

Scouting Sunday topic paper: Knife crime



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Topic 1: Knife crime

Question: It would help tackle knife crime amongst young people if...?

In recent months to read newspapers or watch the news, a picture of Britain as a hotbed of crime and violence emerges. There have been a series of high profile fatal stabbings in recent years that have highlighted the number of people routinely carrying knives and put pressure on the government to tackle what many believe is a growing knife-culture. This year there have been 23 violent murders in London alone, most involving knives and young people. So we're asking you about what you think we can do as a society to stop young people carrying knives.

Background Information: Is knife violence out of control?

The spate of stabbings has led to fears in the press that knife crime is spiralling out of control. But [how common is it?](#) This is difficult to measure because the Home Office keeps no statistics on stabbings as there is no specific criminal offence of stabbing. Instead, attackers are charged with a variety of offences such as murder, wounding or grievous bodily harm.

Given the coverage given to this issue in the press it is easy to think that deaths by knives were becoming more common. But statistics suggest that isn't the case. Last year 258 people were killed by sharp instruments, a number that

has barely changed since the turn of the millennium. As a proportion of total murders (which have been rising slowly for decades), death by sharp instrument is no more frequent now than it was ten years ago, though knives remain Britain's most prevalent murder weapon. The British Crime Survey suggests that violent crime has fallen dramatically in recent years. Yet people are increasingly worried about it, which highlights an [apparent mismatch between perception and reality](#) in the UK.

Furthermore, although murder is not much more common than it used to be, non-fatal attacks seem to be getting more serious. The British Crime Survey asks victims if they were traumatised by their ordeal; last year 86% of those who had been attacked by strangers said they were, against 74% in 2002. The likelihood of being badly hurt has gone up too. In 2002 8% of victims needed to see a doctor; by 2005 that figure had doubled. An increase in knife-carrying might explain the grislier attacks. This is seemingly backed up by the Youth Justice Board, which reckons a third of those aged between 11 and 16 occasionally carry a knife. The police are arresting many more people for possession of a knife, using their power to 'stop and search' people they believe may be carrying a weapon.

What Do the Politicians think should be done about it?

In response politicians from all political parties are calling for action. The Conservatives have called for [anyone convicted of carrying a knife to](#)

[be sent to jail](#) whilst the Labour government has changed the law so that the [prosecution age limit for carrying a knife was cut](#) from 18 to 16 years old and further 'shock tactics' such as [making offenders who carry knives visit hospitals](#) where stabbing victims are being treated are being planned to try to stop young people from carrying a knife. The Liberal Democrats want to see [more money spent on police](#) and more use of the 'stop and search' powers to find people carrying knives. However, others have warned that [these ideas simply target the problem of knife crime](#) rather than the causes.

So what do you think should be done? And what do you think of the politician's ideas?

Further reading

Footballers make knife-crime plea

BBC, 18 August 2008

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7568352.stm>

Young people's knife crime fears

BBC, 28 July 2008

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7523152.stm>

Knife crime: perception v reality

The Guardian, 18 July 2008

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jul/18/knifecrime1>

Knives fears out on the town

BBC, 13 July 2008

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7503871.stm>

Action pledged on knife crime after five killed in a day

The Times, 12 July 2008

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article4318934.ece>

14,000 knife victims a year

The Independent, 6 July 2008

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/14000-knife-victims-a-year-860857.html>

Crime: A Special Report

The New Statesman, 9 June 2008

<http://www.newstatesman.com/pdf/ns-crime-supplement-june-2008.pdf>

Further information

Websites for young people

<http://www.notagoodlook.org/>

<http://www.itsnotagame.org/index.php>

<http://www.provision.org.uk/knife.htm>

<http://www.gameover4knives.com/>

Legislation

<http://www.itsnotagame.org/download/legislation.pdf>

Video

Jeremy Cooke of the BBC reports from New York where scanners are used at school gates to stop knives entering.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_4990000/newsid_4999700/4999782.stm?bw=bb&mp=wm