



Interventions with Children and Young People

Who are EMPOWER?

EMPOWER is a network of stakeholders delivering services in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Northamptonshire. This includes statutory bodies including police, crown prosecution service (CPS), local government, as well as third sector organisations that support survivors and perpetrators of VAWG. EMPOWER is a 9-month project (concluding July 2023) identifying issues and co-producing projects to uncover and explore problems and potential solutions to VAWG. Next steps from these mini-projects will seek to ensure the sustainability of the network and undertake co-designed and co-produced research to develop effective solutions to VAWG-related issues.

What key issues have been identified by EMPOWER so far?

Five key issues were prioritised by stakeholders at the beginning of the project. These are:

1. Accessing and engaging in the criminal justice system
2. Multi-agency/Multi-systems working
3. Education (intervention and training)
4. What works (using best-practice/evidence-based working)
5. Culture in the criminal justice system

Each of these issues was explored via a workshop, which led to the identification of mini-projects designed to further explore the issue. This briefing summarises the *Interventions with Children and Young People Project*, developed from workshop 3: Education (intervention and training).

What were the key aims of the Interventions with Children and Young People Project?

1. To understand what is the evidence base for the content of interventions for children (e.g. healthy relationships interventions) and others (e.g. parents, professionals, older people).
2. In relation to this context, to explore particular aspects of the research evidence to understand areas of interest that were identified as a result of the workshop:
 - U.K vs. international approaches
 - Mode of delivery (workshops, assemblies, mentoring)
 - Voluntary sector vs. statutory sector
 - Language and age-appropriateness
 - Effectives of peer support/bystander training
 - Gender sensitive approaches

What did we do for this project?

We searched for and summarised existing programmes from the UK (and internationally) that have been evaluated in terms of their efficacy as an intervention for young people with regards to VAWG, as well as other related social and behavioural problems. Three key intervention programmes with different modes of delivery (that have peer-reviewed evaluations) were focused on:

1. **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)** (Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Programme)
2. **Big Brothers Big Sisters UK (BBBSUK)** (community-based mentoring programme)
3. **Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)** (Bystander approach/intervention)

We gathered information on the structure and nature of each intervention (aim, target group, mode and context of delivery, language, approach to gender), and how the effectiveness of each intervention has been evidenced/measured.

What did we find?

We found evidence to support the efficacy of all three of the selected programmes, as well as (sometimes limited) evidence of them being implemented successfully within a UK context. Some evaluations focussed more on general behavioural outcomes that can be linked to VAWG (e.g. a reduction in aggressive/disruptive behaviour, improved quality of relationships with friends and family, improved academic performance) and others had outcomes specifically looking at VAWG (e.g. attitudes towards GBV).

A summary of each programme can be found below:

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies ([PATHS](#))

- The key goal is to promote social-emotional development to reduce behavioural and emotional problems and improve academic performance for children.
- PATHS is aimed primarily at children aged 5-11, and is embedded with the school curriculum.
- Multiple large-scale randomised control trials (RCTs) have found strong evidence for PATHS' effectiveness. However, while PATHS has been used in several schools in the UK, random control trials (RCTs) have only been conducted in the U.S.
- PATHS has had a significant effect in reducing children's aggressive and disruptive behaviours.
- Despite the lack of a UK-based RCT, PATHS has been recommended as one of the best early intervention programmes in schools in the U.K.¹

Big Brothers Big Sisters UK ([BBBSUK](#))

- Mentoring young people has been shown to improve academic, social, and economic prospects, including reducing risk factors for VAWG. BBBS is the largest mentoring programme in the world, its key goal being to create a transformative relationship between mentor and mentee that enables young people to realise their full potential (based on the Affective-Behavioural-Cognitive-Dynamic [ABCD]).
- BBBS UK started in the UK with a small pilot programme in Oxfordshire, which has subsequently expanded and has proven very successful.
- It is aimed primarily at young people aged 6-18, who are paired with an adult volunteer. Cross-gender matching, in particular female mentors and male mentees (known as 'Big

¹ Allen, G. (2011). *Early intervention: The next steps*. UK: The Stationery Office.

Sisters to Little Misters') has great potential to improve attitudes and beliefs pertinent to VAWG.

- RCTs have found significant reductions in all sorts of antisocial behaviours, including arrests and substance misuse, with particularly significant effects in boys.

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)

- MVP is a targeted prevention programme for gender-based violence (GBV), sexual harassment, and bullying. Started in the US, it was first introduced in Scotland in 2011, and is now delivered by 20 local authorities nationwide.
- It is delivered by qualified external providers within educational settings, and is aimed at secondary school aged young people. The MVP programme additionally trains young people as peer mentors who then deliver MVP session to younger students.
- MVP has not been as robustly evaluated as the other two programmes, but some reports indicate that it has significant, positive impacts on student knowledge of GBV, student awareness of and attitudes towards gender violence, students' confidence in themselves to prevent or confront sexist and violent behaviour, and students' assessment of their peers' attitudes. However, others have found no concrete evidence that the programme is effective in preventing violence. It is likely further evaluations (including RCTs) will be forthcoming.

What does this mean?

1. A number of effective approaches have been developed to provide early interventions in preventing VAWG, each with different cost and scope implications.
2. Our review suggests that **holistic programmes that have broader aims around social and educational skills** and general wellbeing may be more effective than targeted VAWG/GBV interventions with young people, although ideally both types of programme could be run in parallel.
3. There is significant scope within EMPOWER partners for shared approaches to implementing these approaches/programmes. The links above provide plenty of information about how to 'get started' running these programmes, with worked examples from counties where they have been successfully rolled out.

Thanks to all of our EMPOWER partners who contributed to this work.

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You can find out more about the EMPOWER project here: <https://le.ac.uk/criminology/research/empower>.

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