

Racial disproportionality

in violence affecting
children and young people

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

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Foreword

The Youth Endowment Fund's vision is for every child to live a life free from violence. In the latest year, 40 children lost their lives to violence involving knives;¹ 509 ended up in hospital;² and 1 in 2 teenage children told us they changed the way they live because of the fear of violence.³ This is not okay. Each child affected by violence is a tragedy.

Amid these tragedies lies a further injustice. While children from all backgrounds can face violence and deserve our full protection, children from certain ethnic backgrounds are less safe.

Sometimes the statistics are deeply shocking. It should horrify all of us that a Black child growing up in our country is six times more likely to be murdered. It should also worry us when we hear that Black and Asian children are less likely to be referred for mental health support, or that Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children face disproportionately high rates of school exclusions and suspensions.

It doesn't have to be like this.

Sometimes, these terrible injustices are the consequence of appalling racial injustices rooted deep in our history. At other times, they are the result of recent, direct and unacceptable forms of racism – whether institutional or interpersonal. When compounded by other disadvantages, such as low income, unstable housing or higher risks of extra-familial harm, these inequalities create cycles of disproportionate harm that are difficult to break.

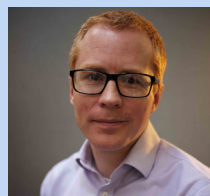
Difficult, but not impossible. Ten years ago, Black children were 1.7 times more likely to be excluded from schools than White children. That is no longer true. Racial inequity does not have to be

This report sets out five actions that the new government can take to address racial disproportionality and keep our children safe:

- 1** Ensure stop and search is fair and 'intelligence-led'.
- 2** Make Outcome 22 a positive outcome in the police outcomes framework.
- 3** Monitor and improve access to psychological therapy.
- 4** Deliver evidence-based support to children absent or excluded from school.
- 5** Urgently reduce disproportionality and improve conditions in youth custody.

permanent. With the right actions, we can give our children a fairer society than the one we grew up in.

These recommendations are not exhaustive – there's always room to do more. However, by acting decisively and urgently on these evidence-informed priorities, the new Labour government has an opportunity to deliver meaningful change, reduce violence and start to build a society where all our children can live free from violence.



Jon Yates
CEO
Youth Endowment Fund

Executive summary:

The current state of disproportionality


Violence has devastating impacts on children and families. While children from all backgrounds can face violence, children from certain ethnic backgrounds are less safe.

The majority of children in the youth justice system, and involved in violence, are White. However, relative to their share of the population, some minority ethnic groups – and Black children in particular – are over-represented, while other groups – e.g. those from Asian backgrounds – are under-represented.

- **Children from certain ethnic groups – especially Black children and young people – are disproportionately likely to be victims of violence.** Relative to their share of the population, Black children and young people are six times as likely to be victims of homicide.
- **Children from certain ethnic groups are disproportionately likely to be represented in the criminal justice system and to become involved in violence, including as victims.** For example, while Black children aged 10–17 make up 6% of the population, in 2023/24, they represented 10% of arrests, 15% of stop and searches and 24% of the monthly youth custody population. They are also five times more likely to be sentenced to custody for homicide and are more likely to self-report being involved in assault both as victims and perpetrators.
- **This does not mean that violence is only relevant to (or mostly caused by) people from minority ethnic backgrounds.** White children make up 71% of 10–17-year-olds who are stopped and searched, 76% of those arrested and 72% of those cautioned or convicted for an offence. There are also other significantly over-represented groups, such as children growing up in poverty and children in care, which intersect with racial disproportionality.

Broad ethnic groupings can mask important underlying differences; to create change we need to understand this detail. For instance, although often categorised as ‘White’, children from Gypsy or Irish Traveller backgrounds are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system. 10–17-year-olds from Black Caribbean backgrounds are significantly more over-represented in arrests, than children from Black African backgrounds.

Racial disproportionality has been getting worse over the last decade. While the total number of children involved in the justice system from all backgrounds has been falling, the proportion who are from Black or Mixed ethnic backgrounds has increased over the last 10 years. Despite small improvements in the last few years, disproportionality in homicide rates has stayed consistently higher than it was 10 years ago.



The drivers of disproportionality are complex. Over-represented groups are more likely to grow up in poverty, experience racism, and have worse access to services and support.

There are inequalities in:

- **Childhood vulnerability.** Children from some minority ethnic groups are more likely to grow up with multiple disadvantages that increase the likelihood of involvement in violence both as victims and perpetrators, for example: low income, higher risks of extra-familial harm, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as witnessing violence in the home, parental substance misuse, and parental mental ill-health.
- **Who gets support.** Children from some groups are less likely to be diverted from the criminal justice system, and less likely to get early or appropriate preventative services, such as psychological therapy or family support. If they are a victim of violence, Black children are less likely to tell the police.
- **How systems work.** Bias and racism have been identified in recent HM Inspectorate reports, and public reviews of the criminal justice system. Although demographic and offence-related factors explain a large part of differences in sentencing, Black children are still more likely to receive a custodial sentence even controlling for these factors.

How do we change things? Five first steps

On the next page, we highlight five challenges for the new government, both inside and outside of the criminal justice system. In this report we describe the scale of these issues and point to evidence-informed approaches that have potential for both reducing disproportionality and reducing violence.



Executive summary:

Five first steps for the new government

1. Ensure stop and search is fair and 'intelligence-led'

Stop and search is disproportionately used with Black children and young people. These are necessary policing powers for public safety, which are supported by the majority of children of all ethnicities. However, how they are used and how stop and searches are conducted really matters. The current evidence suggests that increasing stop and search has limited effectiveness as a deterrent tactic in the UK and has the potential to lead to negative outcomes. To increase effectiveness and reduce disproportionality, it should be 'intelligence-led', and conducted in a way that is fair, and maintains the dignity and trust of those stopped. Hotspots and problem-oriented policing are likely to be more effective as deterrents, with fewer risks of adverse outcomes.

2. Make Outcome 22 a positive outcome in the police outcomes framework

Outcome 22 enables the police to divert children who have committed offences to positive support that could protect them against future involvement in crime. An important feature of this outcome is that an admission of guilt is not required for it to be used. There is some evidence that requiring an admission of guilt to access diversion options is contributing to racial disproportionality in the youth justice system. Giving the police an option to divert children without this requirement may help to address racial disproportionality, and reduce reoffending. However, Outcome 22 is currently not seen as a positive outcome in the crime reporting outcomes framework, which means that police can be disincentivised from using it.

3. Monitor and improve access to psychological therapy

Therapeutic approaches for individuals and families have good evidence of reducing involvement in violence. However, compared to their share of the population, Black and Asian children struggle to access timely and appropriate mental health support. Lack of trust in services, low awareness among professionals of the impact that racism can have on mental health, discriminatory treatment, and differing perceptions of mental health are barriers. We require better monitoring of what therapeutic support children are receiving, and more accessible services for Black, Asian and other minority ethnic families.

4. Deliver evidence-based support to children absent or excluded from school

Absence, suspension and exclusion from school are associated with involvement in crime and violence – both for victims and perpetrators. Children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; White and Black Caribbean children; and Black Caribbean children are more likely to be absent, suspended or excluded. The government should support schools in delivering evidence-informed strategies for reducing absence and providing appropriate support for suspended and excluded children. This would have disproportionate benefits for over-represented groups.

5. Urgently reduce disproportionality and improve conditions in youth custody

Racial disproportionality in the number of children serving custodial sentences is stark. Black children make up 6% of all 10–17-year-olds, but in 2023/24, they accounted for 24% of children in custody – four times their population share. Meanwhile, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children make up less than 1% of children; yet a self-reported 7% of children in custody are from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds – over seven times their population share. Children from Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds are also less safe while in custody. While the ambition should be to urgently reduce the disproportionate number of children from Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds in the secure estate, it is also vital that the government improves the condition and safety of children serving custodial sentences and acts upon the continued recommendations of HM Inspectorate of Prisons. They should also invest in post-custody resettlement programmes.



About this report

Why racial disproportionality matters to the YEF

Children from some minority ethnic backgrounds are significantly over-represented in the youth justice system. The Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF's) mission is to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. It's fundamental that we understand and address the experiences of children from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds in relation to violence and criminal justice. If we don't challenge the role that racism plays in young people's experiences of youth justice, education and access to support, we won't achieve our mission.

As an organisation committed to race equity, we also recognise the importance of tackling racism and racial injustice in all their forms – not only because they affect young people's pathways to violence but also because they have profound and enduring impacts on their lives, opportunities, and wellbeing. Challenging these injustices is central to our values and our work.


The YEF's wider commitments on race equity

Through our [race equity commitments](#), we've set out how we'll use the evidence we generate to challenge ourselves and our partners to address racism. To tackle disproportionality across a range of services and systems we have committed to working with system leaders to identify and deliver evidence-based recommendations to make systems more racially equitable. You can see examples in our Arrested Children guidance, [here](#) and in our guidance on violence prevention in Education, [here](#).

This commitment doesn't reflect a view that violence is a problem that is only relevant to people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Unsurprisingly – because they are the largest group – the majority of violence involving young people is committed by White children. What we want to address are the different ways in which White children and children from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds are able to access support and services. We also recognise that there are lots of issues in society that are associated with young people's involvement in violence – such as poverty or experience of the care system. Our focus on race equity doesn't mean that we won't address these too; indeed many of these issues intersect with a focus on race equity.

