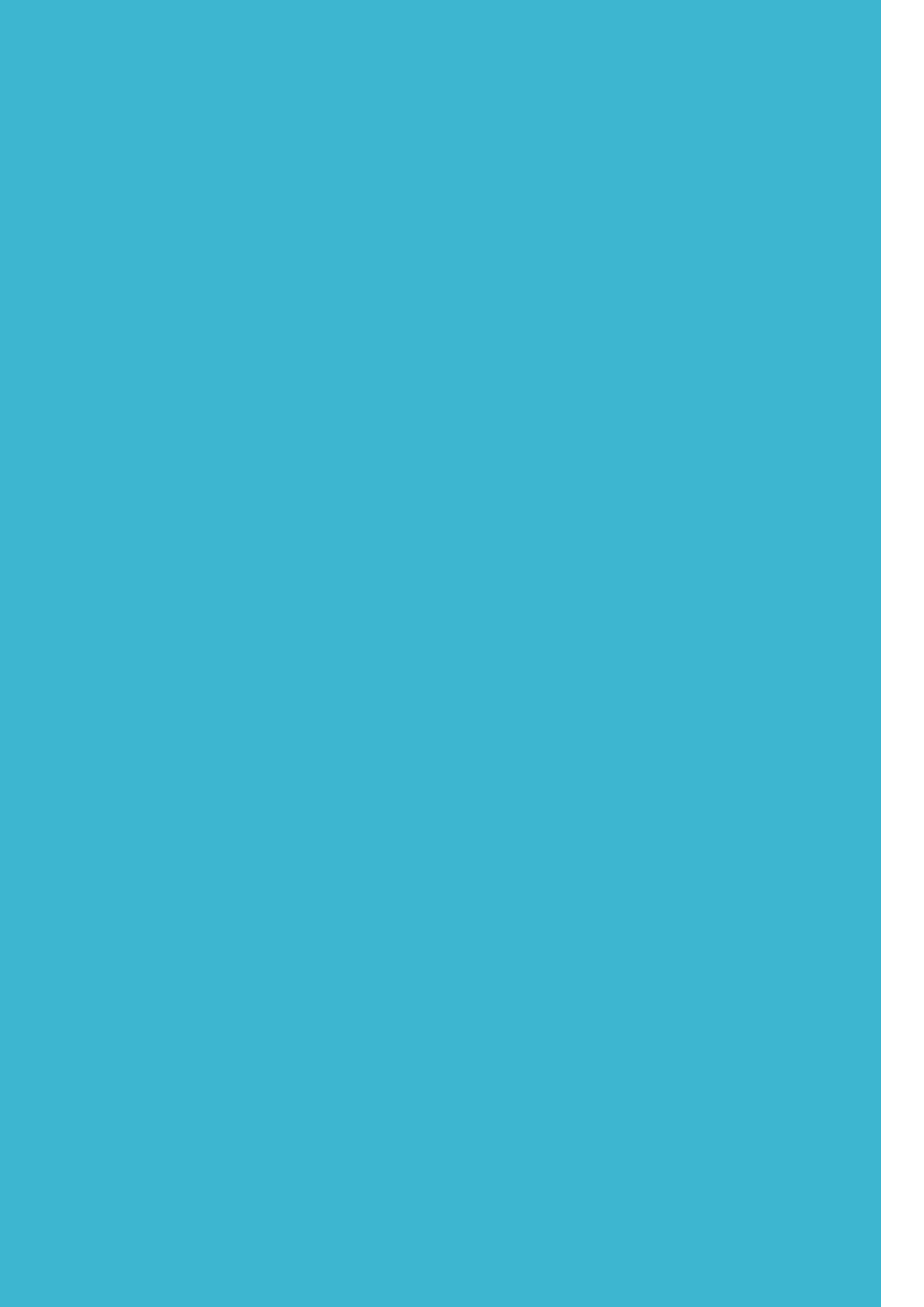


~~No knives~~
Better lives

Better Lives

Youth Voices Survey 2026
Reassurance Over Fear





Better Lives

Youth Voices Survey 2026

Reassurance Over Fear

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About Us

No Knives, Better Lives

No Knives, Better Lives works in partnership with young people and multi-agency practitioners, including youth workers, police, teachers, social workers, and youth justice staff, to understand and address the drivers of youth violence. This work is informed by both youth work and public health approaches.

We take an explicit children's rights approach, recognising that when rights are upheld, children and young people are more likely to grow up safe, supported, and able to reach their full potential.

The **NKBL** programme equips practitioners to work in a trauma-informed way, enabling them to support young people to take action to reduce violence in their communities. We do this by providing training, facilitating focused Communities of Practice, developing resources and toolkits, and building awareness of the key drivers of violence.

As a result, young people are better able to assess risk, make informed decisions, and take greater control over their own safety and the safety of their peers.



Reassurance Over Fear

Young people are not simply asking to be warned about violence, they are asking for safety, fairness, and opportunity.

Effective prevention responses will:

- Combine credible consequences with meaningful prevention
- Reduce fear, not amplify it
- Strengthen relationships, trust, and belonging

Campaigns and policies that succeed will be those that treat young people as partners in the learning process, address the realities of their lives, and offer realistic, supported alternatives to violence.

Executive Summary

Introduction to Reassurance Over Fear

In 2025, **No Knives, Better Lives** undertook a large-scale engagement with **2,922** young people across Scotland to better understand attitudes towards violence, knife crime, and prevention. This work was shaped by a recognition that young people's experiences are often filtered through overwhelming news cycles, global instability, and shifting social expectations, factors which can heighten anxiety and shape perceptions of safety.

Key Findings

Overall, most young people reported feeling safe, particularly when in groups. However, feelings of safety were significantly reduced at night and in environments involving intoxicated adults. In response, many young people, especially young women and those from LGBTQ+ communities, actively adapt their behaviour to manage risk, demonstrating a reliance on personal "protective factors" rather than external systems.

Notably, the presence of police was not widely seen as reassuring. This reflects a broader perception that current measures do not always address the root causes of violence or the realities young people face. At the same time, there was recognition that clearer communication of legal consequences could act as a deterrent to knife carrying.

While most participants did not view knife carrying as common, this perception differed in more deprived communities and among those with experience of the justice system, where it was seen as more prevalent. Where knife carrying does occur, it is often understood as a response to fear i.e. used for protection, status, or self-assurance rather than aggression alone.

The Wider Context: Anxiety, Identity, and Influence

Young people are navigating a complex landscape shaped by constant exposure to global events, negative media narratives, and online violence. Social media plays a central role in their lives, but also exposes them to frequent conflict, with online disputes sometimes escalating into real-world harm.

Issues of identity, particularly around masculinity, also emerged as an important underlying factor. Social pressures to appear strong, dominant, or in control can contribute to risk-taking and violent behaviours, while limiting emotional expression and help-seeking.

Together, these influences contribute to a heightened need for reassurance (often expressed in a desire to see more punitive measures meted out to perpetrators). Many young people are not simply seeking stricter enforcement, but a sense of stability, fairness, and understanding from the systems around them. The systems were not always seen as offering adequate protection, in their words “fucking useless”.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Findings suggest a tension between calls for stronger consequences and a recognition that enforcement alone is insufficient. While some young people expressed more conservative views, supporting tougher responses or increased policing, there is also a clear demand for approaches that address underlying causes, including fear, inequality, and social pressure.

Effective responses must therefore balance:

- **Clear, credible consequences for violent behaviour**
- **Preventative measures that reduce the need for self-protection**
- **Support systems that build resilience and belonging**

What a Successful Campaign Should Look Like

A successful prevention campaign should prioritise reassurance over fear. Rather than amplifying threats or focusing solely on punishment, it should:

- **Build trust and relatability** by centring voices of people with lived experience, particularly from local communities
- **Acknowledge real fears without reinforcing them**, offering practical alternatives to violence
- **Provide clear, consistent messaging about consequences** while emphasising support and positive choices
- **Use a blended approach**, combining in-person engagement with refreshed, relevant online content
- **Challenge harmful norms, including narrow ideas of masculinity**, by promoting healthier expressions of identity and strength

Ultimately, young people are asking not just to be warned, but to be understood and supported. Campaigns that succeed will be those that reduce fear, increase confidence, and offer credible pathways away from violence, helping young people feel safer without making them feel more afraid.

Better Lives – A Graphic Fiction Story

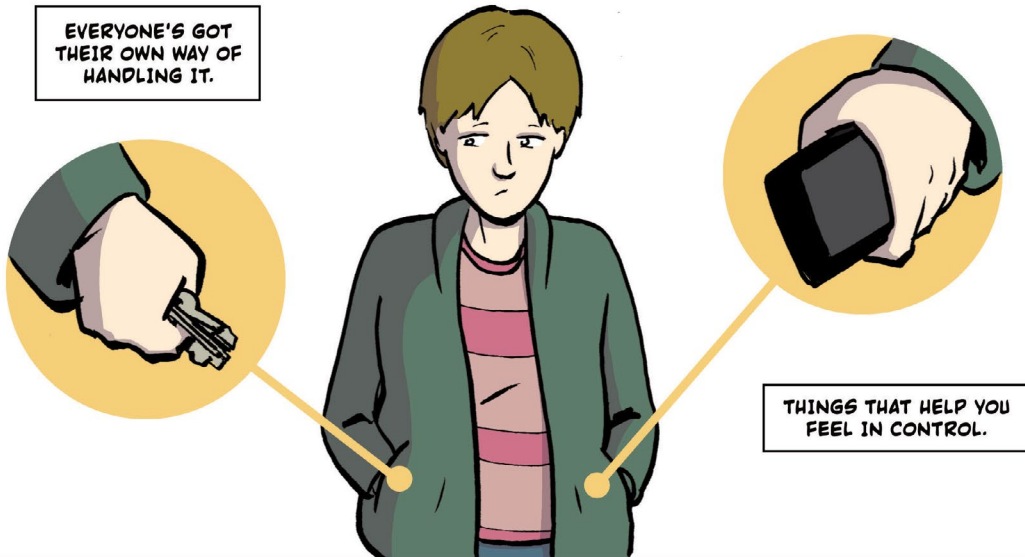
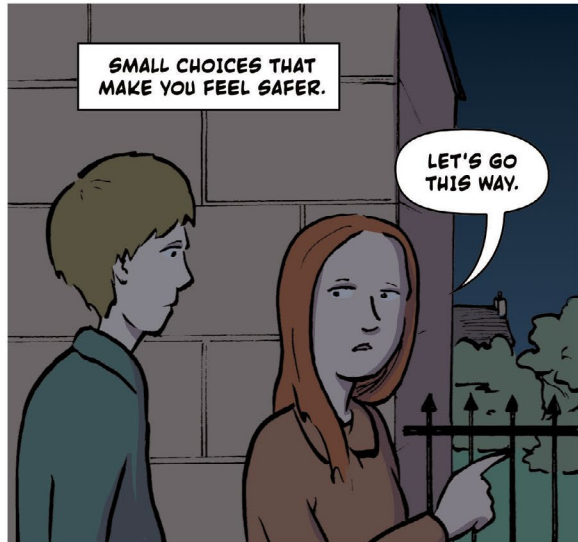
Long reports can feel hard to read; dense, time consuming, difficult to navigate, and not always accessible to everyone. This can create barriers, particularly for young people and others who may find traditional formats hard to engage with.

