YOUTH ENDOWMENT FUND

Report 1

# Children, violence and vulnerability 2026

## The changing scale of violence affecting children



# Contents


3 **Acknowledgements**

5 **Main findings and summary**

6 Executive summary

11 Headline findings

13 **Methodology**

16 **Detailed findings**

17 Fewer teenage children are being affected by violence.

33 But the most vulnerable are still disproportionately affected.

36 Many teens think about violence, but a few appear to be fixated on it.

# Acknowledgements



# Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this report, in particular:

- Savanta, our survey partner, and all those from the team who worked on this year's survey, including Matt McGinn and Benjamin Potts
- Dr Shivonne Gates, for providing support on the survey design and interpretation from a race-equity perspective
- Dr Krisztián Pósch, associate professor in security and crime science at University College London, for providing methodological advice and analysis in support of the survey design and sampling and weighting strategies
- Members of our Youth Advisory Board, for their role in helping design the survey and in sharing their own experiences and how they relate to the findings

Lead contributors from the Youth Endowment Fund include Hashim Ahmed, Dr Cassandra Popham and William Teager.

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

© 2026 The Youth Endowment Fund Charitable Trust. All rights reserved.

This publication contains some public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

# Main findings and summary



# Executive summary

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) surveyed nearly 10,000 children aged 13–17 in England and Wales to hear directly from them about their experiences of violence.

The results are being shared across four separate reports, each focusing on a different theme. This first report looks at the **changing scale of violence**: how many children are affected by violence and how this has changed; which children are most affected; and how many appear to be fixated on violence.

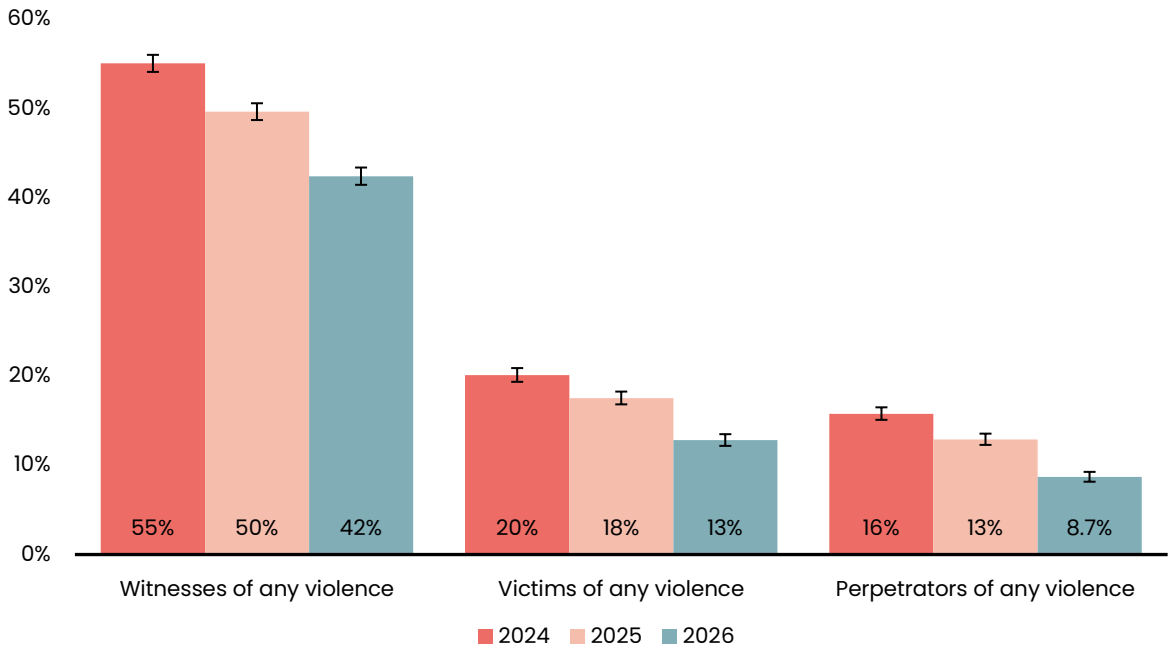
Here's what we found.

## Fewer teenage children are being affected by violence.

Across every measure in our survey, fewer teenage children told us they had experienced violence this year compared to the year before. Thirteen per cent of 13–17-year-olds said they had been a victim of violence in the past 12 months, down from 18% in 2025, and 8.7% said they had carried out violence themselves, down from 13%. Forty-two per cent had witnessed violence happen to another person, down from 50%.

### Violence has fallen for the second year running.

PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS IN ENGLAND AND WALES WHO WERE WITNESSES, VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, BY SURVEY YEAR




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

The falls were largest for the most serious forms of violence. This year, 3.1% of 13–17-year-olds had been a victim of violence that required treatment from a doctor or at a hospital, down from 5.2% last year, and 1.8% had injured someone badly enough that their victim needed treatment, down from 3.3%.

Fewer children were carrying weapons, and fewer were being drawn towards criminal exploitation compared to last year as well: 1.5% said they had carried a weapon in the past year, down from 2.1%, and 6.8% had been approached to sell, store or transport drugs, money or weapons, down from 12%. Fewer children had frequently gone missing from home overnight (3.0% compared to 4.6% last year) and 1.4% said they had been in a 'gang', down from 2.4%.

This is the second year running that our violence measures have fallen. This downward trend aligns with the results from official published data. The latest hospital admissions data shows that the number of children hospitalised for knife assault has also fallen for the past two years. Our *Beyond the Headlines* report, published in July, shows that homicides among 16-24-year-olds fell by 41% in 2024/25, to the lowest number in over a decade.

When we spoke to young people about our findings, some expressed surprise that violence was falling, as it didn't match what they saw online. But others commented on the visibility of violence prevention strategies and thought those could explain the falls:

> ***There's a lot more restrictions that are in place – schools are doing a really good job at making sure physical violence is not happening as often anymore; you'll also see that police are doing more neighbourhood checks walking up and down… I think people are just like kind of scared to do it [violence], because they're really aware of the consequences.***
>
> Young person (anonymous)

## But the most vulnerable are still disproportionately affected.

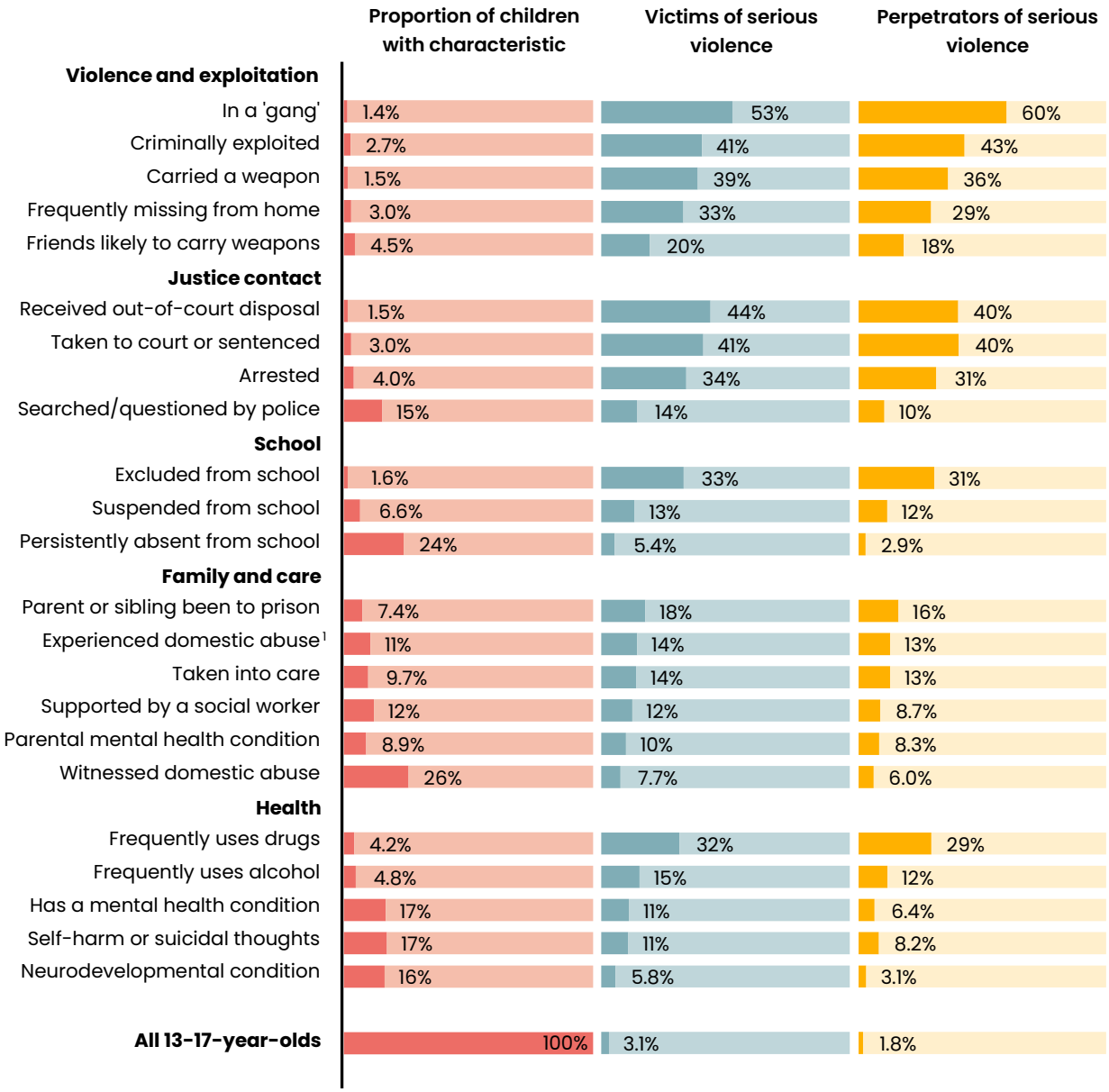
Despite the falls, violence remained heavily concentrated in a small group of children. Those who said they'd been in a 'gang' in the past year – 1.4% of 13–17-year-olds – were the most affected. Of these, 60% had injured someone badly enough that they needed medical treatment, 34 times the rate across all teenagers, and 53% had been seriously injured themselves. Among children who had been criminally exploited into selling, transporting or storing drugs, weapons or money for someone else, 43% had perpetrated serious violence.

Teenage children in contact with the justice system, children facing difficulty at home and children struggling with their own mental health also remained significantly more likely to experience violence than the average teenager. Two in five (40%) of those who had been taken to court or convicted had

perpetrated serious violence, as had 13% of those experiencing verbal or physical abuse from a parent or caregiver and 8.3% of those whose primary caregiver had been diagnosed with a mental health condition in the past year. Four in five (80%) of the children who caused serious injuries had hurt themselves on purpose or thought about suicide.

## Teens experiencing criminal exploitation and in contact with the justice system are the most likely to be affected.

PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WITH SELECTED VULNERABILITIES, AND THE SHARE OF EACH GROUP WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF SERIOUS VIOLENCE




[1] *Experienced domestic abuse defined as experiencing verbal abuse daily or physical abuse ever.*

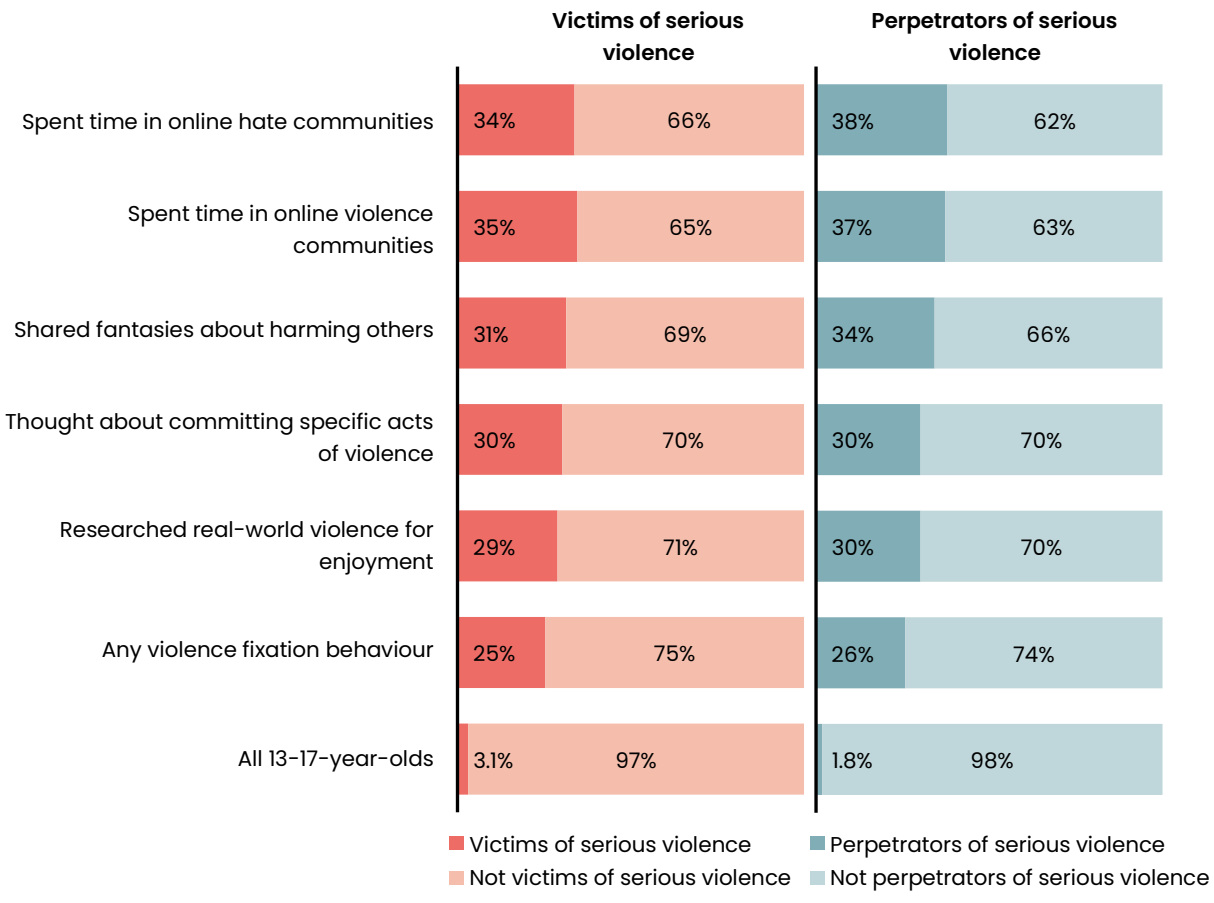
# Many teens think about violence, but a few appear to be fixated on it.

Since the tragic events of the Southport attack in July 2024, the question of what to do about children drawn to extreme violence without a clear or fixed ideology has become a major policy concern. However, how many children are experiencing 'violence fixation' – and whether this number is growing over time – remains unknown.

For the first time this year, we asked children whether and how often they had looked for information about real-world attacks or attackers, thought about committing violence themselves, shared violent thoughts or fantasies with other people, or spent time in online communities built around violence or hatred. This is the first attempt we're aware of to measure how many children in England and Wales are doing things that could indicate a fixation on violence.

## Teens interested in and fixated on violence are significantly more likely to have been victims and perpetrators of serious violence.

PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE REQUIRING MEDICAL TREATMENT, BY ENGAGEMENT IN VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOURS WEEKLY OR MORE



One in five (20%) said they had done at least one of these things at least once in the past 12 months. This figure is striking. However, it shouldn't be treated with alarm. It indicates that many of these behaviours are common, and engaging in them isn't evidence that a child intends to harm anyone. A much smaller group did these things repeatedly. One in 20 (5.6%) did at least one of them weekly or more, and one in 40 (2.3%) did at least one of them daily or nearly every day.

