

Young people's experiences of
identity abuse in the context of
family violence:
A Victorian study



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we come together to conduct our research and recognise that these lands have always been places of learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders — past and present — and acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and their ongoing leadership in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Funding Acknowledgement

Monash University acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.



This report draws on the Victorian data collected as part of the ANROWS-funded project 'Adolescent Family Violence in Australia: A National Study'.

Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our thanks to the 5,000 Australian young people who participated in the ANROWS National Study 'Adolescent Family Violence in Australia'. Given the focus of this study, we would particularly like to thank the Victorian young people who shared their experiences of family violence that targeted their gender identity, sexual identity and/or culture. This study would not have been possible without your generous willingness to share your experiences and insights with us.

This report draws on the Victorian data collected as part of the ANROWS-funded project 'Adolescent Family Violence in Australia: A National Study'. The project team are grateful to the Chief Investigators, particularly Professor Silke Meyer, for her support of this project and for granting permission for this project team to conduct secondary data analysis on a subset of that national project data.

Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon led this project in her capacity as Director of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre. The Report findings are wholly independent of Kate Fitz-Gibbon's role as Chair of Respect Victoria.

Recommended Citation

Fitz-Gibbon, K., Stewart, R. & McGowan, J. (2023) Young people's experiences of identity abuse in the context of family violence: A Victorian study. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University, doi: 10.26180/22191319

ABBREVIATIONS

ANROWS	Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
CISS	Child Information Sharing Scheme
CYP	Children and young people
DFV	Domestic and family violence
DSS	Department of Social Services
FSV	Family Safety Victoria
FVISS	Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme
MARAM	Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
MGFVPC	Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre
MUHREC	Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee
ORU	Open Research Unit
RCFV	Royal Commission into Family Violence

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Executive Summary

The 2022 release of the National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children (DSS, 2022) included a commitment to acknowledging children and young people as victim-survivors of family violence in their own right. That acknowledgement lays the foundations for a long overdue pivot across Australian state and territory policies and practices to ensure that service system responses to children and young people are age-appropriate, child-centred and trauma-informed. For this goal to be achieved, there is an urgent need for Australian states and territories to develop evidence-based, child-informed risk identification, assessment and management practices.

The National Plan (DSS, 2022) includes explicit recognition that LGBTIQ+ victim-survivors can experience unique forms of violence, sometimes referred to as identity-based abuse. The National Plan defines identity-based abuse as a range of different abusive behaviours, including:

- pressuring a person to conform to gender norms or undergo surgery they do not want,
- homophobic rape,
- threatening to 'out' the person's gender, sexuality or HIV status,
- exiling a person from the family due to their sexuality or gender, and
- forcing a family member into conversion practices (DSS, 2022, p. 46).

Despite this recognition at the national policy level, across Australian states and territories it remains unknown to what extent family violence risk identification, assessment and management

frameworks include identity-based abuse. Coupled with the lack of child and young people-specific risk tools, this presents a significant gap in understanding and practice in this area.

The Victorian Government's Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM Framework) must reflect all forms of family violence. Thus there is a need to build understanding of the diverse ways that children and young people experience family violence – and of the nature of that abuse and its impacts on victim-survivors. Two forms of family violence have received limited attention, particularly in relation to young victim-survivors: identity abuse and the cultural impacts of family violence. This study seeks to address that gap by drawing directly on the self-reported experiences of Victorian young people aged 16 to 20.

This study provides an analysis of young Victorians' experiences of gender-identity abuse, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, and the cultural impacts of family violence victimisation. It forms part of a wider study contracted by Family Safety Victoria (FSV) to support the development of the Child and Young Person-focused MARAM practice guidance and tools. This is the second output for the wider study; the first report focused on an analysis of young people's experiencing of seeking help, securing help and navigating the Victorian family violence system (see Fitz-Gibbon, McGowan and Stewart, 2023). Together these reports seek to incorporate the lived experience and the voices of children and young people into the new MARAM Practice Guides currently in development by Family Safety Victoria.

Young people's self-reported experiences of gender-based, and LGBTIQ+ identity abuse demonstrate the unique ways in which these forms of family violence occur, as well as the significant amount of co-occurrence with other forms of family violence. For the young people involved in this study, identity-based abuse experienced in the context of family violence was often perpetrated by a number of family members; in a significant number of cases it went unreported to anyone outside of family and friends. The study also documents that identity-based abuse has both immediate and long-term impacts on the physical and emotional wellbeing of child victim-survivors. Young people in this study also reported impacts on their social connections and their engagement with education.

There is a critical need to improve awareness of different forms of identity-based abuse and to build more effective supports across schools and the specialist service system. Only by doing so can we ensure that when young people do disclose, their experiences are validated, their risk is effectively assessed, and they are connected with the supports required to effectively plan and manage their safety. The experiences of the young people who participated in the national survey demonstrate that identity abuse is not experienced in a vacuum – it typically occurs along with numerous other forms of family violence, and it has myriad of impacts beyond the ways it targets a young person's gender and sexual identity. Effective risk-sensitive practice requires flexibility to respond to the many ways young people experience family violence.

This study also provides valuable insights to inform improved policy and practice-based understandings of help-seeking behaviours among young people who experience different forms of identity-based abuse. Family and friends play critical roles as the most likely first points of contact for young people to disclose their experience of violence. The experiences shared by young people demonstrate their desire for such disclosures to be followed by validation, an offer of support, and in many cases, follow-up actions. Improving informal support provision is a long-term project, one that requires investment in family violence education and community awareness state-wide.

The role of culture and the cultural impacts of family violence are underexplored both nationally and internationally. This is particularly the case for young victim-survivors. It is notable that in both this study and the wider national study from which this data is drawn (Fitz-Gibbon, 2022a, 2022b) young people were the least likely group to provide descriptions of the cultural impacts of family violence. This is not to suggest that cultural impacts do not occur but rather to point to the need to improve our understanding of how best to engage children and young people in conversations about culture – and how it can interact with family violence victimisation. In the descriptions some young people gave about the cultural impacts of family violence, the theme of isolation – from their family, friends, community – was palpable. Beyond risk identification and management practice, responses to young victim-survivors should seek to support these social and familial connections; they are key factors in securing a child or young person's safety and recovery from family violence.

Introduction

In 2016, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) referred to children as the ‘silent victims’ of family violence. The RCFV documented the many ways that children and young people who experienced family violence were being overlooked, invisibilised and failed by system responses designed largely with adult victim-survivors in mind. One of the critical areas of reform recommended by the RCFV (2016) lent support to a key recommendation made by the Coroner in the inquest into the killing of Luke Batty (Gray, 2015) – that is, that the redeveloped Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework includes evidence-based risk factors specific to children. The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework addresses this recommendation and emphasises recognition of children as victim-survivors in their own right. Efforts are continuing to ensure this is realised in practice through progressive implementation of the MARAM Framework.

The MARAM Framework must reflect all forms of family violence. With that in mind, we need to build understandings of the many ways that children and young people experience family violence. We need to understand how that abuse impacts victim-survivors. Identity abuse and the cultural impacts of family violence are two areas of family violence that have received limited attention, particularly in relation to young victim-survivors. This study sought to address that gap by drawing directly on the self-reported experiences of Victorian young people aged 16 to 20.

Identity abuse as a form of family violence

There is a dearth of research specifically examining identity abuse in the context of family violence. The work that does exist has predominately focused on adult experiences of intimate partner violence victimisation (see, for example, Rogers, 2021; Woulfe & Goodman, 2021). Less is known about the circumstances in which children and young people of diverse gender and sexual identities experience abuse in the context of family violence. The Rainbow Health *Pride in Prevention Evidence Guide* notes that research on family violence in the ‘family of origin’ context is minimal and rarely defined as family violence, and further, that while a ‘small body of research... on the impact of negative relationships between parents and LGB adolescents’ exists, there is even less on ‘trans and gender diverse adolescents’ (Carmen et al. 2020, p. 6). Carmen et al (2020, p. 6) note that in responding to LGBTIQ+ youth experiencing family violence, we should begin by acknowledging that it may be perpetrated within the context of their ‘family of origin’ (understood as the ‘biological or adoptive family’) or the ‘chosen family’ or kin that LGBTIQ+ people develop. The *Pride in Prevention Guide* points to evidence that LGBTIQ+ ‘experiences of family rejection’ can have a negative and consequential impact on both ‘the mental health and wellbeing of LGBT young people’ (Carmen et al. 2020, p. 6).

The recently launched National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (DSS, 2022) includes explicit recognition that

LGBTIQ+ victim-survivors can experience unique forms of violence, sometimes referred to as identity-based abuse. Identity-based abuse can include actions such as:

- pressuring a person to conform to gender norms or undergo surgery they do not want,
- homophobic rape,
- threatening to 'out' the person's gender, sexuality or HIV status,
- exiling a person from the family due to their sexuality or gender, and
- forcing a family member into conversion practices (DSS, 2022, p. 46).

This recognition exists at the national policy level. Across Australian states and territories, however, it is unknown to what extent family violence risk identification, assessment and management frameworks include identity-based abuse. Coupled with the lack of child- and young-people specific risk tools, this presents a significant gap in understanding and practice in this area.

