



**THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AND
OTHER SOCIAL HARMS ON YOUNG
PEOPLE IN GLASGOW:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

¹Elina Joy

¹College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence has many negative consequences on a young person's life and can take many forms including so called youth violence, domestic abuse and other forms of gender based violence, sexual abuse and bullying. The consequences of violence for young people are multi-faceted. It can have adverse effects on various aspects of their lives including mental health, behaviour, socio-economic position, physical illness, and cognitive capacity, these factors in turn can alter the life trajectory^[1].

It is well-documented that exposure to violence can increase the likelihood of developing major non-communicable diseases (NCDs): cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic lung disease. It is also associated with health-risk behaviours linked to each of these NCDs such as: tobacco use, high alcohol consumption, obesity, and physical inactivity^[2]. Furthermore, research conducted by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supports the link between violence and health-risk behaviours as it found that youth experiencing three or more types of violence had a higher prevalence of displaying health-risk behaviours^[3]. While chronic health conditions pose a high disease management burden on those affected by it, other future manifestations of exposure to violence can be seen through the development of mental health disorders such as: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression.

The recent COVID pandemic this could have had an impact on violence. Measures to manage COVID-19 involved lockdown and temporary suspension of many services such as: schools, youth clubs, and young person's helplines. Schools and leisure clubs are safe spaces where children can confidentially confide in a youth worker about matters regarding maltreatment and abuse. It is well-recognised that schools are crucial in reporting signs of abuse and play an important role in safeguarding children against violence^[4]. Data from the National Society for the Prevention and Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) show that more than 5000 notifications were made via helplines in the

UK from adults concerned about child safety and well-being within a month of the first COVID lockdown in March 2020. Although this does not capture whether there was a net increase in violence, it highlights the importance of safe spaces for young people while also shedding light on the potential benefits of helpline services in times of crisis when normal mechanisms such as schools and youth clubs were not operational^[4].

According to the World Health Organisation youth violence refers to violence among young people aged 10-29 years^[5]. It is a critical public health issue, remaining one of the leading causes of mortality among youths^[5]. Around 200,000 homicides occur among youth each year which accounts for 42% of all homicides worldwide^[5]. In Scotland in 2020, figures have shown 38.5 people per 100,000 have been injured with a sharp object ^[6]. In the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2018/19, it emerged that individuals aged 16-24 are most likely to be affected by violence^[7]. Furthermore, according to the Community Initiative Violence Reduction Unit (CIRV), in the US, the average age of those engaging in gang-related crimes is 32 while in Glasgow the demographic is significantly younger with an average of 16 ^[8]. As such, it is necessary to adopt specific measures to address and mitigate the adverse effects of violence on young people. Although exposure to violence has significant negative consequences for all ages, at a young age it can have profound detrimental effects on early brain development^[9].

Glasgow has a prolonged history of gang violence and knife crime. It had the highest number of gangs in the 1960s and recorded the highest homicide rates in western Europe in the 1980s, predominantly affecting men aged 20-24.^[10] Until 2006, the homicides rates in Scotland remained high and then it dropped off, this could have been because of the implementation of a violence prevention programme (CIRV) in 2005 which has resulted in a substantial decline in convictions related to violence^[10,11] ^[10]. The landscape of violence in Glasgow is transitioning due to increased engagement in the underground drug market and commercialised crime^[10]. ^[11] Additionally, recent figures illustrate an opioid-related epidemic in Glasgow, recording the highest number of deaths in Europe ^[10]. Youth

violence is widespread in Glasgow, and has an extensive association with men, it is highly correlated with socio-economically deprived areas^[10].

Youth violence has a significant economic burden especially in deprived areas through increased health expenditure, loss of productivity, and decreased property value^[12]. In England and Wales, the socio-economic costs of serious youth violence was £1.3 billion in the 2018/19 period, encompassing criminal justice costs, health-care costs, and victim-service costs^[13]. Individual-based factors that influence involvement in youth violence include mental health disorders, substance abuse, anti-social attitudes, impulsivity, history of victimisation, and poor school performance but are not confined to these^[14].

