Harnessing lived experience

A youth-led consultation on the causes and solutions to serious violence against young people.

October 2019

With special thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund for providing the foresight and funding for this vital work to take place.

Thanks to our partners in the delivery of the pilot, the youth organisations who work on the front line each day supporting young people across the country, without whose commitment to tackling youth violence this project would not have been possible.

Creative Youth Networks
Creative Academy Network
NE Youth

Peabody Estate Pembury Youth Club
Safe in Tees Valley
Skyway

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Introduction

Serious violence affects young people from all communities and in all corners of the country. Lives are lost, local communities suffer, and there are significant negative impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of all young people involved. More than 100 people have been fatally stabbed in the UK so far this year. This sharp rise in serious violence rates has seen the issue return to the headlines, with a 51% rise in the number of under 18s suffering assaults with a sharp object over the last four years (1). There have been calls for an urgent and immediate response. As we seek to take action, it is essential that future work around this issue does not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Well intentioned attempts to address serious violence against young people have often lacked an essential component – the active participation and involvement of young people themselves. This is a long-standing issue; those aged 25 and under are not being given a forum to voice their concerns and opinions, are not being listened to at the initial stages of policy discussions and are then excluded from the discussions that emerge around potential solutions. Government ministers, senior policymakers, police chiefs and the media dominate the debate, with little room or space for the thoughts and views of those who have the most valuable insights to offer; young people.

In a bid to address this shortcoming the National Lottery Community Fund convened a consortium of charities and social enterprises with the reach, skills and experience to put young people at the heart of decision making. This followed the National Lottery Community Fund's work exploring these issues with young Councillor Hamza Taouzzale, and young people in his networks, in late 2018.

In 2019, UK Youth led initial discussions and planning with My Life My Say, Mobilise Public Ltd, Centre for Youth Impact, British Youth Council and Hamza Taouzzale. The phase of work that has resulted in this report was delivered by My Life My Say, Mobilise Public Ltd, Dartington Service Design Lab, Hamza Taouzzale, Creative Academies Network, Creative Youth Network, Pembury Youth Club, Safe in Tees Valley, Skyways and NE Youth.

This work was made possible by generous support from the National Lottery Community Fund, which supported and encouraged an experimental partnership approach that allowed the consortium to push the boundaries on youth advocacy and rapidly deliver findings from this first phase of work. It was also reliant on the generous leadership of all involved, evident through high levels of collaboration and the additional time and resource each organisation donated beyond the funded aspects of the work.

Together we sought to pilot a unique methodology of youth-led research, insight and evidence generation. Our aim is to empower young people with system-thinking approaches to feed into our understanding of both the causes of serious violence, and preventative actions to reduce serious violence against young people. We seek to inform the design of frameworks and individual interventions that collectively underpin a public health approach.

The programme was designed to capture data on:

- **The contributing factors to serious violence identified by young people**

- **The interventions young people believe are effective**

- **The similarities and differences between what existing research suggests, works and what young people believe works**

Young people are rarely recognised as a group with the right to have their views considered or their interests independently represented at any level of decision making. Be it in Parliament where changes of legislation are made, in courts or tribunals where decisions are made about their future, at home or at school.

We are committed to engaging with young people – in particular those with lived experience of the issues being explored - and providing them with a voice on issues that matter to them, beginning here with understanding and tackling serious violence.
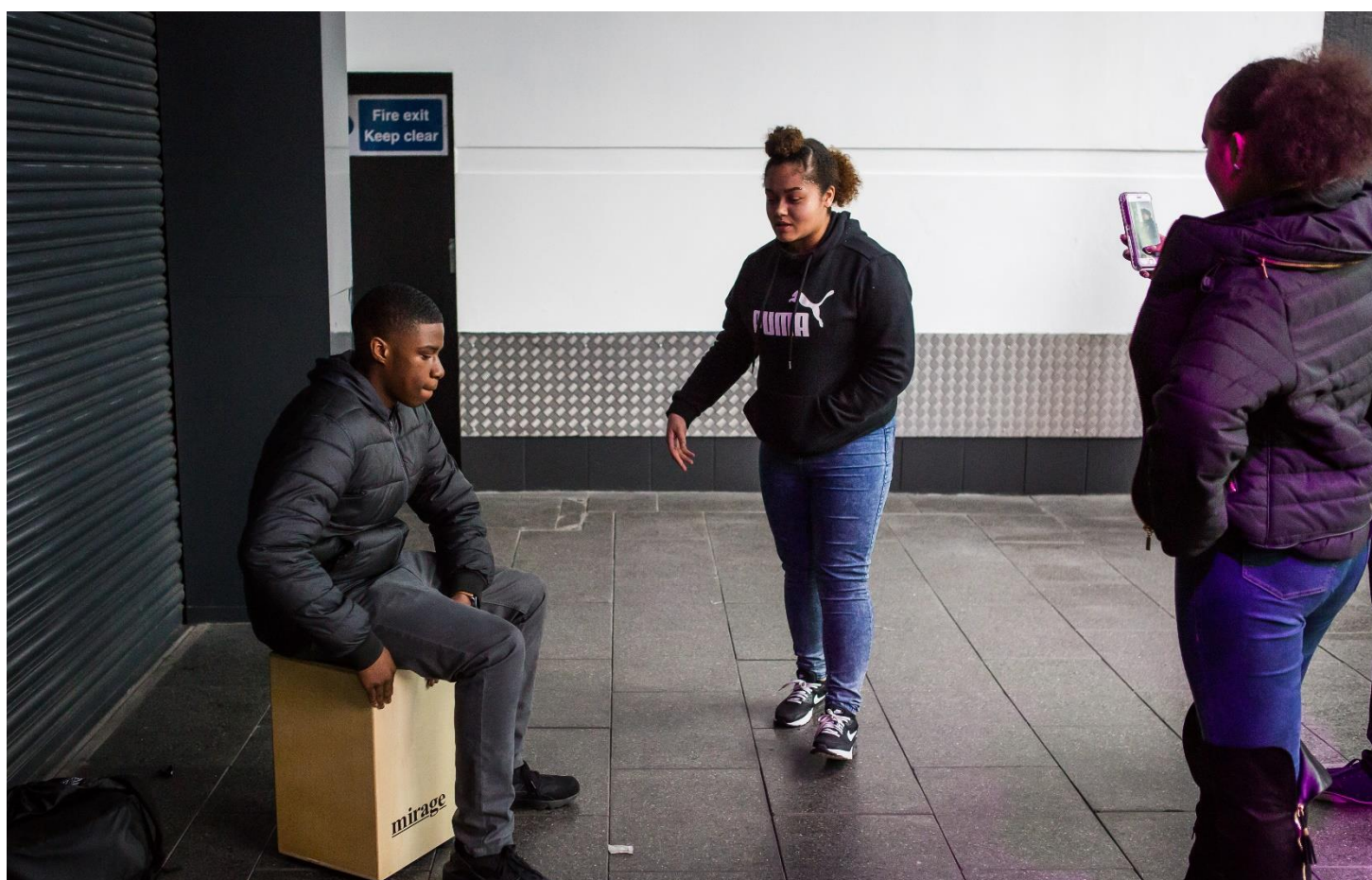
Methodology
A unique approach

It is important to be mindful that there is already an extensive evidence base about interventions that work (and don't work) to reduce serious violence, both here in the UK and abroad. We were keen to build on this foundation, instead of starting from scratch. Importantly, we also wanted to enable young people to review this evidence base for themselves, formulate their own opinions, and feed into further areas of future research.

Past explorations of the causes and consequences of violence against young people typically involve the use of surveys, semi-structured interviews, and life stories, or through literature reviews and/or meta analyses (2-10). While useful, these methods tend to be limited in their ability to capture the dynamic complexities of serious violence, including differences in local communities and the lived experiences of young people.

We set out to address this gap through a combination of youth leadership, peer-to-peer active listening and systems-thinking, which involves developing a youth-led, evidence-informed theory behind the violence. Then we introduced existing evidence of 'what works' and sought to uncover young people's views on the efficacy of these interventions.

The three strands of this pilot were brought together to unlock the experiences and expertise of young people in understanding and tackling serious violence. Youth leadership was provided by Hamza Taouzzale, a young Councillor for City of Westminster who came up with the initial concept for empowering young people to tackle serious violence.

1. A **rapid evidence assessment** of current research was first conducted to gain an understanding of the contributing factors to violence, before looking at existing interventions to ascertain what does and doesn't work to reduce violence most effectively for young people.

2. We created a **peer-to-peer active listening** approach that brought together groups of young people to listen to the concerns of their peers across the country and share their own thoughts. Evidence suggests that peer research has the potential to empower young people to participate in research by minimising power imbalances between researchers and participants (11). This may reduce bias and promote improved understanding to inform policy and practice.

3. Research into best practice approaches to capturing the contributing factors to serious violence, as articulated by young people, led us to incorporate **causal loop mapping – a form of systems-thinking** – into our methodology. Systems-thinking focusses on how things change through time and, based on the feedback structures discovered, it aims to explain the complex patterns of behaviour.

