

Knife Crime in the Capital

Policy Exchange

Liveable London

How gangs are drawing another generation into a life of violent crime

Sophia Falkner

Foreword by Sir Mark Rowley



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About the Author

Sophia Falkner is a Research Fellow at Policy Exchange. As part of the Liveable London unit, her main focus is on developing policy solutions for the everyday challenges faced by those who live and work in our capital city. She joined Policy Exchange in 2019 after graduating from the London School of Economics with a BSc in Economic History with Economics. A fluent German speaker, Sophia has previously worked for a financial advisory firm in London and a think tank in Berlin.

Endorsement

Trevor Phillips, Senior Fellow at Policy Exchange, said:

“Policy Exchange’s report shows that black people are five times more likely to be stabbed than white people in London, and heartbreakingly that young black men are 24 times as likely to die in this way than their white peers. I spent most of my own childhood in a postcode - N22 - that is now so violent that it has given its name to a murderous gang; the violent crime rate there is amongst the worst in London and nearly double that of the nation as a whole. It is also where my own children were born and where we lived for a decade. Every time I hear the news of a fresh death I think that could have been my child.

“Sophia Falkner’s painstaking research pinpoints some of the drivers of this behaviour, including music that promotes violence and revenge. At least one big brand that has promoted on social media a convicted criminal even during his prison sentence. That is a disgrace. If we are to reduce the number of young Londoners – and yes, especially black boys – being killed and the hundreds more being injured on our streets every year we have to start by being realistic about who this is affecting, where and why. Policy Exchange’s analysis of the data provides the best answers I’ve seen.”

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Foreword

By Sir Mark Rowley

I was moved to collaborate with Policy Exchange on this insightful report to try and help break the dangerous logjam in the debate on policing, stop and search, and knife crime. Let's cut to the chase.

A young black man growing up in London is 9 times more likely to be murdered than his white peers; taking the UK as a whole, the risk of a young black man being unlawfully killed is 24-fold that of his white contemporary. Pause and reflect on why we don't hear that number frequently in debate on policing yet reports on the 'disproportionality of stop and search' seem to be released weekly. Why are we more concerned with criticising police operations than with understanding the reason for the tragic concentration of crime in a few communities? It is frankly immoral that we are obsessed with stop and search rather than concentrating on the true injustice faced by young black men. The national figures are heavily skewed by the number of ethnic minorities being killed in London, and this is the focus of this research report.

This insightful report exposes the nature of the problem and constructively challenges both lazy assumptions about current policing strategies and the shocking levels of social and commercial acceptance of a music scene that embraces violence.

Scale. All agree that knife crime is a major political and operational priority for policing, especially in London. It has been for several years and this report shows why the temporary reduction in violent types of knife crime over the last year will be just that, temporary. By breaking down month by month stabbing rates over the course of the pandemic, Policy Exchange shows that much of the reduction in knife crime since 2019 is attributable to coronavirus restrictions, not to a successful strategy to counter it.

This report reveals that widely reported fatal stabbings are merely the tip of the iceberg in the knife crime data. Below the surface, hidden away in the most dangerous estates in the capital, hundreds of injuries are inflicted on young people by knives every year. It is only improvements in NHS trauma care that have prevented the numbers of those killed in stabbings skyrocketing over the past decades. Furthermore, pandemic data should not be used to mistakenly declare victory. And this challenge doesn't stand alone - most notably trust in the Met has declined rapidly in recent years.

Policing strategy. This paper provides a unique analysis of the variety of strategies being used across big cities and finds London adopts an extraordinarily different approach to West Midlands, Merseyside and West Yorkshire. It addresses the balance of broad suppressive tactics including

stop and search, community policing, proactive prosecution of the drug dealers at the heart of gangs and the successful bringing to justice of those who commit a range of knife crimes.

Having policed Birmingham, Surrey, London and led national policing functions in my career I understand the degree to which some differences in approach between police forces are necessary. Indeed, London is a singularly complex British city presenting a unique set of challenges, but the degree to which the Met approaches this wholly differently to others has surprised me. It seems extraordinary that the MPS stop and search rate is 5.5 times that of West Yorkshire, yet the rate at which they apprehend drug traffickers (usually only recorded upon arrest) is less than a third that of Merseyside, and the strength of Neighbourhood Policing in London is just over half that of the West Midlands and less than half that of Merseyside.

These are not subtle differences. The Met appears to adopt a highly suppressive approach yet puts fewer resources and less effort into community policing and pro-active prosecution of drugs gangs. The Met has deteriorating detection rates for knife crime. This is not an argument against stop and search - it is a vital tactic that the Commissioner was right to increase - but it is an argument for a fresh look at whether a different mix of tactics such as those seen elsewhere may be more successful.

Having seen the evidence presented in this report from the limited amount of public data, I am at a loss as to why organisations such as the College of Policing or HMICFRS are not producing this type of analysis. These are the organisations tasked with inspecting the activities of the police and bringing a scientific approach to ‘what works’ in policing, yet they have failed to raise awareness as to the unusual and apparently unsuccessful imbalance in the MPS’ strategy. The Home Secretary, Mayor, PCCs and police chiefs can hardly be expected to make the best decisions, if the quality of research they are being presented with is below par.

Social acceptance. While I am familiar with the policing side of tackling knife and gang related crime, I have been shocked by Policy Exchange’s revelations as to the societal context within which these crimes are occurring. The report exposes the role that gangs, some drill music and some fashionable sports brands are playing in perpetuating violence and destroying lives among young black Londoners. This report reveals how social media has transformed gang relations and the appalling lack of action social media companies have taken against the promulgation of illegal activity on their platforms. This has been compounded by the complicity of the music, entertainment, and fashion industry, who turn a blind eye to the context in which some drill music is created, offering lucrative record and advertising deals with little regard for the ongoing criminal cases their clients are involved in. Sponsoring criminals before they have served their full sentence not only undermines the criminal justice system but sets an atrocious example to younger generations who are often lacking positive role models, as to the true consequences of committing crime. As a society we must consider the consequences of this naïve legitimisation of gang

culture, the victims of which are concentrated in a few communities.

Reflecting back, I regret that when I was responsible for tackling gang-violence in London I was not more assertive in publicly confronting those who are more focused on stop and search than they are on the concentration of crime in a few communities. Whilst we brought new tactics and the now criticised 'gangs matrix' to bear in reducing murders to under one hundred in 2014 for the first and only time, we should have been bolder in what we said. The real injustice is that crime lands very unevenly across communities and consequently policing is bound to follow. No one will be surprised to hear that high crime communities see more of the police than low crime ones. We need debate that recognises the true injustices these communities face and bring them and the police together to find the best mix of tactics to solve this wicked problem.

Finally, the key points that emerge for me from this report are:

- All quarters need to focus on the injustice of the vastly different levels of victimisation faced by communities;
- Key oversight and professional bodies need to do far better at helping the Mayor, Home Secretary and police chiefs improve local strategies based upon 'what works';
- As a society we need to stop undermining community safety through naive encouragement of gang culture and the violence associated with it, and;
- Policing in London and elsewhere needs to reflect on the balance of tactics in its strategy learning more from practise elsewhere where relevant

Policing is a tough profession and inevitably contentious operating as it does at the fractures in communities where the dangerous and the vulnerable collide. The real injustice is the disproportionate way young black men are victims of crime, not policing tactics. It's time for a more constructive, innovative and collaborative approach to solving this all too real tragedy.

Executive Summary

London's Knife Crime Crisis

Knife crime is disproportionately concentrated in London. Only 15% of the population of England and Wales live in London, but a third of all knife offences occur in the capital. Knife crime has become a particularly contentious issue over the last six years, due to its incessant rise since 2014 and its devastating impact on a few communities.

After a brief decline between 2011 and 2014, knife crime offences rose to their highest level of the decade in 2019. In London that year knives were used in 44 offences per day. Although there was a significant drop in the use of knives in crime over the pandemic, 81 per cent of the decline was driven by a drop in robberies involving knives. While the average monthly stabbing rate for 2020/21 was down almost a third from the previous year during the six lockdown months, it was almost the same as the previous year in months with lighter coronavirus restrictions. This problem is not going away, and we should not let the distorted 2020/21 figures diminish the urgency with which it must be tackled.

Although most knife offences are linked to robberies, they make up a fairly small percentage of all robberies. Knives are most closely linked to the most violent types of crime in London. The number of fatal stabbings in London doubled between 2013 and 2019, a period in which all knife crime offences increased by 'only' 58 per cent. This is despite stabbing survival rates increasing by 50 per cent due to improvements to NHS trauma units since 2010. Hospital data, which reveal the true extent of violent knife crime in the capital, shows that 1,100 people were stabbed in London in the year preceding the pandemic.

London's knife crime crisis does not affect all Londoners equally, with large discrepancies across ethnicity, age, gender and borough of residence. If you are Black you are nearly five times more likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of being stabbed than if you are White or Asian. The rate of admission to hospitals for stabbings for White and Asian people was 33 and 34 per 100,000 of their respective populations between March 2012 and September 2020, but 164 and 163 per 100,000 of the population for Black people and Mixed/Other ethnicities. In 2019/20, just over half of hospital admissions for stabbings in London were people under the age of 25. 94 per cent of stabbing victims in 2018/19 were male, and the increase in stabbings since 2013 has been driven exclusively by an increase in the number of men being stabbed. Between 2003 and

March 2021, there have been 80 fatal stabbings in Newham, but only nine in Kingston.¹

The extent to which the increase in stabbings in parts of London over recent years can be attributed to gang related activity is a contentious subject and the evidence presents a mixed picture. Although the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) claims that ‘gang tagged violent crime’ has more than halved between 2010 and 2017, expert criminologists argue that the MPS definition of a gang is outdated, and that gang activity has actually increased over this period. This is in line with findings that much of the increase in stabbings over the last decade has been driven by an increase in the number of young, black male victims.

Policy Exchange analysis of 2018 and 2019 gang related homicides reveals the extent to which a few communities in London have been affected by gang crime. Furthermore, we have found at least 23 per cent of cases to be linked to drill music, at least a quarter of cases explicitly linked to retaliation and at least 40 per cent of cases linked to social housing estates.

A Failure of Strategy in the MPS

The strategy the MPS has chosen to pursue is highly irregular when compared to other big cities, even when taking the unique challenges of policing London into account.

Effective policing with regards to knife crime requires a few key approaches, including suppression, targeting high profile criminals and gang members, and neighbourhood policing. These all contribute towards the vital task of bringing the perpetrators of knife crime to justice. None of these alone are sufficient to tackle knife crime, and in order to be effective the correct balance between these different measures must be struck in order to be effective. Compared to Merseyside Police Force (Liverpool), West Midlands Police Force (Birmingham), and West Yorkshire Police Force (Leeds and Bradford), the MPS has the highest rate of stop and search, lowest rate for apprehending drug traffickers and second lowest rate of officers involved in neighbourhood policing. The MPS stop and search rate is 5.5 times that of West Yorkshire, the rate at which they apprehend drug traffickers is less than a third that of Merseyside, while the strength of Neighbourhood Policing in London is just over half that of the West Midlands and less than half that of Merseyside.

Suppression through measures such as stop and search is essential, but the MPS has over the last few years relied too heavily on this tactic alone, without building support for its activities from the communities most in need of help. This is compounded by a failure to correct the misleading narrative about stop and search claiming that some communities are subject to higher levels of it than others. The real injustice is that young Black men are nine times more likely to die of homicide in London than young White men, with this figure rising to 24 times more likely across the UK as a whole, not that they are subject to higher rates of stop and search.²

1. “Homicide Victims in the MPS: 2003 to March 2021”, Metropolitan Police Homicide Dashboard (accessed July 2021).
2. “Cressida Dick: Black boys ‘nine times more likely to be murdered’”, *The Times* (28 November 2020), [link](#); “Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report”, *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* (31 March 2021), [link](#)

High profile criminals and gang members who are responsible for organising criminal networks, drawing younger generations into a life of crime, and perpetuating gang violence, are less involved in street level crime and therefore less likely to be apprehended through stop and search and the MPS has not focused enough on targeting these criminals. Between 2010 and 2018, the number of drug trafficking offences in London fell by 40 per cent, despite drug consumption remaining constant. The lack of focus on high profile criminals is exacerbated by the way in which homicide sanction detection rates are recorded, which make it seem like a higher number of serious criminals have been apprehended than is actually the case.

Previous successful operations involving higher levels of stop and search (e.g. Operation Blunt) have combined this tactic with intensive neighbourhood policing in order to maintain strong community ties throughout periods of intensive policing and aid with intelligence gathering, which is vital for apprehending high profile criminals. Neighbourhood Policing is also critical for 'upstream prevention', that is the police forces' ability to work with councils and the education sector to prevent young people being drawn into gangs. Although the roots of community policing can be found in Robert Peel's Principles of Policing, the levels of neighbourhood policing maintained by the police varies across forces and over time. Neighbourhood policing teams across London have undergone the most severe cuts over the last decade, which has been accompanied by an increase in crime and falling confidence in the police. Despite the MPS recommitting to this model of policing in 2017, the model proposed is less ambitious than in the 2000s.

Although the policing of London presents unique challenges in terms of the complexity and scale of the task, the MPS seems to have an unusual and unjustified strategy, combining a relatively high rate of stop and search with weak community policing and targeting of high-profile criminals. We are not against the use of stop and search. We believe it is a very effective tool that has undoubtedly saved many lives across the capital. The failure of the MPS lies in their neglect of other tactics to be used alongside this one. Striking the correct balance between these three tactics, in particular building up neighbourhood policing and increasing the number of proactive, targeted operations is vital in the fight against gang violence and knife crime and the police's ability to continue operating with the approval and cooperation of the public.

The Legitimisation of Gang Culture

A failure in the MPS's strategy towards tackling knife crime has been accompanied and exacerbated by naïve societal acceptance of gang culture, making gangs more appealing and lending them an aura of legitimacy, thereby perpetuating their existence.

Actions by social media companies, big brands like Adidas, and cultural institutions enable and support those directly involved in knife crime. This sends a signal to young people susceptible of being drawn into gangs that

this lifestyle is acceptable and even desirable, minimising the repercussions of engaging in violent crime.

The speed of integration of social media into the daily lives of young people has been extraordinary, and only accelerated by the pandemic. Social media has unsurprisingly impacted how gangs interact with each other and display their power. Confrontation between gangs used to be limited to occasional face to face interactions, but they now taunt each other online incessantly. Consequently, the rate at which aggression and violence escalates is much faster, and can happen within a couple of days, instead of over weeks. The number of people who can now bear witness to 'disrespect' has multiplied exponentially. Violent acts are projected across many different platforms, sometimes for years after the attack has happened, with social media users contributing to escalating tensions by sharing videos and inciting violence through comments on social media posts. This is exacerbated by the phenomenon of 'scoreboarding', where points are awarded for beatings, stabbing and murders committed by rival gangs. This amplifies the pressure to retaliate, as well as the reward in terms of social capital for the perpetrators of violence.

Furthermore, the frequency with which young people associated with gangs are confronted with violent videos on social media shifts their sphere of normality, desensitising them and increasing the chance that they will react violently. It also reinforces the perceived need to carry weapons for protection. Social media is also being used to perpetuate gang activity from within prison, creating a culture of intimidation and increasing the sway gang members hold over local communities even after being arrested.

Some genres of music, particularly drill music, have been associated with violent crime. The impact of this genre on crime is notable as the extent to which drill rappers target their taunts and threats at specific individuals or groups is unprecedented, and combined with a large increase in the use of social media and streaming websites, means these videos reach a much wider audience. Prominent drill rappers have themselves admitted the genre influences crime, with drill videos now being used as evidence in court. Analysis by Policy Exchange found that of the 41 gang related homicides in 2018, drill music played a role in at least one third of them. This figure was 23 per cent in 2019, both of which are likely to be underestimates as our analysis relied on open source data. In light of the rise of incitement to hatred prosecutions, we have to ask ourselves why some drill rappers are not receiving the same level of scrutiny. Although not all drill music is bad, it is foolish and naïve to ignore the link this genre has with violent crime committed on the streets of London.

The entertainment and music industry and big brands are exacerbating the legitimisation of gang culture. Apart from the direct killings linked to drill, one of the most damaging effects of the current drill music scene is that it gives rise to the perception that crime and drill music are compatible, and that crime provides the creative material that advances careers in drill music. One drill rapper received a record deal worth hundreds of thousands of pounds while in prison awaiting trial for a murder he was found guilty

of, and videos of him rapping with Capital FM DJ Tim Westwood are still on Westwood's YouTube channel, having received more than 6.5 million views. While on bail for carrying a knife, rapper Headie One (Irving Adjei) was hosted by BBC Radio 1, did a sponsored event with JD Sports and featured in an Adidas campaign. It is remarkable that Adidas chose to launch this campaign with Adjei three weeks before he was sentenced, and that they did not retract it when it became clear he was guilty and going to prison. The company continued to publicly support Adjei by using him as a brand representative while he was serving his sentence for carrying a knife, which arguably sends a signal to followers of Adjei and fans of Adidas, that breaking the law and carrying knives is compatible with their brand and commercial success. International brands are highly influential and in light of the rise of 'woke capitalism' and many of these companies' expression of support for the Black Lives Matter movement, this raises serious questions as to the sincerity of their actions and commitment to improving the lives of Black people in the UK.

