

SOUTHPORT INQUIRY · PHASE 2 SEMINAR

Weapons, young people and serious violence

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Three questions from the Inquiry

Q1

What does the evidence tell us about why young people carry weapons, including the relative importance of fear, self-protection, status, peer influence, grievance, availability and lack of trust in authorities?

Q2

Why do certain weapons appeal to young people or become more likely to be chosen and used in attacks and what role do the design, symbolism, concealability, perceived effectiveness or cultural meaning of specific knives and weapons play?

Q3

How do online spaces contribute to the normalisation, display, promotion or acquisition of weapons? What does this mean for prevention, disruption and early intervention before weapon-carrying escalates into violence

a

What is the contribution of knives and other weapons to serious violence?

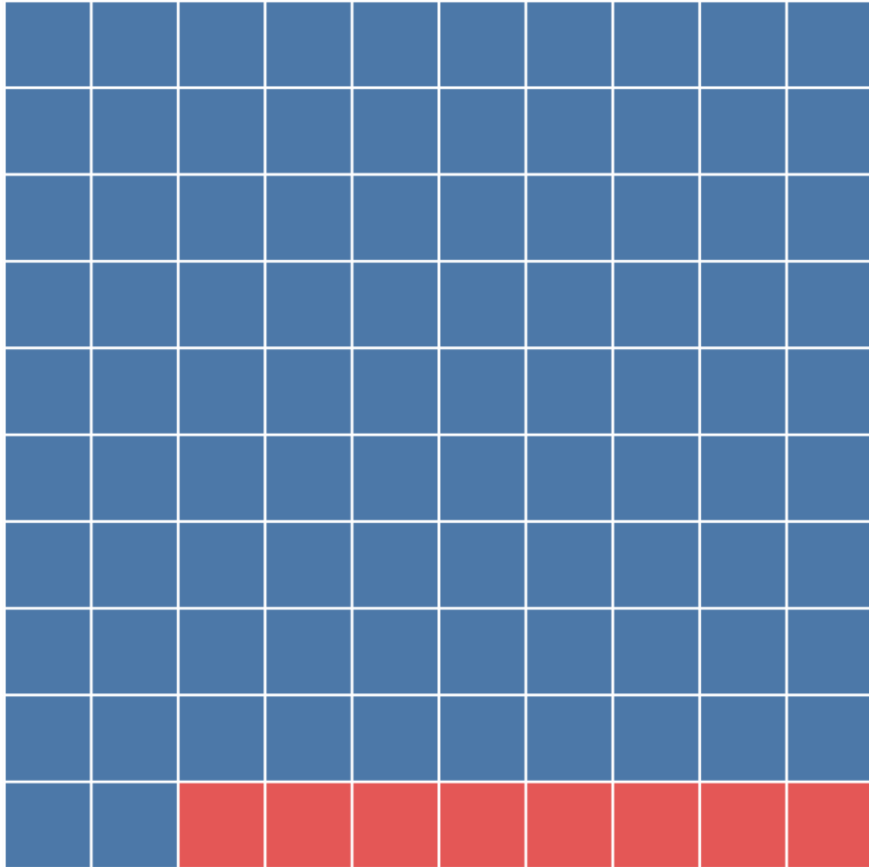
b

What is the prevalence of weapon-carrying by young people in England and Wales?

c

What are the patterns in the carrying and use of different knife types in England and Wales?

All violence (~1m incidents)

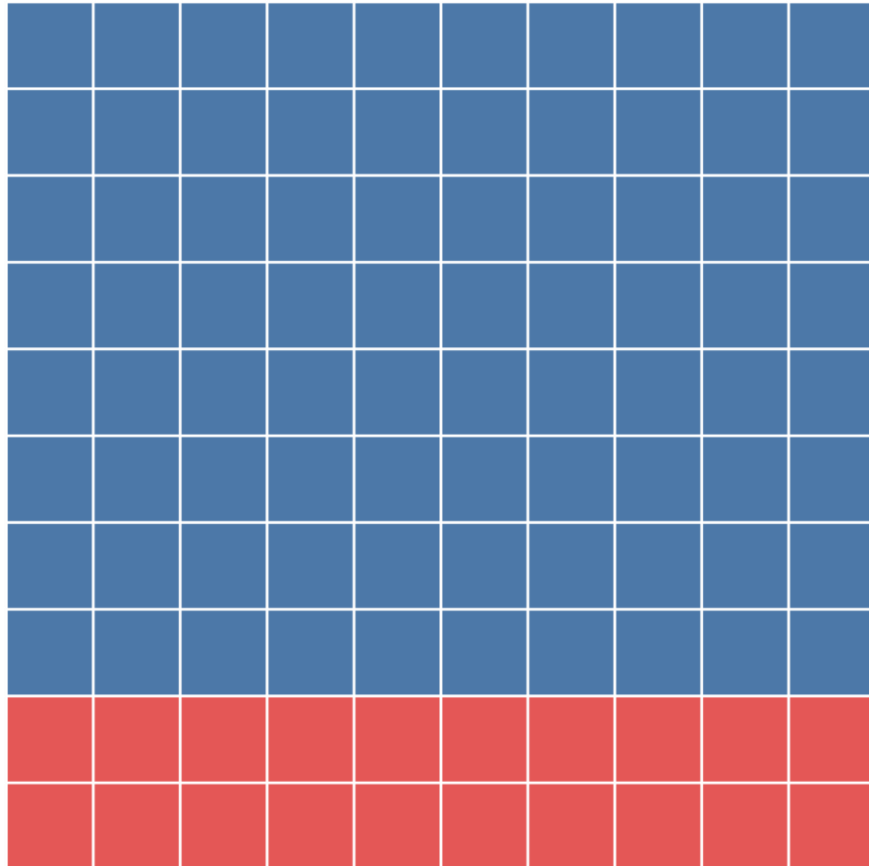


■ Knife/sharp object ■ Not knife/sharp object

Knives and sharp objects are relatively rare in violence

~8%

Violence admissions (~18,000 incidents/yr)

