



Institute for
**Public Safety
Crime and Justice**

**Exploring Serious Violence in
Nottinghamshire – A Qualitative Study**

Second Evaluation Report

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About the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice

Established in 2014, the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice (IPSCJ) at the University of Northampton delivers high quality research and evaluation, insight, and innovation in the fields of public safety, crime and justice. The IPSCJ is situated at the interface between practice, policy, and academia, adopting an evidence-based approach to enhance public service delivery models, organisational strategy, and outcomes for service users. The IPSCJ collaborates with partner organisations at local, regional, national, and international scales to address key global challenges of the 21st century. The core mission of the IPSCJ is to support positive evidence-based policy and practice change for the benefit of society.

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- Exploring synergies within volunteering in law enforcement and public safety in the UK and Japan, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council
- National programme of research in partnership with the NPCC portfolio for Citizens in Policing, funded by the Home Office Police Transformation Fund

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- Organisational development programme with the East Midlands Specialist Operations Unit (EMSOU), funded by EMSOU
- Place-based leadership development in Kenya and Uganda, funded by the Danish Institute Against Torture
- Workforce engagement in Leicestershire Police and Northamptonshire Police, funded by Leicestershire Police and Northamptonshire Police

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- Understanding serious violence in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire, funded by Nottinghamshire Office of Police and Crime Commissioner
- Evaluation of Women's Health Services for Perinatal Female Offenders in HMP Peterborough, funded by NHS England and NHS Improvement – East of England

Executive Summary

Serious violence is complex and has many associated factors shaping its nature and prevalence across different communities. These factors include adverse childhood experiences, educational attainment, school exclusion (internal and external), mental wellbeing, public health, drug and alcohol misuse, employment and household status, poverty and deprivation, environmental and social contexts among many others. However, it is critical to recognise that communities are changing in responses to new and emerging societal conditions, including economic fluctuations and austerity, changes to levels and the nature of employment, behaviour and attitudes towards drugs and alcohol usage, the use and importance of technology within everyday lives including social media, social norms, attitudes towards inequality and diversity including racial disparities, and anxiety for the future.

This report presents the findings from a qualitative study of serious violence in Nottinghamshire, following a process evaluation of violence reduction interventions reported in March 2021. Based on the information from the NNVRU Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), the aim of the study was to explore a series of issues identified in the SNA to further understandings of serious violence and inform future priorities of the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Unit (NNVRU).

A series of themes were identified in the available evidence and are used to structure the content of this report. The themes identified were: victims-perpetrators; young people; special educational needs and disabilities; culture and emerging communities; and partnerships, partners and place. A range of methods were used to engage with different groups; including interviews, focus groups, and creative techniques. All data were transcribed verbatim and were thematically analysed in the following six steps: 'familiarisation' through reading and re-reading transcripts, 'code generation', 'theme identification', 'review' of themes and codes, 'labelling themes', and 'report writing' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Overall, the study engaged with 53 stakeholders and professionals (including commissioners, service providers and community champions) and 42 residents (including young people and service users).

The following information includes key points from the respective chapters in the report:

Victims - Perpetrators

- There is widespread recognition that very often perpetrators of serious violence are also themselves victims, that in many cases they have experienced significant trauma as children and young people, and in some cases that they have been directly victims of serious violence and exploitation themselves. This conflicts against a simple narrative of 'victims', 'perpetrators', and 'community' as being detached and distinct categories, instead seeing that many individuals need to be engaged and understood through all three lenses.
- Issues of identity, inability to effectively communicate, and perspectives of injustice, are all seen as key drivers of serious violence. Identity impacts in many ways, but key elements are in the sense of 'standing', 'self-worth', and 'recognition' that involvement in gangs, criminality, and violence can bring.
- Particularly in the Nottingham City context, but seen to be developing into the County context, the area is seen as having had a quite long and entrenched problems with organised gangs, criminal involvement and exploitation of young people, drugs markets, and sexual exploitation.
- Drugs markets were seen as fuelling serious violence in a variety of ways, including in terms of rivalries between competitive supply networks, and also in the sense of increased vulnerability to victimisation that handling drugs or large amounts of cash brings for the young people involved, which in turn drives knife possession and other escalators of violence.
- Linking to the above reflections on 'root causes', there is strong support for the VRU emphasis on services being trauma-informed, reflecting a clear consensus that trauma, and particularly

elements of early trauma in childhood, have a marked effect on vulnerability to involvement in serious violence later in life.

Young People

- Interestingly, there are differing views and areas of concern for different groups, there is a definite sense that serious violence is viewed through different lenses depending on the position and distance from the problem.
- Large and sometimes subtle definitional differences were identified between practitioners and young people for issues relating to serious violence. For example, issues of language and definitions varied in the use of terms such as “gang” to describe a group of young people.
- The complex nature of the issue of violence and its relation to young people was exposed, where background information is unknown to the professionals who then interact with the young person, where the young person is seen as being responsible for his or her behaviour yet they are immersed in, an often, chaotic environment.
- Information sharing and policies relating to it were raised throughout most of the practitioner interviews, being one of the key issues that impacts the ability of the different agencies charged with helping young people to deliver real quality outcomes.
- The need to improve the advocacy and support available to young people across place-based systems was highlighted by several practitioners, linked with the need to have better relationships and understandings of communities across Nottinghamshire.
- Young people described their lived experiences of being a young person in Nottinghamshire and how they understand and feel about the threat or reality of serious violence as a constant concern. When young people are engaged in the process of understanding the issues it is quite inspiring to see the depth and breadth of the knowledge and experience that they can contribute.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- There was recognition amongst participants of there being a disproportionate number of those with SEND within the justice service and at risk of being drawn into Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation, gangs, radicalisation or other types of violence as a victim or perpetrator.
- Participants of this research viewed exclusion of children from school as a strong risk factor and there was particular concern over the readiness of some Academies to exclude young people who were being disruptive and that they are centred towards academic results which can mean that their culture is not conducive to those with diverse needs. There were also concerns around the safeguarding of children that are ‘off-rolled’ or excluded as they may ‘disappear’ or be out of view to authorities because it is not known what provision they are in, they are being home schooled or they are on part-time timetables.
- In terms of Speech Language and Communication Needs, it was indicated that the ‘really little ones’ tend to be picked up if they have speech or expressive language difficulties but not necessarily those that are showing poor comprehension, for example not following instruction or understanding. This is perhaps because difficulties with expressive language tend to be more obvious.
- Professionals commented that it can be difficult to get access to specialist services, there can be long waiting lists and referrals can be bounced back, which can also discourage future

referrals for children with similar issues. A parent advocate highlighted the irony that if your child comes into contact with the Criminal Justice System, they can get a speech and language assessment, however, if you have a child that you suspect of having SLCN you may have to pay to get an assessment.

- Participants raised concerns that parents and carers are not getting enough information and support to navigate the issues they are facing with their child or the system to gain the best outcomes for their child. Also talked about was a need for support for adoptive parents who are navigating a world of bringing up a child with complex needs. A key issue raised was providing parents and carers receiving support from an independent source, and that some of the roles that are designed to provide independent support may have difficulty in being entirely independent from the system.

Culture and Emerging Communities

- This research has highlighted some key terms and definitions that could be revisited and better defined. For example, the terms “new” and “emergent”, what do we mean when we talk about these. How should a “new” community be defined, is it in terms of the time that the community has been in the county and if it is when is this measured from? The term “emergent” may be a better way to define newly identified communities as this could be adopted in a more flexible way as a community emerges due to its size and so comes to notice or, as is the case for some of the communities identified above, they have emerged due to increasing and, therefore, noticeable issues. The use of language is critical, as participants and service providers reacted differently to how communities were being positioned which then informed how they would engage with the study.
- There were and are clearly different issues for different communities when we look at serious violence, which potentially identifies issues of *overt* violence that communities will engage with and discuss within forums with organisations and *hidden* violence that is beneath the surface and not readily discussed. This can then become a barrier to engagement and identifies the need for long and lasting relationship and trust building.
- The diverse nature of communities themselves is an issue for consideration, as outlined above this can be generational, where the next generation of a settled community adopt a different set of values and social norms and so different issues arise. However, this was also highlighted in respect of communities which are identified as one thing but come from different geographies and have different concerns and expectations.
- There is a clear drive and motivation from all organisations involved in working with diverse communities to deepen and develop greater understanding. However, this must be seen as an ongoing and relentless journey. This should also be seen as a two-way process with service providers deepening their understanding of the community whilst also allowing and inviting the community to ask questions and seek information from the service provider. It is only through developing this depth of understanding that we can build trust that then enables communities to be part of the decision making and solution architecture.

Partnerships, Providers, Place

- Perspectives across stakeholders and partner agencies reflect many positives relating to the development of services and joint working. This is however situated within concerns regarding changes in serious violence, and perceptions of a worsening picture. These concerns, from the

perspective of practitioners working across serious violence, present a picture of growing complexity, and a sense of increasingly severe violence and exploitation.

- For many professionals working across a range of different settings supporting victims, working with perpetrators, and commissioning services, social media is seen as a significant driver of patterns of serious violence, and as a critical area that the partnership needs to get better at understanding, and also, in turn, at potentially positively influencing.
- There are a number of complex, interwoven underlying reasons for gaps in knowledge and under-reporting. Some forms of violence and exploitation are inherently 'hidden' in their nature, such as domestic violence and abuse of children. In some instances, acts of violence are viewed to be responded to differently by professionals, sometimes less formally, resulting in some cases to them being less likely to be placed on formal record.
- There are perspectives that the geography of serious violence is changing, with increasing challenges in many areas across the County, and that this presents some challenges for what is seen as being the legacy of focusing of resources primarily within the City. There are also views that some issues and patterns of violence and exploitation may well have been existent in the County previously, but there were not the mechanisms to identify them and direct individuals towards services.

What can be done to address serious violence?

A series of suggestions, issues and themes were identified in the analysis to address serious violence, including:

- **Social media** – The research points to the critical role increasingly being played by online contexts and social media, as an enabler of serious violence and exploitation, and in some cases directly as the site of that exploitation (CCE, CSE, and abuse).
- **County and City** – In broad terms, there is a sentiment that the City has a stronger suite of both preventative and specialist service provision than the County.
- **Defining and understanding diverse and 'emerging' communities** - There is some welcoming of what professionals perceive as increased awareness and engagement of difference and inequality, and also welcoming of investment and support in their organisations. This research has highlighted some key terms and definitions that could be revisited and better defined.
- **Early intervention and engaging with 'root causes'** – Particularly in respect of building future models of prevention and a whole population, public health approach, there is a need to get beyond 'treating symptoms', and beyond more reactive ('after the event') models of service provision, to also develop understandings of root causes.
- **Being Trauma-informed** – Again resonant with the current strategy and work of the VRU, there is a strong consensus to continue to build models of service provision and community partnership that are trauma-informed.
- **Creating positive, alternative pathways and developing more opportunities for positive activities** - Representing a particular current strength of several voluntary, charity organisations, is the creation of opportunities for positive, alternate, believable futures, through a longevity of personal, stable, committed, professional relationships is crucial.
- **Enabling schools to identify and meet the needs of those with SEND** – The research points to the benefits of increasing awareness amongst school staff about how particular Special Needs and Disabilities might present such as ADHD, ASD, developmental disorder and social communication difficulties in order that they are able to identify whether children need assessment or support.

- **Gender-informed models of practice** – whilst it is recognised that aspects of ‘negative’ or ‘toxic’ masculinities are a driver underpinning a sizeable proportion of serious violence, there is also recognition of a growing involvement of young females.
- **Focusing on transition points in education** - It is key that focus is given to transition points particularly for example, from primary to secondary or if a child is moving from mainstream to an Alternative Provision and appropriate assessments are carried for children who are transitioning from one setting to another that are displaying ‘disruptive’ behaviours or behaviour that suggests they may struggle to cope in a new environment.
- **Challenges for achieving a new approach for victims and perpetrators in the CJS** - Fundamental reform of the CJS is realistically beyond the bounds of local strategy and intervention, but it has been a consistent theme across interviews with service providers and stakeholders that elements of policing, and particular courts and prisons, practice can tend to compound problems and manifest further trauma.
- **Quality assurance** – There are calls across several interviews with service providers for the VRU to establish a clearer ‘guidance’ and ‘standard’ in terms of service providers, amidst concerns that some providers, particularly some new entrants, do not necessarily carry the capability or professional expertise to deal safely and competently with individuals who are vulnerable and who have complex needs, that they are seeking to work with.
- **Commissioning and governance models** – A key priority is seen to be continuing to develop new models of commissioning, and particularly ones which nurture a long-term, stable development of services, and which minimise an unhealthy sense of ‘competition’ between providers.
- **A vibrant, diverse, innovative voluntary sector** – There is recognition of recent changes in respect of a more positive engagement and communication across voluntary sector services, and a sense of greater recognition and respect.
- **Working together** – the ongoing development and maturation of partnership working is foregrounded across many of the interviews with service providers and stakeholders.

Conclusions

The purpose of a broad-ranging, and qualitative research exercise of this nature was never to displace the importance of quantitative data or to replace the value of more specifically targeted research and evaluations, but rather to complement, enhance, and contribute alongside them. To play a part, alongside those other elements of evidence, data, and research, in producing a holistic picture, which will in turn help underpin the strategic, developmental work of the VRU partnership.

One of the cross-cutting findings throughout the chapters of this research report is a recognition that there are ‘gaps’ in data and knowledge, and that there are some gaps in professional focus, awareness, practice, and understandings. A key part of a broad, qualitative research project of this nature is to begin to explore where those gaps may lie, and to help create a ‘whole picture’ of serious violence. What has been revealed is a picture which, in very many respects, is supportive of the strategic direction and vision of the VRU, and which sees the development of partnership working, the engagement of voluntary sector, and the quality of specialist service provision as aspects which, whilst still needing further strategic work, nevertheless are all on an improving trajectory. A key element of future commissioning and partnership development is recognised to be the development of role and effectiveness of ‘mainstream’ front-line practitioners. Working in and with diverse (and sometimes reluctant, suspicious, and discriminated against) communities needs practitioners – both specialist

services but also importantly 'mainstream' - who have a wide and deep skill-set and high levels of resilience.

Linked to considerations of commissioning is the concept of 'governance'. Structures such as the VRU were seen in some practitioner narratives as being like an 'umbrella'; sitting above but understanding and co-ordinating all the different strands of work that are ongoing. The VRU have stated the centrality of a trauma-based approach to tackling serious violence, an approach that has been consistently and widely supported by the participants in this research. From a psychological standpoint, people struggle with complex issues as they are seeking simple solutions. However, simple solutions are only applicable to linear based simple causes. The trauma-based approach, however, seeks to take a step back from this and instead to look at the broader, social, complex system that sits beneath, yet drives these linear outcomes.

The innovative, grassroots, locally driven models of service provision, intervention, and support delivered across the voluntary sector are a key element to be nurtured, in terms of this approach. Whilst the research identifies the need for robustness, standards, quality assurance, and governance safeguards across those who work with serious violence and exploitation, it also champions the enormous value of fostering new, innovative, local (and often lived-experience based) services.

Rather than provide a detailed list of recommendations, it is suggested that the report should be used as a reference point, as a mirror to hold up against SNA findings and VRU strategy, and as an enrichment of considerations across arenas of commissioning and practice. The report reflects what can be gained from engaging deeper perspectives and from a qualitative approach to developing insight and understandings, and hopefully will signal future work of a similar nature.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of residents and professionals who gave their time to share their views and experiences of serious violence to support this project.

These contributions were made during a period of significant challenge for communities and services, and we are privileged to have met so many dedicated people during the project.

We are humbled by the passion, commitment, and desire of so many to both experience a positive change within Nottinghamshire and, perhaps most encouragingly, to be *a part of* that change.

Thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'M' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line extending to the right.

Dr Matthew Callender (on behalf of the Research Team).

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing Serious Violence

There is no specific definition of serious violence: whilst the Home Office's Serious Violence Strategy (2018)¹ covers homicide, gun crime, knife crime and robbery, other organisations have sought a wider definition of serious violence. For example, Greater Manchester's Serious Violence Action Plan (n.d.)² includes the following crimes as 'serious violence', violence with and without injury, domestic abuse, homicide, stalking and harassment, weapon offences, robbery, sexual offences and public order offences such as inciting religious or racial hatred. A wider definition of serious violence such as Greater Manchester's (n.d.)³ will be adopted for this report as it also aligns more closely with the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Unit's (NNVRU) categorisation of serious violence.

Serious violence is complex and has many associated factors shaping its nature and prevalence across different communities. These factors include adverse childhood experiences, educational attainment, school exclusion (internal and external), mental wellbeing, public health, drug and alcohol misuse, employment and household status, poverty and deprivation, environmental and social contexts among many others. However, it is critical to recognise that communities are changing in responses to new and emerging societal conditions, including economic fluctuations and austerity, changes to levels and the nature of employment, behaviour and attitudes towards drugs and alcohol usage, the use and importance of technology within everyday lives including social media, social norms, attitudes towards inequality and diversity including racial disparities, and anxiety for the future. Recent research published by the Home Office (2019)⁴ on serious violence highlights the value of universal and targeted approaches to respond to this complexity.

Recent trends in England and Wales show that whilst overall recorded crime continues to fall, there has been a noted increase in serious violence since 2014. While some of this increase may be related to changes in how police forces record crime, it is agreed that some of these increases are genuine, including a rise in offences involving knives and firearms. National statistics demonstrate how crime has risen in homicide, gun crime, knife crime and robbery (HM Government, 2018)⁵ and the Modern Crime Prevention Strategy (Home Office, 2016)⁶ identifies 6 key drivers: opportunity, character, effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System (CJS), profit, drugs and alcohol.

Understanding the drivers that underpin these changes are a national priority, as confirmed in the Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018)¹ where four key themes are outlined: 1. Tackling county lines and misuse of drugs; 2. Early intervention and prevention; 3. Supporting communities and partnerships; and 4. An effective law enforcement and criminal justice response. There are a series of relevant strategies and guidance relating to serious violence, with much focus on the county lines,

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf

² https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/3106/gm_violence_reduction_plan_final_amends_final.pdf

³ Ibid

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819840/analysis-of-indicators-of-serious-violence-horr110.pdf

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509831/6.1770_Modern_Crime_Prevention_Strategy_final_WEB_version.pdf

involving the criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults (Home Office, 2020⁷). Home Office (2016⁸) priorities relating towards ending gang violence and exploitation remain key considerations guiding practice. Tackling serious violence also features as being of international importance, where the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals specify violence prevention targets within a framework that tackles poverty, inequalities, and the protection of human rights (Middleton and Sheppard, 2018).

The Violence Prevention Alliance⁹ is based around three theoretical models: the typology of violence, the public health approach (PHA) and the ecological framework. The typology of violence helps to define the problem of violence, categorised by self-directed, interpersonal and collective types. The PHA has been promoted as it offers practitioners and policy makers a guide towards planning programmes, policies and investigation, organised into 4 iterative steps: surveillance, identifying risk and protective factors, developing and evaluating interventions and implantation. Finally, the ecological framework helps to account for the complexities of factors at different levels, namely individual, relationships, community and society.

A public health approach to tackling serious violence has been identified as being most successful in Chicago and Glasgow. Operation Ceasefire¹⁰ in Chicago had an aim to prevent violence before it occurred, treating violence as an epidemic disease, where shootings reduced significantly since the project commenced and is now being replicated across America¹¹. The approach inspired Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit¹², where the number of homicides has decreased significantly, and had influenced the formation of Violence Reduction Units across England. Violence Reduction Units were set up to bring together organisations as partners working with each other to tackle the issue of violence at a system-based level with a public health approach.

1.2 Serious Violence in Nottinghamshire

The NNVRU (2020) Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) is a comprehensive overview of violence in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County based on available evidence, which provided the IPSCJ with an advantageous starting point to investigate several of its key findings and observations to grow the evidence base concerning the lived experiences of violence by different people living within different localities to inform understanding within an ecological framework.

The most recent update from the Strategic Needs Assessment by the NNVRU shows that 82.6% of all serious violence offences in the NNVRU area were categorised as violence against the person offences (Domestic Violence, Violence related to the Night-Time Economy, and General Violence). Offences related to 'Possession of Articles with a blade or point' increased by 3.5% compared to the average over the previous three years. Whilst the total number of offences was 10.8% lower, the proportion of serious violence offences which involved a knife or sharp object increased slightly in the last year.

⁷<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines>

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/491699/Ending_gang_violence_and_Exploitation_FINAL.pdf

⁹ <https://www.who.int/violenceprevention/en/>

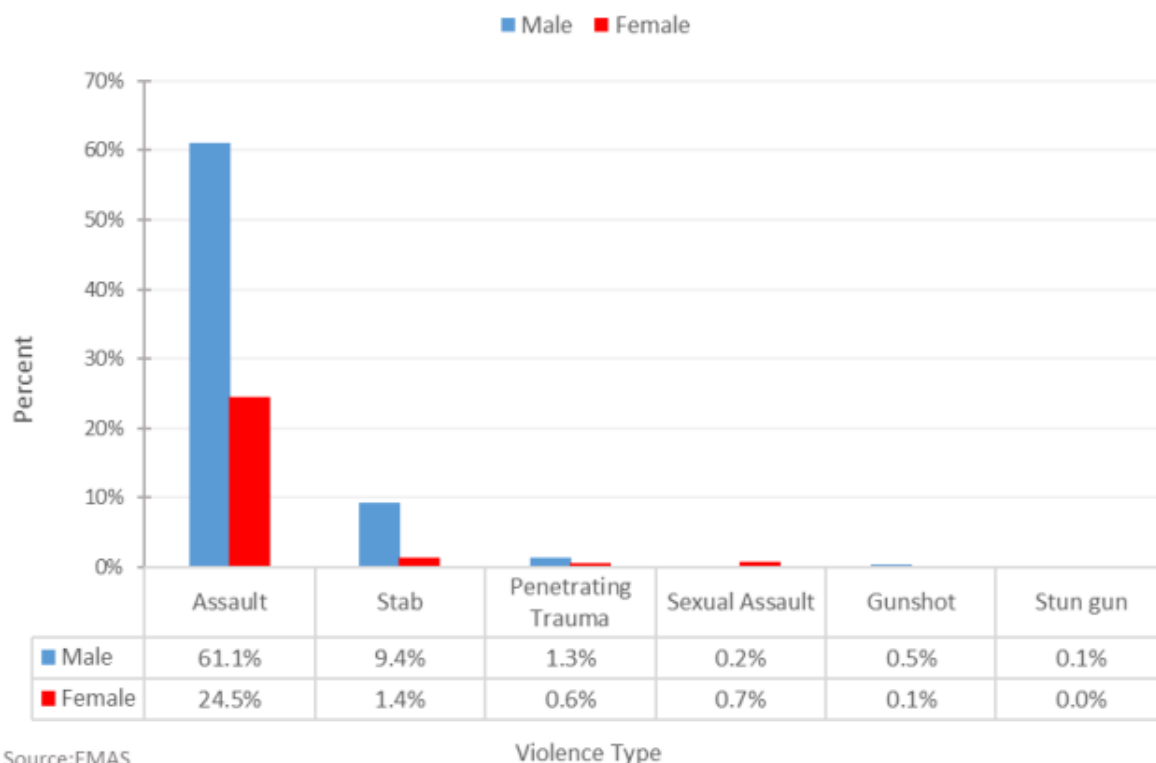
¹⁰ <https://1vp6u534z5kr2qmr0w11t7ub-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Skogan-2009-summary.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention/>

¹² <http://www.svru.co.uk/>

Furthermore, in the highest harm violence against the person offences (those excluding ABH) more than one in five offences involved a knife. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of ambulance callouts by type of violence and shows the gender split per offence.

Figure 1.1 Ambulance callouts by type of violence, Jan 2018 - Sept 2020. Source: NNVRU's SNA Part 1, Page 62, 2021. Data originally sourced from East Midlands Ambulance Services (EMAS). Reproduced.



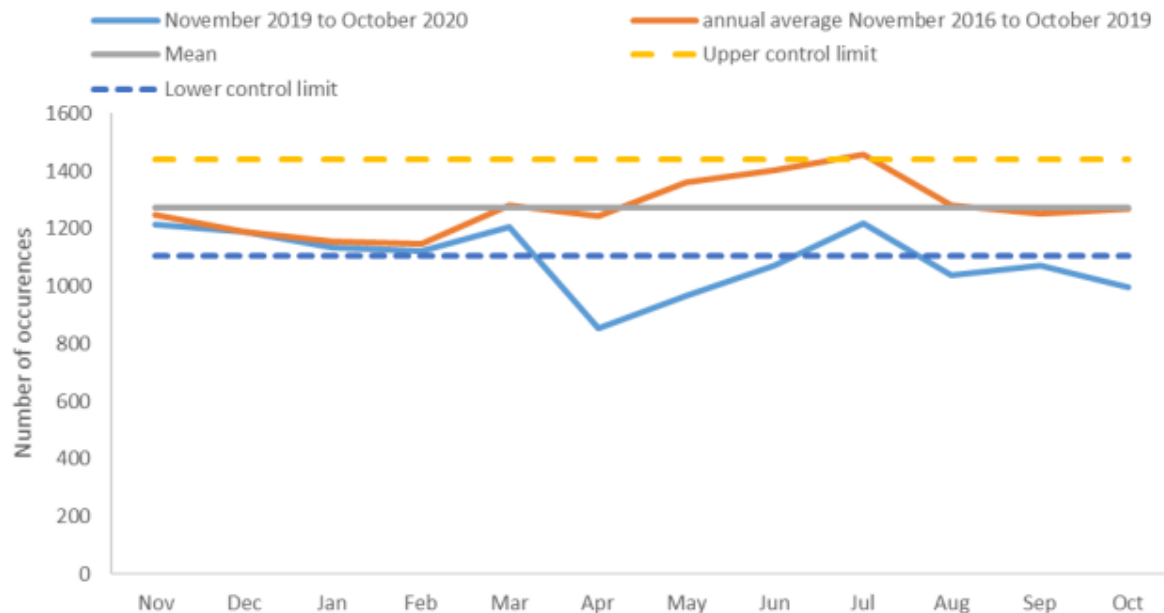
As highlighted in Part One of the most recent SNA (NNVRU, 2021¹³), trends in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire show that key observations are:

- The number of serious violence offences recorded between November 2019 and October 2020 was 14.4% lower than the annual average recorded in the 2020 SNA.
- From November 2019 to March 2020, the number of offences broadly followed the annual average from the 2020 SNA. In April, as the first national lockdown due to COVID began, the number of offences was 31.3% lower than average.
- Offence numbers increased as lockdown restrictions were released but remained at least 14.5% lower than average until October 2020.
- From April to October 2020, the number of offences was statistically significantly lower than the long-term mean in every month except August.
- The largest annual reductions in crimes related to the Night-Time Economy which were 43.6% lower than the annual average from the 2020 SNA and 75-85% lower during the first national lockdown, reflecting the restrictions placed on the hospitality industry during the lockdown. The number of offences in every month of 2020 were statistically significantly lower than the average from November 2016 to October 2019.