Children showing this interest in or fixation on violence were far more likely to have been involved in violence than their peers. Nearly a third (32%) of those engaging in these behaviours daily or nearly every day had perpetrated serious violence requiring medical treatment by a doctor or at a hospital in the past 12 months, 18 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds (1.8%). Similarly, 30% had been victims of serious violence themselves.

However, it's important to note that most children engaging in 'violence-fixated' behaviours hadn't actually perpetrated serious violence. Our survey cannot tell us whether engaging in these behaviours draws children towards violence, whether children who've already been affected by violence seek it out, or whether both follow from something else, such as wider systemic factors.

## How can we protect children from violence?

The year-on-year fall in children experiencing violence is encouraging. Building on this progress means continuing to invest in evidence-backed prevention and providing more intensive support for children who are most vulnerable. Our guidance for **education** leaders, **children's services**, the **youth sector**, **youth justice** and **police forces** sets out practical, evidence-backed steps to help. This includes making sure children can access trusted adults who can build meaningful, sustained relationships with them through mentoring and positive activities. It means proactively safeguarding children in care from violence. It means strengthening youth workers' role in multi-agency responses to extra-familial harm. For police and youth justice services, it includes building effective and fair approaches to out-of-court resolutions.

As one of the young people we spoke to about the results commented:

> ***With emotional regulation there's only so much you can be taught, you have to experience things, but with guidance from adults it's a lot easier, and that's what young people need, a safe outlet, whether at home, in schools having staff know what to say or know who to direct you to is really important.***
>
> Young person (anonymous)

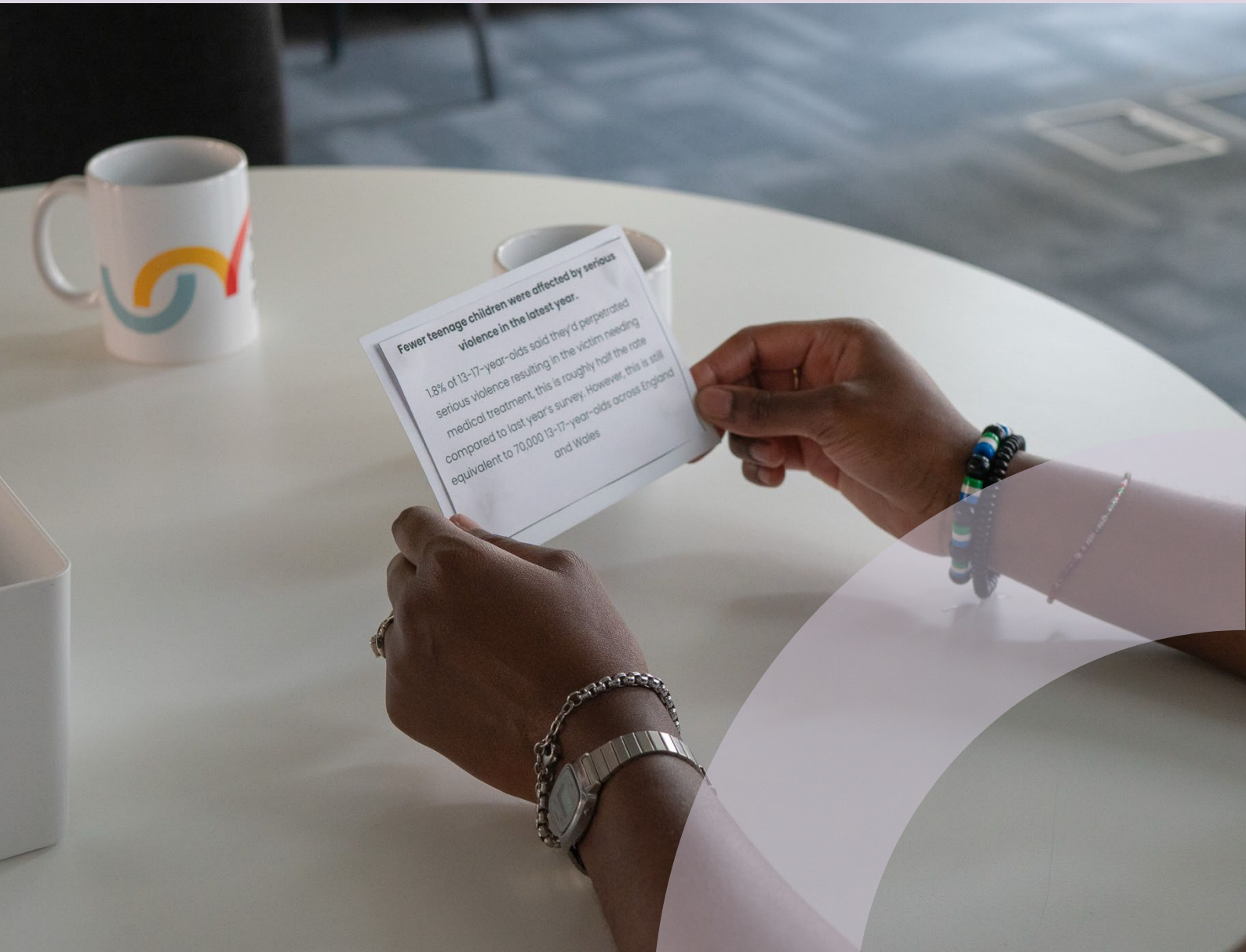
**Across all sectors, the priority is clear: put evidence into practice and focus resources where they can make the greatest difference**. This can help sustain the progress we have seen and move us closer to a world where no child or young person becomes involved in violence.

# Headline findings

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Fewer teenage children are being affected by violence.** |
| **Compared to last year, teens are less likely to experience all forms of violence…** | 42% of 13–17-year-olds witnessed violence in the past 12 months, compared to 50% last year. 13% were victims compared to 18% last year and 8.7% perpetrated violence compared to 13% last year. This drop remained statistically significant even when controlling for changes in the sample composition. |
| **…including serious violence…** | 3.1% had been victims of serious violence requiring treatment by a doctor or at a hospital, equivalent to roughly 120,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales. This was down from 5.2% last year. 1.8% had perpetrated serious violence, equivalent to roughly 70,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales and down from 3.3% last year. Both falls were statistically significant. |
| **…and fewer are at risk of criminal exploitation.** | 6.8% said they'd been approached to sell, store or transport drugs, money or weapons in the past 12 months (down from 12% last year) and 40% of these had gone ahead with it – meaning 2.7% had been criminally exploited. This was slightly lower than last year (3.3%), but the difference wasn't statistically significant. 3.0% had gone frequently missing from home overnight, down from 4.6% last year and 1.4% self-identified as having been in a 'gang', down from 2.4% last year. |
| **But it's still too few who receive support.** | 11% of those who perpetrated violence said a counsellor or therapist tried to support them and 18% said a professional such as a teacher or youth worker tried to help them understand what happened. In total, 25% of those perpetrating violence were offered support by a professional. 6.6% said they turned to AI. |
| | **But the most vulnerable are still disproportionately affected.** |
| **Teens in 'gangs' and experiencing criminal exploitation are most likely to be affected.** | Children who self-identified as being in a 'gang' remained the most likely to have been affected by serious violence – 60% had perpetrated violence that required medical treatment, 34 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds (1.8%). This was followed by those who'd been criminally exploited into selling, transporting or storing drugs, weapons or money for someone else (43%) – 24 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds. |
| **Those in contact with the justice system are also at much greater risk…** | 40% of those who'd been taken to court, remanded or sent to custody had perpetrated serious violence requiring medical treatment – 23 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds. It fell to 31% of those who'd been arrested – still nearly 18 times the average for all 13–17-year-olds. We can't say whether their violence involvement is what led them into contact with the justice system. |
| **…as are those with challenging home and social contexts.** | 18% of those who thought it likely their friends carried weapons had perpetrated serious violence, 10 times the average. Teens who'd had a parent or sibling go to prison (16%) were 9 times as likely to have perpetrated serious violence as the average, and those who'd experienced verbal or physical abuse from a parent or caregiver (13%) were around 7 times as likely as the average. |

| | Many teens think about violence, but a few appear to be fixated on it. |
|---|---|
| **1 in 5 teens have sought out violent material or thought about harming others at least once in the past year.** | 12% of 13–17-year-olds had researched specific real-world attacks or attackers in the past year, because it was exciting, entertaining or felt good. 10% had thought about committing specific acts of violence. 8.7% had spent time in online communities related to violence, 8.4% shared fantasies about harming people with others and 7.8% spent time in online hate communities. In total, 20% had done at least one of these in the past 12 months. |
| **1 in 20 return to violent content or fantasies week after week.** | Far fewer had done any of these weekly or more: 2.6% had looked into real-world attacks at least weekly; 2.6% had thought about committing violence; 2.3% visited online violence communities; 2.3% shared fantasies about harming others; and 2.2% visited online hate communities weekly or more. 5.6% had done any of these on a regular (i.e. weekly) basis and 2.3% had done any on a daily basis. |
| **'Violence-fixated' teens are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of serious violence, but it's still a minority.** | Over half (56%) of those displaying 'violence fixation' (i.e. engaging in any of these behaviours on a daily basis) had been victims of violence in the past 12 months and 51% had perpetrated violence. 32% had perpetrated serious violence, 18 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds (1.8%). However, the majority (68%) of 'violence-fixated' teens hadn't perpetrated serious violence. |

# Methodology



# About this year's survey

## Question and thematic overview

This is our fifth annual survey of children's experiences of violence. This year we surveyed nearly 10,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales about their experiences over the past 12 months. We also surveyed around 4,000 18–21-year-olds, to hear how violence has affected them and what's changed since they were teenagers. We focused on the following themes.

- What's the scale and nature of violence experienced by teenage children, as victims and perpetrators? How has this changed? Which children are most affected, and how many are fixated on violence?
- How many teenage children see violent content on social media? What role does AI-generated content play? How do children view age restrictions on social media?
- How many teenage children are exposed to violence against women and girls, online and offline? What attitudes do they hold towards women and girls?
- What are teenage children's experiences of the care and youth justice systems? How much violence do they experience while they're there and what types of support do they receive?

This is the first report in this year's series. It covers how many children are affected by violence and how this has changed; which children are most affected; and how many appear to be fixated on violence.

## What we did

This year, a total of 9,988 13–17-year-olds responded to our survey, compared to 10,835 last year. We also recruited an additional sample of 4,256 18–21-year-olds, to get their retrospective accounts of their childhood experiences.

As in previous years, we used an online survey conducted by our survey partner, Savanta. The median survey completion time was around 14 minutes, and the survey was live between May and July 2026. Questions typically related to children's experiences over the preceding 12 months.

To ensure the results were nationally representative, we did two things:

- Firstly, we set quotas for key groups. These were age, gender, ethnicity, region and socioeconomic status. The quotas were based on each group's share of the population using Census 2021 population estimates.
- Secondly, we weighted the results to ensure overall representativeness. For more details on this, see the technical report on our website.

## How children were kept safe

Participants were invited to take part in the survey and were made aware of the types of questions that would be asked. Anyone could refuse to take part. For all children aged 15 or under, a parent or guardian had to consent for them to take part. Participants could drop out of the survey at any time. Participants

were asked to complete the survey on their own and in a safe place where their responses could not be seen. It wasn't possible to look back at previous responses once questions had been answered. At the beginning and end and throughout the survey, participants were signposted to relevant support services.

## Approach to reporting results

The smaller the number of responses, the less confident we are in the results. For this reason, we generally don't report results where the total number of responses to a particular question was fewer than 50. All group comparisons mentioned in the report are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, unless otherwise noted.

## What to be aware of

Like all research, our survey has some limitations. We're trying to understand what teenage children across England and Wales have experienced, and while our sample of 9,988 13–17-year-olds is comparatively large for this type of survey, it still represents a small proportion of all children in the country. It's important, therefore, to remember these limitations when interpreting the results:

- Weights are applied to ensure that the results are broadly representative of the national populations of England and Wales. We've refined the weighting strategy so we can more accurately speak to certain subgroups (e.g. by race). However, there are limits to the extent to which weights can be applied to cover variations across all interlocking characteristics. There should be particular caution when looking at results by region due to the challenge in applying interlocking weights at this level.
- The sample size is significantly larger than in other surveys of this kind. However, when we look at the results for some smaller subgroups (e.g. by region, ethnicity and age), these individual groups can be small. This makes it hard to draw generalised conclusions for some smaller populations.
- The subject matter (children's experiences of violence) is sensitive. While we ensured the framing of the questions was suitable for children, it's possible that some may have been unwilling or unable to respond openly and honestly, particularly about things they may have done.

For context, the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CCSEW) – the main national source on children's experiences of crime – stopped collecting data at the end of March 2025 and has been redesigned as an online survey of 10–15-year-olds sampled from administrative data. Its first results were published in September 2026 and cover children's online activity, exposure to harmful content, sexual messages and perceptions of safety, based on responses from 6,031 children. Questions measuring children's experiences of victimisation will be added at a later stage, meaning there are currently no national estimates of how many children are affected by crime and violence.

# Detailed findings



# What we found

## Fewer teenage children are being affected by violence.

### Compared to last year, teens are less likely to experience all forms of violence…

Results from this year's survey showed that the proportion of teenage children experiencing violence had fallen.[1] This year, 42% of 13–17-year-olds said they'd witnessed violence happen to someone else in the past 12 months, equivalent to nearly 1.6 million 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales.[2] Thirteen per cent had been a victim of violence in the past 12 months, equivalent to 480,000 13–17-year-olds nationally. Even fewer – 8.7% – said they'd perpetrated violence, equivalent to 330,000 13–17-year-olds nationally.

**FIGURE 1.1: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS IN ENGLAND AND WALES WHO WERE WITNESSES, VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, BY SURVEY YEAR**




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

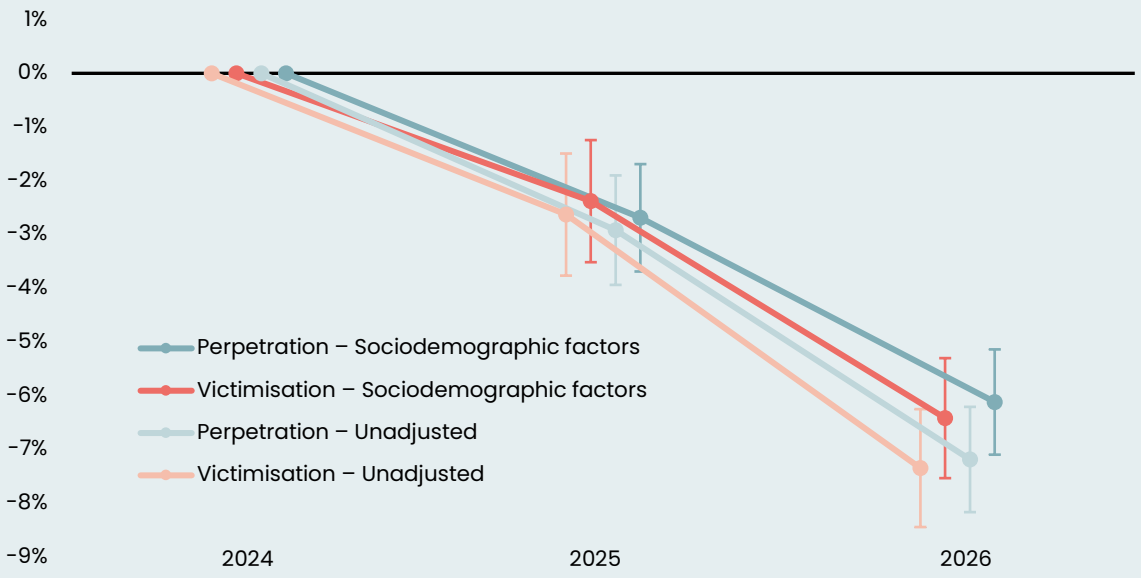
[1] Our core measure of violence remains the same across each year of the survey. We define violence as the use of force or threat of force against another person or people. This includes physical assault (kicking, hitting, pushing, shoving or otherwise being physically violent), robbery (taking something with force or the threat of force), sexual assault (intentionally touching someone in a sexual way without their consent) and weapons violence (threatening to use or using a weapon on someone).

