



A youth research project looking at

Unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth

Much research has been carried out around the topic of unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth. We wanted to find out: does it actually exist? And if so, how does it affect youth and the communities they live in? And what can we do to address damaging consequences and counter these effects?

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With support from: Corina Best, Kali Birchley, Cheryl Chapman and FLIP Theatre



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1.0 Introduction

The Hertsmere Young Researchers team is a group of seven young people ranging from 14-19 years old. The topic we chose to research was the unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth. This was our view:

“The media portrays young people more negatively than positively, which leads to the public forming an unbalanced perception of the behaviour and attitudes of young people.

Negative reporting causes a greater fear of the issue than the actual reality of the reported problem and enhances stereotyping.

Imbalanced negative portrayal of young people in the media has a damaging effect on young people and the community in which they live.”

In the previous months, we have been working hard to further understand the concept of the negative stereotype that faces our youth today.

- Why does it exist?
- Does it affect the youth and the communities that they live in?
- If so, to what extent?
- How can we change the way we are portrayed, and the consequences it brings?

1.1 Our Aims

- 1) Explore how youth behaviour is perceived publicly and how public perception is affected by the media.
- 2) Use this research as a means to raise awareness of how negative reporting and perceptions can be damaging in our communities.
- 3) Help to reduce irrational fear of problems.
- 4) Influence media and other key opinion-leaders to support some of our subsequent recommendations.

After many hours of research, the group’s aim was to draw together a range of evidence which explains our view on how the media affects public perceptions of the youth today.

Through doing this research we would like to make people think, rather than accept, what is put in front of them as ‘fact.’

We aim to raise people’s awareness of the magnitude of the influence the media has over our every day lives, and show people that they have the **choice** of what they think of youth people, and that they don’t have to think something just because of what they see in the media.

We aim to change perceptions of the stereotypical views that the public have of us. Our prime target audience for this piece of research is the local community.

Ultimately we want to influence the way that the community views young people and raise their awareness of the impact that the media has on encouraging stereotypical views.

Other target audiences for this research are; other young people, Hertsmere Borough Council, the police force, youth organisations, town/parish council, adult community groups, Community Safety Partnership, local councillors, local and national journalists, local and national media.

With the help of these groups we would like to encourage the reporting on the youth to be more balanced. We would also like them to help us as much as possible with promoting the findings from our current project.

A campaign

We hope to develop this research project into a campaign which will raise public awareness around negative media stereotyping of youth and encourage people to ... **LOOK BEYOND THE HEADLINES**

1.2 What have we researched?

We did a number of things to gather evidence, including research around the following topics:

- Media representation of youth trends over the past 150 years
- Knife crime statistics
- How the media reports on knife crime
- Student fees protests – what happened and how was it reported?

We carried out an online survey, and vox-pop interviews around Borehamwood on the topic of perceptions of youth-related issues covered in the media.

We carried out invisible theatre in the local high street where we staged scenarios involving young people and adults to see how passers-by would respond.

At the Hertsmere Annual Youth Conference we presented some of our findings and then had discussions and a question and answer session between local young people and a panel of representatives including: *a local journalist, a local councillor, a local police officer, two of our young researchers, the President of the University of Hertfordshire students union, FLIP theatre and Hertsmere Youth Projects Officer.*

1.3 How did we go about researching these things?

There is already a substantial amount of research around our chosen topic area so we wanted to make sure we didn't just repeat what had already been done. We reviewed other research and looked at what they found. Most reports we saw focused on the question 'how are young people reported in the media?' or 'Does negative media stereotyping exist?' The reports that we reviewed tended to agree that young people are reported mainly in a negative-bias and also concluded that negative media stereotyping exists.

We decided that we would explore this concept and review some specific cases to draw up clear evidence of this view. In addition we decided to take the step beyond and look at how this affects communities and also what can we do about it?

We worked with our mentors to focus our research project and make sure that we carried out the right kinds of research activities that would help us to explore the chosen topic in relation to the specific questions we wanted to answer.

We broke down the research in to tasks and each chose a part of the research to do. The research tasks were:

Research Task 1 – Comparison of HOW knife crime stories are reported.

We chose five stories from internet archives and looked at how each was reported by The Sun, The Daily Mail and The Guardian. We made a list of criteria to mark against for comparison.

Research Task 2 – Compare and review recent knife crime statistics.

We attempted to analyse recent statistics relating to knife crime amongst young people. We looked at the statistics in comparison between young people and adults.

Research Task 3 - Study of concept of youth over time.

We chose some of the well-known youth subcultures from the last 150 years and looked at them against a list of criteria to identify similarities in trends and media portrayal of these trends.

Research Task 4 – Perceptions Survey.

We got permission to use the vsurvey about ‘Stereotypes and Labels’ to survey people locally. This survey looked at actual behaviour and perceptions of behaviour. We surveyed adults and young people. *Please see appendix 7.0 to view the survey questions.*

Interviews, Question & Answer sessions

As the project went on we decided to incorporate vox pop interviews with young people and adults in the local area. We also had the opportunity to undertake a question and answer panel with discussion amongst adults and young people at the Hertsmere Annual Youth Conference.

We used the research findings from research tasks 1-4 as a basis for the discussions and interviews and this helped us to get further insight for our project.

Findings and Analysis

2.0 Stereotyping

We looked up some definitions of 'stereotype' and this is what we found:

The Wikipedia definition states:

'A stereotype is a popular belief about specific social groups or types of individuals. Stereotypes are standardised and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior assumptions.'

www.changingminds.org said:

'Stereotypes are generalisations about a group of people whereby we attribute a defined set of characteristics to this group.'

www.media-awareness.ca said:

'Stereotype: A fixed, commonly-held notion or image of a person or group, based on an oversimplification of some observed or imagined trait of behaviour or appearance.'

