



Young people and the future:

Violent crime, risk and
opportunity in uncertain times

A research report for the Co-op



It's what we do



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Addendum: A research note on the impact of COVID-19

We are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat.

While undertaking the research, the true scale of the threat of COVID-19 was becoming apparent. On the 16th March 2020, the Health Secretary informed the House of Commons that all unnecessary social contact should cease. On the 23rd March, an unprecedented lockdown began, spearheading a significant change in the everyday lives of the population and presaging a rapid economic downturn. As of 2nd September 2020, 41,514 people in the UK had lost their lives within 28 days of testing positive for COVID-19. Far from being a great 'social leveller', the virus has thrown into sharp relief entrenched inequalities and social disadvantage relating in particular to class, age, and race. In light of the unique context in which the research took place, it is important to include an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on young people and the implications for the findings and recommendations.

Social disadvantage

The pandemic has served to highlight multiple existing social inequalities relating to economic disadvantage and unequal health outcomes. Data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that people living in the most deprived areas of England are more than twice as likely to die as a result of COVID-19 than those in the least deprived.

Despite a range of government initiatives to alleviate the immediate financial impact of the pandemic, including the the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the

Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, the reality is millions of people across the UK are likely to be experiencing financial hardship and unemployment leading to a range of difficulties, not least homelessness and food insecurity.¹ As the schemes begin to retract over the coming months, more families will find themselves in crisis.

It is important to recognise, however, that prior to COVID-19, millions of people in the UK were already living in poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that more than one in five of the population – equating to 14 million people – were living in poverty in the UK in 2018.² Even before the pandemic hit, there were 4.2 million children living in poverty in the UK – making up 30% of all children in the country.^{3,4} Those experiencing extreme financial vulnerability are increasingly reliant on the UK's 2,000 food banks, which in the year pre-COVID, distributed a record 1.6 million packs of food supplies.⁵ Aside from the national 'COVID summer food fund' providing free school meal vouchers for the 1.3 million most disadvantaged pupils in England, there has been no additional support for children and families.

A further difficulty specifically for young people living in London is the proposed suspension of free travel. As part of the government's funding and financing package for Transport for London (TfL) due to the dramatic downturn in fares during the COVID-19 outbreak, it has insisted that free travel be suspended for under-18s. This will have a huge impact on young people in the capital who are reliant on public transport to get to school or work, which are often a considerable distance away from their place of residence.

"The government has said they are going to take away under 18s free travel. I was thinking 'this is the beginning of it isn't it?' How can you take away free travel for under 18s? What about all those kids who aren't able to pay to go to school? Or go to youth clubs? How are they going to be able to get there? How can you do that at this time? It's cutting off a life-line for so many."

- Female, 18, Caribbean

¹ Independent (2020) 'UK employment falls at fastest rate in more than a decade as 220,000 people drop off company payrolls', <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/uk-employment-jobs-falls-official-figures-latest-payrolls-a9664136.html>

² The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) UK Poverty 2017. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2017>

³ Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2018/19, Tables 4a and 4b. Department for Work and Pensions, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/householdsbelow-average-income-hbai--2>

⁴ According to The Children's Society, a child is said to be living in poverty when they are living in a family with an income below 60% of the UK's average after adjusting for family size.

⁵ BBC News (2019) 'Food bank supplies help record numbers'. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-48037122>

Ethnicity

The virus has had a disproportionate impact on people from ethnic minority backgrounds. A review by Public Health England published in June 2020 found that the highest age standardised diagnosis rates of COVID-19 per 100,000 population were amongst people of black ethnic groups (486 in females and 649 in males) and the lowest were amongst people of white ethnic groups (220 in females and 224 in males). An analysis of survival among confirmed COVID-19 cases showed that, after accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death when compared to people of white British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black ethnicity had between 10 and 50% higher risk of death when compared to white British.⁶ The Public Health England report draws upon literature to suggest that some of the underlying reasons for the excess mortality due to COVID-19 in BAME populations could be linked with social inequalities. It suggests that individuals from BAME groups are more likely to work in occupations with a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure as well as being more likely to use public transport to travel to their essential work. Structural racism and poorer experiences of healthcare may mean that individuals in BAME groups are less likely to seek care when needed, or when working in high risk occupations, are less likely to speak up when they have concerns about Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or risk.

Education

Schools were officially closed across the country from 20th March except for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. According to the results of a TeacherTapp survey, there were early indications of a pronounced education gap amongst children; in the most advantaged state schools, just 14% of teachers felt their students were doing less than an hour of school work per day, whereas in the most disadvantaged state schools, 43% felt their students were doing less than an hour of learning per day.⁷

Some of the disparity is attributable to digital exclusion. Availability of technology varies across households, with access to fewer resources being a particular challenge for low

income families.⁸ Many students in poorer households do not have access to a computer or device, or if they do, it is shared with siblings and other family members and many do not have home internet access.

"We haven't been to school in months and the education gap is getting wider and wider. The government needs to do something for people from lower class backgrounds and particularly young people from ethnic minorities because they're the ones who are suffering the consequences of the pandemic the most. They don't have the same resources, they don't have the laptops and they don't have the same advantages as middle class kids."

- Female, 15, White Other

A UCL Institute of Education study published three months into lockdown, found that one fifth of children had completed 'no schoolwork' at home, or less than an hour a day, which would potentially equate to around 2.3 million children across Britain as a whole.⁹

Mental health

The lockdown has had a profound impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people, particularly those living in areas of deprivation without ready access to outside space. The Mental Health Foundation reported that young adults were more likely to report stress arising from the pandemic than the population as a whole. Findings from the third week of June 2020 highlighted that 18-24 year olds were more likely than any other age group to report feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, an inability to cope and suicidal thoughts/feelings.

"I don't think the government has addressed the impact of coronavirus on young people at all. We are stuck in limbo. We can't get a job and we don't know what is happening."

- Male, 21, British Indian

Young adults have suffered significant social and economic consequences of the pandemic with severely disrupted education, diminished job prospects and reduced social contact with peers.¹⁰ Concerns were raised in this study relating to a lack of motivation, disinterest, feelings of hopelessness and social anxiety.

⁶ Public Health England (2020) Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf

⁷ TeacherTapp (2020) Learning (or not) from afar: The First Week of School Closures. <https://teachertapp.co.uk/learning-or-not-from-afar-the-first-week-of-school-closures/>

⁸ Livingstone, S. and Blum-Ross, A. (2020) Parenting for a Digital Future. Oxford University Press.

⁹ Green, F. (2020) 'Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty', Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies https://www.llakes.ac.uk/sites/default/files/LLAKES%20Working%20Paper%2067_0.pdf

¹⁰ Mental Health Foundation (2020) Coronavirus: The divergence of mental health experiences during the pandemic. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/divergence-mental-health-experiences-during-pandemic>

"After spending so much time indoors not really having much to do, my motivation has gone. I'm struggling to wake up in the mornings. My mental state has been really affected in terms of motivating myself to get out, try and find work and be effective."

- Female, 18, African

"I feel so much more uncertain than I was at the beginning of the year. I always had hopes of moving to America or travelling so it feels a bit disheartening. It's hard to pick yourself up and think that you can find a job in the middle of a pandemic."

- Female, 22, Black British

Employment

Concerns regarding employment were not surprisingly exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Young people are understandably worried about their future employment prospects in a climate where mass redundancies are taking place.

"I had been applying for so many jobs but since COVID my inbox is just full of messages saying, 'sorry this job is no longer available.'"

- Female, 22, Black British

Job vacancies in the UK in April to June were at the lowest level since the vacancies survey began in 2001 at an estimated 333,000; 23% lower than the previous record low in 2009.¹¹ The number of employees on company payrolls fell by 649,000 between March and June. It is important to note, however, that, as part of the coronavirus job retention scheme, 9.4 million workers, at the time of writing, are currently on furlough. As the scheme is scaled back, and is intended to cease in October, many of these furloughed positions are likely to become redundancies. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimates at least 10% of furloughed workers will become unemployed.

"The government is telling us to 'stay calm and stay safe' but what I would really like to see is more action to support young people."

- Male, 18, Black British

Reports have shown that it is the 18-24 age group that have been hardest hit by the employment reductions as they are more likely to work in hospitality and retail; the sectors currently with the highest redundancy rates. In addition, many are employed in casual roles where they are paid 'cash in hand.' As a result of such precarious and non-contractual

labour they are not eligible for the furlough or job retention schemes.

"I work for an independent business and get cash in hand, so I've not been paid, and I'm not entitled to any government funds. I'm having to borrow money off my mum and then I'll have to pay her back once I can get back to work."

- Female, 17, White British

Young people and the impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 was undoubtedly – and understandably – at the forefront of young people's minds during the research and has shaped the findings in many ways. The scope of the project broadened to consider the ways in which young people viewed, experienced and adapted to the impacts of these significant events.

The young people in the present study discussed the multiple impacts of COVID-19. These included their wellbeing and mental health, future training and employment prospects, as well as shouldering the long-term cost of economic recovery through higher taxes, fewer financial support schemes and reduced access to public services.

While the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are only too apparent, it has also illuminated entrenched inequalities and the everyday plight of the most vulnerable, as well as the vital role that keyworkers, including shop workers, play in the effective functioning of society. It is hoped that if there are any positives to emerge from the pandemic, it is that the opportunity is taken to make long-term improvements to the lives of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in society, including children and young people.



¹¹ Vacancies, jobs and public sector employment in the UK: July 2020' <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/jobsandvacanciesintheuk/july2020>

Foreword



In December 2018, the Co-op launched its Safer Colleagues Safer Communities campaign with the aim of keeping our colleagues and their communities safe. When we launched the campaign, we were facing into a rising tide of violence and abuse against shop workers and escalating levels of youth violence in communities.

Our campaign has never been focused on one single element of retail crime, such as longer and tougher sentences for offenders, as we know just this wouldn't keep our colleagues and communities safe. So, our approach is centred around sustainable change. Meaning that we address the root cause of the problem in retail crime.

In Dr Taylor's ground-breaking study, *It's Not Part of the Job*, which was published in September 2019, she set out with shocking reality the violence and abuse shop workers face every day and its long-term impacts. She also began to explore what lay behind the actions of offenders and what might prevent such behaviour.

In this research she examines the involvement of young people in the abuse and violence against shop workers, what lies behind such behaviour and what can be done to change this and keep our colleagues and their communities safe. Once again, Dr Taylor provides compelling evidence both for the reality of the situation, but also for the routes to find a better future for these young people and for the communities they live in.

At the end of the report, Dr Taylor focuses on the public health approach to tackling crime and violent crime, with particular interest in the work pioneered in Glasgow, which is now being replicated across the UK. The starting point of this approach is the 'strong conviction that violent behaviour and its consequences can be prevented'. This is something any co-operator would stand behind because it is full of hope and aspiration.

In 2020, following on from the hugely successfully collaboration with the Damilola Taylor Trust, we announced our support of the Hope 2020 campaign which brings our Co-op into a 'hope collective' of youth organisations. This is a powerful example of working together towards the same goal of creating positive futures for all young people and spreading hope in our communities.

The economic recession we are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will disproportionately affect young people and their futures. As Dr Taylor highlights, now more than ever we need to work even harder to ensure our young people have fulfilling and positive future. The Co-op will play its part and more to help make that happen. As we believe that coming together can help solve seemingly intractable problems so that we can all move forward.



Jo Whitfield
CEO
Co-op Food

Executive summary

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the life of every child in the country. Far from being a great 'social leveller', the virus has thrown into sharp relief entrenched inequalities and social disadvantage relating in particular to class, age and race.

Violence and abuse against shop workers

- The British Retail Consortium (BRC) Retail Crime Survey 2020 reports that incidents of violence and abuse against shop workers have risen to 424 per day in the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, up 9% from the previous year. There has been a concerning increase in the use of weapons in attacks on shop workers.
- Despite being recognised as essential 'key workers' during the COVID-19 crisis, shop workers have actually seen the levels of violence and verbal abuse directed at them rocket during the pandemic. The union Usdaw estimated that incidents have doubled since the outbreak.

Youth offending in England and Wales: Crime and antisocial behaviour in and around retail spaces

- There were almost 60,000 proven offences committed by children (aged 10-17) in the year ending March 2019. Violence against the person accounted for more than 17,000 of these offences, representing 30% of all proven offences committed by children (an increase from 19% in 2009).
- There were almost 7,000 proven offences by children (age 10-17) for theft and handling stolen goods in the year ending March 2019, but in reality, this figure is likely to be much higher due to a lack of reporting and prosecution.
- It is well-known that shop theft is interlinked with violence and aggression; being challenged or apprehended for shop theft is the number one trigger for violence and verbal abuse in the retail sector. Similar to adult offenders, young adults described using violent tactics in order to avoid being apprehended.

- The reasons why young people engage in crime, antisocial behaviour and/or carried knives fall into three main categories: i) peer pressure and respect; ii) fear and protection, and; iii) boredom.
- According to the most recent Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS), reporting rates remain low across all categories of retail crime.

Drivers and social determinants of youth offending

- Many young people engaged in crime and/or antisocial behaviour have experienced difficult, complicated and sometimes chaotic lives. Many have experienced trauma, abuse, bereavement, have grown up in local authority care, been excluded from school, experienced drug or alcohol related dependencies and/or have mental health problems or personality disorders.
- Exposure to violence at an early age can impact on the likelihood of criminal behaviour. This exposure can take many forms, including domestic abuse, being a witness to or direct victim of violence or exposure to violence through multiple forms of media.
- Prior to the devastating impact of COVID-19 on many people's lives, it was estimated that 4.2 million children were growing up in poverty in the UK.
- The number of children subjected to fixed and permanent exclusions from mainstream education has been rising since 2012-2013 and evidence suggests that some schools are engaging in the controversial practice of 'off-rolling' underperforming or non-attending students in order to achieve a better Ofsted rating.
- Between 2010 and 2015, local authority budgets were cut by £18 billion, with youth services, social care, early intervention and housing services particularly affected. The average local authority has reduced spending on services such as social clubs and youth workers by 40%, and some places have seen funding cut by 91% in three years.

Views and experiences of the police

- There has been a significant reduction in the number of police personnel since 2010; estimated to be a total reduction of nearly 21,000 police officers in addition to 18,000 police staff and 6,800 police community support officers. As a result, forces have prioritised reactive, emergency work to the detriment of proactive problem-solving within communities, and neighbourhood policing.
- The decline in neighbourhood policing has contributed towards a loss of trust between communities and the police as well as severely undermining the police's capacity to develop effective, long-term solutions to youth offending, violence and persistent retail crime.
- The use of stop and search had been declining significantly since 2011 but this trend appears to be slowing and, in some areas, reversing.
- In every one of the 43 police force regions black men are more likely to be stopped and searched than any other ethnic group. Overall, black people are 9.7 times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched and a staggering 40 times more likely under the controversial 'section 60' of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The disproportionate use of stop and search is undermining community trust in the police.
- During the pandemic, BAME people were 54% more likely to be fined and issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) under coronavirus rules than white people.
- The proportion of police officers from black, mixed and Chinese or other ethnic groups have remained stable (at 1%, 2% and 3% respectively), far lower than the proportion of the population that they represent.



