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Home Affairs Committee

Knife Crime

Seventh Report of Session 2008–09

Report, together with formal minutes

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The Home Affairs Committee

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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Home Affairs Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3276; the Committee's email address is homeaffcom@parliament.uk.

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Summary

Violent knife offending has tended to mirror trends in overall violent crime, which rose sharply in the 1970s and 1980s but has fallen since the mid-1990s. However, the number of knife homicides increased by over a quarter between 2005/06 and 2006/07; there also appeared to be a rise in other serious knife violence during this year. In addition, a 48% increase in stab-related hospital admissions between 1997/98 and 2006/07 may indicate that knives are being used to inflict more serious wounds.

As with overall violence, the majority of knife victims and perpetrators are young men in their late teens and early twenties. There is also a significant proportion of knife offending that is linked to domestic violence. However, the high levels of knife violence since 2006 appear to be the result of an increase in street violence between groups of young people who are sometimes referred to as 'gangs'. While rural areas have experienced a small increase in knife injuries, knife violence is concentrated in the deprived parts of big cities.

It is difficult to estimate how many young people carry knives but there are fears it is becoming 'normal' in some areas. Young people tend to carry pen knives or flick knives, but kitchen knives are more commonly used in stabbings. Most young people who carry knives say they do so for 'protection'; status and peer pressure are also factors. This perceived need for protection is compounded by the sense, reinforced by media coverage of stabbings, that everyone else is carrying a weapon, as well as experience of victimisation. In terms of knife-users, socially excluded young people from dysfunctional families are more predisposed to be violent, particularly those who witness or experience violence in the home.

Our findings convinced us of the need to target knife-carriers and violent offenders separately. For the former, we advocate education in schools about the realities of knife-carrying and measures to help young people feel safer, such as improving confidence in the police and better victim support. Evidence suggests that the prospect of being caught can deter young people from breaking the law. We therefore support the use of stop and search, providing it is carried out in an appropriate manner.

While we encourage the use of custody as an appropriate sentence for the majority of knife-carriers and for violent offenders, high re-offending rates highlight its ineffectiveness as a long-term solution to violent crime. We recommend the expansion of offending behaviour and resettlement programmes as a means to reduce re-offending by prisoners, as well as interventions with young people on the cusp of more serious offending.

Finally, we advocate the adoption of a long-term violence reduction strategy that focuses on prevention. Evidence from the US points to the savings that can be made to the criminal justice system by investing resources in preventative initiatives, as well as the benefits to individuals and their communities. We specifically recommend better data-sharing about knife violence at a local level, early intervention with babies and toddlers born into dysfunctional families and a more strategic approach to providing diversionary activities and support for excluded young people.

Key facts and figures

- The number of knife homicides rose by 26.9% between 2005/06 and 2006/07. There were 270 knife homicides in 2007/08: the highest total since the Homicide Index was introduced in 1977.
- Knives were used in 6% of British Crime Survey violent incidents in 2007/08. This is estimated to correspond to use in approximately 138,000 robberies, woundings or assaults taking place throughout England and Wales in that year.
- 5,239 people were admitted to NHS hospitals in England with a stab wound in 2007/08. The number of patients admitted rose by 48% between 1997/98 and 2006/07.
- The median age of British Crime Survey knife victims has declined since 2004/05. Between 2003 and 2007 stab-related hospital admissions for under-16s increased by 62.7%.
- Penknives and flick knives are most routinely carried but kitchen knives are more frequently used in injuries presenting to hospital.
- 85% of young people who carry knives claim they do so “for protection”.
- 21% of people convicted of possessing an offensive weapon were jailed in the last quarter of 2008.
- More than half of prisoners re-offend within a year of release.
- 5% of young people commit half of all youth crime. The Government estimates that they come from 110,000 high risk families, 20,000 of whom require intensive interventions.
- The organisation Kids Count estimates that knife crime costs the state in the region of £1.25 billion per year.

1 Introduction

Background to our inquiry

1. Growing public concern about a seemingly new trend in violent knife offending came to a head with a series of high-profile fatal stabbings in May 2008. ‘Knife crime’ dominated the headlines throughout the summer. At the same time, official crime statistics continued to show a sharp decline in violent crime. To try to establish the extent of the issue, we decided to expand our wide-ranging inquiry into *Policing in the 21st Century* to take evidence on knife crime from the Channel 4 Street Weapons Commission, police officers and politicians. In our subsequent Report we concluded that the evidence we had heard “convinced us of the value of undertaking an inquiry devoted to that subject [knife crime], which will commence in the autumn.”¹

2. In July 2008, we therefore published our intention to “investigate levels and causes of knife crime, profiles and attitudes of offenders and assess effective solutions” and to examine in particular the following issues:

- Availability and reliability of data, knife-carrying offences and hotspots
- Offender profiles, and public perceptions of levels of knife crime
- Causes: reasons for knife-carrying and use
- Causes: availability of knives
- Current legislation
- Solutions: education, parents and community projects
- Solutions: police operations, amnesties and enforcement
- Solutions: convictions, penalties and sentencing

3. In the course of our inquiry we took oral evidence from 35 witnesses between November 2008 and March 2009 and received 25 written submissions. A list of those who gave evidence is annexed. We held seminars in South London, Leeds and Bristol with local police officers, medics, youth workers, academics and young people, to establish how different parts of the country are affected by knife crime. We also visited Aylesbury Young Offenders Institution, met with London school children involved with the organisation UNCUT and were briefed by staff from the National Audit Office.

Defining knife crime

4. There is no Home Office definition of ‘knife crime’. The phrase was adopted by the media and is now popularly used to refer primarily to stabbings but also to the illegal carrying of knives by young people in a public place or on school premises. However,

1 Home Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2007–08, *Policing in the 21st Century*, HC 364, para 163

'knife-enabled crime' includes a variety of other offences involving a bladed weapon, for example it is an offence to cause or threaten harm with a knife and if used in a robbery or assault, it aggravates the offence. It is also illegal to look after, hide or transport a dangerous weapon on behalf of someone else, market a knife in a way which is likely to encourage violent behaviour, and sell a knife to a person under 18.²

5. As we discuss in chapters one and two, it became apparent during our inquiry that knives are used in a variety of situations, for a range of motivations and affect different kinds of people, making a coherent analysis of weapon use impossible. The concerns which prompted our inquiry related mainly to knife offending amongst young people, therefore consideration of causes and solutions in the later chapters of our Report focus in the main on knife-carrying and violent offending by children and teenagers.

2 The scale of knife crime

6. We begin by examining data on knife offences, injuries and possession to assess whether they justify public perceptions of an increase in knife crime. In the following chapter, we consider what the data tell us about the characteristics of knife offenders and victims, particularly the extent to which they involve our key subjects of interest, children and teenagers.

Sources of data

7. There are three main sources of data on different aspects of illegal knife use: Home Office crime statistics in various forms, National Health Service (NHS) hospital statistics and a number of surveys with young people to determine the extent of knife-carrying. The Ministry of Justice also publishes data on knife possession. Analysing these data demands a cautious approach because of some inherent limitations, as well as difficulties in comparing one source against another owing to differences in what is measured.

8. In terms of Home Office data, the Homicide Index has been published annually since 1977 and contains details of all cases of murder, manslaughter and infanticide that were recorded in England and Wales over the course of the previous year. Given the definitive nature of fatality and its likelihood of coming to the attention of the police, we can presume that it is probably the most complete source of data on those knife offences which it covers. However, fatal stabbings comprises only a tiny minority of knife offences and accurate data is not published until nine months after the year end.

9. The British Crime Survey has, until recently, been the main means by which the Home Office has measured the use of knives in non-fatal violent crime. The survey records the amount of crime experienced by adults over 16 years of age living in private households in England and Wales. It includes a question asking if the respondent has been a victim of a violent crime over the previous 12 months and, if so, whether or not a knife was involved. From the responses, researchers estimate the total number of incidents likely to have taken place in England and Wales. However, Dr Bob Golding, giving evidence in November 2008 on the basis of research he has carried out for the Policy Exchange think tank, argued that it is difficult to obtain a complete picture of knife offences from the British Crime Survey:

Whilst the survey is helpful it has some limitations particularly in the context of the subject we are talking about today: knife crime. Notably, the British Crime Survey does not count the under-16s which from the research is one of our target or problem populations. It does not collect data from people without access to a home telephone or private residence and it is of limited scale.³

(From January 2009, the survey has been extended to include 10-16 year olds.)

10. Since July 2008, police forces have also been required to publish statistics for recorded use of knives in the most serious offences, namely attempted murder, wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm (GBH), wounding or inflicting GBH, robbery of business

property and robbery of personal property. While this improves our understanding of knife use in violent crime it is also unlikely to reveal its full extent, as it has been estimated that only 50% of stab victims who present at hospital actually report their assault to the police.⁴ This trend was confirmed anecdotally by a young man giving evidence anonymously with The Prince's Trust, who said:

A couple of people that I have been involved with have not even reported stuff, so even if they have been stabbed or whatever they cannot be seen to be snitching. I do not know whether the statistics are really picking up what is out there.⁵

11. Data from health agencies may therefore allow for a more accurate assessment of stabbing trends.⁶ Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) contain information on patients admitted to hospital who receive care provided by the NHS, including their main diagnosis—recorded as ‘Assault by a sharp object’ in the case of stab victims. The statistics have some caveats. For one, they do not include assault injuries to individuals that are dealt with solely in Accident and Emergency departments and do not require admission to a hospital bed. Professor Brohi, a trauma and vascular surgeon at the Royal London Hospital also cautioned that, while he had not heard of victims being “treated in back streets”, “undoubtedly there are people who are injured who do fine without going to hospital and therefore may not need to go to hospital.”⁷ Equally, the statistics will not include the majority of injuries resulting in death, as a comparison of HES mortality data with ONS mortality statistics in 2005 suggested that around 80% of deaths caused by stabbing occurred before admission to hospital took place.⁸

12. Finally, there are a number of self-report surveys asking young people about their experience of knives. The largest of these are the MORI Youth Surveys, commissioned by the Youth Justice Board and carried out annually between 1999 and 2005 and again in 2008 with 11-16 year olds in mainstream education and excluded 11-17 year olds; and the Home Office's Offending and Criminal Justice Survey carried out annually with 10-25 year olds between 2003 and 2006. Frances Done, Chair of the Youth Justice Board, told us “it is generally accepted that self-report surveys are the most accurate way of finding out what is happening on the ground in terms of offending”.⁹ As well as giving an indication of incidence, they explore motivations.

13. The Ministry of Justice publishes convictions for possessing a bladed instrument. This year it also published data on the sentences awarded to those convicted of possessing an offensive weapon. While these data provide some useful information about levels of knife-carrying, it is difficult to assess whether any increase or decrease reflects the trend in

4 Q 202 [DCS Carnochan]

5 Q 272

6 Roy Maxwell, Caroline Trotter, Julia Verne, Paul Brown and David Gunnell, “Trends in admissions to hospital involving an assault using a knife or other sharp instrument, England, 1997–2005”, *Journal of Public Health*, Vol 29, No. 2 (2007), pp 186–7

7 Q 82

8 Roy Maxwell, Caroline Trotter, Julia Verne, Paul Brown and David Gunnell, “Trends in admissions to hospital involving an assault using a knife or other sharp instrument, England, 1997–2005”, *Journal of Public Health*, Vol 29, No 2 (2007), p 188

9 Q 163

carrying or in detection rates linked to police activity. Moreover, the sentencing data cover all offensive weapons, rather than knives alone.

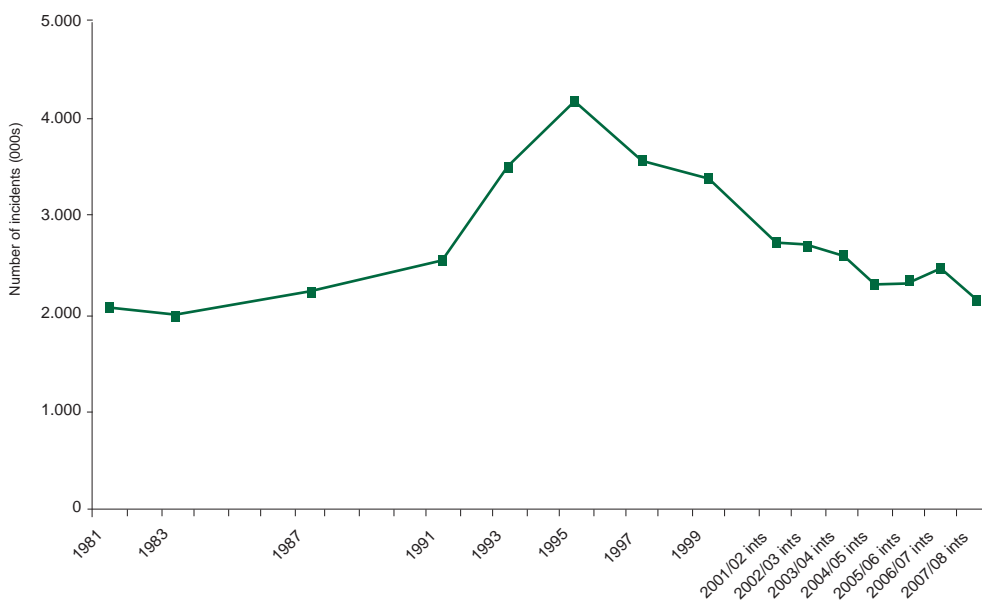
14. **Statistical data about the use of knives in violent offending are contained in the Homicide Index, the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime. Hospital Episode Statistics provide information about knife injuries resulting in a victim’s admittance to hospital. The Home Office Offending, Crime and Justice Survey and MORI Youth Survey have provided information about levels of knife-carrying amongst young people. We welcome the decision to extend the British Crime Survey to under-16s and to publish specific data on knives in police recorded crime as means of improving our understanding of the scale of knife violence. However, limitations remain that inhibit a fully accurate analysis, including poor reporting rates.**

Is knife crime going up or down?

Context

15. We attempted to ascertain the scale of knife possession and use from the data sources listed above, as well as anecdotal evidence from witnesses living and working in communities affected by knife crime. We set out our findings below. While attempting to assess any trend, it is worth bearing in mind overall crime trends. Crime levels rose dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, peaking in 1995. Since that year, violent crime measured by the British Crime Survey has fallen by 48%.¹⁰ However, some academics, such as Dr Marian FitzGerald, have argued that official statistics have failed to pick up a growth in serious violent crime.¹¹

Figure 1: All violent crime, 1981-2007/08 BCS¹²



10 Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2007/08: Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*, July 2008, p 59

11 Ev 163

12 Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2007/08: Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*, July 2008, p 62. "Ints" refers to interviews conducted during that year.

Fatal stabbings

16. The number of overall homicides increased gradually but steadily during the 1980s and 1990s from 418 in 1977 to a peak of 953 in 2002/03, before falling again to 723 in 2005/06. Of these, homicides by sharp instrument rose from 135 in 1977 to 243 in 1995, fell to 197 the following year and then remained relatively stable until rising to 261 in 2001/02 and then declining again to 212 in 2005/06. In percentage terms, 33% of homicides were caused by stabbing in 1977; this fell to 28% in 2000/01 and then remained relatively stable. We were particularly interested in what happened from 2006, the point at which 'knife crime' began to grow in the public consciousness. Fatal stabbings did indeed rise sharply between 2005/06 and 2006/07 - by 57 to 269 (35% of all homicides). Between April 2007 and March 2008, the most recent period for which data is available, the police recorded 270 homicides involving a sharp instrument: the highest total since the Homicide Index was introduced in 1977. This again constituted 35% of all homicides.¹³

Figure 2: Homicide by apparent method of killing, England and Wales, 1997/08-2007/08¹⁴

Apparent method	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
Sharp instrument	202	201	213	215	261	266	242	260	219	269	270
Blunt instrument	68	65	70	77	60	48	73	66	60	45	66
Hitting, kicking etc	103	89	95	102	145	150	137	127	111	141	163
Strangulation	62	78	56	147	78	67	67	64	57	54	57
Shooting	52	46	61	72	97	75	67	70	50	59	53
Explosion	1	2	4	2	1	2	–	2	53	1	–
Burning	28	32	13	18	29	22	28	32	27	29	27
Drowning	6	6	6	9	12	7	24	12	4	9	6
Poison or drugs	17	47	53	33	35	202	20	29	31	26	20
Motor vehicle	13	14	11	16	19	21	22	22	14	6	12
Other	38	43	40	68	40	48	36	41	25	41	52
Not known	19	23	53	14	31	45	60	59	72	62	37
Total	609	646	675	773	808	953	776	784	723	742	763

13 Home Office, *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2007/08: Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2007/08*, January 2009

14 *Ibid*, extracted from Table 1.03

17. **Between 1996 and 2005/06 fatal stabbings mirrored overall homicide rates: the number of fatal stabbings rose sharply before declining again from 2003, but the percentage of homicides that involved a sharp instrument remained relatively stable. However, since 2006 the overall homicide rate has remained relatively stable but the number of knife homicides has increased—by a dramatic 26.9% in 2006/07—to reach 270 in 2007/08, the highest total recorded since the Homicide Index was established in 1977.**

Use of knives in non-fatal violent crime

18. Findings from the British Crime Survey (BCS) indicate that knives were used in 6%, or approximately 138,000, of an estimated 2,164,000 non-fatal violent crimes in 2007/08. This percentage has remained below 8% since 1995. The most common weapons employed in violent crimes were 'hitting implements', used in 7% of violent incidents but 76% of violent crimes did not involve any weapons. Overall violent crime declined by 12% from the previous year; therefore while the proportion of incidents involving knives remained approximately the same, the total number of incidents was lower than in previous years.¹⁵

19. Breaking the data down by crime type, we are presented with a mixed picture. Firstly, we see a decline of almost two-thirds in incidents of knife-enabled woundings between 1995 and 2003/04 (from 84,000 to 29,000), followed by a rise of almost a third to 38,000 in 2007/08. As with homicide figures, the biggest increase occurs between 2005/06 and 2006/07. Figures show that incidents of robberies in which a knife was used also declined by over two-thirds between 1995 and 2004/05 before rising sharply between 2005/06 and 2006/07, but declining slightly again in 2007/08. The use of knives in common assault declined by almost two-thirds between 2006/07 and 2007/08.¹⁶

15 Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2007/08: Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*, July 2008, pp 73, 21

16 *Knife crime statistics*, Standard Note SN/SG/4304, House of Commons Library, March 2009, pp 9–10

Figure 3: Violent incidents in which a knife was used, British Crime Survey data¹⁷

	Wounding		Robbery		Common assault		All violence	
	Estimated number	% of all incidents	Estimated number	% of all incidents	Estimated number	% of all incidents	Estimated number	% of all incidents
1995	84,000	9%	97,000	29%	160,000	5%	334,000	8%
1997	37,000	5%	55,000	17%	77,000	3%	180,000	5%
1999	61,000	9%	72,000	18%	53,000	2%	194,000	5%
2001/2	64,000	10%	63,000	18%	63,000	4%	191,000	7%
2002/3	41,000	6%	58,000	19%	128,000	8%	217,000	8%
2003/4	29,000	4%	30,000	10%	70,000	4%	126,000	5%
2004/5	29,000	5%	26,000	10%	89,000	6%	139,000	6%
2005/6	32,000	6%	41,000	13%	90,000	6%	157,000	7%
2006/7	38,000	7%	65,000	20%	140,000	9%	181,000	7%
2007/8	38,000	8%	48,000	15%	53,000	4%	138,000	6%

However, as we discussed above, the accuracy of BCS data is questionable. In particular, the number of robbery victims interviewed for the survey is generally too low to provide robust estimates of robberies for individual years.¹⁸

20. Police forces have only published data on knife use in serious offences since July 2008; therefore, it is not possible to establish long-term trends from these statistics. The first published data, for April 2007-March 2008, showed 22,151 instances of use of a knife or a sharp instrument in attempted murders, grievous bodily harm or robbery.¹⁹

21. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from Home Office data about levels of knife use in non-fatal violent crime, partly because of the limitations of the source data and partly because they do not indicate many clear trends. It appears that overall knife violence recorded by the British Crime Survey fell sharply between 1995 and 2003/04, in line with overall violent crime, but rose again in 2006/07.

22. A study of Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data on patients admitted to NHS hospitals in England between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 2005 found that the number of admissions for “assault by sharp object” increased by 30% over the study period.²⁰ Since

17 *Ibid*, adapted from Table 3

18 *Ibid*, p 10

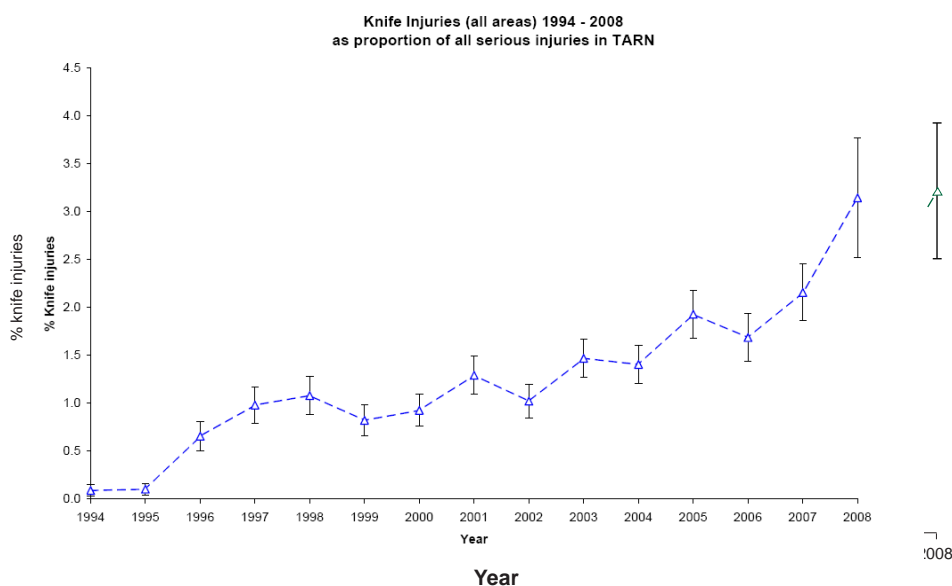
19 Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2007/08: Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*, July 2008, p 75

20 Roy Maxwell, Caroline Trotter, Julia Verne, Paul Brown and David Gunnell, “Trends in admissions to hospital involving an assault using a knife or other sharp instrument, England, 1997–2005”, *Journal of Public Health*, Vol 29, No 2 (2007), p 187

then, the NHS has published data showing the figure continued to rise from 5,072 in 2004/05 to 5,720 in 2006/07, before falling slightly to 5,239 in 2007/08.²¹

23. The Trauma Audit and Research Network (TARN) collects data on patients who are admitted to hospital as a result of serious injury from its member hospitals (about half of all trauma-receiving hospitals in England and Wales) for more detailed analysis. The Network's research director, Dr Fiona Lecky, presented data to our Leeds seminar which demonstrated a sharp rise in the proportion of serious injuries caused by knives:

Figure 4: Knife injuries as proportion of all serious injuries 1994-2008²²



These findings were supported by evidence from Professor Karim Brohi regarding cases treated at the Royal London Hospital, which treats one in four or five of all injuries sustained in the capital:

As to knife crime, currently we see 23 severe injuries a month. So far this year we have had 255 injuries and project 278 up to the end of the year. That compares with 68 injuries in 2003 when our database started ... One in three inpatients is a knife victim, so ... of my dedicated trauma time one third is spent on knife injuries.²³

24. Hospital Episode Statistics show a big increase in knife injuries since the mid-1990s, with the sharpest increase occurring since 2006. This trend was supported by the professional opinion of two senior medical practitioners to whom we spoke. However, we note that the number of stab victims admitted to hospital is far lower than the number of stab victims suggested by the British Crime Survey. This may indicate that the majority of stab wounds are minor. The increase in hospital admissions, however, appears to indicate that serious stab wounds are becoming more common.

21 *Knife crime statistics*, Standard Note SN/SG/4304, House of Commons Library, March 2009, p 13

22 Ev 193 [Trauma and Audit Research Network]

23 Qq 51, 62-3

Knife possession

25. The majority of detailed data about knife possession relates to young people, in the form of self-report surveys. The Youth Justice Board's 2008 MORI Youth Survey found that 31% of 11-16 year olds in mainstream education surveyed reported having carried a weapon in the previous 12 months: the two most common weapons reported were a penknife (17%) and a BB gun, a type of airgun that fires small pellets (15%). 61% of excluded young people admitted to carrying a weapon, including 54% who admitted to carrying a knife.²⁴ The 2008 survey showed lower levels of knife-carrying for both groups than the 2004 survey; however this was off-set by the increased numbers of respondents who did not answer the question about knife-carrying. The Chair of the Youth Justice Board, Frances Done, told us that on the basis of these results:

The level of knife-carrying by young people, either young people generally or those who have said that they have offended—and this is knife-carrying at any time in the last 12 months—is of a level that is obviously of serious concern.²⁵

26. The Home Office Offending, Crime and Justice Survey has found significantly lower numbers of young people reporting to have carried knives. The difference can be partially explained by the survey methodology, the wider age range covered by the OCJS and the fact that the MORI survey included knife-carrying for legitimate purposes (32% of the young people who admitted to carrying a knife said they did so “for hobbies, activities or sports”). The 2006 survey found that 3% of 10-25 year olds claimed to have carried a knife in the last 12 months. Of those who reported to have carried a knife, 54% said they had carried it “once or twice” with only 17% claiming to have carried a knife “10 times or more.”²⁶ The Children's Commissioner's charity, 11 MILLION, took a representative sample of 8-17 year olds in England and a sample of young people who live in seven 'high risk' areas and found that only 4% of 12-17 year olds admitted to carrying a knife either now or in the past, and for the majority carrying was an infrequent occurrence.²⁷

27. While these findings indicate that knife-carrying does not take place on a large scale across the country, there is evidence from people living and working in some communities that levels are much higher. 11 MILLION found that to 26% of young people living in 'high risk' areas perceived knife crime to be either a big or fairly big problem in their area, compared to one in six young people nationally.²⁸ One anonymous witness giving evidence with The Prince's Trust told us “I would say I think it is definitely a problem that is getting worse.”²⁹ On the basis of research with police officers and youth offending teams, Policy

24 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 46; Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in Pupil Referral Units*, February 2009, p 50

25 Q 163

26 Home Office, *Young people and crime: findings from the 2006 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*, July 2008, p 22

27 11 MILLION/YouGov, *Solutions to gun and knife crime*, March 2009, Summary, p 2

28 *Ibid*

29 Q 268

Exchange's Gavin Lockhart argued "I think it is becoming normal for some groups in poor communities to carry a knife."³⁰

28. Dr Golding quoted Ministry of Justice statistics that showed a dramatic increase in knife possession detections over the past decade:

The number of convictions for carrying a knife between 1997 and 2006 has risen from 3,360 to 6,314. Arrests for having an article with a blade or point on school premises has increased by 500% over six years from 1999 to 2005.³¹

However, as we suggested earlier, this may indicate greater police and school activity to detect knife-carrying rather than purely an increase in levels of carrying.

29. Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, noted the irrelevance of official statistics for people living in affected communities. He said:

I actually want to increase the amount of violence that is reported to us ... because right now only 50% of those who turn up at an A&E department (and it is the same in England) will report it to the police, so you are judging us on 50% knowledge, so whether it goes up or down is an absolute irrelevance, it is a measure of activity, because what will happen then, if you live in an area where there is loads of violence and you see it outside your front window, you will know someone who is in prison, you will know someone who has been a victim, and the chief officer stands up, or a politician, and says, "Relax; violence is going down", and you when look out your front window you know that it is not; it is not your experience.³²

A community worker from Peckham who attended our London seminar expressed a similar view, arguing that apparent complacency about knives on the part of the Government and the police would only serve to normalise knife-carrying.

