

The perception of young people on Violent Behaviour

Survey results

Jesmond Friggieri

"It is the failing of youth not to be able to restrain its own violence." Seneca



in collaboration with



2013

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Summary of Findings

Young people seem to be fully aware that they are vulnerable to violent relationships as more than 90% of them confirmed their exposure to such behaviour. They are conscious of the signs of violence such as bruises and other psychological consequences. Whilst females view sexual abuse as more serious than males, the latter stated that physical abuse is more serious. However in the overall rating more than 55% was rated sexual abuse as being the worst form of abuse, followed by physical (44%) and verbal abuse (40%).

Young people attribute violent relationships to *low self-esteem* (35%), *deserving to be mistreated*, *feeling emotionally numb and helpless* and *feeling afraid* as the other pre-dominant factors. *The boyfriend* is seen as the most susceptible perpetrator followed by *peers* and persons in a *higher position*. The boyfriend was seen as the main perpetrator not only females but also by males.

Respondents answered ambivalently when asked about reporting violent encounters. Whilst the majority said that it should be reported to police followed by social worker and a relative, they also stated that most victims do not report due to fear.

The survey was conducted amongst 399 young people attending post-secondary and tertiary education between the age of 16 and 22 years. The survey was part of the 'No to Violent Relationships Campaign' lead by the Malta Girl Guides in conjunction with Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ and the National Council for Women. The launch of the full results will be presented at the National Conference for Malta Girl Guides that will be held in October 2013.

1. Introduction

Various campaigns to bring awareness about violence and its consequences have been conducted in Malta during these last two decades targeting various groups with emphasis on domestic violence. The climax was the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act¹ 2006 and other related acts such as Equality between Men and Women and various other initiatives which clearly condemn any form of abusive behaviour both within the family and other contexts within society. Malta has also been a member of *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* since 1991. However, from the few available statistics², violence still strongly persists in Maltese society. It is known that domestic violence is often not reported and thus a rise in numbers should not necessarily be alarming as this could be an increase in reporting rather than the actual amount of violence in relationships. On the other hand, attention needs to be given as the rise in numbers could be a reflection of other factors.

Meaning of violence evolves as awareness increases and differs from one culture to another. Awareness campaigns about the consequences of violence and service provision have generated openness in discussing such a sensitive subject. Such awareness changed the understanding of violence during these last decades and what was acceptable in the past is unacceptable today. All the initiatives including the legislative frameworks, social support and services such as the Domestic Violence Services (helpline, social work service and the therapeutic services) those offered by Aġenzija Appoġġ, the awareness brought by the National Commission of Equality between Man and Woman of equality between genders, Child Protection Services (in Aġenzija Appoġġ and Education), Bullying Services (Education) and the various services offered by voluntary organizations such as the National Council for Women and Victim Support Unit contributed to raise awareness, change meaning of abusive relationships and also alleviate some of the taboo for seeking help in such difficult situations. However this does not mean that violence has ceased to exist.

Violent relationships have been classified and some are considered more serious than others as they are life-threatening or else they present a threat to minors who are the most vulnerable in society. Various studies indicate how children exposed to violence suffer of various traumatic consequences leaving both physical and psychological effect as this paper on "" clearly points out:

“Frequent and prolonged exposure to elevated cortisol levels may affect the development of a major stress-regulating system in the brain (Cynader and Frost, 1999) either heightening the stress feedback system (leading to hypervigilance, chronic fear and anxiety, negative mood and problems in attending) or reducing it, leading to depression (De Bellis et al, 1994; Hart et al 1995, 1996; Putnam and Trickett, 1997, all cited in Margolin and Gordis, 2000). Chronic stress can cause depression of the immune function

¹ Chapter 481 of the Laws of Malta.

² 355 victims received service from Aġenzija Appoġġ in 2011 retrieved from: <http://www.sundaycircle.com/2012/05/the-unfair-sex/>.

as well as other body systems controlled by the brain (Coe, 1999).” [Australian – New South Wales] Community Services Centre for Parenting and Research, 2002, p.3).

Whilst recognising the vulnerability of children or minors, more attention needs to be given to the traumatic effects on violence on children which consequently lead to abusive relationships at a later stage in life. Are Maltese young people aware of the effects of violent relationships? To what extent are they affected?

2. Rationale

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its World Report on Violence and Health puts forward nine recommendations out of which the following three fall clearly within the rationale of this study:

- *“Recommendation 2: Enhance capacity for collecting data on violence*
- *Recommendation 3. Define priorities for, and support research on, the causes, consequences, costs and prevention of violence*
- *Recommendation 4. Promote primary prevention responses”(2002: 1)*

Understanding and unfolding the perceptions of young people between 16 and 25 years in Malta about violent behaviour and how violent relationships should be handled, are crucial to bring awareness on how to prevent violence within relationships at this stage. Through raising awareness to stop violent relationships at this age, we hope to prevent or minimise its occurrence in the future.

This survey is part of the “Stop the Violence against Girls and Young Women” non-formal educational curriculum which the Malta Girl Guides has piloted through activities carried out with their members and the community simultaneously together with 24 other countries members of WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts). Amongst other activities, the Malta Girl Guides in collaboration with Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ and the National Council of Women have embarked on a prevention campaign targeted for young people – **No to Violent Relationships**.

The results of the survey shall give guidance to authorities and other institutions such as *Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ* and the National Council of Women to develop strategies in preventing violent relationships among young people and other sectors of society. It has been established that between *“12% to 15% of women in Europe face violence everyday – we know this from transnational prevalence studies”* (Fisher, 2010, slide 3). The Malta Confederation of Women Organisations declared that violence costs the 27 Member States around €16 million every year. These figures only amount to domestic violence and do not count other types of violence. The UN Women statistics show that as many as *“70% experience violence or sexual abuse in their lifetime”* (Unifem, 2013) and *“1 in 4 women experience physical and/or sexual violence during pregnancy”*.

Though domestic violence has been at the core of various campaigns, violence is not restricted only to the family, but occurs in other contexts. Thus, a broad definition of violence developed by WHO was adopted as the working definition:

“The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.” (WHO, 2002:4)

The context in which certain behaviours occur can condition whether certain behaviour is considered violent or not. Certain behaviour which is considered violent in certain societies can be

considered as non-violent as this would be part of cultural mores of that country or community. However, the core element of the above definition is whether power or physical force is used consensually or not. On the other hand, it is consensually acceptable only if this does not incur injury, death, and psychological harm, lack of development or deprivation. This broad definition protects any person from direct and/or indirect violence at different levels being physical, sexual, psychological and social.

Taking into account the above definition, the results of the survey can contribute towards designing specific or improving existing prevention programmes for young people and other stakeholders in relation to violence in relationships. These are essential to bring further awareness and reduce violence in relationships at different levels in society: within families (partners and, parents and children), in schools, amongst friends, at the workplace and other places within society.

3. Method

The Malta Girl Guides (MGG) joined forces with National Council of Women and Aġenzija Żgħażaġh to embark on the bold project of bringing awareness on this important and sensitive issue of violence by **No to Violent Relationships Campaign**. As part of the campaign it was decided that MGG conducts a survey amongst young people to measure their awareness about violent relationships.

3.1 Formulation of Questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed through a group effort by a number of Guiders, taking into account the established definition as the set framework. After the initial designing, the questionnaire was tested with ten young people and afterwards it was reviewed to reflect the difficulties encountered during the pilot project. This was finalized before the Freshers' Week³ and the campaign was set to be part of the activities held during that particular week.