Building positive futures and responding to youth offending

- It is estimated that councils now spend around £1 billion per year less on youth justice and youth services, in real terms, than they did in 2010-11. More than 750 youth centres have closed since 2012 and 14,500 youth and community work jobs have been lost since 2008.
- Effective early intervention can identify potential problems and prevent them from occurring, or tackle them directly as soon as they emerge, before they get worse.
- Targeted youth services and specialist services, including mental health and drug and alcohol services, require better funding to ensure that provision can meet identified need.
- Mental health was a particular concern amongst young people. It has been estimated that 10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem and 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not received appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age.
- There are clear indicators that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a serious impact on young people's mental health. The Mental Health Foundation found that 18-24 year olds were more likely than any other age group to report feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, inability to cope and suicidal thoughts/feelings.
- Figures from the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) show that, over a four-week period in April, a third of those fined by police for breaking lockdown rules were young people aged 18-24. Research from the University of Sheffield indicates that poor mental health among young people may impact adherence to social distancing rules.
- Restorative justice provides an effective way to respond to young offenders. Evaluations show high levels of victim satisfaction, a reduction in reoffending and cost-effectiveness.
- Any comprehensive violence-prevention strategy must address the underlying societal factors that are well-established correlates of crime.

Recommendations

1. Enact the Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) Bill 2019-21 to provide reassurance to victims that they can have confidence in the criminal justice system and signal to offenders that violent assaults perpetrated against shop workers will be taken seriously.
2. Develop a joint industry and government communications campaign to reinforce the message that violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers will not be tolerated. Similar campaigns have successfully raised awareness about the levels of violence experienced by frontline workers. The Home Office Government Response to the 'Call for Evidence on Violence and Verbal Abuse Toward Shop Workers' outlines that the government 'will work with the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) to develop communications for both employees and employers to make clear that violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated.' However, in addition, there is a need for public-facing communications to reinforce this message.
3. Reporting rates remain low across all categories of retail crime. The government, industry and the police need to work together to encourage reporting, streamline reporting processes and ensure that barriers to reporting incidents to the police are identified and addressed. Only by reflecting the true scale of the problem in police recorded crime databases will its true scale and severity be reflected in strategic police and crime plans.
4. There is an evidence base to suggest that children excluded from school are at much greater risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of crime. There needs to be better understanding and oversight of school exclusion policies and controversial 'off-rolling' practices. The government should work with schools to review the impact of the Ofsted assessment framework on levels of school exclusion.
5. In July 2019, the Prime Minister pledged to recruit 20,000 police officers, in effect reversing cuts made to frontline law enforcement since 2010 when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came to power. This is certainly a step in the right direction but crucially not only does there need to be a significant increase in the number of officers, there must be better representation of people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds working in all areas of the police. As recommended in *The Young Review*, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Chief Constables should make greater use of positive action measures under the Equality Act to attract and progress BAME police officers.
6. The decline in neighbourhood policing has contributed towards a loss of trust between communities and the police as well as severely undermining the police's capacity to develop effective, long-term solutions to youth offending, violence and persistent retail crime. The pledged recruitment of 20,000 police officers should be used, in part, to reinvest in local neighbourhood policing models.
7. The disproportionate use of stop and search involving BAME people compared to white people has increased in recent years. When stop and search is perceived to be used unfairly, it has a negative effect on people's trust in the police, which in turn, limits the police's ability to effectively investigate crime and protect the public. Police forces, with the oversight of PCCs, should establish, or where relevant improve, monitoring of the way officers deploy stop and search, so they can be satisfied that all officers are acting in accordance with the law (including equality legislation and the Code of Practice) and that the power is used effectively to prevent crime, catch criminals and maintain public trust. Monitoring data should be made publicly available.
8. It is paramount to ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged in the commissioning of services. This should include, amongst other things, where they are located, how they are advertised, what they offer and when. There are also best practice models for involving young people in the delivery of youth services providing peer-to-peer mentoring and support.
9. There needs to be more widespread and mainstream training in trauma-informed approaches for youth workers and teachers, as well as other frontline professionals who come into contact with children and young people.
10. As a result of its high levels of victim satisfaction, ability to reduce reoffending, and cost-effectiveness, the use of restorative justice should be expanded with young adults at every stage of the criminal justice process.



Introduction

Introduction

"When I was younger there were a lot of youth clubs and activities and now they've all been closed."

- Male, 19, White British

"The shops with the small easy pickings – your Superdrug, Boots, Tesco, your Spar, your Greggs – these are some of the most dangerous places in the city to work in."

- Detective Constable

The *It's Not Part of the Job* report published in September 2019 revealed that the frequency and severity of violent incidents in the retail sector has been increasing significantly across England and Wales. The number of shop workers experiencing violence and abuse had reached 'epidemic' levels with far-reaching and devastating consequences.

The report identified multiple and complex causes of violence and verbal abuse from individual to societal levels with wide-ranging cuts to public services being a common theme. Dramatic reductions in public spending on a range of services including drug and alcohol treatment services, mental health provision, youth services, early intervention programs, and education severely impacted some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and communities across England and Wales, not least young people.

Since the publication of the report in autumn 2019, as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, there is significant potential for the societal issues highlighted as correlates of violent crime, such as unemployment, domestic violence and abuse, homelessness, mental health and trauma, to intensify in the coming months and years. In addition, there is the likelihood that the government will further reduce already limited spending on public services. The COVID-19

crisis is exacerbating the social conditions that are known to contribute towards heightened levels of crime, particularly those of a violent nature.

In April 2019, the government launched a Call for Evidence on the issue of violence and abuse against shop staff. The call attracted engagement from an estimated 3,500 individuals highlighting the significance of the issue and its far-reaching impacts for individuals and communities. The findings and government response were published more than a year after the call closed, in July 2020.¹² While the response contains some welcome actions such as a commitment to better understand the role of drugs and alcohol in violent attacks against shop workers, and a post-legislative scrutiny of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing 2014 Act, much of this activity was already in train. There is little immediate action contained in the government response that will alleviate the very real concerns of the three million people currently working across the retail sector. Furthermore, the response implies a lack of government commitment to support the Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) Bill 2019-21 which is currently awaiting its Second Reading in the House of Commons.¹³



¹² Home Office (2020) Call for Evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff. Government Response. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903433/260620_Violence_and_assaults_against_shop_workers_-_Publication_of_Call_for_Evidence_Response.pdf

¹³ The Second reading is scheduled to take place on Friday 30 October 2020. The Bill would make certain offences, including malicious wounding, grievous or actual bodily harm and common assault, aggravated when perpetrated against a retail worker in the course of their employment

Violence and abuse toward shop workers: An update

"Retail workers are one of the most vulnerable sectors in the city in terms of violence and yet they are being neglected and ignored. It's always just classed as a 'business crime' but we need to recognise the human collateral."

- Police Officer

In March 2020, the British Retail Consortium (BRC) released findings from its annual retail crime survey. It revealed incidents of violence and abuse against shop workers had risen to 424 per day in the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, up 9% from the previous year.¹⁴ In the same month, the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) reported findings from their survey which estimated 50,000 incidents of violence against shop workers, a quarter of which resulted in injury. In addition, they estimated that 83% of people who worked in the convenience sector had been subjected to verbal abuse over the past year.¹⁵ Both reports found a concerning increase in the use of weapons in attacks on shop workers. The ACS survey found almost 10,000 of the reported attacks in convenience stores involved some sort of weapon; 43% involving a knife and 5% involving a firearm. Attacks with axes, hammers and syringes were also reported.

These already alarming figures were released just prior to the severity of the impact of COVID-19 becoming apparent, and before 'lockdown' restrictions were put in place in March 2020. Sadly, the situation was about to get a lot worse. Despite being recognised as essential 'key workers' during the COVID-19 crisis, shop workers have actually seen the levels of violence and verbal abuse directed at them soar during the pandemic. As customers have become agitated by restrictions, queues and limits on stock, some have directed their frustrations at public-facing employees working hard to serve their communities.

The union Usdaw reported that abusive incidents towards shop workers had doubled since the outbreak of COVID-19. Respondents to their survey reported being spat at, coughed at and sneezed at when asking customers to practise social distancing. Some stated that they had been physically pushed and verbally abused when trying to enforce buying

limits on in-demand products.¹⁶ On average, retail staff were being verbally abused, threatened or assaulted every week during the crisis, compared with once a fortnight for 2019. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the 4,928 workers surveyed said they had experienced verbal abuse since 14 March, while almost a third had been threatened by a customer and 4% had been assaulted. When averaged across all three million workers in the sector, it amounts to a staggering 3,500+ assaults every day.

Recommendation

Enacting the Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) Bill 2019-21 to provide reassurance to victims that they can have confidence in the criminal justice system and signal to offenders that violent assaults perpetrated against shop workers will be taken seriously.

While not all shop workers suffer to this extent, some actually experience much worse with 1 in 6 reporting being abused on every shift.¹⁷

"One thing that the pandemic has shown us as a society, is how valuable the workers that we usually don't even notice are. People working in shops and people who deliver food. Now they are being called "essential workers" and I just hope that, after the pandemic, we remember just how essential these essential workers are."

- Female, 15, White British



¹⁴ BRC (2020) 2020 Retail Crime Survey. <https://brc.org.uk/news/corporate-affairs/violence-and-abuse-against-shop-workers-spirals/>

¹⁵ ACS (2020) The Crime Report 2020. https://www.acs.org.uk/sites/default/files/acs_crime_report_2020_online_versionb_spreads.pdf

¹⁶ In April 2020, the Sentencing Council published interim guidance for sentencers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The interim guidance clarifies that, when sentencing common assault offences involving threats or activity relating to transmission of Covid-19 (for example, assaults involving spitting or coughing), courts should treat this as an aggravating feature of the offence. This is a welcome move but does not replace the need for specific legislation to protect shop workers who are attacked while undertaking their duties.

¹⁷ Usdaw (2020) The Impact of Coronavirus on the workforce: Survey Results. <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=575d4419-a739-432b-ab54-10e84ad56e26>

Against a backdrop of increasing physical violence and verbal abuse being directed towards shop workers throughout England and Wales, this report provides a continuation of the *It's Not Part of the Job* research with a focus on young people aged 15-25. Through engagement with young people and stakeholders across England, it examines the root causes of youth offending and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

This is not to suggest that young people commit the majority of offences against shop workers; there are no reliable definitive, or even indicative, figures relating to the age of perpetrators (a significant issue in itself). In fact, the scarcity of official statistics pertaining to reported crimes in tandem with a severe level of under-reporting makes it difficult to get a clear picture of who commits offences against shop workers.

"It's just so common now and what comes with that is desensitisation. The threshold for reporting violence and assaults in the retail sector is now too high."

- Police officer

However, youth offending is a major concern in need of attention, particularly serious youth violence. A detailed and concerted long-term government strategy to tackle the established societal causes of youth offending is long overdue. Although youth offending is a complex issue with multiple drivers, there are established underlying root causes, yet a coordinated evidenced-based response is still lacking. While there has been some renewed attention focused on young people, particularly in relation to serious youth violence (SYV) (for example with the development of the Violence Reduction Units) there remains considerable work to be done to ensure that young people are diverted towards pro-social and productive activities. In addition to exploring youth offending, the study outlines the opportunities available to young people of all backgrounds and the barriers that many encounter when trying to access education, training, employment and other services.

As the the cross-party Youth Violence Commission stresses, in order to reduce youth offending, there must be a commitment 'to reduce poverty and inequality and ensure that all children and young people are given the best possible opportunities to cultivate and pursue their hopes and dreams for a better future.'¹⁸

Methodology

This report outlines the findings from engaging directly with young people and stakeholders (including youth mentors, service commissioners, the police, outreach workers, and local authority representatives).

In total, 56 young people participated in 12 online focus groups. Participants were aged between 15 to 25 years old and came from a range of locations and backgrounds; 29 males and 27 females; 38 identified as having non-white or mixed ethnicity (their self-description of ethnicity is provided alongside quotes). The status of the young people was varied with some in full time education at school, college or university, some were undertaking training courses, and some were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Some young people involved in the study were categorised by services as 'at risk' of involvement in criminal activity and some had served a custodial sentence for violent offences.

The research was conducted between March and July 2020. As a result of the UK lockdown commencing on the 23rd March 2020, all of the consultation took place online using a range of different audiovisual services including Zoom, MS Teams, FaceTime and WhatsApp.



¹⁸ Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/>

Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is divided into a further four sections. **Section 2** provides an overview of youth offending in England and Wales with a focus on crime and antisocial behaviour in and around retail spaces perpetrated by young people, including shop theft, criminal damage, and violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers. Knife crime is also examined in this section as it was raised as a major concern by both the young people and youth workers who contributed to this study.

The specific context in which any violent incident occurs is highly variable, yet there are broad themes notable from the study that appear to contribute towards the likelihood of young people engaging in or being a victim of violent crime and/or antisocial behaviour. **Section 3** explores a range of recurrent factors highlighted by stakeholders and young people, including exposure to violence from an early age, either directly as a result of family violence or indirectly via peers or media; school exclusion, and a reduction in services available to young people. There has been a severe lack of funding for the provision of youth services over the past decade that has resulted in the closure of many vital facilities including youth centres, mental health and drug and alcohol services.



Section 4 examines young people's views on – and experiences of – the police. Successive years of budget cuts to Britain's police forces has stretched resources to breaking point. This has directly impacted on the model of policing currently deployed in England and Wales with a notable decline in neighbourhood policing strategies. It is understandable that forces have needed to prioritise reactive, emergency work over proactive problem-solving within communities, but this has come at a significant cost. The decline in neighbourhood policing has contributed towards a loss of trust between communities and the police as well as severely undermining the police's capacity to develop effective, long-term solutions to youth offending, violence and persistent retail crime. Furthermore, the ongoing disproportionate use of stop and search on young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds was a significant concern raised by young people and stakeholders alike and has significantly undermined many young people's trust and confidence in the police to act fairly and proportionately.

It has been estimated that the combined economic and social cost of serious youth violence (notwithstanding other types of crime and ASB) over the past eleven years is a staggering £11 billion.¹⁹ **Section 5** outlines the need to invest in preventative measures that will not only divert young people away from crime and into prosocial and productive activities but will also alleviate the significant financial burden that crime places on communities, the government and businesses. More broadly, the case for a public health approach to tackling violence is outlined in this section. Public health is, above all, characterised by its emphasis on prevention; rather than simply accepting or reacting to violence, its starting point is the strong conviction that violent behaviour and its consequences can be prevented.

The findings have produced 10 actionable recommendations for government, the police, industry, and communities on how to better support young people to live active, prosocial and fulfilling lives.

¹⁹ Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/>



Youth offending in England and Wales: Crime and antisocial behaviour in and around retail spaces

Youth offending in England and Wales: Crime and antisocial behaviour in and around retail spaces

"They have no money, a lot of time on their hands, the city as their playground and nothing but peer pressure to occupy them."

- Police Officer

This section focuses on crime and antisocial behaviour – including shop theft, criminal damage, and violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers – perpetrated by young people in and around retail spaces. Although not all knife crime takes place in retail settings, it is included here for reasons that are threefold; knife crime has been increasing among young people in recent years, particularly in London²⁰; shop workers report an increase in the use of knives in violent incidents²¹; and young people, including participants in this study, have raised it as a major concern for them and their communities.

