

Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System 2019/20

England and Wales

Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice
Experimental Statistics bulletin

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Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System, England and Wales, April 2019 to March 2020

The statistics in this publication suggest that a large proportion of children who are supervised by Youth Offending Teams exhibit a range of important, interdependent and interrelated needs which are captured as concerns by YOT practitioners within AssetPlus.

The type and prevalence of these different needs may represent complex operational challenges around the delivery and provision of appropriate services to ensure best outcomes for children in the Youth Justice System.

Main points

The number of concerns each child had increased with the severity of the type of sentence they received

40%

Of the children assessed who received custodial sentences, 40% had 15+ concerns present, compared with 13% of children assessed who received first-tier sentences.

For five of the 19 concerns, more than seven out of ten children were assessed to have a concern present

71%

These were Safety and Wellbeing (90%), Risk to Others (87%), Substance Misuse (76%), Mental Health (72%) and Speech, Language and Communication (71%).

Over half of children were assessed to be a current or previous Child in Need

57%

19% were considered to have a current status around this and 38% had a previous status.

Almost a third of children were assessed as having a high or very high Risk of Serious Harm rating

32%

30% were considered to be of high risk of serious harm and 2% were considered to be of a very high risk of serious harm.

Almost half of children were assessed as having a high or very high Safety and Wellbeing rating

46%

41% had a high safety and wellbeing rating and 5% a rating of very high.

The categories of factors that had most influence in desistance from offending were 'Learning and ETE' and 'Family and Wider Networks'

37%

For 'Learning and ETE', 16% assessed this as a strong factor and 21% assessed it as a moderate factor. For 'Family and Wider Networks', 15% assessed this as a strong factor and 22% assessed it as a moderate factor.

The categories of factors that had most influence against desistance from offending were 'Features of Lifestyle' and 'Thinking Behaviour'

40%

For 'Features of Lifestyle', 24% assessed this as a strong factor and 16% assessed it as a moderate factor. For 'Thinking Behaviour', 23% assessed this as a strong factor and 17% assessed it as a moderate factor.

For technical details see the accompanying *Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System Technical Note*

We would welcome feedback on this release to informationandanalysis@yjb.gov.uk

Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System

Figures within this release are published as Experimental Statistics under the guidelines set out by the Office for Statistics Regulation's expectations regarding the production and handling of experimental statistics, a subset of official statistics going through development and evaluation, in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics (www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice).

Introduction

AssetPlus is a wide-ranging assessment and planning framework for use with children by Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and secure establishments across England and Wales. The needs of children supported by YOTs are regularly assessed by practitioners using AssetPlus to support the planning of suitable interventions both in the community and in custody.

This publication focuses on a subset of AssetPlus data which includes 19 assessed concern types, eight care status types, the four ratings for both Safety and Wellbeing and Risk of Serious Harm and the 18 factors affecting offending and desistance and their associated ratings. These are based on assessments of children who received a Referral Order, Reparation Order, Youth Rehabilitation Order or custodial sentence between 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

Concern types refer to factors that practitioners judge to be affecting the child. The types of concerns cover their wellbeing (e.g. Mental Health, Physical Health and Safety and Wellbeing), how they relate to other people (e.g. Significant Relationships and Relations to Others), social factors and issues at home (e.g. Accommodation, Local Issues, Learning, Education, Training and Employment, Parenting or Family Behaviour) or their own behaviours (Substance Misuse, Offence Justification or Attitudes to Offending).

The factors around care status look at the child's current and previous care history (e.g. whether they are subject to a care order or child protection plan, whether they have siblings in care or are remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation).

The practitioner assessed ratings for Risk of Serious Harm look at the imminence and likelihood of death or serious personal injury whether physical or psychological. The ratings for Safety and Wellbeing look at the risk that a child's safety and well-being is now or in the future potentially compromised through his or her own behaviour, personal circumstances or because of the acts or omissions of others.

