

SERIOUS VIOLENCE IN LONDON

Perceptions, Costs, and Recommendations

April 2024



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About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners, and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grass-roots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2024 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Introduction

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has a strong legacy of work on improving our criminal justice system, including policy recommendations to reduce serious violence (*It Can be Stopped*, 2018) and tackle inner-city gang membership (*Dying to Belong*, 2009).¹ Yet despite this blueprint of interventions to Government to make streets safer, Londoners continue to fear serious violence that affects them and the people that they know, and the issue continues to represent a significant social and financial cost. This is not without reason: knife crime offences have risen each year in the capital since the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 1), and high-profile cases of stabbings dominate headlines and illustrate the prevalence of serious violence in the city. From a fiscal standpoint, we estimate that in 2023, violence in London cost £7 billion.²

To better understand experiences of serious violence in London over the last five years, the CSJ updated polling questions from our 2018 *It Can be Stopped* report to grasp how the situation in the capital has changed. Worryingly, recent trends reveal an increased risk of young people being caught up in a cycle of fear and violence. A greater number of teenage homicides were recorded in London in 2023 than the year prior, with 21 teenagers being killed.³ More broadly, in England and Wales, almost 18 per cent of knife and offensive weapon offences resulting in a caution or conviction were committed by children aged 10-17.⁴ Fear, either through knowing someone who has been a victim of knife crime, or knowing someone who carries a knife, often drives the tendency to carry a knife for protection.

Previous CSJ research has shown how crime can also be driven by people having little to do in their spare time, few positive role models, and being in a state of poverty combined with a lack of opportunity and aspiration. We know that recorded crime in London is more prevalent in neighbourhoods with higher levels of income deprivation. Overall, 40 per cent more crimes were recorded in the most income-deprived areas in 2023, compared with the least income-deprived 10 per cent.⁵

Throughout the CSJ's research – and research conducted by others across the sector – the importance of preventative techniques to reduce serious violence has been raised, including successful practices used in the Glasgow Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV). To delve further into this and better understand Londoners' current experiences of serious violence, as well as their attitudes towards the police, the CSJ commissioned a poll of 1,007 residents of Greater London aged 18 and over. Fieldwork took place between 22-27th March 2024. The overall sample was weighted to be nationally representative of the target UK population and filtered down to the target audience. The polling was conducted by Survation.

1 Serious violence is classified as violence with injury.

2 See Appendix 1 for breakdown of costs.

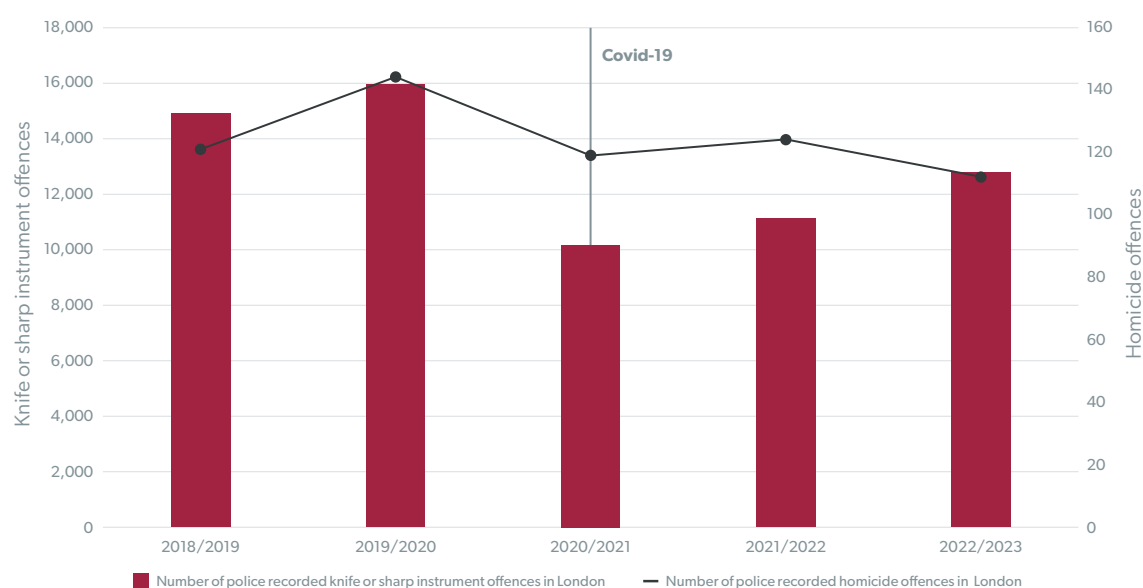
3 Jess Warren, 'London: More teenagers killed in 2023 than 2022', (Jan 2024), BBC.