There have been a range of police, government and judicial responses to the criminal elements of gang culture, with limited success. It is clear that we as society need to play a greater role in calling out the naïve societal acceptance and legitimisation of gang culture and the violence that accompanies it.

Key Statistics

Over 1,000 people in London were admitted to hospital annually from 2015 to the year preceding the pandemic for a stabbing.

The death toll from stabbings in London reached its highest level in a decade in 2019 (94 victims), despite improvements to NHS trauma units increasing stabbing survival rates by 50 per cent.

Black people in London are nearly five times more likely to be stabbed than White or Asian people.

Knife attacks are heavily concentrated in certain parts of London. There were 80 fatal stabbings in Newham, compared to nine in Kingston between 2003 and March 2021. When adjusting for population, Hackney, Lambeth, Haringey, Newham, and Southwark are the five boroughs with the highest stabbing rate (April 2012-September 2019), whereas Kingston and Richmond upon Thames have the lowest.

The drop in knife crime over the pandemic is not indicative of success in tackling the most violent knife crime.

- 81 per cent of the fall in knife crime offences in London over the course of the pandemic is attributable to a fall in the number of robberies involving knives.
- In the six months during which lockdowns occurred, the average number of monthly stabbings was down almost a third compared to the same six months the previous year. During the six months with significantly lighter coronavirus restrictions, the average monthly stabbing rate was almost the same as during the previous year.

Gangs are contributing to the concentration of violent crime among a small subsection of the London population. Policy Exchange analysis of open source data reveals that in 2018 and 2019, of the gang related homicides:

- The average age of a victim was 22 in 2018 and 21 in 2019
- The average age of a perpetrator was 19 in 2018 and 21 in 2019
- At least 80% of victims and perpetrators are BME
- At least 37% of cases were directly linked to drill music in 2018 and 23% in 2019
- At least 25% of cases in 2018 and 2019 are directly linked to retaliation
- At least 40% of cases have a direct link to social housing estates
- In at least 30% of cases, one or more perpetrators were not apprehended

Policy Recommendations

- 1. The Mayor and MPS should publicly acknowledge the impact that gangs are having on knife crime and knife homicides and devise, publish and implement a *Gangs Strategy* for dismantling criminal gangs across London. In this, the MPS should broaden the definition for gang related crime, as the current one results in a misleading assessment of the state of gang related crime in London.** Although the MPS has reported gang crime halving over the last decade, Policy Exchange analysis reveals this is not the case.
- 2. Alongside homicide sanction detection rates, the Home Office should require police forces to additionally publish data on the number of ‘fully detected’ cases.** Policy Exchange analysis reveals that in 2018 and 2019, at least 30 per cent of gang related homicides, one or more perpetrators were not apprehended, yet the MPS regularly highlight a homicide sanction detection rate of 90 per cent. It is important that we have an understanding both of the number of cases where a suspect was apprehended, but also the number of cases where it is known that one or more people involved in the crime were not.
- 3. The MPS must reassess their strategy with regards to knife crime, increasing the amount of targeted, proactive operations to match the current emphasis on suppressive policing.** There is currently a heavy reliance on suppression (i.e. stop and search), with insufficient community policing and targeted, proactive tactics focusing on bringing the most serious offenders to justice.
- 4. The Mayor and MPS should commit to re-establishing a more substantial and sustainable model of Neighbourhood Policing, increasing the current minimum model of Safer Neighbourhood Teams across the 632 wards of London to at least three police officers and one PCSO per ward and a minimum of 1 Sergeant per two wards.** The most dangerous neighbourhoods in London must be prioritised.
- 5. Data sharing between the MPS, NHS, schools and social workers, must be improved so that resources can be more effectively targeted and more accurate preventative policing and interventions can be introduced.** This is in line with the ‘multi-agency approach’ advocated by the London Violence Reduction Unit.
- 6. The Home Office, the Police, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary,**

and the Independent Office for Police Conduct must do more to explain data relating to crime and police operations, and be more vigilant about how it is conveyed to the public and reported in the media. The fact that ‘Black people are 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched’ is frequently reported in the media, despite the fact that this is a highly misleading narrative that undermines the relationship between the police and the communities most affected by crime. It is important to remember that the real injustice is that young black men have a higher victimisation rate and are more likely to die on the streets of London, not that they are subject to higher rates of stop and search.³

- 7. If the draft Online Safety Bill passes through Parliament in its current form, we urge the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to include gang related content in their assessment of illegal content deemed a priority for service providers.** Beyond acts of violence, this should include imagery of weapons and illegal drugs posted by gang members and reposted by followers, as well as new gang related content such as ‘scoreboarding’.
- 8. The Mayor’s Office of Policing and Crime should support charities and local organisations in running highly targeted social media advertising campaigns aimed at diverting young people away from crime.** In light of the amount of time spent by young people on social media, it is important for alternate support networks and help to be easily visible and available alongside the gang related content they view online.
- 9. The Office of Communications (OFCOM) should investigate broadcasters’ engagement with drill music and drill rappers and whether it represents a breach of Section 2 of Ofcom’s Broadcasting Codes.**
- 10. The government and community should call out music production companies and other corporations that sponsor individuals currently involved in violence or knife crime.** We must end the naïve societal acceptance and legitimisation of gang culture and acknowledge the violence that accompanies it.

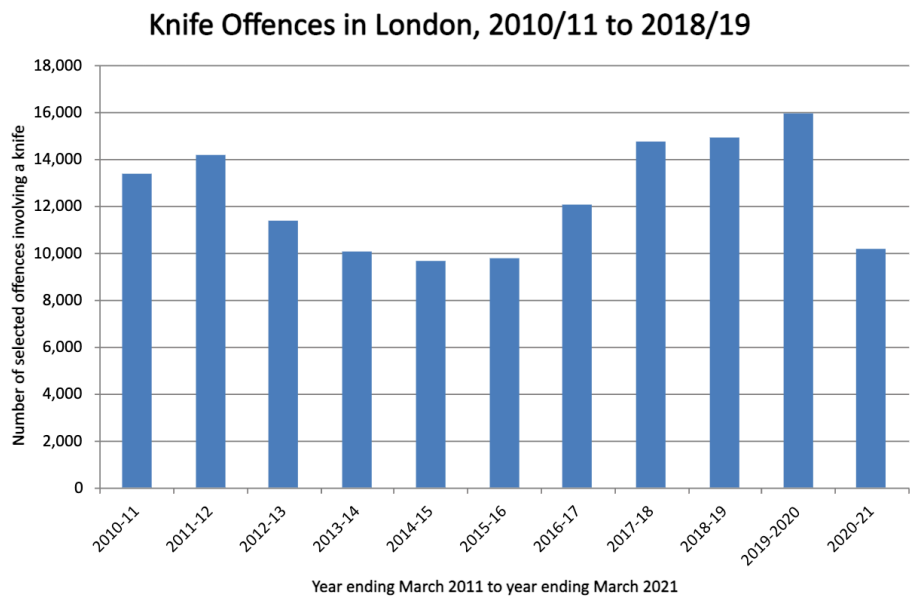
3. “Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report”, *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* (31 March 2021), [link](#)

4. The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities have recommended the Youth Justice Board develop a digital solution to guide young people towards appropriate support networks. Such a solution should be integrated into social media.

1. Knife Crime in London

After a brief decline between 2011 and 2014, knife crime offences rose to their highest level of the decade in the year preceding the pandemic (Figure 1). Knives were used in recorded crime in London 44 times a day in 2019-20, including murder, assaults, robbery and rape.

Figure 1: Knife or sharp instrument offences recorded by the police for selected offences, by police force area, year ending March 2011 to year ending March 2021.⁵



Knife Crime and the Pandemic

The pandemic and accompanying lockdowns radically changed the nature of crime across the country. Although the number of offences involving a knife in London fell to just over 10,000 during the first year of the pandemic, there is little evidence to suggest this change will be permanent now that life is returning to normal. A breakdown of how knives have been used in crime is the first indication of this (Table 1).

5. "Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area tables", Office for National Statistics (January 2020), [link](#)

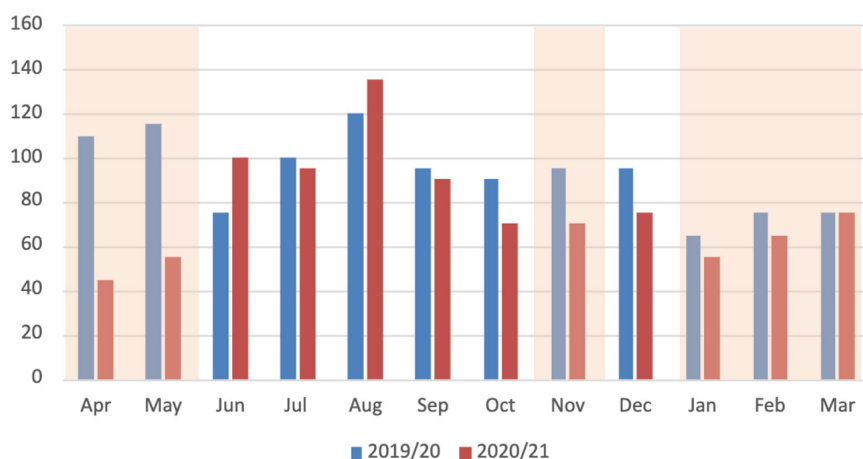
Table 1: Knife or sharp instrument offences recorded by the police for selected offences, by police force area, April 2019 – March 2020 and April 2020 – March 2021.⁶

Offences involving a knife in London	2019/20	2020/21	% change
Attempted murder	85	75	-11.8
Threats to kill	882	737	-16.4
Assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm	4,547	3,659	-19.5
Robbery	10,198	5,495	-46.1
Rape and sexual assault	130	109	-16.2
Homicide	86	75	-12.8

81 per cent of the fall in knife crime offences in London over the course of the pandemic is as a result of a fall in the number of robberies involving knives. All other crimes involving knives, including homicide and attempted murder, have fallen by a much smaller margin, despite the series of lockdowns requiring people to stay at home.

In the six months during which lockdowns occurred in 2020/21, the average number of monthly stabbings was down almost a third, compared to the same six months the previous year (Figure 2). During the six months with significantly lighter coronavirus restrictions, the average monthly stabbing rate was almost the same as the previous year. With regards to gang violence, charities have in fact warned that lockdowns may in the long run have exacerbated crime, as it has left young people isolated and vulnerable to exploitation.⁷

Figure 2: Hospital Admissions for Stabbings during the Pandemic



6. "Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area tables", Office for National Statistics (January 2020), [link](#)

7. Jessica Murray, "Youth violence likely to explode over summer, UK experts fear", *The Guardian* (July 2021), [link](#)

Knives and Violent Crime

A large majority of knife offences are linked to robberies, but when measured as a percentage of all robberies, knives play a much smaller role than they do for other crime types. For example, 25 per cent of robberies in 2019/20 involved a knife, whereas 59 per cent of homicides and 57 per cent of attempted murders in the same year involved a knife.⁸ Knives are most closely linked to the most violent types of crime in London.

The use of knives in particularly violent crime has been rising at a faster rate than for other crime groups. The number of fatal stabbings in London doubled between 2013 and 2019, a period in which all knife crime offences increased by under two thirds (58 per cent). Therefore over the last decade, there has been a disproportionately large increase in the most violent types of knife crime.

Figure 3: Number of homicides by knife or sharp implement recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service, 2010 – 2020.⁹



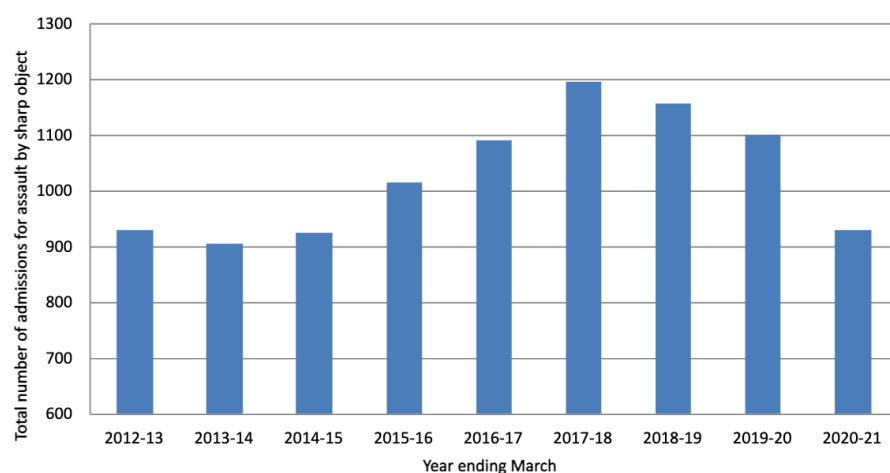
The number of fatalities from stabbings do not however convey the whole picture when it comes to the use of knives in violent crime, as there have been significant improvements to NHS trauma units. Regional trauma units were established across London from 2010 onwards and in the five years following their introduction, survival rates increased by 50%.¹⁰

As victims are now surviving the most violent attacks, including being stabbed in the heart, homicide data alone does not reveal the true extent of London’s knife crime problem. NHS hospital admissions records for assault by sharp objects provides greater insight into key trends in the most violent knife crimes, as it includes almost all stabbing victims, including those who may not report a stabbing to the police. This is often the case in stabbings linked to gangs, where the victim may be a criminal, too intimidated, or from a part of the community where trust in the police is low. Looking at the numbers reporting to hospital with stabbing wounds gives a truer picture as to the state of violent crime in the capital.

8. “Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables” (Table P4), Office for National Statistics (July 2020), [link](#)
 9. “Homicide Victims in the MPS: 2003 to March 2021”, Metropolitan Police Homicide Dashboard (accessed July 2021), [link](#)
 10. Elaine Cole et al., “The Impact of a Pan-regional Inclusive Trauma System on Quality of Care” Centre for Trauma Sciences, Blizard Institute, Queen Mary University of London (July 2016)

Between 2012/13 and 2019/20, there was an 18.3 per cent increase in hospital admissions as a result of stabbings in London (Figure 5). Admissions peaked in 2017/18 at 1,155, or the equivalent of just over three stabbings a day. Although the increase over the period in question is less than that across the country as a whole, the problem is more acute in London, due to the significantly higher stabbing rates (12.2 stabbings per 100,000 of the population in London compared to 7.9 for the rest of England, excluding London, in the year preceding the pandemic).¹⁰

Figure 4: Hospital admissions for stabbings in London, 2012/13 to 2020/21¹¹



Although there was a significant drop in the number of stabbing victims over the course of the pandemic, as highlighted above much of the annual drop in stabbings in 2020/21 occurred during the first lockdown, and is not due to the success of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) or any government interventions.

Who are the victims?

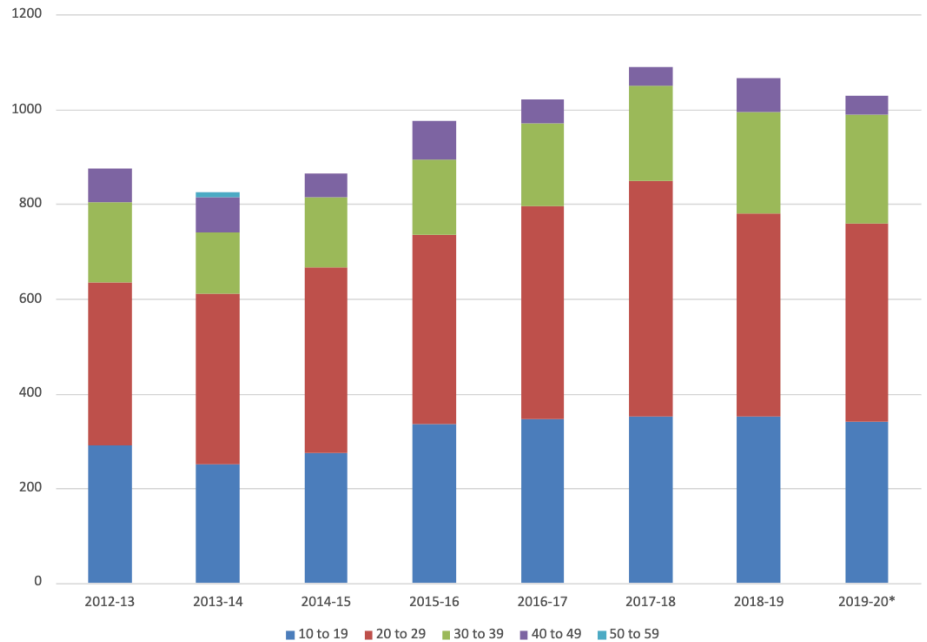
London's knife crime crisis does not affect all Londoners equally. Breaking stabbing victims down by ethnicity, age, gender, and residence reveals that certain groups are particularly affected by changes in the number of stabbings in London.