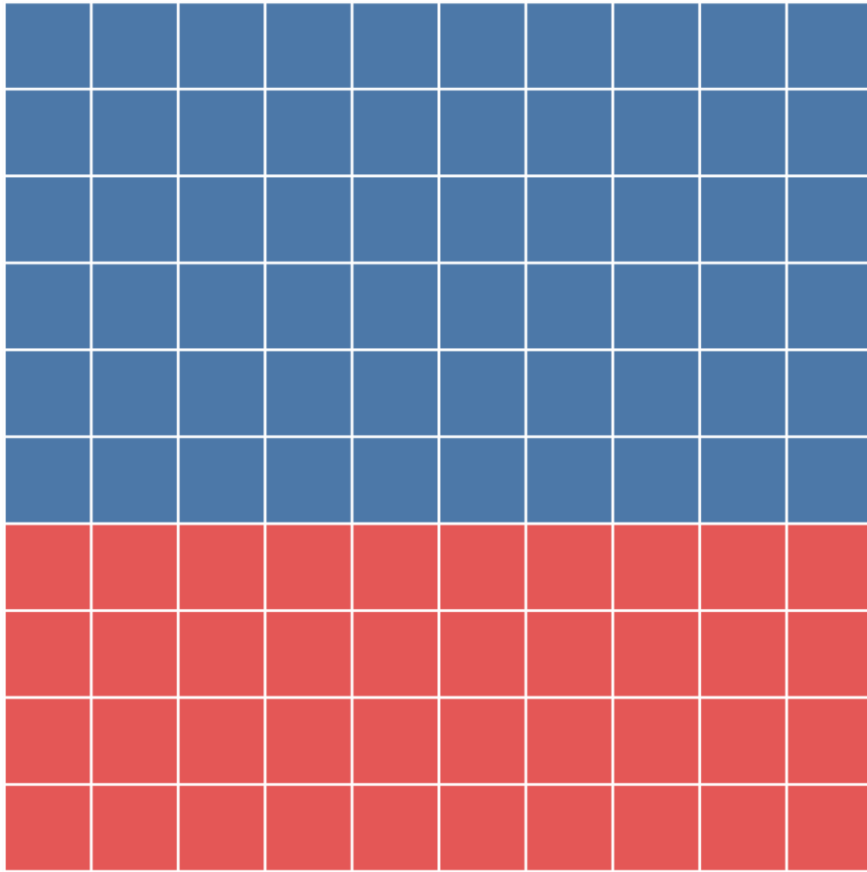


■ Knife/sharp object ■ Not knife/sharp object

**Knives and sharp objects
are increasingly common
in admissions**

~20%

Homicides (~500 incidents/yr)



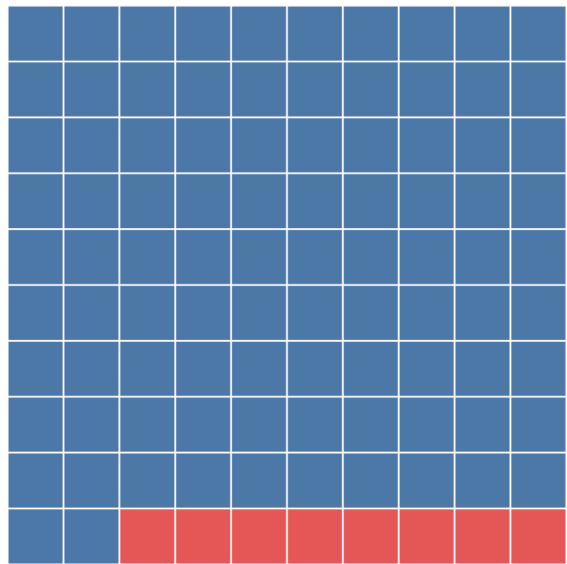
■ Knife/sharp object ■ Not knife/sharp object

**Knives and sharp objects
are the most common
method of homicide**

~40%

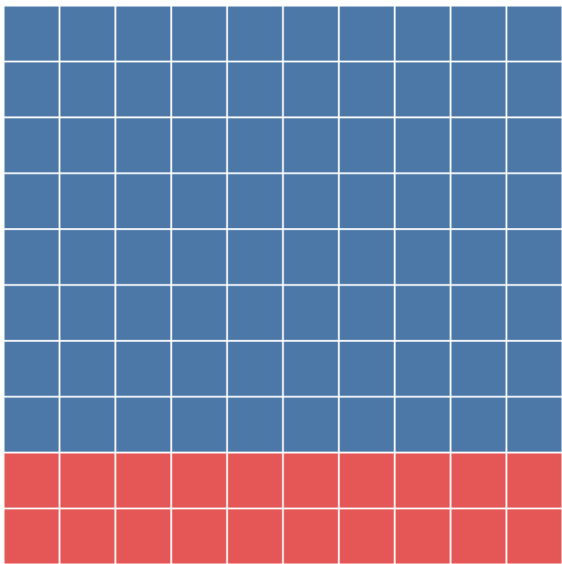
As the seriousness of the violent injury increases, so does the chance that a knife was used

All violence (~1m incidents)



