Young person related violent crime, including gangs

Introduction

Young person related-violent crime and gangs involves a small number of individuals overall; however, the small number of young people who are involved have a disproportionately large impact on the communities around them in some parts of the UK.\(^1\) Young person related violent crime is any violent crime involving an offender aged 25 or below.

Young person-related crime can be a cause of ill health and poor wellbeing in local communities. As well as the personal cost, it can impose a considerable financial burden on local healthcare systems. Significant health inequalities are experienced by both those who are at risk of causing violence and those who are the victims of violence. It is clear that gang membership increases the risk of serious violence. Violence impacts on the wider wellbeing of local communities yet violence is preventable through appropriate targeted interventions, especially in childhood.\(^1\)

A gang is defined as a relatively durable, predominantly street-based, group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a noticeable group, and engage in a range of criminal activity including violence. They may lay claim over territory have some form of identifying structural feature or be in conflict with other gangs.\(^1\) The crimes that are gang related are typically difficult to quantify. It is not always clear who is regarded as being gang members and it is not known which violent crimes are motivated due to gang affiliation or association.

Gang and knife-related youth violence has become a key cause of concern in England.\(^267\) Throughout the early to mid-2000s, both fatal and non-fatal violence involving young people increased. Homicides by 13-24 year olds peaked in 2007/08 (at around 180) and emergency hospital admissions for violence peaked in 2006/07 (at over 15,000). While both figures have since reduced, hospital admission rates for violence remain higher than they were a decade ago.\(^268\)

Risk factors and vulnerable groups

There are particular risk factors and triggers that young people experience in their lives that can lead to them becoming involved in gangs. Many of these risk factors are similar to involvement in other harmful activities such as youth offending more generally or violent extremism.\(^1\) The Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families\(^5\) grouped risk factors under the three headings: child development, parenting capacity and family/environment, as shown in Table 28.

Table 28: Risk factors for children in need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child development</th>
<th>Parenting capacity</th>
<th>Family/environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Early problems with antisocial and criminal behaviour</td>
<td>• Historically involved with, or known to, social services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persistent offending</td>
<td>• Lax parental supervision</td>
<td>• Family members involved with or associated with gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unable to regulate own emotions and behaviour</td>
<td>• Lack of parental attachment to child</td>
<td>• Wider family involved with gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical violence and aggression</td>
<td>• Conflict and violence in the home</td>
<td>• Community norms that tolerate crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Permanent exclusion</td>
<td>• parental violence in the home</td>
<td>• local tensions between ethnic/cultural/religious gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents aggressive</td>
<td></td>
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What is the evidence base?

Comprehensive interventions have a positive, but not statistically significant, effect in size reducing crime outcomes compared with usual service provision. These included:

- Case management/provision personalised to individual offenders.
- Community involvement in the planning of interventions.
- Community involvement in the delivery of interventions.
- Expertise shared between agencies.
- Delivery of incentives to gang members to change offending behaviour, as part of a wider comprehensive intervention approach; for example, educational opportunities, tattoo removal, financial assistance, and recreational activities which may be more effective than those that did not contain one or more of these components. vi

National policy on reducing gang crime focuses on providing expert advisors, promoting intensive family support, identifying mental health and substance misuse problems of those in custody, supporting ex-gang members to be re-housed and extending police powers to take out gang injunctions. There is also a focus on promoting local partnership working through multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) and data sharing eg AandE departments to share anonymised data on knife and gang assaults.

Local picture

Since a high profile murder in Luton in September 2012, Bedfordshire Police recorded an increasing number of firearms and other related violent offending. Further research on the issue identified that this increase was largely influenced by violent crime involving individuals aged 25 and below, specifically those aged 18 or under, some of whom had links to gang related activity. In January 2014, the characteristics of a sample of people identified as related to this issue in Luton were analysed to produce a profile of gangs in the local area and to identify risk factors that lead towards youth-related violent crime. 

During May 2013, 160 individuals were linked to youth violence, either through involvement in specific incidents, or association or affiliation to particular groups. This group of individuals changes on a regular basis; however based on the cohort in May 2013, the age profile is, shown in Figure 58, which shows a fairly even split of gang members between the ages 16-24 years old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>from school</th>
<th>towards, or unwilling to engage with, statutory agencies</th>
<th>known gang recruitment at school</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends condoning or involved in antisocial and aggressive behaviour</td>
<td>Child is not protected from significant harm or danger, including contact with unsafe adults</td>
<td>presence of gangs in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol and drug misuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>High level of local crime including drugs market</td>
</tr>
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</table>
This cohort was predominately African Caribbean (63%) or White British (32%) and the areas of residence of gang members are concentrated in areas with higher deprivation, with Leagrave, Lewsey and Northwell having higher rates with fewer in Limbury and Icknield areas. The North and West of Luton have been the sites of substantial increases in most serious violence relating to offenders under 18 since end of 2012 and gang members generally live in specific, confined areas and offend within their own localities with the exception of the town centre area, which draws offending to the location.

Gang members are more likely to use cannabis, but there is little evidence of using harder drugs including cocaine and heroin. National studies have identified a potential link with substance misuse and health needs of offenders\(^\text{vii}\). However offending is unlikely to be driven by drug addiction and is more likely to relate to more organised offending for financial reward or for reason of respect within peer groups.

A number of gang related individuals have had domestic violence and child abuse within their family backgrounds, and a number have been involved with social services and in foster care in the past. Almost half (47.5%) of gang related individuals are currently, or have previously, been linked to social or council housing addresses in Luton.