¹³ https://54a5c064-2543-4db6-9020-3690be3a7dcf.filesusr.com/ugd/3c0b8b_d4549af081c04cabbeaa8d48892c8f63.pdf

- Weapon possession offences saw a small increase compared to the annual average from the 2020 SNA, but this is likely to reflect changes in policing during the pandemic.
- The largest falls in serious violence are concentrated in the City and town centres, but some more rural and suburban areas have seen increases in violent crime.

Figure 1.2 Serious violence November 2019 to October 2019 and average per month November 2016 to October 2019. Source: NVVRU SNA, Part 1, Page 74, 2021. Reproduced.



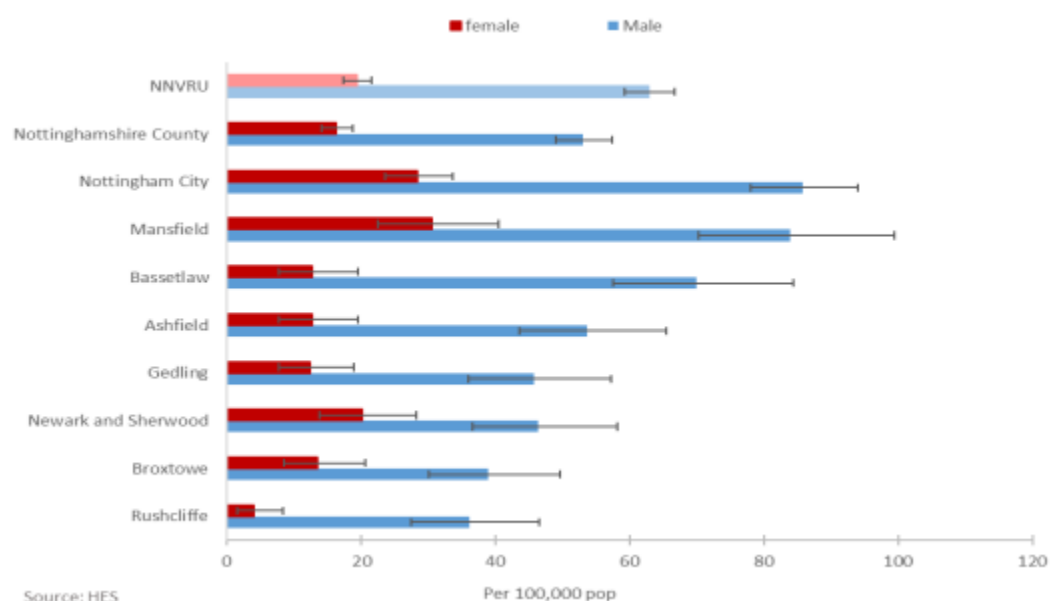
The SNA also highlighted the impact of Covid-19. As shown in Figure 2, during the Covid-19 first lockdown period (March/April 2020), offences fell, however by July 2020 the level of offences had returned to pre-pandemic rates (2020 SNA¹⁴). Furthermore, it is unlikely any falls in serious violence offences would be sustained ‘post-pandemic’, instead reflecting the impact of temporary lockdown rules (SNA, 2021¹⁵). The SNA suggested a multitude of ways in which Covid-19 had impacted on serious violence both directly and indirectly – such as higher unemployment levels creating greater deprivation, and young people spending more time online and involved in social media, which seems linked to serious violence. The current study also explored the impact of Covid-19.

Figure 3 highlights how hospital admissions for violence vary across the NNVRU’s area and are significantly lower for females than for males, a national trend. The impact of ‘place’ is explored further on in the current report.

¹⁴ https://www.nottsvru.co.uk/_files/ugd/3c0b8b_234f9887709a4332be6f1effc1e801d3.pdf

¹⁵ https://54a5c064-2543-4db6-9020-3690be3a7dcf.filesusr.com/ugd/3c0b8b_d4549af081c04cabbeaa8d48892c8f63.pdf

Figure 1.3 Hospital admissions for violence by local authority across 2017/18 - 2019/20. Source: NNVRU SNA, Part 2, Page 24, 2021. Data originally sourced from Hospital Episode Statistics. Reproduced.



1.3 Study Approach

A series of themes were identified in the available evidence and are used to structure the content of this report. The themes identified were: victims-perpetrators; young people; special educational needs and disabilities; culture and emerging communities; and partnerships, partners and place. In partnership with the NNVRU, the IPSCJ identified people across Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire who could provide further insight into these different themes. Participants were invited to participate by email and were provided with information about the study. In some aspects of the study, particularly, in culture and emerging communities, the IPSCJ reached out to organisations directly who they had identified via online research as being representatives of particular communities. Overall, the study engaged with **53** stakeholders and professionals (including commissioners, service providers and community champions) and **42** residents (including young people and service users).

Participants that were invited to participate included:

- Service providers of services to those that have experienced serious violence.
- Schools involved in the violence prevention initiative, Mentors in Violence.
- Community police officers
- Members of the Youth Justice Service
- Schools that provide Alternative Provision
- Further education providers
- Support networks and forums that provide support to parents and carers, either for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities or those whose children have been involved in, or a victim of, violence
- Members of CAMHS

- Groups and representatives that represent particular emerging communities.
- Local Authority members that involved in the education system or support services for example, for those with disabilities or Looked After Children
- Youth and community groups.

A range of methods were used to engage with different groups; including interviews, focus groups, and creative techniques such as drawing. Interviews were conducted largely over the phone or on Teams particularly with service providers and key stakeholders due to Covid-19 restrictions especially in the earlier months of the project. However, there was some face-to-face work conducted particularly focus groups with young people towards the end of the project. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and all data were transcribed verbatim and were thematically analysed in the following six steps: 'familiarisation' through reading and re-reading transcripts, 'code generation', 'theme identification', 'review' of themes and codes, 'labelling themes', and 'report writing' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding of the transcripts was conducted by four researchers who had an agreed understanding of the 'codes/ themes' identified.

The transcripts were coded in relation to the following themes:

- Victims-perpetrators;
- Young people;
- Special educational needs and disabilities;
- Culture and emerging communities;
- Partnerships, partners and place.

It is important to note that often themes had cross-cutting issues and this will be evident when reading the chapters.

The report is structured into the following sections:

- **Chapter 2 Victims - Perpetrators** – Reflecting upon the blurred line dividing 'victim' and 'perpetrator' of serious violence.
- **Chapter 3 Young People** – Exploring serious violence from the perspectives of young people and those that work with them.
- **Chapter 4 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)** – Considering the way serious violence relates to individuals with SEND.
- **Chapter 5 Culture and Emerging Communities** – Looking at serious violence from the viewpoint of various cultures and ethnicities.
- **Chapter 6 Partnerships, Providers and Place** – Exploring how partnerships and providers work together to tackle serious violence, and the impact place has on the problems present and services provided.
- **Chapter 7 What can be done to address serious violence?** – Identifies key themes that emerged from the data, with these themes being located in relation to the ecological framework.
- **Chapter 8 Conclusions** – Provides conclusions to inform the future work of the NNVRU. This chapter builds upon the recommendations shared in the first interim evaluation report in March.

2. Victims - Perpetrators

This chapter explores themes relating to both victims and to perpetrators of serious violence. Whilst many victims of serious violence are not perpetrators, and some perpetrators are not also victims, there is evident overlap in many of the issues raised across the qualitative research, and therefore the analysis has not separated out 'victims' and 'perpetrators' into two separate sections, but rather deals with them together as one collective chapter. The chapter also considers issues of gender and serious violence.

2.1 Context

Much of the content of this chapter reflects the focus of front-line practitioners and of professionals across the partnership on what might be seen as 'deeper', 'environmental', 'causative', 'structural', 'strategic' elements in respect of serious violence. There is an emphasis on the need to think beyond particular categories and contexts, and sometimes beyond the detail of the 'here and now'. To see in the broader sense what drives serious violence, and how services can be strategically improved, over the long-term, and to better meet needs of victims and perpetrators. Issues of 'identity' are foregrounded, as are the intertwined elements of CCE, CSE, gangs, and illegal drugs markets.

Being trauma-informed, the value (and challenges) of early intervention, and the need for positive and ongoing engagement and opportunities to 're-engage' in society are key themes across the interviews with providers and partner agencies, as are reflections on the considerable challenges for some elements of the wider partnership to become trauma-informed or public-health based in their approach, in particular the criminal justice system. The importance of secondary trauma, and trauma at the whole-community level, are drawn out by many of the interviews.

In respect of gender and age of perpetrators of serious violence, the SNA data reflects a propensity for males (82%, page 87, SNA 2021 Part 1) to account for a significant proportion of incidents. However, data also reflects that whilst younger men and boys may represent the largest numbers, a sizeable proportion of serious violence relates to older perpetrators, and a significant (and perceived to be increasing) proportion relates to females. The most recent SNA reflects that the age profile of offenders has shifted *slightly* in the last year towards an older profile, with the highest proportion of offenders in the 30-34 year group in the last year compared to the 25-29 age group in the 2020 SNA (page 87, SNA 2021 Part 1). The SNAs also reflect themes of developing concern regarding female involvement in, and being perpetrators of, serious violence. The most recent SNA found that 34% of perpetrators lived in Nottingham City, 54% lived in Nottinghamshire and 12% resided outside the area (page 85, SNA 2021 Part 1). In respect of victimisation, young men are again the predominant category in the data – for example more than 70% of knife-crime victims were male (page 89, SNA 2021 Part 2) - but females account for a significant proportion of victims, and clearly particularly so in some elements of serious violence and exploitation, such as CSE, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence. 80% of victims were from White ethnic groups (page 89, SNA 2021 Part 2).

2.2 Views on Serious Violence

When considering issues of perpetrators and of victims, and in particular the services being developed to meet the needs of both groups, there is widespread recognition that very often perpetrators of serious violence are also themselves victims. That in many cases they have experienced significant trauma as children and young people, and in some cases that they have been directly victims of serious violence and exploitation themselves. This mitigates against a simple narrative of ‘victims’, ‘perpetrators’, and ‘community’ as being detached and distinct categories, instead seeing that many individuals need to be engaged and understood through all three lenses. One practitioner with considerable experience of working with young people impacted by serious violence reflects:

There’s definitely a need for greater understanding of developmental trauma and how that impacts young people, right down to brain development and the social development and how they see other people. And they are always in that threat mode, they are very much often victims as well as perpetrators, aren’t they? I think it’s important to see that and to see people as children.

Identity and communication

Issues of identity, inability to effectively communicate, and perspectives of injustice, are all seen as key drivers of serious violence. Identity impacts in many ways, but key elements are in the sense of ‘standing’, ‘self-worth’, and ‘recognition’ that involvement in gangs, criminality, and violence can bring. ‘Status’ is seen as fundamental, and can often associate with financial wealth, which in turn can steer young people in a direction of drugs and other criminal activity as a perceived route to making money, set alongside internalised perceptions that the paths to legitimate achievement of wealth and status are blocked, or are difficult for them to navigate. Desire for ‘connectivity’ with others and ‘belonging’ can also associate with contexts of gangs, CCE, and CSE. Practitioners and professional stakeholders working across a range of different aspects of serious violence spoke of what they saw as this critical role for ‘identity’ as a root cause for violence and exploitation.

Either violence being driven by a sense of wanting to belong and conform and do things to get noticed or violence as a way of wanting to assert and establish identity because ‘I’m being picked on.

It’s really just status related. It’s about people’s reputation, their perceived reputation in front of others and their credibility and the way they are seen by others, and their values really are centred around that. You could call it toxic masculinity; you could call it just unhealthy values but that’s what it’s centred around mainly. And then you’ve got gang related issues around that. But I would say the status thing covers all bases really.

And it’s that sort of thing, kids get themselves embroiled into so much just to prove that they have some sort of standing, I think sometimes.

Yes, and children perhaps increasingly feeling isolated and separate and feeling like - so then there maybe is the search for something that is meeting their needs and they again become exposed to people who want to exploit vulnerability.

It’s this mentality of an eye for an eye and it is what it is, and his future is written. And it’s challenging that mindset because these young people that are in these gangs or groups, it’s

very much they follow the rules of that group or that culture of whatever it is they are part of and that's all that matters. It's their religion so it gives them that purpose. So, it's about challenging those beliefs, kind of unpicking for them actually, 'What is important for you?' But a lot of them won't talk about it, that's another obstacle.

It's a two-pronged issue, so thinking about the issue from a personal point of view, from the person, from the individual, it's the status issue - the insecurity of knowing where you fit in and the person that you want to be, how you see yourself. And then the societal issue is that there isn't enough legitimate opportunity - getting an education and doing work is the main issue from a societal point of view.

Associating with issues of identity there are also dynamics of 'lack of cohesion', 'negativity to difference', and 'hate', that lead to identities shaped around 'othering' and 'festering into an in-group, out-group dynamic', whether this be along lines of geography, race, religion, class, age, gender, or a range of other dynamics. Cultures of distrust and antipathy are rife, in part fuelled by little mixing or communication between groups. Structural inequalities, racial inequality, sexual inequality, and other societal dynamics and injustice feed into such perspectives. Such dynamics exist not only between individuals and communities, but also in respect of some agencies, particularly the police. There are calls across professionals working in a range of different contexts around serious violence for more communication, relationship building, and restorative conversation, to seek to reverse what is seen as a worrying trend of such hostile inter-group dynamics worsening.

We are just going to have more people that are afraid of the people that they are living next to and distrustful of not only authority but anyone of any other colour, religion, or the post code.

But it all comes down to relationships and communication and the interactions that people have, that's what I would say. If you were to break down serious violence, it's an inability to communicate healthily. And a sense of manifesting in other things, yes. It's looking at all that learned behaviour, why do people respond in that way to whatever it is that's triggering them to act that way. And as I said at the start of the conversation, it goes back to status and ego and then it's just one big circle really. We're all just putting plasters on what's going on, on the outside.

What I'd love to do is be able to facilitate more conversations between young people or just community members and police officers and to facilitate conversations so that people can start just putting names to faces and unveiling the unhealthy stereotypes that maybe fall towards authority figures. So more restorative justice, but not restorative justice between perpetrators and offenders, just more restorative conversations between community members and groups and trying to embed more conversations to be had between people.

Gangs, Drugs, CCE and CSE

Particularly in the Nottingham City context, but seen to be developing into the County context, the area is seen as having had a quite long and entrenched problems with organised gangs, criminal involvement and exploitation of young people, drugs markets, and sexual exploitation. There are perspectives that sometimes in the past these elements have been considered separately in terms of policy and practice, whereas in reality, on the ground and in the lives of young people, they very often interlink. Much CCE (and to a lesser extent, some CSE) occurs within the context of gangs, organised crime networks, and drugs markets, and a sizeable bulk of gang activity relates directly to drugs supply.

Drugs markets are seen as fuelling serious violence in a variety of ways, including in terms of rivalries between competitive supply networks, and also in the sense of increased vulnerability to victimisation that handling drugs or large amounts of cash brings for the young people involved, which in turn drives knife possession and other escalators of violence. Practitioners working directly with young people involved in gangs, CCE, and violence, recognise this direct, often very 'practical', link between carrying weapons and involvement in the drugs market.

I think with drugs it's if you are selling drugs, you are - if you are holding money or drugs then somebody knows you are selling drugs and they are going to potentially target you to take those drugs off you or take that money off you. Therefore, the person selling the drugs or holding the cash will have a weapon either on them or nearby that they can access so that they don't lose that amount of drugs or money. Usually the drugs aren't theirs, they are somebody else's, so therefore they are in debt to that other person if they get attacked, you know.

Elements of drugs usage are also seen to link directly to issues of mental health, and in some cases to propensity to violence.

We look at trends. At the moment there's a trend of shisha pens, THC and mamba, young kids smoking. But by the time they are smoking them at 14, 15, the Mamba is having such an impact on their mental health it's changing their brain chemistry. The music that combines with it, the drill music and all the rest of it, all these factors contribute for their behaviour, the way they are going to start behaving and get caught up into the gangs and the world of getting involved in county lines, child criminal exploitation.

There are also perceptions across professionals that the broader picture of organised crime and drugs supply is changing, partly relating to changes in technology, and partly to culture in relation to young people.

There is no respect for the older members of the gang anymore, no respect for life, no respect for anyone. Teens who see a pathway to taking over, often a very brutal and violent pathway.

The organised crime, that's completely changing. Before, if you talked about serious organised crime you'd think it was 25 year olds, 30 year olds, maturity. But now it's kids of 18-21 who earn the money to have set up a business. They are very advanced. And they might be getting that knowledge from maybe the older guys but it's even in the prison system. When they go into the prison system their mindset is like, 'I'm going into prison'. It's not, 'I've got five years to do', or 'I've got eight years to do'. They look at, 'I've got five years to do; I'm going to triple the amount of money I was making outside on the streets with my drugs', because the value of drug dealing in the prison system triples up.

Patterns of CCE are recognised to be complex to understand and to deal with – with responses from authorities sometimes split between a recognition of young people as exploited victims, alongside also a recognition that they are criminal perpetrators themselves. Systematic and extensive exploitation of vulnerable young people by adults, and often as well by older siblings or peers, is seen as something which has always existed, but has been vastly accelerated by the advent of mobile phones and related technology, as an enabling mechanism for engaging and then controlling the young people concerned.

Child criminal exploitation poses a massive thing, so you are getting people coming from other parts either trying to coerce, entice, engage with young people towards getting them to do one thing or another.

I think we see that. Some of our young people will be being exploited or controlled, whether that's by an older sibling or by members of their community, parents, relatives. So, we see what those elements are. I think about one young man that we've worked with this year, really quite a vulnerable young man, who's desperately trying to get out of that community, desperately trying.

I don't want to put the responsibility on them [as children/young people]. Yes, there is a vulnerability but actually that's only because there's dangerous people out there who want to exploit them and are very good at tuning in, to recognise the fit for somebody.

Criminals are getting clever, especially after lockdown. They're utilising young kids more than ever to do a lot of the county lines stuff or going into different places, villages, setting up a house. So, a lot of that's happening where a lot of the vulnerabilities of children are being exploited.

It's sort of the good lives model - they're seeking a purpose, they're seeking a community, seeking an identity and they can't achieve that via the means that other young people can. The relationships with these people that are involved and with potential adult exploiters, they aren't complex, they don't need complex social skills. A lot of the young people have got reduced communication skills, reduced interaction skills and a poor understanding of what a healthy relationship is. They've probably been given a sense of power and control over their own life where they've not had that before.

Gender and serious violence

Whilst there is an understandable anxiety not to wish to over-simplify or to stereotype along the lines of an overly binary narrative of gender difference, many of the interviews have reflected that serious violence is gendered. Both in respect that many more young men are drawn into committing acts of serious violence and exploitation, and also in respect of some perceptions of difference in the needs presenting of males and females caught up in the impact of serious violence.

Yes, I do think it's mainly a male thing just because of the hierarchy and status issues that young men find themselves. Also, where that status issue comes from, stems from, is also just a lack of positive male role models and family units, exclusion from school and the household criminality in the family. Yes, all of that sort of context. Yes, and society not offering healthy relationships that allow people to see themselves differently. I think that the main issue as well is that you particularly have these unhealthy status issues [for young men].

There are dysfunctional families, there's no positive male role models. We are also seeing that dynamic of there's a lot of masculine energy. And a lack of opportunities and we are seeing a lot more young men now being pulled into criminal behaviour, drug dealing, county lines behaviour and carrying weapons because they are not actually taking care of themselves to be confident enough to deal with altercations or regulate the emotions. So, they are just seeing red and picking up knives and trying to stab each other.

For some services, there is recognition that there may be 'hidden' or 'unmet' need for services in respect of gender, perhaps most particularly in terms of young males and victimisation in respect of sexual abuse.

But I guess the other bit is within our service we would recognise that only about 18%-20% of our referrals are for boys and young men yet I think we would all anecdotally say that doesn't match with how they've been affected by child sexual abuse, either as a direct victim or that they've lived in a trauma a system in their family where they were being exposed to seeing or witnessing or hearing abuse of their siblings or were being groomed into perhaps a gender based violence in terms of, 'You are the men, you are the boys, you can treat the girls like this'.

Yes, and we quite often work with siblings' groups where we would see perhaps the girl who's disclosed is able to talk a bit and share those emotions and feelings and her brothers are maybe acting out in all sorts of ways but haven't managed to make a disclosure. But clearly their behaviour is saying, 'I am extremely distressed, but I haven't got anyway to talk about it or tell somebody about it'.

Some professionals reflect that they see different issues tending to present, in terms of experience and response to trauma, for females caught up in serious violence. Patterns of female exploitation are seen as more often to involve sexual relationships and sexual exploitation. Females are sometimes also seen as taking different roles as perpetrators within gangs or around issues of serious violence.

The girls who are referred tend to be presenting with more internalising difficulties, so they have high levels of self-harm, of emotional dis-regulation, perhaps have more services already involved... Whereas the males tend to have less internalising and more externalising patterns.

Makes them very vulnerable because they are seeking out affection, especially the girls are seeking out affection and unfortunately, they are not careful about where that affection comes from.

We've got a good mix. I'd say 65-35, we've got a lot of girls coming through, a lot of girls that are being used to honey-trap guys. And also holding weapons and drug trafficking, so we're seeing a lot of young ladies involved in that side of things as well.

We've got a lot of young ladies as well that have been impacted in various different ways from generational trauma or exploitation, sexual exploitation, just because they feel empty, they need somebody, and they end up going with the wrong guys who then exploit them.

2.3 Key themes emerging relating to serious violence

Root causes and environment

Whilst the increased resourcing and focus of the VRU is welcomed, in terms of the sheer scale and depth of issues reflected across serious violence perpetrators and victims, there is still felt to be an unmet challenge in recognising the fundamental, foundational challenges. This is often spoken of as the tendency to treat 'symptoms rather than root causes', and that current approaches can still fail to address 'deeper' issues such as social injustice and deprivation, racial injustice, strategic failures of key local services over the years, and core elements of dysfunctionality in some community contexts.

But I'll tell you, deprivation, trauma, the risk around mental health, drug use and all of those things are significantly high in this city. I can say that because I've worked in other cities as well. One of the things we have to do is get to grips with the scale of the problems and be honest about it and redirect resources in the right way.

There's a kind of complex interface of criminogenic needs, perhaps concerns around family living, social arrangements, emotional, wellbeing, mental health, educational displacement, interpersonal factors.

We've thrown enough money at this issue anyway and there is no quick fix. This is trying to fix family home; this is fixing your school system. This is fixing your criminal justice system, making sure that you keep people out of the criminal justice system as much as possible so they don't get attached to criminal interpretations of themselves and being pushed further into violence as opposed to the alternatives.

Being trauma-informed

Linking to the above reflections on 'root causes', there is strong support for the VRU emphasis on services being trauma-informed, reflecting a clear consensus that trauma, and particularly elements of early trauma in childhood, have a marked effect on vulnerability to involvement in serious violence later in life. Solutions to engage both perpetrators and victims need to understand and work with this broader, more holistic understanding of trauma rather than with the 'surface' presenting features of the case before them. Whilst this is widely recognised across some elements of local services and response, particularly specialist victim services, it still feels much less recognised in some 'mainstream' settings, such as policing and the wider CJS (discussed further later in this section of the report). Whilst models of trauma-informed partnership and service delivery models are felt to be progressing, albeit with much work still to do, broader ambitions of building trauma-informed communities, or a trauma-informed education system or CJS, are seen to still be much further in the future.

We've done a lot of work with the VRU in training schools and partners around being trauma informed, trauma aware.

There's lots of developmental trauma. So, they've experience neglect and abuse or witnessed traumatic events.

Often those difficulties you'll see listed - can't listen, not paying attention, aggressive to others, no clear triggers for it - those things are often symptoms of trauma. So, we want those to be picked up early by the people who can, such as schools. They seem to be the early indicators of the people we are then getting in their late teens, who are then involved with gangs, who've been aggressive, who have committed serious offences.

My understanding and knowledge would inform me to say that generally I imagine the majority of children who end up in that kind of violent exploitation have survived some element of trauma, particularly sexual trauma or domestic trauma that sets up that.

Early identification and intervention

Linked to concepts of public health, being trauma-informed, and recognising and engaging with 'root causes', there is an appetite to further develop the partnership response 'upstream' into more preventative and early-intervention approaches. The need for specialist, reactive services, for example to support victims, is very clearly drawn and understood, but it is also appreciated that such services are in effect 'post-harm', and that a truly holistic, preventative public health-based model would seek to work earlier, with younger children and where possible before acts of serious violence are being committed and experienced.

At times, there is a feeling of exasperation that it is evident there are issues of risk and vulnerability around a young person, and yet nothing is done until it is too late. Or feelings of frustration that a lot can depend on the 'chance' of which agency or which individual professional picks up on an issue, or to whom an individual is referred.

The parent said, 'I'm just so worried that he's going to end up in prison or dead'. He's clearly involved in something, and he's got a burner phone, which was a new one to me. It's something to do with the phone they use to trade or to be contacted. And the police have even been to pick it up to look at what's on the phone. They also said they could n't do anything with him until he actually came into the criminal justice system; they couldn't do any prevention work with him because until he commits a crime, they've got no jurisdiction.

