

# **Knife Crime in the UK**

## **A Review of Recent Research and Interventions**

Dr Rebecca Fish

Prof Sarah Kingston

Dr Emily Cooper

*School of Justice, University of Central Lancashire*

November 2021



Knife Angel at Blackburn Cathedral, Photo: Lynsey Nuttall

## Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>- 3 -</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>- 4 -</b>
<b>MEASURING KNIFE CRIME .....</b>	<b>- 4 -</b>
<b>LEGISLATION.....</b>	<b>- 5 -</b>
<b>WHO IS CARRYING KNIVES? .....</b>	<b>- 8 -</b>
<b>WHY DO PEOPLE CARRY KNIVES?.....</b>	<b>- 9 -</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>- 10 -</b>
<b>INTERVENTIONS .....</b>	<b>- 12 -</b>
<b>POLICY DEVELOPMENTS.....</b>	<b>- 13 -</b>
<b>RESEARCH EVALUATING DEPICTIONS OF EXPERIENCES AND INJURIES.....</b>	<b>- 13 -</b>
<b>POLICING INTERVENTIONS .....</b>	<b>- 14 -</b>
<b>YOUTH WORK INITIATIVES .....</b>	<b>- 18 -</b>
<b>LIVED EXPERIENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS.....</b>	<b>- 19 -</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>- 20 -</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>- 20 -</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knife crime covers a range of activities that involve the possession, threat to use, or the use of a bladed or sharply pointed article in a public place. Almost all police forces have seen increasing knife crime since 2011, with areas with the highest increases being the West Midlands, West Yorkshire, and Thames Valley. In England and Wales, white males between the ages of 16–34 are at greatest risk of being the victims, offenders or victim-offenders of knife crime.

Knife crimes can fall under a number of offences - including possession, homicide, attempted murder, threats to kill, various kinds of assault, robbery, rape and sexual assault. The offences are mainly split across three pieces of legislation, the Prevention of Crime Act 1953, the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and the Offensive Weapons Act 2019.

Some common factors known to influence young people to carry knives are: self-protection, county lines (organised drug networks), peer pressure, and social deprivation. Lack of trust in the police is frequently cited in literature that engages with the perspectives of offenders.

Recent literature offers recommendations for multi-agency working including harnessing public health, place-based and problem-oriented approaches. Many recommendations for change feature in the literature, including improving youth services and awareness-raising, involving young people in the debate about knife crime, increasing transparency, fairness and respect on behalf of police, and in-depth research into victim and offender trajectories.

A number of interventions are underway or being implemented, including policy developments such as *The London Knife Crime Strategy* and *The Serious Violence Strategy*, and police interventions such as Stop and Search and Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs). Also, active throughout the UK are youth-work initiatives and campaigns, including those featuring the voices of people with lived experience.

This literature review provides an overview of recent knife crime statistics and legislation, a summary of known demographics of offenders, and some insights into their motivation for carrying knives. Recommendations for research and practice from the literature are described, as well as selected interventions in the UK designed to tackle knife crime.

# INTRODUCTION

---

Knife crime covers a range of activities that involve the possession, threat to use, or the use of a bladed or sharply pointed article in a public place (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2021). A recent analysis of England and Wales shows that knife crime represents a small proportion of crime (1.86%) and is associated mainly with violence offences rather than other sub-classifications such as drugs or sexual offences (Bailey et al., 2020). Topical attention to knife crime in the news and social media has caused some to question whether it is a new ‘moral panic’ (Williams and Squires, 2021). However, tackling knife crime is indicated as a top priority for the UK government in their Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018) and for police in the College of Policing’s *Knife Crime Evidence Briefing* (McNeill and Wheller, 2019).

Various reasons behind knife carrying have been discussed in academic and policy research, such as self-protection (Traynor, 2016), self-presentation in terms of ‘street credibility’ (McNeill and Wheller, 2019; Silvestri et al., 2009), and lack of trust in policing (Brennan, 2019; Shaw et al., 2011; Harding, 2020). This literature review will explore some of the recent academic research and grey literature that focusses on knife crime, including the up-to-date research on victims and offenders, as well as covering some of the current interventions and innovations.

# MEASURING KNIFE CRIME

---

According to the Office of National Statistics, in the year leading up to March 2021, there were over 44,000 police recorded offences involving the use of a knife or sharp instrument in England and Wales. That is a 29% increase since figures were able to be compared in 2011 and a 80% increase during the last 5 years (Shaw, 2019). The pandemic has affected these numbers. Although the number of knife and offensive weapon offences dealt with by the Criminal Justice System from January to March 2021 was 2% higher than in the same quarter of 2020,

this follows four previous decreases, most notably the 52% decrease for quarter 2 in 2020 versus the same quarter of 2019.

