



6th Bergen International Conference on Forensic Mental Health

-Youth and Emerging Adults: The Intersection of Risk and Vulnerability-

25-26th March 2026

Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACTS

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

TUESDAY 24TH MARCH 2026

Kevin DOUGLAS and Øyvind HEEN OTTESEN YEARSS Workshop

Adolescence is a time of massive developmental change, which is why adolescents are rightfully treated differently from adults in many ways, including legally. However, the developmental processes of adolescence do not end at age 18. Brain development and psychosocial maturity continue to develop for some years after, until roughly the mid-20s – a developmental stage called “emerging adulthood.” Yet, contemporary violence risk assessment and management do not account for this vital developmental stage – there are risk assessment instruments for adolescents or for adults. In this workshop, participants will learn about a new Structured Professional Judgment violence risk assessment and management instrument called the **YEARSS – Youth and Emerging Adult Risk and Strength System: A Developmentally Informed Version of the HCR-20 V3**. It covers ages 12-25 and reflects the science and unique nature of these developmental periods. We will describe the YEARSS conceptual model, highlight the science upon which it is based, and apply the YEARSS beta (test) worksheet to a clinical case. Participants will receive and have the opportunity to provide feedback on this beta version of the YEARSS worksheet and the general YEARSS model and approach. The YEARSS is under development, and we are seeking input from the professional community as part of its development.

This workshop will be of interest to professionals in mental health, social services, corrections, police, and related fields who work with young people ages 12-25.

CONFERENCE WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 2026

Randy BORUM

Understanding extremist violence in adolescents: A developmental risk–resilience model

Adolescents are increasingly coming to the attention of security and mental health services due to concerns about potential involvement in violent extremism. Yet practitioners often face a persistent gap between broad “radicalization” frameworks and the practical demands of assessing risk of violent action in developmentally complex youth. This keynote introduces a parsimonious developmental risk–resilience framework designed to clarify pathways from developmental vulnerability to extremist mobilization and violence in adolescence. The talk opens by briefly situating the applied problem and introducing the *Assessment of Risk for Extremist Violence in Adolescents* (AREVA), an SPJ-based decision-support approach developed through international collaboration with Stephen Hart, Caroline Logan, and Natalie Pyszora. The core of the address presents the conceptual model’s organizing structure and visual schematic, highlighting how developmental anchors (identity development, psychosocial maturity, and social–ecological embedding) shape salient need-based vulnerabilities (significance/identity, belonging, and injustice/humiliation), interact with situational conditions, and influence action through an explicit perception–choice process. The model is designed to support developmentally grounded risk formulation by distinguishing mechanisms, contexts, and trajectory markers while linking assessment findings to targeted intervention and supervision strategies.

Elisabeth HARNES

Psychological Vulnerability to Violent Extremism: Grooming of Transnational Youth

Recent developments indicate a rise in youth radicalisation and minors’ involvement in terrorism-related activities across Europe. Many transnational children and adolescents are groomed and indoctrinated within hybrid ecosystems, where internal turmoil and psychological distress are strategically exploited as fuel for violent extremist and terrorist groups.

This presentation draws on the author's publications, existing research, and practical PVE work. It examines how psychological factors stemming from traumatic childhood experiences may serve as precursors in the developmental trajectory toward violent extremism, with a focus on both individual and collective trauma. For many transnational youth, cumulative trauma unfolds across developmental stages and migration processes, underscoring the importance of mapping risk and protective factors through a socio-ecological, life-course perspective. This approach emphasises the dynamic interaction between ecological systems alongside the child’s individual vulnerabilities.

The analysis also incorporates frameworks addressing migration adaptation and life-course criminological approaches to better understand relevant push and pull factors.

Particular attention is given to post-migration stressors, including migration and acculturation stress, multicultural marginalisation, and race-based trauma. Specific vulnerability factors that extremist networks exploit through tailored grooming strategies, offering perceived relief by mirroring the youth's worldview, experiences of alienation, and feelings of powerlessness—factors often overlooked in assessment and intervention.

Finally, the presentation concludes with implications for trauma-informed and culturally meaningful interventions, emphasising resilience and sustainable countermeasures, highlighting the *Bergen PVE Mentoring Scheme* to support deradicalisation, disengagement, and reintegration.

Kari ØVERLAND

Developmental considerations in forensic evaluations of children and adolescents

Forensic evaluations of children and adolescents play a central role in criminal justice decision-making, yet they are often conducted within frameworks originally developed for adults. This raises important challenges for how children's developmental immaturity, contextual dependency, and capacity for change are understood and assessed.

Drawing on the CHILDCRIM project, this presentation explores developmental considerations in forensic evaluations of children and adolescents in serious criminal cases in Norway. The talk integrates insights from two empirical studies of forensic reports in Norway and addresses key developmental and methodological issues in contemporary forensic practice. Central themes include how developmental factors are conceptualized, how structure and expertise shape evaluations, and the implications of applying adult-oriented assessment frameworks to children.

