

Responses in practice to VAWG perpetrated by children and young people

Summary

- The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is seeking a team to conduct a review of the identification, risk assessment and responses to violence against young women and girls (VAWG) perpetrated by children and young people (CYP). This project will explore practice across local areas to build a picture of how VAWG perpetrated by children and young people aged 10–17 years-old is currently responded to across children’s services, youth justice and policing.
- Our hypothesis is that gaps in identification, coordination and support mean that many CYP who are causing VAWG-related harm are not receiving appropriate interventions at the right time. To improve responses to VAWG among children and young people, it is necessary to (1) understand how instances of CYP VAWG perpetration are currently responded to, from initial identification through to intervention; and (2) identify policy and practice changes needed to improve early identification, risk assessment, and pathways into evidence-based support for those causing harm.
- The study will inform YEF’s practice and system recommendations for key sectors, including children’s services, youth justice, policing, education, and youth services, on how to reduce VAWG amongst children and young people.
- The deadline for proposals is **9am 15th June 2026**. We intend to have appointed the successful team by 10th July. We aim to hold interviews on **23rd June**. The deadline for the full draft report is 7th December 2026.

Background

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluations to find out what works. We also synthesise the best available evidence from across the world and then aim to mobilise what we learn across various sectors to make a change to the lives of children.

It is also imperative that YEF fully understands the context in which children live, and in which services operate to support them. Only then can we make evidence-based recommendations on how best to reduce serious violence amongst children and young people. Alongside our [programme funding](#), and [evidence synthesis](#) work, we fund a wide range of research projects



(including data analysis, youth understanding work, and practice reviews) to better understand young people's lives, and the systems and services that surround them.

YEF works across [seven sectors](#) to use evidence to identify what works and what needs to change, so that children are better supported and violence reduces. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) cuts across all these sectors, and this research will develop evidence that contributes to activity across YEF's work.

How this research will be used

The study will inform YEF's recommendations for Practice and System Guidance for key sectors, such as children's services, youth justice, policing, education, and youth services, on how to reduce VAWG amongst children and young people.

- Practice Guidance is delivery-focused, guiding practice leaders and commissioners on what works to keep children safe from violence.
- System Guidance is system-focused, guiding policymakers and system leaders on the changes needed to enable and sustain best practice.

These recommendations will also draw upon YEF's wider work, including:

- Surveys of youth sector professionals and secondary school teachers on current referrals and pathways following concerns about young people demonstrating VAWG-related harms (to be commissioned).
- Projects YEF has funded and evaluated in the sector (such as forthcoming research on [youth justice responses to serious violence, weapons offences, and VAWG](#), and a [review of Multi Agency Child Exploitation Panels](#)).
- Relevant sections of the YEF [Toolkit](#) (e.g. bystander interventions to prevent sexual assault, and relationship violence prevention, and forthcoming topics such as harmful sexual behaviour prevention approaches and gender-based violence prevention).
- Our annual [Children, Violence and Vulnerability survey, the largest household survey](#) of young people's experiences of violence, which includes questions on relationship violence, sexual violence and online harms.
- Work with our [Youth Advisory Board](#) who will help shape decisions, generate their own projects and provide a youth perspective on our VAWG work.

Scope and definitions

YEF uses the following definitions to describe VAWG:

- Violence against women and girls (VAWG) refers to any act of gender-based violence *'that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty,*



whether occurring in public or in private life'. This definition aligns with that used in the government's [Freedom from Violence and Abuse Strategy](#).

Through this project, YEF is interested in the following scope of VAWG affecting children and young people:

- Peer-on-peer relationship and sexual violence among children and young people aged 10–17 years old – including sexual violence and child sexual exploitation.
- Responses to VAWG among children and young people at the secondary and tertiary prevention level (i.e. where harm has already taken place or young people have been identified as being at risk of causing harm).
- By sexual violence we are referring to offence types including rape and assault by penetration; other sexual offences (including sexual assault and exposure); child sexual abuse; sexual exploitation and grooming; making, possessing, or distributing indecent images of children (IIOC).
- We use the terms 'perpetrator' and 'perpetration' for clarity, however we know that many children who cause harm are themselves highly vulnerable, and may also be victims of violence as well.

