

Causes of the rise of knife crime and evaluation of police responses



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Over the past decade, knife crime has been a topic of discussion and has hit the front of English and Welsh newspapers multiple times and is a major security threat in all areas of England and Wales. Knife crime rates have increased by nearly increased by two thirds from the lowest recorded knife crime rates (in 2014) to the latest year (2018) showing that the rates keep on rising each year. Out of the 44 police forces within England and Wales, only 2 of the police forces did not recognise an increase in recorded knife crime since 2011 (BBC, 2019). This essay will be exploring the key features within knife crime within England and Wales and attempting to understand what causes knife crime to occur on the streets of England and Wales. We will also be exploring the responses of the English and Welsh Government to help reduce the rates of knife crime on their streets.

Definition and Key Features

“ Knife” crime, a crime involving an object with a blade or sharp instrument (House of Commons, 2018). Knife crime was brought to the UK general public as a major concern in 2008 as it was put into the limelight by the UK media creating a moral panic (Cohen, 1973). At the time, the youth were used as a ‘ barometer’ on the state of the nation to illustrate the concerns the UK may have within the future (Bottoms, 1974) and youth violence, use of weapons and the rise of gang culture within the population was evidence of the consequences of the United Kingdoms ‘ broken society’ (Neil, 2007). 2008 was also the year where the government began to implement new strategies to help tackle this knife crime epidemic by the publication of the Youth Crime Action Plan (HM Government, 2008) expressing the no tolerance for carrying weapons. The government also made the police force raise the <https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-the-rise-of-knife-crime-and-evaluation-of-police-responses/>

frequency of the stop and search strategy on the streets of the UK to minimise the number of individuals carrying a knife (HM Government, 2008).

The main way to understand how to reduce the number of individuals in the populations carrying knives is to understand the reasons why they may carry a knife in the first place. There are some reasons as to why someone would carry a knife which is: To increase their capacity to harm another being (Wright, JD. 1993), because of fear of violence in their demographic (Arria, A. Borges, G, 1997), and to facilitate robberies (Wright, JD. 1975). Harriet Harman (Labour politician) believes that ethnic inequality within our society is a big factor in why youth may be carrying knives. The knife crime make up within London shows 50% are under 25, 90% are male and two thirds are BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic people), Harriet says " 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." (Home Office, 2007). This quote suggests within BAME societies, knife crime or carrying a knife can be means of acquiring status as they are at a disadvantage of acquiring status through qualifications and may feel socially excluded (Lemos, 2004).

When looking at the demographics of knife crime, the statistics illustrate that knife crime offences happen more within the capital of England, London. London has 14, 733 per 167, 000 recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument for the year ending in March 2018 compared to the Northeast of England which has the lowest crime rates that year with 1, 029 per 39, 000 people (Office of National Statistics, 2018).

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There is also a graph which compares the number of knife crime occurring each year to the number of police officers there are in England and Wales from 2011 to 2018. Each year the police force numbers slowly decline from just over 140, 000 officers in 2011 (ending March) to around 125, 000 officers in 2018 (ending June). The knife crime offences show a gradual decline from 2011 (rounded to 30, 000 offences) to 2014 (rounded to 25, 000 offences) then begins to dramatically increase to nearly 40, 000 knife crime offences in 2018 (Office of National Statistics, 2018). This graph shows that the decline of the amount of police in the police force has a huge impact on the rates of knife crime occurring within England and Wales. The graph can also suggest that crime is also increasing in other areas (such as shoplifting and gun crime) due to the lack of personnel in the police force, it won't influence just knife crime alone, all types of crime increases (The Police Foundation, 2018).

Responses

The restorative justice council says, " Restorative justice brings those harmed by crime or conflict and those responsible for the harm into communication, enabling everyone affected by a particular incident to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward." (The Restorative Council, 2016). Restorative justice has the offender is confronted by either their victims, the police or community representatives about what actions they carried out which results in a " heartfelt" apology. (Shapland, Atkinson, 2008). The government analysis on the restorative justice process found 85% of victims who participated in restorative justice meetings were

satisfied with the process and the restorative justice reduced the likelihood of reoffending by 14% (Ministry of Justice, 2010).

The Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) is defined as “ The Youth Crime Action Plan is a comprehensive, cross-government analysis of what further we need to do to tackle youth crime... It makes clear that we will not tolerate the behaviour of the minority which causes misery and suffering to other” (HM Government, 2008). YCAP launched in 2008 and was with £100 million of additional funding to enforce, support and challenge young people and families, and prevention of crime committed by young people. the YCAP uses the “‘ triple track’ approach of enforcement and punishment where behaviour is unacceptable, non-negotiable support and challenge where it is most needed, and better and earlier prevention” (Youth Crime Action Plan, 2008). With the YCAP put in place, the number of youths entering the criminal justice system fell by 21. 65% between 2007/08 to 2008/09. (DCSF, 2009).

Tougher sentences for knife crime offences

The government’s response to the increase of knife crime rates in England and Wales was to introduce “ tough new sanctions to tackle knife crime” (Home Office Press Release, 2008). To express the government’s views upon not tolerating knife crime, a law was passed that any individual over the age of 16 who are caught carrying a knife will be prosecuted on the first offence and doubling the maximum sentence for carrying a knife to 4 years of incarceration. The government approach of knife crime sentencing, also working with senior judges, has shown through statistics that since the law

was put in place, was three times more likely to go for carrying a knife compared to 10 years ago. (17% in 2006 and 6% in 1996)(Parliament UK, n. d.). Graphs from the Ministry of justice (2019) year ending in December shows the immediate custodial sentences for knife offences in England and Wales, sentences up to three months have decreased by 30% since 2008 and sentences over six months has increased by 20% since 2008. These statistics illustrate that it is more common now to receive a sentence over six months than a sentence three months and under showing the tougher sentences which were implemented in 2006 has worked.

Evaluation

A strength which has come from attempting to reduce knife crime is it has helped to increase the security around England and Wales making it harder to commit crimes other than knife crimes in hot spot areas (BBC, 2019). CCTV is all over cities and they are very useful as they are cheap and self-disciplined as they record without being controlled by a person (NACRO, 2002). The use of CCTV can be used to reduce crime as criminals are deterred from the area where CCTV is in place (Bennett and Gelsthorpe, 1996). This shows that putting CCTV in known crime hotspots will then deter crime from that area, reducing the crime in the area.

A weakness which has come from attempting to reduce knife crime on the streets of England and Wales has been with a small minority of the police force 'over-exerting' their power on and young people feel criminalised by this legislation because of the way they were stopped and searched (Crawford and Lister, 2007). This resulted in instead of wanting support from

the police, they began to feel vulnerable to being victims of crime (Norman, 2009). The abuse of police power may cause an increase in crime rates as “ People are more likely to comply with rules set by an authority if they perceive the authority to exercise procedurally fair treatment” (Tyler and Huo, 2002).

Opportunities which have opened due to our advanced technological era by the Police using social media to engage with the public (Crump, 2012). Social media can influence the public attitudes about crime and justice (Surette, 1992) through the information seen by the public on social media applications. Social media can also be used as a monitoring tool as geolocations are recorded through social media applications such as Twitter (Cheng, Caverlee and Lee, 2010) which can be used as a method to monitor crime rates within certain areas. This can be relevant for the police as they could be able to use social media to track crime and compare their data with data found on social media applications.

A potential threat which may arise is the budget cuts which occur once the government's target is met. As the rates of youth offences has decreased since 2008 have dropped from over 300, 000 arrests in 2008 to 65, 800 arrests in England and Wales (Youth Justice Board, 2019), the funding from the government is also decreasing showing around £90 million of the Youth offending teams funding has been cut since 2010 (Data showing up to 2017) (Ministry of Justice, 2018). This could lead to a rise of youth offences as the lack of funding can lead to cuts of staff in the Youth Offending teams.

In conclusion, the strategies taken by the English and Welsh government to help reduce knife crime has not reduced knife crime in England and Wales as the offences involving a knife or a sharp instrument in England and Wales has increased and now at an all-time high (Home Office, 2018) which is a major threat to community security as more young individuals are becoming victims to knife crime. However, this will not be the only attempt the government will carry out to help the reduction of knife crime on the streets of England and Wales as the rates of knife crime will continue increasing until the government takes action.

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