

# **Problem profile update: Impact of the pandemic on serious violence in B&NES**

February 2021

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# Scope and methodology

# Introduction: the scope of the problem profile update & Crest's role

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## The issue

There has been a significant increase in some of the most serious and harmful types of violent crime across England and Wales since 2014. Covid-19 has affected all aspects of society in the past 11 months and is likely to have affected the serious violence landscape in Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES). **The Violence Reduction Unit has commissioned an update to its problem profile of serious violence, to be submitted to the Home Office as part of Avon & Somerset's overall response.** Crest has provided 15 days of consultancy to B&NES' Violence Reduction Unit to update the problem profile.

## The purpose

**The purpose of this update is to understand how trends in serious and violent crime in B&NES have changed in the past year, and how identified drivers have been impacted by Covid-19.** It will also shine a light on areas which need to be better understood.

## Crest Advisory

We're crime and justice specialists – equal parts **research, strategy** and **communication**. We work with police forces, PCCs, central and local government, research trusts, businesses, public inquests and inquiries, think tanks and more. We produce **research reports** but also **practical strategy and advice** designed to be useful on the frontline.

# Defining serious violence in B&NES - caveats and limitations due to Covid-19

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**Funding for the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is designed to reduce serious violence**, yet what constitutes “serious violence” is left undefined.

The term “serious violence” is usually used to describe a subset of the highest-harm, least frequently occurring violent crimes which result in serious harm or injury. According to the Home Office’s “[Serious Violence Strategy](#)”, this encompasses **homicide, knife crime, gun crime, and robbery**. In a report for the Avon & Somerset PCC following stakeholder consultation, the Behavioural Insights Team **included more serious violence against the person (VAP) and sexual offences, along with any domestic violence, and any violent offence involving a knife.**

## Defining serious violence in B&NES

As this report will discuss, the extent of the four offence types recognised in the Home Office strategy is limited in B&NES. Given this, we have chosen to adopt a broader definition than that adopted by either the Home Office or the BIT report. This definition examines **overall trends in violence against the person (VAP), robbery, and serious sexual offences**, providing comparative figures for the Youth Offending Service (YOS) cohort. There are also specific focuses on **domestic violence, knife enabled violence** and **drug related offending**.

*Where possible* we draw out findings on under-25s, though available data at this level in B&NES is very limited.

**The pandemic has created issues with reporting and recording of crime and vulnerabilities.** It is likely that reduced access to services has meant vulnerabilities go undetected, while the increased visibility of certain offences, such as drug offences, may have increased the recording of certain crime types. The data presented in the following slides must be understood in this context.  
**Where shifts and trends related to the pandemic have been identified, they are highlighted in purple.**

# Methods and approach (1/2)

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This report updates [the serious violence problem profile provided by Crest in early 2020](#) which examined trends and drivers of serious violence in B&NES from 2014 to 2019.

We have drawn on **similar sources where available** and sought to **test whether Covid-19 has altered the trends in serious violence**, cohorts involved and **areas of specific concern: like domestic abuse, young people (or even children) who have offended and the street population**. We have also sought to understand the **impact of the pandemic on vulnerabilities in B&NES**, which contribute to long term drivers of serious violence.

This report **updates findings and data over the course of the year where available**. Due to the limitations of the data (see slide 5) or limited availability of updated data, this report **draws on observations of officers, practitioners and service providers** on how the pandemic has impacted the picture of serious violence and those affected by it. We have focused on **trends which were corroborated by multiple credible sources (at least 2+)** or supporting evidence from elsewhere.

By definition this is **not a complete picture**, and the true impact of the pandemic on violence and its drivers will only **emerge over time**. We have therefore drawn on the experience elsewhere and early published data on how the pandemic is likely to exacerbate the risks of vulnerability in certain groups.

## Methods and approach (2/2)

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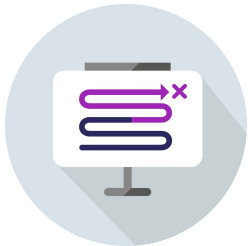
The project involved **three phases**:

- Published and local data analysis
- Practitioner and local leader interviews (25+)
- Analysis and write-up



We analysed **publicly available datasets**:

- Police recorded crime
- LG Inform
- Central government / NHS / Public Health England statistics
- B&NES Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)
- *Developing a Serious Violence Strategy for Avon & Somerset*
- Business Improvement District report
- Third-sector / arms-length body data



We analysed **local datasets**:

- B&NES Council data (e.g. exploitation review)
- B&NES Youth Offending Service (YOS) caseload and Asset+ data
- NHS hospital admissions bespoke data request
- Avon & Somerset Constabulary bespoke data request
- Local drug services reports (NDTMS / Project 28)
- Southside domestic violence report and case studies
- IRIS Monitoring QTR4 report
- MARAC data return

## Glossary of key projects, terms and acronyms

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- **DHI** - Developing Health and Independence, delivering support services in B&NES
- **IRIS** - Identification and Referral to Improve Safety programme, GP-based service delivered by Southside
- **IDVAs** - Independent Domestic Violence Advisers
- **Julian House Freedom Programme** - educational information programme for women who have experienced / are experiencing domestic abuse, run by Julian House (domestic abuse support service)
- **MARAC** - Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, bringing partners together to support high-risk domestic abuse victims
- **NDTMS** - National Drug Treatment Monitoring System
- **Project 28** - young people's drug and alcohol service, part of DHI
- **Southside** - Southside Family Project, supporting families with issues including domestic violence
- **Stand Against Violence** - delivers violence prevention workshops and talks with young people
- **Youth Connect South West** - provides a range of services for young people across B&NES and beyond
- **YOS /YOT** - Youth Offending Service/ youth offending team working with offenders aged between 10 and





# **Executive summary**

## Our previous problem profile (2019) report found the following in B&NES...

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- **B&NES has a low overall rate of recorded violence**, though certain serious violent offence groups have risen significantly over the last five years. Whilst data for under-25s is not currently available, evidence suggests this trend is also true of the Youth Offending Service cohort
- **Serious violence is concentrated in Bath City Centre**, though there are signs of a spillover into other areas such as Keynsham, Twerton, and Somer Valley
- Violence and knife admissions to hospital are concentrated in **the early hours of the morning**
- Knife crime victims are concentrated in the **25-34 age bracket**, and are **overwhelmingly male**
- **Domestic abuse is the most common circumstantial flag** for serious violent offences, and domestic violent offences have a particular profile requiring attention
- A **low proportion of serious violent offences lead to charge / summons**

## ... this updated problem profile (2020) has found the following changes in B&NES – a combination of long term trends and the significant impact of Covid-19 (1/2)

### Offending patterns

In line with national trends, all offending and **serious violence decreased at the beginning of the pandemic but recovered to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2020**. Serious violence and offending are expected to continue to rise in the future, according to local and national long term trends.

**There has been a circumstantial decrease in night-time economy violence, but it has been reported that ‘gang’ and organised violence have become more prevalent.** These incidents can occur during the daytime and involve weapons.

Contrary to nation-wide expectations, **the data on Domestic Abuse suggests only a small increase in volume** (but this may be due to challenges in reporting). However there has been an increase in reporting by BAME victims and mental health and other needs have intensified. Finally, **violence within the street population has anecdotally increased in 2020**.

### Cohorts

In contrast to our previous report, our research suggests that the cohort of **offenders involved in serious and violent crime are getting younger (under 24)**. Young people (or even children) who have offended are **more challenging to identify** during the pandemic, due to a lack of regular service contact (like school closures) and reverse-pressure demand management leading to a high use of Release Under Investigation by the police, slowing their interaction with youth offending services.

One significant change has been the **perceived increase in the involvement of young females in violent offending**.

## ... this updated problem profile (2020) has found the following changes in B&NES – a combination of long term trends and the significant impact of Covid-19 (2/2)

### Drivers

The pandemic has had a **general exacerbating effect on all drivers of serious violence and has increased most forms of vulnerability**. This is particularly true for **financial need and mental health**. If these are not addressed, they are likely to increase involvement in violence and offending in the future.

Furthermore, **opportunities for early intervention may have been lost** as it has been harder to identify potential victims, perpetrators and people in need, during Covid-19. It has also been acknowledged that initiating new relationships remotely between services and clients can be challenging.

There has also been an identified **shift in drug market *modus operandi* and gang behaviour**: the increased presence of County Lines seems to have changed the local violence culture and increased weapon carrying and organised gang violence. This phenomenon has been observed in other parts of the country when County Lines increase.

### Services

Access to services has been challenging and the flow of information has been reduced because of the lack of face to face interaction. A swift **transition to digital services has had some positive impacts** but has placed **some limitations on service delivery**.

Practitioners have also identified **gaps in services**: services are **geographically concentrated in Bath City Centre** and can be hard to access for more rural populations. There was also a lack of **trauma informed and alternative educational provision** for struggling young people. A lack of **domestic abuse perpetrator services** was also identified.

## Lessons from the field to consider going forward (1/2)

### The impact of county lines on the culture of violence and weapon carrying in B&NES must be explored

A shift in the county lines model, where the main runners travel into B&NES from major cities, **is likely to have instilled a culture of violence and weapon carrying in the area**. It is important to recognise this shift in model and its impact on violent behaviours, especially in the context of **young people's increased vulnerability** during the pandemic. Significantly, this pattern has been observed in other parts of the country.

Consideration must also be given to **the significant increase in violent offences committed by young females** in the past year in relation to this shift. Interviews have suggested **social media as a key driver of violence in this cohort**.

### Domestic abuse provision must reflect the changing presentation of need - are services working?

The **increased complexity and severity of domestic abuse cases**, particularly those involving **coercion and financial abuse**, must be explored both within and beyond the context of the pandemic. It is **unclear** whether the changing presentation of need relates to improved awareness of controlling tactics or higher rates of incidence.

Practitioners spoke **positively about adaptations of services during lockdown**. However, **the true impact of underreporting and reduced access to services is not yet known**. It is important to ask how services can be sure they are meeting needs, and how unmet needs will manifest in the long term.

## Lessons from the field to consider going forward (2/2)

### Special attention should be paid to vulnerable cohorts made less visible during the pandemic

While there have been some advantages to remote provision during the pandemic, practitioners were clear that **vulnerabilities are likely to have been missed in the absence of face-to-face contact.**

**Missing children** represent a cohort that is particularly vulnerable to oversight since **the closure of schools.** There have been changes in the relationship between missing children and exploitation elsewhere during lockdown, but **this needs to be better understood in B&NES.**

Importantly, **the dangers of online exploitation,** recognised to have **increased nationally during the pandemic,** require further exploration in B&NES.

Critically, if vulnerabilities are not identified, **opportunities for early intervention are missed leading to greater harm in the long term.**

### Gaps in services need to be addressed, building on improved collaboration during the pandemic

Practitioners were able to identify **several key gaps in services** related to the **geography** of current provision with services harder to access in rural areas, **the lack of trauma informed and alternative educational settings** and the need for **more preventative and restorative domestic abuse perpetrator programmes.** Addressing these gaps will enable B&NES to offer services appropriate to need.

It is recommended that **constructive digital adaptations implemented** during lockdown, such as improved communication and streamlined services, **are carried forward as services develop.**



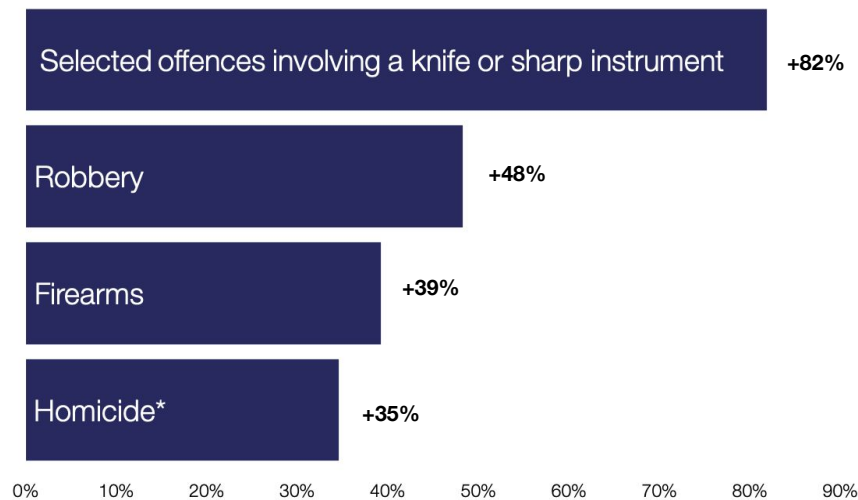
# **1. Serious violence and Covid-19: context**

# 2019: there had been a significant increase in some of the most serious and harmful types of violent crime across England and Wales since 2014

Against a backdrop of falling overall crime, selected high-harm violent offences have risen across England and Wales since 2014

This trend is supported by hospital admissions data for knife assaults. Such data shows a 41% rise in episodes since 2015

Percentage increase in recorded offences related to serious violence, England and Wales, years ending March 2014 to 2019



Number of finished consultant episodes for assault by sharp object, 1998/99 - 2018/19

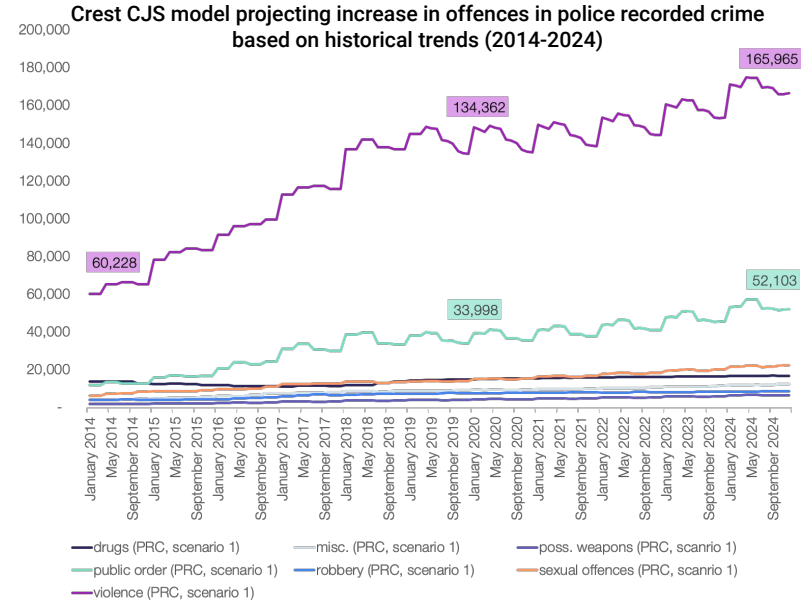
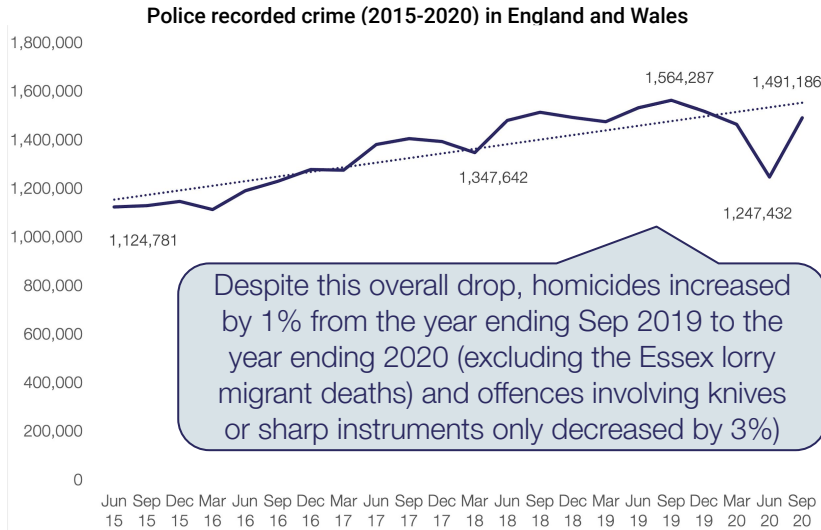