4 UK Government, Ministry of Justice, 'Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics: January to March 2023' (August 2023).

5 Trust for London, Crime and income deprivation, 'Crimes recorded by neighbourhood income deprivation decile in London (2023)', London's Poverty Profile 2024.

Chapter 1: Londoners' experiences of violence

Chart 1: The number of police recorded knife or sharp instrument offences and homicide offences in London



Source: Statista 2024 Data

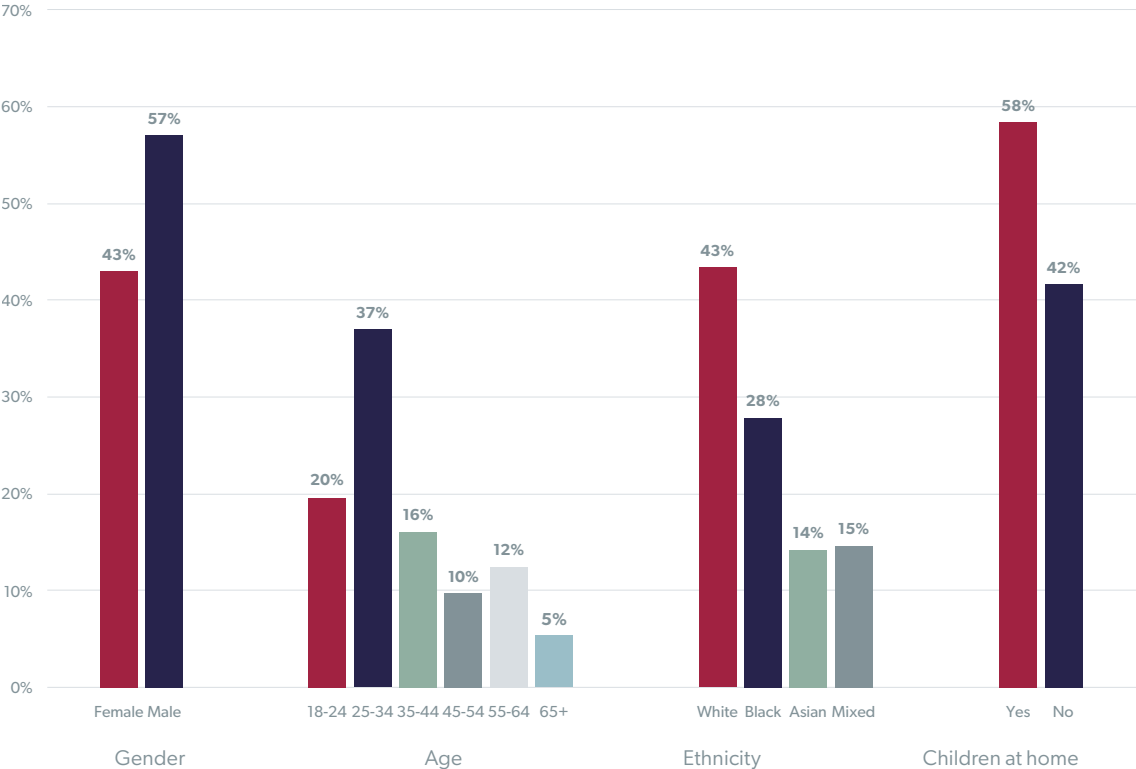
While police recorded knife crime and homicide offences were lower in 2023 than in 2019, knife crime offences have steadily risen since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 (see Chart 1). Moreover, less crime may be reported to police than publicly available data suggests, with previous research by the CSJ demonstrating public disillusionment with the criminal justice system.⁶ This trend is worsened by the fact that so-called 'low-level' crimes (burglary, drug dealing, and anti-social behaviour) also occur with higher frequency. The public's perception that these crimes are not dealt with increases fear that local areas where people live are not safe.

Our polling revealed that nearly 1 in 4 of Londoners (22 per cent) had been attacked or threatened with violence in the last 5 years. Londoners' experiences of violence tend to mirror national trends, with respondents threatened or attacked with violence in the last 5 years being largely male (57 per cent) and young (57 per cent between the ages of 18-34).

