Young, in love and in danger

Teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania

Anglicare TAS
Choice, support and hope

SOCIAL ACTION & RESEARCH CENTRE

RESEARCH REPORT
DR CARMEL HOBBS
NOVEMBER 2022

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Content warning

This project is about the experiences of young people in Tasmania who have experienced domestic violence and abuse in their own intimate partner relationships when they were under 18 years of age. Some of these experiences involve harrowing recollections of violence and abuse. You might find the stories of young people upsetting. You may have personal experiences that are triggered by these stories. The services listed below can be contacted for support:

- 1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732, www.1800respect.org.au
- Full Stop Australia: 1800 943 539, www.fullstop.org.au
- Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline: 1800 497 212
- Family Violence Counselling Support Service (Tasmania): 1800 608 122
- Blue Knot (childhood and complex trauma support): 1300 657 380
- Well Mob
- 13YARN for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: 13 92 76
- A Tasmanian Lifeline: 1800 984 434
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- Men's Referral Service: 1300 766 491

If you or someone close to you is in distress or immediate danger, please call 000.

Suggested citation

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Acknowledgement of Country

Anglicare Tasmania acknowledges and pays respect to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as the traditional and original owners and continuing custodians of this land on which this project has taken place. We acknowledge Elders past and present, and Aboriginal people who have participated in and are connected with this research.

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- Anglicare Tasmania
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- Baptcare
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- Department of Education
- Engender Equality
- Huon Valley Domestic Violence Service
- Karadi Aboriginal Corporation
- Karinya Young Women's Service
- Legal Aid Tasmania
- Office of the Children's Commissioner
- OurWatch
- Sexual Assault Support Service
- Tasmania Police
- The Link
- University of Tasmania
- Women's Legal Service
- Working it Out
- YNOT

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This study uses data from Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). LSAC is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Social Services (www.dss.gov.au), and is being undertaken in association with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (www.aifs.gov.au) and Roy Morgan (www.roymorgan.com) with advice being provided by a consortium of leading researchers at research institutions and universities throughout Australia.

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Importantly I want to recognise all victim-survivors, the women, children and young people who have lost their lives to domestic violence and abuse, and those who continue to live with abuse from a current or former partner every day.

CARMEL HOBBS

About Anglicare Tasmania

Anglicare, in response to the Christian faith, strives to achieve social justice and to provide the opportunity for people in need to reach fullness of life.

Our values:

HOPE	Confidently reaching for fullness of life.
COMPASSION	Showing empathy and care for those in need.
JUSTICE	Promoting the fair distribution of resources and opportunities.
RESPECT	Recognising the inherent value and dignity of every person.

About the Social Action and Research Centre

At the Social Action and Research Centre we investigate how and why Tasmanians are affected by poverty and inequality. We use what we learn to advocate for changes that improve people's lives.

We listen, collaborate, research, advocate and educate.

We carry out qualitative and quantitative research.

- Our qualitative research centres on the lived experience of Tasmanians. It often features the voices of people who use Anglicare services and our frontline workers.
- Our quantitative research uses data to demonstrate social trends.

We engage in social action through advocacy.

- We brief government and stakeholders on our research and create opportunities for networking and collaboration.
- We are independent and set our own priorities according to Anglicare values. Our team has expert knowledge across research, policy development, advocacy, quality improvement and evaluation.

Preface

Over the past year, I have had the privilege to meet and listen to 17 young Tasmanians as they shared their stories of relationship domestic violence and abuse with me. These young people all willingly joined me to produce this piece of work and although there were many difficult moments as they processed past trauma, they were empowered to keep going in the hope that you will be part of creating change to prevent this abuse from happening and support those living with or recovering from it.

In this report you will find pieces of stories of strong young people who together share over 60 years of violence and abuse inflicted by a partner they cared about, trusted and often loved. Their voices are prioritised over other data in the report because the voices of young people who have experienced violence and abuse are sorely missing from research, policy and community-based knowledge about this issue. You will see their voices amplified by the professionals who participated in this project. These workers represent a range of government and non-government services who have direct contact with young people.

Teen domestic violence and abuse is reaching epidemic proportions in Tasmania and nationally. Statistical evidence of this is also included in the report, further demonstrating the magnitude of this issue.

This is the first project of its kind in Tasmania. It is one of few in Australia. I hope that reading this work makes you angry, sad, hopeful, and empowered to be part of the change that is so desperately needed.

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PART ONE

Introduction and background

Part 1: Introduction and background

Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) is a national crisis impacting individuals, families and communities. On average, one woman a week is killed by her intimate partner in Australia (ANROWS 2018), and approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 13 men have experienced intimate partner abuse since age 15 (ABS 2017). Domestic violence and abuse costs the Australian economy $26 billion annually (Australian Government, 2020). In Australia a large body of evidence informs our understanding of and responses to DVA amongst adults. There is also a growing body of evidence on adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) and the impacts of family violence on children as victims in their own right. Yet there remains a significant gap in acknowledging and understanding domestic violence and abuse experienced by young people under 18 within their own partner relationships.

Teen domestic violence and abuse is a serious public health issue causing a wide range of detrimental impacts for victim-survivors, perpetrators and society. The devastating impacts of teen domestic violence and abuse include short- and long-term mental, physical and psychosocial harm, involvement with the youth justice system, and an increased likelihood of victimisation and perpetration in adulthood (Banister & Leadbeater 2007; Barter & Stanley 2016; Chung 2007; Eaton & Stephens 2018; Herrenkohl & Jung 2016; Park et al. 2018).

The gap in understanding teen domestic violence and abuse is not confined to Australia. Globally, the predominant focus has been on adult (mostly women's) experiences, and the impact this has on children and young people (Barter et al. 2017). Where attention is given to younger people and their experiences, it tends to privilege adult perspectives and not involve young people as active agents in generating knowledge and informing change (Carlisle et al. 2022).

Young, in love and in danger seeks to bridge this gap. This report outlines the findings of the research and provides recommendations for preventing and responding to teen domestic violence and abuse.

Definitions and terminology

Defining the issue

For the purpose of this study, teen domestic violence and abuse is defined as:

> *A pattern of behaviours (actual or threatened) that may be physical, sexual, emotional or psychological in nature, and are used to gain power and maintain control over the current or former teen partner, resulting in physical, social, emotional or psychological harm in those subjected to or otherwise exposed to the behaviours.*

Other terms associated with violence within teen relationships include 'youth intimate partner violence and abuse', 'adolescent intimate partner abuse', 'extra-familial harm', 'youth intimate partner violence', and 'teen dating abuse'. Common in North America, use of the term 'dating violence' is growing in Australia and refers to "violence from a current or previous boyfriend, girlfriend or date" (AIHW 2019b). The terminology in this project draws on a recent ANROWS study, which found that young people in Australia prefer the term 'domestic violence and abuse' because it reminds people that it is not only physical violence that constitutes the violence and abuse that occurs in romantic relationships and better describes the context in which the abuse occurs (Carlisle et al. 2022). Teen domestic violence differs from 'adolescent family violence', which refers to family violence where a young person is abusive towards their parents/carers or siblings (Douglas & Walsh 2018).

Defining the cohort

Terms used to describe the population of interest in this research include children (defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as anyone under 18 years), adolescents (defined by the World Health Organization as 10-19 years (World Health Organization [WHO] 2014), teen (aged 13-19), young people/adults (aged 20-24) and youth (defined by the United Nations as anyone aged 15-24 years).

The following characteristics apply to the young people who are the focus of this project:

- aged 12-17
- experience violence and abuse from a person they define as a boyfriend, girlfriend or partner
- in the developmental transitional stage between childhood and adulthood
- of secondary school age in Australia
- Tasmanian.

The terms 'teen' and 'child' are used throughout this report to refer to the cohort described above. 'Teen' is mostly used when referring to the experience as described. 'Child' is used to highlight the rights and protections of people under 18 years of age under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The term 'young people' refers specifically to research participants who were aged 18-25 when sharing their experiences of violence and abuse that occurred when they were under 18.

Theoretical perspectives

This research is guided by a feminist social justice approach that:

- recognises teen domestic violence and abuse as a social injustice
- addresses the social inequalities at the core of this violence and abuse
- draws on social action to influence change.

A feminist social justice approach seeks to address violence prevention by going beyond individual and relationship levels to also address structural and institutional inequalities, such as gender inequality and improving women's economic and political conditions (Flood 2022). Issues of intersectionality can also be woven into this approach, recognising the link between domestic violence and abuse and other forms of social injustice (Flood 2022). Finally, a social justice approach enables community-level strategies that empower us to take action (Flood 2022).

The experience of abuse within intimate partner relationships is understood through a range of lenses. A feminist lens understands intimate partner abuse from a gender perspective on the basis that, across the globe, violence against women is a gendered issue. More women than men experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner, the violence they experience is more severe, and they are more likely to die. It is also vital to ensure that the unique needs and experiences of individuals who do not identify as male or female, and/or do not identify as heterosexual, are also included in our exploration and understanding of the experience of being in an abusive relationship. Though less prevalent, the experiences of men abused by a partner are also important.

This research views teen domestic violence and abuse as a child rights issue, occurring at a key stage of adolescent development. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Australian Government has a duty to ensure that all persons under the age of 18 are provided with the rights and protections set out in the treaty. This includes children experiencing or using violence and abuse in their intimate partner relationships. In particular:

- Children have the right to live a full life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily (Article 6).
- Every child has the right to live their life free from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19).
- Governments should protect children from sexual abuse (Article 34).
- Children who have been neglected or abused should receive special help to restore their self-respect (Article 39).
- Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account (Article 12).

A developmental perspective reinforces the fact that children are fundamentally different to adults in terms of their social, emotional and physical needs. It ensures that they are respected as experts in their own lives who are capable of informing and contributing to change that affects them. Establishing and maintaining romantic relationships is an important developmental task that begins in adolescence. As teens transition from children to adults they "tackle the developmental task of forming an adult identity by making sense of themselves in the larger social context. For young women in Western society, this struggle is characterised by heightened vulnerability" (Banister et al. 2003). This vulnerability is directly linked with patriarchal norms and social expectations of conforming to conventional ideals of being passive, caring, nurturing and self-sacrificing (Banister et al. 2003).

A developmental perspective focusing on adolescents aged 12-17 is important because:

- It distinguishes their experiences from those of adults and allows for comparison with other studies.
- It recognises that their needs differ from 'youth and young people', a broader cohort that tends to incorporate 20-24 year olds.
- From a social norms perspective, the roles and responsibilities, expectations (e.g. sexual activity) and use of services by adolescents are often seen differently to young adults.
- Adolescent development involves important physical, biological, emotional and psychological changes that occur between childhood and adulthood. These changes have important implications for an adolescent's health and how they think about the present and future, which in turn impacts prevention-, support- and recovery-focused initiatives.
- A critical aspect of adolescence is the transition to autonomy and independence. Peers and family are significant sources of influence and support.
- Adolescents are more likely to be living with their own family, to have limited access to an independent source of income, and to be engaged in school. All of these factors are important considerations in policy and program development. However, responding to teen domestic violence and abuse becomes even more complex when adolescents are not living at home and not participating in school. These adolescents require a more nuanced response that simultaneously recognises their increased vulnerability and more adult lifestyle, responsibilities and expectations.
- Health-compromising behaviours including smoking, alcohol and other drug use, sex, and driving typically start during adolescence. These behaviours are more likely to be illegal and to have greater adverse impacts on development among adolescents compared to young adults. This is important for the development of appropriate interventions. These health-compromising behaviours become even more significant when associated with domestic violence and abuse.
- Service providers supporting adolescents have specific issues that need to be considered, such as responding to the specialised needs of adolescents, the involvement of parents/carers, informed consent, and the transition to more autonomous decision-making.
- Neuro-developmental changes to the limbic system and pre-frontal cortex impact decision-making, pleasure-seeking, emotional responses, sleep regulation, impulse control, future planning capacity and organisation (WHO 2014).

Teen domestic violence and abuse (DVA)

Whilst domestic violence and abuse is experienced by women of all ages, it has a particular impact on and is more prevalent among young women (ABS 2017; Brown et al. 2009; Hooker et al. 2019). Teen domestic violence and abuse is a global public health issue with teens representing an at-risk group (Ellsberg et al. 2018; Murray et al. 2016; Wincentak et al. 2017). This is a time when teens often engage in their first intimate relationships (Cerda-Smith et al. 2022), which contribute to their personal growth as they develop their identity and learn about commitment and intimacy (Brooks-Russell et al. 2015). Whilst for many young people this is a positive experience, for some it is unsafe and detrimental to their current and future wellbeing.

Prevalence

Teen DVA prevalence rates found in the literature vary and are not directly comparable due to differences in definitions, type of violence or abuse being measured, measurement tools, the reference period, cultural settings and demographic characteristics of young people included in studies.

Internationally, it is estimated that 20% of 13-18-year-olds experience physical violence (similar rates between girls and boys) and 10% experience sexual violence (girls are more likely to be victims than boys) (Wincentak et al. 2017) perpetrated by a current or former partner. Data from the United States indicates that 40% of 14-21-year-olds experience psychological/emotional abuse from a current or former partner (Ybarra et al. 2016). A consistent pattern is seen across most studies whereby psychological/emotional abuse is most common, followed by physical and then sexual abuse.

Current prevalence of teen DVA in Australia is unknown. A large and comprehensive mixed methods study conducted over 20 years ago asked young people aged 12-20 about their attitudes towards and experiences of violence and abuse. They found similar prevalence rates between females and males with 37% of boys and 36% of girls reporting physical relationship aggression in their lifetime (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001). They found that 26% of girls aged 12-20 had been pushed, grabbed or shoved by an intimate partner compared with 21% of boys, 19% had been physically threatened (compared with 16% of boys), and 14% had intimate partners who tried to force them to have sex (compared with 5% of boys) (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001). It is important to note that this study asked about lifetime experience of violence and abuse, not past 12-month experience.

Over twenty years later, little research on the prevalence and experience of being in an abusive relationship has occurred in this country, with most attention instead directed to young people's attitudes towards violence and abuse in the context of primary prevention strategy development and evaluation. A 2009 Melbourne-based study found that 13% of 150 young people aged 15-24 referred to a specialist youth mental health service had experienced physical dating violence in the 12 months prior to referral (Brown et al. 2009). In 2018, a survey of 275 Year 9 and 10 students in Victoria revealed 88% of participants had been a victim of abuse in their most difficult relationship, and approximately 60% reported mutual abuse in their most difficult relationship (Daff et al. 2018).

These quantitative studies indicate that domestic violence and abuse is an issue for young people in Australia, but provide limited knowledge about the experience of being in an abusive relationship from the perspective of young people themselves.

Differences with adult domestic violence and abuse

Three key factors make adolescent abusive relationships different to those experienced by adults:

- The power dynamic is different to adult relationships because young people are less likely to have shared financial obligations and young women are less likely to be dependent on young men for financial stability. There is also less chance that the couple will have children together.
- Adolescence is when young people usually experience their first intimate relationship. Having limited experience in relationships may increase the use of poor coping strategies such as verbal and physical abuse (Mulford & Giordano 2008). Mulford and Giordano suggest that while navigating jealousy, friendships and new relationships are normal in terms of adolescent development, these experiences can cause conflict and lead to abusive behaviours if young people do not have the resources and support to work through such challenges in healthy and respectful ways.
- Finally, Mulford and Giordano (2008) suggest that the role of peers differentiates adolescent from adult relationships because of the strong influence peers have in adolescence. Peers are also more likely to be closely involved in these relationships and have a critical influence on attitudes and behaviours related to domestic violence and abuse. Being in an abusive relationship at this life stage is particularly difficult due to current social norms and expectations that idealise relationships and sexuality and privatise intimacy in relationships, creating an environment where abuse is silenced and unhealthy relationships are protected (Banister & Leadbeater 2007).

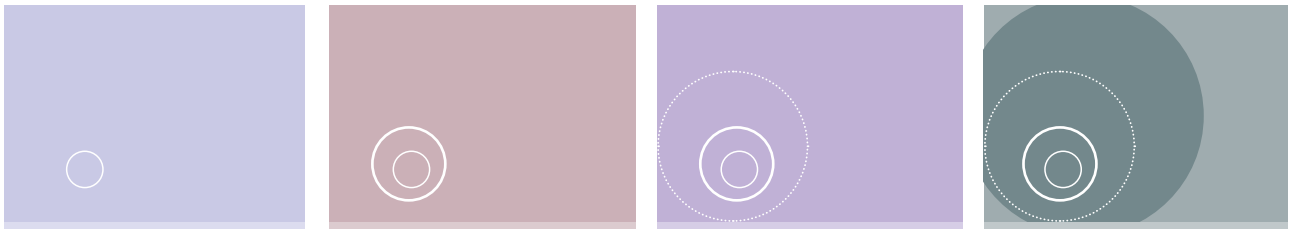
The differences between adult and teen domestic violence and abuse mean that there is a need for further adolescent-specific studies (Daff 2019).

Some studies on teen domestic violence and abuse indicate that bidirectionality, or mutual violence, in teen relationships is more common than in the adult population (Taylor & Mumford 2016). Whilst a number of studies report high rates of mutual violence in adolescent relationships (Beckmann & Kliem 2020; Daff 2019; Murphy & Smith 2010; Taylor & Xia 2020), they tend to measure acts of violence rather than the severity of violence and contextual factors associated with violence (Johnson 2006; Mulford & Giordano 2008). Other studies demonstrate that girls are more likely to report experiencing more severe forms of violence, young men are involved in more severe perpetration, and young men perpetrate more sexual and physical violence than women (Korkmaz 2021; Exner-Cortens et al. 2021). There are also differences in the reported motivations for physical abuse between boys and girls. Mulford and Giordano (2008) found that whilst both genders report anger as the primary motivator, girls are more likely to report self-defence as a motivator, and boys report a need for control. Furthermore, where boys are most likely to laugh in response to their partner's physical abuse, girls suffer significant long-term consequences that impact their health and wellbeing (Ackard et al. 2007). Thus, it has been argued that understanding teen domestic violence and abuse needs to go beyond measuring acts of violence to exploring the consequences, context, meaning and motivation, and that qualitative research methods are necessary for eliciting this data from the perspective of victims and perpetrators (Korkmaz 2021).

Risk factors

A range of factors across the different levels of a socio-ecological framework increase the likelihood of domestic violence and abuse victimisation in teens (Figure 1) (Chung 2007; Decker et al. 2018; Fairbairn et al. 2020; Guggisberg 2018; Leadbeater et al. 2018; Wagers et al. 2021). Other studies have identified that disadvantage and marginalisation increase the likelihood of experiencing domestic violence and abuse from a partner as a teen (Exner-Cortens et al. 2021; Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001).

FIGURE 1: RISK FACTORS FOR EXPERIENCING TEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE



Individual characteristics

- Developmental stages: early, mid and late adolescence, young adulthood
- Phases of a relationship: onset, maintenance, dissolution
- Skills in navigating relationship dynamics, including when relationships end
- Experiences of trauma
- Substance use
- Mental ill-health
- Engaging in risky behaviours
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – risk of DVA increases with number of ACEs

Family and peer relationships

- Exposure to violence at home and in the community, including experiencing childhood sexual abuse
- Interpersonal stress and conflict
- Distal influences e.g. parenting practices, peer aggression
- Being bullied
- Age differences in the relationship
- Young women taking responsibility for the health of a relationship, and therefore the behaviour
- A perception that being protective and jealous is a sign of love

Community level

- Concentrated disadvantage
- Environmental hazards
- Community dis-empowerment
- High rates of firearm carrying and use

Societal influences

- Changing norms of sexual behaviour: early experimentation, oral sex, 'hook ups' (e.g. 'Netflix and chill'), sexting, and combining sex and alcohol consumption
- Changes in cultural and communication contexts: social media, access to mobile technology, online pornography, instant messaging, streaming video, image apps
- Societal attitudes that normalise or minimise gender inequality and violence
- Counterproductive criminal justice policies, including over-incarceration

Impacts

The acute and chronic negative impacts of teen domestic violence and abuse on victim-survivors is devastating. Gender-based comparisons of impacts reveal that girls experience different and more adverse impacts than boys (Hamby et al. 2012; Jackson et al. 2000; Lehrner & Allen 2018). Barter (2009) found that it was more common for girls to report feeling scared and upset, and for boys to report feeling annoyed or thinking it was funny. Existing evidence has found that girls experience more negative internalising outcomes, such as depression and anxiety, than boys who are victims of domestic violence and abuse (Park et al. 2018). Other studies have demonstrated that the severity of violence and abuse experienced is correlated with higher levels of depression in victim-survivors (Roberts et al. 2003; Johnson et al. 2014).

The health and psycho-social impacts of teen domestic violence and abuse include:

- mental and psychological health (e.g. depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and attempts, and other diagnosed mental health disorders)
- physical health (e.g. eating disorders, serious injury, risky sexual behaviour, sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy)
- substance misuse
- involvement with the justice system
- victimisation/perpetration (e.g. revictimisation or perpetration in adulthood).

These have consequential impacts on individuals outside the relationship, families and the broader community (Ackard et al. 2007; Banister & Leadbeater 2007; Barter & Stanley 2016; Chung 2007; Eaton & Stephens 2018; Exner-Cortens et al. 2013; Herrenkohl & Jung 2016; Jouriles et al. 2012; Mulford & Giordano 2008; WHO & LSHTM 2010).

Australian research

A rapid review of existing Australian research reveals that most research about young people and domestic violence and abuse in Australia focuses on the impact of experiencing domestic and family violence where the perpetrator is a family member (Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer, Boxall et al. 2022; Urquhart & Doyle 2022). Other studies focus on young people using family violence – that is, violence used by adolescents towards a parent, sibling or other family members (see for example Douglas & Walsh 2018; Fitz-Gibbon et al. 2021; Guggisberg 2018; Peck et al. 2021). Other Australian research has explored young people's attitudes towards violence against women (Cale & Breckenridge 2015; Politoff et al. 2019; Carlisle et al. 2022), evaluations of and tools for evaluating respectful relationship programs (Murphy et al. 2012; Struthers & Williams 2017), exposure to warning sign behaviours (Murphy & Smith 2010), and the role of technology in perpetrating abuse as well as delivering support to victims (Lopes Gomes Pinto Ferreira 2021).

In a study based in Melbourne, Brown et al. (2009) found that 13% of young people aged 15-24 referred to a specialist youth mental health service had experienced physical dating violence in the 12 months prior to referral. Such quantitative studies indicate that domestic violence and abuse is an issue for Australian teens, but provide limited knowledge about the experience of being in an abusive relationship from the perspectives of young people themselves.

A small body of qualitative work provides some insights to the experience of young people in Australia. Most recently, Iyer (2020) explored young women's perceptions of 'dating and dating violence'.

The majority of participants were educated young women across Australia (24/35 were university educated) and none reported being unemployed or homeless. They represented young women currently and formerly in abusive relationships. The findings revealed overwhelmingly gendered and scripted relationships were central to the dating violence experienced by young women.

Two other qualitative studies of young women who have experienced abuse in their adolescent relationships were both based in South Australia (Chung 2005, 2007; Mackenzie & Mackay 2019). One of these studies is over 15 years old; the other included 10 young women from rural areas. The young women participating in the more recent study reported not recognising the abuse at first, being unsure where to seek support, and not always receiving appropriate support when they sought help (Mackenzie & Mackay 2019).

More recently, there was a piece of research with young people in Melbourne who experienced domestic violence and abuse either within their own families or from a partner. The motivations for this research were that policy and service provision need to better attend to the developmental needs of young people who are victims of DVA, that they are not often recognised as victims in their own right, and that they are often silenced and not provided with opportunities to be heard (Corrie et al. 2021). The findings from this study are useful, but it is difficult to ascertain the difference between participants who were victims of violence and abuse from a partner and those who were abused by a parent/carer.

Tasmanian context

Aside from anecdotal perspectives, little evidence is available regarding the prevalence and nature of teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania. *Tasmania's Primary Prevention Strategy to reduce violence against women and children* seeks to prevent domestic violence and abuse from occurring, but does not explicitly recognise this as an issue impacting teenagers in Tasmania. The Respectful Relationships Education program is available for all schools to access and deliver, but it is not mandatory and it is unknown how many schools deliver the program, or what the impact is for students and the community more broadly.

Practitioners working with vulnerable teens in Anglicare's Supported Youth Program (SYP) are among many professionals in Tasmania who are concerned about the rate of DVA among the young people they are working with. In 2019, the SYP team reported that they were observing high rates of male clients engaging in serious violence and aggression towards their partners and others displaying negative attitudes towards women. Staff predicted that without any significant intervention these negative attitudes would eventually turn into displaying aggression and engaging in violent behaviour towards their partners. They also observed high rates of female clients being victims of domestic violence and abuse, and that the increased use of the drug 'ice' was contributing to the severity and frequency of domestic violence and abuse among young people.

Risk factors that may increase the severity and prevalence of domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania compared to other jurisdictions are:

- high rates of gun ownership and illegal possession of firearms (Alpers et al. 2022b)
- high rates of physical assault against children, especially 10-14 year olds (AIHW 2019a) and children in out of home care with disability (AIHW 2019a)
- the greatest increase in reported sexual assault in Australia during 2021, with young people under 18 making up 60% of victims (ABS 2021)
- high welfare dependence
- a high proportion of the population living in rural and remote areas.

A review of services in Tasmania has revealed that there are few support services designed or funded to respond to teens experiencing or using abuse in their relationships. The small number that do include:

- Family Violence Counselling Support Service (FVSCC). Funded under the current action plan, the FVCSS have no minimum age for working with clients. However, they do not provide long-term therapeutic support. Their role is limited to providing short-term support whilst determining the best next steps for a client, including where to refer them for further support
- SafeChoices (CatholicCare). Provide counselling support services to victim-survivors of intimate partner abuse with no age limit
- Step Up – Hobart (Colony 47). Intervention with children aged 12-17 who are violent towards family members or partners
- Project O – North West (Big Hart). Project O's primary prevention approach engages young women, increases their sense of agency, and skills them up to deliver events in their own communities that change attitudes and de-normalise violence
- Specialist family violence support services such as Engender Equality, Huon Domestic Violence Service and Yemaya, who may work with victim-survivors under 18 but are not explicitly funded to do so.

Attitudes and understanding regarding respectful relationships and violence among young people in Tasmania were explored through a survey and focus groups conducted by YNOT in 2017 (Tasmanian Youth Forum 2017). These activities revealed that young Tasmanians:

- were aware of family violence as an issue in the community
- did not know where to access support if they needed it (half of the participants)
- were not aware of how gender inequality could lead to gender-based violence
- want to prevent violence but struggle to articulate anti-violence messages unless prompted
- wanted to learn about gender inequality from an early age
- wanted encouragement to try activities and jobs that do not conform to outdated gender stereotypes.

Policy and practice: A window of opportunity

Despite a surge in strategies, policy and research focused on preventing violence against women in Australia over the past 30 years (Carrington & Phillips 2006), the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse remains a national crisis. Recognition of and efforts to address teen domestic violence and abuse are significant omissions in federal and state policies and action plans, as well service provision and programs such as Respectful Relationships Education in schools. Occasionally there is reference made to the issue, but it is rarely given explicit attention. Children and young people are referred to most commonly as victim-survivors of family violence between parents or carers. The next most common reference is to Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH). It is clear that the issue of AVITH is being taken seriously in both state and federal jurisdictions. This is a promising step, but although they are related and there are some known links between them, AVITH is different to domestic violence and abuse in an intimate partner context. The absence of specific acknowledgement of this issue is concerning, particularly when children and young people have been identified as a priority topic on *Australia's National Research Agenda (ANRA) 2020-2022* (ANROWS 2020) and specific focus areas include adolescent intimate partner abuse. Also of concern is that Victoria remains the only jurisdiction in Australia where Respectful Relationships Education is mandatory (Pfitzner et al. 2022).

Opportunities to highlight this absence have been taken through consultation processes associated with the development of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* and the third *Tasmanian Action Plan for Family and Sexual Violence*. As part of recent consultation processes, advocates have jumped at the opportunity to alert policy-makers to the need for explicit attention directed at children as victims in their own right:

> *"Developmentally appropriate responses to violence in the context of intimate partner relationships between young teenagers also warrant further consideration to ensure the unique needs of these young people are met" (CCYPT 2022).*

> *"Young people who are experiencing family violence are not recognised as victim-survivors in their own right and have been overlooked by the Draft Plan…. The gap in responses for young people that have experienced family violence is widely recognised by the family violence sector across Australia and the Draft Plan must properly recognise young people under all the National Pillars, especially the need for specialised and age-appropriate services and housing responses" (Melbourne City Mission & Berry Street Y-Change 2022).*

> *"Numerous stakeholders noted that the previous National Plan was titled 'National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children' but that the Draft Consultation Framework had removed the word 'their' from the title. This is essential. Children and young people can be primary victims as well – for example, teenagers in abusive relationships or children who are the target of parental or sibling abuse" (Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer, Gelb et al. 2022).*

> *"Stakeholders identified specific forms of violence they believe to be underexplored, including child sexual abuse and intimate-partner violence in the context of young dating relationships" (Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer, Gelb et al. 2022).*

> *"Education was viewed as an important early intervention for young people, particularly women, who are at significant risk of dating, intimate-partner and sexual violence, and may also be experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence at home" (Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer, Gelb et al. 2022).*

> *"The need to ensure availability and accessibility of age-sensitive interventions was also suggested by some stakeholders, one of whom noted that: 'There's not a lot of funding or very, very little in the early intervention space, particularly with boys and young men as these behaviours are occurring and maybe being picked up for the first time'" (Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer, Gelb et al. 2022).*

Legislation does not clearly recognise children as victims of teen domestic violence and abuse in most jurisdictions in Australia. In Victoria and South Australia, the word 'adult' is used in defining these relationships. NSW, Qld, WA, NT, ACT and Commonwealth legislation all use the word 'person' when defining couple relationships and make no mention of age restrictions. Tasmanian legislation specifically applies to young people aged 16-17 and excludes younger adolescents. This means that in Tasmania, legal protection in the form of family violence orders (FVO) or police family violence orders (PFVO) are only available to young people who are aged 16 and over, leaving those under 16 with no legal protection.

Rationale

Whilst the evidence base is growing, greater understanding of this issue is needed in order to develop prevention and response strategies that meet the unique needs of adolescents. Most research is from the US (referring to it as 'dating violence'), with a large body from Europe (e.g. Barter et al. 2009; Barter & Stanley 2016; Barter et al. 2017), and we need to be mindful of transferring findings from the US to other country contexts (Hamby & Turner 2013).

Quantitative research provides information on the prevalence of abuse and a partial picture of its nature. However, it is limited in its capacity to give in-depth insights into the nature of violence and abuse in these relationships, the impacts of abuse, and what supports young people need. Drawing directly on the voices of young people, qualitative research provides opportunities to better understand the lived experience of teen domestic violence and abuse (Korkmaz 2021). It goes beyond measuring acts of violence to exploring the consequences, context, meaning and motivation from the perspective of victims and perpetrators.

The factors underpinning the rationale for this project are:

- significant detrimental impacts of teen domestic violence and abuse
- limited local and national evidence to inform prevention, intervention and supports
- a need for recognition of the issue in legislation, policy and programs
- the policy-making environment is ready for influence and the issue aligns with research priorities
- young people in Australia want and need more attention placed on the breadth of domestic violence and abuse (Carlisle et al. 2022)
- young people in Tasmania are aware of this issue and eager to engage in prevention activities.

Teen domestic violence and abuse in Australia is a largely invisible issue. This is exacerbated by the fact it is a gendered issue, and that teenage girls tend to be taken less seriously than adult women. For children who experience various forms of marginalisation and disempowerment and may be disengaged from school, involved with child safety services, engaged with various welfare support services, or disconnected from support services altogether, their voices are even further in the margins. To date, most Australian research has included young people who have high levels of education (Iyer 2020), may be reporting on experiencing domestic violence in their family home (Corrie et al. 2021), or are speaking broadly about understandings of/attitudes toward domestic violence and abuse (Carlisle et al. 2022). Research more closely related is dated or from jurisdictions outside of Tasmania.

Young, in love and in danger shines a light on the experiences of children enduring violence and abuse at the hands of their partners. The project provides evidence of the prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse, and harrowing insights from the children who have endured it. It is hoped that the findings will influence significant change that prevents teen domestic violence and abuse and supports the healing and recovery of those who have been forced to endure it.

PART TWO

About ‘Young, in love and in danger’

Part 2: About 'Young, in love and in danger'

Young, in love and in danger is a research project that centres the voices of 17 young people with lived experience whilst providing the expertise and insights of 20 professionals working with young people in Tasmania. It describes the nature of teen domestic violence and abuse and identifies service and support needs of young people. The project was initiated in response to consultation with service providers across Tasmania, through which four key issues related to domestic abuse were raised:

- Gaps in domestic violence and abuse prevention and support services for victim-survivors and perpetrators – especially for those aged under 18 years
- Legal responses to domestic violence and abuse – including police responses, areas for legislation review and court processes that re-traumatise victims
- Culture, values, attitudes and beliefs that drive domestic violence and abuse
- Perceived high prevalence and severity of abuse in adolescent intimate partner relationships.

In particular, Supported Youth Program (SYP) workers expressed serious concerns about relationship abuse being perpetrated and experienced by young people who are under 18 years of age in Tasmania. Broader consultation with the sector in early 2021 mirrored these concerns and revealed a significant gap in support services for victims and perpetrators of teen domestic violence and abuse.

Research aims, approach and design

This research project follows a mixed methods approach, beginning with analysis of existing quantitative data from the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC) to understand the prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania. Given the known limitations of using quantitative data alone, grounded theory methods were used to collect and analyse rich, contextual data in order to understand the lived experience of young people and the professionals working with them. This project received approval from the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference 24940), the Department of Education (Reference 2021-35) and the Department of Communities (Reference P19/000164) in Tasmania. Advice and support was regularly sought and received from a Reference Group comprising family violence specialist support services, government agencies with service provision and policy development responsibilities, and youth support services working directly with children and young people.

The overarching aim of this project was to develop understanding of how young people and the professionals working with them describe what it is like to be in an abusive relationship as a child, and what kinds of supports and prevention activities might make a positive difference. Three sub-aims contribute to this understanding and are presented in Table 1 alongside the exploratory research questions and methods.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH AIMS, QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Aim	Questions	Method
Estimate the prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania	What does existing data tell us about the prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania?	Analysis of Wave 8, Cohort K LSAC data
Understand the nature of teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania	What is the nature of abuse experienced from a boyfriend/girlfriend/partner by young people when they were under 18?	In-depth interviews with young people and professionals
Understand teen victim-survivors' support and service needs	What are the support and service needs of Tasmanian children experiencing domestic violence and abuse from a partner?	In-depth interviews with young people and professionals

Determining the prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania

About the study '*Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*'

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) has been following the development of approximately 10,000 young people and their families since 2003 through biannual collection of data. The young people in Cohort K (kindergarten, who were 4-5 years in 2003-2004) are now in their late teens, and questions relating to safety within their relationships were asked in the 2018 survey (Wave 8). Permission to access this data was granted by the National Centre for Longitudinal Data Dataverse[1]. Training with the Australian Institute of Family Studies was undertaken and additional analysis support was provided by epidemiologist Jon Moore, Professor Neil Paulsen and Associate Professor Jennifer Power.

Sample

The LSAC uses a two-stage clustered sample design; postcodes were selected first, followed by children. Stratification ensured proportional geographic representation across jurisdictions and urban and regional areas. The original recruitment strategy identified 18,814 families to participate in the study who received a letter of invitation from Medicare Australia, which also advised how they could elect to opt-out of the study. The details of the 16,342 families who did not opt out were provided to the Wave 1 data collection agency (I View; ABS collected data from Wave 2 onwards). Of these, 10,090 were successfully recruited in the Wave 1 sample. The K cohort included 4,983 families in Wave 1; this number had decreased to 3,037 in the Wave 8 sample (60.9% of Wave 1 families) (Mohal et al. 2020).

1 Use of the data was permitted only after signing the associated confidentiality deed that clearly stipulates how data will be used, stored and protected.

Measures

1,788 Cohort K participants who had reported ever having a partner were asked to indicate if any of the below had occurred once, a few times, monthly, weekly, daily/almost daily, or not at all in the past 12 months. The fifteen questions were adapted from Composite Abuse Scale Revised – Short Form (Ford-Gilboe et al. 2016)[2].

We would like to know if you experienced any of the actions listed below from any current or former partner(s) in the past 12 months[3]. For each item, please tell us how often it happened.

a. *Blamed me for causing their violent behaviour.*
b. *Shook, pushed, grabbed or threw me.*
c. *Tried to convince my family, children or friends that I am crazy or turn them against me.*
d. *Used or threatened to use a knife or gun or other weapon to harm me.*
e. *Made me perform sex acts that I did not want to perform.*
f. *Followed me or hung around outside my home.*
g. *Threatened to harm or kill me or someone close to me.*
h. *Choked me.*
i. *Forced or tried to force me to have sex.*
j. *Harassed me over the phone, by text, email or using social media.*
k. *Told me I was crazy, stupid or not good enough.*
l. *Hit or tried to hit me with a fist or object, kicked or bit me.*
m. *Tried to keep me from seeing or talking to my family or friends.*
n. *Confined or locked me in a room or other space.*
o. *Kept me from having access to a job, money or financial resources.*

2 Ford-Gilboe et al. (2016) tested the 12-item Composite Abuse Scale (CAS), and found a Cronbach's alpha of .94. Internal consistency for the three sub-scales was acceptable (0.938 for psychological abuse, 0.847 for physical abuse, 0.884 for sexual abuse). The authors included three additional items to address gaps in the CAS identified by IPA experts. These three items were 'Choked me', 'Threatened to harm or kill me or someone close to me', and 'Kept me from having access to a job, money or financial resources'. Ford-Gilboe et al. tested the inclusion of 'Choked me' and found that it loaded cleanly onto the physical abuse scale (0.794) and the model fit was excellent (CFI=0.948, RMSEA=0.07, $\chi 2$=129, df=62, p<0.001). The authors note that the remaining two items require further testing (Commonwealth of Australia 2020).

3 This stem wording is the only adaptation from the original scale which instead asked: 'We would like to know if you experienced any of the actions listed below from any current or former partner or partners. If it ever happened to you, please tell us how often it usually happened in the past 12 months.'

A total score and scores for 3 sub-scales (with higher scores indicating greater severity of abuse) were calculated using a mean of all the items and multiplying by 15, where there were responses for at least 11 of 15 items (~70%). The items were coded as follows:

1. Not in the past 12 months = 0
2. Once = 1
3. A few times = 2
4. Monthly = 3
5. Weekly = 4
6. Daily/almost daily = 5.

The sub-scales were calculated in the same way, using a mean and multiplying by the number of items in the sub-scale. The sub-scales and item allocation are as follows:

- physical abuse - items b, d, h, l, n
- sexual abuse - items e, i
- psychological abuse - items a, c, f, g, j, k, m, o.

Analysis

Descriptive and comparative analyses were undertaken to analyse the prevalence and severity of intimate partner abuse experienced by young people in Tasmania and Australia. Any IPV[4] was used as a binary outcome variable and mean scores as a measure of severity among those reporting any IPV, with higher scores indicating greater severity of abuse.

4 IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) was the terminology used in the LSAC study and is maintained here for the sake of consistency.

Understanding the lived experience of young people who have been abused in their relationships

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 young people aged 18-25 and 20 professionals working with young people aged 12-17. Interviews were conducted October-December 2021 across Tasmania. The decision to interview young people aged over 18 about their past experiences when they were younger ensured that support services were available to participants. Where participants turned 18 during the course of an abusive relationship, their experiences past age 18 have also been included. The average interview length was two hours for young people and 80 minutes for professionals. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participants were provided with a copy of their transcript to review before final inclusion in the project. Three young people who reviewed their transcript in person with the researcher participated in further interviews to elaborate on and further explore the issue together.

As an exploratory study, interviews with young people were open-ended to provide space for participants to share their stories in ways that were safe for them. Broad questions to elicit details about their experiences of abuse and their support and service needs helped to guide young people during the interview. Each interview commenced with the completion of a Life History Calendar. The Life History Calendar method has been used in many retrospective qualitative research projects and comparisons with traditional survey methods have found it to be a more effective model for eliciting reports of intimate partner abuse (Stroem et al. 2021; Yoshihama et al. 2005).