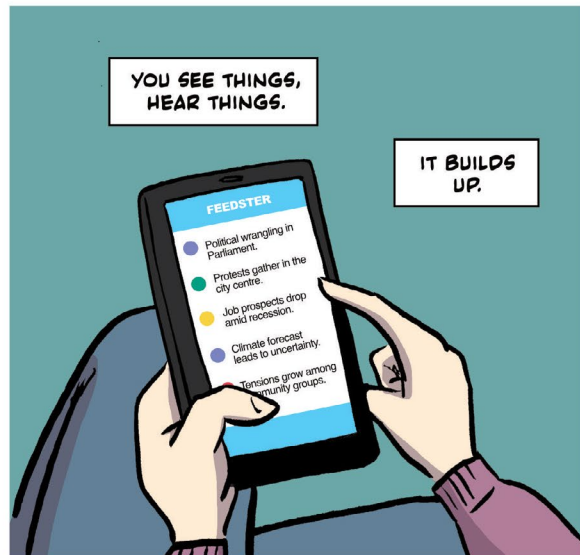
The following story is grounded in lived experience. It brings to life the real voices, emotions, and everyday realities shared by young people through the Youth Voices survey and focus groups. Rather than abstract data or statistics, it centres personal perspectives highlighting how violence and safety are felt, understood, and navigated in daily life.

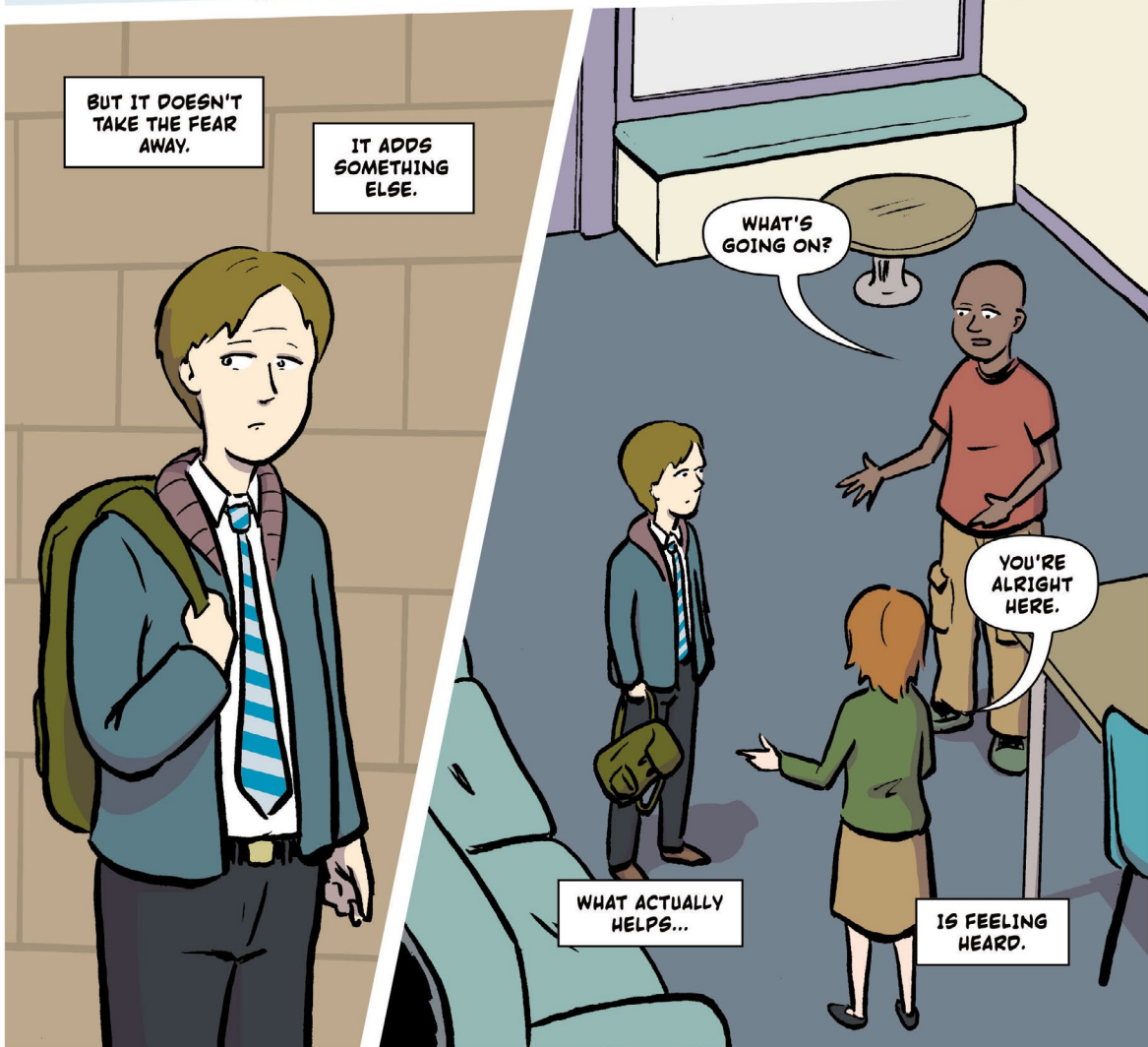
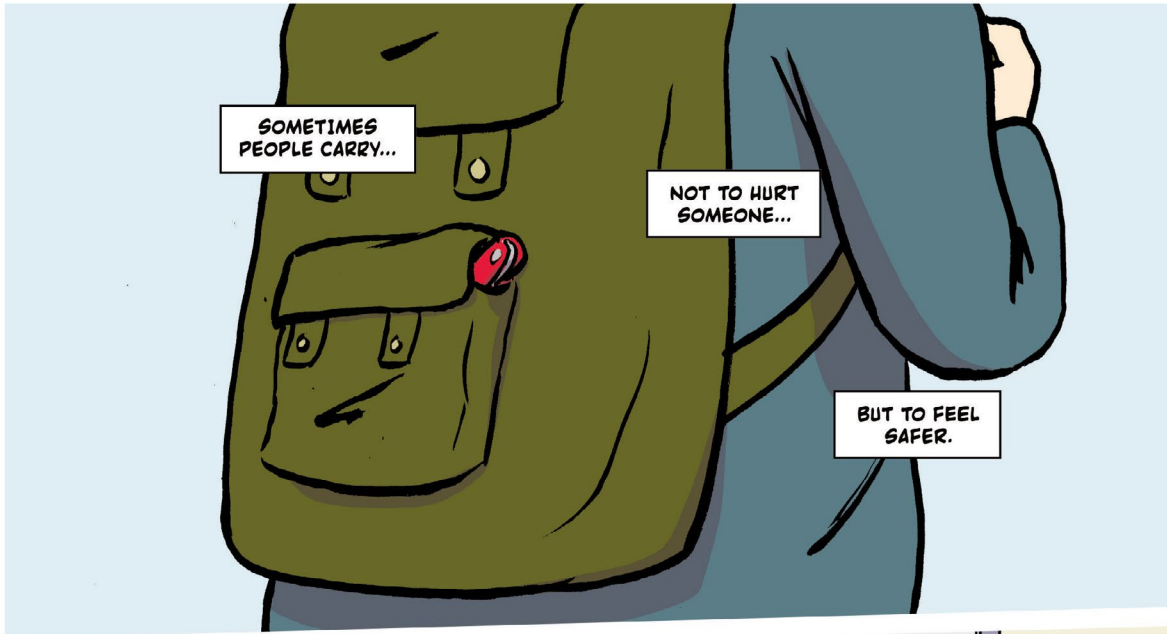
By presenting these insights in a relatable and engaging format, the story not only informs but also amplifies young people's voices, ensuring their experiences are seen, heard, and valued. This story highlights the key messages as told to us by young people.













Continue the Conversation

This story is just the beginning.

Graphic fiction can help continue the conversation about young people's experiences of violence in Scotland in a way that is accessible, engaging, and real.

Here are some ways this could be developed further with young people:

- **Co-create a story with young people**
Shape stories and characters with young people that you engage with.
- **Explore a range of different perspectives**
Reflect a range of backgrounds, genders, sexualities, ethnicities and experiences.
- **Capture everyday life**
Explore the daily experiences and lived reality of safety and violence.
- **Highlight support**
Map places in the community where there are trusted people, places, and services.
- **Use in youth work and school settings**
Start conversations in schools and groups about how to prevent violence.

This is an invitation to listen, reflect, continue the conversation and be creative!



About the Research

Why we undertook this research

We decided it was time for a meaningful check-in with young people about their experiences of violence and their views on what policymakers and practitioners should do. This survey is grounded in a rights-based approach, drawing specifically on Article 12 and Article 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 affirms young people’s right to express their views freely in matters that affect them, while Article 17 recognises their right to access information that supports their wellbeing. By creating space for young people to share their perspectives, this work seeks to uphold those rights in practice.