6 The Centre for Social Justice. 'Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK'. Dec 2023, p. 137

Worryingly, 58 per cent of the group recently attacked or threatened with violence had children under the age of 18 in the household. This is particularly concerning as children and adolescents exposed to violence are at risk of poor long-term behavioral and mental health outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, regardless of whether they are victims, direct witnesses, or simply hear about the crime.⁷

Chart 2: Londoners Attacked or Threatened with Violence in the last 5 years



Source: Survation Polling Analysis

7 US Department of Health and Human Services and Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Healthy People 2023, Social Determinants of Health, Social Determinants of Health Literature Summaries, 'Crime and Violence Literature Summary'. Available: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/crime-and-violence>

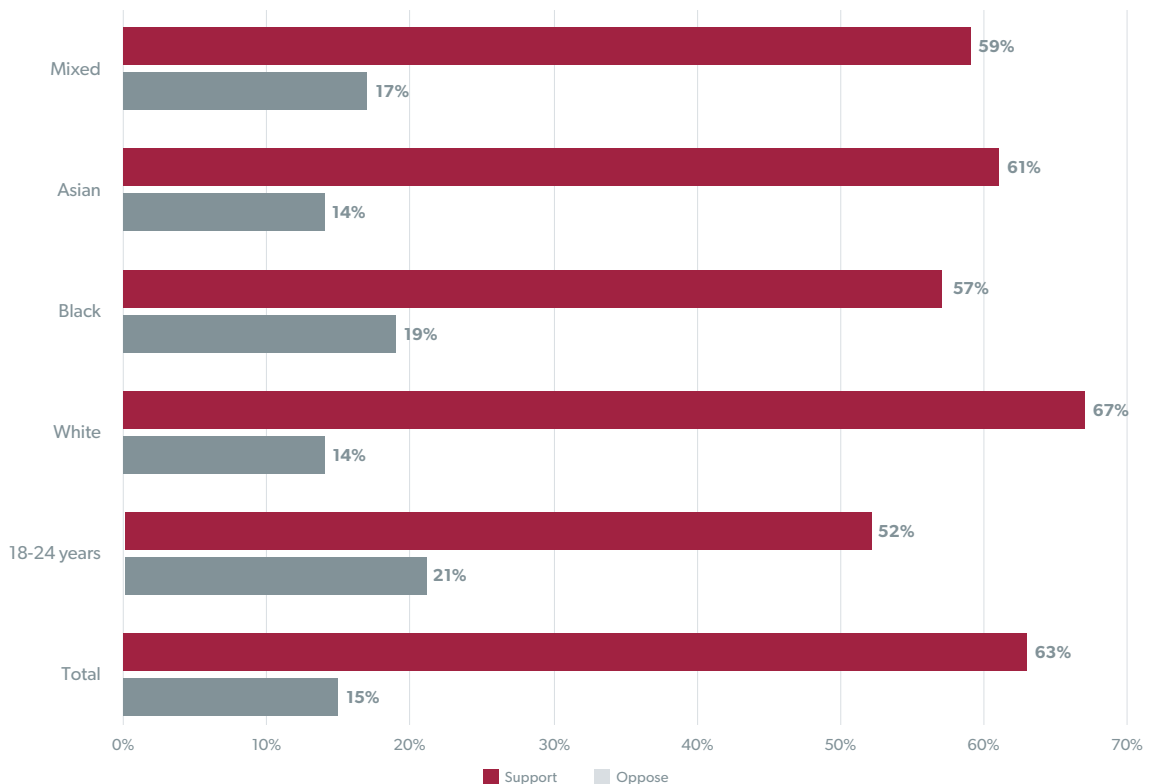
Chapter 2:

Londoners continue to support police powers of stop and search

The majority of Londoners surveyed (63 per cent) supported the power of the police to stop and search if there were reasonable grounds for suspicion and if the police told you what the reason was. This is despite proactive policing in the form of stop and search being under sustained attack from lobby groups for several years, even though it is often used as part of a larger toolkit of preventative techniques against crime.

Interestingly, young people (aged 18-24) were slightly more likely to support the use of stop and search (52 per cent) than when a similar question was asked of the London public by the CSJ five years ago (49 per cent). This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that police forces – along with other organisations and groups – have gone to great lengths to educate young people on their rights in relation to stop and search. Their support is especially crucial, as those aged 15 to 24 years old are some of the most likely to be caught up in serious violence, gangs, gun crime, and knife crime.

