative interventions in domestic abuse for children and young people. Dr Ellis has written a number of publications on violence prevention, including as Co-Editor of Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls: Educational work with children and young people in 2015. Before undertaking her PhD, she worked with children, young people and their families in formal and non formal educational settings as a teacher and community education worker.

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Abbreviations

CHARM	Coaching Health and Respectful Masculinity
CSO	Community Support Officer
CYP	Children and Young People
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GREAT	Good Relationships Are Equal and Trusting
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LA	Local Authority
PHSE	Personal Health and Social Education
PO	Police Officer
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NCSPVA	National Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence and Abuse
SEAL	Social and emotional aspects of learning
SELFIE	Sexualisation Exploitation Love Friendships Information Empowerment
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SRE	Sex and Relationship Education
RE	Religious Education
RS	Religious Studies
VA	Voluntary Aided
VC	Voluntary Controlled
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
UKYP	United Kingdom Youth Parliament

List of tables and figures

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

School-based work to promote respectful or healthy relationships has rapidly developed in the UK over the last ten years; usually situated within the Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) curriculum. A number of government reviews of such school-based work (2008; 2009; 2011; 2014) as well as Ofsted reports show that although there are good examples of teaching 'healthy' relationships; overall the approach taken is of inconsistent quality and requires improvement. Surveys of young people also indicate that they are not getting good quality education about healthy relationships and sex. For example, in 2007; 21,000 young people took part in a survey organised by the UK Youth Parliament and 40 per cent of those young people said that their 'healthy relationships' education was 'poor' or 'very poor' (UKYP, 2007). A similar survey in 2013 showed that 27 per cent of young people thought 'healthy relationships' education was bad or 'very bad'. Worryingly, 30 per cent said they did not learn about sexual consent through this education (NCB, 2013).

PSHE provision on healthy relationships is currently non-statutory and often marginalised in the curriculum, and often does not explicitly refer to gender based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG); something that the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls (VAWG) raised in her 2014 visit to the UK. At the end of her visit, she asserted that she had;

> *noted the efforts of the UK Government, and voluntary sector organisations, in the design and launching of campaigns aimed at reaching out to young people and educating them about different manifestations of violence, including in the home, in schools and in social media and on the internet*

She also said however that "*in order to play a truly transformative role in the longer term, such initiatives, need to be part of the curriculum and be institutionalised in the education system.*

The focus on VAWG reflects current government strategy (2014) which flags the vital role that schools play in the education of young people on healthy relationships (p.11). A large part of that strategy is a focus on educating boys as well as girls. Government reviews, Ofsted reports and research consistently show that school-based healthy relationship work remains fragmented and localised (Stanley et al 2015). There is no clear picture of the extent to which schools provide such education in many areas. This research is designed to fill that gap in Worcestershire and gives an overview of the extent to which schools in Worcestershire are delivering school-based work on healthy relationships; the extent to which those that do involve children and young people in this work and the factors which facilitate or hinder its development and delivery within schools. It should be noted however that this report is based only on information provided by those who participated.

1.2 Aims of the research

The overall aim of the research was to establish the extent and nature of school-based work on respectful or healthy relationships in Worcestershire schools encompassing work on: friendship; keeping safe; bullying; sexual exploitation; domestic abuse; and other forms of gender based violence.

In aiming to meet the overall aim the key questions were:

1. How widespread is relationship education, including work on violence in relationships, in Worcestershire schools?
2. To what extent are children/young people involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of the work?
3. What prospects are there for relationship education to continue and expand?
4. What factors might hinder the continuation and expansion of relationship education?
5. What are the key factors necessary to ensure this work is embedded into schools?
6. What structures need to be in place to enable schools to undertake this work?
7. What other school-based agendas can be used to support the development of relationship education?

1.3 Definitions

The following definitions and abbreviations are used in this report.

Relationship Education is used to mean activities and initiatives intended to provide children and young people with the information, skills and values to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships.

Initiative and programme is used to mean any lesson plan, scheme of work, project; one off event, media campaign, school assembly, external resource or community activity schools are involved with.

Children and young people (CYP) is used to mean those up to 18 years of age

BAMER is used to mean Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee

School is used to mean a school or other educational establishment such as a pupil referral unit

1.4 Research methodology

A mixed methods approach, consisting of an online survey and semi-structured interviews was adopted. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University of Worcester Ethics committee.

1.4.1 Online survey

An online survey designed using Survey Monkey was sent to the safeguarding lead in 272 Worcestershire schools. The main body of the survey consisted of 18 closed and 6 open questions and asked for information on any lessons, programmes or other initiatives on relationship education that had been undertaken in the last 12 months. The survey asked about the nature of initiatives, their content, the target audience, how they were structured, the facilitators and the challenges in undertaking such work.

The contact details for schools was provided by the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children in Education Officer and shared on a confidential basis with the research team solely for use in the research. An e-mail invitation to take part in the survey was sent to school staff on three occasions between 02/02/15 and 27/04/15. A total of 90 schools, representing a response rate of 33 per cent, partly or fully completed the questionnaire. This is a typical response for an online survey as the average response to online surveys is considered to be the same, that of 33 per cent (Nulty, 2008). Information on the number and types of schools who responded is shown in Figures 2 and Table 1.

Respondents to the online survey were asked to specify the type of school they worked for and provide information on the pupils who attended the school.

Schools operate and are governed in a variety of ways. Amongst other things this influences the content of the curriculum. Community, voluntary aided (VA) and voluntary controlled (VC) schools are maintained by the Local Authority (LA) and must follow the National Curriculum. However, voluntary aided and controlled schools have a trust or foundation, usually a religious organisation, involved in funding and maintaining them; the latter are referred to as faith schools. Academies are publically funded independent schools which have more freedom and control over the curriculum. Independent schools charge fees to attend and are operated and governed by the school itself and are lightly regulated by the Government and inspection bodies. Academies and independent schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum and can be faith schools. Maintained schools also have obligations under section 78 of the Education Act (2002) to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of their students to which relationship education can contribute.

Just under a quarter (22%, n=20) were academy schools, two-thirds (67%, n=60) were maintained, of these just over half (56%) were faith schools, and 7 per cent (n=6) were independent schools (3 answered 'Don't know').

All of the schools who responded to the survey were co-educational; two were special schools working with pupils who have been assessed as having special educational needs.

Figure1
Respondents by type of school governance
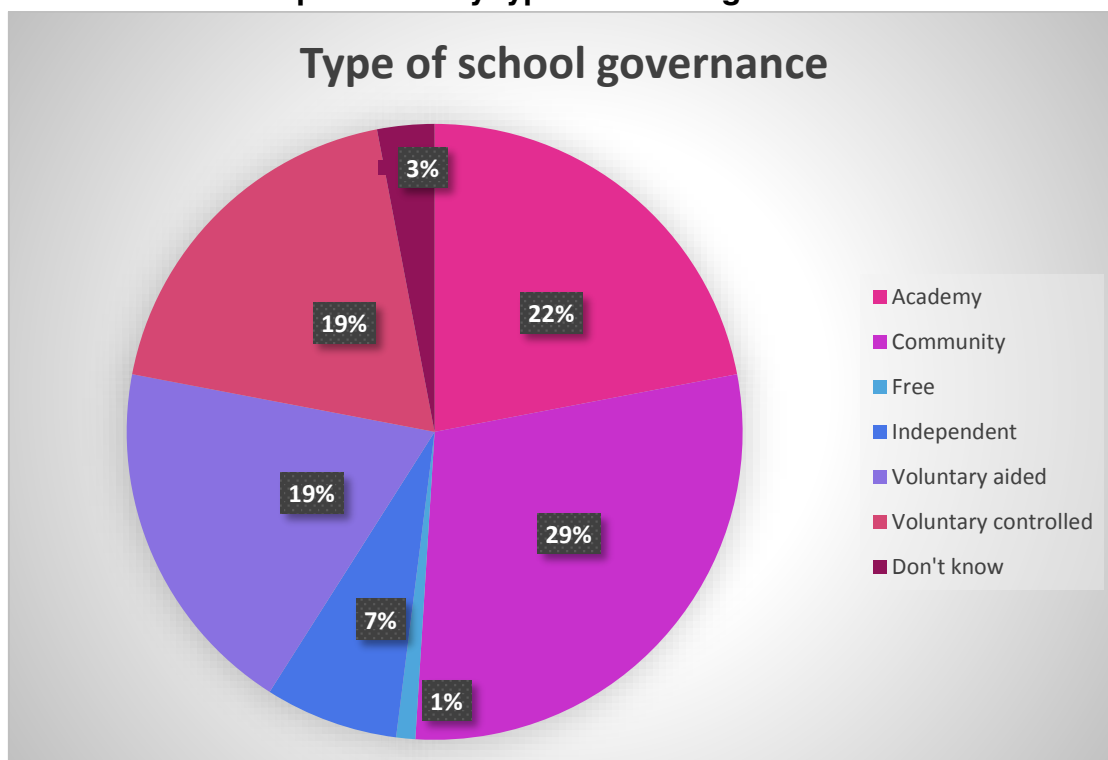
Worcestershire has two systems of dividing pupils by age; in most areas pupils attend primary school to age 11 (reception to year 6) and then transfer to secondary school (year 7 to 13). Alternatively pupils attended first school (reception to year 3 or 4), middle school (year 4 or 5 to 7 or 8) and high school (year 8 or 9 to 13). The majority of respondents worked with younger pupils in first (29%), middle (12%) or primary schools (35%), with just under a quarter (21%) working in secondary and high schools. This disparity was unsurprising since there are a greater number of first-primary-middle schools in the county. Three independent schools worked with children and young people across a broad age range, for example from 3 to 18 years of age.