Stereotypes are as old as human culture itself. They reflect ideas that groups of people hold about others who are different from them.'

www.dictionary.com said:

'A set of inaccurate, simplistic generalisations about a group that allows others to categorise them and treat them accordingly'

And:

'A generalisation usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group.'

Online Etymology Dictionary said:

'Preconceived and oversimplified notion of characteristics, typical of a person or group.'

'Image perpetuated without change.'

2.1 Our research in to stereotyping of young people.

Perceptions Survey

We did a few things to look at the stereotypes currently attached to young people. This included interviewing adults and young people and we also set up an online survey on the website 'survey monkey.'

This was a perceptions survey which looks at personal behaviour (adults and young people) versus perceptions of youth behaviour. The survey was linked to the winspired Voicebox survey 'Labels and Stereotypes' which aims to find out the truth behind the labels and stereotypes attached to young people. It asked several questions involving knife crime, alcohol, under-age sex, politics, eating disorders, respecting your elders and more. We got 235 people who answered.

In our online survey we asked young people (9-21) and adults (22-65+) to list:

- 1) Three things they would associate with a positive image of youth.
- 2) Three things they would associate with a negative image of youth.

This was an open question so people were free to put anything that came to mind.

Please see appendix 7.1 for the extract of this part of the survey

The display below gives a snap-shot view of the responses we received. It shows the initial thoughts and feelings that spring to mind. It helps to give a sense of the types of attributes and behaviour attached to young people that are viewed as positive and negative.

We asked all ages 'what would you associate with a positive youth image? They said:

A Smile. Ambition. Active. Cadets. Caring About Your Family And Others. Community Work. Volunteering. Confident. Conscientious in School or Work. Creative. Curious. Awareness of Current Affairs. Not Carrying Harmful Weapons. Enjoying Life. Enthusiasm. Fashion. Friendly. Fun. Good Manners. Good Social Life. Good Exam Results. Happy. Helpful. Healthy. Helping Others. Honest. Independent. Law Abiding. Learning Quickly. Less Secretive. Lively. Want To Learn. Money. Motivated. Music. Naivety. Never Intimidates Others. Not Drinking. Not Taking Drugs. Not Smoking. Not Shoplifting. Don't Know. Polite. Positive Engagement Outside School. Positive Outlook. Positive Family Relationships. Respectful. Responsible. Sensible. Self Righteous. Smart. Clever. Intelligent. Sociable. Sporting Achievements. Tidy Appearance. Playing Sports. Staying Out Of Trouble. Street Wise. Talented. Thoughtful. Considerate. Kind. Well Behaved At School. Well Presented. Work Part Time Job. Young Carers. Youth Clubs.

#

We asked all ages 'what would you associate with a negative youth image? They said:

Angry. Antisocial Behaviour. Baggy Clothing. Grungy Clothing. Bad Fake Tan. Dressed Scruffy. Arrogance. Drink Related Noise. ASBO's. Being Loud. Bad Manners. Rude. Aggressive. Negativity. Bad Attitude. Abusive. Bad Relationships With Family. Big Groups Hanging Around. Binge Drinking. Broken Homes. Crime. Shop Lifting. Stealing. Theft. Robbery. Disrespectful To Others. Misbehaving. Impolite. Ignoring Adults or Authority Figures. Offensive Behaviour. Drinking In The Street. Taking Drugs. Smoking. Early Sexualisation. Failing In School. Poor Education. Gangs. Getting In Trouble With Police. Disinterest in School. Getting Expelled. Guns. Headphones. Hoodies. Don't Know. Intimidating Behaviour. Looking For Trouble. Aggression. Volatile. Provocative Looks. Bullying. Irresponsible. Crossing The Road With No Thought For Other Road Users. Knife Crime. Lazy. Media. Moody. Not Helping Others. Pessimistic. Racism. Secretive. Selfishness. Self Centred. Self Destructive. Swearing. Teenage Parenthood. Uncompassionate. Underage Pregnancy. Underage Sex. Unhealthy. Unhelpful. Vandalism. Violence. Lack of Ambition. Lack of Drive. Lack of Motivation. Lack Of Achievements. How You Speak. Celebrity Culture. Not Working. Fighting. Girls Trying To Look Older Than Their Age.

Positive Image - Most Common Responses

Age 9-21
257 Responses in total

- 1) Polite (21)
- 2) Respectful (17)
- 3) Community Work/Volunteering Helping Others (14)
- 4) Conscientious in School (14)
- 5) Good Manners (13)
- 6) Well Presented Appearance (13)
- 7) Thoughtful/Considerate/Kind (13)

Age 22-65+
111 Responses in total

- 1) Conscientious in School (12)
- 2) Positive Engagement Outside of School (9)
- 3) Sporting Achievements/Taking Part in Sports (8)
- 4) Community Work/Volunteering/ Helping Others (6)
- 5) Polite (6)
- 6) Well Presented Appearance (6)

Negative Image - Most Common Responses

Age 9-21
279 Responses in total

- 1) Drinking/Drugs/Smoking (68)
- 2) Knife Crime (24)
- 3) Intimidating Behaviour (21)
- 4) Bad Manners (20)
- 5) Disrespectful to Others (18)

Age 22-65+
135 Responses in total

- 1) Bad Manners (19)
- 2) Drinking/Drugs/Smoking (14)
- 3) Hanging Around in Big Groups (12)
- 4) Anti-Social Behaviour (11)
- 5) Intimidating Behaviour (10)

2.2 What do these responses tell us?

In some ways these results help us to see how stereotypes are formed through behaviour (e.g. hanging around in large groups) identifiable characteristics (e.g. fashion trends such as baggy clothing) and individual perceptions of these things.

Interestingly, it seems that the most mentioned characteristics are not exclusive traits of young people. They could all be related to a person of any age as positive and negative images.

