

~~No knives~~  
Better lives

# the Lassies are No Fear

Violence Between Girls in Scotland - Young Person's Report

April 2024



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# Introduction

At No Knives, Better Lives, our team works to understand what causes violence between young people so we can help adults like teachers, youth workers and police officers to help young people make positive decisions.

Over the past two years there has been more attention in the news and on social media about physical violence between girls and young women.

There are no official national statistics from the police, schools or government to say whether this is true. We wanted to talk to girls to learn more about their experiences of violence and to hear their ideas about what could help prevent it.



We spoke with four groups of girls in different areas of Scotland as well as four adults (one teacher and three youth workers) to hear from their perspective. After we collected the information, we also met with two more groups of girls and one group of adults to discuss the findings.

This report tells you more about what we heard and what we think should happen next.



We are really grateful to the young women for sharing their stories with us. They were loyal friends, protective of their families, brave and funny. For most of the young women, there was violence in different areas of their lives, like on social media, in school and the community.

The young women told us about their challenges with mental health, often due to bullying, and how they felt there was not much support available from adults. The young women had been harmed by violence and also harmed others.



The title we chose, The Lassies are No Fear, was something that was said by one of the adults interviewed. We liked that it showed the bravery of young women.

The doodles and hand-written writing in the report are inspired by young women in our workshops. The speech bubbles show real young women's own words.

This report covers topics like physical violence, violence against women and self-harm.

**Each of the three themes in this report has a story. They help to explain the experiences of the young women we spoke to. The stories are a mix of different real experiences we heard from young women in the research, but the characters in the story are not real.**

# R Relationships, Support and Community



## Jess' Story



The taunts, which often involved mentioning her family, became a breaking point. That's just a no-go. Like if you mention family, that's it. All cards are off the table.

Sixteen-year-old Jess found herself at a breaking point after she had endured relentless bullying from other girls at school. Jess felt isolated and unsupported at school. **"The teachers don't care until it's a fight... Until you actually do something. Until you actually try kill yourself."**

Under immense pressure from her family to retaliate, and in the absence of support from the school, Jess decided to confront the group of girls head-on, convinced that fighting was her only choice.

**"My mum was so happy when I hit her," she admitted.**

If you come from a hard family, then you are expected to be hard yourself.

The young women we spoke to were loyal and protective of their family and friends. Family played a big role in how they viewed violence.

Sometimes the young women found it hard to talk to their parents because they were worried about their response.

Some young women told us their families, in particular their mums, supported them to be violent.

"My mum was so happy when I hit [name]."

For young women from 'hard' families, it was difficult to get away from violence.

However, some mums did not support violence.

"My mum, like, she like, refused to, like, watch stuff like that because it's like she thinks it's horrible [...]"

She thinks it's pure like a sin and that."

"Sometimes you don't want to tell your parents that you're struggling because you don't want to worry them on top of all their other worries."



The young women found it hard to get support from other adults like teachers and police officers when they had a problem. They were worried about being called 'a grass' from their friends and also about the reaction from adults.

They did not think that there was support from teachers until the situation was very serious. This meant they felt they had to solve things themselves.

"Yeah, your anger just builds up and up because the teachers aren't doing anything.

Like you have nothing to do but do something yourself."

Overall, the young women did not have good relationships with the police, including campus officers.

Interviewer:  
"Do you think having a police officer on campus has made a difference?"

YP1: "I hardly see him."

YP2: "I forgot he existed."

Friends were a really important part of young women's lives. They stood up for their friends and expected them to do the same.

"I don't feel worried because I know I've got my pals."

Sometimes friends could turn nasty, but they could just as easily be good friends again afterwards.

## Social Norms, Values and Behaviours



### Danielle's Story



They get involved with fights on social media because it gives them something to do and because they find it entertaining. Danielle says she '**gets a buzz**' from arguing with people on social media.

Danielle is 14 years old and was excluded last year from school for violence. Danielle does not access any other educational or skills support programmes.

She sometimes has physical fights with other girls because '**it's easier just to fight**', rather than talk it out. Some of her friends have been seriously hurt in fights, some have even been charged by the police.

Danielle and her friends have '**nowhere else to go apart from McDonalds**' in their area.

Danielle isn't sure anything is going to change. "**that's just the way it's always been**."

## What is a social norm?

Social norms are unspoken rules or expectations of behaviour and thoughts. They are different for each culture and group. The rules tell us what is appropriate and inappropriate.

Often, we don't even think about them, like saying thank you to someone. Social norms change over time, that means we can choose to change them.

The young women experienced violence in different ways and in different places, like at school, online and in the community.

"You just need to watch your back. That's just the way it is. You just need watch your back at all times."



