ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

McMahon, Ellie
M.A. Gender, Globalisation, and Rights
National University of Ireland, Galway

Abstract *Background: A* large proportion of young people's lives now takes place online where they pursue community, creativity and self-expression. However, as young people's intimate relationships move to the digital sphere, digital technology risks becoming a tool of abuse.

*Methods: A*n online survey conducted with 500 young Irish women and men aged 18 to 25 years old and four qualitative focus groups with young Irish women and men with varying levels of experience with intimate relationship abuse.

Results: 49% of young women aged 18 to 25 years old who had experienced intimate relationship abuse experienced the abuse digitally. The most common form of digital intimate relationship abuse experienced was harassment by phone, text, email or private message. Young women perceived digital technology to be a key tool of abuse in intimate relationships. It is seen as easy to perpetrate but difficult to address and seek help for because of 'internalised stigma' and the perception that such abuse is not taken seriously within society.

Discussion: Further in-depth research is needed to gauge the prevalence and nature of intimate relationship abuse perpetrated digitally. Although criminal legal protections have improved in Ireland in recent years, civil remedies are now needed particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse. Education and awareness-raising that comprehensively reflects young people's lived experiences in terms of sex, relationships and technology are needed. These must be firmly rooted within the overall context of the gender (in)equalities that are part of young people's lives in and outside of the home.

Keywords: intimate relationship abuse, young women, digital abuse, online abuse, image-based sexual abuse

Introduction

Digital abuse in an intimate relationship can be defined as 'a pattern of behaviors that control, pressure, or threaten a dating partner using a cell phone or the Internet' (Reed et al, 2016). It is important to note and recognise that digital abuse is not in itself a form of abuse, but instead a tool that perpetrators may use to abuse their current or former partners or coercively control them. Abuse perpetrated in this way can have wide-ranging and devastating effects on victim-survivors, not least because digital abuse can seem inescapable and all-encompassing as young people's lives become ever more entwined with digital devices and the online world (Women's Aid, 2020). Digital intimate relationship abuse is also known as Digital Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (DIPVA) (Hellevik, 2017; Hellevik, 2019), Digital Dating Abuse (DDA) (Hinduja and Patchin, 2020; Reed et al, 2016) and Cyber Dating Abuse (CDA) (Ouytsel et al, 2020). The term digital intimate relationship abuse is used in this study as the qualitative research findings showed some evidence indicating that the word 'dating' was not used in the context of young people's intimate relationships in Ireland.

Ouytsel et al, note that 'just as with other forms of bullying, dating violence is no longer limited to physical spaces' (2020, p.5157). More and more of young people's lives are moving into the digital sphere as they use the internet to find community, pursue passions and to connect with peers. Hinduja and Patchin note that 'much of adolescent development now takes place online, allowing youth to create, explore, produce, and define their identities and relationships through texting, social media interaction, multiplayer gaming, and related forms of connectivity' (2020, p.2). This has inevitably had an effect on young people's intimate relationships as 'the establishment, maintenance and/or termination phases of their intimate relationships also play out in the digital arena' (Lenhart cited by Hellevik, 2017, p. 193) and it is now recognised that digital media is a context wherein significantly harmful behaviours within an intimate relationship can take place (Reed et al, 2016).

Although there is a deficit in data related to digital intimate relationship abuse carried out in Ireland, there is some international data. A survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) found that 19% of Irish women aged 18 to 29 years old had experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 with 11% having experienced cyberstalking since the age of 15. Another U.S. study found that nearly half of female high school students who reported experiencing sexual or physical abuse by a dating partner had also been bullied electronically (Vagi et al, 2015). In the U.K., one study found that 38% of the young people supported by Young People's Violence Advisors (YPVAs) or other specialist practitioners were identified as at risk of experiencing online intimate partner abuse. It was found that 96% of those experiencing or at risk of experiencing online abuse were female (SafeLives, 2015). Other research suggests young women are at a higher risk of intimate relationship abuse than young men. For example, in a systematic review of 30 quantitative studies based on associated factors related to 'digital intimate partner violence and abuse among youth' it was established that the majority of the studies in the review found that women were more likely to be victims of DIPVA [digital intimate partner violence among youth] (Hellevik, 2017). Other research also shows that 'digital media plays a central role in the victimization' of young women in abusive intimate

relationships (Øverlien et al, 2020). This study aims to fill the gap in relation to Irish and European research on digital intimate relationship abuse perpetrated against young women.