The prevalence and magnitude of violence can vary substantially worldwide, so studying youth violence in relation to a specific area is important. Comparing the difference in different geographic locations can highlight the impact of socio-cultural context on violence^[9]. It's essential to acknowledge the socio-cultural factors within which violence occurs and the antecedents of violence to design effective prevention programmes. As well as this, engagement of youth voices is very important when designing robust prevention programmes. Youth violence prevention engaged (YVPE) youths have expressed that they be partners in decision-making towards positive changes in their communities^[15]. We must acknowledge and involve young people at high-risk of violence as they can provide valuable information on what would be an acceptable programme for them^[15]

Prevention programmes can be very effective when designed and implemented efficiently. An appropriate programme should be responsive to young person's needs while collaborating with them in the shared decision-making when it comes to suitable interventions^[16]. The recruitment of appropriate practitioners who are well-equipped to facilitate discussions is crucial to any programme^[16]. Violence prevention levels can be classified into: Primary, secondary and, tertiary. Primary prevention refers to tactics that aim to prevent violence before it even occurs; secondary refers to approaches aiming to mitigate the immediate effects of violence including hospital care and

emergency services; tertiary tactics encompasses a holistic approach through rehabilitation programmes, trauma-related mental health interventions, and social reintegration^[7]. Primary interventions are coined cost-effective and can take on the form of school-based prevention programmes, these can subsequently lessen consequences and improve educational outcomes¹⁶.

AIM OF STUDY

This study utilised qualitative methodology through semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the impact of violence on young people and their communities from their perspectives. It also aims to collate information on social harms such as alcohol and substance abuse. Impact of COVID on violence will also be looked at.

METHODS

SUBJECTS & DATA COLLECTION

This study utilised semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the impact of violence on young people and their communities from their perspectives. Qualitative methodology allows for the collation and analysis of non-numerical data which in this case includes the experiences and beliefs surrounding violence to assess the impact it has on young people and their communities. This methodology was useful in providing contextual and comprehensive information on the research question. Furthermore, youth violence is a prevalent issue and this study focused on gaining perspective from young people on solutions that they believe would be effective in combating it.

Study participants included 5 young people of ages 18-22 from two youth centres in Glasgow. Eligible participants were recruited through two youth centre leads via information leaflet which was distributed to youth centres. Project lead from Medics Against Violence aided in the recruitment of various youth centres. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants, as eligible young people who were present at youth centre were asked if they were interested in partaking in the study. Informed consent was obtained from eligible participants and interviews were conducted in March 2023.

MEASUREMENT & DATA ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data saturation was reached for some of the major themes that emerged. The interviews were aided by a topic guide. Questions were open-ended wherever possible to enable participants to give well-rounded and comprehensive answers. Follow-up questions were utilised to fully draw out any relevant themes discussed by participants, ensuring they were discussed in-depth. Interviews were conducted at a vacant room in the youth centre.

The interviews lasted 10- 20 minutes, they were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. The transcriptions were anonymised to ensure confidentiality. The median duration of the interview time was 20 minutes with the range being 11 to 24 minutes.

Participants were not contacted after the interview for any further input.

Thematic analysis^[17] was utilised, this enables the researcher to identify and collate themes. It is useful in identifying relationships between themes explored by different participants and helps in understanding possible outcomes from the research question. An inductive approach was taken in coding the data, the data was reviewed independently by two individuals (EJ and CG) to identify major themes and sub-themes. Comparison of the results allowed for an accurate final list of themes to be produced. Quotes were extracted from the data to illustrate each theme cohesively. All themes identified were named and had accompanying quotes to illustrate them.

ETHICAL STATEMENT:

Ethical approval was obtained from University of Glasgow MVLS College Ethics Committee.

RESULTS

Interviews lasted 10-20 minutes and the sample included 5 young people (3 males and 2 females) recruited from 2 youth groups in Glasgow. Participant characteristics are outlined in *table 1*.

Eight main themes were identified in this study (*table 2*), each theme was further divided into sub-themes to provide more contextual information.

