FULLY FOC USED

MYM
MILLION YOUTH MEDIA

Fear at Home

Focus Group 12/11/2020

Background

- **Fully Focused is the UK's leading, youth-driven production company, specialising in content made by and for young people. 100% of profits are reinvested into our channel [Million Youth Media](#) (358k subscribers on YouTube) and the MYM Academy, supporting the next generation of filmmakers and underrepresented talent and providing valuable links to paid employment. In recent years we have explored many issues relevant to young people like homlessness, identity, loneliness, toxic use of social media. Young people lead our 'production slate' and choose the issues that we choose to explore in our films. This year we have started to work alongside academics to draw insights from harder to reach groups and place evidenced/informed messages within the content that we create. The topic of hidden violence, fear within the home and the impact on mental health are themes that have arisen through workshops and surveys.**

- **We were approached by Dr Helen Fisher from King's College London to explore the topic of feeling unsafe at home during the COVID-19 pandemic in more detail with young people as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2020. For hundreds of thousands of children and young people, home is not a place of safety but one of risk. School/college closures and social distancing requirements mean they are at increased risk of harm during the COVID-19 pandemic as they may be isolated with abusive family members and cut-off from sources of support and opportunities for respite and escape. This toxic situation is likely to have disastrous effects on young people's mental health. Therefore, we wanted to open up the conversation with young people to hear about their experiences of feeling 'unsafe' at home during the pandemic, and learn about what they thought were the best ways to support young people to survive and thrive during these more socially restricted times.**

- **The content of this documents reflects the results of the Instagram survey completed by 32 young people from across the UK and the ZOOM focus group attended by 22 young people in November 2020. Our future aim is to source funding to create a short film that addresses some of the issues that emerged to raise awareness of the the complexity of the issue and lay out a positive pathway to support.**

What triggers fear at home?
Why might young people feel unsafe?

Physical

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse

Environmental impact

- Siblings/bullying/arguing
- Differences of approach to issues
- Generational differences (tech/values/sexuality)
- Religious/moral differences
- Triggered by screen/viewing
- Lack of personal space/interruptions
- Scary/negative news (Covid19/Brexit/Climate/Trump/BLM)
- Crime rates
- Parents arguing
- Pandemic/instability/uncertainty
- Lack of freedom/unable to escape
- Cyber bullying/technology
- Parenting styles
- Financial difficulties/job loss/furlough
- Political/religious differences
- Bad atmosphere

Feelings/Wellbeing

- Anxiety
- Uncertainty
- Undiagnosed needs
- Mental health issues
- Unloved/uncared for
- Abandoned
- Lack of hope/solutions
- Feeling Isolated
- Feeling threatened
- Alone
- Unheard
- Different/don't fit in
- Overwhelmed
- Negativity
- Emotional resilience/capability
- Confusion - love for abuser

What triggers fear at home?
Why might young people feel unsafe?

When thinking of danger in the home, while it is important to consider the explicit instances of violences, is it crucial to consider other environmental or lifestyle factors.

Layers of stress, that lead to anxiety. Fear of what might happen. Triggers that can make people 'snap'.

Living with heightened fear/anxiety can become a normalised part of daily routine and make it less clear for young people to communicate what is wrong.

Vulnerable lifestyle

- Close proximity to crime
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Lack of nourishment / sleep
- Social network dependency
- Lack of physical activity / mental stimulation
- Lack of green space
- Poor self care - diet

Behaviour within the household

- Not being listened to
- Unstable family dynamics
- Parents/siblings taking out their frustrations
- Being surrounded by stress within the family
- Too much pressure to perform well in school
- Lack of communication
- Being lied to
- Ongoing arguments

Stressful conversations

- Money worries
- Political divisions
- Cultural/religious divisions
- Asking for things (money)
- Access to technology

Demands on Young People

- School work, esp. when the home environment doesn't make for quiet study time
- Social pressures; fitting in with a group at school, being able to open up about themselves, feeling alone
- Uncertain futures (esp. with recent exam concerns, families losing their incomes)

"When everyone is saying it's stressful at home how do you communicate it is really stressful at home? It loses its impact"

"What if you don't know you are being abused because it feels normal"

"If it is a brother or sister it might not be taken seriously because all siblings argue"

"They might not have the words to say it's not ok, it can be difficult to explain"

"Boys might not say as it sounds like weakness especially if it is a mum or sister"

"Your family can tell you you have to be private, don't chat our business'

"People in families can deal with situations in different ways especially when there are generational and cultural differences. Our lives are very different from theirs they don't understand"

"What if you don't have a friend to turn to? It's hard to trust people especially when you are younger"

Who would you tell?

Out of 32 Responses:

Friends	**16**
Family	**2**
Someone older (role model)	**4**
Teacher/Youth Worker	**5**
Charity (Childline/Samaritans)	**3**
Doctor	**2**

"What if you don't have a friend to turn to? It's hard to trust people especially when you are younger and you haven't built strong friendships"

"My teachers don't have time, and don't notice, they are under pressure, they just complain about work"

A surprising number of young people admitted that they would not feel comfortable going to an adult.

Adults usually hold 'safeguarding' responsibilities; young people fear that the situation would be 'made worse' should they get involved. They didn't want to lose control over what might happened next. As a result, a lot of them limited their answer to other friends of their own age.

They don't relate to charity brands NSPCC and Childline feel too young and Samaritans feel to old. May not consider themselves 'at risk'.