Profile of offences committed by children and young people

Over the last ten years there have been large decreases in the number of proven offences committed by children (aged 10-17) but there have also been some important changes to the type and composition of offences.

Of the 58,900 proven offences committed by children in the year ending March 2019, the main offence type was violence against the person (VATP). VATP accounted for more than 17,000 offences and represents 30% of all proven offences by children in the latest year; an increase from 19% in the year ending March 2009.²²

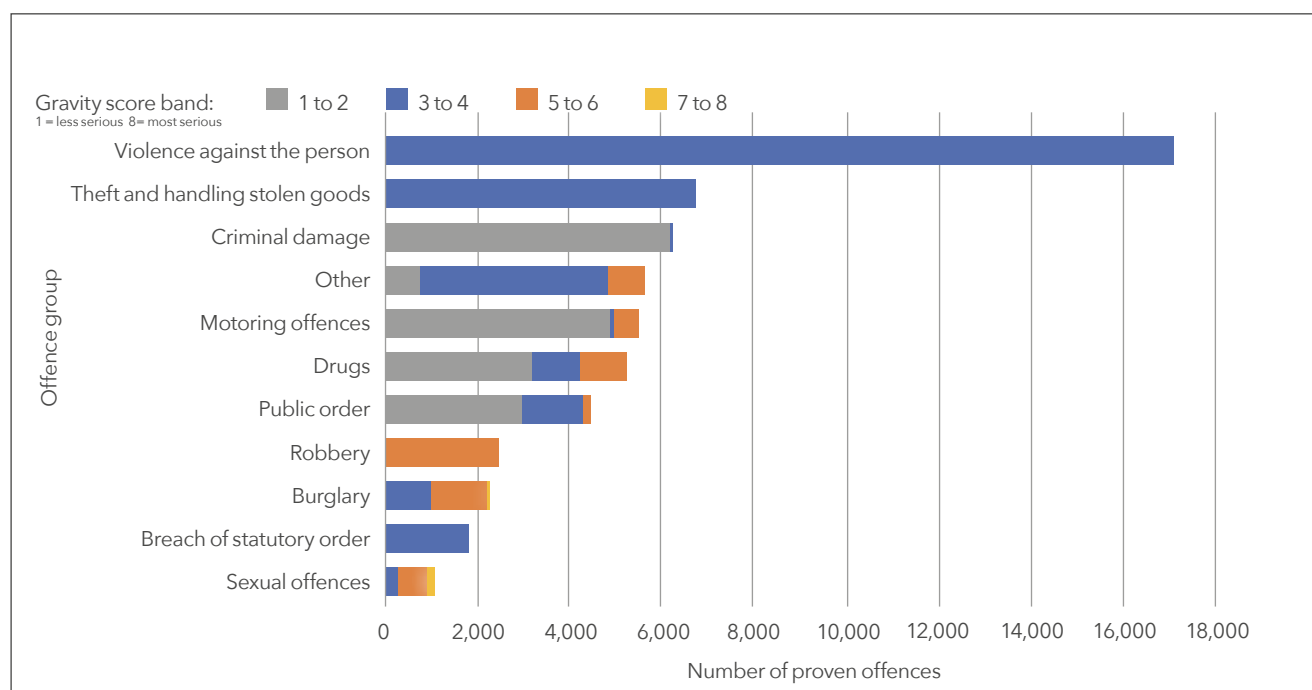


Figure 1. Proven offences by children, by offence group and gravity score band, England and Wales, year ending March 2019. [Source: Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice, 2020]

²⁰ Knife and offensive weapon offences involving those aged 10-17 and resulting in a caution or conviction have risen year on year, from 2,639 in 2013 to 4,562 in 2019 (Ministry of Justice 2020 Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics: July to September 2019).

²¹ For example, the ACS (2020) The Crime Report 2020 estimated that 43% of the 10,000 reported attacks against its members involved a knife.

²² Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice (2020) Youth Justice Statistics 2018/19: England and Wales. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862078/youth-justice-statistics-bulletin-march-2019.pdf

Although the majority of VATP offences have a 'gravity score'²³ of four or below, it is concerning that they comprise almost a third of all offences committed by children. All robbery offences committed by children have a gravity score of '5 to 6' reflecting the use of threat or force and the possibility of a weapon being involved.

Young adults (18-24), are the most likely age group to come into contact with the police, both as victims and as offenders. Nationally, they represent just 10% of the population, but account for around 30 to 40 per cent of criminal justice caseloads - including police time, probation supervision and prison entrants.²⁴ Despite their disproportionate representation at several different stages of the criminal justice system, there is far less data available for this age group as they are often grouped in with all adults.

"Hanging around, smoking marijuana around others and intimidating people gives young people a sense of power. Having something to do would make a massive difference. You need to incorporate a sense of social education - the importance of not being thugs on the streets and not intimidating others."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

Theft

"It's really easy to steal from the corner shop so everyone takes advantage of that and constantly nick stuff; mostly sweets and drinks."

- Male, 17, White British

The number of shop theft offences recorded by the police rose from 370,000 offences in the year to March 2017 to 382,000 offences in the year to March 2018, an increase of three per cent. This is a continuation of a long-term increase in the number shop theft offences. Yet, police recorded crime figures are substantially lower than those reported in the Home Offices' Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS) which in the latest report estimated 7.1 million incidents of theft.²⁵

Of course, not all of these were committed by children or young adults and data is not available to breakdown such offences by age, but it does highlight the sheer scale of the problem that retailers face.

Not least since such estimations are in themselves likely to be the tip of the iceberg.

There were almost 7,000 proven offences by children (age 10-17) for theft and handling stolen goods in the year ending March 2019, but in reality, this figure is likely to be much higher due to a lack of reporting and prosecution.^{26 27}

There is no specific data available for theft by young adults.

"The tactic is that one person goes to the counter to distract the shopkeeper and then the other two lads sneak in and nick whatever they want - usually a couple of bottles of vodka."

- Male, 17, White British

"In a lot of corner shops like the Premier and McColl's and places like that, a lot of people go in and out of there and steal stuff."

- Female, 17, White British

"A lot of young people will go and steal a packet of crisps and a drink on their way home from school."

- Male, 16, Other British

There was a perception amongst some young people that stealing from large companies was not only a relatively victimless crime, but it was also a calculated risk. Some young people estimated that the repercussions would be a lot less severe if they were caught stealing from a large branded store rather than a local independent store.

"If you just go to Sainsbury's or somewhere [to steal] they won't be affected because they are a big organisation and the repercussions are a lot lower. Whereas if you go to the off-licence or a local shop and you steal, they will just beat you up."

- Male, 17, Black British

"If you go to the big branded stores [to steal] there's all of these rules, and there's cameras and security. But if you go to a local shop, they will most likely hit you because they won't tolerate it."

- Male, 19, Black British

²³ An offence's seriousness or 'gravity score' is measured from 1 (less serious) to 8 (most serious).

²⁴ House of Commons Justice Committee (2016) The treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system. Seventh report of Session 2016-17. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmjust/169/169.pdf>

²⁵ Home Office (2019) Crime Against Businesses: findings from the 2018 Commercial Victimisation Survey. Statistical Bulletin 17/19. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/829399/crime-against-businesses-2018-hosb1719.pdf

²⁶ Ministry of Justice (2019) Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2018: A Ministry of Justice publication under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/849200/statistics-on-race-and-the-cjs-2018.pdf

²⁷ Not all of these offences will have been in relation to theft from a shop. There are no available data to disaggregate shop theft from other types.

There is clearly a need to change perceptions of crime against retailers. Although it might be businesses that suffer the financial consequences of retail crime, it is individual shop workers – not their employers – who directly experience crimes that take place in shops.

Violence and verbal abuse in shops

“Some shop workers experience more conflict management on a day-to-day basis than a police officer.”

- Detective Constable

It is well known that shop theft is interlinked with violence and aggression; being challenged or apprehended for shop theft is the number one trigger for violence and verbal abuse in the retail sector – accounting for 25% of incidents (having increased from 15% of incidents in 2016).²⁸ Similar to adult offenders,²⁹ young adults described that they would use violent tactics in order to avoid being apprehended, sometimes callously taking advantage of store policies introduced to protect workers from being physically hurt.

“The protocol in supermarkets is that when people steal, the security guards and whoever else are not allowed to touch them. So, throwing bottles and stuff is a means to get away, right? It’s not a violence thing, it’s because nobody wants to spend a couple of hours in a cell. It’s just a way to get away.”

- Male, 17, Black British

The current elevated rates of shop theft taking place increase the number of incidents in which thieves become aggressive. One police officer believed that the situation had worsened because offenders had become so accustomed to not being held accountable for their actions:

“There’s a massive feeling of entitlement amongst some offenders because they have never been dealt with and so now just the slightest bit of challenge creates this hugely disproportionate violent response. They use very, very aggressive tactics.”

- Police Officer

The absence of consequences for shop thieves was perceived to be due a tendency for such crimes to be trivialised and dismissed as being of a low level of seriousness even when violence and aggression was involved.

“Because of the police’s lack of involvement in shoplifting, because it’s “just shoplifting”, even when violence is involved, there’s a massive desensitisation to what would be extremely serious offences had they have happened to anybody else other than a shop worker.”

- Police Officer

It is important to recognise that shop theft is often a gateway crime, which, if unmonitored and unpunished can escalate in frequency and seriousness before leading on to other criminal activity, including violence.³⁰

“Stealing has become second nature to some kids. It’s not just alcohol and sweets, it leads on to bigger stuff because they think ‘I got away with that, so why not try to nick something bigger next time?’”

- Male, 17, White British

According to the Ministry of Justice, 45% of prolific offenders began their criminal careers with theft offences (mainly stealing from shops).³¹ Early intervention is paramount to ensure that the root causes of theft are adequately responded to before they escalate into entrenched criminality and more serious offences.



²⁸ Usdaw (2017) Freedom from Fear: Shop workers at the sharp end as violence is on the increase.

²⁹ Taylor (2019) It's Not Part of the Job. https://assets.ctfassets.net/5ywmq66472jr/22QfMejeWYbimJ9ykX9W9h/0e99f15c0ed24c16ab74d38b42d5129a/lt_s_not_part_of_the_job_report.pdf

³⁰ Gavin, H. (2014) 'The Psychology of Theft, Robbery and Burglary', Criminological and Forensic Psychology. Sage: Los Angeles.

³¹ Ministry of Justice (2017) *Prolific Offenders: characteristics of Prolific Offenders*.

Enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods

It is estimated that more than 1 in 5 violent attacks on shop workers are triggered by age-restricted sales.³²

The Licensing Act 2003 stipulates that it is the physical seller of the product that commits an offence by selling to a person under the legal age; if shop workers don't enforce the law they are personally liable for breaking it.³³ In order to fulfil their legal obligations, shop workers must take 'reasonable precautions and exercise due diligence' to test the age of individuals seeking to purchase age-restricted goods and services such as tobacco, alcohol, knives and solvents. As such, shop workers can feel under considerable pressure. Some young people might become abusive in order to save face if they are embarrassed by the denial of a sale.

"It's annoying when you go to buy alcohol and you might have just forgotten to bring your ID and they're like "you're not over the age limit" and you clearly are. It's kinda embarrassing when you just have to walk away. It's not really fair because you're gonna end up buying it anyway."

- Female, 18, African

Some young people highlighted the link between the prohibited sale of age-restricted goods and theft.

"It's just easier to nick the stuff that you're not supposed to have like fireworks and alcohol."

- Male, 17, White British

"They have knives on display in the supermarket - they're just they're for the taking. They have Challenge 25 but nothing's stopping you from just taking them."

- Male, 19, White British

In response to age-restricted sales, many retailers have implemented the "Challenge 25"³⁴ scheme endorsed by the Retail of Alcohol Standards Group, the government and Trading Standards. The responsibility placed on shop workers to challenge a customer's age or refuse a sale can result in some individuals responding with aggressive and verbal abuse.

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 was enacted in May 2019. It introduced further restrictions on the sale of some products, including prohibiting the sale of corrosive substances (acid) to under-18s and strengthening the processes for the online sale of bladed articles and offensive weapons.

Whilst retailers and unions are supportive of the legislative changes to tackle rising violent attacks, better protection for shop workers who are responsible for enforcing them must also be introduced.

Not surprisingly, shop workers want to see a change in the culture regarding age-restricted sales that shifts the emphasis away from them having to ask for proof of age towards an expectation that all customers are required to volunteer it. A recent survey revealed that 85% of respondents believe that the government owes a duty of care to shop workers who enforce important laws restricting the sale of certain items like alcohol, acid and knives.³⁵

There are also some voluntary codes applied by retailers to restrict the sale of some products. For example, although at present there is no legal restriction on the sale of high-caffeine drinks, some companies, including the Co-op as part of their social responsibility mandate, have imposed a voluntary ban on the sale of "energy drinks" to under-16s. Customers wishing to purchase these products might also be asked to present proof of age documentation.

It has been estimated that 1 in 20 of the age-restricted violent and aggressive incidents in 2018 involved young people attempting to buy high-caffeine drinks.³⁶

³² Usdaw (2018) *Freedom From Fear*. Above cite.

³³ Failure to comply with trading standards law can lead to enforcement action and to sanctions, which may include a fine and/or imprisonment. In most police force areas, the offence of selling alcohol to a person under 18 years of age can be dealt with by a £90 penalty notice and in some areas can be addressed by an education scheme - i.e. retraining the offender to prevent further sales.

³⁴ Challenge 25 is a scheme that encourages anyone who is over 18 but looks under 25 to carry acceptable ID when they want to buy alcohol. Challenge 25 builds on the Challenge 21 campaign introduced by the British Beer and Pub Association in 2005.

³⁵ The Populus poll of 1,095 adults, commissioned by the Co-operative Party, shows: 85% agree that: "The government owes a duty of care to shop workers who enforce important laws restricting the sale of certain items like alcohol, acid and knives."

³⁶ Usdaw (2018) *Freedom From Fear*. Above cite.

COVID-19 and violence and abuse toward shop workers

As part of evolving measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, on 24 July 2020, it became mandatory to wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces in England including shops, supermarkets, shopping centres, banks, building societies and post offices. Failing to adhere to the rules could result in a fine of up to £100.

Many retailers raised concerns that enforcing the rule could put staff in danger of verbal abuse or even physical violence. The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) advised its members 'not to challenge customers who are unwilling to wear a face covering' to 'avoid any potential flashpoints of abuse'.³⁷

The face covering rule was not welcomed by some young people who felt that it was hypocritical if staff were not wearing one themselves, even though this was not a requirement.

"None of the employees had a mask on today so why the hell were they trying to make me wear one? What kind of logic is that? What scientist made this up? It makes no sense – why make me wear a mask when you're not wearing a mask, when you're not wearing gloves? It's pretty hypocritical if you ask me."

