KNIFE CRIME INTERVENTIONS: 'WHAT WORKS?'

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This review of the literature sought to identify what is known about 'what works' in reducing knife carrying and knife crime. Specifically, it sought to identify the features of successful interventions for young people; summarise evidence of good practice; and examine the outcomes of successful intervention programmes.

- There are a wide range of interventions seeking to tackle knife related crime available throughout the world. Scholars have repeatedly called for comprehensive evaluation to be undertaken with regard to these. This review has highlighted once more the need to remedy this.

- The two chief motivators for carrying a knife are: acquisition of status and fear of crime. Fear of crime is coupled with the belief that carrying a knife is protection against victimisation. Given that these are the main causes, interventions which are the most effective in addressing knife crime are ones which so address these causes.

- Diversionary activities have some potential to address knife crime. These activities, which include engagement in sport and mentoring programmes, may help prevent a young person from choosing to carry a knife.

- Current research suggests that education based interventions hold the *most* promise for effectively addressing knife crime. Education based interventions can be supported by criminal justice responses, which also have an important role to play in addressing knife crime.

- Educational interventions should aim to raise awareness about the dangers and consequences of choosing to carry a knife and engage in knife crime. Acknowledgement should be made of the very real fear many young people have of victimisation, the origins of which may be complex. This acknowledgement should involve taking young people's fears seriously. Once the fear is acknowledged, young people should be reassured that police and other agencies are working hard to ensure their safety, so rendering carrying a knife unnecessary. It should also be emphasised to young people that carrying a knife increases rather than decreases their risk of victimisation.

- Educational interventions should be delivered both in schools and within the communities, in order to reach all young people, recognising that different young people have different experiences of education.

- Educational interventions should be delivered by individuals who are knowledgeable in the area, preferably where this knowledge is a result of direct experience with knife crime, in whichever capacity. These individuals should be adept at engaging young people in this issue. How these different strengths should be combined in practice in Scotland is an area which could be explored by further research.

- Building trust is important for the administration of interventions. This helps to ensure that young people accept and fully believe that police and other agencies are working hard to ensure their safety. Trust can be maintained through the careful use of criminal justice interventions.

- Whilst stop and searches have a role to play, some commentators have expressed concern that stop and searches may exacerbate and create tensions and feelings of mistrust. This may undermine educational efforts which offer these reassurances. It is therefore important that stop and searches are undertaken with some degree of caution.

- Custodial sentences are useful in sending out a message to young people who carry knives to acquire status that the risks of any status acquisition outweigh the benefits. It is important that their function is not over-stated since they may not have a meaningful impact (deterrent effect) on those who carry a knife out of fear.

- Knife amnesties tend to be ineffective on their own, but do have an awareness raising function which can supplement and reinforce the messages contained in educational interventions.

- The mass media can be used positively to raise awareness of the issue, and supplement educational interventions.

- Whilst knives represent a particularly serious form of violence, and can have serious and irrevocable consequences, it is important to consider too the broader context in which knife related crimes occur. The findings from this review reinforce the wisdom of taking a broad approach to violence reduction.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing concern over knife carrying and associated knife crime, in Scotland and elsewhere. Despite this increased concern, there is a lack of robust, shared knowledge on 'what works' in reducing knife carrying and knife crime. In light of this information dearth, a report was commissioned by the Scottish Government from the Scottish Centre for Crime Justice Research. This research sought to:

- Identify features of successful violence reduction/knife crime interventions for young people, with a focus on prevention through awareness raising, education and diversionary activities;
- Identify evidence for what is good practice under these programmes;
- Identify the outcomes which successful programmes look to deliver;
    - What indicators do these programmes use to measure progress against these outcomes?
    - What evaluation methodologies are most successful in measuring delivery of outcomes under these programmes?

Note on Terminology

'Knife carrying' refers to the carrying of a knife, without lawful purpose. 'Knife crime' is a broad term which covers a wide range of offences associated with a knife. In this report, 'knife- related crime' is used as an umbrella term, covering both knife carrying and all other knife offences.

Limitations of this Research

Whilst a wide range of knife crime interventions are currently in use throughout the world, most have not been thoroughly evaluated or, more commonly, have not been evaluated at all (Hausman et al: 1995; Greene: 1998; Eades: 2006; Palasinski and Riggs: 2012; Silvestri et al: 2009l; Lowry et al: 1998; Gliga: 2009; Sethi et al: 2010). This lack or absence of evaluation of existing interventions constitutes a significant limitation of this research.

