



**We're here to prevent children
and young people becoming
involved in violence**

Call for Secondary Data Analysis Proposals

Call open: 10th December 2025 to 13th February 2026

Summary

- We're launching our fourth call for secondary data analysis projects - projects that use existing datasets to address key research questions for policy and practice in relation to children and young people's involvement in crime and violence.
- This year we are particularly interested in receiving proposals for projects which support our work across the **health, children's services** and **youth justice** sectors. We primarily wish to fund impact studies with a strong causal design, that allow us to infer the effects of policies, practices and interventions on youth violence.
- We are also interested in studies which explore the causes, contexts and drivers, of youth violence, particularly forms of violence affecting women and girls, criminal exploitation and the role of digital platforms and social media in promoting youth violence.
- Finally, we welcome studies that contribute to YEF's race equity work, through improving understanding of racial disproportionality and what works to address these injustices.
- All applications should be submitted via the [online form](#), on or before the 13th of February. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview in the first two weeks in March and we intend to inform successful applicants by the 27th of March.

Section 1: Background

At the YEF, our mission is to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

As an organisation, we fund a wide range of research, including [systematic reviews](#), [Evidence and Gap Maps](#), [evaluations](#) of programs we fund, and [secondary data analysis](#). For more details on our strategy, see our [website](#).

This call is for secondary data analysis (SDA) projects, which includes research that uses **statistical analyses of existing datasets** to answer questions about the causes, contexts and prevention of youth violence. SDA can help to address research questions where randomised control trials and other research designs are unfeasible. SDA approaches can include:

- **Impact studies** –quasi-experimental designs that allow causal inference on the effects of drivers, policies, practices and interventions on crime and violence outcomes.
- **Relationship testing** –regressions (e.g. panel designs/multi-level models) that test for the existence of relationships to crime and violence outcomes, although stops short of being able to make casual inference.
- **Descriptive analysis** –descriptions of population or issues that are not well understood or exploration of research questions related to crime and violence, for which there is very little evidence.

A range of different datasets may be used as part of SDA projects, including longitudinal cohort or panel studies, administrative datasets, or locally held linked data from multiple agencies.

Type of data	Example datasets
Administrative datasets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police National Computer (PNC) Mental Health Services Data Set (MHSDS) National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) data Data First Prison Iteration 2 - England and Wales
National annual surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crime survey of England and Wales (CSEW) Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) General Practice Patient Survey (GPPS)
Longitudinal studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) Understanding Society The second Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE2)
Locally held data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Violence Reduction Unit/Network datasets Local authority data (e.g. children's services or housing statistics) Mental health services records e.g. Clinical Record Interactive Search (CRIS) data.
Pre-existing trials' data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Endowment Fund's trials archive (example research here) Youth Endowment Fund's trials archive (about our data here)¹
Linked datasets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Justice and Department for Education linkage, bringing together education and crime records in England The ECHILD database, linking the National Pupil Database (NPD) with health² and social care data for England.

For more details on the types of analysis and data that are in scope, please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (available [here](#)).

¹ We will launch a focused call in 2025/26 for projects that will explicitly aim to draw out learnings from our own trial's database. Applicants wishing to use the YEF's data archive should consider waiting for that separate call.

² Note, health data includes hospital admissions for assault with a knife/sharp object and may be of interest as an outcome for those exploring the impact of violence.

Section 2: Details of our latest SDA call

This is our fourth call for secondary data analysis projects exploring drivers of violence and the effectiveness of different policies and approaches. Through our first, second and third calls, we've funded eighteen research projects, that use a range of datasets and methodologies. You can find out more about these projects [here](#).

This year we particularly welcome projects that fit under the following broad categories:

- 1) **Sector specific work:** while we welcome proposals that contribute to learning across any of YEF's [seven sectors](#), we are particularly interested in research that will expand our knowledge of what drives or prevents children and young people's involvement in violence, within the context of health, social care and youth justice. **We primarily wish to fund studies with a strong causal design**, that allow us to infer the effects of drivers, policies, practices and interventions. However, we will also consider funding research that is more descriptive or exploratory in nature where it can be shown to address a key evidence gap within our priority focus sectors.
- 2) **Drivers and broader context of violence:** We are particularly interested in understanding more about how specific factors interact or combine to predict children's involvement in violence. We will prioritise studies looking to test specific hypotheses for how two or more factors may interact to increase or decrease risk. We are also interested in learning more about the drivers and contexts of children's involvement in forms of gender-based violence, and criminal exploitation. Finally, we are interested in learning more about the role of digital platforms and social media in both driving and preventing children's involvement in violence and crime.
- 3) **Racial disproportionality:** we'd welcome applications that contribute to YEF's race equity work, through improving understanding of both the drivers of racial disproportionality and what works to address these injustices.

How do we define impact studies?

