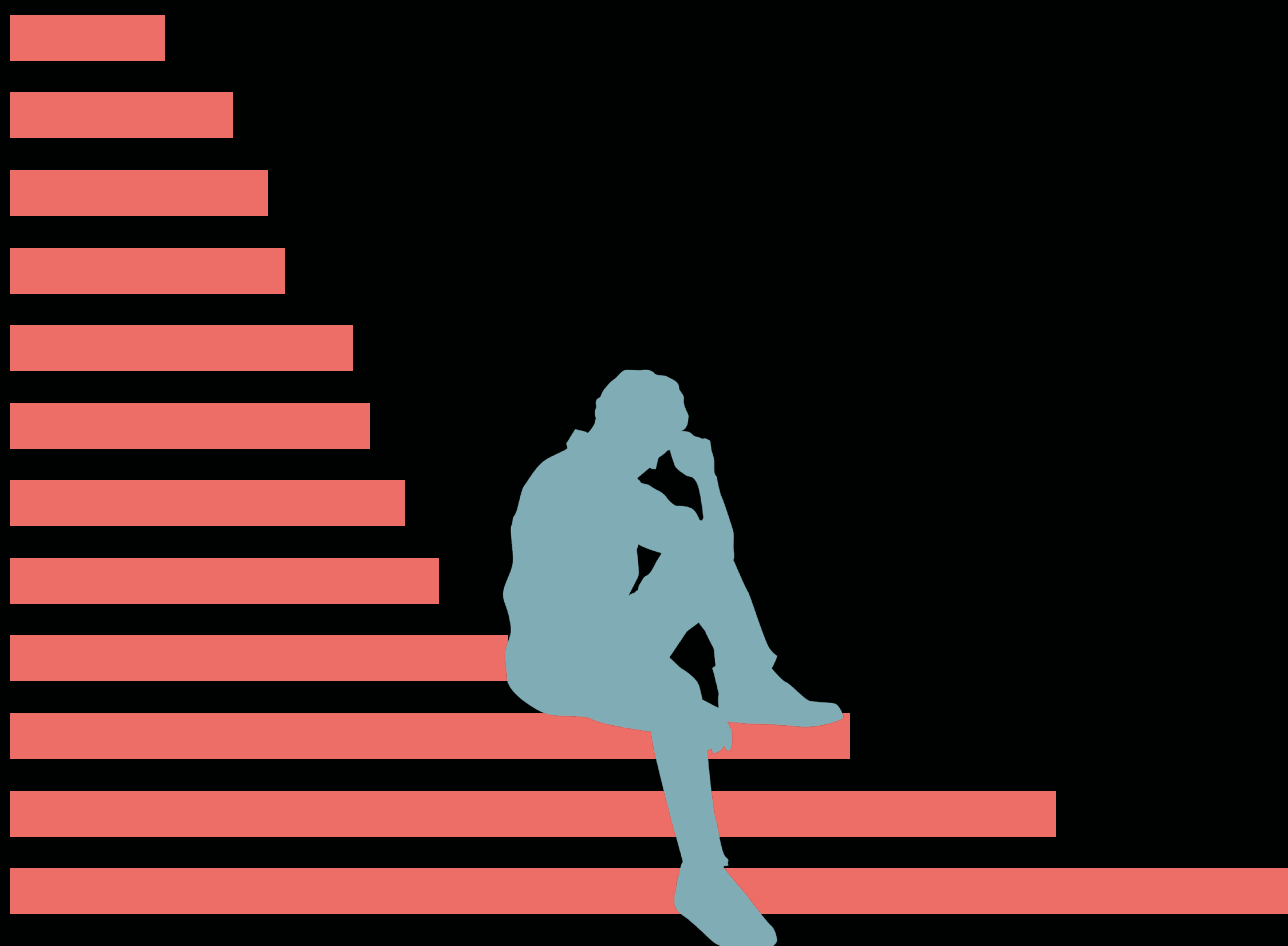


Children, violence and vulnerability 2024

Who is affected by violence?



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All views expressed in this report are those of the Youth Endowment Fund.

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Main findings and summary



Executive Summary

The Youth Endowment Fund surveyed over 10,000 teenage children (aged 13–17) in England and Wales about their experiences of violence.

The findings are detailed across five reports, each focusing on a different aspect.

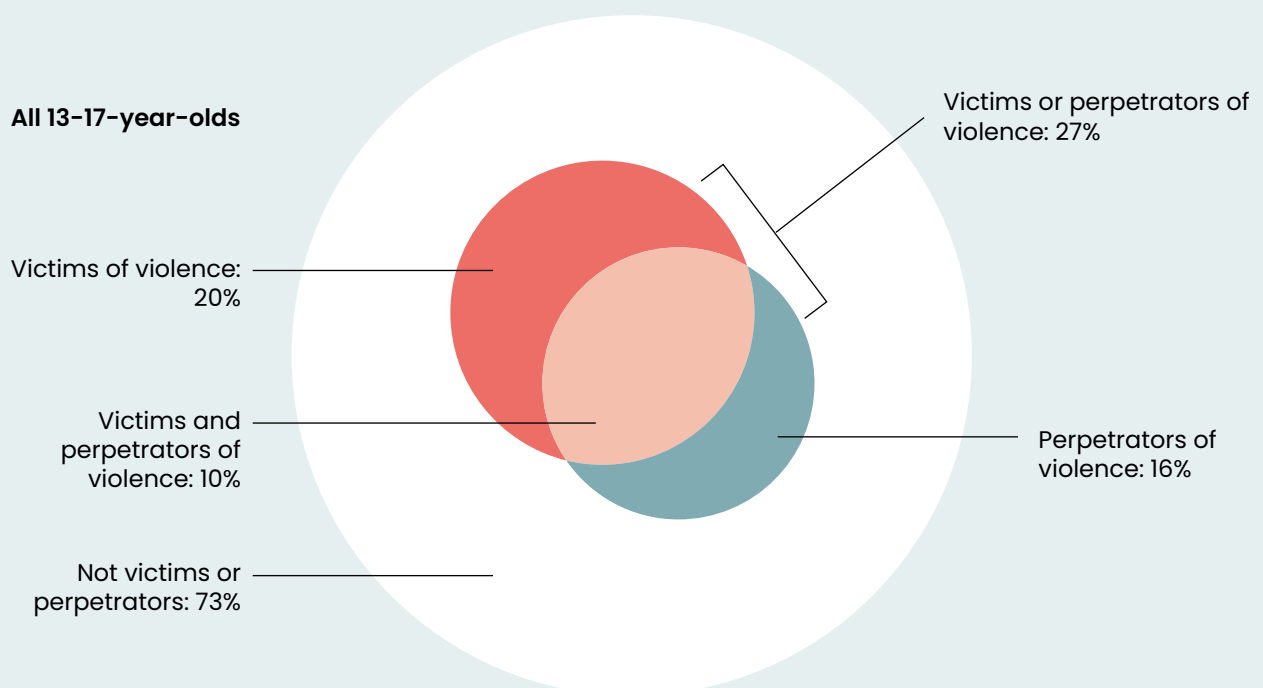
In this first report, we explore who is affected by violence, how widespread it is, the various forms it takes and its impact on children's lives.

Here's what we found.

A worrying minority of children continue to have direct experiences of violence.

In this year's survey, 20% of teenage children told us they've been a victim of violence in the past 12 months. Over half (61%) of these incidents led to physical injury, equating to 440,000 children in England and Wales.

Overlap between children who have been victims and perpetrators of violence



For some, these experiences are not one-off. Of all teenagers who were victims of violence, 65% had it happen multiple times within the year, with nearly a third (31%) — or 5% of all 13-17-year-olds — reporting it occurred more than five times.

Physical assault is the most common form of violence, affecting 9% of all 13-17-year-olds. Theft and sexual assault were each reported by 6%, while 5% experienced a violent incident involving a weapon.

Most victims have been the victim of violence from someone they know, whether a family member (17%), a friend (31%) or another acquaintance (41%).

Perceived discrimination plays a significant role in the experiences of many victims — 41% believe they were targeted due to factors such as religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or disabilities. Among those who committed violence, 19% acknowledge that discrimination influenced their actions.

When we asked the 16% of children who said they'd committed violence about their reasons, many cited reactive motivations. For instance, 36% acted out of annoyance, humiliation or feeling threatened, while 29% retaliated for previous violence. Bullying is a significant factor for 25% of respondents, and 17% report engaging in violence for self-defence or due to rivalries related to gangs, neighbourhoods or schools. Half (49%) of all children who perpetrated violence in the past year have also been a victim themselves.

The consequences for children involved in violence are varied. Most commonly, they face repercussions from parents (39%) or school authorities (32%), with 20% reporting school exclusion and 10% involving the police. However, 21% of those who committed violence say there was no response from adults at all.

Even more concerning is the lack of proactive support. Despite the fact that adults in authority find out about most cases of violence, only 10% of those who committed violent behaviour report being offered support or training to help them better manage their actions in the future. Only 12% say they were offered support or training after perpetrating serious violence that was repeated and led to injury. This highlights a critical gap in addressing the root causes of violence and preventing its recurrence.

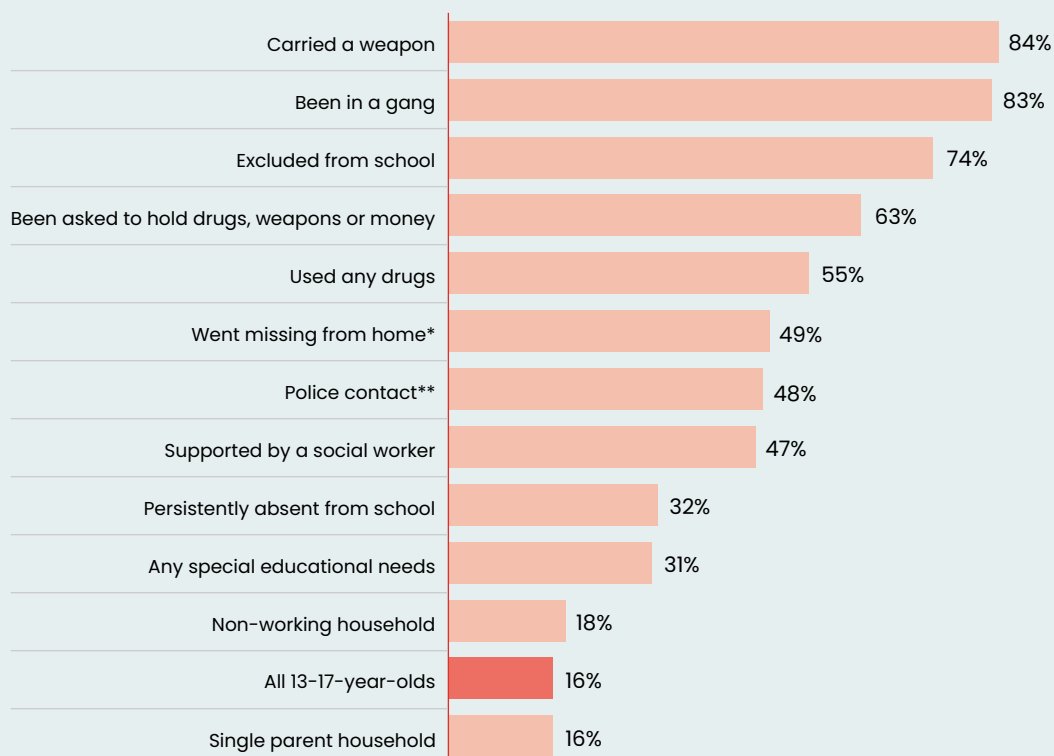
Experiences of violence are concentrated among the most vulnerable.

Not all children are equally affected by violence. Experiences of violence are overwhelmingly concentrated among the most vulnerable teenage children, with certain groups facing a significantly higher risk of becoming victims and perpetrators.

Children struggling in education are particularly vulnerable. Those who are persistently absent, suspended, excluded or attending alternative education settings are far more likely to be victims of and to engage in violent behaviour than their peers. For example, 74% of excluded pupils and 40% of those in pupil referral units report perpetrating violence, compared to just 16% of the average across the population. Children with special educational needs, particularly cognitive or learning difficulties, are similarly at heightened risk.

This year's report sheds new light on children at risk of exploitation, revealing even more concerning links between vulnerability and violence. Children who went missing from home were five times more likely to engage in violence, while those approached to transport or store drugs and weapons were six times more likely. Gang involvement and carrying weapons further escalated these risks, with children in gangs or those carrying weapons being seven times more likely to commit acts of violence than their peers.

The proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have perpetrated violence in the past 12 months by vulnerabilities to violence



*Stayed overnight somewhere other than their or a friend's house without their parent's permission

**Had an interaction with the police over an offence they were suspected of committing (e.g. arrests, stop and searches)

A relatively small number are driven to carry weapons.

Worryingly, 5% of children aged 13–17 say they carried a weapon in the past year. Two per cent said that they carried a knife.