We utilised this model to empower young people to talk to their peers and express their views without imbalance. The pilot allowed participants to think about the causes and consequences of serious violence in their local areas, and to consider different solutions to the issue. It also

encouraged participants to think critically about the research that already exists on serious violence and to highlight their own issues, concerns and thoughts on the matter in a way that could be effectively translated into an effective report with robust recommendations.

Youth-led and youth focused

Workshops were delivered across England through UK Youth's network of youth organisations throughout May and June 2019. A rapid review of the evidence informed a systemic framework against which young people with lived experience or proximity to serious violence

considered 'what matters' and 'what works' from their perspective.

To ensure the delivery model was appropriate and fit for purpose, young people were engaged at every stage of design and delivery. This included:

- Consultation on emerging themes from the rapid evidence assessment and suggesting areas for further research

- Piloting planned activities and resources

- Consultation on the accessibility and format of the workshop materials

- Recruitment of young researchers to co-deliver workshops

- Participation by diverse young people with lived experience of serious violence in all aspects of all workshops

Six different geographic locations to host the workshops were chosen using data from the Government's Youth Justice Statistics 2016 – 2017, correlated against the Index of Multiple Deprivation, to identify Local Authorities with

wards within the top 10% of highest deprivation and top 10% crime rates.

UK Youth then worked with local partner organisations to identify participants to attend workshops in six locations.

- Wolverhampton (West Midlands)
- Bristol (South West)
- East London

- Middlesbrough (Yorkshire)
- North London
- Newcastle (North East)

Due to the nature and context within which the different youth organisations operate – from targeted support to open access provision - the workshops were designed to be flexible and adapted to meet the needs of the young people engaged and the particular barriers they face.
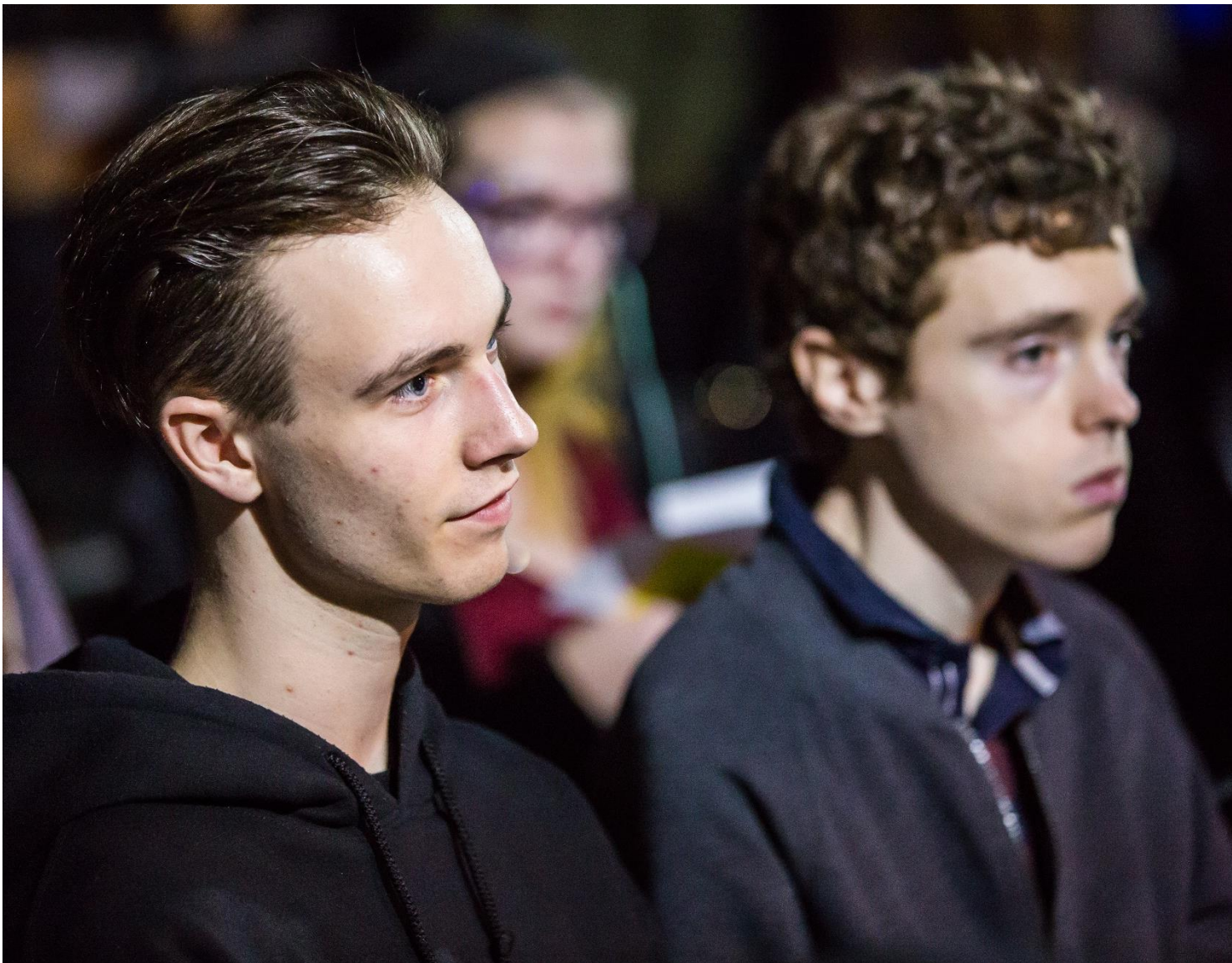
Participants

123 participants aged between 13 to 23 years-old took part in the workshops. Of these, 55% were male and 44% female, 32% were from BAME backgrounds and the average age was 17.

Young people were invited by their local youth organisations to attend the workshops on the basis of their lived experience of serious violence or their proximity to the issue. 26% had been involved in a violent crime incident themselves, 56% knew a friend or family member who had been involved in a violent crime incident, and 41% considered violent crime against young people a major problem where they live. This mix enabled us to hear from a range of young people living with the effects of serious violence, both as possible perpetrators and/or victims.

Such young people face multiple complex issues and additional barriers to participation, which presented several challenges with regards to safeguarding. Measures to maintain a high staff-to-young-person ratio, ensuring local youth workers who have positive relationships with the participants were present, and thorough risk assessments and staff briefings were undertaken.

It was also necessary to ensure that the potential benefits of the research were duly weighed against the potential costs to participants in the event that upsetting conversations took place, and appropriate resources/procedures were made available to deal with potential consequences or disclosures. A verbal briefing on the purpose of the research, their right to anonymity and their right to withdraw from the research at any time was given to participants to ensure a full understanding of what was involved was achieved prior to the signing of consent forms, therefore guaranteeing informed consent was gained before workshop delivery.

Rapid Evidence Assessment

The rapid evidence assessment for the workshops was developed by Mobilise Public Ltd to connect young people to the existing academic research. This resource was designed to give young people the information and knowledge to better understand and analyse their own personal experiences, draw parallels and contrasts with experiences of young people in other regions and countries, and become equipped to articulate their recommendations within the wider context of what we already know about tackling serious violence. We felt this was vital to empower young people by addressing the 'you don't know what you don't know' risk.

Rapid evidence assessments provide a more structured and rigorous search and quality assessment of the evidence than a literature review but are not as exhaustive as a systematic review. They can be used to gain an overview of the density and quality of evidence on a particular issue, and in this instance the method was utilised to quickly assess the evidence available on serious violence against young people. A two-stage process was devised to initially score against relevance, rigour, credibility, innovation and 'youth voice' (whether young people were involved in either the design of the research or consulted at any point, which was found to be lacking across the majority); then summarising those that scored highly – examining methods, findings, what 'worked' and the key themes.

In total, 46 research reports were reviewed using this method, focusing primarily on the evidence gathered for the cross-parliamentary Serious Violence Commission, established in response to the growing concerns of serious violence against young people. From this, the evidence was summarised into a report that balanced the need

to present the findings of the research in a form that is quick and accessible for young people to read, with a requirement to demonstrate that the research had been conducted in a robust and reliable manner, whilst ensuring it was easy for young people to understand. The content from the report was then used to develop a set of resources to use in workshop delivery.

Peer-to-peer active listening

The principle of peer-to-peer active listening was embedded throughout the pilot. The workshops were delivered by youth-led charity My Life My Say and co-facilitated by 'young researchers' – young people who were trained in the methodology before the workshop took place in order to help facilitate discussions among their peers.

The workshops adopted the Democracy Café concept that is a reinvigoration of the 17th Century coffeehouse tradition, where members of society would gather to discuss local issues. These Cafés have proved effective at bringing together diverse, disengaged and underrepresented members of the local community, who often do not interact with one another, to discuss the most pressing issues of the day and possible solutions. Over the past few years My Life My Say has worked closely with the London School of Economics to develop a research methodology that could be embedded into the Café format to ensure that they are more than just a 'talking-shop' and that they can be used to gather invaluable insight to help support decision-making and/or policy. The Café concept can be amended according to the research questions to robustly gather data that is consistent across locations and groups, but within an inclusive, engaging safe-space whereby attendees feel valued and empowered.