These are studies that seek to estimate the extent to which crime and violence outcomes can be **causally attributed to a particular exposure, rather than other factors**. In the context of SDA, studies typically use retrospective, quasi-experimental approaches that allow for causal inference on the effects of particular drivers, policies, practices and interventions on crime and violence outcomes.

We have developed our own framework for assessing the evidence-strength of impact studies known as our 'Magnifying Glass (MG)' security rating system. All SDA impact studies funded by YEF will be assessed and rated according to this system through independent peer review. Our [guidance](#) has more details on the criteria used to assign MGs.

Below we summarise the primary research questions we have in mind. The [annex](#) provides more detail on the evidence gaps these questions aim to fill, as well as secondary questions that might be considered in addition, as part of a successful project.

Research questions

Sector specific work

We welcome proposals that contribute to building evidence on what works to address violence across any of YEF's [seven sectors](#) of focus. However, for this call we are especially interested in funding projects which support our work within **health, children's services** and **youth justice**.

Health sector

We have recently expanded our work in the health sector, from a narrow focus on therapies, to a broader interest in how (physical and mental) health exposures and interventions predict children's involvement in violence. We welcome proposals that explore specific hypotheses within the following broad areas of interest:

- What are the impacts of different types of specific mental health and developmental disorders (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, developmental language disorder, substance use disorder etc.) and treatments for these on children's involvement in violence?
- What are the impacts of specific health exposures, hazards and injuries (for example, environmental pollutants, poor nutrition, traumatic brain injury) on children's involvement in crime and violence and which interventions are most effective at reducing risk?
- How can we use data within health services to better understand the patterns, trends and drivers of children and young people's involvement in violence and explore the impact of prevention efforts (e.g. ambulance data, hospital admissions data, hospital and community navigators, etc.)?

Children's services

Children with social care involvement and care experiences are disproportionately likely to become involved in violence and crime. However, we don't know whether this is due to pre-existing childhood adversities (e.g. abuse, poverty, etc.) or whether social care experience itself has an impact. Furthermore, we currently have little evidence on specific interventions or approaches within children's services that are most effective at reducing risk of violence involvement. We are particularly concerned about a lack of evidence on what works to support children at risk of criminal exploitation.

The specific research questions we welcome bids on across the children's services sector include:

- What interventions for children with social care involvement are most effective in reducing risk of future involvement in violence and crime?
- What is the causal impact of care experience (being taken into care, the type of care placement, stability of placement, etc.) on children's likelihood of becoming involved in violence?
- What are the effects of being identified as being at risk of child criminal exploitation (including via the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and children social care records) on offending and re-exploitation? Is this affected by length of time to receive a decision?

Youth Justice

We're keen to receive proposals that use (both nationally held and locally held) case and assessment data from youth justice services to understand more about intervention practices and outcomes for children charged with and convicted for violent offences, including the most serious crimes.

The specific research questions we welcome bids on across the youth justice sector include:

- What are the outcomes associated with different types of community sentences and how do these compare to outcomes for children given a custodial sentence?
- What are the outcomes associated with the use of remand for children awaiting court compared to community alternatives?
- What interventions for justice-involved children are most effective at reducing the risk/likelihood of carrying knives or being involved in a knife offence?
- What is the impact of restorative justice as part of non-diversion outcomes (e.g. charge, community sentences, custodial sentences) for CYP?

Drivers and contexts of violence

We are also welcoming proposals that contribute to our work exploring the broader causes and contexts of youth violence. This year we have identified the following specific areas of interest:

Violence affecting young women and girls (VAWG)

We welcome proposals that have the potential to expand our knowledge and understanding of the drivers and contexts of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) particularly affecting young women and girls, and the effectiveness of policy and practice interventions.

The specific research questions we welcome bids on include:

- What are the risk factors associated with becoming a victim or perpetrator of SGBV violence, including group-based violence and sexual exploitation?
- What policies, interventions and approaches are effective at preventing SGBV perpetration and/or improving outcomes for young people that have perpetrated sexual and gender based violence, and reducing future offending?

Digital platforms, social media and online drivers of violence

Digital media plays an increasing role in children's exposure to violence. Less is known about the outcomes of these exposures, including links between the content children view online and real-world experiences of violence. We also lack knowledge of the individual factors or policy interventions which may increase or decrease risk of online exposures leading to offline harm.

The specific research questions we welcome bids on include:

- What is the prevalence, patterns and trends in children's exposure to online violence, extremist content and hate speech?
- Does exposure to online violence, extremist content, discussions and hate speech (e.g. misogyny) lead to increases in real world violence?
- Which factors increase children's risk of grooming and recruitment online?

- Has there been any changes to online harm following recent policy changes and regulation (e.g. the Online Safety Bill?)

