



Department  
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Open Innovation Team



YOUTH  
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# **The role of systems of support in serious youth violence: evidence and gaps**

**Deep Dive**  
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## Overview

This report is the first synthesis of evidence and insight on how systems of support may protect or expose children and young people to involvement in serious violence.

We outline many factors in children and young people's vulnerability to involvement in violence and explore the role that systems of support play. We also highlight challenges to implementing approaches which may reduce involvement in violence. This evidence can be used by policymakers to design systems which maximise the protective factors (e.g. positive relationships) and guard against the risks (e.g. stigmatisation).

We identify potential gaps in the evidence base and draw these together under key questions and considerations for future research. This enables researchers and policymakers to understand the limitations of the evidence base for policy making, as well as avenues for future research which are likely to be useful.

## Key themes

### **The drivers of violence are complex, so it's hard to evidence solutions.**

Children and young people involved in violence are often victims as well as offenders. Many of them are facing issues such as poverty, mental or physical ill-health and/or abuse. The complexity of relationships between these factors and violence makes it hard to predict the impact of services which target them. There is also limited evidence on the direct impact of approaches which are likely to be beneficial, such as 'Child First' or multi-agency working.

**Stigmatisation is part of many children's journeys to violence.** Children and young people form 'pro-social' or 'pro-offending' identities, and systems can entrench or challenge this. For example, practitioners may label a child as 'risky' or an 'offender', influencing their self-identity. Children who are male, black, neurodivergent or from low-income households are particularly likely to be stigmatised.

**Positive relationships with practitioners can protect against violence.** Trust, respect, empathy and stability are key here. These relationships can make children and young people feel safe enough to disclose their need for support. Good relationships then help involve and engage children and young people in services, and support them as they transition between services.

**Limited resources mean that some children and young people don't access the right support in time to prevent violence.** Thresholds for accessing supportive services (e.g. mental health services) are narrow. Also, practitioners have limited time to consider an individual's needs, tailor services to them, or coordinate seamless transitions between services.

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## Glossary of acronyms

A&E - accident and emergency

ACE - adverse childhood experiences

ADHD - attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

CAMHS - child and adolescent mental health services

CBT - cognitive behavioural therapy

DfE - Department for Education

EGM - evidence and gap map

GP - General Practitioner

LGBTQ+ - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), plus other sexual and gender identities

MoJ - Ministry of Justice

OIT - Open Innovation Team

RCT - randomised controlled trial

SCR - serious case review

SYV - serious youth violence

VRU - violence reduction unit

YEF - Youth Endowment Fund

YJS - youth justice system

YOI - Young Offender Institution

YOT - youth offending team

# Introduction

## DfE-YEF Serious Violence Research Programme

The Department for Education (DfE) and Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) are co-funding and co-producing a programme of research, aiming to establish evidence-based actions which can be taken at a systems level to reduce serious youth violence. The research question for the programme is:

How does a young person's journey through different systems of support, and the different qualities of the experiences along the way, serve to protect or expose them to involvement in serious youth violence, as victim or perpetrator?

A system of support is the functionality of different services (e.g. schools, social care, youth justice) working individually or together to support children, as opposed to the delivery of a discrete intervention. The programme considers the interactions children and young people and their families have with systems of support through the lenses of:

- access to a system of support: accessing a service in the first place and factors leading up to this
- engagement with a system of support: how children and young people and their families engage (or dis-engage) with a service once they have first accessed it
- navigation within or between systems of support: moving between or leaving different services, from either the same agency or different agencies, once within the system

The DfE-YEF programme has two initial strands: (a) establishing what systems of support look like for children and young people at risk of involvement with violence and (b) identifying and reviewing the published evidence.

## DfE-YEF Systems Evidence and Gap Map

As part of the work to identify the published evidence, DfE and YEF have published a Systems Evidence and Gap Map (EGM). It is accessible [here](#). This is an interactive tool that organises and presents literature relating to systems of support available to children in the UK and Ireland who are at risk of involvement in violence.

The map identifies where evidence does and does not exist, but it does not summarise what the evidence says.

## **Aims of this report**

This report is one part of the Research Programme's strand of work to review the published evidence, building on the DfE-YEF Systems EGM. Its purpose is to set out a preliminary understanding of what is and is not known about how children and young people's experiences of systems of support impact on their involvement in serious violence, based on a review of a sample of evidence from the EGM and interviews with experts.

The report then builds on this understanding to identify relevant questions which could be addressed in future research. This is to inform the next phase of the DfE-YEF Research Programme, as well as other researchers and practitioners or policy professionals.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report aims to set out a preliminary understanding of what is and is not known about how systems of support protect or expose children and young people to involvement in serious youth violence. This is to help researchers understand what important questions remain. Answering these questions could help inform policy and practice, with the ultimate aim of improving services and reducing serious youth violence.

## Approach

This report builds on DfE-YEF's [Systems EGM](#), which organises and presents literature relating to serious youth violence and systems of support. The report synthesises findings from a sample of the evidence in the EGM and from interviews with academics.

We interviewed 18 experts, all of whom have studied children and young people involved in violence and/or systems of support in the UK. We selected academics to interview such that, between them, they could give us a broad overview of the evidence base, speak to each of the relevant systems of support, tell us about the likely evidence gaps and help develop our thinking about future research questions. The interviews were semi-structured, based on an interview framework which included asking about their research, areas of strong or weak evidence in the wider evidence base, future research questions and any challenges to answering them.

We sampled 77 high quality documents from the [longlist of 1,125 studies eligible for inclusion in the EGM](#). The sample includes all the high quality syntheses of research (e.g. literature and systematic reviews) and all the high quality syntheses of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and inspection reports. The remainder of the sample is the high quality literature included in the EGM which is coded as relevant to 'physical violence'. From each document, we extracted the relevant findings, limitations of the research and gaps in the evidence base.

Since we worked almost entirely with documents from the EGM, the same scope and limitations of that work (highlighted in the [Technical Report](#)) also apply to this project. Key limitations are that papers in the EGM:

- date back to 2000, so some findings may now be out of date
- seldom capture the voices of children and young people
- seldom confirm impact or effectiveness



## Insights

Here, we summarise the key insights in the report, the sources they are drawn from, and corresponding gaps in evidence within the sample of literature or the wider evidence base.

We first consider the drivers of serious youth violence (SYV), including the role of identity, so that we can explore the role that systems of support may play in these drivers. We then consider children and young people's interactions with systems of support using the lenses of access to a system of support, engagement with a system of support and navigation within or between systems of support. Finally, we look at some of the challenges to putting into practice what is known about systems of support and SYV.

## Drivers of SYV and the role of identity

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Children and young people involved in violence are often experiencing issues related to poverty, unemployment, housing, mental or physical health, social care or education. They are also likely to have experienced abuse, harm, maltreatment or other adverse childhood experiences. Therefore, many systems of support may be relevant to serious youth violence.</p>	<p>Research publications, SCRs and interviews</p>	<p>A review of evidence said that, due to the number and complexity of the relationships both between the risk factors themselves and serious violence, it is difficult to be certain that targeting an identified factor reduces violence.</p>
<p>Children and young people may act violently because they have formed a pro-offending identity, as opposed to a prosocial identity. Systems of support can negatively influence a child's identity by labelling them with terms such as 'troublemaker', 'risky' or 'offender', or by otherwise stigmatising children.</p>	<p>Research publications and interviews</p>	<p>An interviewee said that there is not yet much evidence showing how pro-offending identity is developed or how this is influenced by systems of support.</p>
<p>Labelling may explain why, once children and young people become involved with the youth justice system (YJS), they tend to become less likely to desist from offending.</p>	<p>Research publications and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence on how involvement in violence is impacted by specific stigmatising interactions within the YJS.</p>
<p>Children who are male, black, neurodivergent and/or from low-income households are particularly likely to have stigmatising interactions within systems of support. This may affect the development of their identity and their involvement in violence.</p>	<p>A research publication, SCRs and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence on how the identity of children from these groups, or intersections of them, is impacted by stigmatising interactions within systems of support – this was only discussed in interviews.</p>

## Access

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Children and their families are not always aware of the services available to them, especially those from ethnic minority groups or who are seeking asylum.</p>	<p>Research publications</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence on ways of raising awareness of services.</p>
<p>When determining whether a child should access a service, practitioners do not always holistically consider the child's circumstances and what they may be saying through their behaviour.</p>	<p>SCRs and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature contains suggestions of ways to address this (encouraging more professional curiosity about children's needs, improving assessment tools) but not evidence of their impact.</p>
<p>Services which most people access, like school or healthcare, are likely to be good places for children and young people to become aware of services and for practitioners to identify those in need of support, but this requires resources.</p>	<p>Research publications and an interview</p>	<p>A literature review identified a lack of robust evaluations of the impact of locating access points to services in schools or healthcare environments.</p>
<p>Children and young people sometimes avoid disclosing their need for support out of fear, shame or distrust, especially if their prior experiences of systems were negative. This is more likely for children who are black, South Asian and/or LGBTQ+.</p>	<p>A research publication, SCRs and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain detailed evidence on what drives mistrust in systems of support, or what might rebuild trust once broken, though research publications make some suggestions.</p>

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Access to services such as children's social care and mental health is limited by capacity constraints. Narrow thresholds for support and delays in assessment or provision can mean that children access services too late to prevent violence.</p>	<p>Research publications, SCRs and interviews</p>	<p>A literature review found that the impact of delays in mental health services are not known. The sample of literature also does not contain evidence about the impact of capacity constraints more widely.</p>
<p>There are 'windows of opportunity' in children's lives when accessing support may be of more benefit to them, for example when they start missing school, when family relationships become more turbulent or when they attend the Accident and Emergency (A&amp;E) Department.</p>	<p>Research publications and an interview</p>	<p>Studies raise a need for more research to identify when 'windows of opportunity' occur.</p>

## Engagement

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Some multi-component services (addressing multiple issues, or tackling them on multiple levels such as by involving families) are more engaging and effective than single-component interventions.</p>	<p>Research publications</p>	<p>A review of evidence identified insufficient evidence on the effects of multi-component services for persistent offenders and noted that there is more to learn about how to effectively implement and evaluate them.</p>
<p>Tailoring services to children and young people's personal needs, experiences and racial or cultural contexts is recommended for improving engagement, yet assessments do not always identify these needs and experiences.</p>	<p>SCRs, inspection reports and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence of how tailoring services impacts engagement or how this in turn impacts SYV.</p>
<p>Involving children and young people in decisions about the support they receive helps develop their decision-making skills and may increase engagement, yet practitioners do not always do this.</p>	<p>Research publications, an SCR, inspection reports and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence about barriers to involving children and young people in decisions about the support they receive, beyond one SCR citing some children being reluctant to engage.</p>
<p>Practitioners' positive relationships with children and young people increase desistance from offending. Trust, support, respect, empathy and reliability are important here.</p>	<p>Research publications and interviews</p>	<p>A review of evidence identified the link between relationships, engagement and violence as a key evidence gap.</p>

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Engaging in a service alongside peers with involvement in, or vulnerabilities to, crime can expose children and young people to involvement in crime.</p>	<p>Research publications and SCRs</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not weigh this risk against potential benefits of engaging children in a service alongside peers who are involved in crime or who are vulnerable to involvement.</p>
<p>Children and young people may feel labelled and stigmatised by being enrolled in a service explicitly targeting a certain group, which can be a barrier to engagement.</p>	<p>Research publications and an interview</p>	<p>A review of evidence called for more studies to understand how interventions delivered as part of universally accessed services, such as schools, could be less stigmatising than targeted services.</p>

## Navigation

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Moving within and between systems is often confusing for children and young people, disrupting the support they receive and the relationships they have built. Particularly difficult transitions include moving between schools, social care placements, from child to adult services and out of Young Offender Institutions (YOIs).</p>	<p>Research publications, SCRs, inspection reports and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence of how experiences of these transitions impact involvement in serious violence.</p>
<p>Children and young people involved in serious violence are often both offenders and victims. Working with these children and young people is complicated by the fact that protection and enforcement are often separate teams' responsibilities within the police and children's social care.</p>	<p>Research publications, SCRs and interviews</p>	<p>An SCR said that greater understanding is needed of how to work with children and young people who are both offenders and victims.</p>
<p>Navigation of systems of support may be better when there is a dedicated and proactive case manager combined with stronger multi-agency working, as well as when peer mentors can serve as a bridge between services.</p>	<p>Research publications, an SCR and an interview</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain conclusive evidence on effective methods to improve children and young people's experiences of transitions.</p>

## Implementation challenges

Insights	Sources	Gaps
<p>Implementing a Child First approach, which aims to minimise stigma and support the development of a prosocial identity, is not straightforward. There are few examples of what it means in practice, practitioners have spent years working with a different approach, and some guidance and policy are not yet aligned with Child First.</p>	<p>Research publications and interviews</p>	<p>An evidence review noted that there are not yet measures of Child First practice or outcomes, although an interviewee said that some current research is focused here.</p>
<p>Multi-agency working is widely regarded as improving practitioners' ability to identify that a child needs to access support, be navigated to a particular service or be engaged with in a particular way. Yet, agencies do not consistently share information or collectively plan and implement responses.</p>	<p>Research publications, SCRs, inspection reports and interviews</p>	<p>An evidence review said that it is difficult to demonstrate the impact of multi-agency working on outcomes for children and young people. The sample of literature contains suggestions of ways to improve multi-agency working but their impact is not evidenced.</p>
<p>Negative outcomes for children are often attributed to limited or inconsistent funding, staffing or training, as well as to instances where practitioners do not follow training or guidance.</p>	<p>Research publications, SCRs, inspection reports and interviews</p>	<p>The sample of literature does not contain evidence of the direct impact of funding, staffing or training models on serious youth violence. A review of SCRs said that research could help understand barriers practitioners face to following training or guidance.</p>



## Future research

Based on our review of the sample of evidence and interviews with experts, the following questions are likely to address key gaps in the evidence base and may produce evidence which can inform impactful policy or practice action.