- Male, 17, White British

During the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the rate of physical and verbal attacks directed at shop workers.³⁸

Knife crime

"People from other areas come into my area and the people feel defenceless without a knife and feel they might get attacked at night or when they are alone."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

Police-recorded knife crime has been rising consistently since 2014.³⁹ Some of these knife offences involve young children; there were more than 4,500 knife and offensive weapon offences committed by those aged 10-17 between April 2018 and March 2019, representing approximately 1 in 5 offences.⁴⁰

The prevalence of knife crime is having devastating consequences. The number of murder victims aged 16 to 24 rose by 45 per cent in the year to March 2018 leading The Home Affairs Committee to describe youth violence as a 'national emergency'.⁴¹ There was certainly an awareness of the heightened level of knife crime amongst young people with some describing it as being 'very close to home.'

"My brother's 18 and his classmate was stabbed to death last year. It feels very close to home."

- Male, 20, Black British

"There are a lot of stabbings and a lot of knife crime. It's something that happens so much that I have got used to it. That's not good."

- Male, 17, White British

"You do get fights and conflict and stabbings flare up and it will make you more wary on the streets. You might avoid certain places for a while."

- Male, 22, Black British

The Youth Violence Commission's 'Safer Lives Survey' revealed that a third of young people personally knew at least one young person who carried weapons, such as knives, when they were outside their home.⁴²

"I try not to get anxious about knife crime because otherwise it just takes over your life and you stop going to places and doing things."

- Female, 18, White British

³⁷ BBC News (2020) 'Coronavirus: What are the rules for face masks or face coverings?' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51205344>

³⁸ Usdaw (2020) *The Impact of Coronavirus on the workforce: Survey Results*. <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=575d4419-a739-432b-ab54-10e84ad56e26>

³⁹ ONS (2019) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2018*.

⁴⁰ Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice (2020) *Youth Justice Statistics 2018/19: England and Wales*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862078/youth-justice-statistics-bulletin-march-2019.pdf

⁴¹ Home Affairs Committee (July 2019) *Serious Youth Violence* (Sixteenth report of session 2017-19). House of Commons.

⁴² Youth Violence Commission (2020) *Youth Violence Commission Final Report*. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/>

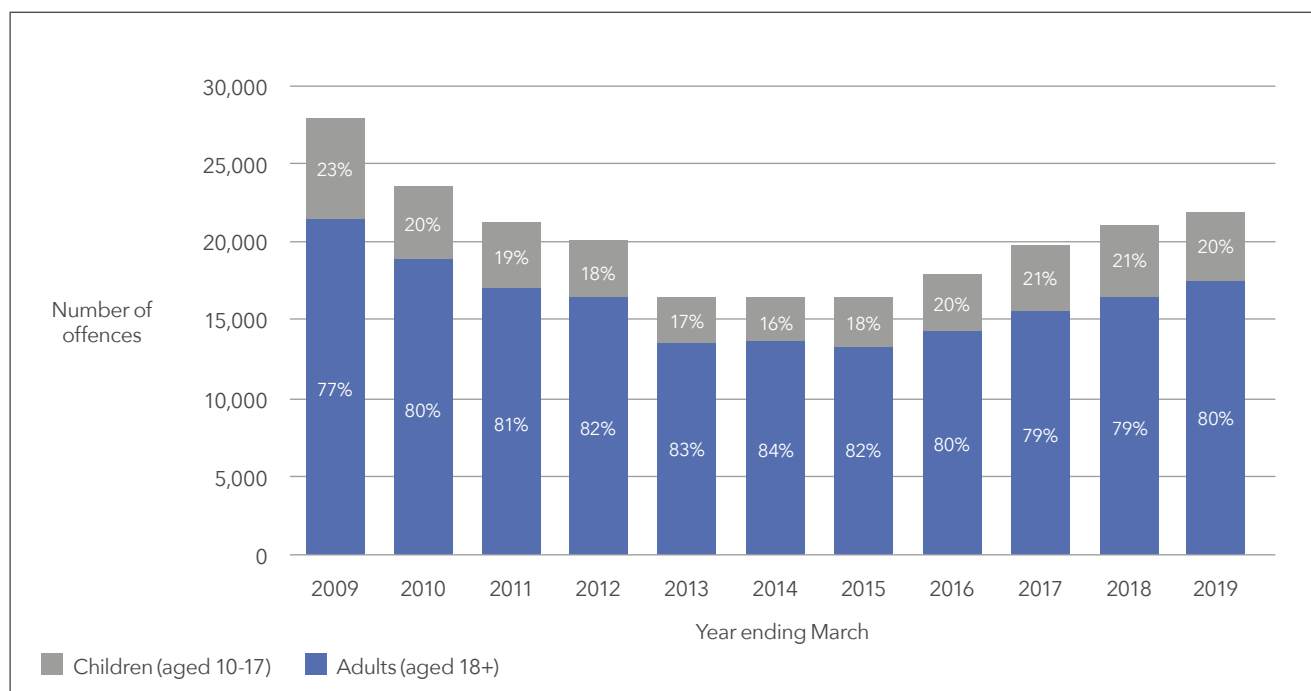


Figure 2. Number and proportion of knife or offensive weapon offences resulting in a caution or sentence, by age group, England and Wales, years ending March 2009 to 2019. [Source: Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice, 2020]⁴³

Knife crime and regionalality

While the total number of offences involving knives or sharp instruments in England and Wales rose by 6% overall, this disguises some significant regional variation.⁴⁴ For example, there was a 7% increase in offences in London and a 10% decrease in offences in West Yorkshire.

Similarly, the figures on the number of homicides where a knife or sharp instrument was involved are skewed when they are not disaggregated by region. Nationally, there was an overall increase of 2% in the number of homicides involving a knife in the year ending March 2020, but this was largely driven by a 28% rise in London (from 67 to 86) whilst the rest of the country experienced a 7% decrease.⁴⁵ In order to channel resources and support to where they are most needed, as well as avoiding heightened levels of fear of crime, it is important to ensure that regional variations are explicitly communicated and understood.

Reasons for theft, violence and verbal abuse by young people

There were multiple reasons provided as to why young people engaged in crime, antisocial behaviour and/or carried knives. These are grouped into three main categories: i) peer pressure and respect; ii) fear and protection; iii) boredom.

Peer pressure, power and respect

The relative deprivation experienced by some of the participants in this study resulted in their inability to gain a sense of purpose or to carve out any significant standing among their peers or within their community. Many described growing up with few opportunities for a meaningful career or stable employment. They described a lack of positive role models and those that they did look up to had often derived their status, and sometimes wealth, through illicit activities. In a context where status is difficult to achieve through legitimate means, peer pressure to engage in respect-building criminal activities can become a powerful force.

⁴³ Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice (2020) Youth Justice Statistics 2018/19: England and Wales. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862078/youth-justice-statistics-bulletin-march-2019.pdf

⁴⁴ Figures exclude Greater Manchester Police (GMP) due to a change in reporting software.

⁴⁵ ONS (2020) *Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/crimeinenglandandwalesyearendingmarch2020>

"Young people steal for a range of reasons such as being told by others to do it - there's a lot of peer pressure."

Male, 16, Bangladeshi

"There's definitely peer pressure. Me being young, I know what it feels like when you want to show off to your friends. In reality, when you think about it logically, they are just employees [being abused] so they can't say anything back to you. It's like swearing at a brick wall."

- Male, 19, Black British

It is clear from the participant above that there is a lack of awareness amongst young people about the impact of verbal abuse can have on the mental health and wellbeing of shop workers, particularly when it is of a personal nature and/or endured over a long period of time.

Recommendation

Launch a joint industry and government communications campaign to reinforce the message that violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers will not be tolerated. Similar campaigns have successfully raised awareness about the levels of violence experienced by frontline workers. The Home Office Government Response to the 'Call for Evidence on Violence and Verbal Abuse Toward Shop Workers' outlines that the government 'will work with the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) to develop communications for both employees and employers to make clear that violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated.' However, there is a need for public-facing communications to reinforce this message.

Related to what criminologists term 'status frustration',⁴⁶

one participant explained that young people use aggression and abuse against those that are unlikely to retaliate in order to gain a feeling of power.

"It's a power thing. When you work for a company or an organisation, they have rules and regulations. They expect you to dress a certain way and talk a certain way. If I were to go into Sainsburys and start saying rude stuff to the staff, they can't say stuff back to me because they will most likely be sacked. So, I have power over them. I have the freedom to say and do what I want without repercussion. Whereas they don't because they are an employee of someone else, so they have to follow someone else's rules and I don't. I have nothing to lose. It's a power thing; an ego thing."

- Male, 17, Black British

Similarly, carrying a knife was a means through which young men could gain a sense of power and respect.

"Carrying a knife definitely gives respect. It does, it does. Some would say it's music, some would say it's the area that you have grown up in. There's a term "getting out the hood" and some boys might not even be about that life or even going down that route but because they wanna seem cool or wanna portray themselves in that way I think they just do it [carry a knife]. I think most boys go through that."

- Female, 18, Caribbean

"It's mostly about status and reputation. Most people who commit knife crimes are male living in areas where there are no opportunities for young men. They feel like their life is stagnant and at that age, like age 16-21, they feel like life is going nowhere for them - they are still living with their parents because they have no economic opportunities to move out so they start seeking to gain status and reputation from other, criminal, means."

- Male, 17, White European

In terms of carrying a knife, there were further specific reasons offered. The most prevalent of these was to protect oneself through fear of being attacked.

⁴⁶ Stanley Cohen first coined this terminology in 1955 arguing that working-class boys often failed at school resulting in a low social status. A response to this was the formation of subcultures or gangs with values that were largely the reverse of mainstream values enabling respect and status to be gained by alternative, often criminal, means.

Fear and protection

"Every young person now thinks they have to carry a knife to be able to protect themselves."

- Male, 17, White British

Fear appears to be a key motivator in the decision of young people to carry a knife. Many described the inability to protect oneself against someone attacking with a weapon. The media depiction of knife crime potentially exacerbates the problem by amplifying the scale of the issue and instilling fear amongst young people.

"It's so easy to get your hands on a knife, isn't it? It's becoming a lot more worrying because it's hard to protect yourself against a knife. I think it is something we've got to be more open about and talk about because the knife crimes are increasing and its scary. I think it's the availability of knives, because anybody can just get their hands on a knife, can't they? It's so easy to commit a crime."

- Female, 17, White British

Territoriality played a prominent role in narratives relating to knife crime.

"A lot of the time young boys will carry a knife for protection because they are scared. If they have confrontation with another group from another area, it's just in case they get caught by them."

- Female, 18, Caribbean

"These kids are growing up involved in a rivalry that they don't even know how or why it started - that's crazy to think about. There are people that I know who carry knives; it's such a widespread problem."

- Male, 16, Other British

"Young people are scared. Being involved in a gang you have a target on your back. If you get spotted anywhere in a rival gang area or even in your own area, you're a target so you have to be ready to defend yourself. So you carry knives or brass knuckles or even guns just as a form of protection."

- Male, 16, Other British.

"Turf wars; that is the biggest manipulation that there is. Those postcodes, those blocks, those areas, those council estates they do not belong to anybody other than the council so for two kids to be fighting over that territory they have been manipulated by someone older into thinking that they own it. They are not landlords, they are just residents, so someone is manipulating them for their own purposes into thinking it's their area because they were born there."

- Male, 19, Black British

There was a general sense of desensitisation to and detachment from the severity of carrying and using a knife amongst some young people. For example, when asked why he thought so many young people were carrying knives, one participant referred only to his appraisal of the utility of using a knife as a weapon over other options.

"If you want to hurt someone, the quickest way is to stab them; it is quick and it is easy; just one motion with your hand. So, for many it's a time thing; it's quick and the easiest way to hurt someone."

- Male, 17, Black British

It was clear that this participant did not consider the emotional hurt and damage that knife crime causes alongside the physical harm.



Boredom and buzzes

"The easy answer is that kids do this out of boredom. Prior to lockdown they were coming into the city in groups of 25 to meet up in the city."

- Police Officer

Between 2010 and 2015, local authority budgets were cut by £18 billion, with youth services, social care, early intervention and housing services particularly affected.⁴⁷ Some young people felt that they were being stigmatised for socialising in public places but had few alternative spaces that they could use for free.

"A lot of young people have nowhere to go so they sit on benches and listen to music and hang out. For some young people the only interaction they have with their friends is outside. I feel like it's another way of creating this negative perception of young people again. If they've not done anything it's unfair that they are always moved on because it's "intimidating."

- Female, 23, White British

"I think there is a lot of stigma against young people."

- Female, 15, Black British

Many of the young people reported having little to do outside of school or college hours and invariably this would lead to them socialising in public spaces such as parks or on streets. At times the sheer number of young people congregating after school could create problems in and around local businesses.

"My school was where all the buses went from so there would be like 200 kids there. McDonald's, KFC, Nando's were there and there were shops like JD, so we all congregated around there and there would be days when fights would happen."

- Male, 21, British Indian

Furthermore, several of the young people in this study highlighted that theft and other criminal behaviour would germinate as a result of having little else to do. For example, some young people would steal 'for the thrill of it'.

"There's a group of people who steal for fun. They steal general items like snacks and things and then there are others who are doing it for more expensive goods to sell to other people."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

According to research by Unison, freedom of information requests from 168 local authorities across the UK show that between 2012 and 2014 around 350 youth centres closed and 41,000 youth service places for young people and at least 35,000 hours of outreach work by youth workers were cut.⁴⁸ The need to invest in high quality youth services in order to alleviate the boredom, frustration and lack of opportunity experienced by many young people is further explored in Section 5.

⁴⁷ Neville, S. (2015) Austerity's £18bn impact on local services. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/5fcbd0c4-2948-11e5-8db8-c033edba8a6e>

⁴⁸ Unison (2014) The Damage: The UK's Youth Services. Unison: London.

Policing violence and verbal abuse in shops

One police officer outlined his involvement with policing a commercial district. He described his first encounter with a victim of a violent attack in a convenience store and how this prompted him to realise the scale of the problem.

"One of my first jobs was an assault on a store worker in a Spar shop. It was a group of teenage girls who had been coming into the city and causing serious issues. It was of an antisocial nature at first and then it raised to affrays, starting fights and constantly rubbing members of the shopping centre up the wrong way, shoplifting – you name it. It got to the point where they've gone into the convenience store and antagonised a member of staff. The primary victim was a young female – they all mobbed her and attacked her – it was a very bad scene. They made a really big mess of the store. When I was talking to her, she told me the range and pattern of abuse that she deals with as a member of staff in a small convenience store. What surprised me is that they hadn't reported the previous encounters. They were so demoralised and desensitised because it was so common; the open threats, being spat at, people saying they'll wait for them after them work."

- Detective Constable

The current model of policing was seen as being ineffectual for tackling low level antisocial behaviour and criminal damage when it first materialises. The lack of action that was often taken against these misdemeanours and petty crimes was seen to allow the seriousness of offences to quickly escalate.

"How many times does it take for a police officer to come up to you and tell you off before you realise, hang on, they're not actually doing anything? OK, I'm being pushed up against the wall and being told off but where's the detriment to my bad behaviour? One thing we're not going to do is start running a 14-year-old into custody for smashing windows, setting off fire alarms or shoplifting. The worst we're going to do is take the items off them and maybe take them home. So they'll just be back in the city as soon as they can. The policing tactics being used end up being counterproductive. It gives the young people a pathway to commit further, more serious, offences because it's not actually being dealt with. In a way, with the best of intentions, we are kind of leading them into these very dangerous offences that end up getting them into very serious trouble."

