

Defining knife crime

What is knife crime?

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Knife crime refers to a broad collection of behaviours that mean different things to different people.

For some, knife crime is exclusively a 'youth crime' issue, despite the fact that many older people use, and are injured with, knives. For others, knife crime is taken to mean 'serious violence', even though most knife carrying does not result in violence. For many, knife crime denotes a series of crimes that typically take place in public between strangers, despite a great deal of knife-enabled violence occurring indoors and between acquaintances.

In light of these differences, it is important to make clear what we mean by the term 'knife crime', and to clarify what we do and do not cover in this guide.

Knife crime relates to crimes involving knives or other bladed or pointed articles. This definition reflects how the relevant laws in England and Wales are worded. (The carrying and use of a bladed weapon is prohibited in a variety of contexts and there are specific knives that are proscribed for ownership, sale and/or carrying in public. In addition, the use of a weapon in a violent incident may be an aggravating factor in sentencing. The Crown Prosecution Service has a detailed description of legislation relating to knife crime: [Offensive weapons, knife crime practical guidance](#).)

Hence, knife crime incorporates crimes involving articles other than knives. The definition of bladed or pointed articles includes, for example, razors, swords, axes, bayonets, forks, needles, arrows and broken glass bottles. Some bladed or pointed articles will be in their original manufactured form, while others may be modified (for example, a screwdriver with a sharpened tip) or improvised (such as a piece of wood with a nail driven through it).

Knife crime, as defined here, broadly relates to two kinds of behaviour. The first relates to people owning or possessing knives when doing so is illegal. This may be because their ownership is specifically banned, such as certain (de facto or 'made') offensive weapons, or because they are illegal in certain contexts, mainly being possessed in public without good reason. These are so-called State or Regina crimes and do not involve a victim. The second behaviour relates to the use of a knife in the commission of another offence, so-called 'knife-involved offences'. Typically, this

relates to violence or threats against the person, theft, burglary or criminal damage.

The scope of this guide

The possession and use of knives to threaten or harm someone covers a wide range of offences, from robbery to serious sexual offences and murder. Producing a guide that covers the huge range of contexts within which knives are used illegally would be unwieldy. We do not attempt that here. Nor do we focus on offences that involve the illegal sale or importation of knives.

Instead, this guide describes a process through which the broad category of knife crime can be broken down into smaller categories of specific knife-involved offences, and demonstrates how doing so can support efforts to develop appropriate, tailored and effective responses to local knife crime problems.

Tags

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