Although the possession, sale and supply of zombie-style knives and machetes are now illegal in the UK, only a small proportion of those who've carried weapons (17%) admit to carrying such knives before the ban. Kitchen and other types of knives are much more likely to be carried. Other items carried include screwdrivers or stabbing implements (25%) and sticks, clubs or hitting implements (24%).

Younger teenagers aged 13–15 are more likely to carry weapons compared to those aged 16–17. Nearly half (47%) of those who carry a weapon do so for self-protection. Others cited being asked by someone else (37%), scaring others (31%) or following the behaviour of their peers (18%).



I [used] to carry weapons – almost every day I would carry a weapon. And I'm not really one of these people who say, 'Oh, I carried it for protection' because if I was really that scared, then I wouldn't have left the house. But for me, it was a bit more of a precaution just because where I'm from, if you haven't got your weapon, but they've got their weapon, then you're in serious trouble, and you're going to get hurt. So, it was more of just a precaution in case the other person had weapons. Then I can defend myself.

Tommy*, Youth Endowment Fund Youth Advisory Board member

*Name has been changed



The majority of children feel the effects of violence.

While 20% of teenagers experienced violence first-hand as victims, its impact extends far wider, with two-thirds (67%) expressing concern about becoming victims themselves. Concern is highest among children from Black and mixed ethnic backgrounds, 74% and 70%, respectively, compared to 66% of White children.

This widespread fear is reshaping how children live their lives. Over half (52%) reported changing their behaviours, with a third (33%) avoiding certain places or social events. For over a fifth (22%), the anxiety has taken a toll on their mental health, disrupting sleep, suppressing appetite and making it harder to focus in school.

In attempts to protect themselves, some children are making choices that may actually increase their risk. Nine per cent admitted to carrying a weapon or joining a gang – decisions that could escalate rather than alleviate the dangers they face.

Headline findings

A worrying minority of children continue to have direct experiences of violence.

In the past 12 months, 1 in 5 teenage children have been victims, and 1 in 6 have perpetrated violence.

20% of 13–17-year-olds were victims of violence in the past 12 months. 12% were victims of violence that led to physical injury (61% of all victims). Just over half (55%) of all 13–17-year-olds say they've been victims or witnesses. 16% of 13–17-year-olds perpetrated violence – of which 48% say it led to physical injury. There's a large overlap between victims and perpetrators – 61% of perpetrators were also victims.

2 in 5 victims think it was motivated by 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 any disabilities). This is particularly high for children of mixed ethnicity (51%) and children with special educational needs (SEN; 54%).

Most teenage children perpetrating violence don't receive support.

For most who perpetrated violence (4 in 5), an adult found out. But only a small proportion received support to improve their behaviour – 10% overall and 12% of children who committed serious violence that was repeated and led to physical injury.

Experiences of violence are concentrated among the most vulnerable.

Children who struggle in education are overrepresented...

32% of children persistently absent from school perpetrate violence vs 7% with no absence. This rises to 53% of those suspended from school and 74% of those excluded vs 9% who've never been suspended/excluded. Risks are also higher for children with SEN, especially cognitive and learning needs (45%), compared to those with no needs (10%).

....as are children engaging in risky behaviour.

Children who used drugs in the past year are five times more likely to perpetrate violence (55% vs 10% of those who haven't). This rises to 77% of those using class A drugs. Children who say they've been in a gang are over seven times more likely to commit violence (83% vs 11% of those who weren't) as are children who carry weapons (84% vs 12% of those who haven't).

Children at risk of exploitation are particularly vulnerable.

10% say they were asked to sell, transport or hide drugs or weapons in the past year. And 14% say they've gone missing from home overnight before. Children who went missing are five times more likely to commit acts of violence (49% vs 9% of those who've never gone missing). Of children who were asked to sell, transport or hide drugs or weapons, 63% say they committed an act of violence (vs 10% who weren't) – six times higher.

A relatively small number are driven to carry weapons.

1 in 20 teenage children say they carried a weapon in the past year.

5% of 13–17-year-olds say they carried a weapon in the past year and 2% carried some type of knife. Among children who carried weapons, the most commonly carried are screwdrivers or other sharp implements (25%); sticks, clubs or hitting implements (24%); kitchen knives (23%); and other types of knives (22%). 17% carry zombie knives or machetes.

Children at risk of violence and criminal exploitation are most likely to carry weapons.

Younger teenagers aged 13–15 (7% vs 4% of 16–17-year-olds) and boys (8% vs 3% of girls) are more likely to carry weapons. Children at risk of criminal exploitation (35%) and in gangs (44%) are over six and over eight times more likely to carry weapons, respectively. Children who've been victims of violence are almost four times more likely to carry weapons (20%) than the average (5%) – rising to 32% for victims of weapons-related violence.

The most common reason given for carrying a weapon is self-defence.

47% of children that carried a weapon say they did it for safety. Other leading reasons include being asked to do so (37%), to scare others (31%) and because others around them do (18%). Being asked to do so is the main reason for carrying a weapon among children in gangs (44%) and those at risk of criminal exploitation (43%).

But the majority of children feel the effects of violence.

Most teenage children are worried about being victims of violence.

67% of 13–17-year-olds are concerned about being the victim of violence from other young people. Boys aged 13–15 (71%), Black children (74%) and those in inner city areas (76%) are particularly concerned. 81% of children attending pupil referral units (PRUs) and 86% of those excluded from school are concerned about violence.

Half say they've changed their behaviour because of violence...

52% say fear of violence led them to change their behaviour or has impacted their wellbeing. 33% changed where they go and what they do to avoid violence. 22% report impacts on their mental health, including sleep disturbances, reduced appetite and difficulty concentrating in school.

...and some of these changes are putting them at greater risk.

Worryingly, 9% of children say they've taken protective measures due to fears of violence, including carrying a weapon or joining a gang. 10% say they've skipped school due to fears of violence, increasing to 26% of children who've been victims of violence.

Methods and detailed findings



About this report

What we wanted to find out

This is our third annual survey into young people's experience of violence. This year, we surveyed over 10,000 children aged 13–17 in England and Wales about their experiences over the past 12 months – compared to 7,500 last year. The greater number of responses provides more confidence in the findings.

This year, we're publishing the findings of the survey in five separate reports, covering:

1. [Who is affected by violence? \(this report\)](#)
2. [What role does social media play in violence affecting young people?](#)
3. [How are boys and girls affected by violence?](#)
4. [What do children and young people think about the police?](#)
5. [Who has access to positive activities, youth clubs and trusted adults?](#)

This is the first report in this year's series. It covers the overall prevalence of violence, including the number of victims and perpetrators, the background and characteristics of those most impacted by violence, the role weapons play and the consequences of violence (and fears of violence).

What we did

This year, a total of 10,387 children aged 13–17 responded to our survey. As with last year, this was an online survey. This year, we worked with a new surveying partner – Savanta. The survey took 15 minutes on average to complete and was live between 22 May and 2 July 2024. Questions typically related to children's experiences over the past 12 months.

To ensure the results were nationally representative, we did two things. Firstly, we set quotas for key groups. These were age, gender, ethnicity, region and socioeconomic status. The quotas were based on each group's share of the population using Census 2021 population estimates for 13–17-year-olds. Secondly, the results were weighted using the same characteristics to ensure they aligned exactly with their national population totals. For more details, see the [technical report](#).

How children were kept safe when taking part in the survey

Children were invited to take part in the survey and were made aware of the types of questions that would be asked. Anyone could refuse to take part if they wished. For all children aged under 16, a parent or guardian had to consent. Participants could drop out of the survey at any time. Participants were asked to complete the survey on their own and in a safe place where their responses could not be seen. Questions were presented so that responses would not remain visible once they'd been selected to protect their privacy. And it wasn't possible to look back at previous responses once questions had been answered. At the beginning and end and throughout the survey, participants were signposted to relevant support services.

Approach to reporting results

The smaller the number of responses, the less confident we are in the results. For this reason, no results are reported where the total number of responses to a particular question was less than 50. All group comparisons mentioned in the report are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level unless otherwise noted.

What to bear in mind when reading the findings

Like all research, our survey has some limitations. We're trying to understand what children across England and Wales have experienced. While our sample of 10,387 13-17-year-olds is large (for context, the Office for National Statistics' [Crime Survey of England and Wales](#) reached 1,528 10-15-year-olds in 2023/24 and has consistently reached around 3,000 young people in recent years), it still represents a small proportion of all children in the country. It's important, therefore, to remember these limitations when interpreting the results:

- Weights are applied to ensure that the results are broadly representative of the national populations of England and Wales. However, the weights applied only cover a limited number of factors.
- Like most surveys, those who respond are self-selecting. Respondents had the option not to take part. Applying weights helps to address this, but the self-selecting nature of the respondents may have biased the results in a way weighting couldn't account for.
- The sample size is significantly larger than last year's survey and other surveys of this kind. However, when we look at the results for some smaller subgroups (e.g. by region, ethnicity and age), these individual groups can be small. This makes it hard to make generalised conclusions for some smaller populations.
- The subject matter (children's experiences of violence) is sensitive. While we ensured the framing of the questions was suitable for children, it's possible that some may have been unwilling to respond openly and honestly, particularly about things they may have done.
- Caution should be taken when making comparisons between this year's survey and last year's. We cannot rule out that changes made to question order, survey length or respondents to the survey affected comparability between years.

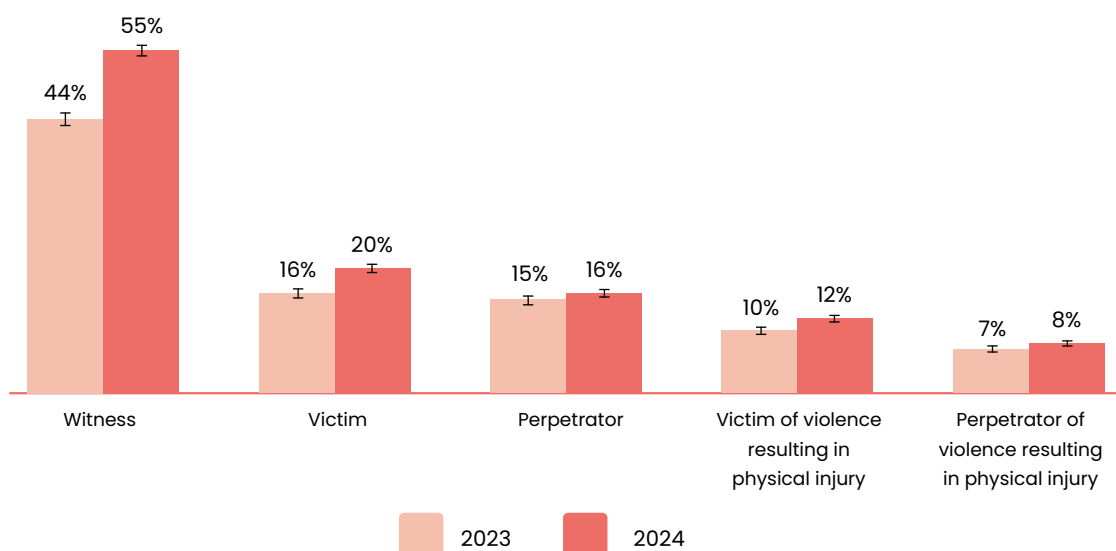
What we found

A worrying minority of children continue to have direct experiences of violence as victims and perpetrators.

One in five teenage children were victims of violence, and one in six perpetrated violence in the past year.

This year's survey continues to find a worrying minority of children aged 13-17 years old are victims of violence. This mirrors the findings from our survey last year. This year, 20% of children report being victims of violence in the past 12 months, equivalent to 730,000¹ 13-17-year-olds in England and Wales. This is somewhat higher than last year's survey, which found 16% of children were victims. However, changes in the surveying methodology this year mean the figures are not directly comparable.

Figure 1.1: Proportion of 13-17-year-olds in England and Wales who were victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence in the past 12 months



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the estimates to fall within.

¹ Estimates based on survey estimated prevalence rates and ONS mid-year 2023 population estimates for 13-17-year-olds in England and Wales ([here](#)).

The majority (61%) of victims say they experienced violence that led to physical injury, with 12% of all 13–17-year-olds reporting being a victim of violence that led to bruises, scratches, cuts or any other form of physical harm (equivalent to 440,000 13–17-year-olds). This is similar to last year's survey, which found that 63% of victims had suffered physical injury. Just over half (55%) report being witnesses to violence. This is a notably larger proportion than last year, due to a change in the way questions were asked this year.

Our survey also shows that a worrying minority of children also continue to perpetrate violence. Around one in six (16%) 13–17-year-olds say they committed an act of violence in the past 12 months. This represents around 580,000 children in England and Wales. This is broadly in line with last year's survey, which found 15% had perpetrated violence. More than one in ten (11%) say that they've kicked, pushed or shoved someone else; 6% say they've stolen something through force or threats; 5% say they've threatened or hurt someone else with a weapon; and 5% say they've touched someone else sexually without consent.

How did we ask about the types of violence experienced?

