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**Violence Reduction Partnership**

Community Voice - Leeds

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# Violence Consultation

## Introduction

Over the summer, a comprehensive programme of community engagement was carried out across West Yorkshire, involving a total of 6,062 people. Twenty-nine percent of those engaged resided in Leeds District – some 1,755 people. Engagement took place through a variety of methods to ensure wide-reaching participation; this included in-person engagement at key community events such as Armed Forces Day and Pride celebrations, alongside smaller discussions with local community groups. Surveys also played a significant role, with some conducted as part of the Mayor’s Police and Crime Plan consultation and others aligned with the Serious Violence Duty.

While the full question set varied across these approaches, a core set of questions were consistently explored.

For each theme discussed in this report, the total number of people asked the question, the number who did not respond, and an analysis of the responses from those who did will be provided. The findings from our engagement have been consolidated here to offer a detailed picture of the views and priorities expressed by communities across the region.

# Defining Serious Violence

We asked respondents to share their views on the definition of serious violence. We introduced the question by explaining that our definition of violence and serious violence is currently:

*"specific crime types where there is the use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community.”*

We elaborated that for West Yorkshire, this encompasses a range of specific crime types, including homicide, knife crime, violence against the person, personal robbery, gun crime, violence against women and girls, organised crime (including county lines), sexual exploitation, and domestic abuse.

Respondents were then asked: *What does serious violence mean to you?*

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| 1164 people asked | 392 chose not to answer | 772 answered |

Of those who responded, 78.6% either agreed with the definition as presented (72%) or agreed with it while offering additional considerations for inclusion (6.6%). The remaining 21.4% raised a variety of themes, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of how serious violence is perceived by the public.

Exploring the additional considerations highlighted by the 28% of respondents, a number of themes were identified:

* Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) (67 mentions) were a significant focus for respondents

“Serious violence, to me, represents actions that cause significant physical, emotional, and psychological harm to individuals. It includes acts such as physical assault, rape, and other sexual offences. These forms of violence not only inflict immediate and often severe physical injuries but also leave deep, lasting emotional and psychological scars on the victims.”

* Fear (38 mentions)respondents describing the profound impact of fear – both physical and emotional. Respondents noted how fear prevents normal activities, such as leaving home or going into local parks.

“Something that causes fear or for me to alter or consider my behaviour e.g. walking to the shop alone.”

* Threat (36 mentions): The concept of threat, both implied and direct, was frequently raised, with respondents identifying it as a precursor to or a form of serious violence.

“Any type of violence - real or threatened against anyone by anyone”

Other themes suggested in much smaller number included the inclusion of **Verbal Abuse** as a form of violence with serious emotional and psychological consequences, that **Hate Crime** should be specifically mentioned, along with **Riots and Disorder** due to the way they can escalate rapidly and affect communities.

# Feelings of Safety

We asked respondents about their feelings of safety in their local area and what made them feel safe or unsafe.

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| 1753 people asked | 24 chose not to answer | 1729 answered |

Some of those whose views were captured at an in-person consultation event in another district (n=175) were instead asked if they felt safe in their local area of which 18 said ‘no’ and 107 said ‘not safe or unsafe’ and 50 said ‘yes’.

Remaining respondents (n=1554) answered on a Likert scale ranging from very safe, quite safe, no feeling either way, through to quite unsafe and very unsafe.

69% of Leeds respondents felt either very safe or quite safe. This was 5% higher than the overall feelings across West Yorkshire

Using a free text field, 80% of people provided narrative on what made them feel safe or unsafe.

Key themes from responses include:

Perception of crime: 21% of respondents who gave an explanation of their feelings of safety drew on their perceptions of the level of criminality in their local area. Many who felt safe cited their perception of low crime rates in their local areas as key, whereas a large proportion of those who felt unsafe shared their perception of high crime rates including burglary, robberies, drug activity and anti-social behaviour.

People and Community: 21% of respondents talked about strong community ties, knowing their neighbours and there being a lot of great people as reasons for feeling safe in their local area, whereas some respondents noted a lack of community cohesion as a reason for feeling unsafe.

“I know a lot of great people on our estate and there's a lot of community spirit”

The togetherness of a community (Harehills) in helping to de-escalate serious disorder in 2024 was praised by the Mayor of West Yorkshire. [Research](https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/the-importance-of-social-cohesion-and-communities/) highlights that community cohesion enhances local areas feelings of safety, as it fosters positive social relations, a sense of belonging, and collective efficacy.

Policing: 11% of respondents mentioned policing – some felt safer due to a visible police presence, some highlighteda lack of police presence as a reason for feeling unsafe. Other issues related to lack of engagement with policing “It would be nice if the police could organise meetings with local residents for them to air them feelings and report any problems that may be happening in their local community” whilst others discussed a perceived lack of action “Lack of police presence and any real confidence that any potential crime would be taken seriously.”

A broad range of additional concerns were raised that contributed to feelings of being unsafe including the prevalence, distribution and use of drugs, anti-social driving including the use of electric bikes (ebikes), anti-social behaviour and gangs and groups - often groups of children or men congregating were referred to as gangs with more anti-social behaviour connotations than organised crime.