30. The picture with regard to knife possession is complicated. The 2008 MORI Youth Survey indicated that 31% of 11-16 year olds in mainstream education and 61% of excluded young people had carried a knife at some point over the course of the previous year; however the 2006 Home Office Offending, Crime and Justice Survey found that only 3% of 10-25 year olds did. This discrepancy cannot be explained by the time lag between the surveys, as the numbers reporting carrying a knife actually decreased between the 2005 and 2008 MORI Surveys. It can partly be explained by the fact that the MORI survey includes legitimate carrying and the OCJS covers a wider age range. Anecdotal evidence indicated that in certain areas levels of knife-carrying have risen to the extent that carrying a knife has almost become "normal". We therefore concluded that, although there is no definitive evidence of the extent of knife-carrying nationally, in parts of England and Wales it was at a level to be of significant concern.

30 Q 40

31 Q 1

32 Q 202

Impact of the Tackling Knives Action Programme

31. The Government has responded to concerns about knife crime with the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP). In June 2008 it pledged £5m additional funding for the ten police force areas in England and Wales judged to be most affected by knife crime—Essex, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Metropolitan, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, Thames Valley, West Midlands and West Yorkshire—to support:

- Increased use of searches, in targeted and intelligence-led operations, to complement new portable knife arches and search wands;
- Fast-tracking the ‘knife referral project’ in which all young people convicted of a knife offence are taught the consequences of knife crime; and
- Home visits and letters to parents of young people known to carry weapons.

32. In December 2008 the Government announced a further £3.4 million for investment in after-school patrols and Safer Schools Partnerships, whereby police officers are based in schools; and an extra 7000 places for young people in ‘positive activities’ on Friday and Saturday nights in TKAP areas. TKAP was originally funded until March 2009 but has been extended for a further year and to a further two areas: Hampshire and Kent.³³

33. We attempted to assess whether this had had any impact on crime levels. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock, who was appointed to lead TKAP until his move to the National Policing Improvement Agency in April 2009, told us in January 2009 that the success of the programme should become evident in statistics for the period October-December 2008:

That will be the quarter when you will start to see the programme has had a significant impact and there has been a significant improvement.³⁴

The figures for this period have since been published. Comparisons of quarterly statistics for April-June 2008, July-September 2008 and October-December 2008 show no clear trends for knife-enabled attempted murder, robbery, threats to kills, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm, rape and sexual assault, although the overall number of knife-enabled violent offences declined slightly from 9,608 in April-June to 9,400 in October-December.³⁵

34. Provisional HES data for 2008 (which should be treated with caution because of its provisional nature) appear to show a decrease of 8.43% for the year during which TKAP was established: 4,899 admissions recorded between December 2007 and November 2008

33 “Tough new sanctions to tackle knife crime”, Home Office press release, 5 June 2008; “Tackling knives action plan, six months on”, Home Office press release, 11 December 2008; “Clamping down on serious youth violence”, Home Office press release, 11 March 2009

34 Q 96

35 Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update to December 2008*, April 2009, p 11

compared with 5,350 admissions between December 2006 and November 2007.³⁶ Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, Alan Campbell MP, told us:

Recent provisional figures produced by the Department of Health that showed in the first period of the programme from June to November of last year that the fall in admissions to accident and emergency of the target group of individuals, 13 to 19 year olds, with reported stab wounds had fallen by 31%. I think if you compare that to the figures for the non-TKAP areas, which is 18%, we can begin to draw conclusions about the success of some of the work that has been done.³⁷

We explore TKAP tactics in more detail in the relevant chapter.

35. The Government's Tackling Knives Action Programme has been in operation for less than a year, therefore it is difficult to evaluate its success. It does not appear to have had a significant effect on reducing police recorded crime, although there have been signs of a notable reduction in hospital admissions in Tackling Knives Action Programme areas.

36 NHS figures, cited in "Knife hospital admissions down 8%", *BBC News Online*, 12 March 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

37 Q 535

3 Victims and offenders

The relationship between victim and offender

36. Most media coverage of knife crime focuses on stabbings that are gang-related or random stranger violence. In 2007/08, domestic knife violence constituted around 6% of all British Crime Survey violence, stranger knife violence constituted 4% and acquaintance knife violence 6%.³⁸ In terms of victims of serious knife injuries that present to hospital, Professor Brohi told us that “a very small proportion” of those seen at the Royal London Hospital are “innocent people walking down the street who are jumped on or stabbed” and only “a very small incidents of domestic violence crime lead to knife crime”: they mainly related to “gang culture”.³⁹

37. Dr Golding argued that one reason for an increased focus on knife crime was a recent change in the nature of the problem: “the context is gangs and the prevalence of youth in a way that was never the case before.”⁴⁰ Professor Brohi agreed, noting that trends in terms of stabbings resulting from “brawls in the street” have been constant since records began but:

The change that we see is really in the teenage group and the rise of a new demographic of teenager being stabbed. That is a very different category of person with a very different background and reason for carrying the weapon. They tend not to be alcohol-related and have more to do with school gangs or local gangs. When we talk about gangs it is important to separate out the organised gangs which tend to be people in their mid-20s and late 20s, often of ethnic or organised crime origin, with teenage school gangs which are more dependent on the area.⁴¹

38. The link between knives and street gangs varies by location, for example, in London and Glasgow there appears to be a strong link whereas in Birmingham and Manchester gangs are more associated with gun violence.⁴² A complicating factor is that there is no clear definition of what comprises a gang. An anonymous witness from Merseyside told us:

When you say gangs, there are not just gangs that are violent, there are gangs of, like, friends, people who are just out for a laugh and out with their mates who are not doing anything wrong. You have to be careful when you say gangs because people might take it the wrong way.⁴³

Most offending by young people is group-related in some way; whether these groups can always be termed “gangs” is another matter.⁴⁴ The Youth Justice Board also told us while

38 *Knife crime statistics*, Standard Note SN/SG/4304, House of Commons Library, March 2009, Table 3

39 Qq 55, 58

40 Q 9

41 Q 53

42 Q 414, Annex B [Leeds seminar notes]

43 Q 342

44 Youth Justice Board, *Groups, Gangs and Weapons*, 2007, Summary, p 3

“street-based groups of young people who are involved in offending may often be armed”, weapon-carrying “is by no means limited to groups.”⁴⁵

39. While there are clearly examples of serious street-gang-related violence in large cities, MyGeneration founder Shaun Bailey has argued that society should keep a perspective about gang culture and not afford members a special status they do not deserve. He believes that fears about so-called colour coding have been blown out of proportion: ‘It does exist, but the wearing of a certain colour in a certain area is very unlikely to put you at risk ... The gangs know who they are fighting with and who they are looking for ... [Parents] should not be worrying that if their kid is from E12 and he goes into E1 he’s finished. It isn’t like that. There has been a certain amount of Hollywoodisation about gangs by the media.’⁴⁶ This point was reiterated by one of the witnesses to our inquiry, Kirk Dawes of the West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Services:

The vast majority of young men who get involved in gangs do not even know that is the way they are going until one day they wake up and realise they are part of a group of people who are behaving in a criminal way ... We have given them the title “gangs”. In 2003 in Birmingham there were 27 gang-related murders, but I tell you now that the Johnson Crew and the Burger Bar Boys did not call themselves gangs; they did not realise it. These were friendships born out of school and childhood. Following some New Year shootings the media said that there were two gangs in Birmingham: the Burger Bar Boys and the Johnson Crew and over night we had two definitive gangs. They then began to believe in their own celebrity status and behaved in that way.⁴⁷

40. A significant proportion of stabbings relate to brawling or domestic violence, but the rise in violent knife offences seen over the past few years is associated with street violence between groups of young people who share a territorial identity, often referred to as ‘gangs’. While young people often offend in groups, there may be a tendency to overstate the phenomenon of streets gangs and a danger that categorising groups of young people in that way may glamorise street violence. Random stabbings of innocent bystanders remain extremely rare.

Geography

41. Not surprisingly, London has the greatest volume of ‘most serious’ knife crime (34% of the national total), although the rate of offending per head for London is similar to Greater Manchester and the West Midlands (9.7 per 10,000 population compared to 8.8 and 8.3 respectively). London also has a higher than average proportion of knife-enabled murders (50% in London against a national average of 3%).⁴⁸ The Youth Justice Board explained some of the reasons why:

45 Ev 121

46 “Colour”, *The Times*, 11 July 2008, T2, p 4

47 Qq 406, 410

48 Ev 134 [Mayor of London]

Evidence from youth justice practitioners supports the widely held belief that knife crime is a far bigger problem in London than in other major cities. There are many reasons for this trend, not least of which are the size of the capital and the proportionally higher number of gangs or other groups. There is evidence to show that other factors contribute to the problem, including the large number of transport links into and around London and the sheer number of postcode areas which young people often associate themselves with. Both of these factors serve to create natural geographical boundaries and generate a greater sense of territorialism, which can result in young people arming themselves with knives when leaving their local area.⁴⁹

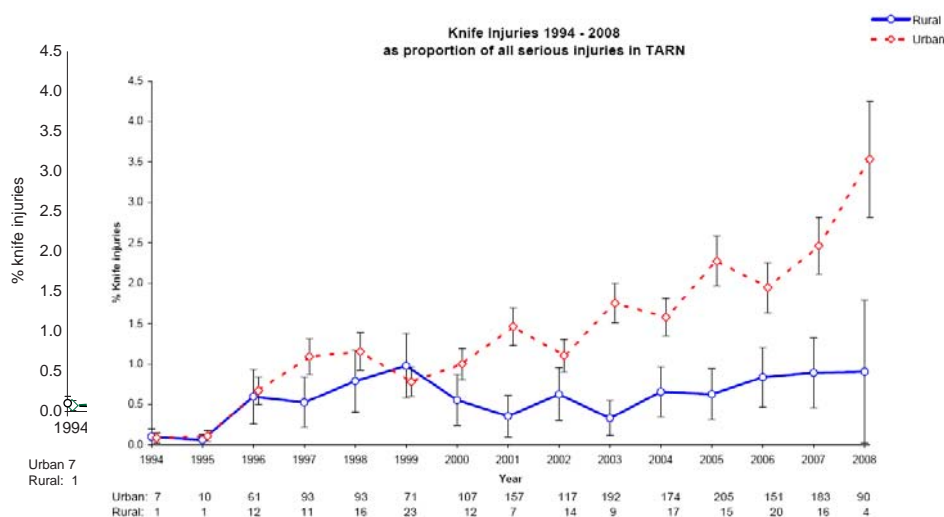
The BBC's Mark Easton noted that of the 179 under-16s admitted to hospital with knife injuries in 2006/07, 40% were in London, whereas not one child in central and south-east England outside London was admitted.⁵⁰

42. The 2008 MORI Youth Survey threw up some interesting results, finding that the highest incidence of weapon-carrying was in Wales and the North-East of England, at 35%.⁵¹ This may be explained by the fact that the survey included legitimate reasons for possession. However, other evidence appeared to indicate that, although knife crime is predominantly an issue for large conurbations, it is also rising in other areas. For example, Policy Exchange found from research with youth offending teams (YOTs):

As expected, urban YOTs reported more increases in knife crime than rural ones, but the difference was not pronounced: 67% of urban and 55% of rural YOTs reported an increase in knife crime incidents among young offenders. This suggests that the phenomenon is spreading from urban centres to less densely populated areas.⁵²

Dr Lecky presented hospital data showing there has been a rise of knife injuries in rural areas since the mid-nineties, albeit less steep than in urban areas:

Figure 5: Knife injuries as proportion of all serious injuries 1994-2008: Urban/rural divide⁵³



49 Ev 121

50 "Knives, guns and teens", Mark Easton's UK blog, www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markeaston, 4 July 2008

51 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 48

52 Policy Exchange, *Going Ballistic: Dealing with Guns, Gangs and Knives* (London: 2008), pp 43-4

53 Ev 193 [Trauma Audit Research Network]

43. Researchers at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies have argued that “people living in poor neighbourhoods also stand a far greater chance of finding themselves at the wrong end of a knife”, noting that, in addition to suffering a higher rate of violent victimisation in general, about 60% of murder victims in the poorest fifth of areas in Britain die from being cut with a knife or broken bottle or glass as opposed to 30% in the wealthiest areas.⁵⁴ The nature of knife crime can also vary across the country. The Youth Justice Board argued:

It is worth noting that the experience of, and reasons for, knife crime amongst young people can be relatively varied between different cities and regions, and therefore assessments of the causes of knife crime need to take into account the local nature of the issue.⁵⁵

An example of this is the extent to which knife crime is associated with street violence.

Ethnicity

44. Patterns of knife offending and victimisation tend to reflect the ethnic composition of the local population rather than being linked to any particular culture(s). For example, Professor Brohi told us in relation to the Royal London Hospital, which is in East London, that:

We do not have solid figures but our local area is such that the majority of the youth-related stab victims are Asian or black.⁵⁶

Whereas we heard our at Leeds seminar that knife offenders in Manchester, for example, would be more likely to be white. This was supported by evidence from Assistant Chief Constable Crowther of the British Transport Police, in relation to knife-enabled robbery and assault.⁵⁷

45. In terms of knife-carrying, the 2008 MORI Youth Survey found “no significant difference in terms of carrying a ‘knife or ‘gun’ across ethnicity overall”.⁵⁸ 11 MILLION found that young people from a black and minority ethnic background were more likely than their white counterparts to say that knife crime was a problem in their area, but the majority of current or former knife carriers were white.⁵⁹

46. We asked specific questions about the relationship between knife-carrying and immigration, in light of evidence to our inquiry into *Policing in the 21st Century* which indicated there could be higher levels of carrying amongst immigrants from Eastern Europe.⁶⁰ Dr Brohi noted that the Royal London Hospital does see evidence of knife use by organised criminal gangs originating from the Baltic states and Turkey, but “the rising

54 Chris Eades, Roger Grimshaw, Arianna Silvestri, Enver Solomon, *Knife crime: a review of evidence and policy*, 2nd edition (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2007), p 24

55 Ev 121

56 Q 65

57 Qq 142–3

58 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 47

59 11 MILLION/YouGov, *Solutions to gun and knife crime*, March 2009, Summary p 2

60 Home Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2007–08, *Policing in the 21st Century*, HC 364, para 81

demographic of youth crime tends to be related to the local population who are not really immigrants; they are British Asian, British black or in Manchester British white people.”⁶¹

47. Violent knife crime is concentrated in the deprived areas of large cities. The nature of knife crime may vary between cities and is not always linked to street violence. While hospital data show a rise in the number of knife injuries sustained in rural areas since the mid-1990s, the trend does not mirror the rapid rise seen in urban areas since 2006 and incidence remains considerably lower than in urban areas. While some immigrants from countries where knife-carrying is socially acceptable may be more predisposed to carry knives, knife use is not linked to ethnicity but rather reflects the local demography.

Age

48. The largest proportion of offenders and victims affected by knife crime are those in their late teens and twenties. For example, the largest category of both offenders and victims in crimes recorded by the Metropolitan police is 18-29. This conforms with data for overall violent offences which show that more than 85% of violent offenders are between the ages of 16 and 29 and the risk of being a victim of violent crime is almost four times greater for young men aged 16-24. According to data supplied by the Trauma Audit Research Network, the median age of hospitalised victims is 27.8.⁶²

49. However, a clear theme that emerged from our evidence was that knife-carrying and use is increasingly affecting children and younger teenagers. For example, between 2003 and 2007 hospital admissions for knife wounds increased by 62.7% for children under 16, from 110 to 179 (although more recently admissions of teenagers have fallen).⁶³ Dr Iain Brennan told us at our Bristol seminar that the median age of British Crime Survey victims has declined since 2004/05.⁶⁴ According to Dr Golding, “one of the issues reported to us is the increasing youth of some of the people who engage in this type of criminality.”⁶⁵ Citing their then-most recent data, between April and August 2008, the Metropolitan Police told us that 24% of knife victims, 31% of knife-enabled offenders and 27% of knife possessors were under 18.⁶⁶ This trend was corroborated anecdotally, for example according to one anonymous witness giving evidence with The Prince’s Trust:

People get involved in it earlier. I do not know exactly the statistics or numbers overall, but I think that is what is quite worrying for me.⁶⁷

50. We tried to establish the age at which young people were most likely to carry a knife. 11 MILLION’s research (with 8-17 year olds) found that the majority of current or former

61 Q 66

62 Ev 130 [Metropolitan Police]; National Audit Office, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, February 2008, p 12; KC 26 [Trauma and Audit Research Network]

63 *Knife crime statistics*, Standard Note SN/SG/4304, House of Commons Library, March 2009, p 13; NHS figures, cited in “Knife hospital admissions down 8%”, *BBC News Online*, 12 March 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

64 Annex D

65 Q 4

66 Ev 130

67 Q 269

knife carriers were aged between 15 and 17.⁶⁸ The 2008 MORI Youth Survey (of 11-16 year olds) reported that 15-16 year olds were more likely to report having carried some kind of weapon than their younger counterparts, although the difference was not dramatic at 34% versus 30%.⁶⁹ The most common age at which the excluded pupils and young offenders interviewed for *Why Carry a Weapon?*, a piece of research carried out by Nicola Marfleet and published by the Howard League for Penal Reform, had carried a knife for the first time was 11.⁷⁰ We also heard instances of some really young children carrying knives:

You do get children from the ages of around seven, eight and nine carrying weapons such as knives ... You can find people from the age of about seven onwards carrying knives and in not only our estate but around Bootle and other areas. It is horrible.⁷¹

Gender

51. Knife-enabled offences are predominantly perpetuated by males on other males. For the most serious cases that end up in hospital, Professor Brohi told us: “Ninety-five per cent of our knife patients are male. The only female patients are those who suffer from domestic violence. Therefore, this is really a male problem.”⁷² Data from other hospitals corroborates this evidence:

Figure 6: Penetrating Injury Audit: Stabbings by gender, July-December 2008 (Greater Manchester)⁷³

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	154	89.5
Female	18	10.5
Total	172	100

This mirrors overall violence trends: more than 85% of violent offenders are male.⁷⁴

52. The 2008 MORI Youth Survey found that boys are predominantly more likely to admit to carrying a knife or gun than girls: 45% of boys compared with 16% of girls. The OCJS 2005 study had similar findings: 5% of boys versus 2% of girls. One anonymous witness told us that in his area of Merseyside girls do carry knives, though maybe for different reasons:

There is a ratio of about 30% of girls that carry around knives and 70% of boys carry around knives because girls have got more reason. Girls have reasons for carrying knives such as rape, assault and other reasons such as that.⁷⁵

53. Males in their late teens and early twenties constitute the majority of perpetrators and victims of violent knife crime, which is consistent with other types of violent offending. However, the number of under-18s affected has risen. The age at which

68 11 MILLION/YouGov, *Solutions to gun and knife crime*, March 2009, Summary p 2

69 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 47

70 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15-17-Year-Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), p 59

71 Q 338

72 Q 64

73 Ev 194

74 National Audit Office, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, February 2008, p 12

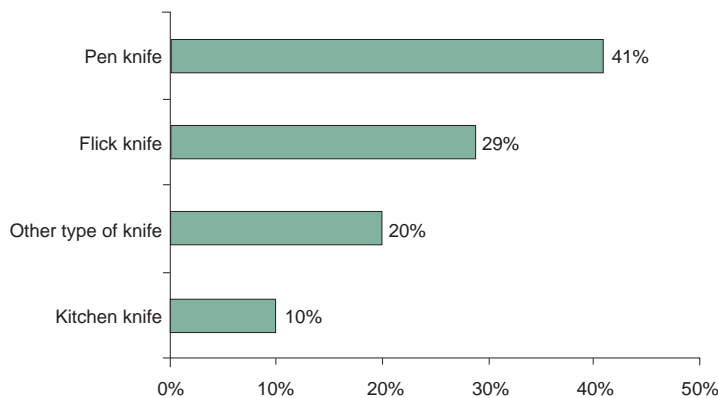
75 Q 343

young people carry knives is also worrying: the incidence of carrying is highest amongst older teenagers, but we heard instances of carrying by children as young as seven. 11 seemed to be a key risk age for first carrying a knife, presumably linked to the transition from primary to secondary school. Boys are far more likely to carry a knife than girls.

Types of knives

54. The 2008 MORI Youth Survey found that the two most common weapons carried were a penknife (17%) and a BB gun (15%). The 2005 and 2006 Offending, Crime and Justice Surveys also found that penknives were carried more commonly than other knives:

Figure 7: Type of knife carried by 10-25 year olds in the last 12 months among those carrying knives, 2005 OCS⁷⁶



However, carrying a penknife is usually legal and cannot automatically be linked to sinister intent. 6% of knife-carriers reported carrying a flick knife and 4% a kitchen knife.⁷⁷ Speaking in reference to the police stop and search operation, Blunt, Dr Golding told us that kitchen knives only constitute “about 10%” of the knives that are used and found, whereas a significant proportion are flick knives and penknives. He noted that about 20% are described as “other”, meaning other illegal weapons, sharp instruments, gravity knives and so forth.⁷⁸

76 Home Office, *Young People and Crime: Findings from the 2005 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*, December 2006, Figure 2.6

77 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 46

78 Q 11–12

55. In terms of use to cause injuries, Dr Lecky presented Trauma Audit Research Network data indicating that kitchen knives were used most often:

Figure 8: Penetrating Injury Audit: Stabbing assault weapons used July-December 2008⁷⁹

Weapon	Total	Percentage
Kitchen knife	59	34
Unidentified knives	37	21.5
Other	11	6.5
Flick knife	5	3
Glass	11	6.5
Penknife	2	1.2
Unidentified weapon	47	27.3
	172	100

56. Hospital data analysed by the Trauma Audit Research Network indicates that the type of knife used to injure most frequently is the kitchen knife, probably because of its easy availability. However, young people tend to admit to carrying penknives, flick knives and other kinds of knives, which are also more commonly found by the police during stop and search operations. This may suggest that the knives used to cause serious injury may differ from those that are routinely carried. The MORI Youth Survey found that penknives were the most common weapon carried by young people, but to some extent this will be for legitimate purposes: only 1.2% of stab wounds recorded by TARN hospitals during the second half of 2008 were caused by penknives.

4 Causes

In this chapter we explore why young people carry knives and factors influencing violent behaviour.

Protection

57. “Protection” tends to be the number one motive given for illegal knife-carrying. A commonly cited figure, taken from the Home Office’s 2006 Offending Crime and Justice Survey, is that 85% of young people carry to protect themselves. Other studies have discovered similar findings. Behind legitimate use, the most common reason given by knife-carriers to the 2008 MORI Youth Survey was “to protect myself”. In *Why Carry a Weapon?*, all focus groups bar one stated that “protection” was the primary reason why young people their age chose to carry a knife.⁸⁰ Young people claim they need a weapon to protect themselves because they feel unsafe.

58. Ian Levy, the father of stab victim Robert Levy, pointed out the weakness of these surveys: “almost all young people you ask, will say they carry it for protection, because that is the simplest and easiest reason to justify the possession of a knife.”⁸¹ We accept that we should treat the figures with caution, and that fear does not excuse weapon-carrying, but it was clear from other evidence that a perceived need for protection does play a role in the decision of many young people to carry knives.

59. This fear tends to be exacerbated by a presumption that others will be carrying knives. One witness who gave evidence anonymously with The Prince’s Trust and who used to carry a knife compared the situation to an arms race:

It was not like I was carrying it because I was going to go and stab someone, it was just other people were doing it so it was just like an arms race. I think in a way—and this is a personal opinion—to make it equal, governments have nuclear weapons because someone else has got nuclear weapons. It is to defend ourselves. No-one wants to use it but it is just there as a deterrent.⁸²

60. Some witnesses pointed to the issue of “territoriality” as a key factor in why some young people felt the need for protection. A recent study published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that, for 13-17 year old boys and to a lesser extent men in their twenties in particular, identity has become strongly linked to neighbourhood, which often expresses itself through violent conflict with groups from other neighbourhoods. A young offender from London interviewed for *Why Carry a Weapon?* described how this affected his decision to carry a knife:

In my area, I’m going to see my girl and she lives in Palmers Green, I have to go through Wood Green to get to Palmers Green, and I’ve got beef with Wood Green,

80 Home Office, *Young people and crime: findings from the 2006 Offending Crime and Justice Survey*, July 2008, p 14; Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 49; Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), pp 60–1

81 Q 231

82 Q 272

man. I get shot, or like if they don't have a strap on them then they chasing up trying to move me up. I'd rather have a shank and flick it out and start wetting man than get stabbed myself. Cos if you have a shank, and they haven't, they're gonna back off.⁸³

61. Even those who do not form part of a group linked to a territory may find themselves at risk of attack when crossing into another area.⁸⁴ An anonymous witness giving evidence with The Prince's Trust explained that the majority of young people in his community in Basildon would only carry a knife if they were going into an unfamiliar area and another giving evidence with 11 MILLION told us that he was at risk of mugging or assault if venturing onto another estate in Merseyside.⁸⁵

62. The perceived need for protection is linked to experiences of victimisation: in the 2008 MORI Youth Survey, 27% of young people who claimed to have been a victim of crime reported carrying a knife at least once or twice afterwards, compared to 20% of non-victims; 7% reported carrying a knife three or four times compared to 4% of non-victims.⁸⁶ Dr Iain Brennan told us that British Crime Survey data also indicated that being a victim of violence in the previous 12 months increased the likelihood of carrying a weapon.⁸⁷

63. There is also a relationship with lack of trust in 'natural protectors', such as the police, as explained in *Why Carry a Weapon?*:

It was unanimous from all 18 participants that the police and their parents could not protect them, but a knife in some circumstances could ... *The police are saying that they keep you safe, but the police ain't gonna protect you 24-7, 52-weeks. Obviously you've got to have something to protect you ...* Several boys mentioned that rather than their parents protecting them, it was their job to protect their mothers and younger siblings.⁸⁸

Frances Crook, of the Howard League for Penal Reform, told us that the research had also found that parents were not responding in a helpful way to their children's safety concerns.⁸⁹ We return to this point in paragraph 128.

Influence of media coverage

64. We heard concerns that intense media coverage of fatal stabbings, particularly over the summer of 2008, may have led to an increase in young people carrying weapons because it fuelled the perception that everyone else was carrying them. The crime reduction charity Nacro, for example, argued:

83 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), pp 77–8

84 Keith Kintrea, Jon Bannister, Jon Pickering, Maggie Reid and Naofumi Suzuki, *Young people and territoriality in British cities* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation), October 2008

85 Qq 273, 370

86 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 50

87 Annex D [Bristol seminar notes]

88 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), pp 61, 67

89 Q 295

The suggestion that it is in any sense the norm to carry weapons is likely to increase the number of young people who do so, simply because they fear attack and wish to have the means to protect and defend themselves.⁹⁰

Mothers Against Murder and Aggression Wales explained that when they ask young people “What do you think is the biggest cause of knife crime and why do you think young people carry a knife”:

More and more the answer is 'the media'. On discussing this issue the children tell us that they see so much in the news about knife crime and the way it is portrayed it gives a message that all teenagers are thugs and are armed. They know this is not true about the areas of Wales that they live in but it still frightens them. Almost everyone who has carried a knife or knows someone who does feels they have to protect themselves because everyone else is doing the same⁹¹

Several other organisations, including SmartJustice and World of Hope, expressed concern about the impact of the media’s negative portrayal of young people:

The attitude of the media, who focus very negatively on young people also contributes to the problem. Screaming headlines about a ‘war on young thugs’ contributes to the concept that for some young people there is a war being waged against them and they should be fighting back.⁹²

65. However, other witnesses cited positive aspects of some media coverage. Mrs Oakes-Odger, who has campaigned against knives since the fatal stabbing of her son Westley Odger, described how the media had helped to raise the issue of knife crime up the political agenda, as well as being a conduit for a Home Office campaign to engage community organisations last summer.⁹³ Not all of the media coverage has been sensationalist. The Daily Mirror, for example, has given practical advice to parents on how to talk to their children about knives.⁹⁴ Valerie Okoampah and Kane Pierce, pupils at Gladesmore Community School in Tottenham, London who are part of a student-led anti-knife campaign called Value Life, explained how Choice FM radio station had helped spread their message by covering their campaign and providing DJs for their rallies and marches.⁹⁵

66. The Royal Armouries Museum, in their literature review of evidence on knife crime, argue that “changing the culture of newspaper reporting is obviously easier said than done but responsible reporting could be facilitated by issuing good quality press briefings about knife-carrying and knife crime that feature reliable research and statistics.”⁹⁶ A 2007 report by the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies gave the example of a Metropolitan Police statement to publicise the national knife amnesty which said that “52 teenagers are victims of knife crime EVERY week in London”: members of the public could reasonably have

90 Ev 104

91 Ev 184

92 Ev 103 [World of Hope]; Ev 106 [SmartJustice]

93 Q 225

94 For an example, see “How parents can win the war against knife crime”, *The Daily Mirror*, 12 June 2008, p 39

95 Q 471

96 Royal Armouries Museum, *Tackling Knife Crime: A Review of Literature on Knife Crime in the UK*, December 2007, para 5.12

assumed this referred to actual stabbings, whereas it includes a range of incidents such as where a knife has been used to threaten.⁹⁷ The Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar, had cause to complain to the Home Office in December 2008 about the premature release of data related to the Tackling Knives Action Programme.⁹⁸ In the past we have urged the Government to provide full and accurate crime information.⁹⁹

67. The vast majority of young people who carry knives say that they or their peers carry knives to protect themselves: according to one survey this reason is given by as many as 85% of knife-carriers. While for some questioned this may be an easy excuse to justify their actions, young people in deprived communities undoubtedly feel unsafe. In part this is down to the risk of being attacked simply for living in a different neighbourhood or “territory”. There is also a strong link between past victimisation and knife-carrying. Many do not trust their “natural protectors”, such as their parents and the police, to keep them safe. A perception that everyone else is carrying a knife fuels a vicious circle, compared by one witness to an “arms race”. Solutions to knife-carrying should therefore focus in part on helping young people to feel safer.

