The ROSA Project:
The prevention and early intervention of Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviours

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Executive Summary

Background
In 2018 Stop it Now Scotland secured funding from the RS MacDonald Trust to pilot and evaluate a preventative and early intervention approach to reducing child sexual abuse. The Risk of Online Sexual Abuse (ROSA) Project commenced in 2018 and was initially planned to be a two-year pilot in Glasgow. This pilot was intended to include a one-to-one psychoeducational programme for children aged 10-14 with problematic or harmful online sexual behaviours. In addition, the programme was supplemented with wider proactive and capacity-building work within one secondary school in Glasgow, with the aim of adopting a whole-school preventative approach. This planned approach was to work with pupils, staff and parents to develop and share key knowledge, skills and messages about online safety and harmful sexual behaviour.

In 2018, Stop it Now Scotland also commissioned the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice (CYCJ) to undertake an evaluation to support the development of this work. The research was given approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee. It consisted of analysis of anonymised administrative data gathered and maintained by the ROSA Project, as well as interviews and surveys with key stakeholders, young people, parents and carers, and referrers.

Implementation and Delivery
The ROSA Project was established to address growing concern amongst professionals, parents and carers about young people’s online behaviours and a clear gap in service provision for a service that responded to online harmful sexual behaviour with a preventative or early intervention approach. Yet, despite significant effort in engaging with partners and promoting the service, the implementation and delivery of ROSA was slowed by a much lower than anticipated referral rate in the early years of the service. The delivery of ROSA was then severely hampered by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions including significant periods of remote learning in schools and restrictions on face-to-face services. The pilot was extended for one further year to respond to these challenges.

Despite these challenges, ROSA remains broadly in line with the initial proposal, in that the service provided a one-to-one service for children becoming involved in harmful behaviour online (61 referrals); as well as providing a presence within a large secondary school to engage with pupils, raise awareness, and support and build capacity, knowledge and skills within the staff group and parents. The work with the school had breadth (1,200 pupils reached through assemblies, and PSE lessons) and depth (regular work with a Young Person’s Steering group to shape the project and co-design the PSE curriculum).

Young People’s Needs and Behaviours
The majority of referrals to ROSA were for males (38, or 62.3%), with 21 females and two non-binary young people referred. Young people referred were aged between 11 and 19, with a mean age of 14 years and five months. The vast majority of referrals were for children who were White Scottish (56, or 91.8%).
The young person’s sexual orientation was known for 43 individuals. Of these young people around two-thirds identified as heterosexual (30, 69.8%), eight (18.6%) homosexual and five (11.6%) bisexual.

Almost half (22, 44%) of all young people referred to ROSA had a mental health issue, learning disorder, or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (either diagnosed or suspected). Of these, nine (18%) young people referred had either diagnosed or suspected ASD and all (100%) of the young people referred with ASD were male, and 80% of those referred with mental health issues were females.

More than one-quarter of young people referred to ROSA were described as socially isolated (14, 28.6%). This rose to 40% of males, and was only 11.8% in females but may be more reflective of neurodiversity than gender. Two-thirds (67%) of those who had diagnosed or suspected neurodiversities (such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder) were described as socially isolated, compared to 19% of those young people who were more neurotypical.

There were 27 young people (44%) who had maltreatment concerns. These mainly related to offline concerns about bullying or neglect, although bullying was the experience most likely to take place both online and offline. One-third of young people (16, 33.3%) had been groomed, with most of this grooming (81.2%) taking place online.

Around three-quarters (32, 76.2%) of the young people referred to ROSA used online pornography. There was a significant gendered element, with 89.3% of males and 41.7% of females reporting pornography use. The vast majority (55, 96.5%) of young people had been involved with an online offending behaviour. Almost half of all children involved in offending behaviours had been involved with a Communication type offence i.e. sending unwanted or unsolicited sexual images or messages. Offences relating to indecent images of children were the next most common, although it should be noted that, out of the 14 young people involved with creating indecent images of children, all (100%) had self-produced the images (either consensually or otherwise through coercion/deception).

**Experience of the ROSA Programme**

Relationships, trust and credibility were key features of the success of the ROSA Project. Parents tended to rate the service very positively and welcomed the support that it had provided to their child. All parents described very positive interactions with the ROSA worker, finding her to be welcoming, non-judgmental and down-to-earth. Similarly, parents invariably rated the rapport and relationships that the worker had managed to establish with their child, despite challenges such as neurodiversities, shyness, or a lack of face-to-face contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parents valued the fact that the service had provided a safe and ‘objective’ space for the young person to talk about difficult and sensitive issues. It also appeared that the wider context around the child had become more open and conducive to preventing or dealing with any new concerns about online sexual behaviour, and parents described feeling supported by ROSA too. Generally, parents felt that their ability to have honest and informed conversations with their child about online safety had improved a little since ROSA, although conversations remained tricky and sensitive.

The online world was a big presence in young people’s lives. However, when the online world became unsafe or frightening it was clear that young people quickly became isolated and ashamed, with no-one to turn to for advice or support through embarrassment or fear of getting
into trouble. When young people's behaviours stretched into unlawful territory, seeking help became even more difficult. In this regard, having an outlet for their worries and concerns, that was separate from their usual sources of support, was an important aspect of the ROSA Project. Despite feeling apprehensive about starting ROSA, young people often came to view the ROSA sessions as a safe and welcoming space (whether in person or online). Young people reported very positive experiences of the programme itself, valuing the way that the ROSA worker had adapted the content or methods to suit their age, stage and learning style.

Referrers described positive experiences of ROSA and it was clear that ROSA was filling a gap in service provision for children and young people at the lower range of concerns and risks. Participants made a referral to ROSA, rather than another service, as it was seen as a specialist service that was at the right ‘tariff’ and was specific to online safety and sexual behaviour.

Outcomes from the ROSA Programme

The ROSA Steering Group and other key stakeholders described positive outcomes for young people who had completed the programme in relation to reduced risk, changed behaviours, and reduced criminalisation. Young people sometimes found it a little more difficult to remember or articulate specifically what they had learned on the programme, but most reported feeling more confident about the internet and that they had gained new knowledge on the programme. Sessions in relation to consent, sex and the law, and the digital footprint were most frequently mentioned as being useful.

Parents felt that their child had gained a greater knowledge and understanding about internet safety and which behaviours were permitted and which were against the law, information which was not really available from other sources. Some parents also felt that their child had gained useful insight into their own behaviours.

Some parents were a little uncertain about how well their child would be able to put their newfound knowledge into practice in the longer-term, citing the appealing and pervasive nature of social media or the pressures of adolescence as factors that may cause their child to return to unsafe behaviours. However, at the time of the interview no parents were aware of any new concerning online behaviours.

Referrers noted an increase in knowledge, and also the development of strategies to reduce the risks online. However, at the time of the initial survey, many referrers were unsure about whether there had been an impact on the child in terms of a translation into behaviour change and reduced risks, either because they did not have the information, because it was too early to tell, or because the young person had not been able or willing to apply the learning. At follow-up, referrers had maintained a very positive view of the ROSA Project and perceived the service to be filling an important gap that other services, or families, could not meet. Due to low numbers of participating referrers at follow up, it was not possible to ascertain their view on longer-term outcomes.

Whole School Preventative Approaches

The ROSA Steering Group and key stakeholders viewed the work in the secondary school, despite the huge challenges faced in terms of implementation and then COVID disruption, as a great success. It was this aspect of ROSA that the Steering Group believed had the potential to be truly preventative and have the greatest impact on the largest number of young people. School was a place where many of these behaviours happened, between pupils both on and
offsites. School also had an important role in educating and supporting young people in relation to their online behaviours, and in creating the right environment for positive outcomes and help-seeking. However, while young people at school described positive relationships with school staff, they also advised that they would like teachers to be more approachable, educated, or equipped for open and honest conversations.

The work that was undertaken was perceived by the school to be hugely valuable in the support that it provided to teachers, and the additional skills, knowledge and capacity that the service brought. The school also valued having a direct link to a familiar service where they could refer pupils whom they were concerned about.

Work with parents and carers to build knowledge and capacity in the young people’s home environment through parent information workshops was tricky to establish with the challenging implementation context, but a move towards online provision towards the end of the project was well received and showed promise for the future.

Conclusions

Technology is now a normal part of adolescent life and as such should form a central focus when supporting children and young people throughout all aspects of their development, including sexual development. However, the complexity of adolescence appears to be intensified online, where behaviours that may be legal offline are not so online. Children and young people are therefore at greater risk of encouraging or being involved in harmful sexual behaviours online, with potential for much longer-term ramifications than for offline behaviours. This evaluation has also shown that the adults around a child often feel ill-equipped to fully support young people to be safe online, especially in relation to their sexual behaviours.

The ROSA Project has shown that there is significant shame and stigma attached to problematic online sexual behaviours, that impede the ability of young people, or families, to seek advice or help. The evaluation also suggests that there may be certain groups of young people that are more vulnerable to being a victim or being involved in TA-HSB.

The style and content of the ROSA programme was valued by the young people and parents, and efforts were made to adapt this to individual needs and preferences wherever possible. The move to online provision during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that online provision is feasible, acceptable and, for some young people, preferable.

Short-term outcomes were very positive, with young people and parents/carers articulating positive benefits for their own personal development as well as online knowledge, skills and confidence. Longer-term outcomes were not evaluated, and appropriate measures and approaches for assessing both short-term and longer-term impact would be valuable in any future research.

The whole school capacity building work was the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also showed the potential for significant reach, and appears promising in both preventing and responding to TA-HSB. The work was highly valued within the school, although the impact of that work has not been able to be measured.
Introduction

Stop it Now! Scotland is a child protection charity that believes that the key to preventing sexual abuse is awareness among parents and community members. Stop it Now! Scotland aims to build public confidence in recognising and responding to concerns about the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. The support services that Stop it Now! Scotland provides are mainly aimed at adult individuals with problematic sexual thoughts or those who may be at risk of sexual offending, and their families. This includes those who are under investigation for internet offences. However, in 2018 Stop it Now! Scotland secured funding from the RS MacDonald Trust to pilot and evaluate a preventative and early intervention approach to reducing child sexual abuse.

The Risk of Online Sexual Abuse (ROSA) Project commenced in 2018 and was initially planned to be a two-year pilot in Glasgow. This pilot was intended to include a one-to-one psychoeducational programme for children aged 10-14 with problematic or harmful online sexual behaviours. The term online harmful sexual behaviours was used to refer to a wide range of behaviours including, but not limited to:

- Possessing, making and distributing indecent images of children online
- Self-produced sexual imagery or ‘sexting’
- Developmentally inappropriate use of online pornography
- Showing another child developmentally inappropriate pornography
- ‘Revenge porn’
- Online solicitation of children and sexual harassment of peers via social media
- Sexual abuse of children online

The term ‘harm’ could also reflect harm caused to other people (both child or adult), but importantly also harm towards the child referred to the service (due to the risks to themselves from their own behaviours, or the behaviours of others). The ethos of the project therefore very much centred around children’s safety and well-being, recognising that many children who act in abusive situations online are often themselves vulnerable and victimised.

In order to deliver ROSA, a multi-agency Steering Group was established and a full-time practitioner recruited and trained in the delivery of the Inform Young People’s Programme, originally developed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (the parent organisation of Stop it Now! Scotland). This six-session early intervention programme is designed for working with children who have displayed problematic or harmful sexual behaviour online. The programme is designed to be delivered on a one-to-one basis but can be adapted to respond to the needs of the individual and is psychoeducational in nature, not therapeutic. The programme covers themes such as consent; communicating appropriately about sex; understanding the law in relation to sexual offences; safety planning and living a good life. While working with a young person, the project aimed to provide complementary support to parents, in order to better equip them to support the young person going forward. Based on local knowledge and need it was envisaged that the programme would work with around 50 young people a year, over two years.

In addition, the programme was supplemented with wider proactive and capacity-building work within one secondary school in Glasgow, with the aim of adopting a whole-school preventative approach. This planned approach was to work with pupils, staff and parents to develop and share key knowledge, skills and messages about online safety and harmful sexual behaviour.
In 2018, Stop it Now! Scotland also commissioned CYCJ to undertake an evaluation to support the development of this work. This evaluation was to span the full two years of the pilot, documenting the journey, experiences and outcomes. The first strand of the research was to document and describe what a preventative and capacity-building approach in a secondary school might look like. The second strand of the study was to evaluate the experience and short-term impact of delivering the one-to-one early intervention programme.