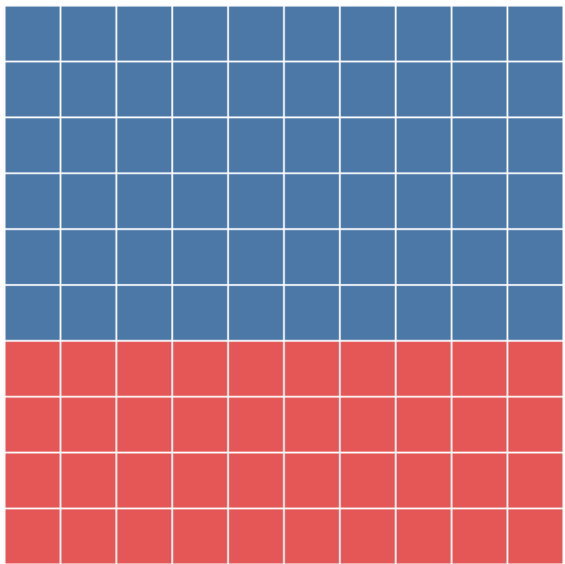
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Violence admissions (~18,000 incidents/yr)



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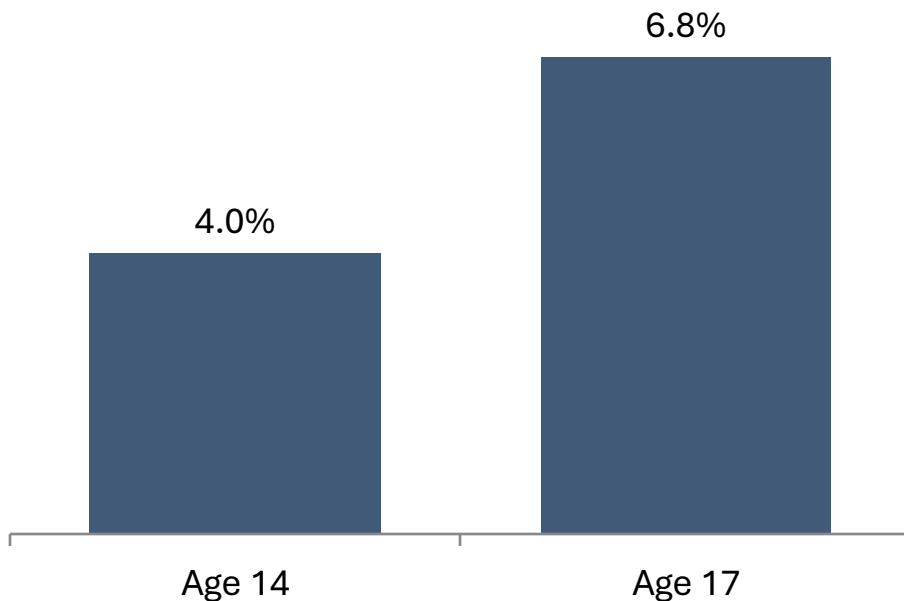
Homicides (~500 incidents/yr)



■ Knife/sharp object ■ Not knife/sharp object

Weapon-carrying is rare — but peaks in adolescence

Millennium Cohort Study (n≈19,000)



A rare behaviour overall

Secondary-school age surveys find 1–6% carried a weapon in the past year (MOPAC, 2023; YEF, 2024/25; ONS, 2025; Villadsen et al, 2021).

