

**Northamptonshire Youth Commission
Full Report**

Gangs & Youth Violence and Young Drivers



BE THE CHANGE

**Northamptonshire Police,
Fire and Crime Commissioner**



Foreword



Last year, I set up a Northamptonshire Youth Commission with one aim in mind, to hear directly from young people about the issues they face and to bring their fresh and exciting ideas to bear on the work of my Office.

The Commission members decided that gangs and youth violence and the matter of road safety were of real concern to them and their peers and they set about interviewing and considering the views of more than 1,100 young people from across the county. As a result of these interviews, the Youth Commission has produced this report on the concerns they have identified and a number of recommendations that they think would make the county a safer place.

I could not be more proud of the work that the Youth Commission has carried out. To have young people capturing the views of other young people on these very significant issues is, I believe, something of a first for the county. I am committed to following through on the recommendations they make and I thank them all for this very important piece of work.

Stephen Mold, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Mold". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Introduction from Northamptonshire Youth Commission Members

We wanted to take a minute to say thank you for reading our report, to introduce ourselves and why we chose to do this consultation. We joined the Youth Commission because we wanted to help make a difference, have a voice for someone who doesn't. Be a part of something to help the next generation - it's our community and we all need to work together to make a difference.

Why we chose the theme young drivers

We are the young drivers of the future and we want the roads safer for us and future generations, including our own brothers and sisters. Most people in our Commission knew someone who had been in an accident or had been affected by one, including people who had lost their lives and this motivated them to do more to raise awareness. People relax more after passing their test, and accidents affect more people than we think, lots involving young drivers. Young people are easily distracted by their mobiles or loud music or pressured to show off with speeding and unsafe driving. We know there are a lot of people who are bad drivers that aren't young people but we want young people to be a generation of better, more aware drivers. We also want young people to feel safe as passengers and know what to do when they don't.

Why we chose the theme gangs and youth crime

Gangs are a big part of our society, Northamptonshire is central to a lot of the cities and used as a bypass for gang activity. We hear about it too much. Some young people don't have a choice – they are forced into gangs for various reasons; sometimes to provide for their family, sometimes due to family connections. Some people are influenced to join gangs as they feel like they don't belong or have a family, so they join the gang as a surrogate family, not truly understanding the consequences. Some people don't have a choice, or fully understand the consequences of the decision they are making. We need to use our platform to raise awareness. We want to let people know where they can go for advice if they need it or are worried about someone, and to help people feel there are choices and someone who cares.



"Social media is being used in a negative way and its influencing young people for example, people showing off weapons and violent music lyrics and videos. So it's up to us to use our platform to show people other ways to use social media and the good stuff that's out there, to influence them in another way"

Youth Commission Member

It's really important you read this report if you live or work in Northamptonshire as this isn't about London or national statistics, this is about our own young people and their views and experiences of Northamptonshire. We don't want to be the generation that is teaching our eight year old kids about the dangers of knives, exploitation, gangs and drugs on the streets instead of how to cross the road safely. We can only make that difference together.

Bradley, Holly and Rowan Northamptonshire Youth Commission members

join us and be a Youth Commission member and help be the change:
<http://www.northantspfcc.org.uk/opfcc-youth-commission/>

To view the Youth Violence and Young Driver full report please go to
www.northantspfcc.org.uk

How the consultation was undertaken

Northamptonshire's first Youth Commission comprises of 20 young people aged 14 – 19 years who are dedicated to giving young people across Northamptonshire a voice, and to ensure the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service make decisions to better meet and understand the needs of local young people.

The Youth Commission discussed with the Commissioner and representatives from the police and fire service the main issues they saw facing young people. This feedback together with the priorities of the youth commission members themselves directed the youth commission to choose youth violence and young drivers. Youth commission members then undertook a large consultation with 1,116 young people across the county. The aim of this consultation was to understand the concerns young people had about youth violence and young drivers and with the aim of finding ways to address some of these issues.

Gangs and Youth Violence

In the survey we asked young people a series of questions to better understand their experience of gangs and youth violence such as; where they would get help, if they thought it is influenced by social media, music etc. If they knew people involved and whether they were asked to be involved or carried weapons. This was to help understand the level of concern or need and where the gaps were.

Respondents were asked: If you knew someone who was at risk of being involved in crime or joining a gang, would you know where to go for help?

75%

of respondents would not get involved or would not know where to get help

 92%

had not heard of CIRV (Community Initiative to Reduce Violence), a multi-agency police led approach to gangs



8%

would tell the police if they were worried about someone and only 2% would tell the police if they were approached themselves

In response to the question do you think that social media/ music/ music videos glamorise being involved in crime or gangs?



