

Youth Violence Commission

Briefing Note for 23 April evidence session on music, media and role models

Key areas for the Commission. The Commission is particularly keen to hear from practitioners, experts and young people. The questions asked, may include:

What is your response to suggestions that some genres of music – such as drill - and social media play a role in encouraging youth violence?

Does the music industry – and individual artists - have a responsibility to help prevent and condemn youth violence?

Do you think 24-hour news channels and social media platforms have played a part in desensitising young people to violence?

What's your perception generally of the way UK media channels report on young people?

Do you think the media should/can play a role in seeking solutions to youth violence?

What positive examples are there of media platforms/agencies working with young people to explore youth violence?

To what extent do you think young people who are at risk of serious violence lack positive role models?

Do you think young peoples' perceptions of positive role models have been blurred by reality TV and media attention to celebrity?

It is worth noting that in previous evidence sessions held by this Commission several issues relevant to this theme have already emerged, including:

- The lack of positive role models, especially for young black men. There are notable exceptions in some areas - such as in music or sport - but these industries are not easily accessible so many young people don't see role models in careers/positions they can realistically aspire too.
- The importance of a mentor or trusted older figure who can provide advice and a consistent, reliable source of support, which is something that many young people do not have in their lives.

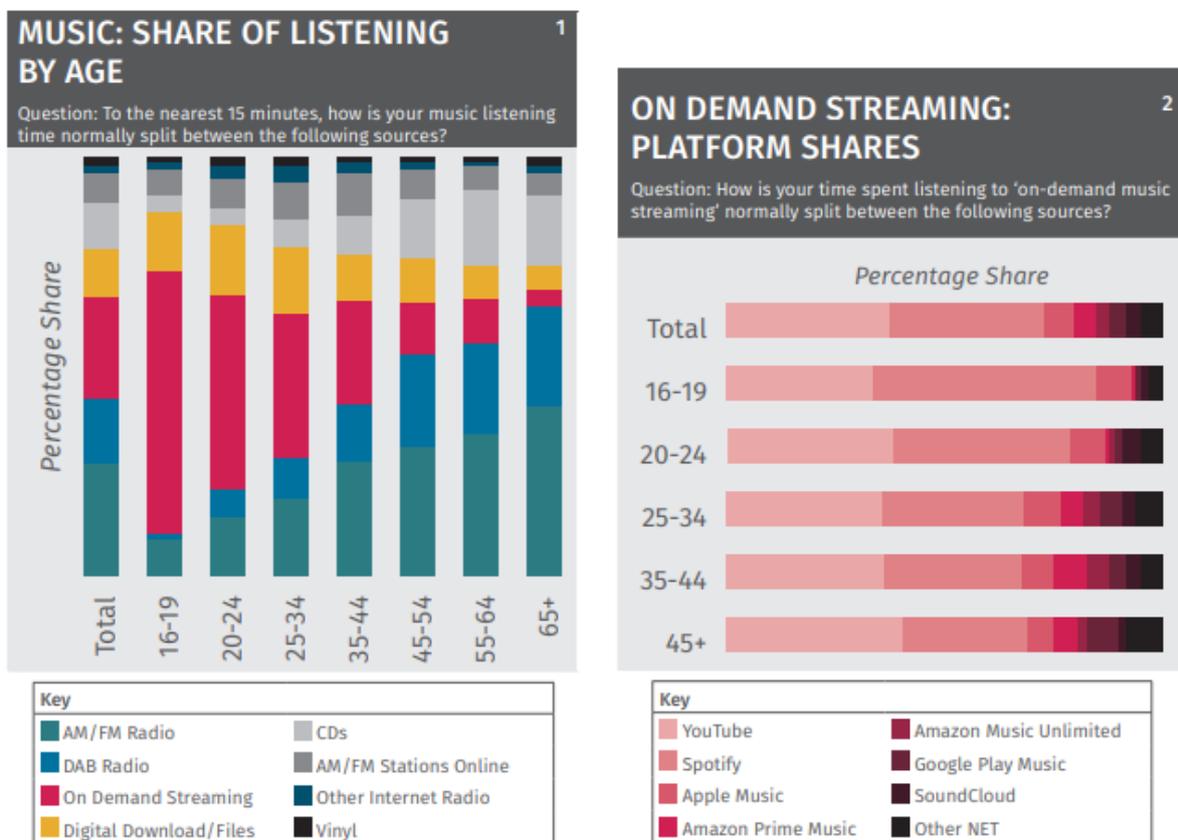
In addition, almost half of the 2,200 young people that the Commission surveyed in February this year¹ said that they listened to music with violent lyrics at least once a day.

