

YOUTH VIOLENCE AND KNIFE CRIME: A GENERATION'S BATTLE

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Abstract

Amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, youth engagement in serious violence, particularly knife crime, has become a growing concern. The pandemic has not only directly affected adolescents but has also left a profound impact on their social, emotional, and mental well-being. Such trauma during a critical developmental stage can have long-lasting consequences. Adolescents have had to adapt to these challenges by altering their social routines. Historically, adolescents have faced various stressors, including social, family, economic, and health-related issues, alongside disruptions to their daily routines and support systems. To address these complex challenges, this study delves into the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) initiated by the UK Home Office in 2007. TKAP, which was later extended to include 13- to 24-year-olds, aimed to reduce the incidence of severe injuries and fatalities among teenagers due to knife crime. It operated in 14 areas across the country and was part of the broader Youth Crime Action Plan, which sought to enhance public confidence in community safety. This research explores the impact of TKAP on youth engagement in knife crime and delves into the effectiveness of the program in achieving its objectives. It also assesses the broader social implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth behaviors and violence. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to address youth violence and support adolescents during challenging times.

Keywords: youth violence, knife crime, pandemic, Tackling Knives Action Programme, adolescent well-being

1. In lieu of an introduction: in Times of pandemic crisis

It is well known that among researchers major concerns raised under the pressure of pandemic crisis demands for physical or social distancing, about the social influence on youth development and social behaviors among the youth.

In recent years, there has been growing concern regarding the rising rates of youth engagement in serious youth violence social phenomena and more specifically youth knife crime. The health crisis of the COVID-19 worldwide outbreak has increased the current concerns. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) affected adolescents directly and indirectly. Beyond getting sick, many adolescents' social, emotional, and mental well-being has been impacted by the pandemic. Trauma faced at this developmental stage may have long-term consequences across their lifespan. In order to deal with these consequences in their everyday life adolescents struggled to change their social routines. In the past, the debates about the exposure of adolescents to change, crisis and risk situations pertaining to social, family, economic, and health stressors, in addition to changes to typical routines and support

systems were common (Center for Control the Disease and Prevention, 2021 Holland Hawks & Morelli et al 2021).

In 2007 the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) was developed by the UK Home Office, working closely with other government departments and key stakeholders including local government, police forces, community groups, and practitioners in affected local areas. In March 2009 TKAP was extended to include 13- to 24-year-olds (previously 13- to 19-year-olds). This work ran alongside the Youth Crime Action Plan. The projects aimed to reduce the number of teenagers killed or seriously wounded and to tackle teenage knife crime in 14 areas of the country in order to increase public confidence that streets are safe (Home Office 2009).

According to the British Office for National Statistics Centre for Crime and Justice the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and related lockdown restrictions have resulted in fluctuations in the level of crime (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

The British Youth Council (2019) to its eighth report on knife crime referred to a broad social phenomenon concerning youth, a Generation's Epidemic. More concretely, knife crime as a serious youth violent social symptom of young people who for example experience mental health issues, adverse childhood experiences, have learning difficulties, live in poverty, or are excluded from school are more likely to be vulnerable to involvement in knife crime.

Furthermore, empirical work that examines the profile of young people finds that the generational characteristics of young people currently evolving in violent situations are more complex than the literature would lead an observer to expect. According to John Poyton (Charity Redthread): —Young people are not carrying knives specifically to go out to perpetrate violence and murder. Again, if we make that assumption, we are writing off an entire section of our youth community, which would be a terrible disservice to future generations. (British Youth Council 2019, p.7) Kwabz Oduru Ayim (Mixtape Madness found that —...unfortunately this generation of latchkey children differ from the last because as opposed to just being raised by the local area they are in, they are now probably raised by social media as well. .. (British Youth Council 2019, p.30).

Generations have been portrayed as baby boomers, generation X, Generation Y digital natives (Prensky 2001), or Net Generation (Tapscott 1998). More specifically the main characteristics referring to Generation Z correspond to the digital features, the degree of technological readiness of young people and their digital skills level, and whether and how they are used in everyday life (Kamarianos et al 2020).

