

# Is knife seizure imagery an effective crime deterrent? A multi-method study



## Knife seizure images serve to reinforce rather than deter knife carrying

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### BACKGROUND

The urgency to reduce knife carrying has been recognised by the police services in Scotland and has been addressed by the introduction of various initiatives to deter knife carrying and crime.

One tactic includes the sharing of knife seizure images, where pictures of knives recovered by police are shared on media outlets.

The aim of sharing these images is to act as a deterrent to discourage knife carrying, however, little empirical research has explored whether this is an effective deterrent.

### AIMS

The study sought to explore adults' views on the use of knife seizure images as a deterrent to carrying knives using photo elicitation techniques.

The role of context by which the images of knives were seized was also explored.

### METHOD

The study explored adults' views of the use of knife seizure images as a deterrent to carrying knives utilising a multi-method approach:

- (1) A cross-sectional online survey (n= 553) consisting of closed and open-ended questions using a quasi-experimental paradigm.
- (2) Individual, online semi-structured interviews with adults (n = 20) (in areas of high and low knife crime in Glasgow).

### RESULTS

Fearful, worried and angry reactions towards knife seizure images were expressed among adults.

All participants reported significantly higher levels of anxiety after viewing knife seizure images ( $F(4,465) = 3.955, p = .004, \eta^2 = 0.033$ ).

Contextualising the images had an emotional impact on how participants' responded to the images.

The use of knife seizure images was found to be an ineffective deterrent against knife crime. Adults living in communities affected by higher rates of knife crime reported that the use of knife seizure images exacerbated negative stereotypes and stigma within such communities and increased concerns about safety and the need to 'protect' self by carrying a knife.

### IMPLICATIONS

Knife seizure images may exacerbate rather than deter knife carrying. Their negative impact in terms of increasing fear, worry and anxiety concerning knife carrying may 'fuel' cultures of fear and discriminatory attitudes towards people living in areas of high knife crime. Community involvement in developing preventative and non-discriminatory approaches to tackling knife carrying is needed. A public health approach criminal justice using early interventions and dealing with the root causes of knife carrying is encouraged.