



# Youth violence

## Purpose

This policy briefing highlights what is known, and unfortunately also what is not known, about interpersonal violence among young people in Europe, by exploring:

- the magnitude of the violence problem;
- markers of prevalence among youth; and
- some prevention programmes and legislative acts being implemented in the 27 EU countries.

Youth violence is a violence acts committed by adolescents and young adults. Violent crimes typically include all non fatal assaults and homicides involving young people as well as specific types of violence such as bullying and gang. (Source: Children's Safety Network)

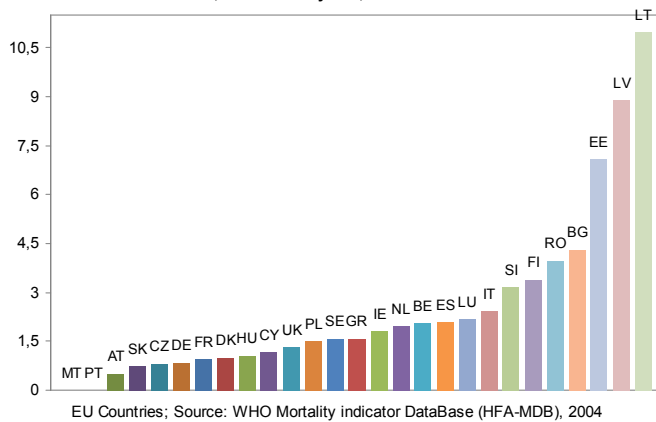
The Public Health Action for a Safer Europe-project (PHASE) addressed the theme of interpersonal violence among youth by focusing on any form of physical abuse among young people in the age range 15-29 years.

## Magnitude of the violence problem

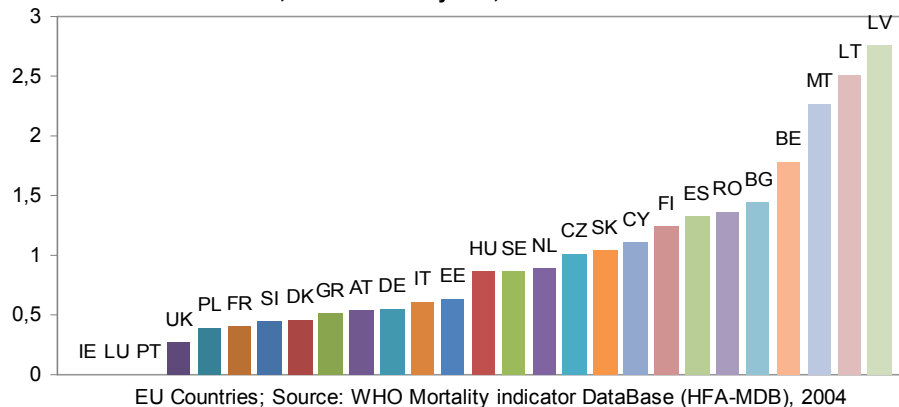
In Europe the proportion of the population aged 15-29 years is approximately 19.3%; ranging from 16.3% in Italy to 24.0% in Cyprus (Source: Eurostat, 2008).

Within the 15-29 age range, the standardized death rate (SDR) due to homicide and assault in Europe is 1.7 for males and 0.7 for females. Among males, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia present higher rates than the other EU Member States whilst among females the highest rates are observed for Latvia, followed by Lithuania and Malta.

Fatal violence: standardised death rate (SDR) per 100,000 homicide and assault, males 15-29 years; ICD-10: X85-Y09

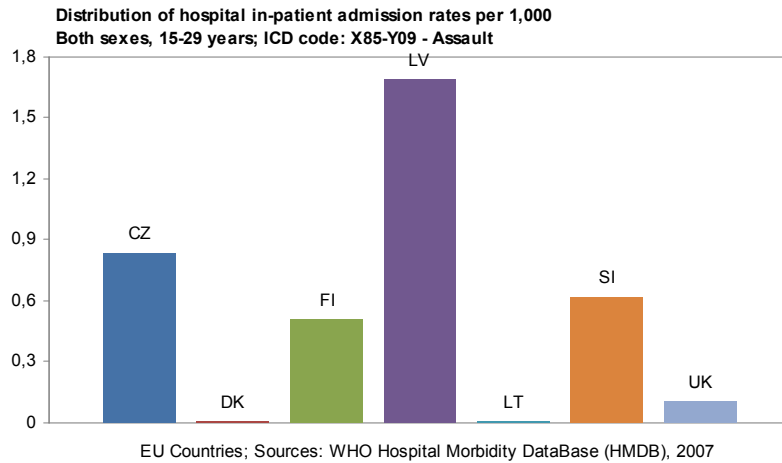


Fatal violence: standardised death rate (SDR) per 100,000 homicide and assault, females 15-29 years; ICD-10: X85-Y





For non fatal injuries due to violence among 15-29 years, information on the hospitalization rate for violence, based on the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) were only accessible for 7 EU Member States. However, across Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and UK, the average annual hospitalization for any type of assault is approximately 0.3 per 1,000 individuals aged 15-29 years.