When asking children whether they'd experienced violence in the past 12 months as victims or perpetrators, we used the following definition:

"... the use of force or threat of force against another person or people, for example, punching someone, threatening someone with a weapon, or mugging someone. This also includes sexual assault, which is when somebody intentionally touches someone in a sexual way without their consent".

We also asked about experiences of specific acts of violence, including robbery (taking something with force or the threat of force), physical assault, sexual assault and weapons offences (threatening or using a weapon on someone).

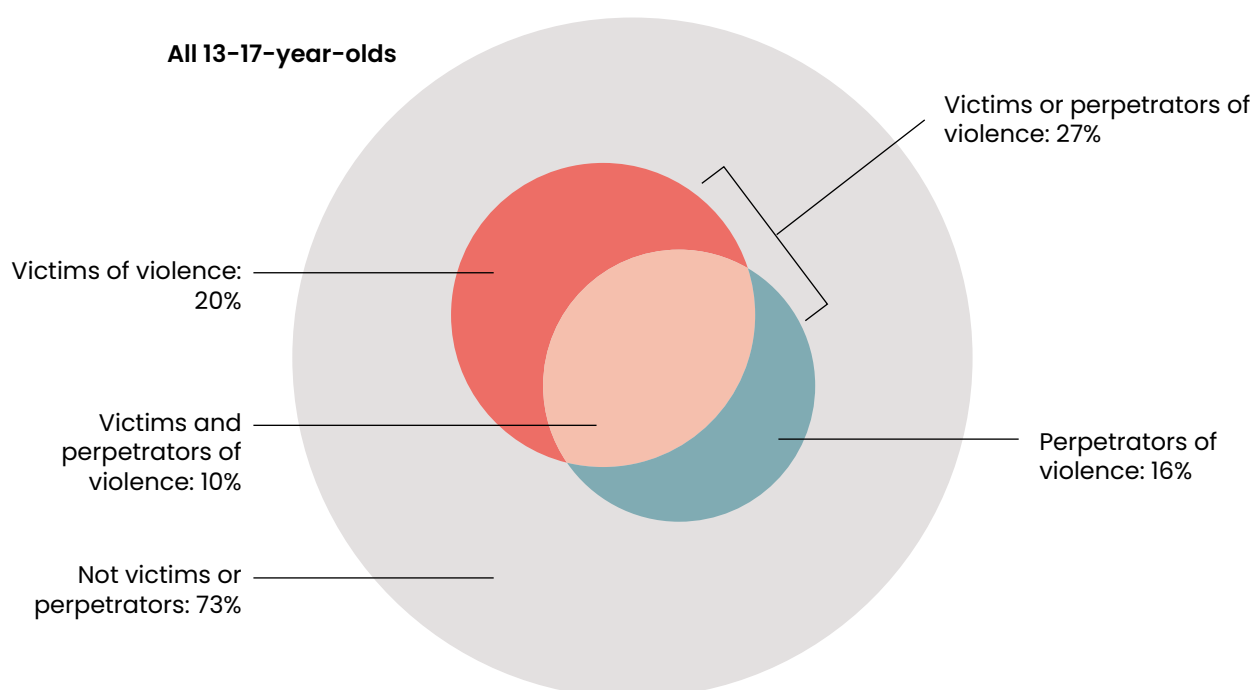
We also asked whether any of the violence experienced led to physical injury. For this, we asked:

"Were you [/they] bruised, scratched, cut, physically hurt or injured in any way?"

There's a significant overlap between victims and perpetrators.

Consistent with our findings from our previous two surveys, we found a large overlap between teenage children who'd been victims of violence in the past 12 months and those who'd committed violence themselves. Of children who've been victims of violence in the past year, 61% also report being perpetrators, and 49% of children who perpetrated violence also report being victims. The overlap between victims and perpetrators increases for more serious violence. Of victims of violence that led to physical injury, 77% were also perpetrators, and 60% of perpetrators of violence that led to physical injury were also victims.

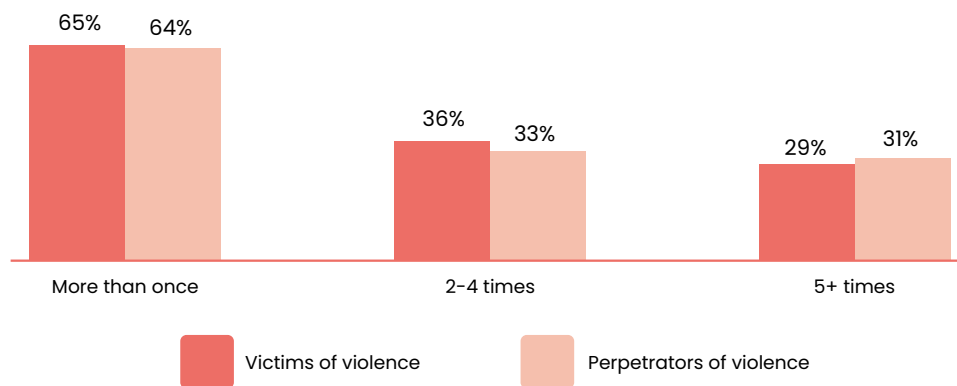
Figure 1.2: Overlap between children who have been victims and perpetrators of violence



Most victims and perpetrators of violence experience more than one incident.

Among those who report being victims of violence, 65% experienced more than one incident in the past 12 months. Twenty-nine per cent – equivalent to 6% of all teenage children – report experiencing violence at least five times. Similarly, among those who report perpetrating violence, 64% say this happened multiple times. Thirty-one per cent – representing 5% of all teenage children – report perpetrating violence at least five times in the past 12 months.

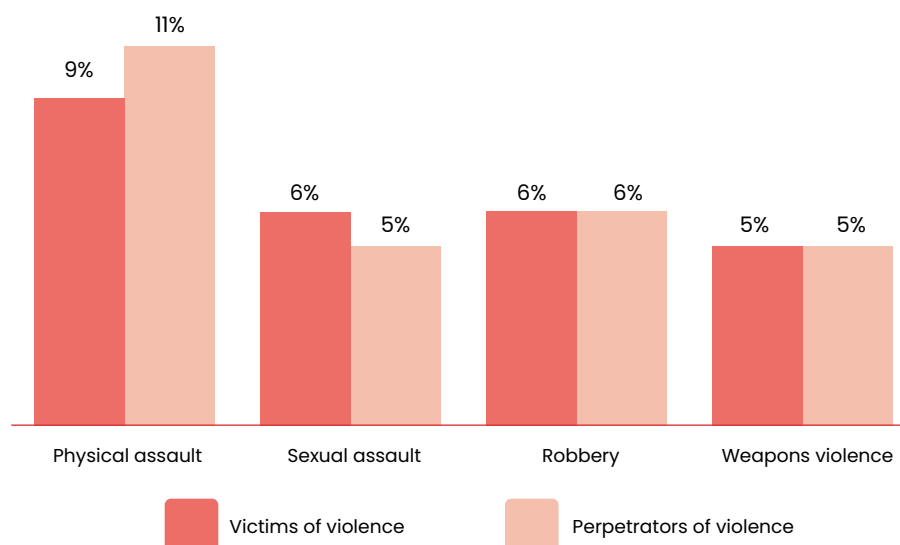
Figure 1.3: Proportion of children who have been victims and perpetrators of violence who experienced more than one incident in the past 12 months



Assault is the most common form of violence.

When looking at the types of violence experienced, 20% of victims experienced physical assault, 17% experienced force or threats for the purpose of theft (i.e. robbery), 17% experienced sexual assault and 16% experienced incidents involving a weapon. These figures represent 9%, 6%, 6% and 5%, respectively, of all 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales. The pattern is similar for the types of violence perpetrated. Physical assault was also the most commonly reported by teenage children (11%). Six per cent report using force or threats to take something (i.e. robbery), 5% report using or threatening to use a weapon and 5% report intentionally touching someone in a sexual way without their consent (i.e. sexual assault).

Figure 1.4: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who were victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by type of violence



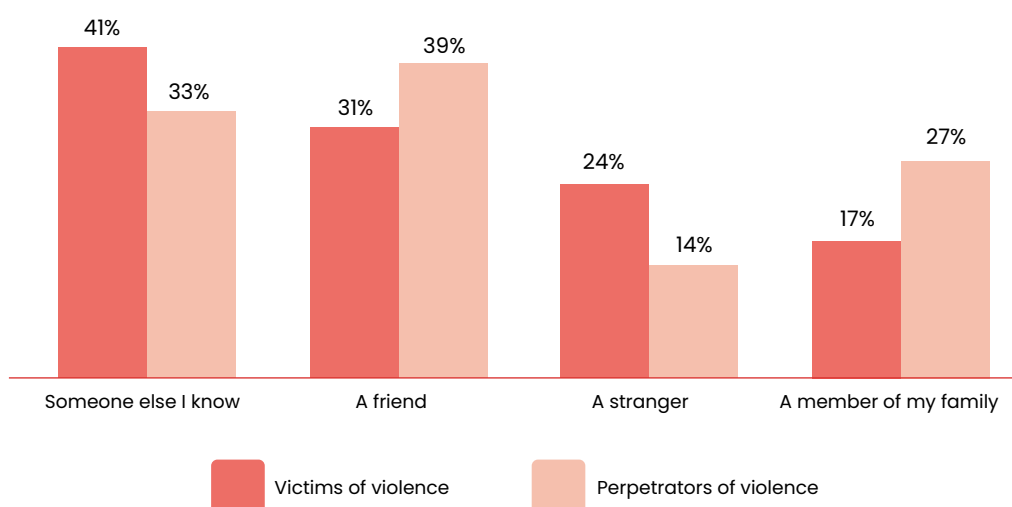
Most children who were victims of violence know the person responsible and tell someone about it.

We asked children who've been victims of violence who did it to them, and we asked children who perpetrated violence who they did it to. They could provide multiple answers if they'd been victimised by or had perpetrated violence against multiple people.

Of children who've been victims of violence, 80% say someone they know has perpetrated violence against them, with 17% of victims identifying a family member, 31% a friend and 41% another acquaintance. A quarter (24%) of victims say they've been the victim of violence by a stranger.

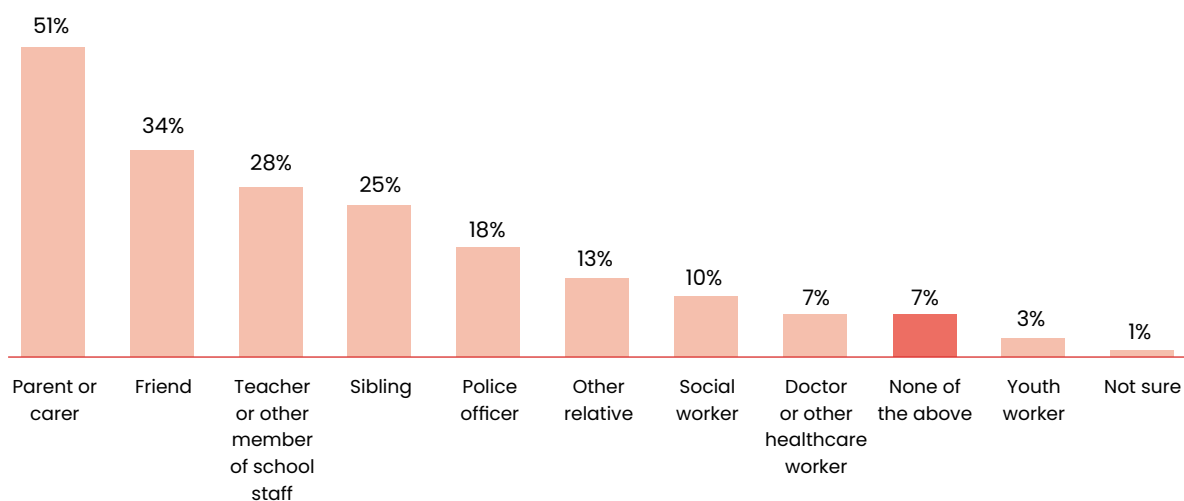
Mirroring this, teenage children who perpetrated violence are most likely to have been violent towards people they know, with 39% having been violent towards friends, 33% towards other acquaintances and 27% towards family members. Fourteen per cent of young people who perpetrated violence did so against strangers.

Figure 1.5: How children who have been victims and perpetrators of violence are related to the person who committed acts of violence against them or who they committed violence against*



*Percentages do not add to 100% as there could have been multiple victims or perpetrators.

Consistent with what we found last year, almost all (92%) victims told someone about it. Parents or carers were the most likely to be told (51%), followed by friends (34%) and school staff (28%). Twenty-five per cent told siblings, 13% told other relatives and 18% reported the incident to the police.

Figure 1.6: Who children told about the violence they'd been victims of*

*Percentages do not add to 100% as children may have told more than one person.