Institutional racism

Institutional racism was defined by the report of the Macpherson inquiry (1999) as "The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour that amount to discrimination through prejudice,



ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people". Recent public reviews have described continuing evidence of institutional racism in the criminal justice system (e.g. Home Affairs Select Committee, 2021; Casey Review, 2023).^{4,5} These are serious concerns that should prompt us to act.

The 2017 Lammy Review proposed a practical approach for the criminal justice system to address racial disparities and inequality within their organisations: "If there are apparent disparities by ethnic group, then the emphasis should be on institutions in the system to provide an evidence-based explanation for them. If such an explanation cannot be provided, action should be taken to close the disparity. This principle would change the default. The expectation should be placed on institutions to either provide answers which explain disparities or take action to eradicate them."⁶

We agree. In support of this "explain or change" principle, an aim of this report is to highlight existing disparities in the systems and services that aim to prevent and respond to violence affecting children and young people, and encourage evidence-based actions towards closing these gaps.

How we produced this report and what it adds

This report draws on the analysis of public datasets, findings from the YEF's work across multiple sectors – including systematic reviews and surveys of children's experiences – and feedback from external experts.

While many previous reports have highlighted racial disproportionality in the youth justice system, this report adds new insights by focusing specifically on violence. It examines preventative factors beyond the justice system, such as access to therapy and education, and provides the most up-to-date statistics from public sources.

This report is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, it offers a snapshot of the YEF's current work on race equity. As our research continues, we will expand our findings to cover other critical aspects of the criminal justice system, such as the policing workforce and sentencing, which are not addressed here.

By providing clear evidence and actionable insights, this report aims to support the new government in addressing violence and racial disproportionality in the youth justice system. We hope our recommendations can lead to meaningful change, ensuring fairer and more effective policies that benefit all children and young people across England and Wales.

Terminology

Throughout this report we follow government guidance on 'Writing about ethnicity'.⁷ However, where we quote from other sources, or report data from tables, alternative phrasings or language may be used. The report has also been reviewed by a Race Equity Advisor, and by other consultative readers.

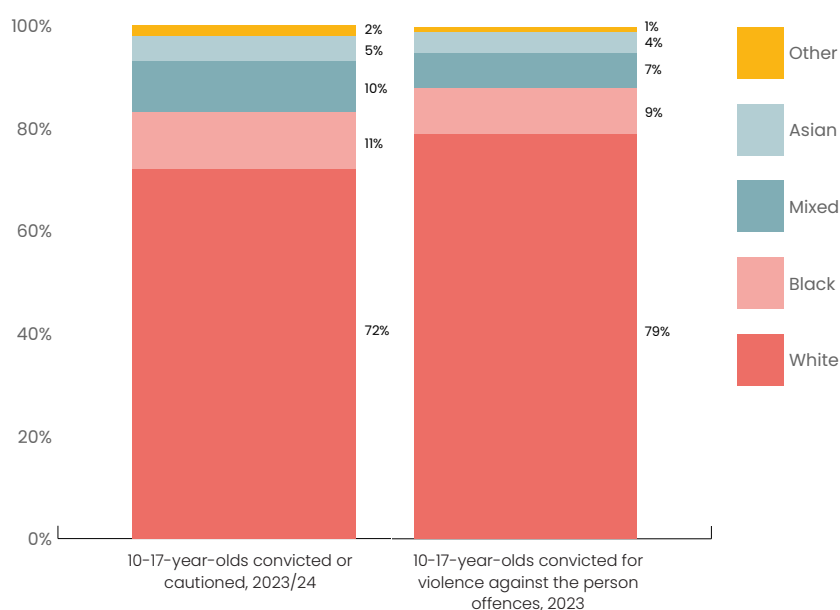
An overview of racial disproportionality

The majority of children in the criminal justice system are White

From reading the news and social media, it might be easy to mistakenly think the majority of crime and violence is linked to Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups. Much of the print and social media commentary on recent tragic events in Nottingham and Southport has focused on the racial and ethnic identities of those involved. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that crime and violence involving people from minority ethnic backgrounds receive more negative and sensationalised coverage.⁸

In fact, the majority of children and young people involved in crime and violence in England and Wales are from White backgrounds. For instance, the latest figures show that 72% of 10-17-year-olds convicted or cautioned for an offence were from White backgrounds, compared to 11% from Black backgrounds, 10% from Mixed ethnic backgrounds, 5% from Asian backgrounds and 2% from other ethnic minority backgrounds.⁹ There is a similar picture for violent crime: 79% of 10-17-year-olds convicted for violence against the person offences in 2023 were White.¹⁰

Chart 1: The proportion of children and young people involved in crime and violence by ethnicity in England and Wales*

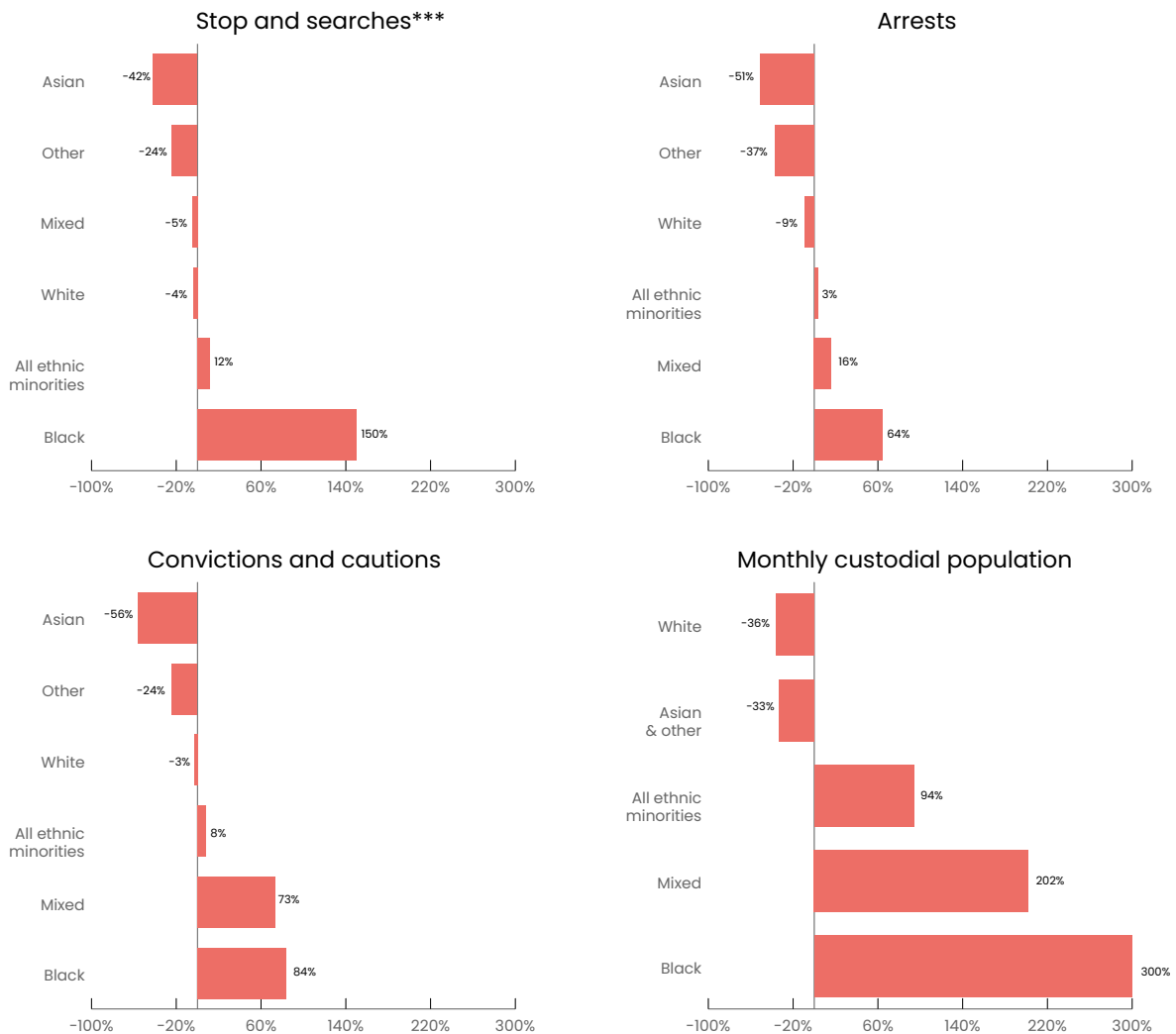



*YEF calculations using data from the Youth Justice Board (YJB) annual statistics ([here](#)) and Ministry of Justice Outcomes by Offence data tool ([here](#)). Figures have been provided only where ethnicity information is known or was provided.

However, when taking account of their share of the population, Black children are over-represented as both victims and perpetrators

The latest 2021 census figures show that White children make up 74% of 10-17-year-olds, compared to 12% Asian, 6% Black, 6% Mixed and 3% Other. Once their shares of the population are taken into account, Black children are over-represented at all levels in the criminal justice system. In the charts below, we've calculated the degree to which children from different ethnic groups are over-represented, relative to their population share. For example, Black children make up 15% of 10-17-year-olds stopped and searched, compared to 5.9% of the population. This means they're more than twice as likely (150%) to be stopped and searched, compared to their population share. This is repeated across other key interactions with the criminal justice system, with Black children 64% more likely to be arrested, 84% more likely to be convicted or cautioned and 300% more likely to be in custody, compared to their share of the population.