[2] Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics mid-2025 population estimates.

## Has violence fallen compared to last year's survey?

Our estimates of violence witnessing, victimisation and perpetration were all down this year (2026) compared to last year (2025), when we found that 50% of 13–17-year-olds had witnessed violence, 18% had been victims of it and 13% had perpetrated violence themselves. These falls in violence were statistically significant and continued the reductions seen from 2024 to 2025. To test whether these reductions reflected a real fall in violence affecting children or were due to changes in who responded to our survey, additional analysis was undertaken.[3] Survey-weighted logistic regression models were used to test whether the falls in victimisation and perpetration between survey years remained significant when controlling for age, gender, ethnicity, region, social grade, living situation and school absence.

**FIGURE 1.2: CHANGE SINCE 2024 IN THE SHARE OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO WERE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF ANY VIOLENCE, WITH AND WITHOUT SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CONTROLS**



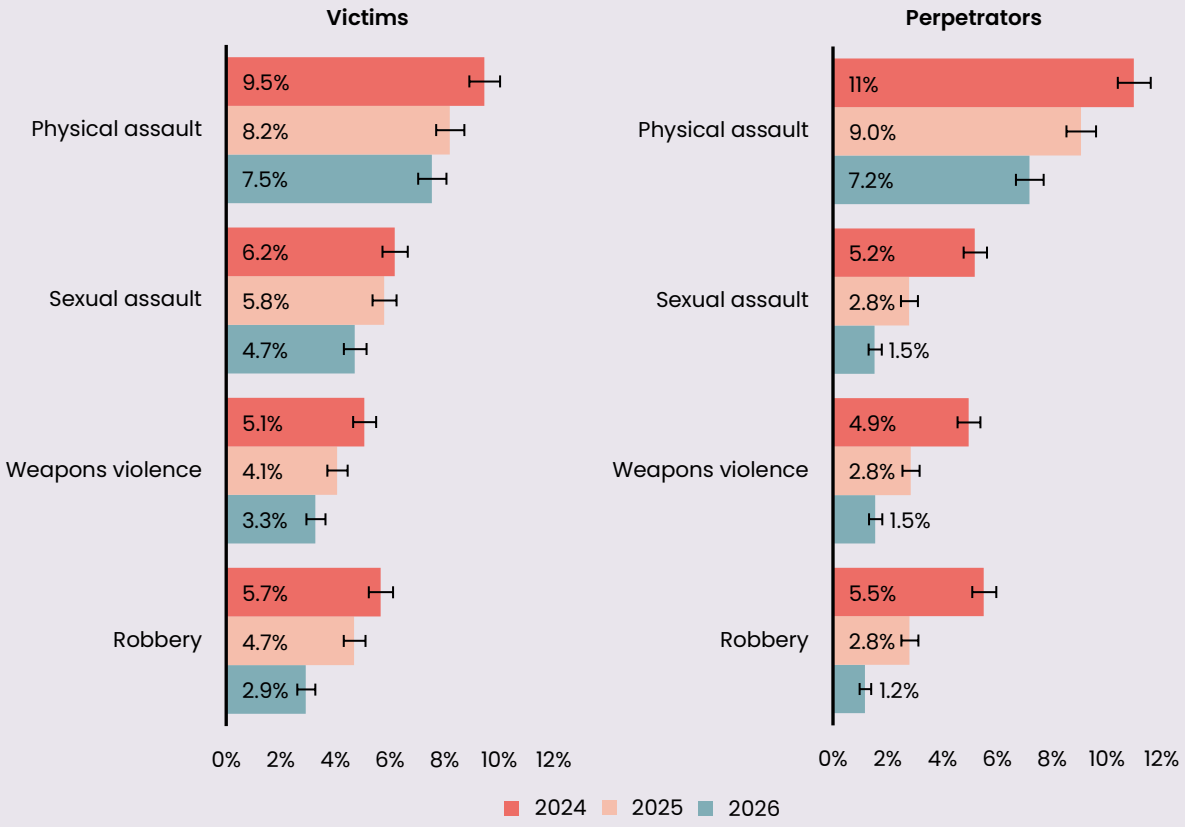

*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

Differences in the composition of the samples between survey years explained only a small part of the falls we saw – around 15% of the fall in victimisation and 20% of the fall in perpetration. Both falls remained statistically significant after taking this into account, as did the falls from 2024 to 2025. The unadjusted model estimated that the proportion of 13–17-year-olds who were victims of violence fell by 4.7 percentage points (pp) between 2025 and 2026; controlling for the factors listed, the estimated fall was 4.0pp. Similarly, the perpetration rate was estimated to have fallen by 4.3pp; once differences in sample composition were taken into account, the estimated fall was 3.4pp. These results are consistent with a real fall in violence affecting children, only slightly smaller than the headline percentages suggest.

[3] The analysis was conducted by our technical advisor Dr Krisztián Pósch and will be published in a forthcoming paper on the potential impact of the Online Safety Act.

As in previous years, physical assault (including kicking, hitting, pushing, shoving and other forms of physical violence) was the type of violence most commonly experienced. Seven point five per cent of 13–17-year-olds said they'd been victims of physical assault and 7.2% said they'd physically assaulted someone else. This was followed by sexual assault, which 4.7% reported experiencing as victims and 1.5% reported perpetrating themselves, and weapons violence, which 3.3% experienced as victims and 1.5% had perpetrated. Robbery showed the biggest drop from last year, with 2.9% saying they'd been victims and 1.2% saying they'd perpetrated it in the past 12 months. Controlling for changes in sample composition from the 2025 to 2026 surveys, the proportion of 13–17-year-olds who'd been victims of robbery was significantly down compared to last year, but the falls in physical assault, sexual assault and weapons victimisation weren't statistically significant. For perpetration, the falls compared to last year were statistically significant across all four types of violence, even when controlling for sociodemographic factors.

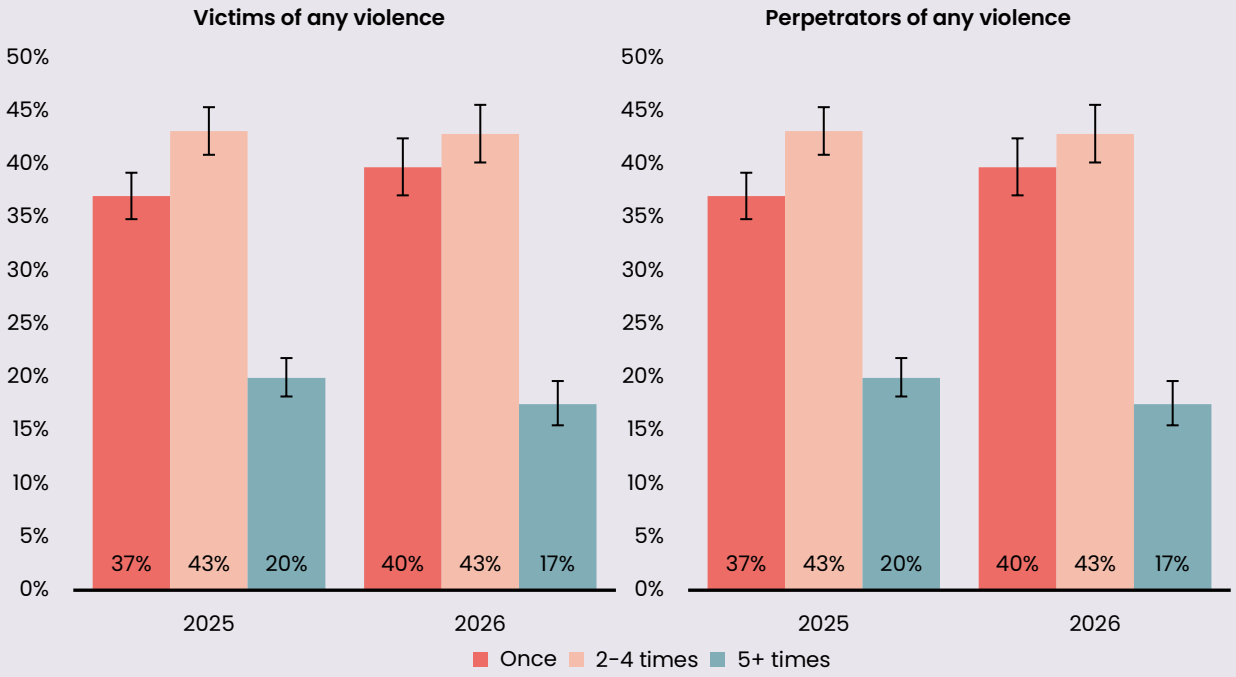
**FIGURE 1.3: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS IN ENGLAND AND WALES WHO WERE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF VIOLENCE, BY SURVEY YEAR**




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

Most 13–17-year-olds affected by violence had experienced more than one instance of it. Sixty per cent of 13–17-year-olds who'd been victims of violence (7.7% of all 13–17-year-olds) and 57% of 13–17-year-olds who'd perpetrated violence (4.9% of all 13–17-year-olds) said it had happened more than once. Seventeen per cent of victims (2.2% of all 13–17-year-olds) and 18% of perpetrators (1.5% of all 13–17-year-olds) said it had happened five or more times. This was roughly the same pattern as in 2025. While the overall rate of violence fell, the children who were affected had experienced a similar number of incidents to those affected last year.

**FIGURE 1.4: PROPORTION OF VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE WHO'D EXPERIENCED MULTIPLE INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE, BY SURVEY YEAR**




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

The proportion of teenagers carrying weapons, whether or not they used them, also fell this year. One point five per cent of 13–17-year-olds had carried a weapon in the past 12 months, equivalent to nearly 60,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales.[4] A further 2.2% had carried one more than 12 months ago, meaning 3.8% had ever carried a weapon. Of those carrying in the past year, 68% had carried a knife (such as a kitchen knife, zombie knife or machete), equivalent to 1.0% of all 13–17-year-olds. The fall in weapon-carrying was statistically significant, but the change in knife-carrying specifically was not. We changed how we asked about weapon type this year, which may have affected our knife-carrying estimates.

### How do our results compare to other sources?

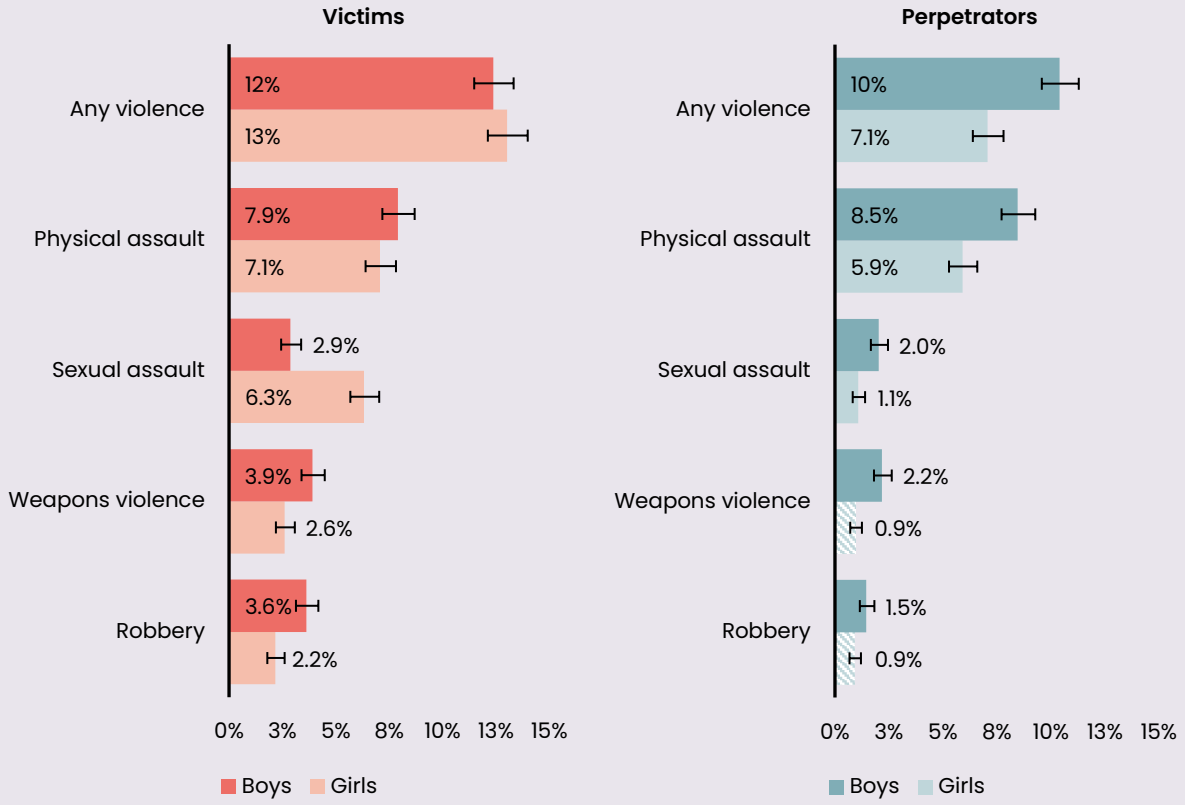
The new Office for National Statistics (ONS) Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CCSEW) found that 69% of 10–15-year-olds had seen or heard about a fight or other physical violence between their peers. This compares to our finding that 42% of 13–17-year-olds witnessed violence, though the ONS's measure includes hearing about violence second-hand, which is a much broader measure. Their closer equivalents to our measure are lower – 28% had seen someone threatened, hurt or assaulted in their local area, and 5% had seen an incident involving a weapon. Our finding that 1.5% of 13–17-year-olds carried a weapon in the past 12 months is broadly similar to the ONS's new estimate that 1% of 10-15-year-olds did so. Their figure rises with age, from 0.4% at 11 to 1.5% at 15 – the same as our estimate across 13–17-year-olds. Future waves of the CCSEW are expected to include questions on violence victimisation, but not on perpetration.

[4] Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics mid-2025 population estimates.

## Violence has fallen across all groups.

Across survey years, there were consistent differences in how boys and girls experienced violence. This year, boys were more likely than girls to have been victims of weapons violence (3.9% of boys vs. 2.6% of girls) and robbery (3.6% of boys vs. 2.2% of girls), while girls were more likely to have been victims of sexual assault (6.3% of girls vs. 2.9% of boys). There was no statistically significant difference in rates of physical assault victimisation between boys (7.9%) and girls (7.1%). Looking at perpetration, boys were significantly more likely than girls to have perpetrated all types of violence. Eight point five per cent of boys said they'd perpetrated physical assault in the past year, compared to 5.9% of girls; 2.2% had used or threatened to use a weapon compared to 0.9% of girls, 2.0% had perpetrated sexual assault compared to 1.1% of girls and 1.5% had perpetrated robbery compared to 0.9% of girls.