About a third of the nationally recorded offences occur in London, and two-thirds of these incidents in the capital involve young people 10 to 25 years. However, almost all police forces have seen increasing knife crime since 2011, with areas with the highest increases being the West Midlands, West Yorkshire, and Thames Valley (HM Government, 2018). Offences involving knife or sharp instrument rate per 100,000 of the population recorded by the police showed highest levels in West Midlands (153), Cleveland (119) and Greater Manchester (118) during the period June 2020-June 2021 (ONS, 2021). Significantly, 58% of homicides involved a knife or sharp instrument.

According to Crimestoppers, around half of knife offences in 2017/18 were a form of assault that caused injury, and about 43% were robberies. Homicides account for less than 1% of all recorded offences. Yet, knives or sharp instruments account for a third of all homicides, making them the most common single method of killing. Although knife crime is reducing in London, there has been a 109% increase in Wales over the last decade, and a 12% increase in UK hospital admissions since 2015 (see [www.Crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.Crimestoppers-uk.org)).

## LEGISLATION

---

Knife crimes can fall under a number of offences - including possession, but also homicide, attempted murder, threats to kill, various kinds of assault, robbery, rape and sexual assault. The offences are mainly split across three pieces of legislation, the Prevention of Crime Act 1953, the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and the Offensive Weapons Act 2019.

The Offensive Weapons Act introduced new offences including *threatening* with a blade, offensive weapon or corrosive substance in a private place, and *possession* of certain knives in a private place (also, possession of a corrosive substance in a public place) - as well as amending some definitions of existing offences. The Act also introduced a range of summary only offences relating to the sale and

delivery of blades and corrosive substances to persons under 18 years that are likely to be taken up by local authorities.

Adults charged with possession of a knife will automatically go before a court. The Sentencing Council state that the maximum sentence for possession offences is four years' custody. If the offender has committed the same offence before or another relevant offence, they will face a minimum sentence of at least six months' custody. The mandatory minimum sentence for threatening offences is 6 months' custody - the maximum sentence is four years' custody (see [www.Sentencingcouncil.org.uk](http://www.Sentencingcouncil.org.uk)).

Children aged between 10-17yrs will automatically be referred to the Youth Offending Team. Where a young person is found in possession of a knife for a second time, the case will generally go to court. About two thirds of convictions result in a custodial offence, and this is increasing over time (see [www.Safe4Me.org.uk](http://www.Safe4Me.org.uk)). Current CPS policy is to charge suspects aged 16 or over for first-time offences involving knives, and also to charge suspects under 16 years of age where aggravating factors are present, but otherwise to divert them from prosecution. This policy is being jointly reviewed by the NPCC and CPS (see [www.CPS.gov.uk](http://www.CPS.gov.uk)).

Currently, Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) are currently being piloted in London as a way to reduce custodial sentences (Martin, 2021). KCPOs can be given when a person is convicted of a criminal offence involving a sharp weapon, including making a threat. The orders may be made in relation to any person aged 12 or over although engagement from the Youth Offending Team will be required for any person under 18 years old. The court has to be satisfied that the defendant was in possession of a 'bladed article' on at least two occasions, either in public or on school or further educational premises, and the court deems it necessary to prevent the defendant from committing an offence involving a bladed article (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2021).

KCPOs can remain in place for a maximum of 2 years, and if the order is breached then this is punishable by a custodial sentence of up to 2 years. If a KCPO is made then the court will decide what combination of requirements or

prohibitions, to impose on the individual. Requirements may include activities such as life skills and educational programmes, counselling and drug rehabilitation, or anger management classes. Prohibitions may include being prevented from entering a particular area, and from associating with certain people or activities.

KCPOs have attracted criticism from legal practitioners and human rights groups that are evident in the grey literature (Martin, 2021; Comyn, 2019; Monaghan, 2021; Prison Reform Trust, 2019) (e.g. Hendry, 2021; Martin, 2021; Comyn, 2019; Monaghan, 2021; Prison Reform Trust, 2019). The criticisms include claims that they require a lower standard of proof than in criminal cases. The lower standard of proof applied means that it is more likely that KCPOs will be made and, therefore there is a higher risk of criminalisation in cases of breaching the order. Further, children as young as 12 can be subject to an order:

*KCPOs would give police expansive powers to impose incredibly onerous restrictions on people, including children as young as twelve, and risk fast-tracking them into the criminal justice system if they fail to comply. As Liberty outlines in our briefing published today, the orders give rise to profound human rights concerns . . . The effect can only be to funnel more children and young people into the criminal justice system, with potentially devastating effects on their future. (Comyn, 2019)*

The Prison Reform Trust further points out the fact that many children involved in knife crime are coerced, groomed and exploited:

*There is emerging evidence regarding the scale of child criminal exploitation, for example the National Crime Agency has identified over 1,000 “county lines”, where exploitation of children is a fundamental part of the drug-dealing model. (Prison Reform Trust, 2019)*

Another criticism is that KCPOs may further target minorities, in particular the black community due to their proactive nature, in other words they operate ‘anticipatorily and in advance of activity or behaviour that would usually attract the label ‘criminal’.’ (Hendry, 2021:5). Hendry refers to this as a ‘pre-emptive logic of security’ that allows for ‘earlier and earlier intervention on the part of the state in the name of the greater good’ (Hendry, 2021:5). KCPOs give police officers the power to stop people who they believe are carrying knives, which strengthens existing stop and search orders. Many studies have shown that

these powers disproportionately impact on young black men, who are much more likely to be stopped and searched yet no more likely to carry knives than other group (Coid et al., 2021). For example in London in 2020, men aged 18-24 identifying as Black were 28 times more likely to be searched for weapons than the population at large (Ashby, 2020). This figure is a stark contrast to the already controversial generic stop and search statistics that show that black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched (Gov.uk, 2021).