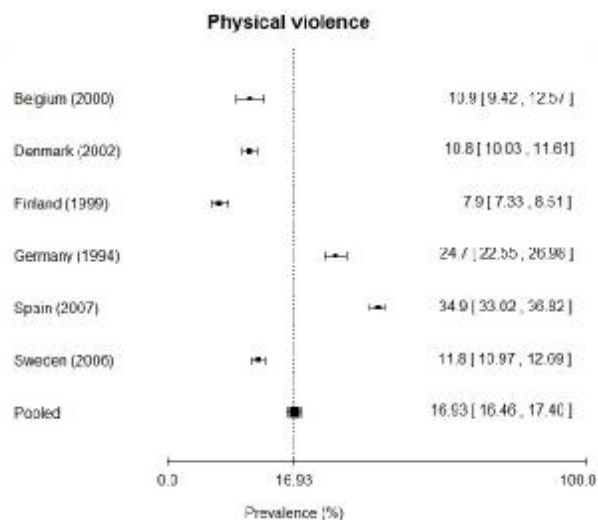
## Markers of prevalence

Physical violence is a common manifestation of interpersonal violence in adolescence. A literature review was performed to collect additional epidemiological data with information on prevalence of any form of physical violence among adolescents. Studies containing appropriate information, were used for meta-analysis.

### Physical violence in general

Among the six studies identified shown in the graph, prevalence of physical violence, mostly occurred during the previous school year, varied between 7.9% for Finland to 34.9% for Spain.

The weighted pooled estimate identifies that 16.9% of youths are victims of any form of physical violence, during the last school year.



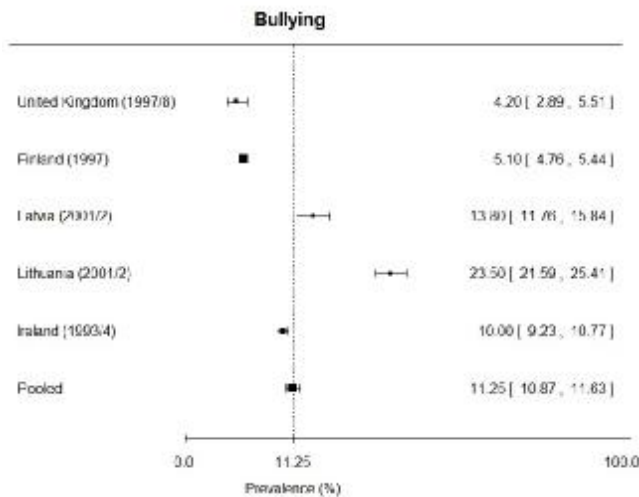


### Bullying among youth

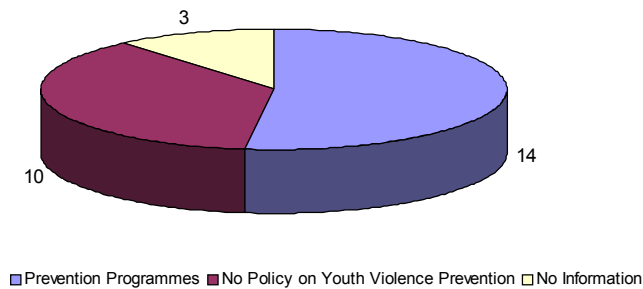
Bullying among youth is an intentional aggressive behaviour, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power or strength.

A literature review was performed to collect epidemiological data with information on the prevalence of youth victims of bullying, which were used for the meta-analysis.

Among the five studies identified, prevalence ratios of being bullied, mostly in the current school year, varied between 4.2% for United Kingdom to 23.5% for Lithuania. The weighted pooled estimate refers to a 11.2% of youth being victims of bullying during the school year.



### Prevention programmes



Searching literature and web information led to the identification of a total of 16 youth violence prevention programmes in 14 countries of the EU-27 region. In 13 EU countries no national policy on youth violence prevention has been identified. In the 14 countries with a prevention programme, this programme was developed and co-ordinated at national level.

### Overall main goals of the programmes

- To reduce gun crime and knife crime involving young people;
- To provide counselling and assistance to victims;
- To increase residents' involvement in youth violence and to reduce their social exclusion;
- To enhance effectiveness and availability of services and to reduce regional inequalities.;
- To issue recommendations on effectively preventing youth violence;
- To diminish conflict and enhance cohesion between parents and youth.

### Target population

In 12 of the 16 youth violence prevention programmes, the target population were both males and females. Ten of the programmes included focus on professionals such as training in youth violence prevention.



## Legislative measures

The literature review showed that youth violence is caused by a complex interaction of multiple factors. Carrying legal or illegal weapons is an important risk factor among young people of school age. Certain situational factors may play an important role in causing violent behaviour. A situational analysis describes how the potential for violence might develop into actual violence. The presence of alcohol is an important situational factor that may lead to violence.

In addition, low levels of achievement in school have consistently been found to be associated with youth violence. Low educational attainment increase the likelihood of being arrested for violence (*WHO, 2002*).

Across Europe there is considerable variation in the legal age for the sale and consumption of alcohol, the school leaving age, the age at which full time work is permitted and the age and reasons for the legal purchase of fire arms and knives. All of these factors are likely to influence levels of youth violence and the impact it has on health. However, examining these relationships is beyond the remit of this policy briefing.

## Public Health perspective

There are strong indications that violence has significant social, structural and environmental root causes. There is increasing evidence that the roots of violent behaviour are established very early in life and that early life interventions are cost effective ways of developing individuals who are less likely to resort to violence in youth when faced with a stressful situation.

When violence does occur in young people this is often in school and community settings and evidence suggests that multi-agency responses that involve communities are most likely to show positive benefits in youth violence reduction.

### Key conclusions:

- In Europe reliable data on youth violence is very scarce.
- There are only a few studies available on the prevalence of youth violence.
- Epidemiological data show that in Europe about 17% of youths are victim of any form of physical violence and 11.2% of youth are victims of bullying.
- There is little data in Europe measuring the impact of youth violence, its causal factors and evaluating the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions.
- There is a general lack of systematic information on prevention programmes and a lack of evaluation studies.



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### Acknowledgements

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