Inspired by the cross-party summit and its call for “meaningful consequences,” we set out to understand what young people believe that term should mean—specifically, consequences that prevent, stop, and deter violent behaviour. Ensuring that young people can both contribute their views and engage with the findings reflects our commitment to treating them as active rights-holders rather than passive recipients of policy decisions.

What does the literature say?

The strongest evidence (including the [Youth Endowment Fund](#) and the [Scottish Violence Reduction Unit](#) research) shows that effective youth violence prevention is early, multi-component, and context focused. A public health approach i.e. addressing structural drivers such as poverty, trauma, and school exclusion, has the most consistent impact. Scotland is often cited as a leading example: the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit combines data-led targeting, prevention, and outreach, contributing to sustained reductions in serious violence.

Evidence also highlights the importance of trusted relationships and developmental support. Mentoring, school-based programmes, and credible messengers can reduce violence and reoffending (around 10–20% in UK studies). Scottish initiatives such as the Navigator programme (Medics Against Violence) demonstrate how trauma-informed, hospital-based support can interrupt cycles of harm.

Targeted approaches, such as focused deterrence and hotspot policing can reduce violence when paired with place-based support services, but enforcement alone is insufficient. The Youth Endowment Fund finds limited evidence that punitive approaches (e.g. stop-and-search) change behaviour.

For knife carrying, the literature is clear: weapon-specific strategies in isolation are ineffective. Young people often carry knives due to fear and perceived need for protection. Effective prevention therefore focuses on reducing victimisation risk, providing safe spaces and youth provision, delivering trauma-informed interventions, and shifting social norms through peers and communities.

Overall, the evidence strongly supports holistic, preventative, and youth-centred approaches, with Scotland's model widely recognised as good practice.

How we went about the research

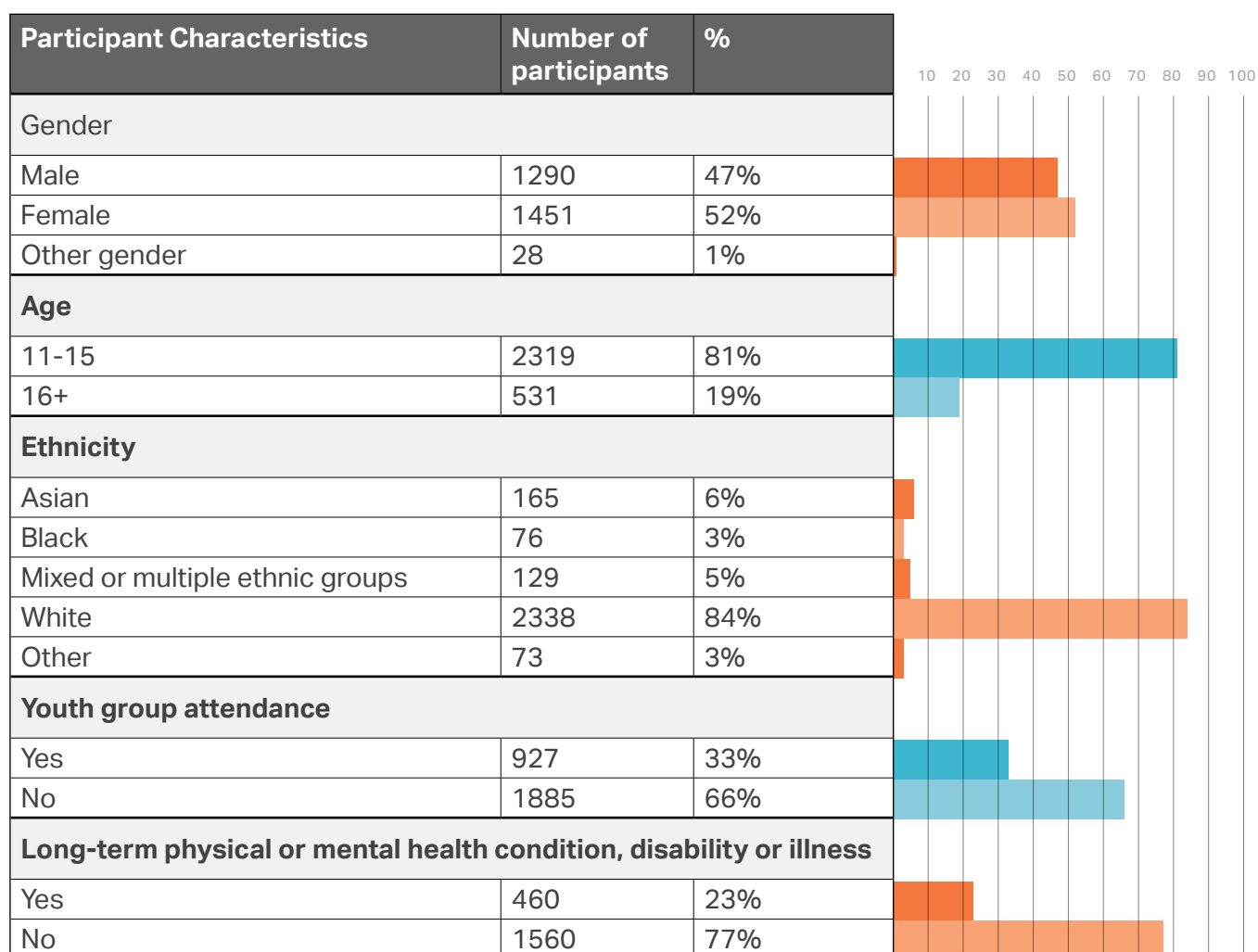
To explore young people's attitudes towards and violence and prevention, we decided to both capture the breadth and depth. We did this through sharing a survey to gather as many young people's views across Scotland as possible and through a deeper dive by conducting focus groups.

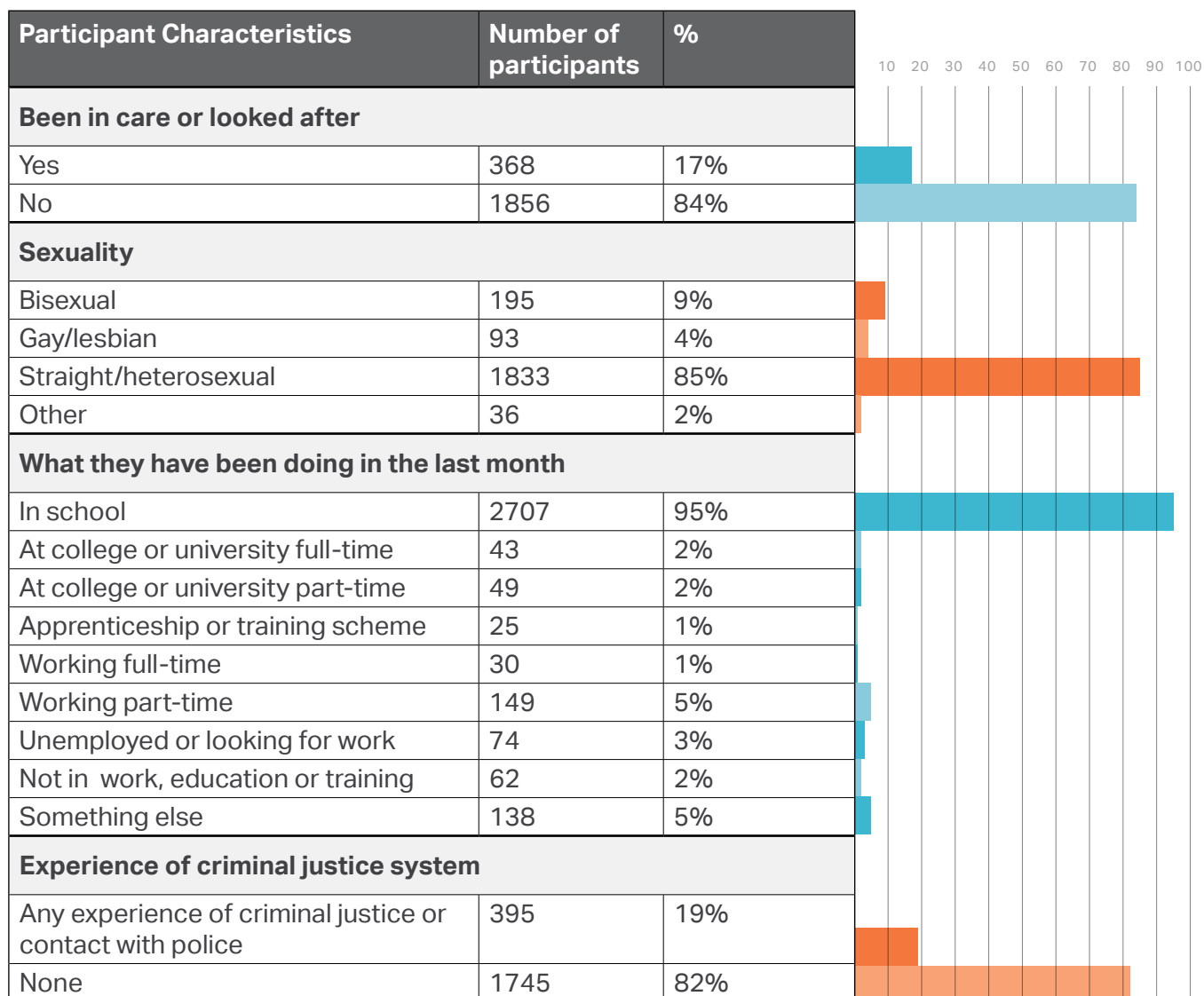
Survey

To reach as many young people as we could we commissioned **ScotCen Social Research** to develop the survey and analyse the data (the young people’s responses). Their ethics committee also gave advice about how best to share the survey to make sure young people were safe and supported when completing it. As a thank you, young people could also get Young Scot reward points for filling in the survey.

Who took part in the survey?