68. Sensationalist media coverage of stabbings has contributed to this “arms race”. Negative media portrayals of young people as “feral youths”, when the vast majority are law-abiding, can add to a sense of being under attack. While we urge media organisations to report knife crime in a responsible manner, we also recognise the positive role that the media can play in mobilising communities against knife crime and acting as a conduit for anti-knife information and campaigns. Furthermore, responsible reporting is assisted by the provision of quality information; therefore we repeat our past recommendation for the provision of full and accurate crime data.

Status

69. Another potential impact of heavy media coverage of knife offences is that it can serve to glamorise knife crime. We heard evidence suggesting that some young people carry knives “out of respect, maybe trying to make a name for themselves on the street”: in order to gain ‘respect’, they will use a weapon to threaten and intimidate people.¹⁰⁰ 4% of respondents to the 2008 Youth Survey said they carried a knife “for street cred” and 5% “to scare others”.¹⁰¹ Shaun Bailey, who runs the youth charity MyGeneration, told us:

When you are young ... you know that carrying a knife is wrong, you know it is dangerous and you know that stabbing people is wrong, but it is not as wrong as not looking cool.¹⁰²

Professor Ellis Cashmore, of Staffordshire University, has argued that knives have assumed a new status as “bling” for those who cannot afford gold chains and fast cars. As they

97 Chris Eades, Roger Grimshaw, Arianna Silvestri, Enver Solomon, *Knife crime: a review of evidence and policy*, 2nd edition (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2007), p 9

98 Letter from Sir Michael Scholar to Jeremy Heywood, 12 December 2008, published at www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

99 Home Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2007–08, *Policing in the 21st Century*, HC 364, para 46

100 Q 345

101 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 49

102 Q 314

cannot display them walking down the street, young people are posting images of themselves posing with knives on the internet.¹⁰³

70. Peer pressure is also a factor: 4% of young people who reported carrying a knife told MORI they did so because “my friends carry one”.¹⁰⁴ Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alf Hitchcock told us:

In some cases we do have young people saying to us that one of the key reasons they will carry knives is because in order to be within those peer groups, in order to be within those gangs, they have to have the kudos of carrying that knife as part of their membership.¹⁰⁵

71. Whether through a desire to gain status, or through fear of repercussions, we also heard evidence that young children are carrying weapons on behalf of older teenagers and adults. According to Frances Crook:

We have some recent evidence ... that the older young men involved in perhaps leading groups or leading gangs and carrying knives are sometimes quite savvy about this, quite sophisticated, and in order to avoid carrying a knife and the possibility of a lengthy prison sentence if they are stopped by the police—because they do get stopped quite a lot—they are using very young children to carry for them. We have heard that they will use a seven or eight year old like a “golf caddy”, this was the expression used, to carry their knives for them and then if they need it the kid will hand it to them.¹⁰⁶

This was supported by the experiences of witnesses living in areas where knife crime is a problem:

I know from experience that people try and offload weapons on to people younger than them. For example, if I tried to offload a knife on to someone who was 11 because I had used that knife. People do try to switch weapons to try and hide them and people do end up with new weapons and pass them around ...

They use younger kids as bait really if they are getting chased by the police or something and they go to a younger child and say, “Take this knife”. There is more chance of a younger child taking the knife and walking around thinking it is cool or something.¹⁰⁷

Under the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006, individuals who use another individual to mind a weapon for them can receive a maximum four year custodial sentence but we heard no evidence to suggest this has had much of an impact.

72. A smaller number of knife-carriers say they carry knives to gain ‘respect’ or street credibility, or because of peer pressure. Measures to tackle weapon-carrying should therefore also focus on resolving the reasons why young people seek “respect”,

103 “Deadly street culture: Lethal Posers of Britain’s Bebo generation”, *The Independent*, 13 July 2008, p 22

104 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 49

105 Q 119

106 Q 296

107 Qq 340–1

including the appeal of violent street culture, and building confidence to resist peer pressure.

73. We were also concerned about evidence that knife offenders are using young children as “caddies” to carry weapons for them. This is now a criminal offence under the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 attracting a maximum sentence of four years. We would like the Home Office to state the number of prosecutions made under this legislation and recommend that such prosecutions are actively pursued by the police.

Availability of weapons

74. One of the major reasons why knives constitute a high proportion of weapon-related crime is their ease of availability, compared with guns for example. Almost everyone will have access to a kitchen knife. In addition, we heard from the Police Federation and the Youth Justice Board that penknives, domestic knives, specialist knives (such as hunting knives) and prohibited knives listed in the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988 are easily obtainable in shops, from catalogues and on the internet.¹⁰⁸ It is illegal under the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 to sell a knife to someone under the age of 18; however young people interviewed by 11 MILLION said that those who are under 18 but appear older are rarely challenged if they attempt to buy a knife in a shop.¹⁰⁹

75. In addition to carrying for protection or to enhance status, we know from crime statistics and self-report surveys that many carry knives with intent to use them. In the 2008 MORI Youth Survey, 3% of young people who had carried a knife had done so in order to threaten others and 3% to injure someone (and bearing in mind that 8% “didn’t want to answer” and 10% were “not stated” these figures could well be higher).¹¹⁰ An anonymous witness giving evidence with The Prince’s Trust explained why young people may be attracted to illegal combat knives:

The majority of the knives I have been involved with are combat knives because obviously it does more damage to the young person or an adult, because if you have a standard kitchen knife, it just goes in and you pull it out and it does not rip or tear them on the inside. With a combat knife you have got a rigid blade on the other side of the blade so it does more damage, so that way you know for effect the young person or the adult is not going to get up or retaliate as much. If it is a normal stab knife, it is in out and it is not doing anything, so you have to stab them several times to do quite a bit of damage.¹¹¹

76. While there is clearly some value in cracking down on illegal sales, Dr Marian Fitzgerald cautioned that this may not solve the problem in the long-term:

Knives may currently be the weapon of choice for those prepared to engage in these types of violent activity but this may simply be a function of their relative availability;

108 Ev 121 [Youth Justice Board]; Ev 111 [Police Federation]

109 Ev 147

110 Youth Justice Board, *MORI Youth Survey 2008: Young people in mainstream education*, February 2009, p 49

111 Q 278

and the possibility must also be borne in mind that the same individuals will simply resort to the use of other weapons if a knife is not to hand.¹¹²

This point was supported by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock:

The knife is the weapon of choice in such a large number of offences because it is easily available and readily available in every home, but the issue to be addressed is violence in the round ... The issue is how you deal with knife violence within the range of violent crimes and then the knife within that context becomes part of a broader violence strategy.¹¹³

77. A huge factor in the decision to carry a knife or use it in an offence is its easy availability. This is clearly particularly true of kitchen knives, but we heard that it is also possible to purchase illegal knives from a number of sources and that under-18s are often able to purchase knives in shops, despite changes in the law. While we believe there is value in exploring ways of decreasing supply, particularly as a solution for those who carry knives without intention to use them, this is unlikely to reduce violent offending significantly. Those intent on committing violence will find other means. Therefore, in order to address the growing trend towards serious violence in a minority of young people, it is important to address its underlying causes.

Causes of violent behaviour

Links to social deprivation

78. We therefore looked at some of the reasons why young people commit violence. Our evidence located the causes of knife crime in social exclusion, particularly an unstable family structure and a lack of self-worth. The crime reduction charity Nacro argued:

They are likely to come from dysfunctional families, to have been excluded from school, to be without qualifications or prospects of decent employment.

They located the problem in:

a shortage of satisfactory youth facilities, lack of funding, not enough educational activities to help young people psychologically build their confidence, not enough support work with parents.¹¹⁴

Highway Youth Club concluded:

Without any self-worth their life and any other person's life for that matter eventually means nothing to them, and so if they fall into a dispute, they do not care about what that means for their self or the victim.¹¹⁵

112 Ev 161

113 Q 118

114 Ev 104–5

115 Ev 124

79. The National Youth Agency summarised the “critical risk factors” identified in research from the UK and US which can combine to heighten the risk of a young person becoming involved in street violence:

- Detachment from families;
- Absence of or poor/inconsistent parental support;
- Weak bonds with school and other institutions;
- High levels of association with delinquent peers;
- High levels of hopelessness: having negative expectations about oneself and one’s future life;
- Propensity to be impulsive and engage in risk taking behaviour; and
- Living in neighbourhoods where positive opportunities are few, where social controls are weak, and where gangs are already embedded.¹¹⁶

Childhood experiences

80. There is a strong links between experiencing or witnessing violence at a young age and committing violence. Professor Dr Christian Pfeiffer told our colleagues on the Justice Committee that 8% of those beaten in childhood and 17% of those who are beaten in childhood *and* youth go on to commit repeat violent offences, as opposed to 2.1% of those who are not beaten: “the creation of violence comes from the family”.¹¹⁷

81. Some of the knife attacks we have read about were shocking in terms of the minor nature of the grievance that prompted them. Young offenders tend to be impulsive and have little understanding of the impact of their actions on others.¹¹⁸ This can be particularly true of children from deprived backgrounds. The organisation Kids Company draws on scientific evidence to highlight the impact of chronic neglect on these children:

The most significant influence on the development of the brain is the quality of early relationships. Such early experiences can influence whether certain genes are expressed or not. For example, some individuals carry a gene which is associated with abnormal behaviour in infancy and poor control of aggression in adolescence but only if their caregivers are insensitive to their developing needs. However, if the same infants are looked after by a sensitive attachment figure they show no early behavioural problems and are able to control their aggression in their teens ...

Neglect and lack of love on their own can devastate more than abuse, as they have a long-term impact on the brain’s development and the individual’s ability to manage or modulate emotion (i.e. to self-regulate) ...

116 Ev 159

117 Uncorrected transcript of evidence to the Justice Committee to be published as HC 54–iii, Q 612 [Christian Pfeiffer]

118 Ev 104 [Nacro]

When the supra-orbital area in the neo-cortex is under-developed the child cannot empathise ... In addition, neglect and/or early traumatic experiences of abuse lead to a failure in modulating negative and positive emotions so that the more aggressive impulsive emotions come to the forefront and are likely to be expressed.¹¹⁹

Brain science can also help to explain why some individuals who have experienced trauma commit extreme violence at very small provocation.

82. However, many young people from deprived backgrounds do not commit violence and conversely we heard examples of young people from strong family backgrounds who do. Kirk Dawes, of the West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Service, told us about one young man who, despite coming from a strong family, being in full-time education and attending church every Sunday, had become heavily involved in gangs after being attracted to the “glamour”.¹²⁰ The organisation SmartJustice, which highlighted “an all pervading, often negative youth culture with an emphasis on status symbols, glorification of violence and the central role of ‘respect’”, cited comments by the barrister Courtney Griffiths who had recently defended a group of youths, all of whom came from stable homes and were at university or college but had stabbed another boy to death in a row caused by perceived disrespect.¹²¹

Exposure to violent entertainment media

83. We were concerned about the impact of watching violent films and video games on young people’s propensity to commit violence, particularly in light of the media furor aroused by the graphic depiction of knife violence in the most recent Batman film.¹²² We took evidence from a forensic psychologist, Professor Kevin Browne, who told us that his review of evidence in the English scientific literature, published in the *Lancet* in 2005 confirmed that there are “well-established short-term effects of children or teenagers watching violent video films, DVDs or playing violent computer games and then behaving aggressively in the hours and weeks afterwards”:

The effect size has been measured and the effect size is equivalent to the effects of using condoms to prevent HIV or the effect size of putting fluoride in the water to reduce tooth decay. It is an effect size that has considerable public health consequences. The scientific lobby is very clear that media violence has effects on children and adolescents in the short term.¹²³

84. While there has been less research into long-term effects and the impact on vulnerable groups, Professor Browne described a Home Office-funded study he undertook in the late 1990s, which found evidence that young offenders reacted differently from non-offenders to media violence. Crucially, the study found:

a distinct difference between children who grew up in a violent environment and children who did not. Children who grew up in a violent environment and who

119 Kids Company, *The Kids Company Brainwave: Learning from Vulnerable Children How to Care Better*, p 10

120 Q 409

121 Ev 105–6

122 “Councils should consider making Dark Knife a 15, say Tories”, *The Guardian*, 6 August 2008, www.guardian.co.uk

123 Q 478

witnessed real violence in their community or family were very prone to copy and imitate what they see on the screen, but this is not direct imitation ... A child or a teenager that copies something from a movie will put it within their own behavioural repertoire.¹²⁴

85. Professor Browne told us that he believed there is a link between watching films and video games and weapons:

We know that children and young people are influenced by heroes in the film and less so by villains. If you live on a diet of violent movies that hit first and ask questions afterwards, which fits in with a violent offender's frame of mind, then you are likely to copy what that violent hero does ... if they come from a violent family background.¹²⁵

He gave an example of a young offender who copied scenes from Freddy Kruger by adding razor blades to the fingers of a gardening glove, which was later found in the back of a car covered in bloodstains.¹²⁶

86. Professor Browne emphasised that media violence is not the only or the most powerful influence on individuals prone to violence, but that it is estimated it contributes around 10% of any person's predisposition to be violent. He argued that we could reduce violence by 10% by being more responsible in the way that we portray violence.¹²⁷

87. Individuals born into social deprivation are more likely to commit violence. Key risk factors for becoming involved in street violence include coming from a dysfunctional family with poor parental support, low self-worth, poor school attendance and living in an area where aspirations are low and there are few employment opportunities. Young people who have witnessed or experienced violence as a child are also far more prone to commit violence. We were shocked by the rapid manner in which violence can escalate between young people from a seemingly minor grievance. Extreme parental neglect halts the development of faculties that enable the majority of people to regulate their aggression. Solutions should therefore focus on dealing with dysfunctional and violent families and providing opportunities for young people to develop self-worth. However, it is important to recognise that not all young people who come from a deprived background are violent and that young people from stable backgrounds can also be violent.

88. Evidence to our inquiry supported our view that violent DVDs and video games exert a negative influence on those who watch and play them. Watching or playing such media contributes around 10% of any person's predisposition to be violent. Of particular concern is their influence on individuals who are already predisposed to violence because they grew up in a violent environment.

124 Q 479

125 *Ibid*

126 Q 487

127 Q 488

5 Legislation, policing and sentencing

89. Having addressed the scale, nature and causes of knife-carrying and violent behaviour in young people, we turn to potential solutions. In this chapter we consider current legislation on knives, police tactics to detect and prevent knife crime and sentencing of knife offenders.

Legislation

90. Laws governing the sale, carrying, use and production of knives are contained within the Prevention of Crime Act 1953, the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959, the Criminal Justice Act 1988, the Public Order Act 1994, the Offensive Weapons Act 1996, the Knives Act 1997, the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006.¹²⁸ It is a criminal offence:

- To have an article with a blade or point in a public place (the carrying of penknives is generally legal if the blade is under three inches in length);
- To have an article with a blade or point on school premises;
- To own a flick knife or a gravity knife;
- To sell a knife or article with a blade or point to a person under 18;
- To market a knife in a way which is likely to encourage violent behaviour; and
- To use another to look after, hide or transport a dangerous weapon (including a knife) to facilitate the weapon being available to him for unlawful purposes.

91. The Police Federation demanded a “single, holistic piece of legislation to cover all aspects of weapon crime (non-firearms)”:

This would bring together clear definitions of what a weapon is and what restrictions there are governing its purchase, manufacture, importation, sale, promotion, carriage, possession and use. It should also cover more recently developed means of advertising, selling and supplying weapons—such as those opportunities provided by the internet and new communications technologies. Anomalies could also be removed, such as the bladed article legislation with its arbitrary 3" provision.¹²⁹

The British Association of Shooting and Conservation also noted that while the legislation “generally includes proper checks and balances to protect the legitimate user and punish offenders”, it is “complicated and widely dispersed.”¹³⁰

92. However, the Metropolitan Police argued that, as “the most common knife used in knife crime appears to be a domestic knife”, which if found on a person in a public place

¹²⁸ Chris Eades, Roger Grimshaw, Arianna Silvestri, Enver Solomon, *Knife crime: a review of evidence and policy*, 2nd edition (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2007), p 7

¹²⁹ Ev 111–2

¹³⁰ Ev 118

fall within existing legislation, “any additional legislation is unwarranted at this time.”¹³¹ According to Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alf Hitchcock:

There are always opportunities for consideration of legislation, but the legislation has been brought in, in each case, to deal with specific things within a wider violence context, which is why each bit sits within different pieces of legislation. Drawing it altogether into a single new knives act, or whatever you would want to call it, would take time and energy and not necessarily achieve anything new, but what I do think, and one of the things we are going to be doing within the Tackling Knives Action Programme, is clarifying what the existing legislation is in an easy read, easily understandable way is important.¹³²

93. The laws regulating the sale, possession and use of different kinds of knives are contained in a number of different pieces of legislation. We note calls from the Police Federation to simplify this legislation; however we consider this would be overly resource-intensive. We understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers is in the process of clarifying the provision of relevant legislation into a definite piece of guidance for use by police officers. We welcome this and urge its speedy publication. Our inquiry did not find any need for further legislation to tackle the sale or use of knives.

Tackling availability

94. The Police Federation argued that confusion over current legislation has contributed to “derisory levels” of enforcement and sanction against knife traders. As we argued in the previous chapter, while tackling the availability of knives is only one small part of preventing knife crime, clamping down on illegal sales may deter those who carry without intention to commit violence and will help to thwart those who seek to carry certain kinds of illegal knives as a status symbol.

95. We received evidence from the Safer Southwark Partnership about their knife charter, which was launched in 2006 as a voluntary agreement between the Council and retailers and sets out tougher requirements around knife sales, including asking prospective knife purchasers who look under 21 for proof of age, displaying knives in secure cabinets and staff training. Between April 2008 and March 2009, the Council completed nearly 100 test purchases and over 90% of retailers refused to sell knives to underage buyers: this was the highest level of test purchasing amongst all London boroughs.¹³³ In February 2009 the Government announced a new national campaign with retailers to reduce underage sales of knives along similar lines. The Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, David Hanson MP, told us:

We have 21 retailers, particularly the big retailers, who have signed up to this ... I think it sends out the right message in store if it is more difficult for people to access knives. In some cases, it will have been the way in which people have got their hands

131 Ev 131

132 Q 130

133 Ev 183

on to relatively cheap knives. Some retailers have also taken knives off their internet sales because that was a way in which people could have accessed them too.¹³⁴

96. The Minister also told us that the Government is looking at the potential to manufacture a “a knife which does the job but which would be virtually useless if it came to doing damage to a human being.”¹³⁵ Staffordshire County Council recently published the results of research commissioned from the Cutlery and Allied Trades Research Association, which found that it would be possible to redesign kitchen knives to retain the sharp point needed to preparing food, but reduce the pressure at the point of penetration should the knife be used in a stabbing incident. The re-designed knife has a sharp point of 15 mm in length, after which the blade width increases rapidly. Taking into account the average life of a knife, the report notes that if the Government were to legislate to ban production of long sharp pointed knives, it would be likely to take at least eight years to achieve a significant reduction.¹³⁶

97. There appears to be a need for better enforcement of current legislation regarding the sale of knives. The voluntary charter initiated by the Safer Southwark Partnership with retailers in the London borough appears to have been successful in reducing underage knife sales. We therefore support the Government’s similar national campaign with retailers. We also support efforts to design a kitchen knife with a shorter point, although note that it would take a number of years to achieve a big reduction in the number of traditional kitchen knives in circulation unless there was an incentive for people to replace their current knives.

Knife amnesties

98. Knife amnesties are another technique that has been employed to try to reduce the number of knives in circulation. The Home Office organised a five-week national knife amnesty in 2006, during which period 89,864 knives were handed in. The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies have cast doubt on its success in reducing knife-carrying and knife-related offences, noting this figure constitutes less than 1% of the knives that could be used, assuming that every household in England and Wales possesses at least one kitchen knife. The amnesty also appeared to have a limited impact on crime levels. For example, the Metropolitan Police Service did notice a reduction in knife-enabled offences five weeks into their operation, but six weeks after the end of the operation these had returned to pre-operation levels.¹³⁷

99. Amnesties on their own are unlikely to dissuade persistent offenders from carrying knives. Young people canvassed by the children’s charity 11 MILLION doubted that their peers who carry knives with the intent of using them would hand in their weapons.¹³⁸ Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock agreed with this assessment but argued that knife amnesties can be used successfully as one of a set of broader initiatives.¹³⁹ The Police

134 Q 581

135 *Ibid*

136 Staffordshire County Council, *Getting to the Point: Preventing Knife Crime*, April 2009, pp 14–15

137 Chris Eades, Roger Grimshaw, Arianna Silvestri, Enver Solomon, *Knife crime: a review of evidence and policy*, 2nd edition (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2007), p 27

138 Ev 149

139 Q 103

Federation considered that amnesties “send an important message to the public that carrying weapons is unacceptable in a civilised society and that a positive stand is being taken by the police and local community.”¹⁴⁰

100. Knife amnesties have a limited impact on crime levels and are unlikely to dissuade persistent offenders from carrying knives. We have no objection to their continued use as part of a broader set of initiatives aimed at reducing knife-carrying, but policy-makers should understand their limited value.

Stop and search

101. Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) allows a constable to stop and search any person or vehicle for prohibited articles if he or she has reasonable grounds for suspecting that he will find prohibited articles. The threshold for reasonable suspicion can be satisfied “*without specific information and intelligence and on the basis of some level of generalisation stemming from the behaviour of a person... Where there is reliable information or intelligence that members of a group or gang habitually carry knives unlawfully and wear a distinctive item of clothing or other means of identification to indicate their membership of the group or gang, that distinctive item of clothing or other means of identification may provide reasonable grounds to stop and search a person.*”¹⁴¹ Police have additional powers to stop and search without suspicion under:

- Section 60 of the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994, which permits officers to stop and search individuals for weapons without suspicion following the designation of an area based on reasonable belief that serious violence may take place or that persons are carrying weapons. The authorisation can initially last for a period of up to 24 hours and can be renewed for a further six hours.
- Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which allows similar searches to occur following designation of an area when the designation is considered expedient for the prevention of acts of terrorism.

102. Much of the media coverage of the Tackling Knives Action Programme has focused on the increased use of stop and search under Section 60 of the Public Order Act. We received conflicting evidence about its effectiveness as a tactic to reduce knife crime. The joint submission from Race on the Agenda (Building Bridges Project), the Street Weapons Action Team and the Independent Academic Research Studies argued that:

Home Office research has identified the limited deterrent effect and detection rates of stop and search, and recent statistics published for Operation Blunt, which demonstrate a success rate under 3%, confirm that this remains the case. The use of targeting areas and focusing on hotspots should produce a higher success rate if they were effective, but at present the results do not represent a policy which is combating weapons crime by any significant margin.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ev 112

¹⁴¹ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Code A, 2.4 and 2.6

¹⁴² Ev 108

103. Provisional Home Office TKAP management information showed that between June 2008 and March 2009, police conducted more than 150,000 stop and searches and seized 3,000 knives—a 2% return.¹⁴³ However, the British Transport Police argued that their stop and search operation SHIELD, which has been running since 2006, had resulted in a reduction in knife offences, suggesting a deterrent effect:

Since 2006 to the present day we have actually seen a 39% reduction in the number of crimes where knives are involved and, at the same time as crime has been reducing, the number of weapons that we have recovered as a result of Operation SHIELD has gone the other way ... Recovery of weapons as a result of these tactics continues to increase with a projected 2008-09 performance year increase of 33.1% (1228 incidents).¹⁴⁴

104. Liberty highlighted comments made by the former head of the Metropolitan Police's Homicide Prevention Unit, Laura Richards, in an interview with the BBC, that appeared to oppose heavy use of stop and search:

I think a lot more could be done as opposed to just a hard edged enforcement around stop and search...we're seeing a number of guys committing the murders are already marginalized, already excluded and we are trying those kind of tactics on those individuals, I fear we just make the problem worse.¹⁴⁵

But police witnesses strongly refuted the suggestion that their approach was limited to enforcement, pointing to the community initiatives and partnership working they had put in place.¹⁴⁶

105. The Metropolitan Police also emphasised their use of intelligence to tackle 'dangerous people' in 'dangerous places' at 'dangerous times'. Commander Simmons told us about Operation Alliance, running since 2007 to target 420 individuals from 22 known street gangs in south London, following which 20% of these offenders were in custody.¹⁴⁷ The Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary, Chris Huhne MP, argued:

I do not think there is any mystery about this, that what the Government has been encouraging the police to do is well established in operational policing ... What I think is not happening is that we are not rolling out the things that we know are effective everywhere they should be rolled out, and so there is a delivery problem. We know what best practice is. What we are not doing is applying best practice everywhere as quickly as we should.¹⁴⁸

106. The majority of individuals and organizations we spoke to supported the use of stop and search as a means of keeping their communities safer, but all pointed to the importance of how it was carried out, with several young witnesses relating negative encounters with the police. We heard that forces aim to ensure "community buy-in" for

143 "Clamping down on serious youth violence", Home Office press release, 11 March 2009

144 Q 151; Ev 113

145 Ev 127

146 Ev 130-1 [Metropolitan Police]

147 Annex A [London seminar notes]

148 Q 525

stop and search by using existing frameworks, such as key individual networks made up of local community members who offer independent advice to the police and the citizens panels who work with neighbourhood policing. Crucially, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock informed us that throughout this recent period, where Section 60 has been used “probably more widely than ever before”, there has been no rise in the number of complaints.¹⁴⁹

107. Further concerns were raised about the legal basis for stop and search, with Liberty questioning the apparent use of Section 60 searches for “reassurance and deterrence”¹⁵⁰ rather than because specific intelligence suggested the likely presence of knives. We put this to DAC Hitchcock, who responded:

The requirement to understand the intelligence profile and the requirement to be able to document and articulate why Section 60 is in place is important; I think it is an important safeguard. I believe that by having that it means that Section 60 is used in the right places at the right times, I believe that the current power is appropriate and the way in which we have been using it has been appropriate and as a result of that I think it has worked well.¹⁵¹

The British Transport Police explain that they can find alternative means to carry out searches where necessary:

So there are some circumstances where a section 60 order is not appropriate or justified by the intelligence but, nonetheless, we seek to use a knife arch in the operation ... The circumstances that we find ourselves in there is that the current codes indicate that, although a consensual search is allowed, the officers have to formulate reasonable suspicion before they can carry out that search. The practical implications of that are we invite people through the arches and the indication from the arch then begins to form that suspicion with the officer, together with the person’s behaviour, demeanour and how they engage with the officer, so that they can make an objective assessment on each case. I guess what we are saying from a practical point of view is that that is a requirement that we have to place on the individual officer and has, therefore, led to us introducing additional training.¹⁵²

108. Stop and search operations are a key component of the Tackling Knives Action Programme. In London they have yielded only a 2% return in knives seized. However, the extent of any deterrent effect is unclear. Moreover, the British Transport Police claimed that their stop and search operation, SHIELD, has contributed to a 39% reduction in the number of crimes where knives are involved since its introduction in 2006. We heard conflicting views from communities affected by knife crime about the impact of stop and search: some pointed to the potential damage to police/community relations; others considered it an important measure to keep their children safe. Police representatives emphasised that their approach combined enforcement with prevention. We concluded that stop and search is an important short-term measure to

149 Q 104

150 Ev 126–7

151 Q 113

152 Q 152

tackle knife offences, with the caveat that it is carried out in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

Convictions and sentences

Sentencing legislation and guidelines

109. Under existing law, those convicted of knife possession in a public place can be sentenced to up to four years' imprisonment. Discretion is built into the sentencing process so that the starting point for those convicted of possession but who did not use or threaten use differs to those who, for example, threatened use. Certain other factors can "aggravate" the offence of knife possession, such as possession near a school or hospital, the offender operating in a group or gang, or possession of a particularly dangerous weapon.¹⁵³ Those convicted of using knives to hurt others can obviously receive much longer sentences.

