Reduction and Prevention of Serious Violence and Knife Crime amongst Young People: A Participatory Project

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- Review of the healthcare services provided to those aged 55 and over in East of England Prisons, funded by NHS England
- Supporting Vulnerable People and Addressing Class A Drug Use in Kettering: An Evaluation of #Citadel, funded by the Home Office

Dedication

This research project was initiated by Michelle Bye-Gannon, in partnership with the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice. Michelle was a very valued member of the Chiltern Learning Trust and a PhD student at the University of Northampton. Michelle was the driving force behind the initial design of the project and this report is dedicated to her memory.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the determination and support of many individuals, to which we would like to give our sincere thanks.

A special thank you to Sufian Sadiq, Director of Teaching School at Chiltern Learning Trust, who provided unwavering support throughout.

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We would like to thank Dr Laura Knight one of the IPSCJs Visiting Fellows for being an expert advisor and workshop co-facilitator. Thank you to the Youth Endowment Fund for allowing us to replicate a couple of questions from the YEF Annual Survey and providing additional data for comparison.

And of course, most importantly, central to this project were the young people that shaped and contributed to it, therefore a very special thank you to:

The members of the Student Advisory Group

All students who gave their time to complete the survey

Students who participated in the workshops

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1 Executive Summary

This project is a collaboration between the University of Northampton (UON) and the Chiltern Learning Trust and was funded by the UON Public and Community Engagement & Participatory Research grants fund, which supports University staff to deliver innovative research that is co-created to deliver wider benefits to the public and communities that UON engage with. This project had two key aims:

(1) The first aim of the project was to gain a better understanding of young people's perceptions of knife crime and serious violence in Bedfordshire and what can be done to address it, particularly by schools.

(2) The second aim of the project was to collaboratively develop techniques and expertise in co-produced participatory research with young people that can be applied in other settings. The project involved an Advisory Group of young people.

The research took a mixed method approach, which included a survey with year 9-11 students (13–16-year-olds) and workshops with year 9 and 10 students (13–15-year-olds). The survey was completed by 1,158 students from 12 schools across Luton and Bedfordshire. In addition to the survey three workshops were held in one of the schools, which 26 students participated in. The design and interpretation of the research was aided by an Advisory Group of nine students from years 9 and 10. Outlined below are some of the key findings from the survey and workshops.

Experience, Prevalence and Worry

- 6% of students had been personally affected by serious violence and/or knife crime in their local area while 16% knew someone that had been impacted by knife crime. In all, 17% had either been personally affected or knew someone that had been affected. When compared to the Youth Endowment Fund (2023)[1] survey 16% of the 13 to 17-year-olds had been victims of violence and 15% had committed violence themselves. 1 in 4 (24%) were either victims or perpetrators of violence.
- 41% of students said there is drug dealing in their area, 37% said there is knife crime and 35% said there are gangs involved in criminal behaviour. It is interesting to note that 10% less students (27%) said there was serious violence in their area compared to knife crime (37%), considering knife crime

[1] Youth Endowment Fund (2023) Children, violence & vulnerability: The Second Annual Youth Endowment Fund report into young people's experience of violence, November 2023, London.

comes under the umbrella of serious violence. However, the Advisory Group felt this could be because some students may be unsure as to the meaning of the term serious violence.

- About a quarter of young people (24%) agreed that they worry about the level of serious violence in their area, however a higher proportion (41%) disagreed and the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed (26%) or responded that they did not know (10%).

Social Media

- Students were asked if they had seen various violence related content on social media in the last 12 months. This question was replicated from the Youth Endowment Fund Survey (2023)[2]. Interestingly a high proportion of students about 4 in 10, for each type of violence e.g. 'sexually violent content or threats' selected 'not sure'. This does not reflect findings to this question obtained in the YEF survey where the proportion of young people that selected 'Don't know' ranged between 8 and 12%. However:
    - Almost 6 in 10 (57%) had seen fights involving children or young people. This compares to 48% the YEF survey;
    - 4 in 10 (40%) had seen threats to beat up another child or group of children, this compares to 36% in the YEF survey; and
    - 3 in 10 (30%) had seen children or young people using illegal drugs and children or young people carrying, promoting, or using weapons (same as in the YEF survey).

Causes of young people becoming involved in Serious Violence

- Students were asked 'why do you think that some young people commit acts of violence in your local area' and given a series of reasons which they had to categorise as 'a major factor', 'minor factor' or 'not a factor'. This question was replicated from the YEF 2023 survey. The reasons most often selected as being a 'major factor' were:
    - 'Gang membership – they are, or they want to be, part of a gang' (46%)
    - 'Money – they need the money to support themselves or their families' (45%)
    - 'Protection – to avoid being hurt or being a victim of crime themselves' (42%)

2 Youth Endowment Fund (2023) Children, violence & vulnerability report. A national survey was conducted involving 7,547 teenage children aged 13 to 17 in England and Wales, sharing their perceptions and experiences of violence. The full survey was shared by YEF with the IPSCJ.

    - ‘Identity – to feel part of something or to be respected’ (40%)
    - Drug supply (39%), drug use (36%) and drug habit (33%)

- Whereas ‘Video games’ (9%), ‘Films and TV shows’ (10%), and ‘Music’ (13%) were less likely to be selected as major factors.

- The survey also asked students if there are any other reasons, not listed, they ‘think are why some young people commit acts of violence’. Key themes raised by students were the influence of peers/ friends and less commonly family members who may be involved in serious violence; wanting to be perceived as ‘cool’ or ‘hard’; and others raised issues surrounding young people’s own experience of trauma or being brought up in an unsafe home environment – what might be described as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s). These additional factors raised by young people are important and it is recommended that the Youth Endowment Fund consider whether they should trigger factors being added to the YEF question, to reflect them. Particularly, one that relates to children and young people’s experiences of trauma or neglect which seems to be the one that particularly does not feature in the factors provided.

Feelings of Safety

- Students were asked about their feelings of safety in different public spaces in the day and after dark. Unsurprisingly, they felt safer in the day in parks, travelling and in the streets near their home. Participants were also given the option of ‘not relevant to me’ which was selected most often for ‘near/around pubs/nightclubs’, with a quarter selecting this option which might be expected given the age range of participants being 13-16.

- However, nearly a fifth (19%) of students did not feel safe on public transport or around bus or train stations in the day and a quarter did not feel safe in/around places that they shop (25%).

- In terms of feelings of safety in and around school, 5% said that they do not feel safe outside school before the school day, 10% said that they do not feel safe travelling to and from school and within school during the school day and 15% said they do not feel safe outside school after the school day. One of the issues raised around feelings of safety in and around school was bullying.

- When asked if there is anything ‘that your school does do that helps to make you feel safe’ the most common response (28%) was school staff patrolling around the perimeter of their school before and after the school day.

A Serious Violence Curriculum

- Students within the survey and workshops were divided on the extent to which they thought learning about serious violence and knife crime could help stop young people becoming involved with violence or knife crime. Within the survey, about half (48%) agreed that it would, 15% disagreed, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed and the remaining 13% said that they did not know.

- For those who agreed, the most common reason provided was because it is beneficial to learn more about serious violence when young (24%) as understanding the consequences and dangers would deter young people from getting involved (23%).

- Reasons why young people disagreed that it would have an impact included, students would not listen or will be bored by it, with comments 'to most people it is just a PowerPoint'. Others noted that there are other factors in young people's lives that influence their likelihood of becoming involved, such as family and friends and adverse experiences, which would need other types of solutions such as therapy and mental health support. Some students expressed the view that if you have a motivation to get involved in serious violence, a 'PSHE' lesson or assembly is not going to make a difference.

- Students were asked in the survey to rank how useful they think different topics are to learn about in terms of serious violence, from very useful to not at all useful. The topics most often selected as being either 'very useful' or 'fairly useful' were:

    - First aid training (79%)
    - How to keep yourself safe from violence and knife crime (77%)
    - Recognise when someone is in danger and intervene safely – (76%)

  The topics most often selected as either 'not at all useful' and 'not very useful' were:

    - Use technology safely and how to keep safe online (24%)
    - Conflict resolution (20%)
    - Hate crime (18%)

  In the workshops, it was identified that not all students understood the terminology 'hate crime' and interpreted 'conflict resolution' differently to the research team, which may have impacted the students' ratings within the survey. Although, even after having been defined, hate crime was also ranked as least useful within a workshop. In terms of the use of technology and how to keep safe

online, the AG suggested this could have been ranked low because they are taught about it a lot already.

- About two thirds of students (65%) have had lessons on, or a speaker come into school to talk to them, about serious violence and/or knife crime. When asked what impact it had on them a third (33%, 236) said 'Neither positive nor negative' and a further 14% (102) said they did not know. However, half (50%, 363) stated it had a positive impact and only 2% (15) stated it had a negative impact.
    - For those that stated that the lesson or speaker had neither a positive nor negative impact on them the most common reason given was that they felt the subject area was not relevant to them as they would not get involved in serious violence or knife crime. This was followed by them saying they already knew all or most of the information given.
    - For those that stated that the lesson/speaker had a positive impact on them the most common type of reason given related to it being informative and they learnt more about serious violence and/or knife crime, followed by it informed them/ helped them better understand the consequences of knife crime.
    - For those that stated it had a negative impact on them, the most common type of reason given was that it was upsetting or disturbing.

Safeguarding and talking to teachers

- Just over a third (35%) of students agreed that they would feel comfortable talking to a teacher, or another member of staff, about the issue of serious violence. Quite a high proportion (28%) said that they did not know if they would feel comfortable and 28% said they would not.

- The most common reason students gave for not feeling comfortable related to fears about confidentially, specifically that staff repeat personal information to other staff members or their parents; followed by concerns they would be labelled a 'snitch' and not being able to approach the safeguarding team privately; and because of not having developed a trusting relationship with staff. Students suggested that by developing better relationships with students and being more approachable and relatable, young people may feel more comfortable confiding in school staff.

Knife carrying

- In response to the question have you ever thought about carrying a knife, 7% (77) students said 'yes'. Additionally, 7% said that they would prefer not to say and 5% said that they did not know.

- When asked why they had thought about carrying a knife, 6 out of 10 that gave a response said they had considered carrying it for safety purposes. '*For protection, it would be a small blade just in case, it's because I sometimes walk back from school and my house is kind of far*.' There were a couple of answers that were particularly concerning such as '*People annoy me a lot and I have anger issues'* and one which suggested the potential negative consequences of inputs in school and '*People mentioning it in assembly made it seem like a good idea'.* Also *'I know others who have done so in the past*'.

- In response to why do you think some young people carry a knife by far the most common response, accounting for three quarters, was for protection and safety.

- Nearly half of students (45%) agreed that a lot of young people carry knives and 15% of young people agreed that carrying a knife keeps you safe.

This executive summary focuses on the results of the research (chapter 5) however, there is information on the participatory approach in chapter 4. The recommendations based on the results of the consultation (chapter 5) are listed below but to be fully understood they should be read in the context of the information provided in the conclusion (chapter 6).

Recommendations regarding a curriculum to reduce the risk of young people becoming involved in serious violence:

It is recommended that:

- the time spent on serious violence in the curriculum is proportionate to the identified levels of risk from, and/or likelihood of involvement in, serious violence. When considering curriculums a key recommendation of YEF is to develop children's social and emotional skills with a universal curriculum. This is a positive way of reducing risk of involvement in violence, whilst developing key skills for all students that will improve other outcomes too- educational attainment, self-

esteem, positive relationships with friends and family[3]. Therefore, it is a way of having a curriculum feature that is sensitive to the fact that most children will not be involved in violence.

- the content design and delivery of messages concerning knife crime are sensitive to young people's fears and perceptions to help mitigate against inadvertently increasing fears of victimisation.
- Ensure that engaging and skilled facilitators are used who are knowledgeable and confident in their knowledge of knife crime[4]. There is evidence to suggest that lived experience facilitators, make the material more relatable to young people and increases their likelihood to engage with it. However, it is important to ensure that facilitators with lived experience having training in facilitation and mentoring to protect themselves and the children/ young people they are delivering to.
- the Trust work with students on designing activities for the curriculum that students find engaging, to learn about knife crime and serious violence. The collaboration with young people within the AG on the activities for the workshops as part of the research process, the research team believe, significantly elevated their accessibility and enjoyability for the wider cohort.

Recommendations regarding the importance of trusted adults

It is recommended that:

- In the overall strategy for reducing young people's risk of becoming involved in serious violence consider how student teacher relations can be built on further, particularly addressing issues of confidentiality. This could be taken forward with a group of young people.
- Consider focusing some resource on targeted interventions for those at risk of involvement in violence. For example, a dedicated mentoring programme, or a sports or arts programme that includes a mentoring component.

[3] Gaffney, H., Farrington, D.P., and White, H. (2021) Social Skills Training: YEF Toolkit Technical Report. London: Youth Endowment Fund. Available at https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Social-Skills-technical-report.pdf

[4] Youth Endowment Fund (2024) Education, Children and Violence: Guidance for school, college and alternative provision leaders to help prevent children's involvement in violence, London. available at https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/YEF.-Education-Children-and-Violence.-May-2024-5.pdf

Recommendations in relation to adverse experiences and trauma

- YEF, state that there is relatively strong evidence that psychological therapy can provide some protection against involvement in violence. Therapies, including individually focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and trauma-specific therapies or family-based therapies, have been shown to reduce children's involvement in violence. They recommend that schools leaders should consider whether to refer those children with the most serious and complex emotional needs or behavioural difficulties to CAMHS whilst recognising that local mental health services are stretched. It should be noted, during the workshops, some students discussed how issues such as underfunding, have made it difficult to access timely mental health support through organisations such as CAMHS.

- It was noted by young people that factors such as trauma, neglect and difficult family circumstances were absent from the YEF national survey question about factors that influence young people becoming involved in serious violence. Therefore, a recommendation to YEF is to consider adding these drivers to their survey, which may broadly be considered to be Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Recommendations relating to feelings of safety in and around school:

- Schools to consider implementing, or reviewing their, anti-bullying strategies and determining whether bullying interventions would be beneficial. Ensure that Youth Voice is integral in this process.

- Schools could use the survey results regarding feelings of safety within their schools, to spark further discussion with students as to what times and where they feel unsafe and what strategies could be implemented to increase feelings of safety in and around schools.

- Schools could consider providing two or more sessions to students aged 14 and above, led by an expert facilitator, on how to identify warning signs and safely intervene should they witness a sexual assault. In addition, schools may consider delivering relationship violence prevention sessions, incorporated into the RSE or PSHE curriculum. Ideally between five and ten sessions are delivered by external facilitators or specially trained teachers.

2 Introduction

This project is a collaboration between the University of Northampton (UON) and the Chiltern Learning Trust and was funded by the UON Public and Community Engagement & Participatory Research grants fund, which supports University staff to deliver innovative research that is co-created to deliver wider benefits to the public and communities that UON engage with. The overall aim of the fund is to 'support projects that better connect the research and work of UON with our communities'. The fund requests that research activities:

> *"Should be designed to inspire and inform, to evidence clear public and or community engagement and lead to demonstratable outcomes including, but not limited to, increasing knowledge and understanding, change in perspectives, perceptions and or attitudes."*

This project had two key aims which are outlined below:

(1) The main aim of the project was to gain a better understanding of young people's perceptions of knife crime and serious violence in Bedfordshire and what can be done to address it, particularly by schools. Specifically, Chiltern Learning Trust are aiming to develop a curriculum for years 7-11 on knife crime. The Trust wish to do everything in their sphere of influence to tackle knife crime and prevent students from becoming involved in it. They are also keen to help other schools outside the Trust. One of the issues that has been identified by the Trust is that children and young people are receiving inconsistent messaging regarding knife crime, and some are receiving no messaging. The Trust has previously produced curriculums on behaviour and attendance that they have shared (for free), and have been adopted, by other schools.

(2) The second aim of the project was to collaboratively develop techniques and expertise in co-produced participatory research with young people that can be applied in other settings. The project involved an Advisory Group of young people who helped design research tools as well as helping to interpret research findings.

3 Method

The research took a mixed method approach, which included a survey with year 9-11 students (13–16-year-olds) and workshops with year 9 and 10 students (13–15-year-olds). The design and interpretation of the research was aided by an Advisory Group of nine young people from years 9 and 10. Further details of the approach are outlined below.

3.1 Online Survey

The survey aimed to obtain a wide view of young people's experiences in relation to serious violence across Bedfordshire. This was to provide the Trust with an understanding as to young people's perceptions of serious violence and their feelings of safety, as well as what they think schools can do to reduce the likelihood that young people become involved in it. The survey was designed by the UON research team based on literature, and reviewed by the Chiltern Learning Trust, both in terms of content and in terms of the appropriateness of language for the target age range. A couple of questions from the Youth Endowment Fund Survey[5] were included and allow comparison with a wider population of young people. The survey was hosted online using a platform called 'Online Surveys'. The results of the survey are contained in Chapter 4. 1,158 students across 12 schools completed it.

3.2 Workshops with year 9 and 10 students

Running concurrently to the survey was a participatory aspect to the research in which an Advisory Group of young people was formed to help design workshops to be run with a number of groups within one of the schools. The role of the Advisory group is discussed in more detail below, but the aim of the workshops was to cover the following topics:

a. What can schools do to help address the issue on knife crime?
b. If a curriculum on knife crime prevention was run in schools, what do they think the key messages should be?
c. Do they think a curriculum could have any negative consequences if so, what might they be and how could they be addressed?

[5] Youth Endowment Fund (2023) Children, violence & vulnerability report. A national survey was conducted involving 7,547 teenage children aged 13 to 17 in England and Wales, sharing their perceptions and experiences of violence. The full survey was shared by YEF with the IPSCJ.

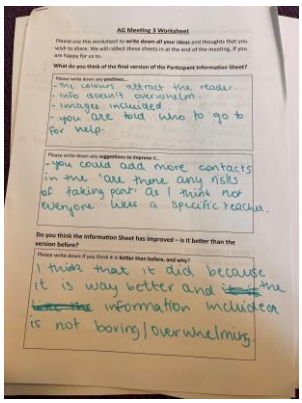
3.3 The Advisory Group

The Advisory Group was formed of young people in years 9 and 10 who helped to advise on the research, particularly the workshops outlined above, and helped interpret the results of the survey and workshops. The school provided potential participants of the Advisory Group with participant information sheets and consent forms and participant information sheets and consent forms were also provided to parents. The Trust also had a meeting with parents and students to explain the research, what was involved if students participated and to answer any questions. Due to the sensitive topic a distress protocol was drawn up in collaboration with the Trust to ensure procedures were in place if students became distressed.