1. What barriers do practitioners face to using evidence-informed practice and how can they be supported to do so?
2. How do experiences of marginalisation affect children and young people's experiences of systems of support and their involvement in serious violence? How can systems of support better meet different groups' needs?
3. How do children and young people's experiences of systems of support contribute to the creation of prosocial (or pro-offending) identity, relationships or values? How might these identities influence involvement in SYV?
4. How do the timing and accumulation of interventions affect children and young people's experiences of them and their impact on SYV? How can systems effectively coordinate interventions and support children and young people's transitions between them?
5. What approaches and conditions are needed to improve children and young people's engagement with services and practitioners?

Finally, we have identified the following key themes in interviewees' advice about designing future research, which are to:

- capture the long term nature of the drivers of serious youth violence with longitudinal studies
- identify early indicators of positive outcomes and learn from good practice, as historically the focus has been on the reasons for negative outcomes and ways to avoid them
- consider qualitative methods for future research, since it is challenging to use quantitative data alone to establish how systems can reduce SYV
- find ways to include the voices of children, young people and their families in all relevant research, especially those who tend not to be engaged in services

## Approach

This section sets out our approach to selecting a sample of evidence to review, extracting insights from the literature, and using expert interviews to supplement the reading. We also set out additional information to help the reader interpret this report.

### Sampling evidence

A sample of 77 documents was selected from the longlist of 1,125 studies eligible for inclusion in the EGM (available [here](#)). The sampling criteria were designed with the aim of reviewing a broad range of high quality, relevant evidence in a short time period. A full list of the 77 documents is available in [Annex 3](#).

To ensure the evidence is high quality, we only included evidence which had been given a high critical appraisal rating (details of the critical appraisal tool can be found in the [EGM Technical Report](#)). Studies included in the EGM had already been rated, but those otherwise eligible for inclusion from the longlist were rated by DfE and YEF for the purposes of this process. Two reviewers met and discussed their ratings. Where consensus could not be reached, a third reviewer's additional independent appraisal was used.

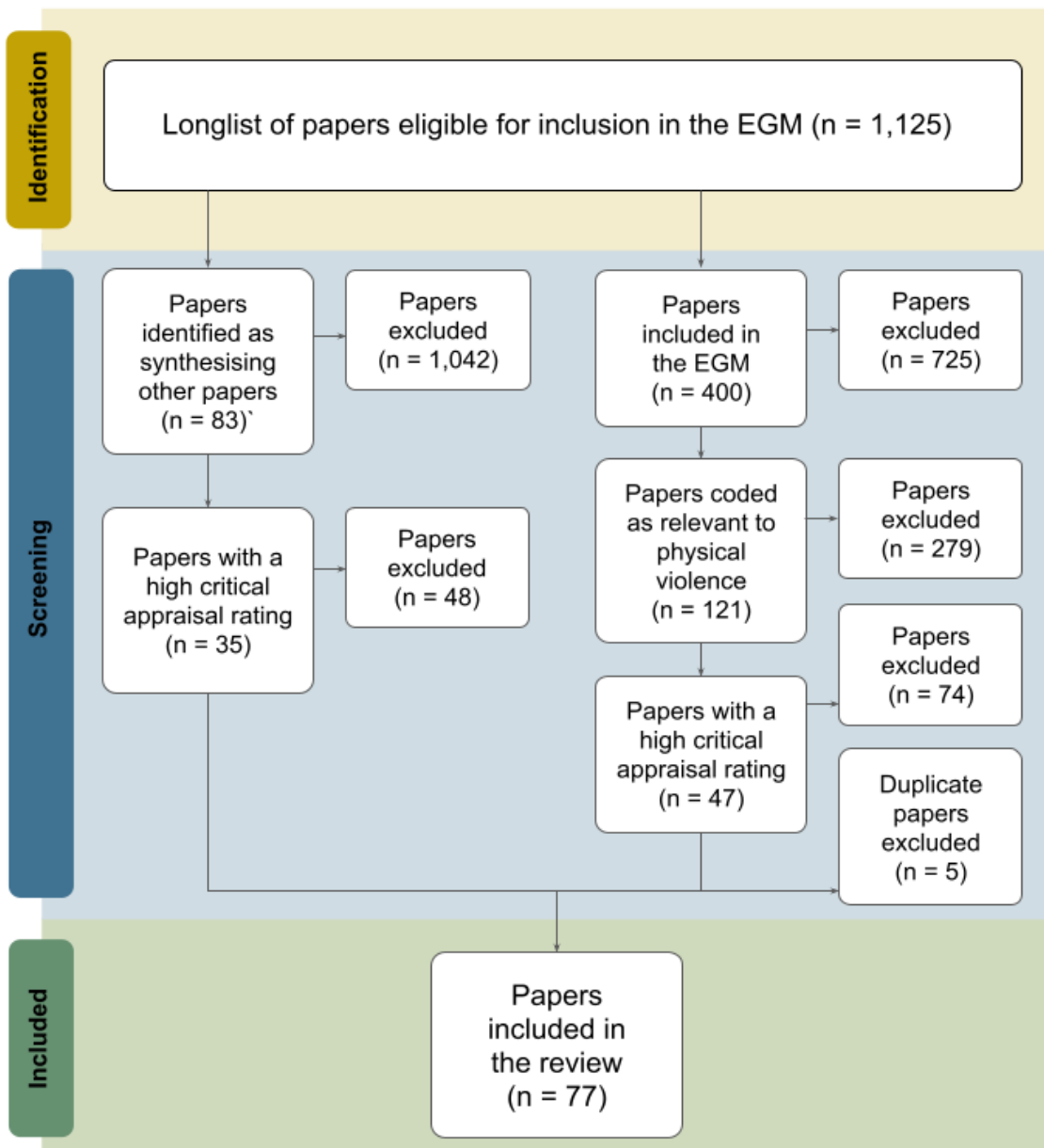
To review a broad range of evidence, we included all high-quality papers which synthesised other papers. There were 35 papers in total, including:

- 24 syntheses of research (e.g. literature and systematic reviews)
- 11 syntheses of inspection reports (official reports by various government agencies) and Serious Case Reviews (SCRs: case studies of victims of harm commissioned by local authorities)

To review evidence which is most relevant to this programme's definition of serious violence, we included all the further high quality literature coded as relevant to physical violence in the EGM. This is because the EGM has a broader definition of violence than the scope of this report, for example including coercive control. We did not include literature relevant to physical violence from the longlist of studies, as it would not have been feasible to code or read these studies in the available time. There were 42 high quality physical violence papers in the EGM which had not already been identified as a paper which synthesised other papers, including:

- 17 studies - either of the system, of interventions which seek to change the way a system works, or looking at the lived experience of children and young people, families and/or practitioners
- 25 inspection reports or SCR's

## Identification of papers from the longlist of those eligible for the EGM



## Extracting insights from the literature

Documents from the sample were allocated to 5 team members to be read. Individuals extracted key insights from the reading and categorised them following the structure of access, engagement and navigation, as well as whether they related directly to SYV or to broader offending or upstream familial factors. The reader also noted key limitations of each study and any evidence gaps they raised. The project lead quality assured the reading and extraction from 20% of all papers to ensure a consistent and accurate approach.

## Selecting interviewees

We read the literature alongside two waves of semi-structured expert interviews. In the first wave, we sought to interview academics who, between them, could:

- give a broad overview of the evidence base on serious youth violence and systems of support, in order to help our interpretation of the reading
- speak to each of the relevant systems of support
- tell us about some of the likely evidence gaps identified by the EGM: gender, ethnicity, Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) and coproduction

In the second wave we sought to interview academics who could tell us about topics which, based on the reading and first wave interviews, seemed likely to be key evidence gaps. This was to investigate whether or not there was relevant research here and to develop our thinking about future research questions. These topics related to:

- the system as a whole: multi-agency working, workforce management and culture, working with children and young people who are both offenders and victims
- particular systems: law, housing, school exclusion, mental health services
- individual characteristics or experiences: neurodisability, ethnicity and culture, trauma, social media, peer relationships, practitioner relationships with children and young people, experiences of victims

We found potential interviewees by reviewing members of relevant research centres as well as by entering key terms into search engines. In keeping with the scope of the EGM, all of our interviewees have studied children and young people or systems of support in the UK. We reviewed their university profiles and recent publications to establish their areas of expertise and interest. When selecting academics, we also sought out diversity of discipline, institution, location, gender and ethnicity as far as possible. A full list of experts interviewed for this project is available in [Annex 2](#).

## Conducting expert interviews

We developed an interview framework which was used as the basis of questions for all interviews. This included asking experts for their thoughts on:

- what their research can tell us in relation to the DfE-YEF SYV Research Programme question
- areas of strong evidence or a lot of research activity in the wider evidence base
- areas of weak evidence, limited understanding or little research activity, and any reasons for these

- important questions to be addressed in future research, in order to inform policy or practice action to reduce SYV
- challenges to answering key future research questions, including methodological considerations

Questions were also tailored to the area of expertise of each academic, both when preparing for the interview and during the interview in response to their answers. All participants gave their informed consent. Two team members were present for each interview. One led the interview, the other took detailed notes and managed the audio recording.

Insights drawn from expert interviews are referenced using " and direct quotes are attributed to named experts.

## Reviewing the report

The report was reviewed and commented on by other staff members from the Open Innovation Team (OIT), DfE and YEF, and the team then made revisions to ensure clarity and accuracy. The report was also externally reviewed by Dr Kevin Wong, Reader in Community Justice and Associate Director of Criminal Justice at the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit, Manchester Metropolitan University.

## Interpreting this report

For the purposes of this report:

- 'children' refers to those aged 5-18 and 'young people' refers to those aged 18-25
- 'serious youth violence' is defined as interpersonal harm through homicide, serious violent assault and/or robbery, where the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) are young people
- a 'system of support' is defined as the functionality of different services working individually and together to support children at risk of involvement in violence, as opposed to the activity delivered within a discrete intervention (such as cognitive behavioural therapy)
- systems of support which are relevant to children's likelihood of involvement in violence are broadly categorised as education, health, social care, justice, youth services and welfare

Since we worked almost entirely with documents from the EGM, the same scope and limitations of that work (highlighted in the [Technical Report](#)) also apply to this project. Key points are that the EGM:

- includes research dating back to 2000, some of which may now be out of date
- only includes studies which contain evidence about UK or Irish systems, although some included literature reviews do not specify which findings derive from or are relevant to the UK
- includes evidence about broader offending and familial support, and the relevance of their findings to SYV is not always clear
- does not include evidence about systems of support which address risk factors for youth violence (beyond familial support services), as these are already covered in other research repositories
- seldom captures the voices of children and young people
- seldom confirms impact or effectiveness

We have reflected this in the report by:

- including older findings when it is likely that they are still relevant and noting their dates where their continuing relevance is unclear
- excluding those that are likely to be out of date (for example, a 2009 review of inspection reports notes improved access to substance misuse services for children who have left YOIs,<sup>1</sup> but a 2019 review of inspection reports says that few children access substance misuse support on release<sup>2</sup>)
- replacing older findings with statistics from '[Education, children's social care and offending - descriptive statistics](#)'<sup>3</sup> (produced in 2022 by DfE), where DfE identified opportunities to do so
- noting that an insight is drawn from international evidence, where it is not clear if it is directly applicable to the UK
- only using 'violence' and 'SYV' where the source material discusses violence; otherwise, reflecting the language of the source material
- prioritising the representation of children's and young people's voices where they are included in research, including the voices of individual children in single SCRs – we have noted where this is the case
- avoiding claims of effectiveness unless confirmed in the source

While the approach to this report was rigorous and the methods used are replicable, it was not designed as a traditional academic literature review. Instead, this report should be interpreted as a summary and synthesis of key insights from the sample of literature

and interviews with academics working in this area. In addition, the scope of the report is broader than evidence which strictly establishes the impact of children and young people's experiences on their involvement in violence: we identify broader insights which may help inform future research, policy or practice. Also, it may be that the gaps and ideas for future research raised in this report are already being addressed in recent or ongoing research. It was beyond the scope of this work to search the literature to establish whether this was the case.

