

NOTTINGHAM  
TRENT UNIVERSITY



## Firebreak (SPUR) Project Report

Young People's Views on Healthy and Abusive Relationships

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## **Executive Summary**

1. This report examines young people's perceptions about healthy and abusive relationships on a socially deprived estate in Nottingham where domestic abuse has been identified as a particular problem. NTU researchers engaged in the research with partners from Nottingham City Council, Youth Support workers and peer support mentors and Equation (formerly known as Nottingham Domestic Violence Forum). This project arises out of concerns about the rise of domestic abuse among young people and recent changes (Home Office, March 2013) to the government's definition of domestic abuse to include 16-17 year-olds. The rationale for conducting this research is to develop an intervention, called a Firebreak, to prevent the inter-generational transmission of abusive attitudes and behaviour from adults to children and young people on the estate. More specifically, the purpose of the research was to:

- Examine, through observations of age- and gender-differentiated focus group interviews, young people's understandings of appropriate relationships, relationship boundaries and what constitutes abusive behaviour in relationships;
- Gain an understanding of the factors influencing young people's views on what constitutes healthy and abusive relationships;
- Apply lessons learnt from this exercise to prevent young people from forming and acting on abusive views, especially in the context of wider concerns about domestic abuse and sexual violence;
- Explore different methods of researching the young peoples' views, including semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted by pairs of Youth Support workers and observed by the NTU researcher;
- Share and feed back the observations and experiences of the Youth Support workers with the NTU research team following the completion of the data collection;
- Provide feedback on the study to research partners providing a set of recommendations based upon a synthesis of the research literature and research findings. In particular, we draw upon a multidimensional approach that addresses the 'interplay of individual, relationship, community, institutional and societal factors' (Flood, 2011: 361).

2. Qualitative research methods were used in the project including semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a small sample of young people from selected age and gender-differentiated groups.

- Over the three weeks that the interviews were conducted in August 2013, 74 participants were interviewed, either in 'one-to-one' interviews or in focus groups of up to six participants.

The target number of participants for the study was 68, which was exceeded by six participants.

- The 74 participants were broken down into the following age groups:

8-11 years:	23
12-14 years:	15
15-18 years:	19
19 plus:	17

- More males than females took part in the interviews and focus groups as more males attend the youth centres.
- There were 9 facilitators, including 6 BEST workers, 2 Play and Youth Support workers and 1 Children's Centre worker.

### ***Background context***

3. The locality for the study has been identified as a socially deprived community with high rates of domestic violence and abuse. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a hyper-masculine culture on the estate, which sustains negative attitudes – especially towards women and girls – in intimate relationships. In the context of agendas set by central government there have been various attempts across Nottingham to tackle domestic violence and abuse. Responses to such violence have focused on (a) addressing the needs of victims and (b) targeting perpetrators, including initiatives in the areas of enforcement and education. Whilst these responses are essential and, in particular, more needs to be done to support and care for victims, perpetrators of domestic abuse prove resistant to change and bringing about desistance from offending is difficult for many men. For this reason the aim is to prevent abusive attitudes and behaviour from forming in the first place through preventative action, starting with children and young people. If effective interventions can be designed and implemented then it may be possible to disrupt the transmission of unhealthy attitudes towards relationships from the older to younger generation.

#### **4. Young people's understanding of relationships and the nature of their relationships**

- There is a diversity of views about relationships, which tend to reflect the participants' personal experiences. There was limited reflection on the issue of relationships in a broader sense by males but females were better able to do so.
- Relationships are defined in terms of family relationships, friendships and other intimates (including sexually intimate relationships). In general, relationships were defined as existing between two people. Younger children were more likely to define relationships within the context of friends and family, whereas older children (i.e. teenagers) and adults, especially males, were more likely to perceive them in terms of more sexually intimate relationships.
- Many participants had clear ideas about what relationships *should* and *should not* be like with most emphasising trust, love and companionship. Some females referred to the importance of equality in relationships, an issue not mentioned by any males.

#### **5. Key characteristics of healthy ('good') and unhealthy ('bad') relationships**

- Domestic abuse and violence, including aggression and arguments, were generally recognised as unhealthy, especially by females.
- There was a general consensus about what constitutes a healthy relationship. Amongst the key words used are: trust, love, communication, respect and loyalty.
- Children and young adults talked about domestic roles, which were described in quite traditional and stereotypical language (for example, about who does the housework), sustaining wider gender inequalities. Younger children also focused on play as well as household chores.
- Female teenagers and adults were more likely to mention stability in a relationship and the need to feel safe, which should be free from abuse, power, control and aggression. Teenage males had more ambivalent and sometimes critical perspectives about intimate relationships, stressing the greater importance of trust and not 'telling lies' rather than the absence of arguments. Some males mentioned bad relationships arising from problems with finances.

## **6. Young people's experiences of 'bad' relationships**

- Crucially, not all the participants had experienced bad relationships, yet those who had not done so recognised what they look like after seeing them on television and via other media sources.
- In general, younger people did not talk openly about their experience of domestic abuse because of a) worry about repercussions and b) emotional difficulties in doing so. Older participants were more able to talk freely. Overall, people do not talk about domestic abuse or do not feel that they should talk about it. There was a general view that what happens between two people is a 'private matter' and 'not anybody's business'.
- Despite saying little about the abuse they have witnessed they willingly articulated their emotional responses to it. Common feelings identified were: fear, anxiety, worry and sadness.
- Younger people are more likely to be upset and traumatised by such events, but older participants appear to have become desensitised and such conflict has become normalised.
- It was felt that witnessing 'bad' relationships when growing up could lead either to: a) 'becoming like that yourself' (male); or b) 'ending up in a bad relationship yourself' (female). Indeed, there was the perception amongst the adults that this cycle is transferred from one generation to the next.

## **7. Who behaves worse in relationships? – gender and age-related responses**

### ***Gender***

- Social scientific research demonstrates that both genders may behave badly in relationships, but the levels of coercion and violence are asymmetrical with males being more abusive and violent.
- The participants, representing both genders and all age groups, said that both females and males could be aggressive. However, females were more likely to point to males being more problematic and drew attention to their aggression, ability to shout and the fact that they were physically stronger and able to overpower females.

### ***Age***

- There is a lack of consensus on this topic but there is an emerging view that young people are susceptible to hormonal changes, which can lead to poor behaviour in relationships. As they get older, they are more likely to grow out of this kind of behaviour.

- Some participants commented that it is not really age that determines how people behave in relationships but rather socialisation and their experience in life.

### **8. Influences on relationships**

- Young people find it difficult to isolate the main influences on their perception of relationships either because they did not know or had not reflected on this issue before. Some discussed the family and its role in socialisation and bringing up children. Others talked about life experience.
- Some of the young and older adults were aware of the potential influence of social media, but implied that this is something that influences other people rather than themselves.

### **9. Young people and their experiences of good relationships**

- A significant number of males from all age groups were satisfied with their relationships with family, intimates and friends; though some adults regretted certain behaviours in past relationships.
- For the most part females had better relationships with their friends and mothers, or with children if they were parents. More specifically younger females mentioned their mother and grandmother, but only their father, siblings and others such as youth workers if prompted.

### **10. Young people's views about how to make relationships healthy/'good'**

- Young children have hope and positive ideas about what we/society can do to bring about change. They draw upon experiences at school and through their contact with professionals in their life and put forward ideas such as, role play, counselling and so on.
- Some children touched on people taking responsibility for their own actions and the power of communication.
- Older children and adults are much more negative about the possibility of change. Some highlighted individuals taking more responsibility for their own relationships, education and the media. However, many of them seem to have become resigned to the existence of bad relationships and it seems to have become normalised. Resignation to this fate is setting in, and for some participants a feeling of hopelessness about the possibility of healthy relationships was expressed. This is more striking with responses from females.



## Recommendations

The recommendations below call for a multidimensional and radical approach, which addresses the ‘interplay of individual, relationship, community, institutional and societal factors (Flood, 2011: 361).’ Each of the recommendations below is underpinned by the view that domestic violence and abuse is the result of gender inequalities that especially disadvantage women and children. Existing work, such as the training of professionals and programmes targeting young people at risk of abuse or becoming abusive, should be sustained. At a local level we also recommend bespoke interventions, which complement already successful work with young people at risk:

1. In developing any interventions to address gender inequalities and violence against women the council and its partners should recognise how the wider social context, including socio-economic factors such as employment and housing, impacts at a local level and affects individual young people’s and young adults’ attitudes and behaviour. The allocation of resources should prioritise supporting survivors and vulnerable children, but other areas are important too. For example, the behaviours and values of communities as well as inter-personal relationships can be affected by worklessness and housing policies, such as tenancy agreements. It should be noted that changes at a structural level can change young people’s lives and the culture of specific communities.
2. Existing ways of understanding what is meant by the local level should be changed so rather than looking at a total place (i.e. a ward or an estate) the focus is on the street level. By concentrating resources and initiatives on the micro level the impact of interventions on values and behaviours is likely to be greater.
3. As well as the interventions identified above resources should also be targeted at tackling worklessness amongst different age groups, but especially young people (e.g. 15 years plus), on particular streets on the estate. This might include job creation, apprenticeships and adults mentoring young people in the workplace. However, unemployment amongst adults is important too because of its potential negative impact on intimate and familial relationships, which in turn can harm children and young people.
4. Any intervention that is developed can feed into existing work being carried out on the estate (e.g. GREAT, apprenticeships, BEST, the Priority Families Programme), in particular through education, economic development and work programmes aimed at getting young people into employment and creating healthy attitudes towards relationships.

5. Any intervention will need to co-exist with the targeted work of Equation and NCDP with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse and violence. In particular, it is necessary to build on work that recognises that domestic abuse perpetrators are influenced by wider factors external to specific streets and estates as outlined in this report.
6. Parents need further support to help them respond to deprivation and experiences of social exclusion. While poverty is certainly not a 'cause' of domestic violence the stresses and strains of unemployment, low income, residential instability and other forms of disadvantage are indicators of risk and can make people vulnerable when it comes to gender relations. Thus because the estate in this study is in an economically deprived area it is necessary to be aware of wider debates about how deprivation might have an influence on the attitudes and behaviour of young people in the context of the relationships they form and that form them.
7. Although there is a tendency to identify young men as being responsible for most of the abusive behaviour and violence going on in the community rather than approaching this as solely a problem of gender it should also be viewed as a community problem. By adopting elements of the Whole Community Approach the aim is to make sure more people within the locality can be encouraged to think of such behaviour as a community rather than an 'individual' problem thus increasing the likelihood that any intervention will be successful. This tendency to 'individualise' the problem is central to the normalisation thesis, i.e. the view that violence is legitimate rather than excessive, which potentially leads to the acceptance of, rather than resistance to, domestic abuse.
8. In the context of Equation's work in schools, in particular the GREAT Project, there should be a review of the relevance of what local primary and secondary schools are currently doing to raise awareness about healthy relationships and interpersonal violence through the delivery of cross-curricular and school-wide lessons (e.g. the Whole School Approach), including the Personal, Social Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) curriculum. This needs to be underpinned by effective leadership, training and staff commitment to a non-violent culture in schools.
9. Local schools could consider measuring and monitoring the attitudes pupils have towards abuse, aggression and violence from as young as 8 years by utilising the REaDAPt (Relationship Education and Domestic Abuse Prevention Tuition) toolkit.
10. There needs to be an effective partnership in the local community that can benefit from awareness of the issue amongst professionals, including not only teachers and police

officers, but also GPs and school nurses. It is necessary that all partners agree on the concepts and terminology relating to the issue, but most crucially that they share common aims and objectives.

11. Whilst formal interventions in public policy and legislation can play a role in addressing unhealthy relationships these need to be reinforced by informal control in the home, at street level and in the wider community. The internalised beliefs and social bonds at an individual level must be challenged (unhealthy attitudes to relationships) and reinforced (healthy attitudes to relationships) through normative behaviours in local communities. Community leader roles could prove to be crucial here.
12. The whole community, including residents as well as practitioners working there, should be made aware of the new definition of domestic abuse so they know that it covers a wide range of controlling and coercive behaviours (i.e. emotional, financial and psychological abuse) in addition to physical violence.
13. The design of a mentoring programme based on Katz's Mentors in Violence Protection (MVP) could be considered whereby young people are trained and empowered to challenge peers about abusive behaviours and attitudes.
14. As much as possible needs to be known about the population for whom an intervention is targeted in terms of attitudes and beliefs and so on. The intervention will be more successful, the more that is known and understood about the target group.

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of young people's views on what constitutes healthy and abusive relationships and the factors that influence these views. The lessons learnt from this study can then be applied to prevent young people from forming and acting on abusive views, especially in the context of wider concerns about domestic abuse and sexual violence. A further aim of the research was to explore different methods of researching the young peoples' views, including semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted by pairs of youth support workers and observed by the NTU researcher. In addition, following the completion of the data collection, the youth support workers were invited to NTU to share and feed back their observations and experiences of the research process with the NTU research team.

The government's recent (March, 2013) widening of the definition of domestic abuse to include younger people, aged 16 to 17 years, is an acknowledgement that young people also experience abusive relationships. In addition, the revised Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy Action Plan first published by the government in 2010 and updated more recently (Home Office, 2010, 2012b) is targeted at young people, and those who work with them, in order to highlight how young women in particular can be subject to sexually abusive and violent relationships.

Although the main focus of the study is on healthy relationships this is underpinned by a concern with domestic abuse, in particular the view that abusive behaviour is observed and potentially learnt by young people in the family environment and amongst their peers as they mature into adults. In addition, there is increasing recognition of the impact of the Internet and new technologies on young people's lives and the negative effects upon relationships (Berelowitz et al, 2013). This report built upon the findings of an 'interim' report (Berelowitz et al, 2012) commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation In Gangs and Groups which highlights the use of technology in the commission of sexual offences against young people. One of the recommendations in the final report was that 'relationships and sex education must be provided by trained practitioners in every educational setting for all children. This must be part of a holistic/whole-school approach to child protection that includes Internet safety and all forms of bullying and harassment and the getting and giving of consent' (Berelowitz et al, 2013, p.95).

Research by Refuge (2008) found that 81 per cent of young women received no information about domestic violence when they were at school, but two thirds said they would have liked to have lessons on domestic violence. Unfortunately, a motion in the House of Lords on the 28<sup>th</sup> January (2014) concerning an amendment to the Children and Families Bill which would make Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) compulsory at all Key Stages in all state-funded schools, was rejected despite a long standing recognition by a number of groups and members of parliament of the need to modernise the UK's 'out of date' sex and relationship education (Peacock, 2013).

It is within this context that this research attempted to deepen our understanding of how abusive attitudes might be formed at a young age recognising the potential to create a 'Firebreak' to disrupt the development and hardening of abusive attitudes and behaviour, as well as interpersonal and sexual violence.

There is a lack of research on young people and their perceptions of healthy and abusive relationships (Barter et al, 2009; Gadd, Fox and Corr, 2012). There is also a paucity of literature on the factors that influence young people's perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' relationships. The Firebreak Project, commissioned by Nottingham Drugs and Crime Partnership and the City Council, aimed to address these gaps in research, albeit at a local level. We also aimed to discover which methods might be most appropriate for conducting research with the young people and, to this end, worked closely with the support workers who facilitated the project.

Both primary and secondary research methods were adopted for this research in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the views of the young people and support workers within the wider context of current government policy. The primary research took the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, conducted with 8-18 year-olds and participants aged over 19 years. These were conducted over the summer period, normally with two support workers asking the questions and observed and audio-recorded by the NTU researcher. The participants were interviewed in age and gender related groups, where feasible, by support workers known to them.

### ***Overview of Sections***

Section Two of this report examines some of the key issues related to young people and their understanding of healthy and abusive relationships, focusing on the relevant current literature in this field. This section also considers key terms in light of the recent (March 2013) government

decision to widen the definition of 'domestic abuse' to include abusive relationships among 16 and 17 year-olds.

The research methods used in the study are outlined in Section Three. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with selected young people aged 8-18 and 19 years and above were conducted for the primary research while we also included a feedback session to hear the views of the support workers who facilitated the interviews and focus groups. The advantages and limitations of these methods are discussed in this section. In addition, we discuss the validity of the data that was collected and the potential limitations of the findings. The research used thematic analysis to identify key themes and topics that form the basis of the Research Findings section. The ethical issues relating to the research, together with the sensitivities associated with research on young people and potentially abusive relationships, are considered in this section.

The fourth section of the report outlines the findings from the primary research, based on the interviews and focus groups with the young people and the feedback session with the support workers respectively. This provides a descriptive summary of the responses from the participants interviewed for the study. In addition, this section outlines key themes and topics that emerged from the data.

The final section, setting out our conclusions, summarises the key findings from the research. Suggested policy and practice recommendations supported by the research are proposed, along with areas of potential future investigation that could enhance our understanding of the factors that influence young people's views on relationships.

## **2. Background and Review of the Literature**

### ***Introduction***

This review focuses on research into the attitudes and beliefs that young people hold about both healthy and abusive relationships. The extent of the influence of societal pressures that might lead young males (and young females) to have unhealthy attitudes to relationships is of particular interest. The wider aim is to identify interventions to radically change the attitudes and beliefs of children and young people in order to foster and maintain healthy relationships in their adult life. The review considers:

- Definitional issues, including the tendency more recently to refer to domestic abuse rather than domestic violence (although we did not refer specifically to domestic abuse in our research with young people);
- The influence of psychological and sociological factors on abusive behaviour;
- Victim-offender relationships;
- The attitudes of young people towards abusive relationships;
- Hypermasculinity, hegemonic and subordinated masculinities;
- Wider factors, such as popular culture and the media, which influence such attitudes; and
- Key issues relating to interventions designed to prevent abusive attitudes and behaviour.

### ***Background***

The main aim of the research is to identify young peoples' understandings of healthy and abusive relationships in the context of reported high levels of domestic abuse on an estate in a city in the East Midlands. The study was undertaken by the researchers in partnership with the City Council, youth and peer support workers and a Domestic Violence Forum (Equation). Using findings from this investigation, the City Council will design an intervention that aims to change, to some degree, the beliefs and attitudes held by these young people within the context of a 'whole community approach'.

This review was conducted to inform exploratory research into the beliefs and attitudes held by 8-18 year-olds, and some participants aged over 19 years, on the estate to identify 'good' and 'bad' or healthy and unhealthy relationships. The research took the form of focus groups of age and gender

differentiated groups of young people, led by pairs of peer support and youth workers who work with young people in the area and which were observed by the student researcher. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants aged 18 and over, to ascertain their views on the key influences on young people's attitudes towards healthy and abusive relationships.

Following this review, in Section Five, we outline how an intervention could be designed to target young people aged between 8 and 18 years and above, to bring about change in their attitudes by:

- Making them aware of the difference between healthy and abusive relationships; and
- Teaching them to resist societal pressures including familial and peer influences to engage in abusive relationships.

This will enable them to build strong, trusting relationships, which is crucial in this developmental stage leading to adulthood.

In sum, this review critically identifies what is already known about the topic and the controversies it poses. It also identifies some inconsistencies in findings relating to abusive relationships amongst young people, which are in need of research.