The Advisory Group was formed and held in the school in which the workshops were to be held and contained students from that school and one other nearby school. Young people assisted in the design of the research tools for the workshops including the participant information sheet and the workshop content and activities. The research team held four Advisory Group meetings of 1.5 hours each, with the support of a member of the Chiltern Learning Trust. The broad content of the meetings was as follows:

Meeting 1	- Introduction to the research and its aims. - Young people created a code of conduct for the AG. - Discussion of views on the project aims and objectives. - Discussion on the proposed participant information sheet for workshop participants (PIS).
Meeting 2	- Introduction to the concept of conducting focus groups about knife crime, the role of schools in prevention, and curriculum content. o What do they envisage to be the key themes and questions? o What activities or materials might be useful for the groups? o Revisit the Participant Information Sheet for workshop participants. (As a result of discussion in meeting 1, students decided to do a video to accompany the written participant information sheet which was filmed in meeting 2)
Meeting 3	- Feedback on the final version of the Participant Information Sheet. - Feedback on and testing workshop activities the research team have developed based on ideas of AG members in meeting 2.

	- Look at some of the survey findings – AG feedback on the results.
Meeting 4	- What did the AG think of the workshops and what worked well and what could be improved? - What did the AG think were the key findings and messages from the research. - What did they think about being a part of the Advisory Group and did they think they had an impact? - What they think went well and what didn't work?


AG Meeting 3 Worksheet

Please use this worksheet to **write down all your ideas** and thoughts that you wish to share. We will collect these sheets in at the end of the meeting, if you are happy for us to.

What do you think of the final version of the Participant Information Sheet?

Please write down any positives...
- The colours attract the reader.
- info doesn't overwhelm.
- images included.
- you are told who to go to for help.

Please write down any **suggestions to improve it...**
- you could add more contacts in the 'are there any risks of taking part' as I think not everyone likes a specific reacher.

Do you think the Information Sheet has improved – is it better than the version before?

Please write down if you think it is **better than before, and why?**
I think that it did because it is way better and ~~it is~~ the ~~like the~~ information included is not boring/overwhelming.

For each of the workshops there were discussions as a group, but also individual AG members were asked to write down their thoughts on worksheets. This allowed all AG members to have a say in the process and express their opinions. It was made clear to AG members that they could write as little or as much as they wanted to, and they did not have to answer anything that they did not want to.

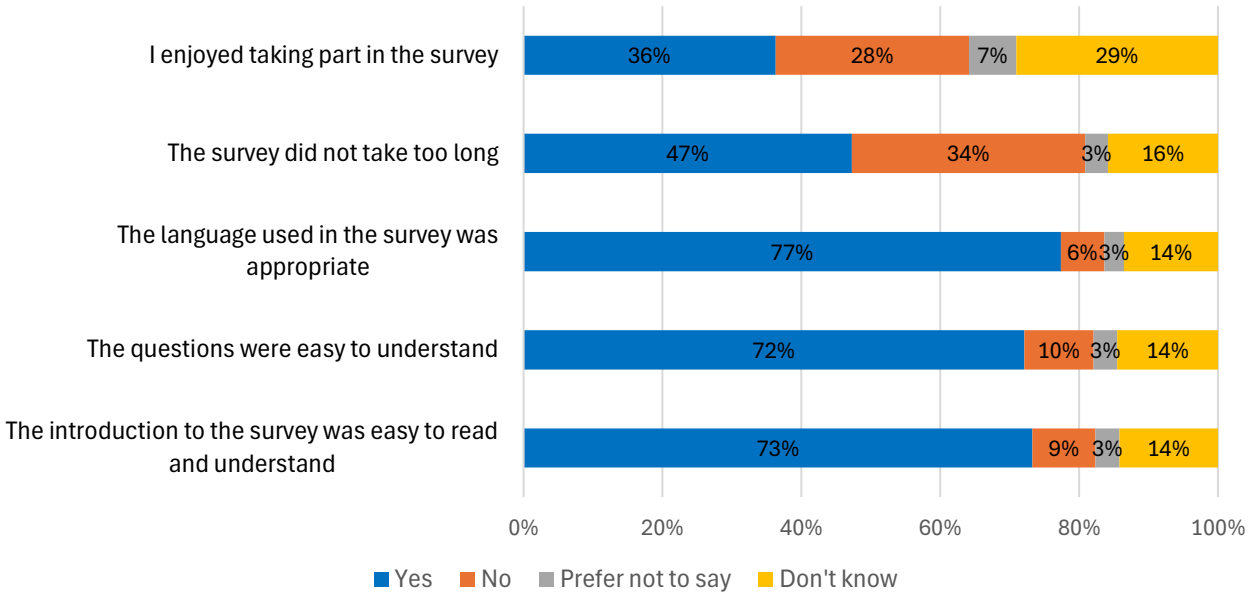
4 Participatory Research

This section outlines how young people influenced the design of the research tools, workshop activities and their interpretation of findings, particularly from the survey. It is hoped that the research can provide valuable insight for others conducting participatory research with young people.

4.1 Survey feedback

As discussed in the methodology, the survey was designed by the UON research team based on literature, and reviewed by the Chiltern Learning Trust, both in terms of content and in terms of the appropriateness of language for the target age range of 13–16-year-olds. Due to the time frame of the project, it was not possible to include the Advisory Group in the design of the survey, but they were asked their opinions on some of the findings and their reflections are contained within chapter 4 with the survey results. The participants of the survey were, however, asked if they agreed with a series of statements about the survey which are represented in the figure below. There was a relatively high level of agreement with the statements 'the language used in the survey was appropriate' (77%), 'the introduction to the survey was easy to read and understand' (73%) and 'the questions were easy to understand' (72%). However, agreement was notably lower for the statement 'the survey did not take too long' (47%) and 'I enjoyed taking part in the survey' (36%).

Figure 4.1: Student agreement with statements about the survey



Students were asked how the survey could be improved to which 206 (17%) students provided a response, of those, 21% (43) responded they did not know and a further 13% (26) said nothing. By far the most common suggested improvement was to make the survey shorter/ have less questions, which was suggested by a quarter of students who provided an improvement (51, 25%). In relation, some students also suggested that the survey was too repetitive (7, 3%).

> *Be a bit shorter as some of the questions were similar*
> *Too long bruv*
> *Gurl make less pages I'm tired of these same questions again and again*
> *It could have been shorter or had questions that summarized instead of 3 questions on one topic.*
> *We kids, nobody going to read a long formal paragraph. Thanks though- its good sm like this exists*

Other suggested improvements mentioned by five or more participants were to make it more interesting or fun (10, 4%), make it simpler to understand (9, 4%), be more specific or direct (7, 3%) and add images or colour (5, 2%).

> *Less boring (no offence)*
> *Less questions and make the questions easier to understand for those of us who struggle with lots of words*
> *The questions are like any other survey I have completed and are honestly very generic and I don't see how these answers are going to help me be safer in public*
> *Add pictures*

There were some suggested improvements that were mentioned less often (once or twice) however they are worth noting and included:

- The survey should consider the wider context of young people's lives not just school (2) e.g. '*consider the home life aspect as well as the school life part of teenagers lives'.*
- Questioning the focus on knife crime (2) e.g. *'To ask less questions about knife crimes as there are other crimes that are just as violent and therefore should be taught too'.*
- Concern about the collection of personal data and anonymity (2) e.g. *'This best be anonymous because they told us this is and if it isn't I'm gonna feel betrayed'.*

- There should be less open ended/ text questions (2) e.g. '*Less questions where you have to write stuff'.*
- There should have been more time to fill it in (2) e.g. '*It was alright but we had like 10 minutes to fill it in'.*
- Comments on demographic categories (3) e.g. *'Maybe add in more groups for ethnicity' and two questioned the gender categories 'Why do many gender options'.*
- Increasing the use of scenarios (2) e.g. '*Making up scenarios to understand the circumstances better'.*

In addition, one student commented *'It could be improved if u don't make me do it'.* Although the suggestion that students felt they had not been given the choice to complete the survey was only apparent once within this question, there were a couple of other comments by students on other questions, which also suggested they felt that they did not have a choice in completing it and the potential negative impact of this.

> *Ask people willing to tell you instead of forcing children from school to do these surveys without their consent. Most find topics such as this quite sensitive and some might even have traumatic experiences from these and schools are making us do them saying our parents agreed when they don't get any notices.*

This was of particular concern to the research team, who raised these responses to the Trust specific point of contact (SPOC), the research team checked responses regularly so that they could highlight issues in a timely manner. The SPOC reiterated to schools that the survey was voluntary and if responses were received that suggested young people hadn't been given a choice the survey would be closed.

Participants of the survey were also asked *'What do you think is the best way to get the views of young people on this topic?'* 194 (17%) students provided a response and of those a third (64, 33%) said that they did not know. Additionally, many of the responses suggested that students read this question as how to teach young people about the topic or to influence them rather than how to gain their views. Some of these comments are below, key themes, from these types of comments included the use of assemblies, bringing speakers in who have personal experience, using videos and showing the consequences of becoming involved in serious violence.

By keep doing assemblies over and over again on this topic and especially BULLYING until they truly understand.

Talks from people who have experience in this topic like police officers or former people involved in gangs.

Scary stories from witnesses followed by Graphic photos and videos.

However, some students provided responses that more specifically related to gaining young people's views, key themes were doing more face-to-face discussions and doing this on a one-to-one basis, others felt surveys were beneficial.

Ask them in real life because they're interested that way or idk actually do more fun surveys

Please make sure they're fun or else they won't be interested.

In person one-on-one conversations with randomly picked kids.

Speak to them but I bet a student would speak to a random adult or maybe any adult so maybe a student.

Surveys and discussions in small groups with peers.

Others talked about advertising, using social media (such as TikTok) and making consultations more interesting and/or interactive.

Advertise it in a way that would appeal to teenagers.

Show them demonstrations practically on a stage or hall for them to visualise and analyse the impacts…

Upload a TikTok make sure to tag the fyp

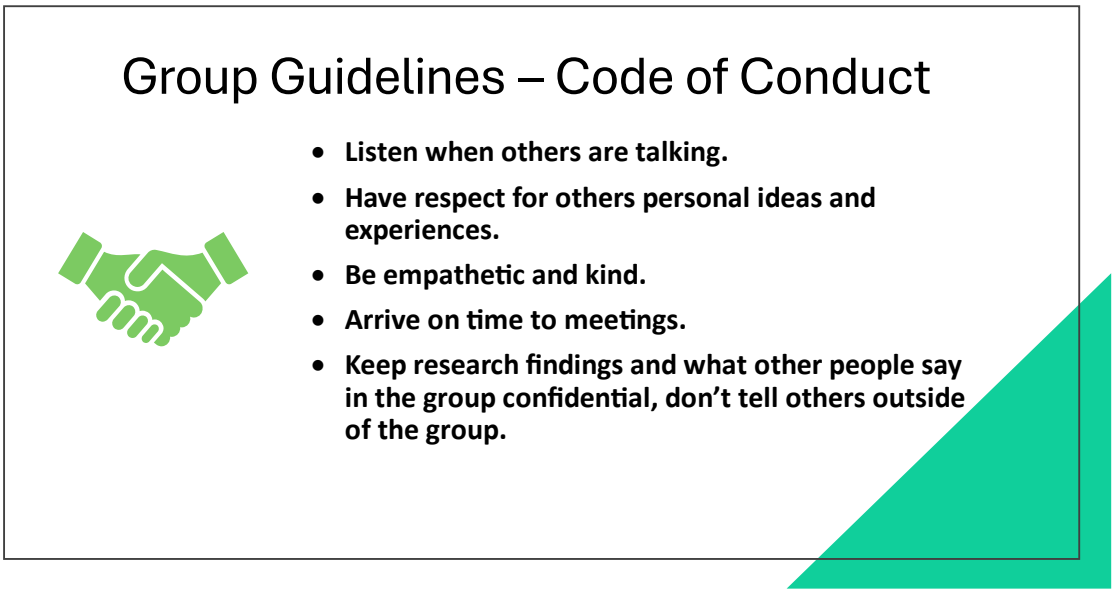
The lack of response to this question and the confusion over its meaning, may be a result of it being at the end of what a notable proportion of students felt was too long a survey. It may have also been the phrasing of the question which was '*What do you think is the best way to get the views of young people on this topic?*'. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring that questions and surveys aimed at young people are clear and concise, and to consider how others may interpret questions.

Although the timeline of this project did not allow for the co-production of the survey, asking students to feedback on the survey itself has provided strong evidence for co-production of surveys with young people in future projects. The feedback on the survey particularly relating to its length, will certainly

prove useful to the research team, if this survey is utilised again with schools, and will also be borne in mind with other surveys created for young people.

4.2 Code of Conduct

As part of the first Advisory Group the members were asked to discuss and agree a Code of Conduct for the meetings. There was some discussion as to what this meant, and it was explained as a set of rules that everyone would agree to abide by in the meetings. The AG devised the below and the Code of Conduct slide was shown at the beginning of every meeting.



4.3 Research tool design – the Participant Information Sheet

In the first Advisory Group (AG) meeting, we asked for the AG members thoughts on the draft Workshop Participant Information Sheet (PIS). The AG members were asked: what they thought were the strengths and weaknesses of the PIS, whether they thought young people will understand the information, and whether they had any suggestions to improve it.

In terms of strengths, feedback included:

> *Explains in detail about the work and aim of research.*
>
> *Is informative and has enough information on knife crime.*
>
> *Tells you what it is (the research) and why you have been chosen to participate.*

However, a clear message from all the AG members was that the PIS was too long. Comments included:

> *Young people would get bored after reading the first page – so won't bother reading the whole thing.*

Some of the students also said they or others do not/ would not understand the language, particular words highlighted included 'ethical' and 'faculty'.

> *It is too wordy. Some words or phrases may be hard to understand.*

The research team talked to the Advisory Group about other methods used to relay information from participant information sheets and showed them a video that had been created for another project. The video was of a group of young people relaying the key information of the PIS to their peers. The video received an extremely positive reaction from AG members, with a notable "thumbs up" from the group. They felt this would be easier for other students to understand and their peers would pay more attention to it. The AG members all agreed to participate in the video version if filming was arranged for the next meeting and a simple script was provided.

Between the first and second AG, the research team took on board the students' advice regarding the written PIS and worked to simplify and reduce the amount of text. However, the AG members were still adamant that there was too much text and students would not read 'more than the first paragraph'. They wanted it reduced further and suggested adding 'images' to make it more interesting to young people. Therefore, the research team produced a third version of the PIS, significantly reducing the amount of text whilst still retaining the necessary information and adding colour and images to make it more engaging and appealing. The final version was shown to the AG in the third meeting, which they were notably happier with.

> *This version's improvements have made (it) more eye catching…and with all the photos and colours it has made it better. Using less big words and having less text has made it easier to go straight to the point and be straight forward and easy to read for kids and parent.*

> *It is a lot better than the last one as this includes images. It is also a lot more eye-catching. Good use of bolding the text to show importance of the information. Lots of ways to contact if people need support. Nice images and colours.*

It is very appealing as it has pictures and is readable.

It's colourful and organised. It summarises everything pretty well. Engages the reader. The colours attract the reader. Info doesn't overwhelm. Images included. You are told who to go to for help.

I like the colours that separate the different topics. The pictures also appeal to people. The info has been shortened and it is clear.

The final version is more colourful, which will grab the readers attention, and there is less writing which won't stress the reader. Also emails and links are in blue, so we know what the links are.

In terms of preparation for the workshops, the Advisory Groups feedback significantly influenced the format and delivery method of the PIS. The initial reaction to the first PIS from the AG members was that it was far too long and wordy, it was clear that the research team vastly over-estimated this age ranges willingness to read and digest information. Many of the AG members said that they would not read it through. They were much happier with version 3, due its length, it being more visually appealing and it being in plainer English. It is important that the potential participants are provided with written information although it was clear from the AG members that they vastly preferred the audio- visual approach. Therefore, the combination of the video and written PIS maximised the accessibility of the research for all the potential participants of the workshops and provided hard copy information for them to keep.

4.4 Workshop Activities Development and Perceived Success

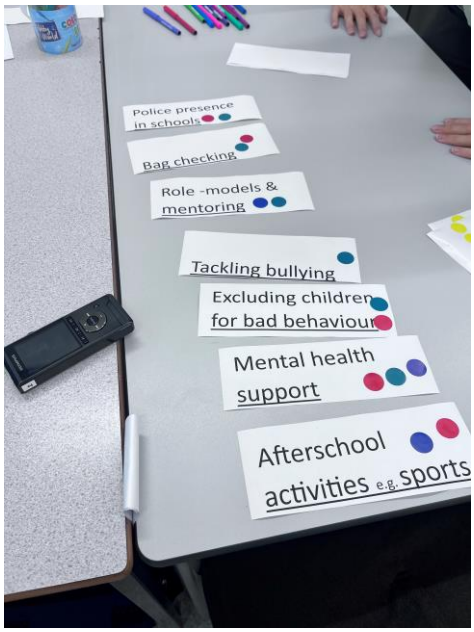
In the second AG, students were asked to think about what activities would engage their fellow students to gain their views of serious violence and knife crime and what schools can do to stop young people becoming involved in it. It is worth noting at this meeting, they were simultaneously participating in the video to accompany the PIS. Therefore, focus was drawn somewhat from the task at hand. However, students did well to get some ideas on paper, which the research team took away to design activities based around their ideas. The research team returned to the third steering group with five suggested activities to discuss with the AG. The nature and development of each is discussed below.

(1) Ranking activity

In the ranking activity the proposal was that students would rank topics to be included in a serious violence curriculum (or a similar question) as most to least important. They would be given each topic on a piece of paper and in small groups asked to place them in order of importance.

The AG trialled the ranking activity. When asked to rank the activities, this activity was the most popular, being ranked 1st or 2nd by all but two of the AG members (giving an average ranking score of 1.8). AG members liked that it was interactive and that it was quite challenging.

> *I think this activity is good because it is interactive and well laid out.*
>
> *Ranking is a good task because in my opinion it was very challenging.*



Testing the activity made it apparent that the information obtained from the ranking activity was limited as the ranking showed what subjects students thought were more important, but it did not provide information on whether they felt subjects would have a positive impact, negative impact or no impact. Therefore, through discussion in the AG it was decided that in the workshops students would also be given stickers to colour code the pieces of paper once they had ranked them.

Colour code it – green: massive difference, yellow: no different, red: negative impact.

In addition, a couple of AG members suggested adding definitions as they did not understand all the topics.

> *Make sure to give a definition of the topic and an example to make sure we understand it fully.*
>
> *It really gets you thinking but the subjects were kind of unclear to me. Maybe add a definition to any words that aren't used much.*

In terms of the workshop AG members felt that the ranking activity was useful and elicited different points of view and they found it interesting to see how workshop groups ranked subjects differently. They felt that testing it in the AG meeting had been very beneficial as adding the stickers to the activity made it easier to understand their opinions.