# 2020: recorded crime fell sharply at the start of the pandemic but has since 'bounced back'. Serious and violent crime is projected to increase over the next four years which suggests a continued context of increasing demand

The total police recorded crime (PRC) shows a sharp drop during the pandemic, largely understood to be caused by lockdown. However, by September 2020, PRC levels returned to comparable pre-pandemic levels, continuing an upwards trend

Crest's statistical model projects that serious and violent crime will increase over the next four years, based on historical trends (for example a 64% increase in possession of weapons, a 24% increase in violence against the person and a 58% increase in sexual offences)



# 2019: B&NES' demographic profile shows that despite comparative affluence, there is a small but complex group with elevated levels of vulnerability and risk on key indicators

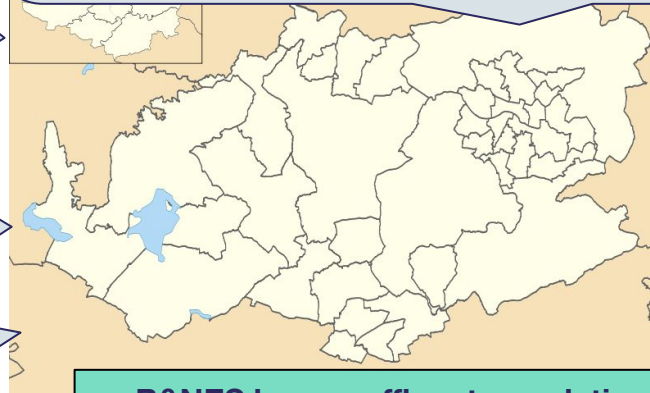
**IMD:** B&NES is the 274th most deprived of 317 local authority districts in England, with just two out of 115 of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most deprived decile nationally. These are Twerton (011C) and Whiteway (015D)

**Age:** B&NES has a comparatively young population, with a median age of 38.2 in 2019 (compared to 40 nationally) and an old-age dependency ratio close to the average

**Employment:** Historically B&NES' claimant rate for unemployment benefit has been below the national average (1.8% / 3.0%)

**Health:** The health gap between occupational groups is the tenth highest of all 55 unitary authorities in England and Wales for men, and twenty-fourth highest for women

**Child poverty:** B&NES has the joint-lowest proportion of children living in poverty after housing costs in the South West (19%). However, there is substantial intra-area variation, with the proportion falling to 11% in Keynsham East and rising to 31% in Radstock and 35% in Twerton. Academic studies (e.g. [Whitworth 2011](#)) suggest that inequality within UK communities is 'fairly strongly' correlated with violence



**Education:** In 2019, B&NES was above the national average in both the proportion of students achieving a good level of development by age 5 (74% vs 72%), and the proportion achieving grades 9 - 5 in English and Maths at KS4 (45.5% vs 43.4% nationally). However, disadvantaged children perform more poorly than they do nationally, and the attainment gap between them and other children is greater: only 17.8% of disadvantaged children in B&NES achieve these grades, compared to a national rate of 24.8%. The rate for all other children in B&NES is 51.2%

**B&NES has an affluent population, but significant inequalities in outcomes and some elevated risk for the most at-risk groups**

# 2020: the demographic profile has remained consistent and the impact of Covid-19 on B&NES has been comparatively light

## Education: B&NES has higher school attendance rates during Covid-19, compared to the national average.

Vulnerable pupils in B&NES (identified by having a social worker) had a higher attendance rate (85%) than the national average (41%) when schools were open (12/20). More information should be sought about attendance of vulnerable pupils when schools were closed

## Covid-19 infection rates: During the week ending 30/1/21, the percentage of the community population testing positive for coronavirus in B&NES; City of Bristol; North Somerset was 1.02%.

This is lower than the 1.55% of the community population in England during the same period. Areas with similar levels of deprivation to B&NES according to the IMD also saw a higher percentage of the community population testing positive for Covid-19: Brighton and Hove (1.61%), Coventry (1.71%), Wakefield (1.11%), Solihull (1.33%)

## Number of deaths related to Covid-19:

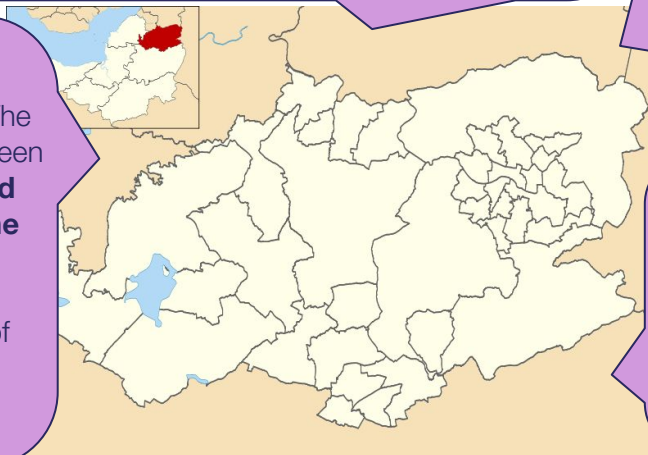
Since the start of the pandemic, there have been 190 deaths in B&NES where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate as one of the causes. This translates to a death rate of 98.3 per 100,000 resident population.

## The death rate in B&NES is lower than that in areas with similar levels of deprivation according to the IMD:

Wakefield (212.2), Solihull (226), Coventry (128.7) and Brighton and Hove (116.5). The death rate from Covid-19 in B&NES is also significantly lower than the national rate per 100,000 population (182.2)

## Universal Credit: In B&NES, 10,847 households were on universal credit as of August 2020, up from 6,023 in August 2019.

The number of households on universal credit has been rising steadily since August 2019, but **increased significantly in April 2020 coinciding with the beginning of lockdown restrictions.** The number of households on universal credit in B&NES as of August 2020 is lower than areas of comparative deprivation according to the IMD: Wakefield (23,848), Solihull (13,790), Coventry (27,253), Brighton and Hove (23,226)



## Employment: B&NES' unemployment benefit claimant rate remains below the national average (4.0% vs 6.3%, as of December 2020).

**This is up substantially from March 2020** (up from 1.7%), but a smaller percentage point rise than occurred nationally (2.3 compared to a 3.2 percentage point rise nationally)



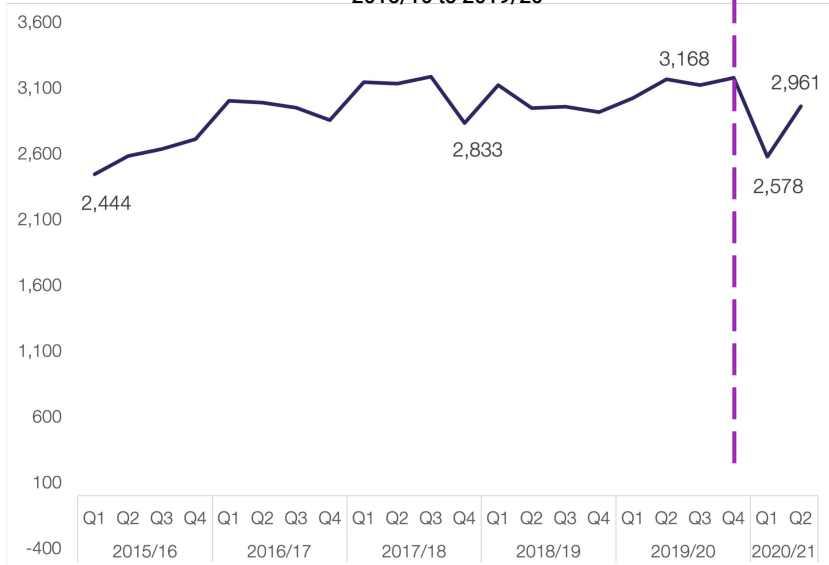
## **2. An update: trends in serious violence and offending patterns in B&NES in 2020**

# Police recorded crime in B&NES mirrors the national trends with a V-shaped recovery. Year on year percentage change even shows that robbery and drug offences rose during 2020

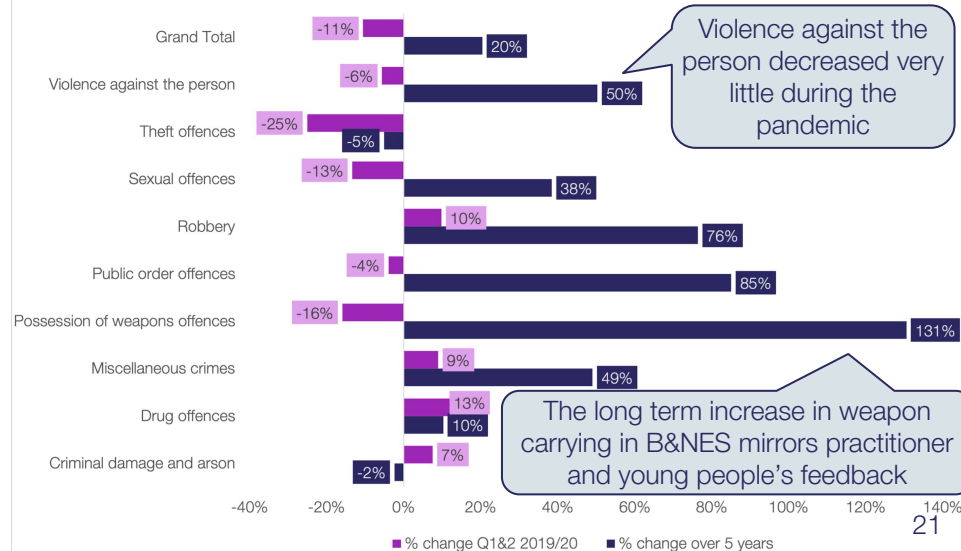
Police recorded crime in B&NES dropped at the beginning of the pandemic - largely due to lockdown - but has since recovered to comparable pre-pandemic levels. This mirrors the long term trend and overall demand shows no sign of decreasing

Pre-pandemic, sustained increases in serious violence were noted for possession of weapons offences, robbery and violence against the person. Patterns mostly reversed throughout the pandemic, except robbery and drug offences which notably increased

Police recorded offences\* in B&NES Community Partnership Area, by quarter from 2015/16 to 2019/20



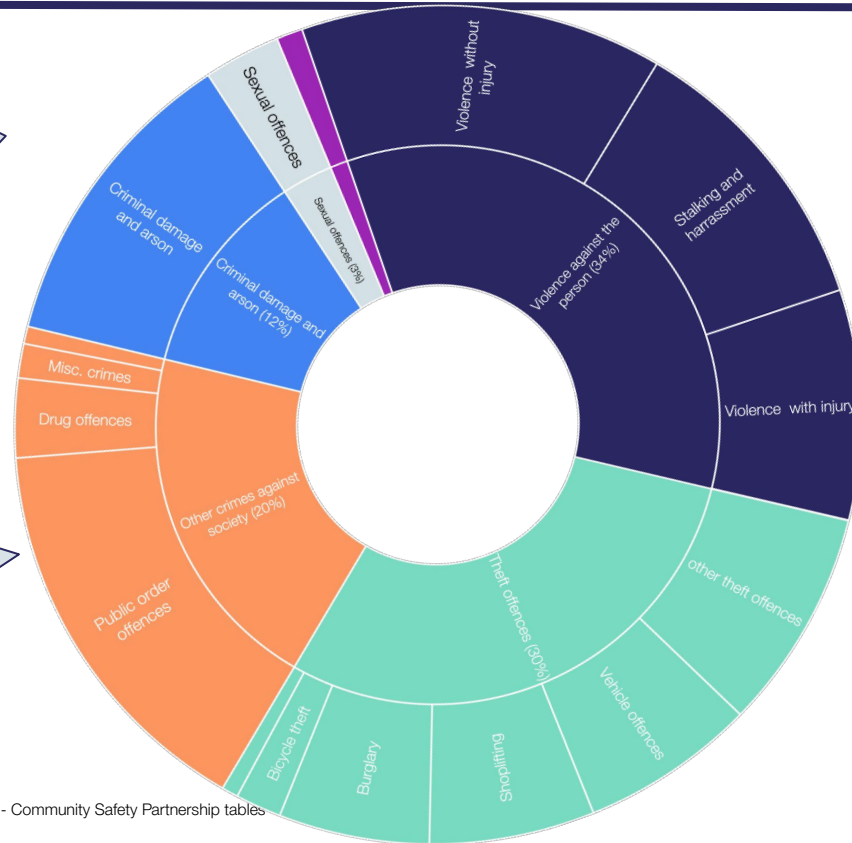
Police recorded offences in B&NES Community Partnership Area, percentage change 2015/16 to 2019/20 vs Q1&2 2019/20 and Q1&2 2020/21



# Despite a temporary drop in the overall volume of crime, violence against the person\* (VAP) continued to account for about a third of recorded crime in B&NES in the first two quarters of 2020/21, the same proportion as in 2019. VAP is likely to remain an issue

Despite robbery increasing in volume during the pandemic, as a proportion of all police reported crime, it remains low at only 1%. This is also the case for possession of weapons which only accounted for 0.6% of all police reported crime

Drug offences increased during the pandemic, possibly because of the increased visibility of offending. They represent 3% of all police recorded crime



Despite the shifts in volumes of police reported crime seen above, the proportion of violence against the person as part of overall crime remains similar, even growing 1% from 33% in 2019 to 34% in the first two quarters of 2020/21