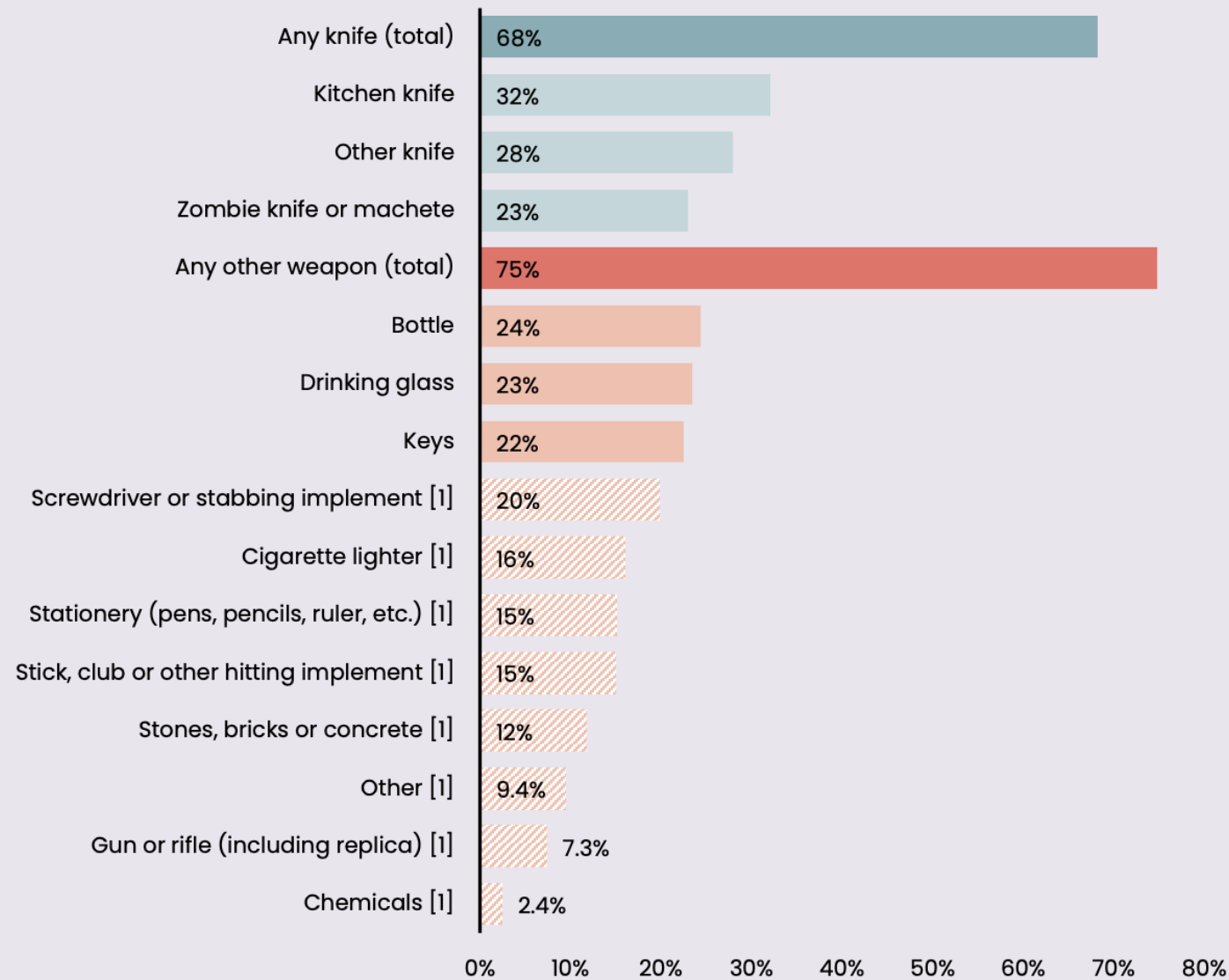
A small, persistent core

Most who carry do so rarely, but a core population carries frequently — this group drives much of the risk.

Rises with age

Prevalence peaks around age 17, consistent with the broader pattern of life-course involvement in violence.

FIGURE 1.6: TYPES OF WEAPONS CARRIED AS A PROPORTION OF 13–17-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAID THEY'D CARRIED A WEAPON IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS



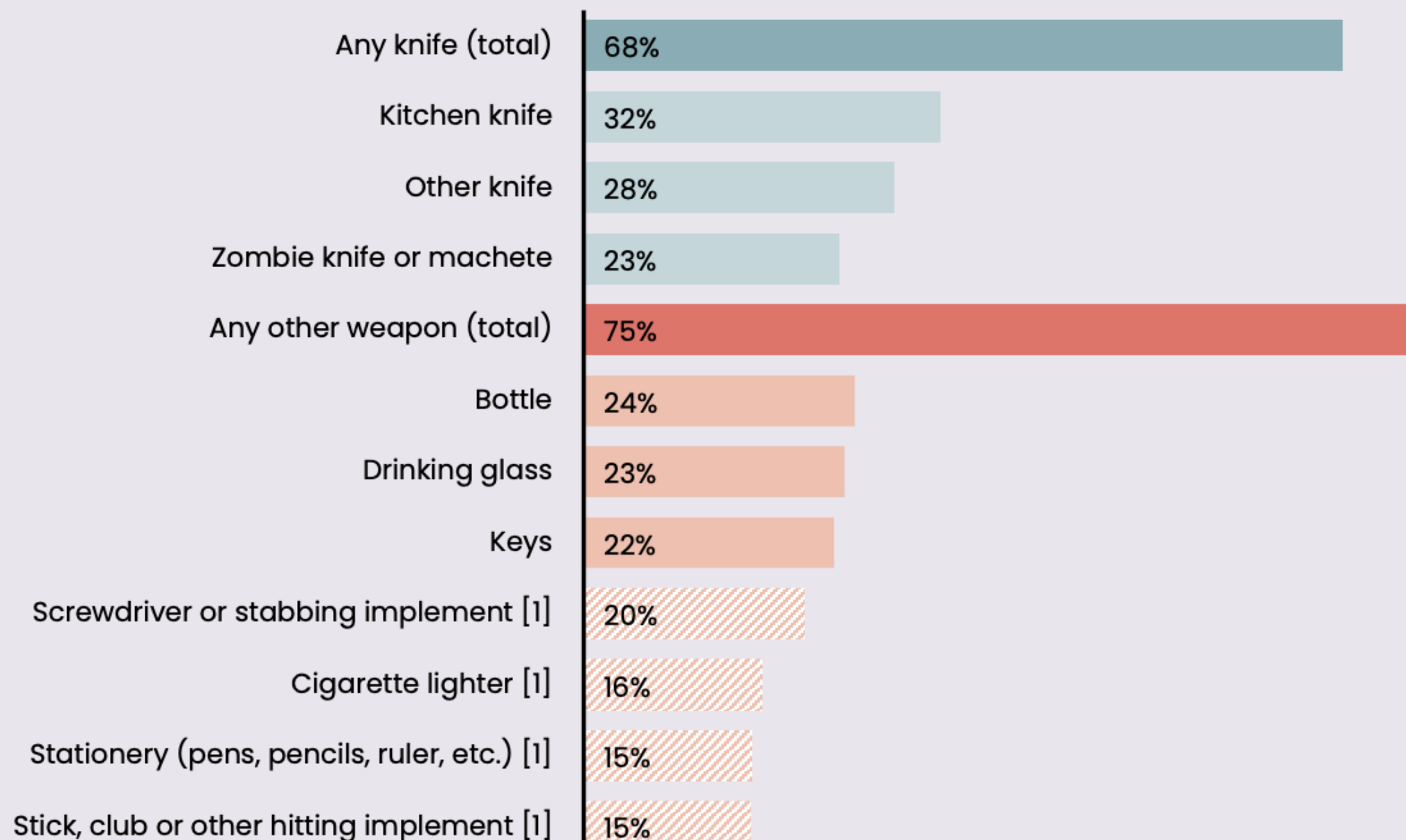
[1] Bars with striped shading have cell counts of less than 50, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Note. Proportions do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of weapon may have been carried.

