

## Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) Phase I: Overview of key trends from a monitoring programme

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The Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) aimed to reduce the carrying of knives, related homicides and serious stabbings among teenagers (aged 13-19) in ten police force areas. A range of local police enforcement, education and prevention interventions were implemented.

A monitoring programme collected management information from a range of sources both before and during the 'TKAP period' (July 2008 to March 2009). Given the provisional nature of some of the data, the lack of statistically robust comparison groups, the dominance of the overall trend by the largest forces, and the potential impact of non-TKAP initiatives, a degree of caution needs to be applied when interpreting these trends and attributing change directly to TKAP.

Key findings relating to the TKAP period (compared to the same period in the previous year) are as follows:

- The provisional number of TKAP stop and searches increased across all ten areas following the start of TKAP and there was a (13%) reduction in the number of recorded offensive weapon offences among people aged 19 and under, compared with an increase (8%) among those aged 20 and over.
- There was no change in the number of provisionally recorded sharp-instrument related homicides among victims aged 19 and under in TKAP areas, and a slight increase among victims aged 20 and over.
- TKAP sharp-instrument 'all violence' offences decreased (by 17%) for victims aged 19 and under. A less marked reduction (8%) was also noted for victims aged 20 years and over.
- The number of sharp-instrument robbery offences reduced (by 13%) for victims aged 19 and under, compared with an (11%) increase in victims aged 20 years and over.
- Building on earlier reductions, there was a provisional 32 per cent decrease in admissions to hospitals for assault with a sharp object among victims aged 19 and under in English TKAP areas, compared with an 18 per cent drop in non-TKAP areas. The fall in the target age group in TKAP areas was more marked than among admissions aged 20 and over, where there was a five per cent reduction.
- In line with national sentencing guidance, provisional figures indicate that tougher penalties were being administered for possession of knives or other offensive weapons offences across England and Wales in all age groups. The average custodial sentence length for these offences also increased.

These findings are encouraging, suggesting that fewer young people are becoming victims of knife crime. While caution must be applied when interpreting these trends, TKAP may well have contributed to a decline in some measures and persisting reductions in others.

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### Keywords

Knife crime	Young people
Offensive weapons	Young offenders
Weapons	Crime reduction
Serious Violence	Performance monitoring
Fear of crime	

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## Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) Phase I: Overview of key trends from a monitoring programme

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### Background

The Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) was a Home Office-led intensive, time limited initiative which aimed to reduce the carrying of knives, related homicides and serious stabbings among teenagers (aged 13-19). It was launched on 5 June 2008 in response to a number of high profile knife-related murders and serious stabbing among young people, and ran until the end of March 2009. The programme was implemented in ten police force areas in England and Wales and was delivered in partnership with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the police and a range of other government departments.

### Aims and Method

This report presents the key findings and an overview of trends from a monitoring programme which was established to support and inform the TKAP initiative.

Provisional monthly management information was collected from a range of sources. These include figures on police recorded knife crime, hospital admissions for assault by a sharp object, Criminal Justice System (CJS) disposals for possession of offensive weapon offences and public perceptions survey data. Where possible, data for TKAP and non-TKAP areas were collected both before and during the TKAP period (defined as July 2008 to March 2009). Due, however, to the limited baseline, the provisional nature and quality of some of the data, and the lack of statistically robust comparison areas, caution must be applied when interpreting the figures and attributing change directly to TKAP.

### TKAP activities

A range of local police enforcement, education and prevention interventions were implemented and these ran alongside a number of national initiatives, some of which came under the TKAP brand. Consistent with the overall aim of the Programme – to reduce teenage knife violence – the great majority of interventions and resources were specifically targeted at the 19 and under age group. These included anti-knife campaigns and tougher sentences for carrying a knife. TKAP built on and embellished existing initiatives in the local areas, notably the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) Operation Blunt 2. This had the same aims as TKAP and targeted the same population group, and has been ongoing since May 2008, one month prior to the start of TKAP.