Figure 2

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Respondent's schools by age of pupils
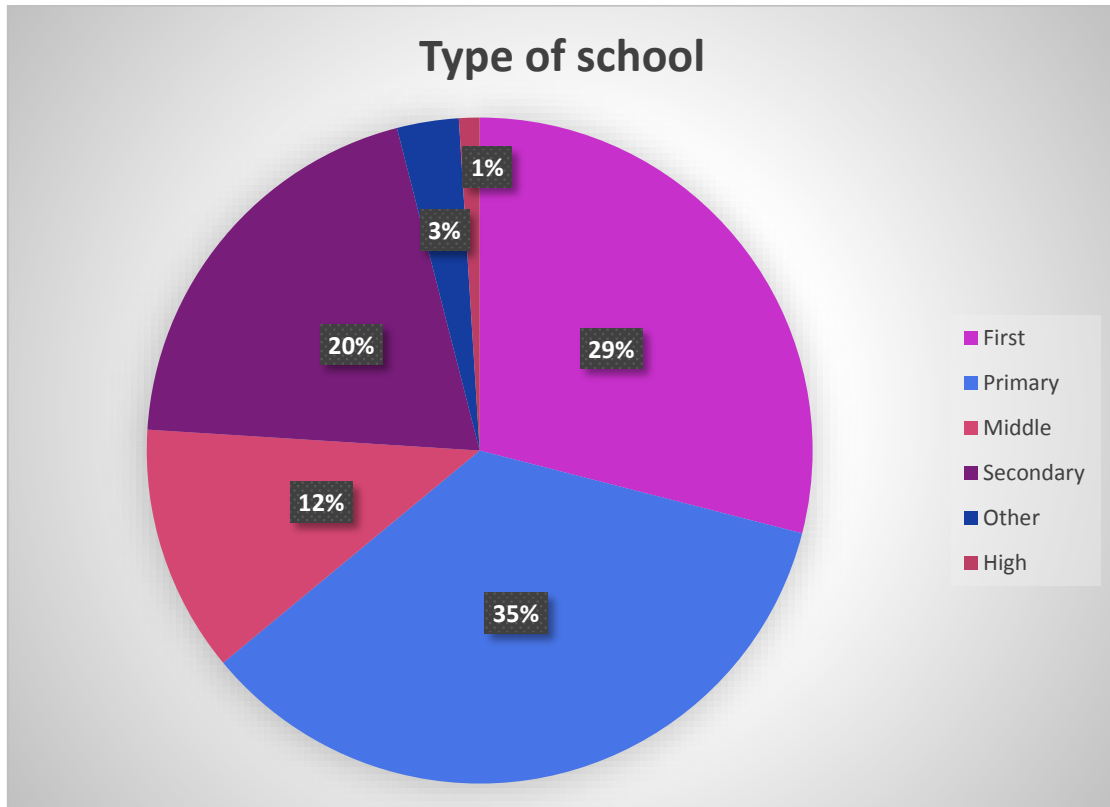
The number of pupils on roll in schools varied. First schools ranged from 40 to 150; primary schools from 75 to 600; middle schools from 250 to 600 and in secondary/high schools from 650 to 1500.

1.4.2 *Semi-structured interviews*

Question 26 in the survey asked respondents if they would be willing to be interviewed as part of the research, of which 25 said 'yes'. Representatives from five schools (6 people) took part in face to face semi-structured interviews, see Table 1 below.

Interviewees were contacted by email by the researcher. Most interviewees gave up their own refreshment break to speak to the researcher given the tight teaching schedule they worked to. The exception being the Librarian and PSHCE teacher at the residential collage who was able to schedule the meeting during working hours.

Interviewees were all enthusiastic about the education provision for their students connected with relationships. They were all willing to speak to the researcher, enabling the interviews to take place in their own rest periods and were pleased to be asked about their role, the provision by the school, the challenges and resources they use to teach.

Table 1

Type of School	Role of Staff agreeing to interview
Secondary Academy School 1,230 on roll 12-18 years	Senior Designated Person for Safeguarding Children (SDP) PSHE Teacher 2 x Female
First School 300 on roll 3-9 years	Deputy Head, Key Stage 2 Leader The Arts, PSHE & C, MFL Female
Primary School 300 on roll 3-11 years	Assistant Head and PSHE Teacher 2 x female
Residential Collage for disabled students 90 students 11-19 years	Librarian and PSHCE teacher Female
First School and Nursery 334 on roll 3-9 years	PSHE Teacher Female

1.5 Analysis

The quantitative survey data was analysed using SPSS 22 using frequency, crosstabs and case summary statistics.

The qualitative data from the survey and the interviews, which were transcribed, were analysed thematically using NVivo 10.

2. Findings

2.1 Policy and curriculum contexts

Relationship education was linked to a wide range of policy areas (see Table 2). The most commonly reported was Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) (53%), anti-bullying (45%), Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) which forms part of PSHE (41%) and behaviour (36%).

Table 2
School policies and relationship education

Policy	Number reported
PSHCE	35
Bullying/anti-bullying	30
SRE	27
Behaviour	24
Child protection/safeguarding	20
ICT and e-safety	14
Equality and diversity/inclusion	13
RE	9
Science	9
Anti-racism	4
Disability/SEN	4
Collective worship	3
Drugs	2
Social, moral, spiritual and cultural	2
Anti-radicalisation and terrorism	1
Health and safety	1

Twenty-two respondents reported working to policy areas that can be grouped together broadly as equality and diversity, this included: equality; diversity; inclusion; anti-racism; disability; SEN; anti-radicalisation and terrorism.

Sixty-six survey respondents provided information on the subject area of the curriculum in which relationship education was delivered and the policies to which it was linked. All 66 reported that it was taught as part of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE), which was to be expected since this is a 'programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives' (PSHE Association, undated). However, the work was not compartmentalized in PSHE since it was also reported to form part of

citizenship (48%), drama (35%), English (38%) and science (62%). Four schools reported work in Religious Education (RE) or Religious Studies (RS), four in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), where a focus on online safety was noted, and two had undertaken cross-curricula topic work.

2.2 Curriculum content

2.2.1 Early years (reception), Key stages 1 and 2

58 respondents answered a question on the topics taught to children from reception to year 6. The most commonly addressed topics across all years were:

- Friendship
- Bullying
- staying safe/protective behaviours
- safe internet use

Between 70 and 80 per cent of respondents reported some teaching on these topics each year (see Figures 3 and 4) with the exception of year 4. In year 4 just over half of schools did work on these four topics (53%-56%).

Skills based work on emotional literacy, help-seeking, non-violent conflict resolution, anger management and problem solving in relationships were also taught across all years although in fewer schools. With the exception of reception classes and year 4 these were covered by just over half of schools.