Desistance factors look at issues that may be either a barrier to stop a child offending or issues which may play a positive role in stopping a child offending.

These concerns and ratings are based on practitioners' judgements and therefore are an indirect measure of children's needs.

These data are from the assessment of a child that is closest to the date of their sentencing outcome and this captures only those who had an assessment completed. Within this publication, statements in the form 'X% of children assessed' refers to those who were assessed using AssetPlus within 30 days either side of their sentencing date.

The supplementary tables that accompany this publication show the data for England & Wales as well as England and Wales separately.

Please refer to the accompanying Technical Note for a guide to the interpretation, methodology and definitions used in this publication.

Statistician's comment

These experimental statistics focus on the assessed needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System. The latest time period of data covered by this report covers up to the year ending March 2020, so will be broadly unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will consider how we can best cover this over the next 12 months.

This is the second time we publish these as experimental statistics. We hope to incorporate them as part or alongside our [Youth Justice Statistics](#) as a regular official statistics publication from next year. Comparisons to the previous year have not been included, as the proportions within them remain broadly unchanged. Last year's publication can be found at www.gov.uk/government/statistics/assessing-the-needs-of-sentenced-children-in-the-youth-justice-system.

This publication looks at concerns, care history, risk of serious harm safety and wellbeing and, for the first time, categories of factors affecting desistance from offending. These are based on youth justice practitioner judgements of children and while there may be a degree of subjectivity, this is based on AssetPlus assessments, the common assessment framework used by the vast majority of Youth Offending Teams around the country.

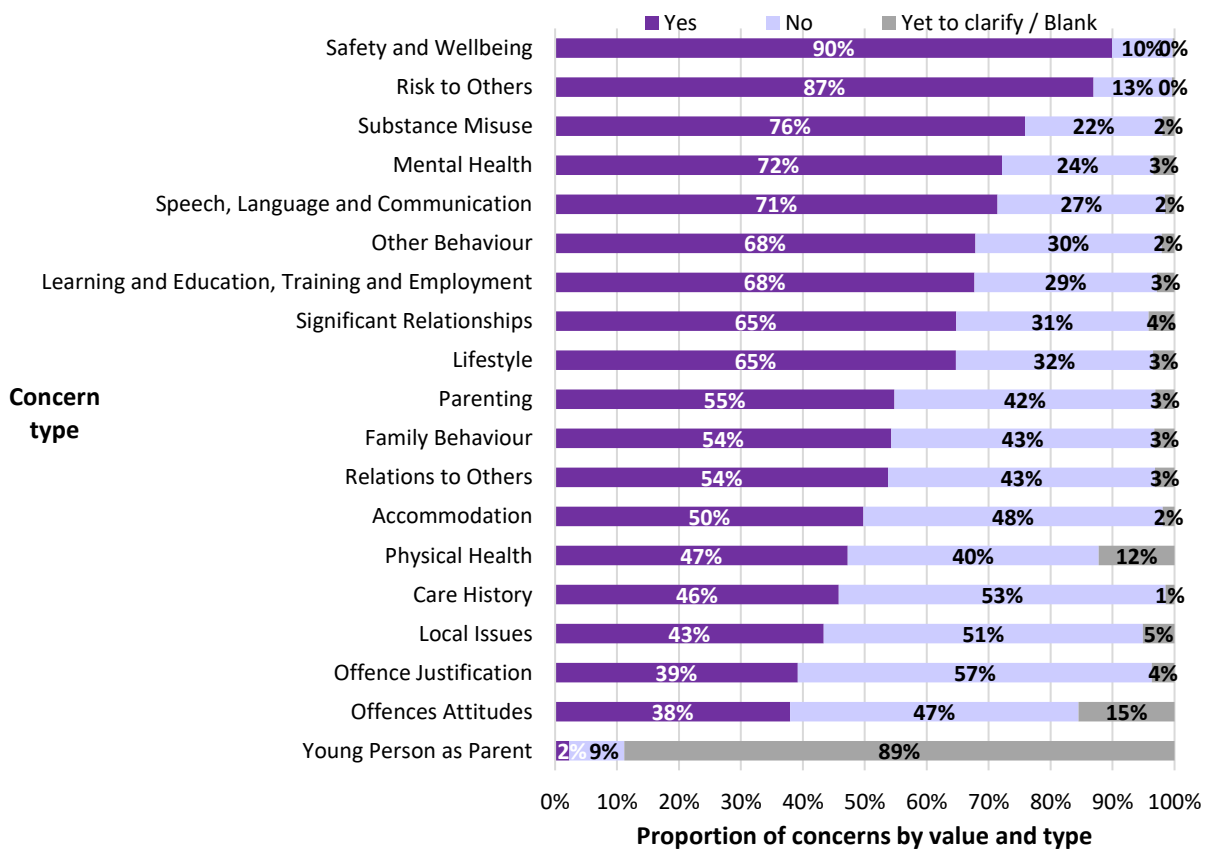
These statistics show differing numbers and types of concerns when looking at sentence type, with a greater number of concerns present for those in custody compared to those on less restrictive sentences. This suggests a custodial population with children that have complex needs, which is further supported by the high number of self harm and restrictive physical intervention incident statistics that can be found in the Youth Justice Statistics publication.

