

# Violence Prevention Framework: Evidence Supplement May 2023

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## Introduction

This supplement expands on the themes referred to in the Violence Prevention Framework, providing readers with the key evidence on the prevalence of violence in Scotland, how individuals perceive their own risk of experiencing violence and how this varies across our communities.

Violence is a cross-cutting issue that can take many different forms. The Violence Prevention Framework is overarching in nature and identifies a number of related policy areas which are taking forward more targeted activities to tackle specific forms of violence. More in-depth and additional evidence on these specific policy areas can be found within relevant policy documents, strategies and publications for individual topics.

This document brings together a selection of social research evidence from a range of Scottish Government and other sources, on the context and drivers of violence, and interventions to prevent and reduce violence.

The supplement also highlights forthcoming Scottish Government commissioned research to better our understanding of interpersonal repeat violent victimisation in Scotland, by exploring the views and experiences of those who are victims in addition to community stakeholders. The study will complete by the summer and findings will be published shortly thereafter.

In addition to the above social research evidence, the supplement also includes findings from Official Statistics sources. Primarily this focuses on [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey](#), but also highlights statistics covering crimes and offences recorded by the police, criminal proceedings in court and hospital admissions due to assault.

This is not an exhaustive review of all existing evidence in this area but outlines the primary evidence base which underpins the Framework and will, in part, be used to monitor its progress going forward.

## Non-sexual violent crime victimisation in Scotland

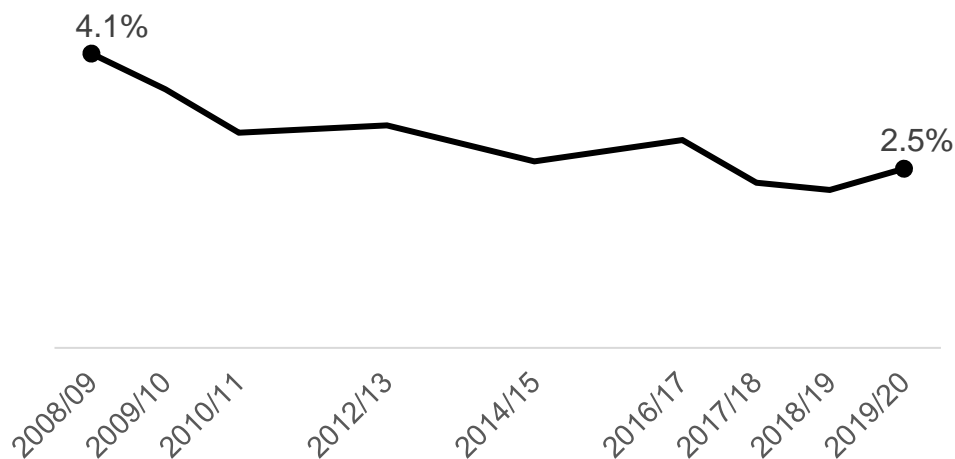
### Rates of victimisation and volume of violent crimes experienced

As stated throughout the framework, while violence can affect anyone it does not impact people and communities equally. The [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey](#) (SCJS) estimates that 2.5% of adults were victims of at least one non-sexual violent crime in 2019/20 (down from 4.1% in 2008/09) ([Chart 1](#)).

However, there was no significant change in this proportion between 2016/17 and 2019/20. The volume of violent incidents experienced by adults fell by two-fifths (39%) in this time, from an estimated 317,000 in 2008/09 to 194,000 incidents in 2019/20.<sup>1</sup> The latest findings for the SCJS, the first since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, are due to be published in Autumn 2023.

The SCJS found that the clear majority (73%) of violent crimes in 2019/20 were incidents of minor assault resulting in no or negligible injury, and relatively fewer (only 6%) were serious assault. This is a similar pattern to that seen in police recorded crime statistics on assault – whereby common assault made up the vast majority (84%) of non-sexual violence in 2021/22, whilst serious assault and attempted murder accounted for 6%.

**Chart 1. Proportion of adults who were victims of at least one violent crime.**



<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 3

**The likelihood of experiencing a non-sexual violent crime in 2019/20 was higher for:**

- Males (3.1%) compared to Females (2.0%)
- Younger people aged 16-24 (5.4%) compared to people aged 45-59 (2.3%) and people aged 60+ (0.6%)
- Those living in an urban area (2.8%) compared to a rural area (1.4%)
- Those living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland (5.3%) compared to the rest of Scotland (2.1%)

**Over time, the likelihood of experiencing a non-sexual violent crime has:**

- Decreased from 4.1% in 2008/09 to 2.5% in 2019/20
- Decreased for men (5.7% in 2008/09 to 3.1% in 2019/20) and for young people aged 16-24 (12.0% in 2008/09 to 5.4% in 2019/20)
- Not had a statistically significant change for women and other age groups.

How do experiences of violence vary throughout our communities?

Evidence considered in the 'Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland' report highlights local variations in rates of offending and victimisation, with deprived communities and marginalised groups within these communities, suffering disproportionately high levels of violence.<sup>2</sup> There is clear evidence of a link between experience of area level deprivation and crime with those living in the most deprived areas being more likely than the rest of Scotland to experience crime.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part, the statistics presented in this supplement have already been published and links to the original data are provided throughout. Due to the sample sizes involved, it is not typically possible to present breakdowns for all ethnicity groups in a single SCJS survey year. In order to say something about how different societal groups experience or perceive the likelihood of being a victim of a violent crime we have developed a new approach, referred to here as the 'SCJS pooled sample', which combines the responses received

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<sup>2</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

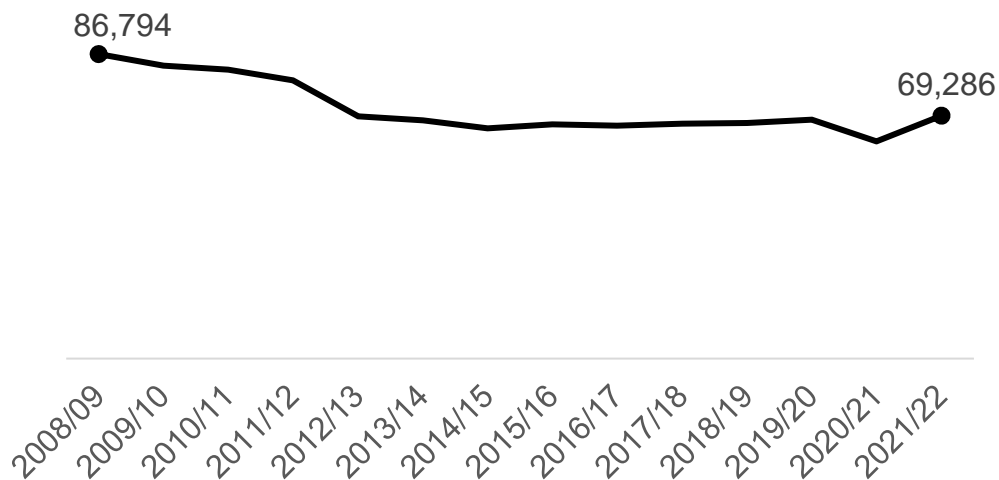
<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

across the nine SCJS surveys conducted between 2008/09 and 2019/20. Where any SCJS results refer to ethnicity, this information is based on a secondary analysis of the previously published datasets, a more detailed description of this analysis is available in the [Ethnicity in the justice system: evidence review](#) paper which was published in April 2023. For example, using this approach 3.2% of adults were a victim of at least one violent crime in the year they responded, and no individual ethnicity group showed a statistically significant difference to this national average.<sup>4</sup>

### Crimes and offences recorded by the police

In line with the reduction in estimated crime as measured by the SCJS, Scotland has seen a reduction in the volume of violent crime recorded by the police over the long term ([Chart 2](#)). Since 2008/09, the number of non-sexual crimes of violence recorded by the police fell by a fifth (20%) with recorded assaults (including both serious and common assault) falling to a similar degree (23%). Common assault makes up the majority of non-sexual crimes of violence, 84% in 2021-22.<sup>5</sup>

**Chart 2. Number of non-sexual crimes of violence recorded by the police**



While the main sources of evidence all show a reduction in violent crime, more recent changes are harder to discern. While the SCJS finds no significant change in the proportion of adults who experienced violence between 2016/17

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Ethnicity in the justice system: evidence review](#)

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

and 2019/20<sup>6</sup>, police recorded non-sexual crimes of violence grew by 2% over the same period, from 66,397 in 2016/17 to 68,020 in 2019/20. The volume of recorded violence then fell sharply during the first full year of the pandemic before returning to pre-COVID levels in 2021/22, with 69,286 crimes recorded (the highest in ten years) ([Chart 2](#)).<sup>7</sup>

The increase in recorded non-sexual violence between 2016/17 and 2021/22 was primarily due to the introduction of new laws to tackle domestic abuse and a rise in cyber-enabled cases of threats and extortion. Excluding the pandemic-related fall and rise back, levels of recorded assault (both serious and common combined) have remained very stable, with around 60,000 assaults being recorded by the police in Scotland each year.

### Homicide

In line with non-sexual violence as a whole, there has been a corresponding decrease in the number of homicides over the long term. Since 2008/09, the number of victims of homicide has fallen by almost half (46%) from 99 to 53, the lowest level since 1976 ([Chart 3](#)). This reduction was similar for both male (48%) and female (43%) victims. The number of homicide cases in Scotland remained relatively stable during 2012/13 to 2019/20, with between 59 and 65 cases recorded each year. The decrease of 10 cases in 2020-21 was the largest one-year change since 2012/13. The rate of homicide victimisation fell from 21.5 victims per 10,000 population for the three-years ending 2008/09 to 10.9 for the three years ending 2021/22.<sup>8</sup>

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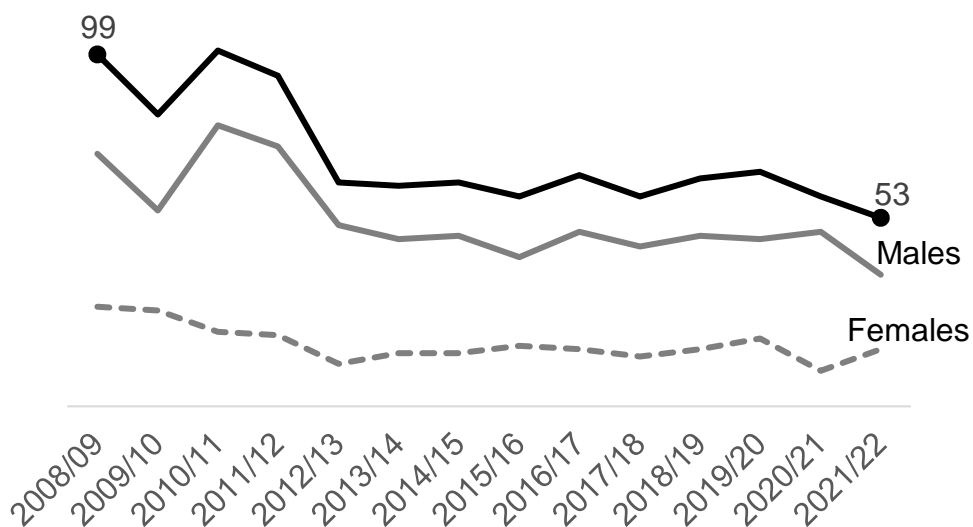
<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 3

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Homicide in Scotland, 2021-22](#)



**Chart 3. Number of homicide victims by gender**



Looking at all victims of homicide over the past ten years, the victimisation rate for males peaks in the 25 to 34 years old and 35 to 44 years old age groups (33 per million population in each case). The victimisation rate for females peaks in the 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 years old groups (9 per million population in each case).

Over the last ten years, the largest decrease in homicide victims was seen in Glasgow City, since 2012-13 the number of homicide victims in Glasgow has dropped by 47% from 19 to 10.

