

IMPACT EVALUATION

'It's No Joke!' anti-knife comedy theatre



The Flavasum Trust

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Executive Summary

1.1 Background

'It's No Joke!' is an anti-knife crime comedy play that was written to reach and engage younger children in primary schools. The play was performed by The Comedy School for 1433 pupils and their teachers in Luton in December 2018.

1.2 Methodology

The aim of the evaluation is to find out whether watching a single performance of an anti-knife comedy play can change the attitudes of younger children towards carrying knives. Specifically, the research was undertaken to discover if the interventions raised awareness of the dangers of carrying a knife, reduced the probability of carrying, and increased the likelihood of a young person taking action if s/he realises someone is carrying a knife. The pupils were asked to complete a questionnaire before the performance and one afterwards and the answers compared. Additionally, a sub-set of pupils who had seen the play completed a follow-up questionnaire six months later to assess whether any attitude changes observed were lasting.

1.3 Sample

A total of 2893 questionnaires were completed: 1603 in school before the performances, 1207 immediately after watching the play, and by 261 Year 7 pupils six months later. A control group of 362 Year 5, 6 and 7 pupils from two local primary schools and one secondary school who did not see the play also completed a questionnaire. The gender breakdown of those who completed the questionnaires was fairly evenly split: 593 boys and 614 girls. Of those who completed the control questionnaire, only 25% were girls.

1.4 Findings

A number of significant immediate attitudinal changes were observed across a series of key questions related to the aims of the research. Watching a performance of 'It's No Joke!'

- **reduced the number of young people who would consider carrying a knife,**
- **reduced the number who thought carrying a knife was a way to keep safe,**
- **reduced the number who thought using a knife only affected the person carrying it, and**
- **increased the number who would do something if they knew a friend was carrying a knife.**

When looking at lasting attitudinal change, some significant changes were observed. Watching a performance

- reduced the number who thought using a knife only affected the person carrying it, and
- increased the number who would do something if they knew a friend was carrying a knife

The results are summarised in the following table of attitudinal changes immediately following the performance and six months later (see Section 4.1, page 12).

Questions	Control group (% yes) n=261	Pre-performance (% yes) n=1063	Post-performance (% yes) n=1207	Follow-up group (% yes) n=362	Change pre- to post	Change pre- to follow-up
Would you consider carrying a knife?	11	9	4	6	-5%*	-3%
Does carrying a knife keep you safe?	28	20	12	20	-8%*	0%
Does using a knife only affect the one carrying it?	10	27	13	13	-14%*	-14%*
Would you stop a friend carrying a knife?	87	83	89	92	+6%*	+9%*
Would you do something if a stranger was carrying?	75	75	66	58	-9%*	-17%*

* statistically significant difference at $p<0.05$

The research also provided an opportunity for a deeper look at some differences in attitudes. Although the majority of young people had never considered carrying a knife, a minority (one in ten) still reported that they would consider carrying one. Of this minority almost two-thirds (62%: 61 out of 98) thought it would keep them safe, compared to 15% of those who hadn't considered carrying (144 out of 944). This suggests that fear is the principal reason why they feel the need to carry a knife.

Significantly, after the sessions, more young people reported they would try to stop a friend from carrying a knife, increasing from 83% (876 out of 1054) to 89% (1073 out of 1200). However, they would remain cautious if they met a stranger who they knew was carrying – increasingly so after the sessions. In that case 75% (789 out of 1051) reported they would do something before the sessions, reducing to 66% (796 out of 1200) after.

It should be noted that this research is based on a before-and-after evaluation design. Whilst it is a more effective method for evaluating change than many other non-experimental designs, there may be some limitations due to threats to the internal validity of the design. However, it is still a useful method for providing

insight, and the evidence provided as part of the research can be built upon by using different methods in the future.

1.5 Conclusions

It is clear from the evidence above that there is a measurable and, for some attitudes, a lasting impact on younger people who watch a single performance of an anti-knife comedy play like ‘It’s No Joke!’

Out of the five questions asked, all immediate changes were statistically significant, including the *decreasing* willingness to do something if they met a stranger they knew was carrying a knife. Four of the changes recorded immediately after the performance lasted six months. Only one, whether carrying a knife was a way to keep safe, did not last six months.

The principal results are greater awareness of the dangers of carrying a knife, that it is not a way to keep safe and increased confidence to negotiate safer paths for themselves and their friends as they mature. Ultimately this could lead to safer families and local communities.

To better understand the effect of school environment on these changes, it is recommended that the design of any future impact evaluation is structured to find out if there are differences 12 months later for a cohort remaining in primary education (Year 5 to Year 6) and for the cohort that has transitioned to secondary education (Year 7 to Year 8).