Values based topics i.e. equality; racism, homophobia, children's rights and gender equality, were taught across all year groups though as children got older the number of schools dealing with these increased. However gender and race were overall more widely addressed with no less than a third of schools covering these from reception onwards. By year 6 just over half (53%) addressed gender equality and children's rights, with two-thirds (67%) covering racism and forty-four per cent homophobia.

Work on child sexual abuse and domestic abuse in adult relationships were rarely addressed until year 5 and 6 when just under a third of schools taught about domestic abuse (29%) in both year 5 and 6) and between a third (38%) in year 5 and almost a half (47%) in year 6 covered child sexual abuse.

Figure 3

Topics taught to children in Reception

Topic	Percentage of schools
Gender equality	32
Homophobia	7
Racism	38
Domestic abuse in adult relationships	0
Child sexual abuse	5
Problem solving in relationships	47
Anger management	42
Non-violent conflict resolution	62
Help-seeking	63
Emotional literacy	47
Children's rights	20
Safe internet use	70
Staying safe/protective behaviours	75
Bullying	77
Friendship	80

Percentage of schools

Figure 4

Topics taught to children at Key Stage 1

Topic	Percentage of schools
Gender equality	35
Homophobia	6
Racism	42
Domestic abuse in adult relationships	0
Child sexual abuse	5
Problem solving in relationships	52
Anger management	44
Non-violent conflict resolution	62
Help-seeking	63
Emotional literacy	53
Children's rights	23
Safe internet use	78
Staying safe/protective behaviours	78
Bullying	78
Friendship	82

Percentage of schools

Figure 5

Topics taught to children at Key Stage 2

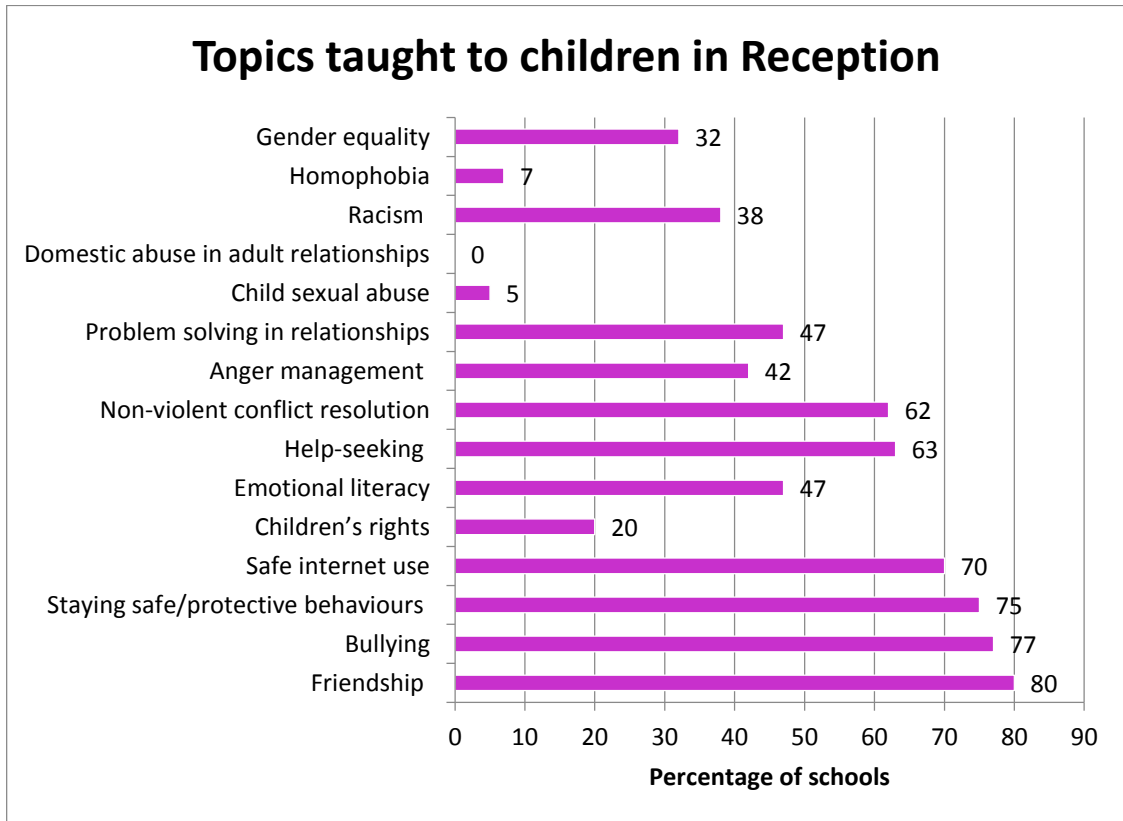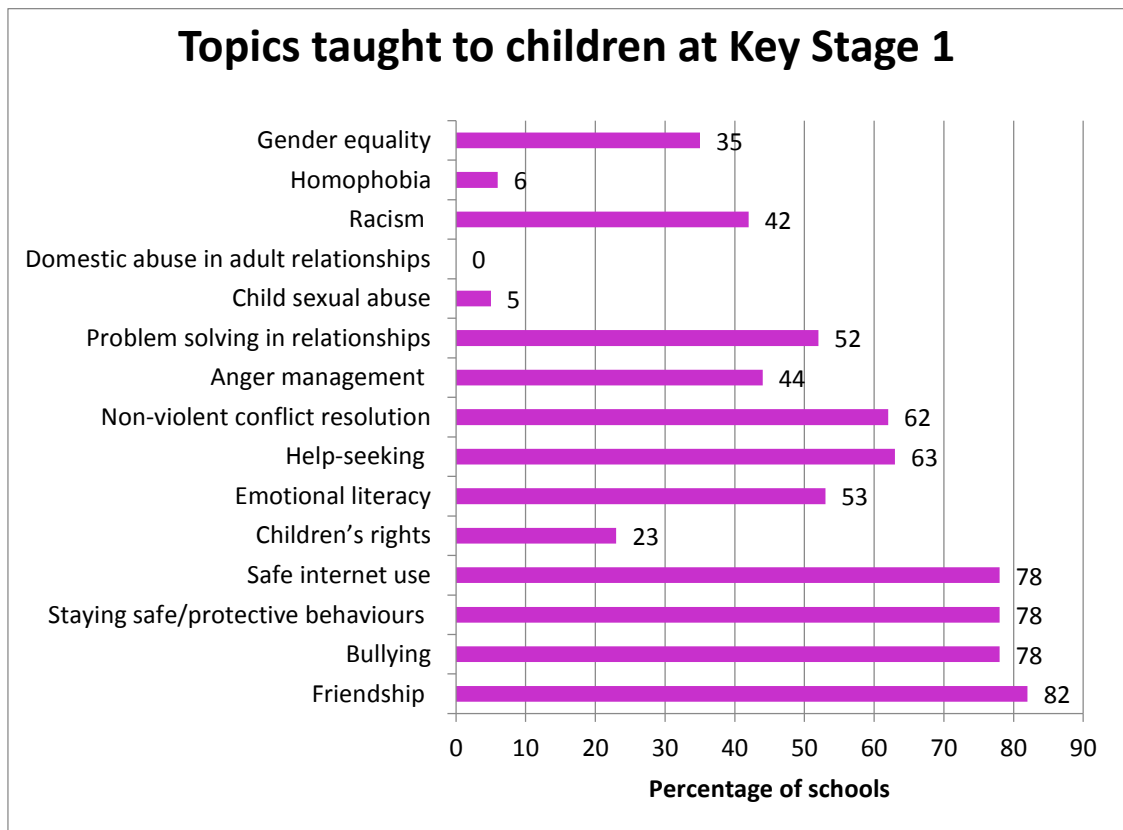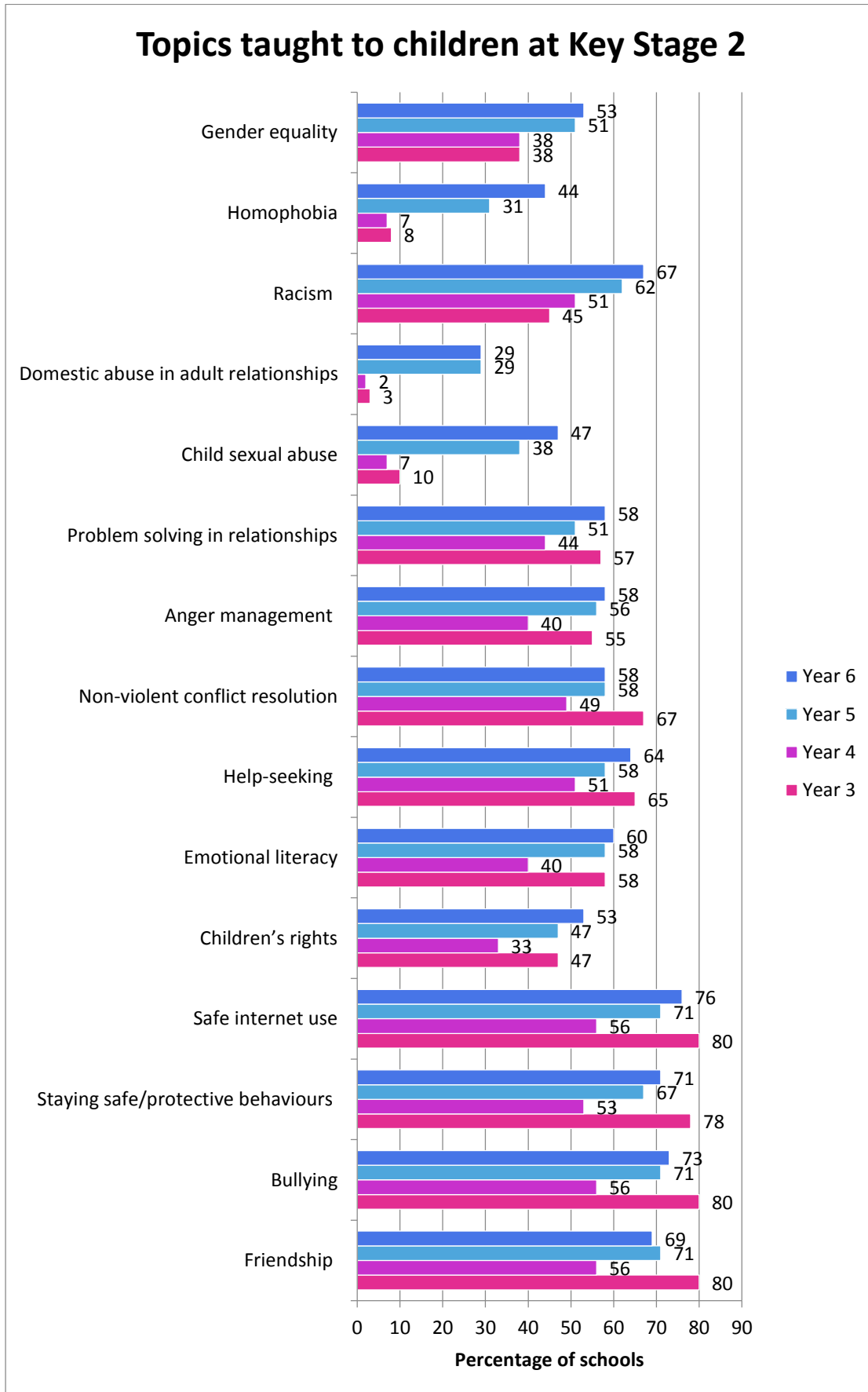| Topic	Year 6	Year 5	Year 4	Year 3
Gender equality	53	51	38	38
Homophobia	44	31	7	8
Racism	67	62	51	45
Domestic abuse in adult relationships	29	29	2	3
Child sexual abuse	47	38	7	10
Problem solving in relationships	58	51	44	57
Anger management	58	56	40	55
Non-violent conflict resolution	58	58	49	67
Help-seeking	64	58	51	65
Emotional literacy	60	58	40	58
Children's rights	53	47	33	47
Safe internet use	76	71	56	80
Staying safe/protective behaviours	71	67	53	78
Bullying	73	71	56	80
Friendship	69	71	56	80

