

# Serious Youth Violence



## What is it?

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation".

Serious youth violence (SYV) is defined as 'any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1-19' i.e. murder, manslaughter, rape, wounding with intent and causing grievous bodily harm. It is a growing area of concern in England & Wales with increased media interest, particularly in relation to knife crime, heightening concern across communities. Whilst overall crime continues to fall, SYV has been rising with figures showing that both perpetrators and victims of these offences are getting younger, with self-reported violence peaking at age 15. Furthermore, both perpetrators and victims of SYV are typically vulnerable young people – at increased risk of exploitation and victimisation, often with significant evidence of adverse childhood experiences (ACE's).

Youth violence is also understood as violence either against or committed by a child or adolescent or a young person up to the age of 25 years, which can impact on individuals, families, communities and society. It can include a range of acts from bullying and physical fighting to more severe sexual and physical assault to homicide. When it is not fatal, youth violence, and violence against young people, has a serious, often lifelong, impact on a person's physical, psychological, and social functioning.

Health and social outcomes are worsened through increased exposure to violence. The fear of violence often leads people to change their behaviour, which can perpetuate the cycle of violence. As such, it is important to understand people's perception regarding violence and their feelings of safety.

### Key principles:

- Young people's safety is paramount.
- Those involved should be treated as children first and offenders second.
- Many who behave violently have themselves been victims and may continue to be victims. Some are traumatised and work with them needs to take full account of this.
- All screening and assessment of children will take full account of what they say and be based on known risk and protective factors.
- It is important to hear the voice of the child more widely. Some may be frightened and want more information on how to report violent crime and keep themselves safe.
- Agencies addressing this issue need to focus on disrupting the adults behind it
- Bolton are developing a more contextual approach to safeguarding and recognise that the risk of serious offending can increase in certain geographical, social or other contexts.
- Parents / Carers may feel out of their depth and would benefit from practical information and opportunities to discuss what they can do to help keep their child(ren) safe.
- Staff may be profoundly affected by this issue and need relevant training and regular, reflective supervision.

### Who can be affected?

The risk and protective factors for involvement in serious violence are very similar to those for criminal exploitation and early onset of the following risks are a particular concern:

- Low socio-economic household status and social inequality
- Neglect and abuse in childhood, domestic abuse and other adverse childhood experiences (ACE)
- Hyperactivity / conduct disorder / high daring
- Friends that engage in violence
- Involvement in anti-social behaviour
- Going missing
- Substance Misuse

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**5** Minute Facts

- Not engaged in education. Low educational achievement, alongside low commitment to school and school failure are well evidenced risk factors for violence. Whereas good school readiness, engagement with education and academic achievement are identified protective factors against involvement in violence.
- Peer influence: Peer relationships play a crucial role in the lives of juvenile offenders. Some juveniles may be influenced by peers involved in delinquent activities, seeking acceptance, or engaging in risk-taking behaviour due to peer pressure.
- Community and societal factors: Knife crime impacts not only the individuals involved but also the wider community and society. Communities with high rates of knife crime may experience breakdown of trust, increased social tensions and a sense of insecurity.

## Protective Factors:

- Economic stability and recreational and development programmes for children
- Extended family support and good family management
- Low impulsivity
- Good peer relationships
- Positive / pro-social attitudes and social skills
- Positive self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Academic achievement

## Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)

Bolton Local Authority work in partnership with the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). Established in October 2019, the Greater Manchester VRU is a team of subject leads and experts from the police, probation, public health, education, community voluntary sector, youth justice and local authorities working to address the underlying causes of violence and working together with communities to prevent it.

In 2020, the VRU launched its Serious Violence Action Plan which sets out seven priorities through which serious violence will be addressed:

1. Improve criminal justice response.
2. Provide interventions in areas of highest need.
3. Support for families and communities.
4. Support for victims.

5. Maintain a dedicated Violence Reduction Unit.
6. Implement place-based approach.
7. Collaborate with schools, colleges, and alternative provision.

There is a partnership approach to tackling serious youth violence in Bolton which sees the local authority working with several key agencies including the police, schools, health providers as well as the voluntary sector ensuring intervention and support is provided when needed. The Youth Justice Service has a dedicated Safer Schools & Community Officer as well as a Serious Youth Violence Diversion worker.

Bolton is currently developing its response to the Serious Violence duty which requires the development of a needs assessment and publication of a Serious Violence Strategy. This will also inform a partnership responses to this issue, which includes serious youth violence. Once completed this briefing note will be updated to reflect this work.

## How we'll know we are making a difference?

Reduction in the following:

- Hospital Presentations and admissions for assaults with a knife or sharp object
- Knife and other weapon enabled serious violence.
- Non-domestic homicides
- Personal robberies
- Severity of serious violence incidents
- Fear of knife crime and serious violence across Bolton
- Reduction in stalking and harassment crimes

## For more information...

If there is an immediate risk of significant harm to a young person or anyone else, call **999**.

If the risk to a child is not immediate, but still significant, follow Bolton's Safeguarding procedures and refer into Children's Social Care using the online referral form (Worried about a child? – Bolton Council) or calling on

**01204 337777**

**All the local info I need is just a click away!**



[www.mylifeinbolton.org.uk](http://www.mylifeinbolton.org.uk)

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