Zemir POPOVAC

Understanding and preventing serious violence in young people

Is serious violence among adolescents primarily an expression of individual psychological pathology, or should it be understood as a consequence of dysfunctional social and societal contexts? This presentation conceptualizes serious violence as a complex phenomenon emerging from the interaction between individual vulnerabilities and external psychosocial stressors. It presents research on psychological risk factors characterizing adolescents who engage in serious violence, as well as societal conditions that increase the risk of violent behaviour. Particular emphasis is placed on how internal vulnerabilities and external risk factors mutually reinforce one another. Finally, the presentation discusses implications for prevention, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions targeting both at-risk youth and structural risk factors within society.

Zainab Al-ATTAR

Intersections between neurodiversity and crime: Relevance to youth and emerging adults

Neurodivergence, including Autism and ADHD, has been reported to have heightened prevalence in young people involved in crime. Whilst in the general population, neurodiversity is not linked to offending risk, within criminal justice, it is important to examine any functional, contextual links between neurodiversity and individual risk and protective factors. Many standardised risk and protective factor assessments and rehabilitative interventions address broad vulnerabilities and risk factors to crime, such as impulsivity, cognitive problem-solving skills, and emotional regulation strategies, which may be helpful for many neurodivergent individuals but may not fully and holistically address some of the nuanced and complex links between neurodivergence and offence pathways, limiting their ability to meet risk, need and responsivity of neurodivergent young people. Additionally, it is not merely deficits and developmental immaturity/delay that can become linked to risk but also strengths and developmental progression that may become a context for some offence pathways. This is especially the case with neurodivergent individuals who do not have global intellectual disability and who engage in complex, instrumental crimes. There are many complex intersections between different aspects of neurodiversity, developmental needs, and risk and protective pathways. The current presentation will highlight some of the relevant questions for forensic mental health practitioners to ask, when approaching work with neurodivergent young people who are involved in crime.

Atte OKSANEN

Digital Pathways to Violence: Youth, Fascination with Violence, and Online Influence

This presentation examines how digital environments create new pathways through which young people encounter, engage with, and at times become absorbed into violent ideas and subcultures. Drawing on long-term research on school shootings, cyberhate, and extremist online communities, it shows how fascination with violence becomes embedded in identity-building processes, cultural scripts, and online group dynamics. Prior studies demonstrate that youth who feel marginalised or bullied may find recognition in online communities that glorify school shooters or extremist ideologies, forming identity bubbles that reinforce violent narratives and provide social support for harmful fantasies. Recent evidence suggests a rapidly evolving landscape. Violent right-wing networks, Siege-inspired accelerationism, and transnational ecosystems such as The Com actively attract and manipulate minors through mainstream social media and gaming platforms. These developments align with broader findings on online communities' psychological power to shape belonging, norms, and behaviour. The presentation integrates earlier research cases to European threat assessments and discusses how digital cultures normalise extreme content, lower barriers to participation, and expose vulnerable youth to manipulation, coercion,

and exploitation. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for prevention, early identification, and strengthening resilience in the digital age.

CONFERENCE

THURSDAY 26TH MARCH 2026

Lorraine JOHNSTONE

Overlapping Risks in Youth and Emerging Adults: A Developmental Framework for Multi-Theoretical Formulations and Age-Responsive Interventions

The purpose of this paper is to detail an approach that promotes our understanding and responses to the types of distress and complex interplay of risks that occur across youth and emerging adults.

Drawing on evidence from developmental, forensic and child welfare research, it highlights shared vulnerabilities—such as those occurring through adversity, mental health, trauma, relational and contextual disruptions—that amplify harmful behaviours and impede recovery and interventions in these cohorts.

The core argument posits that single-lens assessments fall short; instead, multi-theoretical formulations integrating attachment, behavioural, cognitive, trauma, mental health, and ecological models are essential for a nuanced understanding and meaningful responses to both short- and long-term risks posed by young people.

The ‘ABC Framework for Assessing and Managing Distress’ is proposed as a method to achieve this comprehensive approach. The ABC Framework is a developmentally and risk-informed approach, tailored to age-specific stages (e.g., identity formation in adolescence vs. autonomy-building in emerging adulthood). It is applicable across all stages of risk management, from crisis intervention to specialised therapies.

Clinical vignettes will be used to illustrate its practical applications and the ethical imperative for such an approach in justice and care settings, ensuring risk management occurs within a rights-centred policy context.

Berit RITCHIE and Donna McEWAN

Between theory and chaos: Youth exploited by organised crime

This talk explores what it is really like to work with teenagers exploited by organised crime and drawn into serious youth violence. It highlights the gap between academic knowledge, policy development, and the messy reality of exploitation services, where risk can escalate quickly, agencies may understand young people differently, and decisions must often be made while risk is ‘live’ and continuously changing.

A dynamic approach to risk formulation is outlined that can respond in the moment, sometimes without comprehensive knowledge of a young person, using the best available information to make clear, pragmatic recommendations. Structured Professional Judgement (SPJ) frameworks are valued as the gold standard, while recognising that many community services are not resourced to complete full SPJs for exploited children. The session, therefore, considers how services can adapt practice while remaining risk-aware, using a multi-agency formulation to create a credible, shared way of evaluating and reducing risk.

