

# Tackling Intimate Relationship abuse among 18-25s: Considerations for a Peer Supported Approach.

Women's Aid, in collaboration with RedC, recently completed a nationally representative study of 500 young women and men in Ireland (aged 18-25), followed by a series of focus groups. The study explored their understanding of intimate relationship abuse including coercive control; their awareness of available supports including legislation, and; their attitudes to intervening if they thought someone they knew was experiencing abuse.

This short document highlights some of the key findings from this study. The aim is for this to be a 'conversation starter' as part of Women's Aid's continuing commitment to engaging and collaborating with young people to prevent and combat intimate relationship abuse.

This is produced as part of the Women's Aid **Too Into You** Project for the 16 Days Opposing Violence Against Women 2021.

**3 in 5** young people (18-25 years old) have experienced, or know someone who has experienced, intimate relationship abuse.

**1 in 5** young women and **1 in 11** young men have suffered intimate relationship abuse.

**4 in 5** young people believe those experiencing abuse do so in silence and don't seek support.

**20%** of males and **8%** of females believe that it is not their business to intervene in a relationship where they suspect abuse.

**Only 16%** of young people said that it is easy to spot the signs of abuse.

**50%** of young people **are not aware of specialist supports** for intimate relationship abuse.

Half of young people (**53%**) were not aware of new and important legislation, the Harassment & Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (CoCo's law).

## Overcoming Hesitancy

The majority of young people feel a responsibility to intervene if they are concerned a close friend might be experiencing intimate relationship abuse but have a number of concerns which might prevent them from intervening including:

- > Fears around making the situation worse (73%),
- > Concerns about misreading the signs of abuse (48%),
- > Worries about saying the wrong thing (42%),
- > A lack of awareness in terms of how they could actually help (43%).

**61%** said that if they knew what to say and had confidence in how to start the conversation (**56%**), it would help them intervene if they were worried about someone.



## Cause and Effect:

Understanding root causes of intimate relationship abuse.

While many did clearly recognise the cause and effect of intimate relationship abuse, a significant proportion of young people also surveyed had a number of misconceptions around the causes of intimate relationship abuse. This can create a risk of minimising the potential harm to someone subjected to it.

Perpetrators of abuse use tactics that have the impact of **gaining or maintaining power** and control over an intimate partner over a period of time.

Abuse can have devastating and life-threatening impacts for the person who is subjected to it. Very often, efforts are made to try and explain the motivation for abusive behaviour in intimate relationships in ways that do not hold abusers responsible for their behaviours, and which mistake contributing factors as causal factors. This can also result in side-lining the victims/survivors experience, by focusing instead on 'fixing' the perpetrator.

**Myth:** The majority (81%) of young people believe that **drug and alcohol misuse** cause someone to act abusively towards their partner.

**Fact:** While drugs and alcohol can reduce inhibitions – they are not the cause of abusive behaviours. Studies show that even when using alcohol or drugs **abusers can still exercise control** by targeting their partner specifically and not others. Many also abuse when there is no alcohol or drugs involved.

**Myth:** Young people were not sure if a partner getting **jealous** easily is a warning sign for abuse.

**Fact:** Regular expressions of jealousy show **possessiveness** rather than trust and equality in a relationship, which is a red flag for abuse.

**Myth:** Young people were not sure if **looking through a partner's phone** and knowing their passwords is a warning sign for abuse.

**Fact:** Looking through someone's phone is an **invasion of privacy**. We don't let people listen into our private phone calls so why should messages be different? This is very controlling behaviour.

**Myth:** 65% believed being **insecure** is a cause of abuse.

**Fact:** Insecurity is not an **excuse** for acting abusively towards a partner. Many people can feel insecure and not behave abusively towards others.

**Myth:** 41% believe that women are most commonly victims of abuse, 29% of young people surveyed did not believe this, and in focus groups this '**gender neutral**' position was also articulated particularly amongst young men.

**Fact:** This contradicts international evidence as well as our own national findings in 2020 (reaffirmed again in the 2021 survey), which showed that **1 in 5 young women** and **1 in 11 young men** have experienced intimate relationship abuse in Ireland.

## What Next?

There is a need for more support to young people through education and some myth busting around the causes, warning signs and impacts of abuse. We need to be empowering them to take a leadership role as peers, starting from the earliest ages, to work for a future without intimate relationship abuse and violence.

## Speak to Someone

At [TooIntoYou.ie](https://toointoyou.ie) young people can find support for intimate relationship abuse, learn how to spot the signs of abuse and find out how to start the conversation with someone they are worried about.

The **Instant Messaging Service** is confidential and easy to use. Available at [toointoyou.ie](https://toointoyou.ie)

Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline:  
**1800 341 900 open 24 hours a day,  
seven days a week.**