In an ideal world you just want a 'no wrong door' policy, where if you've got concerns around young people with language and communication difficulties or they've got behaviour difficulties you can make a referral and all the necessary assessments will be made and they will be put on the right pathway.

There are seen to be key groups of young people, such as some looked after children, and some of those excluded from education or poorly attending, or some who are lost in the 'grey zone' of home education, for whom risks and vulnerability tend to be more evident than the population as a whole.

There's probably always 10 or 20 young people that are looked after that we are worried about in terms of CSE or CCE. Sometimes it's a bit of both isn't it?

Then as they grow older, they tend to fall into groups with other children who are naughty, are rejected, who are the bad kids. And then unfortunately nowadays they are then picked up by older people who recognise that these kids are vulnerable, that they want to belong, they want to feel that they are successful. And in lots of ways then the success and that self-esteem that we all want, that sense of self-worth comes through being violent, being scary, being part of a gang.

A key element of effective early intervention mentioned is seen as having someone that is consistent in young people's lives, rather than inconsistent and multiple professional engagements with young people.

She's had something like six different social workers in the last year. They've had some early intervention teams come in, a team come in and do some targeted support and then they go after six weeks and she said it's been an absolute shambles.

Trauma at a community and a societal level

The effect of trauma is recognised as not just impacting on an individual level, but also more broadly, environmentally, at a community level. Serious violence creates trauma for individuals directly impacted, but also for friends, family, wider networks and ultimately the local community as a whole. This sense of 'collective' trauma is felt to be important in understanding what drives ongoing patterns of serious violence.

And then in more recent times there was a young man who lost his life and I suddenly found I had young people in my house who were repeating the stories over and over again. I realised that the trauma spread not just to the immediate family but actually wider into the community perceptions [Community]

There is a lot of PTSD, especially with the young people carrying weapons. Many of them have been robbed, which is why they start carrying a weapon; many of them have seen their friends get stabbed, which is why they are carrying a weapon.

Losing friends who I've seen die first hand. I've seen the trauma of how it's impacted on my community, how it filtered, the trauma going right through like a plague.

It just builds that anger, builds that trauma and then people go out and do things and then people bleed on people. Trauma, broken people are breaking more people.

The added impact of secondary trauma. So, the young people being affected by violence that's happening to their friends, to their families or that's happened to them historically down the line, which has impacted on mental health.

It's the fallout and the ripple across all communities when an incident like that happens. We've got communities that are almost being touched by that sort of stuff for the first time. So, we've had these recent stabbings of young people in Stapleford and they've been going, 'This is unheard of in our area', but they can see how it's manifesting itself and how it's building. One person gets stabbed and then there's another because they are retaliating. It just builds and builds unless somebody intervenes.

Linking to this there is also the sense of the threat of violence being experienced more widely across society. A sense of a broader culture of normalising violence, seeing violence as a solution to disputes, and being quick to threaten or to engage violently. As one professional working in the field reflected, this shift in broader cultural norms can feel like it goes unchallenged and can then feed into more entrenched cultures normalising violence within certain elements of society, particularly within some groups of young people.

One other thing from my own perspective I think in terms of violence is that it's not necessarily the violence itself, which is bad, but it's the threat of violence. Any little minor argument - somebody bangs into somebody in the supermarket or a car bumper touches another car bumper in a car park, they jump out and they're threatening to kill them, or they are going to beat them up or going to do this, going to do that. And this is from all sectors of the community. It just seems to be the default position now for any argument is threat of violence. I think that some work needs to be done there to say that this is unacceptable.

Positive models

In respect of working with perpetrators, and those at risk of becoming perpetrators of serious violence, there is strong support for models that focus on long-term, holistic support to create 'new starts' and 'positive pathways', 'different choices' and 'new lives'. To create 'pathways back in'. This lifts thinking beyond short-term interventions to a paradigm of longer-term, holistic support and mentoring of change in people's lives. Linked to this, there is recognition of the strengths of models that draw in 'lived experience' and opportunities for those who have been involved in serious violence in the past to provide mentoring support and role models to others. Injecting positive elements and progress into lives, such as positions of responsibility, sports, education, and employment.

It's a no brainer really, if you've got someone involved in education or training or work, they are less likely to be going out and getting into trouble. So that's definitely a key.

Mentoring support, which is that father figure, that guidance, that direction that many of them were missing.

I got excluded from school. I can remember not even being able to read and write and when people would ask me something I'd rather be violent and kick off than get exposed that I couldn't read and write.

And that's what creates those relationships of trust that lets young people see themselves differently, see themselves as an athlete or someone that can do things that they put their minds to, just to start to develop those healthier connections to other people and to society, building those bonds. So that's what I think is the most practical, useful responses that we have.

But as I say, a lot of the time it's hard to evidence that impact from the charities' perspectives and evidencing how that qualitative change in perspective and values of the young people themselves.

Challenges within the criminal justice system

From the broader standpoint of trauma-informed, public-health, holistic approaches to reducing harm from serious violence, it is recognised that policing and the wider criminal justice system is not always well placed to deliver to this changing philosophy of approach. Particularly for victims of serious violence and exploitation, the CJS can be experienced as a 're-traumatising', or as a 'further traumatising', or 'prolonging' of trauma experience.

I feel like it comes up repeatedly for children and young people, is that the criminal justice process itself in lots of ways replicates the issues around child sexual abuse. So in terms of betrayal - so feeling let down by society when children probably tend to have a fairly straightforward way - if you've committed a crime, if you've stolen somebody's rubber in school you get told off for it, you get sent to the Headmaster, etc. And then they see in the criminal justice process, well they thought if they disclose something that person would be punished and they find, oh they are not. How do they deal with that?

Traumatic sexualisation, that their ordinarily sexual development has been traumatised and they find their sexuality has been affected by that. And I think both at investigation interview but also at cross examination, just some of the questions that are asked compound that sense of shame and stigma and also just traumatising that a child is having to speak out in a way that they would normally not have to.

The shame and stigma and exposure, that level of sense of being in a public gallery.

An element of the judicial experience for young victims can often be that the proceedings only focus upon one dimension, only on one element, of the wider pattern of exploitation, violence, or abuse, because that is the legal focus in respect of the offender and alleged criminal offence, around whom and which the proceedings are exclusively framed.

And they're not really asked about it so they don't recognise that it's part of it and almost not given the scaffolding on which to hang all the different elements of the abuse, to go, 'Oh yes, there was that as well; there was some physical violence, there was emotional violence, there was financial violence; I was held imprisoned in different ways'.

There are perspectives that the CJS remains a largely ‘unreformed’ aspect of the wider partnership, ‘out of step’ with bolder, broader thinking about public-health models and still entrenched in an individualised, adversarial, process-driven model. As one professional with extensive experience of working with issues of serious violence argued:

It’s still the most Victorian public sector part of the entire country. The prisons bit of it is, in particular. The buildings themselves as well and the policy and approach to it, to funding, is just all Victorian. Even though the evidence has been clear since at least the turn of the century as to what works and what approaches work, nothing really changes though. We get reviews all the time, but no recommendations get acted on.

2.4 Summary

The professional stakeholders engaged across the interviews, who have principally been the source feeding into the analysis in this chapter, reflect on the need to see a bigger picture, consider root causes and the wider community and environment in which serious violence takes place. The interviews encourage us to think beyond particular categories or specific contexts of violence, to consider deeper, structural elements of causation. To see in the broader sense what drives serious violence, and how services can be strategically improved over the long-term, in order to better meet needs of victims and perpetrators.

There is widespread recognition that very often perpetrators of serious violence are also themselves victims and are in many cases young people who have experienced significant abuse, violence, and trauma, as well as other societal challenges and structural inequalities. There is also recognition of the critical importance of identity, and of the need to combat growing cultural norms in support of violence, ‘toxic’ masculinities, and a growing sense of lack of respect for others.

The chapter also reflects what seems an increasing complex picture in respect of the gendered nature of serious violence, not least in new forms in which females are both being victimised and also, increasingly, being involved as perpetrators of violence and exploitation. The analysis across the chapter supports a consensus amongst practitioners and professional stakeholders of the need to engage with ‘root’ causes, to recognise challenges at the whole-community level, and the traumatic impact of violence at a whole community level. And to embrace more strongly than ever early intervention and preventative models of trauma-informed practice.

This chapter reflects much that is positive and supportive of the partnership response to these challenges. Recognising progress across the public-health based, partnership response to victims and perpetrators – in particular the strong exemplars of charity work that support young people on positive pathways, the investment in trauma-informed, specialist services, and some progress across preventative programmes.

The chapter also reflects some points of strategic challenge, not least across ‘mainstream’ services and the limited resource for preventative and whole-community models. Specifically, the effects of formal CJS legal, adversarial processes on vulnerable young people, and the re-traumatising effect for vulnerable victims of lengthy legal processes that can be hard to understand and to navigate. And also how effective the CJS is at understanding and tackling ‘root’ causes, working in partnership, evolving beyond being primarily a means for enforcement and punishment to embrace wider ideals of positive future pathways and rehabilitation, prevention, restorative practice, and community prevention and engagement.

This evidence across this chapter – seeing the future development of services for perpetrators and victims of serious violence very much through the eyes of a range of different professionals who work closely, day-to-day, delivering those services on the front-line or holding responsibility for their strategic development – sets out a blueprint for the future of the response to serious violence. Much of which is positively highly consistent with current strategic direction and discourse across the VRU, and consistent with the contents of the SRAs. Foregrounded within this is a recognition of the need to be trauma-informed, and also to understand ‘root’ causes, wider environmental factors, and secondary trauma and trauma at the community level, prompting the need to further develop holistic, whole-community responses that genuinely engage community members and all ‘mainstream’ services, as well as continuing to build the reach and quality of specialist services and providers.

3. Young People

This chapter focuses on young people and serious violence and sought to engage with service providers and young people across Nottinghamshire City and Nottinghamshire County. The scope of the research was amended due to the impact of COVID, however, the data obtained across all the areas of research contained in this document was amalgamated and used to support the findings which ensured a wide range and span of data was collected. In addition to the one-to-one interviews, a workshop was conducted with a number of young people, and this allowed a rich picture to be generated from the discussions and objects created by the young people.

3.1 Context

The Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) of serious violence in Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County (2021) update identified six emerging issues relating to serious violence and young people. These issues were identified through a consultation process carried out with stakeholders working closely with young people. The areas identified were:

- The move to online living is leading to increases in online sexual exploitation and grooming (page 8, SNA 2021 Part 1).

Issues related to online exploitation did come through some of the practitioner interviews, but it was not an issue that the young people themselves raised. However, the number of young people that participated in the interviews was limited due to the impacts of COVID.

- More positively, some young people have felt safer during lockdown but may have concerns when restrictions ease (page 8, SNA 2021 Part 1).

All the young people gave the example of home as the place they felt most safe, however, practitioners, especially those working in school environments cited domestic violence and its impact as being a factor in challenging behaviour. When the young people were asked to define serious violence, they all stated that domestic violence was included in their understanding of serious violence.

- Tensions and conflict between young people are on the increase, partly spilling over from social media and involving girls on a larger scale (page 8, SNA 2021 Part 1).

Some of the practitioners mentioned conflict beginning on social media and then leading to violence but the young people pointed to online factors such as music and its associations with gang culture as being an attractor for younger people. One young person stated:

I saw this kid; he was like thirteen or something and he got stabbed by another young kid. Younger people are more influenced by social media, drill music and stuff like that, younger people are more influenced by social media.

- Trust and confidence in police and other agencies appear to have increased in some sections of communities but other groups feel more alienated (page 8, SNA 2021 Part 1).

Some of the young people interviewed talked about outreach workers as being effective, some had been engaged by a worker in the city centre and felt these were credible and useful people to engage

with. This was raised as something they would like to see more of. This helps to support the recommendation in the SNA relating to trusted relationships and the need to support this. However, there was some negativity towards treatment by the police.

I think the police do...they are quite violent normally...they don't talk to you normally, they are quite physical, around here they tackle you before they talk to you...they do talk but afterwards...they try to show you who is boss

- The experience of online learning and exam result confusion has left a layer of young people unconvinced that education will benefit them (page 8, SNA 2021 Part 1).
- Many stakeholders highlighted the impact of COVID and COVID-related restrictions on the mental health of young people. This impact on mental health is likely to continue when we enter recovery from COVID (page 8, SNA 2021 Part 1).

Mental health and wellbeing were mentioned quite a lot, particularly by practitioners and this was raised below as a key theme.

3.2 Views on Serious Violence

Perceptions

Interestingly, there are differing views and areas of concern for different groups, there is a definite sense that serious violence is viewed through different lenses depending on the position and distance from the problem. For example, a practitioner in school stated:

The main issues are gangs, drugs and through the drugs – knife crime. That's for the boys. For the girls, probably CSE is our greatest concern with some of the girls.

Another school's practitioner sees the problem slightly differently as:

It's not a tsunami but we are seeing a small increase in our young people who are being drawn into criminal activity.

They are largely getting drawn into dealing drugs. We haven't seen much serious violent crime.

A police officer who works in several schools stated the problem in the following terms:

I've been in school's 16 years; I can count on two hands the amount of times a knife has been brought into school.

... to say that every young person is involved in knife crime is a complete fallacy because it's adults that are committing 90% of knife crime.

A professional working with different communities stated:

I think 'gangs' is very prominent wording, and it gives young people or the group of young people a status... we need to understand the make-up of those individuals within that particular group because we need to manage the tensions.

Because we're trying to reduce fear in the community and the only time we should be making those significant words 'gang' is if we've really got solid grounds to justify why we're saying it.

Views of young people

When asked to state what they thought serious violence was, a group of boys stated the following:

Like sometimes you know if someone says something to you, you can't back down in it. Some people feel like they look wet if they back down or whatever so they will try and fight even if they will lose just you to look good

Pride in it (Agreement from others)

Yeah, so stabbing someone, it's all about retaliation...it's all about pride

This type of response may reflect the male feeling about what it means to be male and masculine pride, which is the focus of the mentors in violence initiative in some schools in Nottinghamshire.

By contrast the girls group spoke more about serious violence being related to social media.

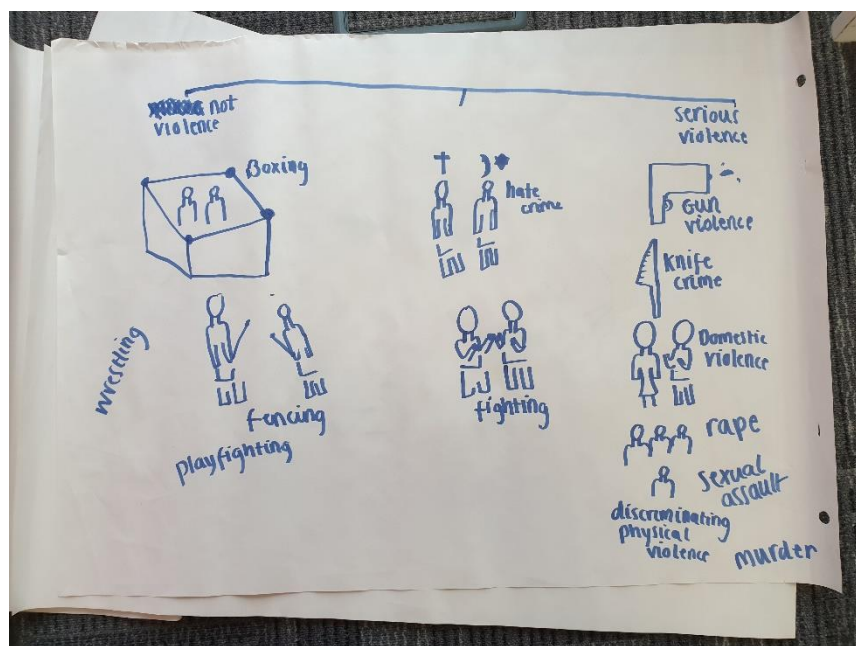
Social media has a huge impact on it (serious violence). Social media is what makes girls get more involved, more than social media influences boys. The girls see how the boys are acting on there, and they decide they need to be like that for the boys to like them

Yeah. Like people go Live on social media don't they? I think that's where all the problems come from – social media

I think most of the problems with gangs now do start over social media. Like, someone will post a picture of a shop or something and somebody will be like 'why are you in my area?' and it'll go from there. Then the next time they see that person they're in trouble.

A young person was asked to draw her perception of what serious violence is. She produced the image in Figure 3.1 below to depict violence on a scale from what is termed “not violence” to what is termed “serious violence”. She went on to point out that just because it's deemed to “not be violence” it still is. She also pointed to the cultural aspects of the serious violence end of the scale and how young people don't necessarily have in mind that they are going to get involved in violence, but they are drawn into it.

Figure 3.1 Young Person's Perception of Serious Violence



Clearly, it is important to understand the sometimes large and sometimes subtle definitional differences that practitioners and young people have of the issues relating to serious violence. This is important for the commissioning processes of the Violence Reduction Unit and came through during the process review conducted earlier in the year. In the process review, the views expressed by service providers who reported that funding decisions can be seen as disconnected from the actual problems on the ground, however, it is contended here that this is a much more complex mix of actual, perceived and politically driven needs. None of these views are necessarily wrong or misleading, it is simply factual to state that they all exist and need to be understood and articulated in the resource allocation decision making process.

Issues of language and definitions are very important and have come through the research quite a lot especially the use of terms such as “gang” to describe a group of young people. In a focus group, the young people expressed their concern that a group of black young people in public will always be labelled as a “gang” when, very often they are simply a group of friends hanging about together. They described how groups of young white people out drinking on a Friday or Saturday night in the city centre will never attract this label as they are considered “University Students” out for a good time, even though they often get into violent behaviour.

Domestic violence in the home

There could be domestic violence going on at home, the kids been up at 3 o'clock in the morning, Mum or Dad hit each other, one of them has been arrested. The kid comes into school the next day, he's in a bad mood, teacher says something, and he kicks off, or she kicks off.

The quote above reflects the complex nature of the issue of violence and its relation to young people. Often the background information is unknown to the professionals who then interact with the young person, the young person is seen as being responsible for his or her behaviour yet they are immersed in, an often, chaotic environment.

Schools don't necessarily have the time to look into the background everything. They've just seen year 9 smack somebody so therefore they've committed an offence, they need dealing with through the school consequence system.

We need to improve the advocacy and support for children and families at risk, to better signpost them, understand what's happening in their lives. Understand our communities better.

Again, the above quotes from practitioners reflect the nature of the complex context in which issues of violence and young people are situated. The revised SNA has created new recommendations for exploring the relationships between adverse childhood experiences and violence which goes some way to begin to develop more joined up approaches. The difficulty here is in bringing together organisations with, often, conflicting outcomes and generating a shared understanding of the complex nature of the problem and then gaining agreement on how best to approach it. Complex emergent problems such as violence from or towards young people often need to be tackled through innovative approaches that allow learning to take place whilst seeking to generate solutions. The adoption of the trauma informed approach outlined in the SNA will go some way to address this, however, as acknowledged within the document, this will take time for all organisations to understand and embed within their individual approaches.

Attachment issues and Looked After Children

Also raised as a vulnerability was 'attachment', with a recognition that attachment issues for children and young people can often co-present with other issues and be a key factor leading to further challenges and difficulties for young people. One professional reflected:

I wonder if it's children with attachment difficulties alongside autism. So if they've not had the best start in life, and the two examples I've given you, most definitely hadn't, absolute neglect within their very young years so they've got attachment difficulties without a doubt... And sometimes the behaviour when children have attachment difficulties is really similar to autism. So I don't know how health professionals determine which one's which, it's all tangled up. So I wonder if maybe there's some learning in the future about how we work with children with attachment difficulties.

Attachment issues were also discussed in relation to the vulnerability of Looked After Children, particularly in relations to girls and vulnerability to Child Sexual Exploitation.

They are in homes where people do a job, but they're not cared for. That makes them very vulnerable because they are seeking out affection, especially the girls are seeking out affection and unfortunately, they are not careful about where that affection comes from.

One professional commented on how they would envisage a model for a home for looked after children.

If I was designing a home for looked-after children I'd be getting people like my engagement team in there and I would be allocating key students to them. Because our key staff, our engagement staff with key students, they are talking to these students in holidays, they are there when they need them. They are always there for them and they're the ones that talk to them when they are having a difficult time. They are the ones that take them out and give them a treat. They need a family. In loco parentis basically, but actually making the parent element very clear, if that makes sense.

Another participant talked about concern over the volume of children that are taken into the care of the Local Authority due to parents/carers struggling to cope and concern that they are unable to keep their child or those around them, such as siblings, safe any longer.

We go out there, we do an assessment, and we work with a family - what works - and try and make some changes within the family home. But what sometimes happens and often happens is that this doesn't work, that doesn't work. The child continues to commit crimes, get involved in antisocial behaviour, missing episodes, and everyone's in a panic obviously. We have this meeting, that meeting, this meeting, that meeting; we can try all different processes. And often what happens is the child will end up in the care of the Local Authority because parents are saying, 'I can't keep him safe anymore', or her safe anymore, 'You can try'. And sometimes you get other professionals saying that's the best thing as well. I argue against that most of the time.

The professional further comments that such challenging behaviours typically continue to happen within the context of local authority care.

It's tricky then because you've got the same behaviour, the same concerns, but residential staff are doing their best - or it might be semi-independent units - they are doing their best. But I

don't think it's probably as helpful as the child remaining with family members who know the child better than anybody.

Policy and information sharing

Policy approaches within the school environment were raised several times by practitioners and in particular, by some schools to exclusion and the use of alternative provision for young people displaying challenging or violent behaviours.

Behaviour policy is often a zero-tolerance approach, which itself presents significant challenges too because one minute the teacher will flag up a young person, you meet with them. But the next time you get there they tell you he's been excluded from school, permanent exclusion.

Schools are still just seeing it as "behaviour" without wanting to see the bigger picture.

But I think schools are straightjacketed in a way that we're not. We're not in a straitjacket of Progress and GCSE results. Yes, our results are important but actually what our young people go on to do is more important as an indicator for me.

This again reflects some of the findings outlined above and it will be something that may present difficult decisions due to the competing need to address the behaviours displayed whilst also needing to deliver a performance regime that may not easily take this work into account. However, this is tempered by findings of some good practice in this area.

We've got a team of support coaches. So, we have, I'd say, 13 support coaches who work one to one with our most vulnerable young people.

That team help advocate for that young person with our curriculum colleagues sometimes. They would help advocate for that young person with other agencies.

Information sharing and policies relating to it were raised throughout most of the practitioner interviews. It seems to be one of the key issues that impacts the ability of the different agencies charged with helping young people to deliver real quality outcomes.

...there was something about the movement of children and sharing intelligence about what's happening in different areas. I've certainly raised this with the VRU recently in a conversation, because we've been trying to do some learning from national and look at how that could relate to Nottingham.

But again, it's a time consuming, because information isn't readily available. So, it all depends on what information we get that we can share on.

Getting everyone to work together and having a potential common database that everything is recorded on. Social care have got their own, the police have got their own, youth services have got their own. But it doesn't necessarily talk to each other.

Clearly information sharing is key to developing outcomes for individuals, families and groups involved in the issues that relate to serious violence. The trauma informed approach that is highlighted in the SNA has collaboration as one of its 6 key elements, clearly effective communication and information sharing will be key to quality collaboration. For many reasons multi-agency partnerships have struggled to be effective at information sharing so in adopting a trauma informed approach it is imperative that the organisations involved are prepared to share where they perceive the blockages are and then to test this against reality.

Advocacy and support for young people

The need to improve the advocacy and support available to young people across place-based systems was highlighted by several practitioners. This is linked with the need to have better relationships and understandings of communities across Nottinghamshire.

We need to improve the advocacy and support for children and families at risk, to better signpost them, understand what's happening in their lives. Understand our communities better.

So we went through a managed move process to support the child into the school more locally which dealt with some of those issues. There were some really serious violence risks around this young person at the time so it can work effectively as well.

It's a lot of interventions, a lot of one to one's. I think you can get through to kids more that way than through classrooms and assemblies and such, but it's different.

When asked what they thought should be done differently to help young people who are at risk from the issues relating to serious violence one young person stated:

You've got to get somebody that they can be close too and that they can relate too

Listening to young people, what do they want. 'Cos it's always, we get all this funding and this is what we are going to do and this is what we're providing for young people.....be, like, right summer holidays are coming up, what do you want to do?

In a focus group, young people talked about the importance of having someone that cares about them and will talk to them. They also felt it was important that these were relatable people that had similar experiences. This is illustrated in the extract below.

Focus Group Extract

Participant A: you need more people that actually care about people. In this school there's actually so many people that care about us. And people that have been through similar stuff we have. Some people in gangs don't have families that care about them or adults that are there for them and tell them 'look this isn't what you should be doing'. People here at this school will say to us 'get your head down, that is not the life (gang involvement) that you should be chasing'.

Participant B: That doesn't happen in mainstream schools.

Participant C: No, that would never happen in mainstream schools, they don't care. They do here, in alternative provisions.

Participant A: In mainstream schools, they don't care. They just want to get their money and teach what they need to teach. If you're a problem they'll put you aside.

Participant B: Even the mentors there don't help. They're not relatable, they haven't been through anything. We need you to have been through similar stuff we have.

Participant A: We can actually talk to the teachers here, they're approachable, we can just chat, they won't judge us.

In their article entitled 'Trauma informed social policy: A conceptual framework for policy analysis and advocacy', Bowden and Murshid (2016) state: "To shape policy so that it better reflects the realities of practice and lived experience, it is critical that policymakers hear directly from those on the ground, including service providers and service users".

Mental health and wellbeing

As highlighted in the SNA, lockdown has had an adverse effect on the mental health and wellbeing of young people, this was also a factor that came through in the interviews for this research.

