

Terms of reference Youth Select Committee Inquiry Knife Crime

Background to the inquiry

Over 1.1 million young people declared knife crime their biggest concern in a [UK-wide ballot](#) of young people aged 11 to 18. Research published by the [House of Commons Library](#) in November 2018, stated knife crime, particularly where it affects young people, has been a 'persistent and growing concern' for successive governments.

Since the announcement of the Youth Select Committee's inquiry there has also been several announcements by the Government, such as the introduction of knife crime prevention orders and investment in early intervention projects. The Spring Budget also included an additional £100 million; to pay for additional overtime targeted specifically on knife crime and to fund new Violent Crime Reduction Units to deliver a "wider cross-agency response".

Call for written submissions

The Committee would welcome submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, charities and organisation which directly support offenders and victims of knife crime as well as schools and businesses.

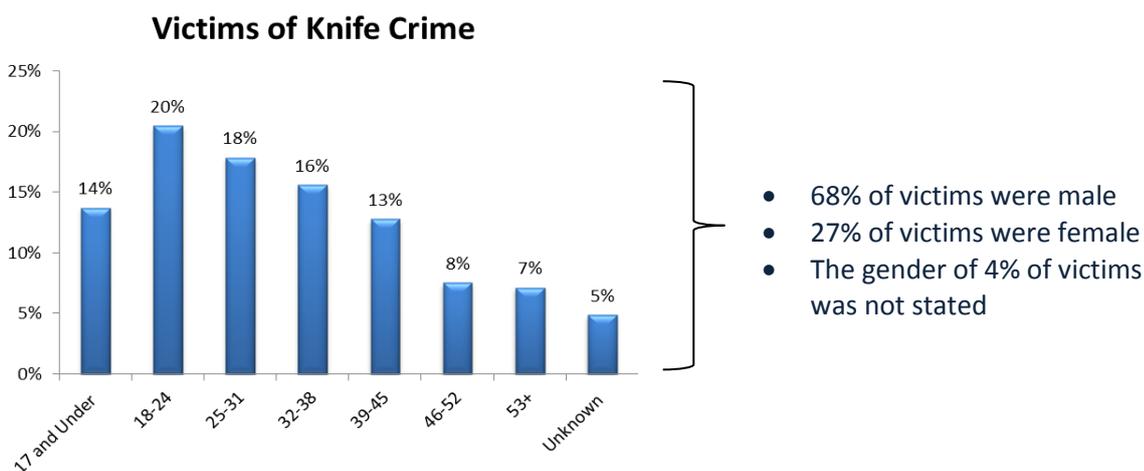
Evidence Submission: The following evidence submission is offered by the Safer Slough Partnership.