2,886 young people completed the survey.





Focus groups

Six focus groups and one interview were conducted with young people across Scotland. The focus groups were run by three members of the YouthLink Scotland team with lots of experience of running focus groups with young people and all had Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) clearance.

All young people were asked to give written consent for taking part and for the focus groups to be recorded. Under 16s also needed their parents/guardians to give their written consent. Each young person was provided with a £20 voucher as a thank you for their participation.

See appendix 1 for young person topic guide, which includes the questions that young people were asked during the focus groups.

Who took part in the focus groups?

36 young people took part in the focus groups, a mix of in-person and online. The young people were aged between 8-22 years. For one focus group young people from the organisation were invited to attend but only one young person did, we will refer to this as a focus group in how we label the quotes in the findings to ensure we protect the anonymity of the young person. We had originally aimed to speak to 11-25 year olds, however for one focus groups 8 and 9 year olds volunteered to take part. As such, we made the decision that it would be important to hear their voices, and parental consent was sought and granted.

Young people were asked to share their demographic data with us; however not all young people were comfortable to do this. As such we make no assumptions about the gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation of all the young people who took part. What we can say is that the focus groups spoke to young people across the gender spectrum, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, a mix of urban and rural communities including a remote island and with representation from the LGBTQ+ community.

The following organisations from across Scotland supported us to conduct focus groups with young people who accessed their services.



Jack Kane Community Centre

A community centre supporting young people based in Niddrie, Edinburgh.



Royston Youth Action

A youth work organisation supporting young people based in Royston, Glasgow



OPEN, Shetland

A youth-led organisation supporting young people based in Shetland.



LGBT Youth Scotland

Scotland's national charity for LGBTQ+ young people aged 13-25.

MOVE ON

Move On

A charity based in Glasgow and Edinburgh supporting young people and adults who face barriers to success including low confidence; little or no work experience; poor physical or mental health; experience with the criminal justice system; experience of care; or experience with addiction.



Passion4Fusion

Passion4Fusion is a Black Multi-Ethnic organisation in Scotland. They work with Black African communities, particularly young people and women, in Edinburgh and the Lothians.



Key Findings



The key findings are split into four themes, including:

**Perceptions of Safety,
Experience of Violence and Knife Carrying,
Online Violence and
Designing a Prevention Campaign.**

The findings draw on the views of young people shared through both the survey and focus groups.

Perceptions of Safety

Young people reflected on how safe they felt in different parts of their lives and the factors that influenced their feelings of safety.

In school

How safe young people felt in school was something we explored in the survey. Encouragingly the majority of young people felt very or fairly safe in school (88%). Young men and women were equally likely to say they felt very safe or fairly safe (91% and 86% respectively), whereas those who identified as another gender were less likely to feel safe in school (61%).

In your local area

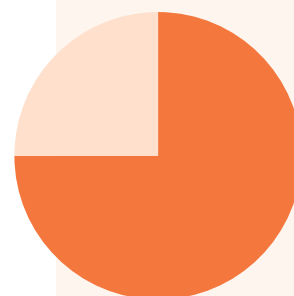
Outside on their own

The majority of young people (75%) said they felt very safe or fairly safe when they are outside on their own in their local area.

We found that young men were most likely to feel very or fairly safe (80%), followed by young women (70%) and then young people who identified as another gender, who were nearly half as likely as both men and women (39%). It is also worth noting that young people from less deprived areas were more likely than those in more deprived areas to feel very or fairly safe (64% compared with 78%).

In the focus groups there were a mix of views shared by young people about how safe they felt in their local areas. Young people living in more rural communities seemed to feel relatively safe.

"Yeah I feel very safe in my local area. I live in the countryside and yeah its very safe. It's only like 20 houses...so its fine and it doesn't matter nighttime or daytime snow, rain, anything. Its good" (Young person, FG4)



75%
of young people feel safe in their own local area.

For young people living in urban communities factors such as the

time of day, how close they live to pubs and football stadiums and whether they were on their own, all influenced how safe they felt.

The majority in the focus groups felt less safe walking outside in their communities on their own.

"I think it would be fine in the daytime it's a little more like sketchy and scary at night" (Young person, FG3)

"Where I'm most likely to feel unsafe are nights when the pubs are right busy because there's a lot more drunk people around" (Young person, FG4)

A young person from the LGBTQ+ community also expressed concern about being verbally harassed by groups of other young people when they were on their own in their community.

"I feel pretty safe. I could say I live in quite a nice area. I don't have fear of knives or anything... Mostly, it can be kind of worrying like with other kids around there, especially if you are queer...It's less so a fear of getting like physically hurt, more fear of like verbal harassment" (Young person, FG6)

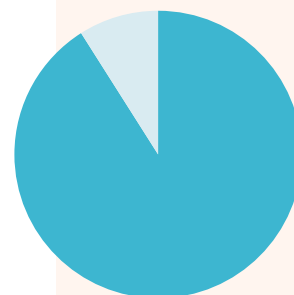
Outside with other people

Most of the young people in the focus groups felt safer when with other people. This was consistent with the survey where the majority of young people (91%) said they felt very safe or fairly safe when they are outside with other people in their local area. Those who identified as straight were most likely to say they felt very or fairly safe (92%), followed by those who identified as bisexual (87%), gay/lesbian (83%) and then other sexualities (81%). Those from the most deprived areas were less likely to say they felt very safe (31%) than those in the least deprived areas (44%).

The young people in the focus groups explained that they feel safe when they are with others:

"When I'm with someone that I know, like part of my family I feel 100% safe but when I'm just like alone walking I don't feel that safe" (Young person, FG7)

"I feel like more safe when I'm with other people just because that's how I am



91%

of young people felt safe when they are outside with other people in their local area

but I would say like since I moved here I feel like safer walking around here than I would where I used to live" (Young person, FG4)

People in their local area they can turn to for advice or support

Part of feeling safer in their local areas seemed to be connected with having people they could turn to for advice and support if needed.

Around three quarters of young people (72%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had neighbours or other people in their local area that they could turn to for advice and support. Those in the least deprived areas were more likely than those in the most deprived areas to agree (83% and 68% respectively).

For young people in the focus groups they discuss going to parents, other family members, friends, romantic partners, teachers and youth work organisations for support.

"Your parents, your friends, and your grandparents, and aunts and uncles that you can trust" (Young person, FG7)

Not in your local area

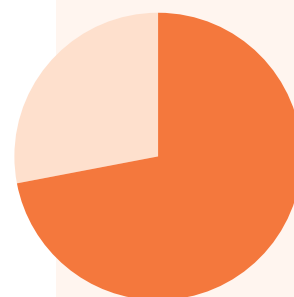
Outside of their own

There was more concern amongst young people in the focus groups about being outside not in their local community, particularly if they were on their own.

"Because like about here you'll ken at least one person, whereas if you're in another town like you might not ken anybody" (Young person, FG1)

As in their local areas, the darkness at night affected their feelings of safety outside of their communities.

This concern extended to young people in the survey. **Less than half (41%) of young people said they felt very or fairly safe when they were outside on their own in areas that are not their local area.**



72%

agreed that they had neighbours or other people in their local area that they could turn to for advice and support.

Young people who identified as straight were the most likely to say they felt very or fairly safe (43%), followed by those who identified as gay/lesbian (35%), bisexual (24%) or another sexuality (22%). Also worth noting that young people with a long-term illness or health condition were less likely to feel very or fairly safe (34%) than those without a condition (43%).

Outside with other people

Similar to when they were in their local area, **the majority of young people (71%) felt very safe or fairly safe when outside with other people in areas that are not their local area.** Young men were most likely to feel safe when outside with other people in areas that are not their local area (77%), followed by young women (67%) and those who identified as another gender (64%).

At night

The night, particularly due to darkness as mentioned previously was a concern to young people in the focus groups and effected how safe they felt. This was a concern also shared in the survey. **Around two thirds (60%) of young people said they felt a bit or a lot less safe at night.** Young women and those who identified as another gender were more likely to say they felt a bit or a lot less safe at night (70% and 71% respectively) than young men (50%). Those in the least deprived areas were more likely than those in the most deprived areas to say they felt a bit or a lot less safe at night (75% and 59% respectively). Those who had never been in care were more likely to say they felt a bit or a lot less safe at night (65%) compared with those who had been in care/looked after (52%). Those with no experience of criminal justice or contact with the police were more likely to say they felt a bit or a lot less safe at night (66%) compared with those who did have experience (56%).



41%

of young people said they felt safe when they are outside on their own in areas that are not their own local area



60%

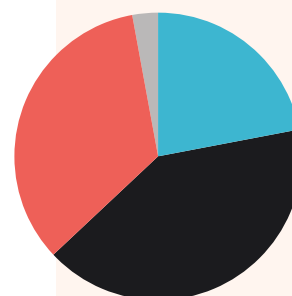
said they felt less safe at night

Is Scotland safer or less safe than it was two years ago?

When asked if they thought Scotland was safer or less safe than it was 2 years ago, 41% said the same, 33% said a bit less safe or a lot less safe and 22% said a bit more safe or a lot more safe.

Those with any experience of criminal justice or contact with police were more likely than those without to say that Scotland was a bit or a lot less safe than it was 2 years ago (44% and 32% respectively).

*Is Scotland
was safer
or less safe
than it was 2
years ago?*



22%
said more safe

41%
said the same

33%
said less safe

What would make them feel safer in their local area

Young people shared what would make them feel safer in their local area, these included:

- Seeing more police in their area (47%)
- Trusted adults in schools or communities (36%)
- Talking more about violence in school (32%)
- Knowing more about their rights and choices (29%)
- More youth spaces or activities (27%)
- Better relationships with teachers or staff (26%).

It should be noted that the suggestions above were part of a list that young people could select in the survey. However, when asked as an open question in the focus groups, young people talked about the importance of their phones to help them feel safer, including speaking on the phone, ensuring their phones are charged and having the tracker on so their parents can see where they are.

