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Record Spike in Youth Violence Sparks Fresh Concerns in Scotland

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– Categories: Crime



Violent crime committed by children in Scotland has reached unprecedented levels, with a new government report revealing that incidents involving under-16s now account for almost a third of all violent offences in the country.

The latest Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS), conducted for the Scottish Government, found that violence committed by children, particularly in schools and care settings, played a significant role in the overall rise. Alarming, attacks by under-16s in the

victim's workplace surged to 23 percent in 2023/24, a dramatic rise from just five percent in both 2019/20 and 2021/22.

The annual SCJS report, based on nearly 5,000 interviews with adults aged 16 and over, noted that 231,000 incidents of violent crime were recorded last year. Children under the age of 16 were reportedly responsible for 31 percent of those incidents, more than triple the figure reported just two years earlier. Most of the attacks took place in workplace settings, predominantly targeting individuals working in education and care roles.

While the report did not detail the exact nature of the assaults on teachers, it did confirm that 87 per cent of violent incidents were classified as either assaults or attempted assaults. Serious assaults made up eight percent of cases.

Education unions have reacted with alarm. The NASUWT teachers' union warned that unless the Scottish Government's Joint Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour is properly implemented, it would support industrial action. National Official Mike Corbett said: "There is no doubt that these figures capture some of the issues facing teachers in Scotland's schools at the moment and echo the findings of our own surveys, all of which confirm that there has been an increase in violent and abusive behaviour from pupils towards teachers in recent years."

He added: "It is vital that the Action Plan is properly embedded in Scotland's schools this academic year. If not, NASUWT will not hesitate to support members in taking industrial action to protect their health and safety, wherever necessary."

Concerns have also been raised about the lack of consequences for pupils involved in such behaviour. At Kirkintilloch High School in East Dunbartonshire, teachers reported a rise in assaults with little to no accountability for those responsible.

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) union echoed the concerns, highlighting the growing challenges teachers face since the pandemic. A spokesperson said: "Violence in schools, including assaults on teachers and other school staff, is a serious issue which has become even more acute in recent years." They emphasised the need for more support for staff and stronger procedures to deal with such incidents.

The SCJS report stated that it was unusual to witness such a steep increase in youth-related violence in just one year, attributing the rise to a growing number of incidents

occurring in workplaces and a surge in under-16 involvement.

Opposition figures have heavily criticised the Scottish National Party (SNP) Government's response. Scottish Labour's Justice spokesperson Pauline McNeill remarked, "It is quite clear that the SNP Government has no answers to tackle this serious trend." She called for greater investment in early intervention programmes to redirect young people towards more constructive paths.

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton, a former youth worker, stressed the need for proactive youth engagement. "While acts of violence require a strong response, punishing predominantly law-abiding young people cannot be only broader solution," he said. "We need youth work to pre-empt and prevent those acts."

Justice Secretary Angela Constance responded by pointing to ongoing efforts, including over £6 million in targeted investment through the Violence Prevention Framework since May 2023. She also highlighted the increased funding for the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, now at £1.2 million, to support initiatives aimed at diverting young people from violence, including knife crime.

In recent years, incidents of violent pupil behaviour have made national headlines. In one disturbing case, a teacher at St Paul's Academy in Dundee was left permanently scarred after being attacked by then-18-year-old Kieran Matthew, who later showed no remorse and avoided prison. In another case, a 13-year-old was charged after allegedly attacking a teacher at Taylor High School in Motherwell. A separate attack in a primary school left a teacher with life-altering injuries and unable to care for his newborn.

Teachers have also reported a culture of fear when it comes to reporting violent incidents, with some alleging that schools discourage complaints to avoid negative attention. Disruption has also been widely reported, with pupils regularly refusing to attend lessons, setting off fire alarms, or roaming the corridors during class hours.

Police Scotland Assistant Chief Constable Mark Sutherland commented: "Violence in any environment, including schools, is entirely unacceptable."