### Crimes and offences involving a firearm

In 2019/20, the police in Scotland recorded 341 offences in which a firearm was alleged to have been involved, the second lowest level since records began in 1980. Of these, around one in seven (14%) involved a non-sexual crime of violence, up from around one in ten (9%) in 2015-16 though in both years this reflected only 10 crimes. Over this period, the number of non-sexual crimes of violence in which a firearm was alleged to be involved, ranged from 10 to 20 crimes.<sup>9</sup>

Since the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015 came into effect on 31 December 2016, there are five full recording years of offences committed under this act. These show a decline in recorded offences, beginning with 396

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<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Crimes and offences involving firearms, Scotland, 2018-19 & 2019-20](#)

offences in 2017/18 and followed by 336 offences in 2018/19, 296 offences in 2019/20, 257 offences in 2020/21 and falling to 215 offences in 2021/22.<sup>10</sup>

## **Knife crime**

Research suggests that one of the chief motivators for carrying a knife is a fear of crime, which is often coupled with the belief that carrying a knife is protection against victimisation.<sup>11 12</sup>

### Crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded by the police

While there have been some encouraging long-term declines in weapons-related violence (not least a 72% fall in hospital admissions for assault with a sharp object since 2008/09<sup>13</sup>), there has been a 30% increase in recorded crimes of handling offensive weapons between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (from 7,733 to 10,048) ([Chart 7](#)).<sup>14</sup> However, the latest data suggests the trend may be changing again, with a 2% fall over the year ending December 2022 (to 9,602 crimes)<sup>15</sup>, and we know operational factors can play a role in the volume of cases recorded. For example, a 2017 study suggested that half of weapons possession crimes (where the weapon wasn't used) were identified through police patrols or the investigation of other crimes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

<sup>11</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2013) [Knife Crime Interventions: What Works?](#)

<sup>12</sup> No Knives Better Lives (2019) [10 Years of No Knives, Better Lives](#)

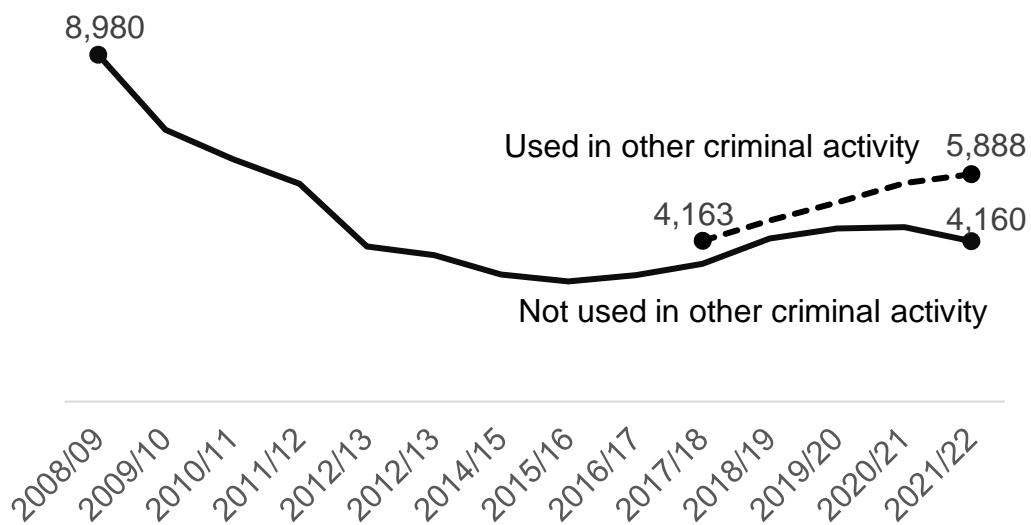
<sup>13</sup> Public Health Scotland (2022) [Unintentional injuries - Hospital admissions year ending 31 March 2022 and deaths year ending 31 December 2021](#)

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

<sup>15</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Recorded Crime in Scotland: year ending December 2022](#)

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Recorded Crime in Scotland: handling offensive weapons](#)

**Chart 4. Number of crimes of handling an offensive weapon recorded by the police**



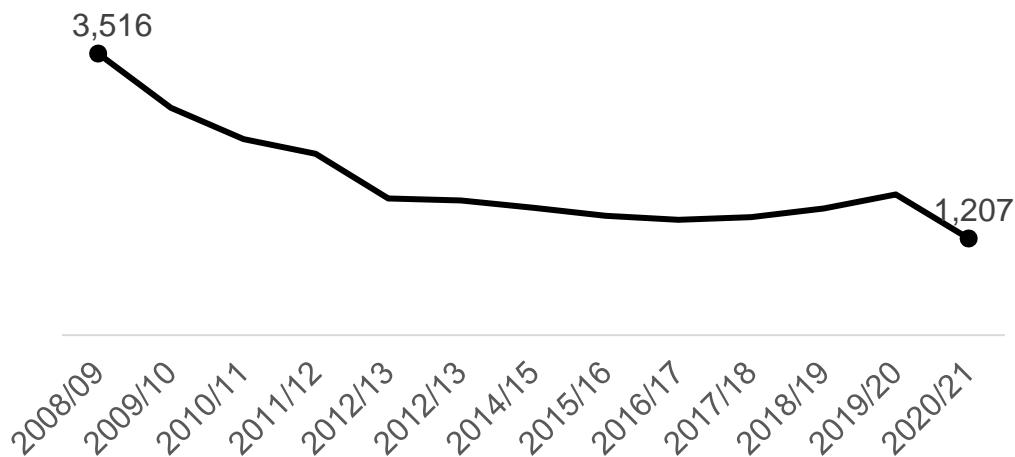
Convictions for handling offensive weapons

Since 2008-09, the number of people convicted in Scottish courts of a main charge of Handling offensive weapons has fallen by half (50%), from 3,516 to 1,755 in 2019-20 ([Chart 8](#)). This number fell further to 1,207 in 2020-21, though this likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across the justice system. Over the same period there has been a shift in the age profile of persons being convicted of Handling offensive weapons. In 2008-09, 30% of convictions were in the over-30s group and 33% were for people under 21 years of age. In 2019-20 more than half (53%) of all offensive weapon convictions were in the over-30s and under a sixth (15%) were for those aged under 21. Although totals were lower in 2020-21, the proportions remained similar to 2019-20, with 52% of convictions for over-30s and 14% for under 21 year olds.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Criminal Proceedings in Scotland, 2020-21](#), Chapter 10

**Chart 5. Number of individuals convicted for handling offensive weapons.**



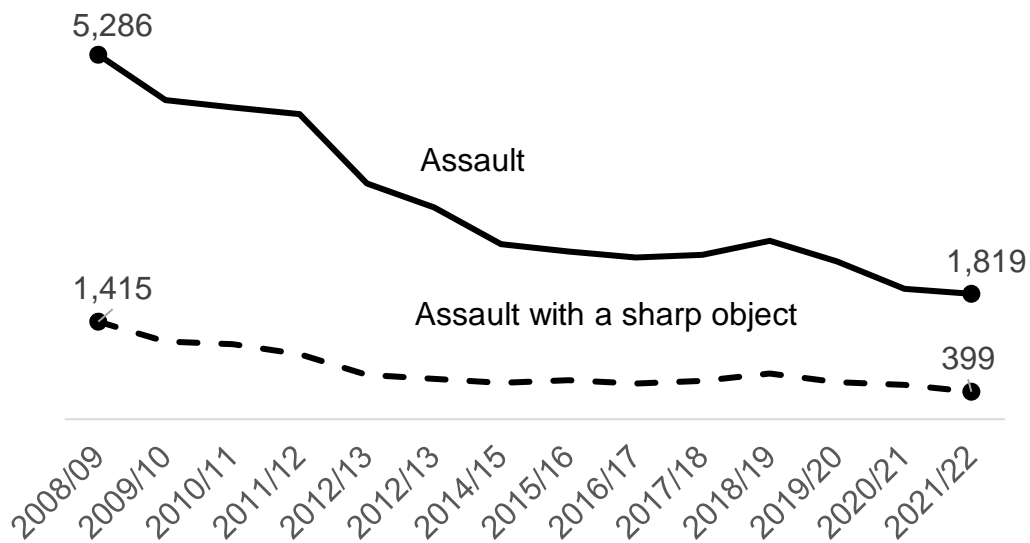
Admissions to hospital due to assault with a sharp object

Similar to the reduction in the number of crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded by the police and convicted in court, there has been a corresponding reduction in hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object over the longer term. Since 2008/09, there has been a 66% and 72% fall in the number of emergency hospital admissions due to assault and assault with a sharp object respectively ([Chart 9](#)). The majority of admissions due to assault and assault with a sharp object since 2008/09 involved a male, for example in 2021/22 the figures were 84% and 93% respectively. Also, the reduction in admissions due to assault with a sharp object since 2008/09 is similar for both males and females, down 72% and 70% respectively.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Public Health Scotland (2022) [Unintentional injuries - Hospital admissions year ending 31 March 2022 and deaths year ending 31 December 2021](#)

**Chart 6. Number of hospital admissions due to assault and assault with a sharp object**



### Knife crime interventions

Education based interventions have been found to offer the most promise for effectively addressing knife crime amongst young people.<sup>19</sup> Such interventions should acknowledge and take seriously the fear many people have of victimisation, whilst providing reassurances that police and other agencies are taking steps to ensure their safety. It should also be emphasised to young people that carrying a knife increases rather than decreases their risk of victimisation. Education interventions should be delivered in both schools and within communities. This should form part of a sustained approach aiming to reduce fear and reduce vulnerability to victimisation.

Diversions activities have some potential to address knife crime. These activities, which include engagement in sport and mentoring programmes, may help prevent a young person from choosing to carry a knife. Further information on these interventions can be found in [‘Knife Crime Interventions: What Works’](#).

It is acknowledged that in some instances recognising young peoples’ fears and providing reassurance, will not, on its own, be sufficient. Where violence is deeply embedded in some Scottish communities, a culture of fear may

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<sup>19</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2013) [Knife Crime Interventions: What Works?](#)

accompany it. This fear may be similarly entrenched and as such difficult to minimise or eradicate.<sup>20</sup>

It is acknowledged that more comprehensive evaluations of interventions seeking to tackle knife crime are needed.<sup>21</sup>

## **Repeat victimisation**

Repeat victimisation is defined as the experience of being a victim of the same type of offence more than once.<sup>22</sup> Repeat violent victimisation, therefore, is the recurrence of violent crime against the same target.

Violent crime is disproportionately suffered by repeat victims. Evidence indicates that repeat violent victimisation (RVV) is common for crimes such as assault, threats, robbery and theft, in addition it would appear that domestic violence is also an important component of RVV. Victims of RVV tend to have particular characteristics, most commonly: young, male (except with domestic violence) and come from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds. Violent offending may be a risk factor for RVV.<sup>23</sup>

We know from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20 that 2.5% of adults experienced at least one violent crime (194,000 incidents). However, a large proportion of violent crimes affect a small group of people, with 1% (or one in every hundred adults) having experienced multiple crimes of violence that year. Those repeat victims accounted for around two-thirds (65%) of all violent crime committed in Scotland in that year.<sup>24</sup>

It has been argued that given the extent and prevalence of RVV, focusing on RVV may be an effective and efficient means of preventing and reducing violent crime. Evidence regarding the nature of RVV suggests safety and protection from re-victimisation is an important way to reduce the likelihood of

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<sup>20</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2013) [Knife Crime Interventions: What Works?](#)

<sup>21</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2013) [Knife Crime Interventions: What Works?](#)

<sup>22</sup> Farrell, G. and Sousa, W. (2001) 'Repeat Victimisation and Hot Spots: The Overlap and Its Implications for Crime Control and Problem-Oriented Policing', *Crime Prevention Studies*, 12, pp. 221-240.

<sup>23</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Repeat Violent Victimisation: A Rapid Evidence Review](#)

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 3

RVV. There are a range of practical measures<sup>25</sup> which can protect victims by preventing future opportunities for violence, as well as increasing the actual or perceived risks of apprehension for offenders. Findings suggest that prevention measures should be implemented quickly, given that RVV often occurs soon after the initial victimisation.<sup>26</sup>

Evidence points to the importance of effective partnership working between agencies in reducing the risks of repeated episodes of victimisations. For example, joint working between the police and support services to improve the safety of victims of RVV.<sup>27</sup>

However, the literature acknowledges that objections have been raised to focusing on RVV, namely that it fails to address the root causes of violent crime.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Including improved home security, panic alarms, heightened police awareness and refuges for victims of domestic violence

<sup>26</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Repeat Violent Victimisation: A Rapid Evidence Review](#)

<sup>27</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Repeat Violent Victimisation: A Rapid Evidence Review](#)

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Repeat Violent Victimisation: A Rapid Evidence Review](#)

## **Research in focus: Understanding Repeat Violence in Scotland**

### **Background**

Researchers at the University of Glasgow are undertaking a qualitative study with people who experience repeat violence, particularly repeat violent victimisation (RVV).<sup>29</sup> Recent data from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey suggests that the risks of violent victimisation are highest for adults living in deprived communities and that victims of repeated incidences of violence account for the majority of non-sexual physical violence reported.