Using a case example, the session shows how exploitation often begins not through dramatic “recruitment” but through relationships that offer belonging, status, protection, money, and a sense of being seen. It explores why “just walking away” is rarely realistic, and how fear, loyalty, debt, threats, and identity can keep young people stuck.

The talk also considers family dynamics and practitioner burden, including vicarious trauma. It ends on a hopeful note, highlighting what helps young people move away from exploitation and build a safer, more stable life.

Dr Ritchie has extensive experience working with children and young people affected by gang violence and criminal and sexual exploitation, areas she has focused on throughout her career and continues to be actively involved in today. She collaborates with a range of services, including NHS commissioners, Youth Justice Services, and Social Services, to address complex risk presentations and support effective systemic responses. She also regularly appears as an expert witness in family and criminal courts, often in cases involving exploitation and risk.

As a side note, Dr Ritchie was born and raised in Norway but remained in the UK after completing her academic training. She is especially delighted to be presenting here on her ‘home ground,’ so to speak.

Michael CALDWELL

Evidence-Based Interventions for Young People at Risk of Serious Violence

The Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center opened in 1995 on the grounds of the state forensic hospital. Under contract with the Department of Corrections, the program was designed and operated by the hospital staff. Boys were typically transferred to the program with no prior consultation or screening when their behavior became too violent or unmanageable for the existing maximum-security programs in the Department of Corrections. Originally envisioned by the Department of Corrections as a supermax prison for persistently violent youth the designers of the program instead created a unique hybrid program based on the principles employed in their previous experience treating persistently aggressive men who had been found criminally insane and committed to a maximum-security forensic hospital. Unexpectedly, outcome studies have repeatedly demonstrated that the program reduces violent recidivism by half

compared to a propensity score matched group of more manageable delinquent youths. The program is also effective with youth with elevated scores on the PCL:YV and other measures of callousness. This presentation will examine the theoretical foundations and structural components of MJTC, review empirical evidence of its impact, and discuss implications for treating the most challenging populations in juvenile justice.

Terje OGDEN

Family-based and systemic treatment approaches to working with antisocial behaviour in young people

The presentation will address the theoretical principles, implementation and clinical outcomes of multisystemic treatment of adolescent antisocial behaviour. It is a family and community-based alternative to individual and group treatment, to placement out-of-home or incarceration. The treatment builds on the principles of family preservation and the empowerment of families by focusing on family strengths and resources and identifying protective factors. The family is the starting point of treatment, and treatment addresses the key predictors of adolescent antisocial behaviour, sources of conflict within the family, and the adolescent's functioning in school. Among the family-based and systemic treatment programs introduced in Norway, the most widely implemented approach has been multisystemic treatment (MST), which started in 1999. By 2025, 27 teams had been established across all regions of the country. Numerous journal articles have documented the program's effectiveness across different populations and the moderating effect of age, gender, ethnicity and implementation quality. This presentation will address the main principles of family-based systemic treatment, the large-scale implementation process and clinical outcomes of multisystemic treatment in Norway.

Further reading:

Ogden, T., & Amlund-Hagen, K. (2023). The European implementation of evidence-based policy and practices in child and adolescent services: The case of Norway. In M.J. Miranda & M. Lee (eds.), *Perspectives on evidence-based policy in human services*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kevin DOUGLAS

Risk assessment and management with young people and emerging adults at risk of crime and violence

The field of violence risk assessment with adolescents is well developed and based on sound science and research amongst this group. Violence risk assessment and management with adults is similarly well developed. However, in recent years, greater focus has been placed on the developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood – termed “emerging adulthood” (ages 18-25). At this age, the brain is still developing, and people are still maturing. Some laws and criminal justice systems internationally have started to accommodate this particular age group, recognizing that it is different from older adulthood. This talk will highlight why it is important to focus on the unique aspects of emerging adulthood in understanding violence amongst this

group, and the risks of not doing so (i.e., missed opportunities to understand risk and promote risk reduction amongst this group). It will also touch on the development of a new violence risk assessment and management instrument called the *Youth and Emerging Adulthood Risk and Strength System* (the YEARSS), a developmentally informed modification of the HCR-20 V3.

Linda GRÖNING

Legal perspectives on children at risk: child rights vs. social safety concerns

This presentation addresses the global challenge of protecting children's rights while ensuring public safety and preventing crime, with a focus on recent developments in the Nordic countries. Although the Nordic region is known for its comprehensive welfare systems, humane criminal law traditions, and strong commitment to children's rights, a concerning trend has emerged: an apparent rise in violent offending among children under 18. Children with mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable in this context. While punitive responses risk undermining children's rights, there is increasing political and public emphasis on safety, driving calls for tougher sanctions and broader preventive measures within the criminal justice system. The presentation will outline and critically examine the role and limitations of criminal law in protecting children, preventing their social exclusion, and responding to serious criminal behaviour. It will also discuss specific challenges at the intersection of law and forensic psychiatry, particularly with respect to risk assessment. The presentation forms part of the larger PROTECT research project funded by the Norwegian Research Council.