This study

This study responds to this recognised gap by providing an analysis of young Victorians' (aged 16 to 20 years) self-reported experiences of gender-identity abuse, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, and the cultural impacts of family violence victimisation. It forms part of a wider study contracted by Family Safety Victoria (FSV) to support the development of the Child and Young Person-focused MARAM practice guidance and tools. This report is the second output of the wider study; the first report focused on an analysis of young people's experiencing of seeking help, securing help and navigating the Victorian family violence system

(see Fitz-Gibbon, McGowan and Stewart, 2023). Together these reports seek to incorporate lived experience and the voices of children and young people into the new MARAM Practice Guides currently in development by Family Safety Victoria.

This report presents the key findings – including quantitative and qualitative analysis – from a Victorian based study of children and young people's experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, gender identity abuse and experiences of family violence that result in cultural impacts. The report presents details about the study design and the broader national data set upon which this project draws. The research findings are organised into six key areas:

1. Young people's experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse,
2. Young people's experiences of gender identity abuse,
3. The impacts of identity abuse experienced by young people,
4. Experiences of abuse for young people who reported cultural impacts,
5. Young people's views on the contributors to their experiences of family violence, and
6. Young people's views on desired supports.

The second half of this report centres the voices of children and young people through the use of direct quotes from participants in this study to explore the impacts of identity abuse. While earlier sections do not readily lend themselves to qualitative analysis, our aim is always to privilege and lead with the voices of children and young people wherever possible. The final section of the report provides a concise summary of the policy and practice implications of this research.

Study design

This project was designed to contribute to the Victorian Government's family violence reform agenda, including the development of the Child and Young Person-focused MARAM practice guidance and tools. The project seeks to support that work by providing much needed insights into a number of areas: children and young people's experiences of identity abuse in the context of family violence; the nature and impacts of such abuse; the cultural impacts of family violence; and young victim-survivors' experiences of disclosing abuse and seeking help.

The national study: Adolescent family violence in Australia

This study draws on a subset of Victorian data from the ANROWS-funded 'Adolescent Family Violence in Australia' national project (see Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022a, 2022b). That project aimed to substantially improve understandings of the nature of family violence used by young Australians within the home and the degree to which young people who use violence within the home have been exposed to different forms of family violence throughout childhood. It also aimed to utilise those insights to improve responses to the support needs of young people experiencing and using family violence in Australia. The ANROWS project involved the administration of a national survey of 5,002 young people living in Australia who were 16 to 20 years old at the time of completing the survey. Survey respondents were recruited through online research panels managed by Open Research Unit (ORU). We note that while the sample represents the largest study of adolescent family violence in Australia to date, it was not nationally representative.

The survey instrument was designed to collect data on young people's sociodemographic characteristics, their current living arrangements, and their experiences of:

- witnessing violence between other family members,
- being subjected to direct forms of abuse perpetrated by other family members,
- using violence against other family members.

Qualitative and quantitative questions were utilised to invite young people to provide details about the forms of family violence they had experienced and used, the impacts of family violence experiences, their experiences disclosing family violence, and their views on their service and support needs. In responding to questions about their experiences of violence, young people were invited to provide detailed information about the nature of the violence, the age of onset and cessation, the frequency of behaviours, and their relationship with the person using violence. Survey respondents were also asked a series of questions about the impacts of the violence across a range of domains, i.e. mental, physical, cultural, social and education.

For a detailed outline of the research methods of the national study from which the secondary data in this project is drawn, including data collection and ethical considerations, please refer to Fitz-Gibbon et al (2022a, pp. 18-23).

The Victorian data set

This study is focused on better understanding experiences of identity abuse and the cultural impacts of family violence in Victoria. Thus, while the analysis conducted in the national study of adolescent family violence provided relevant and valuable insights, a Victorian sub data set was generated for the specific purposes of this project. Narrowing the national data set down to include only Victorian children and young people resulted in a reduction of the total sample size from 5,002 survey respondents to the 1,454 responses received from Victorian young people aged 16 to 20.

To align with the specified focus of this study – young people’s experience of family violence targeting the young person’s identity and/or culture – the research team then further broke down the Victorian responses to include only information provided by two groups: young people who had experienced LGBTIQ+ identity abuse and/or gender identity abuse; and young people who reported cultural impacts experienced as a result of their family violence victimisation. From this narrowing, three sub data sets were identified and collated:

- Survey responses received from 26 Victorian young people who reported experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse,
- Survey responses received from 26 Victorian young people who reported experiences of gender identity abuse, and
- Survey responses received from 38 Victorian young people who reported cultural impacts as a result of their experiences of family violence victimisation.

The participant demographics for each of these Victorian sub data sets are presented in the findings sections of this report, as they provide insights into the nature of identity abuse as a form of family violence experienced by children and young people. Secondary data analysis was conducted on each of the three Victorian sub data sets by collating and analysing qualitative data from responses to the survey’s relevant open-ended questions. A quantitative analysis of all closed-ended questions was also undertaken. To conduct the thematic analysis of qualitative responses, members of the research team did a close reading of the qualitative data identifying key themes and trends across the data.

We note that in narrowing the focus of each of the sub samples, the total number of participants included was significantly reduced. For this reason, the analysis points to common themes and experiences shared by these participants but does not infer that these are representative of the experiences of all Victorian children and young people who have experienced identity-abuse in the context of family. Further research is needed to build in-depth understandings of young people’s lived experience of all forms of family violence, including identity-abuse.

Ethical considerations

Ethics approval for the national study funded by ANROWS was obtained from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC).¹ No additional data was collected by this project team as the analysis relied solely on secondary data analysis of the ANROWS national study data set. For a detailed discussion of the ethical considerations taken into account in conducting the national study please refer to Fitz-Gibbon et al (2022a, p. 21).

¹ MUHREC Project ID: 27269.

RESEARCH FINDINGS






The research findings are organised into six thematic focus areas:

1. Young people's experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse,
2. Young people's experiences of gender identity abuse,
3. The impacts of identity abuse experienced by young people,
4. Experiences of abuse for young people who reported cultural impacts,
5. Young people's views on the contributors to their experiences of family violence, and
6. Young people's views on desired supports.

There were 11 Victorian young people in this study who reported experiencing family violence due to both their LGBTIQ+ and gender identities. The survey data provided by these young people are therefore included across the analyses presented in the first and second sections. The final section of the report provides a conclusion focused on the policy and practice implications arising from this research.



1. YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF LGBTIQ+ IDENTITY ABUSE

This section of the report looks at experiences of family violence specific to the 26 Victorian young people who identified as having experienced abuse from a family member based on their LGBTIQ+ identity. The analysis provides a demographic snapshot of this victim-survivor cohort. It also presents other forms of abuse they reported experiencing along with specific details of their experiences of this abuse; such details include the frequency of the abuse, the age of onset and cessation, and the familial relationship of the perpetrators of that family violence.

Participant demographics

Twenty-six survey respondents indicated that they had experienced family violence in the form of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse. Respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 20 years, with a mean age of 18 years. Gender identities of this subsample included:

- female (n = 13),
- male (n = 2),
- trans (unspecified) (n = 1),
- gender questioning (n = 3),
- non-binary (n = 5),
- brotherboy (n = 1),
- genderqueer (n = 3), and
- agender (n = 1).

Three of the Victorian young people surveyed identified as more than one gender identity (one young person identified as male and trans (unspecified), one as female and gender questioning, and one as non-binary and genderqueer). This subsample of young people had diverse sexual identities. Specifically: bisexual (n = 13), queer (n = 4), pansexual (n = 4), heterosexual (n = 2), gay (n = 2), and lesbian (n = 1).

None of these 26 respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Twenty-three (88%) indicated they were born in Australia and 25 (96%) indicated that the main language they speak at home is English. The remaining young people in this subsample were born in the Philippines (n = 1) and Malaysia (n = 1), and one young person indicated they speak Cantonese at home. Languages nominated by the young people as spoken at home (other than English) include Cantonese, Arabic, Italian, Hiligaynon, Greek, Tagalog, Mandarin, French and Maltese.

The majority of young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse had completed year 12 level education (n = 15), with the remaining having completed to year 10 (n = 7), year 11 (n = 1), or a trade, certificate or diploma (n = 3). Of the 26 participants, 10 were enrolled in a tertiary/university degree at the time of completing the survey.

The majority of these young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse indicated they are living with poor mental health affecting their day-to-day functioning (n = 21, 81%). Additionally, several participants identified as having a disability, including physical impairment (n = 2), visual impairment (n = 4), a specific learning disability (such as dyslexia, dysgraphia and other learning impairments) (n = 2), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (n = 5), or autism spectrum disorder (n = 3). The high presence of reported disability among this sample was also indicated in the wider national study, where disability was found to have a significant impact on young people's experience and use of family violence in the home (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022a).

Respondents were asked about their living arrangements. At the time of completing the survey the majority of young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse indicated they were currently living with

their family (n = 20, 77%). The remaining young people selected that they were living with their chosen family (n = 4), on their own (n = 1) or in shared housing (n = 1). Table 1 shows the living arrangement breakdown, detailing which family members those young people living with their family were currently residing with.

Table 1. Current living arrangements for young people experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse

Living with	Number of survey respondents (n)
Birth mother	19
Younger siblings	16
Birth father	15
Older siblings	7
Extended family/kin	2
Friend	2
Grandparents	2
Step fathers/parent's partner	1
Foster carer	1
Birth parent	2 (1 x birth mother and father, 1 x neither)
Other	1 (3 x dogs)

As shown in Table 1 (above), 3 in 4 of the young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse were living with their birth mother at the time of completing the survey and over half were living with young siblings and/or their birth father. In the national survey sample, young people's relationships with their mother was found to be pivotal in the provision of supports desired by young people who have both experienced and used family violence (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022b).

