



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2018-0274, 12 December 2018

Public Health Model to reduce youth violence

Commons Chamber, Thursday 13 December 2018

A general debate on a Public Health Model to reduce youth violence is scheduled for Thursday 13 December 2018.

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Contents

1.	Background	2
1.1	What is a public health approach?	2
1.2	The Scottish approach	3
1.3	Public health approach in London	5
1.4	Support for a public health approach	5
1.5	Criticisms of a 'public health approach'	5
1.6	Government response to youth violence	6
	The Serious Violence Strategy	6
	Recent developments	7
1.7	Statistics on youth crime (Grahame Allen x2457)	8
	Violent crime	9
2.	News and blogs	11
2.1	Press	12
3.	Parliamentary Business	15
3.1	Debates	15
3.2	Parliamentary Questions	15
4.	Further reading	17

1. Background

1.1 What is a public health approach?

A 2002 report by the World Health Organisation set out a comprehensive study of taking a public health approach to criminal justice. The report included the following summary of what the public health approach involves:

By definition, public health is not about individual patients. Its focus is on dealing with diseases and with conditions and problems affecting health, and it aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people. This does not mean that public health ignores the care of individuals. Rather, the concern is to prevent health problems and to extend better care and safety to entire populations.

The public health approach to any problem is interdisciplinary and science-based. It draws upon knowledge from many disciplines, including medicine, epidemiology, sociology, psychology, criminology, education and economics. This has allowed the field of public health to be innovative and responsive to a wide range of diseases, illnesses and injuries around the world.

The public health approach also emphasizes collective action. It has proved time and again that cooperative efforts from such diverse sectors as health, education, social services, justice and policy are necessary to solve what are usually assumed to be purely "medical" problems. Each sector has an important role to play in addressing the problem of violence and, collectively, the approaches taken by each have the potential to produce important reductions in violence.

The public health approach to violence is based on the rigorous requirements of the scientific method. In moving from problem to solution, it has four key steps:

- Uncovering as much basic knowledge as possible about all the aspects of violence – through systematically collecting data on the magnitude, scope, characteristics and consequences of violence at local, national and international levels.
- Investigating why violence occurs – that is, conducting research to determine:
 - the causes and correlates of violence;

- the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence;
- the factors that might be modifiable through interventions.
- Exploring ways to prevent violence, using the information from the above, by designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating interventions.
- Implementing, in a range of settings, interventions that appear promising, widely disseminating information and determining the cost-effectiveness of programmes.

Public health is above all characterized by its emphasis on prevention. Rather than simply accepting or reacting to violence, its starting point is the strong conviction that violent behaviour and its consequences can be prevented.¹

1.2 The Scottish approach

Knife crime has been treated as a public health issue in Scotland since the mid-2000s. This approach was introduced by police-led operational changes, rather than legislative changes.

The Scottish public health approach has been largely delivered by the specialist Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), which was established by Strathclyde Police. The website of the [Scottish Violence Reduction Unit](#), part of [Police Scotland](#), provides more details:

The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit is a national centre of expertise on violence. Part of Police Scotland the VRU targets violence wherever it occurs whether it's on the streets, in schools or in our homes. Supported by the Scottish Government the unit has adopted a public health approach, treating violence as an infection which can be cured. The VRU is the only police member of the World Health Organisation's Violence Prevention Alliance. The VRU believe violence is preventable – not inevitable.²

Leslie Evans, the [Scottish Government Permanent Secretary](#), has described the approach as having “changed lives”:

Scotland's homicide rate has halved (between 2008 and 2018). Over a decade, the number of hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object has fallen in Glasgow by 62%. In essence, it has changed lives.