Research on this issue to date has typically included young people in schools and universities. In this project, young people were recruited through service providers across Tasmania in the first instance. This deliberate decision sought to include young people with diverse educational backgrounds and not restrict the sample to those who completed school or pursued further education. Using information provided by the researcher, service providers contacted young people they thought might be interested in participating, either directly or by posting flyers on social media or at their organisation's physical location. Interested young people contacted the researcher directly to discuss participation, ensuring appropriateness for the study and that they had the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate. The lack of difficulty in recruiting young people is an indicator of the importance service staff and young people place on increasing knowledge about teen domestic violence and abuse. Recruitment of young people exceeded initial targets and stopped at 17 participants. Explicit mention of violence or abuse was deliberately missing from recruitment information (see Appendix A) to ensure young people with broad experiences of abuse (and who may not necessarily define their experiences as abusive) were able to participate.

Interviews with professionals

Interviews with 20 professionals focused on their observations of young people experiencing abuse in their relationships, the types of support they provide, and opportunities for increasing the safety and wellbeing of young people in abusive relationships when they are under 18. Information about the study was sent directly to service providers working with young people and workers were invited to contact the researcher if interested in participating. Paired and group interviews occurred where more than one professional from a single organisation participated.

Qualitative analysis of interviews

Grounded theory methods were used to analyse interview data. The analysis occurred throughout the study and involved initial line by line coding, categorising, constant comparison and theoretical sampling. Quotes presented in the report were selected to represent the key themes emerging from the research. Member checking was employed as a process where participants were provided with opportunities to review and make edits or provide feedback on both their transcripts and a draft copy of the final report.

PART THREE

Findings

Part 3: Findings – "It feels like we have no voice, and even if we did, people do not care"

As an exploratory project, interviews were deliberately broad so that young people could share their stories. Not all young people were asked the exact same questions; not all young people shared detail about the same topics. The findings of this project illustrate the trauma of being abused by a partner, the nature of abuse in teen relationships, the many ways interventions and prevention strategies could prevent this abuse occurring, and how to mitigate and help repair the trauma that has been experienced. To separate and compartmentalise the different experiences of being abused by an intimate partner would risk minimising the complexity and the cumulative, enduring, multifaceted impacts of experiencing this abuse. Although repetition and crossover has been minimised as much as possible, some repetition is unavoidable to represent the complex nature of these relationships.

The primary aim of this research was to understand the nature of abuse experienced by young people and their support and service needs. Through the course of deep, difficult conversations with participants, other related experiences in their lives were also revealed. Participants led these conversations and disclosures and not all participants have talked about the same things. For example, disclosures of abuse were shared by some participants, and whilst in retrospect it may have been informative to have asked all participants about these experiences, it was not central to the research. So where appropriate this information is provided in the report, but it must be noted that a lack of detail or focus from some participants is not because it didn't occur, rather that it wasn't part of the discussion.

The findings are presented in six sections:

Sections 3.3 to 3.6 begin with a summary of key findings followed by a brief content warning.
The remainder of each section contains detailed descriptions including quotes from participants.

3.1 How prevalent is teen domestic violence and abuse?

Prevalence rates of teen domestic violence and abuse victimisation are critical for understanding the extent of this issue in Tasmania and for assessing the effectiveness of interventions. Until recently, nationally representative data for Australia has been lacking. In 2018, for the first time, young people who had reported ever having had a partner were asked about their experiences of domestic violence and abuse in the past 12 months as part of the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*. Analysis of this data reveals important findings relevant to young people in Tasmania. These are presented below. For more detailed tables and descriptions of this data, please refer to Appendix B.

Results from this nationally representative sample show approximately 40% of young people aged 18-19 in Tasmania may have experienced domestic violence and abuse in the previous 12 months (Table 2).

TABLE 2: WEIGHTED PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA

	Tasmania (n=69) Prevalence % (95% CI)		Australia (n=1788) Prevalence % (95% CI)	
Total (males and females)				
Overall	39.6	(28.1 – 52.4)	28.5	(26.3 – 30.9)
Psychological	35.3	(23.3 – 49.4)	25.1	(22.9 – 27.4)
Physical	24.8	(13.9 – 40.3)	11.7	(10.1 – 13.6)
Sexual	15.8	(7.1 – 31.8)	7.6	(6.2 – 9.3)

Figure 2 shows that 18–19 year olds in Tasmania, both overall and by sex, are more likely to report experiencing domestic violence and abuse than their peers nationally.

FIGURE 2: PREVALENCE OF TEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA

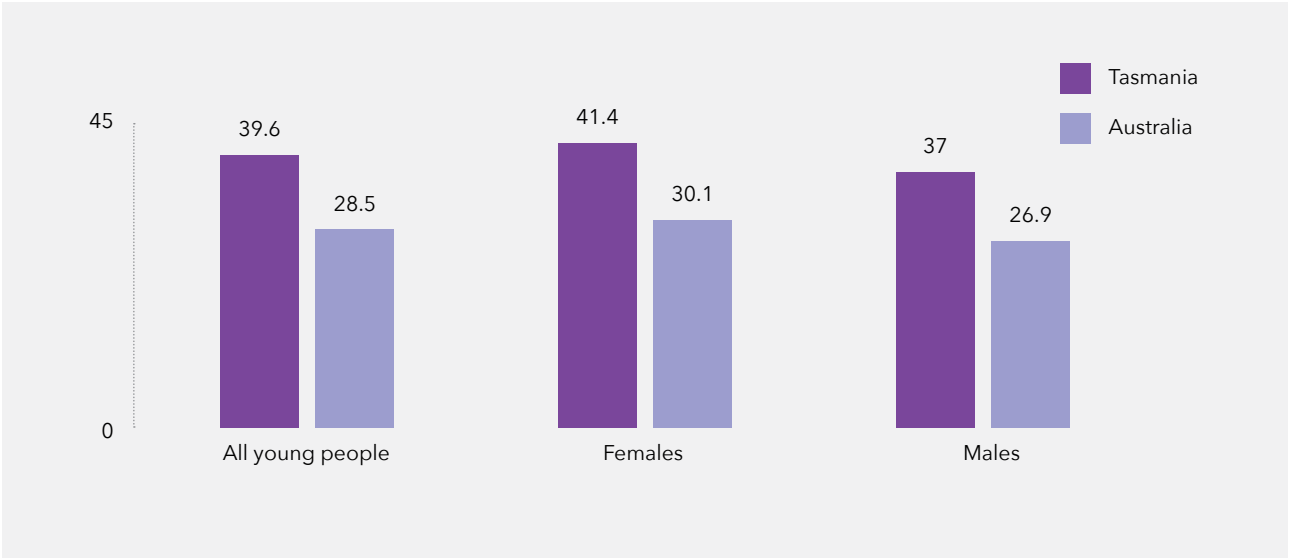
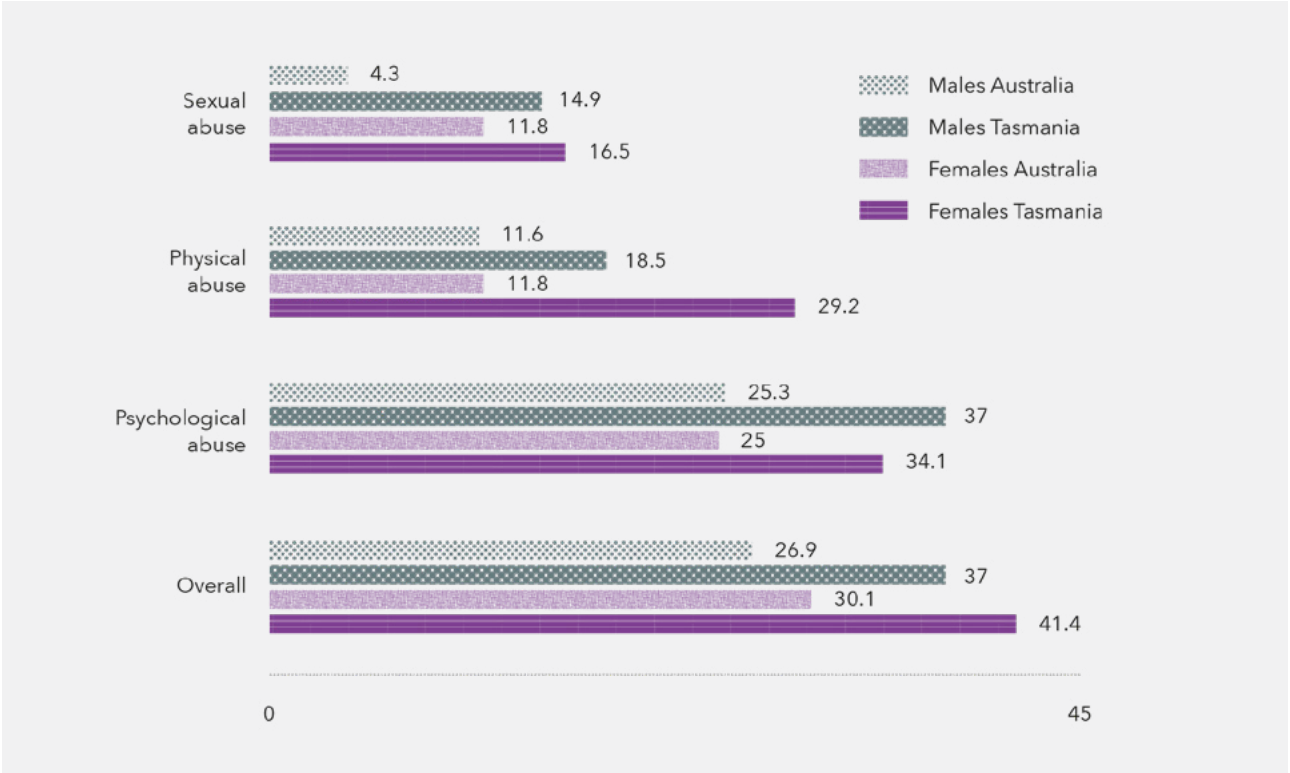


Figure 3 shows that males and females in Tasmania are more likely to experience all types of abuse than their peers in Australia. Females are more likely to experience sexual and physical abuse than males, and males are more likely to report psychological abuse than females.

FIGURE 3: PREVALENCE OF ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA



Statistically significant findings

Tasmanian females aged 18-19 are more likely to have experienced physical abuse in their relationships compared with their peers nationally (29.2% compared with 11.8%).

Tasmanian males aged 18-19 are more likely to have experienced sexual abuse in their relationships compared with their peers nationally (14.9% compared with 4.3%).

Other findings[5]

Young people in Tasmania (males and females combined) are more likely to report experiencing domestic violence and abuse in their relationships compared with their peers nationally.

	Tasmania %	Australia %
Domestic violence and abuse overall	39.6	28.5
Psychological abuse	35.3	25.1
Physical abuse	24.8	11.7
Sexual abuse	15.8	7.6

Sex-based comparisons of prevalence

When compared with males in Tasmania and females in Australia, females in Tasmania are more likely to experience:

- domestic violence and abuse overall
- physical violence and abuse
- sexual violence and abuse.

Young males in Tasmania are more likely to report experiencing psychological abuse than females in Tasmania and males in Australia.

Severity[6] **of domestic violence and abuse**

Females in Tasmania are more likely to report experiencing greater severity of all types of violence than males.

Compared with females in Australia, results show that females in Tasmania were more likely to report experiencing more severe:

- DVA (12.3 compared with 7.2)
- sexual abuse (3.7 compared with 2.6)
- psychological abuse (10.1 compared with 5.8).

Females in Australia and Tasmania reported the same levels of physical abuse.

Compared with males in Australia, results suggest that males in Tasmania were more likely to report experiencing:

- more severe:
  - DVA (8 compared with 6.6)
  - psychological abuse (6.3 compared with 5)
- less severe:
  - physical abuse (1.8 compared with 3.5)
  - sexual abuse (2 compared with 2.3).

5 The small sample size meant findings were unlikely to be statistically significant; nevertheless there were notable differences between Tasmania and the nationwide sample.

6 The severity of violence and abuse is calculated based on frequency – the more abuse types reported and the more frequently these were experienced increases the result and this is defined in the LSAC study as severity. These scores have different maximum scores as a result of the mean being calculated from different numbers of original questions (psychological abuse: 8 questions; physical abuse: 5 questions; sexual abuse: 2 questions each with 5 possible measures of exposure from once through to daily).

3.2 Introducing the participants

Before presenting the qualitative findings of the research, it is helpful to first introduce the participants. Broad information about the 17 young people and 20 professionals who engaged in this project is provided to give context while protecting their identities. The insights into the traumatic experiences of these young people are unique and privileged. A number of participants were sharing their experiences for the first time, remembering detail they had forgotten, or going into depth they had not ventured into before. Driven by intergenerational altruism, they shared their stories hoping to make a difference for others.

> *Hopefully now I can help other people, so they don't go down the same path, or get trapped in the same situation. (Ali)*

> *I think it's really important for me to do this today because I feel like if there had have been preventative measures in place back when I first experienced family violence it wouldn't have continued to the point where a child was exposed, then the drug use because of the trauma; it's all interconnected. (Elise)*

Young people

Table 3 outlines the demographic characteristics of young people who participated in this project.

TABLE 3: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPANTS

Demographic category	Number of participants
Region	South: 9 North West: 6 North: 2
Sexuality	LGBTIQA+: 11 Heterosexual: 6
Gender	Female: 15 Male: 1 Genderqueer: 1
Aboriginality	Non-Aboriginal: 11 Aboriginal: 6
School completion	Year 12: 7 Year 10: 3 Currently attending school (Year 11/12): 3 Year 9: 1
Recruitment pathway	Housing service: 5 Youth service: 4 Family violence service: 3 Word of mouth: 3 Neighbourhood Houses: 2

The diverse lives of participants at the time of interview included one or more young people who were currently:

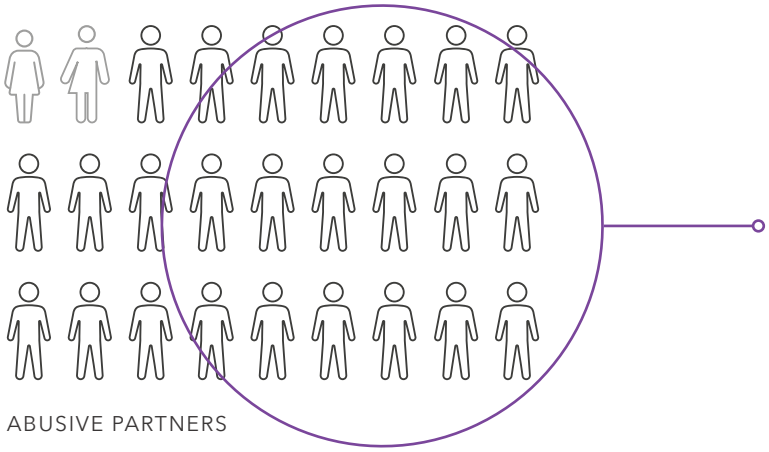
- living alone
- needing secure housing and living in supported accommodation
- studying or working
- pregnant
- seeking protection from ex-partner via police intervention
- working with CSS to have their child returned to their care
- living in fear
- feeling alone
- at risk of returning to their abusive ex-partner
- engaged with therapeutic support services
- suffering from mental ill-health.

Relationship characteristics

The 17 young people described a total of 27 relationships that have been counted in the descriptions below. Some participants mentioned other abusive relationships briefly, but the limited information provided about those relationships meant that they have not been included here. For example, Ali mentioned a relationship where her partner had grabbed her by the throat and threw her up against a car when they broke up. The focus of the interview was on another relationship and so no further information was provided about the one that was only mentioned in passing.

Key characteristics of the 27 relationships described:

- over half started before participants were 16 years old
- almost all (25/27) relationships involved a male-identifying abusive partner and female-identifying victim-survivor. The remaining two relationships involved a female abusive partner and male victim-survivor, and a trans-feminine abusive partner and trans-masculine victim-survivor
- almost all were 6 months or more in duration
- about 1/3 involved significant age gaps ranging from 8 to 22 years
- about 2/3 of abusive partners were also under 18 when the relationship started
- almost half of the participants were in two or more abusive relationships
- in total, participants lived a combined 61 years in violent and abusive relationships.



Almost all relationships described involved a male-identifying abusive partner and female-identifying victim-survivor.

About two-thirds of abusive partners were also under 18 when the relationship started.

6+

Almost all relationships described were 6 months or more in duration.

Table 4 provides an outline of the duration and age gap in each relationship, time to first violent or abusive incident, and frequency of violence and abuse.

TABLE 4: PARTICIPANTS' RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Pseudonyms	Age when in r/ship	Age of partner	Length of relationship
Jess	15-25	14-24	10 years
Saskia	12-13 13-17	13-14 14-18	13 months 4 years
Katie	15-18	25-29	3 years
Jamie	14-19	16-21	5 years
Elise	13-21	16-24	8-9 years
Sahar	13-15 15-15	16-18 23-24	1-3 years 3 months
Lilly	14-16 16-17	17-20 18-20	3 years 18 months
Ali	16-18	14-16	2 years
Michelle	14 15 17	13 17 39	5 months 9 months 2 months
Sarah	17 17	25 20	6 months 4 weeks
Addison	15-19	16-20	5 years
Callum	17	17	1 year
Hazel	14-17	17-20	3 years
Ingrid	14-16 16-19 17	23-25 28-31 17	2 years 3 years 6 months
Jacinta	17 17	17 37	7 months 4 months
Sam	17-18	19-20	1.5 years
Gina	14-15 15-16	15-16 16-17	1.5 years 9 months

Professionals

Twenty professionals across Tasmania participated in interviews for this project. Together they drew on over 243 years of experience working with young people from services in the housing, education, youth, health and welfare sectors. The group of professionals included frontline workers interacting directly with young people and practitioners in senior management and coordination roles with prior experience as frontline workers.

3.3 "It felt like a web that I was trapped in": The conditions that trap teens in violent and abusive relationships

Summary

This research revealed three conditions external to the relationship that strengthened the trap:

- Living in a world where violence and abuse is normal
- Having nowhere safe to live
- Needing love and connection but having limited or no relationship experience.

The normalisation of violence and abuse contributes to young people being trapped in their violent and abusive relationships. Many of the participants had experienced violence and abuse within their families before they formed their own relationships. Several participants described seeing or hearing intimate partner violence and abuse, or being abused by their parents/carers, during their childhood. The violence and abuse within their own intimate partner relationship was sometimes compounded by violence and abuse committed by their partner's family members, either between each other or aimed at the teen. Many participants were growing up and forming a relationship in a culture where violence, including sexual violence, was the norm and something they assumed they had to endure. With their peers and parental figures frequently employing violence and abuse as a means of responding to interpersonal conflict, and even glorifying or condoning violence, there was little opportunity for these teens to repudiate and resist the violence and abuse that was occurring within their own relationship.

It is striking that many of the participants were dependent on their abusive partners for housing. Katie, Jamie, Ali, Michelle, Sarah, Lilly, Elise and Sam were all unable to live with their own families. These young people, as well as Jess, Saskia, Hazel and Sahar who had difficult relationships with their parents (and were only sometimes able to live with them), were all dependent on the living arrangements they had with their violent and abusive partners. Earning little or no income, having inadequate access to Centrelink benefits, and with almost no access to affordable housing, these teens were in an invidious position. For many of them, leaving the relationship would push them into homelessness. Without family willing to take them and a shortage of emergency housing options, many were facing the prospect of sleeping rough.

Many of the participants were living with their partner's family, either in their house or an adjacent shed or other kind of shelter. While for some this living arrangement proved protective to some degree, for those whose partner's parents/carers either dismissed, condoned or perpetrated violence and abuse, it compounded the abuse and violence they experienced from their partners. For couples living alone, the more geographically isolated they were, the more life-threatening the violence and abuse became. Without ready access to transport or independent income, they were effectively trapped.

With limited or no relationship experience and motivated by a natural desire for love and connection, these teens were frequently ill-equipped to navigate violence and abuse. Many of them reported feeling unloved or unsupported as a young child, or losing a parental figure to relationship breakdown, imprisonment or death. For some, this left them searching for love and support in the form of an intimate relationship, and in some cases hoping to build a new family of their own. For others, they were further drawn into the relationship trap by the lure of becoming part of their partner's family. Teens viewed family members as a potential source of love and care, but in reality many of these family members became just another source of exploitation and abuse.

These findings highlight serious structural, systemic and cultural conditions that contribute to teens being trapped in violent and abusive relationships.

CONTENT WARNING:

The remainder of this section contains detailed accounts and direct quotes of participants. Examples of topics covered include violence, abuse, sexual assault and homelessness. These may be triggering for some readers. A list of support services available to contact can be found on page i. If you wish to avoid the detailed parts of this section please skip ahead to Section 3.4.

"It happens to everyone": Living in a world where violence and abuse is normal

When violence and abuse are normalised it is difficult to recognise it as a problem. Alternatively, some victim-survivors may believe they deserve nothing better. In either case, the normalisation of violence and abuse contributes to young people being trapped in their abusive relationships. Three key factors contribute to the normalisation of violence and abuse for the participants in this study:

- experiencing violence and abuse outside the relationship
- cultures of glorified violence and abuse
- violence and abuse being ignored, dismissed, condoned or enabled.

> *My mum had given me that history of me being a bad and naughty kid who deserved abuse, and I'd internalised that, and then that additional reinforcement from Krystyne [her boyfriend's mum] that this was my fault and that I was the problem just cemented that everything that was happening to me was only what I deserved. I don't think I had any idea that anything that was happening was avoidable. I thought at that point that that's just how it is, and that's what life is like. I thought other people just coped with it better and I just wasn't trying hard enough. I think I almost thought that everyone dealt with these things on an everyday basis but they just kept quiet about it because it was not socially polite, and that's why everyone was brushing it off when I was like, "Help". Like, it wasn't a big deal because it happens to everyone and I was just overreacting the whole time. (Hazel)*

"I witnessed my mum getting abused": Experiencing violence and abuse outside the relationship

Outside the relationship, experiencing violence and abuse was normal for most participants. Almost all participants were victims of violence and abuse from people outside the relationship. Parents/carers, siblings, strangers and peers all were named as abusive others in their lives. They witnessed family members and friends experiencing abuse and lived in communities where violence was glorified and seen as a valid form of conflict resolution. Thus, it was unsurprising that they minimised and normalised abuse, particularly if they were in their first serious relationship and had been exposed to family violence as younger children.

> *Everyone I was surrounded by, and I mean everyone, all the people that were in my life… Abused me in some shape, way or form. (Elise)*

> *She [mum] had a similar struggle to me in terms that she was very trapped as well and he threatened to kill her multiple times and even to the point where he actually took a bullet out of his gun and left a note in my crib as a baby and left a note for her saying, "If you try to leave me the bullet goes through the baby". (Jacinta)*

> *I witnessed my mum getting abused, and when you're hearing it … My mum got together with this person when I was six, and she spent about six years with him… So I had a very dysfunctional view on relationships because of what I witnessed and heard. (Michelle)*

A number of participants described being sexually assaulted outside of the relationship by siblings, peers and strangers. The cumulative impact of such abuse is one factor in the minimising and normalising of violence and abuse experienced by young people.

> *I drank vodka – it was at my first party, and I passed out. And I woke up and this guy that I thought was my friend was raping me, in a room full of people. It was dark. About six people were sleeping on the ground. After that happened, I passed out again, woke up, and it was about 7 am. He was on the porch with maybe seven other guys, and he was like, "Guess who got a stat last night, boys?" (Sahar)*

A number of participants experienced a range of abuse from the family members of their abusive partners. Katie was sexually assaulted by Tom's brother, Elise was physically assaulted by one of David's siblings, and many participants experienced various forms of psychological abuse from their abusive partners' families. Hazel felt more afraid of Kayden's mum than Kayden and shared examples of incidents where his mum would yell at her, introduced her to drugs, coerced her into criminal activity, and berated her for not taking the blame for a crime her son committed. She recalled a time when Krystyne had directed them to raid the home of someone who had recently been incarcerated. Hazel and Kayden were caught by police breaking and entering, driving an unregistered car and possessing marijuana, and Kayden was charged.

> *After that happened, it was bad, because he already had a criminal record and I had a clean record. Krystyne was [saying], "You needed to say that all of this was you. You needed to say that you were driving the vehicle. That was your weed and that you were breaking and entering". I got in big trouble for that one. (Hazel)*

Workers felt that experiencing violence and abuse was common for many of their clients and talked about the role this played in young people normalising violence and abuse in their own relationships:

> *Mostly there was a lot of trying to be connected with each other, but not really having a model of what that looked like. So the way they spoke to each other was so volatile consistently, and that was the norm. And that was accepted. And that was a part of their relationship. And then when it got out of hand, it was violent and he would do things like smash her head into the oven. (Andrew, worker)*

> *The young people don't necessarily recognise… that the relationship is not healthy and that it's actually domestic violence… Because it might be the norm for them, so that's what they've experienced at home, seen their parents, so that's probably what a normal relationship looks like… and unless there's bruises or significant injuries, they just don't recognise it. (Alicia and Aileen, workers)*

Workers noted that some abusive partners would employ others in the community to assault victim-survivors. Workers from one service recalled an abusive partner paying a young person to steal their ex-partner's pet so they could kill it. Ali was assaulted by other young people in the community on different occasions and whilst she couldn't attribute it to her abusive partner, he had made many threats that he would have her bashed if she didn't give him money he believed she owed him.

> *A lot of them will get females to bash the female. They'll pay them to bash the female. (Matilda, worker)*

Sadly, the regularity with which some young people endure and witness abuse means that they make comparisons between abusive partners, with the less severe abuse seemingly tolerable or acceptable because it isn't 'as bad':

> *I'd rather be in the relationship I was in with Tim than Steve any day of the week. Me and Tim – it was DV, but nowhere near as bad as Steve. Tim, he never hit me. He threw me up against a wall and broke my pinkie, but that was the worst he'd done. We used to scream at each other. He punched holes through the walls and stuff, but that was the worst Tim ever did. He never used to force sex on me. He used to control my phone. He would let me go see my mum for five hours once a week, but that was all. At least he'd let me see my mum... When he goes off he's scary. But apart from that he's a lovely bloke. (Lilly)*

The combination of commonly observing violence and abuse and witnessing others joking about it contributes to perceptions by young people that it is normal:

> *I would wager that maybe one in three guys my age here in Tasmania have done something like that. [Carmel: What makes you say that?] It is so fucking common. I was in this friend group about a year and a half ago. They treated one of the more well-known rapists in that group as – it was like a joke. It was a joke. Most of the other guys had done it, but he was more well known for it… I'm not sure if it's the world or if it's just here, but for here, it is like every girl – every single girl I know has been raped. (Sahar)*

This joking about violence and abuse is not only the result of normalisation but is part of the process by which it becomes normalised. These experiences of violence and abuse outside the relationship highlight the importance of others intervening to provide a counter-narrative. Without it, they have no alternative views from which to see violence and abuse as problematic.

"Is she fuckable?": A culture of glorified violence and abuse

A number of workers observed how the glorification of violence and status attached to fear, power and control increased the risk of entering and becoming trapped in violent and abusive relationships. When status is attached to being feared in the community, this can be desirable to young people who feel unsafe. Workers from family violence and youth services had noticed abusive teen boyfriends were often involved in criminal activity and had reputation in the community for being violent and 'tough'.

> *They love a kid who goes to Ashley. They had more girlfriends than anything… It's about that status thing. It's about, you know, they have access to a lot of drugs… They might come and pick you up in a car, they might buy them things when they've got a lot of cash and it's very exciting. (Matilda, worker)*

Ali described how she met her partner when he stuck up for her when her previous boyfriend was assaulting her. His protective actions in that moment gave her the impression she would be safe with him:

> *The relationship I had before that, we ended up getting in a fight and then grabbing me by the throat and pinning me up against the car, because we were both smoking bongs and I had the last bong… So his mate at the time stuck up for me, and then we ended up getting together, later down the track. Yeah, like I didn't think he was abusive or anything when I got with him, because he stuck up for me in another abusive relationship. And then yeah, [it] just kind of all went downhill. (Ali)*

Workers talked about the difficulty teen girls face when trying to leave:

> *I've seen it so many times, where they live in fear, if they're living in a community like that. "If I hook up with this guy here he'll protect me from everybody." But then who protects you once he starts on you, and everyone fears him, who is going to help you? You're trapped, and you're trapped for good. And trying to escape those communities out there is intensely difficult. (Bernie, worker)*

Bernie described observing the prevalence of outdated masculinity norms in Tasmania, and its implication for how young men and boys behave in their relationships:

> *That 1970s attitude, male attitude, exists here strongly in Tasmania. And trying to change that can be hard work… If they don't have a positive male role model in their life, how do they know, "Who I am and how do I behave as a man? How do I behave in a relationship, when the only relationship I've ever seen is dad belting the crap out of mum and so does my uncle?" They only see what they see. (Bernie, worker)*

Family violence worker Jo felt that there were higher levels of severe physical violence in teens when compared with adults she had worked with. Similar to Bernie, she also was concerned about the 'old-fashioned' views held by young men in the community.

> *I don't know the stats off the top of my head, but I would say just anecdotally, more young women are probably in more physically violent relationships than older women… and that is somewhat surprising given… young people are supposed to be getting all of this preventative stuff… But these young guys can be very traditional in their views of women and expect their girlfriends to be very submissive and it's a very old-fashioned sort of view that they have. (Jo, worker)*

Lucy witnessed these views first-hand in her work in schools with boys. She talked about the difficulties of engaging boys and young men in violence prevention and sexual consent work. She said that making a joke about it and trivialising the issue were common among boys she had worked with in Tasmanian secondary schools, and that stigma and lack of school-wide approaches may be contributing to the minimising of violence and abuse as an issue.

> *Everyone at school thought it was a joke, and was something that everybody laughed about… I think it's seen as this… siloed thing that we do over here, consent and respect for relationships is what's taught in health class… So there's a little cultural problem there around taboo and taking things seriously. And it's not considered a school-wide priority, and something that's embedded into respect and consent every day, in all relationships. (Lucy, worker)*

Other workers reflected together on the visibility of domestic violence and abuse in the media – including social media – and pop culture, suggesting that high profile celebrities may be normalising or trivialising the issue:

> *Young people see these high status, high profile people, they go, "Oh, well, they do it." (Kate, worker)*

> *All the kids [are] just like, "Oh, yeah." It reinforces it. (Trish, worker)*

Jess described how these outdated masculine ideas manifested in her partner:

> *He started working at a job where it was predominantly females, and he has an issue being told what to do by a female, because "He's a man and men have been put on this earth for – like being superior and*

we're technically the hunters and we go out and we do this"… If he was cheating on me, or if I caught him talking to other females, he'd be like, "What do you expect me to do? You won't have sex with me, and I'm a young man in my prime. I'm supposed to be very sexual and out there and doing all this right now." Those were the excuses he'd give me. He never really had any males in his life… So I don't know where he picked up that delusion of men are superior and things like that. (Jess)

Matilda experienced first-hand the way that some young men are exposed to these kinds of ideas by their fathers:

I was working with this young boy… I could hear him talking to his dad…. And then all of a sudden, I heard his dad say about me, "Is she fuckable?" And he's like, "Dad, stop that," you know? And I just thought, oh my God, is this what these kids are up against? (Matilda, worker)

Solving disputes and conflict with violence also feeds into cultural norms and attitudes about the value of violence and abuse. A number of young people talked about this being a typical response amongst peers and family members. A potential ally for Elise wanted to address the violence she was experiencing by employing more violence:

Even his brother, because we were all drinking at the same place, was like, "You need to leave David; this is fucking wrong." He kept going, "I'm going to bash you," [referring to David] because that's how they deal with things. (Elise)

These cultural norms and values can be hard for men and boys to push back against, as Hazel pointed out:

The only way to win is not to play but in the process you're getting ridiculed because you're a pussy and a coward for not being part of it. (Hazel)

The culture of glorified and inescapable violence generates fear in young people, who are afraid to speak up about experiencing violence because of potential retribution and exclusion from the community and from others attached to their abusive partners. This was clearly described by Elise, and also evident in comments from participants about avoiding seeking support from police.

I don't want to make a statement because I'm scared I'm going to be judged, I'm going to be excluded from all my friends, everyone will think I'm a piece of shit... His family is going to be out to get me… They're all really nasty; so I was scared. I was really scared. And unless you sit and make a statement and you stick to it… There's nothing to protect you. (Elise)

"It feels like we have no voice and even if we did, people do not care": Violence and abuse being ignored, dismissed, condoned and enabled

Young people receive a clear message that the violence and abuse occurring in their relationships is insignificant in two ways. The first is where people ignore, dismiss or condone the violence and abuse; the second is subtler and present in the lack of services and response from formal supports.

Many participants described moments where the abuse they experienced was ignored, dismissed or minimised by others. When bystanders directly witnessed abuse and did nothing, participants were confused but rationalised the behaviour by attributing it to fear or loyalty. The inaction of others exacerbated the isolation young people experienced and contributed to a narrative that abuse was to be tolerated.

> *He started punching me in the gut… And his best mate stood there and watched him… I think he knew in a way I wasn't in the wrong, but he wasn't going to say something to his best mate, he wasn't going to stick up for his best mate's girlfriend. He's going to stick up for his best mate. (Ali)*

Although uncommon, participants' parents/carers sometimes expressed positive feelings toward the abusive partner, making the young person felt more alone and unable to seek help. Gaslighting from partners was common, and participants were often told that they were imagining things or misunderstanding behaviours, and abusive partners took on a victimised persona. This was particularly difficult for Hazel:

> *I told her everything that was actually happening, and she told me that if I was a better girlfriend, that Kayden would be better to me and that sometimes, we get these ideas in our head that we need something better but we don't realise that what we have is the best we're going to get, and we just need to try harder as people if we want to improve our circumstances. (Hazel)*

These kinds of experiences exacerbated the isolation and abandonment felt by participants. Saskia recalled how it deterred her from seeking help in the future:

> *I just felt alone. Alone in this big, wide world. And I had no one to turn to. And then I eventually turned to one of my friends, and she pretty much told me I was lying. And from that moment forward, I never turned to anyone again. (Saskia)*

These findings demonstrate why young people may find it difficult to recognise abuse in their relationships and why they may hesitate to seek help. When other individuals are condoning abuse, siding with the perpetrator, dismissing, minimising and ignoring abuse and calls for help, it is unsurprising that these young people feel trapped and blame themselves for their circumstances.

When formal supports do not exist, or do not respond helpfully to calls for support from young people, it sends a message that the problem is insignificant. This was described by Samantha, a family violence worker who had observed children interpreting a lack of police response to family arguments. This deters them from seeking support from police in future. Matilda and Elle discussed their clients' perceptions that domestic violence offences were only serious if the perpetrator was aged over 18. This was talked about in the context of teens being charged with assault rather than domestic violence when being violent and abusive towards their partners (the only legal option when legislation for family violence does not apply to younger people). Workers felt that failure to charge teen perpetrators with domestic violence offences undermined the seriousness of the offence.

Jess recalled being turned away by Centrelink when she approached them with her sister about the violence they were experiencing from their father (on a recent occasion he had choked Jess, chased her around the house with a knife and thrown her in a freezer). They returned home, receiving a clear message that they couldn't get help. This experience deterred her from seeking formal support when she later experienced violence and abuse in a relationship:

> *Me and my sister, we thought it was so bad at home that we went to Centrelink to talk to them about domestic violence and abuse that we were experiencing at home. And you know what they did? They turned us away. They didn't want to hear anything about it. [Carmel: Why Centrelink?] Well, we didn't know where else to go, honestly. There was no information, especially at school, about domestic abuse in a household, like, we were never taught about anything like that, where to go if you're experiencing domestic abuse. And we just thought, well, the only place that we can go is Centrelink, because I know*

they can help with housing and emergency money and stuff… We were quite young... We just went back home and lived there for another three years… It put us off asking for help anywhere… Like, we didn't even bother about it anymore. (Jess)

It is clear that the inaction, ignoring and dismissing of violence and abuse from others contributes to a culture of violence and abuse being condoned in the community, making it very difficult for victim-survivors to speak up about.

"I was so scared of being homeless again": Having nowhere safe to live

For teens unable to live at home, moving in with a violent and abusive partner can be the only feasible option for avoiding homelessness. Katie, Jamie, Ali, Michelle, Sarah, Lilly, Elise and Sam were all unable to live with their own families. These young people, as well as Jess, Saskia, Hazel and Sahar who had difficult relationships with their parents/carers (and were only sometimes able to live with them), were all dependent on the living arrangements they had with their violent and abusive partners. Without any other options, they were forced to choose between homelessness or violence and abuse. Living together without protective adults drastically increased the risks to victim-survivors' safety. For couples living alone, the more geographically isolated they were, the more life-threatening the violence and abuse became.

Hazel was living with Kayden and his mum (who Hazel described as even more abusive than Kayden). She describes the conditions she was living in, and how the prospect of homelessness kept her trapped in the relationship:

I'd be screamed at if I didn't clean the house… Eventually, I was babysitting, I was shoplifting their food for them, I was making them meals, I was cleaning the house and then because I wasn't taking care of myself because I was so run ragged off my feet and exhausted, then Kayden would lose interest. He'd be cheating and I'd forgive him every time because it just felt like my whole life was falling apart. I was so scared of being homeless again. (Hazel)

Katie described how without family, resources or somewhere safe to live, she was vulnerable to the predatory behaviours of her boyfriend Tom.

I was the perfect target. No family, no friends, no school. Boom. You just take me. (Katie)

Jamie described how, when she was 15, her family moved to the other side of the state without telling her, leaving her with no option but to stay with her partner and his family.

They didn't really ask if I wanted to go with them, or there wasn't really that check-in to see if I was okay staying there [with her boyfriend]. But obviously that became the only option… So my only support network really was, unfortunately, the abusive partner and his family. I also worked in the family business at that time as well, so again, that was my source of income. That was my transport to work. Everything ended up revolving around him. And I can see now that that's what they were doing. (Jamie)

Jamie's situation provides insight into how the absence of their own family supports and complex relationships with the abusive partner's family that provide access to income and resources can be intertwined to entrap young people in these relationships.

For Lilly, being homeless and sleeping rough meant she couldn't escape her violent partner:

> *I used to have bruises from head to toe. I can't even remember how many black eyes I had from him. He threw me against a wall one day. I've got a scar on my back from him… I've got a scar there – there, and there [showing scars], where he's cut my arm open with a knife, trying to kill me. And there was nothing I could do. I was homeless, so I couldn't get away from him, because he just knew where I'd be. (Lilly)*

For other young people, ending the relationship would force their partner into homelessness, a choice that is also difficult to make. Elle and Matilda recalled working with a young couple for whom this was the case:

> *She had a unit. He was homeless, his family was homeless… Those two were everything to each other. So outside of that, they had nothing. So for him to break up with her or for him to leave… What's on her is that then he will be homeless. (Matilda, worker)*

Compared with adults, it is generally more difficult for teens to access reliable and sufficient income, transport and mobile phones. Limited access to these resources traps teens in abusive relationship by reducing opportunities to leave or communicate with others. Without special permission, teens in Tasmania who are under 17 years of age cannot legally drive independently and are unlikely to have access to a car anyway. Jamie described how eventually being able to get her own car enabled her to leave the abusive relationship she was in. Michelle described how having no access to income meant no phone credit, making it impossible for her to contact anyone outside the relationship. Sam described how COVID-19 lockdowns and having limited material resources and friends increased their sense of being trapped in the relationship:

> *We were also struggling with money. We slept on a mattress on the floor and didn't really have much furniture or enough money for food… Even though I was unhappy most of the time, I didn't feel like I could get out. (Sam)*

In an appalling systemic failure, Katie was trapped in the abusive relationship with Tom because she was unable to access material support herself, and Tom, who was ten years older than her, was provided Centrelink benefits as her guardian instead:

> *I was 15 turning 16. I tried to get Centrelink [benefits] and they refused me and I told them my situation. I said, "Well, like, I have no family, I have no money. I'm at risk of homelessness;" and all they gave me was a Kids' Helpline number… The system failed me, actually, and the only thing that they could do for me to get money is get Tom to claim Family Tax Benefits… Yeah, so I was fucked…They actually made it worse for me by giving him money to look after me and making him my guardian. (Katie)*

"I've finally got a family": Fulfilling a need for love and connection with no relationship experience

"I just wanted to be loved": Our human need for love, connection and belonging

Feeling loved and connected is a fundamental human need that can trap teens in violent and abusive relationships. This was described by multiple young people and workers. Missing loving, caring relationships from adult men – fathers – was central to the explanations of many participants. The need to be loved is so strong that it can be difficult for young people to see or be able to leave an abusive relationship or situation. Multiple workers remarked that this was a common story amongst young people they supported; the need to be loved, to belong and to feel connected overpowered self-preservation and safety.