(2) The Human Survey

In the human survey students are asked to stand in a line one behind the other (as if they are in a queue). They are then asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement such as 'Young people getting involved in serious violence is a significant issue in your local area' by standing left or right of that line.

The AG liked the idea of the human survey as they felt it was interactive and engaging, as people are out of their seats and moving around. The AG were asked to rank the five suggested activities, and the human survey was the second most popular activity, being chosen as 1st or 2nd by all but one of the AG members (giving it a ranking average score of 2.3). The research team tested the human survey with the AG, in the initial test students were not given a scale but were asked to stand in a line and then move left or right if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, and to stay in the middle if they had no opinion. They were instructed to move dependent on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, with two members of the research team standing at the point they would need to reach if they strongly agreed or strongly disagreed. After responding to a series of statements there was a consensus within the group that they still liked the activity. However, the AG provided some valuable suggestions for improvement.

(1) The AG felt it would be better to add a scale to the floor to assist students in answering and to provide more accurate answers in terms of level of agreement (AG comments were *"Labelling the floor to be able for it to be more visible", "Make a scale for more accuracy"*).

(2) Some of the AG members felt that the questions/ statements could be simplified and shortened.

(3) One of the AG members that could not participate due to an injury observed the activity and commented that people moved in a similar direction and suggested considering adding statements that were more likely to evoke a difference of opinion. Their position as an observer was beneficial to the exercise.

The human survey was used in all three of the workshops with other students and in all it was the last activity. When the AG were asked which of the activities worked well in the workshops, the human survey was most commonly mentioned:

> *I think the standing human survey (worked well) because it is interactive and they showed what they thought.*

I think the human survey worked well. It got the students moving and everyone was engaged and giving their opinion without talking.

One of the issues the AG raised about the workshops was that the students had their "guards up" to start. In the discussion it was suggested that it would have been better if the human survey had been the first activity as they felt it would have 'broken the ice' a bit more. When asked what it was about this activity that they thought made students more willing to talk, one member suggested it was possibly because students did not have to come to a consensus of opinion with other students (who they may not have known prior to the workshop), as in the other activities, but just needed to express their own opinion. After students were asked each statement, they were asked to raise their hand if they wanted to give a reason for their answer, many of the students did raise their hand to give their opinion.

Nice, everyone was giving their opinion and didn't have to talk if they didn't want to. But should have been longer. Because it was a more enjoyable activity it should have been put at the start to get the students involved and comfortable at the beginning.

One criticism of the human survey raised by a couple of the AG was they felt some people looked to see where other people moved before moving themselves.

Confident people would go one way and then some who were less confident would just follow them rather than give their own answer.

(3) Human mind map

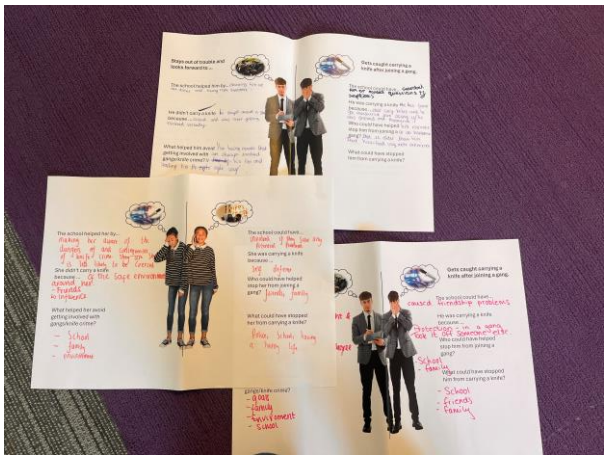
In the human mind map activity, the proposal was that students would split into groups of 3-4 and would be handed large sheets of paper with a picture of someone half sad and half happy, with one side having become involved in serious violence and one side not. Students would be asked to write down on each side of the paper, why/how the young person ended up in trouble or out of trouble and what could have stopped the sad side from hurting someone? This activity was most closely based to a specific idea given by an Advisory Group member.

When asked to rank the 5 activities, the human mind map came in third, with AG members really having a difference of opinion on it and little consistency in its ranking (with a ranking score of 3.9). The human mind map was used in the workshops. AG members did not provide much feedback on the human mind map after the workshop, the comments that mentioned the human mind map included:

I think that all of them went fairly well. In my opinion, the standing human survey and ranking activity went the most well. The human mind map was also good, and the coloured mind map was also very interesting.

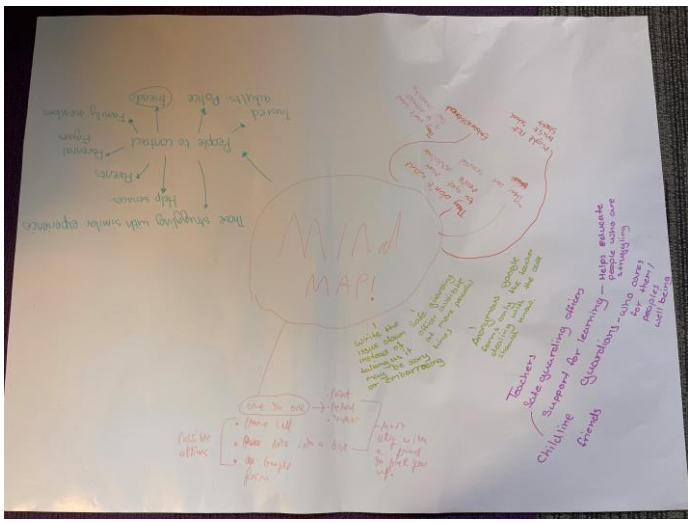
Human mind map – one group wouldn't say anything – didn't find out anything new or unexpected.

(4) Colour coded mind map



In the colour coded mind map activity, the proposal was that the workshop participants would be split into groups of 3 or 4 and they would be asked a series of questions and asked to write their answers in different colours. There were some positive comments on the activity.

This would entertain the people who attend.
Interactive for the students.
Students get to think in detail.



However, when asked to rank the 5 activities, the colour coded mind map came in fourth, being ranked the 4th or 5th choice by 5 out of 8 AG members (with a ranking score of 3.9). The colour coded mind map was used in the workshop and feedback from the AG on the activity was limited, it was not chosen by anyone as the activity that worked particularly well. One person commented that the human mind map and the coloured mind map were too similar.

I think that we could have tried to use a wider range of activities instead of fairly similar things e.g. human mind map and coloured mind map.

(5) Ideas factory - Presentation

The proposal was that participants would be split into smaller groups of 3-4 and each group would be given a specific question to think about. They would be given 15 minutes to think about the topic and 5 minutes to feed back to the whole group with a short 'presentation'. The presentation activity was notably the least popular with the AG. When asked to rank the 5 activities, 6 of 8 AG members ranked it 4th or 5th (with a ranking score of 4.1). AG members were concerned about participants willingness and confidence to present.

> *What if they have no confidence to share ideas?*
>
> *People won't (might) be comfortable presenting.*

There was some discussion around the presentation option, and it was suggested that groups could nominate or agree members that were happy to present the findings to the wider group. However, due to the reaction of AG members to this activity as compared to other activities and due to the limited time available in the workshops it was dropped as an option. It is worth noting that the Trust point of contact also advised against this activity as they said that typically they would give students much more guided time and scaffolding if they were to do similar activity in class.

4.5 Overall Workshop feedback from AG members

Positive feedback about the workshops from some of the AG members was that they thought students did engage with the activities and that the workshops gained a lot of information and different points of view.

> *I think the young people were quite engaged with the activities. We did learn and gather quite a lot of data and young people's experiences.*
> *The workshop was good because it was interactive so students could engage more.*
> *The people we talked to engaged with the workshop relatively well.*
> *There were many different points of view on young violence which was very interesting.*

However, the AG also fed back that in some of the groups in the workshops participants did not want to engage and it was difficult to encourage them to.

> *Students "had their guard up" – maybe because if personal experiences or not knowing the other people in the group.*

They were shy and wouldn't talk much – had to encourage them to talk more.
All the groups tensed up at the start but relaxed throughout.

AG members suggested that it may have helped to have made the workshops longer, so students had more time to relax into it. Students also suggested the use of an ice breaker or re-arranging the activities so that the human survey was at the beginning; an activity that students really engaged with and seemed to open them up to a greater degree than the other activities.

It they were a bit longer and more planned it would have been even better.
The time period. Nothing else really.

Maybe making the workshop longer so that the students had more time to get used to the experience and sharing ideas. And provide time for an icebreaker – at the start could have asked 'why you think you are here?'.

Activities which require giving individual opinions should have been at the start so that they could "get used to who they are with" and familiarise themselves to feel comfortable doing the group activities – "group activities should have been at the end.

There was also discussion about the role of AG members with some feedback that they were not recognised in the workshops as facilitators and were not listened to.

The participants didn't listen to the AG members when they spoke or gave them a prompt.
No as they did not acknowledge me (the students during the workshop).

It was agreed this could have been mitigated to some extent if there had been more time and preparation given to defining the AG members roles in the workshops and making them more prominent by having clearer introductions to their role and them doing some of the introduction to the workshops.

Could have planned our roles more (before) the workshop.
If the workshops we planned were longer. Maybe do an icebreaker to introduce the advisory board.

I would like to talk in the slideshows and like maybe I should have (been) given some lines to say. Maybe hand out sheets or just help out more.

Some also talked of the role of dynamics in participants willingness to speak in the groups. For example, one AG members spoke of the gender balance in the group she was helping to facilitate.

There was only one girl in the last workshop group – "maybe that made her feel uncomfortable". Should have been an even balance of girls and boys in each group – "make it even". "I don't think she will say much" if only with boys.

Other AG members spoke about the impact of mixing year groups and how this might impact some students' confidence to express their views and the extent to which they were listened to as facilitators by older students in the workshop.

Within the workshops students were allocated to a group, AG members felt that it may have relaxed participants if they had been able to select their own groups.

Let the students choose their own groups. They were all year 9 so may have felt more comfortable with friends.

1 Consent for images to be used was obtained from Chiltern Learning Trust who received consent from students and parent/ carers.

As illustrated in this section the AG influenced the nature of the workshop activities and testing some of them was extremely beneficial in terms of maximising the information obtained from the final activities chosen and their accessibility to young people. The AG also provided valuable insight post the workshops on how they could be improved in the future. A notable weakness in the preparation process, which was to some degree a result of time available with the AG,

was the planning of the roles of the AG in the workshop and in ensuring that their role was respected and recognised by participants of the workshop.

4.6 Being part of the Advisory Group

In the final AG meeting, members were asked about their experiences of participating in the group. Firstly, they were asked if they enjoyed it and if so, what they enjoyed. Overwhelmingly, students said they did enjoy it. Key themes they mentioned were that they learnt something; they felt they were helping society; they enjoyed expressing their views and being listened to; and they enjoyed listening to others and feeling like they had made a difference.

> *I Learnt a lot about new stuff that I didn't know about – like knife crime.*
>
> *Yes, because I got my point across. Make people hear my voice.*

> *I really enjoyed it, even if I missed some of it. I enjoyed you guys letting us speak and discuss freely. I like how it was informative and fun but serious at the same time.*
>
> *Yes, as I like being included and sharing what I think and this group allowed that to happen.*
>
> *I enjoyed being part of it really. I felt like I had an important role that could help our school society. I enjoyed coming to the meetings and helping in the workshop. It made me see our teamwork actually work.*
>
> *I enjoyed listening to others opinions and also engaging with everyone to show how I feel about serious violence.*

When asked if there was anything they did not enjoy they all said no (e.g. "*No, it's pretty fun*"). However, AG members did have suggested improvements, some of the group felt there should have been more meetings and/or held more regularly.

Two weeks gap made me forget about the workshop

More groups across the week.

Another comment was that more time could have been spent planning their roles in the workshops. The role of the AG in the workshops is discussed in more detail above (section 3.4). The AG were also asked whether they felt they had an impact on the research and if so what. It was evident from the discussion in the final meeting and from AG members written comments that they felt they had a positive impact on the research. Comments focused on their feedback impacting on the design of the PIS and resulting in the creation of the video; the design of the workshop activities; their facilitation in the workshops; and helping the researchers understand the student perspective.

It would be harder for you (the researcher) to know how to do it – helped researchers know what would work.

I think there was an impact that I made as the information sheet got changed and we made a video all because of our feedback.

I feel like my opinions and ideas made an impact on the workshop. My assistance also helped my group speak up and give their opinion.

I think they helped because they talked about multiple opinions on youth violence, and they helped the researchers learn about this from a student's point of view.

In the last Advisory Group members were presented with a letter from the Director of the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice that outlined their contribution and thanked them for their significant contribution.

This letter hopefully further enhanced their sense of achievement in the process and provided them with a letter to evidence their role that they can use for future opportunities. It is important to note that the AG members gave up 6 hours (and in some cases more) of their own time to participate in the group. Unfortunately, due to ethical constraints the research team were unable to recompense them for their time. However, this should be an important consideration in future projects as to if and how students could receive recompense for their time. The member of Trust staff supporting the group also gave each of the AG members a box of chocolates at the end. She recommended for future projects to provide students with recognition for students' attendance, not just at the end, but throughout – such as a 'postcard' of attendance or certificate. This would encourage them to keep attending as they would feel valued. At one of the groups, the school provided pizza which they had let students know about in advance, it may be unrelated but attendance at this group was particularly high.

4.7 Conclusions, Advice for Researchers and Reflections

The participatory nature of the research significantly improved its design and implementation, and interpretation of results at each stage of the process. Although the timeline of this project did not allow for the co-production of the survey, asking students to feedback on the survey itself has provided strong evidence for co-production of surveys with young people in future projects. The feedback on the survey, will certainly prove useful to the research team, if this survey is utilised again with schools, particularly relating to its length. The feedback will also be borne in mind with other surveys created for young people.

The researchers would advise that when conducting surveys in schools that responses are monitored closely throughout the survey being live. The purpose of this was primarily for the research team to ensure comments that suggested the person completing the survey or someone else was at risk of immediate harm, were identified and flagged quickly to the Trust. Additionally, it allowed the team, to react to comments that suggested students felt that they were not being given the option to opt out and reiterate to schools via the school point of contact that the survey was voluntary and student rights as participants must be respected. The voluntary nature of the research is critical to ethical practice, and it is important for researchers to recognise that some staff in schools culturally may have a different

perspective on giving young people choice in activities. Having the Trust point of contact was extremely helpful in assisting in monitoring this and liaising with the school contacts to reiterate this point. However, it may have been of further benefit if the research team had spoken to each school point of contact individually at the start of the research to really emphasise this point. It is also worth considering in school surveys, to give students the option of opting out without having to ask a member of staff if they can opt out. For example, provide an instruction in the survey that if they wish to opt out but do not want to be identified as opting out by staff in the room, they can complete the survey by selecting 'prefer not to say' throughout.

In terms of preparation for the workshops the Advisory Group's feedback significantly influenced the format and delivery method of the PIS. The initial reaction to the first PIS from the AG members was that it was far too long and wordy, it was clear that the research team vastly over-estimated this age ranges willingness to read and digest information. It is important that the potential participants are provided with written information although it was clear from the AG members that they vastly preferred the audio- visual approach. Therefore, the combination of the video and the shortened and visually appealing written PIS, maximised the accessibility of the research for all the potential participants of the workshops and provided hard copy information for them to keep. It is essential that researchers get this stage of the research right for participants; errors in judgement and the cohort's willingness and ability to read/ digest information, will significantly reduce the likelihood of participants' ability to provide informed consent and to engage fully with the research. The PIS that has been created for this research will be used as a basis for research with other young people in other research projects and if used in participatory research, it may be revised further. Additionally, where possible the audio-visual approach will be built into research more regularly due to the very significant preference expressed by young people in this project for this mode of communication.

Although this project was not working with those within the Criminal Justice System (CJS), much of the IPSCJs work involves this cohort. It is often the case that participants come to research interviews or focus groups having not read or taken in the information they have been given. In all cases the researcher takes the participant through the PIS at the beginning of the interview or focus group. It is known that those that come into contact with the CJS tend to have lower levels of literacy than the general population, for example, 57% of adult prisoners taking initial assessments had literacy levels below those expected of an 11-year-old (Ministry of Justice, 2021)[6]. Therefore, the format of this PIS and video, that has been designed by young people, may also be beneficial for other projects involving

[6] Ministry of Justice (2021) Prison Education Statistics 2019-2020

those in the CJS to maximise the likelihood that they are giving informed consent. Their ability to digest and comprehend the purpose of research and the implications for them is extremely important in contexts in which they may be vulnerable. The research team will explore opportunities to consult with organisations that they have contact with, who work with those with lived experience, to determine whether these templates would be more accessible to them.

The AG also influenced the nature of the workshop activities and testing them was extremely beneficial in terms of maximising the information obtained and their accessibility to young people. In terms of the AG members development of workshop activities, there were challenges for the researchers, as some ideas threw up ethical concerns. For example, some AG members were keen to have two teams in a workshop who would debate a topic around serious violence. However, the research team felt that this would not provide a safe environment for participants whilst exploring a sensitive subject of which some may have personal experience. In addition, the project was conducted over a relatively short period of time meaning the design of the project, reacting to the ideas, and feedback of the AG, was fast paced. This also put pressure on the Universities Ethics Committee to review and respond to proposed changes quickly. Realistic timeframes are something which researchers should consider carefully when conducting participatory research in terms of their capacity to adapt resources and plans and guarantee the ethical scrutiny of a quickly evolving research project.

The AG also provided valuable insight post the workshops on how they could be improved in the future, including what types of activities would have made participants feel more comfortable and willing to share their views. A noted weakness of the workshop process was that the roles of the Advisory Group members within the workshops, were ill defined and more prominence could have been given to them in the workshop process. A further planning AG meeting, before the workshops, could have been beneficial but this would have required extra resourcing and planning for the school, and for the research team and the young people to give more free time. If the process was to be replicated elsewhere there would be more time within the pre-AG meetings allocated to planning and testing the AG members' roles in the workshops.

In AG meetings 3 and 4 the research team shared some of the survey findings with the AG members, particularly responses that the researchers found difficult to explain or were perplexed by. The AG members provided extremely valuable insight into why they thought other students answered in certain ways which are contained in chapter 4. They also interpreted some responses within the survey that included terms the research team were unfamiliar with, such as 'Opps' meaning 'Opponents'. The

AG could certainly have been utilised further in terms of the interpretation of survey results and would have undoubtedly added further value however, this was constrained by time. Nevertheless, the Trust will be taking the survey findings forward to devise a Curriculum and will be further utilising young people as experts in the process of interpretation of the data and designing a curriculum.

