

'We Are London'

Youth Survey

2021-22

April 2023

MOPAC Evidence and Insight





Key Findings and Contents



About the survey (page 8)

'We are London' represents the fourth wave of **dedicated youth surveys** run by the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC). The survey was hosted online between November 2021 and January 2022. A total of 11,874 young people aged 11-16 took part, offering unique insight into the crime and safety issues affecting young Londoners.



Young people and crime (page 10)

- In line with the previous wave in 2018, most young Londoners continue to feel **safe at school** and **in the area where they live**. However, results reveal a minority who feel unsafe, and this is associated with wider risk factors.
- Young Londoners are concerned about a range of **crime issues**, with hate crime, violence and drugs most often perceived to be 'a big problem' both at school and locally. One in ten say they have **personally been the victim of a crime** in the last year.
- Young people also perceive **inequalities in safety**, and are more likely to feel their area is a safe place 'for men and boys' than 'for women and girls' or 'for children and young people'.



Young people and the police (page 15)

- Early **opinions** of the police remain mixed, with **trust** and **confidence** standing below results seen for adult Londoners. Opinions have worsened compared with 2018 – particularly for young females – while fewer young Londoners now feel police **treat everyone fairly**.
- Nevertheless, results show an appetite for engagement between police and **schools**, and reveal a wide range of scenarios that may bring young people into **contact with officers**.
- 6% of young Londoners say they have been **Stopped & Searched**, while wider support for the tactic remains mixed. The survey supports a growing evidence base that suggests **early interactions** with the police – including through Stop & Search – are influential in shaping young people's wider views of the police.



Young people and serious violence (page 27)

- Compared with 2018, fewer young Londoners now say they **know others** in a gang or who have carried a knife. However, a more consistent minority say they have been **personally** involved in these behaviours (1-2%).
- Results newly highlight a small group of young Londoners potentially exposed to **criminal exploitation**, with 3% saying they have been asked or pressured to carry or sell drugs, and 2% saying they have been asked or pressured to carry or hide a knife for someone else.
- The survey adds to the complex picture of risk and vulnerability amongst young people exposed to serious youth violence – including increased likelihood of victimisation, poorer perceptions of the police, and lower feelings of safety.



Young people and safeguarding (page 32)

- Most young Londoners **feel safe online**; but around one in five say something has happened online that made them feel worried in the last year.
- A minority of young Londoners* continue to believe sexual harassment or domestic abuse may be **acceptable**, in particular monitoring a partner’s phone or social media, or controlling their friendships.
- Despite COVID-19 lockdowns, many young Londoners* have personally experienced **sexual harassment** in the last year, with a third experiencing sexual jokes or taunts, wolf-whistling, and unwanted sexual comments.
- A quarter say they have been asked to send **nude pictures**, while 6% say someone has shared their nude pictures in a way they did not want*. However, just 23% of those experiencing sexual harassment or unwanted sexual content say they **spoke to anyone about it**.

*In school years 10 & 11



Building the picture of risk – a focus on young people ‘most at risk’ from violence and exploitation (page 38)

- New analysis reveals a small proportion of young Londoners – 2% - who have been exposed to **four or more different forms** of violence or weapon-related risk (out of eight measures included in the survey): forming a ‘high risk’ cohort.
- In turn, this group see a range of attenuated vulnerabilities – with **a cumulative increase in harm**; such that *particularly poor outcomes* are seen. To illustrate, this cohort are disproportionately most likely to feel unsafe, to have been the victim of a crime, to have been exposed to online risks or sexual harassment/content, and to normalise domestic abuse.
- In turn, this group are also disproportionately most likely to have had contact with officers – including through Stop and Search – and to hold poor perceptions of police. This highlights some **unique safeguarding considerations** amongst this small but potentially most vulnerable cohort of young Londoners.

1. Introduction

The three years since MOPAC's last Youth Survey have brought with them unprecedented challenges. Much of this time has been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of which have been felt globally and across every corner of society. Policing and crime were no exception to this. Political, social and economic shifts over recent years have altered the operational landscape, while several high-profile events placed policing under the public spotlight.

It is against this backdrop that the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) launched our latest Youth Survey – 'We Are London' – to help understand what matters most to young Londoners, and to give them a say in how their city is policed. Indeed, first release data from the 2021 Census reveals that *over a million* Londoners are currently aged between 10 and 19 (Greater London Authority, 2022) - reflecting more than ten percent of the capital's total population and highlighting the importance of undertaking research to understand the views of this next generation. 'We Are London' represents the fourth wave in an ongoing series of surveys of young people conducted by MOPAC, with previous iterations taking place in 2018 ('Youth Voice'), 2015 ('Youth Matter') and 2013 ('Youth Talk').

1.1. COVID-19, crime and young people

Recent years have seen considerable shifts in the picture of crime and disorder across the capital, much of which has been spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. When 'lockdown' took hold and the daily influx of commuters and visitors to the city waned, so too did many types of crime – including certain acquisitive and opportunistic offences such as street theft and robbery (Metropolitan Police Service, 2022). However, as the nation was told to 'stay at home', Londoners' concerns instead shifted to more localised issues and calls to the Metropolitan Police Service about antisocial behaviour contrastingly *increased*.

Such issues were also noticed by young Londoners. Many believed antisocial behaviour and drug dealing had become more visible in their area over 'lockdown' (Leaders Unlocked, 2020), while young people's views of their neighbourhood became increasingly polarised: although some felt residents had 'pulled together' in the face of adversity, others believed community tensions had *worsened* as residents conflicted over Government restrictions (Leaders Unlocked, 2020; Partnership for Young London, 2021). Moreover – despite reductions in recorded knife crime during the COVID-19 pandemic (Metropolitan Police Service, 2022b) – fear of physical and knife attacks nevertheless remained top safety concerns for young people, with many believing levels would rise as the Capital continued to recover from the pandemic (Partnership for Young London, 2021).

And to some extent these concerns were realised: levels of violence and knife crime both saw uplifts once Government restrictions were relaxed and 'lockdowns' were lifted over the summer months. Even when looking at *longer term trends*, the picture of youth violence remains mixed. Encouragingly, the number of young victims of non-domestic knife crime (aged under 25) has seen a sustained downwards trend over recent years, while levels of serious youth violence in 2021 still remain far below pre-pandemic levels (MOPAC, 2022c). However, this picture becomes far less positive when focusing in on the *most serious violence*: in stark juxtaposition to an overall decline in homicides seen across London during 2021 – the number of teenagers losing their lives sadly bucked this trend and reached a record high of 30 (MOPAC, 2022c). For this reason, youth violence remains very much at the forefront of political discourse in London, and a key focus for the Metropolitan Police Service. Indeed, the Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan 2021-25 recognises 'reducing and preventing

violence’ as one of the top priority areas for policing in London, and advocates a public health approach – alongside a dedicated focus on violence affecting young people - to help reduce the harms caused by violent crime across the capital.

1.2. *The changing face of risk and vulnerability*

For many young Londoners, the COVID-19 pandemic also brought important safeguarding implications. With residents increasingly confined to their homes, reports of domestic abuse also increased (Metropolitan Police Service, 2022b), whilst national charities saw *record numbers* contacting their specialist helplines with child welfare concerns (e.g. NSPCC, 2020). Once again, these issues also resonated with young people themselves: 58% of young Londoners felt their relationships with their family had become more strained during lockdown, while *nearly four in five* believed their mental health had been negatively impacted by the pandemic (Partnership for Young London, 2021). Further compounding this, around two-thirds of young Londoners said they now spend ‘far more time’ on the internet as a result of the pandemic, bringing with it the potential for increased exposure to a range of online harms including cyber-bullying, inappropriate content or exploitation.

However – while such risks *increased* – opportunities for safeguarding and early interventions *decreased*. As schooling and education became broadly confined to the virtual classroom, face-to-face contact with peers, teachers and other trusted adults was inevitably affected. For many young people, ‘lockdown’ also meant the loss of valuable wider support services, including youth clubs, recreational activities and healthcare (Partnership for Young London, 2021; Public Health England, 2021). Indeed, the impacts of the pandemic will have been amplified among London’s *most vulnerable children*, for whom prolonged confinement at home coupled with a reduction in protective services may have intensified pre-existing exposure to adversity, neglect, or even abuse (NSPCC, 2020).

1.3. *Policing the pandemic and community relations*

The COVID-19 pandemic therefore brought considerable shifts in the picture of crime and risk for young Londoners. However – stepping briefly into the realm of operational policing – recent years have also provided a particularly challenging backdrop. In unprecedented times, Government restrictions on freedoms and movements became enshrined in law, and the public looked towards the police to enforce them. However, research reveals mixed views among young people towards the police response to the pandemic; whilst many cited examples of positive engagement between officers and the community over this time, others raised concerns over the way in which restrictions were enforced (Aitkenhead et al., 2022; Leaders Unlocked, 2020). Indeed, although 83% of adult Londoners said they supported the Metropolitan Police Service getting additional powers to enforce Coronavirus measures during the first ‘lockdown’ period, support remained considerably lower for younger age groups and stood at 71% among those aged 16 to 24 (MOPAC, 2020).

Compounding this, several high-profile incidents placed policing further into the public spotlight. The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 sparked widespread protests in London as part of the Black Lives Matter movement and became symbolic of structural racism in the police. Among adult Londoners, perceptions that the police ‘treat everyone fairly’ fell by 12 percentage points in the weeks following these events, with such declines once again *even more pronounced* for younger age groups (MOPAC, 2020). Indeed, for many young people these events appeared pivotal in shaping relationships with police, with the Black Lives Matter movement widely listed as one of the most important issues for their generation (Leaders Unlocked, 2020).

Less than a year later, in March 2021, came the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Metropolitan Police Officer, which fuelled a national debate on women’s safety and once again placed police standards and integrity under public scrutiny. Tensions between police and communities rose once more – further amplified by widespread criticism of the handling of subsequent vigils – with a national poll showing nearly half of UK women (alongside 40% of men) said their trust in the police had ‘declined since the details of the Sarah Everard case emerged’ (End Violence Against Women Coalition & YouGov, 2021). Specific to London, public trust in the Metropolitan Police Service saw a notable downturn in the weeks following the murder of Sarah Everard: an effect that was once again more pronounced amongst females (MOPAC, 2021). Although this gender disparity was relatively brief – with females’ opinions quickly returning to levels more in line with males – these events also spurred more sustained reductions in public trust that continued throughout 2021 and into 2022 (MOPAC, 2021; MOPAC, 2022a). More than a year on, the murder of Sarah Everard and allegations of misogyny remained very much at the forefront of Londoners’ minds in shaping their trust in police, highlighting the influence of these issues on relationships between police and communities (MOPAC, 2022b).

Once again, young people were no exception to this: many cited an explicit mistrust in the police following the Sarah Everard case and called for reform to help tackle perceived misogyny and the ‘male culture’ of policing (Leaders Unlocked, 2021). Indeed, the declines in public confidence and trust in the Metropolitan Police Service over recent years have been *particularly pronounced* amongst London’s younger residents (those aged 16 to 24 (MOPAC 2022d)). Moreover, evidence has revealed emerging impacts on how this generation engage with the police, with disproportionate declines also seen in measures of compliance – from supporting operational tactics and reporting crime, through to obeying the law and following police orders (MOPAC, 2022a). Importantly then, falls in public trust and confidence bring potentially tangible impacts on how communities engage with police, with support amongst London’s youngest generation seeming critical to maintaining future police legitimacy.

1.4. Building the wider context of youth

Reflecting back then, the last three years have presented a volatile environment for crime and policing in London, the impacts of which have been felt even among London’s youngest generation. However, the events of these years have not happened in isolation. Indeed, the fall in public trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police Service can be traced back to 2017 (MOPAC 2022e). Looking more specifically at those aged under 16, previous waves of MOPAC’s Youth Surveys show that the views of this group *consistently* track below levels seen for adult residents (see for example Charleton, Harrison & Dawson, 2015; Ramshaw, Charleton & Dawson, 2018).

And all of this also sits atop an existing body of research that has long-evidenced the unique position of children and young people within the criminal justice system. Estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) Youth Module consistently show relatively high levels of victimisation among those aged 11 to 16 – including for low-level violent offences and theft of personal property (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This was echoed in the last wave of MOPAC’s Youth Survey, whereby *over one in ten* young Londoners said they had been a victim of crime during the last year (Ramshaw, Charleton & Dawson, 2018). Furthermore, several authors have revealed an overlap between victimisation and offending among young cohorts (see for example Beckley et al., 2018), with analysis also revealing a complex interplay of victimisation, safety issues and involvement in violent crime among those growing up in the capital (Ramshaw, Charleton & Dawson, 2018).

Looking at interactions with police, young people are far more likely to be the subject of police Stop and Search (Metropolitan Police Service, 2022c) and for many these encounters form ‘prototypical’ interactions with officers (Skarlatidou et al. 2021). Indeed, Stop and Search remains a particular concern among young people, with experiences and perceptions of perceived disproportionality in the use of such powers influential in driving wider mistrust in the police (Jackson & Smith, 2013; Murray et al., 2020). Specific to London, MPS Safer Schools Officers also sit in a unique position to engage with young people in the school environment, despite previous waves of MOPAC’s Youth Survey highlighting mixed awareness and engagement with these officers (Ramshaw, Charleton & Dawson, 2018). Moreover, by the very virtue of their age - and magnified by a range of potential personal circumstances - young people also face a range of specific vulnerabilities, including to exploitation or abuse (Children’s Commissioner, 2017): as such, the police possess a unique responsibility to help safeguard and protect the next generation.

1.5. ‘We Are London’ – hearing the voice of young Londoners

It is against this backdrop that the Mayor of London has published his Police and Crime Plan 2021-25: the document that sets the strategic direction for crime and policing over the next four years. Accordingly, the Plan possesses a strong emphasis on youth and vulnerability, and keeping young Londoners safe from harm. The Plan commits to build trust and confidence in the police across London’s communities, and to ensure that the voices of young people are heard in the decisions that affect them.

With all this in mind, the Mayor’s Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) launched the ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22, which aimed to gather the views of young Londoners aged 11 to 16 across a range of crime and policing issues that affect them. Importantly, this group represent London’s future – the next generation to transition through adolescence into adulthood – bringing with them their views and experiences of the criminal justice system. Against this backdrop of change and uncertainty, the survey seeks to understand *what matters most* to those growing up in the capital, and to give young Londoners the opportunity to have a say in how their city is policed.

2. About the Survey

2.1. Methodology and Fieldwork

The 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 was conducted by the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) and was hosted online using a secure portal provided by Opinion Research Services (ORS).

Fieldwork took place between 29th November 2021 and 21st January 2022. Note that this timeframe followed the return to face-to-face schooling for most pupils in March 2021 as part of the gradual easing of Government COVID-19 restrictions in the United Kingdom.

The survey was distributed to schools offering secondary provision (academic years 7 to 11) in London via a central email distribution list¹. This included state-funded schools, private schools, and specialist educational establishments such as Pupil Referral Units. A total of 1,007 schools were invited to participate², with two reminders sent during the fieldwork period.

The survey covered the following topic areas:

- Safety
- Victimisation
- Perceptions of the police
- Safer Schools Officers
- Stop and search
- Serious youth violence
- Online safety
- Sexual harassment and healthy relationships.