> *The relationship is crucial, it's fundamental, the abuse is something that they deal with for the relationship, like the relationship and that connection with somebody takes precedence over anything. (Danielle, worker)*

> *They think they're getting love. They haven't had it. Like, they've grown up being beaten, a lot of them. You know, I don't think we've got any clients that have come from healthy homes. So they think this is healthy. (Elle, worker)*

This need was clearly articulated by many of the young people who participated in this study.

> *My father wasn't able to look after me in a way that was caring and supportive… I didn't have that – those close connections with people and I didn't understand what love was. (Michelle)*

> *A lot of the reason why I jumped from one abusive relationship to the other was when I was younger, I was involved in domestic violence with my real dad, from before I was born. And then my step-dad, he was violent when he'd drink, and then he ended up in prison… So I had a lot of abandonment issues, and it was like they filled this hole from my dad. (Saskia)*

> *[I had] no father figure… Even though he'd [Jayden] been abusive and honestly terrible, he probably gave me still the most love in those adolescent years than anyone. So even though it was coming from a terrible place, it felt good. (Jamie)*

> *Sounds fucked up, but he was half my parent. He raised me, like, from 14 till 17. It's hard because it also feels like – because I lost my dad, it just felt like something was missing, and then I met him and he kind of replaced everything that I didn't have. Like, he was, like, that adult in my life, the role model that I've lost. (Katie)*

Bernie described working with one young teen who had moved into her boyfriend's family home. When he went to visit her, he could see that her boyfriend's parents were using and dealing 'ice', her boyfriend had just been suspended from school and Bernie felt the environment overall was volatile and unsafe. When he tried to warn her that it wasn't a great place to be…

> *She couldn't see it. "No, they're great. I feel like I've finally got a family. I feel like I'm accepted here"… And they had the whole family telling her… "You belong with us. Now don't worry about going to school today, because I want you to stay babysit my kids for me," and that's what ended up happening.*

She ended up disconnecting from my service, and she ended up very, very unhealthy. [She developed] malnutrition and [it] ended up she was just sleeping on the floor in a back room. (Bernie, worker)

This was very close to Hazel's experience. She explains how a need for unconditional love and support from a motherly figure drew her tightly into the relationship trap.

I wanted someone to love me for who I was, because nobody has ever given me unconditional love. His mother came from a very, very low-income background. She shoplifted to feed all of her children... So they were always having these beautiful, big pot roasts and things like that because she'd shoplift the meat. This really expensive meat. Shoplift the bottles from bottle shops and I was like, "Wait, what? You can do that?" She let us smoke inside, let us do whatever we wanted. Provided alcohol for us. Went and bought cigarettes for us. Got Kayden a car and let him drive around unregoed [in an unregistered vehicle] and without a driver's licence… and I was like, "Oh my God – parents can be like this?", because it was the total opposite of what I knew. I was seriously like, "Oh my God, she's supporting and loving her kids and doing whatever she can to give them a good life, this is amazing, what a good mum," but I didn't quite click that's not a good life. But at the time, on the surface, it was amazing. (Hazel)

Georgia argued that at a societal level, too much focus is placed on relationships and the idea of community is missing:

When you look at our society and the messaging it gives around intimate partner relationships… All the movies and just everything, all of that messaging is our intimate partnerships are everything, it's what life is about, finding the right person, being loved by one person. It's not – I think we've lost the community focus of we don't need one person, we need a whole bunch of people… The more that you think about it as far as systemically in our society the way that it's structured, even the way that our lives are set up, it is very much like that unit of a couple as being so important rather than as a community living all together, everything is so separated. (Georgia, worker)

I asked Katie what kept her going amidst the horrific violence and abuse she was forced to endure, and she said:

The idea of love. Because I never had it as a kid, yeah. So I just wanted to be loved. Like, I did absolutely everything. I was a housewife to 220 percent. (Katie)

This need for family connection and love can further extend to a desire to build their own family through having children with an abusive partner. Elise and Saskia both talked about this:

I just kind of accepted that [violence and abuse] as a part of my life, which was wrong, but, you know. I had everything I've ever wanted: a home with him and a family and a dog, and everything – my life was coming together… I got my (driver's) licence a couple of days before Christmas… So just had a baby, [and] we get to go spend time with all our families. (Elise)

I fell pregnant at a young age. And I miscarried, and it sent me off the rails again, because I [had] felt like, oh finally, I'm going to have this perfect relationship with this perfect family… And then it was before Cody [her son] was born. I'd fallen out of love and I knew this wasn't what I wanted anymore, because I felt trapped because I had this son that I was bringing into this world and I didn't want him to feel the way I felt. I wanted his dad to be around. I wanted him to have a family. So I tried to make things work. (Saskia)

These participants remind us of the need for love, care and belonging that young people will seek out from partners, particularly where it has been missing from caregivers in their families. Even if partners are violent and abusive, the 'sometimes' possibility of feeling loved can trap teens in relationships, particularly if feeling loved and connected is not available to them through other relationships.

"I couldn't go to my mum": Needing supportive, safe, reliable adults

Teens need safe and reliable adults in their lives for guidance and support. Occasionally (e.g. Ingrid, Jacinta and Callum), participants described having family members or other adults who had the capacity to help with the relationship. In these scenarios, family members were often instrumental in enabling participants to escape the relationship and remain relatively safe in the period afterwards. However, most participants in this study had fractured relationships with family members which meant support was difficult to access. Many of the participants were alone and without any reliable, loving family support. Absent fathers were common, as were mothers who had given up or were so impacted by their own experiences of abusive relationships they simply had nothing left in the tank for their children. This trapped participants in the relationship because they:

- had nobody to call when they needed help
- had nobody who would notice when things weren't right
- could not assess whether their experiences were normal or not
- had nobody to talk to about their experiences
- were dependent on the violent and abusive partner to provide them with love and connection.

The quote below from Katie demonstrates how having no family for support and no money meant that even after successfully escaping from Tom (and then being sexually assaulted by a stranger) she had no choice but to contact him:

> *I called my mum, and mum could not give two fucks what was going on… She just didn't care. She was just a raging alcoholic and she didn't care… Gosh, it just – it ruined me actually, to think I was that alone. Like, I had no one… None of my family spoke to me because of my mum… Anyway, I ended up contacting him because I needed money. I just said to him – I was like, "I need at least 50 bucks because I haven't eaten all day. (Katie)*

For some participants, relationships with family members of their partners were all they had. This tended to trap them in the relationship because leaving meant risking losing those positive connections. This was particularly problematic for participants who had no other supportive adults in their lives. Workers repeatedly described this situation, and also pointed out how this made it impossible to create safety plans with teens because there were no safe people they could count on. Jamie and Jacinta both articulated how their connections with their partner's families contributed to them being trapped in the relationships.

> *I had built a relationship with his family… And because his family's so big… I felt like there wasn't a way out for me… It felt like a web that I was trapped in basically where if I cut it off with him I would lose everything. (Jacinta)*

When family relationships are missing, it is easy to see how young people become trapped in any relationship that offers love and connection – if only occasionally.

"It was my first proper relationship": Trapped by limited relationship experience

Participants were also trapped by limited experience. As teens who had been in few (and sometimes no) previous relationships, they described their limited relationship experience as a factor in not knowing if what they were experiencing was normal.

> *I was just obsessed, thought I needed him because it's kind of like this security attachment that I'd formed that was really, really unhealthy, and it was the same for him, like he didn't actually want me to leave him alone, didn't want me to go away; he reckoned he loved me, but he would also tell me to fuck off. So I was, as a young teen, I hadn't experienced a proper relationship before; I just kind of thought this is how it is, and I just didn't understand. (Elise)*

For Sam, learning to be in a relationship for the first time and determining if things were okay for them was made more difficult by their autism:

> *I had no models for what a good relationship could look like. And so I was still very much at the stage with like learning everything, and also just being autistic, that I thought most situations you put yourself in are going to be uncomfortable at first, no matter what. Because that's usually been the case for me with everything… I still hadn't realised how bad most of it was, because it was just the experience I'd had. And I hadn't had a lot of contact with other people. (Sam)*

Katie and Sahar felt that this limited exposure and life experience made young girls easy targets of predatory and abusive men:

> *They go for young girls, one, because we don't really fight back, I guess. Like if you're an adult woman and a guy treats you like shit, you're going to tell them to get fucked. Whereas a girl's just going to say "Oh, I didn't mean to, I'm sorry". Because they've never had a relationship before. They don't know their boundaries. They don't know their identity, things like that. So it's easy for them to mould a young girl, like in the most crucial years of your life I suppose. (Katie)*

> *And what these men get out of dating 15-year-olds I think is nil. I think they… like the part where you don't know much. I've heard so many men say that, "Oh, yeah, women expire at 21 – 25". And I think that's because women start to know who they are at that age and they know what they're worth, and all that. But they want somebody that's like mouldable and palatable and really capable of being moulded. (Sahar)*

Being in love with their partner, despite the violence and abuse, also kept young people trapped in relationships. Participants described a strong desire to make the relationship work, with this need often increasing in tandem with the length of the relationship.

> *You have all this history and times… So much time and effort into trying to making it work, and you've been over all these hurdles together and whatnot, and for me, like, we always had this, "Oh, we're high school sweethearts," like, you know, that kind of shit. (Jess)*

> *It's hard to leave. Especially when you're young. You find that one person and you don't think that there is anybody else, you're set on that one person. And when you're set on that one person it's hard to leave. (Ali)*

When young people have limited relationship experience, little exposure to positive and healthy relationships and few loving relationships with caregivers they are more vulnerable to violent and abusive relationships.

3.4 "I was a hit harder away from losing my life": Young Tasmanians' experiences of domestic violence and abuse

Summary

Understanding the nature of teen domestic violence and abuse as experienced by young people in Tasmania requires a deep exploration of how they describe the behaviours, conditions and contexts they associate with being in a violent and abusive relationship. The stories and recollections in this section are likely to be hard to read. It is important to remember that when enduring this violence and abuse, these young people were children as young as 12.

The findings of this study reveal a number of tactics or behaviours that constitute teen domestic violence and abuse as experienced by teens in Tasmania. The young people in this study have shared numerous examples of these behaviours. They are shared below in their words and with different examples so that they may be used to generate knowledge about the nature of teen domestic violence and abuse and inform the development of interventions for preventing and responding to this issue. The nature of teen domestic violence and abuse are broken into three categories of tactics that seek to control:

- what happens to your body
- your freedom and choices
- your thoughts and emotions.

While these three categories of controlling behaviours are addressed separately below, it is important to note that abusive partners may actually employ them simultaneously or interchangeably, and these behaviours may change over time (usually escalating in severity), as the perpetrator's control tightens.

Controlling what happens to your body

Attempts to exercise control over female bodies is evident in these findings; it is clearly not a feature of violence and abuse that is exclusive to adult relationships. The stories of young people in Tasmania have revealed that control and power over their bodies is sought in three ways: physical violence; alcohol and other drug use; and sexual violence and abuse.

Of the 27 relationships described by young people, 21 included experiences of physical violence. Several of the young people experienced life-threatening physical assaults, including the use of firearms, knives or other weapons; choking, which is a known risk factor for intimate partner homicide; shoving, hitting or biting; being forced to drink toxic substances; and being tied up or trapped in confined spaces. Many of these actions could have had potentially fatal outcomes. All of the victims experienced danger and fear, and most suffered serious physical injuries, including head injuries, poisoning, cuts, dislocated or broken bones, severed tendons, bruises or cuts. Some of the participants were trapped in cars driven at speed or held hostage in their homes.

Alcohol and other drugs exacerbated the severity of violence and were used to groom, sedate and sexually assault participants in abusive relationships. The stories told feature the administration of illegal drugs such as marijuana and 'ice', as well as prescription medication such as benzodiazepines, without the consent or knowledge of victims. At times, the perpetrator's own use of alcohol or drugs was a factor in the severity of their acts of violence towards their partner. Coerced drug use was also a feature of some of these relationships, which created another layer of dependence on the perpetrator as a source of drugs.

Sexual violence and abuse was also a feature of many of the relationships described by young people. Participants described 18 separate relationships in which they had experienced sexual violence and abuse through physical force, coercion or forced intoxication. These acts stripped participants of choice and control, and occurred across a continuum from low to high physical force. Harmful sexual behaviours that humiliated or degraded participants show how power or control can be exerted through sexual acts. Beyond harmful sexual behaviours, some of the perpetrators sexually assaulted their partners, apparently for their own gratification or to express anger or exercise control over their partner. Many of the young women recalled experiences of being coerced into sexual activity, including through the use of guilt, ultimatums or threats.

Controlling your freedom and choices

The freedom and autonomy of participants was controlled by their abusive partners who enforced explicit rules, micromanaged their behaviour, enforced traditional masculinity norms, monitored their movements and actions (including through the use of technology), and isolated them from friends, family members, community, school and work. The sense that they were 'owned' by their abusive partners was felt strongly by many participants.

Some participants also experienced financial abuse. This included instances of victims paying more than their fair share of household costs, paying for jointly held assets such as a car, or having cash stolen from them by their abusive partners. Conversations were controlled too, with particular topics or expressions of emotion deemed off-limits by abusive partners.

Abusive partners exhibited outdated beliefs about masculinity that drove their expectations about how victim-survivors should behave in their relationships, and impeded their freedom and choices. These beliefs and expectations extended to limiting females' choices during sexual activity; at times an emphasis on early commitment and marriage; and expectations that the girl or woman would be solely responsible for household duties.

Limitations on participants' freedom and autonomy were evident in the monitoring and surveillance strategies that partners employed. These strategies included attempting to be with them at all times and using technology such as mobile phones and social media accounts. Technology-enabled control strategies included demanding access to their partner's phones, restricting who they could be 'friends' with, deciding what kinds of photos they could post, tracking their locations, reading private messages, or setting up fake social media profiles. Image-based abuse, defined as sharing or threatening to share explicit photos or videos without the depicted person's consent, was also described by a small number of participants. Some perpetrators used technology to facilitate physical stalking of their partners, or to facilitate monitoring of their partners by other people, including the perpetrator's parents.

At a life stage where contact with peers, school, family and work are critical, many of the young people who participated in this study were isolated and alone. Their abusive partners employed a range of tactics to disconnect them from people outside the relationship. Such tactics included restricting contact with or causing conflict with friends and family, and monopolising the time victim-survivors had to develop or maintain other social and family relationships. A number of participants believed one reason they were being isolated from friends and family was so others wouldn't find out about the violence or abuse.

Controlling your thoughts and emotions

A series of tactics were used by abusive partners to control and influence the way participants felt and thought. There are four groups of behaviours abusive partners used to control how participants thought and felt:

- manipulation
- gaslighting
- eroding self-worth
- inciting fear through threats and intimidation.

Participants felt manipulated into thinking and acting in ways that benefited their abusive partner and disadvantaged themselves. Examples include victim-survivors taking blame for their partner's criminal activity, withdrawing from education and training, and being groomed into entering a relationship with a much older man. Gaslighting techniques left many victim-survivors believing that they were to blame for the abuse they were experiencing, and were always at fault as ever-changing rules and expectations were imposed upon them.

Participants also described a range of behaviours aimed at diminishing their self-worth. Shame-inducing behaviours included being called names, criticised, humiliated and degraded, both in private and in front of their friends or family. Lastly, perpetrators sought to control victim-survivors' thoughts and emotions by employing threats and intimidation, which incited fear and coerced participants' compliance. High levels of fear were experienced by participants, with higher levels of fear reported when more types of violence and abuse were experienced in the relationship. Nine of the participants described being threatened during or after the relationship had ended, including threats of arson, assault or poisoning. Damage to personal property or homes was another tactic employed by abusive partners, as was threats of self-harm and suicide.

CONTENT WARNING:

The remainder of this section contains detailed accounts and direct quotes of participants. Examples of topics covered include life-threatening violence (including the use of firearms and knives), imprisonment, physical violence, drugging, sexual violence and abuse, coercive control, and psychological and emotional abuse.

These may be triggering for some readers. A list of support services available to contact can be found on page i. If you wish to avoid the detailed parts of this section please skip ahead to Section 3.5.

Overlapping tactics of control

In the two quotes below, Jamie and Elise highlight the overlapping and complex nature of these categories. They provide examples of physical and sexual violence, isolation, control, threats and intimidation, emotional manipulation, warping thoughts and perceptions, eroding self-worth, monitoring, tech-facilitated abuse, and victim-blaming. They also highlight some of the cycles and trajectories of violence and abuse in these relationships.

Jamie was 14 when she met Brayden (16) at school. Their relationship ended five years later when he met someone else.

> *He was quite lovely for, I'd say the first six months to a year, and then became very controlling. So he had to know where I was all the time. I wasn't allowed to go to school… I could have gone to school if he was going to school. If he wasn't going, I'd have to stay home. And that slowly transitioned. He just stopped going and he was just working more in the family business. So because he was doing that, I'd have to pretty much verbally fight to be able to go to school. So at that stage there was the manipulation of just playing around to just make sure I stayed home. He would then transition into getting quite physical. So over the years, probably about 15, he would hit me, or push me. And about 15 to 18, he would also rape me. So that would be quite regular unfortunately, but that was the control again. So not being able to see family. By the time I was 15 I didn't have any friends because he cut that off. He made it that I wasn't going to school, so I wasn't in the friendship group, and any time someone had a party or an event or anything that you could go to hang out with people, I wouldn't be allowed to go. So that isolation was 100% there. And then by the time I was about 15 as well, my family moved away. (Jamie)*

Elise was 13 when she met David (16) through a friend, and they were together for 9 years and have a child together.

> *I got off the bus and him and his mate pulled up in a car… I got in the car and I was like, "Hi Daniel," [David's friend] and he was like, "Hey babe," and because I said hi to Daniel first, I must like Daniel more than him and want to have sex with Daniel… That night there was a party… He told me he was going to punch me in the face, "You slut," chucked me out the window… I tried to leave, walked to the end of the road and he'd try and fucking run me over, so I jumped in the bushes to get away from him… I remember ringing my dad, he might come and help me, like that many times I've sat hiding in bushes from him because he'd come back. He wouldn't try and hit me, he'd just scream, threaten to shoot me, threaten to do all this stuff, but he wouldn't physically punch me in the face. So, you know?... That's what he'd say, "I'm not abusive to you; it's all in your head. You deserve this," so I truly believed at that point in time that I deserved it.*
>
> *I just remember him chucking me in a bush… Picking myself up out of the bush and thinking, "What the fuck, what is wrong with him? I haven't done anything wrong", but I'd be like, "Please forgive me, I haven't done [anything]," you know?... So it was just the same kind of things over and over again, that same kind of pattern of behaviour. (Elise)*

Jamie and Elise clearly demonstrate that violence and abuse in their relationships is not made up of isolated behaviours or acts that happen independently of each other. The behaviours can be obvious and unmistakable, or slow and difficult to see in the moment. Regardless of how the abuse is experienced and recognised it is significant, has detrimental short- and long-term impacts and needs to be understood from the perspectives of the young people who have lived through it.

"He's going to fucking hurt me": Controlling what happens to your body

The control of women's bodies is well-established in the domestic violence and abuse field. However, there are significant gaps in what is known about how this looks for teens. The young Tasmanians interviewed for this study revealed that control and power over their bodies occurred in three ways: physical violence and abuse; forced and coerced drug and alcohol use; and sexual violence and abuse.

FIGURE 4: TACTICS FOR CONTROLLING WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR BODY

Physical violence

- Violence involving firearms and other weapons
- Choking
- Pushing, shoving, hitting, punching, kicking, shaking
- Biting, pinching, pulling hair
- Imprisonment

Alcohol and other drug use

- Escalating violence under the influence of AOD
- Introducing her to drugs
- Drug facilitated sexual abuse

Sexual violence and abuse

- Harmful sexual behaviours
- Coerced sexual activity
- Rape and attempted rape

"Run, because I'm going to fucking shoot you": Life-threatening physical violence

It is difficult to see how anything other than luck is the reason Lilly, Sahar, Katie, Elise, Ali, Michelle, Gina and Addison were alive to share the stories of violence and abuse inflicted on them by men they had fallen in love with. This is not to undermine the experiences of other participants who endured physical, sexual and non-physical abuse that was not immediately life-threatening. Rather, it highlights how fatally dangerous these relationships can be for young people.

For almost half of the participants in this study, the risk of death was a real possibility during their relationship. Many of the young people described events (often multiple) and/or patterns of behaviour where they knew their life was in danger. Choking and the use of weapons including firearms, knives and cars – known risk factors for intimate partner homicide (Matias et al. 2020) – were used against them by abusive partners.

Youth and family violence workers expressed concern at the commonality and severity of violence in the lives of many teen clients:

> *They're going to end up dying… It might not be when they're 18, but it probably is when they're 30. From the next man and the next violent relationship they're in.*
> *(Matilda, worker)*

> *The level of strangulation is high, the level of serious assaults is high… the more serious physical violence, the verbal abuse via text sometimes is just absolutely jaw-dropping.*
> *(Jo, worker)*

The interviews for this study indicated the extreme danger faced by some young people in their relationships. Having no family support or alternative accommodation further exacerbated their risk. Living alone with their partner, often in an isolated location, increased their level of dependence on their partner. The young people's recollections described the intensity, fear and complexity of potentially lethal violence and abuse. However, some participants said that it had taken time to recognise the danger:

> *I never wanted to leave the relationship until I realised how dangerous and life-threatening the situation was. I was a hit harder away from losing my life. That's what woke my senses up. I never felt like I'd find love, or anyone could ever love the person I was. (Ali)*

Detailed recollections from Katie, Elise and Michelle further demonstrate the intensity, fear and complexity of potentially lethal violence and abuse. Katie was 15 years old when she met Tom (25). During their three-year relationship she was drugged, abused, isolated and imprisoned by her partner:

> *He ended up taking his gun bolt out and he had it before my head. And he's like, "I'll fucking kill you; if you want to die, I'll fucking kill you". All I kind of remember is just sitting on the floor. I had my hands over my ears because I didn't want to listen to him. And I was just praying. I was just praying, like, over and over and over, I was just like, God, please take me away; over and over. I just said that over and over and… He left about four in the morning… He told me not to go anywhere. He locked me in the caravan and as soon as he left I waited for his car to go out the gate and then that was it, I was just packing a bag. I just grabbed anything I wanted. I didn't really have much to begin with, just a few clothes and things… I had to break the door handle on the caravan to unlock it and get out. (Katie)*

Firearms are involved in over half of intimate partner homicide fatalities among women (Petrosky et al. 2017). Tasmania has the highest per capita rate of both legal gun ownership (Alpers et al. 2022b) and estimated unregistered and illicit firearms (Alpers et al. 2022a) in Australia.

Elise was 13 years old when she met David (16). During their 9-year relationship, there were multiple incidents of life-threatening physical violence inflicted on her by David, including the use of a firearm:

> *He rammed me into the wall, grabbed me by the throat, choked me… I went in the bedroom, was really upset, just holding the puppy really upset, scared… And when he choked me he fucking booted the dog. I remember he picked up the couch and smashed it up through the wall… Smashed up the whole place, carried on, told me, "You want to fucking leave because I'm going to come back I'm going to fucking shoot you. I'm going to shoot you," and I was like, what the hell; surely he's not… (Elise)*

David left the home to retrieve a firearm. When he returned he said he was going to shoot himself. When Elise intervened he turned the gun on her:

> *He goes, "You want to run, because I'm going to fucking shoot you." So I'm like, "What?" and he's literally pulled it, let off a shot, so I'm like, "Fuck, oh my fucking God." (Elise)*

After she had escaped David resumed threatening suicide by phone, making her believe he was inside a car he had set alight. This was not the only, or last, potentially fatal act of violence she had to face. Elise described a terrifying escalation of violence following the birth of their child:

> *I laid down and started breastfeeding him and he came in schitzing and he punched me straight in the side of the head. Liam's head's right there, like this tiny little newborn baby, and I just looked at him and*

went, "You could have fucking hit him then," and he's like, "Fucking should have," and I'm like, "Fuck this, I'm leaving. I can't do this."…

As I walked out to put the [baby] capsule in the car he's gone back in and taken my phone out of my bag and taken the keys, he's thrown my keys on the roof and snapped my phone. I can't leave. He knows I'm trying to leave and he's furious… I was so scared and so I just went and locked myself in the bedroom, I thought, what am I going to do, I don't want to wake Steph [the neighbour] up.

He just kept going and going until I was literally that scared that I didn't know what to do. He had an axe and I remember hearing him pacing and schitzing and he'd pace and he'd schitz and pace and he'd schitz… and I waited and I heard him stop. He's smoking bongs down near the fire. I thought, all right, if I grab Liam [the baby] really quickly, I'll strap him onto me in a baby carrier and I'll run out the door and go next door.

"Quick, let me in. He's going to fucking hurt me, he's going to hurt the baby," and she let me in and locked it and I'm like, "I don't know what to do. Can you just ring the cops? Can you ring, I'm fucking scared. I don't want to ring the cops on him but I've got a baby now. Just call the cops, I'm terrified," and he tried fucking smashing their door down with an axe… (Elise)

At age 15, Michelle endured life-threatening violence and abuse from Jase (17). Below, she describes the violence she faced in the moments after he caught her escaping the shack he imprisoned her in:

I was shit scared of him for my life… He looked in the mirror and he held a knife to his neck, and he said, "Kill her, Jase, kill her." And then I was on the bed like, "No, no." And then he held it to my neck, and then he decided to cut my wrist instead. And so, it was like, you know, then it was like pouring out with blood…

And then he thought I was going to run away again or something. So he decided – this is really, really, really, really bad. He decided to put a chain around my neck… His parents walked out and they said, "Why the fuck do you have her chained up like a dog?" And then they saw my wrist… I don't think he wanted to take me to the hospital. And he said, "dad or mum, could you help us, could you maybe stitch it, or something, or whatever". And then they didn't… I don't know if they knew how to, or whatever. So he decided to look after it, and changed my bandages and stuff, over time. And then it healed up the way it is now, and then it was a bit bigger, but I had stitches by the end of that first relationship I had with him. (Michelle)

Young people interviewed for this report described being choked by their partners. Choking, or non-fatal strangulation, is an act of violence with little if any visible evidence and the potential to cause serious harm to physical and mental health. This life-threatening behaviour sends the clear message that the abusive partner can end the victim-survivor's life whenever they choose (Pritchard et al. 2017). Addison, Gina, Sahar, Elise and Lilly all talked about being choked by their partners. This makes these young women highly vulnerable to being future victims of intimate partner homicide. Glass et al. (2008) found that women who had been choked by a partner were almost eight times more likely to become victims of homicide when compared with women who had been abused but not experienced choking.

There was a night where he choked me to near death… I was lucky that he actually let me go when my face went blue. (Lilly)

Sahar said that while she had not believed her life was in danger during the relationship, the incident described below was a tipping point for her:

> *I don't remember what exactly the argument was. But he grabbed the pillow and he started suffocating me… He choked me right before he put the pillow on me… And I was like, what the fuck? I was just thinking, what the fuck. (Sahar)*

"He never punched me in the face": Physical violence

Of the 27 relationships described by young people for this study, 21 included experiences of physical violence. In addition to the life-threatening physical violence described above, other forms of physical violence experienced by participants included (but were not limited to) being:

- pushed, shoved, shaken
- bitten, pinched, having hair pulled
- punched, hit, kicked
- spat on
- forced to drink hand sanitiser, urine, fly spray
- imprisoned and held hostage.

When contextualised through the examples provided by participants, this rather crude shopping list of violent acts comes to life and provides a glimpse of the danger, fear and risk of physical injury that participants faced in their relationships. Participants described a range of physical violence inflicted on them by their partners. Gina described a cycle of violence common to many abusive relationships, where a violent incident is followed by a period of 'normality' before cycling back into violence and abuse.

> *He would shake me, especially if we were arguing, and he would push me and he'd push me into things… He would grab my arm and put it behind my back… I had a set of tallboys and I had so many bruises, on my back and side, from where he would full force shove me… He would occasionally hit me. He did it in a way where he'd hit me and then he had love for me for a long time afterwards. So then I would forget about it, and the relationship would go back to normal. (Gina)*

Ali recalled an incident when her partner assaulted her following an argument about drugs:

> *He threw the plate of chips at my face, smashed the plate in my face. And then I went outside carrying on, and then he went outside, grabbed all my stuff, chucked all my make-up, all my stuff on the road. So I was carrying on out the front, and I was sitting on the stairs and then he just grabbed my head and smashed my head on the corner of the step. (Ali)*

Michelle said that she learned to be silent while being physically abused:

> *He used to use a hammer on me, on my hands… And he used to say to me, if I kept screaming or kept crying he would do it worse, or whatever. So I would have to hold my tongue really hard and not scream or cry when he did it. So it'd be like just really copping that pain and try not to react to it until he was done. Over a period of time he'd hit the same spots over and over again. And it got to the point where… all here [showing her hands] was like fluid. It was like really puffed up. And over time he'd keep hitting the same one. (Michelle)*

Some participants talked about their partners physically abusing them in ways that would not leave obvious evidence for others to see, whereas others described blatant acts of violence that showed no concern regarding its visibility. For example, Gina described how aside from when he would choke her, between her neck and knees were "fair game" for Matt "because that could be hidden". Whereas for Ali and Lilly, the visual evidence and consequences were unable to be hidden. In addition to bruising and cuts that could be seen by others, the severity of some physical violence resulted in dislocated or broken bones and tendons.

> *I blew a bigger cloud [smoking ice] than him, and because of that he pushed me, I was standing up and he pushed me. Apparently, I'm meant to land on the couch, but I landed and my thumb went like that [showing thumb movement], I snapped the tendon in my thumb. (Ali)*

Lilly's second abusive partner (Tim) broke her finger when she tried to leave him. Her first abusive partner (Steve) broke her collarbone when she refused to have sex with him in her mother's house:

> *My mum's only rule in that house is "No sex in my house". And he's like, "Well, just have sex with me". I was like, "We're in my fucking mother's house. I'm not going to break her rules". So he bashed me and broke my collarbone. And I didn't go to hospital until I actually left him and got with Tim, because he wouldn't let me. (Lilly)*

In some relationships, abusive partners would trap victim-survivors in rooms and in cars. Ingrid said her partner Damien would lock the car's doors and drive dangerously to frighten her, and explained how being locked in a car with him reinforced how trapped in the relationship she was:

> *He locks the doors and he's like you're not getting out until we resolve this problem. And I'm like, okay… Plus, you get afraid to end things, because you're in the car, you can't exit, they're already pushy, they're the type of person that could easily overpower you. (Ingrid)*

Sarah met Steven while experiencing homelessness and moved in with him when she was unable to get a bed in a shelter. When describing being held hostage in his apartment, she showed a photo she had taken of him holding her wrist at night while she slept to stop her from leaving. She spent two weeks locked in Steven's apartment where her forced her to clean, took her phone from her and prevented her from attending school.

> *He was very violent to me mentally and physically. It got to the point where he would literally grab my wrist and lie down when he goes to sleep, even though I didn't want to lie down, and I would wake up with a bruise mark around my wrist. (Sarah)*

Michelle was imprisoned by Jase for the majority of their relationship. The level of control he maintained over her meant that escaping was her only hope of getting out. She had two options for this – the rare occasions when he left her alone in the shack, or when they went to the supermarket together. Below, she describes a time she tried to escape.

> *I shouldn't have worn my backpack – it slowed me down… He would lock me in the shack when he went out sometimes… The first time he decided not to I took my chance to run… He was backing out with the car, with his parents, whatever, and I think that's when he saw [her escaping]... And I'm running. I'm running with my backpack… and then he decided to run after me, and then he grabbed me by my bag*

and pulled me down... and there was mud all over – a big pile of mud, and he dragged me through it. And he was like, "Get up."… Pulled my arm back, and then he helped me over the fence… (Michelle)

Michelle continued trying to identify an escape, including when they shopped for groceries:

Like shopping or whatever – I had to be by his side, though, I couldn't leave, otherwise, yeah, he'd just like say, "Stay in front of me," all the time… So I couldn't run away... Trust me, I was thinking about it… There was one exit in the back of Coles, where the staff go, and I was thinking maybe I could sneak in there quickly, when he was not looking... And then I could quickly tell someone that I was in a relationship – abusive relationship. I thought about it every time I walked past, but I never got the chance to do it. (Michelle)

"He knew if I got hooked, I'd keep going back to him for more": Alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol and other drugs exacerbated the severity of violence in abusive relationships and were used to groom, sedate, rape and trap some of the young Tasmanians interviewed for this research. Lilly, Ali, Addison and Saskia all described how their partners using alcohol or other drugs escalated the violence they experienced. Drug use is not an explanation for why an abusive partner becomes violent. However, it is clear that in some cases, being high, coming down or the anxiety associated with not being able to access drugs did seem to escalate the severity of violence used by perpetrators.

We were on the ice hard, like, we were going through an eight-ball every day… And we had a massive fallout. He was screaming at me. I was screaming at him. I packed my bag, because I was ready to leave… So he's grabbed me by here and here and just threw me up against the wall. And I don't know if you can tell – the dip in here? [Showing her finger.] He broke it… I hit the corner of a wall. And, like he got me from behind, pushed me forward. And I was going to stop it, but instead this hand slipped and… Yeah. He broke my pinkie. (Lilly)

He came home, and he was drunk, and I can still smell the alcohol on his breath. And he held me up against the wall. And I remember his mum screaming at him to let me go, and he was just yelling in my face, I'm nothing, I'm just like my dad… And that was the first step to the abuse. (Saskia)

Experimenting with risk-taking behaviours including drug and alcohol consumption is a common experience in adolescence. Many participants described personal drug and alcohol consumption. Sometimes this occurred in group settings (sometimes this was where they met their partner), or was an activity they engaged in with their partner. Where illicit drugs were involved, this served to further trap young people in abusive relationships. They avoided police and other potential supports due to the risk of a criminal record and stigmatisation by the community. Some participants described their partners introducing them to drugs. Worker Matilda explained that this can leave young women trapped in the relationship:

If there's drugs involved and that's what they're doing to get through at the time, their drug supply might be cut off and that doesn't make things easy for them. (Matilda, worker)

Lilly was certain Steve had introduced her to drugs for exactly this reason:

He forced me to get on ice with him. He wouldn't let me leave his sight unless I'd smoked ice with him, because he knew if I got hooked I'd be going back to him to get more. (Lilly)

Increasing this concern is the fact that for some young people, the parents/carers of abusive partners contributed to this drug use:

> *His parents did hard drugs occasionally as a fun thing. So they gave him cocaine one time, they made me do a little too. (Hazel)*

> *He was on the methamphetamines, real bad, and he was doing it with his parents. And to start off with I didn't even know what it was or anything, and then I started taking it, and I think that's where it went downhill. (Ali)*

Hazel described that when Kayden wanted to continue using cocaine socially, turning their house into a "party house" she couldn't say no, explaining:

> *If I didn't, then I was the killjoy and I'd get in trouble. (Hazel)*

Pushing back against or even questioning this kind of drug use is especially difficult for young women who are expected to be passive and suppress their own needs within their relationships (Banister et al. 2003). When his parents/carers are also involved, this becomes even more difficult, particularly if those parents/carers are providing housing or other resources.

Other participants described being covertly drugged by their partners. For example, Tom regularly drugged Katie during the relationship. He used tactics that included coercion, direct force and sneaking drugs into her food.

> *He also put Valium in my food…so we didn't argue, or to sexually assault me, either way…Tom used to give me fucking Valium and Stilnox all the time. Like even when we'd argue, he'd just give me sleeping medication. (Katie)*

Sahar, Elise, Gina, Hazel and Jess were sexually assaulted under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Jess described being drugged and raped:

> *He got me high one time, and I didn't know what was going on… I didn't know where I was… I just felt so strange… I can't really remember too much about what happened, but I know that I was freaking out, and he had me on the bed. And he just had it at me. (Jess)*

With limited resources and supports, some young women also said they'd 'paid' for drugs with sex. Michelle was drawn to Peter by his ready access to a range of illicit drugs. Without a job or access to income, it seemed reasonable to her that sex could be exchanged for drugs.

> *In return, I'd have sex with him. But I didn't really think of it like that. I was used to it, anyway, you know, sex, drugs, sex, drugs. (Michelle)*

Youth worker Matilda recalled a client whose boyfriend had forced her to sleep with his friends in return for drugs:

> *She was 13 and living with a 16-year-old. And you know he, for drugs, got her to sleep with his mates. And she thought that was okay. She didn't think there was anything wrong like that. Like, she didn't want to do it at the start, but then she's like "Oh, you know, he loves me". (Matilda, worker)*

"'It's your job to do this', that was his mentality": Sexual violence and abuse

Healthy sexual relationships are grounded in trust, consent and mutual pleasure, all of which are missing from the experiences described by the young people in this study. Participants described 18 separate relationships in which they had experienced sexual violence, as well as abuse through physical force, coercion and forced intoxication. Drawing on the work of Liz Kelly, sexual violence in this project is defined as "any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact" (Kelly 1988). Acts of sexual violence and abuse stripped participants of choice and control and occurred across a continuum of force and invasiveness (Bagwell-Gray et al. 2015). They ranged from harmful sexual behaviours with low force and invasiveness, through to rape.

"He pulled my pants down in front of his mates": Harmful sexual behaviours

Harmful sexual behaviours humiliate and degrade victim-survivors and have a detrimental impact on their self-worth. These behaviours exist on a continuum of sexual violence that is not contained within the legal parameters that define what is and is not sexual violence (Kelly 1988). Behaviours that humiliate or degrade participants show how power and control can be exerted through sexual acts.

For participants in this study, examples of harmful sexual behaviour included being forced (physically or through coercion) to:

- be exposed to their partner masturbating
- watch pornography
- participate in humiliating and degrading acts
- include other people in their relationship
- be touched inappropriately in front of others
- not use contraception.

All of these behaviours were described by participants as unwanted and non-consensual.

> *I'd wake up to him wanking beside me. And then I'd have to act like I was asleep, because if he knew I was awake… I'd have to have sex with this person. (Saskia)*

Being touched inappropriately or otherwise sexually shamed in front of other people was detailed by a number of participants:

> *He would touch me inappropriately in front of people, like, he'd grab me, like, as Trump would say, grab them by the pussy, kind of thing, in front of his friends in high school… I told him, like, "Please don't do that. I don't feel comfortable being touched like that in front of people"… He should be allowed to touch me whenever he wants, because I'm his girlfriend. That's how he saw it. (Jess)*

> *He's pulled my pants down in front of one of his mates… So you could see my undies and then I pulled them back up… He was drunk, calling me names, like I'm a slut or this, I'm that. (Addison)*

Gordon, Sahar's partner, would make explicit comments and "creepy" demands that were part of a series of sexual behaviours that included rape, coerced sex, drug-facilitated sexual abuse and image-based abuse.

I was showering at his house one morning, before I was going to catch the bus home, and he took my shoes from the front door and he just came in them. And he was like, "I want you to walk home." (Sahar)

Only a few participants described having contraception controlled (although Saskia, Jess, Elise, Lilly and Michelle all described unplanned pregnancies with abusive partners). Family violence worker Jo had noticed young clients being pressured by their partner to not use condoms.

He would take my contraception away, and then not let me get the morning after pill or anything. And I just prayed to fucking God. My body – always just went nup. And I never got pregnant. But for years he tried. (Jamie)

The examples in this section provide evidence of a range of harmful sexual behaviours that may not fit within current definitions of sexual violence as defined by the legal system yet are clearly problematic and damaging. These findings reinforce the arguments of researchers elsewhere about the importance of recognising sexual violence as behaviours that occur on a continuum (Fileborn & Phillips 2019; Kelly 1988).

"He used a lot of force": Anal, vaginal and oral rape and attempted rape through physical force

Jess, Saskia, Katie, Jamie, Elise, Sahar, Lilly, Ingrid and Gina all described incidents of rape or attempted rape in their relationships.