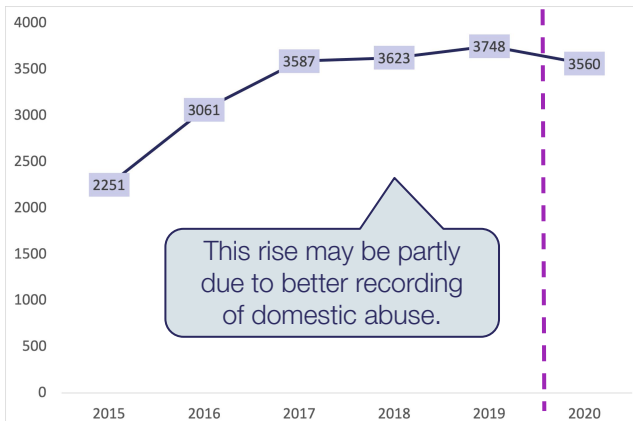
# Despite the short term slight variations in violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences, the overall trajectory since 2015 is still upwards

Violence against the person offences dropped off by 5 % during the pandemic, but are still up nearly 60 % from 2015

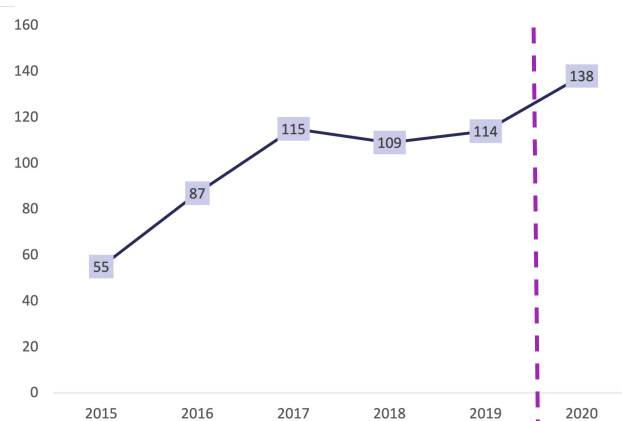
Robbery offences have continued to rise throughout the pandemic, prolonging a trend ongoing from 2015

Robbery offences have continued to rise throughout the pandemic, prolonging a trend ongoing from 2015

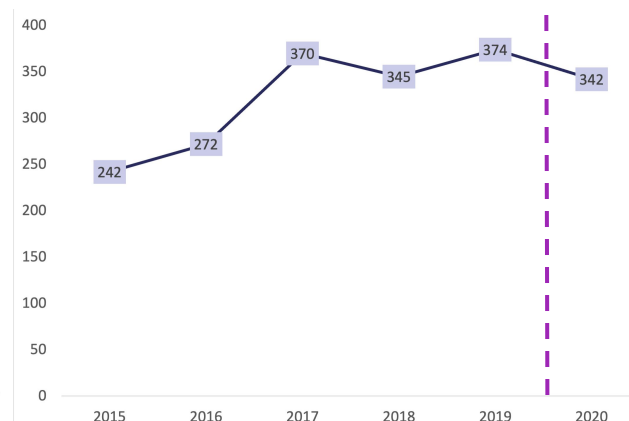
Violence against the person offences, 2015-2020



Robbery offences, 2015 - 2020



Sexual offences, 2015-2020



"[There has been a] national reduction in relation to violence, because we haven't got night-time economies". - Avon and Somerset Police (VRU) Staff 3

"Young people do not seem to want to report incidents where they've been a victim of violence, or if they've been a witness". - YOS Staff 1

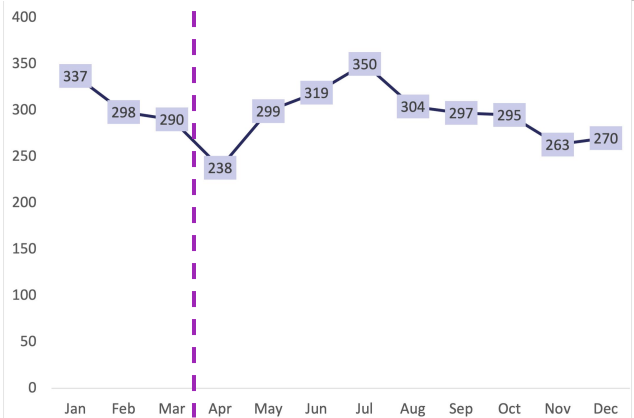
Police data in this report only covers reported/recorded offences. Sexual offences in particular are likely to be underreported

# There were monthly variations during the pandemic: notably violence against the person increased sharply in June/July, possibly due to a greater willingness to report domestic abuse in-between lockdowns. Robbery and sexual offences initially dropped then climbed back up

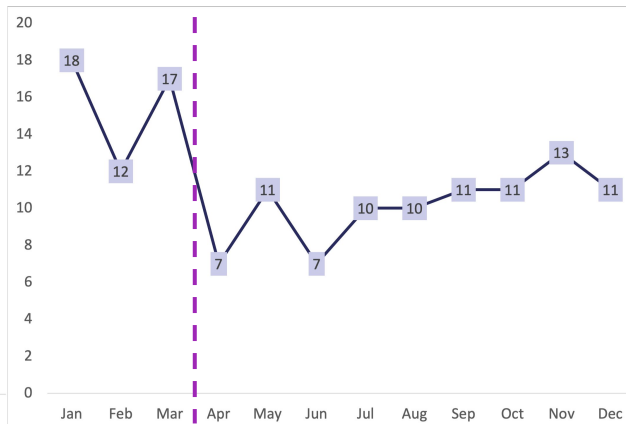
All violent offences show a sharp decrease with the first national lockdown beginning in late March. The increase may be related to the bump in domestic abuse reporting in June

Robbery offences remained fairly steady from May onwards, whereas sexual and violence against the person offences both climbed sharply in the summer before falling again

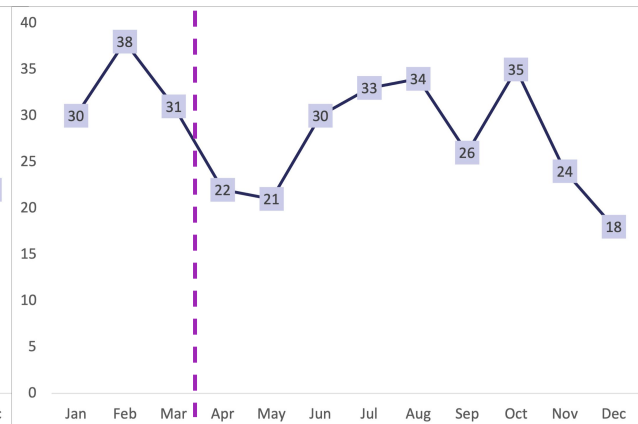
Violence against the person offences, 2020



Robbery offences, 2020



Sexual offences, 2020



“The figures massively dropped off across all crime during the first lockdown [...] most crime just disappeared overnight”. - Stand Against Violence, Senior Staff

The relatively high numbers of robbery offences in the first part of the year mean there was still a year-on-year increase in robbery offences, despite the drop caused by the pandemic.

“Pubs being closed has meant a lot of community violence is reduced, because that was where a lot of that violence happened”. - DHI Senior Staff

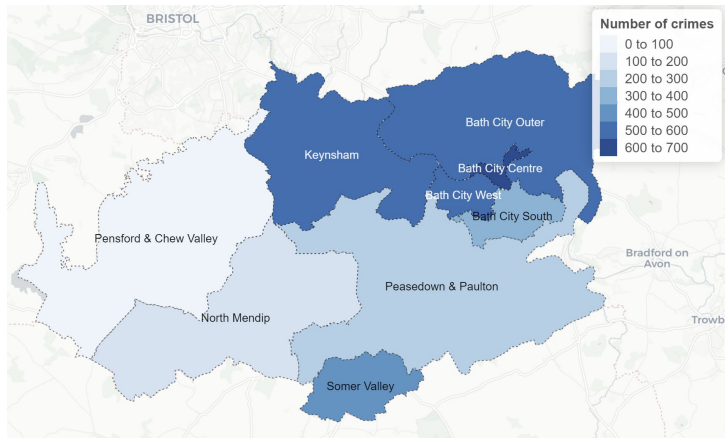


# In contrast to 2018/19, Keynsham is now also an area with higher levels of violence. Bath City Centre and Somer Valley continue to be centres of concentrated violence, despite a drop likely due to the closure of the night-time economy

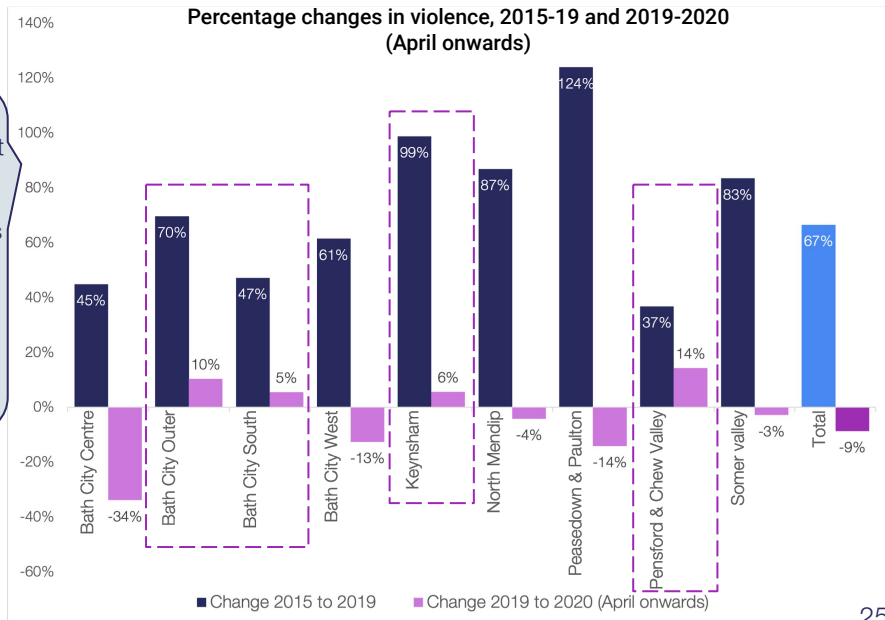
Violence against the person is concentrated in Bath City Centre, Keynsham and Somer Valley, with similar trends for weapons offences. The western region faces very little recorded violence

From 2015 to 2019, all areas saw an increase in violence. The pattern during the pandemic has been more mixed, with some areas experiencing an increase despite an overall fall in violent offences

Number of recorded violence against the person incidents by location, 2020



To get an accurate sense of the impact of the pandemic, we looked at the number of offences committed from April to December 2020, and then compared that to the same period from 2019



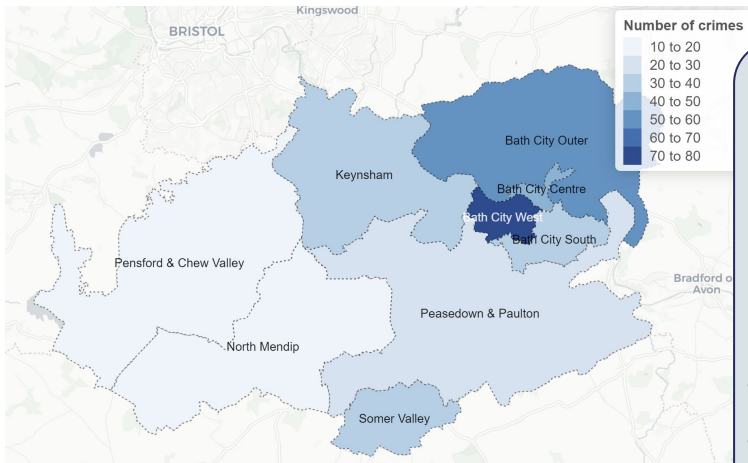
“Keynsham has had a significant problem over the last few months [...] there’s been some, you know, knife stabbings and arranged fights”. - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

# Sexual offences remain more concentrated in Bath City Centre and the North Eastern part of B&NES, despite overall decreases during 2020

Sexual offences are more heavily concentrated in Bath City Centre and the north-eastern parts of the region

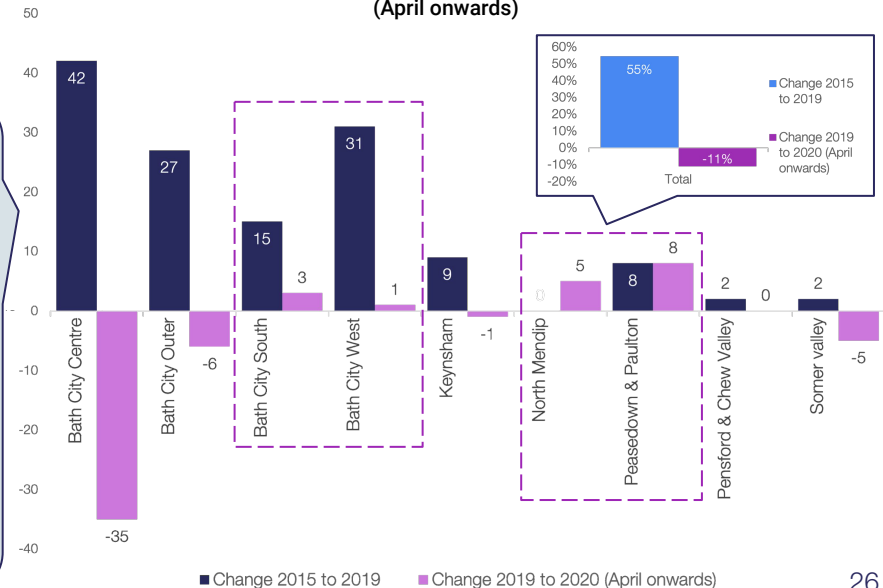
Long term increases have been recorded in most parts of Bath City Centre, along with Keynsham and Somer Valley