¹ <http://yvcommission.com/safer-lives-survey/>

Music

Music is undoubtedly a significant part of many young people’s lives. According to the 2017 Music Consumer Insight Report², more than 70% of 15-24 year-olds think that music is important to them. The percentage is even higher for younger respondents. The report concludes “Young fans are also showing high levels of engagement with music. Despite having enormous amounts of media content competing for their time and attention, they are taking music to their hearts and recognising its value. As they emerge as the next generation of music fans this is an encouraging sign.”

As shown in the UK Music 2017 “Measuring Music” report³, 16-19 year olds are far more likely to access music via digital downloads or on demand streaming than older generations.



There are numerous publications and articles – academic and otherwise – on the impact of music on peoples’ lives and behaviours. Some of these are listed in the resources section below. Commentators appear to be divided on the specific issue of whether certain types of music (and the ease with which lyrics and videos can now be widely shared on-line) contribute to increased youth violence. Two recent articles highlight the differing views:

- In an Evening Standard piece in July 2017⁴ David Cohen argues that “the language of knife culture” is spread via music videos that are posted on YouTube. Whereas in the past, genres like “drill” would have been niche, videos and posts which could arguably

² [Music Consumer Insight Report](#)

³ https://www.ukmusic.org/assets/general/Measuring_Music_2017_Final.pdf#page=14

⁴ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/how-londons-knife-culture-is-being-fueled-by-jargon-social-media-and-music-a3579396.html>

be seen as glamourising violence are now regularly viewed by thousands of young people. Cohen references murder cases in which rivals had previously used social media to taunt each other and issue threats.

- Contrast that with a piece in the Guardian earlier this month⁵ by journalist Suzanne Moore in which she argues that it is too simplistic to blame the rise of serious violence on music or social media. She suggests instead that the root causes of violence are complex and include childhood trauma, widespread mental health issues and a serious lack of youth services.

Given that around half of the young people who completed the Commission's "Safer Lives Survey" stated that they listen to music with violent lyrics **every day**, we are particularly interested in views on this issue.

Media

In 2008, the Local Government Association published a literature review on Young People, Crime and Public Perceptions⁶ which summarised academic studies that explored the media's influence on public perceptions of youth violence. Some interesting points to note for this session include:

- the media systematically misinforms the public about youth crime and despite an overall trend of falling crime levels many people perceive an increase in the number of young offenders,
- an emphasis on the association between young people, crime and disorder has resulted in young people being vilified in the popular press and public discourse,
- the media has a tendency to report on the most violent and sensational crimes which are not representative of the types of offences that make up the majority of youth court hearings,
- whilst older people in general perceive that overall crime levels have increased, younger people overestimate the extent of violent crimes in their area, possibly because they feel that they have an increased likelihood of falling victim to these types of crimes.

In April 2017 a study of over 2,000 young people from 6 different countries⁷ explored links between media violence and aggressive behaviour. The study concluded that:

- Violent media use was positively and significantly related to aggressive behaviour in all countries
- Exposure was related to heightened aggressive thinking and lowered empathy
- Media violence remained significant even after controlling for other risk factors

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/10/drill-music-police-cuts-knife-crime-teenagers>

⁶ <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LYC01/LYC01.pdf>

⁷ [Cross-cultural study strengthens link between media violence, aggressive behaviour](#), *Science Daily*, April 2017

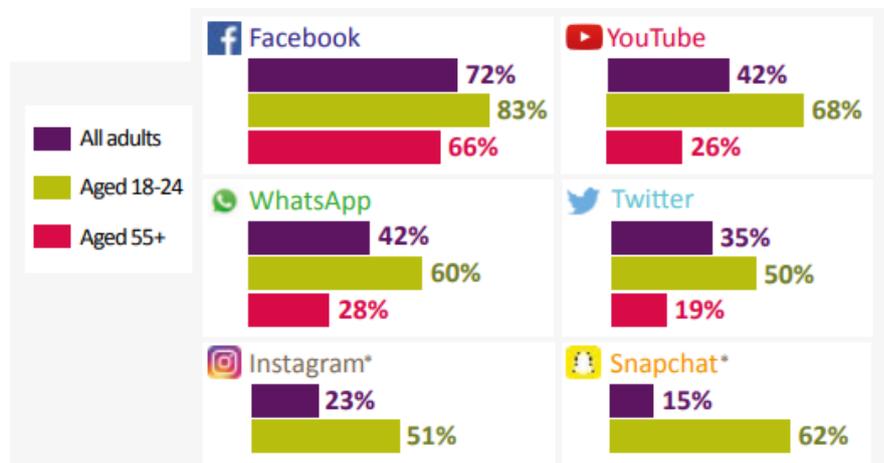
- The effect of media violence was larger than all other risk factors, except peer delinquency

In January 2017 researchers from Catch 22 and the University College Birmingham analysed five of the most popular social media platforms over a six-month period. Their subsequent report⁸, which also considered a review of the international literature and discussions with young people, the police and expert practitioners, listed several key findings, including:

- Social media platforms are often “adult free” zones which allow a small minority of people to share material that displays and incites serious incidents of violence
- By “collapsing time and space” social media platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for young people to disrespect each other
- Concerns raised by young people and professionals about drill music videos which threaten and provoke individuals from rival areas
- Violent intent is the exception rather than the norm
- When young people are disrespected on line, social pressure can lead to retaliation in real life
- Young women can be particularly vulnerable to on-line violence

Kier Irwin Rogers, one of the authors of this report, is an advisor to this Commission.