110. The Sentencing Guidelines Council published advice for magistrates in June 2008, which were due to come into force in August 2008, stating that punishment for knife possession could begin at a Band C fine (ranging from 125 to 175% of the offender's weekly income.) The then Home Office Minister of State and the Head of the Tackling Knives Action Programme criticised the leniency of this, as did we in our Report on *Policing in the 21st Century*.¹⁵⁴ But the following month the Court of Appeal recommended in its *Povey* ruling that for knife-related offences committed by adult offenders, the sentencing guideline should be applied at the most severe end of the appropriate sentencing range. The Sentencing Guidelines Council subsequently advised that offences at:

- Level 1 (knife possession for a first time adult offender where the knife is not used to threaten or cause fear) would attract a sentencing starting point of 12 weeks' custody;
- Level 2 (possession in a "dangerous circumstance" but where a knife is not used to cause or threaten fear) would attract a custodial sentence in excess of six months; and
- Level 3 (where a weapon is used in dangerous circumstances to threaten or cause fear) would attract a custodial sentence in excess of six months.¹⁵⁵

A circumstance is likely to be 'dangerous' if there is a real possibility that the knife could be used.

111. For young offenders, the situation is more complicated and depends on a number of circumstances: under international obligations, custody must be awarded as a 'last resort' and the Government's *Youth Crime Action Plan* emphasises "the key principle of sentencing that a young person should not be sent to custody unless the court is able to specify why dealing with him or her within the community is not appropriate." The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 has created a new single community sentence, known as the youth rehabilitation order.

153 Ev 128 [Liberty]

154 Q 89; Home Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2007–08, *Policing in the 21st Century*, HC 364, paras 153, 166

155 Sentencing Guidelines available at: http://www.sentencing-guidelines.gov.uk/docs/sentencing_guidelines_knife_crime.pdf

112. **The Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 increased the maximum sentence for knife possession to four years. In our Report on *Policing in the 21st Century*, we expressed concern that advice published by the Sentencing Guidelines Council in June 2008 that punishment for knife possession could begin at a Band C fine was too lenient. We are therefore pleased that new guidance sets a starting sentence point of a 12-week custodial sentence.**

Appropriateness

113. Mrs Oakes-Odger has campaigned since her son's murder for more severe penalties for knife-carrying. She told us she was pleased that the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 has increased the maximum penalty for knife possession from two years to four years: "I feel that at that level that is a reasonable penalty and brings it reasonably in line with gun crime."¹⁵⁶ Some witnesses argued that this maximum penalty should be mandatory for all caught in possession of a knife. Mr Levy, the father of stab victim Robert Levy, said:

It is nice to have increased the maximum period of sentence for the possession of a knife in a public place to four years, but in order for that to have the desired effect, it should not be around a maximum sentence, it should be around a mandatory sentence, because up and down the country use of the maximum sentence has always been there, it has been there for some time, and it has rarely ever been used. What has come across from a lot of young people is that, if they find that there is a maximum sentence or a mandatory sentence, they know that they are going to be put away for four years. That does send a strong message for them.¹⁵⁷

114. However, other witnesses, while they favoured tough action for the majority, opposed mandatory sentences.¹⁵⁸ Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock explained why he felt an element of discretion is desirable:

I feel there is a difference, for example, between the mandatory sentence for gun crime, where someone has to be within certain criminal networks and has to procure the weapon ... and knife crime where you are talking about a weapon that is easily accessible ... and the circumstances in which a young person might come to have a knife in their possession can be quite varied. For example, you might have a 16 year old who is a recidivist offender, who is going out and committing robberies, who is going out and threatening other people, who is within a gang environment ... but at the other end of the spectrum you might have a 12/13 year old who has been having a bit of a hard time at school, a bit of bullying and then stupidly puts the knife in their bag on one occasion and gets caught. If you have got a mandatory sentence then that person who is the recidivist, unpleasant, nasty offender is going to get the same sentence as the young person who has done something really stupid and should have a more appropriate sanction.¹⁵⁹

156 Q 222

157 Q 231

158 Qq 176 [Frances Done], 299 [Frances Crook]

159 Q 88

We were particularly concerned about the potential award of a mandatory custodial sentence to an individual who has been coerced into carrying a weapon for an older person.

Application

115. Witnesses also raised the application of sentencing guidelines by magistrates and judges. Mrs Oakes-Odger said she had a “very real concern” that the maximum penalties were not being applied. Despite rising sharply since 1996, when only 6% of those prosecuted for carrying a knife were sent to prison, by 2006 the figure was still only one in six.¹⁶⁰ Prior to June 2008, outside high knife-crime areas police were tending to issue a caution to under-18s who were caught with a knife for a first time. Since that date, the presumption is that anyone caught carrying an illegal knife will face criminal charges.¹⁶¹ Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alf Hitchcock told us that, prior to the Tackling Knives Action Programme, charging standards were “quite variable” across the country but now with the national charging standard “there is now a presumption that people will be charged, which is happening”: 90% of people within the Tackling Knives Action Programme areas are being charged.¹⁶² Assistant Chief Constable John Crowther agreed that “a significantly higher number of people are arrested and charged now than prior to those policies being in place.”¹⁶³

116. In March 2009 the Justice Secretary, Rt Hon Jack Straw MP, announced an increase of 23% in the number of immediate custodial sentences handed down for offences involving possession of a knife or other offensive weapon during 2008. Statistics showed:

- The number of offences resulting in immediate custody rose from 1,125 in the last quarter of 2007 to 1,386 in the same period of 2008. On average there was a 40% increase in the number of prisoners serving a sentence for possession of an offensive weapon between the same periods.
- Fewer cautions were issued: the number fell 31% over the same period (1,706 in the last quarter of 2008 compared to 2,455 in the same period of 2007).
- More use of community sentences: the number of offences resulting in community sentences rose 16% (from 1,861 in the last quarter of 2007 to 2,151 in the same period of 2007).
- Longer sentences: the average immediate custodial sentence rose by 38% (from 133 days in the last quarter of 2007 to 184 days in the same period of 2008).
- The proportion of all possession offences resulting in immediate custody rose to 21% in the last quarter of 2008 from 17% in the same period of 2007. The proportion of

160 Home Office data, cited in “Convicted knife carriers given warning of tougher sentences”, *Police Review*, 29 August 2008, p 35

161 “Tough new sanctions to tackle knife crime”, Home Office press release, 5 June 2008

162 Q 116

163 Q 157

offences resulting in a caution decreased from 36% in the last quarter of 2007 to 25% in the last quarter of 2008.¹⁶⁴

117. While we consider that magistrates should be allowed a degree of discretion when sentencing those convicted of knife possession, and therefore oppose a mandatory sentence, we favour a more consistent approach to sentencing and custody for the majority of offenders. We are therefore pleased to note that there is now a presumption across England and Wales that knife-carriers will be charged, and that the number of offences resulting in custody rose during 2008.

Deterrence

118. We wanted to know whether the prospect of receiving a custodial sentence was likely to deter young people from carrying knives. According to Frances Done of the Youth Justice Board:

There is not very good evidence that says absolutely yes ... We did a survey of young people involved in street crime where we asked them about the things that had the most impact on them, and custody did come high up the list, but the difficulty with that is that it is very clear from the rest of the survey that once a young person has been in custody (and obviously we are talking in terms of young people carrying knives, quite a lot of them will have been in custody already) the fear of custody was gone.¹⁶⁵

The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies' 2006 literature review of existing research on knife crime cited the 2001 Halliday Review which stated there was "no evidence to show what levels of punishment produce what levels of general deterrence."¹⁶⁶

119. Some young people we spoke to argued that prison does not act as a deterrent because young people do not think about the consequences of their actions:

When you are in that experience, when my friend got stabbed when I was with him on the bus, the other gang came on the bus, we had a ruck, he got stabbed, we did not realise and then afterwards because he had been stabbed everyone was like, "We have got to get them." It does not go through your mind at all about prison or whatever; it does not exist.¹⁶⁷

This was emphasised by Frances Crook, of the Howard League for Penal Reform, in her foreword to *Why Carry a Weapon?*:

Children are by definition, immature. Those children who are likely to commit crimes are, arguably, the most immature of all. The consequences of their actions will almost certainly be far from their thoughts, and they may well fear the immediate

164 "Straw: more jailed for knife crime", Ministry of Justice press release, 12 March 2009

165 Q 183

166 Chris Eades, Roger Grimshaw, Arianna Silvestri, Enver Solomon, *Knife crime: a review of evidence and policy*, 2nd edition (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2007), p 29

167 Q 290 [Witness 4, The Prince's Trust]

threat of violence and ridicule among their peers more than the distant threat of court sentencing and custody.¹⁶⁸

120. A custodial sentence is particularly ineffective as a deterrent if you do not believe that you are likely to be awarded one. One witness told us:

I would be more worried about the bag of gear I have got in my pocket, not the knife. I would be worried about going to jail for that. A knife would not cross my mind until after the event. If people are going to get tougher sentences there needs to be really good education.¹⁶⁹

Some of the focus group participants informing *Why Carry a Weapon?* were fairly knowledgeable about the range of penalties they could face if caught carrying a knife but nearly all thought that the law was there “to scare them” and that rather than being given a prison sentence they were more likely to be tagged: this was based on their age, the fact they knew the prisons were full up, and knowledge of older teenagers who had been caught and had not served the minimum sentence.¹⁷⁰ Mr Levy noted that the brevity of the sentences often awarded has a negative influence:

What comes across is that when young people see their friends being sentenced for possession of a knife and within a very short period of time they are back in the community, that has the opposite effect of being a deterrent. It then becomes a badge of honour where they can say, “I have been inside for this and here I am again”, and it does nothing to boost the confidence of the young people within the community who are trying to stay away from it.¹⁷¹

121. We heard that some young people even considered the prospect of prison to be preferable to the potential alternative. One interviewee for *Why Carry a Weapon?* argued “He wouldn’t be thinking about six years, he’s probably be thinking he’s going to be six foot deep if he don’t carry one.”¹⁷² A similar view was expressed by the school children we met with from Paddington, London.

122. Evidence suggests that the fear of getting caught acts as a stronger deterrent. The Halliday Study went on to state “the importance of certainty of punishment ... it is the prospect of getting caught that has deterrence value, rather than alterations to the ‘going rate’ for severity of sentences”.¹⁷³ This point was put to us by Chris Huhne MP and David Hanson MP and also Frances Done, who said:

I think the other information we have which the MORI surveys show us very powerfully is that the thing that has most impact on young people in terms of stopping them committing offending is being caught, which is about twice as

168 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), p 15

169 Q 290

170 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), p 69

171 Q 231

172 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), p 78

173 Chris Eades, Roger Grimshaw, Arianna Silvestri, Enver Solomon, *Knife crime: a review of evidence and policy*, 2nd edition (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2007), p 29

important as the punishment, and there is a whole list of things like parents' feelings, and so on. So actually being caught is a really important issue.¹⁷⁴

123. While it may be an appropriate punishment for knife-carriers, evidence suggests that the prospect of a custodial sentence may not deter young people from carrying knives. Many young people do not think about the consequences of their actions, and for a small minority who feel at risk of violence, the prospect of jail seems preferable to the dangers of being caught without a weapon for protection. Evidence suggests that the fear of getting caught acts as a stronger deterrent for young people. This strengthens our support for strong police action against knives, including the use of stop and search.

6 Reducing knife-carrying

124. Young people who carry a knife because they are frightened or because they perceive it to be glamorous require different preventative interventions from those who carry one with intent to use it. In this chapter we consider possible solutions for the former through education about the reality of knife-carrying—particularly to reinforce the message, in the words of Mr Levy, that “to carry a knife is to use a knife¹⁷⁵—and helping young people to feel safer at school and on the street.

Educating children about the realities of knife-carrying

125. One of the elements of the Government’s Tackling Knives Action Programme is a £3 million media campaign called “It Doesn’t Have to Happen”. Launched in May 2008, it aims to dissuade young people from carrying knives by depicting graphic images of knife wounds and encouraging them to make and share anti-knife pledges. It has included a billboard campaign and radio and viral adverts directing young people to a dedicated page on the social networking website Bebo. The Home Office Minister, Alan Campbell MP, argued that:

I think the media campaign has been remarkably successful and acknowledged as such ... It is one in line with other campaigns that we have run within the Home Office which started by asking young people about the message that would be most effective, and that is not just in terms of content; it is in terms of the medium which is used too ... Around three-quarters of respondents who have seen the campaign said that it would make them less likely to carry a knife; four out of five said it made them more aware of the risks.¹⁷⁶

126. However, some witnesses were sceptical that the media campaign would reach, and influence the kinds of young people who most needed to hear the message. Firstly, an anonymous witness giving evidence with The Prince’s Trust told us that “half the kids you want to reach are not going to be watching it on the TV; they are on the road, they are at a bus shelter or whatever.”¹⁷⁷ Secondly, the message may be too simplistic for the complex realities of living in an unsafe community:

Saying No does not address the problem. You have got to see what is the situation that this young person is facing. Unfortunately, everyone’s situation is different so it has got to be a little bit more of an holistic approach. Instead of wasting resources just doing another workshop or another poster campaign or £1 million advert campaign.¹⁷⁸

The joint submission from Race on the Agenda (Building Bridges Project), the Street Weapons Action Team and the Independent Academic Research Studies argued that

175 Q 231

176 Q 538

177 Q 279

178 Q 279

“advertising campaigns, such as the ‘its not a good look’ campaign fail to identify with any real activity at street level.”¹⁷⁹

127. The Minister accepted that more needed to be done to reach these young people through family members and local champions.¹⁸⁰ When asked by YouGov, on behalf of 11 MILLION, to whom they would pay the most attention on how to stay safe from gun and knife crime, 74% said they would listen to their parents, 67% said they would listen to the police and 46% would listen to teachers.¹⁸¹ However, Nicola Marfleet found in *Why Carry a Weapon?* that parents were struggling to respond properly. Frances Crook discussed the results:

We found that young people had conversations about carrying knives with their parents but the response from parents was not helpful; it was often threatening and not having a proper conversation and not being supportive and not helping the young people to deal with the issues they face. The research showed that the lack of family life for these young people was very important was an inhibitor to having that difficult conversation about how to protect yourself and how not to be a victim and why not to carry a knife.¹⁸²

A 2004 Lemos&Crane report into knife use by young people, *Fear and Fashion*, even found some cases of parents giving knives to their children.¹⁸³ Mothers Against Murder and Aggression Wales told us that some teenagers, particularly girls, had told them they carry a penknife given to them by their fathers: “parents are just as worried by the press reports and are arming their children in the belief that they will be protected.”¹⁸⁴

128. 11 MILLION emphasised the importance of using “real” people, who young people can relate to, to convey the message. Their research found that:

What they do not want are celebrities, they do not want David Beckham rolled out as a role model. The most important role models for them are their parents, their teachers and the police but they also want to hear from people who have been through the same experiences, maybe somebody who has taken a wrong path, they have gone into prison where there were drugs, guns, knives or whatever it might be, and they have come out, they have changed their ways, those are the kinds of people who really have an impact in terms of helping young people to understand what the impact will be on them and on their families if they go down that route themselves and to help them see there is an alternative.¹⁸⁵

The young people who gave evidence to us agreed. An anonymous witness with 11 MILLION suggested that young children are likely to be influenced by the police:

179 Ev 110

180 Q 538

181 11 MILLION/YouGov, *Solutions to gun and knife crime*, March 2009, Summary p 5

182 Q 295

183 Lemos&Crane, *Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people*, 2004, p 11

184 Ev 184

185 Q 377

In primary schools where the children are younger they look up to the police more and they will see them as the good guys and so they will listen to them. I think that is a good way of getting the point across of gun and knife crime.

However, this may be a less useful approach for older children:

in terms of getting to the high schools and colleges, maybe, you want to get knife victims or victim's families to come in and talk about it because when you get to high school you start to tend to lose the respect for the police.¹⁸⁶

Several witnesses advocated using involve former offenders, to talk about the consequences of their actions for themselves and their victims. For example:

I had the pleasure of seeing an organisation do a presentation last Saturday, a group I am working with, and they are run by former firm members. If you get the right sort of people, if you have got respect, whether it be for positive or negative reasons, talking to them, it might just work ... it did seem to get through. It is about education that is relevant to their situation.¹⁸⁷

129. Schools are a good place to reach young people who lack parental guidance. Following her son's murder, Mrs Oakes-Odger has spoken to many 11 and 12 year olds in schools in her native Essex and around the country. She explained how she engages young people, who have no real understanding of what death means, to really think about the potential consequences of carrying a weapon:

I speak to them about what happened to Westley. I show them Westley through their growing up years so that they relate to Westley as being someone within their age field and then the understanding comes out of his story, what relevance that is to them going through their school years; I speak to them about their discos, their social events, where an innocent situation can evolve and, if you have a knife, instead of a possible disagreement where bumps and bruises are involved, with a knife in their pocket, potentially, therein is a life-threatening situation which they then relate to only in terms of missing fingers. I find that showing young people pictures of injuries that they can relate to, such as fingers hanging off, has more relevance to them ... I relate with them about Westley's story as a mum so that they can think about, "How would I feel if my brother or sister was missing and my mother was hurting at the loss of my brother or sister?"¹⁸⁸

In addition to explaining the consequences of knife use for victims and their loved ones, Mrs Oakes-Odgers believed that children should be encouraged to consider the personal consequences of a criminal record or school exclusion for their future lives.¹⁸⁹

130. During our inquiry, we saw several short films that had been made to be shown in schools by organisations including UNCUT and Value Life in London, and Sharpshotz in Bristol. We considered that the graphic reconstruction of a fatal stabbing portrayed in the

186 Q 349

187 Q 280

188 Qq 218-9

189 Q 220

UNCUT film was particularly powerful. Despite these examples of good practice, weapons-awareness training is patchy across the country. The *Violent Crime Action Plan* sets out the Government's aim to use the organisation Be Safe to educate 1.1 million young people over five years about the dangers of carrying weapons.¹⁹⁰ Be Safe was set up in 1998 by former police officers who were asked to put together an educational programme about knife crime by Newham Youth Offending Team for young offenders in that area. An evaluation of 1000 young offenders who were habitual knife carriers found that only 7.8% had re-offended and of those only 1.7% re-offended with a knife after completing the programme. Since then Be Safe has trained professionals to deliver their knife prevention workshop to young people in different parts of the country.¹⁹¹

131. At our Leeds seminar, we heard from representatives of the Leeds Weapons Awareness Programme, which was adapted from the Be Safe weapons to the Leeds context. The programme is delivered to all high schools across Leeds and is believed to be the largest-scale crime prevention programme delivered in the UK. Since it has been running, agencies have noted an increase in young people reporting other young people for carrying knives.¹⁹²

132. We considered the age at which children should be educated about the dangers of knives. Shaun Bailey, of MyGeneration, argued:

I do not think it is right to talk about knife crime with primary school age children—I think it is absolute nonsense—you either terrify them or you alert them to something that they are not aware of and they try to become involved in.¹⁹³

As noted in chapter three, we found that 11 appears to be a key risk age for carrying a knife for the first time. Mrs Oakes-Odgers advocated a national weapons awareness education programme for all Year Seven pupils.¹⁹⁴

133. The Lemos&Crane report quoted a weapons awareness training practitioner who felt that many schools either did not know of, or were in denial about, the extent of the knife problem:

We have recently rolled out a scheme and only two schools have taken it up as the majority deny that they have a problem.¹⁹⁵

PC Bowman, from the Leeds Weapons Awareness Programme, noted that they had encountered some initial resistance from head teachers who were worried that if they were seen to be delivering the programme their school would gain a reputation for having a problem with knives, but that these concerns had been overcome over time.¹⁹⁶

190 Home Office, *Saving lives. Reducing harm. Protecting the public: An action plan for tackling violence, 2008–2011*, February 2008, p 26

191 Be Safe website, <http://www.besafetraining.com/Home>

192 Annex B [Leeds seminar notes]

193 Q 313

194 Q 226

195 Lemos&Crane, *Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people*, 2004, p 5

196 Annex B [Leeds seminar notes]

134. We support the aims of the Government's anti-knife media campaign and we believe it has had some impact on making young people think twice before carrying a knife. However, we are concerned that such campaigns may not reach the most at-risk young people and fail to engage with the realities of street violence. Evidence shows that children are most likely to be influenced by "real" stories, particularly the experiences of former offenders and the families of knife victims. We recommend that all Year Seven school children should participate in an assembly or lesson, delivered by trained individuals to whom children can relate, that focuses on the dangers of knife-carrying and the consequences for victims, their families and offenders. We consider that the short film made by the UNCUT Project provides a particularly powerful means of communicating with pupils about the realities of knife violence. In order to engage children effectively, the programme should be adapted to the local context, along the lines of the Leeds Weapons Awareness Programme.

Keeping children safe at school

Knife detectors

135. One of the measures proposed to prevent knife-carrying is installing metal detectors in schools. As of June 2007, teachers have the power to search pupils without consent whom they suspect of carrying weapons, or to call in the police to carry out the search. Phil Hearne installed knife detectors while he was Principle of the London Academy and of Paddington Academy following the fatal stabbings of pupils from these schools (outside school premises in both cases). We asked him if he would support the installation of knife detectors in every school:

I think the answer is less straightforward than yes or no. The reason we introduced it was because people felt it was necessary to do so on two counts. Without any hierarchy to it, first, they felt safer; second, they wanted to prove to other people that they had nothing to hide. It was their decision to do it. I was quite happy to go along with that decision because in a sense it came from them. I think that it is for schools to make that decision based on what they and the community feel is the need.¹⁹⁷

136. Young people canvassed by 11 MILLION were divided in their views: some would welcome metal detectors while others considered that they might increase levels of fear.¹⁹⁸ In April 2009, Waltham Forest claimed to be the first local authority to introduce random police screening for weapons in all of its secondary schools, using portable weapon detectors. As of 30 April, 12,000 pupils had been screened and no knives had been found.¹⁹⁹

137. Mrs Lawrence, a former teacher and widow of murdered headmaster Philip Lawrence, argued that "most stabbings take place outside school and all the knife arches in the world will not stop someone leaving a knife outside."²⁰⁰ Knife-carrying seems to be a bigger issue outside than within schools—a survey carried out by Dr Carol Hayden of 14-15 year olds in fourteen schools in the south of England found that over the past twelve months 3.4%

197 Q 430

198 Ev 149

199 "Schools install metal detector to screen for pupils' knives", *The Independent*, 30 April 2009

200 Q 462

had carried a knife to school as opposed to 11.1% who had carried a knife outside of school. The same survey found that pupils felt safer in school than elsewhere.²⁰¹

138. The installation of knife detectors can help to reassure pupils and their families that a school is taking firm steps to protect them from potential knife violence. However, they may not be appropriate for every school and also have the potential to make some pupils more fearful. It is also debatable whether they are necessary; a University of Portsmouth study found that pupils feel safer and are less likely to carry knives at school than they are in other environments. We therefore do not recommend compulsory introduction of knife detectors in schools; rather each school community should make the decision for themselves.

Exclusions

139. If a knife is detected, schools have to decide what happens to the carrier. Phil Hearne told us that, under his leadership, if a pupil was found with a knife it resulted in automatic permanent exclusion but this is not necessarily the case in all schools.²⁰² While he accepted that there is a dilemma, in that excluded children are more likely to go on to offend, he believed the needs and wishes of the majority of pupils and their families must come first. The two pupils we spoke to from Gladesmore Community School disagreed as to the best means of handling the situation. Kane argued “they should be permanently excluded because they could use that knife to take someone’s life or use it to hurt someone” but Valerie said “I do not think they should necessarily be permanently excluded because they could have been carrying a knife to show they had trouble. They should be given a second chance.”²⁰³

140. Representatives from schools and youth clubs who spoke to Lemos&Crane emphasised “the need to continue working with young people even after they had been found in possession of a knife, though it may be necessary to work with them in a different way”.²⁰⁴ One of the young people we met argued that expelling a pupil for knife-carrying does not in itself do anything to address their attitude to weapons.²⁰⁵

141. Taking a knife onto school premises is a serious transgression and should be dealt with accordingly. In such cases, many would argue that the child should be excluded for the benefit of the wider school community and we do not seek to remove the discretion of school leaders to make such decisions. However, we continue to be concerned about the increased likelihood of excluded children to go on to offend. For this reason, exclusion should automatically constitute the point of serious intervention by the relevant authority to put in place the kind of diversions we explore in our final chapters.

201 Dr Carol Hayden, *‘Staying Safe and Out of Trouble’: A survey of young people’s perceptions and experiences* (University of Portsmouth, 2008)

202 Q 437

203 Q 463

204 Lemos&Crane, *Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people*, 2004, p 17

205 Annex C [UNCUT meeting notes]

Safer Schools Partnerships

142. Safer Schools Partnerships, whereby a police officer is stationed in a school or linked to a series of schools, were set up in 2002 with the aim of protecting pupils from victimisation as well as reducing crime amongst young people. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock told us that 5,300 schools are currently participating in Safer Schools Partnerships: around 3,800 (about 20% of all) primary schools are covered within it and 1,500 (about 45% of all) secondary schools.²⁰⁶ Mr Hearne spoke in extremely positive terms about the impact of their introduction. In terms of the relationship between schools and the police he said:

For us the important issue is sharing intelligence. Invariably, schools know things before the police because of the network of communication when youngsters talk to teachers about things. They must be able to communicate that efficiently and effectively to the police. Equally, when the police know something they should be able to communicate that efficiently and effectively to schools.²⁰⁷

However, the National Audit Office has noted that, although senior police officers also value these partnerships, the Home Office has not collected reliable data on the number of partnerships that exist nor has it done any evaluation of which models are the most effective.²⁰⁸

143. Detective Chief Superintendent Carnochan, of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, described the benefits of “campus police officers”, who are dedicated community officers who work in about 50 high schools in Scotland:

- Attendance at school has improved;
- Bullying has reduced;
- Graffiti has reduced;
- They provide a means of “dealing with the drama before it becomes a crisis. Because relationships are established, these officers are able to share information about individual boys and girls in the school that otherwise they would not”; and
- Officers link into the feeder primary schools to ease the transition period to high school.²⁰⁹

144. Safer Schools Partnerships, whereby police officers are attached to a school or group of schools, appear to be an effective way of keeping children safer. We heard evidence of how they can help to reduce conflict between pupils and generate intelligence about conflicts that have the potential to spill over outside school. However, we note concerns expressed by the National Audit Office about a lack of evaluation of the different models in existence. We recommend that the Government should carry out such an evaluation with the aim of spreading best practice and

206 Q 124

207 Qq 431–2

208 National Audit Office, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, February 2008, p 7

209 Q 204

ensuring the participation of all schools that would benefit from involvement in such a partnership.