Percentage of schools

2.2.2 Key stages 3, 4 and sixth form (KS5)

14 respondents answered a question on the topics taught to children in key stages 3 and 4 and in sixth form. The most commonly addressed topics across all years were:

- Bullying
- staying safe/protective behaviours
- safe internet use

Almost (47%), or over half of schools reported these topics in years 7 to 10 (see figure 5).

Skills based work on emotional literacy, help-seeking, non-violent conflict resolution, anger management and problem solving in relationships were taught across all years in Key stages 3 and 4 although in fewer schools. Of these problem-solving in relationships was most widely taught with between a third and a half of schools covering it in Years 7-10. Values based topics i.e. equality; racism, homophobia, children's rights and gender equality, were taught across all year groups though these were most common in year 10. Overall racism and homophobia were more widely addressed with over half of schools covering these in year 10. Support for peers either through counselling or mediation was reported to be established in less than a fifth of schools.

The number of schools addressing a range of forms of violence, including child sexual exploitation, forced marriage, human trafficking, domestic abuse in young people's and adult relationships, female genital mutilation, prostitution, pornography, child sexual abuse, consent and coercion and gangs increases from year 7 to year 10 and then tends to drop in year 11. This is unsurprising given the focus on examinations in year 11. The most widely reported topics are bullying, domestic abuse in adult and young people's relationships, consent and coercion and child sexual abuse. The percentage of schools addressing these issues in any one year in key stage 3 and 4 ranged from a 16 to almost two-thirds (63%).

Overall less of a focus on all the topics was reported in sixth form with the exception of gender equality, which varied little across all years and pornography which varied between 10 and 20 per cent of schools across all years apart from in year 10 where almost of third of schools reported addressing this topic (see figure 7).

Figure 6

Topics taught to young people at Key Stage 4

Topic	Year 11	Year 10
Pornography	21	32
Prostitution	16	21
Female genital mutilation	21	26
Domestic abuse in young people's…	37	42
Human trafficking	5	16
Forced marriage	16	26
Child sexual exploitation	32	26
Gangs	16	21
Consent and coercion in relationships	42	53
Peer mediation	5	5
Peer counselling	16	21
Gender equality	26	32
Homophobia	47	58
Racism	42	53
Domestic abuse in adult relationships	58	63
Child sexual abuse	32	37
Problem solving in relationships	47	53
Anger management	10	10
Non-violent conflict resolution	16	21
Help-seeking	37	39
Emotional literacy	37	42
Children's rights	32	32
Safe internet use	42	47
Staying safe/protective behaviours	53	63
Bullying	37	42