- Police Officer

The scale and gravity of the problem requires a policing model that tackles the root causes of violence, ASB and criminal damage by working with businesses and the community to understand the issues and the context in which they occur. The role that neighbourhood policing can play in developing effective, long-term solutions to youth offending, violence and persistent retail crime is outlined in Section 4.

In some instances, it was believed that the police response, although well-intentioned, could actually serve to cement the criminal identities of young offenders. One police officer outlined how giving groups of young people names could forge a unified identity and sense of durability where it would otherwise have not existed.

"The security groups and police who liaise with each other need a way to identify and communicate about the groups of youths, so they come up with casual names to dub them. It might be based on one of the members or what they look like or what they wear – it's well-intentioned but what starts as an informal way of grouping them together becomes their identity and these informal groupings become upcoming gangs. The name catches on, it gets abbreviated, then nobody knows how these groups of kids became gangs, but it starts from this casual informal referencing."

- Police Officer

Violence is often predictable and preventable and early intervention to stop incidents escalating is key. Businesses need to be able to work in partnership with the police to prevent low-level anti-social incidents escalating into serious incidents. All too often, experienced shop workers see the warning signs and report feeling helpless as issues escalate until the predicted assault occurs.





Reporting crimes in retail spaces

"Shop staff become desensitised due to a lack of police response to what would be deemed low level crime due to the screening policy of threat, harm, opportunity and risk. Unfortunately shoplifting does not sit very high within that. There is a massive gap – it is huge – it is missing so much of the problem."

- Police Officer

According to the Home Office 2018 Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS), although showing improvements on the 2017 data, reporting rates are still low across the different categories of retail crime. The 2018 CVS asked those respondents who had experienced crime in the past year whether or not they had reported the most recent incident of each crime type to the police. The findings are as follows:

- 45% of assaults and threats (an increase from 40% in 2017)
- 70% of robberies (an increase from 65% in 2017)
- 42% of theft by customers (an increase from 36% in 2017), and;
- 35% of theft by unknown persons (an increase from 33% in 2017).⁴⁹

Perhaps as a result of underreporting and a perception that crimes that take place on retail premises are somehow less serious, currently, at a strategic level, 63% of police and crime plans make no reference to business crime and 83% make no reference to the business community.⁵⁰

There is a need to reframe the narrative that is used around 'business crime' to ensure that assaults and violent attacks that take place in shops are treated with the same gravity as those in the public.

Recommendation

Reporting rates remain low across all categories of retail crime. The government, industry and the police need to work together to encourage reporting, streamline reporting processes and ensure that barriers to reporting incidents to the police are identified and addressed. Only by reflecting the true scale of the problem in police recorded crime databases will its scale and severity be reflected in strategic police and crime plans.

⁴⁹ Home Office (2019) *Crime Against Businesses: findings from the 2018 Commercial Victimisation Survey*. Statistical Bulletin 17/19. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/829399/crime-against-businesses-2018-hosb1719.pdf

⁵⁰ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) (2018) *Desperate for a Fix: Using shop theft and a Second Chance Programme to get tough on the causes of prolific drug-addicted offending*. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/desperate-for-a-fix-using-shop-theft-and-a-second-chance-programme-to-get-tough-on-the-causes-of-prolific-drug-addicted-offending>.



Drivers and social determinants of youth offending

Drivers and social determinants of youth offending

Offending is a complex issue with multiple drivers and underlying causes. This section explores some of the established factors that can contribute to the likelihood of youth offending including; family background, exposure to violence, mental health, school disengagement and exclusion, drugs and alcohol, mental health, and social deprivation and poverty.

Many young people engaged in crime have experienced difficult, complicated and chaotic lives. Many have experienced trauma, abuse, bereavement, grown up in local authority care, been excluded from school, experienced drug or alcohol related dependencies and have mental health problems or personality disorders. For example, it is estimated that fewer than 1% of all children in England are in care, but looked after children make up 33% of boys and 61% of girls in custody.⁵¹ It is important to recognise that often the perpetrators of violence have themselves been the victim of, or been witness to, repeated psychological and physical trauma.

Experiences of crime

Many young people are exposed to violence from a young age. Young people can experience crime both directly (through being a victim themselves or witnessing the involvement of others), or indirectly (through the media and peers). The Safer Lives Survey revealed that a significant proportion of participants, age 8-27, reported being exposed to serious levels of violence with almost half of children aged 8-11 seeing serious violence at least once a day, or at least once a week, in real life.⁵²

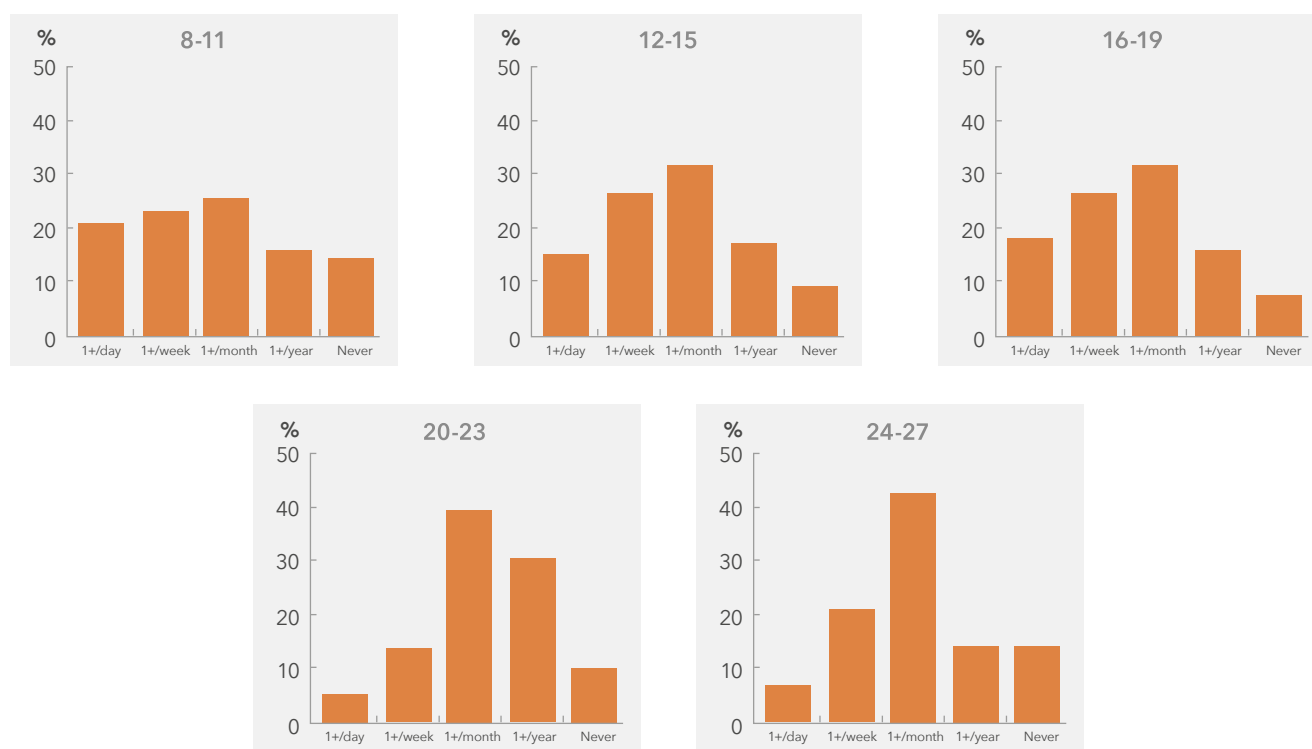


Figure 3. Exposure to Serious Violence in Real Life by Age (%). [Source: Safer Lives Survey, Youth Violence Commission]

⁵¹ NACRO (2020) Young People: The Facts. <https://www.nacro.org.uk/about-us/who-we-support/young-people/>

⁵² The Safer Lives Survey was conducted in early 2018 by the Youth Violence Commission. In total, 2278 young people aged 8-27 completed the survey. *The Youth Violence Commission Final Report*. p.89.

An estimated 11% of 10-15 year olds were victims of crime in the year ending March 2019 and 5% were estimated to have been a victim of a violent offence. For the age group 16-24 year olds this increases to 18% having been a victim of crime. It then steadily reduces the older people are; for example, 5% of those aged 75 years or older having been a victim of crime.⁵³

"I got robbed with machetes and knives and they stole my AirPods and my phone. I was literally ambushed by six guys."

- Male, 17, Black British

"There was one incident recently where a guy was chased down on bikes and they stabbed him a bunch of times. He bled out in the chicken shop and he passed away. There was another incident before that when an 18-year-old got stabbed and he bled outside a Co-op shop and there is a memorial there now. On the Overground there was a gang fighting each other and there was a guy with a gun and he went "pow" and it ricocheted and he shot himself."

- Male, 20, Black British

Of the estimated 841,000 crimes experienced by 10-15 year olds in the year ending March 2019, the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that:

- 54% were categorised as violent offences (of these offences, 19% were categorised as wounding, 56% were violence with minor injury and 25% were violence without injury).
- 27% were theft offences
- 15% were criminal damage to personal property
- 4% were robbery offences.

If there is one positive from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that young people in this study reported a respite from street-based violent crime during the restrictions on movement and activities. However, some experts are predicting an intensification of the underpinning causes of violent crime in the coming months and years following the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.⁵⁴

Exposure to crime through family members

One of the best known studies to explore how and why crime appears to concentrate in families is the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD).⁵⁵ Using a longitudinal design to follow the life-course of 411 South London males from the age of eight to 50 years of age, the study compared the conviction rates of their parents (first generation), the selected sample (second generation) and their biological children (third generation). Farrington, Coid and Murray (2009) found there was significant intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour from first generation males to second generation males; 63 percent of the males with convicted fathers were convicted themselves compared with 33 percent of those with unconvicted fathers. It has been argued that children can themselves become 'quasi-inmates' as they visit and communicate with parents and other relatives incarcerated in prison thus acculturating them to life inside.⁵⁶

Domestic Violence

Being subjected to domestic violence, either as a primary victim or through witnessing violence against other family members, can have long-lasting effects on young people's behaviour and mental wellbeing. It is estimated that one in seven (14%) children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood.⁵⁷ Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions put in place in March 2020, domestic violence deaths had already been escalating, reaching a five-year high in 2018; 173 people were killed, an increase of 32 from 2017.⁵⁸

⁵³ ONS (2020) *Crime in England and Wales: Year ending March 2020* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020>

⁵⁴ Youth Violence Commission (2020) *Youth Violence Commission Final Report*.

⁵⁵ Farrington, D.P., Coid, J.W. and Murray, J. (2009) 'Family factors in the intergenerational transmission of offending', *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 19 (2):109-24.

⁵⁶ Shammas, V.L. (2017) 'Pains of imprisonment', In K.R. Kerley (Ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Corrections*. Wiley Online Library.

⁵⁷ Women's Aid *The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people*. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/impact-on-children-and-young-people/>

⁵⁸ BBC News (2019) *Domestic violence killings reach five-year high*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-49459674>

Since the lockdown began on March 23, there has been evidence from statutory and voluntary agencies across the UK highlighting the increased risks of domestic abuse. The charity Refuge, which supports women, children and men experiencing domestic abuse, reported a 25 per cent increase in calls and online requests since the lockdown began.⁵⁹ Since 2010, local authorities have cut their spending on domestic violence refuges by nearly a quarter (24%).⁶⁰

"Many young people have nowhere to go and they don't feel safe at home; domestic violence is a big problem. There is a lot of hidden trauma and some young people might become withdrawn from school as a result or start hanging around with a negative influential group."

- Streetbase Coordinator, London

Children who witness domestic violence or are victims of abuse themselves can develop long-term physical and mental health problems.⁶¹ Furthermore, children who witness violence between parents may also be at greater risk of being violent in their future relationships.

Media and exposure to violence

Exposure to violence also occurs through multiple forms of media. The Youth Violence Commission's 'Safer Lives Survey' (2020) revealed the extent that young people were exposed to violent content. Of the 2,278 respondents:

- 35% reported seeing videos or photographs on social media that contain acts of violence, at least once a day
- 31% reported playing computer games that contain violence, at least once a day
- 29% reported watching TV programmes or films that contain acts of violence, at least once a day
- 47% reported listening to music that contains violent lyrics, at least once a day

Social media sites in particular were implicated in perpetuating masculine identities that celebrated crime, violence, and the fierce protection of one's reputation and territory. Materials uploaded to these sites, especially drill music videos, were seen to inflame antagonisms between young people and promote a culture of aggressive posturing.

"Rappers and stuff, they brainwash people into smoking weed and they think it's cool but it just rots your brain. Music is a form of brainwashing - smoking weed, selling drugs, robbing people, it's glamourised. People say you're criminalising young people but they are criminalising themselves - if they want to talk about shooting somebody that's on them. It 100% encourages people to be violent."

- Male, 19, Black British

"Drill music has normalised the use of knives, drugs and alcohol, and crime."

- Male, 17, White British

"There is a societal pressure on this generation that didn't exist for previous generations. A lot of it is to do with social media. There is such a powerful image that you have to meet to be seen as a person of value or respected. For example, there are the music videos and you see them in their chains. So, you've got young people looking up to that and thinking 'why am I going to go to school when I can sell drugs and get those chains?'"

- Male, 18, Black British

There is a cyclical and iterative moral panic relating to popular music stemming back to the mods and rockers of the 1960s through, amongst others, punk, shock rock, gangsta rap, grime, and the latest headline grabber, drill. Much has been made in particular of the glamourisation of gun violence, fast money, and disrespect for the law. However, this has largely been deemed to be a misunderstanding of youth culture by older middle class conservative social commentators. It is interesting to hear from young people in this study about the pressure they feel to conform to what they largely saw as the glamourisation of weapons, violence and drugs.

While some materials on social media can glamourise and desensitise young people to violence, it is important to recognise that not all of it does. So, music does not cause such violence. A youth worker cited in the Youth Violence Commission Final Report, claims that by paying attention to the cultural expression of young people, 'UK drill – a rich, visceral, unforgiving cry for help with a mass global audience – provides an opportunity to learn about the roots of violence, as well as tap into solutions for empowering those who have been left behind.'⁶²

⁵⁹ SCIE (2020) Domestic Violence and Abuse: Safeguarding during the COVID-19 crisis. <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/safeguarding/domestic-violence-abuse>

⁶⁰ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2017) Revealed: Thousands of women turned away as refuge funding is cut. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-10-16/a-system-at-breaking-point>

⁶¹ Gilbert, L.K., Breiding, M.J., Merrick, M.T., Parks, S.E., Thompson, W.W., Dhingra, S.S., Ford, D.C. (2015). Childhood Adversity and Adult Chronic Disease: An update from ten states and the District of Columbia, 2010. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*; 48(3): 345-349.

⁶² Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/> p.82.

Social disadvantage and poverty

It had been estimated that 14 million people – more than one in five of the population – were living in poverty in the UK in 2018.⁶³ Of these, 4.2 million are children. Even before the devastating impact of COVID-19 on income and employment, 30% of all children in the country were growing up in poverty in the UK.⁶⁴ Clearly this proportion is likely to get much worse in the coming months and years with knock-on effects on the health, education, and wellbeing of young people.

