



Youth Justice Board
Bwrdd Cyflawnder Ieuenctid

Victims: Evidence Pack

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Summary

- Recent estimates based on self-report data suggest:
 - Around **1 in 5** children in England and Wales report being **victims of violence**, with 29% requiring medical treatment.
 - Around **1 in 5** children report being **victims of robbery**.
 - Around **1 in 3** children report being **victims of fraud and financial crime**.
 - **Around half** of children in relationships report **experiencing at least one form of emotionally or physically abusive behaviour from their partner** in the last 12 months.
 - **Around half** of children who perpetrated violence had also been victims.
- **Black and mixed heritage children and boys are disproportionately affected by violence. Girls are at higher risk of sexual exploitation and relationship abuse, particularly where school exclusion, 'gang'¹ affiliation, or children's social care involvement are present.** Children's risk of victimisation is shaped by overlapping factors such as living in urban areas, having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), school exclusion, substance misuse, and children's social care involvement.
- **Many children who offend are also victims.** Experiences of domestic abuse are common among children involved in serious youth violence and 'gangs', and current youth justice responses to child criminal exploitation (CCE) often fail to recognise and support victims effectively, especially as they get older, instead reinforcing criminalisation and overlooking complex vulnerabilities.
- **Data on child victimisation remains uneven. National sources provide limited and inconsistent information on victims' age, ethnicity, disability and prior offending, particularly for theft, fraud, online harms and child sexual abuse and exploitation.** Data quality across England and Wales is uneven and rarely disaggregated per country, requiring cautious interpretation.
- Many children, particularly **care-experienced children, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, and those living in deprivation, feel ignored and unsupported**; research in England shows children's rights are poorly communicated, while police data from England and Wales highlights gaps in mental health and advocacy support and justice system delays that can re-traumatise children, with voluntary and youth justice services valued for more personalised support.
- **Evidence-informed interventions such as restorative justice, A&E navigator programmes, focused deterrence, trauma-specific therapies and IDVAs/CHISVAs show promise**, but evidence quality varies and further evaluation is needed. Interventions must also address the growing risk of online harms and digital exploitation.
- Youth Justice Services **must follow the Victims' Code** by keeping victims informed, signposting support, offering safe and voluntary restorative justice, ensuring trained staff, and providing personalised, well-recorded support, with this work now more closely assessed through strengthened HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection standards.

¹ Echoing the YEF, we also use the word 'gang' because it is one that many children recognise and use themselves, more than phrases such as *group-based criminality*. But we also recognise its limitations: the term oversimplifies a complex issue and can reinforce harmful stereotypes. To reflect these sensitivities, we use inverted commas when referring to 'gangs'. Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025: Exploitation and gangs.

1 Trends and key data

How many children are victims of crime? (England & Wales – not disaggregated)

Data is not published for those under the age of 16. The 2023 Crime Survey for England and Wales found that 16% of people aged 16 and over experienced a crime in the previous 12 months. People aged 16 to 24 were the most likely to be victims, at 19.5%, and the likelihood of being a victim generally decreased with age.²

○ **Data gaps:**

- There is an evidence gap in victims' data held by the YJB. Gaps include demographic characteristics of victims, including whether the victim was a child or adult, ethnicity, sex, and whether the victim had any prior offending history. There is a Victims Key Performance Indicator (KPI)³, however the focus is on whether they engaged in restorative justice and were followed up with by the YJS.

YEF Violence and Vulnerability Survey (England & Wales – not disaggregated)⁴

- **Victims of violence:** 18% of surveyed children said they had been a victim of violence in the past 12 months (down from 20% in 2024). Nearly three in ten victims (29%), equivalent to 5.2% of all teenage children in England and Wales, needed medical treatment from a doctor or at a hospital.⁵
- **Relationship violence:** Half of 13-17-year-olds in relationships said they had experienced at least one form of emotionally or physically abusive behaviour from their partner in the last 12 months. Monitoring and controlling behaviours were most common. Girls were more likely to experience abuse (41%) but rates were high for boys too (37%). 37% of girls and 35% of boys reported experiencing emotional abuse, while 17% of girls and 13% of boys reported physical or sexual abuse.⁶
- **Exploitation:** More than half of teenage children in 'gangs' had been criminally exploited. Combined, 7.5% of 13-17-year-olds were either criminally exploited, frequently missing from home or in a 'gang', equivalent to 280,000 teenage children.⁷

² Office for National Statistics (2024). Crime in England and Wales, victim characteristics: year ending March 2023. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/crimeinenglandandwalesvictimcharacteristics/yearendingmarch2023>

³ This KPI measures the number of victims of youth crime, and their level of engagement with Restorative Justice (RJ), as well as the support and information they receive about their case. It measures:

- **Victim Numbers** – The total number of victims and the number of children with identified victims.
- **Victim Contact and Support** – Whether victims were consulted before legal decisions, kept informed about case progress, and provided with additional support when requested.
- **Victim Engagement with RJ** – The proportion of victims who consented to be contacted and subsequently engaged in RJ opportunities.