#### *Definitional issues*

Domestic abuse in relation to teenage relationships usually refers to violent or emotional abuse between young people aged eighteen and under. The mechanisms of the abuse are slightly different from those found in adult relationships. For example, in the context of emotional abuse, for young people there is a relatively high level of surveillance through the use of 'mobile phones, specifically the use of text messages' (Barter and McCarry, 2009: 113).

In this study, we are focusing primarily on young people aged 8 to 18 years plus those of 19 and above who may already be in, or who are likely to encounter, unhealthy or abusive relationships. Similarly in this report we refer to both 'domestic abuse' and 'abusive relationships', particularly as the latter term captures how such relationships between young people and their peers may be experienced and understood.



The official state sanctioned definition of domestic abuse, which is in use across government departments, refers to ‘any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality’ (Home Office, 2013: 29; Gov.uk, 2013). The addition of 16 and 17 year-olds in March 2013 reflects recognition that victims of domestic abuse include those under 18 years.

There is some evidence suggesting that the peak age for gender-based violence, both offending and victimisation, might be aged 16 years or below (Walby and Allen, 2004; Starmer, 2011). This indicates that there is a need for more research into this age group. In particular, we do not know much about what influences young people to become perpetrators or victims. There also does not appear to be any readily available solutions to the problem. The inclusion of emotional abuse and coercive behaviour in current definitions is particularly important as it reflects the very real impact this can have on a victim, even though identifying and measuring this can be elusive compared to violent or physical abuse. A YouGov survey commissioned by Refuge in 2008 led to a report entitled ‘Starting in School: To end domestic violence’ which found that ‘recognition of physical and sexual abuse as forms of domestic violence was high among the young women questioned, but far fewer young women recognised other forms of domestic violence such as financial and emotional abuse’ (Refuge, 2008: p.2). Furthermore, one in six teenagers in relationships say they have experienced sexual violence and one in three teenage girls say they have had to put up with unwanted groping or harassment at school itself (Cooper, 2014). Research for the Telegraph conducted by the NSPCC found that a third of young people cite the Internet as their first port of call for answering questions about sex and relationships (Peacock and Barnett, 2012).

A prime example of this is two female participants aged under 18 who believed that the reason why their partner wanted to know where they were all the time was ‘because they loved them’, thus displaying a blurred line between ‘concern’ and ‘control’ (Barter et al, 2009).

#### *Factors influencing abusive behaviour*

There is a wealth of research considering attitudes and perceptions that influence the violation of women’s and girls’ human rights and preventing them from leading lives without physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey, 2008). However, there has been relatively little UK research into abusive relationships between younger people compared to adults. Existing

research on this topic includes some important points in need of further exploration, especially when different age groups are considered (Barter, 2011; Corr et al, 2012; Fox et al, 2012; Fox et al, forthcoming; Gadd et al, 2012; Miller, 2013).

US studies have provided a solid foundation when it comes to understanding abusive relationships among teenagers, although many have termed this research topic 'dating violence' (Foshee et al, 1998; Jaycox et al, 2006; Mueller et al, 2013). Abusive relationships of this kind are prevalent among young people in the US (Hart and Rennison, 2003). In particular, young women aged 16 to 24 experience domestic abuse at a higher rate than other age groups. An example is the work of Jaycox et al (2006; also see Foshee et al, 1999; Husemann and Guerra, 1997) who argues that 'social learning theory' (Bandura, 1977) shows how aggressive behaviour is learnt by an individual in the context of their wider peer groups.

As noted above, 'teenagers' experience of partner violence has not received the same degree of attention in the UK either within research or practice' (Barter et al, 2009: 9). However, the research findings that do exist are very similar to those in the US and the 16 to 19 year-old age group remains at higher risk compared to others (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). Although there have been targeted government responses to dealing with violence against women and girls (Home Office, 2013), domestic abuse is as under-reported among young people as it is for older people and there is evidence that suggests it may even more under-reported (Barter et al, 2009). Potential reasons why less is known about abusive relationships among young people include that they are 'viewing [violent] behaviour as experimental, fear of stigmatisation, a mistaken view that peer abuse is less harmful than abuse by adults, the unawareness of adolescent abuse generally and low reporting levels' (Barter *et al*, 2009: 9).

Burton et al (1998) studied the tolerance and acceptability of violence against young girls and this research later informed a study by Burman and Cartmel (2005), which explored young peoples' attitudes towards gendered violence. The latter study sought the views of domestic abuse held by young people aged 14 to 18 years, revealing that young women were more likely to suffer emotional and violent abuse at the hands of their partner than men (Burman and Cartmel, 2005).

Another background factor related to this research is the relationship between domestic abuse and social and economic deprivation. This is a contentious issue and it is argued that domestic violence

and abuse are not confined to poor and socio-economically marginalised areas. However, there is an association between domestic violence and socio-economic forms of exclusion as there is for violent crime in general (and indeed acquisitive crime too). According to Finney (2006: 9) *British Crime Survey* data shows:

Indicators of socio-economic status such as household income, vehicle ownership, tenure type and council/non-council areas, suggest fairly consistently that higher prevalence rates of intimate abuse are associated with relatively lower levels of socio-economic status ... it is more vulnerable groups that are more likely to experience intimate violence or abuse.

While poverty is certainly not a 'cause' of domestic violence the stresses and strains of unemployment, low income, residential instability and other forms of disadvantage are indicators of risk and can pose challenges to vulnerable gendered identities (Callan, 2013; Ray, 2011). Thus because the estate in this study is in an economically deprived area it is necessary to be aware of wider debates about how deprivation might have an influence on the behaviour of young people, particularly given the nature of the locality under study and its socio-economic deprivation. Data provided by the City Council, highlights that it is subject to high rates of unemployment and welfare dependency along with lone-parent families. For example, Hird (2000 cited in Barter et al, 2009: 33-34) argues that 'given the link between social deprivation and domestic violence, it may be assumed that schools with higher levels of family violence would be located in more disadvantaged areas.'

There is also the matter of 'social capital', which may be low in deprived communities. With less co-ordination, co-operation and reciprocity social networks and support may not be as robust as they are in communities with higher degrees of 'social capital'. Absent or relatively weak social networks and social support, as well as uncertainty about social status and identity, can lead to a greater tolerance of violence (Ray, 2011). Similarly, the presence of strong social ties in relatively homogenous social groups could by the same measure lead to the continuance of pro-violent attitudes and behavior. The community under study is considered to be relatively distinctive for its homogeneity.

### *Victimisation - male and female victims*

Criminologists have debated for some time whether abusive relationships, especially domestic violence, are either 'gender symmetrical' in the sense that men and women are equally culpable of violence or 'gender asymmetrical', meaning that male and female perpetrators behave differently when they are violent (Dobash and Dobash, 2012; Hester, 2013). We concur with Hester (2013) that in heterosexual relationships domestic abuse is asymmetrical because males are more controlling, coercive and violent than their female counterparts. Furthermore, compared to male victims female victims endure more severe abuse and are more likely to use services provided by the police, NHS and other statutory and voluntary community sector agencies. Young males can also be victims of abusive relationships, but less so than young women who are generally physically weaker, so it is likely that more young females are victims of abusive relationships than young males. Indeed it has been found that more females than males are victims of abusive relationships; females are also viewed as suffering a greater emotional impact from abuse than males (Hickman and Jaycox, 2004). Nevertheless, one study found that 10 per cent of young women and 8 per cent of young males who participated in a survey reported that their partner had tried to force them to have sex (Burman and Cartmel, 2005). However, the onus is mainly placed on female victims where they are often blamed for being abused, as there is a 'widespread acceptance of forced sex and physical violence against women' (Burton et al, 1998: 1; Berelowitz et al, 2012; 2013).

As there is this prevailing tolerance of domestic abuse against women, there is a perception that it is in some way their own fault for being abused. There is no implied lessening of severity of physical or emotional abuse on young male victims, but there is simply a higher likelihood of young females being or becoming victims.

### *Attitudes of young people towards abusive relationships*

Attitudes can influence or drive people to behave in a certain way, although the extent of their influence is contested, as 'research findings into the influence of attitudinal factors on the perpetration of domestic abuse are not consistent' (Burman and Cartmel, 2005: 11). Young men are often socialised to believe that if they are not interested in taking a leading role in initiating sexual behaviour, or they are not interested in having several sexual partners, they will be subject to humiliation by their peer groups (Maxwell et al, 2009). This suggests that young males experience pressure in their peer groups to behave in a promiscuous manner, sometimes at the expense of young females, where they are influenced by other factors such as status and lack of self-worth and

therefore condone such aggressive sexual behaviour. There is a sense of the normalisation of sexual abuse against young girls, a point made clear by Burman and Cartmel (2005: 43) when they write that, 'for many young people, however, coercive sex is normalised, as one girl put it "it happens all the time... it's just something you have to deal with"'. This unhealthy cycle is what continues to drive the acceptance of abuse in young people's relationships. The recurring theme is that such group influences do play a part and shape how domestic abuse is perceived by young people.

There is also a set of expectations imposed upon young women to be compliant with aggressive behaviour. Young females are led to believe that if a male spends a lot of money on them, they are expected to engage in sexual relations with them. An NSPCC campaign, in conjunction with the Government, reported that '22% of respondents thought that it was either acceptable, or were unsure if it was acceptable or not, for a boy to expect to have sex with a girl if he has spent a lot of time and money on her' (Home Office, 2012a). The fact that these young people are unsure indicates that there are no clear boundaries in place to demonstrate that such behaviour is unacceptable, and raises questions about from where and how they are getting these unhealthy attitudes and beliefs. Such attitudes are 'normalised' to the extent that there is a view that because everybody else is doing it in their peer groups, it is acceptable for them to do it too. This again reflects the overwhelming influence of peer pressure.

One apparent reason given for why girls can be justifiably hit by their partners is because they have slept with someone else. For instance, in such cases 'over a fifth (22% of boys) and around a sixth (16%) of girls think it is okay [to be hit]' (Bell, 2007: 10). It is important to note that more boys than girls think it is acceptable, which shows a gendered disparity of beliefs. It is essential to take this into account when evaluating young people's attitudes towards abusive relationships, as it appears that young males may be the driving force behind these demeaning and destructive attitudes. As many girls held the same view this suggests that some young women accept that they are responsible for any form of violence committed against them, which again reflects unhealthy attitudes. While it is important to consider beliefs about abuse in teenage relationships, it is equally important to tackle this issue by examining the origins of these unhealthy attitudes.

Coercive sex, and other forms of emotional and physical abuse, is often not viewed as a criminal offence by many young women, who thus may not view themselves as victims. There is a tendency to associate such attacks, and terms such as 'rape', with strangers and not in their personal

relationships (Home Office, 2012a). A reason for this is that they may wish to dissociate themselves from the stigma of being a victim of sexual abuse, particularly if they are in a relationship with the perpetrator. A further issue is that of the problems that can be encountered in the criminal justice system, especially with having to provide evidence to the police and courts, perhaps against a male acquaintance. This presents the criminal justice system with challenges in dealing with the emotional difficulties experienced by victims of sexual abuse in court, both as a result of 'rape trauma' and 'secondary victimisation' in the court trial (Stern, 2007; Heidensohn and Silvestri, 2012). Another possible reason, indicated above, is that these unlawful behaviours, either in the form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, are 'normalised' as demonstrated by recent research into young people's experiences of gang related violence (Beckett et al, 2013; Coy et al, 2013; Gulyurtlu, 2013). It is important to educate young people, both males and females, so that they are aware that they do not have to live with such abuse in their relationships and that such behaviours are not acceptable.

However, it is important to acknowledge that many young people do not think that violence in a relationship is acceptable. Most young people, of all age groups, articulate a clear disapproval of all forms of violence, stating that it is ' "pointless", "stupid", "disgusting", "never worth it", "a last resort" or a sign of immaturity' (Burman and Cartmel, 2005). However, they felt that it depended on the situational context and the type of relationship. According to Burton et al (1998), there seems to be an agreement that violence is acceptable against girls in certain relationships and on certain occasions. So, it appears that there is a degree of tolerance of violence against young women that needs further exploration.

Burman and Cartmel's (2005: 8) study also found that 'a relatively small proportion of young people responded that the man has a right to hit a woman under any circumstances.' This shows that a minority of young people justifies the abuse of women. While reportedly only a small number that believe this, as discussed earlier, peer influences play a large part in facilitating and sustaining the 'normalisation' and tolerance of abuse. Thus if one particularly influential male or female who possesses high status in a group voices the view that abusive attitudes are tolerated or accepted, it is likely that they might spread.

There is a move towards prevention strategies in relation to domestic abuse with directives that recognise the existence of domestic abuse within the context of 'human rights'. It is no longer

enough to simply 'react' to instances of such violence, primarily against women, but rather, there is a need for preventative action (Council of Europe, 2011).

### *Hypermasculinity, hegemonic and subordinated masculinities*

It appears that young males are the domineering gender when it comes to tolerating violence against young women. It is therefore imperative to investigate those factors influencing young males into holding such beliefs. Men/boys and women/girls and their respective attitudes and behaviour are demonstrated in many different historical, cultural and institutional contexts. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) offer a macro level analysis of these issues showing that although there are changeable structural hierarchies and multiple masculinities men are in a dominant position overall because of what has been referred to as 'hegemonic masculinity'. This concept posits that a certain form of masculinity – one amongst many – is valued more highly than others at a particular time and place (for example, the estate in this study in 2013), which in turn legitimates the social domination of masculinity. Such dominance is not automatic and is achieved as part of a struggle but it serves as a touchstone towards which men position themselves. More than that there is a tendency for heterosexual women to be 'complicit' with hegemonic masculinity, something that is more often than not achieved through persuasion rather than violence. Hegemonic masculinity is not so much about groups and interests but a socially dominant ideal of manhood. This ideal, supported by effective authority, encourages men to see the dominant ideal of masculinity as something towards which they aspire. This task of identification is far from straightforward because forms of hegemonic masculinity change over time in cultures and even within subcultures.

In relation to hegemonic masculinity there is the notion that 'hypermasculine' behaviour surrounds boys and men in the context of family environments and wider societal pressures. Research shows that young males are under pressure by society, the media, advertising and peer groups into believing that in order to be accepted as a 'man', they have to display sexual assertiveness and be controlling to establish their masculinity (Frosh et al, 2002; Renold, 2005; Sieg 2007; Barter et al, 2005; Connell, 2005; Katz, 2006). Young males are expected by peers and society to 'be a man', however they may be uncomfortable and defensive about either witnessing or perpetrating abuse against females. In the US Jackson Katz has established a mentoring programme (Mentors in Violence Protection or MVP) based on 'bystander intervention' whereby young people are trained and empowered to challenge peers about abusive behaviours and attitudes (Katz, 2013).

However, many young males have strong ties and bonds with their families, where they may extract most of their influences on how to behave as a man. As discussed earlier, and although a somewhat controversial and contested issue, research by Barter et al (2009) has suggested that there are likely to be higher occurrences of domestic abuse in deprived areas, such as the research location, so it may be plausible to suggest that there could be a breakdown of family ties, which has led to these young people being influenced by peers or other external factors. Furthermore, it is highly possible that socio-economic changes within the research location have potentially impacted upon gender relationships with females being in some respects economically independent of males and with males being somewhat dependent upon females in terms of social housing.

A campaign raising awareness of abusive relationships between young people, run jointly by the NSPCC and Government, distributed a leaflet aimed at parents that outlined the characteristics of an abusive perpetrator for those parents suspecting their children are in an abusive relationship. It states that:

Masculinity is displayed through physical aggressiveness; they [young males] have the right to demand intimacy; they will lose respect if they are attentive and supportive towards their partners and; men and women aren't equal and women should be treated differently; they have the right to control their partners if they see fit (Home Office, 2012: 9).

The points made by the NSPCC and Home Office chime with academic research by Burton et al (1998) and Maxwell et al (2009), both of whose findings demonstrate a form of hypermasculinity among young males that sustains controlling, aggressive and domineering attitudes towards females.

Theoretically informed empirical research conducted in the north east of England stands out as an important contribution to debates about masculinities and violence (Winlow, 2001; Winlow and Hall, 2006; Hall, Winlow and Ancrum, 2008). This body of work does not consider abuse and violence in domestic settings or in intimate relationships, yet it offers two vital insights for our research. The first is that it critiques Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity, which is arguably one of the dominant frameworks underpinning analyses of gender relations and secondly it offers an account



of aggression and violence in working class communities rather than the 'symbolic' (non-physical) violence of the powerful elite groups who control society.

Hall (2012) questions the relevance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a strategy of domination that men as well as women who enjoy the 'patriarchal dividend' use to control the social world, on the grounds that the word hegemony refers to the use of non-violent methods (e.g. through the media, legal system and so on) to maintain social dominance and superiority. This effectively means that inter-personal violence, especially that found in excluded and marginalised communities, cannot be understood with reference to hegemony. What is being referred to instead are subordinated masculinities that, as Hall (2002) puts it, are associated with 'useless violence' that do not bring about 'rewards' for hegemonic masculinity and are not an effective strategy of institutionalised dominance (see also Hall, 2012: 123-4). Thus hegemonic masculinity is not really applicable to the community where our research was carried out or in other similarly deprived and excluded estates. Also pertinent is the point that violent and aggressive masculinities can only be understood in the socio-economic and cultural context in which they are expressed (Hobbs, 2012: 264; Winlow, 2001).

Winlow (2001) places social class at the heart of his research, which considers changing forms of masculinity and violence in working class – or workless – communities in the north east of England. In short, traditional forms of masculinity belonging to manual workers in the shipyards, steelworks and collieries changed due to de-industrialisation, which led to high unemployment in the 1980s. In some locations unemployment became permanent for future generations who now are either out of work or eking out a living in insecure and low paid jobs. Despite not being included in the labour market many of these communities aspire to own and enjoy the goods and services available in a consumer society but these are not easily obtained through conventional means. The physicality and toughness integral to working class male identities have not altogether dissipated and these qualities are still highly regarded. This is not to say that all working class males in such communities are physically violent, though recorded rates of violence are high, but an appreciation of violence is embedded in the psyche of males – and increasingly females – in such communities (Winlow, 2012).

Crucially much of this violence and aggression is symbolic (i.e. through language) as individuals strive to gain social recognition and social distinction when the opportunities to do this are limited, and the use of violence itself is limited to extreme social situations for all but a minority of persistent and

serious violent offenders (Hall, Winlow and Ancrum, 2008). Masculine aggression is there to show other people that a person can look after themselves and not be dominated by others. As Winlow (2012: 204) puts it,

The imperative is not to be dominated by another; to aggressively defend the basic essence of the self in a socio-economic context in which virtually all battles are lost in advance, can play a crucial role in structuring the masculine identity for those who occupy areas of permanent recession beset by high rates of interpersonal violence.

This lends support to Ray's (2011) point noted earlier, that living in socially excluded communities where social mobility is limited creates a range of strains and pressures on individuals and creates the sort of environment where violent and aggressive masculinities are more likely to emerge. Although the research outlined above does not talk much about relationships the logic of their analysis might account for the extent and prevalence of abusive attitudes and behaviours as a way of asserting a sense of self that is vulnerable and under threat. On some socio-economically deprived estates, especially where male unemployment is high, it is conceivable that their subordinated status may impact on their relationships in general, especially intimate relationships.