The rate of admission to hospitals for White and Asian stabbing victims was 33 and 34 per 100,000 of their respective London population between March 2012 and September 2020. Over the same period, the rate was 164 and 163 per 100,000 for the Black and Mixed/Other London population.¹²

11. "Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object from 2012 to 2020", NHS Digital (7 December 2020)

12. "Hospital Admissions for assault by sharp object from 2012", NHS Digital (18 June 2020)

Figure 5: Hospital admissions for stabbings by age



In 2019/20, just over half of hospital admissions for stabbings in London were people under the age of 25, including an alarming number of teenage victims. Over the last few years, there have been around 350 hospital admissions annually for stabbed teenagers, almost one a day.¹³

The starkest contrast can be seen when looking at the gender of victims. In 2018/19, 94 per cent of stabbing victims were male. Furthermore, the increase in stabbings since 2013 has been driven exclusively by an increase in the number of men being stabbed.

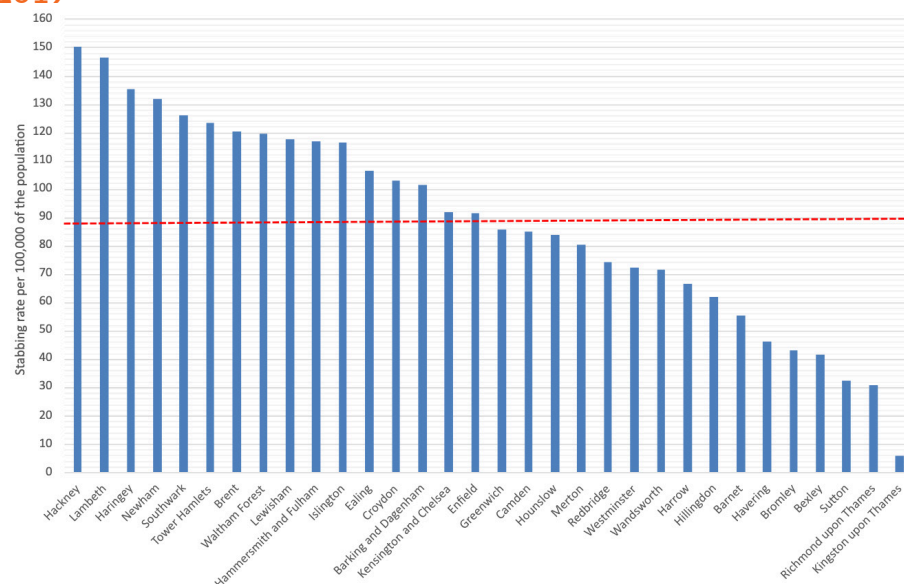
Just as stabbings are not distributed equally across age, race and gender, there are pockets of London in which a disproportionately high number of victims reside. According to data obtained from the BBC, between 2014 and 2018, the highest number of fatal stabbings occurred in Southwark (24), followed by Newham (21) then Brent and Haringey (18 each).

NHS admissions data broken down by local authority of residence confirms the unequal distribution of victims across London. This shows that between 2012-13 and 2018-19, Lambeth saw the highest number of stabbings (430), followed by Newham (420), Croydon (355) and Ealing, Hackney and Southwark, with approximately 350 stabbings each.¹⁴ Even when adjusting for the relative sizes of different boroughs (as below), large discrepancies in the stabbing rate are still observed between different areas of London.

13. "Hospital Admissions for assault by sharp object from 2012", NHS Digital (18 June 2020)

14. NHS Digital, January 2019, *Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object*

Figure 6: Stabbing rate by London borough, April 2012 - September 2019



Gang related stabbings

The extent to which the increase in stabbings in parts of London over recent years can be attributed to gang related activity is a contentious subject and the evidence presents a mixed picture.

The MPS defines a gang as:

“a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who:

- see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group; and
- engage in a range of criminal activity and violence.”

“They may also have any or all of the following features:

- Identify with or lay claim over territory;
- have some form of identifying structure feature; and
- are in conflict with other similar gangs”.¹⁵

The MPS claims that ‘gang tagged violent crime’ has more than halved between 2010 and 2017.¹⁶ This was followed by a further reduction in gang tagged crime in London, from 1099 offences in 2017 to 579 in 2019.¹⁷ However, expert criminologist Simon Harding argues that:

“The new figures do not match what I’m seeing in Accident and Emergency departments, or on the street. If the perpetrator and victim are affiliated then it’s a gang crime, it doesn’t matter if they were carrying out organised crimes.

15. “Review of the Metropolitan Police Service Gangs Matrix”, *Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime*, (December 2018)

16. Sam Francis, “London gang crime down while violent offences increase”, *BBC News* (August 2018), [link](#)

17. “Questions to Mayor: Gang Flagged crime (2)”, *Mayor of London. London Assembly* (December 2019) <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2019/20870>

It's done within the context of building street capital through violence, which is related to gang crime. If we don't tackle these, they will crystallize, deepen and get worse in a way where investment won't shift them."¹⁸

Discrepancies between claims by the MPS and expert analysis of crime across London has been attributed to outdated classifications of gang activity, which do not reflect changes in how gangs now operate, especially as a result of the changing use of technology, in particular social media and the emergence of 'county lines' drug dealing. Furthermore, young people and those most likely to be victimised by gangs are also the least likely to report these crimes to the police.

County Lines

According to the Government, "County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons."¹⁹ Exporting areas tend to be major cities like London or Birmingham, from which drugs are taken into smaller towns and rural areas.

This phenomenon emerged over the last decade, but a government crackdown has meant that the number of gangs operating county lines are thought to have fallen from 2,000 two years ago to around 600 now.²⁰

Policy Exchange have used open source data made available by the MPS, the media, and courts reports to estimate the number of gang related homicides in London in 2018 and 2019. As part of our assessment, we have weighed up a range of factors such as whether the MPS or a judge have explicitly stated they believe the case to be gang related, who the victims and perpetrators have been known to associate with, the number of perpetrators involved in the murder, the nature of the murder, and the apparent motivation for the murder. We estimate that there were 41 gang related homicides in 2018 out of 131 overall (31%) and 44 gang related homicides in 2019 out of 150 overall (29%). The true figures are likely to be higher due to the lack of information available for a number of cases. The remaining homicides occurred primarily as a result of robberies, domestic violence, and argument escalation.

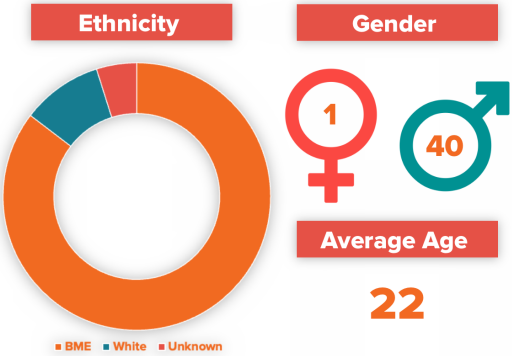
18. Sam Francis, "London gang crime down while violent offences increase", *BBC News* (August 2018), [link](#)

19. "County Lines Exploitation. Practice guidance for YOTs and frontline practitioners", *Ministry of Justice* (October 2019) [link](#)

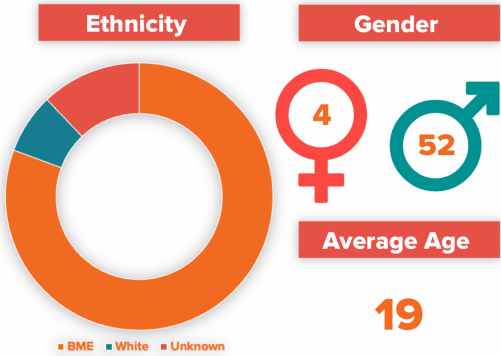
20. Alex Therrien, "County Lines: 1,100 people arrested in UK crackdown" *BBC News* (May 2021), [link](#)

2018 Gang Related Homicides

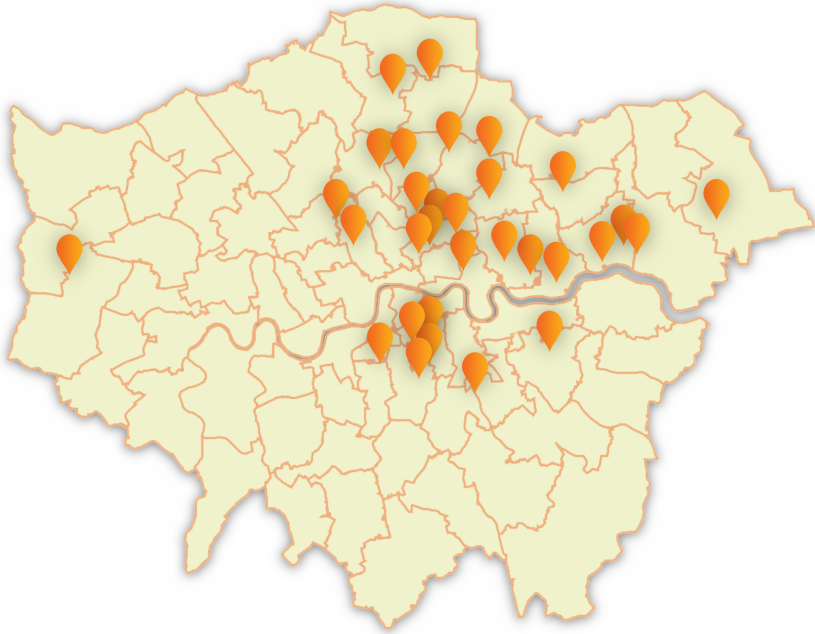
Victims



Perpetrators



Residences of the Victims*



13
Shootings



23 cases where there have been no convictions or where at least one perpetrator of the group has not been charged



At least 17 cases (41.5%) have a direct link to social housing estates



28
Stabbings



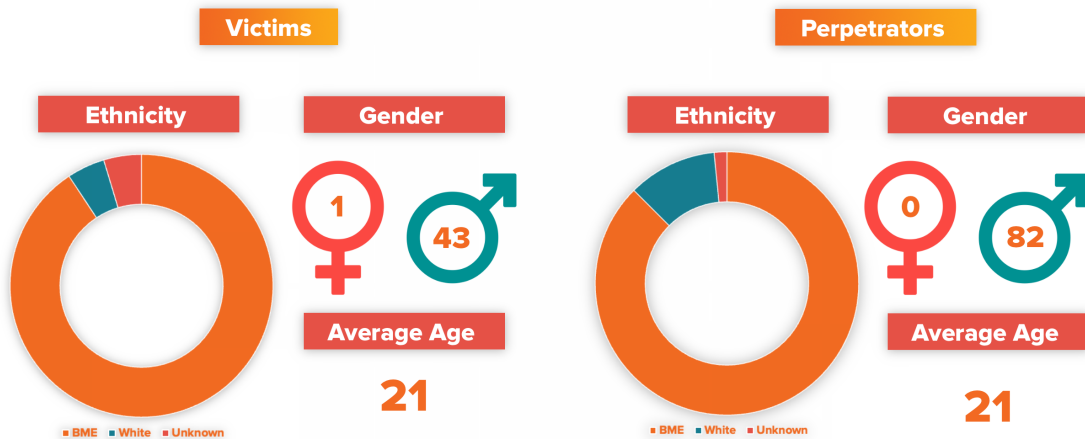
At least 15 cases (36.5%) directly linked to drill music



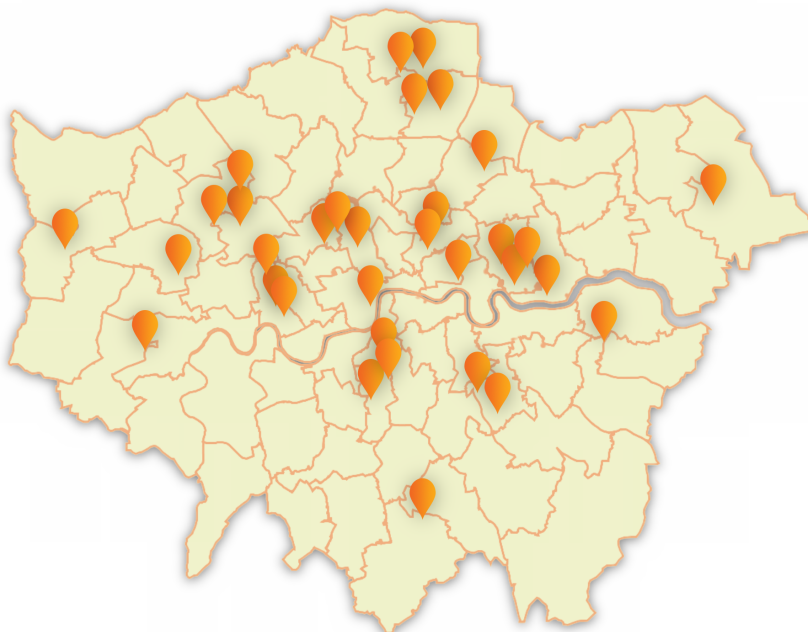
At least 10 cases (25%) retaliation is stated as an explicit motive

* Pins are accurate to a borough level and victims have not been included where the borough of residence is not known or where it is outside of Greater London

2019 Gang Related Homicides



Residences of the Victims*



8
Shootings



13 cases where there have been no convictions or where at least one perpetrator of the group has not been charged



At least 23 cases (52%) have a direct link to social housing estates



35
Stabbings



At least 10 cases (23%) directly linked to drill music



At least 12 cases (28%) retaliation is stated as an explicit motive

* Pins are accurate to a borough level and victims have not been included where the borough of residence is not known or where it is outside of Greater London

Case Study: Israel Ogunsola

On 4th April 2018, 18-year-old Ogunsola was stabbed six times on Link Street, Hackney by Jonathan Obora (of Dalmeny Avenue, Holloway), an 18-year-old male who 'hunted' him and has since been convicted of murder and sentenced to 17 years. According to the Police, Obora did not act alone but the other perpetrators remain at large. Ogunsola had been stabbed five times in the stomach previously at a party on the 1st January 2018 where his friend, Steve Narvaez Jara, was stabbed to death. A family friend who would not be named said that the stabbing was a warning from a gang, and that: "I would not have let him out the house if that were my son."²¹ Ogunsola was also acquainted with Tanesha Melbourne, who was fatally shot on the 2nd April 2018 in Tottenham, in another gang-related attack, which a North London gang later claimed credit for on Snapchat and Instagram. The same gun was used to murder Joseph William-Torres, on the 14th March 2018. Melbourne's killers are still at large.

When looking at links to drill music and where retaliation formed part of the motivation, this information is not always publicly available, so the true figures are likely to be higher.

Our analysis of the characteristics of those being admitted to hospital for stabbing wounds over the last decade and of the homicide victims in London in 2018 and 2019 suggests that gang related crime is not on the decline as the MPS suggests, but is still a serious and pernicious issue in London. The recent fall in stabbings is attributable almost entirely to lockdown measures, so as we emerge from the pandemic and the periods of harshest coronavirus restrictions, it is vital that we prepare for an upswing in violent crime, before knife crime spirals out of control again.

21. Will Humphries, "London murder victim Israel Ogunsola had been stabbed five times in new year gang violence", *The Times* (April 2018), [link](#)

2. Violent Crime Initiatives and Legislation

Governments of all parties have been faced with periodic surges in youth knife violence and homicides over the past twenty years and successive Prime Ministers have felt the need to intervene personally and lead national initiatives and summits to address the problem. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown held knife crime ‘summits’ at Downing Street in both 2007 and 2008, Theresa May held a summit in April 2019, and in January 2020 Boris Johnson pledged to take personal charge of a new Cabinet committee to tackle knife crime.²² Knife crime debates have been repeatedly held in the House of Commons²³ and Lords²⁴ and in the Home Affairs Select Committee.²⁵

Despite being a politically divisive issue, governments of all parties have (with one notable exception – the Conservative government of Theresa May) consistently responded to the problem in the same way, with a strategy that consists of:

- the instigation of a new police-led enforcement strategy with significant increases in the police tactic of ‘stop and search’ sanctioned and encouraged by politicians;
- new legislative measures to restrict the carrying of knives and tighter sentencing in the courts for knife carrying;
- Governments investing in advertising campaigns and local ‘community’ awareness raising initiatives.

Although in the past these strategies have tended to lead to a reduction in knife crime, the outcomes of the current knife crime strategy (2017 onwards) are far less conclusive.

Knife Crime Related Legislation in England and Wales

The key pieces of legislation aiming to restrict the use of knives in crime are:²⁶

- Prevention of Crime Act 1953
 - Prohibits the possession of knives as weapons, and use of them to threaten, in public places.
- Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959
 - Restricts the importation, sale and gifting of flick knives or

22. Macer Hall, “Black kids to blame for knife and gun murders, says Blair” *The Daily Express* (April 2007) [link](#); Richard Alleyne, “Gordon Brown urges tougher punishments for teenage knife crime” *The Telegraph* (June 2008) [link](#); David Child, “British government vows to tackle ‘scourge’ of deadly knife crime” *Al Jazeera* (March 2019) [link](#); Steven Swinford, “Boris Johnson to take lead in fight against crime gangs” *The Times* (January 2020) [link](#)

23. “Knife Crime Volume 657” *Hansard* (25th March 2019) [link](#)

24. “Knife Crime Volume 798” *Hansard* (20th June 2019) [link](#)

25. “Knife Crime. Seventh report of session 2008-09” *House of Commons Home Affairs Committee* (May 2009) [link](#); “Home Affairs Committee – Seventh report. Knife Crime” *Home Affairs Committee* (May 2009) [link](#); “Serious Youth Violence. Sixteenth Report of Session 2017-19” *House of Commons Home Affairs Committee* (July 2019) [link](#)

26. “Offensive Weapons, Knife Crime Practical Guidance”, *CPS* (website accessed August 2021), [link](#); “Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill – Explanatory Notes”, *Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department for Transport* (March 2021) [link](#)

gravity knives and possession of certain knives.