Co-occurring forms of family violence

The majority of Victorian young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse also reported co-occurring forms of family violence. Indeed, only three young people in this subsample of 26 participants indicated they had only experienced family violence in the form of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, with the remaining 23 participants reporting experiencing between three to ten forms of co-occurring abuse. Specifically, of those Victorian young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse:

- 22 per cent reported experiencing 2-3 other forms of abuse,
- 30 per cent reported experiencing 4-6 other forms of abuse,
- 35 per cent reported experiencing 7-9 other forms of abuse, and
- 4 per cent reported experiencing 10 other forms of abuse.

The survey invited participants to identify which forms of family violence they had experienced. While this subsample of young people all experienced LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, their experiences of co-occurring forms of family violence were extremely varied. The majority of these young people indicated they had also experienced verbal abuse (n = 22, 85%) and emotional abuse (n = 20, 77%) as well as a range of other forms of family violence (as shown below in Table 2), including physical violence (n = 15, 58%), property damage (n = 13, 50%), gender identity abuse (n = 11, 42%), threats of harm (n = 10, 38%), threats of harm to someone close to them (n = 7, 27%), threats to kill (n = 6, 23%), strangulation (n = 2, 8%), forced sex (n = 2, 8%), and

forced sexual touching (n = 1, 4%). Table 2 (below) provides the explanations of each type of abuse provided to survey participants.

Table 2. Forms of abuse experienced alongside LGBTIQ+ identity abuse

Co-occurring forms of abuse	Number of survey respondents n (%)
Verbal abuse (including someone yelling or swearing at you, or calling you names)	22 (85%)
Emotional/psychological abuse (e.g. being put down, being told you're useless/stupid/ugly)	20 (77%)
Physical violence (e.g. someone hitting, slapping, pushing, punching, kicking you)	15 (58%)
Property damage (e.g. someone destroying your property, belongings as an intimidation or punishment tactic)	13 (50%)
Gender identity-based abuse, discrimination and prejudice	11 (42%)
Threats to harm/hurt you	10 (38%)
Threats to harm/hurt someone close to you, including a pet, family member or friend	7 (27%)
Threats to kill you	6 (23%)
Forced you to have sex	2 (8%)
Non-fatal strangulation (e.g. being choked, suffocated or grabbed by your throat, being pinned down or against the wall by your throat)	2 (8%)
Made you touch their private parts	1 (4%)

This analysis demonstrates that responses to experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse should be neither examined nor responded to in a vacuum. For the significant majority of victim-survivors this form of family violence occurs within the context of a wider range of abusive behaviours. LGBTIQ+ identity abuse manifests in unique ways, and by its nature it places some young people at higher risk of victimisation than others. Yet it is important to recognise that it does not typically occur in isolation from other forms of family violence victimisation.

Frequency of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, age of onset and cessation²

Victorian young people in this study reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse at a frequency that varied significantly – from once or twice (n = 10, 38%), to monthly (n = 3, 12%), less than monthly (n = 5, 19%), weekly (n = 6, 23%), and for one young person daily or almost daily. Sixteen of the young people were able to indicate the exact age at which their experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse started. The range was from 11 to 17 years old, with a mean age of 14 years old. Of the young people who were unsure of the exact age at which the abuse began (n = 10), two young people identified that it was during primary school, and the remaining eight young people reported that their experience of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse began in high school.

Half of the Victorian young people in this subsample indicated that the abuse was still occurring at the time they completed the survey (n = 12), while the other half indicated the abuse had stopped; two participants did not answer this question. The reported age of abuse cessation for seven of the young people who

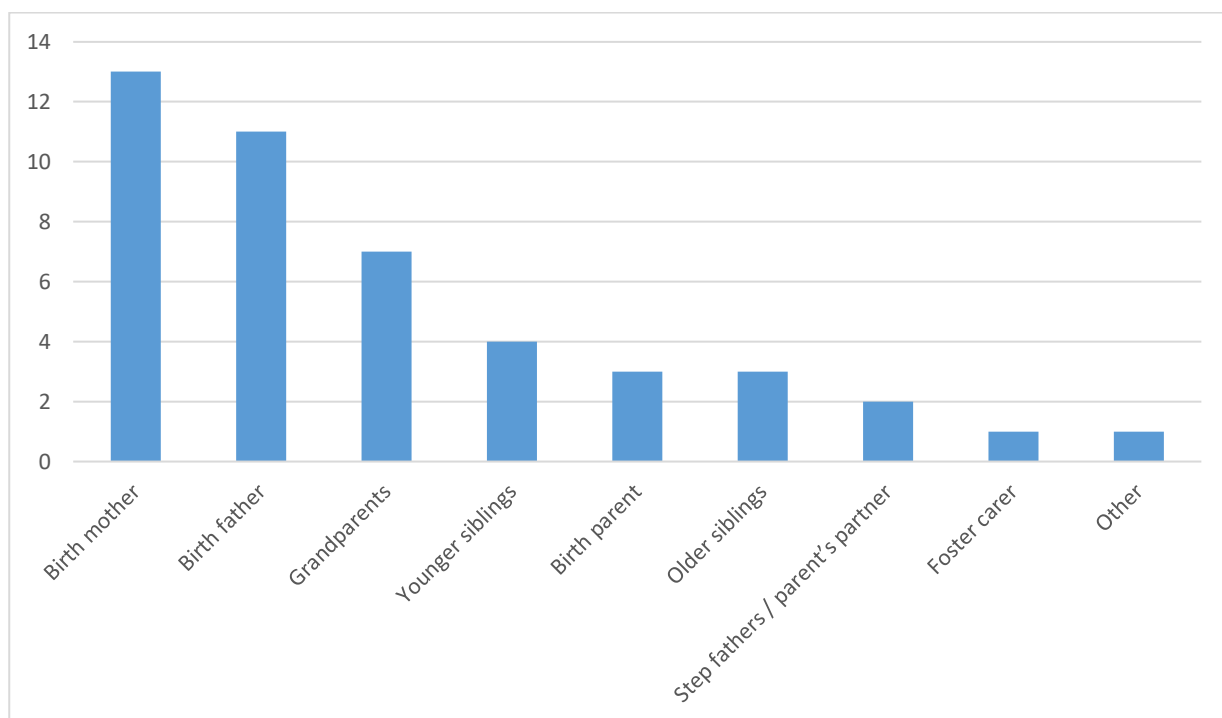
² At this point of the survey one participant dropped out, thus the next sections of the report are based on the responses of the remaining 25 participants who indicated they had experienced family violence in the form of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse.

indicated that the LGBTIQ+ identity abuse was no longer occurring ranged from 14 to 20 years old (with a mean age of 17 years old). The remaining five young people indicated they were unsure of the exact age of abuse cessation, but that it was in primary school (n = 1) or high school (n = 4).

Perpetration of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse

Half of the young people who reported experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse (n = 13) indicated that the abuse was perpetrated by two or more family members. For the majority of young people in this subsample, the LGBTIQ+ identity abuse was perpetrated by their birth mother (n = 13), birth father (n = 11) or a birth parent (n = 3). Figure 2 (below) provides a breakdown of perpetrators identified. In addition to those listed here, it included grandparents (n = 7), stepfather (n = 2), foster carer (n = 1), older sibling (n = 3) and younger sibling (n = 4). One young person also selected 'other family member', noting the LGBTIQ+ identity abuse was perpetrated by their cousin.

Figure 2. Perpetrators of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse



Young people's experiences disclosing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse

Of the 14 young people who indicated they had disclosed their experience of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse to someone, nine participants indicated they had told two or more people. The majority of young people in this subsample disclosed to a friend (n = 6, 43%), or their sister (n = 5, 36%). The remainder of young people who disclosed their experience of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse told a parent, school counsellor, youth worker/counsellor, member of an LGBTIQ+ organisation, specialist family violence support services, child and youth mental health worker, sports coach or psychologist.



Table 3. Who young people disclose LGBTIQ+ identity abuse to

Individual receiving disclosure	Number of survey respondents (n)
Friend	6
Sister	5
Mother	3
Father	2
Member of an LGBTIQ+ organisation	2
School counsellor	2
Youth support worker/counsellor	2
Child and youth mental health worker	1
Parent (including adopted and foster parent)	1
Specialist family violence support service or program	1
Sports coach	1
Psychologist	1

As shown in Table 3 above, only 38 per cent of the young people who had experienced LGBTIQ+ identity abuse disclosed their victimisation to an individual outside of their family and friends. It is important to also remember that many young people in this sample had experienced multiple forms of co-occurring abuse on numerous occasions. Together, they demonstrate the relatively small portion of victimisation that comes to the attention of a professional. This points to the importance of ensuring that any opportunities to effectively intervene and assess risk must be embedded at each point of Victoria's family violence response system.

Eleven of the young people who had experienced LGBTIQ+ identity abuse indicated they did not tell anyone about it. This accounts for 42 per cent of the subsample, highlighting the high level of underreporting of this form of family violence. The survey asked young people to select the reason why they had not disclosed their experience of family violence. Of these 11 survey participants, six young people listed two or more reasons for not disclosing (as detailed in Table 4 below).