2.2. Sample

A total of 11,874 responses were received from young people living or going to school in London. Full sample demographics are provided in Appendix 1. Respondents were aged between 11 and 16 years old, representing secondary school years 7 to 11. Those in lower school years were more likely to take part than those in upper years, likely reflecting curriculum demands. 2% of the sample (188 of 8,080) said they had attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

53% of young people identified themselves as female (6,042 of 11,489), while 45% identified themselves as male (5,153 of 11,489), revealing a slight skew towards female respondents. A further 3% identified themselves as a non-binary gender (294 of 11,489).

Young people were from a broad range of ethnic groups, with the achieved spread broadly reflecting the secondary school population as captured by the Department for Education's School Census³.

¹ Please note that this approach differs to that used in previous waves of the Youth Survey (2015/2018), where the survey was distributed via the Metropolitan Police Service's Safer Schools Officer network.

² 1,013 schools appeared on the central distribution list, but six emails bounced back with a failure to deliver error.

³ Data for 2019 shows 38% of London Secondary School pupils were from a White Background, 22% from an Asian Background, 21% from a Black Background, 10% from a Mixed Background and 6% from an Other Background. <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/percentage-pupils-ethnic-group-borough>

2.3. Ethical Considerations

Distributing the survey via schools provided an ethical safeguard for young people by ensuring that consent from appropriate adults (teachers or parents) was obtained before participation.

To retain confidentiality and comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the survey did not gather any personally identifiable information relating to individuals or to schools. Before taking part, young people were provided with information about the research, and informed that participation was voluntary.

Participants were able to skip any questions they did not want to answer, while questions relating to more sensitive topics also included explicit 'prefer not to say' options. Topic areas relating to online risks and sexual harassment were only asked to those in schools years 10 and 11 to ensure content was age-appropriate. Throughout the survey, young people were provided with links to relevant support organisations, with a detailed list also provided upon completion.

2.4. Survey Scope and Report Structure

The aims of the 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 were two-fold. Firstly, the survey sought to understand how the views of young Londoners may have *changed over time* in light of the current climate of crime and policing. To this end, many questions therefore built upon those asked in previous waves to enable effective benchmarking. Secondly, the survey also sought to generate *novel insight* into young people's views across a range of topical issues, and to this end several questions were newly introduced to this latest wave.

The current report is divided into four sections, each of which explores a different aspect of young people's views of crime and policing⁴. The first section, '**Young People and Crime**' examines young people's feelings of safety in London and provides an updated snapshot of criminal victimisation and experiences of reporting to the police. The second section, '**Young People and the Police**' places a particular focus on trust and confidence in light of recent events and generates new insight into young people's interactions with police in London. The third section, '**Young People and Serious Violence**' explores the prevalence of exposure to weapon-possession and gang issues among young Londoners – including vulnerability to forms of criminal exploitation. Finally, the fourth section, '**Young People and Safeguarding**' examines exposure to online risks among young people, and revisits early attitudes and opinions towards sexual harassment and healthy relationships. The report also concludes with a reflection across the topic areas discussed – '**Building the Picture of Risk**' - with a particular focus on examining the potentially cumulative impact of exposure to harm amongst the small cohort of young Londoners exposed to *multiple different forms* of violence and exploitation. Please note that all differences quoted in this report are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

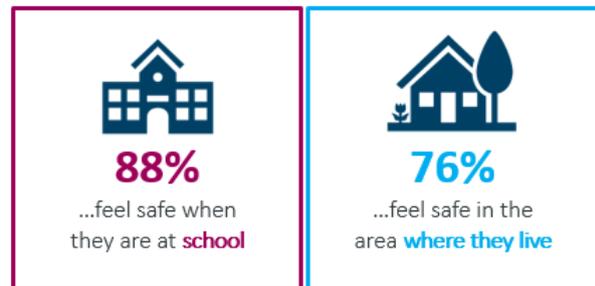
⁴ These sections broadly align with the structure of the survey questionnaire design.

3. Young People and Crime

3.1. Feelings of safety at home and at school

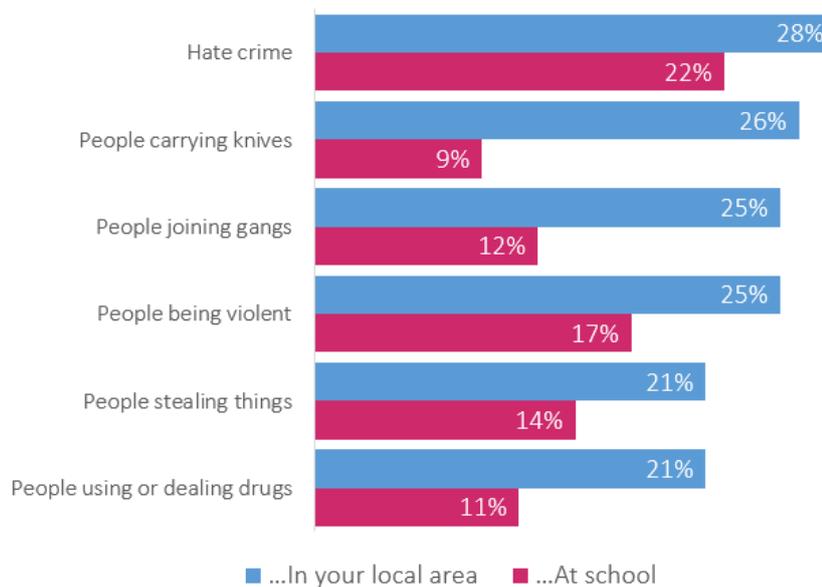
In line with MOPAC’s last Youth Survey in 2018, the majority of young Londoners continued to **feel safe both at school and in their local area** (see Figure 3.1)⁵. However, around one in ten said they felt *unsafe* at school (9%, 966 of 10,481), while one in five felt *unsafe* in their local area (20%, 2,102 of 10,704)⁶. Moreover, there was an overlap between these two locations, such that 5% of the total sample – or 493 respondents – said they felt unsafe *both at home and at school*. Importantly, this reveals a small but potentially vulnerable group of young Londoners growing up in the capital without a sense of safety across either of these locations.

Figure 3.1. Feelings of safety.



In turn, young people felt a range of **crime issues were problematic** both at school and in their local area (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Crime issues at school and in the local area (% big problem).



Hate crime was most often perceived to be a problem, with 28% of young Londoners (2,968 of 10,620) feeling this was a ‘big problem’ in the area where they live, and 22% (2,243 of 10,420) feeling it was a ‘big problem’ at school. Beyond this, young people also appeared concerned about violence in their local area, *with around a quarter* feeling that **people carrying knives** (26%, 2,803 of 10,609), **people joining gangs** (25%, 2,612 of 10,602) and **people being violent** (25%, 2,660 of 10,569) were a ‘big problem’. This is in line with previous research that suggests fear of physical attack remained salient

⁵ 88% feel safe at school (9,225 of 10,481); 76% feel safe at home (8,172 of 10,704).

⁶ Remaining respondents said they ‘did not know’. Regression modelling of safety (blue box) predicted whether or not a young person felt safe in their local area by each of the individual crime problems (big problem vs. bit/not a problem) whilst controlling for individual demographics (age, gender, ethnicity). Second stage also included interaction terms.

for young Londoners despite COVID-19 (Partnership for Young London, 2021). All of the crime issues listed were perceived to be *more of a problem locally than in school* – supporting the lower levels of safety seen here.

Certain groups of young people were *less likely* to say they felt safe at school and in their local area, including those from older age groups and those from Black or Mixed ethnic backgrounds. Importantly, young people who **had attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)** were also significantly less likely to feel safe in their school (74%, 139 of 188) than those who had not attended a PRU (90%, 5,235 of 5,811).

Results from MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ 2021-22 Survey also bring unique and valuable insight into *smaller and potentially ‘hard to reach’ groups* of young Londoners for whom safety concerns may be particularly prominent. Illustrating this, young people identifying as a **non-binary gender** were significantly *less likely* to feel safe either at school (70%, 181 of 257) or in their local area (59%, 154 of 263) when compared with males or females, and in turn were *more likely* to feel that hate crime was a ‘big problem’ (39% at school (100 of 255); 45% in the local area (118 of 261)). This highlights a minority group of young Londoners for whom safety concerns may be more salient - particularly with regards to hate and discrimination.

Beyond this, results also revealed lower levels of safety among the small number of young people **exposed to gangs and knife crime** - including those who *knew others* involved, or who had *felt pressured or been personally* involved (see Sections 5 and 7 for more details). Once again, this highlights a minority of young Londoners – those potentially most vulnerable to violence - for whom safety concerns may be particularly salient.

3.2 London as a safe place for different groups

Beyond their own personal feelings of safety, young Londoners were also asked whether they felt their local area was safe for different groups of people. While nearly eight in ten felt their area **was a safe place for boys and young men**, less than two-thirds felt it was **a safe place for women and girls or for children and young people**⁷ (see Figure 3.3).

Responses for these questions are broadly in line with those seen for adult Londoners as measured by MOPAC’s Public Attitude Survey. However, it is interesting that the proportion of young Londoners feeling their local area is **a safe place for children and young people** tracks below the proportion saying they *personally* felt safe here.

Understanding the Link between Crime Concerns and Safety

Regression modelling⁶ suggests that young people’s concerns about a range of local crime issues shape whether they feel unsafe in the area where they live – but that concerns about violence and drugs are *most influential* here.

Holding other crime concerns and demographics constant, those who felt knife crime was a ‘big problem’ showed 1.9 times increased odds of saying they felt unsafe in their local area. This was followed by people using or dealing drugs (1.7 times) and people being violent (1.6 times).

The only crime issue not to be independently associated with increased odds of feeling unsafe in the local area was hate crime. However, results also suggested that hate crime may be more influential in shaping feelings of safety amongst those identifying as a non-binary

⁷ Safe for women and girls, 6,632 of 10,639; safe for men and boys, 8,313 of 10,593; safe for children and young people, 6,834 of 10,625).

Figure 3.3. Feeling local area is safe for different groups.



When looking at young people’s views of gendered safety, further analysis reveals that perceptions of the local area as a safe place ‘for women and girls’ and ‘for men and boys’ are *both* grounded in wider **concerns about crime**⁸ – in particular **knife crime**. However, whereas a young person’s own gender⁹ and concerns about hate crime appear strongly influential in shaping their views of their area as a **safe place for women and girls**, this is

not the case for judgements about men and boys. Instead, concerns about gangs and ethnicity are more important here, with young Black Londoners also showing independently increased odds of feeling their local area was **NOT safe for men and boys**.

Together, these findings suggest that young people’s views of their local area as a safe place ‘for women and girls’ and ‘for men and boys’ are closely interlinked but are also grounded in slightly different issues. In particular, the link between gangs, ethnicity, and male safety appears prominent for young Londoners: this is to some extent evidenced in current crime trends, with violent crime disproportionately affecting young Black males in the capital, and half of teenage homicides showing links to gangs (MOPAC, 2022c). However, such factors appear *far less influential* in shaping perceptions of female safety, with a young person’s own gender identity and wider perceptions of discrimination and hate in their local area instead having a more important role here.

3.3 Young Londoners’ experiences of crime

When asked about their own personal experiences of crime, *one in ten* young Londoners said they had been the **victim of a crime in the last year** (10%, 987 of 9,837), consistent with levels seen last time MOPAC’s Youth Survey was run in 2018 (12%). This result remains higher than that recorded by the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) Youth Module for children aged 10 to 15 (7%)¹⁰, with the CSEW having recorded a decrease compared with the previous year (ONS, 2020). However, direct comparisons are limited as the CSEW data does not span the COVID-19 pandemic period.

In turn, certain groups of young Londoners were more likely to have experienced a crime. To illustrate, those identifying as a **non-binary gender** were around *three times* more likely to say they had been the victim of a crime (28%, 61 of 217), while the likelihood of victimisation also increased with **age** - from 5% of those aged 11 (82 of 1,738) to 18% of those aged 16 (76 of 427).

Moreover, early victimisation was also associated with a range of wider risk-factors. Young Londoners exposed to elements of **gang and knife crime** were disproportionately more likely to also have been the victim of a crime during the last year (see Section 5 and 7 for further discussion), establishing an

⁸ Results are from two binary logistic regression models predicting feeling the local area is NOT safe ‘for women and girls’ and ‘for men and boys’ from crime problems in the local area (big problem vs. bit/not a problem) controlling for demographics (age, gender, Ethnicity).

⁹ Holding other variables constant, young females showed c. 3x increased odds and non-binary c. 5x increased odds of feeling their area was NOT safe for women and girls compared with young males.

¹⁰ CSEW result is the ‘Preferred measure’ that takes into account factors identified as important in determining the severity of an incidence. The ‘Broad measure’, which counts all incidents which would be legally defined as crimes and therefore may include low-level incidents between children, indicates a prevalence rate of 11% in R12 to March 2020.

important overlap between these experiences. In turn, victimisation also appeared to have profound impacts on young people’s feelings of safety, with *only just over half* of young victims saying they **felt safe in their local area** (57%, 557 of 985). Young victims of crime were also far less likely to hold positive views of the police: just 28% said they had a **good overall opinion of the police** (275 of 986) compared with 48% of non-victims (3,624 of 7,599). Importantly, this highlights a range of wider issues affecting this potentially vulnerable group.

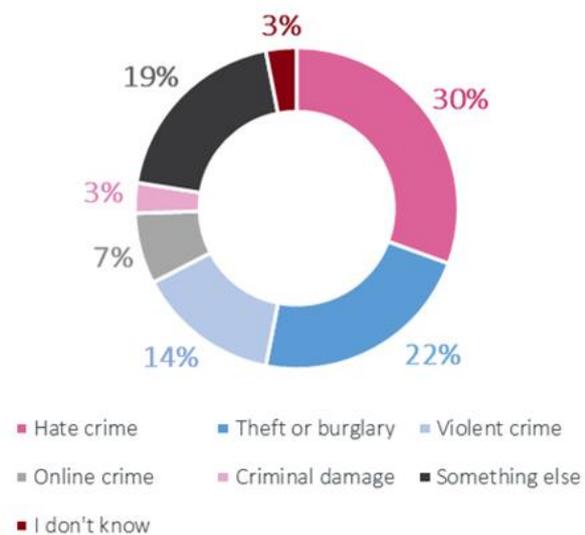
When asked **what type of crime** they had experienced, young victims were *most likely* to classify the incident as a **hate crime** (30%, 272 of 894) followed by a **theft or burglary** (22%, 200 of 894) (see Figure 3.4). It is notable here that the proportion saying they experienced a hate crime has *more than doubled* compared with the last time MOPAC’s Youth Survey was conducted in 2018. This may in part reflect greater awareness of behaviours that constitute hate over this time, and is in line with previous findings that revealed hate crime as the issue young Londoners were *most likely* to feel was a ‘big problem’ - both at school and in their local area (see Figure 3.2). Certain groups of young victims were more likely to say they had experienced a hate crime, including those from **Minority Ethnic Backgrounds** (35%, 180 of 532 across all groups combined, compared with 24%, 87 of 362, from a White Background). Large differences were also seen here by gender: while 21% of young male victims classified their crime as a hate crime (86 of 413) this increased to 35% of young **females** (145 of 409) and stood at 56% amongst the small number identifying as a **non-binary gender** (31 of 55).

3.4. Reporting crime to the police

Despite the prevalence of early victimisation and its potential overlap with wider vulnerabilities, only around a third of young victims said they **reported the crime they experienced to the police** (34%, 317 of 920). This is below results seen during the previous wave of MOPAC’s Youth Survey conducted in 2018 (44%).