Reliable data on the prevalence of VAWG perpetration among under-18s remains limited at both national and local levels, however, evidence suggests that VAWG amongst children and young people is widespread. YEF's [Children Violence and Vulnerability survey found](#) nearly half of teenagers in relationships (47%) report experiencing or perpetrating abuse, and an [Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#) reported widespread experiences of VAWG among young people. Child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) is often peer-on-peer, with over half of CSAE perpetrators aged 10–17 (52%).¹ Sexual offences by children have risen sharply and most cases of child-on-child CSAE involve victims and perpetrators who know each other.²

Safeguarding partners have a duty to protect children from harm both inside and outside the home, which means extra-familial harms including exploitation and abuse should trigger a welfare response. There is a lack of clarity, however, about how children and young people experiencing or perpetrating VAWG should be supported, with concerns that safeguarding approaches may not adequately respond to these instances.³ VAWG among children and young people falls between child protection systems and adult domestic abuse services,

¹ [Youth Justice Statistics 2023–24: Insights report](#) (May 2025) reported a 47% increase in proven sexual offences committed by children. This doesn't necessarily reflect a rise in the number of actual sexual offences but shows an increase in the number of sexual offences resulting in a caution or court sentence.

² NPCC [National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation \(CSAE\) Crimes Report](#) (January 2022 to December 202). In 55% of rapes reported to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) the victims and perpetrators knew each other: YJB (2025) [Youth Justice Statistics 2023–24: Insights report](#)

³ The Children's Society (2020) [Missing the Mark](#) report highlighted teenage relationship abuse is often under-recognised and poorly responded to, with inconsistent referral pathways and limited specialist provision.



meaning no single agency has clear responsibility.⁴ Consequently, responses can occur only after escalation, when serious harm has already taken place.

Multi-agency partnerships often face inconsistencies in processes and thresholds, making it difficult to determine whether the right children are being identified and supported. Schools often identify escalating risks but report uncertainty about appropriate responses and referral pathways. Harmful sexual behaviour and abuse in CYP's relationships are not consistently considered in local safeguarding partnerships. A recent joint inspection by HMIP and HMICFRS on the effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system highlighted limited understanding of VAWG-related sexual offences, gaps in training, and inappropriate responses across policing and youth justice as key barriers to effective diversion.⁵

Delays within the criminal justice system further exacerbate these issues. Long waits for court outcomes in sexual offence cases in particular mean that children and young people can spend extended periods without resolution, increasing the risk that they disengage from, or fall between, support provided by youth justice and safeguarding services.⁶

The aim of this project

Through this research, we aim to better understand how local children's services, youth justice and policing interpret and respond to VAWG among children and young people. This includes exploring how risk is conceptualised and assessed, and what pathways into support or intervention are available. The approach deliberately cuts across agencies to examine how children's services, youth justice and policing interact at different stages of the response and in different contexts.

The project will also examine how factors such as race, disability and prior experiences (such as contact with the criminal justice system and care system) influence both identification and response, as well as how data is collected and used. This will be complemented by analysis of local multi-agency working arrangements, policy frameworks and available service provision to investigate how well current responses align with existing policy and practice guidance on effective prevention and intervention.

By the end of the project, we aim to have a clearer picture of current practice, what is working well and where improvements could be made. The research will identify key barriers and facilitators to effective responses, including issues related to thresholds, coordination, data

⁴ Safe Lives report [Young People and Domestic Abuse](#) highlights that the inclusion of 16-17 years old within the definition of domestic abuse (Domestic Abuse Act 2021) left many services, historically designed around adult victims, feel poorly equipped, prepared or trained to respond to young people whose needs and risks often differ to those of adults.