2.1% of 13–17-year-olds in England and Wales carried a weapon at least once in the previous year

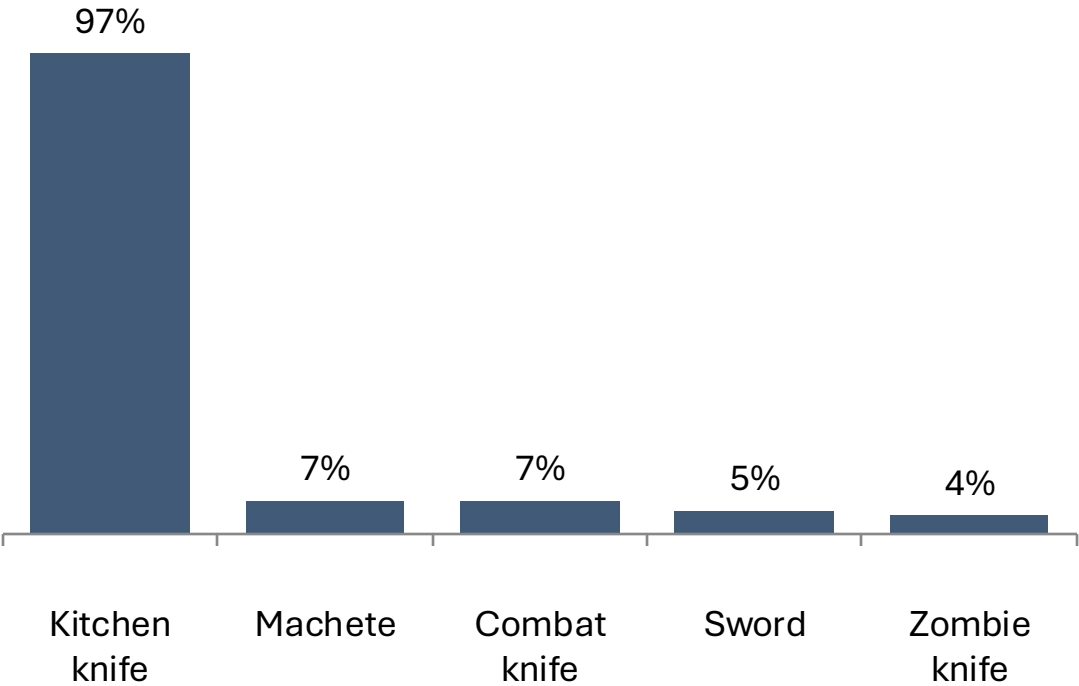
Source:
Youth Endowment Fund, 2025

FIGURE 1.6: TYPES OF WEAPONS CARRIED AS A PROPORTION OF 13-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAID THEY'D CARRIED A WEAPON IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

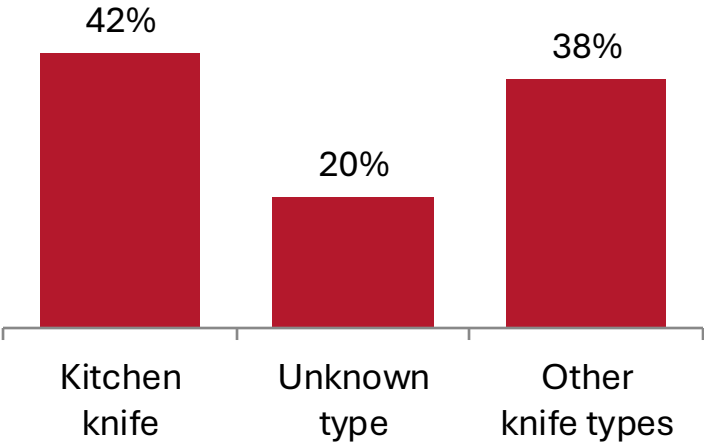


Kitchen knives dominate access and use — but relative to their accessibility, other types are used disproportionately in violence

Adult access to knife types



Knife type in homicides (2023–26)



Q1. What does the evidence tell us about why young people carry weapons, including the relative importance of fear, self-protection, status, peer influence, grievance, availability and lack of trust in authorities?

Risk and protective factors mirror those for serious violence generally

1

Gender & age

Boys are ~40% more likely to carry than girls; prevalence rises through adolescence, peaking around age 17.

2

Deprivation & adversity

Household poverty, poor parental mental health, and accumulated adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) raise risk in a dose-response pattern.

3

Bullying

Being bullied (~1.5×) or bullying others (~2×) both predict later weapon-carrying — though only perpetrating bullying predicts later violence.

4

Fear of victimisation

'Protection' is frequently given reason for weapon-carrying (not always the same of fear or protection).

Risk and protective factors mirror those for serious violence generally

5

Experience of violence

Probably the strongest predictor of weapon-carrying. Each experience of violence increased the likelihood of carrying a weapon in the next year by 6%

6

Trust in authorities

Lack of trust in police competence strongly correlates with weapon-carrying (entitlement)

7

Positive experiences protect

School connectedness, safe neighbourhoods and low-risk peer groups are protective against later weapon-carrying.

Carrying weapons is often about managing uncertainty

5x

more likely to have been a violence victim in the past year, among weapon-carriers vs non-carriers (79% vs 15%)

7x

more likely to have perpetrated violence in the same year, if carrying a weapon

+6%

increase in likelihood of carrying a weapon the following year, per incident of violence experienced

When protection feels absent, some young people describe an entitlement or need to carry a weapon.

A weapon can simultaneously offer protection AND signal a willingness to cause harm.

Q2. Why do certain weapons appeal to young people or become more likely to be chosen and used in attacks, and what role do the design, symbolism, concealability, perceived effectiveness or cultural meaning of specific knives and weapons play?

Weapon selection: the “Four A’s” framework

PUSH

Availability

How prevalent the weapon type is in the community — reduced by bans or restrictions on entry.

PUSH

Accessibility

How easily an individual can procure it — reduced by parental vigilance or age-verified sales.

PUSH

Affordability

Financial, legal and social cost of procurement — raised by pricing, detection risk, or credibility barriers.

PULL

Attractiveness

Instrumental & affective appeal of a weapon type — the key ‘pull’ factor that offsets high sourcing costs.

