

## **Secondary Data Analysis Projects**

### **Call for Proposals**

#### **Summary**

The Youth Endowment Fund is a charity with 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.

We're committed to delivering the highest quality evidence for young people. We want to learn about young people's experiences of violence, the drivers and what works to prevent it. To support this, we're launching a new research round.

We're asking for proposals that exploit existing secondary data sources that address key questions for policy and practice. In this call we're particularly interested in receiving research proposals related to the following three themes:

- Diversion from the criminal justice system;
- Therapies, and
- Education

Although we are particularly interested in these three areas, we also welcome applications on topics beyond these, where they fit within one of our eight [focus areas](#) and address a demonstrated evidence gap.

We expect to approve around 4-8 projects that deliver outputs within 12-18 months of being commissioned. We're interested in proposals which use national datasets as well as those that may be held locally. We'd welcome bids from researchers and data owners who have existing research partnerships (such as police forces, VRUs, local authorities etc) who want to get the most out of their data.

The remainder of this document provides further details on the round, the types of research we're looking for and how to apply.

Applications open on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December and close at **5pm Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**. Shortlisted applications will be invited to interview. Successful teams will be funded through an initial research design phase, where they will be supported in developing a detailed analysis plan, and completing any steps required to secure access to required data. Once this phase is complete, a final decision will be made on whether to take the project forward for full funding.

## **About the round**

### Why are we doing it?

At the Youth Endowment Fund, all of our funding is done to build a better understanding of what works to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. As well as funding projects and evaluations, we also invest in other types of high-quality research about violence, its causes and its consequences.

Last year we launched our first call for secondary data analysis projects exploring drivers of violence and the effectiveness of different policies and approaches. Through it we've funded four research projects, that use a range of datasets that answer questions of relevance to our mission. You can find out more about these projects [here](#).

In this call, we're asking for research proposals that fit with the themes of three of YEF's specific areas of focus:

- Diversion from the criminal justice system;
- Therapies;
- Education.

Below we set out the scope of each theme and suggest a range of potential research questions. The research questions are provided to give an indication of the sorts of projects we might fund, but they are not prescriptive.

Although we are particularly interested in these three areas, we also welcome applications on topics beyond these, as long as they fit within one of our eight [focus areas](#) and address a demonstrated evidence gap.

We are looking for proposals that draw on any of the following types of methodologies:

- **Descriptive analysis** – descriptions of cohorts or issues which haven't been explored before.
- **Relationship testing** – for example simple linear regressions or multi-level modelling methods that look to test for the existence of relationships to offending outcomes.
- **Impact** – Quasi-experimental design (QED) methods that exploit variations in policy or practice to establish casual relationships with offending and other violence related outcomes.

We will give particular weight to research proposals that explore the drivers of violent offending specifically (e.g. homicide, violence against the person and robbery). We will also consider proposals that look at closely related outcomes (such as drug use and

supply or weapons possession), or outcomes which are well-evidenced predictors of violent offending.

Throughout all themes, we are interested in hearing from proposals which explore the drivers and impacts of racial and other disproportionalities.

### *Diversion from the criminal justice system*

We know that sometimes, children need another chance in the form of alternatives to arrest, conviction and custody. Diversion programmes help them do that by diverting them away from formal justice processes to support that could prevent them reoffending in the future.

We are particularly interested in learning more about activity which diverts children from formal criminal justice proceedings before they reach court. This includes formal out-of-court disposals (OOCs), such as youth cautions, or informal diversion schemes where the police agree to take no further action and offer or refer the child to some support.

The use of diversionary schemes has increased significantly over the last 20 years, with a particularly marked increase over the COVID-19 pandemic (CREST 2022).<sup>1</sup> While evaluations of diversionary programmes have demonstrated that diversion can be effective in reducing rates of re-offending<sup>2</sup>, there are gaps in the evidence on their implementation in England and Wales. This includes research on whether and how the system-level increase in the use of diversion relates to overall patterns of offending and incarceration (at a macro level).