In our case, growing empirical literature, researchers, and professionals that study the _knife crime epidemic correspond to symptom clusters that put youth at risk because of various underlying socio-economic issues. At this point in the study, we should point out that such a conceptualization poses a certain difficulty because the generational grouping showed a high degree of diversity. But in response to the need for more research evidence, as a base for discussion, the current study aims to contribute to the study on the current social phenomenon and

especially on attitudes and behaviors underlying socio-economic issues following years of cuts to public services. in irregular times like the pandemic crisis.

It is of great importance, that under the pressure of social limits on social distancing for the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), young people have to cope more efficiently with new routines and barriers on a daily basis involving multiple, complex, social variety of abilities.

2. Research question

In an attempt to better understand and conceive the core characteristics of the young population at risk, the current study aims to approach and examine the ‘knife crime’ as a social phenomenon, responds to the emerging demands of rapidly changing attitudes and behaviors in a risk framework, as a result of a continuum of crisis in Greece (Debt crisis 2009-2010, Refugee crisis 2014-2015, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health crisis. The central research question of the study focuses on the responses (micro and macro) towards the phenomenon in the abrupt times of the pandemic. In addition, the current study also attempts to explore the way young refugees and migrants cope with the current social consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic crisis.

The underlying assumption is that according to their generational characteristics young people in Greece exposed to crisis and risk situations pertaining to social, family, economic, and health stressors, have been impacted socially, emotionally, and mentally. Consequently, youth at risk, with adverse childhood experiences, learning difficulties, living in poverty, or excluded from school are more likely to be vulnerable to involvement in knife crime.

3. Conceptualizing the issues

Youth at risk under the Continuum of Crisis. The Greek case.

Serious youth violence such as knife crime is a symptom of various underlying socio-economic issues following years of cuts to public services and the Welfare state (British Youth Council 2019).

More concretely in Greece, the recent financial crisis had mainly one recipient and that was the welfare state. Thus it is important to emphasize that from the existing empirical studies during these years of crisis, the scholars refer to a common framework of renegotiation and reorientation of identities.

Hence, under the consequences of the debt crisis, the daily situation in Greek society is -since 2009 characterized mainly by the phenomena of liquidity and risk. For Greek society, liquidity and risk have been features of the ongoing crisis since 2009. Therefore, in the context of the present study, this time frame can be considered as a framework for understanding and interpreting the actions of social subjects, where the pandemic crisis followed the refugee and the Greek socio-economic debt crisis.

More specifically, in the Greek case, the current health crisis follows the financial crisis of 2009, with specific consequences both in terms of the financial situation with significant consequences of the deterioration of the quality of daily life. The place of analysis is common: the downturn in the international and European economies

has highlighted several contradictions at the level of national economies as well as in the overall structure of the European Union. Particularly important is the state's withdrawal from critical areas such as education (Koniordos 2011).

The literature on the impact of International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies, especially in the fields of Health and Education, is revealing (Stuckler & Basu 2009, Armijo & Faucher 2002). Empirical data analysis offers a degradation of the two basic functions of the welfare state, education and health, which stems from privatization, minimization of investment, and reduction of funding. (Wilson & Wise 1986). In these cases, the financial burden falls on family strategies. However, these choices have detrimental effects, both in the social and economic fields (Logan & Mengisteab 1993). Thus, in sectors such as Education and Health, the social subject becomes a customer/consumer with implications for identity consolidation, while dynamic management emphasizes the issues of efficiency and effectiveness. and based on the logic of the Market (Ball 2008).

The refugee crisis and the recent SARS-CoV 2 crisis have essentially highlighted the weakness of a welfare state that has been underfunded for decades. The analysis of the ongoing crisis indicates that the crisis is not only economic. From the debt crisis to the refugee crisis and the pandemic crisis, the crisis is social but also a crisis of trust in institutions, a crisis of democracy (Eurobarometer 2021). Moreover, the pandemic crisis due to the SARS CoV2 virus has confirmed that the importance of the digital camera is not only economic but significant social and political to the extent that digital networks become social environments. _For decades it has been commonplace that these tools greatly facilitate differentiation, uncertainty, ambiguity and, above all, constant change and change, both at a subjective and structural level (Clark, 1996).

In conclusion, as it appears from the international and Greek literature, the crisis continuum (debt crisis-refugee crisis-covid-19 crisis) was dealt with and is being dealt with deregulation policies with direct impact to the reduction of funding and the substantial retreat of the welfare State from institutions critical to democracy such as education as recorded in the international and Greek literature, has significant implications especially on vulnerable groups and young people (Kamarianos, Kyridis, Fotopoulos Chalkiotis 2019).