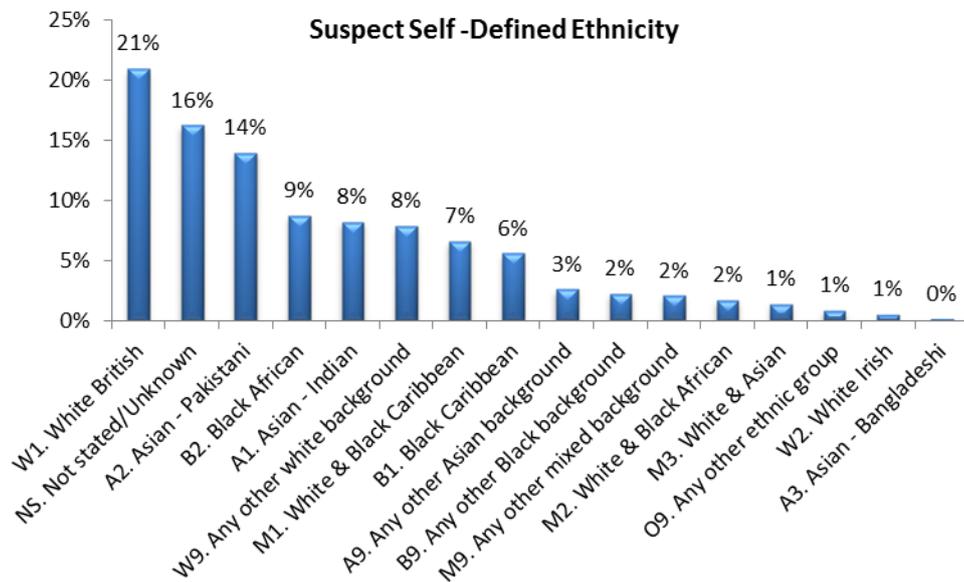
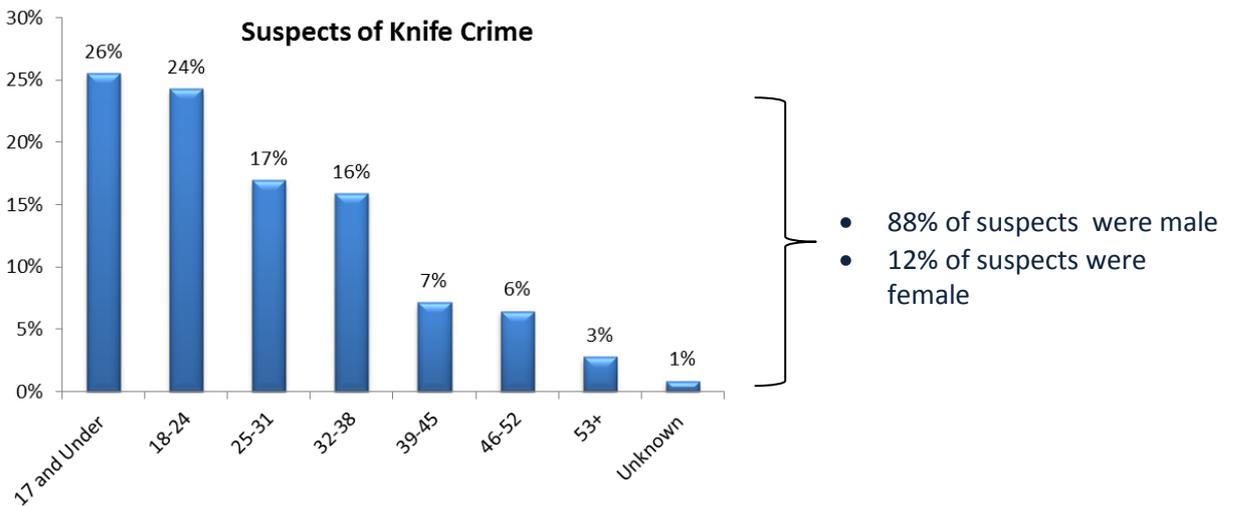
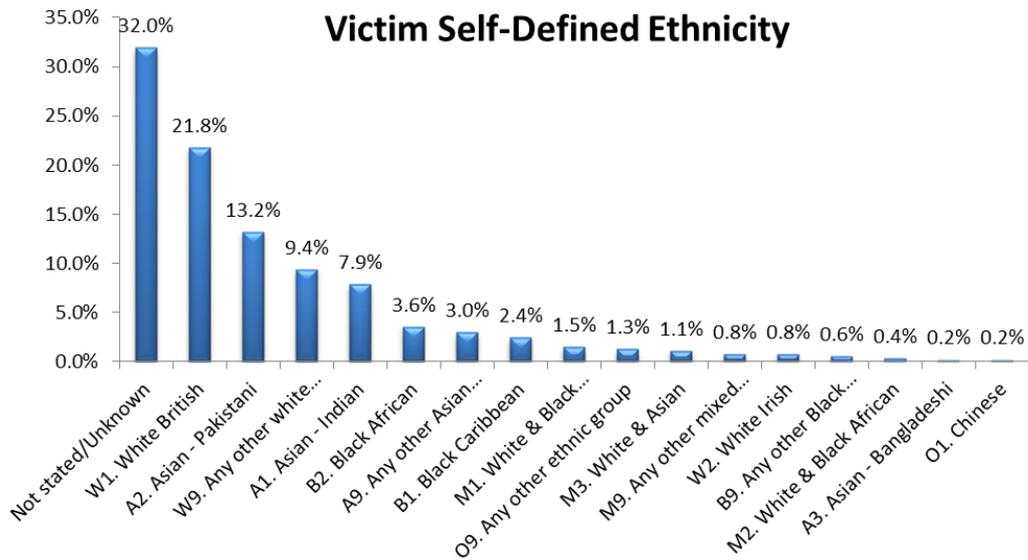
Written evidence is invited on, but not restricted to, the following Terms of Reference:

General

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

Demographic data for valid knife crime offences for the 3 year data period 2016 -2018 inclusive:





- **Please Note:** For a number of offences suspects/offenders were not identified, therefore these figures may represent an underestimate of the true value.
- **Please Note:** The data provided is taken from a Thames Valley Police crime recording system. This is a dynamic system. Additional information identified during the investigation may lead to a reassessment of the crime classification. Information held on the system is also subject to review to ensure compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules for Recording Crime and the National Crime Recording Standard. As a result of this crime levels and classifications may change over time and this data may not match data previously published or data published in the future. For this reason, the data should only be used as an indicator of crime trends.
- **Hidden Problem:** There are likely to be more violent clashes between groups than what is captured within police data, with those involved choosing to deal with it themselves, rather than involve the Police.

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?

- The Safer Slough Partnership has adopted the national Serious Violence Strategy, and created a 1 page summarised version to translate the national plan to a local level, through incorporating a contextual understanding of the problem.
- The evidence based government strategy has provided a national focus, delivering funding and guidance for organisations across the country, with delivery overseen by the governmental task force. However, it is important to note the critical point in relation to effectiveness is how the national strategy is translated and adopted at a local level. Each policing area/local authority area will have adopted different approaches in the implementation the national strategy. Even within individual policing areas, there are varied approaches to the problem, with different commissioned services aiming to address the issue of knife crime, therefore the effectiveness of the strategy is likely to vary from area to area.
- At this point in time the effectiveness of the strategy is difficult to measure locally owing to the new preventative streams of work, and interventions focussed around tackling school exclusions etc., having only just been implemented. The effectiveness of such work will need to be measured over long term scales, and require the coming together of different services to map out an individual's journey, to truly understand and measure the effectiveness of interventions and rehabilitation.

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

- There is a good amount of resources for universal prevention, and intervening early, once the concern is identified. However, it is recognised by practitioners that one of hardest challenges in relation to working with young people at risk of any type of exploitation is ensuring voluntary engagement from both the young person and their parents, where there

are no statutory grounds for engagement. Resistance to engagement limits the ability to intervene for the purposes of prevention and early intervention, such that whilst the service may exist, without engagement the service provision is limited in its effectiveness.

- The Early Intervention Youth Fund (EIYF) which is linked to the strategy only provides short term funding to address serious violence, the consequences of which mean that for those young people heavily involved in violence, intensive engagement is relatively short term, with funding capacity for a small cohort of individuals only. It is feared that the lack of long term support provided by the funding will limit the effectiveness of interventions, particularly those aimed at supporting individuals exiting gangs/youth violence/county lines. Furthermore, the funding secured does not address the true underlying drivers/vulnerability factors which may result in a young person's involvement in serious violence. This could include underlying societal issues, such as poverty, entrenched family criminality, parental substance misuse and domestic violence etc.

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

- The public health model, which looks to prevent violent crime by addressing the causal factors across entire populations, has been linked to large decreases in violent crime in Scotland. However, it is important that the adoption of a public health approach does not overlook the role of enforcement and disruption in helping to prevent violence in the first instance.
- Local policing areas/local authorities will need to identify and scope out what a public health approach would look like in their area, the funding available to deliver upon it, and the evidence base available to support the selection of preventative work streams. Concerns have been raised that the term is brandished around, without a true understanding of what it means and delivers for local areas.
- A public health model would look to address the wider determinants of youth violence and knife crime e.g. ACEs, which requires long term funding; this is not reflected in the EIYF. However, the youth endowment fund, which offers 10 years' worth of funding, should better support this.

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?

- There a number of underlying vulnerability factors which have been recognised in those young people involved in youth violence and knife crime, examples include the following:
 - **Location:** The location a young person lives in will affect access and the level of support services. For example, some areas may offer youth clubs as a preventative measure, whilst others may not, some areas may have high levels of criminality and

established drugs markets and gangs, such that violence and knife crime etc. is normalised for that young person.