This evaluation report presents the findings from all of the evaluation activity that has been carried out since 2018. First, a brief review of the literature is presented, in order to situate the development and delivery of ROSA within the wider context about what is known about technology-assisted harmful behaviour (TA-HSB) and also about Harmful Sexual Behaviour.

**Brief Review of the Literature**

**What is Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)?**

It is natural for children to explore their developing sexuality, and behaviours that are developmentally appropriate, consensual and occur between two children of a similar age and stage are rarely of cause for concern (Lewis, 2018). However, behaviours that are developmentally inappropriate, violent or abusive (Hackett, 2014) and are likely to cause distress due to power imbalances or where behaviours are excessive, planned or secretive (Lewis, 2018) are harmful. HSB can take many forms, but could include sexist name-calling, unwanted touching, coercion into making or sharing images, and sexual assault or rape. Hackett provides a continuum to reflect this spectrum of behaviour from expected or typical behaviours through to that which is highly violent and sadistic (see Figure 1)

![Hackett's Continuum](image)

**Figure 1. Hackett's Continuum (adapted from Hackett, 2010)**
What is Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour (TA-HSB)?

As the internet has become more accessible and more affordable, it has become a normative space where children engage, socialise, form and sustain relationships, as well as a space where young people can develop and experiment sexually, so much so that it can be regarded as a new dimension to the ecology of the child (Quayle & Koukopoulos, 2019). The online or digital world is therefore also increasingly becoming a locus of HSB, although it remains the subject of relatively little academic or practice attention (Lewis, 2018; Reed, Lawler, Cosgrove, Tolman, & Ward, 2021). Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviours (TA-HSB) are behaviours where children use the internet, or other forms of technology, to engage in sexual activity that may be harmful to themselves or others (Hollis & Belton, 2017). These behaviours could include taking, making, possessing or distributing indecent images of children (including self-produced images or ‘sexts’); making, viewing or distributing extreme pornography; grooming; soliciting or sexual harassment online (Hollis & Belton, 2017; Lewis, 2018).

Applying Hackett’s continuum to technology-assisted behaviours (Stop it Now! Scotland, 2021), examples of TA-HSB could include:

- Normal: consensual sharing of nude photos between two 15 year olds in an intimate dating relationship (this is developmentally ‘normative’ although technically illegal)
- Inappropriate: young person sharing a nude image with someone he/she is attracted too
- Problematic: young person posting self-generated images to make money
- Abusive: young person being coerced, blackmailed or groomed to send sexual pictures; or non-consensual sharing of intimate images (‘revenge porn’)
- Violent: accessing violent pornography

The scant literature that exists on the subject indicates that technology offers additional and specific opportunities for HSB. Technology may allow children to overcome interpersonal challenges or social isolation, but it can also be addictive, compulsive and erode offline social skills (Lewis, 2018). Technology, and the anonymity it provides, can open up worlds that children would be too embarrassed or unable to explore in real life (Lewis, 2018), but can also mean that children are inadvertently exposed to inappropriate or harmful material (Hollis & Belton, 2017) or are afforded the opportunity to take sexual risks or offend (Quayle & Koukopoulos, 2019).

However, TA-HSB may also reflect and amplify problematic or harmful sexual behaviours in the child’s offline peer culture or in wider society such as sexist attitudes or sexual harassment (Setty, 2019). Technology can also be used within intimate or dating relationships to initiate, maintain, or escalate abuse (Stonard, 2020). Typical technology assisted behaviours reported by adolescents within their relationships include: the sending of insults, threats, humiliation, non-consensual sharing of images, sexual pressure, monitoring messages or whereabouts, demanding passwords to social media accounts, deleting contacts or preventing an individual using technology (Stonard, 2018). These harmful and controlling behaviours typically fall into three categories: digital monitoring and control; digital direct aggression and digital sexual abuse (Reed et al., 2021) but are often multifarious and can be enacted across a range of devices and platforms, meaning that they can be extensive and highly intrusive.
How prevalent is TA-HSB?

Accurate figures for HSB among children and young people are hard to establish (Pelech, Tickle, & Wilde, 2021), even more so for TA-HSB, despite almost two-thirds of children aged 5-15 owning a mobile phone, rising to 91% of 12 to 15 year olds (Lewis, 2018). Emerging evidence from the Growing Up in Scotland study found that 40% of 12 year olds had engaged in what would be termed ‘risky’ behaviour online (i.e. adding people they do not know to a friends list, or sharing personal information online), but while these have the potential to put children at greater risk, this did not necessarily mean exposure to harmful or sexual behaviours (Pagani, Gorton, & Liddell, 2021). Scottish data (Scottish Government, 2017) that focused on the recorded crimes of ‘communicating indecently’ and ‘cause to view sexual activity or images’ found that children aged under 16 made up one-quarter (26%) of those charged when the offences were cyber-enabled (as opposed to only 6% when they were offline offences). These statistics include those offences which, although illegal, may not have involved harm to individuals (i.e. consensual sharing of images).

Prevalence studies of harmful behaviour are now quite dated and often limited to certain types of offences, for example the possession of indecent images of children (Quayle & Koukopoulos, 2019). Research is also perhaps being outpaced by advancements in technology or behaviour, with figures for TA-HSB such as online sexual harassment, or self-produced IIOC often predating the mass uptake of internet-enabled smartphones. While a Dutch study (Leukfeldt, Jansen, & Stol, 2014) concluded that more than one-third of individuals charged with indecent images of children (IIOC) related offences were children, it has also been observed that more recently IIOC offences have been increasing, partly, although by no means entirely, resulting from an increase in self-produced images for peers (Lewis, 2018; Quayle & Koukopoulos, 2019).

Technology has certainly facilitated access to pornographic material, and by extension to material that is also unwanted and extreme (Lewis, 2018). One study (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ölafsson, 2011) of more than 25,000 children aged 9-16 found that 23% had viewed online pornographic material (of any type) in the previous 12 months, although the authors acknowledge that this is likely to be an underestimate as children may be reluctant to disclose such activity. The NSPCC estimated that between 4 and 17% of children had viewed extreme or illegal pornography online, and that this initial exposure was often accidental due to its accessibility (Hollis & Belton, 2017). A survey of ‘dark web’ users searching for child sexual abuse material online found that 70% had first been exposed to such material while under 18, and one-third had attempted to make online contact with children (Insoll, Ovaska & Vaaranen-Valkonen, 2021). A meta-analysis of online sexual exposure and solicitation estimated that one-in-five children aged 12-16 had been exposed to unwanted sexually explicit material, and one-in-nine has experienced unwanted sexual advances online (Madigan et al., 2018). However, their analysis included studies published as far back as 2004 (drawing upon data from prior to that date) and may not reflect the true nature of experiences in the social media age.

Within intimate or dating relationships the prevalence of TA-abuse (including HSB) varies notably, although is substantial, ranging from a low estimate of 28% of American high school students reporting digital dating victimisation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020) to 73% of British adolescents who reported experiencing some form of technology assisted dating violence (some of which comprises HSB) at least once within their relationships within the past 12 months, including: receiving insults, being humiliated, having messages checked, being
checked up on, receiving unwanted images and non-consensual distribution of images or information (Stonard, 2018). Lifetime exposure to TA-HSB within dating relationships has recently been estimated to be as high as 76% (Ellyson, Adhia, Lyons, & Rivara, 2021).

Who is involved in TA-HSB?

Children who display HSB are heterogeneous, and to add to the complexity cannot be neatly categorised as solely victims or perpetrators of HSB (Pelech et al., 2021). It is not clear how far this also applies to TA-HSB and the profiling that exists is often dated or narrow in scope. For example, possession of IIOC has been an offence predominantly associated with males, who engage alone and have limited prior history of being in conflict with the law (Lewis, 2018). With many self-produced images now falling into the category of IIOC (whether consensual sharing or as a result of coercion) this pattern may not hold, and demographic profiles or legal classifications may need to better reflect changing patterns in technology or behaviour.

In relation to gender, within dating relationships (Reed et al., 2021), boys were significantly more likely to perpetrate digital sexual abuse, and girls were more likely to perpetrate digital monitoring and control behaviours. No gender differences were found for digital aggression. In a US study, males were more likely to report being a victim of digital dating abuse than females (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). Stonard’s (2018) study of 469 British adolescents found that males were less likely to have been a victim only of digital dating violence than females (25%, compared to 22%, but a slightly higher proportion of females had been victim when perpetrator-victims were included (53% of females compared to 43% of males). Thus, it appears that technology assisted harmful behaviour is a common feature of adolescent intimate and dating relationships, but that any gender differences are more qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

The evidence base is also limited in relation to understanding the specific needs of children and young people who engage in TA-HSB, including their atypical interests or abuse histories, and understanding is frequently extrapolated from offline or adult behaviours (Lewis, 2018). However, some small-scale studies indicate that social isolation, social difficulties, and questioning of sexual identity may be features of these children’s lives (Lewis, 2018). It is not entirely clear yet whether the extensive trauma, abuse and neglect histories frequently seen in children with an entrenched pattern of offending behaviour, or with offline HSB (McKibbin, Humphreys, & Hamilton, 2017; Silovsky, Hunter, & Taylor, 2019), are also seen in children involved in TA-HSB. However, online grooming may often be associated with internet offending, either with involving the child in offending as a specific objective of the grooming, or indirectly as children modelling their own abuse online (Lewis, 2018). Research does suggest that, for young males convicted of possessing IIOC, they were less likely to have had childhoods characterised by disruption or adversity and recidivism is low (Aebi, Plattner, Ernest, Kaszynski, & Bessler, 2014; Stevens, Hutchin, French, & Craissati, 2013).

What are some of the key issues specific to TA-HSB?

The increasing reach of technology into all aspects of adolescents’ lives is often seen as a cause for concern, and has been linked to small, but negative, effects on adolescent wellbeing (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). This concern especially extends to children and adolescents’ developing sexual identities and relationships, where technology is generally seen as risky and harmful (Setty, 2019). Yet some argue that the use of technology within adolescent relationships (such as the consensual sharing of nude images) need not be harmful, and indeed can be developmentally appropriate, with children having a right to send
such images (Setty, 2019). In Setty’s research with 41 children aged 14-18, she found that children were able to distinguish between situations involving self-produced images that were coerced, or violated privacy and consent, and that which formed part of natural experimentation, bonding, intimacy and fun. Yet within the current social culture and legal context there are potential harms that can arise from even consensual sharing of images. Firstly, what may be natural experimentation and developmentally appropriate is currently still illegal if either party is under the age of 18, and could have long-term consequences should children be prosecuted for IIOC offences. As Quayle & Cariola (2019: p1) note “these images pose considerable resource challenges for law enforcement and create ambiguity as to what constitutes proportionate legal, education and child protection responses to these activities.”

The nature of the online world also means that, even if developmentally appropriate, self-produced images may also be exploited by peers or adults, or shared non-consensually following the breakdown of a relationship (Quayle & Cariola, 2019). However, the widespread prevalence and normalisation of the sharing of self-produced images (Quayle & Cariola, 2019; Stonard, 2018) may create an environment in which children feel pressured to take and share images, even if they are not directly pressured or coerced per se. Children felt that sharing images of themselves was stupid and risky and they often expressed shame and regret at having done so, as well as being fearful of criticism or judgment from peers or adults (Setty, 2019).

There are also specific aspects of the online sphere that makes shame and humiliation more likely. While Stonard (2020) found that the online sphere offered some enablers for victims, such as the ability to block perpetrators, the availability of documentary evidence to report or more confidence to retaliate online, the harm of TA-HSB outweighed these. The public, permanent and intrusive nature of TA-HSB (Stonard, 2020) means that there is no respite for individuals as they can be contacted 24/7, they can’t easily remove themselves from the abuse and there is also the potential for revictimisation from a wider audience and over a potentially extended or unending timeframe in which there is the possibility of revictimisation (Hamilton-Giachritsis, Hanson, Helen, & Beech, 2017; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020).