Table 4. Reasons for not disclosing experience of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse

Reason for not disclosing experience of abuse	Number of survey respondents (n)
I didn't think anyone could help me	7
I was afraid things might get worse if I told someone about my experiences	4
I didn't want to get the person(s) using family violence into trouble	4
I didn't understand what was happening to me was wrong	2
I didn't understand what was happening to me was not my fault	2
I was afraid people would not believe me	2

When asked who was the *most helpful* of the people they had disclosed to, nine of the 14 participants who indicated they had disclosed their experience/s of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse to someone provided further details on that disclosure. The most common response was friend/s, with participants noting the importance of support and understanding from friends (n = 4). This was followed by helpful responses received from mothers (n = 2) and psychologists (n = 2), whom young people noted were helpful in providing broader context and perspective. The final participant indicated that they had not found anyone they disclosed to helpful. In addition, when asked who was the *least helpful* to them, three of the 10 participants who provided

further details indicated that everyone was useful or that they didn't consider any of the people they disclosed to to be unhelpful.

On the subject of those identified as *least helpful*, three participants discussed their parents. Their experiences range from being ignored, to experiencing homophobia or being told 'it's against God's will'. Two participants listed their school counsellors as least helpful, with one participant describing a specific experience in which they were 'blamed for being too outwards about my identity and not letting my parents come to terms with who I was'. The final two participants indicated that all the people they had disclosed to were unhelpful but did not describe why.

2. YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF GENDER IDENTITY ABUSE

This section examines the experiences of family violence specific to the 26 Victorian young people who identified they had experienced gender identity abuse from a family member. The analysis provides a demographic snapshot of this victim-survivor cohort. It also presents other forms of abuse they reported experiencing as well as specific details on their experiences of this abuse, including the frequency of the abuse, age of onset and cessation, and who the perpetrators of that family violence were.

Participant demographics

Twenty-six survey respondents indicated that they had experienced gender identity abuse. Respondents' age ranged from 16 to 20 years, with a mean age of 18 years. Gender identities of this subsample included female (n = 15), male (n = 2), trans (unspecified) (n = 1), gender questioning (n = 1), non-binary (n = 6), genderqueer (n = 3), and agender (n = 2). One participant opted not to answer this question. Three of the participants identified as more than one gender identity, with one participant identifying as male and trans (unspecified), one as non-binary and genderqueer, and one as female, gender questioning, nonbinary and genderqueer. Young people in this subsample identified with a range of sexual identities, including bisexual (n = 8), heterosexual (n = 3), asexual (n = 2), pansexual (n = 2), lesbian (n = 2), queer (n = 2), and gay (n = 1). One participant indicated they do not identify with any sexuality, and another self-described their sexuality as questioning.

Twenty-five of the young people who had experienced gender identity abuse indicated they do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, with one participant indicating they prefer not to say. The majority of participants in this subsample indicated they were born in Australia (n = 22, 85%) and that they speak English as their main language at home. The remaining participants were born in the New Zealand (n = 1), Malaysia (n = 1), India (n = 1) and Thailand (n = 1). Four participants indicated they speak another main language at home; these were Cantonese, Vietnamese and Telugu, with a final participant not providing the specific language. Other languages spoken at home, in addition to English, included Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, Thai, Khmer, Telugu, Mandarin, French, Vietnamese and Maori.

Less than half the participants had completed year 12 (n = 12), with the remaining having completed year 10 (n = 7), year 11 (n = 2), or a trade, certificate or diploma (n = 5). Of the 26 participants who had experienced gender identity abuse, 11 were enrolled in a tertiary/university degree at the time of the survey's completion. Over half of this cohort indicated they are living with poor mental health affecting their day-to-day functioning (n = 15, 58%). Additionally, several of the young people who reported experiencing gender identity abuse identified as having a disability, including a learning disability (such as dyslexia, dysgraphia and other learning impairments) (n = 5), autism spectrum disorder (n = 5), a physical impairment (n = 4), attention-

deficit/hyperactivity disorder (n = 3), or visual impairments (n = 1). Mirroring the level of disability identified among the sample of young people experiencing LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, this data contributes to a growing body of research in Australia evidencing the high prevalence of disability among young people who experience and use family violence (see, inter alia, Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022a; Sutherland et al., 2022).

The survey also collected data on the living arrangements of the 26 young people who reported an experience of gender identity abuse. The vast majority of these participants were living with their family (n = 24, 92%), with the remaining two young people living on their own (n = 2). Table 5 (below) details which family members these young people were currently residing with.

Table 5. Current living arrangements for young people experiencing gender identity abuse

Living with	Number of survey respondents (n)
Birth mother	22
Birth father	19
Younger siblings	15
Older siblings	11
Birth parent	1 (birth mother and father)
Step fathers/parent's partner	1
Extended family/kin	1
Grandparents	1
Member of chosen family	1 (partner)

Co-occurring forms of family violence

Co-occurring forms of family violence were experienced by the majority of this subsample of participants. Three young people indicated they had only experienced family violence in the form of gender identity abuse, with the remaining 23 participants experiencing between three and ten forms of co-occurring abuse. Specifically, of those 23 Victorian young people who reported experiencing gender identity abuse:

- 22 per cent reported experiencing 2-3 other forms of abuse,
- 43 per cent reported experiencing 4-6 other forms of abuse,
- 26 per cent reported experiencing 7-9 other forms of abuse, and
- 9 per cent reported experiencing 10 other forms of abuse.

The most common forms of family violence experienced by young people alongside gender identity abuse were emotional abuse (n = 22, 85%) and verbal abuse (n = 21, 81%). Further forms of family violence reported as experienced included physical violence (n = 13, 50%), property damage (n = 11, 42%), LGBTQA+ identity/sexuality-based abuse (n = 11, 42%), threats of harm (n = 10, 38%), threats of harm to someone close to them (n = 8, 31%), threats to kill (n = 6, 23%), non-fatal strangulation (n = 2, 8%), and forced sexual touching (n = 3, 12%). Table 6 (below) sets out the number of survey respondents who reported each form of co-occurring family violence.

Table 6. Forms of family violence experienced alongside gender identity abuse

Co-occurring forms of abuse	Number of survey respondents (n)
Emotional/psychological abuse (e.g. being put down, being told you're useless/stupid/ugly)	22
Verbal abuse (including someone yelling or swearing at you, or calling you names)	21
Physical violence (e.g. someone hitting, slapping, pushing, punching, kicking you)	13
Property damage (e.g. someone destroying your property, belongings as an intimidation or punishment tactic)	11
LGBTIQ/identity-/sexuality-based abuse, including family exile and exclusion	11
Threats to harm/hurt you	10
Threats to harm/hurt someone close to you, including a pet, family member or friend	8
Threats to kill you	6
Touched your private parts	2
Strangulation (e.g. being choked, suffocated or grabbed by your throat, being pinned down or against the wall by your throat)	2
Made you touch their private parts	1
Other (no details provided)	1

The severity of the forms of family violence reported alongside young people's experience of gender identity abuse is striking. For example, just over 1 in 4 of these young people reported experiencing a threat to kill. Risk identification and assessment practices tailored to the patterns of family violence experienced by children and young people must ensure that full visibility is given to the range of family violence behaviours that may be experienced – and how they impact the level of risk posed. Additionally, while adult victim-survivor experiences of non-fatal strangulation have garnered significant attention in recent years (see, inter alia, Pritchard, Reckdenwald & Nordham, 2017; Monahan, Bannon & Dams-O'Connor, 2020; Sharman, Douglas & Fitzgerald, 2021), there has been minimal research examining non-fatal strangulation among children and young people. Further research is needed to understand the contexts, nature and impacts of non-fatal strangulation among young victim-survivors.

Frequency of gender identity abuse, age of onset and cessation

The frequency with which young people reported experiencing gender identity abuse varied across participants. Notably, over 1 in 4 of the participants reported experiencing gender identity abuse on a weekly basis, and nearly 1 in 5 reported experiencing gender identity abuse on a daily or almost daily basis. These statistics demonstrate the significant presence of abuse in the lives of these young people. Of the full sample, young people reported experiencing gender identity abuse:

- once or twice (n = 3, 12%),
- monthly (n = 5, 19%),
- less than monthly (n = 5, 19%),
- weekly (n = 7, 27%), and
- daily or almost daily (n = 5, 19%).