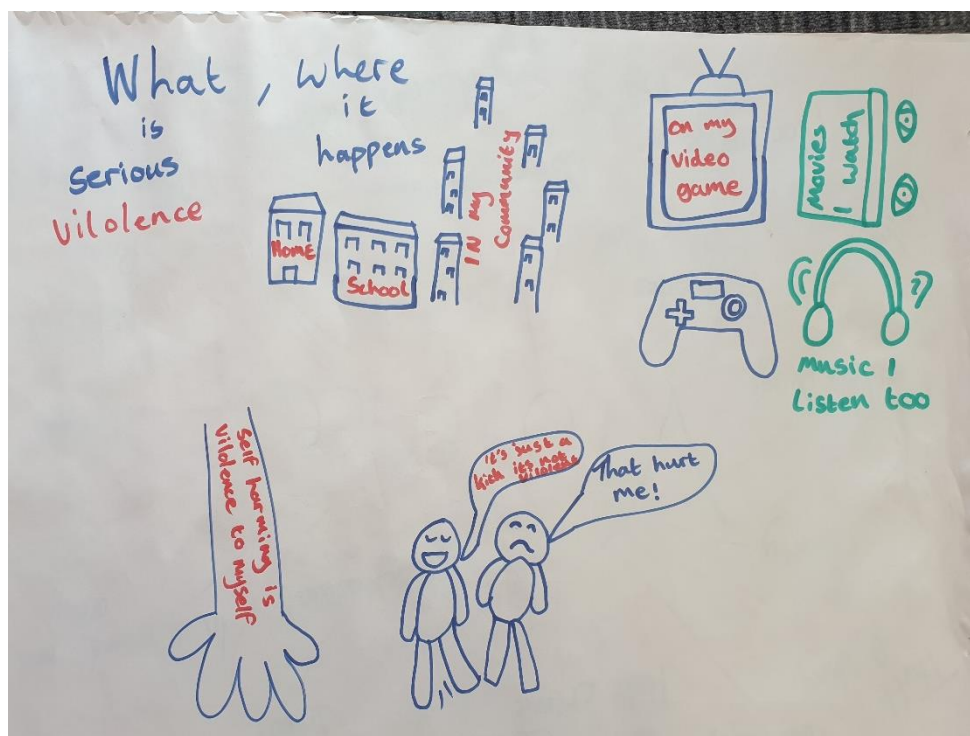
So, this last academic year we have had 31 attempts on life from our student body. And that was from 27 different individuals, so it's not like it's one individual making several attempts on life, it's 27 separate individuals have made a serious attempt on life within the last academic year.

So, I think mental health is becoming a major issue for us in terms of our student population .

What schools refer to as mental health is just behaviour, emotional health and wellbeing which manifests in challenging behaviour.

During a focus group with young people, the group produced the picture illustrated in Figure 3.2 below and highlighted the fact that self-harm was an issue for young people related to serious violence. The impact of COVID and lockdown has been shown by various organisations to have had a detrimental impact upon the mental health of young people, however, as identified in this research young people stated they felt that home was where they felt safe. This clearly would be different for young people in a home environment where domestic violence is present. Again, what this reflects is the complex nature of the issue and the potential that in some circumstances being in lockdown and at home would have positive impacts against other situations where the impact is negative.

Figure 3.2: Young People Focus Group Overview of Serious Violence



3.3 Key themes emerging relating to serious violence

Perceptions and shared understanding

Perceptions of serious violence differ between groups and organisations and the ongoing work to listen to all the voices involved to develop interventions that work is the way forward. As highlighted by the trauma informed approach continued dialogue and surfacing of individual, group and societal perceptions and definitions and the relative power that each of these has must continue. This was highlighted effectively by the young people themselves when they discussed issues related to gangs and ethnicity.

Other people might think differently, like, read too much into it but it's just a group of people.

They can be called gangs but all it is, is like a group of you friends like going around.

What is actually like, gang violence, 'cos it could just be a group of friends that don't like another group of friends.

You can see a group of Uni students and go, oh they're just going to go and drink and just have fun, boys will just be boys but if it's a group of black people or black boys, they'll be like they're gang members, they're up to no good and all of that. When really, they are just out with each other like the rest of the people. I don't think white boys are seen like that though.

A different group that was made up only of boys felt that there was a lot of pressure to be in or remain in a gang.

He was in a gang, yeah, but he felt like he wanted to leave so he did but now he's got nobody do you know what I mean?!... So, people still hate for being in the gang but the gang hate him as well. You can leave the gang, but you are kind of trapped into it, you can't really leave at the same time for that reason

This was reflected by the girl's group also.

You could try not to get involved in the life (gangs) in the first place, but once you're in it, you're in it. What can you do? They don't always want to stay involved, they don't know what to do.

The girl's group also noted the stereotypical "gang" member as:

(The stereotypical gang member looks like...) black boy, has this walk, wears hood up, walks around in a group, has the hands in the pockets

Perceptions are key to people's sense-making and therefore their decision making, different perceptions lead to different focus and therefore different interpretations of the nature of the problem being addressed. It is important that all perceptions are heard and incorporated into the process of decision making.

Understanding the complex inter-relationships of the issue

This underpins the issues highlighted above in relation to effective collaboration and advocacy and support for young people. However, this cannot be achieved without fully understanding the performance, financial and resourcing pressures across organisations working in this area, that then

impact upon decision making and policy formulation. Understanding the lived experiences of both service users and service providers is key effective multi-agency approaches and in such complex environments no single agency can be effective across all of the driving factors. However, it is important to keep in mind that each organisation exists for a specific purpose and sometimes these purposes can be at odds, especially when trying to balance the needs of the individual and the needs of the wider community.

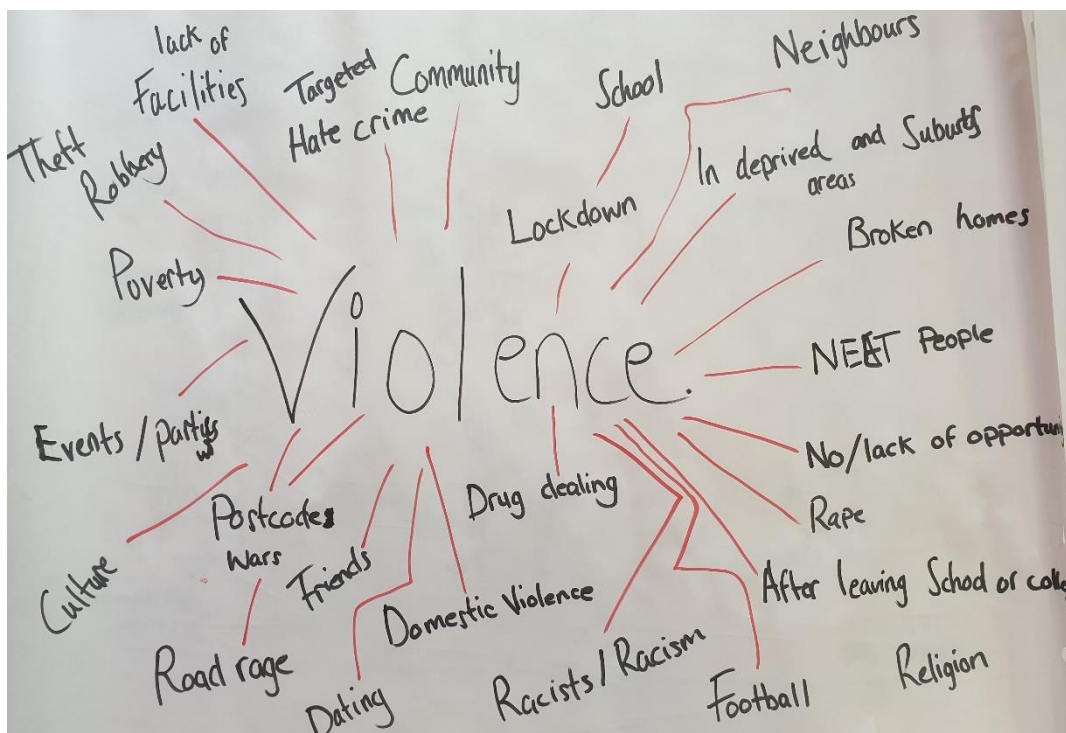
I think about one young man that we've worked with this year, really quite a vulnerable young man who's desperately trying to get out of that community, desperately trying - So actually eventually made himself homeless to get out of the community he's in because actually he knows if he stays there he will go down a path he doesn't want to go down and he's desperate to get himself out of that. So, he's made himself homeless and he's now living elsewhere from his parents. Because he, on a weekly basis, and at weekends, was getting drawn into that gang related culture that he just doesn't want a piece of anymore.

So, the risk factor wasn't his home, wasn't his mum or dad. They were seen by Social Care as a protective factor and therefore the view of Social Care was, 'He's made himself deliberately homeless and therefore we will not house him as an emergency'.

So actually, by staying there he feels he's putting people in his house at risk as well. So you go round that cycle until eventually somebody listens

Figure 3.3 below illustrates the complex or systemic nature of the problem and was created by a young person in one of the focus groups when he was asked what he thought serious violence and its causes were.

Figure 3.3: Meanings Associated with and Causes of Serious Violence created by a Young Person



This is a great illustration of the interrelated issues and shows how a young person thinks about the issue of serious violence. It demonstrates the need to consider the problem itself from many different perspectives and driving factors. Figure 3.3 also shows why there is a need to think about serious violence from the viewpoint of an ecological frame that looks at impacts of individual, organisational, community and societal levels and how these relate to the dynamics of the issue.

Listen and include

Practitioners, particularly those engaged in schools spoke a lot about the need to build trust and relationships with the young people to ensure that they had someone they could talk to or disclose things to. This was often spoken about in relation to safeguarding, however, advocacy for the young person in relation to wider issues was also a feature. One practitioner talked about a team of support workers in an educational setting who work closely with the most vulnerable young people.

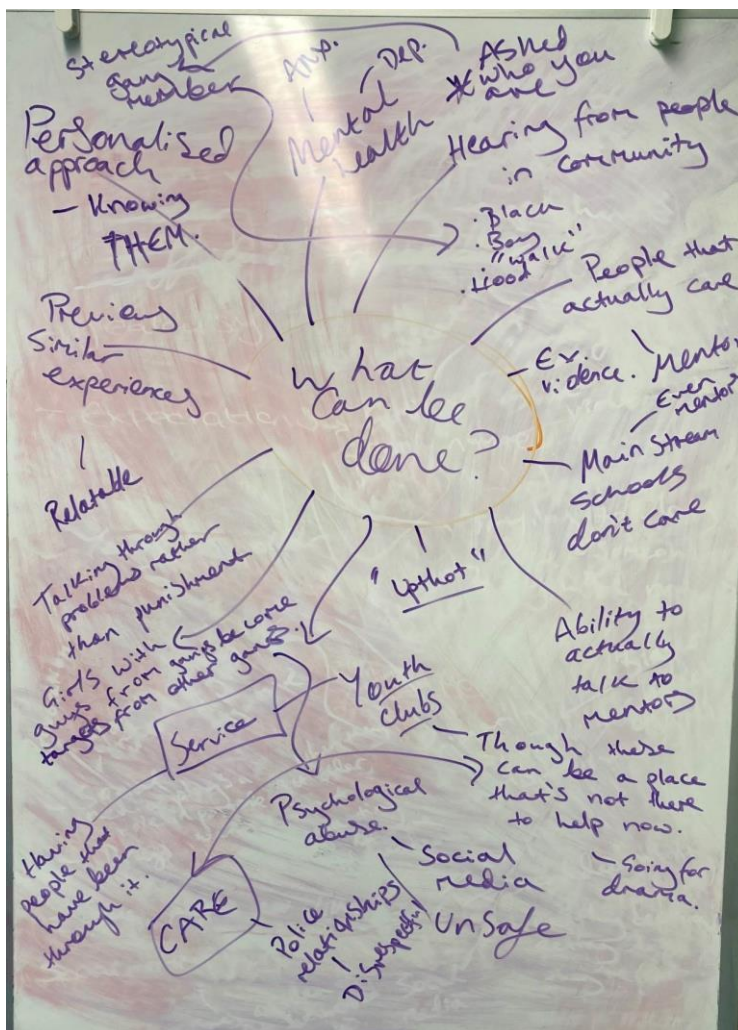
So, they do a whole range of just trying to sort out some of the stuff that gets in the way of that young person achieving at college and they're really, really successful, that team. When I look at some of the outcomes for our very most vulnerable young people, actually they are not a million miles away from their peers, to be honest, so they do a really good job.

A police officer alluded to the importance of relationships when stating:

The Year Leads that they have, have really great relationships in all of my schools. You have a Year Leader that starts with the children in Year 7 and that Year Leader will follow them up right the way through the school. So, they know who their problem ones are, they know the ones that have got those short fuses and they've heard that they've fell out with somebody so they might try and do some sort of restorative justice with them to try and sort out the problem that started it or try and pave the way to keep them apart because they are never going to agree to disagree.

It was, however, during one of the focus groups that a group of girls really expanded the need to listen and include voices of young people, offer the right support through listening and understanding, issues of mental health and anxiety, school impact, gangs, policing, stereotyping etc. Figure 3.4 below shows the points they came up with and discussed, captured on their white board.

Figure 3.4: Solutions to Serious Violence created in Focus Group with Girls



Work together

Through this research young people told of their lived experiences of being a young person in Nottinghamshire and how they understand and feel about the threat or reality of serious violence. They talked about the fact that this was a daily occurrence in their lives and therefore a constant concern.

Both groups said that serious violence happens every day, they hear about it every day from other students as they all live in different areas of Nottingham. They said that a lot of it isn't even reported. 'Every day there is something new'

The trauma informed approach would put the young person at the heart of the intervention and would include the young person in the development of the support that they needed. This requires everyone to work together so as not to increase or exacerbate trauma that has already been suffered. This was explained by one young person when he told of the event in which one of his close friends was stabbed and killed.

I know someone who got stabbed yeah, he was one of my close friends and the ambulance wasn't allowed through until the police cordoned off the scene in it. So they prevented other people before they saved his life and then he died...people ran in his house and stabbed and killed him. The police came but left his body lying on the floor and started dealing with everyone else and he just died on the floor man...

They come up to everyone asking what's happened, what's happened...and just left the body on the floor. Nobody wants to say what's happened when your mate is bleeding out on the floor. It was messed up. People were around him putting pressure on the wound and the police came dragged you all off yeah and the blood just splattered everywhere, and the police were wrestling with the people when there was someone on the floor dying.

They don't have their priorities straight, if that was me, I would save a life first no matter what...but that is what happened, it turned into a massive fight and the person got forgotten about.

This may simply have been an issue of effective communication by the professionals involved who were dealing with a challenging live incident and murder investigation. However, understanding the perceptions of this young person and considering the trauma he had suffered may have gone some way to have helped. As stated previously, these are not simple issues to deal with, they are complex by their very nature and therefore require agencies to be effective in working together and including communities and individuals in the process.

When young people are engaged in the process of understanding the issues it is quite inspiring to see the depth and breadth of the knowledge and experience that they can contribute, illustrated in Figures 3.5 and 3.6. These are examples of whiteboards from the focus groups and show the insights when young people were asked to discuss the drivers or causes of serious violence.

Figure 3.5: Causes of Serious Violence created in Focus Group with Girls

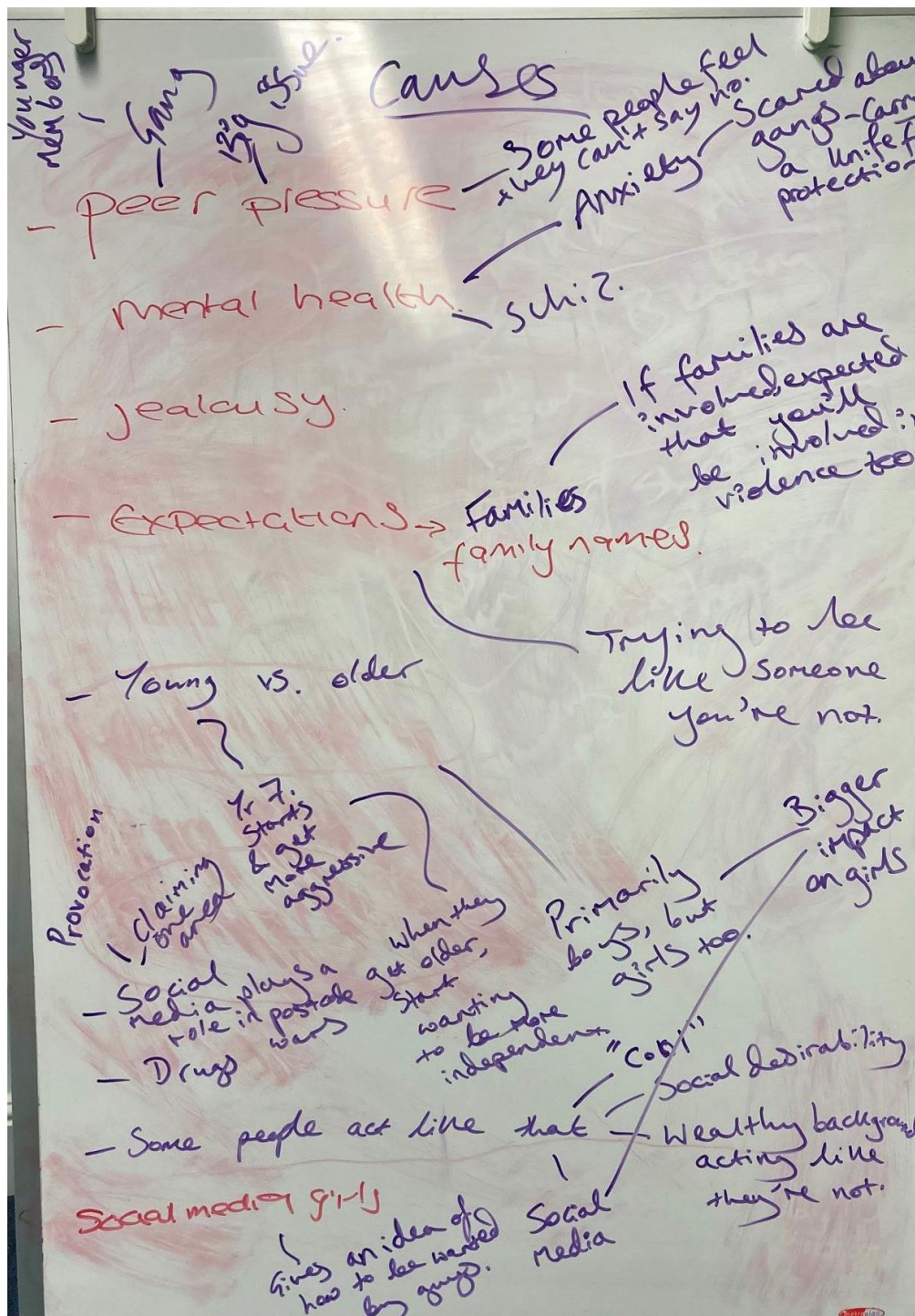
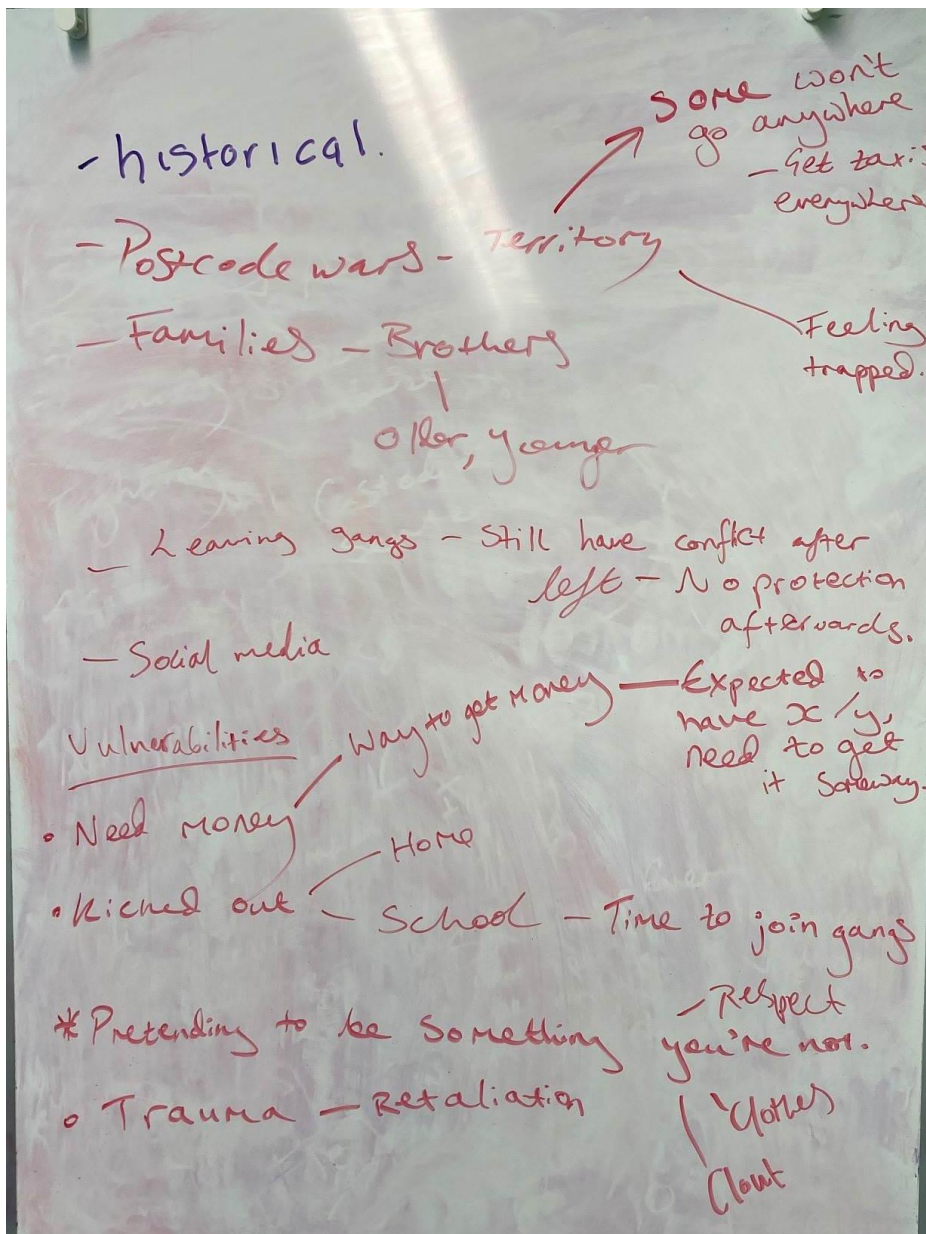


Figure 3.6: Causes of Serious Violence created in Focus Group with Boys



3.4 Summary

All of the participants in this research, both service providers and young people, were passionate about the ongoing work to develop more effective ways of working to prevent serious violence. The recommendations that are contained within the SNA are supported by the findings in this research and will go a long way to develop greater effectiveness.

What must be considered is the power of the cultural narrative that has developed locally in Nottinghamshire (and perhaps, particularly within Nottingham City itself), or as one young person referred to it "Shottinghamshire", alluding to the stigma that still perpetuates from historical gun crime issues. Also, the national narrative in relation to young people, violence, and gangs which impacts upon the perceptions that then drive the thinking behind initiatives and funding.

Several aspects of the analysis within this chapter support the strategic move of the VRU and others towards the implementation of a trauma-based approach to interventions. This will help with the development of local partnerships and interventions, developing a richer, child- and young person-focused, picture of service development, engaging 'root' causes and deeper issues, alongside more immediately presenting problems. This move will require a considerable shift in thinking for some organisations and individuals, and it will take some time and considerable energy and resilience on those charged with implementing it. What is positive is the sense of professional commitment to this shift in the paradigm of service delivery and community engagement.

4. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

This chapter examines perceptions of the prevalence of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) within those who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System, largely focusing on the Youth Justice System. It aims to provide a greater understanding of the prevalence of those with SEND who are involved in or victims of violence, and whether there are particular types of SEND that are most prominent. It also considers reasons why they may be more at risk of becoming involved in violence or violence related crime and what factors are perceived to increase or decrease risk for these groups.

4.1 Context

There have been significant developments in recent years on a national level into understanding the extent to which those within the Criminal Justice System have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities and/ or Neuro-divergent conditions and how these needs are identified and met. For example, HM Government recently released *The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026*¹⁶ that contains within it a vision for improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems recognising evidence that autistic people may be over-represented as people who come into contact with the criminal and youth justice systems, as victims, witnesses or defendants. The Strategy draws upon the All Parliamentary Group on Autism report: *The Autism Act 10 Years On*¹⁷, which highlights issues autistic people face when they interact with the police, the courts and the prison system.

A recent review by the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection looks at how many offenders have conditions like autism and learning difficulties. The review covers a wide range of neurodiversity, including learning difficulties, learning disabilities and emotional and behavioural changes due to acquired brain injuries. The report¹⁸ estimates half of those entering prison could reasonably be expected to have some form of neuro-divergent condition. The identification of whether those involved in the CJS, let alone those involved in violence, have SEND or neuro-divergent conditions is difficult and currently data at a national level is not collated routinely.

The Strategic Needs Assessment comments that *“Local intelligence suggests that Youth Justice clients’ with SEND and adult prisoners, specifically autism, ADHD and conduct disorder (including those with a diagnosis and those without who could anticipate a diagnosis), are over-represented as victims and perpetrators of violence”* (page 17, SNA 2020). Therefore, in partnership with the NNVRU the IPSCJ identified people across Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire who could provide further insight into this finding. This resulted in 14 interviews being conducted with key stakeholders in education, youth justice, CAMHS and County services for those with disabilities and Looked After Children and parent/carer representatives. In addition, 9 young people from Assisted Provision (AP) took part in the research and were asked about their views on serious violence and what could be done to address it.

¹⁶ HM Government (2021) *The national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026*, available at www.gov.uk/government/publications

¹⁷ APPGA (2019) *The Autism Act, 10 Years On: A report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism on understanding, services and support for autistic people and their families in England*

¹⁸ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (July, 2021) *Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of Evidence* available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf>

4.2 Views on Serious Violence

There was recognition amongst participants of there being a disproportionate number of those with SEND within the justice service and at risk of being drawn into Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation, gangs, radicalisation or other types of violence as a victim or perpetrator. As is the case at a national level this view is difficult to evidence through the systematic collation and analysis of data relating to young people coming through the Youth Justice System as although there are screening tools in place, to be used in the effective management of individual cases, this data was reported to be difficult to interrogate from a monitoring perspective.

