

**Report 3 :**

**Feeling safe : An exploratory study exploring  
views of young people in Manchester**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two focus groups took place, in a primary and high school in Manchester, involving 30 pupils from Years 5-9. The purpose was to explore how they think bullying is addressed in school and outside and what measures they think stop people of their age bullying and/ or enable them to change their behaviour.

The study was small and exploratory and should not be used as evidence. Its value is as a basis for further consultation with young people or to indicate possibilities for a further study both in terms of themes to explore and potential methods.

The results indicated:

- Both school and places outside school feel potentially dangerous for some young people
- Sports facilities are considered relatively safe compared to young peoples' facilities and may be better used.

The group gave suggestions of how places could be made safer for them. They included:

- The need for stronger communities
- Specific, appropriate and safe provision for their age group
- More fairness, justice and opportunities for learning at school (attention and resources should be given for good behaviour)
- Support to change the behaviour of young people who were bullies, stopped others learning etc. They thought punishment leads to short term solutions only.

The study concluded that the young people involved:

- are very concerned about safety outside of school as well as in school. This is similar to the national literature.
- lack confidence in the ability of their communities to protect them and feel adults and their friends are a source of protection.
- identified the presence of more lunchtime organisers and teachers in school and community safety officers and police out of school as helpful.

Areas which would benefit from further exploration include:

- consideration of the importance of friendship networks in relation to safety issues, especially looking at what young people do who do not feel they have people their own age to go out with.
- How common it is for pupils to feel that pupils they find intimidating are selected for the school council and as a result to feel their voices are not heard.

In order to promote safety for young people both inside and outside school, MABPPN should link with other initiatives and agencies, for example, Community Safety work, including that being carried out by New Deal for Communities initiatives.

Using a scale to find out young people's ideas for improving levels of safety worked well and is recommended for further development and use.

## 1. Background

The commissioners of this research were initially interested in how young people perceive bullying in relation to being a victim of crime. The investigation wanted to find out if young people were more aware that some bullying behaviour is criminal behaviour, whether they may be more willing to report it, what they perceived would be the response from within and outside school, and where they felt safer from bullying. It was felt that if schools were more aware of the links between bullying and crime they may be more prepared to work more closely with other agencies, such as those in the criminal justice system, with regards to prevention of bullying and support to pupils, both inside and outside of school.

The evidence about safety of young people outside of schools from national literature and the experience of people in East Manchester suggests that the criminal justice system is not a very effective means of controlling bullying and enhancing safety of young people. In the wider community there is a general lack of confidence in the ability of the legal system to control crime, there are high re-offending rates of young people who go through the criminal justice system and high levels of fear of crime ( Pollard, 2000 & Marshall, 1999, Emanuel, 2004). Young people feel similarly. A seminar held in London in 2000 involving 60 12-18 year olds found that:

- Most saw streets and parks as unsafe
- They lacked confidence in their communities to protect them, but said they would feel safer with more police on the streets

(Imagine London, 2000)

The Youth Justice Board found that over 60% of school children in England and Wales were afraid of being physically assaulted; more than the 40% in the same study who were afraid of being bullied (Young Minds, 2001a).

The NSPCC have developed projects to look for local solutions to high rates of victimisation and fear of crime among local children and young people. The experiences, which have been highlighted, are:

- Victimisation being trivialised and not recognised as crime
- Much of the victimisation is perpetrated by other young people
- Fear of verbal and physical abuse especially amongst girls and minority ethnic children restricts the use of common space
- Parental fear for children's safety restricts their access to their local communities and decreases mobility and independence (Ross, N, 2000)

It is recognised that children and young people can both be victims and offenders of crime; the balance in public policy and debate fluctuates (Parker, 2004). An NSPCC report focussing on building safer communities for children concluded that local crime reduction strategies focus on young people as potential offenders rather than victims (Mason, 2001). The NSPCC has argued that crime and disorder reduction partnerships should put children and young

people at the heart of the solution to crime reduction rather than at the root of the problem (Young Minds, 2001b).

It seemed therefore important to get the perspective of school going young people on where they go; where they do and do not feel safe and what solutions they have about developing safer environments in order to begin to consider whether young people in an area of Manchester have a similar experience to that described in the above literature and to find out what if any solutions they could identify.

This piece of research was commissioned alongside an evaluation of the Manchester Anti-Bullying Policy and Practice Network.