4. The Epidemic of Knife crime

The continuum of crisis in Greece and its socio-economic consequences has exposed pre-existing social protection problems - 44% of the Greek population with an income below the poverty line, 25% unemployment, 35% increase in suicides (Hadjimichalis, 2014).

Under the framework of M. Foucault's theory (2010) crisis should be understood _as the general framework of biopolitics'. The continuation of the crisis (The Greek Crisis Continuum) in Greece has very important consequences with vital effects on the functioning of the welfare state, the mechanisms and procedures of social protection with significant socio-economic consequences have exposed pre-existing problems of social protection.

Although it is characteristic that as reported by the Ben Kinsella Trust¹ it is important to mention that the global outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is statistically no greater threat to young people (under25s) than is the knife crime. More specifically in the UK, according to the recent data from the Office for National Statistics in the 12 months up to March last year, 84 under-25s died from being stabbed with a knife. COVID-19 has been registered in the deaths of 50 under-25s so far in England and Wales (Ben KinsellaTrust2020).

Knife crime offenses are reportedly at their highest in a decade. Following the official figures from the British Ministry of Justice 1.1 million young people aged 11 to 18, declared knife crime their biggest concern. Knife crime is a crime involving a knife. It's a crime to threaten someone with a knife or carry a knife as a weapon in a robbery or burglary. Knife crime includes: carrying a knife or trying to buy one if you're under 18.

Threatening someone with a knife. Carrying a knife that's banned. A murder where the victim was stabbed with a knife. A robbery or burglary where a thief carried a knife as a weapon. (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk> Retrieved 2/11/2020). Allen & Kirk-Wade (2020) also showed that knife crime, particularly where it affects young people, has been a 'persistent and growing concern'.

Such research data are not available in Greece but the social phenomenon is important. Especially in Athens hundreds of young people seeking help or survive in precarious conditions. Most of them are children or teenagers, 'children in the shadows' (as they are called in the US), "invisible" to the state mechanisms. Extremely vulnerable and without any social or state protection, those young people survive with difficulty. According to the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless, in the European Union every night 700,000 people sleep on the streets or in shelters. Following Paidakaki (2021) the housing problem has been increasingly evident in many EU cities since the peak of the 2015 —refugee crisis when the number of asylum seekers reached staggering levels in Europe. In 2015, the number of first-time asylum seekers seeking international protection in the EU reached an unprecedented peak of 1.2 million people, double the number from 2014. The three main citizenships of first-time asylum applicants were Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis (Paidakaki 2021, Eurostat, 2016). In Athens, more than 600 homeless children survive.

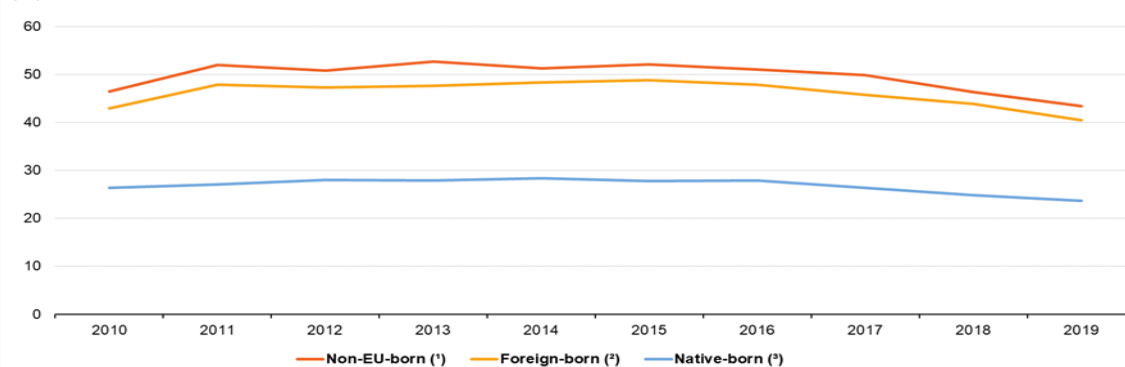
Kourachanis (2018), Papadopoulos, & Roumpakis (2013) offer a nuanced approach to the issue analyzing aspects of the Greek welfare state as characteristics of family-centered capitalism of prosperity (familistic welfare capitalism). Familistic welfare capitalism is a type of national political economy where the family plays a double role both as the main provider of welfare to its members and as a key agent in the reproduction of its politicoeconomic institutional arrangement (Papadopoulos, & Roumpakis 2013). Following Kourachanis (2021)