...in terms of a more strategic view, if you asked me could I tell you what percentage of the children open to (service) have we got a positive indication of them having difficulty maintaining eye contact, I couldn't tell you that. But in relation to a specific child, it's there.

However, there are pockets of data that have been collected as part of initiatives, for example, there was a pilot of having a Speech and Language Therapist placed in the Youth Justice Service¹⁹. As part of this work, it was recorded that, for example, 82% of children referred to the Youth Justice Speech and Language Therapist had difficulties understanding information. One participant commented:

Our data that we've got locally on this does absolutely reflect the national picture data published by the YJB around SEND being a very high indicator of criminality and has a disproportionately high correlation with children entering the criminal justice system, and that runs all the way through. So, whether it's ... or community orders, whether it's in custody, a massive over representation of SEND within that cohort.

Additionally, participants drew on professional experience when describing the prevalence of SEND within the justice system. When asked about whether they saw a high prevalence of particular types of SEND that were vulnerable. There were conditions more commonly mentioned within their answers.

Autism (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Both Autism and ADHD were commonly mentioned conditions, in terms of Autism comments included the below, which suggest that those with autism may be more likely to take things literally, misread situations or become obsessed with particular things.

Prevent teams across the country are finding significant numbers of referrals that are made to Prevent where autism is a factor, particularly in the referrals that they get for people who are under the age of 18. And young people who are autistic are much more likely to take things literally and are much more vulnerable to radicalisation and exploitation

I think if you've got children with ASD it might be that they've got into trouble because they misread situations, that I suppose a lot of those young people have obsessions with things. So it might be that actually some of the obsessions have been around knives or it might be that some of their obsessions have been around other things that obviously they don't realise they shouldn't be getting involved in.

¹⁹ Haddon, D (2020) Speech and Language Therapy in Youth Justice Final Evaluation 2019-2021

ADHD was also mentioned by professionals as particularly common and impulsivity was one of the factors that was mentioned as a risk factor for this group. The below case study gives an example of a young man with ADHD who appears to have become involved in drug related crime. It illustrates the distress of a parent who is desperate to protect her child but can't find and access appropriate help or gain a consistency of support.

Case Study Example: Young Man with ADHD and Drug-Related Crime

Last week I had a distressed parent whose young man, 17, she's got special guardianship of him. He's got ADHD, he's been supported through school - but ADHD is less understood, I think, than autism currently. He is in a safe house in another suburb of the shire because he is putting stuff on social media with piles of drugs on a table and blades flashing and he's in trouble basically and it's input somewhere.

Seventeen years old, he's got learning difficulties and he's got a condition that makes him impulsive. He's of an age where his medication won't be enforceable because he's 17. At the age of 16 a child can leave home and parents don't have any recourse, any power, anything. They are legally responsible until they are 18.

The parent said, 'I'm just so worried that he's going to end up in prison or dead.' He's clearly involved in something, and he's got a burner phone, which was a new one to me. It's something to do with the phone they use to trade or to be contacted.

And the Police have even been to pick it up to look at what's on the phone. They also said they couldn't do anything with him until he actually came into the criminal justice system; they couldn't do any prevention work with him because until he commits a crime, they've got no jurisdiction.

So, what we're looking at is a gap in support services perhaps. I don't know all the ins and outs.

So, this young man has had an EHCP, an Educational Health and Care Plan, but for this parent, she's utterly frustrated at the fact that she has parental responsibility but she is being kept in the dark.

I think she's said something like 'it's in my other notebook' she's had something like six different social workers in the last year. They've had some early intervention teams come in, a team come in and do some targeted support and then they go after six weeks, and she said 'it's been an absolute shambles'.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs and/ or mild learning disabilities

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) were also identified as a vulnerability by many of the professionals in contributing to either becoming involved in committing violent acts or being victimised.

Young people who are referred due to violent concerns, they tend to be the vulnerable population. So talking about the SEND needs, what we're seeing is young people who have a history of trauma, who have a history of school rejection or exclusions, who perhaps have had unidentified learning needs, that young people reach us at, say, 17 and we'll do an assessment and find out they've got a mild learning disability or speech and language needs, things that haven't necessarily been picked up.

National and local data suggested that there are high proportion of children and young people in the Youth Justice Service with speech and language needs. There has been significant acknowledgement of the needs of young people in Youth Justice Service in recent years. In 2015 the Youth Justice Board released 'Practice advice: speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in the youth justice system' for example. In 2017 the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice held a Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in Youth Justice: Understanding and addressing the impact Event. Nationally, 71% of sentenced children²⁰ assessed by practitioners there was a concern about their SLCN. In a recent Health Needs Assessment Report for children and young people aged 0 to 19 in Nottingham with Speech, Language and Communication Needs in Nottingham, identifies there is a higher level of SLCN in Nottinghamshire than Nationally. Practitioners highlighted the high level of SLCN in Youth Justice in Nottinghamshire and that those needs had previously been unidentified.

(Nationally) the research has shown that over 60% of young people have language and communication difficulties. In Nottinghamshire that was around 82-83% of young people that have language and communication difficulties and these were all unidentified prior to entering the Youth Justice Service.

As recommended in the National Report 'Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of Evidence' screening data should be systematically collected and aggregated to provide a more accurate assessment of the prevalence of neurodivergence and SEND to inform needs and support required within the CJS. In addition, this data can be scrutinised in relation offence types, for example, to identify the extent to which those that have committed particular offence types are more or less likely to have SEND or a neuro-divergent conditions. The collection of this data should also allow for more in-depth understanding of the prevalence of types of SEND and how they interact with other risk factors to increase a person's risk of becoming involved in violent crime.

Additionally, consideration should be given as to whether systems can include an indicator of whether particular identified needs have previously not been identified.

Our referral forms ask about any diagnosis, so that includes neuro development difficulties such as autism, ADHD, any intellectual disabilities, so we get all of those. We ask about the family background. As I said, often those things aren't necessarily identified until the point at which they're on the edge of the criminal justice system. So, I guess what we don't record and perhaps should is the number of people who come in and then we diagnose with -

This would be particularly useful if it can be combined with demographic data such as ethnicity, gender and age to determine the extent to which under-diagnosis occurs across groups as there are indications within qualitative and quantitative data that certain groups are more likely to not have their needs identified and receive earlier support.

4.3 Key themes emerging relating to serious violence

This section relates to key themes that were perceived to increase the vulnerability of those with SEND to becoming exploited or involved in violence.

²⁰ Sentenced child was one who received a Referral Order, Reparation Order, Youth Rehabilitation Order or custodial sentence between 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

School Exclusion

The link between pupils with SEND and high rates of exclusion is well known and has been widely reported on, notably in the Timpson Review of School Exclusion in 2019²¹. Participants of this research viewed exclusion of children from school as a strong risk factor.

I think school's a major protective factor because if they are not in school, where are they? That's always a concern. So, I think school's a major protecting factor for some of these children.

It was noted by one participant that many schools have low levels of exclusion however there are handful that have a high number:

I think the other thing that would concern me about exclusions, if you looked over the last four to five years, 80%-90% of all permanent exclusions will have come from two to three schools. Certainly, there's one multi-Academy Trust who currently make up for 50% of all the permanent exclusions this academic year.

There was particular concern over the readiness of some Academies to exclude young people who were being disruptive and that they are centred towards academic results which can mean that their culture is not contiguous to those with diverse needs.

But I don't think at the moment the inspection framework, the OFSTED inspection framework is very helpful in terms of children with SEND. It's very academically focussed so if you are an academy and you are being judged on results then you might not be very welcoming of children that have additional needs.

It is important to note that Ofsted have a new framework which contains a "quality of education" component which is designed to reward schools that are doing the best by all their pupils rather than just the "easiest to teach"²². Participants talked about the Local Authority not having the power or influence over Academies who do not have to justify why they have excluded:

It seems to be a bit of reputational damage control sometimes by Multi Academy Trusts who, say, will permanent exclude because 'It's this issue', and if you dig underneath that issue, actually the evidence is sometimes now quite where it should be. But we've very limited powers to challenge those decisions, obviously.

And if you've really got a magic wand, actually fixing the system, if Academies are more accountable and weren't allowed to exclude the way they exclude, have to maintain some responsibility. The system is inequitable anyway, so our schools that work in an inclusive way, obviously they would be financially punished, they've have to pay for the provision if they permanently excluded high numbers of children. But the schools that don't can just exclude as much as they want and see their school improvement journey coming up.

I find there's a lack of understanding of the SEND code of practice. I think the Local Authority does quite a good job of trying to work with schools but the academisation process has made that more difficult. So, I think when schools were under the control of Local Authorities you might make more headway.

21 Department of Education (May 2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion, Department of Education, London, available at www.gov.uk/government/publications

22 Children's Commissioner (February 2019) Skipping School: Invisible Children: How Children Disappear from England's Schools, Children's Commissioner for England, London.

There were also concerns around the safeguarding of children that are off-rolled²³ or excluded as they may 'disappear' or be out of view to authorities because it is not known what provision they are in, they are being home schooled or they are on part-time timetables.

If they are excluded from school or on part time timetables then you've got a window of opportunity to be groomed or to be approached. If you are not at school for a couple of days you don't tend to stay at home and do nothing, you tend to be out with friends that are either older within the community or others that are not in education

And then schools that don't exclude, what happens to the children there? They go into AP, either privately run by Academies or commissioned separately. So, they are just as at risk as many of those children who've been excluded but we don't have any sight of them at all.

And very often a lot of children end up on part time timetables as well and that can be difficult because we are not always aware of that... they will remain on roll with the school, but they are actually not there most of the time, if at all.

Also mentioned was the risk posed of children potentially being placed in areas that put them at increased risk of harm or having to travel across areas that put them at risk.

Travel is a vulnerability for children because there are hotspots and lots of the buses all come in and out of one area so there tend to be issues in those areas... travel, alternative provision and the moving from where you live and into other areas for AP.

I think the other thing that happens... the children moving from one school to another because they are vulnerable, which actually can put them more at risk because of where they're moving to. So, there's not a lot of intelligence behind the moves, which leaves people at risk

One participant also raised concerns about the use of provisions that are not registered.

There is some concern that some providers are not registered. There's all kinds of rules about when you have to be registered, what means you've got to be registered. So, it's something like the number of children you take etc. But my view would be we shouldn't be placing children in non-registered provision. I just think they are not inspected in the same way. So, I suppose it's that assurance around safeguarding, not just the academic stuff but around the safeguarding really

There has been a recent report by the Children's Commissioner²⁴ into the practice of off-rolling in which she calls for compulsory home education register, stronger measures to tackle 'off-rolling', more support for families who home educate, a greater oversight of home-schooled children and decisive action against unregistered schools. In it, it is reported that the Children's Commissioner's Office will also collect data from all councils in England and publish it, school by school, identifying which schools have high numbers of children being withdrawn into home education which may suggest practices of off-rolling.

23 As reported in the SNA Off Rolling – "is a practise by which schools remove pupils from their roll without following the official exclusion processes. Parents may be asked to take their child out of a school to avoid having an exclusion on their record. As this is not sanctioned by the Department for Education, there are no official records of how frequently this occurs, but anecdotal evidence suggests the practise is increasing and already common in some schools and academy chains"

24 Children's Commissioner (February 2019) Skipping School: Invisible Children: How Children Disappear from England's Schools, Children's Commissioner for England, London.

In summary, the issues relating to exclusion are significant, and are likely to disproportionately impact those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. As one participant commented:

But yes, there needs to be some policy change because it currently leaves big safeguarding loopholes. It might look great for Academy school improvement journeys, but children suffer, and that's what we see in Nottingham. It doesn't surprise me that high levels of violence - we've got the AP task Force coming because we are a violence hotspot and we've got lots of children in AP. High levels of exclusion, high levels of violence; there's a correlation there.

There was concern that children are being excluded without consideration being given to the causes of that behaviour and whether there are unmet needs and indicate that the child has undiagnosed SEND or other issues.

So, a lot of the children who I see being permanently excluded, it's not a significant factor in permanent exclusion, SEND, but further down the line it probably is. So the SENCO at the Pupil Referral Unit has raised that, that there's lots of undiagnosed needs...It does concern me a little bit obviously that you see high levels of exclusion without the agency involvement, without the SEND diagnosis. So, if it's been missed in mainstream but then picked up later, that's a concern.

One participant, who supported parents in meetings and advocated for them at exclusion meetings commented:

I also attend exclusion meetings with parents and I have been quite shocked for those meetings I've attended where the child has clearly got a Plan which states that they have a learning difficulty and the school has still exited that young person.

This is particularly concerning as the Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities for exclusion states that the head should so far as possible avoid permanently excluding any pupil with an EHC Plan, this also applies to looked after children. The box below provides in-depth detail on a particular example that was given where the child had an EHCP but it appeared that the school did not take into consideration the of the context of the child's diagnosis, when interpreting their behaviour.

Example by participant of a school not taking into consideration wider needs

A boy who - first of all I was called to his primary school because his Mum was having difficulty communicating her wants and needs around her son's needs. And one of the things that I found when I went there was that the school staff had turned up mob-handed, so there were six teaching staff in the room to one parent. She was quite a timid lady as it was and I came into the room and began to advocate and it was like, 'Who are you?'

...then she called me to the secondary school. This was a very, very small boy ... He had a form of autism that meant he had anxiety around making friends, he wanted to make friends, and this was all very clearly set out in his Plan, but some of his behaviours, once you got to the root causes and the triggers, it was about his needs to have friends.

So, the opening remark by - I asked the Head Teacher, 'Why are we here?'

Again, large numbers of school staff in the room. And [they] said, 'Because this boy's a thief and a liar'.

This was an 11-year old boy. What he'd done was he'd taken his Mum's dead phone, the phone wasn't working, he'd taken it to school. He'd got involved in some fantasy play where he was talking into the phone and pretending that he had friends on the other line and the teachers had observed this and decided that he was telling lies around having a mobile phone that was working. And also, he'd gone to a local shop and he'd picked up a box of Wrigley's chewing gum, one of the cartons, taken it back to school with him and handed out chewing gum to the other children in order to try to make friends. So, there was no exploration of his autism, understanding about choices and consequences. There was no understanding of the triggers.

I was really shocked, given that something had arrived in school prior to his admission which stated these were the issues and these were how they might manifest themselves. There was absolutely no quarter and I had to say to the Mum in that meeting, 'You have to get your son out of here because this is a hostile environment; he will not prosper here'.

And the Mum said to me, 'I agree', so she then transferred - before he was excluded from his first week at school she had him transferred.

I hope that illustrates to you the lack of awareness, understanding, willingness, commitment to actually support a child that can be met in a secondary school in Nottingham. I found that really shocking. I hope it's a one-off; lots of children do very, very well but I thought that was one of the worst examples I've come across.

The extract below is from a focus group with boys that were in an Alternative Provision. It echoes the point made by professionals about the readiness of schools to exclude, it is not known whether this young person was talking about an Academy.

Focus Group Extract – Focus Group with Boys in Alternative Provision

Participant A: Not kick people out so easy

Participant B: If Mainstream did what you did here? Then this wouldn't be needed. It is not hard to ask your students if they are ok...if they are angry and they have done something they have just come in and done it for no reason do you what I mean although you have to do is ask them why they have done it, it's not that hard. Mainstream they are straight on the phone, police, excluded...

Participant A: Mainstreams just a bit...

Participant B: They just want to kick out any problem that they have so that they don't have to deal with it.

Participant A: I have been to a couple of schools and it's horrible like. They kicked me out for nothing really. They just said this school isn't for you...they was like come in here. My mum was crying and I was like why you crying mum. This schools not for you, you have been here four weeks, you're a little [expletive], one instance bla bla kicked me out.....that was it literally, I sat down, I didn't even get to sit down, I pulled my chair round and went like that (gestured as about to sit down), 'this school ain't for you' stood back up, walked out

Participant B: They never really tell you what you have done wrong either. How is he supposed to get better?

One professional commented that when you have a young person that is at risk of permanent exclusion there should be speech and language and educational psychology assessments carried to find out the context of what is happening for that young person to allow appropriate support to be put in place.

... if they go to a Pupil Referral Unit they know how to support them and how to then reintegrate them back into mainstream education. Of if they are not going back into mainstream education, how to support them to stay in school so that they are not out on the streets during school hours and those kind of things.

This supports the Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion²⁵ in relation to exclusion that *“Disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs. Where a school has concerns about a pupil's behaviour, it should try to identify whether there are any causal factors and intervene early in order to reduce the need for a subsequent exclusion. In this situation, schools should consider whether a multi-agency assessment that goes beyond the pupil's educational needs is required.”*

Also emphasised by a participant is the need for Academies that are excluding to engage with the transition process in a timely manner.

²⁵ Department for Education (September, 2017) Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England: Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion

The intention would be that if a young person's permanently excluded, the school have a meeting with the Pupil Referral Unit and share academic information and risk assessments and other stuff. Sometimes it's very difficult to get the Academy to get that meeting as a priority, which then leads to further delay for the child... if you are making the decision to permanently exclude somebody, you at least have to have the courtesy to prioritise meetings with the Pupil Referral Unit around the next step to that child's educational journey. It's a significant decision to make so you can't just wash your hands of it afterwards.

It is important that Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire continue to input into research and discussion at a local and national level to highlight issues within the education system particularly relating to exclusions that significantly disadvantages and puts at risk vulnerable children and young people in the County. It is clear that this is something that is already occurring, Nottingham City were one of the 11 Councils which provided data the Children's Commissioners Office for the recent report on off-rolling. Participants talked about having conversations on a national level.

There needs to be a strong understanding at a County level as to the responsibility of schools to investigate reasons behind 'disruptive' behaviours and acknowledge that they may be indications of unmet needs. The messages need be loud and clear around their legislative responsibility.

Undiagnosed SEND

A key theme discussed was that those that are excluded from school or entering the justice system often appear to have undiagnosed needs:

And also lots of people who get referred through to Prevent and then referred through to us, clearly autistic spectrum disorder or cognitive issues are a question. And sometimes people will talk about them as if they have got a learning disability or some kind of cognitive delay or they are on the autistic spectrum, but nobody's ever actually done an assessment or even referred for an assessment.

I think coming from my angle, it's probably something about undiagnosed SEND, the issue. So, a lot of the children who I see being permanently excluded, it's not a significant factor in permanent exclusion, SEND, but further down the line it probably is. So, the SENCO at the Pupil Referral Unit has raised that, that there's lots of undiagnosed needs. It does concern me a little bit obviously that you see high levels of exclusion without the agency involvement, without the SEND diagnosis. So, if it's been missed in mainstream but then picked up later, that's a concern.

In terms of Speech Language and Communication Needs, it was indicated that the 'really little ones' tend to be picked up if they have speech or expressive language difficulties but not necessarily those that are showing poor comprehension, for example not following instruction or understanding. This is perhaps because difficulties with expressive language tend to be more obvious:

...expressive language is how you put your sentences together, your narratives; how you formulate responses. Those are the things that people can see; they are a bit more apparent than comprehension difficulties.

It was suggested that there may not be the awareness or structure in place in schools that allows professionals in those settings to recognise that they need to be referred to Speech and Language Therapy.

They will go to Psychology, who might not then have an awareness of language and communication difficulties, or they might then just become expelled and sent onto alternative provisions.

This has been identified at a national level that lack of awareness of SLCN and how it may affect behaviour and how it can lead to not only to no diagnosis but also misdiagnosis of other conditions. This was echoed by another professional that works with young people that have been involved in violence.

My view would be it's due to teachers' capacities and also things like developmental language disorder. They are not well communicated, there's just not the awareness of them. I've only learned about them since being with a Speech and Language Therapist...and I've been in (role) for 17 years. So, there's that huge gap in knowledge of these difficulties unless you are a Speech and Language Therapist, I guess.

There were issues raised to the extent to which there is equity of identification of issues and provision of support in terms of geography, family history and ethnicity. One professional commented in relations to schools.

They'll have other young people where it will be typical for that area or it's typical for that family, so they are perhaps not as concerned about, all their siblings come through and they've had their parents come through at some point so they know that they are going to have difficulties at some point anyway so they might be less engaged to highlight those if they've got other young people with difficulties.

Sometimes I think there's a mix-up between behaviour and SEND. I think that if a young person comes from a deprived area of Nottingham, for example, and they have concerning behaviour that may mask SEND issues and it may be interpreted as there's another reason for that behaviour.

One participant spoke about the discrepancy between BAME young people being under-represented in referrals to CAMHS but overrepresented in the Youth Justice System.

...And I think again it's down to how people are identifying their needs and directing them. Rather than identifying them having needs around managing communication or neuro developmental difficulties, they go through the violence and aggression, and they end up down the Youth Justice pathway because they think they are more likely to be violent and aggressive... I think people find them a little bit more intimidating, whereas if you had a young person that was from a Caucasian background, white British, they tend to get different services. So, they might have their language and communication need identified earlier and it not being just recognised as behaviour, even though their presentations are very similar.

Understanding behaviour and strict behavioural policies

Very clear in interviews from the professionals and young people was that often people do not look past the behaviour to understand the contributory factors whether that be SEND or other issues. The comment below by a young person reflects this, when they talk about the difference between the school environment now, compared to what might have happened previously.

And if you do something wrong here, they won't scream at you or put you in isolation. They take you aside, they talk to you, they want to actually know what's going on, why you've acted like that.

This was very much reflected in the comments of professionals that time needs to be given to understanding and addressing the root causes rather than focusing on the presenting behaviour and how to manage it.

Yes, I think so. There is an understanding that there is a behavioural problem but not necessarily understanding that within the context of what's going on. I think that reflects limited school resources, that teachers don't have the time or the thinking space to really think about what's going on for that child.

And I think a lot of these difficulties are disguised by disruptive behaviours or inattentiveness within classrooms. So, any input that there is, is on trying to support that behaviour and not disrupt the rest of the children. It's not necessarily on what's underlying this challenging behaviour.

What's the trigger for this behaviour? That's the trouble isn't it, we label the child as violent but that's how - It's manifestation of what that's about. Is it because they can't communicate? Is it about something going on at home we don't know about?

Also, talked about were overly rigid behavioural policies of multi-academy trusts which are governing decisions around exclusions which are not necessarily in the best interests of the child.

You might get a child with sensory issues, it could be as simple as they don't like wearing a tie, they can't tolerate the sensation of a tie but that's part of the school uniform... it's those kind of things that can incrementally make young people not want to go to school or not feel part of the school or be excluded, part time exclusions. But I think across the board it very much depends on the school or academy. I think some are better than others, but I think there are some academies that are really very strict, very inflexible and that can be part of the problem really.

The question of whether zero tolerance behavioural policies are legal is a subject of debate, especially given the fact that schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate pupils' needs under the Equality Act 2010 and potentially discriminate against those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Not being able to access support and expertise in a timely manner

Professionals commented that it can be difficult to get access to specialist services, there can be long waiting lists and referrals can be bounced back, which can also discourage future referrals for children with similar issues.

I think it's very difficult to gain access to educational psychologists. So even where teachers are saying, 'I'm really worried, there's problems', there tends to be huge waiting lists for educational psychologists or a very narrow remit of the reasons for referral.

I think the referrals are not always easy; I think there's a lot of gatekeeping. So even if the schools make those referrals I think they'll bounce back. Then schools are less likely to make

additional referrals for other young people with similar issues because they feel that the support is not there or the services are not easily accessible.

The referral system for the 'My Futures' for children that we identify with special educational needs I wouldn't say is the best. I feel like I'm banging my head against a brick wall sometimes. We can't refer on to CAMHS as such like we would if we had a statutory child. We literally have to go through a GP and the referral through the GP process, the waiting list is an absolute joke. It obviously is what it is but it's a long time for some young people.

The recent Health Needs Assessment into SLCN highlighted concerns amongst professionals about the accessibility of Speech and Language services to children that need SLCN support. Issues raised were that the service tended to rely on engaging with the parent/carer and schools have little knowledge or control over whether they have engaged. It was highlighted that parents/carers may have literacy or Special Educational Needs or Disabilities themselves and the system was not particularly accessible, for example, a policy of quick discharges for children that had not come to offered appointments and a 'come back when' system relying on a parent/carers ability to navigate the system. It was felt the system could have an inequitable impact on certain groups accessibility and engagement with the system. Concern was also raised about the number of sessions that children receive and whether it was sufficient to have a significant impact on their SLCN.

A parent advocate highlighted the irony that if your child comes into contact with the Criminal Justice System, they can get a speech and language assessment, however, if you have a child that you suspect of having SLCN you may have to pay to get an assessment:

...if you ended up in the YOT team, guess what - You could get a speech and language assessment. Well, if you're a parent of a four or five year old that's in nursery or pre-school or going to school, you can't get hold of speech and language assessment unless you've got £600-700 to pay for your own. We are failing to assess and picking up in a timely fashion. There's only two words that need to be echoed from me, it's 'unmet needs'. That's the overarching issue here.

It is clear that it can be difficult for both professionals and parent/ carers who have concerns about to access the appropriate support. Additionally, there can be long waiting lists to gain appropriate support.

The ability of schools to meet the needs of children with SEND

Participants talked about the need to increase capacity and capability in mainstream schools to assess and meet the needs of children with additional needs.

Mainstream schools need to be aware of how to support these children and young people in their busy classroom environments where they might not be able to keep up with the pace of the lessons. So if they are starting to show behaviours, put some support in place so that they do not then feel that they've got to be messing about. Maybe they go into smaller groups and have some teaching with smaller groups.

Schools really love it when somebody parachutes in to manage a child, they love that. You get a Behaviour Mentor who will come in three times a week and sit with the challenging child and it feels like a bit of respite. But what we're trying to do is move away from that and be very much more about supporting schools to have the capacity to manage children and include them.

The other thing I guess that I feel is important is support for the staff groups who are meeting the needs of these young people on a day-to-day basis. So again the schools, the parent; where is that non-judgemental reflective space for them to say, 'It's so challenging', and to have that validation and then that time to think about what could be done differently.