I'd say no to having sex with him and he'd still have sex with me. (Lilly)

He also anally raped me. And I think he liked that it was painful for me. And the next morning he told me to give him a blow job, and I did, and he slapped me while he was doing it. And I went, "What the fuck?" And he was like, "Oh, most girls like that," like, "Mature girls like that." (Sahar)

I got pregnant the second time… through rape… I was pretty much raped the whole entire time I was living with him, because I never wanted to have sex, so he would just come home and force himself on me when I'm in bed… And being on my period also wasn't even a thing of a no-go zone week, like, "I can't do anything". It was, "Oh, well, you still have a mouth. It's blow job week". Or, you know, "Anal is always an option". And I was like, "I'm not into that." And he'd always try and force anal and blow jobs and stuff like that. (Jess)

Saskia was 12 when she met Riley (13) through a friend. Consistent with typical patterns of abusive relationships, the abuse began with controlling behaviours that continued to escalate:

He used a lot of force with trying to make me do oral sex, all of that stuff. So that was always a way to make me feel pressured, like if I didn't do this, it's just going to cause something way bigger than it needs to be, even though I was only 12 years old and wasn't ready for that…
We were actually down along the beach… and he raped me there. And then it just got worse from there, and progressed. Like he took me back to his nan's house one day and he done it in the lounge room of his nan's house. (Saskia)

Some of the experiences highlighted the sense of entitlement held by abusive partners who explicitly ignored being told 'no' by their partner.

I caught him when I was asleep, naked, he was trying to stick his penis in my butt… I was too nervous to be, "No, do not" [firmly], so I was like, "No," like, "Stop, stop, stop." [in a quiet voice, laughing nervously] And then I got even more nervous, and I know I laugh when I'm nervous, and I was like, "Stop," and eventually it was like, "Stop." [Directly and firmly]. And he just didn't listen. He just kept trying… I just never had the belief that he could rape me. It wasn't a thought that I'd had. (Ingrid)

He was that off his face. He was like, "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't mean to hit you." And then five minutes later hit me, because I wouldn't have sex with him, while my best friend was in bed with us. Like, I'm not doing that to my best friend. (Lilly)

Demonstrating how sexual violence is a tool for power and control, Jamie and Gina described their partners using it as a form of punishment. When I asked Gina was kinds of things she was being punished for, she said, "Anything. If I stared at him too long, or if I got up to pee too many times."

A giant toddler with anger issues is how I would describe this man…. he would scream, shout, throw things, smash things, hit holes in the wall, hit me; depending on what it was. If it was private he might rape me. If it was something that I'd done to upset him then that was his way of dealing with it. (Jamie)

He would force me to give him blow jobs and he would hold my head down so I couldn't remove myself, and things like that. (Gina)

Brayden used prior consent to justify raping Jamie, whose lack of a safe place to live kept her in the abusive relationship.

I remember the first time that he did sexually assault me. I wish at that time I had left. I was 14... And after he said, "You'd already said yes before." At the time, obviously I said no. And I've tried to physically fight. I ended up just getting thrown across the room into a cupboard. And I just lay on the floor there crying until he fell asleep again, and then climbed into the bed. At this stage I didn't have anywhere else to go, so just accepted that that happened and hoped it wouldn't happen again, but obviously it just got worse throughout the years… I'd say more often, less severe, but because I stopped fighting... I guess if that's what he's going for, you just let it happen. You don't say, "No. I'm trying to do this." You just didn't fight it because it was easier to just dissociate for that five, 10 minutes… Just get it over with, because it was so much easier to just pretend like it didn't happen, and just keep going. Whether it be the middle of dinner, and then you'd have to just go finish cooking dinner for him. Like whatever it was you just got through it. (Jamie)

Jamie's example highlights some of the strategies that victim-survivors used such as saying no, fighting back and disassociating. Many young women said they learned over time that it was 'easier' to 'just let it happen' than try to stop it. This response shows how sexual violence may shift from forced to coerced sexual violence.

"I'd have to give in and let him go for it": Coerced sexual activity

Abusive partners used a range of non-physical strategies including guilt, ultimatums and threats to coerce victim-survivors to engage in sexual activity with them. Jess described how Kristan used guilt, prior consent to sexual activity, physical force, and alcohol and other drugs to rape her throughout their relationship.

> *Because we'd had it the first time he just kept wanting to have it all the time… And we were laying down and stuff and it was really late – it was probably about 2 o'clock in the morning. And then he starts trying to make the moves on me. And I'm like, "Look, I'm really tired after today's event," and stuff, like, "I just want to go to sleep." And then he started guilt-tripping me, and just like telling me this whole story about how he was sexually assaulted by his sister's father, and was bashed with a belt and it was like this whole story that had nothing to do with me not wanting to have sex. And it was more like a thing of him trying to guilt-trip me or feel sorry for him into having sex with him, but then he just kept going on and on and on about everything, when I kept saying, "No. I don't feel like it. I don't really feel like having sex right now. I don't want to be intimate or anything like that. I just want to go to sleep." But he just kept doing it. So I'd have to give in and just let him go for it, essentially. And that was pretty much our whole sexual relationship. It was just me giving in and then him going and doing it. (Jess)*

Ultimatums were used by some abusive partners to coerce participants into engaging in sexual activity. These included threats to the relationship or to the safety of the abusive partner themselves. In some cases, this included making threats to prevent the victim-survivor from reporting sexual violence:

> *It was very much implied though that the cheating was because I was not fulfilling his needs and that if I was doing that more, then he wouldn't feel the need to cheat, but it was a self-fulfilling cycle in that the more he cheated, the less I wanted to be near him… But it was an obligation at that point. I knew I had to do it to keep the relationship happening. (Hazel)*

> *Sexual stuff as well, like, yeah, waking up in the middle of the night and expecting things from her… He was like, "Well, if you don't do this, or if you leave me, then I'll just go and kill myself". (Holly, worker)*

> *Or, if you tell anyone what I've done, I'll kill myself. (Danielle, worker)*

Sahar expressed fear and frustration at the lack of understanding of intimate partner sexual violence among young men and boys:

> *They envision like a big scary man, like dragging a woman into an alleyway and raping her, a stranger. But it's not like that at all. It's usually almost always somebody that you know, and it's partners. But they don't recognise that. They've got this, like, such a movie vision of what rape is in their head that they wouldn't even realise if they'd done it themselves. (Sahar)*

"I had no choice": Controlling your freedom and choices

The freedom and autonomy of participants was controlled by abusive partners who enforced explicit rules, micromanaged their behaviour, enacted outdated norms of masculinity, monitored their movements and actions (including through the use of technology), and isolated them from friends, family members, community, school and work.

"I wasn't allowed to": Rules and expectations driven by a sense of ownership and possession

Participants described feeling that they were 'owned' or the possession of their abusive partners. A series of rules dictated and dominated everyday life and young women were expected to be passive and submissive. Seeking to maintain power over them, abusive partners set and enforced rules about what they were allowed to wear, how they spent their spare time, how their limited income was used, and what they could talk about. Other examples of 'rules' included having a bedtime, dietary restrictions (often to prevent them gaining weight), and the frequency of praying:

> *Who they can be with, who they can sit next to in class, what they can wear, at the extreme end. But just that attitude that they lose their rights in a way, personal rights, once they're going out with someone. (Susan, worker)*

> *He used to send me messages on Instagram about what he wanted me to wear or how to do my make-up… He used to send me half naked pics of females in their underwear saying, "You should wear this, you should wear that." (Sarah)*

> *At school, he knew my dress length. So he would make me do the 'bend over test' to make sure if I bent over, nothing could be seen… I wasn't allowed to really show skin, and I had to be pretty covered up… If it was just us two, he would want me to, in his words, dress more scantily. So I had to wear less clothes, but if we were going out or if anyone else could see me, I had to dress conservative. (Gina)*

Abusive partners also changed the rules without notice. Victim-survivors wondered and worried whether each choice they made would keep the peace or spark arbitrary and unpredictable consequences. Jamie said her partner controlled every aspect of her life:

> *I was there for him. I wasn't able to live my life. I wasn't able to follow any interest that I wanted… I didn't have contribution into simple things like what movie to watch. It was everything. I would cook dinner. But I didn't have a contribution on what dinner was. (Jamie)*

Strong evidence of outdated patriarchal ideals were present in the way abusive partners used marriage proposals and being in a relationship to take money from them and to set expectations about cooking, cleaning and fulfilling their sexual desires. A number of participants also made reference to time spent watching their abusive partner play video games. Sometimes they were directed to do this, other times pressured to do so:

> *I would also feel like I had to spend time with them, so I'd spend hours…just watching them play video games, because I didn't feel like I could go and do something else... And I hate video games. I do not like playing video games. So I would just sit and watch. (Sam)*

Other participants talked about their partners getting angry at them when they suggested or engaged in activities they preferred. Sahar's quote below demonstrates how easy it is for victim-survivors to take these messages and apply them to other aspects of their life, making them feel less in control of their choices:

> *If I had any inspiration or ideas or anything I was excited about, like, if I wanted to learn a language, like, he would shut me down and make me feel silly for being excited or trying to do anything that was a hobby. I got into sewing during quarantine [Covid-19 lockdowns]… and he would get very, very, very upset if I started doing it, like, because I wasn't giving him attention… Like they get threatened by time not being all on them. (Sahar)*

"I was being left with nothing": Financial abuse

As teenagers, the participants in this research had limited financial resources; the majority received all of their income from Centrelink. Five participants had paid employment, and one received financial support from their family. Financial abuse manifested differently for participants. Most commonly, abusive partners would spend the participant's money and contribute nothing financially themselves. Having money taken away, being discouraged from seeking employment or being expected to pay for purchases also featured in participants' stories.

> *I financially supported him most of the time… I worked a lot when I was younger… We had bought a car together. Together means completely in his name, but I paid for it. (Jamie)*

Saskia and Ali both had their partners take money from them to buy drugs. Ali's ex believed she owed him money, whereas Saskia's ex was explicitly taking it to purchase drugs for himself.

> *[He] was taking half of my pay so they could get bags of marijuana and all of that, and I was being left with nothing, pretty much… If he didn't have marijuana it was nothing but nastiness. (Saskia)*

"I wasn't allowed to talk about my feelings": Controlling conversations

Control occurred in the context of what participants were allowed to talk about with their partners. For many, any discussion of their own emotions, issues with the relationship, past relationships, family and friends were off the table. Participants were aware that these conversation topics could be a catalyst for abuse so avoided them in an attempt to remain safe.

> *I wasn't really allowed to talk about my feelings. If he wasn't interested in the topics, he would shut them down, so he'd be like, "I don't care about this." … I basically got degraded for it. He was like, "You're stupid. Just shut up, no one cares. I don't care what you think. I don't care what you feel." (Gina)*

> *I could never sit down and have a normal conversation about our emotions. He'd always just blow up over shit. (Jess)*

Victim-survivors' sense of isolation was magnified by being unable to speak freely. In addition, many were repeatedly told by their partner that they were stupid, to blame and irrational. These young people felt alone, not just physically, but with their own thoughts, and had no one to check their reality with.

"It's not about what you enjoy": Outdated beliefs stripping freedom, choice and autonomy

Abusive partners exhibited outdated beliefs about masculinity that drove their expectations about how victim-survivors should behave in the relationships. These beliefs eliminated the freedom and choices of participants, and had detrimental impacts on their capacity to live their lives as independent young people exerting agency. For example, some participants said their partners felt entitled to sex in their relationship:

> *I used to say to him, "Oh, but this is what I enjoy." And he's, like, "Well, it's not about what you enjoy, it's about submission." (Jacinta)*

> *He'd always bring up the point that I was his fiancée, and that… Couples that are together always have sex and they always have to do this or they have to do that, like, it's your job to do this, kind of thing. So that was his mentality. (Jess)*

Adolescence is a time when young people are learning from their own experiences about what is and is not 'normal' in a relationship. Given the attitudes and beliefs of partners described in these accounts, it is unsurprising that participants sometimes felt uncertain about what was expected in a relationship. Iyer (2020) found that inexperience was a key barrier to young women identifying violence and abuse.

> *Looking back on it, I didn't really realise how bad it was, but he was really abusive and he sexually assaulted me, and that's how I lost my virginity. And I guess, because at the time I didn't know that when you're in a relationship, you could be sexually assaulted. (Gina)*

> *I would often times force myself to, because I felt like it was easier. And it was, I guess, what I was supposed to do. I didn't enjoy a lot of it. (Sam)*

> *I don't know why I'm dismissing it. He totally like – he totally raped me anally… When you're 14 or 13 you just kind of like – you don't know what's going on. I'm not discrediting 13-14- year-olds, but it's your first time doing anything, you just kind of accept it. And it's not until years later that you process it and, like, he didn't even ask me. (Sahar)*

Some abusive partners used a marriage proposal as a strategy for locking in a relationship and maintaining dominance and control. Ingrid and Jacinta's partners used religious beliefs as a foundation for manipulation:

> *Ian told me that God told him he was going to marry me…. He was telling me all these lovely romantic things and "It's fine, there's no worries, like nothing's going to happen until you're over 18". And he'd tell me these things about being married, and that was my biggest insecurity, is that I would just never be loved forever. And so a man telling me that he wants to marry me was like the answer to my prayers. Which is horrible, looking back now I was so indoctrinated. (Ingrid)*

She went on to describe how Ian would read parts of religious texts to her, suggesting that he hadn't already read them, "opened them and then they were all about marriage. So he's clearly already read them, but nonetheless it was very manipulative". Jacinta's partner proposed marriage and moving away from Tasmania:

> *He was, like, "Come and move to [capital city on mainland] with me, I'll marry you"… That was when I finally actually said something to my mum… And my mum was, like, "No fucking way, you're not. She*

was, like, this ends right here, right now"… Looking back now I realise how dangerous that actually was… I could have ended up in a much worse situation had I up and left… and married him because I realise now that there were some very rapey vibes going. (Jacinta)

Both Jacinta and Ingrid explained how it was easier to recognise these behaviours once the relationship had ended, but that while in it, even when it sometimes felt a bit 'off' they were swayed by the positive things their partners would do.

A number of participants said their partners expected them to take sole responsibility for all of the household duties. This was most common in cohabiting couples, but also occurred when they weren't living together:

He used to always take my phone off me. I couldn't leave his side. He made me clean up his whole unit. It was mouldy and everything… So basically I was kept as a slave. (Sarah)

I'd get up every morning, make him coffee, make him breakfast and, I mean, it's freezing cold. There's no heating as well… I'd wash his clothes, I'd have them folded ready for the next day. I'd pack his lunches, have everything ready for the next day, and, yeah, he wouldn't even kiss me. If I kissed him he would, like, wipe his face. (Katie)

"I wasn't allowed to leave my house without him knowing where I was going": Monitoring, stalking and surveillance

Limitations on participants' freedom and autonomy were evident in the monitoring and surveillance strategies their partners employed. This included attempting to be with them at all times, and when that was not possible, using technology or other people to monitor their whereabouts. These strategies left victim-survivors feeling they had no control or choice, no independence and nowhere to turn for help. Their dependence on the abusive partner and their entrapment in the relationship continued to grow:

He just got real controlling, like I wasn't allowed to have friends, I wasn't allowed to see my family, I wasn't allowed to leave my house without him knowing where I was going, or even if he knew where I was going, I wasn't allowed to leave without him, he always had to be with me. (Ali)

"He'd stalk my Snapchat maps": Tech-facilitated monitoring and surveillance

Participants in this study described how their abusive partners used technology to take away their freedom and autonomy. In using technology to facilitate this abuse, partners demanded access to participant's phones and social media accounts. They restricted who their partner could be 'friends' with, what kinds of photos they could post, tracked their locations, read private messages, and – after relationships ended – set up fake profiles to continue to monitor their movements and activity.

Accessing a partner's social media is increasingly normalised amongst young people today, making it difficult to recognise or call it out as abusive behaviour (Stonard 2020). Youth workers expressed concern that they were seeing boys aged 13-14 exhibiting behaviours such as forcing their girlfriends to hand over their devices, demanding to know who they were messaging, and threatening to smash their phones.

Gina's partner controlled her passwords and insisted they have a shared social media account:

> *We had a joint Facebook [account], because I wasn't allowed to really talk to people without him seeing it… He had to have the password. So he would check through my messages and make sure that I was doing things that were deemed appropriate to him… He knew all my passwords, and he would make sure that I didn't change them. And if I did change them, he would just log back into them by hacking them or resetting the password and things like that... He had multiple 'sock puppet' accounts that he used to track what I was doing. (Gina)*

This type of control also meant participants were unable to not safely communicate with others about relationship concerns.

> *"You're not allowed to have a Facebook account". He said it causes more drama in a relationship than anything else. He doesn't want that drama. "Why do we need it? You've got me. You don't need a Facebook [account]. What are you going to be even using Facebook for? You don't know your 'friends'. You're not friends with people anymore, so why do you need it?" (Jamie)*

Ingrid's partner used a variety of monitoring techniques and justified his actions as 'care'. Her quote also highlights the cycle of abuse that occurs in relationships where apologies can mitigate the reaction to the abusive behaviour, creating space for it to happen again:

> *He started getting possessive, really possessive. Like he'd stalk my Snapchat maps. He started texting my friends when I wouldn't reply quick enough. But then, as soon as he'd do that thing he'd say, "I'm really sorry. I'm just really worried, I worry about you"… And then it just kept happening, but in different ways. And I never picked up on the fact that it was just different ways. Like he'd swap from stalking me on my Snapchat maps to just always wanting to be with me. (Ingrid)*

Workers reported the difficulty of keeping up with technology-facilitated abuse. Youth worker Jo said young people were "really good at getting around all of that". One participant described her partner holding her phone in front of her face to activate facial-recognition, so he could "go through everything" on the device. He then accused her of cheating if she had been talking to any male friends.

"I'll fuck your entire life up": Image-based sexual abuse

Image-based abuse – sharing or threatening to share explicit images or videos without the depicted person's consent – was described by a small number of participants. Workers indicated this was a common experience amongst younger clients:

> *Sending photos of them around, after they've split up with them of them naked or you know, putting that on Snapchat… That's a thing they're like, doing when they're 12, 13, 14… That happens quite a bit… And that's heartbreaking… It happens a lot to our girls. (Elle, worker)*

Young people described threats and actual distribution of nude images:

> *He used to buy me stuff, but only if I sent nudes… I wrote a Facebook status about him one time… and then he was like, "Remove it. Remove it by 4.20 pm, or I'll fuck your entire life up." Which he meant by sending my nudes to people. (Sahar)*

> *He had nudes of me and during the period where he was cheating, he sent those pictures to a couple on Craigslist, and they were, "Holy shit. That chick's underage. We're going to call the police on you" and then he came to me crying, and I had to comfort him because he was, "Oh no I'm going to be put on the sex offenders' registry because I'm over 18". (Hazel)*

Hazel's experience demonstrates the complexity of these relationships and the feelings that victim-survivors grapple with. Abusive partners often positioned themselves as victims, leaving participants to console them and 'fix' problems.

"Sometimes he'd just turn up": Tracking her movements and following her

Abusive partners stalked participants using technology, by recruiting others, and in person:

> *He'd just perpetually check where I am, and then sometimes he'd just turn up… He'd be like, "I'm just checking that you're safe," and I'm like, "I don't think you are". (Ingrid)*

Some young women talked about their partners involving other people in monitoring their location. Sarah was trapped in her partner's unit for two weeks, only allowed to go to school. She explained that they were constantly together from after school until curfew at the shelter and that she couldn't escape because "he had a mate in my class. So he would ask his mate constantly where I was". Workers had also seen this kind of abuse, recalling an example where a partner of a client "had people keeping tabs on her and offered rewards to let him know where she was".

Two participants said the fathers of their partners were recruited to report on their movements.

> *Even if I went out to take Aria [dog] for a walk he's like messaging Tim. Tim would call me, "What the fuck do you think you're doing? Get the fuck home." (Lilly)*

Participants reported ex-partners physically stalking them – turning up at work, their home and the residences of their family members:

> *He would sit outside while I was working, the full eight hours a day. He'd have one coffee, and he'd just sit there… All day watching me work. (Jess)*

Some participants described having to move house because of an ex-partner's stalking behaviour.

> *One of the reasons that I went to that town was because the people that lived in the safe house said that he was spending hours just sitting in his car parked across the road, just watching the house. Watching to see if I was going to leave or arrive or something. (Hazel)*

These examples show how the monitoring process is an important step toward isolating victim-survivors. Isolating a partner is easier if other existing relationships are fractured. Some abusive partners deliberately damage already fractured relationships to pull the victim-survivor closer. It is also clear to see how these behaviours continue impacting victim-survivors after the relationship has ended.

"He knew that if I had no friends I'd go back to him": Isolation

At a life stage where contact with peers, school, family and work are critical, the young people who participated in this study were isolated. Their abusive partners employed a range of tactics to disconnect them from the world outside the relationship. This strengthened their hold over them and increased the impact of violence and abuse.

Gaslighting, victim-blaming and eroding self-worth intensify and are more effective in isolation where there are no points of reference for comparisons. Young Tasmanians spoke about living in situations where there was little (if any) opportunity for outside scrutiny of the relationship, and no social connections to reach out to for help. Their dependence on the abusive partner increased and their capacity to trust themselves or others decreased. Often, this isolation happened over time and was not immediately obvious to the young person affected.

Examples of isolation tactics used by abusive partners included:

- not allowing contact with friends and family
- creating conflict with friends and family
- demanding that victim-survivors only spend time with them.

Young, vulnerable and without a strong support network, Katie was an easy target for a man who quickly set about isolating her:

> *A month into that relationship we moved to [rural town]… I didn't have any friends or anybody to talk to up there. And that's where it really started, the control… I had no phone, no social media. I had no norm to tell me what a good relationship was and what a bad relationship is, or nothing else but him… Everything was him. I was sad because of him; I was happy because of him. I'd get up every day, and everything I did was for him. No matter what. (Katie)*

"I wasn't allowed to have friends, I wasn't allowed to see my family": Isolated from friends and family

The phrase "I wasn't allowed…" or "he wouldn't allow…" was used by at least half of the participants when describing being isolated from friends, family, school and work.

> *I wasn't allowed to see friends. He made it quite clear that if I saw friends it was over, and I guess I didn't want the relationship to be over in a way, so I stopped seeing my friends… I had get off the bus to go to his house for a few hours before I was allowed to go home. (Gina)*

> *I fell pregnant… and things got worse from there. I definitely wasn't allowed to talk to my mum unless I had permission. My mum was only allowed at one of my ultrasounds, and that was because I begged and pleaded for her to be there… When I fell pregnant I longed for my mum, so bad, and my sister… I had no one to turn to. (Saskia)*

A number of participants believed they were deliberately separated from friends, family and informal support networks so others wouldn't identify the problems in the relationship and intervene. Both Hazel and Jess were approached about their relationships by acquaintances who were becoming friends. When their partners found out, they swiftly brought these emerging friendships to an end:

> *He said, "He's not allowed to come here. You're not allowed to see him. You need to block him. You're not allowed to contact him. I won't sell anything [drugs] to him. He's not allowed in the house." (Hazel)*

I had like a workmate… He was lovely… I used to hang out with him after work but that became a problem for my ex, you see. I wasn't allowed to hang out with other men by myself. (Jess)

Ali's description of the impact of isolation demonstrates how victim-survivors become more dependent on their partner when relationships with friends and family are damaged or non-existent.

I wasn't allowed to have any of my family around, pretty much. I wasn't allowed to have any of my family over, and his friends weren't my friends, they were his friends… He knew that if I had no friends, I'd always go back to him. I kind of had no one else. (Ali)

"I thought she hated me, and she thought I hated her": Damaging relationships with friends and family

Existing relationships can be manipulated by abusive partners in ways that damage positive relationships and drive deeper wedges into those that are already fractured. Creating conflict, using guilt, forcing a victim-survivor to choose between the partner and friends or family, and acting badly to deter friends from wanting to spend time with them, all weaken relationships. Difficult relationships with family can increase the isolation experienced by victim-survivors. Not knowing if people will support you, or knowing that they won't, greatly diminishes the likelihood of reaching out for help.

Participants Jess and Katie said their partners created conflict to reduce the possibility they might find an ally and leave the relationship.

We ended up not talking when we were living together… I thought she hated me, and she thought I hated her, because of him going back and forth saying things like, "Oh, Jess did this the other day and said this about you", and then he'd come to me and be like "Oh, Carly did this, and said this about you". (Jess)

I thought the situation was a bit weird, but I always got told that she [flatmate] was just mentally ill and they've got to keep an eye on her because she's not 'all there'… I always got told, "You're not allowed to talk to her because she could say anything and she lies a lot"… But, really, they just didn't want me talking to her in case she was going to say something like, "Get the fuck out". (Katie)

Gina's partner used technology in an attempt to cause a rift with her friends:

He would start arguments and he would tell me, he'd be like, "Oh, this person said this about you," … He would make the screenshots and he would photo-shop things that someone had said to make it super out of context… I would confront my friends about it and they were like, "That's not real, that didn't happen." And I was like, "Well, I've seen the photo evidence, I know that it did." And we'd get into really bad arguments, and they would stop talking to me for a while. (Gina)

Tasmanian teens who contributed to this research described feeling abandoned by family members and friends, excluded from events, and people giving up on them when they most needed help.

My friends would even not invite me to stuff because he was so excessively contacting me and then messaging me… He'd call me and then he would get angry and then I'd argue and then I'd be yelling and screaming and crying and I'd ruin the whole mood. (Addison)

"You need to spend the majority of your time with me": Being together all the time

Participants were also isolated by partners who demanded that they spend all of their time together. In the early stages of a relationship, this can be difficult to recognise as problematic behaviour.

> *He was like, "You need to spend the majority of your time with me," and I rarely was able to do anything that didn't involve him. I remember he was working… and I had to just sit there while he was finishing his shift. (Gina)*

Riley, Saskia's partner, tried to stop her from going to a party and threatened to break up with her if she did. When she said she didn't care, he instead decided he would go with her: "he had to come. If I was going, he had to come". Susan recalled working with a young person whose partner demanded he be with her while she completed a college exam that had been set up as an alternative assessment. Susan expressed her sadness knowing that this couple are still together as adults and the abuse has continued:

> *He'd always be with her, talking for her… He insisted on going in there with her at the same time. We said, "Look, she needs to be here doing this on her own." "No. I'm staying." He demanded he was going to stay. (Susan, worker)*

Demands were reinforced by abusive partners using guilt and manipulation to respond to any resistance shown by victim-survivors. Jamie's partner insisted that she always be available for him to contact when they weren't physically together. Early in the relationship, she accidentally left her phone on the school bus. When she retrieved it at the end of the day, she found 200 phone calls and 150 text messages from him. Sam's partner Marti used guilt to keep Sam from spending time with their own friends:

> *It was basically a lot of like guilt… I wouldn't really be able to talk to anyone or establish any supports outside of them as friends, or even go about all the things that I needed to a lot of the time. (Sam)*

Young people also described their partners isolating them from school and work.

> *Work was really my only freedom, I guess. And half the time it was working with him. But when I was younger – 14 – I still worked at [fast food restaurant]. That was a little bit of a getaway. But eventually he made me quit that job and just work for his family. (Jamie)*

A characteristic of healthy relationships is the degree to which each person maintains a sense of independence. The participants in this study had their choice, control and freedom taken from them by abusive partners who dictated their daily lives with rules, enforced outdated notions of masculinity, controlled where and with who they spent their time, and isolated them from family and friends. These abusive behaviours severely restricted participants' capacity to be independent, free and autonomous.

"Messing with my head": Controlling your thoughts and emotions

Abusive partners used a series of tactics to try to influence and control the participants' thoughts and feelings. This kind of behaviour is most easily recognised in hindsight. It is especially problematic because it is often disguised as love, care or concern, making it easy to dismiss or rationalise as acceptable or justified behaviour.

The participants described four groups of behaviours used by abusive partners:

- manipulation
- gaslighting
- eroding self-worth
- inciting fear through threats and intimidation.

"Making me feel guilty": Manipulating you to do things you don't want to

Participants felt manipulated into thinking and acting in ways that benefited their partners and simultaneously disadvantaged themselves. They shared stories of their partners eliciting feelings of guilt, challenging their love or commitment to the relationship, and using concern, love and jealousy to manipulate them into doing things against their will. These behaviours can be difficult to identify and challenge, but often form part of a pattern of abuse.

Hazel said her partner told her he loved her while also pressuring her to participate in criminal activity:

> *He'd be like, "I can tell that you love me so much and that's why you do this stuff for me. I'm so proud of you. I love you, no matter what. I'm so happy that you do all this stuff for me. I'm sorry this stuff happens." (Hazel)*

Highlighting how manipulation can be masked as caring, Sam described how Marti used their concern about Sam's mental ill-health as a way to discourage them from participating in a training program.

> *They told me that I shouldn't do it. They didn't think I would be able to. They said that my mental health wouldn't be able to handle it, and they also said that they would miss me too much. (Sam)*

Ingrid and Jacinta both provided accounts of the grooming practices of men who were much older than themselves. This included the early days of the relationship where the connection was framed as an innocuous friendship but still had dubious undertones:

> *He was like, "I was wondering if you wanted to go and see a movie? But I don't want you to feel uncomfortable, do you want to bring a friend, someone you trust and I can bring a friend"… He held my hand and I thought it was lovely, I loved that attention from an older dude… I remember him also saying to me in church and things, like I'd turn up in a dress and he'd be like, "You look really lovely." … "Yeah, you just look really feminine" and I was like, that's nice. [Then he'd say] "You just look like a mother," and I go, "Ah huh". And it was a nice compliment, I was like thank you… But that's a creepy comment. (Ingrid)*

Ingrid and Jacinta both identified that their partners had manipulated them into entering into the relationship. They said these men had seized opportunities when they were particularly vulnerable. Jacinta said she was groomed by a man 20 years her senior when she was 16 years old:

> *He made me feel like he was a safe person, that he was trustworthy, that I could be vulnerable with him… By being a shoulder to cry on, by saying, "Hey, I'm here for you if you need anything. I want to spend time with you, I want to get to know you." He knew I didn't have a dad in my life and he would try to do fatherly things with me… And that just creating what I saw as a safe environment basically and it made me feel comfortable and… he used to encourage me and say that I was beautiful and stuff, and that my body was beautiful, which was the opposite to how I felt at the time because of what had just happened. And so it was like he was taking advantage of everything that had happened to try and bring me to a place where I could do stuff with him basically. And then he would talk to me about having a family together and just playing on everything that I had said that I'd dreamed of and wanted. That's the best way that I know how to explain it. (Jacinta)*

Taking advantage of the vulnerabilities of a young person, abusive partners sometimes positioned themselves as saviours or heroes in order to increase the likelihood the participants would enter or remain in a relationship with them:

> *I should have realised that what he was doing was to make himself look better by helping me… Back in the old days with slaves… People would take them in and be abusive and the people who organised that would come in and save them, which turns them into respecting those people. So, it's basically what he was doing to me. (Sarah)*

"How is it my fault?": Gaslighting – making you question your reality

Gaslighting forces victim-survivors to question their thoughts, memories and sense of reality (Sweet 2019). Abusive partners do this by suggesting victim-survivors are to blame for the abuse. They fabricate the truth, deny events, manipulate circumstances and use exhaustion to wear their partner down. Gaslighting is one of the most coercive tactics applied by abusive partners because it is difficult to prove, and the longer it persists the more challenging it is for the victim-survivor to recognise.

Participants said they were regularly blamed for the abuse they experienced. This blame was sometimes reinforced by rules enforced by the abusive partner, resulting in a sense of helplessness that no matter what they did, they would still be at fault:

> *He would say, "You made me do this, Gina. If you had just listened to me, this wouldn't have happened." (Gina)*

> *It always felt like it was my fault, or I was the one that was in the wrong… He'd convinced me it was my fault when he'd raise his hands, and continually push the blame on me again and again. It was my fault when he got angry and slapped me around, and no matter what I did to change the situation I was still hated and made accountable. (Ali)*

The desire of abusive partners to maintain control over their partners leads to a constant shifting of expectations. Regardless of what a victim-survivor does, it is never 'right'. They question their reality and a sense of helplessness reinforces the idea that there is no escape from the abuse. This situation is dense with contradictions and confusion. Victim-survivors may try to placate their partner by doing what they are told because it appears to be the fastest way out of an abusive situation. This almost always results in the abusive partner switching to an alternative tactic or approach.

Elise's partner David was intensely jealous and regularly accused her of cheating on him. In an attempt to placate him, Elise adopted behaviours that sought to minimise his worries:

> *I kept all my receipts with the times and stuff like that. Like Macca's stops, servo receipts, et cetera, et cetera, Woolworths receipts. I remember in the end I'd turn on my Google Maps and make sure that my Google was tracking me everywhere I'd go, so I could show him and… He was like, "You can just change that stuff anyway"… You can put all these preventative measures in place if you think they're going to help, but when someone's like that there's nothing you can do. (Elise)*

Participants talked about excruciatingly long arguments that would wear them down to the point it was easier to agree than continue to fight. This also gives some insight to the kinds of incidents where a victim-survivor might fight back, an outcome that can lead to their misidentification as the primary aggressor. For a couple of participants this had contributed to them having family violence orders (FVOs) taken out against them.

> *The arguments were so bad. Like, they'd just go for hours. We'd be up till, like, 3 am in the morning still arguing from when he came home from work. It was just crazy. (Katie)*

> *I was always exhausted and tired, which I think made me more vulnerable, because I was so sleep-deprived that I couldn't think properly. (Gina)*

Being told they are at fault diminishes victim-survivors' ability to trust their own judgement. Participants said they felt less able to accurately assess what was happening to them and in their relationships, which increased their sense of reliance on their abusive partner. In an attempt to resolve the confusion, some participants sought to rationalise their partner's behaviour:

> *For my own sanity, I always made-up excuses for his behaviour… A lot of the time I would look for reasons and then make excuses for bad behaviour, so I wouldn't paint him in a bad light, I'd always speak about him as if he'd done no wrong, if he wasn't the problem, as if I completely was responsible for my own situation. Which in a way I was, but at the same time that's not how I should have been viewing it. That was brainwashing, it was an unhealthy mindset to have about my abuser being seen as not a bad person, and defending him, and I did that for such a long time, when I really shouldn't have. I got him out of so much trouble. I got him out of [criminal] charges… I was defending him when really, I shouldn't have been. (Elise)*

Gaslighting commonly results in victim-survivors believing that they deserve the abuse they are experiencing, or that they are incorrect in thinking that what is happening to them is wrong. It is confusing and deeply damaging.

"He used to spit food on me and tell me I'm worthless": Eroding self-worth

It is easier to keep someone trapped in a relationship if they believe that they are not worthy of anything more than they currently have. Participants described a range of behaviours aimed at diminishing their self-worth. Behaviours included being called names, criticised, humiliated and degraded in private and in front of other people. These behaviours are particularly effective at eliciting feelings of shame. A worker, Heidi, said abusive partners can be particularly skilled at identifying and targeting the vulnerabilities of their partner:

> *Perpetrators are very good at finding the things that people are most self-conscious or uncomfortable or feel shame about. So yeah, we have had a few where the victims have disclosed a history of very significant child sexual abuse by family members and then been told during family violence incidents, "You deserve to be raped by your father, you deserve this or that". (Heidi, worker)*

Lilly said she regretted opening up to her partner about previous sexual assaults and trauma, as he had later used this information to shame and humiliate her:

> *He threw it in my face that I got raped, a couple of times. Called me a rape slut once. It's like I didn't ask to get fucking raped… My brother sexually assaulted me from the time I was eight to the time I was 13… When we broke up, he goes, "Go have sex with your brother again, slut." (Lilly)*

The term 'slut' was commonly used by abusive partners to degrade participants. This was often coupled with accusations of infidelity.

> *He would often say that no one else would love me because I was a slut because I had sex with him, and he would really go hard on how I looked as a person and would constantly call me fat and say that no one would date someone as fat as you, and just pick apart my appearance. So then I was like, okay, well, no one is going to want to be with me and only he would. (Gina)*

A number of participants said they had been told by their partner that they were fat, ugly and disgusting. When Jacinta confronted Korbin about how he would never be seen with her in public, he confirmed and reinforced what bullies at school had told her – that she was too 'fat' to have a boyfriend. She said this contributed to the development of disordered eating behaviours.

Other participants were humiliated by their partner laughing at them, calling them worthless, physically damaging their body and property, and explicitly telling them that they and others hated them.

> *He'd wreck my make-up… He even cut my eyelashes at one point, to make me look ugly. He wanted to make me look ugly… And he cut my hair twice as well, without my permission. He just snipped it all off. (Michelle)*

> *He called me ugly. Told me I was worthless. Told me no-one would want me, every single day. He was like, "You're this, you're that. No-one is ever going to want to be with you. I fucking hate you. Your mother hates you. Everyone hates you. Rah, rah, rah, your family hates you". And it's like, yeah. I dealt with that on a daily basis. And when we'd argue I'd argue back for five minutes and then he'd keep going for hours and hours and hours, and he just wouldn't stop. And it'd get to the point where I'd just be sitting there crying, and he'd be like, "What are you crying for, you pussy… It just kept playing over and over and over in my head for so long after I left him. (Lilly)*

Michelle, Jess and Addison all recalled being spat at or on by their partners:

> *He used to throw food at me and spit on me, he used to spit food on me and tell me I'm worthless and I'm nothing, and it was just gross. (Elise)*

Participants described being denigrated in front of their friends:

> *When I used to ask him why he was hitting me and why he was treating me that way, and he used to say because he hated me. And it's like, well if you hate me, why are you in a relationship with me, why are you doing this to me? And I used to end up in tears because he used to say it in front of my friends and that, put me down in front of my mates. And it was just real downgrading, it's not something that you say. (Addison)*

Tactics to erode self-worth damage the self-concept of victim-survivors, but also serve to isolate them from social connections by manipulating the perceptions of friends and family. Sometimes abusive partners would claim to be the victim in the relationship:

> *Shaming someone into staying quiet is a really, really effective tactic… Because even if you know that you're in the right, you know that there's going to be people that are always going to believe his side. (Hazel)*

Eroding self-worth is effective in keeping young people trapped by reinforcing a narrative that they are unworthy of love and will not find another relationship.

"I'm going to burn your house down": Inciting fear through threats and intimidation

Threats and intimidation incite fear and coerce victim-survivors to follow relationship rules or expectations dictated by their partner.

Many of the participants in this study had lived in fear on a daily basis. During interviews, participants were asked to rank how afraid they had felt of their partner overall on a scale of 0-10 (with 0 being not at all afraid to 10 being the most afraid). Descriptive analysis of these results shows high levels of fear amongst participants. Of the 24[7] relationships where a fear score was given, almost 80% gave a score of 7 or higher. Higher levels of fear were reported when more types of violence and abuse were experienced in the relationship. One-third of relationships (n=8) were ranked at the highest level of fear. Lower levels of fear were associated with less likely reporting of physical violence and abuse (see Table 5[8]).

7 Two participants were not asked about their fear levels of all relationships; One participant reported a score of 5/10 fear of her partner, but a 9-10/10 fear of his mum.

8 'No' is used where participants said this type of abuse was not experienced in the relationship. Not all participants were asked these questions directly so where detail has not been given, 'not described' is used to indicate this may have occurred but was not discussed.