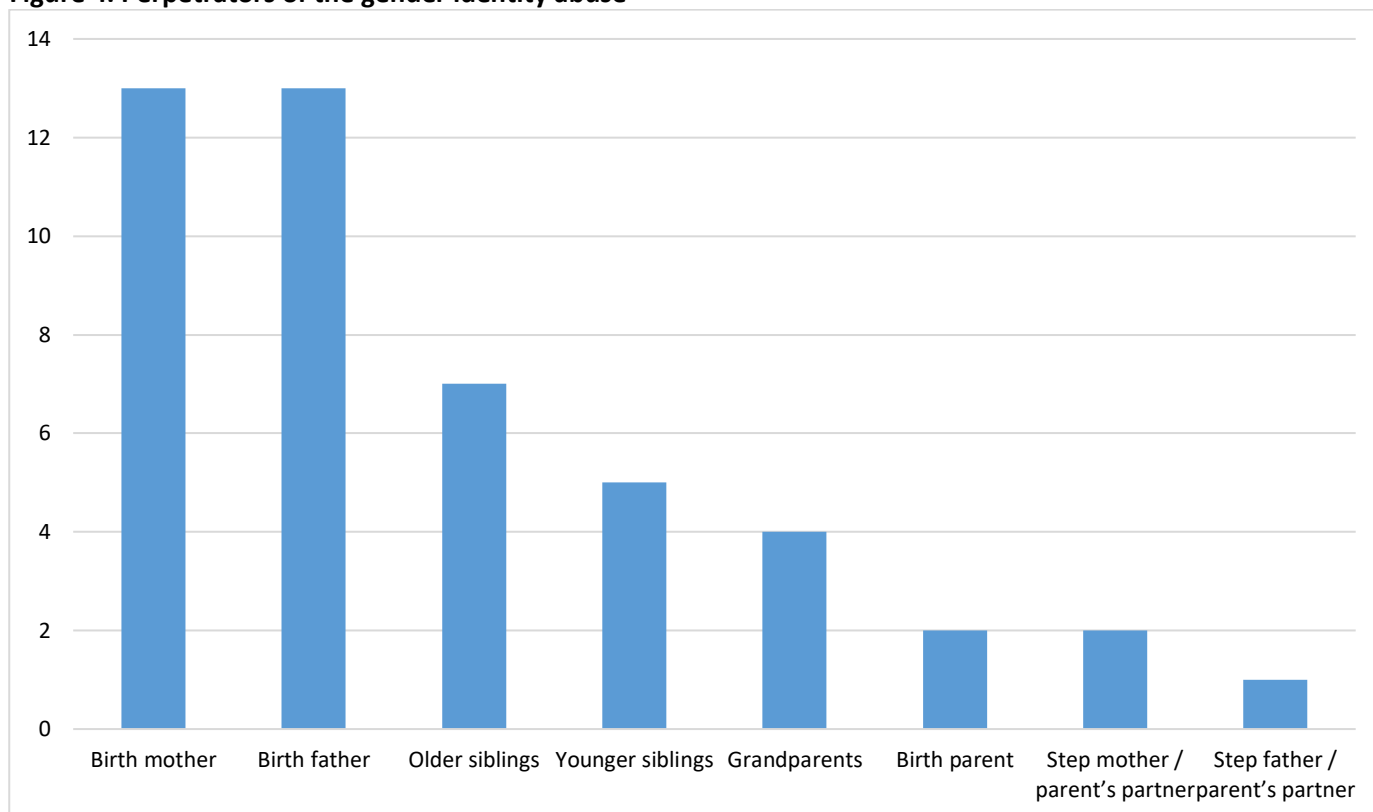
Eleven of the participants were able to indicate the exact age the abuse started, which ranged from 1 to 16 years old. For those who were unsure of the exact age (n = 14), two young people identified the abuse as beginning before school age, one during primary school, ten in high school, and one was unsure.

More than half of the participants who had experienced gender identity abuse indicated that the abuse was still occurring at the time they completed the survey (n = 16, 62%), while the remaining 10 participants indicated they were no longer experiencing the gender identity abuse. Of those young people who indicated it was no longer occurring, only two young people were able to provide a specific age of cessation, which was 17 years old in both cases. The remaining seven young people indicated they were unsure of the exact age, with four of these participants specifying that the abuse stopped during high school (n = 4).

Perpetrators of gender identity abuse


One in two of the young people who reported experiencing gender identity abuse identified that it was perpetrated two or more family members. Figure 4 (below) sets out which specific family members were identified by these young people as using gender identity abuse against them. The most common perpetrator was a parental figure, followed by siblings (both older and younger). One young person selected 'other family member' noting the abuse was perpetrated by their partner, and another selected 'other' but did not provide details as to their relationship with the person using gender identity abuse.

Figure 4. Perpetrators of the gender identity abuse



Help-seeking in relation to gender identity abuse

Of those young people who reported experiencing gender identity abuse, 15 had disclosed their experience; 12 of them indicated that they had disclosed to two or more individuals. Almost 1 in 2 of the young people in this subsample disclosed their experience of gender identity abuse to a friend (n = 7, 47%) or their mother (n = 6, 40%). The high rate of disclosure to peers, both in this sample and the previously explored cohort of young people with experiences of LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, highlights the need to ensure that young people more broadly are equipped with the education and referral information required to respond appropriately



to family violence disclosures from friends. Table 7 (below) provides further breakdown of those young people who had experienced gender identity abuse disclosed to.

Table 7. Who young people disclosed gender identity abuse to

Individual receiving disclosure	Number of survey respondents (n)
Friend	7
My mother	6
My brother	3
My sister	3
Youth support worker/counsellor	3
My father	2
School teacher	2
School counsellor	2
Member of a LGBTIQ+ organisation	2
Child and youth mental health worker	2
Psychologist	1

The remaining 11 young people who had experienced gender identity abuse reported that they did not tell anyone about the violence experienced. Table 8 provides a breakdown of the reasons young people selected for not disclosing. In addition to these reasons, two participants selected 'other', indicating that they did not disclose because 'it came across as a joke' and 'there was no physical violence, I felt fine'. This point about the absence of physical violence as a contributory reason for not disclosing is interesting, given the high level of attention paid in recent years to better understanding coercive control. As policy and practice responses to coercive control expand, it is imperative that education and awareness strategies for children and young people be prioritised – to ensure they understand that experiences of abuse go beyond individual incidents of physical violence.

Table 8. Reasons for not disclosing experience of gender identity abuse

Reason for not disclosing experience of abuse	Number of survey respondents (n)
I didn't think anyone could help me	7
I was afraid things might get worse if I told someone about my experiences	4
I didn't want to get the person(s) using family violence into trouble	4
I didn't understand what was happening to me was wrong	2
I didn't understand what was happening to me was not my fault	2
I was afraid people would not believe me	2

The 15 participants who indicated they had disclosed their experience of gender identity abuse to someone were asked who was *most helpful* among those they had disclosed to. Eleven of them provided further details concerning what were and weren't considered helpful responses. Three young people indicated that they had not found anyone they confided in helpful. Four of the eight participants indicated their friends were the most helpful, with one participant explaining:

My friend, as they were the only one who knew about my gender identity before I publicised my gender identity and understood my situation. (19yo, prefer not to say, gay, gender identity abuse)

Two other participants listed their mum as the most helpful person they told, with one including their brothers as well, explaining:

Mum and my brothers because at least I can vent my feelings about it. (17yo, female, heterosexual, gender identity abuse)

One participant indicated their teacher was the most helpful person they disclosed to, while another young person nominated their psychologist for helping them put their experience into perspective.

Of the 10 participants who provided further details when asked who was the *least helpful* person they disclosed to, three indicated that everyone was useful or that they didn't consider the people they told to be unhelpful. In contrast, three young people indicated that *everyone* to whom they disclosed their experience of gender identity abuse were unhelpful. In terms of who participants specifically found to be the least helpful, friends, school counsellor and mother were named. For one participant, their mental health worker's perceived lack of understanding of gender identity prevented them from providing effective understanding and support.

3. THE IMPACTS OF IDENTITY ABUSE EXPERIENCED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

All young people who reported experiencing a form of identity abuse – be it gender identity or LGBTIQ+ identity abuse – were additionally asked to detail what impact family violence victimisation had on them during their childhood. In the first instance young people were asked to select whether their experience of abuse had resulted in emotional, physical, social, educational and/or cultural impact/s. There was considerable overlap in the experiences of the participants who identified having experienced abuse due to their LGBTIQ+ or gender identities, with 11 young people within these subsamples indicating they had experienced both forms of abuse. As such, this section examines the impact of the experiences of these cohorts together. The quotes presented below contain information to identify which cohort the young people are captured in. The cohort of young people who identified cultural impacts will be examined separately, in the section immediately following.

Per Table 9 (below), emotional and social impacts were experienced by nearly all young people across both victimisation groups. Over half of these young victim-survivors identified that the identity abuse they experienced also impacted their education – as well as having physical and cultural effects.

Table 9. Impact/s experienced as a result of family violence

Type of impact experienced	No. of survey respondents who had experienced LGBTIQ+ identity abuse	No. of survey respondents who had experienced gender identity abuse
Emotional impact	25	25
Physical impact	9	11
Social impact	21	22
Educational impact	15	16
Cultural impact	6	8
Other	0	1

As discussed in earlier sections of this report, both of these cohorts reported high rates of co-occurring forms of abuse (n = 22 for LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, n = 23 for gender identity abuse). This was also the case in regard to reported impacts, with 21 young people (84%) in the LGBTIQ+ identity abuse sample and 13 young people (50%) in the gender identity cohort indicating they experienced between two and six of the different types of impact (emotional, physical, social, educational, cultural and other).

Exploring this data further, the following subsections present findings using a thematic content analysis of the qualitative data provided by young people about the various impacts they have experienced as a result of identity abuse victimisation.