In line with the survey's objectives, MGG opted for a quantitative approach as it enables to measure objectively perceptions on a matter that could be sensitive and be highly subjective. Based on this assumption, a structured self-administered questionnaire was adopted for the following reasons:

1. Structured questionnaires take a few minutes to be filled in; and
2. Semi-structured questionnaire would have given space to open personal issues leaving a counterproductive effect by creating serious ethical issues especially for persons who could be or have suffered because of violent relationships.

During the design phase, we ensured that it would be friendly, straightforward and with a choice of answers as this was going to be answered by young people. On the other hand we left options open so that respondents were able to give another answers not listed in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was reviewed and approved by the two partners of the project. The target was to conduct 380 questionnaires as this would represent sufficiently the population of young people between 16 and 22 years of age satisfying the aims of the survey. However, due to practical reasons it was decided that only students will be interviewed and the employed and unemployed young people will not feature as part of the respondents.

3.2 Recruitment of Interviewers

Upon finalization of the questionnaire, interviewers were recruited from amongst the Girl Guides who are attending the different post-secondary and tertiary education institutions. An induction session was set to discuss and present the questionnaire to those selected. The interviewers were

³ This is held on the University and Junior College campus at the beginning of each academic year.

presented with the importance of confidentiality and other ethical issues that might arise during the administration of the questionnaire knowing that violence could be a very sensitive issue to certain respondents. Moreover they were introduced to the concepts of validity and reliability, as these are essential to have credible outcomes from the surveys.

The interviews were held mainly on the Freshers' Week at University, MCAST and Junior College. Students at ITS, Higher Secondary, St Aloysius & De Las Salle 6th Forms were also approached to have the whole post-secondary spectrum. There was an attempt to take also into account young people who are employed or unemployed but this proved to be difficult as this would have entailed involving other agencies and also demanded the interviewers to seek people in the labour market out of the parameters of the educational faculties. An increase in sample size could have been beneficial; however, this was not possible as the interviewers were conducting interviews on a voluntary basis.

3.3 Sampling

A stratified structured sample was adopted, as this ensured a good representation of the young people of all ages and from different educational institutions. For logistical reasons, an average of 1.8% from every institution (Table 1) was taken randomly amounting to approximately 380 questionnaires:

Location	Population	No of Surveys
University	11300	199
MCAST	6000	106
Junior College/Higher Sec.	3670	65
ITS	500	10
	21530	380

Table 1: Compilation of Survey Population

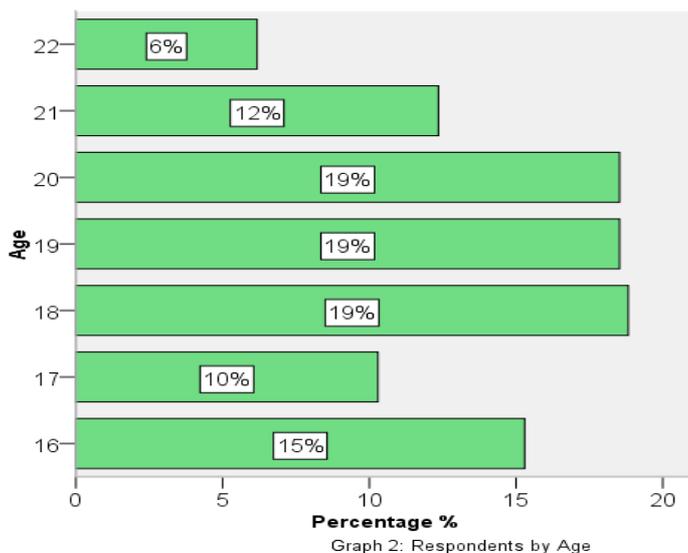
Whilst the results of the survey fully represent the perception and understanding of violent relationships with the age group who continue post-secondary/tertiary education, on the other hand these are only half of the population of this age group as no questionnaires were conducted with those who are in employment or are unemployed.

4. Presentation of Results

4.1 Demographic Data

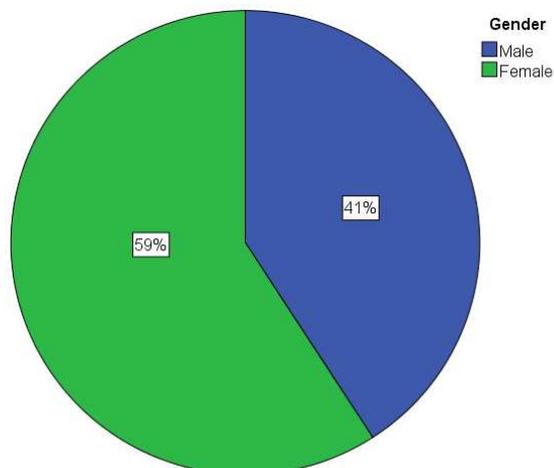
399 students from University, MCAST, ITS, Higher Secondary, Junior College and other 6th Forms were interviewed on their perceptions about violence in relationships. The results are representative of young people between 16 and 22 years of age attending post-secondary and tertiary education was representative of this age group within Maltese society.

The interviews were conducted randomly at these institutions with students who visited the Aġenzija Żgħazagħ stands during the Freshers' week.



to 25 yrs. However, the core interviews were conducted with young people⁴ of 16 to 22 years of age (Graph 2). Thus we can confidently say that these results represent the perceptions of young people between these ages amounting to 92% of the interviewees.

The largest part of the population of young people attending post-secondary education

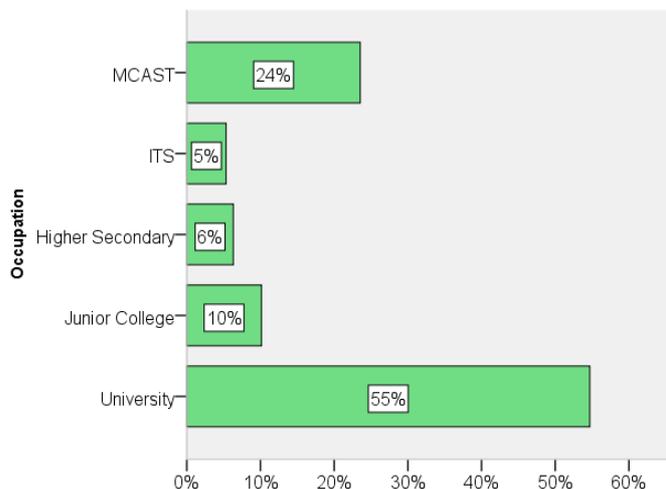


Graph 1: Respondents by Gender

Females were the majority of respondents amounting to 59% against 41% of males; however, interviewers were aware that they had to interview an approximate equal proportion of males and females.

The percentages of respondents between males and females correspond to the ratio of males (43%) and females (57%) that continue tertiary education (NCHE Further and Higher Education Statistics 2009 Report, p. 25). (Graph 1)

The age of respondents varied from 15 yrs



⁴ From this point, the reference to youth will be understood as those youths between 15yrs and 22yrs of age and who are continuing post-secondary education. This excludes those who are registering for work and employed.