Combinations of risk and protective factors

We know that particular vulnerabilities (e.g. school exclusion, special educational needs, experiences of the care system, etc.) and protective factors (e.g. positive peer influences, supportive home environments) are associated with an increase or decreased risk of children becoming involved in violence. Less is known about how specific factors interact to compound or protect against the risk of violence involvement. We welcome proposals that test well-specified, theory-driven hypotheses to better understand how two or more particular, risk or protective factors interact, compound, or mitigate one another in predicting children's involvement in violence.

The specific research questions we welcome bids on could include:

- How does household income interact with special educational needs to predict children's involvement in violence?
- How do school-based factors—such as inclusion, academic engagement, and a sense of belonging—interact with children's mental health experiences (e.g. anxiety, depression, behavioral disorders) to influence their likelihood of involvement in crime or violence?
- Which specific combinations of factors have a cumulative or multiplicative effect on the likelihood of children's involvement in violence?

Drivers and impact of racial disproportionality

It is well established that children and young people from Black and Mixed ethnicity backgrounds are overrepresented at all levels of the criminal justice system. However, fewer analyses have explored what drives these disproportionalities in detail by granular ethnicity. Furthermore, we have limited knowledge concerning which specific policies and interventions are most effective in reducing disproportionalities in outcomes.

The specific research questions we welcome bids on include:

- What disproportionalities exist in children's access to support services, and how do these inequalities influence outcomes for children, especially involvement in violence?
- To what extent can observed ethnic disproportionalities in criminal justice outcomes be explained by factors external to the criminal justice system, and which are most attributable to responses within criminal justice services themselves?
- Which existing policies, programmes, or local initiatives have been effective in reducing ethnic disproportionalities in the youth justice system?

For more details on each of these areas of focus, see the [annex](#).

Section 3: Assessment criteria

Details of the scoring criteria are provided below. All applications need to be submitted via the [online form](#). For details on the questions asked, see the [annex](#).

Criteria	What's assessed?	Scoring Weighting
Research questions	Clear specification of research question(s), which evidence gaps they aim to fill, and impacts the findings could have on relevant stakeholders' decision making.	25%
Methodology	Credibility of the proposed methodology in addressing the research question(s), the extent uncertainties are identified, and a plan in place to clarify during the initial phases of analysis.	20%
Data access	Demonstrated understanding of the dataset(s) being accessed, processes for accessing data and handling issues, including UK-GDPR.	20%
Race equity	How will race equity considerations be factored into your project? Will the research generate findings split by ethnicity? How will sources of bias be accounted for in the analysis and interpretation of findings?	10%
Timeline and budget	A credible timeline ³ (including an articulation of the risks to delivering on time and proposed mitigations) and justification for the costs incurred.	10%
Project team and relevant experience	The extent to which the research team has relevant knowledge and experience of the policy context, datasets and proposed methodologies.	15%

³ We recognise that some projects, if successful, will need to hire new staff. We are likely to prioritise applications where projects do not require lengthy recruitment processes or where elements of the project (e.g. data access, agreeing analysis plans etc.) may still continue whilst recruitment takes place. We will also look favorably on applications where there are planned mitigations in the event of key staff loss.

Section 4: Race equity

In addition to the above criteria, at the YEF, we have a particular focus on race equity (for more information, see details on our [race equity commitments](#)). This includes conducting research that sheds light on the experiences of children and young people from Black, Asian and other minority backgrounds. And in a way that accounts for potential sources of bias in the data and methods used and the interpretation of the findings. For our SDA projects, we'd expect applicants to consider race equity in (but not limited to) the following ways:

- **Subgroup analysis:** Wherever possible, projects should be able to produce results by ethnicity. Where subgroup analysis isn't possible teams will need to provide a strong justification why not.
- **Sources of bias:** Applicants should consider how and from whom the data were collected, the nature of the data or variables used, and their modelling assumptions, in terms of how these may lead to bias in the results.
- **Interpretation:** Project teams should reflect on how they will consult a sufficiently broad and diverse set of viewpoints throughout the project, to ensure the racialised context of their research and findings are fully accounted for.

Section 5: Required outputs

All successful teams will be expected to complete three core outputs over the course of the project and have them signed-off by the YEF before progressing to the next phase. These outputs are:

- **Analysis plan and data access approval:** This initial phase will involve the completion of a detailed analysis plan, expanding on the methodology set out in the application. We also expect to see evidence that all aspects of data sharing and access have been fully approved by relevant data owners. The analysis plan will be published on the YEF website.
- **Interim research report:** This will include an initial descriptive analysis of the dataset(s) and evidence of initial testing; or exploration of the feasibility of the research design, underlying assumptions and/or alternative approaches. Interim reports are typically not published, these are internal documents for YEF to review progress against the agreed research questions.
- **Final research report:** This will include a full write-up of the results of the analysis addressing each of the research questions. These will be published on the YEF website.