3.0 Youth Trends

Our team of Youth Researchers decided to look into the stereotypes of young people throughout the years. This research will help us to explain that we aren't the only youth period who had some members that gave them an overall bad name. We looked at:

The Hooligans ~ 1870s

The Razor Gangs ~ 1920s

Teddy Boys ~ 1950s

Mods and Rockers ~ emerged in the late 50s and early 60s

Hippies ~ emerged in the middle of the 1960s

Skinheads ~ first wave emerged mid to late 1960s

Punks ~ emerged in the mid 1970s

Football Hooligans ~ dates back to 1880s but recently emerged in the 1980s

Chavs ~ 1990s - 2000s

Hoodie ~ 2000s

Postcode Gangs ~ 2000s

For each of the different trends, the kinds of things we looked at were:

- The identifying characteristics and traits
- The age range associated with it
- How it was stereotyped
- What (if any) elements of the trend were taken by the media and sensationalised
- How did the press portray what was happening
- What sort of things were cited by the press as the **cause** of the phenomenon
- When comparing the different trends what are the **similarities** (reoccurring themes) that relate to each of them?

The Hooligans

The Hooligans consisted of thieves, muggers, murderers and pickpockets and came about in the Victorian Times. These groups of young men would roam around the streets, often looking to cause trouble. They would all dress similarly – in a type of 'uniform dress code'. The Hooligans were one of the first groups of young people that came together as a union and were the very first Hooligans to be recorded in time and stereotyped as a whole. There is proof that the way that news has been recorded has changed with time. As we researched the newspapers that were reported in the Victorian Times, even though the news was not pleasant about these Hooligans, the reporter didn't add any exaggeration into the text and just stuck to the facts and to the reality of the situation.

The Razor Gangs

Razor gangs were criminal gangs that dominated the crime scene in the 1920s. The choice of razors, as preferred weapons, were because of the capacity of razors to inflict disfiguring scars. The Glasgow razor gangs were violent gangs which existed in the south side of Glasgow in the late 1920s and 1930s, named for their weapon of choice, which they used to slash their victims. The book *No Mean City* contains a fictionalised account of these gangs and an understanding of why these gangs of young people chose to do what they did. The main age group associated with Razor Gangs were men between the ages of 25-40. In the early 1930s Brighton saw gangs of razor-wielding youths. They formed the background for Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock*, recently made into a film.

The Teddy Boys

The Teddy Boys were a subculture of British teens that emerged in the 1950s. The clothing that the boys would wear was considered to be inspired by dandies and new designers that wanted to push the fashion after the war. The Teddy Boy fashion usually consisted of tapered trousers, long jackets, slim ties and fancy waistcoats – teenagers being the vast majority of the Teddy Boys. Due to some teddies that fought with rival gangs, the boys in general were stereotyped to be violent young people. These assumptions were made by the press, over-exaggerating stories of clashes and fights between the Teddy Boys and other gangs of that time. This was taken up negatively by the media and the community knew the Teddy Boys as a violent culture. With this thought in mind, some of the public started to attack the Teddy Boys themselves before anything happened to them.

Mods and Rockers

Mods (short for modernists) were often characterised by appearance, which was often as clean and fashionable as could be at the time they existed (1950s to 60s), wearing suits (often tailor-made), listening to popular music such as African American soul music, British beat music and R'n'B, along with other types. They also were known to ride on Italian scooters, which were often customised to the owner's tastes. Such an appearance led to media referring to anything fashionable and popular as mod. A well-known rivalry was one between mods and rockers. It isn't hard to see why the rivalry began - the two subcultures were as close to opposites as possible, with the Mods being immaculate in appearance and reputation, and the rockers being scruffy, untidy and loutish. Most physical conflict happened at either football matches, or at seaside resorts, nearer to Rocker territory, and both subcultures were situated in very different areas: Mods in London, Rockers in more rural areas.

The Skinheads

The origins of skinheads began amongst working class youths in Britain in the 1960s and then spread to other parts of the world. It emerged from the mod culture that was popular at the time, and would be compared to modern-day punk styles. Named for their close-cropped or shaven heads, the first skinheads were greatly influenced by West Indian (specifically Jamaican) rude boys and British mods, in terms of fashion, music and lifestyle. Skinheads were part of a subculture that were often represented as angry, threatening and aggressive, and their representation creates negative stereotypes as you often think of Neo Nazis and racism. Originally the skinhead subculture was primarily based on music fashion and lifestyle elements, not politics or race.

The Hippies

The Hippies were not only a widely-known culture but they were a revolution as they wanted to change the way we thought, bring love to the world, stop all war and help the environment. Their colourfully-dressed clothes and symbols came around in the middle of the 1960s and originated from the states. The Hippies brought people together with psychedelic rock and the use of drugs to explore new states of consciousness. During the Hippy times long hair and facial hair, such as moustaches and beards, became extremely common and personal fashions, including nudity, began to be accepted around the world. The Hippies despised the formal or necktie style and society started to see less and less of these appearances. As good as the Hippies seemed to be with spreading love there was always a bad side that was portrayed negatively by the media. These creative groups of young people began to be known as people who just used the excuse of being a free individual as to why they didn't work or contribute to the community. The public thought they were lazy, drug users and they found that they isolated themselves from mainstream society.

The Punks

Punk was ultimately about a mindset that you didn't have to dress or look like anything or conform to a name. The Punk subculture emerged in the mid 1970s and punks came from all walks of life and economic classes. They were mainly concerned with individual freedom and anti-establishment views. Punk is influenced by all sorts of beliefs and forms of expression including fashion, visual art, dance, literature, and film. Media stereotyping suggests that Punks seek to outrage others with the highly-theatrical use of clothing, hairstyles, cosmetics, tattoos, jewellery and body modification and they were known for listening to a loud aggressive version of rock music called punk rock. The Bill Grundy interview with the Sex Pistols, which was broadcast in the early evening of 1 December 1976, is an infamous moment through which the tabloid press coverage brought national notoriety to the group specifically and provided the catalyst for a fully-fledged moral panic about punk rock in general.