Chart 2: The proportion of children relative to their population share* at various points in the criminal justice system by ethnicity in 2023/24 (England and Wales) **



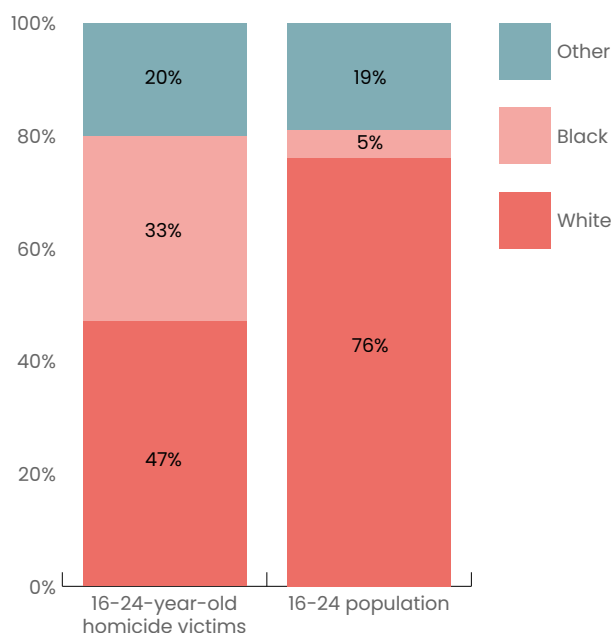
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- * YEF calculations using various data sources. Calculations take the proportion of criminal justice interactions (e.g. arrests) accounted for by a given ethnic group (where race is known) and divide this by that group's share of the total population using the latest census 2021 population estimates ([here](#)).
 - ** For stop and search and arrest figures, we used self-identified ethnicity. There is a relatively large share for whom ethnicity was not provided or not known (20% and 12%, respectively). This, combined with our focus on children who are stopped and searched may lead to differences in our estimates of over-representation compared to other sources.
 - ***Figures on the racial disproportionality experienced within stop and search, when presented at the national level, can be misleading. This is due in part to the geographical concentration of where stop and search powers are most extensively used, particularly in London, and where there is a higher concentration of minority ethnic communities. However, the over-representation of Black children in stop and searches is reflected in figures across all forces, meaning the disproportionate use of stop and searches by some forces does not explain this disparity alone. An analysis of the drivers can be found [here](#).

The picture for Mixed ethnicity children is broadly the same. While Mixed ethnicity children are somewhat under-represented among 10-17-year-olds who are stopped and searched, they're 16% more likely to be arrested, 73% more likely to be convicted or cautioned and 202% more likely to be in custody, relative to their share of the population.

Asian children are significantly less likely to interact with the criminal justice system. For instance, Asian children are 42% less likely to be stopped and searched, 51% less likely to be arrested, 56% less likely to be convicted or cautioned and 36% less likely to be in custody, relative to their share of the population. Combined, children from any minority ethnic background are over-represented in the criminal justice system (12% stop and searches, 8% convictions and cautions, 94% in custody); however this over-representation is significantly driven by the experiences of children from Black and Mixed ethnicity backgrounds.

When it comes to victims of violence, data from the Home Office's Homicide Index¹¹ show that 33% of homicide victims in the past three years (2021/22-2023/24)¹² who were aged 16-24 were from Black backgrounds, while making up only 5% of young people in this age range. This increases to 35% for homicide victims who died due to knife assaults.

Chart 3. The proportion of 16–24-year-old homicide victims from 2021/22–23/24 who are Black*, compared to their share of the population (England and Wales)



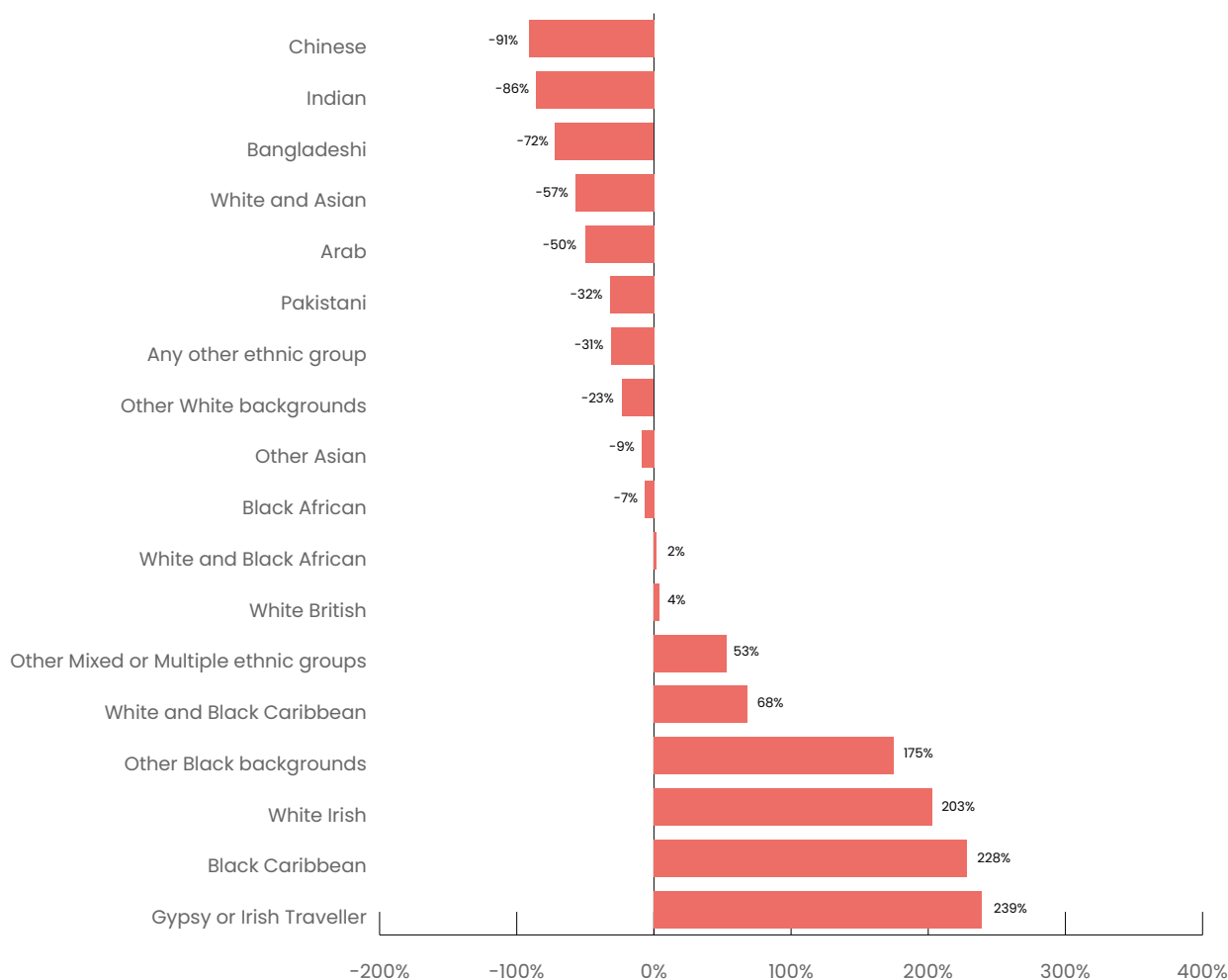
* Based on officer-defined ethnicity as recorded in the Homicide Index. 'Other' ethnicity combines Asian, Mixed and other ethnicities.

There's a similar pattern when looking at children sentenced for homicide. Data from the Ministry of Justice shows that over the past three years (2021/22–2023/24)¹³ Black children made up 32% of 10–17-year-olds sentenced to immediate custody for manslaughter or murder, more than five times greater than their relative share of the total population.

There are important differences within and between different groups


It's important to emphasise that considering racial disproportionality by looking at broad ethnic categories (i.e. Black, White, Asian, etc.) risks masking important underlying differences. Below we've looked at the extent of over-representation in arrests, relative to population shares, as we've calculated before, but this time looking at more granular ethnicity.

Chart 4: Proportion of children arrested relative to their population share by granular ethnicity in 2023/24 (England and Wales)*



*YEF calculations using the latest published Home Office arrests data ([here](#)), split by granular ethnicity (18+1) codes, consistent with ONS definitions, and divided by that group's share of the total population using the latest census 2021 population estimates ([here](#)).

The figures show there are significant differences in interactions with the police, within minority ethnic groups, not just between. For instance, 10-17-year-olds from Black Caribbean backgrounds are significantly more over-represented in arrests, than children from Black African backgrounds. Children from Black Caribbean and Mixed Caribbean backgrounds are 228% and 68% more likely to be arrested, respectively, compared to their population share. This compares to children from Black African and Mixed African backgrounds, who are 7% less likely and 2% more likely to be arrested, respectively, relative to their population share.



While on average, White children are proportionately represented in arrests, children from Irish and Gypsy or Irish Traveller backgrounds are two of the most over-represented groups, by 203% and 239%, respectively. Because these groups represent a small share of the population, they also make up only a small share of children in the youth justice system and can be overlooked when we only look at broad ethnic groupings.