1. Assessed concerns of sentenced children

This section focuses on the high-level concerns assessed by practitioners for sentenced children. For the purposes of this report, a sentenced child is one who received a Referral Order, Reparation Order, Youth Rehabilitation Order or custodial sentence between 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

This section looks at both the concerns by value and type as well as the proportion of children who had a concern present as a proportion of children assessed¹.

Figure 1.1 Concerns by type as a proportion of total children assessed, England and Wales, year ending March 2020²



Supplementary Tables: Table 1.1c

Figure 1.1 shows a large proportion of children assessed had concerns present across most concern types. It is important to note that the data collected does not capture the extent or precise nature of these concerns. However, it does reliably capture their presence and provides an authoritative indication of the vulnerability and complex needs of sentenced children within the Youth Justice System. For five of the 19 concerns, more than seven out of ten children were assessed to have a concern present.

¹ Please see the supplementary tables for the number and proportions these comprised for each concern type.

² Please note this chart was updated in March 2021.

Sentence type

Figure 1.2 Number of concerns present as a proportion³ of children assessed by type of sentence, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Proportion of concerns present per child assessed	Number of concerns present per child assessed			
	0 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19
Overall	10%	25%	40%	24%
First-tier ⁴	17%	33%	36%	13%
Community	3%	19%	45%	33%
Custody	2%	16%	43%	40%

Supplementary Tables: Table 1.1b

When looking at different sentence types, the number of concerns present as a proportion of children assessed increased with the severity of the type of sentence. Of the children assessed who received custodial sentences, 40% showed 15-19 concerns present, compared with 13% of children assessed who received first-tier sentences.

Demographics

Looking at concerns by ethnicity, there was a greater proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children assessed as having concerns with Local Issues⁵ (Asian 40%, Black 58%, Mixed 50% and Other 50%) than White children (39%). A greater proportion of White children assessed had Mental Health concerns present (76%) than all those from a BAME background with the exception of children of Mixed ethnicity (Asian 54%, Black 61%, Mixed 76% and Other 65%).

Children aged 10-14 who were assessed showed a greater proportion of Speech, Language and Communication (80%), Mental Health (78%), Learning, Education, Training and Employment (76%) and Parenting (63%) concerns than 15-17 year olds (70%, 71%, 66% and 53% respectively), whereas 15-17 year olds who were assessed showed a greater proportion of Substance Misuse concerns (78% compared with 64% for 10-14 year olds).

Boys assessed had a greater proportion of Local Issues concerns than girls (45% compared to 27% for girls), whereas there was a greater proportion of Mental Health concerns for girls (80% compared with 71% for boys).