There is work under way in terms of assisting schools to identify and meet the needs of those with SEND. Nottingham has created a framework for the identification, assessment and intervention of children presenting with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs called Routes to Inclusion. Routes to Inclusion (R2i) has been developed by members of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), Behaviour Support Service (BST) and Nottingham City Primary SENCOs. Although it has been rolled out in Primary schools its roll out has been hampered for Secondary Schools by Covid-19.

Creating opportunities for young people to be involved in activities outside of school that can develop their skills and build their self-worth and confidence

When talking about exclusion particularly, professionals talked about the impact on children and young people's self-worth and talked about the importance of the needs to build on children's self-worth and identifying their strengths.

I think when you exclude a child from school you are telling them they're worthless and when they can become worth something and to be a foot soldier for a drugs runner then that's a career path.

I just think that recognition of the impact of being excluded and being labelled early on, finding that child's strengths. What can be built upon? Turning that determination into something more positive, shaping. I could probably talk for hours about the different things.

One thing noted was that children and young people that may struggle at school and not gain a sense of worth from that environment will benefit from engaging in activities outside of school that develop their social and communications skills and/or give them a sense of belonging or self-worth as well as keeping them safe

(It would be good) if able to refer on to specialist services or have some skills to be able to then support those young people to be able to engage in activities outside of school that will develop their skills, so developing their social communication skills; their resilience and ability to say no. Channelling them into music or cooking and different activities that are really functional, that they can do, hands-on activities and things so that they are not just out on the streets or playing on their computers or getting involved in things that can set them up into really vulnerable situations.

Also mentioned was training youth groups and youth workers in awareness around developmental language disorder, autism spectrum disorder, social communication difficulties and that actually young people might have really good surface level language skills but they might not be making inferences; they might be quite literal.

Supporting parents and carers in being able to navigate the system and achieve the best outcomes for their children

Participants raised concerns that parents and carers are not getting enough information and support to navigate the issues they are facing with their child or the system to gain the best outcomes for their

child. Also talked about was a need for support for adoptive parents who are navigating a world of bringing up a child with complex needs.

When you look at a school that excludes 26 children permanently in this academic year, surely 26 of those parents - that's in one school, that's a whole class of children in a secondary school that have been permanently excluded. None of those parents have successfully challenged that process so they are clearly not skilled enough or don't understand how to navigate in it and they probably don't know what that means for their children to come out the other end and end up in an AP unit, mixing with some other challenging children.

I've got a really good social worker and if you don't have somebody to help you navigate through all of that then it is very, very difficult. For me personally, my journey - I've had some upsets along the way but I've also recognised that as someone who's articulate and knows the system etc that serves me well. But for parents and carers who aren't in the same position as me, it's a challenge. And that's where the parent carer forums come in because they do support those parents.

We've got a lot of adopted children that are just got foetal-alcohol, that have been taken away from their drug addict or alcohol dependent parents at birth, placed without giving parents enough information about their genetics, if you like. And then adoptive parents having to unpick all of that, manage that, fight for services, ask for support.

Suggestions for support included an advisor for parents to navigate that exclusion process.

We had an internal conversation the other day about this VRU work-stream, saying wouldn't it be great if we could get the funding from that to fund an IAS worker specifically to work for children? Because that's the support you need isn't it, to empower and to challenge the process the children are going through but also to help parents understand it. What if we had that sort of resource available for parents?

A key issue raised was providing parents and carers receiving support from an independent source, and that some of the roles that are designed to provide independent support may have difficulty in being entirely independent from the system.

My worry there is that they're paid for by the Local Authority. They might be called something else but if their salary cheque comes through, their payslip comes through the City or County Council portal.

There was a SENCO in the room, but it was one of those situations where the Head teacher can be all powerful and in each school you go into the role of the SENCO is very different and the assertiveness of the SENCO is very different. Sometimes they just have to tow the line and they don't get to put those strategies in place that the child needs.

Alongside providing support to parents, the importance of ensuring parent/carers voices are heard and services are co-produced.

We're still trying hard to move towards a coproduction model of services because I believe from experience that services are better if they're coproduced if you listen to what parents and carers say and they have some investment and say in provision. As professionals we think we know what's needed but actually - and it's really quite powerful when you hear some of the stories. We did coproduce our short break offer with them. And that experience was quite useful to me because they do bring - We did some case studies and you start to realise the challenges of living

with children and young people that have behavioural difficulties, and some very violent, and the parents' worries and concerns about that and also their struggle to navigate the system.

It is imperative that parents/ carers receive the information and support that they need to assist them in obtaining the best outcomes for their children or young person. It was clear from narratives of both professionals and those that support parents and carers that they felt that this was not always the case.

Transition from Primary to Secondary school

The transition from primary to secondary was noted as a critical time by professionals where children with needs may cope at Primary but the transition to the Secondary environment is a turning point in their journey. Primary schools tend to be more 'nurturing' and flexible to children's behaviours.

I would say that's a key. I think in primary, as you'll know, they are smaller, they are more nurturing, they are more local to the child's home. And a child with a disability, either a diagnosed disability or a child that's got emotional needs that disable them, the transition to secondary school I think is a significant point, a critical point in that journey.

They are a bit more nurturing, a bit more safe. What I can say is that's where you often see the behaviour escalating. Bigger environments, more sensory overload, more expectation on being autonomous and if you have an intellectual disability or you find those things difficult it then becomes ten times harder.

Exactly, so Headteachers are calling out for help. So, we've done a lot of work around transition, because I think that needs to be improved on because secondary schools need to know what they are getting. Then if we can put the right support in place at primary school that will help at an earlier stage, to help address whatever behaviour or whatever issues the young person is facing.

The last quote above illustrates that there is work being done in this area and order to support earlier and to prepare Secondary schools for meeting particular needs.

Young people with SEND not being able to engage with Youth Justice interventions due to needs

One participant working in the Youth Justice Service with young people spoke about working with young people with Autism.

Anything that we try and educate them with, although they are listening - and I've had amazing relationships with them all - I don't feel that my work's been effective; I don't feel like they are taking half of it in. And if they are, by the time they've got home they've probably forgotten about it or whatever triggers them is triggering them and they forget about all the stuff that we've put in place to help them remain calm, not get angry, other ways of dealing with certain things. It just goes in the moment.

They note that although they built positive relationships with these young people and there was benefit they commented '*...I just don't feel like the work is settling with them. I'm not walking away like they've taken anything from my session so I'm not confident that they are not going to go home and act that same way.*'

Another participant commented that SLCN likely has an impact on their likelihood of being able to comply, understand the content and to not reoffend.

I think that reoffending part comes from them going through these interventions but not really having that understanding around what they're being asked to do. So, they might be breaching without realising; they can't always tell the time; they just might not understand the seriousness of the offence that they've done and just think that they've just been told off like they have been in school in the past, or kicked out of school and not realise that actually it's quite serious offences that they've done.

There has been positive work in this area, for example, gaining a SEND quality mark in 2018 and a pilot of a Speech Language Therapist in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Youth Justice 2019-2021²⁶.

4.5 Summary

This chapter does not intend to comment on the extent to which SEND has played a part in individuals' likelihood of becoming involved in violence, the relationship is likely to be complex and inter-related with other issues which may be more significant factors. However, this chapter does highlight the concern that a high proportion of those that become involved with violence or violence related crime (such as gangs and County Lines) have some form of Special Educational Need or Disability, particularly commonly mentioned were Autism, ADHD, SLCN and mild learning difficulties. Additionally, these often had not been previously been diagnosed before they had come into contact with the Criminal Justice System, there was particularly strong evidence of this in relation to SLCN.

The apparent lack of early diagnosis in these cases needs to be considered in terms of the additional risk it creates for children in becoming involved in violence and exploitation. Firstly, in terms of their individual ability to navigate the world, to protect themselves from harm, exploitation and reduce their likelihood of turning to violent or 'disruptive' behaviours. Secondly, the picture suggests that those with SEND are 'systematically' being put at greater risk of becoming involved in violence or violent related crime. In particular, the school system leans towards academic achievement and behavioural policies that potentially lead to an environment that is not supportive of those that display 'disruptive' behaviour or those with diverse needs. Particularly notable is the disproportionate impact of exclusion policies on those with SEND. Exclusions from schools raise significant issues of safeguarding around vulnerable children, for example, in some cases simply knowing where these children are, what areas they are travelling across to reach provisions and the amount of schooling children are receiving. Thirdly, when a person with SEND does come into contact with the Criminal Justice Service it is imperative that their needs can be identified and that the appropriate professional support is in place to ensure that the provision of interventions is accessible to them, to maximise the chances that the intervention can enhance their likelihood of not reoffending.

There is clear commitment across the professionals spoken to in relation to identifying and meeting the needs of those with SEND to reduce their risk of becoming involved in violence or being exploited. There is work under way in terms of assisting schools to identify and meet the needs of those with SEND. For example, Nottingham has created a framework for the identification, assessment and intervention of children presenting with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs called Routes to Inclusion. Although it has been rolled out in Primary schools its roll out has been hampered for Secondary Schools by Covid-19. Similarly, work in the Youth Justice Service such as gaining a SEND quality mark in 2018 and a pilot of a Speech Language Therapist in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Youth Justice 2019-

²⁶ Haddon, D (2020) Speech and Language Therapy in Youth Justice Final Evaluation 2019-2021

2021²⁷. It was clear from those spoken to that there was agreement that there was positive work happening but more needs to be done to identify and address the needs of those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and support parents and carers to navigate often complex systems.

²⁷ Haddon, D (2020) Speech and Language Therapy in Youth Justice Final Evaluation 2019-2021

5. Culture and Emerging Communities

5.1 Context

The original intention of this research was to identify ways to better engage with diverse communities especially emerging communities that may be new to the Nottinghamshire area. Several communities were suggested to the research team and assisted by the VRU team, contacts were identified and reached out to. Unfortunately, there was a limited response from the community contacts to get involved in the research, therefore, the data set to draw conclusions from is limited. However, through practitioner interviews some insight was gained and this is laid out in this chapter.

There was discussion regarding the concept of what constitutes an emerging community: is it identifying and forming relationships with a community that is genuinely new to the local area, or is it a community that has been embedded for some time but is coming, or has come to attention due to rising incidents? This was highlighted by practitioners:

...at the time when it comes to the eyes of data stats within the police, they suddenly think we've got an emerging community. We don't have an emerging community. Within the Somali community, because the Somali community has been settled over 16+ years, possibly now 20.

This is raised as it is an important and interesting point for thought as across the range of organisations working with communities in Nottinghamshire perceptions of communities and therefore actions to create dialogue and forge relationships may differ considerably.

5.2 Views on Serious Violence

The communities originally highlighted for the research identified were Somali, Polish, South East Asian and Roma and contacts within these communities were approached to take part in the research, however, this it proved difficult to get people to engage. This may be due to a variety of reasons, COVID and the ability to physically engage at the local level could certainly be a factor, it was also suggested that some may feel over engaged with and therefore reluctant to commit further time.

Through talking to practitioners, several communities were highlighted, these are listed below for information purposes and to highlight the diverse range:

Somali	Kurdish	Lithuanian
Afghan	Iranian	Sudanese
Polish	Pakistani	Chinese
Malawian	Eritrean	Latvian
Romanian	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller	

There were and are clearly different issues for different communities when we look at serious violence, for example the Somali community was discussed in relation to issues of female genital mutilation (FGM).

But you can also look at the Somali community when we talk about the FGM issues. That in itself is serious violence.

However, through talking with community members, it was discovered that knife crime was a concern for them.

So, when we talk about that particular serious violence in the Somali community, we know that the issues of knife crime was more concerning.

This potentially identifies issues of overt violence that communities will engage with and discuss within forums with organisations and hidden violence that is beneath the surface and not readily discussed. This can then become a barrier to engagement and identifies the need for long and lasting relationship and trust building. This is another example of the need to build strong, trusted and lasting relationships which take time and constant nurturing to ensure that issues that currently are hidden come to the surface.

A further example was given of concerns within the Eritrean community in relation to knife crime, this was highlighted through work conducted in the county with a member of the community based in London who had been directly impacted.

... there's a lady from London from the Eritrean community, she does some independent work and raises awareness about violence within the Eritrean community, in particular violent knife crime.

There was a growing concern within the Eritrean community about again violence around knife crime as well. So, I would say that's a community that we still need to access.

It was interesting to hear the views of practitioners in relation to generational issues within communities. For example, a discussion took place about the Polish community and the fact that they had been settled in Nottinghamshire for some considerable time.

I remember this back in 2007, we've got our settled Polish community and the church has been up and running for many, many years.

However, what this practitioner went on to discuss was the emerging or new generation of this community who experience different forms or manifestations of violence from the previous generation.

So again, I've started to recognise we're having a new generation of the Polish community. But when it comes to violence, and this is where I talk about modern slavery, that is if you look at the context of violence, that is violence because it's manipulated; it's controlled behaviour

The diverse nature of communities themselves is an issue for consideration, as outlined above this can be generational, where the next generation of a settled community adopt a different set of values and social norms and so different issues arise. However, this was also highlighted in respect of communities which are identified as one thing but come from different geographies and have different concerns and expectations.

When you talk about the Roma community, which is a settled community but then you have the new Eastern Europe Roma community that we see prominently in Hyson Green and they've popped up

These factors are then driving the emergence of new and different violence related crime issues.

...and I'm getting concerned about now is we have a Pakistani community, a settled community, and I'm seeing a drip drip effect of more around drug dealing, violence, being connected towards it.

5.3 Key themes emerging relating to serious violence

Defining communities

This research has highlighted some key terms and definitions that could be revisited and better defined. For example, the terms “new” and “emergent”, what do we mean when we talk about these. How should a “new” community be defined, is it in terms of the time that the community has been in the county and if it is when is this measured from? The term “emergent” may be a better way to define newly identified communities as this could be adopted in a more flexible way as a community emerges due to its size and so comes to notice or, as is the case for some of the communities identified above, they have emerged due to increasing and, therefore, noticeable issues.

The use of the term “emergent” also allows for organisations and practitioners to encompass the idea of diversity within diversity. For example, as in the case above where a new generation, with differing values and norms, begins to emerge within an identified community. They themselves almost become a community within a community and it may allow for deeper understanding and identification of the key people for engagement. As was highlighted in the interviews:

What we are having is the first generation here who are now mixing and socialising. And whereas when they were coming from here the children were a little bit more - I use the word 'controlled' - a bit more within the discipline of the family household. But as you settle in and you start seeing a different culture and a different way of life, the younger generation started to mix and get exposed.

No community is hard to reach, it's your willingness of knowing that community and what are you going to do at their pace

Who are your significant spokes people? Not one person from one community speaks for the whole.

... you do not say that this person represents the whole Muslim community, or this person represents the whole Romanian community or the Roma community. That's absolutely impossible because you've got a Roma community

Building and strengthening relationships

The ongoing work to strengthen and build relationships with emerging communities is something that needs to be at the forefront of this work. There are organisations and individuals across the County who are charged with or in some way engaged in work of this nature. It is therefore key that relationships and connections continue to be forged across these practitioners and an understanding of who is doing what and where is gathered. It is from this understanding that the strength or weakness of relationships within identified communities can be understood, assessed, and addressed.

For this to be effective, it must be led by strong and obvious governance, it raises issues of information sharing and, leadership and joint learning and development that cuts across organisations. The updated

Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) 2021 highlights the need for a better understanding of community assets and several other cross organisational opportunities to generate a more “joined up” approach.

... ‘genuine’ engagement that actually has - where you understand your community and who are the prominent players and build

... we definitely need something that can oversee the vast amount of work. The concerns I have is about everybody wants money, everybody’s saying ‘We can’t do it on thin air’

It’s making decisions that are, ‘Where does this funding go and how do we measure, how do we monitor? Is it fair?’ Accountability

Obvious and hidden issues

Through the generation of greater trust and strong relationships it becomes increasingly possible to raise to the surface issues that are not so obvious to organisations and people who are not part of the identified community. Issues such as female genital mutilation, modern slavery, coercive control and domestic violence have all been highlighted in the literature and at national level as such issues. They remain hidden because levels of trust remain low. However, other issues such as knowledge of the law in relation to knife carrying or road traffic legislation, through building trust, the dialogue becomes a two-way street allowing information to flow back and for the issues to be addressed.

I think the key way to alleviate perception or fear is education and make it relevant so they are aware of what’s happening on their doorstep.

If they are resisting us because they don’t trust us... then we’ve got to really understand how do we do it? We don’t do it in chunks and wait until something happens

...we talk about forced marriages or arranged marriages, honour-based violence, not just in the Indian communities, there are other cultures. You know where the gypsy Roma traveller community where they have to marry at such a young age and it’s led there

The role and effectiveness of frontline practitioners

Working in and with diverse and sometimes reluctant or suspicious communities needs practitioners who have a wide and deep skill-set and high levels of resilience. Forging and deepening trusted relationships takes time and there will be difficulties and setbacks along the way. It is therefore imperative that frontline workers are given the support, tools and leadership to be as effective as they can be. This includes continuous professional development, opportunities to interact with others working in the field and opportunities to speak to others who deliver services within their identified communities to pass on knowledge, skills and advice. This was described well from a policing perspective:

Neighbourhood Policing has to take the forefront of that drive but every individual officer, police staff, what are they doing to improve relationships?

I speak highly of partnership work and if you’ve got the right people with the right mindset like me, we thrive.

...but we’ve put a new training package together and we’ve created our own acronym about - we touch on unconscious bias, we touch on - and it’s jointly done with our community training.

Deepening Understanding

There is a clear drive and motivation from all organisations involved in working with diverse communities to deepen and develop greater understanding. However, this must be seen as an ongoing and relentless journey. This should also be seen as a two-way process with service providers deepening their understanding of the community whilst also allowing and inviting the community to ask questions and seek information from the service provider. It is only through developing this depth of understanding that we can build trust that then enables communities to be part of the decision making and solution architecture.

As can be seen from the evidence above, community is not static, it is ongoing process of change and development with problems and issues and even new facets of that community emerging and becoming a different community. For this reason, community engagement should not be seen or thought of a static thing or set of tools rather, it too, is emergent and needs to adapt as the community changes and new communities emerge.

...[name of area] was black and Asian and now you've seen the Kurdish community growing

Strength of governance

This was described in an interview as “an umbrella” something sitting above but understanding and coordinating all the different strands of work that are ongoing. Through different areas of research conducted and brought together in this document it emerges as one of the key needs and concerns for practitioners and service users. It is often mentioned in the context of money or funding and criticism is sometimes levelled in the terms of why one thing gets funded, and another does not. However, if improved governance in relation to emerging communities is tightly tied into the work of deepening understanding, then governance moves from a perspective of control to one of enabling.

... we definitely need something that can oversee the vast amount of work. The concerns I have is about everybody wants money, everybody's saying 'We can't do it on thin air'

Information

The effective sharing of information is another key theme that has been highlighted in this and the other research strands that make up the chapters of this document. As can be seen information is a bedrock of enabling governance and deepening understanding of communities as well as supporting co-creation of interventions and services that meet local needs. It has been identified that different organisations have different systems and processes for dealing with and sharing information, this has been and continues to be an ongoing national issue. However, it is key to driving forward most, if not all, of the issues raised across this and other research in criminal justice and therefore is worthy of continued pressure and action.

Getting everybody to work together and having a potential common database that everything is recorded on.

is the desire to actually have a meaningful database that there are named people within those organisations that represent - so you could have five within a particular community of identity, or six.

Aligned to this a practitioner discussed the need for what was described by them as “cultural intelligence”, however, they were really talking about cultural understanding and knowledge. Cultural

intelligence is a defined term in the literature and relates to a person's ability to relate to, understand and react appropriately in culturally diverse situations and this may be worthy of wider consideration, however, this was not what the practitioner was referring to.

Also, one of the other things I think we could do better is when it comes to significant festivals, like Black History Month or whether it's Diwali or Ramadan, okay let's have that cultural intelligence and be aware of what's happening

Empower grass roots

There is a plethora of voluntary, statutory, religious and other organisations that work in diverse and emergent community settings. To effectively engage all these people, as well as the communities themselves, in meaningful and effective co-creation of interventions and services they need to feel that they are empowered to do so. This speaks to the point made previously in relation to enabling governance. Allowing people to not just feel but to actually be empowered to make adaptive change as circumstances and understanding changes allows the system as a whole to react quickly and dynamically, led by those who understand what's happening.

The actual doers... the doers is your grass root level people. And I think we owe a lot to them who really want to do something for their community. And if we want to empower people we need to probably get grass root people

Are you out there? Are you putting extra - are you out doing evenings? Are you out there at the weekends? Are you being shown visibly at the places where you need to be? There's a difference being a desktop writer to actually out there

A participant that was talking about a service that supports those that had experienced domestic violence, where most referrals come through the police, commented on the importance of engaging with grassroots organisations.

What Nottingham does have, and I found out through another route, was these amazing networks of really tiny, grassroots organisations that are doing face to face community work. So I'm thinking groups like the (Project) who are working with the African Caribbean communities. But there will also be groups who are working with other communities in other areas who I think we need to be tapping into. They may not be funded by the Local Authority but are run by volunteers. They are committed, dedicated members of the community who want to engage in that work... And it's how do we speak to them, engage with them, respect their expertise and local knowledge, and hear what they're saying about what's happening on the ground, and not just always look at everything through a criminal justice lens.

5.5 Summary

This chapter reflects a complexity in terms of diverse communities, and in particular perspectives that provide a challenge relating to constructs of 'emerging' communities. At times, such emergence can be a product of agency awareness or an uplift in agency engagement, or growth in perceptions of related problems, rather than a community in itself being 'new'.

Consistent with similar themes re-occurring across the various chapters of this report, there is recognition of the importance of developing deeper understandings, the value of insights of those working closely with communities, the importance of building strong and lasting relationships, and the

empowerment of grassroots initiatives. All of this points to the value, reflected again in the following chapter, of developing strong, locally rooted, charities, and of supporting such organisations to grow and to develop. Often is it through such organisations that the understanding and connection with a particular community or context is truly built and included in that will be a development of much greater insight into dimensions of serious violence and exploitation which may previously not have been visible to professionals or commissioners.

The points raised above can often be viewed as distinct areas of work that are planned for and sought to be improved in isolation of the other areas. However, this is an interrelated system and improvement, or decline in one area will lead to improvement or decline across the whole system. This is the whole systems approach that often features in the management and organisational development literature and features within the SNA. Whilst frontline practitioners and service users may not have an understanding of the detail of the whole system approach, they articulate it when they discuss the barriers they feel and the improvements that can be made.

6. Partnerships, Providers and Place

This chapter of the report draws from interviews with service providers and professional stakeholders and considers the broader dimensions of service commissioning and delivery, the partnerships that exist and that are developing across providers and communities, and the community contexts where serious violence takes place. The chapter provides an overview of issues identified by professionals across the partnership in respect of local geographies, and also considers some of the broader trends identified by partners and providers in respect of serious violence.

6.1 Context

The Violence Reduction Unit represents a significant development for local partnership approaches to serious violence, both within Nottingham City and more broadly across the whole of Nottinghamshire. This chapter focuses on partnership (service providers and other professional stakeholder) perspectives on the developments to create a more holistic, preventative, public-health-based model, and on their professional perceptions on efforts to strengthen partnership working arrangements. The chapter identifies cross-cutting elements of partner and provider views on serious violence – including some concerns about worrying trends and a worsening picture, recognitions of the significance of social media as a driver and enabler of serious violence and exploitation, and reflections on the significance of under-reporting and ‘hidden’ elements of serious violence and exploitation.

The chapter explores perspectives on local geographies and the significance of ‘place’ in serious violence and exploitation, as well as identifying some of the challenges of working across the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire geographies, a diverse area with different local authority arrangements and local structures and resources. The SNA identifies strong links between ‘place’ – and particularly social deprivation – and patterns of serious violence. There is recognition from data that patterns and trends in serious violence are not uniform across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The latest SNA reflects that the largest falls in recording of serious violence incidents are concentrated in the City and town centres, but some more rural and suburban areas have seen increases in violent crime (page 12, SNA 2021 Part 1).

Social media is identified as an issue within SNAs, and with regard to girls the most recent SNA mentions social media as problematic and suggests this situation has worsened during the pandemic, particularly through increasing sexual grooming of girls. Social media was also seen as the catalyst for girls being drawn into violence. It was felt that younger girls (around 14-15 years old) were now ‘hanging out’ with very much older boys and men, and getting involved in problem behaviour (page 31, SNA 2021 Part 1), partly enabled by social media. This chapter reflects further partner and provider perspectives on social media, which are supportive of the SNA assessments, seeing it as a critical, and developing, driver of CCE, CSE, and serious violence.

6.2 Views on Serious Violence

Perspectives across stakeholders and partner agencies reflect many positives relating to the development of services and joint working. This is however situated within concerns regarding changes in serious violence, and perceptions of a worsening picture.

These concerns, from the perspective of practitioners working across serious violence, present a picture of growing complexity, and a sense of increasingly severe violence and exploitation.

So, we've definitely been much more aware of the severity of some of the violence around county lines and sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. I think the level of violence, just some of the stories I think sometimes it's about the numbers of perpetrators that there may be who are assaulting one young person. And sometimes I think it's about seeing the impact of that step up... I think there is a level of violence, it's kind of moved into a new, more violent arena really.

But the difference I think at the moment is the complexity. So, I think what we have seen is an increase in complexity of the nature of what's happened to a victim.

Practitioners who work closely in the context of services for serious violence victims also reflect perspectives of a broadening of the demography of victims and perpetrators (with increasing recognition of violence impacting both older adults, and also very young age groups, than previously), geographical expansion from what might have been seen historically as 'hotspot' locations, and a worsening of some community contexts in terms of propensity for future violence.

When social media came about... It's just led to these behaviours, they are generation-related, becoming more embedded... the total disregard for life by young people now compared to when I was younger... the total disrespect for other people, older people.

The other curve that I noticed was possession of knives, more use of wielding knives the crime gets worse and the readiness to inflict serious violence increases. And these young people are then traumatised. They are going to have kids and they are going to be living a life with their kids which is based on a traumatic youth or childhood and so it is very easy for that to keep spiralling.