It was important to the research team that AG members had felt empowered by the process, they walked away feeling they had made a difference and the time they gave to the project was well spent. Their feedback in the last AG suggested that they did, and they could identify and felt proud of the difference they had made. The letter from the Director of the IPSCJ was designed to really highlight the importance of their role and what they had achieved and contributed. In the last meeting the research team were keen to emphasise the importance of their voice and that they had valuable experience and expertise as young people. The researchers provided some examples of other Youth Advisory Boards and Forums, in case, the project had sparked the AG members interest and desire to get involved in using their voice in other ways. The Trust point of contact raised that they would be taking a participatory approach to the design of the curriculum and AG members expressed interest in being involved in this.

The overarching conclusion of the participatory aspect of the research is that the involvement of the AG members significantly enhanced the design of resources to inform the potential participants of the workshops, the activities that were used in the workshop, and on the interpretation of the results. Below are a few recommendations for other researchers conducting participatory research with young people in schools, based on the research teams own observations of the process, recommendations from the AG and from the Trust key contact, who played a very active role in the research process.

- Do not underestimate the value of participatory research in terms of the impact young people can have in enhancing the design of the research process and the interpretation of results.
- Make sure written information (e.g. Participant Information Sheets) is clear and to the point.
- Consider words that young people might not understand fully e.g. words that came up in this research were ‘faculty’ and ‘ethics’.
- Make sure that written information is visually appealing and consider the use of images/ colours.
- If possible, use audio-visual forms of communication, to complement written information.

- Ensure that the format of the information provided to potential participants is age appropriate and maximises their likelihood of engaging with it and therefore, being able to provide informed consent.

- In AG meetings and/or workshops do not front load students with large amounts of information. Start meetings or workshops with an activity that will grab their attention, get them comfortable, relaxed and engaged. Consider what activities might break the ice, for example, in this research the human survey was considered by AG members as an effective ice breaker activity. Get them 'doing' something and then come back together to explain the research once they have already had an idea/taste of what they will be doing.

- Keep it simple – give clear, simple and direct instructions for activities – do not meander to an instruction giving unnecessary detail or incidental information or suggestions.

- When forming Advisory Groups and in workshops consider group dynamics – the impact of having different year groups in one meeting or session on their confidence and willingness to share information.

- Do not provide Advisory Group members with too much paperwork but consider using simple worksheets so that they can give their own individual opinions as well as contribute to the group discussion.

- If you are using multiple methods to relay activities or questions, such as slides and worksheets make sure that they are aligned so questions are asked in the same way and in the same order otherwise group members can become confused.

- Provide recognition for students' attendance, not just at the end, but throughout – if cannot provide anything monetary, even a 'postcard' of attendance or certificate. This will encourage them to keep attending as they feel valued.

- If the subject is sensitive, such as serious violence, ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are provided to students. The support organisations chosen were checked with the Advisory Group, Childline particularly received positive feedback from a member of the AG had engaged with their online forums. Also ensure that there are clear processes in place that are agreed with the school and clear to the research team if a student becomes distressed.

- Consider carefully the use of 'severe' or 'scary' language within documents such as PIS and parent information sheets. For example, using the term 'knife crime' repeatedly within the

information sheets may be intimidating and disproportionately anxiety raising for individuals who are not used to hearing that language used a lot.

- Balance carefully the needs of the research against the impact on participants time and the interruption to their education, consider timings and the ability for participants to travel home safely.

If conducting a survey with schools

- Co-produce the survey with young people or at the very least pilot it on a small number of young people to ensure it is accessible, user friendly and uses appropriate language/ is jargon free.
- Think very carefully about survey length – avoid the temptation for just one more question…
- Consider the extent to which it is visually appealing – this can be difficult with some survey platforms as they can be limited in their ability to add imagery or make surveys particularly interesting in terms of even basic aesthetics such as text options and lay out.
- Ensure that support mechanisms are included both at the beginning and end of surveys.
- Ensure that the introduction of the survey is as short as possible and jargon free, although containing the pertinent points to allow for informed consent.
- Consider throughout the process, how you can emphasise the importance of the voluntary nature of it and safeguard young people's right to opt out.
- Consider giving students a subtle mechanism to opt out. For example, provide an instruction in the survey that if they wish to opt out but do not want to be identified as opting out by staff in the room, they can complete the survey by selecting 'prefer not to say' throughout.
- Check survey responses regularly when the survey is live, to react quickly to any potential safeguarding issues but also to pick up any responses that suggest that student participation has not been voluntary.

In terms of the **next steps** arising from the participatory aspect of the research.

- The project has provided a **model of conducting participatory research on serious violence** with young people with a package of resources including a survey, participant information sheets, s distress protocol, worksheets, slides and workshop activities. That can be utilised with other schools on the topic of serious violence or be adapted for other topic areas. The feedback on

the survey from participants and the AG feedback to improve the workshops will be used to improve the resources further and approach further.

- Particularly valuable has been the co-production of resources, perhaps most notably an accessible PIS and video which provide a template going forward to significantly increase the likelihood that young people are giving informed consent as they are able to understand and digest the information provided. This is beneficial with future work with young people, but also might have significant benefit for other cohorts the IPSCJ work with.

- The IPSCJ will look for opportunities in future projects to test and develop the PIS with other cohorts that might benefit from this format, for example cohorts of adults known to have a lower than average reading age.

- The IPSCJ will produce resources on the participatory aspect of the research to assist other researchers, this may be in the form of a briefing, presentations or journal article. The IPSCJ hope to hold a symposium on serious violence in the Autumn for example and the learning from the participatory approach will be presented at that event.

- The IPSCJ will keep in contact with the Chiltern Learning Trust to ensure that the AG members and other participants are informed of findings and next steps.

5 Findings from the survey and workshops

5.1 Survey sample and demographics

1,158 students completed the survey of which 854 selected which school they attend. 12 schools across Luton and Bedfordshire were invited to participate. The graph below shows that responses across schools ranged, with the lowest being 0 and the highest being 207.

Figure 5.1 Sample by schools

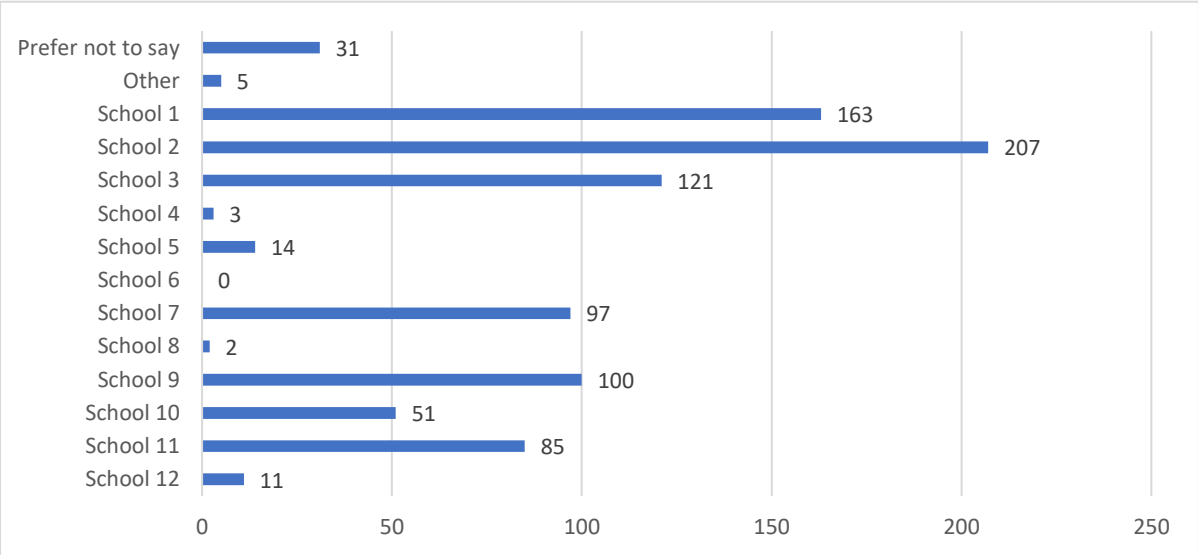
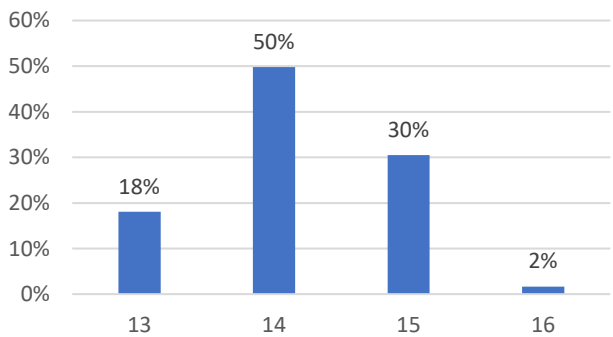


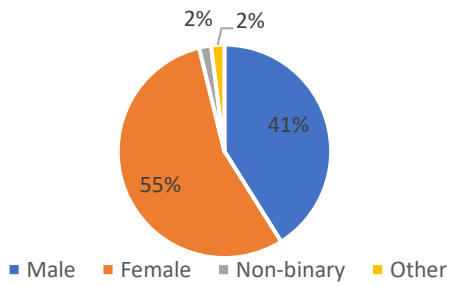
Figure 5.2 Sample by age



The ages of the students ranged from 13 to 16, with most respondents aged 14 (50%, 505), not including the 7% (81) who selected 'prefer not to say'.

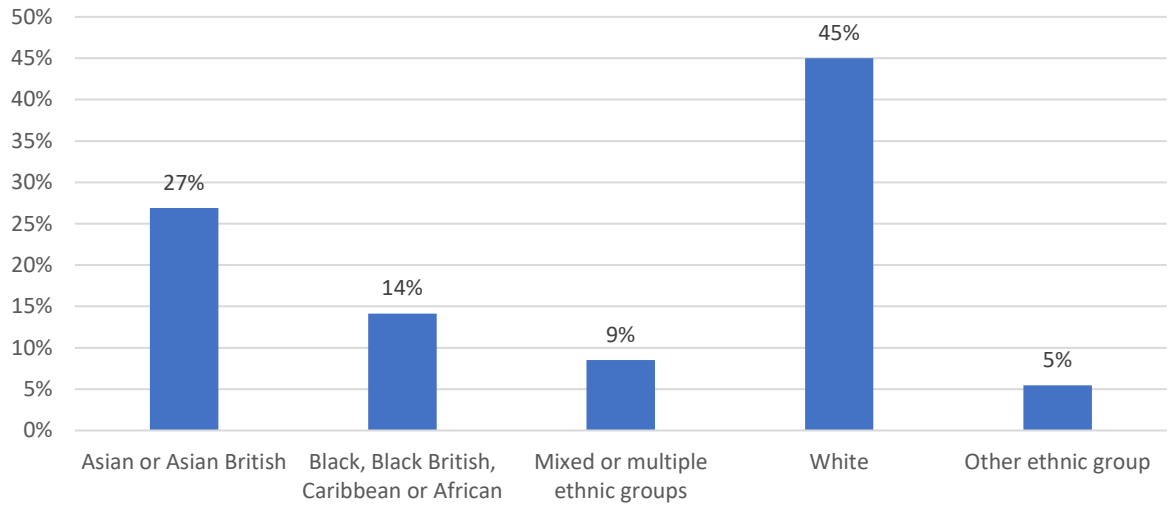
Excluding the 5% (53) which preferred not to say, 55% (577) identified as female, 41% (430) identified as male, 2% identified as non-binary and the remainder selected 'other' (2%, 21).

Figure 5.3 Sample by gender



In terms of ethnicity, most respondents classified themselves as 'White' (39%, 401), the next largest ethnicity was 'Asian or Asian British' (36%, 373), followed by 'Black, Black British, Caribbean or African' (12%, 124). 55 students selected 'Prefer not to say'.

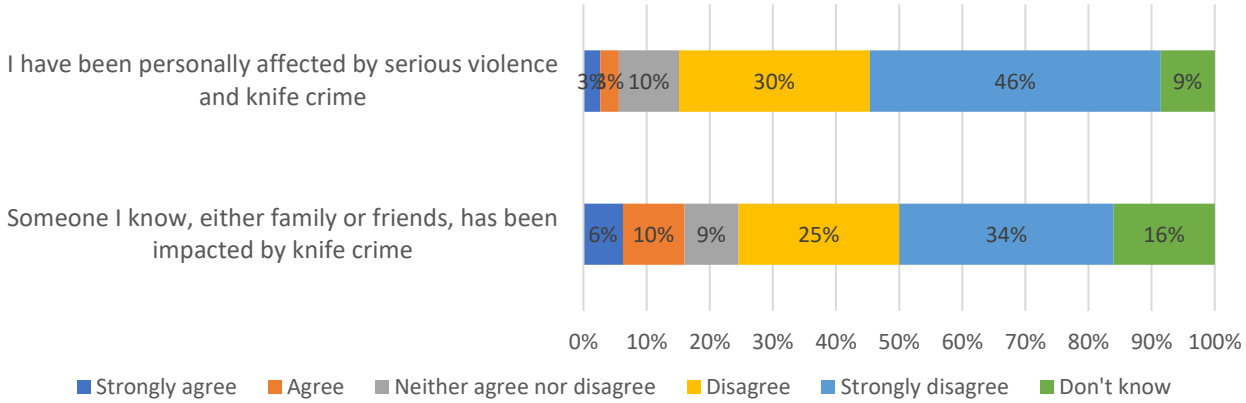
Figure 5.4 Sample by ethnicity



5.2 Perceptions and experiences of serious violence

When asked how much they agree with the following statements, 6% (63) agreed that they had been personally affected by serious violence and/or knife crime in their local area and 16% (179) agreed that someone they know has been impacted by knife crime. It is worth noting that there was a significant overlap between these groups with 76% (47) of those agreeing they had been personally affected also agreeing that someone they know had been affected. Therefore, the proportion of students that agreed that they had personally been impacted and/or they knew someone who has been impacted was 17% (190).

Figure 5.5 Experience of serious violence and knife crime



When asked about their perceptions of whether there was serious violence, and related crime, in their area quite a high proportion of students said that they did not know. With 28% of young people selecting don't know to the statement 'there is drug dealing in my local area' (320) and 'there are gangs involved in criminal behaviour in my area' (319). Whilst about a fifth didn't know if there was 'serious violence' (236) or 'knife crime' (254) in their area. Additionally, the proportion that responded 'neither agree nor disagree' for the statements in the graph, ranged between 26% (293) for 'serious violence' to 14% (160) for 'drug dealing'.

However, 41% (458) of young people agreed that there was drug dealing in their area, 37% (412) agreed that there was knife crime in their local area, 35% (396) agreed that there are gangs involved in criminal behaviour in their area and 27% (313) agreed that there was serious violence in their local area.

Advisory Group Interpretations:

It is interesting to note that 10% less students agreed that there was serious violence in their local area (27%) compared to knife crime, considering knife crime would come under the umbrella of serious violence.

The AG was asked how they would explain this difference in perception of serious violence vs knife crime in the area, to which they responded:

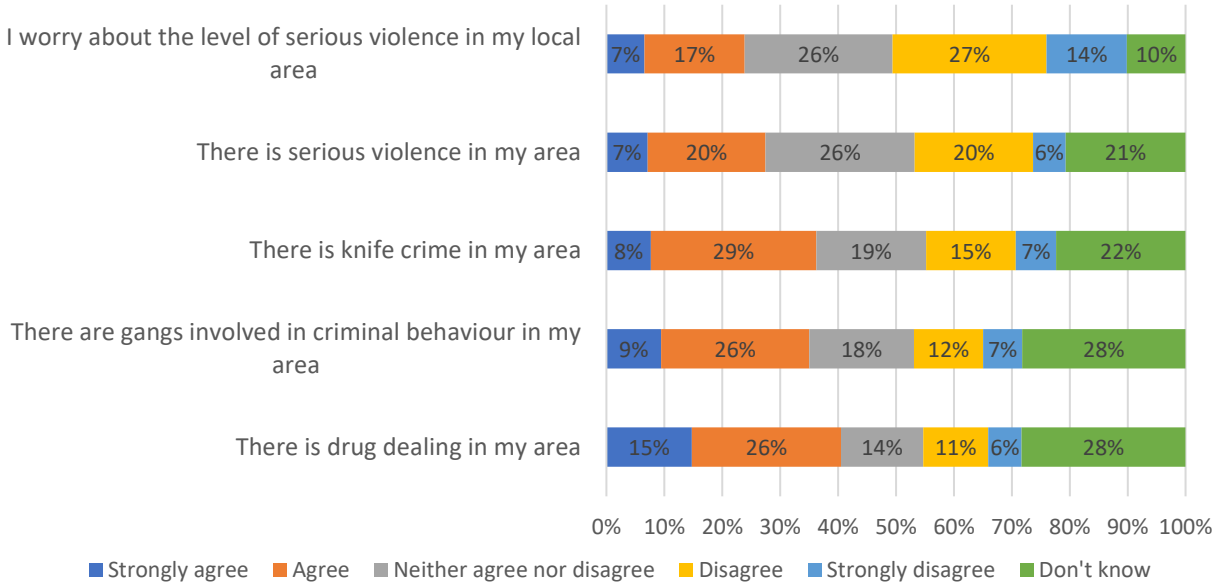
"Some people may not know what serious violence means."

"But they would think oh yeah there is knife crime in my area."

The members suggested that young people may have interpreted differently or not known the meaning of 'serious violence', whereas 'knife crime' would be more familiar to them.

About a quarter of young people (24%, 264) agreed that they worry about the level of serious violence in their area, however a higher proportion (41%, 448) disagreed and the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed (26%, 283) or responded that they did not know (10%, 112).