#### *Cultural and Societal Factors*

In research exploring some of the reasons why abuse occurs in teenage relationships, a key factor appears to be media led sexualisation (Coy et al, 2013; Livingstone, 2008). The media have relative freedom when it comes to advertising, TV programmes, magazines, newspapers and the proliferation of online sources. The media is accessible to nearly all of the population in the UK and its influence on attitudes of people, young and old, cannot be underestimated. Although the media is not the sole, or even most significant, source of influence on a young person's life, it is reasonable to suggest that it plays a significant part with an unprecedented rise in the volume of sexualised images through a number of mediums, including music (Papadopolous, 2010; Zhang et al, 2008).

It is also important to acknowledge that 'young people increasingly learn about sexual relationships through the media and from pornography, as shown in a 2003 study carried out by the Institute of Education which found that 66% of young people reported the media as their primary source of information on sex and relationships' (Object, 2009: 17). The media often portray women as highly sexualised and men as domineering and this could be one of the reasons why young males feel it is

acceptable to treat women as sexual objects. Young males have distorted ideas about women and what the latter are expected to do to seek respect from men (Zero Tolerance, n.d). The sexualisation of young people through the media has been termed the 'pornification of popular culture' (Coy et al, 2013: 45; see also: Object, 2009: 3).

In order to change the attitudes and perceptions of young people regarding distorted concepts about sex and relationships disseminated by the media, it is important to recognise that it is clearly not possible to change such representations in the short term. Therefore, it is a more effective strategy to educate young people on healthy relationships and attempt to change their perceptions of what they are exposed to in the media so that they can challenge abusive content. However, this can be difficult as Gadd et al (2013) show in their critique of social marketing approaches. Due to a 'boomerang effect' the opposite effect to what is intended by the creators of social marketing campaigns might happen. In the case of an anti-domestic violence campaign young men were only temporarily influenced by the media message (i.e. to stop their violence), which was interpreted in the context of their own negative views about female victims of their violence.

The media is in some ways a mirror of society. Research has indicated that young women believe that a male dominated society is the reason why abusive relationships have the opportunity to flourish (Burman and Cartmel, 2005). So the media could be viewed as reflecting the values and assumptions of a 'patriarchal society', indicating that wider problems in the culture contribute to tolerance of abusive relationships by young people. Sexualisation through the media is promoted to young people at an early age, representing girls and women as objects of sexual desire (Papadapolous, 2010).

However, the media is only one mechanism within the social structure that contributes to the widespread belief that abusive attitudes towards, and violence against women is acceptable. To change these societal beliefs the requirement for the 'dismantling of the social feeding ground of violence: patriarchal, heterosexist, authoritarian, [and] in class societies' (Kaufman, 1987, in O'Toole et al, 2007: 34) is deemed essential.

#### *Interventions to create healthy relationships amongst children and young people*

In recent years there has been a raft of legislation and policy interventions targeting domestic violence and abuse yet most of this work refers to the adult population. Because there is a relative

dearth of research on healthy and unhealthy relationships and the links with domestic abuse amongst young people some recommendations relating to interventions draw on those designed for adults and it might be necessary for them to be adapted to take this on board. Several years before the current concern about the involvement of children and young people in abusive relationships, Hester and Westmarland (2005) referred to primary prevention to raise awareness and challenge the attitudes of young people.

In 2000 under the government's Crime Reduction Programme a number of pilot projects were implemented to reduce interpersonal violence. Work was undertaken in primary and secondary schools to prevent the formation of abusive attitudes and beliefs by increasing knowledge and understanding of the facts of domestic violence (Hester and Westermarland, 2005). The delivery of lessons about abusive and healthy relationships were included in the Personal, Social Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) curriculum (Department of Education and Employment, 1999), though it was recommended that this material should be cross-curricular and school-wide (Hester and Westmarland, 2006). This student centred work focused on being safe, self-esteem, feelings and family and often adopted visual input, such as drama. Bell and Stanley (2006) show how drama was a useful medium for developing positive ideas about relationships, though some young people were still not clear about the gendered nature of domestic violence after completing the programme. Nevertheless, it is clear that young people are keen and want lessons in school on domestic abuse (Mullender et al, 2002). However, Schewe (2002) suggests that prevention programmes as part of school based work might be more effective if they focus on increasing the desired behaviour rather than focusing upon decreasing the undesirable behaviour (cited in Ellis, 2008).

It is also worth considering whether the problem is best conceived as a 'gendered' problem or a 'community' problem, a question raised in a paper by Michau (2005) who makes a number of insightful recommendations:

Present violence against women is a community problem, not a women's problem. Constructing the problem of violence against women as a community issue avoids marginalising the issue as women's. It also places responsibility squarely on the community, not only women, to take action (Michau, 2005: 10).

Anthony Wills, Chief Executive, Standing Together Against Domestic Violence, reiterates the need for 'healthy relationships' to be part of PSHE programmes. As well as traditional approaches to reaching children he recommends the use of alternative methods, such as social media. Achievement of this depends on building effective partnerships, which in turn requires raised awareness of the issue amongst professionals, including not only teachers and police officers, but also GPs and school nurses (Wills, 2013).

The role of education and schools is taken up by Gadd et al (2013) who have designed an Attitudes towards Domestic Violence (ADV) questionnaire, which can be used by teachers. This is part of the REaDAPT (Relationship Education and Domestic Abuse Prevention Tuition) project, which uses a quasi-experimental design to measure changes in childrens' attitudes to domestic violence following exposure to three programmes (in England, Spain and France). The findings from the three sites are complex and in some cases contradictory, however after all three interventions it appears that boys, to varying degrees, are more accepting of domestic violence than girls.

The shift of emphasis from approaches that are exclusively law enforcement focused is embedded in more recent government led approaches (Home Office, 2010; 2012b) and has a fit with the rationale underpinning Firebreak, which is an attempt to tackle abusive attitudes before they come to the attention of the police, youth offending teams and courts. A programme very similar to Firebreak is being driven forward by the NSPCC, called the Aggression Project, which is designed to 'disrupt the habits and social context of 11-18 year-olds to reduce their aggressive behaviour in a way that is sustained into adulthood' (Miller, 2013).

Also, it is vital to recognise that intimate violence and abuse amongst young people is a child welfare problem. As Barter (2011: 23) puts it,

Partner violence is a major problem for many young people, and for girls it might be the most common form of childhood violence that they experience. Our study shows that current child welfare policy requires revision so the significance and impact of this form of violence on the lives and well-being of young people is directly acknowledged. Similarly domestic violence policy, currently focused almost exclusively on adults, also needs to respond to the experience of teenagers. Clearly our research shows that domestic violence starts at a much earlier age than previously recognised.

A final important point to consider when it comes to interventions is one made in American research, which refers to the limitations of formal and legal interventions and shows that there is little evidence to show that they work unless they are reinforced by sources of informal control in the home and neighbourhoods (Fagan, 2005). The internalised beliefs and social bonds at an individual level must be challenged (unhealthy attitudes to relationships) and reinforced (healthy attitudes to relationships) through normative behaviours in local communities.

Flood (2011) has written an important, yet relatively neglected article in the field, which evaluates preventative interventions at different levels of social reality, ranging from the individual to society as a whole. This is consistent with Heise's (1998) ecological model, which describes four levels where interventions can be implemented:

- Personal history;
- *The microsystem* (family and the immediate context; here decisions can be taken to control behaviour);
- The *exosystem* (the socio-economic position and the ways in which aggressive and abusive behaviour might be held in high esteem);
- The *macrosystem* (cultural values around masculinities and violence).

In the long term some invaluable lessons can be learnt from Heise's sophisticated framework, but Flood's idea of bring about change in perpetrators through a 'spectrum of prevention' is potentially more pragmatic. Although it is concerned with adult perpetrators it provides a potentially useful framework for thinking about a practical response to abuse and violence at all ages. To prevent abusive attitudes and behaviour it is necessary to focus on children and young people's identities and relations and the sooner this begins the better. Without this an inter-generational firebreak is not feasible. There are six levels on the spectrum of prevention:

- Strengthening individual knowledge and skills – this refers to the enhancement of individuals' skills so they are capable of preventing violence and promoting safety.
- Promoting community education – this is the need to reach groups of people with information and resources, which makes it possible to prevent violence and promote safety.
- Educating providers – it is necessary to inform the providers tasked with transmitting skills and knowledge to others and to help them model positive norms.

- Engaging, strengthening and mobilising communities – Individuals and groups need to be brought together to share and drive forward broader goals so that they can have a greater impact.
- Changing regulations and norms – regulations can be adopted and norms shaped to prevent violence and bring about improved safety.
- Influencing policies and legislation – pass into law and implement policies that facilitate healthy community norms and reduced levels of violence.

This framework and any insights gleaned from the data are used to inform the recommendations for this study.

### **The way forward**

As most research focuses on young people aged 14 years and upwards, and because of the recent inclusion of 16 and 17 year-olds in the Home Office definition of domestic abuse, there is clearly a gap in research findings on younger people and the influences on their attitudes towards abusive relationships. This literature review has identified a number of themes including that young people are exposed to premature sexualisation that contributes to pressures on females to look and behave as sexual objects, and on males to adopt hypermasculine attributes. It has also looked at attitudes held by young people about the acceptability of violence against women and girls. As there is a relative lack of research on abusive relationships among young people, the review has also attempted to explore why this is the case. This report therefore examines why there is a seemingly common attitude among young people of tolerance and acceptability of abuse against young females, which appears to be an inter-generational problem, and the findings of the study are outlined in Section Four.

### **3. Methodology**

The aim of this research study is to examine the attitudes and beliefs about healthy and abusive relationships that are held by young people aged 8-18 and over 19 years. Secondary research was carried out in the form of a literature review to explore published research in this area. This method was used as it gives an insight into what is already known about abusive relationships among young people and which areas need further research. The review also provided useful information about the most appropriate methods for the primary data collection for this study.

In addition to secondary research, empirical research was conducted in the form of observations of focus groups and semi-structured interviews with age and gender-differentiated groups of young people. The researchers were also guided in this methodology by the work of Gadd, Fox and Hale (2013) who have undertaken a research study on young people and their attitudes to healthy and abusive relationships.

It was decided, in consultation with the research partners and support workers, that the most appropriate method would be to conduct focus groups with the young people, to hear their views in a naturalistic setting with their peers, alongside 'one-to-one' interviews with some of the older participants where the wider age range of the '19 Plus' group meant that it was more difficult to conduct focus groups with peers. Other studies on young people and abusive relationships have also engaged in consultation with research partners at all stages of the research process (see, for example, Fox, Corr et al, 2013).

In addition, some interviews with young participants were conducted in their homes where there were siblings who were spread across the age range and where the support worker knew the young people and had a good relationship with their families.

The researcher-observer (referred to in the report as 'the researcher') was a student from the BA (Hons.) Criminology degree course at the University and her (paid) role was to observe the focus groups and interview, audio-record the sessions and make notes about the body language of the participants (for example, whether they felt uncomfortable or made jokes when discussing the questions). Once introduced, the researcher sat apart from the focus groups and interviews and did



not intervene in the sessions. Her role was to be as non-intrusive as possible and the support workers reported in the feedback session that this role was accomplished.

The support workers who conducted the interviews are also referred to in the report as ‘facilitators’ as they were conducting the interviews and focus groups on behalf of the research team.

The semi-structured interviews were referred to by the support workers as ‘one-to-one’ interviews in order to distinguish them from the focus groups. However it was decided by the support workers that there should be two facilitators leading each interview/focus group in addition to the presence of the researcher who was the observer and note-taker. This was because, although they knew the young people through their roles as support workers, they were embarking on a new role as researcher that involved a different set of dynamics with the young people. It was decided that it would work best if each support worker paired up with a counterpart working in a different centre or club for young people in order for the support workers to gain insights into the views of the different age groups of the participants. This is reflected upon in Section Four where we discuss the findings from the focus group for the support workers, which elicited feedback on their experience of being in a different role with the young people from that of their normal support role. The questions for the focus group feedback session for the support workers are set out in Appendix H.

Qualitative research was considered most suitable for this research topic due to its sensitive nature and as it seeks to provide a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ perspectives. Geertz (1973), for example, referred to participants’ accounts of their own experiences and perceptions in the settings in which they live as ‘thick description’. In other words, such accounts provide the researcher with rich and detailed data that would not be so readily available by utilising quantitative methods.

Following the data collection a thematic analysis was undertaken to examine the attitudes held by the young people participating in the research and the extent to which these influence their actions.

We used Excel spreadsheets to manage and structure the data, for example to identify key themes from the focus groups and interviews. Selected quotes from the participants and contemporaneous notes from the observations were added to the data on the spreadsheets. It was found after the data collection that the observations on body language were not readily available in a form that

could be easily incorporated into the research findings, not least because of the difficulties of identifying body language for specific participants in the focus group interviews.

As the young people's support workers were facilitating the focus groups and interviews it was felt necessary that they received training in social research methodology and ethics. The research team devised a training programme and this was delivered at the University and attended by all of the support workers. These were both peer support mentors and youth workers, referred to collectively in this report as support workers, all of whom are employed by the City Council or BEST. The support workers were each given a research pack to take away. The packs contained the focus group and interview question guides, prompts and ground rules for use by the facilitators, participant information and consent forms (separate forms for the parents of the under 18s) and debrief sheets to be given to the young people after the sessions, which provided appropriate sources of further support and help.

#### *Focus Group and Semi-Structured Interview Question Design*

Bryman (2008) states that semi-structured interviews are more open-ended than structured interviews with closed questions thus allowing the interviewer to follow-up participants' responses to questions. In addition, the use of qualitative research methods, such as focus groups, allows the researcher to explore the 'actor's viewpoint' in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions and influences on their actions which, in turn, create their social reality (Jupp, 1989). Semi-structured questions were therefore chosen for the interviews and focus groups with the young people, allowing for a degree of flexibility and further 'probing' by the facilitator when a particular question might spark further discussion or equally where there was a lack of response. Semi-structured questions also give some control to the participants so that they can raise issues that are relevant to them (Bryman, 2011). This, in turn, may generate rich qualitative data from the participants' perspective.

Thus, in order to understand the views of the young people in this study it was important for us to work with the support workers to ensure that our research questions (the same set of questions was used for both interviews and focus groups) were framed in the appropriate language for the different age groups. To this end, the questions were sent to the support workers who, in turn, modified them slightly so that they would make sense, both to the support workers who were

facilitating the sessions and to the young people with whom they work and whom they were interviewing, for example by using more age-appropriate language (see Appendix A).

The order of the questions was intended so that the more general questions were asked at the beginning of the session and the more sensitive questions towards the end of the interview in order to put the young people at ease and build up to the questions that they may have found more challenging to answer.

The researchers also designed a prompt sheet for the facilitators (see Appendix B) which acted as an aide-memoire regarding introductions, setting ground rules for the sessions, explaining issues of consent, anonymity, the right to withdraw before, during and after the interview or focus group, thanking the participants and handing out the debrief sheets at the end of each session.

### *Research Ethics*

Ethical approval for this research study was gained from the University's College Research Ethics Committee before the empirical research could commence. Particular ethical and safeguarding issues were raised due to the age of the participants, some of which were under 18 years. After consultation with the research partners it was decided that opt-in parental consent would be sought for participants under 18 years of age. The issue of whether to use opt-in or opt-out parental consent for research with young people is a contested one (Williams, 2006). Some research studies have used opt-out parental consent to increase the participation rate (see, for example, NSPCC, 2009) while, equally, some local and education authorities insist on opt-in consent. Nevertheless, verbal consent was also obtained from all participants prior to and during the interviews and focus groups.

Information was provided by the City Council regarding their policies on the safeguarding of young people and any disclosure of abuse. Both of these measures were outlined in the participant information forms so that older participants and the parents of the younger participants were fully informed regarding consent (see Appendices C and D).

Separate participant information and consent forms were designed for the participants aged over 18 years and, with both groups, ethical issues were addressed such as assurances about confidentiality, anonymity, security and retention of data and the right of the participants to withdraw from the study (see Appendices C and D). All participants were also given a debrief sheet to take away after

the session, thanking them for participating in the study and providing details of confidential support services for young people (see Appendix E).

In addition, written and verbal consent was sought for the audio-recording of the feedback session for the youth workers and support workers who had facilitated the focus groups and interviews with the young people.

It has been argued that public services at an organisational level have a degree of obligation to allow social research to be conducted on their policy and practices (Dixon-Woods and Bosk, 2011). As organisations such as local authorities are established to serve the public and are funded by public money, there is a view that it is in the public's interest to understand their functioning and effects. The impact of such research on the participants must also be considered, and it was recognised in this research study that the support workers' ('facilitators') opinions and responses should not be used to represent the organisation for which they work. However, it is acknowledged in this report that the feedback provided by the support workers, including their reflections on the research process, are of considerable value to the research partners and, ultimately, will benefit young people in the city.

Extracts from the support workers' feedback focus group have been anonymised in this report, however there is a possibility, outlined previously, that the participants could be indirectly identified from their professional role. We therefore asked participants to provide the most appropriate way of referring to their role in the report and it was decided to refer generically to support workers.

### *Focus Groups*

The use of focus groups was considered appropriate because the attitudes and beliefs of young people about healthy and abusive relationships are best explored in their peer groups. Focus groups can also help to break down the inherent power relations between researchers and participants, thus giving the young people a voice in the study (McCarry, 2005). As outlined in the literature review, young people often develop their attitudes in a peer group so focus groups were considered an appropriate method for this study. The intention was to hold eight focus groups with young people in different age groups (8-11 years; 12-14 years; 15-18 years and 19 plus) with an equal gender split (see Appendix F). This was considered especially important for the 15-18 year group because of potential problems arising when discussing appropriate relationships in mixed sex

groups. However, in practice, due to the availability of the participants over the short period in which the interviews were conducted, there were some mixed sex and age groups.

In addition, there were more interviews and focus groups conducted than planned in the original schedule (see Appendix G). It is often the case in research practice that a degree of flexibility is required depending on issues such as access to participants (Bryman, 2011; Bell 1993; Crowther-Dowey and Fussey, 2013) and this was our experience. Such changes can often be advantageous for the researcher and provide unanticipated yet nevertheless interesting and relevant data.

It was felt important for this study to include the 8-11 year-olds as most existing research has focused on the older age groups, so by including this younger age group, an opportunity for a new area of research emerged (Gadd et al, 2012; McCarry, 2005; Barter et al, 2009).

Focus groups were preferred, where viable, to individual interviews for the participants aged under 18 years because the interaction of the group is of interest to the study's aim of exploring a range of factors that may contribute to young people's beliefs about appropriate behaviour in relationships (McCarry, 2004).

Limitations of focus groups include that there may be participants who are more vocal than others and may attempt to dominate the discussion. Another problem may be that participants, especially younger ones, may simply lose interest and cease to engage in the discussion (Hale, Fox and Gadd, 2012). After liaising with the support workers it was suggested that flipcharts and cards could be used to maintain the interest of the younger participants (See Appendix A). This also made it easier for some of the younger participants to explain their answers to the researchers.

### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews with those aged 18 and above, and with some under-18s, were conducted in addition to the focus groups with the younger age groups. Interviews were considered appropriate for the over 18s as they are adults who may feel more comfortable in the 'one-to-one' setting and also because there was a wider age range in the over 18 years group of participants. As young adults these participants are also more likely to have greater life experience and thus could reflect in a more considered way on factors that influenced their formative views about healthy and abusive relationships. There were also some interviews with individual young people under 18 years,

or where the small numbers that turned up for some of the focus groups warranted 'one-to-one' interviews instead.

An advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are flexible and the interviewee is given the chance to expand on their answer (Bryman, 2011). The questions were designed in order that they were not leading (see Appendix A) and, in consultation with the support workers, were adapted to the age group. For example, the 8-11 year-old age group were asked 'what makes a relationship feel good?' while for all the age groups aged over 12 the question asked was, 'what makes a relationship feel healthy?' Thus the questions were phrased using words that would be likely to be understood by the respective age groups; for instance, the 8-11 age group may not have known what is meant by or what constitutes 'healthiness' in a relationship. As outlined above, semi-structured interviewing also enables the facilitators to probe further and uncover issues that might have not been included in the interview guide.

#### *Advantages and limitations of primary research*

Using focus groups and semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to gain rich, useful data, firstly, to identify the attitudes and beliefs about healthy and inappropriate relationships held by young people aged from 8-18 and 19 and above, and secondly, to identify factors that influence their beliefs and what the participants think could be done to change attitudes to abusive relationships.

However, a possible limitation of the study was that all the participants are drawn from a specific population, and live on an economically disadvantaged estate in a city in the East Midlands. Therefore the findings are not readily generalisable, not least in relation to the city. However, the structural elements of a friendship or peer group remain the same in most residential settings. The young people in this study were exposed to the same potentially influential factors that affect their attitudes and beliefs about relationships, as those identified in the literature review, such as the media, music, TV and Internet content, all of which were mentioned by the young people in the study as influences on ideas about relationships.

Another limitation of primary research, especially in the context of qualitative research, is that because it is so 'open', it is harder to replicate (David et al, 2004). Our study used a relatively small sample, as it was commissioned by research partners to focus on young people in a small residential area, who were accessed through youth, play and community centres in a three-week period over

the summer. This might in itself be a constraint, which may mean that the findings are necessarily limited and cannot be generalised to the rest of the population. However it must be acknowledged that qualitative research, more often than quantitative, statistically based analysis, is often based on small population samples in order to obtain rich, in-depth data (Bell, 1993).

### *Thematic Analysis*

It was decided, given the qualitative nature of this study, to use the method of thematic analysis to identify key themes and issues arising from the transcripts of the interview and focus group recordings and observations. The researchers identified these themes independently and these are explored in the subsequent two sections of the report. This method of analysis aims to enhance the internal reliability and credibility of the research findings.

Thematic analysis has been described as ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998)’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 6).

In summary, the use of both primary and secondary data collection provided sufficient information in order for the research team to identify and analyse significant findings in relation to the research aims and these are outlined and discussed in the following sections of the report.

#### **4. Research Findings**

This section sets out the key findings from the 'one-to-one' and focus group interviews with the young people including selected anonymised quotations. The findings are summarised and considered in relation to local community interventions in Section Five of the report.

##### Interview Questions for the Firebreak Project

*What do you understand by a 'relationship'? (Who do you have relationships with?)*

This relatively open-ended question invited the research participants to talk freely about their own perceptions of what a relationship looks like. It is an important question, especially when exploring the issue of healthy relationships amongst young people. On the surface it appears to be a simple question but people are potentially involved in several over-lapping relationships at different social levels, ranging from the individual to wider communities. It was anticipated that the young respondents might refer to intimate partner and familial relationships as well as non-intimate/non-familial relationships formed at school and/or in the workplace as well as those connecting people during their leisure time. This distinction between intimate and wider relationships is important as domestic abuse, by definition, more usually occurs in the former context.

The family unit has been described as a *haven in a heartless world* (Lash, 1977) yet it is where some of the most damaging violence and abuse occurs. This paradox is important and in asking this question the aim is to identify the perceptions young people have about such relationships in their own right and in relation to non-intimate and familial relationships. It should be noted that data provided by Nottingham City Council shows that there is a relatively high proportion of single parent families in this deprived estate in an East Midlands city, in particular mother-headed households. Also, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that due to high levels of social deprivation and exclusion a significant number of people are dependent on welfare, which has some influence on the dynamics of family and intimate relationships on the estate (Barter et al, 2009; Barter, 2011; Finney, 2006).

Care was taken to avoid steering the research participants in a particular direction, though some of the younger participants, especially children under 11 years, did need prompting to volunteer a view about what a relationship looks like, indicating that this apparently simple question has no clear-cut



answers. In particular, the questions are intended to explore the extent to which inter-generational factors or age has an influence on perceptions about relationships. Although this research is relatively small scale a key objective is to increase awareness of the differences between distinctive cohorts amongst children and young people: young children (8-11); older children (12-14); young teenagers (15-18) ; older teenagers and adults (19+).

### *Key Findings - relationships*

The research participants defined relationships in terms of family relationships, friendships and other intimates (including sexually intimate relationships). Younger children were more likely to define relationships within the context of friends and family, whereas, older children (teenagers and adults) were more likely to perceive this in terms of more 'sexually intimate' relationships. In general, relationships were defined as existing between two people (dyadic).

Younger children found this fairly open-ended question difficult. Quite a lot of prompting was needed from the interviewer to help them to understand the question. In order to help the children understand what was meant by the term 'relationship' examples were given, such as friendships within different contexts, for example, at school. However, clarification was also sought from some of the older males who, in some instances thought this was a question about sexual orientation. Older participants were more likely to conceive of relationships in terms of 'sexually intimate' relationships and some thought that the question was trying to ascertain their sexual orientation.

However, within the context of a focus group consisting of four males and one female ranging from ages eight to nine years, the following was suggested in response to this question:

'A relationship is when two people love each other and they make babies' (male aged 9).

'You have a good relationship when you play with each other' (female aged 8).

Males were more likely to interpret the question about relationships in terms of 'intimate' relationships between males and females. They were less able to conceive of 'relationships' in the broader sense. For example, an older male in the 19+ group responded as follows:

'Nobody really, cos I live on my own you see and that...'

He was asked if he had children to which he replied 'yes' but he did not immediately think about this within the context of a relationship. In contrast, females were more able to conceive of 'relationships' in a broader context:

'Between family members, you and a boyfriend, you can have a relationship with your mum, your boyfriend, your dad, your brother. It's not just a relationship between like you and your boyfriend, it's between your family members, friends and stuff like that...' (female, aged 18).

In general, many participants defined a relationship with reference to what they thought a relationship *should* or *should not* be like. A relationship was therefore defined in terms of 'love', 'trust', 'companionship', being/working together'. Younger participants referred to the importance of 'playing together', whereas teenagers referred to relationships within the context of their peers, for example:

'Erm...it's like a friendly relationship...where you have a friend and you can tell them a secret and say if they say they can like keep it to their self and then they go and tell everyone in school, then that's not a good relationship...' (13 year-old male).

However, females were more likely to draw attention to the issue of 'equality'. This was not mentioned by any of the males in the study. One ten year-old girl replied that a relationship:

'...can't be violent; gonna have to trust the person and erm, other people have to agree that the person is nice.'

An older female said a relationship is about:

'being equal, between the pair of you, heterosexual, bisexual, whatever, just being equal'.

And, a ten year-old girl said a relationship is:

'A good one, no arguing, no fighting, fair, a chance to speak.'

In summary, there was a general consensus about what constitutes a relationship, which centred on issues of 'trust', 'communication', 'respect' and 'love'. A myriad of relationships were identified as existing between family and non-family members but younger people were more likely to conceive of this in terms of family and friends, whereas, older teenagers and young adults were more likely to

think about this within the context of 'intimate sexual' relationships. These findings concur with the research findings reported by Lombard (2012) whose qualitative research explored young people's temporal, spatial and gendered accounts of gendered violence. Males were less able to conceive of relationships in a broader sense and revealed a much narrower perspective, thinking more along the lines of girlfriend/boyfriend, but females were much more aware of the complex web of relationships in which our lives are entwined. Some females also defined relationships in terms of the issue of 'equality', however this was not mentioned by any of the males in the study. It is also important to recognise the potential impact of the work conducted in a number of schools within the locality by Equation, as part of the 'whole school' approach on teaching about domestic abuse, may have had on the responses by young people.

*What makes a relationship feel healthy/good? (Feeling safe, trust, love, humour, caring)*

*What makes a relationship feel unhealthy/bad?*

Society has clear views about healthy relationships, emphasising trust, love, care, humour, safety, as well as unhealthy relationships, which are physically and verbally violent, abusive and controlling (Wills, 2013). The views children and young people hold about these issues are not as well known. Knowledge about violence in intimate teenage relationships is certainly burgeoning and it has recently been recognised as a problem by researchers and those in government (Barter et al, 2009; Barter, 2011; Starmer, 2011). A focus on healthy relationships and strategies to prevent domestic violence in the future has also been on the agenda of policy makers and is an element of many educational programmes and interventions (Bell and Stanley, 2006; Davis et al, 2006).

Much less is known about young people's views about *abusive* rather than violent relationships between intimates. For instance, it is necessary to take into account recent changes to definitions and legislation relating to domestic abuse and the consequences of this for individuals in this deprived estate in an East Midlands city. Criminological researchers know even less about how young people perceive relationships in general, especially how these change over time between the age of 8 years and early adulthood. Consequently the questions in this study were designed to see whether, and to what extent, age and gender has any bearing on how young people describe healthy and unhealthy relationships.

The participants in this study expressed a diversity of views about what makes a relationship feel good or bad (healthy or unhealthy). For younger participants (8-11 years) the wording of the questions was adapted and interviewers asked about 'good or bad' relationships, whereas older participants (12+) were asked about 'healthy and unhealthy' relationships.

### *Good/Healthy Relationships*

In general, young people responded well to this question and were very good at differentiating between relationships that were good and bad (healthy and unhealthy). Healthy relationships were characterised by 'trust', 'communication', 'loyalty', 'love' and 'respect' but the most common factor referred to was *trust*. While both males and females referred to 'trust' as an important characteristic of a good/healthy relationship, male respondents frequently mentioned the importance of trust and the absence of 'lies' and 'deceit'. There was a broad consensus amongst young people of all ages but there were also some subtle gender and age differences.

Males generally spoke about factors such as trust and good communication but one male (aged 18) said he 'didn't have a clue' about what makes a healthy relationship. The issue of deception was mentioned by males while the importance of 'not lying' was seen as key to good relationships. Within one of the male focus groups (aged 15-16 years) one young male suggested that:

'Some arguments can make a relationship healthy'.

When asked to explain further he suggested that if two people are too similar, the relationship will not work and can stagnate. However, none of the females in the study perceived arguments as positive within a relationship and by contrast, they were more likely to draw attention to the negative impact that arguments can have on a relationship. Factors such as arguments, aggression and violence ('domestics') in relationships were not perceived as positive by females.

### *Gender stereotypes*

Younger participants revealed awareness from a young age about the role of domestic chores (housework) as a cause of arguments and conflict within the home. In an interview with two girls and a boy (aged eight, nine and ten) one of the girls identifies 'washing the pots' as helping to define a good relationship. She also refers to 'not washing the pots' as characterising a bad relationship. Another girl (aged 10), when responding to a later question about whether boys or girls behave

better or worse, said that the issue of boys not cleaning up after themselves causes arguments. This reveals implicit recognition of the gendered nature of domestic abuse and issue of power and control within the domestic sphere (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Anderson, 1997).

One of the older males (aged 19+) referred to the need to 'help out' around the house and how this is important to achieve a healthy relationship. He showed an awareness of gender role stereotypes ('women's work') but, importantly, how these are changing:

'Some blokes think oh, like it's a woman's job and things like that, but if you help out, you get on better'.

There seems to be an explicit and implicit awareness of gender role stereotypes and reflecting upon many of the issues raised by females within the interviews who raised issues such as 'equality' and 'being able to have your say' suggests that inequality within the domestic sphere is a bone of contention with many males still believing that this is 'women's work'. If, as seems to be the case in this study, women bear the brunt of childcare while engaging in paid work as the main breadwinners, this finding is not surprising.

However one male defined an unhealthy relationship in the following terms:

'Nagging, moaning and not trustworthy'.

Although this is not explored fully within the interview, the implication of what is said here is that when females make demands on males in relationships they are viewed as moaning and nagging. A number of females in this study referred to the need to feel 'safe', 'stable' and that a good relationship is characterised by a lack of 'arguments and domestics'. This was not mentioned by any of the male respondents.

In defining what makes a relationship good or healthy, quite a few males and females emphasised an absence of negative factors rather than the presence of positive factors, for example, 'no lies' (in the case of males) and 'no arguments or fighting' in the case of females. More males were concerned with 'lies' and some referred to women not being 'trustworthy'. This is something that could be explored further.

Younger children referred to good relationships within the context of being 'played with' (by friends and family), this was important within the context of their lived experience and is also a result of the fact that they were less likely to be thinking about a relationship within an intimate/sexual context. In a mixed focus group (two girls and one boy: aged 8, 9 and 10) the young boy identified a good relationship as 'when you don't trash the bedroom' clearly identifying the reprimand that results from doing so and perceiving this negatively. However, what is not clear is whether 'washing the pots', which was seen by one girl as conducive to a good relationship, is something the child should do or whether this is something she has observed which has resulted in conflict between adults/parents. Nevertheless, young children clearly identified domestic chores as a source of conflict within the home and older males referred to the need 'to help' with such jobs. This finding is not surprising given the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and although some of the comments by females suggest that gendered stereotypes are changing for the better in terms of becoming more equal, responses indicate that domestic chores are still perceived as women's work (McVeigh, 2012).

#### *Bad/Unhealthy Relationships*

Males and females identified a range of factors that can impact upon a relationship to make them feel unhealthy, including a lack of trust and a lack of communication. However, once again there were subtle differences in emphasis between the responses from males and females. The work of Krug et al, (2002) which refers to WHO data shows that some universal triggers of domestic violence and abuse include:

- The woman disobeying her husband
- Women arguing back
- Not having food on the table at the right time
- Not caring for children and the home properly
- Going out without asking for the husband's permission
- Refusing sex
- Pregnancy.

What is interesting is that the young participants in our research point to other key relationship issues, especially trust. Females were much clearer about the role that violence and aggression play

in making a relationship feel unhealthy. Violence, abuse, neglect, fighting and arguments were commonly cited by females as contributing to bad relationships while two females referred specifically to the problem of domestic abuse. One of the older females (aged 47) referred to the problem of alcohol, which she said encourages her partner to become argumentative. This was also raised by younger people in the sample who talked about parents arguing, particularly under the influence of alcohol. However, research that explores the relationship between alcohol and men's violence towards women is rather limited in the UK and a study in 2006 revealed that women tend not to blame alcohol for men's violence but rather tend to hold the men responsible (Galvani, 2006). However, clearly alcohol is perceived here as a trigger for men's poor behaviour by both older and younger women alike.

The importance of respect was also raised by another female participant (19+) who identified not being respected in a relationship as problematic. Sexual abuse was raised within the context of 'unwanted touching' by a 10 year-old girl and another ten year-old girl mentioned that bad relationships are characterised by 'power...like where one person wants to be in charge'. These responses clearly articulate the issues of men's dominance, power and control in the perpetration of violence against women.

In contrast, males primarily identified 'lying and cheating' while 'financial issues' were raised a number of times. It is unclear exactly how financial issues impact upon a relationship to make it feel bad (from the perspective of the males who raise this) although there is clearly research evidence that highlights the negative impact that poverty and deprivation can have upon relationships (Finney, 2006). This could have been explored further but the interviewers did not probe on this point. Is it the case that males highlighting financial issues are unemployed (this is likely given the socially deprived nature of the area under study) and/or could it be that some of the women in the study are more economically stable and in control of finances? There is certainly evidence in the socio-economic data for this area that some of the women go to work while the men are at home.

One of the younger males (aged 10) mentioned 'bullying' within the context of school and an 11 year-old boy referred to 'hurting' someone or any kind of abuse as evidence of bad relationships. However, it is interesting to note that *none* of the female participants referred to financial issues but some did explicitly refer to domestic abuse, power, control and aggression.

*Have you ever seen a bad relationship? If so, what did you do? How did you feel? Did you tell anyone?*

Building on the descriptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships provided by young people this question considers how their perceptions might be shaped by their own experience of seeing bad relationships and to identify the extent to which these might occur in intimate or non-intimate relationships. Police data shows that rates of domestic abuse and violence in the area where the research was conducted are amongst the highest in the city, especially amongst adults and there is evidence to show that this is also increasingly becoming a problem amongst young people. Research has confirmed for several decades that children are often aware of intimate violence occurring in families and there is a relatively high risk of them being physically exposed to abusive and violent behaviour both in the home and potentially other settings in the community (Dutton, 1999; Ehrensaft, 2008). However, we know less about the lived reality of witnessing bad relationships.

This sensitive topic raises issues about disclosure and the psychological and emotional harm arising from seeing bad relationships, but it is important that we learn more about it. Nevertheless, research based upon the British Crime Survey (Walby and Allen, 2004), estimated that at least 750,000 children in England and Wales were living with domestic abuse (Department of Health, 2002). There are particular gaps in knowledge concerning the different types of behaviour seen by different age groups and genders. By asking this question it is possible to find out how young people react to such experiences in terms of their emotional and cognitive responses and any actions they take or decide not to take when encountering abuse and violence.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, some of the research participants, especially the children, were reluctant to provide detailed information about their own experiences and there was at least one disclosure that was followed up by the support workers. In other cases, where bad relationships were discussed, it was reassuring to the support workers to know that the relevant departments were already aware of these cases and necessary safeguarding procedures were already in place.



In general, younger people did not talk openly about their experience(s) of bad relationships both because of worry about repercussions and because it was emotionally difficult to do so. Older participants talked more openly and freely, perhaps because they were no longer in the situation, and had more time to reflect on abusive situations. In accordance with good research ethics practice, the young people were made aware of the necessary limits to confidentiality and anonymity (necessary safeguarding, due care and protection). Whether the focus groups inhibited or encouraged young people to speak freely is difficult to discern but feedback from the support workers who conducted the interviews suggested that they worked well. Interestingly, they reported that boys opened up more than girls within the focus groups. Boys tended to dominate in the mixed focus groups but in the gender-specific focus groups, girls were more talkative than age-equivalent boys. Research into mixed sex focus groups reveals that women are more likely to be reticent in mixed sex groups than all female groups and men are more likely to dominate in such settings (Stewart, 2007).

One of the older female participants interviewed talked about her personal experiences of domestic abuse and how it made her feel 'horrible, worthless and useless'. She clearly had experience of a number of abusive partners and she revealed that even though she felt that she had not done anything wrong, she somehow felt responsible. This finding 'fits' with the research by Refuge (2008), which highlighted that 61 per cent of the young women who had experienced violence did not tell anyone, partly because they felt that they had provoked this behaviour. This participant managed to get out of a recent abusive relationship when she finally admitted it to herself as for a long time she had been in denial. The issue of women blaming themselves is well documented in the literature and is commonly referred to as 'victim-blaming'.