Methodology and Methods

This article is based on research conducted by Red C Research and Marketing in conjunction with Women's Aid in Ireland. The raw data sets were reexamined within the context of this article. A mixed-methods approach was used in the form of an online survey and a number of focus groups. The original research that this article is based on examines all forms of intimate relationship abuse perpetrated against both men and women. The aim of the research was to gauge how young men and women perceived intimate relationship abuse, whether they had personally experienced it, knew someone who had experienced it, or had not experienced it at all. However, this article narrows the scope and offers a more in-depth analysis of the findings related to young women and digital intimate relationship abuse.

The rationale for this specific focus is based on three key factors: Firstly, the number of young women experiencing digital intimate relationship abuse was found to be significant in the original research and a more acute analysis of the findings was found to be warranted due to the gap in data related to the topic in Ireland but also within Europe. Secondly, although the results shown here are weighted, the final sample size for men is too low to make any accurate comparisons between young men and women's experiences, or to go into any great depth in relation to the experiences of young men and digital intimate relationship abuse. This is due to a small number of young men who said they had been subjected to intimate relationship abuse. The focus groups were mostly held with young women, with just one out of four focus groups conducted with men, and so the data in relation to young women is more rich both quantitatively and qualitatively. Lastly, focusing on abuse that is perpetrated digitally is timely as significant changes in the legal landscape in relation to harmful and offensive digital communications and image-based sexual abuse are now taking place in Ireland.

Quantitative Methods

Five-hundred 18 to 25-year-olds living in Ireland took the online survey from the 8th to the 15th of September 2020. The survey questions were designed collaboratively with senior staff at Women's Aid in order to draw on the organisation's decades of frontline experience working with victim-survivors of intimate relationship abuse. The data collected was then weighted across gender, region and social class to ensure a nationally representative sample based on the latest projections from the Central Statistics Office. The online survey was conducted through Red C Research and Marketing and was in no way visibly attached to Women's Aid. Survey respondents could answer anonymously or they could opt to include their contact details upon completion of the survey if they wanted to take part in the focus groups. The online survey consisted of 15 questions in total. Two questions were related to online abuse or abuse using digital technology. Table 1 below outlines the series of questions participants were led through if they said they had personally experienced digital intimate relationship abuse. See appendix 1 for background information provided to those who participated in the survey.

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

Question	Choice of Answers
Q.3a Did online/abuse using digital technology form part of the abuse that you experienced?	1. Yes 2. No 3. I don't know
Q.4a Which, if any, of the following describe the specific nature of online/abuse using digital technology you experienced?	1. Monitoring/stalking through online platforms 2. Harassment by phone/text/email/private message 3. Demanding access to passwords (e.g. phone, social media) 4. Hacking social media accounts and posting messages/materials 5. Taking images/videos without permission 6. Threats to share sexually explicit/intimate photos/videos 7. Actual sharing of explicit/intimate photos/videos without permission 8. GPS Tracking

Table 1. survey questions related to digital intimate relationship abuse

Qualitative Methods

The preliminary quantitative findings were then used as a basis for the focus groups. Also conducted by Red C Research and Marketing, the focus groups were recruited through the online survey and through the Red C Recruiter Network. Four separate focus groups were held: one with women who had experienced intimate relationship abuse personally, one with women who knew someone who had experienced intimate relationship abuse, one with women who had no experience of intimate relationship abuse either personally or through someone else and one with men, half of whom knew someone who had experienced intimate relationship abuse and half of whom did not know anyone or have any personal experience of the issue. The focus groups were also divided across class divisions. Table 2 below shows the breakdown of the focus groups.