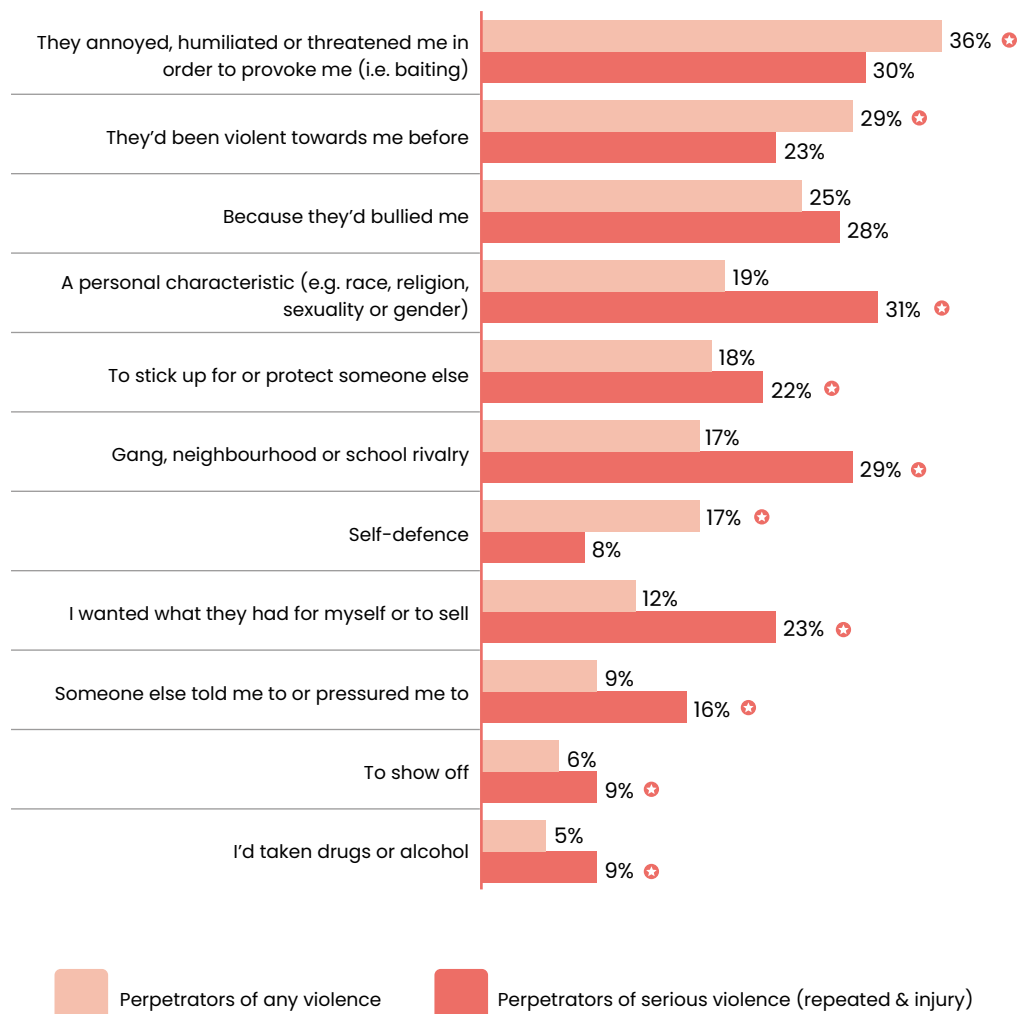
One in five perpetrators and two in five victims say violence was motivated by discrimination.

Children's motivations for committing violent acts are often reactive, with many occurring in response to perceived threats or past experiences of victimisation. Thirty-six per cent of children who committed violence did so because they felt annoyed, humiliated or threatened, while 29% say it was in retaliation to previous violence directed at them. Bullying is also a significant factor, with 25% of children who perpetrated violence citing it as their motivation.

Self-defence accounts for 17% of violent incidents. Social and community factors play a notable role as well. Eighteen per cent of children who committed violence acted to protect or support someone else, while 17% did so as part of gang, neighbourhood or school rivalries. Peer pressure is evident, with 9% admitting to having acted under the influence or direction of others.

Children who'd perpetrated serious violence (repeated and resulting in injury) similarly rate baiting as one of the most common reasons for violence (30%). But they were significantly more likely than perpetrators of any violence to say they'd acted because of personal characteristics (31%) and as part of a gang, neighbourhood or school rivalry (29%). Along with being bullied (28%), these were the most common reasons given by those who'd perpetrated serious violence. They were also more likely to say they'd done it because they wanted what the victim had for themselves or to sell (23%), were sticking up for someone else (22%) or felt pressured into it (16%) compared to perpetrators of any violence.

Figure 1.7: Why children committed acts of violence*



*Percentages don't add to 100%, as children may have perpetrated violence more than once or had more than one reason.

Note. Stars next to the bars indicate where estimates for the two groups are significantly different from one another at a 95% confidence level.

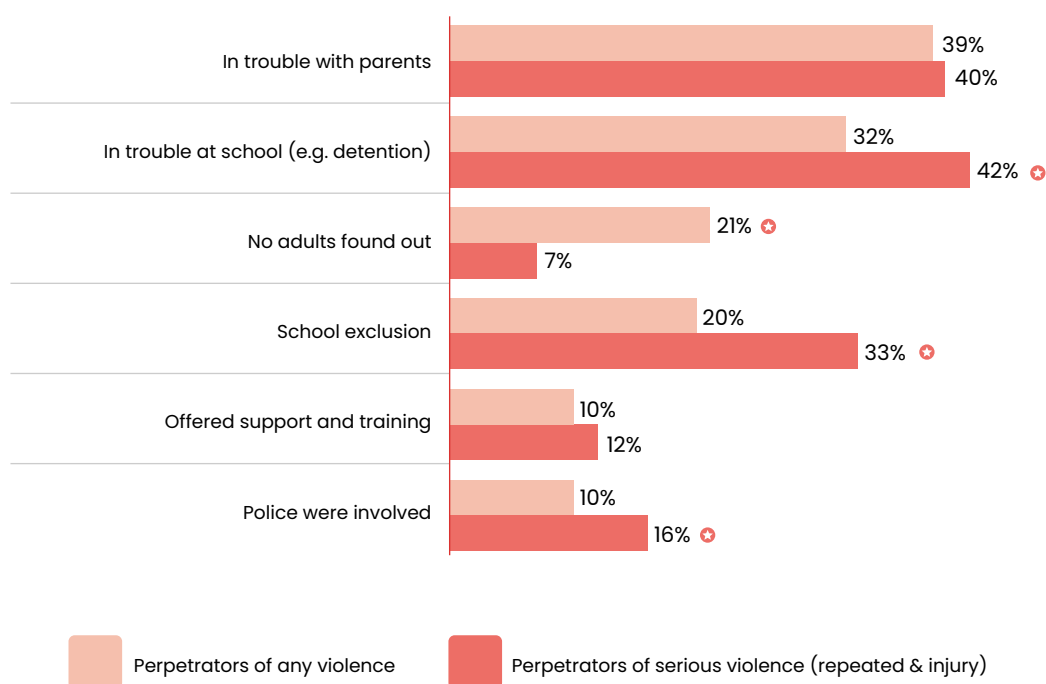
This year, we also asked victims whether they thought they'd been victimised due to discrimination (e.g. because of their religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or any disabilities). Forty-one per cent of victims of violence (equivalent to 8% of all 13-17-year-olds) think they've been victims due to discrimination. When we ask children who've perpetrated violence whether they acted because of someone's personal characteristics (e.g. race, religion, sexuality or gender), only 19% say they acted because of this – equivalent to 3% of all 13-17-year-olds. This increases to 31% for children who say they committed violence that led to injury.

Most children perpetrating violence don't receive support.

When we ask those who've perpetrated violence what the response from adults in authority was, one in five (21%) say no adults found out, but the majority (78%) say there was some form of response. The most common consequences were getting in trouble with parents (39%) or school authorities (32%). Twenty per cent say they were excluded from school, and 10% say the police were involved. Only 10% of teenage children who perpetrated violence were offered support and training to help them control their actions in the future.

For those committing serious violence (defined as repeated incidents resulting in injury), the likelihood of facing consequences increases (93% receive some response), with 42% facing school discipline, 33% being excluded and 16% encountering police involvement. But only 12% say they were offered support or training after perpetrating serious violence, which is only slightly higher than the average of 10%.

Figure 1.8: Adults' responses to children who perpetrated violence *



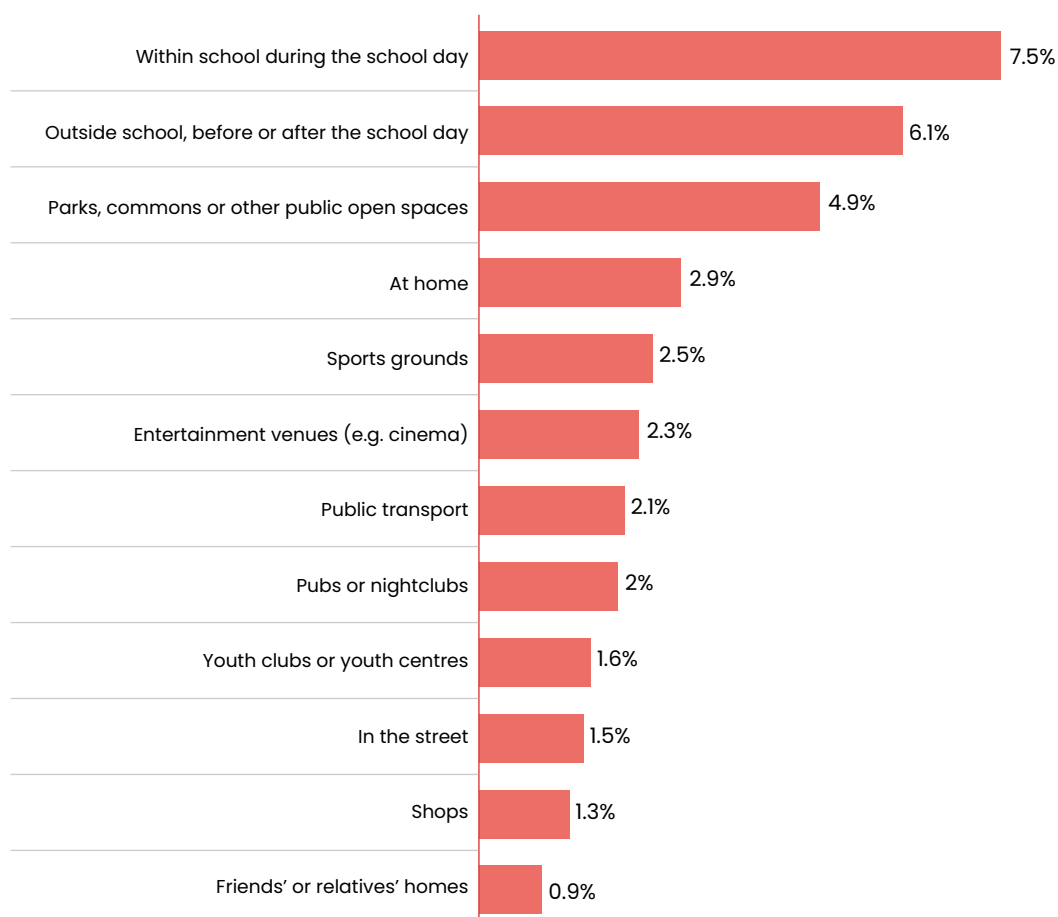
*Percentages don't add to 100%, as children could have selected more than one response.

Note. Stars next to the bars indicate where estimates for the two groups are significantly different from one another at a 95% confidence level.

School is seen as a safe place by most children, but it's also where violence most commonly happens.

For the majority of children, schools are a safe place, but there's a fraction of children who have experienced violence at school. When we ask about where they feel safe, 82% of children say they view school as very or fairly safe from violence. Only 5% think school is unsafe. However, school is also the place where teenage children are most likely to say they've experienced violence; 37% of children who've been victims of violence in the past year say it happened in school during the school day. This is equivalent to 8% of all 13-17-year-olds. The next most likely place violence happened was outside school, before or after the school day (30% of victims of violence say it happened in this way), followed by parks, commons or other public outdoor spaces (24% of victims of violence said it happened in these places); 3% of victims of violence say it occurred in their own home.

Figure 1.9: Proportion of 13-17-year-olds in England and Wales who experienced violence by place it happened



Experiences of violence are concentrated among the most vulnerable.