It has emerged that some of the features of Scotland's knife crime interventions including the No Knives, Better Lives (NKBL) initiative, are shared by other initiatives throughout the world and have been received positively. To some extent, this may provide reassurance to policy makers. However, in light of the lack of formal evaluation, it is not possible to conclusively state that such features are actually effective in reducing knife related offences. Moreover, given that these anti knife

carrying and knife crime interventions are relatively recent, the evaluations which do exist can only evaluate their short-term successes and failures. Thus, where successes are identified, it is not possible to say if these have any lasting effect.

Whilst the evidence presented in this report is largely not based on evaluation of the existing interventions, it is based on academic work and research theory covering a broad range of topics including young people's fears of victimisation and young people's responses to different forms of education.

The Causes of Knife Carrying

An essential part of establishing 'what works' in reducing knife carrying involves consideration of the causes for knife carrying in the first place.

It is of course not practical, or even possible, to consider the myriad of causes of knife carrying (Judit et al: 2009; Camm: 2007; Reid: 2011). However, consideration of the two most common causes for knife carrying is feasible. Research suggests that there are two chief motivators for knife carrying. The first is a fear of crime, which may or may not be due to previous experience of victimisation, whether direct or otherwise, and this fear is coupled with the belief that knives are sources of protection, and thus protect against any potential victimisation (Lemos: 2004; Simon et al: 1999; Booth et al: 2008; Pritchard: 2009; Judit et al: 2009; Barter and Berridge 2005: 201; Eades et al: 2007; Gliga: 2009; Crabbe: 2009). Some research has suggested that fear plays the "most [emphasis added] significant role in a young person's decision to carry a knife or weapon" (Lemos: 2004; Gliga: 2009). The second chief motivator is the perception that carrying a knife is a means of acquiring status (Lemos: 2004; Smith: 2008; Silvestri: 2009). As stated earlier, it seems logical that any intervention seeking to address this behaviour should pay attention to these.

KNIFE CRIME INTERVENTIONS

As stated, there are a wide range of knife crime interventions currently in use throughout the world. Some diversion based interventions will be briefly explored, and these have a number of potential strengths. However, the focus of this report will be on the features and good practice of education based interventions. Research indicates that education based interventions hold the most promise of all the available anti knife carrying, knife crime and violence interventions, and the evidence base for these currently is the strongest.

This report will therefore explore:
1. Diversionary activities
2. Educational interventions
3. Criminal justice and multi-agency approaches
4. Consideration of the broader contexts in which violence takes place

1. Diversionary Activities

Sport has recently been identified as being a "vehicle for change" (Crabbe: 2009), in reducing knife related crime and inter personal violence amongst young people. Engagement in sport may help young people keep busy with a positive distraction, and can give them a greater sense of control, direction and respect (Crabbe: 2009; Street Games Report: 2011; Agnew: 2013). A relationship between gang membership and knife carriage has been identified by other research (for example, Bannister et al: 2010, McVie: 2010; Fitzgerald: 2007), albeit the relationship is not a straightforward one. Membership of a sports team can generate some of the same positive feelings as membership of a gang can produce, thus suggesting that sport related activities may have a positive ripple effect (Crabbe: 2009).

Mentoring programmes have been suggested as potentially having an impact on inter-personal violence. This may involve mentoring between a young person and a positive adult role model; the literature suggests that fostering a positive relationship between an adult role model is a protective factor against violence (Peskin et al: 2009; Booth et al: 2008; Cameron: 2000). Mentoring may also be between peers themselves, which may build self -confidence (Booth et al: 2008); self -esteem has also been identified as a protective factor against violence (England and Jackson: 2013).

2. Educational interventions

The literature suggests that the most successful education based programmes are likely to incorporate the following elements:

The incorporation of the 'fear' element into interventions
Research suggests that interventions seeking to reduce knife carrying and associated knife crime should pay attention to one of the main reasons for carrying a knife: fear of victimisation and the resultant belief that knives are a source of protection against victimisation.

Most educational interventions seek to ensure that young people have a greater awareness of the issues relating to knife crime. These include: awareness of the potential impact of knife crime for all parties involved, including the physical, emotional and legal consequences; awareness of the sanctions if caught carrying a weapon; and awareness that carrying a weapon actually increases one's risk of being victimised (Fitzgerald: 2007; Booth et al: 2008).