We recognise that in advance of projects receiving their data, it's not always possible to fully specify the approach or methodology. The interim reporting phase is intended to provide project teams the opportunity to test and explore their data, in relation to the proposed methodology, and refine the intended approach as necessary.

All outputs will go through a process of external peer review, managed and coordinated by the YEF. All analysis plans and final research reports will be published on the YEF website.

Section 6: Budgets

We do not set an upper ceiling on the total amount we're prepared to fund per project. Projects funded in previous rounds have typically been awarded between £100,000-£200,000 (depending on scope) and are anticipated to last between 18-24 months from contract signing to signing-off of the final report. However, it will be up to individual applicants to make the case for the budget and timelines they submit. We expect budgets and timelines to vary according to research complexity, ambition and design.

Applicants will need to complete a detailed budget template with an accompanying narrative. The template and additional guidance are provided [here](#).

Section 7: Submitting Applications

To apply, you'll need to submit an online application, accessed [here](#). For details on the questions asked, see the [annex](#). You'll also need to submit a completed budget template (downloadable [here](#)) which can be attached to the online application form. Note, we will not accept applications or budget templates submitted via email.

Shortlisted proposals will then be invited to interview between the 2nd and 13th of March. We plan to confirm which projects we'll take forward by 27th March 2026.

If you have any questions, please refer to our FAQs. Further questions can be directed to Liz Yarrow: liz.yarrow@youthendowmentfund.org.uk, copying in data@youthendowmentfund.org.uk.

Annex 1: Detailed research questions

Sector specific questions

Health

What are the impacts of different types of specific mental health and developmental disorders (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, developmental language disorder, substance use disorder etc.) and treatments for these on children's involvement in violence??

There is consistent evidence that certain mental health conditions, neurodevelopmental disorders, and substance use disorders are associated with an increased risk of children becoming involved in violence and crime. These include attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder (CD), and substance misuse or dependency. High rates of these conditions have been identified among children in contact with the youth justice system. For example, 72% of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System Data had an assessed mental health concern.⁴ A meta-analysis of screening studies of young people in custody found that almost one in three met the diagnostic criteria for having ADHD, more than five times the prevalence in the general populations.⁵ Rates of learning disabilities, speech and language difficulties, and trauma-related disorders are also substantially higher than in the general child population.⁶

While these associations are well established, there is limited robust evidence on the effectiveness of specific therapeutic or pharmacological interventions in reducing risk. Some international research, primarily from Scandinavia, has examined whether treating underlying disorders, particularly ADHD, can reduce offending behaviour. For example, a study of registry data in Sweden found that pharmacological treatment for ADHD was associated with a 32% reduction in criminal convictions for men, and 41% among women.⁷ A more recent study from Norway found that pharmacological treatment had a causal impact on reducing crime related to impulsive-reactive behaviour.⁸ However, evidence relating specifically to children and adolescents, and especially within UK populations, is lacking.

Similarly, while a recent systematic review found that treatment for substance use is effective at reducing criminal recidivism, we have not identified any studies that have specifically focused on treatment interventions for adolescents. With regard to broader policy, reviews and meta-analyses have consistently found little evidence that tougher drug penalties reduce youth drug use or drug-related crime. In contrast, some evidence indicates that punitive drug enforcement can exacerbate involvement in the justice system, particularly for young people from marginalised or minority backgrounds and that decriminalisation is

⁴ Assessing the needs of sentenced children within the youth justice system ([youth justice board, 2020](#)).

⁵ Young S, Moss D, Sedgwick O, Fridman M, Hodgkins P. A meta-analysis of the prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in incarcerated populations. *Psychological Medicine*. 2015;45(2):247-258.

⁶ Hales, H., Warner, L., Smith, J. G., & Bartlett, A. (2022). Primary neurodevelopmental disorders in detained adolescents: point prevalence and patterns of care. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 33(3), 354–370.

⁷ Lichtenstein P, Halldner L, Zetterqvist J, Sjölander A, Serlachius E, Fazel S, Långström N, Larsson H. Medication for attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder and criminality. *N Engl J Med*. 2012 Nov 22;367(21):2006-14.

⁸ Widding-Havneraas T, Zachrisson HD, Markussen S, Elwert F, Lyhmann I, Chaulagain A, Bjelland I, Halmøy A, Rypdal K, Mykletun A. Effect of Pharmacological Treatment of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder on Criminality. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2024 Apr;63(4):433-442

associated with reduced offending.⁹ Nevertheless, significant evidence gaps, particularly exploring a UK context, remain.

More detailed and specific questions we'd be interested in exploring through this work include:

- What impact does treatment for ADHD (therapies and treatment) have in reducing children's involvement in violence and crime?
- What is the impact of a) treatment for substance misuse problems b) drug control laws/ policies/ practices on violence/ crime in children?
- Is there a causal relationship between developmental language disorder and children's involvement in violence and crime, and does early intervention and access to SALT reduce risk?