Young women had the impression that city centres were particularly violent. There were other places within communities that were known for violence.

"And everybody just fights there."

Disrespect was the cause of much violence for young women. This could be by saying disrespectful or rude things about friends or family, as well as looking at someone a certain way. Rumours and misunderstandings were also the cause of violence.

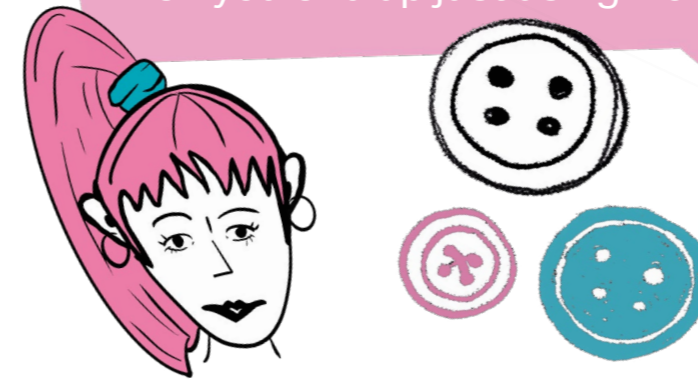
"Breathing, just looking in my direction. And I just go off my nut, innit."

Young women agreed that drinking alcohol made violence more likely. Drugs like cannabis were seen by some young people as ways to chill out.

"Aye, every time I drink I fight. Every single time."

The young women said they found it difficult to control their emotions and their actions. Physical violence was seen as a way to deal with arguments or disrespect.

"Yeah, sometimes when like people push your buttons or whatever and say something to them, you've hit them because you don't know what else to do. Then you end up just using violence."



For young women involved in violence, there were different consequences. Some young people got reputations for being violent, which meant people knew them as the 'trouble maker'. Being excluded from school was also a serious consequence.

"They're saying like there's a really high chance and possibility like if I get in any more fights this year, I'm done for. Like with school and like charges."

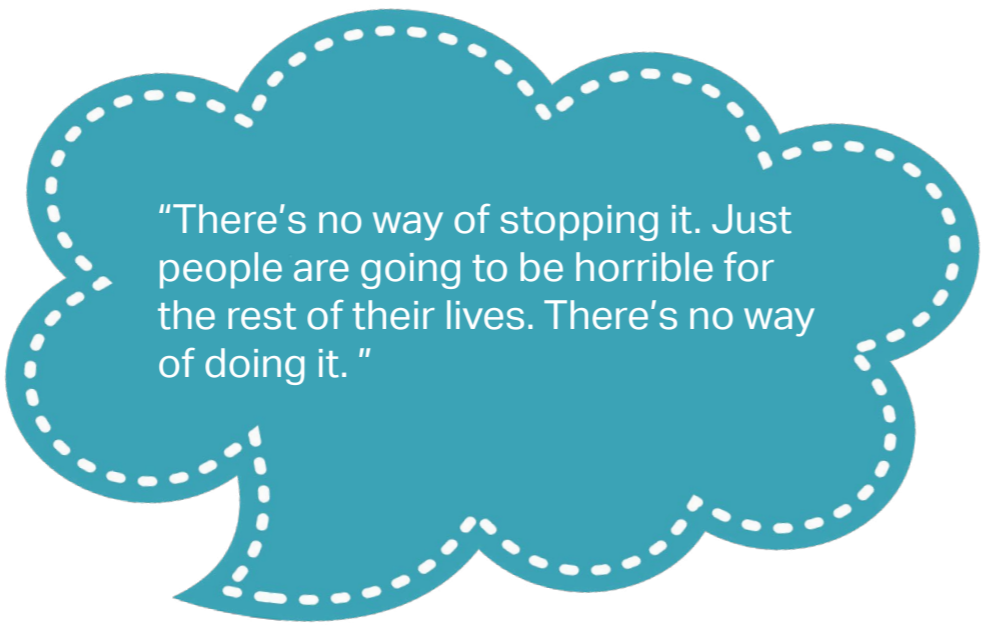
Discrimination against girls and young women was common. This was mainly from boys and young men in schools and the community.

"And boys always have a lot to say about girls' appearances."