Number of recorded serious sexual offences by location, 2020



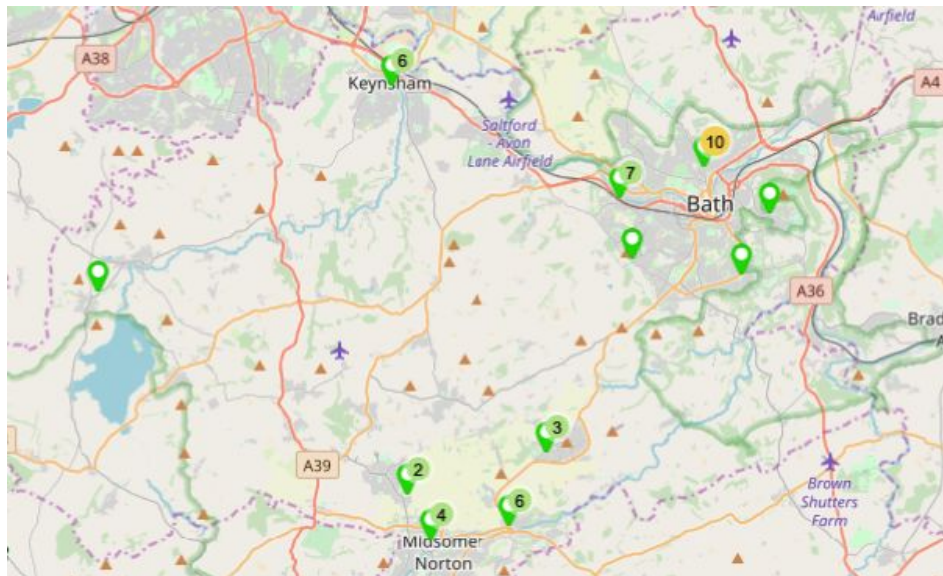
We have included all sexual offences in this problem profile, not only serious sexual offences, because of the frequent link between sexual violence and domestic abuse. Relatively minor sexual offences such as exposure are therefore included, but they represent few total offences - around 15 offences a year across all of B&NES

Numerical and percentage change in sexual offences, 2015-2019 and 2019-2020 (April onwards)

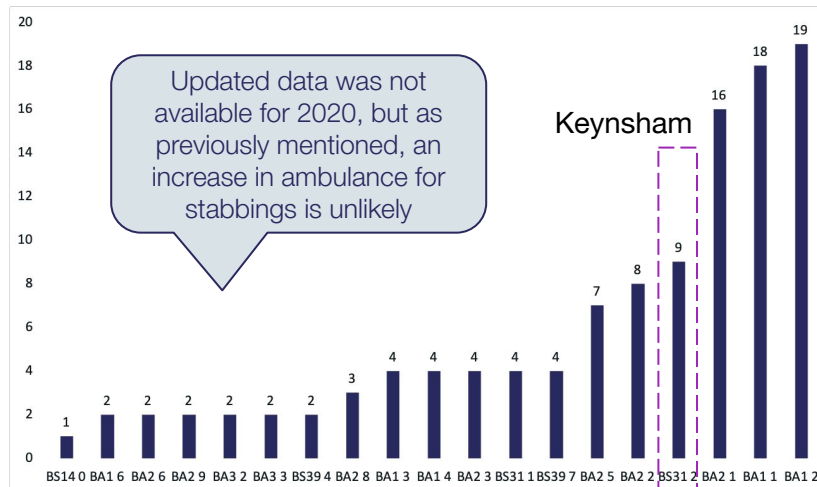


# Most stabbings occur in the city centre, and most of those stabbed are registered with city centre GPs. However, both stabbings and GP registrations spread out to other areas such as Keynsham and Radstock, indicating that serious violence is not just a city centre problem

Number of admissions for assault by sharp object by GP of patient, April 2014 - December 2020



Number of ambulance attendances for stab-related injuries by postcode, 2018 - 2019



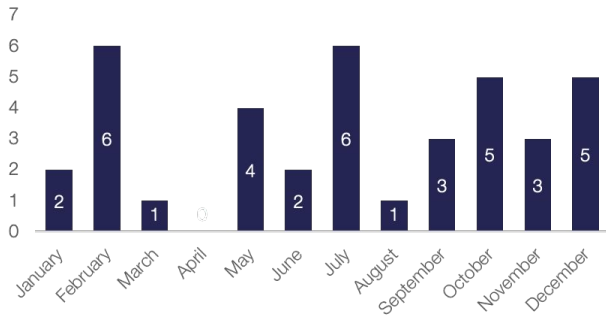
“We’ve got a challenge in Keynsham and a group of young people there who are causing concern and a very serious assault in the park there”. - Young People’s Prevention Service, Senior Staff

# Despite a high profile day-time incident, it remains the case that most stabbings occur during the night, although they are more evenly distributed throughout the week

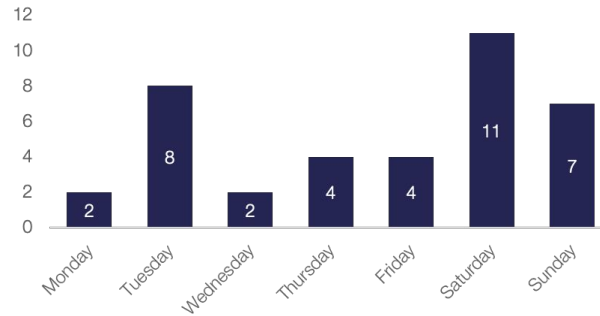
Admissions are spread evenly across months, but are most common on Tuesdays and weekends

Admissions are concentrated between 23:00 and 06:00

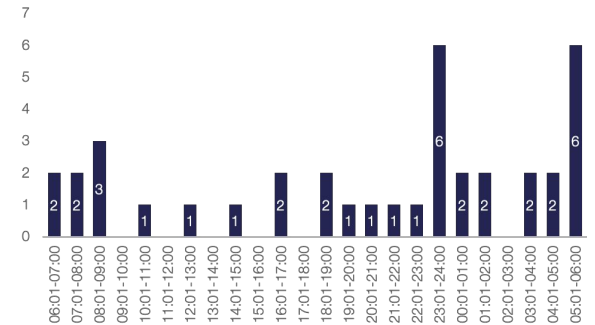
Number of admissions for assault by sharp object by month, 2015 - 2020



Number of admissions for assault by sharp object by day of the week, 2015-2020



Number of admissions for assault by sharp object, by hour of the day, 2015-2020



“We’ve had a few instances recently of quite serious violence in the middle of the night and really upsetting the community [...] And that’s our motivation to address it because we work with individuals who are affected and it’s very real for them”. - Young People’s Prevention Service, Senior Staff

In 2020 there were 6 admissions. 4 of these were between 11pm and 1am, 1 was between 6 and 7am, and 1 was between 8 and 9pm.

**Anecdotally, we know that some serious violence occurred during the day but that is not reflected in the hospital admission data.**

# Police data on violent offences shows a decrease across the board except for threats to kills in 2020 (potentially reflecting domestic abuse and cyber crime). The most common tag used to describe violent offences overall is 'domestic abuse', which is a recognised issue in B&NES

Force tags offer limited insight into the context for specific crimes. However, the vast majority of violence offences recorded have no force tags.

Over the last two years, domestic abuse has dominated force tags and qualifiers across almost all common forms of serious violence

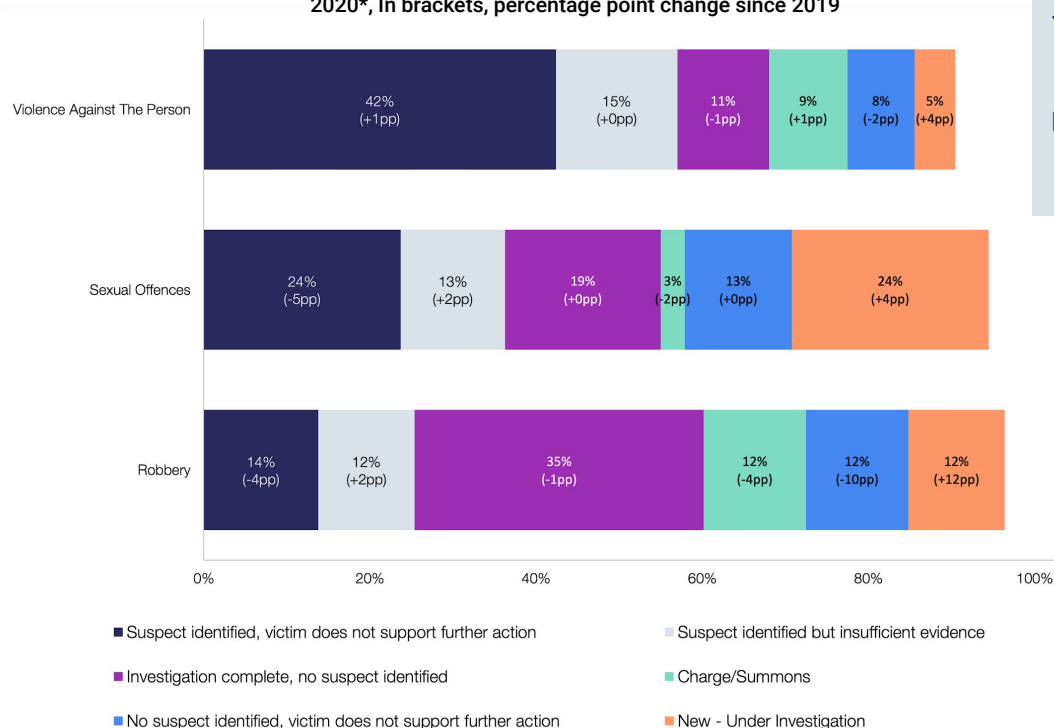
Reflecting the restrictions, tags for licenced-based premises fell sharply from 2019 to 2020, as did qualifiers associated with alcohol and young people.

	Number of offences, 2020	1 year change 2019-2020	4 year change 2015-2019	Most commonly used force tags, 2019	Most commonly used force tags, 2020
<b>Assault occasioning actual bodily harm</b>	694	-207	+208	Domestic abuse; anti-social behaviour; licenced-based premises	Domestic abuse
<b>Common assault and battery</b>	1192	-175	+528	Domestic abuse; anti-social behaviour; licenced-based premises	Domestic abuse; safeguarding child; safeguarding adult
<b>Malicious wounding</b>	23	-14	+16	Domestic abuse (high risk); weapons	Weapons, domestic abuse, ASB (no particular pattern, not more than 2 in any one category)
<b>Threats to kill</b>	85	+10	+48	Domestic abuse; weapons; cyber crime	Domestic abuse, cyber crime, safeguarding adult
<b>Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm</b>	45	-10	+26	Weapons; drugs	Weapons, domestic abuse

This is a key source to understand the context and drivers of serious violence in B&NES but the data set is not conducive to clear conclusions

# B&NES has a high proportion of offences where victims do not support further action which may be linked to domestic abuse and young people's willingness to engage with the police. Furthermore, reports of high use of Release Under Investigation during 2020 may lead to continued victim lack of confidence and an exacerbation of this trend

Outcomes by offence type (violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences) 2020\*, In brackets, percentage point change since 2019



Only 14% of violent offences resulted in a charge/summons. The most common outcome for all violent offences is where the suspect is identified, but the victim does not support further action (35%). This is likely to be connected to domestic abuse. Furthermore, practitioners have indicated that young people and marginalised cohorts can be reluctant to recall incidents to the police because of the perceived ramifications.

We have received anecdotal reports of a **high use of Release Under Investigation - a police outcome which prolongs investigation, like a conditionless and limitless bail** - by the police in B&NES. This is coherent with the evidence submitted to the Justice Select Committee in January 2020 by X as a **result of the reverse pressure of court and Crown Prosecution Service backlogs** onto police activity. Not only does this lead to a police investigation and processing backlog, it also leaves offenders in limbo and victims suffering from delays and loss of confidence in the system. This is likely to **accentuate the current trend of victims not supporting further action in B&NES regarding serious offences.**

Source: Avon & Somerset Constabulary data  
\*Outcomes with low incidence have not been included



## **3. Case Studies**



# **Case Study: focus on domestic abuse**

**In 2019, domestic violence was highlighted consistently as a major part of serious violence in B&NES, so we focus in on changes in 2020**



# Referrals to domestic abuse services did not increase as much as expected during 2020, which should be considered in a context of possible increase of barriers to reporting. However, complex cases involving coercive tactics, financial control and incidents of severe violence were evident

There was an unexpected drop in referrals during the first weeks of lockdown. Practitioners suspected this initial decrease was connected to difficulties in reporting

"I think we all sort of expected, you know, an upwards spike - and that didn't happen. But the numbers have gone up again". - Community Safety for B&NES Council

"Through Covid, [...] there was a slight increase, maybe 10% of reported incidences [...] but that was not a fixed 10%, it would wave up, it would also wave back down again to the same level as the year before". - Avon and Somerset Police (Neighbourhood) Staff 5

"I think initially, we had a situation where people were just very worried about breaking the rules [...] And then we've seen a really mixed picture where there's been spikes". - Community Safety for B&NES Council

Practitioners identified a change in the presentation of need, with increasingly complex and severe cases referred to support services

Practitioners noted an increase in cases involving coercion. Service providers also spoke of an increase in cases of child to parent abuse, and BAME referrals.

"A lot of domestic abuse is about coercion and control. And physical violence is one aspect of it". - Southside Staff

"We're seeing lots more clients coming in who have been subjected to very high levels of financial abuse". - Julian House Staff 2

"I think there has been a more varied list of perpetrators - not just partners and ex partners". - Southside Staff

"[Domestic abuse] probably has increased in severity, I think certainly the families that we're working with now are far more complex". - Children and Families Prevention Services, Senior Staff

Despite challenges, service providers spoke positively about adaptations to services during lockdown. However, the effectiveness of online services has not been tested

"Of course, with lockdown came some real difficulties around delivery, because everything has to go online. And when we did open up again, there were still kind of restrictions around how much face to face". - Community Safety for B&NES Council

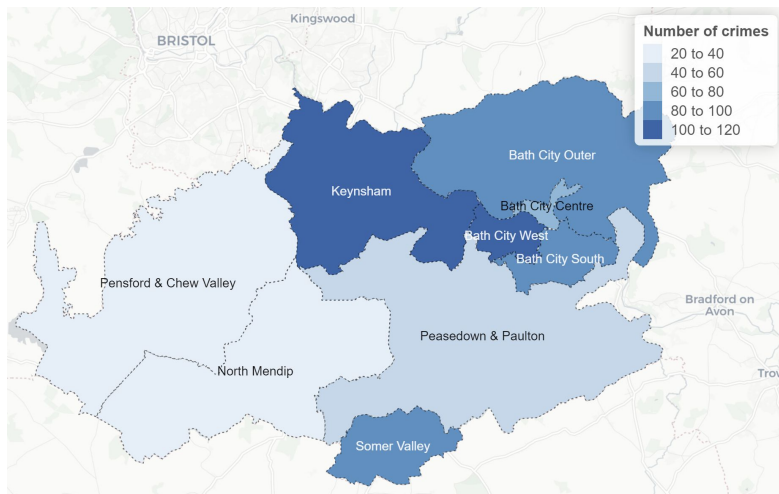
"We've got an outreach policy that has adapted over the different periods of lockdown, where we have had face to face contact, we have supported in court when they were open, but a lot of it has gone online". - Southside Staff

"We're delivering this online, there has been an impact [...] But what's been really heartening is that women have got something positive out of Freedom. And they felt much more empowered, they felt that they've had their voice heard, they've also got better skills". - Julian House Staff 2