What are the impacts of specific health exposures, hazards and injuries (e.g. environmental pollutants, poor nutrition, traumatic brain injury) on children's involvement in crime and violence and which interventions are most effective at reducing risk?

A growing body of evidence links a range of early-life and childhood health exposures — especially lead poisoning, prenatal substance exposures (alcohol, tobacco), poor nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and air pollution — to later problems that increase risk of violent behaviour and contact with the criminal justice system. However, most studies are observational and come from a small set of countries. UK-specific longitudinal, linked administrative evidence is sparse and there is limited evidence on when exposures (prenatal vs early childhood vs adolescence) have the strongest influence on pathways to offending. Finally, few studies have shed light on whether specific policies (e.g., lead remediation, nutrition, pollutant reduction) may be effective in lowering risk of violence or criminal involvement.

More specific questions we might consider exploring through this work include:

- Is there a causal relationship between pollution or lead exposure and involvement in violence?
- Do policies that improve children's nutrition (e.g. free school meals) improve behaviour in children and prevent violence?

How can we use data within health services to better understand the patterns, trends and drivers of children and young people's involvement in violence and explore the impact of prevention efforts (e.g. ambulance data, hospital admissions data, hospital and community navigators, etc)?

We have funded several projects exploring patterns and trends of youth violence using police and justice systems data. However, these sources may introduce systematic biases, as they capture only incidents that are reported to or detected by the criminal justice system and can therefore under-represent forms of violence that remain unreported. To develop a more comprehensive understanding, we are interested in undertaking similar analyses using data collected within health services (e.g. ambulance records, hospital admissions, hospital and community navigators, A&E data), which may offer a broader and less justice-mediated view of youth violence.

⁹ Werb, D., Rowell, G., Guyatt, G., Kerr, T., Montaner, J., Wood, E. 2011. Effect of drug law enforcement on drug market violence: A systematic review. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 22 (2): 87-94.

More specific questions we might consider exploring through this work include:

- What can health data tell us about the timing and location of violence affecting young people?
- How can analysis of health service data better inform local violence prevention efforts, by identifying patterns, places, times and priorities?
- What is the impact of violence prevention efforts targeting the victims of serious violence at the point of medical treatment (e.g. [A&E navigators](#))?

To develop a more comprehensive understanding, we are interested in undertaking similar analyses using data collected within health services (e.g. ambulance records, hospital admissions, A&E data), which may offer a broader and less justice-mediated view of youth violence.

Social care

What interventions for children with social care involvement are most effective in reducing risk of future involvement in violence and crime?

What is the impact of being taken into care on children's likelihood of becoming involved in violence and crime, and how does this differ by care experience (type of care placement, stability of placement, etc.)?

Children with care histories are substantially overrepresented in both youth and adult criminal justice systems. It is estimated that one in three care-experienced children (33%) receive a youth caution or conviction between the ages of 10-17 years, compared to 4% of children without care experience¹⁰, and that by age 24 over half (52%) had been convicted of an offence.¹¹ What is not known is the extent to which pre-existing childhood adversities (e.g. abuse, poverty, etc.) predict both likelihood of social care involvement and later involvement in crime and violence, or whether there is something about the care system itself that the increased likelihood of becoming justice involved. There is a lack of studies that have been able to convincingly estimate the counterfactual: what would have happened to these children had they not been taken into care and what are the mechanisms by which care experience increases the likelihood of involvement in crime and violence?

Similarly, evidence has demonstrated an association between poorer outcomes and certain types of care placement (e.g. in residential settings) as well as placement instability, however, it is not known whether these effects are the result of higher baseline needs (e.g. children with more complex histories and behavioural difficulties are more likely to be in residential care) or whether care setting/ experience itself has a significant impact.

YEF would be very interested in funding studies with a strong quasi-experimental design that compare placement in care, and type of care placement, with behavioural, violence and crime outcomes, while accounting for baseline risk and selection bias. We would also be interested in funding studies that consider how social care involvement interacts with other risk factors (such as SEND, mental health, family background) to predict children's later involvement in violence.

¹⁰ Hunter, K. Care experience, ethnicity and youth justice involvement. ([ADR UK, 2023](#))

¹¹ The education background of looked after children who interact with the justice system ([ONS, 2022](#)).

Other questions we might consider exploring through this work include:

- How does placement type interact with placement stability, child age and other characteristics to predict children's likelihood of becoming involved in violence and crime?
- What variations in care experience (if any) are protective against later involvement in crime and violence?
- What are the impacts of specific types of care-leaver and transition support on young people's later involvement in violence and crime?

What are the impacts of being identified as being at risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE), including on children and young people's involvement in crime and violence, and on broader related outcomes?

Child criminal exploitation refers to the manipulation or coercion of children into criminal activity; for example, exploiting children into selling drugs as part of [county lines](#) operations. Children who are exploited in this way are at high risk of both experiencing and perpetrating violence.