³ Proportions may not sum to 100% due to rounding

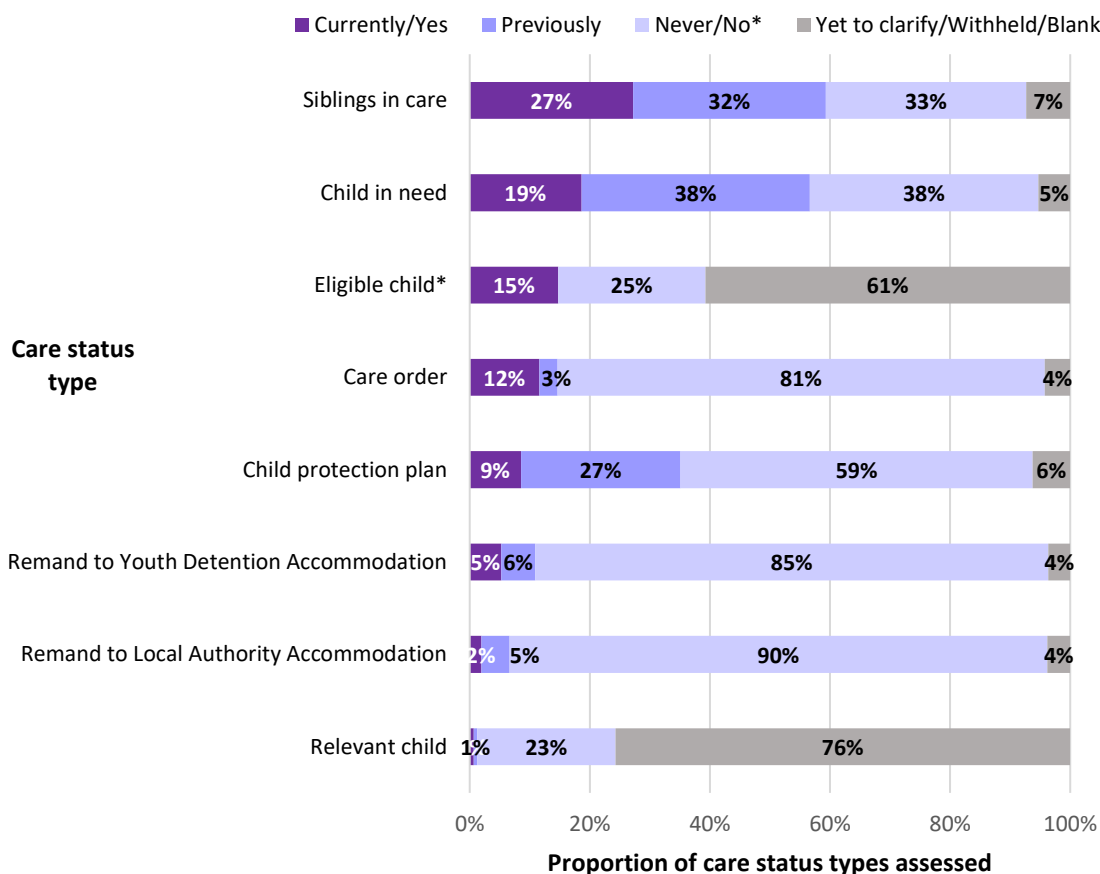
⁴ Referral Orders and Reparation Orders only. Does not include discharges or fines.

⁵ Concerns about the child being adversely affected by specific local tensions, pressures or issues.

2. Assessed care status of sentenced children

This section shows information about sentenced children’s assessed care status.

Figure 2.1 Care status type as a proportion of children assessed, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



*Available values for Eligible Child are Yes, No, Yet to Clarify or Withheld

Supplementary Tables: Table 1.2b

Over half (57%) of children assessed showed them to be a current or previous Child in Need. A Child in Need is defined as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services.