TA-HSB can be more difficult for society, or even some professionals, to recognise as abusive (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020; Stonard, 2020) and even if acknowledged may also be perceived by some as less harmful than HSB that takes place offline (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020; Stonard, 2020). Yet, while more evidence is needed in relation to TA-HSB, evidence from other forms of online harmful behaviour such as cyber-bullying suggests that the impact on individuals may be the same, if not greater than offline behaviours (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020; Stonard, 2018). The dominant discourse around online sexual behaviours that the sharing of self-produced images is always wrong and ‘risky’ or ‘stupid’ can lead to victim-blaming (Lloyd, 2020; Naezer, 2018; Quayle & Cariola, 2019; Setty, 2019). There are also gendered judgements and double standards, with girls often pressured to share images but being judged more harshly when they do (Quayle & Cariola, 2019; Setty, 2019). The perceptions of reduced harm and a culture of victim-blaming have implications for the provision of support to victims who may be seen as less deserving (Stonard, 2020), and therefore can be left isolated.

Lastly, exposure to pornography from a young age is a common feature of referrals to harmful sexual behaviour services (Lewis, 2018), suggesting that it can result in disinhibition to sexual violence and aggressions and skewed attitudes towards sex and relationships or can become addictive (Hornor, 2020; Lewis, 2018). As the expansion of the internet increases the
availability and accessibility of online pornography, including extreme or illegal pornography, it follows that as more and more children socialise and interact online, they will be exposed to this type of material (Farré et al., 2020; Hornor, 2020; Lewis, 2018).

What do we know about interventions?

There is very little research specifically focused on interventions for people who have been involved in TA-HSB. Intervention research is either focused on HSB more broadly, or rarely emphasises prevention or early intervention approaches, despite this being seen as crucial in responding appropriately and preventing behaviours escalating to offending (Pelech et al., 2021). Furthermore, approaches tend to focus on changing the victim behaviour or focus solely on the individuals involved rather than interventions situated in the wider ecology (Firmin, Lloyd, & Walker, 2019; Lloyd, 2019).

Wortley (2012) describes a person-situation interaction that is relevant in online child sexual abuse, in that many people involved in offences relating to IIOC do not initially seek out such content, but may come across it accidentally or become caught up in exploitation or abuse because of the ease of access and anonymity offered by the internet (Lewis, 2018). Wortley (2012) therefore argues that interventions could aim to prevent or deter such behaviours through targeting the person or the situation, but that doing so on the situational side is more cost effective. In this case then, public health approaches that focus on changing the environment at a population level, such as education or making IIOC harder to access, or moderating sites may have particular merit (Quayle & Koukopoulos, 2019). In a study drawing on young people’s and professionals’ perspectives on what might have prevented or stopped their HSB (McKibbin et al., 2017), three opportunities for prevention were identified: reformed sex education that commences at an early stage (ideally before the onset of puberty); providing support for adversity and victimisation in childhood; and managing or limiting children’s exposure to pornography. The identity and credibility of the person delivering sex education or intervention programmes was also an important factor (McKibbin et al., 2017). Prevention strategies could also address attitudes that may facilitate HSB, such as sexist or misogynistic attitudes (Stonard, 2020) or counter the negative effects of pornography by encouraging children to critically reflect on the concepts of power, gender, age, and consent, what some have termed ‘porn literacy’ (McKibbin et al., 2017).

Interventions can also focus on reducing the impact of the harm on victims, such as removing abusive materials from the internet (Stonard, 2020).

Responding to emerging HSB at an early stage also allows a more proportionate response that can focus on safeguarding and welfare, rather than being forced to go down the route of criminal action (Lloyd, 2020). However, the emphasis is on the word ‘proportionate’, as unnecessary interventions with children who are low risk may have the opposite effect to what was intended (Lewis, 2018). This is particularly the case for TA-HSB where “…there is limited empirical research and evaluations on the treatment effects for individuals that have engaged in TA-HSB, as such any suggested intervention should be devised and planned with caution in regards to a lower risk consideration” (Lewis, 2018, p. 8). There are also a lack of TA-HSB specific assessment tools (Lewis, 2018) to guide decision-making. While interventions should be tailored to individual needs, Lewis (2018) describes the key components of a technology specific intervention plan as potentially: education about online safety; awareness of the online consequences of behaviours; dispelling the myth of anonymity; emotional regulation; identifying triggers; understanding consent; social skills; victim empathy; self-compassion and relapse prevention. CBT approaches have been found to reduce self-rated problematic
behaviours (Silovsky et al., 2019), but the active involvement of parents and carers is often a key element in these interventions (Lewis, 2018; Silovsky et al., 2019).

This indicates that support for the workforce and people in the child’s wider environment is also important, as many parents, teachers and practitioners report a lack of confidence, skills, or up-to-date technological know-how to respond credibly or appropriately (Draugedalen, 2020; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020; Lloyd, Walker, & Firmin, 2020). The emotional labour involved in working with HSB also needs to be acknowledged and supported, as practitioners describe the work challenging, intrusive and a change in world view (Ibrahim, 2021; Pelech et al., 2021), each indicators of potential burn-out and compassion fatigue.

Support for peers is also advised, firstly as they are affected by witnessing TA-HSB, but equally because they can play an important part in any intervention approach. Bystanders are acknowledged to be a powerful audience that can shame or support actions and behaviours relating to TA-HSB (Setty, 2019). TA-HSB by peers is also more likely to be disclosed to a peer than to an adult (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019), and the response received that first disclosure received may go on to shape future help-seeking behaviours for TA-HSB (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019; Firmin, 2020).

**Schools as a specific site of TA-HSB.**

Schools are particular sites of interest in relation to TA-HSB, firstly because they are a space where many children are located, and also because they are spaces where systems, practices and cultures can enable HSB and, by extension, TA-HSB (Lloyd et al., 2020). A survey of over 300 Headteachers and Safeguarding Leads in England and Scotland found that 90% had experienced TA-HSB within their school, and 83% felt that this was increasing (Phippen, Bond & Tyrrell, 2018). The widespread prevalence of TA-HSB in schools has left many schools feeling that image sharing is inevitable, overwhelmed and uncertain how to respond (Lloyd, 2020). The resigned acceptance of HSB in schools is in part driven by norms that are created or sustained by the volume of HSB, language, attitudes to disclosure, and the responses taken by schools when HSB is uncovered (Firmin, 2020; Lloyd, 2019). However, schools are in a unique position when it comes to preventing and responding to HSB; providing stability, care and inclusion and in promoting healthy sexual behaviours (both online and offline), and school protective factors are associated with more positive outcomes (Allardyce, Yates and Krothe, 2021; Draugedalen, 2020).

Yet schools’ abilities to respond varied hugely in terms of approaches and resources, and teachers frequently described a lack of clear policies or procedures and insufficient knowledge about how to respond appropriately, and without any national coordination or resources (Lloyd et al., 2020; Phippen et al., 2018). Responses typically focus on prevention and individualised responses that are often inconsistent both within and between schools (Firmin et al., 2019; Phippen et al., 2018), rather than harm reduction and whole school approaches that take into account the wider ecology (Lloyd, 2019; Lloyd, 2020). This approach lends itself more readily to a culture that inadvertently discourages disclosure and reinforces victim-blaming messages (Firmin, 2020; Lloyd, 2020).

Strategies that have been piloted or implemented in schools include: updated policies, bystander intervention training - as peer on peer HSB is more likely to be reported to a peer than an adults (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019), targeted interventions, and situational crime prevention - i.e. designing safer school layouts (Firmin et al., 2019). Preventing HSB in schools worked best when it formed part of the wider school ethos, rather than being limited to one-off
lessons but required staff who were up-to-date on emerging trends and technologies (Firmin et al., 2019). Identifying HSB required training, policies and resources that clearly distinguished between sexual behaviour that was harmful and that which was developmentally appropriate (Firmin et al., 2019), for example clear guidance that did not conflate consensual with non-consensual image-sharing (Lloyd, 2020). A school climate where there were positive relationships between pupils and staff and where pupils felt supported and not shamed when reporting incidents, was an essential part of any intervention (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019; Lloyd, 2019).

Therefore the purposes of this research are manifold. While the primary aim was to provide evidence to inform any ongoing delivery or development of the ROSA Project, the research also had the opportunity to develop new knowledge and fill evidence gaps in relation to: the needs of young people involved with TA-HSB; early intervention approaches for TA-HSB; and whole-school capacity building approaches.

**Method**

The research was given approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee. All participants provided informed consent before taking part in all aspects of the research, with the exception of the database. This was fully anonymised before sharing with researchers, and in that respect ceased to be personal data, and ROSA documentation alerted all individuals to the research taking place. The database was processed in line with permitted exemptions from GDPR and Data Protection legislation which permit the processing of administrative data for research purposes, as long as safeguards are taken to protect the safety of the data, ensure that no individuals can be identified, ensure that no distress is caused to individuals, and that processing is not used to take decisions about any individuals or use the data in a manner that is not congruent with the reasons why it was collected. The data processed would only be used to increase understanding about child protection and public safety in relation to online harmful sexual behaviour.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the research, to strike a balance between quantifying need and patterns of behaviour, with a qualitative exploration of various aspects of ROSA, from the implementation journey to how the service was experienced by the children, family and other stakeholders. The specific methods used in the research varied and are summarised in Table 1.

Evaluation progress was slow, partly mirroring the time that it took the project to get up to speed, but also resulting from some misunderstandings within ROSA about the research process or materials; a reluctance by children and families to participate (possibly because of the sensitive subject matter); and reduced research capacity in CYCJ as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a pragmatic approach was taken to data collection in order to maximise responses, and on occasion anonymised data that had been gathered by ROSA for routine monitoring purposes was included in the research. However, participants may have provided different information directly to ROSA, than they would have to an independent researcher.

Furthermore, the research also had to adapt to the restrictions arising from public health measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in March 2020 and lasted for the remainder of the research. Accordingly, interviews with young people and parents/carers shifted to online video conferencing platforms in March 2020; however, it
should be noted that parents were often in earshot at young person interviews and vice versa. While interviews have only proceeded in this way with the express verbal consent of both parties, it is not known if or how young person and parental responses have been influenced by this presence. All interviews were recorded, with permission, and transcribed verbatim with the exception of two parent/carer interviews where permission was not given to record the interview, and written notes were taken instead. Where verbatim quotes are used in the research, all identifying information has been removed and pseudonyms used.

Table 1: Research Methods and Response Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Element: Overview and Implementation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROSA Steering Group (ROSA managers/staff; social work managers/staff; school managers/staff)</td>
<td>Video call interviews</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSA Steering group</td>
<td>Documentary Analysis (minutes, plans etc)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Element: ROSA Programme</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people referred to the ROSA Programme</td>
<td>Analysis of anonymised ROSA Database</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people completing the ROSA Programme</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews / video call interviews</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people completing the ROSA Programme</td>
<td>Paper feedback form distributed by ROSA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and carers of young people completing the ROSA Programme</td>
<td>Video call interviews</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and carers of young people completing the ROSA Programme</td>
<td>Paper feedback form designed/distributed by ROSA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrers to the ROSA Programme (if not parent / carer)</td>
<td>Online survey upon completion of the programme</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrers to the ROSA Programme</td>
<td>Online follow-up survey at the end of Year 3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Element: Whole School Preventative Approach</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Online Survey at the start of Year 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Follow-up online survey at end of Year 3</td>
<td>0 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils in Young Person’s Advisory Group at school</td>
<td>Online Survey</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and carers attending information workshops</td>
<td>Paper survey designed/distributed by ROSA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils aged 16 and 17 as part of the planning process for ROSA 3</td>
<td>Focus groups designed and delivered by Stop It Now and Barnardo’s</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 There may have been some overlap between participants but as the data was anonymised as far as possible it has not been possible to cross-reference this
2 The follow-up survey was never distributed by the school due to staffing pressures
3 This officially fell outwith the evaluation period, but an anonymised and pre-analysed report from the focus group was shared with the researchers
What have we learned about implementation and delivery?

Evidence for this section is mainly drawn from interviews with key ROSA Stakeholders, who formed part of the multi-agency ROSA Steering Group set up in 2017 to oversee and support both ROSA implementation and delivery. Professionals in this steering group brought with them key knowledge about ROSA or HSB, and key connections across staff and agencies to help promote, align and implement the service. Further evidence is also drawn from documentary analysis (Steering group minutes, ROSA proposal etc) that span the lifetime of the project.

The impetus for the service

The impetus for setting up the service was a growing concern among professionals, and parents and carers, about young people’s online behaviours within the context of increasingly prevalent device ownership and social media use. While Glasgow had a long established HSB service, the Halt Project, there was an identified gap in service provision, and a practice need, for support at an earlier level that focused specifically on harmful online behaviours. It was also recognised that there was an evidence gap about young people’s online behaviours and that a service could play an important role in generating new knowledge in this regard.