Percentage of schools
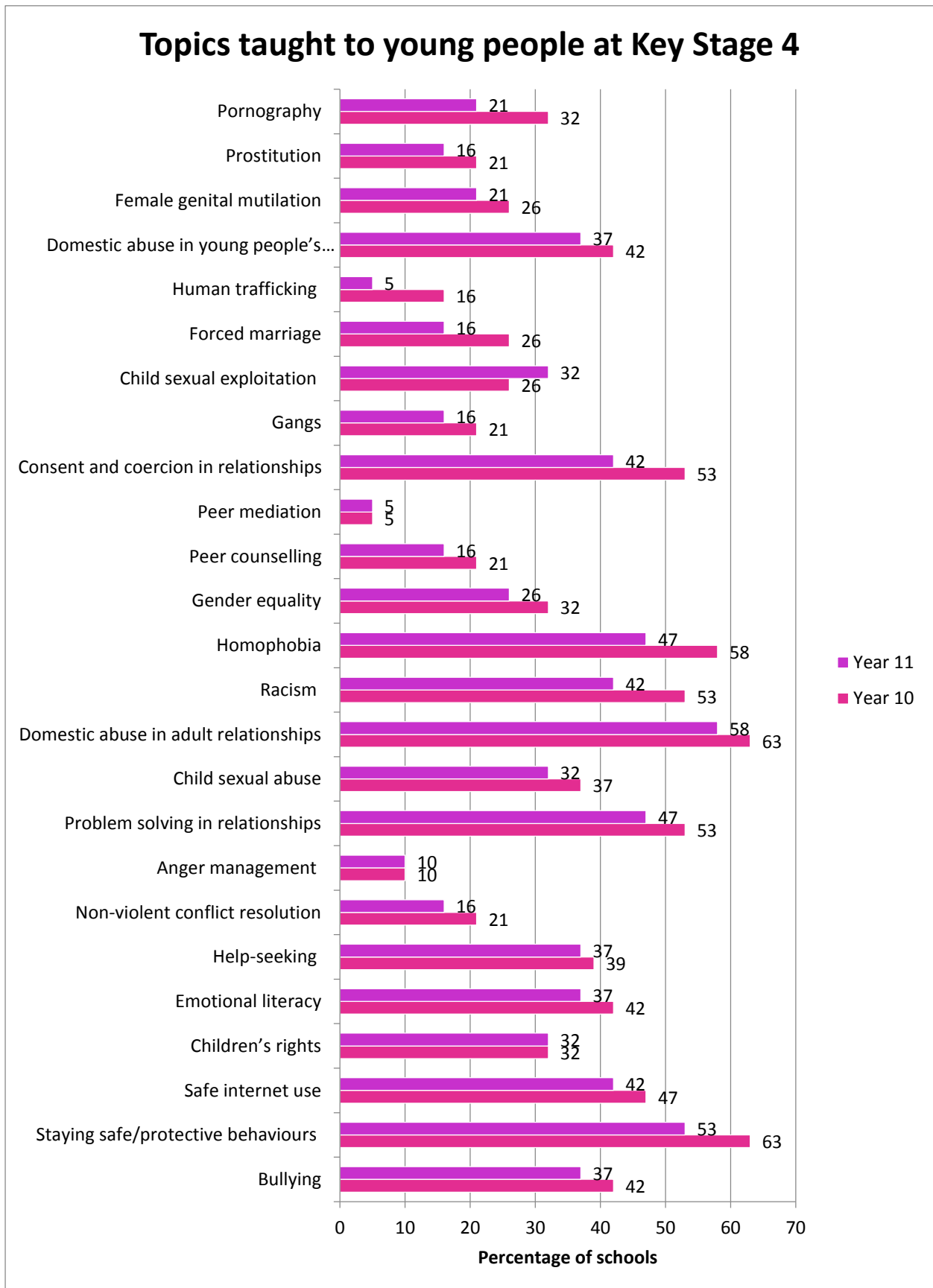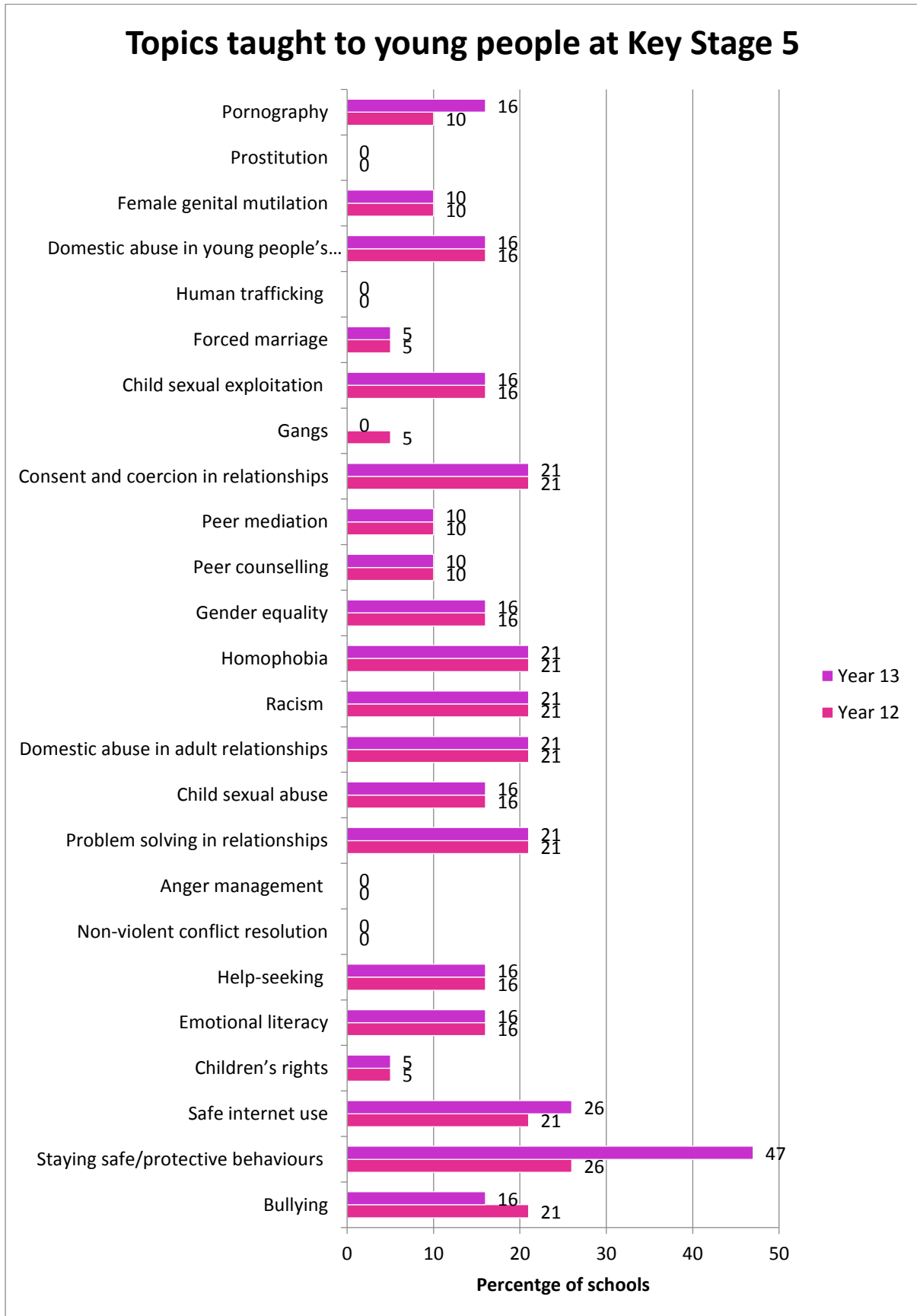
Figure 7

Topics taught to young people at Key Stage 5

2.2.3 Faith schools

The survey data showed that identifiable faith schools working with children under 11 reported covering the main topics discussed above in section 2.2.2 as all other schools in the study. However, the data showed that secondary and high faith schools were less likely to address sensitive or controversial topics with pupils. These findings are consistent with other research which found that addressing relationship education, especially aspects concerning violence against women and girls, can be more challenging for faith schools (Siddiqui and Bhardwaj, 2014).

2.2.4 Use of manualised programmes

Twenty-six respondents reported using some form of manualised programme or resource in delivering relationship education (See Table 3). The most common programme was SEAL used in eight schools; three schools used the Cambridge PSHE Scheme and Women's Aid Expect Respect.

Programmes that specifically address domestic and/or sexual violence i.e. The GREAT Project (Good Relationships Are Equal and Trusting); CHARM (Coaching Healthy and Respectful Masculinity School Programme); Expect Respect, elements of Watch over Me and the SELFIE Project (Sexualisation Exploitation Love Friendships Information Empowerment) were used in seven schools. Expect Respect, used in two primaries and one first school is an educational toolkit developed by Women's Aid. It is a cross-phase programme which deals with gender role, secrets and non-violence conflict resolution with younger children.

Table 3

Programmes used in relationship education, number and type of school

Programme	Total	Sec	High	Middle	Primary	First
SEAL	8			1	3	4
Cambridge PSHE Scheme of work	3				2	1
Expect Respect	3				2	1
Channel 4 Living and Growing	2				2	
Family Links	2					2
GREAT Project	2			1	1	
Health for Life	2					2
Massage in School Programme	2					2
4 Sex and Relationships	1	1				
A volcano in my tummy	1					1
BBC Underage and Pregnant	1	1				
CHARM (A Call to Men UK)	1	1				
Christopher Winter Project	1				1	
GoodSense self-defence	1					1
'Keys to Alcohol and Smoking' (TACADE)	1			1		
My book of worries	1					1
NSPCC Pants Project	1				1	
Nurture	1				1	
'On the booze' (TACADE)	1			1		
Samaritans DEAL	1	1				
SELFIE Project	1			1		
Social skills	1					1
Thrive (The Thrive Approach)	1				1	
Watch Over Me	1	1				
Worcestershire SRE	1			1		
'You bet' (TACADE)	1			1		

2.2.5 Children and young people's involvement in planning and design

Sixty six respondents answered a question asking 'Are pupils involved in writing or designing any of the materials or resources used?' A small proportion (10%, n=7) answered 'yes'; of these five were first schools, one was a primary school and one a secondary. The children and young people's involvement focussed mostly on the topic of anti-bullying where children were reported to have participated in designing posters to be displayed in school and having input into the school bullying policy and the wider behaviour policy. E-safety was mentioned by two respondents and in one case children had created plays for performances to other pupils in assemblies.