Keeping children safe on the street

Increasing young people's confidence in the police

145. As explained in chapter four, young people do not trust their 'natural protectors' to keep them safe. Increasing their confidence to seek help from the police should lessen their perceived 'need' to carry a weapon. 11 MILLION found that most young people feel very positively towards the police. Their research, published in March 2008, found that 82% of 8-17 year olds said they liked the police a lot or quite liked them, while 18% said they did not really like them or did not like them at all. However, for 16 or 17 year olds the proportion saying they really like them dropped to only 10%. 61% of eight or nine year olds feel very or quite respected by the police but the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who said that they feel respected halved to 30%. Moreover, 56% said they see police infrequently or never.²¹⁰

146. One of the reasons for this lack of is a perception that the police do not always respond when a crime is reported to them. The Children's Society did a piece of research which found that the most commonly cited reason for not going to the police was '*nothing the police can do/not interested*', '*nothing ever happens if you phone the police*', '*police don't do anything*'.²¹¹ A second factor is a culture in some communities which discourages positive interactions with the police: summed up by a contributor to the Children's Society research in the phrase '*because I am not a grass*'.²¹² This attitude was clearly demonstrated at our London seminar, where even young people involved in trying to stop their peers from carrying knives said they would not necessarily advise them to go the police. Thirdly, some young people feel they are treated badly by the police when they are innocent of any crime. For example, 11 MILLION reported "unacceptably wide variations in the way stop-and-searches are conducted."²¹³ A 15 year old witness from Merseyside told us:

I have only ever been stopped and searched once but when they were committing this stop and search they went into it violently and they talked down to me. It is not like they were checking to see if you had a knife or anything wrong, any drugs or anything, it is like they want you to have something on you because at the end of the day that is how they see it, they get a bonus for every one they take in, don't they?²¹⁴

147. We heard about some positive initiatives to improve relationships, such as role reversals which allow young people to stop and search police officers in order for the former to gain a better understanding of the reasons why police use the tactic and for the latter to appreciate why the process needs to be conducted sensitively. Schemes such as

210 11 MILLION/YouGov, *Solutions to gun and knife crime*, March 2009, Summary p 5

211 Ev 125

212 *Ibid*

213 Ev 148

214 Q 350

Chance UK, run in the UK for 13 years, see serving police officers acting as mentors to troubled children to prevent them from growing up to see the police as the “enemy”.²¹⁵

148. Outside the school environment, young people should feel they can rely on the police to keep them safe. However a minority of young people view the police as an enemy, rather than an ally, and this minority increases as children progress through their teens. Some of these young people share the fears of some adults that the police will not respond when needed and in this respect our previous recommendations on improving public confidence in the police are pertinent.²¹⁶ However for some of these young people this attitude stems from a negative personal experience, particularly of stop and search. We cannot emphasise enough how crucial it is for stop and search to be carried out in an appropriate and sensitive manner. We also urge support for schemes that break down the barriers between police officer and young people, such as Safer Schools Partnerships and those that see police officers acting as mentors to young people.

Support for victims

149. The Policy Exchange noted recently that victims of violent crime are up to 70% more likely to become violent assailants themselves, but there is no national programme in place to offer trauma support and follow-up counselling to victims who receive hospital treatment.²¹⁷ In 2004 a youth offending team practitioner told researchers Lemos&Crane that “we admit to struggling to engage with victims.”²¹⁸ Victim Support provide vital services but are under-resourced. Better counselling and support for knife victims could help them to deal with their fear in order to reduce the likelihood they will resort to carrying a weapon themselves.

150. Given the correlation between being a victim of violence and carrying a weapon, providing support for assault victims is key. We hope that measures to improve the relationship between young people and the police will encourage higher levels of crime reporting and that when these young people do come forward, they are given the counselling that they need.

215 “Partners in crime ... prevention”, *The Independent*, 12 February 2009, p 18

216 Home Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2007–08, *Policing in the 21st Century*, HC 364, paras 46, 56–9

217 Dr Bob Golding and Jonathan McClory, *Getting to the Point: Reducing gun and knife crime in Britain: lessons from abroad* (London: Policy Exchange, 2008), p 6

218 Lemos&Crane, *Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people*, 2004, p 21

7 Reducing violence: work with offenders

151. In chapter five, we argued in favour of consistent sentencing for knife offenders reflecting the severity of the offence. However, even those witnesses who supported the presumption towards custody were concerned about high re-offending rates, suggesting that a custodial sentence, while often an appropriate punishment, does not provide a long-term solution in its current form. In this chapter we look at ways of reducing re-offending, particularly in relation to changing attitudes towards knife offending and violent behaviour. We also consider work with low-level offenders or those on the cusp of offending to prevent them from graduating to more serious violent offending.

Work in prisons and young offenders institutions to change behaviour

152. Ministry of Justice research with around 5,000 adult prisoners showed that the **odds of re-offending within a year were 58% overall**, including **32% for those in custody for the first time** and **69% for those with previous experience of custody**.²¹⁹ The most recent statistics show that **for every 100 juvenile offenders leaving custody in 2007, 115.7 re-offences were committed**.²²⁰ We were told that there is insufficient work in prisons and young offender institutes to address offending behaviour. Frances Crook, of the Howard League Penal Reform, gave us an example of one young man they had represented:

Since he has been in prison he has had no treatment at all and he has been in for four years. So if you think that by sending people to prison they are going to get some kind of therapy or response to their offending that is not the case. He has lain on his bunk for four years and nothing has happened at all ... At best they may do a three-week or a six-week offending behaviour course ... I do accept that some people who have committed very serious offences must go into custody but that period in custody should be much more useful than it is at the moment. I know that a lot of these young people will spend four, six, ten years in custody and come out more dangerous, more violent and more frightening than when they went in.²²¹

DCS Carnochan argued that “when we speak about mandatory sentencing, we should be thinking about mandatory intervention—that would be much more effective.”²²²

153. The Government’s approach to custody is that it is “first and foremost a punishment” but “alongside this punishment we must give offenders a chance to reform and change their behaviour”.²²³ A Youth Justice Board study of effective interventions to reduce re-offending notes a “high consensus” amongst evaluators that programmes addressing offenders’ ways of thinking and the moral context of their thinking are “particularly promising”.²²⁴ The Enhanced Thinking Skills programme, for example, was introduced

219 Ministry of Justice, *Research Summary Five: Factors linking to re-offending: a one-year follow-up to prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*, October 2008

220 Ministry of Justice, *Re-offending of juveniles: results from the 2007 cohort, England and Wales*, May 2009

221 Qq 296, 306

222 Q 199

223 Ministry of Justice, *Punishment and Reform: Our Approach to Managing Offenders*, December 2008, Summary, p 8

224 Youth Justice Board, *Offending Behaviour Programmes: Source Document*, 2008, p 25

into prisons in the mid 1990s. It consists of 20 sessions run over a period of four-six weeks. A randomised control trial carried out in ten prisons to evaluate the programme found that adult male offenders who completed it showed a significant reduction in impulsivity (which research has linked with lower rates of re-offending), a significant reduction in frequency of prison security reports as well as improvement in attitudes to offending and attention to the consequences of personal actions.²²⁵ We heard at first-hand the success of this kind of programme for some offenders during a visit to Aylesbury Young Offenders' Institution.

154. As part of the Tackling Knives Action Programme, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) set up a Knife Possession Prevention Programme in twelve Youth Offending Teams in July 2008 to work with 10-17 year olds who have been convicted of knife possession. As with educational campaigns aimed at young people more widely, the aim of the programme is to try and instil an understanding of the consequences of carrying a knife in terms of the damage that can be inflicted on victims, and the legal implications for offenders. When we took evidence from the YJB in January 2009, 150 young people had been through the programme. Bob Ashford, Acting Director of Strategy, said:

We know anecdotally ... that some of the most effective parts of that programme have been around the work of victims' organisations and victims who have been describing to young people what it feels like to be a victim. Again, anecdotally, the other parts of the programme we know that have been positively received are the kind of medical information that has been given by primary care trusts to young people about the effect of stabbings, wounding, et cetera, and the kind of damage they can do.²²⁶

Ministers told us that this scheme could include elements of meeting the families of knife crime victims.²²⁷

155. Where offenders are given very short sentences, there is insufficient time to address their behaviour. Evidence shows that adults sentenced to less than twelve months in custody are more likely to re-offend than those subject to longer periods.²²⁸ The Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary, Chris Huhne MP, argued that "if short sentences are used, you find very high re-offending rates; 92% for example for a first custodial sentence for young men, and three-quarters for juveniles going into custody."²²⁹

156. The Government also aims to improve education and employment opportunities for prisoners as another means of reducing the likelihood of re-offending. More than half of prisoners leave school with no qualifications, and a third with literacy skills at the same level as or below those expected for an 11 year old child.²³⁰ Shaun Bailey, of MyGeneration, argued:

225 Ministry of Justice, *Evaluation of HM Prison Service Enhanced Thinking Skills programme*, March 2009

226 Qq 173, 184

227 Q 550

228 Ministry of Justice, *Research Summary Five: Factors linking to re-offending: a one-year follow-up to prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*, October 2008

229 Q 523

230 Ministry of Justice, *Punishment and Reform: Our Approach to Managing Offenders*, December 2008, Summary, p 8

Absolutely you need to educate children in jail. Jail is the one time that you as a government have the right and the opportunity to compel young people to engage in education. If you are a young person and you were in jail and you were not doing your GCSEs I would lengthen your stay.²³¹

157. We heard about the workshop in HMP Liverpool run in partnership with the footwear company Timpsons, who train prisoners in technical, repair and customer service skills then seek to provide them with jobs within the company when they leave prison. We were also made aware of the National Grid Transco scheme in Reading prison, which offers training and employment opportunities for people leaving custody: following the pilot, 70% of participants subsequently found sustainable employment and only around 7% were subsequently reported as re-offending.²³² The Government has also opened a data cabling workshop at HMP Wandsworth with Cisco, Panduit and Bovis Lend Lease and a tool repair workshop at HMP Stocken in partnership with Travis Perkins.²³³

158. The Shadow Home Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, told us that the Conservative Party have “quantified the savings to be made if we can prevent somebody from re-offending” and “put forward a proposal for a structure that would allow governors to access that in partnership with independent organisations on a payment by results basis to deliver much better rehabilitation within prisons and after people have been in prison.”²³⁴

Resettlement on release from custody

159. One of the key factors contributing to the high levels of recidivism is the number of offenders who do not have a stable home or a job (or education establishment in the case of young offenders) upon release. The odds of re-offending increased by 43% for prisoners reporting both employment and accommodation problems on release.²³⁵ The Rainer/RESET publication, *The Business Case for Youth Resettlement*, identified the huge cost of ineffective resettlement.²³⁶ Chris Grayling MP argued that “we should make it a matter of absolute routine that somebody who leaves prison without a job to go to—and one assumes that is pretty much everybody—goes straight onto a structured back to work programme of the kind that we would offer across the welfare system for the longer-term unemployed and of the kind that is used in other countries.”²³⁷ The YJB argued:

When young people have been involved in offending and have had community sentences, maybe even custody, actually trying to re-engage those young people back into mainstream schools or get them other educational provision can be extremely difficult, and the whole issue is around resettlement. How you support young people

231 Q 327

232 The Smith Institute, *CSR in action: a review of the Young Offenders Programme led by National Grid Transco*, 2005

233 Q 578; Ministry of Justice, *Punishment and Reform: Our Approach to Managing Offenders*, December 2008, Summary, p 9

234 Q 515

235 Ministry of Justice, *Research Summary Five: Factors linking to re-offending: a one-year follow-up to prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*, October 2008

236 Rainer/RESET, *The Business Case for Youth Resettlement*, August 2007

237 Q 516

once they have gone through with their punishment and paid the price for what they have done, how you support them back into mainstream life is a big issue.²³⁸

160. The YJB has established a Resettlement and Aftercare Programme in 50 youth offending team areas which provides 25 core hours of support to access information and education, training and employment, as well as peer and family support work and ongoing access to substance misuse and mental health treatment.²³⁹ The YJB Chair, Frances Done, strongly advocated an increased focus by local authorities on support for finding accommodation, getting back into training, jobs, education, and personal mentoring “which is so difficult to find [but] is equally important as anything you do individually with a young person on first detention in custody.” Given its cost, this support should be targeted at offenders “who are ready or in the frame of mind where they may start to think seriously about not offending again”.²⁴⁰ The Prince’s Trust told us about a mentoring scheme they are running in three prisons, which involves using former offenders who have reformed themselves to meet young people at the prison gate and support the transition process.²⁴¹

161. While we advocate the use of custody for violent knife offenders and some knife possessors, we are concerned about high re-offending rates among both adult prisoners and young offenders. Reducing re-offending is key to tackling violent crime in the long-term. There is currently insufficient work in prisons and young offender institutions to address offending behaviour. Young offenders in particular are likely to be impulsive and not consider the consequences of their actions; evaluations of cognitive behavioural programmes, such as Enhanced Thinking Skills, appear to show positive results. We recommend that the Ministry of Justice should expand provision so that more prisoners and young offenders who are judged likely to benefit can participate in such programmes.

162. We heard anecdotally that the Knife Possession Prevention Programme run for all young people convicted of knife possession in Tackling Knives Action Programme areas has had a positive influence on their behaviour. We recommend that an evaluation is carried out to measure re-offending rates and, if judged to be a success, long-term funding for the programme is made available.

163. Improving literacy and skills can also reduce the likelihood of re-offending. More than half of prisoners leave school with no qualifications, and a third with literacy skills at the same level as or below those expected for an 11 year old child. We commend those private companies, such as Timpsons, National Grid Transco, Cisco, Panduit and Bovis Lend Lease and Travis Perkins, who are working with prisons to improve the employment prospects of prisoners. The Government should consider offering incentives for more companies to become involved in such partnerships. A Ministry of Justice study found that odds of re-offending increased by 43% for prisoners reporting both employment and accommodation problems on release. We therefore also

238 Q 172

239 Youth Justice Board website, www.yjb.gov.uk, accessed 11 May 2009

240 Q 181

241 Q 293

advocate increased resettlement support targeted at prisoners who have demonstrated in prison they are unlikely to re-offend.

Gang exit strategies

164. Without support, offenders may find it difficult to fulfil any good intentions made in custody when they return to their community. On the basis of the evidence she heard during her research for *Why Carry a Weapon?*, prison governor Nicola Marfleet questioned how effective interventions carried out in prisons to address behaviour can be “where a juvenile returns post-custody to the very culture that gave rise to and reinforced their criminal actions”. The four young offenders whom she interviewed at Feltham all expressed a desire to stay out of trouble on release but only one suggested that disengaging from “hanging out on the streets” could be a way to ensure this.²⁴²

165. A former young offender told us that he was only really able to change his behaviour pattern by moving away from the area.²⁴³ However, this is not always easy. Kirk Dawes, a former police officer who founded West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Services [WMMTS] to resolve disputes between rival gang members noted that:

They gravitate back. There is a lot of work going on to relocate people and move them out of the gangs, but everything they know is normally contained within the community. That is why mediation, conflict management or conflict resolution should be utilised; otherwise, they will go back to where they came from. You actually deal with the issue.²⁴⁴

Conflict resolution

166. The processes used by WMMTS are influenced by techniques used in Northern Ireland where people with a history of extreme violence towards each other are persuaded to sit down together with mediators and talk about their differences. Mediators include a forensic psychologist, former gang members, firemen, youth offending workers, probation officers and mothers who have lost their children to violence. WMMTS mainly takes referrals from the community: often gang members who are about to be released from prison will phone to ask for help in resolving a conflict with a rival gang member, for which they may have received a prison sentence, but the underlying problem has not been resolved. As well as taking referrals, through the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence Partnership the multi-agency public protection panel uses intelligence from the public authorities and the community to target gang members.

167. Kirk Dawes explained why the approach works. Firstly, it has an advantage over police-led approaches in that the service can act in response to rumour and innuendo rather than waiting until actual violence has been committed. Secondly, the mediators are able “to start the dialogue that [gang members] will find difficult to have, or indeed cannot

242 Nicola Marfleet, *Why Carry a Weapon? A Study of Knife Crime Amongst 15–17-Year Old Males in London* (London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2008), p 79–82

243 Q 284 [Witness 3, The Prince’s Trust]

244 Q 425

be seen to have, and in that way we slow it down.”²⁴⁵ Thirdly, they can create the conditions that means people have a chance to get on with the positive aspects of their lives:

What we do is create the peace. If people go back into education, training or employment they can put their time into that rather than look over their shoulder or plan retaliation and revenge.²⁴⁶

The ‘Boston miracle’

168. We also took evidence from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) on their gang exit strategy. The VRU employs a tactic used successfully in Boston, USA—referred to as the ‘Boston miracle’—to combat gang crime in the 1990s: gang members were offered the choice between support for finding jobs and counselling or told they would face longer, harsher custodial sentences. This contributed to a reduction in violent crime in Boston of about 50% in two years.²⁴⁷

169. The VRU’s Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan described how they had gone about this in Glasgow in the autumn of 2008. Strathclyde Police used intelligence to identify all the gangs and gang members in the area and invite them to a meeting with police officers, teachers, social workers and community workers; 150 of the 220 invited turned up. There were a series of presentations including from the Chief Constable, who made the gang members aware of the extent of police knowledge about them and how seriously they would be targeting them, Medics Against Violence, who gave graphic accounts of the damage caused by violence, former gang members, a mother whose son had been attacked and life coaches. At the end, they were given a card with a phone number on it and told to stand up if they were prepared to seek help to change:

When he said, “Right, stand up”, first of all ten stood up and then maybe 15, and then 20. Every one of them stood up except three and ... In the afternoon we had 55 adults in ... They all stood up. We had six young men in from Polmont Prison who were in the dock with prison officers. They would not leave until they had been given a card with a phone number on it. They have already been on the phone saying, “I get out in seven months. Will this still be here?” It will be. Within the first four weeks 70 contacted us, and they are now in programmes ... It might be about education, it might be about readiness for work, it might be about alcohol counselling, drug counselling, it might be housing, it can be a whole range of things. We have also set up a football tournament with 160 involved in it and yesterday morning my DCI, who is the project manager, received a phone call from the sub-divisional officer, who said, “I am just phoning you, Andy, to let you know, I had no disturbance calls in Easterhouse over the weekend.” So we know it works ... It is our ability to deliver it consistently that is the challenge.²⁴⁸

170. We were also made aware of the Pathways initiatives in London, intended to target violent offenders operating in street gangs through the provision of direct support coupled

245 Q 412

246 Q 419

247 “Boston Miracle inspires UK’s gang fight”, *BBC News Online*, 16 November 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

248 Q 213

with close monitoring and police-led enforcement²⁴⁹ and the Safer Southwark Partnership's programme of home visits to confront young people involved in or at risk of becoming involved in gang activity, with their parents.²⁵⁰ During a previous inquiry, we had visited Manchester to hear about the success of their Multi-Agency Gang Strategy in reducing gun crime.

171. We were impressed with innovative gang exit and violence reduction strategies employed in Strathclyde and the West Midlands, which use different methods but share a multi-agency approach and replicate good practice from the United States and Northern Ireland respectively. We believe that local partnerships are best placed to develop solutions tailored to the needs of their communities, but recommend the establishment of a cross-departmental unit at Government level, along the lines of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, whose role is to oversee the work of partnerships in this area and spread good practice.

Work with low-level offenders and those at risk of offending

172. The Shadow Home Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, argued that the system does not seek to intervene at the first signs of trouble, which often occur in the form of anti-social behaviour when young people start secondary school: there is “nothing in between the problem and the criminal justice system.”²⁵¹ While it is true that young people have been increasingly criminalised over the past decade, the Youth Justice Board gave evidence about some of their interventions which take place prior to offending. Firstly, they have established a police toolkit with the Association of Chief Police Officers to identify, from intelligence held by police, Youth Offending Teams and schools, young people who are at risk and then draw together local organisations to assess the risk posed by that young person and the type of intervention needed to divert them from potential offending behaviour. In contrast to the feedback we heard from Policy Exchange, the Youth Justice Board argued that the ability of youth offending teams to do prevention work has greatly increased recently.²⁵²

173. The Youth Justice Board has also developed a range of initiatives with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to try to prevent young people from offending. These include youth inclusion programmes (YIPs), which were established in 2000 for 8-17 year olds at risk of re-offending, future offending or school exclusion. They were designed particularly to offer intensive interventions to the 50 young people in the most deprived communities in England and Wales who are most at risk of this behaviour, but also offer activities open to all young people in the area. The programme includes “positive activities for young people, triage schemes to try to divert young people in police custody suites, the increasing use of youth workers in terms of outreach work out in the communities, obviously, where young people are engaging in this kind of activity.”²⁵³

249 Ev 131

250 Ev 178

251 Q 501

252 Q 186

253 Q 175

174. Two fairly positive evaluations of YIPs have been carried out. For example, evaluation of phase 2 of the programme, which ran from 2003 to 2006, found that on average 82% of the core 50 in each area had been engaged at some point. Although YIPs struggled to maintain a high level of contact throughout the programme, there was a decrease in average offending of 66% for those who were engaged to any point (to put this in context, rates for young people in general are expected to fall by 55% regardless of intervention as many young people ‘grow out’ of criminal behaviour). Furthermore, the average cost per young person over the three years was only £1,641.²⁵⁴ A young witness who gave evidence with 11 MILLION described the impact of the Sefton YIP:

What the YIP has done, it has done a lot for the teenagers of Midland because it has taken them off the streets and it has reduced the crimes that have been committed because those teenagers have been taken off the street. By taking them off, we have prevented—well not “we” but the YIP—a burglary, a stabbing, any type of crime and with that moving we can all see the crime rate shooting back up to large numbers again.²⁵⁵

175. We also took evidence from the Scout Association about the beneficial impact of organised activity for young people at risk of offending. While scout groups do not generally target any specific group of young people, in Essex a group has been running for about 13 years taking referrals from schools, social services and projects working particularly with young people whose parents are in prison and takes them away for weekend training, which combines activities such as camping and rock climbing with mentoring:

They are people who, when you look at other studies about what the motivating factors for young people getting involved in antisocial behaviour might be, have those factors. We have anecdotal and tracking evidence that proves the difference that it makes to those young people to have that moment where somebody actually says, “You know what, you’re worth something. We’re going to invest in you” ... and it does work ...

The first and foremost test for us is the young people who want to come back. It is young people who perhaps you would not think of wanting to be involved in these kinds of organisations who clamour to come back, whose organisations write to us asking for more spaces and for us to increase the number of kids that we work with.²⁵⁶

176. Witnesses told us that Youth Inclusion Programmes are helping the young people who are most at risk of offending or school exclusion in deprived communities to stay out of trouble. About half of teenagers “grow out” of crime, but an evaluation showed that arrest rates for those who had engaged with a YIP decreased by a further 10%. We were also impressed by the comparatively low costs involved. We therefore recommend that the Government continues to fund Youth Inclusion Programmes as a means of reducing youth crime.

254 Youth Justice Board, *Evaluation of the youth justice programme: phase 2, 2008, Summary*, pp 8–10

255 Q 359

256 Qq 249–50

8 Reducing violence: long-term prevention strategy

Public health approach

177. A number of witnesses, particularly Detective Chief Superintendent Carnochan, the Policy Exchange and Professor Kevin Browne, argued that treating violence as a public health, rather than a criminal justice issue would be more effective at reducing violent crime levels in the long-term. This would put the focus of Government activity on prevention rather than enforcement. DCS Carnochan, who has helped to advance such an approach in Scotland through the Violence Reduction Unit, elaborated:

We have come to the realisation that criminal justice is the service of last resort, not the service of first resort, and that we continue to fill prisons up ... Rather than look and wait until after the point of impact, to look and apply a public health notion that would look then at primary prevention issues ... So it is about the notion that it is preventable, that there are things that cause it. If you were looking from a public health perspective and you used the analogy of TB, for instance, if you applied a criminal justice model to looking for a cure for TB, all you would do is wait until someone got TB, turned up, identified, put into a sanatorium and, if they survived, they would get out and, if they did not, they would not, and that seems to be what we have been doing. We have been isolating those people who are violent but not treating them and not inoculating those around them. It is very long-term; it is a generational change.²⁵⁷

178. This does not mean that violent offenders should not be criminalised: “you still need a robust criminal justice system, you still need the police to play their part”. But rather, “it is understanding what that part is and what police can deliver for you. What they can deliver is keeping a lid on it, containing and managing it while we start to look at the other things.”²⁵⁸ The theory states that if you invest resources in prevention, there will be far fewer offenders for the justice system to deal with in the longer term.

179. Witnesses argued that a preventative approach, while it would initially demand resources, would be cost-effective in the long term, in addition to the benefits it would bring for individuals and their communities. According to Frances Crook, of the Howard League for Penal Reform:

This would all be cheaper than the criminal justice system which is the most expensive blunt instrument we have in this country and the most ineffective. We are spending a lot of money on courts and police and custody, but would it not be better to put in a multi-agency approach earlier into family support, not as part of the criminal justice system, but as soon as that child fetches up in the police station.²⁵⁹

257 Q 191

258 Q 197

259 Q 302

Home Office research estimates that homicide and wounding costs society over £13 billion annually. An average homicide costs over £860,000 in terms of its emotional and physical impact on the direct victims; over £450,000 in 'lost input' and approaching £145,000 in criminal justice system costs, totalling £1,458,975. The estimated bill for a serious wounding is £21,422. The organisation Kids Count has used these figures alongside knife recorded crime statistics for London to make a very rough estimate for the cost of knife crime of £1.25 billion a year.²⁶⁰

180. Homicide and wounding cost society millions of pounds a year. The organisation Kids Count has roughly estimated that knife-enabled crime costs £1.25 billion a year. We heard convincing evidence of the long-term cost benefits of applying a public health approach to violence reduction, as well as the benefits to individuals and communities. A public health approach treats violence as a disease and invests resources in prevention.

181. The World Health organisation explained that there are four stages to a public health approach to violence:

- To define the problem through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics and consequences of violence;
- To establish why violence occurs using research to determine the causes and correlates of violence, the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, and the factors that could be modified through interventions;
- To find out what works to prevent violence by designing, implementing and evaluating interventions; and
- To implement effective and promising interventions in a wide range of settings.²⁶¹

Understanding the problem: collecting and sharing knife data

182. In terms of the first stage, the sharing of information about knife attacks is vital to inform effective policy-making at Government level, as well as effective operations at a local level. Several witnesses complained that data is not currently being shared effectively, particularly between medical practitioners and the police. There are two issues involved: one is whether doctors have a duty to report specific details of an injury in order for the police to pursue their inquiries; the second is about collecting and sharing anonymous data to build up a better understanding of violence (as part of a public health approach).

183. Doctors were issued with specific guidelines in 2003 obliging them to report all gun shot wounds to the police as it is clear that this constitutes a "serious crime", thereby overriding their common law duty of patient confidentiality. The reporting of stab wounds has been more haphazard, owing to a lack of clarity over the term "serious crime", the range of injuries that can be inflicted by a knife and the level of risk posed to the wider

260 Home Office, *The Economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households*; June 2005; Kids Count, *Knife Crime: Bringing the voice of the street to the House*, 2008, p 33

261 World Health Organisation, www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/public_health/en/index.htm

public. The General Medical Council is currently consulting on interim guidelines on knife reporting, published in August 2008. Under these guidelines:

The police are responsible for assessing the risk posed by members of the public who are armed with knives ... For this reason, the police should be told whenever a person arrives at hospital with a wound inflicted in a violent attack with a knife, blade or other sharp instrument ... Identifying details, such as the patient's name and address, should not usually be disclosed at the stage of initial contact with the police.