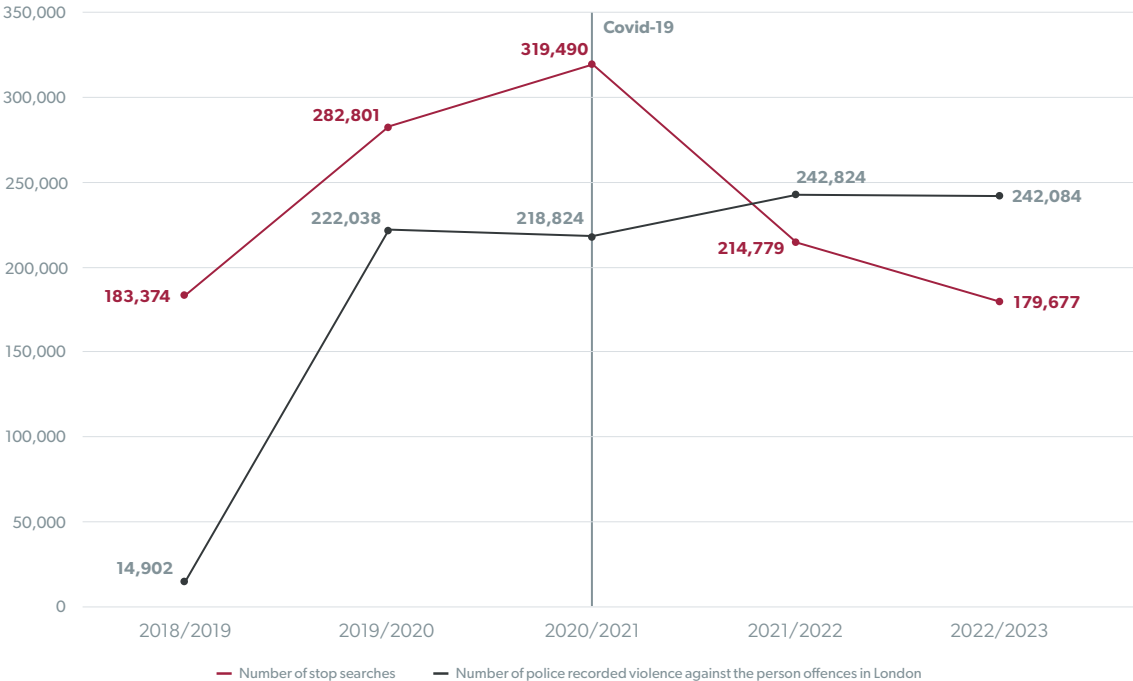
Chart 3: Breakdown of Londoners support for stop and search by ethnicity and age



Moreover, as Chart 3 illustrates, all ethnic groups – whether White, Black, Asian, or Mixed/Multiple ethnicities – majorly supported the use of stop and search as a tool for the police to use to prevent crime. Support for stop and search from ethnic minorities is important given the overall representation of ethnic minorities in crime.⁸ In 2023, 36% of homicide victims in London were black, and black offenders were also notably overrepresented in 40% of homicide cases.⁹ While stop and search is often highly criticised for disproportionately targeting the black population, this data suggests that it may be reflective of the high percentage of black victims and black offenders as a proportion of London’s total population. As such, support for stop and search amongst ethnic minorities is essential in action against crime.

Yet despite this support for stop and search, recent statistics illustrate how the power of stop and search has been used decreasingly by the police. As Chart 4 illustrates, in 2022/23 the Metropolitan Police of London and the City of London police performed 179,677 stop and searches, a significant decrease when compared to the previous year. This came within a broader backdrop of the number of police recorded against the person offences in London, which has steadily risen since the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰ While many factors have contributed to the rise in the number of police recorded violence against the person offences in London (not just a decrease in the number of stop and searches), models such as Glasgow’s CIRV have shown the effectiveness of a multi-agency and community-centered approach, of which enforcement serves as one element of a larger toolkit of interventions, including improving accessibility to services and programmes and building working relationships with key community groups.

Chart 4: Number of stop and searches vs. Number of police recorded violence against the person offences in London



Source: Statista 2024 Data

8 Research from the University of Cambridge analysing racial disparities among murder victims across most of Britain over the last two decades, for example, shows that people of Asian ethnicity are on average twice as likely as White British people to be killed. For Black people, however, the risk of homicide has been over five and a half times (5.6) higher than for White British people – on average – during the current century, and this disparity has been on the rise since 2015. See: University of Cambridge, ‘Ethnic minorities at much higher risk of homicide in England and Wales’, Nov 2020.