⁵ HMIP & HMICFRS (2026) [The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending](#)

⁶ [Criminal court statistics quarterly: July to September 2025 - GOV.UK](#) show that sexual offences are among the cases most likely to be open for over a year (31%), indicating longer waits to trial. The Victims Commissioner [Justice Delayed](#) report (2025) highlights this impact these delays also have on victim uncertainty and impact on wellbeing.

sharing and service provision. It will also highlight examples of promising practice, helping to inform practical and policy recommendations aimed at strengthening early identification and improving multi-agency coordination, with the goal of reducing harm and improving outcomes for both victims and young people displaying harmful behaviours.

Race equity

There are significant racial disparities in children's experience of violence, and across all sectors involved in preventing these harms.⁷ Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children face additional barriers to disclosure and help-seeking for VAWG. Distrust of authorities, interpersonal and institutional racism, both under- and over-policing, adultification bias, fear of reprisal, and cultural stigma can prevent children and families seeking help.⁸ People with insecure or no immigration status are more vulnerable due to their lack of access to public funds and the disincentive for them to make themselves known to the authorities.⁹ Gypsy, Romani and Traveller CYP face heightened risk of VAWG due to stigma, marginalisation and barriers to services.¹⁰ A lack of specialist by-and-for services contributes to a lack of appropriately tailored support that is responsive to need.¹¹

Research questions

Note: this project is focused on lower levels of harm and excludes cases where a child has been charged by the police for VAWG-related harms. The scope includes:

- *10–17-year-olds known to children's services and youth justice services that have displayed attitudes and/or behaviours that suggest they might be at-risk of perpetrating VAWG-related offences;*
- *those that have received a No Further Action (NFA) outcome – Outcome 20, 21, 22, a community resolution or a Youth Restorative Disposal for VAWG-related harms; and*
- *those that have received a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution for a VAWG-related offence.*

We are keen to develop both a deep understanding of local responses alongside a nationally representative picture of current practice. We recognise the scope of this research is ambitious. These research questions are indicative, and we welcome bidding teams proposing amendments, and/or additional questions that they think could help meet the aims of the project. We would expect to finalise the detailed research questions and methods with the appointed team.

⁷ <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/racial-disproportionality/>

⁸ See for example: Hulley et al (2023) [Intimate Partner Violence and Barriers to Help-Seeking Among Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Immigrant Women: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of Global Research - PubMed](#); and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review ["It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children – Panel Briefing 4](#)

⁹ Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2021) Safety Before Status: [Migrant survivors | Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#)

¹⁰ [Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Women • NCDV and social work with romani and traveller children 11 march 2021.pdf](#)

¹¹ Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2021) [DAC Mapping-Abuse-Survivors Summary-Report Feb-2023 Digital.pdf](#)

1. Identification and risk assessment: How is VAWG amongst children and young people being identified and risk assessed?

- a. How are VAWG-related risks or behaviours identified by professionals working in children's services, youth justice and policing?
 - i. What assessment tools or frameworks are being used by these professionals and agencies?
 - ii. How are associations between victimisation and perpetration of VAWG-related harms identified and considered?
- b. What are the next steps or referral pathways that take place as a result of these assessment tools or frameworks?
 - i. For example, where is this information captured, and how is this information communicated to relevant partners?
 - ii. When and how are young people's assessments reviewed or updated?

2. Interventions and services: When harm is identified, what interventions or pathways are implemented?

- a. What services, programmes, or interventions are available to CYP:
 - i. That are at-risk of, or have already displayed VAWG-related behaviours or offences?
 - ii. Have experienced VAWG-related harms?
- b. What data and metrics are available to show (for example over the last 12 months):
 - i. How many CYP are at-risk of perpetrating VAWG-related harms?
 - ii. How many CYP have already displayed VAWG-related harms?
 - iii. How many CYP have been referred into, and how many have received, services, programmes, or interventions that aim to reduce risk of VAWG-related behaviours?
 - iv. Following any intervention received, is the risk of harm re-assessed at any stage, and/or is it known how many of these children re-present in police recorded incidents, or in referrals to children's services?