### **Purpose**

The research aims to better our understanding of interpersonal RVV, by exploring the views and experiences of people with lived experience of repeat violence, not all of whom identify as victims. This includes people with convictions and people with multiple complex needs. In doing so, the research intends to inform policy decisions to reduce and prevent violence, as well as the improvement of support services for victim/survivors of repeat violence in Scotland. Findings will be used to further inform the delivery of the Violence Prevention Framework.

### **Approach**

The research involves qualitative interviews with people who have direct experience of repeat, interpersonal violence (n=62) and the people who support them (n=33). In the main, participants have been recruited from specific urban, town and rural case study areas characterised by high levels of deprivation and violent victimisation, however the study also includes people who fall out with such areas who have experience of repeat violence. This case study design allows the research team to consider the community contexts as well as the individual characteristics of people who experience interpersonal RVV.

### **Scope**

The study is primarily focused on interpersonal, non-sexual violence but it does attend to the relationship between physical and other types of violence, as well as other crimes, as these arise during interviews with participants, including domestic abuse and hate crime.

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<sup>29</sup> [University of Glasgow - Schools - School of Social & Political Sciences - Research - Research in Sociology - Research projects - Repeat Violent Victimisation](#)



Qualitative interview analysis will explore the following:

- What are the characteristics and circumstances/contexts of people who experience interpersonal repeat violence?
- What are victim/survivors' understandings and experiences of repeat violence?
- What impact does interpersonal repeat violence have on victim/survivors?
- What are victim/survivors' experiences of seeking help and support with repeat violence?

### **Timings**

Fieldwork was delayed due to the suspension of face-to-face research during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study resumed in March 2022 and will complete by summer 2023, with the findings published shortly thereafter.

## **Convictions in court and custodial sentences for non-sexual crimes of violence**

In line with the fall in the number of non-sexual crimes of violence recorded by the police there has been a corresponding reduction in court convictions for these crimes. Since 2008/09, the number of convictions for non-sexual crimes of violence fell by almost a fifth (19%), from 2,659 to 2,159 in 2019/20 ([Chart 4](#)). In 2020/21 this fell further to 1,504, but this figure is affected by the pandemic and subsequent court closures. Over the same time, the average sentence length, for those who received a custodial sentence, increased by 4% from 951 days to 986 days. Again, 2020/21 had an unusually low figures of 886 days, only the second time in the preceding ten years that the average sentence fell below 900 days. Between 2008/09 and 2019/20 the proportion of convicted persons that were male increased only slightly, from 88% to 89%. Over the same timespan the median age of a convicted person rose from 24 to 30 years old.<sup>30</sup>

The figures for 2020/21 presented here cover the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of this across the justice system. Whilst it is not

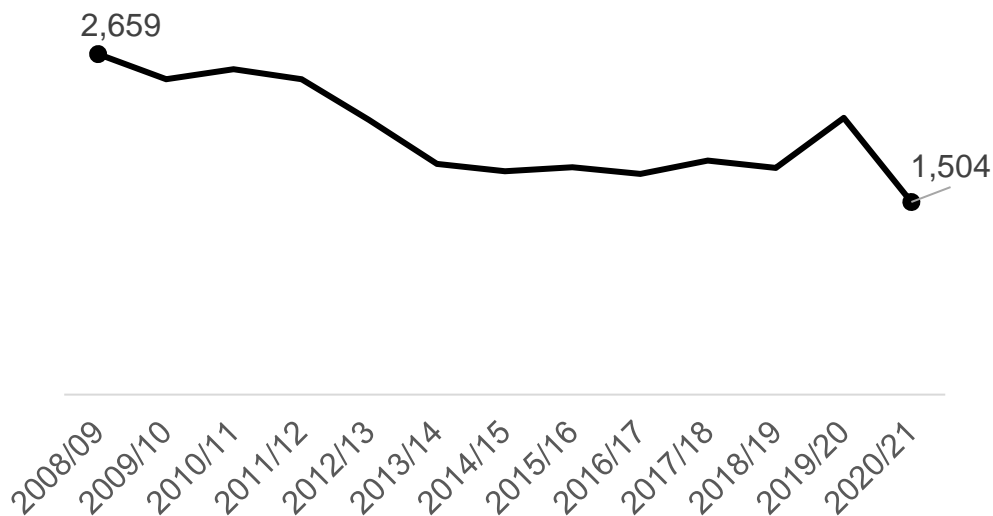
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<sup>30</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Criminal Proceedings in Scotland, 2020-21](#), Chapter 6

yet possible to isolate the impact of the pandemic on the data, it is reasonable to conclude that the latest data is predominantly a reflection of the impact of the pandemic across the justice system, and should not be interpreted as indicative of longer-term trends.

It is also important to note that, unlike other sources presented in this document, such as Recorded Crime in Scotland and the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, the figures for proceedings for non-sexual crimes of violence do not include common assault.

**Chart 7. Number of individuals convicted of a non-sexual crime of violence**



### **Prison population with index non-sexual crimes of violence**

Over the longer term, the average daily population sentenced for non-sexual crimes of violence (inc. common assault) has fallen overall. A pre-pandemic increase in this population – and subsequent reduction in 2020-21 – had not recovered in 2021-22.<sup>31</sup> ([Chart 5](#))

Part of the reason for this reduction is evident in the remand population, which has seen a rapid increase over the past few years. This population growth has been most rapid among those accused of index non-sexual crimes of

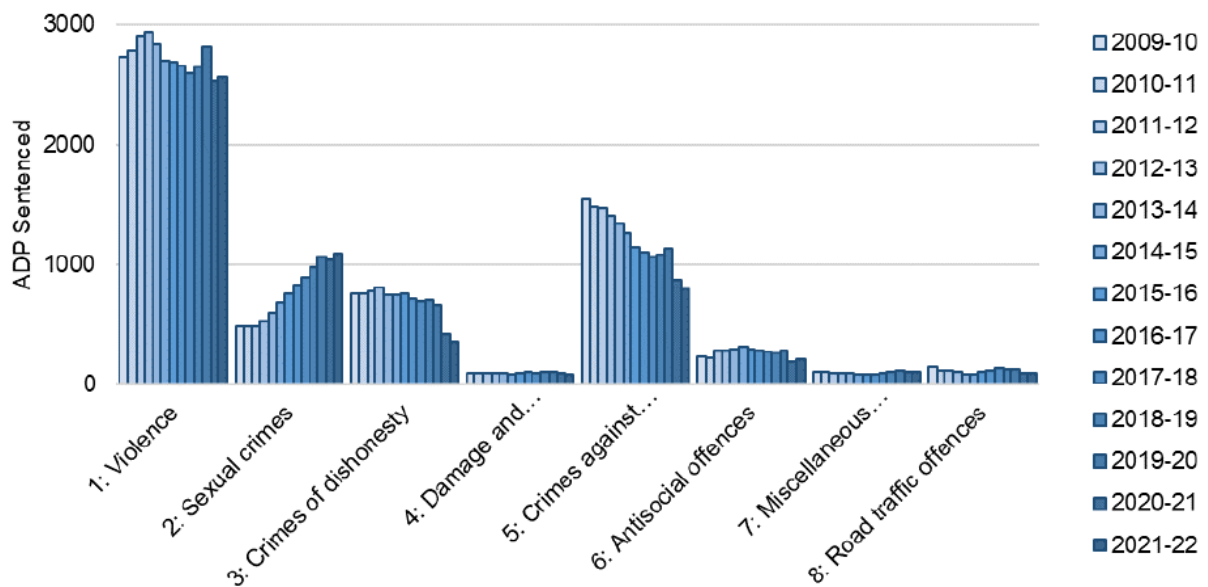
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<sup>31</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Scottish Prison Population Statistics](#), section 1.3

violence.<sup>32</sup> (Chart 6) This difference is indicative of the growing length of time people remain on remand before sentencing.<sup>33</sup>

When taken together, the total population with index offences in the non-sexual crimes of violence group in 2021-22 marginally exceeded the combined population pre-pandemic. The total average daily population sentenced for, or accused of, such offences was 3,549 in 2021-22, up from 3,526 in 2019-20.

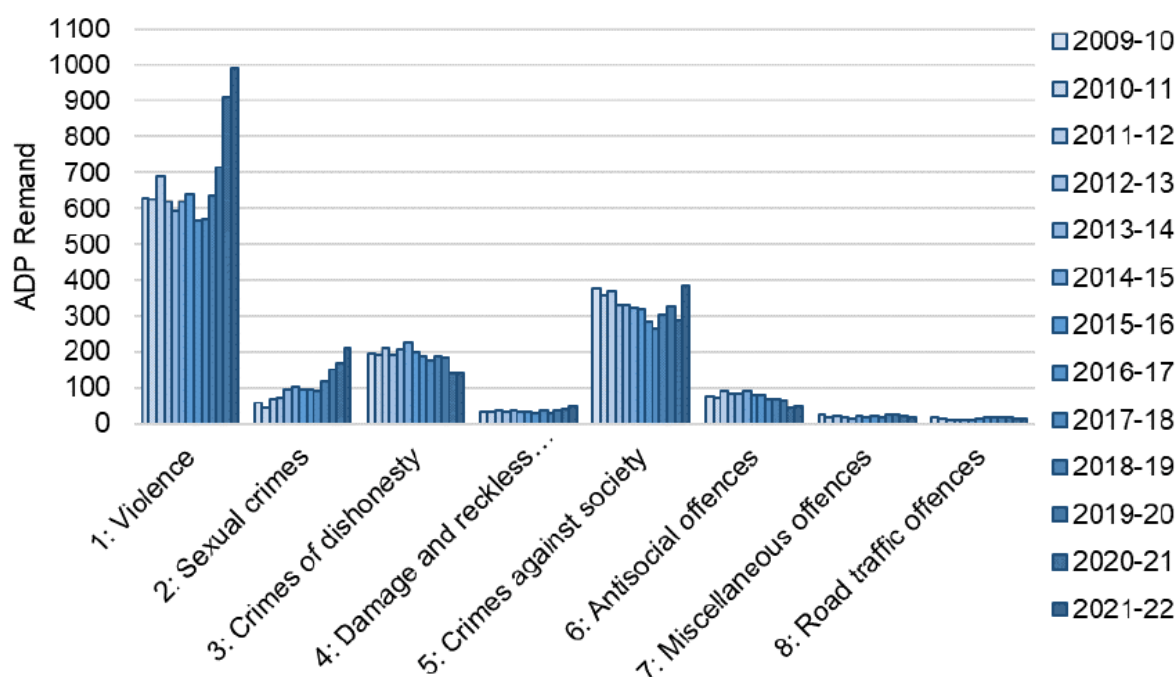
**Chart 8. Average daily population (sentenced) by index offence group**



<sup>32</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Scottish Prison Population Statistics](#), section 5.1

<sup>33</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Scottish Prison Population Statistics](#), section 8.3.1

**Chart 9. Average daily population (remand) by index offence group**



### Impact on non-sexual violence experienced in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic

The [Scottish Victimisation Telephone Survey \(SVTS\) 2020](#) was a social survey which asked people about their experiences and perceptions of crime, safety, and policing during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the most recently published crime survey statistics for Scotland due to the suspension of the SCJS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an alternative to the SCJS, the SVTS did not seek to replicate all questions asked in the SCJS. For example, some areas were excluded, such as questions on stalking and harassment, partner abuse and sexual victimisation, due to concerns around safeguarding those responding on the telephone.

The survey estimated that, rounded to the nearest 1,000 crimes, there was a total of 145,000 violent crimes in the period covered by the survey, that 2% of adults experienced a violent crime<sup>34</sup>, and that 46% of violent crime came to the attention of the police.<sup>35</sup> Further breakdowns, including by demographic

<sup>34</sup> Violence crime includes the following distinct groups: assault (includes serious assault, minor assault with injury, minor assault with no or negligible injury, and attempted assault) and robbery

<sup>35</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [Scottish Victimisation Telephone Survey 2020](#), Chapter 2

variables, were only possible for all crime combined, and not possible just for violent crime due to the small sample sizes involved.

For all crime rather than just violent crime, it is estimated that approximately three-in-five (61%, 269,000) crimes occurred before the lockdown, and two-in-five (39%, 176,000) occurred after the lockdown, meaning that crime fell significantly after the start of the UK's first national lockdown. This equates to an estimated fall in crime of approximately 35% over this time period.