Violence remains a chronic problem - domestic abuse and sexual violence are still areas of concern - but, crucially, we are shifting the focus from reacting to the problem of violence to preventing it happening in the first place.³

¹ World Health Organisation, [World report on violence and health](#), 2002, pp3-5

² Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, [Home](#), [last accessed 11/12/18]

³ Civil Service, [Tackling knife crime in Scotland – 10 years on](#), 24 May 2018

However, others have been more sceptical about reductions in crime in Scotland. A Guardian article on the Scottish VRU highlighted a report on violent crime more generally in Scotland:

In 2015 a UN report claimed Scotland remained the assault capital of the world, with Scots more prone to violent attack than those in any other country, including Mexico, Colombia and El Salvador. The survey, by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, looked at 80 countries, both developing and developed, and found Scots suffered serious bodily injury at seven times the rate of the global average and twice the rate of England.⁴

The director of the VRU, Niven Rennie, has said that the “good news story” of the VRU’s impact on recorded crime is only part of the story:

Speaking from his office in the VRU’s Glasgow HQ, Rennie said: “One of the reasons we’re in the press, particularly in London, at the moment is because we’ve had an amazing turnaround from ten years ago, but violence in Scotland is still running at a level where we as a progressive society should be concerned.

“I get figures on a daily basis from across Scotland and we still see too many serious assaults, too many attempted murders. Yes, it’s a good news story that we’ve reduced violence substantially, but not to the level where we can say we’ve cracked it – that would be wrong.”

According to official Scottish Government statistics, recorded crime is at its lowest level since the mid-1970s. But the VRU maintains the level of crime in society is not reflected in the figures.

“We’re still at the stage where we see more victims of violence coming to A&E than we do to the police,” Rennie said. “We know the statistics are as accurate as they can be, but there’s a lot of crime going unreported.”

He added: “When someone from government stands up and says crime is at a 43-year low, I always say it’s recorded crime that’s at a low.”⁵

Further details of Scotland’s public health approach are set out on the Scottish Government’s website: see [Crime prevention and reduction: Violence including knife crime](#) [accessed 11 December 2018].

An in-depth look at the work of the VRU is set out in “[Violent crime is like infectious disease – and we know how to stop it spreading](#)”, Samira Shackle, Wellcome/Mosaic, 24 July 2018.

⁴ The Guardian, [How Scotland reduced knife deaths among young people](#), December 2017

⁵ “[Violent crime in Scotland ‘higher than official reports’](#)”, The Scotsman, 15 September 2018

1.3 Public health approach in London

In September 2018 the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced the launch of a Violence Reduction Unit in London to implement a public health approach for the capital. The Mayor said:

We have listened and researched the public health approaches in cities like Glasgow, where their own long-term approach over more than a decade has delivered large reductions in violence. City Hall have spent time properly learning the lessons from Glasgow and developing plans to scale their approach up to meet the different needs and challenges we face in London.

....

But I want to be honest with Londoners that the work of the Violence Reduction Unit will not deliver results overnight. The causes of violent crime are many years in the making and the solutions will take time. That's why our new approach is focusing over the long-term. This unit is not a substitute for the investment our public services need if London is to significantly cut levels of violent crime.⁶

The Mayor has committed £500,000 to start the unit.⁷

1.4 Support for a public health approach

Politicians from many different parties have advocated for a public health approach to tackling knife crime.

In its 2009 report on [knife crime](#), the Home Affairs Committee commented that it had heard "convincing evidence of the long-term cost benefits of applying a public health approach to violence reduction, as well as the benefits to individuals and communities".⁸

A number of MPs called for a public health approach during a [House of Commons debate on Serious Violence in May 2018](#), with many referring specifically to the work of the VRU in Scotland.

A public health approach to knife crime was also a key recommendation of the cross party [Youth Violence Commission](#), which published an interim report in July 2018.

1.5 Criticisms of a 'public health approach'

Some have argued that a public health approach is not a straightforward answer to youth violence. The Centre for Social Justice (a conservative think tank) has argued that law enforcement still has a role to play:

Very often seeking to focus on the social causes of violence leads people to believe that adopting a "public health approach" can

⁶ Mayor of London, [Mayor launches new public health approach to tackling serious violence](#), 19 September 2018

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Home Affairs Committee, [Knife Crime](#), HC 112-I, 2 June 2009, para 180

somehow prevent the violence without relying upon or requiring the involvement of policing or law enforcement. It is vital to recognise that this simply is not the case.