Self-report data also show higher violence victimisation and perpetration rates among children and young people from Black backgrounds

It's not just official offending or health care records that show higher rates of violence victimisation and perpetration among some ethnically minoritised groups. Self-report surveys (i.e. where people have been asked directly about the things they've done and experienced) have also shown disproportionality in experiences of violence. In new research commissioned by the YEF, data from the Millennium Cohort Study (a large nationally representative survey that's tracking the same group of children and young people over time) show that Black teenagers are significantly more likely than White and Asian teenagers to self-report perpetrating assault. At ages 14 or 17, 41.7% of White respondents reported committing an act of assault and 39.8% of Asian respondents. This compares to 47.6% of respondents from Mixed ethnic backgrounds and 53.3% of Black respondents who reported committing an act of assault.¹⁴

Data from the YEF's annual survey of young people, 'Children, violence and vulnerability', also supports this finding. Results from our 2023 survey showed that Black teenagers were more likely to report being victims of violence as well as perpetrators, in comparison to White children and children from Asian backgrounds.¹⁵ Results from our 2024 version of the survey (a nationally representative survey of over 10,000 10-17-year-olds in England and Wales) found more mixed findings.¹⁶ Children from Mixed ethnicity backgrounds were significantly more likely to report being victims or perpetrators of violence (25% and 24%, respectively) compared to White children (20% and 16%, respectively). However Black children were less likely to report being victims or perpetrators (18% and 15%, respectively). 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 Caribbean backgrounds are more likely to be victims (22%) and perpetrators (20%) compared to children from White British backgrounds (20% victims and 16% perpetrators).¹⁷ These results highlight again the importance of not generalising across broad minority ethnic groups.

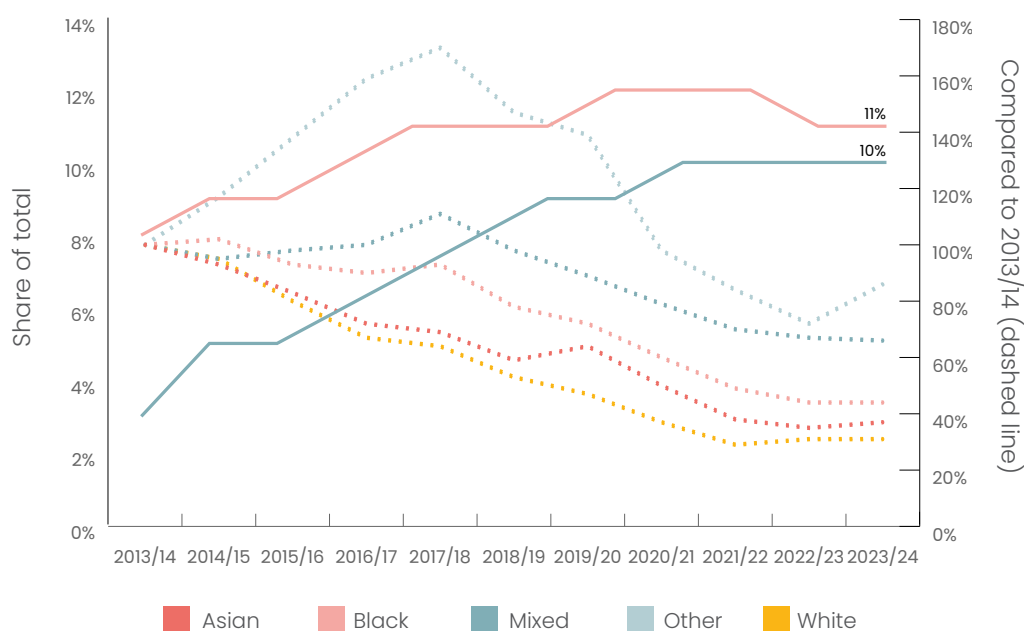
Racial disproportionality in the criminal justice system has been getting worse over the last decade

The total number of children involved in the criminal justice system has been falling over the last 10 years. The total number of children convicted or cautioned fell by 67% between 2013/14 and 2023/24. For White children, numbers fell 69%, for children from Asian backgrounds, 63%, for Black children, 56% and for Mixed ethnicity children, 34%. However, the rate at which it's

been falling for children from Black and Mixed ethnicity backgrounds has been much lower than for children from White, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds. This has meant the share of children from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds has been increasing.

For instance, in 2023/24, the number of White children convicted or cautioned was less than a third (31%) of its 2013/14 level, whereas the number of children from Black backgrounds who were convicted or cautioned was 44% of its 2013/14 level. For children from Mixed ethnicity backgrounds, convictions and cautions fell to only 66% their 2013/14 levels. This means the share of children who are convicted or cautioned who are from Black backgrounds has increased from 9% to 11% over the past decade. For Mixed ethnicity children, it has increased from 5% to 10%.

Chart 5: Children convicted or cautioned, change compared to 2013/14 and share of total convictions and cautions by ethnicity, England and Wales*



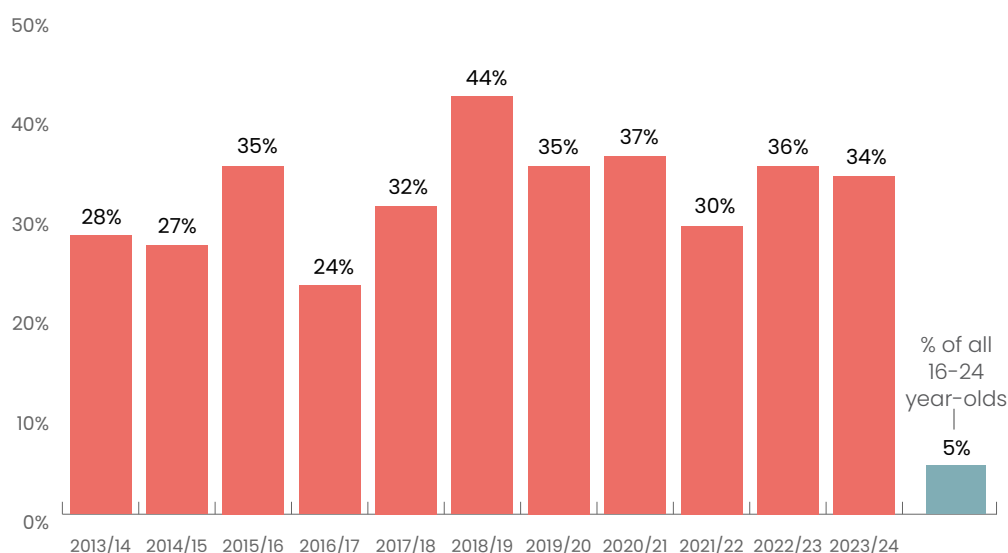
*YEF calculations using the latest published Youth Justice Board statistics ([here](#)). Children whose ethnicity was not known/provided, have been excluded from the calculations.

It is difficult to know what is driving this trend. Since the mid-2000's, there has been a significant increase in the use of police-led diversions and greater targeting of the most serious offending.¹⁸ In this context, one possible reason for changes in disproportionality is differences in the average severity of offences committed among different groups of children. Thirty-one per cent of offences by Black children have a gravity score of 5-8 (gravity scores provide an indication of the seriousness of an offence, with a score of five or above indicating that the majority of similar offences received a custodial sentence); for children from Mixed ethnicity backgrounds

the figure is 22%. This compares to 16% of children from White backgrounds. This means that, on average, Black and Mixed ethnicity children are more likely to be convicted for serious offences, which are less eligible for receiving a diversionary outcome.

When it comes to the victims of violence, the proportion of Black young people who are victims of homicide has followed a broadly similar pattern in terms of increasing disproportionality. The proportion of homicide victims aged 16–24 who are Black increased from 28% in 2013/14 to 44% in 2018/19. This is considerably higher than their share of the population (5%).


Chart 6: The proportion of 16–24-year-old homicide victims who are Black, England and Wales



Despite these broad trends, there have been some recent signs of progress. The proportion of children and young people stopped and searched, arrested and cautioned and convicted who are Black all fell between 2020/21 and 2023/24; from 18% to 15% of stop and searches, 15% to 10% of arrests and 12% to 11% of convictions and cautions. The share of Black 10–17-year-olds in custody also fell over this period. Despite these recent improvements, when looking at children and young people from Mixed ethnic backgrounds, some measures have remained broadly the same, while others have got worse. In 2020/2, Mixed ethnicity children accounted for 5% of stop and searches, increasing slightly to 6% in 2023/24. On arrests, in 2020/21, Mixed ethnicity children accounted for 8% of arrests, falling to 7% in 2023/24. For cautions and convictions their proportion has remained the same over this period at 10%. However, the proportion of children in custody from Mixed ethnic backgrounds increased from 14% to 18%.

The drivers of disproportionality are complex

The over-representation of children from minority ethnic backgrounds in offending statistics is a complex mixture of individual, societal and system-level drivers. A recent literature review notes that many of the causes of disparities within the youth justice system have their origins



in inequalities outside of it, but that those disparities are also exacerbated by the responses of criminal justice agencies themselves and are accelerated once children enter the system.¹⁹

Interviews with children and practitioners on drivers of disproportionality in reoffending (where violence was the most common offence) identified five main themes: (1) marginalisation and exclusion from education and other support systems; (2) wider social inequalities, including poverty and local deprivation; (3) individual, institutional, and systemic bias; (4) weaknesses in prevention and diversion; and (5) negative experiences of the wider criminal justice system.²⁰ It is important to note that the empirical research evidence is limited and contested on the extent to which different factors contribute as drivers of disproportionality. However, there are clear inequalities in several areas, which should be a focus for action.