Finally, the systems lens used in the EGM and this report is just one way of conceptualising services related to youth violence. While we found it a helpful way to analyse and organise research findings, children and young people and practitioners often do not perceive services as coming together in a system which is accessed, engaged with and navigated. We have sought to reflect this by describing the experiences of children and young people and practitioners wherever possible.

## Insights

We first consider the drivers of SYV, including the role of identity, so that we can understand the role that systems of support may play in these drivers. We then consider children and young people's interactions with systems of support using the lenses of access to a system of support, engagement with a system of support and navigation within or between systems of support. Finally, we look at some of the challenges to putting into practice what is known about systems of support and SYV.

### Drivers of SYV and the role of identity

In this section, we briefly highlight some of the commonly identified factors in violence. This helps us understand the relevance of some systems of support to SYV: they can affect some of the factors in SYV. In particular, we discuss the role that identity plays in SYV. This allows us to consider how children and young people's access to and engagement with systems can protect or expose them to involvement in violence by influencing the development of 'prosocial' or 'pro-offending' identity.

#### **Many different factors are associated with an increased likelihood of children and young people being involved in violence**

Self-reported violence peaks at the age of 15, although the vast majority of children and young people never become involved in SYV.<sup>4</sup> Factors which correlate with an increased chance of engaging in serious violence are often called 'risk factors' (some academics challenge the use of this term - see later in this section).

In interviews, (referenced using <sup>1</sup>) many academics said that violence is a symptom of children's needs not being met.<sup>1</sup> Multiple studies identify that children and young people involved in violence are often experiencing issues related to poverty, unemployment, housing, mental or physical health, social care or education.<sup>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</sup> Children and young people are more likely to become involved in violence if they live in an economically deprived community with high levels of crime.<sup>4</sup> However, a 2010 longitudinal study found that, particularly for boys, deprivation plays less of a role than negative interactions with family or peers and the mechanisms children and young people use to cope with these interactions, such as substance abuse.<sup>6</sup>

Young offenders are also likely to have been victims of violence, or to have been exposed to violence directed at others around them.<sup>10, 11, 12, 13</sup> More widely, offenders of SYV are likely to have experienced abuse, harm, trauma, maltreatment or other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).<sup>6, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16</sup>

“The term ‘serious youth violence’ implies a one-way relationship where ‘youths’ commit violence, but there are children who are victims of violence



and many who are experiencing violence as a victim and offender at the same time.” *Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

In addition, some personal characteristics are statistically linked to children and young people’s likelihood of being involved in violence.<sup>4</sup> Analysis of DfE and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) data shows that pupils who are male, recorded as having Special Educational Needs or from certain ethnic minority groups (classified as Black, Mixed or Unclassified) are over-represented amongst children who have been cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence.<sup>3</sup> A government summary of evidence noted that, once other factors are controlled for, it is not clear whether ethnicity is a predictor of offending or victimisation.<sup>4</sup>

Research and SCRs show that many of these issues are intergenerational, particularly deprivation, trauma and social exclusion or marginalisation: they are located within the past experiences of their families and communities.<sup>17, 18, 19, 20</sup>

### **Systems of support aim to address some of these factors, but it is difficult to be certain of their impact on SYV**

Systems of support aim to mitigate many of these underlying issues: education, health, children’s social care, welfare, crime and justice, and the voluntary sector can all play a role. This can be through identifying those in need of support and connecting them to an appropriate intervention (access), supporting them to engage with an intervention (engagement), or coordinating their journey through multiple services (navigation). Access, engagement and navigation are each explored in subsequent sections.

“If we see that violence is a symptom of things not working for a child, rather than something you can directly prevent, then it needs a whole system approach to the whole life of the child. It requires every government department to be engaged.” *Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

“Part of the solution to serious violence is not ‘what do criminal justice systems do?’, it’s ‘what kinds of communities do we have, how do we treat young people, and what’s their relationship like with their community?’ In some ways, the best solution is tackling multiple disadvantage... ending street homelessness or improving drug and mental health services, not just who we catch, convict and punish.” *Phil Bowen, Director, Centre for Justice Innovation*

However, due to the number and complexity of the relationships both between the factors themselves and serious violence, it is difficult to be certain that targeting an identified factor leads to a reduction in violence.<sup>4</sup> In interviews, academics said that identifying risk factors is not sufficient for tackling SYV - we need to understand why

children and young people do or do not become involved in violence, and how systems of support can contribute to those reasons.<sup>1</sup>

### **Children and young people may act violently because they are in situations where it seems rational, or because they have formed a pro-offending identity, shaped by weakened bonds with society and being labelled negatively**

In interviews, some academics explained that violence can feel rational to children and young people in certain situations, for example when they are experiencing poverty, racism and danger. They said that some children and young people see violence as their only route to money or status, or as a necessary way to protect themselves.<sup>1</sup> Other academics focus on the formation of a prosocial or pro-offending identity:

“When faced with a criminal opportunity, we don’t do a cost-benefit analysis, we draw on this sense of who we are. All our backgrounds - activities, interactions and relationships - build up this sense of identity.” *Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

Children and young people are less likely to become violent if they have strong bonds to people or institutions that promote the norms and laws of society.<sup>21</sup> These bonds are formed through socialisation in the family, school and peer group and they shape a prosocial sense of identity.<sup>21</sup> A 2010 longitudinal study found that weakened bonds, in particular poor parental monitoring and weak attachment to school, are significant predictors of boys’ involvement in violence at age 15.<sup>6</sup>

Children and young people can also form a pro-offending identity through ‘labelling’. When children and young people are antisocial or break other rules, adults sometimes label them as ‘bad’, ‘risky’ or ‘offender’.<sup>21</sup> This stigmatises these children and young people and justifies differential treatment of them - for example, increased scrutiny and lower expectations.<sup>1, 21</sup> Labelling and its consequences can cause children and young people to perceive themselves negatively, lowering their self-esteem and reducing their engagement with statutory support, eventually adopting a pro-offending identity.<sup>1, 21</sup>

A review of evidence states that there is strong criminology research showing that social bonds, beliefs and labels influence prosocial identities which support desistance from offending.<sup>21</sup> Therefore systems of support could either protect children and young people from involvement in SYV by supporting them to form prosocial identities, or expose them to involvement in violence through stigmatising interactions which contribute to pro-offending identity formation. However, an academic noted in an interview that there is not yet much evidence showing how pro-offending identity is developed or how this is influenced by systems of support, beyond some research about children in residential care and the YJS.<sup>1</sup>

## **Systems of support may negatively contribute to the development of a child's 'offender identity', especially for children who are male, black, neurodivergent and/or from low-income households**

Ethnographic research shows that when negative labels such as 'troublemaker', 'failure' or 'offender' are applied in the social care, education and criminal justice systems, these labels interact with children and young people's existing social disadvantages to hamper their life chances and their ability to engage in society.<sup>21</sup> An obvious example of labelling is that having a criminal record reduces children and young people's employment prospects,<sup>8, 12, 21, 22</sup> but labelling is not always as straightforward as this. For example, a synthesis of qualitative evidence found that children in care may feel labelled as 'bad' by adults and internalise that, therefore occasionally acting out, while other children in care construct ideas of a 'good child' and do their best to behave accordingly, therefore not engaging in violence.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, risk-focused language and approaches can lead to more stigmatising interactions between practitioners and children, particularly in the YJS where children's risk factors are assessed and interventions are targeted at these risks (though policy is moving away from this).<sup>1, 21</sup> The term 'risk factors' frames children and young people's characteristics or experiences as individual deficits, implying the responsibility for SYV lies with them, and directs attention away from the responsibility of adults around them. It would be less stigmatising to frame these factors as 'barriers to desistance'.<sup>21</sup>

Authors of a 2010 longitudinal study say that this labelling process may explain why, once children and young people become involved with the YJS, they tend to experience repeated and increasingly intensive intervention from police officers and Children's Hearing reporters, and then become less likely to desist from serious offending.<sup>6</sup> This is in comparison with equally serious offenders (those in the cohort who had committed 11 or more serious offences in the last year) with similar characteristics who did not have formal contact with the YJS (a police charge, referral to reporter or hearing).<sup>6</sup> A systematic review of 29 randomised control trials (RCTs) similarly concluded that involvement with the YJS appears to increase children's involvement in offending.<sup>21</sup>

Children and young people from certain groups are more likely to be labelled and have negative interactions with systems, which may be because practitioners reflect wider societal prejudiced beliefs. For example, a 2007 longitudinal study found that children from low-income households are significantly more likely to be charged than children of less impoverished households whose offending was equally serious.<sup>21</sup> In an interview, an academic said that children and young people with neural impairments are more likely to face barriers to presenting well to the police or in courts, for example to demonstrating their empathy, which may make them more likely to be criminalised.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of SCRs also found that practitioners often fail to see older black boys as in

need of protection.<sup>24</sup> In interviews, academics suggested this may partly be because older black children tend to be seen and treated as adults.<sup>1</sup>

The role that schools may play in influencing children's identities from an early age is notable since, for many children, the education system is the system of support with which they have the most contact. In interviews, academics pointed out that intersections of marginalisation in wider society - race, gender and class - can affect teachers' views of children, again mirroring wider societal prejudices, which may in turn affect their access to support and how children see themselves.<sup>1</sup>

“Quite often, there are negative stereotypes or assumptions that are made about young black children, in particular boys. What's overlooked is the impact that it has on young people from quite an early age in terms of the way they think about themselves, the way they form their identity, as often this is based on how other people see us and treat us. Those kinds of dynamics are played out in school, whether it's intentional or unintentional, overt racism or microaggressions.” *Suzella Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Bedfordshire*

“We don't problematise enough that many more boys get excluded from school or are involved in violence. There are things that the system is doing that make that more likely: about how teachers teach, about how systems support or do not support them, practitioners' assumptions about their interests and capabilities.” *Gillian McCluskey, Professor of School Exclusion and Restorative Practice, University of Edinburgh*

“Gender plays a fundamental role in mediating views and can explain why violence persists. For example, if a girl is not acting in accordance with traditional views of femininity within a relationship, violence towards her may be seen as acceptable, excusable or even deserved... Schools can adhere to gender norms or police them, which reinforces them. But there is also an opportunity for schools to play a role in disrupting these norms and preventing violence.” *Vanita Sundaram, Professor of Education, University of York*

However, beyond labelling and the negative events that follow contact with the YJS, there was limited evidence in our sample of literature on how children and young people's experiences of the system shape their identity or on how this may link to violence.

## Most youth justice research and policy now focuses on promoting positive identity or outcomes, but we need more evidence on what this means for practice

In interviews, some academics said that the likelihood of negative interactions within the YJS is such that children should not be brought into the criminal justice system at all.<sup>1</sup>

“Children should not be criminalised as mini-adults. Bringing them into the criminal justice system goes against everything we know about trauma. If we raised the age of criminal responsibility, we could give children early support instead of managing their ‘risk’.” *Hannah Smithson, Professor of Criminology and Youth Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University*

However, others said that it is possible to have a YJS that minimises stigmatising interactions and supports the development of a prosocial identity, though we do not yet know enough about which YJS actions are likely to be stigmatising.<sup>1</sup>

“It’s appropriate to acknowledge in court that a child has offended. But then when you work with the child, you need to focus on non-stigmatising support which looks forward and helps them to desist, instead of calling them an offender and sending them on offence-related interventions.” *Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

Since the 2000s, many academics have focused on a ‘Child First’ approach to youth justice, in response to their criticisms of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.<sup>21</sup> Child First principles can be summarised and contrasted with the criticisms of a risk approach:<sup>21</sup>

- child-friendly practice which places responsibility on adults, as opposed to treating immature children as if they were responsible for their ability to access support and achieve positive outcomes
- diversion from the formal YJS into other support systems, as opposed to interventions which underline a child’s status as an offender
- promoting positive behaviours and outcomes, as opposed to over-emphasising the prevention of negative ones which can have labelling effects
- facilitating children’s meaningful engagement with processes and decisions, as opposed to doing justice ‘to’ them, which does not help them form positive identities

This approach was first tried in Wales and it is now a formal part of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales’ strategy and national standards. Evaluation found that when Swansea adopted child-friendly, holistic, needs-led processes, there were annual decreases in first-time entrants to the justice system and reoffending rates for children.<sup>21</sup>

Yet despite local successes, empirical evidence does not yet show whether and how Child First rhetoric can consistently progress into observable, measurable changes to practice across the YJS that transform children's experiences and outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Further research is needed to evidence more practical ways in which the YJS can support children and young people to develop prosocial identities. This question is also likely to be relevant to other systems of support - our sample of literature contained little evidence on non-stigmatising practice here.