## **2 The study**

The aims and objectives for the study were to find out from young people:

### **2.1 Aim**

How they think bullying is addressed in school and outside of school and what measures they think stop people of their age bullying and/or enable them to change their behaviour.

### **2.2 Objectives**

1. How they think bullying is handled both inside and outside of school
2. Where they feel safer and why
3. What strategies they think work and do not work and any other suggestions they may have.

### **2.3 Limitations of the study**

The study was small and exploratory and should not be used as evidence. Its value is

- as a basis for further consultation with young people
- to indicate possibilities for a further study both in terms of themes to explore and potential methods.

### **2.4 Methodology**

The focus group in the primary school lasted for 1 hour and included the following activities:

- Working in pairs; half the group identified places they went to, the other half feelings they associated with safety. They then fed these back to the whole group.
- a whole group exercise using a flipchart. Each participant indicated whether they felt safe at the places that had been previously identified by pairs, if they went to them with people of their own age or alone.

These 2 exercises were to develop a picture of where they went, with whom and how they felt about it.

- small groups brainstormed what advice they might give to the headteacher, the School Council, the police and the Local Authority about how to make places safer for people of their own age.

The methods and focus of the group held at the High School were developed both from the data collected at the primary school and to explore in more depth some of the questions, which had arisen in the material from the primary school. . A handout was used, where information was collected about where they went, how they got there and whether they went with an adult,

people their own age or alone. They were also asked to rank how safe they felt using a scale of 0 (unsafe) –10 (safe).

7 young people opted to stay for a second hour for a more in depth discussion about safety issues and their views on how to raise levels of safety.

Schools were asked to select young people to get a mix of gender, ethnic group, attainment levels and experience in relation to bullying. They were also asked to give out leaflets to the young people and send leaflets home, which informed both the young people and their parents or carers about the research and gave them the opportunity to refuse involvement if either party did not want them to participate. No refusals were recorded. Participants were told at the beginning that participation was voluntary and all agreed they wanted to take part. Confidentiality was also explained through a warm up exercise and all information has been kept confidential.

The data was written up, for the young people to see and comment on prior to final analysis.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Participants

The 2 focus groups involved a total of 30 pupils; 12 Year 5 and 6 pupils and the other with 18 Year 8 and 9 pupils. The primary school group involved 6 boys and 6 girls; 3 of the boys and one of the girls were black (40% of the school population are from black minority ethnic groups (BME) groups).

In the High School, 18 pupils from Year 8 (7 young men and six young women) and Year 9 (4 young men and one young woman) took part during the first hour. Three of the young men were from BME groups (44% of the school population are from BME groups).

Seven of the group volunteered to stay for a second hour for discussion, six young men and one young woman; 2 of whom were black. Some young people acknowledged that they were able to speak openly because they trusted other people who were in this group, but if certain young people had been there who they considered to be bullies they would not have been able to say what they thought.

#### 3.2 Where young people go

The primary school group came up with the following place where they went; town, library, park, shops, pub, places for their own age group, for example play schemes, Brownies and Cubs and sports centres including swimming pools.

When asked if they feel safe with friends or on their own in the places they go to, they following results arose:

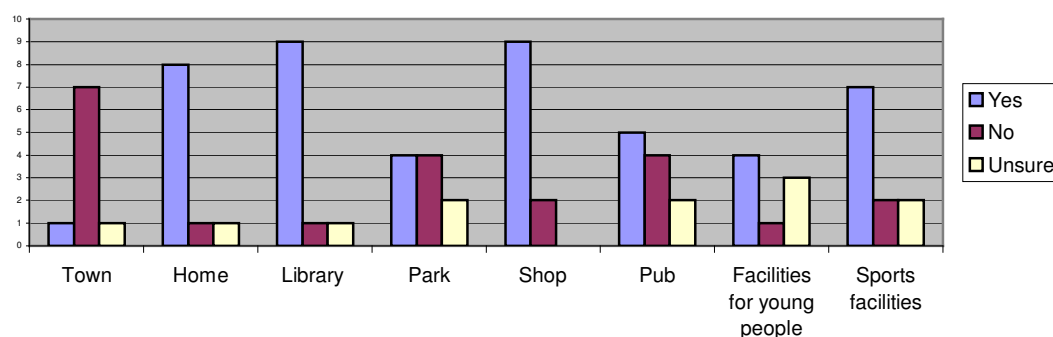


Table 1: Feelings of safety among primary school group about going to the places they go to with friends or on their own