Furthermore, levels of reporting fell to *just one in six* among those who had experienced a **hate crime** (17%, 43 of 259); the lowest proportion for any of the crime types. Indeed, the type of crime seemed *particularly influential* in shaping whether or not a young person sought such support, with regression modelling showing that – even when controlling for aforementioned demographic differences and wider relationships with police – crime type remained a strong driver of whether or not young victims told the police about the crime they experienced.¹¹

Figure 3.4. Crime types experienced by young victims



¹¹ Binary logistic regression predicting if a young victim told the police about their crime by individual demographics (gender/age/ethnicity), perceptions (overall opinion of the police, confidence, trust), having an SSO at school, crime type.

Amongst the young victims who DID report their crime to the police, just one in three said they were **happy with the way the police dealt with the crime** (31%, 97 of 317), while approaching half said they were unhappy (44%, 139 of 317).¹² These results are broadly consistent with the last time MOPAC's Youth Survey was run in 2018. Results suggest that negative experiences of reporting a crime may detrimentally impact on young people's wider views of the police, with *just one in five* of those unhappy with the way the police dealt with their crime saying they had a **good overall opinion of the police** (20%, 27 of 138). Importantly though, opinions of the police were *similarly low* amongst the cohort of young victims who **did NOT report their crime** (23%, 129 of 562, compared with 36%, 115 of 316, of those who DID report), perhaps suggesting that poor opinions of the police may also serve as a barrier to seeking help in the first place.

Reflecting back then, these findings highlight the prevalence of crime victimisation amongst young Londoners, coupled with relatively low levels of reporting and mixed experiences of the police response to such reports. Indeed, this picture of early victimisation becomes particularly concerning in light of the identified overlap with wider risk factors, including reduced feelings of safety and increased exposure to elements of gang and weapon-related violence, and this is discussed further in Sections 5 and 7.

¹² The remaining young victims said they were neither happy nor unhappy (22%, 71 of 317) or did not know (3%, 10 of 317).

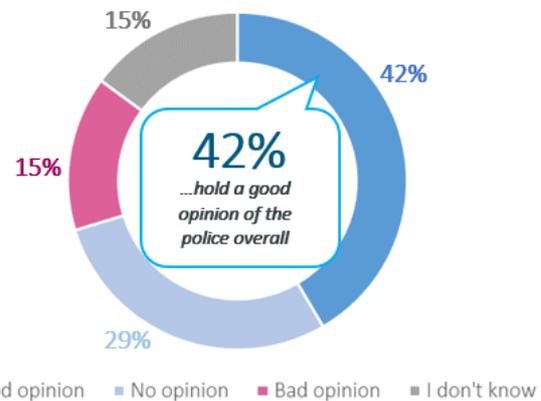
4. Young People and the Police

4.1 Young Londoners' overall opinions of the police

Moving beyond crime and safety, MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 sought to understand more about young Londoners' perceptions and interactions with police in the capital.

Overall, young people held mixed opinions of the police. 42% (4,921 of 11,855) said that they had a **good opinion** of the police, while one in six (15%, 1,720 of 11,855) said they had a **bad opinion** (see Figure 4.1). Results here are *below levels* seen last time MOPAC's Youth Survey was run in 2018, where 50% held positive views.

Figure 4.1. Overall opinions of the police.



Remaining respondents either **held no opinion** (29%, 3,404 of 11,855) or said they did not know (15%, 1,810 of 11,855), highlighting a considerable proportion of young Londoners who may not yet have formed strong views of the police.

Consistent with MOPAC's last Youth Survey in 2018, certain groups of young Londoners were *less likely* to hold good opinions of the police. This includes those from minority ethnic backgrounds, with lowest results seen for young Black Londoners at 22% (369 of 1,712). Opinions also became more negative with age: whereas 58% of those aged 11 (1,177 of 2,024) said they had a good overall opinion of the police, this fell to just 25% among those aged 16 (141 of 557).

Results also reveal an emerging gender gap, predominantly driven by worsening opinions among young females. Whilst 48% of young males (2,489 of 5,144) said they held good overall opinions of the police, this figure stood at just 38% for young females (2,304 of 6,034), a statistically significant gap of ten percentage points. The gap has *widened considerably* since the last time MOPAC's Youth Survey was run 2018, when 53% of males and 51% of females held good opinions. These findings are in line with recent trends seen among young adults in MOPAC's Public Attitude Survey, whereby perceptions of the police have *disproportionately worsened* among young females (aged 16 to 25) during the most recent financial year (MOPAC, 2022d).

To offer further insight into young Londoners' impressions of the Metropolitan Police Service, respondents were also asked to write the **first three words they think of when they think about police in London** (see Figure 4.2). Several positive words were mentioned, such as 'brave', 'helpful', 'friendly', 'protect / protection / protective', 'safe / safety', 'strong' and 'trustworthy'. However, a range of more negative words also emerged - most prominently 'racism / racist' and 'scary' - but also including 'bad', 'biased', 'corrupt', 'intimidating', 'rude', 'unhelpful', 'unreliable', 'untrustworthy', 'useless' and 'white'. Again, these findings highlight mixed opinions of the police among young people growing up in London.

treat everyone fairly (803 of 2,013), this declined to *just one in ten* by age 16 (11%, 59 of 555), with similarly low levels seen for young Black Londoners at 12% (197 of 1,695).

Moreover, young Londoners exposed to other forms of risk were also less likely to respond positively across a range of these perception measures. As discussed earlier in Section 3.3, those who had been the victim of a crime during the last year were less likely to hold positive views of the police, and it is perhaps particularly concerning that *only one in three* here believed **the police could protect them from crime** (33%, 324 of 980, compared with 56% of non-victims, 4,214 of 7,581). Beyond this, it is notable that those who felt unsafe where they live were also more likely to respond negatively – including for feeling the **police do a good job in their local area** (12%, 261 of 2,095, compared with 37% of those feeling safe, 3,031 of 8,154) - while those exposed to elements of violence or exploitation were also less likely to hold positive views across the suite of perception measures (see Section 5 and 7 for further discussion). These findings highlight some important challenges to relationships with police amongst groups of young Londoners who may be at increased risk of wider harms.

Exploring Young People’s Trust in the Metropolitan Police Service

MOPAC’s Youth Survey 2021-22 newly captured trust in the police among young Londoners. Here, just 43% agreed the Metropolitan Police Service was an organisation they could trust – far below levels seen for adult Londoners in MOPAC’s Public Attitude Survey at 73% in 2021.

Trust was even lower for certain groups of young people, at just a quarter among those aged 16 (26%, 146 of 557) and those from Black Backgrounds (24%, 416 of 1,700). A considerable gender gap once again emerged, with 38% of females trusting the police (2,283 of 6,019), compared with 51% of males (2,626 of 5,126).

Regression modelling¹³ shows that trust in the Metropolitan Police Service is closely interlinked with young people’s wider views of the police. However - even controlling for these wider perceptions – the demographic differences above continued to persist. Furthermore, analysis reveals that perceptions of police reliability (i.e., feeling the police can protect me from crime/will be there when needed) are particularly influential in shaping wider trust; even more so than aspects of police engagement or treatment. This suggests that – for the youngest generation – a belief in the police’s ability to keep them safe seems a core element of trust.

In line with previous waves of MOPAC’s Youth Survey, results for many of the perception measures for young Londoners also continue to track *below* levels seen for adult counterparts as measured by the Public Attitude Survey (PAS). However, although recent years have seen a sustained decline in perceptions of the police among *adult residents*, comparable measures¹³ for young Londoners appear to have remained more stable and are broadly in line with those seen in MOPAC’s last Youth Voice Survey 2018. An important exception to this is feeling the police **treat everyone fairly**, which has seen a *reduction of 13 percentage points* over this time from 37% in 2018 to 24% in the current wave. Once again, this highlights perceptions of police fairness as a particular issue for young people growing up in the capital.

¹³ Several measures included in MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 21-22 are similar to those asked in the PAS, including feeling police can be relied on to be there when needed; deal with local issues; listen to local concerns; treat people fairly; and do a good job in the local area.

Blue box: Trust was predicted by individual demographics (gender/age/ethnicity) and mean scores across perception questions on three factors identified by factor analysis: reliability (police can protect me from crime/will be there when I need them), fair treatment (police treat everyone fairly/treat young people the same as adults) and engagement (police are helpful and friendly/deal with issues that matter to young people/listen to concerns of young people).

4.3. Young people’s priorities for policing in London

When asked to select their *top three* priorities for policing in the capital, young people placed a clear focus on tackling violence and higher-harm issues. Those surveyed were most likely to feel the police should prioritise **gun and knife crime** (70% listed this in their top three), closely followed by **domestic abuse or sexual violence** (54% listed this within their top three). Many young people also placed a focus on **gangs and gang-related crime** and **keeping children and young people safe** (see Figure 4.4¹⁴).

Figure 4.4. Priorities for policing in the Capital.

	Ranked first	Ranked second	Ranked third	Total
Gun and knife crime	28%	22%	20%	70%
Domestic abuse or sexual violence	20%	18%	16%	54%
Gangs and gang related crime	11%	13%	13%	37%
Keeping children and young people safe	9%	11%	11%	31%
Drugs and drug related crime	7%	10%	10%	27%
Terrorism	10%	8%	8%	26%
Keeping vulnerable people safe	4%	5%	6%	15%
Better relationships between police and public	3%	3%	4%	10%
Burglary	2%	3%	4%	9%
ASB	3%	3%	3%	9%
Online crime and fraud	2%	3%	3%	8%
Vehicle crime	1%	1%	1%	3%

These top priority areas *consistently emerged* across a range of demographic groups, suggesting a consensus among young people. However, results also revealed some more nuanced differences. For example, females and non-binary young people were far more likely to feel **domestic abuse and sexual violence** should be the first priority for policing in London than males (females: 27%, 1,494 of 5,461; non-binary: 38%, 101 of 264; males: 10%, 477 of 4,683). Similarly, the proportion listing **building better relationships between the police and the public** as their first priority increased with age, while young Londoners with ‘bad’ overall opinions of the police were also more likely to place this within their top three choices. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that young Londoners overwhelmingly agree that violence and safeguarding issues should form key priorities for policing in the capital, but also highlight some specific groups of young people for whom certain issues may be attenuated.

4.4. Young people’s interactions with the police

MOPAC’s Youth Survey 2021-22 sought to bring new insight into young people’s personal interactions with police officers in the capital. Here, a quarter of those surveyed (25%, 1,406 of 5,534) said that they **had spoken to or had contact with a police officer in London during the last year**¹⁵. However, young people’s **experiences of this contact** were divided: half felt the interaction had been positive overall (45%, 615 of 1,356), but a quarter felt it had been negative (25%, 344 of 1,356) and 22% described it as mixed (300 of 1,356).

¹⁴ Total calculated by adding the proportions ranking as first, second or third priority. Please note that numbers therefore do not add up to 100%. Total N for first priority = 10,752; total N for second priority = 10,459; total N for third priority = 10,199.

¹⁵ This question was randomised and asked to half of respondents.

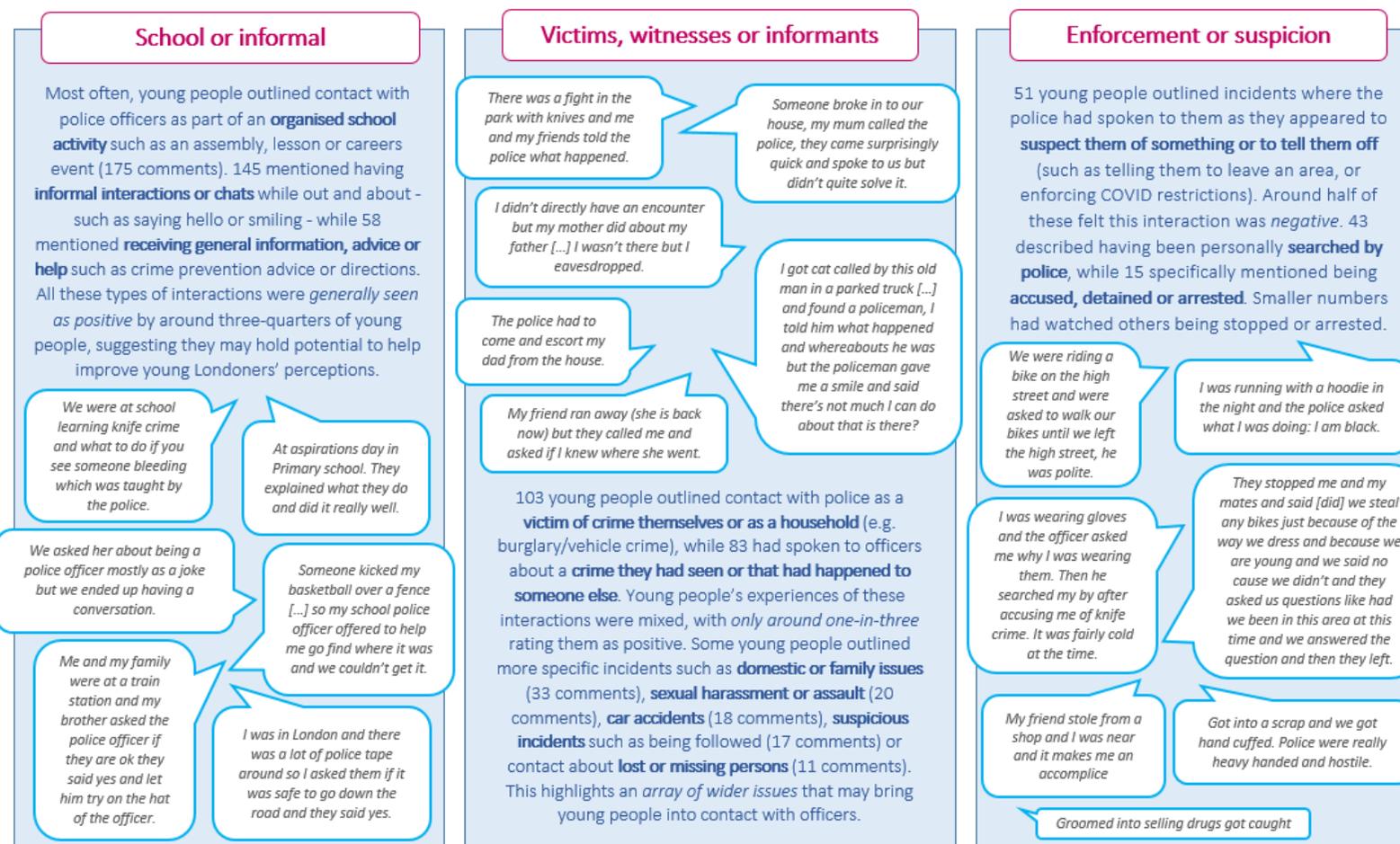
Young people were asked to outline their contact with police in their own words. **School-based contact** with officers (such as in assemblies or lessons, or at careers events) or **informal contact** (such as saying hello, smiling or asking questions) were the most common forms - and were also generally seen as positive by young people. However, results also revealed an array of wider safeguarding, enforcement and victimisation issues that bring young people into contact with police in London (see Figure 4.5).

