



Emerging Learning on Serious Violence from Lockdown: Addressing the Consequences of the Pandemic / Rapid Read

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a serious increase in some forms of violence and exploitation, as well as on many people's mental health.

This Rapid Read outlines some of the effects that COVID has had, as well as the initiatives that are being put in place to address them as we emerge from the pandemic.

WHAT EFFECT HAS THE PANDEMIC HAD?

Research by the University of Nottingham, based on interviews with hospital accident and emergency (A&E) professionals, indicates that:

- COVID-19 restrictions have hindered the ability of youth workers to safeguard vulnerable young people, and increased difficulties in identifying and responding to victims of County Lines
- there has been a rise in the incidence of violence, including shifts in the types of injuries and their severity
- the mental health of already vulnerable children and young people has deteriorated, with indications that substance misuse and self-harm are on the rise.

'County Lines' exploitation involves urban gangs persuading, coercing or forcing children and young people to store drugs and money; they will often transport them to suburban areas, and market or coastal towns. The Local Government Association (LGA) reports that **girls and young women are being deliberately and increasingly recruited** into such gangs. County Lines activity is widespread and is a form of child abuse.

Other forms of criminal exploitation include child sexual exploitation, trafficking, and gang and knife crime. Perpetrators use children and young people to maximise profits and distance themselves from the criminal act of physically dealing drugs.

The LGA is calling for Violence Reduction Units to be extended to all police forces in England and Wales and for them to have five years' long-term funding, rather than year-on-year commitments.

DISCHARGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

Elizabeth Wortley and Dr Ann Hagell published their research paper **Young victims of youth violence: using youth workers in the emergency department to facilitate 'teachable moments'** in the BMJ July 2021. The article is available for free.

Wortley and Hagell report that there have been rising concerns in the UK about the levels of serious violence between young people, especially serious physical violence, and knife crime. They suggest that interactions with young people in the emergency department (ED) at the time of injury provide an opportunity for screening and intervention to reduce the risk of repeat attendances.

The report finds that paediatricians and other healthcare workers can feel unsure about the best way to intervene. Embedding youth workers in EDs has started in some UK hospitals, making use of a potential 'teachable moment' in the immediate aftermath of an event to help change behaviour. Wortley and Hagell summarise the evidence for these types of interventions and present two practice examples, as well as discussing how EDs might approach the routine embedding of youth workers.

SERIOUS VIOLENCE DUTY – GUIDANCE FOR RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES

Research shows that effective multi-agency working is currently being undertaken in only 30% of local government areas in England and Wales. The **Serious Violence Duty** legislation will complement existing multi-agency approaches and structures locally. The duty provides enough flexibility for relevant organisations to work together ensuring that serious violence is made a focus within existing multi-agency arrangements.

Royal Assent for the Serious Violence Duty is planned for January 2022, when detailed guidance and case studies will be published.



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As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, the true effects on people's mental health, and on the rise of serious violence, are becoming apparent. The following information outlines extra investment and new initiatives designed to meet these challenges.

EXTRA FUNDING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

An **extra £40 million** has been allocated to address COVID impact on children and young people's mental health, including an increase in eating disorders. It will help meet the challenge nationally of having the right types of beds in the right places.

Across the country, £10m capital funding is being used to provide extra beds at units that provide care for young people with the most complex needs. A further £1.5m will ensure there are additional facilities for children under 13.

This is in addition to £79m in government funding to support children and young people's mental health in the community, including better access to crisis and eating disorder services, and new mental health support teams.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH?

Kooth, the online mental wellbeing community, has been collecting anonymous data since March 2020, to monitor COVID's impact on young people. Its findings indicate:

- a 13% rise in those presenting with thoughts around self harming
- a 9% increase in the rise of stress and anxiety issues, compared with 2019
- a 100% increase in students' concerns about school and college
- a 21% increase in suicidal thoughts

WHAT IMPACT HAS COVID-19 HAD ON SAFEGUARDING?

Crimes such as child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, sexual violence and modern slavery typically take place behind closed doors. There is evidence to show that incidents of these 'hidden harms' have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during lockdown.

NHSE/I National Safeguarding Team are leading on developing a 'safeguarding at place level' dashboard, which will show us where to focus our efforts, share best practice and reach out to our partner organisations. This will help us work together to reduce all aspects of harm, abuse and serious violence.

DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT

The Domestic Abuse Act became law in April 2021. NHS Safeguarding are working with safeguarding system leaders and cross government to better understand the impact of domestic abuse on the serious violence agenda. The **Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance** is out for consultation, and we are working collaboratively to advance this agenda.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT AS WE EMERGE FROM LOCKDOWN?

The Home Office is investing £17m for Violence Reduction Units **to support young people at high risk of involvement in serious violence** in England. The funding will provide high-intensity therapeutic and specialist support from trained youth workers, to help divert young people away from violence.

A multi-agency, cross governmental approach is being led by Public Health England, DHSC, NHSE/I National Safeguarding Team, the Home Office, the Department for Education, the police, and the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme.

Our aim is to establish national indicators for serious violence, to help local areas better understand the needs of their area and to track progress in tackling violence. It will also enable comparisons between areas and facilitate best practice learning.



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