⁴ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025. The YEF surveyed nearly 11,000 teenage children (aged 13-17) in England and Wales about their experiences of violence

⁵ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025: The scale of violence affecting children. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/CVV25_R1_ScaleofViolence.pdf

⁶ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025: Violence in relationships. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/CVV25_R2_Relationships.pdf

⁷ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025: Exploitation and gangs. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CVV25_R4_Exploitation.pdf

- **Victims of robbery and theft:** Robbery is a notable element of child victimisation, with 17% of children reporting experiencing force or threat for the purpose of threat (i.e., robbery).
- **Evidence gap:** Robust UK child-specific prevalence data is limited for victims of theft and robbery outside of data published by the YEF.

Victims of violence by a weapon/sharp object (England only)

In 2023, 500 children aged 10–17 were admitted to hospital for assault with a sharp object — 57% higher than in 2014.⁸

Victims of sexual offences (England & Wales – not disaggregated)

In 2023/24, over 7,000 Sexual Communication with a Child offences were recorded by UK police, an increase of 89% since 2017/18.⁹

- **Evidence gaps:** Ethnicity, disability and other protected characteristics are not consistently recorded for child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) victims, and in many police forces ethnicity is only recorded for a minority of cases. We have strong data on grooming and sexual communication offences, but less on financial crime targeting children online (fraud, identity theft).

Victims of fraud and financial crime (England & Wales – not disaggregated)

88% of 13–21-year-olds surveyed in 2023/24 had been targeted by fraud, and nearly a third (29%) had been a victim. Older children and young adults, and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), were particularly at risk.¹⁰

⁸ NHS England (2024). Hospital Admitted Patient Care Activity, 2023-24. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2023-24>

⁹ NSPCC (2024). Online grooming crimes against children increase by 89% in six years. Available from: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2024/online-grooming-crimes-increase/>

¹⁰ Crest Advisory (2025). Understanding and addressing fraud against children and young people: An action plan. Available from: https://ddb962fd-ceef-47ec-9eb9-5a301e40dc7a.usfiles.com/ugd/ddb962_907ee79fea684aa688fa1fb1cbb32c05.pdf

2 Contextual and protective factors

There are a range of contextual drivers and protective factors associated with children being victims.

Ethnicity

- **Children from certain ethnic groups – especially Black children– are disproportionately likely to be victims of violence.** Relative to their share of the population, Black children are 6 times as likely to be victims of murder or manslaughter.¹¹
 - **Evidence gaps:**
 - Home Office data on homicide in England and Wales uses broad ethnic appearance categories of 'Black', 'White', and 'Other'. This categorisation does not disaggregate additional ethnic groups such as Mixed, Asian or other sub-groups.
 - Limited and inconsistent ethnicity recording for child victims in police, health and safeguarding data.
 - There is virtually no quantitative national data on victimisation for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, despite their over-representation among children in contact with the youth justice system. This is a significant evidence gap.

Gender

- YEF survey data suggests boys are disproportionately affected by violence. In 2023/24 24% of boys reported being victims of violence compared with 16% of girls, including higher rates of physical assault, robbery, and weapons violence.¹²
- Research shows that girls are at increased risk of being victims of child sexual exploitation. **Girls account for 79% of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) victims.**^{31 32} Analysis of a representative sample identified that 4 in 5 (80%) of these involve self-generated indecent imagery (SGII).¹³
- An estimated 60,000 girls in England may be vulnerable to serious violence and exploitation, due to a range of complex and interrelated risk factors. These include personal experiences such as abuse and mental health issues, domestic instability, poor school attendance, and broader structural challenges like poverty, housing insecurity, and societal inequality.¹⁴

¹¹ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Racial disproportionality in violence affecting children and young people. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/YEF_Racial_Disproportionality_FINAL.pdf

¹² Youth Endowment Fund (2024). Children, violence and vulnerability 2024: Who is affected by violence? Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R1_OverallViolence.pdf

¹³ Vulnerability Knowledge & Practice Programme (2023). National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Crimes Report 2023.

¹⁴ Commission on Young Lives (2023). Keeping Girls and Young Women Safe: Protecting and supporting the girls and young women at risk of exploitation, violence, gangs and harm. Available from: <https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Keeping-Girls-And-Young-Women-Safe-MMU-and-COYL-report-.pdf>

- **Evidence gaps:**

- There is no published headline estimate for Wales or boys. Available data on child exploitation is fragmented and there are significant levels of under-reporting.
- We know much more about victims of violence due to YEF survey than we do other offence types.

Place

- **The risk of violence changes depending on where children spend time and where they live.** YEF survey data suggests boys are more likely to experience violence in public spaces (16% of boys compared to 7% of girls), boys (13%) and girls (16%) face similar levels of violence in their homes.¹⁵
- Survey data from the YEF shows children in London report the highest rates of victimisation (24%), compared with Yorkshire and the Humber with the lowest (12%). London's highly urbanised landscape may contribute to elevated levels of victimisation, as violence rates in urban areas were notably higher than in rural areas (21% compared to 18%). However, looking exclusively at cities within regions, children in Wales report the highest levels of victimisation (25%), followed by London (24%).¹⁶

Family and care

- **Children who are already supported by children's social care face much higher levels of repeated violence.** The same YEF survey shows half of children who had been supported by a social worker in the past 12 months reported that they had been a victim of violence, with just over one-fifth reporting being a victim at least 5 times.¹⁷