Although these combined figures do not allow us to say if violent crime fell during the pandemic, evidence from other sources suggest that it did. The number of police recorded non-sexual crimes of violence decreased by 9% from 68,020 in 2019-20 to 61,913 in 2020-21.<sup>36</sup> Combined with the fall in all crime estimated by the SVTS, this may suggest that violent crime fell too.

Notwithstanding the above, there is a body of Scottish and international evidence which demonstrates that the pandemic significantly impacted victims of domestic abuse, including the incidence and severity of abuse in addition to challenges accessing services and alternative accommodation. However some caution is advised before necessarily attributing any observed changes in domestic abuse incidents solely to COVID-19.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

<sup>37</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018: Interim Reporting Requirement](#)

## Sexual crimes

Whilst Scotland has seen decreases in both the volume and rate of victimisation from non-sexual violence over the longer term it is important to acknowledge that people experience other forms of violence not included in this definition. In particular, sexual crimes recorded by the police have been on an upward trend since 1974, with some fluctuations. Prior to small decreases in 2019-20 and 2020-21, there had been increases each year since 2008-09. Sexual crimes account for 5% of all crimes recorded in Scotland in 2021-22. The national rate of recorded Sexual crimes was 28 crimes per 10,000 population in 2021-22, up from 24 per 10,000 population in 2020-21.

A number of legislative and procedural changes should be kept in mind when reviewing trends in sexual crimes over the longer term.<sup>38</sup> In addition to these changes, historical reporting of sexual crime also continues to play a role in these statistics. Further information from Police Scotland suggests that just under a quarter (23%) of sexual crimes in 2021-22 were recorded at least one year after they occurred. This figure is similar to the previous year. The increase in sexual cyber-crimes has also had an impact on the trend of recorded sexual crimes in recent years. We estimate that the volume of sexual crimes that were cyber-crimes has increased from 1,100 in 2013-14 to 4,210 in 2021-22.<sup>39</sup>

According to the latest SCJS findings, in 2018/20, 3.6% of adults experienced at least one form of serious sexual assault since the age of 16, this has shown no change since 2016/18. The proportion who experienced serious sexual assault since the age of 16 was higher for women than men (6.1% compared with 0.8%), those living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland than the rest of the country (4.9% compared with 3.4%), and those who were classed as victims in the main SCJS survey compared to those who were not (7.1% compared with 3.1%).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#), Annex 3

<sup>39</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

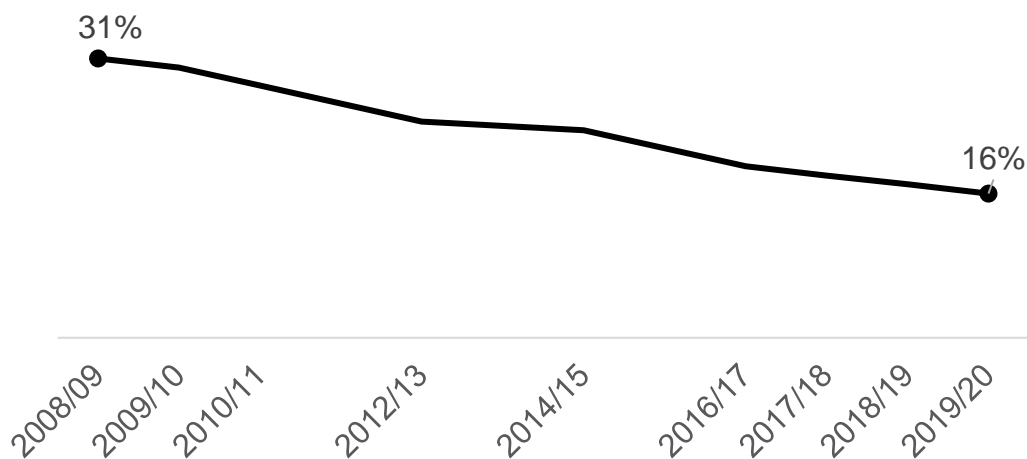
<sup>40</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 9.4

## Perceptions of violence and feelings of safety

### Fear of experiencing a violent crime

A much greater number of people are worried about violent crimes happening to them than the number who are victims. Around one-in-six adults (16%) in 2019/20 were worried about being physically assaulted or attacked in the street or other public place. This has fallen from around one-in-three adults (31%) in 2008/09 ([Chart 10](#)).<sup>41</sup>

**Chart 10. Proportion of adults who were worried about being physically assaulted or attacked in the street or other public place.**



When examining the responses across the SCJS pooled sample (2008-2020), 26% of adults were worried about being physically assaulted or attacked in the street or other public place. This proportion was higher for those who identified as Asian (37%) or African, Caribbean or Black (39%). All other ethnic groups showed no statistically significant difference from the national average.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 7

<sup>42</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Ethnicity in the justice system: evidence review](#)

**The proportion of people who were worried about experiencing a violent crime in 2019/20 was higher for:**

- Females (19.2%) compared to males (11.8%). This difference is also present within all age brackets
- People aged 16-24 (19.9%) compared to people aged 60+ (14.0%)
- Younger women aged 16-24 (27.1%) compared to older women aged 60+ (16.1%)
- Those that had been a victim of crime (30.1%) compared to non-victims (13.6%)
- Those who live in an urban area (16.5%) compared to a rural area (11.3%)
- Those who live in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland (26.1%) compared to the rest of Scotland (13.9%)

**Over time, the proportion of people who were worried about experiencing a violent crime has:**

- Decreased from 30.7% in 2008/09 to 15.6% in 2019/20
- Decreased from 17.3% in 2018/19 to 15.6% in 2019/20

As noted in the 'Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland' report, qualitative research evidence highlights the indirect effects of violence and disorder on community wellbeing, especially in relation to the fear of violence.<sup>43</sup> Literature points to marginalised communities, where there is little evidence of serious violence, yet people often report being unable to access facilities or activities due to the threat or fear of violence, sometimes leading to social isolation.<sup>44</sup>

### **Fear of being sexually assaulted**

In 2019/20, one in ten people (10%) were worried about being sexually assaulted. This has fallen from around one-in-six (15%) in 2008/09 but was unchanged since 2018/19 ([Chart 11](#)).<sup>45</sup>

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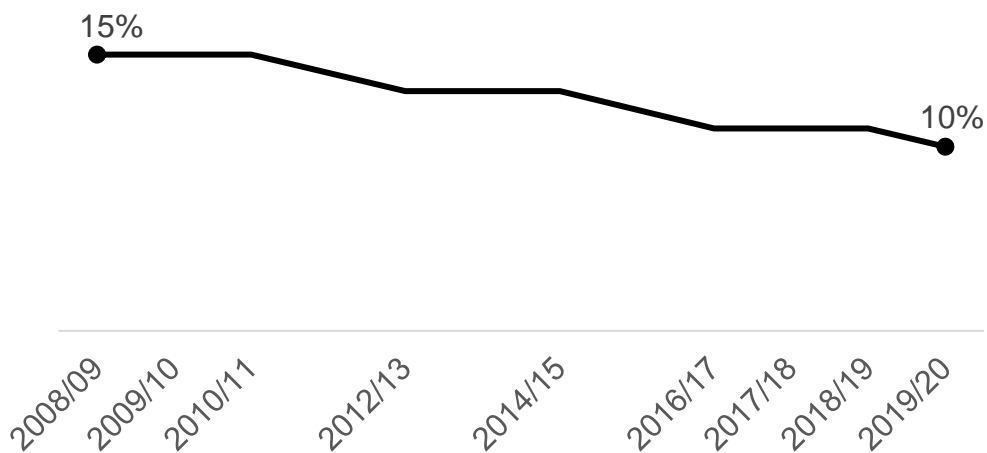
<sup>43</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>44</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>45</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 7



**Chart 11. Proportion of adults who were worried about being sexually assaulted.**



When examining the responses across the SCJS pooled sample (2008-2020), 13.6% of adults were worried about being sexually assaulted. This proportion was higher for those who identified as Asian (20.7%), African, Caribbean or Black (22.9%), and Other Ethnicity (19.9%) compared to the national average.

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**The proportion of people who were worried about being sexually assaulted in 2019/20 was higher for:**

- Females (16.4%) compared to males (2.3%). This difference is also present within all age brackets.
- Younger people aged 16-24 (16.8%) compared to all other age groups (11.3% 25-44, 8.2% 45-59, 6.1% 60+)
- Younger women aged 16-24 (30.1%) compared to older women aged 60+ (9.5%)
- Those who were the victim of a crime (18.1%) compared to non-victims (8.4%)
- Those who live in an urban area (10.7%) compared to a rural area (4.1%)
- Those who live in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland (12.9%) compared to the rest of Scotland (9.1%)

<sup>46</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Ethnicity in the justice system: evidence review](#)

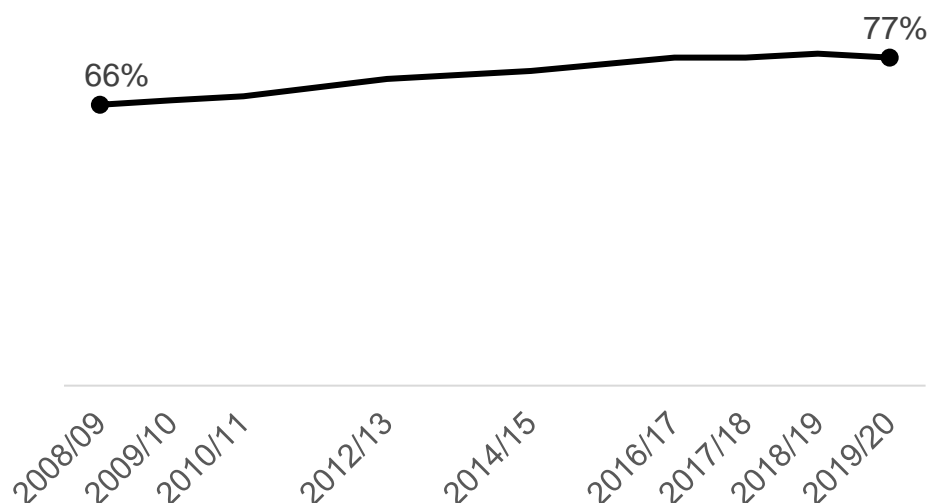
**Over time, the proportion of people who were worried about being sexually assaulted has:**

- Decreased from 14.6% in 2008/09 to 9.6% in 2019/20

### **Feelings of safety in your local area: walking alone after dark**

As well as the reduction in the volume of violence being committed over time as described above, there has been a fall in people's perceptions of their own risks of victimisation. Since 2008/09 there has been an increase from 66% to 77% in the proportion of adults who felt safe walking alone in their local area after dark ([Chart 12](#)).<sup>47</sup>

**Chart 12. Proportion of adults who felt safe walking alone in their local area after dark.**



Using the SCJS pooled sample approach (2008-2020), on average 70% of adults felt safe walking alone after dark. The proportion was higher for those who identified as being mixed ethnicity (81%), and lower for those who identified as Asian (64%). No other ethnic group showed a statistically significant difference from the national average.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 7

<sup>48</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Ethnicity in the justice system: evidence review](#)

**The proportion of people who felt safe walking alone in their local area after dark in 2019/20 was lower for:**

- Females (64.9%) compared to males (90.2%)
- People aged 60+ (69.9%) compared to all other age groups (77.3% 16-24, 83.0% 25-44, 78.2% 45-59)
- Those who were the victim of a crime (65.5%) compared to non-victims (78.7%)
- Those who live in an urban area (74.2%) compared to a rural area (91.1%)
- Those who live in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland (63.3%) compared to the rest of Scotland (79.4%)