The consortium thus developed a workshop which allowed participants to think causally about serious violence in their local areas, and to consider different solutions to the issue. The workshops were designed to capture data on:

a. **Causes of serious violence**

b. **Mapping complexity of violence**

c. **Effective interventions**

Causal loop mapping

Two of the workshops took a wider systems view of the issue, with the Dartington Service Design Lab facilitating with young people a 'causal loop mapping' methodology. Causal loop diagrams (CLDs) are used to develop a causal hypothesis that explains the dynamic behaviour of the system. This can be developed using group model building which allows many people to offer their ideas, based on personal experience, of the causes and consequences of the issue in question. This is then synthesised and refined to bring together a series of hypotheses. Hypotheses are refined using further comments from participants and the literature.

Prior research using CLDs to explore violence have focused on developing CLDs from previous literature; eliciting causes and effects from within this. An exception is work undertaken by collaborators of the Dartington Service Design Lab - the Social Systems Design Lab in St Louis, Missouri. Their work directly explored with young people their experiences of gun crime to develop a series of CLDs, and areas for intervention and innovation. Using CLDs to explore violence appears to be a novel approach within the UK,

with previous literature stemming from other countries. However, the approach is flexible and well placed to collate many people's views as well as capture individual ideas.

In workshops in Wolverhampton and Bristol, young people were asked to write factors that they believe are drivers or outcomes of serious violence in their local area. They wrote the factors around a circle and drew arrows to indicate interrelationships between factors (Figure 1). The resulting 'connection circles' are the first step in developing a causal loop diagram (CLD). Collation of patterns and connections from these connection circles were used to develop a CLD for each site (see insight section).
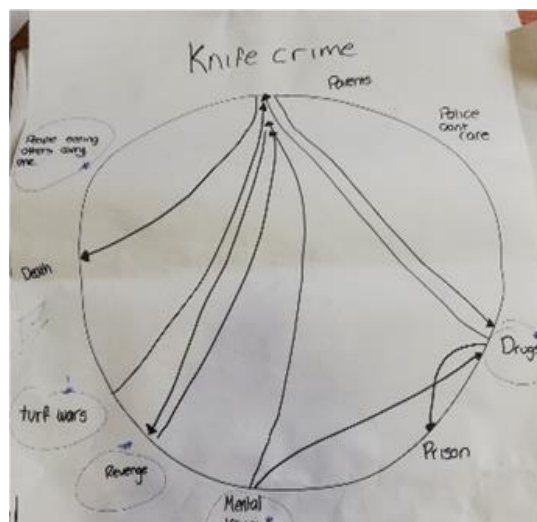

Figure 1: Connection circle drawn by young people in Wolverhampton

See Appendix 2 for more information about causal loop mapping.

Pilot insights into the contributing factors to serious violence

Overview

This section sets out the pilot's insights into contributing factors to serious violence, based on the lived experience of the young people we spoke to. Through the course of our research we:

a. Uncovered the most common contributing factors to violence identified by young people
b. Mapped the inter-relationships between individual causes and consequences of serious violence reported by young people

Contributing factors to violence identified by the young people

Young people in the pilot were asked to discuss their personal experiences of the contributing factors to serious violence in their local area. These causes were collected during the workshops and coded using the categories of evidence-based risk factors in the Home Office Serious Violence Strategy. Causes were then counted for the frequency they were mentioned.

Contributing factors identified by young people mapped against Home Office risk factors.

Category	Factor	Frequency
Individual	Abuse / Neglect	0
	Low self-control	0
	Aggression	2
	Low intelligence	0
	Substance use	10
	Motivation for crime	0
	ASB	0
	Criminal background	0
	Low self esteem	1
	Gang membership	6
	Head injury	0
Family	Family socioeconomic status	13
	Poor parenting	4
	Poor supervision	3
	Parent criminality	2
School	Low school performance	0
	Bullying of others	1
	Low school attendance	1
Community	Urban areas	0
	High crime areas	5
	Local deprivation	3
Peer Group	Influence of friends	9

The most common causes identified through young people's own experience that directly matched the Home Office evidence-base were family socioeconomic status, influence of friends, and substance use. For young people, family socioeconomic status was heavily about poverty and the inability to buy things you wanted and needed in life, which in some cases increased the likelihood of crime e.g. stealing bikes and mobile phones from other young people. Substance use was often not just about personal drug use but also the circulation of drugs through buying and selling, which could lead to conflict. Influence of friends was around peer pressure, fitting in, and copying older young people in the area.

There were three contributing factors identified by young people in the pilot that perhaps went wider than the Home Office categories or at least did not use the same language (and are therefore not included in the table above). These were social division (mentioned 22 times), fear of violence (mentioned nine times), and online conflict escalation (mentioned 10 times). For young people social division spanned a range of issues

and crucially was wider than simply gangs. It included divisions between social classes, geographical areas, and attitudes of young people to people of different cultures, and those with differing sexual orientation to themselves. Fear of violence was the cyclical effect of tensions and proximity to violent incidents. If others were carrying weapons or threatening to attack you, then young people felt no choice but to carry their own weapons and/or protect and defend themselves. This is linked to online conflict escalation, which is about the role of social media – including anonymous apps – to both begin and escalate conflict. Online apps allow others to insult individuals, but also for others to share widely who's insulted who and arrange or call out each other to violent means of resolution.

The table below shows how young people in the pilot responded when asked to consider all the contributing factors to violence highlighted in the research and/or through their own experience, and identify the top five most significant contributors to violence in their local area.

	Wolverhampton	Bristol	East London	Middlesbrough	Newcastle
Top Five Local Contributing Factors	Substance use	Nothing else to do	Nothing else to do	Nothing else to do	Online escalation
	Social division	Social division	Social division	Substance use	Social division
	Family economic status	Family economic status	Social division	Family economic status	Family economic status
	Influence of friends	Poor local schools	Fear of violence	Cuts in services	Social division
	Gang membership	Poor supervision	Social division	Influence of friends	Gang membership

This mapping exercise demonstrates the ability of this methodology to potentially identify contrasts and similarities across different regions. In this small sample pilot study, although there was not one category that ran across all six locations, there was some commonality in the top categories of contributors to violence from young people's perspectives.

A central observation we made was that the Home Office report (and much of the wider evidence base) is focused on the characteristics of young people who become perpetrators of serious violence, whilst young people themselves tend to focus on the macro factors acting on them and their peers which they believe increase the likelihood of being drawn into serious violence. Young people consistently talked about the negative forces impacting them and their families over a sustained period, and the ramifications of this in terms of becoming exposed to serious violence.

Mapping the complexity of serious violence against young people

In order to understand the interrelationships between individual contributing factors and the consequences of serious violence reported by young people in the pilot, we carried out a more in-depth analysis in two locations; Wolverhampton and Bristol. The interconnectedness of these are illustrated by the mostly reinforcing feedback loops in Figure 5 (Wolverhampton) and Figure 6 (Bristol). These are explored and broken down into key themes in the following section.

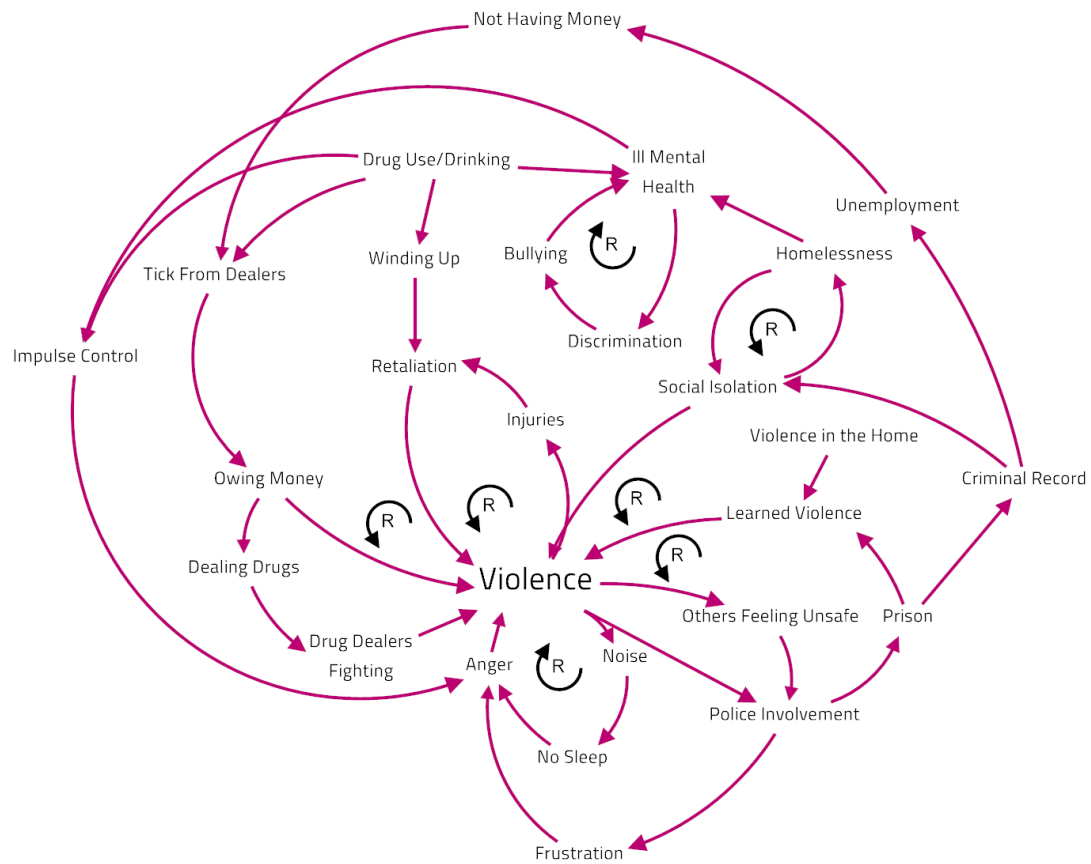Figure 5: Place-based composite CLD for Wolverhampton

