

6. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

6.16 Youth Offending

It is well established that young people involved in the Youth Justice System often represent a hard to engage, complex and vulnerable population of young people. Many of these have health and social care needs which go unrecognised and unmet (Chief Medical Officer, 2012). Whilst these are not the cause of offending behaviour, they are often linked to issues of self-esteem, emotional well-being and other factors that influence behaviour more generally (HM Government, 2009). The following section on the needs of young offenders focusses on four key areas of health need: Emotional and Mental Health, Physical Health, Speech, Language and Communication, and Substance and Alcohol Use.

6.16.1 Importance

6.16.1.1 Emotional and Mental Health

Prevalence of mental health conditions is more common among children and young people in the Youth Justice System. Nationally 1 in 5 young offenders have significant depressive symptoms, 1 in 10 has reported anxiety or post-traumatic stress symptoms and 1 in 10 reported recent self harm (Teplin et al, 2002). Self harm is a specific issue of concern, particularly for those within the Secure Estate (HM Government, 2009). There is a need to understand the psychological difficulties that are likely to contribute to offending behaviour and in particular violence.

6.16.1.2 Physical Health

Nationally there is a lack of data on the range and extent of physical health problems among young people in contact with the Youth Justice System. A review of the health problems of 16-24 year olds in custody noted that, overall, they had greater health problems than their peers but had received less in the way of health promotion, screening, preventive and early intervention services (Ryan and Tunnard, 2012).

6.16.1.3 Speech, Language and Communication

At least 60% of young people known to Youth Offending Services nationally have speech, language or communication needs, in comparison with up to 8% of the general population (J. MacKenzie, Royal College of Speech, Language and Communication). If these needs are untreated, 33% will develop mental illness and over 50% will become involved in criminal activity (Breakthrough Britain – The Centre for Social Justice, March 2009).

6.16.1.4 Substance and Alcohol Use

Young people in contact with the Youth Justice System have high levels of problem drinking, use of illegal drugs and volatile substances (HM Government, 2009). These

increase the risk of young people committing an offence as well as having a detrimental effect on their general health and well-being.

6.16.2 Information on Youth Offenders

6.16.2.1 Emotional and Mental Health

Between August 2013 and September 2014, 78 young people were referred to the CAMHS YOS Link Clinician in Buckinghamshire. Consultation between the YOS case manager and the Clinician took place in 45 of these cases. The remaining 33 young people required further input, which included referrals to specialist health services.

Physical Health – Within the same period, 49 young people were assessed by the YOS Nurse, with the majority requiring extensive follow up work in a variety of different areas. This included support with healthy lifestyles, smoking, diet, sleep, sexual health and immunisations.

Speech, Language and Communication – Between December 2014 and June 2015, 60.3% of young people screened by the YOS were identified as having speech, language and communication needs (70/116). In addition, 75 of this cohort had Statements of Educational Need. This is in line with the national research quoted above. In secure settings the national figure rises to between 60 and 90% (Professor Karen Bryan).

Substance and Alcohol Use – Estimates from the UK suggest that nearly half of those aged 16-24 have used illicit drugs at some point in their life, with up to 20% having used drugs in the last month. During 2014/15, the YOS made 37 referrals to Young Addaction for specialist intervention with young people with substance and alcohol needs.

6.16.3 Inequalities

Young offenders are recognised as a vulnerable group. The evidence above illustrates that young people within the Youth Justice System have specific health needs that increases that vulnerability. The Buckinghamshire County Council Public Health “Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy” 2013-16 has a clear remit to promote equality of opportunity and address the health and wellbeing needs of vulnerable residents of Buckinghamshire. Evidence suggests that there is considerable overlap between children who are in contact with Children’s Social Care Services and those in the Youth Justice System (Ryan and Tunnard, 2012). Children Looked After are more likely to experience mental health problems (Ford et al, 2007) compared to other children. In July 2015, Children Looked After accounted for 14% of the overall YOS caseload (13/92), of which 77% were placed outside of Buckinghamshire (10/13).

6.16.4 Demand

The total population of Buckinghamshire is projected to increase by 7.4% between 2011 and 2020. In the same time period, the population of children under 15 is expected to increase by 11.7% (CHIMAT), placing potential greater pressure on those providing health and youth offending services.

6.16.5 Public Views

The Youth Offending Service conducted a health audit in September 2014, offering all young people open at that time an opportunity to participate. 43 young people completed the questionnaire.

Emotional and Mental Health – 44.2% (19) stated that they at times felt sad or miserable. 32.6% (14) had experienced panic attacks and 27.9% (12) admitted to feeling worried or scared for long periods of time. 14% (6) stated they had self harmed with 11.6% (5) saying they had thought about harming or killing themselves. 34.9% (15) said they had been through a traumatic experience, citing rape, bullying, accidents and fights. 16.3% (7) had received treatment for mental health issues. 32.6% (14) had seen a professional regarding mental health issues. Of these, 11.6% (5) stated they had been prescribed drugs. 46.5% (20) reported having had injuries to the head.

Physical Health – 74.9% (32) stated that they were sexually active. Of this 32, 15 had unprotected sex. 58.1% (25) had been tested or treated for sexually transmitted diseases. 7% (3) had been pregnant or got someone pregnant. 30.2% (13) reported having lost weight recently and 25.6% (11) stated they had gained weight. 25.6% (11) stated they had problems with their eyes, hearing or oral health.

Speech, Language and Communication – 30.2% (13) felt that they had speech, language or communication difficulties. However, further exploration of this showed that 65.1% (28) found it difficult to find the words to get their message across when they were calm and 72.1% (31) struggled with this when they were cross. 46.5% (20) had difficulties with understanding questions people asked them.

Substance and Alcohol Use – 65.1% (28) stated that they smoked, with 14 young people stating that they smoked more than 10 cigarettes per day. 53.5% (23) said that they drank alcohol or used drugs. 11.6% (5) stated they had committed crime in order to obtain drugs or alcohol.

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June 2016*

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June 2016*