

Systems Evidence and Gap Map

Summary report

Summary report of an Evidence and Gap Map of research and literature related to systems of support for children and young people who are at risk of or involved in violence.

June 2022



Executive summary

- The Systems Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) is the largest repository of evidence of its kind. It's here to help you navigate research on different systems of support that are available to children and families in the UK and Ireland and how they might protect (or expose) children and young people to violence.
- Our Systems EGM suggests that we can have a good level of confidence in the studies in our map. However, the majority of papers did not outline researcher's own bias. Encouraging study authors to acknowledge the way their experiences and identities affect their research design and analysis can improve our confidence in study findings.
- In our Systems EGM we found many studies examining the criminal justice systems, the social care system and which contain multi-sector insights. However, it also suggests there is an opportunity to further summarise learning about systems of support, as there are comparatively few literature reviews.
- The EGM shows that there are numerous studies that shed light on young people or families access or engage with systems of support. However, relatively few papers included findings that explained the way young people and their families navigated throughout or between different systems, for example being referred to children's social care by a youth work offending team.
- The Systems EGM is part of the Department for Education (DfE) and Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Serious Violence Research Programme, which aims to better understand children and families' journeys through different systems of support, and the different qualities of the experiences along the way. That's because we want to know how these systems might protect or expose children and young people to involvement in serious youth violence. We recognise that the Systems EGM is a quite a technical resource, which means it's most useful to researchers, analysts and other people with research experience. That's why, as part of our joint programme, we'll produce literature reviews, that will summarise the studies in the Systems EGM in an accessible way.

Why create a Systems Evidence and Gap Map?

It is critical that we map existing research on what works best to prevent children from becoming involved in violence. This is where evidence and gaps maps (EGMs) come in.

What is an EGM?

Evidence and Gap Maps help us figure out what we do – and don't – know about a particular topic. They focus on a specific policy area (for example, reducing homelessness or – in our case – reducing serious violence) and offer us a visual representation of where evidence exists and how rigorous the research was. What they don't show us is what the evidence says. You couldn't look at an Evidence and Gap Map to see, for example, if a certain policy or programme achieves the result it intended to. For that level of information, you have to read the studies themselves or use other evidence resources (including evidence toolkits). One evidence toolkit is the [YEF Toolkit](#), which is a free tool that provides an overview of research on approaches to preventing serious youth violence.

How does the Systems EGM fit in with the YEF's Programmes EGM?

The [YEF Programmes EGM](#) and the [DfE-YEF Systems EGM](#) do different things. The first EGM produced by the YEF is a [Programmes EGM](#), which can help you find studies about the way a particular intervention (for example, a 12-week sports and mentoring programme) supports children to improve certain outcomes (for example, a reduction in risk-taking behaviours).

Together, the YEF and the Department for Education, are building on this work to map research on the way different systems work to support young people and prevent their involvement in serious violence. The Systems EGM contains studies about the ways systems or services of support (for example, education, health, social care or community support) may impact on youth violence. It's here to help policy makers, policy analysts, and researchers find studies that assess the way that systems work, including children and families' access to, engagement with and

navigation between of different support services, as well as studies that assess the views of the frontline workers who work in different systems.

What do we mean by 'system' or 'systems of support'?

When we talk about systems, we mean the organisation of people, institutions, and resources that deliver services.

Our Systems EGM covers systems in education, health, social care, crime and justice, welfare, community services and approaches that work across these different areas.

What does the Systems EGM do?

The [Systems Evidence and Gap Map \(EGM\)](#) brings together and organises evidence about systems of support in the UK and Ireland. It is a free to access interactive map that contains 400 studies.

Although we know the map doesn't contain all eligible studies, a complete list of eligible studies is available [here](#).

What types of studies does the Systems EGM contain?

The Systems EGM includes studies about systems of support that are delivered by both government bodies (like the NHS or a local authority), as well as charitable organisations. The aim is to find examples of systems successfully providing support, as well as cases of systems that aren't working as well.

It also includes studies that outline the perspectives of children and young people, their families and the frontline workers who support them.

What types of study are included in the Systems EGM?

There are lots of types of studies included in the Systems EGM. These include:

- Literature reviews about relevant themes within services. For example, this might include reviews looking at different responses to drug use within the criminal justice system, to see which help to reduce future involvement in violence.
- Evaluations of different interventions which have been implemented within a system. This might include, for example, an examination of case management systems used in children's social care.
- Research that seeks to understand young people and families' experiences of different systems, or aspects of systems. For example, this might include research that interviews young people about their experience of Youth Offending Teams.
- Inspection reports of social care and offending services. These are the reports on inspections carried out by independent bodies to assess the quality of different services.
- Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), which are reviews carried out when a child dies or is seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect (or where there is suspected abuse or neglect). These reports help identify learning for agencies or professionals, so that children can be safeguarded better.

How was the Systems EGM made?