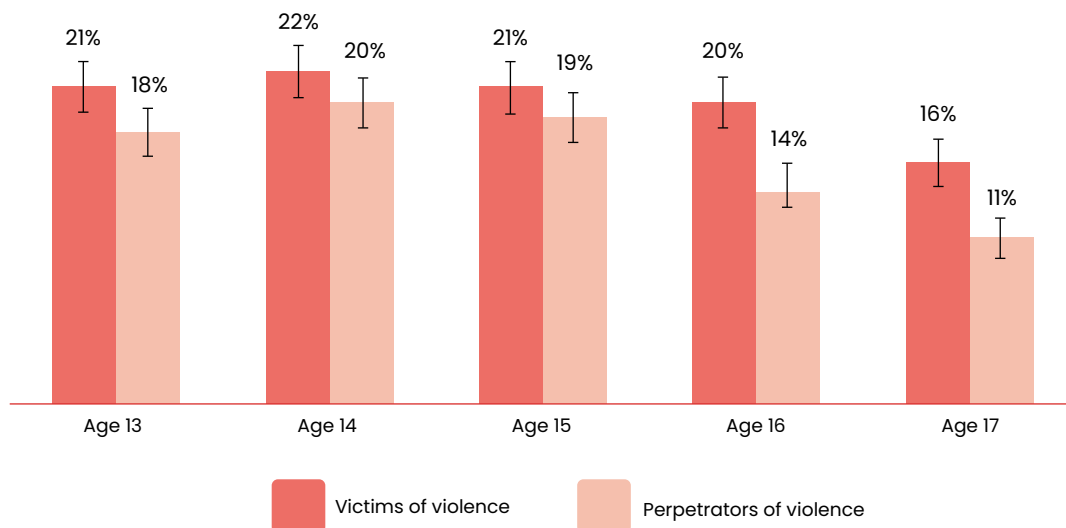
Not all children are equally likely to be involved in violence as victims or perpetrators. There are various factors relating to children's backgrounds, characteristics and experiences that put some children at greater risk.

Background characteristics

Age

Younger children report higher rates of being both victims and perpetrators of violence, although the nature of the violence varies. Twenty-one per cent of 13-year-olds report being victims of violence, compared to 16% of 17-year-olds. A similar pattern is true for the perpetration of violence. Eighteen per cent of 13-year-olds report having perpetrated an act of violence in the past 12 months, compared to 11% of 17-year-olds.

Figure 2.1: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have been victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by age



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the estimates to fall within.

Younger teenagers are more likely than older ones to say they've physically hurt someone in the last year; 13% of 13-year-olds say they've been physically violent in some way compared with 8% of 17-year-olds. Similarly, 17% of 13-year-olds say they've been a victim of physical assault compared with 12% of 17-year-olds. Younger respondents are also more likely to say they've been a victim of repeated violence, with a third (33%) of 13-year-old victims saying they've been a victim at least five times compared to 26% of 17-year-olds. When older teens commit acts of violence, they're more likely to do this to family members (32% vs 25% of 13-15-year-olds) and as a one-off (42% vs 33% of 13-15-year-olds).

Gender

Boys are around twice as likely to report being both victims and perpetrators of violence. Twenty-four per cent of boys aged 13-17 report being victims of violence in the past 12 months, compared to 16% of girls. When it comes to perpetration, 21% of boys report committing an act of violence in the past 12 months, compared to 11% of girls. Boys are also more likely to report witnessing violence – with 58% saying they've seen real-world violence in the past 12 months, compared to 53% of girls.

The [third report](#) in this year's series will explore the differences in how boys and girls experience violence in more detail.

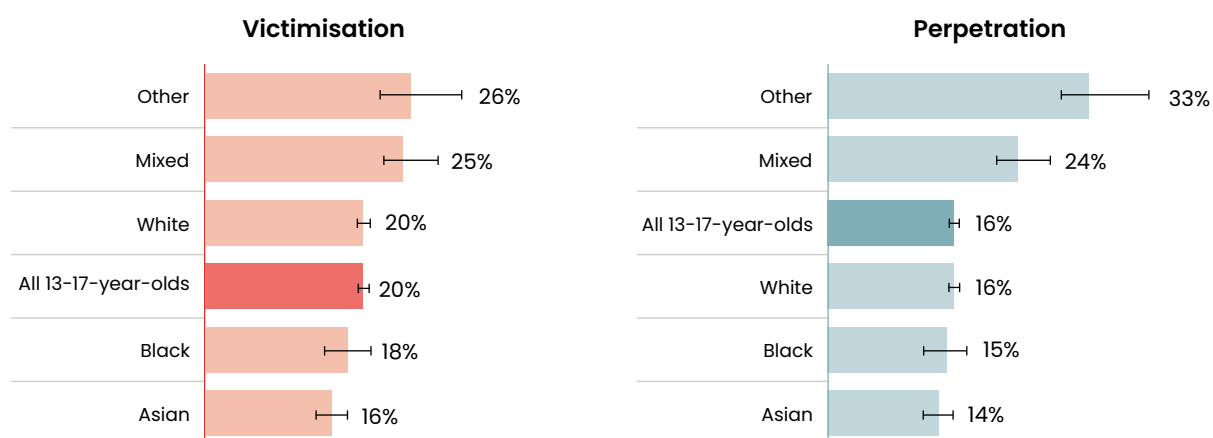
How do these prevalence figures compare to other surveys?

Last year, we also found that boys were more likely than girls to be victims or perpetrators of violence (e.g. 17% of boys reported perpetrating violence, compared to 13% of girls). Our findings this year are broadly in line with this and other surveys. For example, the 2018/19 [Crime Survey of England and Wales](#) found that 7.2% of boys aged 10-15 were victims of violence, compared to 3.5% of girls.

Ethnicity

Children from mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to report being victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence compared to White children. Twenty-five per cent of 13-17-year-olds from mixed ethnicity backgrounds had been victims of violence in the past 12 months, compared to 20% of White children. The pattern is similar for the perpetration of violence, with 24% of mixed ethnicity children committing a violent act in the past year, compared to 20% of White children. Over half (51%) of mixed ethnicity children who were victims say that they believe they were victims due to discrimination; comparatively, 40% of White children who were victims believe it was due to discrimination. We found no statistically significant differences between children from Asian and Black backgrounds compared to White children. Unfortunately, there aren't enough respondents to break these results down by specific ethnic groups.

Figure 2.2: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have been victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by ethnicity

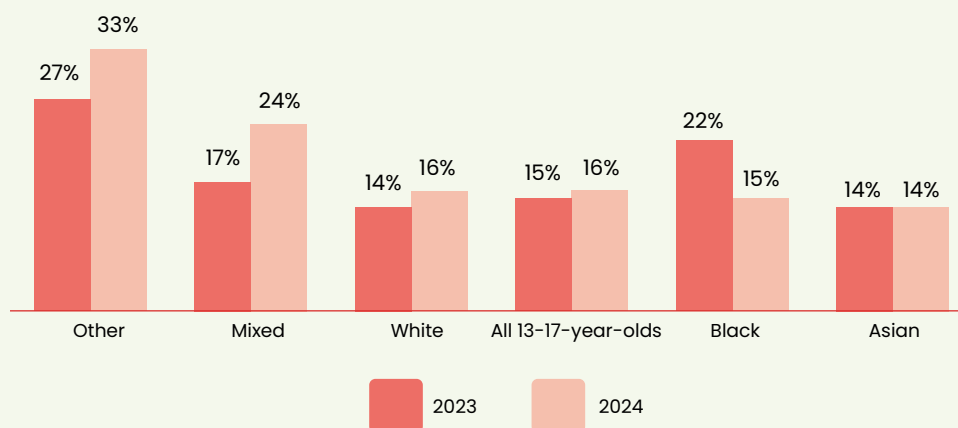


Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the estimates to fall within.

How does this compare to what others have found?

Last year, we found that children from Black backgrounds were over-represented as both victims and perpetrators of violence. This was in line with what [official national data](#) tells us about formal interactions with the criminal justice system (e.g. arrests) and the victims of violence (e.g. homicides). However, this year, we found no statistically significant differences between Black children's victimisation and perpetration rates compared to children from other backgrounds. This finding was consistent across regions (e.g. Black children living in London compared to the rest of England and Wales) and across broad economic groups (e.g. whether they were receiving free school meals).

Figure 2.3: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds who perpetrated violence this year compared to last year's survey by ethnicity



What might explain this?

It's important to emphasise that while this is the largest national survey on children's experiences of violence, once we break results down by children's ethnic backgrounds, these subgroups can be small. In total, 625 Black children responded to the survey. While we're confident the total results are representative of the experiences of children across England and Wales, the findings for smaller subgroups (e.g. ethnicity) might not fully reflect the experiences of those groups. There might be factors driving why some children choose to respond that we cannot fully control for.

When we further cut the results by more specific ethnic groups (e.g. Black Caribbean or Black African), we find moderate evidence that children from Black African backgrounds are less likely to be victims (16%) and perpetrators (13%) of violence, while Black Caribbean children are slightly more likely to be victims (22%) and perpetrators (20%) compared to children from White British backgrounds (20% victims and 16% perpetrators). However, these differences are not statistically significant.

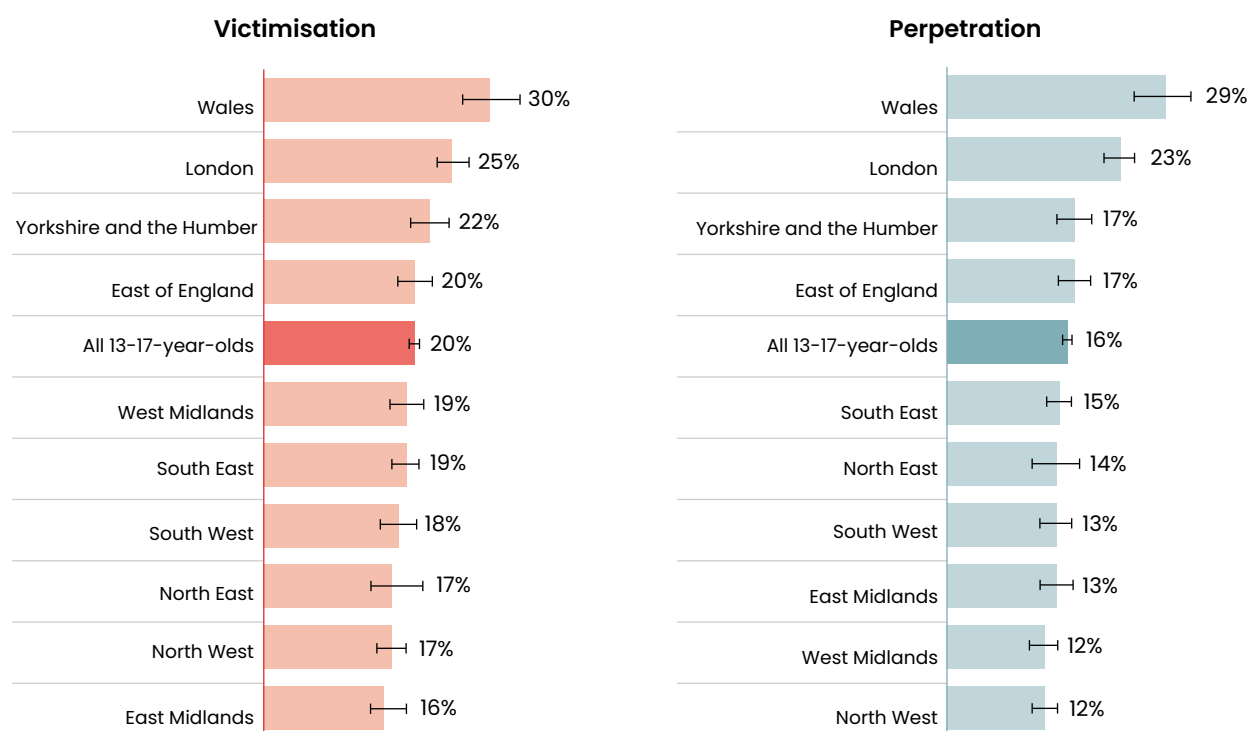
While the number of children who responded for these smaller groups is too small to draw strong conclusions, these findings are consistent with what we see in other datasets. This highlights the importance of using more specific ethnic groups wherever possible.

Vulnerabilities to violence

Where young people live

Children living in Wales report the highest rates of experiencing violence – 30% of Welsh children say that they've been a victim of violence, and 29% say that they've perpetrated violence themselves. After Wales, London has the highest rates of victimisation and perpetration, at 25% and 23%, respectively.

Figure 2.4: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have been victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by region



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the estimates to fall within.

Many of the differences by region can be explained by whether children live in cities. Children living in inner city areas were significantly more likely to be both victims of violence (31% vs the average 20%) and perpetrators (27% vs the average of 16%). Comparatively, 15% of children in villages and 16% in towns have been victims of violence, while 10% and 12%, respectively, have perpetrated violence. When we combine this with region data, we see, for example, that the rate of violence perpetration in London (23%) is similar to the rate of violence in cities in other regions, such as Yorkshire and the Humber (24%), South East (21%) and East England (25%).

Family networks

To understand children's home lives better, we asked about how the household was structured (e.g. whether parents lived together) and whether families had extra support (e.g. being supported by a social worker).

Children from single-parent households are slightly more likely than those from married or cohabiting households to be victims of violence – 22% compared to 19%. There were no differences in perpetration levels between children from single-parent or two-parent households (16% for both). We see a similar pattern for more serious violence that led to injury – 9% of children from single-parent and two-parent households have been victims of violence, and 5% and 7%, respectively, have perpetrated violence. This is broadly in line with our findings from last year's survey, which showed only small differences in victimisation and perpetration rates.