60%

thought that social media/music/ music videos glamorised being involved in crime or gangs

The top themes from the respondent's comments were about:

- **The influence of music, music videos and social media, and promotion of gangs and violence:**

"A lot of music nowadays, especially rap music denotes anti-social behaviour including lyrics that suggest vigilante behaviour and going against authority figures such as the police. The more this is listened to the more likely kids are to adopt these views because they idolise the artists"

"In most grime and drill music videos, the singers boast about carrying around weapons, doing drugs and being in gangs"

"People are manipulated by the things that are shown on social media, they think it's a trend or cool to be involved in crime/ gangs and they don't take notice of all the consequences"

"Drill music' has been mainstreamed even though the lyrics describe knife violence. It usually has a good beat which makes it popular with young people"

- **Others described the feelings of peer pressure:**

"No proper role models to look up to and people feeling pressured to become like other people"

"Especially music videos and lyrics, they influence young people into thinking gangs and crimes are good which it isn't"

- **Other young people talked about popularity:**

"Young people are always bothered about other people's impressions on them. If they were to join a gang they'd express it on social media in an attempt to gain popularity etc."

"People boast about how 'hard' they are when involved in these things and social media is used to spread that and encourage the image"

One of the respondents shared their idea on how we can try to raise awareness:

"Grime, drill and rap videos are very popular with secondary children. The songs always include lyrics to do with gangs. These lyrics will be sung by the children and will go around in their brain to the point where they think it is okay to be in a 'gang' or smoke weed. What could happen is assemblies on gang violence with someone that WAS in a gang, our age, and he could talk about how he felt and why it was wrong of him to be in one. Assemblies where police talk about what gangs do and say 'you will be put in jail' don't really go into the brains of secondaries [secondary school students]. Being put in jail isn't one of their biggest problems"

Do you think social media/music/music videos have an impact on young people's mental health?

71% of young people felt it had an impact on mental health with females reporting that they felt it affected mental health more than males. The top themes from young people's comments were:

Impact on self-esteem, popularity, beauty and body image

'Very badly. Social media has a habit of making you feel bad about yourself for just being who you are'

Negative impact on mental health

'Young people described 'paranoia, PTSD or depression after leaving and anxiety over being involved in certain situations'

Influence and peer pressure

'The stress and pressure that these kids must be under would be intense and although they may not admit it, most of them will be constantly petrified. This stress is no good for anyone's mental health let alone that of a person who's brain isn't fully developed'

Have you or someone you know been approached to join a gang or commit crime? Who would you talk to if you needed help?

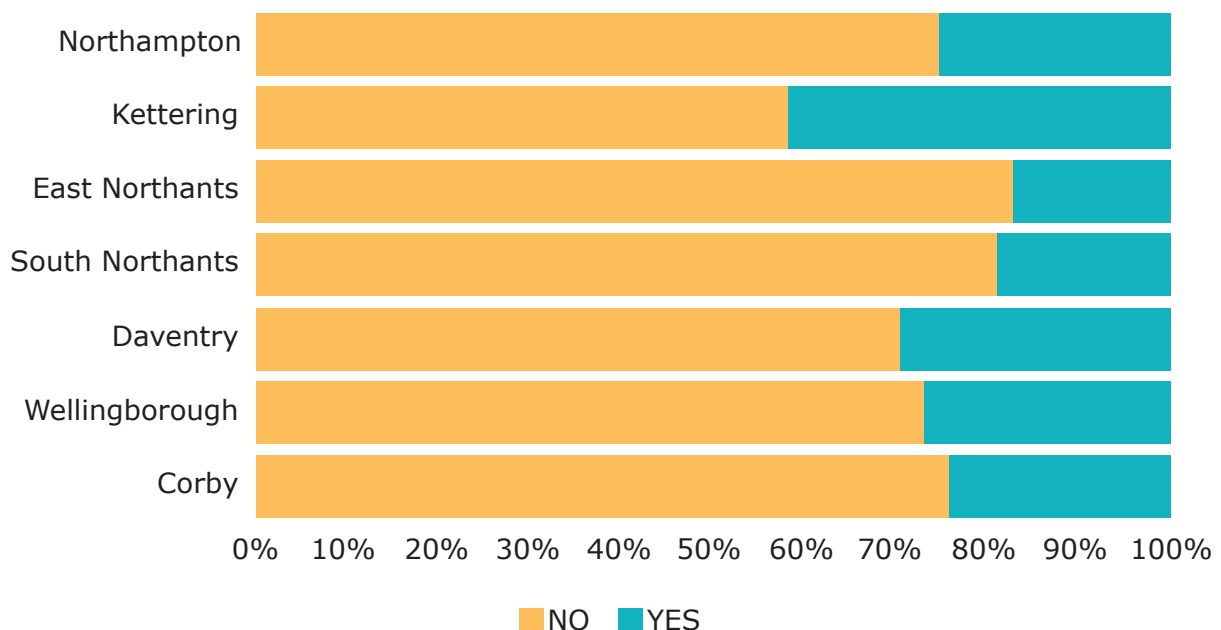


22%

of respondents said they had either been approached to join a gang or commit crime, or knew someone who had

The below table shows the responses broken down by geographical area

Have you or anyone you know been approached to join a gang or take part in criminal activity?