Police and healthcare workers who respond to gang problems know that after-the-event efforts are not enough. A trauma surgeon or paramedic who treats gang-related stabbings or a police officer who must tell a parent that their son has been killed in a fatal stabbing are likely to appreciate and understand the need for prevention. Both public health and law enforcement have roles to play in stopping the violence before it begins.⁹

1.6 Government response to youth violence

The Serious Violence Strategy

The Home Office published the [Serious Violence Strategy](#) on 9 April 2018, which it has [described](#) as looking at “the root causes of the problem and how to support young people to lead productive lives away from violence” as well as at law enforcement.

Action in the Strategy is centred on 4 main themes:

- tackling [county lines](#) and misuse of drugs
- early intervention and prevention
- supporting communities and local partnerships
- law enforcement and the criminal justice response

The Government has described the Strategy as taking a “public health approach” to serious violence:

The strategy represents a step change in the way we think and respond to serious violence. Our approach is not solely focused on law enforcement, very important as that is, but depends also on multi-partnership working and a ‘public health’ approach across a number of sectors such as education, health, social services, housing, youth services, victim services and others.¹⁰

A major focus of the Strategy is early intervention and prevention, which can help catch young people before they go down the wrong path and can encourage them to make positive choices.

The Strategy includes a new £11 million Early Intervention Youth Fund to support communities for early intervention and prevention with young people. The [Fund was open for bids](#) over the summer of 2018, and successful applicants were announced in November 2018: see [Transparency data - Early Intervention Youth Fund: successful bids](#), 10 November 2018.

Other early intervention approaches contained in the Strategy include:

- cross working between various government departments on projects such as developing effective police-school partnership

⁹ Centre for Social Justice, [It can be stopped: A proven blueprint to stop violence and tackle gang and related offending in London and beyond](#), August 2018, p34

¹⁰ [PQHL9766, Knives: Crime](#), 23 July 2018

models and tailored support for vulnerable children such as those 'looked after' and excluded from school;

- working with charities and volunteers to provide intervention at 'teachable moments' in hospitals and custody suites;
- encouraging employment by providing early access to the [Work and Health Programme](#) to those identified at Jobcentres as involved in, or at risk of, gang violence;
- trialling preventative policing models centred on understanding childhood trauma in Wales; and
- extending funding for the [anti-knife crime Community Fund](#) of up to £1 million. The fund allows community groups to bid for money to support their work with young people affected by, or at risk of, knife crime.¹¹

Many stakeholders have praised the government for emphasising early intervention. However, others have expressed concerns that there would not be enough funding.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) said:

Prevention and early action is key, this must involve co-ordination of a wide range of services, including those to support families and young people, but also stimulating housing, employment opportunities and community facilities. The strategy emphasises the importance of local communities and partnerships yet provides little for local authorities to develop local responses.¹²

The Early Intervention Foundation said it was "delighted" that early intervention had been placed at the heart of the Strategy, describing it as a "critical part of the solution". However, it said the Government's stated commitment to early intervention was not matched by what was set out in the Strategy, and it called on the Home Office to be "more ambitious" about early intervention.¹³

Recent developments

At the Conservative Party Conference in October 2018, the Home Secretary announced a number of new measures aimed at tackling serious violence:

The rise in serious violence in London and our cities is especially worrying. There's no time for sitting around when young people are dying on our streets. We need to bring everything – and everyone – to bear on this.

Through our Serious Violence Strategy we have already brought together all the key parts of government, law enforcement and society. And now we will do more. We will take steps to introduce a statutory duty for all agencies to tackle this problem together.

¹¹ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

¹² ADCS, [Response to the government's Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018

¹³ Early Intervention Foundation, [Serious Violence Strategy: Government needs to start engaging with the evidence base](#), 10 April 2018

That means those in health, education, social services, local government, housing – the whole lot.