It is also recommended that suitable cohorts are chosen from both primary and secondary schools that do not see a performance as a control to confirm the changes are a result of watching the play.

2. Background

2.1 Context

Violent crime, including knife crime and homicide, has been on the rise across England and Wales. In the year ending March 2014 there were 23,945 knife crime offences recorded by the police (excluding Greater Manchester due to data recording issues). Five years later, in the year ending March 2019, this figure had risen by over 80% to 43,516. London bore the brunt of this problem: in 2019 there were 169 knife offences per 100,000 population, in stark contrast to the next highest figure of 93 offences per 100,000 in North West England. In the same year there were 4,306 recorded knife possession offences committed by 10-17 year olds in England and Wales (Home Office, 2019). In the year from September 2018 to August 2019, possession of weapons in Luton increased by 57.8% and was the sixth highest rate out of 104 postcode areas in England and Wales (plumplot.co.uk, based on UK police data).

2.2 Aims of the project

The Flavasum Trust uses the arts to reach and engage young people who are at risk of carrying knives or other weapons. It does this by offering schools anti-knife crime sessions using film and theatre to dramatise the dangers of carrying weapons. The Trust needs to know whether these interventions are effective and worth the investment of private donations and public funds.

2.3 Intended outcomes

The project aims to assess whether young people in education watching a single performance of an anti-knife comedy play can change their attitudes.

2.4 Outline of the project

‘It’s No Joke!’ was performed for Years 5, 6, and 7 (9 to 12 year olds) in primary and secondary schools in Luton. The play was devised and written by the director of The Comedy School and first toured to schools and pupil referral units in Camden. It was further developed by a partnership with the Metropolitan Police and toured Haringey, Croydon and Camden as part of Operation Blunt. It is performed annually as part of Barnet’s Junior Citizen Scheme.

Before the start of each performance, the pupils are asked to complete a short anonymous questionnaire to assess their baseline attitudes towards knife crime. For 20 minutes after the play the actors answer questions from the audience as the characters they played and reinforce some of the key learning outcomes. Before leaving, the pupils complete a second questionnaire asking the same questions, but in a changed order and wording to avoid unintentional bias. Differences between the answers given in the two questionnaires can be analysed to measure shifts in attitudes. Six months later a third questionnaire was completed by some of the Year 7 secondary school pupils who had seen the play. A control questionnaire was also

completed by Year 5, 6 and 7 pupils at two primary schools and one secondary school who did not see the play.