TABLE 5: FEAR OF PARTNER AND ABUSE TYPES EXPERIENCED

Fear/10	Emotional and psychological abuse	Physical violence and abuse	Sexual violence and abuse
11[9]	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	Not described
8	Yes	Yes	Not described
8	Yes	Yes	Not described
8	Yes	No	No
7	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	No	Yes
4	Yes	Not described	Yes
2	Yes	No	Yes
5	Yes	No	No
0	Yes	No	Yes
0	Yes	No	Yes
	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Yes	Not described	Yes
	Yes	Yes	Yes

9 Two participants asked if they could rate their level of fear as 11/10.

"To everyone else, it probably looked normal": Threats to victim-survivors

Addison, Gina, Ali, Elise, Hazel, Jess, Katie, Sahar and Saskia all described being threatened by abusive partners during and after their relationship had ended. The physical violence experienced by these participants meant the threats were taken seriously and were effective in instilling a sense of fear:

> *"You're a slut," threatening me, "I'm going to burn your house down"… There's been lots of times he's threatened, when he's been drunk, threatening [with] a knife, or, "I'll slit your throat". (Addison)*

Often, threats were used to frighten participants into staying in the relationship. Gina said she had been afraid to leave because he had threatened to hurt her if she ever broke up with him. Threats were also used to coerce participants into agreeing to things they didn't want or to generate a sense of unpredictability. For example, Gina's partner threatened to spike her food:

> *He would say, "Oh, should you be eating that?" And I was like, "Why?" And he was like, "Nothing. I just probably put something in it." (Gina)*

There were incidents where young people were bashed or threatened by people outside the relationship who were asked (and sometimes paid) to do so by abusive partners:

> *I'd get stood over for my money. He would take it from me, or hit me, or threaten me that he was going to get people to bash me, because apparently, I owed him money, but I didn't owe him money, it was my payday, he'd just expected money. (Ali)*

Some threats were delivered via text and social media. One example was a warning that other people were watching her movements and would assault her at her partner's command. Other forms of intimidation were also used to frighten participants. Damien, one of Gina's partners, would drive dangerously to frighten her. Jess said her partner would physically corner her in a room to scare her:

> *He never hit me. He did push me, and he did shove me quite a lot. He'd get up right in my face, like nose to nose, screaming at me. He'd bail me up in a corner though, like, he would keep walking towards me until I'm backed up somewhere trapped. (Jess)*

Other participants described their abusive partners destroying personal property or physical structures such as windows and walls to frighten them and demonstrate potential physical violence toward them. Phones were the most commonly destroyed personal property. One participant said her partner had smashed 14 of her phones. Destroying phones had a double impact on participants – it was a reminder of the physical damage an abusive partner could inflict, and further isolated them by cutting off their ability to communicate with others.

Addison, Lilly, Hazel and Jamie all described their partners smashing windows and punching holes in walls when they got angry. These young women knew that these behaviours were intentional and part of the abusive behaviour that was supposed to make them afraid. For Lilly, this kind of abuse escalated when Tim was using 'ice':

> *I think it was probably eight or nine months into the relationship. We had an argument and he pushed me, and that's when I knew, fuck, this is like bad. And then when we were on ice together it got to the point where his dad would call the cops on us. He punched a hole through two walls, like, through our bedroom wall, into his dad's bedroom, at 3 o'clock in the morning. Woke his dad up and everything.*

> *There was gyprock everywhere. His knuckles were split… The wood pillars in between the walls, he punched one of them and broke his knuckle. (Lilly)*

Participants described their partners using gestures and weapons to frighten and intimidate them. These types of threats were clear to victim-survivors but their meaning could elude bystanders:

> *Before eating and if he had a knife… He would grip it really tightly and look at me in a way that could be seen as a threat to me, but to everyone else, it probably just looked normal. (Gina)*

Addison described how Jesse would use "gun fingers" and "death stares" in the same way.

The fear felt by victim-survivors is magnified when children are used as pawns. Saskia was obliged to maintain contact with her ex-partner, Daniel, as they had a son together, and he continued to threaten her with violence. Daniel was enraged when she broke up with him and threatened her family, new partner and her. He made terrible threats to her via text and social media that included threats to hospitalise her new partner, bash her family, stalk her, and expressed hope that she would suffer from mental health issues resulting from feeling fear every day of her life. He also threatened suicide and that he would have people watching her and ready to assault her at his command.

"He's going to kill himself": Threats of self-harm

Threats of self-harm tap directly into victim-survivors' emotions. They prepare victim-survivors to feel blame, guilt and shame if the abusive partner follows through with the threats. These threats are particularly powerful because they are tied up in confused feelings of care and love for a partner. Abusive partners threatening suicide – particularly when they thought the relationship was under threat – were described by several participants in this study:

> *He used to blackmail a lot when I'd try to leave, like, "I'm going to kill myself." Because his mum died when he was young, "You're the only thing that brightens my world since my mum's gone," and all of that stuff, and would make me feel horrible for leaving. (Saskia)*

> *He messaged me [the day we broke up]… And he just kept saying "I love you… I'm sorry… I can't do this," like, saying he was going to kill himself. (Lilly)*

The mind games associated with threats can keep victim-survivors constantly on edge. David could quickly transition from threatening Elise to threatening himself, taking her from fearing for her own safety to feeling responsible, guilty and frightened for his.

> *A lot of the time when he would try and kill me, or do something that really scared me, if I did leave, he would flip the table and say or do something that would make me think, "Oh my God, he's going to kill himself". So it would be roles reversed, and then I'd feel sorry and bad for him… It was like, "Oh my God, fuck this, he's going to kill me" to, "Oh my God, fuck this, he's going to kill himself". (Elise)*

Family violence worker Toni said the fear of an abusive partner dying by suicide could trap young people in relationships, even when they wanted to leave:

> *He wasn't using physical violence with her, but he would use it on himself if she tried to leave him… And tell her he's going to commit suicide. She could clearly identify that she didn't want to be in a relationship, she was like I don't want this, and her barriers to leaving were that complex between seeing his good side [sort of] thing, seeing when he was nice, and then also the pressure that he would put on her about his safety if she left him. So they were the two things that held her back from leaving. (Toni, worker)*

3.5 "I'll never be the same": Suffering the acute and chronic impacts of teen domestic violence and abuse

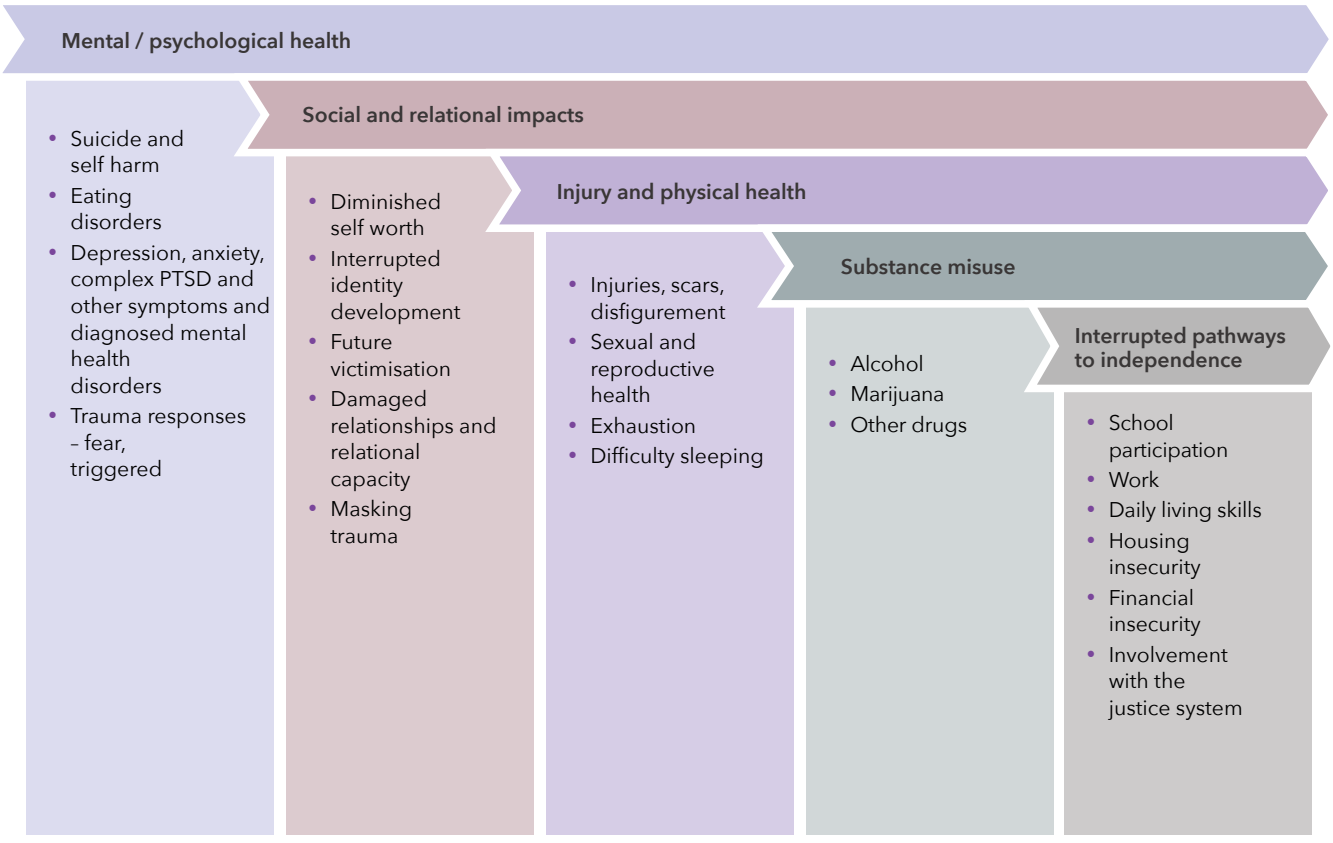
Summary

All participants live with daily emotional and psychological impacts reminding them of the violence and abuse they have experienced, and some have painful or visible evidence of injuries inflicted by abusive partners. Unpacking the impacts of violence and abuse on young people was not a specific aim of the research, yet emerged as a key theme in the interviews. These findings do not seek to attribute causality of specific abuse types with specific outcomes, which would require a different research design.

Teen domestic violence and abuse has profound and serious immediate and long-term impacts on victim-survivors. An overview of the acute and chronic impacts described by participants is presented in Figure 5 to demonstrate how these young people felt that violence and abuse harmed them. The findings demonstrate broad impacts from internalised manifestations such as anxiety and depression through to impacts on their relationships with others, social connectedness and participation in everyday activities such as education and work.

The impacts of violence and abuse are not isolated, easily disentangled outcomes. They are intertwined with each other and not experienced in the same way by all young people. Some of these impacts may increase risk for ongoing victimisation and other health and wellbeing consequences later in life.

FIGURE 5: IMPACTS OF TEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE



Not all participants described only harmful outcomes. A small number also felt that their experiences opened their eyes to behaviours and red flags they would recognise in future relationships. Over time, and with support, healing and recovery can occur. Reclaiming self is a key part of the healing and recovery process. Ingrid initially met Ian, who was nine years her senior, through their church when she was 14. After the church intervened to separate the pair, Ian moved away. He contacted her again after she had turned 16 and they maintained a secret long-distance relationship, characterised by online sexual abuse, coercive control and manipulation. Ingrid's quote shows how, at the time of her interview, she was reclaiming self – she had shifted from a young teenager who thought this older man was kind and lovely to saying:

> *Sometimes when he messages me, he tells me how disappointed he is with me. That I'm not particularly following Christianity the way I wanted. Good story. I'm disappointed in your paedophilia. (Ingrid)*

CONTENT WARNING:

The remainder of this section contains detailed accounts and direct quotes of participants. Examples of topics covered include suicide, miscarriage, abortion, mental ill-health, and alcohol and other drug use. These may be triggering for some readers. Skip ahead to the Section 3.6 if you wish to avoid this potentially triggering content. A list of support services available to contact can be found on page i.

"They found me on the bridge": Suicide, self-harm and mental ill-health

The most devastating impact of these relationships is how close these young people were to death. Nine participants – Jess, Saskia, Katie, Jamie, Lilly, Hazel, Ingrid, Sam and Gina – had attempted suicide (sometimes multiple times) as a consequence of the violence and abuse they experienced. These findings are consistent with existing evidence (Ackard et al. 2007; Exner-Cortens et al. 2013; Roberts et al. 2003) that attributes suicide and self-harm to victimisation of domestic violence and abuse. Suicide and self-harm are in the top five causes of death and disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) for adolescents in Australia (WHO 2022), so it is critical that teen domestic violence and abuse is understood as a contributing risk factor.

> *There was one occasion where I jumped out the window and wrapped my drawstring from my hoodie around my neck and tried to kill myself… I used to self-harm all the time… I've got scars all up there, all up there, all down there, all here [showing her arms, legs and torso]… And he's just laughed about it… He was that toxic. (Lilly)*

> *Mum actually had to call the cops on me one day because I told her I was going to kill myself and turned my phone off and just walked straight to the bridge… They found me… And had to pull me off the bridge. (Lilly)*

Saskia described attempting suicide twice within a week, the culmination of complex trauma including violence and abuse, miscarriages and isolation from family and friends. The first suicide attempt followed a miscarriage that Daniel blamed her for, at a time when she also suffered from "major depression". She attempted suicide by overdose and was hospitalised.

Release from hospital following a suicide attempt requires the completion of a safety plan. However, young people's unstable lives and estranged relationships with family can mean that these plans are not always followed, placing the young person back in an unsafe, abusive situation. The mental health assessment undertaken before Saskia's release from hospital stipulated that she should return to live with her dad and not Daniel and his family. Her dad picked her up from hospital, but after she said she was feeling nauseous, he asked if she would like to go 'home' to Daniel's. She gave him the address and was dropped off. Within a week she had attempted suicide again.

> *I'd written a letter on the back of an envelope, and I said to not call the ambulance, because I don't want one, I just want to die. I don't want to be alive anymore… And then I remember waking up in a hospital. (Saskia)*

Despite the failure of her last safety plan, Saskia's discharge plan after her second suicide attempt again required her to live with her dad. Her step-mum picked her up and took her to Daniel's, ignoring the conditions of her discharge.

Participants described various self-harming behaviours, with Jess commenting how this could have escalated to suicide had her relationship with Kristan not ended when it did. When we talked about the terminology used to describe people who have experienced violence and abuse from a partner, she felt that 'survivor'[10] applied to her because if she hadn't left she "probably would have offed myself".

10 Other participants preferred the term 'surviving' because they felt like they had not survived and it was a long-term process they battled with daily. Others used the word 'victim', and others talked about not having a preference or not knowing what language would best describe themselves in this context.

In addition to suicide attempts, ideation and self-harm, participants also reported diagnoses and symptoms including complex PTSD, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, living in permanent fear for their safety, and being triggered by everyday objects such as mobile phones. The impacts of the violence and abuse they experienced affected them on a daily basis, and continued to plague them as adults.

> *There's not much to hang onto after they've broken you as a person… I'm always on the verge of tears. I just have this hole in my chest. It's like someone's physically punched me through the chest and I just – it feels heavy and empty at the same time. I don't know how to explain it. It's just my heart is broken physically. And then you just get to a point where you're like I can't do this. (Katie)*

A number of participants developed eating disorders they attributed to comments or behaviours from partners which made them feel bad about their bodies and appearance. For others, eating disorders were a way of regaining a sense of control that had been stripped from them.

> *He was starting to make friends with people who were gym people and bodybuilders… And he said that he's trying to get in with that crowd and that he needed a girlfriend who would do that with him and so he wanted me to change my way of eating and he wanted me to lose weight so that he could fit in more with that crowd… I just became an emotional wreck really and I started to do things like starving myself or becoming obsessed with exercising… Because I thought that that's what I would have to do to have a boyfriend. (Jacinta)*

An ongoing sense of fear was common, a trauma impact which has flow-on physiological and psychological impacts on individuals that last long into the adult years (Wong et al. 2014).

> *One word is on my mind after all the rest… Unsafe - not only in my own unit with myself and another youth, but also in their home and their parents in the community such as around [regional city], friends' houses, the street, or even the hospital where their anger and actions have struck me. (Ali)*

The mental health of all participants was adversely affected by their experiences with abusive partners. This was both an immediate, acute impact and long term chronic impact. Their mental ill-health had flow-on effects including impacts on their self-worth, relationships and capacity to engage in everyday activities.

"It shapes you differently to who you thought you were": Impacts on self-worth and identity development

One of the most significant impacts on teens in violent and abusive relationships links directly to key developmental aspects of adolescence. How young people see and feel about themselves is crucial as they explore their identity through the transition from childhood to adulthood. The diminished self-worth so strongly experienced by most participants in this study has serious consequences for their ongoing development. The lack of freedom and autonomy they experienced during their abusive relationships further impacts their identity as they did not learn to make choices independently and many were unable to establish meaningful connections outside the relationship.

> *I would probably take getting my nose broken, after 10 years of everything, like isolation, choice, and gaslighting and all that kind of stuff. Because it takes a huge toll on you physically and mentally, and you as a person, it shapes you differently to who you thought you were… Like you look back as like when you were a kid, like I find how you're so innocent and just learning everything... Now I feel sad for that adolescent... Because she always had anxiety. She was always afraid. She didn't feel like she was*

allowed to go out and do what she wanted. She always had to ask permission to do things. Couldn't hang out with some of her friends because it would upset him. She was always trying to please this person in her life, and what for? What did she get in return? Fuck all. (Jess)

In detailed reflections from Katie, the complex impacts on self-worth and identity development after the relationship ended are clear. Her quotes describe immediate and long-term impacts from Tom's abuse on her identity, sense of self and emotional state.

I'll never be the same. He did take my glow. I kind of wish I could go back to who I was… He's also taken away my innocence, and ignorance. Ignorance is bliss. It is. It really is. He's just ripped it from me… And you're just empty.
He took away my self-worth. I hated myself. I've got scars all over my body from how much I sliced myself up because I just hated myself, and he took that away from me, and if I had of had my self-worth and gone, "No, I deserve way better than this" instead of listening to him… I wish I had… Accepted myself more to say, enough's enough…
I've taken on some of his traits, and sometimes I just hate myself. I might say something and I'm like, that would be something he would say. Or, that would be something he would do. Like, it just – I have a lot of self-hate, actually. I've gotten heaps better, but, yeah, it was pretty bad when I first left him… It's fucking hard though. I still… Have moments where I feel like calling him when everything goes to shit. (Katie)

Heidi (worker) reinforced these findings from young people, highlighting how trauma impacts brain development and how you interact with the world:

I think [the impacts are] really really significant on a developing brain and really formative in terms of how expectations and patterns and thoughts about the world and yourself get hardwired or confirmed if you've been traumatised already as a child. (Heidi, worker)

These participants have shown the significant impact abuse can have on their self-worth and identity as they grow into adults. This has implications for them internally, affecting their mental health and wellbeing, as well as how they relate to others, which in turn affects how they feel about themselves.

"I can't make friends": Impacts on relationships with peers and family

Participants talked about how their violent and abusive relationships damaged their relationships with others during and after the relationship had ended. Gina, for example, struggled to trust other people and build meaningful relationships because she was afraid they would treat her like her partner had. Sam's biggest regret was losing their best friend because their relationship with Marti had stopped them from staying in contact. Katie talked about finding it impossible to make friends with people her own age and isolating herself because she is afraid of being hurt. Lilly described how adopting the behaviours of her partners impacted the way she treated her family and damaged her relationship with her mum and sisters. Others talked about the isolation they experienced, how relationships had been damaged and how the sense of being alone affected their day to day lives even after relationships with their partners had ended:

I withdrew myself from everyone. I didn't speak to any of my friends… I just went to work and went home and just stayed in my own little bubble, and didn't eat and just went to sleep and just repeated the whole day, essentially. (Jess)

Hazel was hospitalised after ending her relationship with Kayden and talked about struggling to cope and taking it out on a friend who helped her get out of the relationship. The behaviours she describes below are the result of trauma. For Hazel, the ripple effects include "deep-seated guilt" flowing from the way she treated her friend, further demonstrating the complexity of the impacts:

> *So I'd be really awful, crying one moment, blanking out and disassociating another, angry and lashing out the next. Saying things like, "I know you're going to leave. I know you hate me secretly. I'm going to kill myself and it'll be because you abandoned me when I needed you." All kinds of just awful, disgusting stuff being spewed out of me, and obviously him being a teenager himself, he couldn't cope with that… I'm so, so deeply grateful to him for everything he did… I spent years internally punishing myself for what I did to him, wishing I could apologise and thank him, knowing he was probably scared of me… He recently friended me on Facebook after having blocked me for years. I don't want to reach out first because I'm so worried about bringing up traumatic memories for him or saying the wrong thing. (Hazel)*

Participants also spoke about new romantic relationships. Occasionally there was talk about how they had learnt from their abusive relationships, could more easily recognise red flags and had higher standards than before. Despite these seemingly positive outcomes, nobody thought they were better off overall. Participants also described having difficulties in new relationships for fear of being abused again, feeling insecure, and having difficulty establishing trust.

"Bruises from head to toe": Injuries and physical health

Participants experienced significant physical injuries and impacts on their health during their relationships. Serious physical injuries described included bruises, broken bones, snapped tendons, cuts and dislocated joints.

> *He was giving me black eyes all the time. (Ali)*

> *I remember when he bashed me the first time when we all came back from a party at a friend's place… I remember he got me up against the wall and he pulled and twisted my – like, my thumb is still stuck; you see how stuck it is [showing disfigured thumb] ... and fuck it hurt so much, I was in so much pain. (Elise)*

Hazel described the physical impacts of combined drug use, stress and not eating or sleeping that were part of her daily life when with Kayden:

> *I weighed 43 kilos. I was bones in human skin. I couldn't sleep without weed, and the sleep I did get was little bits here and there and I'd have nightmares. I was vomiting every single morning, as soon as I woke up"… You could count every single one of my ribs going up, the whole way up. It was nuts… I think it was pretty obvious to everyone that I was a young teenager in danger from the people around her, sick, and wasn't really capable of any form of higher thought other than immediate survival needs. I looked like I should be in hospital at that point. (Hazel)*

These injuries often resulted in permanent reminders of the violence in the form of scarring, improperly healed bones and physical pain, sometimes years after the abuse had occurred. A number of participants had visible signs (e.g. scarring, disfigured limbs) of the damage their partners had done to them; Lilly wore

a sling to the interview due to pain from her improperly healed broken collarbone, even though it was more than two years since the original injury. Callum described physical impacts he continued to suffer from:

> *I still have to wear a mouthguard… Because I was just stressing so much about it and all of that. I have to take melatonin because I was just up and because I was anxious and all of that, when's she texting me next? (Callum)*

"The baby is there, but there's no heartbeat": Sexual and reproductive health

Violence and abuse had varying impacts on the sexual and reproductive health of participants. For some, there was direct impact such as miscarriage as described by Lilly below. Others were forced to make decisions to continue or end a pregnancy. A number of participants experienced losing a child. As children themselves, these experiences and decisions were highly traumatising. Their youth and limited experience meant that they sometimes did not know what was happening to their body or their unborn baby. Saskia described being sent home, as a child, to experience a miscarriage on her own, in the shower:

> *They were just like, "The baby is there, but there's no heartbeat. You're having a miscarriage"… I went home and I didn't even tell Daniel. I went straight to the shower and shut the door, locked it… I actually caught the baby in my hands as it came out of my body, and I still remember that so clear to this day. And then I didn't know what to do, so I just flushed it down the toilet. (Saskia)*

> *I was pregnant and I got bashed and I lost my daughter. (Lilly)*

Jess and Michelle both opted to not continue with pregnancy and were supported by services to access medical support for this.

The reproductive health of young people could also be impacted by forced drug use. For Katie, this resulted in her not being able to have her own biological children in the future:

> *He started providing me with steroids, which is why I can't have children. (Katie)*

The loss of children, whether through miscarriage, abortion or removal by Child Safety, was not necessarily directly caused by the violence and abuse they experienced. However, the experience was often more traumatic for participants because they were young, alone, trapped, and in need of support.

"I started drinking": Substance use and misuse

The use of drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism was common among participants. Katie described being addicted to prescription medication, taking up to five Valium a day to stay asleep and not have to feel anything when she was alone in remote areas while Tom was at work. Sam used marijuana in secret as a way of coping with their abusive relationship at the same time as coming off prescription medication. Saskia described heavy alcohol and marijuana use during her second abusive relationship as a way of masking her feelings. Although she described it making her happier, she said it was a key factor in her starting physical fights with other young people.

I asked Jamie what impact the relationship had on her life after it had ended and she described what many participants had told me:

> *After the relationship? Fuck load. So I went through quite a bit of mental health struggles. I had tried to kill myself quite a few times after that… I started drinking. Never used to be a drinker. I'm not much of a drinker now but I'd say between 19 and maybe 22, I would drink quite a lot. I would smoke a lot of weed. I got addicted to speed at one point. It was just anything you could get to just shut the brain off. (Jamie)*

Elise lived with guilt over the consequences of her methamphetamine use, which led to the involvement of Child Safety regarding her son, criminal activity, homelessness, and long-term mental health consequences that, with support and reliable housing, she is now managing. She attributes this downward spiral to the trauma she suffered, her fear of her partner re-entering her life, and a lack of positive supports in her life, describing it as a desperate cry for help:

> *I was like I'm really sick on the inside, no one can see this, no one wants to help me, and my parents don't fucking understand, nobody cares, I went, fuck it, I'm going to start doing drugs and then they'll be able to see on the outside how sick I am on the inside. (Elise)*

For many participants, alcohol and drug use impacted them both during the relationship and after it had ended, with ongoing adverse impacts on their health and wellbeing.

"I blame him for the fact that I didn't do what I could have done with my life": Interrupted pathways to independence and social participation

The lives of participants were negatively impacted in ways that related to their future life opportunities, social participation and daily life, through consequences most often related to:

- housing instability and homelessness
- employment (i.e. difficulty working)
- interrupted schooling
- illegal activity or involvement with the justice system
- antisocial behaviour (including illegal activity, bullying, fights).

Those participants who had left school early most often attributed it to the abusive relationship. For those who finished school, there were significant interruptions and decline in their performance and overall engagement in their learning. Lilly described how the complex PTSD she has as a result of her relationships still prevents her from participating in school. Elise described herself as smart and having good grades for most of her school life until she was in the relationship with David. Workers described the low school attendance and completion rates of their clients, noting how much more difficult this was for clients who were also pregnant or young parents:

> *A lot of them have not done well with school… One at the moment… can't read or write. She's now 18… (Trish, worker)*

A lot of them have not finished high school. Some of them, and I'm not putting this on the Education Department at all, some of them, I don't know how they've been shuffled through year after year after year… (Kate, worker)

They keep going through grades, but they're not going to school… It happens a lot. (Ros, worker).

Some participants described antisocial behaviour including getting into fights with peers and family members. Other participants described impacts on everyday skills needed as adults, such as budgeting and money handling. Below, Elise describes these impacts and how desperately she needed earlier intervention and support. She expressed deep gratitude for the support worker who has helped her over the past five years:

It directly affected and impacted all the important things that you're doing that age to set yourself up, your future life, your future career, your future rental history… I just ended up a mess with no support, addicted to drugs, no home, couldn't see my son… The most important time to get that support would have been when I was in high school… That's when – teenagers need so much God damn support. (Elise)

A less commonly discussed impact of abusive relationships described by workers and young people was victim-survivors accepting blame or committing crimes to protect their abusive partners from legal consequences.

We were driving and we come around this corner, he was drunk, wouldn't have passed a drug test for weed… We've just gone bang, straight into the side of them and I've jumped out and said, I was driving… even though I only had my L2s… I knew he'd go to jail. (Elise)

We had one young woman who was out scoring drugs for him, and she would go and steal as well for him because he was too scared of being caught by the police, so he would send her out and then, of course she got done for that. (Jo, worker)

3.6 "It's so hard to even ask for that help in the first place": What we can do to prevent and respond to teen domestic violence and abuse

Summary

Responsibility for preventing and responding to this issue lies with adults, not children. The quotes below demonstrate some of the complexities in providing supports and interventions to young people, highlighting barriers that need to be considered in planning and delivery. Whilst all participants described what could have helped them, a number highlighted how hard it is to receive help once the violence and abuse is entrenched in the relationship. They described how the nature of adolescent development can be a barrier to receiving help, highlighting the importance of prevention and using young people's strengths as a platform for providing support.

> *I was so stuck and invested in this relationship, that I didn't want help back when I was that age. I would have refused it. So it's really hard to know what could have helped me because when you're that age… all your emotions are tenfold, you're just so frustrated and angry and excited and everything is just so full-on, but you also think you're right about everything. It's just a really stubborn age. So, I don't know what exactly you could have said to 14-year-old Elise before it all got really nasty. (Elise)*

Hazel's quote reminds us that abuse experienced outside the relationship increases the barriers to young people being able to receive supports.

> *I think if people had tried to step in too early or people had tried to step in the wrong way, that I would have just disregarded it or thrown myself further in, because I didn't really trust people. I still kind of don't. I would have been worried it was a test. And saying generic things like, "I love you and it will be okay and you're worth it"… had already come out of the mouths of people who would abuse me the next day, so it all meant nothing to me. People tried to help sometimes with lots of different intentions and ended up making it worse, and all the advice in the world didn't change what was happening to me. (Hazel)*

There were five distinct actions for preventing and responding to teen domestic violence and abuse identified by young people and workers, summarised below.

Education about violence and abuse, relationships and that increases self-worth

Young people and professionals were clear that greater capacity, skills, knowledge and resources to develop and maintain safe, healthy and happy relationships were critically missing from the lives of young people. Importantly, this education needs to be direct and up-front about violent and abusive teen relationships, so that teens understand its relevance for their age group. Building the self-worth of both males and female teens was also seen as important for providing a good basis for healthy intimate relationships. Delivery of this education in schools in particular was highlighted.

Protection when in danger

Participants and professionals identified two main sources of protection for teens experiencing violence and abuse in their relationship: formal supports, including the Child Safety Service, police, and domestic violence services; and informal supports such as bystanders intervening in incidents, calling the police or providing a place to escape. There was a shared view among workers that the formal supports available in Tasmania were either insufficient or were not employed to their full extent, arising from gaps in legislation, funding and service delivery. Workers perceived the Child Safety Service as treating teens as 'old enough' to make their own choices even if that means living in unsafe situations. Alternatively, the adult domestic violence system was seen as not always being able to respond to these unsafe relationships, because some teens were defined by legislation as 'too young' to be experiencing family violence.

Participants also described instances of informal support, in which family members, friends or even strangers intervened in incidents or called out patterns of abuse, and even provided places of refuge for teens escaping violence and abuse. For many participants, growing up in communities characterised by crime and youth offending, calling the police for their protection wasn't always seen as a socially acceptable or safe option in the long run. In this context, intervention in incidents and the provision of immediate, practical support such as transport and housing was valued by teens in a violent and abusive relationship.

People who care

Young people need to know there are responsible, safe, trustworthy adults in their lives they can count on. Safe adults who exhibit genuine care can provide important points of reference, act as role models, and increase the safety of young people. Different people in participants' support networks approached them with concerns about their relationships, drawing their attention to 'red flags' or highlighting a perceived decline in their wellbeing. Teens emphasised the need for people to believe them when they disclose a violent and abusive relationship, be persistent in condemning their partner's violence and abuse, and offering them an alternative path to care and support.

Access to housing and material resources

As noted in section 3.3, most if not all of the teens had few economic resources, and this significantly constrained their ability to escape a violent or abusive relationship. As one participant explained, escaping a violent and abusive relationship requires both housing options and access to material resources: "How can I get a house away from this situation? How can I afford to be by myself? Food, how can I get food? Where can I go? Clothing? Medical supplies?" Young people and professionals described feeling failed by systems that do not adequately provide teens with access to safe and suitable housing and material resources for escaping violence and abuse, especially in rural and remote communities where services and supports are often thin on the ground.

Specialist teen domestic violence and abuse services and professionals

There are almost no services in Tasmania for teens experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships. Of the services that do exist (e.g. Step Up and SafeChoices), awareness of and accessibility of these services is limited. Three clear needs for service provision emerged from this study:

- specialist support and programs for teen victim-survivors
- programs for young people using violence and abuse in their relationships
- a supported and highly trained workforce.

Workers were concerned about the numerous missed opportunities for intervening with young people using violence and abuse. A sense of 'too little too late' and recognising clear trajectories from teen perpetration of abuse to later adult perpetration and involvement in the justice system stood out amongst the workers' experiences. Some workers described seeing links between childhood exposure to abuse and adolescent and adult perpetration, suggesting that more intervention with young children is needed to break intergenerational cycles of domestic abuse.

CONTENT WARNING:

The remainder of this section contains detailed accounts and direct quotes of participants. Examples of topics covered include violence, abuse and homelessness. These may be triggering for some readers. A list of support services available to contact can be found on page i. If you wish to avoid the detailed parts of this section please skip ahead to Part 4 – Discussion.

"I wish I was actually taught that": Education that empowers

The findings from this research overwhelmingly point to a critical need for increasing access to effective and inclusive education, social-emotional learning, life skills training and awareness of teen domestic violence and abuse for children and those around them. Children also need empowering education and programs that strengthen their self-worth, and school environments that are safe and enabling. Young people and professionals were clear that greater capacity, skills, knowledge and resources to develop and maintain safe, healthy and happy relationships were missing from the lives of young people. It is critical that all children are provided with appropriate, robust, evidence-based and engaging Respectful Relationships Education (RRE), yet in Tasmania the delivery of RRE in state schools is not mandatory. It makes sense, then, that all of the young people in this study said 'education' when asked what needs to change to prevent this issue and support those living with it.

A lack of education for young people can contribute to normalising violence and abuse. This prevents young people from seeking help and maintains a narrative that violent and abusive relationships are something that happens to adults and is only serious when it mirrors the kinds of violence seen in the media.

> *Education about abusive relationships, what they are, what happens to people if they don't leave, all of it. I wish I was actually taught in school the red flags... There needs to be a lot more education around it. (Saskia)*

Across Australia, RRE aims to address issues of violence and abuse from a strengths-based perspective, teaching young people about respectful and healthy relationships. Whilst this is an effective approach for many reasons, it can also be detrimental to those students who are in violent and abusive relationships. The approach can lead to 'othering' whereby young people may feel further excluded, not part of the conversation, or that what is happening to them shouldn't be or isn't talked about. It can contribute to normalising these behaviours and prevents victim-survivors having their experiences validated. There needs to be a distinct shift that allows young people to talk about violence and abuse. Susan felt that a lack of explicit attention on unsafe relationships creates obstacles to help-seeking:

> *Perhaps that's a barrier for young people accessing support is they only hear what they should be seeing, rather than what they're actually seeing and experiencing. And there could be a sense of shame created around that, because they're not experiencing the respectful relationship. And they're like, "Am I allowed to talk about these things that are happening to me?" (Susan, worker)*

The importance of undoing attitudes and beliefs that normalise and glorify violence and abuse was considered key to any education about respectful relationships. Similar to existing Tasmanian research, there is a need for explicit, direct language and information in education programs about sex and relationships (Rodgers et al. 2022). Young people who have experienced abuse need messaging that is direct and clearly shows what is abusive behaviour. Without this, the normalisation of violence and abuse continues, and young people have little reason to question what is happening to them.

> *It… shouldn't just be normal, because obviously where I come from there's obviously a lot of violence and a lot of stuff like that, so you don't think of it much, but then in high school you need to be reminded and you should be reminded. You should be taught about it, you should be taught about services…, you should be taught about all of this… You should be taught about sex. (Addison)*

> *I never really knew that growing up, that relationships could be abusive. So I just thought things like that were normal, and I think you see it a lot in domestic violence campaigns that show… people that are older, but they never really show someone that could look like you as a teen. I think that if there was more awareness around that, that could help. (Gina)*

Addison and Gina pointed out what was the case for many participants – that their experiences fit within what was normal in their world. This makes recognising violence and abuse as problematic very challenging. When this is coupled with a lack of clear and direct messaging from school-based education, victim-survivors feel more isolated, unable to speak up and have the normalising of their experience reinforced. The participants who recalled receiving education on relationships and domestic violence described it as being too distant from their experience to be relevant. Framed as an issue that affects adults, or where abusive people are strangers rather than partners, or where violence is physical without addressing abusive behaviours that don't cause physical injury, meant that the experiences of these young people were not part of the narrative. This was a big gap recognised by participants that needs to change.

Participants made suggestions for what education about teen domestic violence and abuse could look like. Young people and professionals indicated a need for more explicit naming of, and talking about, domestic violence and abuse. The use of metaphors and euphemisms to describe abusive partners and victim-survivors can be patronising and young people want clear, direct and honest conversations about this issue. Workers also talked about the importance of naming violence and abuse directly, not 'dancing around it', and respecting teens as capable of talking about difficult issues that impact their lives.

> *Dolphins and bloody sharks… With a lot of kids, we're at a critical point where you've just got to name it up. Because it is violent and it is bad. And, yes, you have those kids who come from healthy homes and things like that. Some of these other courses might be okay for those [young people]. But these other ones, you're at a critical [point] – you've just got to name it up and, otherwise, you know, they're going to end up dying. (Matilda, worker)*

Understanding the importance of self-worth, participants also talked about a need for education or programs that don't just address domestic violence and abuse, but also focus on personal empowerment:

> *I think a lot more education on how to respect yourself… do you know what I mean?... No one tells you about it; you know it's a thing, abuse, out there, but when you think of abuse as a young teen you think, oh yeah, someone's getting bashed. Because a lot of mine was mental abuse, yeah, just an understanding of what mental abuse actually is, what it entails. The first signs, so the red flags. (Elise)*

> *Most of those boys have no self-worth… and it probably is a lot around, yeah, their skewed views of what love is… and they're looking for connection as well, but then it comes out as ownership and control. But, yeah, there's probably nothing out there that teaches them why they would do that and that it probably… comes back to their own self-worth and underlying trauma, like where are they going to get any advice around that? (Matilda, worker)*

Importantly, addressing the self-worth of all young people, including young men, was raised by workers as a crucial strategy for preventing teen domestic violence and abuse.

School settings must be set up to ensure the physical and social environment creates safety for students to talk about relationships and seek appropriate support. The Tasmanian *Education Act 2016* requires all young people to participate in education and training until they complete Year 12, gain a Certificate III or turn 18. This makes schools critical settings where teens are spending a significant amount of their time. The need for these spaces to be safe for young people, including having support people available to assist when

requested, was commonly raised as a gap for young people. Schools also could invest greater effort into following up with students who are disengaging, providing appropriate training and resources for staff, and screening and supporting young people who are experiencing or using abuse in their relationships.

> *I think we could probably do more with working with schools somehow… to build their capacity in understanding the impact of family violence and the laws, because I think that's important, they're powerful for communities to know. (Susan, worker)*

A number of young people specifically talked about the need for schools to have more resources for supporting students living with domestic violence and abuse. They called for more social workers in schools, persistent follow-up with students who are disengaging, teachers who students feel comfortable talking to, and readily available information and referrals for students who need them. Safe and enabling school environments can shift the narrative that domestic violence and abuse is an invisible issue that only happens to 'other', usually older, people.

When describing what education about teen domestic violence and abuse should look like, young people and professionals argued strongly for education that:

- starts as early as possible – pre-kindergarten was commonly mentioned as where education about respect, safety and relationships should begin
- teaches young people how to:
- recognise domestic violence and abuse in their own and their peers' relationships
- develop economic independence
- identify positive role models
- spot red flags and toxic stepping stones in relationships
- explicitly talks about and uses direct language around violent and abusive relationships
- aims to undo attitudes and beliefs about violence and abuse being normal
- is delivered both within and outside of schools to ensure young people not attending school still have access to information, and that parents/carers and other community members can also learn more about the issue and have the tools to prevent and respond effectively to it
- is delivered as a team including teachers, external experts and people with lived experience.

"I was running in the driveway with the pram": Protection when in danger

Protection from violence and abuse is a central pillar of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The experiences of young people in Tasmania have clearly revealed a need for much greater protection of their safety. They, and the professionals who support children and young people in Tasmania, made multiple suggestions for better protecting children experiencing violence and abuse from a partner. This included:

- protection provided by formal supports
  - » Child Safety Service
  - » Legislation
- protection provided by informal supports
  - » Intervening in incidents
  - » Calling police
  - » Providing a place to escape.

"We're not intervening early enough": Protection provided by formal supports

"There needs to be an adolescent-specific team": Greater involvement from the Child Safety Service

Workers expressed concerns about the limited capacity of the Child Safety Service to adequately protect children from violence and abuse. This included young people in their own relationships, as well as where violence and abuse was being used by family members towards children or others in the home. Workers expressed great concern about the danger young people are facing as a result of limited intervention from Child Safety, both when violence was occurring in their family unit and when it occurred in their intimate partner relationships:

> *There needs to be more stuff done there in the family unit… to support the family in dealing with their stuff, so they're not putting it on to the kids as well, and the kids are [not] witnessing that as they're growing older. (Danielle, worker)*

> *Even though, you know, it might be a bit too late in terms of family reunification for a 14, 15-year-old, there's not enough support for them because they're deemed as being old enough to be able to protect themselves in some capacity, but they really can't. So that's where they do gravitate towards these relationships with the people that promise them safety, or stability, or some kind of comfort. And they turn out to be just as bad as their home life. (Holly, worker)*

A better understanding of the needs of teens was sought from Child Safety by professionals. Concerns about intervention from Child Safety decreasing as at-risk children got older was shared among participants, with terms such as 'self-selecting' or 'self-protecting' used. These terms were understood to mean that young people are making a choice about where they live and that they are capable of protecting themselves. This leaves responsibility in the hands of children. Heidi's concern about this approach was that it left young people without access to interventions, further increasing their risk of being victim-survivors or young people who used violence and abuse in their relationships. Workers described Child Safety as seemingly focused on violence and abuse inflicted by parents/carers, and that recognition of domestic violence experienced by young people in their own relationships is needed. Where Child Safety was involved in the relationships of young people, this occurred more often when the couple were also parents.