"Friends don't have the skills to deal with the problems, we need them to know when it is something they can't help with and they need professional help"

Has the pandemic made it worse?

An overwhelming majority of young people feel that the pandemic, even in the most stable of households, has exacerbated problems as well as creating new ones. As we look at the various situations that trigger unsafe situations at home, we can see how lockdown has potentially made them worse.

- With more and more families studying and working from home, space to work and focus is almost impossible for young people
- Without opportunities to meet up outside of school, young people can feel increasingly isolated and unable to 'offload'
- After a confusing and unfair grading system for exams this summer, young people are feeling increasingly defeatist about their futures.
- Surfing social media and obsessing over the news may actually make you feel more isolated and give you a distorted sense of what's actually going on.
- Being stuck indoors means less fresh air, less change in routine and increased lethargy
- COVID-19 has caused major economic devastation, disconnected many from community resources and support systems, and created widespread uncertainty and panic. Such conditions may stimulate violence in families where it didn't exist before and worsen situations in homes where mistreatment and violence has been a problem. Fear it will get worse before it gets better
- Differences of opinion, particularly where the lockdown measures are concerned, have divided households across the nation, and discouraged communication.
- Household incomes are vulnerable making conversations surrounding money increasingly volatile
- Christmas!

How can young people be supported?

Boost self esteem and confidence:
- **Make young people feel wanted /valued**
- **Allow them to offload and be heard**
- **Avoiding placing blame, always telling them they are wrong**
- **Have belief in young people to make sensible decisions**

Positive Environments
- **Instill hope, belief that things can change and get better**
- **Share stories of change, encourage open talking, know that it is ok to have bad times**
- **Comfortable, non-judgemental spaces**
- **Access to information so they realise what 'isn't normal' or pushes the boundaries of normal family stress**
- **In school, continuously remind young people who they can talk to if things are not ok**
- **Regular check-ins and one to one support,**
- **Outdoor conversations**
- **Group meet-ups where possible**
- **Anonymous chat/ask questions**

Providing opportunities
- **Mentoring programmes/peer to peer support (Someone they can relate to)**
- **Access continued support - not short term - a place they can always go/rely on**

   "It's annoying being told you are not old enough to deal with something when you have been dealing with it for years"

Themes

- Friendship vs Help and Healing
- Showing the value of friendship but the need for professional help
- Dealing with the trauma vs the trauma itself
- Feelings are valid
- Finding your own spaces
- Vulnerability does not equate to lack of strength
- Social media persona vs real life
- Sitting with yourself, and being comfortable with that.
- Confidence to speak up

Re-jig the narrative of 'you can always rely on your friends'

- It's not about how much you trust them, or how much they love you, it's about are they equipped to be able to help/what support can they give you.
- They can support you through your process of resolving the issue, and hold your hand through it. Like having a baby, they will hold your hand and smile and cry with you, but at the end of the day, the midwife is the one leading you through the process.

Sitting with yourself, and being comfortable with that

- In lockdown, you've had to sit with yourself and question 'Who actually am I? Whats going on here'

Nothing is what it seems

- People have a poker face sometimes, particularly men. We distract ourselves from problems and in lockdown, suddenly those distractions are less present and we are forced to confront our own problems.
- People take their issues out on others

What feels important to get across in film?

- Crucially, we want to highlight issues that don't immediately strike as 'dangerous', bringing attention to how these problems can go unnoticed, even by the victim. e.g stress within the family, being pressured to do well at school, uncertainty in the future etc.

- Show that abusive situations can occur in loving homes or 'normal families'

- How layers of stress build up and can cause someone to snap, people take their anger out on others

- How a young person can love the person that puts them at risk e.g. mum/sibling

- How different people in the same family have got different capacities do deal with things e.g one person might 'brush it off' vs another who may be really affected

- Show adults/where or how they are getting it wrong e.g a teacher not noticing the signs

- Let them know when it has gone beyond something they can sort themselves

- Show that confidence/bravado can be a mask for difficult situations

- Show that things can change for the better

Potential storylines for a future film

- Arguments between siblings when parents are at work, one at risk because of the others behaviour. It would be good to show a situation through the eyes of someone much younger.

- A parent with an undiagnosed/untreated mental health problem exacerbated by stress.

- Invisible disabilities and how that affects communication in the family e.g. stress, lack of support, trigger for anger. Showing that it's not just cliche 'baddies' that are abusive

- Young men, masculinity, generational differences and power dynamics that creates conflict in the home

- Showing professional help in a positive / human light. There is a growing concern that young people who feel unsafe at home will actively avoid seeking adult professional help, because they worry that the situation will be made worse with their interference.

- We could make content that shows the benefits of communication with adult figures in your community. Look at it from different angles e.g Comedy involving an 'unlikely' bond between a teacher / social worker and a young person? Could show teachers/parents getting it wrong.

- Showing the value of friendship. Seeing healthy friendships supporting each other through problems, but crucially do not solely rely on one another. We do NOT want to guilt-trip individuals into thinking that they are forcing their friends to carry their baggage. We can explore how friends are limited in how much they can help, and they may also be going through their own problems too; a universality to mental health. We could even flip this, see the best friend helping a friend with their problems, but realising that they are using this as a distraction from their own issues.

Contact information

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See here for COVID-19 resources from VAMHN: http://www.vamhn.co.uk/covid-19-resources.html