Childhood vulnerability

Children from some minority ethnic groups are more likely to grow up with multiple disadvantages that increase the likelihood of involvement in violence both as victims and perpetrators, for example: low income²¹, adverse childhood experiences,²² and higher risks of extra-familial harm.²³ The increased risk of violence for Black and Mixed ethnicity children is likely linked to these factors.

Results from recently published research commissioned by the YEF show that much of the difference in children's involvement in violence can be explained by the vulnerabilities they experience. The research looks specifically at the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as witnessing and experiencing physical violence in the home, parental alcohol and drug abuse, parental mental ill-health and poor inter-parental relationships. When these factors were controlled for, there were no significant differences in the proportion of Black children that committed assault, compared to White children. 47% of children from Black backgrounds who experienced high numbers of ACEs said they had perpetrated assault, compared to 46% of White children who experienced high numbers of ACEs.²⁴

Who gets support

Some research suggests that Asian, Black and Mixed heritage children are less likely to be diverted from the criminal justice system and more likely to be charged than White children.²⁵ Research also suggests that they are less likely to get early or appropriate preventative services, such as psychological therapy or family support.²⁶ If they experience violence, Black children (9%) are less likely to tell the police than White children (19%).²⁷

Even where services are accessed, they may not be appropriate. For example, in an analysis of family support services, experiences of racism were commonly reported, with one in three people saying they had been treated unfairly when seeking out support. Even where they did receive support, 40% said it was no help or even made things worse, mostly because they didn't feel heard, understood or empowered by their practitioner. Overall, a lack of cultural sensitivity was identified as a potential problem.²⁸



How systems work

In 2021, an HM Inspectorate of Probation report identified experiences of racist discrimination in half the sample of cases it reviewed of Black and Mixed heritage boys in the criminal justice system. It concluded: “At a strategic partnership level there is a lack of clarity and curiosity about what is causing the disparity and what needs to be done to bring about an improvement. Partners are not collating data and using it effectively to analyse and address the barriers that contribute to the over-representation of black and Mixed heritage boys in the criminal justice system.”²⁹ As noted in the introduction, recent public reviews have described evidence of institutional racism in the criminal justice system (e.g. Home Affairs Select Committee, 2021; Casey Review, 2023).^{30, 31}

There is some evidence that differential treatment and sentencing decisions of minority ethnic children play a role in disproportionality. For example, analysis conducted by the Youth Justice Board found that minority ethnic children who were due to be sentenced were more likely to receive a custodial sentence compared to White children. This was mostly explained by differences in offending profiles (e.g. the severity of offending). However, once offending profile, other demographics, and practitioner assessments of risk and vulnerability had been controlled for, Black children remained more likely to receive harsher sentences.³² Recent analysis (which focused on disposals following reoffending) finds a similar picture: children from a Black, Asian or Mixed heritage background are more likely to receive a custodial sentence following reoffending compared to White children, even after contextual factors – such as offence type, practitioner assessment of risk, previous disposal – are accounted for.³³

Five areas to focus efforts

1. Stop and search

What's the issue?

Black children are 150% more likely to be stopped and searched compared to their share of the population. This disproportionality continues into adulthood, rising to 273% for over-18s.³⁴ A recent report from the Children's Commissioner (2024) found that Black children in England and Wales were over four times more likely to be strip searched when compared to national population figures.³⁵ Under Section 60, the use of 'suspicionless' stop and search, Black people are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched than White people.^{36, 37}

Arrest rates as an outcome of a stop and search are higher for Black, Asian, and Mixed ethnicity children, compared to White children; 13% of stop and searches conducted on Black or Mixed ethnicity children resulted in an arrest, dropping to 10% of those conducted on Asian children, and 8% of White children.³⁸

What do we know about the nature and drivers of disproportionality?

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) surveyed 11,874 young Londoners between the ages of 11 and 16 and found that when controlling for exposure to gang and weapon-related violence, and for being a victim of crime (which was associated with a higher likelihood of being stopped and searched) there were still increased odds of young Black Londoners being searched than White Londoners.³⁹ Similarly, an analysis by the Home Office shows that when controlling for higher concentrations of Black people in some geographies, Black children are still more likely to be stopped.⁴⁰

The review of the case of Child Q, a Black girl who was strip-searched in school while on her period, highlighted 'adultification' as a significant feature, suggesting that this was why she received a largely criminal justice and disciplinary response, rather than a child protection response.⁴¹ Some studies highlight 'adultification' as a cause of disproportionately high stop and searches on Black boys under the age of 17.⁴² According to this view, adultification takes place when adults, or people in positions of power, treat children as less innocent, less vulnerable, and more emotionally resilient than they are. It is thought to be driven by discrimination and bias about a child's personal characteristics or lived experiences. Some research suggests that Black children may be more likely to be subject to adultification and assumed to be engaging in criminal or antisocial behaviour.^{43, 44}


Currently, around half of stop and searches are self-generated, which means an officer decides to stop a person based on what they see or hear. Around one in ten stops and searches are led by intelligence, which means an officer stops a person because the police hold intelligence that they may be in possession of an unlawful item at that time.⁴⁵ Guidance on stop and search suggests that is more likely to be effective when it is intelligence-led.⁴⁶

What do children and young people say?

Most children and young people are generally supportive of the use of stop and search: in the YEF's 2024 survey of over 10,000 teenagers across England and Wales, 68% agreed that the police should be able to carry out stop and search, while 11% disagreed and 21% were neutral or unsure.⁴⁷ 72% agreed that using stop and search helps prevent people from carrying knives. But fewer think the police use it fairly (56%), and certain groups of children, including Black, Asian and Mixed ethnicity children are less likely to be supportive of its use. 63% of Asian and Mixed ethnicity children and 59% of Black children think the police should be able to use stop and search, compared to 70% of White children. Just under half (49%) of Black and Mixed ethnicity children think it's used fairly, compared to 57% of White children.⁴⁸

Children who have been stopped and searched are more likely to agree (74%) that the police should be able to use that power than the average (68%). When asked about their own experiences, 70% of children who had been stopped and searched thought the police were polite and 66% felt they were treated with respect. But experiences of stop and search seem to be worse for children from minority ethnic groups. 54% of Asian, Black, Mixed and other ethnicity children who had been stopped and searched agreed that they were treated with respect compared to 70% of White children. 23% disagreed, compared to 12% of White children. In general, Asian, Black and Mixed ethnicity children are significantly less likely than White children to think the police treat people fairly.⁴⁹

Other surveys and focus groups have found some children tend to have negative views and experiences of stop and search. Research by Crest Advisory⁵⁰ found that out of 101 children who had experienced stop and search, half said that they trusted the police less as a result of this experience. 52% said they felt humiliated and embarrassed by the experience, and found the experience traumatic. In MOPAC's 2023 survey of 11-16-year-olds in London, only 38% of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic children who'd been stopped and searched said the police treated them with respect, compared to 62% of White children. And only 35% of all young Londoners surveyed agreed that the police should carry out stop and search.



“I somewhat agree with stop and search but I also disagree with stop and search. I was on a run recently, there was a robbery nearby. They searched me, but I didn’t fit the description of the tall Black male. I did feel panicked... I’ve seen stop and searches where knives have been found especially in Bradford, so I think there should be stop and search. If there are people who are being watched and then targeted I agree with that but stopping those that are of colour for no reason undermines the whole process. Stop and search is useful but it’s how you do it...”

HANZALA,
MEMBER OF THE YEF’S YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

What’s the opportunity?

Stop and search powers are critical policing powers that can play an important role in detecting crime. They may also act as a deterrent, reducing crime by increasing fear of being caught. However, current evidence suggests that they have limited effectiveness in reducing crime in the UK and have the potential to lead to negative outcomes.⁵¹

To increase effectiveness and reduce disproportionality, stop and search should be ‘intelligence-led’, and conducted in a way that is fair,⁵² and maintains the dignity and trust of those stopped. Having strong rather than weak grounds for a stop is associated with higher find rates, and lower disproportionality.⁵³ Increasing the proportion of stop and searches that are based on intelligence could be influenced through national guidance, workforce training, and policies set by police chiefs. In addition, hotspots policing⁵⁴ and problem-oriented policing are likely to be more effective strategies in deterring crime, with fewer risks of adverse outcomes.

Many officers only receive formal training in conducting stop and search during their initial police training. This means that the development of stop and search practice is based primarily on watching and listening to the conduct of other officers. Police forces should provide a structured programme that ensures officers receive refresher training, that includes guidance about fair decision making, professional interactions, clear communication, and accurate recording of individual encounters.⁵⁵ There is growing evidence about what might be more and less effective for reducing disproportionality as part of such training.^{56, 57}

2. Diversion for arrested children

What's the issue?


As we saw earlier in the report, while the total number of children involved in the justice system has been falling, the proportion who are from Black or Mixed ethnic backgrounds has increased over the last 10 years.