Social and emotional impacts

The social and emotional impacts on this cohort of young people who have experienced family violence based on their LGBTIQ+ and/or gender identities were significant. For almost all the young people involved, this centred on issues with emotional regulation and mental health, and on difficulties in forming and sustaining relationships and friendships. For some, this also extended to a desire to hide what their home life was like from others. As two young people commented:

I didn't interact with many people as I didn't want them to become too close to me and see what my life was like. (19yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

I struggled to develop friendships because I often wasn't allowed to go out and I didn't want to invite people to my house. (19yo, non-binary/genderqueer, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Impacts on young people's emotional regulation extended across both social and emotional parameters. They were described largely as experiences of aggression and anger, withdrawal, hardening and numbness, and fear and anxiety. Young people reflected on these behaviours and experiences occurring as types of defence or protective mechanism, as is articulated in the following comments:

I've become quite numb to a lot of emotions. (18yo, female/gender questioning, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Emotionally unavailable in fear of those emotions being used against me. (18yo, female, queer, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Made me more hardened, harsh, distrusting, closed off towards others. (19yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Inability to trust others or be emotionally vulnerable. (20yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Damaged trust and communication with family relationships. (17yo, male, heterosexual, gender identity abuse)

Not being social for the fear of being hurt. (20yo, female, bisexual, gender identity abuse)



Several young people commented on feeling unable to regulate their emotional responses as a result of the family violence experienced. This included fear responses but also defaulting to using anger and violence as a means of communication. As four young people commented:

Issues interacting with others, uncomfortable with physical affection, rely on violence to get points across. (17yo, genderqueer, queer, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Unregulated emotions, feelings of hatred, depression. (20yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

I have developed emotional disorders and react very strongly to other people's emotions. I get scared and anxious very easily, particularly around loud noises or angry people. (19 yo, non-binary/genderqueer, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

My emotions easily fluctuate with my family members. I find myself being particularly sensitive to their feelings and emotions and I would notice changes in their moods. When they're angry, I can easily get defensive and hurt by their words and actions compared to other people. (17yo, female, heterosexual, gender identity abuse)

Existing research on adverse childhood experiences has demonstrated the links between experiences of family violence and neurological developmental disruption, including difficulties with stress responsivity and emotional regulation (Zarse et al., 2019). Some young people in this study, however, described feelings of shame at their behaviour, leading to withdrawal from social interactions. As two participants explained:

Having the aggressive behaviours come from myself, it made me feel very guilty and often I tried to isolate and avoid myself from fear of displaying those behaviours. (20yo, female, heterosexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

...hated myself thinking it was my fault. (17yo, female, heterosexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

The challenges young people described with emotional regulation had flow-on effects for them, with multiple young people reflecting on the impact this had on their ability to instigate, engage and maintain friendships and relationships with others. This is captured in the following comments:

Lost a lot of friendships because of them. (20yo, gender questioning, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Socialising with people is really hard and I have difficulty keeping friendships. (17yo, gender questioning, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

I tend to close off and shut people out or just cry in tough situations. (19yo, female, bisexual, gender identity abuse)

These reflections reveal some of the reasons why young people who experience family violence, including identity abuse, may consequently feel isolated from social connections, including with friends. For a number of young people in this study, experiences of abuse and consequent emotional and social impacts have resulted in significant trust issues that have prevented them from seeking out friends, old or new. As two young people described:

Ruined my ability to socialise in some situations and made me fearful of trusting others. (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Have trust and commitment issues now, find interpersonal relationships difficult to create and maintain. (18 yo, female/gender questioning, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

As discussed by Fitz-Gibbon et al. (2022a) in their analysis of the national survey cohort, the effects of childhood abuse on young people's mental wellbeing are well established (see, for example, Badr et al., 2018; Gekker et al., 2018; Meltzer et al., 2009; Zarse et al., 2018). The observations from this cohort are similar, with multiple participants describing the impacts of depression and anxiety on their emotional and social lives, as well as on their educational experiences (as will be discussed below). Additional identified mental health issues included panic disorders, PTSD and bipolar disorder, intersecting impacts on their LGBTIQ+ and/or gender identity, and general feelings of worthlessness. Some of this is captured in these statements from young people:

Exacerbated my mental ill health and LGBTIQ+ identity issues. (19yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

I still feel like I'm not enough. (19yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Makes you feel sad and feel unworthy. (20yo, female, bisexual, gender identity abuse)

Educational impacts

Experiencing family violence has significant impacts on education and school engagement for young people who have been abused due to their LGBTIQ+ and/or gender identities. This included the ongoing effects of mental illness and health challenges, disrupted school attendance, poor performance at school, failure to complete schoolwork at home, and difficulties stemming from the inability to concentrate. Prior research has pointed to ways that schools and other education settings can be safe places for young people, offering respite from their experiences of family violence and other forms of child abuse (Lloyd, 2018). However, the data from this cohort, and that of the broader survey sample (see Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022b), also highlights the range of adverse consequences that experiences of identity abuse have on young people's school attendance and performance.

Participants discussed the school-based impacts of mental health issues, particularly in relation to the impact their victimisation had on concentration and school attendance. Experiences extended to ongoing impacts such as anxiety and trouble focusing on studies, with young people highlighting the exacerbation of these intersecting factors during periods of abuse or in the immediate aftermath. As three young people explained:

The mental conditions I have developed as a result of these experiences has caused me to struggle to complete my schoolwork. I also struggle to complete work when I am currently or have recently been abused. (19 yo, non-binary/genderqueer, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

As part of family violence, I developed mental illnesses that affected my education. I dropped out of high school as a result and doing it online now is difficult due to the time I missed. (19yo, female, lesbian, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

I didn't complete school because of some of the things happening and my mental health left me never going to school. (20yo, female, does not identify with any sexuality, gender identity abuse)

Poor grades and missing assignments and exams were other impacts faced by these young people. So too were issues with self-confidence and the impacts of home life infiltrating their educational experience. The range of educational impacts experienced by young people are captured in the following quotes:

Had to do last year of high school homeless didn't sit exams so have to wait for university. (20yo, gender questioning, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Would sometimes prevent me from being able to do homework, complete assignments, concentrate in school, etc. (19yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Couldn't focus on study because of home life. (20yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Emotional impact from it all would lead to and still leads to me performing poorly at times due to stress or not attending school. (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Missed an amount of school due to dealing with brother. (17yo, genderqueer, queer, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Inability to do work, loss of motivation, dissociation. (17yo, female, heterosexual, gender identity abuse)

Twelve participants from each cohort indicated that their experiences of family violence specifically impacted their participation or attendance in school and/or university; seven of these young people were represented in both cohorts of identity abuse. When reporting many of the impacts captured above, these young people also cited the impact of ongoing mental health issues, distraction, and difficulties concentrating. The majority of young people discussed missing school entirely and/or being physically present but mentally absent, as is represented in the following quotes.

Some classes I couldn't attend because I was having panic attacks but often I was in class and then would have to leave because I would start crying. (19yo, non-binary/genderqueer, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Reduced school attendance and lowered concentration in school. (20yo, female, questioning, gender identity abuse)

Yes, as I would be emotionally and physically drained and couldn't attend school or would go and not pay attention. (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

I've developed a lot of mental health issues, which over time has made me less and less of a functional human being – my participation in class sucks because I can't ever seem to get awful memories out of my head. (18yo, female / gender questioning, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

These findings provide valuable insights. They alert professionals working in school-based settings to the signs of risk of family violence among children and young people.

Physical impacts

The physical impacts described by young people experiencing family violence were significant and wide ranging. The discussions focused primarily on the lasting impact of physical injuries and the self-harm and eating disorders that developed as a result of the abuse they had experienced. Young people described initial and immediate physical injuries sustained from abuse, including bruises and muscle strains, as well as long term physical impacts such as tics, scarring and ongoing issues from injuries. The young people who had experienced either or both forms of identity abuse focused on the specifics of the physical impacts and often did not expand on how they coped with these consequences, as is captured in the following quotes:

Scar on forehead and probably more but I'm not sure where they are. (18yo, male/trans(unspecified), bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Physical tics – occur when triggered. (17yo, genderqueer, queer, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Self-harm, pain from injuries. (female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Been bruised, muscles strained and more. (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Bruises and marks. (20yo, female, bisexual, gender identity abuse)

For one young person, the physical impacts of family violence resulted from neglect, as the family member would not take them to the doctors:

Long term injury from when they wouldn't take me to the doctors. (20yo, gender questioning, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

In addition to the physical impacts described here, young people also described ongoing experiences of self-harm, eating disorders and body dysmorphia, including weight fluctuations, which they saw as resulting from the abuse they experienced. The young people across these two cohorts who described impacted relationships with their body and food were all female-identifying, which is reflective of the broader survey sample from which this subsample was taken (see Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022a). It is also reflective of the broader literature that has connected eating disorders and distorted body image with female victim-survivors of childhood abuse (see, inter alia, Caslini et al., 2016). As one young female commented:

I stay inside my room a lot and don't really exercise or eat the best foods or a lot of foods. (20yo, female, does not identify with any sexuality, gender identity abuse)

There have been recent calls from advocates and scholars for further research to better understand the contributory role of family violence among young people who self-harm (see, for example, Atienzar-Prieto, Meyer, Fitz-Gibbon, Moore & Cataldo, 2022). While the link between experiences of family violence and rates of suicide among young people has received growing attention at the state level, largely through the work of the Commissions for Children and Young People and Child Death Inquiries (see, inter alia, Commission for Children and Young People, 2019; Coroner's Court of Queensland, 2022; Coroner's Court of Western Australia, 2019; National Children's Commissioner, 2014), research conducted directly with children and young people exploring the impact of self-harm resulting from family violence victimisation remains limited.

The cultural impacts of identity abuse

In their analysis of the broader survey cohort, Fitz-Gibbon et al. (2022a) observed the lack of current research looking at the intersection of culture and experiences of, and recovery from, family violence. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the cohorts examined in this report, young people who have experienced abuse based on their LGBTIQ+ and/or gender identities. The inability to express their true identity was consistently identified as a key theme across survey respondents. As one young person described it, 'I cannot be my true identity around my family' (18yo, nonbinary, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse).