Figure 6: Place-based composite CLD for Bristol

Key drivers and outcomes of serious violence against young people

Six themes emerged from the connection circles drawn by young people in the pilot across both local areas:

1. Gang formation and conflict
2. Drugs
3. Poor mental health of young people
4. Interpersonal violence
5. Financial troubles
6. Perceptions and effects of the criminal justice system

Gang formation and conflict

In Wolverhampton, gangs and 'postcode' or territorial wars were listed by most young people as being among the strongest influences of knife crime. Gang formation in particular was described as the result of younger people banding together out of fear of violence and intimidation from gangs of older people. A natural reinforcing feedback loop emerges as younger people form gangs as a solution to pre-existing gang violence, and inadvertently perpetuate the problem of gang violence (Figure 7). The contributing role of gang warfare to serious violence is consistent with evidence from previous studies.

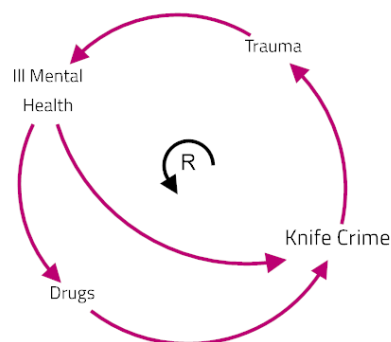Figure 7: The reinforcing formation of gangs

Figure 8: Drugs and mental health loop from Wolverhampton

Drugs

Young people in both Bristol and Wolverhampton frequently mentioned drugs, including dealing, both as a driver and an outcome of knife crime, suggesting that drug use can be a way of coping with the stress of knife crime or result from trauma and poor mental health. This fuels violence and knife crime as people under the influence are less likely to be in control of their emotions and are more likely to respond violently to tense situations. Similar findings have been reported by previous studies.

Poor mental health

In Wolverhampton one group of young people highlighted the link between knife crime and poor mental health, a relationship supported by evidence from other studies. The group described how knife crime can be traumatising, not just to those who perpetrate or are victim in an instance, but others around them. This worsens their mental health, which itself was identified as a cause of knife crime. There was also another causal pathway involving drugs, identified above.

Interpersonal conflicts

Young people described interpersonal conflicts as general or everyday disagreements that can escalate to violence if either party has a dangerous weapon. They distinguished this from other kinds of conflicts triggered by the need for revenge or retaliation to right a wrong done to themselves, their friends or family.

One group also explained that family could be targeted, and that this could motivate pre-emptive violence to protect those around you meaning that, like with carrying, violent acts can pre-empt anticipated violence. Figure 9 shows two cycles of violence reinforcing loops, one from each local area. Previous studies show that interpersonal violence can result from various perceived risks.

Financial troubles

In Bristol, where probing questions were used to further unpack the relationships, a potential interrelationship between violence, drug abuse and un-met financial needs also emerged. One young person suggested that people who abuse drugs often end up in financial troubles, leading them to "tick" from dealers – take drugs from dealers with a promise to pay later.

Their subsequent inability to pay forces them into dealing drugs themselves to work off their debt. Groups at Wolverhampton identified owing money as an independent contributor to knife crime unrelated to drug abuse or drug dealing. However, there was less opportunity in this setting to explore this potential relationship in detail.

Though there wasn't opportunity to explore the factors that led to people getting into debt, it is possible that they are similar to the findings from Bristol, which would "close this loop" and articulate another system driver of the trend. Other links between financial problems and violence as a result of unemployment or unstable employment are supported by previous studies.
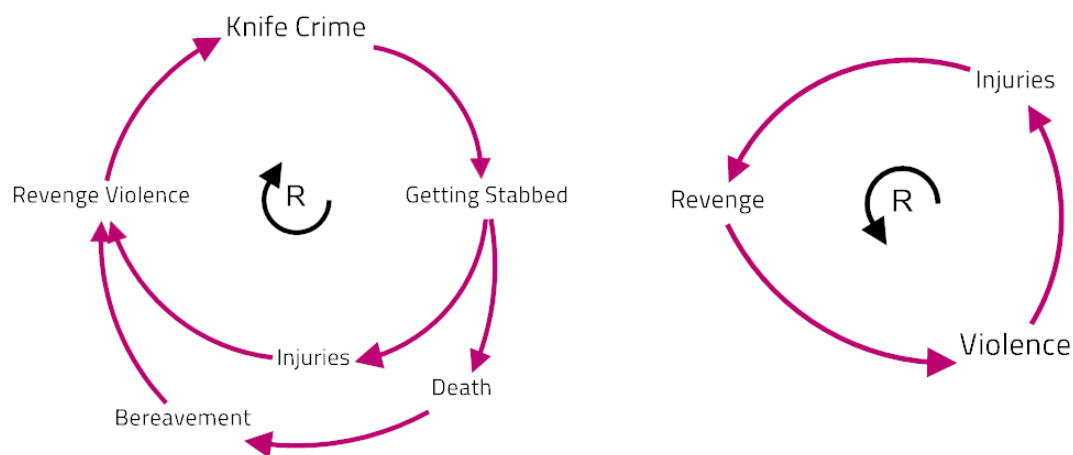
Figure 9: Cycle of violence loops from Wolverhampton and Bristol

Perceptions and effects of the criminal justice system

The criminal justice system was highlighted in both Wolverhampton and Bristol with young people universally assuming the perspective of someone arrested and prosecuted, and subsequently describing this in only negative terms (as opposed to police looking to protect people and enhance safety within the community); a view supported by evidence. In both locations, they mentioned the isolation that would result from having a criminal record and the effect this would have on their reputation – there is a dearth of evidence about this relationship. In Wolverhampton, this was captured simply in "*ruined lives*" and at Bristol, captured in "*no-one wants to be with you*". Whilst only touched upon in the workshops, this important theme of isolation, related to mental health, fear and knife-carrying, is worthy of further exploration.

Loops emerged in both workshops, though they took different forms. In Wolverhampton, while police involvement reportedly had several consequences, only that of being 'tagged' or required to wear an ankle monitor was voiced.

Being monitored was suggested as a precursor to paranoia and worsening mental health, contributing to more knife crime. This proposed feedback loop differed from the perspectives on the criminal justice system that emerged from Bristol. There, one young person described prisons as a place where young people can potentially come to view violence as a norm – 'learned violence' (Figure 10). This perspective concurs with published evidence regarding permissive attitudes to violence and participating in serious violence.

Another consequence of a criminal record that was highlighted in Bristol was the potential impact on future employment and other institutional barriers. In Wolverhampton it was mentioned as a driver of poverty. Poverty has been cited as a cause of violence in previous studies. In the wider diagram, this is bound in violence perpetuated by drug dealers and motivated by rivalry and theft.
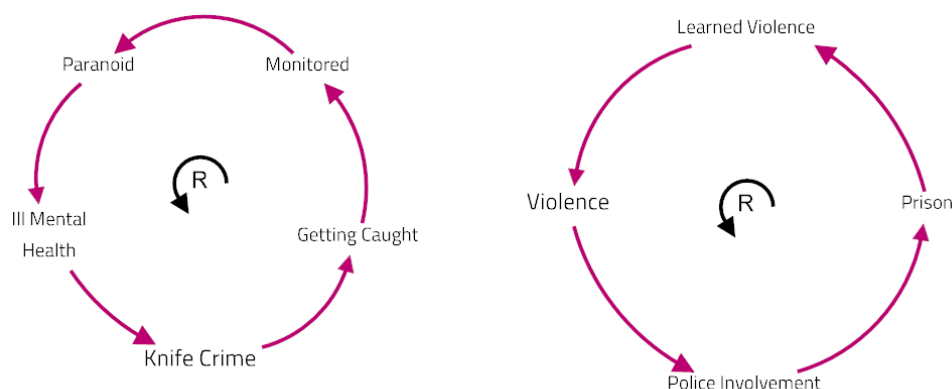

Figure 10: Reinforcing loops with the criminal justice system in Wolverhampton (left) and Bristol (right)

Archetypes

In the study of system dynamics, a number of archetypes have been identified as common across a range of systems. The data from the connection circles and the discussion with young people can be interpreted through this lens.
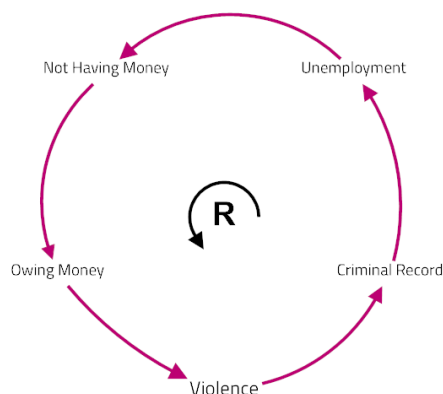

Figure 11: Unemployment and criminality loop from Bristol.