> *Another invisible spot [is] in terms of responses, because Child Safety is mandated to intervene when there is not a protective parent. So if a child is refusing to engage in supports, that's either a teenage victim or perpetrator of violence, refusing to get engaged into school because they're still in this relationship… Unless the parent is actively putting them at risk, neglecting them, there's really very little that can or will be done. And that also ties into the general vibe or attitude… That once someone's a teenager they can look after themselves. So oftentimes you'd have… a teenager who's experiencing family violence in their relationship, there were some other issues in the home but nothing crazy, and it was only if there were children under ten who were displaying significant things [issues] and there was a problem – in quotation marks – with the parents, that you could send it to Child Safety for assessment. (Heidi, worker)*

This view was mirrored by shelter workers who were deeply concerned about a lack of involvement from Child Safety with their older teen clients:

> *They don't pick up our young people now, so why would they pick them up if they were in an unsafe relationship? ... Child protection, to be brutally honest, for a 15-year-old, if they were experiencing family violence like you were talking about that young person, I'd be surprised if they'd step in there unless there was considerably younger siblings in the house. And they wouldn't step in just on one notification, necessarily. (Trish, worker)*

One solution would be the establishment of an adolescent-specific team that can respond to the unique needs of teenagers in danger:

> *There needs to be an adolescent-specific team here, because it's this whole other world, and also just because a parent is being protective and cares for their child and doesn't want them to be in a violent relationship, that doesn't mean that that child's not still at risk. It's basically like you have to wait for a teenager to fall pregnant before you can intervene, if there's not further concerns. And there's always exceptions to that, but that is by and large the trend that I've seen. (Heidi, worker)*

The reported patterns of domestic violence and abuse in the family lives of participants and their partners suggest there is need for targeted early intervention for children exposed to domestic violence and abuse. Teenagers living with violence and abuse in their relationships are a specific cohort of children whose safety is in danger but seem to be invisible to the system that exists to protect them.

"Police can't deem their relationship as being significant": Legislation that provides greater protection

A number of professionals described gaps in legislation that mean young people under 16 are unable to access protective mechanisms available to older people. This was a great cause of frustration, leaving workers feeling unable to properly support their clients and having to hold on to fear for their safety. The *Family Violence Act 2004* provides protection in the form of family violence orders and police family violence orders for people in significant relationships. The *Relationships Act 2003* defines significant relationships as applying to people aged 16 and over. As described by Jo, this means younger children can't receive the same kind of protection normally available to victim-survivors:

> *There have certainly been some challenges around young people being able to access the full suite of Safe at Home services, because police can't deem their relationship as being significant under the Act… They can't become a Safe at Home client… and have a police family violence order protecting [them] or be the respondent in one… Child Safety, Police Prosecutions, Police Family Violence Unit, Family Violence Counselling Support Service, the Defendant Health Liaison Officer and someone from Corrections… So they all become aware and if that young person is in [a state] school then that Department of Education [now Department for Education, Children and Young People] rep can make sure that the school knows if that's necessary... So someone who is not in the Safe at Home program can slip through… And they may not be able to access any other support because they probably won't know about it. (Jo, worker)*

If you are under 16 you are able to apply for a restraining order, but as Jo said,

> *It's seen as being probably a little bit less weighty in the courts, and you don't have that multiagency support around you from the Department of Education [now the Department for Education, Children and Young People] and Child Safety, and all of those other Safe at Home partners. (Jo, worker)*

Samantha explained that the inability of police to serve family violence orders to young people sent a message to victim-survivors and perpetrators that their domestic violence and abuse is not serious.

On the other hand, professionals also discussed the risk of criminalising the behaviour of children and pointed to a need to provide therapeutic, rehabilitative interventions for child perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.

"She would bring tea": Protection provided by informal support networks

In the absence of formal protective support mechanisms, informal supports are providing support and protection to young people when they are in danger. Whilst this proved useful to some participants, informal supports alone are insufficient for protecting children from violence and abuse. Participants described how family members, friends, work colleagues and strangers intervened in their relationships and provided protection from violence and abuse. Sometimes this occurred in critical moments, and other times it supported them to leave the relationship. These experiences highlighted the importance of bystanders having capacity to intervene safely and effectively.

Informal supports typically provided protection by intervening in incidents verbally, calling police and providing a place to hide. Verbal confrontation usually involved approaching or calling out to the couple, or directly addressing the abusive partner. Family members and strangers in public were most commonly described as intervening verbally in abusive incidents.

> *There was a police officer actually off duty that was going for a jog, and he came up to us, because he noticed that my ex was being really up in my face and screaming at me. And he was like, "Does anything need to be done here? Because this isn't right." And then obviously my ex turned it off and he was like, "No. Nothing. It's fine. Everything is fine." (Jess)*

Hearing abuse can also prompt others to intervene. Gina described her mum calling out when she heard a banging sound coming from Gina's bedroom:

> *I had set of tallboys [chest of drawers] and I had so many bruises, on my back and side, from where he would full force shove me, and I remember a loud bang happened because of it and my mum yelled out. She's like, "What are you guys doing in there?" And I was like, "Oh, ha-ha, nothing. Sorry. We're just like play-fighting." And she was like, "All right then." … [Carmel: Did her calling out stop that particular incident?] For a while, but he was holding me really tightly, my arm, and telling me what to say. (Gina)*

Bystanders would also subtly but still directly intervene in incidents. Jamie described her partner's grandmother intervening when she heard her being abused. Jamie felt that she wasn't more direct because of her fear of her grandson:

> *She would come if she would hear yelling or banging… she would bring tea, or just something to intervene… Subtle. I knew what she was doing but there still wasn't that out [escape] from it. It was just in the moment. (Jamie)*

Jamie's quote highlights that these immediate interventions are useful for interrupting incidents of violence and abuse, but were not sufficient to help her leave the relationship.

Young people were mostly resistant to involving the police in their relationships if they could avoid it. There were many explanations for this, including a cultural attitude that exists in many communities where anyone who calls the police is labelled a 'rat' or a 'dog'. The trap of an abusive relationship also prevents young people from calling – they don't want to get their partner 'into trouble'. Where police were called it was either by a bystander or in life-threatening situations where young people were left with no other option.

> *I never called them and honestly, in situations like mine when Jesse was… always in trouble… I didn't want to add to that… And then obviously… with [named suburbs] it's not a common thing to call the police… because you don't want to be [called a dog]… And I think that's more or less for everybody. I've heard people say, "I don't do that, I'm not a dog." (Addison)*

Neighbours, family members and strangers called police to respond to incidents of violence or concerns about a relationship. Trusting her suspicions, the stranger who picked up Katie from the side of the road played an important part in Katie interacting with local police and receiving support.

> *I had to break the door handle on the caravan to unlock it and get out. I just started walking along the highway, put my thumb out. A lady picked me up… dropped me off at the park. She was a little bit suspicious… she came back probably two hours later and she saw me still at the park and she's like, "Right, there's something not right about this." She called the police and, yeah, so I was in the police station for I don't know how long. (Katie)*

In moments of extreme distress, some people stepped in to help participants escape their abusive partners. On different occasions, Elise was able to seek refuge at her neighbours' or her mum's or by calling her dad to pick her up. Elise's neighbour gave her somewhere to hide and called the police on her behalf after she ran from her partner who was chasing her with an axe.

Saskia's story below includes her mum, sister, step-dad and a friend of her mum's who lived in the same town as Saskia all being part of helping her escape the abusive relationship. Following an argument with her abusive partner's mother, Saskia fled with her four-month-old son from the home they were living in with her son's father and his family. She called her mum who lived two hours away for help. Her mum called a friend to help her but Saskia had already left the house. After her partner had found her in the street and tried to take their child, Saskia ran from him and called her mum's friend, and then ran to his house:

> *And then he got there just as I was running in his driveway with the pram, and he's just grabbed my son out of the pram and gotten him inside, and I've just broken down, and I just fell, and I just felt like I was finally safe. I'd gotten away. (Saskia)*

For many young people, support in the community is not available. Living in rural and remote areas (the majority of Tasmania) adds layers of difficulty for young people in abusive relationships. In addition to having limited services, such as public transport, police and health services, small population centres limit opportunities for seeking safety. For Elise, living in a small town with David (where he had lived his whole life) meant that he knew the places she could hide and most people in town. Elise felt she couldn't go to anyone's house for protection because she feared the consequences for anyone who tried to help her. Elise recalled an incident in which she left a party they attended together and went and sat in David's car in

an attempt to avoid a fight. He followed her, kicked in the car windows and windscreen and refused to let her drive to her mum's. He got in the car:

> *I'm like, "Just give me the key; let me go then, just let me go," and he wouldn't. And he wouldn't let me walk. He's walking around each door and I'm just like, "Well, give me the key, let me go, I'll go home, I'm just going to go to mum's." I remember he got me, goes, "You're not fucking leaving; I'll take you there mate."… I got out [of] the car in the main street somewhere and I just ran… I remember going down and hiding, and he ran around [small rural town]… calling out, "Elise, where are you? It's all right, I just want to talk," and all this. And it was really fucking creepy. It's like by this point, 6 o'clock, 5 o'clock in the morning… I've sat in a bush all night, or if he's got closer to where I am I've moved because he knows every spot in town, so I can't just go knock on someone's door. No one's going to take me because he'll come smash up their house, or carry on at their house. It was so scary for me while I was hiding from him… I thought, is this for real? This is my actual life, like, what is wrong with him? (Elise)*

This quote from Elise highlights why having people who care – whether they are known or complete strangers – is so important.

"Anyone that is worried for me, I want them to tell me": People who care

Young people need to know there are responsible, safe, trustworthy adults in their lives they can count on. The participants in this study described how people being role models, providing points of reference, not giving up on them, and raising concerns – either through explicitly warning them or more subtly talking about the relationship – were all significant actions that helped them feel safer, and sometimes provided the support needed to leave an abusive relationship. Participants shared many examples of people in their informal support networks exhibiting care. Given so many were missing strong family supports, the impact of other people caring was invaluable.

> *All teenagers, all they're looking for is constant points of reference… Not any one point of reference will be enough to create, I don't think, their whole picture of what they want to be, but they will take a lot from each point. (Andrew, worker)*

Overall, when other people intervened to stop incidents of abuse occurring or to help make a young person safer, it was valued and appreciated by victim-survivors. However, this does not mean that these interventions always have an immediate or visible result. Where it had an immediate impact this usually entailed stopping an incident of abuse and mostly this was well-received, although some participants also recalled abuse continuing or being labelled the 'bad guy' by their partner.

Participants strongly emphasised the value of others persisting and not giving up on them. The deep trap keeping them in these relationships means it is not easy to "just leave". Young people needed people to care, to understand and believe what was happening to them and to continue being there for them even when they didn't leave the relationship.

> *Just being more persistent. My mum… was telling me about her experience and… if I had have heard that from other people it probably would have made a bit of my brain happy… If people were being more persistent and be like, "No, I don't condone this," then it probably would have made a difference… My mum, my friends, anybody that sees it, like my teachers, anybody that can see the relationship with red flags. Anybody that is worried for me, I want them to tell me. (Addison)*

Where people didn't persist, participants felt alone, trapped and sometimes deserving of the abuse they were experiencing. This was exacerbated by others ignoring, dismissing and minimising the abuse in their relationships.

Different people in participants' support networks approached them with concerns about the relationship. Sometimes this was the result of seeing evidence of abuse, other times it was a result of paying attention to red flags. Most of the participants also described an acute awareness of their friends and family disliking their partner.

> *My dad wanted to beat him up. My mum absolutely despised him… My sister didn't like him. No one liked him. My grandparents didn't like him. My friends didn't like him. No one liked him. And even my teachers that I had at school didn't like him. They're just like, "Why are you with him?" And I'm like, "Oh, because I love him." (Jess)*

Others also observed and pointed out patterns across participants' relationships, or commonalities with their own experiences of abusive relationships.

> *My mum and me had a talk one night and she was like, "You need to leave. He's turning out to be exactly like Steve [previous boyfriend]. You need to leave." And when she said that he's turning out to be like Steve – obviously from a mother's perspective, she can see it all, and that's when I flicked in my head and I was like, fuck I actually do need to leave. I need to listen to her, because if I don't leave then I'm fucked. And I left. (Lilly)*

Participants described others noticing when they were spending less time with them, going to school less, losing weight, or when their mental health was declining. Peers and family members would also pay attention to what they heard about abuse in the partner's relationship history. These concerns provided a backdrop from which to raise their concerns with participants. Participants recalled times where others approached them with concerns regarding the relationship. Sometimes this happened before others were certain abuse had occurred. For some participants, these conversations were important stepping stones to leaving relationships.

> *One of the people that we were selling [drugs] to at the time. Warren, new customer, really polite, really nice, very sweet human being… Took me down the road one day to just go sit on the roof because I needed to get out of the house for a bit… And he was being really quiet and then he was, "So what's actually up?" and I was, "What do you mean? I'm fine. I'm just really tired at the moment, it's all good"… And he got really teary and was, "No. Everyone can tell. I don't know why no one's talking about it. Everyone can tell what's happening," and I talked about it and he didn't get angry or anything. He just cried. (Hazel)*

> *It got really bad, to that point that I had to go to the police. My manager at work told me I had to go and show them everything. And they're [the police] just like, "Yeah, wow… If we don't do something there might be something that will go down". (Jess)*

Individuals in their informal support networks would raise concerns when they thought the young person might be in danger or if they observed the abusive partner or ex-partner behaving in disturbing ways. Hazel was staying in a safe house immediately after she left Kayden. Other residents at the safe house noticed him watching her movements in his car and told her about it. This prompted her to move in with a friend "in the middle of nowhere" where she felt safer.

After they had broken up, Jess's ex-partner wrote detailed posts on social media about their relationship, blaming Jess for the break-up and discrediting her publicly. She had blocked him online so she couldn't

see these posts, but was alerted to them by an acquaintance and some Facebook friends. "I said, 'Can you please report it.' I told everyone to report it, so it would be hidden."

It is clear that young people value and need others to believe them, to exhibit care, and to provide them with genuine support when experiencing violence and abuse. This support comes in many forms and will have different impacts on different young people. What is clear is that the absence of such care leaves victim-survivors alone, questioning their reality, potentially blaming themselves or accepting the violence and abuse as normal, and remaining trapped in the relationship.

"They don't have any other options": Housing and material resources for independence

Young people are being failed by systems that do not provide access to safe and suitable housing and material resources for escaping violence and abuse and gaining financial independence. The absence of available and appropriate safe homes for young people makes them vulnerable to moving in with abusive partners (and their families), couch surfing or rough sleeping. Hazel listed the questions she asked herself when contemplating leaving, which highlight many of the barriers to leaving a violent and abusive relationship:

> *How can I get a house away from this situation? How can I afford to be by myself? Food, how can I get food? Where can I go? Clothing? Medical supplies? Who can I talk to that's not going to tell the police, because that would make it worse. Who can I talk to that's not going to tell my mum? If shit really, really hits the fan one night, where do I go, because a lot of times, things did hit the fan and I had to pack up a bag and go and I had nowhere to go. The shelters are full. There's a waitlist for them. A lot of them need parental consent if you're under a certain age. (Hazel)*

Being desperate to leave, having nowhere to go, no resources and no adults stepping in to help left some participants reflecting that their only way out would have been forced removal. Elise described this as being the only option in the absence of safe housing. She referred to the situation as a double-bind where forced removal would be traumatic, but remaining in the home and relationship is likely to be more traumatic. Other participants made similar comments, with some adding that even if forced to leave, they would likely have returned to the relationship.

> *Forcibly removing someone and making them do something is trauma, but it's a hell of a lot less traumatic than what you'll experience if someone doesn't… It's a real Catch-22 isn't it? … But that's honestly the only thing that would have helped, is forcibly [removing me] – or if I had have been offered my own space. (Elise)*

Shelter workers described providing young people with material resources including taxi vouchers to support their independence. However, without housing availability these supports are insufficient – young people have to have somewhere to go that is safe. These workers described the situation as "grim". The lack of housing options and services for young people living with violence and abuse in their relationships forces them to choose between rough sleeping or returning to the abuse.

> *Last week, we received two phone calls from other services having young women sitting in front of them, fleeing, but nowhere to put them. Nowhere. (Kate, worker) There's no crisis accommodation. (Ros, worker) Nowhere safe to be able to put young women… That's really hard when you're talking [to] another provider, you know they're face-to-face with this young person and having to tell them, "No". (Trish, worker)… And they're going to have to go back. Or the street. There's nowhere else. (Ros, worker)*

> *They are children at the end of the day. They… don't have any other options sometimes… So, they go back. (Matilda, worker)*

Workers Matilda and Elle saw access to resources for young people as an enormous advantage. They described being able to purchase basic items that supported their clients with day to day living. Workers and young people listed essential items victim-survivors needed access to: mobile phones, credit for phones, bags filled with material items needed to escape, food, clothes, money for basic needs, and identification and birth certificates. Katie demonstrates the need for material resources when she says she wouldn't have reconnected with Tom had she been provided with more useful resources:

> *When the police put me on Centrelink, I just got a normal payment, I didn't get, like, a domestic violence payment or anything to help me. Like, if I had of had that money, I probably wouldn't have gotten back with him, like, because I just had no money. (Katie)*

Jo mentioned a variety of financial supports available to victim-survivors:

> *'Keeping women safe in their homes' is like a security upgrade thing that is pretty much only for Safe at Home clients, so young people can't necessarily access that. The 'flexible support package' goes through Safe at Home as well, and then there's the new one that's done through the Salvos, Safer in the Home… There are all these little buckets of money and I don't know whether young people can access any of that to increase their safety. (Jo, worker)*

This demonstrates some of the implications of legislation not recognising the relationships of young people in Tasmania, excluding them from existing protective mechanisms and making them more vulnerable to danger.

"There's nowhere to go": Provide trauma-informed specialist youth domestic violence and abuse services and care

There are almost no services for teenagers experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships as teenagers. Of the services that do exist (e.g. Step Up and SafeChoices), awareness of and accessibility of these services is limited. A recent Tasmanian study found young people in particular were unaware of sexual violence support services available to them (Rodgers et al. 2022). The lack of services available to children experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships was raised consistently by young people and workers. Not only does this gap mean that children are unable to receive professional and appropriate support, it also sends a message that the issue is not a big enough problem to warrant investment in services. Three clear needs for service provision emerged from this study:

- specialist support and programs for teen victim-survivors
- programs for young people using violence and abuse in their relationships
- a supported and highly trained workforce.

"A specialist service that actually dealt with this kind of stuff for young people": Support services and programs

Clear gaps in service availability were identified by young people and workers. Heidi (worker) described the gaps in the Tasmanian service system for young people, pointing out that nobody has teen domestic violence and abuse as a focus – for example, headspace works with young people but they focus on

mental health, and the Family Violence Counselling Support Service is there for family violence but doesn't provide specific supports to young people.

> *I think that a big issue is the lack of youth-focused family violence-centric support… there's a lot of handballing around. (Heidi, worker)*

Professionals confirmed that their young clients were not engaging with existing services such as helplines and mental health support:

> *The lack of services, specialised services, for teenagers just puts them at such high risk of harm. I think designing programs for young people is always really challenging, but as a service you can gain that understanding and meet them on their level. (Heidi, worker)*

> *Helplines are available, but I don't know any young women who ever call them, even though I have very high regard for the Family Violence Counselling Service as a service and they would help, but I've never known them [clients] to call them. (Susan, worker)*

This gap in services was confirmed by young people. For example, Jamie and Jess both described the need for a holistic set of supports. They mentioned the potential benefits of helplines but also that they did not entirely meet their needs.

The way that young people engage with services and their experience of existing services can inform the development of specialised teen domestic violence and abuse supports. The need to tailor service provision to the unique needs of young people, recognising that their needs are different to those of adults, was raised by a number of workers. Jess said that what she needed was someone who could help her with a practical plan for leaving the relationship. She needed a person and a plan that recognised she was only 14 or 15, couldn't live with her family, was being abused by her boyfriend and needed somewhere safe to live and resources to be able to leave.

> *A place that's kind of like… Something that youth can… feel safe coming to and talking about abuse that's going on… Talking to someone that has broad information and resources to help them in that kind of situation… It's good to talk about what's going on and getting it off your chest, but then it's also like you need something back to help you get out of that situation…. (Jess)*

> *I knew about Kids Helpline. I never used it, but that was all I knew there was. And I was, "I don't want to talk to a counsellor right now." (Jamie)*

In addition to services being available, young people need to know they exist. Jamie reminds us that young people may not even be aware of services that are common knowledge to professionals:

> *If someone came up to me right now and they were 15 and they said, "This is happening. This is my situation," I wouldn't know where to take them. Obviously, I'd find out where to take them, but off the top of my head I wouldn't know. And especially at a young age I didn't know, even things like Anglicare. If you asked me when I was 15, "What's Anglicare?", I'd have gone, "I don't fucking know"… When you're that young you don't even know it exists. You don't know that there's all of these different services and people that want to help. (Jamie)*

Jamie described the response from a school counsellor when she sought help for the violence and abuse Brayden was inflicting on her. Upon disclosing the abuse, she was given meditation exercises and similar tools to use. Jamie's response provides a clear outline of the practical supports she wished were available to her. It also highlights the critical importance of professionals knowing how to provide support to teens and understanding that when a young person is asking for help, the response needs to be practical and fast.

> *Deep breaths aren't helping me do shit, babe. I need someone to come and pick me up, pack my shit and get me out. I don't need counselling and breathing exercises. You need that physical help. Someone to be there with a community car… To come with the police. To help you get your stuff. Have a safe place to go to. Whether it be a transitional, "Oh, let's just get you into this safe place for the night. We'll have a case worker tomorrow, and then we can figure out where from here. Is it safe to go home? Do we need to look at temporary accommodation?" What's something that can be done that's physically feet-on-the-ground helping people? Because you can run as many workshops… You can have as many helplines as you want. But until there's physically someone there holding your hand, walking you out of there, a lot of people won't get out. A lot of people will just get stuck because it's so hard to even ask for that help in the first place. (Jamie)*

Workers described in detail the limited capacity and scope of existing services including headspace, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), specialist family violence services and generalist youth services – all of whom have some of the skills and capacity to do this work, but none of whom are trained or funded to deliver domestic violence and abuse services specifically to teens. Two distinct options were raised, both requiring further investigation as to their appropriateness and potential effectiveness:

- specialist domestic violence services providing supports to teens
- youth services providing domestic violence and abuse support.

> *It'd be great if there was even, like, a specialist service that actually dealt with this kind of stuff for young people, that would be amazing, or even like just an arm in [adult domestic violence and sexual assault services], that really, actually like a youth specific one because it's very different, it is a very specialised space. (Holly, worker)*

> *I do think that general youth services need to be given the specialist skills and also resourcing, because that's… where the young people are going. (Lucy, worker)*

Professionals working with young women in shelters and teen parents described the challenges faced by their clients in attending meetings, highlighting the need for flexible service delivery:

> *We've got young mums, young babies. You know what, if they haven't slept all night, they're not getting to a 9 o'clock appointment. A lot of services, you have to be there at 9 o'clock to be able to then book it. They're not getting there… And if you miss your appointment, then you've got to wait. (Kate, worker)*

The consequences of missed appointments were a source of great frustration for youth workers Matilda and Elle. They talked about their clients being 'exited' from services for non-attendance at appointments, and felt there was a lack of understanding for the young people and their circumstances. They were clear that exiting young people made future service engagement increasingly difficult.

> *We need places to refer to and places that… when these kids don't turn up to appointments, just cancel them. (Matilda, worker)*

Elle and Matilda reinforced the importance of physically going to young people and meeting with them in locations where they felt safe, or bringing them to the service for appointments. Shelter workers described the value of outreach work with young people, visiting them at home:

> *You get to see all those things that you wouldn't if they were sitting in an office… You also get to see holes in the walls… You get to see a whole picture. You get to see the bruises 'cause you're coming in instead of her cancelling and saying, "No, I can't come in". (Ros, worker)*

The quality of the client-worker relationship was critical for workers, who described the many challenges of working with young people in unsafe situations where feelings of shame and fear dominate their experience. Andrew works with highly vulnerable young people with complex needs. As a youth worker, the focus is not on violence and abuse although that may be part of the young person's challenges. He describes patience and time when working with young people as absolutely critical to influencing behaviour change:

> *Be patient, it takes time. Takes a lot of time to try and change some of these values and beliefs. It's not that easy when young people don't come to you wanting to change… We've got kids who don't want to see us, that don't want to know us. They're really complex situations and we're intruding in their lives saying, yeah, "Let me try and support you". That's a different challenge. But once you've got that rapport in that relationship, it's still quite a challenge to even help them see that change is necessary, because change is hard and scary. And so the first thing we do is we have no agenda. We don't come to change. We just come to accept and to help you feel safe. So we spend a lot of time doing that and we're really successful at that. And hopefully that leads them to wanting to make a positive change. But it's never a guarantee. (Andrew, worker)*

Danielle and Holly also described some of the ways young people engage with services differently to adults, further demonstrating the critical nature of strong, trusting relationships for young people:

> *For a young person, you really have to work hard to develop the relationship before you will get anywhere, but sometimes that takes weeks. So people that are specialised in providing youth services actually, you know, have that framework and that understanding around how to engage… with young people., like, they won't even answer their phone if they don't know the number. Like, you have to text them sometimes, and sometimes, more often than not, they won't answer their text and it's until they know you and get to know you, they might, once, in a couple of weeks, they might actually answer your call… it is very much a specialised response. So having someone that would be suitably trained in that youth space to be able to work on those healthy relationships with young people would be amazing. Yeah. (Danielle, worker)*

The importance of these relationships is amplified by the fact many trauma-affected young people have been let down or been abused by adults in their lives. In order to build these relationships and offer long-term support, funding arrangements and organisations need to have capacity to employ high quality staff in secure positions where they are appropriately remunerated.

> *So, I think any service that wants to be a high-quality specialised service has to find the practitioners to do that work and pay them what they're worth, for a start... So, I think if that service was to be created, that would be the first thing in the design of it, is how do we retain specialised staff? (Lucy, worker)*

There is an assumption that if programs exist and services are available, then they are accessible. The referral pathway to most additional services typically comes from existing involvement with services. The section above highlights how isolated from supports some young people are; we can't assume that providing services is enough. We have to find new ways of being in contact with young people to ensure that they can receive support when they are most in need. The young people who participated in this project were not all strongly connected to services. Schools and Centrelink were the most common settings or services that young people had some connection with. Other services and settings they were connected with (to varying degrees) included:

- police/Youth Justice
- housing services
- church
- youth support services
- Child Safety
- health services
- workplaces – retail, hospitality and cleaning industries.

These service connections provide opportunities for referral pathways to be better developed in order to link young people in with the domestic violence and abuse support they need. Professionals spoke at length about the need for support services to firstly exist, and then for clear referral pathways to support workers and young people.

In developing services tailored to the unique needs of young people experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships, some key conditions were identified for services to be effective. These included recognising the past trauma teens have experienced, the added pressure when they become parents themselves, and their difficulties in coming forward and seeking support. The necessary elements of a youth-specific domestic violence and abuse service, as described by participants, incorporated:

- access to support that is responsive and flexible
  - » outreach and drop-in options
  - » casual support including drop in and phone/text support (i.e. not appointment only)
  - » availability outside of regular business hours
- different ways of meeting, e.g. walking in a park or outreach in safe space as nominated by clients
- communication that "works for young people" – text messaging, video calls, less formal and more responsive than a scheduled appointment
- a case management approach that supports the multiple and complex needs of children
- physically accessible, including funding for young people to access the service via appropriate and safe transport
- long-term relationship building between clients and workers
- services tailored to the age, stage of development and individual circumstances of clients
- open books where young people aren't exited from a service for not attending
- trained and adequately renumerated staff with secure employment
- recognition that capacity needs to be available to ensure service is available when young people need it
- collaboration with mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services, schools and the justice system
- trauma-informed practice.

Professionals described the following conditions as central to being able to provide support to young people experiencing and using violence and abuse in their relationships:

- supportive colleagues and management/leadership who value employees
- professional boundaries and capacity to provide support without burning out
- clinical supervision
- quality training
- access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- debriefing, offers of support from HR, and time out following critical incidents
- flexible work arrangements
- open door policies with management.

"Support for men and young men would be really powerful": Programs for people using violence and abuse

Workers were concerned about the numerous missed opportunities for intervening with young people using abuse. A sense of 'too little too late' and recognising clear trajectories from teen perpetration of abuse to adult perpetration and involvement in the justice system stood out amongst the workers describing their involvement with young people. Some workers described links between childhood exposure to abuse and adolescent and adult perpetration, suggesting that more intervention with young children is needed to break intergenerational cycles of domestic abuse. Early intervention with these young people and providing therapeutic, supportive programs was deemed crucial. Professionals also called for mentoring programs that would provide young people with role models and points of reference from which to assess their own values, attitudes and behaviours.

Heidi highlighted the tensions around criminalising the behaviour of children and teenagers and protecting others, and the potential pushback for funding perpetrator programs. In doing this, she emphasises the importance of prevention and the increased harm victim-survivors experience when there are no interventions for young people who use violence and abuse:

> *It's a really hard ethical line, I guess, in terms of criminalising children and teenagers, and sending them to spaces that are not therapeutic. But I think there needs to be interventions and mandated interventions as well, especially at that age. And I think the lack of interest - the perceived lack of interest on my part I guess, in terms of being able to fund and explore those interventions, it just ends up putting victims at so much more risk… I think there's a real adversity to being seen, as a government, to giving perpetrators of violence money [by funding services for perpetrators], because I think it's a really easy thing for people to seize on and be like, "Why are you giving them money, they're criminals?" without understanding… a well-designed therapeutic intervention is better than nothing. Especially if it's coming at people from a young age. (Heidi, worker)*

The need for extensive, long-term programs with young people using abuse was highlighted by workers, who pointed out the limited impact that short amounts of time can have when trying to counter cultures of and exposure to violence and abuse:

> *Even if we were spending a really quality hour with an offender, and we're really engaging with the issues, he's still spending the rest of the week with others who might be reinforcing those beliefs and attitudes that are the drivers of his violence, so that makes it really tricky… Working solely with that offender and asking them to make change, but whilst all of their home, their family, so their brothers and their dad, and whilst those attitudes remain the same around them, is really hard. So thinking about how we can have,*

like, build strong and supportive, not only formal supports, but informal support for men and young men would be really powerful and I think a really, probably huge area for us to strengthen. (James, worker)

James provided a clear perspective about interventions needing to include informal support networks. Although the needs or experiences of young people who use violence and abuse were not the focus of this research, a clear need for programs directly targeting this cohort emerged.

"We're not trained in that": A supported and highly trained workforce

In addition to the need for specialist services preventing and supporting young people experiencing and using violence and abuse in their relationships, it is also essential that professionals working with young people are adequately equipped to recognise the signs, ask the right questions, provide appropriate support and refer externally when needed. Professionals expressed a strong need for training in teen domestic violence and abuse to be able to better support the young people they work with, and refer them to specialist services where appropriate. When asked what would help prevent and support young people experiencing violence and abuse, young people also talked about the need for workers to be trained in the area.

We've all done DV training… We've done it to death, but again, that youth-specific is a completely different demographic… It just needs to have that youth focus. (Trish, worker)… And what do we do with the information we get? At the moment it's almost like we carry it. 'Cause where can you refer them that's timely, that's affordable. That's not going to put them at risk. (Kate, worker)

General youth services need to be given the specialist skills and resourcing… Because that's where the young people are going… It's a specialised lens with specialist knowledge around identifying dynamics and patterns of behaviour and power and control. And also understanding the way in which that traumatises people. And having an understanding of trauma and trauma-informed interventions. It's not a given that youth workers will have that lens. (Lucy, worker)

Supporting findings from other Tasmanian research (e.g. Rodgers et al. 2022), the need for workers and services to support young people from a trauma-informed perspective was commonly raised by professionals. Workers also raised the issue of funding and access to training, wanting it to be affordable and available to all workers from a service. They felt 'train the trainer' models were inadequate and lacked capacity for full integration within a service.

Professionals also called for training in working with young people who use violence and abuse. Matilda was concerned about one of her clients who had told her he didn't want to be in another relationship because of "lines he had already crossed" and did not want to cross again. Matilda expressed her concern about not having the training to offer this kind of support:

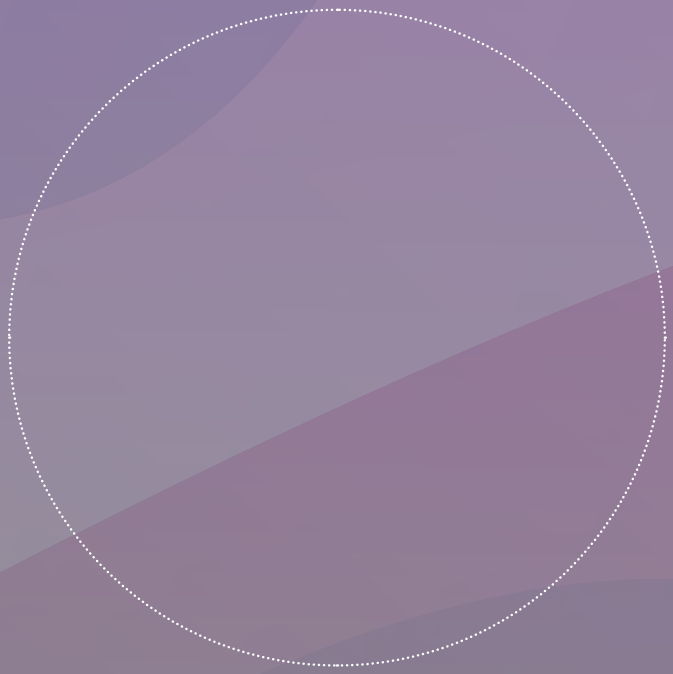
He's scared of what another relationship looks like… without some real work on it… We don't know how to do that. We're not trained in that. Without some really decent work on that, I don't know what his life will look like. (Matilda, worker)

Workers specifically called for training focused on:

- characteristics of teen domestic violence and abuse
- safety planning with children
- referral pathways
- mandatory reporting and relevant legislation
- trauma-informed practice.

PART FOUR

Discussion



Part 4: Discussion

The findings presented throughout this report provide invaluable information about the experiences of children experiencing violence and abuse in their intimate partner relationships. Although calls to recognise children as victims in their own right are growing, most research, policy and practice in Australia remains focused on adults. Where children do receive attention it is in the context of their family environment where they are recognised as victims of family violence occurring in their home or family of origin. By contrast, this study focuses directly on violence and abuse experienced by teenagers. Furthermore, despite teens being a focus of violence prevention efforts more broadly, their voices are seldom given priority in policy and practice design and implementation. This study serves to address these two gaps.

By talking directly to young people who experienced abuse from a partner as a teen and the professionals who work with them, and analysing nationally representative prevalence data, this study has revealed:

- domestic violence and abuse are experienced by teens in Tasmania at an alarming rate
- the nature of abuse as described by young people occurred along a spectrum where violent and abusive partners used physical and psychological means to take away participants control of:
  - what happened to their body
  - their freedom and autonomy
  - their thoughts and emotions
- teens are trapped in violent and abusive relationships by:
  - their abusive partner
  - a culture where violence and abuse is normalised
  - a lack of safe, secure housing and other material resources
  - limited positive relationships with safe, supportive adults
  - a need for love and connection
  - limited experience or understanding of healthy relationships
- acute and chronic impacts of abuse cause immediate and long-lasting harm that devastates the lives of victim-survivors
- to prevent and respond to teen domestic violence and abuse it is critical that young people have access to:
  - education that empowers
  - protection when in danger
  - people who care about them
  - housing and material resources for independence
  - trauma-informed specialist teen domestic violence and abuse services and trained professionals.

Young: A significant child safety concern

The findings from this research clearly show that children are experiencing domestic violence and abuse at the hands of their partners. Their vulnerability as children intersects with other aspects of their lives including mental ill-health, disability, Aboriginality, where they live, being victims of family and domestic violence as younger children, homelessness, involvement with Youth Justice and/or Child Safety Services, and gender (consistent with other studies of domestic violence and abuse, almost all of the participants in this study were abused by male partners). This intersectionality increases the need for complex, multisectoral responses that recognise the diverse needs of vulnerable children.

The young age of abusive partners reported by participants in this study is disturbing. Seventeen of the 27 abusive partners described were also children at the commencement of the relationship, with six of these partners being under 16 at the time. On the other hand, there were also some disturbing age gaps ranging from 8 to 22 years. These factors represent a significant concern for the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian children and indicate a need for targeted interventions with boys and men. In their analysis of the need for gender-based violence prevention interventions, Reed et al. (2010) concluded that failing to consider gender inequality and its contribution to dating violence will lead to failed attempts to address "this highly prevalent and debilitating public health threat" (p.351).

It is also important to acknowledge that whilst sexual violence and abuse constitute domestic violence and abuse, it is also recognised as a separate criminal offence. When this happens to children, it is child sex abuse. In some circumstances, including some of the relationships described by participants in this study, the acts of violence and abuse would also fall under legislation such as the *Tasmanian Criminal Code Act 1924* (Tas) and the *Police Offences Act 1935* (Tas). The current strategy for responding to family violence in Tasmania has recognised that sexual violence often intersects with family violence, but also requires separate and additional responses. The 2019-2022 Action Plan incorporated sexual violence as a specific focus for the first time.

A large body of research indicates strong links between exposure to family and domestic violence in childhood with domestic violence and abuse experienced later in life, including adolescence (Cheung & Huang 2022). For this reason, exposure to family and domestic abuse in childhood was not a focus of this study, yet 16 out of 17 young people disclosed historical violence and abuse in their family homes as younger children. Many also disclosed being victims of violence and abuse perpetrated by extended family members, peers and strangers. These findings suggest that an absence of supportive, reliable, trusted adults in the lives of young people increases vulnerability to abuse. Other studies have found direct links between childhood experiences of familial intimate partner violence and teen domestic violence and abuse.

The need for safe and secure housing for children and young people is paramount. In 2020-2021 for every 10,000 specialist homelessness service clients in Tasmania, 27.2 were young people aged 15-24 presenting alone, compared with 16.2 per 10,000 nationally (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2021). The findings of this study reinforce how a lack of safe, adequate housing for children can increase their vulnerability to violent and abusive relationships, and trap them if they are provided with shelter by a partner (or their partner's family). A lack of safe, stable home environments and emergency, short and long-term housing options are putting Tasmanian children in danger.

The role of trauma and attachment theory is important here. Studies have found an association between unmet attachment needs in childhood and disturbed attachment patterns that create difficulties with relationships and romantic attachments in adolescence (Cascardi & Jouriles 2018) and adulthood (Ali et al. 2020; Noonan & Pilkington 2020). The young people in this study who described living away from their parents/carers, not having people they could count on, and having fractured relationships with their parents/carers experienced the most severe violence and abuse from partners. For these young people the trap of the relationship was especially strong. Living alone with a partner (with or without the abusive partner's parents/carers) and having limited material resources left young people in an almost impossible position.

Apprehension in seeking or receiving support from adults and service providers must be understood within this context. These children have learned through direct experience that adults cannot be counted on to act in their best interests, and could intentionally put them in danger and harm them.

The findings also revealed these children receive inadequate protection from adults and government bodies responsible for their safety and wellbeing. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges signatories to implement laws and measures to protect children from all forms of violence. Consistent enforcement, and reforms where necessary, is critical for providing protection to children experiencing violence and abuse from a partner. Legislation must prevent violence and abuse at the same time as protecting victim-survivors and ensuring perpetrators of violence and abuse are held accountable and provided with appropriate, rehabilitative support that reduces recidivism. This includes laws criminalising violence, abuse and exploitation of children, laws that reduce access to firearms and other weapons (Tasmania has the highest rates of legal and expected ownership of firearms per capita in Australia; Alpers et al. 2022b), and laws that prevent alcohol misuse. An extensive body of evidence demonstrates that laws preventing alcohol misuse (such as increased prices, minimum age purchase limits, changes to closing times) are effective in decreasing domestic violence and abuse (WHO 2016).

