Beyond Knife Crime:
Towards A Design-Led Approach to Reducing Youth Violence

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CREDITS

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EXPERIENCE FROM DESIGN IS THAT CO-PRODUCTION, CREATIVE LEARNING AND RELATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AS MIGHT BE ENVISAGED THROUGH SMALL-SCALE YOUTH PROJECTS, HAVE A PROFOUND AND SIGNIFICANT IMPACT, TRANSFORMING LIVES.

ABSTRACT

There is a great deal of alarm about the continued rise in knife crime. A government strategy, a body of research, reams of reports, high-level select committees, and many policy *'think tanks'* have yet to curb the trend. Numbers are rapidly approaching an unprecedented 50,000 reported offences in England and Wales per year and the stakes are high. Knife crime triggers interventions by law enforcement and the courts that incur massive costs for society but with little prospect of benefit in ending the toll on young lives.

This report works through the bewildering knife crime literature, and skims out an overview – a current understanding but with a difference. It's for people involved in *'design against crime'* and social innovation who also want to help policy makers find solutions. We have learned from working in criminal justice that neurodiversity produces intelligence that works better for many when creative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning rather than memorising and recalling facts are given precedence, as Sir Ken Robinson *(2006)* has significantly discussed. Furthermore,there are different ways of understanding the same experience.

Visualising data in creative ways can help us see diversity, and shifts the gaze beyond *'deviance'* and antisocial behaviour. By drawing on a range of sources not just from criminology and sociology but also from health, arts and humanities, this report hopes to surface truths, provide a stimulus for discussion, and make a pragmatic call for action.

Among all of the information, statistical trends, summaries of research across a range of disciplines, critique and commentary, policy and practice, this report notes the interplay of factors associated with inequality. It sees the pernicious impact of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. It comments on how theories of the causes of knife crime have changed over time, how they differ according to the perspective of the observer, and it asks what's missing.

Exploring the data and reviewing the literature highlights discordance between research and practice. This report finds that interventions are not always developed with or even alongside the individuals and communities most affected. Over-reliance on the external agencies of criminal justice especially has unintended consequences which potentially, perversely, increase the likelihood of knife crime. Criminalising young people not directly responsible for the underlying issues creates injustice, and overlooks factors driving their vulnerability and exploitation.

In reaching for answers, this report also finds alignment with the dominant narrative about the positive potential of a public health strategy. The emphasis on a holistic response, identifying opportunities for prevention, resonates with the approach and methods used in social innovation design. It recommends a way forward that shifts the locus of decision making from national to local; it rebalances the accounts by cashing in high-cost, low-value criminal justice actions for youth-led prevention; and it promotes the creative context of community ownership.

INTRODUCTION

Knife crime is brutal and brutalising. It's a definitive, unequivocal act, but writing about it is far from clear cut. Even a superficial look into the issues raises ambiguities: the absurdity of expecting to find simple solutions to complex issues; the inertia that's left when cross-government policy makers reach consensus yet are unable to deliver joint working; the disparity between the hopes and expectations of communities and the heavy hand of government. Unintended consequences litter the floor.

Written by a public health consultant with an interest in arts, health and justice and a professor of Design *(a director of the Design against Crime Research Centre)*, the thinking and interpretation in this report are heavily influenced by a collaboration with colleagues involved in the delivery of *'socially responsive design' (Gamman and Thorpe, 2016)* and *'social innovation design' (Manzini, 2015)* – new approaches for making a difference to strategic social and policy issues through designing for the public good.

The main aim of this report is to stimulate debate and discussion about youth violence and how to find solutions. It starts with a conventional root, looking at statistical trends and reviewing evidence from research in criminology, sociology and public health. But then, adding in more evidence about the impact of the arts and design and through a unique focus on creativity, it is able to look at the multiple levels at which knife crime operates. Given the complexity of the issue an interplay of interventions is likely to be needed to create a cultural context for finding lasting solutions.

A design framework, thinking about the cognitive, strategic and practical processes by which new structures or services are built, assists thinking about how it might be possible to reframe the knife crime narrative building a relational focus *(Brown, 2010)* into the account. The approach also considers the contribution of key art and design interventions in supporting a change process. This could operate in a similar way to how Buchanan *(2020)* has assessed the value of '*strategic design initiatives*', in particular those described as policy and civic interventions.

Over the last fifteen years such strategic design initiatives have become much more commonplace, as discussed in different ways by Bason, *(2010),* Junginger *(2013),* Staszowski, Sypek and Junginger *(2014),* Binder et al *(2015),* Sangiorgi and Prendiville *(2017),* Savage and Burrows *(2007),* Kimbell and Bailey *(2017),* Buchanan, Amatullo and Staszowski *(2019)* and Buchanan *(2020).* It is true, however, that such strategic design scenarios are not widely understood by non-designers *(Mulgan, 2014).* They may nevertheless share a human-centred approach to social innovation and seek new ways to reach into and connect with communities in order to bring about transformational change.

> Experience from design is that co-production, creative learning and relational engagement as might be envisaged through small-scale youth projects, have a profound and significant impact, transforming lives.[1]

A theoretical understanding of the potential for arts or design initiated youth projects to meet public health targets raises questions for empirical research about what key steps contribute to the effect and how to optimise the benefits. Our contention is that a collaborative approach setting interventions within the framework of our combined thinking may help to overcome the label of *'diversionary'* often attributed to these kinds of interventions.

We recognise that data visualisation and other design techniques have the potential to deepen understanding of the relationship between knife crime and young people. Such understanding may also shed light on why, with so many high-level and government

1. *https://www.bac.org.uk/content_category/3381/young_people__learning/the_agency_1525*

2. Overall, 53% of *(2,029)* prisoners at Chelmsford were diagnosed as having dyslexia, compared to 10% of the UK population (*Hewitt-Mann 2012*) an important indication of the need to address different learning styles.

bodies advocating investment to address the issues, top-down anti-youth violence initiatives are not having the impact intended.

Trends in knife crime are described using statistical data from official sources, looking at demographics where available and changes in activity, mainly over the last decade from 2011 when reliable comparative data was first made available by the Office for National Statistics *(ONS).* Research literature from criminology and sociology is reviewed over a similar time period, though some reference points, for example those looking at changes in the theoretical understanding of knife crime, take us further back. Information is also included on interventions designed to prevent or ameliorate the impact of knife crime. There is little convincing comparative work, so this is confined mainly to studies showing promise or included in the government strategy for preventing knife crime.

Evidence is considered also from evaluations of arts interventions. They provide an important though as yet under-explored contribution to understanding the causes of knife crime *(Froggett, Kelly and Manley, 2018).* Studies of the impact of arts on people affected by the criminal justice system identify the complex origins of crime and the many ways in which interventions are needed that can address neurodiversity.[2]

For many individuals, the arts have enabled a transformative impact. Participants can explore identity, and re-imagine a different future. For designers, these insights raise questions about the role of empathy, the meaning of culture and what the humanities might have to offer in both understanding knife crime and preventing it.

This is a report that brings forward short reviews of a wide range of literature. It's not a systematic review of specific issues and no new primary research is intended or offered. Discussion will, hopefully, identify gaps in knowledge, raising questions for research and development. Data trends on knife crime and summaries of research are set out below, with a full bibliography of sources in Appendix 1. A legal definition of knife crime is encapsulated in Appendix 2, '*The current state of the law*'. It is important to note that national statistics count *'knives'* with *'other sharp instruments' (such as broken bottles).*

A discussion/summary picks up key themes arising from the review, with a recommendation that adding a design lens to the consensus around the need for a public health response brings a stronger

and more holistic focus on prevention. Building ownership among all those involved through co-production, a central tenet of design practice, offers a structured approach to finding lasting solutions for individuals, families and communities.

DATA ON REPORTED CRIME AND SENTENCING PRACTICE

THE NUMBERS AND RATE OF VIOLENT CRIME ARE UNDER-REPORTED IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS.

Before reading the statistical information set out below, it is important to note that the data are expected to under-report for a number of reasons. First, they are not based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales, the usual measure of crime in England and Wales. The survey measures the amount of crime experienced by adults aged over 16 living in private households in England and Wales. It provides an understanding of personal experiences of crime and, because of including crimes not reported to the police, is seen as an important accompaniment to police records.

Secondly, though *'police-reported crime'* is considered a more reliable measure of violent crime, not all crime is reported to the police and the data has for many years been unable to include crimes committed in the Greater Manchester Police area. Police-recorded knife or sharp instrument offences data are submitted via a special collection. The ONS now publishes this series from 2011, as the earliest date for comparable data collection going forward.

THE RATE OF DECREASE IN VIOLENT CRIME HAS FLATTENED OUT AND THE USE OF KNIVES IS RISING.

There have been long-term reductions in police-reported violent crime, though trends started to flatten in the early 2000s with little change in recent years. Against this background knife crime *(with a knife or sharp instrument)* has risen, reaching an

unprecedented high of 45,627 offences in England and Wales in the year ending December 2019 *(excluding Greater Manchester)*. This is a 50% increase since 2011 and the highest number on record *(ONS, 2019b)*. Using estimates from a House of Commons briefing paper *(Allen et al, 2019)*, including the Greater Manchester Police area may increase this total to around 48,000.

Over this time period there has been an increase in all categories of crime involving a knife or sharp instrument, including a more than doubling of 'intent to kill' with a knife and increases in the use of knives for sexual assault *(87%)* and rape *(116%) (Elkin, 2019)*. This trend in serious violence is driven partly by homicides, up 39% since 2014/15, where the victim is primarily male, under 35 and killed with a knife or sharp instrument *(used in 58% of these cases)*. Where the victim was male, he and the suspect were most usually strangers and the incident occurred in a public place. At least 50% of the increase in homicides over this period involved a drug-related motive where the victim or suspect was a known dealer or user *(ONS, 2019c)*.

Knives are the most commonly used deadly weapon…

In the year ending March 2018, out of 850 homicides *(defined as murder, manslaughter, corporate manslaughter and infanticide)* 285 *(34%)* involved a knife *(or sharp instrument, including broken bottles)*. Knives and sharps were the most frequent weapon used.

…but the number of deaths due to knife crime is falling.

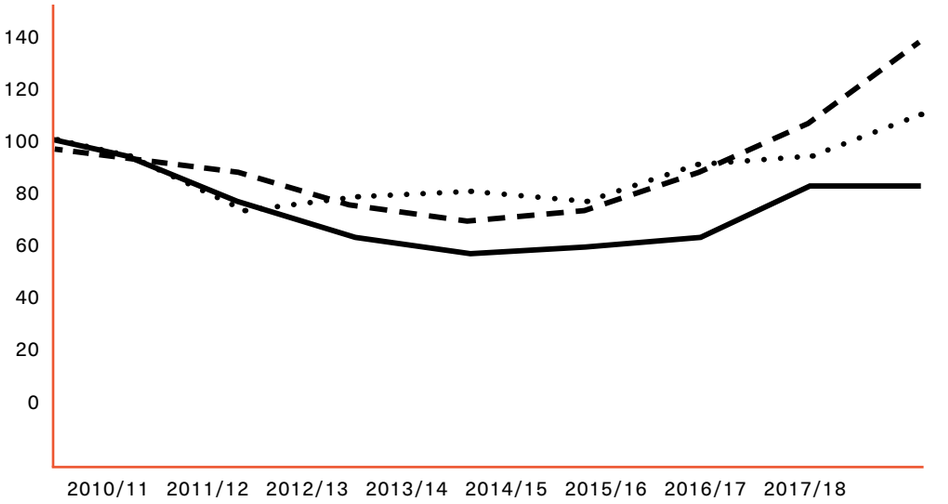
In the year to September 2019 the number of deaths due to knife crime fell. This was mostly because of a decrease in London where the Metropolitan Police Service recorded an 18% reduction to 71 killings from 87 in 2018/19, still far higher than the 56 deaths recorded in 2016/17. Figures in other police force areas showed little change.

THE INCREASE IN KNIFE CRIME IS FELT IN THE NHS.

A similar trend over this period is found in a survey of NHS admissions data, estimating a 41% increase in episodes involving assaults with a sharp object in 2018/19 compared with 2014/15, against a fall in reasons for admissions due to violence in general

SERIOUS VIOLENCE TRENDS IN ENGLAND & WALES

(NATIONAL INCREASE IN SERIOUS VIOLENCE.)



(Sivarajasingam, Page et al, 2019). The admissions are mostly emergencies, but the data excludes those who were discharged directly from A&E; less than 5% were women or girls.

ROBBERIES INVOLVING KNIVES SEEM TO BE DRIVING THE INCREASE IN KNIFE CRIME.

The assault categories *'with injury'* i.e *'with intent to cause serious harm'* and *'robbery'* account for the highest proportion of knife crime offences, comprising 19,455 *(46.5%)* and 18,043 *(43.1%)* of the total in 2018/19. *'Intent to kill'* is the next highest category, constituting 7.3% of the total. There has been a steady increase in each of these categories since 2010/11. The rise in robbery with a knife aligns most closely with the overall trend.

The highest numbers and rates of offences involving knives or sharp instruments are in London, but marked increases in some police forces outside London may indicate a shift in regional patterns of criminal activity, heralding *'county lines'* activity.

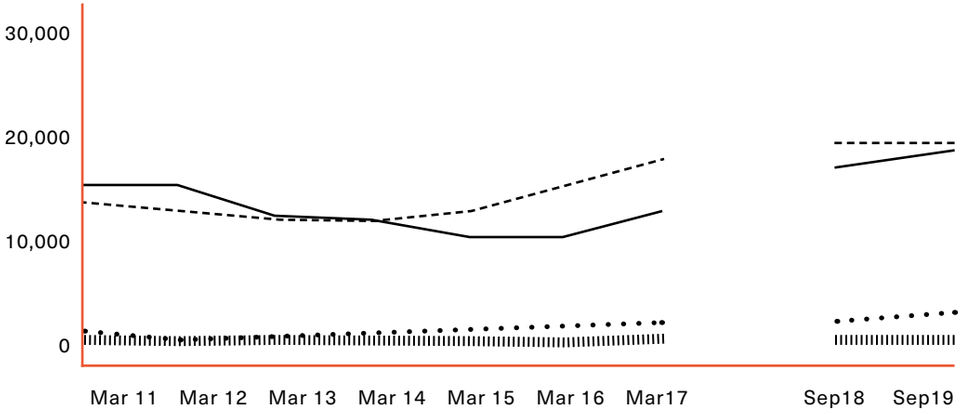
Urban police forces tend to record higher levels of crime involving knives than more rural ones. In 2018/19, London's Metropolitan Police Service recorded 14,800, the highest number of offences involving knives or sharp instruments – a rate of 169 offences per 100,000 population. By contrast, Gwent Police in Wales recorded the lowest, at 24 offences per 100,000 population.

Three police forces close to London have however seen large percentage increases in the number of offences involving knives or sharp instruments in recent years compared with 2010/11: Surrey, from 6 per 100,000 population in 2010/11 to 39 in 2018/19, a rise of 584%; Sussex, from 22 offences per 100,000 population in 2010/11 to 58 in 2018/19, up by 171%; and Kent, from 20 per 100,000 population in 2010/11 to 52 in 2018/19, an increase of 161%. The smallest proportional increase of 4% was recorded in London *(from 163 offences per 100,000 population in 2010/11 to 169 in 2018)*. West Yorkshire decreased by 8% over this time period and West Midlands increased by 17% *(ONS, 2019a)*.

3. The data covers offences involving the use of a knife or sharp instrument and reports on serious violent offences thought most likely to involve the use of knives. This includes homicide, rape and sexual assault, threats to kill, attempted murder, grievous bodily harm *(GBH),* actual bodily harm *(ABH),* robbery of business property and robbery of personal property.

RISING TREND IN CRIMES INVOLVING KNIVES OR SHARP INSTRUMENTS DRIVEN BY INCREASE IN ROBBERIES

ENGLAND AND WALES, YEAR ENDING MARCH 2011 TO YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 2019



Source: Home Office – Police Recorded Crime

OVER A THIRD OF ALL KNIFE CRIME IN ENGLAND AND WALES IS IN LONDON.

For every 100,000 people there are 169 knife related incidents in London compared with comparable metropolitan areas of 129 and 118 per 100,000 in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. The average for England and Wales, at 80 per 100,000, is less than half the rate in London.

In the most recent data *(2018/19),* Westminster reported 985 knife or sharp instrument offences, the highest number of any London borough *(the borough figures are reported as numbers not rates).* This is a rise from 650 in 2017/18. The next highest are Southwark *(777),* Haringey *(764),* Newham *(696),* Brent *(680)* and Tower Hamlets *(667).* Southwark experienced the highest number of knife crime offences with injury *(239),* followed by Tower Hamlets *(221).* The London boroughs of Sutton *(148),* Kingston *(157)* and Richmond upon Thames *(157)* have the lowest levels of knife crime overall *(Allen et al, 2019).* Newham has the highest relative death rate from knife crime, a fact that police link to having a higher population of young people compared with other London boroughs.

Stop and search influences the data on knife crime. *(ONS, 2019)*

Police-recorded *'possession of an article with a blade or point'* offences rose by 17% over the previous year to 21,563 offences in September 2019. These trends are influenced by a rise in targeted police action, such as stop and search, which usually kicks in following rises in offences involving knives.

Young men are both significant perpetrators and victims of knife crime.

Evidence of the increasing involvement of young people, mainly men and boys, in knife crime comes from a number of sources. Sentencing data shows that the perpetrators of knife crime are mostly young men; NHS data finds that they are also the main victims of knife crime. Admissions of young victims for *'assault by a sharp object'* have increased over the last five years. In 2018/19, only 8% were young women; almost 60% were under 30 and just under 25% were young men aged 10–19 *(Sivarajasingam, Page et al, 2019).*

Data for homicides in England and Wales reveals that 25% of the 285 deaths due to knives were of young men aged between 18 and 24, and 16% were boys under 16. Of these, a quarter were killed by friends or acquaintances and a quarter by a stranger *(ONS, 2019).* Suspects are mainly young men aged 16–24. The Murder in Britain study *(Shaw, Tunstall and Dorling, 2005)* showed that out of 786 men convicted of homicide, 73% were known as persistent offenders; many had a cluster of risk factors. A fifth, who began offending before the age of 13, had the most chaotic backgrounds, 30% had been physically abused, 17% sexually abused and 45% had been taken into care before the age of 16.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales *(ONS, 2019b)* asks children aged 10–15 about their experience of crime. In 2018/19, 6.5% reported that they knew someone who carried a knife.

At King's College Hospital in London, the busiest day for young knife victims is Saturday; but on an average day *'you get a big peak after school',* says A&E consultant Emer Sutherland.

> 'And then a big peak about 9.30pm before they go home. For the older boys, it could be any time day or night. We get kids getting stabbed on the way to school' (Younge, 2018).

Drawing on Freedom of Information requests to put together a detailed review of the deaths of children and young people (*under 20)* from stabbings in England and Wales in 2017, Gary Younge for The Guardian reported that the average age of victims was 16 and that of perpetrators, 19. A third of perpetrators were under 18. The youngest, 14-year-old friends, had met and had an argument with their victim online, the day before they stabbed him *(Younge, 2018).*

The Children's Commissioner estimates that 27,000 children in England and Wales identify as gang members, and 2,000 teenagers from London alone have links to distribution of illicit drugs in so called *'county lines'* drugs activity *(Children's Commissioner et al, 2019).*

CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS HAVE LESS SUPPORT FINANCIALLY, SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.

THE PRECIPITOUS RISE IN KNIFE CRIME, IS ASSOCIATED WITH ALARMING TRENDS IN A NUMBER OF SOCIAL INDICATORS

FIRST THERE HAS BEEN AN UNPRECEDENTED INCREASE IN SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS AND CUTS IN YOUTH SERVICES

School exclusions, including exclusions from pupil referral units, have been rising since 2012/13 and are highest in areas of greatest deprivation *(Department for Education, 2019)*. A third of local authorities have seen a decline of 80% in youth services and almost all have implemented cuts in funding by at least 50% over the last decade *(YMCA, 2018)*.

Since 2010, resources have been channelled away from young people in many ways. In 2011, the government scrapped the £30-a-week education maintenance allowance for low-income students in school or college. Between 2010 and 2014, education funding for 16–19 year olds fell by 14% in real terms. More recently there have been severe cuts to urban schools *(APPG, 2019)*.

NHS cuts have made child and adolescent mental health services more difficult to access *(Young Minds, 2018)*. Children and teenagers have less support financially, socially and emotionally. They have fewer places to go and fewer things to do, and less professional adult supervision outside school and home.

The story continues with a look at use of drugs by young people, starting with the upward trend in recreational drug use.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales *(2018/19)* is used to estimate long-term trends in recreational drug use and provides useful information about types of drugs in circulation and the sectors of the population involved. It is insensitive to problematic drug use, not least because it doesn't include homeless people or people living in institutions, including prisons.

The survey does however continue to demonstrate that young people are far more likely to use drugs than older people. Showing what looks like a flattening, or a reversal in the downward trend of illicit drug use in the previous decade, there has been a genuine rise in Class A drug use among young people aged 16–24.

This trend may be picking up negative effects from issues relating to the 2008 financial crash. It's also heralding the impact to come from a concoction of powerful social factors: poverty; malign behaviours in criminal gangs; and policy constraints leading to reduced investment in services for young people.

About one in five young people aged 16–24 used drugs in 2018/19 compared with one in nine older adults *(25–54);* frequency of use is about twice as high in the younger age groups. Cannabis is the most frequently used drug, with about a third of those using it, aged 16–24, classed as frequent users *(more than once a month).* Almost 8% of 11–15 year olds also report cannabis use in the last year. Like all other drugs, cannabis use is down from levels seen in the late 1990s and early 2000s; it peaked at 28% of 16–24 year olds using in 1998, reducing to just under 17% in 2018/19. There has also been a long-term downward trend in the use of powder cocaine and ecstasy, though there is some evidence of a reversal in this since 2011. Use is still far lower than for other recreational drugs.

Young men are twice as likely to use any drug than young women. Factors predicting positive association in use are: younger age *(under 25),* male sex, single marital status, and relatively high levels of alcohol consumption.

Data on the problematic use of drugs is the missing link between young people and knife crime. It explains how the insidious nature of drug markets has fuelled the rise in knife crime.

The insidious relationship between drug markets, knives and young people comes to the surface in official statistics at or around

the beginning of the 2010s, with a high proportion of children and young people under 20 *(28%)* being sentenced for drug possession and supply *(Black, 2020)*. In recent figures more than a third *(36%)* of those sentenced for offences relating to crack cocaine were under 20.

There are similar trends for cannabis and heroin with the proportion of young people involved also rising steadily. Data from eleven police force areas in the UK corroborate these findings, with all showing an increase in arrests of children for drug possession over this period, especially those under 17. Young people involved in drugs are likely to be more violent than those involved in other types of crime. There has been an increase in stabbings and weapon carrying among young people involved in the supply of drugs.

Racial bias is a significant issue. It highlights the arbitrary nature of the system and the need for reform. Victims of crime are more likely to be from a Black and minority ethnic *(BAME)* group than from a White ethnic group yet people from BAME groups are more likely to be arrested and convicted of crimes.

The Office for National Statistics publishes tables and infographics on race and the criminal justice system. The data presents numbers rather than rates. The stop and search figures for London show that an equal number of *'White'* and *'Black'* people are stopped *(Home Office, 2005)*. The 2011 census *(the most recent)* shows that there are more *'White'* people than *'Black'* people in London by a ratio of about 4:1 *(White, 2012);* about 60% of the population of adults in London were from a *'White'* ethnic group compared with 13% of people in a *'Black'* ethnic group, suggesting that stop and search activity is biased against *'Black'* people.

Picking up on the need to analyse census data alongside data from the criminal justice system, a report authored by David Lammy MP and statisticians from the Home Office *(Shepherd, 2017)* found significant over-representation of people from BAME groups, with some groups heavily discriminated against.

Lammy notes that across England and Wales, people from minority ethnic communities are breaking through barriers. More students from BAME backgrounds are achieving in school and going to university, yet the criminal justice system is *'bucking the trend'*.

The report concludes that there is systemic racial discrimination across the criminal justice system, especially towards young Black men:

- BAME people represent 14% of the population, yet the proportion of BAME young people in custody rose from 25% to 41% between 2006 and 2016, despite the overall number of young offenders falling to a record low.
- Black people represent 3% of the population in England and Wales, yet 20% of children in custody are Black.
- The rate of Black defendants pleading not guilty in crown courts in England and Wales between 2006 and 2014 was 41%, compared to 31% of White defendants. This means they lose the possibility of reduced sentences and it raises questions about trust in the system.
- The BAME proportion of young people sentenced for the first time rose from 11% in 2006 to 19% a decade later.
- Black people are significantly more likely to be subject to '*Stop and Search*' than White people, especially in London.
- Black people serve a greater proportion *(70%)* of their sentences in custody than any other ethnic group *(White 63%, Asian 62%, mixed 64%, Chinese 66%)*.
- Crown court BAME defendants are more likely than White defendants to receive prison sentences for drug offences, including when factors such as past convictions are taken into account.

The report concludes that there is no evidence-based relationship between race and crime. There *is* evidence of stereotyping and racial harassment, and of poor decision making in a system that has been far too slow to react to injustice, entrenching disproportionality.

UNCOVERING THE STORY BEHIND THE DATA: RESEARCH, THEORY AND PRACTICE

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH OFFER A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR WHY VIOLENCE HAPPENS, HOW FORCES INTERACT.

Family contexts such as poor socio-economic conditions, strain, lack of caregiver warmth and parental violence figure prominently in criminological theories about knife crime *(Farrington, Gaffney and Ttofi, 2017),* but reviews suggest that these may only come into play when there is also adversity or vulnerability from another cause *(Derzon, 2010)*. Links can now be evidenced between the stifling effects of poverty and social exclusion and the psychological and neurological impact of traumatic events, such as adverse events in childhood *(Bellis et al, 2014)*.

A CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF KNIFE CRIME OVER TIME IS DESCRIBED BY CRIMINOLOGISTS, SOCIOLOGISTS AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS.

Research identifies a change in the nature of knife crime over time, a complex legacy that builds understanding of contributory circumstances. There is a periodicity of emergence and re-emergence where changing social conditions and behaviours shed light on the causes of youth violence and how these link into or fail to properly inform the policy response *(Oldfield et al, 2009)*. Literature from the 1990s often focuses on environment and specific motivational paradigms. Fear is generated as the lived experience of young people in relation to levels of inequality, disaffection and disadvantage.

The effects hold either individually or for groups and can contribute to peer bonding *(Silvestri et al, 2009)*. This leads to the suggestion that random crimes are committed by those *'marginalised'*, as a way of navigating street life. Knives are used for protection but with the end result being aggression *(Harding, 2020, citing Lemos and Crane (2004))*.

Following a wave of violence in the early 2000s, tropes associated with aggressive masculinity, 'men fighting' and postcode territoriality become prescient, including as a result of emerging illegal drug markets. Carrying a knife becomes symbolic *(Palasinski and Riggs, 2012)*, a way of generating respect *(Shepherd and Brennan, 2008)*, and demonstrates a lack of trust in the police, especially in under-policed areas *(Brennan, 2018)*.

More recently, detailed qualitative research with people involved in gangs or serving prison sentences for violent crimes has surfaced a culture that has moved beyond defensiveness, carrying knives for self-protection, to a situation where in some places not carrying a knife is deemed weak or *'moist' (Harding, 2020)*. Gangs, driven by the profit motive of illicit drug markets, are responsible for a major part of this current wave of violent crime. Researchers suggest that they are increasingly vicious and alarmingly well organised They question the extent to which gangs' mode of working and influence is properly informing the policy response *(Densley and Stevens, 2014)*.

The brew of neglect, vulnerability and malicious pursuit of profit that characterises gangs, illicit drug markets, knives and young people comes to the surface in official statistics at or around the beginning of the 2010s *(Black, 2020)*. Social determinants such as relative inequality, deprivation and low opportunity entice young people seeking status or money or excitement into gangs – or, if not, into carrying knives for fear of attack *(Grimshaw and Ford, 2018)*.

Some researchers believe that young people are not usually business-minded or motivated by profit, but may be flattered by opportunities for improving image and reputation *(Andell, 2019)*. Others explore the notion that capitalism has influenced all parts of society and that for young people with a lifetime experience of alienation and marginalisation the profits from gang membership offer a true lifestyle choice *(Whittaker et al, 2020)*. Noting agency in this context, these authors debate the notion of victimisation for some gang affiliated young people. For some people in some neighbourhoods, a violent lifestyle may be a positive choice. Compelling new

evidence is strengthening understanding about the range of conditions that might need to be in play to create the environment for this *(Holligan, 2015)*.

> Violence arises from a range of factors that are 'locked in battle'; the causes of crime are complex, no single factor determines a bad outcome, it's a collective achievement. (Holligan, 2015)

For Latour *(2005)*, the world of the neighbourhood can be supportive, forming, redemptive, but these features are never static and can be fragile. Issues such as social adversity and disorder reduce social cohesion in neighbourhoods, eroding the collective capacity of communities to challenge antisocial behaviour. Latour characterises the range of factors in neighbourhood as *'actants'* battling in trials of strength where family and community play a major role. Coining *'Actor Network Theory'*, he suggests that a number of single factors associated with violence can be shaped into multi-faceted, dynamic *'ontological forces'*.

For Ray *(2016)*, violence is induced by shame, humiliation and cultures of masculine honour, conditions that arise from the impact of socio-economic inequalities. He conjures interlocking associations of *'actants'* originating from structural exclusion that itself arises from adversity, discrimination and unemployment.

For Bourdieu *(1981)*, there is a sense of embodied history: longstanding experiences in family and neighbourhoods that may impact negatively on a young person's emerging orientation towards society and its institutions.

In qualitative research with 37 young men serving long prison sentences for violent crimes including murder, Holligan *(2015)* embraces the concept of *'Actor Network Theory' (ANT)*. He deconstructs individual life stories into themes that describe the potential for violence arising from a combination of causal properties. His findings support the view that both physical places and cultures explain social phenomena such as knife crime *(Pollini, 2013)*.

In ANT, violent offending can be interpreted as arising from a particular assemblage of factors. Human factors are parents, friends, *'big'* people in neighbourhoods as substitute families, and webs of relationships that trap or constrain individuals *(Holligan and Deuchar, 2015)*. There are non-human structural factors such as housing or environment, as well as levels of alcohol consumption and drug taking.

Experiences leading to committing acts of violence come from a combination of factors: abuse in childhood leading to low self-esteem *(Bellis et al, 2014);* a sense of loss or shame; a shared family history of neighbourhood allegiance that was bonding but relied on mistrust, leading to territorial violence. Schools, families and peer associations matter but loyalties could hinge people into conflict, especially where a responsible parent or authority figure is absent.

Further factors include truanting or being excluded from education. Being left out of positive social institutions, such as places of learning, schools, colleges, the workplace and youth clubs lapses into damaging models of behaviour and emulating inappropriate role models. Encounters with the police or other authorities reinforce feelings of exclusion rather than linking people back to family and community.

Traumatic events that happen in childhood such as neglect and abuse, including in care homes, further diminish or limit empathy and personal resilience. They reduce a young person's capacity for avoiding aggressive or impulsive behaviour, lashing out, and committing violent acts. Factors such as social deprivation and negative peer pressure seep into the unconscious mind, muting resistance to provocations to meet certain types of behaviour *(Latour, 2005).*

Current social trends align with this theoretical framework. Robbery at knifepoint is increasing, with some of the rise attributed to new business models in illicit drug markets. The National Crime Agency has documented a shift in the locus of supply and distribution of drugs, opening up new markets, so-called *'county lines',* in semi-urban and more rural areas *(National Crime Agency, 2017).* There is evidence that a growing number of disaffected young people who have been excluded from school are being coerced into participating in drug distribution by violent street gangs. Exposed to knives or other weapons, they find themselves in an environment that fosters aggressive masculinity.

Gang members now operate within a 'social field' where the boundaries are more likely to be about people than place and where carrying and using a knife has become a signifier of street authenticity.

Recent research identifying the predictors of knife crime *(Harding, 2020)* suggests that it is a route to personal agency,

INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENT ACTS IS THE PRICE TO PAY FOR A SENSE OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY WITHIN THE GANG.

especially in the context of advancement within a gang. Participants conform with codes of violent behaviour and rules known as *'the game'*. Within the social field of the street gang, each person is motivated to improve their position within the hierarchy by the expectation of improved status and advantage. They generate street capital[4] by demonstrating skills in 'the game' according to their level of criminal or social activity, including use of a knife. The gang structure privileges longstanding members – elders, usually those over 25 – while in the next stratum down, members aged between 18 and 24 struggle for dominance by employing subversive sometimes violent tactics within the gang which permit re-positioning.

'STREET CAPITAL THEORY' DESIGNATES THE NEED TO ELEVATE YOUR REPUTATION ABOVE OTHERS TO ACHIEVE DISTINCTION.

In an increasingly competitive social field, violence escalates. A simple stabbing becomes commonplace, no longer deemed sufficient to build street capital at the level required. What is needed is a *'reputational extravaganza' (Harding, 2014)* – a public display of *'the game'*. Thus, visible incidents are sought out: a victim stabbed in a public street, or in a public domain unconnected to the social field. Such incidents of hideous street performance bring instant street capital and signal the increasingly dangerous nature of the social field (Shammas and Sandberg, 2016) because of unpredictability, the willingness to stab on sight, and the increasing pressure within gangs to perform. Stocks of street capital accredited in this way determine an individual's share of economic capital.

The daily experience of gang-affiliated youth is of navigating a *'landscape of risk'*.

The social field becomes a competitive place of conflict. As described by Bourdieu, the need to maintain position can be compromised by other gangs or through peer pressure within the gang *(Shammas and Sandberg, 2016)*. Conceptually the use of knives in violent acts both cuts and heals, manifestly wounding the rival while healing the internal psychological latent wounds of the assailant by imparting agency, albeit through a criminal act *(Harding, 2014)*. Different variants exist in different localities such that assessment of risk may not translate between individuals or across areas *(Harding, 2014)*.

4. An aggregate of cultural capital *(street knowledge and street skills)*, habitus, local history, family connections, networks *(social capital)*, relationships, reputation, status and symbolic capital *(available assets of recognition)*.

Taking on a violent identity cuts off usual forms of socialisation and personal advancement.

Constant daily immersion within the social field generates a sense of normalisation of behaviours including violence. It establishes conditions where knife-carrying is legitimised and validated by the passivity of local neighbourhoods where community resilience is low. Knife-carrying generates and cements in-group loyalty and, because it's expected behaviour, it goes more or less unchallenged *(Harding, 2020)*.

As the habitus and the economic conditions in the local environment become mutually reinforcing, they limit conventional forms of personal advancement and career prospects.

Analysing knife crime against a background of culturally impoverishing effects, educational exclusion and institutional abandonment contribute to the creation of *'neighbourhoods of relegation' (Clement, 2010)*, where a widening of embedded poverty reinforces relative deprivation and individual or group exclusion *(Wacquant, 2008)*. In this situation condoning knife-carrying for protection generates agency or tacit permission for wider criminality and can be interpreted as acquiescence to it.

For those growing up in a violent environment, adopting similar behaviours can become instinctive or subconscious, instilling a *'retaliate first'* mentality *(Winlow and Hall, 2009)*.

> 'It was in my neighbourhood every day. Right in front of my face someone would be getting robbed, somebody would be having a fight, and then someone would get stabbed, right in front of my face like it was nothing. Someone was running off, everyone was scattering about the place and then there was a body just dying right in front of me. And the worst thing about it is you walk past it because it's an everyday situation.' [5] (Myron, 21 years)

5. Quotes taken from Harding *(2020)* unless otherwise referenced.

CONDITIONING TO SOCIAL FATE CAN LEAD TO DESPAIR, AND AN ASSUMPTION THAT MERELY BEING YOUNG OR IN A MINORITY GROUP COMES WITH THE CERTAINTY OF BECOMING A TARGET OR A VICTIM OF KNIFE CRIME.

Conditioning to social fate can lead to despair, and an assumption that merely being young or in a minority group comes with the certainty of becoming a target or a victim of knife crime. This realisation can generate the practice of carrying knives out of fear or resignation *(Harding, 2020)*.

> 'It's eat or be eaten.'[6]

For many, this social field is all-encompassing, generating not only a social code of conduct but a code of street justice:

> 'It comes with the game, it's the lifestyle, this shit comes with it. So if you want to be on this ting, then this comes with it, innit, you're gonna have to be part of what it is and deal with the consequences.' (Prince, 21 years)

A lack of trust is ubiquitous in the social field:

> 'So you've gotta watch out for all of them, you understand, and on top of that it's snakes, normal people that will snake you, you understand?' (Sage, 21 years)

RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS IN CURING VIOLENCE ALSO SHEDS LIGHT ON ITS ORIGINS, AND HOW TO PREVENT IT.

Research identifies the importance for mental health of being able to understand actions in terms of thoughts and feelings. Learnt in childhood during '*attachment*' to parents, Emde et al *(1998)* refer to this attribute as *'mentalisation'*, arguing that its absence leads to *'affect'*, or *'emotional'*, dysregulation, a psychological diagnosis characterised by a person's difficulty in managing the intensity and duration of negative emotions as often associated with relationship stress.

Where mentalisation is compromised, for example in a family environment characterised by neglect, abuse, excessive control, or one that discourages discussion about thoughts and feelings, children may have difficulty regulating their emotions.

6. *https://www.probonoeconomics.com/resources/measuring-impact-art-against-knives-0*

A lack of validation by caregivers, not recognising the child's experience and perspective, can be devastating, leaving scars that are evident in ongoing antisocial or violent behaviours in adulthood.

Individuals who fail to understand the actions of others in terms of mental states such as sadness or anger are at risk of low self-esteem, depression, and self-harm as a distraction from distressing introspection; negative thoughts and feelings become prominent. Behavioural therapies designed to improve mentalisation have positive outcomes, including reducing self-harm, impulsive behaviour and the propensity for antisocial behaviour *(Rossouw and Fonagy, 2012)*. Rossouw and Fonagy conclude that enhancing mentalisation can strengthen personal agency and self-control. They stress the importance of positive early childhood experiences in the development of personal resilience and the ability to manage emotions.

CHANGES IN SENTENCING PRACTICES CRIMINALISE YOUNG PEOPLE.

Over the last decade there has been a rise in convictions associated with anti-social behaviour and changes in sentencing practices that might be interpreted as potentially criminalising a growing cohort of young people *(Clements, 2010)*. Official statistics record that an increasing proportion of children and young people under 20 *(28%)* are being sentenced for drug possession and supply *(Black, 2020)*. According to recent figures, more than a third *(36%)* of those sentenced for offences relating to crack cocaine were under 20.

Over this same time period, first offenders – including for possession of a knife – become increasingly likely to receive an immediate custodial sentence and for longer *(Ministry of Justice, 2020)*. This is despite evidence suggesting that rates of reoffending are lower for those serving community sentences as an alternative to going to prison, for equivalent crimes *(Jolliffe and Hedderman, 2015)*.

In the year ending June 2019, 38% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 23% in the year ending June 2009. The average length of custodial sentences received increased, from 5.9 months to 8.1 months. Section 28 of the Criminal Justice Act, introduced in 2015, now makes it more likely that a second or subsequent knife crime offence *(including possession)* will result in a custodial sentence.

In 2019, 44% of 16 and 17 year olds received an immediate custodial sentence for reoffending compared to 28% in 2014 *(Ministry of Justice, 2020)*.

As discussed earlier, '*Stop and Search*' activities have increased, reducing trust in the police, especially among young people, and exacerbating concerns about racial bias *(Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019)*. Young Black people are significantly more likely to be subject to Stop and Search than White people, especially in London. They serve a greater proportion *(70%)* of their sentences in custody than any other ethnic group. At the crown court, defendants from BAME communities are more likely than White defendants to receive prison sentences for similar drug offences *(Shepherd, 2017)*.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders *(KCPOs)*, a central plank in the government's Serious Violence Strategy[7] *(HM Government, 2018)*, are being piloted in London prior to roll-out across the country. These require young people identified as being at high risk of violent crime to attend programmes involving mentoring, mental health assessments and skills workshops.

Despite being intended to build opportunities for employment and education, KCPOs have drawn criticism from organisations such as Liberty and NACRO *(Comyn, 2019)*, and concerns have been raised that the coercive element may retraumatise young people whose criminality is linked to mental health issues, inhibiting recovery *(Bateman, 2007)*.

Noting that breaching the requirements of a KCPO could lead to criminal conviction and up to two years in prison, the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers describes them as likely to increase rates of incarceration *(Brackenbury, 2019)*. Others fear they will add racial bias to an already discriminatory system and call instead for restoring investment in youth services to support young people *(Cooper, 2019)*.

Blaming music genres such as rap, hip hop and drill for encouraging or prompting violence is a popular narrative in press and media; there is marginal correlation with some media theory but the connection is not supported by robust evidence.

In 2006, Prime Minister Cameron famously accused a radio DJ of contributing to knife crime by playing hip hop *(Morris, 2018)*. Amber Rudd as Home Secretary made the same claim in 2018 *(Drury and*

7. See Bellow

Kent-Smith, 2018). Yet research does not support a causal relationship between genres of music and the attitudes and behaviours of young people *(Tatum, 1999).* This review of the few empirical studies that have been done with young people who are regular followers of music such as rap, grime and drill suggests that while cultural background may predict music preferences, they in no way predict behavioural problems or propensity for crime. The author concludes that any perceived association may be due to criminalising of young people who listen to certain kinds of music. She calls for more and better research into the stigmatising effects of labelling and stereotyping young people.

Research on violent lyrics in music reveals that young people critique the apparent glamorisation of violence and the social stereotypes represented and they may be upset or depressed by them. Using a range of evaluative techniques including workshops, interviews, group discussion and writing *(biographies or keeping journals),* researchers Mahiri and Conner *(2003)* noted that young people demonstrate curiosity but also considerable skill, meticulous observation and insight when viewing negative images.

Young people in the study, challenged hackneyed stereotypes of men and women recognising instead the violence of poverty and homelessness. They noted bullying, assault and hate crime as frequently confronting young people in schools and suggested that a climate of opprobrium associated with musical preferences led to the inappropriate criminalisation of young people and children. They suggest that the normalisation of violence may arise from a sense of hopelessness.

VIOLENT IMAGES IN MUSIC VIDEOS EXIST AS A REACTIVE COUNTERCULTURE RATHER THAN A CRIMINAL JUSTICE SUBCULTURE.

Nevertheless, the debate has intensified, with concerns that cultural resistance theory has become an explicit focus for criminal justice agencies making exaggerated claims about a propensity for drill, grime and rap trap to incite violence *(Fatsis, 2019).* London's Metropolitan Police Service has issued Criminal Behaviour Orders to prohibit drill videos and served injunctions on artists and gang members to prevent or limit the playing or recording of certain types of music.

Listening to rap has been said to demonstrate adherence to a drug-dealing way of life and to normalise gangs and weapon carrying *(House of Lords, 2019).* Threats recorded in rap music videos were recently used as evidence in a murder trial. Said by the judge to be at the *'heart of the attack',* they supported the conviction by jury of a group of young people aged 18–24 for the murder of 17-year-old Marcel Addai in North London *(Bartholomew, 2016).*

Arguably a more explicit use of social media where rival gangs use music videos to taunt each other - and the police - has the potential for creating a spiral of violence *(Dearden, 2018).* The development of performance crime – illegal activities captured on music videos – is also concerning. By drawing young people to specific websites associated with violent acts in their neighbourhoods this form of exhibitionism sparks and potentially normalises criminality *(Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney, 2017).*

The lyrics in such videos do not, however, identify a straightforward causal relationship with violent acts. In a narrative analysis of three videos from Birmingham, London and Chicago, Pinkney and Robinson-Edwards *(2018)* find complexity in the genre, suggesting that the videos reinforce the notion of a counterculture. As a medium for expression, they give voice to valid and neglected concerns. The messages are not binary. So-called *'gangsta rap'* is often admixed with *'victim'* narrative as the individuals in the videos draw on a range of past and present experience to express feelings of exclusion. Beyond a dominant narrative about violence, power and masculinity, other deep-rooted themes emerge that reference police harassment, guilt by association, racial bias and false imprisonment. The authors conclude that the music almost certainly raises tension but is not a direct – and certainly not the only – link with violent behaviour.

THE FATE OF GIRLS IN GANGS

Point-of-arrest health screening data from a collaboration across 37 Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion sites provides insights into the smaller numbers but higher relative vulnerability of girls in gangs. Looking at a sample of 8,209 young people aged 10–18 involved in the youth justice system, only 1% *(80)* were girls affiliated with gangs *(Khan and Brice et al, 2013).* The mean age of young women with gang associations was 15, ranging from 11 to 17 years.

YOUNG WOMEN IN GANGS ARE FAR FEWER IN NUMBER BUT VERY VULNERABLE. MORE LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN CHILDHOOD, THEY FACE EVEN GREATER LEVELS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ASSAULT AND HUMILIATION THAN YOUNG MEN IN GANGS.

The study provides an indication of the multiplicity of need and the relative vulnerability of girls in gangs. They were at least three times as likely as other female entrants *(not in gangs)* to present with seven or more vulnerabilities including parental imprisonment, poor parental mental health, parental substance misuse, family conflict, violence, exclusion from school and neglect.

In this sample, girls in gangs were more than twice as likely to use violence as other girls arrested. Patterns of aggression in young women have been noted in other studies and require further study. It has been suggested that female aggression has its root in fear and survival, a protective response to vulnerability *(Bell, 2009)*. Male acts of violence may also be associated with vulnerability but interpreted as a pursuit of power or status within the gang *(Putallaz & Bierman, 2004)*.

Sexual exploitation of girls is well documented in gangs.

Young women involved in gangs were eight times more likely to be victims of sexual abuse, including non-consensual and degrading acts, than general youth justice entrants, and three times more likely than boys in gangs.

Over a 14-month period, the Office of the Children's Commissioner's enquiry into sexual exploitation in gangs and groups identified 2,409 confirmed victims of sexual abuse, under the age of 18, most were girls. The actual numbers were likely to be much higher *(Berelowitz et al, 2013)*.

The police have expressed concern that sexual assault and violent attacks against young women and girls may be linked to their appearance in music videos. Most reports are deeply concerning, with girls with gang affiliations being groomed to carry knives or other weapons. Some commentators report girls within gangs being considered as legitimate targets for rape or violence *(Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney, 2017)*. Further research is urgently needed to understand these issues.

INTERVENTIONS TO INFORM A BROAD POLICY PERSPECTIVE

TACKLING KNIFE CRIME HAS BEEN DECLARED A TOP POLICY PRIORITY FOR THE UK GOVERNMENT.

In response to the rise in gun and knife crime, the UK government published a Serious Violence Strategy *(HM Government, 2018)* which made clear that this was not a law enforcement issue alone. The strategy has four key themes: tackling county lines and misuse of drugs, early intervention and prevention, supporting communities and partnerships, and a law enforcement and criminal justice response. The strategy was published with the expectation of building on an existing *'Youth Endowment Fund'* exceeding £40 million from Big Lottery and the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport, with the announcement of an additional three-year *(2018–21),* £11 million early intervention fund, a £1 million Community Fund for each of two years, and further investment in a police-led *'Ending Gang Violence & Exploitation Fund'*.

The Serious Violence Strategy:

- Has a focus on drugs and gangs
- Values early intervention with young people
- Gives a key role to police and National Crime Agency

The focus of the Serious Violence Strategy *(SVS)* is on drugs and gangs, emphasising early intervention and prevention with young people and giving a key role to the police and National Crime Agency.

The SVS stresses the need to address a shift in violence involving young people and recognises vulnerability associated with school exclusions as a possible cause. It notes the apparent increase in male on male violence rather than violence involving women and girls, domestic abuse or sexual violence. Recommendations in the strategy are mostly directed to young people under 18. There are also some suggested actions directed towards older adults under 25 where they are involved in illicit drug markets.

There has been investment in the National Crime Agency *(NCA)* for a key focus on organised crime in gangs or violence associated with drugs, especially use of crack cocaine. A cross-government task force has been set up to address the need for interconnectedness across government and with the devolved nations. A role for alcohol is discussed but it is not considered as a main driver in the rise in violent crime. Local partnerships are encouraged in the SVR, though funding is channelled through central government and based on short-life projects.

Other aspects of the strategy focus on the development of local partnerships, building, for example, co-operation between services to identify young people at risk and provide support to divert them into more productive activities, employment and education.
The strategy establishes partnerships between the police and retailers to prevent the sale of knives and encourages engagement across civil society to build resilience in communities.

The policing strand of the strategy focuses on restricting the activities of gangs. Significant efforts are being made to build intelligence for targeting organised crime through data sharing and developing predictive models capable of identifying 'hot spots' for serious criminal activities. New enforcement powers are being introduced to limit the use of violent images and lyrics in social media and *'Stop and Search'* will target known *'hot spots'*, improving the arrest rate and charging of offenders. Work is also in hand to support victims and vulnerable witnesses with the aim of increasing rates of conviction.

The section in the SVS on early intervention and prevention has the strongest evidence base. Evidence from 11 of the 14 systematic reviews included suggests that, for young people under 18 involved in criminal activity, early intervention is effective in reducing aggression. It notes also that those involved in criminality at an early age are most likely to have long criminal careers. Effective interventions include pre-school programmes, support for parenting. Building family relationships is both effective and cost-effective in reducing adverse outcomes for children and families.
The evidence is most compelling where specific groups are targeted – either young people at risk of committing crimes or those already involved in criminality – and where there is high programme intensity *(Matjasko et al, 2012)* addressing multiple risk factors rather than focusing on single elements of risk *(Genoves, Morales and Sanches-Meca, 2006)*.

The strategy recognises vulnerability associated with school exclusions as a possible cause of knife crime, though it is yet to introduce measures to change this practice and has faced criticism for its early emphasis on increasing criminal justice measures. Removing restrictions on emergency powers for *'Stop and Search'* and introducing Knife Crime Prevention Orders has drawn criticism about the stated aim of implementing a public health preventive model.

Lessons from elsewhere reinforce the value of a public health approach over more retributive criminal justice solutions.

In Scotland a public health approach is widely held to have made a major difference, with a massive reduction in knife crime from a European high over the last ten years. Launched in 2005, the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit *(SVRU)*, an arms-length police-led initiative, and the only police member of the World Health Organization *(WHO)*, is widely credited as playing a key role in reducing deaths from violent crime *(down from 137 in 2005 to 59 in 2017/18)* and an almost halving of the number of violent crimes, down from 14,728 to 7,251 between 2004/05 and 2016/17. The range of interventions it kicked off is characterised as taking a public health approach using the definition of *'treating violence as a preventable disease'*.

Ceasefire Boston, a multiagency programme of work in the USA *(Kennedy, Braga and Piehl, 2001)*, influenced a major feature of the Scottish unit's activity: the Community Initiative to Reduce Violent Crime *(CRIV)* is specifically targeted at known gang members. *'Calling in'* gangs is followed up with offers of mentoring, skills development, a requirement to attend workshops, referrals to mental health services and insistence that violent activity must end.

Communities understand the social drivers of violence.

The SVRU analysed a range of data sources on violence, not just police-reported crime, concluding that prevention should start with communities best placed to understand and address social drivers of violence. It designed a range of relationship-centred interventions aimed at active mobilisation of people thought to be best placed to carry out preventive activities. People with lived experience of violence were especially valued for their skills in forging effective personal relationships across the community.

The range of interventions rolled out by the SVRU specifically address the causes of crime, with an underlying belief in connection and opportunity as an antidote to violence. Examples include:

- Street and Arrow, a cafe drop-in and referral site *(based in a hospital)* that provides a range of 1:1 mentoring, counselling and advice services including the development of a range of personal and employment skills.
- Mentors in Violence Prevention is an anti-violence schools programme using an active bystander approach. Fifth and sixth formers are trained to challenge violent behaviour safely and to call out the exploitative activities of gang members.
- Medics Against Violence, a programme set up by hospital consultants, works to make young people aware of the consequences of violence. It includes a secondary school-based programme.
- One Community Scotland, a programme of work to reduce racism, reaches out to specific communities, promoting measures for inclusivity and intersectionality across society. Other initiatives focus on *'secondary prevention'* to prevent repeat offending.
- A *'Navigator'* project established for people affected by repeat violence aims to end the 'revolving door' in attendance at A&E. Peer mentors are trained to work in hospitals with those caught up in gangs, at a time when they might be susceptible to offers of help.
- Ask Support Care *(ASC)* is a community engagement scheme which aims to encourage a range of people in the community *'front line',* including hairdressers, vets and firefighters, to identify those at risk of or affected by violence and signpost them to sources of advice and support.

There has been a sustained downward trend in violence in Scotland since 2012, though this is beginning to flatten out – and Glasgow still has double the murder rate of London. Evaluations of the Unit show significant effects, with reductions in violent crime among participants, including an almost 60% reduction in carrying knives, and gang fighting reduced by over 70% *(Shift, 2019)*. Subsequent research suggests that the driver for the reduction in violence has been the reduction in use of knives and other weapons by gangs of young people in public places; the SVRU is widely attributed as bringing about this level of change *(Shift, 2019)*.

CURE: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO ENDING VIOLENCE IN CHICAGO.

The success of various violent crime prevention programmes in the USA, such as *'Cure'* in Chicago's *'high need'* communities[8], influenced UK politicians keen to find a way to square the circle between a retributive criminal justice solution to crime and the emerging public health narrative, which requires a more developmental approach *(Roberts, 2019)*.

Cure was developed as a grassroots community-based outreach programme staffed by people from the neighbourhood with street status and legitimacy – usually because they are ex-offenders who have turned their lives around. There is some level of collaboration with the police on data sharing but these so-called *'ceasefire'* outreach workers act independently to provide emotional, educational and recreational support to young people thought to be at risk of crime. A series of high-quality qualitative and quantitative evaluations found positive results *(Gorman-Smith and Cosey-Gay, 2012; Henry, Knoblauch and Sigurvinsdottir, 2014)*.

Using matched comparisons to explore a possible counterfactual analysis in areas not subject to the intervention, researchers found distinct and significant benefits: a reduction in violent crime *(actual and attempted shootings)* and reductions in gang related activity, especially retaliatory killings. In detailed time series analysis, covering many years of study, the impact was characterised as either ' *immediate and permanent'* or *'gradual and permanent' (Skogan et al, 2009)*.

Key elements of success include recruiting workers who are effective communicators able to gain the attention of young people

8. *https://cvg.org*

at high risk; recruiting them on the streets, not through institutions or from police referrals; and delivering support, explicitly using mentoring skills to motivate subjects to engage with mainstream services, especially employment opportunities.

The outreach workers also intervene directly in conflict, offering mediation and shifting perceptions of normality by providing alternatives to disputes that might otherwise have ended in violence. They work against a shifting and low resource base with complex caseloads, in neighbourhoods with high levels of violent crime, where residents have come to feel that enforcement is the only viable option open to them – despite having a negative view of police effectiveness. Many in the community reflect positively on the role of the outreach teams:

> 'They're out there without vests stopping shit that the police department can't stop.'
> (Gorman-Smith and Cosey-Gay, 2012)

The evaluations also suggested there was more work to do in restoring community confidence.

EARLY INTERVENTION IS EFFECTIVE

Economic evaluation of the Scottish VRU suggests that the potential impact is considerable. The annual budget of the SVRU is about £1 million. Compared with the estimated cost per killing *(over £1.9 million)* and the cost of common assault *(more than £1.5 billion)*, this represents considerable savings for the public purse, with a claim that up to an estimated 40% of all public spending could potentially be avoided using a preventative approach *(Shift, 2019)*.

There is an evidence base for prevention. Further research is needed to improve reach and impact.

Successful interventions for improving outcomes for young people at risk are documented in the Serious Violence Strategy. They include skills building, cognitive behavioural therapy enabling personal resilience and emotional regulation *(Hofmann et al, 2012)*, some aspects of restorative justice *(Restorative Justice Council, 2016)*,

THE SVRU SUGGESTS THAT PREVENTING KNIFE CRIME COULD HAVE MASSIVE ECONOMIC BENEFIT.

and mentoring – especially where strong positive ongoing relationships are formed *(Dubois et al, 2002)*.
Picking up on these findings, a programme of primary prevention entitled *'Growing Against Gangs and Violence' (GAVR)* was delivered in the UK through schools-based lectures, film and drama workshops, initially by the London Metropolitan Police. The work used techniques imported from the successful US-based Gangs Resistance Education and Training Programme *(GREAT) (Esbensen, 2013)* but had mixed results according to a well-designed evaluation *(Densley et al, 2017)*. Schools thought to be in at-risk areas were targeted; 90,000 school-children were involved prior to the evaluation. There was no significant reduction in gang membership or levels of youth violent offending, though the programme did lead to positive benefits in improving trust and understanding between young people and police.

Researchers noted positive, though not statistically significant, trends towards achieving behavioural goals, such as improving students' commitment to school, reducing adherence to street code and gang norms, promoting refusal skills, resistance to peer pressure, and non-violent conflict resolution. They concluded that more targeted support, such as could be achieved by better integration of services, was needed for individuals identified as already involved with gangs or at risk. This was especially problematic where the work was led by police officers. Commenting on the marginal effectiveness of the GAVR programme, they suggest that any further dissemination should reconsider the content and mode of delivery, especially the need for more 1:1 support and more in-depth engagement with issues associated with the sexual exploitation of young women.

Interventions offering a public health rather than a criminal justice approach have the strongest evidence base: offer young people opportunities to build life and social skills, support young people with peer and family-based therapies, develop parenting skills.

There is a wide range of evidence to inform a broader public health-and humanities based policy perspective. Further research is needed to guide practice but a report from WHO Europe presents a range of evidence to demonstrate that violence among young people can be prevented. The report notes that interventions offering a public health rather than a criminal justice approach have the strongest evidence base *(Sethi et al, 2010)*.

Programmes that target children early in life are most cost-effective. These include parenting programmes that have long-term effectiveness in preventing violent offending during adolescence and adulthood *(Olds, 1998)*. Programmes that develop children's life and social skills in early childhood show effectiveness in both the short and longer term.

Improving school performance and social skills *(Durrant, Barkin and Krowchuk, 2001)* increases opportunities for employment and reduces risks of involvement in substance misuse and crime *(Murray and Belenko, 2005)*. Such programmes should be implemented widely, given the massive impact on life chances and the high societal costs of violence; they will require multiagency working. For young people already involved in violence the report identifies some benefits of *'treatments'* such as multisystemic therapy, which involves interventions designed to help parents respond effectively to young people engaging in serious criminal behaviour *(Schaeffer and Borduin, 2005)*. Problem-oriented policing and multicomponent programmes that combine social interventions at the community level also report positive results. Legislative measures to address access to knives and knife-carrying show some promise, though they need to be studied further, and urban design strategies also show effectiveness *(Mair and Mair, 2003)*.

A PROGRAMME OF EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

Improving access to drug treatment and mental health services is a central tenet of multiagency prevention.

Diagnosis and treatment for mental health issues are most effective in improving personal resilience and wellbeing when provided at an early age, where access is made available locally and where treatment can potentially engage with wider support systems of friends and families *(Underwood and Washington, 2016)*. Alternative educational support such as in pupil referral units can be of benefit, but only where it is high quality, temporary and permeable, providing a bridge back into mainstream provision *(Mills and Thomson, 2018)*.

There is also emerging evidence to suggest that young people are able to navigate the *'social field'* of the gang and the rules-based environment of school or college. A policy of exclusion on the basis of gang membership may need to be discouraged where this could

INTERVENTIONS OFFERING A PUBLIC HEALTH RATHER THAN A CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROACH HAVE THE STRONGEST EVIDENCE BASE

limit opportunities for harm reduction interventions through contact with mainstream education *(Irwin-Rogers and Harding, 2018)*. Access to drug rehabilitation services achieves best outcomes, reducing relapse and the risk of crime, when linked with follow-up counselling *(Boorman and Hopkins, 2012)* and peer support *(Borrill et al, 2003)*. Mentoring schemes enable young people to connect back into communities, improving opportunities for education and employment. There is little or no evidence for the value of punitive approaches, including those such as *'scared straight'* that use fear as a means for changing behaviour *(Adler et al, 2016)*.

SOME STORIES CAN ONLY BE TOLD THROUGH THE ARTS.

There are good reasons to think that the arts, including design, may be of significance in creating the psychological and cognitive conditions that precipitate personal transformation towards desistance from crime.

Current theories of desistance suggest that initially individual motivation to change is supported by activities that stimulate empathy or bring about a desire to take on a different identity.

The arts engage with the dynamics of behaviour – its changeability *(Parkes and Bilby, 2010)*. Participants in the arts are inspired to consider changes in self-perception, to explore the possibility of re-defining themselves *(Weaver and McNeill, 2010)*, to contemplate different lifestyles *(Bilby, Caulfield and Ridley, 2013)*. Secondary desistance, a more sustained approach to abstaining from offending, is also likely to be advantaged by engagement with arts *(Farrall and Maruna, 2004)*.

> The arts can help people re-imagine identity, leading to a changed perception of social 'fate', replacing inertia and hopelessness with motivation for future prospects (Kougiali, Einat and Leibling, 2017).

In Forum theatre, Baol *(Matarasso, 2019)*, Odd Arts *(Froggett, Kelly and Manley, 2018)*, Geese Theatre Company *(Harkins et al, 2008)* and others make practical sense of this concept. By creating

opportunities for people to cross from being a member of the audience to the stage they can re-imagine the drama, watch the story and change it. For people who propose and act out alternatives the effect can be life-changing *(Maruna et al, 2004)*.

In design, Makeright involves people in prison in a transformational change process. Creative techniques for *'making'* impart technical and entrepreneurial skills but also importantly develop social and emotional attributes, fostering self-esteem and self-confidence. Additionally, designing a product for an end user fosters empathy and social connection *(Steer, Jewkes et al, 2016)*.

Making for Change *(a project run by London College of Fashion with women in prison)* and Inhouse Records *(a 'rehabilitative record label for change', operating in and out of UK prisons)* have similar transformational intentions. These projects identify strategic contexts in which to promote pioneering co-production design techniques for building aspiration and effecting personal change *(Weaver and McNeill, 2010; Massie, Jolly and Caulfield, 2019)*.

A body of research is emerging that focuses specifically on the cultural value of the arts in supporting desistance from crime. In the context of criminal justice the emphasis is not only on creative ways to support personal transformation *(Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008)* but by fostering the creative expression of experience *(Clennon, 2013)* the arts can shed light on the causes of crime.

The arts deal with the complexity of human experience in a way that lets the clarity of empathy – relatability – seep into our consciousness *(Bazalgette, 2017)*. They highlight the interplay between external and intrinsic factors: how one affects the other, how inequalities are internalised, how power relationships between family, friends, neighbourhoods and agencies of government shape our ways of being.

Arts interventions are disruptive; they build active listening and negotiating skills, bringing a more critical understanding of social structures and issues associated with belonging and being part of a community *(Caulfield and McGuire-Snieckus, 2014)*. The self-consciousness of creativity encourages personal insights in a way that enables individuals to reach out, make social connections and even inform and ultimately shape social justice *(Matarasso, 2019)*. For individuals, families and communities affected by injustice and discrimination, the arts can be emancipatory. The positive effects

of participation in drama or music or writing or painting act on personal concept increasing the capacity to express emotions *(Anderson et al, 2011)*. They also shed light on the origins of behaviour. They demonstrate how we are shaped by a tension between current realities and past experiences, our social context and our cultural and political environment.

Music production charity United Borders reports how violent song lyrics reflect a reality for some young people. They are worn as a shield in the same way that a knife is carried for protection. These young people rap from perceptions of a violent world, but the process imparts a recognition that it can be changed. Overcoming the traumatic origins of behaviour through re-connecting individuals with their families and enabling communication across neighbourhoods that lie between gang disputed territories, it is possible to change the lyrics. Working with young people over even a short period of time, in a matter of days or weeks, the songs begin to speak of a wider narrative: coming to terms with what's happened to them, renewing hope, building ambition for change.[9]

THE ARTS MAY BE WHERE TRANSFORMATION BEGINS: A THEORY OF CHANGE.

Research into the transformative impact of the arts in the criminal justice system identifies a theory of change *(Froggett, Kelly and Manley, 2018)*. Starting with the importance of collaboration and co-production in arts practice, acknowledging that people are experts in their own lives, studies report that participants in theatre *(Eagle, 2008)*, music *(Massie, Jolly and Caulfield, 2019)*, dance *(Miles and Strauss, 2008)* and visual arts *(Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016)* are able to connect emotionally and psychologically with an artistic process and be changed by it *(Frater, 2019)*.

The interrelationships between the arts and mental health prompt a psychological process, unravelling the complex causes of mental states and enabling self-evaluation. Reflection, harnessing the arts as a medium for self-discovery, prompts consideration of the possibility of intrinsic change and of engaging externally with community and social structures *(Freire, 1972)*.

The development of intermediate outcomes such as improvements in health and wellbeing and emotional regulation *(Cursley, 2012)* are crucial stepping stones. They support the emergence of a

9. Finlayson, personal comment.

new positive self-identity which finds common goals and capacity for trust in social skills gained from mentoring and team working. These transforming effects contribute to final outcomes, building bridges into education and employment *(Wilson, Atherton and Caulfield, 2009)*, stimulating curiosity for using services such as health *(Anderson et al, 2011)* and ambition for further training and employment *(Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016)*.

Longer term or more sustainable benefit is demonstrated by economic evaluation which finds that for every £1 spent on arts interventions there is potentially a £3–5 return on investment from reducing reliance on the criminal justice system *(Johnson, Keen and Pritchard, 2012)*. Shifting policy and practice from a focus on criminal justice to health and humanities has the potential to improve life chances for individuals; it exposes the costs of inequalities and disproportionality and reduces the human and economic costs of crime to communities.

DISCUSSION/SUMMARY

Based on a broad-brush review across a range of sources, this report on knife crime and young people is written for, and with, designers who are looking for new ways of creating meaningful social innovation projects with young people. Through collaborative design and co-production techniques that enable different ways of visualising data, it is possible to identify what works and what doesn't. The aim is to find solutions to knife crime by moving beyond the policy inertia that often seems to kick in when social issues, with complex causes, require multiagency solutions.

Taking a deliberative approach to finding literature across several domains and disciplines – criminology, sociology, public health, design, arts and humanities – reveals a broad range of evidence relating to the origin of youth violence and its solution.

THE STATISTICAL NARRATIVE

The statistics highlight a convergent narrative that should be raising alarm.

Trends in violent crime seem to be going down, though the data is skewed by spikes – outbreaks that happen in *'decivilizing spurts' (Turner, 2004)*. Against this background the proportion of knife crime is rising. It's fuelled by acquisitive crime *(Eades et al, 2007)*, and it's getting nastier *(Harding, 2020)*.

THE AIM IS TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO KNIFE CRIME BY MOVING BEYOND THE POLICY INERTIA THAT OFTEN SEEMS TO KICK IN WHEN SOCIAL ISSUES, WITH COMPLEX CAUSES, REQUIRE MULTIAGENCY SOLUTIONS.

From the early 2010s, following the financial crisis and widening income inequality, the rise in knife crime is highly correlated with increases in school exclusions; arrests of young people under 20 for drug offences; NHS admissions for sharp injury trauma among young people; reductions in public sector spending on drug rehabilitation; cuts in youth services and family support; and reduced access to mental health services.

Commentary from criminology and sociology develops the discourse towards a theoretical understanding of how social indicators and psychological factors combine to create the conditions for violent crime.

Through the lens of *'social field' (Harding, 2020)* and *'actor network theory' (Latour, 2005)* better understanding of the complex phenomenon of youth violence is contextualised . It is understood as arising from both external and intrinsic factors – both with competing influences that may be *'locked in battle'*.

Drawing on research from mental health literature, supports components of these observations. Psychological research identifies how responses to social factors such as material deprivation or income inequality might operate at a personal level to lock individuals into criminal acts *(Fonagy, 2003)*.

Research evidence identifies a range of predicting factors and motivations.

Among young men, carrying a knife arises from vulnerability, fear and a feeling of personal insecurity *(Silvestri et al, 2009)*, especially in unpoliced areas *(Brennan, 2018)*. There are identity issues, a legacy of low self-esteem from adverse child events *(Bellis et al, 2014)*, alienation and lack of opportunity due to discrimination *(Shepherd, 2017)*. Young people are influenced by their environment, especially living in *'neighbourhoods of relegation' (Clement, 2010)* or where they face pressure from peer-group violence, school exclusion and exposure to gang violence. For some, knives are symbolic, given social meaning for status and respect where the world appears to present no alternatives *(Riggs and Palasinski, 2011)*. For others it's social fate, a sense of hopelessness *(Shammas, Sandberg and Pedersen, 2014)*.

Gang life can be a vicious *'business'*, a means for gaining competitive advantage in drug markets; an operating model that

profits from the vulnerability of young people – boys mostly – left out in the open, exposed to malign forces *(Harding, 2020)*. Involvement in gangs is not homogeneous but contributes to transgressive behaviour *(Densley and Stevens, 2014)*, intensified by drug use and illicit drug markets *(Children's Commissioner et al, 2019)*. Where girls are involved, brutal levels of sexual violence are documented. Urgent action is needed to address this issue. More research is also needed to understand how the motivation for gang membership can better inform exit strategies for young people or strengthen resilience to resist the draw. These are complex issues that inhibit our understanding of which interventions might be effective; they resist a generalised response *(Grimshaw and Ford, 2018)*.

Most people don't die from knife crime but there are life-changing injuries and mental scars. There are inconsistencies in defining who is involved. The victims are mostly young men – but so are the perpetrators. Children as young as 9 and 10 have been implicated. The peak age for knife crime in the under-20s is between 13 and 17 – but we're cautioned against blaming immaturity *(Riggs and Palasinski, 2011)*.

NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

The complexity of knife crime is increased as a social phenomenon when filtered through social media. This is new ground for young people uninhabited by their parents' generation.

Social media amplifies every argument, each slight or difference of opinion exposes young people to new levels of insecurity and victimisation, with measurable impact on mood and self-perception *(Sharma, John and Sahu, 2020)*. The internet has contributed to the ubiquity and normalisation of violent images, including through music and the games industry, and by increasing opportunities to purchase weapons including knives.

There is evidence that rival gangs use social media to promote gang culture, taunt each other and incite violence *(HM Government, 2018)*. A counternarrative is also apparent, with evidence that lyrics in some music genres reflect cultural resistance to violence. They identify young people's feelings of hopelessness, discrimination and harassment *(Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney, 2017)*. For some this may explain identification with gangs as a place of refuge; for others

a sense of alienation, fatalism and futility – factors surely amenable to change.

> A range of studies is deepening understanding about conditions that create an environment for violent crime and criminalisation. (Holligan, 2015)

Links can now be evidenced about how the stifling effects of poverty *(Grimshaw and Ford, 2018)* and the psychological and neurological impact of traumatic events, such as neglect and abuse in childhood *(Bellis et al, 2014)* lock young people into criminal activity at a psychological level *(Holligan and Deuchar, 2015)*.

The challenge for social policy is how this wealth of evidence can prompt preventive interventions ending reliance on criminal justice *(Grimshaw and Ford, 2018)*.

Analysing the evidence highlights incongruities in the policy response.

Interventions, it seems, are not always developed alongside the individuals and communities most affected. The literature is drawn across disciplines yet it is rarely multidisciplinary in concept or execution. Some voices are missing. In particular, there is no national conversation with young people *(Harding, 2020)*. Those most at risk of becoming involved in or being affected by violent crime feel deeply the harm done to them by actions taken in one place that have unintended consequences in another. Studies show that school exclusions increase vulnerability *(Berelowitz et al, 2013)* and that high-quality alternative provision, offering a bridge back into mainstream provision, is scarce *(Mills and Thomson, 2018)*.

There is discordance between research and practice. Missed opportunities to meet need, public sector cuts or poorly integrated service delivery fail families at risk. Reducing access to services increases vulnerability. Reduced capacity for drug rehabilitation and harm reduction has undermined opportunities for spotting young people at risk of exploitation or being drawn into crime *(Children's Commissioner et al, 2019; Black, 2020)* and there is little space for innovation. Emerging evidence suggests that given support, young people are able to navigate the 'social field' of the gang alongside the rules-based environment of school or college. Yet, a policy of man-

dating school exclusion on the basis of gang membership is more likely than not *(Irwin-Rogers and Harding, 2018)*.

Research suggests that *'Stop and Search'* is of marginal benefit *(Eades et al, 2007)* but the practice continues and the stigmatising effects are known to be long lasting and to dislocate whole communities from trust in the police. New *'Knife Crime Prevention Orders'* are thought by many organisations involved in advocacy for young people to be *'fast tracking them into custody' (Brackenbury, 2019)*. Over-reliance on the external agencies of criminal justice in responding to knife crime, especially following a first offence, has unintended consequences, potentially exacerbating factors which lead to carrying and using knives. Criminalising young people not directly responsible for the underlying drivers of knife crime creates a sense of injustice and increases risks of reoffending. For young people leaving prison there are missed opportunities for providing support in rehabilitation and reintegration.

Mental health services are much needed yet most difficult to find. Prime Minister May pledged to make mental health provision for young people a priority. But, half of the extra money allocated for child and adolescent mental health went to plug more visible gaps elsewhere – hospital operating targets and A&E trolley waits *(Young Minds, 2018)*. Almost a quarter of referrals to specialist services made by GPs are turned away *(Khan, Parsonage and Stubbs, 2015)*.

Accurate data on drugs, deaths, injury and disability, outcomes, and costs of youth violence are essential to develop and monitor prevention strategies. Yet there are problems with data. The number of knife crimes is estimated from *'police-reported crime'* yet reports suggest up to a third is missed *(HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2014)*. Data from the NHS also under-represents the problem incidents are counted only when it leads to a hospital admission.

There is evidence that knife crime could be prevented because patterns of activity are predictive of future risk (Linden, 2010), but the data needed to plot trajectories is incomplete and approximate. A great many high-level individuals and organisations stress that agencies must work better together to find solutions, yet data sharing is poor and leadership weak *(House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2019)*.

A GREAT MANY HIGH-LEVEL INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS STRESS THAT AGENCIES MUST WORK BETTER TOGETHER TO FIND SOLUTIONS, YET DATA SHARING IS POOR AND LEADERSHIP WEAK

Moving towards solutions by taking a public health approach has been widely heralded as responsible for the reduction in knife crime in major cities such as Glasgow.

The Home Affairs Select Committee endorsed the public health approach in concept. It noted the importance of a strategy that focuses on prevention based on principles that call for a joined-up policy response across government departments and local agencies. There are lessons to be learned from studying the work of regional initiatives such as the West Midlands Data Sharing pilot *(PHE, 2015)* and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, but the Select Committee called for a more generalisable framework.

This report highlights the enormous scale of lost life chances and the costs to society of violence among young people. It identifies that the potential for prevention, addressing underlying structural determinants, risks and exposure, is considerable. The evidence base for adopting a public health and humanities approach is stronger than relying on criminal justice interventions but a more facilitative, multiagency response will be required. In this context, moving towards strategic design thinking to generate solutions for knife crime and young people offers alignment with public health principles and practice and a number of possible advantages.

Designers want to work with and for communities, not be constrained by organisational boundaries.

A design facilitated approach would seek to engage with all agencies involved. Designers would wish to co-design projects with young people and to be evidence-based, though they will value stories and case studies over, or certainly as well as, numeric or empirical sources of evidence. Collaboration, co-production and visual iteration sprints are central tenets of design practice. So, rather than just looking at *'defined qualities'* – attributes that can be measured or scored, like 'levels of deprivation' or *'numbers of adverse child events'* – designers would want to focus on understanding life journeys, the person, the individual experience. Design practice springs from belief that how people see and feel should guide thinking about understanding the present and shaping the future.

When design is used to interrogate and visualise data about what is working and what isn't, it becomes very quickly apparent that top-down initiatives are less effective than, for example, small youth-led projects that employ creative techniques and rich relational engagements *(Steer, Jewkes et al, 2016)*. On the face of it, these might be considered time consuming. They have been described as *'diversionary' (Adamson, 2003)*. But such projects do far more than *'divert'* young people off the street. Particularly for those experiencing alienation and estrangement from society, they offer a vital opportunity to develop social skills, build self-reliance and engage in rethinking identity. In reality, small-scale community-based youth projects, often those facilitated by social innovation design and the arts, enable young people to reach out and re-connect *(Anderson et al, 2011)*. As such they hit public health targets, delivering prevention *(Shift, 2019)* and reducing the cost of crime to communities.

At a more strategic interface, design operates within a cultural context but can provide scope for experimentation. Early signs from five innovative, youth-led design projects are already demonstrating considerable potential for enhancing relational engagements for young people. Detailed evaluation from these projects, some currently running at the University of Arts London or with partners, are already available or will become available over the next few years.

FIG.1

FIG.2

CASE STUDIES

ART AGAINST KNIVES

CASE STUDY ONE

AAK was set up in response to the unprovoked stabbing of Central Saint Martins student Oliver Hemsley in 2008, which left him wheelchair-bound. AAK started as an exhibition to raise money and awareness of the incident a year after the attack. Many well-known names from the art and fashion industries, including Tracy Emin, Banksy, Christopher Kane and Rankin, donated work to support this event. It instigated a dialogue between London's creative community and some of the inhabitants of the most deprived London boroughs, with AAK listening to young people to understand first hand the root causes of violent crime.

For the last ten years Art Against Knives has worked with youth to channel these learnings into actions, mobilising some of London's most isolated communities through creativity, co-creating environments that young people want to be a part of, and embedding specialist support into everyday community life through diverse activities.

AAK's award-winning community nail bars project has been recognised for creating safe spaces for young women to come forward about major problems they experience, including abuse. AAK helps them access the support they need – providing safe and trusted environments.

DESIGN+MAKE is a unique programme created by AAK with London College of Fashion's Social Responsibility Department, led by Claire Swift, which supports young adults in creating their own positive futures.[10] Small groups of students aged between 18 and 24 from the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham engaged in intensive two-week leather-making skills workshops[11] and a programme of trips, industry events and showcase experiences *(Swift and Mair, 2015),* followed in 2016 by a mentoring programme. By placing opportunity in the hands of young people, AAK seeks to redesign youth futures. It has received recognition from the Metropolitan Police, the Mayor of London and the Home Office.

FIG.3

10. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4WayUVbNPY*

11. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLHd-ABsTxg*

CUT

CASE STUDY TWO

CUT emerged from the London College of Fashion's *'Making for Change'* initiative, and engages young people through fashion and making, this time in Waltham Forest, to customise jeans donated by Blackhorse Lane Ateliers, a local denim design and manufacturing business.
A partnership with local government, fashion businesses and the charity Through Unity has been brokered by University of the Arts London *(Dr Francesco Mazzarella),* with designing and making clothing against knife crime as the foci.

Co-creation workshops are facilitated for local young people to develop design ideas for jean customisation. They bring forward new ideas for messaging to reduce knife crime at the same time as learning new design, making and entrepreneurial skills. The jeans are anticipated to be customised with buttons and rivets cut from knives that ultimately operate as part of a design range to protect young lives, through fashion activism and awareness raising.

Throughout the project, a film will be produced and a fund-raising event organised at the end. Funding raised will contribute to supporting a social enterprise with ongoing activities focused on fashion to tackle knife crime.

FIG.4

REPREZENT

CASE STUDY THREE

Founded in 2004 by Shane Carey, a former teacher and radio producer, Reprezent works creatively with young people to help them realise their potential, through practising and developing social, emotional and vocational skills. Through accredited radio training, group work, events and media production, young people also present, speak and develop all the content on the London-wide radio station, Reprezent 107.3FM. Over 6,000 students have progressed through the programme since 2011. Alumni include Stormzy and Jamz Supanova. Reprezent collaborates and delivers with strategic partners on conditions and opportunities for young people by guiding youth policy and funding initiatives.

FIG.5

The 2014 evaluation project *'Becoming Radio Ready'* appraised Reprezent's delivery of 'soft' vocational skills important to career development *(such as interpersonal, time management and public speaking skills)*. As the evaluators pointed out:

> Young people involved demonstrated motivation, communication and technical skills needed to access posts in the creative industries. Throughout the project we witnessed an increase in prospects through the nurturing of participants' own aspirations and building of professional networks. Notwithstanding the shortage of available employment, Reprezent has facilitated access to jobs in the creative and cultural industries that young people from London may not normally be able to access. This social enterprise assists in the production of competitive candidates who demonstrate an increasing level of confidence and competence.
> (Shukra and Mullings, 2014)

12. See *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-z9x6CpDUs&feature=youtu.be*

13. Reprezent in collaboration with Newham NHS Clinical Commissioning Group went on to win a national award for *'Innovation in Mental Health'* for this initiative.

Following an intensive assessment of the training programme, City and Guilds awarded Reprezent the Princess Royal Training Award for Outstanding Training and Skills Development.

Reprezent also works in schools across Essex and London, supporting pupils to improve their awareness of their own mental health issues. During Mental Health Awareness Week 2014, a national award-winning Reprezent youth broadcast campaign was delivered by young people using peer led engagement to increase knowledge and reduce the stigma of discussing mental health issues. A further Mental Health in Schools initiative in Essex and London set up in 2017 helps pupils to understand mental health, building self-resilience through adopting digital health tools and services. Pupils interact and engage with digital health tools via their phones and tablets to understand and work on their mental health issues *(this engagement is also tracked through digital partner service usage in intervals following delivery).* Feedback on the programme has been tremendous and the initiative has subsequently expanded to include an additional Teacher Training programme to help teachers recognise and support pupils' mental health issues.

14. See Case study video *(password: 'essex').*

15. *We cannot thank Reprezent Radio enough. The subject of mental health is a hard one to navigate and yet via the station's interactive approach they successfully made the topic accessible for all the students involved. There really does need to be more projects like this for school. I wouldn't hesitate in being part of the project again – actually we demand to be.'* Carrie Gibbs, King Harold Business Academy, Harlow.

16. *'An important and timely programme to give our teachers the skills they need to help to manage pupils'* heightened anxiety and mental health issues on return to schools. Providing them with the tools to cope is crucial in avoiding escalation to the need for acute Mental Health interventions.' Rt Hon Sir Norman Lamb, Chair of South London and Maudsley NHS Trust.

TRASHCAN

CASE STUDY FOUR

This scheme pairs product design students from Central Saint Martins *(CSM)* with Youth in Camden via Somers Town Youth Centre *(STYC)* to create easy to make objects from waste. Young people learn technical skills and how to figure out entrepreneurial techniques by selling products.[17] They report *'keeping out of trouble'* and improvements in mental health through *'making'* in the time of COVID-19.

17. *https://vimeo.com/435470166*

Make@Storygarden, behind the British Library in Camden, is the venue where TrashCAN is delivered. Led by UAL professor Adam Thorpe *(Public Collaboration Lab/UAL),* working in collaboration with Jamie King and Shazna Ahmed *(Youth Leaders for STYC)* and delivered by CSM product designers, who since graduating in 2020 have been continuing to implement and document the project, TrashCAN finds a way to bring much needed legitimate and sustainable income to youth and youth centres in contexts of deprivation and austerity. Through the life of the project the learning materials and design resources are being collated to ensure that the approach can be shared with other youth organisations.

FIG.5

WALTHAM FOREST'S *'EASTSIDE STORY'*

CASE STUDY FIVE

In 2019, Catalyst In Communities *(CIC),* a UAL project partner, with support from the Greater London Authority's Young Londoners Fund and the local authority, delivered the highly acclaimed *'EastSide Story'* as part of the inaugural Waltham Forest London Borough of Culture celebrations. The process was documented by the BBC and broadcast as part of the *'Imagine'* series.[18]

18. The full BBC1 documentary can be viewed at *https://vimeo.com/367237008* and a short at *https://youtu.be/G19Ray6eh10*

The project placed young people and youth coaching at the core and wrapped the co-creation, development and performance of an original piece of theatre around this. CIC believe that meaningful solutions to a community's challenges can only come from the community itself. They see participants not as problems, but as people coming together to find solutions.

A central tenet of the project is equal partnership in delivery. Robin Lockhart, CIC's co-founder, describes the transforming effect of people working together:

> 'We all get told stories growing up about who we are, what we are capable of, what we ought to be and what we shouldn't ever consider ourselves to be… Whether we choose to believe these stories or not changes who we become…'

Young people from two local rival estates initially took part in an immersive programme of group coaching. They explored beliefs, values and emotions through a process of appreciative enquiry, asking: What are they? Where do they come from? What are they for? How can they help us to improve our lives? The groups then came together to devise an original piece of unscripted theatre that was performed to sold-out local audiences and received standing ovations. The work energised them to find productive ways to stay out of crime.

FIG.6

Two of the case studies described above (*TrashCAN and CUT*) are ongoing and led by strategic design initiatives connected to research centres Design Against Crime and the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at University of the Arts London. Art Against Knives, Reprezent and EastSide Story are also linked to the activities of UAL Research Centre's project partners. They offer generalisable frameworks that can apply meaningful techniques and metrics across different settings linked to diverse subject foci.

These initiatives consistently demonstrate what makes a difference to local communities: the importance of working locally to map the drivers for and barriers to knife crime, the creative value of co-production and relational networks, and the intrinsic power of projects that are youth led. Putting young people and youth workers at the heart of change fosters internal and external collaboration: the right technical skills for the job and the social, emotional and leadership skills to deliver lasting change.

Building on the experiences of young people and their families and communities, new skills, relationships and opportunities are generated. These can be developed at scale and offer opportunities for incremental application of knowledge from local data. These 'design led' projects can be described as coterminous with a public health approach. Giving young people a creative identity builds clarity of empathy and personal agency that can be directed to positive individual and social change. It enables them to reveal, reflect on and subvert the malign nature of the knife crime narrative.

BUILDING ON THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES, NEW SKILLS, RELATIONSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE GENERATED.

CONCLUSION

This report sets out how creative as well as design techniques linked to social innovation projects, and system mapping and data visualisation, can reveal the interrelation of factors that contribute to youth violence. A straightforward look at patterns in statistical trends identifies conditions that are highly correlated with the rise in knife crime. These include a rise in the rate of school exclusions, reducing investment in provision for young people, recourse to police interventions such as 'Stop and Search', and changes to sentencing policy increasing the likelihood of prison for a first offence of possession. Regarding this we hope you will take time to look at two further documents we have contributed to that use data visualisation and systems mapping *(see www.arts.ac.uk/redesign-youth-futures)* to understand the complex multiple drivers that impact upon and inform youth violence.

System mapping enables visualisation of the constellation of drivers and other factors that contribute to adverse outcomes that are not inevitable. It notes that the journeys through them may have a range of effects for different individuals. Cause is not a straightforward concept and solutions will require a tailored approach for different people and places.

The background to the report draws on a body of research and commentary that points to or exemplifies the value of a public health approach to navigating this complex problem. It identifies

complementarity with design thinking which takes up the imperative for prevention, bringing a creative context for change.

Going beyond rhetoric, real life examples are presented that suggest how design techniques can shift the inertia created by complexity. They make real strategic intentions to deliver a sustainable response.

Evaluations find that interventions designed for individual change work best where there is true co-production with the people most affected. Engaging young people and their families and communities in activities or enterprises likely to be enjoyed, valued and respected by them creates opportunities for self re-evaluation and improved personal resilience.

Case studies are presented that deliver skills for work, inspire further education, and improve social capital. Recognising interconnectedness starting with those most at risk draws more immediate consideration of shared accountability across agencies. It calls for joint investment among all stakeholders and brings reciprocity of responsibility for delivering agreed outcomes through the combined efforts of society.

Appendix One

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Appendix Two

KNIFE CRIME: ASPECTS OF THE LAW

1 THE CURRENT STATE OF THE LAW [19]

Laws restricting the sale, carrying, use and production of knives are contained in a number of pieces of legislation: 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 *(as amended in 2004)* and the more recent Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006.

The Prevention of Crime Act 1953 defines an offensive weapon as *'any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person, or intended by the person having it with him for such use by him or by some other person'.* As the law now stands, it is an offence to have an article with a blade or point in a school or public place without good reason or lawful excuse, although an exception applies to folding pocket knives with a blade of less than three inches. Certain types of knives, such as flick knives, gravity knives and replica samurai swords, have been banned outright.

An officer of inspector rank or above may, in certain circumstances, authorise police officers within a given area to stop and search for offensive weapons. The carrying of a knife while committing another crime *(such as burglary or theft)* would be likely to result in a harsher sentence. Prior to the most recent piece of

19. From Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2009).

legislation, an offender could be sentenced to a maximum of two years for carrying a knife in public and four years for carrying a knife in a school. The Violent Crime Reduction Act increased the penalty for possession of a knife in a public place without a lawful reason to a maximum of four years. The Act also:

- raised the minimum age at which a young person can buy a knife from 16 to 18 years of age;
- introduced a power for head teachers and other members of staff in schools to search pupils for knives;
- reduced the threshold for a police constable to enter a school and search the premises and/or people from *'reasonable grounds for believing'* to *'reasonable grounds for suspecting'* that weapons are held;
- created a new offence of using another person to mind a weapon and included an aggravating factor in sentencing if the person involved is a child.

2 KNIFE CRIME PREVENTION ORDERS [20]

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 allows the Secretary of State to issue guidance relating to *'the exercise by a relevant person of functions in relation to knife crime prevention orders (KCPOs) and interim knife crime prevention orders'*. A *'relevant person'* is detailed as *'a person who is capable of making an application for a knife crime prevention order or an interim knife crime prevention order'*. This guidance is therefore primarily intended to be used by the relevant authorities who can apply for a KCPO, namely the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. The guidance will also be of interest to the judiciary. KCPOs will require a multiagency approach. The police are expected to work with relevant organisations and community groups to support those who have been issued with a KCPO to steer away from crime. All will have a role to play to ensure that KCPOs are the preventative tool they are intended to be. This guidance is therefore also aimed at those who are involved in the management and review of KCPOs.

20. From Home Office (2019).

KNIVES AND OTHER OFFENSIVE WEAPONS: PUBLIC INTEREST FACTORS [21]

There is a strong public interest in deterring the carrying and use of knives and other offensive weapons.[22]

Where the evidence discloses that the defendant has used a knife to cause injury / threaten violence / cause fear, or has carried a knife in a way which contravenes a possession offence, there will be a number of compelling public interest factors in favour of prosecution which should be accorded proper weight. These include the following:

- a conviction is likely to result in a significant sentence;
- a weapon was used or violence threatened during the commission of another offence;
- the offence is widespread in the area where it was committed;
- the offender was a ringleader;
- there is evidence that the offence was premeditated;
- there are grounds for believing the offence is likely to be repeated;
- prosecution would have a significant positive impact on maintaining community confidence;
- a culture of carrying weapons encourages violence and may lead to more serious criminal behaviour.

Depending on the facts, there may also be other important public interest factors supporting prosecution – for example, the offence was committed in a school, prison, hospital or public house, or the defendant was motivated by hostility towards another individual or group.

The Code for Crown Prosecutors makes clear that a prosecution will usually take place unless there are public interest factors tending against prosecution which outweigh those tending in favour *(paragraph 4.8)*.

21. Guidance from the Crown Prosecution Service.
22. See National Police Chiefs' Council *(2015)*.