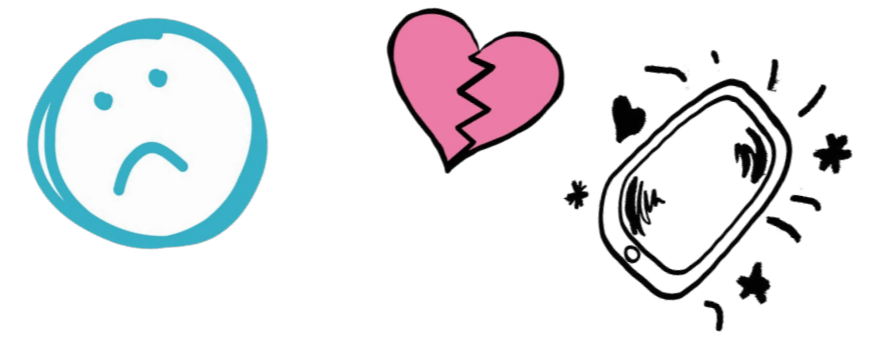
Practitioners wondered whether girls turned to physical violence because they needed to protect themselves.

**"How do we make society different and better for girls to grow up and be safe within their communities and not need to resort to violence to be able to get their voices heard?"**

For most of the young women, they also internalised these messages.



Young women had little hope for the future. They didn't think anything would change.



# Social Media



Sarah, 13, was recently attacked by a girl from a rival school. The fight had been filmed and was posted on an anonymous Instagram page named Local Scraps. The person who filmed it did so because it's funny.

Her friends are adamant that if she's getting battered, they're going to go in. They created a group chat on Snapchat and lots of people were added to the group.

Sarah felt humiliated that everyone in the school had seen her being battered. The thought of the videos out there forever had a big impact on her mental health and she stopped going out as much.

After some back and forth, a time and place for a fight was arranged. They decided on the back of some local shops as there's hardly any cameras down there. Sarah's friend, Emma, doesn't want to fight but she knows that there's basically no way out once you are in the Snapchat group. She's gonna have to do it.

Using the internet and social media has lots of benefits for young people, however, they can also experience risky or harmful things online. The young women we spoke to told us about how social media is linked to violence in their lives.

They saw lots of violence on social media, for example fights between young people, animal cruelty and hurtful words. Violence could be found easily through searching, viewing people's Stories or being sent videos directly.

"Like you can't control if they post it on their story and we just click it. We don't know that they posted it. Like we just click a story and there's a mad scrap."

Seeing lots of violence affected the way the young women felt about violence.

"I'm so used to seeing like videos like all the time, so it's just got to the point where it just doesn't [affect me]."

For some young women, watching videos of violence was entertaining and funny. They did not feel responsible for reporting content when it was not directly related to them.

"Sometimes they're funny. Sometimes they're not like proper fights."

"Doesn't bother me. It's not me or anybody I know then it's nothing to do with me."

Young women found some videos of violence to be unacceptable and did not like them. They remembered lots about videos that were very violent.

"I wish I had never seen that one."



Young women knew how to report content in apps but did not think they were effective.

"Like nothing gets banned out of it."

Some of the young women had been involved in physical violence that had been filmed or had filmed violence for their friends. They said they wanted to film this to prove they 'won' the fight.

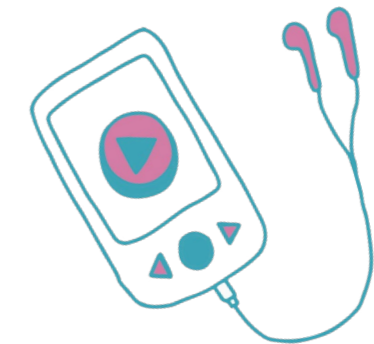
"I wanted to look at how good of a job I'd done."

When young women had been filmed being harmed by violence, they said it was embarrassing and had an impact on their lives. Families and communities also experienced negative impact.

**"Just knowing that your child is on social media being battered is horrendous."**

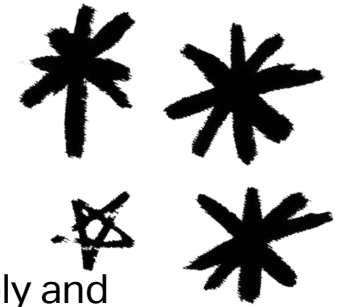
Snapchat was one app that was used by young women to organise fights and to gang up on someone. This could be with people you know and strangers.

"I always argue with people from England [...] just add you on Snapchat getting wide."





# What needs to change



We know that with the right support at the right time, all young women can grow up safely and reach their full potential. For this to happen, young people must have a say in the solutions. These are our recommendations for what needs to improve for young women:

- More research on girls and young women's experiences of violence.
- Stop gender-based violence in schools.
- More support for families to change attitudes around violence.
- More mental health support for young people.
- Improve reporting function on social media platforms.
- Support young people experiencing bullying.
- Support young people to be active online bystanders.
- Support families, teachers and youth workers to understand more about harmful online behaviour.

**Many thanks to all those who took part in the research and contributed to this resource.**

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Valid Until  
January 2024