What we probably don't talk about enough as professionals, is the spikes arising in violence with the over 25s and the over 40s and the over 50s... that doesn't get documented in the newspapers and your local press and media because it's probably not as sexy as the young person in a hoodie.

The growing significance of social media

For many professionals working across a range of different settings supporting victims, working with perpetrators, and commissioning services, social media is seen as a significant driver of patterns of serious violence, and as a critical area that the partnership needs to get better at understanding, and also, in turn, at potentially positively influencing.

Yes, they are filming the fights. We've had that for years, to be honest with you. They film the fight, target a girl, one of their friends is filming it while they are targeting the person that they've got the issue with, then you have a fight and then they use that on social media to embarrass the other person, I suppose.

And if you delete your page or block them you are showing a sign of weakness in their world, so they refuse to do that, which then makes the scene more heightened because they are constantly seeing the comments that are being made.

Social media and gaming are seen as playing a role in desensitising to violence. Gaming is recognised as one specific element, perhaps particularly with younger children exposing, them to significant violent imagery. One practitioner with experience of working with younger children reflects:

I think the violence that then is rippling out to people who are hearing those stories [of serious violence incidents]. I think there's a desensitising of violence in terms of society, in terms of what's shown on television, what children are gaming. I regularly hear 6 year olds, 7 year olds saying, 'I was on Call of Duty', or, 'I was on-'. But that's for an 18+ and it's your older brother who's not even 18 themselves who is showing it to you. So, it's that kind of ripple out.

The digital age, and the extent of social media, is recognised as presenting problems, both for workers focused on supporting victims and understanding the dimensions of an individual's experience, and also for those investigating and working with perpetrators.

Feeling more and more helpless I guess around - I'm less and less equipped to function in this social media milieu. And I think that the gap between how children and younger people use social media and what adults understand.

I think also recognising the complexity for the police who are trying to investigate those cases, that this isn't just an investigation interview, this is needing to look at all this equipment.

On the other hand, there is also recognised to be huge potential to seek to utilise new technologies and ways to communicate in positive ways, to combat serious violence and help protect vulnerable people. Several practitioners in the field are considering models for how to achieve this:

Use it positively with young people. We understand that phones are young people's safety nets a lot of the times and if they are being exploited on particular Apps we try and push safety Apps with them. So if they are comfortable using Apps and things like that we're trying to play to these skills sets. Rather than take a phone away from a young person, 'You don't use your phone because you are being exploited', actually use your phone but use these Apps, use these things.

Under-reporting and the challenge of not understanding the full picture

A key challenge to tackling serious violence identified across the interviews is that many issues and experiences of victimisation may go unreported. This has a significance in terms of weakening the ability for the strategic response to serious violence to be driven by comprehensive, reliable data. Gaps in knowledge weaken the evidence-base informing the design and resourcing of prevention and victim services, in terms of understanding and prioritising risk and harm and identifying trends across different localities and forms of violence.

There are a number of complex, interwoven underlying reasons for gaps in knowledge and under-reporting. Some forms of violence and exploitation are inherently 'hidden' in their nature, such as domestic violence and abuse of children.

There's a history of parents being very avoidant of services because the source of trauma is within the family home.

If it's domestic violence, the kids are going to be quite scared about saying anything because they don't want Mum and/or Dad, whichever one it is which is the perpetrator getting into trouble. They would have been threatened not to say anything to authorities, that type of stuff.

In some instances, acts of violence are viewed to be responded to differently by professionals, sometimes less formally, resulting in some cases to them being less likely to be placed on formal record. Sometimes this links to an (understandable, and appropriate) professional ambivalence regarding the individuals involved, particularly where a perpetrator may be a vulnerable young person. And sometimes, in the perception of some of those interviewed, there are broader patterns of non-identification of issues which some would allege link to elements of organisational reputation and performance.

The domestic violence at home towards parents is huge. Parents are being beaten up, mothers and fathers, especially within our community with the kids who are quite erratic in behaviours through the drugs they are abusing. If this were being perpetrated by adults, there would be a fixed police response. With young people, our response, it is more nuanced.

There's a lot of unreported stuff as well. You know like the shisha, the mamba, the THC. The schools are not reporting it, it's under reported there because of OFSTED so that's another challenge because they want Academies on a nice squeaky image.

An adult male partner is probably more readily seen as a perpetrator whereas somebody under the age of 18, particularly 14, 15, was still seen as a child and maybe still seen as a victim.

Especially where it is a clear case of CCE, the police and other services are not going to proceed in the same way as they would if there was not that context.

A lot of people are getting dealt with out of court and they are still there, still got the same problems. And it's absolutely right if they are vulnerable and they end up in this situation when it could have been avoided, I think it's right to avoid criminalising young people, but then there's still a lot of resources that are based on a young person getting convicted.

Some individuals and communities may have distrust or ambivalence towards authorities, or cultural norms regarding not involving outsiders. Some of the activities of young people may simply not be seen or understood by adults. For some, the issue may be less one of distrust, and more one of a lack of confidence or a scepticism that anything positive will result if an issue is reported to someone in authority, such as the police.

And I think to a certain extent that still happens in the old pit villages... where it is a community that deal with things themselves. Things aren't necessarily reported to us because they want to deal with it themselves. And how do you break that thought process? You probably can't, to be fair, for another 20-30 years when all the old mine workers have gone.

It is about working closely with young people. Otherwise, we may think we have, but we have no idea what is going on.

I think one of the issues for us a lot of crime isn't reported because people go, 'Well, what can you do because the police can't do anything'.

There are also some contexts, in terms of places, or times of days, where there is a perception that criminal activity occurs 'out of sight' when the police are known not to be around.

When we go to bed at night I know at 10 o'clock when the Police go off shift here, you can hear the mopeds going out to do their deliveries and it's not pizzas [laughs]. You just know, you can hear them start off around 10 o'clock and you'll hear them whizzing around and you think that's what's happening.

There will never be a point where the reporting and the data picture in respect of serious violence and exploitation are comprehensive and accurate. There is no single solution to improving understandings and data, though it does seem evident that where charities or other organisations work very closely with young people, they can develop a picture directly through that higher level and depth of engagement which is far more comprehensive than the one formally seen in the likes of police and crime statistics. The gap between recording and available knowledge, and lived-reality, is important, and needs to be borne in mind when developing strategic approaches and taking decisions on prioritisation. This reflects very much into the next section of the report, which discusses perceptions regarding the geography of serious violence across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

Serious violence and geography

There are perspectives that the geography of serious violence is changing, with increasing challenges in many areas across the County, and that this presents some challenges for what is seen as being the legacy of focusing of resources primarily within the City. There are also views that some issues and patterns of violence and exploitation may well have been existent in the County previously, but there were not the mechanisms to identify them and direct individuals towards services. This leads to numerous calls across the interviews for the VRU (and other strategic commissioners) to focus more on the County as well as the City in terms of services and priorities.

But County areas are seeing it a lot more now and it's just spreading like an infectious disease.

I'm afraid that there has to be some serious work to happen in the whole of Nottinghamshire. We need to consider - we accept that within Nottingham City there's a lot of crime that happens within that area, I accept that. Crime stats used to be, and I'm not sure where we are at now, off the radar. There's more raids, there's more of all of this sort of stuff. But we have county lines, we have vulnerable communities all over the County that are isolated. We've got cuckooing which is going on all over the County. It's more likely to happen in the County than it is in the City, just because people are less likely to notice, if you see what I mean.

Yes. The VRU know this and I will keep telling them every day. They know that if I'm sat in a room that's the first thing I will say, 'What are you doing in the County?'

Within the diversity of the County geography, there are several voices across the interviews recognising a complex and changing context, and that areas traditionally felt to be 'hotspots' are not necessarily remaining so in as stable a fashion as was once perceived to be the case, and that issues are spreading to many other parts of the County.

So, I actually feel that there isn't that any more, there doesn't seem to be a specific place like it was previously, say, predominantly in Ashfield.

We've got a particular young person at the minute who seems to know everybody and this young person is very high risk so it's quite concerning for us that - I found one of my young people who's on the cusp of potential CCE and violence and apparently this boy's visited him at home and the home weren't aware of this young person so immediately I'm panicking. And this

is a [geographical] area where this boy wasn't known to be associating. So, it's very much transient at the moment, it's not a particular street or a particular locality.

There is recognition that some problems, which are acute within the City, are tending to now 'ripple' out into the County, particularly in relation to drugs and CCE. Likewise, some agencies recognise that at times, individuals who present a risk of serious violence are moved out from the City (as part of individual risk management plans) and this can then in some cases 'export' problems into County communities. However, others also see many County communities as experiencing long-term challenges and issues, and as being vulnerable to increase in serious violence, CCE and CSE, with some issues of long histories of worklessness, and communities feeling 'separate', 'disenfranchised', and 'left behind'.

Talking to children and young people and they are going back to when the mines were shut. But then you look at it logically and you realise even their parents weren't born when the mines were shut. So there's a legacy issue here, a massive legacy issue.

Within the City context in particular, there are challenges of working in communities which may have negative views or animosity regarding other areas of the city, and in respect of public organisations.

Well, inner city is a very busy area in Nottinghamshire, so a lot of those families, a lot of the children that you have, their parents might well have been arrested, their houses might well have been raided. They're probably watched Interceptors where all the police thing - where you drag people over the front of cars and you are bosching doors all the time, it's something pretty negative.

However, they are coming [to attend appointments] from different parts of the city which brings its own challenges for the setting with post code rivalries etc, which is something that I try and work on.

There's a perceived belief that you can't move from a post code to another post code because you are going to get beaten up, that type of stuff. There's gangs operating, they don't like you coming from a certain NG post code if you come into our NG post code.

There is realism that in respect of County and City, there are political and agency structures that are separate, and that whilst they will engage and work collaboratively together, that distinctiveness will remain.

They are separate entities. Will they work together? Well mostly - they are separate. I'm not talking about politically here but just in terms of getting work done they do talk to each other, they will sit on each other's groups. Will they amalgamate those groups so that they've got one group and it's done, everything's done strategically across City/County? That will never happen; the answer is no.

6.3 Key themes emerging relating to serious violence

Developing an effective public health model through commissioning

The breadth and quality of services already available, particularly in the voluntary and charities sector and in Nottingham City, is generally looked on positively across the interviews. Whilst there are several

key suggestions for further development and improvement, there is acknowledgement that much that is already in place is of a high quality.

What we do have in Nottingham is really strong partnership structures. We have very mature, long-standing partnership arrangements which bring together all the agencies that need to come together. All those agencies are committed to it.

Partnership arrangements - we have an excellent third sector. We have some very strong providers, specialist providers who really know what they are doing and deliver well.

This also reflects in many positive sentiments about the partnership structures and models. The VRU specifically receives strong support across many stakeholders and is seen to have made key improvements in terms of engaging and supporting the voluntary sector and particularly smaller charities, and in creating an improved space for collaborative commissioning and service development.

I think Nottingham is in a better place now that we've got the Violence Reduction Unit in place and that the Council and the Police are working in harmony rather than in silos.

I guess strengths, the VRU, having the Violence Reduction Unit is a massive strength, to have a central figure co-ordinating violence as it were, to steer and guide and advise and fund projects.

I think it has been giving us [voluntary sector] the same kind of respect and bringing us into forums where we can actually mash together certain concerns or bring certain concerns or disclosures to the forefront and to be able to have a holistic approach when we're working with the Council and the Police in the Violence Reduction Unit to be able to provide a real, strong package of support to our communities.

I feel that the Violence Reduction Unit has also started to help the relationships between the Council and the Police, which has historically been very strained. And also it's starting to give community groups a little bit more confidence and trust that we actually feel a little bit valued and heard because historically we've never been valued and we've never been heard, only until there's a murder or something.

Yes, it feels like you've got people who've very much got your back because you are their service. They are paying you so they want it to go well, they want you to build those relationships and they really facilitate it. So I think in terms of our profile and, I suppose, our confidence about delivering a service, it feels very positive.

There is widespread commitment and support to develop a public health-based approach, a more holistic, preventative, integrative, and community-engaging model. Good examples are cited, for example the whole systems approach paper regarding domestic abuse, as pointing the way to evidence-based, holistic models of partnership practice. The development of bespoke school health profiles, and stronger public health thinking across schools, parents, and partners is seen as crucial in respect of young people. There are some reflections that the language used to galvanise around a public health approach needs to be managed carefully, with some concerns that it can sometimes sound 'blamey' or single-out young people or certain communities as a negative, and as a problem. But the general approach is well supported.

Whilst there is substantial support for the VRU model and for the work undertaken to date, there is also frustration at the short-term funding inherent in how VRUs are currently being taken forward as an initiative nationally. This approach of short-term and uncertain financing is seen to be fundamentally at odds with the core principles of design for a genuine long-term, preventative, public health approach.

Absolutely, so I think that's right. I agree with the Public Health approach. I think the way that it has been funded completely undermines that approach because it's so short term. You will have heard this from everyone I am sure, but the short-term nature of the funding is utterly insane because you can't take a Public Health approach in a year and it creates all sorts of difficulties, practical difficulties, certainly with the commissioning.

It creates difficulties because you can't confirm anything beyond a year, you can't think as long terms as you should. So, I think that's really problematic, I think in the longer term.

But I think the single biggest challenge and difficulty with what they've got is the way that they are funded. And it's not even about the money, it's just how the money comes is really unhelpful.

Adopting a longer-term perspective and recognising the need for longevity of engagement, in respect of working with individuals and communities, are seen as critical success factors. The sense that there are 'no quick fixes', no 'rapid treatment outcomes you can tick off, count up, put in a graph', in respect of much of the work undertaken across prevention, perpetrator work, and victim services.

Yes and there's no quick fix. What we do is we try and get them back into the system where they feel part of the community again. We get them back into either working around the local mosque or around the foodbank or within the community.

It's like patching them up slowly, a healing job. But at the same time the after care is really important. It's not just, 'I've done this bit', and then you can go. It's longevity. You need a one to five year plan with each person.

Working with young people who are young adults, so they've been through our service, and after doing that we offer a follow-up. So, I feel like that's giving me a new insight as they start to reflect back on their childhood.

Once you've got that broad lens then you can be a bit more tactical, but a lot of the time we're being a lot more tactical with a shorter lens, which sometimes means you miss out on what's playing out over longer periods of time. Which makes, even though what you do may be effective, it's just not as effective as it could be.

There are frustrations amongst some charities of what they perceive as long-term, structural barriers, historical patterns of commissioning, limitations of commissioning approaches, and at times what are conceived as 'political agendas', that tend towards favouring some areas, communities, ethnicities, issues, and organisations, at the expense of others. There are calls for a fundamental rethink of service commissioning, particularly in terms of perceptions that some BAME communities do not receive appropriate focus and support.

This is what we're going against - the system, the disparities as well as trying to provide the best support for these individuals and communities which is just getting more challenging.

I think what we need is a whole restructure. We are in the old trend of years and years with the same cycle, last 10, 15 years the same type of commissioning, same type of funding, same type of school of thought.

I think there's too many political agendas. If people are putting their heads above the parapet they get put down. There's a lot of hate, there's a lot of competition between community groups and within the statutory sector. We know that people within the statutory sector have got favourites and they tend to not want to work with certain people because they think they are getting too big. And some groups have even been persecuted for being too successful.

There is perceived to be real strength in the quality, and specialisms, of smaller charities, but those charities also feel vulnerable in a competitive commissioning 'market' where they feel it is difficult to compete and to remain viable against larger competitors, particularly when funding models are short-term and uncertain. Levels of process and bureaucracy relating to tendering and commissioning can feel 'difficult to navigate', and at times like 'a hostile environment' for smaller charities. Sometimes this is simply in the basic sense of the level of administrative burden in applications and reporting, and sometimes there is a broader sense of tone of commissioning relationships, and of charities not feeling 'respected' or 'valued'.

They are big charities, big organisations, we're small organisations. So we really do struggle when it comes to commissioning. And the big charities can easily swallow up small charities. Even if you go into a partnership tender, they might eat you up or destroy you.

Again, there has been a lot of bureaucracy, red tape about and stigma around working with voluntary organisations. They are made to be feeling really small, they're made to feel devalued. But it's starting to get there now; it's starting to get there with some of the organisations. I think that some of the statutory organisations need to sort out their own home first. Some of their own services aren't joined up

At times, commissioning models and the uncertainty attendant to short-term funding, can draw charities towards needing to expand or depart from what they perceive to be their core talents and specialisms.

Yes definitely, its profoundly unhelpful isn't it? And I think we're also aware that at times it pushes you out of your specialism as well to think, 'Well, we could extend out to this, there's this tender going there, shall we extend to that because we're not sure what's happening here so that will at least shore us up a little it'.

Competition in service commissioning is seen as being a root cause of some competitive rather than collaborative behaviours between partners, which in turn are seen to undermine the fundamental principles of a collective, holistic public health approach to service delivery.

There's always going to be a competitive edge. If you pitch one organisation against another for money, there's always going to be an issue. And there's always going to be, 'My organisation can do this better than your organisation'. It's always going to be like that and Nottingham is notorious for that happening. Not so much in the County but definitely Nottingham City.

There is felt to still be a need to further incentivise and encourage more collaborative working, through change in future commissioning approaches.

There's a lot of groups all doing different things, all fighting for that same funding. I think the more they're pushed into doing work which is partnership work - and I like to push behind the scenes and go, 'Look, they're doing this over there, you're doing this over here; you could work really well together'.

Whilst the innovation, 'lived-experience', drive, and community roots of many charities is seen as a real strength, there are also some concerns regarding new entrants working in the field, and whether in some cases they bring the degree of professional experience, and appropriate approach to engaging with young people who are vulnerable or who have complex needs.

There needs to be quality assurance. There's so many groups jumping on board saying, 'We're trauma informed'. Everyone's jumping on the bandwagon of thinking, 'I've got lived experience'.

But I have lived experience but I still had to go to uni for the last nine years of my life. I studied a Degree. You can't just come in and not be accredited because it's like me saying I'll come and do your job.

We're working with kids that have been let down consistently by agencies. So, when they get lured into that shop window and then they get let down, once they become hopeless, that's when we lose them because they won't trust people again.

When I work with them in partnership, there's no professional boundaries, there's no confidentiality. There's a lot of gaps and elements of risk.

I would like to see more partnership working, but I would like to see the standards rising because the problem that we're having at the minute is that a lot of people are rolling out of bed and becoming knife crime experts or counselling experts or whatever. They are setting up organisations because they are seeing people on TV doing good work.

What's happening is then they go in for pots of money and when they get that money it's not working because they are not qualified to be working with these kinds of things.

Reflecting on these concerns, there is perceived to be a need to strengthen models of governance, support, quality assurance, training, and professionalisation.

If the VRU had a gold standard or a quality mark or something along those lines around violence or around the projects that they fund that have to sign up to a charter, they know, 'Okay, they've got the quality mark, we can refer straight into them without having any barriers.'

I'm not saying don't come on board, I'm saying have quality assurance framework, check who's on board. Are they good enough, are they accredited? Are they accredited enough to be part of the VRU? If not, are they willing to be developed, do they want to change and develop?

So having a framework that actually shows the competence of organisations and then those organisations partnering with other organisations, the statutory sector, healthcare, everybody working together in collaboration, information sharing, sharing the resources, sharing best practices.

Working together

There is strong support to further build models of collaborative, partnership working, across statutory agencies and better engaging charities and the community more broadly.

And I think a more multi agency working partnership would probably make a huge difference. We still tend to come in our silos, in our little boxes and we are trying very hard to get out of that. We are doing some really good work, certainly at the City, outside of our silos but when it comes to you've got a school and their children, they tend to be quite isolated and people will come in and work with you but not in that partnership way.

Linked to this, there are desires to see a better coming together of assessment and referral approaches (a 'no wrong door' model), and greater development of knowledge across partners regarding what services are available, including directories, sign-posting, and briefings on services. Referrals into specialist services and provision are often still seen as being too reliant on the knowledge and relationships of particular professionals, rather than a more systematic, structured approach. In

particular, in more 'mainstream' settings (e.g. hospitals, GP surgeries, schools, etc.) the knowledge of specialist service availability is viewed to remain limited and inconsistent. Improved data sharing, and greater development of more joined up systems and processes, would also be welcomed.

I think sometimes we don't hit the right people within schools then the information doesn't get disseminated down. Individual teachers might spot something that they can refer on to but they probably wouldn't know about the programme potentially.

Getting everybody to work together and having a potential common database that everything is recorded on. Social Care have got their own, the Police have got their own, Youth Service have got their own. But it doesn't necessarily talk to each other.

So, it is a constant message-giving thing to keep making referrals. It's a lot better than where it was, It takes time to get it that way, probably takes about 18 months to fully settle and embed in a hospital.

There is support for 'getting it into the culture', and 'mainstreaming our awareness about serious violence', across mainstream services such as in schools.

Developing a whole school approach and embedding it into your curriculum but also having a year-long calendar of activities and things like that, so that way it's the culture.

If I look back five years, some of the things we are doing now with our students we wouldn't have been doing five years ago, and that includes some of the work that our support coaches and our safeguarding do with our young people. There would probably have been another agency involved in that mix with that young person.

This is seen to need to be accompanied by models of support, training, and professional mentoring and 'safe space' to learn and to develop, for all of those involved in that broader network of practitioners across 'mainstream' settings.

Support for the staff groups who are meeting the needs of these young people on a day to day basis. So again, the schools, the parent; where is that non-judgemental reflective space for them to say, 'It's so challenging', and to have that validation and then that time to think about what could be done differently?

Providing bespoke training to all primary schools. This is my pie in the sky dream that all primary schools would have a day on, 'This is what trauma looks like in four year olds; or this is how it can present', just to raise that awareness. I know that within schools there's a lot of training around safeguarding, around neglect and around abuse and recognising the signs, but I don't know whether there's necessarily the same level of input related to very challenging behaviour that can be indicative of trauma. It's not just your bruises, your unkempt children, it is those children who appear inattentive, who shout out, who lash out quickly. And how to make your environment trauma informed, so that it reduces - it's not re-traumatising for those young children.

There is considerable shared ambition to work better together, across statutory agencies, voluntary sector, business, and communities. There is recognition of the legacy and historic barriers to engagement and collaboration between some agencies, in particular some reticence to engage with the police. This is seen as an improving picture. There is also an acceptance, reflecting points made in the previous section of this report, that some models of competitive commissioning can militate against healthier models of cross-referral and a more collaborating ethos between services.

I guess speaking of barriers, there are barriers around charity, private, public sector in terms of how they work together. Our organisation is very open to working with everyone and anyone, together or personal, we put aside personal differences. For example the police, I know that some of our team may not favour the police personally, in their own life, but they will put that to the side and work professionally to safeguard that young person.

I think what's bad about it and what we're seeing slightly more of now with the VRUs having had enough time to embed themselves... So I think one of the issues is that you have a lot of people -It's the framework for funding that makes people more competitive with each other which then inhibits the amount of shared work, in sharing the information and sharing of best practice, which then makes the responses that we have, even when they are doing well they are not really reaching many people.

A lot of good work is being done in the shadows to improve things... I guess, everyone just seems to think it always comes down to money, but we really need to be looking at it more, just breaking it down into relationships. Like how do we fund creating better relationships and cultures?

Beyond professionals and service delivers, there is recognition of some progress in better engaging individuals and communities more broadly, developing constructs of the broader, inclusive community partnership. One aspect of this is 'bystander' models, encouraging safe and positive impact and intervention in respect of issues such as hate crime, racism, and misogyny.

6.4 Summary

Overall, there is much that is identified as positive in respect of current provision. In particular across the strengths of specialist services provided to address serious violence and exploitation. The VRU is mostly seen as a positive development, and to be value-adding, and there is a good level of consensus about the advantages of developing a more holistic, preventative, engaging, public-health model. There are also positives in respect of what is mostly perceived as an improving picture of engagement and respect for the voluntary sector. Having said this, challenges remain in respect of commissioning, particularly short-term funding, and the challenges of creating a less competitive and more collaborative commissioning context, and one more effectively supportive and sustaining of smaller, local, community-rooted charities.

There are concerns that aspects of serious violence are worsening, and related concerns that social media is increasingly a critical driver of that worsening, serving as a key enabler of aspects of CCE, CSE, gangs, and abuse, in ways that were not possible before the current age of mass ownership by young people of mobile phones. The technology tends towards having an effect of broadening geographical reach of those seeking to criminally engage and exploit young people, which likely in part underpins the sense that some aspects of serious violence and exploitation are worsening in County areas. There is recognised to be a need to improve intelligence and capabilities to counter online forms of exploitation and abuse, and also to develop ways in which the same technologies and platforms can be utilised in a positive, and protective, way for young people.

There is widespread commitment to further developing the partnership, alongside some clear understandings of the directions that this may need to take. One aspect is in respect of quality assurance, standards, and governance. Whilst supporting community-rooted organisations and interventions and the value of 'lived experience', and appreciating the strong innovative and

entrepreneurial aspects of many of the charitable service providers across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, there are also concerns that there is a pressing need for greater clarity of standards, training, and professionalisation, and for a more clearly articulated partnership practice model, to help ensure that new entrants engage in a safe and effective way with young people, many of whom are extremely vulnerable and have complex needs.

7. What can be done to address serious violence?

This chapter of the report explores suggestions, issues and themes identified in the analysis to address serious violence. The NNVRU adopts a Public Health Approach (PHA) to reducing violent crime, “focusing on what will make a difference to whole populations, communities and groups. In practice this means we are looking beyond the statistics about incidents of crime and its causes to research and evidence that explains why people behave in certain ways and what contributes to this behaviour”.

A Public Health Framework is helpful to investigate and understand the causes and consequences of violence and for preventing violence from occurring through primary prevention programmes, policy interventions and advocacy. The World Health Organisation identified the PHA as consisting of four steps:

1. To define the problem through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics and consequences of violence.
2. To establish why violence occurs using research to determine the causes and correlates of violence, the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, and the factors that could be modified through interventions.
3. To find out what works to prevent violence by designing, implementing and evaluating interventions.
4. To implement effective and promising interventions in a wide range of settings. The effects of these interventions on risk factors and the target outcome should be monitored, and their impact and cost-effectiveness should be evaluated.

