

Chair of Equality and Social Justice Committee
Senedd Cymru
Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddCydraddoldeb@senedd.cymru

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddEquality@senedd.wales

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Dear Ms Rathbone,

Thank you for your letter dated 25th July 2023, following the oral evidence session on the 19th June 2023, in which you asked to provide additional information in relation to the following:

- The evidence base that exists for restorative approaches, and how effective these approaches are in preventing gender-based violence?
- Whether enough is being done to equip young people with the skills to protect themselves from online abuse and harms?

We address the two questions in turn in the attached paper.

Yours Sincerely



Alexa Gainsbury, Consultant in Health Improvement
Emily van de Venter, Consultant in Health Improvement

1. Restorative Approaches

Restorative practice, or restorative approaches, are ways of working that focus on relationships and understanding the needs of individuals and communities. In situations of conflict or harm the approach focuses on accountability, solutions and opportunities to make amends rather than establishing guilt, blame, placing attention on the problem or seeking punishment.

Restorative approaches first emerged within the Criminal Justice sector, with the Restorative Justice movement arising in North America in the 1970s. The practice has been developed and applied within education settings since the 1990s.

Restorative practice is not a discrete programme with defined delivery parameters, but rather a way of working as a community. Within the UK, the Restorative Justice Council (RJC) is the independent membership body for the field of Restorative Practice and provides quality assurance over training standards. RJC provide evidence-based Practice Frameworks and Guidance to support the delivery of quality restorative practice.

The RJC list six principles of restorative practice as:

- Restoration – the primary aim of restorative practice is to address and repair harm
- Voluntarism – participation in restorative processes is voluntary and based on informed choice
- Neutrality – restorative processes are fair and unbiased towards participants
- Safety – processes and practices aim to ensure the safety of all participants and create a safe space for the expression of feelings and views about harm that has been caused
- Accessibility – restorative processes are non-discriminatory and available to all those affected by conflict and harm
- Respect – restorative processes are respectful to the dignity of all participants and those affected by the harm caused.¹

Operation Encompass applies the principles of restorative practice when dealing with incidents or concerns of domestic violence or abuse, or gender-based violence, involving a child and working with parents/carers and education settings. Training and resources are provided to enable those agencies working with children and young people to apply restorative approaches in response to specific incidents.

¹ [Principles of restorative practice - FINAL 12.11.15.pdf \(restorativejustice.org.uk\)](#)

1.1 Restorative Practice as a Whole-School Approach

Public Health Wales has recently reviewed the evidence base for the use of restorative practice as a whole school approach and impacts on mental wellbeing outcomes. While there are many ways of implementing Restorative Practice in schools, there's a body of evidence to suggest that a Whole School Approach is likely to be most effective.

Nine studies were reviewed, three of these were from a single large-scale realist randomised control trial in the UK of strong quality (Bonell et. al. 2018, Melendez-Torres et. al. 2021, Warren et. al. 2019), the other studies were of limited quality and hence firm conclusions cannot be made based on their findings (Acosta et. al. 2019, Gregory et. al. 2015, Hollands et. al. 2022, Norris et. al. 2019, Todic et. al. 2020, Wong et. al. 2011).

The large-scale realist randomised control trial from the UK found evidence of a positive effect for 11–15-year-olds from a whole school implementation approach. Positive results included reduced bullying, improved psychological functioning, increased wellbeing and quality of life, and reduction in health-harming behaviours. Intervention effects appeared to strengthen over time. The evidence suggests a significant amount of time is required for the intervention to effect organisational change within school settings. Positive effects were found despite variable fidelity suggesting that with whole school interventions overall fidelity to mechanism of action is more important than fidelity to intervention delivery/ component.

Findings from the evidence review were presented to and discussed by an Expert Panel involving academics, public health and education professionals. The expert panel consensus was that there is **some evidence from studies that this intervention is likely to have a positive effect on health and wellbeing but this is not conclusive (+)**.

The panel considered this evidence statement to reflect the evidence base for secondary aged learners as there was insufficient evidence for primary settings. Restorative approaches appear to have promise in improving multiple health and wellbeing outcomes among secondary school populations. Evidence suggests significant time is required to effect organisational change. When applied comprehensively and consistently there are positive impacts, however implementation may be variable. Mechanisms that support success appear to include, the use of local data to understand need, the involvement of school senior leadership, whole school commitment and the quality of sustained implementation across a school.

1.2 Mental health and perpetration of violence against women and girls

There are fewer studies exploring the relationship between violence against women and girls and the mental health status of perpetrators than there are on the mental health impacts of being a victim of violence and abuse. Those that do exist tend to be from cross-sectional or retrospective studies so findings should

be interpreted with some caution. However existing studies suggest associations between mental ill-health disorders and perpetration of domestic violence and abuse (Oram et. al. 2017, Dutton & Karakanta, 2012). These findings suggest that promoting positive mental health may contribute to reduced risks of violence against women and girls.

2. Online safety

2.1 What is being done in Wales to equip young people with skills to protect themselves from online abuse and harms.

The Digital Competence Framework is one of three mandatory cross-curricular frameworks within **Curriculum for Wales**. The framework includes concepts of conscientious digital citizenship alongside critical evaluation of the digital world and one's place within it. Further there is a specific 'online behaviour and bullying' element of the digital competency framework which includes skills progression to prevent (primary and secondary) perpetration of online bullying.