Diversion involves a child receiving an alternative outcome that avoids a criminal record.⁵⁸ Whilst the use of diversion has increased over the last 10 years, there are differences in access to and engagement with such opportunities. This matters because there is good evidence that diverting children who have committed low-level or first-time offences from formal criminal justice processes and outcomes can protect them from future involvement in crime. It can also lower the severity of any crimes they later commit.⁵⁹

What do we know about the nature and drivers of disproportionality?

As we discussed earlier, the under-representation of some minority ethnic children in who gets diverted may be explained by the greater level of severity of the offences committed by children from Black and Mixed ethnicity backgrounds, however this does not explain all of the differences.⁶⁰ Some research argues that “unequal treatment early in the system accumulates into larger disparities downstream”, though empirical analysis on this is limited.^{61, 62} Qualitative research suggests there may be several drivers for disparities in diversion, including:

- **Inequity in other parts of the system:** The Magistrates Association notes, “An increased use of stop and search on one particular group may result in that group having a much higher rate of out of court disposals or arrests against them.”⁶³
- **Risk assessments and adultification:** Some research suggests that Black children may be more likely to experience adultification bias⁶⁴ and may be assessed as higher risk than White children, though this research is based on small samples.⁶⁵ This can result in safeguarding needs not being met and being deemed unsuitable for diversion.
- **Admission of guilt:** Some diversion options require an admission of guilt. However, the lack of trust some Black, Asian and Mixed heritage children have in the police, and criminal justice system more broadly,⁶⁶ means they are less likely to admit an offence.⁶⁷
- **Officers' understanding of diversion:** A recent inspection found that “officers' flawed understanding of Outcome 22 may disproportionately affect children from minority ethnic backgrounds and contribute to these



children being more likely to be prosecuted than their White counterparts”.⁶⁸ The misunderstanding was in the circumstances in which Outcome 22 can be used, with officers incorrectly believing that an admission of guilt was required to use Outcome 22.

More empirical analysis is needed that compares differences in diversion rates on a like-for-like basis, to better understand the contribution of potential drivers of disproportionality.

What do children and young people say?

The Centre for Justice Innovation conducted qualitative research with Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic Heritage children and young people who were in the justice system to explore their experiences of diversion.⁶⁹ As the sample did not include children from White backgrounds it is not possible to assess the extent to which these perceptions were more generally true across different ethnic groups. The research found that:


- Children and young people’s experiences of professionals varied, with some perceiving their interactions with the police to be racist and discriminatory.
- However, positive practices during the diversion process were also shared including respectful police officers, culturally competent solicitors and supportive youth justice workers.
- Some of the children and young people were confused by the legal processes, and unclear about the diversionary outcome they’d been given and the consequences of non-engagement.

What’s the opportunity?

Outcome 22 is an outcome code the police can use when an arrested child has completed diversionary, educational or intervention activity and when it is not in the public interest to take any further action. Outcome 22 enables the police to divert children who have committed offences to positive support that could protect them against future involvement in crime. An important feature of this outcome is that an admission of guilt is not required for it to be used. However, Outcome 22 is currently not seen as a positive outcome in the crime reporting outcomes framework, which means that police can be disincentivised from using it. And – as noted above – there is some misunderstanding over the circumstances in which Outcome 22 can be used.

The Home Office should update the crime outcomes framework so that Outcome 22 is recorded as a positive outcome when applied to children. This would encourage all forces to use Outcome 22 where appropriate to divert children from formal criminal justice outcomes to positive support, with the aim of reducing reoffending and helping address inequality in access to diversion.

Steps should also be taken to ensure frontline police officers across the country have an accurate understanding of when it is appropriate to offer Outcome 22 to children. Making



clear to officers across all forces that Outcome 22 does not require a child to admit guilt for the offence may help to reduce disparities in access to diversion.

There is also an opportunity to increase the use of “deferred prosecution”, which is another disposal option that falls within Outcome 22. In deferred prosecution, the child who has been arrested agrees to comply with certain conditions and complete activities that support them to not offend in the future. If they complete these activities, then the case is recorded as an Outcome 22 and they don’t receive a criminal record. However, if they fail to complete the conditions, they can receive a formal sanction or prosecution. An experimental evaluation of deferred prosecution found that it led to 36% fewer harmful crimes and had larger effects for people from minority ethnic backgrounds.⁷⁰ Other evaluations of deferred prosecution are ongoing but the emerging evidence is promising.

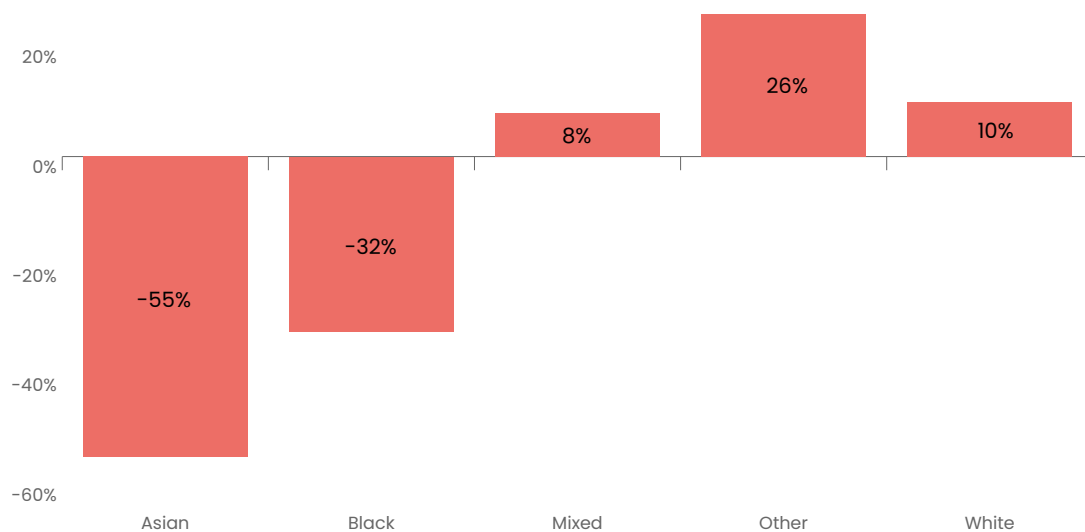
Five areas to focus efforts


3. Access to therapy

What's the issue?

A national survey of adults in 2014 found that Black (24%) and Mixed (20%) ethnicity adults were more likely to have common mental health disorders compared to White adults and adults from Asian backgrounds (17%).^{71, 72} People in Black ethnic groups had lower treatment rates after controlling for need.⁷³ The picture among children and young people is less clear with variation in prevalence rates among different studies, age groups, and mental health types.^{74, 75} However, there is evidence that compared to their share of the population, Black and Asian children are less likely to be referred to mental health support.⁷⁶ Of children referred to mental health services in 2023/24, 4% were Black, despite making up 6% of the population – making them a third (32%) less likely to be referred compared to their share of the population. Asian children are also under-represented, making up 6% of referrals but 12% of the population – making them half as likely to be referred.

Chart 7: Under- and over-representation of children referred to mental health services in 2023/24 by ethnicity, England





Black and Asian children and young people are also less likely to access mental health services voluntarily through primary care and are instead more likely to access them via social care or the justice system (which are more likely to be compulsory). An analysis of national data from 14,588 young people (under 25, with an average age of 12) shows that, compared to White British young people, Black young people and Mixed ethnicity young people are more than twice as likely to be referred for mental health support through social care or youth justice than voluntarily through primary care. Compared to White British young people, those from an Asian background were also almost twice as likely to be referred through social care or youth justice.⁷⁷

Once referrals have been made, people from some backgrounds are less likely to receive support.⁷⁸ An analysis of access to psychological therapies among adults found that in 2021/22, 55% of White people (across all ages) received a course of treatment following a referral. This figure drops to 53% of people from Indian backgrounds, 51% from Caribbean backgrounds, 50% from African backgrounds and 47% from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds.⁷⁹ Specific data on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people were not collected.

When considering young people specifically, an analysis of 23,300 young people who received support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) between 2011 and 2015 showed that Black young people were more likely to attend services for only one session (average attendance was four sessions for all young people; 46% of the sample attended for one session). It is unclear whether these young people attended a single session because further support was not required or because they disengaged with further support. This merits further research.⁸⁰

What do we know about the nature and drivers of disproportionality?

There are several barriers that prevent children and young people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities from accessing therapeutic support. These include:

- **A lack of trust in the mental health system.** Qualitative studies with children, young people, and their parents from certain communities show that individuals and families may fear unfair and discriminatory treatment by mental health professionals. For instance, a survey of 293 parents in London who explored help-seeking attitudes for OCD, showed that parents from minority ethnic communities were more likely than White parents to cite fear of judgement from doctors on their ethnic or cultural background as a barrier to accessing support.⁸¹
- **A lack of appreciation from mental health professionals of the impact that racism can have on mental health.** Qualitative studies that have explored the experiences of adults from minority ethnic communities show that patients are frustrated by health professionals' lack of understanding of what racism is, and how it impacts mental health.⁸² Once again, this could reduce their trust in services, and prevent services from effectively engaging and

retaining them. It is notable that a relatively low proportion of psychologists are from minority ethnic backgrounds, relative to population shares.⁸³

- **Discriminatory and racist treatment from services.** There are several examples of how services discriminate against Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities; for instance, there is a clear and persistent ethnic inequity in compulsory admission to psychiatric wards, particularly affecting Black groups, but also Mixed Black and White groups and South Asian groups.⁸⁴ This will diminish trust in services. The Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities are also reported to face discriminatory practices in accessing health care, leading to scepticism and mistrust.⁸⁵
- **Language barriers.** A range of qualitative literature from the UK has highlighted that language barriers and poor access to trained interpreters can impede access to mental health services for families from particular communities.⁸⁶
- **Differing cultural perceptions of mental health needs and where to seek support.** Families from some communities may be more likely to seek support for mental health needs from other sources, such as religious leaders.⁸⁷ Some communities may also have different perceptions of mental health needs and could hold more stigma towards mental illness. The NHS Race and Health Observatory's review of mental health care for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities in the UK, for instance, identified the shame and stigma associated with mental health among some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.⁸⁸ A 2020 systematic review and meta-analysis of 29 studies (the majority of which are from the US) comparing mental illness stigma between racial majorities and minorities also found that racial minorities showed more stigma than racial majorities. This was also found in the three UK based studies in the review.⁸⁹ Services need to do more to engage with communities, allay stigma, and provide support.