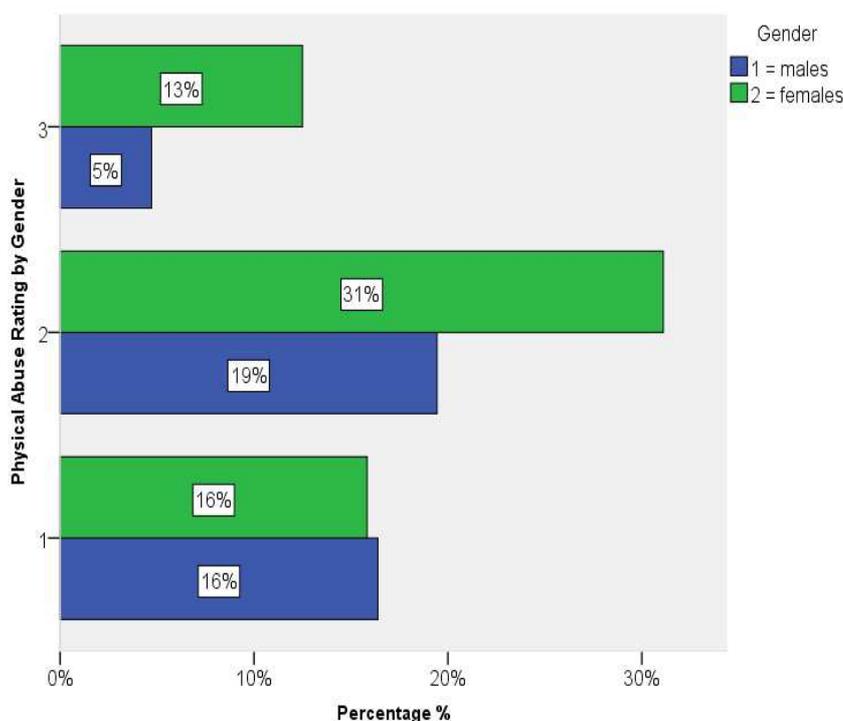
within this age bracket is studying at University and the largest number of respondents came from this institution (more than 50%). The second biggest cohort is from MCAST as this is the second biggest institution. Though there might be differences between students going to different institutions as how they perceive violent relationships, however this will not impinge on the global outcome as the respondents are representative of this age group who continued post-secondary education. (See Graph 3)

4.2 Understanding the nature of Violence

Young people were asked about their understanding and perception of violence: which type of abuse they perceive as the most serious and dangerous by rating them 1 to 5. The survey aimed at verifying young people’s perceptions about all forms of abuse including cyber stalking or stalking which is another form of abuse that young people might encounter in this day and age. Table 2 indicates how young people perceive what type of abuse are the most serious (1st) and least serious (5th). In order that respondents would have the same understanding of the type of abuse, a short definition was placed near each typology.

Rating	Type of violent relationship (See Graph 5)	Percentage %
1 st Rated	Sexual Abuse	55%
2 nd Rated	Physical Abuse	46%
3 rd Rated	Verbal Abuse	40%
4 th Rated	Stalking or Cyber stalking	41%
5 th Rated	Economic or financial abuse	45%

Table 2: Ratings of Types of abuse



Graph 4: Physical Abuse rating by Gender

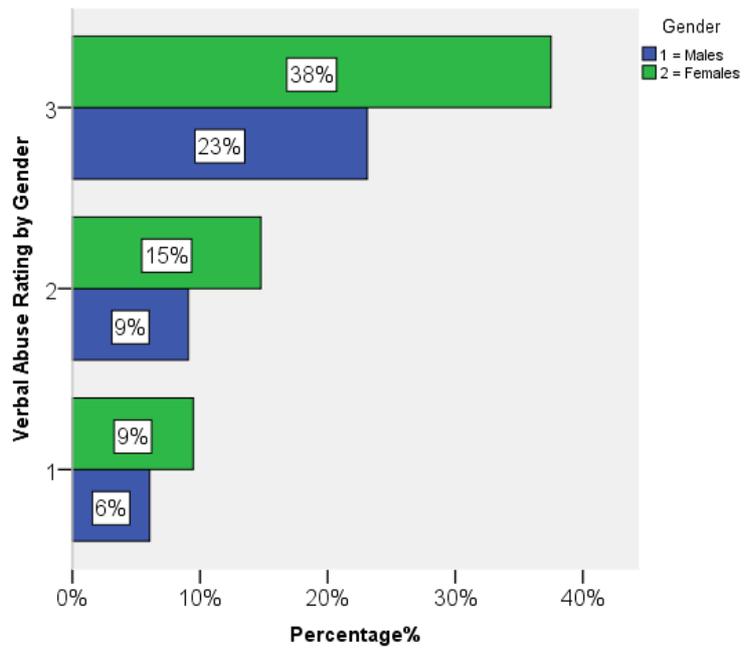
Young people regarded Sexual Abuse as the worst type of abuse followed by Physical Abuse and thirdly Non-verbal/Verbal Abuse⁵. As the ratings range between 55% and 45% this shows that all the forms of abuse were considered. Perceptions differed between males and females and whilst the latter regarded Sexual Abuse as more serious, the former scored higher on physical abuse. This difference is not due to higher number of female respondents as females perceived physical abuse also serious when rating it

⁵ Nov-verbal/Verbal abuse, included emotional and psychological abuse as per the following definition: *(name-calling, put-downs, blaming or criticizing)* or nonverbal abuse *(includes behaviours that diminish a person's self-esteem making him/her afraid)*

second to sexual abuse.

Cyber stalking or stalking is perceived also more serious than Economic or Financial Abuse. However, this could be related to the age group as:

1. Adolescents and young people tend to experiment more with relationships and thus financial constraints might not on top list as they tend to be either more financially dependent on their parents or on their income.
2. Economic/Financial Abuse is more associated when two persons are sharing their finances and this could become more predominant in a more adult generation or a stable relationship where persons are sharing their belongings.



Graph 5: Verbal Abuse by Gender - Ratings 1 to 3

When young people considered Physical, Sexual and Verbal Abuse as more serious than Stalking and Cyber Stalking are they underestimating the consequences of this form of abuse? A similar study shows that:

“only 29.9% of the college students labelled it as such in the current study. In fact, 7.6% of the sample did not even label it as harassment, let alone stalking. This occurred in spite of the fact that 69% of the participants felt that it was “physically threatening” or worse, and almost three quarters (73%) said that they would report it to the police” (Alexy E., Burgess T., Baker T., Smoyak S. (2005).

Since stalking and cyber stalking could have sexual, physical and verbal elements, do young people consider Stalking/Cyber Stalking as such? It would have been interesting to ask why they made the distinction and why did they perceive one more serious than the other.

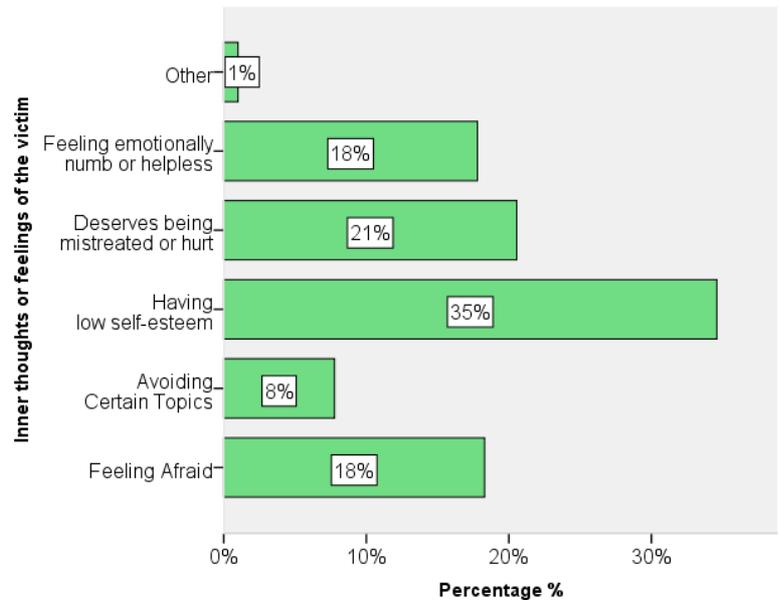
For the exception of rating physical and sexual abuse as the most serious type of abuse, all other responses follow approximately the ratio of male: female respondents (2:3). This means that males and females perceive that type of abuse equally serious. Males are conscious that physical abuse is unacceptable; however, they might underestimate how females feel about males’ sexual approach. The number of females compared to males that scored that Sexual abuse is more serious than physical abuse is almost 2 (females – 35%):1(males – 18%). This indicates that young males might regard certain sexualized behaviour as non-violent whilst it would be for females.

