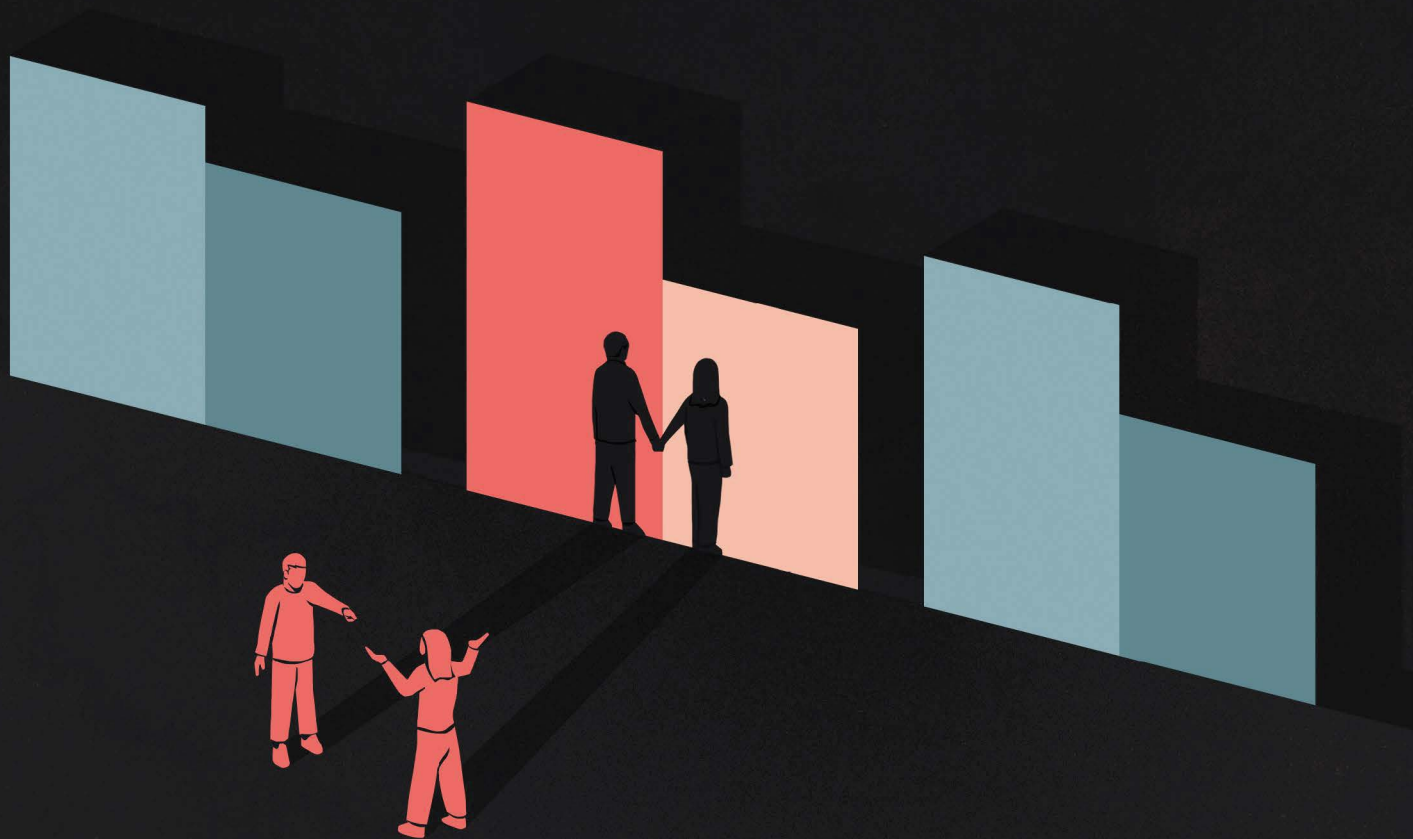


# Children, violence and vulnerability 2025

## Violence in relationships



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# Acknowledgements



# Acknowledgements

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- [Savanta](#), our survey partner, and all those from the team who worked on this year's survey, including Matt McGinn, Benjamin Potts and Toni Cundy
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- Members of our Youth Advisory Board, for their role in helping design the survey and in sharing their own experiences and how they relate to the findings

Lead contributors from the Youth Endowment Fund include Hashim Ahmed, Dr Cassandra Popham, Matt Shaw, William Teager and Ciaran Thapar.

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# Main findings and summary



# Executive summary

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) surveyed nearly 11,000 children aged 13–17 in England and Wales to hear directly from them about their experiences of violence.

The results are being shared across several reports, each focusing on a different theme. This second report looks at **violence in relationships**, exploring emotional, physical and sexual abuse in teen relationships, the emotional impact of such abuse and young people's views on consent.

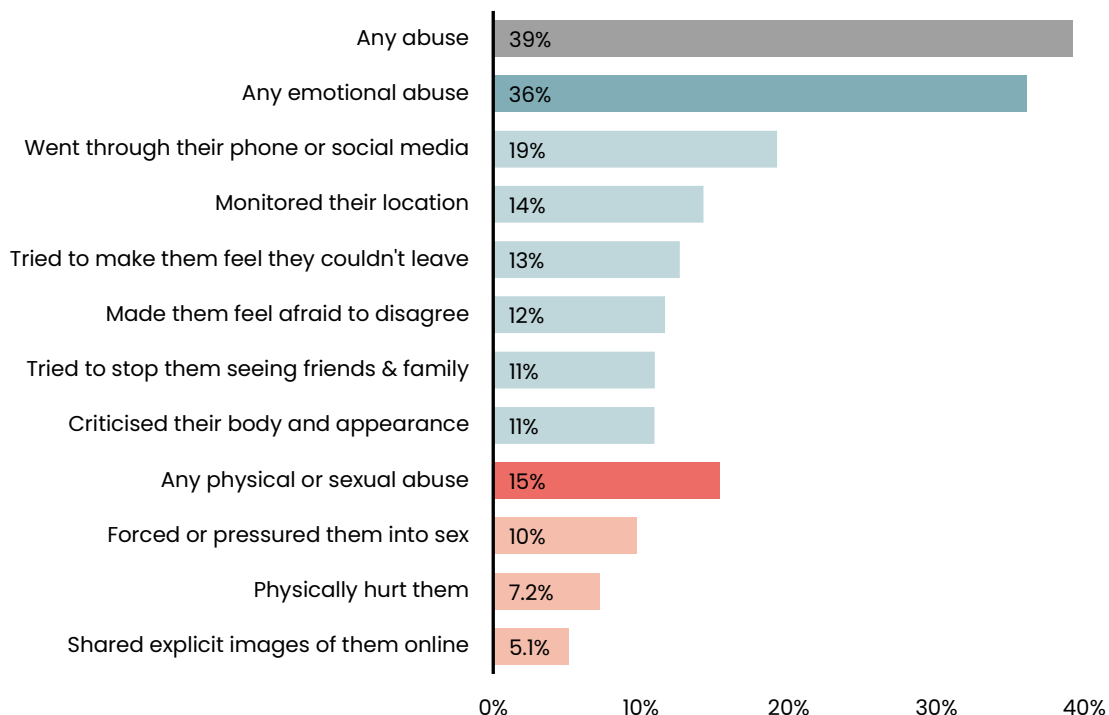
Here's what we found.

## Relationship abuse impacts too many teenage children's day-to-day lives.

Teenage years are often when children first begin to explore romantic relationships. At their best, these can bring joy and companionship and teach important lessons about trust. But for too many, they are marked instead by control, pressure or violence — experiences that can undermine a young person's safety and affect their daily life.

### Two in five teens in relationships have experienced emotional or physical abuse.

#### PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO'VE BEEN VICTIMS OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE



This year, 28% of the teenage children we surveyed told us they'd been in a relationship in the past 12 months. Of those, nearly two in five (39%) had experienced some form of emotional or physical abuse – the equivalent of over one in ten of all teenagers (or 390,000 13–17-year-olds)<sup>1</sup> across England and Wales. For the 36% who reported experiencing emotional abuse, behaviours ranged from partners checking their phone or social media (19%) or monitoring their location (14%) to criticism of their body or appearance (11%). Even more concerning, 15% of teenage children in relationships said they'd been subjected to physical or sexual abuse – including being forced or pressured into sex (10%), physically hurt (7.2%) or having explicit images of them shared online (5.1%).

In discussing these findings, several of our Youth Advisory Board members commented on how difficult it can be to recognise relationship abuse when it happens to you and the importance of equipping young people with the tools and language to do so.

“

*I also think it's about educating them on what actually is relationship violence and what, like, the different aspects of it [are]. I think oftentimes, when you think of it, you think of just one thing, and no, there's so much [sic] different scenarios that can contribute to ... relationship violence. So I think it's about giving young people the resources and the understanding of what it is so they have the knowledge for themselves and they can see things a bit clearer.*

”

Ava\*, YEF Youth Advisory Board Member

\*Name has been changed

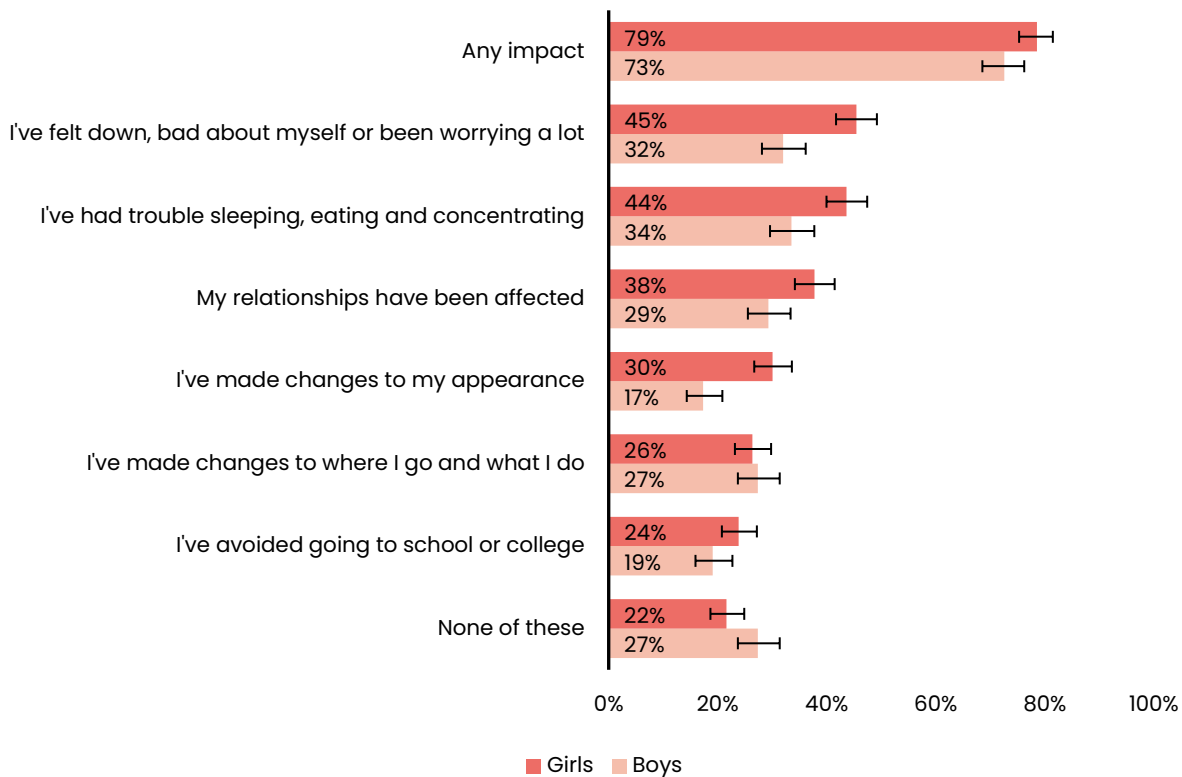
Most teens who'd experienced abusive behaviours said it had affected their day-to-day lives – from feeling anxious, low or bad about themselves, to struggling to sleep, eat or concentrate. More than a third said it had strained their relationships with their friends or family, and over one in five had avoided school or college because of something that had happened with a partner. In some areas, the impact was felt more strongly by girls, who were more likely to say the abusive behaviours had damaged their self-esteem or led them to change their appearance.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics [mid-2024 population estimates](#).

