

## Response ID ANON-HU2X-Q2E8-7

Submitted to Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK

Submitted on 2021-04-30 15:08:14

### Transparency statement

We would like to know as much as possible about what you think of ONS and our proposals. We aim to be as open and transparent as possible, so we will publish an anonymised summary of the responses to this consultation – comments will not be attributed to specific organisations or individuals. We will list all of the organisations that participated in this consultation. As a public authority ONS is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and while we would never voluntarily release personal information from responses to this consultation we are not able to provide a guarantee of confidentiality. Please see our privacy notice for full details of how we will handle your data.

Agree

### Introduction

#### Which of these statements best describes yourself?

I am a researcher with an interest or expertise in using data and statistics to research children and young people

We may wish to contact you in relation to your response to this consultation. Would you be happy for us to do so? If so, please include your email address below

**Email:**

rachael@youngpeopleshealth.org.uk

#### What is your organisation?

**Organisation:**

Association for Young People's Health

### Questions for researchers and people who work with children

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unhappy and 5 is very happy, how happy are you with the concept of a survey to measure the current prevalence of child abuse?

3 – neither happy or unhappy

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unhappy and 5 is very happy, how happy are you with the proposed survey to measure the current prevalence of child abuse?

Not Answered

To what extent do you feel the proposed survey would meet your needs?

Not Answered

In what ways does the proposed survey meet or not meet your needs?

• In what ways does the proposed survey meet or not meet your needs? :

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it that survey data on the current prevalence of child abuse is collected?

5 - very important

If a survey was not implemented, what would the impact of this be to you, and more generally?

• What would be the impact of not collecting survey data on the current prevalence of child abuse?:

We recognise the benefit of capturing data on child abuse to inform research, policy and practice, and ultimately improve outcomes for children and young people. Currently, there is a lack of representative and robust evidence on the prevalence of child abuse. It is understood that disclosures of abuse (particularly in young men) are extremely rare and a better understanding of this prevalence would be very helpful. Consequently, there is a lack of appropriate and high quality support available for young people experiencing abuse.

What additional information about a prevalence survey would you need to increase your support for it?

• What additional information about a prevalence survey would you need to like or support it more? :

We support the proposals to introduce a prevalence survey on child abuse. However, we recommend that the ONS appropriately plan, design and implement the survey in a way that safeguards and protects children and young people.

The survey should provide a clear definition of 'child abuse', alongside provision of support to help young people understand what constitutes abuse. Not all young people are aware of what abuse is and may be unaware that they themselves have experienced it.

Engagement with young people through the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH) has revealed that some young people have had negative experiences of disclosing to teachers. In these cases, teachers have been unprepared and overwhelmed by the information shared by young people. We recommend that a trusted adult with appropriate training and experience to support young people who have experienced child abuse should assist young people completing the survey. For young people who identify as having experienced abuse, there must be appropriate follow-up support and guidance after having completed the survey.

The survey should outline how the ONS will use the data and information captured by the survey. Young people completing the survey should be reassured that their input will have a meaningful impact and will not be tokenistic. Child and youth friendly information about the confidentiality of the process must also be shared with any limits to that confidentiality clearly set out.

**The proposed survey would cover six types of abuse; neglect, physical, emotional, sexual, child exploitation and exposure to domestic violence or abuse. What specific types of abuse within these do you think should be included?**

**• A prevalence survey as presented here would cover six types of abuse; neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child exploitation and witnessing domestic violence or abuse, what specific types within these do you think should be included?:**

We recommend providing a clear definition for 'child abuse' and the six types of abuse. We agree that all of these six types of abuse should be included. Young people should be supported to understand what constitutes as abuse - not all young people are aware of what abuse is and may be unaware that they themselves have experienced it. Abuse is often framed within a narrow circumstance (e.g. a parent or person of authority) which ignores wider contexts in which abuse can occur (e.g. peer to peer or sibling abuse). Understanding how young people with experience of abuse understand and refer to these categories of abuse is also important in order to support the effective design of the survey tool.

**The proposed survey would focus on capturing lifetime and past year experiences of abuse, which may result in less scope for collecting detailed information on the nature of abuse. To what extent would this meet your needs?**

To some extent

**On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it to you that a prevalence survey includes children aged 16 and 17?**

5 - very important

**On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it to you that a prevalence survey includes young adults (from age 18)?**

5 - very important

**What are your views on the proposed lower age limit of 11 and upper age limit of 25?**

**What are your views on the proposed lower age limit of 11 and upper age limit of 25?:**

We agree with proposals to introduce a lower age limit of 11 and an upper age limit of 25. We suggest development of two different surveys, one for the younger age group and one for the older age group. The different surveys should use developmentally appropriate language and signposting support that is relevant for the age group.