Importantly, this participant had not told anyone about the abuse. This fits with one of the key findings of this research, which is that people do not talk about domestic abuse nor do they feel that they should talk about it. There was a general view amongst the research participants that what happens between two people is a 'private matter' and 'not anybody else's business'. There is a tendency to believe that it is better to keep it to oneself or between the two people themselves. When asked about what they did or whether they did anything as a response to having witnessed a 'bad' relationship, common responses were as follows:

'Not really, cos you can't do anything'; 'No, just kept it in, kept it to myself'.

‘Well you feel bad but it’s not your place to say anything...it’s their relationship...if they wanna carry on then it’s up to them’ (19 year-old male).

‘I talked to my friend about it and told her that it’s not good that she’s in a relationship like that but not really much else cos I don’t think she really wants to listen anyway’ (27 year-old female).

The findings suggest that there is a tendency to conceive of domestic abuse as a private matter rather than a public (community) problem, which clearly has ramifications for both reporting and interventions. The more people within the locality can be encouraged to think of such behaviour as a community rather than ‘individual’ problem, the more likely that any intervention will be successful. This tendency to ‘individualise’ the problem is central to the normalisation thesis, which suggests that this leads to acceptance of rather than resistance to domestic abuse. In this instance, violence is viewed as legitimate rather than excessive (Lombard, 2012).

An eighteen year-old female talked about how she had witnessed domestic abuse between her parents while growing up and the impact this had upon her life. She then proceeded to talk about her own subsequent personal experiences of bad relationships: ‘My mum and dad only found out about it ‘cos I had like marks on my face and stuff but I think if I didn’t have the marks on my face I wouldn’t have said owt...’.

A younger, female participant (aged 10) talked about witnessing a ‘bad’ relationship between her mother and her mother’s boyfriend but when asked after the interview whether she wanted to discuss this further she declined. This was sensitive research and it was recognised that it was difficult for young people to talk about such experiences. The interviewers were aware of the need to protect respondents from any potential harm and avoided probing where this could have a negative impact or risk upsetting participants.

Although young people in the study who had witnessed any kind of abusive relationship found it difficult to talk about, they were very good at articulating their feelings. Common feelings identified in the research were: ‘fear’, ‘anxiety’, ‘worry’ and ‘sadness’. Seeing bad relationships was clearly an upsetting experience for young people and some talked about being ‘caught in the middle’ particularly when this was closer to home. Indeed Worrall et al (2008) in their research highlight a

wealth of evidence that suggests that children and young people do want to talk about their experiences and the impact that witnessing domestic abuse has upon their lives.

Other participants had witnessed 'bad' relationships in public places (on the street) and talked about this being upsetting. One young boy talked about seeing a couple arguing in the street and how this made him feel:

'I felt totally confused 'cos one minute they were walking really nice together and talking really nice and then they was fighting' (9 year-old boy).

He talked about the police coming to the scene and how scared he was:

'I was worried 'cos I was scared the girl was going to actually die'.

A nine year-old boy who witnessed violence towards his mother also talked about his brother's violent behaviour:

'When my brother was playing with his mate, I brought my dog out for a walk and then my brother started kicking the dog and then my brother's mate gave him a knife and he stabbed my dog'.

Young males and young females in the sample had witnessed or experienced violence in their lives and the research was sensitive with regard to asking about their feelings and the negative impact the abuse has had upon them. The following quote highlights the impact such violence had upon the nine year-old boy, above, when asked how he felt about seeing such bad relationships:

'I feel that the person who's done it, I want to go mad and go on a rampage, feel sad.'

Within the focus group context, discussing such sensitive issues as arguments and violence was difficult. One young girl who took part in a focus group of females (aged 13 to 19) also revealed that she had witnessed violence but she did not want to discuss this further 'because of who it was'. She had not told anyone.

One of the older males in the study (19+) talked about his friends (a male and female) and their continued arguing. However, in contrast to responses from younger participants, he did not perceive this in a traumatic or upsetting way. The findings show that younger people are upset by such events but older participants appear far more casual and potentially 'desensitised'. Such conflict has to a certain extent become normalised (Home Office, 2012a). The concept of normalisation helps to

explain the acceptance of such violence and the framing of this as part of everyday life. Young people come to accept this as normal and perceive this as an 'individual' problem rather than the result of wider structures of male dominance (Kelly, 1988; Stark, 2007, cited in Lombard, 2012). The following quote is very illuminating, particularly when we reflect back upon earlier observations regarding the home, domesticity, gender roles and conflict resulting from such tensions:

'...I've got a few friends and they're always like fighting with their missus, arguing. It's like you go round there to their place and that, sometimes it's their place and that, well sometimes it's the missus' place and you go round and there's loads of people round all the time and she comes back from work and then starts swearing saying "ah, you ain't done this, you ain't done that" and then they're like arguing in front of ya [laughter from group] so you just get up and go'.

Some of the older females were able to talk about their own personal experience(s) of 'bad' relationships:

'I'll admit, I have left very abusive partners. It has got to the point where I've been punched, kicked, had things thrown at me' (older female 19+).

Younger females in the study admitted to having seen 'bad' relationships, often between their mother and father (or mother's boyfriend) but they did not feel able to talk about it. Those females who were in their teenage years seemed far more resigned to such bad relationships:

'Yes. You can't tell them, it's their choice. You try to help, but it is their choice' (15 year-old girl).

#### *Negative effects of witnessing bad/unhealthy relationships*

In general, young people did not feel able to talk about their experiences of bad relationships. In part, it was emotionally difficult for them to do so but there was also the issue of disclosure and a need to protect family. However, as mentioned above, young people were good at articulating their feelings as this quote from an eleven year-old boy highlights:

'Made me feel weird, bad and not normal. Felt sad'.

An older male who talked about witnessing a couple of friends going through difficult times said:

'I try not to get involved too much. Hard to watch them go through it, apart from give advice'.

In terms of the negative impact, the themes to emerge from the data were that such experience of 'bad' relationships when growing up could lead either to becoming like that yourself (male responses) or ending up in a bad relationship yourself (female responses). Indeed, there is evidence from the study of the 'cycle of abuse' theory and the transference of such behaviour from one generation to the next. Participants in this study, drew attention to the influence of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) which is well documented within the literature. For example, young mothers talked about helping their daughters out of 'abusive' relationships and also about the impact that their own violent relationships had upon their children:

'You see I've made that mistake with my children, they've seen a lot...my domestic relationship, it affected them quite a lot and now I've got another fella...my daughter remembers a lot...the shouting...dad threatening mummy or this and that from like when she was 2 years old. I mean that's what I brought it down to for what she's going through in her life... when children see this kind of thing it messes them up...it messes me up. I see this kind of thing with my mum and my dad and it messed me up'.

Females talked about not wanting to end up in that kind of relationship:

'I just wouldn't want to get in one' (15 year-old female).

While males are very aware of the danger that they could end up emulating this behaviour and becoming perpetrators:

'It didn't make me feel too good 'cos you could come out like that' (15 year-old male).

Participants in the study recognised the real danger that such exposure (as either victims or witnesses) could have upon their lives and the inter-generational nature of this within their community.

*Who behaves 'better and worse' in relationships?*

Research on domestic violence demonstrates that compared to women and girls men and boys are more likely to be the perpetrators (Barter, 2011; Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey, 2008). However, if young people are asked a more open question about who behaves better and worse this gives them leeway to talk openly about relationships in general. Because we lack a clear sense of young people's working definitions of a relationship and their evaluations of what makes them healthy and unhealthy, their responses to this question allow some insight into the extent to which abusive behaviours are a key aspect of their day-to-day lives. For example, it might be that the bad behaviour is related to non-intimate and non-familial relationships and that it has no direct connection with domestic violence/abuse. Only by phrasing this question in more generalised terms can we find out more about young people's understanding of what it means to be in a relationship.

There was clearly an awareness of gender stereotyping in terms of masculinity and femininity but there was no consensus as to whether males or females behave better or worse in relationships. The following is an extract from a female focus group, which provides a flavour of what was said:

“The men’, ‘the boys’. ‘That’s not true’. ‘You can’t say that though’. ‘It could be the girls as well ‘cos I’m more violent than my boyfriend...I’m more aggressive’. ‘It’s not always men, that’s just stereotyping’ (Female focus group aged 12 to 15).

Male and female respondents were aware that society thinks men behave worse in relationships but they acknowledged that women could be violent and aggressive as well. Younger respondents recognised that boys are ‘physically stronger’ and ‘bigger’ while they were also aware of the societal view that it is wrong for boys to hit girls.

However, in general, although responses were mixed about whether males or females are ‘better’ or ‘worse’ by far the most common view was that males and females could both be aggressive and that although society thinks males are worse this is not necessarily the case. In a male focus group (aged 15-16 years) the following responses were elicited:

‘Could be either at times’. ‘Most people say it’s only like boys but sometimes it’s like girls who are aggressive in the relationship’.

However, one male (aged 18) said that boys were worse because they 'get irate'. One of the older males (aged 30) said that it depends:

'Don't think you can say really, depends upon the situation, the reason, can both be as bad as each other'.

One of the older male participants (aged 46) explained this ambiguity in the following terms:

'In general it is considered that the man is worse in a relationship but in my experience and through education, that's not so, it's more evenly balanced than it's perceived in society'.

One of the older females in the study (19+) said:

'It can be either, some women are nasty and men are just as bad'.

A 27 year-old female similarly stated:

'Both as bad in a sense 'cos you can't blame one...obviously if you look at a certain relationship you can say well "he's worse than her" but you can't say all females or all males are worse.'

In general, there was agreement that males and females can both be abusive. However, some female respondents (particularly the older women in the 19+ group) were more likely to identify men as worse:

'I'd say men, but not always the case. I know women who can be abusive. It's all about how people are brought up'.

And another female in the older age group stated:

'Bit of both. Most people think men. I say the man but if I think about it in depth, I have heard it on TV that women can cause problems in relationships'.

'Males...'cos they've got more of a temper, instead of talking it's more shouting and they're more scary I think'.

In summary, both genders generally expressed the opinion that both males and females could behave badly and that it not possible to say who was worse. However, older females were more likely to point to males being more problematic and drew attention to their 'aggression', 'ability to shout' and the fact that they were 'physically stronger'. These findings lend support to the concept of normalisation and the tendency not to see men's violence against women as 'gendered' or part of the imbalance of power relationships between men and women but rather to perceive the problem as 'individualised' (individual incidents) rather than a general problem of female victimisation.

*Which age groups do you think behave 'best' (and 'worst') in relationships?*

New government definitions of domestic abuse (March, 2013) identify its effects on young people (16-17 year-olds) whereas it is often considered to affect only the adult population. The impact of this change of perception by policy makers on the day-to-day experiences of children and young people is as yet unknown. To further explore this issue one goal of our study was to determine whether age and gender shape how young people perceive the behaviour of different age groups.

Responses to this question were mixed. However, in general teenagers were thought to be the worst behaved in their relationships. The general consensus was that adults tended to be better behaved. Some young people felt that grandparents were the best at relationships, which was a result of their maturity. However, unsurprisingly, some young people drew attention to the idea that adults can also be bad at relationships. As the following quote from an eighteen year-old female highlights:

'At mum and dad's age you still get people that like cheat...don't think there really is an age...depends upon the person...like if their mum and dad are violent when they get in a relationship they might be violent 'cos that's how they've been brought up and that's how they've seen it. I wouldn't say there's a certain age'.

Another female in the 19+ group said:

'Older people in their 80s and 90s have been in abusive relationships for life. Married for 60 years and still abusive. They put up with it because that is all they know.'

These quotations highlight awareness that one of the most important factors in determining behaviour is the influence of family and how you are 'brought up'. There is also an implicit



recognition that some people never grow out of abusive behaviour and this is perhaps testimony to the kind of abusive relationships that some people have been exposed to throughout their lives. What is striking about the responses of both older male and female participants in the study is their recognition that such unhealthy relationships are a part of their lived experience and the culture within which they have grown up.

However, there is a range of factors which young people identify as being responsible for bad relationships. In some instances, being a young teenager, susceptible to hormonal changes, is felt to contribute to bad relationships. As this thirteen year-old states:

‘...’cos like you’re just starting to be a teenager and you’re starting to turn as a teenager and you get really excited and people think they can push you around ‘cos they’re bigger than you and they think they can tell you to shut up and swear at you and you just go and tell your teachers and you don’t want to go to school any more’.

As one ten year-old girl identified, ‘teenagers are the worst’ because they go through a ‘mardy phase’. Indeed, one of the males in the older age group talked about being better able to ‘handle relationships’ as you get older:

‘When I was younger I weren’t too good myself, you know what I mean...I’ve calmed down a bit now so I suppose my views on relationships and how to handle them, ‘cos I’m older it’s a bit easier, you know when you grow up a little bit, people are always changing aren’t they? You never stay the same throughout your life...’[prompt] ‘I don’t think anything’s influenced me, it’s like being in certain situations when you are younger, you don’t know how to handle them and you get a bit mardy’.

However, one of the older males also pointed out that adults could be ‘just as bad’. In this instance, the participant pointed to those adults who have problems such as substance misuse who behave badly in relationships while he also recognised that teenagers can be problematic.

One of the older females in the study suggested that age is not an important factor:

‘It isn’t down to age. Personal and home experience...if you see your parents fighting, arguing, you automatically think it’s normal.’

In summary, there is no consensus about age but what emerges from the data is the idea that as young people get older, they mature and become less problematic, although not in all cases. Teenagers are susceptible to hormonal changes which can impact upon their mood and temperament and this can lead to them behaving badly. However, as some of the older participants highlight, not all older people do become more mature or grow out of this behaviour. Some of the participants highlight that it is not age that determines how people behave in relationships but rather their experience in life and how they have been brought up. This is an important finding from the study.

#### *What influences your views about relationships?*

This question was posed to participants aged 12 years and above. In our study anecdotal evidence implies that there is a 'hyper-masculine culture' on the largely working class estate that has been sustained over several decades (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). It is beyond the remit of this report to confirm whether such a culture has an influence on young people in this community, but it is a potentially influential factor that should be acknowledged. More importantly, caution should be exercised to avoid pathologising an estate and its residents without examining the influence of wider social and cultural processes.

The complex influences of peers, friends, classmates family, schooling and the wider society on how young people view relationships is undoubtedly important and there is growing concern about the influence of mass media. In the past television and films were identified as potentially problematic in terms of their negative influence on young people. In more recent times concerns about social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have come to the fore and there are renewed anxieties about their effects on children. Images of girls being abused, often in a sexualised way, are a major concern. Gang culture and phenomena such as 'gangsta rap', even when young people do not actually belong to gangs, are also seen to give negative impressions to young people, especially through the promotion of misogynistic attitudes and behaviour (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013; Berelowitz et al, 2012; 2013). Such research has also highlighted the use of media to 'entrap' young and vulnerable girls in high profile cases of 'on-street' grooming. Of special interest in relation to influencing factors are differences along the lines of age and gender.

The focus groups and interviews from this study highlight disparate responses to this question which was found to be quite challenging for most participants in the study. Young people in particular, found it difficult to identify influences upon their behaviour explicitly. It is likely that they have never really thought about this before. While some young people identified social media (such as Facebook) or TV, others talked about the importance of how you are 'brought up'. The following is a quote from a 15 year-old male:

'I just think my parents, family, older people as well, they're meant to influence you on how you're meant to be'.

A female in a female focus group said:

'Facebook's weird though isn't it?...You get couples having arguments over it instead of doing it quietly to themselves'.

A fifteen year-old girl replied:

'Read and watch stuff that changes the way you look at things...but can't think'.

However, a twenty-seven year-old female who was clearly able to reflect more about life and influences said:

'Yeah, I suppose like when you're younger films do, they give you the picture that it's all perfect when it's not, you have to work at a relationship don't you I suppose'.

Stereotypical images portrayed on TV and through other media such as television create idealistic understandings of how life should be and this participant was aware of this. Another female in the 19+ category said that it was all about how you are brought up:

'If you see your parents being abusive, that is how you expect a relationship to be, you would know no different'.

To a certain extent, young people were not very reflective about wider influences. This is probably not surprising although some did mention the negative portrayal of females in social media. Influences upon attitudes and behaviour work at a subliminal level and it is therefore unsurprising that the majority of young people found this question difficult to answer. Some simply did not know. Younger people found it more difficult to answer than older people. However, older participants were rather more reflective.

One of the older females in the study talked about the dangers of the Internet and social networking:

‘I mean I put a block on my Internet so my kids can’t get on it ‘cos you hear about children and suicide...not just the children, I mean there’s things on there for men’.

The interviewer did not probe for more information but it seems a safe assumption to make that the participant was referring to ‘adult material’. This is an on-going concern for Government and there is growing research that highlights the dangers of the Internet for young people, particularly with regard to online pornography (Coy et al 2013; Object, 2009) and the need to educate young people in school about the dangers of pornography referred to earlier in the report.

A nineteen year-old male talked about the impact of social media and television having a minimal impact because ‘you know that it isn’t real’. He suggested that ‘life’ experience was more influential, such as learning from other peoples’ mistakes as well as your own. Females also highlighted this:

‘I get most of my information from life, like from what I’ve been through’ (Female, aged 18).

‘Different things I have heard, different things I have seen on TV, it all impacts on what you think’ (Female, 19+).

Others rejected the idea that they were influenced by social and other media and suggested that:

‘I’m not influenced by anything. I don’t follow celebrities. I make up my own mind’ (Female, 19+).

In general, the factors that young people identify as influencing their views are diverse. It was not a question that the young people in this research study found easy to answer and it was asked only of those aged 12 and above. It was recognised that influences stem from life experience, family and friends and that other things such as the media may also have an impact.

*Who do you have a good relationship with? (Ages 8-14 years). Are you happy with the relationships in your life? Or would you like to change your relationships (if so, how)? (14 years plus)*

After exploring the nature and range of influences on healthy and unhealthy relationships this question revisits the earlier one about young people’s perceptions, focusing this time on their positive experiences of relationships. To avoid making the assumption that all relationships are

unhealthy and a generally negative experience for children and young people this question encouraged them to deliberate on what a good relationship looks like and how this can lead to personal happiness. This is important because it is clear that the prevalence and extent of domestic abuse and violence is relatively high on the estate so young people are likely to be aware of its existence even if they do not experience it directly. The second part of the question then explores the relationship between different types of relationship and any desire to bring about change. For example, are children and young people resigned to the way things are in terms of their relationships or do they aspire for things to be different?

Young people (8–14 years) were asked whom they had a good relationship with but the question of whether they were happy with their relationships or whether they would like to change them was reserved for older respondents. The data for younger participants is therefore more limited.

Younger participants identified having good relationships with a range of people in their lives, such as ‘family’, ‘best friends’ and ‘girlfriends/boyfriends’. Male participants as young as 11 years referred to having good relationships with their girlfriends and others talked about having a good relationship with their ‘dads and brothers’. Female participants as young as 10 referred to good relationships with their sisters and grandmothers. The following responses identified by males and females relate to the older participants in the study.

#### *Male responses*

In general, males expressed satisfaction with the relationships in their life. Some of the older males in the study reflected upon relationships in the past as being ‘less good’ and one of them talked about regrets that he was not better educated. A 30 year-old male said the he was currently happy with his relationships:

‘Everything is good, good relationships with my family, my girlfriend, good all round really’.