Nearly 40% of young people that responded from Kettering reported that they or someone they knew had been approached to join a gang or commit crime. Whilst this ranged from 20 – 30% in Northampton, Corby, Wellingborough and Daventry and less than 20% in East Northants and South Northants.

If you knew someone who was at risk of being involved in crime or joining a gang, would you know where to go for help?

It is concerning that 75% of respondents either would not get involved or would not know where to get help. Of those who would talk to someone if they were being pressured to take part in crime or join a gang, there was a reliance on family members (599) or friends (538) who also may not know how to access help, compared to the next highest answer teacher (236). 125 respondents said they wouldn't talk to anyone.

"I wouldn't trust a school counsellor or anyone employed by a school, including teachers, because from what I've heard from friends who have been through counselling and who have gone to teachers, the situation always ends up worse for them. Too often a friend has gone to a counsellor, expecting to speak to someone they trust, to have then had everything they've said reported back to parents when the friend wanted the information kept from their parents.

I'd also not want any police or anything like that involved in matters in fear that I would accidentally destroy my future or a friend's future by having something said that goes down on a permanent record and then can't get a job. I also think that it's important young people can get over past issues they've had so that they can build a brighter future for themselves rather than feeling like their entire future and any hopes of a career are now ruined because of a stupid mistake they made while they were going through some of their most immature years"

Do you know anyone who has carried a knife or other weapon, why do you think people would do this?

43% of young people who answered this question said they know someone who had carried a knife or other weapon. 54% thought people carried weapons for protection, 25% to look good with peers and 21% to threaten others/ cause injury.



43%

of young people who answered this question said they knew someone who has carried a knife or other weapon



54%

thought people carried weapons for protection



25%

to look good with peers



21%

to threaten others/cause injury

A gang member's experience

Workshops were held with young people from Blackthorn, Goldings and Corby to share their views on their experiences of the police and relationships with them. They shared their concerns about gangs and associated crime/ behaviour in their area and the difficulties of having neighbours that are involved in gangs with the fights, risky people around, drug use and feeling unsafe.

In addition to this a further discussion took place with a current gang member and an ex-gang member about their experiences and what life was like from their perspective. The current gang member, a 17 year old male, described how he believed he would be next to die in his community, including the impact this has on his mental health.

*'I will be the next to be killed, it will be retaliation, I f***ed with another gang. I live everyday thinking this will be my last, its f***ed with my head. I can't do much about it.'*

He went on to talk about why he got involved and has to carry weapons:

'I had to go out and sell a load so I could get a grand and buy stuff for my mum, you do it for your family. They need electric, food, pay bills so they don't get evicted. I want to be able to go to my family and say order a takeaway and I'll pay. I need the money for my family.'

*'We use knives to protect ourselves, our stash [Drugs]. If it gets stolen we will be killed anyway so we have to protect it and risk being stabbed by people trying to take it – either way you're f***ed!'*

He then discussed witnessing friends and people around him being stabbed and shot, dying in front of him. He shared about how hard it hits you and hurts every time it happens.

'I've seen people shot and stabbed, my mate got killed next to me – I contacted mans to get a dotty [Gun] to go back and get them but when I met mans they told me to wait, chill – we got this. I let them – I don't want to get caught with a gun, that's 10 years! The more times you see people get stabbed/shot the more deep it is [pats heart], gets you deep.'

His friend, 18 year old male, disagreed and described it having less impact the more you see it:

'People getting stabbed/ shot all the time – you don't cry no more'

He is no longer involved in gangs but did express how he misses the 'family' element it provided, he went on to share:

'I used to be in gangs but I got out because I moved away, I miss it and sometimes think about going back – I feel safe as part of a gang – I have people to back me, they got my back.'

He expressed feeling safe as the gang 'had his back' but acknowledged in other areas of the conversation that the lifestyle messes with your head and stated:

'I always hug my sisters and my family and say goodbye before I go out in case I don't come back'

Both young men seemed very sombre as they talked about the lives they have to lead and shared that it is 'expected' of them due to family members already being in the lifestyle. They shared their concerns about gangs and associated criminal behaviour in their area and the difficulties of having neighbours that are involved in gangs and the level of drug use and generally feeling unsafe.

Summary of consultation on gangs and youth violence

The survey results has shown that 75% of young people that responded either did not want to get involved, or if approached by a gang did not know where to go to for help. Young people need more information about what to do and where to get help at an early stage.

