



Learning Lessons Briefing – Knife Crime Thematic Review

Methodology:

This Thematic Review of Knife Crime was commissioned in direct response to three incidents of Serious Youth Violence that occurred between **April and June 2022**.

The three cases were analysed and form a central part of the review.

One of the victims, of the three cases survived the injuries inflicted upon them, and agreed to co-author the review, to ensure that the review was reflective and inclusive of lived experience.

In addition, to ensure that the review was reflective of the reviews of a wider sample of children and young people, a survey was collated and shared with children and young people aged between 11-18, to capture their views and perspectives of knife crime. A total of **929** survey responses were received.

The review Author is accredited to use Serious Incident Learning Process Methodology (SILP). Whilst not commissioned as a SILP review, the key principles of SILP methodology were applied to ensure that the review process;

- **Is “systems based”** – Avoids apportioning blame on any one agency by ensuring that when things went wrong or did not happen in the way they should have, a systems lens is applied. This helps to understand the system in context and provide insights into the multiplicity of factors and barriers that influenced actions and decision making.
- **Is “strengths-based”** – Whilst the purpose of any review process is to highlight areas of systemic weakness and areas for development, it is equally as important to look for areas of strengths or exemplar practice. This is to ensure that good, effective practice and ways of working that are keeping children, young people, and families safe are highlighted and replicated and embedded into practice.
- **Is a Collaborative Process** – The review involved collaboration with not only system leads, but also with families, children and young people, and front-line practitioners. In this case, the review was co-authored by a young person who has lived experience of Knife Crime. Their generous contributions strengthened the review process by providing unique insights and perspectives.
- **Is an Analytical Process** – The methodology applied ensured that the review was focused on “*the Why*” as opposed to the “*the What*”. There had already been comprehensive rapid review processes undertaken in relation to all three cases central to this review. Therefore, whilst the review provided some context

about *what* happened, the focus was analysing the information available to understand the factors and processes that contributed to *why* events happened as they did. This is key to learning.

Practitioner Involvement:

A total of **three** practitioner learning events were held. The purpose of practitioner learning events is to enable the review author to ask key questions to aid their understanding of events, whilst simultaneously providing safe, reflective environments for practitioners to also be a central part of the review process and have the opportunity to reflect.

Practitioner learning events were held for practitioners who had direct involvement with both the victims and those individuals who had carried out the acts of violence that had led to the victims' deaths or serious injury. This enabled the review author to look for cross-cutting themes between victim and "perpetrator"¹ profiles and to gain a valid understanding of the stories of children who have been victims and offenders (or both) of serious youth violence.

Practitioners were also given the opportunity to review the draft recommendations of the review, to ensure that the recommendations proposed, translated into practice in a way that was most likely to result in positive and practical system change.

KLOE's:

Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) were established to define the purpose, structure, and the key area of analysis of the review. The KLOEs for this thematic review are as follows:

Prevention and Education

- Determine the efficacy of programmes available locally that prevent and desist Serious Youth Violence and weapon carrying behaviour
- Understand the impact and efficacy of educative strategies.

Demography and problem profiling

- Understand how effectively partners quantify local levels of Serious Youth Violence and their understanding of the drivers of Serious Youth Violence and weapon carrying behaviour.
- Ascertain if certain locale, or certain cohorts of children and young people are disproportionately impacted by Serious Youth Violence and weapon carrying behaviour and if so, identification of the factors that contribute to certain cohorts being disproportionately impacted.

¹ The term perpetrator is used to distinguish those individuals that committed acts of violence from the victims at the centre of this review. However, the victim offender dichotomy is recognised, and it is understood that many perpetrators of serious youth violence will themselves, have been victims of interpersonal violence in a variety of contexts.

- Ascertain if and how the Covid-19 pandemic and other current societal factors has impacted the exploitation landscape and contributed to Serious Youth Violence and weapon carrying behaviour.

Partnership working and information sharing

- Understand the effectiveness of partnership working and the use of public health infrastructure to tackle the issue of Serious Youth Violence and weapon carrying.
- Establish the systemic and operational barriers that impede the identification and response to children and young people who may be at risk of Serious Youth Violence.
- Determine the effectiveness of information sharing across local authority borders for children and young people who may be at an enhanced risk of exploitation and associated Serious Youth Violence.

Assessment and risk management

- Explore the consistency and accuracy of risk categorisation and management and understand how this may impact on proportionate and effective safeguarding responses.
- Determine how effectively organisations are working contextually to understand risk and plan effective risk response.

Participation and engagement

- Understand how the voices and lived experiences of children and young people are influencing learning and changes to policy and practice.
- Explore how well sighted strategic partners are on the needs of those working operationally with children and young people and their families.

Scoping Period for the review:

Given the proximity of the three incidents (Table A), the scoping period of the review was focused on the period of April to June 2022. However, given the thematic nature of the review it was necessary to explore contextual and historical information that was pertinent to the focus of the review that fell outside of this scoping period.

Key Findings Summary:

This review found that there are multiple complex drivers that underpin and fuel Serious Youth Violence and therefore rejects single-level theories of violence prevention. Instead, the review found evidence violence prevention strategies

requiring the adoption of social-ecological and contextual approaches that understands the intersect between structural, cultural, and individual contexts.

The review also concluded that changing the trajectory of children's lives and making a significant difference to children's outcomes, whilst possible, can seldom be achieved by professional intervention alone. Instead, there is a need to understand and work in effective collaboration with families, children, and whole communities.