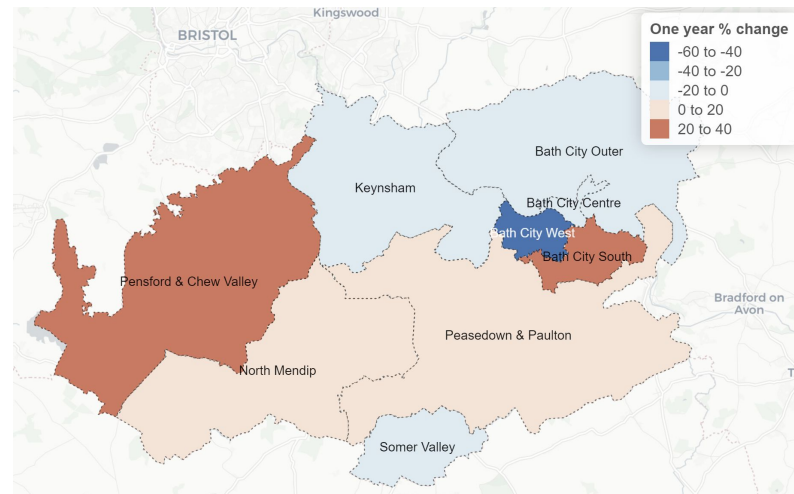
# Domestic abuse incidents continue to be highly concentrated in areas of socioeconomic deprivation. In 2020, some trends in increase continued but areas of high occurrence counterintuitively saw a decrease. This is an area which requires more investigation

During 2020, there was a continued increase in Pensford and Chew Valley and new increase in Bath City South. In contrast, there was a decrease in areas of frequent occurrence like Bath City Centre and Somer Valley

Number of violence/robbery incidents linked to domestic abuse by location, 2020

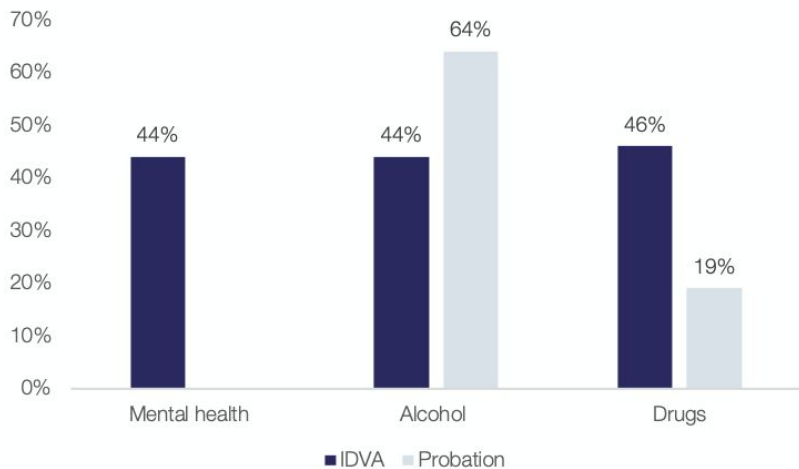


Change (%) in the number of violence/robbery incidents linked to domestic abuse by location, 2019 to 2020

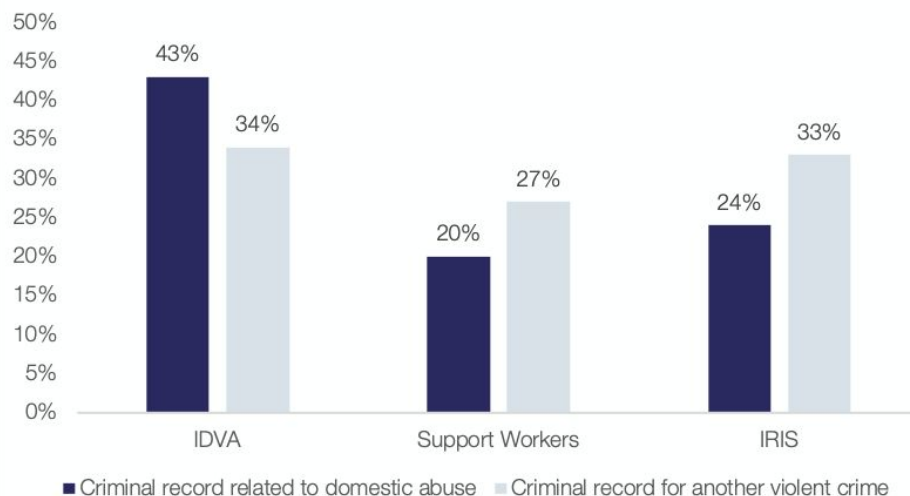


# Although we have no new data, probation and IDVA data showed a high incidence of mental health, alcohol and drugs issues amongst perpetrators of domestic violence, which is only likely to have been exacerbated during the pandemic, given general vulnerability trends

Proportion of domestic abuse perpetrators with mental health, alcohol or drug issues, as recorded by Southside IDVA and Avon & Somerset probation trust (2013)



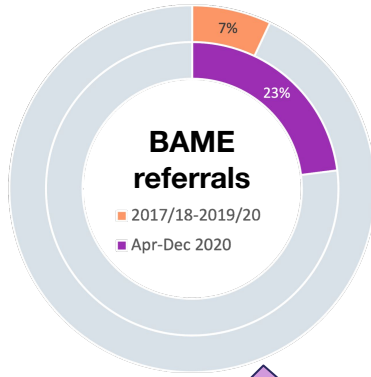
Previous contact with the police, by agency (2015)



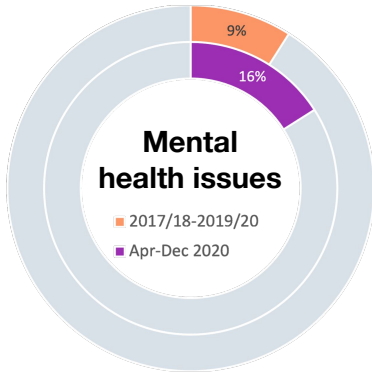
# Domestic abuse victims' needs and characteristics shifted during the pandemic compared to previous years. A greater proportion reported financial and mental health issues, a greater proportion are BME and Southside's risk assessments suggested lower overall risk level



**Mental health issues** as a proportion of referrals also spiked

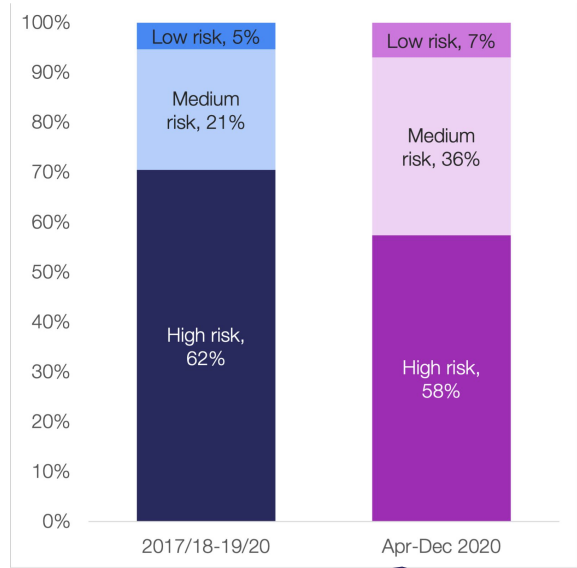


There was a big jump in the proportion and absolute number of IRIS referrals who were **Black, Asian or from another minority ethnic background**



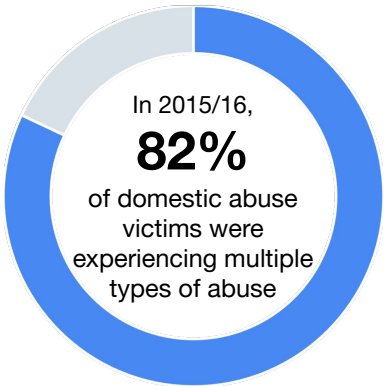
The proportion of IRIS referrals reporting financial issues **more than doubled** during the pandemic, rising from just 5% to 11%

Risk level of Southside clients, 2017/18-2019/20 and April-December 2020



The overall risk profile of Southside's clients shifted downwards during the pandemic. It is not clear why this is the case - it may be the result of a large number of new clients coming to their attention for the first time, or conversely because lockdown prevented the highest risk victims from seeking help

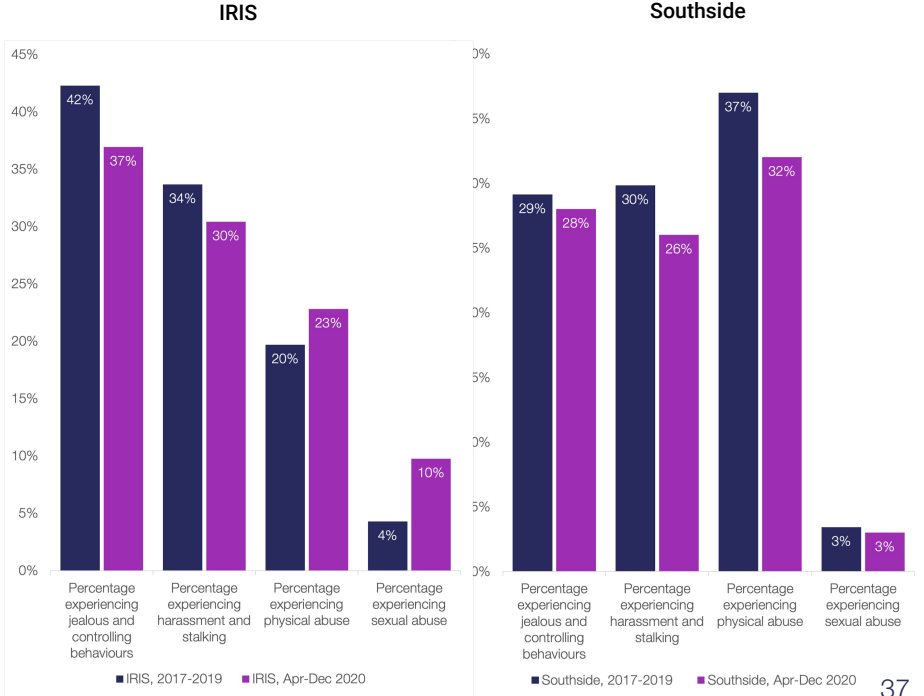
# The majority of domestic abuse victims supported by B&NES experience multiple types of abuse at the point of referral. Jealous and controlling behaviours or physical violence are most prevalent depending on the method of reporting



“We do get a lot more referrals where there are **coercive controlling tactics** being used. And we have noticed that there's an **increase in people with complex needs** who are looking for refuge accommodation”. - Julian House Staff 2

“Perhaps people who didn't know what coercive control was before would **now label behaviors as coercive control**. So I think we have got that spike of violence, but we've also got greater understanding in the population”. - Children and Families Prevention Services, Senior Staff

Types of abuse experienced by domestic abuse victims supported by domestic abuse services (2017 Q1 - 2020 Q4)



Source: B&NES Council JSNA - Domestic Abuse Characteristics; IRIS Monitoring Q1 2017 - Q2 2019; Southside DV Report Q1 2017 - Q2 2019  
 \*IDVA = Independent Domestic Violence Advisers; IRIS = Identification and Referral to Improve Safety Programme



# **Case Study: youth violence and exploitation**

**The Government's serious violence strategy has a strong focus on reducing youth violence. Here we look at what has happened on serious youth violence in 2020**

# County Lines exploitation: County Lines are recognised as more prevalent than before in B&NES and their *modus operandi* is understood to influence violence and weapon carrying locally. Practitioners noted that susceptibility to exploitation is likely to have increased with lockdown

## County lines have become more prevalent in B&NES, coming from London and other metropolitan centres

"We seem to be an area that is quite associated with London [...] the end of the train journey. You do hear about London gangs coming to Bath." - Children and Families Prevention Services, Senior Staff

"In the last 12 months [...] the young people that might have been actually on the streets, dealing the drugs seem to have come from outside of Bath. [...] So there's a bit of a change of model of that county lines operation, whereas before, they really targeted the local kids" - Avon and Somerset Police (Neighbourhood) Staff 1

"It feels like that serious violence linked to county lines group [...] have infiltrated this wider group of kids that would normally not come to police notice." - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

## County lines members from London influence local behaviour, creating a culture of violence and weapon carrying

"There is an influx of of county lines members coming from London [...] and they are more predisposed to carry weapons. [...] So I think some of the weapon carrying has been influenced by outsiders coming into the area" - Avon and Somerset Police (Neighbourhood) Staff 5

"There's lots more violence or peer pressure, carrying of weapons [...] and it is quite a scary world out there for young people at the moment" - Youth Connect South West, Senior Staff 1

"I think a lot of young people that we work with don't feel safe, and consequently, carry a weapon. And that in itself will exacerbate problems that they have". - YOS Staff 1

## In the context of Covid-19, young people's vulnerability to county lines exploitation is increased

"If they've got nothing to to engage them or keep them busy, then it just makes them more vulnerable" - Avon and Somerset Police (VRU) Staff 4

"Vulnerable young people have definitely become more susceptible to getting involved with things like being exploited [...] Because there's [...] fewer opportunities for them to get involved in positive things" - YOS Staff 1

"We've had to assist financially with basic food and toiletries [...] for] a lot more vulnerable young people, who then become vulnerable to all sorts of things [...] in terms of potential criminal exploitation". - Bath College, Senior Staff

This shift towards a culture of violence and weapon carrying has been recognised in other areas where county lines becomes more prevalent.

# Missing Children: Nationally and locally, children who go missing are recognised as being vulnerable to exploitation

## Reports of missing children initially decreased under lockdown as school closures made it harder to identify absences

Practitioners noted **a significant proportion of missing children are repeat cases**, which **could be indicative of ongoing exploitation or risky behaviours**.

Involvement in **county lines** activity was suggested as a factor, but only in a handful of cases.

There was some indication that **online exploitation** could be a factor in missing children cases. However, the role of online exploitation is not fully understood.

The true picture of missing children in B&NES is obscured **because information is not always shared on missing children placed in care homes out of county**.