Furthermore, data on the use of diversion is not routinely collected at a national level and local level data collection is patchy (CREST 2022).<sup>3</sup> This means we know little about how practice varies in-terms of who is and isn't diverted. There is a lack of evidence on: the prevalence of different types of activities; which children receive each type of intervention, and the effects of various different types of support on children who've committed more serious offences. We also don't know enough about the relative effectiveness of different diversionary outcomes (e.g. youth caution vs youth conditional caution) on reoffending or

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<sup>1</sup> Shaw, D. et al (CREST 2022). Making the criminal justice system work better: how to improve out-of-court disposals and diversion schemes. ([here](#))

<sup>2</sup> . One review found point-of-arrest diversion and OOCs resulted in an average 13% reduction in reoffending compared to formal criminal justice processing: Gaffney, H. et al (Campbell Collaboration 2021). Pre-Court Diversion: Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit Technical Report. ([here](#))

<sup>3</sup> Shaw, D. et al (CREST 2022). Making the criminal justice system work better: how to improve out-of-court disposals and diversion schemes. ([here](#))

the effects on timing (i.e. the length of time between being diverted and reoffence) or offence severity.

Some of the important evidence gaps we've identified are:

Descriptive:

- How has violent crime committed by under 18s, as well as 'what happens' to children apprehended for a criminal offence, changed over the past decade (e.g., overall rates of crime, demographics of which children are committing crimes, etc.)? What has changed in the outcomes/destinations of children arrested (e.g., diversion)?
- How are police forces making use of diversion and out of court disposals (e.g. Outcome 22) for children? Which are the children receiving these measures and what ethnic and other disproportionalities exist in the use of diversion and Outcome 22 disposals? What types of diversionary activities are children receiving in practice, and how do these vary by area?
- How does geographical funding for YOTs map onto variations in criminal offending and levels of need for diversionary support?
- How does the speed of referral from arrest to support vary across local authorities or by other characteristics, and how are variations associated with offending outcomes?

Relationships:

- What is the relationship between increased use of diversion and overall reductions in future offending and incarceration?
- How are different local characteristics (e.g. levels of funding for diversion; HMIP Inspection judgements across different areas of practice, such as leadership and case management; varying approaches to diversion, such as variation in the organisations delivering diversion, referral systems, or intervention availability), associated with outcomes, eg, re-offending?

Causal inference:

- Has the increased use of diversion for children overtime led to a reduction in overall rates of crime and incarceration?
- How effective are informal, non-statutory diversion schemes in reducing violent offending?

## *Therapies*

In this area, we are interested in understanding more about the mental health needs and therapeutic support available to justice-involved children, as well as those at risk of becoming involved in violence. Therapeutic support may span a broad spectrum of interventions from cognitive behavioural therapy to help children manage negative thoughts and behaviours, speech and language therapy to improve communication and interaction with others, and therapy to help recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. It also includes supporting children to recover from trauma or training staff to recognise its signs and symptoms.

Recent evidence suggests that the mental health needs of children and young people may be increasing, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Justice-involved children tend to have particularly high levels of mental health need when compared to children in the general population and early intervention has been recognised as key to improving outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile very few quality studies have explored evidence in relation to therapeutic interventions to address the mental health needs of justice-involved children, or those most at risk of becoming involved in violence and crime.<sup>6</sup>

These interventions may include a range of different activities to support children to develop coping skills, make sense of traumatic experiences, or improve their communication and interactions with others, including through addressing speech and language difficulties. Recently there has been a growing focus specifically on screening and support for justice-involved children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).<sup>7</sup> Although data are patchy, evidence suggests that over 60% of justice-involved children may have SLCN<sup>8</sup>, and that children may be misdiagnosed as having a behavioural problem or conduct disorder, when in fact they have undiagnosed SLCN. A recent study conducted in Australia using longitudinal data found that early intervention and support children with SLCN reduced the risk of involvement in the criminal justice

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<sup>4</sup> Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (2022). COVID-19 Mental health and wellbeing surveillance report. ([here](#)). NHS Digital (2020). Mental health needs of children and young people in England. ([here](#))

<sup>5</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation (2023). The evidence base – youth offending services – mental health. ([here](#))

<sup>6</sup> Gaffney, H., Joliffe, D., White, H., (YEF 2022). Trauma-specific therapies: toolkit technical report. ([here](#)); HM Inspectorate of Probation (2023). The evidence base – youth offending services – mental health. ([here](#))

<sup>7</sup> Youth Justice Board (2015). Practice advice: speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in the youth justice system. ([here](#))

<sup>8</sup> Senedd (2023). 60% – Giving them a voice: speech, language and communication needs in the youth justice system. ([here](#))

system and has the potential to substantially reduce costs associated with youth justice.<sup>9</sup> Evidence from the UK on the provision of SLCN to justice-involved children, or children at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, and outcomes associated with these interventions, remains very limited.