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

Group	Gender	Age	Class Segmentation	Experience	Date
1	Female	18 - 25	ABC1	Knew someone who experienced intimate relationship abuse	13.10.20
2	Female	18 - 25	C1C2	Personally experienced intimate relationship abuse	14.10.20
3	Female	18 - 25	DE	No experience with intimate relationship abuse	14.10.20
4	Male	18 - 25	BC1C2	Half knew someone who had experienced intimate relationship abuse, half had no experience with intimate relationship abuse	15.10.20

Table 2. Description of focus groups

As with the survey, all participants were 18 to 25 years old and living in Ireland. The aim of the focus groups was based on four key themes: describing the kind of abuse that happens in intimate relationships, discussing intimate relationship abuse amongst young people, disclosure in relation to intimate relationship abuse, and a discussion around what drives intimate relationship abuse and what the barriers are to seeking help. The focus groups were conducted through Zoom and were facilitated by a member of the Red C Research and Marketing Team. All participants' cameras were turned off and they were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. See Appendix 2 for the discussion guide on digital intimate relationship abuse.

All research participants were provided with contact information for domestic violence support organisations for men and women after they had participated in the research.

Results

Quantitative Findings

If participants said that they had personally experienced intimate relationship abuse, they were then asked a series of questions related to that abuse. Table 3 below shows the results related to digital abuse. The base for this data set is 'all personally experiencing abuse'. The data shows that 49% of women had experienced intimate relationship abuse online or using digital technology.

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

	Q1. Personally Abused Woman	Q5a. Relationship to abuser
	Yes - female	Female abused by partner
Unweighted Base	82	67
Yes	48%	49%
No	42%	39%
Prefer not to say	-	-
Don't know	10%	12%

Table 3. Findings for Q3a. Did online/abuse using digital technology form part of the abuse you/the person you know experienced?

In Question 4a. participants were asked to choose from a list to describe the nature of the online abuse using digital technology they had been subjected to by their partner. Table 2 shows the results of this question. The findings show that harassment by phone, text, email, and private message was most common with 47% of women having experienced this. Although a good deal fewer women had experienced this, many women also had their partners demand their passwords to their phone or social media accounts (25%). A significant number of women said they were monitored/stalked using online platforms (22%). A number of women also experienced image-based sexual abuse: 20% had images or videos taken without their permission, 15% said that their partner threatened to share sexually explicit or intimate images or videos of them without their permission and 17% actually had explicit or intimate images or videos shared with others without their permission. Other women had their social media accounts hacked into with messages or other materials posted by their partner (8%), 11% were tracked using GPS and 3% had spy software installed onto their digital devices.

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

	Female abused by male partner
Base	66
Harassment by phone/text/email/private messages	47%
Demanding access to passwords (e.g. phone, social media)	25%
Monitoring/stalking through online platforms	22%
Taking images/videos without permission	20%
Threats to share sexually explicit/intimate photos/videos	15%
Hacking social media accounts and posting messages/materials	8%
GPS tracking	11%
Actual sharing of explicit/intimate photos/videos without permission	17%
Using Spyware software	3%

Table 4. Findings for Q4a. Which, if any, of the following describe the specific nature of the online/abuse using digital technology that you experienced

Qualitative Findings

A key tool of abuse

Online abuse and abuse using digital technology was recognised by focus group participants as an effective and easy way to carry out intimate relationship abuse. However, it was described as a method of intimate relationship abuse that is difficult to escape and to address by seeking assistance and support in relation to the abuse. Intimate relationship abuse that occurs online or through the use of digital technology was cited as more commonly experienced and perpetrated by younger people in comparison by older people. Digital abuse was also noted as a particularly effective way of inflicting psychological or emotional abuse on a partner.