Education

- **Children who are excluded from mainstream education or have additional needs are at much greater risk of violence.** Children with SEND are significantly more likely to have been victims of violence than children without SEND (36% compared to 13%). 47% of children in pupil referral units report being victims of violence, and children who have been suspended or excluded also report higher victimisation (56% and 71%).¹⁸

Identity and discrimination

- Of victims of violence, 41% (8% of all 13-17-year-olds) say they were victimised due to discrimination (e.g., because of their religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or disability). This was particularly high for children of mixed heritage (51%) and children with special educational needs (54%).¹⁹

Substance misuse

Children who use drugs or live in environments where substance use is present are more likely to experience violence, partly because drug use is linked with other difficult circumstances and lack of protective support. 57% of children who had used any drug in the

¹⁵ Youth Endowment Fund (2024). Children, violence and vulnerability 2024 How do boys and girls experience violence? Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R3_Gender.pdf

¹⁶ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025: The scale of violence affecting children. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/CVV25_R1_ScaleofViolence.pdf

¹⁷ Youth Endowment Fund (2024). Children, violence and vulnerability 2024: Who is affected by violence? Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R1_OverallViolence.pdf

past 12 months reported being a victim of violence, compared to 14% of children who had not used any drug. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Online context

- **Online spaces are increasingly being used to target vulnerable children, especially those with limited support or supervision offline.** Online gaming platforms, including those linked to the metaverse, have become spaces where groomers exploit largely unmoderated chat functions to target children.
- Professionals believe that a child's vulnerability to online harms is shaped by their broader circumstances, with increased vulnerability among those who lack offline social support from friends and family, have unsupervised access to personal devices, experience bullying or discrimination, live with SEND or mental health difficulties, or are very young and less equipped to navigate online spaces safely.¹⁸

Poly-victimisation

- **Some children experience repeated and overlapping forms of harm rather than a single incident**, often referred to as poly-victimisation.
- One study that followed children over time, using data from the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, found that having previously committed a criminal offence, financial difficulties, living in an urban area with a population over 10,000, and previous parental involvement with the police were found to be the strongest predictors of poly-victimisation.¹⁹
- Demographic characteristics such as age (being younger), gender (being a boy), and living in an area of deprivation were also found to be significant predictors of poly-victimisation.

¹⁸ Gill, V., Monk, L., & Day, L. (2022). Qualitative research project to investigate the impact of online harms on children. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1167838/Online_Harms_Study_Final_report_updated_51222_updated_290623.pdf

¹⁹ Tura, F., Nomikos, E., & Betts, L.R. (2022). Prevalence and predictors of poly-victimization of adolescents in England and Wales. *Journal of interpersonal violence*. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/08862605221118967>

3 Pathways between victimisation and offending

Overlap

- Traditionally people tend to make a conceptual distinction between 'offender' and 'victim' and the characteristics of both. **This tends to be at odds with the experience of many children in the youth justice system who are likely to be victims of crime, as well as abuse and neglect.** In response to this there is a need for a more sophisticated systems approach which recognises the victim-perpetrator paradigm and thus seeks to address offending behaviour whilst also seeking to acknowledge and meet the needs that a child may also have as a result of their victimisation.
- Survey data from the YEF suggests 39% of victims had carried out violence, while more than half of perpetrators (53%) had also been victims. The overlap was even greater in serious cases: almost half (49%) of victims who needed medical treatment said they had also perpetrated violence, while over three-quarters (77%) of perpetrators whose actions caused injury had themselves been victims.²⁰
 - **Evidence gaps:**
 - We do not fully understand how victimisation and perpetration interact, as methodological challenges make it unclear which comes first.
 - Unlike murder/manslaughter, there is **no routine national breakdown** of who harms whom in **non-fatal** knife offences.
 - The extent of overlap for offences such as burglary, fraud, and financial crime remains largely an **evidence gap**.

Entry points

- **Exposure to domestic abuse has been associated with serious youth violence and 'gang' involvement.** Research has found 37% of children involved with serious youth violence, and 42% of children involved in 'gangs' respectively have experienced domestic abuse, highlighting how early harms can shape pathways into offending behaviour and exploitation.^{21 22}
 - **Evidence gap:** The lack of a prevalence survey and limited official statistics in England and Wales creates a gap in estimating the number of children affected by domestic abuse.

