





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

12. Overwhelmingly, young people tell us that they carry weapons for protection and would rather be caught by the police with their weapon (and face the consequences of this) rather than encounter an adversary without it. In essence, young people would rather run the risk of a prison sentence and having a criminal record over the possibility of becoming killed or seriously maimed. In the face of this stark and depressing 'choice', custodial sentences would appear to fail to act as a deterrent. It shines a light on the fact that serious violence is a requires a nuanced and multi-faceted response, much of which lies outside the realm of the criminal justice system.

## 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?

13. In general, young people from more disadvantaged communities and backgrounds are more likely to become vulnerable to knife crime and serious violence both as victims and perpetrators. In our experience there are a number of factors which could be driving this:

- Parents working long hours due to in-work poverty meaning that they are not necessarily able to monitor what their children are doing and the friends they are spending time with.
- Financial constraints meaning that there is no money to pay for out of school and holiday time activities that their more affluent peers may benefit from. Similarly, there are often pressures on young people to have money, the latest clothing and other possessions which can help drive them towards crime and associated violence – particularly that involved in county line exploitation.
- Exclusion from mainstream education (more below)
- Geographical areas can also affect susceptibility and if a young person is growing up in an area where they are surrounded by crime and weapons carrying it can increase the likelihood of them also doing so. For many it is the norm rather than the exception and it takes an exceptionally strong and brave young person to go weapon free in these situations.
- Social media – it is worth highlighting the role of social media in perpetuating a culture of violence and weapons amongst young people.

14. Whilst knife crime still typically affects deprived urban communities, it is worth noting that it is spreading to suburban and rural areas partly due to the increase in county line activity (as mentioned in the first answer).

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

15. Overwhelmingly young people tell us they carry weapons for self-protection. The reality or perception amongst them that their peers are all carrying weapons and likely to use them makes the lives of these young people a frightening place to be. Many have lost their siblings and best





testimonies and really understand the importance of thinking for the long term when making choices.

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

25. See above. The same project we offer this local group works in schools across the UK using the facilitators described above to go into schools to deliver sessions on weapons, drugs, the realities of having a criminal record whilst carrying out one to one work with any young person there are particular concerns about. This project reached over 40,000 young people last year and whilst it is difficult to give data evidence on whether young people have desisted from serious violence as a result of the sessions, feedback from young people and staff tells us that the work is playing an important role in prevention. Feedback also tells us that the use of people with lived experience and real credibility to deliver it is the major reason why.

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

26. Knife crime and serious youth violence are still often wrongly perceived as problems solely affected young black men and a black urban problem. In our experience, it simply reflects the local demographic of the area it is taking place in. Our work in Kent in this area tackling young people exploited through county lines – many of whom were both victims and perpetrators – involved a caseload that was mainly white and suburban/rural. Parents of these young people expressed frustration at the fact the issue was not presented in a necessarily representative way. There is a potential to skew the way services are designed as a result.

27. At the other end of the spectrum, some hard-to-reach communities are often not able to access services and support due to language barriers and similar issues. They require lots of brokerage and proactive work so that they are able to connect and trust mainstream services or possibly have services specifically targeted at these communities. Our peer-led work takes just this approach through using people who are from these communities to offer services and become the bridge to wider ones.

## Intervention

**Q 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?**

28. Alongside preventative work, we also work with young people who are already entrenched in serious violence using our peer-led approach of training and employing people who have 'been there' themselves to offer intensive support to help the young person with both practical and emotional issues which are pushing them towards their offending. These workers are often part of multi-agency partnerships within local authorities so information can be shared and the workers can be passed the cases of young people who have been identified as being at a high level of risk. Our presence offers an independent, credible source of support to the young person and their families who are often reluctant to engage with mainstream services. Having direct personal experience of the issues themselves means our staff have cultural competence with the communities they are working with, are highly motivated and are able to effectively challenge negative thinking and behaviour. The lives of the young people they are helping are usually highly chaotic which means they require round the clock support which we are able to offer them at the most critical times. Last year, the team helped 287 young people in London safely exit lifestyles involving serious violence, gangs and county lines out of an active caseload of over 800. Most of these engaged in education, training and employment opportunities we were able to help them access. Furthermore, we don't give up on young people who may mess up whilst they are working with us – we will continue our support if a young person is sent to custody so we can pick up work with them again upon their release. For those heavily entrenched, it can take number of years to make a sustained change to their lives so there is no 'two strikes and you are out' approach.

**Q 17. What examples are there for whole community approaches to intervention? Q 18. Are there any examples of how police and communities**

**have worked together to tackle knife crime?**

29. Please see second paragraph to answer to question 15.

30. Partnership work is vital to ensure information is shared and that the young person can be worked with in a comprehensive way. No single agency has the answer to such a complex problem. We work within local authority integrated gangs units and are embedded within these teams. Our role is to be an independent presence for young people who may not trust or engage with statutory services. As such we can share information and support safeguarding.

31. Our preventative work described above is carried out in close consultation with the local community. Alongside schools, we carry out this work with parents, young people in out of school settings and also offer training to professionals in agencies such as local authorities and the police using our ex-offender facilitators to help them gain a better understanding and insight into the lives of young people who carry and use weapons and to promote best practice and prevention.

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

32. They are vital but also need to be credible. Young people are often bombarded with celebrity and role models from the world of music and premier league sports. Whilst not a bad thing in itself, most young people will not be able to achieve this or they are based on a 'get rich/achieve fame quick' myth so more credible alternatives need to be available of individuals who are from their communities, have similar backgrounds and are relatable. They can help young people identify realistic goals and help them realise that they need to put time and effort in to achieve them. Many of the facilitators and caseworkers we employ in this area of our work were also former clients. They have been inspired by their former caseworker to follow in their footsteps and train to become able to help other young people, created a positive ripple effect in these communities.

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

33. Stop and search has a place but will not address the problem of knife crime in itself. Inappropriately used it runs the risk of damaging hard won relations between the police and disadvantaged communities and could therefore be counterproductive. If stop and search is used it needs to be based on firm intelligence and police need training in how to carry it out in a way which does not make the individual being searched feel singled out, targeted or violated.

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