2.5 Timeline for development of the project

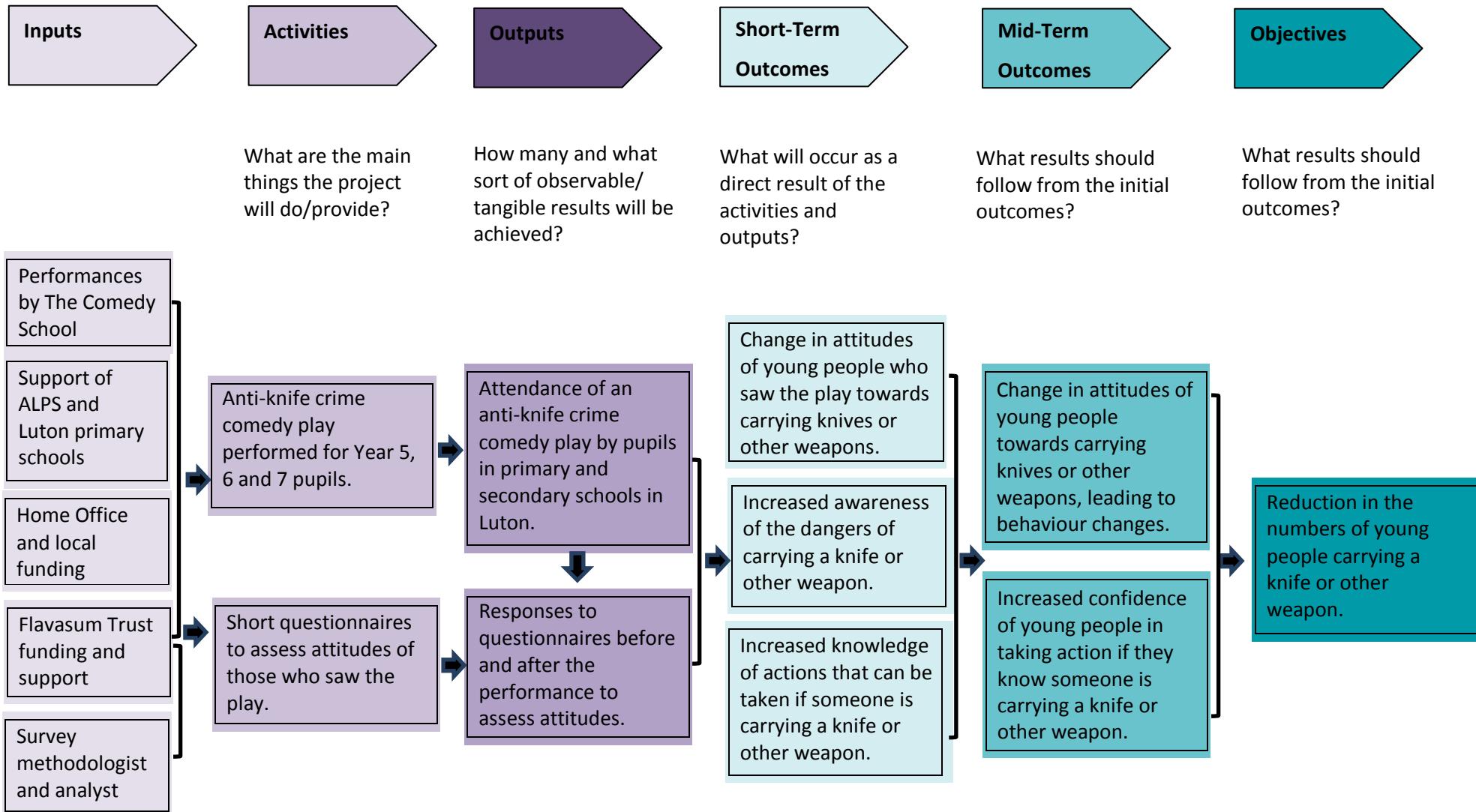
The play was promoted to Luton schools in Autumn 2018 and performed twice daily over ten days in December 2018 at the Alternative Learning & Progression Service, Cutenhoe Road, Luton. The pupils and their teachers were collected and returned to their schools by bus.

2.6 Theory of Change description and diagram

The ultimate aim of the project is to effect attitude change among younger pupils in primary education towards carrying knives or other weapons, leading to changes in behaviour, i.e. a reduction in the number of young people carrying knives or other weapons.

Theory of Change Diagram

Goal: Reduction in the numbers of young people carrying knives or other weapons, reducing subsequent knife crimes



3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The principal research question this study intends to answer is:

Can watching a single performance of an anti-knife comedy play change the attitudes of younger people towards carrying a knife?

3.2 Study design

In order to answer the research question, the study was designed in a way to allow us to capture attitudes of young people towards carrying a knife prior to the performance, immediately afterwards and then six months later (Brown and Novak 2007; Child Health Promotion Research Centre 2012).

A quantitative approach was chosen as we wished to assess attitudes of large numbers of young people. Two short anonymous self-completion paper questionnaires were designed, one to be administered prior to the performance and one after. Self-completion questionnaires were deemed the most appropriate method to use to avoid social-desirability bias. Social desirability bias occurs when respondents are inclined to give more socially desirable answers when responding to an interviewer, and is less likely to occur if they respond privately, so nobody can see their responses (Tourangeau *et al.* 2000; de Leeuw 2005; Holbrook and Krosnick 2010). As the topic under study in this project could be considered sensitive and some of the potential responses socially undesirable, it was considered appropriate to use self-completion questionnaires to obtain more accurate and honest responses. Additionally, a face-to-face methodology would have been prohibitively expensive given the size of the sample.

The questionnaires contained no personally identifying information, asking only for the respondent to self-report their gender and answer five attitudinal questions.

3.3 Sample

Performances of 'It's No Joke!' were promoted to all the primary schools in Luton and booked by eight schools on a first-come first-served basis. Two secondary schools serving disadvantaged wards were also offered performances to ensure target audience numbers were achieved. The sample of respondents consisted of all pupils in the respective year groups in the schools who booked a performance. The decision to invite Year 5 and 6 pupils was made by the project partners because they did not believe the play was age-appropriate for Year 4 pupils, and Year 6 and 7 pupils were particularly affected by the issues raised in the play as they transition from primary to secondary education.

Every pupil was asked to complete the two questionnaires, one at school prior to the day of their performance, and one immediately after the performance and discussion before returning to school. No identifying information was included on the

questionnaires, so it was not possible to link pre- and post-questionnaires and measure individual changes of attitude. Demographic information collected from respondents was limited to gender. A total of 2531 questionnaires were completed, 1063 in school prior to the performance, 1207 immediately after watching the play and 261 six months later. Although all the pupils due to attend the performances were provided with questionnaires, more pupils attended than had completed them.