Normalisation of violence

a. Witnessing Violence in Childhood and as a young person

Many young people expressed witnessing severe forms of violence at a young age, they recalled these events very vividly. They also hinted at how they are still exposed to violence occurring in their communities.

I've witnessed somebody stabbed before. That was quite extreme, especially...I was only, like, nine, I think. And that's still...it's, like, a strong memory in my head.. (1)

A lot. I actually remember once seeing some of my brother's friends beating someone up with a baseball bat... I would have been between seven and nine years old. (5)

b. Desensitisation to violence

All participants in this study had felt an element of desensitisation to the violence with many explaining that this is the norm for them.

Because it (violence) is an automatic thing that happens out here. When you walk out the door, you can see someone getting stabbed or someone getting rushed in an ambulance, it is just normal to us now in this world. ...a lot, lot of violence goes on down here, so we just get used to it. (1)

.....It (violence) is just every day, every day is a normal day. When something happens it is just normal, completely normal to people. (1)

This place is founded in violence. Everywhere, this full place, Glasgow as a whole. (2)

That's just a usual thing that people use at entertainment, like, arguing and stuff. (3)

Because obviously if they get brought up with that, and then they get older and older and they keep seeing this, they might think that's fine. They might think that's just a kind of ordinary day to day task, but it's obviously it's not (4)

So, it's like a perpetual cycle of kids seeing violence in the streets. Kids growing up to think that's normal and then them, when they're adults, they're like re-enacting the violence. And it's just a never-ending cycle. It kind of normalises it. It de-sensitises you to it. (5)

c. High frequency of occurrence

Violence was a commonplace in both communities, with many expressing that it occurred as frequently as every day.

Every day, mostly every day. Mostly every day something happens (1)

Every day. (3)

The way that, I've seen so much, the way I think about it now is, I'm, I can't go out my way to avoid it. Because if I go a different way, I'm probably just going to see something else as well, so it's like you can't really avoid it (5).

Figure 1: Quotes highlighting normalisation of violence.

Nature of Violence in the Community

a. Physical abuse

Young people highlighted various forms of physical violence occurring in their community.

Just fighting and arguing. That's just where my head goes. (3)

Everything like stabbings, fighting, gang fighting, domestic violence. I have seen it all, pretty much. (1)

It can range from either fist fights, knives, guns (4).

b. Verbal abuse

Many participants acknowledged that violence is not just physical, and that verbal abuse can be just as scary.

violence is like verbal as well. ... I think some of the words that people use, verbally..., it's scary. It's scary the way people treat each other. (5)

It can even be verbal abuse. (4)

c. Gang Violence & Territorialism

Two young people explained the nature of gang violence, with one participant reflecting on how this is deeply ingrained in the culture while another participant explained how territorialism is often associated with gangs, showcasing the dangers of going to certain areas.

It's (gang violence) so embedded in the culture, isn't it. It's just the only way I can see it. It's the only way I can really elaborate on it... it's always been here (2)

Because obviously, you've got these kinds of wee gangs, in a sense... years ago, it was like Drumchapel versus Clydebank most of it... it still happens but it wasn't as bad as it was back then (4)

here's like wee group of gangs or whatever you want to call them kind of hanging about a certain area, and if you go there, they go, oh, what are you doing in my area and that? (4)

d. Domestic violence

A young person highlighted domestic violence as another type of violence and identified that it often occurs when people are in close in proximity to their significant other for long periods of time.

Not even just physical violence, but domestic violence and things as well with people being cooped up together for so long and unable to get some personal space. And it just does, a lot of problems arise from, you know, being by yourself for too long, or with somebody else for too long. (5)

e. Social Media

A young person described how social media can instigate events of violence in the community.

argue with randomers online and Facebook and Snapchat. If you are going to add a random person, they might start getting cheeky with you. That is what everybody says, don't let anybody be cheeky to you. Then sometimes people take it too far and verbally abuse people. It is just a lot of hate crime, mostly hate crime, yes. (1)

Figure 2: Quotes highlighting nature of violence in the community.

Triggers

a. Alcohol and drugs

Almost all young people highlighted that being under the influence is a common trigger for violence, with many emphasising the crucial role they play in propagating violence in their communities.