The Welsh Government Digital Resilience and Education Team support schools, including through the provision of resources, via the Hwb website. The Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience also provides learners with skills development regarding critical engagement with social influences whilst the mandatory Relationships and Sexuality Education Code considers online and offline information, interactions and behaviours analogously. Mandatory roll out of the curriculum began from September 2022 and thus it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness in equipping young people with skills to protect against online harms. However, the existing evidence base does help to identify potentially effective strategies, many of which align with ambitions within the new curriculum as well as broader whole school approaches to health and well-being discussed during the oral evidence session (see below).

The recently published Wales Without Violence Framework details nine strategies to prevent violence among children and young people, including VAWDASV. Opportunities for online interventions over and above the new curriculum within these strategies are listed below with varying potential to contribute to young person skills development. They include:

- offering resources and advice on online safety to parents and caregivers;
- connecting trained outreach staff with community members to mediate any conflicts and help children and young people access community support (online and offline);
- providing training for education staff on healthy relationships, social norms and values, violence prevention, and online safety, including current trends;

- legislation on online safety, including enforcing duties to protect children and young people from violent content online;
- social marketing campaigns that aim to challenge and change harmful attitudes, beliefs, social norms and stereotypes that uphold privilege, inequality and subordination, justify violence and stigmatise survivors.

There are already some interventions active in Wales which incorporate these recommendations including 360 Safe Cymru, Report Harmful Content and professionals' access to the UK Professional Online Safety Helpline. However, I am not aware of any evaluations into their effectiveness in supporting young person skills development.

2.2 Young People's perceptions of online safety and attitudes towards interventions

During the consultation for the Wales Without Violence Framework (Snowdon et al., 2023), the Wales Violence Prevention Unit and Peer Action Collective Cymru spoke to over 470 children and young people about their perceptions of violence. Overall, 47% of children and young people who took part in the consultation felt that bullying, online and in-person, was the most common issue in their community. Other responses relevant to this inquiry included sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic abuse, stalking and hate crime including trans abuse and homophobia.

The children and young people who were consulted with did not differentiate between violence experienced in-person, and violence experienced online. A common suggestion for preventing violence put forward by young consultees was to 'regulate web-based material to protect children and young people from the harmful content online' (Walker, 2023). This aligns with wider evidence generated from a representative survey of the British adult population regarding experience of online harms and attitudes towards online safety interventions (Enoch et al., 2023) which identified that exposure amongst participants to online harms was high and the majority were supportive of regulatory action from media platforms to respond to users who generate harmful content, and government-to respond to platforms that fail to deal with harmful online content.

2.3 What works to prevent online harms; the evidence base

The recently published WHO 'what works to prevent online violence against children' (WHO, 2022) report provides a useful summary regarding the epidemiology of online violence against children and young people as well as potentially effective strategies for prevention. They identify multiple structural, skills and knowledge and skills components associated with success from the literature.

Structural components associated with success include varied learning strategies; well-trained facilitators or teachers; quality assurance; attention to special and

high-risk populations; repeat exposure to messaging; interactive delivery and programmes delivered as part of a whole school approach.

Skills development associated with effectiveness include problem-solving, assertiveness and self-efficacy; empathy development; self-regulation and emotion management; conflict resolution; help-seeking and bystander activation.

Knowledge components associated with effectiveness include social norms, relationships and sexuality education and substance misuse education.

WHO identify bullying as a developmental precursor to online violence and thus recommend bullying prevention and respect-building skills should be a developmental cornerstone for the prevention of later forms of offline and online violence. Finally, given the overlap of online and offline violence they identify the need to integrate content about online dangers with offline violence prevention.

Essentially these core components, skills and knowledge are consistent with those you would prioritise to promote mental wellbeing with one or two specific exceptions e.g. bystander interventions. Consequently they should be incorporated into broader programmes relating to health and well-being rather than the development of standalone interventions aimed at preventing violence as recommended within the Wales Without Violence Framework.

The 'What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Systematic Evidence Assessment' (Addis and Snowdon, 2021) states that interventions need to be socio-culturally relevant to be effective (Nation et al., 2003) and that the use of online and social media platforms in violence prevention might resonate particularly with younger audiences in countries with high internet usage.

The report also draws on evidence from Mennicke et al. (2018) evaluation of a five-year social norms sexual violence prevention marketing campaign designed specifically for men at a large university in the United States. Over five years of data collection, men's perception of their peer's attitudes and beliefs improved, the discrepancy between perceptions and self-report decreased, and their own beliefs (more so than attitudes) improved. In addition to gains on measures of both self-reported beliefs and perception of peer attitudes and beliefs, men's self-reported behaviour also improved throughout the course of the intervention. Men reported sexually aggressive behaviour less frequently during later years of the intervention and indicated that they engaged in bystander intervention behaviour more frequently. Results from this research suggests that social norms marketing campaigns can be used to positively engage men in violence prevention.

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Additional Information Requested by Equality and Social Justice Committee from Public Health Wales

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