Analyses once again suggest that early interactions with officers may be critical in shaping young people's wider views of the police – in particular their trust in the Metropolitan Police Service. Illustrating this, while 46% (1,658 of 3,591) of those who had NOT spoken to an officer in the last year agreed **the Metropolitan Police Service was an organisation they could trust**, this stood at *just 13%* (43 of 344) among those who HAD spoken to an officer but felt the interaction had been negative. Crucially though, among those feeling their interaction had been positive, trust in the Metropolitan Police Service was *conversely higher than those having no contact at all*, at 58% (352 of 612). Importantly, this highlights the potential for recent interactions to both positively and negatively impact views: although negative encounters were associated with *worse* perceptions of the police, positive encounters may hold the potential to *improve* early perceptions – albeit to a lesser extent¹⁶. This is in line with a body of research that has also established an asymmetrical effect of citizen contact on perceptions of the police among adult populations (see for example Skogan, 2007).

¹⁶ These relationships remained true even when controlling for other variables, such as individual demographics (e.g. age, gender and ethnicity) and young people's wider experiences of crime and policing (e.g. whether they had been stopped and searched, whether they had been the victim of a crime, whether they knew their school had an SSO).

Figure 4.5. Exploring young people’s contact with police officers.

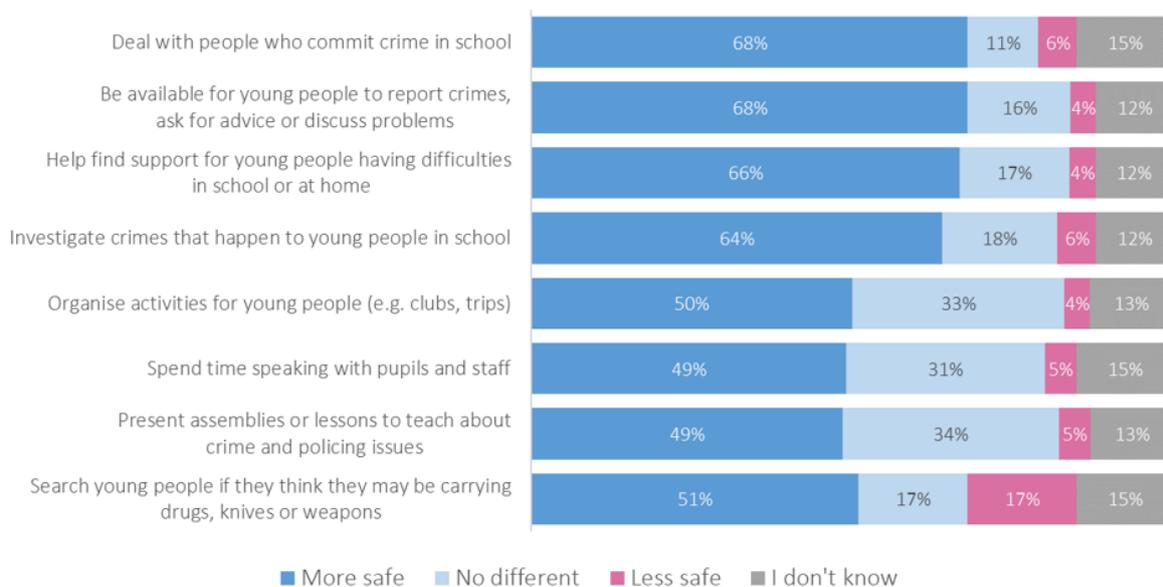
Young people who had spoken to a police officer in the last year were asked to describe this interaction in their own words. 1,131 comments were made, bringing rich insight into the nature of early interactions with officers.



4.5. Partnership working between police and schools

Despite the generally mixed perceptions of police outlined earlier, it is encouraging that nearly nine in ten young people surveyed believed it was **important for the police to work together with schools** (88%, 8,811 of 10,041). This highlights a clear appetite for engagement between officers and young people within the educational setting. However, when given a list of specific activities that police may undertake in school, young people’s views were more divided (see Figure 4.6¹⁷).

Figure 4.6. Feelings of safety in response to different activities of Safer Schools Officers



Encouragingly, around two-thirds said they would feel ‘more safe’ if Safer Schools Officers worked with schools to respond to crimes and support pupils - including **by dealing with people who commit crime in school**, being available for pupils to **report crime or get advice**, and **helping find support for those experiencing difficulties**. However, young people were less likely to feel that engagement or educational activities would make them feel ‘more safe’, including having Safer Schools Officers help to **organise school activities** or **present in lessons or assemblies**. Despite this, the number of young people believing such activities would make them feel ‘less safe’ remained small – while earlier findings also highlight the potential for early encounters with the police in an educational setting to hold wider benefits to building

Support for school searches among those affected by serious youth violence

Perhaps counterintuitively, young people who said they had been hurt or threatened with a knife, or those who had been pressured to carry a knife or drugs for others, were more likely to say school searches would make them feel ‘less safe’ at school: arguably two groups that such searches would most aim to protect.

Importantly though, multivariate analysis shows this relationship weakened once controlling for a young person’s own direct involvement in gangs and/or weapon possession – suggesting the overlap between victimisation and offending is key to understanding this.

¹⁷ Approximately 9,850 young people answered these questions.

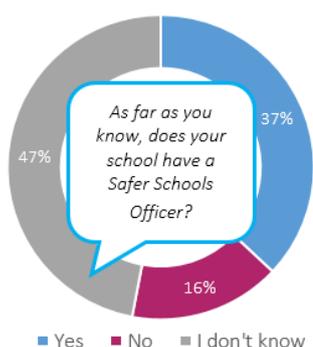
positive relationships between young people and police (see Section 4.4).

Importantly, young people’s views were particularly divided on having Safer Schools Officers help to **search pupils if they thought they were carrying things they should not be**. While half of young people believed this would make them feel ‘more safe’ at school, 17% (1,639 of 9,891) said this would make them feel ‘less safe’ – levels over *three times higher* than those seen for other activities.

In general, certain groups of young people were *less likely* to say that activities carried out by Safer Schools Officers would make them feel ‘more safe’ at school – including older age groups, young people from Black Ethnic Backgrounds, and those who had attended a Pupil Referral Unit. Importantly though, gaps tended to be smaller when asked about Safer Schools Officers **organising activities for young people**; in fact, young Black Londoners were here *most likely* to say this would make them feel ‘more safe’ at school (56%, 737 of 1,318, compared with 46%, 1,741 of 3,748, of White respondents). This could highlight the potential for Safer Schools Officers assisting with school trips and clubs to help reach young people from a range of backgrounds.

4.6. Engagement and Interactions with Safer Schools Officers

Figure 4.7. Awareness of Safer Schools Officers



Just over a third of young people surveyed said they **were aware that their school had a dedicated Safer Schools Officer** (37%, 3,628 of 9,908). This is *lower* than levels seen the last time the Youth Survey was run in 2018 (57%), likely reflecting changes to the survey methodology which had previously been distributed in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service Safer Schools network (see Figure 4.7).

A large proportion of young people said they **did not know** whether their school had a Safer Schools Officer (47%, 4,662 of 9,908), while a further 16% (1,618 of 9,908) believed their school **did not have an officer**. Taken together, these findings highlight the potential to improve young people’s awareness of dedicated police officers working with schools and educational establishments across London.

Among those who *were* aware that their school had a Safer Schools Officer, 41% (1,441 of 3,532) believed the presence of **this officer made them feel more safe at school**, while only a small minority said they felt less safe (3%, 99 of 3,532). These results are broadly in line with those seen in 2018. However, less than half of young people (47%, 1,658 of 3,527) said they would be **likely to speak to their Safer Schools Officer** if a crime was to happen to them or if they were worried about something. In line with the last time the Youth Survey was run in 2018, results were *particularly low* for those feeling **unsafe at school** (20%, 62 of 311), highlighting an important barrier to communication with schools officers among this group of potentially vulnerable pupils. Similarly, willingness to speak to a Safer Schools Officer was also lower amongst the cohorts of young people who had personally **been the victim of crime during the last year** (26%, 105 of 404) or who had **been threatened or hurt with a knife** (29%, 56 of 196), once again highlighting potential barriers to help-seeking amongst young Londoners potentially most at risk of harm from crime.

Just over one in ten young people saying their school had a Safer Schools Officer said they had personally **spoken to or had contact with this officer** (13%, 445 of 3,529). This group¹⁸ most often said it had been on an informal basis, such as for a chat, or in a lesson, assembly or club (37%, 166 of 445). However, approaching a quarter said they had spoken to their schools officer as they had been the victim or a witness of a crime (23%, 101 of 445); 15% (68 of 445) wanted help or advice, and 12% (47 of 445) wanted to give information. Some young people said they had spoken to their Safer Schools Officer as they had been accused of doing something wrong or committing a crime (15%, 67 of 445), while 7% (29 of 445) said they had been searched by their schools officer. Overall few demographic differences were seen in the proportion of young people saying they had contact with their Safer Schools Officer or the type of contact experienced – including by age, gender, or ethnicity.

Nevertheless, these findings highlight a range of scenarios that bring young people into contact with their Safer Schools Officers. Accordingly, young people's experiences of such contact were also divided: although half felt their **interactions had generally been positive** (54%, 235 of 438), one in ten felt they had **been negative** (10%, 44 of 438) and a further 22% (97 of 438) felt they had been **mixed**. This mirrors earlier findings into young people's interactions with police officers more widely (see Section 4.4), and once again different types of contact were viewed differently. Encouragingly, *three-quarters* of young people saying they spoke to their Safer Schools Officer on an informal basis or in a lesson/assembly/club felt this contact had been positive (73%, 121 of 166), again highlighting such routes as key to building relationships between Safer Schools Officers and pupils.

4.7. The prevalence of Stop and Search experiences

To further explore young people's early contact with the police, MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 also sought to understand their experiences of Stop and Search. Here, 6% of young people said they had **personally ever been Stopped and Searched by the police in London** (577 of 9,543), while 25% said they **knew someone else who had been Stopped and Searched in London** (2,328 of 9,494). These results have both *decreased* compared with the last time the survey was run in 2018 (from 10% and 38% respectively). However, new questions also revealed that around half of those Stopped and Searched said this had happened **more than once** (47%, 262 of 563) - with a fifth saying they had been stopped **more than three times** (21%, 118 of 563). This highlights a considerable number of young people who may have had contact with police in this way on *multiple occasions*.

As noted in the previous wave of this survey, the proportion of our young cohort saying they have been Stopped and Searched may be higher than expected among those aged 11 to 16.¹⁹ This may in part reflect young people's own understanding of what constitutes 'Stop and Search', or experiences of related procedures (such as 'Stop and Account'). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that this proportion of young people *feel* or *believe* that they have been Stopped and Searched in London, and results in this section therefore emphasise the value of each interaction with the police; regardless of how such encounters would be officially recorded.

The prevalence of self-reported Stop and Search experiences increased with age - from 3% of those aged 11 (53 of 1,675) to 12% of those aged 16 (50 of 414) - while young males were more than twice as likely to say they had been Stopped and Searched as young females (9%, 362 of 4,202, compared

¹⁸ Young people could select all types of contact that apply, and 'other – please specify' comments were back-coded where possible.

¹⁹ Stop and Search data recorded by the MPS shows 12.9 per 1,000 population searches involving a subject aged 10 to 14 (volume: 5,911, population: 456,696) (MPS, 2022c)

with (4%, 183 of 4,815). Young Londoners from Black Backgrounds were *most likely* to say they had been Stopped and Searched (9%, 116 of 1,263); while those from Asian Backgrounds were *least likely* (4%, 91 of 2,479).

Once again, young Londoners exposed to a range of wider vulnerabilities were more likely to have said they had been Stopped and Searched by the police. In particular, such experiences were *disproportionately concentrated* amongst those exposed to gangs or weapon-related violence: nearly a quarter of young people who **knew someone in a gang** said they had personally been Stopped and Searched in London (22%, 194 of 863), and this increased further to *around half* of those who had been **asked or pressured by someone else to carry or hide a knife** (50%, 71 of 143), or who had **personally belonged to a gang** (57%, 49 of 86). Such findings inevitably reflect the intelligence-led nature of Stop and Search employed as a tactic to specifically target those involved in criminality. However, it is worth noting that - *even when controlling for exposure to such elements of gang and weapon-related violence* – regression modelling continued to reveal increased odds of experiencing Stop and Search amongst the demographic groups outlined above.

Furthermore – and in line with the overlap in such risk-factors identified earlier (see for example Section 3.1) – the prevalence of self-reported Stop and Search was inevitably also increased amongst those with wider vulnerabilities, including those who had **been the victim of a crime during the last year** (20%, 177 of 896) and those who felt **unsafe in their local area** (11%, 213 of 1,884) or **at school** (17%, 143 of 857). In turn, these findings once again serve to reinforce the particularly complex picture of wider harm and vulnerability affecting young Londoners coming into contact with the police through Stop and Search, and emphasise the importance of recognising such issues during these interactions.

4.8. Young people's experiences of Stop and Search interactions

Young people who said they had been Stopped and Searched by the police in London were also asked to reflect on their experiences of these interactions. Here, *less than half* of those stopped said the **police were polite** (40%, 220 of 544), **treated them with respect** (39%, 212 of 542) or **explained why they carried out the Stop and Search** (42%, 230 of 542) during their most recent interaction. This picture remains broadly similar compared with the previous wave of the Youth Survey conducted in 2018, but results are considerably more negative when compared with experiences of adult Londoners as captured by MOPAC's Public Attitude Survey.²⁰ Furthermore, young people who said that they had been subject to a Stop and Search more than once were in turn *less likely* to have responded positively about these three aspects of the interaction compared with those who said that they had been Stopped and Searched on just one occasion.²¹

In line with the last wave of MOPAC's Youth Survey, results once again highlight the influence of early Stop and Search interactions in shaping young people's wider views of the police. In general, young people who said they had personally been Stopped and Searched were also *far more likely* to have a **bad overall opinion of the police** (40%, 232 of 576) compared with those who had not been stopped (12%, 1,011 of 8,503). However, further analysis reveals that the *nature of the Stop and Search*

²⁰ PAS result for the police were polite is 68%, treated you with respect is 68% and explained why they stopped and searched you is 82% for FY 2021/22, excluding those who said 'I don't know'.

²¹ Among young people who said that they have been subject to a Stop and Search more than once, 31% (79 of 254) said the police were polite, 29% (73 of 249) said the police treated them with respect and 38% (95 of 251) said the police explained the reason for the Stop and Search, compared with 53% (109 of 205), 52% (107 of 207) and 50% (104 of 208) respectively among those who said that they have been subject to a Stop and Search only once.