Responses to victimisation

- **Children who have been harmed may adopt coping or safety strategies that may increase their likelihood of offending.** There is now robust evidence that fear is a

²⁰ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Children, violence and vulnerability 2025: The scale of violence affecting children. Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/CVV25_R1_ScaleofViolence.pdf

²¹ Children's Commissioner for England (2019). Keeping kids safe: Improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation. Available from: <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2019/02/CCO-Gangs.pdf>

²² Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (2019). Vulnerable Adolescents Thematic Review. Available from: www.croydonlcsb.org.uk/sites/default/files/10261667/2023-07/vulnerable-adults-thematic-review-var60_0.pdf

central driver of knife possession.²³ Recent survey data also suggests that feeling unsafe is strongly associated with weapon possession among 13–17-year-olds. 79% of teenage children who had carried a weapon in the past year had been a victim of violence, making them five times more likely to have been a victim than those not carrying weapons. They were 14 times more likely to have been a victim of repeated incidents of violence, suggesting that cycles of violence may drive some children to arm themselves for defence, retaliation or other reasons.²⁴

- **Boys' decisions to engage in knife-related crime are based on their analysis of risk and *perceptions* of risk.** These perceptions of risk are shaped and further influenced by instances of previous victimisation as a result of knife-related crime.¹²
- **Joining peer groups or 'gangs' can similarly be motivated by a need for protection and belonging.** HM Inspectorate of Probation²⁵ found that children often view 'gangs' as meeting fundamental needs for status, friendship, and *safety* in environments where support from family or services is absent
 - **Evidence gap:** There is a lack of research into girls who engage in knife possession or weapon carrying in response to fear or previous victimisation. A number of areas remain unexplored including girls as "holders" of knives, their role within male-dominated group dynamics and in the "mediation" of violence, and whether there are any connections between girls who carry or hold knives for males and sexual violence victimisation against them.

Escalation and desistance

- **Without support, these pathways can escalate into chronic cycles of violence, exploitation, and criminalisation.** A 2023 DfE–YEF review of support systems highlights that increases in poor or delayed engagement with schools, social care, or YJSs can exacerbate children's unmet needs and vulnerabilities, creating additional barriers to their positive development and wellbeing, while positive relationships can protect against escalation.²⁶

Transitions

- **Recognition and support often fall away after age 18, leaving young adults exposed to ongoing risks without protection.** This cohort is susceptible to higher thresholds for appropriate support, increasingly severe criminal justice consequences, prosecution, and sentences, despite their own victimisation.²⁷

²³ Figueira, A., Alleyne, E., & Wood, J. (2024). Fear and masculinity as motivational narratives for knife-related crime: a systematic review of the literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39066634/>

²⁴ Youth Endowment Fund (2024). Children, violence and vulnerability 2024: Who is affected by violence? Available from: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R1_OverallViolence.pdf

²⁵ HMIP (2024). Youth justice – specific sub-groups. Available from: <https://hmipprobation.justiceinspectories.gov.uk/our-research/evidence-base-youth-justice/specific-sub-groups/children-involved-in-urban-street-gangs/>

²⁶ Department for Education & Youth Endowment Fund (2023). The role of systems of support in serious youth violence: evidence and gaps. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/649ac6ecf90109000c818883/The_role_of_systems_of_support_in_serious_youth_violence_-_evidence_and_gaps_June_2023.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

²⁷ Alliance for Youth Justice (2025). From exploited to exploiter? Preventing the unjust criminalisation of victims of child criminal exploitation in the transition to adulthood. Available from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f75bfbfb67fc5ab41154d6/t/68c1707d3795c66a6dda43ee/1757507709517/FINAL+AYJ-Exploited-to-Exploiter-CCE-Transition-to-Adulthood-Report+10.09.25.pdf>

Child criminal exploitation (CCE)

- Research undertaken with children and youth justice practitioners in England shows **current CCE victim identification processes have been argued to not meaningfully reverse the ‘offenderisation’²⁸ of children** because at present, these processes often further entrench children within the youth justice system.²⁹ This is based on delays to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)³⁰ process, the use of criminalisation as a safeguarding tool, and the difficulties children experience in conforming to the narrow standards of ‘victimhood’.
- **Children experiencing less visible or less extreme forms of exploitation—such as socioeconomic pressure, coercion, or trauma—are often excluded from being labelled as CCE victims**, as practitioners struggle to define and apply thresholds for exploitation.²³ This exclusionary practice conflicts with the Child First evidence base by overlooking the complex realities of many children’s lives and failing to address their unmet needs.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that NRM pilots are helping to improve the experiences of children who are victims of CCE.³¹

²⁸ The process by which children affected by CCE are positioned and treated as offenders rather than victims.

²⁹ Marshall, H. (2023). Victims first? Examining the place of ‘child criminal exploitation’ within ‘child first’ youth justice. *Children & Society*. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/chso.12696?msockid=082570c63810688d1d1f65223936699d>

³⁰ The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK’s framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, including children who have been exploited.

³¹ Home Office (2024). An evaluation of the pilot to devolve decision-making for child victims of modern slavery. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-pilot-to-devolve-decision-making-for-child-victims-of-modern-slavery/an-evaluation-of-the-pilot-to-devolve-decision-making-for-child-victims-of-modern-slavery>

4 Lived experiences of children as victims

Children's experiences of crime and harm are shaped by how they see themselves, how adults and systems respond, and wider inequalities such as poverty, racism, disability and gender. The evidence base is still relatively small compared with adults and often focuses on domestic abuse, sexual abuse and serious youth violence rather than the full range of offences.

