

Methods Statement and Research Questions

Appendix to:

Young people's experience of low-level
mental health issues and violence – Final
report by Rocket Science for West
Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit

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1. Methods Statement

1.1 Introduction

This research was undertaken in two phases. The first phase used desk-based research to conduct and produce an evidence review on the relevant topics, while the second phase involved consultation with key stakeholders, including young people, parents/carers, teachers and other youth practitioners.

1.2 Evidence review

Rocket Science reviewed evidence from the Idox Knowledge Exchange database, Google Scholar, and third-sector and government websites. The search terms were based around the research questions and sub-questions (shown in the evidence review) and were broad-reaching.

Where initial evidence gaps emerged, these were supplemented with additional searches focused on that knowledge area.

Inclusion criteria were that sources should, where possible, be from a UK perspective and from the past five years. Where insufficient sources met this criteria, additional information was included from comparable contexts.

1.3 Consultation groups

The consultation phase of the research we conducted fieldwork with 3 schools, 1 youth club, including 41 young people aged 12-16, and 7 teachers or school staff. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the numbers consulted in schools. We also interviewed 3 mental health practitioners who specialise in youth work and ran a workshop with 6 youth practitioners (Table 2). Finally, we conducted surveys with parents/carers, young people, and youth practitioners (Table 3).



Table 1 Young people consulted for this research, by group, age and gender

School/group	Session age group	No. Male	No. Female	Total	No. staff/ teachers
Youth Club	Age 13 and 16	4	1	5	
Secondary (academy), Kirklees	Y7/8s	2	2	4	
	Y9/10s	4	3	7	
	Y12s	2	0	2	
School total		12	6	18	3
Secondary, Kirklees	Y7 (age 12)	2	0	2	
	Y8 (age 12/13)	3	0	3	
	Y10 (age 14/15)	4	2	6	
School total		9	2	11	3
Alternate provision school, Kirklees	Age 14/15	3	1	4	
	Y10s	2	0	2	
	Age 15/16	4	2	6	
School total		9	3	12	1
Overall total		30	11	41	7

Table 2 Consultation with youth practitioners

Consultation type	Number of practitioners
Interviews	3
Workshop	6

Table 3 Survey responses (including partial/incomplete responses)

Survey	Respondents
Parents/carers	34
Practitioners	70
Young people	215



Consultation with young people focused particularly on secondary school age groups for two reasons. Firstly that this age group are the ones most at risk of both poor mental health and of violence, compared to younger children. Secondly, the nature of the topic lends itself to more in-depth emotional and situational understanding, which is easier to discuss with older children, for them to have good grasp of the topics.

In total, we spoke to 41 young people, from age 12 to age 16, in both school and youth club settings. Of these, 30 (73%) were male, and 11 (27%) were female.

Focus group and interview transcripts were then tabulated by research question topic, allowing comparison between young people, school staff and youth practitioner responses on common areas of interest.

The survey results were analysed using Excel. Some free text responses were coded according to common themes that emerged.

1.4 Limitations of the research

There was an element of selection bias involved, as we relied on schools being willing to take part in this research, rather than being able to sample randomly to select schools. Schools with a particular interest in mental health were therefore likely to have volunteered to take part, and those with less focus in this area may have different experiences. Similarly, the staff that we had access to within schools were generally those with a particular interest in this area.

Likewise, the young people interviewed through the consultation were either suggested by staff or volunteered themselves. The sample was therefore not randomly chosen, nor can we know if it is representative of that school or the area as a whole. Therefore their views are indicative but not definitive.

There were relatively small numbers of survey respondents, so the results can only be said to be indicative and not representative of the experience across everyone in West Yorkshire, particularly for the parents/carers surveys, which had the smallest response.



The surveys asked about mental health alongside questions about social media and about the aspirations of young people. Presenting these topics together may have influenced some of the responses.

Particularly in the case of the parents survey, only those parents who are engaged with schools and have the time to take part in research are likely to have responded. Parents who are less engaged in their child's education or who themselves are facing more challenges are less likely to have filled in the survey but are statistically more likely to face challenges and to have children who are more at risk.

Despite these limitations, when read alongside the evidence review of published literature, we feel that together this research presents a strong picture of the current situation around young people's mental health and links to violence in West Yorkshire.