There are several routes through which children may be identified as being at risk of criminal exploitation. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the key framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive appropriate support. Other pathways include identification as a *child in need* by children's social care, or through safeguarding efforts led by charities and other specialist services.

In 2021, the Home Office launched a pilot across 10 sites to test a devolved decision-making model for identifying child victims. An additional 10 sites joined in 2023, and in October 2024, local authorities not already participating were invited to express interest in joining.¹² Evaluation of the pilot found that the devolved model enabled faster decision-making and improved awareness and understanding of both the NRM process and modern slavery more broadly.¹³ Identified and potential child victims also receive support from the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) service, delivered by Barnardo's, which operates across selected areas in England and Wales.¹⁴

We are keen to strengthen the evidence base on:

- the effectiveness of mechanisms such as the NRM;
- the safeguarding processes put in place for potential victims;
- the criminal justice outcomes for offences committed under exploitation; and
- any racial disproportionalities within these processes.

Other related questions we'd be looking to explore through this work include:

- How many children are at risk of CCE and how do the different referral mechanisms vary in terms of coverage? What are the gaps (i.e. which children are not being captured)?

¹² Devolving child decision making pilot programme: general guidance ([Home Office, 2023](#))

¹³ An evaluation of the pilot to devolve decision-making for child victims of modern slavery ([Ipsos UK & Home Office, 2024](#))

¹⁴ Annex: Independent child trafficking guardianship statistics, year ending March 2024 ([Home Office, 2024](#))

- Is it feasible to obtain and analyse data on referrals (e.g., from first responder organisations, NRM, local authorities), and link these to outcomes including support and safeguarding received and criminal justice outcomes? How does this compare to other referral mechanisms?
- What are the characteristics of and risk factors (e.g., going missing from home, involvement with organised crime or serious youth violence, affiliation with groups or gangs, lack of safe accommodation, perpetration of crime) for children and young people who are referred or identified as victims of CCE, through different channels?

Youth Justice

What are the outcomes associated with different types of community sentences and how do these compare to outcomes for children given a custodial sentence?

In England and Wales, community sentences are the most common type of disposal for children who are convicted of criminal offences, with custodial sentences reserved for the most violent and persistent offenders. The main community-based options include Referral Orders, Youth Rehabilitation Orders (YROs) with various requirements (such as supervision, activity, or curfew), and Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS) for higher-risk children. Evidence indicates that the use and type of community sentence vary systematically by demographics and prior criminal justice history: boys, children from minoritised ethnic groups, and those with previous convictions are more likely to receive custodial rather than community sentences, even after controlling for offence severity. However, detailed, up-to-date data disaggregating community sentence use by ethnicity, gender, region and offence type is limited and inconsistently reported (YJB, 2024; HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023).

Evidence shows that children given custodial sentences are more likely to offend compared to those given community sentences. However, few studies are able to robustly account for baseline risk, as those who commit the most serious offences are most likely to end up in custody. Furthermore, there is very limited evidence comparing the different outcomes associated with specific types of community sentence (e.g., Referral Orders vs YROs with ISS conditions). Many studies group all community sentences together, making it difficult to identify which models or conditions are most effective, for which subgroups, and under what circumstances.

YEF is interested in funding both descriptive and exploratory studies which provide up to date, detailed and disaggregated data on how different types of community sentence are applied by demographic and offence characteristics. We are also interested in funding studies with a robust quasi-experimental design comparing different types of sentences to outcomes.

What are the outcomes associated with the use of remand for children awaiting custody compared to community alternatives?

England and Wales have comparatively high rates of child remand use. In the year ending March 2024, 43% of the average youth custodial population were children held on remand, and almost two-thirds (62%) of those remanded to youth detention accommodation did not subsequently receive a custodial

sentence.¹⁵ International research indicates that the use of pre-trial detention for children in England and Wales is higher than in many other European jurisdictions.¹⁶

Evidence shows that being remanded in custody is associated with substantial harms: disruption to education, loss of family contact, increased exposure to violence and trauma, and elevated risk of reoffending after release. Conversely, community-based remand alternatives (such as bail support, electronic monitoring, or intensive supervision) are associated with reduced rates of re-offending, but provision is inconsistent across local authorities, and evaluation evidence is limited. However, few robust UK studies directly compare outcomes for remanded versus non-remanded children with similar risk profiles, leaving significant uncertainty about causal effects.

We are aware of the significant challenges and gaps in the data infrastructure within the youth justice services and would welcome projects that draw on specific local partnerships and propose novel means of analysing service-user data (e.g. use of AI natural language processing models to mine case notes, etc.)

Other questions that we'd be interested in exploring with our youth justice work include, what works to support children's successful transition from youth justice services into adult justice services?