There is certainly a need for such information to be delivered to young people, and understood by them. Indeed, addressing this low level of consequential thinking was

one of the reasons behind the NKBL initiative (Scottish Government Resource Document). It also seems useful to consider exactly how this information is received by young people: detailed consideration of this in the existing literature is lacking. Receipt of such information may discourage those who carry knives in an attempt to elevate social status, who may subsequently decide that the risks outweigh any benefits. However, this information may less positively be received by those who are fearful: this information makes no reference to the fear some young people have, leaving this fear unacknowledged, and unaddressed, and as such, one of the main causes also unaddressed.

Consequently, it has been suggested that addressing teenage concerns about personal safety should be a paramount consideration (Palasinski: 2013). Increasingly, scholars have called for a greater acknowledgement of, and greater attention paid to, the fears of young people regarding crime and victimisation (Stephen: 2009; White: 2004). Educational approaches are well placed to do this. Such approaches should aim to reduce perceived vulnerability to victimisation (Simon et al: 1999; White: 2010). As one scholar has identified, perception, however inaccurate, can have an "enormous bearing on how one behaves" (Aynsley-Green: 2009). Perceptions regarding vulnerability to victimisation are often shaped by mass media; this is a heavily researched topic in academia (Dowler: 2003; Meghji: 2008). Perceived vulnerability to victimisation may be addressed by calibrating the mass media's depiction of violence, including its prevalence, and educating young people about how they should interpret media sources (Palasinski: 2013). The fear shared by young people should be acknowledged, and acknowledged as a legitimate one (Palasinski and Riggs: 2012). This, however, should not be dwelled on. Once fear is acknowledged, an educational programme should stress that the police and other agencies are working hard to keep young people safe, even if criminal justice measures, such as police stop and search tactics, present them as in an opposite (adversarial) position to young people. In emphasising this, young people can be informed that resorting to self- protection by carrying a knife is unnecessary. Young people can also be informed that carrying a knife will offer little protection; in fact, it will leave them less protected than they would otherwise be.

It is acknowledged that in some instances, acknowledging fear and providing reassurance, will not be a panacea. Where violence is deeply embedded in some Scottish communities, a particular issue in the West of Scotland (Foulkes: 2007; Halbert: 2005), a culture of fear may accompany it. This fear may be similarly entrenched and as such difficult to minimise or eradicate.

However, the existing research does suggest incorporating recognition of the fear and providing reassurance, into an educational intervention, is good practice. A number of 'Fear and Fashion' projects in England and Wales have been the subject of extensive evaluation. These projects have been praised for tackling the issues young people themselves have raised, and have identified as priorities (Clear Plan: 2010). Fear of victimisation is one such commonly raised and pressing issue.

These educational interventions should form part of a sustained effort to reassure young people, and adults, that their fears are taken seriously, and efforts are being made to ensure their safety. Indeed, many scholars have suggested that there is no 'quick fix' to tackle such a long standing and complex issue: sustained efforts are necessary (Booth et al: 2008; Halbert: 2005; Fitzgerald: 2007; Greene: 1998). Sustained efforts then have a chance to address a long standing culture of fear, which pervades a number of Scottish communities. Crucially, the effectiveness of programmes of reassurance will be undermined if not supported by a much wider effort to enhance safety and reduce the vulnerability of young people in their communities: this, of course, will reduce not only perceived vulnerability to victimisation, but actual vulnerability too.

Therefore, it is suggested that the main causes of knife carrying, and the features of any education based initiative should be married up. In this instance, acknowledging and minimising the fear, one of the main reasons, should be incorporated into an educational intervention. This should form part of a sustained approach aiming to reduce fear, and reduce vulnerability to victimisation.

An informal and formal approach to education

Research indicates that taking a broad approach to education is best practice. This involves using education in its traditional sense, taught in schools, but also in the community: a formal and informal approach (Lemos: 2004), or education "in all its forms" (Booth et al: 2008). Research indicates that this two pronged approach to education can effectively reach and engage young people. This approach also recognises the different experiences of and involvement with education that young people have. Crucially, an informal approach helps engage young people who may be more at risk of carrying a knife already, in light of their poor attachment to school (Kodjo et al: 2003; England and Jackson: 2013; Judit et al: 2009). In the US, informal approaches, termed 'alternative education' approaches have been met with some success. Such approaches have involved delivering an interactive and engaging programme, in sites used by young people in the communities, such as youth organisations and community health centres (Hausman et al: 1995). Ensuring the programme is engaging is particularly important where young people have not responded positively to formal education in schools (Stephenson: 2009).