What do children and young people say?

Two qualitative studies of Black boys and young men and their attitudes towards seeking help for mental health problems identified that a key barrier was their fear of unfair treatment by mental health professionals:

- Dada and colleagues conducted focus groups with 78 Black boys and young men (aged 13–24 years old) in Manchester and concluded there was a 'general fear that going into statutory mental health services for help, would result in being permanently labelled, locked in, and medicated on strong drugs without hope of getting better or getting out again'. These children and young men also believed that they would be treated differently by mental health services due to their ethnicity.⁹⁰


- Meechan and colleagues interviewed 10 Black male teenagers (16-18 years old) and found that a reluctance to seek help from formal mental health services was related to boys perceiving that most mental health professionals were White and would not understand their problems or “world”.⁹¹

What’s the opportunity?

While we know that there are prominent disparities in referral methods to mental health services for children, and inequities in adults’ access to psychological therapies, we know much less about children’s access to therapies and how this varies by ethnicity. Services should be collecting much better data to monitor what therapies children are receiving, and whether there is inequity in access according to ethnicity, for example to monitor the extent to which referrals to Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (the most specialist service for children involved in violence) are equitable. It is also imperative that all ethnic groups are included in this data capture (including children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities), and that data systems can appropriately aggregate data between these groups.⁹² This should form part of mental health service providers’ commitment and ongoing work on the Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) in England (launched nationally in 2023), ensuring that data are effectively collected and used to reduce health inequalities, in addition to improving leadership and governance and feedback mechanisms.

More psychological therapy should be provided to children at risk of involvement in violence, and particular care and attention should be taken to ensure that children from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities are and remain engaged. Therapy providers should have a clear strategy for engaging families from all communities. This could include liaising with parents and carers to secure their buy-in and making appropriate adaptations (such as using bilingual providers, translating content, delivering therapy in accessible places and times, and making use of content that holds relevance for different communities) to effectively engage children from minority ethnic groups. Therapists could also be trained to better understand the culture and beliefs of minority ethnic communities. More could be done to encourage a diverse workforce that reflects the backgrounds of the people they are serving. A recent systematic review of psychological therapy interventions that made cultural adaptations to better serve Black and other minority ethnic adults found that these adaptations made the therapy more effective.⁹³ Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a particularly promising model that has demonstrated evidence, internationally, for reducing involvement in violence, and should be prioritised in the provision of therapy.⁹⁴

Finally, care and attention may be required to target specific communities such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. There should be a comprehensive strategy to support the mental health of people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, at both national and local levels.⁹⁵



“I think representation is really important, Roma communities and Eastern European communities are underrepresented in all these professions. There are heavy stigmas to overcome in some communities. There needs to be more support for workers, there’s no point in giving therapy if it makes the person uncomfortable.”

MUNA,
MEMBER OF THE YEF’S YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

Five areas to focus efforts

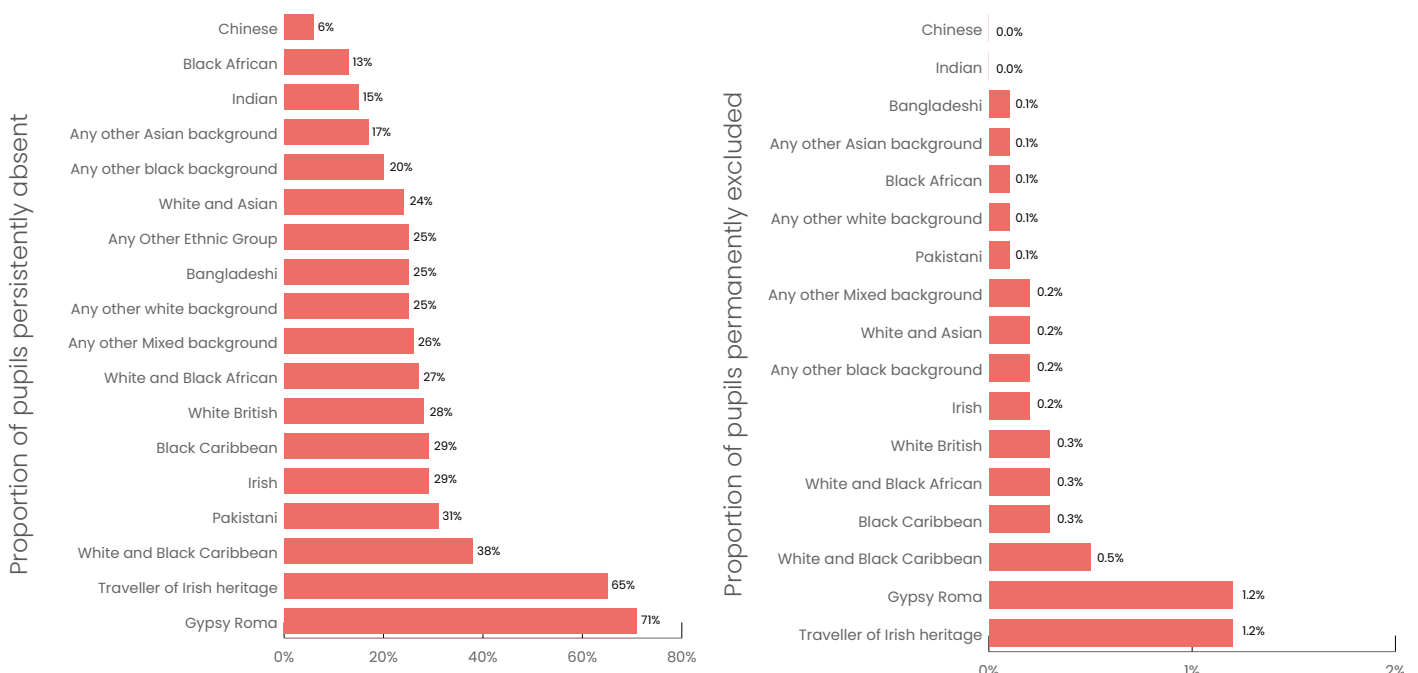
4. Absence and exclusion from school

What's the issue?

Being in education reduces the risk that a child will become involved in violence.^{96, 97, 98} It is, therefore, very concerning that children from particular minority ethnic communities are more likely to be suspended, excluded or absent from school. While the gap between the exclusion rates of Black and White children has narrowed,⁹⁹ the outcomes of children of particular ethnic backgrounds are still a cause for concern. For example, children from Black Caribbean backgrounds are excluded at a much higher rate than children from Black African backgrounds.

In both England and Wales, Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish traveller heritage, White and Black Caribbean children, and Black Caribbean children are most likely to be excluded or suspended.¹⁰⁰ In England, a greater proportion of Gypsy and Roma Traveller children, children of Irish traveller heritage, White and Black Caribbean children, Pakistani children, Irish children and Black Caribbean children are also persistently absent (not in school for more than 10% of the time) when compared with White British children.¹⁰¹

Chart 8: Absence and exclusion rates in state-funded secondary schools in 2022/23 by detailed ethnicity, England



What do we know about the nature and drivers of disproportionality?

Deciding whether to suspend or exclude a child is a challenging decision that requires headteachers to carefully balance the needs of the child and the wider school community. Headteachers do not exclude children lightly, and while the rate of exclusions and suspensions is rising, there remains a relatively small number of children who are excluded each year.¹⁰²

However, we should still be troubled by the rise in suspensions and exclusions, which may imply worsening behaviour in schools, and the YEF is especially concerned with the post-Covid rise in absence (persistent absence doubled from 11% in 2018/19 to 21% in 2022/23). But what is particularly concerning in the context of this report is the racial inequity present across suspension, exclusion and absence.


The drivers of this disproportionality are contested, and the evidence explaining these differences is limited. Drivers may include both in-school and out-of-school factors.¹⁰³ In-school factors might include instances of discriminatory practice. It is very difficult to establish how widespread in-school discrimination is; however, there are examples. Based on their casework with Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children and families, in 2018 the Children's Society reported that children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities "often experience racism, discrimination and isolation from peers and school staff" and feel that sometimes schools lack cultural sensitivity, such as in relation to the reasons for missing school.¹⁰⁴ Small-scale qualitative research on the drivers behind the exclusion of Black Caribbean children also argues that low expectations held by teachers for Black Caribbean children, lack of training for school staff on race, and the labelling of Black children may be contributing to disproportionate outcomes.¹⁰⁵ It remains very challenging to establish how widespread these in-school instances of discrimination may be.