**On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important, how important is it to you that a prevalence survey covers the whole of the UK?**

5 - very important

**How often should a prevalence survey be carried out to meet your needs?**

**• How often should a prevalence survey be carried out to meet your needs?:**

We recommend that the survey is conducted every five years. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, completing the survey will be a demanding and onerous task for young people and professionals.

**The proposed survey would be completed by children under 16 in a school environment, what additional considerations should be taken into account or researched around how a survey should be conducted in schools?**

**• A prevalence survey as presented here would be completed by children under 16 in a school environment, what additional considerations should be taken into account or researched around how a survey should be conducted in schools?:**

We recommend the ONS consults existing good practice on conducting research surveys within a school environment.

The following considerations should be taken:

- Teachers must foster a position of trust and respect with young people
- Young people must consent to completing the survey
- Schools must have a robust safeguarding procedure that all teachers are aware of and trained in how to respond. Teachers must be aware of: when to act on safeguarding, how to act on safeguarding, how to act without breaking trust with the young person, how to respect confidentiality, and when not to report further
- Training for teachers on what constitutes as child abuse and how to discuss this sensitively and appropriately with young people
- There should be support available for teachers, who they themselves may have historical experiences of child abuse
- Schools and teachers should be aware of appropriate support and services to signpost to when discussing child abuse with young people, particularly providing follow-up support for any young people who have disclosed abuse
- The time which it takes for teachers and pupils to complete a survey of this nature and any potential unintended impact this may have on time and resource required for day-to-day teaching
- For some young people, school is considered a safe place and an escape from abuse. If asked to make a disclosure of abuse within the school setting it may mean that the young person's place of safety is lost. Some of these young people may choose not to make a disclosure within school to ensure that there is no school, police or social work involvement in their lives.

**What additional evidence or further research should be considered around whether schools would be willing to participate in a prevalence survey?**

- **Whether schools would be willing to participate in a prevalence survey has been identified as an area that needs further exploration before a decision on the feasibility can be made, what additional evidence or considerations should be used or research should be carried out to inform this research question?:**

**We need to conduct further research to determine whether children and young people would be willing to participate in the proposed survey, and whether they would be able to recall, or willing to report, instances of abuse. What additional evidence or considerations should we take into account when exploring this?**

- **Findings on whether children and young adults would agree to take part in a prevalence survey and whether they could recall or would be willing to report experiences of abuse are so far inconclusive, what additional evidence or considerations should be used or research should be carried out to inform these research questions?:**

Efforts from the ONS to seek the views of children and young people who have experienced child abuse, to consult with them on how best to design and implement a survey on this topic are important. It would be helpful to know how this information will be used to best inform the survey development, as it should not be collected in a tokenistic way and must meaningfully inform whether a survey of this nature is feasible.

**We need to conduct further research into whether parents or guardians would give permission for their child to take part in the proposed survey, what additional evidence or considerations should we take into account when exploring this?**

- **Findings on whether parents would give permission for their child to take part in a prevalence survey are so far inconclusive, what additional evidence or considerations should be used or research should be carried out to inform this research question?:**

Requesting permission from parents or guardians may mean that parents who abuse or facilitate abuse allow their children to opt out from completing the survey. We recommend that equal weighting is given to whether young people understand the issue and parental permission when determining whether young people can competently complete the survey.

**The proposed survey would be framed as a child safety survey, what do you think about this?**

- **A prevalence survey as presented here would be framed as a child safety survey, in addition to those options considered, what alternative options are there for framing a survey to encourage buy in?:**

We support this proposal.

**The proposed survey would not be completely anonymous, what do you think about this?**

- **A prevalence survey as presented here would be required to not be completely anonymous, what do you think about this?:**

We support this approach, to ensure that standard safeguarding procedures are adhered to.

**The proposed survey would implement a flagging safeguarding procedure which would be used to assess the level of risk a child is in and apply different levels of safeguarding depending on the circumstances of the abuse disclosed. What additional factors should be considered in the design of a flagging procedure?**

- **A prevalence survey as presented here would implement a flagging safeguarding procedure which would be used to assess the level of risk a child is in and apply different levels of safeguarding depending on the circumstances of the abuse disclosed. What additional considerations should be taken into account as part of the design of a flagging procedure?:**

The young person should be clearly informed at the outset and throughout the survey about the safeguarding process that will be followed if a disclosure of abuse is made. Young people should be made aware of who their survey response will be shared with. This will ensure that there is transparency and trust from the young person's perspective.