When KCPO evaluation results are known, the plan is to implement KCPOs nationally. Liberty argues that rather than rolling out KCPOs, the government should be looking to invest in communities to tackle the root causes of serious violence (Comyn, 2019).

## WHO IS CARRYING KNIVES?

---

Bailey et al. (2020) analysed police records of violent crime in England and Wales between 2015-2019. They found that 16–34 year-old white males are at greatest risk of being the victims, offenders or victim-offenders of knife crime, and that both knife offenders and victims are likely to have an existing criminal record. Knife crimes are usually not gang-related (with less than 20% being gang-related), and experienced mostly between strangers, generally a non-retaliatory ‘one-off event’ (Bailey et al., 2020). They concluded that incidents of knife crime are relatively predicable, as a substantial ratio of offenders and victims of future knife crime can be found in police records. They recommend that prevention strategies should be focussed on repeat victims who are known to the police. Bailey et al’s analysis suggest that about one-fifth of repeat offenders committed about 42% of all the knife crime. Interestingly, Bailey et al. highlighted the low number of retaliatory incidents in their sample, noting that offenders who participated in retaliatory knife incidents were more likely to have an extensive criminal history.

The Victim / Offender Overlap (or V-OO) is where victims and offenders share social characteristics and social spaces. Bailey et al. (2020:2) further argue that ‘V-OO may be a viable theoretical composition through which we can

contextualise, forecast, and potentially prevent knife crime’. The Mayor of London’s 2017 London Knife Crime Strategy analyses MPS victims and accused data from 2016/17, demonstrating considerable offender / victim overlap. Of the 306 suspects in a 2017 homicide investigation, 72% (220) had previously been a victim of crime and 26% a victim of knife crime prior to the homicide investigation (The Mayor of London, 2017). There is a large international literature that looks at victim / offender overlap in terms of adverse childhood experiences and offending (Ross and Arsenault, 2018; Miley et al., 2020). In terms of weapon carrying, most analyses show that recent offending and experiencing threats and violent victimization were strong predictors of weapon-carrying (Brennan, 2019). Therefore, it is not only important to analyse individual risk but to look at the structural issues and social networks that contextualise the crime.

Focussing on social issues, Haylock et al’s (2020) review of the literature found no association between ethnicity and youth violence - contrasting current understanding and portrayals within media. They commented that multiple research papers identified adverse childhood experiences and resulting poor mental health as positively associated with youth and gang violence. They conclude that community and societal risk factors, such as stigma, hypermasculinity, discrimination and economic inequality, were linked to youth violence and gang involvement, including knife crime. Poverty was a key indicator of youth violence in the findings of McAra and McVie (2016), who analysed the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime - a prospective longitudinal study of 4300 young people in Scotland. They concluded that:

*Young people who become involved in violence are vulnerable, have limited opportunities for gaining status in more pro-social ways, and do not see education as a route to self-advancement. (McAra and McVie, 2016:76)*

## **WHY DO PEOPLE CARRY KNIVES?**

---

Some common factors known to influence young people to carry knives are:

- Gang affiliation – including for protection/status
- Media attention/glamorisation, including violent media entertainment

- Fear of crime – self-protection, ongoing bullying victimisation
- County lines – organised drug networks
- Peer pressure – the perception that most young people carry knives
- Availability of particular weapons
- Social deprivation - including adverse childhood experiences as a result  
(adapted from WHO, 2010; Home Affairs Committee, 2009)

A significant indicator as described in recent research is lack of trust in the police, causing young people to feel the need to protect themselves (Skarlatidou et al., 2021; Harding, 2020), for example:

*“If there is no trust, how are you going to tell the police and how are they gonna resolve the situation. . .you need to be able to have trust in them. Because if it comes to a knife, you can’t do much, you’re gonna die” (Quote from participant in Skarlatidou et al., 2021:17)*

Palasinski et al. (2021) reviewed research with just under 600 participants regarding tolerance for knife carrying. They found predictors of knife carrying tolerance to be limited trust in authority, limited control over one’s status, and the need for respect, as well as macho, aggressive culture. This study demonstrates the need for services to include cultural and place-based context when planning interventions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE LITERATURE

---

Many sources recommend the need for more research into factors that bring about knife crime. This includes the need for more reliable information on perpetrators and victims, including richer data about offenders’ risk perceptions, worries, needs and expectations in order to provide more insight into reasons for offending (Skarlatidou et al., 2021; Harding, 2020; Bailey et al., 2020). Others have recommended further research into the role of gender, including masculinity in knife crime (Cook and Walklate, 2020) as well as the role of women and girls as carriers – who make up 10% of those accused of carrying knives in London (The Mayor of London, 2017). Haylock et al. (2020) highlight key areas for future research, including the link between poor mental health and knife-crime, and the trajectory into gangs.