'Escalation' Archetype

One archetype is 'escalation'. This is the archetype of arms races, where individuals aim to protect themselves. This creates a deficit between others and them, represented by the fractional variable "Arming of 'A' Relative to Others". When this is low, 'A' perceives others as a greater threat and arms themselves. This balances the relative arming but means that others are motivated to carry more knives to tip the balance in their favour (see Figure 12). Each individual ends up balancing their concern – that they will face someone better armed than them – but at the cost to the community.
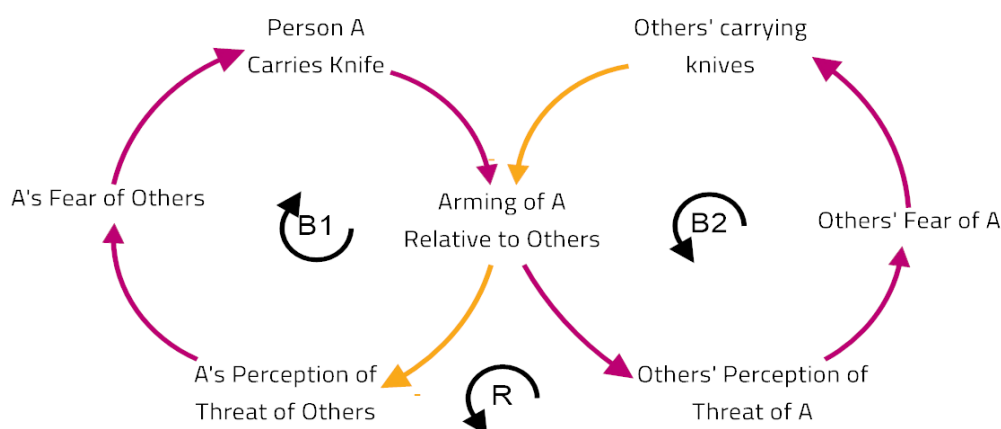

Figure 12: Escalation of knife carrying

'Fixes that fail' archetype

The young people also described features of the 'fixes that fail' archetype. This is when the solutions to a problem are substituted for alleviation of a symptom which perpetuates the original problem. In Wolverhampton the young people described the drive for younger people to join gangs to protect themselves from others in older gangs. While this alleviates their fear, they become a part of the problem as they are now intimidating others with their gang (see Figure 13). A similar process is in play when the symptom of fear – this time of others carrying a knife – means that young people themselves carry knives.
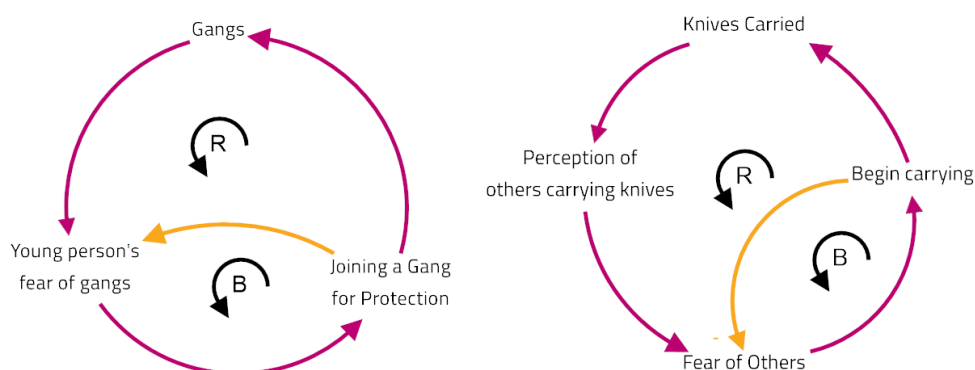

Figure 13: Fixing the fear - unintended consequences of alleviating fear

Commentary on the findings

There is always a gap between an individual's lived experience and their ability to understand wider systemic issues. For example, we would not expect a victim of domestic violence to necessarily understand the shared contributing factors that many abusers may have experienced. They may have views on this, but these are likely to be anecdotal rather than evidence based. This is the issue we run into when we ask young people questions around violence - their answers will naturally be based on what they know and what they perceive. We therefore need to be careful what conclusions we draw from the outcomes of the pilot workshops - and ensure that we read the findings correctly.

For example, we can see from the findings from the pilot workshops that young people have only identified something that could be categorised as local deprivation as being a contributing factor in their area on three occasions. This could be read as indicating that they do not believe this contributes to violence. However, many more of them have gone on to identify high unemployment, social division, nothing for young people to do and cuts to local services as being significant contributing factors to youth violence. This indicates that the term local deprivation may not resonate with them, not that they do not experience it.

Equally, young people appear to only identify poor parenting on four occasions, whilst none identified abuse/neglect, low self-control, low intelligence, motivation for crime, anti-social behaviour, criminal background or head injury as individual contributing factors when asked from their own experience what are the contributing factors to youth violence in their local area. Tellingly in East London, feedback was captured that, *"We did not talk about family as when it did come up the reactions suggested this was too much of a sensitive topic to discuss"*. This

serves well in showing that it is not always easy for people to discuss issues that are painful. The few instances of people identifying these individual contributing factors maybe because they are painful to discuss, or because it is hard to identify the lack of something if you have not experienced it positively. It could also be because young people perceive the identification of individual factors as contributors to violence as somehow blaming young people themselves for the rise in youth violence. This is somewhat paradoxical as individual contributing factors are mostly a product of the family, school and community influences the individual has experienced.

What is useful for us to note from the young people's discussion is that one of the top contributing factors that they identified was what they term 'nothing else for young people to do'. From a research or policy perspective, we would see this as a *symptom* of factors such as local deprivation – i.e. this is what young people are experiencing as a result of under-investment in their local areas rather than it being in itself a causal factor. This therefore supports the evidence base, rather than contradicting it. On reviewing the raw data, we note that social division was used to capture attitudes towards others including people from different post codes, with different sexual identities, or from different nationalities/ethnicities. Again, social division is likely to be exacerbated by other factors such as local deprivation, differences in housing, education and local services rather than itself being a causal factor.

These nuances of interlinked contributing factors are aptly described by a participant:

"There's literally nothing for young people to do. Or if there is, there's a cost. When people aren't as well off, they're not going to send their kids to do that [activity] every week when

they can just say 'go play out on the estate'. So, then it's like the kids are gonna get bored and they're gonna be like, 'Oh, this is sh*t' and then there's no police about so then it's like what else can we do? And the first thing is obviously do stuff that's wrong because naturally when someone says don't do that, you do, don't you?"

More time to explore themes in additional regions, with wider representation from the local community in each one, would likely generate further insights, exploring in more detail the local contextual influences in these communities. The insights and perspectives of young people are enlightening. It could also add value to explore the perspectives of others in the area – that of adults in the community, local service providers and public system agencies (such as youth workers, safeguarding teams, police) and local policy makers. This would provide a wider-angle view on the issues.

Pilot insights into interventions that are evidenced to work

Overview

This section sets out the insights gathered from the pilot into potential solutions to serious violence based on the lived experience of the young people we spoke to.

a. What works according to existing research? A Rapid Evidence Assessment by Mobilise Public Ltd
b. Young people's reflections on evidence-based interventions

What works according to existing research?

To inform this area of work, Mobilise Public Ltd carried out a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and produced a summary of evidence-based interventions (this can be read in full in the separate report '*Serious Youth Violence – Lessons from the Research*').

The contributing factors to serious violence against young people are complex and there are no easy solutions or quick ways to reduce it. The Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) identified three main approaches to reducing violence, which we outlined in straight forward terms to the young people participating in our workshops.

- **Stop it before it happens,** examples of this are giving support to families and very young children or helping people who are at high risk.

- **Support people** to move away from violence such as outreach, youth workers or providing alternative opportunities, such as after-school activities, counselling and training and employment.

- **Suppression,** which is law enforcement and other ways that react to violence to protect the public.

Most interventions fit into one of these categories and research suggests that a successful place-based response needs all three to work. We have chosen to focus our work on the first two approaches, as these are areas where young

people and the youth sector can have the greatest influence. We have not looked in this report at approaches to suppression and law enforcement (although the prior causal loop mapping with young people did suggest perceptions in this regard may be an area worthy of further exploration).

The research exercise that was conducted to support these workshops was specifically based around identifying what we already know about serious youth violence: the contributing factors that make it more likely to occur and what works to tackle it. Mobilise Public Ltd.'s *Serious Youth Violence – Lessons from the Research* report condenses multiple other reports that grapple with this question of what works and is careful in only highlighting approaches where there is evidence to suggest they work.