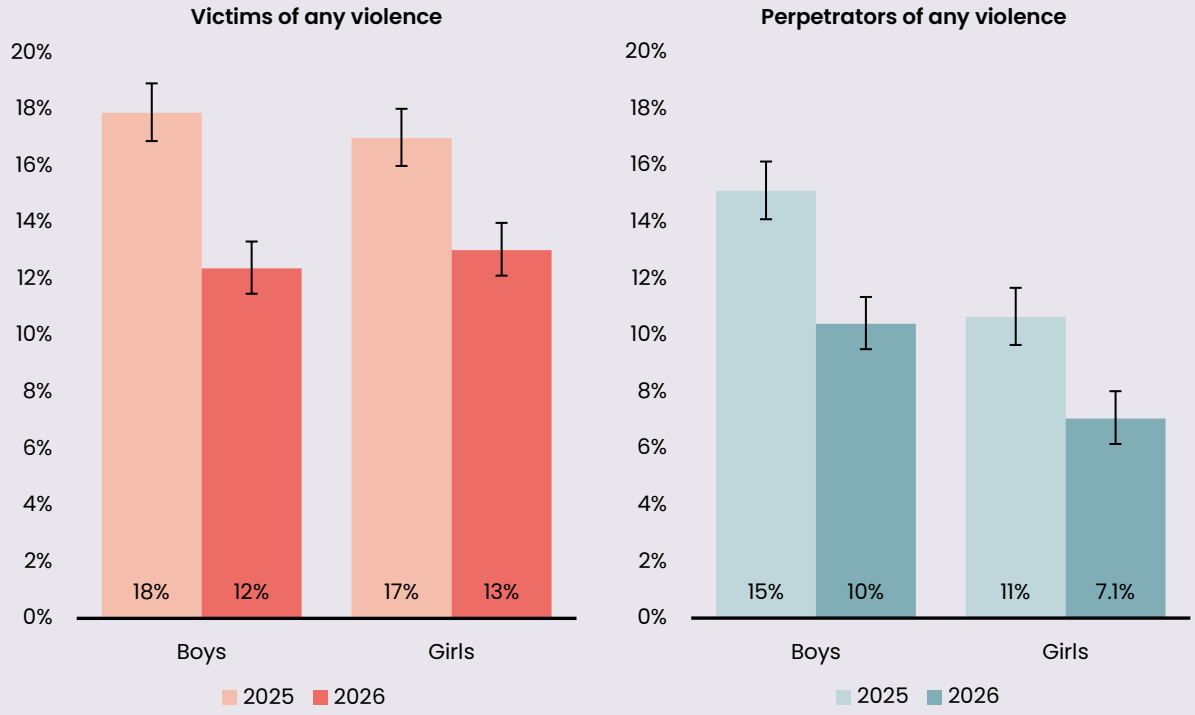
**FIGURE 1.5: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF VIOLENCE, BY GENDER**




*Notes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Bars with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.*

All of these figures were down compared to last year's survey. Both boys and girls were significantly less likely to have been affected by violence as both victims and perpetrators in the latest year. In total, 12% of boys had been victims of violence in 2026, compared to 18% in 2025, and 13% of girls had been victims in 2026, compared to 17% in 2025. Perpetration rates showed a similar fall: 10% of boys had perpetrated violence in 2026, compared to 15% in 2025, and 7.1% of girls had perpetrated violence in 2026, compared to 11% in 2025.

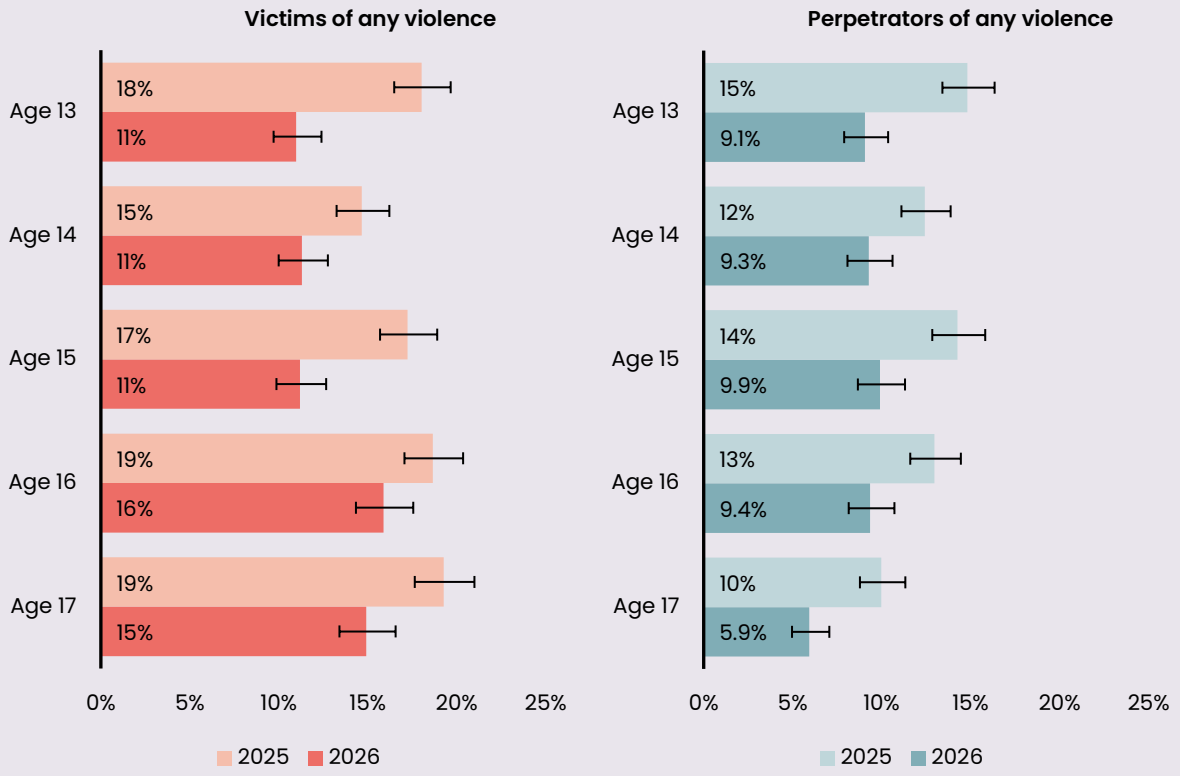
**FIGURE 1.6: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE, BY GENDER AND SURVEY YEAR**




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

Looking at age differences, as in previous years of the survey, there wasn't a clear increase or decrease in exposure to violence by age. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds were more likely to have been victims of any type of violence in the past year, primarily driven by a much greater likelihood of having experienced sexual assault. Together, 7.3% of 16–17-year-olds had been victims of sexual assault in the past year, over twice the rate among 13–15-year-olds (3.0%). Meanwhile, perpetration showed an opposite pattern, with 17-year-olds specifically less likely than all other ages to report having perpetrated violence in the past year. This was primarily driven by differences in rates of physical assault, which 4.4% of 17-year-olds had perpetrated in the past year compared to between 7.3% and 8.3% of 13-16-year-olds, although response numbers for other types of violence are too small to be confident in age comparisons. Overall, rates of violence victimisation and perpetration were down across all ages, compared to last year's survey.

**FIGURE 1.7: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE, BY AGE AND SURVEY YEAR**

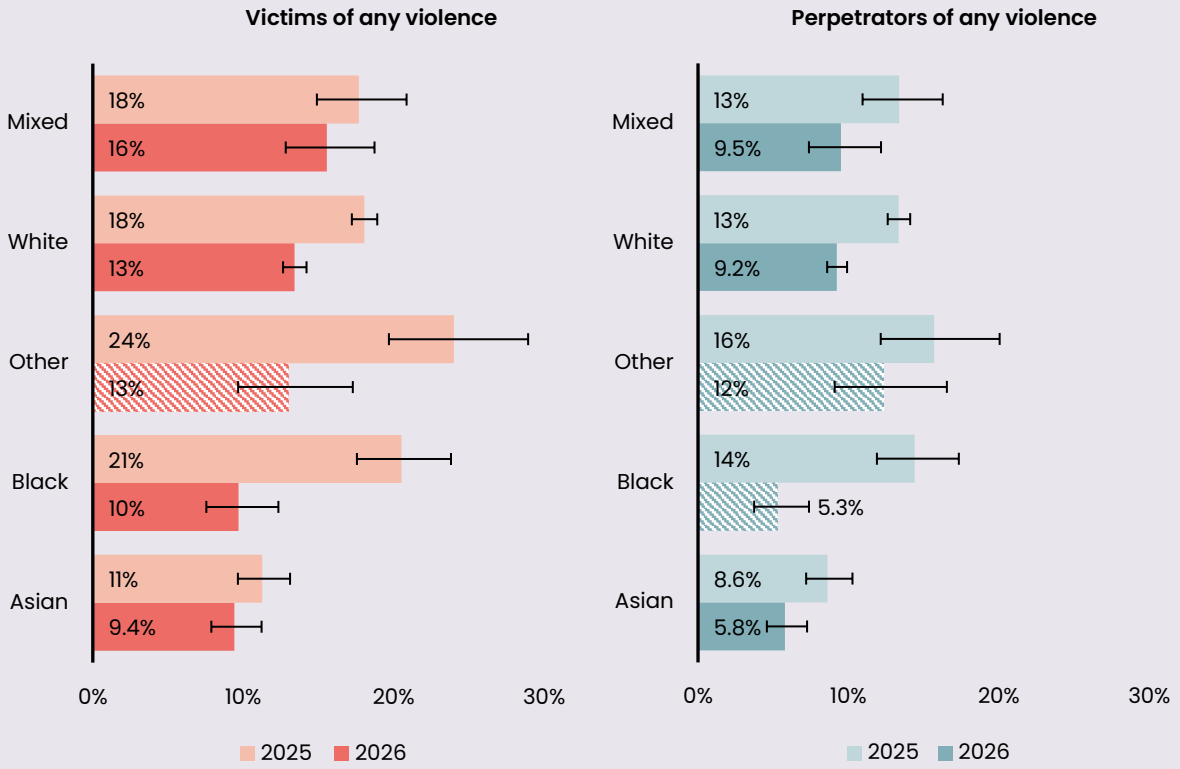



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

As we've seen in previous years, the pattern in differences in experience of violence by race was inconsistent. Last year, children from Black, White and Mixed ethnic backgrounds were more likely than children from Asian backgrounds to have been affected by violence as both victims and perpetrators. This year, children from White and Mixed ethnic backgrounds were more likely than both Black and Asian children to have been victims and perpetrators of violence. This shift was related to a marked drop in violence rates among Black children. While rates of violence dropped for children of all ethnic backgrounds in this year's survey, the fall was much greater for children from Black backgrounds. In this year's survey (2026), 10% of Black children said they'd been victims of violence in the past year and 5.3% said they'd perpetrated violence themselves – around half and just over a third, respectively, of the rates from the 2025 survey when 21% of Black children reported being victims and 14% reported perpetrating violence.

We don't know why this year shows such a marked difference for Black children specifically; some of it may be due to sampling variation across years. While we feel more confident making comparisons across time when looking across the whole sample, the number of survey respondents from specific racialised groups is relatively small, reducing our confidence in these estimates. For example, out of the 9,988 13–17-year-olds who responded to our survey, 670 were from Black backgrounds. After applying weighting, this number was 589, which is in line with their total proportion of the population of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales (6.0%), but small overall.

**FIGURE 1.8: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE, BY RACE AND SURVEY YEAR**




*Notes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Bars with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.*

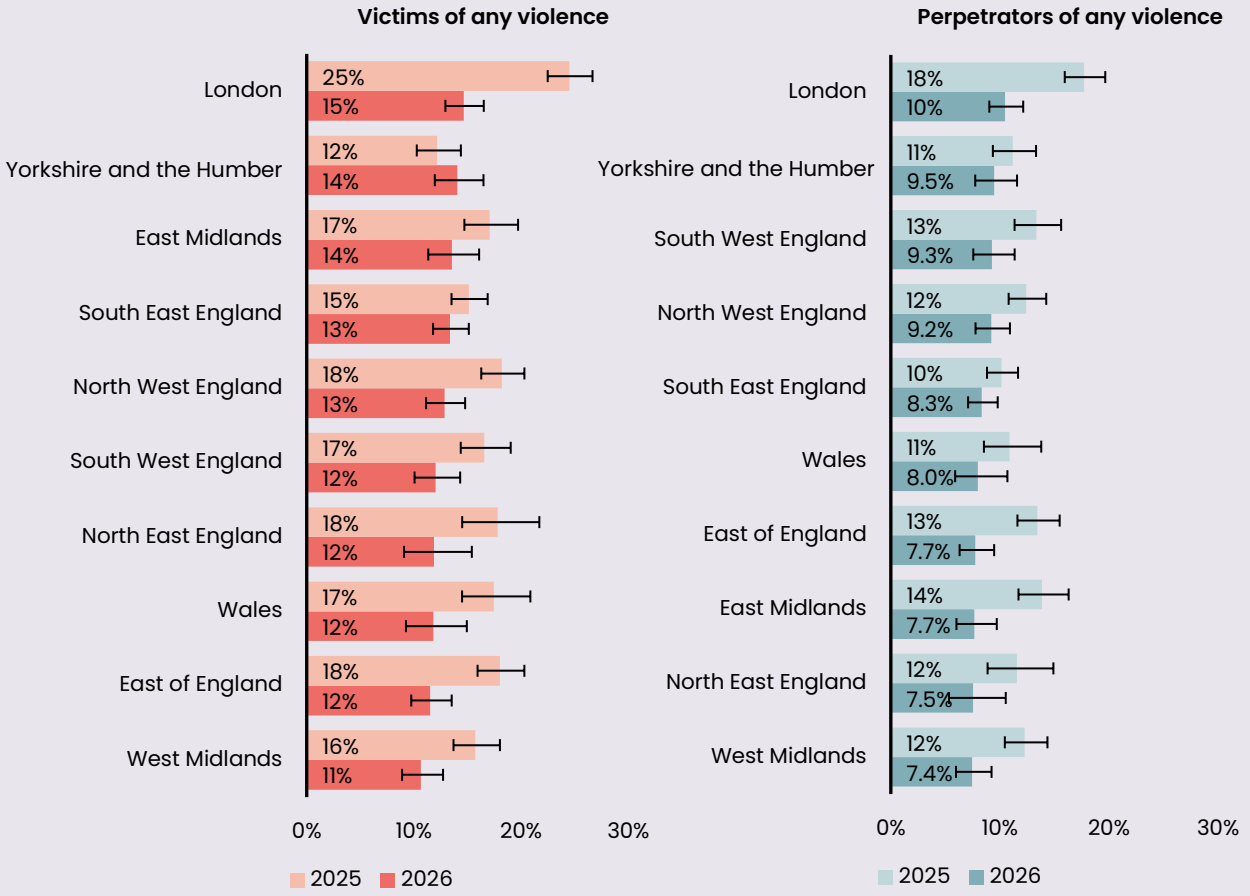
## What can other data sources tell us about racial disparities in children's exposure to violence?

Children from all backgrounds face violence, but Black children are over-represented at all stages of the criminal justice system. Looking at data from 2024/25, Black children were 2.5 times as likely to be stopped and searched, twice as likely to be cautioned and convicted, and nearly twice as likely to be arrested, compared to their population share. The only stage at which Black children are under-represented is diversions; Black children are less likely to receive outcomes diverting them away from criminal justice processes compared to White children even when controlling for the seriousness of the offence. Black children and young people are also disproportionately likely to be victims of the most serious forms of violence; in 2024/25, Black 16–24-year-olds were over six times as likely to be victims of homicide compared to their population share.

Our survey doesn't show this pattern; Black children don't consistently report higher rates of violence victimisation or perpetration than other groups. This is likely because we measure self-reported experiences of violence, rather than violence criminalisation, which is shaped by documented racial disparities and racist discrimination. We're also measuring less extreme forms of violence and, despite our overall sample size being large, we don't have sufficient numbers to look at differences by more specific ethnic groups.