Straw et al. (2018) interviewed 16 boys from refugee communities aged 12-17 in London in order to explore ideas and knowledge about knife crime. They identified three key themes: distrust of public services, a lack of knowledge of the justice system, and misconceptions around the consequences of knife crime. They recommend focussing analyses on areas of vulnerability, as well as targeted public health interventions to support these teenagers including accessible awareness-raising.

Skarlatidou et al. (2021) used their research with 105 young people in London to make recommendations for approaches to build trust in the police:

- Filling in young people's knowledge gaps to avoid misinformation and misconceptions. It is important that people have access to trustworthy information, including levels of risk and awareness of campaigns and initiatives.
- There should be opportunities for young people to shape the debate around knife crime. This is described as key to a public health approach to policing: 'Community involvement and exploring young people's risk perceptions in specific local contexts is critical for the development of effective local strategies for tackling knife crime. . . by identifying how young people encounter and perceive worrying situations, we move towards reducing knife crime and harm' (Skarlatidou et al., 2021:6).
- Forces should use available local knowledge to provide an in-depth understanding of known factors that increase trust, such as professionalism, accountability, transparency, respect, and fairness.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2010) made many recommendations for statutory organisations to consider in the prevention and management of knife crime. These include indirect approaches that do not address violence directly but influence the risk and protective factors that can impact young people's chances of being involved in violence in later life; and direct approaches that specifically seek to prevent violence by modifying the environments in which violence occurs. Their recommendations include:

- Focussing on prevention throughout school years, including early years education
- Modifying settings where young people are, including interventions such as bullying prevention and limiting access to alcohol and drinking environments
- Problem-oriented policing (making use of local knowledge) and intensive treatment programmes
- Addressing gender inequality from a young age

- Reducing access to knives and making use of weapon detection systems
- Introducing safer drinking containers
- Urban design strategies such as improving street lighting
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Family interventions and youth inclusion work
- Focus on services and support for victims

Many of the interventions currently being implemented in the UK harness these recommendations. The next section will detail some of the more recent activities.

## INTERVENTIONS

---

Much of the literature provides recommendations for interventions that involve wider social and political intervention. Grimshaw and Ford (2018:10) state that 'interventions which do not seek to address wider social issues such as inequality, deprivation, poor mental health and drug addiction are unlikely to provide long-lasting solutions to knife violence'. However, a recent report by the APPG on Knife Crime commented on the 69% cut in spending on youth services over the past ten years, with areas suffering the largest cuts to spending on young people seeing larger increases in knife crime (Smith, 2020). The report conveys the responses to survey questions including: 'If there was one thing you could change that you think would make young people safer, what would it be?' Over 2,200 young people responded, with the most popular response being 'the provision of more youth centres, sports clubs and other youth activities in their local areas' (Smith, 2020). Other reports highlight the consequences of cuts in mental health services for young people, as well as the scrapping of the educational maintenance grant (Frater and Gamman, 2020), demonstrating that interventions have been affected by austerity.

There are examples of many types of intervention initiatives in the research and grey literature, relating to policy, policing, education, and community. I will detail some examples below.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENTS**

*The London Knife Crime Strategy* by Sadiq Khan set out ‘a comprehensive plan of partnership action to tackle the immediate threat to safety posed by knife crime in London’ (The Mayor of London, 2017:5). Plans include: deploying a specialist team of 80 officers - plain clothes and uniform - to carry out targeted crime prevention and enforcement in knife crime hot spots; reviewing the MPS Gangs Matrix in order to strengthen the identification of young people (perpetrators or victims) who are involved in serious violence; ensuring that Pre-Sentence Reports (PSR) and Personal Victim Statements (PVS) are completed in 90% of cases; and working with offenders on their transition back into the community.

*The Serious Violence Strategy* (HM Government, 2018) sets out a programme of commitments focusing on tackling county lines and misuse of drugs, early intervention and prevention, supporting communities and local partnerships, and an effective law enforcement and criminal justice response.

## **RESEARCH EVALUATING DEPICTIONS OF EXPERIENCES AND INJURIES**

Some evaluations of small-scale interventions have been published in the wider literature. For example Tribe et al. (2018) involved young people in workshops focussed on prevention of knife crime. The workshops featured testimonies from knife crime victims and a simulated emergency abdominal operation on a silicone model which included dialogue between the surgeon, the victim (who required an intestinal stoma as a result of the knife injury) and his mother. The evaluation showed that participants demonstrated significantly increased awareness of the consequences of knife carrying.