Attractiveness = instrumental effectiveness + affective reward

INSTRUMENTAL

Practical effectiveness for the weapon's purpose

Longer blades inflict more harm and keep distance from a target

A guard protects the user from self-injury

A more menacing weapon confers coercive power without violence

Greater sourcing effort signals deeper commitment to violence

AFFECTIVE

Emotional reward from possession and identity

A thrilling sense of breaking social rules

Reduced sense of vulnerability; enhanced physical confidence from 'bigger' knives

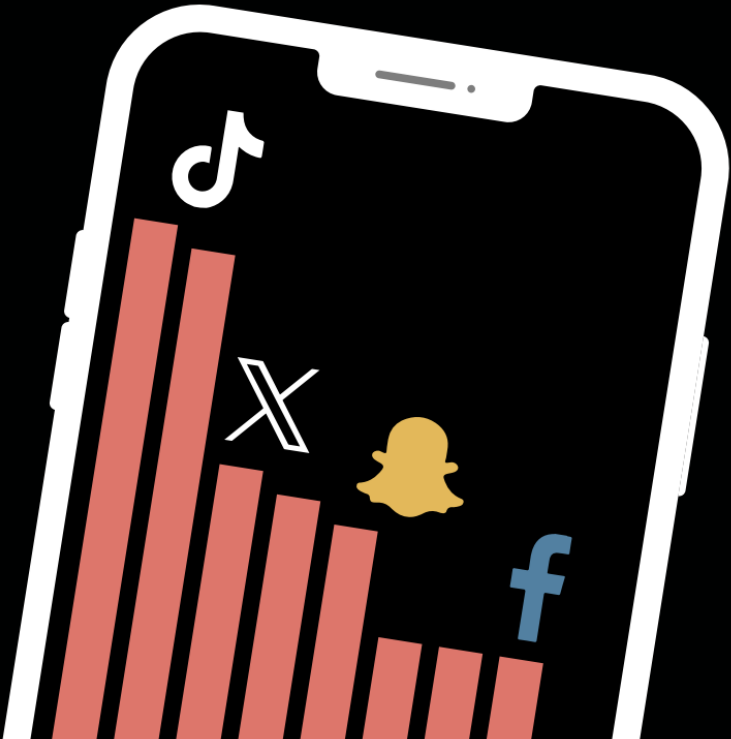
A source of power and 'mattering' for marginalised young people

Shapes reputation — an 'aggressive precaution' / street capital as well as gender identity

Q3a. How do online spaces contribute to the normalisation, display, promotion or acquisition of weapons?

Children, violence and vulnerability 2024

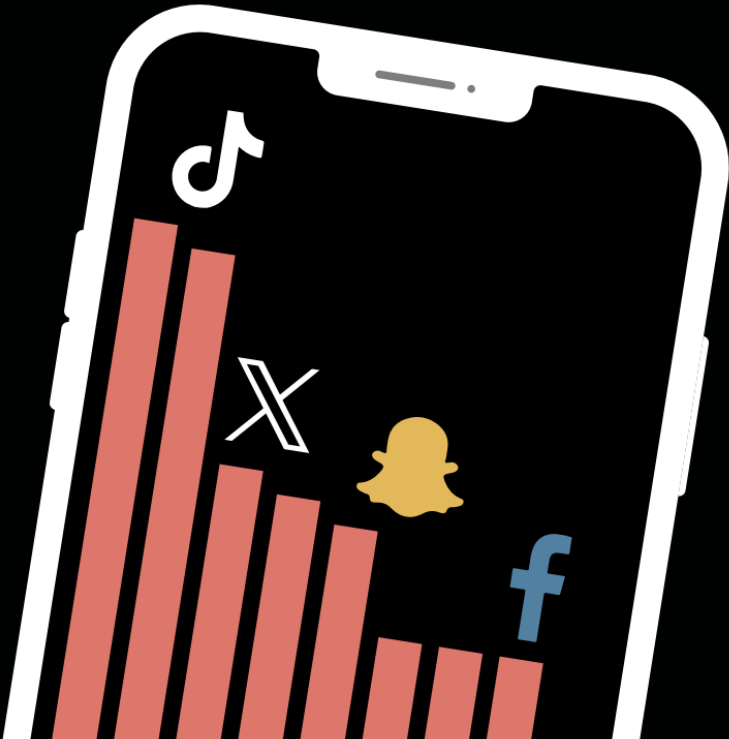
What role does social media play in violence affecting young people?



70% of children have seen real-world violence online in the past year

Children, violence and vulnerability 2024

What role does social media play in violence affecting young people?



**Around 1 in 3 have seen
real-world violence
involving weapons**

Children, violence and vulnerability 2024

What role does social media play in violence affecting young people?