Young people were also asked what causes violent relationships and they identified *low self-esteem* followed by *deserving to be mistreated, feeling emotionally numb and helpless* and *feeling afraid* as the predominant factors. Self-esteem is usually associated with the belief that a person has in oneself, but this belief is known to be built slowly through a complex process of feedback received during life especially childhood and any event can affect profoundly one's self-esteem. However, Bunker (2003 p. 12) notes *"the effects of self esteem, depression, closeness to family or family structure on breakup are not significantly different between violent and non-violent relationships."* Bunker (2003) states that these effects are only related to the emotional commitment and a person could not necessarily be in a violent relationship to feel these effects.

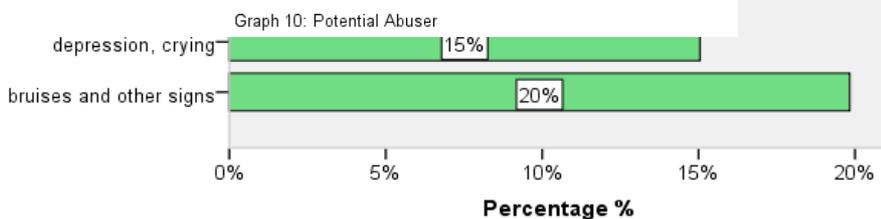
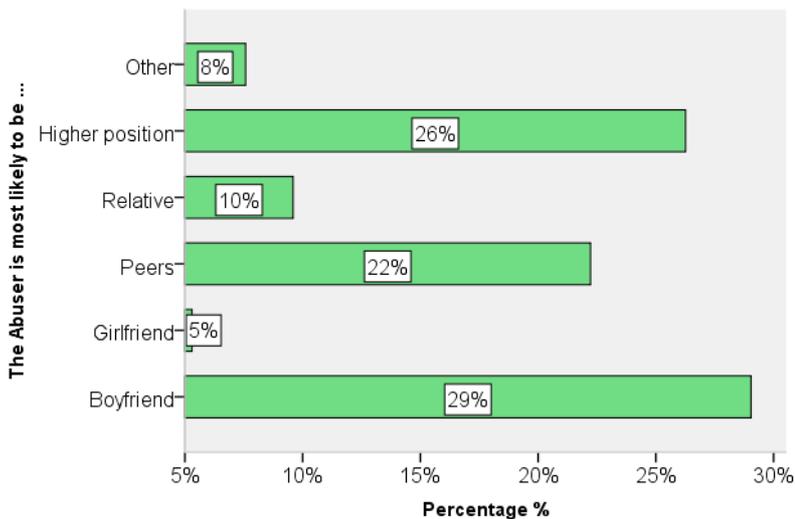
More than 22% answered that victims in violent relationship feel deserved being hurt or mistreated. Have these young people experienced violence directly or indirectly? Usually such a symptom is felt rather by people who have experienced violence which is related to feelings of guilt believing that they have provoked the perpetrator. Although this might seem paradoxical, it is directly related to the issue of self-esteem and the feedback received from the perpetrator during violent events. A male survivor of sexual abuse recounted: *"If sexual abuse occurs, you really feel like you're so bad that it's supposed to happen. That it's a punishment. That you did something wrong and this is more shame and guilt sort of coming down on you. And when you're that young you don't know any differently"* (Lisak, 1994:543). Lisak in his article mentions fifteen psychological themes as effects of violence: *Anger, Betrayal, Fear, Homosexuality Issues, Helplessness, Isolation and Alienation, Legitimacy, Loss, Masculinity Issues, Negative Childhood Peer Relations, Negative Schemas about People, Negative Schemas about the Self, Problems with Sexuality, Self Blame/Guilt and Shame/Humiliation"* (p. 525).

Moreover, young people were asked to identify three main signs of violent behaviour (Q4) where six out of twelve given were more pronounced than the others:

1. Bruises and other signs of impact on the skin (20%)
2. Depression, crying (15%)
3. Low self-esteem (14%)
4. Fear of partner (11%)
5. Denied opportunities due to the offender's jealousy (11%)
6. Lack of trust in others (9%)



Graph 7: Most likely inner thoughts and feelings of victim



Graph 8: Signs of Violent Behaviour

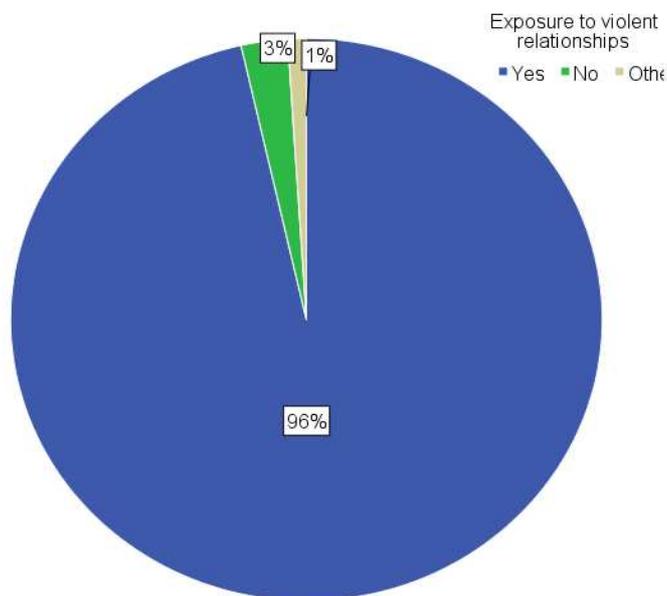
Clearly, violence was associated with physical (59%) and sexual aspects. On the other hand, emotional and social abuse was perceived equally serious. However, it is known that apart from where there is physical or sexual violence, the effects of non-physical violence and also in certain cases sexual and physical violence leave serious psychosomatic and social effects. Most abusive relationships endure the pain and conflict in the silence of homes and

hearts. Thus the psychological signs cannot be underestimated.

4.3 Handling Violent relationships

The third part of the questionnaire focused on how young people handle violent relationships. It explored exposure to violent relationships, to whom they report and why do people do not report violence.