Additionally, a control questionnaire was completed by 362 Year 5, 6 and 7 pupils at two primary schools and one secondary school who did not see the play. The schools were chosen because of their willingness to help the research, but completion of the questionnaires was solely determined by the teachers. Only 26% of the control questionnaires were completed by girls. Table 1 summarises the sample composition by gender.

Table 1: Sample composition by gender.

Gender	Pre-performance questionnaire	Post-performance questionnaire	Control questionnaire	Six months later	Total
Male	520	593	265	124	1502
Female	543	614	97	137	1391
Total	1063	1207	362	261	2893

The sample composition by gender is nearly identical for the group completing the pre-performance questionnaire (51% female), the post-performance questionnaire (51% female), and the follow-up group six months later (52% female). However, the composition of the control group is markedly different, only comprising 26% girls. As such, the aggregated responses of the control group may be driven by gender and thus not a good example from which to draw inferences about the effectiveness of the performances on changing attitudes.

3.4 Confidentiality, ethics and consent

Prior to the performance, and completion of the first questionnaire, a representative from the Alternative Learning & Progression Service provided the young people with information about the play they were going to watch and were told they would be asked to complete two questionnaires. They were also told that participation was voluntary; if they did not want to take part, they did not have to. The questionnaires were anonymous. Participants were reminded not to write their name or other identifying information on the questionnaires. As the questionnaires were paper-based, the young people could choose not to answer any question that they did not want to.

‘It’s No Joke!’ is performed by three actors recruited and trained by The Comedy School for each school tour. It was written and designed for mainstream schools as well as for young people at risk of offending. A fast moving succession of intercutting scenes uses comedy to address the issues of anti-social behaviour and weapon-

related crime. Each performance is followed by a discussion with the audience where the young people can ask the characters why they chose to do what they did and what the consequences would have been if they had made different choices.

Pre- and post-performance resource sheets are available for teachers to download from The Comedy School website at <https://www.thecomedschool.com/its-no-joke.shtml>.

3.5 Evaluation tools

The questionnaires used were developed in line with best-practice principles of surveying young people. They were intentionally kept short and simple in order to facilitate high levels of completion and accuracy. To each question asked (see Section 4.1), simple tick-box answers of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ were requested.

- *Have you ever thought about carrying a knife or weapon yourself?*
- *Do you think carrying a knife or weapon is a way to keep you safe?*
- *Do you think the use of a knife or other weapon only affects the people carrying them?*
- *If you knew a friend was carrying a knife or other weapon would you try and stop them?*
- *If you met someone you didn't know who was carrying a knife or other weapon, would you do something?*

The first questionnaire was distributed to the schools prior to the day of the performance. These were completed in school and brought by the teachers on the day of the performance. The second questionnaire was completed immediately after the discussion with the actors following the performance, in the group setting, and collected by school staff before they returned to their school.

No qualitative evaluation of the performances was requested from either the pupils or teachers, although positive informal feedback was received but not recorded.

The follow-up and control questionnaires (asking the same questions) were sent directly to the participating schools and completed in class time. They were collected and returned by the schools.

3.6 Methodological limitations

This research is based on a before-and-after evaluation design. While it is a more effective method for evaluating change than many other non-experimental designs, there may be some limitations due to threats to the internal validity of the design. However, it is still a useful method for providing insight, and the evidence provided as part of this research can be built upon using different methods in the future.

Given the anonymous and quantitative nature of the study we cannot establish in-depth reasons why attitudes are held. We also do not have access to any background information on respondents, aside from their gender, so we cannot establish causal or correlational reasons for their attitude.

All the schools that took part were self-selecting, which is likely to mean they serve wards where anti-social behaviour has already had a greater impact on them than on those schools which chose not to participate. This may introduce a bias in the results that cannot be factored out. In future iterations it should be possible to include more detail about the schools themselves and the catchment areas they serve.

The expediency of asking only five questions with simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers can only provide global measures of attitude changes.

An additional limitation is that the wording of the questions differed slightly between the two questionnaires. Whilst it is not anticipated that those changes altered the meaning or understanding of the questions, future iterations will need to look more closely at the design of the questions and what is being asked.

4. Quantitative Results

4.1 Outcomes

A total of five different behavioural and attitudinal questions were included in the questionnaires. Across these questions a number of significant attitudinal changes were observed, summarised in Table 2 below. Watching a performance of 'It's No Joke!'

