

Police 'missing signs that could help them stop teenage killings'
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Martin Bentham, Home Affairs, The Evening Standard

Vital opportunities that could help prevent young Londoners killing each other are being missed, an official study warned today.

The report found many victims and their killers had already been the victims of attacks, highlighting the "dangerous" environment in which they lived.

Others had experienced the loss of someone close to them through a stabbing or shooting.

The research was compiled for a conference today of the London Serious Youth Violence Board, which was set up in response to the violent deaths of 30 young Londoners last year.

It suggested police and social services could use the warning signs to identify potential victims and attackers and find ways to help draw them away from crime.

In a further finding disclosed today, the analysis of recent murders showed that many of those involved had regularly failed to turn up to college or training courses. The report said colleges often failed to pursue non-attendance to youth offending teams in charge of supervising the absentee teenagers.

It warned that a "fatal combination" of lack of daily structure, the failure to see learning as a route to success and experience as a victim of violence could give youths a "distorted perception of how to feel safe and survive".

The report said early intervention by schools, colleges, councils, police and community and voluntary groups could prove vital in

preventing teenage deaths: "Focusing our efforts on these themes could provide us with the understanding to intervene in a troubled young life before it is too late. Offering support to the right people at the right time must be the key to addressing this most serious of challenges."

Javed Khan, executive director of the youth violence board, said: "Victims can turn into perpetrators very quickly, wanting to take control of justice and get revenge. So if we can intervene early the hope is that we can prevent the violence and stop them carrying out attacks or becoming victims again themselves."

Other findings announced at today's conference, at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge stadium, disclosed that 85 per cent of murder victims aged between 10 and 19 in London from 2007 to this year were from black or other ethnic minority backgrounds.

Further findings confirmed that serious youth violence remains concentrated in deprived areas of London.

The figures do show positives, with serious youth violence falling in all but two of the capital's 32 boroughs during the 12 months to March this year.

Further statistics show a sharp drop in the number of murders from 12 at the end of November compared with 30 for the corresponding period last year.

More than four out of five young Londoners feel safe in their neighbourhoods, with 83 per cent expressing this view in the latest survey for the Greater London Authority. However, many said they would still like to see more police on the streets.

One in four young people is also concerned about knife crime — although only one per cent reported having been a victim — while 22 per cent said they felt unsafe because of teenagers hanging around on the streets.