**Over time, the proportion of people who felt safe walking alone in their local area after dark has:**

- Increased from 66.2% in 2008/09 to 77.1% in 2019/20

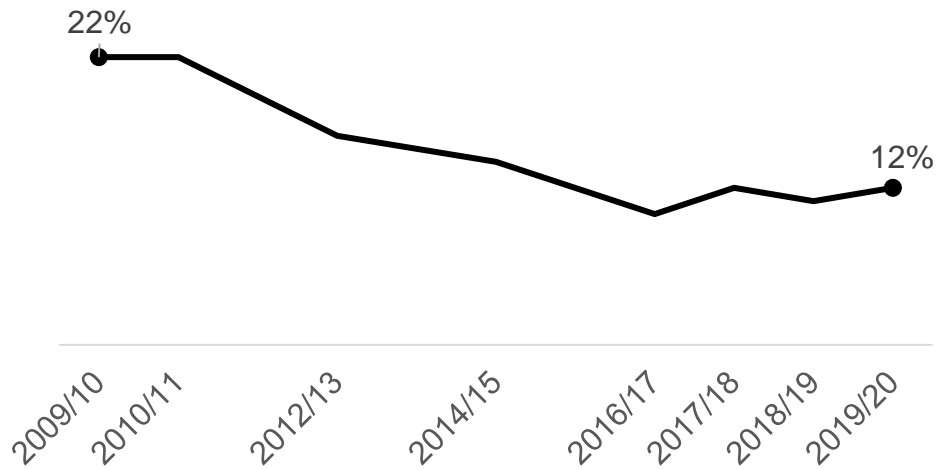
**Feelings of safety in your local area: whether carrying knives is common**

Similar to the reduction in the number of crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded by the police and convicted in court as well as a reduction in hospital assaults due to assault with a sharp object, there has also been a fall in the proportion of adults who thought that people carrying knives was common in their local area. Between 2009/10 and 2019/20 this proportion fell from 22% to 12% ([Chart 13](#)).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 7

**Chart 13. Proportion of adults who thought people carrying knives was common in their area.**



**The proportion of people who think people carrying knives in their local area is common in 2019/20 was higher for:**

- Those that were the victim of a crime (24.4%) compared to non-victims (10.7%)
- People living in an urban area (13.6%) compared to a rural area (5.4%)
- Those living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland (25.1%) compared to the rest of Scotland (10.1%)

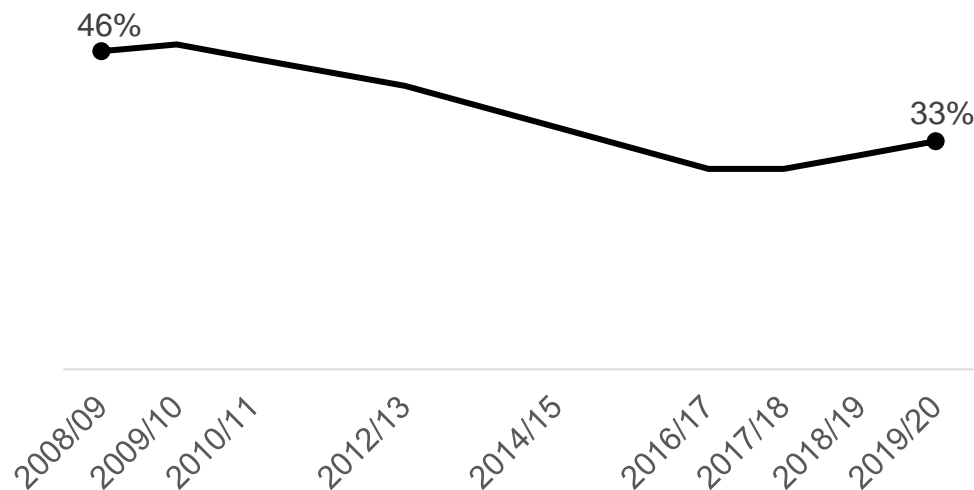
**Over time, the proportion of people who think people carrying knives in their local area is common has:**

- Decreased from 2009/10 (22.4%) to 2019/20 (12.2%)

## Feelings of safety in your local area: people behaving in an anti-social manner in public

The SCJS reported that a third of adults (33%) thought people behaving in an anti-social manner in public was common in their area, which is down from 46% in 2008/09 ([Chart 14](#)).<sup>50</sup>

**Chart 14. Proportion of adults who thought people behaving in an anti-social manner in public was common in their area.**



### The proportion of people who think people behaving in an anti-social manner in public in their area is common in 2019/20 was higher for:

- People of all age groups (50.4% 16-24, 37.8% 25-44, 37.6% 45-59) compared to people aged 60+ (18.4%)
- Those that were the victim of a crime (49.8%) compared to non-victims (31.4%)
- People living in an urban area (36.4%) compared to a rural area (18.8%)
- Those living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland (62.8%) compared to the rest of Scotland (28.8%)

### Over time, the proportion of people who think people behaving in an anti-social manner in public in their area is common has:

- Decreased from 46.4% in 2008/09 to 33.4% in 2019/20

<sup>50</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 7

We know that feeling safe is not felt equally across everyone in our communities – different crimes are experienced differently by different groups. For example, women are more likely than men to be concerned about crime and perceive some issues to be more prevalent in their neighbourhood than men. People who have experience of the justice system also feel less safe than the general public.<sup>51</sup>

As noted in the ‘Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland’ report, fear of violence closely follows lines of disadvantage, with evidence suggesting that deprived communities suffer disproportionately.<sup>52</sup> This interacts with, and is underpinned by, structural inequalities - with marginalised groups within communities suffering disproportionate fear of crime.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [The Vision for Justice in Scotland 2022](#)

<sup>52</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>53</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

## Hate crime and prejudice

### Hate crimes recorded by the police

The police recorded 6,927 hate crimes in 2021-22. Since 2014-15, the number of hate crimes recorded has fluctuated between 6,300 and 7,000 crimes. In the latest year, just over three-fifths (62%) of hate crimes included a race aggravator, over a quarter (27%) included a sexual orientation aggravator, 8% a disability aggravator, 7% a religion aggravator and 3% a transgender identity aggravator.<sup>54</sup>

In 2021-22, just over half (53%) of hate crimes recorded were Threatening or abuse behaviour. This was followed by Racially aggravated conduct which represented 13% of hate crimes recorded. A further 11% of hate crimes were common assault. The total number of Threatening or abusive behaviour offences recorded by the police has increased from 2,432 in 2014-15 to 3,703 in 2021-22. Over the same period, the number of Racially aggravated conduct offences recorded fell from 2,196 to 932.

A study into the details of police recorded hate crimes in 2020-21 found that violent crime made up 13% of all incidents where the victim was not a police officer. This proportion is relatively consistent across the five aggravators, with race-aggravated hate crime having the highest proportion at 13.4% and religion-aggravated the lowest at 8.4%. The other aggravators were between 11% and 13%.

Where the victim was not a police officer, the study shows in over a third (36%) of race-aggravated violent hate crimes, the words used, or actions taken by the perpetrator suggest anti-Black prejudice. A quarter (25%) of crimes showed anti-Pakistani prejudice and 7% showed anti-Polish prejudice. In a further quarter of crimes, the perpetrator made generally xenophobic remarks not directed at any one group.

For the other hate aggravators:

- The majority (80%) of disability-aggravated violent crimes showed prejudice towards learning disabilities.
- For religion-aggravated violent hate crimes, just over a third (36%) showed anti-Catholic prejudice. All other religions did not appear at a high enough prevalence to be able to report on.

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<sup>54</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Police recorded hate crime - characteristics: updated study](#)

- Three quarters (75%) of sexual orientation-aggravated violent hate crimes displayed homophobia, and 30% showed anti-Lesbian prejudice. More than one type of prejudice can be shown in the course of a crime, so figures can total over 100%.
- All violent crimes with a transgender identity aggravator showed prejudice towards the transgender community

Where the victim was a police officer, a lower proportion of crimes were found to be violent at 5%, compared to 13% for crimes with a non-police officer individual. The most common type of prejudice shown in these violent crimes was homophobia, which accounted for 29% of such crimes.

### **Hate crimes reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service**

Details of hate crime reported to the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland are included annually in the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) report, 'Hate Crime in Scotland'.<sup>55</sup> The 2021-22 report includes the following headline findings:

- The total number of charges reported containing at least one element of hate crime was 5,640 in 2021-22, marginally less (-0.2%) than the 5,654 charges reported in 2020-21.
- Racial crime remains the most commonly reported hate crime. In total 3,107 charges relating to race crime were reported in 2021-22, a decrease of 7% compared to 2020-21. The numbers of charges have fluctuated in recent years but are currently 32% lower than the peak in such charges in 2011-12, when 4,547 were reported.
- Sexual orientation aggravated crime is the second most commonly reported type of hate crime. The number of charges reported increased by 10% in 2021-22 to 1,781. With the exception of 2014-15, there have been year on year increases in charges reported since the legislation introducing this aggravation came into force in 2010.
- There were 512 charges with a religious aggravation reported in 2021-22, 16% fewer than in 2020-21. Although direct comparisons are not possible with all earlier years, the number of charges with a religious aggravation in 2021-22 is the lowest number containing a religious element since 2004-05, when 479 charges were reported.
- The number of disability aggravated charges increased by 44% to 666 in 2021-22. With the exception of 2016-17, there have been year on

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<sup>55</sup> Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (2022) [Hate Crime in Scotland 2021-22](#)



year increases in charges reported since the legislation introducing this aggravation came into force in 2010.

- There were 84 charges reported in 2021-22 with an aggravation of transgender identity, an increase of 87% compared to 2020-21. This is the highest number of such charges reported since the legislation introducing this aggravation came into force in 2010.<sup>56</sup>

## Experiences of hate crime

The 2019 SCCJR paper 'Taking Stock of Violence' acknowledges that while there is little research evidence on hate crime in Scotland, the limited research which does exist highlights the varied experiences of hate crime and points to under-reporting in addition to repeat victimisation.<sup>57</sup>

In 2016, Maureen McBride conducted a review of the evidence on hate crime and violent prejudice in Scotland.<sup>58</sup> As part of this research, McBride surveyed a series of key stakeholders comprising national and local organisations to explore organisational data collection, usage, and perceived gaps in information. The study underscored the underreporting of hate crime in official data and emphasised problems associated with the aggregation of, and different definitions of, protected group characteristics. Aggregation of protected group categories was also considered to obscure underlying patterns and trends. The report observed: 'while reported crimes related [to] race/ethnicity have declined in the most recent reporting year, there have been reported increases among some particular ethnic/national groups.'<sup>59</sup>

Stakeholder organisations taking part in McBride's study reported many and widespread experiences of direct harm (direct experiences of being targeted and harmed through hate crime and discriminatory practices). They also emphasised that hate crimes perpetrated on the basis of multiple characteristics were typical; and that the contemporary focus on 'hate crimes' obscured the ordinariness of much of the prejudice that minority groups face.

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<sup>56</sup> Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (2022) [Hate Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

<sup>57</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>58</sup> McBride, M. (2016). [A Review of the Evidence on Hate Crime and Prejudice- Report for the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion](#). The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research

<sup>59</sup> McBride, M. (2016). [A Review of the Evidence on Hate Crime and Prejudice- Report for the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion](#). The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research

In addition, the research drew attention to marginalised perspectives in hate crime research, noting that people with learning disabilities are less likely to take part in research due to accessibility issues, while people in prison may experience hate crime but lack the support to report or challenge it.<sup>60</sup>

Drawing on the wider academic literature on hate crime, Kevin Kane's report for Victim Support Scotland similarly suggests that 'some of the most vulnerable victims of hate crime are excluded from existing policy and legislative frameworks.'<sup>61</sup> These groups include: the elderly, homeless, asylum seekers/refugees, and Gypsy/Travellers.

Phillippa Wiseman and Nick Watson conducted qualitative research with 22 adults with learning difficulties from across Scotland to explore their views and experiences of hate crime.<sup>62</sup> The study found that all participants had experienced violence in the course of their lives and in a range of settings. Participants reported violent incidents and experiences of hate crimes, linked to them having a learning disability, including: name calling, bullying, targeted harassment and physical violence, stalking, home invasion, theft, and financial crime/exploitation. While some participants identified violence specifically as hate crime, others talked about violence in more everyday general terms. For most participants, experience of violence was ongoing and weekly, if not every day. These experiences led some participants to be too afraid to leave the house, to go on public transport, to carry out essential tasks (e.g. get food shopping) and to take part in their everyday community activities. Participants noted the detrimental effects this had on their health and wellbeing, with some having to move areas.<sup>63</sup>

The 'Taking Stock of Violence' report notes that hate crime in Scotland should be a focus of future research, as it has received relatively little attention to date. Furthermore, future research needs to attend to the experiences of multiple marginalised groups, including those with learning disabilities.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> McBride, M. (2016). [A Review of the Evidence on Hate Crime and Prejudice- Report for the Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, Prejudice and Community Cohesion](#). The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research

<sup>61</sup> Kane, K. (2017). [Fostering a Victim Centred Approach to Hate Crime in Scotland](#). Victim Support Scotland.