“You see a lot of crime nearby and you just think, ‘This might be the only way for me to earn a living or keep going or provide for my family.’ I think a lot of it is down to trying to provide for families.”

- Female, 17, White British

“In my opinion the reason people do crime is because they have no way of making money, right? So they will choose the easy way to make money. I’ve seen people drop out of full-time college because they are broke and start doing stupid stuff like stealing motorbikes. You need some source of income.”

- Male, 19, Black British

“We need to prepare ourselves for the fallout for children at the end of lockdown. They are seeing parents losing jobs, while young people are graduating from university with nothing to go to. It makes me very depressed knowing that we are going to go into another recession. There is a lot of anxiety amongst young people.”

- Service Manager

The ways in which structural inequalities such as race, gender, disability and class intersect and amplify disadvantage and marginalisation requires careful attention. The tendency to silo these strands often fails to capture the complex combinations of intersecting aspects of disadvantage, or recognise how they can become compounded.⁶⁵

Education: School exclusion and pupil referral units

Between 2009 and 2018, the number of pupils in state-funded primary and secondary schools rose by 8.4%. During the same period, total school spending per pupil in England fell by 9% in real terms. Such sizeable cuts to funding have led to reductions in school staffing. Government figures show that staff numbers in secondary schools have fallen by 15,000 between 2014-15 and 2016-17, despite the increase in pupil numbers. This equates to an average of 5.5 fewer members of staff in each secondary school in England and Wales.⁶⁶ The reduction in staffing not only has a detrimental direct impact on class sizes, but it also reduces the amount of time available for teachers to undertake vital training on recognising and understanding issues that students might have, including trauma and mental health issues.

The number of children subjected to fixed and permanent exclusions from mainstream education has been rising since 2012-2013. In 2016-17, an average of 40 children were permanently excluded from school each day. This number was 50 times higher for fixed-term exclusions, with 2,000 children being subject to a fixed-term exclusion on a daily basis. It has been suggested that some schools ‘off-roll’ pupils who might have poor attendance or who are not excelling academically so that they can achieve higher positions in school league tables, or meet the attendance statistics required to ensure they achieve a positive Ofsted rating.⁶⁷

Although available research cannot determine whether school exclusions are causally linked to offending, there is an established evidence base to suggest that excluded children are at much greater risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of serious youth violence.⁶⁸

⁶³ The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) UK Poverty 2017. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2017>

⁶⁴ Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2018/19, Tables 4a and 4b. Department for Work and Pensions, 2020. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789756/households-below-average-income-quality-methodology-2017-2018.pdf

⁶⁵ The Women and Equalities Committee has launched an inquiry into the impact of coronavirus, Unequal Impact: coronavirus and the impact on people with protected characteristics, with three sub-inquiries: coronavirus and BAME people, gendered economic impact, and disability.

⁶⁶ National Education Union (2018) Schools forced to cut teachers and teaching assistants to make ends meet. [Online] [Accessed 2nd February 2020] <https://neu.org.uk/schools-forced-cut-teachers-and-teaching-assistants-posts-make-ends-meet>

⁶⁷ Timpson, E. (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

⁶⁸ Deakin and Kupchik (2018) ‘Managing Behaviour: From Exclusion to Restorative Practices’, *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control*. Palgrave Macmillan.

"The big thing for me is kids who get excluded. They are just being left behind and then they spiral out of control and start getting involved in more serious crimes. We've gotta stop just excluding kids and not thinking about what will happen after. The only way to tackle knife crime and violence is to start with education. You can't kick them out of school and not expect them to just get worse."

- Male, 16, Other British

There are multiple critiques of zero tolerance policies, filtered down from the criminal justice system into schools, resulting in already marginalised and vulnerable young people being excluded from mainstream education.⁶⁹

An established body of research highlights the links between young people disengaging or being excluded from school, and an increase in the likelihood of being victims or perpetrators of serious violence. Furthermore, it has been reported that young people in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Young Offender Institutes (YOIs) are far more likely to experience high levels of serious violence than others. Over 25% of young people in PRUs and YOIs reported personally knowing four or more young people who had been hospitalised as a result of serious violence in the last five years, compared to just 10% of mainstream school students.⁷⁰

Recommendation

There is an evidence base to suggest that children excluded from school are at much greater risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of crime. There needs to be better understanding and oversight of school exclusion policies and controversial 'off-rolling' practices. The government should work with schools to review the impact of the Ofsted assessment framework on levels of school exclusion.

Disinvestment in youth services

A recent parliamentary inquiry directly linked prolonged austerity measures to increasing rates of violent crime. Between 2010 and 2015, local authority budgets were cut by £18 billion, with youth services, social care, early intervention and housing services particularly affected.⁷¹ The average local authority has reduced spending on services such as social clubs and youth workers by 40%, and some places have seen funding cut by 91% in three years.⁷²

The underlying causes of youth violence and antisocial behaviour in society are multiple and complex with contributing factors identifiable from individual to societal levels. What is abundantly clear, however, is that dramatic cuts in public spending have resulted in devastating consequences for some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and communities across England and Wales.

"I don't think there is enough to do outside of school. There are some youth clubs but there is not enough."

- Female, 18, White British

It is important to identify and address the root causes of violence, not just the symptoms. Approaching violence and antisocial behaviour as a law enforcement issue alone will not solve it. Any comprehensive violence prevention strategy must address the underlying societal factors that are well-established correlates of crime and that requires investment. As the Youth Violence report illustrates, investment in early intervention strategies and youth services returns significant cost savings in social and criminal justice outlays in later life. The antecedents of violent crime correlate with other poor life outcomes such as low educational attainment, poor health and unemployment. Therefore, by addressing violent crime risk factors, interventions can bring a multitude of benefits to individuals, communities and wider society.

⁶⁹ Taylor, Deakin and Kupchik (2018) *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁷⁰ Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/>

⁷¹ Neville, S. (2015) Austerity's £18bn impact on local services. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/5fcbd0c4-2948-11e5-8db8-c033edba8a6e>

⁷² The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Knife Crime obtained the figures on youth service budgets using freedom of information requests in 2019. See <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/>



Views and experiences of the police

Views and experiences of the police

On 25th May, midway through the research, George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, sparking Black Lives Matter protests across the world, including in the UK. It also intensified discussions around police resources, tactics, and power. Young people in this study talked about systemic racial inequalities, and in particular, ongoing tensions between the police and young people, particularly those from BAME backgrounds. It clearly highlights that more needs to be done to ensure young people, and especially those of colour, are treated fairly and with respect by all criminal justice agents.

Young people in this study indicated they'd welcome closer relationships between police and their local communities:

"I think because they're not patrolling the streets anymore, we don't really see them. People can't respect the police as much because they're not there for communities anymore. They've got so many other bigger things going on that you don't see them, and they're not chatting to the elders who are sat on the benches in [northern town] anymore. They've not got that relationship as deeply as they probably used to do back when police used to be a sign of respect and dignity. If they were stood there you would be scared, wouldn't you, wondering what was going on? Now, because they've got cars and telephones and it's so much easier for them to get to the crime that they're not interested in the smaller things that are going on in and around the community. I think younger people do look at them and think, 'We can get away with anything now.'"

- Female, 17, White British

Dramatic changes have occurred to the police forces in England and Wales in recent years, mostly spearheaded by huge reductions in funding and resources.⁷³ The long-term reduction of the number of police personnel over a sustained period of time (estimated to be a total of nearly 21,000 police officers in addition to 18,000 police staff and 6,800 police community support officers) has had a detrimental impact on crime rates, community safety and public security.

This has directly impacted on the model of policing currently deployed in England and Wales with a notable decline in neighbourhood policing strategies. It is understandable that forces have needed to prioritise reactive, emergency work over proactive problem-solving within communities, but this has come at a significant cost. Neighbourhood policing encompasses much more than a visible presence in communities, it also includes working proactively with community partners to solve long term problems based on an in-depth understanding of the local area and the issues it faces. It can assist with building public confidence in the police, community engagement, community intelligence gathering, and proactive prevention measures.⁷⁴

Views of the police: A lack of community engagement

The relationship between young people and the police is not straightforward. In this section, findings relating to the role of the police, feelings of safety, the use of stop and search with young people, and how relationships could be improved are explored.

The decline of neighbourhood policing and a corresponding lack of systematic police engagement with young people has contributed to a distrust of the police and officers being seen as 'enemies.' As a result, street codes have emerged that strictly prohibit young people from engaging with the police.

"The number one rule is no snitching. No snitching. So, if you were going to try and go to the police then you are going to be shamed for it. I know from my own experience that you get shamed for it. The police are seen as enemies."

- Male, 19, Black British

In a recent survey, less than half of young people agreed, or very much agreed, with the statement 'The police make the lives of young people safer'. This provides a telling indictment of the perceived lack of confidence in the police's ability to keep young people safe.⁷⁵

⁷³ As at 31 March 2019, there were 123,171 police officers in the 43 police forces (an increase of 0.6% since March 2018). This miniscule increase follows a decade-long decrease in the number of police officers. The number of police officers has decreased since the peak at 31 March 2009, from 143,769 to 123,171 officers as at 31 March 2019 (a reduction of 14%). Home Office (2019) *Police Workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2019* (second edition). Statistical Bulletin 11/19. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831726/police-workforce-mar19-hosb1119.pdf

⁷⁴ Higgins, A. (2018) *The Future of Neighbourhood Policing*. The Police Foundation.

⁷⁵ Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/>

"When you report crime you don't get what you're looking for. You're in danger so what are you going to do, just sit around waiting for them?"

- Male, 17, Black British

"You might see a police car whizzing past, but you'll never see a police officer on the street. You used to see them a lot more. It's not the police's fault, they are very underfunded by the government."

- Male, 17, White British

Stop and search

The police have a variety of legislative powers to stop and search those they suspect have certain items. The stop and search powers allow police officers to 'allay or confirm' suspicions without making an arrest. Under Section One of The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), officers must have 'reasonable suspicion' that the person stopped is in possession of stolen or prohibited articles. The person being stopped is then issued a receipt to enable them to access a report of the encounter.⁷⁶

Searches under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 differ from PACE searches in that they do not require suspicion in individual cases. Under this Act, officers can search an individual without reasonable grounds, sometimes known as 'no suspicion' or a 'section 60' search. This power can only be used when authorised by a senior officer.

The use of stop and search has declined significantly since 2011 but this trend appears to be slowing and, in some areas, reversing. The number of searches conducted across England and Wales in 2018/19 was 73% lower than in 2009/10 but 36% higher than in 2017/18.

Stop and Search: The Legal Framework

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)

The majority of stops and searches in England and Wales are conducted under The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) but also under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and Firearms Act 1968. To stop and search under these three Acts the police are required to have 'reasonable suspicion' that the person stopped is in possession of stolen or prohibited articles. These are sometimes known as 'Section 1' searches.

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

Searches under section 60 of this Act differ from PACE searches in that they do not require suspicion in individual cases. They can be authorised by a senior police officer based upon a reasonable belief that incidents involving serious violence may take place or that people are carrying dangerous instruments or offensive weapons in a specific locality. They are sometimes known as a 'Section 60' or 'no suspicion' search. These powers were intended to prevent violent offences at large-scale events such as football matches but have been used much more frequently in recent years in policing activity relating to knife crime.

Terrorism Act 2000

The requirement under section 43 of this Act is a 'reasonable suspicion' that the person is a terrorist. Under section 44 people can also be stopped without reasonable suspicion – but only within a specific area in which this power has been authorised by a senior police officer. Searches under section 44 of the Act were ruled unlawful by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in January 2010, as they breached Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

⁷⁶ Originally, and on the recommendation of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (1999), a full written record was required for each stop and search. The record was to be completed and handed to the person concerned at the time of the encounter. On the grounds of saving time and paperwork the recording requirements have now been reduced and only a numbered 'receipt' is provided to those stopped who can then collect a report of the stop from a police station or online at a later date.

Concerns relating to the disproportionate policing of people from BAME backgrounds are not unfounded.

People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds have been consistently more likely to be stopped and searched than white people. The disparity is particularly pronounced for black people. The latest statistics, published in March, show that in every one of the 43 police force regions black men are more likely to be stopped and searched than any other ethnic group; between April 2018 and March 2019, there were 4 stop and searches for every 1,000 white people, compared with 38 for every 1,000 black people.⁷⁷

"I have been stopped by the police and even though I am confident that I have not done anything wrong I am not confident that they will treat me fairly. It damages the relationship between the police and the community that they serve when they pull over young black men for no reason. Some of my friends now say the police have learnt their name and are constantly harassing them."

- Male, 22, Black British

It has been more than two decades since the publication of The Macpherson Report⁷⁸ acknowledging the existence of institutional racism within the police, yet young black boys still experience disproportionate policing. Overall, black people are 9.7 times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched and a staggering 40 times more likely under the controversial 'section 60' of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Reasons for stop and search

When conducting a stop and search, police record the reason for the stop and search as well as the ethnicity of the suspect. There are various reasons why the police may carry out a stop and search, for example they may suspect an individual is carrying drugs or a weapon.

In the latest year, suspicion of drugs and offensive weapons were the two most common reasons for stops across all ethnic groups. In 2018/19, 69% of stop and searches conducted on suspects from Asian ethnic groups were for drugs, which is higher than all other ethnic groups (ranging between 56% and 59%). A higher proportion of stop and searches conducted on black suspects were for offensive weapons (including firearms), at 24% compared 13% for white, 16% for Asian, 18% for Chinese or other and 20% for mixed ethnicity suspects.⁷⁹

What is causing the disproportionality in search rates?

There is no evidence to suggest that people from BAME backgrounds are more likely to carry items that officers have powers to search for. Neither is there evidence that suggests they are more likely to be involved in criminality associated with stop and search enforcement. Other reasons frequently suggested to explain the disparities in ethnic search rates (such as black people spending more time in public spaces, or the under recording of searches conducted on white people) have also been shown to have no credible basis. Societal racism and its effects (including unconscious bias in some officers) appears to explain the majority of the disparity in stop and search rates by ethnicity.⁸⁰

Some of the participants blamed the media for perpetuating negative stereotypes about young people of colour:

"I think a lot of it is to do with the media as well. There are a lot of instances where white people commit a crime and the Daily Mail will say something like 'oh they were such a kind person' but as soon as a black person does something or a Muslim they are just like, this person they smoke weed, they're a drug dealer, they've done so many crimes blah blah blah' and it puts us in a bad light for no reason."

- Female, 23, Black British

⁷⁷ Gov.uk (2020) *Stop and search*. Last updated June 2020. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest>

⁷⁸ The Macpherson Report was published in February 1999 following an inquiry into the Metropolitan Police's actions in relation to the murder of Stephen Lawrence. It concluded that the Metropolitan Police's murder investigation had been 'marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers.' https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf

⁷⁹ Ministry of Justice (2019) *Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2018: A Ministry of Justice publication under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/849200/statistics-on-race-and-the-cjs-2018.pdf

⁸⁰ House of Commons briefing paper (2020), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03878/>

Policing the Pandemic

In this study and others, young people expressed concerns that police had unfairly targeted young people from BAME backgrounds during lockdown. Several people commented that they had observed differences in the way police treated individuals from different ethnic groups. Young people from both white and BAME backgrounds made these observations and it was particularly prevalent in London.