"We know for a fact from talking to various parents that we're involved with that [...] sometimes those young people are going missing. But because no one is checking, **because they're not being hassled by the school to say, 'where are they?', they're leaving it longer to report them** or just not reporting them". - Children's Services Staff

"We know that people have gone missing and become involved with **risky behaviors** that have **started with communication online**". - Missing Children B&NES Staff

"For many of our young people who are exploited, **parents don't report them as missing**". - Service for Care Outcomes, Senior Staff

"[There are] obviously links in relation to the **children who go missing and links to violence** and serious violence". - Avon and Somerset Police (VRU) Staff 3



# Missing children: However, there are clear gaps in understanding the overall picture relative to missing children and exploitation in B&NES. Recorded data shows that during the pandemic there was a decline in missing reports which may be due to parents not reporting

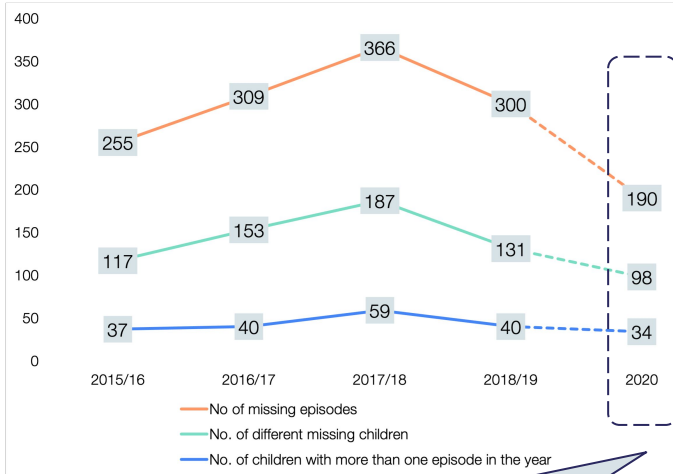
Data on missing children has been challenging to analyse: multiple sources seem to count differently and flag different things. This needs to be better understood in B&NES.

The picture we have collated suggests that while absolute numbers have fallen (according to data shared by the police), the proportion of children going missing more than once has increased during the pandemic.

The reasons for this need to be explored, but Crest research elsewhere has suggested that the most vulnerable children have continued to go missing during the pandemic. **More information on this cohort would help with understanding potential links to exploitation.**

We have observed **data gaps when recording missing episodes**: some reports are no longer being produced, there seems to be a **lack of flag for specific vulnerabilities** (drugs, alcohol) and a high risk of exploitation. Concerns have been expressed by services about inaccuracies in the data.

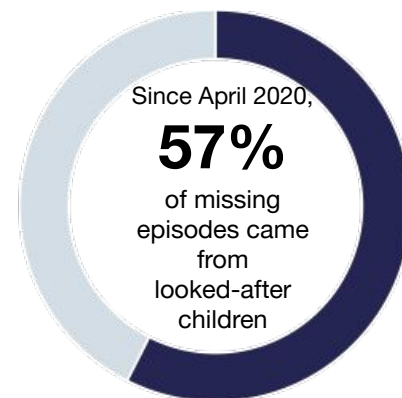
Number of missing children, episodes and children with more than one episode in a year, 2015/16-2020



The 2020 data for this graph comes from the police, but there are some discrepancies with Children's Services data for 2020/21. This records significantly more missing episodes (229) but fewer individual children (87). The periods are different, but this is unlikely to account completely for the differences

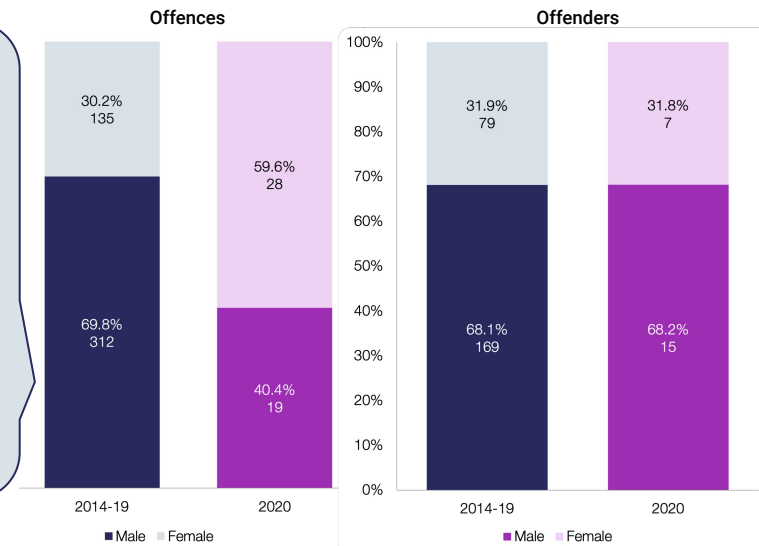
Most recent data shows a concerning amount of children with multiple missing episodes, and a majority of missing children being looked after

Out of 87 children with missing episodes recorded since April 2020, 9 children have gone missing 5 or more times in that period, and 4 have gone missing more than 10 times. All 9 were current or former looked-after children. They exhibit the hallmarks of susceptibility to exploitation.



# Violent offences: In 2020 there has been a change in the proportion of violent offences committed by young females part of the YOS cohort. This seems to mirror a wider trend of females committing more violent offences noticed by practitioners. Young people who have offended were also more likely to commit racially aggravated offences compared to overall offenders

Number and proportion of offenders of selected violent offences in the Youth Offending Service cohort by gender, 2014 - 2019



The increase in **YOS recorded violent offences** committed by young females are **restricted to a small cohort**. However, **practitioner interviews have supported the hypothesis that more females were involved in violent offending behaviour across B&NES**.

“On the out of court crime disposal panel, we’ve seen probably for the first time ever more violent offences from females than males [...]. When you speak to a lot of the young girls around town, it’s all about social media and recording it and doing something exciting”. - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

The sudden appearance of racially aggravated offences is likely linked to the pandemic, and appears to be specific to the youth cohort

There were four racially or religiously aggravated offences among the YOS cohort in 2020, all committed by different offenders. This is the **first time** racially aggravated offences have appeared in the data we looked at (2014-20), despite the total number of offences in 2020 being the lowest on record.

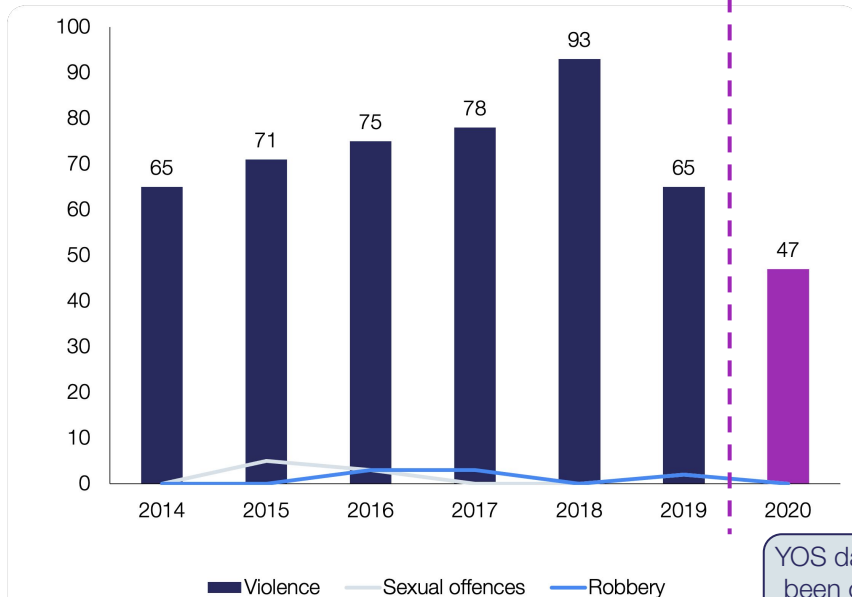
This pattern **is not** repeated in police data covering all ages: racially aggravated offences among this group fell by 5% from 2019 to 2020 - the same as the overall decrease in violence against the person offences.

“I think we’re [...] definitely seeing more hate crimes per day or week or month, and then we would have been 12 months ago.” - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

# Knife crime and violence: Among the YOT cohort, violent offences fell by 30% in 2019 compared to their 2014 level. Both violent offences and knife crime offences fell sharply during the pandemic. However this may be an under representation as YOS only keep records on children they work with, rather than all young people who have offended which are Released Under Investigation

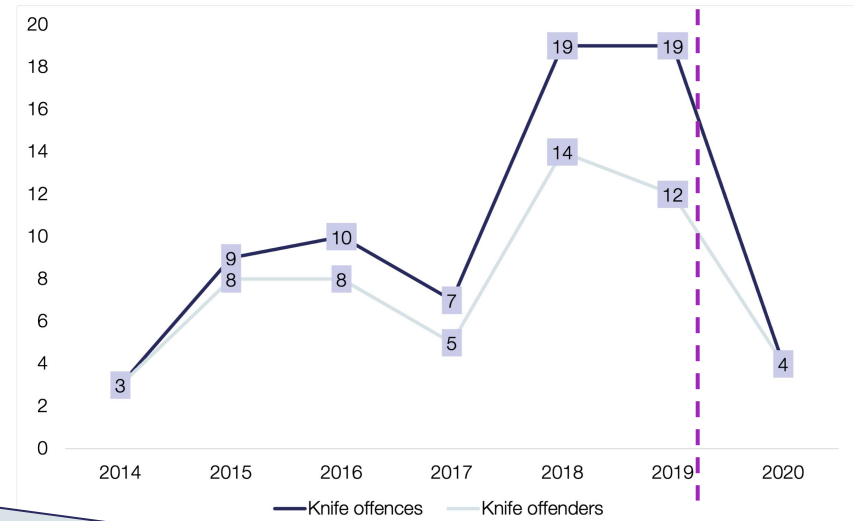
A rise in violent offences over recent years reversed sharply in 2019 with a sharp drop in 2020. This decline is worthy of investigation

Number of offences within B&NES Youth Offending Service cohort by offence type, 2014 - 2020



Knife offences and offenders had been rising sharply pre-pandemic and dropped in 2020

Number of knife offences and knife offenders within B&NES Youth Offending Service cohort by offence type, 2014 - 2020

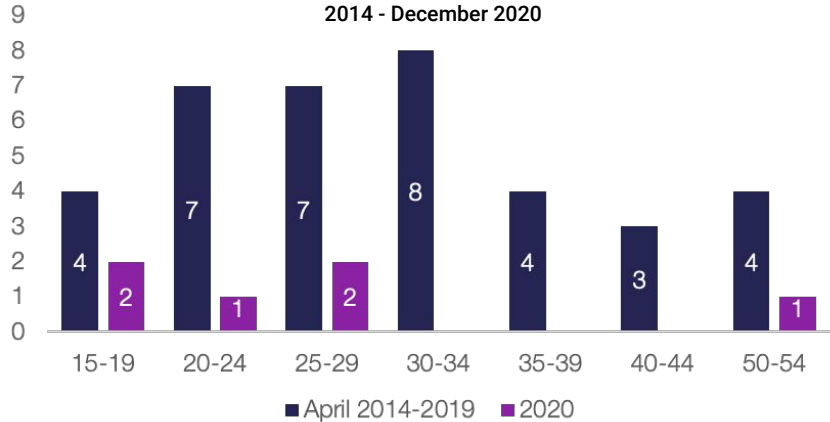


YOS data does not include offences committed by youth if they have not been charged, Thus, it is also possible that the increase use of Release Under Investigation in 2020 has hidden some of the demand

# Knife crime victims: In 2020, although numbers are very low, knife victims appear to be younger. This is coherent with practitioner perspective that the cohort involved in serious violence is getting younger

Victims under the age of 25 accounted for three of the 6 admissions for assault by sharp object over the last year

Number of A&E admissions for assault by sharp object by age bracket of patient, April 2014 - December 2020



“Young people are more involved, more inclined to take part in that kind of violence or to carry a weapon”. - Avon and Somerset Police (Neighbourhood) Staff 5

Practitioners have reported that the cohort involved in serious violence in B&NES is getting younger, compared to our previous report in 2019

Practitioners suggested that **the age bracket for both victims and perpetrators had gone down from the previously identified cohort** - with **under 18s** involved in some of the most serious incidents of violence.

There was some suggestion that the recruitment of younger children into county lines was part of this trend.

“We’ve seen an increasingly lower age spectrum between the young people initiating a lot of the violence [...] 15/16 that age group recruiting younger boys of 13/14 years old”  
- Project 28 Staff



# **Case Study: Vulnerable adults: street population in Bath**

**In 2019, chronic violence among the street population in Bath was identified as an area of particular concern. We look at changes in 2020**

# Interviewees reported a spike in violence in the street community during the lockdown – in particular, incidents of domestic abuse and drug-related violence

Violence associated with the street community predominantly occurs in Bath city centre, as this is the community base

Anecdotally, the **increase in crime within the street community** has been linked to competition over access to drugs, after supply reduced significantly during the pandemic.

Practitioners are aware of **incidents of violence directed at the street community and perpetrated by young people**. It has been suggested that these incidents may relate to drugs networks, or may feature as an 'initiation' process in gang culture.

**Domestic abuse remains prevalent within this cohort.**

"[Violence associated with the homeless community is] **very often drug-related but it's also quite often domestic-related as well**". - Avon and Somerset Police (VRU) Staff 3

"When lockdown started, we **very rapidly became aware of an increase of crime within the community**. And it was community members turning on one another, in relation to **getting hold of drugs, and getting hold of scripts, because the supply of drugs in the area dropped quite significantly**". - Julian House Staff 3

"We have heard of **young people attacking and intimidating homeless people** [...] It's either young people that are intimidating homeless people or dealing to homeless people, and then threatening them because they're easy targets as well". - Project 28 Staff

"If you're a **female that's on the street, you're in a very vulnerable situation** [...] if you end up with a bloke that is abusive, they will stop you from getting into a safe location and keep you isolated, and **it's very rare for the females to then disclose to us within the street community**". - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

"[The Homeless Community] are very vulnerable. [...] Those that have substance abuse issues are **usually more self destructive than destructive towards other people**". - Stand Against Violence, Senior Staff

## ... however, the move to house the street community during the pandemic may lead to a decrease in vulnerability in the long term, and was generally praised by practitioners and identified as a possible opportunity for the long term

"Initially [...] **almost everyone was provided with kind of single unit accommodation** in shared accommodation, [...] and they worked really well. **It's really fantastic**". - Public Health, B&NES Council, Senior Staff 1

"It's been **rare over the last eight or nine months to see perhaps more than a couple of people out on the street**". - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

"A few people have really adapted well to having this extra accommodation. Now, **some of our long term offenders in the street community have changed their ways** quite a bit. And a few people that have been very violent to women in the past have actually **addressed some of their addictions and problems and, and living a more structured life**". - Avon and Somerset Police Staff 2

"The impact of putting people into **self contained flats during Covid has been fantastic, because people are coping**". - Julian House Staff 3

### There has been widespread praise for the government's move to house the street community during the pandemic

Service providers stressed the difficulties of effectively supporting the street community in **small, shared and overcrowded accommodation**.

Gaps in service provision remain around space for clients. Practitioners stated that **self-contained flats have a positive impact** for clients working through trauma.

It was noted, however, that the low level of reporting of domestic abuse in this population would be likely to persist once they were housed, making **violence within the community less visible but still present**.