The lack of supports for children experiencing domestic violence and abuse places the weight of responsibility in the hands of children themselves. There is an absence of legislation, services and access to the protective mechanisms of the justice and child safety systems for children facing violence and abuse in their partner relationships. In Tasmania, legal protection in the form of family violence orders (FVO) or police family violence orders (PFVO) are only available to young people who are aged 16 and over (and whose relationships are deemed significant from a legal perspective), leaving those under 16 and those aged 16-17 whose relationships are not deemed 'significant' in dangerous situations with inadequate legal protection. Child safety services then become the most likely mechanism for providing formal protection. Child safety policies across Australia aim to protect children from the "risk of harm from abuse and neglect" (Powell et al. 2020, p.1168). However child safety systems are often overwhelmed and in disarray (Herrenkohl et al. 2019). In these circumstances the likelihood of older children receiving child safety services diminishes, leaving young people in these relationships with no formal protective mechanisms in place. This is a gap that must be addressed as a priority.

Currently *Tasmania's action plan for family and sexual violence 2019-2022* specifically draws on definitions articulated in the *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas) and the *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas), as explained in the associated *Responding to Family and Sexual Violence: A guide for service providers and practitioners (2020)* (Tasmanian Government 2021):

In Tasmania, under the *Act*, family violence can only occur in marriages or significant relationships between two adults, or between two people where one or both are aged 16 to 18 years.

Violence perpetrated by someone other than a spouse or partner, or in dating situations where the relationship is not deemed significant by the *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas), is not considered family violence in Tasmania because the relationships are not covered by the *Family Violence Act* (Tas).

Examples:

- Violence perpetrated by a child against a parent is not considered family violence in Tasmania because the violence is not perpetrated by a spouse or partner.
- Violence perpetrated in a casual dating situation is not family violence as the relationship does not fit the definition of significant, as defined by the *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas).

(Tasmanian Government 2021, pp. 4-5)

The use of the term 'family violence' rather than domestic violence or abuse means that young people under the age of 16 and those in relationships not defined as 'significant' are excluded and unable to access the various mechanisms made available to others in abusive relationships (e.g. family violence orders and the associated supports that come via the Safe at Home program). Whilst the Tasmanian Government use the term family violence "to acknowledge that children are impacted when violence is directed at one of their carers, and as a result, are victim-survivors in their own right" (Tasmanian Government 2021, p.5), recognition of their status as victim-survivors in their intimate partner relationships is still missing. These limited views of domestic violence and significant relationships create barriers for teenagers in accessing protection and support services. This forces services and professionals in other sectors (e.g. housing, mental health, education) to provide these supports without the necessary skills or referral pathways.

In love: Young people, their relationships, and their experiences of abuse need to be taken seriously

This study has shown the relationships of young people are important and significant. They are serious. Whilst some relationships may be short in duration, the majority of relationships in this study were six months or more, and collectively totalled over 60 years of relationship duration (an average of 2.2 years per relationship). Being in love and/or being in a first relationship for a teenager is a momentous life experience. For young people who have experienced childhood trauma and who have fractured or estranged families, the need to connect and share love and care with another person is acute. The findings from this research have revealed that this need contributes to teens being trapped in violent and abusive relationships, highlighting the devastating impact that childhood trauma and family dysfunction can have. Love, connection or the need to be in a relationship can for some teens be critical to their identity, their ability to cope with other life pressures, and their self-worth. Having a partner may also be protective (despite what happens within the relationship) and meet other needs including housing, access to material resources, drugs, employment, and connection and status within the community. Teenagers' relationships must be viewed by society as being as important as adult relationships.

Yet despite robust international evidence demonstrating high rates of domestic violence and abuse experienced by young people under 18, efforts to prevent or respond to this issue are almost non-existent in Australia. It is rarely mentioned in policy or legislation, and only occasionally in Respectful Relationships Education programs. The absence of teen domestic violence and abuse from everyday narrative, policies, legislation, education, prevention efforts and response strategies sends a message that this is not an important issue. It can reinforce feelings of being deserving of the violence and abuse, and/or that what they are experiencing is normal. Participants in this study felt this clearly – when there were no services for them to access, when people turned them away or dismissed their disclosures or comments about their relationships, it told them that it wasn't serious. When an issue is not talked about, it is difficult for those experiencing it to be validated. In an adult-centric policy and practice world, the voices of young people to do not get the attention they should (Carlisle et al. 2022).

When violence and abuse is common, tolerated and in some cases glorified, it creates significant barriers for young people and those around them recognising relationship violence and abuse as problematic. Young people in this study referred to their exposure to violence and abuse in their own family, in the community and amongst their peers. Similar to a recent Tasmanian study focused on sexual violence (Rodgers et al. 2022), the findings in this study found the normalisation of violence within families contributed to the experiences of young people, and this is reinforced and exacerbated by small communities. Professionals expressed grave concerns over the presence of traditional ideals of masculinity where being tough, using aggression and having a reputation for violence and inciting fear are prominent. The glorification of violence, and the status attached to it among young people and adults in Tasmania (which was perceived as being worse the more regional/remote the area), suggests this is a significant factor in teens not feeling able to speak up, seek help, or talk about or challenge violent and abusive behaviours.

Young people need a counter-narrative to this. Values, attitudes and beliefs that underpin the normalisation of violence and abuse must change if this issue is to be taken seriously. Young people need positive role models with diverse life experiences around them, to show them how healthy relationships and attitudes towards women should look. Poor understanding of respectful relationships can also contribute to teen domestic violence and abuse, with young people in this study and in evidence reported elsewhere struggling to distinguish between abusive and loving behaviours.

Recent Australian research has revealed troubling findings that show almost 40% of young men felt they should know where their female partners are at all times, and almost 30% believed men should have final say about decisions in relationships (Flood 2022). The sense of entitlement and dominance exhibited by many abusive partners described in this study – particularly in relation to sexual violence – is representative of this issue. These beliefs positioned male partners as dominant and in control of when, where and how sexual activity occurred. Pressure and expectations to engage in sexual activity were common amongst young people who described sexual violence and abuse in their relationships.

Young people learn about relationships in their homes and communities as well as in the relationships they develop. When the messaging young people receive at home, in the community and from systems such as the legal system is accepting of or tolerates abuse in relationships, the normalisation of such behaviours is strengthened. For young people to recognise that what they are experiencing is abuse, it needs to be recognised by people around them. This means that the broader population needs a much clearer understanding of what teen domestic violence and abuse is, and this begins with the systems and structures at a societal level demonstrating this is an issue that is taken seriously.

In danger: Enduring severe violence and abuse with devastating impacts

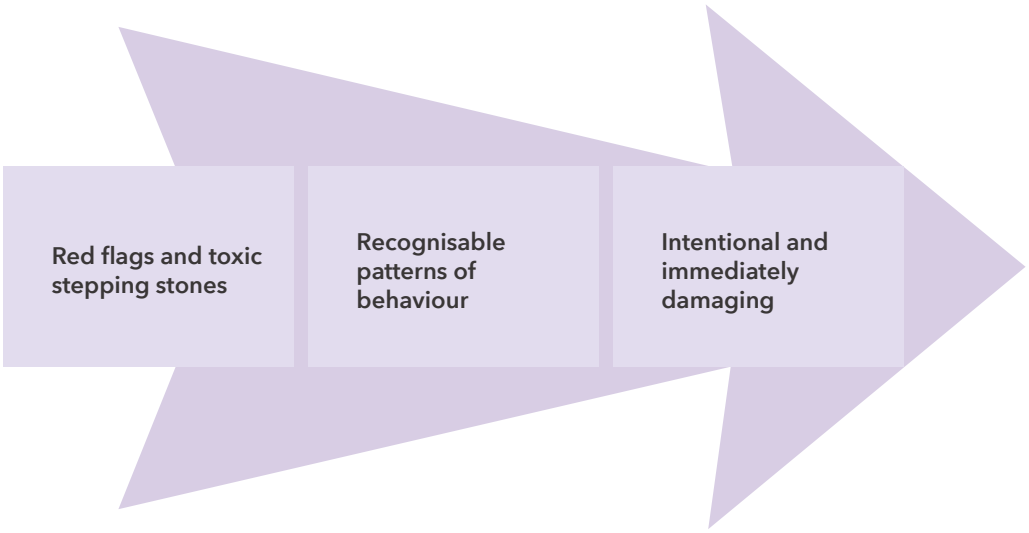
This is the first study of its kind to estimate the prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse in Australia and Tasmania using nationally representative data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. Analysis of this data revealed that 40% of young people aged 18-19 in Tasmania reported experiencing DVA in the previous 12 months. This is compared with 28.5% of teens nationally. Additionally, and of great concern, are statistically significant findings that show Tasmanian females experience physical violence and abuse and Tasmanian males experience sexual violence and abuse at higher rates than their peers nationally.

The nature of abuse experienced by teens in Tasmania exists along a continuum, with subtle behaviours at one end and explicit and intentionally dangerous behaviours typically causing immediate harm at the other (Figure 6). The continuum is complex because it represents a range of behaviours that all have detrimental impacts, but do not occur in a linear fashion and may not be experienced by all victim-survivors in the same way, nor have the same impacts. The behaviours at the hidden and subtle end of the continuum can be difficult to recognise, and in some cases abusive partners may not be engaging in these behaviours with willful intent to cause harm. As described elsewhere (e.g. Carlisle et al. 2022), they may be normalised relationship behaviours among young people that only become obvious in hindsight, or when situated alongside more explicit behaviours.

Understanding which behaviours and tactics constitute teen domestic violence and abuse is important because current evidence suggests that young people have difficulty identifying abuse in intimate partner relationships, particularly abuse that does not involve physical violence or forced sexual violence and abuse (Carlisle et al. 2022; Iyer 2020). When young people in Australia describe what domestic violence and abuse looks like to them, they set aside behaviours of toxic and unhealthy relationships from behaviours they view as domestic violence and abuse (Carlisle et al. 2022). They describe domestic violence and abuse as including repetitive and ongoing behaviours that escalate in severity, cause harm and are intentional (Carlisle et al. 2022). Toxic and unhealthy behaviours in relationships tend to be temporary, unintentional and resolvable. However, they may snowball or be stepping stones towards domestic violence and abuse. Young people also reported that when it comes to physical and sexual violence, these acts constitute domestic violence and abuse even if they occur in isolation from other patterns of behaviour (Carlisle et al. 2022).

The findings of this study reveal a number of tactics or behaviours that constitute teen domestic violence and abuse as experienced by teens in Tasmania. The young people in this study have shared numerous examples of these behaviours. Examples of the kinds of behaviours that represent 'red flags and toxic stepping stones', 'recognisable patterns of behaviour' and 'intentional and immediately damaging' (Figure 6) can be found in Appendix C.

FIGURE 6: CONTINUUM OF VIOLENT AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS



The relationships of Callum and Amanda, Jacinta and Korbin, and Sarah and Josh could be positioned toward the left end of the continuum. In these relationships, behaviours that represented stepping stones to more complex abuse included lies, emotional manipulation and coercion to control how and with whom they spent their spare time, body shaming, and continued and persistent contact through fake social media profiles following breakups. These are serious behaviours that caused harm to participants and must be understood to identify the early stages of relationship abuse.

The middle of the continuum is the most complex and difficult to categorise section. It is here that different tactics form patterns of behaviour that constitute increasingly harmful and serious forms of domestic violence and abuse. These patterns are closely associated with developing definitions of coercive control. The findings that abusive partners use threat of suicide as a tactic of coercive control are supported by recent research exploring contexts surrounding suicide and interpersonal violence perpetrated by men living in rural areas of Australia (Fitzpatrick et al. 2022). Despite ongoing debate over definitions of coercive control, it is commonly understood to situate power and control at the centre of all domestic violence and abuse and incorporates a range of behaviours or tactics used to manipulate, dominate and control another person (ANROWS 2021; Otter & Bosanko 2022). It involves a course of conduct or pattern of behaviours and is not a one-off incident, easily resolved or temporary (Carlisle et al. 2022; ANROWS 2021). These behaviours are often integrated into everyday life and over time erode the autonomy and self-worth of victims. Not only do these tactics have direct short- and long-term impacts on the health and wellbeing of victim-survivors, they are also central to keeping victim-survivors trapped in a relationship. Further examples of these behaviours include (but are not limited to) using guilt or pressure to coerce someone to behave or think a particular way, fighting for hours, gaslighting and micromanaging everyday

behaviours. Hazel referred to this kind of abuse as a constant and inescapable but not overt pattern of behaviour to be endured:

> *That kind of background, unspoken, implied, coercive stuff, it was every day. There weren't any days where I was like oh my God, I don't feel like I have to clean the house and be quiet. (Hazel)*

At the most extreme end of the continuum sit the relationships of Elise and David, Katie and Tom, Michelle and Jase, and Lilly and Steve. These young women endured potentially fatal physical violence amidst cumulative and intentional behaviours across the whole continuum.

One of the most disturbing, and unexpected, findings from the qualitative component of this study was the harrowing stories of severe violence and abuse experienced by young people in Tasmania. This was reinforced by the unsurprised responses from professionals working with Tasmanian teens. Youth and housing workers worked with young people where this level of violence and abuse were common. Domestic violence workers commented on the greater severity of physical violence they saw in younger people when compared with adults. The severity of physical violence and coercive control experienced by young people in Tasmania paints a dark picture of future risk of intimate partner homicide. Participants in this study described life-threatening incidents of abuse alongside patterns of abusive behaviours that align with known risk factors for intimate partner homicide (Matias et al. 2020). These findings highlight a critical need for legislation and action to reduce the risk of life-threatening violence victim-survivors are facing.

Although not all participants described incidents that were life-threatening, the patterns of abuse in most relationships were potential precursors to further escalation of abuse. The risk to abusive partners' lives is also present – participants described partners threatening suicide and evidence from elsewhere suggests a real risk of suicide that follows intimate partner homicide. Without support for young people using and experiencing abuse in their relationships, the risk of death in their current and future relationships is very real. Given the known availability of firearms in Tasmania (Alpers et al. 2022b), and older research that found Tasmanian young people were statistically significantly more likely to report parental domestic violence involving knifes or firearms than the national average (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001), it is reasonable to hypothesise that this level of access to weapons is having an impact on domestic violence and abuse incidents involving weapons.

The detrimental impact of experiencing teen domestic violence and abuse is made more complex by intersecting experiences typical in adolescence that can exacerbate the violence and/or the negative consequences of the behaviour. Examples of these intersecting experiences in this study include drug and alcohol use, technology and social media use, and changing perceptions of body image.

Evidence about tech-facilitated abuse among teens and young people has grown exponentially over the past decade and has revealed a number of abusive behaviours – such as having access to a partner's social media – are increasingly normalised, making it difficult to recognise or call out as abusive behaviour (Stonard 2020). When technology is used as a platform for abuse it can be inescapable, and abusive partners take advantage of this to control the freedom and autonomy of victim-survivors, isolating them and cutting them off from a world outside the relationship.

While alcohol use and abuse is sometimes talked about in the context of teen relationships, and in the adult domestic violence and abuse literature (Wilson et al. 2020), there is less known about other kinds of drugs, how they are used and what this looks like for young people. A large body of evidence has established links between teen DVA victimisation and substance use and misuse including alcohol, illicit substances such as marijuana, and tobacco smoking (Barter & Stanley 2016; Park et al. 2018; Ackard et al.

2007; Exner-Cortens et al. 2013; Rizzo et al. 2010). In addition, there is evidence suggesting that substance use and misuse can be both a precursor and impact of teen DVA (Barter & Stanley 2016).

The findings from this study build on this growing evidence base, demonstrating that alcohol and other drug use has exacerbated violence, kept young people trapped in relationships, and been used by abusive partners to groom, abuse and assault victim-survivors. The use of alcohol and other drugs in adolescence is a strong predictor of substance use disorders in adulthood, alongside a range of negative health and social wellbeing outcomes (Mahumud et al. 2022). Abusive partners who are introducing their partners to drugs, covertly drugging them, and facilitating further drug use are exacerbating this risk, which adds to the cumulative concern about violent and abusive relationships.

A need for a multisectoral response to prevent and respond to teen domestic violence and abuse

Teen domestic violence and abuse requires an urgent, systemic and multisectoral response. Children in Tasmania are experiencing violence and abuse at home and in public. The responsibility and opportunities for ending this crisis sit with local, state and federal governments, the private sector, and civil society organisations such as community services, faith-based organisations, academic institutions, professional associations and other non-government and not-for-profit organisations. Together, these stakeholders can address causes and outcomes, and provide the conditions needed for teens to build and maintain safe, healthy intimate partner relationships. In order to do this, each of these sectors requires strong, effective systems that enable the delivery of evidence-based programs and services. Efforts to prevent and respond to violence and abuse against children are most effective when they are well-coordinated, supported and undertaken at a large scale (WHO 2016). It is not possible for one sector or individual governments to address this issue – clear coordination mechanisms must be in place for undertaking large-scale, well-supported prevention and response strategies.

All Australian governments have committed to ensuring women and their children live free from violence via the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2022-2032*. Despite submissions to the recent consultation calling for greater recognition of the experiences of teens as victims of violence in their own right (Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer, Boxall et al. 2022), most reference to teenagers in the new plan remains in the context of Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) or parental intimate partner violence. Whilst the plan does not directly exclude children under 18 years as victims of domestic violence and abuse, it has failed to explicitly recognise their needs as a distinct cohort. For example, when depicting the life stages where violence affects women – childhood, adulthood and older age – adolescence is missed entirely (Commonwealth of Australia 2022). Under the list of abuse types impacting children, intimate partner abuse is missing.

Tasmania has already taken significant steps to implement the actions in the *Action Plan for Family and Sexual Violence 2019-2022,* including establishing a governance structure. The action plan is under review at the time of writing this report. In their submission to the review, the Commissioner for Children and Young People recommended:

> *The current Action Plan acknowledges related national and state policies and commits to supporting existing programs to address family and sexual violence. However, it is recommended the third Action Plan clarifies and articulates its inter-relationship with existing national and state-level frameworks and*

strategies that contribute to preventing and responding to family and sexual violence against children and young people and any emerging policy initiatives. (CCYPT 2022)

As part of a multisector response, workforce needs must be prioritised. This research has found that professionals working with teens are attempting to provide support to highly traumatised children in a system without referral pathways or specialist staff. Their calls for professional development opportunities, referral pathways, infrastructure for necessary supports, and strong and supportive workplace cultures must be heard. Other research suggests service providers may not routinely screen for violence and abuse (Burton et al. 2016) and workers have barriers and fears in supporting women experiencing domestic violence and abuse (Tarzia et al. 2021).

The impacts of trauma inflicted on these children – sometimes by other children and sometimes by adults – are immense, often with lifelong consequences. The importance of actions to prevent teen domestic violence and abuse should not be underestimated. At the same time, responses are critical for those for whom prevention strategies are yet to work. Simply providing services is not the whole solution for these children; it is important to remember that many participants were not connected with services when in these relationships and it also can't be assumed that making services available is a solution on its own. Whole of population approaches in addition to targeted interventions for specific cohorts of the population are needed.

Teen domestic violence and abuse is a multifaceted problem with risk and protective factors, causes and impacts at individual, relationship, community and societal levels. Combining a public health approach with the socio-ecological model allows for these different levels to be covered through primary prevention, early intervention and tertiary responses. As outlined by the World Health Organization (2016, p.18), this requires implementing measures designed to:

- create safe environments and provide specialised support for children at risk of experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships
- reduce risk factors that minimise the threat of violence and abuse
- address gender inequality
- change cultural norms, values and beliefs that support, normalise and condone violence and abuse
- ensure legal frameworks prohibit violence and abuse, and limit access to products that increase risk and severity of violence and abuse (e.g. firearms, alcohol)
- provide trauma-informed, quality, accessible and available support services to children affected by violence and abuse
- "eliminate the cultural, social and economic inequalities that contribute to violence and abuse, close the wealth gap and ensure equitable access to goods, services and opportunities"
- "coordinate the actions of the multiple sectors that have a role to play in preventing and responding to violence against children".

PART FIVE

Recommendations

Part 5: Recommendations

The findings of this research reveal disturbing insights to the lives of teenagers experiencing violence and abuse in their relationships. Teen domestic violence and abuse is a child rights issue. Our response must reflect the fact that despite their life experience and ongoing transition to adulthood, these young people are legally children and are not responsible for what has happened to them. They require protection, guidance and resources to develop and live their lives fully. Although the terms 'teens' and 'young people' have been used elsewhere in this report, these recommendations will use the term 'child' to make clear that we are referring to children who are afforded protection rights under international conventions to which Australia is a signatory.

The recommendations emerging from this research are aligned with seven evidence-based strategies[11] that address risk and protective factors across all levels of the socio-ecological framework – individual, relationship, community and society – and do not place full responsibility on any one approach. To support a coordinated, multi-sector response, each recommendation is supported by a series of suggested actions.

11 Developed by the World Health Organization in collaboration with several international agencies, the INSPIRE package includes a set of evidence-based strategies that provide a framework for ending violence against children (World Health Organization 2016).

Guiding principles

The implementation of recommendations from this research should be guided by the following key principles:

- Children and young people are different to adults and must be respected and treated as such.
- Responses should be child-centred and recognise children as victims of domestic violence and abuse in their own right.
- It is important to recognise children as experts in their own lives and value their experiences, perspectives and opinions, including the efforts children are already making to prevent and respond to violence and abuse in their own communities.
- Aboriginal people should be central to determining and leading appropriate responses for their children, and prevention efforts should draw on the guidance provided in *Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* (Our Watch 2018).
- Family and community should be included as partners in developing and implementing solutions.
- Solutions should be developed and delivered using trauma-informed, strengths-based approaches.
- Responses should be tailored to meet the needs of specific cohorts of children.
- Solutions should be intersectional and multisectoral, include all settings and systems related to places children live, work and play, and address all levels of the socio-ecological framework – individual, relationship, community and society – through a public health approach.
- Mechanisms for involving children should provide appropriate and ethical supports to keep children safe, prevent retraumatisation and empower them to contribute to policy development, service planning and practice.
- Responding to and addressing the presentation and impacts of intimate partner violence requires specialist gender and family violence frameworks.
- All actions must be monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness and modify strategies as required.

INSPIRE: Recommendations

Implementation and enforcement of laws

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Review and, where appropriate, reform legislation to ensure children are protected from violence and abuse in their intimate partner relationships.

This research has highlighted the lack of recognition of teen intimate relationships and the need to protect children from violence and abuse in their relationships. There is a pressing need to review and reform legislation to ensure all children are protected from violence and abuse within intimate partner relationships, with particular focus on the *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas), *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas), *Youth Justice Act 1997* (Tas) and the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* (Tas). In doing this, it is important that children using violence and abuse are not criminalised and recidivism is prevented through the development and implementation of a rehabilitative and restorative justice response for these children. The adequacy and enforcement of other legislation should be considered, with the aim of reducing access to firearms and reducing barriers to reporting of violence and abuse such as fear of drug prohibition laws where there is concurrent illegal substance use.

Suggested actions include:

- Review and reform legislation to ensure all children in significant relationships receive protection from violence and abuse (e.g. *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas), *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas), *Youth Justice Act 1997* (Tas) and the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* (Tas). This must be done at the same time as ensuring appropriate and effective responses are applied to young people using violence and abuse in their relationships.
- Review and reform the *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas) to ensure that significant relationships are more appropriately defined and recognised.
- Review and reform legislation to further reduce access to firearms and other weapons.
- Consider the role of drug prohibition laws and how these may be modified to increase the safety of children in violent and abusive relationships. For example, strict marijuana laws may prevent children from reporting violence and abuse to police for fear of consequences related to drug use.
- Explore and implement a restorative justice response to children using violence and abuse in their relationships.

Norms and values

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Address norms and values that normalise and/or condone violence and abuse.

Disrupting norms and values that contribute to violence and abuse in relationships is core to primary prevention strategies. This research revealed a distinct need to address deep-seated norms and values that normalise and condone violence and abuse in relationships.

Suggested actions include:

- Develop and deliver primary prevention strategies that explicitly focus on teen domestic violence and abuse. Campaigns should:
  - change adherence to restrictive and harmful gender and social norms
  - ensure men and boys are part of solutions
  - raise awareness of problematic masculine ideologies
  - target all layers of the socio-ecological model (family, workplaces, schools, media, community)
  - use existing platforms and resources (e.g. 'The Line' www.theline.org.au, consider Centrelink as a platform for messaging; modify formal roles such as the OurWatch Senior Advisor role in Tasmania).
- Develop and deliver bystander interventions for informal social supports including parents/carers, neighbours and community members. 'Mentors in Violence Prevention' training, currently available to community members in Tasmania, could be expanded to include a specific focus on the needs of children experiencing or using abuse in their relationships.

Safe environments

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Eliminate the choice between homelessness and violent and abusive relationships.

It is abhorrent that children are having to choose between homelessness and violence, whether that be from a partner or family members. Suggested actions include:

- Provide practical support and emergency accommodation options for children to safely escape domestic violence and abuse.
- Increase safe, appropriate housing options for homeless children.
- Address the gap for children who may be considered too old for child safety involvement, but not old enough to access other housing options.

Parent and caregiver support

RECOMMENDATION 4 – Provide parents and caregivers with targeted support to build positive relationships with their children and protect them from domestic violence and abuse.

When parents and carers are supported to learn positive parenting techniques, the risk of children being exposed to or using violence and abuse in their relationships is reduced (World Health Organization 2016). Suggested actions include:

- Provide programs for new parents and carers, ensuring that young parents and those who have experienced domestic violence and abuse in particular are provided with adequate support to access and engage. In Tasmania, this could be delivered through Child and Family Learning Centres (CFLCs), Child Health and Parenting Service (CHAPS), Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) and specialist domestic violence services.
- Deliver programs for parents and carers that increase their capacity to talk to children about domestic violence and abuse and access support services if needed.
- Provide targeted, trauma-informed, therapeutic and practical support to parents and carers who have experienced domestic violence and abuse themselves.
- Deliver programs that support the development and maintenance of loving, trusting connections between children and their parents/carers.
- Provide targeted assistance to parents and carers supporting their children experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships.

Income and economic strengthening

RECOMMENDATION 5 – Increase the financial independence of children impacted by domestic violence and abuse.

Lack of financial resources is an underlying barrier to parents and caregivers providing a safe environment, secure housing and emotional support. Lack of financial resources available to children is also a barrier to their escape from domestic violence and abuse. Suggested actions include:

- Ensure children living apart from their parents/carers have access to income support and material resources that are sufficient to financially support themselves.
- Ensure children have independent access to the 'Escaping Violence Payment'. Extend the monetary value of this payment, as recommended by the National Women's Safety Alliance (2022), and remove the 'cash equivalent'.
- Clear housing debt and bad records with housing authorities resulting from violent and abusive relationships.
- Provide programs for children that increase financial independence through development of life skills, empowerment and financial literacy.

Response and support services

RECOMMENDATION 6 – Provide specialist teen domestic violence and abuse supports and services supported by a sustainable workforce of teen domestic violence and abuse specialists.

It is critical that concurrent funding is provided for prevention and response strategies to ensure any increased demand for service arising from growing awareness of the issue can be met by service provision. Access to high-quality, appropriate health, social welfare and criminal justice support services for all children who need them is the most urgent priority in responding to and preventing teen domestic violence and abuse. Providing appropriate, effective, timely support for prevention, healing and recovery from violence abuse requires a trained, supported and sustainable workforce. Professionals working with children report a need for training, support and effective referral pathways that will enable them to provide best-practice care. Suggested actions include:

- In partnership with children, co-design a holistic, case-management-focused support system to meet the unique needs of children experiencing and/or using abuse in their relationships. This must include a trauma informed, therapeutic, developmentally sensitive, restorative youth domestic violence and abuse support service.
- Broaden the scope of existing services with additional funding as required to provide counselling and therapeutic support to children by:
  - expanding specialist domestic violence and abuse services already supporting victim-survivors so they can include children aged 12-18 in their client base (not just those who experience family violence from a parent/carer/family member)
  - reviewing and where appropriate expanding service provision boundaries to ensure all children have access to services (i.e. they are not 'out of area')
  - embedding an adolescent-specific team in Child Safety Services / departments. In Tasmania, this could sit in the Advice and Referral (ARL) Service and Child Safety teams
  - in Tasmania, expanding the scope of recently announced 'Multidisciplinary Centres' to address domestic violence and abuse as well as sexual violence.
- Provide access to evidence-based preventive and restorative interventions for children identified as perpetrating teen domestic violence and abuse.
- Deliver mentoring programs that are affordable, accessible and available to children:
  - exposed to domestic violence and abuse in their family homes
  - involved with Youth Justice
  - involved with the Child Safety System
  - participating in flexible learning options (Tier 4 programs in Tasmania)
  - known to police for their own or their family members' exposure to or use of violence and abuse
  - identified by any support service or school as potentially benefiting from connection with a trusted, caring adult.

- Continue to enable professionals in the justice system to encourage children involved with the youth justice system to participate in trauma-informed violence prevention interventions.
- Continue investment in youth-specific mental health and AOD services and those already delivering support to children and parents where abuse is occurring in their relationships. For example, Step Up should be provided with ongoing investment, statewide expansion and additional resources to refine its approach with children using violence and abuse toward their partner.
- Invest in programs to improve relationships between children and police.
- Embed specialist domestic violence and abuse workers in schools.
- Ensure school, service and workplace policies and processes provide mechanisms for safely identifying and supporting children who may be experiencing or using abuse in their intimate partner relationships. In the Tasmanian public education system, this could be done by including suspected domestic violence and abuse as a vulnerability indicator.
- Invest in the development and delivery of teen domestic violence and abuse modules for all professionals working with children. This could occur within existing domestic violence professional development programs (e.g. DV-Alert, Safe and Together, Family Violence Graduate Program in Victoria, and university qualifications such as the Graduate Certificate in Domestic Violence Responses).
- Establish a network of teen domestic violence and abuse specialists.
- In Tasmania, revise *Responding to Family and Sexual Violence: A guide for service providers and practitioners in Tasmania* (Tasmanian Government 2021) to directly address teen domestic violence and abuse.
- Ensure adequate funding and resources are provided to response and support services to protect and strengthen staff wellbeing.

Education and life skills

RECOMMENDATION 7 – Mandate the delivery of trauma-informed, evidence-based Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) that is co-designed with children and young people and begins when children enter the education system in all government, Independent and Catholic schools.

A trauma-informed approach is necessary for ensuring that all children and young people are able to engage in efforts to empower them to build positive relationships as they grow older. A trauma-informed approach recognises the impacts of childhood trauma on attachment and emotional regulation and does not assume that education targeted at whole population groups will be effective in reaching all students. Furthermore, education and programs must reach all young people, not only those engaged in formal education settings. Suggested actions include:

- Develop resources for RRE that explicitly focus on teen domestic violence and abuse and include:
  - real life stories of children who have been in abusive relationships
  - how to recognise abusive behaviours
  - material for children who use abuse in their relationships
  - what others can do to recognise and support people experiencing and/or using violence and abuse in their relationships
  - rights and responsibilities (including consent)
  - safe sex and contraception
  - where to access formal supports in emergency and non-emergency situations
  - your 'safe' people / Circle of Safety work
  - empowerment and self-worth strengthening.
- Develop a quality assessment tool and associated guidelines for ensuring quality, evidence-based RRE is delivered to all children.
- Fund the exploration and development of a co-delivered RRE curriculum between external experts, peers, survivors and school staff.
- Embed RRE training in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses.
- Ensure school staff are appropriately trained and prepared to be part of whole school approaches to RRE, including the delivery of relevant curriculum and referral pathways.
- Identify and deliver effective educational strategies for children not participating in formal school settings, including those involved with Child Safety, Youth Justice, and out of home care.
- Employ a dedicated liaison officer in state government education departments to coordinate, monitor and report on the delivery of RRE in schools.
- Embed the delivery of RRE and employment of a liaison officer into criteria for independent school registration.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Part 6: Conclusion

This study represents the first Tasmanian study of teen domestic violence and abuse, and one of few studies nationally. The findings from this research indicate that almost 40% of 18-19-year-olds in Tasmania may have experienced domestic violence and abuse from a partner in the past 12 months. The young people who participated in this study have offered deep insights to their experiences, demonstrating the multi-faceted, frightening nature of abuse that occurs in the intimate partner relationships of teenagers. The impacts are devastating and will likely continue to impact these young people for many years, if not their whole lives.

Many of the young people who participated in this study viewed the experience of violence and abuse in relationships as a normal aspect of intimate partner relationships. Their exposure to violence and abuse in other parts of their lives was a strong contributor to these views. The impact of gender was also clear. In line with domestic violence abuse in the adult evidence base, almost all of the abusive partners described in this study were male and almost all victim-survivors were female.

This research has revealed that interventions and prevention and response strategies with young people using abuse in their relationships must be a priority. It is not the responsibility of girls, young women and other victim-survivors to end violence against women. This research has clearly shown teen domestic violence and abuse occurs in the lives of children, and it is the responsibility of all levels of government to prevent this from occurring. This form of domestic violence can no longer be ignored and must form a central policy and practice element in all work with children and young people, and in any violence prevention strategy.

Limitations

This project is focused on the experiences of young people and professionals working with children and in the domestic violence sector in Tasmania. Domestic violence and abuse can be a difficult experience to talk about and effort must be made to not re-traumatise participants. Sensitivity and ongoing assessment of participants' wellbeing during interviews is critical. In this study, this meant that not every participant was asked exactly the same questions. Whilst this is a limitation, it is also a deliberate part of the research design. The aim of the research was to centre the voices of young people who experienced domestic violence and abuse when they were under 18, and this meant allowing them to direct the conversation and make choices about their disclosures.

Of the research on this topic that has been undertaken in Australia, participants are typically recruited via educational settings – schools and universities. In contrast, participants in this study were recruited through services and word of mouth. It is possible that this different approach to recruitment has located a greater proportion of participants who are marginalised and less advantaged than their peers in educational settings. Research from the UK compared the experience of teen domestic violence abuse in disadvantaged teens with school-based populations and found that disadvantaged young people experienced more severe and frequent violence and a high level of tolerance and acceptance of abuse when compared with a school-based sample (Wood et al. 2010).

The small scope of the project means that the qualitative results cannot be generalised to a larger population. The strength of this approach, however, is a deep understanding of the unique experiences and needs of young people in Tasmania that can be used to inform future research, policy, and primary prevention, early intervention and response programs targeted at young people. Additionally, this project asks young people to recall experiences that have occurred in their past. To mitigate recall bias, the use of the Life History Calendar method was used in interviews with young people. This method has been tested in a number of qualitative retrospective studies of traumatic historical experiences (Axinn et al. 2020; Yoshihama et al. 2005) and lifetime experience of mental disorders (Axinn & Chardoul 2021) and found to be a valid tool for recalling life events (Caspi et al. 1996).

Directions for future research

This research addresses a significant knowledge gap and has identified opportunities for future research. This study focused specifically on the lived experience of young people in Tasmania as well as using new prevalence data on domestic violence and abuse at a national level. Future research should extend these findings and explore patterns elsewhere in Australia. The use of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children also provides scope for deeper exploration of risk factors and impacts associated with experiencing domestic violence and abuse as a teenager. As an exploratory study, this project has shone a light on a number of issues related to teen domestic violence and abuse that require further exploration, including:

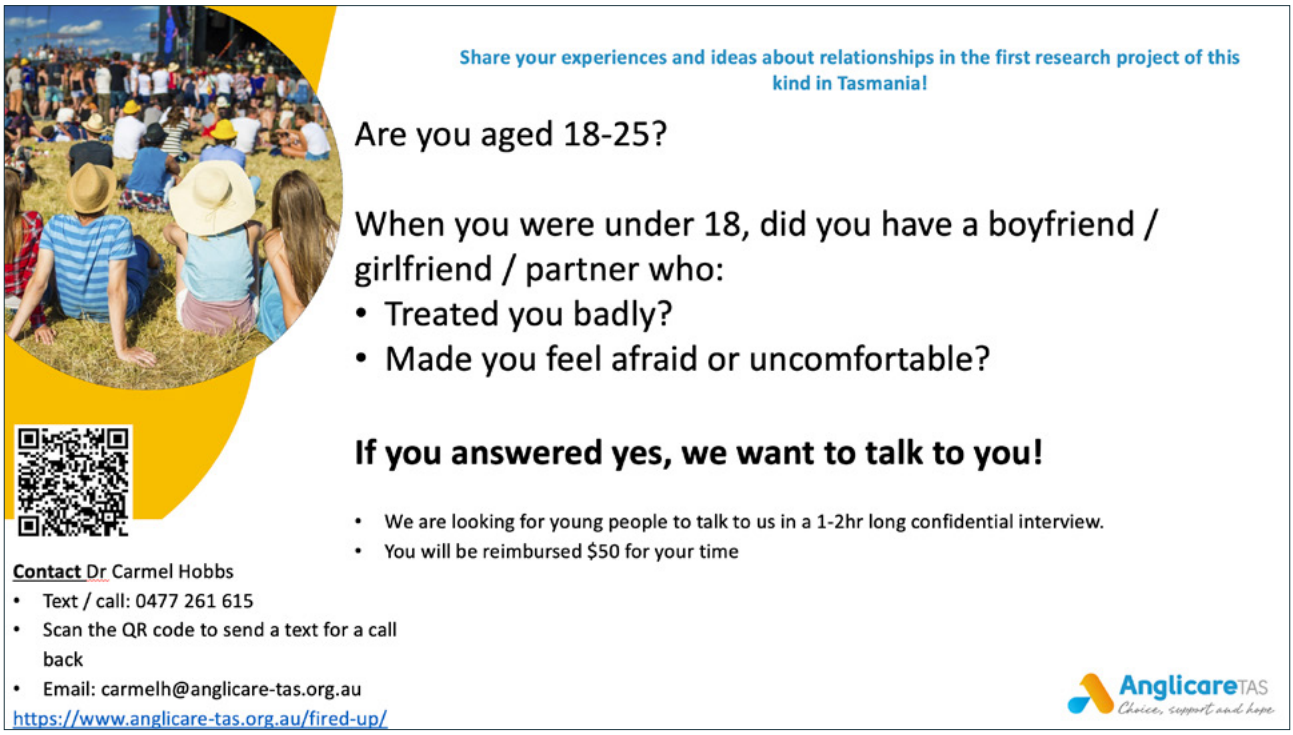
- the experiences of young people using violence and abuse in their relationships
- the role of alcohol and other drugs in violent and abusive teen relationships
- how the families of abusive partners act as enablers to teen domestic violence and abuse
- police responses to teen domestic violence and abuse
- a focus on specific cohorts including young people from Aboriginal, migrant and refugee communities
- pregnancy and parenting as a victim-survivor of teen domestic violence and abuse
- determining best practice for screening children for teen domestic violence and abuse
- how young people's ideas of relationships, gender and sexuality impact how abuse is presenting and understood in their relationships
- what bystander actions of informal support networks are effective for interrupting and intervening in violent and abusive teen relationships
- the potential relationship between teen domestic violence and abuse victimisation and the absence of a positive father figure in early childhood
- understanding the severity of teen domestic violence and abuse, including factors that contribute to more severe violence and abuse
- how aspects of adolescent development intersect with violence and abuse in relationships, and the implications of this for long term health and wellbeing
- barriers and enablers to safely ending violent and abusive relationships as a teenager.

PART SIX

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment flyer



Appendix B: Prevalence of teen domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in Tasmania

The results that are presented below include both crude and weighted percentages. The crude percentages (and associated numbers) represent the actual number of participants from the LSAC Wave 8 survey. Where relevant, statistical significance is reported in relation to the weighted data.

Prevalence by sex

The results from this study suggest that almost 40% of 18-19 year-olds in Tasmania experienced abuse from an intimate partner on at least one occasion in the previous 12 months (Figure 7). Females were more likely to report experiencing DVA than males (41.4% compared with 37%) (Figure 7 and Table 6), although this difference was not statistically significant.

