

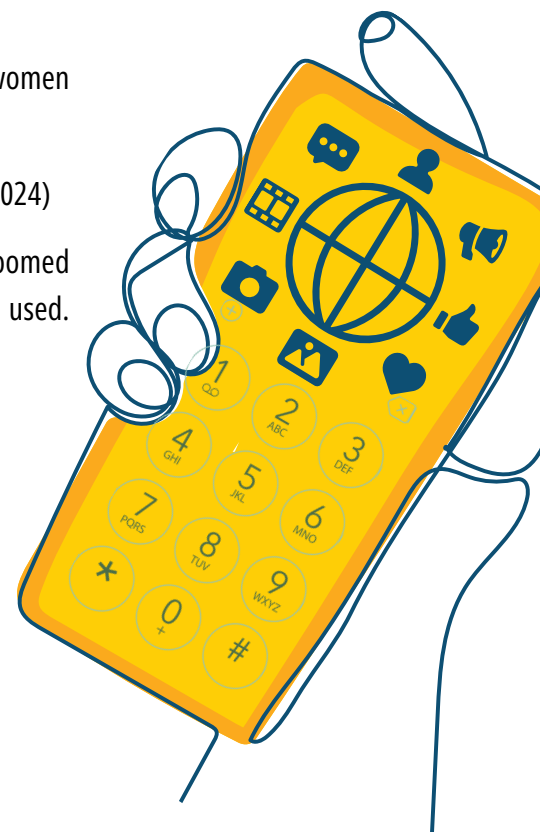
CTRL+ALT+SAFETY

Handout

Content Warning Please be aware that this briefing contains content which refers to domestic abuse and sexual violence, including rape.

Key Stats

- ▶ 10% of young women under 25 experienced DA, compared to 6% of women older than 25 (Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2024)
- ▶ 77% of girls and young women faced online harm in 2024. (GirlGuiding, 2024)
- ▶ 2023/24 data shows that in cases where gender was known, 81% of groomed children were girls, with Snapchat being the most common platform used. (NSPCC, 2024)
- ▶ Advance began providing gender-specific support to girls through the Young Londoners Victims and Witnesses Service which began in October 2024, and in that time, we have seen a huge number of referrals. In just three months (Oct-Dec), we found that at least 10% of referrals where a crime has been reported to the police has been linked to online and social media activity. This has included cases of unwanted explicit imagery to girls, blackmail, grooming and rape.



What is the Problem?

- ▶ Technology is intertwined with the lives of young people. It provides opportunities for learning, exploration, and connection but also exposes users to harm.
- ▶ Misogyny remains a persistent issue in all arenas of our society and is being amplified in online space and perpetrators exploit online tools to groom, exploit, and abuse young women and girls.
- ▶ Vulnerable young women and girls who face intersecting challenges may be at further risk of online abuse. Young people with longstanding illnesses may spend more time online, and therefore at further risk, and past traumas may be exploited by perpetrators to gain trust. This is exacerbated by reduced access to safe online education.
- ▶ Coercive and controlling behaviour is a fundamental pattern of abuse, and perpetrators increasingly use technology and social media to exert control, making it harder for victims to escape.
- ▶ Research by Women's Aid and Cosmopolitan found that a third of teenage girls have been in an abusive relationship. However, many teens struggle to recognise the signs of abuse, suggesting the actual figure may be even higher.
- ▶ One report (Women's Aid, 2023) found that young people exposed to misogynistic social media content are almost five times more likely to view physically hurting someone as 'acceptable' if the perpetrator apologises afterward.

What Should Be Done?

As adults, our responsibility is to equip young women and girls with the tools they need to navigate it safely. Simultaneously, we must advocate for stronger safeguards and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. On top of this, we need to equip young women and girls with support in their 'real-world'.

1. **Safe Spaces:** Real-world communities need dedicated women-only spaces where young women and girls can feel safe and supported to ask questions and have conversations about safe and healthy relationship – online and offline.
2. **Prevention and Early Intervention:** Support services must be designed to not only respond to abuse but also prevent it from occurring in the first place. Professionals who engage with young people should receive up to date training and tools which reflect the world around us and include possible online harms.



3. **Long-term Funding:** Sustainable funding must be allocated to early intervention and prevention services, reducing reliance on reactive measures. This should include real-world safe spaces, support services, and trusted mentors for girls and young women.
4. **Accountability:** Platforms must be held accountable for allowing harmful behaviours to proliferate, and legal frameworks should be strengthened to address digital abuse.
5. **Further research:** Further research is needed on this subject and the many interlinking factors within it, including the impact of technology and digital influences on sex and relationships.

We must shift our approach from reactive solutions to proactive prevention, ensuring that young people are protected before harm occurs.

Online Safety Act

The Online Safety Act (October 2023) requires tech companies to:

- Reduce harm to women and girls.
- Remove illegal content from their platforms.

The Online Safety Act (October 2023) requires tech companies to:

- Content and activities disproportionately affecting women and girls.
- Strategies for assessing and reducing harm to them.

Emerging concerns:

- **Deepfakes/AI-generated explicit content:** These technologies are being used to create harmful content, particularly affecting young women and girls.
- **Campaigns for legal reform:** EAW and other organizations are advocating for a new offence criminalizing the creation of non-consensual sexually explicit deepfakes, as part of broader image-based abuse legislation.

Rising online misogyny:

- Social media algorithms amplify harmful misogynistic content, normalising it among young people.
- Research from UCL, University of Kent, and Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) found a fourfold increase in misogynistic content on TikTok's "For You" page within five days.
- Online misogyny is impacting offline behaviour, with these ideologies moving into schoolyards.

Gender gap in online safety:

- Research by King's College London (2024) shows men are more likely to engage with online safety resources than women.
- It's critical to equip young women and girls with tools to navigate and protect themselves in the digital space



How Do We Help Solve the Problem?

Advance is committed to providing vital gender- and age-responsive support for young women and girls who have experienced, or are at risk of, domestic abuse and other forms of exploitation. We intervene at the earliest opportunity to help them escape harm and fulfil their aspirations. To do this, we offer them recovery-focused and skill-building programs to empower them to move forward with confidence and security in safe, women-only spaces.

Advance Services:

- ▶ **Maia and Lift Programme:** Led by Advance and in partnership with three specialist organisations, Maia/LIFT provides vital support for young women and girls who have experienced or who are at risk of domestic abuse.
- ▶ **The Young Londoners' Victim Service:** As part of the Young Londoners' Victim Service, Advance provides gender-specific support to girls and young women who have been victims and witnesses of crime across London to help them cope and recover from their experiences.
- ▶ **Young Women's Minerva Keyworkers:** We support young women and girls who are justice experienced with gender and age-specific issues such as emotional management, healthy relationships and self-esteem, and help them to mitigate the cliff-edge of support which often occurs when a girl reaches the age of 18.
- ▶ **CouRAGEus:** This program is a safe and confidential space for young women, LGTBQ+ young people and disabled young people from Black and minoritised communities in London.

Advance toolkit

In response, we have worked with Agyeiwaa (Jay) Pepera, Certified Cybersecurity Practitioner and a communications specialist to create a comprehensive guide in the form of our **Keep Yourself Safe Online toolkit**, designed to help individuals navigate their online journeys safely and confidently - both with social media and online dating. It also serves as a valuable tool for professionals working with young people, equipping them to provide practical advice and support for managing online dangers. You can download it immediately after the webinar from advancecharity.org.uk

Through our work, we strive to create a safer world where young women and girls are protected from digital and real-world threats, ensuring they have the resources they need to thrive.



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