How children understand harm and victimhood

- **Many children do not see themselves as “victims” and do not always recognise what has happened to them as a crime.** Children often describe harm on a spectrum, where bullying, fights, harassment and online abuse are treated as part of everyday life, and only the most serious incidents are seen as crime.³²
- **Children report adapting their behaviour to stay safe, for example avoiding particular streets, parks or bus routes, changing how they travel, or limiting online activity.** ONS and YEF survey data show that a large proportion of children have seen or heard about violence between peers, and many feel unsafe travelling alone after dark or around people they believe are in ‘gangs’.³³
- **Care-experienced children, those in poverty, and minority ethnic children felt especially invisible to public services.** Children also expressed a need for better education on harm and victimhood, especially within schools.²⁶

Experiences of services, rights and communication

- Views of services are mixed. Research among children in Wales found statutory agencies such as the police, courts and children's social care are often described as procedural, impersonal or dismissive. Children report not being believed, feeling blamed and having little say over decisions. By contrast, youth justice services, voluntary organisations and young victim services are valued for offering consistent relationships, practical help and emotional support.³⁴
- **Although the Victims' Code sets out specific entitlements for children, many say they have never been told about their rights.** Analysis by the Children's Commissioner of police interviews and case studies found that information and explanations were often incomplete or unclear, that communication tended to be directed at parents rather than at children themselves, and that engagement with children was sometimes unsuitable, with inappropriate, harm-minimising, and victim-blaming language being present in interview transcripts.³⁵
- Recent analysis of Crime Survey for England and Wales on “sources of support and perceptions of safety” shows that most 10- to 15-year-olds would turn first to parents or carers, then to friends, if they felt unsafe, and only a minority would approach the police or

³² Haines, K. & Charles, A. (2019). Responding to Harm: The Challenge of Children's Perspectives. *Journal of victimology and victim justice*. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2516606918819282>

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³⁴ Haines, K. & Charles, A. (2019). Responding to Harm: The Challenge of Children's Perspectives. *Journal of victimology and victim justice*. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2516606918819282>

³⁵ Children's Commissioner (2024). Children's experiences as victims of crime. Available from: https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2024/06/Childrens-experiences-as-victims-of-crime_final.pdf

other formal services. Around 3.5% report having no trusted adult in their life. This helps explain why many harms are never reported.³⁶

- **Delays in the criminal justice process are a major source of distress.** Recent work by the Victims' Commissioner and specialist young victims' services highlights that long investigations and repeated court adjournments are linked to anxiety, worsening mental health, disruption to education and withdrawal from proceedings.^{37 38}

Exploitation, criminalisation and gender

- **For children involved in county lines, child criminal exploitation, gangs or serious youth violence, the distinction between “victim” and “offender” is often blurred.** Whether a child is treated as a victim can depend on their ability to disclose exploitation and how closely they fit professionals' expectations of an “ideal victim”.³⁹
- Interviews with YJS practitioners in England found that girls affected by child sexual exploitation were identified and supported more quickly, often through multi-agency teams. Boys were overlooked because of stereotypes around masculinity, leading to weaker responses.⁴⁰

Barriers in domestic abuse cases

- Victim Support research (2021) with child victims and advocates highlighted barriers to engaging with services for domestic abuse. These included children's lack of awareness of available support, parents underestimating the impact on children, stigma around advocacy, and fears that disclosure could trigger family separation by children's social care.⁴¹

What children say they need from support

Across studies, children are broadly consistent about what they want from support after victimisation^{41 42}:

- They want trusted, consistent adults who listen, believe them and keep their promises, rather than seeing many professionals briefly.
- They want clear, honest, age-appropriate information about what is happening, what choices they have and what to expect from the justice system.

³⁶ ONS (2025). Sources of support and perceptions of safety among children in England and Wales: year ending March 2024. Available from: [Sources of support and perceptions of safety among children in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/victimsandabuse/articles/sourcesofsupportandsafetyamongchildreninenglandandwales/2024-03-01)

³⁷ SAFE! (2023). Living in limbo: The impact of delays in the criminal justice system on young victims of crime. Available from: <https://safesupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Living-in-limbo.pdf>

³⁸ Victims Commissioner (2025). Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](https://www.victimscommissioner.gov.uk/justice-delayed-the-impact-of-the-crown-court-backlog-on-victims-victim-services-and-the-criminal-justice-system/)

³⁹ Marshall, H. (2024). Child criminal exploitation and the interactional emergence of victim status. *The British Journal of Criminology*. Available from: <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/64/5/1011/7612775>

⁴⁰ Hill, L. & Diaz, C. (2021). An exploration of how gender stereotypes influence how practitioners identify and respond to victims (or those at risk) of child sexual exploitation. *Child & family social work*. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cfs.12845>

⁴¹ Victim Support (2021). Restoring trust: Children witnessing domestic abuse: learnings for support services. Available from: https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Restoring_Trust_external-report.pdf

⁴² Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025). Tell Nicole “our feelings matter”. Available from: https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/dac_bcyp_tell-nicole_report_FINAL-DIGITAL-2.pdf

- They value practical help with safety, school, family relationships and online risks, alongside emotional and therapeutic support.
- They want to be able to access help without being forced into a particular criminal justice outcome, and to return to support if they disengage or circumstances change.