Palasinski et al. (2021) evaluated public health anti-knife slogan posters with 320 male participants of various backgrounds and socioeconomic status aged 18 to 25. The study was introduced to them as “an exploration of anti-knife injury posters”. The study revealed that images depicting fresh injury, particularly eye injuries, were rated as the most persuasive, emotional, and believable, with death-related messages rated as less effective (which they hypothesize is due to

avoidance due to high emotional reaction). The authors conclude that position of depicted injury is more effective than how 'graphic' the image is.

## **POLICING INTERVENTIONS**

**Stop and Search** - One of the most controversial recent policing interventions, the Stop and Search system, gives police powers to stop and search a person if they have reasonable grounds to suspect they are carrying a weapon, drugs, or stolen property. The practice has been widely criticised, in particular because of its unequivocal consolidation of police powers, and its disproportionate use on minority citizens, resulting in the 'othering' of black youth (Williams and Squires, 2021). Research on its effectiveness has been mixed, with quasi-experimental and retrospective analyses showing that stop and search implementation has made no difference to crime levels (McCandless et al., 2016; Tiratelli et al., 2018; Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019). There is some evidence of the harms caused by stop and search, including damaged relations between police and the community, undermining cooperation and police-legitimacy, and a reduction in public trust and confidence (Delsol, 2015). Further, research into police decision-making found that officers are often unclear about what constitutes 'reasonable grounds' for Stop and Search, in practice (Flacks, 2018).

Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) argue that initiatives such as Stop and Search may actually cause crime, since police activity perceived as unfair undermines public trust and police legitimacy, and weakens people's social bonds to the law and legal institutions.

**The Knife Crime Prevention Order (KCPO)** was introduced in January 2019, in response to the high and rising rates of knife crime in England and Wales. Described as a preventive tool, KCPOs are designed to divert those who may be carrying knives, or who are at greatest risk of being drawn into serious violence, away from being involved in knife crime. As mentioned earlier, the implementation of KCPOs has been widely criticised (see Hendry, 2021).

**Serious Violence Reduction Orders** - A SVRO is a civil order made in respect of an offender convicted of an offence involving a bladed article or offensive weapons. The order provides the police with the power to search a person subject

to an SVRO, to ascertain if they have a bladed article or offensive weapon with them and to detain them for the purpose of carrying out that search, provided that person is in a public place (Home Office, 2021).

**The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP)** - This programme, hosted by the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), was created and is working with force violence and public protection (VPP) leads to identify current interventions and approaches to vulnerability and serious violence across forces in England and Wales.

**Violence Reduction Units** – London, Lancashire and Merseyside have established VRUs. These utilise service collaborations and up-to-date intelligence and data, to employ a public health approach to tackle violent crime (Astrup, 2019), demonstrating promising early outcomes in terms of establishing partnerships to initiate early intervention and preventative activities (Gov.uk, 2020). Evaluations of VRUs were ongoing throughout 2021.

Using the public health model gives 3 main levels of prevention which often form the whole system approach:

- Primary prevention (focussing on those at risk) - reduce access to knives, alcohol and drug programmes awareness-raising campaigns
- Secondary prevention (early incidence and those with specific risk) - action to address truancy, gangs, school exclusion, mental health issues
- Tertiary (targeting established incidence) - recovery and rehabilitation programmes.

**Operation Blunt 2 (2008)** – During this operation, ten London boroughs recorded a more than threefold increase in the number of weapons searches, up from 34,154 in the year before BLUNT 2 to 123,335 in the first year of the operation. A statistical analysis, which controlled for other factors that might affect crime trends, found no statistically significant crime-reducing effect from Operation BLUNT 2. The authors of this study concluded that the greater use of weapons searches was not effective at the borough level for reducing crime. (McCandless et al., 2016)

**Operation Teal (2015 onwards)** - This Metropolitan Police intervention targets knife crime with injury, which to date has produced 10,000 arrests, 2,000 knives seized, 800kg drugs and over £5m in cash and assets seized.

**Operation Sceptre (2015 onwards)** - This was designed to complement new legislation. Those convicted of carrying a knife for the second time will face a mandatory custodial sentence. Operation Sceptre focusses on habitual knife carriers, tackling importation, supply and access to weapons. During specific awareness-raising events, police conducted knife sweeps, deployed portable knife arches, conducted proactive patrols and performed a number of stop and search activities. Officers also co-ordinated 18 test purchases in shops to make sure business were selling knives legally.

Also, collaborating with local partners, community colleges and schools, officers held more than 30 anti-knife and drug events engaging with 8,000 people across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Online, officers conducted digital knife crime awareness sessions, which were attended by in excess of 4,000 students and teachers.

**The Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV)** is delivered by Northamptonshire Police alongside a range of partners. It is focused on under 18s and works to divert people involved or at risk of becoming involved with gangs into a range of local support services. Referrals come from various sources, e.g. schools, parents or from police or partnership intelligence. Participants are allocated to specific services or to a CIRV navigator, who works with the participant and supporting agencies to provide support (College of Policing, 2021).