Half (50%) of children who've been supported by a social worker in the past 12 months say they've been a victim of violence, and 21% have been a victim at least five times. Of children who've been victims of violence, those supported by a social worker are also significantly more likely to say violence happened at home (17%) and was perpetrated by a family member (30%) compared to those who've never been supported by a social worker. Similarly, nearly half (47%) of children who were supported by a social worker in the past year have perpetrated violence themselves. They're significantly more likely to say they perpetrated as part of a gang or neighbourhood rivalry (27% vs 6% of children who've never had a social worker) and because of the victim's personal characteristics (26% vs 10% of children who've never had a social worker).

Financial and material resources

The financial and material resources a household has are considered by many as important determinants of whether children are vulnerable to crime and violence. We explored this association in this year's survey by asking about household resources, parents' profession, the type of house they live in and whether they receive free school meals.

Three of our five measures of households' financial and material resources have little association with involvement in violence:

- Children living in council or socially rented housing and those in families that own their own homes are equally likely to have been both victims (20% for both) and perpetrators (15% social housing vs 17% owned) of violence in the past year.
- Children in households with no parents or guardians in work are slightly more likely to have been victims of violence in the past year (24%) compared to households with at least one parent in work (19%). There's no difference in perpetration rates (18% vs 16%, respectively).

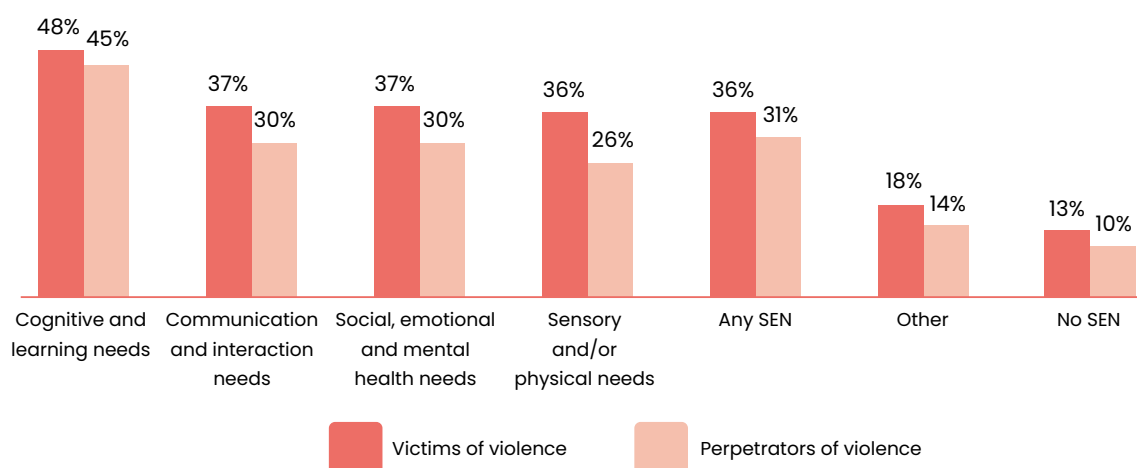
- Children from working-class and middle-class households are equally likely to have been victims of violence in the past year (21% working-class vs 20% middle-class). Children from working-class backgrounds are slightly more likely to have perpetrated violence (19% vs 15%, respectively).²

Children in households where they're not able to have their own bedroom are slightly more likely to have been victims (24%) and perpetrators (21%) of violence compared to the average (20% and 16%, respectively). But these differences, while significant, aren't large. The one poverty measure for which we did find a consistent association with violence was free school meals. Children eligible for free school meals are more likely to have been victims of violence than those not eligible – 32% and 14%, respectively. They are also more likely to have perpetrated violence – 29% and 9%, respectively. It's important to note, however, that in some areas of the country, free school meals are now being offered regardless of household income, including in secondary schools (e.g. Tower Hamlets). This means that it might be a less reliable indicator of household income. The higher rates for this group may reflect other relationships, such as where the child lives.

Access to education

This year, we explored a number of new factors related to education that could be associated with children's involvement in violence, including the type of school or education setting attended, absence in the latest school term, school suspensions and exclusions, and special educational needs (SEN).

Figure 2.5: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have been victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by special educational needs (SEN)



² In this context, working-class (also known as C2DE) refers to households where the main income earner works in manual or lower supervisory roles, while middle-class (also known as ABC1) refers to households where the main income earner works in managerial, administrative or professional occupations. These classifications are based on the National Readership Survey social grade system commonly used in the UK.

Children with SEN are significantly more likely to have been victims than children without SEN, 36% and 13%, respectively. More than half (54%) of children with SEN say they think the violence they experienced was due to discrimination, and for children with cognitive and learning needs, this rises to 66%. Nearly a third (31%) of those with SEN say they've perpetrated violence in the past year. Forty-five per cent of those with cognitive and learning needs say they perpetrated violence, compared to 30% of those with communication needs and 30% of those with social and emotional needs. Children with SEN are more likely to say that being bullied was a motivation behind why they perpetrated violence (28% vs 20% for all perpetrators).

Children in SEN schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) are significantly more likely to have been involved in violence compared to those in mainstream education. Forty-five per cent of children in SEN schools and 47% of children in PRUs report being victims of violence. Nearly a third (31%) of those in SEN schools and a quarter (25%) of those in PRUs believe they were victims due to discrimination. They're also more likely to have perpetrated violence, at 46% of those in SEN schools and 40% of those in PRUs.

Children who've been suspended or excluded also report higher involvement in violence. Fifty-six per cent of children suspended in the past year and 71% of children excluded in the past year say they were victims of violence. Perpetration rates are also higher, with more than half (53%) of those suspended in the last year and three-quarters of those excluded (71%) saying they've perpetrated violence.

Thirty per cent of children in education or training say they've been persistently absent (absent for 10% or more of the time) in the past school term. The most common reason children who were persistently absent give for their absence is illness (55%). But they're significantly less likely to cite illness compared to those with only short absences (86%) and more likely to give reasons such as struggling to follow lessons (15% vs 6%) and bullying (10% vs 5%). Those who've been persistently absent are also more likely to have been directly affected by violence, with 34% of those persistently absent from school saying they perpetrated violence.

Engaging in risky behaviours

In this year's report, we identified three particularly risky behaviours we wanted to find out about. These include taking drugs, being a member of a gang³ and carrying a weapon. It's important to emphasise that while some children may say they took part in these activities, that doesn't mean they always had a free choice. Many would have felt coerced or compelled to do so.

³ We used the following definition of being in a gang: "By a 'gang', we mean a group of young people who think of themselves as a gang, probably with a name, and are involved in violence or other crime."

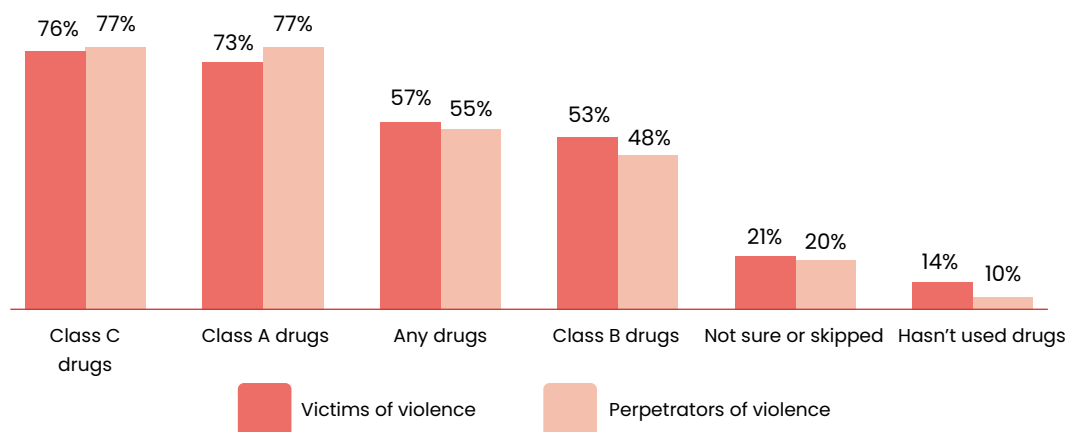
⁴ Last year's survey found that 13% of 13-17-year-olds had used illegal drugs in the past 12 months, which is in line with 12% we found this time. Other surveys find similar prevalence rates; for instance, the NHS survey of smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England found that 12% of 11-15-year-olds had taken drugs over a 12-month period.

Using drugs

Twelve per cent⁴ of 13–17-year-olds say they've taken drugs in the past 12 months. Six per cent have taken class A drugs, 8% class B and 4% class C. Children who live in inner city areas are more likely to say they've taken a class A drug (13%) compared with those from towns and rural areas (4%). More than half (57%) of children who've been in a gang have taken a class A drug.

Drug use is associated with higher rates of victimisation and perpetration. Fifty-seven per cent of 13–17-year-olds who've used any drug in the past 12 months have been victims of violence, compared to 14% of children who haven't used any drugs. Fifty-five per cent of children who've used any drugs have perpetrated violence, compared to 10% who haven't used any drugs. The risks increase for those using class A drugs – 77% of those children had perpetrated violence.

Figure 2.6: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have been victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by drug use



Carrying a weapon

Five per cent of 13–17-year-olds carried a weapon in the past year. Boys are more likely than girls to say they've carried a weapon (8% vs 3%), and 13–15-year-old boys are more likely than 16–17-year-old boys to carry weapons (9% vs 5%)⁵. Those from inner city areas are more likely than those from towns and villages to have carried weapon (11% vs 2%).

Over three-quarters (78%) of children who carried a weapon were victims of violence in the past year. Comparatively, 16% of those who'd not carried a weapon say they were a victim of violence. A third (32%) of children who carry a weapon say that they've had someone else threaten them

⁴ Last year's survey found that 13% of 13–17-year-olds had used illegal drugs in the past 12 months, which is in line with 12% we found this time. Other surveys find similar prevalence rates; for instance, the NHS survey of smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England found that 12% of 11–15-year-olds had taken drugs over a 12-month period.

⁵ In our survey last year, we found that 4% of children had carried a weapon – similar to the 5% figure this year. This is also broadly in line with findings from the Millennium Cohort Study, which found that at age 14, 3.7% of children say they'd carried a weapon, and at age 17, 6.4%. When we ask what kind of weapons children carried, 2% say they'd carried a knife. This is also broadly in line with findings from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) Youth Violence Survey of 11–16-year-olds, which found that in 2018, 3% of children in London self-reported carrying a knife.

with or use a weapon against them (vs only 3% of children who haven't carried a weapon). Eighty-four per cent of children who have carried a weapon report they've perpetrated violence in the past year (vs 12% who haven't carried).

Being in a gang

Seven per cent of 13-17-year-olds say they've been in a gang in the past 12 months.⁶ Children who've been in a gang are more likely to be younger boys (12% of 13-15-year-old boys vs 7% of 16-17-year-old boys and 4% of 13-15-year-old girls), from inner city areas (16% vs 4% from towns and 2% from villages), have SEN (17% vs 3% without SEN), use drugs (40% vs 2% who haven't used drugs) and have been excluded from school (49% vs 2% who've never been excluded).

Three-quarters (75%) of children who've been in a gang have been victims of violence in the past year. They're also more likely to have perpetrated violence – 83% vs 11% of those who haven't been in a gang. The rates are particularly high for robbery and sexual offences. Half (50%) of children in gangs say they've non-consensually touched someone sexually, compared to 2% of those not in a gang. And over half (51%) say they've robbed someone, compared to 2% of children not in a gang.

Risk of criminal exploitation

Children at risk of criminal exploitation also show higher rates of exposure to violence. This year, we asked two new questions to identify children at risk. Firstly, we asked whether they'd stayed overnight somewhere other than their or a friend's house without their parent's permission (i.e. went missing from home). Secondly, we asked whether they'd been approached to sell drugs, transport drugs from one place to another or store drugs, weapons or money for someone else.

Fourteen per cent of teenage children in England and Wales say they've gone missing overnight in the past year without their parents' or guardians' knowledge. This increased significantly for children from inner city areas (23%) and those with cognitive and learning needs (35%). The risk of being involved in violence increased substantially for this group, with 49% of children who've gone missing in the past 12 months saying they've perpetrated violence and 51% saying they've been victims, compared to 9% perpetration and 13% victimisation rates for those who haven't been missing.

Ten per cent of teenage children report being approached to sell or transport drugs or store drugs, weapons or money for someone else. This increases to 30% for children who've had a social worker support them in the past year, 56% of those excluded in the past year and 30% of those who attend a SEN school.