Figure 5.6 Perspectives of serious violence in the local area



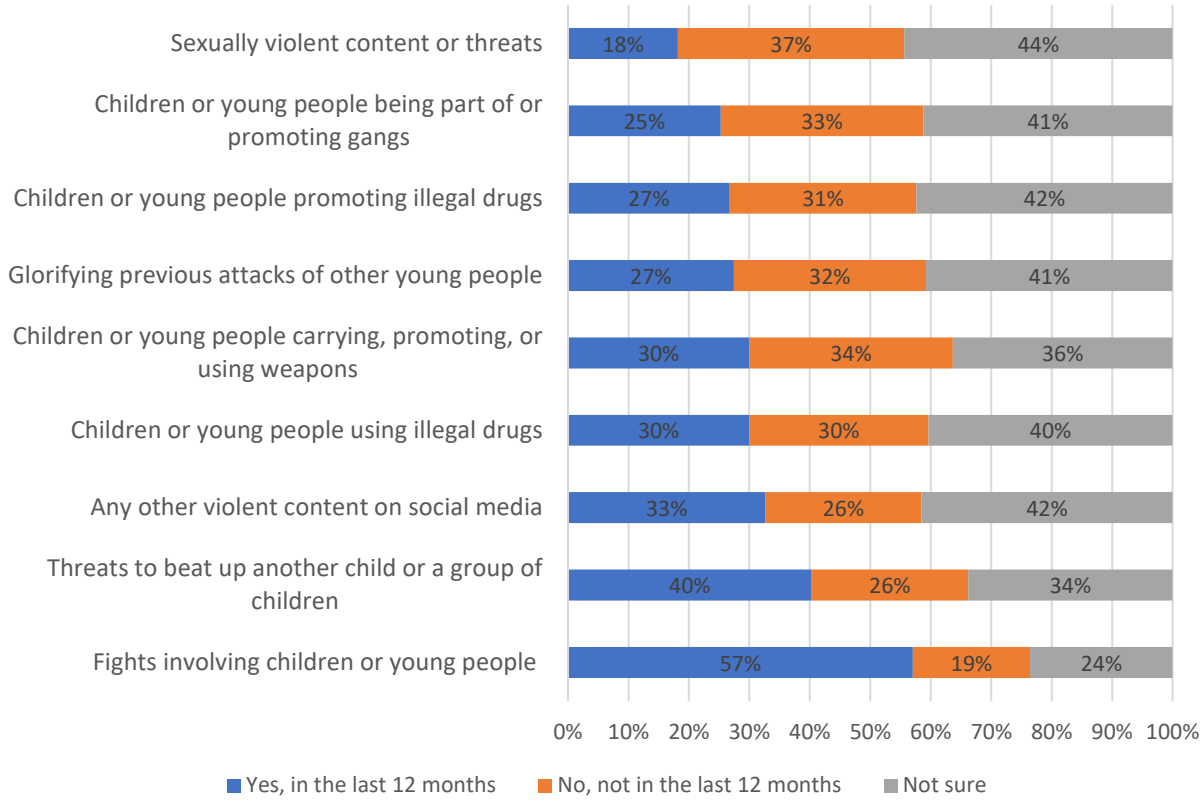
Young people were asked if they had seen a variety of violent, drug or gang related activities on social media in the last 12 months. This question was replicated from the Youth Endowment Fund (2023) Children, Violence & Vulnerability Survey 2023[7]. Five per cent of participants responded with 'prefer not to say' for all the types of content listed, except for 'any other violent content' for which 6% responded 'prefer not to say'. These cases were removed from further analysis. Figure 5.7 shows that a very high proportion of young people selected 'not sure', for most of the activities about 4 in 10 stated 'not sure'. This does not reflect findings to this question obtained in the YEF survey where the proportion of young people that selected 'Don't know' ranged between 8 and 12%.

However, 57% (615) selected that they had seen 'fights involving children or young people' in the last 12 months on social media. In comparison, YEF's 'Children, violence and vulnerability' Report 2023, found that 48% of respondents had witnessed 'fights involving children or young people' on social media in the past 12 months which is lower than our findings, though they did see a 4% increase from

[7] Youth Endowment Fund (2023) Children, violence & vulnerability report. A national survey was conducted involving 7,547 teenage children aged 13 to 17 in England and Wales, sharing their perceptions and experiences of violence. The full survey was shared by YEF with the IPSCJ.

the year before. In this survey 40% (435) of young people had seen threats to beat up another child or children in the last 12 months which is more similar to the results in the YEF survey (36%).

Figure 5.7 Have you seen any content on social media that included the following?



5.3 Perceived causes of serious violence.

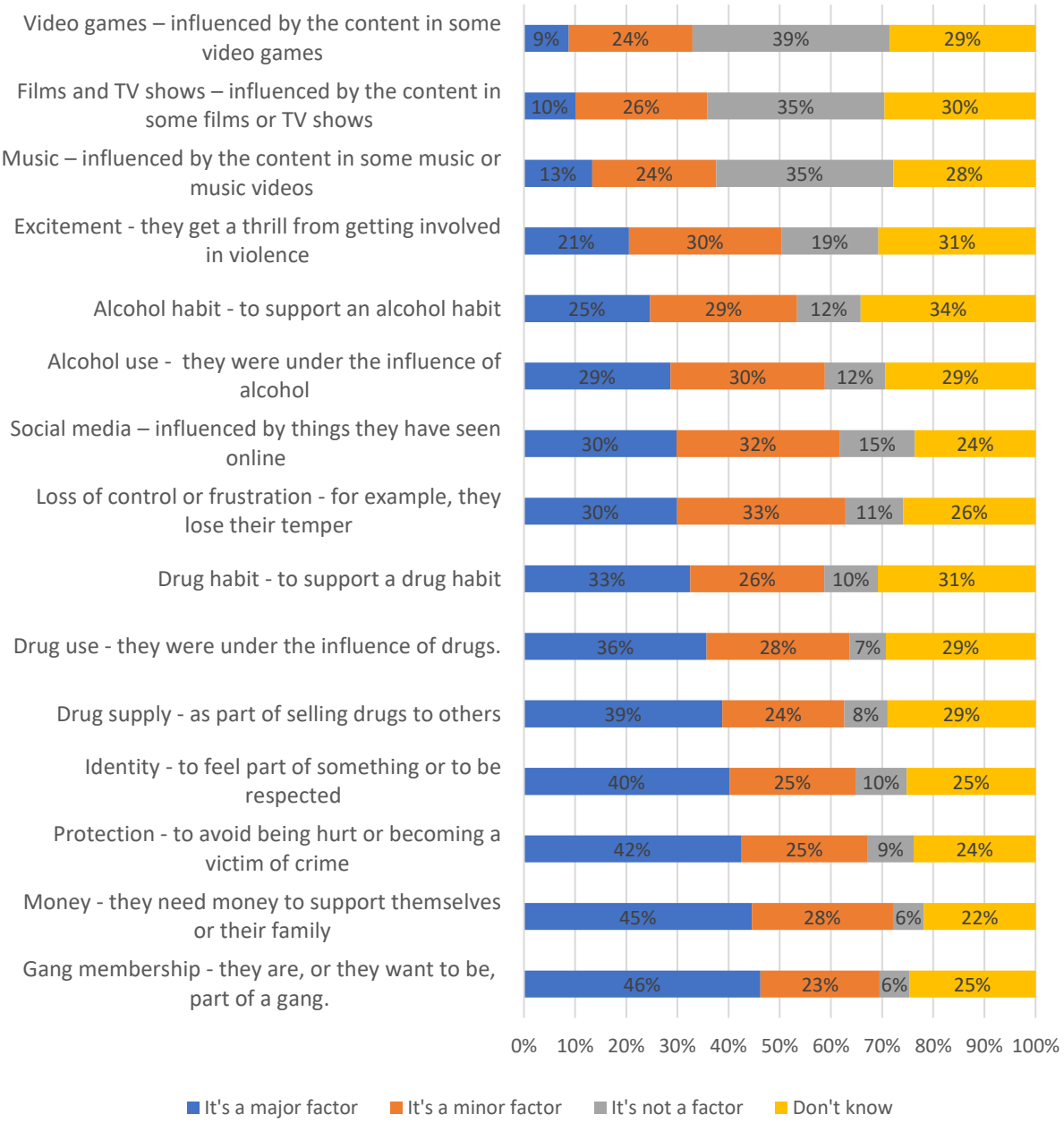
When asked 'why do you think that some young people commit acts of violence in your local area' from 22-35% responded 'don't knows' to how much of a factor the different options were. This was also a question replicated from Youth Endowment Fund Survey (2023)[8] and again the proportion of young people that selected 'don't know' to this question was much lower in the YEF results ranging between 5 and 11%.

The reasons most often selected in this survey as being a 'major factor' were 'Gang membership' (46%), 'Money' (45%), 'Protection' (42%) and 'Identity' (41%). 'Gang membership' (50%) was also the most commonly chosen 'major factor' in the YEF results. However, 'Money' (37%) and Protection (32%) were

[8] Youth Endowment Fund (2023) Children, violence & vulnerability report. A national survey was conducted involving 7,547 teenage children aged 13 to 17 in England and Wales, sharing their perceptions and experiences of violence. The full survey was shared by YEF with the IPSCJ.

less commonly chosen as a 'Major Factor' in the YEF results. In the YEF results, Drug Use (48%) was the second most commonly chosen, Drug habit the third most commonly chosen along with 'Loss of contol' (46%) and Drug supply (45%) fourth. In this survey these drug related options were also chosen often but followed, 'Gang membership', 'Money', 'Protection' and 'Identity'. The least commonly chosen options to be selected as major factors were 'Video games' (9%), 'Films and TV shows' (10%), and 'Music' (13%) which mirrors the results of the YEF survey.

Figure 5.8 Why do you think that some young people commit acts of violence in your local area?



Students were also asked if there are any other reasons, not listed, they 'think are why some young people commit acts of violence' for which respondents provided a range of answers. One reason which was raised by 44 (22%) out of 202 responses was due to the influence of others around them referring to friends and peer groups (31), or family members (13) who may be involved in violence and gangs, and the desire to 'fit in' and belong (16).

Similarly, within the workshops when asked about what may lead a young person to get involved in knife crime and serious violence, students discussed the influence of others:

> *"Friends have a big influence on you"*
>
> *"But if had bad parents that were in gangs he'd immediately get put into a gang mindset from a young age so he's more likely to go into a gang."*
>
> *"I feel like also instead of just parents it could also just be siblings. If your siblings are good people and they do well in school then maybe they inspire you to be like them. But if you have worse siblings that don't do good in school then you try to be more like them and it's a different upbringing."*

The second most common survey answer was 'to look cool' (25, 12%), many respondents referenced that young people think it makes them cool or 'hard' and commits acts of violence for respect and status (11).

> *They want to be recognised or have the respect of others.*
>
> *To feel feared and have power, so they feel respected.*
>
> *Sense of security and belong. Trying to fit in and think it is cool to get involved in violence.*

Another common response referred to the impact of trauma, neglect and family problems (21, 10%) and what might be described as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)

> *Upbringing, they may commit crimes because of childhood trauma or neglect.*
>
> *They were raised a way to believe that violence can be the answer, maybe they were abused by parents or have had family problems.*
>
> *They were brought up in an unsafe environment where these acts are normalised or encouraged by parents, siblings and other significant figures in their life.*

These additional factors raised by young people are important and it is recommended that the Youth Endowment Fund consider adding these factors to their annual national survey. In particular, the survey should include experiences of trauma or neglect, for which there is a growing evidence base that demonstrates associations between ACEs and risk of involvement in violence (Gray, P., 2021[9]; Duke et al., 2010[10]).

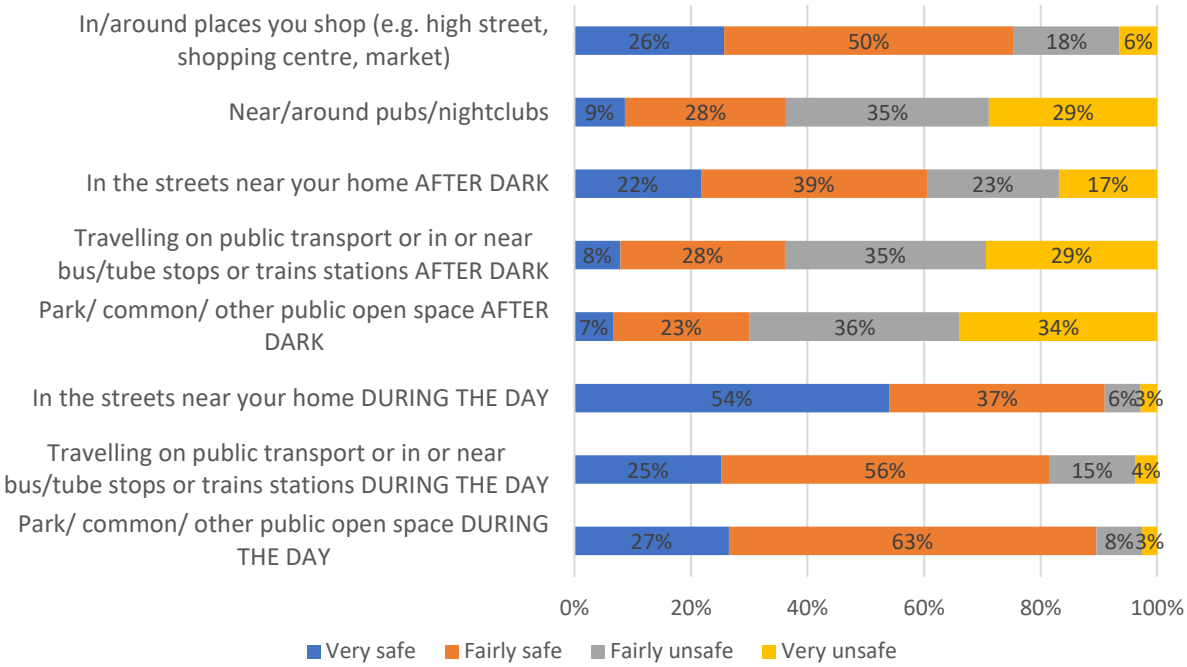
5.4 Feelings of safety in their local area, and in and around school

Young people were asked how safe they feel in different public spaces. Along with levels of safety (see figure 5.9) they were given the option of 'not relevant to me' which students particularly selected for 'Near/ around pubs/ nightclubs', which might be expected given the cohorts age (25% of respondents selected it). Those that selected 'not relevant to me' or 'prefer not to say' were excluded from further analysis.

The figure below shows the responses of those that selected a level of safety. As would be expected, they were more likely to feel safe in the day compared to after dark in the streets near their home (91% vs 61%), in a park/common or other open space (90% vs. 30%) or travelling on public transport or in or near a bus/ tube stop or train station (81% vs 36%). 36% agreed that they feel safe near/ around pubs/nightclubs. 75% of respondents said that they feel safe in/ around places they shop, meaning that a quarter said that they did not.

[9] Gray, P., Smithso, H. and Jump, D. (2021) Serious Youth Violence and its relationship with adverse childhood experiences, HM Inspectorate of Probation, Academic Insights 2021/13)
[10] Duke, N., Pettingell, S., McMorris, B. and Borowsky, I. (2010). 'Adolescent Violence Perpetration: Associations With Multiple Types of Adverse Childhood Experiences', Pediatrics,125, p. 778

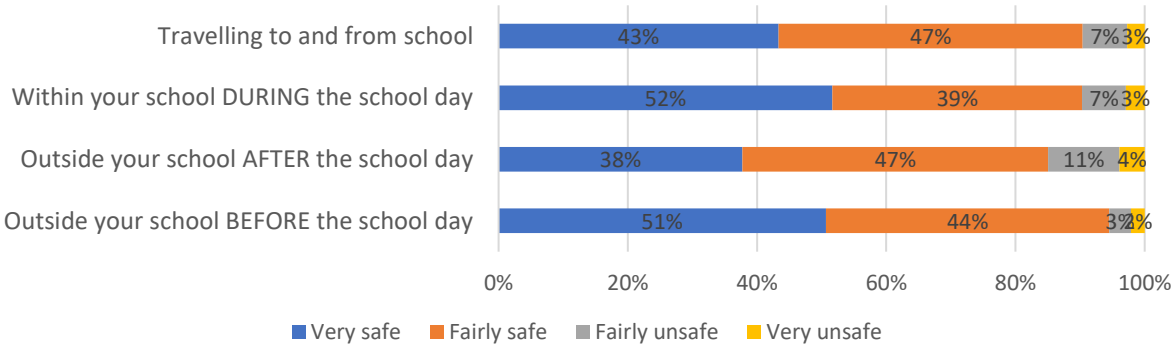
Figure 5.9 How safe or unsafe do you feel in each of the following locations?



Students were asked if they take any safety measures or do anything extra to help keep yourself safe or make yourself feel safe when you are out? Only 173 students provided a response which may suggest a need to review this question and of those 34 said that they did not do anything extra to keep themselves safe. 29 (17%) stated that they either did not or tried not to go anywhere alone after dark and always stayed in groups or with family. Many also mentioned the ways they used their mobile phone as a way of feeling or keeping safe, either by having them on them and charged (27), staying on the phone with someone whilst walking places (7), or by having their location live for family or friends to track (9). Other safety behaviours mentioned included avoiding suspicious people hanging around (7) and avoiding "dodgy" places (5).

Figure 5.10 shows that 5% (59) of students said they do not feel safe outside their school before the school day (with 2% feeling 'very unsafe'), 10% do not feel safe travelling to and from school (103) and within school during the school day (104) (with 3% in both cases feeling 'very unsafe') and 15% (160) said that they felt unsafe outside their school after the school day (with 4% feeling very unsafe).

Figure 5.10 How safe or unsafe do you feel at the following times?



Feelings of unsafety during and after school may be linked to bullying which was an issue raised a few times across the survey by young people.

> *They need to look out more because there are many children within schools who feel unsafe and threatened because of bullying of other kids but are too afraid to inform a member of staff so they have to deal with it there self, which usually ends up in fights or permanent mental wellbeing issues.*

> *If teachers take more action when they see bullying or violence and swearing.*

Advisory Group Interpretations:
The AG were asked, why they thought that more students felt unsafe after school than before the school day, to which one AG member suggested that some students may have interpreted the statement 'outside your school after the school day' as including within their home rather than on their way from school:

"*maybe how safe they feel at home or in their neighbourhood*"

Another member suggested that maybe they had experienced or were afraid of someone following them home, particularly by bullies.

When asked '**Is there anything that your school does do that helps to make you feel safe either during the school day or at the beginning or the end of the day?**' over half (148, 56%) that gave a response, gave an example of something that their school does, most commonly, students mentioned school staff patrolling around the perimeter of their school before and after the school day and watching that students get home safely (74, 28%).

> *Yes, we have many staff outside the gate making sure everyone leaves and arrives at school safely and happily, not once have they failed to do so.*

After school there are so many teachers out and inside the school looking after the students

Participants were asked '**Is there anything you think your school should do to increase your feelings of safety either during the school day or at the beginning or the end of the day?**' to which 272 provided a response of those 115 (42%) said no and a further 29 (11%) said they don't know.

Nothing they do can directly impact level of safety as most fights are caused by students and they can't exactly resolve fights or arguments between students permanently.