A Form of Abuse with No Reprieve

The 'always on' nature of digital technology and the internet was seen as particularly difficult as it gives victim-survivors less chance to escape the abuse as they may always be contactable even if they are not physically with their abusive partner. Creating fake accounts was seen as something that's very straightforward, easy to do and this gives a lot more opportunity for digital

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

abuse. Young women described this kind of abuse as 'constant', 'draining' and 'exhausting'. One young woman with firsthand experience of intimate relationship abuse using digital technology said that:

> *It can be particularly draining. You're always expected to be reachable, and if not you are doing something wrong.*

The Direct Messaging Function

When asked about the kind of platforms where digital abuse takes place, platforms with a direct messaging function were seen as the most likely platforms for this to happen. This includes Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and Whatsapp. The application TikTok was seen as more popular with those under 18 rather than the 18 to 25-year-old cohort that the focus groups are based on. The application Snapchat, however, was seen as a platform that could be particularly dangerous for those at risk of intimate relationship abuse. It's common, for example, for screenshots to be taken of nude images without the person's consent. It can also be difficult to capture evidence of the abuse, because of the way the app works. Snapchat 'stories' only last for 24 hours and then they disappear. The young women in the focus groups saw all-men Whatsapp groups as 'breeding grounds' for 'toxic', sexist behaviours.

Difficult to Address

Participants discussed that although having a diminished online presence would lessen the chances of experiencing intimate relationship abuse digitally, they did not see this as a viable option for young people in 2020. One young woman noted the pressure that can come from others to leave social media platforms if they are experiencing abuse:

> *I think people can be more dismissive of it too, why don't you just get off that platform?*

There was a feeling among participants that digital abuse is not something that is taken seriously culturally or within the legal system and many said that they would be reluctant to seek help if they experienced abuse in this way. One young woman noted that the 'internalised stigma' is higher when it comes to digital intimate relationship abuse and that this is a barrier to seeking help when it does occur. Another young woman noted that she felt that this kind of abuse just wasn't taken seriously.

Discussion

Prevalence

This research shows that of the young women in Ireland aged 18 to 25 years old surveyed who experienced intimate relationship abuse, just under half had experienced this abuse digitally. Those who had experienced abuse in this way found it particularly difficult to cope with, as it was difficult to escape from and perceived as risky to speak out about and seek help for, as they felt that there was a high chance that intimate relationship abuse using digital technology would

not be taken seriously by those around them. However, the main aim of the research was to examine intimate relationship abuse against young women in Ireland in all its forms rather than just digital abuse. Further research is urgently needed that gives in depth insight and analysis of the prevalence, nature and impact of digital intimate abuse. Research on this phenomenon is only in its infancy (Hinduja and Patchin, 2020, Hellevik, 2017) and 'as the majority of research on DIPVA is carried out in the U.S., an increased focus on this issue in European research is critical for the accurate identification of potential aspects unique to the European context' (Hellevik, 2017). Research on image-based sexual abuse in particular is needed to assess the specific patterns, harms and impacts related to this abuse in an Irish context. McGlynn et al note that research among groups such as 'minoritised, indigenous, migrant and refugee peoples, gender and sexuality diverse peoples, sex workers, and those with a disability, is vital to explore intersectional experiences of image-based sexual abuse in more detail' (2020, p.8). Research that targets young women under the age of 18 is also needed in relation to this tool of abuse. Research conducted by Hellevik (2019) on teenagers' personal accounts of experiences with DIPVA showed that the teenagers aged 15 to 18 years old who had experienced this form of abuse were subjected to harassment, control, monitoring and sexual coercion. The research shows that the abuse was multifaceted and had a severe impact on the teenagers' lives. Research into the pattern between intimate relationship abuse and digital intimate relationship abuse is also needed and it is such in depth analysis and examination of this phenomenon that should guide all prevention and protection strategies (Reed et al, 2017).

Protection

The young women that took part in the focus group section of this research felt that legal protection was lacking when it came to intimate relationship abuse perpetrated digitally and that abuse perpetrated this way would not be taken seriously. The Domestic Violence Act 2018 represented some positive steps towards protecting young women from digital intimate relationship abuse. It included, for example, abusive behaviours conducted by electronic means. When this research was conducted, however, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 had not yet been enacted. On the 9th of February 2021, this Act commenced creating three new offences, two related to image-based sexual abuse and one related to 'grossly offensive communications'. The Act was widely welcomed, particularly by victim-survivors, their families and organisations supporting those affected by digital intimate relationship abuse. The Act introduces a number of positive steps in relation to digital intimate relationship abuse. It is an aggravating factor, for example, to be or have been in an intimate relationship with the victim-survivor. It is also a stand-alone offence to threaten to distribute intimate images - even if the images are not actually shared - and altered images, including those that have been Photoshopped, are included in offences related to image-based sexual abuse.