Support gaps

At system level, evidence points to uneven access to specialist advocacy and therapeutic services for children, including child-specific domestic and sexual violence advocates, with provision highly variable by area. Police data from forces in England and Wales (2022) showed major gaps:

- **Advocacy:** At least 92% of child victims did not receive Independent Sexual Violence Advisor/Independent Domestic Violence Advisor support.⁴³
- **Mental health:** Just 216 referrals were made to CAMHS for over 36,000 child victims of serious violence, sexual violence or domestic abuse.⁴³
- **Schools:** Teachers and school staff sometimes punished behaviour linked to trauma (such as non-attendance), rather than recognising it as a response to victimisation.⁴³

⁴³ Children's Commissioner (2024). Children's experiences as victims of crime. Available from: https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2024/06/Childrens-experiences-as-victims-of-crime_final.pdf

5 Interventions - what works to support victims?

The interventions referenced below are mostly drawn from the [YEF Toolkit](#). It is important to note that the primary outcome the toolkit focusses on is reductions in violence, rather than how these interventions can improve positive outcomes for victims. However, these interventions have been included because they can indirectly contribute to improving outcomes for victims and creating safer environments.

Restorative Justice

- Restorative Justice⁴⁴ is a process which supports the victim of a crime and the person responsible to communicate, repair harm, and find a positive way forward. It focuses on making the person responsible aware of the harm they caused and helps them to make reparations. Restorative justice can take place at any stage of the criminal justice process including after conviction or before a case comes to court, as part of a diversionary process.

On average, restorative justice is likely to have a **high impact on preventing violence**. Evidence suggests that restorative justice may **reduce violence by 13%**.⁴⁴

- **Evidence limitation:** The confidence in this estimate is low, as the estimate is based on only four studies. These studies are of moderate quality, and all four were conducted in the USA.
- **Evidence gap:** The effectiveness of this intervention is based on the perpetrators' likelihood of reoffending and does not tell us about the impact of restorative justice on victims themselves.

A&E Navigator Programmes

- A&E Navigator Programmes⁴⁵ are an intervention which places a case worker (known as a 'navigator') in hospital emergency rooms to support children and young people who have been victims of a violent crime.
 - Navigators' roles are to develop trusting relationships with children who have been victims of a violent crime, with engagement consisting of steps such as a holistic needs assessment of victim's needs, offers of support, tailored service plans linking to services (e.g., counselling, family support, mentoring, conflict resolution, substance misuse support), and follow ups with the victim and their family after discharge.
 - Recognises that being a victim of a violent crime is strongly associated with future involvement in violence, so the support provided intends to protect victims from becoming involved in this cycle.

⁴⁴ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Restorative Justice. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/restorative-justice/>

⁴⁵ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). A and E navigators. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/ae-navigators/>

Available evidence suggests that A&E navigators could have a **high impact on preventing further violence**. For victims' outcomes to be improved, effective implementation is fundamental, including the formation of strong and trusting relationships with children, combining immediate intervention with continued support after discharge, and visibility and awareness of A&E navigators in hospitals.⁴⁵

- **Evidence limitation:** This estimate is based on limited evidence. There are only two studies (one of moderate quality and one of low quality, both in which were conducted in the United States of America).
- **Evidence gap:** More UK-based evaluations are required to increase the quality of the evidence. The YEF is in the process of setting up several A&E navigator evaluations.⁴⁶

Focused deterrence

- Focused deterrence⁴⁷ attempts to identify those most at risk of involvement in violence and support them to desist, recognising that serious violence is often associated with previous experience of victimisation and trauma related to violence.
 - Focused deterrence combines several core strategies: support for those involved in violence, community engagement and relationship building (including engagement with victims' families), and deterrence which clearly communicates the consequences of violence.

Available evidence suggests that focused deterrence could have a **high impact, reducing violent crime by 33%**. The confidence in this estimate is high, based on a high-quality review of studies. 22 out of 24 studies found positive impacts for this intervention.⁴⁷

Practice example: Wiltshire YJS launched a pilot on a focused deterrence model. The offer is a county-wide, trauma-informed intervention that identifies children vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and exploitation and provides intensive, multi-agency support. It includes mentoring, wellbeing coaching, education, and therapeutic activities that aim to disrupt offending behaviour and promote positive outcomes. This pilot found that the outcomes of children vulnerable to being both victims and perpetrators can be significantly improved by this model, which was both child-centred and recognised the overlap between victimisation and offending behaviour.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Youth Endowment Fund to support grassroots organisations to take part in research to find out what works to keep children safe from violence. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/youth-endowment-fund-to-support-grassroots-organisations-to-take-part-in-research-to-find-out-what-works-to-keep-children-safe-from-violence/>

⁴⁷ YEF (2025). Focused deterrence. Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/focused-deterrence/>

⁴⁸ Murray, J. (2025). Focused deterrence end of year report. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Wiltshire-YJS-Focused-Deterrence-end-of-year-report-2024-25.pdf>

Trauma-specific therapies

- Trauma-specific therapies⁴⁹ typically involve forms of psychological therapy that aim to support victims to recover from trauma. This intervention can be used with victims who both have and have not been in contact with the criminal justice system.