It was apparent that nearly half of the respondents knew someone who carried a knife or other weapon, and of those, 53% thought weapons were carried for protection. There is a need to further remind young people about the dangers of carrying for protection, the chances of the weapon being turned and used on them and the consequences of carrying a weapon.

Young people need greater support and promotion of positive mental health, including the resources available to them in a way that suits them. The impact was apparent from the comments young people left about things such as self-esteem, body image, depression and anxiety. The case study showed the impact on someone's mental wellbeing when in a gang and the mind-set of those that are now trapped within the gang lifestyle. No young person should be living their life waiting to be next to die.

There has been considerable national evidence that show young people join gangs to feel they belong, as they have little to do in their local community and feel a lack of inclusion, lack of role models etc. There is a need to build a sense of family and belonging within the community, to combat those who are looking to exploit vulnerable people.



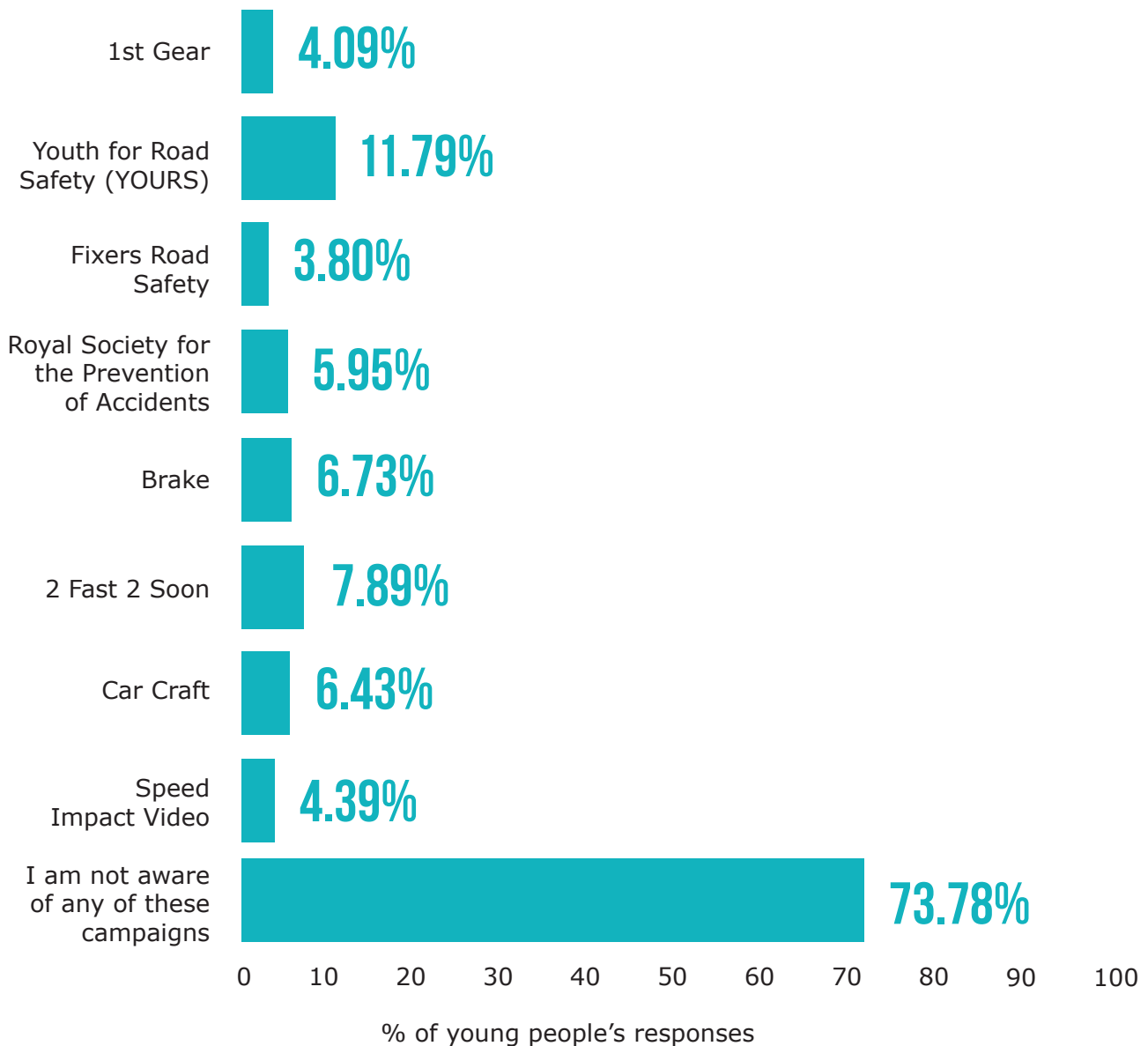
Young Drivers

The second issue young people chose to look at was young drivers when looking at priorities for the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS), as they felt this was something that was relevant to young people and a real concern for them. Most of the youth commission knew someone who had been in an accident (sometimes fatal) or knew people who had been affected by one. They met with members of NFRS to gain a better understand of what the issues are and to gain more knowledge.

