

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING AND VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNITS

A MORE DETAILED RESPONSE TO A KEY QUESTION DISCUSSED AT THE WEBINAR

Q

Are public health and contextual safeguarding approaches the same thing?

A

Public health and contextual safeguarding approaches share much in-common, as is outlined the webinar. In this sense they are complimentary approaches and could be used together in our efforts to keep young people safe. However, they are not the 'same thing'. The approaches have been designed, promoted and measured for different purposes. Contextual Safeguarding is principally a framework for contextualising social care responses to harm beyond families; it has multi-agency implications but in essence is about child protection and wider child welfare systems. Public health is a broader approach to addressing a myriad of issues that affect populations (it is not about child protection systems specifically) – and is based on the use of knowledge about population trends to inform how local services respond to communities. Contextual Safeguarding looks at contextual, situational and locational dynamics of harm and it promotes child welfare responses that target those dynamics of harm. Public health approaches look at population trends, and identified risk or protective factors in those population trends – targeting those risk factors; in the case of violence reduction, risk factors at a population level are targeted with the intention of preventing, or intervening early, in violence.

Q

In the webinar you suggest there are differences between public health and contextual safeguarding approaches – there isn't agreement on this.

A

This brief webinar was the start of a conversation about public health approaches, the work of violence reduction units and the Contextual Safeguarding approach; it was intended to prompt discussion and debate as we begin to explore how to use these two ideas together. In our work across the UK we have identified numerous examples of population-based interventions that target individuals. This challenge has been well-documented by researchers outside of the Contextual Safeguarding programme – such as Professor Nigel Parton. In short, we know that school exclusions are correlated with young people's experiences of violence and harm beyond their families. We see this trend across the population of young people identified as experiencing extra-familial harm. In some areas we have seen this statistic used to target interventions at young people 'at risk' of exclusion. This would be an example population-based data being used to intervene with individual people. A Contextual Safeguarding approach would seek to identify the schools with the highest rates of exclusion – assess and where necessary intervene there to reduce exclusions in that context. The intervention would target the context or situation the child is in – rather than the child. Both responses are linked to trend-based data but they have a different outcome. Arguably there is a place for both approaches, and we are inviting VRUs to reflect on this as we continue to explore whether Contextual Safeguarding is a useful framework which advances their efforts to use public health principals to reduce violence.