## Access

Systems of support will only have an effect if children and young people access them in the first place. We discuss how this is dependent on either children and young people and their families being aware of services, or practitioners noticing their need for support, as well as on them being willing to receive support from services and on services having sufficient capacity. Finally, we discuss how the timing of access to support affects how the child or young person experiences it.

## Awareness

### **Children and young people are not always aware of services; practitioners are not always aware of their needs or of services which could meet them**

A 2004 literature review found that the most vulnerable children and families are often the least likely to access support.<sup>26</sup> This could be because they are not aware of services or do not understand their role – for example, families from ethnic minority groups or who are seeking asylum may not understand the role of social services.<sup>26</sup> Or they may not be offered services that are appropriate or sensitive to their needs.<sup>26</sup>

“I’ve spoken to parents and young people in the black community and they were just really unaware of the kind of help they can get.” *Suzella Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Bedfordshire*

Children and young people also may not be able to identify or name their own needs. In interviews, academics explained that children and young people rarely tell practitioners why they are behaving in particular ways – for example they may not know themselves if they have an undiagnosed neurological impairment.<sup>1</sup> Parents also might not know what their child’s needs are, or how to articulate them to practitioners in such a way that will secure additional resources or support.<sup>1</sup>

“Some people with individual needs have people that shout louder for them than others do, so there is a relative hierarchy of what gets paid attention to and what gets funding. For example, more parents successfully draw attention to and articulate the needs of their children on the autistic spectrum than parents whose issue is poverty or gender.” *Gillean McCluskey, Professor of School Exclusion and Restorative Practice, University of Edinburgh*

Multiple SCRs call for more ‘professional curiosity’: identifying a child’s needs by holistically considering a child’s circumstances and what they may be saying through their behaviour.<sup>19, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30</sup> This does not always happen, for example a review of SCRs found that information about domestic violence rarely triggered a multi-agency response to consider the needs of the children.<sup>31</sup> One barrier is that the design of

assessment tools, such as those used by police officers, does not always allow for the context and detail of individual cases to be captured.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, biases sometimes lead practitioners to miss indicators of needs in children who are male, black and/or disabled.<sup>1, 24, 30</sup>

Even when the need is identified, practitioners are sometimes unaware of available services, especially those from the voluntary sector. An interviewee said that one reason for this is inconsistent funding, which causes the services on offer to change regularly.<sup>1</sup>

One study points out that publicity could help raise awareness of services (in particular, tailored interventions for young offenders who are parents, or soon to be parents) among practitioners, children and young people and their families.<sup>33</sup> However, the evidence reviewed for this report did not contain evaluations of actions or changes which could increase awareness of services, nor practitioners' ability to identify children in need of support.

### **Services which most people access, like school or healthcare, are good places for children and practitioners to become aware of each other, but this requires resources**

Schools are the one universal service that the vast majority of children are a part of, so they are likely to be a good place for raising awareness or identifying that a child needs support.<sup>34</sup> For example, identifying signs of child maltreatment is one of the roles of a school nurse.<sup>35</sup> Another example is children finding out how to access psychological support through their school.<sup>8</sup>

Emergency departments provide treatment to young people involved in violence who are not always known to the police.<sup>4</sup> One study suggests that this makes medical settings the most fruitful in accessing people involved in violence.<sup>7</sup> The study also suggests that certain types of nurses, such as maxillofacial (mouth, jaw, face and neck) nurses, are well placed to combine traditional care with brief violence interventions without requiring much extra training or workload.<sup>7</sup> Maxillofacial nurses see higher concentrations of young male alcohol abusers who are exposed to violence and are potentially inclined to alter their behaviour, particularly when sober at follow-up clinics.<sup>7</sup> Yet one academic stated in an interview that some children involved in violence who receive healthcare do not access any further support, since the right information is not recorded or reported.<sup>1</sup>

“Many incidents of violence where people are patched up by the ambulance service or A&E are never recorded as instances of violence; there’s useful intelligence here for police and missed opportunities for intervention.” *Susan McVie, Professor of Quantitative Criminology, University of Edinburgh*



However, services do not always have the capacity to help young people who they know are facing difficulties. A research report suggests that this is the case for schools, so it is important that they have effective partnerships with other services with the required resources and expertise.<sup>36</sup> The same 2013 report also found that only 27% of hospitals in the Home Office's priority areas for tackling gangs at the time had provided staff with training on spotting the signs of gang association.<sup>36</sup>

A 2004 literature review further identified descriptive accounts and small-scale evaluations demonstrating that locating support services in settings used by most families, e.g. schools and General Practitioner (GP) surgeries, can make them more accessible.<sup>26</sup> However, it highlighted a lack of more robust evidence. The review also cautions against relying on schools as access points, as this runs the risk of further isolating children who do not attend school, such as some travellers or asylum seekers. Authors of a longitudinal study said that there is a need for open door voluntary sector services and outreach services to support children and young people who are otherwise unknown to agencies as being in need of support.<sup>6</sup>

## **Perceptions of systems of support**

### **Children and young people may avoid disclosing their need for support out of fear, shame or distrust, especially if their previous experiences of systems were negative**

A systematic review of international evidence found that children experiencing abuse generally do not feel safe or confident enough to disclose this to practitioners.<sup>23</sup> This is sometimes out of fear of being placed in care or something bad happening to their family members<sup>23</sup>, or due to shame about what has happened.<sup>19, 37</sup> In an interview, an academic reflected that the sense of shame may be heightened in particular communities, for example for black children and young people experiencing mental health problems.<sup>1</sup>

“Children who really need help can often appear no different to their peers. This can mean that certain signs are being missed, for example at school. The ‘telling’ about abuse only comes when a relationship of trust has been built.”  
*Marian Brandon, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia*

In interviews, many academics said that if children or their families have previously felt harmed by systems of support, they probably won't trust these systems to help them in the future, or even to not harm them.<sup>1</sup> Black<sup>1, 38, 39</sup>, South Asian<sup>1</sup> and/or LGBTQ+<sup>1</sup> children and young people are more likely to have experienced stereotyping or harassment by practitioners such as police officers in the past, so they are less likely to turn to them for help in the future. In an interview, an academic shared that in her

research Black and South Asian heritage girls have also spoken about losing trust after teachers did not take their experiences of gender based violence seriously.<sup>1</sup>

“The police and the wider criminal justice system are not seen as systems of support by young black males. They are seen as systems of oppression.”

*Suzella Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Bedfordshire*

A stronger understanding of what drives mistrust in systems of support, or what might rebuild trust once broken, could inform improvements here. For example, one literature review found that children and young people want to meet their potential therapists before deciding to begin therapy.<sup>40</sup> Barriers and facilitators of building trusted relationships are explored in the section on [practitioners' relationships with children and young people](#).

One SCR noted that disclosure - i.e. directly telling a practitioner that something serious has happened - is sometimes a criterion for access to services such as children's social care, which creates a barrier to access.<sup>11</sup> Disclosure is likely dependent on trusting the practitioner<sup>1</sup> which, as we have seen, ethnic minority and LGBT+ children and young people may find more difficult. This re-emphasises the importance of understanding more about how practitioners can better identify children's needs.

Voluntary sector organisations, such as Redthread, do not always require disclosure from children (unlike many social services) and can therefore take support forwards on children's own terms.<sup>36</sup> However, the sample of literature did not contain evidence on what the consequences would be of adopting this approach in statutory services.

## Limited capacity

### **Even if children are identified as needing support, the specificity of access requirements may prevent them from receiving it, or there may be long delays**

Some SCRs note that access to children's social care and mental health services is limited by high thresholds for support.<sup>10, 41, 42</sup> This can be frustrating and further weaken confidence in these systems of support, sometimes leaving families and practitioners feeling that a child's behaviour would need to get worse before they could get support.<sup>42</sup> A literature review also found that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have high acceptance thresholds and long waiting lists, but that the impact of these are not known.<sup>40</sup>

“Thresholds are often perceived to be too high. We see families being sent away by services so that things get worse before they can get help. This can have wider impacts. If services don't take a case from a school, for example, the school can be left thinking that the case maybe wasn't as serious as they

understood it to be. They may then hold back on future referrals.” *Marian Brandon, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia*

On the other end of the scale, children also cannot access services if their needs are deemed to be too high. For example, access to diversionary activities such as football is sometimes withdrawn from repeat or high-risk offenders.<sup>43, 44</sup>

The language used by practitioners can affect whether or not children and young people are perceived to meet thresholds. Analysis of SCRs found that practitioners sometimes use vague or detached phrases in assessments which dilute the reality of life for a child, such as writing ‘poor home conditions’ instead of ‘unsanitary with a foul smell and a fire hazard’.<sup>45</sup> On the other end of the scale, an SCR said that emotive language used by practitioners who never met the child may have exaggerated his behaviour, resulting in him being excluded from sources of help.<sup>41</sup>

SCRs and studies also give examples of delays in assessment or provision, as well as access being prevented entirely due to limited capacity. This is for a wide range of services including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) assessment<sup>19</sup>, mental health services<sup>19, 32</sup>, parenting support<sup>17, 33</sup> and secure accommodation<sup>41</sup>. Factors contributing to limited capacity are explored in the section on [implementation challenges](#).

## Timing

### **Access to services may be more important at particular times in children’s lives, but there is limited research on ‘windows of opportunity’**

Many SCRs show children accessing services too late to prevent violence.<sup>41, 45, 46, 47</sup> Vulnerable children’s needs are not always identified early and multi-agency responses often wait until after a child’s behaviour escalates instead of providing early support.<sup>1, 41, 48</sup>

“There’s scope to intervene at earlier stages where there is leverage to help children disengage, but once they start getting entrenched in the system, those chances get more rare and harder to make use of - the levers get weaker and weaker.” *Sajid Humayun, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Greenwich*

This is specifically the case for services which seek to meet children’s needs, such as social care or mental health, as opposed to services such as youth justice which sometimes seek to manage their risk. As we have seen in the section on [drivers of SYV and the role of identity](#), if contact with the YJS is stigmatising it can have negative effects, so research supports diversion to other systems where possible.<sup>6, 21</sup>

“The need for earlier support is wrongly conflated with risk and managing risk. A public health approach providing support for children who are experiencing trauma should start as soon as a child needs it. Youth justice services often find themselves ‘mopping up the mess’ left by inadequate service provision at a much younger age.” *Hannah Smithson, Professor of Criminology and Youth Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University*

There are also particular times in a young person’s life when providing support may be more important. A report based on interviews with girls in gangs and practitioners raised ‘windows of opportunity’ when girls in gangs are more likely to engage with support.<sup>36</sup> These included the imprisonment of a boyfriend, the birth of a child, a visit to a sexual health clinic and, potentially most importantly, a visit to the emergency department. A longitudinal study found that the important changes which occur in the lives of those who experienced criminal convictions in their teenage years occurred primarily between 13 and 15.<sup>6</sup> These changes include broken or turbulent family relationships, substance misuse, truancy and school exclusion. These studies note that further research could tell us more about critical moments.<sup>6, 36</sup>

“When you’re an early teen, you buy into the narrative of the gang, but the older you get, the more you question it and start to disengage from the group. When you have the ‘aha’ moment that gang life is not working out for you, that’s the moment for intervention: to add a ‘pull’ to the ‘push’.” *James Densley, Professor of Criminal Justice, Metropolitan State University*

## Engagement

Systems of support aim to engage children and young people in their services, so that they can have an effect. We discuss how this may be affected by whether services feel meaningful to the child or young person, involve them and provide multiple tailored offerings. We also explore the contribution of practitioners' relationships with the child or young person, as well as peer relationships.