Survey results

74% were not aware of any young driver safety campaigns

Are you aware of any of these campaigns?



Percentages add up to over 100% as young people could choose several options.

Have you ever felt unsafe in a car?

Nearly half of those that answered had felt unsafe in a car, 85% of those as a passenger (there is a need to take into account their age and understanding of the question i.e. most respondents would be too young to drive and some had ticked they felt safe but then still ticked as a passenger). More males said they had felt safe in a car compared to females.

When asked why they felt unsafe, speeding was the main concern for people, some of the other concerns shared were:

Standards of driving, that of the driver they were with or other drivers:

“Knowing the driver had previously been in car crashes”

“How people in other cars drive (stupidly, dangerously such as over taking on corners and speeding) no wonder accidents occur”

Dangerous/ bad driving:

“The speed the driver went at/their sudden braking, which was too close to the car in front”

“I was driven the wrong way round a roundabout because the area was unfamiliar and the driver was distracted”

Did you feel unsafe before you got in the car, or on the journey?

Over 90% of respondents did not feel unsafe prior to getting in the car. Those that were concerned prior to the journey stated reasons including; actions of others, speeding, scared of their driving and inexperienced/ nervous drivers

“Driver showing off driving at high speeds”

“One time there was a full car of people and my friend had not long passed”

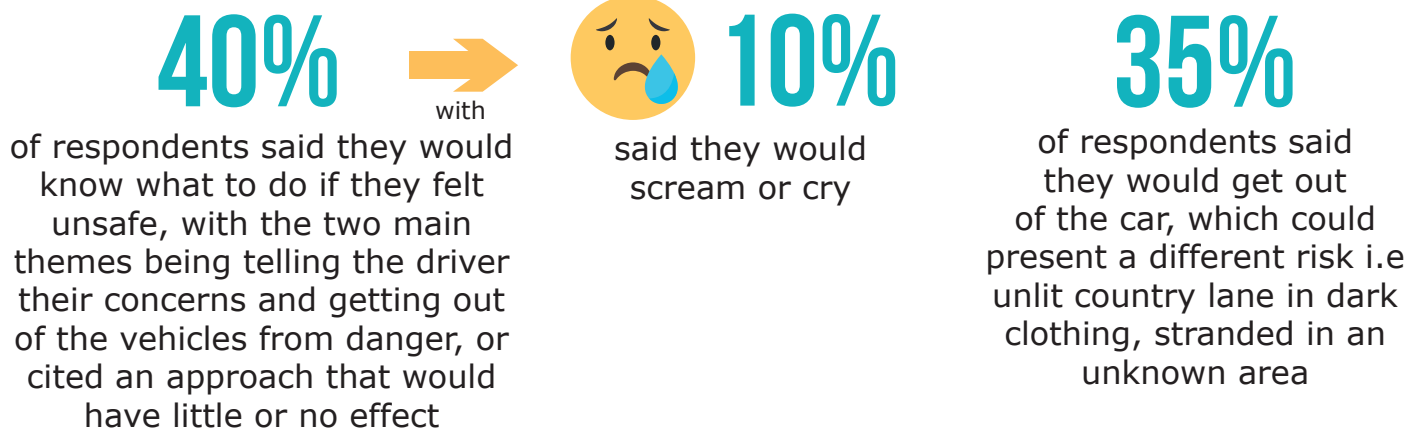


46%

felt unsafe on a car journey, citing speeding as their main concern, other concerns included; other drivers, dangerous driving and no confidence in driver/ driver attitude

“The driver being on their phone, other drivers around us going too fast and overtaking, other drivers on their phone”

Do you know what you would do if you felt unsafe in a car?