Drivers and broader contexts of violence

Sexual and gender-based violence

What are the risk factors associated with becoming a victim or perpetrator of SGBV violence, including group-based violence and sexual exploitation?

Which interventions and support improve outcomes for young sexual offenders, and reduce future offending?

The YEF is interested in expanding its work on the drivers, contexts and prevention of SGBV, including group-based violence and exploitation. While existing studies identify a range of risk factors for both victimisation and perpetration, such as prior abuse or neglect, exposure to domestic violence, time in care or unstable housing, poverty, substance misuse, and disengagement from education, the majority of this evidence is qualitative, focused on lived experience and based on small, non-representative samples.¹⁷ Moreover, few studies use robust statistical methods to examine how intersecting factors, including disability, ethnicity, gender identity, and digital exposure, interact to heighten risk or resilience. For sexual exploitation and group-based violence, additional factors like peer coercion, online grooming, gang involvement, and neighbourhood deprivation have been noted, but there is very limited quantitative evidence on group-based violence.

There is a particular gap in evidence on risk factors associated with adolescent SGBV perpetration. Adolescent sexual offending may differ from adult sexual offending: offending can be more situational, often peer- or relationship-based, and associated with broader behavioral and developmental difficulties. While some longitudinal studies suggest that most young people who commit sexual offences do not

¹⁵ Youth Justice statistics 2023-2024 ([Ministry of Justice](#)).

¹⁶ Annual penal statistics ([Council of Europe, 2023](#)).

¹⁷ Tarzia L, Henderson-Brooks K, Baloch S, Hegarty K. Women Higher Education Students' Experiences of Sexual Violence: A Scoping Review and Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Studies. *Trauma Violence Abuse*. 2024 Jan;25(1):704-720.

persist into adulthood, the evidence base is limited by small sample sizes, inconsistent definitions, and a lack of UK-specific research. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in evidence on interventions and support that can prevent SGBV, reduce risk of reoffending and improve psychosocial outcomes for young offenders, leading to uncertainty amongst policy makers and practitioners as to how to the best disposals for children convicted of such crimes. .

We are interested in funding analyses that draw on longitudinal and administrative data sets, to enable stronger causal inference and ultimately supporting more effective, data-driven approaches to violence prevention.

Online violence

What is the prevalence, patterns and trends in children's exposure to online violence, extremist content and hate speech?

Does exposure to online violence, extremist content, discussions and hate speech lead to increases in real world violence?

Which factors increase children's risk of grooming and recruitment online?

Have there been any changes to online harm following recent policy changes and regulation (e.g. the Online Safety Bill?)

Large surveys and systematic reviews document that a substantial proportion of children and adolescents experience online violence and harassment (cyberbullying, image-based abuse, exposure to graphic real-world violence) and that social media platforms have been used for grooming and recruitment. We estimate from our own [research](#) that as many as 70% of children have encountered violent content on social media platforms, with over one in three exposed to videos involving weapons. There is also some evidence of an increase in children's exposure to various forms of extremist content and hate speech in recent years, such as misogynistic rhetoric promoting harmful sexual behaviour towards women and girls.¹⁸

However, less is known about the links between the material children view online and links to real world violence. Furthermore, prevalence of grooming and successful online recruitment among adolescents is poorly estimated in population-representative data; most estimates derive from qualitative research, police/agency casework or small samples. We lack knowledge about which subgroups of young people (e.g. due to age, trauma history, neurodivergence, social isolation, etc) are most likely to transition from online exposure to offline harm. Finally, studies that explore how changes in algorithms, moderation policy or platform availability may result in effects on real world violence are limited.

¹⁸ UK Parliament Committee written evidence. (2024). Changes over time in children's exposure to sexist online content and offline behaviour. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/143160/html/> UK Parliament Committees

Combinations of risk and protective factors

Which specific risk factors have a cumulative or multiplicative effect on the likelihood of children's involvement in violence?

Existing evidence consistently shows that certain vulnerabilities, including school exclusion, social care involvement, special educational needs, and household poverty, are associated with an increased likelihood of children becoming involved in violence, either as victims or perpetrators. Conversely, protective factors such as strong family relationships, engagement in education, positive peer and community connections, and stable housing appear to reduce this risk.

We know less, however, about how specific risk factors interact; existing research tends to treat these variables additively or include them together in broad regression models, which limits insight into the mechanisms linking specific combinations of vulnerabilities to violence involvement, which could support more targeted prevention efforts.

In this call, therefore, we welcome proposals that test precise, theory-driven hypotheses about the interactions between two or more individual risk or protective factors. For example, analyses might examine which specific factors or interventions, moderate the association between SEN and violent behaviour, or whether strong peer and family relationships can offset the elevated risk link to social care involvement.

Race Equity

What disproportionalities exist in children's access to support services, and how do these inequalities influence outcomes for children, especially involvement in violence?

