

Young people's views on responses to harmful sexual and relationship behaviour.

Summary

- The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is seeking a team (or individual) to conduct a qualitative research project with young people who are receiving, or have received, support or intervention for violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence-related behaviours or concerns.
- This is an opportunity to design a study with young people, ensuring their voices are shaping the design, tools and how findings are interpreted. We are looking for a team that can do this safely and ethically.
- We want to hear from young people on what has helped and what made things worse. What they tell us will inform what YEF recommends to schools, police, children's services and youth justice.
- The deadline for proposals is **9am on 14th September**. We intend to have appointed the successful team by **25th September**. The deadline for the full draft report is **22nd March 2027**.

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. Hearing directly from young people is central to this understanding. 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 on how to reduce VAWG amongst children and young people.

- YEF Practice Guidance is delivery-focused, guiding practice leaders and commissioners on what works to keep children safe from violence.
- YEF 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](#), responses in practice to VAWG by children and young people 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 young people's 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 including sexual violence and child sexual exploitation. While the age range for this

project is proposed at 16–21, we are interested in experiences and support that took place at a younger age (10–17).

- Responses to gender based violence 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; and making, possessing, or distributing indecent images of children (IIOC).

The project excludes anyone who is under active police investigation. Within this broader scope, the project focuses on young people aged 16 to 21, allowing us to reach those able to reflect on support received when they were younger.

The aim of this project

Adolescence is a critical period for prevention, as relationship norms and behaviours are formed, yet there is limited understanding of protective factors against young people using harm or of what works to prevent different forms of VAWG among young people. Much existing evidence focuses on victims' safety and harm reduction rather than preventing young people from using harmful behaviours, and it is unclear how far findings from adult-focused interventions apply to younger people. This project aims to understand the experiences of young people aged 16 to 21 who have caused, or been at risk of causing, VAWG and gender-based violence-related harms, focusing on the support they received and how they responded to it.

These young people are among the best placed to say what helped, what did not, and what a good response would look like. The project will build on existing evidence, and reach voices underrepresented in research to date, particularly boys and young people who have received support for their use of harmful behaviour. Throughout, we recognise that many of these young people face vulnerabilities and may also be victims of violence.

By the end of the project, we aim to have a clearer picture of what is working well in current support and where improvements could be made from the perspectives of young people. The research will identify key barriers and facilitators to effective engagement, including routes into support, labelling and stigma, trust in practitioners, the responsiveness of services to young people's identities and needs, and what sustains change when support ends. It will also highlight what young people themselves identify as promising practice, informing practical and policy recommendations to strengthen the design and delivery of support, with the goal of reducing harm and improving outcomes for both victim/survivors and the young people receiving support. The study will be designed with young people, whose involvement will shape the questions asked, the tools used and how findings are understood.

Race equity

There are significant racial disparities in children's experience of violence, and across all sectors involved in preventing these harms¹. 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.² 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.³ Gypsy, Romani and Traveller CYP face heightened risk of VAWG due to stigma, marginalisation and barriers to services.⁴ When it comes to accessing help for racially minoritised children, the specialist 'by-and-for' model (provision designed and led by and for the communities it serves) is well evidenced for minoritised survivors of VAWG⁵, but has rarely been extended to children who have caused harm.

We would like this project will work with young people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including White young people. The research should aim to hear from young people from Black, Mixed Heritage, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds within the sample of young people it engages, and we will expect proposals to set out the relationships and routes that could help involve them. There will be no set targets given the size of the sample, and where the study cannot speak to these experiences in depth, this should be discussed in the final report.

Research questions

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

¹ Youth Endowment Fund, Racial Disproportionality in violence affecting children and young people. Available : <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/racial-disproportionality/>

² 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 Meta synthesis of Global Research](#) – PubMed; and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review ["It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children](#) – Panel Briefing 4

³ Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2021) [Safety Before Status: Migrant survivors | Domestic Abuse Commissioner](#).

⁴ NCDV, [Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Women](#), and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Work Association (2021) [Working Together to Safeguard Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families](#).

⁵ Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales (2023) *A Patchwork of Provision: How to Meet the Needs of Victims and Survivors of Domestic Abuse in England and Wales*.

project. We would expect to finalise the detailed research questions and methods with the appointed team.

1. How do boys and young men come to receive support for harmful sexual or relationship behaviour, and how do they experience it?

- How did boys and young men come into support (e.g. via school, police, social care), and how did that route shape their feelings about it?
- How did their experience of the service, and the practitioners delivering it, affect their engagement?
- What did they find helpful or unhelpful about the support they received, and did they have a say in shaping it?