Alongside a PHA, understanding the issues and themes associated with serious violence within an ecological framework is supported by the World Health Organisation by viewing, for example, interpersonal violence as the outcome of interaction among many factors across different levels. Figure 7.1 illustrates our understanding of the ecological framework, adding an ‘organisational’ layer within the original four layers as outlined by the World Health Organisation.

Figure 7.1 Ecological Framework



This chapter will now present suggestions, issues and themes identified in the analysis to address serious violence, linking these issues to the key layers of the ecological framework.

7.1 Key themes and issues

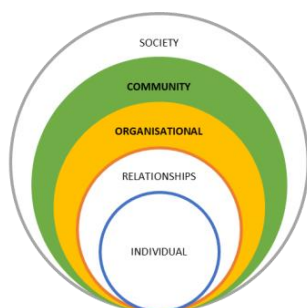
There are several cross-cutting themes and issues across the chapters of this research, which point towards some key challenges and also potential solutions for the future, in terms of tackling serious violence and exploitation.



Social media— The research points to the critical role increasingly being played by online contexts and social media, as an enabler of serious violence and exploitation, and in some cases directly as the site of that exploitation (CCE, CSE, and abuse). Whilst recognising, of course, that for many communities and young people, it is the real-life, direct physical violence which they still most emphasise and fear. Nevertheless, a key priority across the partnership needs to be to develop future strategic approaches in respect of social media

Firstly, to develop enhanced understandings in respect of social media, and secondly to identify how positive models of intervention and engagement can be achieved via social media, particularly with vulnerable young people. How patterns of grooming and exploitation via social media can be more effectively disrupted and enforced. Whilst the role of social media in exploitation may be understood quite well within the specific contexts of specialist services that work with young people, there may be more of a basic knowledge gap to address in respect of the wider body of professionals in broader, ‘mainstream’ settings, such as schools, the health service, and the police, and also in respect of broader society, parents, and communities.

Certainly, thinking about the length of time that I’ve been working in the field, I think the internet and social media has provided another route for violence to be normalised maybe, for it to be an increasingly complex picture.



County and City— In broad terms, there is a sentiment that the City has a stronger suite of both preventative and specialist service provision than the County, in part because for years the particular challenges of the City have been recognised and invested against, and in part simply because the City is a small, relatively tight geographical area, and the County is more heterogeneous, and covers a much larger and quite diverse geographical area. There is some identification that issues are

developing and worsening in County areas, and also perhaps that there are ‘hidden’ and ‘unmet’ aspects of serious violence and exploitation across County areas. This points to a need to better develop County services in the future.

Well, you’ve started small [as the VRU] but you’ve picked the place that everybody picks, which is the City. And if you are going to be truly a Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Unit you’ve got to have the balance, even if it means more work you’ve still got to do it. You’ve got to pick your ambassadors from across the patch; you’ve got to show that the work that you are doing is across all communities. You’ve got to equally fund people that are working over here as well as what you do. The City is rife with projects, in the same way that the City is rife with employment and skills programmes, there’s just so many of them. The County has much less of all that.



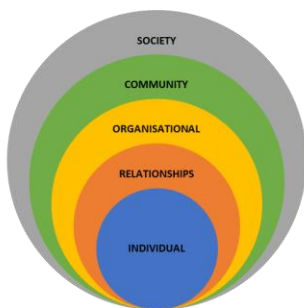
Defining and understanding diverse and ‘emerging’ communities

Throughout the qualitative research, the diversity of Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire is highlighted, and the complexity of communities across the area, and patterns of ‘new’ or ‘emergent’ communities are recognised. Many of the professionals engaged in this research work within charities that have a specific focus, expertise, or engagement with

particular communities. Amongst these professionals, there is some welcoming of what they perceive as increased awareness and engagement of difference and inequality, and also welcoming of investment and support in their organisations. However, they also maintain concerns that BAME communities are under-invested, and that historically there have been structural inequalities in patterns of funding.

This research has highlighted some key terms and definitions that could be revisited and better defined. For example, the terms ‘new’ and ‘emergent’ prompt questions over meaning, ambiguity, and utility. There are some frustrations expressed that talk of ‘new’ communities encompasses communities that have been present in the area for long periods of time, in some cases decades. The term ‘emergent’ may be preferable, as it reflects to a degree the sense of communities emerging into the awareness of agencies and professionals, and thus foregrounds the importance of professional engagement and awareness.

Deepening understandings and relationships is critical. There is a clear drive and motivation from all organisations involved in working with diverse communities to deepen and develop greater understanding, of communities and between communities. However, this must be seen as an ongoing and relentless journey. This should also be seen as a two-way process with service providers deepening their understanding of the community whilst also allowing and inviting communities to ask questions and seek information from the service provider. It is only through developing this depth of understanding that we can build trust that then enables communities to be part of the decision making and solution architecture. Community is not static, it is in an ever ongoing process of change and development. For this reason, community engagement should not be seen or thought of itself as a static approach. It, too, is always ‘emergent’ and needs to adapt as the community changes and new communities evolve and develop.



Early intervention and engaging with ‘root causes’ – Particularly in respect of building future models of prevention and a whole population, public health approach, there is a need to get beyond ‘treating symptoms’, and beyond more reactive (‘after the event’) models of service provision, to also develop understandings of root causes. Early identification and intervention are seen as critical, as is recognising the importance of identity. This very much already reflects the policy and

practice of the VRU and partners and is supported by the perspectives shared within this research. One element of this is strengthening models of early assessment and diagnosis. Another, reflected elsewhere in this chapter, is the priority of enhancing support, training, and knowledge of front-line staff in ‘mainstream’ service settings.

And also, I think the fact that a lot of the services at the minute are designed to deal with the symptoms rather than the root issues. We're looking at the symptoms. Knives don't kill people, people kill people and if we don't really focus on the root issues of why that's happening and really start to focus on the issues that are causing the symptoms, like that they need opportunities, they need counselling, they need role models, they need more opportunities, they need more of a supportive culture within the communities. That supportive community feel isn't there anymore.



Being Trauma-informed – Again resonant with the current strategy and work of the VRU, there is a strong consensus to continue to build models of service provision and community partnership that are trauma-informed. One important element of this is recognising the importance of secondary trauma and community-level trauma, appreciating the wide-scale of impact that issues of serious violence and exploitation can have across communities and many people's lives, and not only for those most directly victimised.

The impact of trauma and the increasing understanding we have about how not only does it become passed down generationally but how trauma ripples out so widely.



Creating positive, alternative pathways and developing more opportunities for positive activities - Representing a particular current strength of several voluntary, charity organisations, is the creation of opportunities for positive, alternate, believable futures, through a longevity of personal, stable, committed, professional relationships is crucial. There is a sense of 'battling the immediacy of the offer' – in terms of perceptions of routes to self-worth, meaning, relationships, and wealth, accessible via CCE, CSE, gang membership, etc. – and creating

genuine pathways 'back in' for individuals, through sports, education, work, and community contribution. There are typically not 'quick fixes', and this model of long-term, supportive environment in which young people can have a positive space and be mentored to plot a different course, can be difficult at least in the short-term to measure outcomes, but feels important to further nurture and grow, as part of the wider public health future strategy to combating serious violence.

Having good teachers and good friends... you've got to make going straight and narrow or you've got to make conforming to the letter of the law more appealing than the status quo that they're used to within their communities and within their friendship groups.

This links, with younger people, also to creating opportunities for those of school age to be more involved in activities outside of school that can develop their skills and build their self-worth and confidence. One thing noted in the research was that children and young people that may struggle at school and not gain a sense of worth from that environment will benefit from engaging in activities outside of school that develop their social and communications skills and/or give them a sense of belonging or self-worth as well as keeping them safe

(It would be good) if we were able to refer on to specialist services or have some skills to be able to then support those young people to be able to engage in activities outside of school that will develop their skills, so developing their social communication skills; their resilience and ability to say no. Channelling them into music or cooking and different activities that are really functional, that they can do, hands-on activities and things so that they are not just out on the streets or playing on their computers or getting involved in things that can set them up into really vulnerable situations.



Enabling schools to identify and meet the needs of those with SEND

The research points to the benefits of increasing awareness amongst school staff about how particular Special Needs and Disabilities might present such as ADHD, ASD, developmental disorder and social communication difficulties in order that they are able to identify whether children need assessment or support. Linked to this is the need to consider provision to schools of more support, such as access to expertise

to be able to support children’s needs appropriately ensuring the support is not only about ‘behaviour’ management but about addressing the routes causes of that behaviour whether it be related to SEND needs or other needs such as trauma or attachment issues.

Schools really love it when somebody parachutes in to manage a child, they love that. You get a Behaviour Mentor who will come in three times a week and sit with the challenging child, and it feels like a bit of respite. But what we’re trying to do is move away from that and be very much more about supporting schools to have the capacity to manage children and include them.

It has been recognised, and welcomed, within the research that there is work underway in terms of assisting schools to identify and meet the needs of those with SEND. Nottingham has created a framework for the identification, assessment and intervention of children presenting with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs called ‘Routes to Inclusion’. R2i has been developed by members of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), Behaviour Support Service (BST) and Nottingham City Primary SENCOs. Although it has been rolled out in Primary schools its roll out has been delayed for Secondary Schools by Covid-19. Nevertheless, this more systematic and unified partnership approach is welcomed.



Gender-informed models of practice

whilst it is recognised that aspects of ‘negative’ or ‘toxic’ masculinities are a driver underpinning a sizeable proportion of serious violence, there is also recognition of a growing involvement of young females. Gender stereotypes, identities, and expectations feel important in underpinning patterns of serious violence and exploitation, for both males and females, and for victims as well as perpetrators. And both positive gender role models, and a healthy safe

modelling of positive relationships, seem to be in short supply for many young people. Whilst across the broad range of serious violence and exploitation, the gendered nature is multi-faceted and complex, there does feel an importance to developing a gender-informed understanding of serious violence, and to grow gender-informed models of prevention and intervention.



Focusing on transition points in education

It is key that focus is given to transition points particularly for example, from primary to secondary or if a child is moving from mainstream to an Alternative Provision and appropriate assessments are carried for children who are transitioning from one setting to another that are displaying 'disruptive' behaviours or behaviour that suggests they may struggle to cope in a new environment.

Exactly, so Headteachers are calling out for help. So, we've done a lot of work around transition, because I think that needs to be improved on because secondary schools need to know what they are getting. Then if we can put the right support in place at primary school that will help at an earlier stage, to help address whatever behaviour or whatever issues the young persons is facing.

Also, key is that transition points are engaged with by all parties in a timely manner, to ensure the best outcome for the child, for example in terms of minimal time between settings in the context of exclusions.



Challenges for achieving a new approach for victims and perpetrators in the CJS

Fundamental reform of the CJS is realistically beyond the bounds of local strategy and intervention, but it has been a consistent theme across interviews with service providers and stakeholders that elements of policing, and particular courts and prisons, practice can tend to compound problems and manifest further trauma.

There are some positive reflections across the interviews of significant change in culture and practice within policing, and towards the building of very different relationships between the police and partners and communities.

The courts system is perceived to be less on a path to improvement, and some of the structural challenges, particularly in terms of adversarial proceedings, in terms of lengthening delays (sometimes of many years, for contested proceedings), and in respect of what is often experienced as a lack of focus on the needs and vulnerabilities of victims and witnesses, feel fundamentally embedded in how the courts system currently operates. There may not be instant solutions towards creating a trauma-informed CJS that would effectively 'fit' to a wider public health strategy, but it may be that further specific local steps can be considered, particularly around elements of addressing and reducing the repeat-trauma effects of court proceedings for young victims of serious violence, abuse, and exploitation.

It just feels like it replicates some of those issues and carries with it a level of almost societal violence because it's so re-traumatising... it's just at each a developmental stage for that child over perhaps a period of five years there's another assault on their sense of themselves and their identity and their sense of betrayal as well. It just feels so unfair and I think adds to - thinking about violence, it's just compounding the original assault.

There is recognition of progress in adapting services within the Youth Justice Service to be more focused on need and trauma-aware, and specifically within that there is recognition of the importance of

identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND or neuro-divergent conditions. This latter point is seen as important, ensuring that work continues in adapting programmes within the justice services to meet the needs with SEND, to enable young people with particular needs to understand and engage in interventions to reduce their chances of future offending. There has been positive work in this area, for example, Youth Offending Services gaining a SEND quality mark in 2018 and a pilot of a Speech Language Therapist in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Youth Justice. The resourcing to further continue this development is seen as critical.

...at the time that we did that a lot of the work that we did was around making our communications, the intervention plans or letters or all of these things much more child friendly, much more aware of different learning styles... I think it's sort of become a part of routine practice now. And I think that for a lot of people in the sector that's where it stopped because we can get it that far then to move onto the next stage...you really need to have a committed, dedicated resource in relation to speech and language therapists or clinical psychologist, people like that on staff who can absolutely lead on those bits of work.

As recommended in the National Report 'Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: A Review of Evidence', screening data should be systematically collected and aggregated to provide a more accurate assessment of the prevalence of neurodivergence and SEND within the justice service to inform needs and support required



Quality assurance – There are calls across several interviews with service providers for the VRU to establish a clearer 'guidance' and 'standard' in terms of service providers, amidst concerns that some providers, particularly some new entrants, do not necessarily carry the capability or professional expertise to deal safely and competently with individuals who are vulnerable and who have complex needs, that they are seeking to work with. There are seen as advantages to developing a central, articulated

operating model across work with serious violence as a whole, to help develop a clarity of standards, training, and approach, and in effect something akin to a VRU 'quality mark' to assure service providers and further build confidence across the system of the safety and efficacy of referrals to specific providers.

Possibly a suggestion, I wouldn't really call it a weakness is do maybe - the Violence Reduction Unit, do they need to prescribe a model that people work to or a particular - whether that's a reporting model, whether that's a standards model, whether that's a quality model, similar to what happens in America?

There is emphasis that whilst such developments are needed, they should seek to avoid discouraging, or creating greater barriers to, new entrants to work with serious violence. One of the key strengths of the partnership locally is seen to be the diversity, innovation, and vibrancy of community-rooted, lived-experience driven, local charities. The aim needs to be to continue to nurture the development of more organisations of this nature, whilst providing a stronger sense of governance and assurance across delivery as a whole.

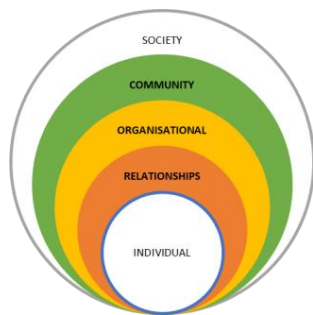


Commissioning and governance models – A key priority is seen to be continuing to develop new models of commissioning, and particularly ones which nurture a long-term, stable development of services, and which minimise an unhealthy sense of ‘competition’ between providers.

Yes, in my view competitive tendering isn't the way forward when you are dealing with human beings. I just don't think it's an effective way of working, the merry-go-round of different services picking up bits of work because they've got slightly improved offer than the person who's held it and built up the skill and the partnerships and, 'Out you go, we're going take over'.

As part of developing and commissioning services, providing support, advice and advocacy for parents and carers is seen as a critical success factor. It is imperative that parents/carers receive the information and support that they need to assist them in obtaining the best outcomes for their children and to assist them in navigating systems that are complex such as gaining additional support for their child or responding to processes of school exclusion. It was clear from narratives of both professionals and those that support parents and carers that they felt that this support was not always available and for those that did not have support the system can remain difficult to navigate.

I've got a really good social worker and if you don't have somebody to help you navigate through all of that then it is very, very difficult. For me personally, my journey - I've had some upsets along the way but I've also recognised that as someone who's articulate and knows the system etc that serves me well. But for parents and carers who aren't in the same position as me, it's a challenge.



A vibrant, diverse, innovative voluntary sector – There is recognition of recent changes in respect of a more positive engagement and communication across voluntary sector services, and a sense of greater recognition and respect. The voluntary sector does bring some real strengths to the ongoing work to tackle serious violence and exploitation, and a sustainable, thriving voluntary sector will be a critical success factor going forwards. A continuation of the current direction of travel, to involve and to support the sector more is to be encouraged.

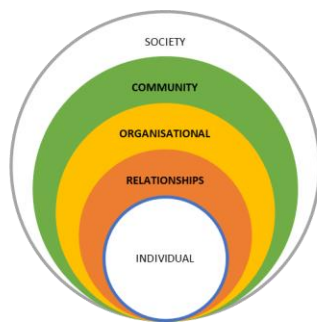
Specifically, within that, models that better commission in a supportive and sustainable way, in respect of local, small, community, (and often ‘lived experience’ based) charities still need to be further developed.

I also think now that we are bringing in the voluntary sector as well and actually having a little bit more respect for the voluntary sector rather than stigmatising them as the poor little brother.

Supporting, nurturing, and engaging voluntary sector organisations is key to building and strengthening relationships, across agencies and particularly into and across all communities. The ongoing work to strengthen and build relationships with emerging communities is something that needs to be at the forefront of VRU strategy, and local charities and small organisations are key to that. There are many organisations and individuals across the county that are charged with or in some way engaged in work

of this nature, across a wide range of different communities and context. It is therefore key that relationships and connections continue to be forged across these practitioners and an understanding of who is doing what and where is gathered. It is from this understanding that the strength or weakness of relationships within identified communities can be understood, assessed, and addressed. For this to be effective it must be led by strong and obvious governance, it raises issues of information sharing and, leadership and joint learning and development that cuts across organisations.

Through the generation of greater trust and strong relationships it becomes increasingly possible to raise to the surface issues that are not so obvious to organisations and people who are not part of the identified community. Issues such as female genital mutilation, modern slavery, coercive control and domestic violence, and some elements of CCE, CSE, gangs, and drugs markets. They remain hidden because levels of trust remain low. Organisations rooted within communities, identifying within them and knowing them well, and working closely particularly with young people, are most strongly placed to improve such understandings.



Working together – the ongoing development and maturation of partnership working is foregrounded across many of the interviews with service providers and stakeholders. This encompasses a range of issues that are familiar, and probably to some degree relatively generic, across partnering contexts, including data sharing, joint models of assessment, improved models of referral, improved communication and collaboration, and enhanced knowledge of what services are available, and as reflected variously above, issues of

governance, quality assurance, and effective commissioning.

This underpins the issues highlighted above in relation to effective collaboration and advocacy and support for young people. However, this cannot be done effectively without fully understanding the performance, financial and resourcing pressures across organisations working in this area, that then impact upon decision making and policy formulation. Understanding the lived experiences of both service users and service providers is key to effective multi-agency approaches and in such complex environments no single agency can be effective across all of the driving factors.

The effective sharing of information is another key theme that has been highlighted across this research. As can be seen information is a bedrock of enabling governance and deepening understanding of communities as well as supporting co-creation of interventions and services that meet local needs. It has been identified that different organisations have different systems and processes for dealing with and sharing information, this has been and continues to be an ongoing national issue, but is manifested in a range of ways locally.

Getting everybody to work together and having a potential common database that everything is recorded on.

The desire to actually have a meaningful database that there are named people within those organisations that represent.

Aligned to this, there is the need for ‘cultural intelligence’, and cultural understanding and knowledge, across partners. As reflected above, the engine-room for successful, vibrant partnership working is grass roots, local, charitable organisations. There is a plethora of voluntary, statutory, religious and other organisations that work in diverse and emergent community settings. The goal is to effectively

engage all these people, as well as the communities, in meaningful and effective co-creation of interventions and services, that they need to feel that they are empowered to shape and engage in. This speaks to the point made previously in relation to 'enabling governance'. Allowing people to not just feel empowered, but to actually be empowered, to make adaptive change as circumstances and understandings change, allowing the partnership and system as a whole to react quickly and dynamically, led by those who understand what's happening in communities, and on the ground.

The actual doers... the doers are your grass root level people. And I think we owe a lot to them who really want to do something for their community. And if we want to empower people, we need to probably get grass root people.

8. Conclusions

This qualitative research project has engaged a wide range of individuals and perspectives, bringing a considerable diversity of lived and professional experience in respect of serious violence and exploitation. The purpose of a broad-ranging, and qualitative research exercise of this nature was never to displace the importance of quantitative data or to replace the value of more specifically targeted research and evaluations, but rather to complement, enhance, and contribute alongside them. To play a part, alongside those other elements of evidence, data, and research, in producing a holistic picture, which will in turn help underpin the strategic, developmental work of the VRU partnership.

One of the cross-cutting findings throughout the chapters of this research report is a recognition that there are 'gaps' in data and knowledge, and that there are some gaps in professional focus, awareness, practice, and understandings. A key part of a broad, qualitative research project of this nature is to begin to explore where those gaps may lie, and to help create a 'whole picture' of serious violence. And, particularly by feeding in the rich insights of some of those who work most directly on the front-line, to help inform comprehensive, public-health based, preventative, community-engaging approaches to tackle serious violence and exploitation in the future.

There is considerable detail across the chapters of this report. What has been revealed is a picture which, in very many respects, is supportive of the strategic direction and vision of the VRU, and which sees the development of partnership working, the engagement of voluntary sector, and the quality of specialist service provision as aspects which, whilst still needing further strategic work, nevertheless are all on an improving trajectory.

A key element of future commissioning and partnership development is recognised to be the development of role and effectiveness of 'mainstream' front-line practitioners. Working in and with diverse (and sometimes reluctant, suspicious, and discriminated against) communities needs practitioners – both specialist services but also importantly 'mainstream' - who have a wide and deep skill-set and high levels of resilience. Forging and deepening trusted relationships takes time and there will be difficulties and setbacks along the way. It is therefore imperative that frontline workers are given the support, tools, and leadership to be as effective as they can be. This includes continuous professional development, opportunities to interact with others working in the field, and opportunities to speak to others who deliver services within their identified communities to pass on knowledge, skills, and advice.

Linked to considerations of commissioning is the concept of 'governance'. Structures such as the VRU were seen in some practitioner narratives as being like an 'umbrella'; sitting above but understanding and co-ordinating all the different strands of work that are ongoing. For example, in interviews for this research, governance in the area of emerging communities was seen as tightly tied into the work of deepening understanding, with governance effectively moving from a perspective of control to one of enabling and driving, and of achieving cohesive models. In terms of this 'enabling leadership', enabling leadership sits between *administrative leadership* (what some see as controlling, but which is necessary) and *adaptive leadership* (which sits at the point of interaction or delivery). This enabling position allows governance to become the vehicle that gives space for innovation and empowerment.

The VRU have stated the centrality of a trauma-based approach to tackling serious violence, an approach that has been consistently and widely supported by the participants in this research. This approach does not deny the fact that there are victims of serious violence or that there are perpetrators of serious violence, but it looks at the trauma that both have suffered, through their life-course, and that led to the outcomes or situations that people find themselves in. It then looks to find innovative ways to redirect this life-course and help the individual onto a different, more productive, and socially, mentally, and physically healthier pathway. To effectively implement such an approach will require a system-wide change to the way people and organisations think about, listen to, and talk about serious violence and those immersed in it. There is considerable detail in this report which helps highlight changes in models of commissioning, partnering, and ‘mainstream’ service change, which will need to be considered within this system-wide change.

From a psychological standpoint, people struggle with complex issues as they are seeking simple solutions. However, simple solutions are only applicable to linear based simple causes. The trauma-based approach, however, seeks to take a step back from this and instead to look at the broader, social, complex system that sits beneath, yet drives these linear outcomes. What is engaged with across this research in respect of recognising ‘root’ causes, the value of early intervention, and the importance of ‘identity’. A trauma-informed model looks at how the system can be re-shaped, reformed, to deliver better outcomes, not simply case by case for the ‘victim’ or for the ‘perpetrator’, but for society as a whole. To be effective in this endeavour requires an approach that allows solutions to emerge through learning orientated experimentation. Some things that are tried will fail, but learning will take place and actions will be shaped by this learning so that future actions will better shape the emergence of ever increasing and positive outcomes.

The innovative, grassroots, locally driven models of service provision, intervention, and support delivered across the voluntary sector are a key element to be nurtured, in terms of this approach. Whilst the research identifies the need for robustness, standards, quality assurance, and governance safeguards across those who work with serious violence and exploitation, it also champions the enormous value of fostering new, innovative, local (and often lived-experience based) services. There is much in this report which is positive about improving engagement, investment, and support for small charities working across serious violence and exploitation, but also accompanied by recognition more needs to be done to provide a truly supportive, sustainable, and appreciative context for their growth and development.

There are limitations to this work. Qualitative work of this nature can draw in, as this work has done, a large range and diversity of perspectives, but it is inevitably only a part of a much wider whole. There will be many valuable perspectives and insights missing from this work. This research project has encountered difficulties in engaging some sections of the community and some practitioners, this should not be labelled or viewed as some form of failure, rather, it should be seen as data. The reasons for people or organisations not engaging are complex so rather than focus on the problem being a lack of engagement, complexity theory focuses our attention on what have we learned and what would we do differently in the future to engage them more effectively. In more practical, and less broad terms, the Covid-19 context, the existence of other consultative work, and the sheer breadth of ‘serious violence and exploitation’ have presented limitations to a project of this nature providing as whole and comprehensive a picture as it might otherwise have done. But what this research project hopefully does provide is still a rich picture of insight across a wide range of dimensions of serious violence and exploitation.

Rather than provide a detailed list of recommendations, it is suggested that the report should be used as a reference point, as a mirror to hold up against SNA findings and VRU strategy, and as an enrichment of considerations across arenas of commissioning and practice. The report reflects what can be gained from engaging deeper perspectives and from a qualitative approach to developing insight and understandings, and hopefully will signal future work of a similar nature.

This research has allowed the voices of those embedded within the system to point to and raise issues which can then become the starting points for change. The next steps will be to begin to generate the narrative that starts to challenge and to prompt change. The trauma-based approach suggested in the SNA is an excellent starting point, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that systems are based on deep rooted cultures and histories which are strong and powerful. To be successful in generating such a change will take courage and will need the skills of self-reflection, non-judgemental listening, openness to challenge, and resilience. Without these, we run the risk of waking up one morning at some future point and looking out at the world and seeing it as we see it today.



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