If you have got a drug in you then you are going to want more of these drugs... If you can't get more then they will try and rob somebody or try and hurt someone so that they can get stabbed or anything ... drugs is the most common one. (1)

A big role. Especially alcohol. Especially with, like, the shopping centre ...Most people are, like, hanging about drunk and drugged up and stuff and that's where their courage and confidence comes from... when they've got all that courage they try and bump up their name and, like, that just causes fighting and arguing and stuff (3).

it is always people that are under the influence...Because you can always tell because they don't like drink responsibly at all. They're always absolutely wasted and then their inhibitions are gone, and they fight. (5)

But then there's people that are on it, they're on it daily...Because obviously alcohol changes your mindset about things. And I think it's the same with drugs as well...depends on how, the way the person has been brought up, or what their situation is..... I think they both do have a role in violence. (4)

b. Verbal

Participants explained the retaliatory nature of the violence often witnessed.

Maybe they've just got too much on their mind or somebody has said the wrong thing. I don't know. (1)

A lot of the time violence happens through lack of communication, isn't it, aye. (2)

Figure 3: Quotes highlighting Triggers.

Potential Prevention strategies for violence and other social harms

a. Education

Many young people stated that education surrounding violence at young age is crucial in preventing it. They highlighted how schools are important in educating about violence, they recognised violence strategies should be context-specific e.g., specific to the community you reside in.

Try and help children understand what is right and what is wrong... because they don't understand what is right and what is wrong right now. (1)

When I was in school we had people coming in and speaking to us explaining it (violence), because in my year there was a lot of people who were very violent ...having those people come in but it was mainly just maturity where people are realising they don't need to go about and be this violent person (3).

I think just a lot of stuff in school as well to try and, it's like to try and catch it (violence) before it hits...Trying to catch the ball before it hits the floor maybe... Like the social education side of things as well in school should have a lot more to do with your actual community that you go to school in. (5)

b. Street outreach teams

Several young people thought having street outreach teams which consists of detached youth workers was an effective way to prevent violence by encouraging young people to often to go to the youth club.

I think getting more community safety officers, because if people are out in the community drinking and that then people would come up to them and talk to them. (1)

We used to have supervisors here... We would be sitting there drinking, smoking or whatever and they (youth workers) would come down and have a chat with us and we just got on with them. They would be like, if you want to come up here, get a drink, get a calm space, you can have a chat. (1)

And more like Street Team stuff where we're going out and we're publicly interacting with kids. Rather than waiting for them to come to us, we go to them. (5).

c. Community Building initiatives

Participants mentioned described community building initiatives such as the youth club and Men's Matter and how they can deter young people from being involved in violence as well as using alcohol or drugs.

Well, I grew up through the Youth Project it's a positive place for growth and help. And the whole point in being here is to help each other and help each other progress. There's no negativity allowed in here. It's left at the door, and if you can't do that, then you'll be left at the door. (5)

Aye... things like Men Matter...the violence is still bad, but there's a lot of guys I've seen first hand who have absolutely turned their lives around from drugs and drinking and violence and being in prison...more of these services need to be, like have a light shined upon them. (5)

Just another (youth club) community building where young people can come in and they don't need to go out there and discover the world. (1)

They are going to have a drink or whatever, but we can smell the alcohol off them. If they are going to drink out there, then we will tell them they can't come in because that is breaking one of our rules in here (youth club). (1)

You cannae drink in a community centre... You can drink outside if you choose it, and usually the drink leads to violence most of the time, especially young people. (2)

there's some young people in the past that I've seen..., they've either witnessed it or been a part of it (violence), and obviously has brought them in (youth club) and tried to kind of turn the coin. (4)

d. Increasing activities

Some young people discussed that there is a lack of activities in the community, and they mentioned how increasing activities could help.

Because we wanted a community cafe, we wanted a beauty room, we wanted to do this and she got it all for us. Making a bit better life now. (1)

If there was more stuff to do in the community... activities for young people... that could help. (2)

Drugs and alcohol are rife in Drumchapel... there's not an awful lot to do about there... before I found this place (youth club) and before I found Men Matter, I thought the same. I thought, there's nothing to do about here. (5)

Figure 4: Quotes highlighting potential prevention strategies for violence and other social harms.