¹ The Ben Kinsella Trust is tackling knife crime through education and campaigning. It is one of the leading anti-knife crime charities in the UK, set up following the tragic murder of Ben Kinsella in 2008. Ben was just 16 years old when he was stabbed to death in a horrific act of senseless violence on 29th June 2008. Ben was the 17th teenager to be killed in London that year (<https://benkinsella.org.uk/bens-story/>).

unaccompanied minor refugees (URMs) in Greece, due to the application of the specific social policies that have residual characteristics and focus on emergency housing services, are consequently directed into delinquency or precarious status as trapping them in dismal conditions that violate human rights (Kourachanis 2021). Therefore, the risk of deviance and social exclusion are a daily occurrence for these young people. According to Eurostat migrant integration statistics (2021), more than 24% of native-born young people and 40% of foreign-born young people had the risk of being in poverty or socially excluded in 2019 (Eurostat (2021)).

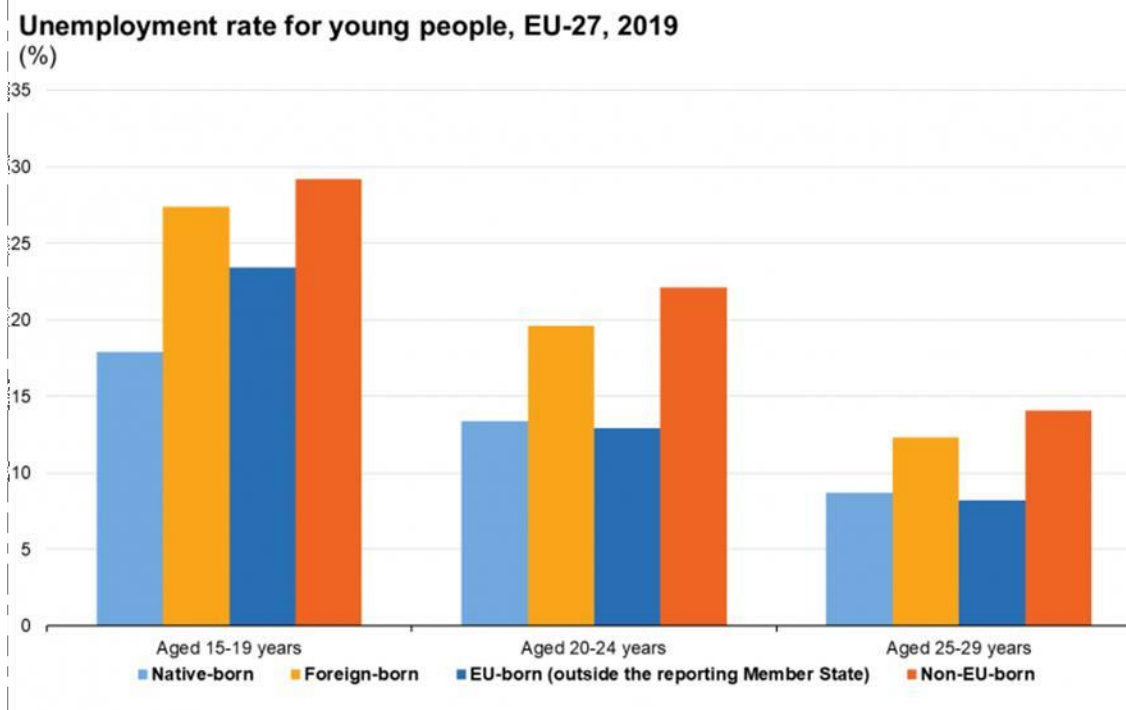
Table 1: The development of the risk of poverty or social exclusion for young people (aged 16-29 years) in the EU-27:

At risk of poverty or social exclusion rate of young people (aged 16-29 years), EU-27, 2010-2019 (%)



Source: Eurostat 2021

Young people in the EU-27 labor market aged less than 20 years were much more likely to face unemployment than either of the other age groups of young people (Table 2), this pattern was observed for native-born and both groups of foreign-born persons. Equally, for all three age groups, young people born outside the EU were most likely to be unemployed (Eurostat 2021).