2. How do boys and young men make sense of their behaviour, and what helps that understanding shift?

- How do they understand and explain their behaviour, and what shapes this (for example emotions, peer norms, ideas about gender and masculinity, and online influences)?
- How do they feel about their behaviour, and how has this changed over time?
- Where their understanding of the impact of their behaviour on others grew, what helped?
- What role, if any, do peer groups play in whether they change their behaviour, for example through stigma, ridicule or support?

3. What do boys and young men need from support relationships that are responsive to their identity?

- Who do they want working with them, and what makes someone feel like the right (or wrong) person?
- What role does practitioner gender play in building or losing trust?
- What do racially minoritised boys and young men need from culturally relevant support, and where have they seen this done well, or badly?
- How do neurodivergent boys and young men experience support, and what, if anything, needs to be different for it to work for them?

4. What does lasting change look like, and what do boys and young men need to sustain it?

- What happens when support ends, and what makes a good ending?
- What do they need beyond formal support, in their relationships, peer groups, families or communities, to maintain change?
- Was there anything they feel should have been available to them sooner?

Required outputs and methodology

To answer the research questions, we invite teams to adapt the approach set out here. Our

starting proposal is for in-depth qualitative work with a minimum of 12 young people aged 16 to 21 who have caused VAWG-related harm or have been identified as at risk. We deliberately leave the choice of methods open: proposals should set out the methods considered most appropriate for this sample.

We would like teams to set out how the design, tools and interpretation of findings will be developed with young people. Within the scope of the project, teams should set out what is feasible, e.g., a small advisory group of three or four young people, paid for their time, shaping the work at key milestones such as design, sense-making and reporting.

Our priority is a team that combines subject expertise with the ability to reach and recruit young people within a limited timeframe and ensure ethical, safe engagement throughout. By subject expertise we mean a strong understanding of adolescent harmful sexual behaviour and peer relationship abuse, and the confidence to hold conversations with young people about harm they have caused. We are particularly interested in teams already embedded in practice with young people, with existing relationships, safeguarding built into their ways of working, and credible routes to recruitment. Proposals should set out how they will approach ethics and safeguarding, including the route to ethical approval and how disclosures will be handled.

At the end of the study, we would expect to see a written report, comprising:

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

We will not stipulate a length, but we imagine a report could be around 25–50 pages long. The Peer Action Collective's [report](#)⁶ on school exclusions is a good example of a report that is accessible, transparent about its methods, and shaped by young people's input. 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. The report will then go through an editing process. As part of this, YEF will pay for it to be peer reviewed: one or two independent researchers with relevant expertise will read the report and comment on the methods, the analysis, and how well the findings support the conclusions. This happens alongside our own internal review, and applicants should plan time for 1–2 rounds round of edits in response to that feedback. We will agree the timeline with you.

⁶ Haringey Peer Action Collective (2025) The role of schools as a protective factor in youth violence: exploring young people's experiences of support during exclusions and suspensions in London. London: The McPin Foundation and The Peace Alliance.

After publication, will ask the successful organisation to join YEF in the dissemination of the report and its findings. In practice this could look like providing a quote for press materials, speaking to a journalist, or collaborating on social media content.

Timeline

The deadline for proposals is **14th September**. We may email questions or ask for a short interview during the w/c 21st September if more information is needed. We intend to have appointed the successful team by **25th September**.

The deadline for the full draft report is **22nd March 2027**, after which a peer review process will take place, with a final draft due 26th April.

Budget

We expect the project to cost approximately £30-40k. 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%).** Does the team have the skill and experience to hold discussions with young people about harm they have caused? We are looking for strong understanding of adolescent harmful sexual behaviour and peer relationship abuse, gender dynamics and coercive control as they play out in young people's relationships.
- **Recruiting and supporting young people (25%).** Does the team have the relationships and routes to recruit ~12 young people from our target scope within the project timeframe? How will they engage participants ethically and safely, including how disclosures and safeguarding concerns will be handled, and what support is in place for young people during and after taking part?
- **Research experience (20%).** How much experience does the team have in delivering similar research projects, and specifically in research that includes young people's participation?

- **Proposed methodological approach (25%).** What methodology has been suggested, does it match our needs, how will the voices of children and young people be gathered and represented, and how will young people shape the design, tools and interpretation of findings?
- **Value for money (10%).** 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 2,500 words, and should set out the team's expertise, experience, methodological approach, and budget. You may attach relevant documents to support your application – these 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 youthvoice@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by 9am on 14th September. We welcome any questions regarding the project, please email these to the same address by 9th September.