Role Modelling

a. Positive role modelling

Young people gave different examples of times people were positive role models, they also explain why this is particularly important in violence prevention and decreasing other social harms in the community.

There is a girl called J, she comes in, she gets really bad pains and all that through drinking ... when she sees younger ones drinking,...I am not trying to say you can't do it, but try and not do it because that is what you end up with stuff in life, throughout life, through your mental health and your health issues. (1)

We are getting a lot of help off the government as well. Bob Doris, he came in the other day and we were talking about violence and talking about women's rights. That is one project we are doing right now is women's rights. (1)

Definitely... Youth Project, P and R, a lot of young boys that I know think...like, they look up to them. And there's been a few that have aspired to be them, so they've stopped a lot of what they've done, just with knowing them and having conversations with those two. (3)

people with lived experience...people who have either had violence committed upon them, or previously committed violence, they are the ones that can truly create change, because they know how it is to be on either side. And if they have changed, then they can put forward change for somebody else. (5)

b. Negative Role modelling

Some participants identified the effects of negative role modelling and how it is very common to see negative role models in their communities.

The younger ones look up to the older ones...Older ones drink and get drunk and smoke. The younger ones are trying to learn from that.... Say they are ten-years-old, they will be looking at 13-year-olds and that, they are sitting smoking and drinking (1)

It kind of teaches you that that's how to react...the way that lot of young people are around here, that they see violence and they think, well that's how mummy and daddy act, so that must be how I should act. (5)

Figure 5: Quotes highlighting role modelling.

Safety

a. Safe spaces

Many participants highlighted the youth club and their home to be their safe spaces.

This is (youth club) just...my house or in my friend's house or something would be my safe space. (1)

My house definitely. I feel major safe in my house...But I'd say my house and youth group is probably the two safest places. (4)

I've got a lot of safe spaces here. The Youth Project is one of them. Places like Men Matter are really good. To be honest, the only place you're kind of really safe in Drumchapel is inside. And even then, it's not guaranteed...apart from my own house and my family members' houses and my friends' houses, the only real place I can think about other than that is like schools. (5)

b. Safety associated with familiarity

Two participants associated safety with their own lived experience of different areas showing that familiarity played role in perceptions of safety.

I feel safe in my own community, but other places I don't feel safe (2)

When I was starting the high school... I moved into the high school into Clydebank. I didn't know the area too well, so I was quite wary of where I was going..... I would always be with a group of friends. But as I got older, I got to know like the area more felt safer. Obviously, nowhere is safe. Anything can happen anywhere, but obviously just with your experiences, you might feel like you're more safer here than there. (4)

c. Street wise

Many participants showcase examples of being street wise. One participant highlighted that they would avoid dim lit areas and others explain how their knowledge of their surrounding areas aid them in safely navigating the community.

But yeah, as you get older, you kind of start to see more things...it can kind of mess your head up... get you to understand your environment more and you can understand, right okay, don't go this way, go this way instead. Because certain areas it's just, there's groups of people and you're like, nah, I'm going to stay away from that, I'll go this way instead. (4)

especially during, obviously the clocks have went forward so we've got longer nights, but when the clock goes back it gets darker at earlier times. You avoid certain areas. So, the likes of, the alleys that are quite dark. So, for me, any area that's not as well lit as others, I would stay away from there. Because obviously, you can't see what's going to happen. (4)

It makes you scared to go outside, like especially when you're young. Not so much now, I'm older. I know I can take care of myself(5).

But, because of, because I kind of know Drumchapel, Clydebank, the different areas and that, I wouldn't say I've got a safe place. I'm quite safe everywhere. I don't have a certain area of where I feel safe. (4)

Figure 6: Quotes highlighting safety.