"If I had to walk by myself I would go on phone to like a partner or somebody and be like talk to me so I don't get attacked" (Young person, FG4)

"I wouldn't go out with like 20% charge just in case anything happens, I need to charge it before I go out" (Young person, FG1)

Being near shops, doctors etc would also help them to feel safer as they would have somewhere to go if they were feeling worried.

"I think its easier when like there are shops and that about or like here, or like a school, anything, doctors or that because it means like if you think you're in danger you've got places you can not necessarily hide but you can be safe until somebody is like notified that you feel like you're in danger" (Young person, FG1)

For some but not all young people, the police being visible in their area helps them to feel safer.

"The police station is not that far, it's next to like the shops at the crossroads" (Young person, FG1)

Some tactics to feel safer described by young women included, walking faster, holding keys in their knuckles so they can defend themselves if necessary.

"Walk faster so you look like you're on a mission to get home" (Young person, FG4)

"Keys in your knuckles" (Young person, FG4)

For a trans young person, they discuss changing their behaviour through acting more confident than they feel, deepening their voice, gripping their phone and having headphones on with no music playing, in order to not draw attention to themselves to try and prevent people shouting abuse at them.

"If I'm walking like really, really cowardly, then people will notice it and they will shout at me, to keep a good grip on my phone in case someone wants to like yank it in my hands, to not have music playing in my headphones, but I'll keep them on my head. Just to try and like seem more confident where I'm walking... don't like don't come at me...if you fake that confidence, they won't like bother you as much, I don't think. Or even they'll be like, oh, do you know where such and such is? And if they get asked anything, just deepening your voice, like I've got a high pitched voice, like trying to like deepen your voice, make it sound different. So like it's they don't like clock you as much" (Young person, FG6)

For other young people from the LGBTQ+ community they discuss not using buses at night due to past experience of witnessing hate crime.

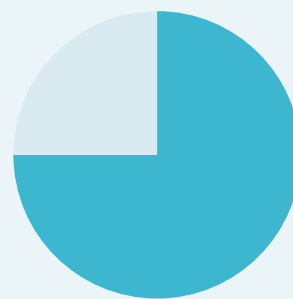
"I'll choose routes that I know I feel safe taking. A lot of the time I won't take the bus because at nighttime I don't really feel safe doing that because of the route that it goes on and because of experiences I've had in the past on the bus.

...I think it was I think it was about last year. I like witnessed a hate crime like right in front of me on the bus and it took them ages to sort it out. So it was just like ongoing. And so a lot of the time I'll take the train which is more expensive, but it's more direct, so I feel safer" (Young person, FG5)

Summary of perceptions of safety

This section has focused on young people's perceptions of safety. What we've learned is that the majority of young people felt safe in and outside their local communities, as long as they are with other people. The nighttime, being near pubs and football stadiums can impact their feelings of safety. They had developed tactics to help them feel safer including having full charged phones, making sure family know where they are and having trackers on their phones. For young women and young people from the LGBTQ+ community they also talk about changing their behaviour and amending their journeys to feel safer.

Just under half of young people (47%) felt seeing the police in their area would help them feel safer.



47%
**of young
people felt
seeing police
in their area
would make
them feel
safer**

Experience of Violence and Knife Carrying

In this research as well as discussing young people's perceptions of safety, we also wanted to explore their experience of violence and knife carrying. Through asking young people directly, we will have a better sense of what life is like for them in their communities.

How common knife carrying is in their local area

The majority of young people in the survey did not think knife carrying was common in their local area (16% of young people said not at all common, 49% said not very common). **Significantly, young people in the most deprived areas were three times as likely as those in the least deprived areas to say it was common** (51% and 17% respectively). Those with any experience of criminal justice or contact with police were also more likely to say it was common than those with no such experience (55% and 29% respectively).

In the focus groups the responses were much more mixed and nuanced. Some young people, particularly in urban areas felt it was "common" (Young person, FG1). For a few young people they didn't know how common it is and that made them feel worried as they felt there is the potential for people to be carrying knives.

"I don't know and that's why I think it's quite dodgy" (Young person, FG3).

"But I haven't seen people carrying them. I still am afraid that people are. So especially at night, if someone, if it's a quiet night and I don't see very many people around and there's maybe like one person who seems intoxicated, I wouldn't want to go up to them. I wouldn't want them to go up to me because if there aren't people around, I would be afraid that they, if they were carrying a knife, they would feel the need to use it" (Young person, FG5)

Young people from the most deprived areas were

3x more likely to say knife carrying was common

than those in the least deprived areas

"I don't know if they do or not but like there are some people that are kind of sketchy that I just assume like yeah this person might carry a knife" (Young person, FG4)

For some young people they knew people who carried knives in their local area:

"How common I don't know but I've known a lot of delinquent teenagers and they carry knives around here" (Young person, FG7)

"I know a hell of a lot of people who carry knives around" (Young person, FG4)

"You kind of know like local drug dealers, stuff like that. So I would personally say, I don't know anybody that knows, but I know that it would be quite common" (Young person, FG5)

Some young people had stories of hearing about or witnessing first hand people carrying knives or machetes. This was the case even in areas such as the island community and more rural areas, where they didn't think knife carrying was common.

"I know someone got stabbed in a park like six years ago, 8 years ago, like a while ago. And then there was nothing heard of like no one carrying anything for ages. And then a year ago, there was a guy with a machete who like he didn't end up hurting anybody with it, but he was walking in the street, he was drunk, he was carrying one" (Young person, FG6)

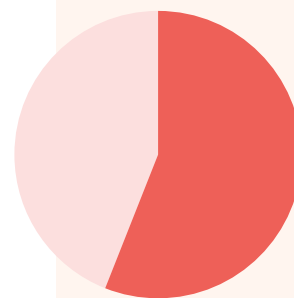
"I nearly seen a guy get stabbed. I seen a guy nearly get stabbed because he was in a fight with somebody and the guy pulled out like a 20 inch blade" (Young Person, FG3)

"Once in a while you hear about someone breaking out from prison and for example, the guy who had knives the other day, he got caught the same day, they found him the same day, they arrested him the same day" (Young person, FG7)

"I heard about someone being threatened with a machete" (Young person, FG4)

Which age group is more likely to carry a knife

Interestingly, over half of young people in the survey thought the most likely age group to carry a knife was aged 13-18 (56%), followed by 23% who said aged 19-24. Only 5% said aged 25+ and only 1% said aged 8-12. This contrasts with what we know from evidence that 29 is the average age of someone convicted of carrying a knife in Scotland¹.



56%
of young in the survey thought the most likely age group to carry a knife was 13-18

Why they think people carry knives

In the survey when asked what the reasons were why they thought people carried knives, the most common response was 'to make them feel safer' (63%), followed by 'for protection' (61%), 'to show power' (56%), 'peer pressure' (44%) and 'to gain respect' (35%). The reason 'its fashionable' was only selected by 7% of respondents.

This was consistent in the focus groups, where young people shared the reasons they believed people might carry knives, including for protection, to feel safe, to cause trouble, because they were up to something "sketchy" (FG2), to look scary, because they are being bullied and to impress their friends or social media followers.

"I think maybe that some people do it to impress their friends and impress people they want to be like as well" (Young person, FG3)

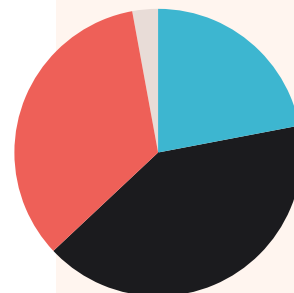
"It can also be for like popularity reasons because see how people...especially in different communities and that, they're like oh aye I'll do this, I'll do that, blah-blah-blah and then they'll post something their wee TikTok pages, like I'll do this with a knife and I'll do that, that sort of stuff ken what I mean?" (Young person, FG1)

1 https://noknivesbetterlives.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Brief-Intervention-Cards_FINAL_compressed-1-2.pdf

Carrying a knife for protection

We have learned so far that young people have some concerns about their safety and have taken actions to help them feel safer. **In the survey we asked if they ever felt like they had to carry a weapon (like a knife) to protect themselves, even if had never actually carried a knife, 16% of young people agreed and 82% did not agree.** This is encouraging that the majority had not felt the need to carry a knife. It should be noted that some characteristics did affect young people's feelings about carrying a knife. Young people who have a long-term illness or health condition were more likely to agree they had felt like carrying a weapon (25% compared with 12% who don't have a long-term health condition or illness). Young people who have ever been in care/looked after were more likely to agree (25%) compared with those who have never been in care (13%). Young people with any experience of criminal justice or contact with police were more likely to agree (30%) than those who had not (13%).

Have you ever felt like you've had to carry a weapon for protection?

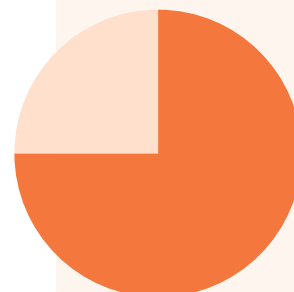


86%
disagreed

16%
agreed

How likely they would be to tell an adult or the police if someone they knew was carrying a knife

As we have heard the majority of young people are not likely to carry a weapon. **Young people do seem to understand the seriousness of knife carrying and as such, two out of three young people (66%) said they would be very or quite likely to tell an adult or the police if someone they knew was carrying a knife.** When looking at gender, young women were more likely to say they would tell an adult or the police if someone they knew was carrying a knife (72%), compared with young men at 59%. Young people with any experience of the criminal justice system or had contact with the police were less likely to say they would tell (42%) than those who had not had any experience of criminal justice (73%).



66%
of young people said they would be likely to tell an adult or the police if someone they knew was carrying a knife

- Young people who identified as straight (68%) or bisexual (64%) were more likely to say they would than those who identified as gay/lesbian (45%) or another sexuality (56%).
- Those aged 11-15 were more likely to tell an adult or the police than those aged 16-24 (68% and 53% respectively).
- Young people with any experience of criminal justice or contact with police were less likely to say they would tell (42%) than those who had

not had any experience of criminal justice (73%).