- Criminal Justice Act 1988
 - Restricts the carrying of and threatening with knives in public spaces and educational premises, and the manufacture, sale or hire of offensive weapons.
 - Amended in 2016 to include zombie knives (see box below).
- Offensive Weapons Act 1996
 - Restricts the possession of knives within school premises and imposes age restrictions on the sale of knives
- Knives Act 1997
 - ‘Prohibits the sale of combat knives and restricts the marketing of knives as weapons’
- Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006
 - Imposed stricter age restrictions on the sale of knives and increased maximum penalty for possession of a knife.
- Serious Crime Act 2015
 - Restricts the possession of knives in prison
- Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015
 - Introduced minimum custodial sentences for repeat knife possession and offences that involved threatening with a weapon.
- Offensive Weapons Act 2019
 - Restricts the possession of offensive weapons in private, and the delivery of bladed products to residential premises and under 18’s.
 - Introduced Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs).
- Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021
 - Encourages a multi-agency approach for tackling serious violence.
 - New court orders to make it easier to stop and search those convicted of a knife related offence.

Zombie Knives

An amendment to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (introduced in August 2016) prohibited the sale, manufacture, rental or importation of ‘zombie knives’, ‘zombie killer knives’ and ‘zombie slayer knives’²⁷ following concerns that these knives were glamorising violence. Evidence for this was the frequent references to these knives in popular culture and the fact that they have no other use than as an offensive weapon, with design features such as their size and serrated edges existing purely to inflict maximum physical harm. The then National Police Chief’s Council lead for Knife Enabled Crime, Chief Constable Alf Hitchcock said:

“Zombie knives are absolutely horrific weapons. Forces are determined to reduce the harm caused by these and all other dangerous weapons...”

The then Minister for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism, Sarah Newton said:

“Zombie knives glamorise violence and cause devastating damage – they have no place whatsoever in our society”²⁸.

Current Initiatives to Tackle Knife Crime

Violence Reduction Units

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is modelled on a Glasgow based model that addresses violence as a health issue. This ‘whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention’ was first recommended by the World Health Organisation, and involves collecting data, researching the causes of violence, and evaluating and implementing effective interventions.

In September 2018, London Mayor Sadiq Khan established a VRU in London. In January 2020, the VRU published two reviews, the first looking into the complex causes and impact of violence in London, the second conducting an in-depth examination of the reviews that take place after each specific homicide.²⁹ The reviews found that:

‘Violence has become more serious, more frequent and driven by the use of knives. Additional VRU data shows that there has been a 47 per cent increase in knife-related homicides since 2016, while between 2013/14 and 2017/18, hospital admissions for assaults with a sharp object increased by 32 per cent.

- A highly localised approach – even down to specific roads and estates - is essential to understanding and responding to violence.
- The drugs market has become more lucrative which has increased competition between criminal gangs. The darknet and its expansion has increased competition in drugs market³⁰.

The VRU has received £34.5 million of funding between 2019/20 and 2020/21, which has been allocated to a range of services including

29. “Analysis of statutory reviews of homicides and violent incidents in London – Appendices to the report for the Mayor of London’s Violence Reduction Unit” *Social Care Institute for Excellence* (January 2020) https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/scie_homicide_review_appendices.pdf

30. “New report shows violence cost London £3 billion last year” *Mayor of London. London Assembly* (January 2020) <https://www.london.gov.uk/city-hall-blog/new-report-shows-violence-cost-london-ps3-billion-last-year>

27. “Zombie knives banned in England and Wales” *Home Office* (August 2016), [link](#)

28. “Zombie knives banned in England and Wales” *Home Office* (August 2016), [link](#)

local authorities, schools, PRUs. It has also lobbied for more reviews of homicides and for a *Serious Violence Duty*, which has been incorporated into the PCSC Bill.³¹

While the call for a localised approach and greater research based on homicides is welcome, it is hardly revolutionary. The findings from the VRU appear to be limited and it has not as yet replicated the success of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit. This is in part due to the significant differences in the population, pattern and nature of crime in Glasgow in 2004 and London in 2020. Although the Mayor claims the VRU has had the effect of substantial reductions in the number of homicides and knife crime in London, this is based on misleading comparisons between 2019 and 2020.³² As we highlight above, much of 2020 was spent in lockdown and knife crime in London surged when coronavirus restrictions were lifted. The evidence supporting the success of the VRU in London is limited. It does not appear to be the correct approach for tackling knife crime in London.

Glasgow Based Model

In 2004/05, there were 40 homicide cases in Glasgow alone and a total of 137 in Scotland, making it the 'murder capital of Europe'. By 2016/17 the number had more than halved to 62.

The Glasgow sector was part of a wider model called the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU). This treated violence like a disease, with cause and effect. The Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit described this model as "treating violence as a disease which was infecting our communities".³³

The SVRU gathered data, evaluated existing policies and trialled new interventions across gangs, US influence, health, education, and opportunity. The most successful and cost-effective schemes were then scaled up across the community.

A common misconception about the Glasgow Based Model is that the primary focus was partner interventions. In fact, it included a ramping up of policing activity alongside this, with Scotland consistently maintaining a higher number of police officers relative to the size of their population than in England and Wales.³⁴

Violent Crime Taskforce

Mirroring Operation Blunt 2 ten years previously, the MPS established a Violent Crime Task Force (VCTF) in April 2018 and a VCTF Co-ordination Centre. It describes the work of the VCTF as:

*'Officers will combine Stop and Search, Q-car tactics, and intelligence development of warrants, manhunts and surveillance. Extra police resources are currently deployed in the boroughs where the highest knife crime occurs'*³⁵

Between April 2018 and February 2020, the VCTF had conducted over 14,000 weapons sweeps, made 8,722 arrests and taken 1,514 knives and 999 offensive weapons off the street.³⁶ While this is welcome and suppressive tactics are necessary in the fight against knife crime, an

31. "Questions to Mayor: 20.4m violence reductions fund (2)" *Mayor of London, London Assembly* (March 2021), [link](#)

32. "Questions to Mayor: 20.4m violence reductions fund (2)" *Mayor of London, London Assembly* (March 2021), [link](#)

35. "Business Plan 2018-2021" *Metropolitan Police Service*, [link](#)

36. "Questions to Mayor: Knife Crime Strategy (1)" *Mayor of London, London Assembly* (March 2020) <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2020/1122>

33. Lizzie Dearden, "Violent crime to be treated as 'public health issue' to reduce stabbings and shootings in London" *The Independent* (September 2018), [link](#)

34. Grahame Allen & Megan Harding, "Research Briefing: Police Service Strength", *House of Commons Library* (17 September 2021), [link](#)

overreliance on suppression will not yield long term reductions in crime, as we highlight in Chapter 3.

London Gang Exit Service

The Mayor of London Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the London Community Rehabilitation Company have funded a London Gang Exit (LGE) Service, designed to divert vulnerable young people from a life of crime. LGE brings together a range of partner agencies covering education, housing, health and employment and assigns young people a caseworker who works with them intensively on their individual needs.³⁷

Between February 2016 and December 2018, the LGE worked with 399 young people, from a total of 501 referrals.³⁸ The LGE was allocated over £2 million of funding between October 2015 and September 2019.³⁹

The 2017 MOPAC Interim Valuation Report highlighted ‘client motivation as key in achieving results’.⁴⁰ Essentially, it is very hard to help people who do not want to be helped.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders

Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) were introduced through the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 and will give officers an additional tool to steer those most at risk away from violent crime. The orders are intended to be preventative rather than punitive, to help people change their behaviour and avoid being drawn into knife crime.

The Metropolitan Police Service have implemented, on a trial basis, court orders preventing individuals as young as 12 from carrying knives. The Programme will last 14 months before plans to roll them out across England and Wales. They can be imposed on individuals the police believe are carrying knives or are habitual knife carriers, or those who have been previously convicted of a knife-related offence.

Police can apply to the courts for the orders. The conditions attached can include curfews and restrictions on an individual’s use of social media, travel outside geographical boundaries, as well as explicitly banning them from carrying a knife. Courts can also prescribe positive intervention, such as educational courses, sports club referrals, relationship counselling, anger management, mentoring and drug rehabilitation.

These orders have been introduced due to the alarming trend of knife crime offenders becoming younger year-on-year. This targets a small but ‘high risk’ cohort of individuals from causing immediate harm to others and support earlier interventions to turn young people away from a life of crime and protect them from potential exploitation from criminal gangs.

Knife Crime Prevention Orders can be in place for a maximum of two years and must be reviewed by the courts after 12 months, with orders issued to under 18s to be reviewed more regularly. The results of the pilot, which commenced on Monday 5 July 2021, will be reviewed after 14 months before deciding whether to roll the orders out to all other forces in England and Wales. The initial results are not promising, with not a single successful application for a KCPO during the first six weeks

37. “The London Knife Crime Strategy” *Mayor of London* (June 2017) [link](#)

38. “Questions to Mayor: Gang Exit Strategy” *Mayor of London. London Assembly* (February 2019) <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2019/3814>

39. “Questions to Mayor: Gang Exit Strategy” *Mayor of London. London Assembly* (February 2019) <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2019/3814>

40. “London Gang Exit – Interim Evaluation Report” *Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime* (October 2017) https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lge_interim_2_oct_2017.pdf

of the trial.⁴¹

The Politics of Knife Crime

Knife crime is a highly sensitive political issue due to the devastating effects on victims, families and communities and the lack of consensus as to its root causes. As it is rarely one factor that drives people towards knife crime, there is a constant debate as to whether this is a social or criminal justice problem and which drivers or background conditions matter the most and warrant government attention. Social justice factors include weak family structures, school exclusions, poor education, poverty, a lack of opportunities, social media, gang culture and mental health problems. Seen from a criminal justice viewpoint, factors include the levels of neighbourhood policing, conviction rates, sentencing policy, prison reform and improved rehabilitation.

Government and police approaches to knife crime are particularly controversial, as anti-knife crime policies appear disproportionately to impact BME communities, who are disproportionately both victims and perpetrators. This phenomena is not new. In 2007, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair caused controversy by alluding to this issue after the seventh Londoner under the age of 16 had been murdered since the beginning of that year, stating that the violence would not be stopped “by pretending it is not young black kids doing it”.

He also said:

“the black community - the vast majority of whom in these communities are decent, law abiding people are horrified at what is happening - need to be mobilised in denunciation of this gang culture that is killing innocent young black kids.”⁴²

The current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, acknowledges in his current Knife Crime Strategy the particular problem of knife crime within BME communities of London:

‘BME young males are disproportionately affected, with 6 in 10 young male victims recorded as from BME backgrounds. More specifically, almost half of all young male victims of knife crime with injury were of black ethnicity’.⁴³

More specifically, in relation to gang related knife crime, the Mayor stated:

‘Gang-related knife crimes are usually of a more violent nature to other knife related offending and that young black and ethnic minority males are disproportionately affected by more serious and violent forms of knife crime, where an injury has resulted from the offence. Statistics show that the victims of serious, gang motivated knife crime are predominantly male (92 per cent), young (80 per cent under 25 years of age) and from a BME background’⁴⁴.

It is important that we are able to continue to openly discuss the communities most likely to commit and be victimised by different types of crime. This is vital if we are to create meaningful policies and interventions tailored to those actually committing crime.

41. Ryan Hooper & Sam Russell, “Knife crime prevention trial sees no results in first six weeks”, *Independent* (20th September 2021), [link](#)

42. Patrick Wintour, Vikram Dodd, “Blair blames spate of murders on black culture” *The Guardian* (April 2007) <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/apr/12/uk-crime.race>

43. “The London Knife Crime Strategy”, *Mayor of London* (June 2017), https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf

44. “The London Knife Crime Strategy”, *Mayor of London* (June 2017), https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf

The Home Office and HMIC must be more vigilant about how data relating to crime and police operations is conveyed to the public and reported in the media. As highlighted by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, the damaging claim that ‘black people are 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched’ is frequently cited in the media, despite the fact that the use of a national relative rate is highly misleading as it ignores discrepancies in ‘the sizes or characteristics of local populations’ and crime rates.⁴⁵ Even across London, there are large differences between boroughs and wards in terms of ethnicity, crime levels and the use of stop and search, which can lead to misleading city wide generalisations about how and why this power is being used.

The Metropolitan Police Stop and Search Dashboard shows that for each month in the year ending July 2021, the stop and search rate per 100,000 of the population is around three times greater for Black people than it is for White people, without any reference to the fact that the boroughs with higher levels of crime, therefore warranting higher levels of stop and search, have a greater than average share of ethnic minorities. For example, in the year ending July 2021, 5.9 per cent of all MPS stop and searches were in Southwark, whereas 1.4 per cent occurred in Sutton. Southwark is 30 per cent Black, whereas Sutton is 6 per cent Black. Black people will therefore appear disproportionately targeted at a city-wide level, as the areas they live in are subject to higher levels of stop and search. This is only exacerbated when you look at national figures. This also ignores the fact that Southwark also has a higher rate of crime than Sutton (99.2 vs. 59.5 per 1,000 of the population in the year ending July 2021), including higher rates for weapon possession and violence against the person, on which basis there are higher levels of stop and search.

The Home Office, the Police, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, and the Independent Office for Police Conduct must do more to explain the data presented to the public, including why police activity varies across regions. Fighting the narrative around stop and search is important as it undermines the relationship between the police and the communities most affected by crime, preventing them from being able to conduct their role effectively. It is important to remember that the real injustice is that young Black men are nine times more likely to die of homicide in London than young White men, with this figure rising to 24 times more likely across the UK as a whole, not that they are subject to higher rates of stop and search.⁴⁶

45. “Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report”, *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* (31 March 2021), [link](#)

46. “Cressida Dick: Black boys ‘nine times more likely to be murdered’”, *The Times* (28 November 2020), [link](#); “Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report”, *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* (31 March 2021), [link](#)

3. The Policing of Knife Crime

There is a lack of strategy in the Met with regards to tackling knife crime, which has resulted in a mismatch between the range of different techniques required to do so. Tackling knife crime through policing requires three key approaches: suppression, targeting high profile criminals and gang members, and neighbourhood policing. None of these alone are sufficient to tackle knife crime, but even when used together, the balance struck between these different measures must be correct in order to be effective.

We shall first explore each of these measures individually, and then assess how a coherent strategy with regards to knife crime could be established, by looking at how different police forces have chosen to operate.

Suppression

A key suppressive tactic used in the fight against knife crime is stop and search. This is the police power that allows the police to search for illegal drugs, weapons, or stolen property, if they have 'reasonable grounds' to suspect an individual (Section 1 Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984).⁴⁶ Stop and searches without reasonable grounds can only occur under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, if it is believed serious violence will occur; a person is carrying a dangerous object or offensive weapon; or that an incident involving serious violence has taken place and a dangerous instrument or offensive weapon used in the incident is being carried in the locality.⁴⁸ Section 1 is the most commonly used investigative power of stop and search, constituting 97 per cent of all stop and searches in England and Wales in 2019/20.⁴⁹

The use of stop and search has fluctuated as the police power has been subject to legislative and procedural change over the past ten years (Figure 7). Stop and searches peaked in 2008 as the Metropolitan Police Service launched Operation Blunt 2, which resulted in an almost permanent employment of section 60 stop and search designations in 'violent hotspots'.⁵⁰

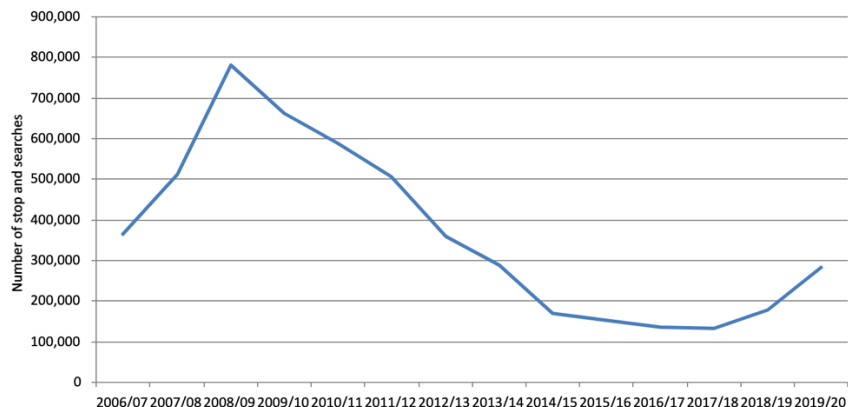
47. 48 - Jennifer Brown, "Briefing Paper: Police powers: stop and search", House of Commons, 10 March 2021

48. "Section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994" Metropolitan Police <https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/central/advice/met/stop-and-search/section-60-stop-and-search.PDF>

49. "Stop and Search" Gov.uk (February 2021) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest#by-ethnicity-and-legislation>

50. Peter Squires, Peter Kennison "Shooting to Kill?: Policing, Firearms and Armed Response. Wiley (March 2010) [link](#)

Figure 7: Number of stop and searches in London, 2006/7 to 2018/19.⁵¹



Operation Blunt

As part of the Home Office *Tackling Knives Action Programme* (TKAP), aiming to reduce teenage knife crime in ten police force areas in England and Wales from June 2008 to March 2009, the MPS launched Operation Blunt 2. The operation also focused on enforcement activity designed to reduce the harm caused by a minority of individual violent offenders involved in groups or gangs.