In the report *Policing the Pandemic* (2020)⁸¹ it was revealed that BAME people are 54% more likely to be fined and issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) under coronavirus rules than white people. Between March 27 and May 25, young men from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds were 1.8 times as likely to be issued fines for breaches of coronavirus lockdown rules than white men the same age. As a result, a National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) report concluded there had been 'disproportionality' in the issuing of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) by forces in England and Wales.

In addition, figures from the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) show that over a four-week period in April, a third of those fined by police for breaking lockdown rules were young people aged 18-24.⁸² Psychology research from the University of Sheffield indicates that poor mental health among young people may impact adherence to social distancing rules.⁸³

Impact of disproportionality

If used appropriately and proportionately, stop and search could increase community confidence in the police and make a positive contribution to reducing the fear of crime. However, it is understandable that law-abiding people who feel they have been unjustifiably targeted are less likely to trust the police and engage them when they experience a crime. On the whole, there was a willingness amongst the young people in this study to comply with the police and understand the context of their activities. However, it was clear that the over-policing of some ethnic backgrounds could quickly build resentment and mistrust.

"I've seen many people be harassed; people who haven't done anything wrong but they 'look suspicious'. The police have done a lot to stop the occasional gang fights and the gang wars. But young people get stopped and searched quite often and it can cause a lot of resentment. It depends if you understand what the police are trying to do."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

"I stay cool when the police stop me and ask questions; I always comply. They are just doing their jobs at the end of the day."

- Male, 20, Black British

"Personally, I'm fine with the police. I understand the job of protecting others, but I also understand why some of my friends from different races feel threatened by them because they have been stopped and searched on not one, but multiple occasions and by multiple officers. They feel they are being harassed. Coming from a different race like blacks or Somalians they feel threatened because they are being singled out."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

The entrenched pattern of the disproportionate use of police stop and search powers has created and reinforced mistrust amongst some of those who are more frequently subjected to it, which in turn can alienate communities.

"Young people's view of the police is very negative. The police target us unfairly. I could be walking with my friends who are not white and we have been stopped and searched more times than other groups. It's because we look a certain kind of way. We have nothing on us and we haven't done anything, we are just walking. I don't think it is fair. I don't agree with stop and search."

- Male, 21, British Indian

"I had one situation where I had basically been stopped and searched by the police for no reason. I was just walking. I had just come back from the mosque and I was walking back home and the police were in their van and they drove past and then they stopped. One person came out and he said, 'I'm going to stop and search you' and obviously there was nothing I had done wrong. I asked him why they were doing it and he said, 'because we believe you look similar to someone'. I found it very weird that they did that. It left a very bad taste in my mouth."

Male, 22, British Pakistani

⁸¹ Policing the Pandemic is youth-led study that seeks to provide a snapshot of young people's views and experiences of policing during lockdown. Between May and June 2020, the project gathered views from over 3900 young people across England and Wales. <http://leaders-unlocked.org/publication/policing-the-pandemic/>

⁸² BBC News (2020) Coronavirus: Young men 'more likely to ignore lockdown: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-52587368>

⁸³ Levita L. (2020) Initial research findings on the impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of young people aged 13 to 24 in the UK. COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC), University of Sheffield.

"Growing up, the police would stop us for no reason and they would search the boys and wouldn't give any real reason why they were doing it. Sometimes they wouldn't give them the receipt to make sure that they don't get stopped again in the same day."

- Female, 18, British African

Recommendation

The disproportionate use of stop and search against black, asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people compared to white people has increased in recent years. When stop and search is perceived to be used unfairly, it has a negative effect on people's trust in the police, which in turn, limits the police's ability to effectively investigate crime and protect the public. Police forces, under the supervision of PCCs, should establish or, where relevant, improve monitoring of the way officers deploy stop and search so that they can be satisfied that all officers are acting in accordance with the law (including equality legislation and the Code of Practice) and that the power is used effectively to prevent crime, catch criminals and maintain public trust. Monitoring data should be made publicly available.

Arrest and criminal justice disproportionality

In the year ending March 2019 there were just over 60,200 arrests of children (aged 10-17) by the police in England and Wales for notifiable offences.

Black children were over four times more likely than white children to be arrested. The ethnic disproportionality in arrests, which typically represents the first interaction a child will have with the Youth Justice System (YJS), could be a driver of further disproportionality seen at other stages of the system. Minority ethnic groups appear to be over-represented at many stages throughout the CJS compared with the white ethnic group. The greatest disparity appears at the point of stop and search, arrests, custodial sentencing and prison population. Among minority ethnic groups, black individuals were often the most over-represented.

In 2018, minority ethnic children also had a higher proportion remanded in custody, had a higher custody rate and received longer custodial sentences than white offenders.

Furthermore, a greater number of children in prison are from minority ethnic groups; two fifths (40%) of prisoners aged under 18 were black or mixed ethnicity, despite these ethnic groups accounting for less than one fifth (17%) of the entire prison population.⁸⁴

Diversifying the police force

A paucity of young police officers, particularly from BAME backgrounds, is amplifying divisions between young people and the police.

The proportion of police officers from black, mixed and Chinese or other ethnic groups have remained stable (at 1%, 2% and 3% respectively), far lower than the proportion of the population that they represent. White police officers still make up 93% of the force. The proportion of police officer joiners from minority ethnic groups was 11% in the latest year. This proportion has fluctuated slightly over the last five years, with a low of 9% in 2017/18.

In July 2019, the Prime Minister pledged to recruit 20,000 police officers, in effect reversing cuts made to frontline law enforcement since 2010 when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came to power. This is certainly a step in the right direction but crucially not only does there need to be a significant uptick in the number of officers, there must be better representation of BAME people working in all areas of the police. Multiple inquiries including The Scarman Report following the Brixton riots in 1981 and The Macpherson Report following the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, have highlighted the need to recruit a more diverse and representative police force yet the number of BAME officers remains severely low. Similar recommendations have also been made in the Lammy Review in order for the CJS to aspire to a representative judiciary and magistracy by 2025.⁸⁵

Recommendation

As recommended in The Young Review⁸⁶, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Chief Constables should make greater use of positive action measures under the Equality Act to attract and progress BAME police officers.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Justice (2019) Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2018: A Ministry of Justice publication under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/849200/statistics-on-race-and-the-cjs-2018.pdf

⁸⁵ The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System (2017): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf

⁸⁶ The Young Review (2017) Police & Crime Plans: A race Equality Audit.

Improving police engagement with young people and communities: neighbourhood policing

"One of the things that we do really well is that we have officers from the Youth Offending Service based in the office. We use a boxing academy that is run by the police and young people do get involved. These kinds of activities help to break down stereotypes of the police. But it is a different kettle of fish when you are out in the community and you are known by the police and are frequently stopped. Thinking about what this must be like for a young person – is it any wonder they think 'I'm being targeted, I'm being picked on'?" It is the same picture across the country for most black young people."

- Service Manager

There is a need for more proactive and positive engagement with young people by the police. One way to rebuild confidence and trust in the police is by reinvesting in neighbourhood policing models. It is understandable that forces have needed to prioritise reactive, emergency work over proactive problem-solving within communities, but this has come at a significant cost.

"The response officers deal with things of an emergency nature; first responders are great at dealing with a problem there and then but they're never going to put anything in place to solve the problem long term. It's just putting a plaster on a very bad wound. The commercial district requires a neighbourhood policing model that takes a long-term view to dealing with problems from start to finish. There needs to be an evidence-based plan in place to solve bigger issues by working with a range of partners."

- Detective Constable

The decline in neighbourhood policing has contributed towards a loss of trust between communities and the police as well as severely undermining the police's capacity to develop effective, long-term solutions to youth offending, violence and persistent retail crime. The relationships built by neighbourhood officers enable problems to be dealt with before they escalate. There has always been a high level of public support for neighbourhood policing with opinion polls consistently reporting high degrees of public support for foot patrol.⁸⁷


Neighbourhood policing encompasses much more than a visible presence of the police in communities. It enables officers to work proactively with community partners to solve long-term problems, including retail crime and the root causes of youth offending.

Recommendation

The decline in neighbourhood policing has contributed towards a loss of trust between communities and the police as well as severely undermining the police's capacity to develop effective, long-term solutions to youth offending, violence and persistent retail crime. The pledged recruitment of 20,000 police officers should be used, in part, to reinvest in local neighbourhood policing models.



⁸⁷ Wakefield A. (2016) The Value of Foot Patrol: A Review of Research, The Police Foundation. <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/publication/the-value-of-foot-patrol/>



**Building positive futures and
responding to youth offending**

Building positive futures and responding to youth offending

"There's a real sense some young people are struggling; particularly those who are in gangs or drug dealing. The main aim has to be getting them off the streets and somewhere safe."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

Youth offending, and particularly serious youth violence, is having a devastating impact on young people, families and communities. Yet the factors that contribute to violent incidences – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed. It is particularly important to recognise that young people who commit violent acts have often themselves been victims of abuse, violence and trauma. Indeed, the cross-party Youth Violence Commission established in 2017 described having to change its focus from 'from the violence perpetrated by young people, to the shocking levels of serious violence inflicted on these same young people throughout their lives.'⁸⁸ If long-term serious strategies are to be put in place to reduce youth violence, these first need to be focused on protecting young people from the significant harms and traumas that characterise far too many children's lives.

The below section outlines the need for early intervention, universal youth services (such as youth clubs and sports activities), specialist services (including mental health provision and substance misuse services), as well as targeted youth services for young people deemed to be at risk of criminal behaviour.

Early intervention

Early intervention means identifying and providing effective early support to children and young people who are at risk of poor outcomes, including criminal behaviour. Effective early intervention works to identify potential problems and prevent them from occurring, or to tackle them directly as soon as they emerge, before they get worse. Research has demonstrated that the early years of a child's life can

have significant, long-lasting effects on their life-course trajectory, affecting everything from mental and physical health to employment. Adverse experiences in childhood, such as abuse, neglect or difficult household situations, are associated with an increased risk of health and social problems in later life, with the prevalence of a range of these problems increasing with the number of adverse experiences suffered.⁸⁹

"Going to places like youth clubs does make us happy because it acts as a distraction from our problems at home. When we're stuck at home it can increase anxiety, depression, and other issues with our mental health. We need interaction to boost our mood and our mental health."

- Male, 16, Black British

There is an increasing range of early intervention programmes that have been shown to improve life outcomes for those affected by childhood trauma or adversity, while also saving long-term costs for the government. However, the provision of these services is not uniform across the country. In 2016, the Early Intervention Foundation estimated that the cost of 'late' intervention in England and Wales reached at least £16.6 billion⁹⁰ and in 2017 reported that there was a 'significant gap between what is known to be effective from peer-reviewed studies and what is delivered in local child protection systems.'⁹¹



⁸⁸ Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. p.60.

⁸⁹ House of Commons (2018) Evidence-based early years intervention. Eleventh Report of Session 2017-19. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/506/506.pdf>

⁹⁰ Early Intervention Foundation (2016) The Cost of Late Intervention: EIF Analysis 2016. <https://www.eif.org.uk/download.php?file=files/pdf/cost-of-late-intervention-2016.pdf>

⁹¹ Early Intervention Foundation (2017) 'Improving the Effectiveness of the Child Protection System: Overview (2017).

Universal services

Universal services are those which are available to all children and young people, and their families. They can be accessed without needing assessment or meeting any specified criteria.

The importance of youth services cannot be understated. Not only do they provide extra-curricular activities to develop new skills, build confidence, participate in arts and sport, enable active citizenship, drive aspirations, and provide a safe space to develop social groups, they also provide an opportunity for young people to seek advice and support on issues relating to crime and violence. One young offender echoed this sentiment when reflecting back on a time that he was trying to reach out for help due to a fear of being seriously physically hurt.

"I had lost faith in the system. The police let me down, school let me down, I had no friends. There was no one that I trusted. I had a lot of emotional trauma, paranoia. I had no one to trust in but myself."

Male, 19, Black British

The Youth Violence Commission's *Safer Lives Survey* findings published in 2020 revealed that 23% of respondents stated that they would ask youth workers for help and advice if they felt worried about being a victim of violence. Furthermore, when asked 'If there was one thing you could change that you think would make young people safer, what would it be?', the most popular response was the provision of more youth centres, sports clubs and other youth activities in their local areas.⁹²

"I think youth clubs especially are useful. They help me to learn a new passion and to get skills like cooking, as well as meeting new people. I never get anything like that anywhere else. I feel a lot more confident now."

- Female, 15, White Other

"I don't think there is enough in terms of really broadening horizons and showing young people what is out there. School is very limited in terms of teaching life skills. It doesn't really allow young people to embrace their talents or find out what is happening in the community and get involved, or point you towards different projects."

- Youth Worker

It is estimated that councils now spend around £1 billion per year less on youth justice and youth services, in real terms, than they did in 2010-11.⁹³ More than 750 youth centres have closed since 2012 and 14,500 youth and community work jobs have been lost since 2008. Many young people highlighted that free-to-use public spaces, particularly for sports, were becoming privatised resulting in the exclusion of many young people who could not afford to pay to use facilities.

"A lot of the youth clubs in my area have closed and even the ones that remain are struggling. There's been a huge change in recent years and gentrification has played a big part. There was an Astroturf pitch nearby and it was available to everyone but now it's been privatised so a lot of the local kids can't afford to use it."

- Male, 22, Black British

"There are very few free spaces left. It used to be that you could use the tennis courts or the basketball courts if you turn up with your own ball but now you have to pay for them. If your parents don't have the money what are you supposed to do in your spare time?"

- Female, 20, White Other



⁹² Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report.

⁹³ Home Affairs Committee (July 2019). *Serious Youth Violence* (Sixteenth report of session 2017-19). House of Commons.

Sports, leisure activities and cultural experiences

Sports were seen as a positive way to engage young people in prosocial activities while developing their confidence.

"The main aim is to encourage them to take part in sport and physical activity and to bring the best out of them. A lot of the children are quite shy and anxious and it's about getting them to try different things, build their confidence and show them that there are a whole lot of different things that they can do."

- Youth worker

"My main activity is going to youth clubs to interact with friends and socialise. They offer boxing, curricula activities like programming, sports activities. They came to our school and advertised their club there."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

In addition, cultural experiences are important for young people, particularly those that would not otherwise be able to access them. The London borough of Islington has developed an '11 by 11 Islington Pledge' which is a policy commitment to ensure all children and young people attending a school in Islington have 11 outstanding cultural experiences by Year 11.⁹⁴ The range of free creative and cultural activities include experiences such as concert tickets, backstage theatre tours and inspiring talks by creative professionals.

"At school they do what they can. You don't get a lot of it, but you do get trips to, say, theatres. But the problem now is funding. When I was at school, I was fortunate that I could go on trips, but many can't because of money and so they don't have the opportunity."

- Youth Worker

"There needs to be more residential trips and the opportunity to explore outside of London and the area. You don't get people showing you where to go and teaching you life skills. When you're living in a densely populated area you don't get much experience of fresh trees and different experiences like the countryside."