Football Hooligans

Football Hooliganism is unruly and destructive – such as brawls, vandalism and intimidation. Fights often broke out between supporters of rival teams, whether they were in their home country or others around the world. The supporters who caused the trouble were normally aged between the years of 19-25. As a result of their trouble causing, English football supporters were banned from many European countries. Deadly weapons such as sports bats, bottles, rocks, and knives were often seen at some matches. The media was very biased and targeted hooliganism for the kind of sensationalist reporting that boosts their circulation using powerful headlines and violent imagery for the reader.

Chavs

Chav is a slang term which appeared in mainstream dictionaries in 2005. There are many regional variations of chav, including scally, townie, Kev, Ned, Mallie, pikey, and charva. The term chav refers to a sub-cultural stereotype of people fixated on fashions such as flashy 'bling' jewellery (generally gold), and designer clothing brands such as Berghaus, Burberry, Von Dutch, Louis Vuitton, Fred Perry, Stone Island, Kappa, Lonsdale and Ben Sherman. Musically, chavs tend to have taste mainly involving rap, dance music and RnB. Response to the term has ranged from amusement, to criticism that it is a new manifestation of classism. A BBC documentary suggested that chav culture is an evolution of previous working-class youth subcultures associated with particular commercial clothing styles, such as mods and skinheads. The stereotype has been linked widely throughout the media to a number of social problems such as antisocial behaviour, teenage pregnancy, delinquency and binge drinking. By 2004 the word was being used regularly in national newspapers. A survey in 2005 found that the word was used in 114 British newspaper articles in December 2004 alone.

Hoodies

A Hoodie is a sweatshirt with a hood. The characteristic design includes large frontal pockets, a hood, and (usually) a drawstring to adjust the hood opening. If they have a zipper they are sometimes called zip-up Hoodies. Hoodies are chosen by many people in casual settings for warmth and protection against wind. In the UK, Hoodies have been the subject of much criticism; some shoplifters have used the hood to conceal their identities from CCTV cameras in shopping centres. Particularly when worn with a baseball cap, the Hoodie has become a trademark of chavs, or Neds. In May 2005 Bluewater shopping centre in Kent banned shoppers from sporting Hoodies or baseball caps. The then PM –Tony Blair, supported the stance and vowed to clamp down on the anti-social behaviour with which Hoodie-wearers are sometimes associated. 'National Hoodie day' a pro-youth initiative to challenge youth stereotypes, was launched in May 2008 in New Zealand.

Postcode Gangs

Postcode gangs have become the most recent threat to the community in London. They are essentially what the title implies, people associating themselves by the postcode that they live in. For example, boys living in Highbury that have a postcode starting with N5 may be in a gang that simply refer to themselves as N5.

Postcode gangs began to emerge in the early 21st Century. In the media they are portrayed extremely negatively, and, as per usual with most media stories, portrayed as far worse than the facts actually suggest. The media portrays postcode gangs as hungry for violence, and having a need for gang warfare, when in actual fact this is not the case. There tends to be few individuals who actually cause violence, the others simply group together in large numbers, providing an intimidating image but not necessarily a threat. Postcode gangs tend to have one significant member, possibly a leader, which has the biggest influence the gang itself and has the responsibility of making a name for the gang and making it well known.

3.1 Youth Trends Conclusion

We have concluded that the past stereotypes of young people from many eras have many similarities when compared to modern day stereotypes. Most of these youth subcultures (or 'gangs') have been negatively portrayed by the press, journalists and media in general. Like our own time gangs, there have always been a few violent or aggressive members who have generated an overall negative name for the entire group of young people.

As our research shows, the younger generation have been ignored when they have tried to make a stand and instead are being put down by the media. A current example of this is how the recent student fees protests were sensationalised by the media as 'riots' - which deflected away from the real issue and made them look irresponsible.

This method of reporting news by focusing on the negatives has been going on for too many years to change with a click on the finger but we hope that we've helped with the process.

The Teddy Boys aimed to start a youth-based trend that showed teenagers not just as children, but as young adults while the Hippies tried to eliminate war and spread love, but the media has tended to forget the positives of these subcultures and exaggerate the negatives.

We believe that stereotyped young people of all eras have just been misunderstood by society. You can only discover the true meaning of what a group of young people stand for by being a part of that group or trying to understand them.

If society looked deeper into these groups, instead of assuming what they're like by reading the front page headline or making a judgement based on clothing, then maybe these past subcultures could have then become widespread movements.

"If consumers decided that they were going to look deeper than what was written on the front page of the newspaper, younger generations could have been accepted as the ambitious people that they are and have always been. We may not be able to change how the media works, but what we can do is change our mindsets and how we process information that is put in front of us."

This quote sums up how we believe society should change the way that they process information in the news by not just accepting everything they read/see, but taking responsibility to find out some facts before making an overall judgement.

4.0 Knife Crime

Knife crime among young people is commonly presented in the media as a major social issue in England. In this section of the research we attempt to compare and review recent knife crime statistics.

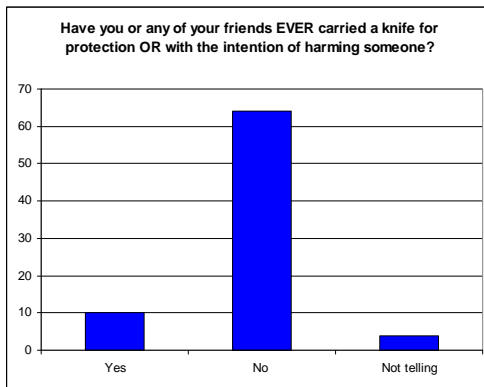
The intention of this review is not to trivialise such offences and tragedies, but to put the issue in to some perspective. By looking at the published statistics in relation to the portrayal of these crimes by the media we can gain an insight to the level of what is happening, and whether or not it can honestly be classed as a social epidemic or if the media and official responses to such incidents create an irrational panic amongst the public.