What would happen if someone is caught carrying a knife by the police

- When asked what they thought would happen if someone is caught carrying a knife by the police, the most common answer was 'The police would get their parent involved' answered by 67% of people, followed by 'prison/young offenders institute' chosen by 41%, 'a fine' chosen by 37%, 'given a community sentence' chosen by 28% and 'a verbal warning' chosen by 24%. Less than 5% of people answered 'Nothing' (2%) or other (4%).

What would prevent someone their age carrying a knife

If the police did catch someone carrying a knife, 67% thought the police would get their parent involved, 41% thought it would result in prison or a young offenders institution and 31% thought they would get a fine.

What would help prevent a young person carrying a knife?

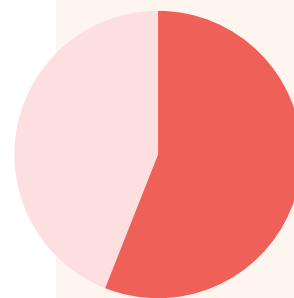
Interestingly when asked what they thought would help prevent someone their age from carrying a knife, the most common answer was **knowing the legal consequences (58%)**, followed by 'more police around' (48%). Young people aged 11-15 were more likely to say 'more police around' (51%) than those aged 16-24 (37%). This more punitive response was also discussed in the focus groups.

"The law in general, like you're not supposed to so not being able to get one"
(Young people, FG2)

"Ban them" (Young person, FG3)

"Jail" (Young person, FG3)

"This is going to be a bit controversial potentially, if the police actually did their job because I mean from recent times where I've actually had to phone the police they have been fuckin' useless and its actually just kind of sad...So I think if the police were doing that then there wouldn't be a reason for anyone to have a knife" (Young person, FG4)



58%

of young people thought that knowing the legal consequences would help prevent someone their age from carrying a knife

In one focus group, the young people discussed the fact that they didn't think you could prevent other people carrying knives.

"Nothing really because I think that they will just think that they should carry it just in case anything happens" (Young person, FG1)

In the survey other suggestions of what could prevent young people carrying knives included positive role models (43%), knowing the personal consequences (39%), trusted adults to talk to (36%) and education in schools (33%). Less common answers were other young people speaking out (25%), scare stories (16%) and campaigns (12%).

In one of the focus groups though the young people had expressed the more punitive options of banning knives and jail, they also talked about the need to check in on their friends and encouraging people to talk to each other as a prevention tool.

"M Just talk to them yeah, so we could encourage people to talk to each other.
M Ask them how they are?
M Yeah check up on them" (Young people, FG3)

Summary of experience of violence and knife carrying

We wanted to better understand young people's experience of violence in their communities and whether they felt knife carrying was common. Encouragingly, the majority didn't think knife carrying in their local areas was common. Though important to note that young people from more deprived communities and who had experience of the criminal justice system thought it was common. When people do carry knives, the majority thought this was to make them feel safer, for protection and to show power. Of the young people who took part in this research, the majority had never carried a knife and they were likely to tell an adult or the police if they knew someone who was carrying a knife. This demonstrates they know the seriousness of knife carrying. Many of the young people felt that knowing the legal consequences would help prevent young people from carrying knives.

Online Violence

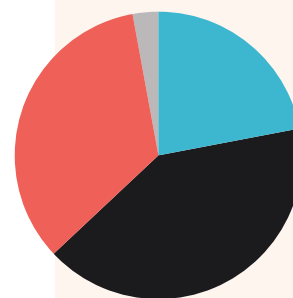
We know that social media is a significant part of young people's lives. We wanted to learn and understand more about how they are using social media and their experience of online violence. There is much discussion amongst adults and practitioners about young people's use of social media, this was an important opportunity to hear directly from young people and ask them about how to prevent online violence.

Typical social media use

In the survey, we wanted to understand how much young people are using social media, so we asked 'on a typical day when you are not in school, college or work, how often, if at all do you usually check your social media or messaging apps?'. What we found was that 36% of young people said at least every half hour, 26% at least every hour, and 25% at least every couple of hours. Only 5% reported checking their social media or messaging apps less often than that, and 3% said not at all. Young women were more likely to check their social media or messaging apps at least every half hour (41%) compared with young men (31%).

The majority of young people were using social media to connect with friends (87%) and watch videos (80%). Other less common uses were keeping up with news and current events (34%), following celebrities or influencers (33%), sharing their own content (19% of respondents), and talking about serious issues (10%).

**Is Scotland
was safer
or less safe
than it was 2
years ago?**



22%
said more safe

41%
said the same

33%
said less safe

How often they see violent content

When asked how often they see violent content online, 14% of respondents said daily, 23% weekly, 17% monthly, 25% less often than monthly, and 17% said they do not see violent content online at all. In the focus groups, young people talked about seeing violent content "quite a bit" to "a lot". As one young person shared:

"As someone who spent like most of their teenage years online it is surprising how much violence you will see. It doesn't matter what platform you're on, especially if you are under the LGBTQ community there are people who will go out of their way to show you horrid violent things. Like disgusting things. So it is very, very prevalent online" (Young person, FG4)

Instagram is mentioned as one of the main platforms used for sharing violent content, including fighting in school and knife fights.

"There's an account set up for my school that I still follow showing all the fights that have happened in school...I mean people who previously went to the school and people who are currently at school all watch it. It's basically the same as word-of-mouth drama it just spreads through Instagram instead" (Young person, FG2)

"Young person: People make accounts of people actually having knife fights and people dying and all that.
Interviewer: So it's quite heavy stuff as well isn't it on Insta?
Young person: I thought about Instagram, what's it called –
Young person: Scheme Life" (FG3)

How much online violence influences offline behaviour

Around one in four young people (27%) said they had experienced violent threats online. Of this one in four, 26% had experienced violent threats online that had led to a physical fight in real life. 15% of young people thought seeing violent content online would make people much more likely to carry a weapon such as a knife, 57% thought it was a bit more likely.

How often do you see violent content online?

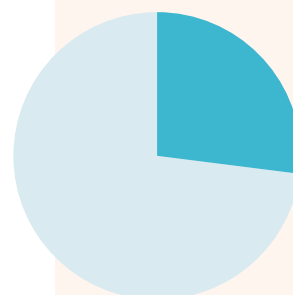


23%
said weekly

17%
said monthly

25%
said less often than monthly

17%
said not at all



27%
said they had experienced violent threats online

In the focus groups young people tended to think that seeing online violence had an impact on offline behaviour. The following two quotes highlights the concern about online influencers such as Andrew Tate leading to young people, particularly young men being violent towards women.

“Yeah, I'd say so. Especially with, you know, do you know of Andrew Tate? Yeah, that for ages in school... there was a lot of boys in my class who like idolised him. Even like as a joke, they would say it, but it's just the fact that it was just indoctrination... But for a while afterwards, some boy in my class threw his shoes at some girl because she quote 'disrespected him' and he got like screamed at, which he should have been absolutely. But he like he chose like, oh, she like ignored me. I'm going to take” (Young person, FG6)

“Like they can see them as like a role model, like wee bairns with the rappers and that or just singers and some of the music videos are brutal or some of the words they say. They're like oh aye I'm going to copy them because I look up to them or I want to be them” (Young person, FG1)

For one young person, they explained that it also depends if someone thinks they are going win a fight, as to whether they would choose to fight.

“It depends if you're going to win. If you think you're going to win you're probably going to be more likely to do it because people who win get all the praise where people who lose get all the shit for it” (Young person, FG2)

What they do if they see violent content online

“I would just scroll away” (Young person, FG2) is a common view shared in the focus groups about what they would do if they saw violent content online, 20% in the survey would also ignore it. Some suggest that they would report it depending on how serious they felt it was. In the survey 13% said they would tell the police, 10% would report it to the social media platform, 28% would tell a parent, carer, or teacher, 18% would talk to a friend.

Only 2% would share or comment on it and no-one in the focus groups claimed that they would share any violent content.

Interestingly, young people from more deprived areas were more likely to say they would tell the police (20%) than those in less deprived areas (6%).

If young people were in charge what would they do to stop violence being shown online?

Young people were asked to reflect on what they do if they had any authority to stop violence being shown online. For some young people the answer was simple ban social media, have clear consequences, introduce fines.

“Just ban all social media completely” (Young person, FG2)

“Make the consequences...like up the consequence” (Young person, FG2)

“Fine them” (Young person, FG1)

An important point was raised that despite the “horrible stuff” shared on social media it plays an important role for young people who are LGBTQ+ and autistic to find community.

“I wouldn’t ban it at all, though. I know there’s a lot of discussion about it, but I think one of the worries is the internet’s used for a lot of horrible stuff, but also for a lot of queer people, that is their escape because for people who are autistic, it’s hard to find if you live in a small area or you have parents to accept, you can message people who are like you” (Young person, FG6)

For some young people, rather than bans, they discussed possible restrictions, including stricter age restrictions and mechanisms to prove their age.

"Maybe not ban maybe restrict it" (Young person, FG2)

"Set up community restrictions like you have to have your account ID verified to make sure you're that age" (Young person, FG3)

"Stricter age restrictions, see how a lot of young people can lie about their ages and be like oh I am 34 but they're really like 12. I think before you even are able to make an account you need to like photo verification and stuff and it needs to be like different steps because see how some of them are like...they lie and say they're their ma and get a photo of their ma and they're like...it should be like a video of them saying something to make an account rather than oh aye there's a photo of ma, Bob's your uncle sort of thing" (Young person, FG1)

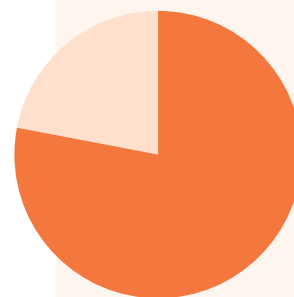
A few young people mentioned parents needing to play a stronger role in restricting and monitoring their child's social media use.

"I would say that they if they're like 18 or under they should like have only this access thing that only your parents can do on their devices ...the parents should first delete anything that's bad...they should delete apps first so that they can't install anything bad" (Young person, FG7)

78% of young people shared that social media platforms should do a lot more or a little more to prevent young people seeing youth violence online. For some young people in the focus groups, they agreed and felt they should put more measures in place and hold themselves accountable.