In summary, the rapid assessment evaluation uncovered a range of interventions that have been shown to work. These include family-focussed programmes where parents were able to develop positive parenting skills (17); interventions focused on building character-based skills and non-violent norms (4); and where government engages with communities in a way that recognises and supports local leaders, building on what works at a local level instead of creating new initiatives run by 'outsiders' (21). Other programmes such as mentoring, and community engagement look promising, but there is not enough evidence to show they work. Counselling was found to be

variable, with the least effective counselling programmes being those in which a peer (another young person) took the lead. One-off sessions of less than an hour were also ineffective, and computer-based programmes and those that did not have much adult input were unsuccessful (17). Some people believe in order to progress, young people need to learn discipline. But studies show interventions like military style boot-camps, also have no positive impact and can even be a negative influence (17).

The table below provides a general overview of some of the ways countries and cities have tried to reduce violence that have had an impact. This summary of the data was shared with young people participating in workshops:

Summary of evidenced based interventions

STOP IT BEFORE IT HAPPENS	SUPPORT PEOPLE TO MOVE AWAY
Support for parents and families: This includes interventions that work to strengthen family ties and improve home life for young children. It can involve home visiting, parenting classes and family therapy.	Getting young people involved in other activities: Engaging young people in activities such as sport or art can be a way of taking them away from violence. Studies show there may be some evidence to suggest this approach works, but more research needs to be done.
Strengthen young people's skills: Interventions that focus on building interpersonal, emotional and behavioural skills can help reduce violence. This can help increase self-awareness, ability to avoid risky behaviours and capacity to resolve conflict without violence.	Mentoring/positive adult relationships: Mentoring has become popular in the UK as a way of tackling violence. However, the effectiveness of mentoring depends on the quality of the scheme. It is important that the relationship is set up right and the right person is doing the mentoring.
Provide high quality early years education: This can make it more likely that children will experience stable, nurturing relationships, academic success and lower rates of behaviour problems, aggression and crime.	Communities taking action: 'Communities' can mean towns or areas, neighbourhoods or even 'school communities'. This is when a whole community decides to take action to tackle its own problems together.

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Young people's reflections on evidence-based interventions

Once young people had completed the first half of the workshop, which focused on mapping the causes of serious violence, they were introduced to the summary of evidence-based interventions developed by Mobilise Public Ltd (see preceding table). UK Youth and My Life My Say then asked young people to share their reflections on the evidence-based interventions through the lens of their personal lived experience.

Limitations of this approach

It is important to note that for practical reasons young people were only provided with this high-level summary and were not expected to review the full report which provides more information about each of the evidence based interventions. As a result, the responses we have gathered from young people about whether they have participated in one of these interventions, and whether they would like to see more or less of such interventions in their local community is highly subjective. Each young person may have interpreted what was involved in each intervention slightly differently, and therefore not all young people calling for more support for parents and families (for example) will have the exact same intervention in mind.

However, considering these limitations, the reflections gathered from young people still provide a highly valuable perspective. Whilst an intervention might be evidenced to work in one city or country, that does not necessarily mean that it will be effective in a different geographical location or context. The findings below begin to unpick where young people with lived experience of serious violence in different areas of the UK report effective interventions are in place or lacking, and where they would like to see more of less of them. Far more work needs to be done to fully understand and correctly interpret these emerging themes, but we hope to provide a helpful starting point on that journey.

What we found

There was a strong sense among young people that high quality early years education was an effective intervention, suggesting that in this area their personal experience mirrors the evidence. In contrast, support for parents and families was thought to be ineffective by 58% of young people. This may be because they have experienced poor quality support themselves that is very different to the family support interventions that are evidenced to work, or it may be that the family support interventions evidenced to work elsewhere would not be effective in this local context. It would be interesting to explore this further in future work.

There was strong support for two of the intervention types that move young people away from violence, with half of the workshop participants reflecting that getting young people involved in other activities and mentoring/positive adult relationships were effective approaches.

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A summary of findings is set out in the next table.

The percentage of young people reporting that evidence based interventions are available and effective in their area.

Evidence-based interventions	Available	Effective	Unsure	Ineffective
Stop it before it happens				
Support for parents and families	46%	17%	25%	58%
Strengthening young people's skills	46%	38%	23%	38%
Providing high quality early years education	31%	75%	8%	17%
Support people to move away (from violence)				
Getting young people involved in other activities	31%	50%	25%	25%
Mentoring/positive adult relationships	54%	50%	25%	25%
Communities taking action	8%	27%	55%	18%

Support for parents and families

Just under half of young people (46%) reported that support for parents and families was available in their area. However, most young people (58%) felt it was ineffective as a solution to serious violence.

It is worth noting that young people often interpreted support for parents and families to mean social services and other forms of government support, suggesting that few had lived experience of targeted, evidence-based interventions on which to base their judgement. Young people reported that their experience of

social services was that it was over-stretched and therefore unable to help.

This suggests that whilst there are quite a lot of forms of support for parents and carers in the six areas where we held workshops, few are evidence based. As a result, young people have become sceptical about their effectiveness and may be reluctant to engage with this kind of intervention. There is a risk that new evidence-based initiatives launching in this area could struggle to get buy-in from young people.

Strengthening young people's skills

This type of intervention includes interpersonal, emotional and behavioural skills to increase self-awareness, ability to avoid risky behaviours, and resolve conflict without violence.

46% of young people reported having access to opportunities to strengthen their skills in this way. 38% believed this to be an effective approach, whilst the same number thought it was ineffective.

We observed that young people had experienced a wide range of skills development programmes, often of varying quality. This has led to mixed experiences among programme participants and subsequently wide-ranging perceptions of the effectiveness of skills development programmes. Most talked about employability or life skills (i.e. interpersonal and emotional skills), suggesting they had less experience of programmes designed to help avoid risky behaviour or conflict.

Every group emphasised the lack of employment opportunities available for them, particularly in careers they would enjoy, and a sense that there were few legitimate ways for them to progress. A group of boys at Pembury youth club in Hackney said, *"they just want to get us a job, any job, not one we will enjoy or that can be a career"*.

It would be interesting to understand more about the experiences of those young people who report that skills development is an effective intervention, compared with those who don't. This would help to identify the components of a successful skills development programme.

Providing high quality early years education

Many of the young people participating in workshops ignored the early years focus of this intervention type and instead chose to view it as simply 'education'. They emphasised the importance of school and getting a good quality education, called for teaching in schools around issues of conflict and violence, and sought support during transitions between primary and secondary school and from school to training or work.

We observed that for some young people school was seen as being the primarily mechanism for early intervention because it was all they knew. However, others recognised that to address the issue of violence among young people, interventions had to begin early and not after problems had already begun and they believed school was the best place to do that. An example from one young person was, *"We need to be shown videos about positive relationships when you still have an open mind and your 'normal' mind has not been set yet."*

Young people attending pupil referral units and other alternative provision frequently reported a lack of emotional support in mainstream schools as the primary driver for exclusions. One girl from a Pupil Referral Unit in the West Midlands had this to say about the response of mainstream schools to troubled children, *"They just take all the bad kids and put them together and then it gets even worse"*. Young people expressed a preference for being somewhere with a high staff to student ratio where *"there are more teachers, so they get to know you better, they can tell when somethings up and support you better than in mainstream"*. Forming a positive relationship with an adult who is interested in the welfare of the young person, not just their academic performance, appears to be key.

75% of young people believe high quality education is an effective intervention to reduce serious violence. However, only a third of young people thought high quality education was available in their area, which raises some troubling questions about their lived experiences in school.

Getting young people involved in other activities

Involving young people in positive activities was generally regarded as an effective way to address serious violence (50% said it would be effective), but just 31% of young people reported such activities being available in their area. This maps clearly onto young people regularly saying that one of the key factors to serious violence was there being nothing positive and affordable in local areas to get involved in and spend time doing. Comments from participants included, "*There's nothing for young people because of all the cuts in services*", "*cost and distance are a barrier*", "*fitness and exercise spaces are expensive*" and "*even if there are facilities, they are not safe to hang around in*".

Mentoring and positive adult relationships

Mentoring and positive adult relationships were one of the interventions perceived to be available most often (just over half, 54%), and were generally seen to be an effective intervention for tackling serious violence (50% said it would be effective). Of those who didn't think it would be effective or were unsure, this was because young people thought that mentoring in particular is not always successful, because it depended on who it was with, how long it was for and what it was about. Young people commented on the importance of the mentor 'caring' about them and for the support to be long term for this intervention to be effective. As one young person said, "*For some mentors, it's just a job. For the relationship to really matter it has to go beyond that.*" Other young people identified local 'unofficial' role models who understand their experiences and will take the extra time with them to be more important.

Communities taking action

Finally, young people responded to the communities taking action intervention – presented as a whole community deciding to take action to tackle its own problems together - mostly with a lack of understanding of what this looked like in practice as a solution to serious violence. Only 8% had any experience of seeing or being involved in community-led solutions. This is likely to be a significant contributing factor to only 27% citing it as effective, whilst the majority (55%) were unsure whether it would be effective or not.

Despite national efforts to engage more people in volunteering and social action, young people who are directly affected by serious violence are unlikely to have experienced the benefits of being part of a network of local community volunteers.

The interventions young people would like to see in their local area

We mapped young people's perspectives on whether the evidence-based intervention types explored above would be appropriate in their local area. The following table shows the pattern of the results, and which interventions were identified most commonly across areas.

