



What works

Preventing children and young people from becoming involved in violence

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An introduction to the Youth Endowment Fund and how to work with us

About us

The Youth Endowment Fund is a charity with a £200m endowment and a mission that matters. We're here to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

About this briefing

The Youth Endowment Fund was founded in 2019. We're at the start of a ten-year journey. We've developed this briefing as a first step to help you lead local efforts to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence.

We've summarised what we already know about different programmes and approaches and how effective they are at reducing youth violence. We hope it's a useful way to start thinking about what might work.

It's the first of many evidence resources we'll be creating. In 2021, we'll also launch the first version of our Toolkit. This'll be an easy to access, online resource that'll explain more about what we know. It'll summarise lots of existing evidence about different approaches, to support you when you're making decisions about your local area.

Work with us

While the existing evidence is useful, there's also a lot more we need to know about what works. That's why we'll be funding and evaluating projects in England and Wales, to understand whether promising approaches work or not. And we'll be working with young people's services and young people themselves, to get a deep understanding of their lives.

But we know that our effort to understand what works will only be useful if it's being put into practice. That's why we want to work with you. We want to build networks across the youth sector, education, children's services, the police, community organisations and more. We'll support you to share your knowledge with others. And we'll build a movement of people committed to delivering the approaches that work.

We're confident that, with your help, we can reduce the number of young people whose lives are devastated by involvement in violent crime.

To find out more about our work and how you can get involved, email us at hello@youthendowmentfund.org.uk



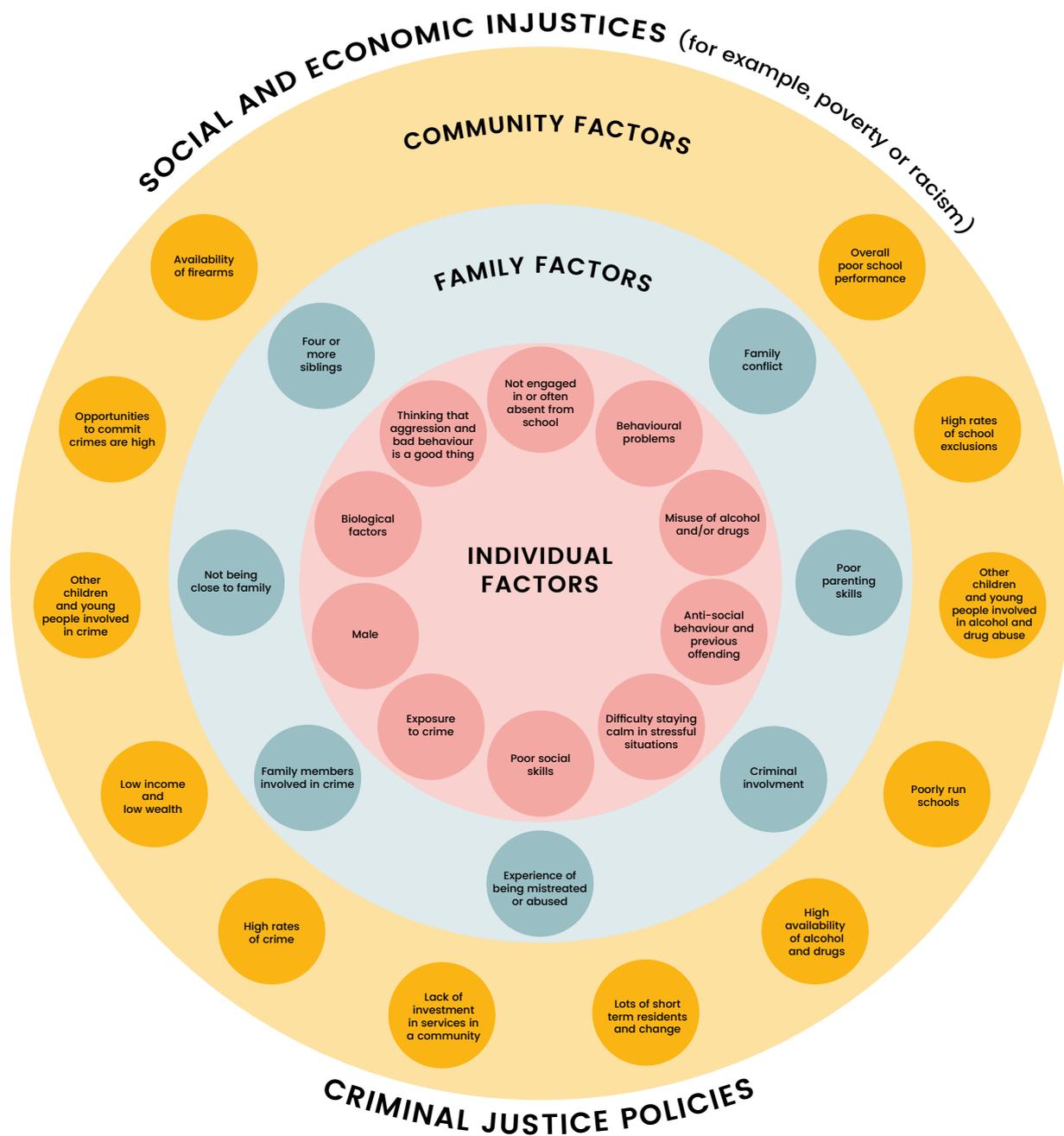
What we know about children and young people at risk of becoming involved in crime