4.1 Perceptions

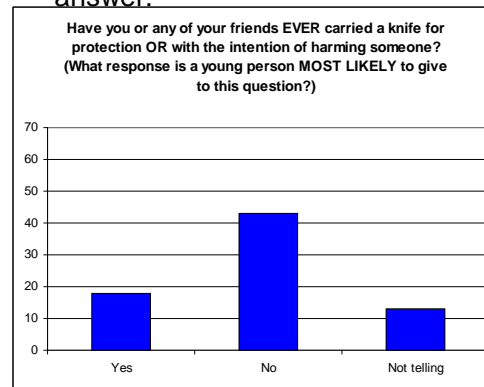
From our online perceptions survey we made charts to analyse the responses relating to knife crime.

Have you or any of your friends EVER carried a knife for protection OR with the intention of harming someone?

Young people aged 9-21 answers:



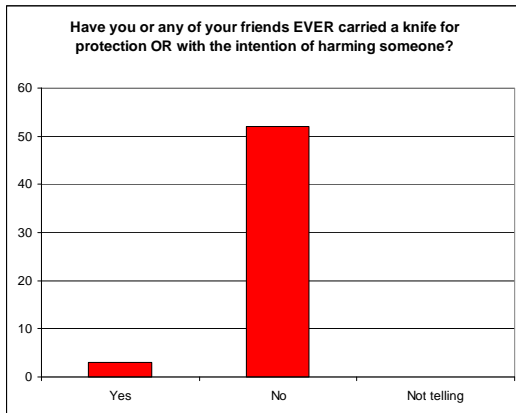
What young people thought another young person would answer:



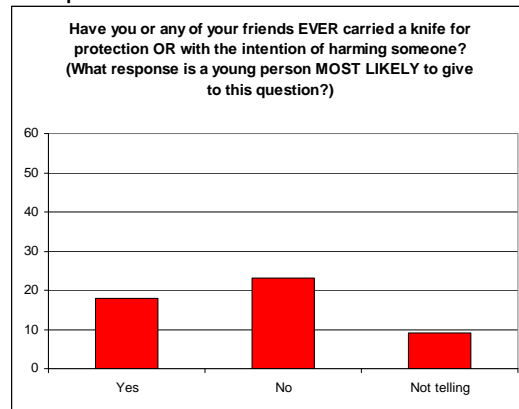
This is very interesting because the young people answers clearly show that the very much majority of them have never carried a knife, but when they had to answer what other young people would say as you can see they thought a lot more people would say 'yes' and 'not telling'.

Have you or any of your friends EVER carried a knife for protection OR with the intention of harming someone?

Adults aged 22+:

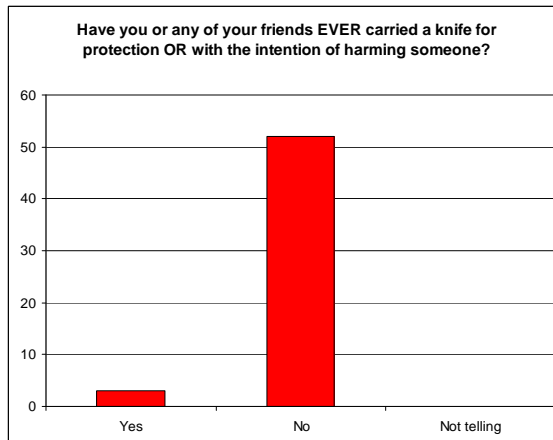
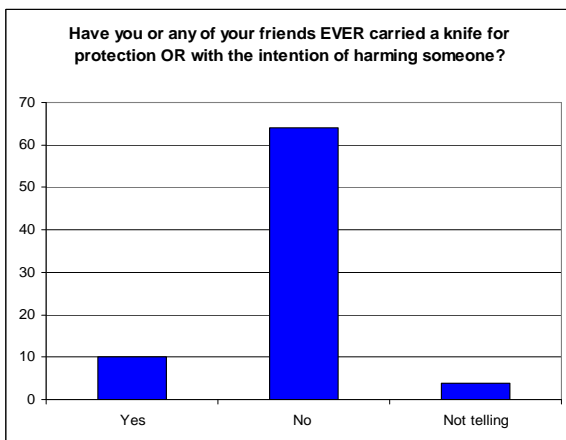


What adults thought a young person would answer:

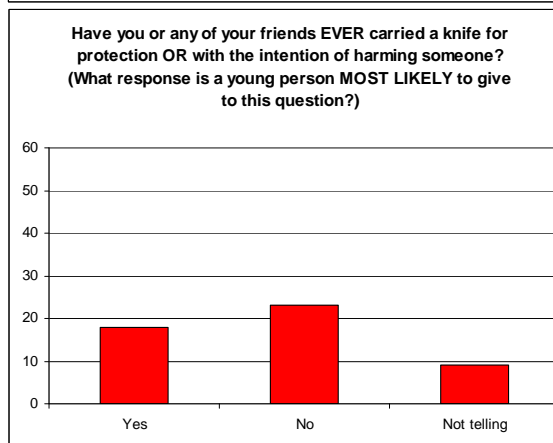
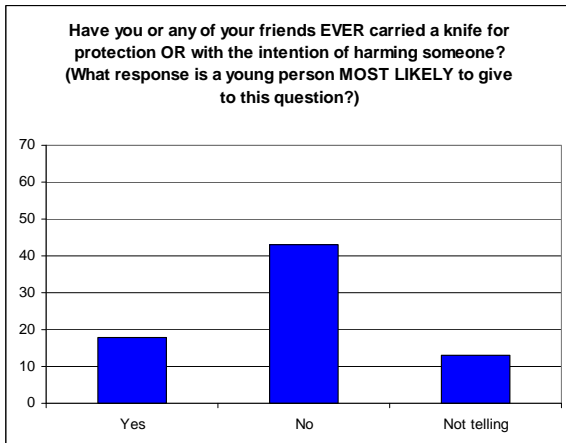


Adults have answered that on average they haven't carried knives either. But looking at what they thought a young person would answer, they definitely made it clear that they think a bigger percentage of young people would have carried a knife.