Ofcom’s [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report](#) provides data on the proportion of children with an active social media profile. The chart below is from page 102 of the report.



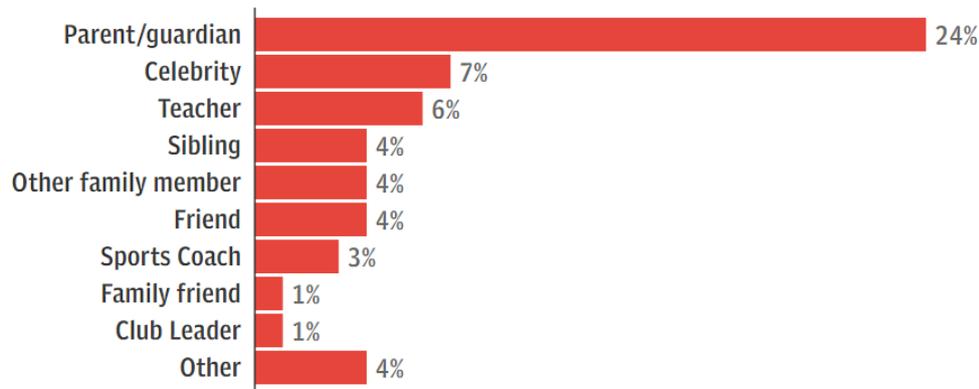
Role Models

The lack of positive role models, especially for young black men, is an issue that has emerged from several of the Commission’s evidence sessions. Whilst there is little recent academic research on this particular issue, the National Citizen Service (NCS) surveyed

⁸ Catch 22, [Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence](#), January 2017.

around 1,000 16 to 17-year olds asking about their role models and the responses are summarised below:

Question: Do you have any role models in your life? I.e. people you look up to or might like to imitate in some way.



Source: NCS, Youth report, cited in [The Guardian, December 2017](#)

Academic literature on the effects of role models on young peoples' behaviour is somewhat patchy but an American report in 2010⁹ found that "role model antisocial behavior is directly linked to increased violent behavior and indirectly linked to increased violent behavior through adolescents' attitudes toward violence..."

The lack of role models for young boys can be particularly problematic in families with absent fathers. In 2014, an article in *The Voice*¹⁰ reported on various studies into this issue with testimonies from gang members themselves who saw the lack of a father figure as being a significant risk factor for physical and mental health issues, gang involvement and vulnerability to negative behaviours.

There are numerous mentoring schemes in London and elsewhere across the country. Some of these, such as the Mayor's Mentoring Programme¹¹, focus specifically on providing mentors for young black boys. There is, however, very little information on the effectiveness of these schemes.

⁹ Noelle Hurd et al, [Role Model Behavior and Youth Violence: A Study of Positive and Negative Effects, The Journal of Early Adolescence](#), March 2010

¹⁰ <http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/'clamp-down-absent-fathers-prevent-youth-violence'>

¹¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/education-and-youth/initiatives-schools-pupils/mayors-mentoring-programme>