“But it seems to be an issue that lots and lots of practitioners were talking about lots and lots of practitioners seem to have cases, people seem to be struggling with what are the right resources, what are the right kind of responses?”

“I think it was recognised that there was a gap in service provision for young people who were experiencing difficulties online at a kind of early interventions stage, um so I think there were services for young people who had committed harm online and that was covered by Halt and youth offending teams, but there wasn’t really much there for young people who were on the cusp … I think also it’s recognised that there’s not a lot of data about young people who are getting into trouble and experiencing trouble online. And I think the idea behind that was to look and see what you could find out from young people and what supports or resources we could develop.”

The implementation of the ROSA Project

The ROSA implementation generally went as planned, with great engagement with stakeholders. However, one of the biggest challenges that the service faced was a lower than anticipated referral rate. Based on local knowledge and assessment of local needs, it was estimated that the ROSA Project would work with up to 50 young people per year, for two years. In total, 61 young people were referred to ROSA over an extended three year pilot. The ROSA worker started in July 2018 and referrals were opened shortly after, with the first referral made in July 2018. However, only nine referrals were made in 2018, rising to 26 in 2019 (the first full year of operation), and falling a little to 23 in 2020, no doubt affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that started in March 2020 and continued throughout the year with extended lockdowns at various points. Only three referrals were made in 2021, reflecting the planned wind down of the ROSA Project pilot.

Minutes from late 2018 and early 2019 show high levels of activity in relation to awareness-raising and promotion of the service, including: presenting at meetings, engaging with schools and third sector agencies, sending out communications and leaflets to the relevant social work team. Yet referrals remained persistently low, despite a belief that the need was out there. This low referral rate was described by stakeholders as one of the biggest puzzles and
disappointments of ROSA, and had an ongoing impact on other elements of the project, including the data available for research and evaluation and the ability of the project to capitalise on that knowledge and experience.

“So in the beginning I had some visions that it would be a really popular service in terms of potentially being inundated with referrals...and I did have a worry about that ....[but] [ROSA worker] would have lots of referrals that didn't happen, so that did surprise me, the kind of lack of an inundation of people needing a service.”

“I wanted this to be a really successful project and be seen as something that could be replicated or that people would want to kinda copy the work from, so the low referral rates were really disappointing I suppose for me.”

The Steering Group attributed some of this lower referral rate to the COVID-19 pandemic, but observed that the problem had existed prior to the start of the pandemic. Others felt that it was typical of any new service provision, which always took time to embed in processes and mindsets, but that more possibly could have been done to target promotion of the service. Others felt that there was an element of normalisation of online harmful behaviours in some settings, or a sense of agencies being overwhelmed by the prevalence of these behaviours.

“So it’s very much about just trying to keep it and workers awareness of the service and what’s out there and the connection in. So I think we probably had to do a bit of work around that, and I’m not sure we did it well enough. but I mean, we certainly had to go out and raise awareness of it as you would for any new services, it’s just the fact it’s a new service. And people don’t know about it and you need to help people know what’s out there.”

“I don’t know, I think that, I think there’s an element of normalising this type of behaviour, so you know for young people exchanging pictures online, sending nudes or making a meme of someone else that’s sexualised, I think there’s an element from professionals that is if we were to make a referral every time we encountered an incident like this, we would be sending you referrals all day every day so there was an element of normalisation, so they only referred when it became really problematic, or when someone’s parent made a complaint, you know that kind of thing, where they had to be seen to be making a response, I think that was an issue definitely.”

However, it was felt that the ROSA Project had been incredibly busy throughout the pilot, and that the original throughput thresholds were maybe unrealistic in terms of feasibility.

“So I think we have worked at pretty much well at full capacity or beyond full capacity throughout the two years I’m amazed at [ROSA worker’s] resilience and capacity to keep on going and so we haven't worked with quite as many young people as we expected.”

Adapting to online provision during the COVID-19 pandemic also created safeguarding challenges such as ensuring privacy and mechanisms for disclosure of harm or complaints, and follow-up support should a young person become distressed, as well as logistical issues, but these were quickly resolved. However, ROSA stakeholders felt that while this shift was successful in the short and medium term, often engaging with young people and families that there had been some face-to-face contact with prior to the pandemic, as the pandemic wore on engagement via online methods waned. By the lockdown of January to March 2021, stakeholders reported challenges in engaging with new referrals, or maintaining the engagement of existing young people.
"I was a bit reticent about contacting young people online because I thought they'd be either a bit ambivalent or not very keen about meeting me online when we didn't already have an established rapport and I thought it would be difficult to start a relationship online but that's no been the case, I've found that young people have been just as comfortable online."

"I would also say that...we had a generally good level of motivation from young people... from March through to December time. I think you know [ROSA worker] was taking new referrals and she was seeing cases through to completion and closure. What has happened since you know, the most recent lockdown is that we've seen a real kind of puncturing of motivation of young people."

While this is less reflected in the parent and young people's perspectives, it should be noted that those who participated in the research were those who had managed to successfully complete ROSA online. The restrictions associated with COVID-19 also brought the work in the secondary school to a complete standstill in March 2020, just as it was really beginning to establish itself, and although work did happen in the school during autumn term, the service never regained its momentum and was derailed again by the closure of schools in December 2020. For a more detailed exploration of the implementation and delivery in the school, see the 'Whole School Approach' section later in this report.

The partnership established through the Steering Group was seen as crucial in the successful implementation of the ROSA Project, and in overcoming these challenges. Another key factor that was believed to be behind the ultimately successful implementation of the ROSA Project was the tenacity of the ROSA worker and the significant efforts she had gone to in order to raise awareness, engage with stakeholders and find solutions to barriers.

“So I think that the biggest facilitator if you like was the support for the steering group, that was useful for making links with other agencies, having access to whole council emails that you know we could inform team managers and ask them for referrals, the links that were established from the steering group were the basis for going out there and making contact with stakeholders and setting up the basis for referrals if you like, so the steering group was kinda instrumental in helping start off the whole process. [School staff member] was instrumental for setting up ROSA in school, I couldn't have done it without his support.

“Indeed, the kinda support that we've had from stakeholders, has been remarkable on this project.”

The shape of the ROSA Project today

Despite these challenges, ROSA remains broadly in line with the initial proposal, in that the service provided a one-to-one service for children becoming involved in harmful behaviour online; as well as providing a presence within a large secondary school to engage with pupils, raise awareness, and support and build capacity, knowledge and skills within the staff group and parents.

“ROSA has been set up to work with the young people who have been involved in online, probably in accessing inappropriate images and inappropriate material online, some of which will be for themselves, but in other instances it will be about sharing images and content with others, which is inappropriate. We also set ROSA up to do direct work with children or young people... but also they have done considerable work with implementing into one of the schools in Glasgow... And they have undertaken significant work in the school around about raising awareness across the staff group, parental group and working with young people as well. So they've had a significant reach within the school.”
While the overall shape of ROSA has remained the same, there have been minor tweaks along the way, mainly in response to either the lower than anticipated referral rate, the needs of young people, or the COVID-19 pandemic. A key change was the expansion of the age range from aged 10 to 14 as outlined in early documentation, to an upper age of 18 following consultation with parents and young people in late 2017, after identifying that while age 12-13 was a pinch point for emerging behaviours, ages 10-11 and 14-15 were seen as important stages too.

Another change was that the six-week programme became more flexible to meet the needs of young people, often extending up to around 10 weeks. However, the ROSA service became much more than the programme, with time spent building relationships first, or providing ongoing check-in support to young people and their families for several weeks after the end of the programme, particularly when there were upcoming court cases which caused the families prolonged stress and distress. Twenty-five of the young people were described as having full engagement, and the average length of their ROSA service was 21.9 weeks, ranging between six and 55 weeks. For those whose ROSA intervention was marked as complete (20 young people), the average length of time that the service remained involved was 17 weeks, ranging between six and 33 weeks. However, this timeframe also reflects the time that the ROSA worker spent trying to engage, or re-engage, the young people in the service.

In total, 14 young people were described as having partial engagement with the programme and 10 did not engage at all. Some were unable to participate because of external factors (i.e. the social worker never followed up on the referral, or they moved away), or others were not interested in participating, or withdrew for other reasons.

The biggest changes to the operation of ROSA were the unplanned adaptations made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as described earlier. In relation to the one-to-one programme, the delivery was swiftly moved online and this mode of delivery was viewed as acceptable (or even preferable) by many parents and young people (see later sections on their experiences).

Referrals and Throughput

Young people were mainly referred to ROSA from Social Work or from school, although a wide range of agencies were represented in referrals (Table 2).

Table 2: Referral Source (n=61)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral Source</th>
<th>Number of Referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-referrals (child or family)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversion/EEI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More young people were referred from the South area of the city, than the North East or North West, although this is broadly proportionate with the differing child population between areas (Glasgow HSCP, 2020). Three young people were referred from outwith the city boundaries.
Table 3: Referral Location (n=61)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral Location</th>
<th>Number of Referrals</th>
<th>% of Glasgow referrals</th>
<th>Area % of city child population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Learning about implementation and delivery

There was significant support for the service, and evidence of a need for a service pitched at this earlier level, but it was challenging to translate this into direct referrals. While significant activity was undertaken by ROSA to promote the service among key stakeholders, this was an area that affected the implementation and subsequent evaluation of the project. The role of the steering group was invaluable and having local and multi-agency buy-in is essential to implementation.

Capacity-building work in schools was welcomed and very well received, but the practical logistics of delivering this in large and busy schools, and the need for more than one school ‘champions’ should be clarified prior to any further school roll-out.

The children and young people referred to ROSA presented with often very complex needs and behaviours. The support needs around this, and the impact on staff capacity (i.e. time spent engaging and building relationships, extension of the programme, maintaining ongoing support post-programme) should be factored in to any service roll-out.

What have we learned about young people’s needs and behaviours?

from young people (focus groups prior to ROSA implementation)

A focus group was delivered by Stop it Now Scotland and Barnardo’s Scotland, with a diverse group of 13 young people aged 16 and 17 from the secondary school in the pilot. The focus group took place in 2017, so falls outside of the evaluation period, and was designed to help ensure that the development of the ROSA service was directly informed by young people’s needs and views. Highlights from the consultation report have been included here as they provide a useful perspective of young people’s needs in relation to online sexual behaviour and online safety.

The analysis revealed a group of young people who were comfortable with online technology, and who demonstrated insight and awareness of the risks that could be present online. There was a disconnect between current policy/legislation and young people’s views and experiences, in that young people generally felt that the consensual sharing of nudes was fairly commonplace among older teenagers and did not see this as problematic. Young people did recognise the risks of nude pictures being shared without permission, especially in the context of a relationship breakdown etc. Pornography was not viewed as a big issue for young people and they did not feel pressure to watch it. Young people felt that pornography was more readily accessible but that they did not tend to view it (although they may be reluctant to...
disclose porn use in public) and thought that most young people would recognise that it was not necessarily reflective of real relationships.

Young people tended to think that the adults in their lives were not in the best position to talk to, educate, or support them with online sexual behaviour. Firstly, young people were not that comfortable talking to their parents or teachers about these issues for fear of them ‘overreacting’, instead turning to friends, Google and older relatives. Secondly, parents, and sex education classes in school were seen as out of date, out of touch and unable to keep up with developments in the online and technological world. Although they recognised the use of parental controls with younger children had helped, this blunt approach did not work as children grew older and were trying to develop a life online. Young people did suggest that if people were at risk online then they should contact the police, but recognised that the police were powerless to do much, for example in relation to online bullying. Their feedback suggests a place for provision where advice and support is provided by peers or young adults, who may understand their world a little better (although such a service model will likely need to be overseen by professionals to ensure appropriate support and safeguarding for children and their peer supporters).

from the database analysis (programme)

ROSA maintained a routine monitoring database throughout the duration of the project. A completely anonymised version was analysed as part of the evaluation to identify demographic characteristics, common needs and any patterns of behaviour. The results of that analysis are presented here. Some children had missing data for some variables, that was not available to ROSA, and data for each variable is therefore expressed as a percentage of those children where data is known, not necessarily all children who were referred.

a) Demographics

In total, 61 individuals were referred to the programme. The majority of referrals were for males (38, or 62.3%), with 21 females and two non-binary young people referred. Due to the small number of young people identifying as genders other than male or female, data for these individuals have been excluded from any gendered analysis.