Evidence-based interventions	Wolver-hampton	Bristol	East London	Middles-brough	North London	Newcastle
Support for parents and families	Yes	Yes				
Strengthening young people's skills					Yes	Yes
Providing high quality early intervention	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes
Getting young people involved in other activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Mentoring/positive adult relationships	Yes				Yes	
Communities taking action		Yes				

This mapping exercise demonstrates the ability of this methodology to help identify contrasts and similarities across different regions. Although this pilot evidence is from a small sample, it suggests that perhaps evidence-based interventions could be matched to specific local contexts to maximise the chance of success and ensure they are well received by young people.

Alternative interventions that young people suggested

Young people in the pilot were also asked for their own intervention suggestions that they didn't feel they saw in the evidence-based intervention categories presented.

The table below shows the most common interventions classified into a series of types, mapped against the regions the suggested intervention types came from.

Alternative interventions	Wolver-hampton	Bristol	East London	Middles-brough	North London	Newcastle
Improved policing services	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Improved economic opportunities	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community cohesion	Yes	Yes			Yes	
Legalised drug policy		Yes		Yes		
Improved schools and education		Yes	Yes			
Weapon amnesty incentives					Yes	

There was a strong desire among young people in five of the six regions for improved police services. The only interactions most young people in the pilot reported having with police were negative, based on inaccurate stereotypes, and damaging to relationships. This was exemplified by this comment from one young person, "*No more police involvement, they make everything worse*".

Young people wanted to see an end to police tactics perceived to be aimed at intimidating young people away from violence, such as driving round particular areas, and a move towards positive solutions such as better training for police on how to engage young people positively rather than aggressively, and better representation among police of people from the areas these young people are from.

There was also appetite in five out of six areas for improved economic opportunities to address poverty and poor economic prospects as a cause of violence and crime. Young people cited the need for national policies like raising the minimum wage and lowering the legal working age, as well as more tailored measures like ESOL classes for parents with English as a second language to help improve the family economic situation.

Importantly, when talking about employment young people were clear that it wasn't just a case of getting any job, but instead being helped to get jobs they wanted to do and that had good prospects. Few saw school as a useful pathway into employment. For example, one young person's comment on the opportunities offered through school was:

"*Work experience opportunities are not available for everyone, just the good students get picked. They are not geared to what young people actually like and want to do but focus on just getting any job. They do not raise aspirations or provide support for young people to see how they can end up in a better position.*"

Conclusions from the pilot

Through this youth led consultation we have been able to gain a better understanding of young people's views on the causes and solutions to serious violence nationally and within local communities. It is helpful and informative to consider these views alongside the academic evidence of 'what works' to ensure young peoples' lived experience is not overlooked. This pilot has given us confidence that there is value in bringing these two perspectives together to inform investment decisions and delivery approaches to tackling serious violence against young people.

Conclusion on the approach

Involving young people throughout the work has deepened our understanding of the issues. By engaging young people with lived experience of, or proximity to, serious youth violence throughout the approach, we have gained insights that would not have been accessible through solely desk-based research or consultation with other stakeholders. The important of youth involvement and influence from programme inception, through design and rollout, to delivery, impact and evaluation has been critical to the success of this work.

While this work focused on the issue of serious youth violence, the approach we took to engage young people in meaningful ways across the work is one that would likely provide similarly valuable insights to other issues. This approach could serve as a framework for how to embed the voice of young people at every stage of other programmes.

Conclusions on the issue of serious youth violence

A range of contributing factors to serious violence emerged across the six workshops we ran. These included some common themes across England, and others that are unique to certain localities. Many are interconnected and some are described using different language by young people, researchers and policy makers.

The factors cited most often by young people were:

1. **Social divisions, including stereotypes of young people (e.g. racial profiling)**
2. **Financial troubles / family socio economic status**
3. **Online conflict / Influence of friends**
4. **Drugs/substance misuse**
5. **Gang formation and conflict, including postcode status**
   Other key factors cited included:
   * **Poor mental health of young people**
   * **Interpersonal violence (and fear of violence)**
   * **Perceptions and effects of the criminal justice system**

What is useful for us to note is that the top contributing factors identified by young people are typically *symptoms* of factors such as local deprivation i.e. this is what young people are experiencing as a result of under-investment in their local areas rather than it being in itself a causal factor. This therefore supports the evidence base, rather than contradicting it.

The most commonly cited factor - social division - was used by young people to encompass attitudes towards people from different post codes, with different sexual identities, or from different nationalities/ethnicities. Again, social division is likely to be exacerbated by other factors such as local deprivation, differences in housing, education and local services rather than itself being a causal factor.

In addition to the individual factors cited above, young people identified the escalation risk of arms races, where individuals aim to protect themselves by carrying a knife for the first time or carrying an increasingly bigger knife. They also highlighted the drive for younger people to join gangs to protect themselves from others in older gangs. While this alleviates their fear, they become a part of the problem as they are now intimidating others with their gang – this is a fix that fails to de-escalate the issue and instead exacerbates it.

We observed a disconnect between how the research and young people talk about the issues surrounding violence; the terminology used in the literature does not match the language used by young people. Despite testing the resources with young people before delivery of the pilot, many of the participants were confused by the research presented to them. Any future workshops would need to ensure the research included relevant examples and language that young people fully understood in order to provide accurate commentary on. Equally, it is important to be aware of these differences in language when gathering feedback from young people. For example, young people typically talked about 'gangs' and 'postcodes' as two separate issues, whilst research reports frequently conflate the two.

Young people found it hard to think of and develop their own interventions in any detail. Many of the young people had never been asked about their own solutions to serious violence before, and therefore had less thought-through

ideas ready to contribute. They also lacked experience of using a logical framework approach to come up with a solution for a problem. Future work with young people to develop beneficiary-centred solutions should consider this and potentially incorporate training and support around how to develop solutions before moving into solution generation.

We were able to begin to understand which interventions young people believe work, but more investigation needs to be done in this area to produce conclusive recommendations for investment.

The interventions supported by young people were:

1. High quality education (e.g. focus on personalised pastoral care, support to access meaningful careers)
2. Getting young people involved in other activities
3. Positive adult role models

Young people were divided on the value of interventions that strengthen young people's skills. There was little appetite for support for parents and families, and very low experience levels of communities taking action.

The young people participating were a diverse group – in terms of ages and ethnicity – with a strong skew towards young people with lived experience of serious violence. The group selected were not intended to be fully representative of the wider community, as this work was designed as a pilot to test this approach to youth leadership and advocacy in the prevention of serious violence. As such, this cohort would have faced multiple barriers and possibly have negative experiences and views of statutory services and government initiatives, giving a potentially biased perception of any authority-led intervention aimed to help them. It is perhaps therefore unreasonable to ask young people to talk about what a 'good' intervention

looks like if they have not experienced it, and as such highlights a potential flaw in the methodology.

Importantly, our work highlighted how rarely young people with lived experience are actively engaged in understanding and tackling serious violence. This was a surprise, given previous feedback that some groups of young people (particularly in London) have been consulted multiple times and have reported suffering 'fatigue' from too much youth engagement coupled with too little practical follow up action to resolve the issues highlighted. That was not the case with the young people we engaged.

Future work should involve a wider range of stakeholders who work closely with young people and can provide valuable insights into tackling serious violence. Youth and community workers typically understand the local landscape of public and voluntary sector agencies, the relationships between them, and funding available. The youth workers we engaged really valued being involved in the initiative, with one saying:

"*The work you have been doing by giving a voice to these young people across the country will be infinitely valuable*".

There was a sense among the youth workers who contributed to this pilot that the spread and level

of violence, along with the mechanisms behind the violence, have been changing rapidly over the last 5 years, particularly with reference to online, social media and county lines. However, some reported feeling that we have reached a plateau which provides a window of opportunity to catch up with these developments through training and peer support and ensure interventions being delivered locally are up to date, evidence informed and relevant. Understanding the mechanisms and risk factors behind the violence can help with identifying those at risk and support workers to signpost or refer onwards to give the holistic support that is so often needed by young people with complex and chaotic lives.

Youth-led research can uncover innovative ways of working. In Hackney some of the boys we consulted suggested free gym membership as a simple tool to provide an alternative activity to divert them away from violence. This kind of initiative is grounded in emerging evidence that 'getting young people involved in other activities' works. It would be interesting to test and evaluate this approach to contribute to the evidence base. In addition, it could be worth testing this in conjunction with another approach such as 'strengthening young peoples' skills' which was less enthusiastically championed by young people but has a strong evidence base behind it.

Learning and next steps

These insights were generated through six regional workshops with young people in youth club settings. Due to locations, timing and numbers of young people attending, the structures of the workshops differed in each of the six locations. For example, in Wolverhampton, groups of six to eight young people worked together to discuss and consolidate their perspectives into connection circles. In Bristol, a less formal structure had to be used, which included mostly having one-to-one discussions

with young people. The use of different approaches limits the ability to make comparisons between locations or say whether differences found between locations were due to true uniqueness in young people's perspectives and lived experiences. However, we have mapped the findings across regions to demonstrate the potential for this methodology to identify contrasts and similarities if piloted across more areas and a more unified delivery approach adopted.