Available evidence suggests that trauma-specific therapies can support victims to cope with trauma and adverse childhood experiences. It is estimated that this intervention is likely to have a **high impact on reducing violent crime (45%) for children who are likely to come in contact with the criminal justice system**, disrupting the link between trauma and involvement in crime and violence.⁴⁹

- **Evidence limitation:** The confidence in this estimate is based on 4 studies with significant variation in the impacts they found. Some studies suggested that the impact was higher, and others suggested it was lower. Studies have generally used very small sample sizes, typically between 21 and 30 children. Most studies were conducted in the USA and the review didn't find any studies from the UK or Ireland.
- **Evidence gap:** There is a broader evidence gap on other types of victim support programmes that services deliver, including prevalence of different programmes and which of these programmes are effective.

Specialist advocacy: Independent Sexual Violence Advisors and Children & Young Person's Independent Sexual Violence Advisors

- An Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) provides independent, specialist, victim-centred emotional and practical support to individuals affected by sexual violence or abuse. Some ISVAs have specialist expertise to support victims with specific needs, such as Children & Young Person's Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (CHISVAs).⁵⁰
- There is now a clearer policy and evidence context for ISVAs, including:
 - Home Office and MoJ guidance on ISVAs issued under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, which includes specific recognition of Children and Young Persons ISVAs (CHISVAs). and MoJ guidance on ISVAs issued under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, which includes specific recognition of Children and Young Persons ISVAs (CHISVAs).⁵⁰

Earlier evaluation and process research showing ISVAs can improve emotional support and navigation of the justice process for victims of sexual violence, including children and young people.⁵¹

- **Evidence gap:** More recent evaluations are required, particularly on CHISVAs, to assess their impact and effectiveness in supporting child victims of sexual violence.

⁴⁹ Youth Endowment Fund (2025). Trauma-specific therapies, Available from: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/trauma-specific-therapies/>

⁵⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Independent Sexual Violence Adviser Statutory Guidance. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-sexual-violence-adviser-statutory-guidance>

⁵¹ Robinson, A.L. (2009). Independent sexual violence advisors: a multisite process evaluation funded by the Home Office. Available from: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/24241/>

6 The role of YJSs in supporting victims

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, known as the “Victim’s Code” outlines the services that should be available to victims of crime by various service providers in England and Wales along with the minimum standards that are expected.⁵² **We are aware that an updated Victims’ Code is forthcoming. This pack will be revised accordingly once the updated information has been released.**

YJSs have a statutory duty to comply with the code of practice for victims of crime. Under the Code for Victims YJSs are listed as an organisation that are required to contact victims; to keep victims informed; and to signpost to victims’ services. Case Management Guidance (CMG) is the formal guidance that the YJB gives to practitioners, managers, partners and leaders on how to work with children in the justice system based on the National Standards.⁵³

- The CMG explains that under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, YJSs are referred to as service providers. Within the Code victims, whether an adult or child are entitled to information about the progress of the child’s case upon request and information on appropriate victim services if a request for additional support is made. YJSs are expected to offer the victims the opportunity to participate in voluntary Restorative Justice activities. The decision to invite the victim to take part in RJ should consider a number of things including the feelings and concerns of the victim and any sensitivities in the case to ensure that the process is safe. The code states that “Restorative Justice is voluntary for all parties and it must be agreed by all involved, including facilitators, that it is safe and appropriate to proceed”². Within the guidance it also states that expectations of what is and is not feasible, realistic and safe. There is a requirement for all YJS staff who work with victims to be appropriately trained and must receive appropriate training (including facilitating RJ processes, particularly mediation and conferencing) and to be familiar with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. Based on CMG, YJSs should:
 - **Follow the Victims’ Code:** Ensure all actions comply with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.
 - **Offer restorative justice:** Give victims the choice to participate in restorative processes (e.g., meetings, letters, reparation).
 - **Victim-led approach:** Let victims decide their level of involvement and respect their wishes and provide updates on the child’s progress and outcomes if the victim wants them.
 - **Safeguard all parties:** Assess and manage risks before any victim contact or restorative work.
 - **Train staff:** Ensure staff working with victims are trained in restorative justice and victim support.
 - **Record and report:** Keep clear records of victim contact and report on victim services in youth justice plans.

⁵² Ministry of Justice (2020). Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974376/victims-code-2020.pdf

⁵³ Youth Justice Board (2022). Case Management Guidance. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/case-management-guidance>

- **Personalise support:** Tailor information and support to each victim's needs and preferences.
- HMI Probation (HMIP) have updated their inspection framework for youth justice services and this now includes a new victims standard. The new standard seeks to have a stronger focus on victims within inspections and will consider the service victims are receiving – many of whom are children. The focus on services to victims and the criteria considers whether 'organisational arrangements and activity drive a high-quality, individualised and responsive service for victims. It also considers organisational arrangements and activity such as whether there is an active and engaged management board driving victim work, effective information sharing arrangements and skilled and supported staff with manageable workloads.

7 Recent practice examples

The YJB's Developing Practice Fora has identified examples of practice across YJSs around how to support victims:

Victim awareness and education for children

- **Cardiff YJS** have produced a workbook to help children understand the effects that offending can have on victims.⁵⁴
- **Croydon YJS** is preparing to implement an intervention session for all children designed to help them explore the impact of their experiences of victimisation.