Although the originally intended age range had been to work with children aged 10 to 14, this was expanded over the implementation of the pilot. Young people referred were aged between 11 and 19, with a mean age of 14 years and five months (M=14.39, SD=2.02). Slightly more than half of all referrals (34, 55.7%) fell into the originally anticipated age range. There was no difference in the age of referral between males (M=14.42, SD=1.91) and females (M=14.24, SD=2.30).

The vast majority of referrals were for children who were White Scottish (56, or 91.8%).

The young person’s sexual orientation was known for 43 individuals. Of these young people around two thirds identified as heterosexual (30, 69.8%), eight (18.6%) homosexual and five (11.6%) bisexual. Because of the small sample sizes, the sexual orientation variable was collapsed into two categories (heterosexual, other than heterosexual) for any analysis by sexual orientation, although the researchers recognise that this is not a helpful description in practice. While on the surface there appeared to be gender differences in sexual orientation among the referrals to ROSA (58.3% of males identified as heterosexual, compared to 88.2% of females), this did not quite reach significance ($\chi^2 (1, n=41) = 2.975$, $p=0.085$), although may have done so with a larger sample.
b) Young People’s wider needs

Almost half (22, 44%) of all young people referred to ROSA had a **mental health issue**, **learning disorder**, or **Autistic Spectrum Disorder** (either diagnosed or suspected). The sample size was very small for some categories, so any statistical analysis here should be treated with caution, but a Chi Square test did suggest there were significant differences between males and females in their presentation ($\chi^2 (3, n=48) = 9.659, p=0.015$). Nine (18%) young people referred had either diagnosed or suspected ASD and all (100%) of the young people referred with ASD were male, and 80% of those referred with mental health issues were females.

Young people referred to ROSA rarely presented with any physical health needs, with only two having a known physical health issue. Similarly, no young people reported any substance misuse issues.

More than one-quarter of young people referred to ROSA were described as **socially isolated** (14, 28.6%). This rose to 40% of males, and was only 11.8% in females, although the difference was not quite significant ($\chi^2 (1, n=47) = 2.896, p=0.089$), and may be more reflective of neurodiversity than gender. Two-thirds (67%) of those who had diagnosed or suspected neurodiversities such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder were described as socially isolated, compared to 19% of those young people who were more neurotypical. Although the sample was small this was statistically significant ($\chi^2 (1, n=45) = 5.686, p=0.011$).

The majority of young people (47, 77%) were attending school, although for seven of these young people they were attending with concerns about attendance or other issues that are not able to be specified from referral data. The majority of those with school concerns were male. The remaining 14 young people were currently unemployed.

c) Young people’s experience of maltreatment, neglect or grooming

There were 27 young people (44%) who had maltreatment concerns (either self-reported or in the referral information). These mainly related to offline concerns about bullying or neglect, although bullying was the experience most likely to take place both online and offline. Small numbers of children referred had experienced abuse (3, 5%) or victimisation (3, 5%), either online or offline. However, one-third of young people (16, 33.3%) had been groomed, with most of this grooming (81.2%) taking place online.

d) Young People’s sexual behaviours

Around three-quarters (32, 76.2%) of the young people referred to ROSA used online pornography. There was a significant gendered element, with 89.3% of males and 41.7% of females reporting pornography use ($\chi^2 (1, n=45) = 7.778, p=0.003$). Pornography use did not appear to be related to age, with no significant difference in the average age at referral of young people who used pornography (M=14.38) compared to those who did not (M=14.2, t (40) =.292, p=0.810)

Young people referred to ROSA were most frequently defined as having a ‘peer-to-peer’ status (26, 42.6%) which refers to consensual behaviour between peers (e.g. in the context of a relationship) but that may have been shared or used coercively after the event and is thus deemed problematic or harmful in some way. Seventeen (27.9%) young people were described as a ‘victim’ only (including those who had been sexually exploited). Again, there appears to be a gendered element to the young person’s status with all bar one of the 17
young people described as having a ‘perpetrator’ status i.e. where there was a clear intention to cause harm or upset, identifying as male (16, 94.1%). Young people with this status may have displayed behaviours that were characterised as solely ‘perpetrator’ or as a perpetrator, peer and/or victim.

e) Young People’s internet usage

Most young people (58, 95%) had access to the internet, and of those 22 (37.9%) had unsupervised access, with a further 14 (24.1%) described as being inadequately supervised. Three young people had no access to the internet, presumably as a result of restrictions put in place to manage online behaviour.

Young people mainly accessed the internet for social media and YouTube, followed by gaming (Table 4). One-third used the internet to access pornography and for chat and communication. Although gender difference have not been analysed statistically, on the surface there appear to be gendered patterns of usage, with females more likely to access the internet for social media, YouTube and shopping; males were more likely to use the internet for gaming and pornography (Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for using the internet</th>
<th>Number of Young people</th>
<th>% Young people</th>
<th>% Males</th>
<th>% Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaming</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornography</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat / communication</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating (including adult dating sites)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f) Young People’s behaviours

The vast majority (55, 96.5%) of young people had been involved with an online offending behaviour, whether charged or not (Table 5). All of the males had been involved in offending behaviours, and most of the females (90%). Almost half of all children involved in offending behaviours had been involved with a Communication type offence i.e. sending unwanted or unsolicited sexual images or messages. Offences relating to indecent images of children were the next most common, although it should be noted that the self-production and consensual sharing of images for any under 18 also falls within this category. Out of the 14 young people involved with creating indecent images of children, all (100%) had self-produced the images (either consensually or otherwise through coercion/deception).

There were no significant differences between the genders in relation to possessing (males non-significantly higher) or distributing (females non-significantly higher) indecent images of children (Table 5). However, females were significantly more likely to be reported with creating indecent images of children ($\chi^2$ (1, n=59) = 6.455, p=0.007). This suggests that females are more likely to be self-producing sexual images (whether coerced or consensual). Although males were more likely to be involved with communication behaviours, this difference was also not statistically significant ($\chi^2$ (1, n=59) = 2.243, p=0.134).

4 14 young people (23.0%) were aged under 13, the typical cut-off for social media platforms

5 56 young people (91.8%) were aged under 18. Pornography sites are required to verify that a user is aged over 18
Eleven of the young people had been formally charged with an offence, nine of whom were male (81.8%).

g) Victims of young people’s behaviours

In the majority of behaviours where there was an identified victim, the victim was known to the young person (28, 59.6%). Males were more likely to know the victim of their behaviour (71%) compared to females (40%), although this difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 (1, n=46) = 2.874, p=0.090$). Almost three-quarters of young people where the victims were known (38, 70.4%) had harmed a ‘pubescent’ person, indicating possibly harmful sexual behaviour between peers. Males made up 11 (68.8%) of the individuals with concerning behaviour involving extreme behaviours, or prepubescent victims.

**Key Learning about young people’s needs and behaviours**

More than half of the males referred to ROSA were LGBT+, and around one-in-five of the females, compared to official figures for 16-24 year olds of around 7% (ONS, 2019), although official figures are likely to be an underestimate. Adolescence is a key time for sexual development, and it may be that, in a world that still tends towards the heteronormative, LGBT+ young people are more likely to be exploring their developing identities online, with the additional opportunities and risks that this brings. Preventative approaches may wish to ensure that young LGBT+ people are specifically catered for in any resources or interventions.

Young people presented with complex needs around mental health issues or autistic spectrum disorder. Around one-in-five of young people referred had ASD, compared to estimates of less than 2% of schoolchildren in England (Roman-Urestarazu et al., 2021). Males were more likely to have diagnosed or suspected ASD than females, and females were more likely to present with mental health issues. A quarter of young people referred to ROSA were socially isolated, rising to 40% of males. There is evidence of a potential interaction between gender, ASD and social isolation that might increase vulnerability and risk factors online, which would be important to explore in research with larger samples.

Pornography use was common, especially among young males. Communication offences were the most common offence (i.e. sending unsolicited picture etc). Perhaps surprisingly, females were significantly more likely than males to be involved in creating self-produced images of children. This mainly relates to self-produced images (whether by consent, indirect peer pressure or coercion). Victims of the young people referred to ROSA were frequently described as ‘peers’. Although it is not possible from the data to ascertain if any harm was caused by these actions, this highlights the potential criminalisation of young people for what may be developmentally typical, if risky, behaviours.
What have we learned about how the ROSA programme was experienced?

from parents and carers (programme)

Nine parents/carers (henceforth ‘parents’) were interviewed via video call by the researcher, and four completed a written survey for ROSA at the end of the programme.

Parents described a basic level of knowledge about internet safety, gleaned from various sources such as work or their own internet use. However, many observed that this level of knowledge was quickly outpaced by their child’s use of the internet, and some expressed concern or even shock when the boundaries they had put in place were not sufficient to keep their child, or others, safe online. Many described not being fully informed about the online world.

“we had kinda spoke about it and they’d done it in school and everything but I was more lackadaisical about it than I really should have been as well, it probably is my fault too.”

“ehm its just its changing all the time you know doesn’t it and it’s just about trying to keep yourself up to date about what’s going on and about how to keep everybody safe.”

Parents felt that the referral process was straightforward, and the information they had received about ROSA was sufficient, with many hearing about the service through a third-party, such as a social worker or lawyer. Many parents did observe though that they would have never known about the ROSA Project without this third-party knowledge, and a common suggestion was that the service should be better promoted so that parents could access support for their child themselves at an earlier stage.

Parents tended to rate the service very positively and welcomed the support that it had provided to their child. All parents described very positive interactions with the ROSA worker, finding her to be welcoming, non-judgmental and down-to-earth. Similarly, parents invariably rated the rapport and relationships that the worker had managed to establish with their child, despite challenges such as neurodiversities, shyness, or a lack of face-to-face contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, a number of parents also observed that the worker was able to calm their child down, which was seen as essential to engagement, especially given the sensitive subject matter. Others noted that the worker had gone out of her way, within the COVID-19 restrictions, to make young people and their families comfortable, for example by meeting face-to-face in an outdoor location before commencing online sessions.

“It does take Jack a while to build relationships but she managed to calm him down and done some work to calm him down and I must admit she's been fantastic. Absolutely fantastic.”

Parents valued the fact that the service had provided a safe and ‘objective’ space for the young person to talk about difficult and sensitive issues, as previously parents felt that their child had not been able or willing to talk to them about their online behaviours or that they themselves were not equipped for such conversations. The non-judgmental approach of the ROSA worker, and their knowledge and confidence in this area, often gave the service credibility for their child.

“I guess just the openness about it the fact that nothing was taboo, and there was no pressure from [ROSA worker], and I think that it’s consistent for her…and I think it shows that nothing’s ever that bad that you can’t speak to her about it and fix it.”
It also appeared that the wider context around the child had become more open and conducive to preventing or dealing with any new concerns about online sexual behaviour, and parents described feeling supported by ROSA too. Generally parents felt that their ability to have honest and informed conversations with their child about online safety had improved a little since ROSA, although conversations remained tricky and sensitive, and parents recognised that an external source of advice (whether a relative or professional) was always helpful. Parents were confident that they now knew where they could turn to for help should any concerns arise in future.

“because obviously what he done, he kept to his self, I don't know, for maybe 9 months I don’t really know. I knew something was going on, he definitely knew something was going on…but now we can sit down and talk about it, its always, he's still upset don't get me wrong he still breaks down before he can tell us what kinda happens, so yeah she’s made us feel like we can talk to each other now”

Parents described the move to online service provision, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as fairly straightforward and reported no accessibility issues relation to hardware, software or data/internet. Most parents identified important benefits to the move to online provision, including: their child being able to participate from the comfort of their own home; less travel; less burden for working parents if they did not need to accompany their child to the ROSA office; less shame or embarrassment; or just that their child preferred online interactions.

“I think we only met her once or twice, and then we had to carry on over Zoom, that was quite a big change I think, I think it’s been managed really well.”

“I think Max liked it a bit more because there’s not the whole rigmarole of getting on a train with his parents and the shame and embarrassment that goes with that – so its basically a case of get himself in front of a computer a minute before the meeting starts and then the meetings are a bit more open because it's his own environment, so yeah I think as far as this is concerned, the lack of face to face and the internet transactions over the web are actually better, that’s Max’s opinion anyway.”

Some parents felt that face-to-face-work would have been preferable for relationship-building but accepted the reasons for online provision, often being surprised about how well it had worked despite the challenges. Others appreciated the efforts that the worker had made to meet face-to-face where allowed, which had benefitted the online relationship. One parent, interviewed towards the end of the project, commented that their child’s engagement declined over the course of ROSA, and attributed this to boredom with Zoom, possibly reflecting a wider fatigue with pandemic restrictions and online video calls more generally.