- **Education:** Different schools will offer different levels of awareness raising and in-house interventions in relation to knife crime, such that the support offer is not universal across education establishments.
- **Household Income and Socioeconomic Background:** If parents are struggling financially to meet the basic needs of the family, some young people may get involved in county lines/drug dealing etc., as a way of generating income for themselves and their family. Furthermore, involvement in violent crime through drug running could offer an escape from the current situation they find themselves in.
- **Differing Parenting Capacity:** Lack of supervision/lack of parental boundaries/lack of emotional care/poor health/ negative role modelling/ and failure to protect the child from unsafe associates, can all lead to a young person becoming involved in knife crime/gangs etc.

8. What motivates young people to carry knives?

- Fear, reputation, protection, peer pressure, intimidation, and the normalisation of knife carrying.
- Knives are easily accessible from the home, every day shops and online, they are easy to use and conceal. Firearms are more difficult to source and purchase.

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

- From having conducted focus groups with young people in the local area, fear was a suggested motivator for carrying a knife. Knife carrying is like a snowball effect in that, once a young person thinks others are carrying a knife and/or weapon they feel that they need to, as a form of protection. Organisations need to look in partnership at how they can break down the myth of 'everyone carries knives' (a counter narrative); this must be informed by young people, and by those who have carried knives/weapons themselves.

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

- **The Effects of Social Media:** Focus groups held with young people highlighted the negative ways in which social media was being used to heighten the level of tension, aggression, and disagreement between individuals, groups, and gangs; with Instagram and Snapchat described as the platforms of choice. The platforms are being used to organise fights and violence, with recorded footage subsequently broadcasted. Social

media also provided a method of information collection for those not actively involved, such that fear of crime was heightened through the platforms use.

- **The Influence of Drill Music:** Drill music, a form of trap music (trap refers to the locations where drug deals take place) was identified as hugely influential amongst a cohort of young people involved in the focus groups. Drill music is often violent and aggressive, with lyrics describing violent attacks including knife and gun crime, drug dealing, gang culture, and is often extremely derogatory to females. Performers are typically young in age, making the genre relatable. Practitioners feel that signing drill artists is sending out the wrong message to young people; it is normalising the type of violent lifestyle and gang culture it describes, with some feeling it serves almost to indoctrinate. Some of the young people currently involved in youth and gang violence are currently producing their own drill music and/or that akin to it. There are pressures around the persistent narrative of 'will you follow through on what you say in your music?' i.e. if they threaten harm to someone in their music and videos, there can be pressure to follow up on the threat. Some young people felt that drill music and other genres alike, as well as films, had glamorised gangs, inspiring some to join. Further to this, practitioners shared concerns that some young people were replicating behaviour and incidences witnessed in other areas such as Chicago and LA, which experience high levels of homicide, violence, and gang issues.

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

- At a national level we recognise that concerns have been raised in relation to the link between school exclusions and youth violence/knife carrying (Timpson Report, May 2019); this is something as a partnership we are looking into.

Prevention

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

- Address the underlying vulnerability factors which may lead to a young person's involvement in violent crime/knife carrying in the first place.
- Long term funding to support long term provision of support.
- Statutory engagement from parents and young people, for prevention and early intervention work.

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

- There are provisions of support across tiers 1-4, with universal services appearing most predominant. Locally we have elements sitting across the school transition years 5-8 in a PSHE format offered to all but not taken up by all schools. There are also universal positive activities, secondary school assemblies/workshops where requested, and

limited intervention for those known to be already involved. These support raising awareness of risk indicators, consequences and support services to young people themselves.

- To support professionals to be able to identify those at risk we offer free training on child exploitation, modern slavery and gangs for multi-agency audiences. There is also a consistent screening tool for referrers and a multi-agency panel held monthly to ensure we can discuss, plan disruption, share intelligence and risk assess young people to provide the right intervention.
- Some of these mechanisms are effective in their identification for those who are well versed in this field, others are fairly new, and implementation we believe will upskill those who are in key roles, professionals, and the community, to recognise risk and respond appropriately.

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

- The majority of focus in relation to knife crime/gangs etc. is on secondary school aged children; there needs to be a greater focus on awareness raising and support for younger age groups, we are typically having the conversations re: knife crime etc. too late.
- Siblings of those involved should be a key focus of prevention work, however owing to challenges in relation to engagement resistance and the lack of statutory grounds for engagement and intervention, siblings will get missed.