Impact of COVID on young people

a. Varied impact on violence

Participants' perception of COVID and its effects on violence were very varied. Another participant said it had a positive impact on violence and decreased it, while another suggests it has potentially increased.

think with the lockdown, obviously everybody being away from each other was quite good because they realised they didn't have to fight for them to be able to just be alive....I think a lot of people realised that you don't need that....I think it (violence) decreased it 'cause everybody was just happy to be out instead of wanting to fight everybody. (3)

Like I've seen maybe something here, your neighbours obviously have a carry on and then it's like too far and they're hitting each other. But I haven't seen anything too major. So, I wouldn't say it's (violence) increased or decreased. I'd say it's; I would say it's about the same. (4)

When you're cut off from society for a while, you just kind of stop learning how to deal with other people, especially with the drink and the drugs that people just become irritable, and they take it out on other people. (5)

b. Loss of routines

Loss of routines during the COVID pandemic especially because of online schooling was mentioned by two participants.

But then since COVID hit it completely changed me. So, my whole routine completely went down the sink. That's including a school schedule, study schedule, just a schedule in general. (4)

they're going to think it's normal to sit inside all day and see these things. And like just play Xbox all day or play their computers and just not leave their beds and not get out and do it. (5)

c. Mental Health

Young people mentioned a decline in mental health during the pandemic. One young person explained how young people often felt a loss of purpose, while another person touched on lack of social support during this time.

A lot of young people now they feel quite disenfranchised. They don't know what their purpose in life is, and then COVID struck, and then it's just their mental health...I think it affects young people a lot more...It affected me. I'm young. It affected me. It could have an impact on violence as well. (2)

I think it did affect, like, young people with their mental health just being alone in terms...there was nobody else there. (3)

Like I hated being stuck inside. I just felt like crap all the time. (4)

d. Loss of community

Participant explains how the community was already isolated and the influence of the pandemic on further isolating it, while touching on the use of alcohol or drugs during this period.

I think the COVID pandemic made the isolated community that we live in even more isolated.People's mindset has changed. Like these people are still living in lockdown mode, except they're just in lockdown outside, I think. They're just sitting about down the shopping centre, not moving, taking drugs and drinking. And it's that like social barrier that's made it even stronger because people weren't really interacting as much. (5)

Figure 7: Quotes highlighting impact of COVID on young people

Mental Health

Negative impact on mental health

Young people discuss the negative impact exposure to violence has had on their mental health. One participant discusses how an acquaintance was grossly affected by a violent incident they witnessed, with the quote outlining key symptoms of PTSD including: hyperarousal, avoidance and reexperiencing symptoms.

Just, don't know, it's not nice to see. It's just trying to stop thinking about it sometimes. (2)

*They were a very outgoing person, loved going out, doing all sorts, whether it's just having a brisk walk, going for their messages, but aye, he had ended up witnessing some brutal bit of violence. I'm not going to mention it...but yeah, and he's kind of been a hermit ever since that situation, which was figural.
So, it's really affected him and he's just, he's never out the house now. He's always stuck inside because of what happened. He's too nervous. Because he has been, he's able to go to the front door and answer the door and that, but he never steps a foot outside, because I think if he ever did, he would just, his anxiety and everything would just build up and he'd freeze on the spot. (4)*

Figure 8: Quotes highlighting mental health.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored the impact of violence on young people and their communities.

All participants interviewed had some form of exposure to community violence, with all witnessing some form of violence or frequently hearing about incidents in their community. Exposure to community violence can be looked at on a gradient; from being direct victims, to indirectly being involved by witnessing or hearing about it to being unaware^[18]. The range of violence can vary from physical fights, stabbings, shootings and verbal abuse, this study highlighted events with relation to physical fights, stabbings, and verbal abuse.

Various factors can trigger violence in a community setting. All participants in this study identified alcohol or drugs as a trigger for violence, emphasising the 'big role' they play. One participant mentioned that violence can be perpetuated to gain access to alcohol or drugs. Alcohol and drugs being a trigger for violence has been evidenced by various studies^[19,20]. According to the Crime and Justice survey, 44% of victims (those who were able to respond) identified that offenders were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the crime^[21]. Reducing alcohol consumption is crucial in violence prevention as there is strong link between alcohol consumption and individual risk for committing violence or being victimised^[22].