However, gaps in legislation remain, particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse. Image-based sexual abuse can have significantly devastating and long-lasting effects on victim-survivors as images can be distributed widely at a rapid pace after the image has been initially uploaded. Therefore, civil remedies to have images removed are urgently needed and this

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

should be made possible through the establishment of the Online Safety Commissioner, as proposed in the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2019. The Bill should provide for fast and cost-free civil legal remedies (such as take-down orders) to have distressing and abusive images removed from online platforms quickly (Women's Aid, 2020). Jurisdictions with such remedies in place should be used as best practice examples. In Australia, for example, victim-survivors can report digital abuse to the eSafety Commissioner and they will provide assistance to have image-based abuse removed. The Australian eSafety Commissioner has a number of roles that include education and guidance, research and responding to complaints about illegal and harmful content (*eSafety Commissioner*, 2021).

Apps noted by research participants with direct messaging functions such as Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp, where intimate relationship abuse is seen as particularly easy to carry out, need to be sufficiently regulated and held to account in terms of the abusive behaviours that their product has become a vehicle for. Furthermore, the research participants show that they fear being asked why they don't remove themselves from such platforms if they are experiencing abuse. It should be recognised and accepted that it is not a viable solution, nor is it just, to ask young women to limit their use of or step away from social media. So much of young people's lives are now conducted on these apps and cultural attitudes that support such solutions endorse abuse perpetrated in this way and invalidate young women's experience of such abuse. Many victim-survivors do, however, shut down their accounts as a result of digital intimate relationship abuse and this can further solidify the isolation that such abuse engenders (McGlynn et al, 2020).

Prevention: education and awareness-raising

The research findings show that despite the high level of young women experiencing intimate relationship abuse digitally, the victim-survivors themselves find it difficult to recognise these abusive behaviours and to seek help because of the 'internalised stigma' that is often present and the perception that this kind of abuse is not taken seriously within society at large. Legal remedies (both criminal and civil) are an important tool, but they will never sufficiently protect women and girls from the myriad of abuse and harassment happening online and they should never be the sole strategy for achieving such protection. However, fortunately the law is not the only resource available; education and prevention campaigns are needed that highlight and address the gendered nature of such abuse. Ultimately, 'what is needed is education programmes that explore intimate relationships and the increasing use of technology, value sexual expression and autonomy, and emphasise and distinguish between consent and coercion' (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017, p. 48).

Sex and relationships education that accurately reflects young people's lives and includes clear-cut insights into the ever-changing digital terrain where young people conduct many aspects of their intimate relationships is needed. Hellevik notes that 'for policy-makers, a key component in the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies, should be a holistic perspective on young people's intimate relationships, sexuality and online proficiency, as these factors are 'interrelated' and 'as violence and abuse is more than specific acts and behaviours, a

broader understanding on young people's intimacy and sexuality - beyond the mere mechanical aspects of sexual intercourse - should form the basis for sexual education in schools and elsewhere' (2017, p.210).

Such educational initiatives should also be firmly situated within the overarching context of gender (in)equality, as young people experience it including gender roles and norms, beauty standards and body shaming and the use of pornography. All curriculums should include information and reflection on the intrinsic links between digital intimate relationship abuse and other causes and consequences of gender (in)equality such as unpaid care work, the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women and feminist ideologies in politics and other areas of leadership. This is key in order to challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes as well as abusive behaviours that may be upheld in young people's homes. Research by Ouytsel et al, for example, conducted with secondary school students who were in romantic relationships showed that when they observed obtrusive and controlling behaviours by their fathers this was 'significantly and positively related to adolescents' perpetration of digital monitoring behaviours'. They note that prevention efforts are needed that focus on reducing the impact of gender stereotypical attitudes and the effect that witnessing controlling behaviours within the family has on the perpetration of cyber dating abuse (2020, p.5157 - 5158). In order to reduce the rate of digital intimate relationship abuse, prevention strategies are needed that target young people's attitudes towards gender roles, their use of digital media and understanding of sexuality and their ideas surrounding boundaries and what it means to be in a healthy intimate relationship (Hellevik, 2017, p.210).