Males in general talked about being happy with their relationships and this was in terms of partners, friends and family. This was the most common response ranging from eleven year-old boys to adult men.

One 19+ male talked about generally being happy with his relationships but he said:

'I don't really know, I'm happy at the moment and that but sometimes I get a bit low and that, like my son and that, 'cos he don't text me and I get a bit angry inside and that, 'cos he expects me to text him and that first'.

Another of the older males said:

'Yeah, I'm alright, I'm single and I can do what I want. I'm happy. I just came out of a four year relationship a while back. I'm happy just kicking back at the minute and being myself.'

When asked if he would like to change anything in his life, he said:

'Nah, not really, I wouldn't change nothing, it's made me who I am today. All the good things and the bad things, it makes you who you are now, don't it?'

Another older male talked about being very happy but when prompted about what he would change he said he would change himself and that he needs to 'pay more attention to my missus'.

In summary, males in general expressed a view of being happy with their relationships however, they were not so adept in the interviews at articulating relationships in their broadest sense.

### *Female responses*

In general, females talked about having good relationships with their mothers, their children and their friends. However, in contrast to males, females identified a range of problems in their current relationships. For example, a 47 year-old woman talked about having a good relationship with her husband and her sons but she said her daughter was more caring. She also talked about her husband's alcohol problem. Another of the older female respondents talked about being a single parent and having a strong bond with her daughter. She reflected that her relationship with her brother and sister has improved since her ex-partner has gone. A 27 year-old female said:

'I've got a good relationship with my family at the moment. I suppose with a partner, I haven't really got one at the moment, but you do have difficulties when you've got partners and they have different views on things...'

Responses from females about their 'good' relationships encouraged them to reflect on what they considered positive and negative about their current and past relationships. This raised lots of questions about the men in their lives; men with drink problems, men who saw things differently, men who are problematic in some way. Another older female talked about her friends being the

best relationships in her life. She has experienced relationship problems but has managed to 'sort these out' more recently:

'Five years ago I had loads of problems, but I've sorted out my life now. I have steered my daughter out of that way of life, abusive relationships. Helping my daughter sort her life out has been the best thing'.

One of the eighteen year-old females in a focus group talked about being unhappy when her parents argue. She discussed the fact that there are a lot of feuds in her family and the impact this has upon the whole family:

'Like if my family has an argument, if my dad and his brother had an argument, it's like we can't talk to his girlfriend or any of them kids 'cos then you will feel awkward. So I'd like to change it by like sitting them in a room and talking about it but I don't think that will ever happen. So you wouldn't be able to do that so you just have to put up with it'.

Once again, the responses draw attention to arguments resulting from their relationships with males and it is noticeable that females tend to seek support from each other. Females do not talk about a desire to change men and seem to accept that the way men behave is a 'way of life', which fits in with the concept of normalisation.

Younger females talked about having good relationships with their mothers mostly, and also their grandmothers and friends. When prompted, others mentioned siblings, fathers and youth workers. In summary, males in the study were far more content with their current relationships than females. One of the themes to emerge from this data is the support network that females provide to each other and the difficulties that arise in their lives, primarily to do with their relationships with men. However, what is also clear is that young people do not perceive this as a structural or cultural problem but rather as an individualised one.

#### *What can we all do to make a good relationship? (8 – 14 years)*

Younger children expressed a range of good ideas about how we could foster (improve) relationships. Sometimes they needed prompting but their ideas were insightful and indeed rather creative. They were very good at relating this question to their personal experiences. Some, for example, clearly had experienced some kind of intervention from professionals such as social

workers, while others drew upon broader educational experiences, for example those used to teach them in other areas such as PSHE and via the use of role-plays. An important theme to emerge from the responses of younger children is that, in general, they are optimistic and hopeful about change. For example, a ten year-old girl talked about involving social workers more in school activities:

‘Other people, like social workers, could be more at school and ask pupils what they’ve been through and if there’s been violence in the house or on the streets and what their life’s been like’.

In an interview with two girls and a boy (aged 8, 9 and 10) the children talked about being ‘careful what we’re doing’, ‘being kind to each other’ and ‘not getting into trouble’. Children as young as eight and nine years who took part in mixed focus groups shared ideas with the support workers. This particular young male had witnessed violence between his parents and talked about his brother’s violence. When asked about encouraging good relationships, he suggested:

‘Making them see a counsellor could help to make a better relationship’ and also ‘asking somebody if they want to play with you’.

One 13 year-old boy suggested that a good way to get the message across to people would be to:

‘Put it on a banner or like on a sign on the roads where like every time you go past in a car or walk you can see it...on a banner and, erm, on gates and on lamp posts and bus stops where people can go everyday’.

In one of the focus groups, three eleven year-old boys took part and one suggested that to make good relationships, we need to:

‘Show people what a good relationship is and tell people to stop hitting girls, show them what is right and wrong’.

Females within a focus group (aged 13 to 19) said the following:

‘Be honest’, ‘keep your business to yourself’, ‘trust people’, ‘if someone tells you something, listen to them and don’t tell everyone if they don’t want you to’.

What is clear from these responses is that younger people are optimistic about change and, importantly, they are also aware of a need for change. It is unclear the extent of the impact of the work on relationships in local schools as part of the ‘whole school’ approach by Equation. Indeed the optimism might be evidence that the educational input in schools is having a positive impact upon young people included in this study.



*What can we all do to try and stop bad relationships? (8 – 14 years)*

This question prompted similar responses to the previous question about improving relationships. When asked about what society can do to stop abusive relationships, the younger children shared interesting ideas. For example, a nine year-old boy suggested that we could ‘protest to the police’. When asked why, he replied ‘because they’re supposed to be stopping violence on the street’. Younger people in the research were both optimistic about change and also maintained a belief in the power of authority figures in society. The same young boy emphasised the importance of ‘talking to each other’ as a way to stop bad relationships:

‘The person who it is, talk to them and tell ‘em how you feel’.

However, as the following two sections indicate, older teenagers and young adults were less optimistic about the prospect of improving relationships or preventing bad relationships and this was particularly noticeable in the responses of females.

*What can we /society do to encourage good/healthy relationships? (14 years plus)*

Older children were asked about what society can do to encourage healthy relationships and one 15 year-old boy replied:

‘Not put programmes on like that show men beating up their girlfriends if you know what I mean like ‘cos kids will pick this up from a young age and like carry on and keep doing it’.

This young male explicitly recognises that such behaviour observed in life and through cultural mediums has the potential to reproduce itself in a ‘cycle of abuse’. Some young people (males in particular) said they did not really know what society could do to help with good relationships. One male (aged 30) responded: ‘Don’t know, maybe you can press pause while I think about it’.

In contrast, a fifteen year-old girl suggested that showing videos that document relationships ‘gone bad’ might be a good idea. However, older teenagers were less optimistic about change:

‘Sometimes there’s nothing you can do really, if anything, it’s best not to get involved ‘cos it’s their business not yours’ (15 year-old female).

An older male (aged 19) said:

'There's nothing you can do, it's always gonna happen no matter what, it always has happened...when a relationship starts to go bad you just get out of it rather than staying in an unhealthy relationship...rather than waiting and hoping that it blows over'.

A 17 year-old male in a one-to-one interview replied:

'Can't do anything if it is a bad relationship'.

And females in a focus group suggested that it would be:

'Better to keep it between themselves and not let everyone know' (13- 19 years).

A 27 year-old female said:

'Just listen and be there for each other, understand each other, rather than thinking negative all the time. Like if you are thinking about domestic violence and like say it's a gentleman and he's beating his wife up or whatever, he's obviously not listening to her and he's not respecting her or loving her is he? He's not doing what he should be doing in that relationship'.

In one interview a ten year-old girl who had direct experience of violence within the home stated:

'Erm...tell people they have to be a certain age before they can have a boyfriend. They have to trust them and know about them like their recent relationships'.

This highlights a maturity of thought and knowledge for a child as young as ten and reveals the way in which children so young are forced to grow up at a very early age under such difficult circumstances. It also perhaps indicates the impact of intervention within the family and/or school.

This is particularly striking when you compare her response to that of an older male (19+) who said quite simply:

'I don't know you know, I don't know, can't answer that one, can't think'.

*What can we /society do to try and stop bad behaviour in relationships? (14 years plus)*

A 15 year-old male replied:

'It's not what we can do, it's what the people in the relationship can do. Trust each other, they need time out now and then, yeah and don't spend as much time together, that's when arguments begin'.

This male believes that those who fight and argue in relationships are responsible for their own actions and that it is up to them to take positive steps to prevent this from happening. He thinks that sometimes people spend too much time together and he also refers to the importance of trust.

However, it seems that older participants are more negative about the possibility of change. They seem to be more resigned to the existence of bad relationships and they seem to have become 'normalised' in that a sense of resignation sets in. This is particularly striking with responses from females:

'Don't know, got me stumped, can't help' (older female 19+).

'That's a hard one, I don't know. I don't think society can help, it's like all inwards like in people. Obviously there's gonna be support groups, like for abuse and for women who have been abused and things like that, but nothing's gonna stop the person from doing it' (18 year-old female).

In terms of the gendered nature of responses, females were more inclined to think that change is not possible. Where females talked about how things might be improved, they did not talk about the need to change men. Female respondents talk about the need to 'speak out sooner than later':

'Try to encourage the person being abused to speak out. The sooner people speak out, depending on the circumstances, i.e.: if they are badly beaten the person needs to be arrested and jailed'.

They talked about 'getting out of the relationship', 'running away' and 'getting away from them'. Females talked about giving 'support' and drawing upon counselling but they do not seem to believe that change can happen and neither do they talk about trying to change men. This perhaps reflects the tendency in the past for attempts to combat domestic abuse to be reactive rather than the more proactive attempts today:

'More help, people to listen. You cannot stop bad behaviour but help can be given. You'll never stop it, everyone is equal and they will do what they want' (47 year-old female).

'Get counselling and things like that but I don't know...'

(27 year-old female).  
'More help for people who are struggling with relationships. Go to Relate, not to solve but to help...'

(18 year-old female).  
'Can't stop it, it's life. Just happens' (15 year-old female).

### *Six Levels of Prevention*

The objective of these questions was to elicit the participants' appreciation of the potential for change in relationships and that there is no need to view abusive relationships as an inevitable part of their lives. In order to prevent unhealthy relationships from emerging and becoming embedded, Flood's (2011: 359) research provides a useful template for initiating change through the 'spectrum of prevention'. To prevent abusive attitudes and behaviour it is necessary to focus on children and young people's identities and relationships and the sooner this begins the better. Without this an inter-generational firebreak is not feasible. Whilst there was no expectation that the research participants would have clear ideas about how to foster healthy relationships it is worth identifying potential opportunities for change. There are six levels on Flood's spectrum of prevention:

- Strengthening individual knowledge and skills – this refers to the enhancement of individuals so they are capable of preventing violence and promoting safety.
- Promoting community education – this is the need to reach groups of people with information and resources, which it possible to prevent violence and promote safety.
- Educating providers – it is necessary to inform the providers tasked with transmitting skills and knowledge to others and to help them model positive norms.
- Engaging, strengthening and mobilising communities – Individuals and groups need to be brought together to share and drive forward broader goals so that they can have a greater impact.
- Changing regulations and norms – regulations can be adopted and norms shaped to prevent violence and bring about improved safety.
- Influencing policies and legislation – pass into law and implement policies that facilitate the healthy community norms and reduced levels of violence.

It is suggested that this framework, together with any insights gleaned from the data in our study, should inform policy regarding interventions and a 'whole community' approach to setting up inter-generational firebreaks and desistance from domestic abuse.

## Summary of main points from the interviews with young people:

### *Relationships*

- Relationships were defined in terms of a number of 'key' factors but 'trust' was a central factor referred to by a majority in this study.
- Younger participants conceived of relationships in terms of 'friendship' and within the context of friends and family.
- Older participants conceived of relationships more in terms of 'intimate/sexual' relationships.
- Males revealed a much narrower perspective focused on boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.
- Females revealed a much broader perspective on relationships and their complexity.

### *Good/Bad/Healthy/Unhealthy Relationships*

- Young people had a very clear understanding of what characterised a good/bad relationship.
- Young people revealed an awareness of the 'home' and conflict over domestic chores as a potential cause of 'bad' relationships.
- Males were more likely to perceive arguments as conducive to a healthy relationship.
- Females perceived arguments as unhealthy.
- Females viewed good relationships in terms of the need to feel safe.
- Violence, abuse, neglect, fighting and arguments were identified as bad.
- Males perceived good relationships in terms of 'no lies' or deception.
- Trust was particularly important to male respondents although both genders cited this.
- Only males in the study referred to financial issues causing bad relationships.
- Only females in the study referred to a need to feel safe in relationships.

### *Personal experiences*

- Younger participants were less able to talk openly about personal experiences (for a range of reasons) but they were very good at talking about their feelings.
- A central finding is that, generally, participants believed that 'bad' relationships between two people are a private matter that they should keep between themselves and not talk about.

- Younger participants often appeared upset by experiences of bad relationships – whether they were close to home or slightly more removed from direct personal experience.
- Older participants were apparently more casual about such bad experiences and there appeared to be evidence of ‘desensitisation’ about, and ‘normalisation’ of abusive relationships.
- Older females talked about their own victimisation.
- Younger teenagers were more resigned to abusive behaviour as a ‘way of life’.

#### *Negative impact*

- Males worry about becoming perpetrators.
- Females worry about becoming victims.

#### *Who behaves ‘better’/‘worse’ – males or females?*

- The most common response was that males and females can both be as bad as each other although some female respondents (particularly older) recognised that males could be worse (more violent) and this was attributed to their physical strength and aggression.

#### *Who behaves ‘best’/‘worst’ – age groups?*

- There were mixed responses.
- Generally, teenagers were felt to be the worst behaved.
- Generally, adults were felt to be the best behaved.
- There was a view that it is not so much about age but socialisation (particularly within the family).
- Participants expressed recognition that some older people never grow out of abusive relationships.

#### *Factors influencing views on relationships*

- There was no consensus about this.
- Young people were less reflective and found the question difficult to answer.
- Older participants were more reflective about influences.

- The most common factor identified was about 'how you are brought up'.

*Who do you have good relationships with? (Aged 8-14 years)*

- Young people identified a range of people with whom they have good relationships: family, friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, youth workers and so on.

*Are you happy with the relationships in your life? Or would you like to change your relationships? If so, how? (14 years plus)*

- In general, males were satisfied with the relationships in their life.
- This was true for both younger and older males (14 years plus).
- In general, females were less satisfied with relationships in their life and these unhappy relationships centred on the men in their lives.
- Females referred to other women in their lives (friends, daughters, mothers) as positive relationships.

*What can we all do to make a good relationship? (8 – 14yrs)*

- Younger children were optimistic about change and improving relationships.
- They drew from experiences at school and with professional interventions.
- They also had faith in the ability of the powers that be to intervene to improve things.

*What can we /society do to encourage good/healthy relationships? (14 years plus)*

- Older teenagers were less optimistic about change.
- Older teenagers were more resigned to the existence of bad relationships and less hopeful that society can improve things.

*What can we /society do to try and stop bad behaviour in relationship? (14 years plus)*

- Older respondents were not optimistic that we can bring about change and there is evidence of a degree of 'normalisation' and 'desensitisation' about abusive relationships.

- Females did not talk about changing men even though many of the problems they identified in their relationships centred around the men in their lives.
- Females talked about support for women through counselling but, generally, seemed resigned to the 'way things are' and were less optimistic about change.



## **5. Summary and Recommendations**

The first part of this section summarises the responses both from the interviews with the young people and from the feedback focus group with the support workers. In the second part, we make suggested recommendations for taking forward the findings through interventions at a local level.

### **a) Responses from the interviews with the participants**

#### *Healthy and Abusive Relationships: age and gender issues*

- The young people, particularly those in the younger age groups, did not readily understand the concept of 'relationships' and needed prompts from the facilitators.
- The older groups interpreted relationships as sexually intimate whereas the younger cohorts referred to relationships with friends and family.
- The key features of a healthy relationship were trust, communication, respect, loyalty, lack of deception and love, with trust seen as most important.
- Males saw relationships in narrow dyadic terms, such as boyfriend/girlfriend, whereas females were more likely to see relationships as complex with some referring to issues of gender equality.
- Some of the males saw arguments as positive for healthy relationships whereas none of the females saw arguments, aggression or violence as positive attributes. In contrast, the females focused more on the importance of feeling safe and secure in relationships.
- Some of the females, especially older participants, referred directly to domestic or sexual abuse in relation to unhealthy relationships. Males focused more on financial issues as a feature of unhealthy relationships although this was not elaborated upon.

- There were two disclosures of abusive relationships by the participants that were followed up by the support workers, in line with organisational safeguarding policy and practice.
- One of the key findings of the study is that people do not generally discuss domestic abuse and tend to see it as a sensitive and private matter.
- The younger participants saw unhealthy or 'bad' relationships in terms of fear, worry, anxiety and sadness. Many, across the age groups, had witnessed violence that had upset them, including bullying and domestic abuse.
- There were gender differences regarding witnessing abusive relationships with males saying that they did not want to become abusers in adulthood and females not wanting to become victims of domestic abuse.
- Participants recognised domestic abuse, not only in their close relationships but also from seeing depictions on television and in social media.
- Views about whether males or females were 'worse' in terms of abuse in relationships were mixed, however, while acknowledging that males were stronger and more argumentative, there was a consensus among younger participants that 'both are as bad as each other'. In contrast, older females, drawing on their experience, thought that males were more abusive.
- The younger participants thought that age was a relevant factor in abusive relationships, expressing the view that adults behaved better than young people. However the older participants saw age as largely irrelevant and not a determinant of abusive behaviour.
- Males tended to express more satisfaction in relation to their relationships. Females were generally happier with their relationships with family members, friends and their own children, however they were less positive about relationships with male partners.

- Younger participants were generally more positive, creative and hopeful about fostering good relationships.
- Older participants were more cynical, at times expressing an almost fatalistic attitude to preventing bad relationships. Older females were inclined to express negative views about the possibility of changing societal attitudes towards abusive relationships. In addition, they were not optimistic about changing men's abusive behaviour.
- Younger people referred to the positive impact in their lives of professionals and counsellors and enjoyed, for example, role-play sessions on healthy relationships.
- The latter finding suggests that in order to prevent abusive attitudes and behaviour it is essential to focus on children and explore with them positive views about identities and relationships at an early age. This was seen as key to work and interventions in relation to an inter-generational firebreak.

#### *Key Factors Influencing Views on Relationships*

- There were diverse responses to the question about influencing factors on relationships. Younger participants found this question more difficult as they had not reflected on influencing factors on relationships. Older participants were more articulate though some still found the question confusing.
- Influencing factors included a range of media such as books, social media sites, television, films, music and the Internet. These were often, but not exclusively, seen as potentially negative influences on ideas about healthy relationships.
- Some of the older participants saw social media and television programmes that focus on abusive relationships as potentially positive influences as they can trigger healthy discussion and challenge abusive behaviours.

- Some participants referred to the influences, both positive and negative, from family, friends and peers.
- Older participants felt that the portrayal of negative relationships in the media could adversely affect relationships in people's lives.