Looking at differences across the regions of England and Wales, consistent with previous years, children living in London were the most likely to have been affected by violence as victims (15%) and perpetrators (10%). Unlike in previous years, children in the West Midlands were the least likely to have been victims (11%) and perpetrators (7.4%) of violence. However, very few differences were significant between individual regions. This may be partly due to small numbers; the total number of children affected by violence fell in nearly every region in this year's survey (2026) compared to last year (2025). The exception to this pattern was Yorkshire and the Humber, which was the only region that saw a rise in victimisation rates, from 12% in 2025 to 14% in 2026, although the difference wasn't statistically significant. Caution should be used when interpreting regional results; as with differences by race, the numbers of children responding from individual regions are small, creating additional uncertainty in our estimates.

**FIGURE 1.9: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE, BY REGION AND SURVEY YEAR**

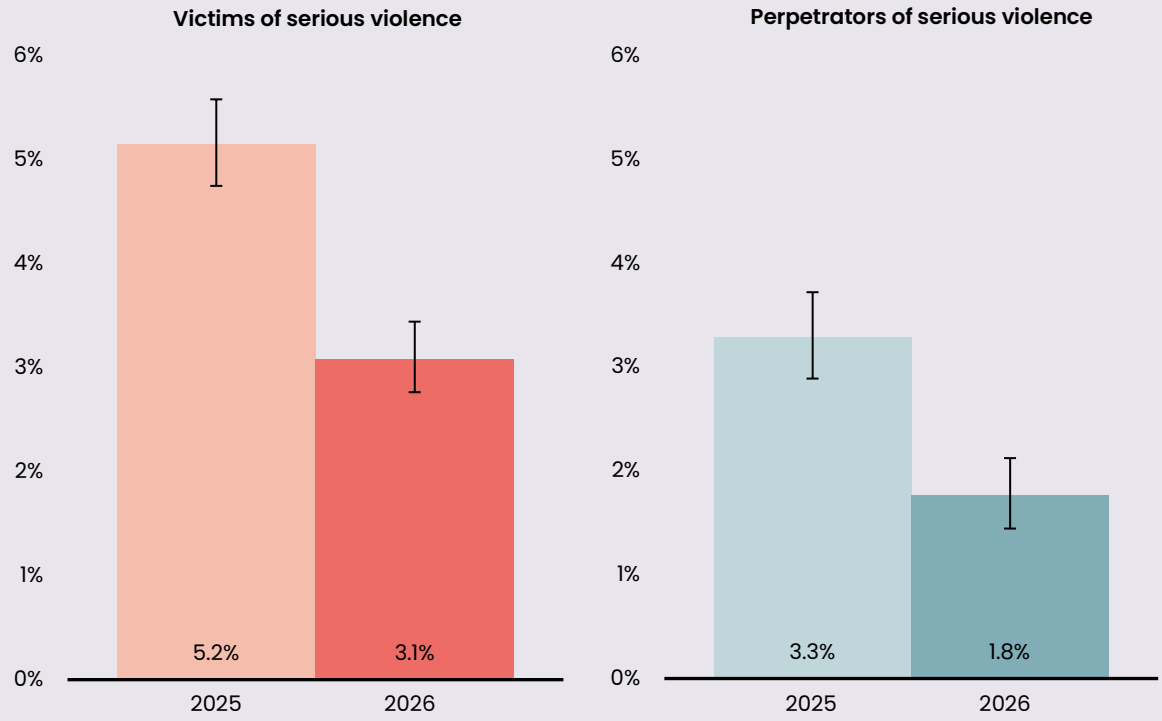



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

## … including serious violence…

In last year's survey, to find out how many teenage children were involved in more serious violence, we asked for the first time whether victims of violence had to seek medical treatment for their injuries. In this year's survey, the proportion of children involved in serious violence as both victims and perpetrators was also down compared to last year. Of those who'd been victims of violence, 24% said they had to seek medical treatment from a doctor or hospital as a result, equivalent to 3.1% of all 13–17-year-olds, or approximately 120,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales.[5] Of those who said they'd perpetrated violence this year, 20% said their victim had to seek medical treatment, equivalent to 1.8% of all 13–17-year-olds, or approximately 70,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales. These figures were significantly lower than last year, when 5.2% of 13–17-year-olds had been victims of violence that resulted in them seeking medical treatment and 3.3% said they'd perpetrated violence resulting in medical treatment.

**FIGURE 1.10: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO WERE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF SERIOUS VIOLENCE, BY SURVEY YEAR**




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

In this year's survey, for the first time, we also asked around 4,000 18–21-year-olds about their recent and childhood experiences of violence. When we asked them to think back to any experiences they had before the age of 18, 44% said they'd been a victim of at least one type of violence. One in three (32%) had been a victim of physical assault, over one in five (22%) had been a victim of sexual assault, 18% had been a victim of weapons violence and 17% had been a victim of robbery. Five point nine per cent said they'd experienced serious violence that resulted in them seeking medical treatment from a doctor or hospital.

[5] Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics mid-2025 population estimates.

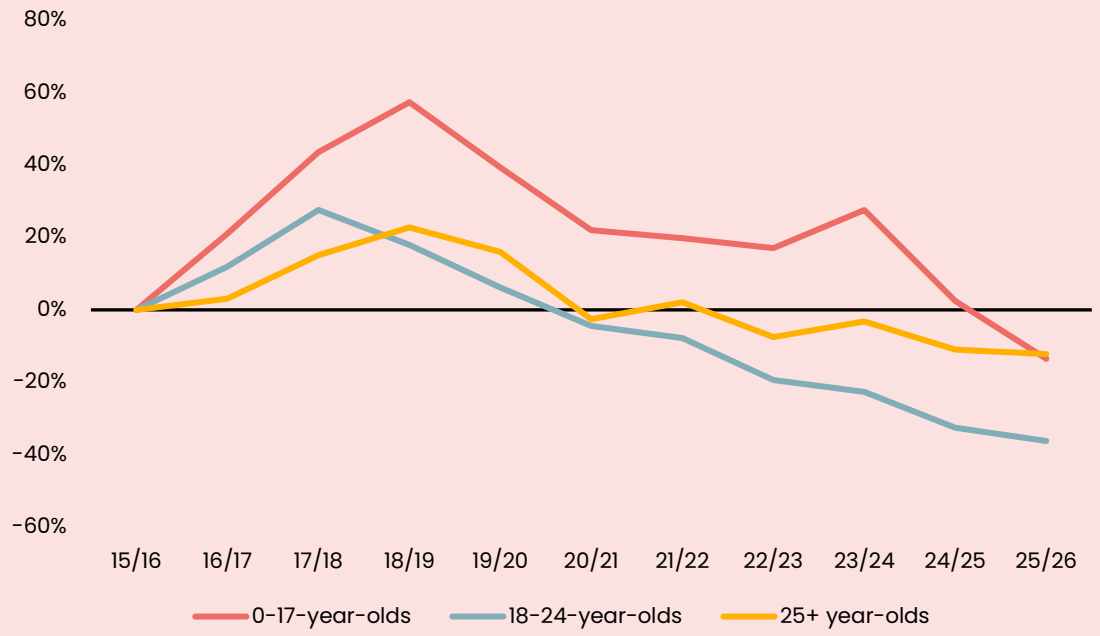
Fewer admitted to perpetrating violence themselves as children; 19% said they'd perpetrated some form of violence before the age of 18, and 4.3% said they'd perpetrated serious violence that led to the victim seeking medical treatment. Crucially, most (68%) of those who'd perpetrated violence as children hadn't done so in the past year, but those who'd perpetrated serious violence as children were more likely to have also perpetrated serious violence in the past year (50%).

It's important to note that these estimates aren't comparable to our estimates of violence for the core 13–17-year-old sample, because those are based on experiences in the past 12 months, whereas we asked 18–21-year-olds about any experience before the age of 18.

### How does this fit with what we see from other data?

This is the second year running that our core measures of violence have fallen and the first year that we're able to identify a drop in the proportion of children reporting involvement in serious violence requiring medical treatment. These falls align with results from official national data. Our Beyond the Headlines report, published in July, shows the number of 16–24-year-olds who were victims of homicide fell 41% in 2024/25, to the lowest number in over a decade. The numbers of children admitted to hospital following knife assault are also falling. These trends are signs of positive progress, but there's still a long way to go. In the latest years for which we have data, 122 children and young people under the age of 25 lost their lives to violence, there were 345 hospital admissions of children for knife assault and we estimate that 480,000 teenage children experienced violence that may not have reached the attention of the authorities but that could have a lasting impact nonetheless.[6]

**FIGURE 1.11: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN NUMBER OF HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS FOR KNIFE ASSAULT IN ENGLAND SINCE 2015/16, BY AGE GROUP**




[6] 480,000 is our estimate of the number of 13–17-year-old victims of violence across England and Wales.

## … and fewer are at risk of criminal exploitation.

In the past 12 months, 5.1% of 13–17-year-olds had someone ask them to sell drugs, 4.5% had someone ask them to transport drugs from one place to another and 3.8% had someone ask them to store drugs, weapons or money for them. Overall, 6.8% had been asked to do any of these in the past 12 months. Of those, 40% had gone through with at least one of these things, equivalent to 2.7% of all 13–17-year-olds or over 100,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales.[7] We consider these children to have been criminally exploited. Compared to last year, the proportion of children approached (i.e. at risk of criminal exploitation) was significantly down (from 12% in 2025), but the proportion of those who went through with it was up. Overall, the proportion of children exploited was slightly lower than last year (3.3%), but the difference wasn't statistically significant.

### How do we measure criminal exploitation?

Criminal exploitation is difficult to measure via survey methods, as children who are being exploited may not view themselves as such. However, other data sources, such as crime and safeguarding data, are likely to paint an incomplete picture of which children are at risk of exploitation, because they rely on cases reaching the attention of services. Because of this, it's important we try to understand how many children are at risk of and experiencing exploitation in our survey.

To do this, we used three different measures:

1. To directly measure criminal exploitation, we asked whether children had been approached to sell drugs; transport drugs; or store drugs, weapons or money for someone else and whether they'd gone through with it. This gives us an indicator of whether a child is at risk of and being exploited in relation to the illegal drugs trade, but isn't a full measure of all forms of child criminal exploitation (CCE).

2. To measure whether children have gone missing from home – a common sign that a child is at risk of or is already being exploited – we asked whether and how often children had stayed overnight somewhere that wasn't a friend or family member's, without their parents' permission.

3. To measure whether children self-identified as being in a 'gang' – another potential sign that a child is being criminally exploited – we asked if they'd been in a 'gang' in the past 12 months, using the following definition: *"By a 'gang', we mean a group of young people who think of themselves as a 'gang', probably with a name, and are involved in violence or other crime."*

[7] Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics mid-2025 population estimates.

### How do our results compare to other sources?

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime's 'We Are London' Youth Survey reached 11,874 11–16-year-olds in late 2021 and early 2022. It found that 2.6% had been asked or pressured to carry or sell drugs and 1.6% to carry or hide a knife, compared with our 6.8% approached to sell, store or transport drugs, money or weapons. Our larger result may be explained by our wider age range and broader question. The 'We Are London' survey found a similar concentration of harm in this group as we do: 43% of those pressured to sell drugs had been threatened or hurt with a knife, rising to 55% of those pressured to carry one, compared to 3.6-3.9% of those who hadn't been pressured to do these things.

The proportion of children frequently missing from home also fell in this year's survey. In the past 12 months, 9.3% of 13–17-year-olds had spent the night away from home, not at a friend or family member's house, without their parents' permission. Of these, most had done so rarely but some had done so monthly or more – 3.0% of all 13–17-year-olds, equivalent to over 110,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales.[8] This was significantly down compared to last year, when 11% of children said they'd gone missing in the past year and 4.6% had done so monthly or more.

When we explicitly asked children whether they self-identified as being in a 'gang', 1.4% said they'd been in a 'gang' in the past 12 months and an additional 2.0% said they'd been in one more than 12 months ago. This is equivalent to over 50,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales having been in a 'gang' in the past year. It was significantly down compared to last year's survey, when 2.4% self-identified as having been in a 'gang' in the past 12 months.

These groups have considerable overlaps, with many children experiencing more than one. In total, 4.9% of 13–17-year-olds reported being criminally exploited, frequently going missing from home or being in a 'gang' in the past year, equivalent to nearly 190,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales. While the total proportion of children who'd experienced any of these in the past 12 months (4.9%) was lower than we saw in last year's survey (7.5%), those who were affected may be more vulnerable:

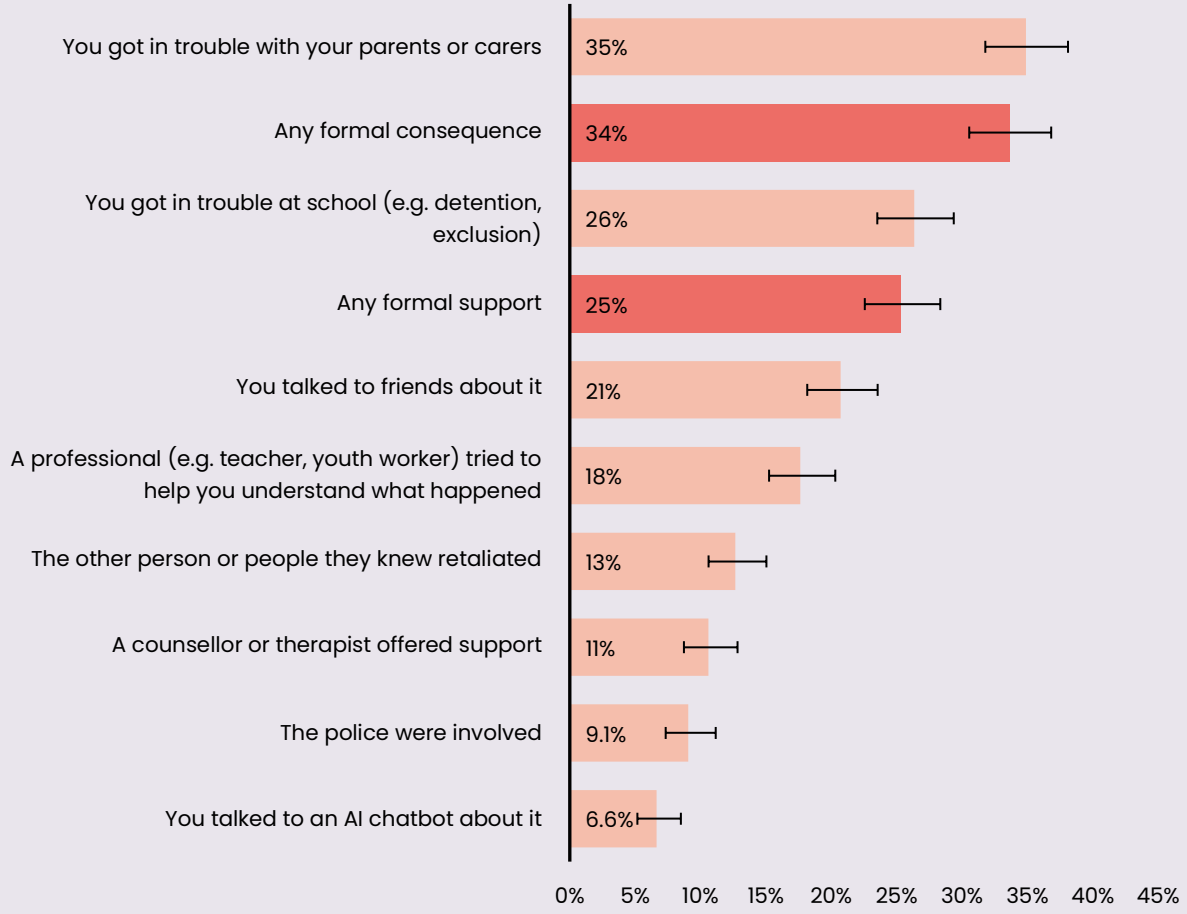
- Of the 3.0% of 13–17-year-olds who'd gone missing from home frequently (i.e. monthly or more), 36% had been exploited and 25% had been in a 'gang' (vs. 26% exploited and 20% in a 'gang' last year). This means the majority of 13–17-year-olds going frequently missing from home weren't in 'gangs' or being exploited, but they were significantly more likely to be, compared to the average.
- Of the 2.7% of 13–17-year-olds who'd been exploited, 40% had gone missing frequently and 37% identified as being in a 'gang' (vs. 35% missing and 39% in a 'gang' last year).
- Of the 1.4% of 13–17-year-olds who self-identified as being in a 'gang', 53% had gone missing frequently and 70% had been exploited (vs. 39% missing and 55% exploited last year).