I'm also pleased to announce today a new £200 million endowment fund, that will target young people at risk of starting a life of crime and violence. We know that one of the causes of the rise of serious violence is changes in the market for illegal drugs. We need a much better understanding of who drug users are, what they take, how often they take it, and so much more. So I will launch a major review of the market for illegal drugs.

Armed with this evidence, I will step up our fight against drugs gangs that prey on our children. On my watch, illegal drug use will never be tolerated.¹⁴

Further details were set out in a Home Office press release: [Home Secretary announces new measures to tackle serious violence](#), 2 October 2018.

The bidding process for an organisation to run the £200 million Youth Endowment Fund opened on 10 December: see Home Office press release, [Home Secretary opens bidding process for Youth Endowment Fund](#).

1.7 Statistics on youth crime (Grahame Allen x2457)

The MoJ publication: [Youth Justice annual statistics](#) looks at the wider Youth Justice System (YJS) in England and Wales and provides statistics on the number of children and young people (those aged 10 – 17) in the criminal justice system, "the offences they committed, the outcomes they received, their demographics and the trends over time".

The main points from the MoJ's latest YJS publication: [Youth Justice annual statistics: 2016 to 2017](#) show that in the year to March 2017:

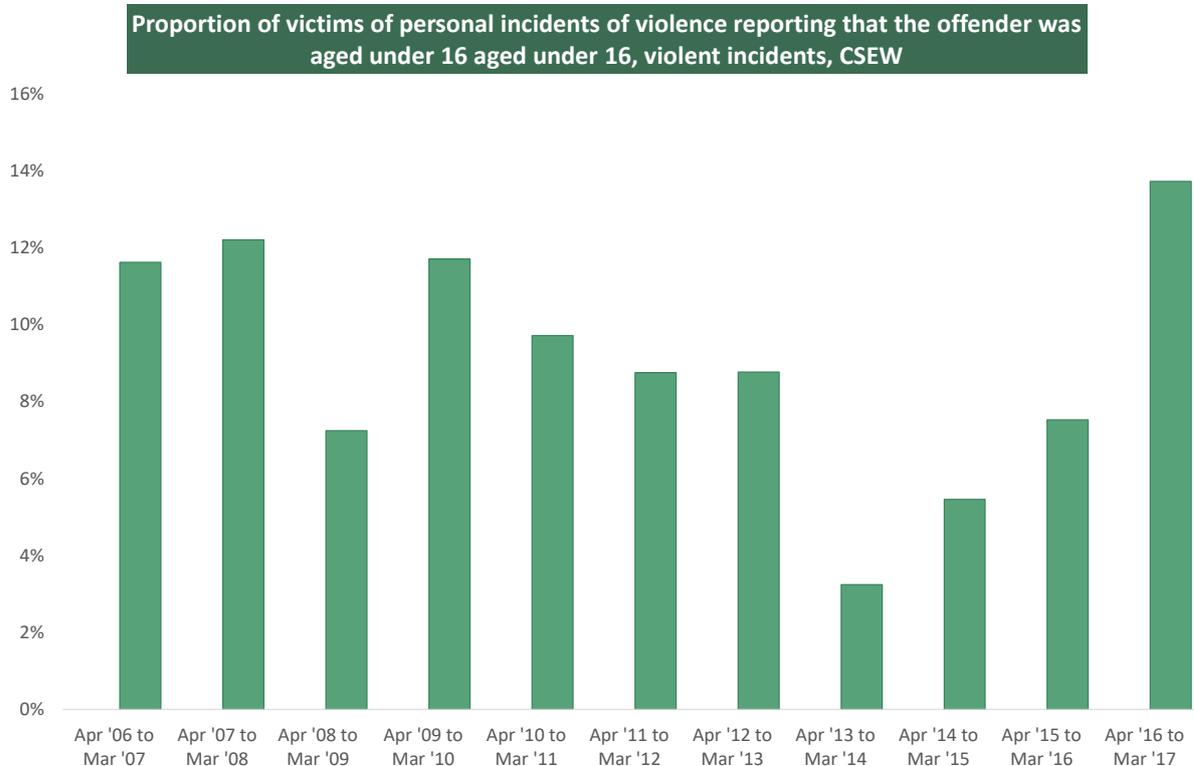
¹⁴ Sajid Javid's speech at the Conservative Party Conference, October 2018, as reported in the Spectator at "[Full text: Sajid Javid's Conservative conference speech](#)", 2 October 2018

