



SERIOUS VIOLENCE STRATEGY SUMMARY - APRIL 2018

A YOUNG PERSONA'S VIEW

WHAT AND WHY?

Following an increase in violent crime during the recent weeks approaching Spring 2018, Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, has released a new Serious Violence Strategy in order to address and tackle the issues. Although overall crime rates have fallen in England and Wales since 2014, there has in fact been a rise in violent crime such as attacks using corrosive substances, knife attacks and gun crime. Rudd says the government will be doing all they can to break the deadly cycle that is devastating the lives of many individuals.

It appears that the number of violent crimes taking place has increased looking at the number of crimes being reported to the police, although, it is likely that there may not necessarily be a significant rise in the amount of crimes that are being committed but, alternately, an improvement in the recording of these crimes.

The Serious Violence Strategy will be delivered to promote effective law enforcement and also prevention of similar incidents in the future. It will work by focusing on four key themes: tackling county lines and misuse of drugs, early intervention and prevention, supporting communities and partnerships and effective law enforcement and criminal justice response.

WHAT IS THE DRIVING FORCE FOR VIOLENT CRIME?

The strategy introduces the five main drives that may lead towards an individual committing a serious violent crime. Drugs and profit are a huge driving force towards crime, drugs such as crack cocaine have psychoactive effects which often lead to antisocial behaviour, but as well as the use and misuse of drugs there is also a large, competitive gang community surrounding drug supply. Homicides where either the victim and/or the suspect are drug dealers or users are increasing. Alcohol sits alongside this with more than 35% of homicides in 2016/17 involving a drunk victim or perpetrator.

The effectiveness of the criminal justice system is also suggested in the strategy as a drive towards crime. The number of recorded stop and searches have declined as violent knife and gun crime has risen. For criminals to know that there is a certainty of being punished for their actions, it is likely this would have a greater impact than knowledge of the severity of the punishment that many perpetrators often manage to avoid.

Reports show that a small minority of people commit a majority of crimes. Violent crime is often male on male, and since 2012/13 the NHS have reported the number of incidents involving a sharp object with an under 18 year old as the victim or the perpetrator has risen by 51%. Children who are in or have been in the care system, excluded children and homeless adults are also among those reported to have the highest involvement in violent crime.

Crime however may not just be driven by the individuals behaviour, but also by opportunity in a situation, such as an individual being in a confined pub or club with lots of people drinking alcohol.

Growth in smartphones and social media also presents an opportunity for crime, as gang members use online platforms as a place to provoke rivalry and also promote drugs.

THE HOW - THE STRATEGY

Prevention and Early Intervention

Preventing violence with early intervention was presented as a highly effective method during research for the Serious Violence Strategy. Fourteen systematic reviews aimed at reducing aggressive behaviour in individuals under the age of 21 were analysed for the strategy, eleven of these displayed that early intervention is an effective way of reducing violent behaviour in the future. The research also showed that there are links between those who present disruptive behaviour at a young age and the likelihood of committing crime in the future.

Early intervention for violence prevention can be practiced with a universal approach by educating anyone in the population using a soft touch method of behaviour education, however evidence of the long term effectiveness of this is limited. A more targeted approach of intervention works by focussing on individuals who are seen as high risk, working with their individual needs to positively shape their future. The Home Office have agreed to provide £11 million over the next two years to support an early intervention youth fund as well as working with Ofsted to offer support in schools.

County Lines and drug misuse

County lines is the name given to organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs. County lines networks are a huge issue for violent crime as they are wide circling, and work by exploiting young people and vulnerable adults by putting them at risk of threat, intimidation and violence, including violence of a sexual nature.

In 2016 the National County Lines Action Plan (NCLAP) was set up to tackle drug dealing in organised criminal networks before looking at the issue from a widespread perspective. The group are raising awareness to police and key governmental sectors such as housing, healthcare and childcare about the county lines groups as well as providing training for the law enforcement response. As well as the NCLAP, National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) aim to prosecute offenders as well as also identifying and safeguarding those who become caught up. Offenders in county line networks can be prosecuted under the Modern Slavery Act (reviewed in 2017).

Alongside the NCLAP and NCLCC, a Drug Strategy was formed in 2017 with the aim of reducing the number of people taking drugs and providing treatment to those who need it. Tackling the drug issue will reduce the demand for drugs, therefore restricting the supply in criminal gangs with the focus on recovery, ideally this will reduce drug related violence. The Serious Violence Strategy will increase drug testing on arrest, support the Drug Strategy (2017) and obtain funding from the Home Office for Heroin and Crack Action Areas.