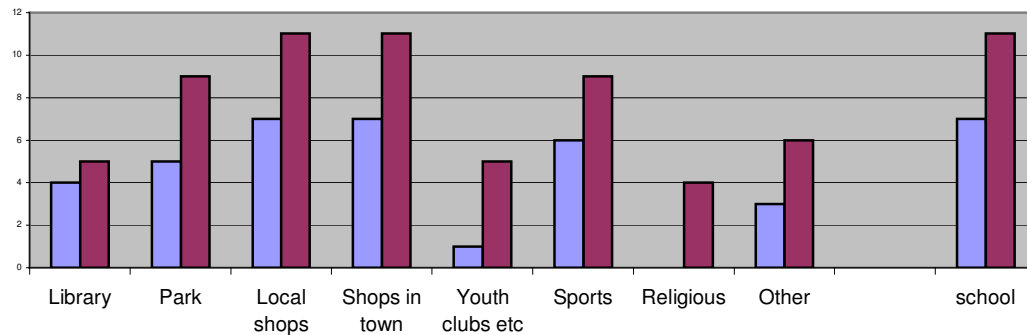
There was a very strong feeling that town was not a safe place for people of their age without an adult; they said this was re-enforced by parents.

They explained the different results at the park in the following ways. Some thought it was safe because they knew an adult who lived nearby. Others thought some



parks were safer than others. Some also thought that some areas were safer than others.

The places identified were used in the High School to get more in depth information for example, with whom the young people went to different venues.



Purple – females; total =7  
 Maroon – males; total =11

Table 2: Places Year 8 & 9 young people went.

All the High School group went to local shops and shops in town and to school. These figures suggest that more of the young men may go to more places especially youth clubs and religious institutions, but care should be taken with these figures given the small numbers and the greater numbers of males than females in the group.

While some young people felt safe in most places; others did not feel safe in many places. The range of answers was quite great for both young men and women. Having people their own age and adults to do things with may influence both where they go and how safe they feel.

<b>Place</b>	<b>Been there in the last year</b>	<b>Perceived Safety levels</b>
Library	Half, slightly higher proportion of young women than men had been. Young men in particular are likely to go on their own	Fairly high
Park	14/18 had been to the park. Mostly with people of their own age. One-third of young men had also gone with an adult.	Concerns but most still go
Local shops	All go, with people of their own age, adults and alone	Some concerns
Shops in town	All go, mainly with people of their own age and adults	Major concerns
Youth clubs	Used by one-third, mainly young men	Safety issues stopped several young people using youth clubs
Sports facilities	Used by 15/18	Most thought they were safe
Religious	Less than a quarter	Safe although one young person who would like to go but did not, would like them to ensure young people can get home safely if they go alone.
School		In discussion it was clear that school did not feel any safer or less safe than outside school. Most young people indicated they felt fairly to very safe at school. One exception felt very unsafe in school but reasonably safe outside of school.

Table 3: Places the High School pupils go to and how safe they feel

3 young women added that they went to the cinema and to friends' houses. 6 young men identified other places that they went to which were the market, cinema, to see family, out with mate, holidays and the beach. The Year 9 young men had higher levels of fear than the Year 8 young men. With such a small number this may be relate to the particular young men rather than their age. 2 young women did not do anything with anyone of their own age; one did not do anything with an adult either. She was the only female to report going to town alone; four boys reported doing this. Both the young women who did not do things with people of their own age recorded high levels of fear for most places.

### **3.3 Feelings of safety**

The primary school participants associated feeling safe with having an adult with them or nearby and people they knew, liked, loved, trusted and were happy with. In particular family, teachers, friends, and shopkeepers were people associated with feeling safe.

There were mixed feelings amongst High School pupils about whether they felt safer in school or out of school. Some felt if there was an incident in school, people got into trouble in school; it was less safe out of school unless you were with an adult.

### **3.4 What is and feels unsafe**

Fears and concerns about safety of High School pupils included terrorism, dirty needles, rapists and crowds. Concern about crowds included unsafe people, pickpockets and getting lost. Some thought knowing what goes on in the area increases fear and that nowhere is safe.

The young people were asked how do you cope with living in fear and becoming independent. One suggested that they:

*'go out anyway- not let them ruin their lives.'*

### **3.5 What helps to feel safe?**

The young people identified strategies they use to protect themselves, for example, going in groups of more than 3, keeping away from bushes and looking for an adult if they felt unsafe.