Conclusion

This research shows that of the young women who have experienced intimate relationship abuse, just under half had experienced this abuse digitally. The majority experienced the abuse in the form of harassment by phone, text, email or private message, however, many also had their account passwords demanded from them and some experienced image-based sexual abuse and tracking and monitoring using spyware and GPS. Research participants found abuse perpetrated in this way to be particularly draining due to the 'always on' nature of digital life and the pressure to be reachable at all times. For these reasons it is also perceived to be difficult to escape from. The young women who participated in the research felt that this abuse was not taken seriously in society at large but also within the legal system and an 'internalised stigma' was expressed that presented as a barrier to seeking help in relation to the abuse. Further research is needed in this area to discover the prevalence and nature of intimate relationship abuse perpetrated digitally and to establish and implement appropriate prevention and protection strategies. The research should go beyond the scope of this study to include adolescents below the age of 18, it should examine the intersectionalities at play and should thoroughly investigate the harms and impacts of such abuse as well as the patterns between digital intimate relationship abuse and in-person abuse. Civil legal remedies are needed to protect young women, particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse and education and awareness-raising that reflects the lived realities of young people's romantic, sexual and digital lives must play a key role in preventing abuse that is perpetrated in this way.

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

References

eSafety Commissioner (2021) Available at: https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do (Accessed 29 March 2021)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (20142) *Violence Against Women, An EU-wide Survey. Main Results.* Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf (Accessed 29 March 2021)

Hellevik, P.M. (2017) 'Digital Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse Among Youth, A Systematic Review of Associated Factors' in Holt, S., Øverlien, C. & Devaney, J., *Responding to Domestic Violence: Emerging Challenges for Policy, Practice and Research in Europe.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. P. 192-214.

Hellevik, P.M. (2019) 'Teenagers' personal accounts of experiences with digital intimate partner violence and abuse', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 92, p. 178 - 187. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2018.11.019

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2020) 'Digital Dating Abuse Among a National Sample of U.S. Youth', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, p.1-21. doi: 10.1177/0886260519897344.

McGlynn, C. Johnson, K., Rackley, E. Henry, N., Gavey, N., Flynn A. & Powell, A. (2020) "It's Torture for the Soul': The Harms of Image-Based Sexual Abuse', *Social and Legal Studies* p.1-22. doi: 10.1177/0964663920947791

McGlynn, C. & Rackley, E. (2017) 'More than 'Revenge Porn': Image-Based Sexual Abuse and the Reform of Irish Law, *Irish Probation Journal.* Available at: http://probation.ie/EN/PB/0/12D6F4D1961C4695802581D0003D92D9/$File/ClareMcGlynn_ErikaRackley_IPJ.pdf (Accessed 29 March 2021)

Ouytsel, J.V., Ponnet, K. & Walrave, M. (2020) 'Cyber Dating Abuse: Investigating Digital Monitoring Behaviours Among Adolescents From a Social Learning Perspective', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 35 (23-34) p. 5157 - 5178. doi: 10.1177/0886260517719538

Reed, L.A., Tolman, R.M. & Ward, L.M. (2016) 'Snooping and Sexting: Digital Media as a Context for Dating Aggression and Abuse Among College Students', *Violence Against Women,* 22 (13) p.1556-1576. doi: 10.1177/1077801216630143

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

Reed, L.A., Tolman, R.M. & Ward, L.M. (2017) 'Gender Matters: Experiences and consequences of digital dating abuse victimization in adolescent dating relationships', *Journal of Adolescence*, 59 p.79-89. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.05.015

