PREVENTING HARM BEFORE IT HAPPENS

RISE POLICY BRIEF | OCTOBER 2026

Key takeaways

1. **Tech-facilitated VAWG is normalised among young people, with early warning signs often missed by professionals**
2. **Each additional hour of unstructured time can increase the risk of intimate-partner violence (IPV) by 7.5%**
3. **We know much more about what causes VAWG than what prevents it, with prevention mostly targeting individuals not systems**

Recommendations to policymakers

Prevention programmes must change systems and act across people's lives

Current prevention programmes concentrate on changing individual behaviour rather than the systemic causes of VAWG. Government should strengthen investment in interventions across the life course, with programmes that address influences at the community and wider societal level.

Establish a national early intervention framework for tech-facilitated VAWG

This should support young people with healthy relationship education, digital literacy, bystander approaches and whole-system prevention, and equip practitioners to identify monitoring, coercion, dependency and image-based abuse before significant escalation occurs.

Consider (un)structured activities and routines when designing interventions

The Home Office and local commissioners should pilot and evaluate prevention approaches that increase access to structured activities and stable routines for disadvantaged young people. UK-specific longitudinal data linking VAWG with detailed information on time use should also be funded.

Invest in interventions that can show a long-term reduction in VAWG

Prevention programmes must actually reduce violence, not only improve attitudes, awareness and knowledge. Future investment and evaluation should examine what works, for whom, in what circumstances and over the long term, including how programmes are implemented, sustained, scaled and delivered.

Research findings

Tech-facilitated VAWG in young people is normalised and warning signs are spotted too late

Dr. Hannah Guy, Adolescent TFVAWG

A systematic review found that VAWG among adolescents doesn't emerge suddenly. It often begins with harmful technology-facilitated behaviours, such as monitoring location, 'nude' requests, persistent messaging and harassment.

These actions are frequently normalised among teenagers and dismissed as 'typical teenage behaviour'. Such a permissive peer culture is marked by sexual double standards, victim blaming, misogyny and status-seeking, which is in turn fuelled by pornography and misogynistic content.

In stakeholder interviews, with professionals across education, charities, policing, healthcare and local government, many reported struggling to spot the early signs of tech-facilitated VAWG. Abuse is frequently recognised only after it has occurred, and routes to de-escalation are fragmented.

The project's TFVAWG Practice Framework outlines how we can embed healthy relationships education and digital literacy skills in schools, clearer professional guidance and training, and more joined-up safeguarding and support pathways.

> **"It is quite normalised for young children that you send nudes."**
>
> – Practitioner interviewee, Adolescent TFVAWG Project

How people spend their time can increase the risk of intimate-partner violence (IPV)

Dr. David Buil-Gil, Dr. Niels Blom and Ms. Yijie He, Proximal Risks

The link between disadvantage and higher rates of VAWG is well-established. A data analysis of 4,481 people in the US at 12,965 points across their lives tested whether this was because disadvantage is correlated with higher engagement in substance abuse or 'unstructured activities', such as socialising with friends, television, video games and internet use. While alcohol or drug use did not explain why socio-economic disadvantage was linked to higher levels of IPV, the study found each additional hour of unstructured time was associated with 7.3% higher IPV between people and 2.5% higher IPV across the same person's life.

Prevention interventions should therefore include increased access to structured activities and stable routines for young people facing disadvantage.

Each additional hour of unstructured time increased risk of IPV



+7.3%
Between people

+2.5%
Across the same person's life

We know much more about what causes VAWG than what prevents it

Dr. Nisar Ahmed, Rapid Evidence Review

A review of VAWG risk and protective factors found that potential protective factors, such as emotional regulation, communication and conflict-resolution skills, have been studied much less than risk factors.

Prevention programmes predominantly address individual and relationship-level behaviours, while the structural influences that lead to VAWG are less commonly targeted – family and peer relationships, communities, gender norms, inequalities and wider social conditions, starting in childhood and through to adulthood.

Additionally, while prevention programmes were seen to improve attitudes, knowledge, relationship skills and bystander behaviour, evidence of lasting reductions in violence was less consistent.

We need to know not only whether a prevention intervention changes intermediate outcomes, but whether it actually reduces VAWG in the long term.

References

RISE Projects

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About RISE

The UK Government's Safer Streets Mission and Freedom from Violence and Abuse strategy aim to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the next decade.

Funded by UKRI's R&D Missions Accelerator Programme, RISE is an interdisciplinary research and engagement programme led by SPRITE+, NSEC and SALIENT to help deliver this aim.

Recognising that no single intervention can tackle VAWG alone, RISE's 13 research projects take a whole-society approach and tackle critical issues including early prevention in adolescents, online misogyny, disability-inclusive approaches and women's safety in public spaces.

We want our work to reach the practitioners and policymakers working in this area, and most importantly, make a difference to those impacted by gender-based violence and abuse.

Find out more

Email: sprite@manchester.ac.uk
Web: spritehub.org/rise-projects

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