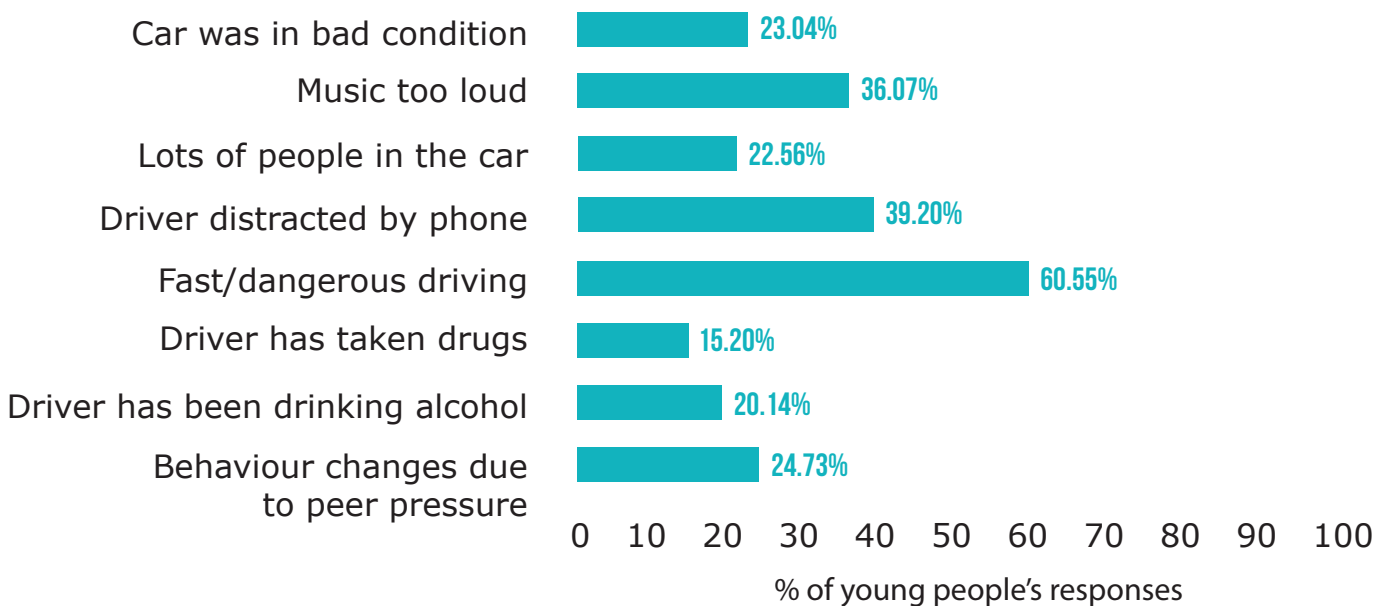
“I would ask the driver to change how they are driving. For example if they are driving too fast I would ask them to slow down. Otherwise I would ask to leave the car”

“Depending on who the driver is I would tell them however if it was someone I didn't know I'd do nothing”

“Wait for a point at which the driver ultimately has to stop (i.e. red lights or traffic) and immediately exit the car”

What concerns have you had about being in the car with a young driver?

The main concern for people when in the car with a young driver was: the car being driven too fast/ dangerously, followed by being distracted by their mobile and the music is too loud/ fast (concentration of driver).



Percentages add up to over 100% as young people could choose several options

Respondents also shared concerns about inexperience, driver's behaviour and other drivers with 20 respondents saying they had no concerns.

“I have no concerns, all the young people that I've driven with act sensibly on the roads, more sensibly than adults that I've been in a car with”

Young driver's consultation summary

The main concern for people when in the car with a young driver was: the car being driven too fast/ dangerously, followed by being distracted by their mobile and the music is too loud/ fast (concentration of driver).

The survey showed that a large number of young people had experienced feeling unsafe as a passenger in a car because it was being driven at excessive speed, or the music was too loud/fast, or the driver was distracted by e.g. a mobile phone. Young people either had no strategy for removing themselves from danger, or cited a strategy that would have little or no effect.

The survey suggests that there is a need to continue educating young drivers and passengers about these issues and also help young people remove themselves from danger.

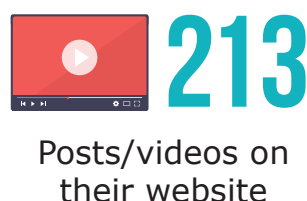


Sharing Information with Young People

In the survey young people were asked how they wanted information to be shared with them. Their feedback has helped inform the recommendations in the gangs and youth violence and young drivers sections of this report:

As can be shown below young people preferred to receive information through social media, and face to face events/ or through their school (respondents could pick more than one option).

What do you think would be the most effective way that the police or fire service could get information to young people?



There is a need for services to recognise that if they want to effectively engage with young people and raise their awareness on issues affecting them then they need to do this in a way that will have the most impact. Young people have stated that social media (Instagram and Snapchat) and face to face are the most effective ways to do this.

Campaigns for young people need to be promoted through social media. This could be undertaken by using sponsored or featured posts which will target young people on social media platforms such as Instagram as they have said they are unlikely to go looking for them. When face to face meetings were discussed, young people talked about them needing to be short and preferably by people they can relate to, they gave an example:

“My science teacher, who’s old, was talking to us about sexting and it was obvious he didn’t really understand it and had no experience of it, no-one took it seriously. If it had been delivered by someone who had been affected, or even someone nearer our age it would have more impact”

Recommendations

Gangs and Youth Violence

Overall young people wanted emphasis placed on supporting vulnerable young people and preventing them from entering into a gang rather than focussing on punishment and enforcement.

