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Professor Iain Brennan, Professor Simon Green,
Dr Charlotte Russell, Dr Nicola O'Leary, Sophie
Blanchard, Dr Victoria Burton and Dr Craig
Barlow



Breaking the Cycle: Youth Violence Prevention, Trauma-Informed Practice, and Multi-Agency Strategies

Abstract: How do you reduce youth violence in a post-industrial region, battling to recover from a decline in its traditional shipping and fishing industries? Based on an ongoing evaluation of a violence prevention partnership in the North-east of England, the causes of youth violence are firmly located in a sense of threat felt by young people. This threat is constituted of precarity and trauma in the home, the neighbourhood, and the night-time economy. Coupled with strained relationships with criminal justice, youth and children's services one response to this is hypervigilance among young people.

Delving into the specific processes of a violence reduction partnership, this panel will highlight the benefits of a trauma-informed, strengths-based partnership and evaluation. Through a detailed case study, we will introduce insights yielded at the mid-way point in the partnership about the different activities funded by the partnership. Concluding with an assessment of the achievements and challenges of this partnership approach, we will provide valuable interdisciplinary perspectives to the field of youth violence reduction.

Key words: violence reduction, partnership working, trauma informed, youth violence



Effectiveness of Violence Reduction Units in England and Wales, 2019-2023 by Professor Iain Brennan

Abstract: Prompted by the apparent success of the Glasgow Violence Reduction Unit (later, Scottish VRU) in reducing serious violence in Scotland and a ten-year peak in youth homicide, government in England and Wales established the Serious Violence Fund. Since September 2019, the fund has supported the creation and operation of Violence Reduction Units and the implementation of ‘Surge’ policing activity in the twenty most violent police force areas. This has resulted in a two-pronged approach to violence that combines a coordinated multi-agency ‘public health’ approach with proactive policing of violent areas and individuals.

This paper will describe these two programmes of activity and estimate the effect of the Serious Violence Fund on six violence outcomes: homicide, admissions to hospital for violent injury (sharp object or any mechanism), police recorded violence (with and without injury) and possession of weapons offences. To reflect the uneven distribution of violence and violence prevention activity toward population dense, higher violence areas and to reduce the effect of confounding between the baseline outcome and funding, local authorities were used as the treatment unit. To estimate the cumulative effect of funding, pre-post trends in violence between April 2013 and December 2022 in funded area were compared with a synthetic control group of unfunded areas. The analysis found no effect of funding on the primary outcomes of homicide or admission to hospital for violence with a sharp object or the police-recorded secondary outcomes. However, there was an observed reduction on admissions to hospital for any violence.

Modest evidence for an effect of the Serious Violence Fund is emerging, but not definitive and separating effects of VRUs and proactive policing remains a challenge. Understanding the contribution of VRUs is an important component of evaluating the Serious Violence Fund and crucial to the future of violence prevention policy.



How to Build a Safe Place: a strengths-based, partnership approach to preventing violence by Dr Charlotte Russell and Professor Simon Green

Abstract: How can you build safety? What strategies can you deployed and how can researchers contribute to the safety of a place? Based on an ongoing evaluation of a violence reduction unit in the North-east of England, the causes of youth violence are firmly located in a sense of threat felt by young people. This threat is constituted of precarity and trauma in the home, the neighbourhood, and the night-time economy.

Based on a three-year government-funded project, the local response has been to build safety through a trauma-informed, strengths-based collaboration between young people, services, and researchers. The goal is to develop both the physical, and the felt, sense of safety by identifying and supporting those young people most at risk of experiencing or using violence. At the halfway point in the project, we report on the successes and obstacles to achieving these outcomes for young people. Focusing on the development of the partnership, success measures and strength-based approach to evaluation, this presentation will provide an assessment of how far the partnership has come and the road still to be travelled.



‘On the field’: case study of sports interventions for young people at risk by Sophie Blanchard and Dr Nicola O’Leary

Abstract: Addressing youth violence is a public health priority given its prevalence, harms and costs to society. Services designed to prevent or reduce youth violence do exist. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that youth diversion is a more efficient method to address violent behaviour amongst young people than the standard criminal justice responses. However, the effectiveness of diversion and interventions often depends on young people engaging with them and it is important for funders and providers to know how best to support this process.

This paper aims to identify key messages and lessons learned from intervention projects attempting to engage young people at risk of violence/knife carrying in the Humberside region of the UK. Our strength-based methods investigation consisted of two strands of data collection.

Firstly, a proforma survey was sent to all leaders of funded intervention projects that were asked with engaging and intervening in the lives these young people. What was returned gave us insight into the aims and hopes of the intervention leads for the young people and the impact on the wider community affected by violent crime. The second stage is an in-depth case study of one such intervention. This deep dive exploration tells the story of not only the hopes, ambitions, and successes of those working with young people in this way, but also narrates the challenges and obstacles that they strive to overcome. Ultimately, we hope to identify key messages and understanding about how services can meaningfully engage with young people at risk of involvement in violence in a positive and impactful way.



Trauma Informed Approaches to Criminal Justice by Dr Craig Barlow and Dr Victoria Burton

Abstract: Trauma informed approaches are increasingly being recognized as a framework to understand a range of behaviors including entry into the criminal justice system. Understanding the impact of trauma across the life course is emerging as a public health priority whereby childhood trauma is associated with impaired educational achievement, limited employment opportunities and crime. Linked to this, adopting a trauma informed approach to violence and crime prevention is known to have benefits for both victims and offenders. Within this context, research was commissioned to develop a definition and key principles for a multi-agency trauma informed approach to violence prevention for the Humber region in the UK.

A consensus-based definition of Trauma Informed Practice for violence prevention is required to create consistency between and within different organisations, enabling a shared understanding of trauma and trauma informed practice to develop. The aim is to assist the work of the violence prevention partnership and the police to have impact where it is most needed.

To:

1. Establish an overview of patterns of violence and victimisation that emerge in different contexts from different relationships and interactions.
2. Produce through consensus a shared definition of a trauma informed approach and practice.

In this case, the team used a mixed methodology, combining a series of focus groups and an anonymous Delphi panel of experts, to synthesise different multi-agency perspectives to formulate a consensus for a working definition that would be relevant and applicable in practice.