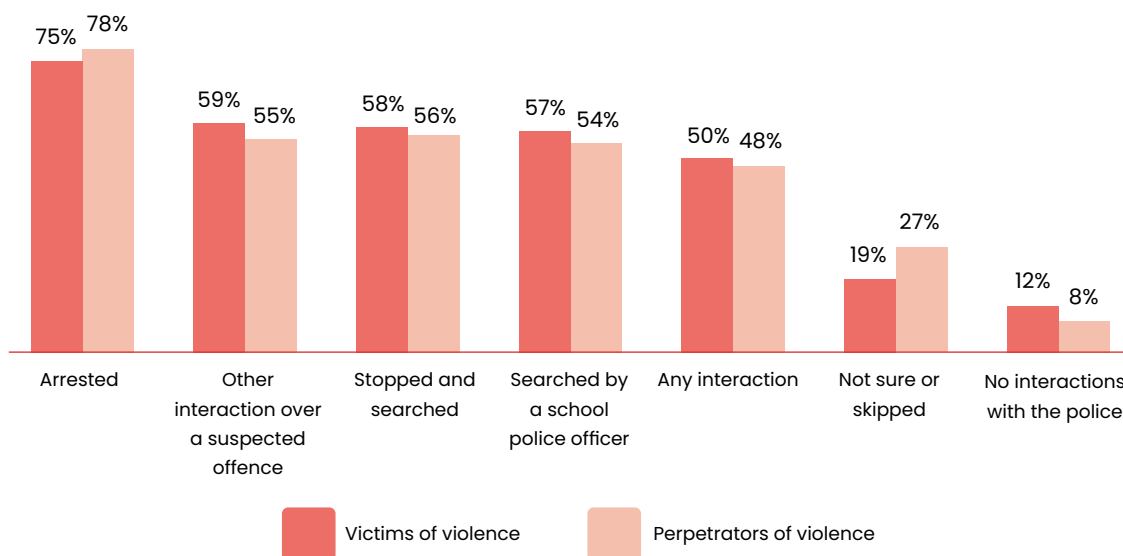
⁶ Last year, 5% of children said they'd been in a gang. This year, our estimate is 7%. This is somewhat higher than the 3% of 11-16-year-olds in London who said they're in gangs according to the 2018 MOPAC Youth Violence Survey. MOPAC used a similar definition of gangs to the one we used. While higher, the overall percentage remains small.

Two-thirds (65%) of those approached to hold drugs, weapons or money have been victims of violence in the past year (compared to 15% of those who haven't been approached), and 63% have perpetrated violence (compared to 43% of those who haven't been approached). More than half (54%) of those approached say they've perpetrated violence more than five times in the last year, and 62% have committed violence resulting in injury.

Contact with the criminal justice system

Half (50%) of children who've had an interaction with the police in the past year over an offence they were suspected of committing (e.g. being arrested) have been victims of violence, compared to 12% of children who haven't interacted with the police. Three-quarters (75%) of those who've been arrested were also victims of violence. Fifty-eight per cent of children who've been stopped and searched and 57% of children who were searched by a school police officer were victims of violence in the last year. Nearly half of children (48%) who've had any interaction with the police say they've perpetrated violence (vs 8% perpetration rates for those who've had no interaction). Fifty-six per cent of those who've been stopped and searched, 54% of those searched by school police and 78% of those arrested have perpetrated violence in the past year.

Figure 2.7: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales who have been victims and perpetrators of violence in the past 12 months by interaction with the police over a suspected offence



How might authorities identify the children most at risk of involvement with violence?

Our report shows that a small but disproportionately vulnerable group of young people is over-represented among those who are involved in violence. One challenge facing local authorities and other agencies is how to identify and support the children with the greatest needs to prevent violence before it occurs. This is likely to require the analysis of local data and professional judgement.

This report highlights several factors that are strongly associated with involvement in violence and, importantly, which are available to the agencies responsible for supporting children. For example, children who've been arrested (78%), gone missing from home (49%), been excluded from school (71%) and been severely absent from school (21%) are all at increased risk of committing acts of violence. Forty-seven per cent of children with any one of these characteristics say they've perpetrated violence in the past 12 months, compared to 9% of children without any of these characteristics. This equates to 53% of children who've perpetrated violence having at least one of these characteristics. Using a combination of such factors to prioritise support is likely to be important.

The Youth Endowment Fund plans to do further work over the next year on what combination of factors is most informative and how agencies can prioritise support for the most vulnerable.

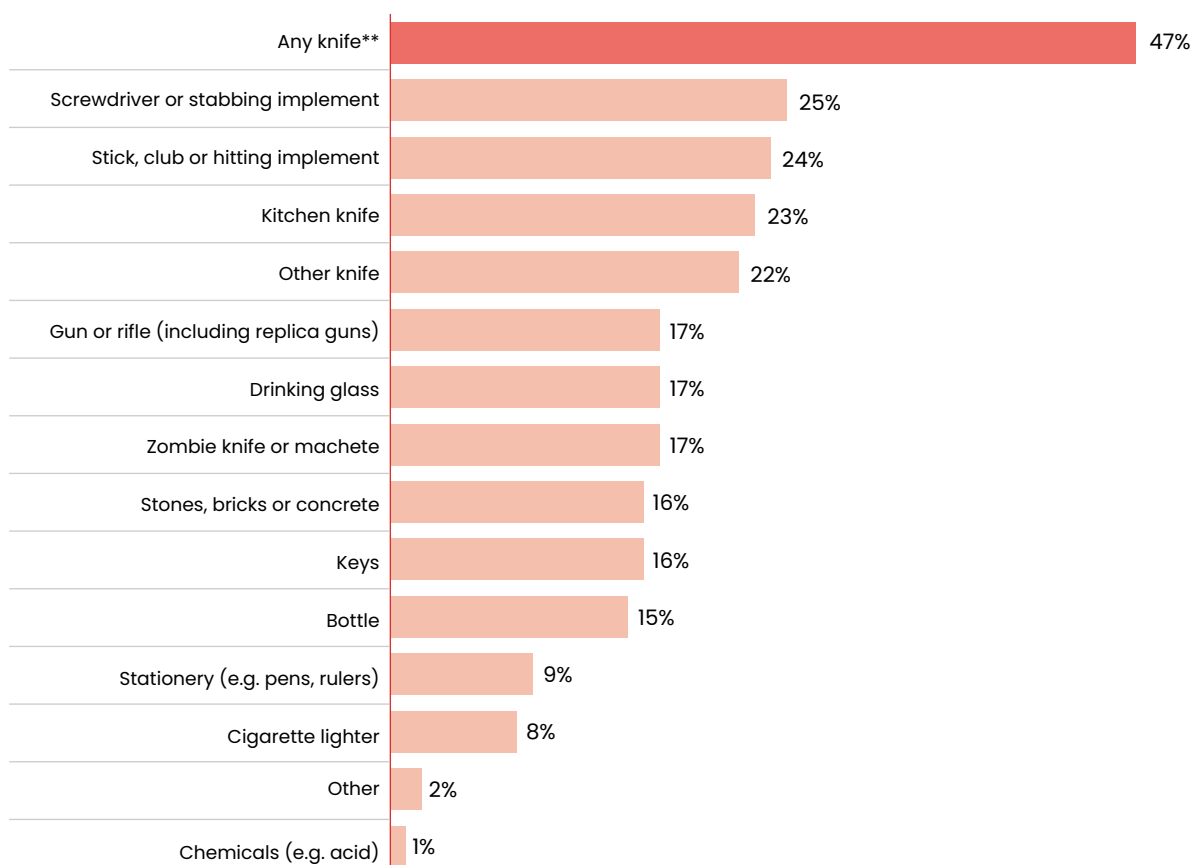
A small number are driven to carry weapons.

One in 20 teenage children report carrying a weapon in the past year.

As we've seen already, one in 20 (5%) children aged 13–17 say they've carried a weapon in the past year, and the risk of involvement in violence is significantly higher for these children. They're more likely to have been victims (78%) and perpetrators (84%), and just over half (52%) say they've actually used a weapon to threaten or hurt someone in the past year.

To find out more about these children, we asked more detailed questions about the types of weapons they carry. Among children who say they've carried a weapon, the most frequently carried weapons include screwdrivers or stabbing implements (25%); sticks, clubs or hitting implements (24%); kitchen knives (23%); and other types of knives (22%). Seventeen per cent say they've carried a zombie knife or machete.

Figure 3.1: Types of weapons carried by children who have carried weapons in the past 12 months*



*Percentages don't add to 100%, as children could have carried more than one type of weapon.

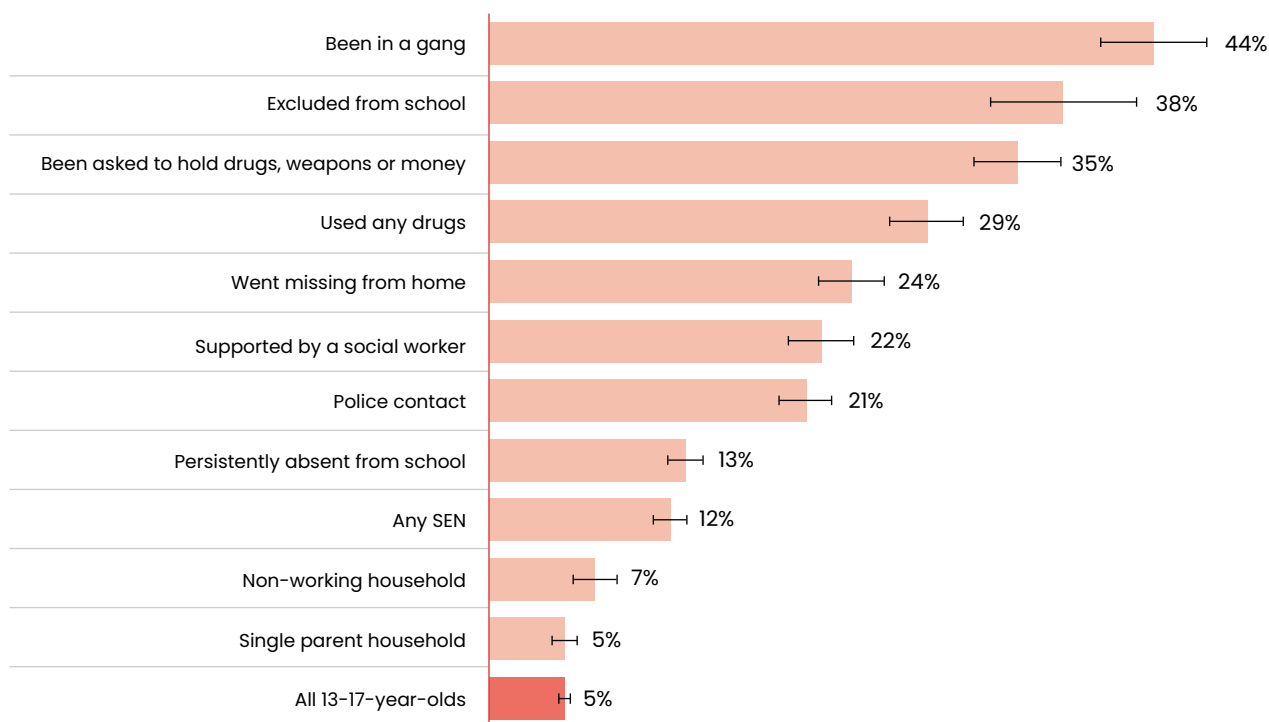
**Kitchen knife, zombie knife or machete, or other knife.

Vulnerable children are more likely to carry weapons...

As mentioned above, younger teenagers (7% of 13-15-year-olds vs 4% of 16-17-year-olds), boys (8% vs 3% of girls) and children living in inner city areas (11% vs 2% in towns and rural areas) are more likely to report carrying weapons.

Children most at risk of violence are also those with the highest likelihood of carrying weapons. This includes children with SEN (12%), those supported by a social worker in the past year (22%), pupils in SEN schools (21%) and those who've been persistently absent (13%), suspended (21%) or excluded from school (36%) in the past year. Children who've taken drugs (29%), been in a gang (44%) and are at risk of criminal exploitation (i.e. asked to hold drugs, weapons or money; 35%) also show a higher likelihood of weapon carrying.

Figure 3.2: Proportion of 13-17-year-olds in England and Wales who have carried a weapon in the past 12 months by vulnerabilities to violence



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the estimates to fall within.

...as are those directly impacted by violence.