Some potential research questions we've identified are:

Descriptive:

- What access do justice-involved children (including those supported by YOTs and in custody), or those at risk of becoming involved in violence have to therapeutic support, and does this vary by area? What disproportionalities (e.g. by ethnicity) exist in the provision of therapeutic support to justice-involved children?
- What are the speech and language therapy (SALT) needs of justice-involved children, or children at risk of becoming involved in violence? How has SALT been integrated into justice-system interventions, and with what outcomes?

Relationships:

- Are there any observed relationships between the provision of different types of therapies and behaviour/violence/offending outcomes?

Causal inference:

- Does integrating SALT in justice interventions improve outcomes for children in contact with the justice system?
- What role does mental health play in gang exit and desistance from crime?

*Education*

This area covers school-wide policies and practices, including safeguarding measures, support for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), managing exclusions and suspensions and strategies to address persistent and severe absences. It also includes individual interventions to address specific issues – such as bullying, relationship violence and carrying knives in school.

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<sup>9</sup> Cronin, P. & Addo, R., (2021). Interactions with youth justice and associated costs for young people with speech, language and communication needs. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 56.4: 797-811.

It is well established that a child's education and experience at school, college or alternative provision has significant effects on their future outcomes. We know that receiving both fixed and permanent school exclusions is associated with future offending, whilst positive school attainment can be a protective factor (DfE 2022).<sup>10</sup> We also know that being a perpetrator of bullying at school is an evidenced predictor for future offending (EPI 2018).<sup>11</sup> However, less is known about how school, college and AP practices affect future violence perpetration, including the impact of special educational needs provision, or the impact of safeguarding practices and supports systems, such as welfare or attendance officers.

In this call we are particularly interested in receiving proposals exploring relationships between special educational needs provision and offending. Support for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) is an area of increasing education policy interest and reform in the UK.<sup>12</sup> [Growing numbers](#) of children are being diagnosed with SEND and are receiving an education, health and care plan (EHP). Evidence indicates that children who offend are disproportionately likely to have SEN compared to the general pupil cohort, with almost a third (30%) of prolific offenders recorded as having SEND.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, recent analysis conducted by the Department for Education (DfE) suggests that children cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence are more likely to be first issued with an EHC plan at a much older age than children with SEND who do not offend.<sup>14</sup> However, the reasons for this are unclear. In general, there is very limited evidence on how school-based SEN provision may affect future violence perpetration, and we would like to know more.

Some of the research questions we've identified in relation to education are:

Descriptive:

- Which types of SEND are most prevalent amongst justice-involved children? What proportion of these children have had access to SEND support, and how does this compare to support for children with SEND in the broader population?
- Who are the children missing from education? What has changed pre- and post-Covid? How does the profile of children missing from education overlap with those at higher risk of becoming involved in violence?

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<sup>10</sup> Department for Education (2022). Education, children's social care and offending: Descriptive Statistics. ([here](#)).

<sup>11</sup> Education Policy Institute (2018). Bullying: A review of the evidence. ([here](#)).

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education (2023). SEND alternative provision and improvement plan. ([here](#))

<sup>13</sup> Department for Education & Ministry of Justice (2022). Education children's social care and offending: descriptive statistics. ([here](#))

<sup>14</sup> Fuller, M. & McNally, J. (DfE 2023). Education, children's social care and offending: multi-level modelling. ([here](#))

- What is the overlap between children missing from school and those identified as being vulnerable to child criminal exploitation (CCE)? How does this vary geographically? Which comes first, exclusion or the CCE flag?

#### Relationships:

- What are the relationships between different types of SEN needs or provision and offending? Which factors mediate these relationships?
- What is the relationship between going missing from education and becoming involved in violence? Which factors mediate this relationship?

#### Causal inference:

- Does early intervention SEN support reduce youth violence and offending?
- Do different types of SEN provision have an impact on youth violence and offending?
- Does having an ECH plan help prevent violence and offending?