"I feel like if you post a video there needs to be like surveys like if they think it's not appropriate for like TikTok or whatever they can put a survey through" (Young person, FG1)

"I personally think that apps as well should be holding themselves accountable but then with the rise in AI a lot of people are saying this stuff is AI generated when in reality it's not and that's bypassing their terms of service" (Young person, FG4)



78%
of young people said that social media platforms should do more to prevent young people seeing youth violence online

Young people told us what they think would help make social media safer, this included:

- Better ways to report content/accounts (58%)
- Easier ways to choose what content you see (45%)
- More education on how to use social media safely (35%)
- More restrictions on use (e.g., from parents, teachers, youth workers, actual restrictions on apps) (28%).

Summary of online violence

We know that social media is a big part of young people's lives, we wanted to understand how they are using it and how much online violence they are seeing. They told us that they use social media to connect with friends and watch videos. Most of the young people were seeing violent content daily, weekly or monthly. Just over a quarter had violent threats online that led to physical fights. However, some young people shared that they would "scroll away" in they saw violent content. Interestingly, some young people would ban social media and others would place restrictions on its use. The majority thought that social media platforms should do a lot or a little more to prevent online violence. Following from this, the majority also felt there should be better ways to report content/accounts.

Designing a Prevention Campaign

No Knives, Better Lives are considering designing a new prevention campaign. To help with the development, we asked young people what key messages should be included, where the campaign should appear and who should deliver the messages.

Key messages

Consequences

For some young people, they would like to see the consequences of violence included in any campaigns, such as prison sentences and the impact on families of victims and perpetrators.

"I suppose like as well its basically like...have any of you seen the drink driving ads that you see sometimes? It shows the consequences. So that was a good idea...When it comes to like jail time" (Young person, FG2)

"Young person: What would he a good kind of catchy slogan basically saying like...because how many lives would be ended if somebody did lose their life?"

Young person: Multiple.

Young person: Yeah because what would happen, they're maybe ending up in the jail and then there's both sides of the families" (FG3)

Impact on victims

Some young people discussed the impact of violence on the victims and then any campaigns should focus on how violence is making other people's lives "miserable".

"I want them to think about safety and like health... they just hurt other people, they're not actually helping the other people. They're basically just making the other people's lives more miserable" (Young person, FG7)

Don't carry a knife for protection

A discussion in one of the focus groups included any campaigns making clear not to carry a knife for protection, as the knife may then be used in "self-defence".

"I think it's just instead of looking at it as you don't carry a knife its more here is why it's actually...why you don't actually have to carry a knife on you because I think like people feeling the need to have a knife on them is a big reason why there is knife crimes because I mean I don't know the statistics but how often is someone stabbed because someone was using a knife for self-defence?" (Young person, FG4)

Where campaign should appear

Those who had seen campaigns about youth violence or knife carrying shared where they had seen the campaigns. 66% was through discussions at school, 42% on social media and 27% on TV adverts.

There was no consensus amongst young people in the focus groups about where they would like a campaign to appear, instead they had lots of ideas, including: bus stations, schools, online, youth centres, community centres, shops, adverts on social media and Netflix and football tops.

Social media

In relation to social media, there were some suggestions that adverts may be impactful and that TikTok is a platform used by many young people, as well as Instagram.

"Maybe...an advert which like any of us could watch and none of us carry knives but we'd still feel some sort of guilt just watching the advert, so it sticks with anyone" (Young person, FG2)

“And I’d say put it on TikTok probably, but also have some stuff in real life, but definitely put it on TikTok because that’s where most young people will see it”
(Young person, FG6)

However, there was some concern that young people are “over saturated with the information” and it would be easy for them scroll past campaigns on social media.

“I also think that social media campaigning is a good idea, but I also think that people on social media are so oversaturated with the information that they’re like receiving.

That it’s so easy for someone to be like on a TikTok page and see an advert or like a campaign thing and think, oh, that’s a good idea. And then scroll past it and not think about it again and forget by the time they’ve got their phone because it’s been like 3 hours or something. So, I think that it probably needs to be physical and it probably needs to be like, like an actual intervention in an inviting way” (Young person, FG5)

Posters

Due to the oversaturation on social media and some not accessing social media, there were some suggestions about instead having “physical” campaigns, such as posters in places “where young people hang out”.

“So it would be good for them to access it and in schools, places where young people hang out, like pubs and nightclubs and if we’re talking down south then it’s like shopping centres, bus/train stations, or just generally transport hubs and the side of buses” (Young person, FG4)

“A poster because some people are not allowed to have social media” (Young person, FG7)

It was suggested that posters can be overlooked and so they would need to be updated so they “don’t just fade it into the background”.

“Yeah updating the poster, changing the colours on it and stuff and maybe the designs and like pictures you put on there, change it up a bit so that people don't just fade it into the background. Like oh they just put a new poster up but it looks the same so you can't really tell the difference” (Young person, FG4)

Local campaigns

There was also an idea shared about the campaigns being based locally so that young people can relate to the messages and the areas highlighted in the campaign.

“Because if it's just about Glasgow, people from Aberdeen won't be like, well, I don't understand this. Even if you're like mentioning like locations being like, even like four corners being like, people can be like, yeah, no, I understand that. I've seen that. I'm from Glasgow. I know that's a bad spot...Just get someone from the place to talk about that place and show people who are in that place so they have an idea about it, I'd say” (Young person, FG6)

Free local events was also mentioned as a way to raise awareness and engagement

“Posters often get looked over and ripped, that's the only thing, or graffitied. If there was like a small event properly organised, maybe, I'm not sure what of just like bringing, even just like bringing awareness to the situation, a free event with like, I'm not sure just to talk about it, like stats there, just like something for people to like go and discuss about it, to learn more about it, to like show like people to like understand, just to bring awareness for it, even if it's not like in like a main busy area and like smaller areas nearby being like, hey, like we're doing this right here. Do you want to come here? Someone talk about it. We can show you some videos” (Young person, FG6)

How often campaign should be shared

A third of young people (32%) say they never see or hear any campaigns about youth violence or knife carrying, with a third (38%) seeing or hearing them less than monthly.

There were a mix of views shared by young people about how often they would like to see a campaign. There was a suggestion about the more often the more likely they are to remember it.

"It's like the more you see it the more you remember it" (Young person, FG2)

For others, they would find it annoying if the same adverts appeared on social media repeatedly.

"Not like every time because then you'd get annoyed..Yeah maybe not like the same ones repeating" (Young person, FG1)

There was also a suggestion that repeated violence prevention social media posts might in fact encourage the carrying of weapons, so perhaps sharing less often would be preferable.

"How often it should be shared then if it's like social media posts then not too often because it could be like...reverse psychology, people might be like reminded about knives and they might be more prone to use them if it's like constantly put up and if they're feeling unsafe. So, like that kind of posts, like maybe once a month, every few months and then if its posters then maybe like they'll obviously stay up but make sure they're maintained and maybe updated every 3 months to make sure they're looking nice, more up to date" (Young person, FG4)

Who should deliver the campaign

Young people believed the most effective deliverers of campaigns to reduce the number of people carrying knives included:

- People who have experienced violence (51%)
- People their age (45%)
- Police or government (39%)
- Celebrities or influencers (26%)
- Parents (20%)
- Teachers or youth workers (18%)
- These suggestions are consistent with discussions young people had in the focus groups.

People who have experienced violence

Some shared that they thought it would be impactful to hear from those who had first-hand experience of violence.

"I would maybe have people that like have been affected by knife crime or like the impact it's made on family and friends of people that have either been carrying or on like the other end because I feel like hearing their stories and the impact that it's made on them might...it might deter or like make at least one other young person think differently by hearing it like firsthand almost"
(Young person, FG1)

"Yeah and then another thing we wrote was like people who've had experience with like knife crimes so knife crime victims, like people who have felt the need to carry knives, just anything that does relate to knife crime and people with experience of that" (Young person, FG4)

"I think, the people who are carrying knives in the first place so...I think they should hear it from them not celebrities because that seems pretentious. You should only hear from the loved ones that care about them. There should be more outreach to families, the connected people that connect to the people who are doing all this stuff" (Young person, FG7)

People their age

There were suggestions about young people sharing the messages, particularly friends encouraging young people to not put themselves in danger and local young people who know the area and have experience of violence.

"I would say other young people" (Young person, FG1)

"Like I think you should stop doing that, you could put yourself in danger they might considerate it because like their friends might be like a good influence" (Young person, FG1)

"I think what could be quite good is having people from each area. As in, if it's like, if you is one going about Glasgow, get teenagers from Glasgow who are walking around at night, who know about it themselves" (Young person, FG6)

Police

There were different views about the police, some young people suggested that "nobody likes the police" so they were unlikely to listen to them. For others, they would listen as long as the police make sure they are "relatable to the young people"

"The police or well should be...relatable to the young people. Okay yeah, police should take a relatable approach to the young people" (Young person, FG4)

Summary of designing a prevention campaign

No Knives, Better Lives are considering designing a new prevention campaign. As such, we wanted to hear young people's thoughts about what the campaign should look like. Ideas for key messages included consequences of violence, impact on victims and stressing the point not to carry a knife for protection. It was generally felt that campaigns should appear on social media (particularly TikTok) and also have posters in places where young people spend time. Any content whether on social media or on posters should be updated regularly to ensure young people pay attention. Having more local campaigns would help ensure it's relatable. The majority want to hear the messages from people who have experienced violence, followed by young people and the police or government.



Conclusion



This research wanted to explore young people's perceptions of safety, experience of on and offline violence, knife carrying and then hear their ideas for a prevention campaign.

2,922 young people across Scotland who took part in a survey and focus groups shared their views with us. So, what have we learned? The majority of young people feel safe when outside with other people, but nighttime and being near adults who have been drinking affects how safe they feel. The majority did not think seeing the police in their area would help them feel safer, so they used their own protective factors. Young women and young people from the LGBTQ+ community in particular would amend their journeys, even if it cost them more money and have keys in their hands to use a weapon if required.