96% of the young people stated they are exposed to violent relationships. Though violence did not seem to be the order of the day, but this response is very high and it shows that violent relationships are quite common in various forms. In similar levels, Ausbrooks (2010) found that 90% of the participants in her research *“acknowledged that they had in at least one fight, and they all reported that they witness fights after school on an almost daily basis”* (p12). She defined violence as *“guns, stabbing, jumping someone, emotional abuse, abuse from parents, animal abuse, physical abuse, drive-bys, gangs, drug-influenced behaviour, home violence, relationship violence and being beaten with a four-by-four.”*



Graph 9: Exposure to violent relationships

Young people were asked to identify who most likely would be the abuser(Graph 11): three were identified as being the most probable: boyfriends, people in higher position and peers. Whilst it might have been expected that boyfriends, girlfriends and peers were amongst those who were

identified as perpetrators, it was less expected that people in higher positions were identified as equally possible perpetrators. The question here is who do young people identify as possible people in higher positions: teachers, parents, employers, etc? Possibly it would be less employers as the population of the survey is mainly students. Thus, this would be teachers, lectures, management of educational institutions, parents and other people holding a role of responsibility with young people. Actually this corroborates with studies that identify that parents and caregivers remain the most susceptible perpetrators within children populations and this could be applicable also to young people who are still living with their families. *“In the 3,408 substantiated reports, 62 percent of the perpetrators had a parental (mother, father, stepparent, paramour of a parent) relationship to the child”* (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Annual Child Abuse Report 2011, p. 8). On the other hand in the case of partner relationships, the potential perpetrator was the partner or the spouse as our respondents have identified are boyfriends/girlfriends. If we compare the NSO statistics issued on the 8th March 2013 regarding the reported domestic violence to police this corroborates perfectly with the perceptions of young people of violence for males and females over all. Though there seems to be the same trend in the overall reporting of violence, there is a gap in violence reporting between males and females under the age of 18.

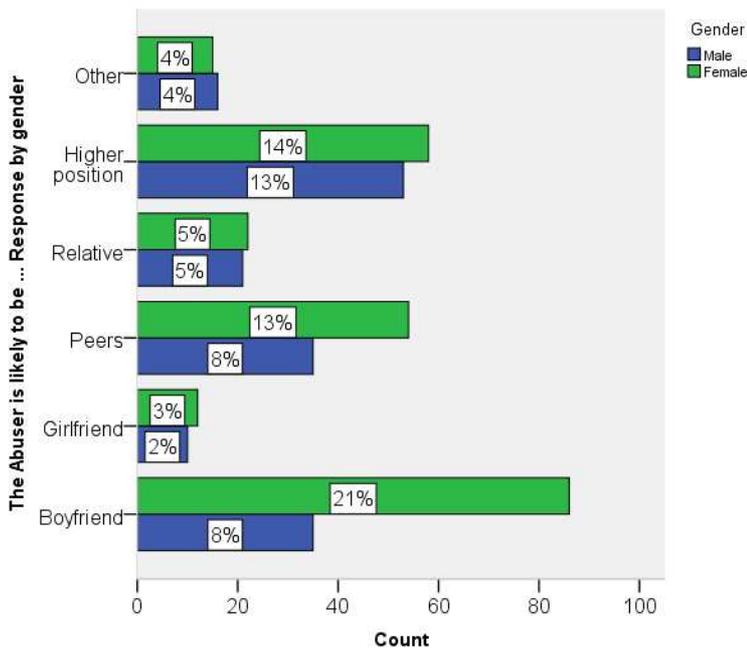
Domestic Violence reports to Police compared with Young People’s Perceptions of Violence				
		Males	Females	Total
NSO Statistics ⁶	%	23%	77%	100%
Overall	Count	258	860	1118
Under 18 yrs of age	%	14% (total Males)	4% (total Females)	18%
	Count			
		Girlfriends	Boyfriends	
Extrapolation of Perception of Young people on violence ⁷	%	5%	29%	34%
	Count	21	120	141
	%	15%	85%	100%

Table 3: Comparison between NSO Statistics and our results

The gap above in reporting between males and females under the age of 18 poses a number of questions: do females report less violence than males? Why women do not report violent behaviour? Is this correlated to emotional commitment in relationships (Lisak, 1994)? Another hypothesis could be: lack of proof, the unprofessional treatment by authorities, lack of financial means to sustain a court case, lack of courage, fear that violence would increase, that the partner is the breadwinner of the family or bad reputation to the family. On the other hand, the reports of males within this age range are they concerned between partners or else with parents?

⁶ Unfortunately, data is not available of how many of the cases reported to the police resulted from violence between partners/spouses and parents and children. Moreover, data is not available of violence between 16 and 22 years of age which corresponds to our sample.

⁷ It is important to note that the comparison of data has been done only with that of boyfriends and girlfriends, assuming that most reports to the Police concerned domestic violence between partners/spouses and much less between parents and children. Moreover the comparison could vary since our population ranges between 16 and 22 years of age.

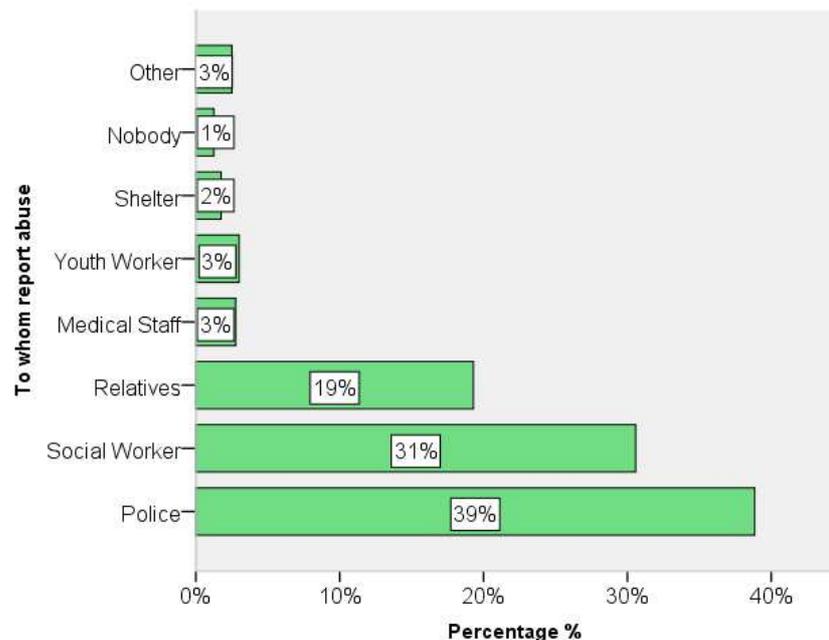


Graph 11: The abuser - Response by gender

Peers and people in a higher position follow boyfriends as potential perpetrators. The most common form of abusive relationship between peers is what we call bullying. Does this mean that we have around 22% of young people who were or feel bullied? Though we cannot conclude that this reflects the amount of bullying young people pass through, it shows how much peer pressure is high on the agenda of young people and it is known that this is an issue when it comes to substance abuse, lifestyles, choices and other delinquent behaviour. In the UK, it is estimated that “almost 12% of 14 and 15-year-

olds belong[ing] to one of these groups [delinquent peer group]” (Youth Crime Action Plan, 2008, p.18). Though this might differ in Malta, but this shows that peer pressure might be core to violent or non-violent relationships. How are prevention programmes being effective? Are these being effective to prevent bullying as much as possible and excessive peer pressure? This questions whether the anti-bullying programmes at school, the prevention programmes offered by *sedqa*, youth centres are treating this issue effectively and thus preventing that young people pass through from excessive peer pressure that it is considered as a violent relationship? What happens in peer pressure to make it so violent or is it just a perception? Moreover, (see Graph 12) the most who reported violent relationship with their peers were females: is this more prevalent amongst females or females find it more difficult to handle?

Questions also arise when speaking of the abuser in the ‘higher position’: were they referring to parents, teachers, lecturers, counsellors, other persons holding high positions in society... exactly to whom? The question arises because most students would not have been in employment and the probability is that they could not perceive their manager as their potential abuser.