Source: Eurostat 2021.

As can be seen from the above daily obstacles such as poverty and risk caused by the weakness and sometimes absence of social policy mechanisms (Kourahanis 2018), are associated with deviant behaviors and ultimately lead young people in Greek society to deviance, trapping into dismal conditions.

According to the Hellenic Police Headquarters statistics since 2013, there has been a significant increase in juvenile delinquency. Drug use and trafficking by younger and younger people, school dropouts are some of the consequences of the financial crisis and austerity policies of recent years. The recent attacks on minors in Kaisariani, a large neighborhood of Athens (July 2020), are indicative. Since 2018, the Greek police have arrested 196 young people which were involved in 130 cases, for causing dangerous bodily injuries. In addition, Greek police arrested more than 2,629 young people for theft during the same period. Most of them were boys.

5. GenZ on the dark side

Gen Z according to the generational characteristics responded successfully and efficiently to the increased liquidity and dynamic change. So Gen Z is connected, informed, and ready for business. But as a generation that has grown up in economic austerity (mainly in South Europe), Gen Z has inherited a set of economic, political, and social dismal situations because of the crisis consequences. A noteworthy part of those young people with

common generational characteristics prepared themselves, by endorsing all the necessary attitudes and behaviors that are needed to enable them to face precarious situations (Kamarianos et al. 2020).

In any case, according to the researchers, Gen Zs have always known turbulence and instability. They experienced the debt crisis, the biggest recession, and worst employment rates since the 1930s, refugee crisis, and now they experience a pandemic crisis. In global politics they have known only a post-9/11 world, the war on terror; thus, a situation of the crisis has been their norm. In an effort to deal with these difficulties rising from a continuous liquid micro and macro framework in crisis, Generation Z's members are highly informed and as they lack institutional trust, they want to take charge of their lives and their futures.

Hence, on a macro level or at a micro level, anxiety and the threat of personal harm is constant, as a defining characteristic for this generation (Kamarianos et al. 2020, Mack & Palley 2012, Merrinam 2015). Following Bauman, the liquidizing powers have moved from 'system' to 'society', from 'politics' to 'life policies' - or have descended from the 'macro' to the 'micro' level of social cohabitation (Bauman 2000, p.7).

Thus, in their effort to cope with the difficulties of constant and dynamic uncertainty, digital tools (PC, social media, and electronic games) and their operation are very familiar. At the same time, however, they have to deal with the disadvantages of using these digital tools. On a micro-level approach symbolic violence, as bullying has gone online via social media.

In conclusion, poverty, anxiety, lack of trust, and risk caused by the weakness and sometimes the absence of social policy mechanisms (Kourahanis 2018), are characteristic aspects of a culture expressed by wider cultural influences of music, media, and computer gaming as reinforcing gender identity and aspirations towards street credibility deviant behaviors and ultimately lead young people in Greek society to deviance, trapping into dismal conditions (Hardin, 2020). However, as Hardin (2020) states cultural artifacts are available to a wider population, their influence upon the specificity of knife-carrying youth remains unexplained.

6. In lieu of a conclusion

Under the weight of the impact of the crisis continuation (debt crisis, refugee crisis pandemic crisis), the unpredictable and the liquidity constitutes a hermeneutical framework of the normality. Particularly, the role of the instability of the social policy is indicative especially to the degree that instability makes it impossible to develop a plan with clear targets and deadlines aimed at tackling the injustices which make a young person more vulnerable to knife crime. The worldwide epidemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has raised these concerns.

The arguments made concerning analysis in this article supports the proposition that there are many obstacles to at-risk youth that according to their generational characteristics young people in Greece exposed to crisis and risk situations, with adverse childhood experiences, learning difficulties, living in poverty, or excluded from school are more likely to be vulnerable to involvement in knife crime. Daily obstacles such as poverty and risk caused

by the weakness and sometimes absence of social policy mechanisms are associated with deviant behaviors and ultimately lead young people in Greek society to deviance, trapping into dystopian conditions.

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