It was good to hear that that majority didn't think knife carrying was common in their areas, but important to note that this did not apply to young people in the most deprived communities and with experience of the criminal justice system who thought it was common. The majority had not felt the need to carry a knife, but thought that people who did, did so to make them feel safer, for protection and to show power. It was also good to hear that the majority would tell an adult or the police if knew someone was carrying a knife. Interestingly, they thought that knowing the legal consequences would help prevent young people from carrying knives

Unsurprisingly, social media was a big part of the lives of the young people. They mainly used it to connect with friends and watch videos. Most of them are seeing online violence regularly and sometimes online threats led to physical fights. There were no easy solutions suggested to prevent online violence, but the majority thought that social media platforms should be doing more.

No Knives, Better Lives certainly have some key takeaways when it comes to designing a new prevention campaign including focusing on consequences and impact of violence. Campaigns should ideally be a mix of in-person and online, with content being refreshed to avoid it blending into the background. Young people mainly want to hear from people who have experienced violence, ideally from their local areas who they can relate to.

Recommendations for Violence Prevention Partners

Balance Enforcement with Prevention

Young people's perspectives reflect a familiar tension witnessed by NKBL trainers when delivering multi-disciplinary violence prevention sessions (to police, teachers and youth workers) enforcement alone does not sustainably reduce violence.

Recommendations:

- Maintain clear, proportionate, and consistently applied consequences for violent behaviour to support legitimacy and deterrence
- Avoid over-reliance on punitive approaches (e.g. stop-and-search or exclusion) that can erode trust, particularly among marginalised groups
- Integrate public health approaches that treat violence as preventable, focusing on risk and protective factors across the life course

Evidence insight:

Research shows that procedural justice (fair, respectful treatment by authorities) is more strongly associated with compliance than severity of punishment. Young people told us that they wanted to see more 'effective' policing, which to them meant visibility and relatability.

1. Invest in Early Prevention and Structural Drivers

Young people clearly identify fear, inequality, and social pressure as drivers of violence, aligning with findings from the Youth Endowment Fund.

Recommendations:

- Scale up early intervention programmes (ages 10–14), especially in high-risk areas
- Address structural inequalities through access to safe spaces and youth provision
- Reduce environmental risks (e.g. unsafe routes, lack of supervision) through place-based interventions

Evidence insight:

Interventions that combine individual support with environmental change (e.g. mentoring + community investment) show stronger long-term impact than standalone programmes. Young people told us they...

2. Reduce the Perceived Need for Self-Protection

A key driver of weapon carrying is fear rather than intent to harm.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise safety-building strategies, including safe travel routes and trusted adults as well as school and community-based conflict mediation
- Implement violence interruption and outreach models in high-risk contexts (detached youth work etc)
- Increase visibility of non-violent norms, showing that most young people do not carry weapons. Youth work emphasises this.

Evidence insight:

Perceived norms strongly influence behaviour; correcting misperceptions can reduce risk-taking (social norms theory). Young people told us that it was not normal to carry a knife and most young people felt safe in their own areas. When an incident occurred however it received a lot of attention, often disproportionately.

3. Build Strong, Trusted Support Systems

Young people emphasise the need for belonging, guidance, and trusted relationships.

Recommendations:

- Invest in long-term, relationship-based interventions (mentoring, youth work) rather than short-term projects
- Ensure services are, culturally competent, locally embedded and co-designed with young people
- Strengthen links between schools, community organisations, and families

Evidence insight:

Consistent adult relationships are one of the strongest protective factors against youth violence. Young people told us that they were likely to tell an adult in a situation where they knew someone who was carrying a knife.

4. Design Campaigns that Reassure, Not Alarm

Fear-based messaging can backfire by reinforcing the very anxieties that drive violence.

Recommendations:

- Shift from deterrence-only messaging to reassurance and empowerment

- Centre authentic voices, particularly those with lived experience from local communities
- Provide practical alternatives (what to do instead of carrying, how to stay safe)
- Use clear, credible messaging about consequences, but avoid exaggeration or moralising

Evidence insight:

Campaigns are more effective when they increase self-efficacy (confidence in making safer choices), not just awareness of risk. Young people were clear on the need to have messages delivered by relevant local people citing authenticity and relatability. They also were clear on the need to reduce fear and to not resort to scare tactics.

5. Use a Blended Engagement Approach

Young people consume information across multiple channels and contexts.

Recommendations:

- Combine both face-to-face engagement (schools, youth hubs, outreach) as well as digital content (short-form video, social media storytelling)
- Keep content non-criinge, regularly updated, visually engaging and platform-specific

Evidence insight:

Multi-channel campaigns outperform single-channel approaches, particularly when messages are reinforced through trusted relationships offline. Young people told us they preferred to receive their messaging across a number of platforms online and IRL.

6. Challenge Harmful Social Norms and Identities

Norms around masculinity, respect, and reputation can drive violence.

Recommendations:

- Develop programmes that promote healthy, diverse expressions of masculinity and challenge the link between violence and status
- Use peer-led approaches to shift group norms
- Embed this work within schools, youth work services, and campaigns

Evidence insight:

Gender-transformative approaches reduce violence by addressing root causes, not just behaviours. Young people told us why they felt that young men in particular might feel driven by narrow and harmful versions of masculinity to pick up a knife.

7. Co-Produce Solutions with Young People

Young people are not just the passive recipients of a set message but they are key partners in creating prevention messages that work.

Recommendations:

- Involve young people in campaign design, message testing as well as delivery and peer out-reach
- Compensate and recognise their contributions
- Ensure diversity of voices, especially those most affected

Evidence insight:

Co-produced interventions show higher engagement, credibility, and effectiveness. Young people trusted other young people, those with lived experience and local voices fronting local campaigns.

8. Ensure Consistency and Long-Term Commitment

Short-term initiatives undermine trust and impact.

Recommendations:

- Move from pilot culture to sustained investment
- Align messaging and approaches across police, schools, community and youth work organisations
- Build shared frameworks and evaluation metrics

The Bottom Line

Young people are not simply asking to be warned about violence, they are asking for safety, fairness, and opportunity.

Effective responses will:

- Combine credible consequences with meaningful prevention
- Reduce fear, not amplify it
- Strengthen relationships, trust, and belonging

Campaigns and policies that succeed will be those that treat young people as partners, address the realities of their lives, and offer realistic, supported alternatives to violence.

Appendix 1 – Young Person Focus Group Topic Guide

Youth Voices on Violence and Prevention Research

Introduction

Explain why you are conducting a focus group

- No Knives Better Lives based at YouthLink Scotland are conducting focus groups on young peoples' attitudes towards violence and knife crime in Scotland. We feel it's the right time to have a proper check in with young people about their experiences of violence and what they feel is needed by policy makers and practitioners.
- To do this, a researcher and a development worker from YouthLink Scotland will run focus groups with young people, with youth workers on hand to provide any support. The workers from YLS are really experienced at running focus groups with young people.
- There are 6 focus groups taking place with young people across Scotland in total.

Details about their participation

- voluntary - both overall and in relation to any specific questions and discussions
- audio recording (and possibly video recorded if online) of discussion
- confidentiality, and how findings will be reported
- No names, nothing that could identify them individually
- Recordings held on a secure server for up to 12 months; only research team and transcribers have access to them. Anonymised transcriptions will be kept for a minimum period of 5 years from project completion and then destroyed by YouthLink Scotland.
- ask people to respect each other's views and confidentiality
- length – 1 ½ hour. Will finish on time.

After the focus group

- You be provided with a £20 voucher as a thank you for taking part
- No Knives Better Lives at YouthLink Scotland will use this learning to write a report which will be available for you to read and will be shared publicly e.g. on social media. No young person's name or identifiable information will be shared in this report.
- If you have any questions you can let your youth worker know and they can put you in touch with Amy or Vicki – details are on the information sheet.

Basic Ground Rules

- We'll let you know when we start and stop recording during the focus group
 - No right or wrong answers – just interested in your views and experiences
 - Really want to hear from everybody so encourage people to come in when they want – only request that do not all talk at once (recording)
 - We'll start with questions, but want you to talk to each other, not just to us.
 - That said, there may be points where we need to interrupt or move the discussion on – not that we're not interested, we just need to make sure we cover everything and hear from everyone.
 - Everybody has a right to their views and people's views may be different: feel free to disagree with other people whilst respecting their right to their views. It is important to avoid any personal attacks or derogatory comments based on gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.
 - Helpful to have all mobile phones either off or on silent
 - Do you have any questions?
-

1. Introductions

- Run an icebreaker?
-

2. Perceptions of Safety

- How safe do you feel outside in your local area? (is it different depending on whether you're alone or in a group, during the day or night?)
 - How safe do you feel outside not in your local area? (is it different depending on whether you're alone or in a group, during the day or night?)
 - What steps might you take to help you feel safer?
 - Are there people in your local area who you could go to for support?
-

3. Experience with Violence and Knife Carrying

- How common do you think it is for someone to be carrying a knife in your local area?
- Why do you think people carry knives?
- What do you think would prevent people carrying knives?

4. Designing a Prevention Campaign (Young People to participate if they want to)

- I would like you to design a campaign to try and prevent young people from carrying knives. Think about:
 - The key messaging
 - Who should deliver the message (prompt - other young people, people with experience of violence, police, teachers, youth workers...)
 - Where should the campaign appear (prompt – posters, social media (which apps), videos etc)
 - How often should the campaign be shared?
-

5. Violence Online

- How much violence do you think young people see online?
 - Do you think this influences their behaviour offline? If yes, in what ways?
 - What would you do if you saw violent or threatening content online?
 - If you had any authority what measures would you put in place to prevent violence being shown to young people online?
-

6. Final Thoughts and End

- Anything they feel we've not covered that they want to add?
- Bring discussion to a close, thank young people and remind them that they will be anonymous in any reports.
- Any questions about the research?



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