Of all the impacts young victim-survivors were invited to reflect upon, *cultural impact and consequences* was the category which drew the least attention. Only six participants across both cohorts provided reflections; four fell across both groups, and two came from the gender identity abuse subcohort. Family was a shared theme for these six participants. This included feeling unable to express their true identity and feeling they had missed out on cultural experiences due to cultural clashes resulting from their experiences of abuse. Young people also expressed anger at the conservative beliefs and influences of their family, as is highlighted in the following two quotes:

They basically taught me to be racist, homophobic and transphobic, which is wrong. (17yo, nonbinary, lesbian, gender identity abuse)

I despise my family's culture as it's tied to violence. I don't follow any cultural practices or beliefs as a result. (19yo, female, lesbian, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

In addition to feeling that their true identities had been suppressed, these young people spoke of being sheltered and consequently uneducated about cultures outside those of their family. This outcome was particularly challenging for them, given their rejection of their family's culture and its perceived ties to violence.

4. EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WHO REPORTED CULTURAL IMPACTS

The cultural impacts of family violence have remained relatively underexplored, particularly in relation to the experiences of children and young people. This section presents data on young people who reported both having experienced a cross-section of forms of family violence during their childhood and having experienced cultural impacts from that abuse. Here we present the demographic details of this group of young people along with details limited to the forms of abuse and co-occurring forms of abuse experienced. A thematic analysis of the cultural impacts and consequences experienced by this cohort is also provided.

Participant demographics

Thirty-eight Victorian young people indicated that they had experienced cultural impacts as a result of the family violence they had experienced up to the age of 17 years old. Respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 20 years, with a mean age of 18 years. Gender identities of this subsample included female (n = 28), male (n = 4), non-binary (n = 4), and genderqueer (n = 2). Sexual identities in this subsample included heterosexual (n = 16), bisexual (n = 8), lesbian (n = 5), queer (n = 2), pansexual (n = 2), and gay (n = 1). Two of the young people who had experienced cultural impacts of family violence selected 'unknown' as their sexual identity, one young person indicated they preferred not to say, and one young person chose to self-describe as 'questioning'.

All 38 young people who had experienced cultural impacts as a result of their family violence victimisation indicated they do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The majority of these young people indicated they were born in Australia (n = 26, 68%) and usually speak English as their main language at home (n = 31, 82%). The remaining young people in this sub sample were born in China (n = 2), the Philippines (n = 2), and one each in New Zealand, England, and India. Five young people selected other, nominating Albania, Indonesia, Congo, Tanzania and Singapore as their countries of birth. Six of the Victorian young people who had experienced cultural impacts indicated they speak another main language at home. Main languages selected were Mandarin (n = 2), Chinese, Romanian, Bengali and Teo Chew. Other languages spoken at home, in addition to the main language of English, include Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Chinese, Chinese/Malay, Dari, Filipino, Italian, Khmer, Knokani, Malay/Arabic, Mandarin, Maltese, Romanian, Spanish, Swahili/Kinyamulenge, Tagalog, and Teo Chew. The diversity of languages spoken by these young people provides a useful reminder that awareness materials and information about available support services should be translated into a range of languages beyond English to ensure maximum reach and accessibility across Victorian children and young people.

Just under half the young people in this subsample had completed year 12 (n = 17), with the remaining having completed year 10 (n = 5), year 11 (n = 9), or a trade, certificate or diploma (n = 6). Of the 38 young Victorians who had experienced cultural impacts of family violence, 17 were enrolled in a tertiary/university degree at the time they completed the survey. Half of this cohort indicated they are living with poor mental health affecting their day-to-day functioning (n = 19, 50%). Additionally, numerous participants identified as having a disability, including a visual impairment (n = 4), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (n = 2), autism spectrum disorder (n = 2), a specific learning disability (such as dyslexia, dysgraphia and other learning impairments) (n = 1), a physical impairment (n = 1), or an intellectual disability (n = 1).

In terms of living arrangements, the majority of young people who had experienced cultural impacts as a result of their family violence victimisation indicated that they were living with their family (n = 30, 79%), with the remaining young people living in share housing (n = 5), on their own (n = 1), in out-of-home care (n = 1) or with their partner (n = 1). Table 10 shows the breakdown of whom these young people were living with at the time they completed the survey.

Table 10. Current living arrangements of young people who had experienced cultural impacts of family violence

Living with	Number of survey respondents (n)
Birth mother	27
Birth father	24
Younger siblings	18
Older siblings	9
Friend	5
Grandparents	4
Birth parent	3 (all selected birth mother and birth father)
Member of chosen family	2 (partner, twin sibling)
Step father/parent's partner	1
Step mother/parent's partner	1
Extended family/kin	1
Foster carer	1

Co-occurring forms of family violence

Co-occurring forms of family violence were experienced by two-thirds of this subsample of participants. Specifically, young people who reported cultural impacts as a result of family violence victimisation were most likely to have experienced between two and six different forms of abuse. As a breakdown, young people in this subsample reported the following number of co-occurring forms of abuse:

- 44 per cent reported experiencing 2-3 other forms of abuse,
- 44 per cent reported experiencing 4-6 other forms of abuse, and
- 12 per cent reported experiencing 7-9 other forms of abuse.

The majority of Victorian young people in this sub sample reported experiences of verbal abuse (n = 26, 68%), emotional abuse (n = 24, 63%) and physical violence (n = 23, 61%). However, there was also a range of other forms of family violence experienced by these children and young people, as shown in Table 11 (below). One participant selected 'other', detailing that they had experienced 'minor inappropriate sexual behaviour'.

Table 11. Forms of abuse experienced among young people who reported cultural impacts of family violence

Co-occurring forms of abuse	Number of survey respondents (n)
Verbal abuse (including someone yelling or swearing at you, or calling you names)	26
Emotional/psychological abuse (e.g. being put down, being told you're useless/stupid/ugly)	24
Physical violence (e.g. someone hitting, slapping, pushing, punching, kicking you)	23
Threats to harm/hurt you	13
Property damage (e.g. someone destroying your property, belongings as an intimidation or punishment tactic)	8
Threats to harm/hurt someone close to you, including a pet, family member or friend	7
Gender identity-based abuse, discrimination and prejudice	6
Threats to kill you	5
LGBTIQ/identity-/sexuality-based abuse, including family exile and exclusion	4
Non-fatal strangulation (e.g. being choked, suffocated or grabbed by your throat, being pinned down or against the wall by your throat)	2
Touched your private parts	1
Forced you to have sex	1
Other (no details provided)	1

These findings demonstrate that the forms of family violence that have cultural impacts on young people are extremely diverse and extend to both physical and non-physical forms of family violence, different forms of identity abuse, threats of harm, and sexual violence.

Young people's experiences of the cultural impacts of family violence

Thirty-eight young Victorians identified specific cultural impacts experienced as a result of their family violence victimisation. A thematic analysis of the qualitative responses provided by these young people identified several key impacts, including feelings of anger and aversion to their culture (and in some cases their family), frustrations at the rigid and conservative beliefs and values imposed upon them, and feelings of loss in terms of connection to their own culture and families, as well as other cultures and experiences.

Several participants expressed feelings of resentment and anger towards their culture for the family violence they had experienced and its ongoing impacts. Although this was often accompanied by insights on the part of the young person into the fact that more than just culture played a contributory role, there remained a sense of disconnection and rejection of their culture. As three young people commented:

Feelings of resent[ment] towards the culture. I can recognise there are other factors than culture contributing to the decision to behave violently, nonetheless, it doesn't leave the best impression of the culture. (20yo, female, heterosexual)

I feel very emotionally disconnected from my culture and I hate my relatives, the culture, language, etc. because of my traumatic experiences with family. (19yo, nonbinary, unknown)

It made me very judgemental of my culture. (18yo, female, heterosexual)

Some young people focused specifically on the restrictive and conservative beliefs and values espoused by their culture and families. They reflected on how actions on their part to distance themselves were met with abuse, enforcement of these values and beliefs, and feelings of rejection from their parents. This is described by three young people:

I was forced to follow a culture I didn't want to and when I didn't I would be physically abused. (16yo, female, unknown)

Coming from immigrant parents I feel as though they try to bring culture into everything, and they reject me trying to fit in with people of other cultures. (18yo, female, heterosexual)

Talk of marriage and settling down with a man, talk of family members disowning or not approving. (19yo, genderqueer, bisexual)

In addition to feelings of anger and rejection, young people who experienced the cultural impacts of family violence expressed avoidance and aversion to their culture, either through actively seeking to avoid it, or in the case of one participant, feeling detached from their country of origin. Young people commented:

I don't go to many cultural social events I try my hardest to avoid them. (17yo, female, heterosexual)

I don't identify strongly with my culture anymore I would rather remain unattached to my family. (18yo, genderqueer, lesbian)

This theme of rejection was further exemplified through some participants' discussion of the negative connotations associated with their culture; they discussed perceptions that outsiders see this type of behaviour as the norm, and they alluded to the internalisation of these beliefs. On this point, three young people remarked:

People just think it's a normal part of our culture. (20yo, female, bisexual)

People talk badly about our family. (18yo, female, straight)

Felt like this was normal for my culture. (20yo, female, bisexual)

It is important to note, however, that not all young people in this subsample expressed anger in their comments about the cultural impacts of family violence victimisation. Some young people reflected on their own loss of connection to their culture. As one participant described:

Losing touch with your family and culture and the traditions you used to or would have engaged in. (19yo, female, heterosexual)

This extended to a loss of sense of self and, as discussed above, an inability to express their true identity. One participant described this in relation to their inability to distinguish between their trauma and their cultural experience:

Not knowing who I was and what my culture was. I didn't know how to distinguish my culture from trauma. (18yo, female, heterosexual)

Other young people reflected on the influence of their experiences in terms of feeling uneducated about other cultures, feeling disconnected across their families, and grappling with instilled patriotism and the use of violence to discipline children.

5. YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON THE CONTRIBUTORS TO THEIR EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

In addition to investigating the impacts of the abuse they experienced, the survey asked children and young people what they thought contributed to the use of violence and abuse to which they were subjected. This was an open-text question allowing participants to provide as much or as little detail as possible. For most of the young people who had experienced gender identity and/or LGBTIQ+ identity abuse, responses to this question focused on the presence of intergenerational abuse and trauma within their families. This is captured in the reflections provided by numerous young people:

(Un)processed family trauma. (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Generational abuse. (17yo, genderqueer, queer, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Parent's childhood experiences. (19yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

History of abuse for parents. (20yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Probably a history of violence and poor parenting. (20yo, female, questioning, gender identity abuse)

Generational trauma and abuse. (20yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Generational trauma/violence. (17yo, female/genderqueer/nonbinary/gender questioning, queer, gender identity abuse)

The identification by these young people of their parents and abusers' own experiences of trauma and abuse is consistent with other research examining the links between experiences of abuse and future use of violence (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015). Indeed, in their examination of the broader national survey cohort from which this subsample has been taken, Fitz-Gibbon et al. (2022a) found that those who had 'witnessed' and 'experienced' family violence were more likely to report using violence in the home themselves.

Some young people made reference to the influence of patriarchal values including 'male dominance and violence over women' (19yo, female, lesbian, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse). Another participant reflected on how the intolerance they experienced in relation to their identity in turn impacted their confidence:

Intolerance/lack of understanding about my identity (resulting in fear and trepidation about my publicly presented identity). (19yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)



In making sense of what contributed to their own experiences of trauma and abuse, other young people discussed the contributory role of intolerance and hatred, particularly from their parents. As one young person succinctly put it:

My parents' hatred and narrow minds. (20yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

The influence of religion was another key theme to emerge from participants reflections on the contributory factors to their abuse, including differing beliefs and the ongoing impacts of remaining devout. This is highlighted by these participant quotes:

Religious background in my family, me having different beliefs compared to them. (18yo, nonbinary, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

My parents being religious and choosing to stay married despite not being compatible as it is seen as a sin to get a divorce. (19yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Religion, my family is very traditional and religious which impacts their perspective on certain attributes. (16yo, nonbinary, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Religion was perceived to have been a contributory factor only among those children and young people in the survey sample who had experienced sexual and gender identity abuse. Religion was not one of the key contributors to emerge in the analysis of the wider national sample study of children and young people who have used family violence (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022a).

Several participants reflected on the contributory role of financial stress and strain, as well as the mental health issues of other family members (including the abuser), alcohol use and work stressors. It is worth noting that data for the broader national study was collected during 2021; the degree to which these stressors were amplified during the pandemic should be taken into consideration. This is likely to be important for this subsample of Victorian young people who experienced significant periods of COVID-19 related public health restrictions. The pandemic's impact on children's and young people's experiences of family violence has so far received limited examination, particularly from their perspective – this is despite significant evidence documenting an increase in the severity and frequency of family violence during the first year of the pandemic (see, inter alia, Boxall, Morgan & Brown, 2020; Carrington et al., 2021; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & Meyer, 2022; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & True, 2022). The very same factors that young people cite as being instrumental to their experiences of family violence continue to be exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and the high cost of living. There is a critical need to better understand how these factors may increase risk of family violence victimisation for children and young people.

6. YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON DESIRED SUPPORTS

The survey asked all young people who had experienced any form of family violence what their most desired support was at the time of the abuse. This was an open-text question allowing survey participants to provide as much or as little information in their response as they wanted. For the young people experiencing LGBTIQ+ and/or gender identity abuse, the most frequently identified useful support was the ability to remove themselves from the family home or environment in which the abuse was occurring. This included being able to leave the location of the abuse for short periods of time, 'getting out of the house more often' (20yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse) and being provided space away from their parents.

Participants described wanting greater knowledge about their options to permanently leave the home. As two young people described:

If I had the resources or support to leave the home as a minor. (19yo, female, lesbian, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

...an understanding of what our options were if we could leave. (18yo, female/gender questioning, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Other participants specifically reflected on the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting government-imposed lockdowns had on their experience of abuse and access to supports. For several participants the pandemic was viewed as exacerbating the abuse they experienced and creating additional barriers to leave. As two young people commented:

...somewhere to go to escape it (peak violence was during covid lockdowns). (17yo, genderqueer, queer, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Being able to leave, but COVID got in the way. (16yo, nonbinary, pansexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

In addition to possessing the knowledge, support and opportunity to leave the abusive environment, young people identified the importance of having a support person or persons. This was described as someone they felt safe to confide in, someone who plays a supportive role, believes them, and ensures privacy and confidentiality – as is captured in the following comments:

To have someone who understood my specific situation and could relate (e.g. someone who has or understands mental ill health and who was part of the LGBTIQ+ community). (19yo, nonbinary, gay, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Support from parents rather than them not believing me. (17yo, genderqueer, queer, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Promise of support with confidentiality (as I'm not telling parents or police of some things). (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Having someone who would actually help me. (19yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

The need for a support person was identified in the broader national study of children and young people experiencing and using a wide range of forms of family violence (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2022b); it was likewise viewed as important for children and young people experiencing different forms of identity abuse.

Young people surveyed also identified the need for greater education for themselves and their parents – about what constitutes different forms of abuse (e.g. sibling violence) and how to identify and respond to them. Several young people raised this point in response to the open-ended question:

More conversations about home violence. I grew up thinking it was a shared experience across all families. Just like there are ads on violence against women, we need ads on family violence too.

Sibling violence being a thing to look out for, I brush off everything since most of it was from my younger brothers, except I was scared to go home and wanted to run away. (18yo, male/trans (unspecified), bisexual, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Education at a young age. (17yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

If my mother had the education and skills to understand that it was abuse and how to deal with it. (19yo, female, lesbian, LGBTIQ+ and gender identity abuse)

Critically, several young people said that the provision of education must also include information on available services and supports. As one young person commented:

Better understanding of what abuse looks like and where you can get help. (20yo, female, bisexual, LGBTIQ+ identity abuse)

Reflecting key themes raised in the analysis of the cultural impacts of family violence, some young people also referred to the need for culturally appropriate resources, as well as the need for families to be more open minded.



Conclusion:

Implications for policy & practice

The 2022 release of the National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children (DSS, 2022) includes a commitment to acknowledge children and young people as victim-survivors of family violence in their own right. That acknowledgement lays the foundations for a long overdue pivot in Australian state and territory policies and practices to ensure that service system responses to children and young people are age-appropriate, child-centred and trauma-informed. For this goal to be achieved, there is an urgent need for Australian states and territories to develop evidence-based, child-informed risk identification, assessment and management practices. Family Safety Victoria is currently developing new MARAM practice guidance and tools to support practitioners to work directly with children and young people experiencing and using family violence. This report seeks to ensure that that work is cognisant of the variety of ways young people experience identity-based abuse in the context of family violence, and the significant cultural impacts young people experience as a result of their family violence victimisation.

Young people's self-reported experiences of gender-based and LGBTIQ+ identity abuse demonstrate both the unique ways in which these forms of family violence occur and their significant co-occurrence with other forms of family violence. The identity-based abuse the young people involved in this study experienced in the context of family violence was often perpetrated by a number of family members, and in a significant number of cases it went unreported to anyone

outside of family and friends. It should not be surprising, given the gravity of the abuse experienced by many of the young people involved in this study, that identity-based abuse has both immediate and long-term impacts on their physical and emotional wellbeing, their social connections, and their engagement with education.

There is a critical need to improve awareness of different forms of identity-based abuse and to build more effective supports across schools and the specialist service system. Only by doing so can we ensure that when young people disclose, their experiences are validated, their risk is effectively assessed, and they are connected with the supports required to plan and manage their safety effectively. The stories of the young people who participated in this research demonstrate that identity abuse is not experienced in a vacuum – it typically occurs at the same time as numerous other forms of family violence, and it has myriad impacts that include and extend beyond the ways in which it targets a young person's gender and sexual identity. Effective risk-sensitive practice requires flexibility to respond to the wide range of ways in which young people experience family violence.

This study also provides valuable insights to inform improved policy and practice-based understandings of help-seeking behaviours among young people who experience different forms of identity-based abuse. The experiences of young people in the research reveal the critical role of

family and friends; they are the key first points of contact to whom young people are likely to disclose their experience of violence. The experiences shared by young people also demonstrate their desire for a disclosure to be followed by validation, an offer of support, and in many cases, follow-up actions. Improving informal support provision is a long-term project, one that requires investment in family violence education and community awareness state-wide.

The role of culture, and the cultural impacts of family violence are underexplored, particularly for young victim-survivors. It is notable that in both this study and the wider national study from which this data is drawn (Fitz-Gibbon, 2022a, 2022b)

young people were least likely to provide descriptions of the cultural impacts of family violence. This is not to suggest that cultural impacts do not occur but rather to point to the need to improve our understandings of how best to engage children and young people in conversations about their culture, and how it is impacted by family violence victimisation. Among those young people who did describe the cultural impacts of family violence the sense of isolation – from their family, friends and community – was palpable. Responses to young victim-survivors should seek to support these connections; they are a key factor in securing a child or young person's safety and recovery from family violence.

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Suggested citation

Fitz-Gibbon, K., Stewart, R. & McGowan, J. (2023) Young people's experiences of identity abuse in the context of family violence: A Victorian study. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University, doi: [10.26180/22191319](https://doi.org/10.26180/22191319)