All four charts together



As we can see from the graphs the amount of young people and adults who have carried a knife are both very low.



However young people and adults both think that there is a big percentage of young people who do carry knives.

Where do these perceptions come from?

4.2 Statistics

We reviewed knife crime statistics from the time period 2008 and 2009.

What we found

From April 2008-March 2009 the *Homicide Register* recorded a total of :

255 murders caused by sharp instrument

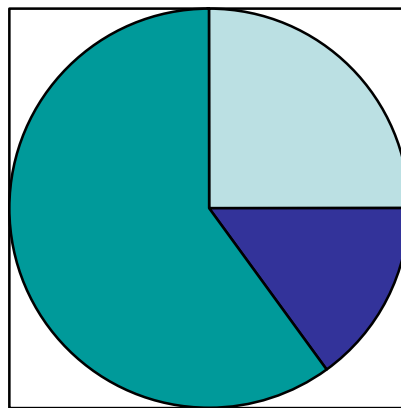
NOTE: Bear in mind that this figure covers not only knife-related incidents, but ALL incidents involving sharp instruments e.g. domestic incidents.

According to the report 'Youth Deaths: The reality behind the Knife Crime debate' by Rebecca Wood, there were **73 teenage violent deaths which took place in Britain in 2008**. Of these:

- 43 were outside Greater London
- 14 of these killed by other teenagers, of which;
- 7 were killed by other teenagers carrying knives
- 30 were in Greater London
- 15 of these were killed by other teenagers, of which;
- 11 were killed by other teenagers carrying knives.

From these figures we can see of 73 violent teenage deaths:

- 18 were killed by other teenagers carrying knives. A total of 25 percent.
- 11 were killed by other teenagers in other circumstances. A total of 15 percent.
- 44 were killed by adults. A total of 60 percent.



- 25% by a teenager carrying a knife
- 15% by a teenager in other circumstances
- 60% by an adult

A large number were killed in instances of domestic violence or in late night drunken fights.

If we combine the statistical data from the Homicide register and the IRR report (bearing in mind that the reporting period is slightly different for each).

- Assuming that there were **73 teenage deaths out of a total of 255 recorded murders** caused by sharp instrument;
- That **leaves 182 incidences which did not involve the death of teenagers**;
- This means that **over two-thirds** of all murders caused by sharp instrument **did not involve the death of teenagers**.

Also bear in mind that:

- The figure of 73 covers ALL teenage violent deaths not only those caused by knife or sharp instrument.
- The figure of 255 is not ONLY knife-related incidents but includes all sharp instruments.
- That means over two thirds of all murders caused by a sharp instrument did not INVOLVE teenagers in any way whatsoever.

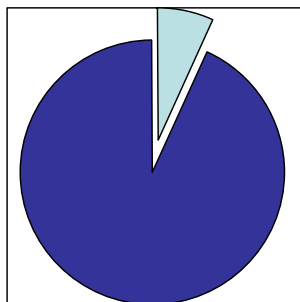
Taking all of the figures previously:

- A total of **18 teenagers across Britain were killed by other teenagers carrying knives**.
- That is **18 out of 255 total murders**.

Based on these figures, in 2008 OR 2008/09 ...

- **7% of all murders by sharp instrument** were carried out by teenagers on teenagers.
- This leaves **93% of murders by sharp instrument** in other circumstances.

Is this representative of common perceptions relating to knife crime?



- In 2008/09, 7% of all murders caused by sharp instrument were teenagers killed by other teenagers carrying knives
- In 2008/09, 93% of all murders caused by sharp instrument in other circumstances

4.2i Other factors to be considered

Statistically, fatalities caused by knives are at their highest point since the introduction of the Homicide Register in 1977. However, it is also worth noting that the number of murders by sharp instrument largely remain stable. Therefore, whilst the knife as a weapon of choice has increased, the overall problem is not necessarily worse.

A trauma surgeon at the Royal London Hospital has however highlighted that although overall numbers remain fairly stable, there has been a significant increase in the admission of under 20s as knife or gun victims.

Statistics show that nationally the number of teenage violent deaths remains stable, and has done so for a number of years. Greater London is the variance with significant rises seen since 2007.

There is a lot of research, statistical data and perception surveys, reports and reviews around the issue of knife crime.

One of the key things that is reported time and time again is that this problem is made larger by the Government's responses to issues and also in courting media attention.

The issue is far more complex than that suggested by the media and political response to this it. Circumstances and factual description are often missing from the media reporting. For example key factors often excluded from media reports:

- Teen knife crime is concentrated within a small section of the community – it is largely unlikely to happen in most areas, and therefore is of minimal threat to the wider public.
- Particular circumstances which leave people far more likely to be caught up in a cycle of violence such as – deprivation/poverty and coming from a BME or asylum/refugee background.
- Mental health deterioration often as a result of the abovementioned circumstances.

4.3 Media Reporting

We also reviewed five different knife crime cases, how they were reported online generally and specifically by different newspapers - The Guardian, The Daily Mail and The Sun. For each story we looked at things like:

- Age of victim
- Age of offender
- When the victims name is typed in to a google search how many returns do you get?
- Number of times it was reported (if at all)
- Article word count and images
- Headline
- Does the story describe the circumstances leading up to the event? (context)
- What is cited as the reason for the incident?
- Is the story reported in a MORE factual or emotive way? (tone)
- Are other cases of knife crime cited within the article?