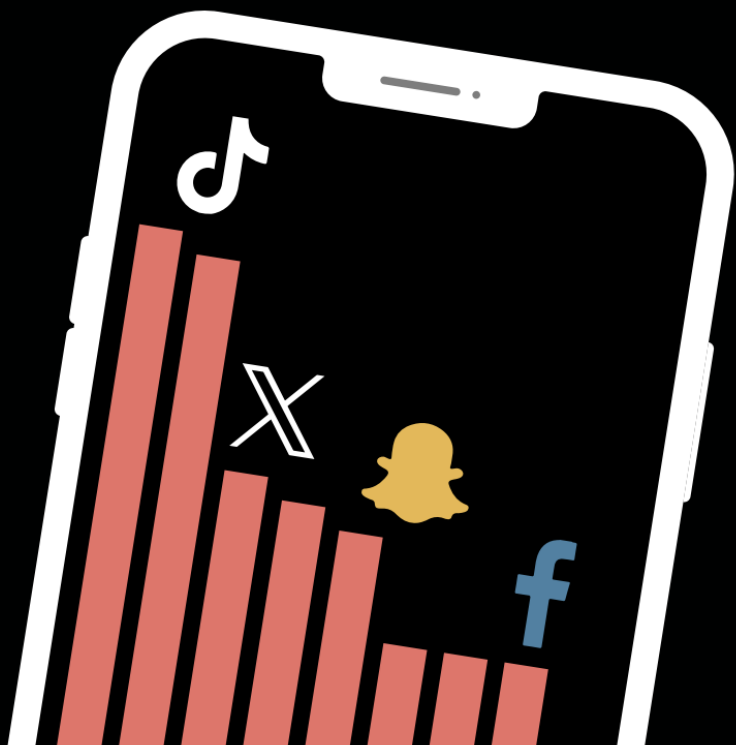
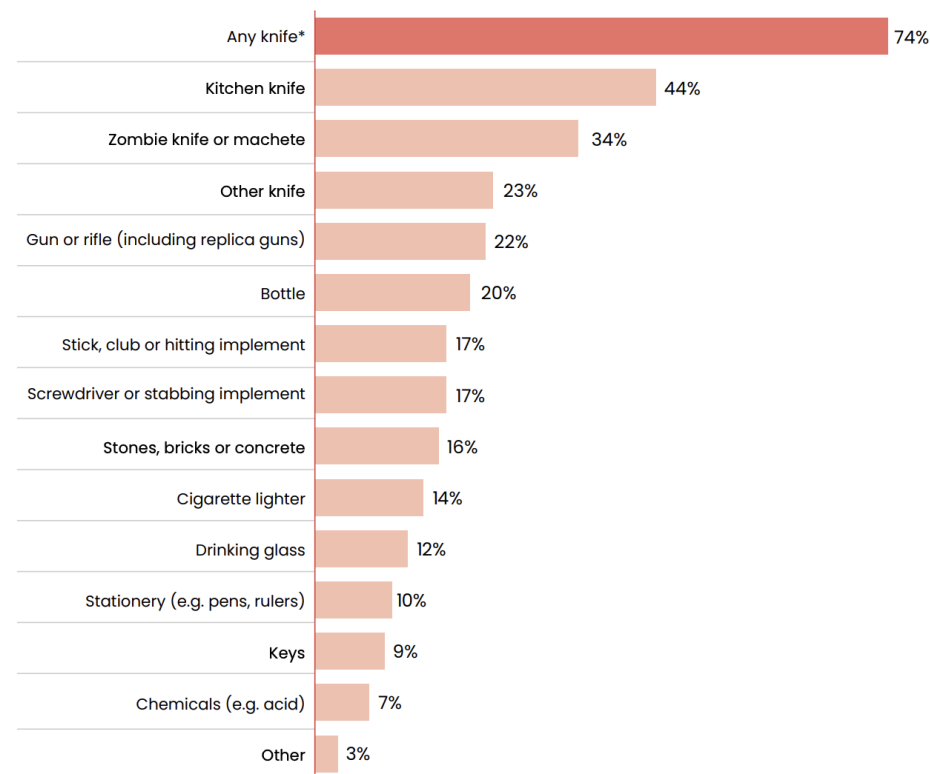


Figure 1.4: Types of weapons seen by 13–17-year-olds who have seen weapons content online in the past 12 months



*Kitchen knife, zombie knife or machete, or other knife.