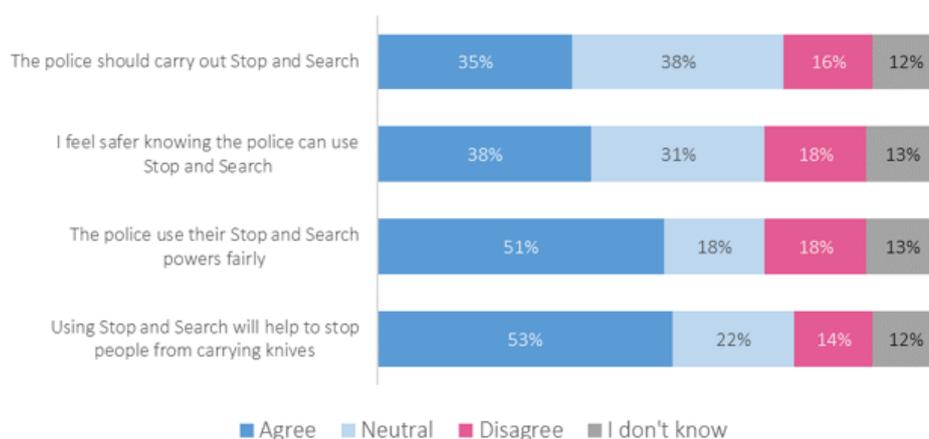
interaction remains key here. Illustrating this, those who had been stopped - but who felt police were **polite, respectful** and **explained the process** - were *no more likely* to say they had a bad overall opinion of the police (15%, 18 of 119) than those not stopped. In contrast, *a particularly large disparity* emerged among young people who felt police had **not done these three things**, with *nearly half* in this group now saying they had a **bad overall opinion of the police** (48%, 202 of 421). Crucially, these findings reveal the importance of *how* – and not simply *whether* – young people experience Stop and Search, and emphasise the value of each individual encounter in shaping early views of the police. This is in line with a large body of research that has shown the link between fair and procedurally just interactions and wider public confidence and legitimacy amongst adults (e.g. Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2003), with the potential for negative interactions to be particularly detrimental to public opinions (Bradford, Jackson and Stanko, 2009; Stanko et al., 2012).

Looking beyond young people’s own experiences of Stop and Search, results from the ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also brought new insight into what young people *hear about Stop and Search from others*. Indeed, among those saying they knew someone else who had been subject to a Stop and Search in London, more than half said they had heard **negative things about this person’s experience** (55%, 1,212 of 2,206), while only 5% (120 of 2,206) had heard something positive.²²

4.9. Young people’s support for Stop and Search

MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also sought to understand young people’s wider attitudes and support for police use of Stop and Search. Opinions were divided here: only around a third agreed that the **police should carry out Stop and Search** (35%, 3,298 of 9,521), with relatively large proportions saying they were neutral or that they did not know (see Figure 4.8). Although *more* young Londoners believed **police use their Stop and Search powers fairly**, confidence in this was still low, with just 51% agreeing here (4,795 of 9,489).

Figure 4.8. Young people’s perceptions of Stop and Search



When compared with previous waves of MOPAC’s Youth Surveys, the proportion of young people believing police **should conduct Stop and Search** is lower here (44% in 2018, 56% in 2013), perhaps revealing *declining support* for the tactic amongst young people. This result also stands below levels

²² The remaining respondents said they heard something mixed (19%, 420 of 2,206), hadn’t heard anything (11%, 239 of 2,206) or did not know (10%, 215 of 2,206).

seen amongst adult Londoners as recorded in MOPAC’s Public Attitude Survey (PAS).²³ Furthermore, whereas results from the Youth Survey show that young Londoners are *more likely* to agree that Stop and Search powers are used fairly than to agree that Stop and Search should be carried out, the *reverse* is seen among adult Londoners.²⁴

In line with the mixed overall support for police use of Stop and Search, young people were also divided about the impacts of the tactic. To illustrate, half of young people believed that **Stop and Search will help to stop people from carrying knives** (53%, 5,005 of 9,478), while even fewer agreed that they **felt safer knowing the police can use Stop and Search** (38%, 3,641 of 9,474).

Once again, attitudes towards Stop and Search varied across demographic groups. Support for all four of the measures outlined in Figure 4.8 declined by age, while young males were *more likely* to respond positively towards the tactic than either females or those identifying as a non-binary gender. To illustrate, while nearly half of young males agreed that they **feel safer knowing police can use Stop and Search** (45%, 1,892 of 4,163), this fell to just a third of young females (34%, 1,647 of 4,785) and to *just 15%* of non-binary young people (34 of 228). Those from White or Asian Ethnic Backgrounds were also *more likely* to respond positively across many measures than those from Black, Mixed, or Other Ethnic Backgrounds. However, few differences by ethnicity were seen in young people’s agreement that **police use Stop and Search fairly**; this is despite far larger inequalities seen amongst adult Londoners in the PAS. In turn, it is also worth noting that attitudes towards Stop and Search tended to be more negative amongst young people who said they had **personally been Stopped and Searched**, with only a quarter of this group saying they **feel safer knowing police can use the tactic** (25%, 143 of 564).

Exploring drivers of support for Stop and Search among young people, and the role of gender

Young female Londoners tended to *be less supportive* of Stop and Search and have less positive perceptions of the tactic compared with young male Londoners, despite also being *less likely* to have said that they have been personally subject to Stop and Search.

Regression modelling shows that the strongest driver of support for Stop and Search is having a good overall opinion of the police.²⁴ However - even when controlling for these opinions and wider factors (such as personal experiences of Stop and Search and concerns about crime in the local area) - females *still remain* less likely to support the tactic.

²³ PAS result for agree that the police should conduct Stop and Search is 74% for FY 2021/22, excluding those who said ‘I don’t know’.

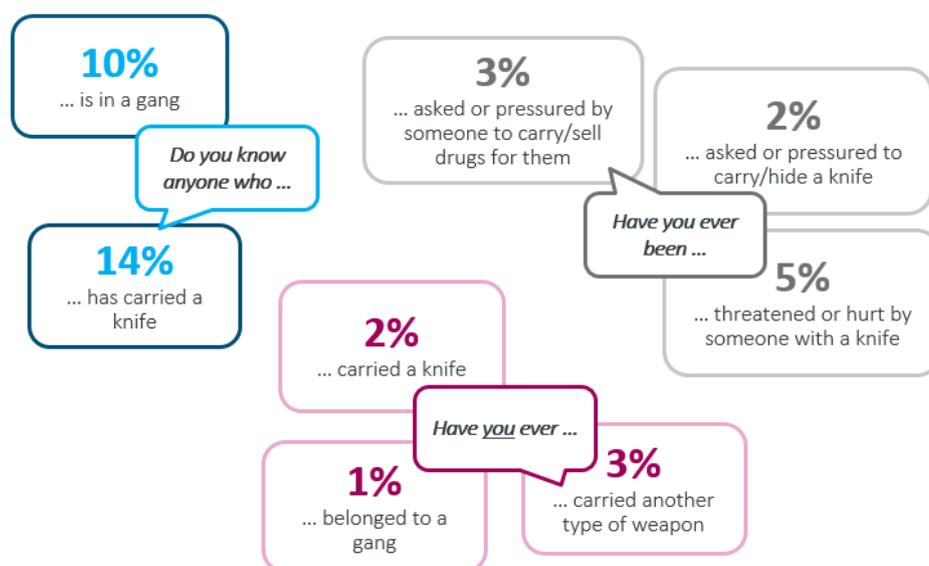
²⁴ PAS result for confident that the police in the local area use their Stop and Search powers fairly is 63% for FY 2021/22, excluding those who said ‘I don’t know’. Blue box shows results from a regression model predicting agreement that police should carry out Stop and Search by individual demographics (gender/age/ethnicity), perceptions of the police, crime concerns in the local area, feeling safe in the local area, ever being subject to a Stop and Search, knowing someone ever subject to a Stop and Search.

5. Young People and Serious Violence

5.1 Young people's experiences of gangs and knife crime

Young people taking part in MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 were asked a bank of questions that aimed to capture exposure to and involvement in violence (see Figure 5.1). Several questions mirrored those asked in the last wave of the Youth Survey in 2018 – allowing for comparisons over time – whilst other measures were newly introduced to explore exposure to wider elements of criminal exploitation.

Figure 5.1. Young people's exposure to gang and knife-related activity



Here, one in ten young Londoners said they **know someone who is in a gang** (10%, 874 of 8,869) – a *decrease* from around a quarter (23%) when the survey was previously run in 2018. Similarly, the proportion of young people saying they **know someone who has carried a knife** also declined this wave to one in seven (14%, 1,204 of 8,699) – from around a quarter (26%) in 2018.

Looking at *personal* involvement in these behaviours, fewer young Londoners said that they themselves had **belonged to a gang** or had **carried a knife** or **another form of weapon**. However, these proportions remained broadly stable with those seen in the last wave of MOPAC's Youth Survey in 2018.²⁵ These findings are also in line with those from the UK Millennium Cohort Study where 3.7% of young people aged 14 reported carrying or using a weapon (Villadsen and Fitzsimons, 2021).

Beyond this, a minority of young people also said they had been exposed to behaviours that may indicate elements of criminal exploitation. For example, 3% of our young cohort said they had been **asked or pressured by someone to carry or sell drugs** (231 of 9,022), while 2% said they had been **asked or pressured by someone to carry or hide a knife** (145 of 9,095). Together these findings highlight a range of violence-related risks experienced by young people growing up in the capital.

Exposure to such risks became particularly attenuated amongst the small group of young Londoners who said they had attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Here, approaching a quarter said that they

²⁵ 2018 Youth Survey result for belonged to gang is 3%, carried a knife is 3% and carried another weapon is 5%.

had been **threatened or hurt with a knife** (22%, 38 of 170), while around one in five said they had been **asked or pressured to carry or sell drugs for someone** (18%, 30 of 163). In turn, over one in ten young Londoners who had attended a PRU said they had **personally belonged to a gang** (11%, 18 of 170) or had **personally carried a knife** (13%, 22 of 172). This aligns with a body of previous research that identifies children outside of mainstream schooling to be at increased risk of gang involvement and youth violence (Dempsey, 2021).

Certain demographic groups were also more likely to have been exposed to elements of gang and weapon-related violence. In particular, prevalence increased with age; such that those aged 16 were around five times more likely to say they had **been threatened or hurt by someone with a knife** (11%, 41 of 389) when compared with those aged 11 years old (2%, 38 of 1,603). Across most measures, young females were less likely than males to say they had been exposed to elements of gang or weapon-related violence. However, in some cases results were *significantly higher* amongst those identifying as a non-binary gender: to illustrate, 13% of this group said they had **been threatened or hurt by someone with a knife** (27 of 211) and one in ten said they had **carried a weapon or something they intended to use as a weapon** (9%, 19 of 206). In general, differences seen by Ethnicity tended to be comparatively small, with young people from Asian backgrounds *significantly less likely* to have been exposed to many of the measures of gang and weapon-related violence than those from other backgrounds.

It is worth noting here that considerable overlap was seen between many of the eight measures of exposure to gang and weapon-related violence. For example, those who **knew others in a gang** were significantly more likely to say **they themselves had been part of a gang** (9%, 73 of 831) or that **they themselves had carried a knife** (9%, 77 of 832). In turn, it is perhaps particularly concerning that young people experiencing elements of exploitation – including being asked or pressured to carry drugs or knives – were *also* far more likely to have engaged in such behaviours. Moreover, we see that *around half* of young people who said they had **been asked or pressured to sell drugs** (43%, 95 of 222) or to **carry a knife for someone else** (55%, 74 of 134) said that they had **been threatened or hurt with a knife** – compared with just 4% of young people not experiencing such forms of pressure²⁶. Importantly, young people exposed to elements of gang and knife crime are often overlapping populations, and the potentially cumulative impacts of exposure to *multiple different forms* of such risks are discussed further in Section 7 of this report.

Building on this, results from MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 also reinforce the overlap between involvement in violence and wider criminal victimisation. As mentioned earlier in this report (see Section 3.3) young people exposed to or directly involved in a range of gang and knife-related activities were far more likely to say they had **been the victim of a crime**. Although caution should be taken in interpreting results due to low base sizes, victimisation was *particularly high* among those saying they had **personally belonged to a gang** (54%, 43 of 79) or had been **asked or pressured to carry or hide a knife** (47%, 61 of 129). Once again, these findings highlight the complex relationship between victimisation and offending, and the potential for increased vulnerability to harm among young people exposed to or involved in serious youth violence. This reflects a body of existing research

²⁶ N=302/8,404 for those who had been asked or pressured to carry or sell drugs, and n=332/8,558 for those who had been asked or pressured to carry or hide a knife.

that finds victims and perpetrators of violence among young people are not distinct, but rather largely overlapping groups exposed to multiple, chronic sources of violence in their lives (Kincaid et al., 2021).

In turn, this vulnerability was once again further reflected across broader measures throughout the survey – including through lower personal feelings of safety (see Section 3.1) and through poorer perceptions of the police (see Section 4.1). Indeed, building on previous findings, it is notable that across *each of the eight measures* of exposure to elements of gang and weapon-related violence, those saying ‘yes’ were around 20 percentage points *less likely* to say they have a **good opinion of the police** or that they **trust the Metropolitan Police Service**²⁷. As an example, just *one in five* young Londoners who have been asked or pressured by someone else to carry or sell drugs for them believed **the Metropolitan Police Service was an organisation they could trust** (20%, 46 of 230, compared with 47%, 3,964 of 8,470), bringing potential implications for how police can best engage to safeguard this potentially vulnerable group. Moreover, this also sits atop previous findings that revealed young people exposed to elements of serious violence were also more likely to have come into direct contact with the police, including through **Stop and Search** (see Section 4.7). This is perhaps unsurprising given the intelligence-led nature of such tactics, but nevertheless again builds an increasingly complex picture of early contact and relationships with police amongst the cohort of young Londoners potentially most vulnerable to harm, exploitation and victimisation. These issues are also explored further in Section 7. Crucially, results once again highlight the value of recognising opportunities for safeguarding interventions through these frequent police interactions – with previous research emphasising the value of adopting trauma-informed approaches with perpetrators or victims of violence to help build trust in the face of detachment among those who need help (Kincaid et al., 2021).

5.2. Young people’s views on what drives violence

Building on this, findings from MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also reveal that young people themselves broadly recognise the interplay of wider risks and vulnerabilities that can underlie violence. Illustrating this, young people cited a range of drivers when they were asked **what they thought the main reasons were that some young people get involved in violence** (see Figure 5.2).

Responses most commonly described issues related to young people’s **social environments** (such as peer influence, interpersonal disputes and acting to be popular or appear strong), **home environments** (such as adverse family situations, domestic abuse, and poverty or the need to make money), **fear, vulnerability and harm** (such as being forced or pressured into violence, concerns for personal safety, and gang-related activity) and **psychological wellbeing** (such as mental health, emotional distress, trauma, and lack of support). Once again, many of these themes reinforce findings already highlighted in this report – including lower levels of safety among young people exposed to gangs and knife crime (see Section 3.1). Taken together, young people’s responses clearly highlight the broad and intersecting range of vulnerabilities and risk factors that may lead young people to involvement in violence, closely reflecting a body of research that has already identified factors in a young person’s background and upbringing as linked to an increased likelihood of violent offending (e.g. Dempsey, 2021; Early Intervention Foundation, 2015; Kincaid et al., 2021; Villadsen and Fitzsimons, 2021).

²⁷ Compared with those saying ‘no’ or that they ‘do not know’ in response to survey measures relating to exposure to or involvement in violence.

