



## **Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships (STIR) Connecting online and offline contexts and risks**

### **Briefing Paper 2: Incidence Rates and Impact of Experiencing Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships**

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The aim of **Briefing Paper 2** is to explore the STIR survey findings on the incidence and impact of experiencing Interpersonal violence and abuse (IPVA) in young people's intimate relationships, including sending and receiving sexual images, across five European countries: Bulgaria; Cyprus; England; Italy and Norway. The main findings are:

- **Between a half and two-thirds of young women aged 14 to 17 years-old and between a third and two-thirds of young men from the five countries reported experiencing IPVA.**
- **The majority of young women reported a negative impact to their experiences while the majority of young men reported an affirmative impact or no effect.**
- **In all countries, young people who reported experiencing IPVA in their relationships were at least twice as likely to have sent a sexual image or message compared to young people who had not been victimised.**





## AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The STIR project's aim was to document young people's own experiences of online and face-to-face forms of interpersonal violence and abuse (IPVA) in five European countries: Bulgaria; Cyprus; England; Italy and Norway (see [www.stiritup.eu](http://www.stiritup.eu)). The specific objectives included exploring:

- the incidence of online and offline physical, emotional and sexual forms of IPVA in young relationships
- sending and receiving sexual images between intimate partners
- the subjective impact
- associated risk and protective factors
- help-seeking
- young people's experiences and perspectives on what would help.



## METHODOLOGY

STIR was based on a four stage mixed-method approach:

- Stage 1: Expert workshops to map policy and practice in five European countries.
- Stage 2: School-based survey of 4,500 young people aged 14-17 year-olds.
- Stage 3: Interviews with 100 young people
- Stage 4: Development of an app resource for young people ([www.stiritapp.eu](http://www.stiritapp.eu))

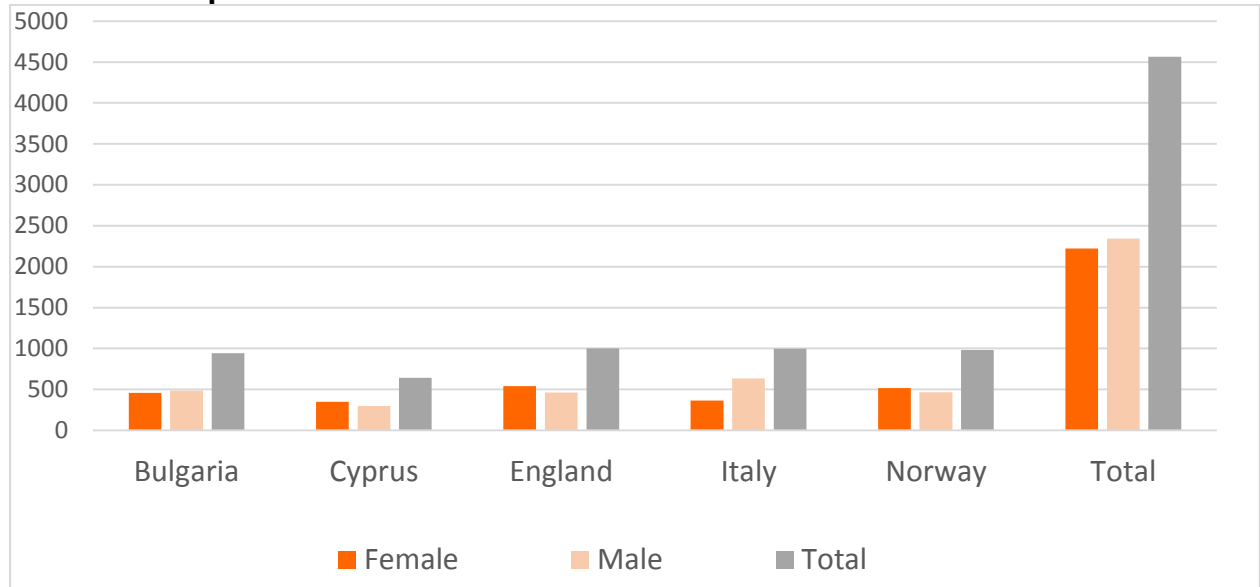
A young people's advisory group was convened in each country to comment on all aspects of the study.



## SURVEY SAMPLE

**4564** young people aged between 14 and 17 years-old took part in the school survey (see Table 1). The majority of young people (72%) reported having a boyfriend or girlfriend. This was highest in Italy and lowest in Norway. Most young people (96%) had a partner of the opposite-sex and 4% had a same-sex partner. All the survey findings are based on the **3277** young people who said they had been in a relationship.

**Table 1: Sample and Gender**



**STIR**  
SURVEY FINDING

**Incidence Rates**

The survey explored four different types of IPVA: Online Emotional Violence; Face-to-Face Emotional Violence; Physical Violence and Sexual Violence. We also asked about sending and receiving sexual messages. Each type of violence was measured by a range of questions. For the results we have combined all the questions for each form of violence victimisation to give an overall incidence rate for each country (see Table 2).

**Table 2 Gender and Incidence Rates for Experiencing IPVA**

Country	Gender	Online %		Emotional %		Physical %		Sexual %	
		no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Bulgaria	Female	53	47	59	41	89	11	79	21
	Male	57	43	65	35	85	15	75	25
Cyprus	Female	55	45	69	31	90	10	83	17
	Male	57	43	66	34	91	9	81	19
England	Female	52	48	52	48	78	22	59	41
	Male	75	25	73	27	88	12	86	14
Italy	Female	60	40	59	59	91	9	65	35
	Male	54	46	41	41	87	13	61	39
Norway	Female	62	38	68	32	82	18	72	28
	Male	80	20	81	19	92	8	91	9

## **Online Emotional Violence**

Online forms of emotional violence were measured by six questions. In the survey respondents were asked 'Have any of your partners ever done any of these things using a mobile phone, computer or tablets to:

- Put you down or sent ever sent you any nasty messages?
- Post nasty messages about you that others could see?
- Sent you threatening messages online or by mobile phones?
- Try and control who you can be friends with or where you can go?
- Constantly check- up on what you have been doing / who you have been seeing, for example, by sending you messages or checking your social networking page all the time?
- Used mobile phones or social networking sites to stop your friends liking you, for example, pretending to be you and sending nasty messages to your friends?

The overall rate for experiencing some form of online violence was around 40% for both young women and young men in each country. However, young men in England and Norway reported much lower levels of online violence compared to young people in other countries (around 23%). Controlling behaviour (measured by 'control who you can be with...') and surveillance (measured by 'constantly checked up on...') were the most commonly experienced forms of online violence for both young women and young men.

## **Face-to-Face Emotional Violence**

In the survey to measure offline or face-to-face emotional forms of violence we asked respondents 'Have any of your partners ever done any of these things face-to-face':

- Put you down in a nasty way?
- Shouted at you/ screamed in your face/ called you names?
- Said negative things about your appearance, body, friends or family?
- Threatened to hurt you physically?

Rates for experiencing face-to face violence were more wide-ranging than rates for online violence. Across the five countries, between 31% and 59% of young women and 19% and 41% of young men reported experiencing this form of behaviour from a partner. Young women and young men in Italy reported the highest levels. As with online forms of violence, young men in England and Norway reported the lowest levels of face-to-face emotional violence.

## **Physical Violence**

Physical violence was measured by: 'Have any of your partners ever done any of these things:

- Used physical force such as slapping, pushing, hitting or holding you down?

- Used more severe physical force such as punching, strangling, beating you up, hitting you with an object?

In each country between 9% and 22% of young women and 8% to 15% of young men reported some form of physical violence. Young women in England and Norway reported the highest levels: almost one in five reported having experienced physical violence compared to 1 in 10 young women in other countries.

## Sexual Violence

Lastly, to explore sexual violence we asked young people: ‘Have any of your partners ever done any of these things:

- Pressured you into intimate touching or something else?
- Physically forced you into intimate touching or something else?
- Pressured you into having sexual intercourse?
- Physically forced you into having sexual intercourse?

Rates for sexual violence ranged from 17% to 41% for young women and 9% to 25% for young men. Most young people reported pressure rather than physical force. The majority reported this occurred face-to-face or both face-to-face and online, very few reported online pressure in isolation. Again, young women in England and Norway reported the highest rates with one in three reporting some form of unwanted sexual activity.

**Note on Comparative Research:** As European research on adult domestic violence (DV) has shown, the willingness of participants to report their experiences is often heavily influenced by how DV is viewed in different countries (FRA 2014). Countries with higher gender equality and greater DV awareness also often report the highest levels of DV. This may be because in these countries DV is viewed as a social and political rather than a personal and therefore private problem. The STIR expert meetings (see Briefing Paper 1) and the young people’s advisory groups identified that England and Norway had the highest levels of awareness in respect of interpersonal abuse in young people’s relationships. They also had the highest levels of physical and sexual violence for young women. It may therefore be that young women in Bulgaria and Cyprus are under-reporting their experiences of physical and sexual violence in a social context where awareness of the problem is lower.

## Overall Incidence Rates

By combining all of the above responses into one category, we can see how many young people in each country experienced violence from a partner. Between 53% and 66% of young women and 32% and 69% of young men reported experiencing at least one form of violence. Incidence rates for young women were similar across the countries with England and Italy reporting the highest levels. Italy also reported the highest rates for young men whilst England and Norway had the lowest rates for

young men. Most young people who experienced violence reported both online and offline forms of violence, few reported online victimisation in isolation.

## Subjective Impact

For each form of IPVA we asked respondents: How did this behaviour make you feel? The response options were placed to ensure that affirmative and negative impacts were dispersed. For the analysis results we grouped responses into two categories:

**Negative** responses were; upset; scared; embarrassed; unhappy; humiliated; bad about yourself; angry; annoyed; and shocked.

**Affirmative/no effect** responses were: loved; good about yourself; wanted; protected; thought it was funny and 'no effect'.

Impacts varied across the different types of violence. Nevertheless, a clear pattern emerged. Young women were much more likely to report a negative only impact, whilst young men were more likely to report a positive/ or no effect response to their experiences. This was most noticeable for sexual violence where between 81% and 96% of young women reported a negative only impact whilst between 60% and 75% of boys reported a positive or no effect response. It therefore appears that young women may be more negatively affected by their experiences than young men.

## Sending and receiving sexual images and text messages

Although there was little difference in young people's access to mobile phones, substantial variations existed between countries in relation to sending and receiving sexual images and messages. Between 6% and 44% of young women and 15% to 32% of young men said they had *sent* a sexual image or text message to a partner (see Table 3). Similar proportions of young women, between 9% and 49%, and a slightly higher proportion of young men, 20% to 47%, reported received a sexual image or message from a partner. The highest rates for both sending and receiving were in England and the lowest in Cyprus. In all countries it seems that this was often a reciprocal activity, as approximately two-thirds of young people who had sent an image or message had also received one.

**Table 3: Sending and receiving sexual images and text messages**

<b>Sent</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Cyprus</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Norway</b>
Female	26%	6%	44%	16%	34%
Male	29%	15%	32%	25%	25%
Total	28%	10%	38%	22%	30%
<b>Received</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Cyprus</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Norway</b>
Female	35%	9%	49%	18%	37%
Male	36%	20%	47%	36%	35%
Total	35%	14%	48%	30%	36%

Many participants reported an affirmative only impact to sending images or messages, with between 41% and 87% of young women and 75% to 91% of young men stating this. However, between 13% and 59% of young women and 9% and 25% of young men recorded some form of a negative impact after sending sexual images or text message. Girls in England, Norway and Italy were more likely to report a negative impact.

## **Sharing Sexual Images and Text Messages**

Between 9% and 42% of young women in four of the five countries reported that a message they sent was shared with other people by their partner. Cyprus was not included due to low numbers. In contrast, only 9% to 13% of young men reported this. Young women in England were most likely to report that a photo or message had been shared (42%), followed by Norway (27 per cent).

Due to low numbers, we can only examine sharing of messages in England and Norway. Our findings indicate that young women whose images or messages were shared with other people by their partners were more likely to report a negative impact. In England and Norway, nearly all young women whose image or message was shared also reported a negative impact (97 per cent in England and 83 per cent in Norway). Nevertheless, although very few Italian young women in the survey reported their images had been shared, a high proportion (43%) reported a negative impact from sending a sexual image or text message.

Variations by country were found in the impact of sexting. These may be explained by more recent access to new technologies in some countries or by differing attitudes towards female sexual activity between countries. Higher reporting of negative impact in some countries may be associated with a greater awareness of the dangers of sexting in those countries particularly in relation to sharing messages.

## **Associations with Relationship Violence and Abuse**

In all countries, young people were more likely to have sent a sexual image or text message if they were experiencing violence or control in their relationships. Also in all countries, young people who reported experiencing IPVA were at least twice as likely to have sent a sexual image or text compared to young people who had not experienced IPVA (see Table 4). This was the case for all types of violence, irrespective of gender.



**Table 4: Associations between sending images and violence**

Type of abuse	Female		Male	
	Victim	Non-victim	Victim	Non-victim
<b>Online</b>	8% - 65%	4% - 24%	20% -50%	11% -26%
<b>Emotional</b>	11%- 59%	3% - 30%	26% -53%	19% -24%
<b>Physical</b>	21% -75%	4% - 35%	38% -58%	13% - 29%
<b>Sexual</b>	28% -68%	6% - 28 %	24% - 69%	13% - 25%

### Reasons for Sending Sexual Images and Messages

The most common reasons for sending a sexual image or message were: because a partner asked them to send it (between 32% and 56% of young women and between 20% and 44% of young men); to feel sexy or flirtatious (between 36% and 51% of young women and between 21% and 57 % of young men); and as a joke (between 14% and 47 % of young women and between 17% and 39% of young men). In England, some young women reported sending sexual images and text messages to prove their commitment to a partner (43%) and because they were pressured by a partner (27%).



### IMPLICATIONS

1. This is the first study of IPVA in young people in the general population across European countries. The findings show high levels of IPVA among young people in all the countries studied and this will compromise their health and wellbeing both in the present and in the future. There is a need to develop pan-European policies that aim to reduce IPVA among young people. Such policies should address awareness, prevention and interventions (see STIR Briefing Papers 1 and 4).
2. The strong association between online and offline forms of IPVA in young people's relationships clearly demonstrates the inter-connection between these forms of violence and control in the lives of young people across a number of European countries. Online abuse should not be tackled in isolation but as part of a whole strategy addressing all forms of IPVA in young people's relationships.
3. Many young people gave affirmative responses when asked about the impact of sending an image or message. This has implications for policy and practice aimed at educating young people about sharing sexual images and for the development of law in this area.



4. Control and coercion characterise all the forms of IPVA identified by this research. High rates of sexual coercion were reported in some countries and these need to be addressed through education and awareness raising that aims to challenge attitudes and change behaviour.
5. The impact of IPVA varied by gender. This has implications for the content of campaigns and education and how they are targeted at boys and girls.
6. This study demonstrates that it is possible to research sensitive issues such as IPVA with young people across national and language barriers.



## REFERENCES

FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) (2014) Violence Against Women: An EU-Wide Survey.  
[http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results_en.pdf)



## Briefing Papers

1. *Policy and Practice Awareness in Europe on Teenage Intimate Relationships and New Technology*
2. *Incidence Rates and Impact of Experiencing Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships*
3. *Risk and Protective (Predictive) Factors for IPVA Victimisation and Instigation*
4. *Young People's Views on Prevention and Intervention for Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Young People's Relationships*
5. *Young People's Perspectives on Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationships*



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The full project report will be available in Spring 2015, please contact Christine Barter at [Christine.Barter@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Christine.Barter@bristol.ac.uk) or visit the STIR website for a copy.