“I mean I think it would maybe have been a bit better, I think they would have maybe built up a better relationship if they had met face to face but do you know [worker] was still really good on Zoom, and Sophie never missed a session or anything.”

“I think initially it was a bit maybe kind of ehm maybe just initially a wee bit hard for him because it was all the adjustment, you know with school and college and you know it was just kinda, he felt a bit like it was just another thing thrown into the mix, but I think he’s managed really well with and I think it’s a good option to have.”
from young people (programme)

Nine young people were interviewed for ROSA (one face-to-face prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the remainder online). In addition, ten young people completed a paper feedback form designed by ROSA, however, there is likely to be some overlap between the two modes of participation. It was clear from the interviews that the online world was a big feature of adolescent lives, as was the complexity of their developmental phase within the context of a confusing legal landscape:

“…I’ve come from a generation growing up where you know all of our entertainment is on TV and in phones, and you know. You don’t really engage with like a book or people and you don’t go outside and talk with people.”

“Yeah you’re legal at 16 to have sex but you’re not legal to send nudes, so you’re in a weird space between 16 and 18 where you like. So I can engage in sexual act, but I can’t like show people that I want the interest in it. You know it’s legal to have sex at 16 but a lot of dating sites don’t allow you on to them until you’re 18”

However, when the online world became unsafe or frightening it was clear that young people quickly became isolated and ashamed, with no-one to turn to for advice or support through embarrassment or fear of getting into trouble. When young people’s behaviours stretched into unlawful territory, seeking help became even more difficult.

“I wasn’t really happy about what someone had done to get me into trouble and that. And I didn’t really want to tell anyone because I didn’t really want to get into trouble.”

“I’d keep it to myself…I didn’t think they’d understand”

“There’s a certain stigma around that that’s…very hard to sort of overcome when you’re like, you’ve got sort of cognitive dissonance. Stuff like ‘You shouldn’t be doing this, but also if you tell anyone about it, you’re going to get labelled a paedophile. You’re going to, you know, get harassed’…And without knowing of stuff like the ROSA project there’s no really sort of safe way to be like ‘hey, I’m potentially engaging in some offensive and risky behaviours – help!’”

In this regard, having an outlet for their worries and concerns, that was separate from their usual sources of support, was an important aspect of the ROSA Project.

“It was sort of a support thing of having someone who was sort of impartial to the situation. Being able to like, discuss it outwith you know, family who have also been affected by it or, um, friends who you don’t want to know about it.

However, almost all young people described feeling nervous or apprehensive prior to meeting with the ROSA worker, and were worried that they would be judged. Others were very uncertain about what to expect.

“I was like, I was a wee bit worried to see what it would be like cause I thought it would be me like getting into trouble, for the stuff I did wrong, so I was quite nervous, I was worried, cause I don’t really like getting into trouble.”

“At first I was kinda unsure of it, I didn’t know what, I didn’t really know what it was going to be like but I just decided to try it and just see if I liked it or not, and if I didn’t it was OK.”

However, these nerves quickly subsided upon meeting the ROSA worker and as the work progressed young people often came to view the ROSA sessions as a safe and welcoming space (whether in person or online). This was largely due to the approach of the ROSA worker and the time taken to build relationships and trust with the young people.
“She was like really nice and, like, relatable and understanding and she made stuff that was like serious more enjoyable than how like the police will talk about it or like my Mum or someone like that.”

“No, not at all, [ROSA worker] told me everything about it, she told me all this stuff we were going to learn about and all that. So she reassured me.”

“It wasn’t easy to talk to her at the start because I really didn’t have a bond yet, so she took weeks to get to know me which was really nice. That helped a lot.”

Young people identified varying motivations for engaging with the ROSA Project. They most frequently referred to the opportunity to learn about the internet and online safety.

“I thought, well, I'll do it, to be honest with you, ’cause I wanted to get a little bit more education about this stuff, what to do, what not to do and all that, so it's actually very helpful for me.”

“Because I wanted to learn about the law online and get taught about the law and stuff. Just so I can know in the future.”

While young people generally believed they had an element of choice to participate in the ROSA Project, two young people mentioned being motivated in order to demonstrate compliance following an arrest, and two said that they had participated to appease their parents. However, young people often reflected that they gained much more from the ROSA Project than they had anticipated.

“Ultimately, because it really wouldnae hurt to show that I’m willing to seek assistance. But after the fact it did, it sort of helped my mindset, realising what the offending behaviour had sort of done and opened my eyes to a few things.”

Young people reported very positive experiences of the programme itself, viewing the ROSA worker as credible and valuing the way that she had adapted the content or methods to suit the young person’s age, stage and learning style.

“I think she understood and she knew what she was talking about.”

“We worked on like lots of different things like she helped me with, we’d play games sometimes to help me understand it, like flash cards and videos.”

“She explained it in different ways which helped a lot because I couldn’t understand at first.”

Young people had generally coped very well with the transition to online provision as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, although it should be noted that the young people who were interviewed were those who had successfully engaged to some extent online, as the interviews also took place online after completion of the programme. The ROSA project did report greater disengagement from young people towards the end of the project, after a year of the pandemic and following extended restrictions during the Winter 2021 lockdown. However, out of the young people interviewed, all found participating online acceptable in the circumstances.

Some young people preferred taking part online, as they felt that they could be more open and honest, or enjoying being able to participate from the comfort of their own home.

“I think it was better because like. I felt more comfortable doing it over the phone because like in person, I woulda just went all nervous and shy and on the phone you can say anything and I don’t know like, I don’t know, it just feels more comfortable doing it over the phone.”
“I’d definitely rather do it online…. It’s no as awkward….on your summer holidays, you can just wake up at like 11 o clock, and still in my pyjamas and then just come down stairs and have a little meeting with [ROSA worker], without having to get dressed, go out, with a long journey to Glasgow.”

Others referred to the shame and embarrassment of accessing the ROSA Project office which, although unobtrusive, still caused some young people to feel anxious or intimidated. For these reasons the young people preferred participating online.

“[Accessing the building was] almost like scary. Like, you know going into this old building ring the doorbell…”

“The only thing that was kind of uneasy is getting into the building, because it's a buzzer system and you're going to have to be like, "hey, I'm here for whatever".

Others would have preferred face-to-face but found the online sessions a close second and quickly adapted to the new approach. One young person did not particularly enjoy online methods, but still reported a positive experience of the service overall and had developed a positive relationship with the ROSA worker.

“I mean, I would have liked to meet her, to be honest with you, but I think Zoom’s close enough.”

“It was strange and I didn’t really know what….I wasn’t used to talking to people on Zoom and that and it was a different experience. But after the first week it was…. [ROSA worker] made the experience feel like it was just a casual talk about this stuff, about the law and that.”

“Zoom’s not my favourite thing, I don’t know I don’t really like doing Zoom calls, I like face-to-face better.”

from referrers (programme)

Referrers were asked to provide online feedback, typically when a young person completed the psychoeducational programme, although at times they were asked for feedback before the young person had finished their ROSA work, and at others this was not requested until several months had passed. A total of 21 referrers provided feedback, including: social workers (11), school staff (four), the Police, residential care staff, legal and health care professionals.

Referrers mainly made a referral because they wanted the young person to become better educated and better supported in relation to online safely (18 referrers). Referrals were typically made as a reaction to an incident of online harm, either an arrest or growing concerns about online behaviour.

“A young person who I was working with was putting himself at risk through social media and appeared unaware of the risks”.

“To support a pupil in my caseload who is making poor choices online.”

Referrers hoped that the service would be able to provide non-judgmental but up-to-date advice to increase the young person’s understanding of the dangers that they might face online (12 referrers), a well as give the young person insight into their behaviours and how they might harm others (six referrers).

“Education and guidance on how to use the internet in a safe manner, what is appropriate to send in social media and how to be responsible with what you are accessing.”
“Understanding of the behaviour, social expectations, and behavioural strategies.”

“Support and guidance to make better choices and understand the potential impact of their behaviour on both themselves and others”

It appears that ROSA was filling a gap in service provision for children and young people at the lower range of concerns and risks. Participants made a referral to ROSA rather than another service, as it was seen as a specialist service that was at the right ‘tariff’ and was specific to online safety and sexual behaviour (10 referrers).

“It seemed most appropriate - in this case was online specific.”

“ROSA appeared to offer the appropriate service related to the level of risk to the young person and others.”

A number of referrers described positive experiences of the ROSA Project in the past, or an established relationship with the ROSA worker and trust in the service. Others had not intended to refer to ROSA but had been signposted to the service via other service providers.

“Only service I know and trust that works in this area.”

“A referral was made to the Halt Service (Glasgow) who signposted to the ROSA Project.”

The experience of the service was positive, with 17 referrers noting that that were very satisfied with the referral process and three satisfied. No referrers were unsatisfied, although one did not respond to the question. All referrers were either very satisfied (14) or satisfied (six) with the communication from the ROSA Project. Overall the majority of referrers were happy with the service, with 13 very satisfied and five satisfied. Two referrers were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, but this may have been to do with a lack of knowledge about the intervention provided or the outcome of the service, as neither received any information about the outcome of the referral. Only 11 referrers received any information about outcomes, although for many referrers they did not have any expectation of ongoing communication due to the nature of their role and did not feel that they required any further information about the service. Two comments were made about lines of communication when the allocated worker was the referrer, but the child lived in a residential unit. In both cases the main communication was between ROSA and the residential unit and one referrer felt that there could have been more communication directly with themselves as the allocated social worker, in order to ensure that the messaging and support offered to the child was consistent from across the care team. This may reflect communication between ROSA and referrers, but also between residential staff and social workers.

Overall, the service was seen as valuable and filling a hitherto unmet need in early intervention and low level problematic online behaviour, especially in the context of an increasingly online world: “has definitely helped me in times when I cannot offer a service a young person requires i.e. moved to problematic/harmful behaviours”. Referrers hoped to see the service continue and one referrer suggested expanding the service to adopt a more preventative role throughout educational establishments.
Key learning about how the ROSA programme was experienced.

The feedback from young people and their families highlighted a sense of shame and stigma about online HSB. This shame and stigma reduced the ability for young people to seek help, even though they often wished for advice and guidance. Help was often not received until crisis point (typically an arrest). The ROSA project was highly valued for offering a supportive, non-judgemental relationship, as well as knowledge and expertise. The service was viewed as filling an important gap in service provision, both in terms of being targeted at an earlier intervention stage of behaviour, and offering specific support around TA-HSB.

While the adaptation to online provision during the COVID-19 pandemic was acceptable to all, and preferable for some, engagement did wane over the course of the lengthy pandemic. However, the ROSA Project has shown that it is feasible to deliver these types of sensitive interventions online, and a hybrid approach in future, tailored to individual needs and preferences, may prove beneficial.

What have we learned about outcomes from the ROSA Project?
from the ROSA Steering Group / Stakeholders

Both elements of the ROSA Project were seen to be successful, with positive outcomes observed from young people who had completed the programme in reaction to reduced risk, changed behaviours, and reduced criminalisation.

“the success for me will be basically doing the programme with a couple of young boys from diversion and with successful outcomes which means they were diverted from prosecution.”

“I think that's had an excellent, it’s had some really really good outcomes, and because she'll meet with them for the six sessions or whatever it is … I think we can’t overestimate the impact that’s had on the young person and you know their safety as they grow up.”

However, the work in the secondary school, despite the huge challenges faced in terms of implementation, and then COVID disruption, was also seen as a great success, and the aspect of ROSA that had the potential to be truly preventative and have the greatest impact on the largest number of young people. The implementation and experience of the work in schools is explored in more detail in the ‘Whole School Approach’ section of this report.

“Just the work that's been done within the schools in terms of helping teachers in how they respond, looking at the work with pupils. the work with parents. I think it has, I really feel it has a potential to positively impact on outcomes for young people at that level.”

“I think one of the, I’m quite proud of the work we’ve done in the schools even though it feels as though we’ve never really finished anything. I think had the opportunity been there and COVID not have raised its ugly head I think the work in the school would have been really good and it's something to be proud of and take forward into other schools."
from young people (programme)

Young people sometimes found it a little more difficult to remember or articulate specifically what they had learned on the programme, but most reported feeling more confident about the internet and that they had gained new knowledge on the programme. Sessions in relation to consent, sex and the law, and the digital footprint were most frequently mentioned as being useful.