When the police arrive, you should not allow them access to the patient if this will delay or hamper treatment or compromise the patient's recovery ... If the patient's treatment and condition allow them to speak to the police, you or another member of the health care team should ask the patient whether they are willing to do so ...

Where it is probable that a crime has been committed, the police will seek further information. If the patient cannot give consent (because they are unconscious, for example), or refuses to disclose information or to allow health professionals to do so, information can still be disclosed if there are grounds for believing that this is justified in the public interest or disclosure is required by law. Disclosures in the public interest are justified where:

- Failure to disclose information may put the patient, or someone else, at risk of death or serious harm.
- Disclosure would be likely to assist in the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime and failure to disclose would be prejudicial to those purposes.²⁶²

184. From his perspective as trauma and vascular surgeon at the Royal London Hospital, Professor Brohi agreed that "it is very important that hospitals, police, education and public health agencies work together". However, he argued that the issue of automatic reporting to the police is not as clear-cut as many would like it to be:

In trauma if we are to save lives, limbs and prevent disability we need to have the person with us within minutes of the incident. If there is any delay about presenting to hospital because of concerns about whether the incident will be reported to the police and place the patient in more danger later on it is likely that more people will die because of it. Is there a difference between knives and guns? From our point of view one is much more likely to die from a gunshot wound than a knife wound. The injuries are very different. Is there any difference in terms of social responsibility? Probably not. In these cases it is very difficult to know who is at risk and whether this is a one-on-one injury or there is a wider danger to people at large and to make decisions.²⁶³

He went on:

If you believe that informing the police when something has occurred without any real evidence as to what has actually occurred and who the perpetrator is and to

262 General Medical Council and Department of Health, *Reporting knife wounds: interim guidance*, August 2008

263 Qq 73, 79

focus on it as a criminal issue, therefore essentially criminalising a teenage generation, you are perhaps not doing society or public health the good you should be doing compared with perhaps the other way round, namely that the police should be liaising a lot better with a public health body whose responsibility it is to tackle this problem. Information should flow to a public health body rather than necessarily that it be the job of the police to look after it.²⁶⁴

185. In terms of anonymous data-sharing, when the National Audit Office (NAO) carried out its study to inform its 2007 publication, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, it found that anonymised data on violence-related woundings from Accident and Emergency departments, and on children excluded from school for violence, had been used in only 45% and 26% of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships respectively. More recently, Chris Huhne MP told us that of the 148 out of 169 NHS acute hospital trusts which had responded to a Liberal Democrat freedom of information request, only 25 said that were participating with local police forces in reporting where and how knife injuries were being sustained.²⁶⁵ However, the Home Office Minister, Alan Campbell MP, told us that 38 key hospitals in the ten Tackling Knives Action Programme areas are sharing information in this way.²⁶⁶

186. The NAO also noted that “even if data was to be shared routinely, Partnerships do not currently have the capacity or expertise to make good use of it”. In Cardiff, this analytical role is provided by the University, who are involved in the Cardiff Community Safety Partnership’s Violent Crime Group.²⁶⁷ The NAO highlighted their effectiveness:

Since starting to use this more targeted approach Cardiff has moved from being average in its ‘family’ of most similar Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in 2000, to being the least violent Partnership from 2004 onwards. Since 2002, Cardiff has outperformed its family’s average monthly number of police recorded crime incidents by 111 incidents a month, a reduction of over 30%. Assuming a cost of approximately £9,600 per offence these results suggest a total annual saving of approximately £12.8 million, of which £2 million relates to the NHS.²⁶⁸

187. The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit replicate the Cardiff model. DCS Carnochan explained how the data is collected and used:

It is anonymised. Where did it happen? When did it happen? What age are you? Male or female? Was there a weapon used? And other ones. We include sectarianism as a question - gangs, and so on. That information is then matched with what we know and we get a clearer picture of what is there ...

In paper form it is in almost every A&E [in Scotland] ... but it is difficult with the paper form because we still only get a return of maybe 60 or 70%. We have in Lanarkshire a Health Board, which will be kicking off, I think, at the beginning of next month, an electronic system where we actually merge the data, and we have an

264 Q 80

265 Q 522

266 Q 548

267 National Audit Office, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, February 2008, p 7

268 *Ibid*, p 25

analyst and the analyst will merge the data and she will feed that information into the local police tackling and co-ordinating unit.²⁶⁹

Chris Huhne MP argued that the Government should introduce the so-called Cardiff model for all accident and emergency departments across the UK as a high priority.²⁷⁰

188. An effective public health approach depends upon accurate data about the incidence and nature of violent crime. Effective data sharing amongst local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships about knife violence will assist in the development of preventative approaches, as well improving intelligence-led enforcement activity. Several witnesses cited the beneficial impact of an approach to sharing anonymous data about knife incidents pioneered in Cardiff on crime reduction levels. We were disappointed to learn that this has not been fully implemented throughout England and Wales and recommend that this is done immediately. All agencies within partnerships should have an equal duty to share.

189. The General Medical Council is currently consulting on guidelines regarding the duty of medical practitioners to report details of specific knife injuries to the police. We are sympathetic to concerns that an automatic duty to report may dissuade some victims from seeking treatment. We also appreciate that the first duty of doctors is to their patients. However, we think that it is in the public interest that the police are informed when a person arrives at hospital with a wound inflicted in a violent attack and that the draft GMC guidelines, which allow for anonymity and patient consent where appropriate, would provide adequate safeguards.

Breaking the cycle of violence

190. In terms of prevention, we looked at a number of approaches. Given evidence, summarised in paragraph 84, from the forensic psychologist Professor Kevin Browne about the effect of witnessing or experiencing violence in the home on later propensity to commit violence, it is clear that addressing domestic violence is important for preventing other kinds of violent crime, such as knife crime. Last year we published a Report into *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence*, which contained a number of recommendations in this area.²⁷¹ Professor Browne told us that his key recommendation for tackling violent crime would be to introduce treatment orders in the family courts:

Unfortunately a small proportion of children grow up in violent families and role model on violent fathers. Often these violent fathers, because there is not enough evidence to convict them in a criminal court beyond all reasonable doubt, go from one family to another because under the balance of probability in a family court they are not allowed to see their own children because they have been violent, so they move on and join another family and set a violent environment there. That is because we do not have treatment orders in the family courts. Only convicted violent criminals are given any form of treatment ... I work in the family courts and I see

269 Qq 208–9, 211

270 Q 522

271 Home Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2007–08, *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence*, HC 263

many men leave those family courts just to move on, separated from the current family that we are discussing. They are the problem.²⁷²

191. Professor Browne was sceptical about the likely impact of greater censorship of violent films and video games, given the way in which young people are able to access material on the internet, and instead advocated:

I would go down the road of education and public health education to parents and to health visitors. Health visitors should be checking what children are seeing in the home environment, but now we do not have a health visiting system that visits homes so we cannot do that sort of thing. We need to re-establish our interest in the homes of children and how they grow up and make sure that there is not inappropriate imaginary and that parents are responsible and we need to help them in that.²⁷³

However, he did posit that internet and telephone service providers “are getting away with ‘murder’.”²⁷⁴

192. Professor Browne was also adamant that vulnerable groups, such as the mentally ill and young offenders, should be denied access to violent materials: this is both easier to control and also, in light of his evidence set out in chapter four, more effective as a violence prevention measure. He advised that inmates in local authority secure units or youth offending institutions are able to borrow DVDs and computer games from the library that are “completely inappropriate” for those convicted of violent offences.²⁷⁵

193. In light of evidence that children who witness or experience domestic violence are significantly more likely to go to commit violent crime, we recommend that the Home Office implements our detailed recommendations on preventing domestic violence published in June 2008. The Government should also consider introducing Treatment Orders in Family Courts so that men for whom there is not sufficient evidence to convict of a criminal offence but who are judged to be too violent to see their own children, are treated for violence before they go on to infect another family.

194. We were disturbed to learn that young offenders who are convicted for violent offences are allowed to watch violent DVD and video games in secure units and young offending institutions, given that they may increase the risk of violent behaviour in those already predisposed to violence. We recommend that the Ministry of Justice should institute a ban on this kind of material.

Providing positive alternatives for young people

195. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Hitchcock argued that the key to tackling knife crime is maintaining momentum on detecting knife offences, addressing social deprivation and long-term support for diversionary activities for young people.²⁷⁶ The Tackling Knives

272 Q 493

273 Q 491

274 Q 497

275 Q 486

276 Q 122

Action Programme has provided 7,000 places through the Department for Children, Schools and Families for young people to take part in diversionary activities on Friday and Saturday nights. Being involved in structured activities can help young people to develop the skills, confidence and sense of self-worth which will make them less likely to offend. This can be particularly true for those who do not excel at school. For example, Shaun Bailey told us that “sport does work because it gives you discipline and self-discipline is the answer to most of these problems. It gives you something to do and hopefully gives you something that you are good at.”²⁷⁷

196. The Scouts Association told us about the benefits of Scout membership for young people:

I think young people who have been involved in youth organisations have better relationships with their peers, with adults, they are more involved in their communities and they do better in their lives as a whole. We do not think that is accidental ... We know that concern about knife crime is an issue within our Scout groups in some areas ... but we also know there is something about scouting and the confidence and the skills it gives young people to make those positive choices that means our young people are more resilient.²⁷⁸

However, organisations like the Scouts face a number of barriers. We heard that there are 30,000 young people on waiting lists to join groups; but not enough volunteers to meet the need. The Association argue that the Government should explore the right for employees to request time off for training “because all of our adult volunteers are offered accredited training, and we work very hard to make sure that our leaders get something back from their involvement, skills that are transferable to the workplace”²⁷⁹ The young Scout leaders who gave evidence to us told that there is a need for greater awareness-raising about Scout groups in schools.²⁸⁰

197. The young people we spoke to from London and from Merseyside stressed the absence of facilities for young people:

You have got to book it [football pitch] well in advance because there are too many people going there nowadays ... We have got two youth clubs, we have got the Midland Boys’ Club which is for younger ages, like 13 and under, and you have got the Sefton YIP which is for the older groups, and even then, with the YIPs moving to Bootle, there will be even less things around our area to do. Boys’ clubs you just cannot get in to because you are too old. The parks are always taken over by gangs so you cannot go anywhere and do anything.²⁸¹

198. Witnesses emphasised the need for robust and consistent support for deprived young people. Frances Crook, of the Howard League for Penal Reform, explained the extent of what she believed was required:

277 Q 321

278 Qq 243, 247

279 Qq 246, 256

280 Q 256

281 Q 355

It has to be everybody working together at a local level to put into place more appropriate adults and to give these young people hope and a life. It is not just a question of putting in a skate park or putting in one hour a week at a youth club; it has to be a whole life approach to these young people so that they can see a vision of themselves which is an alternative to that being offered by the groups and the gangs of older young men.²⁸²

199. Ian Levy, whose organisation The Robert Levy Foundation seeks to provide employment-related opportunities for young people, told us:

I do find that a lot of organisations are willing to get involved with helping young people, a lot of confidence through the CSRs to encourage the employers to offer at least a day a year to volunteer to help local voluntary groups to go into schools, et cetera. On that basis there is a willingness to do that, but what we are interested in is that long-term contact or that long-term support from employers to make this happen. What we found when started to look at this, one of the things that young people said to us is that there is always something there but it only lasts for so long and then it ends, and then they are back to stage one when there is nothing to do, nobody supporting them.²⁸³

Young people we met from London also argued for more part-time job opportunities to show that there are positive alternatives to a criminal lifestyle.

200. Participation in activities like sport or uniformed organisations can help young people to develop discipline, skills and confidence to control aggression, resist pressure to engage in street violence and raise their aspirations. We were greatly encouraged during our evidence sessions and visits round the country by the dedication shown by local public servants and volunteers to providing these activities. However, young people told us there is a shortage of places available for them. The Scout Association told us that a shortage of volunteer leaders in particular is preventing them from meeting demand. We recommend that the Government should work with employers to make it easier for their employees to volunteer their time. We also suggest there may be a need for a more strategic approach to provide consistent and tailored support for young people. In addition, young people told us that access to paid employment would make a criminal lifestyle less attractive. We recommend that the Government facilitates more part-time job opportunities for 14-18 year olds.

Early intervention

201. The Shadow Home Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, argued that early intervention with at-risk toddlers and their parents is the key to violence reduction.²⁸⁴ Research commissioned by the National Audit Office from RAND Europe found that early interventions are a “highly effective means of targeting expenditure for reducing violent crime” and that interventions undertaken before the age of five are the most effective at preventing violent and criminal behaviour.²⁸⁵ Those children who are most at-risk of going

282 Q 301

283 Q 235

284 Q 501

285 National Audit Office, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, February 2008, p 21

on to commit violent behaviour in later life can be identified by a statistician before they are born.

202. Shaun Bailey, of youth charity MyGeneration, argued that “the key difference between kids who succeed and kids who do not is normally the family”.²⁸⁶ Richard Taylor, the father of Damilola Taylor, drew a link between street gang involvement and parental neglect: “there is no parental guidance and no authority.”²⁸⁷ Assistant Chief Constable John Crowther, of the British Transport Police, noted that while many parents are willing to work with the police to address the situation when their child has been found with a knife, “with the current way that sometimes families are constructed, there are less opportunities for parents to be influential around what their children are doing.”²⁸⁸ Chris Grayling MP told us “I think one of the big challenges we have got is that in many households there is an utter absence of any sense of responsibility”:

I do not purport to say that strengthening the family is either easy or will make all the difference, but I am absolutely certain that if in the future we can get back to a situation where more young people are being brought up in a more stable family environment we are likely to reduce the incidence of criminality later on in life.²⁸⁹

203. Ministers argued that the Government is already taking steps to implement an early intervention approach with problem families. Home Office Minister Alan Campbell MP told us:

Most of the support for parents with regard to TKAP comes via the Department for Children, Schools and Families through a whole variety of things like, for example, early intervention programmes, family intervention programmes and of course the fact that there are parenting practitioners in every local authority area. It is about giving parents access to the right advice to allow them to meet, perhaps together, in order not just to discuss with professionals how best they can resolve issues within their families but also to work with other parents in those areas, too. It is, as you suggest, a longer term, very much a preventative approach.²⁹⁰

The Justice Minister, David Hanson MP, drew our attention to a £10 million “intensive fostering” pilot scheme operating in three areas over the next three years whereby children from dysfunctional families who are prosecuted for low-level crime are taken out of their environment and supported by a foster family. There are currently 30 families involved.²⁹¹ The Safer Southwark Partnership described their work under the Family Intervention Programme with 20 high risk families, offering case work, counselling, parenting support and other support services.²⁹²

204. The Government estimates that **real social failure comes down to about 20,000 “hard core” families out of an overall total of 110,000 “problem families”**. Around 5% of

286 Q 312

287 Q 392

288 Qq 145–6

289 Q 493

290 Q 561

291 Q 568

292 Ev 177

young people commit half of all youth crime.²⁹³ Public Service Agreement Delivery Agreement 23, which aims to reduce serious violent crime, emphasises the importance of early intervention in preventing the escalation of violence.²⁹⁴ The *Youth Crime Action Plan* also sets out the Government's aim to expand intensive family interventions for the most vulnerable and problematic families with children at risk of offending, with non-negotiable elements and sanctions for those who refuse to engage, and expanding Nurse Family Partnerships to support vulnerable families in the early years.²⁹⁵

205. In April 2008 Nottingham became the first 'Early Intervention City'. The five main areas of work include the Family Nurse Partner Project, in which family nurses support teenage mothers through pregnancy and early parenthood; a mentoring scheme for young people, focusing on those at risk of becoming involved in serious crime; supporting victims of domestic violence through a sanctuary scheme; and a drug awareness scheme. It is based on a programme in Colorado that was recently evaluated by Nobel economist James Heckham, who found that every dollar invested in early intervention saved between \$6 and \$17 in criminal investigation, court proceedings and custody programmes.²⁹⁶

206. In a publication for the Centre for Social Justice, Graham Allen MP and Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP argued that:

The two public policy strengths of Early Intervention are firstly that it is less expensive and second it is more effective than late intervention ... suppose that we help a young mother and a toddler with a £1000 worth of health visiting at the time she and her baby need it most: that makes more sense than waiting 16 years in order to pay £230,000 to incarcerate that baby in a young offenders' secure unit for a year when he has gone astray".²⁹⁷

In the short-term it will be expensive to fund early interventions alongside the huge current costs of the criminal justice system. To manage this, the Centre for Social Justice has recommended that the Treasury and Cabinet Office explore "a form of financial instrument which could be devised to borrow against the future savings of Early Intervention".²⁹⁸ Another way to reduce costs is through better targeting: Policy Exchange have criticised the Sure Start programme, for example, for its universal approach.²⁹⁹

207. There appeared to be cross-party support for early interventions with very young children born into dysfunctional families. The Government has already begun to invest resources in family nurse partnerships and intensive fostering. It will be difficult to measure the success of such schemes in this country as they will not become evident for a generation. However, evidence from the United States indicated that investing in similar interventions can save a significant amount in future criminal justice costs. Such measures are resource-intensive, but are only needed for a small minority: around

293 Home Office, *Youth Crime Action Plan*, July 2008, p 1

294 National Audit Office, *The Home Office: Reducing the risk of violent crime*, February 2008, p 13

295 Home Office, *Youth Crime Action Plan*, July 2008, p 7

296 Kids Count, *Knife Crime: Bringing the voice of the street to the House*, 2008, p 35

297 Centre for Social Justice, *Early Intervention: Good parents, great kids, better citizens*, September 2008, pp 113–4

298 *Ibid*, p 119

299 Q 44

5% of young people commit half of all youth crime, and the Government estimates that real social failure comes down to about 20,000 “hard core” families. The Government should target resources very specifically on these families.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Statistical data about the use of knives in violent offending are contained in the Homicide Index, the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime. Hospital Episode Statistics provide information about knife injuries resulting in a victim's admittance to hospital. The Home Office Offending, Crime and Justice Survey and MORI Youth Survey have provided information about levels of knife-carrying amongst young people. We welcome the decision to extend the British Crime Survey to under-16s and to publish specific data on knives in police recorded crime as means of improving our understanding of the scale of knife violence. However, limitations remain that inhibit a fully accurate analysis, including poor reporting rates. (Paragraph 14)
2. Between 1996 and 2005/06 fatal stabbings mirrored overall homicide rates: the number of fatal stabbings rose sharply before declining again from 2003, but the percentage of homicides that involved a sharp instrument remained relatively stable. However, since 2006 the overall homicide rate has remained relatively stable but the number of knife homicides has increased—by a dramatic 26.9% in 2006/07—to reach 270 in 2007/08, the highest total recorded since the Homicide Index was established in 1977. (Paragraph 17)
3. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from Home Office data about levels of knife use in non-fatal violent crime, partly because of the limitations of the source data and partly because they do not indicate many clear trends. It appears that overall knife violence recorded by the British Crime Survey fell sharply between 1995 and 2003/04, in line with overall violent crime, but rose again in 2006/07. (Paragraph 21)
4. Hospital Episode Statistics show a big increase in knife injuries since the mid-1990s, with the sharpest increase occurring since 2006. This trend was supported by the professional opinion of two senior medical practitioners to whom we spoke. However, we note that the number of stab victims admitted to hospital is far lower than the number of stab victims suggested by the British Crime Survey. This may indicate that the majority of stab wounds are minor. The increase in hospital admissions, however, appears to indicate that serious stab wounds are becoming more common. (Paragraph 24)
5. The picture with regard to knife possession is complicated. The 2008 MORI Youth Survey indicated that 31% of 11-16 year olds in mainstream education and 61% of excluded young people had carried a knife at some point over the course of the previous year; however the 2006 Home Office Offending, Crime and Justice Survey found that only 3% of 10-25 year olds did. This discrepancy cannot be explained by the time lag between the surveys, as the numbers reporting carrying a knife actually decreased between the 2005 and 2008 MORI Surveys. It can partly be explained by the fact that the MORI survey includes legitimate carrying and the OCJS covers a wider age range. Anecdotal evidence indicated that in certain areas levels of knife-carrying have risen to the extent that carrying a knife has almost become “normal”. We therefore concluded that, although there is no definitive evidence of the extent of knife-carrying nationally, in parts of England and Wales it was at a level to be of significant concern. (Paragraph 30)

6. The Government's Tackling Knives Action Programme has been in operation for less than a year, therefore it is difficult to evaluate its success. It does not appear to have had a significant effect on reducing police recorded crime, although there have been signs of a notable reduction in hospital admissions in Tackling Knives Action Programme areas. (Paragraph 35)
7. A significant proportion of stabbings relate to brawling or domestic violence, but the rise in violent knife offences seen over the past few years is associated with street violence between groups of young people who share a territorial identity, often referred to as 'gangs'. While young people often offend in groups, there may be a tendency to overstate the phenomenon of streets gangs and a danger that categorising groups of young people in that way may glamorise street violence. Random stabbings of innocent bystanders remain extremely rare. (Paragraph 40)
8. Violent knife crime is concentrated in the deprived areas of large cities. The nature of knife crime may vary between cities and is not always linked to street violence. While hospital data show a rise in the number of knife injuries sustained in rural areas since the mid-1990s, the trend does not mirror the rapid rise seen in urban areas since 2006 and incidence remains considerably lower than in urban areas. While some immigrants from countries where knife-carrying is socially acceptable may be more predisposed to carry knives, knife use is not linked to ethnicity but rather reflects the local demography. (Paragraph 47)
9. Males in their late teens and early twenties constitute the majority of perpetrators and victims of violent knife crime, which is consistent with other types of violent offending. However, the number of under-18s affected has risen. The age at which young people carry knives is also worrying: the incidence of carrying is highest amongst older teenagers, but we heard instances of carrying by children as young as seven. 11 seemed to be a key risk age for first carrying a knife, presumably linked to the transition from primary to secondary school. Boys are far more likely to carry a knife than girls. (Paragraph 53)
- 10.
11. Hospital data analysed by the Trauma Audit Research Network indicates that the type of knife used to injure most frequently is the kitchen knife, probably because of its easy availability. However, young people tend to admit to carrying penknives, flick knives and other kinds of knives, which are also more commonly found by the police during stop and search operations. This may suggest that the knives used to cause serious injury may differ from those that are routinely carried. The MORI Youth Survey found that penknives were the most common weapon carried by young people, but to some extent this will be for legitimate purposes: only 1.2% of stab wounds recorded by TARN hospitals during the second half of 2008 were caused by penknives. (Paragraph 0)
12. The vast majority of young people who carry knives say that they or their peers carry knives to protect themselves: according to one survey this reason is given by as many as 85% of knife-carriers. While for some questioned this may be an easy excuse to justify their actions, young people in deprived communities undoubtedly feel unsafe. In part this is down to the risk of being attacked simply for living in a different

neighbourhood or “territory”. There is also a strong link between past victimisation and knife-carrying. Many do not trust their “natural protectors”, such as their parents and the police, to keep them safe. A perception that everyone else is carrying a knife fuels a vicious circle, compared by one witness to an “arms race”. Solutions to knife-carrying should therefore focus in part on helping young people to feel safer. (Paragraph 67)

13. Sensationalist media coverage of stabbings has contributed to this “arms race”. Negative media portrayals of young people as “feral youths”, when the vast majority are law-abiding, can add to a sense of being under attack. While we urge media organisations to report knife crime in a responsible manner, we also recognise the positive role that the media can play in mobilising communities against knife crime and acting as a conduit for anti-knife information and campaigns. Furthermore, responsible reporting is assisted by the provision of quality information; therefore we repeat our past recommendation for the provision of full and accurate crime data. (Paragraph 68)
14. A smaller number of knife-carriers say they carry knives to gain ‘respect’ or street credibility, or because of peer pressure. Measures to tackle weapon-carrying should therefore also focus on resolving the reasons why young people seek “respect”, including the appeal of violent street culture, and building confidence to resist peer pressure. (Paragraph 72)
15. We were also concerned about evidence that knife offenders are using young children as “caddies” to carry weapons for them. This is now a criminal offence under the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 attracting a maximum sentence of four years. We would like the Home Office to state the number of prosecutions made under this legislation and recommend that such prosecutions are actively pursued by the police. (Paragraph 73)
16. A huge factor in the decision to carry a knife or use it in an offence is its easy availability. This is clearly particularly true of kitchen knives, but we heard that it is also possible to purchase illegal knives from a number of sources and that under-18s are often able to purchase knives in shops, despite changes in the law. While we believe there is value in exploring ways of decreasing supply, particularly as a solution for those who carry knives without intention to use them, this is unlikely to reduce violent offending significantly. Those intent on committing violence will find other means. Therefore, in order to address the growing trend towards serious violence in a minority of young people, it is important to address its underlying causes. (Paragraph 77)
17. Individuals born into social deprivation are more likely to commit violence. Key risk factors for becoming involved in street violence include coming from a dysfunctional family with poor parental support, low self-worth, poor school attendance and living in an area where aspirations are low and there are few employment opportunities. Young people who have witnessed or experienced violence as a child are also far more prone to commit violence. We were shocked by the rapid manner in which violence can escalate between young people from a seemingly minor grievance. Extreme parental neglect halts the development of faculties that enable the majority of people to regulate their aggression. Solutions should therefore focus on dealing

with dysfunctional and violent families and providing opportunities for young people to develop self-worth. However, it is important to recognise that not all young people who come from a deprived background are violent and that young people from stable backgrounds can also be violent. (Paragraph 87)

18. Evidence to our inquiry supported our view that violent DVDs and video games exert a negative influence on those who watch and play them. Watching or playing such media contributes around 10% of any person's predisposition to be violent. Of particular concern is their influence on individuals who are already predisposed to violence because they grew up in a violent environment. (Paragraph 88)
19. The laws regulating the sale, possession and use of different kinds of knives are contained in a number of different pieces of legislation. We note calls from the Police Federation to simplify this legislation; however we consider this would be overly resource-intensive. We understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers is in the process of clarifying the provision of relevant legislation into a definite piece of guidance for use by police officers. We welcome this and urge its speedy publication. Our inquiry did not find any need for further legislation to tackle the sale or use of knives. (Paragraph 93)
20. There appears to be a need for better enforcement of current legislation regarding the sale of knives. The voluntary charter initiated by the Safer Southwark Partnership with retailers in the London borough appears to have been successful in reducing underage knife sales. We therefore support the Government's similar national campaign with retailers. We also support efforts to design a kitchen knife with a shorter point, although note that it would take a number of years to achieve a big reduction in the number of traditional kitchen knives in circulation unless there was an incentive for people to replace their current knives. (Paragraph 97)
21. Knife amnesties have a limited impact on crime levels and are unlikely to dissuade persistent offenders from carrying knives. We have no objection to their continued use as part of a broader set of initiatives aimed at reducing knife-carrying, but policy-makers should understand their limited value. (Paragraph 100)
22. Stop and search operations are a key component of the Tackling Knives Action Programme. In London they have yielded only a 2% return in knives seized. However, the extent of any deterrent effect is unclear. Moreover, the British Transport Police claimed that their stop and search operation, SHIELD, has contributed to a 39% reduction in the number of crimes where knives are involved since its introduction in 2006. We heard conflicting views from communities affected by knife crime about the impact of stop and search: some pointed to the potential damage to police/community relations; others considered it an important measure to keep their children safe. Police representatives emphasised that their approach combined enforcement with prevention. We concluded that stop and search is an important short-term measure to tackle knife offences, with the caveat that it is carried out in an appropriate and sensitive manner. (Paragraph 108)
23. The Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 increased the maximum sentence for knife possession to four years. In our Report on Policing in the 21st Century, we expressed concern that advice published by the Sentencing Guidelines Council in June 2008

that punishment for knife possession could begin at a Band C fine was too lenient. We are therefore pleased that new guidance sets a starting sentence point of a 12-week custodial sentence. (Paragraph 112)

