

Written evidence submitted by XLP (BY025)

General

1. Are there any prominent trends in the statistics on a) who commits knife crime b) who are the victims of knife crime?

2. Is the Government strategy to combat knife crime doing enough to effectively: a) prevent b) intervene and; c) sentence those committing knife crime d) rehabilitate those cautioned or sentenced for knife crime?

I think the news we see week-in, week-out and the fact that the Youth Select Committee has opened an inquiry suggests not yet.

3. Does the Government's Serious Violence Strategy strike the right balance between preventative and punitive action?

We have always stated (as has Teresa May herself) that we cannot arrest our way out of this situation. Many, if not all, perpetrators are victims of disadvantage, and whilst of course we believe in justice (and protection for wider society), our experience is seeing many offenders more likely to reoffend after having been incarcerated. Our emphasis is on preventative work, and particularly on long-term youth work. We have seen that long-term relationships make a lasting and sustained impact, and it is this consistency of intervention for young people whose lives are not marked by stability or consistency, that makes a difference and leads to real transformation.

4. Is treating knife crime as a public health issue an effective approach?

I believe firmly in a scientific approach, and if a public health approach implies coordination across borough and city boundaries, then this will help. If it refers to the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) approach that has evolved in the US, then I hope it will have similar backing across government departments and a solid theory and evidence-based approach, that utilises front-line insight, direct knowledge of front-line workers and anecdotal data on communities and individuals. The GVI approach was aimed specifically at violence and not general criminality, and I have heard different things about what approach will be used in the 'public health' approach that is to be adopted in London.

5. How is knife crime affecting a) public services b) health services c) schools d) emergency services?

We work in over 50 schools and PRUs and see the impact on young people in terms of fear, trauma, distraction, apathy and a sense of hopelessness – essentially believing things won't change so why bother. Bringing hope and aspiration to those individuals through youth work, mentoring, residential trips away from their areas, building relationships – positive, lasting, trusted relationships – enable young people to believe that things can be different, that they can be different, that their futures can be different, and it is this belief that helps lead to change.

I believe that trauma is an area that has not yet been fully identified and will not be fully felt for years to come, but that certain sections of society will be affected by trauma in a way that will impact their ability to thrive, work, build relationships, and so on, and will further exacerbate any inequality.

6. Is judicial sentencing effective in a) serving as a deterrent and b) preventing reoffending?

I have definitely heard young people speak of their fervent intention not to go back into prison having been released, so it can and does work to prevent reoffending in some instances, but it can also do the opposite and provide an environment that ends up leading to reoffending, and I would think the statistics suggest that is more often the case. David suggested that it is the certainty and swiftness of any sentence that is important, not the severity.

Young people

7. How do differences in young people lives (e.g. geographic location, education, mental health, household income and socioeconomic background) make them more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime?

All those areas listed can and do make young people more vulnerable to knife crime in ways that are too varied to list (psychological, emotional, physical, aspirational, attitudinal, behaviourally, etc.).

8. What motivates young people to carry knives?

Fear; a lack of belief that there is another way; not having had another way modelled; a sense of safety given that there is a likelihood of them finding themselves in a situation where someone else pulls a knife on them.

9. Is fear a motivator for young people who carry knives? What causes this? What can be done to address it?

Certainly.

10. Is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

11. Is there a correlation between young people being excluded, or not getting enough support from, education and involvement in knife crime?

The statistics I have read suggest this, but we do not have sufficiently robust data to make a statement about correlations. Anecdotally, I would say yes, and even just the amount of time available to young people who have been excluded, who do not have the same structure as those in schools, is relevant.

Prevention

12. What could be done to make young people less likely to a) carry knives b) commit knife crime?

Build long-term relationships. Treat young people as individuals (not beneficiaries to be put through a programme, even though at a very high level this is the case); those working on the ground must be fiercely committed to the individual and to their futures, willing to journey through the ups and downs for considerable time. Attitudinal change stems from belief, which requires trust to build.

13. What support is available to identify and help young people at risk of getting involved in knife crime? Is it effective?

14. Are there examples of local initiatives which have worked well to prevent young people being victims or/and perpetrators of knife crime?

XLP has shown this with many young people over the years. As with any preventative work, proving attribution is complicated, but something we are determined to do over the coming years.

15. Are there particular groups of young people who are overlooked by current prevention strategies?

It is likely that the more disadvantage a young person has faced, the more intervention will be needed. As such, projects working with the 'hardest to reach' will likely have less good outcomes than those working with those more likely to respond to an intervention. In a 'cost per outcome' market, there will be a tendency for programmes to work with those less needy in order to demonstrate better outcomes.

Intervention

16. Are there any examples of intervention schemes that have successfully rehabilitated young people who have been cautioned, reprimanded or sentenced due to knife crime, back into the community, education and/or employment?

At XLP, whilst we do not specifically target those who have been cautioned, reprimanded or sentenced due to knife crime, the nature of our work and our target population necessarily includes many such young people, and we continue to encourage many many young people back into education and the community having had brushes with the law of varying degrees. Our Ready to Work project helps 16-24 year olds back into education or employment. Our X-mobile project uses music to that effect, and works predominantly with black males who are in or on the verges of gangs. Our Mentoring project specifically targets those who have been excluded or are on the verge of exclusion and/or in gangs or on the edges of gangs. Our Exclusion Reduction Programme looks to work in schools with those at risk of exclusion. Our bus projects are parked on estates where many young people have been cautioned, reprimanded or sentenced. Our sports and arts projects work with a variety of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In all these projects will be found young people who have been cautioned, reprimanded or sentenced due to knife crime and who are being encouraged and nurtured back into the community, education and/or employment.

I have also seen a number of other organisations doing this to good effect:

Penny Parker and Jo Fellows at StandOut (<http://standout.org.uk/>) do exactly that.

The coaches at Spear (<https://resurgo.org.uk/spear-programme/the-spear-programme/>) do not specifically target those in that category, but by the nature of their target population find themselves helping ex-offenders and those who have been involved in the criminal justice system back into employment and/or education.

Annie Gale of Cook Foods runs their Raw Talent programme

(<https://www.cookfood.net/info/jobs/essential-ingredients/Talent-Programme/>), which does the same.

17. What examples are there for whole community approaches to intervention?

18. Are there any examples of how police and communities have worked together to tackle knife crime?

19. How effective are positive role-models in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity?

Massively – external research shows this, as does all the evidence we have through our explicit mentoring programme and all our youth work, which seeks to build positive, long-term relationships between young people and youth workers or volunteers or mentors.

20. Are the police's stop and search powers effective in promoting safety and/or putting young people off carrying knives?

I have had many conversations around stop and search, and one recurring theme is this: that as a white male from a middle-class background, I can discuss the theory of stop and search, and consider what might be needed for it to be an effective strategy (e.g., trust between police and the community, education, no racial bias, etc.), but I simply cannot know the emotional impact or the feeling of mistrust that communities feel. Discussing it without that input from people who have lived with it in their communities is problematic in terms of making decisions.

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