Sentence type

Of those children sentenced to custody, 29% were assessed to be an Eligible Child⁶ compared with 19% of those on community sentences and 8% of those on first-tier sentences.

Demographics

When comparing genders, there was a higher proportion of girls assessed with the following care statuses than boys:

⁶ An Eligible Child refers to those in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for a period to be prescribed. The age at which time in care start to count towards eligibility will also be prescribed.

- Siblings in Care (31% compared to 27%);
- an Eligible Child (20% compared to 14%);
- a Child in Need (20% compared to 19%);
- on a Care Order (19% compared to 11%); and
- on a Child Protection Plan (12% compared to 8%);

Children aged 10-14 assessed showed a larger proportion than 15-17 year olds with:

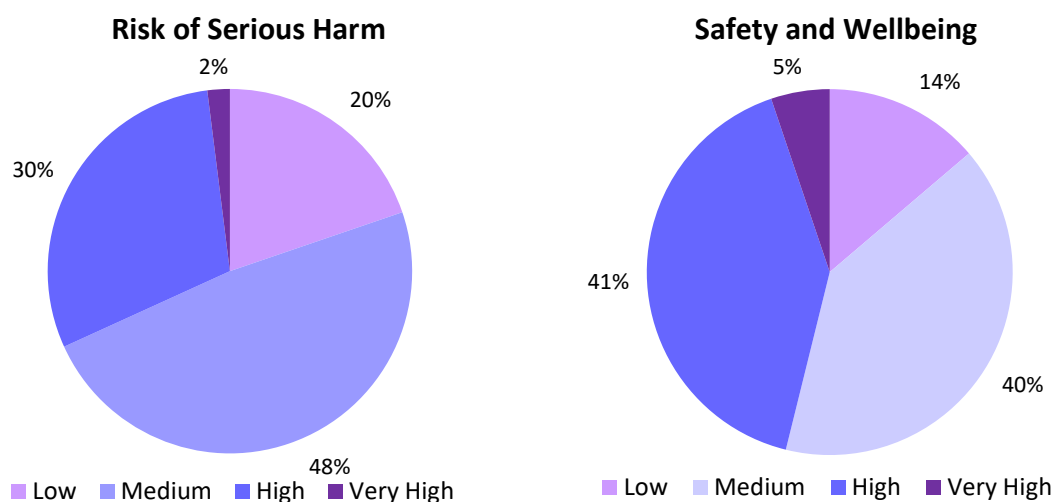
- Siblings in Care (37% compared to 26%);
- A Child in Need (25% compared to 17%);
- on a Child Protection Plan (19% compared to 7%); and
- On a Care Order (13% compared to 11%).

3. Risk of Serious Harm and Safety and Wellbeing ratings

Risk of Serious Harm is the imminence and likelihood of death or serious personal injury whether physical or psychological. This is rated as Low, Medium, High and Very High.

Safety and Wellbeing is defined as the risk of whether a young person’s safety and well-being is now or in the future potentially compromised through his or her own behaviour, personal circumstances or because of the acts or omissions of others. This is rated as Low, Medium, High and Very High.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 Risk of Serious Harm and Safety and Wellbeing ratings as a proportion of children assessed, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Supplementary Tables: Table 1.3b

In the year ending March 2020, almost half (48%) of children assessed had a Medium Risk of Serious Harm rating, while 32% were rated as High or Very High.

For Safety and Wellbeing 40% of children assessed were rated Medium risk, while 46% were High or Very High.

Sentence type

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 Risk of Serious Harm and Safety and Wellbeing ratings as a proportion⁷ of children assessed by sentence type, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Sentence type	Risk of Serious Harm				Sentence type	Safety and Wellbeing			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High		Low	Medium	High	Very High
First-tier	31%	54%	14%	0%	First-tier	22%	49%	27%	2%
Community	11%	50%	37%	2%	Community	7%	35%	51%	7%
Custody	2%	21%	69%	8%	Custody	2%	23%	63%	12%

Supplementary Tables: Table 1.3b

As the sentence type severity increased so did the proportion of children that had a High or Very High Risk of Serious Harm rating. Over three quarters (77%) of children assessed who received a custodial sentence had a High or Very High Risk of Serious Harm rating, compared with 39% of those who received community sentences and 14% of those who received first-tier sentences.