Main points

16,500 first time entrants to the YJS	↓	The number of first time entrants has fallen by 85% over the last 10 years, and by 11% in the last year.
28,400 children and young people were cautioned or convicted	↓	The number of children and young people who received a caution or sentence has fallen by 81% over the last 10 years, and by 14% in the last year.
4,000 proven offences involving possession of a knife or offensive weapon	↑	The number of these offences committed by children and young people has increased by 11% since the year ending March 2012, while the number of these offences committed by adults has fallen by 10% over the same period.
1,600 children and young people were sentenced to custody	↓	The number of children and young people sentenced to immediate custody has fallen by 74% compared with 10 years ago, and by 7% in the last year. In the latest year, there was an average of around 870 children and young people in custody.

Violent crime

The chart below shows the proportion of victims of personal incidents of violence that reported the offender was aged under 16, based on incidents in which the victim could say something about the offender(s), from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW):¹⁵



¹⁵ ONS, [The nature of violent crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2017: Nature of crime tables, violence](#), 8 February 2018

The data shows that:

- For 2016/17, 14% of the respondents who had been the victim of personal incidents of violence reported that the offender was aged under 16.
- Between 2013/14 and 2016/17 the proportion of victims of personal incidents of violence, where the offender was reported to be aged under 16, rose by two percentage points.

Although not strictly comparable the Scottish Crime & Justice Survey suggests that for 2016/17: in 14% of "violent crime incidents where the respondent could say something about offender" the perpetrators were identified as being aged under 16.¹⁶

¹⁶ Scottish Government, [Scottish Crime & Justice Survey 2016/17: Main Findings](#), Figure 3.9, p 40, 27 March 2018

2. News and blogs

The Conversation

[Youth violence: rise could be linked to British people's growing distrust of authority](#)

29 November 2018

Queen Mary University of London

[London doctors call for urgent action to tackle legacy of youth violence](#)

6 November 2018

Home Office

[Home Office hosts first serious violence event in London](#)

8 October 2018

Local Government Association

[LGA responds to Sajid Javid announcement on funding to tackle serious violence](#)

3 October 2018

Catch 22

[What does a 'Public Health' approach to violence really mean?](#)

2 October 2018

Home Office

[Home Secretary announces new measures to tackle serious violence](#)

2 October 2018

Mayor of London

[Mayor sets up Violence Reduction Unit to tackle violent crime](#)

20 September 2018

Mayor of London

[Mayor launches new public health approach to tackling serious violence](#)

19 September 2018

Health Foundation

[Implementation of Redthread's hospital-based Youth Violence Intervention Programme](#)

Undated (2018)

University Hospitals Birmingham

[Youth work service launches at UHB](#)

7 August 2018

Home Office

[New taskforce to take action against violent crime](#)

25 April 2018

Barnardo's

[Barnardo's working to help stem the rise of knife crime](#)

1 January 2018

2.1 Press

Spectator

[The lessons politicians don't want to learn from Glasgow's knife crime strategy](#)

6 December 2018

Guardian

[Don't fear failure: Glasgow's advice for London knife crime unit](#)

5 December 2018

Financial Times

[Why England is facing a rising tide of knife crime](#)

20 November 2018

Independent

[Violence should be treated as a contagious disease, says Sajid Javid as study links school exclusions to rising gang crime](#)

29 September 2018

BBC News

[From murder capital of Europe to role model for London](#)

19 September 2018

Independent

[Violent crime to be treated as 'public health issue' to reduce stabbings and shootings in London](#)

19 September 2018

Guardian

[Sadiq Khan launches anti-violence plan based on Glasgow unit](#)

19 September 2018

Guardian

[Chuka Umunna calls for national mission to end youth violence](#)