Literature/reports/resources

- [Cross-cultural study strengthens link between media violence, aggressive behaviour](#), *Science Daily*, April 2017
- Catch 22, [Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence](#), January 2017
- Craig Anderson, [Media Violence Effects on Children, Adolescents and Young Adults](#), *Journal of the Catholic Health Association of the United States*, July/August 2016
- Arline Kaplan, [“Violence in the Media: What Effects on Behavior?”](#), *Psychiatric Times*, October 2012
- Kevin D Browne, Catherine Hamilton-Giachritsis, [The influence of violent media on children and adolescents: a public-health approach](#), *Lancet*, 2005
- [Irresponsible reporting of knife crime 'alienating young people'](#), *Guardian*, 28 March 2017
- [“How London's knife culture is being fueled by jargon, social media and music”](#), *Evening Standard*, 4 July 2017
- Courtney Shields, [Does Rap Music Increase Aggression?](#), Angelo State University, 2018
- [Danielle Ward, The influence of the ‘hip-hop lifestyle’ on the possession and use of weapons by young male gang members in the UK](#), Undated, Sheffield Hallam University
- Gaye Soley and Elizabeth S. Spelke, [Shared cultural knowledge: Effects of music on young children’s social preferences](#), *Cognition*, March 2016
- [Media and Violence: An Analysis of Current Research](#), Common Sense Media, February 2013 – includes discussion of music videos and lyrics
- American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Communications and Media, [Impact of Music, Music Lyrics, and Music Videos on Children and Youth](#), *Pediatrics*, Vol 124 (5), November 2009
- Peter Fischer and Tobias Greitemeyer, [Music and Aggression: The Impact of Sexual-Aggressive Song Lyrics on Aggression-Related Thoughts, Emotions, and Behavior Toward the Same and the Opposite Sex](#), *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, September 2006
- Steven C Martino et al, [Exposure to Degrading Versus Nondegrading Music Lyrics and Sexual Behavior Among Youth](#), *Pediatrics*, Vol 118 (2), August 2006
- Suvi Saarikallio and Jaakko Erkkilä, [The role of music in adolescents' mood regulation](#), *Psychology of Music*, Vol 35 (1), 2007
- Donald F Roberts et al, [“The Effects of Violent Music on Children and Adolescents”](#), chapter 8 of Douglas A Gentile (ed), *Media violence and children: a complete guide for parents and professionals*, Praeger, 2003

- CelebYouth (<http://www.celebyouth.org/about/>) - website for a research project on 'The role of celebrity in young people's classed and gendered aspirations', funded by the Economic and Research Council, 2012-2014
- ["Why Media Role Models Matter"](#), Common Sense Media, January 2018
- [Celebrity culture 'a threat to today's youth'](#), YouGov, July 2014
- Noelle Hurd et al, [Role Model Behavior and Youth Violence: A Study of Positive and Negative Effects](#), *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, March 2010
- Fatimah Awan, [Young People, Identity and the Media: A Study of Conceptions of Self-Identity Among Youth in Southern England](#), Bournemouth University, 2007
- ['Clamp Down On Absent Fathers To Prevent Youth Violence'](#), The Voice, June 2014
- ['A million children growing up without fathers'](#), BBC, 10 June 2013
- Sarah Teitelbaum, [Present and absent fathers in a juvenile delinquent population](#), University of Florida, 2013
- Erica Lawson, ["Single Mothers, Absentee Fathers, and Gun Violence in Toronto: A Contextual Interpretation"](#), *Women's Studies*, pp805-828, September 2012
- Jerrod Brown, [Father-Absent Homes: Implications for Criminal Justice and Mental Health Professionals](#), Minnesota Psychological Association, August 2004
- ["Crime linked to absent fathers"](#), Guardian, 5 April 2001

The Youth Violence Commission – Background

Following a debate in Parliament, a Cross Party Commission was launched in 2017 to examine the root causes of youth violence in England, Scotland and Wales. The Commission is consulting young people and working with academics and practitioners to better understand how serious violence manifests itself in many young people's lives. The Commission has the support of MPs from across political parties, but it is not funded by Government, nor is it an All Party Parliamentary Group. It will produce a written report with policy recommendations to address serious, youth violence issues.

Commissioners

- Vicky Foxcroft, Chair of the Commission, Labour, Lewisham Deptford
- Chuka Umunna, Labour, Streatham
- James Cleverly, Conservative, Braintree
- Mark Field, Conservative, Cities of London & Westminster
- Chris Stephens, SNP, Glasgow South West
- Norman Lamb, Liberal Democrat, North Norfolk

Evidence Sessions

The Commission is running several Evidence Sessions to gather views and insights of experts, practitioners and young people. The following sessions have already taken place:

- 16 October 2017: Youth and Community
- 11 December 2017: Public Health and Mental Health
- 26 February 2018: Early Years, Education and Employability
- 26 March 2018: Housing, Communities, Relationships and Faith Groups

Further sessions will take place in 2018, including on the following themes:

- April: Media, music and role models
- May: Policing and Criminal Justice

Safer Lives Survey

The Safer Lives Survey was conducted in January/February 2018 and asked young people about the levels of violence that they are exposed to in their everyday lives. It is the first national survey of young people's views on these important issues. It will provide an underlying evidence base for the Commission and will ensure that young people's views are central to its work. Over 2200 responses were received and the results are being analysed and will be reported later in April 2018. A second stage, to include an online version, is being considered for later in 2018.

Scotland – sharing good practice

The Youth Violence Commission is in contact with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in Glasgow. This has included a fact-finding visit in early October 2017. The VRU is a police and government unit which tackles violence by working with partners to achieve long-term societal and attitudinal change. The VRU's adoption of a public health approach to violence has had outstanding positive outcomes.