### Meaningful offerings

#### **Services which have multiple offerings for children and young people and their families seem to have better engagement than those with just one focus**

Delivering multiple interventions for children and young people and involving families is seen as important for tackling youth violence. A review of evidence suggests that interventions aiming to address multiple risk factors tend to do better than those addressing just one risk factor or acting only on the individual level, for example with no involvement of family or peers.<sup>9</sup> An accumulation of interventions may address violence better because the factors which increase children and young people's likelihood of involvement in violence tend to be multiple and cumulative.<sup>9</sup>

"It's very unlikely that children and young people involved in violence would have one problem – the problems will span education, health, housing and so on." *Gillean McCluskey, Professor of School Exclusion and Restorative Practice, University of Edinburgh*

For example, a literature review concluded that counselling services for children who have experienced sexual abuse or exploitation should be offered alongside advocacy support to have the best chance of improving outcomes.<sup>34</sup> This is because the wide range of issues affecting these children are not resolvable solely by counselling.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, evidence suggests cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) services for young offenders are more effective when combined with employment and vocational training support.<sup>9</sup> A 2004 evidence review found that attendance and engagement is more likely if the intervention allows vulnerable families to discuss life concerns such as job stress, health problems and personal worries, suggesting the need for a holistic approach.<sup>26</sup>

Children and young people also benefit when their parents or families receive support too. A 2008 programme evaluation described multiple intervention use within families as potentially the biggest 'added value' when it comes to working in a cross disciplinary way with families<sup>49</sup> and a 2011 synthesis of international research suggests including parents is likely to help services better understand and meet young people's needs<sup>50</sup>. The positive consequences of including families when delivering services might be partly because the issues children face often stem from the past experiences of their

parents, families and communities.<sup>17</sup> A review of evidence found many of the most well-evidenced and effective programmes to prevent gang-involvement, violence and crime involved families.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, an evaluation report concluded that practitioners and participants noted a positive impact from engaging parents and siblings in interventions.<sup>52</sup>

However, a multi-intervention approach may be more successful for some groups than others. A 2008 review found positive effects for multi-component interventions when compared with standard diversion for first time offenders, but there was insufficient evidence about the effect for persistent offenders.<sup>53</sup> This review also noted that there is limited evidence and understanding of what exactly needs to be known before implementing this accumulated approach to interventions, what the logistical barriers are, or how impact could be measured. Therefore, while multiple-intervention approaches show promise, there is more to learn about how to evaluate them or effectively implement them.

### **Tailoring services to children and young people's personal needs, perspectives, experiences and practical requirements is likely to improve engagement**

It is important for systems to consider individual needs when designing and delivering services for children and young people. SCRs suggest that an approach which considers the personal and social needs of each individual and helps them recognise how past experiences influence their way of relating to the world around them is important for fostering engagement.<sup>37, 54</sup> In interviews, academics said that sometimes the design of systems and processes can instead encourage practitioners to treat their actions like tick-box exercises - responding to a risk factor ticked in an assessment instead of how the child is experiencing their life at the time.<sup>1</sup>

“Systems typically don’t allow a more nuanced way of thinking about risks and the roles young people inhabit. They are designed to identify and tackle a risk and then close the case. If you’re not in a position to think about a range of risks, roles and activities in a young person’s life, then you can’t implement something that deals with that.” *Sajid Humayun, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Greenwich*

An example of a tailored approach is services that adopt a ‘trauma informed’ approach, where there is an understanding of the impact ACEs have had on a child. The 2018 government Serious Violence Strategy highlighted a study where a trauma informed approach was tested in 3 Youth Offending Teams (YOTs: multidisciplinary teams who support children to move away from offending).<sup>4</sup> The report suggests this study confirmed improvements to young people’s resilience to chaotic family life, self-confidence, emotion regulation and resilience. There was also reduced re-offending and improved compliance with sentence conditions. However, only 21 young people were

involved in this study and the primary paper is not cited in the report, so caution should be exercised in generalising the findings further.

Tailoring services to address practical requirements has been shown to be useful too. A review of inspections of YOTs found that those who achieved the highest inspection ratings were those that also recognised the practical needs of children and young people.<sup>1</sup> These include travel payments, crèches for younger children and availability at different times of the day to cater for variable work patterns.<sup>1</sup>

Certain groups of children and young people may be more in need of tailored services than others. For example, an academic highlighted that for those with neural impairments, interventions need to be adapted and tailored to better consider challenges such as difficulties with retaining information.<sup>1</sup> There is also evidence highlighting that successful strategies for engaging children of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds may differ to approaches that work for white children and, similarly, successful approaches for engaging girls may differ to boys.<sup>21</sup> Research in our sample of literature did not explore these differences, but they are likely to be covered in other work.

In order to tailor services, practitioners first need to accurately identify children and young people's needs and experiences. SCRs highlight how individual requirements or circumstances were often missed when it came to assessing the support needs of a child or young person. For example, these included the impact of bereavement<sup>44</sup>, of having a mother who did not speak English<sup>37</sup>, and of religion and culture on a child's ability to disclose the need for support with an alcohol problem<sup>37</sup>. SCRs also note that practitioners do not always appreciate racial or cultural contexts to the challenges children face.<sup>24, 44</sup>

A review of YOT inspections concluded that assessors should work with children and young people to establish and prioritise the range of factors influencing their offending, while recognising that these can change over time.<sup>1</sup> An academic added that assessments themselves need to be tailored to individual needs.<sup>1</sup> For example, they suggested that inclusive interview techniques may be beneficial for neurodivergent children and young people, such as using simpler language.

However, our sample of literature contained little direct evidence on how tailoring services impacts engagement and how this in turn impacts SYV, nor on effective practice to support this.

### **Ideally, children and young people should be well informed about plans and be invited to have a say in decisions about the support they receive**

International evidence suggests that services can be designed in a way that helps to empower young people<sup>53</sup> and provides a chance for them to use autonomous decision



making as part of their normal adolescent development<sup>55</sup>. Experts say that children and young people should be able to make choices and there should be a sense of negotiation over interventions, plans and support.<sup>1, 21</sup> An interviewee gave the example that involving children in decisions about care placements may mitigate major risks such as running away.<sup>1</sup> An SCR also concluded that it is essential to consult children when making decisions which affect them, such as developing long-term care plans.<sup>15</sup>

"You can't do youth justice to a child, you have to work with them. It's their journey and their development of their identity. That's the currency we now recognise in youth justice." *Neal Hazel, Professor in Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

"It's important that children have agency and choice, rather than services being enforced on them. We should try and create a sense of negotiation." *Marian Brandon, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia*

In interviews, academics raised concerns that currently services are sometimes 'enforced' or 'done to' children and young people.<sup>1</sup> A review of YOT inspections between 2003-8 found tools designed to elicit the preferences of children and young people were used inconsistently, with a 'What Do YOU Think?' self-assessment not being used in over a third of cases.<sup>1</sup> In addition, children and young people are not always well-informed about what is going to happen to them.<sup>1, 2</sup> They may be poorly informed about the service or intervention they will be enrolled in, or the nature of the sentence they will be given. For example, YOT inspections found that a copy of the pre-sentence report was provided to the child and their parents/carers in less than half of the cases they looked at.<sup>1</sup>

However, ensuring children and young people are well informed and involved in decisions can be difficult to do in practice. One reason for this highlighted in an SCR is that some children might simply be reluctant to engage and therefore will be poorly informed and unlikely to be involved in decision making.<sup>15</sup> There are likely to be other barriers to informing and involving children and young people, but these were not given in our sample of literature.

## **Practitioners' relationships with children and young people**

**Positive relationships with practitioners may be key to desistance - trust is important here, as well as respect, empathy and reliability**

Some academics and evidence suggest that positive relationships between children and young people and practitioners are more important for improved outcomes than the interventions they are delivering.<sup>1, 21</sup> A review of evidence found several studies to support this: an evaluation reports that mentoring based upon relationships of trust



increases desistance; authors of a longitudinal study argue that work which builds upon supportive relationships is more effective than formal justice intervention; and a HMI Probation report concluded that a trusting, open and collaborative child-practitioner relationship is the most significant factor in promoting desistance.<sup>21</sup> A positive relationship may help deter the young person from violence because it offers a sense of protection and belonging and can bond them to the norms and laws of society.<sup>1, 21</sup>

“Building positive relationships with children is much more important than interventions. Psychologists working in custody admit that positive outcomes may come from their relationships with offenders, not course content.” *Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

However, the same review concluded that the link between relationships, engagement and violence is a key evidence gap.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it noted that previous research found that many practitioners were unable to differentiate between children and young people simply participating (by showing up) and engaging (by drawing meaningful support from services). This is problematic given findings suggest that children and young people’s relationships with practitioners are key to their engagement.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, evidence can tell us what children, young people and their parents value in practitioners when they are experiencing difficulties. A 2004 evidence review found that both children and their parents prefer the practitioner to be reliable, to keep promises, to be respectful, to offer practical help and to take the time to listen.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, other research found that empathy, respect and genuineness from practitioners is key to successful relational work with children.<sup>21</sup> Children also appreciated practitioners seeing their lives in the round, rather than focusing on their problems.<sup>26</sup> A systematic review found parents engage when they feel they are being understood and respected, and that practitioners value their role.<sup>20</sup> It is important that engagement with parents does not simply mean engagement with mothers – there are concerns that practitioners may alienate, rather than involve, male family members.<sup>45</sup>

“Engagement in services is usually about the adult which the child has a connection to. A child might not attend school, but still go to their youth club if that is where they have the positive relationship.” *Gillian McCluskey, Professor of School Exclusion and Restorative Practice, University of Edinburgh*

Finally, trust is also a practical requirement for services supporting children and young people, particularly in sensitive services. For example, a literature review noted that local authorities aim to deliver sexual abuse and exploitation support within a trusting relationship.<sup>34</sup> While evidence on this from the sample is limited, at least one SCR highlighted the importance of practitioners forming meaningful, safe and trusting relationships with young people, to enable them to confide in the practitioner.<sup>37</sup> The

SCR added that it is unrealistic to expect a child or young person to engage with questions posed by an unknown practitioner, when they likely find it very hard to tell a trusted person.

### **Trust can be difficult to foster as many children and young people involved with systems have insecure patterns of attachment, often due to experiences of abuse, neglect and loss**

Building trust-based relationships can be difficult. Children engaging with services may well have had previous experiences of abuse, loss and other adversity, which primary research found can impact on children's patterns of attachment and their trust of adults.<sup>17</sup> But these patterns of attachment are not widely researched, meaning practitioners and others working in systems may not be well informed on these issues.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, it is particularly hard to foster trust in children and young people who have had negative experiences with practitioners in the past. As explained in the section on [perceptions of systems of support](#), this is more likely to be the case for children and young people who are black, South Asian and/or LGBT+.

A literature review highlighted that, for social workers or key workers to build trust-based relationships with victims of childhood sexual abuse and exploitation, they need easy access to expert trauma-informed support and low practitioner caseloads.<sup>34</sup> Enabling practitioners to work with individuals over time is also important for developing meaningful, safe and trusting relationships, which in turn allows the child to confide in the practitioner.<sup>37</sup> Finally, children and young people prefer services which have clear policies on confidentiality.<sup>26, 52</sup> However, a 2008 evidence review notes a shortage of evaluative research, among other factors, which may be limiting our understanding of how the above factors influence engagement.<sup>53</sup> It's also likely that are factors influencing engagement which were not raised in the sample literature.

### **Academics suggest that voluntary organisations often have better engagement than statutory services because children and young people see them as more legitimate**

It is hard to determine, but there are suggestions in written evidence and from academics that children engage well with voluntary services.<sup>1, 8</sup> For example, primary research found that voluntary groups engaging with children involved in violence via hospital settings have good engagement.<sup>36</sup> It was suggested that this was because children were more willing to trust the voluntary sector service. However, engagement was lower once the same service attempted to work with children after they left hospital, implying the significance of service location to engagement.

“The downside of voluntary services is that they don't have the scale of government services. But the upside is that they feel authentic and intimate, it's

not just a system with numbers; there's a need to feel a true human connection.”  
*James Densley, Professor of Criminal Justice, Metro State University*

Interviewees suggest that children and young people's positive engagement with voluntary services may be because practitioners and volunteers working as part of these services sometimes have lived experience of the challenges and circumstances of the young person.<sup>1</sup> The result of this is that children and young people see the service as being more authentic, appealing and credible.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, services delivered by the voluntary sector are generally something the child or young person has opted in to, meaning there is a degree of engagement from the outset which practitioners could foster.<sup>1</sup> However, the sample of literature contained little research on how children and young people engage with voluntary services compared to statutory services or on why.

