

## Blunt Reality

**Knife crime, you can't get away from it. It has been around for decades, from the mods and the rockers in the 1960's to the streets of London today. If you are a young person in the capital the likelihood is that you'll know someone who is carrying a knife. Headliners reporters ask why so many are rolling with a shank?**



"If we can make young people feel safer when they are walking around the streets then they won't be carrying knives." (anonymous)

Opinion is divided. China, 14, said "Young people are carrying knives for protection, or to start fights."

However Johnny, 19, believes the claim that it is for protection is false. "I do believe they do it to show off and look bad. Try and be the big man in front of their friends... I don't think there is any way that we can stop them from carrying knives, but we can stop them carrying them into schools and colleges by investing in metal detectors."

Detective Chief Inspector Simon Lawrence, from Islington Police believes status and protection play a part. He said it might be around initiations into gangs. "Gangs are on the rise in London and people are affiliated with them. We have seen it in the media with different post code gangs etc, and I think to be accepted into a gang, carrying a knife or to use one, is part of that initiation and I think that is very sad.

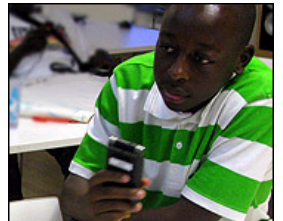
I can never see the point of carrying a knife for protection. I know the police have CS spray or a stick for their own protection, but they are not going to kill someone. With a knife, do you use it to threaten someone off? Do you actually use the knife? Do you get it taken off of you and used on you? I don't see anyone being innocent when carrying a knife. Every murder I've investigated, the knife has been a kitchen knife. It's the easiest to get your hands on.

"We're not doctors we're not biologists, we don't know how the human body works. I have seen a knife go in 3 cm and kill and one that went in 28 cm and the person survived. I've seen people stabbed to the hilt with a knife and come out of hospital the next day and then again people that have been killed. If someone is stabbed in the leg, will it kill them? Damilola Taylor was stabbed in the leg and that killed him."

Knife attacks were splashed all over the media in 2008 including some high profile ones such as Ben Kinsella and Robert Knox. The media plays a big part in informing us of what is going on around us, but does it create a climate of fear? Do they make us suspicious of every young person walking down the street? We put these questions to Alex Chandler, the Programme Editor for ITV News who said. "The media has a role in representing the truth about the world around us and communicating it to others. Personal stories of loss and injury help to inform and reveal experiences which can improve people's lives and life chances. Moralising is not the role of the media, although many newspapers chose to ignore that. Letting people make decisions based on relevant information is our aim."

But things on the street are changing. Detective Chief Inspector Lawrence is positive the streets are getting safer. He said. "Last year (2008) it was spiralling out of control, but now we have got back in control and we are making more inroads into tackling knife crime and that's through operation Blunt 2. This year we have had around a 20 percent reduction in knife crime and that's down to police tactics and enforcement and engagement."

He added. "Our Youth Engagement Team's role is to get on with youths and divert them away from bad activities before it gets to the stage where we have to use enforcement tactics. It is about engagement and finding out what their fears are, what they want to get into and how we can help them get into youth projects that interest them. It's about giving them something meaningful to do rather than nothing and then temptation to drift towards gangs."



And if engagement doesn't work what is plan B? Detective Chief Inspector Lawrence added. "Some people do not want to be helped, and enforcement will be the next move. What point can you not help somebody? They've got to want to engage, it's a two-way process. But sometimes enforcement works. They are alone in a police cell, they are being interviewed, they get charged, they go to court, they go into custody. You'd hope that would be the next deterrent."

The police seem to be getting to grips with the problem but can the media play a part in getting knives off the streets? ITV's Alex Chandler said. "As for taking a campaigning stance - newspapers have more freedom to do this than broadcasters due to regulatory issues."

Ultimately this problem lies with the young people. Can they ever see an end to young person on young person knife crime? Johnny said "I hope it does but I don't know." China said "No, not until young people feel like there isn't a reason to carry them."

**This story was produced by Akram Bwanika, 15, David Omara, 15, Habben Michael, 16, Dexter Kunaka, 18 and Zena Belo-Osagie, 19.**

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