2.3 Structure of teaching

Sixty-nine respondents answered a question on the structure of teaching. Of these 22 (32%) taught for some time each week across the whole academic year while 12 reported using drop down days (17%) and seven (10%) used themed weeks. The most common structure, adopted in 41% (n=28)of cases was a combination of two or more approaches, for example weekly teaching supplemented with specific initiatives or themed weeks *e.g.* White Ribbon Campaign*.* These patterns were determined by the content being taught, as one respondent noted;

> *Some aspects are taught weekly, others as drop down days or 'one off' sessions. Other topics occur in the curriculum at regular intervals throughout the school year depending on schemes of work.*

The amount of time dedicated to relationship education teaching in the curriculum each week varied little. Of the 66 respondents who answered a question asking 'Approximately how much time would you say is spent on relationship education each week?' 82 per cent (n=54) reported one hour; this represents 62 per cent of the first/primary/middle schools and 53 per cent of secondary/high schools who responded to the survey. One secondary school reported they spent two hours a week and five primaries and one first school reported spending between 3 and 10 hours per week.

Figure 8

Structure of teaching

Weekly: 32%
Drop down days: 17%
Themed weeks: 10%
Combined approaches: 41%
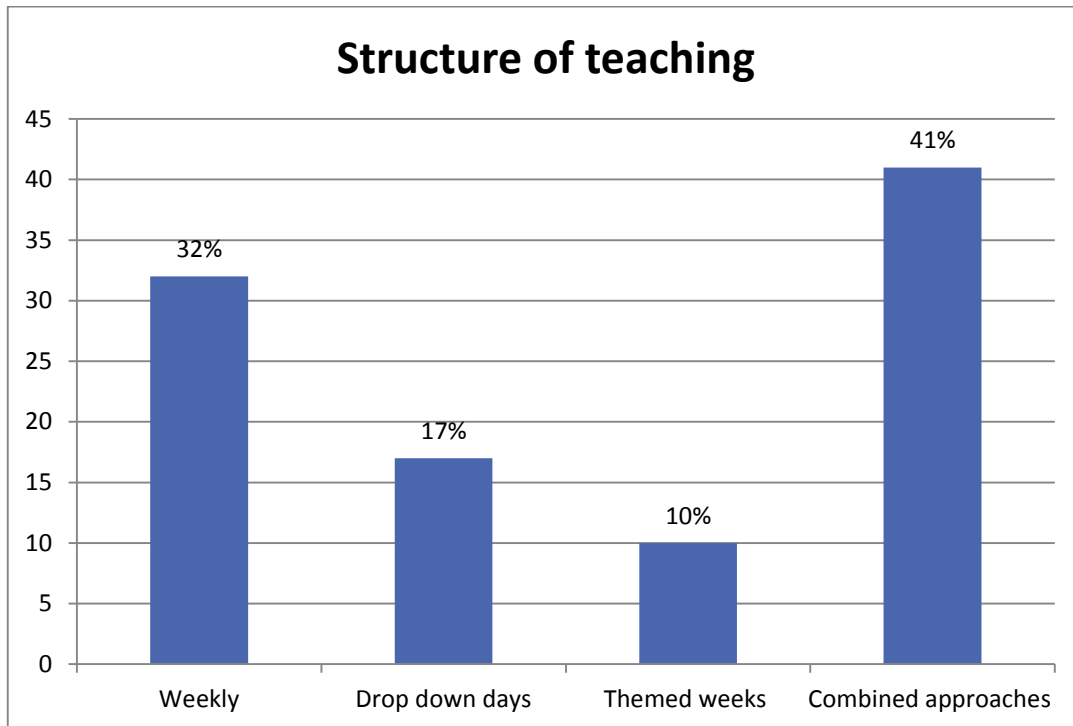
2.4 Target Audience

2.4.1 Gender grouping

All the schools who responded to the survey were co-educational however of the 66 who answered a question on gender grouping for teaching almost half of the schools (44%, n=29) reported that they delivered some aspects of relationship education to single-sex groups. The largest number of schools who had adopted this approach were primaries (n=19). Respondents were not asked to provide reasons for employing both mixed and single sex groupings however; this flexibility enables initiatives to be more responsive to the needs of particular groups and gives opportunities for the discussion of issues in different settings.

2.4.2 The involvement of parents/carers

Seventy-three respondents answered the question 'Is any aspect of relationship education taught in conjunction with a programme for parents/carers?' All but one of those who said 'Yes' (27%, n=18) were first, primary or middle schools (n=17); three respondents answered 'Don't know'.

The work done with parents took a number of forms ranging from direct support on parenting skills to information sharing about intended curriculum initiatives. Four schools undertook parenting programmes; one school offered raising self-esteem classes although it was unclear if this was for parents themselves or for parents to help raise their children's self-esteem. Three schools reported work on e-safety while

the remaining ten involved parents, to differing degrees, in sex and relationship education. Three respondents specifically mentioned puberty or growing up; one reported inviting parents in to watch and discuss resources used for teaching '*Year 6 where children are taught about the sexual act as part of a loving adult relationship*'.

In one school 'both teacher led and parent workshop format' was used to teach SRE. It unsurprising that schools work in partnership with parents/carers regarding SRE since parents are the key educators of children on these matters and the schools' role should complement parents.
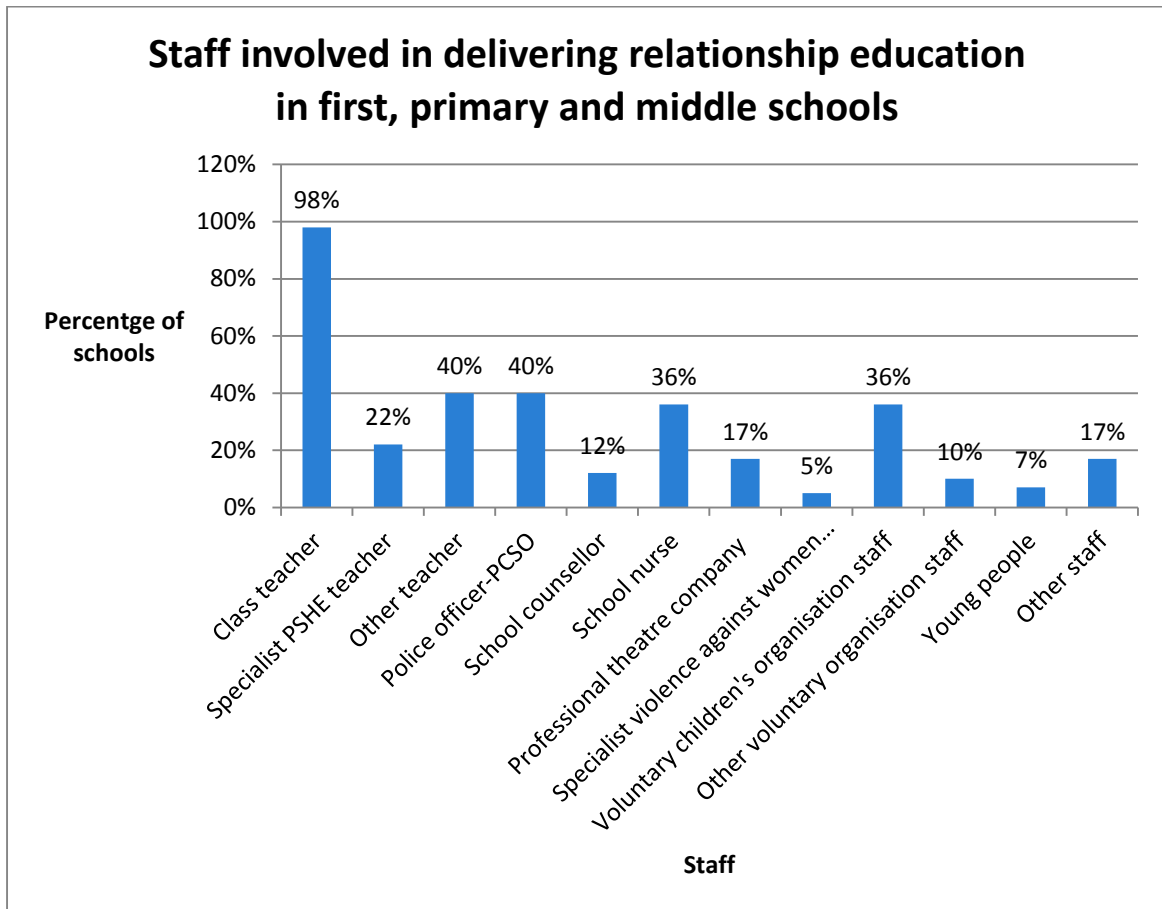
2.5 Staffing