In Luton there is a relatively higher percentage of households rented from the local authority, especially in Lewsey, Leagrave and Northwell which are the areas with higher a residence of gang members. This is also the case in small areas of Icknield, Crawley and Round Green where gang member home addresses appear to be concentrated.

Over half of all gang related offenders have been excluded from school on at least one occasion, over two thirds of these exclusions relate to reasons of physical assault. Gang related offenders are more likely to target their friends and figures of authority between the ages of 13-15 years. This coincides with the average age for exclusions and may be an indication of violent or bullying behaviour within school.
Gang members appear to be grouped in areas where there are 20%-40% of households without qualifications. High concentration where for 20% to 25% households, the highest qualification is National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 1 and gang member home addresses correlate with areas of unemployment benefits claimants, especially in the Northwell.

Crime

Offending behavior of the Serious Youth Violence (SYV) group has been compared with general offending populations. In comparison to other offenders, those believed to be involved in SYV offending are more likely to be involved in gangs and gang related persons are 12 times more likely to commit murder than the rest of the offending population, however, some crime types, such as rape occur at a small level overall.

Gang members compared with the general offending population are more likely to be in possession of firearms; commit repeat robberies; rape or commit other sexual offences against females, have evidence of sexual exploitation (see section on Child Sexual Exploitation) and domestic violence; witness intimidation; and supply drugs.

Victims of gang related crime in the main were males aged 16 to 24 years of age; however, there were also some potential issues identified in terms of female victimisation, specifically in the areas of domestic violence and sexual exploitation, which occurs at an average age of 15 years for offenders.

What is being done locally?

There is a broad range of prevention actions happening across Luton to reduce the risks of young people becoming involved in crime and gangs; these include actions within Flying Start programme around parental attachment, family nurse Partnership, supporting young mothers, youth substance misuse prevention, reduction of domestic violence and community development and engagement.

Tackling youth and young adult serious violence and gang related activity has become a priority for the Luton Community Safety Partnership (SoLUTiONs). The Gangs and Youth and Young Person Violent Crime Partnership Strategy Luton 2015-18 is being implemented. It identifies, co-ordinates and leads on all aspects of the developing work on tackling and reducing gang related crime and disorder and the impact upon local communities. It covers all partners who together make up the Serious Youth Violence Coordination Group, in addition to wider identified community partners. This Gang Strategy is owned by the SoLUTiONs partnership.

The Community Safety Partnership Co-ordination Group has commissioned the introduction of a multi-agency referral system (MAGPan) to help agencies throughout Luton reduce gang violence. The intention is to identify lower level offenders who may be at risk of becoming involved in gang violence and to ensure that agencies are able to work with them before they become involved in more serious crime.

An individual can be referred to the MAGPan if they are involved, affected by or deemed to be at high risk of gang activity. The focus of the MAGPan is to support individuals, and where appropriate and their families so that they and the public are safeguarded. The over-arching purpose of the MAGPan is to safeguard the communities of the town from this type of serious criminal behaviour by
delivering interventions to individuals and families that ideally prevent their involvement or, failing that, disrupt their criminal behaviour, whilst also providing support where appropriate.

Locations can be referred to the MAGPan when there is evidence/intelligence of a large number of incidents of serious violence and/or gang activity. This could be a single address or a larger geographical area, eg. a block of flats, park or parade of shops.

**Perspective of the public/service users**

A local survey conducted during August 2014 indicated that those who live and work in Luton identified an issue of gangs and youth violence in Luton and the perception was that this is getting worse. 29% believed there was an issue across Luton, 41% identified that this was in some communities, whereas 29% believed there were a few localised issues of gang and youth violence. This highlights youth related anti-social behaviour is a concern for Luton residents.

**Priorities**

1. Develop shared data protocols to include data from accident and emergency and information pertaining to mental and sexual health to improve the targeting of preventative action.

2. Review the actions and outcomes of the Gang and Youth and Young Person Violent Crime Partnership Strategy to ensure there is appropriate impact of the strategy.
References


Gangs and Youth and Young Person Violent Crime Partnership Strategy Luton 2014-17 - Association of Chief Police Officers definition


soLUTIONs. Gangs and Youth & Young Person Violent Crime Partnership Strategy, Luton 2014-17. Available from: http://democracy.luton.gov.uk/cms5public/Document.ashx?czKcaeAiStUFL1DTL2U4ezNRBcoShgo=T2v%2Fzu eY85VCyRDpYainy7RpiAHVRSsRpgITD716wSn5g0%2BiUtNHyA%3D%3D&rUrwpF%2BZ3zd4E7Ikn8Lyw%3D%3D =pwR6EGJfLDNh225F5QMaWQtPHwdhUfcZ%2FLUO%7Ag2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3D%3D&mCTibCubSFFr50DGW91Xn jg%3D%3D=hflUdN3100%3D&kCx1AnS9%2FpWQ40DFxvdEw%3D%3D=hflUdN3100%3D&uJovDxwdjiMPoYv %2BAjYyta%3D%3D=ctNJF55vVA%3D&FgPieYl0s%2BYoBiIoA%3D%3D=NHDURQburHA%3D&d9Qjj0 Pd993jzyOjqFvmyB7XOC5QK=ctNJF55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBux0R1Q8a60lavYmz=ctNJF55vVA%3D&W GewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCpMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJF55vVA%3D