**DIVERT** is an intervention that was delivered in six custody suites across the Metropolitan Police Service, where custody was used as a "teachable moment" to divert young people away from crime. Young people between the ages of 18 and 25 were given the opportunity to meet custody intervention coaches (CICs) for an information and guidance meeting. At these meetings CICs engage with young people to understand their main challenges (e.g. employment, education,

training, housing, etc.) and offer support and access to various services (College of Policing, 2021).

**Early Action Together (Wales)** – This is a multi-agency partnership between Public Health Wales, police forces in Wales, police and crime commissioners, Barnardo's and HM Prison and Probation Service. It is a public health approach to policing and criminal justice, which uses early interventions and precautionary measures to deal with vulnerable people and the root causes of criminal behaviour (see [www.PHW.nhs.wales](http://www.PHW.nhs.wales)).

**Knife amnesty awareness** - This covers media awareness campaigns of knife amnesties, including reporting using images of knives recovered. This strategy has also met heavy criticism, for example Cogan et al. (2021) carried out a survey of 553 participants, as well as 20 in-depth interviews exploring these campaigns. They found that adults display fearful, worried and angry reactions towards the use of knife seizure images, and they raised concern that the use of such images may reinforce rather than deter knife carrying due to the perceived need for self-protection. Adults in their study expressed concerns that the use of these images served to reinforce negative stereotypes within communities affected by high knife crime.

**Problem orientated policing** - Problem-oriented policing identifies and examines a specific problem in a community and seeks to develop solutions involving a collaboration of local services (such as police, health services and social services). For example, Operation Ceasefire in Boston, United States of America, brought together a multi-agency partnership of criminal justice agencies, social services agencies and other agencies to address firearm-related homicide among young people. Police adopted a zero-tolerance approach to violence and firearm-related offences and communicated this to gang members through meetings and outreach work, resulting in a significant reduction in homicide. Gang members were also offered support in moving away from violence, including job referrals and access to social services.

The evidence base is clearly much stronger for interventions that adopt a public health rather than criminal justice approach and for those that reduce risk

factors and strengthen protective factors among young people early in life than for measures that seek to address violent behaviour once it has already emerged. Most successful programmes require multiagency, multidisciplinary and multisectoral collaboration. More evaluative research is needed here, including studying the cost benefits of youth violence prevention measures.

## **YOUTH WORK INITIATIVES**

**StreetDoctors** – This is an initiative where a network of more than 400 volunteer medical students, junior doctors, and other healthcare professionals visit schools, youth groups, and young offender units to teach skills that can save lives (Shepherd, 2019). StreetDoctors has 22 groups in 17 cities in the UK, with plans to expand. A 2018 audit found they had reached 4039 young people through 810 sessions. The charity supports a public health approach to knife crime that views stabbings as preventable. Workers give vital information about responding to somebody who had been stabbed, explain about lifting their legs up, applying pressure to their wound, and waiting for the ambulance (see [www.Streetdoctors.org](http://www.Streetdoctors.org)).

**Redthread** - This is a charity working to reduce youth violence by placing youth workers in A&E units in London, Nottingham and Birmingham. The workers provide support and counselling to young people following violent incidents, embracing what the charity describes as the ‘teachable moment’, when young people are able to evaluate and discuss their behaviour (see [www.Redthread.org.uk](http://www.Redthread.org.uk)). The government has also consulted on plans to introduce a new statutory ‘public health duty’ to raise concerns about children at risk of becoming involved in knife crime, in a bid to ensure professionals across health, education, police, social services, housing and the voluntary sector are held accountable for safeguarding young people at risk of serious violence in England and Wales.

**No Knives Better Lives (NKBL)** - NKBL is a Scottish national programme that aims to deter young people from carrying knives. It is a collaboration between Scottish Government and YouthLink Scotland (the national agency for youth work in Scotland). The campaign aims to raise awareness of the consequences of

knife crime, for young people, parents and practitioners and is now available to any local authority area in Scotland (see [www.Noknivesbetterlives.com](http://www.Noknivesbetterlives.com)). Resources include online practitioner training packages, peer education training, educational toolkits for schools and youth work settings and a range of supporting resources such as high-quality videos, animations and branded merchandise.

The NKBL website reports that between 2008-09 and 2017-18, the number of violent crimes recorded by the police in Scotland fell by 43%, while recorded crimes of handling an offensive weapon (where not used to commit another offence) fell by 60%. Also, the number of young people, under the age of 18, convicted of handling an offensive weapon fell by 85%. Finally, the number of crimes of handling an offensive weapon recorded by the police in Glasgow City decreased by 71% (see Astrup, 2019).