Wider factors beyond school are also likely to play a role. Children may have several overlapping vulnerabilities such as poverty, special educational needs (SEN) and poor mental health that increase their risk of exclusion.¹⁰⁶ This emphasises the need to provide additional support to children with multiple risk factors.

What do children and young people say?

There is limited qualitative research that speaks directly to children from minority ethnic backgrounds who have been excluded or are absent from school in England and Wales.¹⁰⁷ However, there is more research conducted with families; Feyisa Demie's qualitative research on the causes of disproportionality in school exclusions raises the concern from Black Caribbean parents that their children are labelled due to their ethnicity.¹⁰⁸

In addition, LKMco's report on the educational outcomes of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children interviewed children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities who highlighted the bullying they face, and how this may result in self-exclusion from school.¹⁰⁹



“I had a friend a year older than me – he was excluded from school, multiple different reasons. He got into Cambridge now, but he had to find his own way. He said there was a lack of support. I think there’s a certain stigma to children that have been excluded. He had to move to a different city, so that he wasn’t in the same school or school district. I think they should know that there is a second chance – I think schools should work to be more accepting of those children, I had a lot of friends who were excluded and came back, and schools were still targeting them.”

HAYA,
MEMBER OF THE YEF’S YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD


What’s the opportunity?

We are unaware of programmes or interventions that have evidenced an impact specifically on reducing racial inequity in rates of absence or exclusion. However, there are pockets of very interesting practice.

For instance, the Co-op Academy Leeds and Oasis Community Learning Trust (supported by Oasis Community Partnerships) recently designed and began to implement specific strategies to reduce exclusion and absence among Black Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

Recognising the disproportionate levels of absence and exclusion among these children, these schools are delivering:

- A parental engagement campaign, employing and training community liaison officers to conduct a listening campaign and understand any barriers faced by these children that may be preventing their presence in school.
- A social and emotional learning programme designed to reduce the need for exclusions; this includes designing and delivering a new volunteer mentoring programme to create long-lasting and trusted relationships. These schools are also training their staff to be aware of the racial disproportionalities seen in exclusion and attendance rates.



Beyond bespoke programmes for particular groups, given that a disproportionate number of children from particular communities are absent, suspended and excluded, delivering strategies to support all absent, suspended, and excluded children will have positive impact on these children. Strategies that have been robustly evaluated should be prioritised.¹⁰

Strategies should include:

- Delivering evidence-informed attendance-improvement strategies (such as meetings with parents/carers and breakfast clubs).
- Implementing whole-school and targeted behaviour support to reduce the need for exclusion.
- Providing appropriate support for temporarily suspended and permanently excluded children.

For more detailed information on these strategies see the [YEF's Education Practice Guidance](#) for schools, alternative provision, and colleges.

Five areas to focus efforts

5. Youth custody

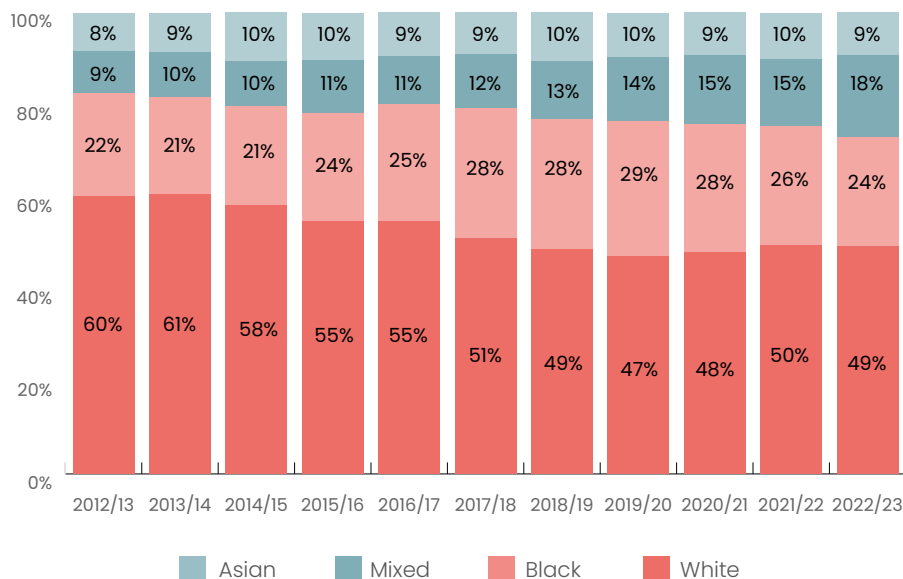
What's the issue?


Racial disproportionality in the numbers of children in custody is stark. Black children make up 6% of all 10–17-year-olds, but in 2023/24, they accounted for 24% of children in custody – four times their population share.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller make up less than 1% of children; yet, a self-reported 7% of children in custody are from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds – over seven times their population share.¹¹²

This is relevant to disproportionality in violence for several reasons. First, because more than two-thirds (68%) of children in the secure estate have been sentenced for a violent offence.¹¹³ Second, because there is a large volume of violence that occurs within the secure estate itself, with minority ethnic groups more likely to be involved and less likely to feel safe (see below). And third, because reoffending rates from custody are high (66% re-offend within one year of release) with disproportionately high reoffending rates for children from Black backgrounds.¹¹⁴

Over the past decade, the total number of children serving custodial sentences has fallen, but this hasn't impacted children of all ethnicities equally. For instance, the number of White children in youth custody fell by 80% between 2010/11 and 2020/21. In the same period, the number of Black children fell by only 54%, and the number of Mixed ethnicity children by 37%.¹¹⁵

Chart 9: Proportion of average monthly child custody population by ethnicity, England and Wales





There are serious concerns regarding conditions and levels of violence in the children and young people's secure estate. HM Inspectorate of Prisons has issued urgent notifications for several sites in recent years. Urgent notifications are issued where the inspectorate has identified significant concerns about the treatment and conditions of those detained. Other organisations, including the Parliamentary Justice Committee, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Children's Commissioner, and the Howard League for Penal Reform, have also identified concerns. Given the aforementioned racial disproportionality in the population of the secure estate, children from minority ethnic communities are being disproportionately impacted by these worsening conditions.

Especially concerning is that even within the secure estate, children from particular ethnic communities are less safe. Violence is a particular concern. In the year ending March 2023 the number of assault or fighter involvements per 100 children was 640; this was higher for Black children at 880.¹¹⁶ The Inspectorate has also been very critical of the equality and diversity provision on offer at Young Offender Institutions, explaining that "Too often, leaders were unable to identify effectively or address potential discrimination. It was disappointing to find that in 2022–23 only Feltham had made reasonable progress in making sure children with protected characteristics were treated fairly while in custody, despite their prevalence within YOIs."¹¹⁷

Other pressing concerns in the children and young people's secure estate include the distance children are placed from home and the lack of contact with their families,¹¹⁸ poor provision of education and purposeful activity, lack of time out of cells and self-harm.¹¹⁹

What do we know about the nature and drivers of disproportionality?

Analysis by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) highlights that differences in demographics and offending profiles explain some disproportionality. However, after accounting for these factors there is still disproportionality in custodial outcomes.

There are three disproportionate outcomes that such factors (Youth Offending Team, type of offence, offence history, court type and demographic characteristics) cannot fully explain: there are more restrictive remand outcomes for Black and Mixed ethnicity children; there are fewer out-of-court disposals for Black, Asian and Mixed ethnicity children; and there are harsher court sentences for Black children.¹²⁰

As noted earlier in this report, recent analysis by the Youth Justice Board (2023) focused on disposals following reoffending finds that children from a Black, Asian or Mixed heritage background are more likely to receive a custodial sentence following reoffending compared to White children, even after contextual factors – such as offence type, practitioner assessment of risk, previous disposal – are accounted for.¹²¹

What do children and young people say?

In 2022-23, 83% of children in custody responded to HM Inspectorate of Prisons' survey on their perceptions of their care. Their responses illustrate the poor conditions and level of care:

- 46% of children reported feeling cared for by staff
- 32% of children did not have a single member of staff they trusted to help them if they had a problem
- Just 55% of children thought their experiences of custody made them less likely to offend in the future

There is also clear racial disproportionality expressed in this survey. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children were less likely to report feeling safe when they arrived in custody and 57% reported having felt unsafe during their time in custody, compared with 28% of children who were not from this background.¹²²

“I am shocked to imagine that 57% reported that they feel unsafe – to think that you’ve given them a place that they’re supposed to feel safe in, but they’re saying that they don’t.”

PRINCE,
MEMBER OF THE YEF'S YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

What's the opportunity?

As a matter of urgency, the government should focus on improving conditions in the children and young people's secure estate, particularly by reducing the levels of violence and acting upon the continued recommendations of HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

There is also promising evidence that custody aftercare and resettlement programmes have a positive impact on reducing convictions following release into the community.¹²³ These programmes typically involve a case worker who intensively supports the child before, during and after their custodial sentence. This includes assessing children's needs and risks, providing support, and coordinating services, such as emotional and behavioural support programmes, welfare and family support, substance misuse services, and re-engagement in school. These programmes should be invested in to support children when they leave custody.

Endnotes

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