The built environment impacted feelings of safety, with unlit areas, graffiti and areas baring damage contributing to reduced feelings of safety and areas. The City Centre generated safety concerns, with people worried about the presence of people under the influence, people rough sleeping and begging.

**Demographic Insights**

Age Groups:

* Younger Respondents (0-17): Often mentioned feeling unsafe due to groups of teenagers, gang activities, and antisocial behaviour
* Older Adults (65-74): Generally felt safer in their neighbourhoods but expressed concerns about the lack of police presence and the anti-social behaviour of younger people.

Gender:

* Women: Frequently mentioned feeling unsafe due to the presence of groups of men, especially at night. Concerns about sexual harassment and violence were common.
* *Men:* Generally felt safer but still expressed concerns about gangs and antisocial behaviour.

Sexual Orientation:

* LGBTQ+ Respondents: Highlighted concerns about hate crimes and feeling unsafe in certain areas

Disability:

* Respondents with disabilities: Often felt more vulnerable and unsafe, particularly due to the lack of police presence and anti-social behaviour in their areas.

**Locational Differences:**

* LS11 and LS13: High levels of concern about gangs, drugs, and antisocial behaviour. Respondents from these areas frequently mentioned feeling unsafe.
* LS16 and LS22: Generally felt safer, with respondents highlighting community support and lower crime rates.

## Daytime into night

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| 1754 people asked | 23 chose not to answer | 1731 answered |


64% of respondents indicated that their feelings of safety differed between night and day. 67% of respondents then provided an explanation as to why their feelings changed, with several intersectional themes emerging:

Increased fear at night: Many respondents felt less safe at night due to reduced visibility, fewer people around, and the perception that crime was more likely to occur after dark.

Environmental factors: Poor street lighting and reduced visibility at night were significant concerns. Well-lit areas were
 perceived as safer.

Areas that were clean and well-maintained were perceived as safer and accordingly areas with signs of neglect (e.g., graffiti, litter), contributed to feelings of insecurity.

Presence of Others: The presence of groups, especially those perceived as threatening or those perceived to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs made people feel unsafe particularly in hours of darkness. Areas with fewer people around, particularly at night, were perceived as more dangerous (absence of capable guardians).

Perception of Crime: Many respondents believed that crime is more prevalent at night, particularly drug use, the presence of gangs and anti-social behaviour. Some respondents referred to personal experiences or knowledge of specific incidents of crime.

Police Presence: A common concern was the lack of visible police presence, which made people feel less safe, especially at night.

Child Concerns: There were specific mentions of children and young people feeling unsafe due to groups of older children and young people or gangs. This was particularly noted in the context of school and after-school activities.

Parental Concerns: Some responses indicated that parents were concerned about their children being out after dark, leading to restrictions on their activities during the evening.

**Demographic Insights**

Gender:

* Women: often felt less safe at night due to concerns about visibility, fewer people around, and the potential for encountering threatening situations. Many women mentioned avoiding going out alone at night.
* *Men:* generally reported feeling safer than women but still expressed concerns about nighttime safety, particularly in areas with poor lighting or known for higher crime rates.

**Locational Differences:**

* LS11, LS13, LS9: These areas had higher reports of feeling unsafe at night due to poor lighting, presence of groups, and perceived higher crime rates.
* LS7, LS10: Residents in these areas also expressed concerns about nighttime safety, particularly related to anti-social behaviour and lack of police presence.

# Effect of Violence

We asked respondents if they felt that violence has an effect on their local area.

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| 1747 people asked | 47 chose not to answer | 1700 answered |

60% of respondents felt violence had an effect on their local area, whilst 40% felt it didn’t.

The most common effect of violence mentioned by respondents was a general sense of fear and insecurity. Many respondents felt that violence made their neighbourhoods less safe, particularly at night. Respondents reported changing their daily routines to avoid potential violence. This included avoiding certain areas, not going out at night, and being more cautious in general.

Violence was seen to reduce trust within the community. People felt less confident in their neighbours and were more wary of strangers. The fear of violence led to reduced social interactions, making people feel more isolated. This was particularly noted among older respondents who felt more vulnerable.

There were significant concerns about the safety of children and the influence of violence on young people. Respondents worried about the impact of witnessing or experiencing violence on the younger generation.

There was a strong call for more community support and a visible police presence as respondents felt increased police patrols and community initiatives could help restore a sense of safety and trust.

# Causes of Violence

We asked respondents what they thought were the causes of violence in their local area.

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| 964 people asked | 277 Didn’t answer/ know | 687 answered |

A number of influential factors for violence were covered in responses to this question.

Drugs were cited by 38% of respondents as the cause of violence, with comments covering both the misuse of drugs and alcohol and how this impacts behaviours and others talking about the impact of drugs supply networks on communities. A number of respondents mentioned peer pressure as a concern and many also spoke of the presence of gangs in their areas. The term gang was frequently used to describe groups of children or men in particular grouped together on streets.