Figure 5.2. Exploring drivers of young people’s involvement in violence

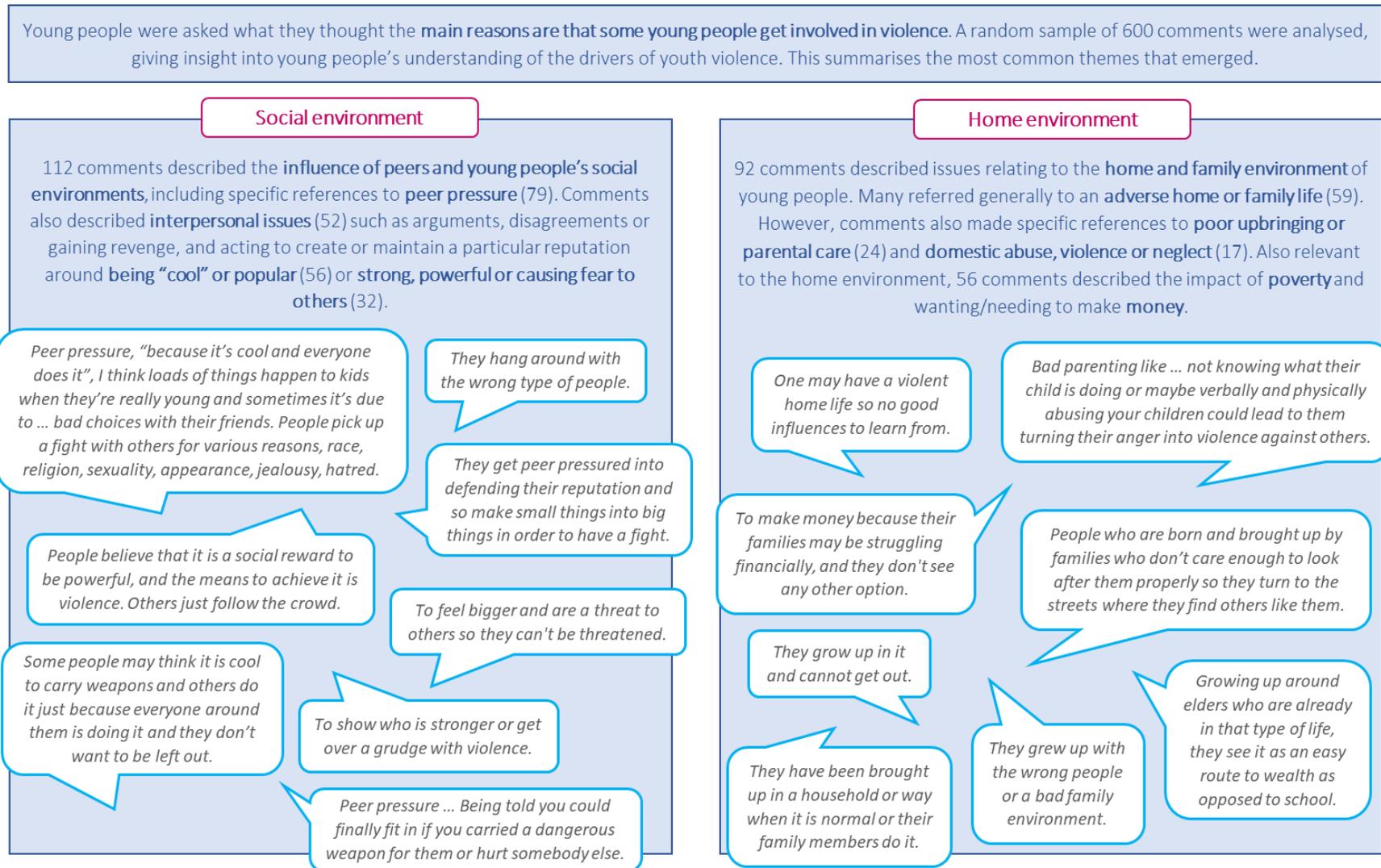
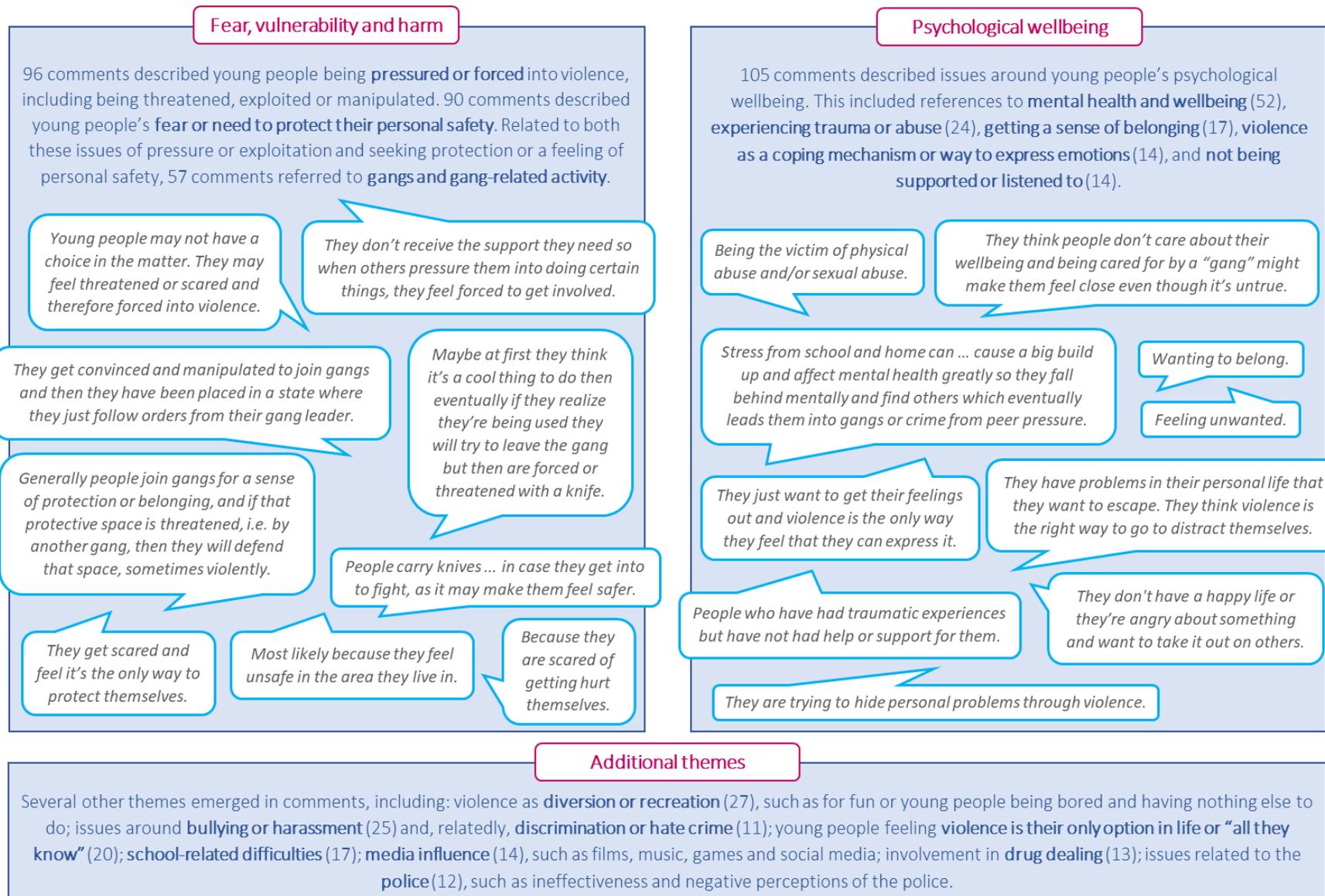


Figure 5.2 (continued)



6. Young People and Safeguarding

6.1. Young people’s experiences and safety online

MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also sought to understand young people’s exposure to wider safeguarding issues on the internet and social media. Positively, four in five young Londoners said that they **feel safe when they are online** (81%, 6,931 of 8,582, see Figure 6.1). However, despite this, around one in five said that **something had happened to them online during the last year that had made them feel worried** (19%, 1,542 of 8,021)²⁸. Furthermore, a quarter of young Londoners said that **someone had said mean things to them, bullied them, or upset them online during the last year** (25%, 1,992 of 7,991) – with 40% of this group believing they had been specifically **targeted because of a protected characteristic** (40%, 769 of 1,933).

Figure 6.1. Feelings of safety online



Together, these findings suggest that many young Londoners may have been exposed to potentially harmful experiences online. However, it is particularly concerning that the small cohort of young Londoners identifying themselves as a **non-binary gender** were *around twice as likely* to say that someone had **said mean things to them, bullied them or upset them online** (51%, 93 of 182), and were in turn also more likely to believe they had been **targeted because of a protected characteristic** (78%, 72 of 92). These findings link back to earlier results that revealed the prevalence of hate crime amongst young victims (See Section 3.3), and importantly highlight the extent to which such issues may also pervade into the online sphere.

Moreover, results indicate that **experiencing something worrying online** may have a *particularly negative impact* on shaping young people’s feelings of safety online: controlling for individual demographics, this emerged as *an even stronger predictor* of whether or not someone felt safe than having been bullied or upset online²⁹. In turn – despite previously seeing that non-binary young people were more likely to have been exposed to harmful online experiences - this group still continued to feel less safe online *even when controlling for such experiences*, suggesting other factors may also be influential in shaping lower security amongst this potentially vulnerable group.

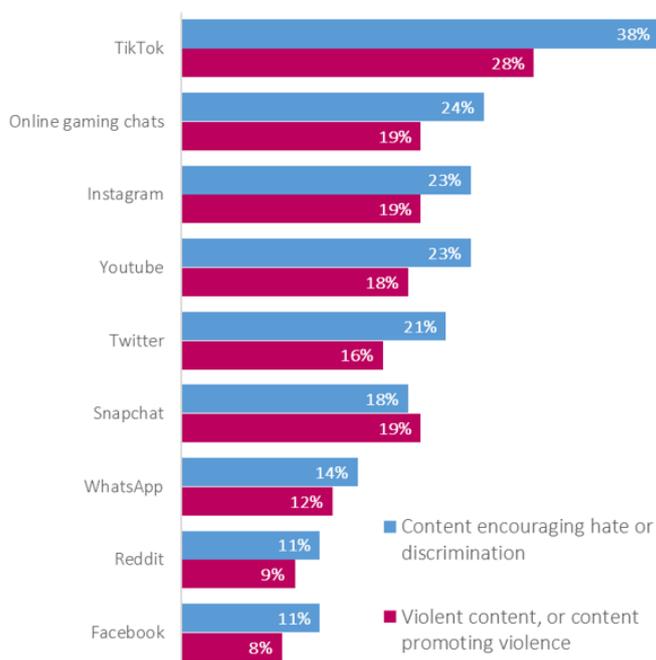
Beyond this, results from MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also sought to explore the prevalence and sources of potentially harmful or inappropriate content – including **violent content** and **content that encourages hate or discrimination** – on social media platforms (see Figure 6.2).³⁰ Here, young Londoners were most likely to say they had seen such content on **TikTok**, with over a quarter saying they had seen violence or something that encouraged violence on the platform (28%, 989 of 3,473) and almost two-fifths said they had seen something encouraging hate or discrimination

²⁸ Apart from overall online safety question, all other measures in this section exclude young people who say they ‘don’t use the internet or social media’.

²⁹ Binary logistic regression predicting safe online by individual demographics (gender/age/ethnicity), having had someone bully/upset/say mean things online and having had something worrying happen online

³⁰ Respondents were randomly allocated to answer *either* ‘In the last year, have you seen violence or anything that encouraged violence in any of the following places?’ *or* ‘In the last year, have you seen anything that encouraged hate or discrimination (such as racism or sexism) in any of the following places?’.

Figure 6.2. Exposure to inappropriate online content during the last year



(38%, 1,329 of 3,531). However, it should be noted that responses may reflect whether - and how often - young people access each of these different platforms; alongside the prevalence of such content.

Nevertheless, less than half of respondents believed **the police understand online issues that affect young people** (45%, 3,585 of 8,030), with agreement declining by age (from 60% of those aged 11, 853 of 1,416, to 27% of those aged 16, 95 of 355). Furthermore - despite potentially increased exposure to online targeting- *only one in*

five non-binary young people believed the police understand such issues (19%, 36 of 186).

6.2. Acceptability of sexual harassment, controlling and coercive behaviours

Building on this picture of online safety, MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also sought to explore early attitudes and experiences of wider safeguarding risks including healthy relationships and sexual harassment. Please note that these questions were only asked to young people in school years 10 and 11 (aged 14 to 16) due to the nature of these topics.

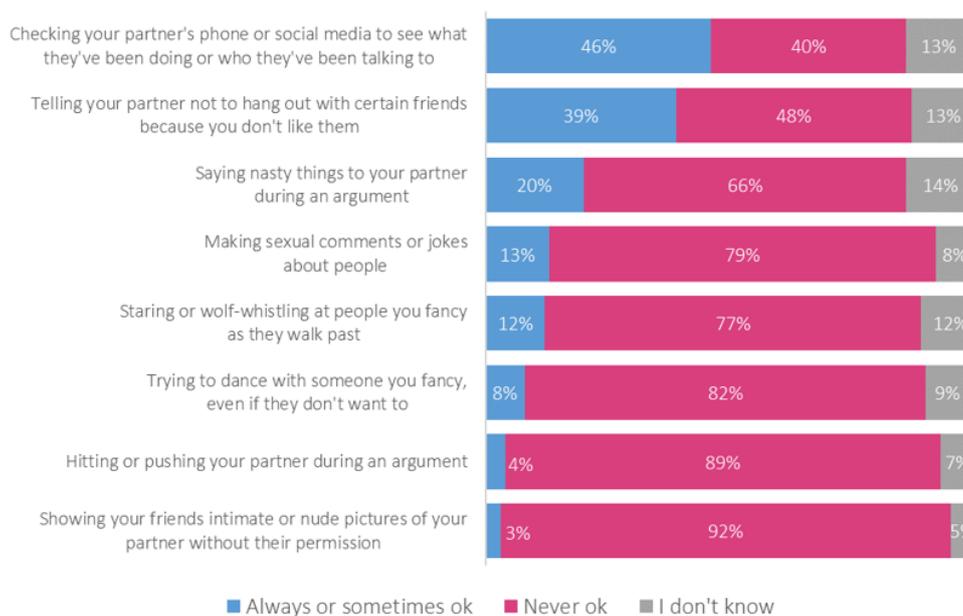
Young people were given a range of scenarios that could be considered to be coercive control, sexual harassment or domestic abuse, and were asked whether they felt it was ‘always ok’, ‘sometimes ok’ or ‘never ok’ for people to display these behaviours (see Figure 6.3³¹).

Responses for these questions were mixed. Many young people felt it was ok to display elements of coercive or controlling behaviour in a relationship, although fewer felt sexual harassment was acceptable – such as **staring and wolf-whistling** or **making sexual comments or jokes**. In turn, young people were *least likely* to feel it was acceptable to physically **hit or push a partner** or to **share intimate pictures without their consent**.

In line with results seen in 2018, young females were more likely to feel many behaviours were ‘never’ ok, while young males were more likely to say they ‘did not know’. This could highlight greater uncertainty among young boys growing up in the capital around the acceptability of behaviours that constitute harassment or abuse. Illustrating this, young males were *over four times* more likely than young females to say they ‘did not know’ whether it was ok to **share intimate pictures of a partner without their consent** (9%, 85 of 932, compared with 2%, 24 of 1,094).