- reduced the number of young people who would consider carrying a knife,
- reduced the number who thought carrying a knife was a way to keep safe,
- reduced the number who thought using a knife only affected the person carrying it, and
- increased the number who would do something if they knew a friend was carrying a knife.

Table 2: Attitudinal changes immediately following the performance and six months later.

Questions	Control group (% yes) n=261	Pre-performance (% yes) n=1063	Post-performance (% yes) n=1207	Follow-up group (% yes) n=362	Change pre- to post	Change pre- to follow-up
Would you consider carrying a knife?	11	9	4	6	-5%*	-3%
Does carrying a knife keep you safe?	28	20	12	20	-8%*	0%
Does using a knife only affect the one carrying it?	10	27	13	13	-14%*	-14%*
Would you stop a friend carrying a knife?	87	83	89	92	+6%*	+9%*
Would you do something if a stranger was carrying?	75	75	66	58	-9%*	-17%*

* statistically significant difference at $p<0.05$

The responses to each question are discussed in turn in the following sub-sections. Multiple comparisons are made

- between pre- and post-performance attitudes, to assess instant impact on attitudes,
- between attitudes of the control group (who did not see the performance) and post-performance attitudes, to assess whether it was the treatment, i.e. the performance, which caused any changes in attitudes found, and

- between pre-performance attitudes and attitudes six months after the performance (the ‘follow-up group’), to assess whether any changes in attitudes are lasting.

In addition, we have looked at differences in baseline attitudes reported by those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not.

Independent samples t-tests were used to assess differences in pre- and post-performance attitudes. Significance is established at the $p<0.05$ level.

(i) Attitudes towards carrying a knife

Pre-performance question: *Have you ever thought about carrying a knife or weapon yourself?*

Overall, 9% of respondents said they had thought about carrying a knife or weapon. This splits into 12% of boys and 7% of girls. The difference is statistically significant.

Post-performance question: *Would you consider carrying a knife or weapon yourself?*

Overall, 4% of respondents said they would consider carrying a knife or weapon. This splits into 5% of boys and 3% of girls. The difference is not statistically significant.

In the post-test, 4% of respondents said they would consider carrying a knife or weapon compared to 9% in the pre-test. This is a statistically significant decrease.

Of the control group who did not see the performance, 11% said they would consider carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the post-test and control group is statistically significant, suggesting the reduction in those reporting that they would consider carrying a knife or weapon may be due to the treatment, i.e. the performance. However, the limitation in terms of gender representation of the control group also needs to be kept in mind.

Six months later, 6% of those who had seen the performance said they would consider carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the pre-test and follow-up group (a 3% reduction) is approaching statistical significance at $p=0.07$. This suggests the reduction in those reporting that they would consider carrying a knife or weapon may be a lasting attitude. Table 3 summarises the attitudinal changes split by gender.

Table 3: Attitudinal changes, split by gender.

Demographics	Control group ‘yes’ response % (n)	Pre- performance ‘yes’ response % (n)	Post- performance ‘yes’ response % (n)	Follow-up ‘yes’ response % (n)
Boys	12 (32)	12 (60)	5 (27)	6 (7)
Girls	9 (9)	7 (38)	3 (18)	6 (8)

(ii) Attitudes on whether carrying a knife keeps an individual safe

Pre-performance question: *Do you think carrying a knife or weapon is a way to keep you safe?*

Overall, 20% of respondents said ‘yes’, split into 24% of boys and 16% of girls. The difference is statistically significant.

If we look at whether there are differences in this attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not, we see 62% who have considered carrying a knife thought it was a way to keep them safe, compared with 15% of those who have not considered carrying a knife. This is a statistically significant difference.

Post-performance question: *Would you feel safer if you carried a knife or other weapon?*

Overall, 12% of respondents said ‘yes’. This splits into 16% of boys and 8% of girls. The difference is statistically significant.

In the post-test 12% said ‘yes’ compared to 20% in the pre-test. This is a statistically significant drop.

Twenty eight percent of the control group said they would feel safer if they were carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the post-test and control group is statistically significant, suggesting the reduction in those reporting that they would feel safer carrying a knife or weapon is due to the treatment, i.e. the performance. Again, the limitation in terms of gender representation of the control group needs to be kept in mind.

Six months later, 20% of those who had seen the performance said they would feel safer if they were carrying a knife or other weapon. There is no difference between the pre-test and follow-up group, suggesting the immediate change in attitude does not last. Table 4 summarises the attitudinal changes split by gender.

Table 4: Attitudinal changes, split by gender.