SafeLives (2015) *Young people experiencing or at risk of online abuse. Research briefing for professionals working with young people.* Available at: https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SafeLives%20research%20briefing%20-%20young%20people%20and%20online%20abuse.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 2021)

Vagi, K. J., Olsen, E. O. M., Basile, K. C., & Vivolo-Kantor, A. M. (2015). *Teen dating violence (physical and sexual) among US high school students: findings from the 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey,* 169 (5), p.474-482. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2014.3577 (Accessed 29 March 2021)

Women's Aid (2020) *One in Five Young Women Suffer Intimate Relationship Abuse in Ireland.* Available at: https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/one_in_five_women_report_womens_aid_2020.pdf (Accessed 16 March 2021)

Appendix 1. Background information provided to participants

Topic: the role of online/digital technology abuse in intimate relationships.

Time allotted: 10 Minutes

Aim: to capture the broad experience of intimate relationship abuse using digital technology rather than collecting any specific accounts of such abuse.

Background

- Introduction to the research – why the work is carried out – to understand how to encourage those impacted to seek help.

- Explain format of groups – everybody except moderator has camera off, people are invited not to sign in with their real name, this is all to protect your identity. We have clients listening into the groups but they are not able to communicate with you. The group is recorded but this recording can only be used to generate the report and will be deleted by mid Nov.

- Explain recruitment – majority people recruited following a quantitative survey conducted and invited based on varying levels of experience on the subject. When talking about experience of intimate partner abuse please draw on any experiences you have but without giving direct examples to protect your own and others privacy. If,

following the group, you would like to talk, or feel you need support we will provide a number for this purpose.

Questions

1. Some people experience intimate relationship abuse online or through digital technology.

   b. What platforms do you think are most open to this kind of abuse and why?

   c. Which platforms are less open to such abuse and why?

   d. Is there any one specific platform where this kind of abuse is more likely to occur?

   e. Moderator to ask specifically about Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, TikTok and pornography websites.

2. How does intimate relationship abuse perpetrated online or using digital technology differ from intimate relationship abuse perpetrated in other ways?

   a. Are there ways in which such abuse is easier or more difficult to manage?

3. Our national survey found that 3 in 5 of those experiencing intimate relationship abuse, experienced the abuse online or using digital technology.

   a. Does that figure reflect the level of intimate relationship abuse experienced online or using digital technology that you would have perceived to have been present?

   b. What do you think would help someone who was experiencing this kind of abuse?

Thank you for your time

Support number for Women's Aid – 1800 341 900 also www.womensaid.ie for Instant Messaging Support Service

Support number for Men's Development Network – 1800 816 588

Appendix 2. Discussion guide section on digital intimate relationship abuse

The role of online/digital technology abuse?   *10 min*

Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

When talking about online/digital technology abuse we would like to capture the broad experience of this versus any specific account.

- Some people experiencing dating abuse/intimate partner abuse experience this online/digital technology.

    o What platforms do you think are most open to this kind of abuse? Why?

    o What are less open to it? Why?

    o Is there any one specific platform that is used more?

    o Moderator to probe on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, porn sites, WhatsApp, TikTok

- How does this means of abuse compare with others in your opinion? Why?

    o Are there ways in which it is harder or easier to manage?

- Our national survey found 3 in 5 of those experiencing abuse experienced online abuse.

    o Does this sound high/low to you?

    o What do you think would help someone having this experience?

Ellie is the Policy Officer at Women's Aid. She works with the Strategic Communications and Fundraising Department to provide recommendations on improving systemic responses and protection for women and children experiencing domestic violence. Ellie's work is aimed at improving access to justice for women and children across Ireland and driving positive government action in relation to domestic violence. Ellie has an MA in Gender, Globalisation and Human Rights from the National University of Ireland Galway. She has worked with the National Women's Council and Oxfam Ireland on policy and communications in the areas of gender, migration and climate change. Ellie is a passionate advocate for women's human rights and strives to work towards a fairer, more gender equitable Ireland for everyone.