Graph 12: To whom report abuse...

Respondents had the option to

give their specific answer and 6% answered either anyone or all the above can be the potential abuser. This shows some young people are aware that abusive relationships can happen anywhere and by anyone.

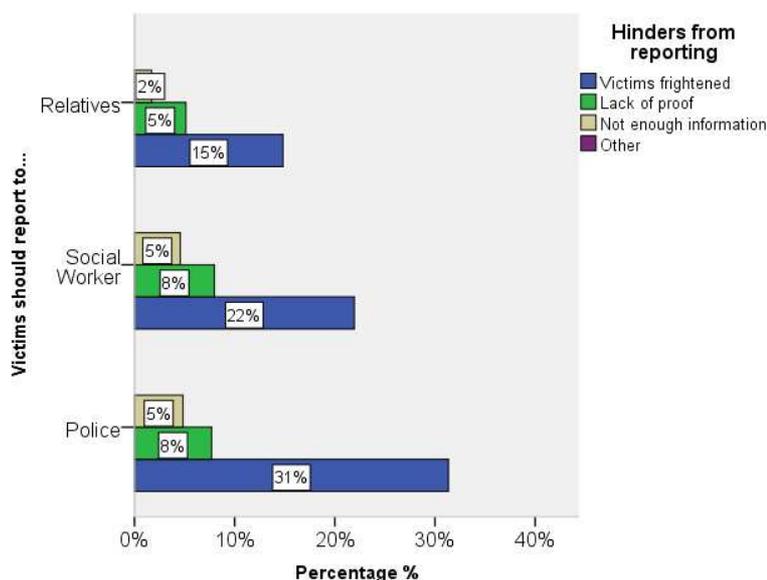
39% of young people believed any abuse should be reported to the police showing that they believe that abuse is a crime and that they trust the police corp. Second in the list were social workers followed by relatives. Are the police equipped to deal with reports of violent behaviour of any type? The fact that the majority identified police and social workers as the main source of help in the case of abusive relationships, thus young people are aware of the seriousness of certain behaviour and that other professionals or relatives are less in a position to help or protect them. Whilst it was expected that a young person would have sought help at a social worker or a youth worker, it might not have been expected that young people report to police.

Those who answered that they would report to the police, they scored when asked what hinder young people to report violence on the factor of fear. The same applied proportionally to social workers and also to relatives. Thus young people show high awareness that reporting violence

might make victims more vulnerable and hinder the latter from reporting due to fear and lack of proof.

Greenfield et al. (1998) identify three reasons for not reporting:

- the incident is considered as a personal or private matter,
- victims fear retaliation from their abuser, and
- they do not believe that police will do anything about the incident.

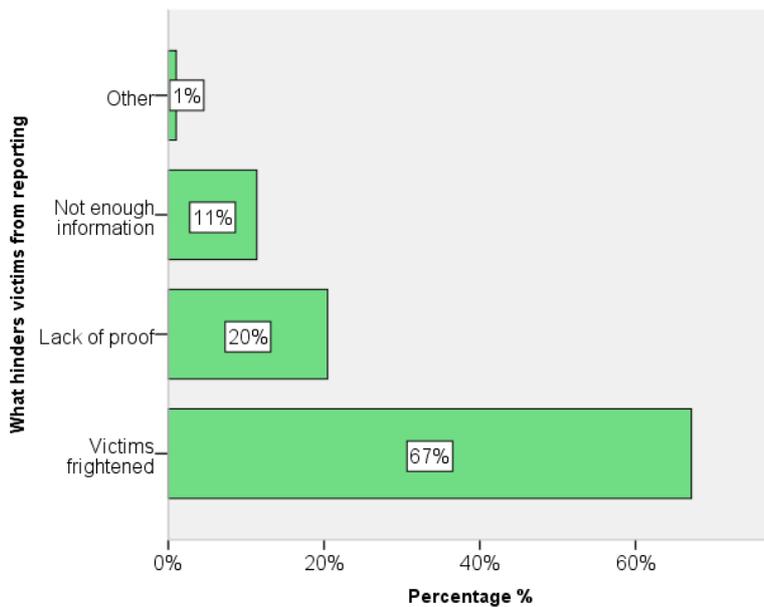


Graph 13: Answers to Q7 (Report to) against Q9 (Why not reporting)

Fear (64%) was the main incumbent to reporting for various reasons and

remained the major cause why victims do not report violence. The understanding of fear was refined by certain respondents and the same understanding could be applied to those who have answered generically:

- Scared of what might happen
- Blackmail
- Loss of kids including their property
- Fear the abuser will use stronger measures
- Lack of confidence
- Reporting abuse is not always heard / not good action is taken thus victim is then afraid of repercussions.



Graph 14: What hinders victim from reporting

These reasons follow Felson's (2002) four reasons why victims feel hindered from reporting to the police:

- perceptions of the incident as minor,
- concerns for privacy,
- protecting the offender, and
- not important to the police.

However, victim rights are protected through an EU Directive⁸ which is one of the biggest steps towards protecting the victim. The EU Directive has the

following aims:

- *Victims are treated with respect*
- *Police, prosecutors and judges are trained in sensitivity to victim*
- *Victims are entitled to be kept informed of their case, in a manner that is clear and understandable to them*
- *Each member state shall have a designated victim support service*
- *Victims can take part in proceedings and will be helped to attend the trial*
- *States must identify vulnerable victims, such as victims of sexual assault, disable victims or children, and must properly protect them*
- *Victims are protected while police investigate the crime and during court proceedings.*

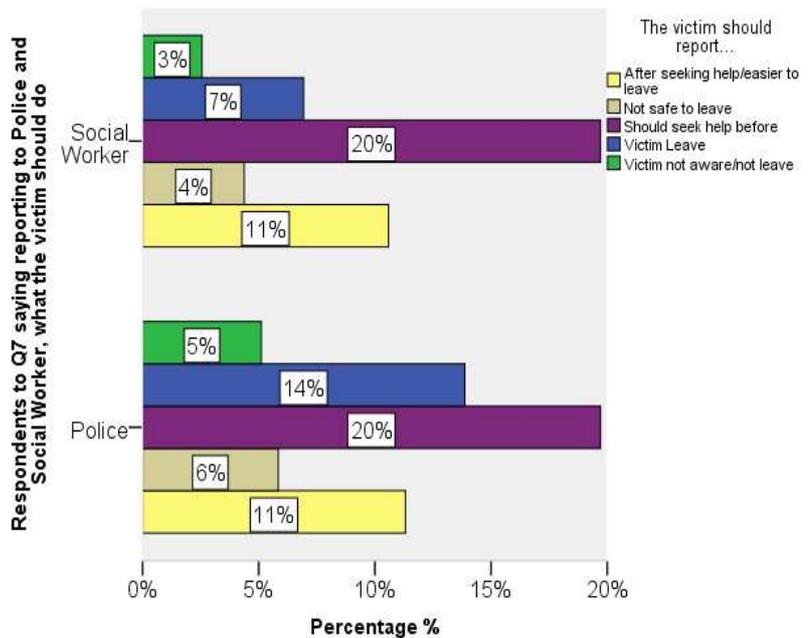
Paradoxically, 36% of young people said that in cases of violence one should seek help and another 21% said that after seeking help the victim should leave. It would be interesting to know why they should leave, whether they believed that the perpetrator ever changed or because the situation would become more dangerous.