125 (46%) gave a suggestion of some kind which included:

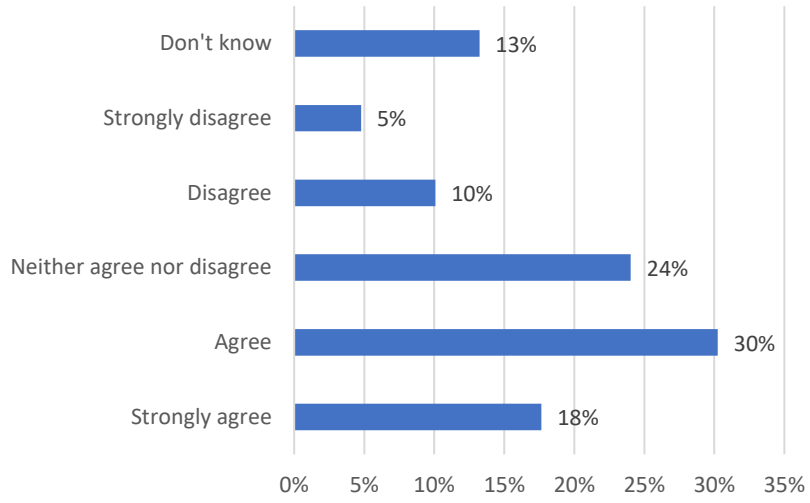
Talk more about who we can go to if we feel unsafe and seem more approachable instead of making others nervous to go up and speak to them due to them seeming to be in a bad mood. Maybe go over how to enter pupil support areas as it can be daunting at times asking for help when it seems strange for others to do.

Make sure there isn't any overgrown plants that can block peoples view of what is in front of them and make sure dark places like alleyways have lights in them so people can see especially during winter times. They can also have more staff in places that students are most likely to commit crimes near the school such as alleyways next to schools and any close parks.

… stop the one-way system that's in place as it actually causes more crowds.

5.5 A Serious Violence Curriculum

Figure 5.11 How much do you agree or disagree that learning about serious violence and knife crime in school could help stop young people becoming involved with violence or knife crime?



48% (532) of respondents felt that learning about serious violence and knife crime in school could help reduce young people becoming involved with violence, whereas 15% (165) disagreed, and 24% (267) neither agreed nor disagreed.

491 students provided a reason for whether they agreed, disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed. For those who agreed that learning more would be helpful, the most common reason provided was because it is beneficial to learn more about serious violence when young (116, 24%) as understanding the consequences and dangers would deter young people from getting involved (115, 23%). Some respondents also noted how it would be useful to learn how to keep yourself safe from violence (16).

> *We as kids need to know how to protect ourselves and to stay away from them. And, how to not get involved and how to prevent them.*

> *It would educate them because normally they don't think about what could happen after all the "fun" stuff has quickly ended. They don't realise that they would be sucked in to it for a long time and educating kids beforehand is great way to prevent it, as they will be aware of all the consequences, problems and danger that would follow on.*

Some students within the workshops, provided a similar response,

> *"Because most of the times when they get into knife crime they get coerced into it and they are unaware of the consequences. So if the school tells them that 'This is what can happen to you; this is what can happen if you get involved in knife crime', they are less likely to be involved with it."*

On the other hand, 93 students (19%) responded that students '*don't care'*, particularly those already involved in crime or violence (21) and/or don't listen to teachers or the school, some expanded that lessons on serious violence are '*boring*' so wouldn't have an impact on students. Also, some argued that young people already know that getting involved in serious violence is '*bad*' and know of the consequences, yet some young people don't care about the impact or harm it may cause, and that they already learn a lot about serious violence in school and it has had no impact.

> *The people that are likely to commit crimes with knives or other weapons are the type of people that don't care about school and don't listen to teachers.*

> *Because children don't listen to things like that, talking won't fix anything because they already have their mind set in that way so they won't want to change just because someone tells them to, especially one of their teachers or some random "trusted" adult. and they aren't clueless either, they know the risks of stuff like that yet they still choose to do it.*

As 24% (267) responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed, these students felt that whilst it could have a positive impact on young people, many would not listen or care, or would be influenced more by external factors (23).

> *There are other factors that can influence young people like family, friends, social media etc and most people don't really care/listen to when assemblies are made.*

> *It could do both influence but could also stop children becoming involved in acts of violence but to most people it's just a PowerPoint.*

22 respondents argued that it could have a negative impact by either making young people curious and encouraging them to get involved in serious violence and knife crime or scaring them into joining a gang.

> *…this could also plant the seed of potentially doing it themselves as several young people like to rebel and go against expectations and orders.*

> *It would get them curious, and it would be semi encouraging them to see what will happen.*

> *It is more effective to promote and raise awareness about matters like these if someone has firsthand experience, the point does not get across if it's done by someone who's never had to worry or experience these types of things, it would most likely encourage a child to it more, just doing more harm than good even if the intentions of raising awareness were not malicious.*

There were also suggestions made that schools should help address the wider issues or causes behind the behaviour such as through mental health support:

> *People who engage in these crimes know the impact and consequences of their action yet still involve in them perhaps better systems other than enlightenment or education could be introduced for example therapy or anger management.*

In one workshop with 13 students, they were asked to rate how much they agree with the statement *'we should be taught more about serious violence and knife crime in school?*', to which 9 strongly agreed, 2 agreed, and 2 neither agreed nor disagreed. The two that did not agree provided these reasons:

> *"We have been taught enough about it already"*

> *"We are taught quite a descent amount about it but and that's good, but I also think we should have a specific teacher for it, and not class teachers like history or RE teacher, because I don't think they would have the qualifications"*

In another workshop, with 12 students, they were asked to rate how much they agree with the statement 'we are taught enough about serious violence and knife crime in schools', to which 6 agreed, 3 neither agreed nor disagreed, and 3 disagreed. The same group was asked 'if there was a serious violence curriculum, do you think students will listen to teachers on the subject?', to which there was scepticism from some students:

> *"I don't think students will, it's just brushed over…"*

> *"If we have an assembly about it … If you have a real motive to do it (SV), assemblies aren't going to do anything"*

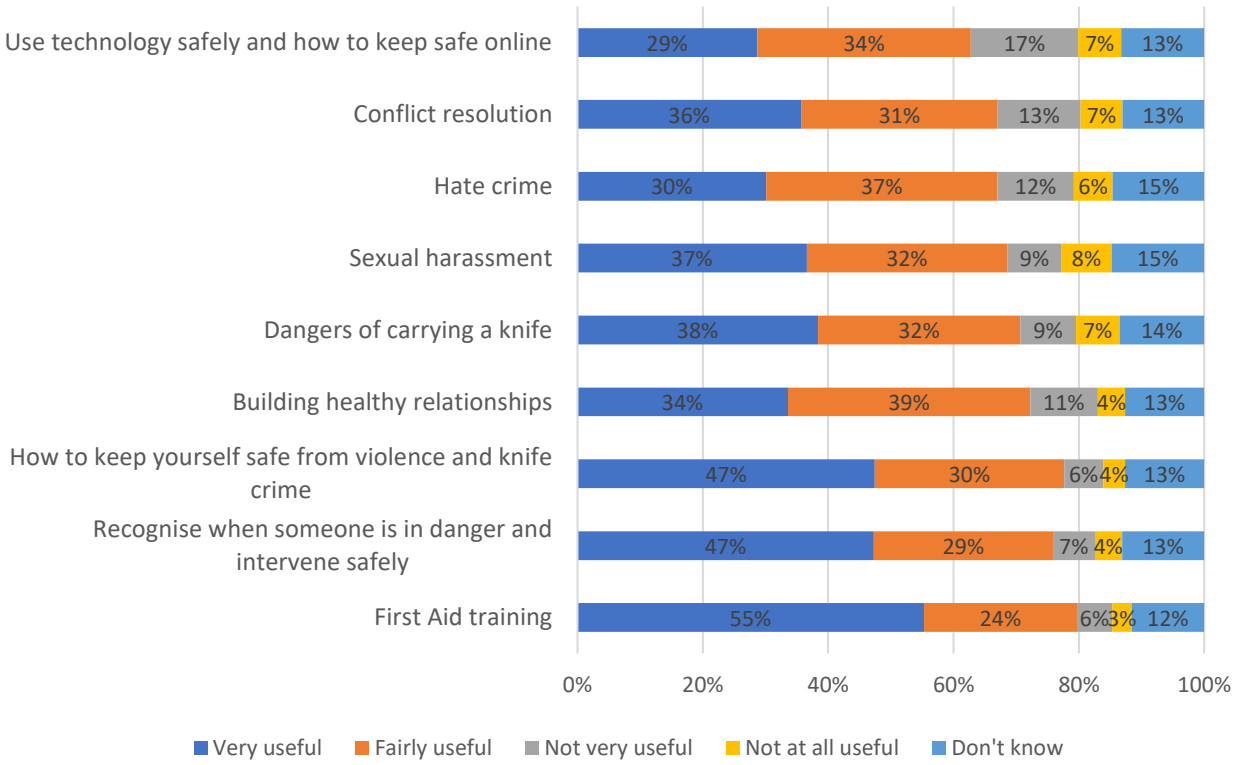
A topic discussed by some students in the workshops, was at which age should schools be teaching young people about serious violence, with some arguing that students should be taught earlier than in secondary school. When asked at what age they think students should be taught things such as 'anger management', one student responded:

> *"Like he said, Year 4 to Year 6. Because especially when you go into high school, high school is like a foreign place to be in sometimes. Obviously, you need to be prepared and we … It's better to learn off young as well because sometimes you could even see kids get involved in Year 7, Year 8, because they don't even know what they are doing. So, it's better to start off young."*

A student within another workshop, provided a similar response,

> *"It's like the younger you teach them, the more it will get stuck in their mind and in their head. So I feel if we get taught it later then it would have been worse and maybe a lot more people would be involved in it."*

Figure 5.12 Which topics do you think would be useful to learn about in school in terms of serious violence?



Students were asked in the survey how useful they think different topics are to learn about in terms of serious violence (See figure 5.12). 'First aid training', was considered as being the most useful to learn about, with 55% (599) of students selecting that it would be 'very useful' and 24% (264) 'fairly useful'. This was followed by 'recognise when someone is in danger…' and 'how to keep yourself safe from violence and knife crime' which 47% (512) selected as 'very useful'. These findings were also reflected within workshops. Interestingly 'self-defence', was ranked as the most useful in a ranking activity the students completed during one of the workshops which relates to 'how to keep yourself safe'. When asked in the survey *what else* students think would be useful to be taught about, out of 73 responses, 'self-defence' was mentioned 7 times, and 'mental health' and 'dealing with grief and trauma' were suggested by 6 respondents.

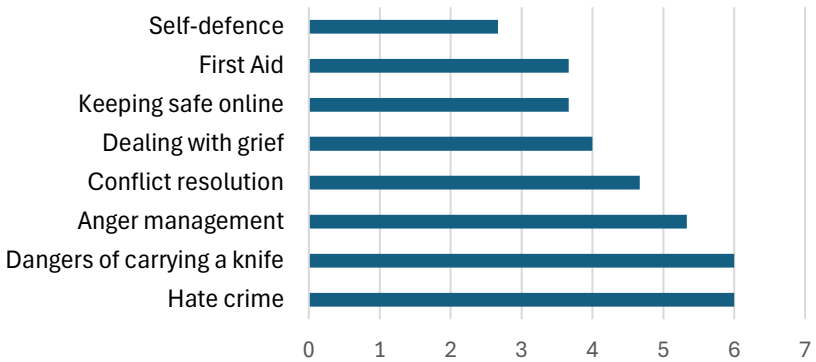
How to use technology safely was voted as the least useful, with 24% believing it would not be useful to learn about and only 29% believing it would be very useful. Whilst 'conflict resolution' had the second most votes for not being very useful (13%, 143) and not at all useful (7%, 72), 36% of respondents (386) felt it would be very useful and 31% (339) fairly useful. However, through the workshops it was identified that not all students understood the terminology 'hate crime', more than one student asked 'what's hate crime' or 'what does that mean'. 'Conflict resolution' is another term which may have not been clear to survey respondents, as in a workshop some students understood it as the school getting students together, who have had conflict, to resolve these issues, whereas the research team in the survey were referring to teaching students how to resolve conflicts themselves.

> *"They encourage them both to sit down with each other, to have a conversation, talk it out … Most of the time I don't think it works."*

Advisory Group Interpretations:
The AG were asked why they thought the 'Use technology safely and how to keep safe online' was rated as the least useful. They commented that students learn a lot about this anyway in school and students know a lot about how to keep safe online, sometimes more than teachers.

Within one workshop, 12 students, in groups of 3 ranked these 8 curriculum topics from most (1) to least (8) useful to learn about. Self-defence was ranked as the most useful, followed by first-aid and keeping safe online, and then dealing with grief. The topics considered least useful were hate crime and learning about the dangers of carrying a knife. However, it is important to note that these rankings were done in groups, and not all students agreed with the final rankings, as one student explained their top choices:

Figure 5.13 Average ranking out of 8 (1 = most useful)



> *"My top one, one out of my top three was conflict resolution. I think this should be taught because at the end of the day a lot of these situations that happen, it starts off small so it's to be able to learn how to nip stuff in the bud. Say you punch somebody or beat someone up, it's a fight. Someone might have got hurt but no blood, there's nothing yet. So being able to nip it*

in the bud before knives and guns get involved. … Another one is anger management as well. I thought that was out of order at the bottom because a lot of people nowadays, they take anger management as a privilege … So, I think it should be something that's taught from that year, for Year 4 to 6 so you have that knowledge. So, when you go into the high school, you are going around Year 11s, 10s, 9s, you know how to approach a situation if you get asked to carry something or do something that you don't want to do."

This was also supported by another student's response:

"If you don't manage your anger well, that can lead to stabbings. Most of the time gang violence, it's not premeditated, it's mostly…anger, it's mostly escalated fights. And conflict resolution, if you don't de-escalate the conflict as soon as possible it can lead to further violence."

In reference to hate crime, one group said, *'no-one cares', 'I don't think a lot of people care' and 'we've heard a lot about it' before.*

The reason one group put self-defence as the most useful topic, is because they felt that young people carry knives for self-defence purposes, so if they knew how to defend themselves in other ways, they wouldn't feel the need to carry a knife.

When asked:

"*So, do you still all agree that self-defence is the number one way to reduce violence?"*

A student responded:

"*That's the main reason that people carry knives, or they get involved in violence. They think it's the best way to self-defend themselves."*

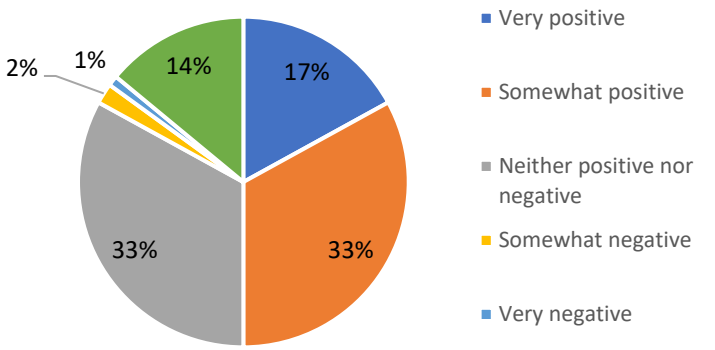
The group also discussed how they had already been taught about most of the subjects mentioned except for 'first-aid' and 'self-defence'. They also discussed how they have had many lessons on peer pressure which had been ineffective as young people will always listen and be influenced by their friends. This was supported by another group, as when asked if there was anything schools could do about peer pressure, they responded with a resounding 'No'.

"Everyone thinks that they don't listen to their friends, but they do. They think, 'I'm not naïve, I won't listen to them, no thanks'."

A suggestion from the one group was to teach young people more about managing finances and how to legally earn money as:

> *"…most people get involved with drugs and violence because of the incentive of money and wealth."*

Figure 5.14 Have you had any lessons on, or had a speaker come into school to talk to you, about serious violence and/or knife crime?



About two thirds of students (725, 65%) said that they have had lessons on, or a speaker come into school to talk to them, about serious violence and/or knife crime. When asked what impact it has on them, a third (33%, 236) said 'Neither positive nor negative' and further 14% (102) said they did not know. However, half (50%, 363) stated it had a positive impact and only 2% (15) stated it had a negative impact.

What impact did this have on you?

Students were asked to give a reason for their answers and 230 students did. For those that stated that the lesson or speaker had neither a positive nor negative impact on them the most common reason given was that they felt the subject area was not relevant to them as they would not get involved in serious violence or knife crime (33%, 29).

> *Knife crime doesn't affect me directly so I have no use for lessons on it.*

> *I never planned to carry a weapon or commit a crime.*

The second reason given was that they already knew the information or most of the information provided (16%, 14).

> *I didn't really have a lesson, I had an assembly but it was just talking about how people carry knives with them and basic info everyone knows.*

The third and fourth most common reasons given as to why it had neither a positive nor negative impact was that it was boring, they didn't listen (11, 13%) and had forgotten the information provided (7, 8%).

> *They teach it in a boring way to make people not care or want to be bothered. Doesn't prevent knife crime in any way.*

> *I really didn't care once I left, I forgot about the whole speech because it's so boring to listen to all day everyday when no one changes even after all their long speeches sometimes I get so sleepy after them I don't wanna do work.*

For those that stated the lesson/speaker had a positive impact on them the most common reason given related to it being informative and they learnt more about serious violence and or knife crime (31, 33%).

> *I found it very educational and how it highlights the risks of knife, crime and violence. At a young age, it's not spoken about Much and if it is, it's discussed in little to no detail. This gives no understanding of what is going on in their surroundings and how they can be aware. This is not fair!!!*

The second most common response for those that said it had a positive impact was that it informed them/ helped them better understand the consequences of knife crime (24, 18%).

> *(It) helps me understand the dangers and violent stuff that are happening and the consequences that will happen if you do these activities*

The third most common them of responses was that it provided them with information about how to stay safe, protect themselves and be aware of their surroundings (15, 11%).

> *We had policers officers come into our school and teach us the dangers of crime around Luton. We were again told what do to protect ourselves and what to do if we see it happen.*

> *I'm now more aware of my surroundings and if I do encounter any knife crimes then I know to tell someone such as the teachers or police*

Only a few students (9) stated that the lesson/speaker had a negative impact on them, the most common type of reason given was that it was upsetting or disturbing (3) and this was also raised by other students who had said that it had a positive impact (2) or neither a positive nor negative impact (3). Overall, 14 students commented on this, and 9 students commented on the content being gruesome or gory (8).

It was disturbing and violent with detailed information on real stories, focused around people our age.

It definitely made me more aware of the dangers and consequences around these actions, which is very important knowledge to be equipped with. It was very upsetting and worrying, however.

it was just upsetting and quite gory at times, causing someone to pass out.

I found it boring and unnecessary. The pictures of injuries were disgusting to look at, and I think someone had a seizure.

Other reasons given by those that said it had a negative impact replicated the reasons mentioned by students who felt it had neither a positive nor negative impact i.e. it was boring, they wouldn't get involved anyway and they already knew the information. Whilst one of the students said that the content was out of date and not relevant to their age group.

They bring up things from their timeline (dinosaur) like it's still a thing.

I already knew it, but it is useful info to have. I think they should have a lesson on how to defend yourself against someone with a knife instead of telling us the same thing each time.