This is a joint project between the Department for Education's Serious Violence Research and Analysis team and the YEF. Both organisations worked closely with Campbell Collaboration, an international social science research network that pulls together research evidence about different policy areas, produces plain language summaries and policy briefings. We also worked with other government departments, academics, What Works Centres and frontline workers, to try and make the Systems EGM as useful as possible. To find out more details about how the map was made please visit our technical report.

Technical report

Our Systems Evidence and Gap Map is one of the more technical resources we produce. You can read more about how we developed it in our accompanying Technical Report, available on the [YEF website](#).

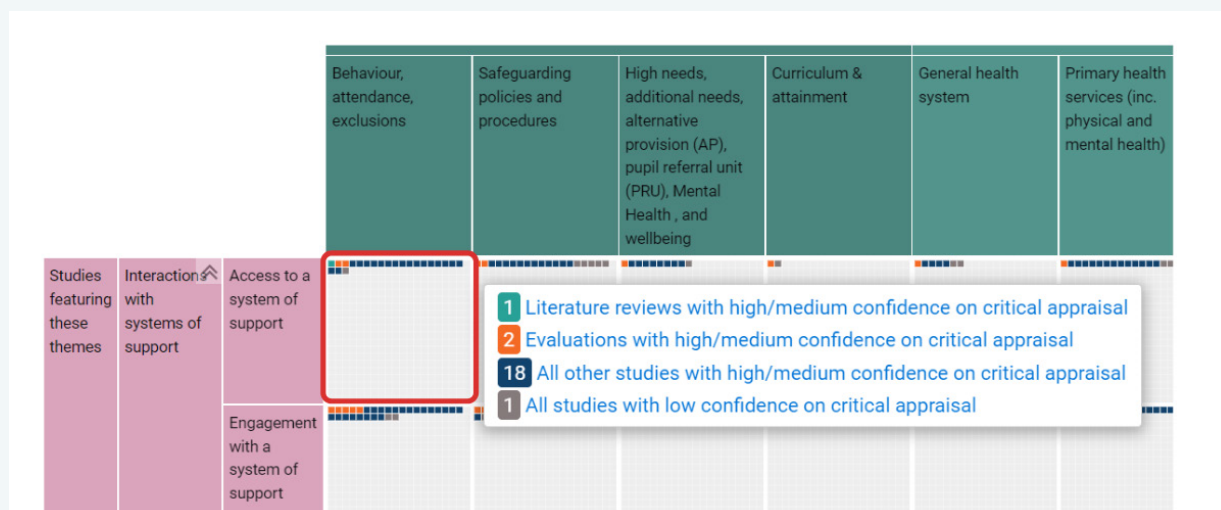
How do you use the Systems EGM?

The Systems EGM is a free to access, interactive resource, available for anyone interested in reducing serious violence and the academic literature that evaluates, assesses, or describes systems in the UK and Ireland. For a quick guide in how to use the EGM please follow [this link](#).

We've created the Systems EGM to make navigating the literature easier so that you find relevant information faster.

What does one cell of the EGM show?

One cell of the EGM is the cross section of the x-axis and y-axis, as highlighted in the red box below. A single cell shows the quantity, study type, and critical appraisal of evidence. The evidence in each cell varies by system sub-category and the themes the study captures. An example is provided below:



In this example, the cell illustrates how many studies are available that feature content on the educational system that specifically relates to behaviour, attendance, and exclusions as well as access to systems of support. The study included here is a review of practitioners' opinions about school behavioural policies and how children can access services. By hovering over this cell, you can see in the pop-up box that there aren't very many reviews or evaluation studies that feature content about behaviour, attendance, and exclusion in the education system as well as insights about accessing systems of support.

Who is the Systems EGM for?

We hope that the Systems EGM will be useful to anyone who wants to identify literature on different systems operating in the UK and Ireland that may help prevent serious youth violence. Out of all the resources that the YEF produces, separately, as well as within the programme of work with the DfE/YEF partnership, the Systems EGM is one of the more technical pieces of work. We will summarise the findings from our Systems EGM in accessible literature reviews.

Although we hope that the Systems EGM is as accessible as possible, we think it will be most useful as a reference database for policy-makers working in central and local government, professionals working in the third sector, commissioners working on serious violence reduction, and academics. This is because it can help users identify relevant studies more quickly. In particular, it can help find studies that look at different policies and initiatives, which assess things like children and families' access to, engagement with, navigation between or out of, and experience of different approaches, as well as studies that assess the views of the frontline workers who work in different systems.

How will the YEF and Department for Education use the Systems EGM?

The YEF and the Department for Education will use the map to help us understand existing evidence on young people's experiences of accessing and engaging with different systems of support, as well as their experiences of navigating between or out of these services.

By learning more, we want to find out how systems might protect young people from (or expose them to) involvement in serious violence, so that we can better understand how to prevent it. Along with other research and resources, it will help us to make sure we commission research that builds on what we already know and avoids duplicating existing evidence in our joint programme of work.