In this study, participants reported the positive effects of role modelling; the supportive relationship young people have with youth workers often helped to reduce substance use and involvement in

violence. Social cognitive theory recognises that individuals learn behaviours and showcase attitudes learned through the influence of an example present in their environment whether it be positive or negative^[23]. Aspy et al. found that positive role modelling can be a protective factor for young people through lower engagement in antisocial behaviours and violence^[24]. Prior research has illustrated the association between positive role modelling and decreased presence of internalising and externalising behaviours^[25].

All young people highlighted that the repeated exposure to violence has had a detrimental impact on their mental health. One participant discussed the negative impact of violence on someone they knew after they witnessed a violent incident, in the description many symptoms of PTSD was delineated such as reexperiencing symptoms, avoidance and hyperarousal^[26]. Many studies have documented a link between exposure to community violence in childhood and mental health adversities including depression, PTSD, and anxiety^[18,27,28].

Desensitisation to violence experienced was a prominent theme that emerged in this study. All participants reported this and unfortunately, they described that violence is the norm in their communities. A systematic review by Miliauskas et al. supported this and showed that young people residing in areas of high exposure to community violence often became psychologically desensitised to it^[28]. Previous studies have indicated the link between the chronicity of violence and young people presenting with decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety, while exhibiting more aggressive behaviours^[28]. Moreover, a study of African American youths also observed a similar pattern with their results showcasing an increase in depressive symptoms as violence increased to a moderate level, followed by a decrease in depressive symptoms experienced when violence continued to increase beyond this moderate threshold^[29]. While the desensitisation theory has been well-documented by several studies, we must also consider that instead of being desensitised, youths may be suppressing their depressive symptoms to effectively navigate their dangerous neighbourhoods^[30].

Many young people employed various strategies such as avoidance, hypervigilance, and emotional management when navigating their dangerous neighbourhoods which closely aligned with findings from previous literature^[31,32]. Safe spaces are often embedded in dangerous areas^[31], this was the case for the youth club with many young people identifying it as their safe space. Recently, the Scottish government has substantially cut funds to youth services which further widens socio-economic gap and can have adverse consequences for young people utilising services offered by youth clubs^[33].

Avoidance of certain areas due to poor lighting was mentioned since they present opportunities for the occurrence of violence. Young people also mentioned not going to certain areas when its dark due to the persistence of violence there. Physical characteristics of the environment can determine an individual's perception of safety^[34]. Report on the prevention of youth violence addressed how upkeep of physical environment is crucial in youth violence prevention and may help people feel more at ease when accessing different areas^[34].

Many participants mentioned the importance of community building initiatives and its role in violence prevention and exposure to other social harms. It was stated that these initiatives can foster community growth and encourage positive relationships. Programmes such as Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) where young people work on community improvement projects alongside adults in the community and Clean and Green which focuses on improving derelict neighbourhood areas through creating community gardens spaces are effective in enhancing social capital^[35,36]. Promoting 'busy streets' utilises community assets and resources to foster community spirit through positive interactions, which subsequently stimulates perceptions of safety and security, with a potential to decrease violence. While this approach has many positive attributes, the caveats to this approach should be noted; increased accessibility of outsiders into communities may promote crime, therefore it is critical to empower those in the community to make positive changes^[37].

In this study participants reported the importance of street outreach programmes and of going out into the community rather than 'waiting for them to come to us'. Outreach programmes are beneficial in

changing preconceived notions surrounding the acceptability of violence, especially since in this study it was found that young people are often desensitised to it and to some extent, it is normalised. Cure Violence is a street outreach programme which aims to reduce violence and shootings particularly among youth. Skogan et al. evaluated the programme reporting positive outcomes in most areas it was implemented in, these outcomes encompassed fewer killings, reduced shootings, and change in beliefs surrounding the acceptability of violence^[38]. Moreover, Pollack et.al. highlighted the invaluable role of social outreach workers (SWs)^[39]. In the study, 82% individuals reported that SWs mediated and resolved their conflicts effectively^[39]. Unlike the study by Skogan et al., which mainly involved high-risk groups of youths, this study involved both high and low-risk youths, both studies also involved members of the community who provided social outreach^[38,39].