The dilemmas of violence emerge clearly: on one hand young people want to seek help and some of them believe that they should leave, however due to fear they would not leave because of the reasons already mentioned. Do young people feel safe enough to report to the police? It is clear that young people felt that they should seek help in such situations and if they sought help this should be either to the police or the social workers.

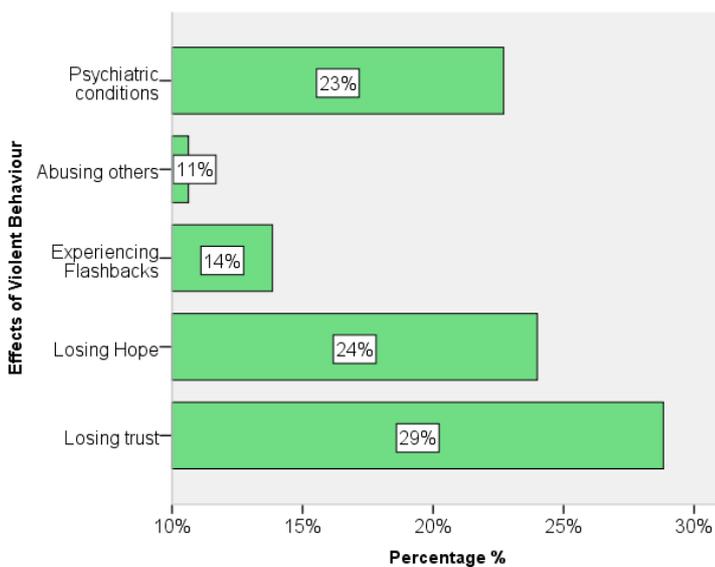
⁸ Directive 2012/29/EU of 25 October 2012 on minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

They identify police more for protection as to leave from the relationship. Approximately 30% of young people declare that they need to seek help before leaving a violent relationship. This is in line with the high percentage of young people who perceived fear as the main incumbent to leave and thus that they should seek help before leaving because this could make the victim in a more vulnerable situation.

98% of respondents of the survey acknowledged that violence has negative repercussions on the person even leading to psychiatric



Graph 15: Answers to Q7 (Report to) against Q8 (What does the victim should do)



Graph 16: Effects of Violent Behaviour

conditions. Moreover, 48% of young people saw violence as having very serious effects like experiencing flashbacks and abusing others. It would be interesting to know whether such awareness is a result of the personal experiences or else through awareness campaigns. From a generic perspective it is positive that 98% of young people perceive that violence has practically only negative effects, however, only 48% acknowledge that the effects of violence tend to damage the person and could leave lifelong impact. *“Children who experience child abuse and neglect*

are 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28% more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30% more likely to commit violent crime” (Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect. Child Welfare Information Gateway. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). Should young people become more aware of the long-term consequences of violence rather than simply losing trust or hope?

5. Conclusions

From the above results we can confidently put forward the following conclusions:

1. Young people are quite well aware of what violent relationships entail and differentiate clearly between the different types of abuse and its effects such as losing trust and hope, leading to psychiatric conditions such as depression. However, further awareness might be needed to emphasise the serious consequences of violence such as the psychiatric conditions and flashbacks. Awareness about violence could become part of the Personal and Social Development curriculum in schools. This will ensure systematic awareness as from young age.
2. Young males are aware that physical violence is unacceptable whilst young females tend to consider certain sexual behaviour as abusive more than young males. Thus young females consider sexual abuse as a more serious offence than physical abuse. There seems to be the need of further awareness that young females might feel offended by certain sexual behaviour, which from the male side this might not be considered as abusive. . This leads us to conclude that young males need to be educated on the repercussions of sexual abuse on females.
3. Though perceptions of violence are related to physical abuse (Q4), there is a slight shift towards recognising psychological and social effects of violent relationships. Usually the physical and sexual abuse are also accompanied by psychological and social effects and these might need to be equally emphasised as violence is still strongly associated to physical signs.
4. With regards to potential abusers, we can conclude the following:
 - a. Whilst it was expected that boyfriends and girlfriends would be identified as potential abusers, it is interesting to note that peers and people in a higher position scored approximately equally to the former.
 - b. Peer pressure is being classified as an abusive relationship and thus further awareness about this issue might need to take place. It is known that peer pressure starts earlier than this age range, but are our young people able to handle it positively? Though many might not be aware of the seriousness and consequences of cyber stalking, since the majority of young people use social media as part of their communication with peers, young people are in a more vulnerable position to encounter such difficult situations more easily and potentially in a more subtle way due to the anonymity that the internet could provide to the perpetrator.
 - c. When rating people in higher positions were they referring to lecturers, teachers, heads of institutions, parents? This might need further clarification. The question is: are we doing enough to bring awareness that peer pressure and having a higher position can lead to abusive behaviour? When our young people speak up, are they being listened to or else they continue to carry the blame?
5. Young people unanimously declared that they could be exposed to violent relationships. This poses doubt how much campaigns against violence and abusive relationships are being effective. If they are not effective, why and what needs to be done alternatively so that these become more effective? Or is this only a perception? Is certain type of behaviour being interpreted as violent? How does this high possibility of exposure to violent

relationships relate to other social difficulties that are not necessarily directly related to violent relationships, but have an abusive element such as crimes, substance misuse and abuse (including alcohol), the way young people entertain themselves during weekends, how are all these correlated? This might be an opening to further research on the perceptions of young people on violent relationships. What impact shall this have on future society?

6. Fear remains the predominant factor that stops young people from reporting abuse like in other generations. Victims of abuse might not feel understood or else feel that they will be judged or it becomes worse. Do we have enough safety for victims to report any abusive relationship? Though research shows that it is normal that violent relationships are underreported we still do need to further investigate how we can make the system safer to report such abuse.
7. There seems to be high awareness among young people that violent relationships are unacceptable. Almost 90% said that they should seek help or else leave the relationship. This is positive as prevention programmes and campaigns seem to have brought the desired awareness that violence in any situation is unacceptable and the victim should not succumb to violence.

These above conclusions are the perceptions of young people between the ages of 16 and 22 in further and higher education about violent relationships.

6. Limitations

This study presents the following limitations:

1. It has been conducted with a sample from just more than half of the population within this age range and thus these perspectives are only of those who attend post secondary / tertiary education. It does not cover the employed and unemployed sector which amounts almost to the same sample of population.
2. Another limitation of this study is that certain questions remain unanswered for instance, why do they report to the police more than social workers, why do young people feel that they are exposed to violent relationships and why fear remains the main incumbent to report abuse. These need further research and study to understand better these perceptions.

7. Recommendations

The following are some recommendations that emanate from this study:

1. A study should be commissioned to understand the perceptions of those who are in employment and unemployed about violent relationships. This could change the level of awareness showed by young people who continue post-secondary and tertiary education.
2. Whilst the study shows that there is a high level of awareness of the exposure to violent relationships, of who can be the abusers, of how to handle violent relationships and their effects, we might need to consider sexual abuse and cyber stalking /stalking in prevention programmes and campaigns since these might have become more frequent in our society especially with social media in place without creating unnecessary alarm. The perception given by the media on how the woman should look and be attractive also leaves an impact on this scenario.
3. Fear to report remains a major issue. Whilst it is understandable that victims find it difficult to report as this might make their position more vulnerable, on the other hand safety needs to be ensured when victims report any abuse. Safety procedures should be in place in order to create a safe place for such cases to be dealt with and that safety is secured after reporting. On the other hand service providers (this refers to police, school management, and health professionals) and management of organizations need to be aware of such a preoccupation and need to deal with such an issue before dealing with the abuse itself. Thus campaigns and prevention programmes could be directed towards service providers and management of organizations on bringing awareness how to handle such reports in a way that victims feel safe, understood and supported whilst dealing with the abuse.
4. During the compilation of the report, it was very difficult to access data regarding domestic violence or the data is not detailed enough. Further detailed statistics need to be gathered in order to have a more exact picture even if it is known that violence is underreported especially for the young people age group. More exact statistics can help to build more focused prevention programmes at addressing particular issues.