Research suggests that those who deliver an educational programme about knives should have a healthy knowledge of the issue (Brookman and Maguire: 2003). This helps to ensure that the young people in receipt of the programme respect the person delivering the programme, and so give the programme its deserved attention (Downer: 2004). Those who have some experience of knife carrying and knife crime, in whatever capacity, may be appropriate persons to be involved in such programmes, as they naturally have this knowledge (Eades et al: 2007). Experiences may include being a former knife carrier or being a victim of a knife offence (Eades et

al: 2007). Moreover, it is important that the person or persons who deliver a programme are adept at engaging with these young people, or at least, appear adept at engaging these young people (Clear Plan: 2010). For example, an educational intervention may involve combining the expertise of a teacher or youth worker, with a person who is knowledgeable in the area, such as a knife crime victim or a medical professional who has experience in treating knife related injuries. This is merely an example. How the combination of these features may be achieved in practice in Scotland, is not clear. It is suggested that this be explored by further research.

The positive use of mass media

Whilst the mass media may be part of the problem surrounding fear of victimisation they may also be part of the solution. Research suggests that whilst the mass media has limited effectiveness when used in isolation, when used in conjunction with education, both formal and informal, its effectiveness is raised. Media campaigns have been identified as a "promising strategy" for reducing substance misuse (Gottfredson et al: 2007), and reducing tobacco use (Swaim and Kelly: 2008). Research suggests mass media can be used to reinforce the messages from school and community-based programmes on knife crime (De Jong: 1994; Swaim and Kelly: 2008).

3. Criminal justice and multi-agency responses

Many commentators have suggested the wisdom of a multi-agency approach to address knife carrying (McCallum: 2011; Walsh: 2011; Silvestri et al: 2009; England and Jackson: 2013; Golding and McClory: 2008; Lowry et al: 1998). Criminal justice agencies, institutions and practices are of course a crucial part of this multi- agency approach.

Research suggests that criminal justice interventions have an important place in tackling knife-related crime (for example, Stephen: 2009). However, research also suggests that such responses should be measured. It is important that the balance between criminal justice interventions and educational interventions is struck appropriately, in order to ensure the best application of both. Their best application is ensuring that the two major motivations for carrying a knife are addressed.

A range of criminal justice measures have been introduced and applied to address knife carrying in Scotland and elsewhere. However, their appropriateness has been questioned. 'Stop and search' policies have successfully deterred some young people from choosing to carry a knife (Bannister et al: 2010), and as will be discussed, these are likely to be those young people who may be motivated to carry a knife for status acquisition reasons. Whilst there has been some success, low 'hit rates' have also been frequently cited (Silvestri et al: 2009; Walsh: 2011; Brookman and Maguire: 2003). Moreover, concern has been raised over the potential counter- productive effect of 'stop and search' practices. This effect is the exacerbation of existing poor

relationships between youth and the police, or the creation of poor relationships with the police (White: 2004; Kinsella: 2011; Stephen: 2009). This may be worsened further by the very way in which young people often communicate with one another, as identified by an influential study in Edinburgh in 1994: the sharing of 'cautionary tales' about the police, and police incidents, even if they themselves are not directly involved. If such tales relate to police activity which has been received negatively, then this is likely to have a significant impact on young people's perceptions of the police (Anderson et al: 1994). If these perceptions are negative and distrustful, then efforts to reassure young people that the police and other agencies are working hard to ensure their safety are undermined. Young people may feel unprotected, and thus may feel that they must instead protect themselves (Fitzgerald: 2007).

Knife amnesties have typically been accompanied with high expectations, though they also typically fail to live up to these expectations (Eades et al: 2007). Given the inherent ease with which knives are accessed, knife amnesties are also likely to be inherently limited. Even if a sizeable number of knives are seized, they tend to represent a marginal proportion of the total number of knives available. For example, in the 2006 knife amnesty, whilst an impressive 89, 864 knives were collected in England and Wales, this represented only 0.0041 knives in homes, assuming each of the 22 million households in England and Wales had only a single knife (Eades: 2006). Research has indicated that knife amnesties tend to be unsuccessful as stand-alone measures (Bannister et al: 2010; Booth et al: 2008; Sethi et al: 2010; Downer: 2004; Eades: 2006). Nonetheless, research suggests that knife amnesties may have an important awareness raising function, by supplementing the information presented in educational interventions (Eades et al: 2007).