2. Research Questions

2.1 Overarching research questions

The overarching research questions of this research were:

- What is the link between low-level mental health and violence?
- What are the key risk factors and do these differ by demographic groups?
- Which types of interventions can break the link between low-level mental health and violence?
- How do low-level mental health issues affect contact with the criminal justice system?
- What are the practitioner training needs for youth workers and mental health practitioners?

2.2 Topic guide for schools consultation

2.2.1 Introduction

- About the research
- About the session:

2.2.2 Low-level mental health issues

Key research question: What kind of support do you think is needed to help young people like yourselves look after your wellbeing?

Questions for young people:

- Warm up question: if you're feeling low, what's one thing that you do to feel better. (write it on a post-it) **OR** What words/phrases do you associate with mental health?
- If you had low levels of mental health and wanted to talk to someone, who would they be? and where would they be?
- Would you like to have it in school or out of school?

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- In your area, are there opportunities for you to do fun activities? Are there any barriers to accessing things, such as time, money, transport...

2.2.3 Links to violence

Key research question: What, if any, are the links between low level mental health issues and violence, and what could break that link

Questions for young people:

- How would you describe violence to me in 3 words?
- Do you think there's a lot of violence or bad behaviour that goes on in your school/area?
- So some of the research we've been doing has showed that young people who've got low levels of wellbeing / mental health (dependant on age) are more likely to be victims of violence or participate with violence.
- If you could write down one reason for this happening, what would it be? (Some people take victims of violence and other take participating in violence)
- What kind of things do you think could help support young people who are at risk of violence?

2.2.4 Wrap up

- Thanks, recap the purpose of the research.
- Activity: can all of you think and write down one thing you're looking forward to, either this week or in the next couple of weeks. It could be something really small or something really big.

2.3 Topic guide for youth club

2.3.1 Introduction – 5 mins

About the session, who we are, about the research, anonymity and housekeeping, etc. This is a safe space, we ask that anything said in the room stays in the room.

Ice breaker activity: in twos or threes what's one thing that you do on a regular basis that has a positive effect on your mental health or wellbeing? Feedback to the group.



2.3.2 Low-level mental health issues – 10 mins

- We want to find out about what affects how young people are feeling, and what might impact their wellbeing. Thinking about yourself, or your friends and people you know, what do you think are the important things that affect how people feel or affect their wellbeing?

Reflect back on what's gathered, talk about the grouping, "so some things are things you do yourself... Others are about school or community... etc"

- What kind of support do you think is needed to help young people like yourselves to get to those good things, and to help when you feel the bad ones?

[prompt based on some of the examples they've come up with if needed. support from family, friends, teachers, other adults,. Having access to hobbies and clubs (sport, drama, arts, music, general socialising).]

- Do you think there are the right kind of things available in your area for this? [eg are there opportunities to do hobbies and activities? What reasons stop you from accessing these? Time, money, transport, etc.]
- What other things do you think there needs to be to help support young people like you and your friends in this area?

2.3.3 Links to violence – 10 mins

We're interested in what links there might be between how people feel and whether that can affect how they might get into trouble, either through being violent, or even having people be violent towards them.

- Are there any links between how people are feeling and whether they might be more likely to experience violence? (people witnessing violence, being violent, being victims of violence).

[reflect back on previous responses – eg if talked about clubs and hobbies, ask whether they help stop people getting into tricky situations. If we talk about supportive relationships, are people more likely to talk about their feelings with a trusted person if they're angry, does that help them to avoid a fight...?)

- Additional Q if needed: What sort of things can help to support young people? [are these the same things as for mental wellbeing]



2.3.4 Wrap up -2 mins

- Finish on a high note: thank you for time, etc. Reiterate that we'll use this in reporting but it'll be anonymous.
- Activity: one last thing before we go – can all of you think and write down one thing you're looking forward to, either this week or in the next couple of weeks. It could be something really small or something really big. But in twos or threes spend one minute talking about it then tell me what some of them are...

2.4 Questions used with teachers

Training needs

- What kinds of training do you get for supporting young people with their mental health?
- Is this enough?
- What barriers are there to accessing training? (Time pressure, funding, lack of buy in from leadership?)

Mental health

- How has young people's mental health changed due to the pandemic?
- Do you see links between poor mental health and violence?
- What types of support work to support young people with their mental health? Do they have access to this? What settings work best for this? (schools, youth clubs, family services, etc)

2.5 Questions for practitioners

2.5.1 Practitioner workshop

Introduction

- About the session, who we are, about the research, anonymity and housekeeping, etc.
- Tell me about who you are and what your role entails [go around the group, one by one].