The initiative was supported by a central ‘task force’ of 50 officers drawn from all boroughs for central daily deployment in accordance with identified incidents. Operational tactics comprise:

- Increased fixed and flexible search deployments and security measures to restrict knife carriage – educational establishments, entertainment and leisure venues, transport infrastructure and public space events;
- Intelligence led stop and search operations targeting specific individuals, groups, areas, events, venues, town centres and transport hubs/routes;
- Targeted enforcement operations to disrupt and prevent violence perpetrated by violent individuals and groups (gangs);
- Disruption of knife supply through intelligence-led ground searches (neighbourhood weapon sweeps) and enforcement of existing retail sale supply legislation (including internet)⁵²

During Operation Blunt, special initiatives were introduced to address knife crime in London. The Home Office ran the Connected Fund which provided financial support for small community groups to carry out projects intended to reduce gun, knife and gang crime. In addition, Borough-based projects such as Not Another Drop⁵³ and a number of community-based projects ran in the capital. Examples included: Crime Reduction in Schools (CRIS), Game over 4 Knives⁵⁴, the Supported Training and Education Pathway (STEP), Streetwise, the Arc Theatre for Change, Calling the shots, the Sub-Saharan Agenda (TESSA) and the Yes Entertainment Studios⁵⁵. All of these initiatives have subsequently been discontinued.

51. GOV.UK, February 2019, *Stop and Search*; Data.Police.UK, Metropolitan Police Stop and Search Data, 2018/19

52. “Operation Blunt 2” Metropolitan Police Authority (June 2009) [link](#)

53. “Questions to Mayor: Not another drop march” Mayor of London. London Assembly (October 2008) <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2008/2244>

54. “Crackdown on knife crime” *The Daily Echo* (November 2009) [link](#)

55. “Briefing no 18 – London’s gun, gang and knife culture: a young people’s issue” ROTA (March 2007) [link](#)

According to the Metropolitan Police Authority:

'Youth homicide (under 20 years) decreased by 23.3% in the year to March 2009 compared with the previous year. (30 to 23). Recorded knife crime in London reduced by 13.3% (14,192 to 12,310) in the year ending March 2009 compared with the previous year representing 1,882 fewer recorded crimes involving a knife. The number of youth victims (10-19 years) of violent crime in London reduced by 9.8% (22,586 to 20,377) in the year ending March 2009 compared with the previous year, representing 2,209 fewer young victims of violent crime'.⁵⁶

With regards to the disproportionate impact of the use of stop and search on BME communities, it was noted that 'Youth homicide impacted disproportionately upon BME communities in London during Operation Blunt 2.... An examination of persons stopped and searched between July 2008 and February 2009 showed that the proportion of searches impacting BME communities (68%) was broadly aligned to the proportion of those had been historically accused of knife crime offences from BME communities (72%)'.⁵⁷

The Public Attitude Survey (PAS) showed that the percentage of people who were very or fairly worried about knife crime fell from 43% for the quarter ending September 2008 to 38% for the quarter ending December 2008

In 2014, the then Home Secretary Theresa May increased the threshold for authorisation to exercise the Section 60 power, adding in a requirement of 'necessity' and amending the senior officers' suspicion that serious violence "will" take place rather than "may take place"⁵⁸. Forces had to limit its application to 15 hours and communicate with communities before and after. This action followed a series of statements over several years by Theresa May that suggested that the application by police of stop and search was disproportionately targeting BME communities. These statements and the curtailments of the power discouraged police officers from using stop and search, contributing to the drop before 2014.

Commenting on this decline in the use of the power, Chief Constable Sara Thornton, then Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) wrote in April 2018:

"Chief Constables tell me that their officers have been feeling hesitant about using stop and search"

*"the use of this power has been discouraged and the statistics are stark. In London alone, the use of this power has fallen from 1,429 instances to 23 between 2011/12 and 2016/17."*⁵⁹

The change to the Section 60 power was, however, subsequently reversed by then Home Secretary Sajid Javid on 31 March 2019, who increased the number of officers able to authorise its use and lowering the degree of certainty required by authorising officers, from a belief that serious violence 'may' rather than 'will' occur.⁶⁰

On 5 June 2019, Sajid Javid confirmed that the use of stop and search in 'violent hotspots' by the MPS had increased 423% in 2018/2019 compared to the previous year.⁶¹ The MPS also confirmed that at the same

58. "Stop and search: Theresa May announces reform of police stop and search" *Home Office* (April 2014) [link](#)

59. Sara Thornton, "Give police the confidence to use stop and search – they're an important tool against violence" *The Telegraph* (April 2018) [link](#)

60. "Greater powers for police to use stop and search to tackle violent crime" *Home Office* (March 2019) [link](#)

61. John Simpson, "Stabbings fall as Metropolitan Police increase stop and search by 400 per cent" *The Times* (June 2019) [link](#)

56. "Operation Blunt 2" *Metropolitan Police Authority* (June 2009) [link](#)

57. "Strategic and Operational Policing Committee: OPERATION BLUNT 2", Metropolitan Police Authority (8 June 2009), <http://policeauthority.org/metropolitan/downloads/committees/sop/090608-20-exemptreport.pdf>

times as searches rose, killings in the capital dropped by 25% from 163 in 2017/18 to 122 in 2018/19 and knife crime injuries among the under-25s fell 20% compared to the previous year.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan's own policy on stop and search is less clear. Prior to his election as Mayor in September 2015, Sadiq Khan promised to cut stop and search saying:

"...if I am Mayor I'll do all in my power to further cut its use. Overuse of stop and search can have a dramatic effect on communities"⁶².

However by 2018 Khan had reversed his position, writing in the *Evening Standard* that the Metropolitan Police was:

"Ramping up its fight against violent crime" adding "this will include a significant increase in the use of targeted stop and search by the police across the city."⁶³

Khan's latest position involves increasing 'community scrutiny' of the Met's use of stop and search, and scaling back the use of stop and search on the basis of the smell of cannabis.⁶⁴

Much of the debate regarding stop and search lacks nuance. Assessing the effectiveness of stop and search on crime is extremely challenging, as different communities have different levels of tolerance for this tactic, and the overall impact of stop and search on crime depends on a range of other activities being carried out by the police. Furthermore, powers such as Section 60 are only deployed where violence is expected and may therefore be expected to be accompanied by higher levels of crime.

Stop and search therefore cannot be viewed as either good or bad, without taking into account the wider policy and societal context within which it is applied. Stop and search is a very effective tool that has undoubtedly saved many lives across the London. It is particularly effective when applied appropriately and fairly, alongside an effective communications strategy and a range of other measures designed to build trust with the communities subject to stop and search. However, if overused by a police force lacking ties with the community, stop and search can contribute to a toxic environment that prevents the cooperation required between people and police to tackle serious crime.

Apprehending High Profile Criminals and Gang Members

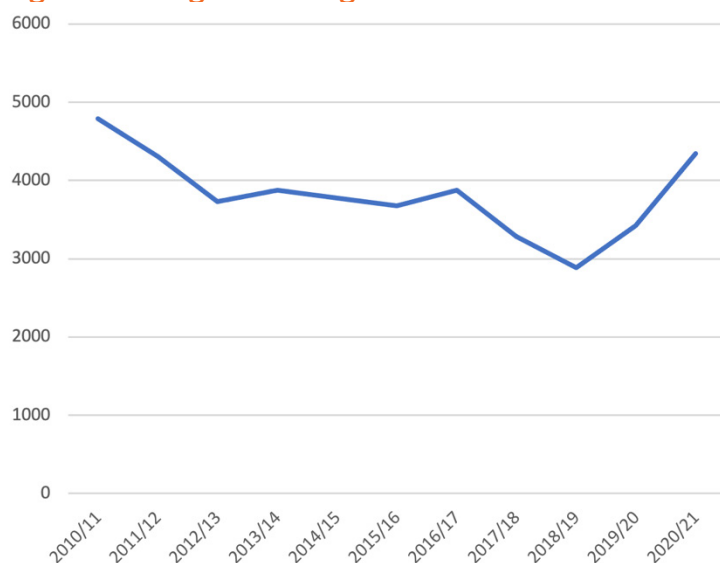
Although suppressive techniques are useful as a short-term measure, long term reductions in crime can only be achieved by removing key targets. These are the serious criminals and gang members not involved in the street level crime that is affected by stop and search. Although this is not always possible or easy, apprehending these individuals is an essential element of any strategy targeting violent and organised crime, due to the role they play in organising criminal networks, drawing younger generations into a life of crime and perpetuating gang violence.

62. Pippa Crerar "Sadiq Khan: 'I'd do everything in my power to cut stop and search'" *The Evening Standard* (September 2015) [link](#)

63. Lizzie Dearden "Sadiq Khan to 'significantly increase' stop and search in London" *The Independent* (January 2018) [link](#)

64. "Mayor's Action Plan focuses on disproportionality of police powers" *Mayor of London. London Assembly* (13th November 2020) [link](#)

Figure 8: Drug trafficking offences in London



We have used drug trafficking as a proxy for assessing whether there is an appropriate focus on removing high profile criminals. The number of drug trafficking offences is particularly relevant as they are only recorded when police make arrests and are rarely reported by members of the public. This means that detecting this crime requires proactive, targeted, intelligence led police operations, as opposed to stop and search, and is strongly linked with gang activity. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick has previously stated that she believes the illegal drug trade is “at the root of” London’s knife crime crisis.⁶⁵

Between 2010 and 2018, the number of drug trafficking offences in London fell by 40 per cent, despite drug consumption remaining stable.⁶⁶ This suggests that the MPS seriously reduced the number of proactive, targeted police operations they are carrying out, despite the introduction of intelligence gathering exercises such as the gang violence matrix. The lack of targeted police interventions may have been exacerbated as over this period many of the serious criminals apprehended as a result of the London riots may have been released from jail.

The increase since 2018 is due to the increased focus on county lines drug dealing, and although it is welcome to see the number of drug trafficking prosecutions increase, it is clear the MPS needs to focus more on apprehending high profile criminals going forward (see below).

This problem is exacerbated by the way in which the homicide sanction detection rates are recorded. When someone is charged, cautioned or otherwise held to account, a homicide is deemed ‘solved’. While this information is useful, it can be misleading if viewed in isolation. Policy Exchange analysis reveals that in 2018 and 2019, a significant share of perpetrators were not apprehended, yet the MPS regularly highlight a homicide sanction detection rate of 90 per cent.⁶⁷ As the majority of gang murders involve multiple perpetrators, with one case in 2018 involving seven teenagers, it is vital to have an understanding of how many people

65. Dave Hill, “London knife crime crisis a ‘new phenomenon’ with drug trade ‘at the root of it all’; says Met chief Cressida Dick”, *OnLondon* (27th March 2019), [link](#)

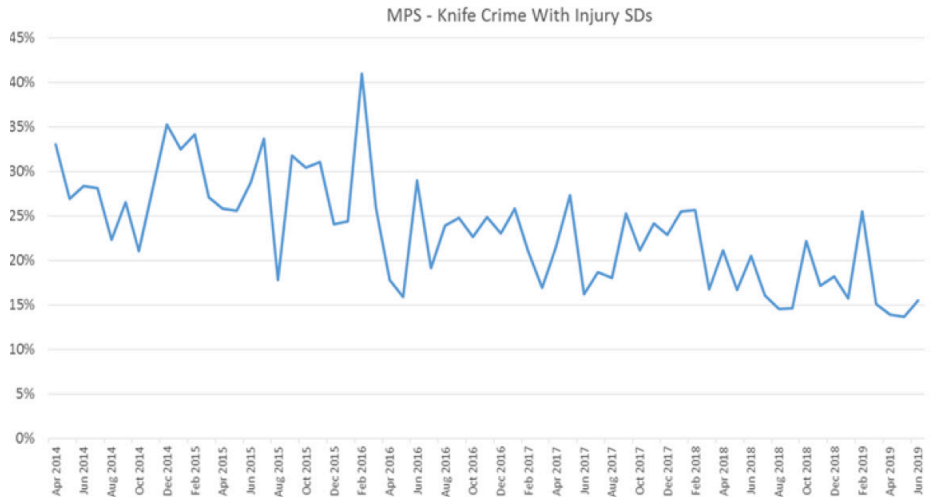
66. “United Kingdom drug situation 2019: summary”, *GOV.UK* (31 March 2021), [link](#)

67. “Quarter 1 2019-20: Business Plan progress report”, *Metropolitan Police Service*, [link](#)

involved in serious violent crime are still walking free. These people are likely not just to commit serious crime again, but also influence others in their assessment of the risk of going into a life of crime. The Home Office should therefore require police forces to additionally publish data on the number of ‘fully detected’ cases.

Sanction detection rates for other related crimes, e.g. knife crime with injury, are much lower. The following graph (Figure 9) illustrates that MPS sanction detection rate for knife crime with injury fell from around 27 per cent in 2014 to around 17 per cent in 2019. According to the MPS, this is due ‘to the increasing complexity of this type of investigation when witnesses are not willing to engage.’⁶⁸ Although ‘knife crime with injury’ involves other types of knife crime such as domestic violence, this highlights the importance for the police of maintaining strong ties with the community to assist with intelligence gathering in the aftermath of a crime.

Figure 9: MPS Knife Crime with Injury Sanction Detections



68. "Quarter 1 2019-20: Business Plan progress report", Metropolitan Police Service, [link](#)

Gangs Violence Matrix

One of the tools used by the Met to identify individuals involved with gangs is the gangs violence matrix, a database used to identify and assess the risk of people in or affiliated with gangs across London, as well as their potential victims. This was established following the London riots in 2011, there was increased concern over the role that gangs played in the days of violence and looting that overcame the capital.

Individuals are rated on the basis of past convictions, police intelligence, social media activity and networks and placed into three categories (Red, Amber and Green) based on the risk they pose to society or the threat posed to them from others. This system allows the MPS to target interventions more effectively and assess where more resources are required. The database is constantly updated, in Q4 of 2020/21, 71 people were added to the matrix and 176 were removed.⁶⁹

According to information released about the database as of 31 March 2021, of the 2206 individuals on the matrix:⁷⁰

- 41 per cent are in custody
- 12 per cent are White and 80 per cent are Black
- 13 per cent are 18 or under and 58 per cent are aged 19-25
- 6 per cent are in the high risk category 'red', while 67 per cent are in the low risk category 'green'
- 6 individuals are female

Despite the significant intelligence sharing benefits of the matrix that allow for more targeted interventions for both victims and criminals, this technique was heavily criticised in an Amnesty International report in 2017 which highlighted the methods used to place individuals on the matrix (e.g. sharing a drill music video online), the overrepresentation of BME and the data sharing practices of the Metropolitan Police. The ICO launched an investigation into the matrix⁷¹ finding it to be in breach of data protection rules, which had in some cases led to inappropriate discrimination by local councils and housing associations towards relatives of individuals placed on the matrix.⁷² This was followed by a report in 2018 by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), which called 'for a comprehensive overhaul of Matrix processes and oversight'⁷³, whilst acknowledging that the Matrix had played a role in reducing violence.

Community Policing

Protecting the most vulnerable from knife crime and identifying those encouraging and perpetuating this type of crime requires cooperation with the police from the local community. This is best fostered through a model of policing known as Neighbourhood Policing, first established in 2005, which involves units of Police Officers and Police Community Support Offers dedicated to patrolling small areas.

Although the roots of community policing can be found in Robert Peel's Principles of Policing, in particular the need to prevent crime as opposed to solely repressing it through force and the importance of maintaining public approval and cooperation, this type of policing has been difficult to maintain over time, a phenomenon known as 'the reinvention cycle'.

69. "Gangs Matrix figures – headlines 2020/21 Q4" *Metropolitan Police* <https://www.met.police.uk/cy-GB/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/force-content/met/about-us/gangs-violence-matrix/gangs-violence-matrix-q4-2020-211.pdf>

70. "Gangs Matrix figures – headlines 2020/21 Q4" *Metropolitan Police* <https://www.met.police.uk/cy-GB/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/force-content/met/about-us/gangs-violence-matrix/gangs-violence-matrix-q4-2020-211.pdf>

71. "Trapped in the matrix – Secrecy, stigma, and bias in the Met's Gangs Database" *Amnesty International* (May 2018)

72. Peter Yeung, "The grim reality of life under Gangs Matrix, London's controversial predictive policing tool" *Wired* (April 2019) <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/gangs-matrix-violence-london-predictive-policing>

73. "Review of the Metropolitan Police Service Gangs Matrix" *Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime* (December 2018) https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gangs_matrix_review_-_final.pdf

According to a statement issued on 16 June 2011 by the then Assistant Commissioner of Territorial Policing:

‘A key driver for the creation of Safer Neighbourhoods was the desire to break what was termed “the reinvention cycle”. The MPS, along with police across the UK, had tried on a number of occasions to develop a sustainable community policing model. The results of previous attempts to achieve this had suggested that increasing and competing demands on the police, without additional investment or disciplined change management, has resulted in a cycle of implementation failure (i.e. the reinvention cycle).

