7 Minute Briefing

Violence Fixated Individuals



Background

Violence Fixated Individuals, or VFI, describes an emerging pattern in which young people develop a persistent interest in extreme violence that is not driven by ideology.

Increasingly, this behaviour is shaped by online environments where graphic content, harmful forums and unmoderated discussions normalise violent themes. Adolescence, emotional volatility and social isolation can intensify vulnerability, making it crucial for practitioners to recognise early emerging patterns and maintain professional curiosity within frontline safeguarding practice today.

Key Concepts

VFI is informed by several concepts that help explain how violent interests develop. These include fixation, obsession, nihilistic violence, distorted worldviews and extreme over-valued beliefs that gradually dominate thinking. Trauma, instability or difficulty interpreting social cues may further contribute to harmful cognitive patterns. These concepts guide practitioners in recognising emerging risk without relying on assumptions and support proportionate, evidence-informed professional decision making.

Case Examples

Recent incidents demonstrate how violent fixation appears in practice. Cases such as Columbine, Sandy Hook and Breivik show themes of grievance, identity seeking and immersion in violent material. More recent UK cases, including Rudakubana and Prosper, highlight non-ideological motivations centred on notoriety and engagement with harmful online content.

Intersectionality

Understanding VFI requires recognising the wider context affecting children. Low school attendance, adolescence, social isolation, neurodivergent traits and increased exposure to violent content can combine to heighten vulnerability. These factors do not predict violence individually but should trigger proportionate professional curiosity.

Barriers

Safeguarding responses are challenged by gaps in legislation, the focus on harm to rather than from children, and the absence of formal VFI guidance. Prevent's historical focus on ideology also creates uncertainty. Multi-agency information sharing remains inconsistent and maintaining clarity and proportionality across all involved safeguarding agencies.

Disruption, Diversion & Professional Curiosity

Effective early intervention relies on professional curiosity, exploring children's digital lives, challenging harmful content and working transparently with families. Practitioners should develop multiple hypotheses, use supervision to explore uncertainty, and collaborate across agencies to disrupt risk, redirect fixations where appropriate and strengthen protective relationships for safety.

Further Support

ACT Prevent Line: DPA

Crimestoppers: DPA

https://www.ocem.org.uk/blog/online-safety-for-neurodiverse-children