9 Overton, I. (2024). *London’s 2023 murders examined: key figures in the UK capital’s homicides*. Available: <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/london-2023-murders-examined-key-figures-in-the-uk-capitals-homicides>

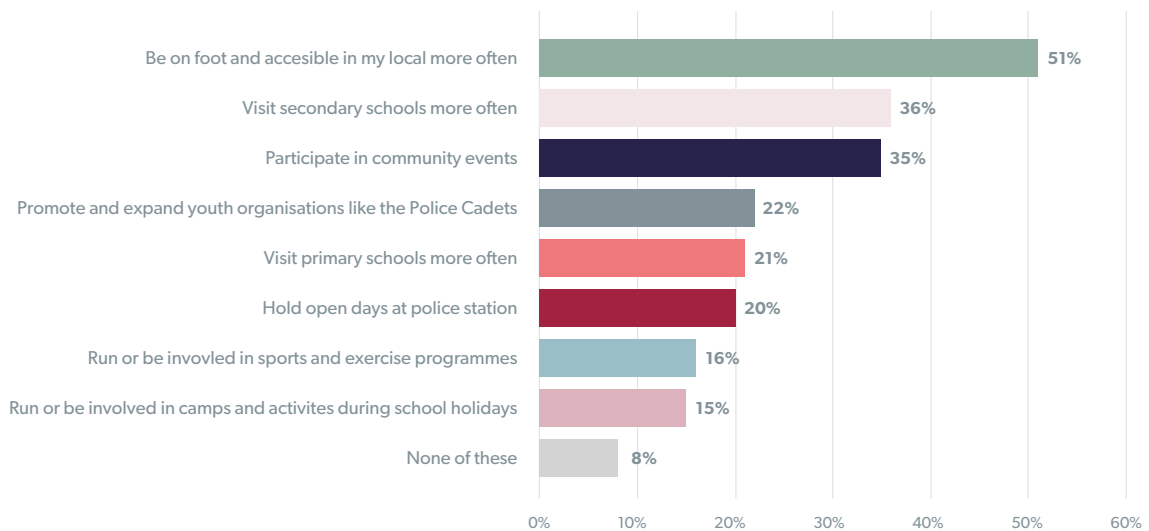
10 It must be noted that figures recorded by the police can be skewed by how offences are counted and by the willingness of victims to come forward.

Chapter 3:

Londoners and their changing expectations of the police

Our polling also explored how Londoners would like to see the police better connected with young people in the capital. The two most popular requests were for the police to be on foot and accessible in the local area more often (51 per cent), and to visit secondary schools more often (36 per cent).

Chart 5: Which of the following would you like the police to do to better connect with young people in London? Please select up to three