Several cross-cutting themes were identified as a result of detailed analysis of victim and perpetrator profiles. The themes identified were:

- **Gender** – all victims and perpetrators were male. This aligns with the national landscape which also highlights that male are disproportionality represented in both victim and perpetrator profiles. This review concluded that gender socialisation and stereotypes are linked to SYV and weapon carrying is perhaps symbolic of masculinity.
- **Ethnicity** – All victims of the cases that formed a central part of the review were non white. A review of the perpetrator profile also found that those from non-white backgrounds were disproportionately represented. This again aligns with the national landscape. Ethnicity is not a criminogenic factor but understanding the intersect between SYV and the disproportionate representation from non-white backgrounds is critical. This often the result of children and young people who are non-white being locked in positions of economic and social disadvantage. Therefore, understanding how intersectional and cultural factors influence a child's lived experience and perception of the world is key.
- **Cannabis Misuse** – The review found another common factor in cases analysed was the use of cannabis. However, the risks and links that often exist between cannabis misuse, exploitation and SYV were frequently inconsistently identified or assessed.
- **Cumulative Harm** – One other cross cutting theme found from the review is that many all victims and most perpetrators had experienced at one or various points in their lives, exposure to violence in a variety of different contexts. For some young people, exposure to or experience of interpersonal violence is likely to impact on their perceptions of safety.
- **Feeling Safe** – The review also found that weapon carrying is often a tactic employed by children and young people to keep them safe from harm. However, the survey revealed that whilst fear of knife crime is high amongst young people, only a very small percentage of those young people surveyed (13%) admitted to carrying a bladed article. This highlights that there is further work to do to challenge the myth that knife crime and weapon carrying is disproportionality problematic in Wolverhampton. The review recognises that the tragic incidents that occurred within such a short timeframe, has presented the local area with a challenge in relation to this work.

Whilst several cross-cutting themes were identified between cases that formed part of the rapid review sample and perpetrator profiles, risk indicators may not always be predictive of future behaviour and therefore care should be taken to conceptualise SYV and knife crime in a way that is homogenous and not universal.

How can you make a difference?

Key messages from the learning to ask yourself for your practice are: -

- *Can I make changes to improve my own practice when working to support children and young people who may be at risk of being a victim and or an offender of serious youth violence?*
- *Do I need to seek further support, training, or supervision to understand and recognise the drivers of serious youth violence and weapon carrying?*
- *What is my role in educating the children and young people I work to support about the dangers of weapon carrying?*
- *How can I create regular opportunities to talk to children and young people about their feelings and perceptions of safety?*
- *Do I know how to escalate and share my concerns of I suspect or know a child or young person to be carrying knives or other weapons?*

Recommendations

Theme 1: Training and Professional Development

- The current training offer should be expanded to provide specialist training to ensure that practitioners from all sectors understand the concepts of adultification, intersectionality and how these factors intersect with SYV, exploitation and knife crime.
- Training should be provided to practitioners from all sectors to ensure that they understand the lived experiences of children growing up in poverty and the intersect that can be observed between poverty and serious youth violence.
- Additional targeted workshops to provide further education and awareness raising about the role that social media plays in the amplification of issues that may culminate in violence should be provided for children, parents and carers and professionals.

Theme 2: Risk Assessment and Response

- Practitioners at an operational level should be offered additional learning and support to explore and understand how intra and extra familial experiences interface and increase the propensity of risk beyond the family environment.
- Additional support and training should be provided to schools to facilitate them to carry out effective peer mapping that extends beyond the scope of schools and to understand and respond to issues and complexities presented by the “peer paradox”.
- Practitioners should receive additional training and support to identify when a child may be “freelancing” and the harms associated with this concept. Plans and processes should be put in place to ensure that any child who is identified as a “freelancer” is subject to appropriate safety planning and in receipt of appropriate intervention and support to respond to identified levels of risk.
- There should be continued commissioning of services that provide children access to relatable practitioners with lived experience and ensure that children who lack positive male influence are able to access support and intervention from positive male role models.

Theme 3: Intelligence and Information Sharing

- Intelligence gathered locally should be used to explore and better understand the drivers that underpin weapon carrying behaviour in females and the role of females in co-offending peer group contexts and Serious Youth Violence.
- The location and times of incidents of Serious Youth Violence should ensure that interventions are delivered at key times and in problematic locations and spaces to respond to risk and threat. Strategic and operational leads should work directly with children to understand, from their perspective, their perceptions of safety, what proactive and innovative multi-agency interventions are required to make spaces and places safer for children.
- Existing audit frameworks and processes should ensure that intelligence and information provided by parents, carers and the wider community is being appropriately considered and used to inform risk assessment and safety planning and given the same weight and consideration as intelligence and information provided by police and statutory partners.
- Educative strategies should ensure that information reaches those not in full time or mainstream education, including those that are electively home educated. The delivery of educative strategies should involve a multi-agency approach to ensure that education and awareness raising is not the sole responsibility of schools.

Theme 4: Strategy and Governance

- The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Exploitation agendas should be aligned to strengthen approaches and intervention to Serious Youth Violence that recognise how factors such as gender roles and socialisation intersect with SYV.
- the development and roll out of a strategy which ensures that consistent, equitable and appropriate support and interventions are put in place to support and protect the families of victims and perpetrators in the aftermath of incidents of SYV should be considered as part of the Serious violence Duty.
- The development of a Children's Substance Misuse Strategy that ensures the continual and strengthened strategic focus on children's substance misuse and the role that substance misuse may play in increasing levels of SYV, and exploitation should be considered.