⁷ Proportions may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The same is true for Safety and Wellbeing ratings. Three quarters (75%) of children assessed who received a custodial sentence had a High or Very High rating, compared with 59% of those who received community sentences and 29% for those who received first-tier sentences.

Demographics

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 Ratings of Risk of Serious Harm and Safety and Wellbeing as a proportion of children assessed by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Sex	Risk of Serious Harm			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Boys	18%	48%	32%	2%
Girls	34%	52%	12%	1%

Sex	Safety and Wellbeing			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Boys	14%	40%	41%	5%
Girls	11%	42%	42%	5%

Supplementary Tables: Table 1.3b

Just over a third (34%) of boys assessed had a Risk of Serious Harm rating of High or Very High compared with 13% of girls. Though a small percentage point difference, the proportion with High and Very High Safety and Wellbeing ratings was greater for girls (47%) than boys (46%).

Figures 3.7 and 3.8 Ratings of Risk of Serious Harm and Safety and Wellbeing as a proportion of children assessed by age group, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Age Group	Risk of Serious Harm			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
10-14	23%	50%	26%	1%
15-17	19%	48%	30%	2%

Age Group	Safety and Wellbeing			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
10-14	11%	39%	46%	4%
15-17	14%	40%	40%	5%

Supplementary Tables: Table 1.3b

Over a quarter (28%) of 10-14 year olds assessed had a Risk of Serious Harm rating of High or Very High compared with 32% of 15-17 year olds who were assessed. For Safety and Wellbeing, the proportions that had a rating of High or Very High were higher for 10-14 year olds (50%) than 15-17 year olds 45%.

Figures 3.9 and 3.10 Ratings of Risk of Serious Harm and Safety and Wellbeing as a proportion of children assessed by ethnicity group, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Ethnicity Group	Risk of Serious Harm			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Asian	16%	55%	28%	0%
Black	11%	43%	43%	3%
Mixed	15%	48%	36%	2%
Other	15%	44%	37%	3%
White	23%	49%	26%	2%

Ethnicity Group	Safety and Wellbeing			
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Asian	19%	38%	40%	2%
Black	9%	34%	49%	8%
Mixed	9%	39%	47%	5%
Other	10%	37%	48%	5%
White	15%	42%	38%	5%