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Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

Young people in every country across the world are being subjected to many forms of violence – this is wrong and must stop. The *Malta Girl Guides (MGG)*, *Aġenzija Żgħażaġh* and the *National Council for Women (NCW)* believe that everybody has the right to live free from violence and the fear of violence. We need to be aware of our rights – and find the voice to create a global movement and actions to end violence. Through this survey, we are trying to raise awareness about all forms of abuse.

Confidentiality clause

Your anonymity is paramount and the results will divulge no personal details. However an overview of the global results will be published as part of a report and an analysis.

1. Respondent's Gender & Age

Male

Female

Age _____

Studying at: *Please tick accordingly.*

University

Junior College

Higher Secondary

IT

MCAST

Not studying

Employed

Unemployed

2. What do you think are the worst forms of violent relationships?

Kindly mark with 1 to 6 with 1 denoting the worst form of violence; 2 the next etc.

physical abuse (*battering, pushing, etc*)

verbal (*name-calling, put-downs, blaming or criticizing*) or nonverbal abuse (*includes behaviours that diminish a person's self-esteem making him/her afraid*)

sexual abuse (*somebody taking sexual advantage of another person for which the latter does not consent including verbal and sexual behaviour*)

stalking or cyber stalking (*act of threatening, harassing, or annoying someone through multiple messages, face-to-face, written and electronically*)

economic abuse or financial abuse (*e.g. not allowing someone to manage own accounts or the victim is left without money to sustain his/her basic needs*)

spiritual abuse (*using one's position to make another person believe in principles that s/he does not consent to*)

other (*please elaborate*) _____

3. What, in your opinion, is the most likely inner thought or feeling of a victim in a violent relationship?

*Please tick **only one** thought / feeling you think the victim experiences.*

- feeling afraid
- avoiding certain topics out of fear of angering the abuser
- having low self-esteem
- believing that he/she deserves to be hurt or mistreated
- feeling emotionally numb or helpless feeling hostile towards the gender of the abuser
- other (please elaborate) _____

4. What are the signs of violent relationships? Please tick **three (3)** of the following statements.

- bruises and other signs of impact on the skin, with the excuse of “accidents”
- depression, crying
- frequent and sudden absences
- harassment
- fear of the partner, references to the partner’s anger
- inability to concentrate at work or to study
- low self-esteem
- lack of trust in others
- denied opportunities due to the offender’s jealousy
- isolation from friends and family
- insufficient resources to live decently (money, credit cards, car)
- Other (please elaborate) _____

5. Do you think that young people aged 16 – 22 can be exposed to violent relationships?

- Yes No Other. Please specify: _____

6. Who is the most likely to be the abuser? Please tick **only one (1)** of the following:

- boyfriend
- girlfriend
- peers (e.g. friend or an employee at the workplace)
- relative
- anyone in a higher position than the victim (e.g. teacher or manager at work)
- Other. Please specify: _____

7. To whom do the victims must report the violence? *Please tick only **one (1)** of the following:*

- police
- social worker
- relatives
- medical staff (eg. doctor or psychiatrist)
- youth worker
- shelter
- nobody
- Other. Please specify: _____

8. What should a victim of violence do in an abusive situation? *Please tick only **one (1)** of the following:*

- the victim can and must leave
- the victim may not be aware of other options and doesn't know that he/she can leave
- the victim is not always safe to leave
- the victim should first seek help before leaving
- the victim may find it easier to leave after seeking help
- Other. Please specify: _____

9. What is mostly likely that hinders a victim from reporting an abuse? *Please tick only **one (1)** of the following:*

- victims are frightened of repercussions
- lack of proof prevents them from putting forward their report
- not enough information about who to ask for help
- Other. Please specify: _____

10. What are the effects of violence on a relationship?

- losing trust in others
- losing hope in life
- experiencing flashbacks

- abusing others
- psychiatric conditions
- no change
- Other. Please specify: _____

Any comments/suggestions you would like to add regarding the campaign.

Would you be interested in having an active role in the campaign? If so, please specify in which way and give your contact details. **This information will remain confidential and will only be used to contact you in case you are willing to offer your help.**

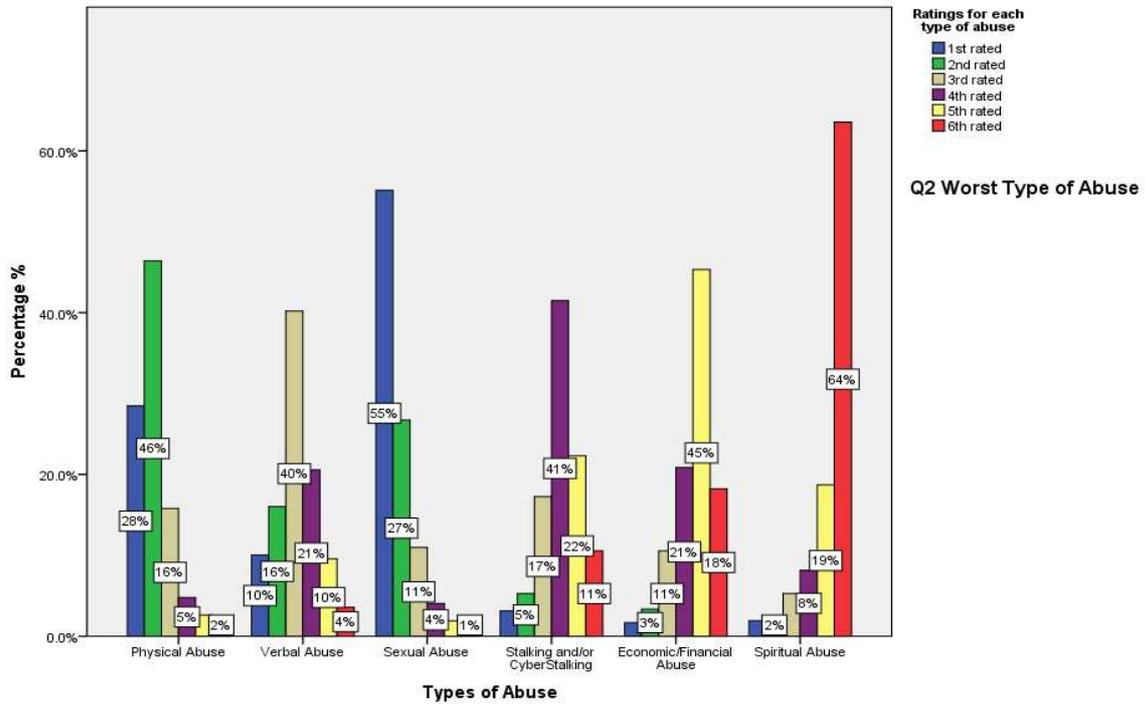
I would like to help out by

Name: _____ E-mail Address: _____

Contact Number: _____

We would like to thank you for your input as it really means to us. You will be able to see the outcome results of this survey on our website: www.maltagirlguides.com.

Appendix 2 – Additional Data



Graph 4 Comparative Results of types of abuse.