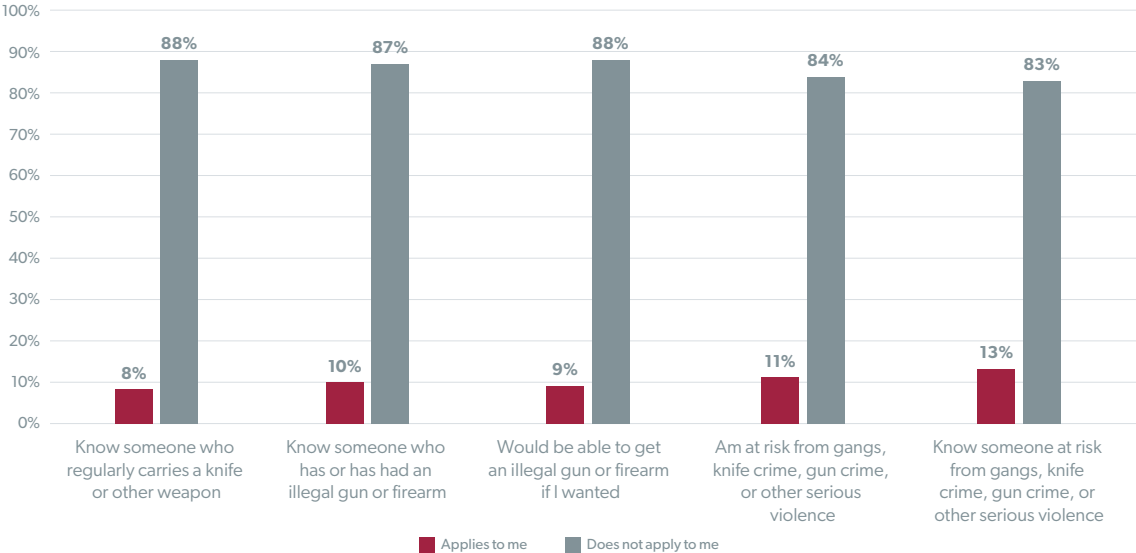
Source: Suration Polling Analysis

Interestingly, almost 1 in 4 non-white Londoners supported the initiative that police should run or be involved in sports and exercise programs. Amongst those respondents who had been attacked or threatened with violence once or more than once in the last five years, support for police visiting secondary schools (19%) and wishing to see police to on foot and accessible more often in their local area (16%) was significant.

Chapter 4:

The evolving nature of weapons and serious gang violence

Chart 6: Risk of and possession of weapons amongst Londoners



Source: Survation Polling Analysis

Whilst a knife is still the dominant tool used to commit serious violence, there has been a worrying escalation in the use of firearms. Our survey now highlights that 1 in 10 Londoners (10 per cent) said that they knew someone who has or has had an illegal gun or firearm, and a similar percentage (9 per cent) said that they would be able to get an illegal gun or firearm if they wanted. These figures are slightly higher (9 and 8 per cent respectively) to a poll conducted by the CSJ in 2018.

Given that our polling reveals that the London public has slightly higher concerns about firearms than they did five years ago, the Home Office should be vigilant around the changing tools being used to commit serious violence. Finally, while concerted efforts have been made to tackle the sale of weapons in shops, it is concerning how easily various weapons in different forms are available online.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Ensure that stop and search continues to be used as a part of a toolkit for crime prevention

Despite levels of stop and search falling over the last five years, the public remains largely supportive of it. We believe the reduction in stop and search is not because of any change in legislation, but rather economic and political considerations relating to shrinking police budgets, a reduction in the number of officers, an inability to retain talented police officers, and clear political messaging from lobby groups and the Mayor of London.

We would encourage that stop and search continue to be used as part the enforcement arm of a wider toolkit to prevent serious violence, as was the case with Glasgow's Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV). The Mayor of London should better coordinate information sharing between multiple local and citywide organisations targeting various forms of antisocial behaviour to feed into an overall strategy to prevent and reduce street gang violence. Given the increasing risk of London youth getting caught up in serious violence, we recommend replicating Glasgow's commitment to early and effective intervention by designing and delivering tailored diversion activities and programmes, particularly for the at-risk under-16 age group.

Recommendation 2: Publicly and regularly release findings of stop and search to improve trust and confidence in the police

We propose that police forces continue to use stop and search as a preventative tool to reduce serious violence but focus less on quantitative targets. Therefore, the focus should not be on meeting a minimum quota of stop and search levels per day (which may lead to the same people being stopped and searched again and again to meet these targets) but rather ensure that searches are as effective as they can be, and that the individual being stopped genuinely understands the motivations and purpose of the power. We also recommend that the Home Office consult on the development of a new methodology for assessing and understanding potential racial disparity in the use of tactics like stop and search. This is vital to ensure that the public, politicians, and police leaders are armed with methodologically sound facts in relation to this important crime-fighting and life-saving tool.

Moreover, it is concerning that the London mayor has failed to deliver on his promise of a city-wide study on stop and search, which would help improve trust and confidence in the police.¹¹ It is vital for public confidence that alleged disparities are understood and explained or, if there is no explanation, then they should be tackled. The Home Office and partners should consult on the development of new measures for assessing and understanding potential racial disparity in the use of tactics like stop and search. At a minimum it should seek to consider both the available street population in each area, the racial breakdown of suspected offenders for appropriate crime types, and the breakdown of local prolific or high-harm offenders.

Recommendation 3: Publicly and regularly release the findings of the newly created Violence Harm Assessment

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Gangs Violence Matrix (GVM) was a tool used to identify and risk-assess the most harmful gang members in a Borough. The Mayor of London made a commitment in his 2016 manifesto and his Police and Crime Plan 2017-21 to conduct a review of the GVM. This review was published in December 2018, and was the largest and most comprehensive exploration ever conducted into the Matrix. One of the recommendations was the need to systematically capture key elements of the Matrix process and report annually on outputs in terms of the Matrix population.