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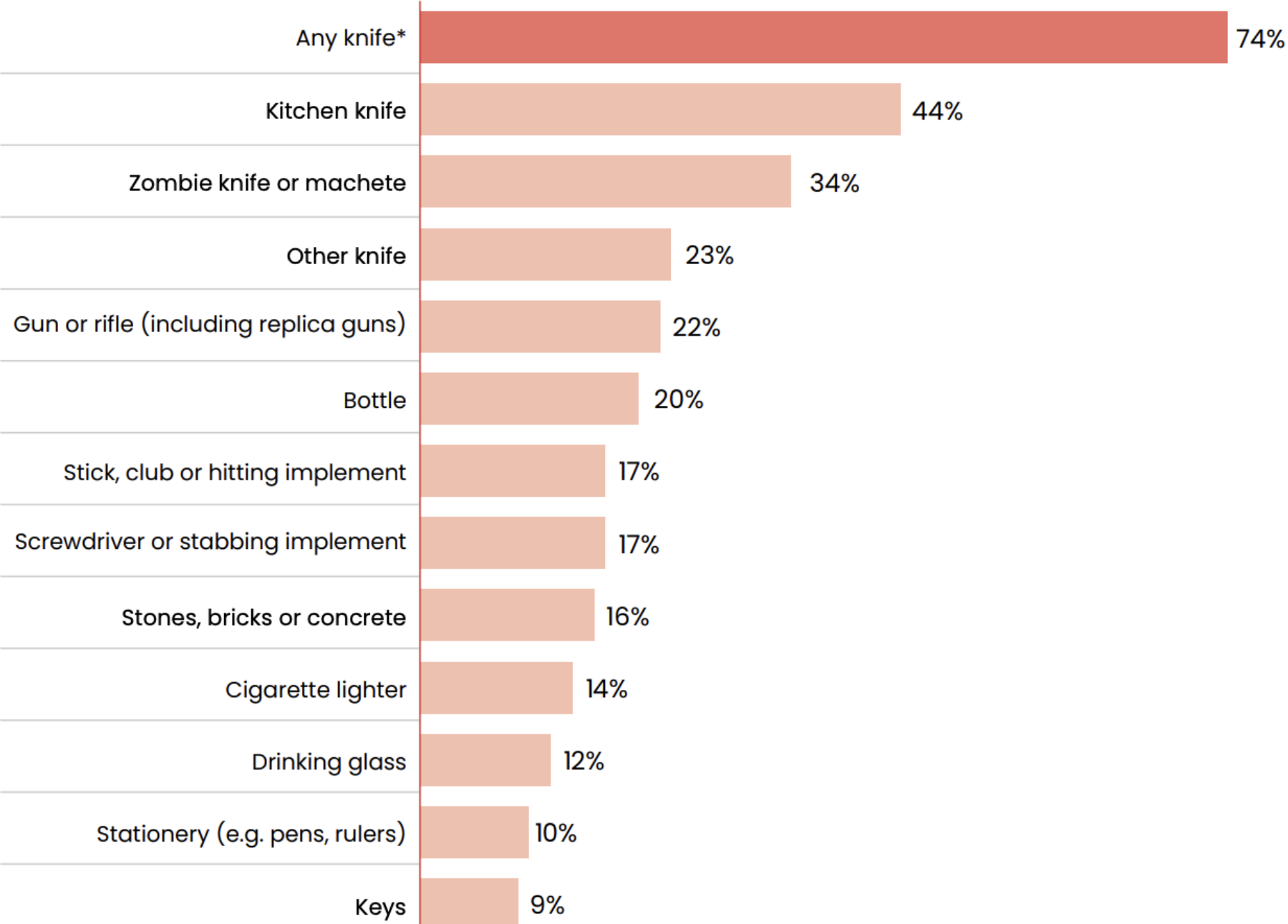
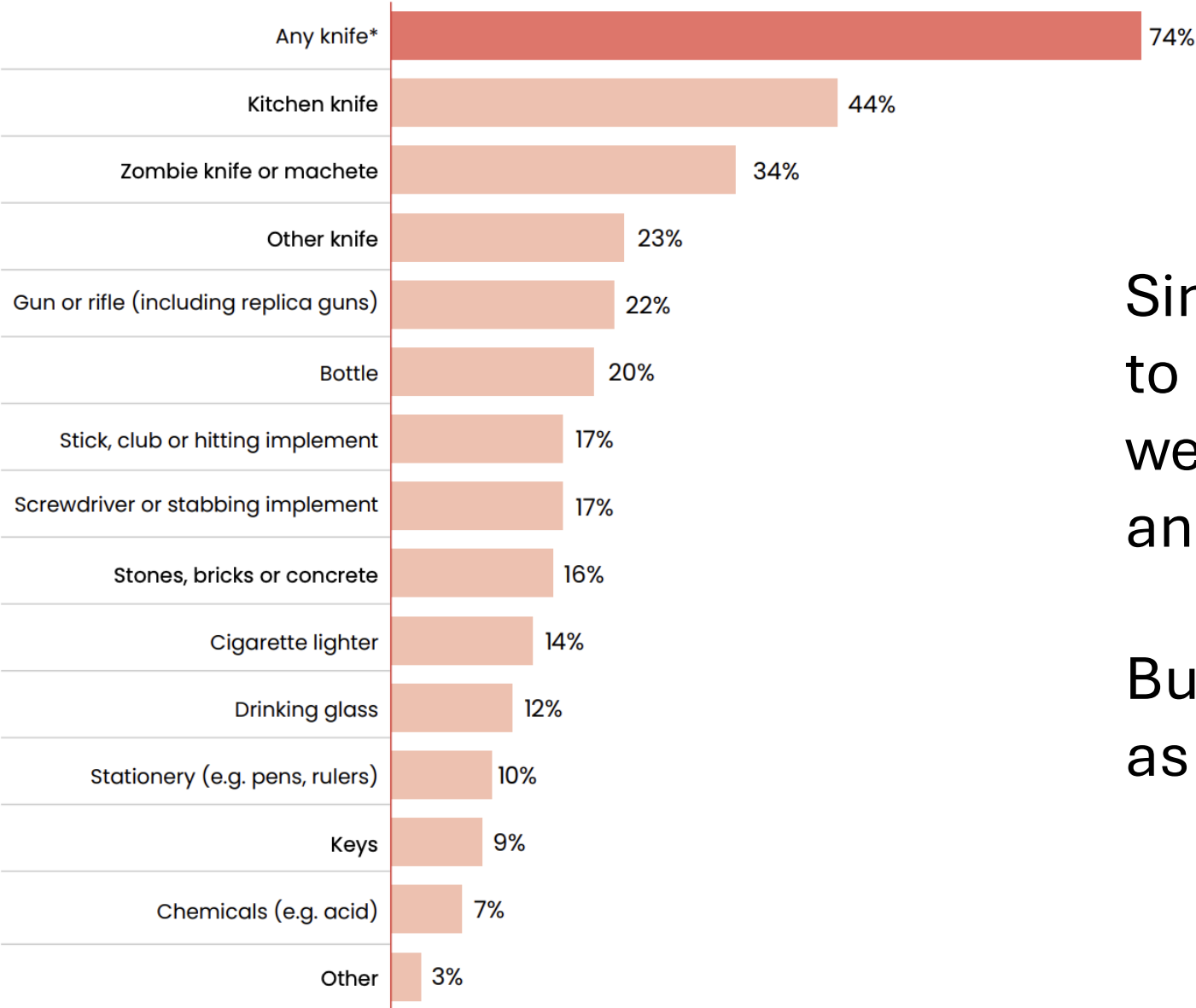


Figure 1.4: Types of weapons seen by 13–17-year-olds who have seen weapons content online in the past 12 months



Similar rates of exposure to online violence and weapon-carrying in 2024 and 2025

But weapon-carrying fell, as did violence

*Kitchen knife, zombie knife or machete, or other knife.

What does this mean for prevention, disruption and escalation?

1

Standardise knife-type recording

Establish a standard, low-burden method for police to record weapon types recovered in violence and seen online.

2

Treat weapon accumulation as a risk flag, not a verdict

Weapon accumulation should raise safeguarding concern — but the type procured matters more than volume alone as a predictor of serious risk.

3

Reduce the lethality of the most-used weapon

Since kitchen knives cause the most homicides, blunting sharp tips deserves strong consideration — while watching for displacement effects from restricting rarer weapon types.