2.5.1 First, primary and middle schools

Fifty-eight respondents (89%) answered questions on who was involved in teaching relationship education in first, primary and middle schools. In the majority of these schools (n=51, 86%) a range of staff were engaged in delivering work to pupils (see Figure 9); some schools used up to seven different professional groups of staff. However, class teachers were most commonly reported (n=57, 98%); they were involved in all but one school who noted the use of only police officers/community support officers (POs/CSOs). The next largest group involved were other teachers (40%) and POs/CSOs (40%); schools nurses and staff from voluntary children's organisations, NSPCC/ChildLine and Barnardos for example were used in 36% of cases. Ten schools (17%) reported the use of professional theatre companies who can be engaging for children and tackle difficulties in sensitive ways; however they can be expensive to buy in. Only three schools used staff from specialist violence against women organisations which reflects the number of the schools engaged in domestic violence curriculum work.

Other staff reported to be involved had a variety of roles within schools or were from external organisations or services: pastoral staff (n=4), teaching assistants (n=3), independent organisations (n=2); safeguarding staff (n=2); family support staff (n=3); positive behaviour team (n=1) and Gypsy Roma Traveller service (n=1) were all noted.

Figure 9

## Staff involved in delivering relationship education in first, primary and middle schools

The main topic covered by external staff in first, primary and middle schools clustered around forms of child abuse, including bullying and staying safe, which was reported by 26 of the 34 respondents who answered the question (76%). Other topics included domestic abuse, which was specifically mentioned by four schools, sexualisation, healthy relationships in general, gender stereotypes and racism. Help seeking, and from whom to seek help, is usually incorporated into 'staying safe' although this was explicitly mentioned by three respondents.

2.5.2 Secondary and high schools

Fourteen respondents from secondary and high schools (67%) answered questions on who was involved in the teaching relationship education. In the majority of these schools (n=12, 86%) a range of staff were engaged in delivering work to pupils (see Figure 10); one school used up to nine different staff groups. However, form teachers were most commonly reported (n=11, 78%) and specialist PSHE staff (57%) were used in the remaining three schools.

Figure 10

Staff involved in delivering relationship education in secondary and high schools
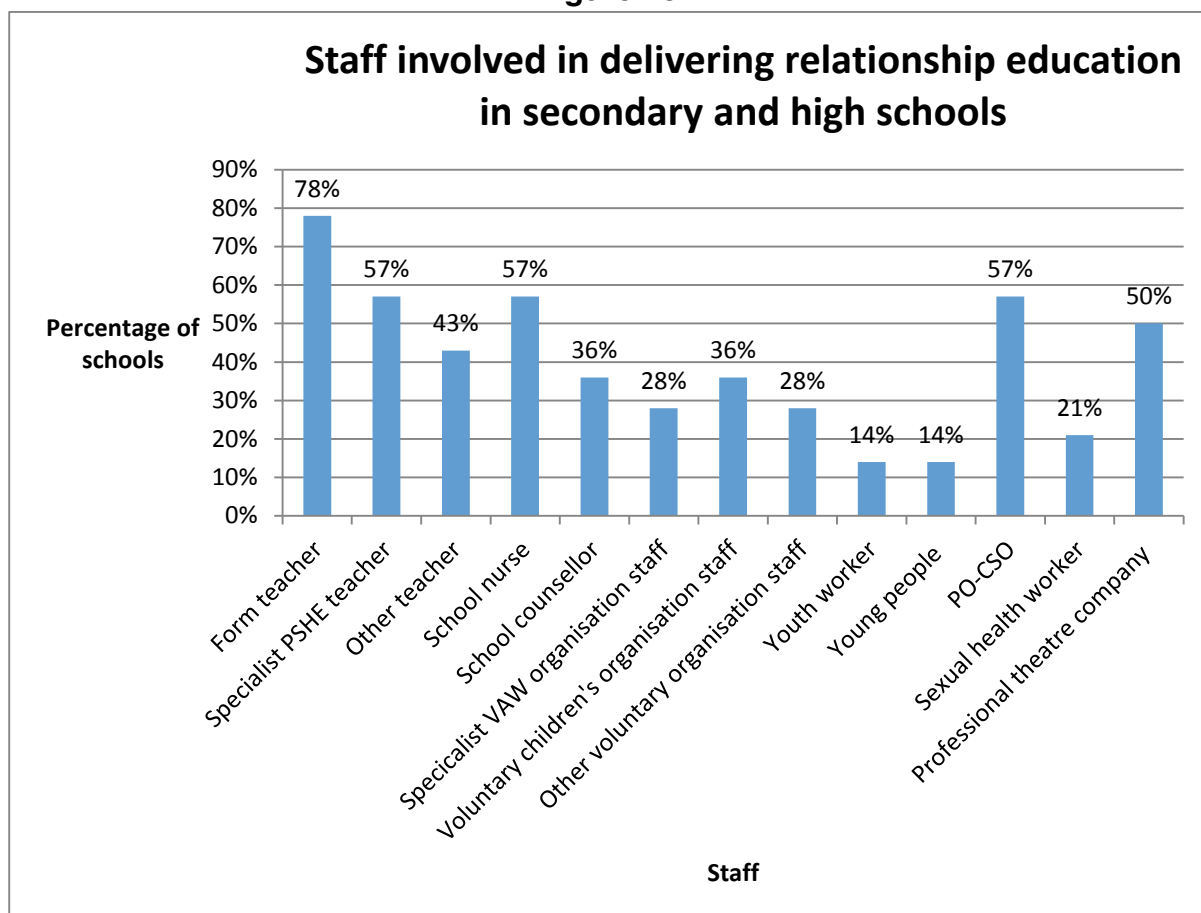
The next largest group involved were school nurses and POs/CSOs (both 57%). Use of staff from voluntary sector organisations was greater than in primary schools, with six schools using at least one organisation, as was professional theatre companies, with half of the schools having used the latter (50%).

Staff external to secondary/high schools delivered topics on:

- consent and coercion
- healthy relationships
- sexting
- domestic abuse
- homophobia
- sexual health
- crime including hate crime
- bullying
- child sexual exploitation
- staying safe
- the CRUSH programme.

We do not know from this study how the external staff are used in schools, different models of working are common in school/external partnerships (Ellis, 2004; Stanley et al., 2015). Who should deliver work on domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence is a key debate in the literature and in practice. There are pros and cons to external staff delivering work; they have specialist knowledge and expertise, and are more likely to be at ease in dealing with the topics and subsequent discussions, however: they are usually dependent on insecure funding potentially making the work unsustainable; are unable to work with all children and young people in an area or school; do not have established relationships with children and young people should safeguarding issues arise; and are less likely to influence school culture. On the other hand teachers often lack the confidence and competence to deliver controversial topics (see discussion below) and yet they are able to respond with a dynamic sensitivity which contributes to the effectiveness of programmes (Stanley et al., 2015)

3.Challenges in providing relationship education

Sixty-six survey respondents provided information on the challenges in developing and delivering relationship education in their schools. A complex range of issues arose which have been grouped into four overlapping areas, each of which is considered here in turn:

1. competing and controversial subjects
2. issues related to staff
3. issues related to children and young people
4. external factors.