Supplementary Tables: Table 1.3b

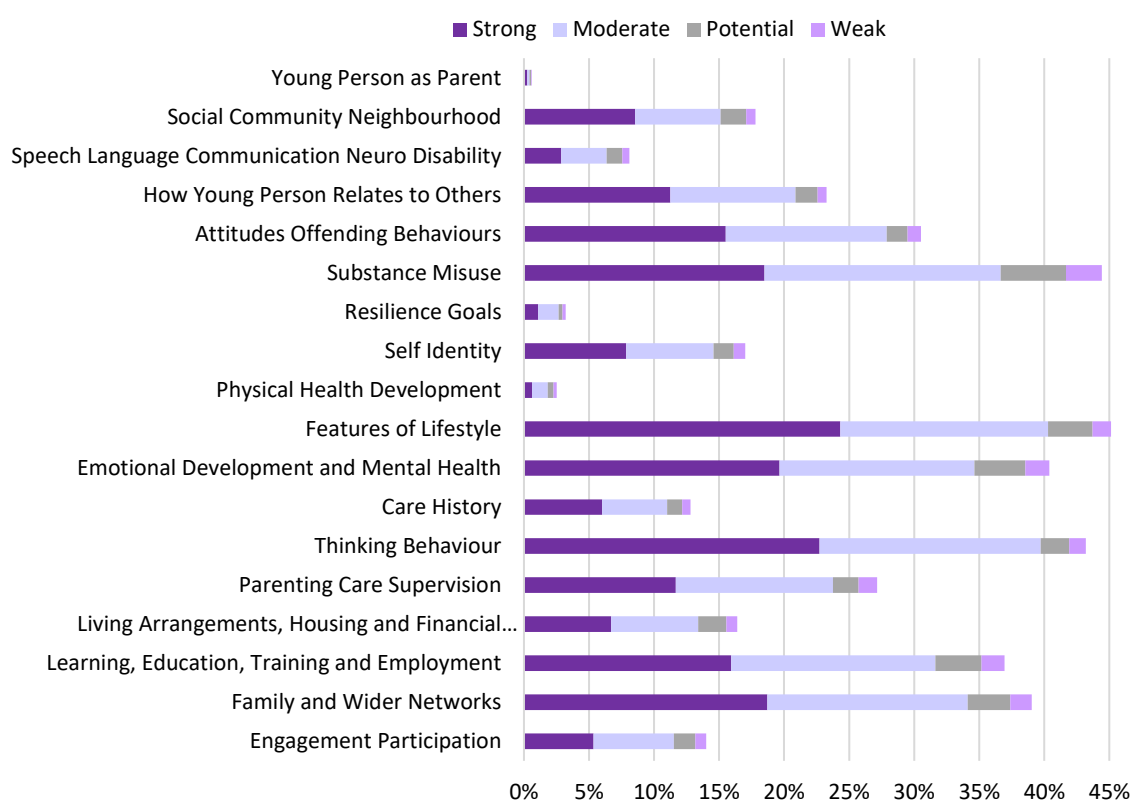
White children assessed had a smaller proportion (27%) of High or Very High Risk of Serious Harm ratings than children from three of the four BAME groups (Asian 29%, Black 46%, Mixed 38% and Other 40%). For Safety and Wellbeing, over half (57%) of Black children assessed had a High or Very High rating, compared with 42% for Asian, 52% for Mixed, 53% for Other and 43% for White.

4. Desistance Factors Categories

The AssetPlus desistance table is designed to support focus within intervention planning on addressing the child's needs and behaviours. Factors against desistance look at issues that may be a barrier to stop a child offending while factors for desistance look at issues which may play a positive role in stopping a child offending. These factors are unique to each child but fit into the broad categories presented below. These are rated based on how much the practitioner assesses the factor plays a role in desistance.

Factors against desistance categories

Figure 4.1 Factors against desistance categories by rating as a proportion of children assessed, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