Many participants felt that education on violence, especially at a young age, is crucial in alleviating the impact of violence during one's life course, as well as reducing its overall prevalence in the community. Prior theories have indicated that violent patterns emerge during adolescence and peak during early adulthood, therefore underlining the importance of effective implementation of prevention programmes to those under 18^[40,41]. A young person also identified that prevention education should be relevant to the community young people reside in, as the socio-cultural factors within which violence occurs varies^[9]. Moreover, several school-based violence prevention interventions were mentioned by several young people, these programmes have been shown to be beneficial in decreasing frequency of violence such as the Life Skills Training programme in the US^[34].

Some young people reported a decline in their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, this aligns closely with a systematic review which evidenced increased levels of anxiety, depression or psychological distress in 87% of the studies it reviewed^[42]. Reports on the impact of COVID on violence from the participants were mixed, with some suggesting a decrease to other suggesting an increase in violence. A qualitative study interviewing youth service providers found that violence among youth was perceived to have initially dropped during the lockdown period, then as restrictions

eased, they felt that levels of violence were similar to that of pre-pandemic levels or conversely an increase^[43].

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations, the sample size of this study was only 5 participants from two different youth groups in Glasgow, therefore it is not generalisable to the other areas in Glasgow. An ideal sample size would have been 10 young people, however several constraints meant this could not be achieved. Some constraints were late accrual of ethical approval, cancellations of multiple interviews due to several unforeseeable circumstances and difficulties in recruitment. Despite this, even with the 5 participants data saturation was achieved for many of the major themes identified. Participant bias was present in the study, as participants may have responded to different questions with regards to what they think the researcher wants to hear instead of their own natural opinions. Moreover, the presence of cognitive bias meant that young people who participated in the study may have their own agenda in the information they want to discuss. Youth that participated in the study were mainly those that were positively engaged with their youth centre; therefore, they may have a positively skewed perspective on the effectiveness of youth club-initiated violence prevention measures.

FUTURE WORK

The impact of violence is multi-faceted, the impact on a young person's life ranges from negative future health outcomes to poor educational outcomes^[1]. Further work should involve studying violence in specific socio-cultural contexts to necessitate evidence towards evidence based prevention measures in a community. A rigorous qualitative study involving young people from different areas of Glasgow would be helpful in highlighting the differences in socio-cultural context within which violence occurs as well as highlighting any common violence prevention measures which can be adopted. This qualitative study could be coupled with quantitative studies which provide measures of socio-economic background and violence-related measures. Moreover, involving young people at

high risk when designing violence prevention programmes is essential as they can provide information surrounding the acceptability of the programme.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study adds to the body of evidence on the wide range of consequences of violence on a young person. The results of this study show the need for more evidence-based violence prevention measures in communities. This study also evidences the potential effects of alcohol and drugs on the perpetuation of violence in the community, as well as some modest information surrounding the potential impact of COVID on violence. Many young people also highlighted the positive impact of the youth club in their communities and with cuts in funding for youth services, this can have adverse consequences for young people accessing it and further widens the socio-economic gap. The powerful testimonies provided by several participants underlines the negative impact of violence in their own lives and on their communities, which highlights a need for more violence prevention measures at both an individual and community level.

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Appendix

Participant	Age	sex	Race
1	18	female	White
2	22	male	White
3	19	female	White
W	18	male	White
5	19	male	White

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Main Themes	Subthemes
Normalization of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witnessing violence in childhood and as young person. • Desensitisation to violence • High Frequency of violence
Nature of violence in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical abuse • Verbal abuse • Gang violence & Territorialism • Domestic violence • Social media
Triggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and drugs • Verbal
Potential prevention strategies for violence and other social harms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Street outreach teams • Community building initiatives • Increasing activities
Role modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive role modelling • Negative role modelling
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe spaces • Safety associated with familiarity. • Street wise
Impact of COVID on young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied impact on violence • Loss of routines • Loss of community
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative impact on mental health

Table 2. Themes and subthemes identified.