…when someone who has personal experience with knife crime comes to talk about it, they give a lot more details. Most young people, I feel, glorify crimes because they may think that it's cool or something, but when an actual person comes into to talk about their experience, they wake up and realise that that is not the life they want to be a part of.

In the workshops, students provided examples of the positive impact/ improved understanding, which education/talks on serious violence have by demonstrating their knowledge on the subject:

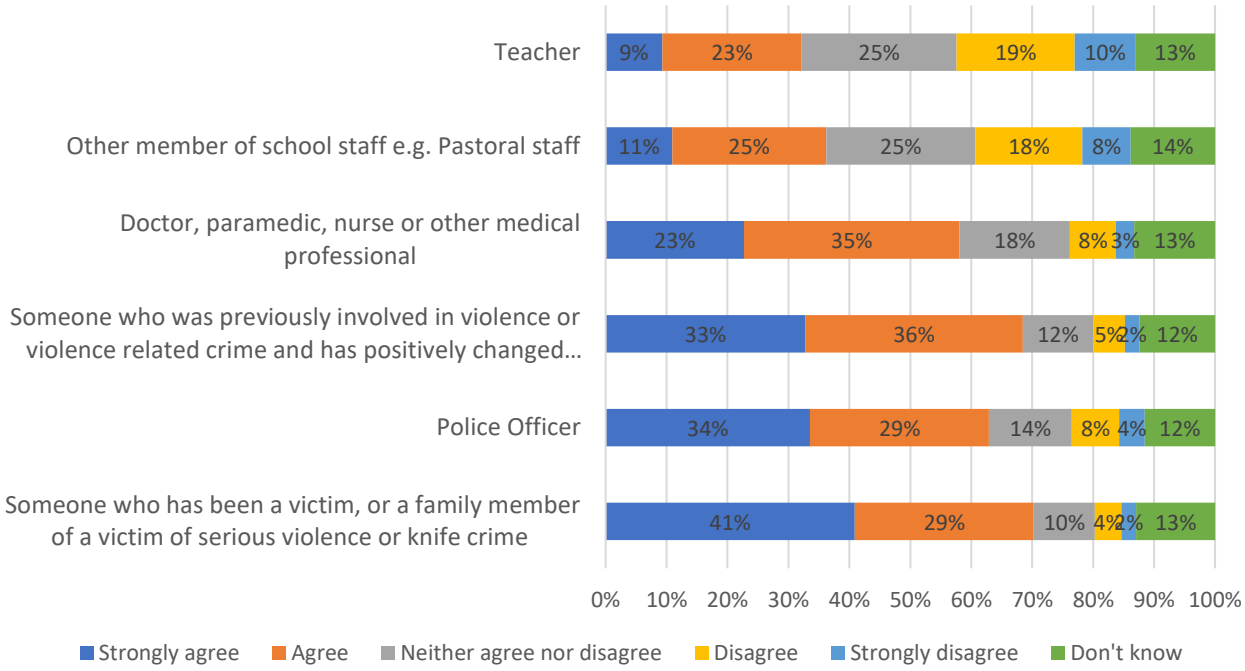
"I just remember in a - I think in Year 7 we went to watch a play about knife crime and they were just saying that if you carry a knife and then you take it out, for example, there's a risk of you getting hurt as well as the other person."

"I think if you have someone that had first-hand experience they can tell you more information about it. And I had something similar in primary school, like Year 5, it was a man who got involved in drugs and then he got sent to jail… But he was saying, 'It ruined my life … because obviously a criminal record makes it harder for you to obtain a job. That also had a big impact

because if you hear someone's first-hand experience then it really encourages you to think twice about your actions."

When asked how much they agreed of disagreed that young people would listen to the following people when talking about serious violence, students most strongly agreed that young people would listen to a victim, or family member of a victim, of serious violence (41%, 441), followed by a police officer (34%, 360), and someone who has previously been involved in serious violence (33%, 353). Whereas only 9% (98) of students strongly agreed that young people would listen to a teacher, and 11% (116) another member of school staff.

Figure 5.15 How much do you agree or disagree that young people would listen to the following people when talking about serious violence and the consequences of carrying a knife?



Advisory Group Interpretations:

We asked the AG for their interpretation of graph 5.15, some expressed that the percentage of students agreeing that young people would listen to a 'Police Officer' was higher than they would have expected:

"Expected police officer to be less because some people don't trust the police"

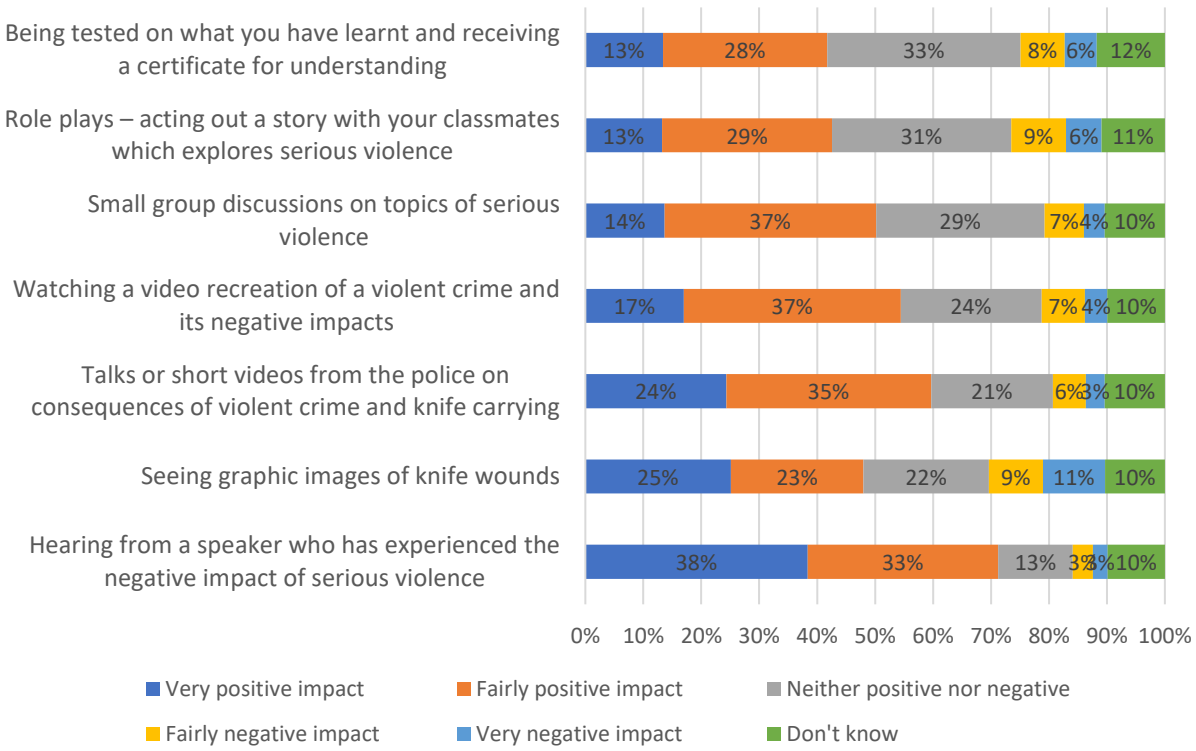
"People make the police look bad"- specifically on social media.

One member thought young people wouldn't trust the police as 'they are very strict' and are there to 'punish you'.

When asked, if there are any other people or organisations that you think young people would listen to or want to hear from on the subject of serious violence and knife crime, thirteen students suggested that young people would listen to family members, some students also suggested young peoples' friends or peers, or relevant organisations such as: the Youth Endowment Fund, Childline, or the World Health Organisation.

> *Someone who talks to students at an equal level. Teachers have authority, so do any other members of staff. Students will listen to those who can connect at a stable level with students.*

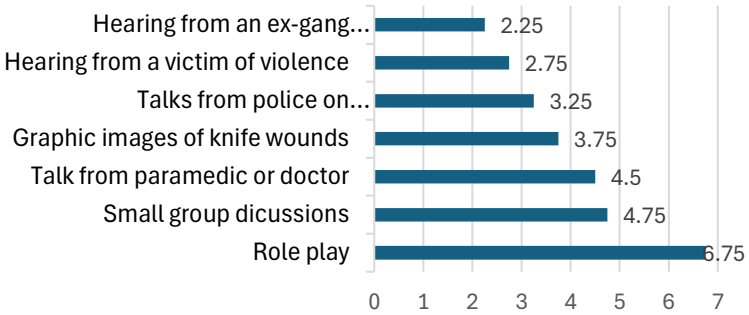
Figure 5.16 If there was a curriculum on serious violence how much do you think the types of learning below, would have a positive or negative impact on young people?



Hearing from a speaker who has experienced the negative impact of serious violence, was considered most likely to have a positive impact (71%) with 38% (396) believing it would have a very positive impact, 33% (339) fairly positive, and only 6% (62) a negative impact. Whilst 25% of students felt that 'seeing graphics images of knife wounds' would have a very positive impact; it was also rated the most likely to have a very negative impact (11%) and a fairly negative impact (9%). Role plays were also considered as potentially having a negative impact, with 9% of students believing it would have a fairly negative impact and 6% very negative, whereas only 13% believed it would have a very positive impact. Talks or short videos from the police on the consequences of violent crime and carrying a knife, was second most likely to be considered as having a positive impact (59%) which reflects the previous findings (in figure) that 63% of survey respondents thought that young people would listen to a police officer.

The workshop findings reflect the survey findings, as when asked to rank from 1 (most effective) to 7 (least effective), different types of learning, role play was ranked as the least effective by 3 out of 4 groups. Whereas hearing from an ex-gang member or from a victim of violence were both ranked as being more effective than most other methods.

Figure 5.17 Average ranking out of 7 (1 = most effective)



One group within the workshop explained that young people don't take role plays seriously:

"Will make people laugh, everyone will think it's funny"

"Makes it more of a joke… no one takes it seriously"

"Really awkward, so doesn't do anything"

In terms of talks from different individuals, one student explained that hearing from the police would be more effective than from doctors or paramedics because the police will have witnessed more and have more knowledge surrounding the issue of serious violence.

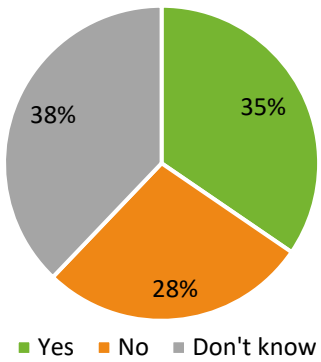
Advisory Group Interpretations:
In response to the low percentage of students being in favour of 'role plays', the AG members said that no students like roleplays and they don't take them seriously because it's not real, and instead "*mess about*".

"It's embarrassing"

They also said that serious violence "should be its own curriculum" so should receive more dedicated learning time rather than being thrown in with PSHE, which can sometimes be cancelled.

5.6 Safeguarding and talking to teachers

Figure 5.18 Would you feel comfortable talking to a teacher, or another member of staff, about the issue of serious violence?



When asked in the survey if they would feel comfortable talking to a member of school staff about serious violence, only 35% (343) responded with 'Yes', 28% (274) responded 'No', and 38% (376) responded 'Don't know', not including the 7% (77) which selected that they would 'Prefer not to say'.

Of the 103 young people who provided a reason in the survey for why they would not feel comfortable, the most common reasons are outlined below.

- 19 (18%) referred to fears that teachers would not keep the information they share with them confidential, being concerned that they might tell other staff members or tell their parents e.g. "*Risk of getting other people involved i.e. parents & services*" and "*I feel like in school, word travels quickly, so if one person knows, in the span of a day, everyone is going to find out, I'd go to a teacher that you know is not going to tell anyone.*"

- 14 (14%) referred to not feeling comfortable talking to others, specifically people they don't know well, about their feelings and experiences. This may explain why some young people do not feel comfortable talking to school staff, as five respondents explained that they do not know their teachers well enough e.g. "*Because I don't really know them so I can't really trust them" and "I'm not comfortable talking to people I'm not friends with or not comfortable with"*

- 12 (12%) said that they would not feel comfortable talking to teachers because they have in the past and felt that the teacher/ staff member did not take any action or effective action or they have felt that they haven't taken action in relation to others issues *e.g. "I have before in my school and they don't really do much" and "I don't really trust the teachers when I see my friends or people I know have situations of mental health problems, bullying, social media and physical fights, go to them for help and be denied or have it poorly dealt with."*

- 5 (5%) suggested they were concerned that if they were to speak to school staff about the issue of serious violence, other students may find out and they would be labelled a 'snitch' and potentially be in danger of retaliation e.g. *"I feel like most cases in school will involve other students, and that will come back to you, like snitch."*

- Five (5%) suggested that young people could feel more comfortable talking to school staff if they developed better relationships with them or if they were more approachable and 'friendly'. One issue raised was that safeguarding teams are seen to play a disciplinary role with a student commenting that this would make them cautious in seeking help from them e.g. *"I think they have reputation for dealing with children that are always in trouble ... always in isolation or detention. I feel like that doesn't give them a good reputation because I'll think 'oh that going to be me' if I go and tell them my issue. I guess making it more well known that they are here to help...*

Some key suggestions made when asked 'What could the school or staff do to make them more approachable, so students feel comfortable talking to them or reporting something?' were:

Participants suggested that if students knew staff members and those responsible for safeguarding better, they would be more approachable.

> *"I think if we saw them more day to day, be softer and nicer"*
>
> "I think talking to students more outside of class and work, getting to know teachers more, making them more approachable"

Other suggestions referred to how schools could make reporting more accessible and confidential.

> *Safeguarding officer available at more peaceful times.*
>
> *Anonymous google forms only the teacher dealing with case should know.*

The following are suggestions from students within the workshop and survey on how teachers/schools could make students feel more comfortable talking to them about serious issues affecting young people such as serious violence or knife crime.

> *"Check on students privately like pulling them out of class because sometimes they don't want to go to a teacher because they don't know what to say"*
>
> *Talk more about who we can go to if we feel unsafe and seem more approachable instead of making others nervous to go up and speak to them due to them seeming to be in a bad mood. Maybe go over how to enter pupil support areas as it can be daunting at times asking for help when it seems strange for others to do.*
>
> *More teachers or assistants that have gone through hard times and sections of violence and negativity or poverty in their life, that they are willing to share or talk about to help others.*

Is there anything else that you think your school or other schools should be doing to protect young people against being involved in serious violence or becoming a victim of serious violence?

45 students provided a variety of different responses, the most common response (8) related to increasing young people's knowledge and understanding of serious violence and its consequences, such as through a 'play' or 'more talks' including talks from the police. Five students suggested increasing police presence or having police investigate and deal with serious situations. Another five responses referred to schools improving how they handle situations and preventing things from escalating:

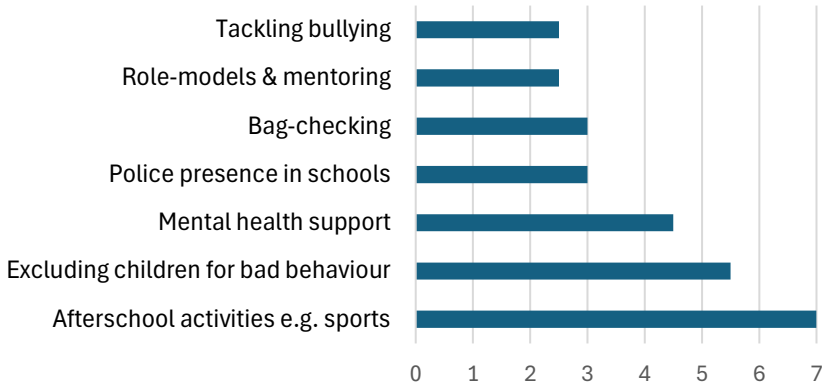
> *Train the teachers on how to stop conflicts between children at an early stage, before reaching a serious aggressive problem.*

Five students talk about working on student-teacher relationships, listening to students and increasing teacher approachability, so that young people are more like to confide in and approach teachers for support.

They should have a closer, more friendly relationship with their students to make them feel as if they can ask them for help instead of being very strict and only treating the student like some random person who is studying….

Within one workshop the group of students were asked to rank seven interventions from most (1) to least (7) effective in reducing young people's likelihood of becoming involved in serious violence. Afterschool activities were unanimously agreed as least effective:

Figure 5.20 Average ranking out of 7 (1 = most effective)



"Nobody cares about after school activities"

"I feel like that doesn't really have an effect on youth violence but it's good that they do it"

"What you're gonna play sports, like that's gonna help anyone"

Excluding children for bad behaviour was considered the second least effective and some students discussed how it could more harmful than helpful especially if students are excluded because then they are outside of school where they will "*have more time to do more bad things*" and are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. The students also raised the concern that by excluding students, you may be putting them at risk of harm at home:

"If they have a bad upbringing then their parents could maybe harm them"

Police presence is schools and bag checks were also considered by one student as potentially having a harmful effect:

"So, I feel that would more scare them into not getting involved than actually helping them not get involved. That might be unhealthy and might affect their mental health in a negative way." (95)

Although, some students argued that it is better to be scared into not getting involved in violence or gangs, than getting involved:

> *"It's better if they are scared not to join a gang than actually killing somebody."*

In response the student said:

> *"Maybe but it's like in the morality of it, if it's good morals to put a policeman and just sort of intimidate them into that, I feel there's better ways to do it. Like, for example, the after-school activities and the role models than having just police presence. I feel yes you are right in the sense that it would maybe help in a way but I feel also it's a bit negative because it would impact them unhealthily."*

Tackling bullies and providing role models and mentoring were ranked as the two most effective interventions,

> *"Tackling bullies because that's the main causation and the leading point."*

> *"I actually feel like the schools, especially this one, has a good pastoral team that if you are bullied, a lot of the time you can actually trust them and talk about it and they'd actually help you get over bullying"*

Whilst one group agreed that tackling bullying was a positive intervention, some felt that their school was already doing enough in terms of tackling bullying and that they should focus more on other interventions.

> *"It's important but I feel like it shouldn't be the main thing because they already know how to do it because they've been doing it for years. … Maybe it would help just to keep it that way and focus on other things, maybe like mental health support and stuff like that."*

Whilst mental health scored 5th out of the 7 interventions, there were reoccurring references to young people's mental health being a risk factor for getting involved with serious violence and/or knife crime, within the survey.