### **Data and methods**

#### What data might you use?

We are interested in secondary data analysis projects that exploit existing datasets. These could include cohort or longitudinal studies; administrative datasets; or locally held linked data from multiple agencies. Proposals might also consider re-analysis of pre-existing data from completed evaluations. Data should be on populations in England and Wales.

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Potential datasets</b>
Administrative datasets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police National Computer (NPC)</li> <li>• NHS hospital admission data</li> <li>• DfE National Pupil Database (NPD)</li> <li>• Mental Health Services Data Set (MHSDS)</li> <li>• National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) data</li> <li>• Ambulance Data Set</li> <li>• Linked datasets including: the DfE-MoJ linkage; the new ECHILD database linking the NPD with health and social care data for England, and the NPD &amp; PNC, or links between locally held public health datasets and the NPD.</li> </ul>
National surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP)</li> <li>• General Practice Patient Survey (GPPS)</li> </ul>
Cohort studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)</li> <li>• Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Society</li> </ul>
Locally held data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local VRU datasets (e.g. linked individual police, care and schools data)</li> <li>• YOT data and case notes</li> <li>• Local authority data (e.g. children's services or housing statistics)</li> <li>• Databases associated with local NHS Trusts including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)</li> </ul>

Whilst the focus is secondary data analysis, we will consider proposals that link existing datasets with primary data collected as part of the project where this enables novel insights. However, we would not expect primary data collection to form a substantial part of the budget. We are also interested in hearing from proposals which plan to perform new linking between existing data. In both cases, the feasibility, cost and timeline implications will need to be justified in light of the insights it will bring.

### **Route to impact**

We want to fund research projects which have a clear route to impact and that can demonstrate potential for change. This could be through filling evidence gaps to answer nationally relevant policy or practice questions. Or, it could be through the analysis of locally held data, based on the relationship between data owners and researchers who want to get more out of their data to inform operational decisions. Any research plans that use local data should also have relevant outcomes for the wider population.

### **Outputs**

All projects will produce a study plan during the initial design phase which pre-specifies the methodology in full. This will be published on our website. Following the research project, the first publication of results to be a report on our website, including an accessible summary. All outputs will be peer reviewed prior to publication.

### **Application considerations**

Interested applicants are requested to submit a full research proposal detailing their proposed project including:

- Proposed research question(s);
- Rationale for why this matters;
- Methodology/techniques and full description of approach;
- Data access plans, timeline and understanding of data privacy/anonymisation requirements under UK-GDPR (ethical risks should be carefully mitigated);
- Detailed timeline and budget;
- Project team and relevant experience.

We will work with successful teams to refine their project design and analysis plan from March 2024, before final plans are agreed.

#### Budgets and Timeline

We are looking to fund 4–8 projects. The final budget will be decided after research plans are confirmed, and following an iterative design period between YEF and the research team. We expect the number of projects we fund and their budgets to vary according to research complexity, design and timeline.

Please detail your budget by filling out the attached budget template.

We expect most projects to be delivered over 12–18 months from initial commissioning. Some project may take less time, particularly for more descriptive or exploratory projects. Full proposals should include a consideration of potential delays to the data access process and include mitigations within the timeline.

#### Other considerations

When reviewing applications, we will put particular emphasis on plans around data risks. The best applications will already have experience of accessing and analysing the data, and have pre-existing relationships with data owners. Applications should be clear on how issues with data access might influence the project.

Any applications proposing the linkage of existing datasets should include a detailed plan for doing so, and consider how data sharing and storing could impact the timeline, risks and budget for the project.

#### How to apply

If interested in undertaking this work, please send a full proposal (no more than 4,000 words) and detailed budget, through filling out the attached templates, copying in [data@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:data@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) and Liz Yarrow: [liz.yarrow@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:liz.yarrow@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) by **5pm Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024**

Applications will be scored with the following weightings:

- 25% research questions and potential to influence;
- 20% methodology and feasibility of addressing research question;
- 20% data and access plans;
- 10% plans to address potential bias or disproportionality in data;
- 10% timeline and budget;
- 15% project team and relevant experience.



Shortlisted full proposals will then be invited to interview.

We plan to confirm which projects we'll take forward through design phase by March 2024, and projects should be approved for full funding by June.

For any questions please email [data@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:data@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) and copy in Liz Yarrow [liz.yarrow@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:liz.yarrow@youthendowmentfund.org.uk)