³¹ N for these questions = 2,154 to 2,170

Figure 6.3. Acceptability of behaviours



Importantly, young people exposed to a range of wider violence-related risks were also more likely to feel such behaviours were acceptable, perhaps also indicating an underlying trend towards the normalisation of potentially harmful behaviours among this vulnerable cohort. For example, those who **knew other people in gangs** were *over twice as likely* to feel it was ok to hit or push a partner during an argument (8%, 26 of 308) than those not knowing anyone in a gang (3%, 48 of 1441). Moreover, this effect was even more pronounced among the small group of young people *personally* involved in violence, with around one in five of those who had **previously carried a weapon** here believing it was acceptable to hit or push a partner (19%, 15 of 80). This builds upon the already complex interplay of risk factors seen amongst young Londoners exposed to gang and weapon-related violence (see Section 5). Indeed, it is perhaps particularly concerning that young people exposed to *multiple forms of violence or exploitation* were in turn *even more* likely to normalise abusive behaviours, and this is discussed further in Section 7.

Encouragingly, results reveal some positive shifts in young Londoners' attitudes towards sexual harassment over recent years. When compared with the last time the survey was run in 2018, young people were now *less likely* to feel it was acceptable to **stare or wolf-whistle at people**, to **make sexual comments or jokes**, or to **force someone to dance** at a party³². However, results for other measures have remained more stable over this time (including feeling it is acceptable to **hit or push a partner** or to **check their phone or social media**), while the proportion feeling it is ok to **tell a partner not to hang out with friends** *increased* from 31% to 39%. Importantly, this suggests that improvements identified earlier were largely confined to behaviours constituting sexual harassment; in contrast, less progress appears to have been seen over this time in changing young Londoners' attitudes towards healthy relationships or domestic abuse.

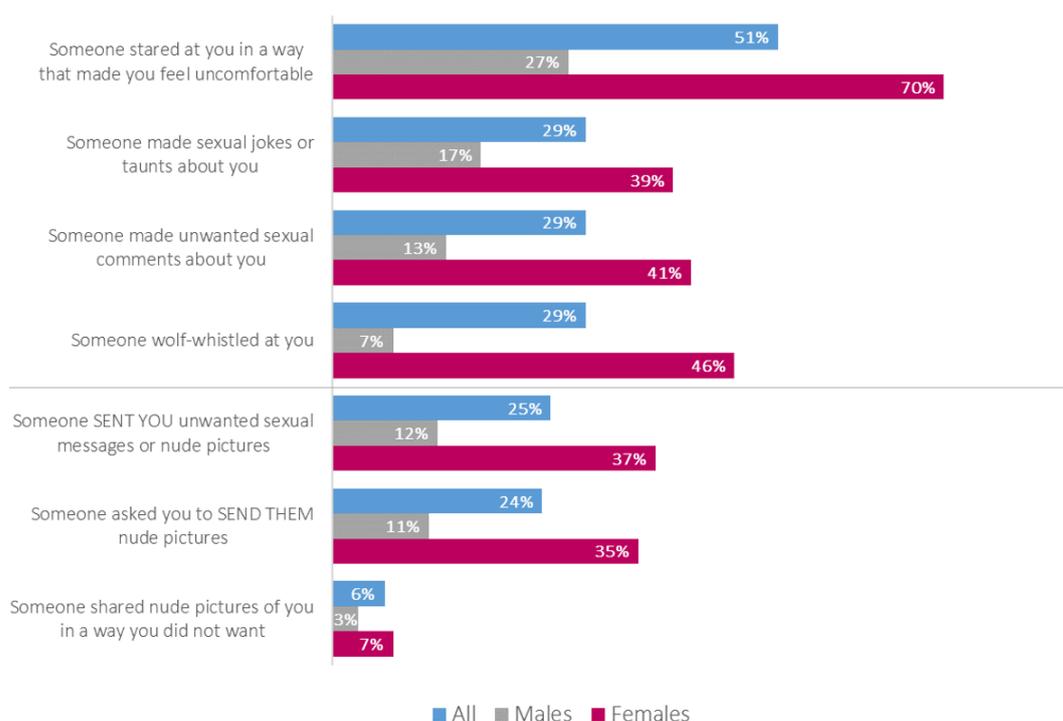
³² In 2018, 31% of young people felt it was acceptable to stare or wolf-whistle at people, 23% felt it was acceptable to make sexual comments or jokes, and 23% felt it was acceptable to try to dance with someone at a party even if they don't want to dance with you.

6.3. Young people’s experiences of sexual harassment

Young Londoners in school years 10 and 11 were also asked about their own experiences of sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual content. Here, half of our young cohort said someone had **stared at them in a way that had made them uncomfortable** during the last year (51%, 1,063 of 2,104), while just under a third said that someone had **wolf-whistled them** (29%, 602 of 2,110), made **sexual jokes or taunts** (29%, 619 of 2,102), or made **sexual comments** about them (29%, 609 of 2,099). These results represent a slight *increase* compared with the last time the survey was run in 2018 – in particular for unwanted sexual jokes and unwanted sexual comments, which are both *seven percentage points higher* than levels seen in the last wave. This is despite the current survey wave being conducted shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which inevitably limited opportunities for social contact and the use of public space for young people growing up in the capital.

Gender differences were also stark (see Figure 6.4). In line with results from 2018, young females remained far more likely to say they had experienced forms of sexual harassment than young males. Illustrating this, females were *over three times* more likely to say they had experienced **unwanted sexual comments** (41%, 431 of 1,056, compared with 13% of males, 118 of 925), and were *over six times* more likely to have experienced **wolf-whistling** (46%, 486 of 1,055, compared with 7% of males, 63 of 934). Although base numbers are low for non-binary young people, exposure was also particularly high for this group. For example, 67% of non-binary young people said they had experienced **unwanted sexual comments** during the last year (36 of 54), while 60% had experienced **sexual jokes or taunts** (32 of 53).

Figure 6.4. Experiences of sexual harassment and sexual messages/images during the last year.



6.4. Young people’s experiences of sexual content

MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22 also brought new insight into young Londoners’ exposure to other forms of sexual content, including messages and images (see Figure 6.4). Here, a quarter of young people in school years 10 and 11 said that they had **received unwanted sexual messages or nude pictures** (25%, 536 of 2,106), while a similar proportion said someone had **asked them to send nude pictures** (24%, 510 of 2,105).

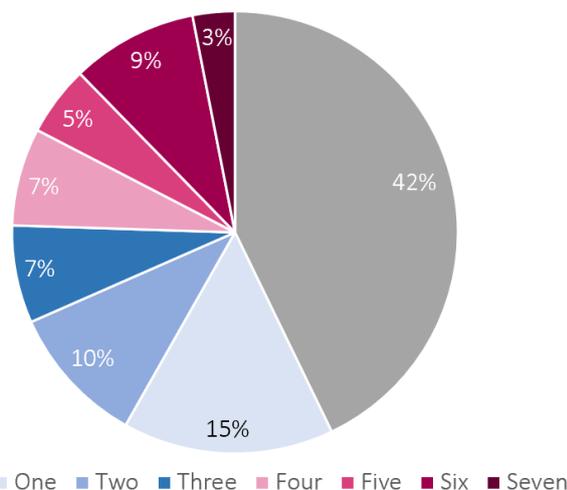
Large gender differences again emerged, with young females around *three times* more likely to say they had received or been asked to send nude pictures compared with young males. A smaller group of young people in school years 10 and 11 – 6% – said that someone had **shared their nude pictures or selfies in a way that they did not want** (125 of 2,119). Despite low base numbers, prevalence was *particularly high* here among young people identifying as a **non-binary** gender (20%, 11 of 56).

6.5. Understanding cumulative exposure to sexual harassment and content

Using the seven measures of sexual harassment and inappropriate content measured in MOPAC’s ‘We Are London’ Youth Survey 2021-22, it was possible to calculate **cumulative exposure to inappropriate sexual behaviours** – i.e., how many young people had experienced *more than one type of risk* during the last year (see Figure 6.5).³³

From this, 42% of young people (851 of 2,024) in school years 10 and 11 said that they had experienced **none of the behaviours listed** – leaving 58% who had experienced **at least one** (1,173 of 2,024). Worryingly, a quarter of young people had experienced **four or more** of the seven listed forms of inappropriate sexual behaviour – with a small minority (3%, 69 of 2,024) experiencing **all seven** (Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.5. Proportion of young people experiencing *multiple forms* of sexual harassment or inappropriate content



Again, the effect of gender was particularly pronounced here: females were *nearly five times* more likely to have experienced **four or more** forms of inappropriate sexual behaviour (39%, 388 of 1,005) than males (8%, 71 of 909) – and this increased even further to 62% of non-binary young people (31 of 50).

In turn, results once again also revealed an overlap with a range of wider vulnerabilities, including victimisation, exploitation and violence. Indeed, such issues were *particularly attenuated* among the cohort of young people experiencing **four or more** different forms of sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual content: here, *one in six* said they had been **threatened or hurt by someone with a knife** (15%, 74 of 489) and *one in eight* had been **pressured by someone else to carry or sell drugs** (12%, 55 of 477) – levels *over five times* higher than those seen for young people not experiencing any of the listed safeguarding risks (at 3%, 22 of 839, and 2%, 13 of 840 respectively). In turn, only around

³³ Totals calculated for young people giving valid responses (i.e. yes/no/don’t know’) across all seven measures in Figure 6.4.

half of those experiencing four or more forms of sexual harassment or inappropriate content said they **felt safe in the area where they live** (56%, 283 of 505): significantly below all other groups. Again, this adds to the increasingly complex picture of risk and vulnerability amongst young Londoners, with those most exposed to *multiple different forms* of sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual content at an early age seemingly also experiencing a range of wider adversities; this is explored further in Section 7.

6.6. Seeking help for experiences of sexual harassment and inappropriate content

Overall, less than a quarter of young people who had experienced any of the seven listed sexual harassment and/or inappropriate content risks during the last year said that they **had spoken to anyone or sought help for their experience(s)** (23%, 270 of 1,181). This is in line with the last time the Youth Survey was run in 2018.³⁴

Although young people experiencing multiple forms of sexual harassment and inappropriate content were more likely to say they had spoken to someone or sought help, levels nevertheless remained low: 28% of those experiencing *four or more forms* said they had spoken to someone about their experiences (134 of 484), compared with 17% of those experiencing just one (48 of 290). Furthermore, young males were significantly *less likely* to say they had spoken to anyone (15%, 50 of 344) than females (26%, 196 of 759), perhaps highlighting an increased hesitancy to seek support here.

Young people who *had* sought support were most likely to say they had spoken to **friends or family** (79%, 212 of 270), with one in five saying they had told someone at **school or a teacher** (19%, 51 of 270).³⁵ However, far fewer said they had spoken to the **police** (9%, 23 of 270) or to a dedicated **organisation or charity** (4%, 12 of 270). Together this highlights considerable under-reporting of sexual harassment and inappropriate content among young Londoners, with those affected far more likely to turn to *informal support networks* such as peers and relatives than more formal channels.

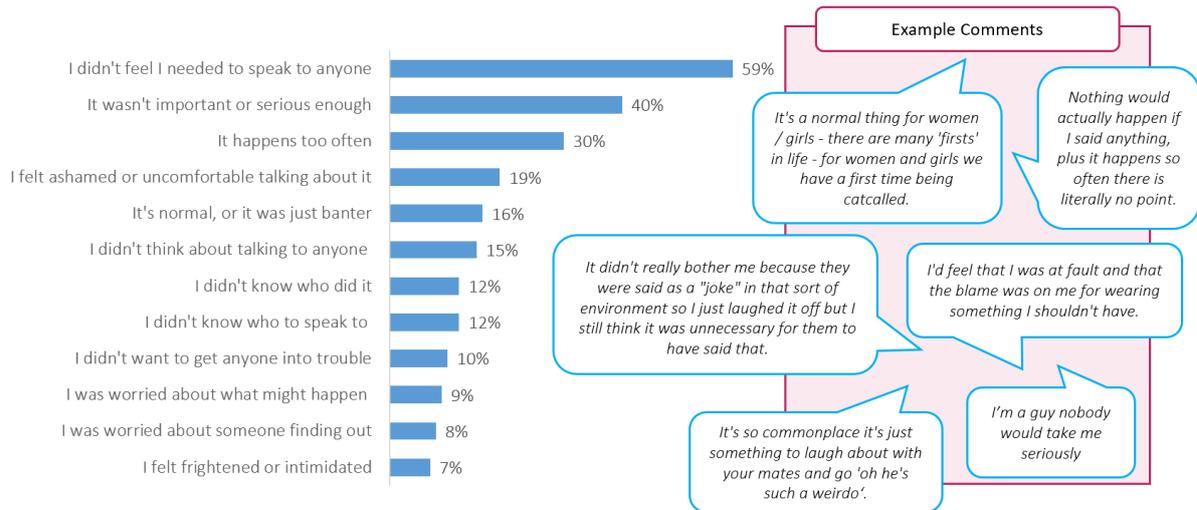
Consistent with the last time the survey was run, results once again revealed a range of barriers that prevented young people from seeking support (see Figure 6.6). Those who *did not* speak to anyone about their experiences most often said this was because **they didn't feel like they needed to** (59%, 373 of 804)³⁶. However, results also highlight a degree of normalisation of behaviours among young Londoners: many felt their experience **wasn't important or serious enough** (40%, 325 of 804), **happens too often** (30%, 239 of 804) or that it was **just normal or 'banter'** (16%, 128 of 804). These themes also emerged in young people's own comments. Some young people also expressed concerns about the consequences of seeking help, or felt unwilling to speak to anyone as they felt ashamed or frightened.

³⁴ Please note that the previous Youth Survey in 2018 asked only about sexual harassment experiences, so figures are not directly comparable.

³⁵ Respondents could select all that apply, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

³⁶ Respondents could select all that apply, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

Figure 6.6. Reasons for NOT seeking help

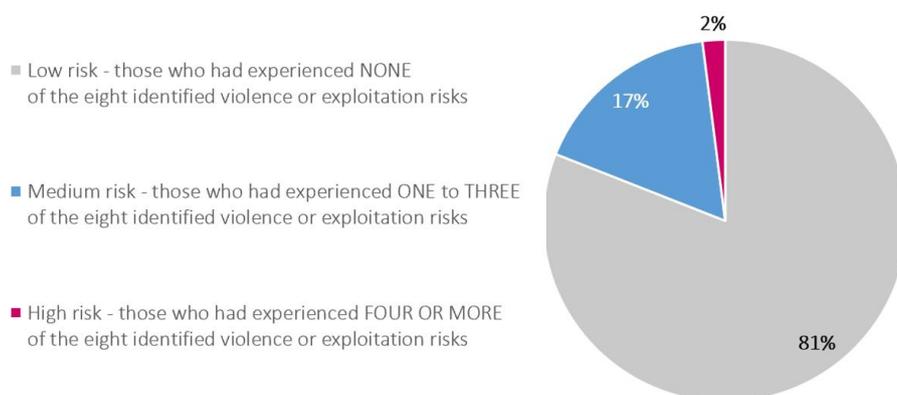


7. Building the Picture of Risk – a focus on young people ‘most at risk’ from violence and exploitation

7.1. Defining cumulative risk

Reflecting back across the topics covered by MOPAC’s Youth Survey 2021-22, it is clear that findings paint a complex picture of risk and vulnerability that pervades across many of the areas discussed. The final section of this report seeks to explore this interplay further with a specific focus on understanding the cohort of young Londoners **exposed to multiple different forms of violence and exploitation**. To achieve this, a composite measure was calculated to reflect the total number of risks experienced across the eight measures of exposure to serious violence or exploitation included in the survey – including vicarious and personal exposure to gangs and knife crime³⁷. Young people were then grouped into three categories as outlined in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1. Prevalence of exposure to multiple forms of violence and exploitation – and risk groupings



7.2. The prevalence of cumulative risk

Positively, the majority of young Londoners said that they had not experienced ANY of the eight identified violence or exploitation risks (81%, 6,606 of 8,151) – forming our ‘**low risk**’ group. However, 17% of young people fell into the ‘**medium risk**’ category (1,412 of 8,151), while results revealed a small minority of young people – 2% - who had experienced *four or more* of the eight identified risks and formed our ‘**high risk**’ cohort (see Figure 7.1). This equated to 133 young people in total – with 32 of these saying they had experienced *all eight* of the identified violence and exploitation related risks.