## Peer relationships

### Children and young people's willingness to engage with a service may be influenced by who else is involved and where the service is located

Children can influence each other's behaviour and beliefs. A meta-analysis of international evidence on juvenile delinquency prevention programs advised services to avoid delivering group sessions for homogeneous groups of 'antisocial' peers because they may reinforce one another's delinquent behaviour.<sup>56</sup> Other research showed that antisocial peers can provide a sense of belonging for one another and fill the void left by families but can lead to gang affiliation<sup>8</sup>, and that the presence of delinquent peers is a risk factor for involvement in violence<sup>4</sup>. One SCR said that clustering children with vulnerabilities to, or involvement in, crime may also create an environment which drug networks view as an opportunity for recruitment.<sup>41</sup> Another SCR noted that a child's placement in a PRU exposed him to new young people who proved to have a negative influence on him, despite the placement being intended as a way of mitigating the influence of his pre-existing negative peers.<sup>10</sup>

However, some services take a different approach, for example programmes that bring children and young people from rival gangs together to help tackle violence, which may help children and young people to identify with each other.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, having someone who has 'grown out' of their offending behaviour as a mentor in a service may help in reducing problematic behaviours.<sup>1, 40</sup>

Where a service is located is also important to children and young people's engagement. Interventions based in schools are cited as having good outcomes<sup>51, 53</sup> and a YJB-commissioned review identifies working in schools, specifically for YOT prevention workers, as good practice<sup>57</sup>. A 2004 review of evidence suggests that children prefer services that are based in attractive, welcoming places.<sup>26</sup> However, service location can be detrimental, or at times dangerous, for children and young

people. In an interview, an academic highlighted concerns that services can sometimes be in areas where children and young people feel unsafe because of rival gangs.<sup>1</sup> However, there was insufficient evidence in our sample of literature to say with confidence that certain settings for services are more successful at reducing SYV than others.

### **Services offered to all children may carry less stigma, while tailored services may be more meaningful for children and young people**

Services should be advertised and designed in a way that avoids the child or young person being stigmatised by becoming involved. In an interview, an academic said that projects to tackle violence and knife crime need to be framed carefully, as children and young people may feel stigmatised and labelled by enrolling in a service explicitly targeting a certain group.<sup>1</sup>

A 2010 longitudinal study said that targeted services, especially those that are focused on early identification using risk factors, run the risk of stigmatising children and young people and creating what could be described as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.<sup>6</sup> However, the authors did note that it could still be beneficial to identify areas where there are concentrations of risk factors, and then offer non-stigmatising support to all children, young people, and families in these areas.

Some studies suggest that interventions delivered as part of universally accessed services, namely schools, reduce stigma as they are not targeted to particular groups, but there is not robust evidence. One 2004 evidence review called for studies to help understand the role of schools as a non-stigmatising site for multi-agency interventions on SYV.<sup>26</sup>

## Navigation

Navigation is related to moving between or leaving services, once within the system. We discuss how this can be disruptive for children and young people, focussing on a few particularly difficult transitions. We also explore how more joined-up working might help address this.

### Children and young people's experiences

#### **SCRs show that moving within and between systems is confusing for children and young people, disrupting the support they receive and the relationships they have built**

The support children and young people receive changes as they move between different services which take different approaches. Sometimes these approaches are inconsistent: parents have reported receiving mixed messages from different practitioners on the actions they should take, leaving them uncertain about how to support their child.<sup>42</sup>

At other times, delays leave children and young people without appropriate support. SCRs and inspection reports show delays in service provision arising from slow decision-making or long waiting lists.<sup>45, 46, 48, 58</sup> If cases are not handed over properly, for example when a child moves to a new area, then practitioners may not become aware they should be providing support at all.<sup>59</sup>

Children are also asked to repeatedly forge new relationships with adults and retell their story to different practitioners in different agencies.<sup>1, 2, 10</sup> Overall, there is a lack of long-term ongoing support for children and young people as they move through the system.<sup>52, 58</sup>

“It’s often very confusing for children and young people going through the systems - there are lots of agencies and tasks to be done. Journeys are not mapped out and there is a lack of clarity.” *Kevin Wong, Reader in Community Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University*

### Key Transitions

#### **Transitions within the education system and from child to adult services are often identified as difficult for children and practitioners to navigate**

Moving from primary to secondary school can expose young people to higher levels of crime and violence at an age of social difficulty and vulnerability to gang affiliation.<sup>8, 39</sup> The commute to secondary school can be a site of increased opportunities to engage in violence in the community.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, supportive relationships with teachers

and friends from primary school are lost at a time of identity formation, causing social instability.<sup>39, 59</sup> Relationships are also lost when moving schools at any age, including to avoid exclusion.<sup>30</sup>

SCRs report that this transition can be particularly delicate for young people with special educational needs or disabilities. One SCR found a child with significant disabilities and complex chronic medical needs felt humiliated by being placed outside the mainstream classroom, which led to anti-social behaviour.<sup>37</sup> Another SCR focused on a child with ADHD and Conduct Disorder who lost specialist support in the transition, without which he struggled to regulate his feelings and behaviour, resulting in exclusion.<sup>59</sup>

It is commonly suggested that school exclusion is associated with involvement in SYV.<sup>42</sup> Analysis of DfE and MoJ data shows that children who have been permanently excluded are more likely to have been cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence than those who have not been excluded.<sup>3</sup> However, beyond correlation, there is very little understanding of how or whether school exclusion might *cause* involvement in SYV. The majority of these children (88%) received their first exclusion before their first serious violence offence, but there is often a significant time lag between the two events and, since offending tends to peak at around 15 to 16 years old, permanent exclusions will usually be in the past anyway.<sup>3</sup>

In an interview, one academic argued that transitions from mainstream education to pupil referral units can entrench behavioural problems by labelling children as deviant.<sup>1</sup> Another academic contended that the core reasons a child is excluded from school might also be the root cause for their involvement in serious violence.<sup>1</sup>

The threshold between child and adult services is difficult for children and practitioners to navigate. Young offenders struggle with the abrupt transition from child to adult courts<sup>14</sup>, since they are relatively less resourced.<sup>1</sup> One academic interview highlighted that although this transition is inevitable, the handover could be better managed.<sup>1</sup> Confusion about whether a young person should receive child or adult services has also meant child victims of domestic violence were not identified or protected.<sup>60</sup>

“Events leading to SCRs tend to cluster at certain thresholds, such as... when a child is on the cusp of moving to adult services.” *Marian Brandon, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia*

“Evidence suggests that the welfare approach to young people in the criminal justice system only lasts until about 16, after which practitioners' attitudes and approaches to young people change quite quickly. For example, some judges treat post-16s more punitively than they should do. I certainly think there is a willingness to prioritise the welfare of young people, but external factors such

as wider public opinion make that difficult." - *Denise Martin, Professor of Criminology, Abertay University*

## **Transitions can be especially critical for children and young people in the social care or criminal justice systems**

Looked after children often experience regular moves between placements and local authorities throughout childhood.<sup>15, 42</sup>

“Removing children and young people from their communities can often affect their emotional and relational wellbeing. This is missed, as the focus is often only on physical wellbeing and safety. Some children, young people and their families feel this puts them at risk in new communities. The return home can be poorly managed too: it can be unplanned or dictated by resource or arbitrary timescales, rather than need.” - *Lauren Wroe, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Durham University*

The threshold between child and adult services is particularly critical for looked after young people.<sup>17</sup> A 2011 systematic review found that there is considerable variation in the support which local authorities provide to ease this transition, as well as a lack of high-quality research on whether services are effective or how they could be improved.<sup>61</sup> The review also found a lack of research on experiences of transitioning to adult services and the effectiveness of support services for children who are in residential care settings, have complex needs or disabilities, have travelled as unaccompanied asylum seekers, are lesbian or gay, or are of an ethnic minority group.

Transitions out of youth offenders' institutions (YOIs) can occur simultaneously to these other moves between services. When children leave YOIs, they may access different education or health services, be resettled in a new area with different agencies and/or move to adult services. A thematic inspection of youth resettlement notes that children and young people sometimes experience delays in leaving YOIs or accessing services after they have left (specifically counselling, substance misuse support, and education, training or employment provision).<sup>2</sup> This was especially the case when accommodation arrangements were not made far enough in advance or when plans for after release were poorly communicated.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a review of YOT inspections between 2003-8 found that more needed to be done to ensure children access mainstream services after release, particularly for physical and mental health.<sup>1</sup>

The thematic inspection of youth resettlement also found no discussion or recognition of children's need for emotional support that accounts for the trauma of imprisonment or the loneliness of moving to a new place.<sup>2</sup> One child told inspectors that he felt “like a parcel”.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving YOIs can be particularly difficult for girls because there are fewer YOIs for girls, meaning they are more likely to be placed further from their home.<sup>21</sup> This limits the quality of relationships forged during custody and makes it harder to maintain those formed prior to custody, posing a challenge to the relationship-based practice which is important to resettlement.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, prison interventions do not always prepare children and young people to re-enter the community and, as one academic said in an interview, can be repeatedly started and unfinished due to short sentences and breaches of orders.<sup>1</sup> A review of inspections of YOTs between 2003-8 found that work started in custody was not developed or reinforced in the community after release in over a quarter of cases.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the thematic inspection of youth resettlement noted little continuation of work on education, training or mental health, partly because case managers mistakenly thought this work did not need continuing or because they did not have enough knowledge of the content to do so.<sup>2</sup>

## Opportunities

### **Stronger multi-agency working and case management could help, particularly regarding children and young people who are both victims and offenders, but there is limited evidence on what works**

Poor multi-agency working is regularly identified as a key reason for children and young people's negative experiences navigating through the system.<sup>1, 10</sup> Ineffective communication and inaccurate referrals can mean that children are frequently referred between too many different services, and a lack of joint planning can lead to a disjointed experience.<sup>11, 60</sup> For example, a review of YOT inspection reports between 2003-8 found that only 38% of young people leaving YOTs had a clear exit strategy with commitment from other partners to continue relevant work.<sup>1</sup> It follows that stronger multi-agency working could improve children and young people's experiences of transitions better, but our sample did not contain evidence of the impact of this on SYV (see the section on [implementation challenges](#) for more on multi-agency working).

In our interviews, an academic also described how peer mentors may be able to serve as a bridge between services.<sup>1</sup>

“Even if young people have this outwards persona of being indifferent or grown up, it's quite bewildering if you don't understand the terminology or what's going to happen - peer support navigators can help explain and navigate this.” - *David Porteous, Associate Professor of Criminology, Middlesex University*



Dedicated case managers can play a similar role.<sup>43</sup> As well as providing a more consistent relationship, they can run regular case management meetings.<sup>43</sup> These bring practitioners together to share information about an individual's needs or expectations and to agree which services are most appropriate to support them.<sup>43</sup> In an interview, an academic also raised that this stable, long-term relationship with case managers helps children and young people navigate the system.<sup>1</sup>

However, the presence of case managers does not guarantee improved navigation. An inspection programme of youth resettlement work found 'little evidence of YOT case managers advocating for children, pushing for the right interventions, or following up on courses', even though 80% of case managers said they felt confident to do so.<sup>2</sup> In addition, good case management is dependent on other practitioners' contributions. For example, a review of YOT inspections between 2003-8 found that case managers were often not aware of work undertaken with victims, as records were often not kept on this work.<sup>1</sup> Also, some practitioners may see working with other practitioners as either diverting time away from their core work<sup>43</sup> or inhibiting the development of their relationship with a child or young person.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, designing services to support those who are both victims and offenders could improve navigation. As explained in the section on [drivers of SYV](#), offenders have often been victims. An SCR suggests that children who display criminal behaviour should be viewed within multi-agency partnerships as children at risk of harm, as well as children who pose risk of harm.<sup>37</sup> However, it is likely that we need greater understanding about approaches to situations where a young person is both a victim and offender.<sup>42</sup> This is complicated by the fact that teams and services that focus on protection or enforcement are often separate, especially in the police and children's social care.<sup>1, 42, 43</sup>

"We understand the connection between offenders and victims... we know that the problem is, but we need evidence on solutions and how to build organisations that can effectively deal with it." - *Denise Martin, Professor of Criminology, Abertay University*

## Implementation challenges

There are challenges to translating what is known about systems of support and SYV into policy and practice. We discuss challenges specific to implementing two approaches which are often recommended: 'Child First' and multi-agency working. We also discuss the barriers to reducing SYV raised by limited or inconsistent funding, staffing or training.