> *Mental health is one of the most major factors commonly because of pressure from schools and the education system as a whole.*

> *Mental health and how it links, Why being kind to troubled individuals are so important and how to respect people with trauma revolving around a person, object, place or scenario*

During a workshop, one student referred to mental health services such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as having a 'bad reputation' as,

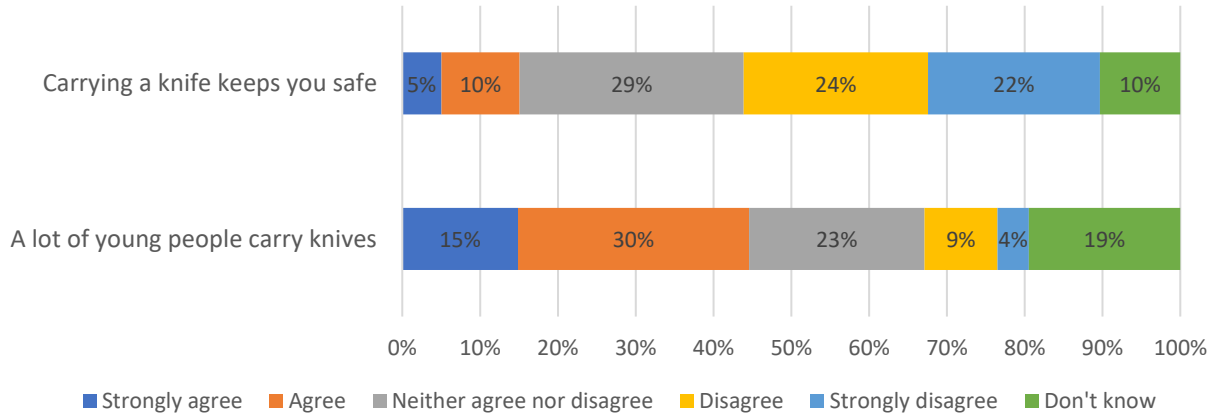
> "*They don't really help people … people get transferred to them from school, I have friends who have gone there but they're underfunded, and they don't actually do stuff*".

Therefore, it could be suggested that young people do not have as much faith in the support provided by mental health services rather than feeling there is a lack of need for mental health support.

Whilst the group agreed that it is important to have good role models and would help keep young people away from serious violence, there was disagreement as to whether that is an intervention which schools can successfully provide, as most young people look up to their family members.

> *"I feel like that has an impact, but I don't feel that people can do much to change that because a lot of people's role models are either their parents or their older siblings. So, I feel you can't really change that problem…"*

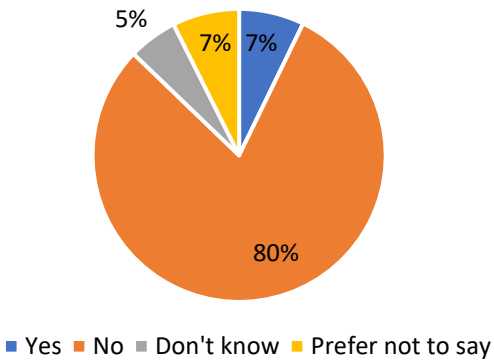
Figure 5.21 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



45% of students (476) believed that 'a lot of young people carry knives', 23% (241) neither agreed nor disagreed, 13% (143) did not agree that a lot of young people carry knives, and the remainder selected that they did not know (10%, 111).

Concerningly, 15% of students believed that carrying a knife keeps you safe, 29% neither agreed nor disagreed and 10% did not know.

Figure 5.22 Have you ever thought about carrying a knife?



Out of 1070 young people, 856 (80%) responded with 'No' to the question 'have you ever thought about carrying a knife'. 77 students (7%) responded with 'Yes', 58 (5%) 'Don't know', and 79 (7%) selected that they 'Prefer not to say'.

When asked why they have thought about carrying a knife, out of the 31 who provided a reason, 19 (61%) students responded that they had considered carrying one for safety purposes, particularly as they felt the area they lived in was unsafe.

> *For protection, it would be a small blade just in case, it's because I sometimes walk back from school and my house is kind of far.*
>
> *It's safer to have a knife than not.*

These responses reflect the findings in Figure 5.21 with 15% of young people concerningly agreeing with the statement 'Carrying a knife keeps you safe'.

There were also a couple of answers which are more concerning in nature:

> *People annoy me a lot and I have anger issues.*
>
> *To hurt those who have hurt me.*
>
> *People mentioning it in assembly made it seem like a good idea. Also I know others who have done so in the past.*

Why do you think some young people might carry a knife in your local area?

When asked, why they think some young people carry knives in their local area, 219 students (73%) out of 299 responses, suggested that young people may carry a knife for protection and safety. Many explained that some may carry a knife for protection because they believe other young people are carrying knives. Some responses suggested that some may feel the need for protection because they

have been threatened or fear retaliation or being harmed after a conflict with another young person. Others referenced that the area they live in unsafe and has high rates of violent crime:

> *Safety, the local area can be quite dangerous, I personally know someone who has been attacked, so safety.*
>
> *They might feel threatened at school and at home and need it for protection.*
>
> *Scared of other people carrying knives.*

Some responses referred to young people wanting to 'look cool' (44, 15%), to feel 'tough' or 'hard' (11), and to gain respect or status (12). 19 students answered that some young people have 'violent intentions' and carry a knife because they want to harm others, 17 answers referenced gangs, and 11 suggested that young people may be influenced by others.

6 Conclusions, Recommendations and Next Steps

These research findings are based on the views of 1,158 students across 12 schools in Luton and Bedfordshire that took part in the survey, 26 students from a school in Luton who took part in the workshops and 9 students from 2 schools in Luton who were AG members. This sample provides a strong evidence base on young people's perspectives of serious violence and knife crime in Luton and Bedfordshire and what schools can do to reduce the risk of young people becoming involved, as a victim and/or a perpetrator. However, it is important to acknowledge that the survey responses are not necessarily representative of the population of young people in Luton and Bedfordshire, as they are focused in 12 schools and there are certain schools within that sample that are much more prominent in the dataset than others. However, in this cohort of young people, 6% (equating to about 1 in 20 young people) agreed that they had been personally affected by serious violence and/or knife crime in their local area and 16% (equating to about 3 in 20 young people) agreed that someone they know has been affected. In all, nearly a fifth of young people (17%) agreed that they had been personally affected or knew someone that had been affected in their local area. Just over a quarter (27%) agreed that there is serious violence in their area and over a third (37%) agreed that there was knife crime. About a quarter (24%) of young people agreed that they worry about the level of serious violence in their area. Below provides a discussion on some of the key points of the results of the consultation, what the implications of them might be and potential recommendations, which are couched in guidance recently produced by the Youth Endowment Fund (2024)[11] of what schools can do to help prevent young people becoming involved in violence, based on the evidence of what works.

A serious violence and knife crime curriculum – A key aim of the survey was to determine students views on the benefits of a serious violence and knife crime curriculum. The results of the survey and workshops highlighted a divided opinion amongst young people as to the extent to which learning about serious violence and knife crime in school could help reduce young people becoming involved in knife crime with about half agreeing it could. Similarly, of those that said that they have had a lesson or had a speaker come in to talk to them about serious violence and/or knife crime about half agreed that it had a positive impact. A third said it had neither a positive nor negative impact on them, the most common reason being that they felt it is not relevant to them or they have no intention of becoming

[11] Youth Endowment Fund (2024) Education, Children and Violence: Guidance for school, college and alternative provision leaders to help prevent children's involvement in violence, London. available at https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/YEF.-Education-Children-and-Violence.-May-2024-5.pdf

involved in serious violence. Although, few stated it had a negative impact this was most commonly due to them finding it disturbing or gruesome. This is an important point, to consider, in terms of the extent to which an intervention on serious violence that is primary in nature (i.e. targets all students rather than targeting those that are at risk of becoming, or are already, involved in serious violence) is going to provide maximum benefit for those that may need it and minimum cost to those that do not. In this research 7% of students said that they had considered carrying a knife with the most common reason being for self-protection. Nearly half (45%) of students agreed that a lot of young people carry a knife and when asked why they think they carry knives three quarters said for self-protection. Worryingly, 15% of young people agreed with the statement 'carrying a knife keeps you safe'[12]. An important balance therefore is needed to increase knowledge and awareness on issues relating to serious violence without inadvertently increasing young people's fears of victimisation an unintended consequence of which may increase likelihood of knife carrying.

Although YEF caution that resources may be better directed to other strategies, such as developing children's social and emotional skills, with more established evidence bases, they do offer advice to schools that decide to deliver a knife crime education programme (YEF, 2024), which are to:

- Use real life stories about knife crime- young people find sessions more impactful when they hear stories about how knife crime has affected people, particularly when they hear from the victims or their families. This was reflected in this research, when asked who they thought young people would listen to,[13] the highest proportion of students agreed with 'Someone who has been a victim or a family member of a victim of serious violence or knife crime'. A high proportion of students also agreed that students would listen to someone who was previously involved in violence or violence related crime and has positively changed their life.
- Engage skilled facilitators- sessions receive better feedback from participants when facilitators knowledgeable and are confident in their knowledge of knife crime and can engage in lively discussion. As is noted in more detail below young people had a preference for external speakers (e.g. those with lived experience particularly and members of the emergency services).

[12] At the end of the survey and the workshops, information was provided to students to emphasise that they are at greater risk of harm if they carry a knife, and that serious violence and knife crime has seen a reduction in recent years and can appear over-inflated in the media.
[13] The choices being teacher, other member of school staff, doctor/ other medical professional, someone who has previously been involved in serious violence and has changed their life, police officer, someone who has been a victim, or a family member of a victim.

- Closely manage group discussions – Group discussions can help reinforce messages about the consequences of knife crime, but sessions need to be managed closely to identify situations where children may demonstrate support for knife carrying or may threaten others.
- Adapt to local context – The content and examples shared in sessions need to feel relevant to children. The information from this consultation with young people should provide useful local contextual data about young people's experiences and could be embedded into the curriculum.
- Provide follow-up materials and support – Provide opportunities for children and young people to debrief with trusted adults in the days or weeks following a session as they may find discussions/images distressing.

As mentioned above this research showed that young people felt that students were more likely to listen to external speakers than teachers or other staff showing a strong preference as mentioned above for those with 'lived experience', followed by police officers and medical professionals. A method that should be treated with caution is the showing of graphic images of knife wounds as it had the second to lowest proportions of students agreeing that it would have a positive impact (48%) and the highest proportion agreeing it would have a negative impact (20%). The research available on the impact of speakers talking about the impact of knife crime, or using images of knife-related injuries, is very weak and there are no studies that measure impact on knife carrying or violence perpetration[14]. Some research suggests that showing imagery of knives can cause some young people to feel scared or upset[15]. Students were positive towards inputs from the police on consequences of knife crime, with 6 in 10 believing it would have a positive impact, police input along with talks from those who have experienced serious violence, were deemed the least likely to have a negative impact. There were learning strategies that students were markedly negative about most notably role playing and being tested on what they had learnt.

Recommendations regarding a curriculum to reduce the risk of young people becoming involved in serious violence:

It is recommended that:

- the time spent on serious violence in the curriculum is proportionate to the identified levels of risk from, and/or likelihood of involvement in, serious violence.

[14] https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/knife-crime-education-programmes/
[15] https://www.n8prp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/315/2022/11/N8-PRP-Knife-imagery-Report-Quants.pdf

- the content design and delivery of messages concerning knife crime are sensitive to young people's fears and perceptions to help mitigate against inadvertently increasing fears of victimisation.
- Ensure that engaging skilled facilitators are used that are confident in their knowledge of knife crime[16]. There is evidence to suggest that lived experience facilitators, make the material more relatable to young people and increases their likelihood to engage with it. However, it is important to ensure that facilitators with lived experience having training in facilitation and mentoring to protect themselves and the children/ young people they are delivering to.
- the Trust work with students on designing activities for the curriculum that students find engaging, to learn about knife crime and serious violence. The collaboration with young people within the AG on the activities for the workshops as part of the research process, the research team believe, significantly elevated their accessibility and enjoyability for the wider cohort.

Communicating with 'trusted adults' at school- An area that the research has highlighted may need development is building students trust in staff, and willingness to engage with relevant staff. Only a third of students said that they would be comfortable talking to a member of school staff about serious violence. Whilst it is noted that many young people may have a trusted adult outside of school or feel more comfortable confiding in family or friends, having a trusted adult within school who students feel comfortable talking to would ensure that vulnerable children have someone to seek support from. Key reasons why students said that they would not feel comfortable were:

- Fears about confidentiality, that staff would tell other staff or their parents appeared to be the most prominent area of concern.
- Fears they would be considered a 'snitch', expressing difficulties in being able to approach the safeguarding team without others knowing they have been in contact with them.
- A general lack of trust in staff to deal with situations either at all or what they would consider appropriately or satisfactorily.
- They do not feel like they know staff or do not consider staff to be visible or approachable.

[16] Youth Endowment Fund (2024) Education, Children and Violence: Guidance for school, college and alternative provision leaders to help prevent children's involvement in violence, London. available at https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/YEF.-Education-Children-and-Violence.-May-2024-5.pdf

One of the five recommendations of the YEF guidance to help prevent children's involvement in violence (YEF, 2024) is to provide children with trusted adults. Providing mentoring and role models was an approach that was ranked highly by students in the workshop activities.

Recommendations regarding the importance of trusted adults

It is recommended that:

- In the overall strategy for reducing young people's risk of becoming involved in serious violence consider how student teacher relations can be built on further, particularly addressing issues of confidentiality. This could be taken forward with a group of young people.
- Consider focusing some resource on targeted interventions for those at risk of involvement in violence. For example, a dedicated mentoring programme, or a sports or arts programme that includes a mentoring component.

Trauma, neglect and adverse experiences – It is important to recognise on various questions throughout the survey some students highlighted the absence of consideration of drivers such as trauma, neglect or grief in the survey. Some students specifically suggested that these were factors that schools could provide support, with one commenting, *People who engage in these crimes know the impact and consequences of their action yet still involve in them, perhaps better systems other than enlightenment or education could be introduced for example therapy or anger management.*

Recommendations in relation to adverse experiences and trauma

- YEF, state that there is relatively strong evidence that psychological therapy can provide some protection against involvement in violence. Therapies, including individually focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and trauma-specific therapies or family-based therapies, have been shown to reduce children's involvement in violence. They recommend that schools leaders should consider whether to refer those children with the most serious and complex emotional needs or behavioural difficulties to CAMHS whilst recognising that local mental health services are stretched. It should be noted, during the workshops, some students discussed how issues such as underfunding, have made it difficult to access timely mental health support through organisations such as CAMHS.
- It was noted by young people that factors such as trauma, neglect and difficult family circumstances were absent from the YEF national survey question about factors that influence

young people becoming involved in serious violence. Therefore, a recommendation to YEF is to consider adding these drivers to their survey, which may broadly be considered to be Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Feelings of safety in and around school- 5% of students said they do not feel safe outside their school before the school day, 10% do not feel safe travelling to and from school and within school during the school day and 15% said that they do not feel safe outside their school after the school day. This may vary across the schools and further analysis can be provided to individual schools on their student's levels of feeling safe in these contexts. One of the issues raised in relation to feelings of safety, throughout the school day was bullying. According to YEF although the evidence is limited, preventing bullying could also keep children safe from involvement in more serious violence and they recommend the implementation of anti-bullying strategies in schools. In reference to specific programmes of good practice to tackle bullying, they reference a programme called 'Learning Together', which a randomised controlled trial demonstrated schools that implemented it had lower levels of bullying after 3 years, and attainment also improved in these schools. Within the survey students were asked, is there anything you think the school can do to increase feelings of safety either during the school day or at the beginning or end, although few students provided responses, more common suggestions alongside addressing bullying were to have staff being present/ or patrolling areas that are more risky such as alleyways and at key times at the beginning or end of the school day. This fits in with recommendation 4 of the YEF guidance which is to target efforts at the places and times where violence occurs, with recommended actions of consulting children and staff to determine where to focus efforts and meet with partners to understand the local context and coordinate a safeguarding response. Within the survey, students did talk about things their schools did do to make them feel safe, a prominent one being school staff patrolling around the perimeter of the school at the beginning and end of the school day.

Within the survey, learning how to recognise when someone is in danger and intervene safely was regarded as one of the most useful topics to learn about (with 47% voting 'very useful' and 29% 'fairly useful'). Fittingly YEF recommends teaching young people how to be active bystanders specifically in the case of sexual assault, by recognising warning signs and knowing how to safely intervene. The evidence shows that, on average, bystander programmes can reduce sexual assault perpetration by 14%[17]. YEF recommends sessions are provided to children aged 14 and above and are provided by confident and expert facilitators. In addition, there is strong research evidence that shows the impact of relationship violence prevention programmes in schools, as part of the curriculum or as additional

[17] https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/bystander-interventions-to-prevent-sexual-assault/

programmes delivered in RSE or PSHE. The evidence suggests that, on average, relationship violence prevention programmes can reduce violence by 17%[18].

Recommendations relating to feelings of safety in and around school:

- Schools to consider implementing, or reviewing their, anti-bullying strategies and determining whether bullying interventions would be beneficial. Ensure that Youth Voice is integral in this process.
- Schools could use the survey results regarding feelings of safety within their schools, to spark further discussion with students as to what times and where they feel unsafe and what strategies could be implemented to increase feelings of safety in and around schools.
- Schools could consider providing two or more sessions to students aged 14 and above, led by an expert facilitator, on how to identify warning signs and safely intervene should they witness a sexual assault. In addition, schools may consider delivering relationship violence prevention sessions, incorporated into the RSE or PSHE curriculum. Ideally between five and ten sessions are delivered by external facilitators or specially trained teachers.

Overall, the evidence presented in this report provides detailed insights and interpretations from an extensive consultation with young people, in relation to what is currently known about what works to reduce young people's likelihood of becoming involved in serious violence. It highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach by schools, which requires a comprehensive understanding of the risk and protective factors that influence young people's likelihood of becoming involved in serious violence and what types of interventions and approaches effectively mitigate risk factors and enhance protective factors. The recommendations in this report focus primarily on schools and education. However, working with partners to address risk factors and enhance protective factors is key to reducing young people's risks of becoming involved in serious violence. This is central to the Serious Violence Duty (2023) introduced as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, and came into force on 31st January 2023. The Duty requires organisations to work together and plan to reduce and prevent serious violence in their local area through the adoption of a public health approach. The Duty stresses the importance of involving young people – *"Engaging children and young people is important to make sure they have a say on the issues which affect them and that they care about",* which highlights the importance of participatory research and the nuanced, considered and important contributions young people have made to this research.

[18] https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/dating-and-relationship-violence-prevention/

Below are outlined some of the next steps in relation to the findings of this research.

Next Steps

- The IPSCJ research team and Chiltern Learning Trust, will work together to determine the best formats to disseminate findings to a wider audience and to students.
- Results will be presented to the Chiltern Learning Trusts wider Bedfordshire Serious Violence Partnership at an in-person event.
- The Chiltern Learning Trust intend to work with students going forward to use the findings to develop a curriculum plan. The IPSCJ will continue to monitor this development and provide support as appropriate.
- IPSCJ will explore further funding opportunities to develop the reach, impact and engagement with this project.

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