

# Critical Perspectives and Responses to Knife Crime

Nikki Holmes - Safer Together  
April 27th 2023



WOLVERHAMPTON  
SAFEGUARDING  
TOGETHER

# Purpose and Aims

Two Thematic Reports commissioned by WST in response to 3 incidents of Serious Youth Violence (SYV) which cumulated in death/or serious injury between April and June 2022.

- Additional assurance of the efficacy and robustness of current systems
- Gain further insights from stakeholders including parents and carers
- Deep dive of a Rapid Review sample to understand commonalities and themes
- Insights into perpetrators and victims

Phase One  
(Exploitation  
Thematic)

Phase Two (Knife  
Crime Thematic)

System Analysis of  
Exploitation

"Deep Dive" Rapid  
Review Sample



# The Rapid Review Sample

- **Three cases form part of the Rapid Review sample**
- **ZS.** Male 15 years. Fatal Injury
- **RK.** Male 16 years . Fatal Injury
- **KW.** Male 15 years. Serious Injury

# Key themes and Findings

- Key themes and findings
- Recommendations in reports (awaiting sign off)



# Identification of key themes

- Established and agreed Key Lines of Enquiry and Terms of Reference (ToRs) in place
- Influenced by recommendations and findings of the Whole Systems Review
- Emerging themes from systemic analysis and deep dive – commonalities and cross-cutting themes

# Phase 1 (Exploitation) Themes

Understanding the efficacy and impact of systems and processes implemented post the whole systems review.

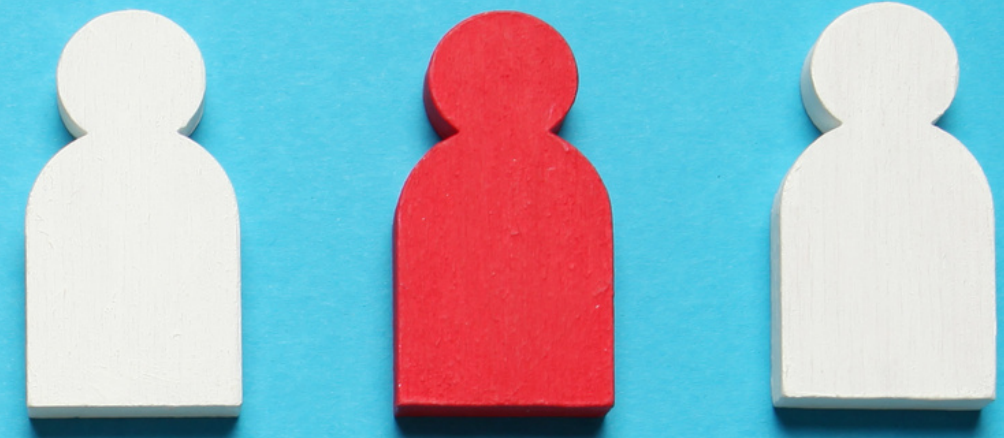
- Are current processes of screening and identification facilitating preventative approaches?
- Are tools and processes enabling the "widening of the lens" to enable the accurate capture of all forms of vulnerability and risk
- Are there any deficits and disadvantages associated with the use of current tools and processes?

- How effective is information sharing across professional and geographical boundaries?





# Categorisation of abuse and the impact on safeguarding response





# Phase 2 ) Knife Crime) Themes

Commonalities and  
cross-cutting themes  
(Rapid Review Sample)

Gender

Ethnicity

Cannabis Use

Cumulative  
Adversity

# Gender



- In 2021, London recorded its worst-ever annual death toll from teenage homicides, with a total of 30 boys and young men killed in 2021 because of knife crime.
- But knife crime and serious youth violence is **NOT** a London-centric problem, but an issue that is pervasive in many urban areas across the UK
- Where knife crime is an issue, boys and young men are disproportionately represented both in the context of victims and perpetrators.
- **But do we critically explore the role of gender in SYV?**



# Key Considerations

- To understand all aspects of gender-based violence, we have to understand the concepts of patriarchy and misogyny. BUT... do we consider the impact of these constructs on boys and men?
- How might gender socialisation feed into wider forms of harm?
- Do we understand how hypermasculinity and SYV are inextricably linked?
- Is there a metonymic relationship between weapon carrying and normative masculinity?
- How do we as a system challenge this?



# Adultification and Intersectionality

- When put in the context of population size, those from Black communities had higher rates of victimisation. (Six times higher for Black victims than White victims and almost four times higher than victims of other ethnicities.)\*
- The common over-simplistic discourse widely perpetuated by the media, professionals, and the public, is therefore that issues of knife crime and SYV are "black on black" issues. – A narrative that is dangerous, inaccurate and oversimplistic.

\*Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2021 (ONS)