### **It is not straightforward to measure or implement a Child First approach, so practice is currently a mixture of this and a risk-based approach**

As covered in the section on [drivers of SYV and the role of identity](#), Child First principles have been developed which seek to minimise some of the ways in which the YJS could expose children to involvement in violence. Yet some interviewees said that YOTs may be intimidated by the shift to Child First working.<sup>1</sup> Practitioners have spent years working in a risk-based approach, and some guidance and national targets are still shaped by risk and holding children responsible.<sup>1, 25</sup>

"I don't think there is a clear understanding of what Child First means in the youth justice system, partly because we are lacking examples of it. It is easy to say but not to enact." *Hannah Smithson, Professor of Criminology and Youth Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University*

"Safeguarding partnerships involve lots of different agencies and organisations with different mandates and objectives, which is a challenge to implementing the practice and values of a child welfare response. The policy context and local guidance is mixed too. Some are saying they take a welfare approach to working with young people, on the other hand there is a very crime prevention heavy response; this contradiction is experienced on the ground by practitioners." *Lauren Wroe, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Durham University*

Another challenge in taking a Child First approach is that measures of Child First practice and outcomes have not yet been established.<sup>25</sup> Doing so may be difficult, as elements such as engagement, relational work and identity development are not very tangible. However, an academic said during an interview that progress is being made on this issue:

"One of the barriers to progress in this area has been the lack of a measure of prosocial identity which can be used as part of interventions or evaluations. But Chris Birkbeck and I have developed a short scale for measuring prosocial

identity which we are just finishing testing.” *Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford*

Finally, a research report on children in the West Midlands Criminal Justice System concludes that it is difficult for a Child First approach to work without addressing broader structural issues in society, such as poverty, social exclusion and intergenerational disadvantage.<sup>17</sup> In interviews, academics also pointed out that public attitudes are still shaped by ideologies of punishment and retribution, which in turn can influence policy. However, this is changing over time.<sup>1</sup>

“Even though we might want to look at things differently, we will still be guided by our history of retribution. But things are changing - for example, Scottish school exclusion policies now talk about ‘distressed behaviour’ instead of ‘challenging behaviour’.” *Gillian McCluskey, Professor of School Exclusion and Restorative Practice, University of Edinburgh*

### **Negative outcomes are often attributed to poor multi-agency working, but it is hard to know how to improve this or what impact this would have on SYV**

Agencies are increasingly working together to support children and this is widely regarded as improving the quality of services, according to a 2011 synthesis of international evidence.<sup>50</sup> SCRs say that agencies need to work together to build and respond to a comprehensive picture of a child’s life: their needs, safeguarding concerns about them and how an accumulation of events is affecting them.<sup>15, 19, 39</sup> Without this, practitioners may fail to identify that a child needs to access support, be navigated to a particular service, or be engaged with in a particular way.

Analyses of case reviews and YOT inspections find that agencies do not consistently share information with each other.<sup>1, 30, 60</sup> Sometimes, key practitioners do not contribute to assessments<sup>30</sup> or attend multi-agency meetings<sup>1, 15, 41, 44, 45, 62</sup>, they do not record relevant details or record them unclearly<sup>1, 28, 30, 45, 54</sup>, or they do not recognise the need to refer to another service<sup>15, 30, 59, 60, 63, 64</sup>. Agencies’ IT systems are often incompatible, so it is not convenient to share information digitally.<sup>1, 29, 57</sup> Some practitioners are also reluctant to share information for fear of breaking data protection law, or sharing information which is sensitive to a police operation.<sup>1, 48</sup>

Multi-agency working should involve practitioners sharing information to collectively plan and oversee a holistic response, but they do not always involve other relevant practitioners in making decisions.<sup>10</sup> Physically co-locating practitioners from different agencies encourages practitioners from different agencies to interact.<sup>57, 65, 66</sup> There are indications that this improves multi-agency working: in interviews, practitioners said that co-locating YOTs with Children’s Services departments improved working relationships and access to services between the organisations.<sup>65</sup>

Even when the right practitioners are involved, they can disagree about what the plan should be<sup>32, 41</sup>, expect others to act<sup>30</sup>, or pass responsibility between agencies with no follow-up<sup>11, 41</sup>. These issues are sometimes resolved when practitioners challenge their colleagues to act or escalate a decision to someone more senior.<sup>31</sup> However, practitioners are reluctant to do this when they feel that escalation is slow with no guarantee of a positive outcome<sup>41</sup> or that challenge is not allowed<sup>31</sup>. A review of SCRs concluded that creating a culture which facilitates constructive challenge requires permission to invest in relationship building and critical reflection, as well as manageable workloads.<sup>31</sup>

Multiple studies recommend strategic engagement between agencies to alleviate some of the challenges to multi-agency working.<sup>1, 9, 45</sup> This could tackle issues such as:

- a lack of common objectives<sup>57</sup> or national guidance on how to resolve competing objectives<sup>52</sup>
- services which have been commissioned or designed without considering how they will work together, or how service users will move between them<sup>30</sup>
- a lack of information-sharing protocols or service level agreements to clarify responsibilities, or a lack of awareness of them<sup>1, 49, 57</sup>

A 2011 synthesis of international evidence concluded that multi-agency working improves children's access to services and practitioners' understanding of their needs, but it is difficult to demonstrate the impact on outcomes for children.<sup>50</sup> An evaluation report and inspection reports observe that there tends to be good multi-agency working in the areas in which services are having a positive impact on youth crime, though these reports are over a decade old.<sup>1, 67</sup> However, the sample of literature does not contain evidence on whether it is multi-agency working which is making the positive impact or, if so, which aspects of this way of working are important, nor how to make improvements.

### **Limited or inconsistent funding, staffing or training are further barriers to addressing serious youth violence**

Funding, staffing and training can affect whether or not a child or young person accesses or is navigated to a service, as well as how staff engage with them.

A 2010 review of social services in Scotland highlighted that consistent funding led to most services having dedicated youth justice staff, with protected workloads.<sup>58</sup> This allowed them to spend more time working with young people, at the same time as working well with a wide range of partner agencies.<sup>58</sup>

Yet inspection reports, SCRs and interviewees raise that services are often only funded in the short-term, giving the examples of YOTs' work with parents and carers or restorative justice work<sup>1</sup>, Violence Reduction Units (VRUs)<sup>1</sup>, Local Authority-funded

youth services<sup>10</sup>, and many voluntary sector services<sup>1</sup>. Academics explained that, if these services come and go as funding availability changes, they may struggle to establish themselves as permanent features of the system, limiting the number of referrals they receive and the quality of multi-agency working.<sup>1</sup> Other academics noted that the YJS has been better resourced than other services which provide early support.<sup>1</sup>

“The Social Care system just doesn’t have the headspace or management systems to be picking up street violence as well as violence within families. So children are pushed towards Youth Justice instead, where there is more of a risk that they might be criminalised.” *Sajid Humayun, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Greenwich*

Evidence reviews stress the importance of developing a skilled and sustainable workforce for addressing SYV.<sup>9, 53</sup> Yet multiple SCRs and inspection reports highlight that workforce management issues need to be addressed, such as unfilled vacancies, high levels of sick leave and staff turnover, and unmanageable workloads.<sup>1, 30, 38, 45, 47, 68</sup> The sample of literature did not provide explicit evidence on what staff shortages mean for children and young people, but there were indications. For example, one SCR found that a child saw lots of different practitioners rather than consistently working with one, social workers were too busy to attend relevant meetings, and referrals and key decisions were not followed up on.<sup>44</sup>

“Fully staffed and fully supported teams are important: without them, interagency working is more difficult and you get lots of fissures where things can go wrong.” *Marian Brandon, Professor of Social Work, Director of the Centre for Research on Children and Families, the University of East Anglia*

A consistent theme in the evidence and interviews was the call for more and improved staff training, across systems of support. Suggested topics included: neurodiversity<sup>1</sup>, gang association<sup>36, 46</sup>, children and young people’s use of technology<sup>45</sup>, sexual behaviour<sup>19</sup>, emotional neglect<sup>11</sup>, mental health<sup>1</sup>, and ACEs<sup>1</sup>. SCRs also called for training to improve professional curiosity<sup>28, 30</sup>, and decision making<sup>30</sup>.

One expert raised in an interview that, although more training is often cited as a solution, we have little understanding of whether this can be delivered sustainably and in a way which makes a difference in practice.<sup>1</sup> Even when guidance and training is provided, it is not necessarily followed<sup>30, 69</sup> – research into professional behaviours is needed to better understand why this occurs<sup>30</sup>. Funding and staffing models may play a role here, but the sample also contained little evidence showing what impact they have on children and young people’s outcomes.

## Future research

This section outlines questions and considerations for future research. The considerations are drawn largely from interviews with academics and are worth keeping in mind when designing any future research.

To form the five questions for future research, we listed the evidence gaps identified in the literature or interviews. We also listed the questions which were raised, but not answered, in the sample of literature. Then, as a team, we prioritised topics where we thought research was most likely to yield evidence which could inform action to reduce SYV. We tested some of this thinking in interviews with experts in the latter stages of the project. We explain our reasons for recommending these questions in this section, as well as any insights from academics on challenges or suggested approaches to answering the questions.

These questions have not been formed based on a comprehensive review of all potentially relevant literature, so it is possible that there is some existing research relevant to these questions. Future research should start by considering the available evidence on these particular topics. Also, a more comprehensive literature review may raise additional themes to explore. Nevertheless, these five questions are likely to be fruitful starting points for future research.

As commissioners of this research, DfE and YEF note that they are currently engaged in work which addresses some of these areas. YEF is working on mixed methods approaches to establishing what works, for whom, when and why at a systems-level. DfE and MoJ have linked administrative data to analyse patterns in education, children's social care and offending.

## Considerations for designing future research

### **Capture the long term nature of serious youth violence with longitudinal studies**

Experiences which play a role in children and young people's journeys to SYV may occur many years prior to the violence. The consequences of involvement in SYV are also long-term. In interviews, many academics called for more longitudinal research to capture patterns over time. Although there is current longitudinal work, academics said that there are further topics to be explored here, such as earlier indicators of achieving positive outcomes, children and young people's reasons for disengaging from support, the effectiveness of family-focussed interventions, and the role of intersecting forms of marginalisation.

However, longitudinal studies require a relatively large amount of funding and time. Data collection for longitudinal studies could be embedded within interventions from the

start, to assist with evaluation. Government data is also a key area of opportunity for longitudinal studies, especially where datasets can be linked so that data on individuals' contacts in separate services can be analysed together.

### **Identify early indicators of positive outcomes and learn from good practice**

Most youth justice research we reviewed focussed on the reasons for negative outcomes or on ways to avoid negative outcomes. In an interview, an academic explained that when it comes to SYV, little data is collected about earlier indicators of positive child outcomes, nor about children and young people who were successfully diverted away from the YJS. This means that we do not know why some children and young people achieved positive outcomes while others did not, so this knowledge cannot be used to help more children and young people achieve positive outcomes. We can learn from literature on positive outcomes for children from other fields such as education or social care.

Likewise, a lot of work in this area is based on analysis of poor practice. In an interview, an academic suggested that looking only at when things go wrong is not the best approach to learning. New research could focus on what can be learnt from examples of best or promising practice, with attention given to any contextual factors which may be contributing to success. This could include comparing practice and outcomes in different regions or nations.

### **It is challenging to use quantitative data alone to establish how systems can reduce SYV – qualitative methods are also useful**

In interviews, academics reflected that research funders and policy actors often place an emphasis on establishing what works for reducing SYV using research methods like RCTs, which require quantifiable metrics. Evidence reviews also call for more RCTs on interventions such as targeted mental health support or community orders.<sup>8, 70</sup> Yet some of the relevant factors are hard to measure, such as power dynamics or the quality of experiences within systems.

In addition, promising interventions are multifaceted, so it can be difficult to disentangle which aspect of them made the difference. Also, interventions are often tailored by practitioners to the local or individual contexts, so it is hard to measure and compare the impacts of precise interventions. In an interview, an academic stressed the importance of not trying to find a single intervention that works, but rather understanding what works, for whom and in what circumstances. As commissioners of this report, YEF note that some of their work is trying to build this understanding and overcome these challenges.

Some academics also raised ethical limits to the kinds of changes that can be tested using RCTs. For example, you would not want to randomise a participant into a less



procedurally fair position. Academics also noted that RCTs do not tell you about the power dynamics or human experiences that might affect whether an intervention works and explain why it does or does not work. This kind of understanding is important when it comes to replicate that approach in new settings or under different conditions.

Therefore, it could be beneficial to use mixed methods approaches, collecting and/or analysing both quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Find ways to include the voices of children, young people and their families in all relevant research**

Capturing children and young people's views, ideas and experiences is central to understanding 'why' systems of support impact youth violence, as opposed to just 'how'. Yet, as we have seen, children and young people themselves are seldom heard in research. When they are, it is usually the voices of those already engaged in services, who have been recruited via these settings, while individuals with more chaotic lifestyles who may be more likely to engage in serious violence tend to drop out of longitudinal studies.<sup>5</sup> As a result, there is likely a particular blind spot around the experiences of disengaged children and young people.

Many studies and academics raised practical and ethical barriers to researching with children and young people, though other academics said that there are some suitable methods. In interviews, experts suggested that co-producing research with children and young people is likely to generate more in-depth findings and it may also help with engagement. This could include participatory research, for example children and young people generating or gathering data by keeping video diaries. Peer mentors or other trusted adults could support with engagement in research, or even conduct ethnographic research.