## **b) Responses from the Feedback Session with the Support Workers**

### *Responses in relation to the Focus Groups and Interviews*

- Some of the focus groups were exclusively with females and some with males while some were with mixed gender groups.
- In some sessions, for pragmatic reasons, there were mixed age groups.
- With some of the younger focus groups the males 'opened up' more than the females. However, with a few of the 19 plus groups the females were more confident in responding to the questions.
- In general the younger participants found it harder to answer some of the questions. For example, 'The younger groups were harder. I don't think they understood the questions very well'. 'They weren't messing about or being silly. I think they were just a bit shocked at what was going on'.
- With regard to the younger participants in focus groups, one support worker commented, 'If they're quite young, and they don't know each other, then you're putting six strangers together really'.
- In some of the sessions with the younger participants play cards (Enplay) and PlayDoh were used successfully to draw out responses and keep the children focused.

- As outlined above, younger participants did not always understand some of the questions about relationships and the support workers then engaged in prompting to elicit responses.
- In the case of two disclosures the support workers referred these to the appropriate professionals with whom they work and were confident in local disclosure and safeguarding policies.
- Several support workers referred to issues of 'inclusiveness' with regard to the sample of young people interviewed. It was felt that this could be potentially problematic for the following groups: young people where English is a second language; young participants who do not have a grasp of the concept of relationships; young people with learning and physical disabilities could, potentially, be excluded from responding to the sessions (one young person was in a wheelchair but was accommodated).
- Some of the support workers felt that there might be difficulties in rolling out the sessions to young people in some other, more multicultural, parts of the city. For example, 'If you'd gone to a different area, a different part of the city, you'd have had a lot more multicultural. It would have just eliminated half your session as you wouldn't have got half the people. That means you're not including half the population because some areas have got so many different pockets of nationality.' Another responded, 'If it had been somewhere else we could have had 21 languages'.
- With regard to the issue of language and inclusiveness one support worker said, 'If a child comes to the centre, and English is not their first language, you can get a translator for the forms. So we've got the tools in place but things like this [the Firebreak interviews] that are a one-off, it doesn't work for'.
- For the support workers the role of research facilitator was new and some had felt slightly uncomfortable in this different role with the young people. One person said that it had been a 'learning curve' but a positive one in terms of experience and insight gained through exploring issues about relationships with the young people.

- A positive outcome of the study was that support workers reported that they had found it beneficial to work with different age groups than they would normally do in their day-to-day roles.
- The young people were not fazed by the presence of the researcher/observer though some had expressed anxiety about the audio-recording of the interviews. For example, one young person asked 'Is my Mum going to listen to this?'. Other young people were fascinated about hearing their voices being recorded, many for the first time.
- When asked about the influencing factors on young people's views about relationships the support workers responded that they had to draw out, through prompting, discussion of influences. Once the young people understood the question they often referred to the influence of TV and the Internet (for example, the influence of Facebook on relationships).
- Some of the participants discussed their response to the 'This is abuse' campaign on television. One older participant had felt that it could have a negative influence on young people, reinforcing negative messages about abusive relationships. The support worker who had interviewed this person commented, 'He had values, saying that they shouldn't show things that could influence people'. 'There's always that debate though, isn't there? About if you expose something, which way is it going to go?'

#### *Ethical issues and parental consent*

- There were some problems with the decision to obtain opt-in parental consent, alluded to earlier in this report (see Section 3). It was felt that this had in some cases slowed participation rates as some parents had felt threatened that the young people were being asked about relationships.
- One support worker commented, 'When we were trying to get parental consent for the younger ones, I noticed the first week, whenever I mentioned relationships, right from the word go, they just shut down. You could hear it in their voices and see it'.

- Another point that was raised was that some of the parents had responded that, 'It's up to the children' which the support worker thought was 'really interesting and the children were only about nine or ten'.

### **c) Methodological Recommendations:**

- In response to the difficulties that some of the younger participants had with understanding the questions, one support worker stated, 'I think on reflection maybe we could pilot a completely different set of questions with easier language'. There was a consensus in the feedback session that this was an important consideration for rolling the study out to other groups of young people in the city.
- It was felt that opt-out parental consent for the young participants would be more helpful in terms of widening the participation of the young people. For example one support worker commented, 'The moment that the sheet [parental information and consent sheet] came out.... because we had to get consent it was like drawing teeth'.
- Regarding the timing of the study, it was suggested, 'If we could have done it at the beginning of the [summer] holidays when we had up to 60 children it would have been better, but we didn't, therefore you can imagine how many said "no"'.
- Another point regarding the interview schedule was the implications of the timing of the interviews and focus groups for support workers, 'All our sessions were staggered, so staff didn't know where they were supposed to be at the right time. Every day it was a different time. The programme [of activities] determined things.' One support worker responded, 'Yes, the ones at the youth club were from 6.00pm to 9.00pm. However, it was a good time for them as that's when they tend to come'. Another said, 'I'm used to working evenings anyway'.
- Although there was some disagreement about the tight timeframe for conducting the focus groups and interviews, positive views were also expressed, 'I think it was good because it was a tight timeline, we were all focused, we all knew what we needed to do, we all knew when it was going to start and finish, so I think that sometimes that makes it smarter, so it's

not dragging on. Also, I think if it had been longer, we would have lost the communication loop as well and the spontaneity with the young people’.

- The shopping vouchers (£5.00 vouchers for a local shopping centre) were seen as a positive incentive to participation. In addition, refreshments such as biscuits and fruit had been provided for the young people and these were also positively received. It was therefore recommended that such incentives worked well for the study.
- Recommendations were suggested regarding key things that the young people had identified that they would like to see provided at the clubs and centres. For example, ‘I know some of them at the youth club were asking for different things, like they wanted more sessions on particular subjects. As a service we’re just waiting for the paperwork to do it.’ ‘When we asked questions like “What difference can you make? What can we do to help?” they wanted sessions on at the club so that they’ve got the opportunity to discuss certain subjects’. ‘That is something that we will thread through, to the clubs’.

#### **d) Recommendations for an Inter-Generational Firebreak**

The purpose of this section is to identify the key lessons learnt from the research and to think about designing interventions targeting young people and their attitudes towards healthy and unhealthy relationships, including intimate partner abuse and violence. It is only in relatively recent times that central government has directed its attention towards the vulnerability of young people to become the perpetrators and victims of abuse and our knowledge of this demographic group is limited, especially the differences between young children, teenagers and young adults. It has been recognised for a long time that abusive behaviour can be transmitted inter-generationally and that many adult abusers were exposed to aggression and violence during their childhoods. However, it is also becoming clear that abusive behaviour and domestic violence now starts much earlier than previously thought.

There is a burgeoning literature on the impact of domestic and sexual violence on adults, including a range of policy responses and whilst these may inform what can be done for children and younger people, evidence of ‘what works’ might need adapting for children and adolescents. Also, caution



must be exercised to take into consideration the need for age differentiated responses that reflect some of the subtle transitions occurring between the ages of 8 and 18 years and beyond. There is the lack of a consensus in international research about the most appropriate age for work based with children and young people, but the earlier an intervention takes place the sooner a child can *unlearn* abuse and learn to make healthy choices in their relationships. However, programmes should be repeated frequently in response to different types of abuse and the personal and social issues that arise at different ages.

The overarching rationale of the recommendations below is, in the spirit of the NSPCC's Aggression Project, to 'disrupt the habits and social context of 11-18 year-olds to reduce their aggressive behaviour in a way that is sustained into adulthood.' This is a long term and ambitious aspiration and any change is likely to be gradual. Most crucially preventative interventions are required at different levels of social reality, ranging from the individual to society as a whole. Thus our recommendations are based upon a synthesis of the research literature and research findings. In particular, we draw upon a multidimensional approach that addresses the 'interplay of individual, relationship, community, institutional and societal factors' (Flood, 2011: 361). This is consistent with Heise's (1998) ecological model, which describes four levels where interventions can be implemented:

- *Personal history*;
- *The microsystem* (family and the immediate context; here decisions can be taken to control behaviour);
- The *exosystem* (the socio-economic position and the ways in which aggressive and abusive behaviour might be held in high esteem);
- The *macrosystem* (cultural values around masculinities and violence).

The *personal history* of the individual is very important and although it is not feasible to create bespoke responses for each person, their own stories, such as those revealed in the interviews and focus groups, should be acknowledged. In doing this a number of patterns can be discerned relating to age and gender. It appears that young children are quite optimistic about the potential for change and improving unhealthy relationships whereas older children are more fatalistic and sceptical about their ability to influence and transform relationships. Also, for young women in particular there is a sense that abuse and violence are normalised and something to be tolerated.

The *microsystem* refers to the nature of relationships in the community. The research participants tended to view relationships exclusively in terms of familial and intimate relationships. By no means were all relationships abusive or violent, but many were, and almost all the participants were aware of such behaviour. Although both genders and age groups could be abusive males were widely viewed as more problematic, not only for their abuse, but their behaviour more generally.

The *exosystem* covers issues at the level of the community, such as poverty, socio-economic status and levels of social cohesion. The locality under study has high levels of socio-economic deprivation and data provided by the City Council highlights that it is subject to high rates of unemployment and welfare dependency along with lone-parent families. Unlike some poor and excluded communities, which are disorganised and lacking social cohesion, the estate studied is relatively distinctive for its homogeneity. The presence of strong social ties in relatively homogenous communities can lead to the continuance of pro-violent attitudes and behaviour. Although the estate has the third highest rate of recorded violent crime in the city, as well as not being the highest ranked for crime, there is also the lack of the hyper-masculine gang culture and attendant problems found elsewhere. Due to welfare policy the status of some males is marginal in the lives of women on the estate. In a sense, our findings suggest the women are out of step with the males as it is the women who have the resources such as housing (this refers to the policy to have women as the legal tenants rather than men so it is easier to remove the men when they become violent). The men are in some respects economically dependent on women, which in some cases is manifest in the form of subordinated masculinities and the infantilisation of some men. The influence of this on the perceptions and behaviour of children and adolescents is less clear.

Finally the *macrosystem* consists of wider influences on the community such as norms that support the view that women and girls should be controlled and that violence is accepted as a method of resolving conflict and establishing control, thus normalising abusive attitudes and behaviours. Familial ideologies and the prescription of gender roles are also influential. The literature review discusses hegemonic masculinities showing how dominant ideas about gender relations shape societal expectations about what it means to be male and female, but our evidence suggests that hegemonic and hypermasculine cultures are not as embedded in the community as in some places and that despite there being a sense of rigid gender roles and male aggression some of the masculinities displayed locally are subordinated rather than dominant.

This theoretical framework has informed our exploratory research and it has enabled us to identify several areas where the application of interventions might be considered appropriate on the estate studied for this report. In the long term some invaluable lessons can be learnt from Heise's sophisticated framework, however Flood's idea of bringing about change in perpetrators through a 'spectrum of prevention' is more pragmatic. Although Flood is concerned with adult perpetrators the spectrum concept provides a potentially useful framework for thinking about a practical response to abuse and violence at all ages. To prevent abusive attitudes and behaviour it is necessary to focus on children and young people's identities and relations and the sooner this begins the better. Without this an inter-generational firebreak is not feasible. There are six levels on the spectrum of prevention:

- *Strengthening individual knowledge and skills.* This refers to the enhancement of individuals' skills so they are capable of preventing violence and promoting safety. This works best at a local level and involves the dissemination of information about healthy relationships and skills by professionals and community leaders to prevent abuse. It can be effective when focused on boys and adolescents who are poor and excluded (i.e. with low educational attainment, unemployment), particularly if they have witnessed abuse, because such groups face a higher risk of becoming a perpetrator.
- *Promoting community education.* This is the need to reach groups of people with information and resources, which makes it possible to prevent violence and promote safety.

There are three main types:

- *Face to face educational groups and programmes* in schools can have a positive and beneficial effect on male attitudes to abuse, but changes can be small, attitudes can be worsened and changed attitudes are not automatically translated into changed behaviour. Educational programmes of this kind are more likely to be effective by using peer education and mentoring, especially if they are led by non-violent men.
- *Communication and social marketing* is a widely used method of primary prevention and can bring about changes to attitudes and behaviour. Television, films, radio, pamphlets and theatre have been used to promote ideas about healthy and non-abusive relationships.
- *Local educational strategies, such as social norms* can prevent people from conforming to social norms that sustain abusive and violent ideas. Bystander

intervention campaigns encourage the whole community to assume responsibility for healthy relationships and to de-escalate abuse when it occurs around them.

- *Educating providers.* It is necessary to inform the providers tasked with transmitting skills and knowledge to others and to help them model positive norms. This tends to occur in the workplace but if providers and professionals are educated about unhealthy and healthy relationships this can challenge or sustain the norms and values they might hold.
- *Engaging, strengthening and mobilising communities* – Individuals and groups need to be brought together to share and drive forward broader goals so that they can have a greater impact. Abuse and violence are justified with reference to social norms, gender roles and power, which influence attitudes and behaviour. Local communities need the capacity to respond to social harms such as domestic violence. Community action teams, with community leaders, can organise campaigns (e.g. the White Ribbon Campaign), events and networks to challenge social problems, but other community issues (e.g. economic development, regeneration) need to be addressed at the same time. The success of these approaches need a ‘critical mass’ or a coalition to bring together the whole community at a grassroots level, including businesses, the voluntary and community sector, central and local government agencies, as well as residents.
- *Changing regulations and norms.* Regulations can be adopted and norms shaped to prevent violence and bring about improved safety. This can be achieved in organisations (e.g. schools, councils, the media, youth and sports clubs), which can promote violence prevention and healthy relationships within the organisational culture and the wider community.
- *Influencing policies and legislation.* The passing into law and implementation of policies that facilitate healthy community norms and reduced levels of violence. Communities can lobby central government to initiate policy and law reform in response to local problems.

(These points are drawn from Flood, 2011).

#### **Recommendations at the local level:**

The recommendations below call for a multidimensional and radical approach that addresses the ‘interplay of individual, relationship, community, institutional and societal factors’ (Flood, 2011: 361). Each of the recommendations below is underpinned by the view that domestic violence and abuse is the result of gender inequalities that especially disadvantage women and children. Existing

work, such as the training of professionals and programmes targeting young people at risk of abuse or becoming abusive, should be sustained. At a local level we recommend bespoke interventions:

1. In developing any interventions to address gender inequalities and violence against women the council and its partners should recognise how the wider social context, including socio-economic factors such as employment and housing, impacts at a local level and affects individual young people's and young adults' attitudes and behaviour. The allocation of resources should prioritise supporting survivors and vulnerable children but other areas are important too. For example, the behaviours and values of communities as well as interpersonal relationships are affected by worklessness and housing policies such as tenancy agreements. It should be noted that changes at a structural level can change young people's lives and the culture of specific communities.
2. Existing ways of understanding what is meant by the local level should be changed so rather than looking at a total place (i.e. a ward or an estate) the focus is on the street level. By concentrating resources and initiatives on the micro level the impact of interventions on values and behaviours is likely to be greater.
3. As well as the interventions identified above resources should be targeted on tackling worklessness amongst different age groups, but especially young people (e.g. 15 years plus), on particular streets on the estate. This might include job creation, apprenticeships and adults mentoring young people in the workplace. However, unemployment amongst adults is important too because of its potential negative impact on intimate and familial relationships, which in turn can harm children and young people.
4. Any intervention that is developed can feed into existing work being carried out on the estate (e.g. GREAT, apprenticeships, BEST, the Priority Families Programme), in particular through education, economic development and work programmes aimed at getting young people into employment and creating healthy attitudes towards relationships.
5. Any intervention will need to co-exist with the targeted work of Equation and NCDP with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse and violence. In particular, it is necessary to build on work that recognises that domestic abuse perpetrators are influenced by wider factors external to specific streets and estates as outlined in this report.
6. Parents need further support to help them respond to deprivation and experiences of social exclusion. While poverty is certainly not a 'cause' of domestic violence the stresses and strains of unemployment, low income, residential instability and other forms of

disadvantage are indicators of risk and can make people vulnerable when it comes to gender relations. Thus because the estate in this study is in an economically deprived area it is necessary to be aware of wider debates about how deprivation might have an influence on the attitudes and behaviour of young people in the context of the relationships they form and that form them.

7. Although there is a tendency to identify young men as being responsible for most of the abusive behaviour and violence going on in the community rather than approaching this solely as a problem of gender it should also be viewed as a community problem. By adopting elements of the Whole Community Approach the aim is to make sure more people within the locality can be encouraged to think of such behaviour as a community rather than an 'individual' problem thus increasing the likelihood that any intervention will be successful. This tendency to 'individualise' the problem is central to the normalisation thesis, i.e. the view that violence is legitimate rather than excessive, which potentially leads to the acceptance of, rather than resistance to, domestic abuse.
8. In the context of Equation's work in schools, in particular the GREAT Project, there should be a review of the relevance of what local primary and secondary schools are currently doing to raise awareness about healthy relationships and interpersonal violence through the delivery of cross-curricular and school-wide lessons (e.g. the Whole School Approach), including the Personal, Social Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) curriculum. This needs to be underpinned by effective leadership, training and staff commitment to a non-violent culture in schools.
9. Local schools could consider measuring and monitoring the attitudes pupils have towards abuse, aggression and violence from as young as 8 years by utilising the REaDAPt (Relationship Education and Domestic Abuse Prevention Tuition) toolkit.
10. There needs to be an effective partnership in the local community that can benefit from awareness of the issue amongst professionals, including not only teachers and police officers, but also GPs and school nurses. It is necessary that all partners agree on the concepts and terminology relating to the issue, but most crucially that they share common aims and objectives.
11. Whilst formal interventions in public policy and legislation can play a role in addressing unhealthy relationships these need to be reinforced by informal control in the home, at street level and in the wider community. The internalised beliefs and social bonds at an individual level must be challenged (unhealthy attitudes to relationships) and reinforced (healthy

attitudes to relationships) through normative behaviours in local communities. Community leader roles could prove to be crucial here.

12. The whole community, including residents as well as practitioners working there, should be made aware of the new definition of domestic abuse so they know that it covers a wide range of controlling and coercive behaviours (i.e. emotional, financial and psychological abuse) in addition to physical violence.
13. The design of a mentoring programme based on Katz's Mentors in Violence Protection (MVP) could be considered whereby young people are trained and empowered to challenge peers about abusive behaviours and attitudes.
14. As much as possible needs to be known about the population for whom an intervention is targeted in terms of attitudes and beliefs and so on. The intervention will be more successful, the more that is known and understood about the target group.