21 August 2018

Independent

[Violent crime is contagious – but we know how to stop it spreading](#)

7 August 2018

Evening Standard

[Violent London: treat crimewave like public health emergency, experts say](#)

18 July 2018

Guardian

[Treat London's violence as public health crisis, say Scottish experts](#)

6 April 2018

Huffington Post

[Labour MP Sarah Jones: Government must treat knife crime as public health issue](#)

4 January 2018

Guardian

[How Scotland reduced knife deaths among young people](#)

3 December 2017

Guardian

[UK needs coordinated strategy to tackle knife crime, says MP](#)

18 October 2017

Evening Standard

[London MP sets up all-party group to combat knife crime](#) [Sarah Jones MP]

22 August 2017

3. Parliamentary Business

3.1 Debates

[Violent Crime](#)

HL Deb 29 November 2018 c771-810

[Youth Violence](#)

HC Deb 10 October 2018 c253-60

[Serious Violence Strategy](#)

HL Deb 11 June 2018 c1508-47

[Serious Violence Strategy](#)

HC Deb 22 May 2018 c738-810

3.2 Parliamentary Questions

[Serious Violence Taskforce](#)

Asked by: Louise Haigh

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if his Department will publish (a) the actions, (b) the minutes and (c) any completed actions of the Serious Violence Taskforce relating to the minutes of that taskforce's meetings on (i) 11 June 2018, (ii) 17 July 2018 and (iii) 22 October 2018.

Answered by: Victoria Atkins | Home Office

Due to the nature of the discussions of the Serious Violence Taskforce, the minutes and actions of the meeting are not available publicly so to ensure an open discussion. The Taskforce is a valuable forum and it led to the Home Secretary's recent announcements on a new £200m Youth Endowment Fund, a consultation on the proposed new legal duty to support the public health approach to tackling violence, and an independent review of drug misuse.

20 November 2018 | Written question | 188129

[Youth Crime: London](#)

Oral questions

HL Deb 22 October 2018 c645-7

[Knife Crime: Prosecution Rates](#)

Oral questions

HC Deb 6 September 2018 c315-6

[Crime Prevention: Glasgow](#)

Asked by: Heidi Alexander

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of Police Scotland's violence reduction unit in Glasgow, and whether she has plans to replicate the work of that unit in England.

Answered by: Victoria Atkins | Home Office

We have not made an assessment of the effectiveness of the Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland. We will shortly be publishing our new Serious Violence Strategy which will respond to concerns about serious violence especially recent increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide.

The approach we will set out in the Strategy will give much more of an emphasis to prevention and steering young people away from crime in the first place, and it will put in place measures to tackle the root causes of the problem.

3 April 2018 | Written question | 134089

4. Further reading

Library papers

[Violent Crime: Government Strategy](#), Lords Library Briefing LLN-2018-0126, 22 November 2018

[Serious Violence Strategy](#), Commons Library debate pack CDP-2018-0124, 21 May 2018

Official publications

HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

Home Affairs Committee, [Serious violence inquiry](#)

Home Affairs Committee, [Serious violence](#), 16 October 2018, HC 1016, Q41, 55, 60, 77, 79, 80

Home Affairs Committee, [Serious violence](#), 30 October 2018, HC 1016, SVC0013 (Faculty of Public Health, London)

Home Affairs Committee, [Serious violence](#), 30 October 2018, HC 1016, SVC0005 (Institute of Alcohol Studies)

Organisations and reports

Register of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, [All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime](#)

[Redthread](#)

[Youth Violence Commission](#)

Youth Violence Commission, [Interim report](#), 18 July 2018

Mayor of London, [Violence Reduction Unit](#)

Police Scotland, [Scottish Violence Reduction Unit](#)

Paul Vulliamy and others, [Temporal and geographic patterns of stab injuries in young people: a retrospective cohort study from a UK major trauma centre](#), British Medical Journal Open, 8 (10), 2018

Ingrid Torjesen, [Can public health strategies tackle London's rise in fatal violence?](#), British Medical Journal, 6 April 2018

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