“teaches you like how to be safe online and stuff.”

“consent, internet safety, um, our digital footprint, like what we’re doing online, is that ok? Um dos and don’ts on the internet.”

For a small number of young people the content was not new to them, was still useful and informative. Young people did acknowledge that where this was the case the ROSA worker adapted the content where possible to meet their needs.

“It was useful because not because it was new, but because it was a refresher. The footprint stuff, was quite, it just kinda reminded me like, other people can see what I’m doing online, people will find out what I’m doing online so that’s good to know yeah.”

Young people also reported observing changes in their self too, often feeling that they were more confident or skilled online, as well as having a greater insight into their behaviours which has enabled them to make changes to their online interactions.

“I’m more confident like if people say stuff I can be a bit ‘naw’”

“I guess the thing is it’s helping me like mature a bit more.”

“’I’m definitely more careful online. Just like whatever you know sending a meme to my friends, or you know, posting something.”

from parents and carers (programme)

In describing what they wanted the service to achieve, parents frequently wanted their child to understand more about the dangers of the online world, and to learn how to keep themselves safe. Parents also wanted their child to have the opportunity to reflect on their own behaviours, and to understand the consequences of their behaviours online.

“just with her understanding, you know ehm about the internet, you know about the dangers out there on the internet, you know the different type of people who might not always be who they are, you know, and just learning about that”

“I was hoping that they would help her understand maybe why she done what she done, ehm, why she felt pressured, why she felt she couldn’t come to anybody, and a wee bit of self awareness from Sara, and consequences of things that she is too immature to understand”

Parents felt that their hopes had been achieved during the service provision. They felt that their child had gained a greater knowledge and understanding about internet safety and which behaviours were permitted and which were against the law, information which was not really available from other sources. Some parents also felt that their child had gained useful insight into their own behaviours.

“we kinda got a lot of information that I think a lot of kids her age should you know, know in day to day life and it’s a lot of different information that I think Kate has learnt.”
"I think ROSA really helped him understand that there’s a world out there that’s not exactly benign when you’re 14… so I think ROSA really helped with keeping Max safe and I also think that ROSA really helped with making Max understand that as well, despite the fact he’s 14, and naïve, ultimately what he did was a crime, and why it’s a crime."

Some parents were a little uncertain about how well their child would be able to put their newfound knowledge into practice in the longer-term, citing the appealing and pervasive nature of social media or the pressures of adolescence as factors that may cause their child to return to unsafe behaviours. However, at the time of the interview no parents were aware of any new concerning online behaviours, although a number of cases still had to come to court.

"I’m just hoping obviously, now that the meetings and things are finished that, you know she’s keeps it on board and, you know, remembers everything and you know, nothing else sorta slips or anything happens or anything…"

**from referrers (programme)**

The service was well received in terms of the support and awareness raising provided to the child and their family, with referrers noting an increase in knowledge, and also the development of strategies to reduce the risks online. However, at the time of the initial survey, many referrers were unsure about whether there had been an impact on the child in terms of a translation into behaviour change and reduced risks, either because they did not have the information, because it was too early to tell, or because the young person had not been able or willing to apply the learning.

"The young person understood that his behaviour wasn't socially acceptable and learned positive behaviours and coping strategies."

"The young person has definitely gained knowledge and awareness but is often choosing to ignore this."

In order to address this uncertainty around outcomes, a second follow-up survey was sent to all referrers in July 2021 to enquire about outcomes. Seven referrers responded, six were able to provide an update and one responded but was not in a position to provide more up-to-date feedback. Reflecting back on the impact of ROSA at the point the young person had completed the programme, referrers were generally satisfied that the young person had gained new knowledge and new coping strategies to navigate the internet safely.

"A really positive impact. Greater awareness of the legal position in relation to consent and sexual images and a deeper understanding of consent, sexual exploitation and how it applied to the young person and his situation."

Referrers were then asked to reflect on the young person's current situation and whether they had embedded the knowledge gained from the ROSA programme. Only three referrers answered this question, and all responded ‘partially’. However, it is important to note that three respondents reported no further concerns of HSB, or any online behaviour concerns, since completing the ROSA Project. The one referrer who did note some ongoing concern online described a young person who was still accessing a potentially risky social networking site; however, the young person now acknowledged that these sites could be risky and was better equipped to identify and manage these potential dangers. This reduction, rather than removal, of risk perhaps reflects the ubiquitous and normalised use of such sites among young people,
and the nature of adolescent online behaviour, including increased risk-taking as a natural developmental stage.

“I would say the ROSA Project course did not deter the young person from placing themselves at potential risk but did provide the knowledge and information the young person requires to try and keep safe.”

Referrers generally noted that young people were doing well in wider aspects of their lives, such as employment. Two referrers felt that there was no need for further supports relating to online behaviours. However, two workers also felt that a refresher session or sessions with ROSA would be beneficial, either because of actual or hypothetical concerns about increased vulnerability or a return to past behaviours.

“Yes, it would have been beneficial for him to have maintained his relationship with his ROSA worker and to have some follow up sessions to reinforce previous learning. After a period of around 12 months after closure he began to become subject to further exploitation.”

Referrers had maintained a very positive view of the ROSA Project and perceived the service to be filling an important gap that other service, or families, could not meet. Concerns and challenges relating to young people and online behaviours were prevalent in their caseloads, yet workers lacked the specialist knowledge, skills or confidence to address these behaviours with young people.

“The service is of significant value in reaching young people in an individual way to offer support and advice in a particularly sensitive area in a tailored and confidential way where the young person is comfortable to explore their needs. It would be my assessment this need would not be met by other services or parents due to the many barriers to full engagement and the need for a specialist approach.”

“I would hope that the service gets funding to continue and expand as the issues around online safety and exploitation are the most prevalent among the group of young people I currently look after. Any periods of crisis or conflict are around 90% related to online and social media. It is extremely difficult to manage and not everyone on the team has extensive knowledge of online and social media activity and use.”

Key learning about outcomes

The evaluation intended to measure short-term outcomes from the project at the point of closure. At this point participants could demonstrate a positive impact in terms of personal benefits (increased confidence etc) as well as increased knowledge and learning from the programme (internet safety, consent, digital footprints, the law).

Adults around the child (parents, carers and professionals) agreed that the programme could demonstrate an impact on the child, and also recognised that they were potentially better equipped to support the young person going forward. However, the adults around the child expressed some apprehension about how well the young person would be able to apply the learning in practice, given the widespread and pervasive nature of the internet in young people’s lives. While it has not been possible to ascertain what outcomes have been achieved beyond the immediate impact of the project, it is positive to note that only two young people had been re-referred, and a follow-up with referrers suggested an ongoing impact.
What have we learned about building whole school preventative approaches?

The work in the secondary school was multifaceted. The ROSA worker participated in assemblies with more than 1,200 pupils in order to raise awareness and normalise conversations relating to online sexual behaviour, as well as to promote the presence and purpose of ROSA in the school. A Young Person’s Steering group was established in order to give pupils a voice and a role in identifying issues and concerns, and influencing the shape and focus of the ROSA Project. This engagement ultimately led to pupils peer reviewing resources, amending the PSE curriculum to more directly address needs, and influencing the content of the parent information workshops. Work was also underway with the Steering Group to develop peer education lessons from senior pupils to younger pupils in the school. The ROSA project worker also directly supported pupils by developing resources, delivering PSE lessons and operating a drop-in service in the school. In December 2020 the ‘Dear ROSA’ service was established as an anonymous confidential advice portal available via the school website to provide advice, support and information to children and young people at the school who had concerns in relation to their own online sexual behaviour or the behaviour of someone else. The aim was to ensure that children and young people have quick access to anonymous advice so that situations escalating to abuse or exploitation were de-escalated and that young people could make decisions that proactively promoted safety and prevention of harm. Unfortunately, the timing of the launch coincided with a further period of remote learning that lasted from January to April 2021 which meant that the initiative could not be promoted or supported properly.

Figure 2: Whole School Engagement and the reach of the ROSA Project
The work undertaken in the secondary school was seen as a hugely positive element of the ROSA Project, albeit one that was drastically curtailed because of the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Even young people, referrers and parents who had no involvement in the school element of ROSA recognised school as an important site for this work to take place. School was a place where many of these behaviours happened, between pupils both on and offsite. School also had an important role in educating and supporting young people in relation to their online behaviours, and in creating the right environment for positive outcomes and help-seeking.

“The schools should teach you like what you are allowed to do online and what you are not allowed to do.”

from young people (young person’s steering group)

Five young people responded to an online survey about online sexual behaviours in school, relationships with teachers, and experiences of ROSA. It should also be noted that these young people had regular and direct contact with ROSA in school. The survey asked young people to rate their agreement with the questions set out Table 6 on a scale of 0 (disagree all of the time) to 10 (agree all of the time). However, few questions were answered by all five pupils and to preserve their anonymity only the key themes are reported here, rather than the exact responses.

Table 6: Questions asked of the Young Person’s Steering Group (n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School feels like a safe place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are generally good relationships between teachers and pupils at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils regularly send sexts / nudes at my school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a problem with sexting / sending nudes at my school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers understand about young people’s online sexual behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are approachable if pupils want to talk about online sexual behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers respond fairly to allegations of harmful sexual behaviour online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers respond consistently to allegations of harmful sexual behaviour online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSA are approachable if pupils want to talk about online sexual behaviours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a rule pupils tended to report that school felt safe most of the time, but it was clear that the school experience was very variable, with some children feeling that school was a very safe place, and others indicating that school rarely felt safe for them. Most felt that pupils at school regularly sent nudes/sexual images but, as with the other questions, perspectives on this differed widely. The sending of nude or sexual images was relatively normalised and not viewed as particularly problematic, although very few pupils answered this question.

Relationships with teachers were generally positive, but variable. However, there was a strong consensus that, despite positive relationships overall, teachers were not especially understanding or approachable about online harmful sexual behaviours (it is not clear whether this was because of embarrassment or apprehension on behalf of the pupils, the teachers’ responses/knowledge, or a mix of both). Regardless, it was clear that pupils preferred to discuss online sexual behaviours with someone who was external to teaching staff. When asked what one thing they would like to change about school in relation to online sexual behaviours, four out of five mentioned that they would like teachers to be more approachable, educated, or equipped for open and honest conversations.

Pupils were not entirely sure if or how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected pupil safety online, although a small number of pupils noted that children were more at risk as they were
spending more time online. The pupils all really enjoyed working with ROSA and described it as a safe place where they could have open and honest conversations. Pupils also very much valued being heard and making a contribution to improving their school.

“Finding a group of people that do also care for the school and want to see things improve”

from school staff (survey)

The school survey took place online in December 2018 and January 2019, just as the ROSA work was beginning to establish itself in the school. The aim was to develop a baseline and picture of the school environment which is what is presented here. A follow up survey was planned for summer term 2020, but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and also to align with shifts in the evaluation timeframe and focus. This was subsequently due to take place in June 2021, with the timing agreed with the school, but the follow-up ultimately did not take place due to pressures and priorities in the school.

In relation to school readiness in developing an early intervention approach to addressing problematic online sexual behaviour, there was a good base from which ROSA could work. The issue of problematic online sexual behaviour was one that was difficult for school staff to quantify and understand, as well as an area that many school staff felt a little uncertain about addressing directly with pupils and required further training and professional development and support in. However, staff tended to believe that they had a key role to play in this area and broadly it was felt that the wider school culture provided a positive setting within which pupils and staff could be supported to develop approaches to the problem, with appropriate resources and guidance.