**Which key referral services do you think should be included within our opt-in support option and safeguarding flagging procedure?**

**Please provide your answer below:**

We recommend including local specialist voluntary sector services.

**On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unhappy and 5 is very happy, how happy or unhappy are you about older children and young adults completing a prevalence survey online?**

3 – neither happy or unhappy

**What factors should be considered in determining the survey mode for older children (aged 16 and 17) and young adults who would not complete the survey in a school environment?**

**• What considerations should be taken into account in determining the survey mode for older children aged 16 and 17 and young adults who would not complete the survey in a school environment? :**

For young people who complete an online survey there must be appropriate follow-up and signposting to support services mirroring support that would be provided to young people completing the survey in a face-to-face environment. As above, there must be explanation and support given to young people to assist in their understanding of what constitutes as abuse.

We are concerned that there may be a delay in a young person completing the survey and receiving necessary support – no young person should be unsupported throughout and after the process, especially if it is the first time that they have made a disclosure of abuse.

**What additional research questions should be investigated, or further research should be carried out before making a conclusion on whether a prevalence survey would be feasible?**

**• What additional research questions should be investigated, or further research should be carried out before making a conclusion on whether a prevalence survey could be successful? :**

We recommend further research is conducted on how schools currently address child abuse, both how it is taught and discussed and how robust safeguarding procedures are. This would help to identify training gaps and needs for teachers on how to appropriately introduce and complete the survey with young people in a sensitive way. It is necessary for teachers to be provided with training and support so that young people have positive disclosure experiences. Through our engagement work at AYPH, young people have told us that the extent to which they consider their disclosure experience to be positive will inform how likely they are to seek out and engage with support services.

We recommend further research on accessibility - how best to share and disseminate the survey among young people to ensure that all young people are able to participate. Child abuse rarely occurs in a vacuum and poverty is often a factor that leads to a child being vulnerable to abuse. Noting this, some young people may not be able to access surveys in traditional or online formats. Therefore, when considering the feasibility of such a survey issues of access must be explored. This includes digital exclusion, language and communication barriers, children who are home schooled.

We recommend exploration of alternative places in which young people could complete the survey. Young people are more likely to engage within places that they feel safe. This could include youth centres or organisations that regularly work with young people.

**If the conclusion to phase one of the study supports the feasibility of a child abuse survey, there are several other areas which would require further investigation before a pilot survey could begin (see 'more information' for details). What other areas should be considered in phase two?**

**• If the conclusion to phase 1 of the study supports the feasibility of a child abuse survey, there are several other areas, as identified in the next steps and future developments, which would subsequently need further investigation as part of phase 2 before a pilot survey could be run. What other considerations should be taken into account in the next steps in phase 2?:**

We would welcome being involved in future consultations on the feasibility and development of a child abuse survey.

**Do you have any other comments on the proposed survey's coverage?**

**• Which elements of the proposed survey's coverage would you want to be changed for it to be more useful for you? :**

**Do you have any other comments on the proposed survey's methodology?**

**Please provide further details.:**

**Do you have any other comments on the proposed survey's ethical procedures?**

**Please provide further details.:**

The survey must be accompanied by appropriate support for children and young people, especially those who have experienced child abuse. There should be signposting to relevant services and online support for those who have made a disclosure. Safeguarding young people is of paramount importance to ensure that young people are completing the survey within a safe place and are not currently experiencing abuse. If the survey is focused on detecting historical abuse, the safeguarding risk and legal repercussions of encountering young people currently experiencing abuse may be reduced.

**Do you have any other comments?**

• Do you have any other comments?:

## **Personal Experience**

**Understanding the views of people who have experienced abuse as a child is important to us and we know that some people may want to share their experiences. This section of the consultation includes a question on whether you have any personal experience of abuse as a child. You may find being asked this question upsetting. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. Please select 'skip this section' now if you do not wish to continue, or select 'prefer not to say' at any questions you are not comfortable with.**

**Information on support services and how to contact them is listed at the end of the consultation should you wish to seek help and advice after completing this consultation. We want to understand the views of both people who have or have not experienced abuse as a child.**

**Please provide your answer below:**

Skip this section