The standard ‘one size fits all’ model was developed, in conjunction with other factors such as Signal Crime theory, to enable swift delivery of neighbourhood policing to London residents.’

The piloting of the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) between April 2003 and 2005 led to the national Neighbourhood Policing programme launched in April 2005. The NRPP evaluation⁷⁴ highlighted three key activities for successful Neighbourhood Policing, namely:

- ‘the consistent presence of dedicated neighbourhood teams capable of working in the community to establish and maintain control;
- intelligence-led identification of community concerns with prompt, effective, targeted action against those concerns; and
- joint action and problem solving with the community and other local partners, improving the local environment and quality of life.’

A neighbourhood policing model was fully rolled out by the MPS across all 624 wards of London in 2006. Teams comprised 1 sergeant, 2 constables and 3 PCSOs (1-2-3) for every ward in London, with enhanced teams of 1-2-6 later established on wards with a population of 14,000 or more. This model allows the police to build relationships with the local community, develop their understanding and knowledge of key areas, rivalries, and individuals likely to be involved in crime, while improving communication between the police and the local community with regards to their purpose and intentions. By 2011, the roll out of Neighbourhood Policing in London was widely regarded as a total success and a major contributing factor to reductions in crime across all crime types across London, including knife crime. Alongside significant reductions of crime, significant improvements in public satisfaction with the police were recorded.⁷⁵

However, in the face of nationwide reductions in the police force strength, Neighbourhood Policing teams across London have been subjected to drastic cuts. Figure 10 highlights a reduction in the number of PCSOs in London of 50% between May 2013 and July 2018, with the number of police support staff falling by over 30% in this period. Total

74. “HMIC Inspection Report – Metropolitan Police Service Neighbourhood Policing Developing Citizen Focus Policing” *Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary* (September 2008) [link](#)

75. Andy Higgins, “The Future of Neighbourhood Policing”, *The Police Foundation* (May 2018), https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/TPFJ6112-Neighbourhood-Policing-Report-WEB_2.pdf

Notifiable Offences (TNOs) drastically increased over this period, rising from a low of 52,676 in February 2014 to a high of 81,649 in July 2019, a 55% increase. This has been followed by a drop in confidence in the police. In particular, the number of Londoners who know how to contact their local ward officer has fallen from 42 per cent in March 2015 to 13 per cent in March 2020 and the number who think police do a good job in the local area has fallen from 67 per cent to 58 per cent over the same period (later periods are excluded due to changes in the interview methodology).

Figure 10: Total Notifiable Offences recorded for London by MPS between January 2008 and January 2020. Indexed trend in the Metropolitan Police Force Strength between May 2013 and December 2019.⁷⁶

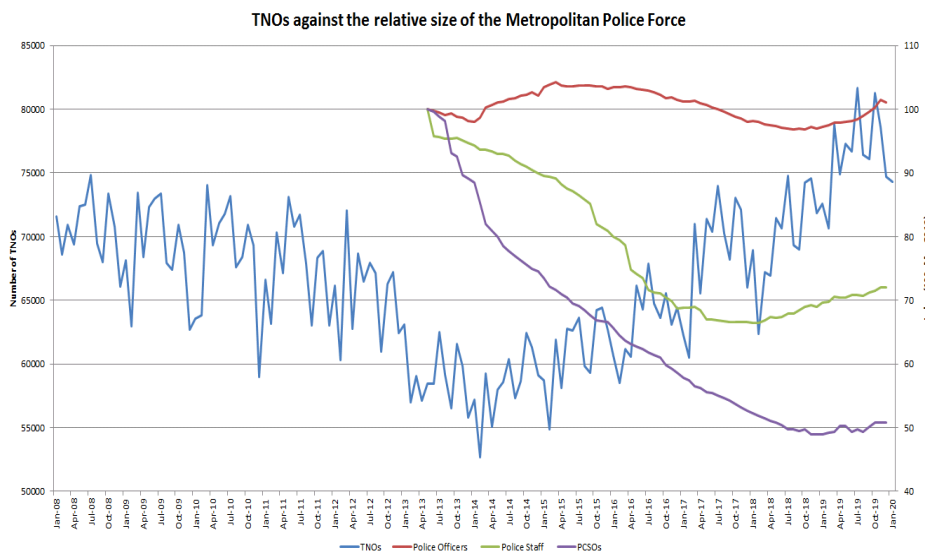
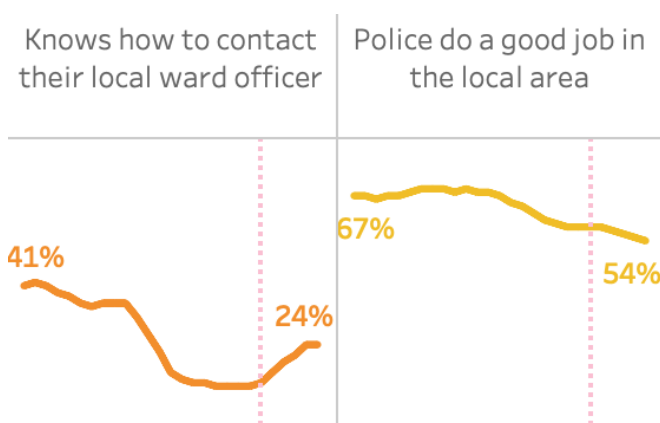


Figure 11: Public Perceptions over time for MPS residents. Dotted line denotes when the interview methodology changed from April 2020 onwards.⁷⁷



76. "Recorded Crime: Geographic Breakdown" *London Datastore* (Accessed September 2021) [link](#) ; "Police Force Strength" *Greater London Authority* (Accessed September 2021) [link](#)

77. "Public Voice Dashboard" *Mayor of London, London Assembly*. (Accessed September 2021) <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/public-voice-dashboard>

In light of the uplift to police numbers promised by the Government, the Met must accelerate investment and look to expand the Neighbourhood Policing model. Although the Commissioner of the MPS Cressida Dick acknowledges the importance of neighbourhood policing in the London Knife Crime Strategy (2017), stating that, “our fight against knife crime is ingrained in our neighbourhood policing and runs through everything we do”, the current definition of neighbourhood policing is far less ambitious than it used to be.⁷⁸ According to the London Knife Crime Strategy:

‘There will be one PCSO and two Police Officers dedicated to every one of the 629 wards in London – this commitment has already been met in terms of the PCSOs, whilst the vast majority of the Police Officers are also in post.’⁷⁹

This commitment by the Mayor⁸⁰ and the Commissioner of the MPS of just 2 Police Constables and 1 PCSO (compared to 1 sergeant, 2 constables and 3 PCSOs in the 2000’s) on every ward represents a significantly reduced policing presence across London’s wards and is itself a strength not yet achieved. Policy Exchange looked into the number of PC’s and PCSOs on the 304 wards of the 15 boroughs with the highest stabbings rate and found that just before the pandemic, 57 wards (19%) had less than 2 Constables and 26 wards (9%) had less than 1 PCSO.⁸⁰ While this is marginally better than the London average, where 21 per cent of wards have less than 2 Constables and 14 per cent of wards have less than 1 PCSO, it is nevertheless concerning that this minimum level of neighbourhood policing in the most dangerous boroughs had not been achieved. In the face of limited resources, police efforts should be more targeted.

Furthermore, no commitment is being made on the numbers of Sergeants across Safer Neighbourhood Teams, a critical element of a successful neighbourhood policing model.⁸² Successful Neighbourhood Policing Teams require strong leadership, for which Sergeants are required. Sergeants can also be held accountable for the priorities of the Neighbourhood Policing Team by local authorities, as in the previous neighbourhood policing model. By increasing political scrutiny and accountability, greater alignment between police forces and the communities they serve can be achieved. The MPS should make a commitment to dedicate a Sergeant to each Neighbourhood Policing Team, as in previous iterations of this policing model.

Strategy

The Met’s inability to stem the rise in knife crime over the past few years is in part due to a mismatch between the three key policing strategies that have emerged over the last decade. The MPS have not struck the correct balance between stop and search, apprehending high profile criminals, and investing in neighbourhood policing. We are not against stop and search, which is an effective tool that has undoubtedly saved many lives across the capital, the failure of the MPS lies in their neglect of other tactics to be used alongside this. None of these tactics alone will lead to long term reductions in knife crime; they are most effective when used in tandem.

78. “The London Knife Crime Strategy” *Mayor of London* (June 2017) https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf

79. “The London Knife Crime Strategy”, *Mayor of London* (June 2017), https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_knife_crime_strategy_june_2017.pdf

80. “Mayor announces a second dedicated PC in every London ward” *Mayor of London, London Assembly* (July 2016) <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayors-first-step-to-real-neighbourhood-policing>

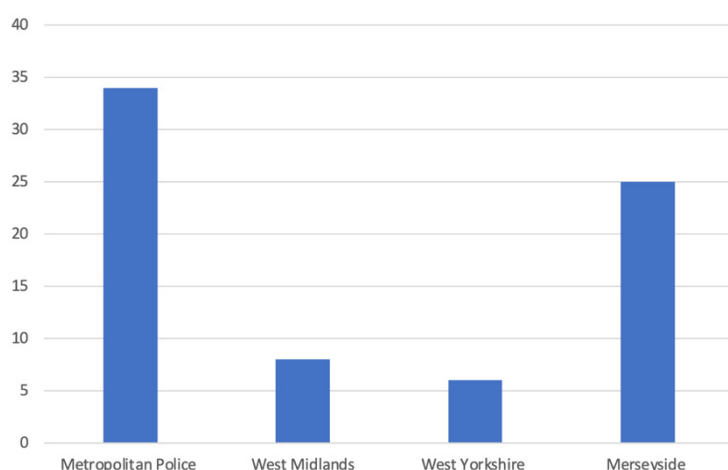
81. “Workforce data report - January 2020”, *Metropolitan Police*, <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/workforce-data-report/>

82. Andy Higgins, “The Future of Neighbourhood Policing” *The Police Foundation* (May 2018) [link](#)

Although the MPS face a unique set of challenges in policing the capital city and one must therefore be careful when drawing direct comparisons with other police forces, it is nevertheless useful to see how other police forces operating in urban areas have dealt with the nationwide rise in knife crime. We have looked at Merseyside Police Force (Liverpool), West Midlands Police Force (Birmingham), and West Yorkshire Police Force (Leeds and Bradford). Data relating to Greater Manchester Police Force is not available due to issues with the implementation of a new IT system.

London has the highest rate of homicides involving knives (0.95 per 100,000 of the population, vs. 0.68 for Birmingham, 0.34 for Leeds and Bradford, and 0.28 for Liverpool).

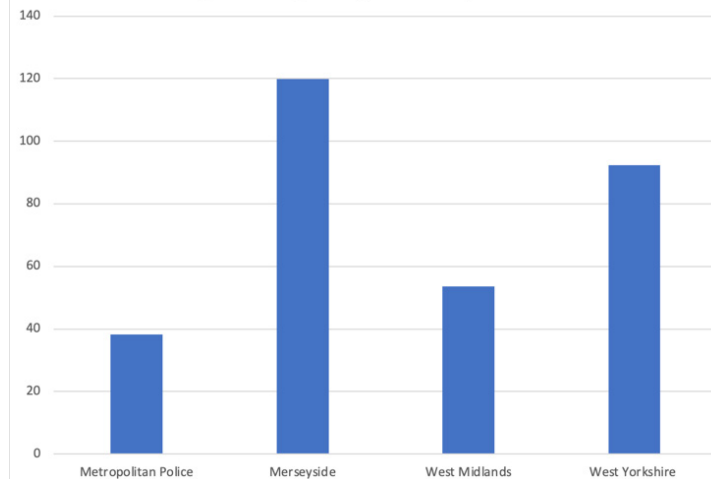
Figure 12: Stop and search rate per 1,000 people by police force area, year ending March 2020.⁸³



The MPS is particularly reliant on suppressive tactics, with London having the highest rate of stop and search. Although increasing stop and search, particularly from a low base, can result in immediate reductions in crime, if not combined with an effective community relations strategy, cooperation with the police in the long run will fall, negatively impacting on their ability to tackle crime. Increasing the use of stop and search in London is less likely to yield great benefits, without addressing the MPS' relationship with the communities most affected by this tactic first.

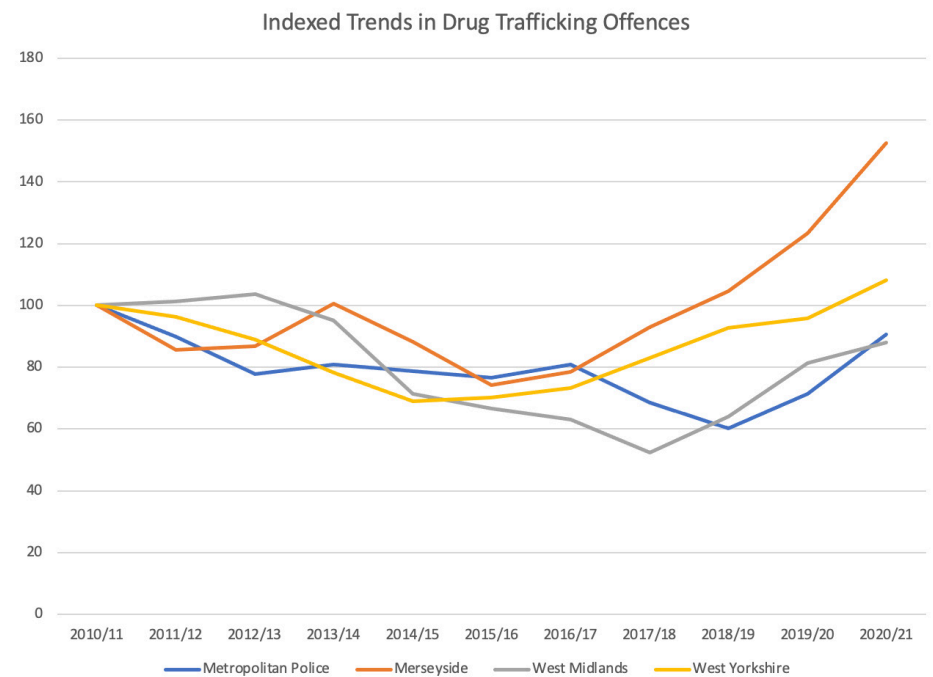
83. "Stop and Search" Gov.uk (February 2021) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest#by-ethnicity-and-area>

Figure 13: Drug trafficking rate (per 100,000) in 2019/20



Using drug trafficking as a proxy for apprehending high profile criminals, we can see that the MPS has the lowest rate for apprehending drug traffickers of the four police forces in question (Figure 13), following significant reductions in the number of drug trafficking offences over the last decade (Figure 14). Although there were falls across all forces, the MPS and the West Midlands saw the largest reductions, and have failed to make the gains made by Merseyside and West Yorkshire over the last few years. This suggests the MPS is not carrying out as many targeted, proactive operations, taking out the most serious criminals perpetuating gang violence and crime, as other police forces.

Figure 14: Indexed trends in drug trafficking – police recorded crime



Neighbourhood policing contributes to the effectiveness of both stop and search and the apprehension of high-profile criminals. It soothes community relations by building an understanding among the innocent who will inevitably be stopped as to why these actions are necessary, reduces riot risk, and aids with vital intelligence gathering required to apprehend serious criminals. For example, the MPS's knife crime initiative Operation Blunt 2 between 2008-2010 coincided with the successful roll out of Neighbourhood Policing across London, which was key to ensuring medium- and long-term reductions in crime, beyond the effects of hotspot focused policing.⁸⁴ This type of policing is critical in maintaining a positive relationship with members of the public. Only a committed, local force, regularly visible patrolling the same streets can create a sense that the police are there to serve the local community, and therefore deserve the communities cooperation and trust. This is of particular importance in the communities with the highest levels of crime, as these often display the lowest level of trust.

Neighbourhood Policing is also critical for 'upstream prevention', that is the police force's ability to work with councils and the education sector to prevent young people being drawn into gangs. If a police officer on patrol can identify an at-risk young adolescent who has been spotted for the first time with a known gang member, he can alert the relevant institutions and attempt an early intervention. Closer cooperation between the MPS, NHS, schools and social workers is required for this to be effective.