<sup>62</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>63</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>64</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

## Harassment and discrimination

In 2019/20, the SCJS found that 13% of adults said that they had been insulted, pestered or intimidated in the previous year, in line with the proportion of respondents who experienced such incidents in 2008/09 and 2018/19.<sup>65</sup>

Across most of the population sub-groups focussed on in this report, there were no differences in the proportion that said they had been insulted, pestered or intimidated in the previous year. However the proportion was higher among those who had been victims of crime in the previous year than those who had not (30% compared to 10%, respectively).

Around three-in-five (61%) did not think any of their characteristics were an influencing factor in their most recent (or only) experience of harassment. Around one in ten (11%) thought that their gender, gender identity or perception of this was a possible motivating factor, while 9% believed their age and 8% believed their ethnic origin or race was a possible influence.

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<sup>65</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 8.2

## Serious organised crime

A Scottish Government commissioned study of community experiences of serious organised crime (SOC) found that, for communities where SOC is deeply embedded, fear and violence form part of the background to everyday life.<sup>66</sup> Whilst incidences of serious violence were relatively rare<sup>67</sup>, the threat of violence was an implicit feature and residents suggested that it allows groups to exert coercive control over communities.<sup>68</sup> The research also found instances where, following initial incentives, it is the threat of violence which binds vulnerable individuals to exploitative relationships.<sup>69</sup>

The 2022 Scottish Multi-agency Strategic Threat Assessment for SOC, notes that the risk posed by Serious Organised Crime Group (SOCG) related violence remains high. Violent incidents relate to long running feuds between rival families, personal grievances and retribution for perceived disrespect or previous violent acts. Alcohol is a notable factor in acts of homicide<sup>70</sup>.

The demand for firearms relates mostly to SOCG drug activity and violence/feuds. The central belt is predominantly the locus of violent offending and firearms incidents. Overall, Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire are significantly impacted by SOC.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Community Experiences of Serious Organised Crime in Scotland](#)

<sup>67</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>68</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Community Experiences of Serious Organised Crime in Scotland](#)

<sup>69</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Community Experiences of Serious Organised Crime in Scotland](#)

<sup>70</sup> Police Scotland (2022) [Scottish Multi-agency Strategic Threat Assessment Overview 2022](#)

<sup>71</sup> Police Scotland (2022) [Scottish Multi-agency Strategic Threat Assessment Overview 2022](#)

## Violence against women and girls

### Domestic abuse

Whilst the majority of domestic abuse incidents involve a female victim, it is important to acknowledge that men can be victims too, from either partners who are men or women.

In 2021/22, the police recorded 64,807 incidents of domestic abuse. Of these, where the gender information was recorded by the police, around four-fifths (81%) involved a female victim and a male suspected perpetrator, a further 15% involved a male victim and a female suspected female victim, in the remaining 4% of domestic abuse incidents, the victim and suspected perpetrator were the same gender. These proportions have remained relatively stable over several years.<sup>72</sup>

The type of crime or offence that was most frequently recorded as part of a domestic abuse incident in 2021/22 was common assault, accounting for 32% of the 34,430 crimes and offences recorded. Including all other non-sexual crimes of violence, these comprise two-fifths (40%) of all crimes and offences recorded.

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 was brought into force in April 2019. In the latest full year available, 2021/22, 1,760 crimes were recorded by the police under this legislation, an increase of 5% from the 1,681 recorded in 2019/20.<sup>73</sup>

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey finds that approximately one in six people (or 16.5%) have experienced at least one form of physical or psychological partner abuse since the age of 16. However, it also finds that women were almost twice as likely as men to have experienced partner abuse. Just over a fifth (or 21.2%) of women have experienced at least one form of partner abuse compared to just over a tenth (or 11.2%) of men.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Domestic abuse: statistics recorded by the police in Scotland](#)

<sup>73</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#)

<sup>74</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 9.3

Children can also be affected by these incidents<sup>75</sup>. The SCJS shows that of the 32% of people who said that there were children living in the household, the majority (71%) of the time children were present during the incident and saw or heard what happened during the most recent incident.

## **Misogyny**

A survey conducted for the Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice in Scotland, found that the majority (63.5%) of reported misogynistic behaviours were experienced in the street, followed by online (59.9%), in work (55.0%) and in a pub, club or other commercial space (52.3%).<sup>76</sup> Many experiences reported by respondents included more than one misogynistic behaviour in the same incident, and suggested an escalating pattern of abusive behaviour, where if participants did not respond positively or as expected to the first behaviour then more serious behaviours followed, which could include threats or acts of physical and sexual violence. The survey found that threats of sexual and physical violence were amongst the most common misogynistic behaviours experienced online.<sup>77</sup>

## **Prostitution**

Recent research conducted by the Scottish Government to better understand prostitution in Scotland, found that people who sell sex 'on-street' were perceived by organisations interviewed to have a range of vulnerabilities and complex needs, commonly including alcohol and substance misuse problems, lack of secure accommodation, mental health problems and often backgrounds of deprivation and abuse. Additionally, there was concern from police and health workers that health and safety support services are less available for those involved in indoor prostitution, because they do not often use 'drop-in' services and are less easy to identify and promote/offer services to. Many respondents identified the importance of developing better

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<sup>75</sup> Scottish Government (2017) [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Bill: Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment](#)

<sup>76</sup> Question base- 925

<sup>77</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice: Lived Experience Survey Analysis](#)

knowledge and understanding of the people involved in indoor prostitution and their support needs.<sup>78</sup>

The study offered insights from professionals about the impact of involvement in prostitution on risk and wellbeing. Most of those respondents who provide services and support to those involved in prostitution emphasised a range of risks and adverse impacts associated with prostitution in the short and longer term in relation to general and mental health, safety and wellbeing and sexual health.<sup>79</sup>

In Scotland, there is evidence of links between prostitution and serious organised crime, and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.<sup>80</sup> Police participants in the Scottish Government study on prostitution, spoke of local and national intelligence which pointed to links between prostitution and organised crime.<sup>81</sup>

## Interventions

There is robust evidence that interventions focused on modifying unsafe physical school environments are effective<sup>82</sup> in preventing violence against women and girls. An example is the [Shifting Boundaries](#) programme in the USA, where evaluations indicate there were reductions in perpetration and victimisation of sexual harassment, peer sexual violence, and adolescent relationship abuse. Combining classroom and building-level interventions is more effective than classroom intervention alone.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Scottish Government (2017) [Exploring Available Knowledge and Evidence on Prostitution in Scotland Via Practitioner-Based Interviews](#)

<sup>79</sup> Scottish Government (2017) [Exploring Available Knowledge and Evidence on Prostitution in Scotland Via Practitioner-Based Interviews](#)

<sup>80</sup> Police Scotland (2022) [Scottish Multi-agency Strategic Threat Assessment Overview 2022](#)

<sup>81</sup> Scottish Government (2017) [Exploring Available Knowledge and Evidence on Prostitution in Scotland Via Practitioner-Based Interviews](#)

<sup>82</sup> Evidence that the intervention is associated with a positive impact on preventing violence, based on a moderate or strong evidence base. Due to the complexity of causality, an 'effective' intervention should be considered one that contributed towards violence prevention or mitigation rather than one that single-handedly accounts for a decrease in violence.

<sup>83</sup> Scottish Government (2020) [Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls - What Works: Key Findings](#)

Evidence suggests that school-based programmes which seek to prevent violence in dating and intimate partner relationships (through developing life skills, improving knowledge of abuse, and challenging social norms and gender stereotypes that increase the risk of violence) are promising, with signs of improving violence related attitudes and knowledge, although evidence of the influence on violent behaviour is less clear.<sup>84</sup> Within this approach however, there is evidence that the US-based [Safe Dates programme](#) is effective.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>85</sup> Scottish Government (2020) [Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls - What Works: Key Findings](#)



## Youth violence

As part of an ESRC-funded study titled 'Public Health, Youth & Violence Reduction', researchers at the University of Glasgow conducted a focus group with four community-based youth workers (three women, one man) working in the east end of Glasgow to explore the changing dynamics of violence in the east end, experiences of growing up in the area, and suggestions for policy and practice. All four participants had grown up in the east end and had experience of witnessing territorial 'gang' activity, and offered comment on the changing picture of gang culture and community violence from this perspective.<sup>86</sup>

Participants identified clear changes in the patterning and dynamics of violence over the period 2005-2022, with a growing role for social media as both an outlet and potential risk for young people, particularly children. In order to address violence and related social issues participants were clear on the need for, and value of, the provision of safe local spaces for young people with low barriers to entry; staffed by trusted adults, including those who had grown up locally; with funding diverted to local partnerships for neighbourhood-level planning; that involves outreach and visibility, but with clear ground rules; and that involves clear pathways to volunteering and employment opportunities.<sup>87</sup>

### The role of school

Evidence tells us that early exclusion from school predicts later engagement in crime and offending, both in terms of 'general' offending and 'serious' offending. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime shows early school exclusion was one of the strongest predictors of making the transition from the Children's Hearing System to the adult criminal justice system and of ending up in custody, even taking other factors such as offending behaviour

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<sup>86</sup> Gillon, F. and Fraser, A. (2023). 'Community Experiences of Violence'. Unpublished Research Briefing produced for Scottish Government in support of Scottish Government Violence Prevention Framework.

<sup>87</sup> Gillon, F. and Fraser, A. (2023). 'Community Experiences of Violence'. Unpublished Research Briefing produced for Scottish Government in support of Scottish Government Violence Prevention Framework.

into account. School exclusion by age 12 increased the odds of imprisonment by age 22 by a factor of 4.<sup>88</sup>

The importance of the school environment is highlighted as crucial in addressing the causes of offending and in ensuring a range of positive outcomes for young people. It is also important in providing a diversionary role from offending activity (and reducing available time to engage).<sup>89</sup> Attachment to school is an important protective factor for children and young people to avoid involvement with crime.<sup>90</sup>

## **Interventions**

School-based interventions have been found to be effective in reducing the risk of offending, especially those that encourage positive behaviour by clearly enforcing the boundaries around acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.<sup>91</sup>

There is strong international evidence to suggest that school and education-based interventions, aimed at helping young people build resilience are effective in preventing youth violence. These include programmes, such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), strengthen social, emotional and life skills. Focusing on such skills can reduce violent outcomes, in addition to impacting on risk and protective factors. The most effective programmes have clearly defined goals, are intensive in their duration and include a mix of cognitive elements, role play and relapse prevention.<sup>92</sup> It has been noted, however, that there is limited evidence regarding who is more likely to change and when programmes should be implemented.<sup>93</sup>

According to the Early Intervention Foundation the “key principles of effective programmes” for preventing youth violence include:

- Strategies that seek to create positive changes in the lives of youth and/or their families, as well as reduce risk factors and prevent negative outcomes

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<sup>88</sup>Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>89</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>90</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>91</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>92</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>93</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

- The involvement of trained facilitators who are experienced in working with children and families
- Working with young people in their natural setting (e.g., school or home)
- Ensuring that programmes are delivered as originally designed, specified and intended (i.e., high implementation fidelity)
- Regular and/or frequent contacts (e.g., regular weekly contact delivered over the school term or year)
- Encouraging positive interactions between young people, families and teachers/schools (i.e., addressing violence at individual and relationship levels)
- Regular and/or frequent contacts (e.g., regular weekly contact delivered over a school term, the school year or longer)
- Delivery through interactive sessions that provide the opportunity for skills-based demonstrations and practice.<sup>94</sup>

Research suggests that therapeutic approaches to supporting young people are effective<sup>95</sup> and shown to be associated with a reduction in violence and violent re-offending. Such approaches tend to be used in situations where a young person has already been involved in violence in some capacity. Approaches include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Mult-systemic Therapy (MST). It is important that supportive and trusting relationships are at the heart of the practice and that the support provided is tailored to the specific needs of the individual.<sup>96</sup>

Evidence indicates some bystander intervention programmes are promising, including [Mentors in Violence Prevention](#) (MVP). Using a peer-learning model, MVP gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence. The peer-learning model is found to effect positive attitudinal and behavioural change.<sup>97 98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>95</sup> Evidence that the intervention is associated with a positive impact on preventing violence, based on a moderate or strong evidence base

<sup>96</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>97</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>98</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](#)