### Results

#### **TKAP police enforcement activity and CJS disposals for possession of offensive weapon offences**

- During the TKAP period, there was an increase in the provisional figures for the number of S1/S60 stop and searches for offensive weapons conducted by the police, compared to the same period in the previous year. There was also a decrease in the proportion of searches that led to the recovery of a weapon in the TKAP areas.
- There was a (13%) reduction in the number of offenders aged 19 and under caught in possession of an offensive weapon, and an (8%) increase among offenders aged 20 and over in the TKAP areas during the intervention period, compared to the same period in the previous year. While the overall trends are driven by MPS data, the majority of TKAP forces also showed reductions in the target group.

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- In line with national sentencing guidance, tougher penalties were administered for possession of knives or other offensive weapon offences. Provisional figures show an increase (across England and Wales for all ages) in the number of disposals for offensive weapon possession offences resulting in an immediate custodial sentence, community penalty, or suspended sentence, and a decrease in the number resulting in cautions.
- When comparing TKAP and non-TKAP areas between the TKAP period and the same period in the previous year, the increase in offences resulting in immediate custody was far more pronounced in TKAP areas (37% vs. 17%), but increases were greater in non-TKAP areas for community penalties (12% vs. 19%) and suspended sentences (44% vs. 99%). There was also an increase across England and Wales among all ages in the average length of immediate custodial sentences for knife and offensive weapon possession offences.

### **Knife crime: victims aged 19 and under**

- The number of provisionally recorded TKAP homicides in the target age group (19 years and under) did not change during the intervention period (23 recorded during the TKAP period and in the same period in the previous year) and there was a slight increase among victims aged 20 and over.
- TKAP 'all violence' offences against victims aged 19 and under decreased (by 17%), compared with a less marked decrease among those aged 20 and over (8%) during the TKAP period compared to the same period in the previous year.
- The total number of TKAP sharp-instrument robbery offences reduced (by 13%) for victims aged 19 and under and increased (by 11%) for victims aged 20 and over, comparing the TKAP period with the same period in the previous year. The trends for the two age groups diverge after the start of TKAP, with sustained reductions evident in the target age group.
- The trends for provisionally recorded homicides, 'all violence', and robbery offences were heavily dominated by the larger forces, particularly the MPS. The reported trends do not therefore reflect the results for all of the individual forces.
- Provisional figures for admissions to hospital as a result of assault with a sharp object among victims aged 19 and under began decreasing early in 2008, prior to TKAP, having previously peaked in 2006. During the TKAP period there was a 32 per cent decrease compared with the previous year, and compared to an 18 per cent drop in non-TKAP areas. The fall was more marked in the target age group than among admissions aged 20 and over, where there was a five per cent reduction.

### **Public perceptions of knife crime**

- Public fears about knife crime increased dramatically around April/May 2008. Since then the proportion of respondents spontaneously citing knife crime as one of the most important crime issues facing Britain has fluctuated considerably. Public fears appear to be driven, understandably, by reports of knife-related homicides; media coverage on the topic of knife crime may also have influenced perceptions.

### **Conclusions**

- The findings indicate an overall decline in recorded knife crime and hospital admissions in the target age group (19 and under). Provisional NHS admissions data suggest that the drop was more marked in the TKAP areas, though the start of this decrease does appear to predate implementation of the initiative. Trends in TKAP areas for hospital admissions and victims of robbery differed for those aged 19 and under and those aged 20 and over. This separation provides some evidence that TKAP activities may have selectively influenced the target age group, perhaps contributing to the sustained reductions in this group.
- There are some important limitations to the data: the lack of statistically robust comparison areas; the provisional nature of most of the data; the heterogeneity of the forces; and the domination of the overall trend by a handful of forces. Notably, the sheer volume of offences in the Metropolitan Police area drives the overall trend and their decrease in teenage knife-related crime may have been influenced by other initiatives, such as Operation Blunt 2.
- A better understanding of the factors which drive knife crime would inform the interpretation of these trends. These findings are, however, encouraging and suggest that fewer young people are becoming victims of knife crime. While caution must be applied when interpreting these trends, TKAP may well have contributed to a decline in some measures and persisting reductions in others.