The tools and resources offered on the NKBL website include Balisong (a play) and Mark's story (a film), which have been seen by over 20000 school students. The rationale for NKBL is that using a public health method of policing – including understanding why and prevention, can effectively reduce crime. The strategies used by NKBL are as follows:

- Reassurance - Conveying the message that hardly anyone carries a knife
- Responsibility/Reporting – Showing that it's okay to report knife carrying (informing people where to report – for example signalling [www.fearless.org](http://www.fearless.org))
- Risks and Consequences – Showing that you are at more risk of harm if carrying a knife
- Resilience - Instilling the confidence to resist knife carrying in the first place

## **LIVED EXPERIENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS**

**Ben Kinsella Trust (see [www.Benkinsella.org.uk](http://www.Benkinsella.org.uk))** - This is a website dedicated to Ben Kinsella, a 16-year-old boy who died in a knife attack in London in June, 2008. The website contains information and statistics, as well as educational apps, tools and resources for specific groups including young people, teachers and practitioners, and parents.

**The JJ Effect** – Byron Highton set up this initiative in response to the death of his younger brother Jon-Jo (JJ) who was stabbed over 20 times in Preston in 2014. He provides information and awareness sessions for schools along with his colleague Eve Cross, who herself has been a victim of knife crime (see [www.thejjeffect.org](http://www.thejjeffect.org)).

## CONCLUSION

---

It is clear that knife crime is a significant and growing concern throughout the UK. The review has demonstrated the need for more research and evaluation in intervention areas to aid awareness and intelligence, the need for multidisciplinary and collaborative working, and the need for police evidence-based education of the established and emerging risks. Particular areas for further work to fill gaps in the literature are:

- Research on knife carrying based on place-based and local contextual data (including qualitative research with offenders)
- Risk perception of offenders, including worries, needs and expectations - and the trajectory into gangs
- The role of gender in knife crime, including women and girls as offenders as well as victims
- The link between poor mental health and knife-crime
- Quantitative work on repeat offenders and victim/offender overlap
- Research comparing interventions and their outcomes, including collaborative working between agencies, and those that include the voices of young people.

The review also demonstrates the benefit of both problem-orientated and public health approaches to policing – however what is needed now is more clarity about what public health approaches mean, what evidence supports them, and how they might best be implemented (Grimshaw and Ford, 2018).

## REFERENCES

---

Ashby, M. (2020) Stop and Search in London: July to September 2020. *London; UCL Institute for Global City Policing.*

- Astrup, J. (2019) Knife Crime: Where's the public health approach? *Community Practitioner*, 92(6), 14-17.
- Bailey, L., Harinam, V. & Ariel, B. (2020) Victims, offenders and victim-offender overlaps of knife crime: A social network analysis approach using police records. *PLoS one*, 15(12).
- Bradford, B. & Tiratelli, M. (2019) Does stop and search reduce crime. *UK Justice Policy Review*, 4, 1-11.
- Brennan, I. R. (2019) Weapon-carrying and the reduction of violent harm. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 59(3), 571-593.
- Cogan, N., Chin-Van Chau, Y., Russell, K., Linden, W., Swinson, N., Eckler, P., Knifton, L., Jordan, V., Williams, D. & Carney, S. (2021) *Is knife seizure imagery an effective crime deterrent? A multi-method study*. 22nd Annual Conference of European Society of Criminology: ESC Eurocrim21. 2021.
- Coid, J., Zhang, Y., Zhang, Y., Hu, J., Thomson, L., Bebbington, P. & Bhui, K. (2021) Epidemiology of knife carrying among young British men. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 1-9.
- College of Policing (2021) Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme: Findings from the serious violence diversion interventions. *What Works? Briefing 28 July 2021*. Available at [https://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/News/Pages/VVCP\\_Violence.aspx](https://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/News/Pages/VVCP_Violence.aspx) [accessed 06/11/2021]
- Comyn, R. (2019) Knife Crime Prevention Orders would only harm the fight against violent crime. *Liberty Human Rights UK*. 6 February 2019: Available at <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/> [accessed 11/11/2021].
- Cook, E. A. & Walklate, S. (2020) Gendered objects and gendered spaces: The invisibilities of 'knife' crime. *Current Sociology*, 0011392120932972.
- Delsol, R. (2015) *Stop and search: The anatomy of a police power*. Springer.
- Flacks, S. (2018) The stop and search of minors: A 'vital police tool'? *Criminology & criminal justice*, 18(3), 364-384.
- Frater, A. & Gamman, L. (2020) Beyond Knife Crime: Towards A Design-Led Approach to Reducing Youth Violence. *London, University of the Arts*.
- Gov.Uk (2020) Violence Reduction Unit evaluation, 2019 to 2020. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/violence-reduction-unit-evaluation-2019-to-2020> [Accessed 17/11/2021].
- Gov.Uk (2021) Stop and Search Facts and Figures: 21 February 2021. Available at <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest#by-ethnicity-over-time> [Accessed 17/11/2021].
- Grimshaw, R. & Ford, M. (2018) Young people, violence and knives: Revisiting the evidence and policy discussions. *London, UK: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies*.
- Harding, S. (2020) Getting to the point? Reframing narratives on knife crime. *Youth justice*, 20(1-2), 31-49.
- Haylock, S., Boshari, T., Alexander, E. C., Kumar, A., Manikam, L. & Pinder, R. (2020) Risk factors associated with knife-crime in United Kingdom among young people aged 10–24 years: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1), 1-19.
- Hendry, J. (2021) 'The Usual Suspects': Knife Crime Prevention Orders and the 'Difficult' Regulatory Subject. *The British Journal of Criminology*, Online early.
- Hm Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf) [accessed 05/11/2021].
- Home Affairs Committee (2009) *Knife crime: seventh report of session 2008-09*, [Vol. 1]: Report, together with formal minutes. London; The Stationery Office.
- Home Office (2021) Serious Violence Reduction Orders Draft statutory guidance. *October 2021. London: Home Office*.

