

THE LOST CHILDREN

# Gang violence: middle-class hypocrites 'destroy lives with drugs'

Alice Thomson, Rachel Sylvester

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A boy aged 15 was stabbed to death in Romford on Saturday as the toll from the knife epidemic grew. Three teenagers have been questioned over the crime  
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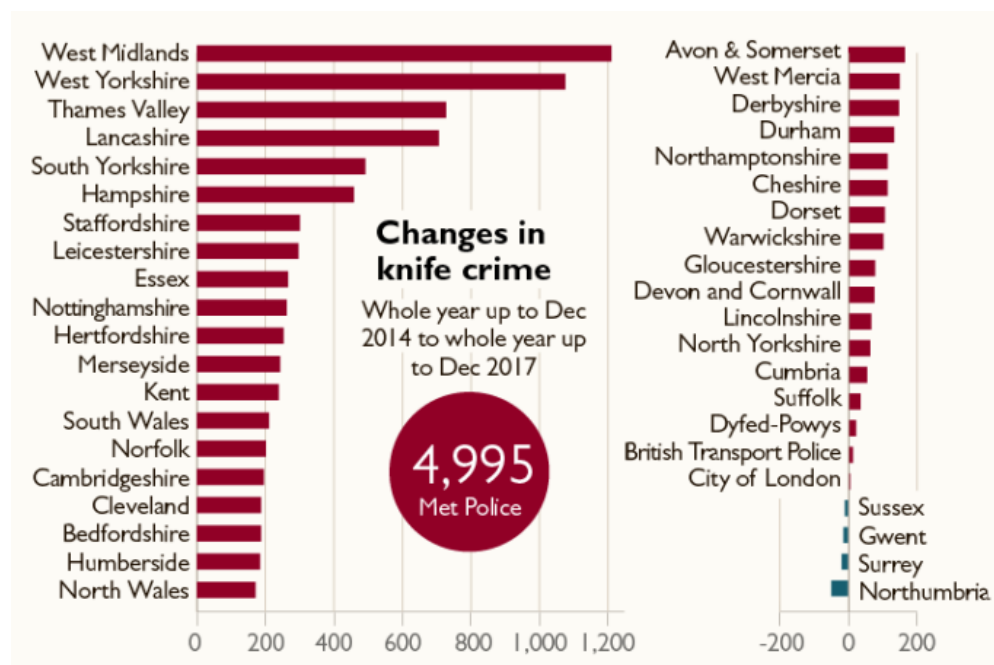
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[Middle-class drug users](#) who pride themselves on being ethical consumers are “destroying children’s lives” with their weekend habit, according to the police chief responsible for children and

young people. Olivia Pinkney, who is also chief constable of Hampshire, said that wealthy adults who took recreational drugs were supporting gangs by contributing to a drug market that was driving an epidemic of violence on the streets.

In an interview with *The Times*, Ms Pinkney criticised the hypocrisy of those who took the moral high ground when shopping while ignoring the social consequences of buying cannabis and cocaine. “What infuriates me most is the middle-class drug users who have Fairtrade coffee and condemn sweatshop clothes and child slavery and then take recreational drugs,” she said. “Do they know how they got these drugs, which child went on what train or bus to provide them?”

She said that those buying drugs should realise they were financing a criminal underworld. “They think they are cool because they are doing the right thing but they aren’t when they take drugs . . . They wouldn’t blow cigarette smoke in a child’s eyes or refuse to put a seatbelt on them in a car. They think they like children but they are destroying some of their lives.”



The middle classes, with the money to pay the criminals, “make our job so much harder”, she said. “This glamorisation of drugs by adults has to stop. The adults say it isn’t harming them, it’s just fun, at a weekend, but it is destroying others.”

Last week the government ruled out any liberalisation of the laws on drugs for recreational use. But [Lord Hague of Richmond](#), the former Conservative leader, warned that the “war on drugs” was failing and should be rethought.

Ben Wallace, the security minister, said recently that Britain “is fast becoming the biggest consumer of cocaine in Europe” and that it was no longer “the preserve of the yuppie or the rich”. According to the Global Drug Survey, in many cities cocaine can be delivered faster than a pizza, with a third of users able to get their hands on the drug within half an hour. Dealers even boast of offering loyalty cards.

The Home Office has identified the illicit drug trade as a main cause of the rise in knife crime and gang violence. Since 2013 there has been an increase in production of the coca plant in Colombia, the main source country for cocaine in Britain. The surge in supply has led prices to drop.

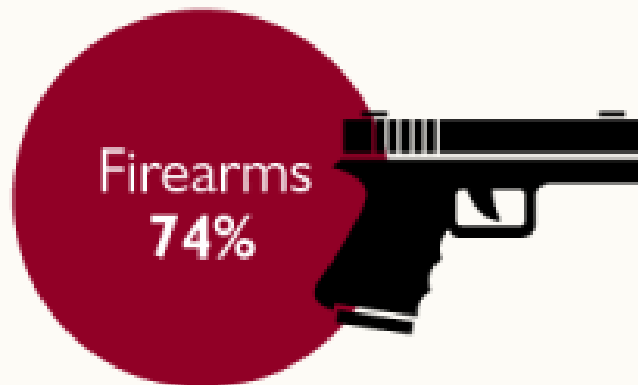
The booming market has encouraged the spread of violence around the country, with gangs competing to control different areas. Of the 44 police forces, 35 have had problems with knife crime linked to drug running by county lines — organised crime networks that do business by mobile phone — and 32 forces have dealt with gun crime.

Between 2014-15 and 2016-17 the number of killings involving drug dealers as either victims or suspects increased from 206 to 247. The share of murders that were drug-related rose from 50

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### Linked ammonia attack



per cent to 57 per cent.

There has also been an increase in the number of young people dealing drugs. Between 2012 and 2016, convictions of those aged 10-17 for Class A drug production and possession with intent to supply went up by 77 per cent, three times the equivalent increase among adult offenders.

David Lammy, the Labour MP for Tottenham, said that the war on drugs had been a “complete failure”. The spiralling violence

was “really about a massive increase in cocaine use across the country”, he said. “Knife crime, gun crime and gang crime have been with us in this country for decades, it’s getting worse because of the money that sits behind it and the serious trafficking of drugs and weapons. Cocaine and organised crime have not been a national priority and now it’s playing out on the streets of Tottenham and Hackney.”

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