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**Appendices:**

**Appendix A: Interview/Focus Group Questions for all participants (8-11 years; 12-14 years; 14-18 years; 19 plus)**

**Appendix B: Prompt Sheet for Facilitators for Interviews and Focus Groups**

**Appendix C: Participant Consent Forms for Parents and Guardians (for 8-18 year-olds)**

**Appendix D: Participant Consent Forms for 18 years and over**

**Appendix E: Debrief Sheet for Participants**

**Appendix F : Firebreak Project Research Timetable**

**Appendix G: Breakdown of Focus Groups and Interviews**

**Appendix H: Questions for Youth and Support Workers Feedback Session**

## Appendix A:

### Interview/Focus Group Questions for all participants (8-11 years; 12-14 years; 14-18 years; 19 plus)

#### Interview and Focus Group Questions for Firebreak Project

1. What do you understand by a `relationship`?  
(Use set summary if children/young people/19 plus if need clarity)
2. Who do you have relationships with?  
(Could use flip chart to write up ideas; Friends/siblings/classmates/teachers/ family/neighbours/ others?)
3. What makes a relationship feel good? (ages 8 – 11yrs)
3. What makes a relationship feel healthy? (ages 12yrs plus/19 plus)  
(Feeling safe, trust, love, humour, caring)
4. What makes a relationship feel bad? (ages 8 – 11yrs)
4. What makes a relationship feel unhealthy? (ages 12yrs plus/19plus)  
(Inappropriate behaviour, violence, abuse – verbal/physical, bullying, lack of trust/controlling behaviour)
5. Have you ever seen a bad relationship?  
8 – 11 years Yes / No cards (will encourage the quieter ones)  
Extend on conversation if answered yes; (who? girls? boys? adults?)  
19 plus (ask to give examples)
6. If so, what did you do? How did you feel? Did you tell anyone?

(Option for everyone to use the Ngage feeling cards)

7. Who behaves worse in relationships, girls or boys?

(Option for everyone to use boy/girl cards)

8. Which age groups do you think behave best (and worst) in their relationships?

(8- 14 years use the age and stage cards as prompts)

(14 plus: young children, older children, young teenagers, older teenagers, adults)?

9. Just for 12 yrs plus:

What influences your views about relationships? Ask them to give examples here, as this is one of the key questions for the research: TV and films, social media – what types? (E.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), music, videos/DVDs, magazines/books, peers, friends, family, classmates, other influences.

10. Who do you have a good relationship with?

(Ages 8 – 14yrs)

Are you happy with the relationships in your life? Or would you like to change your relationships (if so, how?)

(14 yrs plus)

11. What can we all do to make a good relationship? (8 – 14yrs)

What can we all do to try and stop bad relationships? (8 – 14yrs)

What can we/society do to encourage good/healthy relationships? What can we /society do to try and stop bad behaviour in relationship? (14 yrs plus)

Thank you for helping with this study, If you have any questions, or would like to discuss any of the issues further, please see me after this session.

- For 8-18 years: Please pick up the Debrief Sheet, which gives further information about the study, and take this with you.
- For 19 plus: Please take the Participant Letter and Debrief sheet with you and make sure that you have completed, signed and handed back the Consent Form.

## Appendix B:

# Prompt Sheet for Facilitators for Interviews and Focus Groups

### ***Physical Layout of the room***

Ensure that all chairs are in a circle, so that all participants are facing one another.

***Switch on the recorder*** (Place this in the middle of the circle; test it first).

### ***Welcome***

Thank you for coming along today and for agreeing to take part in this interview/focus group discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to discuss and share ideas about relationships and what makes relationships healthy/good or bad.

### ***Introductions***

My name is ... and I will be leading the focus group today. I'd like us to welcome Charlene who is a researcher from NTU. Charlene will be writing notes and recording our discussion, however she will not be taking part in our discussion.

### ***Purpose of Interview/Focus Group***

The purpose of the interview/focus group is to try to find out about your thoughts, experiences and ideas about good/healthy relationships. We are working with Nottingham City Council and Nottingham Trent University to try to find out about young peoples' views on relationships. We value your input and would like you to be as honest as possible.

### ***Establish Ground Rules***

- Mutual respect (confidentiality) 'What is said in this room stays in this room'.
- Participation from everybody (though if a participant prefers not to engage in any part of the discussion or not to answer a question that should be respected). For younger participants use of Ngage cards as prompts.
- There are no right or wrong answers (you can feel free to agree or disagree).
- We will be recording the discussion but all names will be removed and the write-up of the research will be anonymised. We won't be identifying anybody by name.

- Limits to confidentiality (it should be explained that the write-up of the recording will only be viewed by Charlene and her research supervisors).
- Reiterate important details, check for understanding.
- Remind participants of the role of the facilitator (you) and the researcher.

### **Ice-Breaker**

It is a good idea to try to put everybody at ease and for everybody to feel as comfortable as possible.

As part of the ice-breaker, each participant should introduce themselves (name, age) even if they know each other. You could ask each participant to write their name on a sticky label and attach it to their clothing. Charlene and the facilitator should also introduce themselves.

### **Interview/Focus Group Questions**

Please refer to the Interview/Focus Group Topic Sheet provided by the researchers.

Ensure that the easier questions are asked first and more sensitive questions towards the end.

The Interview/Focus Group Topic Sheet is very useful. However, it does not need to be followed in strict order and is more of a guide.

If people deviate from the topic, this is ok and can be allowed (if relevant). However, if less relevant, the facilitator can ask the next question to re-focus the discussion.

Be aware of participants who are reluctant to talk (shy?) and try to be inclusive and encourage participation (sensitively) without making them feel embarrassed. However, in order to avoid undue stress to participants, it is not recommended that individuals are picked out.

The facilitator needs to monitor the time and make sure the discussion finishes on time. It is recommended that the recorder is switched off after the young people have left the room.

At the end, thank the participants. We have produced a **Debrief sheet** for the facilitator to give to the young people to take away that provides more information about the study and that includes a list of further support organisations.

## Appendix C:

### Participant Consent Forms for Parents and Guardians (for 8-18 year-olds)

#### INFORMATION SHEET for Parents and Guardians

#### 'Firebreak' Research Study: Young People's Attitudes to Relationships

**Researcher:** Charlene Kumarage ([charlene.kumarage2011@my.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:charlene.kumarage2011@my.ntu.ac.uk))

**Project Supervisors:** Terry Gillespie ([terry.gillespie@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:terry.gillespie@ntu.ac.uk)), Tel. 0115885531.

Christopher Crowther-Dowey ([christopher.crowther-dowey@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:christopher.crowther-dowey@ntu.ac.uk)), Tel. 01158482129.

Kristan Hopkins-Burke ([kristan.hopkins-burke@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:kristan.hopkins-burke@ntu.ac.uk)), Tel. 01158486893.

Dear parent or guardian,

We are writing to ask permission for your child to take part in a study being conducted by researchers at Nottingham Trent University with their research partners at the City Council. We are researching young people's views on relationships. Young people aged 8 to 18 years are being invited to participate in this study through focus groups led by peer support mentors, known to the young people, and observed by the researcher, Charlene Kumarage.

#### **What will my child be asked to do?**

The young people will be asked to discuss, in 'focus groups' of approximately six young people of their own age, what they see as 'good' and 'bad' relationships. Girls and boys will be interviewed in separate groups. These will take up to 40 minutes depending on the age of the child.

The focus group will be led by a youth worker, called a Peer Support Mentor, who knows your child. All of the Peer Support Mentors, as employees of Nottingham City Council, have received clearance from the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB check, now known as



Disclosure and Barring Service or DRB check) to work with young people. In addition, the Council has produced the following statement about the safeguarding of all the young people in the study:

The safeguarding and protection of children, young persons and families will be monitored and supported by the Early Support Specialist within the City Council's Family and Community Team for [this area], in line with Nottingham City Safeguarding Children's Board guidance and protocols. Although confidentiality will remain a priority, the safeguarding of participants will override this should any action need to be taken to protect the participants. This will be explained in participant consent forms and at the beginning of focus groups.

Statement taken from the *Nottingham City Safeguarding Children's Board* guidance and protocols.

The researcher, Charlene Kumarage, will not actively be involved in the focus group discussion. Instead, she will be observing the focus groups and audio-recording the group discussions.

All peer support mentors taking part in the study will receive research training from the supervisors of the study at Nottingham Trent University, about issues such as research ethics, confidentiality, informed consent and so on, before commencement of the focus group study.

### **Will my child remain anonymous in this study?**

Your child will remain anonymous and not be named in the study. None of the focus group participants will be named in the final report of the study or any publications arising from the study.

### **Will the information be kept private?**

All the information collected will be kept confidential. The only people who will have access to the data from the focus groups will be the researcher and her supervisors at

Nottingham Trent University. All data will be kept in locked cabinets in a locked room at Nottingham Trent University. All the information collected for the project will be destroyed 5 years after the study ends.

**Who has approved this research?**

The study has been subject to ethical review by Nottingham Trent University's College of Business, Law and Social Science Research Ethics Committee, and has been approved.

**Does my child have to take part in the study?**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. For the focus groups we are using a form of consent for parents and guardians known as 'opt-out' consent. In other words, we are assuming that you are happy to give consent for your child to take part in the study unless we receive the reply slip on the bottom of this letter which states that you do not give such permission.

**Do I, or my child, have the right to withdraw any data collected in the study after the focus group has taken place?**

Yes, you can ask for your child's contribution in the interview to be withdrawn up until the 01/09/13. It may be difficult for the researcher to identify a young person's particular contribution in the focus groups, however every effort would be made to do so if a young person, or their parent or guardian, wishes to withdraw their data from the study.

In addition, your child will be told at the start of the group that any young person can leave at any time before or during the focus group and they do not have to answer any questions while in the group.

**What if I have any further questions?**

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Charlene Kumarage, or her research supervisors (contact details are outlined at the start of this letter). We would be happy to tell you more about the research and to discuss any concerns you might have.

Kind Regards

Charlene Kumarage (researcher)

Terry Gillespie, Christopher Crowther-Dowey, Kristan Hopkins-Burke (research supervisors).

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REPLY SLIP: Young People's Views on Relationships

**Please return to the Peer Support Mentor or send to the researcher, Charlene Kumarage, at the address at the top of the letter.**

I **DO** **NOT** give permission for (child's name) \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in the focus group.

Your child's age: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix D:

### Participant Consent Forms for 18 years and over

**INFORMATION and CONSENT letter for participants aged 18 years and above.**

#### **'Firebreak' Research Study: Attitudes to Relationships**

**Researcher:** Charlene Kumarage ([charlene.kumarage2011@my.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:charlene.kumarage2011@my.ntu.ac.uk))

**Project Supervisors:** Terry Gillespie ([terry.gillespie@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:terry.gillespie@ntu.ac.uk)), Tel. 0115885531

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Kristan Hopkins-Burke ([kristan.hopkins-burke@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:kristan.hopkins-burke@ntu.ac.uk)), Tel. 01158486893.

Dear participant,

We are writing to ask you to take part in a study being conducted by researchers at Nottingham Trent University with our research partners at the City Council and BEST. We are researching people's views on relationships. Young people aged 8 to 18 years, as well as older people aged 18 years and above, are being invited to participate in this study through either one-to-one interviews or group discussions (focus groups) led by their support workers. Some of the one-to-one interviews and focus groups will be observed and recorded by the researcher, Charlene Kumarage who will take notes for the study.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to discuss, in a focus group or one-to-one interview with a support worker, what you see as 'good/healthy' and 'bad/unhealthy' relationships. The interviews will take up to 40 minutes.

The researcher, Charlene Kumarage, will not be directly involved in the focus groups and interviews. Instead, she will be observing and audio-recording one of the interviews and all of the focus groups for the research study. For the interviews that Charlene will not be observing the support workers will be audio-recording the interviews on behalf of the research team.

All support workers taking part in the study have received research training from the supervisors of the study (the research team) at Nottingham Trent University, about issues such as confidentiality, informed consent and so on, before the interviews take place.

**Will I be identified by name in this study?**

You will remain anonymous and not be named in the study. None of the participants will be named in the final report of the study or any publications arising from the study.

**Will the information be kept private?**

All the information collected will be kept confidential by all the research partners. The only people who will have access to the recorded information from the group discussions and one-to-one interviews will be the researcher, Charlene Kumarage, and her supervisors at Nottingham Trent University. All the information will be kept in locked cabinets in a locked room at Nottingham Trent University and destroyed 5 years after the study ends.

**Who has approved this research?**

The study has been approved by Nottingham Trent University's College of Business, Law and Social Science Research Ethics Committee. The study has also been approved by the City Council and BEST.

**Do I have to take part in the study?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you are over 18 we would like you to complete the reply slip at the bottom of this letter, which gives your consent to take part in the study.

**Do I have the right to withdraw my contribution in the study after the one-to-one interview has taken place?**

Yes, you can ask for your contribution in the study to be withdrawn up until 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2013. In addition, you can leave at any time before or during the discussion and you do not have to answer any questions while in the interview.

**What if I have any further questions?**

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Charlene Kumarage, or her research supervisors (contact details are given at the start of this letter). We would be happy to tell you more about the research and to discuss any concerns you might have.

Kind Regards

Charlene Kumarage (researcher)

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CONSENT FORM: Interview on Relationships (over 18 years)

**Please give this reply slip to the support worker or the researcher**

I (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ consent to take part in the study.

Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

Male/female: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix E:

### Debrief Sheet for Participants

#### Debrief Sheet for Participants in Interviews and Focus Groups

Thank you for taking part in the relationship discussion and we hope you enjoy spending your £5 gift voucher.

As mentioned in the ground rules it is important to respect everyone's opinions, so instead of talking with your mates have a chat with a worker you know, a family member or you can come into a children's centre or activity building during our opening hours.

Or you can contact one of the support groups listed further below under Further Support.

#### **Do I have the right to withdraw my discussion after the interview or focus group has taken place?**

Yes, you can ask for your contribution in the interview or focus group to be withdrawn up until 1st September, 2013. It may be difficult for the researcher to identify a young person's particular contribution in the focus groups, however every effort would be made to do so if you wish to withdraw your data from the study.

#### **What if I have any further questions?**

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Charlene Kumarage, or her research supervisors. We would be happy to tell you more about the research and to discuss any concerns you might have.

Thank you,

Charlene Kumarage (researcher): [charlene.kumarage2011@my.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:charlene.kumarage2011@my.ntu.ac.uk).



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### **Further Support:**

#### Childline

Confidential telephone counselling for any child or young person with a problem

Freephone: 0800 1111 (24 Hours) Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

#### Support Line

Confidential emotional support for children, young people and adults. Keeps details of agencies, support groups and counsellors throughout the UK.

Helpline: 01708 765200

Email: [info@supportline.org.uk](mailto:info@supportline.org.uk)

#### Bullying Online

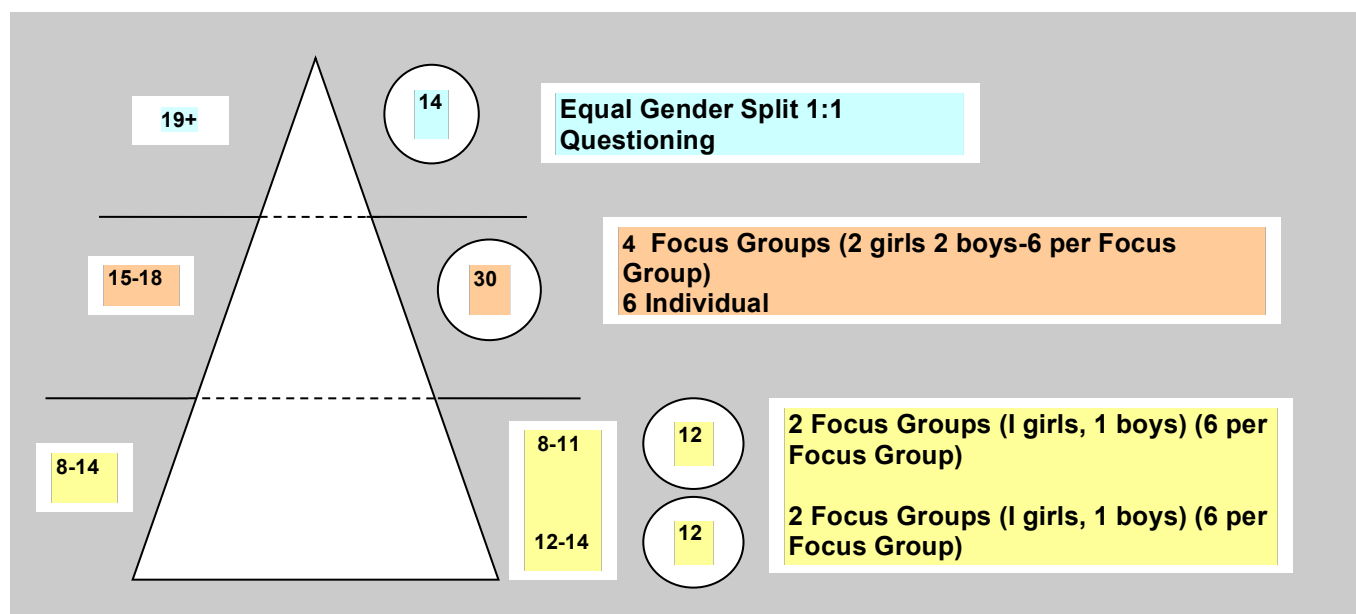
Information and advice about bullying. Email: [help@bullying.co.uk](mailto:help@bullying.co.uk)

Website: [www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk)

# Appendix F:

## Firebreak Project Research Timetable

### FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS



Focus Group	Format	Context		Workers	Date 5 <sup>th</sup> -30 <sup>th</sup> August tbc
19+	Equal gender Split 1:1 Questioning	Female Group	Peer support workers	FSW team tbc	
		Male Group	BEST build workers	FSW team tbc	
15-18	4 Focus Groups ( 2 girls, 2 boys)	1 <sup>st</sup> Girl Group	YMCA, Groundwork, Football sessions, targeted support tbc	FSW team tbc	
		1 <sup>st</sup> Boy Group			
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Girl Group			
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Boy Group			
8-11	2 Focus Groups ( 1 girls, 1 boys)	Girl Group	Primary School, Phoenix, Play & Youth Groups tbc	FSW team tbc	
		Boy Group			
12-14	2 Focus Groups ( 1 girls, 1 boys)	Girl Group			
		Boy Group			

## Appendix G:

### Breakdown of Focus Groups, Interviews and Supplementary

#### Costs:

- Over the three weeks that the interviews were conducted in August 2013, 74 participants were interviewed, either in 'one-to-one' interviews or in focus groups of up to six participants.
- The target number of participants for the study was 68 and this was exceeded by six participants.
- The 74 participants were broken down into the following age groups:

8-11 years:	23
12-14 years:	15
15-18 years:	19
19 plus:	17
- More males than females took part in the interviews and focus groups as more males attended the centres.

- There were 9 facilitators, including 6 BEST workers, 2 Play and Youth workers and 1 Children's Centre worker.
- 73 £5.00 shopping vouchers for a local shopping centre were made available as an incentive for participation.
- 1 Dictaphone was purchased.
- Snacks for the participants were provided at 7 sessions.

## **Appendix H: Questions for Youth and Support Workers Focus Group Feedback Session**

1. What was your experience of conducting the interviews and focus groups?
2. The interview process – the dynamics (age/sex), recruitment, bias in selection (who took part and why), difficulties, unanticipated events/dilemmas, the issue of disclosures (were there any? And, if so, how were these handled by the support workers?)
3. Power relationships – think about dynamics of interviews with up to three adults in a room?
4. The focus groups and their relative size...
5. Interviewing very young people (aged 8ish), sometimes with older ages
6. Interviewing a young person with English as their second language
7. The use of an incentive (did all of the young people receive the shopping vouchers as many were given to parents?)
8. What were the obstacles to the research?
9. What were the positives?
10. What might be the limitations of the data?