The Cases

Sofyen Belamouadden, age 15

Sandra Crawford, age 53

Jane Clough, age 30

Marcin Bilaszewski, age 19

Aliza Mirza, age 17

See appendix 7.2 for comparison / review charts

What we found

Findings					
	AGES OF PEOPLE INVOLVED	MULTIPLE STORY LINKING	CONTEXT EXPLANATION	MOTIVE / CAUSE OF INCIDENT	PORTRAYAL
	Ages / Circumstances	In which incidences did the media link the stories to other knife crime stories?	Did the media explain the context of the situation leading up to the incident?	What do the media say about motives for the incident?	How is the story portrayed by the media?
Sofyen	Teen on teen ages between 14-18 cited	All 3 papers did this	None of the papers did this.	Provided several suggestive motives around territorial & gang related things but no evidence of this.	No real context included in this story (with regard understanding circumstances surrounding it and leading up to the incident) Incomprehensible violence
Sandra	Adult on adult 46 & 53 & teen on adult 18 & 46	The Daily Mail did link. The Sun linked this incident to other knife stories but did not appear to report on the actual story in its own right!	Yes, all articles included context	Diminished mental health	Teen cited as 'hero' and 'lawful killing' Unfortunate set of circumstances.
Jane	Adult on adult 30 & 26	None	Yes, all articles included context	Domestic violence, diminished mental health	Media shows clearly tragic story, diminished responsibility, unfortunate set of circumstances
Marcin	Adult on teen 33 & 19	The Daily Mail did link. The Guardian linked this incident to other knife stories but did not appear to report on the actual story in its own right.	Yes, all articles included context	Unprovoked attack by someone on drugs. Diminished responsibility	Tragic incident. Unfortunate set of circumstances.
Aliza	Teen on teen 17 & 18	All 3 papers did this	None of the papers did this.	Provided a suggested motive related to domestic situation.	Domestic violence. Unfortunate set of circumstances.

What we found

- It would appear that the incidents with the least facts or detail of context are the ones which were covered the most.
- The incidents involving teenagers vs. teenager in ANY context raise the most media coverage.
- The incidents involving teenagers vs. teenagers NEARLY ALWAYS have reference to other totally unrelated incidents within the report.
- In cases where there was no evidence of a particular story being covered in its own right; the incident was still cited within other articles on knife fatalities covered by the same paper (Sandra Crawford).
- Of the five cases studied, the only one which was not linked to other cases of knife crime was the only one which did not involved teenagers in any way (Jane Clough).
- The Sofyen & Aliza cases were the two which only involved teenagers and by far had the least context or background information.
- The Sofyen case which cited 'gang rivalry' appears to be the only one of the five that offers speculation and leaves question of 'why' open to public imagination.
- The Aliza case, although providing minimal context, did not offer speculation in the same way as the Sofyen case.
- However in the case where the 'teen' killed an adult he was described as a 'hero'. (Sandra Crawford)

4.4 Knife Crime Conclusion

- Doing this research has highlighted the difficulty in finding clear, easy-to-understand statistics which correspond with each other e.g. different time frames, different age ranges, different variables assessed. This in itself leaves fact open to speculation.
- The statistical evidence for teenager on teenager knife fatalities shows without a doubt that the problem of fatal incidences as a result of attacks using a knife/sharp instrument is much wider than the problems as they are reported, and in actual fact an adult is more likely to commit such a crime in an everyday situation.
- In an area of public concern that is commonly attributed to teenagers as the main culprits, the statistics we found highlight it could equally be portrayed as a completely different picture.
- It also shows how easy it is to slant the interpretation and release of statistics to suit your own purpose.

- The review of media reporting was interesting because when you look deeper in to it you see a number of things.
- We saw that there is a lack of understanding behind WHY teen knife crime is happening. This showed in the lack of factual and contextual information reported in comparison to other knife stories which gave a full picture.
- Interestingly our VOX pop street interviews echoed this with several people saying ‘We need to know WHY this is happening.’ (See DVD interviews).
- Further to this, from our own research we KNOW that this information is available. (See section 4.2i) So why isn’t it included?
- From our research we saw that the media further hypes up teen knife crime by linking all of the stories together even though they are isolated incidents that are nothing to do with each other. Can you imagine if this was done every time there was a case of domestic violence resulting in murder? Or every time there was a drunken street brawl?
- With regards to all knife crime murders, we saw that teen-on-teen knife murders were by far the most covered in the news and across the web. However, there was very little factual contextual information anywhere. Also, there rarely seemed to be follow-up coverage after trials had taken place.
- One of the most worrying things was also mixed messages which are sent out about acceptability of violence and knife crime. In the case where the teenager stabbed someone to protect his mother he was hailed by the media as a ‘hero’. Whilst he acted in defence and protection of his family, does such an act deserve title of ‘hero’?
- If you are going to tackle knife crime as an issue in society, tackle it in all areas. The percentage of teenager-on-teenager fatalities through knife is less than 10% of the total problem.

5.0 Overall Conclusion

Within the report, we have made conclusions about the different areas we looked at. For our final conclusion we will go back to the original question:

“Much research has been carried out around the topic of unbalanced negative media portrayal of youth. We wanted to find out: does it actually exist? If so, how does it affect youth and the communities they live in? And what can we do to address damaging consequences and counter these effects?”

And our starting view:

“The media portrays young people more negatively than positively which leads to the public forming an unbalanced perception of the behaviour and attitudes of young people.

Negative reporting causes a greater fear of the issue than the actual reality of the reported problem and enhances ‘stereotyping’.

Imbalanced negative portrayal of young people in the media has a damaging effect on young people and the community in which they live.”

The evidence in our research shows that negative media stereotyping of young people exists and has done for a very long time.

Our youth trend work showed that media reporting has always been capable of creating ‘moral panics.’ In the earlier trends such as Victoria’s Children (Hooligans), reporting did use stereotyping to identify those involved. However the content of a story was more factual. Over time this has become worse - content can be more sensationalist and stereotyping continues. However, we saw that different papers will do this to different levels – The Guardian tends to be more factual whereas reports in The Daily Mail or The Sun can be more emotive.