Service designers and commissioners will always need to be cognisant of the evidence when planning change to address the underlying causes of youth violence. However, the real value of the pilot is that this approach will also allow them to reflect on what young people's concerns and experiences are locally, so they can design interventions that respond accordingly. It is unreasonable to expect young people to have a strategic overview of a situation they are currently experiencing – just as it would be to expect a person experiencing homelessness to do so, but this pilot shines a light on how young people perceive the problem and what is needed to address it in their community. In this sense, the local level data is more illuminating than when the findings are extrapolated across all of the

workshops. At the local level however, participant numbers are small so this pilot would need to provide a basis for further research, rather than in itself guiding decision making.

It would be valuable to undertake a more comprehensive study in this vein to a) build up a national picture of the causes and solutions to serious violence identified by young people; b) inform the design and delivery of national and local interventions; and c) explore sources of local variation which are critical to developing public health or place based approaches. The findings from such a study should be used in conjunction with data on evidence-based interventions, not in place of them.

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Appendix 1: Acknowledgements

Consortium members

UK Youth is a leading national charity committed to ensuring all young people are empowered to build bright futures, regardless of their background or circumstances. They sit at the heart of a national network of 3,536 youth organisations and support 1.5 million young people. Together with their network, they offer support, advice and training to equip young people with the vital life skills needed to engage in education, volunteering and employment.

Mobilise Public Ltd is a social purpose business and since 2006 we have provided services to local authorities, housing associations and third sector organisations. Our social purpose is to change the relationship between citizens and the public services that serve them, in order to encourage more active and engaged communities. We specialise in engagement, empowerment and co-production to work with communities and agencies at the local level. We have a strong track record of supporting innovation, working with organisations to deliver change, and supporting them to undertake evaluation and review.

My Life My Say is a youth-led, non-partisan charity on a mission to empower young people to participate in democracy, by creating spaces for dialogue across communities and generations, and by providing young and socially excluded citizens with the tools to lead change within society. Their Democracy Café events have been recognised by many high-profile institutions as a unique and innovative methodology for consulting youth views. They offer consultancy services to Governments, corporates, and third-sector organisations to help them be more inclusive in their products and services, and last year they were awarded the UK Government's National Democracy Change Maker Award.

Dartington Service Design Lab reimagine the way services and public systems are designed and delivered in order to improve the lives of children, families and communities. They do this by taking a scientific approach coupled with an inclusive process that involves the people who use and deliver services. The research unit has operated in many different formulations over its 50-year history: starting life in Kings College, Cambridge then moving to Dartington in the late 60s, with offices subsequently established in London, Glasgow, Madison and San Sebastien. They work with those that are willing, in partnership with them, to try new things in order to improve the outcomes of children, families and communities.

Centre for Youth Impact is committed to working collaboratively to progress thinking and practice in impact measurement in youth work and provision for young people. Their vision is for all young people to have access to high quality programmes and services that improve their life chances. They aim to work in collaboration with others to test, learn and build momentum behind the impact agenda, across organisations working with young people.

British Youth Council As the National Youth Council of the UK, the British Youth Council brings young people together to find their voice and use it for social and political change. They support with young people to build their skills, confidence and experience to advocate on behalf of other young people and work with decision makers to ensure that they value, seek out and act upon young people's voices. As a membership organisation, the British Youth Council uses its collective mandate to speak out with and on behalf of young people locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Councillor Hamza Taouzzale Councillor, Queen's Park Ward and Shadow Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Digital. Hamza was elected to the Council in May 2018 and is the youngest Councillor ever to sit on Westminster City Council. Previously Hamza was a Member of Youth Parliament when he represented the young people of Westminster. Hamza has always been an active member of the community and has a strong desire in fighting for what's best for the community. He is also currently studying Politics at Goldsmiths University.

With special thanks to young researchers from Reaching Higher and UK Youth Voice.

Delivery partners

Creative Academies Network (Wolverhampton) has positioned itself to Listen, Learn and Lead in identifying the needs to strengthen the wider sector for the Life of children and young people, across multiple geographical settings in the West Midlands (Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley & Birmingham). We want to ensure that children and young people are at the heart of the decision-making, design, development, delivery and dissemination of services, that matter most to them. We aim to support and strengthen the sector to bridge the gap to support children and young people to accelerate their personal growth, for them to be ambitious and aspirational.

Creative Youth Network (Bristol) enables young people, no matter what their background or circumstances, to reach their own potential. All of our young people are experiencing barriers that are preventing them from flourishing. Many of our young people are marginalised, unemployed, not in education, suffer poor mental health, are in care (or are care leavers), are asylum seekers, refugees, disabled, from low income households or are an ethnic minority. We work to help young people remove or overcome the barriers young people face by: building trusting relationships with young people that enable us to address their individual needs; advocating for young people to influence policy and get young voices heard; providing a wide range of programmes and activities to help young people reach their potential.

Pembury Youth Club (East London) operate an exciting activity programme for children and young people, giving children and young people the opportunity to experience new adventures away from the estate. We believe that every young person has the power to achieve absolute happiness and fulfilment and they should have equal opportunities to do so. We provide a range of services and support and our young people come from different walks of life in Hackney.

Safe in Tees Valley (Middlesbrough) is an independent community safety partnership. Our work brings together people, communities and organisations whose behaviour, policies and practices can influence community safety: to work in partnership; to create opportunities; to promote safer communities. We create, lead, facilitate, and support projects and services that tackle the causes and effects of community safety related issues. Currently Safe in Tees Valley lead on programmes which look to address young peoples' risk talking behaviour who reside in Middlesbrough. The Positive Activities for Young People programme (PAYP) is centred around tackling anti-social behaviour and low-level crime, the other programme is serious youth violence (SYV).

Skyway (North London) works in collaboration with a variety of voluntary and community groups as part of the Friends of Damilola Taylor Centre to deliver positive activities for young people. Skyway works with some of the most vulnerable young people in our society. We offer practical and emotional support through our core projects. Our services are available to young people aged between 8 – 25 years old. We are

community focused and deliver a wide range of activities and programmes in youth clubs, local sports centres, parks, housing estates and on the streets. All these services are FREE at the point of access.

NE Youth (Newcastle) is one of the North East's leading youth development charity's supporting young people in the region. Our vision is to make sure all young people have the opportunities they deserve, and to get involved in their communities, enjoy their lives and achieve their potential. We do this by providing a high-quality youth offer across the region through our own direct youth work services and by working with and supporting our member network of organisations working with young people.

Appendix 2: Causal Loop Diagrams

CLDs are a way of conceptualising causal relationships that emphasise causal behaviour. In a CLD, each arrow represents a hypothesised causal relationship (a cause and effect relationship between two variables). The notation next to the arrowhead indicates the direction of causality. For example, in Figure 2, the pink arrowhead indicates a causal relationship that moves in the same direction, illustrating the hypothesis that as violent acts increase, the number of resultant injuries also increases. The orange arrowhead shows a relationship that moves in the opposite direction: carrying a knife is likely to reduce a young person's fear of not being able to fend off a violent attack by other young people who carry knives (Figure 2).
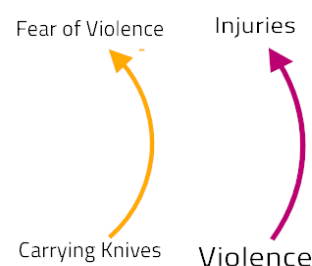

Figure 2: An example of a positive causal relationship.

When several variables link together, with the last connecting back to the first, this creates a feedback loop. Feedback is a phenomenon of a change in a variable causing a chain of effects that comes back around to the original variable. Figure 3 suggests that an increase in injuries contributes to an increase in the desire to exact revenge which fuels acts of violence, leading to further injuries. Feedback is central to systems thinking, driving the behaviour of systems and explaining trends over time. There are two types of feedback loops: reinforcing (labelled R) and balancing (labelled B). The arrow around the label denotes the direction of causality. Reinforcing feedback is when a change in a variable feeds back to reinforce itself and the variable changes further in the same way (as is the case in the example in Figure 3). Balancing feedback is when a change in a variable feeds back and diminishes the original change in itself. The fear of violence leads to more people carrying knives, which causes alleviates their fear (at least in the short-term) (Figure 4).
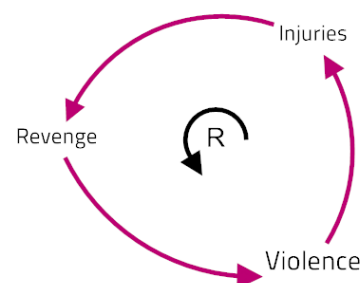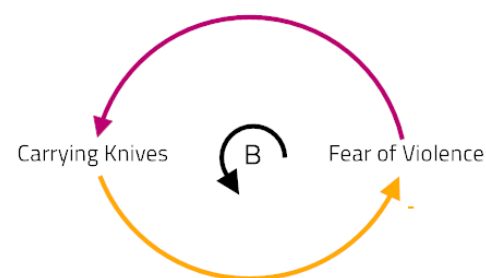

Figure 3: An example of a reinforcing feedback loop

Figure 4: An example of a balancing feedback loop