- (if not already clear) Does your role work with young people with low-level mental health issues? [note if exclusively young people, or all ages. Promoting wellbeing/good mental health, do they work specifically with diagnosed mental health conditions, etc]

Low-level mental issues and violence

- How prevalent are low-level mental health issues in young people? [defining low-level mental health issues as things like low mood, anxiety etc. often may be subclinical and not have a diagnosed condition]
 - what are the main types of issues?
 - has this changed over time?
- The evidence from the literature suggests that there are key risk factors for low-level mental health issues. We're really interested from your experience in West Yorkshire what they are...?

[Prompts from report findings: risk factors including exposure to crime, behavioural problems, poor attainment or attendance at school, school exclusion, family conflict, ACEs, alcohol and drugs, community-level factors.]

- We're particularly interested in the situations where low-level mental health issues are likely to lead to experiences of violence. What would you say from your experience in West Yorkshire is the link between low-level mental health issues and violence?

Prompts: Lots of young people experience low-level mental health issues but when and why does this lead to experiences of violence, and when and why does it not. Transition points as a higher risk time? Gendered differences in experiences?

- Is level of support what determines whether YP get involved in violence?

Addressing the issue

- At which points do low-level mental health issues arise for young people? (eg are transition points key for this, if so which ones)
- And therefore what are the important moments where they may need support and what does support look like?
- What would an ideal intervention look like for XXX [each of the key moments identified for when to intervene eg primary-secondary transition, 16-18 transition, etc]



- When is the ideal time to intervene to prevent or reduce low-level mental health issues?
 - Is it better to intervene early? Why?

- What if that ideal moment is missed, what's second best? Is it a gradual over time thing or is there a point of no return?

- Is there anything that feels particularly relevant of your experience of why the picture might be different in your area of West Yorkshire? [prompt for gender, ethnicity, part of WY/living situation – housing/finance/health/etc]

- Is mental health picture different for different groups, what about risks for violence, etc. [build on what their specialisms are...]

- So for example, we know from evidence at the national level that girls are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators, and boys are more likely to be perpetrators than victims... how does the match, or not match, your experience?
 - Prompt for other difference:
 - Masking behaviours and lack of recognition of the types of mental health issues young people are facing.
 - Lower reporting of mental health issues in young people from minority ethnic backgrounds
 - Differences depending on young people's living situations and access to services

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Training needs

- From the discussion we've had, is there anything you feel like you'd want more training in?

Wrap up

- Any other thoughts or key issues we should know about young people, low-level mental health issues, raising aspirations or violence?



2.5.2 Practitioner interviews

Interviews with mental health practitioner(s) who work specifically with young people

- Can you tell me a bit more about your role?
- Do you see MH youth workers as a new model of working?
- What does your work with young people tend to look like?
- What do you observe in terms of the prevalence of low level mental health conditions amongst young people? How has this changed over time?
- Do you have a sense of how this could link with experience of victimisation or perpetration of violence?
- What does good practice look like (for supporting young people)? [in this role, and across the wider sector]
- Tell me about the training you have/need for this role?

Interviews with mental health practitioner(s) with some experience of working with young people

- Can you tell me a bit more about your role?

Men

- Which factors do you feel impact young people's mental health?
- What types of low-level mental health problems are common? (eg sub-clinical depression, anxiety) [Prompt: is this changing over time?]
- What are the key risk factors for young people? [Prompt: who develops low-level mental health problems, or who doesn't get these noticed and supported?]
- How can risk factors be effectively identified early in a child's life?
- To what extent do you work with young people who have low-level mental health issues how do these manifest?
 - differences by age, gender, ethnicity, any other factors
- What do you think are the most useful types of training for people working with young people? Are there any gaps in training?
- Are these the same types of risk factors as for exposure to violence, or perpetrating violence?
 - Is mental health one of the risk factors for violence (perpetration or victimisation)?
 - Is violence one of the risk factors for low-level mental health issues (perpetration or victimisation)



- What types of interventions work best, to break the links between low-level mental health issues and violence?
 - Prompts: what types of settings work best: Schools, youth clubs, via formal CAMHS services etc? And what types of practitioners should be involved? (teachers, mental health workers, activity clubs)
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- How much do organisations work together, or should work together?
 - (prompt: coordination, information sharing etc)
- Anything else that you think is important or relevant that we should know about?

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