# **Case study: demand for drugs**

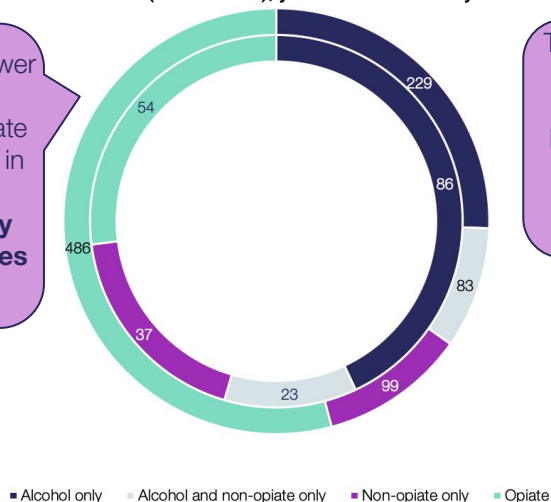
**Drug misuse and the impact of drugs are key drivers of violence. We note changes observed in 2020**



# Drug users in B&NES continue to be especially complex through 2020. For example, the proportion of heroin users injecting remains above the national average. Similarly, the proportions of young users in treatment needing support with harder drugs beyond cannabis are above national averages

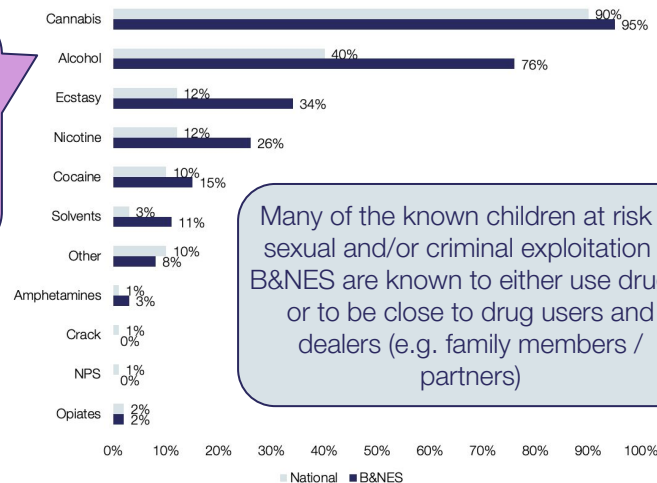
Drug needs of adults in treatment (NDTMS), new presentations to treatment (inner circle) and all in treatment (outer circle), year to 29th January 2021

Proportionately fewer adults were in treatment for opiate use in 2020 than in 2019, and **proportionately more non-opiates (likely crack)**



The proportion of youths in treatment with **cannabis and alcohol needs increased** between 2019 and 2020, whilst cocaine and solvent needs decreased

Drug needs of youths in treatment (Project 28), total (2020)

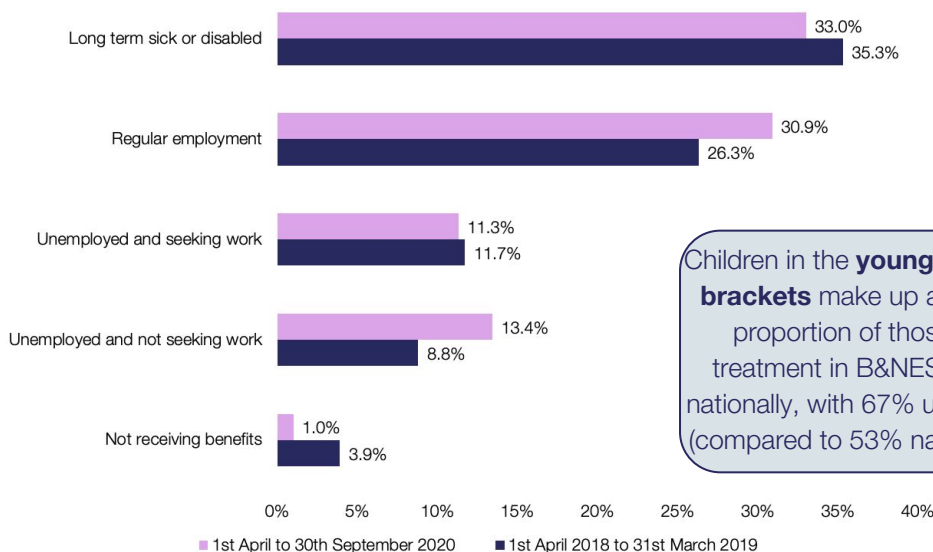


Many of the known children at risk of sexual and/or criminal exploitation in B&NES are known to either use drugs, or to be close to drug users and dealers (e.g. family members / partners)

“My of knowledge has been the sort of wider group of people who use **heroin and crack**. And that’s been more where I get reports, at least anecdotally, of **violence being perpetrated and actually rising violence**, where **you’ve got an intersection of county lines drug dealing**, trying to get a grip within the B&NES area, especially in Bath City Centre, and then **issues with supply that the first lockdown brought around**. So heroin was in greater demand, which obviously causes then associated violence as people either seek to control who’s supplying it or seek to get hold of supplies. And we’re aware, you know, we were made aware of people being robbed, certain houses being targeted, certain people being targeted”. - DHI Senior Staff

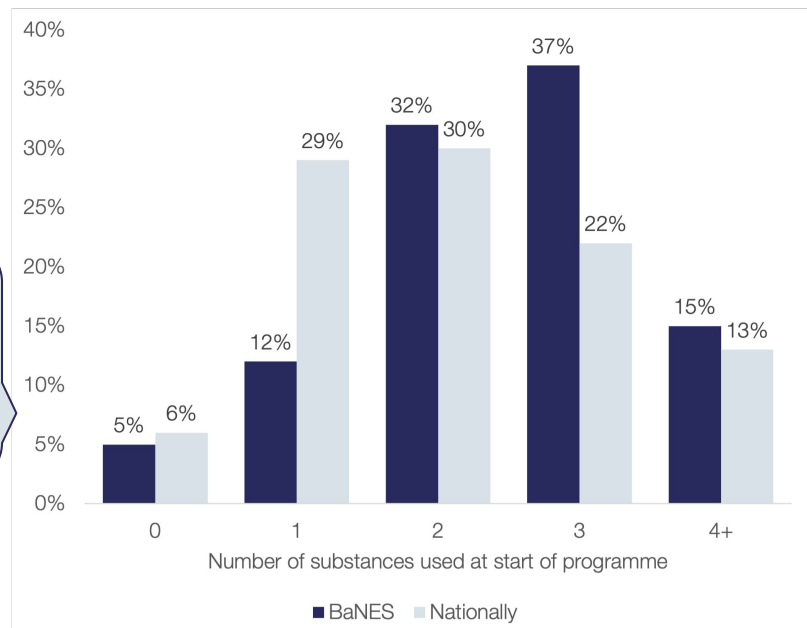
# 2020: the profile of adults in treatment is similar to 2019. A high proportion of adults in drug treatment are disabled or long term sick, and poly substance use is common among young people undergoing drug treatment. This suggests particularly high levels of vulnerability

Proportion of adults undergoing drug treatment in different types of employment in B&NES, 2018/19 and Apr-Sep 2020



Children in the **youngest age brackets** make up a larger proportion of those in treatment in B&NES than nationally, with 67% under 16 (compared to 53% nationally)

Proportion of young people undergoing drug treatment using multiple substances in B&NES and nationally, Q2 2020/21





## **4. The impact of Covid-19 on vulnerability and violence**

# Covid-19 and lockdown measures have exacerbated the risks of vulnerability and increased susceptibility to exploitation and violence

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There is growing **evidence** that the **pandemic is harming the health, social and material well-being of many children**, with the poorest and most vulnerable hardest hit. School closures, social distancing and confinement increase the risk of exposure to domestic violence, increase anxiety and stress, and reduce access to vital family and care services. Widespread digitalisation mitigates the education loss caused by school-closures, but the **poorest children are least likely to live in good home-learning environments with internet connection**. Furthermore, increased unsupervised online internet use has magnified issues around **exploitation and cyber-bullying**.

B&NES comparative affluence means it is likely to be less affected. However, **pockets of deprivation and poverty and small groups of children and families with complex needs** have elevated levels of vulnerability and risks. Interview highlighted concerns around:

- Children and families under pressure
- Mental health in families and young people
- Those missing education

**Practitioners also expressed concerns that, in the past year, opportunities for early intervention were missed - potentially leading to more complex vulnerabilities and violent behaviours in the future.**

# Children in families under pressure: practitioners are concerned about the increased stress placed on already vulnerable families which may increase abuse and violence towards children

Practitioners are concerned that familial environments are degrading significantly for young people

“There’s been an **increase in levels of alcohol consumption at home** [...] and that’s naturally going to **lead to more abusive environments**. There are a lot of people that are trapped at home with their abusers that aren’t able to report or get out because of fear of retribution”. - Stand Against Violence, Senior Staff

“Being in lockdown, children not going to school, home schooling, furloughing, **families being together under stress with reduced financial capacity**, mental health issues increasing or being exacerbated - **all of that is on top of what we reported last year**”. - Southside Staff

Without referrals from schools and GPs, local authorities, it is harder for them to protect children

According to Amanda Spielman (the Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills), **the ‘toxic mix’ of Covid-related poverty, isolation and mental ill-health led to a 20% rise in serious harm suffered by infants** —

“[School closures have put] **massive pressure on families**, and obviously will have a knock on effect for children who are living at home around the **general stress and impact of lockdown**, but also where there are abusive and corrosive relationships”. - Southside Staff

Nationally, social care referrals fell by almost a fifth in the first lockdown, meaning fewer children at risk were identified and provided with support

In a recent survey of social workers carried out by Community Care, **92% reported greater levels of need among service users** during the pandemic. Respondents were most concerned about the mental health impact on young people and their parents and carers - at a time when access to mental health services was severely limited.

“We had a **real dip in referral rates coming into children’s social care during the first pandemic**. [...] We can see a direct correlation to children not being visible when they’re not at school”. - Service for Care Outcomes, Senior Staff

# Mental ill-health has been identified as significant driver of vulnerability and violence: mental health problems among families and young people are understood to be increasing due to the pandemic

Mental health treatment data\* shows that demand in B&NES has been increasing since 2014, and it was widely acknowledged by practitioners that the pandemic has exacerbated existing mental health vulnerabilities

The [UK Household Longitudinal Study shows](#) that there was an **increase in clinically significant mental distress** over the first month of lockdown, especially among **16-24 year olds** and the **parents/carers of young children**.

“What we're seeing is [...] lots more **people using drugs and specifically alcohol as a way of coping** in the current situation. They will feel extra stress, **they're feeling more anxious, they're feeling depressed**”. - DHI, Senior Staff

“What we've seen through Covid is the **mental health of parents**. So some **increased substance misuse, mental health needs**, you know, being exacerbated for parents, which then have a kind of knock on for young people. **Home life becomes even more unstable**, perhaps”. - Service for Care Outcomes, Senior Staff

"It's a very **unprecedented** thing, this pandemic, which I think has just **exacerbated everything else**, but particularly that sense of **isolation**". - Senior Staff, Public Health

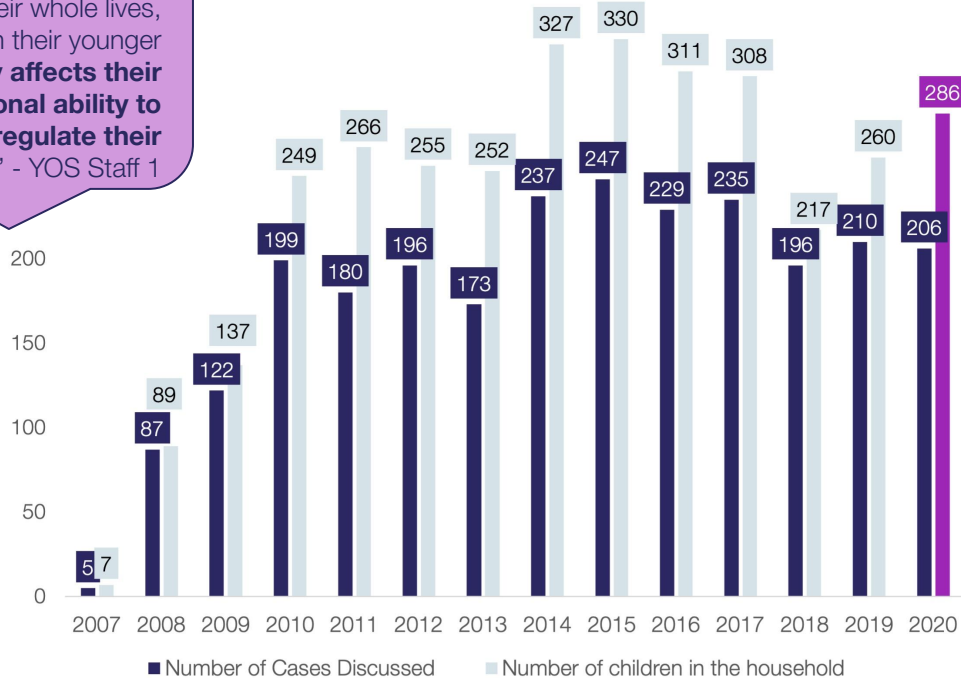
The Mental Health Foundation has carried out eight 'waves' of a survey to assess people's mental health throughout the pandemic, with the most recent in late November. The survey responses suggest that **young people are struggling more now than they were early in the pandemic: 64% reported that they were coping well with the restrictions in April, but this had sunk to 49% by November.**

# Family violence: exposure to domestic abuse is known to increase the risk of a child being affected by violence later on. It is usual in B&NES for domestic abuse cases to involve children but MARAC cases have involved more children per case in 2020 than in 2019. If even more cases are hidden due to schools and other services not picking up the signs, we can expect to see longer term damage

“The population of kids that we work with have been **massively affected by domestic abuse** [...], really, very much so for their whole lives, you know, particularly often their younger childhood which [...] **massively affects their development and emotional ability to develop relationships, regulate their emotions**” - YOS Staff 1

MARAC data shows that a high number of children were involved in domestic abuse cases (1.3 children per cases) compared to 1.2 in 2019.