We believe such reviews and the resulting data are significant in reducing crime. Yet, in 2024 the Matrix was decommissioned following a legal challenge and because it was classified as racist by lobby groups. As a replacement, each area in London will use the information of a new, broader Violence Harm Assessment to prioritise police resources towards the most harmful individuals. We strongly encourage regular and transparent reporting of the new Violence Harm Assessment to the public to ensure that public perceptions of tackling violence and trust in the police is addressed. We would also welcome a comparison of the effectiveness of the new, Violence Harm Assessment with the old GVM to determine whether the prior matrix should be re-introduced, given the prevalence of gangs in relation to knife crime and serious violence in London.

¹¹ Annie Green and Noah Vickers, 'Met Police: Call for London mayor to complete stop and search study' (Nov 2023), BBC.

Recommendation 4: Expand the Volunteer Police Cadet programme and ensure the police play a role in delivering an enrichment programme and a Right to Sport in all schools

To build on the relationship between police officers and young people, we recommend that all secondary schools and colleges in London be affiliated to a Volunteer Police Cadet programme. All Pupil Referral Units in London should also be affiliated to a nearby Volunteer Police Cadet Unit.

The Volunteer Police Cadet programme should be part of a package of engagement between the police and the wider community. Alongside the third sector, the police should play a role in supporting schools to deliver an enrichment guarantee and a Right to Sport in schools – both policies the CSJ continues to call for. The Volunteer Police Cadet programme should focus on those children excluded or at risk of exclusion from school, as evidence suggests these children are at higher risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime.

Recommendation 5: Legislate for social media companies to use Redirect methods against knife and firearm sale searches online

Research by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) has revealed that 60 per cent of children witnessed real-world acts of violence on social media in 2023.¹² Social media has an important role to play in the normalisation of violence. It is also concerning that weapons and knives can be easily found to buy online, on marketplaces such as Amazon, and through a simple Google search.

We recommend that social media companies use techniques used in the fight against terrorist content online, such as the Redirect method, to make extreme violent and graphic content and the sales of weapons online harder to find. As part of this initiative, we would encourage companies to redirect such searches to helplines and charity organisations that can provide young people with alternative narratives and engagement programs. We also recommend that companies are put on a timeline for this, and fines are implemented by Ofcom under the Online Safety Act 2023 if companies fail to comply within that time frame.

As part of this effort, we also recommend that police restrain from publicly posting pictures of obtained knives and other serious weapons to back up the use of stop and search. This can not only normalise or glamourise the use of such weapons, but also help perpetrators obtain weapons with slightly different details or requirements.

12 Jon Yates, 'Violence on social media – the online fight for our children's attention', (Nov 2023), Youth Endowment Fund.

Appendix 1:

Estimating the cost of violence in London in 2023

Table 1: Estimating the cost of violence in London in 2023

VIOLENCE TYPE	SUB-TYPE	NUMBER OF RECORDED OFFENCES	UNIT COST (£)		TOTAL COST (£)
Violence against the person	Homicide	64	£ 4,247,416	£	271,834,675
	Violence with injury	110,034	£ 18,546	£	2,040,701,691
	Violence without injury (not including stalking and harassment)	84,838	£ 7,827	£	664,081,842
Sexual Assaults	Rape	15,245	£ 51,955	£	792,088,197
	Other sexual offences	136,306	£ 8,606	£	1,173,108,261
Robbery	Personal robbery	139,814	£ 14,942	£	2,089,164,184
Total		486,303		£	7,030,978,852

Our sources to arrive at these estimates come from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Home Office, and police recorded crime data for the year ending 2023. All data was subject to a multiplier from the Home Office, as not all victims report crimes to the police, and the police do not record all crimes reported. Financial figures were also updated using the latest inflation estimates from the Bank of England.

It should be noted that the first estimate of the cost of violence in London was conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) in their 2019 report *Violence in London: what we know and how to respond*.¹³ We used similar methodology, unit costs, estimates, and source information to arrive at our updated 2023 figure of £7 billion. Our analysis differed from the BIT, however, in that they used multiple data sources to estimate the number of violent crimes, whereas we used police recorded crime and the Home Office multiplier.¹⁴

¹³ The Behavioural Insights Team, 'Violence in London: What we know and how to respond', (Jan 2020) p. 62

¹⁴ UK Government, Home Office, 'The economic and social costs of crime, second edition', (July 2018), p. 21.



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