- **Involvement of young people**

The Youth Commission members are keen to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to take part in activities that engage them, so that they feel valuable members of the local community. This will prevent them from feeling the need to belong to a gang or take part in criminal activity.

- **Understanding what activities already exist**

The Youth Commission wanted to understand what opportunities and activities currently exist for young people in areas of vulnerability across the county and to ensure these are communicated to young people who live there. These activities may need access to funding and should be shaped by the young people who will potentially use them and need a partnership approach.

- **Promotion of resources via social media**

There are a number of current resources that the Youth Commission considered to be effective, but there is a need for current and new resources to be promoted through schools and specific social media sites that are used by this age group. Young people stated that currently the most popular sites for their age group are Instagram and Snapchat. Young people stated that it was important to include information on how a young person can access help and to equip young people with strategies to employ when they feel in danger or concerned.

- **Spoken word and clean drill project**

A project of communicating Northamptonshire Stories (case studies of those who have been at risk of or who have been part of a gang) was suggested with potential contributions in spoken word, music, and video. As there was particular concerns from young people in Kettering, one of the projects will be undertaken with young people in this area. With the aim of promoting this throughout the county.

- **'Episodes' style game**

To develop an online game/App with young people using the spoken word case studies as a basis for the game.

- **Mentoring scheme**

There is a need for a mentoring scheme to be developed as the youth commission feel there are a lack of role models and positive influence. Young people stated that this should be delivered by people they can relate to and be made available at youth provisions and organisations that offer support, and on a voluntary basis, not through schools and by a self-referral system.

- **Impact of social media**

Young people described the impact of social media generally on their mental health and suggested the development of a "positive self" campaign, that should include how and where young people can access support.

Recommendations

Young Drivers

There is a lack of awareness of the current available resources for young people on road safety, and those they are aware of are often outdated

- **Promote resources**

Young people lack strategies on what to do when they feel unsafe on a journey, the youth commission suggests a social media campaign and more face to face work in schools to raise awareness of what to do.

- **Too fast to soon video**

Use data collected from the survey to help inform a new "too fast too soon" video through the Northamptonshire Safer Roads Alliance

- Use social media (Instagram, snapchat) to promote and share. Young people wanted the video to pop up ensuring more young people will see it and it will have a wider impact.
- Young people wanted greater recognition of other young people that have lost their lives on Northamptonshire roads and to demonstrate the impact that unsafe driving (e.g. drink driving and not wearing a seat belt) can have on individuals, and families and friends who have lost a loved one.
- It was also suggested that a slogan could be used as part of this campaign and within the video to encourage the message to be retained in young people's minds

- **Online App**

Young people spoke positively about developing an online app to increase awareness of road safety and educate other young people about potential hazards when driving.

- **Social media campaign**

Short video clips to raise awareness with young people about the dangers and their impact on young people and their families, using Northamptonshire examples of young people losing their life on Northamptonshire roads.

- **Road Safety Champions**

Young people lack strategies on what to do when they feel unsafe on a journey, the youth commission suggested utilising peer educators in schools sharing resources and strategies.

Young People's Conclusion

Thank you for reading our report, we hope it has inspired you to take action and work with us to make a difference. These issues are affecting us as young people, they may not be affecting you directly but they will be affecting your daughters, sons, nieces and nephews who live in this reality. Nobody wants to get that knock on the door to say their son has been stabbed or their daughter has died in a car accident – we need to act now to make Northamptonshire a safer place.

If you're aged 14 – 19 years join us and be a Youth Commission member and help be the change:

<http://www.northantspfcc.org.uk/opfcc-youth-commission/>

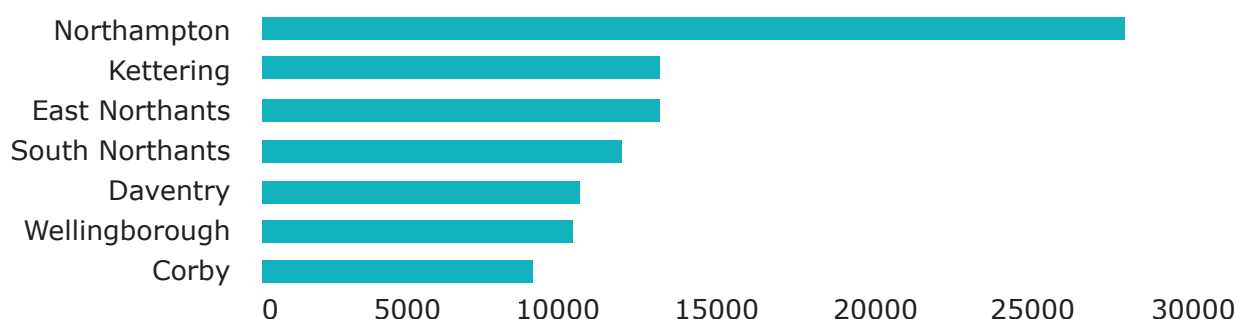


Demographics

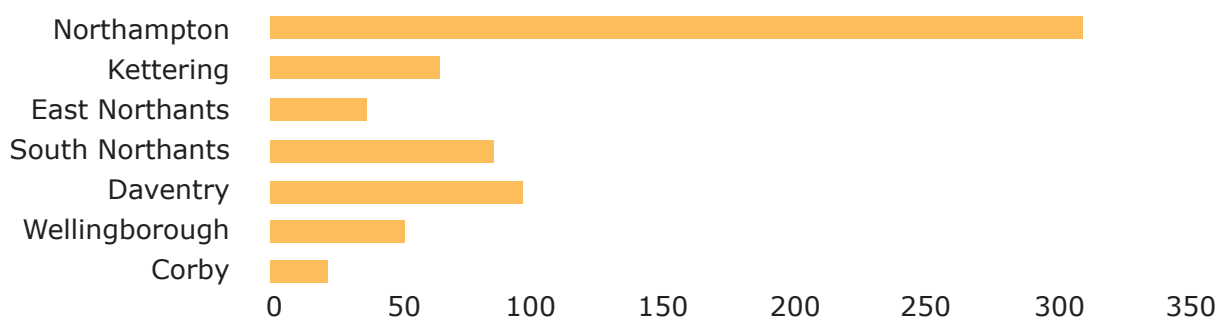
The Office for National Statistics estimates 86,165 young people aged 10-19 live in Northamptonshire (data from 2017). 43,825 are male (51%) and 42,340 are female (49%).

The Youth Commission Survey received a response of 1094 (online). Of those that stated their gender, 370 were male (44%) and 473 were female (56%). The below tables shows that the location of survey respondents generally mirrored that of the general population.

Northamptonshire youth (10-19) population by location (Office of National Statistics data)

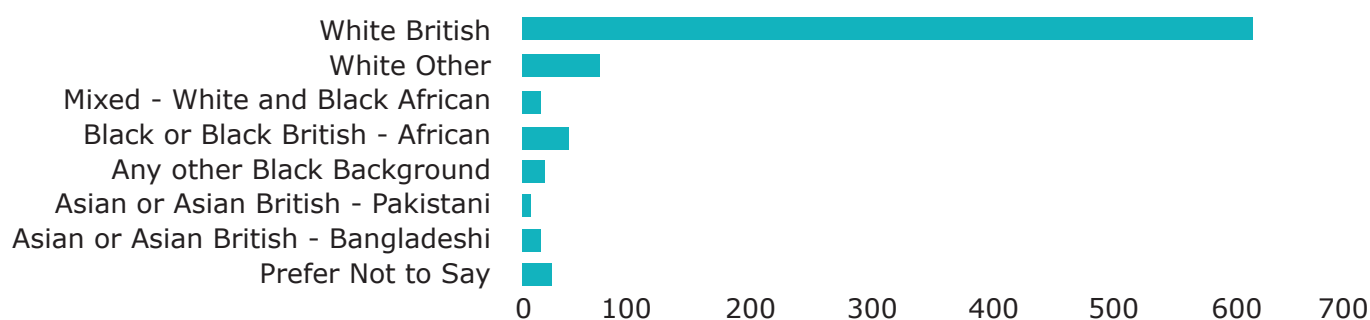


Survey respondents breakdown by location



Ethnic breakdown of survey respondents

The ethnic breakdown indicated in the below table shows that the range of respondents was in proportion to the population of Northamptonshire, with slightly more BAME young people responding than is representative of Northamptonshire.



Help and Advice

Gangs or Knife Crime:

CIRV – If you are in a gang and want to get out ring 07539 183975 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. CIRV have a team ready to help you. <http://www.aimonline.org.uk/CIRV/>

Knife free - <https://www.knifefree.co.uk/know-the-risks/>

NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/staying-safe-away-from-home/gangs-young-people/>

Runway helpline - <https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/advice/gangs/>

Youth Counselling - reachyouthcounselling.org.uk

Free2Talk - <https://www.free2talkcic.org/>

Road Traffic Accidents:

Voice for road harm - providing practical and emotional support for victims of road harm and trauma. <http://voicenorthants.org/roadharm/>

BRAKE - Support following a road death or injury <http://www.brake.org.uk/>

Roadpeace - We help bereaved families through peer support, our local group network, befriending service and trauma support programmes. <http://www.roadpeace.org/>

Cruse Bereavement Care Helpline - www.cruse.org.uk

Samaritans - The Samaritans provide confidential, non-judgemental emotional support. www.samaritans.org

Join us and be a Youth Commission member and help be the change:
<http://www.northantspfcc.org.uk/opfcc-youth-commission/>



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