24. While we consider that magistrates should be allowed a degree of discretion when sentencing those convicted of knife possession, and therefore oppose a mandatory sentence, we favour a more consistent approach to sentencing and custody for the majority of offenders. We are therefore pleased to note that there is now a presumption across England and Wales that knife-carriers will be charged, and that the number of offences resulting in custody rose during 2008. (Paragraph 117)
25. While it may be an appropriate punishment for knife-carriers, evidence suggests that the prospect of a custodial sentence may not deter young people from carrying knives. Many young people do not think about the consequences of their actions, and for a small minority who feel at risk of violence, the prospect of jail seems preferable to the dangers of being caught without a weapon for protection. Evidence suggests that the fear of getting caught acts as a stronger deterrent for young people. This strengthens our support for strong police action against knives, including the use of stop and search. (Paragraph 123)
26. We support the aims of the Government's anti-knife media campaign and we believe it has had some impact on making young people think twice before carrying a knife. However, we are concerned that such campaigns may not reach the most at-risk young people and fail to engage with the realities of street violence. Evidence shows that children are most likely to be influenced by "real" stories, particularly the experiences of former offenders and the families of knife victims. We recommend that all Year Seven school children should participate in an assembly or lesson, delivered by trained individuals to whom children can relate, that focuses on the dangers of knife-carrying and the consequences for victims, their families and offenders. We consider that the short film made by the UNCUT Project provides a particularly powerful means of communicating with pupils about the realities of knife violence. In order to engage children effectively, the programme should be adapted to the local context, along the lines of the Leeds Weapons Awareness Programme. (Paragraph 134)
27. The installation of knife detectors can help to reassure pupils and their families that a school is taking firm steps to protect them from potential knife violence. However, they may not be appropriate for every school and also have the potential to make some pupils more fearful. It is also debatable whether they are necessary; a University of Portsmouth study found that pupils feel safer and are less likely to carry knives at school than they are in other environments. We therefore do not recommend compulsory introduction of knife detectors in schools; rather each school community should make the decision for themselves. (Paragraph 138)
28. Taking a knife onto school premises is a serious transgression and should be dealt with accordingly. In such cases, many would argue that the child should be excluded for the benefit of the wider school community and we do not seek to remove the discretion of school leaders to make such decisions. However, we continue to be concerned about the increased likelihood of excluded children to go on to offend. For this reason, exclusion should automatically constitute the point of serious

intervention by the relevant authority to put in place the kind of diversions we explore in our final chapters. (Paragraph 141)

29. Safer Schools Partnerships, whereby police officers are attached to a school or group of schools, appear to be an effective way of keeping children safer. We heard evidence of how they can help to reduce conflict between pupils and generate intelligence about conflicts that have the potential to spill over outside school. However, we note concerns expressed by the National Audit Office about a lack of evaluation of the different models in existence. We recommend that the Government should carry out such an evaluation with the aim of spreading best practice and ensuring the participation of all schools that would benefit from involvement in such a partnership. (Paragraph 144)
30. Outside the school environment, young people should feel they can rely on the police to keep them safe. However a minority of young people view the police as an enemy, rather than an ally, and this minority increases as children progress through their teens. Some of these young people share the fears of some adults that the police will not respond when needed and in this respect our previous recommendations on improving public confidence in the police are pertinent. (Paragraph 148)
31. However for some of these young people this attitude stems from a negative personal experience, particularly of stop and search. We cannot emphasise enough how crucial it is for stop and search to be carried out in an appropriate and sensitive manner. We also urge support for schemes that break down the barriers between police officer and young people, such as Safer Schools Partnerships and those that see police officers acting as mentors to young people. (Paragraph 148)
32. Given the correlation between being a victim of violence and carrying a weapon, providing support for assault victims is key. (Paragraph 150)
33. We hope that measures to improve the relationship between young people and the police will encourage higher levels of crime reporting and that when these young people do come forward, they are given the counselling that they need. (Paragraph 150)
34. While we advocate the use of custody for violent knife offenders and some knife possessors, we are concerned about high re-offending rates among both adult prisoners and young offenders. Reducing re-offending is key to tackling violent crime in the long-term. There is currently insufficient work in prisons and young offender institutions to address offending behaviour. Young offenders in particular are likely to be impulsive and not consider the consequences of their actions; evaluations of cognitive behavioural programmes, such as Enhanced Thinking Skills, appear to show positive results. We recommend that the Ministry of Justice should expand provision so that more prisoners and young offenders who are judged likely to benefit can participate in such programmes. (Paragraph 161)
35. We heard anecdotally that the Knife Possession Prevention Programme run for all young people convicted of knife possession in Tackling Knives Action Programme areas has had a positive influence on their behaviour. We recommend that an evaluation is carried out to measure re-offending rates and, if judged to be a success, long-term funding for the programme is made available. (Paragraph 162)

36. Improving literacy and skills can also reduce the likelihood of re-offending. More than half of prisoners leave school with no qualifications, and a third with literacy skills at the same level as or below those expected for an 11 year old child. We commend those private companies, such as Timpsons, National Grid Transco, Cisco, Panduit and Bovis Lend Lease and Travis Perkins, who are working with prisons to improve the employment prospects of prisoners. The Government should consider offering incentives for more companies to become involved in such partnerships. A Ministry of Justice study found that odds of re-offending increased by 43% for prisoners reporting both employment and accommodation problems on release. We therefore also advocate increased resettlement support targeted at prisoners who have demonstrated in prison they are unlikely to re-offend. (Paragraph 163)
37. We were impressed with innovative gang exit and violence reduction strategies employed in Strathclyde and the West Midlands, which use different methods but share a multi-agency approach and replicate good practice from the United States and Northern Ireland respectively. We believe that local partnerships are best placed to develop solutions tailored to the needs of their communities, but recommend the establishment of a cross-departmental unit at Government level, along the lines of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, whose role is to oversee the work of partnerships in this area and spread good practice. (Paragraph 171)
38. Witnesses told us that Youth Inclusion Programmes are helping the young people who are most at risk of offending or school exclusion in deprived communities to stay out of trouble. About half of teenagers “grow out” of crime, but an evaluation showed that arrest rates for those who had engaged with a YIP decreased by a further 10%. We were also impressed by the comparatively low costs involved. We therefore recommend that the Government continues to fund Youth Inclusion Programmes as a means of reducing youth crime. (Paragraph 176)
39. Homicide and wounding cost society millions of pounds a year. The organisation Kids Count has roughly estimated that knife-enabled crime costs £1.25 billion a year. We heard convincing evidence of the long-term cost benefits of applying a public health approach to violence reduction, as well as the benefits to individuals and communities. A public health approach treats violence as a disease and invests resources in prevention. (Paragraph 180)
40. An effective public health approach depends upon accurate data about the incidence and nature of violent crime. Effective data sharing amongst local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships about knife violence will assist in the development of preventative approaches, as well improving intelligence-led enforcement activity. Several witnesses cited the beneficial impact of an approach to sharing anonymous data about knife incidents pioneered in Cardiff on crime reduction levels. We were disappointed to learn that this has not been fully implemented throughout England and Wales and recommend that this is done immediately. All agencies within partnerships should have an equal duty to share. (Paragraph 188)
41. The General Medical Council is currently consulting on guidelines regarding the duty of medical practitioners to report details of specific knife injuries to the police. We are sympathetic to concerns that an automatic duty to report may dissuade some

victims from seeking treatment. We also appreciate that the first duty of doctors is to their patients. However, we think that it is in the public interest that the police are informed when a person arrives at hospital with a wound inflicted in a violent attack and that the draft GMC guidelines, which allow for anonymity and patient consent where appropriate, would provide adequate safeguards. (Paragraph 189)

42. In light of evidence that children who witness or experience domestic violence are significantly more likely to go to commit violent crime, we recommend that the Home Office implements our detailed recommendations on preventing domestic violence published in June 2008. The Government should also consider introducing Treatment Orders in Family Courts so that men for whom there is not sufficient evidence to convict of a criminal offence but who are judged to be too violent to see their own children, are treated for violence before they go on to infect another family. (Paragraph 193)
43. We were disturbed to learn that young offenders who are convicted for violent offences are allowed to watch violent DVD and video games in secure units and young offending institutions, given that they may increase the risk of violent behaviour in those already predisposed to violence. We recommend that the Ministry of Justice should institute a ban on this kind of material. (Paragraph 194)
44. Participation in activities like sport or uniformed organisations can help young people to develop discipline, skills and confidence to control aggression, resist pressure to engage in street violence and raise their aspirations. We were greatly encouraged during our evidence sessions and visits round the country by the dedication shown by local public servants and volunteers to providing these activities. However, young people told us there is a shortage of places available for them. The Scout Association told us that a shortage of volunteer leaders in particular is preventing them from meeting demand. We recommend that the Government should work with employers to make it easier for their employees to volunteer their time. We also suggest there may be a need for a more strategic approach to provide consistent and tailored support for young people. In addition, young people told us that access to paid employment would make a criminal lifestyle less attractive. We recommend that the Government facilitates more part-time job opportunities for 14-18 year olds. (Paragraph 200)
45. There appeared to be cross-party support for early interventions with very young children born into dysfunctional families. The Government has already begun to invest resources in family nurse partnerships and intensive fostering. It will be difficult to measure the success of such schemes in this country as they will not become evident for a generation. However, evidence from the United States indicated that investing in similar interventions can save a significant amount in future criminal justice costs. Such measures are resource-intensive, but are only needed for a small minority: around 5% of young people commit half of all youth crime, and the Government estimates that real social failure comes down to about 20,000 “hard core” families. The Government should target resources very specifically on these families. (Paragraph 207)

Annex A: London seminar notes

We held a seminar in the King George Conference Centre, Stockwell on 17 November 2008 to launch our inquiry and discuss knife crime in London. We heard five presentations and held an open discussion with around 50 representatives from London and national bodies based in London. A summary of proceedings is set out below.

Simon Hughes, MP for North Southwark and Bermondsey

Simon Hughes MP introduced our seminar. He said that most young people are well-behaved and should be seen as a promise, not a threat.

In the past, the British Crime Survey has excluded under-16s, which has skewed official knife crime statistics. Crime has reduced in Southwark at an even greater rate than the London average, but violence is starting at a younger age and getting more serious.

He quoted Patrick Regan, of youth charity XLP, who says that young people originally carried knives because it was “cool”, then because they made them feel safe, whereas now they do so because they are afraid.

The response to knife crime in South London is called ENOUGH, which builds on the good work already being done in schools, youth groups and faith groups rather than introducing lots of new initiatives. There is a focus on “speaking and listening” with parents, as many do not communicate properly with their families. There is also good work being done on anger management. Peer mediation in schools can work very well, such as that carried out by the Southwark Mediation Service. Activity fillers, such as after-school clubs, also work well.

Simon Hughes MP said that the law has to be enforced but he does not believe that maximum sentencing will solve the problem of knife-carrying by young people. It is often difficult for a sibling or friend to resist when asked to carry a knife on someone else’s behalf.

The Liberal Democrats advocate putting more people on the street to deal with knife crime, such as Safer Neighbourhood officers and more youth workers.

Commander Mark Simmons, Metropolitan Police

Commander Simmons spoke on behalf of the Metropolitan Police. He said that knife crime is one of the most important issues affecting young people in London. While statistics only present part of the picture, they do show some positive trends.

Violence against the person is falling, and at a higher rate amongst young people than amongst adults. There has been an 8% reduction in young people carrying out serious crimes and a 7% reduction in young people carrying out all types of crime. There has been an 18% reduction in young victims of knife crime; robberies with knives are down 14%. Broadly, half of knife offences involve robbery.

However, the murder rate is very serious. About a third of victims are under 20. This year the Met has taken action against 3300 individuals for knife offences; approximately 40% of these were young people.

The police cannot solve the problem on their own. Since Operation Blunt started, there have been 150,000 searches resulting in 5000 arrests and 2000 knives recovered. They have increased the use of Section 60 searches. Their strategy targets:

“Dangerous places” - the use of stop and search is guided by day-to-day intelligence, for example significant incidents that might lead to reprisals. There is widespread use of screening arches, to which there has been a strongly positive public response. Police have also recovered 300 weapons through neighbourhood weapon sweeps on the basis of local knowledge.

“Dangerous times” – the peak time for knife incidents is 3-6pm; this is linked to young people travelling home from school or college. Educational establishments are key to addressing the challenge. Putting officers in schools can help the police to gain intelligence about potential violence.

“Dangerous people” – 420 people have been identified as the most serious gang members in South London. 150 of these are currently in custody. Some people carry knives to help them to feel safer, others for criminal purposes, others for “respect” or status.

The Met have carried out 600 test purchases and found over 110 illegal sales of knives.

If someone is caught in possession of a knife, police policy is to put them before the court; what happens next is a matter for the court.

Community engagement is very important for stop and search. There is a strong mandate from communities across London, with a caveat around the way in which they are carried out.

Question and Answer

The Chairman asked why younger children are carrying knives and what the solution is. Simon Hughes MP replied that at primary school level, the solution lies in promoting communication within families, and at secondary school level, in peer group mediation schemes.

The Chairman asked if there should there be weapon checks at large entertainment events. Commander Simmons replied that the police work closely with local authorities and venues to ensure they are well managed.

Martin Salter MP asked about the impact of stop and search on relations between the police and the community and how the police balance dealing with those carrying knives for legitimate purposes and those carrying for non-legitimate purposes. Commander Simmons replied that stop and search is an intrusive power and therefore officers have to take care in how they use it. Monitoring of complaints data is very important. The law regarding the carrying of offensive weapons and possession of bladed articles is very clear. Officers assess the nature and size of the weapon and whether there is a reasonable purposes for carrying it.

David Davies MP asked whether the crime trend data provided by Commander Simmons were based on recorded crime or British Crime Survey statistics. Commander Simmons replied that they were based on both, acknowledging there is currently a gap as young people have not been represented in the British Crime Survey.

David Davies MP agreed with Simon Hughes MP that mandatory minimum sentences are not the solution. He asked Mr Hughes whether he agreed that there should be a change in PACE to allow police officers who have stopped someone for a non-arrestable offence to be able to search for weapons upon discovery of a recent conviction for weapon possession. Simon Hughes MP replied that he would be sympathetic to a change in PACE to this effect and had spoken to the Borough Commander in Southwark about this. Simon Hughes MP believed there is a good case for saying that officers should not have to complete the same amount of paperwork if dealing with a known person.

Tom Brake MP noted that young people often urge their parents not to intervene when they have problems with other young people at school; and asked how this barrier could be overcome. Commander Simmons replied that it is important that young people have access to the right support, such as Safer Schools police officers working in conjunction with youth workers.

Open discussion

Carlene Firmin (Race on the Agenda) considered that it was necessary to include the use of rape when considering the kinds of weapons used by gangs.

Dr Marian FitzGerald noted her concerns about the use of section 60 searches (which are only legally allowed to be carried out for a 24 hour period, which can be extended in emergencies), 90% of which produce no results and which predominantly target young black men.

Peter and Milton, Young Ambassadors, The Prince's Trust

Peter said that young people carry knives because of fear – if they are going to an unfamiliar area, they might bump into hostile people; if they are carrying a knife they will feel better equipped. A lot of young people feel the whole world is against them, so they can only rely on themselves for protection.

Milton said that young people do whatever it is they have to do to feel safe and tend to use kitchen knives, often taken from someone else.

Peter said that it is important to persuade all young people that other young people are just like them. This process should start in schools. He also favoured mentoring.

When asked whether he would encourage a young person with a knife to go to the police, Milton replied that he would not as this is “snitching” and a young person would prefer to talk to someone who will understand their situation.

When asked about the underlying causes of youth violence, Peter said that pride has a lot to do with it. Even too much eye contact can result in violence. Milton said that it is part of growing up, trying to prove yourself. Peter said that young people are wild and see themselves as caged – if you cage a wild animal and open the cage, anything can happen.

Open discussion

Hannah Adu-Gyamfi (a youth worker from Haringey) told us that when she asked the young people she works with why they use knives, they answer that they want to “make a mark” on someone. She has found that some fatal stabbings were a “scratching” gone wrong. Almost every one of the young people she works with know someone with some kind of “scratch”. There is a lot going on behind the scenes that we do not know about.

Young people would rather be stopped and searched than murdered. Three 16-year-olds she has spoken to have said that the more that stop and search goes on, the more the fear of being found out increases.

David Gustave (Kid’s Company) said that the focus should not be on the weapon in the hand, but the mind behind the weapon. 83% of the young people they work with are victims of crime, 84% are homeless and 84% have received some kind of trauma in the past year. Kid’s Company has done research about brain development and the fact that damaged young people cannot empathise as a result of their experiences. They do not trust adults.

Fiona Blacke, Chief Executive, National Youth Agency

Fiona Blacke reiterated that it is important to keep things in proportion and remember that most young people are not involved in violence. Most of those who are come from the poorest and most deprived backgrounds. About one-third are likely to be victims of domestic abuse. Young people with a low self-image will turn to gangs of other young people for their support.

Enforcement is critical. In terms of prevention and diversion, it is important to have significant numbers of young people involved in planning, rather than just parachuting in professional ideas.

Youth workers are key to delivery, providing challenging activities to allow young people to develop their identity as well as mentoring and befriending.

The National Youth Agency is supporting 15 areas (including seven in London) with additional funding for youth activities and developing a knowledge bank of what works. Much of the mapping is based on data that is two years out of date. It is important to have a systematic evidence-base of what works. Local groups, supported by the statutory sector, will make a difference and they need sustained funding. There is also a need for better inter-agency working and more youth workers on the street.

She was concerned that police officers are not trained to deal with young people as part of their core training.

Open discussion

Hassan (The Prince’s Trust) asked Peter whether stop and search and prison act as a deterrent to young people. Peter argued that they do not, as a lot of young people are not frightened of going to prison.

Michael Strickland (community radio) argued that the gap between young people and those in authority needs to close. He considered that it makes community work harder when police cite statistics saying that crime is going down. As knife crime becomes more of a social norm, it is easier to ignore. He has friends who are now at university or in good jobs who carried knives when they were younger. Young people need to be allowed to speak out. He trains young people in how to speak. He advocated regional forums with young people that are broadcast.

Florence Emakpose (World of Hope) argued that young people need to be empowered and made to understand that their actions have consequences.

Sean Benson disagreed with the view that young people are like wild animals and said he did not view prison as a holiday. He has been stopped and searched by police, some of whom were “dodgy”; others were fine. In the same way that he does not generalise about police officers, it is important not to generalise about young people. Young black people do not have many role models. Young people do not read books or watch the news and the media have desensitised young people to violence. Young music listen to music every day which is saying ‘make money, sell drugs’. Young black people switch off when talking to middle-class white people. It is important to invest money in activities that young people are interested in.

Kit Malthouse, London Deputy Mayor for Policing

In answer to the question of whether knife crime is going up or down, it is neither going up nor down, but changing. Young people are generally less violent, but a small group are more prone to more extreme violence. It is important to look at specific solutions for specific groups. He feared there is a growing intolerance of young people in society.

The Mayor of London is tackling this issue from two directions:

Policing solutions:

- Operation Blunt, which is stemming the tide but also reassuring communities (parents are accepting of stop and search); and
- Operation Tyrol, which puts more police officers on the transport system under the belief that young people who see a reassuring and calming police presence on their way home will be less likely to offend.

Longer-term prevention:

- Working with the Youth Justice Board to separate those incarcerated for the first-time from repeat offenders to reduce recidivism. There is a 78% reoffending rate for first-time prisoners at Feltham Youth Offending Institution.
- Working with London Councils to target truancy more effectively by taking parents to court. For example, emulating Hillingdon Council who currently hand out half of the total truancy notices for the whole country.

- In recognition of the fact that 73% of children in the care system are will go on to offend, assigning them an individual supervisor who follows them from home to home, school to school and so forth.
- Project Titan - developing self-respect in young people through programmes like Project You, where young people on the cusp of serious offending are referred to uniformed youth organisation such the Scouts and Cadets or sport programmes; for example the Kicks programme has resulted in a reduction in offending.
- Project Oracle – an audit of what works in terms of community projects so that local authorities can target grants towards effective organisations.
- Teenagers do not come from outer space. We need to think carefully about the messages given through out by the media, musicians and employers.

Question and Answer

The Chairman asked the age at which schools should deal with the issue of violence. Kit Malthouse replied that it should start pre-conception with parenting classes. We do not need to educate 3 and 4 year olds about knives per se, but rather about manners and conflict resolution.

Kit Malthouse agreed with David Davies MP that sports groups like Gloves in the Community have a role to play in reducing youth crime. He also considered that there was currently too much focus on entertaining rather than educating young people—formal music education, such as learning musical instruments, was another good form of diversion.

Tom Brake MP asked about school exclusions. Kit Malthouse noted that the push against truancy also includes work on excellence in Pupil Referral Units.

Kit Malthouse did not necessarily agree with Martin Salter MP's view that sentences should be longer, because of the difficulty in achieving much with a deeply troubled young person over 12 weeks, but did agree that there needs to be a support structure in place upon release.

Tom Brake MP welcomed Project Oracle but asked how it will it work and if it will lead to a cut in funding for voluntary groups. In response, Kit Malthouse noted the problems of a lack of sustainable funding and of an evidence base of what works. Under the new system, a borough council would be able to gain a quality mark for a project from City Hall.

Open discussion

Professor Peter Squires (Brighton University) noted the profound inadequacies of data from A&E departments. It is clear from evidence from the Street Weapons Commission's visit to Glasgow that they had some good solutions. However, he was not convinced by suggestions that A&E departments should be mandated to pass data to the police as this could deter victims from seeking treatment.

Evan Jones (St Giles' Trust) noted there is a massive resource in ex-offenders who want to help with prevention work but who are constantly pushing against barriers, such as potential employers.

Fiona Blacke defended the use of informal music education as a vehicle to engage young people; following which they could move towards improving their literacy through formal education.

Annex B: Leeds seminar notes

We held a seminar in Leeds Town Hall on 26 January 2009 to discuss knife crime in the North of England. We heard three presentations and held an open discussion with around 20 representatives from Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. A summary of proceedings is set out below.

Cathy Elliott, Community Foundation for Merseyside

Cathy Elliott presented the work of the Community Foundation for Merseyside. The Foundation was established in 1999 as a registered charity that acts as an intermediary between donors and the community. It works with over 50 donors across all sectors and currently delivers £4.5 million a year in grant-making to around 1,000 community groups. It has 150 local community volunteers.

It provides a community-led response to the issues of street crime, gang culture and supports 'at risk' young people in transforming their lives—essentially a youth crime prevention scheme. It administers a programme of community grants, community leader support, local capacity building and expertise sharing. A cross-sector, multi-agency approach using a community engagement model is more effective because it captures and uses expertise.

It was founded in partnership with Merseyside Police, and is also partnered by the Liverpool Echo and the Tutu Foundation UK, supported by Cherie Booth QC & George Howarth MP and funded by Merseyside Police, the Home Office and local Housing Associations. At a national level, it is partnered by the Community Foundation Network and the Channel 4 Street Weapons Commission.

Its projects include:

PAYES Plus Extra (September '06 – April '07)

- 11 projects were funded at approx. £1,000 each;
- 8,015 young people were engaged;
- 36% of young people involved were deemed 'at risk'.

Operation Safe Space (Summer '07)

- 24 projects were funded at approx. £1,000 each;
- Achieved an 11.3% reduction in anti-social behaviour;
- 2,140 young people were engaged.

Grassroots Activities

- Led by local community leaders working with 'at risk' young people;
- Activities inspired and created by local leaders and young people;

- Supporting and empowering local people finding local solutions.

Achievements

- Creation of support networks – e.g. youth mentoring;
- Creation of new project strategies;
- Self-esteem & confidence building;
- Creation of Training & Employment opportunities.

The Foundation operates across six boroughs in Merseyside, which each have different issues, for example in Liverpool it is gangs; in the Wirral a lack of opportunities for young people. Their funders are mainly from the public sector but they were hoping to secure their first private sector funder that week.

The Young Transformers Programme has demonstrated a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

There are issues around drugs and alcohol and territoriality but also there was nowhere for young people to go, and no community support.

Agencies have worked with the Liverpool Echo to ensure the paper puts across a balanced view of youth crime.

As part of the Tackling Knives Action Plan, the Foundation is working with a youth forum in each of the six boroughs and will be sharing this evidence in March. On 23 March there will be an event in Liverpool where young people will be talking about knife crime.

Question and Answer

In response to a question from Karen Buck MP about dealing with the issue of postcode gangs in providing services for young people, Cathy Elliott replied that they explore meeting up in neutral areas, for example they funded an away day in Yorkshire for young men trying to avoid gangs.

In response to a question from Karen Buck MP about how the Foundation fits in with the extended schools agenda, Cathy Elliott replied that the Foundation does not yet work with extended schools but is keen to have more partners round the table.

Mrs Ann Cryer MP noted that there are two groups of young people in her constituency who are constantly fighting and asked how this might be dealt with. Cathy Elliott noted the findings of the recent Joseph Rowntree report, *Young People and territoriality in British Cities*. The Foundation wants to explore the implications around the finding that feuds are passed down from generation to generation.

In response to the Chairman, Cathy Elliott said that the Foundation has £100,000 for grant-making and costs. It employs 16 members of staff. It received £25,000 in the spring from the Home Office and £15,000 more recently.

Dr Fiona Lecky, Trauma Audit Research Network

For details of the data presented by Dr Lecky, please see her written memorandum published in volume 2 of this Report.

Open discussion session

In response to the Chairman, Dr Lecky said that only a very small minority of victims are injured by intervening to stop a fight. In some cases she has witnessed real intent (particularly with ex-partners). The other big area of injuries (besides domestic violence) is through fracas.

In response to the Chairman's question about data-sharing between hospitals and the police, Dr Lecky said that the policy within the Greater Manchester Police area is that, regardless of the wishes of the patient, hospitals will report incidents to the police where there is a serious threat to life or limb. For more minor cases, they will report all cases in an anonymised fashion (such as where it happened, type of weapon) to enable the police to undertake preventative work in communities. Their fear as doctors is that, if patients think the incident will be reported to the police automatically, this may deter them from seeking medical help.

Fabian Hamilton (MP for Leeds North-East) asked if there is any data to suggest that carrying a knife makes you more likely to be stabbed. Dr Lecky replied that patients often do not give details of incidents and hospitals are not at liberty to do routine searches.

Karen Buck MP asked if the nature of knife crime is changing. Dr Lecky replied that she was surprised at the extent to which kitchen knives were used in incidents, but from her experience of 20 years in A&E it has not changed much otherwise.

In response to Mrs Ann Cryer MP, Dr Lecky said that in the context of fracas, which is not premeditated, injuries tend to be to the arms and legs rather than to the vital organs.

In response to Mrs Ann Cryer MP, Dr Lecky said that glass is only used in 5-10% of cases and she has never personally seen a case of bleeding to death from a glass wound.

In response to Mrs Ann Cryer MP, Dr Lecky said that she would want all cases where there is a severe threat to life or limb to be reported to the police, but not all incidents of knife use, as this could be challenged under current patient confidentiality rules.

Keith Lawrence, Leeds Community Safety, PC Bob Bowman, West Yorkshire Police, and Peter Armstrong, Royal Armouries Museum

Presenters told us about their award-winning Leeds Weapons Awareness Programme. The Programme grew out of a conference held in Leeds in 2004 where 120 people across agencies met to discuss the issue of young people and knives. At the same time, the Leeds Youth Offending Service was looking at weapon prevention and became keen to adapt the Be Safe weapons prevention programme being piloted by the London Borough of Newham to the Leeds context.

The programme is now delivered to all high schools across Leeds. It is believed to be the largest-scale crime prevention programme delivered in the UK.