[8] Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics mid-2025 population estimates.

## But it's still too few who receive support.

Of the 13–17-year-olds who perpetrated violence, 35% said they were in trouble with their parents as a result, 26% got in trouble at school and 9.1% said the police were involved. Thirteen per cent received some form of retaliation from the person they'd been violent to, or people who knew them. In terms of support, 18% said a teacher, youth worker or other professional tried to help them understand what had happened and 11% said a counsellor or therapist talked to them or tried to give them support. A fifth (21%) said they talked to friends about what happened and 6.6% said they talked to an AI chatbot about it. In total, 34% received a formal consequence, either from the police or school, and 25% had a professional offer support. Reassuringly, 13–17-year-olds who'd perpetrated serious violence requiring medical treatment were more likely to have received some form of professional support after perpetrating violence, at 44%. However, this still leaves the majority not saying they'd received support.

**FIGURE 1.12: WHAT HAPPENED TO 13–17-YEAR-OLDS AFTER PERPETRATING VIOLENCE**




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

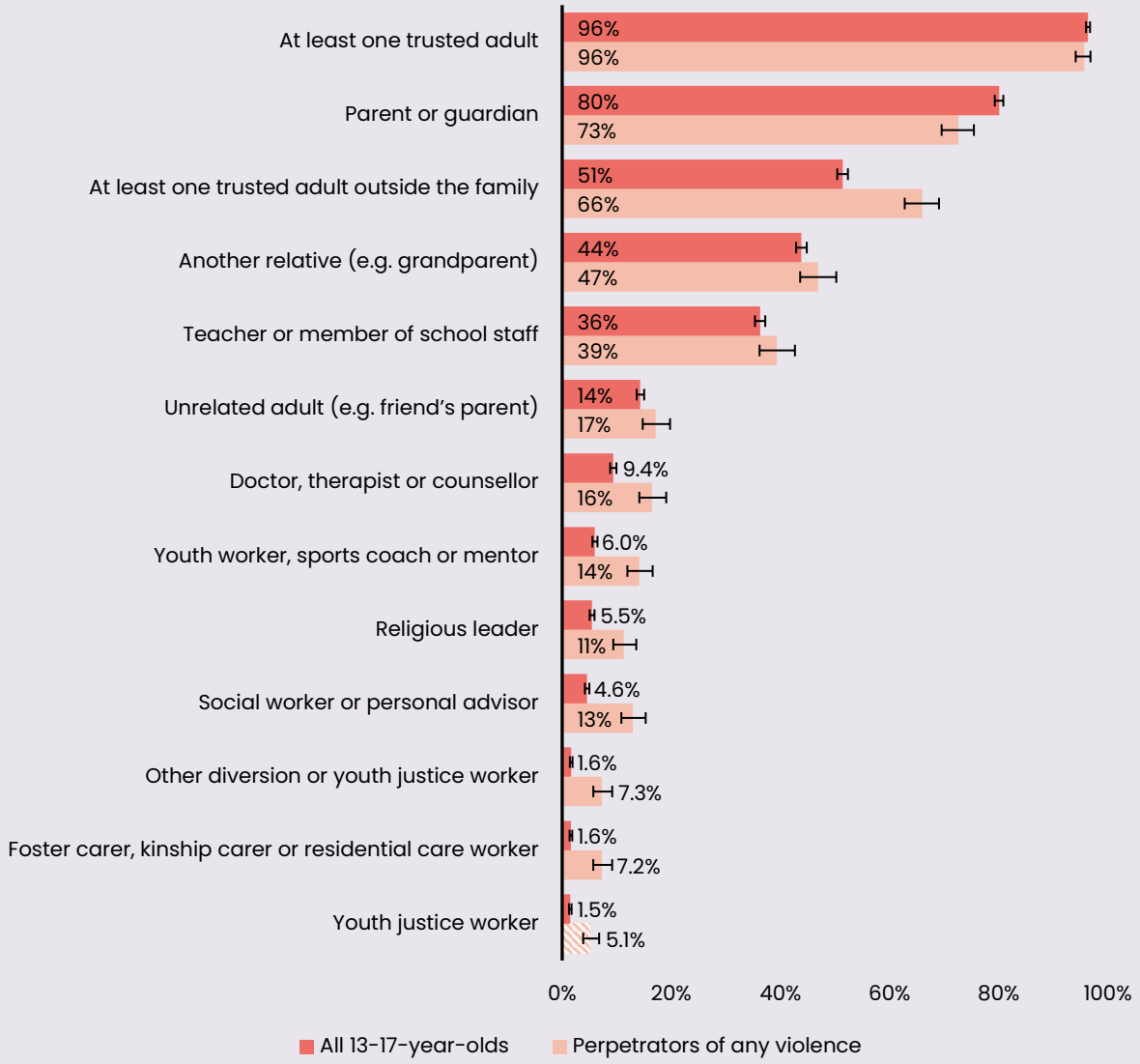
## Children involved in violence are significantly less likely to feel they can go to a parent with things that are worrying them.

Nearly all (96%) 13–17-year-olds had an adult they trusted and felt they could go to for advice and support, most commonly a parent or guardian (80%), followed by another relative such as a grandparent (44%). However, when we look at access to trusted adults outside the family, only 51% of 13–17-year-olds said they had an adult they trusted and could go to with sensitive information. A teacher or other member of school staff was the most common, but was only selected by just over a third (36%) of 13–17-year-olds. They were even less likely to say they trusted professionals from other settings. For example, just 6.0% of 13–17-year-olds said they had a youth worker, sports coach or mentor they felt they could go to.

Those aged 13–17 who'd perpetrated violence were just as likely to have access to at least one trusted adult (96%), but who they trusted differed. They were less likely to name a parent as a trusted adult (73%) but significantly more likely to have a trusted adult outside the family (66%). They were significantly more likely to trust a doctor, therapist or counsellor (16% compared to 9.4% of all 13–17-year-olds), a youth worker, sports coach or mentor (14% vs. 6.0% of all 13–17-year-olds), a social worker (13% vs. 4.6% of all 13–17-year-olds) or a religious leader (11% vs. 5.5% of all 13–17-year-olds).

Differences were even more notable for 13–17-year-olds who'd perpetrated serious violence that required medical treatment. Only 47% said they had a parent they could go to but 75% said they had a trusted adult outside their family, compared to 66% of those who'd perpetrated any form of violence and 51% of all 13–17-year-olds.

**FIGURE 1.13: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO HAD TRUSTED ADULTS, BY INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENCE**




*Notes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Bars with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.*

# But the most vulnerable are still disproportionately affected.

## Teens in 'gangs' and experiencing criminal exploitation are most likely to be affected.

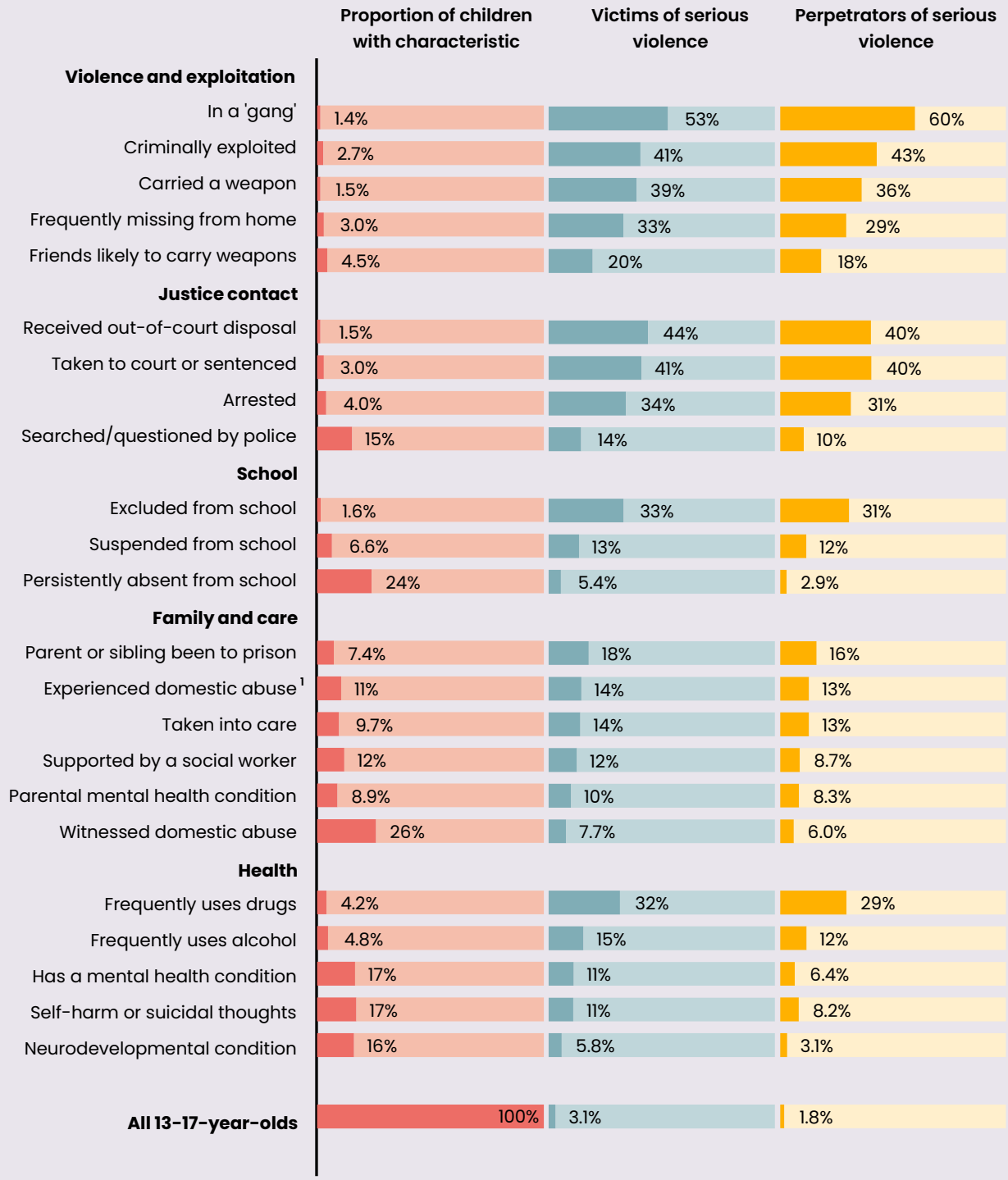
Children who self-identified as being in a 'gang' were the most likely to have been involved in violence. Most (84%) had perpetrated at least some type of violence, most commonly physical assault (58%), followed by sexual assault (55%) and weapons violence (51%). Robbery was the least common, but still high at 46%, compared to just 1.2% across all 13–17-year-olds. Sixty per cent had perpetrated violence that resulted in their victim seeking medical treatment from a doctor or hospital. This was 34 times the rate amongst all 13–17-year-olds (1.8%). Over half (53%) had been a victim of serious violence requiring treatment themselves, making them 17 times as likely to have been a victim of serious violence as all 13–17-year-olds.

Children who'd been criminally exploited (i.e. had sold, transported or stored drugs, weapons or money for someone else) were the next most likely to have been involved in violence. Two in three (66%) had perpetrated any type of violence and 43% had perpetrated serious violence resulting in medical treatment – 24 times the rate amongst all 13–17-year-olds. A similar proportion (41%) had been victims of serious violence themselves.

Those who'd been frequently missing from home (i.e. been away overnight without their parents' permission monthly or more) – a possible warning sign of exploitation – were also among the most likely to have been affected by violence. Forty-three per cent had perpetrated any type of violence and 29% had perpetrated violence resulting in medical treatment, while 33% had been victims of violence resulting in medical treatment. Children frequently using drugs were similarly likely to have been victims (32%) and perpetrators (29%) of serious violence.

Serious violence rates were down this year for nearly all 13–17-year-olds, but a couple of these most vulnerable groups showed the opposite pattern. In this year's survey, those who self-identified as being in a 'gang' and those who'd gone frequently missing were even more likely to have been victims and perpetrators of serious violence compared to last year's survey. Last year, 50% of children in 'gangs' had been victims of serious violence and 54% had perpetrated serious violence themselves. This rose to 53% victims and 60% perpetrators this year. For children frequently missing, last year 28% had been victims and 25% had been perpetrators of serious violence, rising to 33% and 29%, respectively, this year. However, none of these differences were statistically significant.

**FIGURE 2.1: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WITH SELECTED VULNERABILITIES, AND THE SHARE OF EACH GROUP WHO WERE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF SERIOUS VIOLENCE**




[1] *Experienced domestic abuse defined as experiencing verbal abuse daily or physical abuse ever.*

## Those in contact with the justice system are also at much greater risk…

This year, we asked more about contact children had with the criminal justice system. As might be expected, 13–17-year-olds who'd come into contact with the police and courts were also among the most likely to have been affected by violence. Around a third of those who'd been arrested in the past year had been victims (34%) and perpetrators (31%) of serious violence. Those who'd received a caution or other form of out-of-court disposal were even more likely to have been affected by violence.[9] Two in five (40%) had perpetrated serious violence and even more (44%) had been victims of serious violence. Rates were similar for those who'd been taken to court, found guilty of a crime, had contact with youth offending or probation services and been remanded or sentenced to custody; 40% had perpetrated serious violence and 41% had been victims of it. However, it was still less than half the children in contact with the justice system who'd perpetrated serious violence. We don't know whether the violence these children were involved in is what led to their contact with the justice system. The fourth report in this year's series will further explore the experiences of this group.

## … as are those with challenging home and social contexts.

Children exposed to difficulties at home and risky social contexts were the next most likely to have experienced violence. One in five (20%) who thought it was likely their friends carried weapons had been victims of serious violence in the past year and 18% had perpetrated serious violence themselves. Children who'd experienced verbal or physical domestic abuse from their parent or caregiver were slightly less likely to have been affected – 14% had been victims and 13% perpetrators of serious violence – but still nearly five times as likely to have been victims and over seven times as likely to have perpetrated serious violence as the average.

For the first time this year, we also asked about the mental health of children's primary caregiver. Those whose primary caregiver had been diagnosed with a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression in the past year were significantly more likely than average to have been affected by violence. One in ten (10%) had been victims of serious violence and 8.3% had perpetrated serious violence themselves. This was lower than the rate for those experiencing abuse in the home, but was over three times the rate of victimisation and nearly five times the rate of perpetration for all 13–17-year-olds.

Teenagers' own mental health was also associated with exposure to violence. For example, 11% of those who'd hurt themselves on purpose or thought about suicide in the past year had experienced serious violence as victims and 8.2% had perpetrated serious violence themselves. If we look at this the other way round, four in every five (80%) teenagers who'd perpetrated serious violence had also self-harmed or thought about suicide.

Those drinking alcohol on a frequent basis (i.e. weekly or more) were also significantly more likely to have been affected by violence and those using drugs frequently (i.e. weekly or more) were some of the most likely to have been affected – at 32% victims of and 29% perpetrators of serious violence.

[9] Out-of-court disposals are outcomes that aim to divert children away from prosecution and formal court processes. They can be issued by the police after an arrest or following a voluntary interview, before any formal charges are made. They are typically used to support children who admit to committing a less serious offence and often take the form of Youth Cautions or Youth Conditional Cautions.