Community and local partnership support

The Serious Violence Strategy is not solely focused on law enforcement, but it is also dependent on partnerships such as those within education, health, social services and more. Support from communities is essential, the strategy suggests that it is time for partnerships to put the tackling of violent crime to the top of their agenda. An Anti-knife crime Community Fund has been introduced by the Home Office, who have accepted bids adding up to £760,000 to fund early intervention schemes and knife crime education.

Police patrol routes will be adjusted by re-allocating police in certain areas at different times of the day and week, alongside this there will be an increase in CCTV in pedestrianised areas. Local areas should aim to establish stronger relationships with one another to enable discussion and to share initiatives about tackling violence.

The Home Office continue their support with the introduction of a major media campaign in March 2018: #knifefree, highlighting the risks of carrying a knife with the necessary steps to support those who need it. The Home Office are also encouraging the government to work with retailers to prevent the selling of knives and corrosive substances to young people, specifically those under the age of 18, the aim is for this to also include online and private retailers. Trading standards will be revised and established in order to make sure that retailers breaking these rules are prosecuted.

Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

Key actions of law enforcement following the strategy will have a heavy focus on taking action against the way social media encourages serious violence. Online platforms allows rapid and widespread sharing of information that may be dangerous or even illegal. The NPCC will work closely with social media companies in order to make sure legal action is taken against illegal content shared online.

It will be ensured that police have the capability to undertake street searches when they suspect someone may be armed or in possession of a corrosive substance, it will also be ensured that any victim of attack by a corrosive substance will receive support from the initial medical response. The NPCC have a policing strategy that they're working on to aid this.

On a national level, a new Inter-Ministerial Group will be assigned to overseeing the Serious Violence Strategy. The group will include ministers from relevant departments to support the strategy such as the Department for Education, Department of Health and Social Care and Ministry of Housing. The Home Office will appoint local Serious Violence Taskforce groups to oversee local progression; they will feedback to the Inter-Ministerial group on a quarterly basis. As well as these quarterly meetings, there will be a series of events taking place nationally and regionally during 2018 where key sectors will come together to assess the changes and to challenge the impact.

THE WHEN - THE FUTURE

All data collected from assessing and overseeing the impact of the strategy will be closely studied. Links within data patterns will be examined intricately so that by reviewing the effectiveness of the strategy on a wider scale can begin to set out the stepping-stones for the future aims of the Serious Violence Strategy.

MY PERSONAL VIEWS

As a nineteen-year-old living in London amongst the news of violent crime happening within such close proximity, I feel that the Serious Violence Strategy has built a strong framework to tackle the problems that are occurring from the source. The idea of an early intervention scheme for the prevention of future crime is an idea I can resonate with personally, as a student working part-time in childcare to fund and support my studies. Working closely with small children has educated me on how children's behaviours can change through their engagement with peers in school, and their interest in activities directly related to competitiveness through violence, such as computer gaming.

I see on social media that the people I considered to be 'naughty' at school are often engaging in online arguments, are victims of broken relationships and occasionally becoming involved in petty crime. On the other hand, I notice that those who presented better behaviour and engagement when they were young, are now studying at university, becoming independent and travelling the world. To me this shows that early intervention education is key, especially for those who fit into a high-risk category, as young brains are easier to adapt and educate, both positively and negatively.

Reading through the strategy I do question how the government have settled on the figures for the funding they are going to apply to different areas of the strategy. What will happen if the £11 million that has been proposed to fund early intervention schemes cannot cover all of the elements that the programme will need in order to be completely successfully? Also, there has been a lot of talk on the news about policing cuts, I didn't notice this until the media started talking about it, but now I know this, I question how soon police will be able to be reallocated to areas that are more violent crime heavy. It is essential for the wellbeing of young people such as myself and my peers to know that help is being put in place, and that it's happening with immediate effect.

With the Serious Violence Task force in place, reporting back to the Inter-Ministerial Group, I feel assured that the ideas and funding that have been proposed in the strategy are not going to be closed away into a document with the hope that violent crime incidents will become a thing of the past. The regular reviews that are scheduled for the strategy allow room for progression. It is settling for myself as a young person to see a strategy that will be actively applied in order to promote a less violent future.

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