



# AlCrime Reduction Matters

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## The carriage and use of knives by young people

The most common type of weapon category used in violent crime in Australia is that of knives. There has been widespread community concern about the use of knives in crime, and particularly about young people carrying or using knives. This is in part due to media attention on recent violent incidents involving young people and knives. Some states have already reformed weapon laws to outlaw the carriage of knives in public, and there are plans for making further restrictions, including restricting young persons' ability to purchase knives.

There has been little academic research conducted in Australia on the carriage and use of knives. One Victorian study, however, has investigated the perceptions, motivations and experiences of young people (aged between 10 and 25 years) regarding the acquisition, carriage and criminal use of weapons, particularly knives (Bondy, Ogilvie & Astbury 2005).

The study examined data from several sources. The qualitative component involved 82 young people, with an average age of 16, of whom more than half were male. The methodology included focus groups with young people in five areas of inner and outer metropolitan Melbourne considered to be weapon hot spots by Victoria Police, and a small number of interviews with incarcerated youth. Key stakeholders in the youth, health and criminal justice sectors were also interviewed. Findings from the study included that:

- The majority of young people do not carry weapons.
- Year nine students aged 14 to 15 from low socioeconomic backgrounds who become involved in delinquent peer-group activities were most likely to carry a knife.
- Young people's perceptions of safety, specifically in public spaces and at night, influence knife carriage.
- There was no causal evidence that suggested that a particular ethnic group was more likely to carry a knife; rather, the evidence suggested that social disadvantage and other structural and situational factors influenced the likelihood of carrying a weapon.

The research suggests that carrying a weapon is a complex behaviour shaped by numerous factors. The findings do indicate the need for education programs directed at those in their early teens in high-risk areas. If further research is undertaken it could ascertain what other initiatives may improve young people's perceptions of safety and assess the effect of legislative reforms that seek to reduce the acquisition and carriage of knives.

## References

Bondy J, Ogilvie A & Astbury B 2005. *Living on edge: understanding the social context of knife carriage among young people*. Melbourne: RMIT University Press