Separately, at the YEF, we're also planning to use the Systems EGM to support our [Agency Collaboration funding](#). We're investing in these

grant rounds to fund and evaluate activities to find the most effective ways agencies can work together to identify and support the children most in need of support. We hope that the Systems EGM will help our evaluation partners learn from and develop existing research into different approaches to the ways systems have already tried to work together to prevent violence.

At the Department for Education, following our recent [Education, children's social care and offending](#) publication, we're in the process of designing more advanced analysis of the data-share with the Ministry of Justice, which looks at the educational and social care characteristics of young people cautioned or sentenced for serious violence offences. The EGM will be used to support our team to understand how young people journey through systems, which will complement the data analysis work and therefore enable a more comprehensive view of the of what is needed to reduce serious violence.

What does the Systems EGM tell us?

While findings are limited because they are based on a sample of 400 studies out of the 1,1125 of the eligible studies (about one third) the Systems EGM does tell us:

- **That our sample of the evidence base is of reasonably good quality, though recognition of researcher's own bias wasn't consistently acknowledged within studies in the map.** A total of 78% studies rated as high/medium on the critical appraisal tool, which is a technical mechanism of helping us to understand the confidence we have in research findings. The most common reason studies were rated as medium was because data collection was only partially adequate, or the findings in the study were only in part based on the evidence it presented. The most common reasons studies were rated as low on the critical appraisal tool were in relation to unclear data analysis, or inadequate descriptions of data. We also found that researchers' own experience, assumptions and possible biases were not outlined for 79% of studies, and there was no conflict-of-interest statement for 88% of studies.
- **The majority of papers featured content on the 'crime and justice system' (61%), social care system (42%) and multi-sector insights (39%).** This isn't surprising and is likely because of the scope of the map, which aimed to find studies linked to violence prevention. This is also reflected in the types of professionals referenced in the literature we mapped; more than 50% of papers have learning relevant for 'youth offending workers and custody professionals' and 'social care workers'.

The Systems EGM also found some possible gaps in the research evidence:

- In general, we found **few literature reviews (just 7% of total papers)**, suggesting that not much work has been undertaken to summarise the existing literature.
- Only 3% of the total papers in the map were **dedicated to co-production** (which is where people with lived experience of an issue – either as professionals or young people who use services – lead the development of programmes and research). Of these studies only **one was a high or medium quality evaluation and none were high or**

medium quality reviews. This suggests a gap in our knowledge about co-production approaches to reducing young people's involvement in violence. It highlights the importance of evaluating the YEF's [Neighbourhood Fund](#), which examines the impact of community-led, co-produced approaches to reducing serious violence in high crime areas.

- **Very few papers discussed Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) (1%),** which may suggest a gap in the literature about the role of VRUs. This is in contrast to youth offending teams which were featured in about a quarter of all papers. This is partly because VRUs have only been set up in 2019 in England and Wales, whereas youth offending teams have been established for longer. However, VRUs were established in 2005 in Scotland, so it is surprising more literature hasn't been published. Furthermore, even though the gap for England and Wales may be expected it is still important to highlight where studies could usefully contribute to the evidence base.
- **Studies that broke down their findings by gender or race were very limited.** Most of the studies (59%) did not analyse by demographics and only 4% of the total papers included children who were recorded as being from ethnic minority backgrounds. This may point to a gap in the literature to focusing on how children's experiences might be affected by characteristics like race or gender.
- Compared to the themes of access to and engagement with systems of support (which both featured in 48% of the papers), **few papers included an investigation of the way young people and their families navigated through different systems (22%).**
- Most of these studies were based on professional views of systems of support (58%) and document reviews (44%). Many of the studies do include data about children and young people (36%) and their families (17%), however, it is unclear to what extent this was a focus of each individual paper.

What are the next steps?

To help us make the learning we've identified through the Systems EGM more accessible, we're commissioning literature reviews (which provide overviews of existing research). These will help to explain the policy and practice implications of what we've learnt about:

- Children and young people's first entry into a system.
- How children, young people and their families interact with different systems, and how systems interact with them to offer support.
- How systems connect together, and how children and young people and their families are supported to navigate different systems of support.

About us

Tackling serious youth violence is a top priority for Government. Government's approach to preventing serious violence involves a whole system strategy, with partners from across different sectors coming together in a multi-agency response that is focused on tackling serious violence through early intervention and prevention, supporting communities and local partnerships, and law enforcement and the criminal justice response.

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) 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. Our System Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) is a joint piece of work between the YEF and the Department for Education.

The Department for Education and YEF Serious Violence Research Programme

Our Systems Evidence and Gap Map is part of a wider partnership between YEF and the Department for Education. Together, we're working on a the DfE-YEF Serious Violence Research Programme which aims to better understand how a person's journey through different systems of support, and the different qualities of the experiences along the way, might protect or expose them to involvement in serious youth violence.

Sign-up to the [YEF newsletter](#) to hear about our upcoming research, briefings and reports.

Enquiries

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact DfE at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus



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We reserve the right to modify the report at any time, without prior notice.

The Youth Endowment Fund Charitable Trust

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