After initially maintaining a strong neighbourhood policing presence, the MPS introduced some of the most severe cuts to the number of Police Officers and PCSOs committed to neighbourhood policing since 2016. The number of Police Officers and PCSOs in London committed to Neighbourhood Policing has fallen from 7,607 in 2015/16 to 3,019 in 2020/21.⁸⁵ The number of Police Officers specifically allocated to neighbourhood policing has fallen by almost a third since 2012, despite police officer numbers slightly increasing over the period in question. As of the year ending March 2021, the MPS has dedicated the smallest number of officers and PCSOs to neighbourhood policing relative to the size of the population, compared to Merseyside, West Midlands and West Yorkshire (Figure 16).

84. Damian Small, "Met roll out next phase of Operation Blunt" *Police Professional* (November 2006) <https://www.policeprofessional.com/news/met-roll-out-next-phase-of-operation-blunt/>

85. "Police workforce England and Wales statistics", *Home Office* (28 July 2021), [link](#)

Figure 15: Neighbourhood policing – police workforce tables

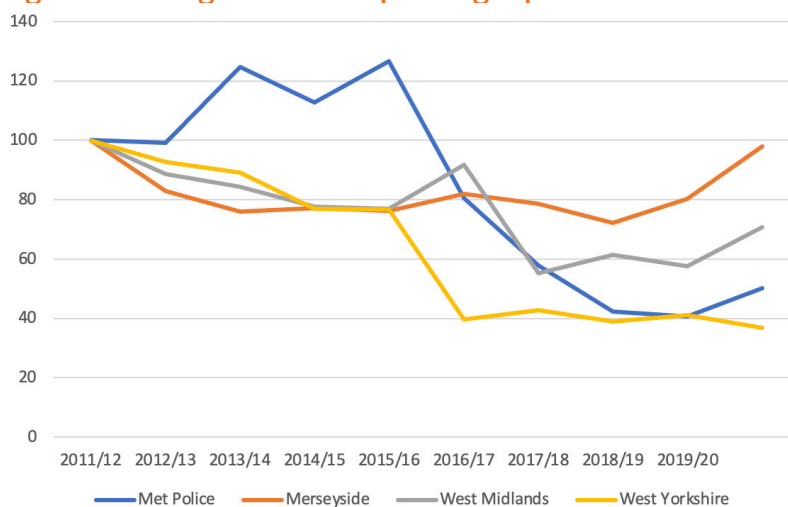
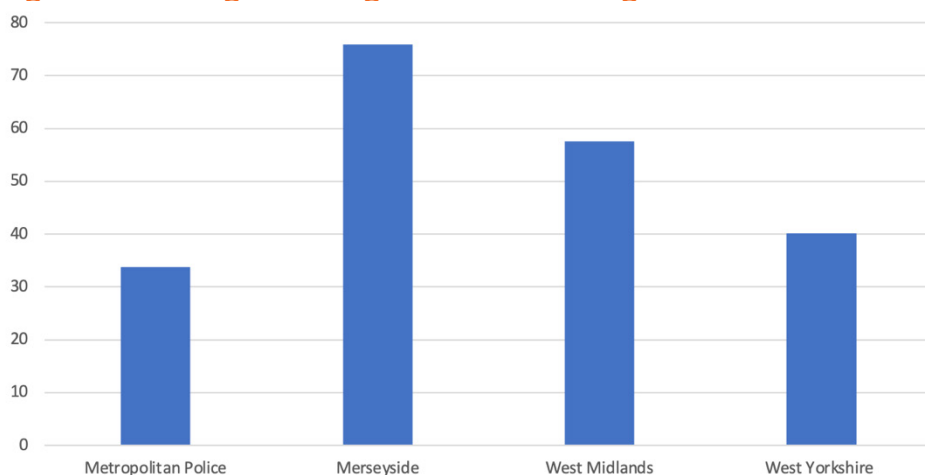


Figure 16: Strength of Neighborhood Policing



Our analysis reveals the Met has what appears to be an imbalanced policing approach to gangs and knife crime when compared to other forces.

Police Force	Suppression	Apprehension of High-Profile Criminals	Neighbourhood Policing
Metropolitan Police Service	H	L	L
Merseyside	M	H	H
West Midlands	L	M	M
West Yorkshire	L	H	L

Although the policing of London presents unique challenges in terms of the complexity and scale of the task, the MPS seems to have an unusual and unjustified strategy, combining a relatively high rate of stop and search with weak community policing and targeting of high-profile criminals. The MPS stop and search rate is 5.5 times that of West Yorkshire, the rate at which they apprehend drug traffickers is less than a third that of Merseyside, while the strength of Neighbourhood Policing in London is just over half that of the West Midlands and less than half that of Merseyside. Striking the correct balance between these three tactics, in particular building up neighbourhood policing and increasing the number of proactive, targeted operations is vital in the fight against gang violence and knife crime and the police's ability to continue operating with the approval and cooperation of the public.

4. The Legitimisation of Gang Culture

A failure in the MPS's strategy towards tackling knife crime has been accompanied and exacerbated by naïve societal acceptance of gang culture, making gangs more appealing and legitimising and perpetuating their existence.

Actions by social media companies, big brands like Adidas, and cultural institutions, enable and support those directly involved in knife crime. This sends a signal to young people susceptible of being drawn into gangs that this lifestyle is acceptable and even desirable, minimising the repercussions for engaging in violent crime.

Social Media

The speed of integration of social media into the daily lives of young people has been extraordinary, and the pandemic has only accelerated this trend. Ofcom found that in 2020, 91% of 12-15 year olds owned a smartphone, 87% of this age group use social media and 99% use video-sharing platforms.⁸⁶ 66% of 12 to 15 year olds used Instagram, 58% used Snapchat and 54% used Facebook, a company now worth over \$1 trillion.⁸⁷ The average social media user in the UK has 6.9 accounts and spends 1 hour and 50 minutes a day using them.⁸⁸

Social media has undoubtedly transformed how people interact with one another, from workplace networking to online dating. It is therefore unsurprising that social media has also changed how gangs and criminals interact with one another too.

If you are seeking to build a reputation based upon violent behaviour, the payoff is limited by the size of the audience who can witness and hear of your crimes. In the past this was limited to direct witnesses and acquaintances, as criminals wouldn't be able to for example rent a billboard or post an advertisement in the local paper to draw attention to their actions. This limited the humiliation factor for the victim, and reduced the social capital reward for the perpetrator. However, the rise of the internet, smartphones and social media has changed the incentives for committing and publicising violent crime. Videos of stabbings and beatings and live tallies of violent acts are easily disseminated online, which means the number of people able to witness violent acts has risen exponentially. The reputational gains from crime are greater now than ever before, as are the losses to status and reputation for victims.

86. "Children and parents" media use and attitudes report" Ofcom (April 2021) https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf

87. "Children and parents" media use and attitudes report" Ofcom (April 2021) https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf; 'Facebook Net worth 2009-2021' Macrotrends (Accessed September 2021) <https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/FB/facebook/net-worth>

88. "The UK social media statistics for 2021" Avocado Social (February 2021) <https://www.avocadosocial.com/the-uk-social-media-statistics-for-2021/>

Case Study 1: Violence Shared on Snapchat and Twitter

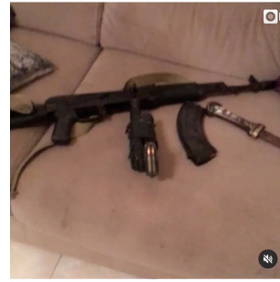


This video of a 15-year-old boy being beaten up on the street (hosted on Twitter but originally shown on Snapchat) received 1400 views in the first two weeks of it being uploaded on 12th February 2020 and is a prime example of the amplification of violent acts on social media. Prior to the advent of social media, it would have been inconceivable to have so many witnesses to a beating. Not only does this legitimise violent behaviour, it also increases pressure on victims to retaliate.

Social media has impacted how gangs interact with each other and display their power. Confrontation between gangs used to be limited to face to face interactions, which meant that this did not occur as frequently, and the potential fallout from a perceived loss of face was reduced. Social media has completely changed this. Firstly, gangs now taunt each other online incessantly, by sharing videos of themselves trespassing onto the territory of other rival gangs and taunting rival gang members. Consequently, the rate at which aggression and violence escalates is much faster, and can happen within a couple of days, instead of weeks. Secondly, the number of people who can now bear witness to 'disrespect' has multiplied exponentially. Violent acts are projected across many different platforms, sometimes for years after the attack has happened, with social media users contributing to escalating tensions by sharing videos and inciting violence through comments on social media posts. This amplifies the pressure to retaliate and undermines the work of charities like Redthread, who run a Youth Violence Intervention Programme in hospital emergency departments (where youth workers attempt to de-escalate tensions while victims are at their most impressionable). The consequences of this can be seen in our analysis of gang related homicides. In 2018 and 2019, at least a quarter of victims died in acts of retaliation.

An additional factor is that the frequency with which young people associated with gangs are confronted with violent videos on social media shifts their perception of normality, desensitising them and increasing the chance that they will react violently. It also reinforces the perceived need to carry weapons for protection.

Case Study 2: Showcasing Illegal Activity on Instagram



This video found on Instagram displays a range of weapons laid out on a sofa in Manchester (according to the caption). Such displays of force on social media allow gangs to broadcast their strength to a much wider audience. Similarly, other illegal activities, such as the possession of illegal drugs are openly displayed on social media sites. Social media companies have failed to adequately monitor and take responsibility for the content being displayed on their sites, and the effect this has on people exposed to it.

Social media has also created a platform for gang rivalries and disputes to be showcased and promoted in a less conventional way. One of the most alarming trends that we have observed across a range of social media platforms (including YouTube and Instagram) is that of 'scoreboarding'. Scoreboards are being used to track gang supremacy between rival gangs across London, where points are awarded for beatings, stabbings and murders. The most violent gang with the most points wins. The way in which the stabbings and murders are scored with a points system in a game is horrific, yet these posts generate tens of thousands of views and hundreds of comments which glorify and encourage the violence that the videos display. A culture has evolved around these videos that celebrates and grants awards for extreme violence, as well as shame for perceived failure.

Case Study 3: Scoreboards on YouTube



One example of a scoreboard that can be found on YouTube is a montage created out of clips taken from music videos uploaded by different gangs, which tracks the ongoing dispute between four gangs: Edmonton and Wood Green vs. NPK (Northumberland Park Killers) and OFB (Original Farm Boys), who are purportedly just a drill music group. The video has attracted more than 45,000 views and over 500 comments in its first six months of being uploaded. This rivalry resulted in at least 5 gang related homicides in 2018, and this video appears to relate to real life events. The reference to 'Kobi' appears to relate to the 22 year old Kwabena Nelson, who was known as Kobi to his friends, and who was stabbed to death in Tottenham on the 3 February 2018. Neron Quartey, the 21 year old who has been jailed for Nelson's murder, is from Wood Green, which fits with the narrative of the Wood Green Tottenham rivalry and the awarding of 2 points for this act (WG).



The assertion that 'Lampz killed Kobi', but then '(NPK) killed Lampz' suggests Neron Quartey, who has been convicted of Kobi's (Kwabena Nelson's) death and is not dead as the second image asserts, seems to suggest that the real killer was not apprehended. As Neron Quartey was one of four involved in the murder, yet the other three have not been apprehended, this could well be the case. However, fitting with the narrative of the video, a boy who did go by the nickname 'Lampz' was killed on 8 March 2018 in Wood Green, in what was described as a 'revenge killing'⁸⁹ for Kwabena Nelson. This man was 19-year-old Kelvin Odunuyi, and it is unclear whether he was ever investigated about the death of Kwabena Nelson.⁹⁰

This highlights two significant issues. If Odunuyi was involved in Quartey's murder, this video highlights the fact that many perpetrators are not in fact apprehended, increasing a sense of impunity – advertised online – which plays a role in encouraging young people to take their first steps into violent crime. If this is a case of misinformation (it is hotly debated in the comments), it still reinforces the narrative that the police are not effective. If this is a purposeful lie, it points to a worrying trend where more people want to be seen as violent criminals. Either way, this is a damaging narrative, and further evidence of the misuse of social media to perpetuate violence and crime.

Another scoreboard on YouTube describes how Siddique Kamara, a known gang member, 'bussed the case' (was found not guilty in court) for a murder, which the video asserts he committed. Kamara was then himself killed 6 months later. This is another example of one of many 'scoreboards' across a range of social media websites (including Snapchat and Instagram) that normalise and glorify stabbings, murders and tit-for-tat violence, rewarding and encouraging young people to act in a violent way.

Social media is also being used to perpetuate gang activity from within prison, extending gang culture and the influence they hold over local communities beyond the time when their members are arrested and jailed.

89. Dan Warburton, "Thugs rap 'I got you a coffin' in sick Youtube taunt to murdered teen's family" *The Mirror* (November 2019) <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/thugs-rap-i-you-coffin-20945919>

90. John Dunne, "Wood Green shooting: grieving mother pays tribute to victim Kelvin Odunuyi aka Dipdat, who was gunned down in escalating gang 'postcode' war", *Evening Standard* (9 March 2018).

Case Study 4: Social Media in Prison



2,967 likes

This post on Instagram, originally uploaded to Snapchat shows the ease with which gang members congregate in prison and use phones. The fact they are willing to so brazenly broadcast the fact that they have and use phones online, demonstrates the extent to which there is no fear of retribution.

The use of social media from within prison and such bold displays of prison gang activity have serious consequences for society. It perpetuates a culture of intimidation and undermines faith in the entire criminal justice system. If these images from inside prison are being projected over social media, young people affected by gang activity will not feel protected by law enforcement, further increasing the pressure to carry knives for their own protection. It also undermines efforts by the police to solve knife crime incidents, as witnesses do not cooperate for fear of retribution. Such fear is not unfounded, as is evident in the case of Abraham Badru, who it is believed was shot dead in 2018 for testifying in a gang rape case over a decade earlier.⁹¹

Drill Music

Drill music is a subgenre of rap, known for its violent and nihilistic lyrics. It first evolved around 2011 in Chicago, with origins in trap music, an American type of hip-hop.⁹² The term 'drill' first emerged in Chicago as a slang word for shooting. Some rappers in London have since adopted a similar style of music, but using their own slang, from which UK Drill began to emerge from 2012 onwards.

Supporters of drill music argue that it is a way for young people to express what they are going through and communicate the difficulties of their lives. Furthermore, many argue that the popularity of drill provides opportunities for young aspiring rappers, who are traditionally from more deprived areas, that did not exist before. When challenged about the violent nature of many songs, which have frequent references to stabbings (often referred to as "cheffing", "chinging" or "slashing") and shootings, it has been argued that the music merely reflects the reality of life in London and that this could even be beneficial, as it raises attention to the issue.

DJ Bempah argued on BBC Radio 4 that drill artists are "literally just

91. Sam Gelder, "Abraham Badru: Mother says shooting was revenge for testifying in Frampton Park Estate gang rape case" *Hackney Gazette* (April 2018) [link](#)

92. "What is UK drill? A primer on the rising British rap sound" *Red Bull* (March 2019) <https://www.redbull.com/gb-en/uk-drill-FAQ-history-artists-and-future>

telling a story”.⁹³ Although for many drill rappers this is the case, some artists go beyond mere commentary of their lives and use music to make explicit threats to members of other groups and discuss intended future violence. Some songs actively encourage viewers to “check out the scoreboards” that track and tot up violent interactions between gangs, then taunting rival gangs, asking them “How you gonna make it even?”.⁹⁴ The way in which drill is being used highlights its role not just as a form of emotional release, but ‘as a call to violence’.⁹⁵

While some compare the negative attention drill music is receiving to the alarm in the 1990s over gangster rap or in the 2000s over grime, drill distinguishes itself from these genres in two ways. Firstly, the extent to which drill rappers target their taunts and threats at specific individuals or groups is unprecedented. Secondly, the rise of social media and streaming websites means that these videos reach a much wider audience, with a single music video often receiving millions of views, as well as thousands of comments that fuel ongoing feuds.⁹⁶ Shorty Capone, a prominent drill music producer in Chicago has himself admitted that:

“It’s fuelling the violence because if you say something about me, and everyone sees you say something about me, that means you disrespecting me. And if you disrespecting me, I can’t let you get away with disrespecting me. So you have to retaliate.”

These two factors taken together escalate tensions and place pressure on individuals and groups who choose to use drill music in this way, to act violently and retaliate. It also increases the pressure for members of such groups, as well as their affiliates, to carry knives, as they feel constantly under threat.