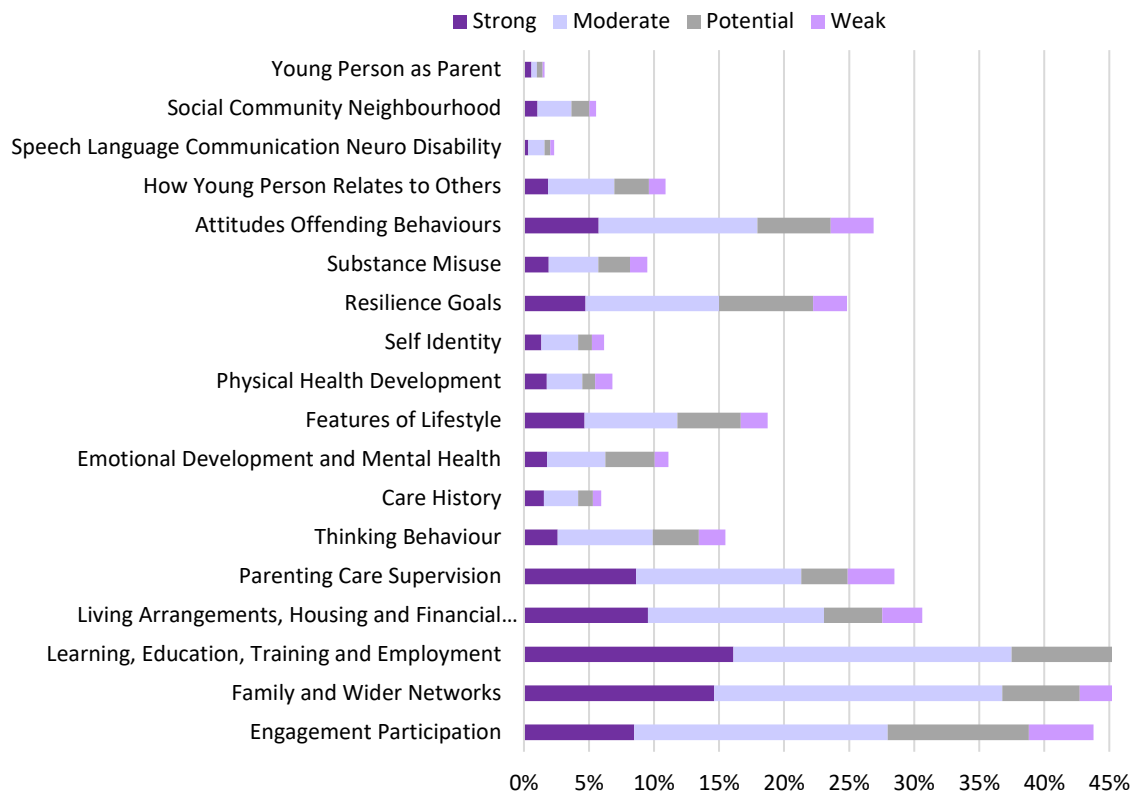


Supplementary Tables: Table 1.4a

For children assessed, the categories that were most directly associated with offending were Features of Lifestyle (24% with a Strong rating and 16% with a Moderate rating), Thinking Behaviour (23% with a Strong rating and 17% with a Moderate rating) and Substance Misuse (18% with a Strong rating and 18% with a Moderate rating).

Factors for desistance categories

Figure 4.2 Factors for desistance categories by rating as a proportion of children assessed, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Supplementary Tables: Table 1.4b

For children assessed, the categories that were most directly associated with desistance from offending were Learning and ETE (16% with a Strong rating and 21% with a Moderate rating), Family and Wider Networks (15% with a Strong rating and 22% with a Moderate rating) and Engagement Participation (8% with a Strong rating and 19% with a Moderate rating).

User feedback

Experimental statistics are a subset of newly developed or innovative official statistics that are undergoing evaluation. They are developed under the guidance of the Head of Profession for Statistics.

Experimental statistics status provides a clear statement of the nature of the official statistics going through development, with a potentially wider degree of uncertainty in the resulting estimates as the methods and processes are established and verified.

Testing of the experimental statistics allows producers to gain a good understanding of their quality, including their accuracy and reliability, and their value.

Users are central to this process – without their involvement, producers will have an incomplete understanding of the suitability of the statistics. The YJB Information & Analysis Team welcomes feedback from users of these figures, specifically in relation to the following issues:

- Are these figures useful?
- How would you like statistics from AssetPlus data to be developed in the future?
- What other data would be of value from the data captured within AssetPlus?

Feedback can be sent to the following e-mail address informationandanalysis@yjb.gov.uk, with the subject 'AssetPlus Experimental Statistics Publication', or to the postal address below.

Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Email: newsdesk@justice.gov.uk

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

Damon Wingfield

Acting Head of Profession for Statistics

Ministry of Justice

10 South Colonnade

London

E14 4PU

Tel: 07542 943761

Damon.Wingfield@justice.gov.uk

Bryce Millard

Head of Information and Analysis

Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

70 Petty France

London

SW1H 9EX

Tel: 07773 597442

Bryce.Millard@yjb.gov.uk

General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be e-mailed to:

statistics.enquiries@justice.gov.uk

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