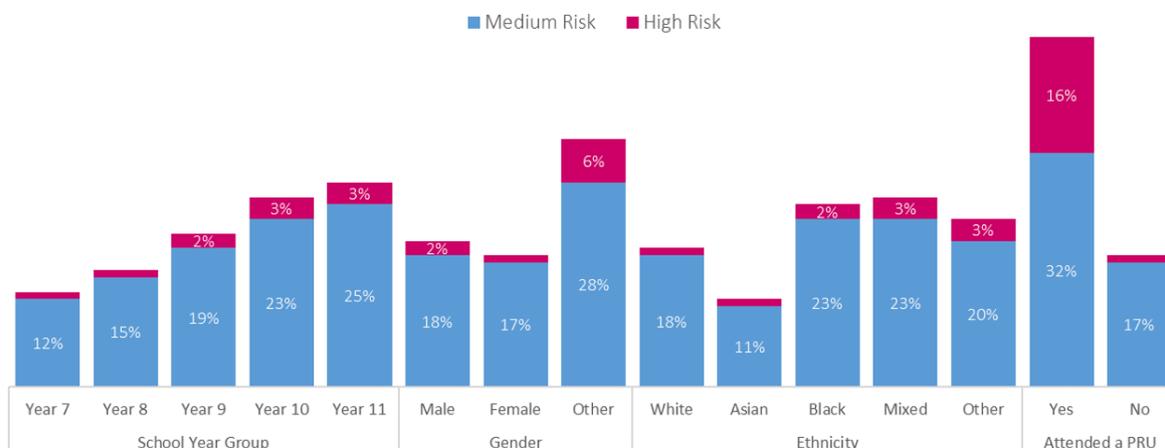
Importantly, when looking across key demographics, certain groups of young people were disproportionately more likely to fall into this ‘high-risk’ cohort (see Figure 7.2). Perhaps unsurprisingly, exposure to cumulative risk increased with age. In addition, young people identifying as a non-binary gender were around three times more likely to fall into this ‘high risk’ category (6%, 11 of 179).

Particularly prominently – and building on findings in Section 5.1 – results once again also revealed an exceptionally high prevalence of exposure to multiple forms of violence and exploitation risks amongst those who had attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Indeed, within this small group *over one in six* young people said they had experienced four or more forms of violence or exploitation related risk

³⁷ Calculated for young people giving valid responses (i.e. yes/no/don’t know) across the eight measures listed in Figure 5.1.

(16%, 23 of 142). This is far higher than all other demographic groups, and again highlights a disproportionate concentration of risk within such specialist educational settings.

Figure 7.2. Proportion of young Londoners falling into risk groups, by key demographics.



7.3. The complex picture of wider vulnerabilities

In turn, further analysis revealed a range of attenuated vulnerabilities amongst young Londoners more exposed to violence and exploitation in the capital. Crucially though – and building on previous findings throughout this report – this section reveals a *cumulative increase* in risk; such that *particularly poor outcomes* are seen amongst the small cohort of young Londoners *most exposed* to these issues.

To illustrate, when looking at safety, just 43% of this ‘high risk’ group said that they **felt safe in their local area** (57 of 133): significantly below levels seen either for our ‘medium’ risk (67%, 942 of 1,409) or ‘low risk’ group (82%, 5,394 of 6,600). A similar pattern was seen at school, with half of the ‘high risk’ group feeling safe here (53%, 70 of 133); compared with *nearly all* of those exposed to none of the violence or exploitation risks (92%, 6,069 of 6,586). Accordingly, young people in the ‘high risk’ group were *around three times more likely* to feel that issues such as ‘people using or dealing drugs’, ‘people carrying knives’, or ‘people joining gangs’ were a big problem where they live – and these gaps became even more pronounced in the school environment (where those in the ‘high risk’ group were *around five times* more likely to feel these issues were a ‘big problem’ than those in the ‘low risk’ group).

In turn, it is perhaps even more concerning that *over half* of the young Londoners in our ‘high risk’ group for violence and exploitation said that they had **personally also been the victim of a crime during the last year** (55%, 66 of 119): levels twice those seen for the ‘medium risk’ group (22%, 296 of 1312) and *over ten times* higher than the low risk group (5%, 330 of 6392). Building on earlier findings, this once again highlights the overlap between victimisation and exposure to wider aspects of criminality – with a seemingly disproportionate impact on the small group of young Londoners potentially *most exposed* to multiple forms of violence and exploitation.

Furthermore, this effect also pervaded across wider safeguarding issues – including into the online sphere, where our ‘high risk’ group were over twice as likely to say **someone had bullied or upset them online during the last year** (53%, 60 of 114) than the ‘low risk’ group (18%, 1,047 of 5,764).

Although base numbers were low³⁸, young people in our ‘high risk’ group also saw significantly increased exposure to inappropriate sexual behaviours – including **jokes or taunts of a sexual nature** and **unwanted sexual comments**. In many cases, exposure to such behaviours were also elevated amongst the ‘medium risk’ cohort; but findings were particularly stark in relation to inappropriate sexual content. Here, *nearly two-thirds* of our ‘high risk’ cohort said **someone had sent them unwanted sexual messages or images during the last year** (62%, 34 of 55) – significantly higher than levels seen both for our ‘medium risk’ (44%, 197 of 446) or ‘low risk’ (15%, 206 of 1,343) groups – while *around one in three* said **their own nude pictures had been used or shared in a way they did not want** (29%, 16 of 55). This is striking when compared with just 3% of our ‘low risk’ cohort (38 of 1,354) – and is once again also significantly above the ‘medium risk’ group (9%, 40 of 446).

With this in mind, it is perhaps particularly concerning that the small group of young Londoners most exposed to multiple forms of violence and exploitation were in turn also *disproportionately more likely* to believe such inappropriate behaviours were acceptable. To illustrate – not only were our ‘high risk’ cohort more likely to have had their own nude images used in a way they did not want – but *nearly a quarter* of this group believed it was **‘always or sometimes OK’ for people to share intimate pictures of a partner without their consent** (23%, 13 of 56). Again this is stark when compared with just 1% of young people in our ‘low risk’ group (14 of 1,375) and 4% of those in the ‘medium risk’ cohort (18 of 457). Furthermore, half of our ‘high risk’ group believed it was **OK to insult a partner during an argument** (50%, 28 of 56), while a quarter believed it was **OK to physically hit or push a partner** (25%, 14 of 56): demonstrating an acceptance of domestic abuse behaviours significantly higher than those seen amongst either the ‘low risk’ or ‘medium risk’ cohorts.

Importantly, these findings paint a particularly complex picture of wider risks and vulnerabilities amongst young Londoners potentially *most exposed to multiple forms* of violence and exploitation-related risks – with potentially cumulative impacts that bring implications for effective safeguarding.

7.4. Challenges to relationships with police

Building on this, results also reveal unique challenges to wider engagement with the police amongst this cohort of young Londoners. In light of the picture already established, it is perhaps unsurprising that those most exposed to multiple forms of violence and exploitation were more likely to have come into contact with the police. To illustrate, *nearly all* of the ‘high risk’ cohort said they had **spoken to a police officer in London** (83%, 45 of 54³⁹). In turn, around half said they had specifically **been Stopped and Searched by police** (53%, 69 of 130) – again significantly above both our ‘low risk’ (3%, 174 of 6,591) and ‘medium risk’ (11%, 156 of 1,405) cohorts. This is in line with earlier findings in Section 4.7, and likely reflects the targeted nature of the tactic. However, in turn, it is worth noting that young people forming the ‘high risk’ cohort were also disproportionately more likely to have been stopped *on multiple occasions*, with 41% of this group saying **they had been Stopped and Searched more than three times** (28 of 69). This was significantly higher than our ‘medium risk’ (19%, 30 of 155) and ‘low risk’ (11%, 77 of 173) groups, and again illustrates the need for effective interventions to help break this cycle.

However – and reinforcing the inherent challenges in this – it is perhaps particularly concerning that over half of this group of young Londoners exposed to four or more forms of violence and exploitation risk said that they had **a bad overall opinion of the police** (54%, 72 of 133). This pattern was reflected across wider perception measures, with young people in our ‘high risk’ cohort disproportionately

³⁸ These questions were only asked to young people in school years 10 and 11 – representing around 60 young people in our ‘high risk’ cohort.

³⁹ Please note low base as question was randomised to half of the survey sample.

more likely to hold negative views of police when compared with both the 'low risk' and 'medium risk' groups.

Taken together then, these findings also reveal a unique and particularly challenging picture of relationships between police and this small cohort of young Londoners potentially *most exposed to multiple forms of violence and exploitation*. Indeed, given the intelligence-led nature of police operations alongside the aforementioned array of overlapping risk-factors, it is perhaps unsurprising that this group are disproportionately more likely to come into contact with police. Inevitably, such contact also brings valuable safeguarding opportunities; but results also highlight specific challenges in trust and confidence amongst this group that may serve as a barrier to effective engagement. With all this in mind, it therefore appears particularly important to recognise that many young people coming into contact with the police in London may have experienced a range of wider adversities, and to ensure that this complex interplay of vulnerabilities is considered across these interactions.

8. Conclusion

MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 brings rich insight into a range of crime and safety issues affecting those growing up in the capital. Reaching nearly 12,000 young people aged 11 to 16, the survey offers an unrivalled capture of what matters most to young Londoners, and gives the next generation a say in how their city is policed.

This latest wave of MOPAC's Youth Survey took place at a unique point in time – closely following the COVID-19 pandemic and several high-profile events affecting policing in London. Overwhelmingly though, results reveal a *broadly stable* picture across many topic areas when compared with the previous wave in 2018. Indeed, for many young people the picture of crime and safety seems to have remained largely static: the same issues appear at the forefront of young people's minds, even in light of this potentially changed context.

Illustrating this – and in line with the last survey wave – it is positive that most young Londoners continue to feel safe in the capital. Nevertheless, results reveal a considerable minority who feel unsafe, and suggest that young people remain affected by a range of crime issues – with many still concerned about violence, and around one in ten directly experiencing criminal victimisation themselves. Consistent with 2018, results highlight a relatively stable minority of young people *personally* involved in gangs and weapon possession, although it is encouraging that fewer now say they *know others* involved in such behaviours. More widely, results again reveal potentially concerning normalisation of inappropriate sexual behaviours among young people, while experiences of sexual harassment remain prevalent among our young cohort, even in spite of recent COVID-19 'lockdowns'.

Importantly though, MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 also reveals some emerging areas of concern. Compared with the last wave, issues relating to hate crime now appear more prominent on young people's minds. Indeed, this now forms the top 'crime problem' for young people both at school and locally, while the proportion of young victims saying they have *personally* experienced a hate crime has more than doubled over this timeframe. Although this may in part reflect improvements in young people's understanding of what constitutes hate, findings nevertheless highlight this as an emerging issue for young Londoners. In addition, new insight from the survey also reveals the prevalence of discriminatory content online, in terms of online bullying as well as exposure to content promoting hate across social media platforms.

Furthermore, results from this wave of MOPAC's Youth Survey also highlight emerging risks to young people's wider views and relationships with the police. In line with the 2018 wave, early opinions of the police remain mixed, while trust and confidence stand below levels seen for adult Londoners. Importantly though, young Londoners' opinions of police have also become *more negative* since 2018, in particular among the capital's young females. Compounding this, significant declines have also been seen in the proportion believing police 'treat everyone fairly', with just one in ten young Black Londoners now agreeing with this statement. Moreover this picture is not unique to youth: MOPAC's Public Attitude Survey also reveals a downwards trend in perceptions over this timeframe among *adult Londoners*, once again more pronounced for younger females (MOPAC, 2022d).

Despite this, a key limitation of the current survey is that it remains a 'snapshot' capture of young Londoners' views at a specific point in time. It is possible that recent events – including the Black Lives Matter protests and the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer – may have been *particularly influential* in driving these declines, and the lasting impact of such events on young

Londoners remains unknown. To this end, future waves of MOPAC's Youth Survey will be invaluable in continuing to monitor these trajectories on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, our findings here highlight young people's perceptions of the police as a key area of emerging risk, and emphasise the importance of work to build positive relationships between the police and young people.

Related to this, MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 also brings new and innovative insight across a range of novel topics. One such area includes identifying the diverse range of situations that bring young people into contact with police officers – as victims, witnesses, vulnerable people, and through school engagement – with results here highlighting the particular value of *informal interactions* in helping to build positive relationships between young people and the police. This stands atop findings that emphasise the importance of procedural justice during police encounters – treating young people politely and with respect – in helping to maintain good opinions of the police. Encouragingly, we see that the majority of young people also support partnership working between police and schools, again highlighting opportunities for positive engagement between young Londoners and the Metropolitan Police Service.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly – MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 also brings new insight into the complex interplay of risk and vulnerability affecting many young people growing up in the capital. Adding to the existing evidence base, we identify a considerable minority of those aged 14 to 16 who have had their images shared with others in a way they did not want, and reveal extensive *cumulative exposure* to sexual harassment and inappropriate content among the young cohort. Looking specifically at youth violence, results newly identify a small but potentially vulnerable group of young Londoners exposed to elements of criminal exploitation – including being asked to carry knives or sell drugs on behalf of others. Once again, the survey reveals an overlap between exposure to such elements of youth violence and an array of wider harms, including increased criminal victimisation, lower feelings of safety, poorer perceptions of the police, and normalisation of potentially harmful sexual behaviours. In turn, results also show that this potentially vulnerable cohort are also disproportionately more likely to come into contact with the police – including through Stop and Search – once again reinforcing the value and opportunity for early interactions with officers to help safeguard and support young Londoners. On top of this, new analyses reveal a small cohort of young Londoners exposed to *multiple different forms* of violence and exploitation – for whom many of the risks outlined above are disproportionately further attenuated – and emphasise some unique challenges to effectively engaging with this particularly vulnerable group.

To conclude, MOPAC's 'We Are London' Youth Survey 2021-22 provides a robust evidence base across a range of crime and policing issues affecting young Londoners at a unique – and potentially pivotal – point in time. Results from this survey will continue to be disseminated across key partners and stakeholders to provide a catalyst for ongoing improvements to service delivery, and to ensure the views of young Londoners are heard in the decisions that affect them.

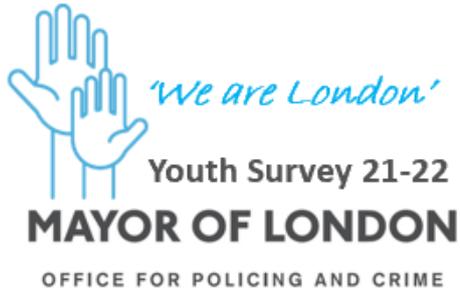
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Appendix 1: Survey sample demographics.



11,874
 young people living or going
 to school in London