Children who've had direct experiences of violence are also significantly more likely to carry weapons. Eight per cent of children who've witnessed violence in the past 12 months say they've carried a weapon (compared to 2% who haven't witnessed violence). This increases to 12% for those who've witnessed violence involving weapons. Twenty per cent of children who've been

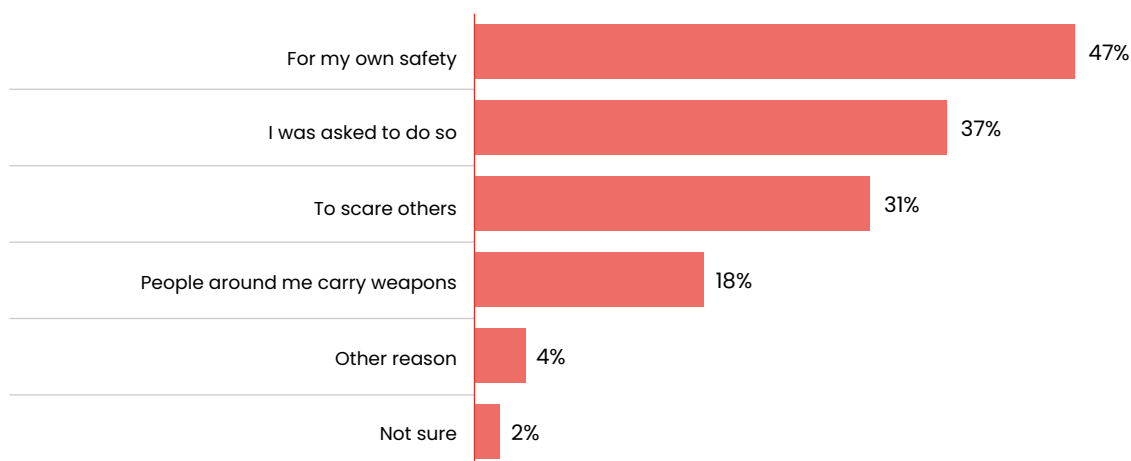
victims of violence in the past year say they've carried a weapon, increasing to 32% if they were victims of violence involving weapons.

The likelihood of weapon carrying increases further for children who've been victims of frequent violence (defined as being a victim five times or more in the past year) or serious violence (defined as repeated incidents resulting in injury) – 39% and 33%, respectively. The rate of weapon carrying among children who've perpetrated violence is 26% (compared to 1% of children who haven't perpetrated violence in the past 12 months).

Self-defence is the most cited reason for carrying a weapon.

When we ask 13-17-year-olds who carried weapons why they did it, nearly half (47%) say they did it to protect themselves. Thirty-seven per cent say they were asked to do it by someone else, 31% say they did it to scare others and 18% because others around them did.

Figure 3.3: Why children carried weapons*



*Numbers don't add up to 100%, as children could have had more than one reason.

Older teenagers (aged 16-17) are more likely to carry weapons for self-protection compared to younger ones (aged 13-15), with 56% and 43%, respectively, citing safety as a reason. Vulnerable children are also more likely to carry weapons due to external requests or to intimidate others; for example, 42% of children with SEN and 42% of children supported by a social worker carry weapons because they were asked to do so. Being asked to carry a weapon is also more common among children who have been suspended (45%), been excluded (46%), been in gangs (44%) and been asked to hold drugs, weapons or money (43%), compared to all children who've carried a weapon (37%).

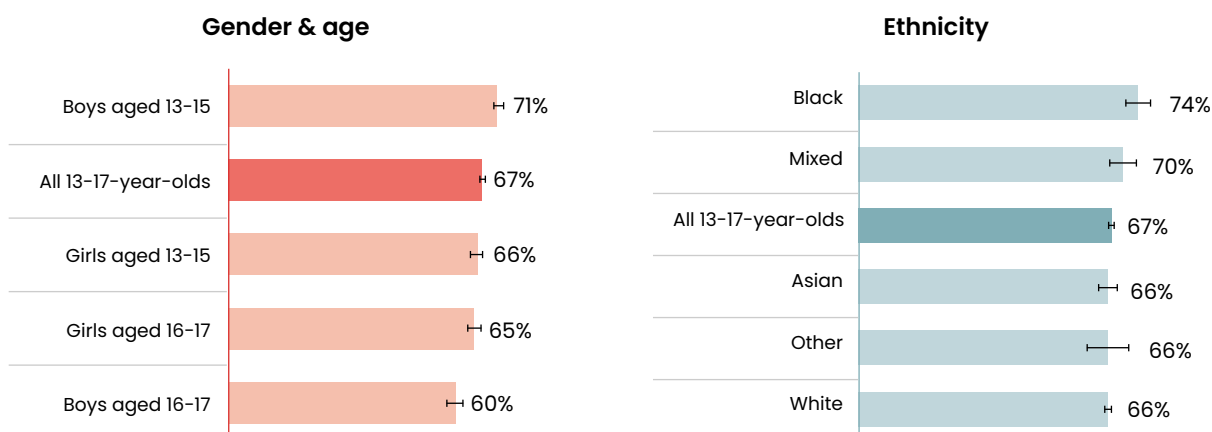
The majority of children feel the effects of violence.

Two-thirds of teenage children worry about becoming victims of violence.

To understand the full impact violence has, we wanted to find out how many children are concerned about violence on a day-to-day basis. Sixty-seven per cent of teenage children express worry about potentially becoming victims of violence from other young people. Of these, 22% report being very concerned. Sixty-nine per cent of younger teens (13-15-year-olds) are concerned about violence, compared with 63% of older teens (16-17-year-olds).

Black and mixed ethnicity children are more likely to be concerned (74% and 70%, respectively) compared to Asian and White ethnicity children (66% for both) – 38% of Black children report being very concerned about violence, significantly more than mixed ethnicity, White and Asian children (27%, 27% and 20%, respectively). Three-quarters (76%) of children from inner city areas are concerned about violence, compared with 63% of children from towns and 57% of children from rural areas.

Figure 4.1: Proportion of 13-17-year-olds in England and Wales who are worried about being victims of violence by gender, age and ethnicity



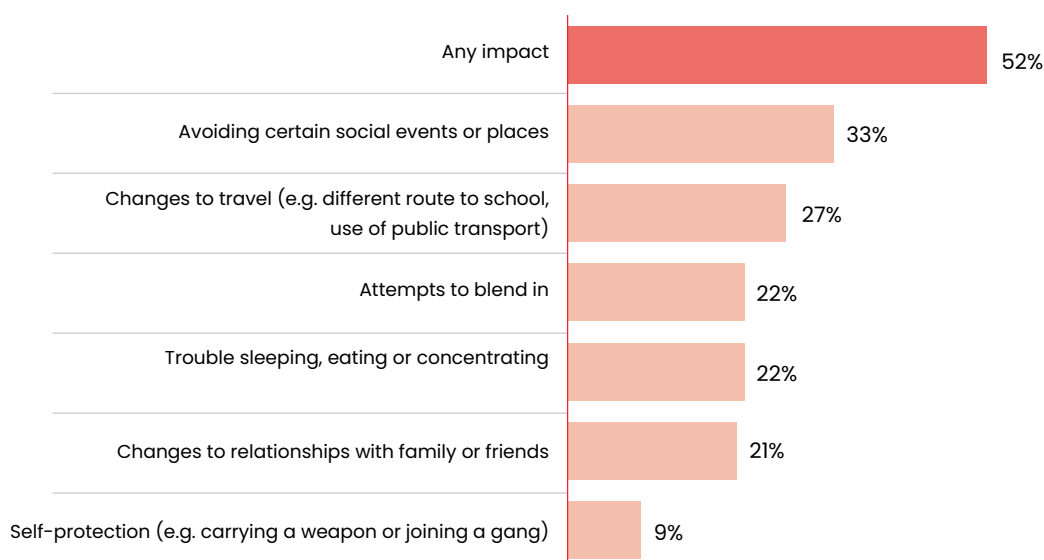
Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the estimates to fall within.

Children with certain potential vulnerabilities tend to have higher concerns about violence than those without. Seventy-six per cent of children with SEN and 82% of children supported by a social worker say they're concerned. Eighty per cent of children suspended and 86% of children excluded from school in the past year are concerned about violence. Children with some of the highest risks of involvement in violence are also some of the most likely to be concerned. Ninety-one per cent of those who've been in a gang and 91% of those who've carried a weapon are concerned about violence. Children who've perpetrated violence are just as concerned about being victims of violence (83%) as children who've been victims (85%).

Half of children say they've changed their behaviours due to fear of violence...

The impact of these worries on daily life is significant, with 52% of children reporting they've been affected by concerns of violence in some way. The most common impact, affecting 33% of all 13–17-year-olds, involves making changes to the places they go, such as avoiding certain locations or social events. A quarter (27%) say they've changed the way they move around, such as taking a different route to school or avoiding public transport. Twenty-two per cent report impacts on their mental health, including sleep disturbances, reduced appetite and difficulty concentrating in school.

Figure 4.2: Proportion of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales reporting day-to-day impacts of fears of violence*



*Numbers don't add up to 100%, as more than one change in behaviour could be selected.

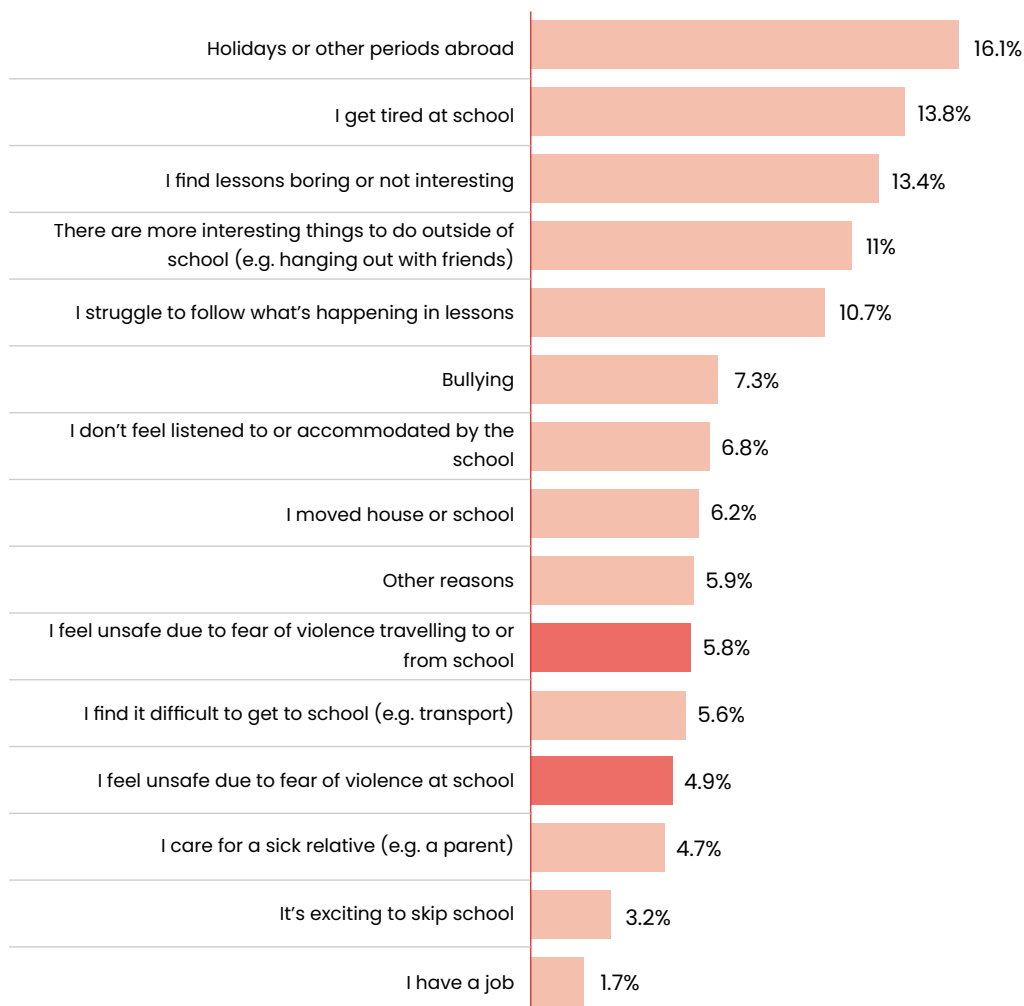
Certain children are even more likely to have changed their behaviours in some way. Not only are children from Black and mixed ethnicity backgrounds more likely to be concerned about violence, they're also more likely to report impacts on their daily lives (60% of Black and 56% of mixed ethnicity children) than White children (51%). Two-thirds (65%) of children in inner city areas report at least one impact: 43% say they've avoided certain locations, and 35% say it's affected their sleeping and appetite. Three-quarters (75%) of children with cognitive and learning needs have changed their behaviours: almost half (49%) say they've had trouble with sleep, appetite or concentration due to fears of violence. Fifty-seven per cent of those who were victims in the last year say that they've had trouble sleeping, eating or concentrating because of their worries around violence; 56% say they've made changes to where they go.

...and some of these changes are putting them at greater risk.

Nine per cent of children say they've done something to protect themselves, such as joining a gang or carrying a weapon, due to fear of violence. This increases to 28% of children who've already been victims of violence and 34% of children who've perpetrated violence. Rates are also higher for children with cognitive and learning needs, with 27% saying they've carried a weapon or joined a gang because of fears of violence.




We separately asked children who'd been absent from school what the reasons were. As we've seen already, three in 10 (30%) 13–17-year-olds in education or training say they've been persistently absent in the January 2024 school term – that's equivalent to missing 10% or more of possible lessons. When we ask children who missed school at least once in the January school term why they were absent, 10% say it was due to fears of violence either at school or on their journey to and from school. A quarter (26%) of both victims and perpetrators of violence give this as a reason for missing school.

Figure 4.3: Reasons children were absent from school, other than illness





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