Demographics	Control group ‘yes’ response % (n)	Pre- performance ‘yes’ response % (n)	Post- performance ‘yes’ response % (n)	Follow-up ‘yes’ response % (n)
Boys	31 (81)	24 (124)	16 (95)	19 (23)
Girls	21 (20)	16 (83)	8 (49)	21 (28)

(iii) Attitudes towards who is affected if a knife is used

Pre-performance question: *Do you think the use of a knife or other weapon only affects the people carrying them?*

Overall, 73% thought the use of a knife or other weapon affected more people than just those carrying them. This is split into 71% of boys and 75% of girls. The difference is not statistically significant.

We see no differences in this attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not: 73% of both groups thought the use of a knife affected more than just the person carrying the knife.

Post-performance question: *If someone uses a knife or other weapon do you think it affects more people than those directly involved?*

Overall, 87% said yes. This splits to 85% of boys and 89% of girls. The difference is statistically significant.

In the post-test 87% said 'yes' compared to 73% in the pre-test. This is a statistically significant increase.

Ninety percent of the control group said they thought carrying a knife or other weapon affected more than those directly involved. This figure is unexpected given it is closer to the post-test group than the pre-test group. As such, we cannot be sure that the change in attitudes between pre- and post-performance questionnaires is solely due to the performance itself. However, this unexpected result may also be driven by the gender differences between the control group and the other groups.

Six months later, 87% of those who had seen the performance said they thought carrying a knife or other weapon affected more than those directly involved. The difference between the pre-test and follow-up group is statistically significant. This suggests that the attitude change caused by the performance is lasting. Table 5 summarises the attitudinal changes split by gender.

Table 5: Attitudinal changes, split by gender.

Demographics	Control group 'yes' response % (n)	Pre- performance 'yes' response % (n)	Post- performance 'yes' response % (n)	Follow-up 'yes' response % (n)
Boys	89 (234)	71 (368)	85 (502)	85 (102)
Girls	92 (87)	75 (400)	89 (544)	89 (120)

(iv) Attitudes towards meeting a friend carrying a knife

Pre-performance question: *If you knew a friend was carrying a knife or other weapon would you try and stop them?*

Overall, 83% said yes; 82% of boys and 84% of girls. The difference is not statistically significant.

If we look at whether there are differences in this attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not, we see 69%

who have considered carrying a knife would try to stop a friend carrying compared with 84% of those who have not considered carrying a knife. This is a statistically significant difference.

Post-performance question: *Would you try and change a friend's mind if you knew he or she was carrying a knife or other weapon?*

Overall, 89% said yes; 88% of boys and 91% of girls. The difference is not statistically significant.

In the post-test 89% said 'yes' compared to 83% in the pre-test. This is a statistically significant increase.

Eighty-three percent of the control group said they would try to change a friend's mind if they knew they were carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the post-test and control group is statistically significant, suggesting the increase in those reporting that they would try to change a friend's mind is due to the treatment, i.e. the performance. However, the limitation in terms of gender representation of the control group also needs to be considered.

Six months later, 92% of those who had seen the performance said they would try to change a friend's mind if they knew they were carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the pre-test and follow-up group is statistically significant, suggesting that the attitude change caused by the performance is lasting.

If we look at whether there are differences in this attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not after watching the performance, we see 62% who said they would consider carrying a knife would try to stop a friend carrying a knife or other weapon, compared with 91% for those who would not consider carrying a knife. This is a statistically significant difference. Table 6 summarises the attitudinal changes split by gender.

Table 6: Attitudinal changes, split by gender.

Demographics	Control group 'yes' response % (n)	Pre- performance 'yes' response % (n)	Post- performance 'yes' response % (n)	Follow-up 'yes' response % (n)
Boys	81 (214)	82 (424)	88 (519)	87 (108)
Girls	89 (85)	84 (452)	91 (554)	97 (133)

(v) Attitudes towards meeting a stranger carrying a knife

Pre-performance question: *If you met someone you didn't know who was carrying a knife or other weapon, would you do something?*

Overall, 75% said yes. This is split into 74% of boys and 76% of girls. The difference is not statistically significant.

If we look at whether there are differences in this attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not, we see 67% who have considered carrying a knife would do something if they met someone they didn't know who was carrying, compared with 76% for those who have not considered carrying a knife. However, this is not a statistically significant difference ($p=0.06$).

We also find that if they said that they would try to stop a friend who was carrying a knife they are more likely to do something if they met someone they didn't know who was carrying: 79% would do something, compared with 54% of those who would not try to stop a friend carrying a knife – a statistically significant difference.