An up and coming 23-year-old UK drill rapper, Sidique Kamara (known as Incognito or SK), spoke out about the relationship between drill music and violence shortly before he himself was stabbed to death in 2018:

“The crime that’s happening, right, music does influence it. You’ve got to put your hands up and say drill music does influence it.”⁹⁷

Some drill music videos are believed to have played such a significant role in escalating tensions, that they are now being used as evidence in court. In 2015, 18-year-old Marcel Addai from Hoxton in east London was stabbed to death on an estate by the rival Fellows Court gang. Eight drill videos were used as evidence in court due to the direct and targeted threats to members of rival gangs, which escalated tensions, not least due to the large number of people watching and commenting on the series of videos online. This led to a jail time for the four defendants of 97 years between them.⁹⁸ The impact of this music on the chain of events was so severe, that Her Honour Judge Poulet declared:

“Rikell Rogers, you featured in almost all the gang videos, and I have no doubt the ongoing threats between you and the Hoxton boys were at the heart of this attack”⁹⁹

93. Dan Hancox, “The Drill and Knife Crime Story is a Classic Chicken-and-Egg Dilemma” *Vice* (May 2018) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/nek3qm/drill-knife-crime-violence-london-long-read>

94. Ian Cobain, “London drill rapper killed in knife attack admitted music’s effect on crime” *The Guardian* (August 2018) [link](#)

95. Keir Irwin-Rogers and Craig Pinkney “Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence” *Catch 22* (January 2017) [link](#)

96. Dan Hancox, “The Drill and Knife Crime Story is a Classic Chicken-and-Egg Dilemma” *Vice* (May 2018) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/nek3qm/drill-knife-crime-violence-london-long-read>

97. Kevin Rawlinson, “Man charged with murder of drill rapper Sidique Kamara” *The Guardian* (August 2018) [link](#)

98. “Marcel Addai: Four jailed over gang stabbing murder” *BBC News* (May 2016) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-36322629>

99. Emma Bartholomew “Marcel Addai killing: Gangster YouTube rap threats were ‘at the heart’ of attack” *Hackney Gazette* (May 2016) [link](#)

This is not an isolated case. The number of criminal cases involving drill music has been steadily on the rise. Analysis by Policy Exchange found that of the 41 gang related homicides in 2018, at least one third were directly related to drill music (where either the victim or perpetrator was an aspiring drill rapper, or drill music videos were used as evidence in the trial). This figure was 23 per cent in 2019. This is a conservative estimate of the impact of drill, as it does not include cases where drill's influence on perpetrators was not explicitly stated in the case. Despite this, Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, dismisses the impact of drill music on crime, stating in December 2019 in response to a question about the link between drill and crime that "there is no evidence to suggest that certain genres of music are directly responsible for criminal activity".¹⁰⁰

One way to view the impact of drill is through the lens of hate crime, particularly incitement to hatred. In the UK, hate crime is related to hostility on the basis of race, gender identity, religion, or disability. This can include threats and harassment as well as physical harm and damaging property, and can occur online as well as in person.¹⁰¹ We have to ask ourselves why if a far-right activist was jailed for branding immigrants and refugees as rapists at a series of marches that were linked to an attack on two Asian men, drill rappers, whose lyrics are frequently linked to the hundreds of stabbings based on gang identity in London, do not receive similar scrutiny and treatment.¹⁰²

Naturally, not all drill music is bad, and it has provided a route out of poverty for a select few. Nevertheless, it would be foolish and naïve to ignore the link this genre has with violent crime committed on the streets of London.

The Entertainment and Music Industry and Big Brands

Despite the attempts by the police and government to react to these changing trends that are aiding violent criminality, their efforts are being compounded by investment from the private sector into those who are perpetrating or encouraging the violence.

The music industry contributed £5.2 billion to the UK economy in 2018, and the drill music industry is seen as glamorous and lucrative to some. One up and coming drill musician MC Abra Cadabra describes the appeal:

*"When the youth see man at Wireless festival, hear man on the radio, and see man making money out of this, it inspires them."*¹⁰³

Drill rappers have become role models for some young people from particular communities that are prone to gang violence. This is problematic when their music and their lifestyle are associated with violent crime. Apart from the direct killings linked to drill, one of the most damaging effects of the current drill music scene is the perception that crime is not just compatible with, but in terms of creative content, can advance a career in drill music.

To give one example, it was revealed that drill rapper Jayden O'Neill-

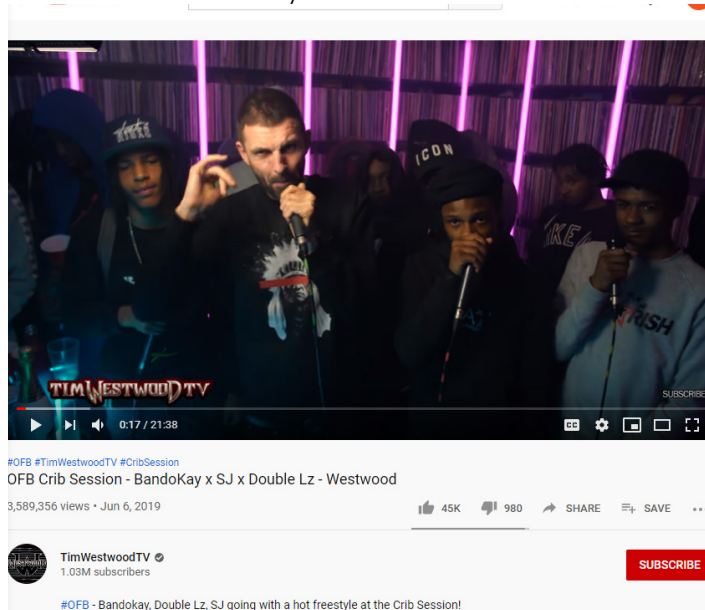
100. "Questions to Mayor: Drill Artists" *Mayor of London, London Assembly* (December 2019), [link](#)

101. "Hate Crime" *CPS* (Accessed September 2021) <https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/hate-crime>

102. Lizzie Dearden, "Brexiters jailed for inciting racial hatred" *The Independent* (September 2019) [link](#)

103. Ben Beaumont-Thomas "Is UK drill music really behind London's wave of violent crime?" *The Guardian* (April 2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/09/uk-drill-music-london-wave-violent-crime>

Crichlow was ‘offered a £150,000 record deal while in prison awaiting trial’¹⁰⁴ for murder, for which he has now been given a life sentence. O’Neill-Crichlow (also known as SJ) is a member of Original Farm Boys, a group which has received millions of views on YouTube and one of the four groups whose violent activities were tracked in the scoreboard above. The scoreboard video appears to suggest O’Neill-Crichlow has been involved in four other attacks, some of which he appears to make direct reference to in his own lyrics.



Despite Capital FM (formerly BBC) DJ Tim Westwood having to remove some YouTube videos with several known gang members from his personal channel in 2018, he has since uploaded videos featuring Original Farm Boys and O’Neill Crichlow (to the left of Westwood in the image above), which are still on his channel and have received more than 6.5 million views.¹⁰⁵

The promotion of O’Neill-Crichlow is problematic as his actions, not just his lyrics, have proven to be violent. In his Tim Westwood appearance, O’Neill-Crichlow raps about knives, stabbing, shooting, taking out opposition gang members, the death of Kelvin Odunuyi (linked to a rival gang) and the stabbing of ‘DV’ (also referenced in the scoreboard video). Another OFB member also rapped about the fact that ‘SJ shanked two yutes’ (stabbed two young people).

Westwood claims that his ‘editorial policy included a ban on threats of violence’¹⁰⁶, but after seeing what he has posted on his channel, it is unclear why he does not believe this content constitutes a ‘threat of violence’. Despite these damaging lyrics, OFB continues to excel, with 19 million streams and over 600,000 listeners on Spotify in 2019 alone. Given the success of OFB despite the violence of some of their members, which is directly referenced in their lyrics and has been proven in court, it is unquestionable that certain young people will be influenced by this and encouraged to follow in their footsteps.

104. John Simpson, “Rapper jailed for murder was offered music deal” *The Times* (January 2020) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rapper-jailed-for-murder-was-offered-music-deal-0zxfr5gfj>

105. “OFB Crib session – BandoKay x SJ x Double Lz – Westwood” *TimWestwoodTV* (Youtube) (June 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbpQpbWl8o>

106. John Simpson, *The Times*, January 2020, *Rapper jailed for murder was offered music deal*

While the members of OFB, DJ's like Westwood, music production companies, streaming services and social media companies benefit and profit from the popularity of the music produced by the gang, the costs of the violence committed by OFB members and those they inspire must be born by society.

In light of the direct taunts to other gang members from drill rappers, reference to specific murders and number of homicides linked to drill music, Ofcom should investigate whether broadcasters such as the BBC and Capital FM are in breach of Section 2 of The Ofcom Broadcasting Code. According to 'Section 2: Harm and Offence' of The Ofcom Broadcasting Code:

"2.4: Programmes must not include material (whether in individual programmes or in programmes taken together) which, taking into account the context, condones or glamorises violent, dangerous or seriously antisocial behaviour and is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour."¹⁰⁷

107. "Section two: Harm and offence" Ofcom (March 2021) <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-two-harm-offence>

Case Study 5: Big Brands Sponsoring Criminals

Another case where the music industry and large brands have turned a blind eye to violence can be seen in the success of the UK rapper, Headie One (Irving Adjei). Adjei is undoubtedly the most successful UK drill rapper, with two top 10 singles, and collaborations with artists like Stormzy and Dave. This success has been despite four convictions. Adjei, who grew up on the same estate as O'Neill-Crichlow, was jailed in 2014 after being caught with over £36,000 worth of heroin and cocaine and a knife in Aberdeen.¹⁰⁸ The details of his other two convictions are not clear, but Adjei himself claims he has been convicted for "Everything, really. Drugs charges, violent charges."¹⁰⁹



His most recent conviction was for possession of a knife, for which he was sentenced to 6 months in jail in January 2020, after being arrested in June 2019 following a stop and search by police.¹¹⁰ It has been reported that while on bail, Adjei completed his own UK tour and performed at Glastonbury and Wireless festivals. Our research also shows that he was hosted on BBC Radio 1 in September 2019, and did a sponsored event with JD Sports in November 2019 as well as featuring in an Adidas campaign in December 2019, less than a month before he was sentenced.

It is remarkable that Adidas chose to launch this campaign while Adjei was on bail, three weeks before he was sentenced, and that they have not retracted it since. They continued to publicly support Adjei and use him as a brand representative while he was serving his sentence for carrying a knife, which arguably sends a signal to followers of Adjei and fans of Adidas, that breaking the law and carrying knives is compatible with their brand and commercial success.

There are thousands of famous musicians, as well as popular role models in other industries, who could be used to promote Adidas. These international brands are highly influential and in light of the rise of 'woke capitalism'

108. Rebecca Buchan, "Man jailed for concern in supply of class A drugs" *The Press and Journal* (October 2014) <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/aberdeen/383622/man-jailed-for-concern-in-supply-of-class-a-drugs/>

109. Jordan Bassett, "Headie One: "If you make a mistake, you've got to move quickly" *NME* (April 2019) <https://www.nme.com/big-reads/big-read-headie-one-make-mistake-youve-got-move-quickly-2478038>

110. "Rapper Headie One jailed for six months" *BBC News* (January 2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-51039235>

and Adidas' own support for the Black Lives Matter movement, this raises serious questions as to the sincerity of their actions and commitment to improving the lives of black people in the UK.

Mars have set a better example, withdrawing all adverts from YouTube after a Starburst advert appeared on a drill music video produced by the infamous group, Moscow17.¹¹¹ Music producers and large brands have the power to promote better role models and make violent crime and success incompatible, changing the incentives that exist for young people to go into a life of crime. It is imperative they start doing so.

The Pushback Against The Criminal Elements of Gang Culture

A Detective Superintendent said that the MPS had been monitoring the increase in the number of videos that incite violence since September 2015 stating:

'The gangs try to out rival each other with the filming and content - what looks like a music video can actually contain explicit language with gangs threatening each other,'

...

'The Met has got a central database of more than 1,400 indexed videos that we assess and use to gather intelligence.'

*He added: 'Closer partnership work with Google has been developed in the past few months, in order to evolve and increase our capacity to remove social media videos that incite violence, as quickly as possible.'*¹¹²

There have been a range of police, government and judicial responses to this phenomenon, with limited success. This was followed by a move from Commander Jim Stokley, the Met Police's gang crime lead, to grant some of the powers used in the fight against terrorism online to be used against gangs, who use social media to encourage and glorify crime. Just as under the Terrorism Act, where the crime of inciting an act of terrorism need not be linked to a specific attack, videos and social media posts that are not linked to a specific act of violence can be used to convict an individual of the crime of incitement to violence.¹¹³ Stokley argues that this approach is "not about policing the internet, it's about working with [social media companies] to reduce violence".¹¹⁴

The Met have also used Criminal Behaviour Orders and gang injunctions against drill artists, to prevent them creating, uploading or performing music that is believed to incite violence. The first instance of this occurred in June 2018, when five members of the west London drill group 1011 were banned from recording or performing music without consent from Scotland Yard, after being found guilty of planning a machete attack on a rival gang.¹¹⁵ Some of the provocative music videos by 1011 had received more than 11 million views on YouTube, prior to being deleted. In the beginning of 2019, the first ever prison sentence for performing a song

111. Shingi Mararika, "Mars drops YouTube ads in drill music row" *The Times* (August 2018) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mars-drops-youtube-ads-in-drill-music-row-lbx-rvwfdt>

112. "Youtube fails to take down violent music videos despite police requests as gang culture on social media is blamed for London's rising murder rate" *The Daily Mail* (May 2018) [link](#)

113. John Simpson, "Police to treat gangs like terror suspects" *The Times* (May 2018) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-to-treat-gangs-like-terror-suspects-7zms8gsmr>

114. John Simpson, "Police to treat gangs like terror suspects" *The Times* (May 2018) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-to-treat-gangs-like-terror-suspects-7zms8gsmr>

115. Chris Baynes, "Drill rap gang banned from making music without police permission in legal first" *The Independent* (June 2018) [link](#)

was handed out to Skengdo and AM, after they breached a gang injunction. The song in question taunts and threatens rival gang members, with whom there is real and violent history, by name.¹¹⁶ Other groups have been served injunctions, banning lyrics concerning specific postcodes, groups and individuals. The backlash from artists and civil liberties campaigners has been severe, but more importantly, this reactionary approach does not appear to be sustainable, in light of the continued growth of the UK drill music industry.

One of the ways in which the government has attempted to minimise the harm caused by content online is through the Home Office social media hub, which began operating in May 2019 with £1.38 million in funding and 17 police staff and officers. The work of this hub has been specifically targeted at ‘disrupting and removing overt and covert gang-related online content’.¹¹⁷ In the first six months since of the Home Office Social Media Hub being fully operational (from May 2019), 673 cases of gang-related content had been identified, with 107 videos referred to YouTube for removal, of which 83 were taken down. Eighteen have been arrested in relation to the evidence found by the Social Media Hub online.¹¹⁸ While these are positives steps towards countering the damage done online, the ease with which we have been able to find a range of violent material online (in the form of music videos, gang scoreboards, illegal weapons and beating on the street) across a range of social media websites suggests that the current strategy is inadequate for tackling the problem.

There are a range of issues that further complicate the work of the Social Media Hub. Firstly, an approach based on the human monitoring of content will never be sufficient to stay on top of the sheer quantity of inappropriate material posted online. This is further hampered by the fact that many of the pages that display illegal and harmful activities online are private. This means that the content can only be viewed by those the creator of the page approves, and not by law enforcement (unless they infiltrate such groups, which is timely and costly). This seriously impacts the ability of third parties to flag dangerous material. Furthermore, even when inappropriate material is identified, social media sites often fail to respond. Although the number of videos removed by YouTube is a significant improvement on their previous record of failing to remove around half of those requested by the police,¹¹⁹ the fact that 24 videos flagged by the social media hub have as yet not been removed raises questions about the compliance of social media companies and the need to introduce primary legislation to regulate their platforms.

The response by social media companies so far has been inadequate. YouTube’s response to the ongoing debate about the link between the content that they host on their platform online has failed to shed light on any ongoing strategy, or why some harmful videos, flagged by the police, are still on their website:

116. Dan Hancox, “Skengdo and AM: the drill rappers sentenced for playing their song” *The Guardian* (January 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/31/skengdo-and-am-the-drill-rappers-sentenced-for-playing-their-song>

117. Sajid Javid MP, “Home Secretary to take action against violent content online” *Gov.uk* (April 2019) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-to-take-action-against-violent-content-online>

118. “Drill music: YouTube remove more than 80 videos for inciting gang violence” *LBC* (November 2019) <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/drill-music-youtube-remove-more-than-80-videos/>

119. John Simpson, “Police to treat gangs like terror suspects” *The Times* (May 2018) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-to-treat-gangs-like-terror-suspects-7zms8gsmr>

“We have developed policies specifically to help tackle videos related to knife crime in the UK and are continuing to work constructively with experts on this issue.

We work with the Metropolitan Police, the mayor’s office for policing and crime, the Home Office and community groups to understand this issue and ensure we are able to take action on gang-related content that infringes our community guidelines or breaks the law.

We have a dedicated process for the police to flag videos directly to our teams because we often need specialist context from law enforcement to identify real-life threats.

Along with others in the UK, we share the deep concern about this issue and do not want our platform used to incite violence.”¹²⁰

In May 2019, following the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand, a pledge was signed by the G7, European commission, Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, YouTube, Daily Motion and Quant, agreeing to introduce legislation and measures to tackle terrorist and extremist violence online.¹²¹ The commitment has failed to counter violence online, and there appears to be no solution to tackle this phenomenon.

It is clear that we as society need to play a greater role in calling out the harmful legitimisation of gang culture and the violence that accompanies it.

120. “Drill video naming murder victims banned by YouTube”, *BBC News* (9 December 2019), [link](#)

121. Kim Willsher, “Leaders and tech firms pledge to tackle extremist violence online” *The Guardian* (May 2019) [link](#)



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