# Many teens think about violence, but a few appear to be fixated on it.

## One in five teens have sought out violent material or thought about harming others at least once in the past year.

For the first time in this year's survey, we asked respondents about their engagement in a range of behaviours related to violence fixation. Overall, one in five (20%) 13–17-year-olds had done at least one of these behaviours in the past 12 months, equivalent to 760,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales.[10]

Looking at specific behaviours, in the past 12 months 12% of 13–17-year-olds had looked for information about specific real-world attacks or attackers because it was exciting, entertaining or felt good. Two point six per cent had done this weekly or more. The next most common behaviour was thinking about committing specific acts of violence against a person or group of people; one in ten (10%) had thought about this in the past year and 2.6% had done so on at least a weekly basis. Eight point seven per cent had spent time in online communities related to violence, 2.3% on at least a weekly basis. A similar proportion (8.4%) had shared their thoughts or fantasies of harming others with other people, either online or in person, and 2.3% had done so on at least a weekly basis. The least common behaviour was spending time in online communities that encourage hatred or violence towards specific groups of people, but it was still 7.8% who'd done so at all and 2.2% who'd done so at least weekly.

### What is violence fixation?

Violence fixation (also called violence fascination) is an intense interest in extreme or mass violence where ideology is not the primary driver, although interest in ideologies may be present. It can involve seeking out extreme violent content on niche forums and 'gore' sites, researching past attackers and methods, and sharing violent material within online communities. The concept has moved up the policy agenda since the Southport attack in July 2024: Lord Anderson's review of Prevent recommended the programme remain open to such individuals, the government accepted that recommendation and set up a Home Office taskforce on non-ideological extreme violence, Phase 2 of the Southport Inquiry is examining how the risk they pose should be managed, and the government has said it will legislate against the spread of extreme violent content online.

There is no agreed definition of what counts as a fixation on violence, and no estimate of how many children have one. The closest available figure comes from referrals to the Home Office's Prevent programme under the category 'fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks (where no other ideology)'. In the year to September 2025 there were 818 such referrals, 8.0% of all Prevent referrals. Of these, 566 (69%) were for children. This category involves disproportionately more young people than Prevent referrals as a whole, where children account for roughly half of referrals. However, only 118 of the children referred in this category were adopted as Channel cases, meaning a multi-agency panel judged there was enough concern to assess further or offer support. Adoption as a Channel case isn't evidence that a child has committed, or will commit, violence.

[10] Estimates derived using the Office for National Statistics mid-2025 population estimates.

These figures do not measure how many children are fixated on violence. They measure referrals rather than children, and they count what referrers – mainly schools and the police – choose to report. They are highly sensitive to public attention: referrals in this category rose from 81 in October to December 2024 to 286 in April to June 2025, a rise potentially linked to publicity around the Southport trial. Referrals in this category also don't cover all children fixated on violence, as children whose interest in violence relates to a specific ideology covered by Prevent are counted under other categories. Finally, many children experiencing a fixation on violence won't necessarily come to the attention of the authorities, so the true number is almost certainly larger than these figures suggest.

To better understand the numbers at risk, this year we introduced new questions related to violence fixation to the survey. There is no well-established measure of or criteria for violence fixation, so we asked about a range of behaviours related to thinking about, researching and discussing violence. This was informed by the Violent Ideations Scale, but adapted to be suitable for younger respondents. It included the following items:

- Looked for information about specific real-world violent attacks or attackers because it was exciting, entertaining or felt good.
- Thought about committing specific acts of violence against someone else or a group of people.
- Shared thoughts, fantasies, or statements about harming others with someone else, online or in person.
- Spent time in online communities related to violence.
- Spent time in online communities that encourage hatred or violence towards a group of people because of who they are (e.g. their race, religion, gender or sexuality).

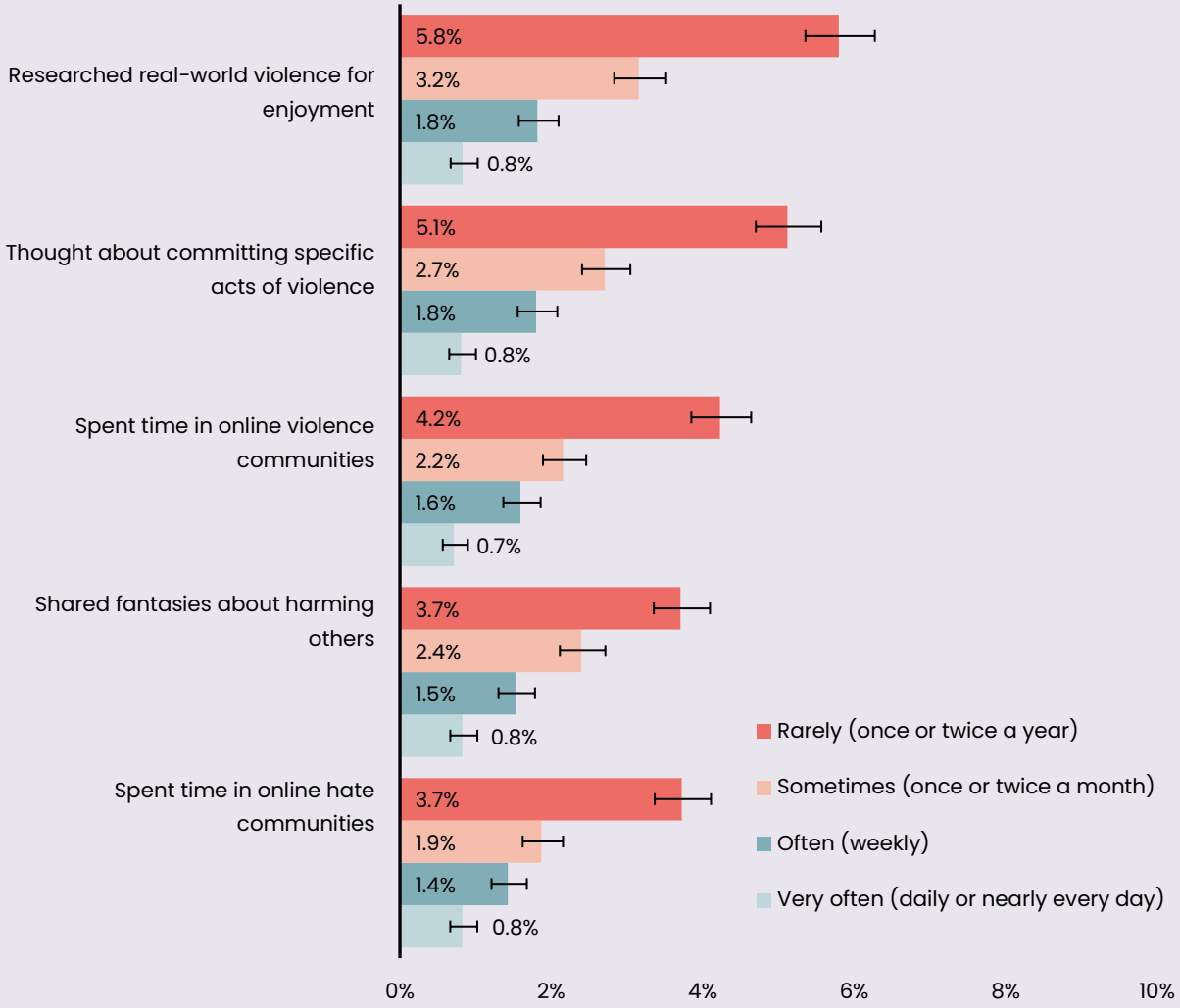
For each item, we asked the frequency with which respondents were engaging in the behaviour. For the purpose of this report, we considered a child to be fixated on violence if they engaged in at least one of these behaviours on a daily or nearly daily basis. It's important to emphasise that children demonstrating these behaviours daily wouldn't necessarily meet thresholds for Prevent or local safeguarding responses. Nor does it mean that they are all at risk of committing acts of extreme violence. We did not ask about intent to commit violence.

We also asked two additional questions that may be indicators of or risk factors for violence fixation:

- Thought about injustices or wrongs done to you.
- Felt socially isolated, excluded or like you don't belong.

We didn't include these questions in our 'violence fixation' measure as they are common experiences that aren't specific to violence. But we included them in the survey so we could identify what association they have with violence fixation.

**FIGURE 3.1: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO'D ENGAGED IN VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOURS**

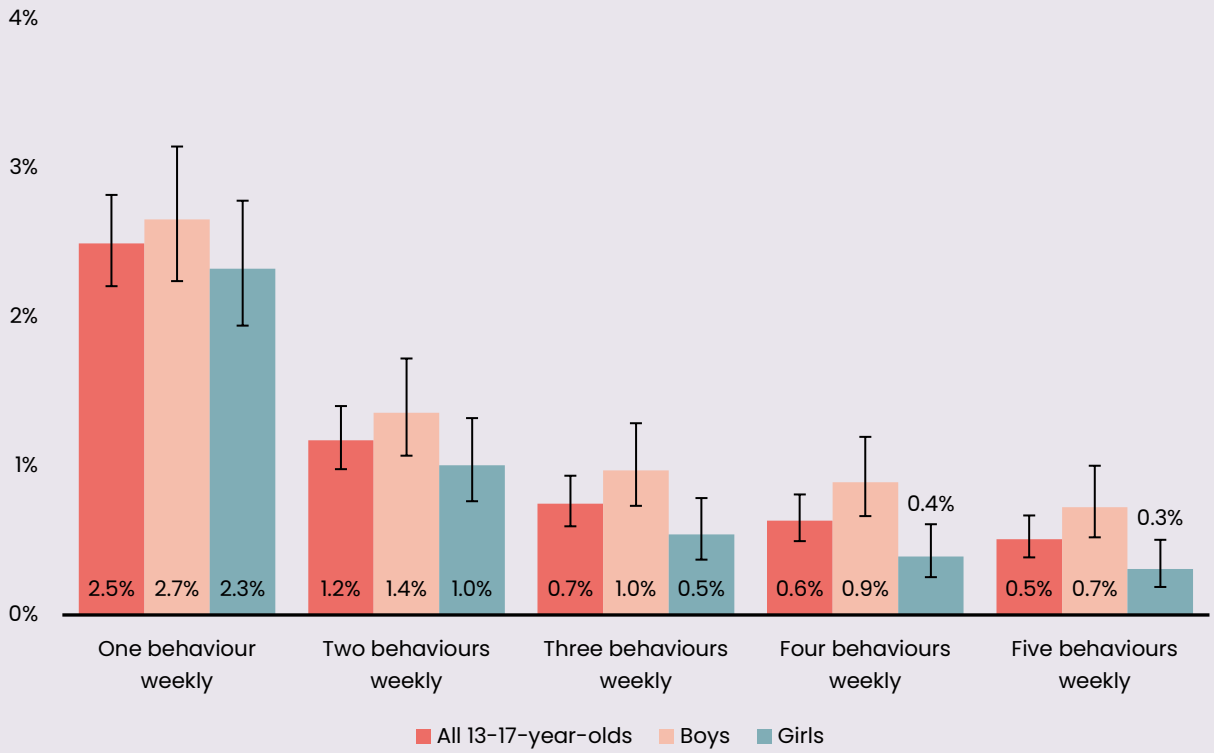



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within.*

## One in 20 return to violent content or fantasies week after week.

The number of 13–17-year-olds engaging in any of these behaviours frequently enough to suggest a fixation on violence was much smaller. One in 20 (5.6%) had done at least one weekly or more and one in 40 (2.3%) had done at least one daily or nearly every day. Even fewer had engaged in multiple behaviours. Just 3.1% had done at least two, 1.9% had done at least three and 1.1% had done four or more on at least a weekly basis.

**FIGURE 3.2: NUMBER OF VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOURS 13–17-YEAR-OLDS HAD ENGAGED IN AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK, BY GENDER**

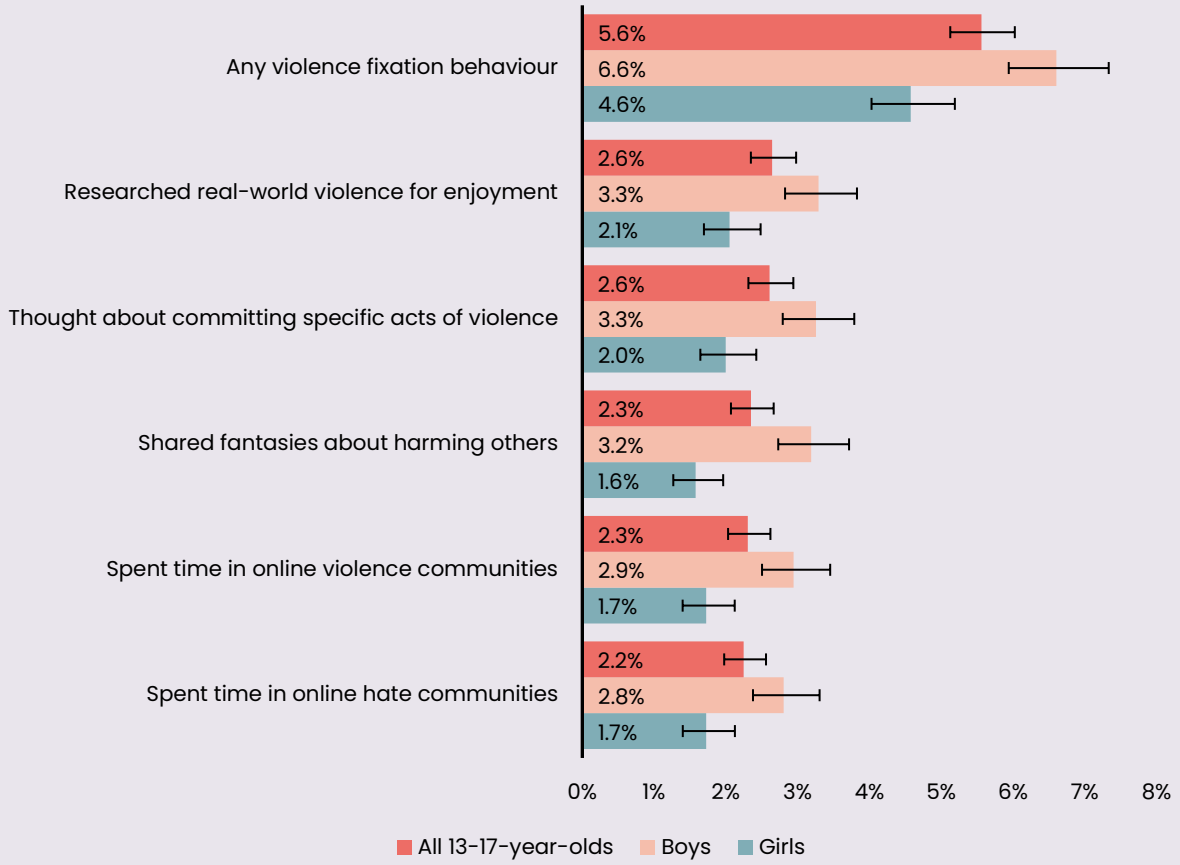



*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Numbers of respondents engaging in multiple different behaviours on a daily basis are too small to report, so this chart focuses on those engaging on at least a weekly basis.*

Boys were more likely to show an interest in or fixation on violence than girls. In total, 3.0% of boys and 1.7% of girls had engaged in any violence fixation behaviour on a daily or near-daily basis. Boys were twice as likely to have engaged in three or more behaviours (2.6%) compared to girls (1.2%). In total, nearly two-thirds of those who'd engaged in any behaviours daily (63%) and just over two-thirds of those who'd engaged in three or more behaviours on a weekly basis (67%) were boys. The behaviour with the biggest gender difference was sharing thoughts or fantasies about harming people with others – boys were twice as likely to do this weekly or more (3.2%) compared to girls (1.6%).