Post-performance question: *Would you do anything if you met someone you didn't know who was carrying a knife or other weapon?*

Overall, 66% said yes. This is split into 64% of boys and 68% of girls. The difference is not statistically significant.

In the post-test 66% said 'yes' compared to 75% in the pre-test. This is a statistically significant decrease.

Seventy five percent of the control group said they would do something if they met someone they didn't know who was carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the post-test and control group is statistically significant, suggesting the decrease in those reporting that they would do something is due to the treatment, i.e. the performance. However, the limitation in terms of gender representation of the control group also needs to be kept in mind.

Six months later, 58% of those who had seen the performance said they would do something if they met someone they didn't know who was carrying a knife or other weapon. The difference between the pre-test and follow-up group is statistically significant, suggesting that the attitude change caused by the performance is lasting. This was a *drop* in the numbers who would do something, a strong indication that they had changed their minds during the intervening six months.

If we look at whether there are differences in this attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife or other weapon and those who have not after watching the performance, we see 47% who said they would consider carrying a knife would do something if they met someone they didn't know who was carrying, compared with 67% for those who would not consider carrying a knife. This is a statistically significant difference.

We also find that if after the session they said that they would try to stop a friend who was carrying a knife or other weapon they are more likely to do something if they met someone they didn't know who was carrying: 70% would do something, compared with 29% of those who would not try to stop a friend carrying a knife – a statistically significant difference. Table 7 summarises the attitudinal changes split by gender.

Table 7: Attitudinal changes, split by gender.

Demographics	Control group 'yes' response % (n)	Pre- performance 'yes' response % (n)	Post- performance 'yes' response % (n)	Follow-up 'yes' response % (n)
Boys	75 (198)	74 (381)	64 (380)	51 (63)
Girls	76 (73)	76 (408)	68 (416)	67 (88)

4.2 Baseline attitudes to knife crime

Baseline attitudes, measured using the questionnaires immediately prior to the performance, show 9% of young people would consider carrying a knife or other weapon. However, one in five believe carrying a knife or other weapon is a way to keep safe. One in four believed that the use of a knife or other weapon only affected those who used it. When asked whether they would try to stop a friend if they knew they were carrying a knife or other weapon, 83% would. This figure was lower, at 75%, when young people were asked whether they'd do something if they knew a stranger was carrying a knife or other weapon.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 The research question

In the year from September 2018 to August 2019, possession of weapons in Luton increased by 57.8% and was the sixth highest rate out of 104 postcode areas in England and Wales (plumplot.co.uk, based on UK police data).

‘It’s No Joke!’ is a short comedy play that captures the attention of young people through humour and delivers a strong message about the dangers of carrying a knife.

In December 2018, over 1,400 young people in schools in Luton benefited from the delivery of free performances of this anti-knife crime play.

The aim of the research is to find out whether watching a single performance of the play can change the attitudes of young people aged 9 to 12 years towards carrying knives.

5.2 The findings

The research shows that the attitudes of pupils in this younger age group do change after watching a single performance of the play. ‘Yes’ responses to the first question ‘Have you ever thought of carrying a knife?’ showed a statistically significant decrease of 5% after the play, and a 7% decrease against the control group. Six months later it had dropped to a decrease of 3%, which isn’t statistically significant.

To the question ‘Do you think carrying a knife is a way to keep safe?’ there was a statistically significant change compared with the control group: 28% of the control group said it was, and 12% said it was after they had seen the play. However, six months later it had returned to 20%, a change that was not statistically significant, but suggesting the immediate attitude change did not last.

When asked if they thought the use of a knife affects more people than those involved, 87% thought that it did after seeing the play, a statistically significant increase of 14%. Of the control group, 90% believed it did. Six months later, 87% continued to believe it did, a statistically significant result that supports the suggestion that this immediate attitude change lasts.

Similarly, when asked if they would try to stop a friend from carrying, the change from 83% (the same as the control group) before the performance to 89% after is statistically significant and a result of watching the performance. Six months later this had increased to 92%, again supporting the suggestion that the immediate attitude change lasts.

The answers to the last question if they would do something if they met a stranger who they knew was carrying a knife are less expected. After seeing the play there was a decrease in the number who said they would from 75% before (the same as the control) to 66% after. This was even greater after six months, from 75% before to 58%, a 17% decrease, strongly suggesting that the immediate attitude change lasted and was also a result of watching the play. Notably, this was not the same as the

result in Barnet six years earlier, where the change was an increase of 10% after the play and 7% a year later.