- Martin, D. (2021) Knife Crime Prevention Orders: A Life Saving Measure or a Step Too Far? Available at: <https://www.jmw.co.uk/services-for-you/criminal-defence/blog/knife-crime-prevention-orders-life-saving-measure-or-step-too-far> [Accessed 20/09/2021 2021].
- Mcara, L. & Mcvie, S. (2016) Understanding youth violence: The mediating effects of gender, poverty and vulnerability. *Journal of criminal justice*, 45, 71-77.
- Mccandless, R., Feist, A., Allan, J. & Morgan, N. (2016) Do initiatives involving substantial increases in stop and search reduce crime? Assessing the impact of Operation BLUNT 2. *London: Home Office*.
- Mcneill, A. & Wheller, L. (2019) Knife Crime Evidence Briefing. *Coventry; College of Policing*.
- Miley, L. N., Fox, B., Muniz, C. N., Perkins, R. & Delisi, M. (2020) Does childhood victimization predict specific adolescent offending? An analysis of generality versus specificity in the victim-offender overlap. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 101, 104328.
- Monaghan, A. (2021) Knife Crime Prevention Orders: Blunt Tools against Knife Blades?. *Crucible Law* September 2021. Available at: <https://crucible.law/insights/knife-crime-prevention-orders-blunt-tools-against-knife-blades> [Accessed 11/11/2021].
- Palasinski, M., Brown, W., Shortland, N., Riggs, D. W., Chen, M. & Bowman-Grieve, L. (2021) Masculinity, injury, and death: implications for anti-knife-carrying messages. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 36(13-14), NP7163-NP7182.
- Prison Reform Trust (2019) Prison Reform Trust response to the Home Office consultation on the Knife Crime Prevention Order (KCPO) guidance – September 2019. Available at <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Consultation%20responses/HO%20consultation%20on%20the%20KCPO%20PRT%20response.pdf> [Accessed 07/11/2021].
- Ross, L. & Arseneault, S. (2018) Problem analysis in community violence assessment: revealing early childhood trauma as a driver of youth and gang violence. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 62(9), 2726-2741.
- Shaw, D. (2019) Ten charts on the rise of knife crime in England and Wales. *BBC News Online*, 18.
- Shaw, D., Pease, K. & Heberton, B. (2011) Possession of a knife and private defence: Dilemmas in the pursuit of personal security in England and Wales. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 39(4), 266-279.
- Shepherd, A. (2019) Knife crime: the volunteer doctors teaching lifesaving skills to teenagers. *BMJ*, 367.
- Silvestri, A., Oldfield, M., Squires, P. & Grimshaw, R. (2009) Young people, knives and guns: a comprehensive review, analysis and critique of gun and knife crime strategies. London, Centre for Criminal Justice Studies.
- Skarlatidou, A., Ludwig, L., Solymosi, R. & Bradford, B. (2021) Understanding Knife Crime and Trust in Police with Young People in East London. *Crime & Delinquency*.
- Smith, N. (2020) Securing a Brighter Future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime. *The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Knife Crime & Violence Reduction*. Available at [www.preventknifecrime.co.uk](http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk) [accessed 01/11/2021].
- Straw, I., Thornton, M., Hassan, F., Fibresima, H., Kokkinos, N. & Dobbin, J. (2018) Knife crime in London, UK: a youth perspective. *The Lancet*, 392, S85.
- The Crown Prosecution Service (2021) Legal Guidance - Offensive Weapons, Knives, Bladed and Pointed Articles. Available at <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/offensive-weapons-knives-bladed-and-pointed-articles> [accessed 05/11/2021].
- The Mayor of London (2017) The London Knife Crime Strategy. *Greater London Authority*.
- Tiratelli, M., Quinton, P. & Bradford, B. (2018) Does stop and search deter crime? Evidence from ten years of London-wide data. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 58(5), 1212-1231.
- Traynor, P. R. (2016) *Closing the 'security gap': Young people, 'street life' and knife crime*. University of Leeds.
- Tribe, H., Harris, A. & Kneebone, R. (2018) Life on a knife edge: using simulation to engage young people in issues surrounding knife crime. *Advances in Simulation*, 3(1), 1-9.

- Williams, E. & Squires, P. (2021) A Moral Panic: The 'War on Knife Crime'. *Rethinking Knife Crime*. Springer.
- World Health Organization (2010) *European report on preventing violence and knife crime among young people*. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe.