Fear and fashion
The use of knives and other weapons by young people

Gerard Lemos

Lemos & Crane

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**Notes**

**Bibliography**
This report by Lemos & Crane, on a very important subject concerning young people in London and all those who work with and for them, deserves our thanks, which are also due to all of you – practitioners and policy makers – who took part in the research. The Bridge House Trust very much appreciates and values your contributions.

The intention of the Trust in commissioning this report was to determine how it might best make a positive contribution to this difficult subject by determining what were the key factors involved in young people deciding to carry knives and weapons; what was the scale of the problem; and what were the most effective types of intervention.

The report pulls together much of the available research whilst incorporating the views of practitioners at the ‘coal face’. It confirms that whilst carrying knives has always exercised a fascination for young people there is evidence that the use of weapons is increasing. The findings point to the need for ‘demonstration’ or pilot projects, which bring together elements of best practice now dispersed across a number of agencies.

With this information the Trust believes that it will be able to target its grant-making more effectively; add positively to the debate; and give to the voluntary and community sector practitioners information that will perhaps help them in their relevant work with young people.

I am sure you find the report both interesting and helpful and join me in thanking Lemos & Crane for all their work.

Patrick Roney CBE MA
Chairman
Bridge House Trust
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The views expressed here are my views, not those of Bridge House Trust. These views, along with any mistakes, are my responsibility alone.

Gerard Lemos
Lemos&Crane
September 2004
Introduction

Reports from practitioners and the press suggest that carrying and using knives by young people, sometimes as young as ten and eleven, is increasing. Commissioned by Bridge House Trust, this report seeks to establish clearer evidence about the use of knives and weapons by young people as well as to identify approaches currently being taken to deal with the problem.

The report draws on an extensive literature review, an e-survey of schools and community and voluntary groups working with young people in London and discussions at meetings with Corporation of London stakeholders and invited practitioners from across London.

Part One of this report sets out the available research and the views of practitioners about the extent and causes of young people carrying knives and other weapons. Part Two deals with some of the approaches being currently adopted. Part Three summarises the findings and suggests the key elements of a programme to address the problem.

Part 1: Extent and Causes

One in ten boys aged 11 and 12, according to Beinart et al., are reported to have carried a knife or other weapon in the previous year and eight per cent said they had attacked someone intending serious harm. By the age of 16, the figures had risen to 24 and 19 per cent respectively. A MORI youth survey in 2003 reported that pupils attending schools said that offences typically happen at school while excluded young people appear more likely to experience crime in the local area where they live. Carrying a knife appears to be more common for young people excluded from mainstream education. Sixteen per cent of mainstream students compared with 46 per cent of excluded young people had admitted having carried a weapon. The “peak” age for both boys and girls committing offences is 14 to 15. The carrying of a weapon is most common among the oldest age group of the survey (year 10 and year 11). Both boys and girls carry and use knives and weapons, but boys are more than three times more likely to do so.

There is much inconclusive debate about the impact on young people’s attitudes and behaviour of violence portrayed on television, in computer games and in music. There are also other risk factors that have a cumulative and reinforcing effect on young people. ‘Knives hold a particular fascination for children’, according to researchers at Glasgow University, and the aspiration of holding, possessing, and brandishing what only the adult, brave and qualified soldier is entitled to carry legally is part of many young boys’ childhood, whatever their social background. The possession of a knife or other weapon can also be a means of acquiring status. Peer influences and fashion also seem to play a part in encouraging young people to carry knives. Children who experience failure at school or other kinds of social exclusion could be looking for status by carrying and brandishing a knife. Fear and victimisation play the most significant role in a young person’s decision to carry a knife or weapon. Practitioners who attended the seminar, unprompted, shared the perception that fear was the main motive for carrying a knife. One youth worker practitioner commented:

‘Fear outweighs aggression as a motivator. We work with teams of offenders and at the bottom of it is fear … [it’s for] defence, but the fact is a knife are not a defensive weapon … It’s an attacking weapon.’

Fear can result from personal experience of crime, or the reported experience of friends or siblings. Victimisation and offending are strongly linked. Related to this is the lack of reporting. Although young people are worried about becoming – and many in fact are – victims of crime, over half of the victims (51 percent) do not report the crimes they have suffered to the police and 45
percent do not even tell their parents. Even teachers sometimes do not report crime to the police when they witness it.

Some young people – without necessarily having been victimised previously – decide to carry a knife with the intention to scare, harass or steal. Belonging to a group, the consumption of alcohol and the use of drugs is also linked to the likelihood of aggression, and can directly lead to an increase in the number of offences perpetrated and their seriousness, though there is no conclusive link between the use of alcohol or drugs and the carrying or using of knives and weapons. Moreover, the lack of support for young perpetrators and victims from parents, schools and youth community services appears to be a further significant risk factor.

Part 2: Approaches

Few projects or activities specifically focus on preventing or tackling the use of knives amongst children and young people, but those identified include projects designed to raise awareness amongst young people of the dangers of carrying knives, informal education projects, work with offenders and support for victims of crime. As well as these specific projects some others integrate work with young people on carrying offensive weapons with more general youth offending programmes. These include mentoring, conflict resolution, work with gangs and support for parents. Practitioners attending the consultation seminar also highlighted the difficulty of partnership working, the need for information sharing as well as maintaining the balance of safety of users and staff when working with young people at risk. The important role of the police in education and prevention work as well as law enforcement was also emphasised.

Part 3: Findings and Recommendations

The extent of carrying knives and other weapons amongst young people appears to be growing, with the likelihood of using knives being greatest among the age group over 15 and 16. Young people are carrying knives in school, youth clubs and on the street, and the most common reason given for doing so is fear.

Although the problem appears to be growing, few dedicated public awareness or educational programmes have been developed or delivered. Similarly, few dedicated programmes working with young people at risk of carrying and using knives have been developed. Consequently, there are relatively few examples of good practice, and those that there are have not been widely disseminated or shared.

Drawing on the literature and this research, key priorities for action therefore are:

1. developing local demonstration programmes and activities;
2. developing good practice materials for schools, youth clubs, youth offending teams and the police;
3. promoting and disseminating good practice materials and examples.
Introduction

Practitioners and the media suggest that carrying and using knives by young people, sometimes as young as ten or eleven, is increasing. Commissioned by Bridge House Trust, this report seeks to establish harder evidence about:

1. the extent to which knives and weapons are carried and used by young people;
2. the causes of increased carrying and using of knives, if established;
3. the ranges of knives and other weapons used;
4. the locations where knives and weapons are used by young people;
5. the types of young people that carry or use knives and other weapons;
6. whether it is boys or girls who carry and use knives and weapons, or both;
7. approaches currently being taken to deal with the problem.

This report draws on an extensive literature review, an e-survey of schools and community and voluntary groups working with young people in London and discussions at meetings with Corporation of London stakeholders and invited practitioners from the police, youth offending teams, schools and education services and community groups around London.

The report is in three parts. Part One sets out the available research and the views of practitioners about the extent and causes of young people carrying knives and other weapons. Part Two deals with some of the approaches being currently adopted. Part Three summarises the findings and suggests the key elements of a programme to address the problem.
Part 1
Extent and causes
1 Extent

A growing problem

An increasing number of people of all ages have been convicted of carrying a knife in public.1 Reports from hospitals also indicate a rise in stab wounds particularly among young men aged between 14 and 25.2 A survey in 2002 of 14,000 students in secondary schools, reported that a significant minority of respondents admitted carrying weapons.3 One in ten boys aged 11 and 12 said they had carried a knife or other weapon in the previous year and eight per cent said they had attacked someone intending serious harm. By the age of 16, the figures had risen to 24 per cent admitting to carrying a knife or other weapon and 19 per cent admitting to have used one. The proportion of young people who said they repeatedly committed these offences, however, was small. Four per cent of boys in year 10 and 11 said there were three or more times when they had attacked someone intending to seriously hurt them. Frequent carrying of knives and other weapons was more common than using them to attack someone, with nine per cent of boys in the two eldest age groups saying they had done it three or more times. This compared with 14 per cent who said they had done so once or twice.4 Other studies, asking slightly different questions to larger age cohorts, have found an even higher incidence. In a survey for the Youth Justice Board in 2003 MORI found that 29 per cent of young people at school admitted that they had ‘carried a knife’.

Types of knives and other weapons carried or used

The range of weapons carried and used by young people includes baseball bats, snooker balls in socks, screwdrivers, chains, lipsticks and mascara containing blades, and sharpened plastic pens5 but the most commonly used are different types of knives6 (kitchen knives, combat knives, swords, Stanley knives, etc.)7 Combat knives are still available for legal purchase and one participant at one of the seminars felt that making the sale of combat knives illegal would be a step in the right direction, even if it would not stop the carrying and use of household knives.

Locations: streets; schools; youth clubs

Weapons are confiscated everyday on London streets but, according to The Observer in November 2003, it is ‘inside the nearby schools where the problem remains most profound’.8 A youth worker based in school, who attended the practitioners’ seminar held as part of this research, took the opposite view. She told us that the problem was worse in youth clubs than in schools, linked to the presence of neighbourhood gangs and their effect on young people’s sense of safety:

‘Young people tend not to carry weapons in school but the same young person will carry a weapon in the youth club. There was quite a rough time recently when young people were turning up at the youth club with baseball bats and snooker balls in socks as they felt that they needed to protect and defend themselves. At school these young people feel safer, but in the youth club there is an issue of territory, as people come from all over the area and wear paintball masks to distinguish that they are from different gangs. The girls that carry weapons tend to do so because they feel vulnerable.’

A practitioner who delivers weapons awareness training to young people in schools and other settings felt that many schools either did not know of, or were in denial about, the extent of their problem:

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

Students attending schools report that offences typically happen at school while excluded young
people appear more likely to experience crime in the local area where they live.9

The explanation for these apparently contradictory views may be that some schools have more serious problems than others. Another possibility is that some schools are better at preventing the problem through their general approach to discipline and behaviour at school, or are better at dealing with it when the problem arises, for example in their approach to school exclusions and anti-social behaviour, as discussed see below.

Young people carrying knives and other weapons

Practitioners who attended the seminar held as part of this research suggested the following typology of young people who carry knives and other weapons.

Group A. Young people who have offended and are in the criminal justice system.

Group B. Associates of offenders - those in group A who have not been identified by the criminal justice system (and are therefore not being worked with by youth offending teams or probation).

Group C. Young people who carry weapons a lot of the time and are known to youth, education and criminal agencies.

Group D. Young people who carry weapons on an ad hoc basis when they feel there are known risks, but without the knowledge of any agencies.

Although those in groups A and B are the more serious sources of concern and probably have the most intractable problems, they are also likely to be a relatively small proportion of young people as a whole and are probably already known to a range of practitioners and agencies. The young people at the other end of the spectrum who are carrying a knife or other weapon without anyone knowing and probably without intending to use it, believing it to be a defensive weapon, are likely to be greater in number but with fewer professionals available to support and assist them.

Gender of young people carrying knives and other weapons

According to research both boys and girls carry weapons, but boys greatly outnumber girls. The number of girls who admitted carrying a knife or other weapon to school or in their neighbourhood increases from two per cent in year seven to eight per cent in year 11. In contrast, the number of boys who admitted this same offence increases from ten per cent in year seven to 24 per cent in year 11.10

Exclusions from mainstream education: likelihood of carrying knives and other weapons

Carrying a knife appears to be more common for young people excluded from mainstream education. In its youth survey conducted for the Youth Justice Board in 2003, MORI carried out two separate studies, a survey of 4,963 11 to 16 year olds in mainstream education and a survey of 586 young people excluded from school, currently attending a special project. The results of these studies showed that, in response to the question ‘what offences have you committed in the last year?’ 29 per cent of young people in schools admitted to have ‘carried a knife’ compared with 62 per cent amongst excluded students, making knife carrying one of the two most common offences committed by excluded students (the other being hurting someone, but not to the extent of their needing medical attention.) Similarly, 16 per cent of mainstream students compared with 46 per cent of excluded young people have admitted having carried a weapon other than a knife or a gun.11
‘Peak’ age for young people carrying knives and other weapons

All types of offences, including carrying a knife or other weapon, are more commonly committed by older pupils aged 15 and 16 (according to MORI 39 per cent of 15 and 16 year old students in mainstream education, 61 per cent of 15 and 16 year old excluded young people) than by younger pupils (14 per cent of 11 year old mainstream students, 43 per cent of 11 year old excluded young people).12 These findings by MORI are in line with the survey in 2002 by Beinhart and others which ‘suggest that the “peak” age for both boys and girls committing the more common offences was around 14 to 15’13 and shows that the carrying of a weapon is most common among the oldest age group of the survey (year 10 and year 11).14

Age of first offence for carrying offensive weapons

One in eight mainstream and excluded offenders committed their first offence when they were seven years of age or younger (12 and 13 percent respectively). The typical first offender, however, is aged between 11 and 13, ‘with 38 per cent of mainstream and 41 per cent of excluded offenders reporting this as the age they first committed an offence’.15
Knife culture in a culture of violence

Young people’s behaviour is influenced by the level of violence surrounding them. The impact of violence on television or in computer games is much contested and research findings contradict each other. A study published in the USA in 2003 on the impact of violent television programmes on young people’s behaviour appeared to show that childhood exposure to media violence is a predictor of young adult aggressive behaviour for both men and women. Identification with aggressive television characters and the perceived realism of television violence also predict later aggression. According to the study’s authors, these relations persist even when the effects of socio-economic status, intellectual ability and a variety of parenting factors are controlled. Music, video and computer games are also said to influence young people’s attitudes and behaviour. Metropolitan Police Service assistant commissioner Tarique Ghaffur is reported to have accused record companies of defeating anti-gun campaigns. He has also suggested that ‘shoot-em-up’ style video games should be banned as part of the struggle against crime. None of these findings about the media however explain the counter-factual: as virtually all young people are exposed to TV and media violence, why is there a negative impact only on some of them? Other risk factors must be at work, such as parental control and school attendance, which may have cumulative and reinforcing effects; increasing either protection from or risk of negative or destructive influences.

Against this backdrop of material readily available to young people featuring explicit violence of many different kinds, knives seem to have a special aura and appeal for some young people. According to Glasgow University, ‘knives hold a particular fascination for children.’ The pleasure of holding, possessing, and brandishing what only the adult, brave and qualified soldier is entitled to carry legally is part of many young boys’ childhood, whatever their social background. In this sense knives are ‘a link with adulthood’ for some children. The use of weapons is also associated with ‘classical images’ of gender identity. War toys are, notoriously, often given to young boys and less often to young girls reflecting society’s different expectations. These toys of mock violence give younger boys ‘the opportunity to be passionate and expressive without appearing feminine.’ The use of knives and other weapons (toy or real) by teenagers could therefore be seen as strengthening gender-defined identity. The increasing number of girls carrying weapons and their reported increasingly violent behaviour could similarly reflect a redefinition in gender identity, with girls being increasingly portrayed and seen as assertive and independent and therefore having a need and desire to stand up for themselves and to protect themselves by their own means.

The possession of a knife or other weapon can also be a means of acquiring status. Children who experience failure at school or other kinds of social exclusion could be looking for status by carrying and brandishing a knife. Harriet Harman, Solicitor-General and MP for Peckham makes a link with race: “There is clearly a sense that this is an unequal society where you are blocked by the colour of your skin, and there is a feeling that you achieve status not by getting a degree or by qualifications but by having a knife.” The status associated with the possession of a knife has a ripple effect and creates a fashion that other children might want to follow. As Mark, a sixteen-year old from North London puts it, “it’s showing off to other people who are into knives. If someone’s got a brand new knife and they say they’re going to use it, their friends think they’re hard and let them into their group.” The importance of status and the influence of friends and other peers are significant. MORI’s youth survey showed that most offences are carried out in the company of friends while peer pressure was
one of the reasons most typically cited, being bored and being drunk for offending behaviour.10

**Fear as a motive for carrying knives**

The MORI youth survey shows that over a third (35 per cent) of young people in school and 21 per cent of excluded young people say they feel unsafe when out walking after dark.11 Another survey, commissioned by the charity Crimestoppers (with the Daily Mirror and GMTV) looked at a representative nationwide sample of 1064 boys and girls, aged 10 to 15 and reported that 42 percent were very worried or fairly worried about crime. Under 16’s biggest worries about crime were theft (for 26 per cent), drugs (13 per cent), and crimes involving weapons (5 per cent). When asked whom they were frightened of, under-16s answered ‘teenage gangs’ (46 per cent), ‘people on drugs’ (43 per cent), ‘drunks’ (40 per cent) and ‘bullies at school’ (26 per cent). 12Being bullied ‘seems to be a far bigger concern among school pupils than among those attending excluded projects. Overall, 37 percent of young people aged between 11and 16 say they are worried about bullying, compared with 13 per cent of excluded pupils.’13

No national study has yet investigated the existence of a causal link between fear and the decision of young people to carry a knife, but the media has pointed to fear as an important motive. Some young people are said to carry knives and other weapons to feel safer but with no intention of using them. According to Professor Neil McKeeganey of Glasgow University, ‘for some young people, carrying a weapon [is] a way of making them feel safe.’14 Similarly, BBC News quoted Unun Seshmi, chairman of Boyhood to Manhood, a charity seeking to steer young black people away from crime: ‘Of those that do brandish a blade, many justify it as in the interests of “self defence”. … They are walking around in fear of being stabbed. They feel there is nobody there to protect them. They don’t want to go to the police. But they don’t want to use the knife either.’15 Practitioners who attended the seminar, unprompted, also shared the perception that fear was the main motive for carrying a knife. One practitioner who was ex-military and ex-police and now runs weapons awareness educational programmes with young people commented:

‘Fear outweighs aggression as a motivator. We work with teams of offenders and at the bottom of it is fear … [it’s for] defence, but the fact is knives are not a defensive weapon … It’s an attacking weapon.’

So whilst fear may be the motive, aggression may be the result. The experience of victimisation is discussed below.

**Experience of being a victim of crime**

Personal experience of crime, or the experience of friends or siblings can lead to fear. In the MORI survey 18 per cent of under 15s had been a victim of a crime (22 per cent of young men and 15 per cent of young women). Thirty-one per cent had a friend, brother or sister who had been victim of a crime. One in four had a friend, brother or sister who had had a mobile phone or a bicycle stolen. Young people who have been victims of crime usually know their assailants16 who are usually under the age of 18.17

In the 12 months preceding the MORI Youth Survey, some young people had ‘been threatened by other(s)’ (26 per cent of mainstream pupils, 41 per cent of excluded young people), ‘been bullied’ (21 per cent of mainstream students, 22 per cent of excluded young people) and ‘had something other than a mobile phone stolen from them’ (13 per cent and 24 per cent respectively).18 Young people are therefore the most common victims of crime, with 20 percent of young men aged between 16 and 24 having been victim of violent offence19 and more than one in three 12-15 year olds being assaulted each year.20 As well as being victims of crime, practitioners are also concerned that victims can
Fear and fashion

become perpetrators. One youth worker commented:

‘I think many of the perpetrators have been victims and their fear is real and they’ll ask, ‘what do I do?’ and what do you do? You’re between a rock and a hard place.’

Reluctance to report crimes

Although young people are worried about becoming, and many in fact are, victims of crime, over half of the victims (51 per cent) do not report the crimes they have suffered to the police and 45 percent do not even tell their parents. “The police are often the last port of call for many young people that have been victims of crime.” The reasons for not reporting crimes ‘may include peer pressure not to ‘grass on peers’; believing that the crimes are trivial and would not be taken seriously; a fear that the perpetrators will find out about the reporting; a negative rapport and a sense of mistrust of the police, partly due to a feeling that the police see them as offenders rather than victims, and a lack of awareness as to how to report a crime.’

Even teachers do not report crime to the police when they witness it. According to one youth offending team officer who had dealt with a thousand young Londoners carrying knives, “you’d think head teachers would call the police as much for their safety as anything else – but they don’t.” One practitioner commented at the seminar.

‘Although there are all sorts of ways to report, none could guarantee that they could protect him or catch the perpetrators. There is also an issue that victims don’t want to be identified.’

Victimisation

Some young people carrying a knife “have been victim of a crime and find themselves persuaded that it is morally justifiable to carry a weapon for self defence.” according to the charity Young Voice. Victimisation and offending are strongly linked. Victims and offenders often come from similar backgrounds and have had similar experiences. Many risk factors for offending are also risk factors for victimisation. Young people who experience high levels of victimisation are far more likely than other young people to get involved in offending. As explained by Young Voice, “In response [to being bullied] we see two behaviours: the submitters and the retaliators. The former become withdrawn and depressed, fail to fulfil their potential, or immerse themselves in their work. The retaliators fight back either directly by forming gangs and carrying weapons, or indirectly by using illegal drugs, drinking, fighting and generally becoming ‘hard’ and abusive. So it is possible to see an exponential increase – bullying breeds bullying as young people begin to retaliate.”

Intending to harm

Some young people (without necessarily having been victimised previously) decide to carry a knife with the intention to scare, ‘harass’ or ‘steal’. Belonging to a group, the consumption of alcohol and the use of drugs significantly influence this type of behaviour.

Belonging to gangs; being influenced by friends

Although gang members are often thought to be carrying knives and other weapons, no convincing evidence has so far been put forward that belonging to a gang drives young people towards the carrying of knives or other weapons. However, ‘offending in a group [in general] or on your own does tend to impact on the level of offending and the types of crime committed.” Being part of a group tends to increase the number of offences and
their seriousness. ‘Mainstream pupils who typically offend whilst on their own tend to commit a lower number of offences than those who offend with their friends or siblings’. When asked about the circumstances that applied to them when they committed the offence(s) in the last 12 months, 22 per cent of young people in school and 27 per cent of excluded young people replied ‘I was influenced by friends.’

**Alcohol consumption**

Drinking too much and using knives are not definitively linked, however being drunk is strongly linked to the likelihood of aggression and to offending behaviour in general. The MORI Youth Survey showed that 16 percent of mainstream students and 26 per cent of excluded young people were ‘drunk’ or ‘had been drinking alcohol’ when they committed the offence(s) in the previous 12 months. According to the Home Office, ’18 to 24-year-old binge drinkers were almost three times more likely to have committed an offence than 18 to 24 year olds who often drank but were infrequently drunk. This difference was particularly marked for fights: young binge drinkers were five times more likely to admit involvement in a fight. Binge drinkers were twice as likely to have participated in arguments during or after drinking, four times as likely to admit to taking part in a fight, five times as likely to admit to criminal damage and eight times as likely to admit to a theft than other regular drinkers.’

**Drugs use**

The direct link between drugs and carrying knives and other weapons, needs further investigation however, the survey by Beinhart and others in 2002 has shown that drug consumption may drive young people into offending behaviour. Similarly, the MORI Youth Survey shows that seven percent of mainstream students and 20 percent of excluded young people were ‘on drugs’ when they committed their offence(s) in the last 12 months.

**Lack of parental support for young perpetrators and victims**

Research in 2003 on violence and indiscipline highlights community and parental influences as having the greatest impact upon pupil behaviour within schools. However parents do not always feel responsible for the bad behaviour of their children in school. Teaching staff also feel they lack the training and skill in managing behaviour and indiscipline. Outside the school environment, most support services for victims of crime are for adults and tend not to be accessible or appealing to young people. Practitioners reported that some young people carried knives with the knowledge – and perhaps consent - of their parents.

‘There are cases where the young person is given the knife by a parent and you need input with them too … We need to educate the parents that want their children to carry weapons and show them that, if they are carrying weapons, they are likely to end up in prison with those very people that you want them to keep away from.’
Part 2
Approaches
3 Overview of approaches

This part of the report is divided between specific approaches to tackling the carrying and using of knives and, on the other hand, more general approaches seeking to prevent or reduce youth offending. Few projects or activities are specifically focused on preventing or tackling the use of knives by young people. Those identified are briefly described below. These include projects designed to raise awareness of the dangers of carrying knives, as well as other projects that offer both short and long-term support to young people. General weapons awareness programmes are also briefly described below. Other projects seek to encourage young people to report crimes and to prevent and divert young people from offending. Those more general activities are not all described here, though some projects which work in innovative ways with young people at risk of carrying knives or other weapons are included. Broadly speaking the approaches are set out in this part of the report in the same order as in the flow diagram below.

Partnership working and information sharing

Despite the range of local partnerships and forums, practitioners report difficulty in ‘joined-up working’. In particular information sharing, although widely agreed to be important, is still not smooth or reliable. A youth worker from the voluntary sector commented on the paucity of information they receive from statutory services.

'[The] YOT and Social Services refer young people to our programmes and we are told nothing about them. We had one guy who had had the tendons of one of his arms pulled out in a revenge attack who caused us nothing but trouble. There was another case of a girl referred to us by her social worker who was doing great and all her social worker did was to call to find out if she was OK, and we were like ‘she is doing great, why don’t you come to see her?’ The community/voluntary sector don’t get any information from them. The only people we work well with are the police.'

Another practitioner commented on the differences between theory and practice on information sharing.

‘Agreements between agencies about dealing with situations that arise are theoretically a good idea but in practice they don’t necessarily work out. We are not a front line service but we end up dealing with front line issues and if we’re talking about someone specifically its not good nor healthy to label a young person. If we have an agreement between agencies this will be allowed.’

Plans are nevertheless afoot to improve information sharing and casework management. Information, however, is only likely to be shared about known offenders, or for child protection reasons and about young people at risk. These arrangements will need to be built, as far as possible, on common platforms and shared systems. Practitioners at the seminar suggested that partnership working and information sharing needs to be improved in three areas:

1 examples of good practice;
2 casework management;
3 Information about hotspots and groups of young people who may be carrying knives and weapons but who are not known to criminal justice agencies or social services.

Role of the police

According to practitioners the police have an important role to play in education, prevention and working with young people at risk as well as their role in law enforcement. One police officer commented:

‘We have worked with youth clubs … and we inform the young people that we are talking with their youth workers across the boundary.’
Overview of Approaches

Partnerships (including YOTs, police, schools, voluntary sector, local authority youth workers)

Policy

Strategy (CDRPs, LSPs, etc.)

Information-sharing (individuals and hot spot mapping)

Encouraging reporting

Action plan

Proactive and explicit work on knives and weapons

Integrating work on knives and weapons in joined-up working on youth offending

Raising awareness

Mentoring

Informal education

Conflict resolution

Working with offenders and young people at risk

Gangs

Support for victims

Working with offenders

Support for victims

Support for parents
A youth worker based in a school said:

‘Before we used to have a police officer talk to year 7 and 8 about weapons, but the officer has moved on and we haven’t had anyone to talk to them for the past year. The officer has not been replaced … for the majority of police it’s not very attractive to do this sort of work.’

The right kind of approach by a police officer can win trust even in environments where the police are treated with suspicion, overcoming racial and other barriers. A youth worker commented:

‘A youth involvement officer came down to the club and worked with our young people, who are normally very anti-police and they really took to him and asked him questions. He has now moved on, about a year ago, and I still get kids asking me where he is as they want to ask him something. It’s all about building confidence between people and bringing about more resemblance between a black young man and a middle class white police officer.’

An ex-police officer who now works as a trainer on weapons awareness commented that sometimes:

‘It does take a special kind of police officer to do this, to take his hat off, and then put it on again.’

Some police officers work closely with, or are seconded to, youth offending teams to work one to one with offenders. A youth offending team manager commented:

‘In our youth offending team we have police officers and they have these skills, they go in and are received differently. It’s all about good practice and being able to work in the community, you need special skills; you can’t just put anyone into that job.’

Effective policies and procedures

Many schools and youth clubs have so called ‘zero tolerance’ policies on dealing with anti-social behaviour. In a nutshell they state that, if a young person is found with a knife or another weapon on the premises, the police will be called and the young person may be excluded. Some practitioners felt this approach was impractical and counter-productive.

‘How do we as service providers deal with the weapons issue on site? Do you have signs in your centre saying if we find a weapon you can no longer return? Or do you search people or have metal detectors installed? … this is the very group of people we need to work with but we also need to be able to provide a place of safety … how do you work with them?’

Practitioners emphasised the need to continue working with young people even after they had been found in possession of a knife, though it may be necessary to work with them in a different way.

‘Lots of the young people that come to us have been excluded and we would not exclude them but would have a contract with them. If they turn up with a weapon and it’s a workable situation we will carry on working with them, we need to work with them and can’t exclude them.’

Another practitioner commented:

‘If we find a young person with a knife we will carry on working with them but if we find it again then they will be excluded, but exclusion will be from the open door service as there are different ways to provide a service. It involves us working differently.’

And in the school context:

‘Pupils are excluded immediately but this is followed up by a conference to see how the person can best be reintegrated into school.’

Policies and procedures therefore need to balance the safety of users and staff with the need to continue to address the problems and need of the young people at the greatest risk.
Encouraging reporting

The reluctance of many young people to report to the police - and sometimes even to their parents - that they have been the victim of a crime, has already been noted. Various initiatives in different parts of London have sought to encourage reporting through more user-friendly and youth-centred means. One of the most innovative, using text messages, is briefly described below.

Text Message Crime Information, Newham
The Youth Crime Action Group in Newham is piloting a text message reporting system to encourage young people to report bullying and street crime anonymously using a freetext number. The scheme has been advertised through the local press, schools, and the Council in a campaign involving Crimestoppers. Trained workers at the Young Offending Team receive the texts and respond to the young person by text to find out more about the bullying or other offence. They can then direct the young person towards support services and build the young person’s confidence to report the offence to the police. Youth offending team workers have met with several young people face to face, following a text. The service is due to be extended with a 24-hour service.1
4 Proactive work on knives and other weapons

Prevention and raising awareness

A typology of young people carrying knives was suggested in chapter 1 that ranged from the small number of young people convicted of carrying an offensive weapon to the much larger group who may carry a knife out of motives from fashion to fear. This larger latter group are often under the delusion that carrying a knife is a way of defending themselves. In fact carrying a knife puts them at far greater risk of being stabbed or committing an aggressive act and therefore being labelled an offender with all the consequences that flow from that. These young people need to have their awareness of the risks they run raised in order to prevent and protect them from carrying a knife. A few campaigns have been planned to run with a view to prevention and awareness raising. They are described below.

Mayor of London Weapons Initiative

In response to the increasing evidence that imitation firearms and air weapons are playing an important role in serious crime the Mayor has called for a total ban on replica guns and air weapons because:

‘The range of people affected is much wider than just the victims themselves and includes not only the families, but also police officers and whole communities who live in fear of violence, intimidation of the actual or threatened use of these dangerous weapons.’

Respect campaign, Newham

The London Borough of Newham implemented its ‘Respect’ campaign in 2001 to prevent Newham traders from ‘making a killing’ out of under-age sales of knives, alcohol, solvents and inappropriate videos. The campaign has been working with head teachers to provide activities and opportunities led by Respect partners. These included personal safety talks, fire safety demonstrations, cycling proficiency and road safety, and workshops on the dangers of carrying knives.

A campaign, backed by the Newham’s Youth Offending Team, was also launched in 2001 to warn young people about the dangers of carrying a knife. It aimed to shock teenagers into realising the risks associated with using a knife, from having it used on them by an attacker to murdering someone. Posters of wounds inflicted by knives went up across the borough to force home the message – ‘do not put a knife in your pocket’ – ‘don’t arm your attacker’. The campaign also highlighted how carrying a weapon can ruin a promising young life, from maiming or killing someone, being sent to prison, possibly being released, unable to find work, turning to crime and ending up back in prison. A practitioner who had been involved in this initiative told us:

‘These young people that we work with are bright and intelligent but they have incorrect information and are carrying the weapons for defensive purposes. What we are saying is that it won’t help you, we need to demythologise; the fact is that you can be stabbed or shot and that you will not be able to walk away and get yourself into hospital. We need to provide information about what happens when you get shot or stabbed.’

Knives amnesty

The Metropolitan Police and Hillingdon Council launched a knife amnesty in 2002. People can drop knives in a secure metal bin which moves round the borough. As the bin arrives at each site police officers visit secondary schools to let young people know of the month-long amnesty. Police warn that youngsters, or anyone else, found carrying a knife after the amnesty could face arrest and prosecution. The amnesty follows the success of a similar community bin-a-knife campaign in the borough three years previously.1
Fear and fashion

Face to face: informal education

Building on these general awareness raising and prevention campaigns designed to address all young people, there are also more proactive and interactive programmes and projects working more directly face to face with young people, some of whom are more likely to be at risk of carrying a knife or other weapon. A few of these are described below.²

Boyhood to Manhood

This project works with young black boys excluded or at risk of being excluded from mainstream education or those at risk of offending. The project aims to reduce the barriers to education, to prepare young men to deal with the challenges of life by equipping them with social skills, self awareness, employment skills and new ways of expressing themselves.³

Weapons awareness course

The Be Safe Personal Safety Consultancy in partnership with the Newham Youth Offending Team runs informal education programmes.

The consultancy runs a weapons awareness course that provides young people with accurate information about the consequences of carrying weapons and allows them to make an informed choice. The course covers the law relating to the possession and use of weapons, the medical implications of using weapons and the likelihood of being injured with their own weapon. The course also explains the consequences to themselves, their families and friends of having a weapon, or of being a victim of a knife attack, and seeks to correct the misconception that a knife is a good defensive weapon. Discussions are completely confidential enabling young people to share their experiences and concerns without fear of disclosure.

Face to face: working with offenders

The most intensive work is undertaken with young people convicted of using an offensive weapon. These programmes are longer, more structured, mandatory and designed to deter the young person from re-offending by encouraging them to reflect on their own behaviour and its causes and consequences. A few are briefly outlined below.

Wandsworth YOT

Police officers attached to Wandsworth Youth Offending Team have been working with St George’s Hospital to address the consequences of carrying weapons in two-hour long workshops. The first part is led by St George’s staff and looks at the immediate danger to health of an injury and the long term care and trauma of the victim. Case studies of various victims are considered and basic first aid is taught. The second part is facilitated by police officers and addresses legal aspects, again through case studies, from the perspectives of the victim and perpetrator.

‘Wasted’ programme – Lewisham YOT

Lewisham Youth Offending Team have been working in conjunction with the local health action zone, Southwark youth offending team and the Headway clinic based in Kings College Hospital to deliver a weapons awareness programme to young offenders convicted of crimes involving knives, and to those at risk of using a knife or weapon. The programme lasts twelve and a half hours and is delivered over three weeks. Participants are given information on injuries, legislation and on police powers and procedures. They also look at the reasons why weapons are carried and are taught alternative ways of behaving which can help diffuse situations, making them more aware of body language, assertiveness, citizenship, and self-protection. Offenders are also taken to the A&E department at King’s College Hospital and speak to
patients with knife injuries and the medical staff that attend to them. They are taught basic first aid. In the last session, offenders participate in a drama exercise, based on the material covered in the course and participate in an open-mike session in which they talk about their experiences and impressions of the programme.

Supporting young victims

Practitioners recognised the importance of supporting victims, but it is a difficult area where there is much more to do. A practitioner from a youth offending team admitted to some of these difficulties:

‘The YOT has about 30 per cent victim involvement, but the majority of young victims are likely to meet the perpetrator so not many come along. The victims we do have tend to be those who have had a moped stolen and that kind of thing. We admit to struggling to engage with victims.’

Another practitioner from a conflict resolution organisation commented that it is sometimes possible to engage with victims indirectly.

‘We are currently at the end of our first year piloting a three year programme in three schools in Tower Hamlets where we are working with 240 pupils. Twenty are trained as peer trainers and then they go on to train year 7s and I imagine that a huge number of those involved are victims but we don’t directly ask the question. Or we find out that they are victims in the course of exploring conflicts within the school and when evaluating the costs and gains of action. We don’t work on a one to one basis with victims but rather in groups tackling issues of conflict resolution and restorative justice.’

As has already been noted most of the support available for victims of crime is to meet the needs of adults. Some projects however have sought to meet the needs of young victims of crime. A few examples are given below.

Victim Support Lewisham

Bridge House Trust and the London Borough of Lewisham have jointly funded a Children and Young Persons Support Worker to run a dedicated service for young victims of crime at Victim Support Lewisham. The support worker offers emotional and practical support to young victims. The one-to-one service is also training volunteers on how to support young victims of crime and a resource centre has been established. The resource centre provides information on services and agencies working with young people and arranges information according to age group and the type of support required, for example, how to go to court. Support groups, and courses on anger-management and building self-esteem, and an anti-bullying forum are being developed.

Islington Victim Support

The project offers support to young victims of reported and unreported crime, aged 17 and under. Referrals are accepted from local agencies as well as from victims themselves and staff also work in local schools. The service in schools supports the work of the school’s pastoral support team and can involve working with a specified class tackling covert and overt bullying or working with an individual victim. The service has worked with 288 victims between June 2003 and March 2004, and of these only two cases reached the courts, reflecting the reluctance of victims to report crime. The practitioner interviewed commented that:

‘Young men definitely need extra support because of the culture that they are supposed to be seen as big and not a grass. … On particularly large estates no one comes forward as a victim because of the culture of not grassing.’
5 Integrated work on knives and other weapons as part of jointly tackling youth offending

A wide range of interventions has been developed to work with young people to address either the causes or the consequences of offending behaviour. Some work with individuals, such as mentoring, with a view to helping young people to re-direct and re-order their own lives away from offending towards a more positive engagement with the community and with their own future. A couple of examples are briefly described below.

Mentoring

CHANCE
CHANCE is a community-based intervention programme designed to prevent long-term antisocial behaviour, social exclusion and criminal offending. The project’s main programme provides trained mentors who work one-to-one with primary school-aged children who exhibit behaviour problems and other risk factors. The goal is to intervene only, to support and redirect the children away from more serious and long-term problems.1

Mentoring Plus
Mentoring Plus, led by Crime Concern, is a community-based mentoring and education project for young offenders and young people excluded from school. The project aims to reduce youth crime and other at-risk behaviour, help young people at risk aged between 15 and 19 back into education, training and employment, enable young people to get involved in volunteering. The Mentoring Plus project model was first developed as the Dalston Youth Project in Hackney in 1994. Mentoring Plus projects are now being run in Hackney, Camden, Islington, Bexley, Newham, Brent, Lambeth, Lewisham, Manchester and Bath.2

Conflict resolution

As has already been noted the use of knives and other weapons has been associated not just with the behaviour of individuals, but also with group identities and peer pressures. In extremis these coalesce into gangs. Gangs, as opposed to posses or groups are characterised by defined and defended territories, a ‘uniform’ or visual signals in dress and style and perhaps a name. Making an impact on the use of knives and weapons may therefore require interventions to break down these other underlying or informal networks and divisions and thereby to change the associated behaviour. Some conflict resolution activities and interventions to influence gang behaviour are described below.

Bears Youth Challenge, Brent
The Bears Youth Challenge aims to deliver a bespoke service for hard-to-reach young people who are at risk of falling into serious criminal activity that may ultimately lead to them carrying firearms. There is also a targeted preventative service to pupils in primary education at risk of school exclusion and who may find the street lifestyle of fast cars and guns glamorous and attractive. Youth officers meet with the young people at risk and deliver a peer-led conflict resolution programme as part of the schools anti-bullying policy.3

LEAP
LEAP has been running several projects on youth violence and victimisation. ‘Conflict in Schools’ project supports secondary schools in developing programmes to help young people tackle conflicts. The ‘Quarrel Shop’ is a part-time training and volunteering course for young London based volunteers between 16 and 21. The young people learn mediation, communication and conflict
resolution skills using discussions, games, exercises and role-play. ‘Gangs? What’s gangs?’ is a research project that focuses on gangs and territorialism with the aim of developing innovative, practical approaches to re-integration of young people involved in street gangs. ‘Leadership with Young Offenders’ are courses offered to young people on remand, or convicted, in Young Offenders’ institutions and the officers who work with them. A practitioner from LEAP commented:

‘We deal with gangs and territory and work with schools offering mediation and conflict resolution, but how you make a young person feel safe? And you have to look at what resources are available for working on a one-to-one basis. We look at ways of confronting conflict, letting young people know what’s involved in gang membership and offer leadership courses.’

**Gangs**

**Rapid Response Team, Tower Hamlets Youth Support Services**

Established in 1999, this project seeks to reduce youth conflict and gang fighting in Tower Hamlets. The target group is young people aged between 12 and 21 involved in gang and street fights, truancy, leaving secondary schools without qualifications, drug users in the early stages, petty crime (e.g. mugging and car theft), and those on anti-social behaviour orders. The rapid response team offers one-to-one guidance and support to young people working with voluntary organisations and ‘acts as the glue between all the different organisations’. The personal advisers and key workers make contact with young people on their own territory, and work with them outside youth clubs and centre-based activities. The workers suggest referral and learning and training opportunities in conflict resolution. They also aim to involve the young people in self-awareness, group work and confidence building activities. The long-term aim is to create a detached and street youth work service across the borough.

**Gang Reduction Project, Southwark**

The Youth Offending Team’s Gang Reduction Project works with young people aged between 11 and 17 who are on the periphery of gang involvement and those or at risk of gang involvement. Two workers deliver the “impact” 12-week programme to schools, pupil referral units and youth clubs. A one-off condensed version of the programme is also provided for both voluntary and statutory agencies involved in working with young people. Their aim is to demystify the appeal of gangs by challenging young people’s attitudes and beliefs, exploring issues around masculinity, violence, race and the effects of popular culture on identity. They aim to work in innovative ways with young people to develop their self-esteem and confidence thereby enabling them to resist gang culture. Using a variety of mediums, from art and drama to video, the programme focuses on issues of identity, group involvement, conflict resolution, reducing risk behaviour and promoting positive peer group associations.

**Support for parents**

Key protection factors for all offending behaviour are parental influence, support and control and school attendance. Home Office research found that “inadequate parental supervision is strongly associated with offending”. Young people with low or medium levels of parental supervision were twice as likely to offend as those with high parental supervision. The Government has introduced a range of measures to encourage and indeed to compel to keep their children under control. Programmes have been developed to support parents, not just in control, but also in promoting and modelling good behaviour.
A practitioner who attended the seminar noted:

'We need to educate the parents that want their children to carry weapons and show them that, if they are carrying weapons, they are likely to end up in prison with those very young people that you want to keep them away from.'

Trust for the Study of Adolescence - Video, guide and assessment tools
As mentioned above, the research conducted on violence and indiscipline in UK schools highlights community and parental influences as having the greatest impact upon pupil behaviour within schools. The Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) has produced video, guidance and assessment tools that address parenting skills, guide parents engaged in the youth justice system, and discuss the importance of focused family involvement with intervention schemes; assistance is also provided to youth offending teams in administering parenting support services.
Part 3
Findings and next steps
6 Findings and recommendations

Findings

The extent of carrying knives and other weapons amongst younger people appears to be growing. This affects children in the 11 to 16 age group, as well as those between 16 and 25; the likelihood of knives being used is greater in the older age group. Young people carry knives in school, youth clubs and on the street. Boys are more likely to carry knives than girls, though there is also a problem amongst girls. Young people who have been excluded from school are the most likely to carry, and use, knives and other weapons, as well as commit other offences. Fear is the most common reason given by young people themselves, by youth workers and teachers for carrying knives. Peer influences, group identity and fashion also seem to play a part in encouraging young people to carry knives. A lack of support from parents, schools and youth community services also increase the likelihood of offending generally.

Although the problem of young people carrying knives and other weapons appears, by common consent, to be growing, few dedicated public awareness or educational programmes have been developed or delivered. Similarly few dedicated programmes working with young people at risk of carrying and using knives have been developed. As a consequence, there are relatively few examples of good practice. Those that there are have not been widely disseminated or shared.

Recommendations

Drawing on the literature and this research, key priorities for action therefore are:

1 developing local demonstrations, programmes and activities;
2 developing good practice materials for schools, youth clubs, youth offending teams and the police;
3 promoting and disseminating good practice materials and examples.

Demonstration projects

From these findings, key elements of a demonstration programme to combat the problem would include the following:

1 Efforts are most likely to be successful if they focus on geographical hotspots.
2 The involvement of a range of agencies including the police, schools, youth services, the voluntary sector and youth offending teams is needed.
3 The programme should include the following components:
   • raising the awareness of the young people about the problem;
   • formal and informal educational activities;
   • encouraging young people to discuss the problem;
   • ensuring they know whom they go to report incidents they experience or witness;
   • support for young people at risk (particularly those facing school exclusion), including one to one support, peer leadership, mentoring and conflict resolution, not just general youth work;
   • direct work with young offenders convicted of carrying offensive weapons;
   • diversionary activities;
   • skills development for teachers;
   • support for parents.

Good practice materials

Subjects on which good practice materials need to be developed include:

1 Information-sharing about individual young people carrying or using knives and other weapons.
2 Model policies and procedures for schools, youth clubs and youth offending teams.

3 Support programmes for young people at risk and young offenders.

4 Public awareness campaigns.

5 Informal and formal educational programmes.

6 Encouraging reporting.

Some of these materials may already exist. Most, however, would have to be developed through action learning and action research. The most effective method of promoting and disseminating information and case studies is through a website. Without proactive knowledge management, however, websites quickly degrade and fall into disuse if new material is not regularly posted; users of the web site also need to be regularly informed about new information added to the web site.
Chapter 1

1 Lane, M., Wheeler, B. ‘Is Knife crime really getting worse?’ BBC online, 7 November 2003: “Evidence shows knife seizures are on the increase. The number of people convicted of carrying a blade in public rose from 2,559 in 1995 to 3,570 in 2000, according to the Home Office”

2 See Lane, M., Wheeler, B. ibid.


4 Beinart, S., et al. ibid., p.16.

5 Katz, A., ‘Bullying: mutating and secretive – are new responses needed?’, www.young-voice.org..


7 Hopkins, N. ‘Children shown mortuary photos to deter carrying of knives’, The Guardian, 1 August 2001. ‘The Metropolitan police confiscates more than 1,000 knives a month, and the haul usually includes dozens of machetes, combat knives at least six inches long, swords, and Stanley knives that have been adapted to carry two blades to cause maximum harm.’

8 Townsend, M., Barnett, A.

9 MORI. p.51.


11 MORI. p.21.

12 MORI. p.5.


14 Beinart, S., et al. p.16.

15 MORI. p.5.

Chapter 2


3 Brooks, L. ‘Armed and Dangerous’.

4 Brooks, L.

5 Brooks, L.

6 Tracy McVeign. ‘Girls are now bigger bullies than boys’, The Observer, 10 November 2002.

7 Beinart, S., et al.


9 Brooks,L.

10 MORI. p. 5.

11 MORI. p.21.

12 Crimestoppers. www.crimereduction.gov.uk

13 MORI.p. 46.


15 Lane, M., Wheeler,B.

16 Crimestoppers.

17 MORI. p.50.
Fear and fashion

18 MORI, p.49. (Six per cent of mainstream pupils and 12 per cent of excluded young people had a mobile stolen. ‘Despite the continued publicity about mobile phone theft among young people, the level of offenders committing this offence remains low among mainstream offenders, at 5 per cent, which is consistent with previous years. However, mobile phone theft is increasing among excluded offenders with three in ten (31 per cent) self-reporting this crime, compared with 25 per cent in 2002.’ MORI, p.23.)


21 Crimestoppers.


26 Youth and Crime Unit London.


28 Brooks, L. The Guardian.

29 MORI, p.27.

30 MORI.

31 MORI, p.28.

32 MORI, p. 29.


34 MORI, p. 29.


Chapter 3


Chapter 4


3 Youth and Crime Unit London (YACU). www.youthcrimelondon.gov.uk

Chapter 5

1 St James-Roberts, I, Coram Research Unit, Can mentors help primary school children with behaviour problems?, Home Office, 2001. According to this final document, “the evaluation report contains very positive assessments of the project’s implementation, management and professional development. It also notes that the children and their families trusted and valued their mentors highly. However, the findings on outcomes are not consistently favourable. Children, parents and mentors reported positive increases in confidence, self-control and relationship. But, more rigorous standardised assessments of behaviour and school-related measure show improvements only equivalent to those of a comparison group of non-mentored children.” (p. iv.)
2 Youth Justice Board Practitioners’ Portal. www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk “External evaluations of DYP found that levels of offending amongst young people on the project had decreased and 60-70 percents of participants went on to full-time education, training and development.”

3 Youth and Crime Unit London. www.youthcrimelondon.gov.uk. There have also been a number music and DJ workshops, which engage young people initially in the service. There is also a recent initiative that has been developed as part of this project called ID. It runs culturally specific workshops, looking into key issues such as self-esteem and identity.

4 LEAP website at www.leaplinx.com

5 Youth and Crime Unit London. www.youthcrimelondon.gov.uk

6 Safer Southwark Partnership website at www.safersouthwark.org.uk

7 Home Office. *Parenting Controls and Orders Guidance*, 2004

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9 Youth Justice Board Practitioners’ Portal at www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk
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