However, an interviewee warned that young people may say what they think researchers want to hear, or parrot language or narratives which they have heard from practitioners. They said that practitioners sometimes repeat narratives based on single cases, as opposed to forming them from a broad evidence base. Care should be taken before concluding that triangulation of narratives from children and young people's voices, researchers and practitioners shows that the narratives hold true.

SCRs sometimes include the voice of children and this should be encouraged. However, it is important to mitigate the risk of the voices of parents or guardians dominating and deflecting from what the child has to say<sup>66</sup>, for example by speaking to the child in private as part of the SCR<sup>45, 66</sup>.

Research funders have influence here - they could require future research to include the voices of children, young people and their families as an integral part of the design, where relevant. Involving children and young people's voices would be beneficial for all



the questions proposed below, with the exception of the first question which focuses on practitioners.

## **Questions for future research**

### **What barriers do practitioners face to using evidence-informed practice and how can they be supported to do so?**

The evidence summarised in this report is most useful if it informs practice. This will also be true of any evidence which comes from answering the questions for future research. The sample of literature we reviewed did not tell us the extent to which existing policy, service design, guidance or training are evidence-informed, though we have seen that guidance does not always align with Child First or enable strong multi-agency working. We have also seen that guidance and training are not always followed by practitioners.

Any future changes to policy or practice will need to have input from practitioners and an awareness of how to change behaviour across the workforce. Changes to practice without 'buy in' from practitioners will likely lead to a disconnect between policy and practice. Researching this question would also be an opportunity to identify aspects of policy which practitioners feel are prohibitive to effective work. Understanding how to better align practitioner behaviour with evidence and policy is important because practitioners can affect children and young people's experiences of the system at multiple levels.

This line of research could focus on gaining a better understanding of challenges practitioners face when implementing change, for example time and financial constraints or disruptive organisational cultures. Case study work could also ascertain why practitioners in some settings are better able to implement change than in others. A good understanding of these issues will help policy or practice be designed in a way that is realistic about how it can be delivered.

Any work on practitioner behaviour must recognise that they are working within systems, so research should address wider organisational cultures and structures. Research design needs to be flexible and accommodate practitioners' finite capacity and resources, and any eventual recommendations should also take this into account.

### **How do experiences of marginalisation affect children and young people's experiences of systems of support and their involvement in serious violence? How can systems of support better meet different groups' needs?**

Children and young people involved in SYV are not a homogenous group. In interviews, experts reflected that the marginalisation of certain groups of children and young people likely plays a role in SYV. This marginalisation may include direct discrimination or

stereotyping as well as services being designed without bearing certain groups' needs in mind. Evidence reviews noted a lack of evidence on children and young people from marginalised groups, including those who are from ethnic minorities, neurodivergent, disabled, LGBTQ+, migrants, care-experienced or from low-income households.

Multiple studies also said that children and young people from these groups are likely to experience systems of support differently and that effective practice may vary for different groups. In addition, experts noted that lots of policy actors want to tackle disparities, but there is little evidence on what works. A better understanding of the experiences of children and young people from marginalised groups is needed to inform actions which both reduce systems' unintentional negative impacts and increase their intentional positive impacts.

Marginalised children and young people are also not a homogenous group. Research projects exploring this question could focus on certain aspects of marginality, or certain intersections of these aspects. It would make sense to focus on aspects of marginalisation which are thought to bear the most impact on children and young people's involvement with violence. Further research would be needed to ascertain what these aspects are, but this could include focussing on the groups who are most over-represented in the YJS. Alternatively, research could focus on the most under-researched groups, although a lack of research was noted for many groups.

Another way to approach future research on marginalisation is to explore its role as an important sub-question to any other future research question.

### **How do children and young people's experiences of systems of support contribute to the creation of prosocial (or pro-offending) identity, relationships or values? How might these identities influence involvement in SYV?**

Research often focuses on identifying risk factors or evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. As one interviewee reflected, these studies do not usually explain why significantly more or fewer children and young people with a risk factor, or who have experienced an intervention, go on to become involved in violence. They also do not explain why some of these children and young people go on to act violently and some do not.

In interviews, academics said that the formation of identity, relationships and values plays a large role in explaining how and why children and young people's experiences of systems impact on serious youth violence. A better understanding of causation would be useful for designing practice with children and young people involved in violence, as well as primary prevention. An interviewee said that there is still relatively little research on this, particularly on the formation of identities which are conducive to positive outcomes or to initial contact with systems of support. This could be a promising area

for future research and action, as it has the potential to identify small but possibly impactful changes, especially in universal systems such as education.

Research on this question could include exploring how systems of support do or do not:

- give children and young people a sense of belonging (as opposed to stigmatising, adultifying and criminalising them)
- contribute to prosocial beliefs and identity
- inform and involve children and young people
- facilitate positive relationships with practitioners
- facilitate positive peer relationships
- facilitate trust in systems of support
- prevent any biased practitioners' perceptions of children and young people from different marginalised groups from impacting on any of the above

An academic suggested that initial research could focus on aspects of children and young people's journeys or particular groups for which identity is likely to be particularly relevant. Existing research could be consulted to ascertain these priority areas - the interviewee gave initial examples of the induction wing of a YOI or children in the residential care system.

Understanding children and young people's experiences and feelings is particularly important for this research question - qualitative and participatory research may well be fruitful here.

**How do the timing and accumulation of interventions affect children and young people's experiences of them and their impact on SYV? How can systems effectively coordinate interventions and support children and young people's transitions between them?**

Many SCRs and studies in the EGM consider the role of timing in services' impact on SYV. However, there are few actionable conclusions beyond avoiding intervention that is stigmatising or too late. Identifying 'windows of opportunity' for access and engagement could help target support more effectively and efficiently. It would also be helpful to explore the role of screening, thresholds and service capacity in the timing of support for children and young people.

In addition, evidence suggests that an accumulation of interventions is more effective than just one. This is likely because they can holistically support children and young people with the many different problems that might play a role in their journey to SYV. However, there is relatively little understanding of how different combinations of interventions affect their impact on youth violence. For example, future research could

look at which combinations of services children and young people feel they would benefit from, or explore which complementary services maximise the effectiveness of a core intervention.

Alongside this, it is helpful to consider how children and young people can be navigated through the most appropriate combination of interventions at the most impactful times, without this being too disruptive or confusing. Many SCRs and inspection reports cite poor multi-agency working as a barrier to this. But there is limited information on the impact of improved multi-agency working or which specific features achieve this improvement. Multi-agency working can be considered at different service levels: strategic, operational, front-line or individual case level. Aspects of multi-agency working whose impact could be evaluated include: information sharing, joint assessments and planning, and strategic engagement between agencies on objectives, service design and protocols. Finally, transition support services could also be a useful focus - there is currently limited or inconsistent evidence on their effectiveness.

It could be challenging to quantify the outcomes from engaging children and young people during a 'window of opportunity' compared to any other time. Furthermore, these critical time periods will not be consistent for everyone. Instead, research could aim to better understand how improvements can be made around key transitions that affect most children and young people, such as between stages of education or between child and adult services.

It is more worthwhile to investigate the timing, accumulation and coordination of interventions which have been shown to impact SYV. The scope of research here could be narrowed by focussing on the most effective interventions. Determining the effectiveness of discrete interventions was beyond the scope of this report - wider research on programmes could be considered here.

### **What approaches and conditions are needed to improve children and young people's engagement with services and practitioners?**

It is assumed that children and young people must engage with services in order for them to have an impact, rather than being passive recipients. Further research is needed to ascertain exactly how positive and meaningful engagement may improve longer term outcomes. This could also establish ways to measure techniques for engagement and their outcomes, which would be helpful for comparing techniques.

Interviews and reading for this report surface potential factors in engagement. These included ensuring services are meaningful for children and young people, partly by involving them and tailoring to their needs, as well as by building positive trust-based relationships with practitioners. Yet multiple reviews found limited evidence about or evaluation of engagement techniques, particularly with youth justice processes.

Voluntary services are thought to see good engagement - research could explore why this may be the case and whether elements of this could be used effectively in the statutory sector. However, if viable approaches to fostering engagement are identified, we cannot be certain they will work across all systems as their success may be dependent on the context in which they were used.

## Other evidence gaps

There are a few other seemingly important topics on which we saw relatively little evidence in our sample.

YOIs are arguably a key part of the system's work to reduce SYV and, since they involve the deprivation of liberty, they are one of the most interventionist aspects of the system. However, the work within them was only discussed in two documents in our sample: a review of international evidence on parenting interventions for male young offenders<sup>33</sup> and an inspection report on youth resettlement from YOIs, which focussed on work completed outside of YOIs<sup>2</sup>. This may be due to the difficulty of conducting research in secure institutions like YOIs.

The 2018 Serious Violence Strategy cites social media and county lines gangs as likely drivers of an increase in serious violence.<sup>4</sup> Yet we saw surprisingly little evidence on either. An evidence review noted growing evidence to suggest that social media use may play a significant role in SYV<sup>9</sup>, yet other than this review it was only mentioned in one interview and one SCR<sup>10</sup>. Here, concerns were raised about how social media can put young people under pressure, fuel gang rivalry, assist county lines operations and pose risks to children more generally.

County lines gangs were raised in three SCRs<sup>41, 42, 64</sup>, but we found no evidence on how county lines involvement related to children and young people's experiences of systems of support. However, since county lines is a relatively new phenomenon, it may be that research is too recent to be included in the EGM or is still underway. County lines were raised in multiple interviews with academics. One of them pointed out that it is hard to identify children and young people involved in county lines for research: many administrative data systems do not have flags for county lines, gangs constantly shift the groups of children and young people they target so as to evade police detection, and asking these children and young people to contribute to research could put them at serious risk from gang members. However, another academic questioned whether county lines is just a new representation of familiar underlying problems, such as addiction to drugs, suggesting that focussing research on it may be a distraction.

# Annexes

## Annex 1 - About the Open Innovation Team

### The Open Innovation Team

The Open Innovation Team (OIT) is a cross-government unit, based in the Department for Education, that works with academics and other experts to generate analysis and ideas for policy. We synthesise academic evidence and expert opinion in a way that is useful for other teams in government, drawing from our interviews with experts and reading of published research.

### Conflicts of interest

The author team includes two permanent members of OIT and three PhD students on three-month placements within the team. OIT are not involved in the design of relevant policy or the management or delivery of services and so have no direct conflict of interest in those respects. None of the authors have conducted primary research directly relevant to the DfE-YEF SYV Research Programme question.

The drafting of this report was conducted as a team: if one author shows a specific bias, others in the team can challenge and a less biased decision can be made.

OIT does not receive central funding, rather we are commissioned by other teams and departments in government. OIT's work on this project was jointly funded by DfE and YEF. OIT is also sponsored by six universities (Brunel, Essex, Lancaster, Reading, Surrey and York), but they have no direct involvement with OIT project work. As such, there are no conflicts of interest to declare.

### Authors' experience

The authors do not have prior experience of systems research on youth offending. OIT permanent staff are generalists, specialising in synthesising evidence on topics for a policy audience. Three of the authors are completing PhDs using mixed methods, two of which focus on public sector services (health and education).

Some of the authors have direct relevant experience as professionals or volunteers. One author was a trustee of a conflict mediation charity for 4 years, although it was rare for the charity to provide mediation services to children during her tenure. The same author previously held a policy role in prison reform, but with a focus on older offenders. Another author worked in English primary schools for 6 years. Finally, another author specialises in violence against women and girls, including support work in the UK and research overseas.

## **Annex 2 - List of expert interviewees**

Anthony Gunter, Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies, The Open University

David Porteous, Associate Professor of Criminology, Middlesex University

Denise Martin, Professor of Criminology, Abertay University

Gillean McCluskey, Professor of School Exclusion and Restorative Practice, University of Edinburgh

Hannah Smithson, Professor of Criminology and Youth Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University

James Densley, Professor of Criminal Justice, Metro State University

John Pitts, Vauxhall Professor of Socio-legal Studies, University of Bedfordshire

Kevin Wong, Reader in Community Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University

Lauren Elizabeth Wroe, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Durham University

Marian Brandon, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia

Nathan Hughes, Professor of Adolescent Health and Justice, University of Sheffield

Neal Hazel, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Salford

Phil Bowen, Director, Centre for Justice Innovation

Sajid Humayun, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Greenwich

Steve Case, Professor of Youth Justice, Loughborough University

Susan McVie, Professor of Quantitative Criminology, University of Edinburgh

Suzella Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Bedfordshire

Vanita Sundaram, Professor of Education, University of York



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