Number of MARAC cases in B&NES (2007 to 2020)



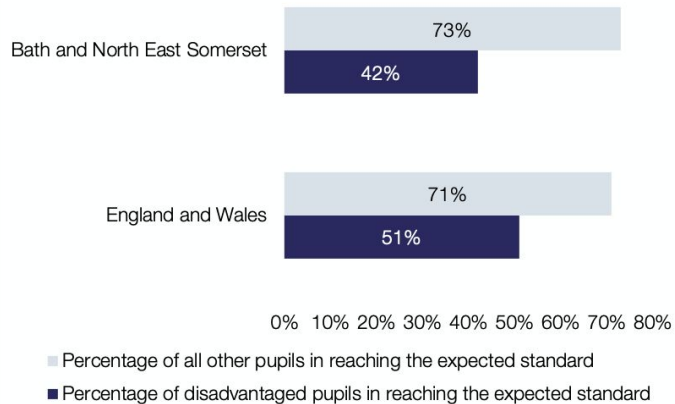
Other services in B&NES had also previously reported high levels of children involved in cases: 67% in Southside IDVA services, 75% with Support Workers Service cases and 57% of Iris cases (see previous report)

“The **long term impacts of a child witnessing domestic abuse are immense**. We consider that any child growing up in a household where there's domestic abuse taking place, whether they physically see it or not, they are experiencing, **they are being affected by what's going on.**” - Julian House Staff 2

# Children missing education: although educational attainment overall in B&NES is above the national average, with high levels of attendance even during the pandemic, inequalities have likely been exacerbated for vulnerable learners

There is a pre-existing attainment gap for vulnerable children in B&NES. This may have been exacerbated as a national learning gap opened up in the first lockdown - with some groups devoting significantly less time to schoolwork at home

Attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and maths by disadvantaged pupils in state funded schools in B&NES and England and Wales (2018)



Although in B&NES 85% of pupils with a social worker attended when schools were open to all pupils, **interviewees raised concerns around school attendance by vulnerable pupils when schools were closed.**

**We know that nationally, only 41% of pupils with a social worker were in school during the most recent lockdown (21/1/21), compared to 75% when schools were open to all pupils (16/12/20).**

Amongst other links between education and violence, analysis by the Children's Commissioner revealed that **children in gangs were 37% more likely to be missing/absent from school** than other children who offend, so developing a better understanding of children missing school during Covid-19 is key to **prevent the storing up of susceptibility to violence**.

"I think I think the lockdown has had, you know, **a much worse impact on vulnerable children than it has sort of more stable kids** [...]. They've got technology at home to do home learning, they've got [...] more of a kind of ability to engage with the education system at the best of times". - YOS Staff 1



# Children missing education: In B&NES interviewees highlighted that online learning could not always be accessed by young people with existing vulnerabilities, so they missed out on education

Practitioners were clear that school closures during lockdown have disadvantaged young people with existing vulnerabilities

Some young people have found it difficult to engage with online courses. **School closures have highlighted the impact of digital poverty on attainment.**

There is concern that as young people fall behind with their education, **they become disillusioned** and may be **involved in dangerous or criminal activities**. This is particularly **concerning given the previous attainment gap identified between disadvantaged and all pupils.**

Remote learning also impacts on positive relationships. Young people may feel isolated, and **safeguarding issues are harder to identify.**

**“School sometimes was an escape from home**, whether it had been abuse, mental health or substance misuse going on, there was a break, and **now seemed to be no healthy break at all.** [...] So I think, in that sense, **mental health escalated as education declined for them**”. - Project 28 Staff

“A concern in the pandemic has been that colleges in particular are offering much more **part time programs and online learning** [...] that's made it much more difficult to keep young people involved in education. **And we know that education is a massive factor for desistance**”. - YOS Staff 2

**“As they fall behind they'll become more disillusioned with education,** and that's when they tend to fall in with the wrong crowd and, and **go down the more destructive path**”. - Stand Against Violence, Senior Staff



## **5. How services are responding**

# Access to services has been a challenge, which not only means that the true depth of demand is hard to judge, but also that there may have been lost opportunities for early intervention

## Practitioners acknowledged difficulties in identifying need during the pandemic, particularly with school closures and online service provision

“We had a real dip in referral rates coming into children’s social care during the first pandemic. [...] We can see a direct correlation to children not being visible when they’re not at school”. - Service for Care Outcomes, Senior Staff

“There definitely are teenagers in our area that regularly are involved in violence [...] They’re involved in substance use, particularly substance dealing, and most of it goes unreported and unnoticed [...] And so I guess it’s about identifying those cohorts, which we’re trying to do within the the work of the Serious Violence Reduction Unit”. - Youth Connect South West, Staff 2

“Some children are even more vulnerable than they were before, because they’re not being seen”. - YOS Staff 1

## Needs that have not been addressed are building up, and may lead to more complex issues in the long term

“I don’t know if it’ll be a crisis [...] but I think there’ll be people who have been quite traumatised by a long term feeling of risk, personal risk and personal threat to their well being”. - Pubic Health, B&NES Council, Senior Staff 2

“I think the economic impact [of the pandemic] is having a massive social and domestic impact over time, we don’t even know the start of it really - how that’s going to manifest itself into potential domestic violence, neglect, homelessness”. - Bath College, Senior Staff

“If we’re going to change the outcomes for future young people, you know, when they become the adults, we need to be starting earlier, rather than leaving it until these behaviors are really very much entrenched [...], you need to putting that support into place through schools, and through those networks, rather than waiting until things are just in a really bad place”. - Julian House Staff 2

Moving forward, services must do more to focus on clients at medium-level risk, before needs escalate. Early intervention programmes can help to prevent violent and risky behaviours and are needed now more than ever to mitigate the multiple and long term impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable cohorts.

# Covid-19 has posed obvious challenges to services in B&NES which have adapted to new modes of interaction. Despite the lack of face to face contact, this has yielded benefits both for services and service users worth considering in the long term

## Services adapted swiftly to offer remote support and worked to identify high-risk clients for in-person provision

In some cases, online and phone consultations freed up resources, allowing practitioners to take on a bigger caseload. Several practitioners referenced improved collaboration and streamlined services across B&NES.

“It has taken quite a bit of development to ensure that the program is able to run successfully online. [...] So it's been a process of kind of deliver, evaluate, deliver, evaluate what worked”. - Julian House Staff 2

“In some ways it's streamlined our offer of support, because in order to meet the support needs of people who are vulnerable, we kind of brought everything together in quite a good way”. - Public Health, B&NES Council, Senior Staff 2

“There have been improvements in terms of multi agency working anyway, we have a much better system, much better communications pathway with [...] children's social care [...] over the period”. - Southside Staff

## Practitioners identified the positives and negatives of remote services for their clients

While some clients prefer the flexibility of remote provision, there is a risk that complex vulnerabilities are missed when provision is not delivered in person.

“We've just adapted [...] and where we have met people face to face we've done, you know, walks and dog walks [...] but it's where you need to do work with children and young people and you're not getting into houses, you're not seeing the whole picture”. - Southside Staff

“With some of the high risk ones, there is potential to sort of do that engagement online, [...] it suits them, you know, it suits their their lifestyles. [...] It's about having the right technology and the right person”. - Avon and Somerset Police (VRU) Staff 3

Where adaptations have resulted in more efficient and streamlined services, practitioners are encouraged to carry learning forward. Success with online programmes may help shape future outreach. Collaborative patterns of working and improved communication networks are a positive outcome of service management during the pandemic.

# Gaps in provision have been identified around the central location of services, alternative and trauma-informed education, and preventative programmes for perpetrators

## Centralised services located in Bath or Bristol can be difficult for clients to access

"We've got this funny old area that's not got a massive population, but it's all spread out [...]. How do you get, with limited resources, out into those areas? [...] Also our court system - more and more victims of domestic abuse are having to go to Bristol".  
- Community Safety for B&NES Council

"A lot of the young people that possibly come within your scope [...] because school hasn't been right for them to do things like Construction Skills, or motor vehicle skills, [...] have to go to Bristol [...] And I think I don't think it's right that young people should have to travel to another area to access that sort of provision". - YOS Staff 2

## Trauma-informed, alternative provision is needed for those who can't manage in mainstream educational settings

"There are more problems than we acknowledged that people have seated in early trauma". - Public Health, B&NES Council, Senior Staff 2

"I'd like to see skills based training for young people who aren't ready for an apprenticeship [...] much more flexible and accessible for young people who find it hard to manage college and college environments. And it's something we've been asking for for a long time". - YOS Staff 2

"If there were higher quality, alternative educational provision for children who couldn't manage in a mainstream environment, or had some kind of trauma informed, therapeutic approach, then I think we'd solve [...] a lot of problems". - YOS Staff 1

## Gaps in preventative and restorative services for perpetrators were referenced by several practitioners

"There is a gap around services for domestic abuse perpetrators [...]. Given the level and nature of the offending, I don't think there is sufficient provision". - Young People's Prevention Service, Senior Staff

"We don't have enough perpetrator programs, whether male or female, you know, and support for male victims is difficult because they're few and far between". - Children and Families Prevention Services, B&NES Council, Senior Staff

"If there was more funding, we could [...] work with people earlier on to have that preventative approach. [...] If we didn't have perpetrators, we wouldn't have victims". - Community Safety for B&NES Council

Existing gaps in service provision in B&NES are exposed by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, where need is enhanced among vulnerable cohorts. These gaps must be addressed to ensure that provision in B&NES is accessible, tailored and proactive.



# **Conclusion and lessons learnt**

## Key conclusions in context

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- **The pandemic has caused levels of violence to drop temporarily but they are back on an upwards trend.** There is no indication that the long term increase in serious and violent offending will not continue
- We can expect the continued **expansion and adaptation of county lines drug dealing and the exploitation that is inherent in it**
- The pandemic has exacerbated many forms of vulnerability and has disproportionately affected those in need. We can expect **a growing focus on violence and vulnerability** in violence reduction efforts going forward
- The **criminal justice system's backlogs and procedural challenges** (like Release Under Investigation) is likely to impact the experience and intervention in offenders' lives
- **Opportunity for early identification and intervention will have been lost** for many vulnerable and at risk children and young adults, so we recommend that a key focus for the forthcoming year be dedicated to identifying relevant interventions to prevent a long term increase in serious violence.

## This updated problem profile (2020) has found the following changes in B&NES – a combination of long term trends and the significant impact of Covid-19 (2/2)

### Offending patterns

In line with national trends, all offending and **serious violence decreased at the beginning of the pandemic but recovered to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2020**. Serious violence and offending are expected to continue to rise in the future, according to local and national long term trends.

**There has been a circumstantial decrease in night-time economy violence, but it has been reported that ‘gang’ and organised violence have become more prevalent.** These incidents can occur during the daytime and involve weapons.

Contrary to nation-wide expectations, **the data on Domestic Abuse suggests only a small increase in volume** (but this may be due to challenges in reporting). However there has been an increase in reporting by BAME victims and mental health and other needs have intensified. Finally, **violence within the street population has anecdotally increased in 2020**.

### Cohorts

In contrast to our previous report, our research suggests that the cohort of **offenders involved in serious and violent crime are getting younger (under 24)**. Young people who have offended are **more challenging to identify** during the pandemic, due to a lack of regular service contact (like school closures) and reverse-pressure demand management leading to a high use of Release Under Investigation by the police, slowing their interaction with youth offending services.

One significant change has been the **perceived increase in the involvement of young females in violent offending**.



# This updated problem profile (2020) has found the following changes in B&NES – a combination of long term trends and the significant impact of Covid-19 (2/2)

## Drivers

The pandemic has had a **general exacerbating effect on all drivers of serious violence and has increased most forms of vulnerability**. This is particularly true for **financial need and mental health**. If these are not addressed, they are likely to increase involvement in violence and offending in the future.

Furthermore, **opportunities for early intervention may have been lost** as it has been harder to identify potential victims, perpetrators and people in need, during Covid-19. It has also been acknowledged that initiating new relationships remotely between services and clients can be challenging.

There has also been an identified **shift in drug market *modus operandi* and gang behaviour**: the increased presence of County Lines seems to have changed the local violence culture and increased weapon carrying and organised gang violence. This phenomenon has been observed in other parts of the country when County Lines increase.

## Services

Access to services has been challenging and the flow of information has been reduced because of the lack of face to face interaction. A swift **transition to digital services has had some positive impacts** but has placed **some limitations on service delivery**.

Practitioners have also identified **gaps in services**: services are **geographically concentrated in Bath City Centre** and can be hard to access for more rural populations. There was also a lack of **trauma informed and alternative educational provision** for struggling young people. A lack of **domestic abuse perpetrator services** was also identified.

## Lessons from the field to consider going forward (1/2)

### The impact of county lines on the culture of violence and weapon carrying in B&NES should be explored

A shift in the county lines model, where the main runners travel into B&NES from major cities, **is likely to have instilled a culture of violence and weapon carrying in the area**. It is important to recognise this shift in model and its impact on violent behaviours, especially in the context of **young people's increased vulnerability** during the pandemic. Significantly, this pattern has been observed in other parts of the country.

Consideration must also be given to **the significant increase in violent offences committed by young females** in the past year in relation to this shift. Interviews have suggested **social media as a key driver of violence in this cohort**.

### Domestic abuse provision should reflect the changing presentation of need - are services working?

The **increased complexity and severity of domestic abuse cases**, particularly those involving **coercion and financial abuse**, must be explored both within and beyond the context of the pandemic. It is **unclear** whether the changing presentation of need relates to improved awareness of controlling tactics or higher rates of incidence.

Practitioners spoke **positively about adaptations of services during lockdown**. However, **the true impact of underreporting and reduced access to services is not yet known**. It is important to ask how services can be sure they are meeting needs, and how unmet needs will manifest in the long term.

## Lessons from the field to consider going forward (2/2)

### Special attention should be paid to vulnerable cohorts made less visible during the pandemic

While there have been some advantages to remote provision during the pandemic, practitioners were clear that **vulnerabilities are likely to have been missed in the absence of face-to-face contact.**

**Missing children** represent a cohort that is particularly vulnerable to oversight since **the closure of schools.** There have been changes in the relationship between missing children and exploitation elsewhere during lockdown, but **this needs to be better understood in B&NES.**

Importantly, **the dangers of online exploitation,** recognised to have **increased nationally during the pandemic,** require further exploration in B&NES.

Critically, if vulnerabilities are not identified, **opportunities for early intervention are missed leading to greater harm in the long term.**

### Gaps in services need to be addressed, building on improved collaboration during the pandemic

Practitioners were able to identify **several key gaps in services** related to the **geography** of current provision with services harder to access in rural areas, **the lack of trauma informed and alternative educational settings** and the need for **more preventative and restorative domestic abuse perpetrator programmes.** Addressing these gaps will enable B&NES to offer services appropriate to need.

It is recommended that **constructive digital adaptations implemented** during lockdown, such as improved communication and streamlined services, **are carried forward as services develop.**

# Thank you

For more information please contact  
[sarah.kincaid@crestadvisory.com](mailto:sarah.kincaid@crestadvisory.com) or  
[callyane.desroches@crestadvisory.com](mailto:callyane.desroches@crestadvisory.com)

[www.crestadvisory.com](http://www.crestadvisory.com)

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