There is promising evidence that universal and targeted mentoring approaches could be effective in young people's involvement in violence and lessen the influence of risk factors. Mentoring tends to be most effective when programmes provide emotional support, there is frequent contact, the mentoring takes place over a prolonged period and where mentoring is part of a suite of interventions. However, the approach could have a detrimental effect if not delivered correctly by trained mentors.<sup>99</sup>

Evidence suggests that focused deterrence approaches that combine communicating the consequences of violence with support to navigate away from it, are associated with a reduction in violent crime. Such approaches centre on young people who have been involved in high levels of violence and aims to tackle the factors which make them likely to engage in violence again.<sup>100</sup>

A focused deterrence approach in Glasgow to reduce gang violence – Community Intervention to Reduce Violence (CIRV) - was found to result in participants being less likely to carry weapons, which can prevent consequences for victims, offenders and society<sup>101</sup>. The CIRV model aims to address the underlying causes of a person's involvement in crime and violence by taking a whole person approach. Wider community engagement is key, as the CIRV model establishes a partnership amongst a range of services and the local community. In Glasgow, gang members involved in violence were offered the chance to engage with the project, with warnings given of a stronger law enforcement response for those who chose not to cooperate.<sup>102</sup> A CIRV programme has since been launched in Northamptonshire.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](https://svru.co.uk)

<sup>100</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](https://svru.co.uk)

<sup>101</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>102</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](https://svru.co.uk)

<sup>103</sup> [CIRV - Community Initiative to Reduce Violence \(cirv-nsd.org.uk\)](https://cirv-nsd.org.uk)

It is noted that further evaluations of youth violence interventions are required to better understand ‘what works’.<sup>104</sup>

## **Social media and online harms**

Online harm – and different forms of online harm – can impact people differently.<sup>105</sup> Viewing online pornography can impact upon young people’s attitudes and behaviour towards sex and relationships;<sup>106</sup> while early exposure to pornography and frequent consumption have been shown to significantly increase the likelihood of viewing violent content.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, viewing and/or sharing self-harm and suicide online content may exacerbate self-harm behaviour and suicidal ideation and promote a wide range of negative emotional responses.<sup>108</sup>

A review by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and City, University of London highlight the negative emotional impacts of cyberbullying on children and young people, discussing how young victims experience feelings ranging from anger, to being upset, and embarrassment. It also indicates that some victims experience higher levels of harm compared to other victims; and demonstrates how cyberbullying can negatively impact education and social relations.<sup>109</sup>

The issue of social media is complicated and whilst it can be a significant risk factor in violence, it can also bring benefits for children and young people, including enabling them to stay connected with friends and family, enabling innovative ways of learning, and creating new ways for them to express

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<sup>104</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>105</sup> UK Government. 2022: [Online harms research publications: December 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#); Amnesty International UK: [Online abuse of women widespread in UK | Amnesty International UK](#).

<sup>106</sup> Hudson, David, Haux, Kersting, MacNaboe, McDonough, Phillips & Woolfe (National Centre for Social Research) & Myers (City, University of London). 2022: [Content and activity that is harmful for children within the scope of the Online Safety Bill \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), pp.44-46.

<sup>107</sup> Children’s Commissioner. 2023: [cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#), p.7.

<sup>108</sup> Hudson, David, Haux, Kersting, MacNaboe, McDonough, Phillips & Woolfe (National Centre for Social Research) & Myers (City, University of London). 2022: [Content and activity that is harmful for children within the scope of the Online Safety Bill \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), p.9.

<sup>109</sup> Hudson, David, Haux, Kersting, MacNaboe, McDonough, Phillips & Woolfe (National Centre for Social Research) & Myers (City, University of London). 2022: [Content and activity that is harmful for children within the scope of the Online Safety Bill \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), pp.34-35.

themselves. In addition, social media can enable organisations to: stay in contact with children outside of face-to-face meetings, activities and events; provide specialist support to children, such as counselling and therapy; promote events; livestream activities and run online sessions; and create online groups, forums and communities.<sup>110</sup>

## **Interventions**

Longitudinal research conducted in UK secondary schools has also indicated plausible links between bullying/cyberbullying victimisation and an increased likelihood of subsequent risk-taking behaviour in adolescence, with the researchers noting that policy options should focus on implementing evidence-based antibullying school interventions.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> NSPCC: [Social media and online safety | NSPCC Learning](#).

<sup>111</sup> Shah, Dodd, Allen, Viner & Bonell. 2022: [Is being a victim of bullying or cyberbullying in secondary school associated with subsequent risk-taking behavior in adolescence? A longitudinal study in secondary schools - Shah - 2022 - Journal of Adolescence - Wiley Online Library](#).

## Violent reoffending

### Reconviction rates for violent crime

Despite a slight increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19, both the reconviction rate and average number of reconvictions per offender have been generally decreasing over the past decade. For violent crime specifically, the reconviction rate fell by 3.7 percentage points between 2008/09 and 2018/19, from 25.5% to 21.8%. Over the same period, the average number of reconvictions per offender fell by 19%, from 0.42 to 0.34.

Evidence shows that individuals with an index conviction of a violent crime who are given a community sentence are consistently less likely to be reconvicted compared to those who are given a short-term custodial sentence. In 2018/19, the latest year available, the reconviction rate for community payback orders (CPO) was 24.1% compared to 55.8% and 47.3% for those given a custodial sentence of three months or less and over three months to six months respectively. Overall, those with an index conviction of a violent crime released from a custodial sentence of one year or less had a reconviction rate of 46.2%. This pattern has been consistent each year since 2011-12, the first full year of use for CPOs.<sup>112</sup>

### Reducing violent reoffending

Evidence points to restorative justice (RJ) being effective in reducing the likelihood of young people committing violent acts again, where there is an identifiable victim. But the importance of high-quality practice and safeguarding has been emphasised, including being led by a trained facilitator.<sup>113</sup> Other studies have shown the positive results of RJ conferencing for adult offenders.<sup>114</sup> The dynamics of the conference itself - particularly the quality of offender-victim interaction - seem key.<sup>115</sup> Using RJ for more serious

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<sup>112</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [Reconviction Rates in Scotland: 2018-19 Offender Cohort](#)

<sup>113</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>114</sup> Scottish Government (2015) [What Works to Reduce Reoffending: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>115</sup> Scottish Government (2015) [What Works to Reduce Reoffending: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

offences requires more stringent practice guidelines and highly trained facilitators.<sup>116</sup>

A comprehensive review of RJ interventions by the Campbell Collaboration concluded that RJ conferences cause ‘a modest but highly cost-effective reduction in repeat offending’, and that the impact of conferences was more greatly experienced in crimes of violence than in crimes against property. Similarly, the Smith Institute evidence review concluded that “In general, RJ seems to reduce crime more effectively with more, rather than less, serious crimes”, while also noting that evidence on its effectiveness varies between different programmes and target groups.<sup>117</sup> A review of available evidence from other jurisdictions suggests RJ could be used at several points along the criminal justice pathway, for all offenders and offence-types as long as there are the necessary guidelines and high quality training.<sup>118</sup>

Research found that the most effective reoffending interventions adhere to Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR) principles. Interventions should be tailored to an individual's needs and the intensity should reflect the level of risk. Interventions should also be well-sequenced and see progress as a series of small, achievable steps.<sup>119</sup>

For offenders most resistant to change (for all crime types), research found evidence of the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) interventions which seek to address attitudes that support offending whilst develop cognitive and problem-solving skills. CBT also works well if delivered alongside anger management interventions.<sup>120</sup>

For violent crimes, the most effective interventions use the cognitive behavioural approach, are intensive in their session length and overall

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<sup>116</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Uses of Restorative Justice: Evidence Review](#)

<sup>117</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>118</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Uses of Restorative Justice: Evidence Review](#)

<sup>119</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Reducing Reoffending - Effective and Promising Investments: Research](#)

<sup>120</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Reducing Reoffending - Effective and Promising Investments: Research](#)



duration, and include cognitive skills training, role play and relapse prevention.<sup>121</sup>

Given that offenders often face challenges in a number of areas, such as substance use or educational deficits, some researchers suggest that holistic interventions that address multiple criminogenic needs are more likely to be effective in reducing reoffending. This is particularly the case for young people and women who offend.<sup>122</sup>

Diversion from prosecution prevents an individual entering the wider criminal justice system by addressing the underlying causes of offending and helps to ensure people get access to the drug, alcohol and mental health services they need. It is especially effective when the diversionary intervention is complemented by work designed to address the underlying issues which contributed to the offending behaviour. Evidence has shown that this lowered contact, particularly for young people, reduces their likelihood of further involvement in offending.<sup>123</sup>

Strong societal attachments in the form of stable employment have been identified as a key factor in promoting law abidance. Research suggests that programmes should support offenders and those who are at risk of offending, with issues such as education or motivation in order to help them move towards employment. Criminal justice sanctions should (wherever possible) minimise the impact on employment prospects.<sup>124</sup>

Community interventions are more effective than short prison sentences at addressing offending behaviour and breaking the cycle of reoffending.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Reducing Reoffending - Effective and Promising Investments: Research](#)

<sup>122</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>123</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>124</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>125</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

## Childhood adversity

### Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma

Early life experiences are highlighted as important in shaping an individual's life chances and their likelihood of becoming involved in offending.<sup>126</sup>

Research consistently shows a strong association between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and crime. People who experience multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs<sup>127</sup>) are more likely than those who do not to engage in risk taking behaviours which are some-times associated with criminal behaviour. Children and adults who experience ACEs are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system as victims, witnesses or perpetrators of crime. For example, a Welsh study of ACEs showed that when compared to those with no ACEs, people with 4 or more ACEs were:

- 14 times more likely to be a victim of violence in the last 12 months
- 15 times more likely to be a perpetrator of violence in the last 12 months
- 20 times more likely to have been incarcerated in their lives.<sup>128</sup>

However the evidence does not prove causality. Not all children who experience multiple ACEs become victims or perpetrators of violence in adulthood, but they are statistically more likely to than people with no ACEs.<sup>129</sup>

The Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) longitudinal research study tracks the lives of thousands of children and their families from birth through to the teenage years and beyond, collecting a wide range of information from a representative sample. Analysis found that 65% of children in the 2004/05 birth cohort had experienced one or more ACE<sup>130</sup> by age 8, with 10.5% experiencing 3 or more. Results indicate that children living in more

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<sup>126</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>127</sup> The 10 most commonly measured ACEs are: Abuse- verbal, physical and sexual. Neglect- physical and emotional. Household adversities- mental illness, incarcerated relative, domestic violence, parent separation, and substance abuse.

<sup>128</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>129</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>130</sup> Seven ACEs (or proxies) were assessed: physical abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, parental separation, parental incarceration and emotional neglect

disadvantaged circumstances were more likely to experience ACEs.<sup>131</sup> ACEs have been linked to many ‘criminogenic’ risks (factors that increase risk of offending) including substance and alcohol abuse, deprivation, poor educational attainment, and mental health problems.<sup>132</sup>

Research carried out in Scotland indicates the prevalence of adverse ACEs across the youth offender population, especially amongst violent offenders. The findings are summarised in ‘Taking Stock of Violence’ and are largely based on small-scale, qualitative samples.<sup>133</sup>

In 2019, 15% of adults in Scotland reported four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).<sup>134</sup> Those in the most deprived areas were almost twice as likely as those in the least deprived areas to experience four or more ACEs.<sup>135</sup>

Six in ten (61%) of adult respondents to a 2019 prisoner survey in Scotland had been bullied at school or elsewhere, whilst around half (47%) said that they had been physically abused in their home as a child, with 40% reporting that adults in their home had physically abused each other<sup>136</sup>. Fifty-six per cent of young people in custody said they had been sworn at, humiliated, or put down by an adult in their home.<sup>137</sup>

As highlighted in ‘Taking Stock of Violence’, the links between trauma and violent offending are well evidenced internationally. In a Scottish context, a study of young imprisoned male violent offenders, found most participants had early life experiences characterised by parental drug addiction and/or criminality, physical abuse and/or domestic abuse, bereavement and/or parental absence. Many reported experiences of psychological distress, loss and attachment traumas. The report notes that similar themes were present in

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<sup>131</sup> Marrayat L, Frank J. (2019). [‘Factors associated with adverse childhood experiences in Scottish children: a prospective cohort study’](#). BMJ Paediatrics Open 2019; Vol 3; Issue 1

<sup>132</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>133</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>134</sup> Abuse: verbal, physical or sexual. Household: domestic violence, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental illness, parental separation or incarceration of household member.