To what extent can observed ethnic disproportionalities in criminal justice outcomes be explained by factors external to the criminal justice system, and which are most attributable to responses within criminal justice services themselves?

Which existing policies, programmes, or local initiatives have been effective in reducing ethnic disproportionalities in the youth justice system?

It is well established that children and young people from Black and Mixed ethnicity backgrounds are overrepresented at all levels of the criminal justice system, from police contact, diversion decisions, remand and sentencing, to custodial sentences. However, when we look beyond these broad racialised groups, we see that those from Black Caribbean and Mixed Black-White Caribbean backgrounds are particularly overrepresented, along with children and young people from Roma and Gypsy or Irish Traveller backgrounds.¹⁹ Evidence on the specific drivers of these disproportionalities by detailed ethnic groups is lacking, and there remains limited clarity on which interventions most effectively reduce these inequities in youth justice outcomes.

The Youth Justice Board has undertaken some analysis into the extent and drivers of ethnic disproportionality in remand and sentencing decisions.²⁰ This work categorised children and young

¹⁹ Beyond the Headlines 2024 Summary ([YEF, 2024](#))

²⁰ Ethnic disproportionality in remand and sentencing in the youth justice system ([Youth Justice Board, 2021](#))

people into broader ethnic groups, which may have inadvertently obscured specific experiences of disproportionality for different ethnic groups. We'd be interested in funding projects that can build on this evidence using administrative datasets (e.g., the national [Ministry of Justice and Department for Education](#) linkage) that have more granular data on ethnicity and that allow analysis on the drivers of disproportionality with adequate controls for confounders (e.g., geographical location, deprivation, special educational needs, experiences in school and care).

We'd be particularly interested in funding projects that:

- Explore what drives the disproportionality in offending outcomes, by granular ethnicity, with a particular focus on children and young people from Black Caribbean, Roma and Gypsy or Irish Traveler backgrounds?
- assess the extent to which disproportionalities can be explained by the pattern, nature and severity of offending, background characteristics (including experiences prior to entering the criminal justice system), and geography, and
- Identify which policies, programmes or local initiatives have been shown to reduce ethnic disproportionalities in violence outcomes, and what are the key features of those that work (or fail)?

Annex 2: Application Form

Below is provided a copy of the questions asked in the online application. You may use this when drafting your submission. However, all submissions must be submitted **online**, along with the completed budget template, **via the online [application form](#)**. **We will not accept applications sent via email.**

Organisation name(s)	
Named lead contact: i) Name ii) Job title	
Telephone number:	
Email address of lead contact	
Secondary contact i) Name ii) Job Title	
Telephone number:	
Email address of secondary contact	

Criteria 1: What is the proposed research question(s) your project will answer?

- *Please include all research questions answered by the project.*

(max 2,500 characters including spaces – c.250 words)

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Criteria 2: Why are these important questions to address?

- *What evidence gaps will this project fill?*
- *Who are the key audiences and what might they do differently as a result of the findings?*

(max 8,000 characters including spaces – c.800 words)

Criteria 3: What methodology and techniques do you propose to address the research question?

- *Why is the methodology the preferred approach and what alternatives were considered?*
- *How far will the methodology support causal inference?*

(max 7,000 characters including spaces – c.700 words)

Criteria 4: How will you access the data required for the project?

- *Please explain how you will gain access, what partnerships (if any) are necessary to make this happen and the timeline for doing this.*
- *What are the risks around securing data access and how will these be mitigated?*
- *If relevant, please describe any specific uncertainties/risks around proposed new data linkages.*
- *If data privacy and anonymisation risks or UK-GDPR are relevant, please explain how these will be addressed.*

(max 7,500 characters including spaces – 750 words)

Criteria 5: How will race equity considerations be factored into your project?

- *To what extent will the findings be broken down by ethnicity?*
- *What sources of bias exist in the data and how will these be addressed?*
- *How will you ensure that the racialised context of your findings will be fully accounted for?*

(max 5,000 characters including spaces – c.500 words)

Criteria 6: Use the box below to provide a detailed timeline for the project. There is a separate budget template. Please complete this and attach it with your application form when you submit.

For budgeting and timeline purposes, the three main areas of activity should include:

- *production of a full research protocol and securing access to your data;*
- *completion of an initial interim report, reporting initial descriptive analysis of the dataset and any methodological exploration or feasibility testing;*
- *final report production, which includes all analysis to address the research questions.*

(max 5,000 characters including spaces – c.500 words)

Criteria 7: Provide details of the project team who will be completing the project. Note: You do not need to submit CVs.

- *Please provide relevant experience of the team as a whole, and each individual researcher including their role within the project. Please justify the time allocated to team members and the specific contribution they will be making.*
- *Please indicate how you might respond to any unforeseen changes in staff resourcing (i.e., team members leaving the project early), to ensure the project remains on track.*

(max 5,000 characters including spaces – c.500 words)