PC Bob Bowman was one of the first officers to be trained in the programme and he has now trained all of the Leeds school officers and those throughout West Yorkshire. There is close liaison between the police and youth workers to decide which of them is the most appropriate agency to deliver a particular session. They encountered some initial reluctance in schools who feared the training could imply the school had a problem with weapons but now all the secondary heads are on board, which in turn has led to improved working and extension of the Safer Schools Partnership. They have recently increased the number of Safer Schools officers in Leeds from 11 to 22.

The programme affect young people's thought processes about knives and they have seen an increase in young people reporting other young people for carrying knives.

The Royal Armouries is a national museum that holds around 100,000 articles including many weapons. They bring a lot of things to the table as a museum: an element of neutrality as opposed to police or schools; a level of credibility in their role as a trusted disseminator of information (unlike the public perceptions of Government statistics); and through the academics working with them on these issues. Initially the organisation CASAC delivered the Leeds Weapons Awareness Programme but when they began to struggle with funding, the Royal Armouries took it over and funded it themselves.

A lot of other museums are having similar thoughts, for example the Royal Armouries Museum is currently working with the Manchester Imperial War Museum and the Customs and Excise museum.

With the help of the campaigner Pat Regan, they developed 'Impact Reality' as a resource for police to use with young people. Displays in the museum have allowed parents visiting the museum to raise the issue of knife crime with their children.

The Royal Armouries has also launched the 'No to Knives' campaign, which involves running weapon prevention sessions in the museum, training on detecting concealed weapons, working with the youth service on adult training, working with the Youth Offending Service on the Weapon Possession Prevention Programme and are interested in the Safer Schools Partnership.

Question and Answer

In response to a question from the Chairman, we were told that 10,000 young people have signed the No to Knives pledge on the internet and 7,000 have signed on paper. It is currently restricted to Yorkshire. They believed that 20,000 people have completed the Weapons Awareness Programme.

In response to a question from the Chairman, we were told that ethnicity is not a factor in street violence to the same extent in West Yorkshire as in London, but there are occasionally problems with gangs.

Open discussion session

Kate MacDonald (Manchester Youth Offending Service) added that in Manchester there is a difference between the nature of gun crime, which is gang-related, and knife crime, which is not. Gang-related crime tends to involve members of the black community, whereas the

average profile of a knife-offender tends to be a white, working-class male aged 22 or 23, with victims aged around 30.

Assistant Chief Constable David Evans (West Yorkshire Police) told the Committee that the picture is different in West Yorkshire, partly because there are rural as well as urban communities.

Dennis Lewis (Leeds Youth Offending Service) told us that he currently works with seven young knife offenders, six of whom say they were carrying for protection (the other got drunk and used a knife in a fight). Therefore, removing fear is key to tackling knife carrying.

In response to Karen Buck MP's query about the transition from primary to secondary school, PC David Brook (West Yorkshire Police) noted that the rise in knife offences beginning in the mid-1990s appears to coincide with the abolition of the middle-schools tier in West Yorkshire in 1992. In his opinion, 10-12 is the key risk age.

Kate MacDonald noted that it is fascinating to see how much the situation varies from area to area, demonstrating that solutions must be tailored to the local situation.

Phil Hull (No to Knives volunteer) noted that gangs are often formed along area codes, which then escalates to violence. The key age for intervention depends partly on the kind of area – in a “bad” area, by the age of 16 kids will often be already too involved in crime and it is too late to reach them. Mark Cooper (No to Knives) noted that lots of young people witnessed a stabbing in December on an estate in Phil's area – these are the kinds of ‘role models’ these young people have.

ACC David Evans informed the Committee that West Yorkshire Police carried out a survey of 5,000 children, 2% of whom said they carried weapons on a regular basis, but 34% of whom said they were worried about knives—showing the discrepancy between fear and reality. 42% of knife offences in West Yorkshire take place away from the street. ‘Knife-enabled’ crime, such as glassings, are down significantly in West Yorkshire.

Cathy Elliott made a plea to all police forces across the country to get involved in community work.

Yvonne Crowther said that the Cardinal Youth Club have eight young people who will be going into schools to deliver a weapons prevention programme to younger pupils, trained by police officers. They hope to expand it out of Leeds.

Nadine Sargeant (Royal Armouries Museum) noted the need to work with parents.

Mark Cooper told us about the ‘final warning’ programme run at the Royal Armouries for young people. He believed there has been an increase in people carrying weapons because of media coverage of knife crime, but that there is a small core of young people who will always carry knives.

Karen Buck MP said she was surprised at how little work is done with young people on avoiding escalation, such as anger management. Dennis Lewis replied that historically Youth Offending Teams have done little work on prevention but this is changing. Peter Armstrong said that often in the case of kitchen knives, individuals lose their temper, go

home and find a knife, rather than carrying it all the time. Schools have identified that many knife carriers are bullies or are bullied—there is a need for more work on conflict resolution between young people.

The Chairman asked each participant to state one key action they would like to see. The results were as follows:

- Early intervention (Peter Armstrong);
- Viewing each area's problems individually (Nadine Sargeant);
- Better data-recording systems (Keith Lawrence);
- Early intervention (David Brook);
- More youth provision and for younger children (Yvonne Crowther);
- Early intervention and more responsible media reporting (Dr Lecky);
- A multi-agency approach (Cathy Elliott);
- Laws and powers to help prevent knife crime (Phil Hull);
- A recognition that a young person carrying a knife is more likely to be injured, linking with safeguarding children and installing self-esteem through leadership programmes (Kate MacDonald);
- Early intervention and mandatory prison sentences for repeat offenders (Mark Cooper);
- Sustainable funding for programmes (Dennis Lewis);
- More official credibility given to restorative approaches (PC Bob Bowman);
- An acceptance that the factors underpinning knife crime are very complicated and the response must therefore be multi-faceted (ACC David Evans).

Annex C: UNCUT meeting notes

We met with staff from the organisation UNCUT, their partners and around 20 children and young people of primary and secondary school age, including former gang members to discuss their experiences of street violence and solutions.

As part of the meeting we watched a DVD made by UNCUT depicting a fatal stabbing scenario that has been shown in London schools over the last six months.

The work of UNCUT

Sean Simms, UNCUT Project Manager, gave a presentation on the work of the organisation. UNCUT was launched in March 2007 to investigate the motivations behind weapon carrying with the aim of changing the attitudes of 10-18 year olds and delivering a range of preventative initiatives which could then be integrated into mainstream services.

An initial consultation was carried out with over 200 young people in North Westminster with the following results:

- The majority of young people knew someone who carried a knife.
- Many older boys were aware of gang activity.
- Many young people did not feel safe.
- Older girls felt that boys lacked the motivation to do positive activities.
- Older boys were very pessimistic about effecting change in weapon carrying.
- Most felt that the police should do more about knife crime.
- However, the majority would not report incidents to the police or their parents.
- The main motivations for carrying were protection (self-defence), committing robberies and peer pressure.
- Most felt the situation with regard to weapon carrying was getting worse.

UNCUT then held a series of workshops with young people, in which the following suggestions were made as means of discouraging knife carrying:

- Talks with relatives of fatal stab victims;
- Showing videos of stabbings;
- Role plays;
- Visits to criminal trials and A&E departments to witness the consequences;
- Self-defence classes; and
- Group discussions.

UNCUT now carries out the following work:

- School assemblies focused on fatal stabbings;
- Workshops on conflict management, young people and the law, the aftermath of knife crime, and the UNCUT Parents' Programme; and
- One-to-one mentoring.

UNCUT has worked with approximately 1050 young people in total.

The group sessions are an opportunity to engage with young people, to increase awareness and to build their skills in dealing with situations. Following these, a Further Intervention Assessment is carried out, involving parents, and if deemed necessary one-to-one sessions are held to build confidence and change attitudes and behaviour. Referrals are also made to Youth Inclusion and Support Panels, school counsellors and so forth.

Discussion point: Is “the street” becoming more violent?

There was a lot of disagreement about this amongst the young people. The general view was that confrontation between gangs has become more subtle and more personal. Previously there would be confrontations involving lots of people fist-fighting, whereas now there are more knives involved.

Discussion point: The effect of criminal penalties

The young people again took a mixed view. Some argued in favour of awarding tougher sentences to knife carriers to act as a deterrent. Others argued that sentencing is irrelevant, that young people are more worried about the immediate situation they find themselves in rather than fearing longer-term consequences: they feel they have to be aggressive because of the way things are on the street.

The Youth Offending Team is now dealing with more young people serving longer sentences for weapon possession. Sean is training their staff to deliver a different approach which focuses on conflict resolution.

Discussion point: The influence of “elders”

The community “elders” (defined by the young people as typically 19 and 20 year olds) act like parents “out on the road”. They have a huge influence on younger teenagers, who will follow their example, good or bad. If they see them dealing drugs and getting flash cars, they want to emulate that lifestyle. But if they can be a good influence, they can help them avoid temptation. One former-gang member and stab victim described how he tries to help younger kids resist joining gangs, or leave them if they have already joined, by learning from his experiences.

Another boy described how mentoring had helped him to leave a gang when he was worried about retaliation from the older gang members.

Discussion point: The role of parents

The young people explained that no matter what their parents said to them at home, when they're "out on the road" it's different. Their parents don't know what they are up to.

The adults present emphasised the importance of educating parents about the signs of gang membership or criminality, because their children don't tell them what's going on.

Some of the young people argued that a lack of parental discipline is not the issue, as parents from African communities are actually very strict with their children. They love and respect their families. But there are different rules at home and on the street.

Discussion point: Shock tactics as a deterrent

A paramedic described the talks she gives in school assemblies about her experiences of attending stabbings. She plays the CD of a real 999 call, which gets a very emotional reaction, and also educates children about actions to take if they witness a stabbing.

There was a discussion around whether fear of death was a deterrent. The young people explained that the prevailing attitude is often "get money quick because you're going to die young". If you ask some young people where they think they will be in ten years, they will reply "dead or in prison". UNCUT workers argued in favour of more one-to-one work with kids as they will respond differently from when they are in a group and are more likely to admit to aspiration.

The paramedic wondered if it might be a more effective deterrent to emphasise that a stab victim could spend the rest of his or her life paralysed or disabled, to show that there is nothing glamorous about knives.

Discussion point: The transition from primary to secondary school

The adults present argued that targeting awareness-raising at 10 and 11 year olds is important. Primary school aged children are already aware of gang activities.

Primary school children are frightened of being bullied when they go to secondary school. One of the benefits of UNCUT is they bring in older children to talk to primary school children and they give them advice about how to handle the transition and emphasise that knives are not the answer.

Discussion point: Negative portrayals of young people

The young people asked why it is that adults always assume they are going to cause trouble.

They argued for more positive stories in the media about the achievements of young people.

Discussion point: The role of teachers

Young people are advised to tell their teacher if they are being bullied, but they find it difficult to talk to teachers; they only talk to people who they feel comfortable with.

One of the teachers said that it was more effective for UNCUT to intervene with a child than for a teacher.

Young people said that they were more likely to open up to teachers if they took time to see them in their own environment, such as youth centres. Teachers are often surprised to discover that their pupils are in gangs. In return the teachers explained that they need more help with behavioural support to be able to give adequate attention to all pupils.

One young person argued that if you are caught with a knife at school, you are expelled, but no-one helps you to change your attitude.

Discussion point: The need for positive alternatives

The young people explained that there are so many of their peers who want to be in projects like UNCUT but there is not enough space for them.

They also argued for more job opportunities to show that there are alternatives to making money besides dealing drugs; and for more funding for youth clubs.

From their own personal experiences of turning their lives around, they emphasised the need to show young people what they can do with their lives.

Annex D: Bristol seminar notes

We held a seminar in the Trinity Centre, Bristol on 2 March 2009 to discuss knife crime in the South-West of England and Wales. We heard three presentations and held an open discussion with around 25 representatives from Bristol, Devon and Cardiff. A summary of proceedings is set out below.

Dr Iain Brennan, Violence and Society Research Group, Cardiff University

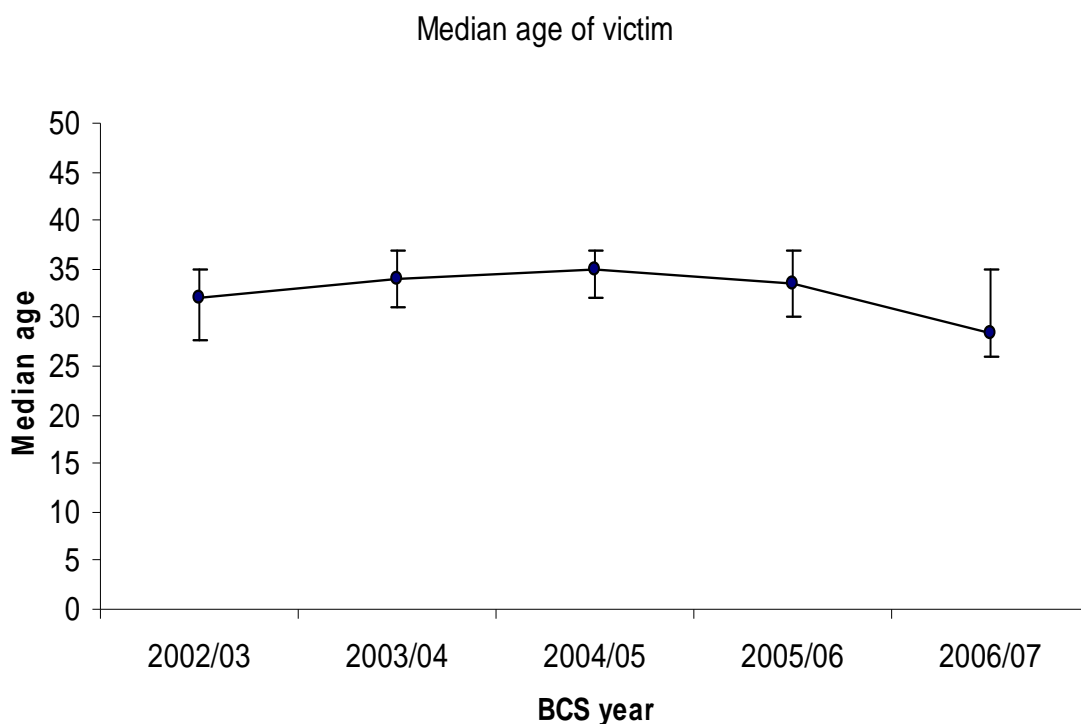
Dr Brennan presented aspects of his research which used data from the British Crime Survey to highlight the nature of knife violence and weapon-carrying. He also presented accident and emergency data to give an indication of the nature of knife violence in Cardiff.

Incidence of knife violence (British Crime Survey 2002/03-2007/08):

- Knife assaults account for 5-7% of total assaults;
- The presence of a knife in an incident does not make injury more likely;
- Regions of highest likelihood of knife use in violence: London; West Midlands (the top ten are London; West Midlands; Eastern; South East; East Midlands; Wales; South West; Yorkshire & Humber; North West; North East);
- Police force of highest likelihood of knife use in violence: West Midlands, Met/City of London (the top five are West Midlands; London; Thames Valley; Hertfordshire; Northumbria).

Victim and offender characteristics:

The median age of victims has decreased in recent years (to around 27):



The key risk factors affecting an individual's likelihood of carrying a weapon are:

- Being male (though females more likely to carry weapons “for self-defence”);
- Being young;
- Having recently been assaulted;
- Having recently been threatened;
- Being the victim of an assault taking place outside of own area.

In addition, the drug-weapon link is very strong in both US and UK studies. In terms of support structures, having family social support protects; but peer social support can be a risk factor.

Attitudes to weapons vary considerably across areas and subcultures and have a contagious effect. Exposure to weapons and violence at younger age increases likelihood of use, and the perception that others are carrying increases an individual's likelihood of carrying. Lack of confidence in Criminal Justice System is also a factor. Weapon use is associated with earlier age of first conviction, aggression and other delinquency traits.

A reputation for irrational violence can be an asset to an individual as it can be helpful in self-defence, in business, in the commission of crime and can protect against prosecution. These factors perpetuate weapon-carrying in a violent subculture.

Many young people have limited ‘scripts’ for resolving disputes (a series of learned actions that are accessed during violent situations and which influence individual behaviour and poor decision-making skills.)

The relationship between fear and weapon-carrying:

- Defence mechanism – constraining exposure to risk;
- Offensive mechanism – poor risk assessment leads to exaggerated and irrational responses to danger;
- Self-defence/fear is the most frequently cited reason for carrying a weapon.

Cardiff Emergency Department findings

- Sharp injuries accounted for ~4% of assault attendances (118 out of 3,836 in 2008);
- Over half of knife assaults took place in the street and very few took place in licensed premises (distribution of knife assaults: street 50%, home 33%, other 14%, licensed premises 2%, work 1%);
- The circumstances of knife violence are relatively similar to those of other violence:
 - Both are more likely to take place at weekends (61% for sharp instruments; 58% for overall violence);
 - Median age is similar (25 for sharp instruments; 24 for overall violence);

- Proportion of male victims is higher with sharp object injuries (84% as opposed to 74%).

Possible conclusions about 'knife crime':

- Is 'knife crime' a useful concept? Many of the characteristics of knife offenders and victims reflect risk factors for general violence and the fear of knife violence is self-perpetuating.
- There is still no robust evidence to support a knife crime 'epidemic' in England and Wales.
- There is an over-emphasis on knives and under-emphasis on youth violence and shifting ages of victims and offenders.
- Are we fixating on the medium (i.e. the knife) and ignoring a wider problem?

Weapon-focused interventions

- Supply-side (reducing the availability of the weapon will decrease its use):
 - Limited success in US interventions;
 - *Some* applicability in UK.
- Demand-side (reducing demand for the weapon will decrease its use):
 - Deterrence - 'Pulling every lever'.
 - Conflict resolution - decision-making and scripts.
 - Safer areas reduce need for self-defence.

Hen Wilkinson, Community Resolve

Hen Wilkinson described the work of her organisation, Community Resolve, in preventing street violence. Community Resolve was formed in response to violent youth clashes in Easton and St Paul's areas of the city. The Bristol Gang Awareness Project employs 12 staff trained in conflict resolution techniques reaching 2-3,000 young people a year throughout Bristol through workshops on dealing with peer pressure, bullying and violence.

Last year funding was made available in Bristol for a project to look at knife and gang issues as they affected 11-14 year olds. The project found that what was missing was work being done with adults. Currently, young people do not feel safe but adults are not being held responsible for this. Adults are very confused about how they should be talking to young people about these issues.

Finland replaced a very punitive approach to youth offending with an approach which penalises responsible adults. This has resulted in a massive reduction in anti-social behaviour.

In Bristol, money has since been diverted into adult training, for which they have received very good feedback. They run parenting courses mirroring the "Strengthening families,

strengthening communities” programme developed in the US. They have also started working closely with the youth offending team around a pack for parents outlining the signs to look for if they suspect their child is involved in a gang—“withdrawn, unhappy, wanting to stay inside, over-anxious, thinking the UK is a terrible place”—and how they should deal with the situation.

Garry Brandrick, Positive Role Model Agency

The Positive Role Model Agency is a community organisation that promotes positive alternatives for young people.

One of their projects is the annual Sharp Shotz Animation Competition, whereby Bristol school children have the chance to work with Aardman Animations and the University of the West of England to produce a short film focusing on the consequences of guns, knives and drugs.

We watched the two YouTube video made by each of the 2007/08 winning groups from Fairfield High School and City Academy, including 10 Seconds, which portrays the realities of knives. All Bristol secondary schools have been encouraged to show the films to their pupils.

Open discussion session

In response to Martin Salter MP, Dr Brennan confirmed that young people are more at risk of carrying a weapon if they do not have strong family support.

In response to the Chairman’s question about the effect of violent video games on committing knife crime, Dr Brennan replied that it is a topic of much debate but Tanya Byron’s recent report noted that for people at the bottom of the cognitive spectrum it could have a negative influence, as they do not recognise the difference between reality and non-reality.

In response to Gary Streeter, Hen Wilkinson replied that some knife use is related to gangs in Bristol although we should be careful of how we define gangs. The recent Joseph Rowntree publication on territorialism noted that Bristol was more complex than some other cities as some of the gang identities relate to geography but some to ethnicity, with people realigning their sympathies according to the situation.

Participants had noticed that the age of young people involved in street violence was going down, as with other forms of behaviour such as drinking alcohol. Primary school children, for example, are far more aware of gang issues than their parents.

Garry Brandrick agreed with Martin Salter MP that there are examples of where groups of young people can be a positive force. He is hoping that his organisation can broaden their apprentice scheme to allow young people to make more use of their creative talents.

All participants opposed mandatory custodial sentences for knife possession. One young man considered they might dissuade some young people from carrying weapons; but it would be unfair to penalise people who carry because they are scared. He also noted that young people grow up surrounded by negative influences, like video games and war.

Patricia Roger noted that many young offenders do not have positive role models at home and her organisation, Right Track, is struggling to provide mentors in the absence of funding.

Superintendent Keith Perkin noted that the evidence from his force (Devon and Cornwall) is that most knife assaults take place in the home; Dr Brennan confirmed that research points to this being the case.

Inspector Graham Fox said that in his opinion Bristol is not doing too badly at dealing with weapon and gang issues. He considered that the word gang has demonised groups of young people. One of the issues with street violence in Bristol concerns the Somali community; he had attended a Somali conference recently and it had been very positive to witness the efforts the community was making to find solutions for themselves.

We heard from a prisoner on day release at the end of his life sentence. In his view, young people are not frightened of committing serious violence because they are not aware of the psychological realities of what happens if you cross that line. If they had witnessed gang leaders who have committed murder breaking down, as he has in prison, it might make them think again. This message needs to be communicated.

Dr Nikki McKenzie, of the University of the West of England, was concerned that organisations are working reactively rather than proactively. She considered that we need to teach young children conflict resolution skills.

Fran Harrison endorsed Dr Brennan's point about young people's "scripts" and the need for better decision-making skills. Her organisation, Fairbridge, encourages young people to identify for themselves what is holding them back and to develop resilience to deal with conflict situations. She considered that the school curriculum is currently too focused on academic rather than life skills.

In response to Gary Streeter MP, she explained that pupils who are excluded or at risk are referred to Fairbridge by their schools or social workers or homeless workers.

Gladys Gibbs, of the Barton Hill Youth Project, noted how important identity is to young people. Creative activities allow young people to express their identity in a positive rather than a negative way and also helps to build their self-esteem.

Martin Salter MP argued that re-offending rates are appalling and asked what society should do with young people who go to prison for the first time. Patricia Roger said she knows people who have re-offended in order to go back to prison because of the structure and sense of belonging it offers them. She argued we need to reconnect young people with their own communities. Fran Harrison argued that it is about taking the best work that happens in youth offender institutions and continuing it on the outside.

Jodie Chidgey and Leanne Nicholls, of Ashfield Youth Offending Institution, noted the need for solutions tailored to individual needs and that there should be an increased emphasis on education and resettlement. Not enough money is spent on work to change offending behaviour.

Some of the young people present noted that young people are not scared of going to prison and that it can help them to move up the “gang chain” afterwards. Prison should do the job of schools, teaching responsibility and good citizenship.

In response to the Chairman’s question about links between knife crime and ethnicity, young people, including representatives from the Somali community, said there are sometimes conflicts between ethnic groups because Bristol is facing the biggest demographic changes in the country and problems relate to social cohesion. Superintendent Perkin argued that gangs and weapons are not linked to race but to youth culture. He was pleased to see the political agenda appeared to have moved on from legislation and sentencing to the issues under discussion today; he did not see a need for further legislation.

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 20 May 2009

Members present:

Rt Hon Keith Vaz, in the Chair

Ms Karen Buck

Martin Salter

Mrs Janet Dean

Mr David Winnick

Draft Report (*Knife Crime*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 61 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 62, read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 63 to 66 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 67 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 68 to 96 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 97 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 98 to 107 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 108 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 109 to 133 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 134 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 135 to 151 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 152 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 153 to 160 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 161 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 162 to 198 read and agreed to.

A paragraph — (*Ms Karen Buck*)— brought up, read the first and second time and inserted. (now paragraph 199).

Paragraph 199 (now Paragraph 200) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 200 (now 201) to 206 (now Paragraph 207) read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to

Annexes read and agreed to

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for placing in the Library and Parliamentary Archives.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 2 June at 10.15 am

Witnesses

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Professor Karim Brohi , Barts Hospital and the London NHS Trust	Ev 7
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Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alf Hitchcock , Association of Chief Police Officers	Ev 12
Assistant Chief Constable Paul Crowther , British Transport Police	Ev 19
Frances Done , and Bob Ashford Youth Justice Board	Ev 22
Tuesday 20 January 2009	
Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan , Strathclyde Police	Ev 29
Ann Oakes-Odger , www.KnifeCrimes.org and Westley's Weapons Awareness Programme, and Ian Levy , Robert Levy Foundation	Ev 34
Tuesday 27 January 2009	
Dr Stella Creasy , Nancy Ibrahim , and James Reid , The Scout Association	Ev 40
Tuesday 24 February 2009	
The Prince's Trust	Ev 45
Frances Cook , Howard League for Penal Reform	Ev 50
Shaun Bailey , MyGeneration	Ev 54
Tuesday 10 March 2009	
11 MILLION	Ev 60
Kirk Dawes , West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Services, Richard Taylor , and Gary Trowsdale , Damilola Trust	Ev 67
Philip Hearne , Paddington Academy	Ev 73
Frances Lawrence , Philip Lawrence Awards, Kane Pierce and Valerie Okoampah , Value Life, 2008 Philip Lawrence Award winners	Ev 76

Tuesday 24 March 2009

Professor Kevin Browne , Nottingham University	Ev 80
Chris Grayling MP , Shadow Home Secretary	Ev 84
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6	Independent Academic Research Studies (ISARS)	Ev 108
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17	Grief Encounter Project	Ev 137
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23	National Youth Agency	Ev 158
24	Dr Marian FitzGerald	Ev 160
25	KnifeCrime.org	Ev 171
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27	Mothers Against Murder and Aggression (MAMAA)	Ev 183, 184
28	Trauma Audit and Research Network	Ev 191

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2008–09

First Report	Monitoring of the UK Border Agency	HC 77 (HC 381)
Second Report	The Police and the Media	HC 75
Third Report	The Work of the Committee 2007–08	HC 76
Fourth Report	Policing Process of Home Office Leaks Inquiry	HC 157
Fifth Report	Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill [HL]	HC 425
Sixth Report	The Trade in Human Beings: Human Trafficking in the UK	HC 23

Session 2007–08

First Report	The Government's Counter-Terrorism Proposals	HC 43
Second Report	Bulgarian and Romanian Accession to the EU: Twelve months on	HC 59
Third Report	Security Industry Authority	HC 144
Fourth Report	Work of the Committee in 2007	HC 226
Fifth Report	A Surveillance Society?	HC 58 (Cm 7449)
Sixth Report	Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence	HC 263 (Cm 7450)
Seventh Report	Policing in the 21st Century	HC 364

Session 2006–07

First Report	Work of the Committee in 2005–06	HC 296
Second Report	Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System	HC 181 (Cm 7217)
Third Report	Justice and Home Affairs Issues at European Union Level	HC 76 (HC 1021)
Fourth Report	Police Funding	HC 553 (HC 1092)

Session 2005–06

First Report	Draft Corporate Manslaughter Bill (First Joint Report with Work and Pensions Committee)	HC 540 (Cm 6755)
Second Report	Draft Sentencing Guideline: Robbery	HC 947
Third Report	Draft Sentencing Guidelines— <i>Overarching Principles: Domestic Violence and Breach of a Protective Order</i>	HC 1231
Fourth Report	Terrorism Detention Powers	HC 910 (Cm 6906)
Fifth Report	Immigration Control	HC 947 (Cm 6910)
Sixth Report	Draft Sentencing Guideline: Sexual Offences Act 2003	HC 1582