## Relationship abuse impacts girls' and boys' day-to-day lives.

### IMPACTS REPORTED BY 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'VE EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY GENDER



Note. The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.

## It's common for both girls and boys.

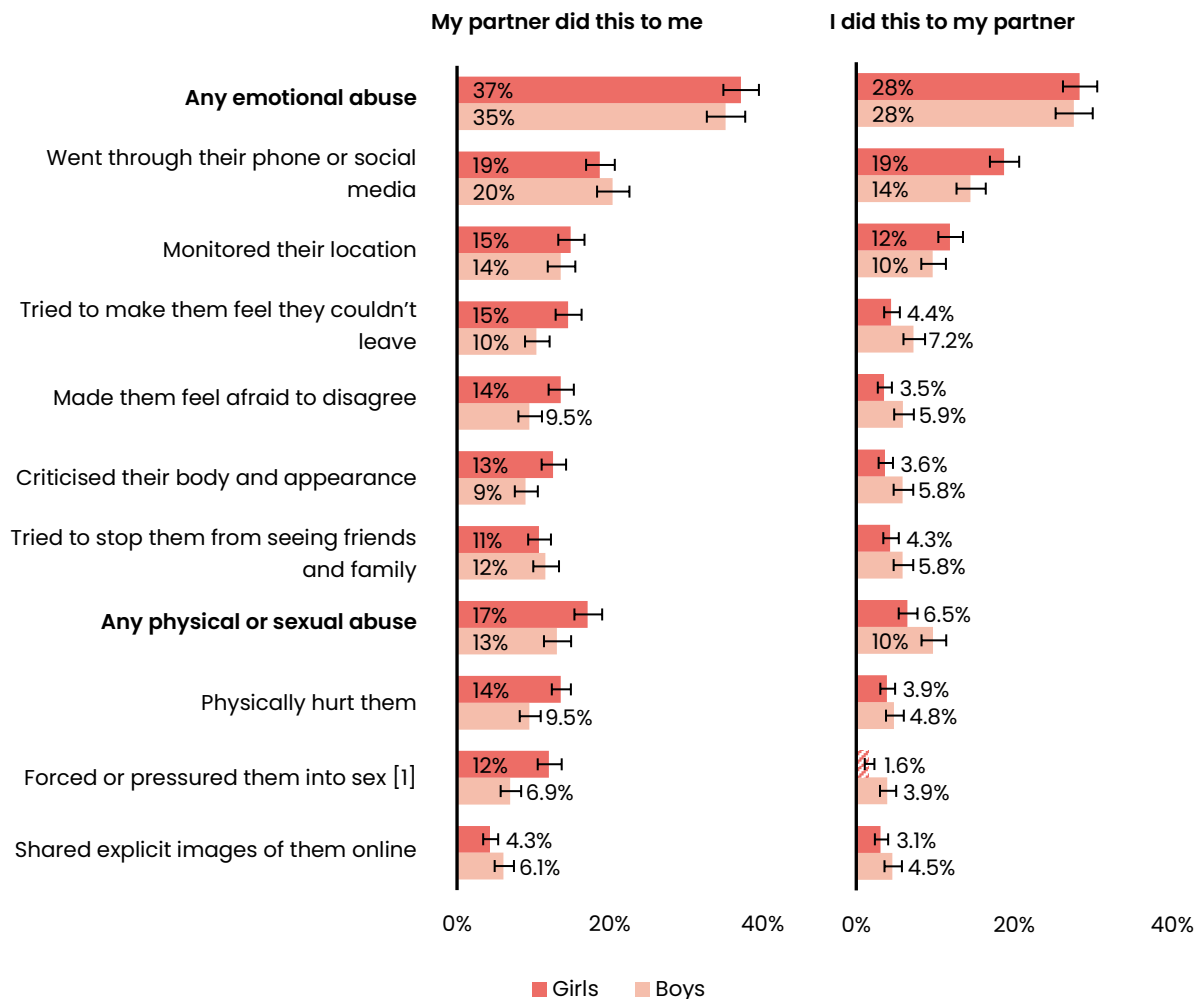
Our findings reinforce why lessons on healthy relationships are so important for all teenagers. Although girls were slightly more likely to receive emotional or physical abuse from a partner than boys, the difference was small (41% of girls compared to 37% of boys).

The types of abusive experiences differed by gender. Girls were more likely to say their partner had made them feel they couldn't leave, made them afraid to disagree, criticised their appearance or pressured them into sex. Boys, meanwhile, were more likely to report having explicit images of themselves posted online.

Differences also appeared when teens reflected on their own behaviour towards their partners. Girls were more likely to admit checking their partner's phone or social media and tracking their location. Boys were more likely to report trying to control who their partner saw, making their partner afraid to disagree, criticising their partner's appearance, pressuring their partner into sex or posting explicit images of their partner.

## The types of relationship abuse teens experience differ slightly for girls and boys.

PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO'VE PERPETRATED AND EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY GENDER



[1] Bars with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Note. The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.

## Teens who view sexual aggression as acceptable are more likely to commit relationship abuse.

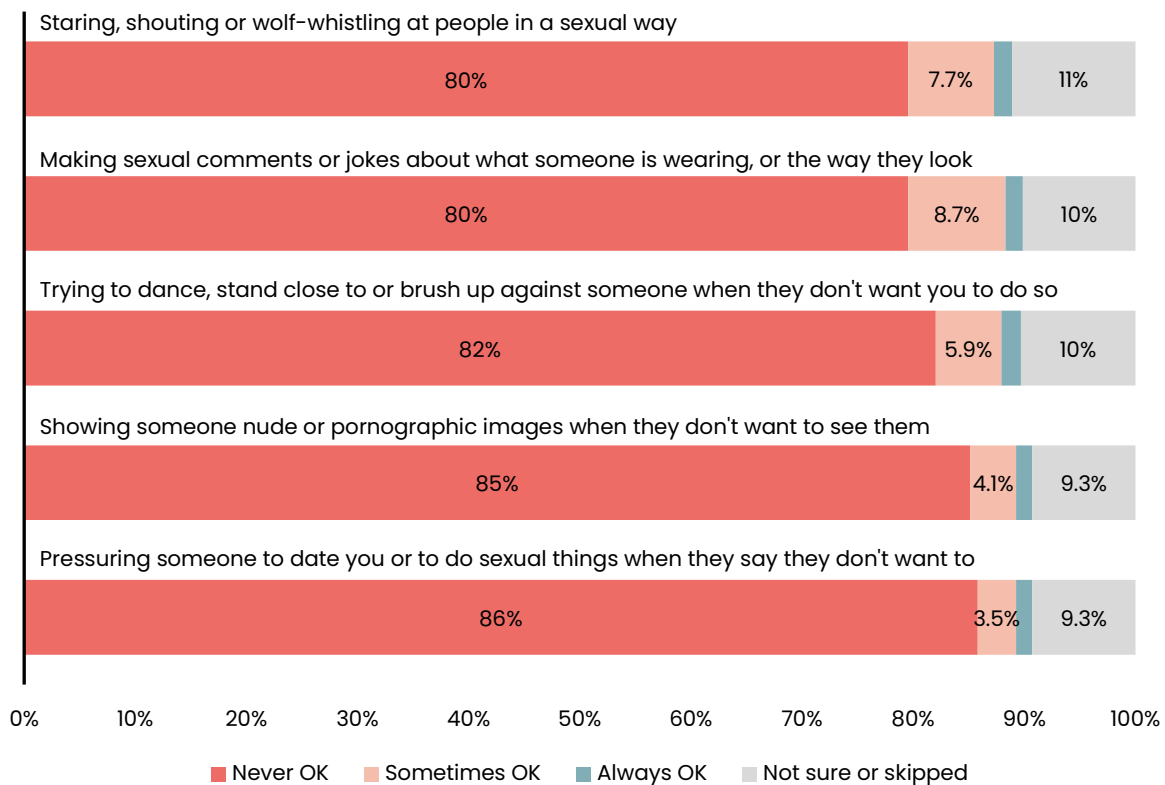
Encouragingly, most 13-17-year-olds rejected harmful attitudes: 86% said it was never OK to pressure someone into dating or sex when they've already said no, with just 4.9% saying it was sometimes or always acceptable.

Exposure to harmful content online was associated with more permissive attitudes and behaviours. Teens who'd seen sexually violent content on social media were significantly more likely to say that pressuring someone into sex after they'd refused was acceptable (8.5%, compared to 4.9% overall). While we can't say

whether harmful content directly influences children's understanding of what's OK to do in relationships, or whether those with certain views are more likely to seek out or be suggested harmful content, the association is troubling.

### Most teenage children recognise that sexual harassment is never acceptable.

PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO THINK CERTAIN BEHAVIOURS ARE NEVER, SOMETIMES OR ALWAYS OK



Abuse at home is also associated with children's views and behaviours outside the home. Teenage children who've experienced or witnessed abuse in their family are much more likely to be victims of abuse in their own relationships and to perpetrate it themselves. More than half of those exposed to physical abuse at home reported committing emotional or physical abuse in their own relationships, compared to 18% of those who hadn't. Over a quarter (27%) of those who'd witnessed physical abuse thought pressuring someone into sex after they'd refused was acceptable.

Members of our Youth Advisory Board commented on the importance of the types of relationships children see modelled and how valuable positive examples of relationships can be.

“

*Because I know we've touched on it before in the YAB [Youth Advisory Board] but, so, like, we're shown so little what healthy relationships look like. And oh, [we haven't been told,] 'This is a good one. This is what maybe you should want to aim for,' especially in school. Because, OK, maybe they give you the signs of an unhealthy one, but it's a lot easier to look at something and be like, 'Oh, I don't have that,' than to look at something and think — like, you can always sort of excuse yourself out of negative things.*

”

Martha, YEF Youth Advisory Board Member

## What works to prevent violence in relationships?

Unhealthy behaviours in teenage relationships — from subtle put-downs to serious harm — affect both girls and boys. Experiences of violence, whether in-person or online, shape how young people think, feel and act. While most teenagers reject sexual harassment, a small minority still believe it is acceptable. Combined with the high rates of emotional and physical abuse reported in teen relationships, this shows how essential it is that all young people learn what healthy relationships look like.

Evidence shows that education can make a real difference. A global review found that **specialist lessons**, delivered by trained and confident staff, can reduce relationship violence by around 17%. **Bystander intervention programmes** also show promise — these teach teenagers how to safely step in during situations of potential sexual assault. Those who take part are not only more confident about intervening but also less likely to commit sexual violence themselves.

Together, these findings highlight that change is possible. By giving young people the knowledge and skills to build healthy relationships, we can give them the chance to form connections that are supportive, respectful and free from violence.

# Headline findings

## Relationship abuse impacts too many teenage children's day-to-day lives.

### Half of teens in relationships experience emotional or physical abuse.

39% of 13–17-year-olds in relationships said they'd experienced at least one form of emotionally or physically abusive behaviour from their partner in the past 12 months. 29% said they'd done emotionally or physically abusive things to their partner. Overall, 47% had either done or experienced emotional or physical abuse in their relationship – equivalent to 13% of all 13–17-year-olds.

### Monitoring and controlling behaviours are the most common...

Emotional abuse can manifest in a range of behaviours. 19% of teens in relationships had a partner go through their phone or social media to check who they were talking to. 16% said they'd done this to a partner. 14% had their partner constantly monitor their location, while 11% said they'd done this to a partner. 11% said their partner had tried to stop them seeing friends and family, while 5% admitted to doing that to a partner.

### ...but worrying numbers have also experienced physical and sexual violence.

Physical abuse is less common. 10% of teens in relationships said their partner had forced or pressured them into sex; 2.6% admitted to doing so to a partner. 7.2% said their partner had physically hurt them; 4.2% said they'd hurt their partner. 5.1% said they'd had explicit images of themselves shared online without their consent, while 3.8% said they'd done this to a partner.

### Relationship abuse impacts teenage children's day-to-day lives.

76% of those who'd experienced violent or controlling behaviours in their relationships reported that it had impacted their lives. 40% felt down about themselves; 39% had trouble eating, sleeping or concentrating at school; and 34% said their relationships with friends and family had been affected. 22% said they avoided going to school or college.

## It's common for both girls and boys.

### Girls and boys are equally likely to be abusive in relationships.

30% of girls and 29% of boys in relationships say they've been emotionally or physically abusive to a partner in the past 12 months. Girls were more likely to experience abuse from their partner (41%), but rates were high for boys as well (37%). Overall, 49% of girls and 45% of boys had either perpetrated or experienced relationship abuse in the preceding year.

### Girls are more likely than boys to monitor their partners.

19% of girls said they'd gone through their partner's phone and social media to check who they've spoken to, compared to 14% of boys. 12% of girls said they'd tracked where their partner has gone, compared to 10% of boys.

### Boys are more likely to say they've forced or pressured their partner into sex.

3.9% of boys in relationships said they'd forced or pressured their partner into sex, compared to 1.6% of girls. Boys were also more likely to say they'd criticised their partner's looks (5.8% vs 3.6% of girls), tried to stop them seeing friends or family (5.8% vs 4.3% of girls), tried to make them afraid to disagree (5.9% vs 3.5% of girls), tried to make them feel they couldn't leave the relationship (7.2% vs 4.4% of girls) or posted explicit images of them online (4.5% vs 3.1% of girls).

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## Teens who view sexual aggression as acceptable are more likely to commit relationship abuse.

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### Most teenage children recognise that sexual harassment is never acceptable.

When asked about the acceptability of behaviours, 82% of 13-17-year-olds said standing close and brushing against someone when they don't want you to do so is never OK. 85% said showing someone sexual images when they don't want to see them is never OK. 86% said pressuring someone into dating or sex when they say they don't want it is never OK. 1 in 10 were unsure or chose to skip the question.

### Those exposed to sexual violence online and in-person are more likely to think it's OK...

4.9% of 13-17-year-olds thought pressuring someone into dating or sex when they've said no is sometimes or always OK. This rose to 8.5% of those who'd seen sexual violence on social media, 25% of those who'd experienced physical or sexual abuse in their relationship and 27% of those who'd witnessed physical abuse between their parents.

### ...and those who view it as OK are more likely to do it themselves.

13-17-year-olds who view pressuring someone into dating or sex as OK are over twice as likely to have perpetrated emotionally abusive behaviours in their relationship (63%) and nearly 10 times as likely to have perpetrated physical or sexual relationship violence (44%) than those who think these actions are never OK (25% and 4.5%, respectively).

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# Methodology



# About this year's survey

## Question and thematic overview

This is our fourth annual survey of children's experiences of violence. This year, we surveyed nearly 11,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales about their experiences over the past 12 months. In this year's survey, we focused on the following themes.

- What's the scale and nature of violence experienced by teenage children, as victims, perpetrators and witnesses, in person and online? What are the characteristics of the teens most impacted?
- How prevalent is relationship violence? How does this impact boys and girls differently? What do teens view as acceptable behaviour?
- How prevalent are mental health difficulties and neurodevelopmental conditions among teenage children? How do these overlap with experiences of violence? Where do teens turn to for support?
- How many teenage children are at risk of or experience criminal exploitation? What are the routes into and out of exploitation?

This is the second report in this year's series. It covers the prevalence and types of violence experienced in relationships, with new questions on children's perpetration of relationship abuse. It also looks at how these experiences differ between boys and girls and the characteristics of those at risk and how these overlap with perspectives on what constitutes acceptable behaviour.

## What we did

This year, a total of 10,835 13–17-year-olds responded to our survey, compared to 10,387 last year. This slightly larger sample size ensured we heard sufficiently from smaller groups.

As with last year, we used an online survey conducted by our survey partner, [Savanta](#). The average survey completion time was around 14 minutes, and the survey was live between May and July 2025. Questions typically related to children's experiences over the preceding 12 months.

To ensure the results were nationally representative, we did two things:

- Firstly, we set quotas for key groups. These were age, gender, ethnicity, region and socioeconomic status. The quotas were based on each group's share of the population using Census 2021 population estimates for 13–17-year-olds.
- Secondly, we weighted the results to ensure overall representativeness. This year, we worked with survey consultants from University College London (Dr Krisztián Pósch and Ana Cristancho) to refine the methodology for applying weights to ensure the results are as accurate as possible, particularly when looking at findings by subgroup. All results from last year's survey have been updated to reflect the revised weighting methodology to ensure results are as comparable as possible. For more details on this, see the technical report on our website.

## How children were kept safe

Children were invited to take part in the survey and were made aware of the types of questions that would be asked. Anyone could refuse to take part. For all children aged 15 or under, a parent or guardian had to consent for them to take part. Participants could drop out of the survey at any time. Participants were asked to complete the survey on their own and in a safe place where their responses could not be seen. It wasn't possible to look back at previous responses once questions had been answered. At the beginning and end and throughout the survey, participants were signposted to relevant support services.

## Approach to reporting results

The smaller the number of responses, the less confident we are in the results. For this reason, we generally don't report results where the total number of responses to a particular question was less than 50. All group comparisons mentioned in the report are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, unless otherwise noted.

## What to be aware of

Like all research, our survey has some limitations. We're trying to understand what teenage children across England and Wales have experienced. While our sample of 10,835 13-17-year-olds is comparably large for this type of survey (for context, the Office for National Statistics' [Crime Survey of England and Wales](#) reached 1,528 10-15-year-olds in 2023/24 and has consistently reached around 3,000 young people in recent years), it still represents a small proportion of all children in the country. It's important, therefore, to remember these limitations when interpreting the results:

- Weights are applied to ensure that the results are broadly representative of the national populations of England and Wales. This year, we refined the results so we can more accurately speak to certain subgroups (e.g. by race). However, there are limits to the extent to which weights can be applied to cover variations across all interlocking characteristics. There should be particular caution when looking at results by region due to the challenge in applying interlocking weights at this level.
- The sample size is significantly larger than in other surveys of this kind. However, when we look at the results for some smaller subgroups (e.g. by region, ethnicity and age), these individual groups can be small. This makes it hard to draw generalised conclusions for some smaller populations.
- The subject matter (children's experiences of violence) is sensitive. While we ensured the framing of the questions was suitable for children, it's possible that some may have been unwilling to respond openly and honestly, particularly about things they may have done.
- Caution should be taken when making comparisons between this year's survey and last year's. Whilst we've updated the results from last year to reflect some observable differences in who was recruited, we cannot fully rule out that any differences in the results between the years reflect unaccounted-for changes in the characteristics of those who responded.

# Detailed findings



# What we found

Violence and abuse in teenage relationships can have a significant impact on young people, but there's a lack of research on how relationship abuse affects younger teens. Last year, we found that violent and controlling behaviours were concerningly common in teenage children's romantic and sexual relationships. In this report, we explore the prevalence of emotional, physical and sexual abuse in teen relationships; the emotional impact of such abuse; how the abusive behaviours teens perpetrate in their relationships relate to what they've experienced as victims; who's most likely to be affected; and teens' views on consent and sexual harassment.

## Relationship abuse impacts too many teenage children's day-to-day lives.

### Half of teens in relationships experience emotional or physical abuse.

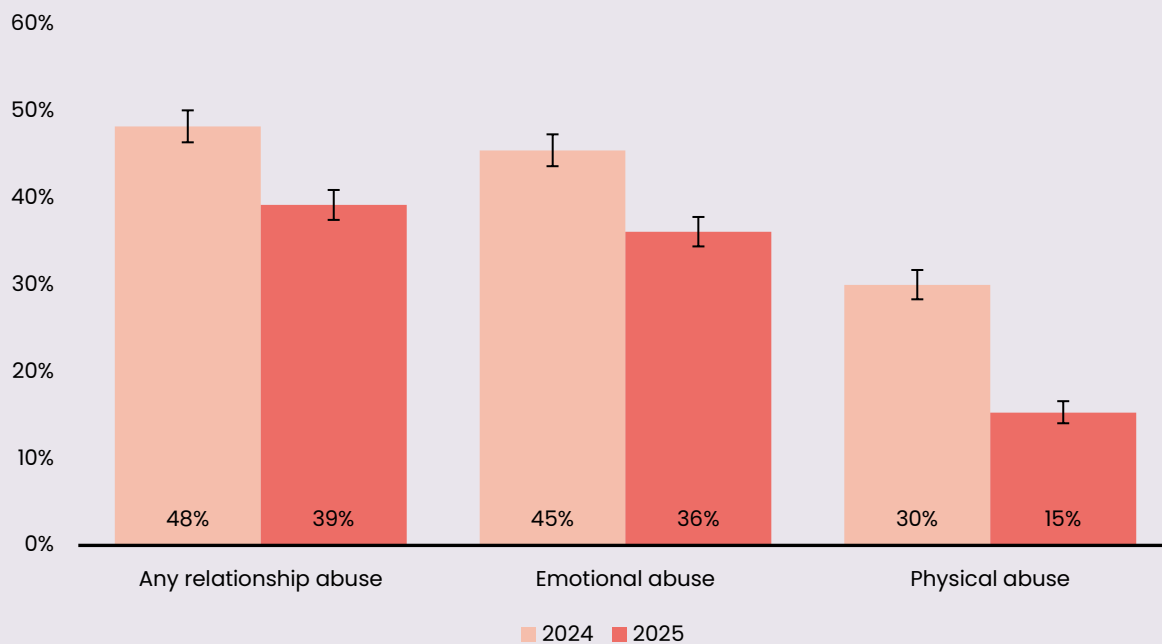
Of the 10,835 13-17-year-olds we surveyed this year, 28% said they'd been in a romantic or sexual relationship in the previous 12 months. Of those, 39% said they'd experienced some type of emotional or physical abuse from their partner, equivalent to 11% of all 13-17-year-olds. Thirty-six per cent said they'd experienced emotionally abusive behaviours, such as their partner trying to stop them from seeing their friends or family, equivalent to 10% of 13-17-year-olds (or 390,000 teenage children)<sup>2</sup> across England and Wales. Fifteen per cent had experienced physical or sexual abuse, equivalent to 4.3% of (or 160,000) 13-17-year-olds.

In our survey last year, we found that 48% of 13-17-year-olds in relationships had experienced violent or controlling behaviours in their relationships, equivalent to 13% of all 13-17-year-olds. Forty-five per cent had experienced emotionally controlling behaviours — equivalent to 12% of all 13-17-year-olds — and 30% had experienced physical or sexual abuse — equivalent to 8.2% of all 13-17-year-olds. Our estimates this year are considerably lower. However, we used a different set of questions this year to ask about emotional abuse, and we changed the way we asked about relationship abuse overall. So, we can't say whether differences are due to actual falls in prevalence, changes to the questions or changes in sample composition that can't be accounted for through our weighting and sampling strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics [mid-2024 population estimates](#).

**FIGURE 1.1: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO’VE BEEN VICTIMS OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, COMPARED TO LAST YEAR’S SURVEY**



*Notes. The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Figures for 2024 have been updated from those published last year to reflect the revisions in the weighting methodology – for more details, see the technical report on our website.*

This year, for the first time, we also asked teenage children in relationships whether they’d done these things to their partner. Respondents were less likely to say they’d done things themselves than experienced them, but 29% admitted to perpetrating some form of relationship abuse. Twenty-eight per cent said they’d perpetrated emotional abuse, and 7.9% admitted to physical or sexual violence towards their partner. In total, 47% of teenage children in relationships had either perpetrated or experienced some form of relationship violence – equivalent to 13% of all 13–17-year-olds (or 500,000 13–17-year-olds)<sup>3</sup> across England and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics [mid-2024 population estimates](#).

## How do we define relationship abuse?

We asked all 13–17-year-olds who said they'd been in a romantic or sexual relationship in the preceding year whether they'd experienced or perpetrated any of the following behaviours. The questions were slightly different from those we used in last year's survey and were adapted from a [Women's Aid healthy relationships quiz](#) and the [Measure of Adolescent Relationship Harassment and Abuse](#). In our analysis, we divided the behaviours into emotional abuse and physical abuse, as below.

### Emotional abuse:

- Went through the other person's phone or social media to see who they'd been talking to
- Monitored where the other person was all the time, such as by tracking them on their phone
- Tried to make the other person feel like they couldn't break up or get out of the relationship
- Made the other person feel afraid to disagree, in case the perpetrator got angry
- Tried to stop the other person from spending time with their friends or family
- Criticised the other person's body or appearance

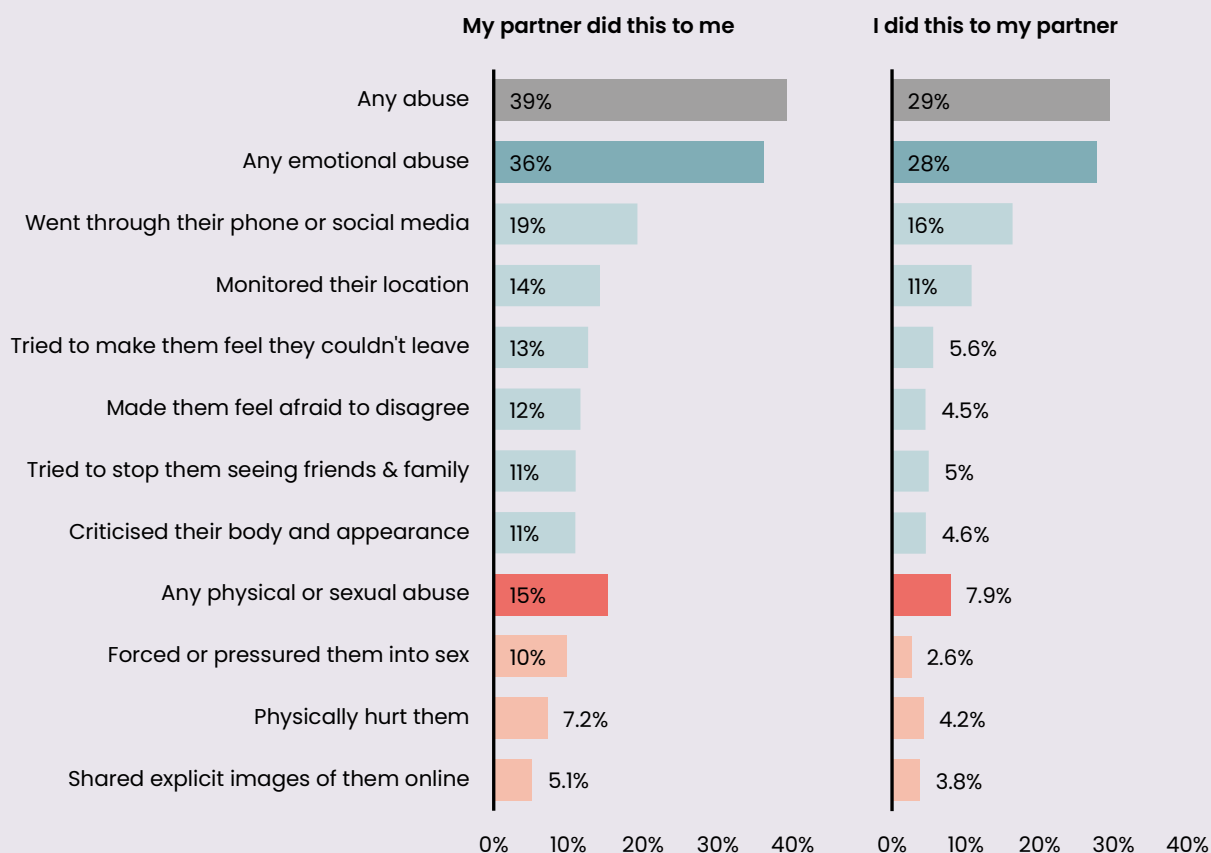
### Physical abuse:

- Forced or pressured the other person to do something sexually that they didn't want to do
- Physically hurt the other person, e.g. pinched, pushed, slapped, hurt or threatened to hurt them
- Posted or shared any explicit or intimate images or videos of the other person online

## Monitoring and controlling behaviours are the most common.

One in five (19%) teenage children in relationships said their partner had gone through their phone or social media to check who they'd been talking to, and 16% admitted to doing this themselves. The next most common behaviour was monitoring the other person all the time, such as by tracking them on their phone – 14% said their partner had done it to them, and a relatively large proportion admitted to doing it to their partner (11%). Smaller, but still worrying, numbers said they'd done or experienced things such as forcing or pressuring the other person into sex, physically hurting or threatening to hurt them or sharing explicit images of them online.

**FIGURE 1.2: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO’VE BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE**



## How does this compare to other surveys?

Few other surveys provide estimates of dating and relationship violence among younger teens, but a 2017 [survey](#) of 74,908 students aged 11–16 in Wales found similar rates of physical abuse to our survey: 15% of those with dating experience reported being a victim of physical abuse and 7.6% reported perpetrating it themselves. This is almost identical to what we found: 15% of 13–17-year-olds in relationships in our survey had been a victim of physical or sexual abuse and 7.9% had perpetrated it themselves.

The Welsh survey estimates of emotional abuse were considerably lower than our own (24% had been victims and 17% perpetrators, compared to 36% and 28% of our sample, respectively), but the Welsh findings were only based on a single question about hurtful comments.

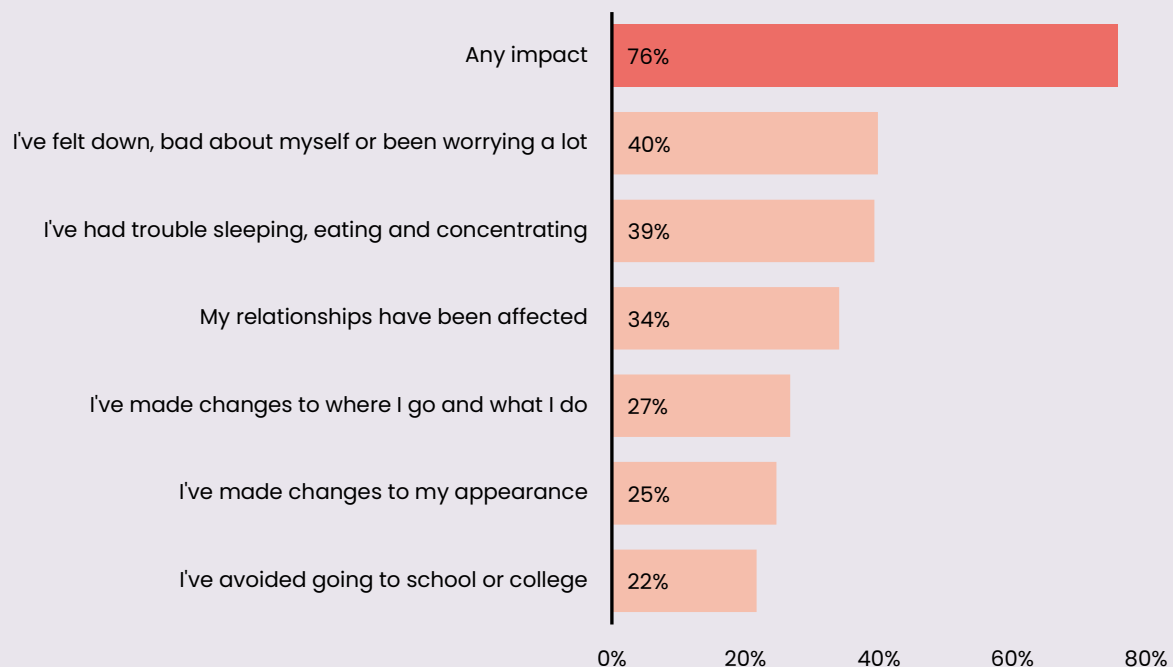
Almost three-quarters (73%) of teenage children who've perpetrated emotional or physical relationship abuse have also been a victim of it themselves. Going through a partner's phone or social media and monitoring a partner's location — the two most common behaviours — had a particularly large overlap of

children who'd experienced the behaviour and those who'd done it to their partner. Forty-eight per cent of 13-17-year-olds who'd gone through their partner's messages said their partner had done it to them too. Forty-two per cent of those who'd monitored a partner's location said their partner had done the same.

## Relationship abuse impacts teenage children's day-to-day lives.

Most 13-17-year-olds (76%) who'd experienced any form of relationship violence reported that it had a concrete impact on their day-to-day life. The most commonly reported impacts were emotional, such as feeling down, feeling bad about themselves or worrying (40%) or having trouble sleeping, losing their appetite and struggling to concentrate on things (39%). Over a third (34%) said their relationships with other people, such as friends or family, had been affected. A worrying 22% said they'd avoided going to school or college as a result of the things that had happened with their partner.

**FIGURE 1.3: IMPACTS REPORTED BY 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'VE EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE**



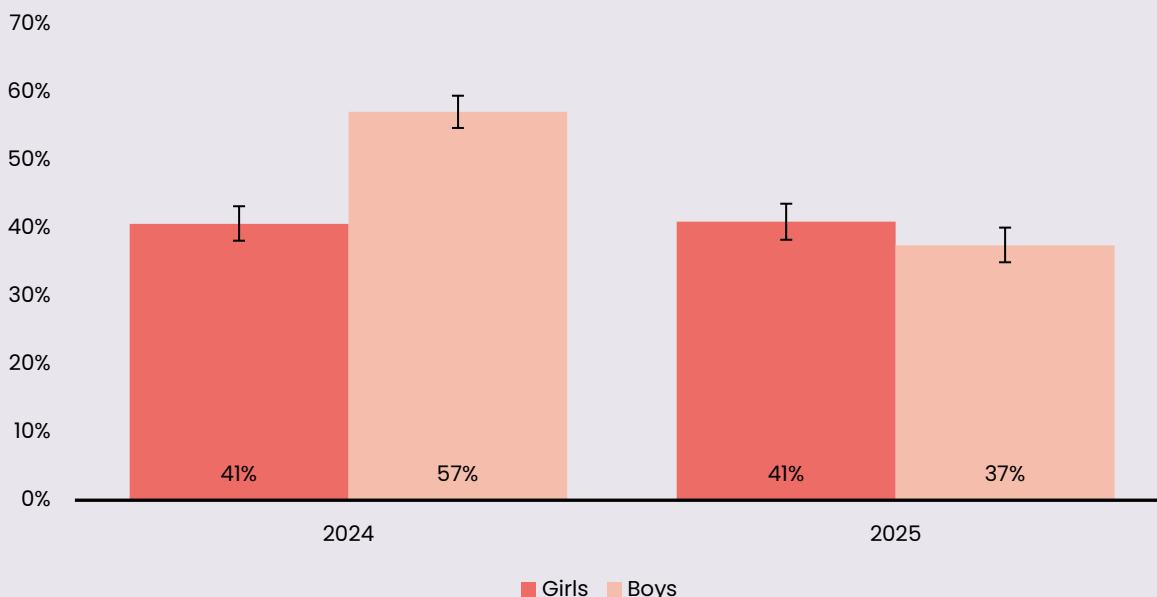
## It's common for both girls and boys.

### Girls and boys are equally likely to be abusive in relationships.

Overall, girls in relationships were more likely (41%) than boys in relationships (37%) to have experienced any form of emotional or physical abuse, although rates were high for boys as well. In terms of individual types of experience, girls were more likely to say their partner had tried to make them feel like they couldn't break up with them or leave the relationship (15% compared to 10% of boys in relationships); made them feel afraid to disagree with them (14% compared to 9.5% of boys in relationships); criticised their body or appearance (13% compared to 9% of boys in relationships); or forced or pressured them into sex (12% compared to 6.9% of boys in relationships). The only experience boys were significantly more likely to report was having their partner post explicit or intimate images of them online (6.1% of boys compared to 4.3% of girls).

Last year, we saw much more pronounced gender differences in the opposite direction: boys were more likely than girls to report experiencing all forms of relationship abuse. Fifty-seven per cent of boys in relationships had experienced emotional or physical relationship abuse, compared to 41% of girls. This year, the proportion of boys in relationships reporting relationship abuse fell significantly – down from 57% to 37%. In contrast, the proportion of girls reporting abuse has remained the same across the years. We can't say whether the difference across years is due to changes made to the sample or the framing of questions, but the large change for boys, compared to the stability for girls, could indicate that last year's results were impacted by the specific sample of boys who responded.

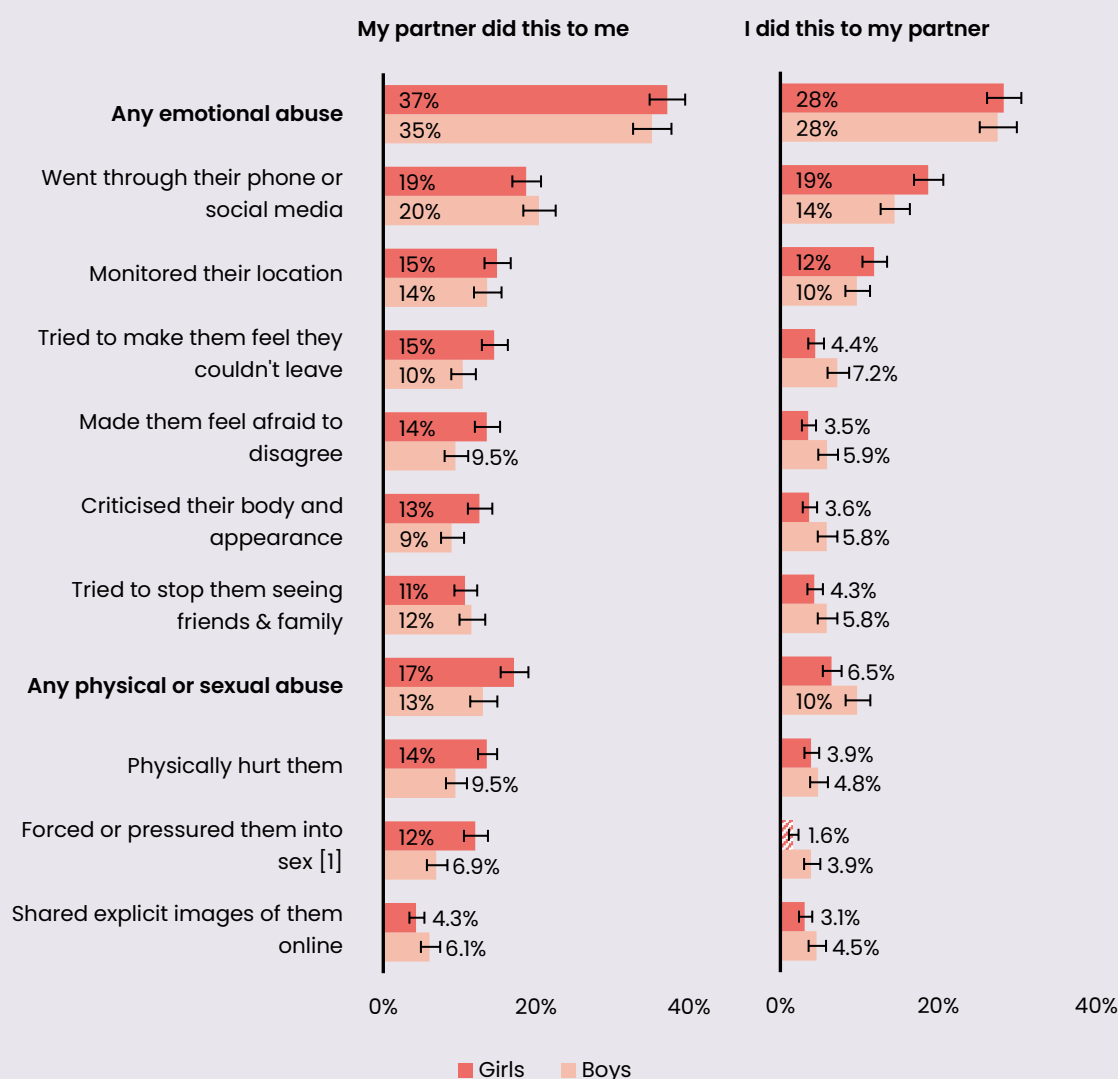
**FIGURE 2.1: PROPORTION OF GIRLS AND BOYS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO'VE EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, COMPARED TO LAST YEAR'S SURVEY**



*Notes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Figures for 2024 have been updated from those published last year to reflect the revisions in the weighting methodology — for more details, see the technical report on our website.*

When it comes to things children admit to doing, boys (29%) and girls (30%) were equally likely to say they'd committed at least one emotionally or physically abusive behaviour in their relationship. But gender differences emerged in terms of the types of behaviours children had engaged in. Girls were more likely to have perpetrated controlling behaviours — specifically, going through their partner's phone or social media to check who they'd been talking to and monitoring or tracking their location. Boys were more likely to have tried to stop their partner seeing friends or family; to have made them feel afraid to disagree with them or that they couldn't break up; or to have criticised their appearance, pressured them into sex or posted explicit images of them online. There were no gender differences in who'd physically hurt or been physically hurt by their partner. Overall, 49% of girls and 45% of boys in relationships had either perpetrated or experienced relationship abuse in the preceding year.

**FIGURE 2.2: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO PERPETRATED AND EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY GENDER**



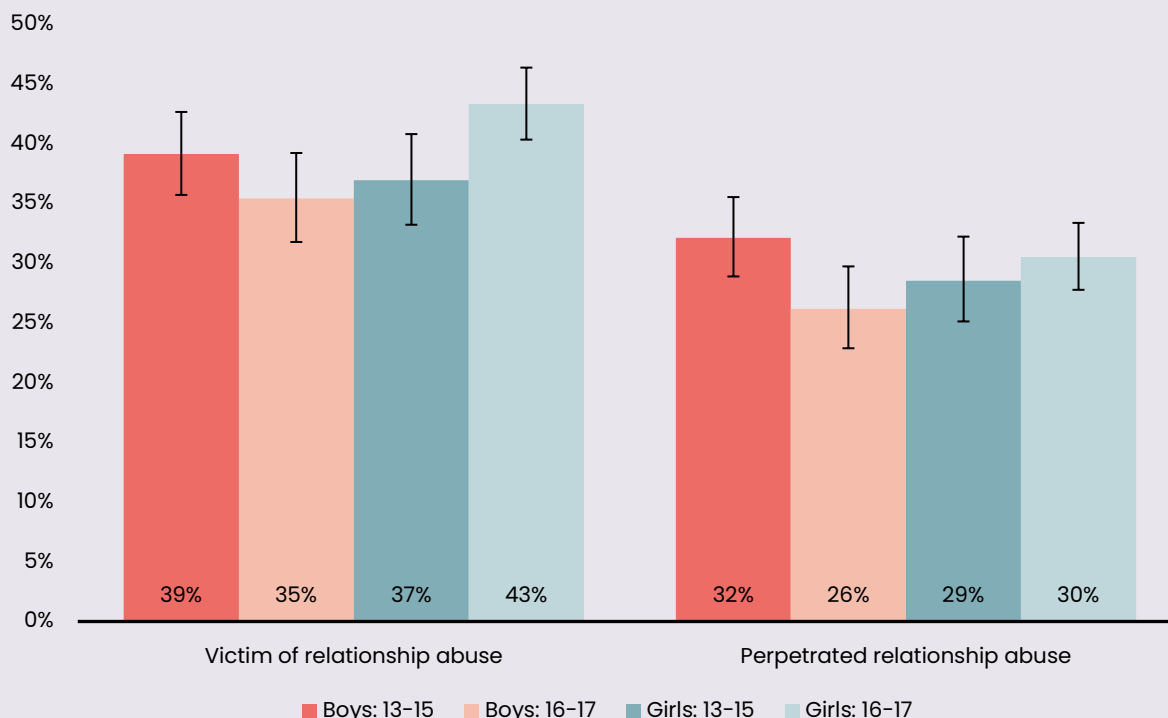
[1] Bars with striped shading have cell counts less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.

For every child who'd experienced some form of relationship violence, we asked what gender the person was who'd done it to them. They could select multiple options if they'd experienced abuse from multiple people of different genders. Fifty-six per cent said the perpetrating partner was male, while 44% said they were female. This difference is because girls were slightly more likely to have experienced relationship violence, while also being less likely to say that the person who did it to them was the same gender as them. Eighty-one per cent of girls who'd experienced relationship violence said the perpetrator was male, and 20% said they were female. Boys were slightly more likely to have experienced violence from a same-gender partner: 75% said the perpetrator was female, and 24% said they were male. For context, the [2023 Annual Population Survey](#) run by the Office for National Statistics found that 10% of 16-24-year-olds in the UK identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). National estimates of sexual orientation aren't available for younger age groups, but the available estimates show that the younger people are, the more likely they are to identify as LGB, so the numbers of same-gender partnerships in our survey aren't surprising.

The age profile for experiences of relationship abuse differed for boys and girls. Younger boys were significantly more likely than older boys to have committed relationship abuse. Thirty-two per cent of boys aged 13-15 had committed emotional or physical abuse, compared to 26% of boys aged 16-17. The age difference of those who'd committed abuse wasn't statistically significant for girls. In contrast, the age difference of those who'd experienced abuse wasn't statistically significant for boys whereas older girls aged 16-17 were significantly more likely to have experienced emotional or physical relationship abuse (43%) than younger girls aged 13-15 (37%).

**FIGURE 2.3: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO'VE BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY AGE AND GENDER**



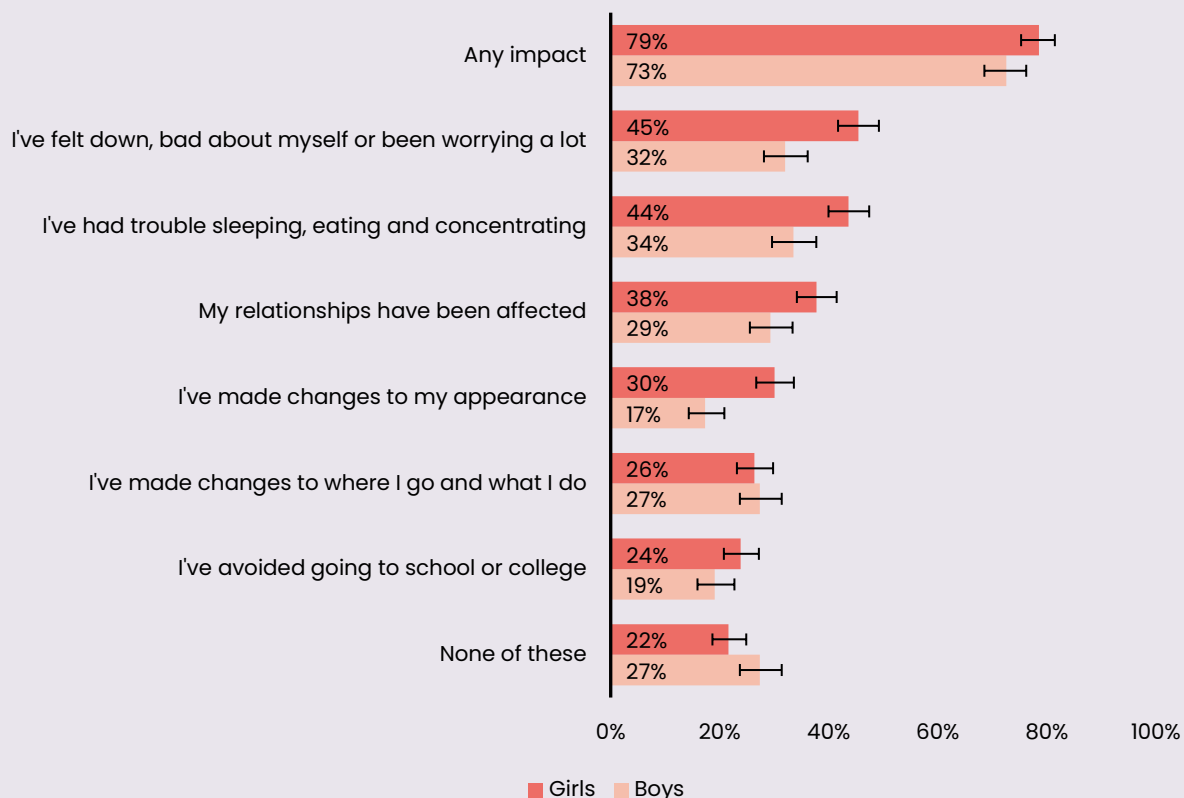
*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

Teenage children from White ethnic backgrounds in relationships (28%) were the least likely to have reported perpetrating abusive behaviours, compared to teens from Asian (38%), Black (36%) and mixed ethnicity (35%) backgrounds. They were also the least likely to report experiencing abuse (38%, compared to 41% of teens from Asian, 42% of teens from Black and 42% of teens from mixed ethnicity backgrounds), but the differences weren't statistically significant.

## Girls are more likely to report that relationship abuse has impacted their well-being.

Seventy-nine per cent of girls and 73% of boys who'd experienced relationship violence said it had impacted their life in some way. Certain impacts showed larger gender differences than others. In particular, girls were significantly more likely to say they'd made changes to their appearance as a result of the abuse — 30%, compared to 17% of boys. They were also more likely to say they'd felt down, bad about themselves or been worrying a lot — 45%, compared to 32% of boys.

**FIGURE 2.4: IMPACTS REPORTED BY 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'VE EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY GENDER**



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

## What are the experiences of teenage children with other gender identities?

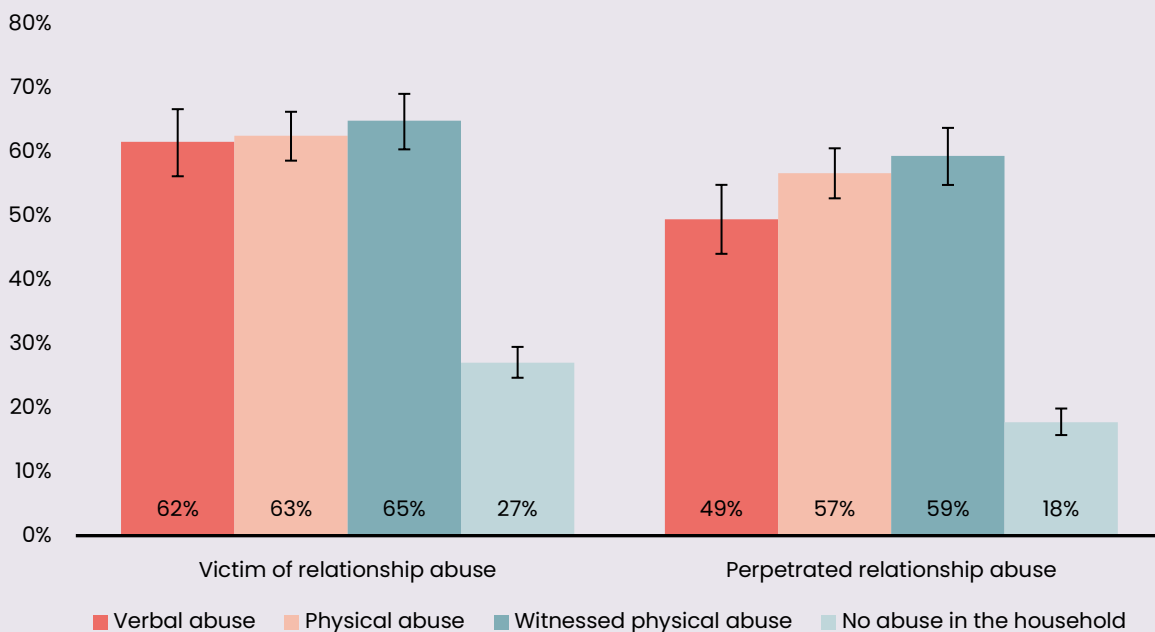
In total, only 108 children who responded to our survey said they were non-binary or had another gender identity. Of these, only 42 said they'd been in a relationship in the preceding year. These small numbers mean that we could not make any reliable estimates of the scale of relationship violence among non-binary children or those of other gender identities. But we can report what the 42 13–17-year-olds responding told us about their experiences.

Of the 42 13–17-year-olds who were non-binary or had a different gender identity, 11 had experienced some form of emotional or physical abuse from their partner, and nine had perpetrated this sort of behaviour themselves. This means they were slightly less likely to have perpetrated or experienced abuse than those who identified as boys or girls. But the number of responses was so small that this finding can't tell us anything about the experiences of a wider group.

## Teens who've experienced physical abuse at home are three times as likely to commit physical relationship abuse as those who have not.

In addition to asking about experiences of violence and relationship abuse, in our survey, we also asked about other experiences that might put children at increased risk of violence. This year, we added new questions about verbal and physical abuse in the home. We considered children to have experienced verbal abuse if their parents or guardians shout at them daily or almost every day. Physical abuse was measured by asking if the children's parents or guardians had ever pushed, slapped, hit or hurt them physically in any way. We also asked the children if they'd witnessed their parents or guardians physically hurting one another. Teenage children who'd experienced abuse in the home were significantly more likely to have experienced abuse in their romantic relationships than those who hadn't experienced any abuse at home. Sixty-two per cent of those who'd experienced verbal abuse, 63% of those who'd experienced physical abuse and 65% of those who'd witnessed physical abuse at home had been victims of relationship abuse. Those who'd experienced (57%) or witnessed (59%) physical abuse at home were more than three times as likely to have perpetrated emotional or physical relationship abuse as children who hadn't experienced abuse at home (18%). Verbal abuse in the home was less strongly related to relationship abuse perpetration, but rates were still high — half (49%) of those who'd experienced it had perpetrated relationship abuse themselves.

**FIGURE 2.5: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO'VE PERPETRATED AND EXPERIENCED RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE AT HOME**



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

## Teens affected by serious violence are more likely to experience abuse in their romantic relationships.

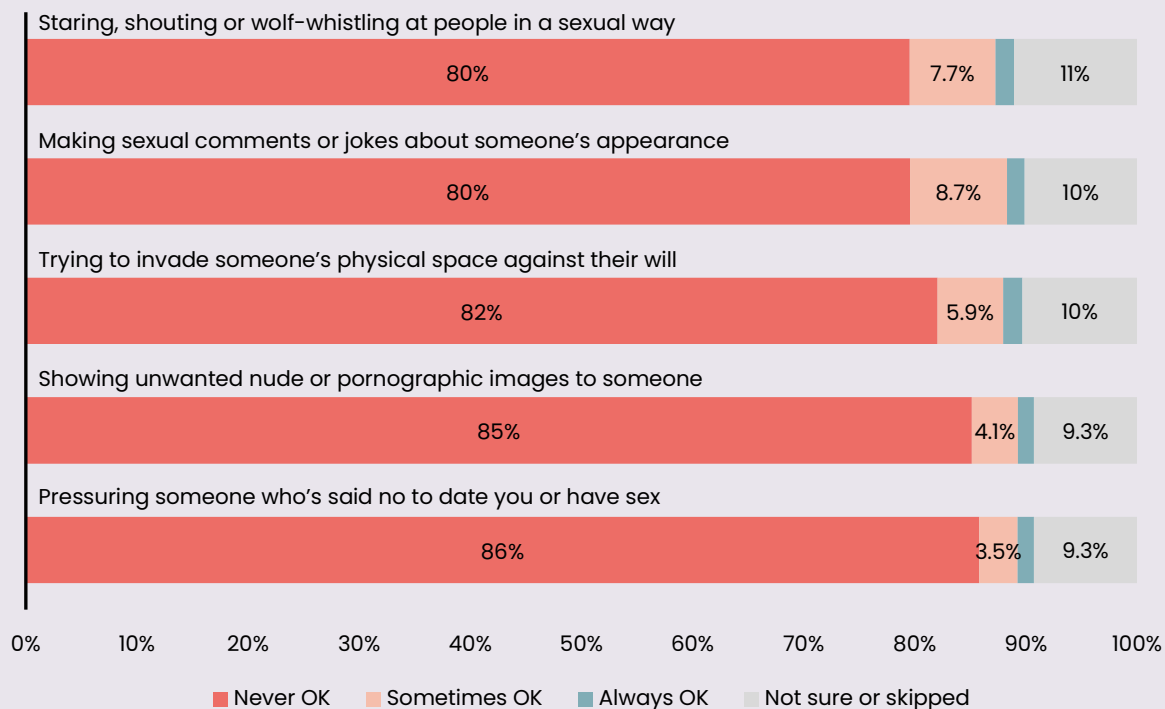
Experiences of violence outside of the home are also associated with relationship abuse. Teenage children who'd experienced serious violence (including physical assault, robbery, weapons violence and sexual assault) that required medical treatment by a doctor or at a hospital were significantly more likely to have experienced and perpetrated relationship abuse than those who hadn't experienced violence. Seventy-one per cent of teenage children in relationships who'd been victims of serious violence had experienced emotional or physical relationship abuse, compared to 29% of those who hadn't been a victim of violence, and 60% had committed it themselves, compared to 22% of those who hadn't been a victim of violence. Teens who'd perpetrated serious violence requiring medical treatment were similarly likely to have experienced relationship abuse (72%), and almost three-quarters of these (73%) had committed it themselves — three times the rate among teens in relationships who hadn't perpetrated violence (23%).

## Teens who view sexual aggression as acceptable are more likely to commit relationship violence.

### Most teenage children recognise that sexual harassment is never acceptable.

In this year's survey, we presented a range of sexually aggressive or non-consensual behaviours and asked respondents whether they thought it was OK for people to do these things. Most 13-17-year-olds thought the behaviours were never OK, although some behaviours had more of a split than others, and around one in ten chose 'not sure' or skipped questions. Making sexual jokes or comments about someone's appearance and staring, shouting or wolf-whistling at someone in a sexual way had the biggest split of opinions. Eighty per cent said they were never OK, but 8.7% thought sexual comments were sometimes OK and 1.6% thought they were always OK, while 7.7% thought staring, shouting or wolf-whistling was sometimes OK, and 1.7% thought it was always OK. Ten per cent and 11%, respectively, weren't sure. Reassuringly, more 13-17-year-olds said the more explicitly non-consensual behaviours were never OK. For example, 86% said it was never OK to pressure someone to date or to do sexual things when they've said they don't want to, but 3.5% said it was sometimes OK, and 1.5% said it was always OK.

**FIGURE 3.1: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO THINK BEHAVIOURS ARE NEVER, SOMETIMES OR ALWAYS OK**

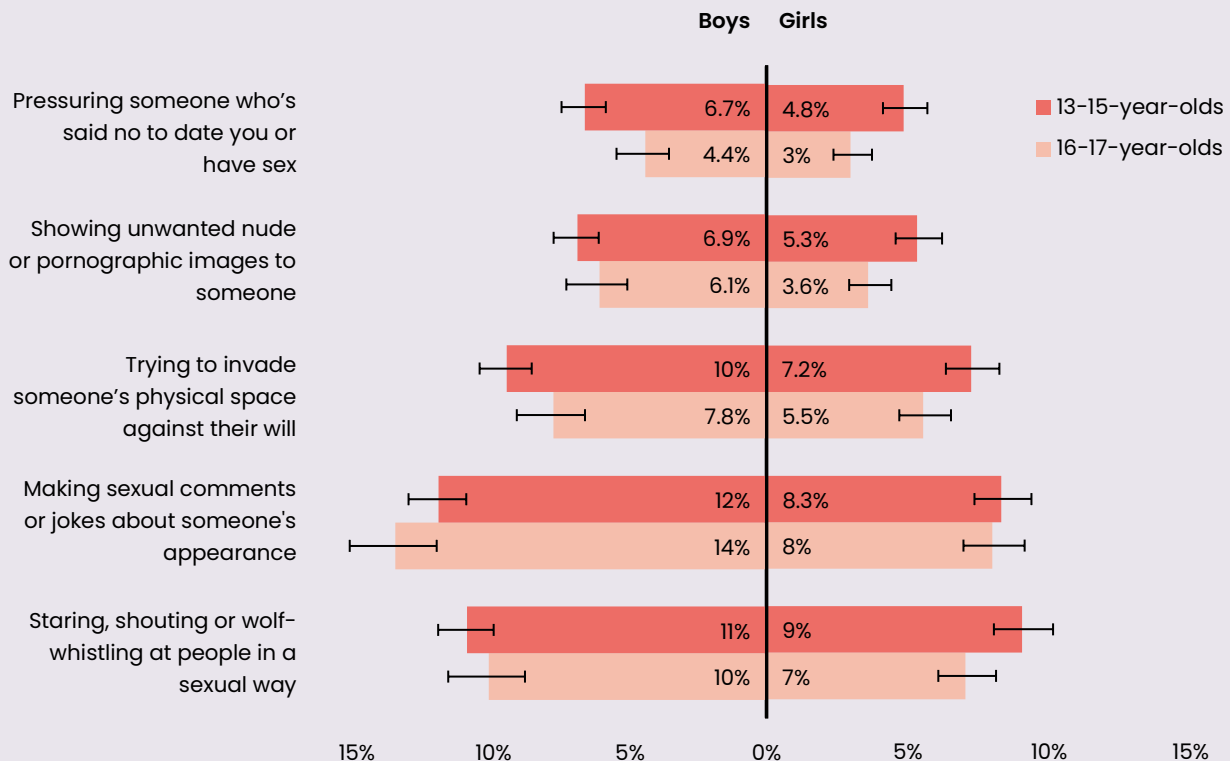


## Boys are more likely to view sexually aggressive behaviours as OK than girls.

The older teens get, the less acceptable they seem to view sexual aggression. Seventeen-year-olds were the least likely to view non-consensual sexual behaviours as OK, compared to younger teens. For example, 5.6% of 17-year-olds thought unwanted attempts to invade someone's physical space were sometimes or always OK, compared to 8.5% of 13-year-olds, and 3.8% of 17-year-olds thought unwanted sharing of nudes or pornographic images was sometimes or always OK, compared to 5.9% of 13-year-olds. Sixteen and 17-year-olds were significantly less likely than 13-15-year-olds to think that pressuring someone who's said no into dating or sex is OK (3.6% of 16-17-year-olds thought this was OK, compared to 5.8% of 13-15-year-olds).

Overall, boys were more likely than girls to think that all the behaviours we asked about were sometimes or always OK to do. And for the most part, girls and boys showed a similar pattern by age; older girls were less likely to think these behaviours were OK than younger girls, and likewise for boys. Girls aged 16-17 tended to be the least likely to agree with a behaviour, while boys aged 13-15 were the most likely. For example, 7% of 16-17-year-old girls thought staring, shouting or wolf-whistling at someone was OK, compared to 11% of 13-15-year-old boys. Three per cent of 16-17-year-old girls thought pressuring someone into dating or sex was OK, compared to 6.7% of 13-15-year-old boys. The only behaviour where the pattern by age differed was in regard to making sexual comments or jokes about someone's appearance – the older the boys were, the more likely they were to think that it was acceptable to do this.

**FIGURE 3.2: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO THINK BEHAVIOURS ARE SOMETIMES OR ALWAYS OK BY AGE GROUP AND GENDER**

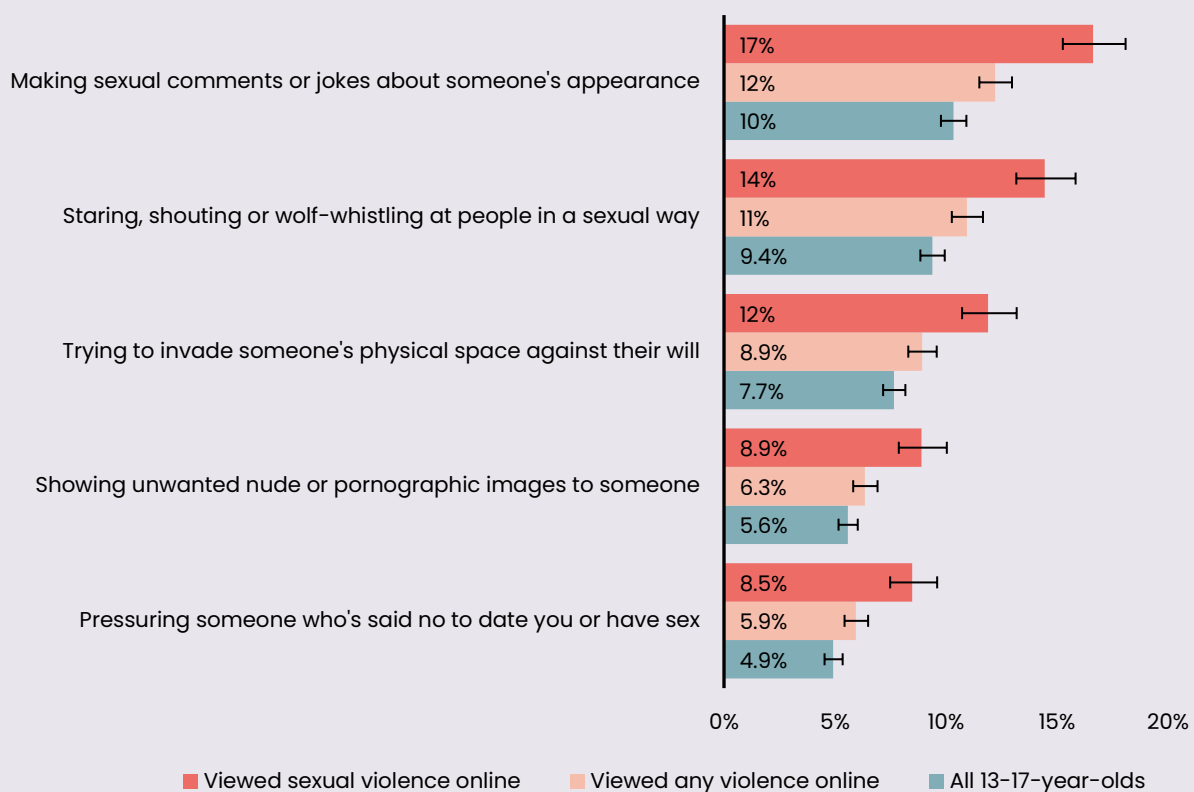


Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.

## Those exposed to sexual violence online and in-person are more likely to think it's OK ...

Teenage children who'd seen content on social media promoting violence against women and girls, sexually violent content and content glorifying violence were more likely to view all sexually aggressive behaviours as OK than were the total of all 13-17-year-olds or those who'd seen other types of violence (e.g. fights) online. For example, 17% of those who'd seen sexual violence on social media thought making sexual comments or jokes about someone's appearance was sometimes or always OK, compared to 12% of those who'd seen any form of violence online and 10% of all 13-17-year-olds. This difference extended all the way to views on the most explicitly nonconsensual behaviours we asked about – 8.5% of those who'd seen sexual violence online thought it was sometimes or always OK to try and pressure someone to date or have sex with them after they've said no, compared to 5.9% of those who'd seen any violence online and 4.9% of all 13-17-year-olds. However, we can't say whether this type of content impacts children's views or if those who have certain views are more likely to seek out or be suggested such content.

**FIGURE 3.3: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO THINK BEHAVIOURS ARE SOMETIMES OR ALWAYS OK, BY EXPOSURE TO VIOLENT CONTENT ONLINE**

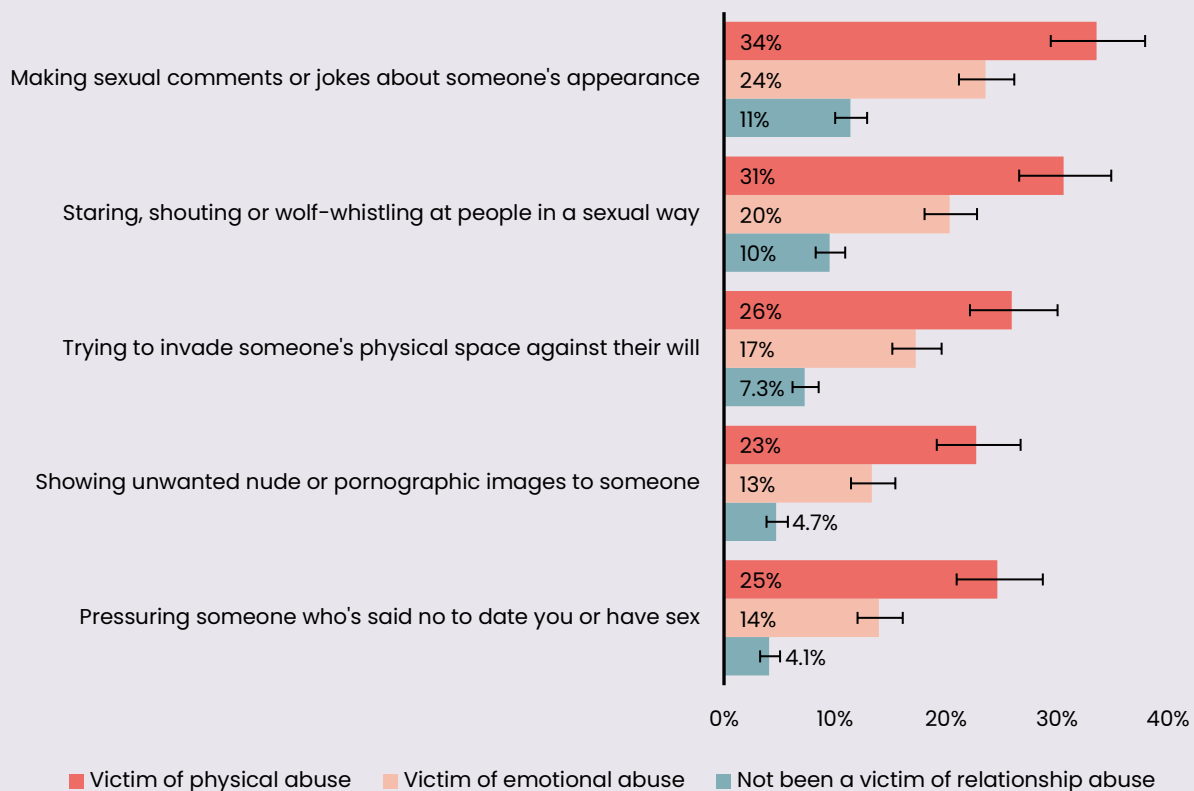


*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

Teenage children who'd experienced abuse in the home and in their romantic relationships were even more likely to think sexually aggressive and nonconsensual behaviours were OK. For example, 16% of those who'd experienced verbal abuse<sup>4</sup> by their parents thought it was sometimes or always OK to pressure someone into dating or sex after they'd said no – over three times the proportion across the total sample of all 13–17-year-olds. This rose even further: to 20% of those who'd experienced physical abuse from their parents and to 27% of those who'd witnessed physical abuse between their parents.

Among those who'd been in relationships, 14% of 13–17-year-olds who'd experienced emotional abuse from a partner said it was sometimes or always OK to pressure someone to date or to have sex when they'd said no, compared to 4.9% of all 13–17-year-olds. This rose to a quarter (25%) of those who'd experienced physical or sexual abuse – six times the rate for those in relationships who hadn't been a victim of any form of relationship abuse (4.1%).

**FIGURE 3.4: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO THINK BEHAVIOURS ARE SOMETIMES OR ALWAYS OK, BY EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE**



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

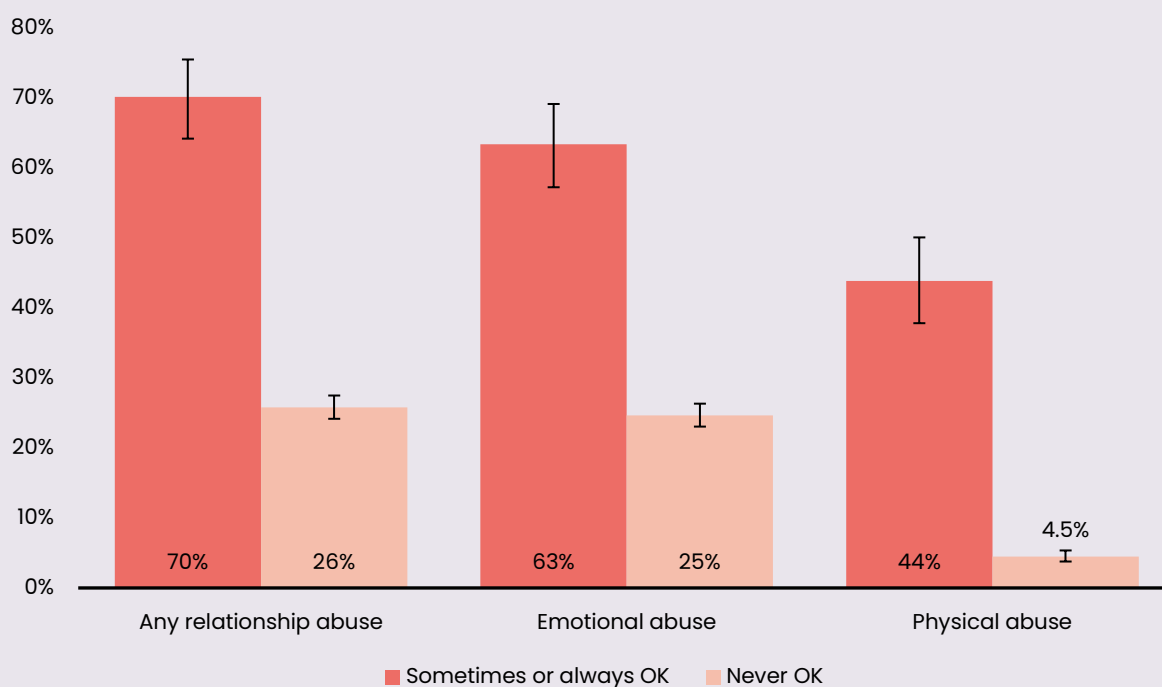
<sup>4</sup> Defined as being shouted at daily or nearly every day.

## ... and those who view it as OK are more likely to do it themselves.

Teenage children who'd perpetrated emotional or physical relationship abuse were also more likely to view sexual aggression as OK. For example, over a quarter (27%) of 13-17-year-olds who'd perpetrated emotional abuse thought it was sometimes or always OK to make sexual comments or jokes about someone's appearance, compared to 11% of those in relationships who hadn't perpetrated any abuse. This rose to over half (55%) of those who'd perpetrated physical abuse — nearly five times the rate of those who hadn't perpetrated abuse. Even more concerning, 18% of those who'd perpetrated emotional abuse and 45% of those who'd perpetrated physical abuse thought that pressuring someone to date or to have sex when they'd already said no is sometimes or always OK.

The reverse was also true: those who viewed sexual aggression as acceptable were more likely to have done it themselves. Among 13-17-year-olds who'd been in a relationship in the preceding year, those who thought pressuring someone into dating or sex was OK were more than twice as likely to have perpetrated emotionally abusive behaviours in their relationship (63%) and almost ten times as likely to have perpetrated physical or sexual relationship violence (44%) than those who thought it was never OK (25% and 4.5%, respectively).

**FIGURE 3.5: PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'VE PERPETRATED DIFFERENT TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, BY WHETHER THEY THINK PRESSURING SOMEONE WHO'S SAID NO TO DATE YOU OR HAVE SEX IS OK**



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals — this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

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