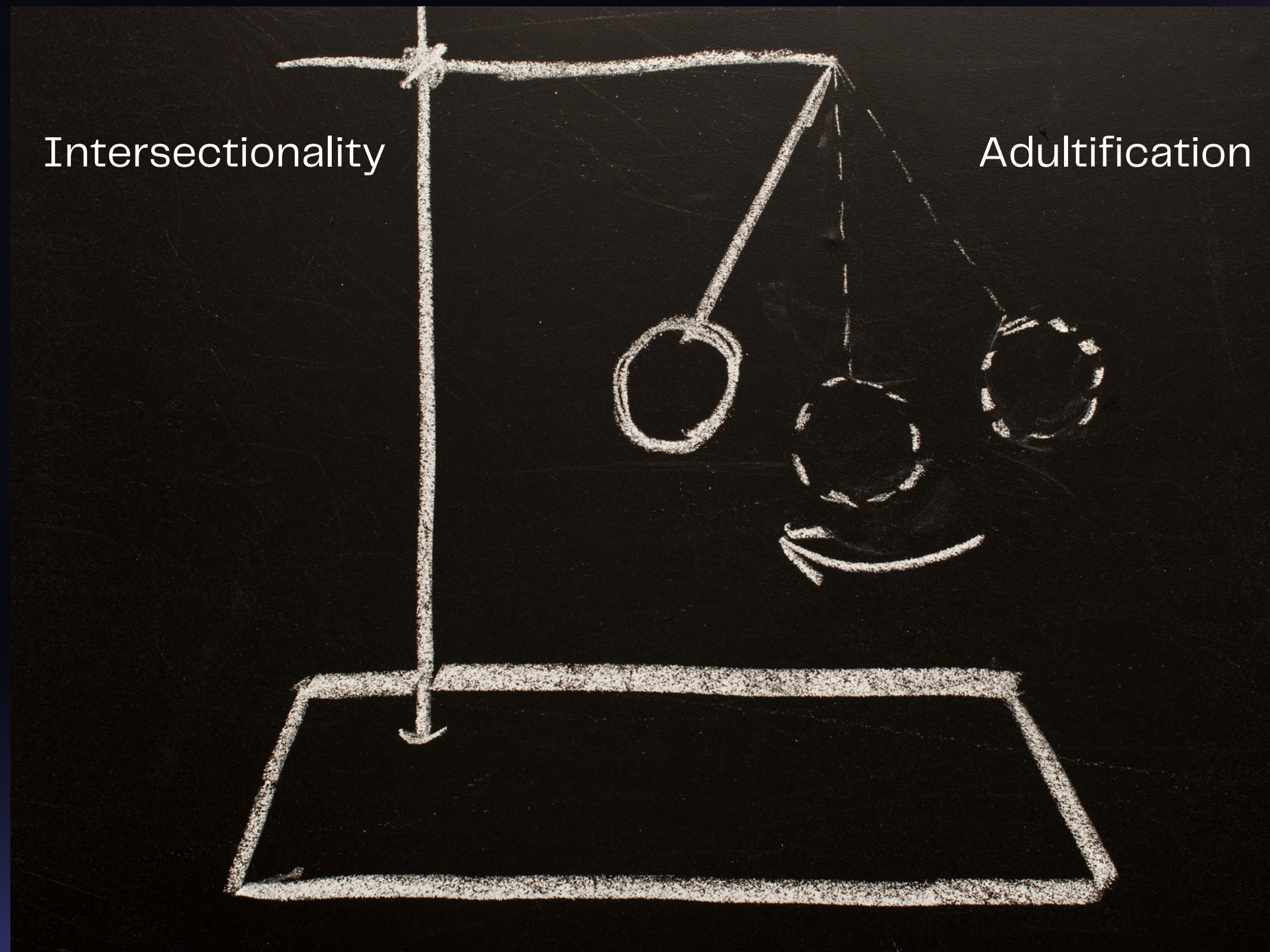


## Key Considerations

- Blackness and ethnicity are NOT criminogenic factors. The harms of adultification and racial profiling is well documented, evidenced and researched. BUT
- Exploring the disproportionate representation of non-white children in incidents of youth violence when this occurs, and exploring how factors such as ethnicity and intersectionality intersect with SYV and knife crime is crucial.
- The review to date has found no evidence of adultification being a factor in any of the cases that form the Rapid Review sample. BUT....



# The Pendulum of Adultification and Intersectionality



# Cumulative Risk and Quantifying the "Unknown"

- Risk is not static, and therefore risk assessment and response is a dynamic and fluid process.
- Contextual understanding of cumulative and intersecting risk is key.
- This review seeks to understand how the system is consistently looking beyond single incidents and recognising the accumulation of adversity.

## Review Focus

- **In practice, case history is often used to establish the pattern of behaviour to predict likelihood of significant harm – but how effective are assessment processes in identifying the cumulative impact of events to evidence significant harm?**
- **How effectively do risk assessments respond to the "unknown"?**

Contextual  
Safeguarding: The  
voices of children,  
parents, carers and  
communities



- Contextual safeguarding requires systems to work collaboratively with children , parents/carers and communities.

## Critical Questions:

- **How much weight and gravity is given to information provided by the community, young people, parents and carers?**
- **Does evidence provided by children, parents and carers consistently feed into the risk assessment process?**
- **How can we work with communities and families to co-produce responses to serious youth violence?**



# Cannabis Misuse



- Substance use is identified as a risk factor for involvement in SYV in the Home Office's Serious Violence Reduction Strategy, due to the often-inextricable links that exist between drugs and exploitation.
- The links between substance misuse and gang affiliation are well researched. Research carried out by the Children's Commissioner in 2019 found that 81% of gang associated children have substance misuse issues, meaning that this cohort were 34% more likely to be drug dependent than other cohorts of children known to the criminal justice system.

## Review Focus

Are the links between cannabis use, exploitation and SYV sufficiently understood and considered?



# Key Considerations

- Are we de-sensitised to cannabis use in children and young people because of the prevalence of use?
- Does this potential normalisation of cannabis use result in an element of "professional apathy" and therefore lead to cannabis misuse not being recognised consistently as a risk indicator of exploitation and harm?
- Given that engagement with treatment services is largely dependent on consent, do we need to review how persistent efforts to provide support and intervention via other routes are made?



# Next Steps