Ideas they had about how to make things safer for their age group included:

**Greater community cohesion :** This was expressed as

*'Coming together – make more of a community feeling'*

#### **Activities for young people:**

In general young people wanted more things for to do and opportunities to develop hobbies. They were keen that youth clubs become safe places for young people and offer things they want to do.

**Environmental:** This included clean parks and big fences near lakes.

#### **Improving Security:**

There were a range of views about security cameras amongst both groups of young people, some young people felt they made them feel safer and others that they did

not. Some doubted whether anyone watches them, others did not want to be watched,

*'being watched all the time would make me feel unsafe.'*

some felt that some are useful and some are not.

They were keen that there were community support officers and police in the community

### **3.6 What can be done about bullying in school?**

*'If it happens in school sometimes things are done about it, but not always. Some young people want to commit suicide.'*

High School group member

No-one in the High School group felt that punishment works, particularly long term, they felt it was crucial to find ways of changing the behaviour of bullies. They did however feel that people who behaved badly at school got a lot of attention and rewards eg free trips, getting places on the school council whereas people who were trying to learn and behaved well had a disappointing experience of schools. One said:

*'School is the biggest let-down.'*

They did not feel that the Government were doing anything about bullying.

Overall there was a clear message that school needed to ensure that good behaviour was encouraged and justice was seen to be done to all and exactly how to get the balance right may be difficult to achieve. One primary school pupil who acknowledged she had been a bully said she had changed because she thought she was missing out. She did not have friends or get certificates and by changing, she got them.

Several of the suggestions for staying safe from the primary school group included having people around eg staying with friend when outside school, more teachers and lunchtime organisers outside at break times, the school council keeping an eye on people who are being bullied.

The ideas from the High School group included:

Counsellors for bullies

Getting ex-bullies to speak to bullies

Set up a group for people who are afraid of being bullied – but it was recognised that young people may not want to say if they have been bullied.

Separate bullies if they are disturbing others; if people do not want to learn they should not be there

Show bullies what they have done but some bullies do not care about the consequences

Not getting into trouble if they are defending themselves

The most important things they identified that they thought would make school safer were:

1. Faster response
2. The right to act in self defence
3. More support for people being bullied
4. 'Gotta get it cured! Positive things to help people to change
5. Fair reward systems – justice and attention to good pupils
6. Take disruptive pupils out of class where pupils want to learn
7. A suggestion box for everyone to help school be a safer place (not just reporting bullying incidents)
8. More security cameras
9. More educational resources rather than trips
10. Homework clubs

### **3.7 Methods**

Using a scale to find out young peoples ideas for improving levels of safety worked well.

#### **4 Discussion, conclusions and recommendations**

This small study indicates that the participants were very concerned about safety outside of school as well as in school and had high levels of fear about their safety about a wide range of issues. This is similar to findings in national literature.

They lack confidence in the ability of their communities to protect them and feel adults and their friends are a source of protection. They identified the presence of more lunchtime organisers and teachers in school and community safety officers and police out of school as helpful. Friendship networks may be important to enable young people to feel they can go out safely with people their own age. This may be worth further exploration and especially looking at what young people do who do not feel they have people their own age to go out with.

There is a need to address the strong sense of injustice felt by High School participants that attention and resources continue to be given for bad behaviour. That some high school pupils found pupils selected for the school council intimidating and felt their voices were not heard raises important issues if many pupils feel this. The degree to which this is a concern of pupils should be explored further.

In order to promote safety for young people both inside and outside school MABPPN should link with other initiatives and agencies, for example, Community Safety work, including New Deal for Communities initiatives.

Using a scale to find out young peoples ideas for improving levels of safety is recommended for further development and use.

## 5 References

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### **APPENDIX : Manchester Multi-Agency Anti-Bullying Policy and Practice Network**

The Manchester Multi-Agency Anti-Bullying Policy and Practice Network (referred to as the Network) was established in 1999. It involves partners from a range of statutory, voluntary and not for profit independent organisations to provide support for schools within Manchester Local Education Authority (LEA).

In 2002 Guidelines produced by the Network were launched as part of the LEA's anti-bullying strategy. These are currently being piloted in one High School and 3 Primary Schools as part of the implementation programme, known as Creating Safe Learning (CSL).