It is possible that this final result is both a result of seeing the play and the circumstances facing young people in Luton in 2018, who may be very fearful of the risk posed by people carrying a knife who they don't know. The play might well have heightened their awareness of the dangers. As regards Barnet, six years ago it was not a borough where knife crime was considered a serious problem and could explain why a more positive response was recorded, although it too was less a year later.

A statistically significant difference between boys and girls was recorded in answers to the first question 'Have you considered carrying a knife?' Pre-test the difference between boys and girls who had considered carrying was 12% and 7%, and post-test this was 5% and 3% (although post-test the difference was not statistically significant). To the second question 'Is carrying a knife a way to keep safe?' the pre-test difference between boys and girls who thought it was a way to keep safe was 24% and 16%, and post-test 16% and 8%, which was also statistically significant. The differences in answers between boys and girls to the other three questions were not statistically significant.

In terms of the difference in attitude between those who have considered carrying a knife and those who haven't, it can readily be seen that the majority of those who have considered carrying think that it is a way to keep safe (62% compared with 15%, a statistically significant difference) and would be less inclined to try and stop a friend from carrying (69% compared with 84%).

Interestingly, 79% who said they would try to stop a friend from carrying would also do something if they met a stranger they knew was carrying, compared with 54% of those who would not try to stop a friend from carrying, a statistically significant difference. This seems to suggest that increasing the confidence of young people to find a way to make theirs and their friends' lives safer also means they are more inclined to do something if they met someone they don't know who is carrying a knife. This is an important lesson for young people trying to navigate a safe path for themselves as they transition from primary to secondary education.

5.3 Comparison with 2012 research

In June 2012, the Flavasum Trust used pre- and post-questionnaires to evaluate the impact of the same play (but different actors) on Year 6 pupils in primary schools in the London Borough of Barnet. A total of 1847 questionnaires were completed before the play, 1180 after, and a year later by 450 pupils who had seen the play. A comparison can be made with those questions that correspond.

Answers to two of the three questions common to both Barnet and Luton show some similarity. Those who had thought of carrying a knife were very low in Barnet (2%) and there was no change over a 12-month period. In Luton, the number was higher at 9%, and dropped to 4% immediately after the performance, but increased to 6% six months later.

When asked if carrying a knife would keep them safer, a similar positive change was recorded for pupils in both Barnet and Luton immediately after the play (-7% in Barnet and -8% in Luton), although in Luton the change was reduced to zero six months later. Table 8 shows the comparison of attitudinal changes between Barnet in 2012 and Luton in 2018.

Table 8: A comparison of attitudinal changes between Barnet (2012) and Luton (2018).

Questions	LB Barnet 2012 (%yes change)	LB Barnet (12 months later) (%yes change)	Luton 2018 (%yes change)	Luton (6 months later) (%yes change)
Would you consider carrying a knife?	0	0	-5	-3
Does carrying a knife keep you safe?	-7	n/a	-8	0
Does using a knife only affect the one carrying it?	n/a	n/a	-14	-14
Would you stop a friend carrying a knife?	n/a	n/a	+6	+9
Would you do something if a stranger was carrying?	+10	+7	-9	-17

The third question that was common to both – *Would you do something if you met a stranger who was carrying a knife?* – shows a very marked difference: 87% of Barnet pupils thought they would before seeing the play, increasing to 97% after, and decreasing to 94% twelve months later. In Luton, 75% thought they would, decreasing to 66% after, and decreasing further to 58% six months later.

5.4 Impact

It is quite clear from the findings above that there is a measurable and, for some attitudes, lasting impact on younger people who watch a single performance of an anti-knife comedy play like ‘It’s No Joke!’.

Out of the five questions asked, all changes were statistically significant and could be a result of having seen the performance. Four of the immediate changes lasted six months. Only one, whether carrying a knife was a way to keep safe, did not last six months, an unsurprising result given that they’ll have been mixing with young people in secondary school who might think that carrying a knife is a way to keep safe.

The principal results are greater awareness of the dangers of carrying a knife, that it is not a way to keep safe, and increased confidence to negotiate safer paths for themselves and their friends as they mature. Ultimately this could play a role in creating safer families and local communities.

5.5 Recommendations

Although there is evidence to show that watching a single performance can change attitudes, what is not so clear is whether lasting changes are influenced by the transition to a new school environment. It is recommended that the design of the impact evaluation in any future iteration is structured to find out if there are differences 12 months later for a cohort remaining in primary education (Year 5 to Year 6) and for the cohort that has transitioned to secondary education (Year 7 to Year 8).

It is also recommended that suitable cohorts are chosen from both primary and secondary schools that do not see a performance as a control to confirm the changes are a result of watching the play.

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