It is noteworthy however, that seven respondents reported that there were no challenges; as one first school head teacher commented *'None, it is seen as an integral part of our school's ethos and curriculum'.* Similarly a primary school head teacher noted '*How to create positive, beneficial relationships is part of our culture. SRE is just one part of this*'. Such comments suggest a whole-school approach is taken to relationship education which involves action at institutional and policy levels, the engagement of all members of the school community, awareness raising and training for staff, the taught curriculum and work outside the classroom with pupils.

3.1 Competing and controversial subjects

The most common issue raised by respondents was 'time' (n=14) and two respondents highlighted the need for quality teaching which time did not always permit: *'Finding time to teach it fully'* and *'time to deliver it well'.* There are significant demands on curriculum time in all phases of education, many imposed by statute, although PSHE is non-statutory and therefore can be marginalised. Additionally education is generally viewed as the panacea for all ills and schools are called upon to address prominent social issues with children and young people. Again there are myriad topics and any claim to incorporate one into the curriculum necessitates it being seen as worthwhile, and as more worthwhile than others.

Also commonly reported was the need for *'suitable age appropriate, 'modern' resources';* the often lack of them and difficulties finding them. One respondent noted anxiety about some of the subject matter by saying they had 'a *fear of introducing topics for which children are not mature enough to understand'* and about when it was appropriate to introduce them. Many of the areas addressed in relationship education are seen as 'sensitive' or controversial topics particularly those dealing with the negative aspects of relationships such as domestic violence and child sexual exploitation. Other topics were mentioned and although schools wanted to address them *'ensuring that some of the more mature parts are suitable for younger children i.e. homophobia or radicalisation'* was a challenge.

Two schools specifically reported that being faith schools presented a challenge; one noted that in particular a '*lack of diversity in an all-white, Christian school'.*

3.2 Issues related to staff

Nine respondents commented on the confidence and competence of teachers to deliver aspects of relationship education. This related to lack of expertise and knowledge of topics, for example the *'range of subjects in which teachers may lack specialist knowledge and confidence e.g. FGM'* and a lack of *'experienced staff'.* In addition, some respondents noted that some teachers may not be comfortable dealing with sensitive topics because, like concerns expressed for children and young people discussed below, it may be part of teachers' *'own experiences'* or may challenge their values and opinions. Teachers are more able to work flexibly and be *'responsive to students - sometimes dealing with ad-hoc situations as they arise, i.e. time from other subjects'.*

The size and composition of classes was raised by two respondents; large classes with a range abilities and experiences *'make it more difficult, differentiation can be a challenge'* and small schools have classes with pupils of different ages creating tensions over appropriate content and managing safe learning.

3.3 Issues linked with children and young people

Children and young people in the same year group mature at different rates again presenting challenges regarding the appropriateness of materials used for teaching. As one respondent noted *'pupils mature at different rates so some programmes are not necessarily appropriate to all pupils in a class'.* Along with age and maturity it was acknowledged that pupils have different life experiences and being sensitive to these was noted. One participant highlight the importance of *'being aware of the emotionally damaged children and being sensitive to their needs'.* Similarly important but challenging was an understanding of, and being responsive to, children's life outside school including the *'pupil home setting'* and the wider community. Concern arose over children living '*in very small rural community, therefore opening children's eyes to the real world'.* Children and young people bring with them to the classroom existing knowledge, values and attitudes to relationships and schools, in promoting respectful and positive ones will have to challenge some pupils. As one survey respondent noted '*Some students are much more aware than others, and have often been misinformed or see some relationships as normal when they would be deemed unhealthy'.*

Three respondents identified challenges when working with students who have special educational needs. This related to increased vulnerability to abuse or harm and to their learning. '*The nature of our students who have* [SEN category] *makes them very vulnerable…..They also lack incidental learning'.* For older students *'resources that are age appropriate but academically based at a lower level'* are needed*.* Making work appropriate and meeting the needs of all but *'allowing access by all SEN children'* is an issue.

3.4 External factors

Eight respondents made comments relating to parents or children's home lives. Five mentioned issues relating to parents views of relationship education and their expectations and/or resistance. One participant said '*they* [parents] *tend to be over protective and express concerns that children are being exposed to some aspects too young'* with the example of same-sex partnerships given. Conversely engaging parents was also raised as a challenge '*Parental involvement and collaboration'* and being able to *'Involve... the parents in a new initiative'.*

The outside world was viewed as rapidly changing which posed challenges with *'Keeping it current'; 'Keeping up to date'* and these two respondents specifically

mentioned ICT; '*changes within the internet means so many more websites are available to children*' and '*Social Media*' is an issue. An additional issue was '*the changing nature of families*.

The financial constraints imposed by central Government have impacted locally; one respondent noted that staff from services '*are less available to support initiatives than previously*' which has implications for the curriculum since external staff work with schools to deliver aspects of relationship education.

More generally one respondent identified that '*there are so many issues affecting students'*, it was unclear whether this meant personally on an individual basis or more widely at a societal level. However, despite the challenges discussed many schools are not afraid of addressing them, as one head teacher reported: '*We meet the challenges with focus and determination. We are a nurturing and secure school and healthy relationships are a priority to our school ethos*'

3.5 Summary

From the response to this piece of research, education within schools in Worcestershire to promote respectful or healthy relationships has been incorporated into the curriculum; usually situated within the Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) curriculum. From the sample taken, it appears that although there are good examples of teaching 'healthy' relationships; overall the approach taken is inconsistent, using variable resources that each individual school can locate. Teaching staff are making attempts to deliver relevant and useful education to pupils in a complex relationship landscape; attempting to incorporate changes and increases in online environments such as in social networking, and at a time of intense media influence and of financial challenges across many sectors.

School staff who participated in the taped interviews for this evaluation commented on the difficult to access up to date, age appropriate teaching materials, and that they would feel it beneficial to be able to engage in communication with other schools and areas with regarding to providing relationship education. These interviews, albeit small in number, revealed the commitment of individual Worcestershire schools in terms of the importance of this area of education for their students.

4. Recommendations

Should Worcestershire Domestic and Sexual Violence Forum seek to promote and extend work with children and young people on healthy relationships in schools the following should be considered:

1. Have a clear definition of 'healthy relationships'
2. Create a multi-agency working group including representatives from schools to develop and provide strategic and practice guidance.
3. Have a dedicated post to lead the development and promotion of relationship education in partnership with schools- to be established and maintained for a period of at least five years. The post holder should have knowledge and experience of education and schools along with knowledge and understanding of GBV and be accountable to the multi-agency working group.
4. Develop a local network to assist in the sharing of best practice, provide ongoing support and guidance, and the sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise. This could be provided and supported virtually
5. Learn from good practice examples in other areas of the UK (a review could be commissioned)
6. Encourage schools to receive regular information from existing bodies such as the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum.
7. Develop practice guidance to promote work and establish standards of quality which can be linked with existing guidance for schools and from specialist voluntary sector services.
8. Create training opportunities for teachers and all other school staff, including governors, to raise their confidence and competence in delivering input on 'sensitive' topics.
9. Maximise the number of teachers who deliver the work so that the work is embedded into school culture and linked with other whole school issues
10. The knowledge, skills and experience of specialist organisations should be fully utilized to inform and direct the development, delivery and evaluation of the work.
11. Lobby regional initial teacher training institutions to include training on these issues on the curriculum along with safeguarding.
12. Assist schools in identifying resources for use in all phases of compulsory schooling which are integrated across the curriculum and provide continuity and progression for pupils.
13. Develop work with the children and young people who experienced programmes so they can influence their peers and assist in shaping the content and design/redesign of teaching materials.

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Projects Used by Schools in Worcestershire

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Expect Respect. http://www.womensaid.org.uk/page.asp?section=0001000100140010004&sectionTitle=Education+Toolkit Accessed 10/07/15.

The Great Project. Nottingham Domestic Violence Forum. Accessed 10/07/15.

http://www.nelsonslaw.co.uk/site/news/blogs/good_relationships_are_equal_and_trusting.html

SELFIE Project (**S**exualisation Exploitation Love Friendships Information

Empowerment) http://www.wmrsasc.org.uk/children-and-young-people/selfie-project/

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