What puts children and young people at risk of involvement in crime?

What we know: There are a lot of things in a child or young person's life that might mean they're more likely to become involved in crime. It could be family conflict, going to a school where there's a high rate of absence or lots of instability in their local community. These things are often called risk factors.

We know that a small number of children are involved in the majority of youth crime and violence. And these children, especially those who're most likely to continue their involvement in crime as adults, often have a lot of risk factors present in their lives.

Risk factors are all interconnected, working together to influence a young person's likelihood of becoming involved in crime. And different factors will have different effects on different children at different times in their lives.



Risk factors

Individual risk factors include:

exposure to crime, behavioural problems, low commitment to school

Family risk factors include:

having four or more siblings, experience of being mistreated, family conflict

Community or school risk factors include:

overall school performance, high rates of school exclusions, high availability of alcohol and drugs

Society risk factors include:

wider social and economic injustices, including discrimination and institutional bias

Disproportionality in youth justice

Statistics show us that marginalised groups of young people are significantly overrepresented in the youth justice system.

This includes:

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children and young people

Children with special educational needs

Looked-after children

Children receiving Free School Meals

It's important that we understand the causes of this disproportionality, including the role of institutional bias and discrimination.

Using risk factors: While the causes of crime are complex, risk factors help us to understand how, where and when to intervene. For example, you might offer family-based support where there's been a breakdown in relationships or specialist drug and alcohol programmes in areas where children and young people are struggling with substance abuse.

Limits of using risk factors: While risk factors can help us to develop targeted programmes or policies, they can't be used to automatically identify specific children or young people who need support. Having a lot of risk factors in their life doesn't mean a child will become involved in crime. And likewise, there will be children and young people who don't have any risk factors but do offend.

So in an individual case, evidence about risk factors isn't a substitute for assessment by a skilled practitioner. Relying too heavily on risk factors research (for example, by using risk factor checklists) could lead to a child or young person being wrongly assumed to be in need of support. And it could leave others without the services they need.

What protects children and young people from involvement in crime?

What we know: There are a lot of things in a child or young person's life that might mean they're less likely to become involved in crime. It could be a stable family, being a high academic achiever or living in a community where crime is low. These things are often called protective factors.

Protective factors

Individual protective factors include:

wanting to help others, a belief in moral order, having a sense of confidence in your ability, being resilient

Family protective factors include:

good family management, stable family structure, a close relationship with at least one parent

Community or school protective factors include:

a strong sense of local community, high academic achievement, low crime rates in

What we need to find out: There's a lot less research on protective factors than on risk factors. And we don't know much about the way that risk factors and protective factors work together to influence a child's life. Different protective factors will have different effects on different children and young people at different times in their lives.