- Male, 16, Bangladeshi

Targeted and specialist youth services

Targeted youth services focus on providing early help to young people (typically aged 10 to 21 years old) and their families, who require additional support in addition to universal services. The services often place a strong emphasis on community-based delivery providing support within local community settings and working with local neighbourhood services to enhance community cohesion and prevent the escalation of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime.

The importance of making the input meaningful to young people was highlighted by one Service Manager working in targeted youth support:

"One of the things that shocks young people is the consequences of certain offences that could affect them in later years – such as if they needed a visa to travel to America. An offence could prevent them from obtaining a visa. I have heard young people say, 'What, really?! I can't go to America? For real?' This can be a real wake-up call. Consequential thinking is key when supporting young people in this area of prevention work."

- Service Manager for targeted youth support

This was echoed by a young offender who had been imprisoned for a violent offence. He relayed the ongoing restrictions placed upon his ability to travel and secure a good job:

"To be honest, I'm upset that I can't do a lot of things; I'm very restricted. Like, I can't go to America. I can't ever work, like, as a teacher or those kinds of things. Every job I look at I have to look to see if they do the DBS check. It's really hard to get a good job."

- Male, 19, Black British

Specialist youth services respond to young people who are experiencing particular problems such as substance misuse, mental health and wellbeing issues, or homelessness. Services often provide education as well as guidance and support. Poor mental health can be associated with violent behaviour in both directions, both contributing to and resulting from violent behaviour.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Further details of the '11 by 11 Islington Pledge' can be found here: <https://www.islington.gov.uk/libraries-arts-and-heritage/arts/cultural-enrichment-schools-and-youth/11-by-11-islington-pledge>

⁹⁵ Sethi, D., Hughes, K., Bellis, M., Mitis, F. and Racioppi, F. (2010), European report on preventing violence and knife crime among young people, Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization.

The links between traumatic experiences and behaviour that can be labelled criminal are widely evidenced.⁹⁶ The importance of recognising that many young people who are involved with services have experienced significant trauma was highlighted by a Service Manager for targeted youth services.

"We are trauma-informed which means that we understand that young people have gone through some terrible stuff whether it be that the parent has gone through a mental health episode, the parent has been bereaved, the parent has been in custody, in prison, whether they have seen domestic violence, or whether they have been a victim of abuse themselves. These experiences are going to have a detrimental impact when they are making the transition from being a child to a teenager to a young adult and could impact their parenting and their future relationships. It is crucial to have an understanding of that throughout."

- Service Manager

Recommendation

There needs to be more widespread and mainstream training in trauma-informed approaches for youth workers and teachers, as well as other frontline professionals who come into contact with children and young people.

Mental health was a particular concern among the young people in this study. It has been estimated that 10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental problem.⁹⁷ Concerningly, 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not received appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age.⁹⁸

"People might say I am a confident young person - people might say I'm doing antisocial behaviour - but behind the closed doors I am battling a lot of things personally and struggling mentally just to get through the day. There needs to be opportunities for young people to allow them to get away from everything."

- Female, 16, Nigerian

"The NHS provides some mental health services but it takes months and months. Personally, I have been to a therapist a couple of times and sometimes I pay him £48 because going through the NHS it took too long to get through but, when I finally did, it was free so that was more helpful. For mental health it is important as a lot of young people stuck inside are feeling depressed and anxious. Young people need somewhere to go to get mental health support."

- Male, 22, Black British

"I've had my low days and I had no one to talk to about it. The reaction I got when I talked to some people about it was 'oh, grow a pair, you're young. I've had problems too' and just because we're young it doesn't mean we don't have issues. It's not always good to share. Some understand and some don't when it comes to young people and certain backgrounds and experiences."

- Male, 20, Black British

"Young people need mental health support and it has to come with a confidentiality agreement because a lot of young people are scared to open up because they think it will get reported back to their parents or the police, which adds to them building it up inside."

- Female, 16, Black African

There are clear indicators that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a serious impact on young people's mental health. The Mental Health Foundation has reported that young adults were more likely to report stress arising from the pandemic than the population as a whole. Findings from the Mental Health Foundation in June 2020, revealed that 18-24 year olds were more likely than any other age group to report feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, inability to cope and suicidal thoughts/feelings. Young adults have suffered especially harsh social and economic consequences of the pandemic with severely disrupted education, diminished job prospects and reduced social contact with peers.⁹⁹ The concern was highlighted by a Service Manager for targeted youth support:

"We need to be ready and preparing ourselves for the fallout of COVID-19. All those anxieties and concerns are likely to trigger young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health."

- Service Manager

COVID-19 and the restrictions placed on social activities was having a deep impact in some young people in the study.

⁹⁶ Ardino, V. (2012) 'Offending Behaviour: the role of trauma and PTSD', European Journal of Psychotraumatology.

⁹⁷ Green, H., McGinnity, A., Meltzer, Ford, T., Goodman, R. (2005) Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain: 2004. Office for National Statistics.

⁹⁸ Children's Society (2008) The Good Childhood Inquiry: health research evidence. London: Children's Society.

⁹⁹ Mental Health Foundation (2020) Coronavirus: The divergence of mental health experiences during the pandemic. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/divergence-mental-health-experiences-during-pandemic>

Streetbase: reaching out to young people in hotspot areas

Streetbase is a peer-to-peer engagement programme developed by the National Young Advisors charity. It was first implemented in Southwark in 2009 and as a result of its success it has also been adopted in Waltham Forest.

As part of the initiative, trained Young Advisors (age 16-25) visit different locations around the borough to work with local young people 13-25 years old. The Advisors are trained in specialist areas including mental health, safeguarding and conflict training, and conduct patrols of the areas that are popular with young people such as parks and estates. All Advisors are paid the real Living Wage.

"We work really closely with our partners such as the police, social workers and ASB teams but we are not authority - we are not the police and so we can instantly break down any barriers with authority that some young people might have."

- Streetbase Coordinator, London

The team work with young people to find out about their interests and encourage them to get involved in positive activities, opportunities and support. Working in partnership with the local authority, emergency services and other key partners including charities, the team help tackle low-level crime and antisocial behaviour.

"When you speak to young people you can begin to understand the issues that they are experiencing and why it might be resulting in ASB and low-level crime. Many young people have nowhere to go and they don't feel safe at home; domestic violence is a big problem. There's a lot of hidden trauma and some young people might become withdrawn from school as a result or start hanging around with a negative influential group. The Young Advisors can offer peer-to-peer support and pick up on risks such as if they are getting into gang culture or involved in robberies. It's important to catch them early before it escalates."

- Streetbase Coordinator, London

Drugs were also a concern amongst young people and there was a shared perception that they were much easier to access than for previous generations, with many dealers now utilising the anonymity of social networking sites to sell drugs.

"Drugs are getting a lot easier to get; people are selling them on Snapchat and Instagram. Anything is easily accessible - MDMA, weed, ketamine, cocaine, balloons (nitrous oxide)."

- Male, 17, White British

"With drugs comes the culture; the antisocial behaviour, the shoplifting, the low-level crime. There's no point just having a class in school where it says 'don't do drugs', young people need more services."

- Male, 18, White British

"When it comes to drugs I've noticed there is a lot of peer pressure. I see a lot of people are taking heavier drugs now like cocaine, mushrooms, LSD and it's becoming a huge worry. There are a lot of young people getting dragged into it because of the peer pressure and it not being cool to say 'no'."

- Male, 17, White European

"It's important not to demonise young people who take drugs and help them with their addictions. It can come from having a bad home life or a need to escape mental health problems."

- Female, 15, White British



Diverting young people from custody: Restorative justice

"The goal shouldn't be to just punish but to make sure that it never happens again."

- Male, 17, White European

Restorative justice (RJ) brings those harmed by crime or conflict and those responsible for the harm into communication. It can take the form of victim-offender mediation either through direct contact between the offender and victim or indirect communication involving written letters or third parties. RJ conferences involve the discussion of the offence, its consequences and resolution with victims and perpetrators (as well as their supporters and other affected parties if relevant and appropriate), facilitated in a safe environment by a trained mediator. The process can also involve reparation or compensation where this is appropriate and agreed between offenders and their victims.

Restorative justice practices are considered to fulfil three broad aims:

- Victim satisfaction: To reduce the fear experienced by the victim and ensure they feel 'paid back' for the harm that has been done to them.
- Engagement with the perpetrator: To ensure that they are aware of the consequences of their actions, have the opportunity to make reparation, and agree a plan for their restoration in the community.
- Creation of community capital: To increase public confidence in the criminal justice system and other agencies with a responsibility for delivering a response to antisocial behaviour and crime.¹⁰⁰

Restorative justice could be a particularly effective means of repairing the harm caused in incidents involving shop workers. The Home Office Government Response to the Call for Evidence on Violence and Verbal Abuse Toward Shop Workers highlighted that many victims were dissatisfied with the response that they had received from the criminal justice system. In particular, victims reported:

'A lack of understanding of how, or the opportunity for, victims to explain how they have been affected by crimes committed against them either through a Victim Personal Statement or Business Impact Statement.'¹⁰¹

One of the key strengths of restorative justice is the high levels of victim satisfaction it provides. Victims' satisfaction with the handling of their cases is consistently higher among those who attend RJ conferences, compared to those dealt with solely by standard criminal justice processes such as the courts.¹⁰¹ Key factors underscoring high levels of victim satisfaction with RJ conferences relate to its focus on dialogue enabling the victim to ask questions about why the offence occurred and why they were the target. In addition, the victim's ability to have direct involvement in the outcome of the conference, such as an apology or reparation, has been regarded as positive by victims.

"If a young person steals from a shop they need to pay back to the community and do something constructive."

- Female, 15, White British

As well as providing consistently high levels of victim satisfaction, community-based restorative justice can be a more effective means of reducing reoffending than other criminal justice sanctions, particularly custody. Prison has been proven to be ineffective for the rehabilitation of many young adults. For example, 18-25 year olds sentenced to prison have the highest reoffending rates of any group (75% reoffend within two years of release from prison), and the highest breach rates of adults serving community sentences.¹⁰³ A Ministry of Justice evaluation of restorative justice suggested that it led to a 14% reduction in the rate of reoffending.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the use of face-to-face RJ conferences has been found to be highly cost effective: a meta-analysis of studies in the UK demonstrated that overall, the value of benefits of averted crimes is eight times the cost of delivering RJ conferences.¹⁰⁵ In other words, for every £1 spent on delivering a face-to-face meeting, £8 was saved through reductions in reoffending.

¹⁰⁰ CPS (2019) Restorative Justice: General Principles. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/restorative-justice>

¹⁰¹ Home Office (2020) Call for Evidence - Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff. Government Response. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903433/260620_Violence_and_assaults_against_shopworkers_-_Publication_of_Call_for_Evidence_Response.pdf

¹⁰² Strang et al. (2013) 'Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC) Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review', Campbell Systematic Reviews, 9(1):1-59.

¹⁰³ House of Commons Justice Committee (2016) The treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system. Seventh report of Session 2016-17. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmjust/169/169.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Justice (2010) Green Paper Evidence Report: Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/185947/green-paper-evidence-a.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Strang et al. (2013) 'Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC) Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review', Campbell Systematic Reviews, 9(1):1-59.

Recommendation

As a result of its high levels of victim satisfaction, ability to reduce reoffending, and cost-effectiveness, the use of restorative justice should be expanded with young adults at every stage of the criminal justice process

Involving young people in the commissioning and delivery of services

A recurrent theme throughout the study was the importance of involving young people in the commissioning of services. Not only would this ensure that the services and activities provided respond to their needs, but it would enhance engagement and a sense of ownership.

"Why not involve the youth and delegate the money to them? They have ideas on how to improve the community and stop youths getting involved in crime. By doing that you show them trust and give them the power to make things better for themselves."

- Male, 16, British Bangladeshi

"When decisions are made for young people it's often by people who don't understand what young people want. We are the ones experiencing it so we should have more influence and decision-making about what should happen."

- Female, 15, Black British

Recommendation

It is paramount to ensure that young people are meaningfully engaged in the commissioning of services. This should include, amongst other things, where they are located, how they are advertised, what they offer and when. There are also best practice models for involving young people in the delivery of youth services providing peer-to-peer mentoring and support.

A public health approach

A vision of moving away from criminal justice has long been mooted with 'public health' models of tackling violence, advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO), showing positive outcomes in some locations.^{106,107}

With the new public health system emerging, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that approaches to tackling violence move from a historically punitive system based within criminal justice to a preventative approach that utilises all the assets of government and civil society.¹⁰⁸

A public health approach to tackling violence means looking at violence not as isolated incidents or solely as a police enforcement problem. Instead, this approach looks at violence as a preventable consequence of a range of factors, such as adverse early-life experiences and harmful social or community experiences and influences. Pivotal to the success of reducing levels of violence in society is a long-term vision that tackles the root causes of serious violence.

Any comprehensive violence-prevention strategy must address the underlying societal factors that are well-established correlates of crime. The root causes of violent crime share similar risk factors with other types of crime and antisocial behaviour, as well as correlating with poor life outcomes such as low educational attainment, poor health and unemployment. By addressing violent crime risk factors, therefore, interventions can bring a multitude of benefits to individuals, communities and wider society.

The 'public health approach' to reducing violence typically involves four main stages: i) defining the problem by gathering and analysing sufficient data to understand the nature of the issue; ii) identifying risk and protective factors; iii) designing strategies from evidenced-based practice (based on the best available theory, data, and analysis); iv) building in ongoing evaluation to learn and improve on interventions and their outcomes.

¹⁰⁶ The use of a public health approach for violence reduction is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO): <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/violence-and-injuries/violence-and-injuries>

¹⁰⁷ BBC Panorama (July 2020) How Scotland Cut Violent Crime: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000gxgv>

¹⁰⁸ Bellis, M., Hughes, K., Perkins, C. and Bennett, A. (2012), Protecting people Promoting health. A public health approach to violence prevention for England, Liverpool: North West Public Health Observatory.

Conclusion

The economic cost of serious youth crime is significant. The Youth Violence Commission estimates that in 2018/19, serious youth violence across England and Wales generated a total economic and social cost of £1.3 billion.¹⁰⁹

The figure of £1.3 billion was calculated from: i) police costs; ii) wider criminal justice system costs; iii) health service costs; iv) costs associated with physical and emotional harm; v) victim services costs; vi) costs from lost economic output. It represents an increase of more than 50% across England and Wales since 2014/15 as a result of the recent increase in levels of serious violence between young people.

Estimating costs over a longer period of time, serious youth violence across England and Wales had a total economic and social cost of £11 billion over the past eleven years.

Cutting budgets to vital youth services is a false economy. Closing youth centres, curtailing mental health support, reducing the number of teachers, and cutting domestic violence support, places some of the most vulnerable children in the country at a heightened risk of being both a victim and perpetrator of violent crime. Any cost savings made at the front end of these cuts will be paid back at a hugely amplified rate in the form of health, social and criminal justice system costs at a later date. Much violence is avoidable, and not tackling it through root causes will severely hamper the post-pandemic economic recovery and promises to 'level up'.

¹⁰⁹ Youth Violence Commission (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report. <http://yvcommission.com/final-report/>





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