Restorative justice

- **Southwark YJS** have collaborated with the Restorative Justice Council and Roadworks Media on a film which explores the process and impact of using restorative justice after a child commits a violent assault on a police officer.⁵⁵

Victim response models

- **Darlington YJS** endeavour to deliver a flexible and bespoke response to all victims of crime in the area. Darlington's Victim Liaison Officers contact all victims to offer tailored support options, conducting impact and needs assessments to provide appropriate help such as emotional support, restorative approaches, case updates, referrals, impact statements, or being a listening ear.⁵⁶

Victim assessment and audit tools

- **Cheshire YJS** has developed a victim audit tool to ensure practice supports the HMIP framework expectations for victims of crime and to inform development plans.⁵⁷
- **Salford YJS** have produced a victim safety assessment and accompanying guidance to be used to produce individualised plans for victims of crime and ensure appropriate support.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Cardiff Youth Justice Service (2025). Victim Awareness Workbook – Cardiff Youth Justice Service (June 2025). Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/victim-awareness-workbook-cardiff-youth-justice-service-june-2025/>

⁵⁵ Restorative Justice Council (2025). Facing the Impact: a restorative justice film from Southwark Youth Justice Service and the Restorative Justice Council. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/facing-the-impact-a-restorative-justice-film-from-southwark-youth-justice-service-and-the-restorative-justice-council/>

⁵⁶ Darlington Youth Justice Service (2025). Darlington young people's engagement & justice service's victim support. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/darlington-young-peoples-engagement-justice-services-victim-support/>

⁵⁷ Cheshire Youth Justice Service (2025). Cheshire Youth Justice Service's victim audit tool. Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/cheshire-youth-justice-services-victim-audit-tool/>

⁵⁸ Salford Youth Justice Service (2025). Victim Safety Assessment – Salford Youth Justice Service (May 2025). Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/silence-the-violence-a-film-on-knife-crime-2/>

Victim services and support

- **Avon and Somerset** have a Young Victims Service (YVS) which provides help and support to young people (aged five to 18) who have been victims of crime, anti-social behaviour or domestic abuse.⁵⁹
- **Surrey YJS** are responsible for the delivery of the *Side by Side* programme which aims to support children who have been victims of crime.⁶⁰

Ongoing activity to support victims

Who	What
YJB	Currently in the process of commissioning a piece of external research on CCE to help the YJB better understand how children who are victims of CCE are identified, supported and safeguarded by YJSs in England and Wales.
Restorative Justice for All	Monitors YJSs' performance, this includes against 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the MoJ, including KPI 10, which tracks the proportion of victims engaged in restorative justice. This data will be available in December 2025.
Northumbria University	Running a longitudinal pilot to establish what is effective to support victims across YJSs. ⁶¹ This work will help identify what works in supporting victims across YJSs, ensuring that interventions are evidence-based.
Foundations	Established the Safer Children Network —a regional partnership of academics and practitioners focused on the support of children impacted by violence, harm and exploitation.
	The What Works Centre for Children & Families “Foundations” ⁶² has created a 5-year road map called <i>Researching Effective Approaches for Children</i> to establish what works to prevent domestic abuse and support child victims.

⁵⁹ Young Victims Service (2025). Young victims service. Available from: <https://youngvictims.org.uk/>

⁶⁰ Surrey Youth Justice Service (2025). Side by Side programme – Surrey Youth Justice Service (March 2025). Available from: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/surrey-yjs-side-by-side-programme/>

⁶¹ Awareness of this pilot is based on soft intelligence provided by the Operations directorate.

⁶² What Works Centre for Children & Families (2024). Researching effective approaches for children: REACH. Available from: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/researching-effective-approaches-for-children-foundations-reach-plan.pdf>

About this evidence pack

Author(s)

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Type of urgent review

Short turnaround (4 weeks)

External engagement

A targeted call out was made to the YJB's Academic Liaison Network to academics who have indicated a specialism in victims. This call out requested for any relevant evidence or research they are undertaking to be provided to the Evidence and Insights lead to form part of this evidence review.

Search methodology

Exclusion criteria: Population and policy wide interventions (e.g., evaluation of policy), adult only population studies, essay or opinion pieces, articles behind a pay wall.

Inclusion criteria: Studies in English, published in the last 5 years unless level of relevance showed otherwise, individual studies and grey literature were included but systematic reviews and meta-analysis were prioritised.

Databases searched: PubMed, Google Scholar, EBSCO

Other websites: GOV.UK, YEF Toolkit, Resource Hub

Papers identified by topic experts have also been included and reference lists of relevant papers have been screened. This included a call for papers and examples of practice via the Girls Practitioner group, and Operational Colleagues.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, no critical appraisal has been carried out. This means that whilst we can provide a synthesis of the evidence, we cannot provide an estimate on how strong or robust it is. However, to mitigate this, systematic reviews that have conducted a critical appraisal process have been prioritised in our search and reporting. Thus, this briefing is based on a narrative review of available evidence and includes a wide variety of evidence to provide an overall summary. This narrative review was designed to be an informative (rather than all-encompassing) review of recent data and evidence about victims within the youth justice system in England and Wales, guided by the themes set out by the YJB's Strategic Priorities.