<sup>135</sup> Scottish Government (2020) [The Scottish Health Survey 2019](#)

<sup>136</sup> Scottish Prison Service (2020) [17th Prisoner Survey 2019](#)

<sup>137</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

a study of young women convicted of violent offences, as well as incidences of childhood sexual abuse.<sup>138</sup>

Young people and adults with care experience are overrepresented within the criminal justice system in Scotland.<sup>139</sup>

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime points to a relationship between self-reported involvement in violence/offending at age 15 and a range of vulnerabilities. Regression analysis revealed that violent offenders were (among other things) significantly more likely than non-violent youths to be engaged in self-harming and to have been a victim of crime by the age of 15. For girls, another significant variable was having experienced family crisis in the last year.<sup>140</sup>

Dr Susan Batchelor's 2005 study of 21 young women imprisoned for violent offending also showed that two-fifths of them had been sexually abused. The same proportion described witnessing regular incidents of serious physical violence between their parents (most of which were attributed to parental alcohol misuse).<sup>141</sup>

Further research is needed to understand the causal mechanisms between childhood adversity/trauma and different types of criminality and victimisation in adulthood.<sup>142</sup>

## **Interventions**

As noted above, evidence on childhood adversity and trauma does not prove causality with outcomes experienced later in life- not all people who experience adverse or traumatic childhoods become victims and/or perpetrators of crime, but it does increase the risk. Understanding why some children do well despite early adverse experiences is crucial. Identifying which buffers, or 'protective factors', can mediate the effects of childhood adversity and trauma can inform policy and practice to help more children reach their

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<sup>138</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>139</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>140</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>141</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>142</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

full potential and reduce crime and victimisation.<sup>143</sup> [‘Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime’](#) sets out protective factors against offending, most of which fall out of reach of the justice system.

Building resilience in children and young people, and their families and communities, is crucial to reducing crime and victimisation. Cross-cutting policies are needed to identify and support children and their families at risk of early adversity at the earliest stage possible. There is an emerging body of evidence pointing to the value of trauma-informed approaches which advocate a more compassionate and strengths-based justice system.<sup>144</sup>

Facilitating supportive adult-child relationships has been found to build resilience in children who have experienced childhood adversity. Having a trusted adult, effective parenting and a stable family structure have been identified as ‘protective factors’ against offending for children who encounter early adverse experiences.<sup>145</sup>

Preventing ACEs and, where they occur, addressing their negative impacts could provide a significant opportunity to reduce crime in Scotland. Some studies have estimated that preventing ACEs could halve violence perpetration and incarceration. Yet, it is acknowledged that further research is needed to understand the causal mechanisms between childhood adversity/trauma and different types of criminality and victimisation in adulthood.<sup>146</sup> Some literature is also critical of the focus on ACEs, noting the emphasis on adversity within the family at the expense of wider structural inequities and inequalities.<sup>147</sup>

The Scottish Public Health Network (ScotPHN) 2016 report ‘Polishing the Diamonds’ identified three key priorities to prevent adverse childhood experiences:

- Community context – including reducing isolation, tackling poverty and low wages, and mitigating the impact of recession and austerity
- Family risk factors – including strengthening family and parental support, with a focus on families who have multiple risk factors.

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<sup>143</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>144</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>145</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>146</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>147</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

- Tackling household adversity – including addressing parental substance use through coordinated action, reducing domestic violence.<sup>148</sup>

The links between offending behaviour and experiences of abuse and neglect, underlines the importance of a child protection system which identifies and addresses this as early as possible.<sup>149</sup>

Several evaluations have found that school-based bullying prevention programmes which develop social and emotional skills in addition to challenging attitudes and encouraging bystanders to intervene, are effective in reducing both bullying perpetration and victimisation (see the following examples of such interventions: [Olweus](#) and [KiVa](#)).<sup>150</sup> Bullying prevention is most effective when it takes a whole-school approach over a sustained period i.e., creating a non-violent environment in school, through engaging pupils, staff and parents.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Scottish Public Health Network (2016) [Polishing the Diamonds: Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences in Scotland](#)

<sup>149</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>150</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>151</sup> Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (2023) Violence Prevention Toolkit for Scotland – a summary of the evidence, see [Research Hub | Scottish Violence Reduction Unit \(svru.co.uk\)](#)

## Relationships

When it comes to building resilience, research points to the importance of children having at least one stable and committed relationship with an adult.<sup>152</sup>

Good familial relationships (especially marital) are identified as key factors in promoting law abidance. Criminal justice sanctions should (wherever possible) minimise the impact on familial relations. Family and strong societal relationships are also a known protective factor against reoffending.<sup>153</sup>

Yet, evidence from the Edinburgh study of Youth transitions and crime found that living in disorganised and deprived neighbourhoods could lessen the impact of good parenting.<sup>154</sup>

A lack of self-control is linked with a higher propensity towards offending behaviour. Literature has highlighted parenting as a crucial factor in developing self-control.<sup>155</sup>

Connections with positive peers, low social isolation and involvement in positive organisations, activities or sports, have been identified as protection factors against offending for children, especially those who experience adversity and trauma.<sup>156</sup>

## Interventions

Parenting programmes that focus on early parenting methods to improve children's self-control (e.g., effective discipline), and to increase parental involvement in children's education, have been found to be successful in preventing youth offending.<sup>157</sup>

There is evidence that interventions which aim to develop parenting skills and strengthen the relationship between parent and child by encouraging safe, stable and nurturing relationships, may have promising effects on perpetration of youth violence, by reducing risk factors of children engaging in violence

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<sup>152</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>153</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>154</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>155</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>156</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

<sup>157</sup> Scottish Government (2018) [Understanding Childhood Adversity, Resilience and Crime](#)

later in life.<sup>158</sup> Examples include Triple P and The Incredible Years. More information on these interventions can be found in [‘What works to prevent youth violence’](#).

Research has shown that a respectful, participatory and flexible relationship with a community supervisor can trigger the motivation for an individual to change and thus help to promote desistance. A good relationship with the supervisor, who is perceived to understand the supervisee’s needs, is important.<sup>159</sup>

Yet, as previously noted, evidence from the Edinburgh study of Youth transitions and crime found that living in disorganised and deprived neighbourhoods could lessen the impact of good parenting.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [What Works to Reduce Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>159</sup> Scottish Government (2015) [What Works to Reduce Reoffending: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

<sup>160</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)

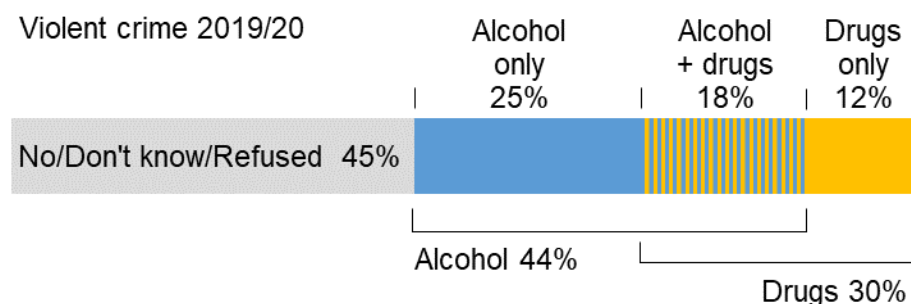


## Drugs and alcohol

### Involvement of alcohol and drugs in violent crime

The consumption of alcohol, and to a lesser extent drugs, remains a factor in violent crime. Where victims were able to say something about the offender, over two-fifths (44%) of violent crimes in 2019/20 involved an offender who was believed to be under the influence of alcohol ([Chart 15](#)). This figure is lower than the estimate in both 2008/09 (63%) and 2018/19 (59%). Also in 2019/20, 30% of violent crimes involved an offender believed to be under the influence of drugs, which is unchanged from 2008/09 and 2018/19. Just over half (55%) were under the influence of either alcohol or drugs.<sup>161</sup>

**Chart 15. Proportion of violent crimes in 2019/20 including alcohol and/or drugs**



In addition, nearly two-thirds (63%) of police recorded serious assaults in 2017/18 referred to the consumption of alcohol by either the victim and (or) the perpetrator prior to the incident. One-in-ten (10%) serious assaults made a reference to drugs.<sup>162</sup>

The 'Taking Stock of Violence' report highlights the clear link between alcohol and interpersonal violence, particularly in relation to identified male offenders from socio-economically deprived areas but also between young women within the context of the night-time economy.<sup>163</sup> The authors summarise observational studies of the night-time economy which have illustrated how

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<sup>161</sup> Scottish Government (2021) [The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20](#), Chapter 3

<sup>162</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Recorded crime in Scotland: attempted murder and serious assault, 2008-2009 and 2017-2018](#)

<sup>163</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

alcohol-related violence is shaped by the situational contexts in which drinking takes place.<sup>164</sup>

The report also notes how social, cultural and situational factors shape attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol. For instance, alcohol may reduce inhibition and increase the likelihood of an argument escalating into an assault, while socially learned expectations about alcohol's potential to elicit aggression can mean that alcohol is intentionally consumed in preparation for violence.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, the report notes that a key trend over time for alcohol use in Scotland has been a shift from on-sales (pubs and clubs) to off-sales (shops); in addition, nightclubs have been in sharp decline.<sup>166</sup>

As the 'Taking Stock of Violence' report highlights, research on the relationship between drugs and violence, while sparser, reveals the potential impacts of changing drug trends, specifically the increase in cocaine and crack cocaine use, as well as novel psychoactive substances.<sup>167</sup>

As is also outlined in the 'Taking Stock of Violence' report, qualitative research with current and ex-offenders underscores how involvement in substance misuse and violence change throughout the life-course; however, both appear to escalate for those young people who progress from youth gangs to street gangs and whose offending becomes more instrumental.<sup>168</sup>

The 2019 Scottish Prisoner Survey showed 40% of prisoners who completed a questionnaire reported being drunk at the time of their offence, whilst 45% reported being under the influence of drugs.<sup>169</sup>

## **Interventions**

It is argued that any consideration of how you prevent violence must include alcohol interventions. A strong body of evidence suggests that restrictions on the availability of alcohol, including minimum pricing, ensuring a minimum age

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<sup>164</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>165</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#); see also: Parker, H. (1996) Young adult offenders, alcohol and criminological cul-de-sacs. *British Journal of Criminology* 36(3): 282-298.

<sup>166</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>167</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>168</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>169</sup> Scottish Prison Service (2020) [17th Prisoner Survey 2019](#)

of purchase is adhered to, reducing the number and density of premises where alcohol is sold and restricting days and hours of sale, are all associated with a reduction in crime.<sup>170</sup>

There is good evidence that alcohol-related interventions can help reduce hazardous drinking more generally, although there is limited evidence of the effect of such interventions on violence. For example, alcohol brief interventions (ABIs) have proved effective in decreasing negative drinking outcomes but not self-reported aggression.<sup>171</sup> There is good evidence supporting the effectiveness of various treatments in tackling alcohol misuse among the wider population, particularly cognitive behavioural and psychosocial interventions, but also self- and mutual-help approaches.<sup>172</sup>

School-based interventions which focus on psychosocial and developmental skills can be effective in reducing drug use. Prevention programmes for young people are more likely to be effective if they combine social and personal development, resistance skills and normative education techniques. Evidence suggests that wider programmes that are delivered in schools, which target multiple risk behaviours, help build self-esteem and life skills are more likely to be effective in preventing drug use.<sup>173 174</sup>

In relation to reducing reoffending across crime types, research found that high intensity drug treatment in the community that uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approaches represents good value for money.<sup>175</sup>

The causes of drug and alcohol misuse may be rooted within low levels of self-control. It is therefore argued that measures to improve levels of self-control via more consistent and effective parenting interventions could help reduce offending.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Justice Vision: Annex C - Evidence Supplement](#)

<sup>171</sup> The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (2019) [Taking Stock of Violence in Scotland](#)

<sup>172</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Reducing Reoffending - Effective and Promising Investments: Research](#)

<sup>173</sup> Scottish Government (2016) [What Works in Drug Education and Prevention?](#)

<sup>174</sup> Scottish Government (2016) [What Works in Drug Education and Prevention?](#)

<sup>175</sup> Scottish Government (2019) [Reducing Reoffending - Effective and Promising Investments: Research](#)

<sup>176</sup> Scottish Government (2014) [What Works to Reduce Crime?: A Summary of the Evidence](#)