Using protective factors: Protective factors can help us to develop targeted programmes or policies, because they help us to understand which young people are most at risk of becoming involved in crime and violence.

Limits of using protective factors: Protective factors can't be used to automatically identify the specific children who might be less at risk. There might be children who have lots of protective factors in their life, but still go on to become involved in crime. So in an individual case, evidence about protective factors isn't a substitute for assessment by a skilled practitioner. Relying on protective factors too heavily could lead to some children and young people missing out on the support that they need.



Which approaches work to prevent children and young people becoming involved in crime?

What works?

We know that there's reliable evidence showing that a range of approaches can help to reduce youth crime and violence and we've included some examples in the boxes below.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Whole-family interventions:

These approaches work with children and parents, helping families to develop skills that strengthen their relationships. They include interventions such as home visiting and family therapy.

Parenting training:

These approaches focus just on parents, teaching them how to strengthen their family relationships.

Therapeutic Foster Care:

These approaches are where children who can't live at home are placed in a foster home. The foster parents are trained to help the child learn social and emotional skills.

SUPPORTING BETTER BEHAVIOURS

Developing social and emotional skills:

These approaches develop young people's abilities to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. And we know that these approaches are most effective when they're delivered in schools, rather than other settings. They also work best when they use cognitive behavioural therapy (there's more information below).

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT):

These approaches use cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which is a type of talking therapy that helps people to change the way they think or behave. CBT is often used as part of family interventions, as well as with children and young people individually. And we know that when CBT is focused on anger management and problem solving in relationships, it can help people who've been involved in crime to stop.

Restorative Justice Conferencing:

These approaches are about repairing the harm caused by crime, by helping people who've committed offences accept the consequences of their actions. At these conferences, a victim explains the impact of a crime to the person who committed it. They then acknowledge their actions and take responsibility. While there have been reductions in repeat offending when used after someone's committed a crime, results have

been more mixed when Restorative Justice Conferencing is used in schools or for anti-bullying situations.

Anti-bullying programmes:

These approaches are most often based in schools, with the aim of reducing bullying. They often target the whole school and they tend to focus on encouraging children to want to help others.

COMMUNITY PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

Situational approaches:

These approaches try to change a local area where crime tends to happen (for example, at shops, parks and outside schools). Adapting the area, for example by improving CCTV and lighting, is used as a measure to reduce crime.

Policing approaches:

These approaches include hot-spot policing, where resources are focused on the small areas where crime tends to happen. They also include problem-oriented policing, which involves looking closely at a specific problem (for example, drug use in a community) to develop the right solution (which might involve working with substance abuse services). They're effective at reducing crime in specific local areas.

Which approaches are promising?

Evidence shows that these approaches may well be effective, but we don't have enough evidence to know. Sometimes the evidence hasn't been rigorous enough to show that that the approach has definitely been the cause of a positive change. We need more research to know just how well they work at preventing children and young people becoming involved in crime. The Youth Endowment Fund will work to improve that evidence.

MENTORING

Mentoring:

These approaches involve an older or more experienced person offering support and guidance to a young person over time. Mentoring can have a positive impact on a child or young person, but it can vary in quality. It's likely to be at its most effective when mentors are volunteering for professional development. And for mentees, programmes are best when they're focused on emotional support and advocacy.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Teachable moments:

These approaches are focused on trying to change behaviours at a 'teachable moment'. That might include supporting a child or young person after they've had to go to hospital because of a violent assault. While these approaches have been found to be promising, they need further evaluation because some trials have had problems with people dropping out of them, or they haven't been robust enough to show these approaches work.

Police-led diversion:

These approaches involve the police taking action to find support for children and young people who they have come into contact with. This could be because they've been involved in a low-level crime, like criminal damage, anti-social behaviour or shoplifting. Diversion means that those young people don't receive formal sanctions, like a police caution or prosecution, but are diverted to community organisations which can provide support. We need more evidence to find out which programmes are the best at supporting children and young people who've come into contact with the police.

SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Classroom management:

These approaches focus on preventing disruptive behaviour in the classroom. It usually involves training with teachers to help them reflect on their skills in the classroom and try new approaches.

SPORT-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Sport-based interventions:

These approaches involve giving children and young people the chance to be part of a team or train with other people. They show promise as a way to get children engaged in new activities and give them a chance to "start to stop" any involvement in crime. But the evidence shows us that if children and young people are taking part in sport without any additional support programmes, there isn't a link with lower crime.

Where are the results mixed?

When researchers have tried to understand how effective some approaches are, they sometimes find that results are mixed. That means that, for approaches like after-schools clubs or police officers in schools, some research shows there might be a positive impact. But other studies have found that they don't reduce young people's involvement in crime and violence. We need more evaluation of these projects to know how well they work.

SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

After-school clubs:

These approaches include activities targeted at children who might be at home alone or who don't have anything to do after school. Some studies have found that they help to reduce crime, while others have found that they actually lead to an increase.

Police officers in schools:

These approaches involve police officers going to schools to help with crime prevention and information gathering. There's not much evidence about whether this is effective. Where studies have been done, they've not been rigorous enough for us to draw any conclusions.

School based approaches to reduce dating and sexual violence:

These approaches cover educational and skills-based programmes that aim to reduce sexual violence. Some studies show that they improve young people's knowledge and skills, while other research hasn't found any evidence that they help to reduce relationship violence.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Alternative Education (for example, Pupil Referral Units):

These approaches include education designed for young people who can't go to traditional schools, in some cases because of exclusion. Some research has shown that Alternative Education doesn't reduce anti-social behaviour or crime, while more recent studies have shown that there could be a promising effect on reducing aggression.

AFTERCARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE RE-JOINING COMMUNITIES

Aftercare for young people re-joining communities:

These approaches offer support to young people who are re-joining their communities after spending time in a secure centre. Evidence suggests that aftercare might work with some young people, including those who have been involved in violent crime. But it's not as effective for others, including young people under 17.

What doesn't work?

Evidence shows that military-style boot camps and attempts to scare children and young people away from involvement in crime not only don't work, but can even make things worse. They should be avoided.

BOOT CAMPS

Boot camps:

These approaches are aimed at preventing young people from becoming involved in crime through military-style programmes or boot camps. There's strong evidence that they have little or no effect.

DETERRENCE

Deterrence and Scared Straight:

These approaches try to frighten young people away from crime by using scare tactics. Research has repeatedly shown that interventions, most famously Scared Straight, don't work. In some cases, they've even been found to increase the likelihood of young people becoming involved in crime.

More information

At the Youth Endowment Fund, we're focused on supporting children aged 10 to 14, reaching them before they become involved in crime and violence. That's why the studies we've used to develop this briefing include approaches aimed at this age group. And we've looked at how well these approaches reduce all crime, rather than just violent offences.

Limitations of the evidence we've used

Much of the strongest evidence on preventing young people from becoming involved in crime comes from outside the UK – mostly from the US as well as from other countries. The evidence base in the UK is at a comparatively early stage.

Many of the approaches we've looked at are very broad. That also means there aren't widely accepted definitions of the different types of interventions.

Many studies focus on short-term behaviour change. This means it's impossible to say whether involvement in a programme leads to continued reductions in crime over a longer period.

Why our work matters

It's clear we need more, better quality evidence about what works to prevent children and young people becoming involved in crime. And that evidence needs to be easy to understand and easy to use. That's why our work is so important. We'll continue to make the evidence accessible to everyone, by creating our Toolkit and useful briefing papers. And we'll support you to use the evidence in your work, so that you can make change for children and young people.

Over the next ten years, with your help, we'll improve our understanding of what works and build a movement to put this knowledge into practice. Together, we can make sure that children and young people get the support and services they deserve.