Today, there are so many more ways to hear and receive news. This in its self will play a big role in how big of an impact it has in society and how much it affects communities.

Our findings show that this does lead to the public forming an unbalanced perception of the behaviour and attitudes of young people.

When you see the actual statistics in relation to media reporting and public perceptions of an issue, it shows how influential the picture painted by the media can be. Our review of knife crime shows that negative reporting does cause greater fear than the reality of a problem and enhances stereotyping. We saw how the media sensationalises these stories and our survey and vox pop interviews gave evidence of how the way something is reported influences people’s perceptions of the issue. (See DVD). The results in our perceptions survey give a clear example of this, not only from adults towards young people, but among young people too.

Looking at our original question in relation to our research project:

‘Does unbalanced negative media portrayal actually exist?’

Yes, and it's the modern day reporting styles that sensationalise factual news more than ever. This way of reporting news has become embedded into all aspects of social life and it will be extremely hard to change the way that the media, such as tabloid newspapers, well-respected news channels and international radio stations report usual findings and facts. We can prove that most media coverage about the younger generation has been unbalanced and negatively portrayed, giving the youth of today an overall bad name.

There has always been a poor image around teenagers, but recently people are becoming a lot more worried about the youth culture. So where is this coming from? The media showing youths in a bad light, dramatising youth problems and not showing that the vast majority of youths are well behaved and law abiding contribute to this. From our research we have found that over two thirds of all murders caused by a sharp instrument did not involve the death of a teenager. This is not the way the media portray teenage knife crime. When we researched articles from newspapers the teen-on-teen knife crimes were reported with far less background knowledge and were linked to other knife crimes that had nothing to do with the incident. This makes the reader think that there is far more knife crime by teenagers than there actually is, portraying teenagers in a very negative way, when our research shows that an adult is much more likely to commit such a crime.

A good recent example of this negative portrayal in the media towards the younger generation is when the student fees protests were held in London. These groups of young people joined together in a peaceful protest to stand up for their beliefs and for something that was going to, or was, affecting their lives in a major way. These peaceful protests were soon turned into riots when some disrespectful youths joined and decided to take violent action. Most of these violent rioters weren't even of the age group that would be affected by the rise of the university fees, however, the media took advantage of this news opportunity and only focused on the stories that the reporters thought would sell newspapers. This news was extremely unbalanced, didn't give all of the facts, and the peaceful protests were not mentioned in most cases, neither were the reasons behind why these protests/riots took place.

“How does this affect youth and the communities they live in? And to what extent?”

The media portrayal of teenagers plays a big role in that teenagers are stereotyped wherever they go and whatever they do. When people see teenagers they are suspicious of them and suspect that they are up to no good. This has a very bad effect on teenagers as they always feel that people are watching them and suspicious of what they are up to.

This affects youth and the communities they live in in major way, as the younger generation are forced away from mainstream society because others have heard and read negative portrayals of youth.

An implication is the public perceptions of young people is determined by the media portrayal of young people as yobs, hoodies or gang members. They are led to believe that

young people are violent, dangerous, disrespectful, bad mannered and overall lazy members of society. This pushes away youth people and could, in some scenarios, begin to transform ambition into abusive behaviour.

So it may be causing a self-fulfilling prophecy amongst young people themselves. For example, if you fear being stabbed you are more likely to carry a weapon for protection. Therefore the heightened fear of attack can be part of deepening the problem.

Through sensationalising stories the media also gives status to the small percentage of the population who are looking for notoriety. This could be likened to how ASBOs have been known to be 'worn as a badge of honour' by some younger recipients.

Teenagers need to be welcomed into society and accepted as the enthusiastic young people they are but instead others are judging their personalities before they have even tried to explore what us young people are searching for in life, just because of the information they are processing from the media.

6.0 Recommendations

In recommendations we will talk about the final part of our original question

“How can we address damaging consequences and counter these effects?”

Below we have given a number of ideas for how we can work to make a positive change in the way young people are portrayed and perceived.

Reaching out to the media

We could try to show the media the effect that this is having on teenagers and adults and try to persuade them to print positive things that teenagers are doing to help the community, rather than always showing the dark side of a very small minority of teenagers.

We could get the media to show positive roles that teenagers have within the community and show that there is no need to fear teenagers, and that the majority are really OK.

However, evidence shows that the media is very unlikely to change how they work as they have always been like this. And we know that ‘bad news sells’. So we have ideas that we could work on ourselves in our local community.

A petition

We could do a petition to the government to set limits on the stories that are written about teenagers and the bias they show against teenagers.

A campaign

Rather than trying to change how young people are portrayed in the media we can try to change how the public perceive the younger generation through launching a campaign. With social website sensations such as Facebook, for which nearly every young person with access to the internet has an account, spreading the word and making an advertising a campaign to make a stand against media generated stereotypes of youth is easier than ever.

The campaign could show everyone how the media sensationalises stories and shows teenagers in a negative way that is unfair on the vast majority of teenagers.

Create our own news source

One way we could change the way we are portrayed in the media is to start our own news source. As a team we could publish a regular newspaper or use the internet to broadcast positive, community centralised information. It would be good if we could make an official website that would consist only of factual news that would give clear and concise articles of the latest news headlines but would mostly contain positive news stories and headlines.

Create an event

Another way of changing how the public perceives us would be to hold an event in which all members of society can attend in all different communities to unite the elder generation with the younger. This event would be called 'Hug a Hoodie Day', as many teenagers are

stereotyped as misbehaving members of a community when they are seen wearing a hoodie. Every event attendee would have to dress in a hoodie to show that an item of clothing is not a reason to fear a certain age group of people and assume trouble just because of a choice of fashion. Having everybody stamped as a whole and not different stereotypes would tighten a community.

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Subsequent Information

- We also produced a DVD and footage of our research project. This is available for viewing at request.
- The full results for our online perceptions survey are available on request.

For further information about this project please contact

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