FIGURE 7: PREVALENCE OF DVA BY SEX, TASMANIA

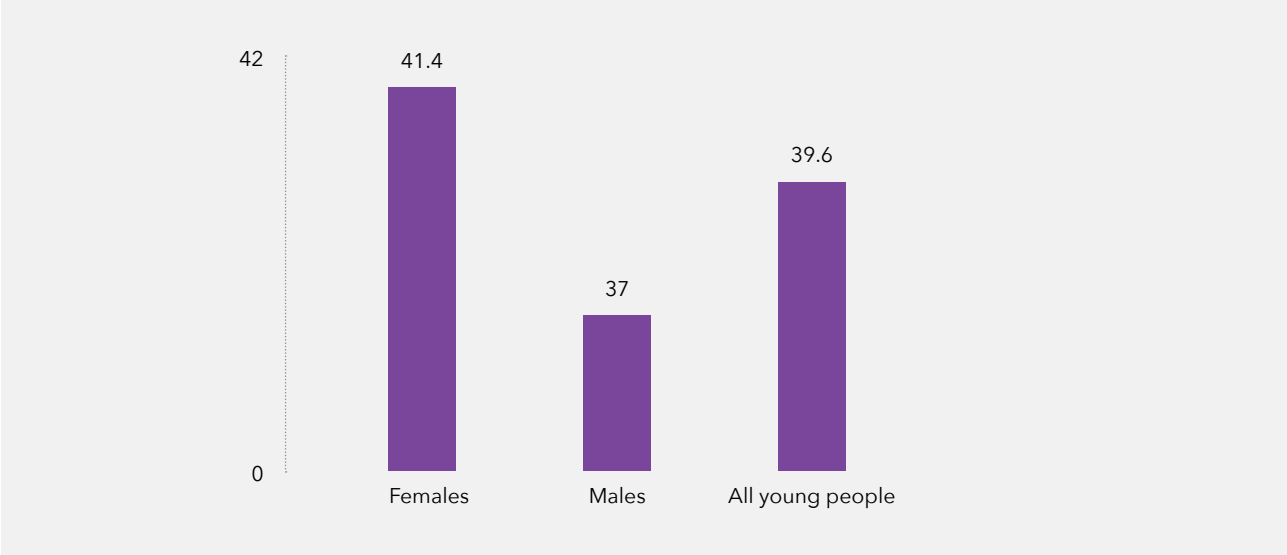


TABLE 6: PREVALENCE OF DVA BY SEX, TASMANIA

Sex	Number of responses	Number reporting any IPV	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Females	41	14	34.1	41.4	27.7	56.6
Males	28	8	28.6	37.0	21.7	55.4
Total	**69**	**22**	**31.9**	**39.6**	**28.1**	**52.4**

TABLE 7: PREVALENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA

Sex	Number of responses	Number reporting any psychological abuse	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Females	41	11	26.8	34.1	20.7	50.6
Males	28	8	28.6	37.0	21.7	55.4
Total	**69**	**19**	**27.5**	**35.3**	**23.3**	**49.4**

TABLE 8: PREVALENCE OF PHYSICAL ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA

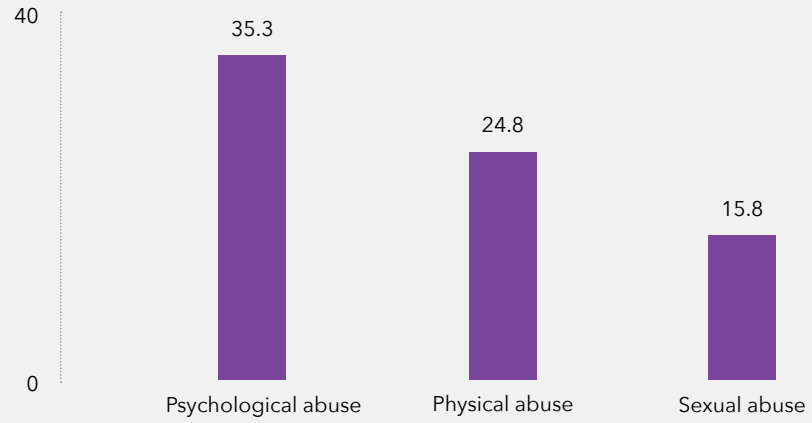
Sex	Number of responses	Number reporting any physical abuse	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Females	41	9	22.0	29.2	15.5	48.1
Males	28	2	7.1	18.5	8.3	36.4
Total	**69**	**11**	**15.9**	**24.8**	**13.9**	**40.3**

TABLE 9: PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA

Sex	Number of responses	Number reporting sexual abuse	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Females	41	6	14.6	16.5	7.5	32.6
Males	28	1	3.6	14.9	6.0	32.2
Total	**69**	**7**	**10.1**	**15.8**	**7.1**	**31.8**

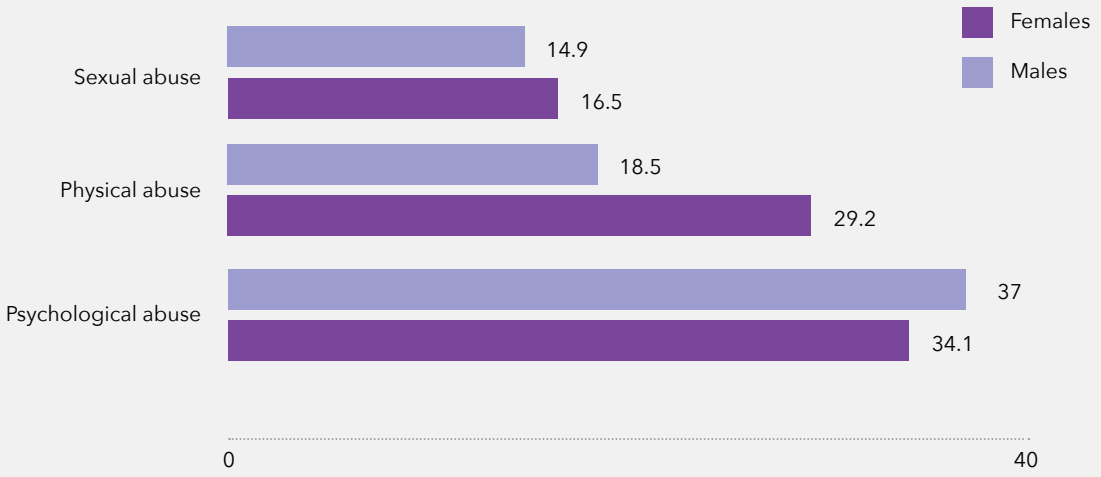
In Tasmania, the most common form of abuse reported was psychological abuse (35.3%), followed by physical abuse (24.8%) and sexual abuse (15.8%) (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: PREVALENCE OF DIFFERENT ABUSE TYPES, TASMANIA, ALL YOUNG PEOPLE



Females were more likely than males to report experiencing physical abuse (29.2% compared with 18.5%) and sexual abuse (16.5% compared with 14.9%) but males were more likely than females to report experiencing psychological abuse (37% compared with 34.1%) (Figure 9). Whilst the point estimates of prevalence for each sex differed, the results were not statistically significantly different.

FIGURE 9: PREVALENCE OF ABUSE TYPE BY SEX, TASMANIA



Severity of abuse by sex[12]

On all measures, females in Tasmania were more likely to report experiencing more severe abuse than males (Figures 10-13[13]), although these differences are not statistically significant. Females reported higher severity of DVA overall (12.3 compared with 8 for males), psychological abuse severity (10.1 compared with 6.3), physical abuse severity (3.5 compared with 1.8), and sexual abuse severity (3.7 compared with 2).

FIGURE 10: SEVERITY OF DVA IN TASMANIA

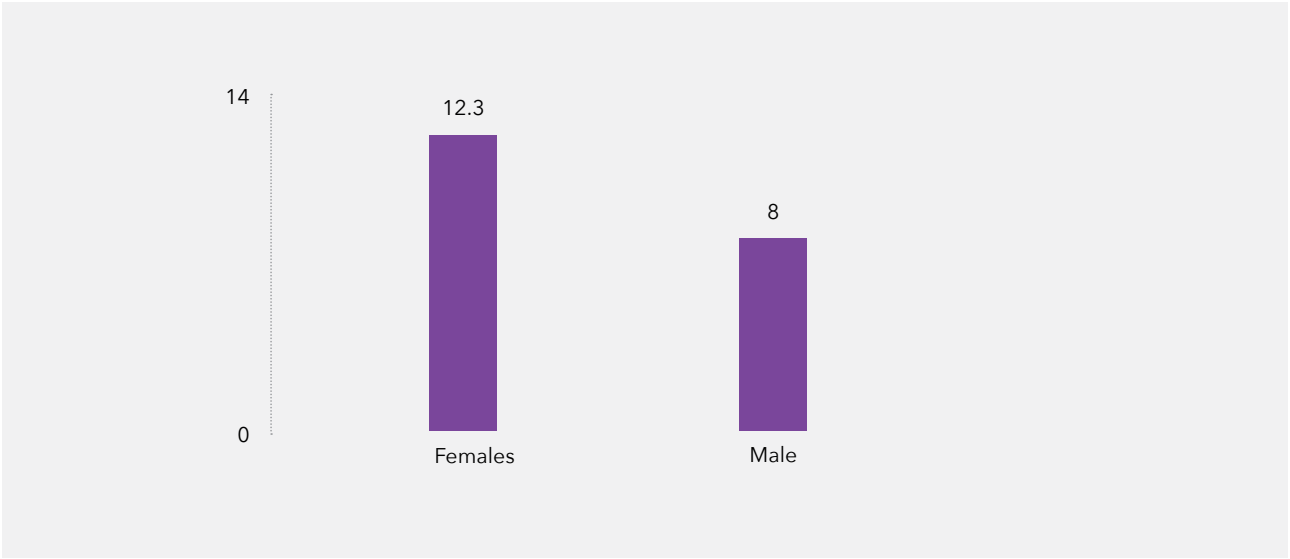
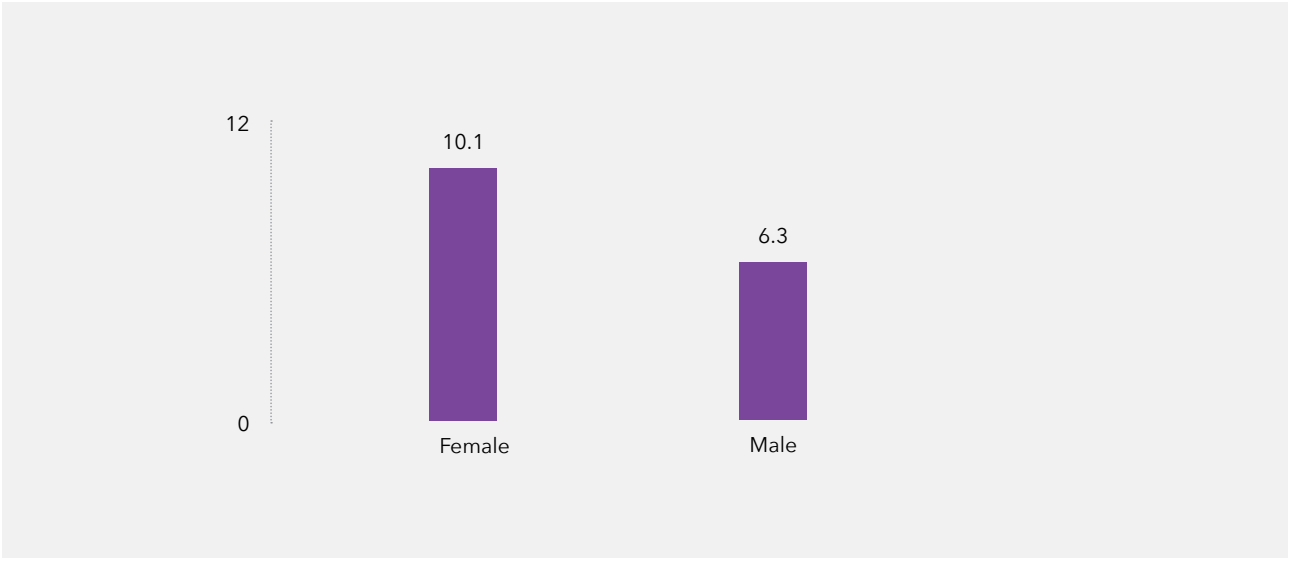


FIGURE 11: SEVERITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE IN TASMANIA



12 A total score and scores for 3 sub-scales (with higher scores indicating greater severity of abuse) were calculated using a mean of all the items and multiplying by 15, where there were responses for at least 11 of 15 items (~70%).

13 These scores have different maximum scores as a result of the mean being calculated from different numbers of original questions (psychological abuse: 8 questions; physical abuse: 5 questions; sexual abuse: 2 questions each with 5 possible measures of exposure [from once through to daily]).

FIGURE 12: SEVERITY OF PHYSICAL ABUSE IN TASMANIA

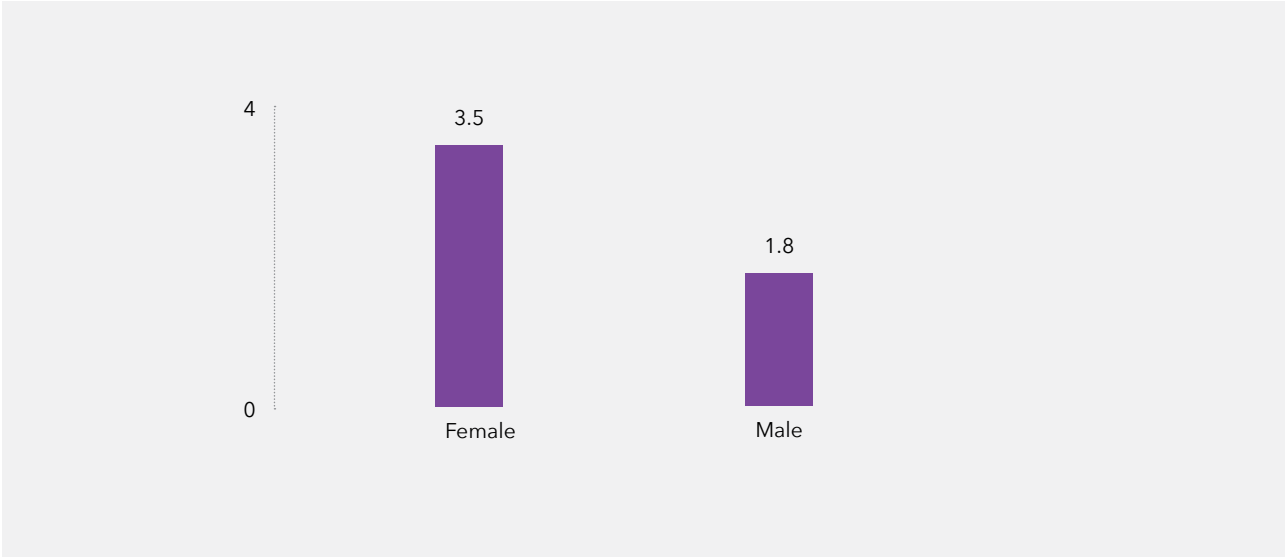


FIGURE 13: SEVERITY OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN TASMANIA

How Tasmania compares with the rest of Australia

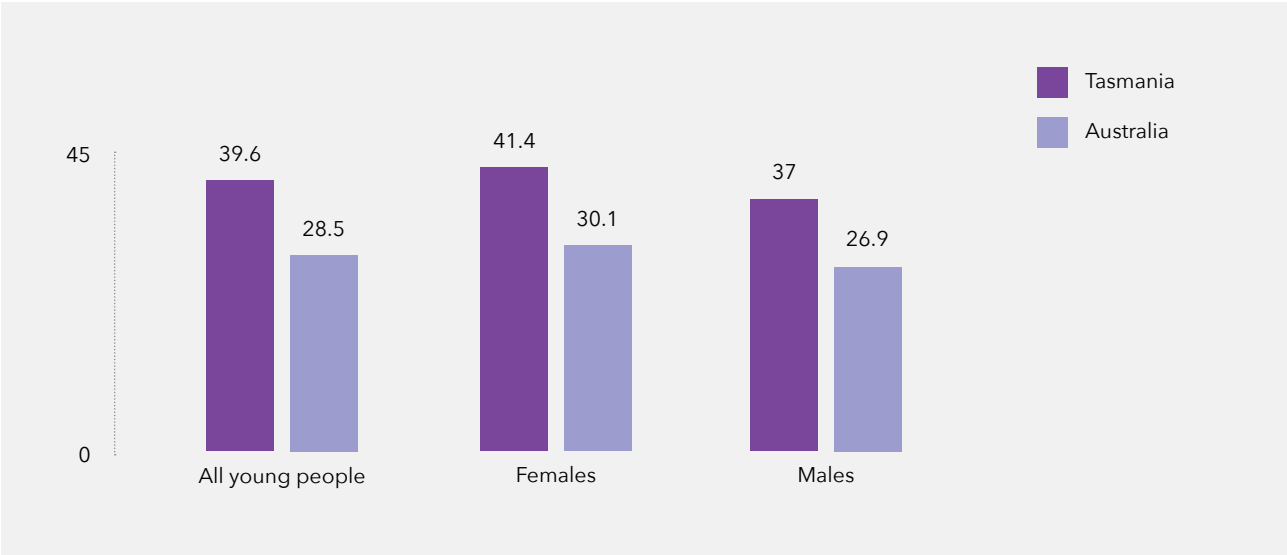
Prevalence

Of the 1788 participants who reported having a partner in the previous 12 months, 27% (n=482) of 18-19-year-olds in Australia reported experiencing intimate partner abuse (DVA). In Tasmania, 31.9% (n=22) of young people reported experiencing DVA (Table 10). Accounting for survey design and attrition, the prevalence of DVA in Tasmania was over 10% higher than the Australian average at 39.6% compared to 28.5% (Figure 14). While this difference was non-significant, the small number of responses from Tasmania (n=69) affects the power to detect statistically significant differences. The reported prevalence for Tasmania was notably higher than the Australian average for all young people, females and males (Figure 14).

TABLE 10: PREVALENCE OF DVA, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA

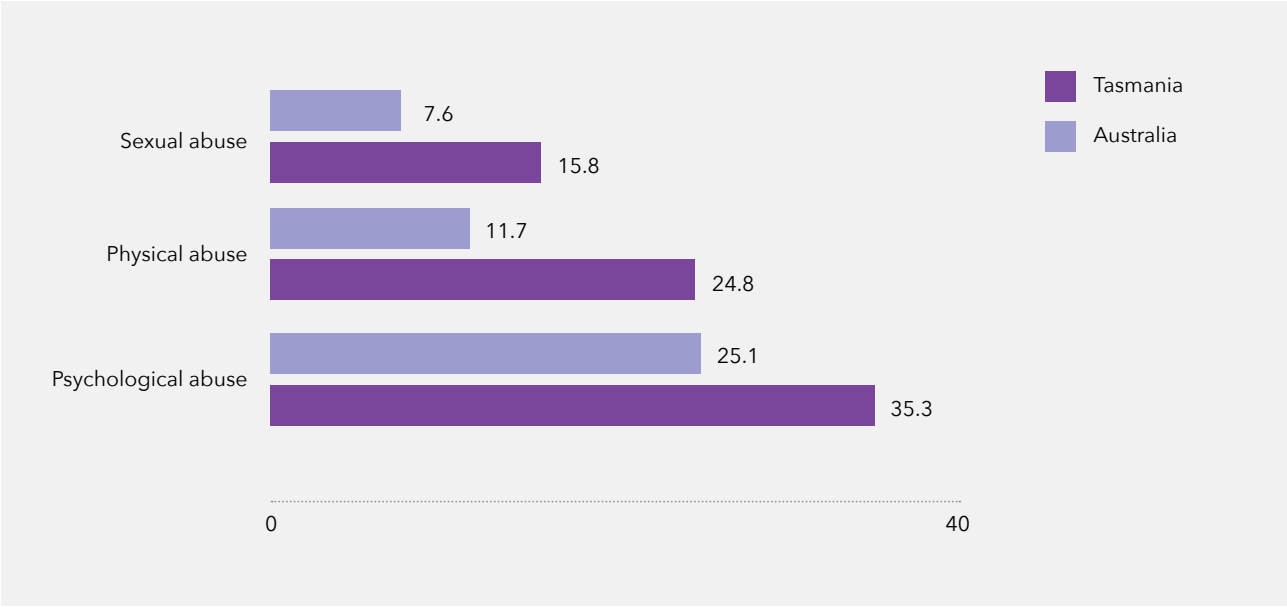
Abuse type	Jurisdiction	Number of responses	Number reporting abuse	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
DVA	Tasmania	69	22	31.9	39.6	28.1	52.4
	Australia	1788	482	27	28.5	26.3	30.9
Psychological	Tasmania	69	19	27.5	35.3	23.3	49.4
	Australia	1788	420	23.5	25.1	22.9	27.4
Physical	Tasmania	69	11	15.9	24.8	13.9	40.3
	Australia	1788	188	10.5	11.7	10.1	13.6
Sexual	Tasmania	69	7	10.1	15.8	7.1	31.8
	Australia	1788	125	7	7.6	6.2	9.3

FIGURE 14: PREVALENCE OF DVA, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA



As in Tasmania, in the national data, psychological abuse was most commonly reported form of abuse among young people, followed by physical abuse and sexual abuse. The results show that when compared with young people in Australia, young people in Tasmania are significantly more likely to report experiencing physical abuse (24.8% (95% CI 13.9, 40.3, p<.05) compared with 11.7% (95% CI=10.1, 13.6, p<.05)). The results also suggest that young people in Tasmania may be more likely to report experiencing sexual abuse (15.8% compared with 7.6%) and psychological abuse (35.3% compared with 25.1%) (Figure 15 and Table 10), though these differences were not statistically significant.

FIGURE 15: PREVALENCE OF ABUSE, ALL YOUNG PEOPLE, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA



When comparing the prevalence of physical abuse, females in Tasmania were more likely to report experiencing physical abuse than females in the Australia-wide dataset (29.2% compared with 18.5%) and males in Tasmania are more likely to report experiencing sexual abuse than males in Australia (14.9% compared with 4.3%[14]). These results are statistically significant.

14 This result is based on small crude numbers of males reporting. It is statistically significant nonetheless and future research could help to explore this finding further.

FIGURE 16: PREVALENCE OF ABUSE BY SEX, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA

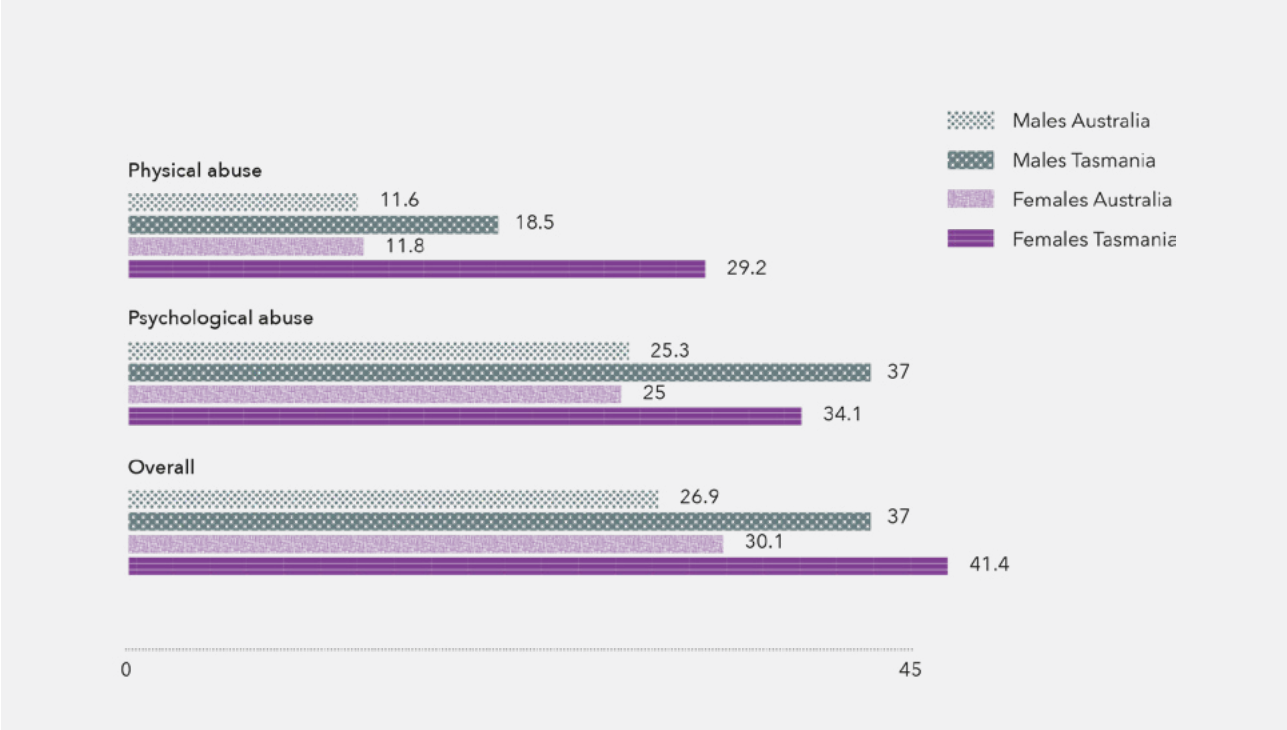


TABLE 11: PREVALENCE OF DVA, FEMALES, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA, CRUDE AND WEIGHTED FIGURES

Abuse type	Jurisdiction	Number of responses	Number reporting abuse	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
DVA	Tasmania	41	14	34.1	41.4	27.7	56.6
	Australia	913	257	28.1	30.1	26.9	33.5
Psychological	Tasmania	41	11	26.8	34.1	20.7	50.6
	Australia	913	215	23.5	25.0	22.0	28.2
Physical	Tasmania	41	9	22.0	29.2	15.5	48.1
	Australia	913	98	10.7	11.8	9.5	14.4
Sexual	Tasmania	41	6	14.6	16.5	7.5	32.6
	Australia	913	94	10.3	10.9	8.8	13.3

TABLE 12: PREVALENCE OF DVA, TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA, MALES, CRUDE AND WEIGHTED FIGURES

Abuse type	Jurisdiction	Number of responses	Number reporting abuse	Crude prevalence (%)	Weighted prevalence (%)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
DVA	Tasmania	28	8	28.6	37.0	21.7	55.4
	Australia	875	225	25.7	26.9	24.1	30.0
Psychological	Tasmania	28	8	28.6	37.0	21.7	55.4
	Australia	875	205	23.4	25.3	22.5	28.2
Physical	Tasmania	28	2	7.1	18.5	8.3	36.4
	Australia	875	90	10.3	11.6	9.7	13.9
Sexual	Tasmania	28	1	3.6	14.9	6.0	32.2
	Australia	875	31	3.5	4.3	3.1	5.8

In summary:

- Compared with females in the rest of Australia, results suggest that females in Tasmania may be more likely to report experiencing:
  - DVA (41.4% compared with 30.1%)
  - physical abuse (29.2% compared with 11.8%) – statistically significant difference ($p<.05$)
  - sexual abuse (16.5% compared with 10.9%)
  - psychological abuse (34.1% compared with 25%).
- Compared with males in Australia, results suggest that males in Tasmania may be more likely to report experiencing:
  - DVA (37% compared with 26.9%)
  - physical abuse (18.5% compared with 11.6%)
  - sexual abuse (14.9% compared with 4.3%) – statistically significant difference ($p<.05$)
  - psychological abuse (37% compared with 25.3%).

Severity

The results of this study suggest that when compared with females in the nation-wide sample, females in Tasmania were more likely to report greater severity of sexual abuse (mean score 3.7 compared with 2), psychological abuse (10.1 compared with 5.8), and overall DVA (12.3 compared with 7.2), and the same severity of physical abuse (3.5). When compared with males in the rest of Australia, the results suggest that males in Tasmania were more likely to report greater severity of psychological abuse and overall DVA (mean score 8 compared with 6.6, and 6.3 compared with 5 respectively). Males in Tasmania may experience less severe physical and sexual abuse when compared with males in Australia (mean score 1.8 compared with 3.5, and 2 compared with 2.3). Having said this, none of these differences were statistically significant.

FIGURE 17: SEVERITY OF DVA BY JURISDICTION AND SEX

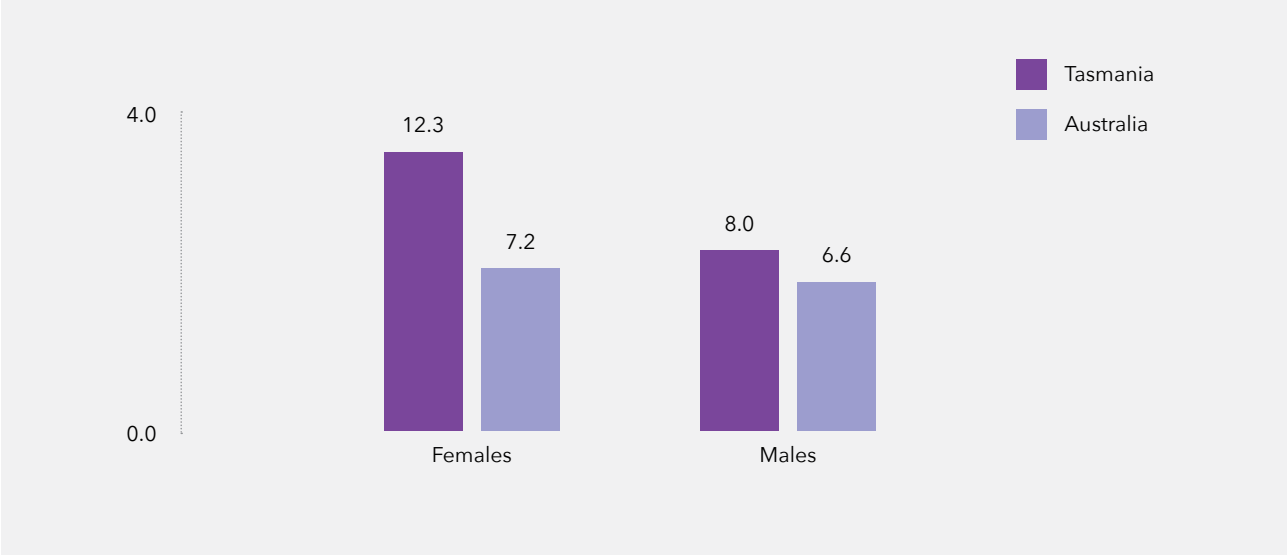


FIGURE 18: SEVERITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE BY JURISDICTION AND SEX

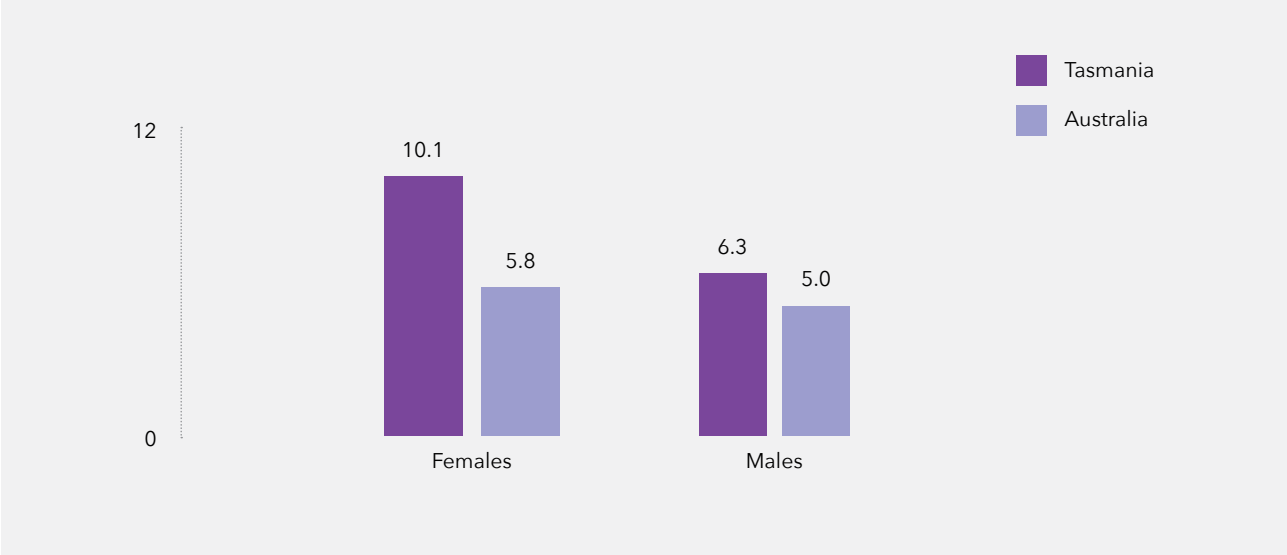


FIGURE 19: SEVERITY OF PHYSICAL ABUSE BY JURISDICTION AND SEX

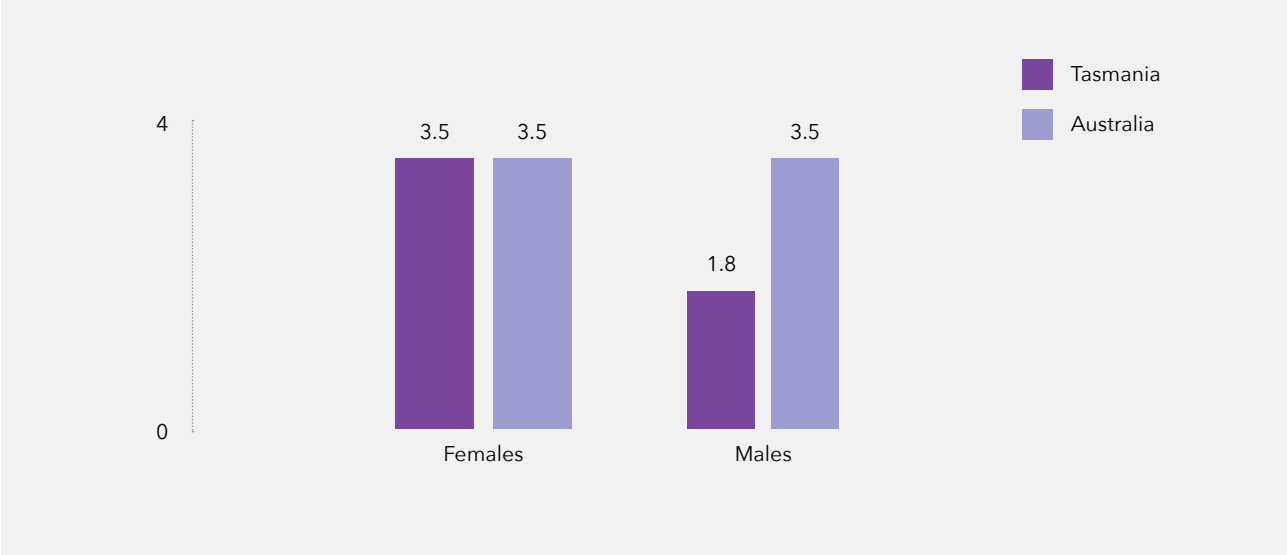
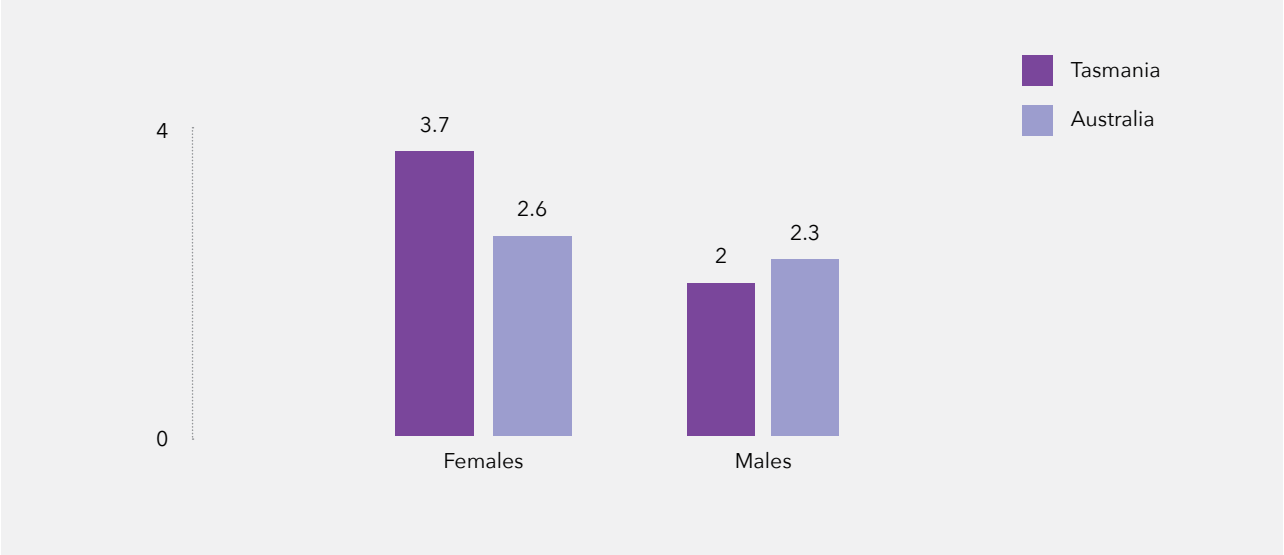


FIGURE 20: SEVERITY OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY JURISDICTION AND SEX



In summary:

- Compared with females in Australia, results show that females in Tasmania were more likely to report experiencing more severe:
  - DVA (12.3 compared with 7.2) – statistically similar
  - sexual abuse (3.7 compared with 2.6) – statistically similar
  - psychological abuse (10.1 compared with 5.8) – statistically similar.
- Females in Tasmania reported the same level of severity of physical abuse when compared with females in Australia.
- Compared with males in Australia, results suggest that males in Tasmania may be more likely to report experiencing more severe:
  - DVA (8 compared with 6.6) – statistically similar
  - psychological abuse (6.3 compared with 5) – statistically similar.
- Compared with males in Australia, results suggest that males in Tasmania may be more likely to report experiencing less severe:
  - physical abuse (1.8 compared with 3.5) – statistically similar
  - sexual abuse (2 compared with 2.3) – statistically similar.

Appendix C: Examples of abusive behaviours across a continuum

The purpose of this list is to provide readers with examples of abusive behaviours. It does not include all abusive and violent behaviours, and some of the behaviours could be placed in different columns depending on the context of the relationship.

Red flags and toxic stepping stones – early warning signs you might be in an abusive relationship	Recognisable (known) patterns of abusive behaviour	Intentional and unmistakable medium/high risk behaviours
(Do not dismiss)	**(Seek support)**	**(Get immediate help)**
• Introducing you to drugs • Inviting other people into the relationship for sex • Exposure to sex – e.g. unsolicited photos, masturbating and/or watching porn in front of you without your consent • Destruction of property • Abuse of others – especially siblings and family members Hurting animals/pets • Proposing • Making it hard to talk about feelings or issues in the relationship • Checking your messages • Turning up unannounced • Messaging / contacting your friends to find out who you are with or where you are • Moving in together (quickly) within a few weeks or couple of months • Having only you as someone who cares/supports them	• Coerced sex • Exchanging sex for drugs • Grooming • Subtle public humiliation • Gaslighting • Can't win / it's always your fault • Using guilt or pressure to make you do things you don't want to / stop you from doing things you do want to do • Getting you to take the blame for illegal activity • Fighting for hours • Blaming you for abuse • Body shaming (can be framed as 'caring about your health') • Suicide threats • Telling you what to wear, how to do your makeup • Name calling • Micromanaging everyday choices (like what you wear, eat) • Stopping you from seeing friends or family • Discouraging you from going to school, getting a job, going to work • Spending your money • Dismissing your needs • Having passwords to your social media accounts, phone • Tracking your location / knowing where you are at all times • Always being together • Fake social media profiles	• Drugging you or coercing you to take drugs / alcohol • Physical violence • Touching you inappropriately or in ways that make you feel uncomfortable in front of other people • Controlling contraception • Rape and attempted rape • Spitting food at you • Cutting your hair, eyelashes • Ruining your clothes, makeup • Threats – to your safety or to impact your life negatively (e.g. sharing nudes) • Stalking in person or online • Coercion to engage in sex work Creating conflict with your friends or family • Taking your money • Breaking or smashing your personal belongings, hitting walls, throwing things at you

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