Younger teenagers were more likely to have engaged in any of these behaviours daily (e.g. 2.6% of 13–15-year-olds vs. 1.9% of 16–17-year-olds) but the differences weren't statistically significant. The numbers of respondents were too small to look at any differences by race.

**FIGURE 3.3: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS ENGAGING IN VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOURS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK, BY GENDER**



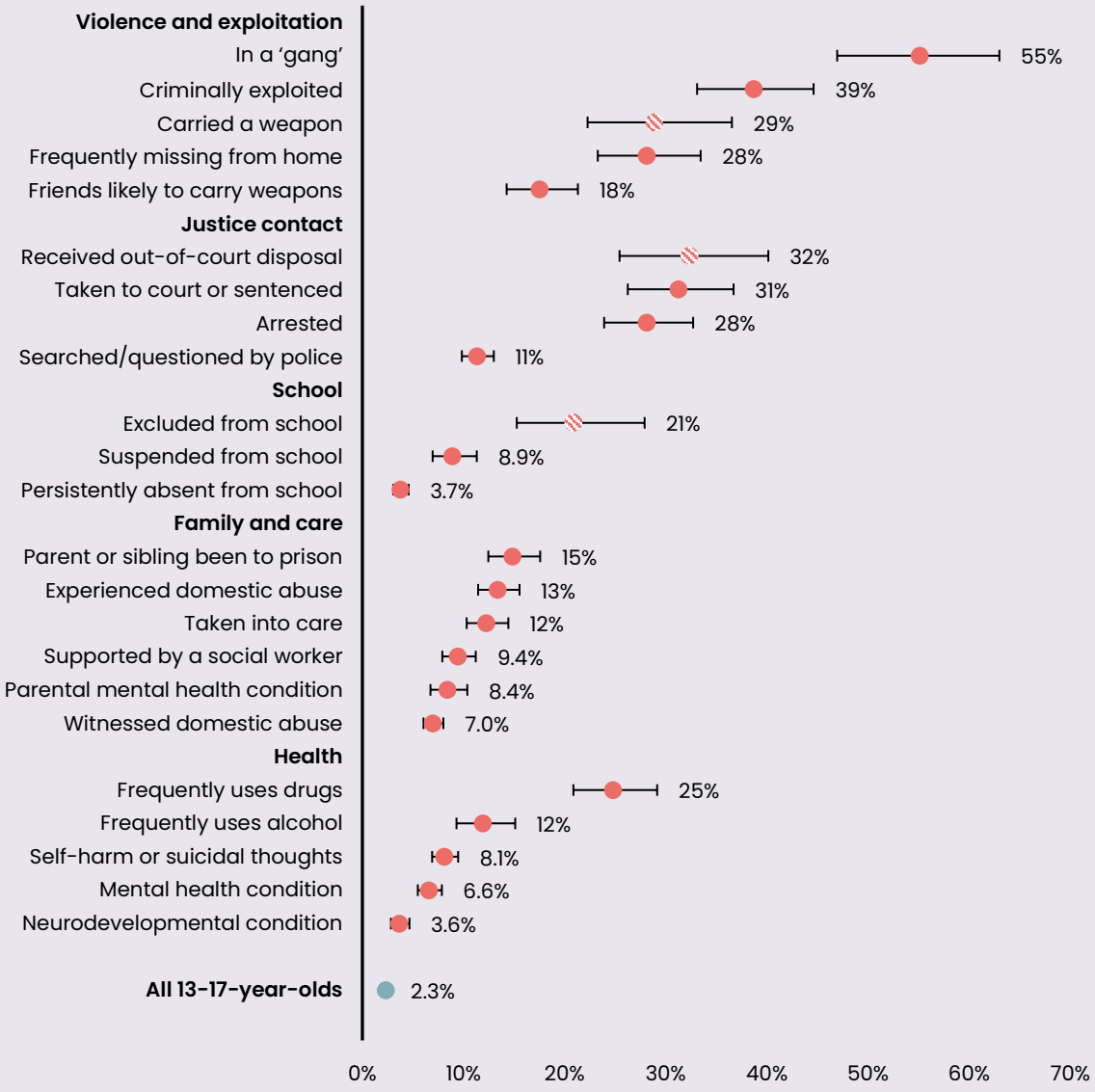

*Notes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Numbers of respondents engaging in specific behaviours on a daily basis are too small to report, so this chart focuses on those engaging on at least a weekly basis.*

Those demonstrating an interest in or fixation on violence were also much more likely to say they felt socially isolated and spent more time on social media. Over half of those engaging in these behaviours daily or nearly every day felt socially isolated, excluded or like they didn't belong (56% compared to 14% of all 13–17-year-olds) and nearly two-thirds regularly thought about injustices or wrongs done to them (62% compared to 9.9% of all 13–17-year-olds). They were also significantly more likely to spend a large amount of time on social media: over half (52%) spent six or more hours and 30% spent eight or more, compared to 24% and 13% of all 13–17-year-olds, respectively.

Looked at the other way round, 13–17-year-olds who spent eight or more hours a day on social media were more than twice as likely as average to have engaged in violence fixation behaviours on a daily basis – 5.3%, compared with 2.3% of all 13–17-year-olds. Online spaces appear to play a central role in the spread of harmful and extremist narratives and violent content, but we can't say from this survey whether heavy social media use draws children towards an interest in violence, whether children already drawn to it spend longer online, or whether both follow from something else.

Overall, 13–17-year-olds who were most likely to be affected by violence were also the most likely to show an interest in or fixation on violence. Those who self-identified as being in a 'gang', who were the most likely to have experienced serious violence, were also the most likely to say they'd engaged in at least one violence fixation behaviour on a daily basis – 55%, compared to 2.3% among all 13–17-year-olds. Children who'd been criminally exploited, had contact with the police and justice systems, gone frequently missing and frequently used drugs – all of whom were the most likely to have been involved in serious violence – were also among the most likely to have displayed a fixation on violence. Meanwhile, the groups who had a slightly elevated likelihood of becoming involved in serious violence were similarly slightly more likely to have shown violence fixation. For example, 6.6% of those with a diagnosed mental health condition had engaged in any of the behaviours on a daily basis, compared to 2.3% of all 13–17-year-olds.

**FIGURE 3.4: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS ENGAGING IN AT LEAST ONE VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOUR DAILY OR NEARLY EVERY DAY, BY SELECTED VULNERABILITIES**

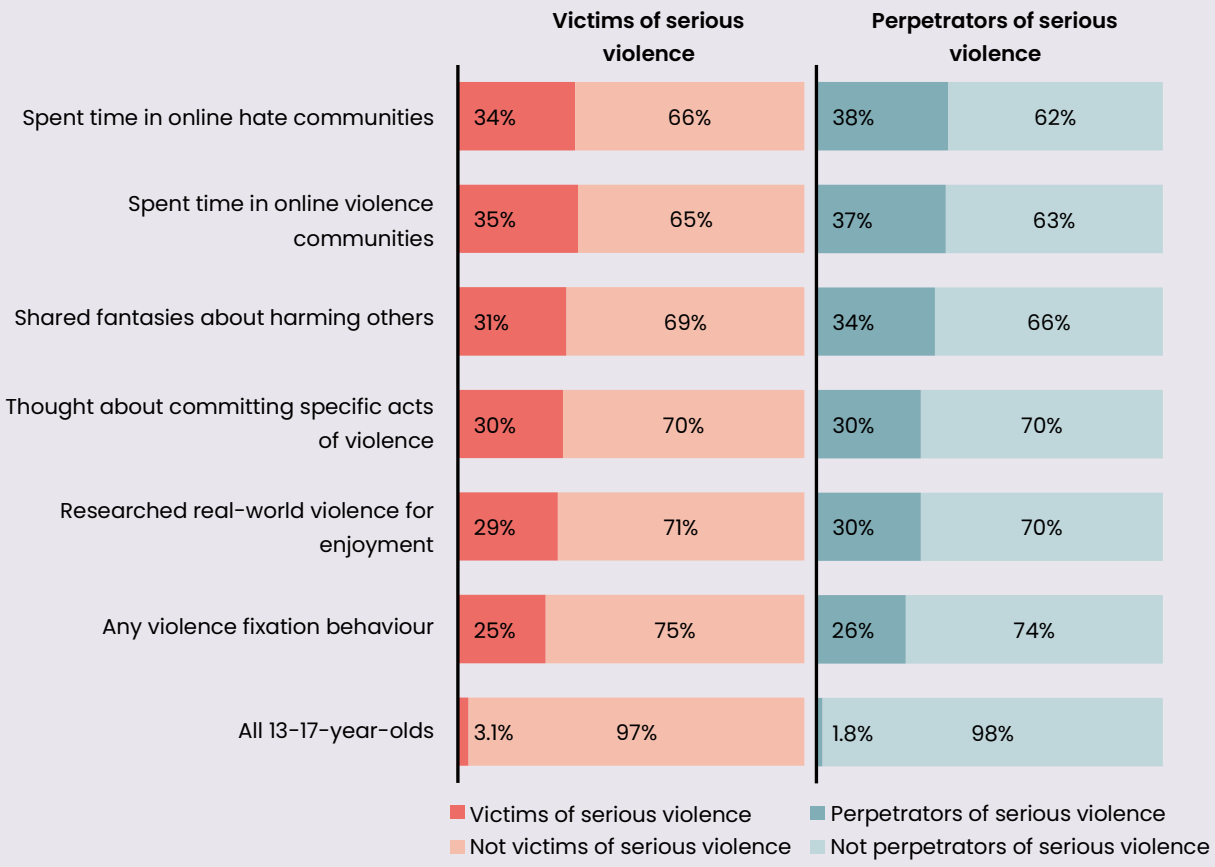



*Notes. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Points with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.*

## ‘Violence-fixated’ teens are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of serious violence, but it’s still a minority.

Children ‘fixated’ on violence were significantly more likely to have experienced violence as both victims and perpetrators. Of all 13–17-year-olds, 13% had been a victim of violence in the past 12 months. This rose to nearly half (49%) of those who engaged in any violence fixation behaviours on at least a weekly basis and 56% of those engaging in them daily. Looking at perpetration, 8.7% of all 13–17-year-olds said they’d perpetrated violence in the past 12 months, rising to 44% of those engaging in these behaviours weekly or more and 51% of those engaging in them daily. The difference was even more stark when we looked at serious violence. A quarter (25%) of those engaging in these behaviours on a weekly basis had been victims of serious violence requiring medical treatment by a doctor or hospital in the past 12 months, rising to 30% of those engaging in these behaviours on a daily basis, nearly 10 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds (3.1%). A quarter (26%) of those engaging weekly or more had perpetrated serious violence in the past 12 months, rising to 32% of those engaging daily – 18 times the rate for all 13–17-year-olds (1.8%). Nearly all (94%) children who’d perpetrated serious violence had engaged in at least one of these behaviours at some point, 81% had done so weekly or more and 43% had done so daily. But the relationship did not hold in reverse: most children engaging in these behaviours had not been involved in serious violence.

**FIGURE 3.5: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO WERE VICTIMS OR PERPETRATORS OF SERIOUS VIOLENCE, BY TYPE OF VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOUR ENGAGED IN AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK**

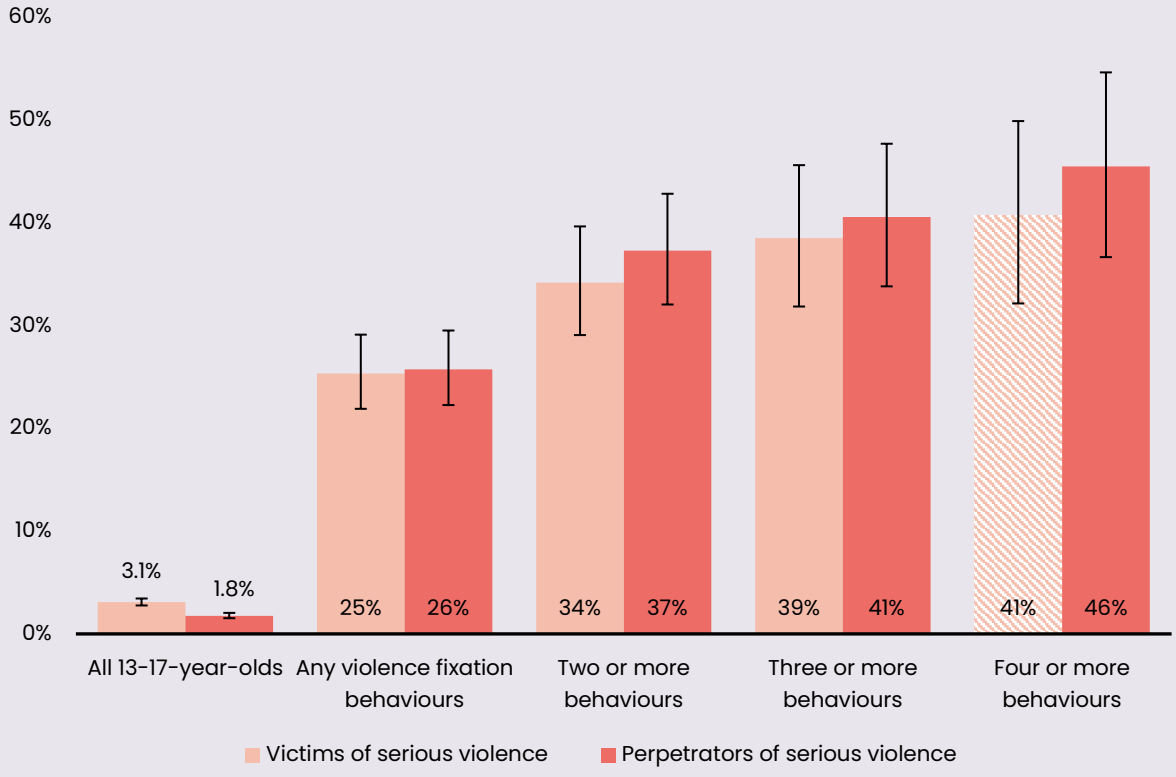



*Note. Numbers of respondents engaging in individual behaviours on a daily basis are too small to report, so this chart focuses on those engaging on at least a weekly basis.*

The association with violence differed depending on the type of behaviour. Numbers of respondents engaging in individual behaviours every day are too small to report, but looking at those engaging in specific behaviours weekly or more, 30% of those who'd looked for information on real-world attacks or attackers had perpetrated serious violence in the past year. This increased to 34% of those who'd shared fantasies with others about harming people, and even further to 37% and 38% of those who'd spent time in online communities related to violence and that encourage hatred towards specific groups, respectively.

The more of these behaviours children engaged in, the more likely they were to have been victims and perpetrators of serious violence. Forty-one per cent of those who'd engaged in at least three on a weekly basis had perpetrated serious violence that resulted in the victim seeking medical treatment from a doctor or hospital. This rose to nearly half (46%) of 13–17-year-olds who'd done at least four of these behaviours on at least a weekly basis. However, it's important to note that even among those engaging in multiple behaviours on a weekly basis, the majority hadn't engaged in serious violence, and we don't know whether children had perpetrated violence before or after engaging in these behaviours. We cannot say whether or how these behaviours are related to intent to cause harm.

**FIGURE 3.6: PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO WERE VICTIMS OR PERPETRATORS OF SERIOUS VIOLENCE, BY NUMBER OF VIOLENCE FIXATION BEHAVIOURS ENGAGED IN WEEKLY OR MORE**




*Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals – this reflects the range we expect the true value to fall within. Bars with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution. Numbers of respondents engaging in multiple different behaviours on a daily basis are too small to report, so this chart focuses on those engaging on at least a weekly basis.*

Youth Endowment Fund
Charitable Trust
Registered Charity Number: 1185413

youthendowmentfund.org.uk
hello@youthendowmentfund.org.uk