The existing school leadership; relationships; and staff experience and expertise were generally recognised as factors in the school environment that would help staff to support the needs of pupils displaying problematic online sexual behaviours. Areas where the school could do more to develop and support staff and pupils tended to relate to more tangible elements of the school approach, where practical steps to change are easier to implement than systemic change across the culture. These included: staff training; school policies and procedures; and staff supervision that included a more direct focus on this issue. Table 7 highlights the responses to these questions in more detail. For simplicity in this interim analysis, the responses ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’ have been collapsed into one overall ‘agree category’, and similarly the ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘somewhat disagree’ responses have been collapsed to create an overarching ‘disagree’ category.
Table 7: School readiness, culture and environment (n=27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School priorities</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problematic online sexual behaviour is an issue in my school</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the role of school staff to support children who display problematic online sexual behaviour</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual knowledge, skills and confidence

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have had enough training in regards to problematic online sexual behaviour</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident in dealing with or discussing problematic online sexual behaviour</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the skills and knowledge to discuss and deal with problematic online sexual behaviour</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current school culture and approach

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School leadership helps staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying problematic online sexual behaviours</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School training helps staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying problematic online sexual behaviours</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff supervision helps staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying problematic online sexual behaviours</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School relationships help staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying problematic online sexual behaviours</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff experience and expertise helps staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying problematic online sexual behaviours</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policies and procedures help staff to support the needs of children who may be displaying problematic online sexual behaviours</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the initial school survey awareness about the ROSA Project was low. This was to be expected as the timing of the initial survey was designed to gather a baseline of the school’s position pre the ROSA involvement. It was anticipated that, if the work by ROSA in the school was successful, then school staff would show a significant shift in knowledge and understanding by the time of the second survey. Table 8 reports the responses from school staff at the time of the initial survey (with ‘good’ and ‘very good’ collapsed into a ‘good’ category and ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’ also combined into one ‘poor’ category).

Table 8: Awareness of the ROSA Project (n=27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness and Understanding</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>neither good or poor</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General awareness of the ROSA Project</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the purpose of ROSA work in school</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of ROSA processes in school</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of ROSA content and methods</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the ROSA 6-week programme</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>neither good or poor</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of ROSA communication</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of ROSA relationships with school staff</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of ROSA relationships with pupils</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of ROSA – relevance to school / staff needs</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of ROSA – relevance to pupils’ needs</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from the ROSA Steering Group / Stakeholders

ROSA Steering Group members recognised a real need for this work in schools, and that the risks to young people online had only increased as a result of the lower levels of school engagement and supervision, combined with increased online activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it was acknowledged that teachers were not always the best equipped, or in the best position to take on some of this work.

“I think more and more we were seeing situations young people were in that we were concerned about with online safety and you know speaking with young people who disclosed something to us, or very often a young person disclosed a concern about another young person to us because yes although teachers are often very trusted and important to young people, we’re still teachers and I think having someone like [ROSA worker] here was that interim person who was a bit more approachable than a teacher.”

“I suppose it meant that young people are spending a whole lot more time online and isolated from real life people to share concerns and worries with, so … it definitely makes me more concerned about young people and how they are interacting online because there’s so much more of it, there’s an element of isolation so I think it’s raised concerns.”

The implementation in school had been quite tricky, however, even prior to COVID-19. The ROSA worker had at times struggled to find a place and space in a large and diverse school and to raise awareness of the work. Although the school had been very receptive to the work and very supportive, with a senior manager championing the work within the school, the nature of busy workloads in school and other priorities meant that at times progress had been slow. Despite this, the ROSA worker had found the school support invaluable, in terms of both practical and moral support, as well as the values and commitment that the school brought to the project. This commitment was seen as a crucial factor in the success of the work in school, in particular the Young People’s Steering Group.

“I think one of the tricky parts might have been that um finding a base for her to work in and having a set place, so I think it was more logistical things, practical things about you know so say if she set up her steering group finding out what classes those young people were in, so just all the day to day housekeeping kind of stuff that probably proved a bit more challenging and ended up taking up more of her time than it probably really should have.”

“In hindsight I suppose I just naïvely thought that I would go into school and things would fall into place … I didn’t actually realise how busy [senior manager] was or how much other demands for their time there were… when we actually got that done their support was invaluable in terms of setting up the group and getting access to rooms, get young people into classes, any resources that we needed, but also [senior manager] would come in every day and ask ‘how did your group go’ and listen to the feedback and go ‘OK well lets run with that’.”

A change of key school personnel (through unplanned and unforeseen circumstances) part way through the project delayed progress further, as this senior member of staff had almost all of the responsibility for the project and the ROSA worker did not have an established line of contact with other staff initially.

“I think in hindsight and it’s not really avoidable I think because everyone changed remits, I took over the team and I wasn’t really aware of what was going on, I think there was a bit of a communication breakdown which was nobody’s particular fault, but I think in hindsight if I was starting off again as you always would we would do things slightly …and I think that breakdown kind of stalled the project and then.”

The COVID-19 pandemic then brought two extended school closures (although schools were
still operating virtually and were physically open for a small number of pupils) between March and August 2020, and December 2020 and April 2021. Outwith these lengthy closures, the school was operating in challenging circumstances relating to the ongoing physical, emotional and academic fallout from the pandemic for both staff and pupils.

“…to be brutally honest it was, August to Christmas, we were on survival mode and anything addition really was, really, we weren’t in a state to pick up.”

“So the work in [school] has been brilliant but its been…. stop start stop start all the time, especially in this last year due to the impact of COVID, and lockdown… the impact of COVID has been massive because its stalled every project we’ve had in schools, because the schools have been in lockdown and they’ve not been able to come in.”

When viewed within this challenging context, the achievements and impact that the work in school had on teachers, pupils and parents is remarkable. The work that was undertaken was perceived to be hugely valuable in the support that it provided to teachers, and the additional skills, knowledge and capacity that the service brought.

“The work that she did, it was so really really well received and I know that some staff even went along to [ROSA worker] to say can you explain to me about this app, I’m concerned about this, so people did approach her about a wide range of things.”

“Having [ROSA worker] here, and knowing who we can go to with referrals, and talking, even just having her here to talk through concerns around young people and her giving this amazing advice, taking on referrals from us.”

“I think it’s see as well because there’s so many new apps and different things that young people can do online, teachers are not best placed people to know everything about this and advise young people the way you should be able to so all of that is very very helpful.”

The work undertaken with the Young People’s Steering Group (see section above), was also viewed as having a significant impact, on both the pupils who participated directly, and also from the work that the Steering Group did to influence and change the focus of ROSA work, and the content of PSE lessons to make it more relevant and accessible to pupils. The ROSA worker was also viewed as being credible and approachable with pupils.

“I think one of the … biggest things is that people who have been involved in the steering group and what its meant to them…. I’ve certainly seen a huge impact on the young people who have been involved in it … they were working on new PSE lessons for us, which you know … is a wonderful opportunity, for us it means people’s voices are being heard, and really truly listened to, that would then bring about change in the PSE curriculum…. I know for those young people it developed so many things leadership skills, communication, you know they’ve maybe taken a role or responsibility in the school thinking about what younger pupils need so I think that was really wonderful.”

“Particularly the models for PSE. Um, the work that was done with steering groups…when [ROSA worker] has been able to get access to young people I think some of that work has been really useful for these young people in terms of change. And again the parents group I feel so I think probably has been a real success … the roots that have been put down to take forward some parenting work. I think it’s going to be really useful how it’s travelled to that place of talking about the whole school approach, I think it's actually really, really useful.”
“...Her whole manner with the young people was just fantastic and she created really great relationships very very quickly she didn’t shy away from difficult conversations that, she was honestly fantastic [ROSA worker] really brought such a lot to our school

Similarly the work with parents and carers to build knowledge and capacity in the young people’s home environment through parent information workshops was slow to get off the ground. There were perceived concerns that parents might be reluctant to talk about sensitive or personal issues, as well as cultural barriers in doing so. These concerns were, in the main, unfounded and the work ROSA did with the parent teacher council and at parents’ evenings to promote the service was well received.

“There was I suppose a bit of concern that some groups might have been a bit more conservative, that there might have been pushback, but every parent that I spoke to at the parents evening was really supportive of ROSA and saying we wouldn’t have a problem with this kind of information being shared at school. The feedback was really positive.”

There were practical issues to overcome, such as language and cultural barriers, as well as work and childcare commitments which also delayed implementation and reduced uptake of workshops.

“I think in hindsight I totally know why it was 3 hour sessions but I think in hindsight what I would have done is seen if [ROSA worker] could have done a half hour intro session and then let parents sign up because I think parents looked at it and thought 3 hours I don’t have the time I think if they’d had more info about it then they might have prioritised it.”

A parents’ group was eventually run in December 2019 and the feedback from the parents that did attend was very positive. The workshop was viewed as being very helpful in increasing awareness about the internet, the law, how to keep children safe online, opening up difficult conversations and raising awareness about sources of help and support. Feedback did indicate however that more flexible or accessible workshops would be helpful, with suggestions including a recorded webinar (this was pre-COVID) or workshops available at weekends.

Parents information workshops were then stopped during the bulk of the COVID-19 pandemic, however in spring 2021 there was increased uptake of a parents’ workshop that was adapted to online delivery. This online mode of delivery was believed to be more suitable to many parents, and may have increased parental engagement if it had been available earlier.

“yeah we’ve had quite a bit uptake with parents [online] ... it’s much much easier just, you know if it’s a miserable night and you think ‘aw I’m going to have to get a babysitter I’m going to have to do this and that’. Its much much easier having a tea and sitting in living room and I think parents would be a lot more willing to do that.”
Conclusions

The online world is a relevant and important space for children and young people, where they study, socialise, grow and experiment in terms of their personal and sexual development. Technology is now a normal part of adolescent life and as such should form a central focus when supporting children and young people throughout all aspects of their development, including sexual development.

Yet the online world also presents many risks and opportunities, and as the ROSA young people so clearly articulated, the complexity of adolescence appears to be intensified online, where behaviours that may be legal offline are not so online. Children and young people are therefore at greater risk of encouraging or being involved in harmful sexual behaviours online, potentially with much longer-term ramifications than for offline behaviours. This evaluation has also shown that the adults around a child often feel ill-equipped to fully support young people to be safe online, especially in relation to their sexual behaviours.

The service encountered significant challenges in establishing itself despite clear multi-agency support from the Steering Group, and substantial and proactive efforts on behalf of the ROSA team. This was then compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic halfway through the project. Despite extending the service, and associated evaluation, for an additional year, throughput remained lower than anticipated and limited the data available for evaluation. Professional knowledge and expertise in the area suggests that this is not due to a lack of need, and so consideration as to how to overcome these barriers to implementation in the future would be needed for any future service and programme development.

The ROSA Project has shown that there is significant shame and stigma attached to problematic online sexual behaviours, that impede the ability of young people, or families, to seek advice or help. Although most of the young people first felt apprehensive about their contact with ROSA, the sense of relief that they were able to access non-judgemental and expert advice and support was palpable. This was in no small part due to the knowledge, skills and personal qualities of the ROSA worker, who quickly made young people feel at ease and was credible, accessible and flexible. However, many young people and their families only became aware of ROSA at crisis point (after a harmful incident or arrest, for example).
is work to do to ensure that young people and families are aware of, and can easily access, early intervention supports for TA-HSB.

The evaluation also suggests that there may be certain groups of young people that are more vulnerable to being a victim or being involved in TA-HSB. As the sample size is small, firm conclusions cannot be made, but there may be merit in exploring online safety and behaviours among young people who are neurodiverse, socially isolated, or exploring LGBT+ identities online. Although males were more likely to referred to ROSA, young females appear to be especially likely to come into contact with authority through the sharing of self-produced images (triggering concerns around the creation of indecent images of children). This is worth exploring further to understand the potential for unnecessary criminalisation arising from gendered norms and stereotypes influencing adult concerns.

The style and content of the ROSA programme was valued by the young people and parents, and efforts were made to adapt this to individual needs and preferences wherever possible. The move to online provision during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that online provision, is feasible, acceptable and, for some young people, preferable. While online engagement dropped significantly over the final year of the programme, it is not clear if this was to do with the mode of delivery or reflected wider pandemic-fatigue. The provision of a choice of online or offline (or hybrid) methods of service delivery should prove to be beneficial to ensure accessibility for young people in any future service provision.

Short-term outcomes were very positive, with young people and parents/carers articulating positive benefits for their own personal development as well as online knowledge, skills and confidence. Longer-term outcomes were not evaluated, and appropriate measures and approaches for assessing both short-term and longer-term impact would be valuable in any future research. There was an apprehension about how well the learning would be translated into practice, or sustained in the longer term. While it is not known if these fears were borne out, and it is positive that only two young people were re-referred, the development of refresher sessions or materials may be of merit.

The whole school capacity building work was the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also showed the potential for significant reach, and appears promising in both preventing and responding to TA-HSB. The work was highly valued within the school, although the impact of that work has not been able to be measured. The logistical challenges of getting ROSA established in the school, despite the clear leadership commitment from the school, highlighted the important of ensuring responsibility for championing the work across a range of staff roles. As such further work, and research, in this area would be beneficial.
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