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill 2013 has been introduced, and intends to amend the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995 to increase the maximum custodial sentence for unlawful possession of a knife from four years to five years; the expectation is that this will have a deterrent effect (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service). Some scholars have expressed reservations over the effectiveness of increased custodial sentences, suggesting that those who carry knives tend to be young people who are less likely to foresee both the short term and long term consequences of their actions (Eades et al: 2007). This could be countered by educational interventions which seek to educate young people about such consequences, and this may deter those young people who are motivated to carry knives for status acquisition. However, this is unlikely to be effective with young people whose fear may overtake any objective knowledge and understanding of carrying a knife, with all of its attendant consequences. An interview with a knife carrier highlights this well: "They only say four years to stop you but it doesn't. No- cos you can't just stop carrying a knife because you might get four, five years. You've got worries. I'd rather have a...and flick it out and start wetting man than get stabbed myself..." (Pritchard: 2009). To some extent, lengthier custodial sentences punish those who are most fearful. Evidently, education has an essential role in reassuring young people that

carrying knives is unnecessary; indeed, it may be the only way in which fears can be addressed, and the only way in which knife related crime can be reduced, amongst those who perpetrate it as a result of fear.

Indeed, it has been said that zero tolerance approaches fail to distinguish between the different reasons for knife carrying (Brown: 2004; Thomas: 2004). Criminal justice measures appear to concentrate on discouraging knife carrying and as such knife related crime, amongst those who are motivated to carry for acquisition of status reasons. This is an advisable approach to address this reason. However, it is not best placed to address fear of victimisation. Rather, educational interventions seem best placed to mediate this fear.

A multi-agency approach demands cooperation, and the careful balancing of the measures used by each agency. Academic theory and empirical evidence both highlight the importance of criminal justice interventions in, for example, deterring others, improving public safety and in conveying a message to society that the act in question is unacceptable. Therefore, criminal justice interventions are a necessary and important part of tackling any form of crime, and knife related crime is no exception. Educational interventions are equally necessary and important. Of course, the involvement and support of other agencies, not least agencies of the voluntary sector have an important part to play. It is essential then that roles of each agency within this multi -agency approach, are balanced appropriately, so that the approaches used by each, complement, rather than conflict with one another.

4. Consideration of the broader context in which violence takes place

In addition to the specific details provided above, the literature also suggests that any intervention seeking to reduce knife related crime should pay significant attention to the wider culture and context in which these activities take place. Isolating knives from other weapons, and isolating weapons from the wider issue of violence may be problematic (Fitzgerald: 2007; Grimshaw: 2008).

Knives appear to be the "weapon of choice" by those who choose to carry a weapon (Fitzgerald: 2007) at present, and the ready availability of knives may preserve this status quo. However, ultimately, the weapon of choice may be subject to change. An over-emphasis on the 'knife' may be "something of a distraction" (Silvestri et al: 2009) to a consideration of the broader context in which weapon related violence takes place, and the underlying causes of violence. If the underlying causes of violence are obscured, then the impact of any intervention seeking to reduce knife crime specifically may have a "limited impact" (Grimshaw: 2008). The impact may be hampered further, if the weapon of choice changes.

Consequently, a number of scholars have suggested that greater consideration be paid to these underlying causes (Golding et al: 2008; Webster et al: 1993; Silvestri et

al: 2009; Squires: 2009). These suggestions were responded to in the 'Fear and Fashion' projects referred to earlier in this report. Such projects have shifted away from a consideration of knife crime as a "phenomenon per se" and instead moved towards a consideration of knife crime as part of an "overall pattern of youth-on-youth violence" (Clear Plan: 2010).

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS AND OUTCOMES

As stated earlier, most interventions have not been subject to evaluations, or, where evaluations have taken place, these have been limited in scope. As such, the evidence used in this report is largely based on academic studies of causes and wider aspects of young people's lives, rather than evidence from evaluation of specific interventions. This lack of evaluation means that the following indicators are only suggested indicators:

- Reduction in the number of people carrying knives;
- Reduction in knife related crime (Hitchcock: 2010);
- Increased awareness of the consequences of knife carrying and knife crime (McCallum: 2011);
- Reduction in involvement in physical fighting (Lowry et al: 1998), so recognising that the knife may be representative of a wider culture of violence. This is premised on the recognition that if violence in general is reduced, there is hope that this may in turn reduce knife carrying and other knife related offences.

It is therefore suggested that in any future evaluation of any anti knife crime intervention, these indicators only act as a guide. Instead, tailored indicators should be drawn up and applied.

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