3. Race equity: Is disproportionality routinely examined by local partnerships, looking across children's services, youth justice and policing?

- a. How do identification, risk assessment, referrals, and service/programme/intervention participation vary for children and young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

Required outputs and suggested methodology

To answer the research questions, we would expect to see a detailed written discussion that may draw from a range of methods, including:

- a. Desk based research: a review of relevant national policy and guidance relating to the current recommended practice response to VAWG among children and young people.
- b. Practice case studies: to map how VAWG among children and young people is identified, assessed and responded to at a local level. Areas would be identified and approached to participate in agreement and collaboration between YEF and the research team, with a goal to have a range of geographical variation. For each site, we would anticipate:
 - a. Interviews and focus groups with practitioners and decision-makers across children's services, youth justice, policing and multi-agency partnerships (e.g. Community Safety Partnerships, Violence Reduction Units/Partnerships).
 - b. Review of case files where feasible, e.g. case histories or illustrative journey mapping;
 - c. Analysis of local datasets where feasible, e.g. multi-agency referral or case management data;
 - d. Comparative analysis of local policy implementation, to review what local and national guidance is being used and implemented in the context of VAWG among children and young people;
 - e. Identification of best practice, including opportunities to 'scale up' promising approaches.
- c. National data analysis: we would welcome suggestions for opportunities to analyse national data to explore the extent of VAWG among children and young people, and to answer our research questions.
- d. Codesigned national survey: using the learning from the research, and with involvement of practitioners and experts in this area, we would welcome ideas for conducting a national survey of practice across a wider number of geographical areas to capture a more comprehensive picture.
- e. Additional or alternative methods suggested by the research team.

We strongly encourage teams to consider how they could provide quantitative insights on the research questions.

At the end of the study, we would expect all these outputs to be drawn together in a written report, comprising:

- a. An executive summary
- b. An introduction
- c. Methodology
- d. Findings (written discussion of each of the research questions in turn)
- e. Conclusion and insights for policy and practice



Upon sharing the final report with us, we would expect the research team to provide a short presentation to the YEF team on the study's findings. YEF will pay for the peer review of the report.

Timeline

The deadline for proposals is **9am 15th June 2026**. We intend to have appointed the successful team by 10th July 2026. The deadline for the full draft report is **7th December 2026**, after which a peer review process will take place.

Budget

We expect the project to cost approximately £75-120k. However, we have some flexibility here, and will be judging bids on value for money rather than absolute cost. This range gives an indication of the scale of budgets we envisage - we will consistently prioritise proposals that give good value for money and strongly discourage research teams using these figures as the sole driver of their costs.

We would not expect VAT to be included in teams' budgets. Pass through VAT via sub-granting work to other organisations may in some circumstances be included. However, it is up to the bidding team to decide if they need to include VAT and any charges must be covered within the total grant amount.

We do not require budgets to use a specific template in proposals. Any approach that enables us to see total cost, the cost of project components, day rates, and number of days assigned to each team member is sufficient.

How to apply

YEF will judge research applications using the following criteria:

- **Subject expertise (20%).** How much expertise does the team have relating to VAWG perpetrated by children and young people?
- **Research experience (20%).** How much experience does the team have in delivering similar research projects? Does the team have expertise and experience in delivering research projects that aim to understand racial disparities?
- **Proposed methodological approach (40%).** What methodology has the team suggested, and does it match our needs?
- **Value for money (20%).** Does the bid represent value for money?

Where teams may be weak in any of the above areas, we encourage applicants to seek expert consultants and partnerships to supplement their bid.

Proposals should be no longer than 3,500 words, and should set out the team's expertise, experience, methodological approach, and budget. You may attach relevant documents to support your application - this will not be included in the word count.



As noted above, we are open to research teams suggesting their own research questions and methodology, and/or suggesting improvements and amendments to our own.

Please email your application to jess.southgate@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by 9am 15th June 2026. We aim to hold interviews on 23rd June. If you have any questions regarding the project, please email these to the same address by 9am 1st June 2026.