In addition to the influence of peer pressure, the influence of media and social media portrayal of violence was noted, with respondents talking about “Social media misinformation”, and issues “stoked up by social media” breaking out into violence.

Parenting styles were also seen as contributing factors by both children and adults, with comments made about "poor parenting" and "lack of discipline." This theme of a lack of consequence from family influences linked across to concerns about the perceived lack of consequence from policing and the justice system. Many also commented on the lack of police presence in their local area.

Limited access to community resources was a concern, with responses talking about no provision such as clubs and activities, citing that children are bored “nothing for the kids to do”

Intolerance, racism and discrimination were both cited in responses and in a number of cases, evident in the way that responses had been written. These issues were seen as contributing to violence and social division, with some respondents expressing frustration at the lack of effective solutions to address these deep-rooted problems.

# What should be done?

We asked respondents what they thought should be done to tackle and prevent violence in their local area.

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| 1231 people asked | 102 chose not to answer | 1129 answered |

46.5% of respondents emphasised the need for more police, some clarified that this should be through more visible patrols, both during the day and night. Some suggested that police officers should be more integrated into the community, getting to know residents and building trust.

“Bobbies on the street should interact with community”

Respondents also referred to the need for tougher penalties for those who commit crime and anti-social behaviour. Some talked about involving parents and schools in responses to poor behaviour.

Several respondents suggested community-building activities, such as youth programmes, community centres, and public awareness campaigns. These were seen as ways to engage children and young people and prevent them from turning to violence. Topics suggested included education on the consequences of violence and crime and the promotion of cultural awareness and cohesion.

There was a call for more support services to support some of the influential factors for violence including mental health services and drug and alcohol treatment as well as providing families with support.

Some respondents talked about the need for more CCTV cameras to be installed in public areas to monitor and deter criminal activities along with better street lighting to make areas safer at night.

**Demographic Insights**

Age: Children primarily emphasise the need for youth services and initiatives whilst older respondents (55 and over) tended to emphasise the need for more police presence and stricter enforcement.

Ethnicity: Respondents from global majority groups often highlighted the need for cultural awareness programs and better community-police relations.

Gender: Women were more likely to mention the need for support services whilst men were more focused on policing and deterrence.

**Locational Differences:**

* LS11, LS9 respondents were more likely to mention issues related to gang violence and drug-related crime. They called for more police presence and community engagement programs.
* LS20, LS22 respondents focused on the need for community cohesion and preventive measures, such as neighbourhood watch programs and better street lighting.

# What makes preventing and tackling violence difficult?

We asked respondents what they thought makes preventing and tackling violence in their local area difficult.

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| 1172 people asked | 132 Didn’t answer | 1040 answered |

The responses from the community highlight several significant challenges in preventing and tackling serious violence in Leeds, underscoring the need for a layered approach to address issues effectively.

Policing was a common thread across responses with many highlighting that they don’t feel there are enough officers patrolling their areas whilst some people expressed a lack of trust in the police, feeling that the police were either not interested or not effective in dealing with violence. Some respondents indicated that they (or others) would be afraid to report violence or intervene due to a fear of reprisal. Whilst some suggested this lack of trust in policing, others perceived that many people do not respect those upholding the law. Indeed a significant number of responses highlighted that some young people do not care about the consequences of their actions.

Some respondents felt that there was a lack of community spirit and engagement, which makes it difficult to tackle violence collectively.

**Locational Differences:**

LS11, LS13 and LS9 respondents frequently mentioned a lack of police presence, whilst LS9 residents also highlighted problems with drug dealers.

LS20 respondents mentioned general attitudes and lack of community engagement as significant barriers.

LS22: Lack of trust in adults and authority figures was a notable concern in this area.

# What services and initiatives are missing?

We asked respondents if they thought any services and initiatives that would help prevent violence and/or the causes of violence were missing from their local area.

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| 1176 people asked | 271 Didn’t answer/know | 905 answered |

In exploring responses to this question, it appears that many residents were unaware of the services available in their area to be able to consider what the gaps in provision were.

Services and initiatives mentioned as missing or in short supply include:

Youth Services: There was significant demand for more youth clubs, activities, and engagement programs to provide young people with constructive outlets.

Police Presence: Many respondents again highlighted the need for an increased police presence. This included more foot patrols and community officers.

Community Initiatives: Respondents suggested more community centres and hubs where people can gather, build relationships, and foster a sense of community.

Improved Public Services and Infrastructure: Some responses pointed to the need for better public services and infrastructure, ranging from improved street lighting and CCTV cameras to the need for more mental health services and provision for those at risk of being drawn into violence. Community engagement was also called for to raise awareness about available services.

**Next Steps**

The findings from the community engagement highlight the complexity of preventing and tackling serious violence in Leeds. A layered approach is essential, involving collaboration between residents, community groups, organisations, local government, police and education to name a few. The approach should focus on both long-term prevention strategies, addressing the influential factors for violence, fostering a supportive and engaged community and enforcement in the ‘here and now’ to create a safer and more cohesive community.