




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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SUMMARY OFFENCES (PREVENTION OF KNIFE CRIME) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (6.51 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Summary Offences (Prevention of Knife Crime) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill following the member for Gregory, who is making a case that somehow this legislation is affecting shop owners and not actually reducing crime. I am just aghast, especially given that so many of those opposite have spoken in support of this legislation and about how it will make it harder for young people to get their hands on knives or other weapons. The member for Bonney himself said in this place that there is no silver bullet to stop knife crime, but this is another measure which will reduce access and availability, and access and availability absolutely play a role when it comes to reducing knife crime. Reducing access and availability will reduce knife crime. There is a direct correlation.

Yes, there are other layers and complexities with respect to knife crime and why this is a phenomenon that we are experiencing with young people, which is why I am particularly interested in the psychology behind young people carrying knives. Why do they carry knives and what do they intend on doing with them? The research is very clear. There is global research which suggests that many young people carry knives with the deliberate intention to harm but also to protect themselves or gain respect from peers. It is important to decrease fear of crime and give young people alternative strategies to build their self-esteem. Although it is not possible to predict whether and when an individual will commit a violent crime, research into the psychology of violent behaviour has uncovered those individual and social factors that increase the likelihood of a violent act.

Norms of behaviour are acquired through social learning from family or peers. These norms can lead to automatic behaviour choices. When aggressed, retaliation is the only response that comes to mind. Adolescence is a period of increased sensitivity to peer pressure, heightened interest in risk-taking and decreased sensitivity to punishment. This all adds to the risk of getting involved in violent conflicts. To work on the adolescent brain, deterrent and corrective measures should be built on positive feedback for good behaviour instead of negative feedback for bad behaviour. Certainty of punishment and not the harshness of punishment deters young people from crime, and we know this from the research. To decrease recidivism, custodial punishment must be accompanied by appropriate long-term psychological and social interventions. It is possible to change a young person's social environment or give them the cognitive tools to diminish the impact of a negative social environment. To increase the efficiency, all interventions when it comes to violent crime and knife crime should be designed based on scientific theories and evidence, and that is what we should be talking about in this place. Certainly accessibility and availability are an incredibly important part of this discussion.

Looking at the psychological factors behind knife crime has revealed a complex phenomenon. Based on statements from young people who have been interviewed, young people carry knives because they want to protect themselves or because they want to be respected by peers. Deterring them from carrying knives requires decreasing fear of crime and giving them alternative strategies to

build self-esteem. School suspension of those caught carrying knives may diminish other pupils' fear of victimisation but could also be seen as a medal of honour by those young people keen to raise their status amongst peers.

I was hosting a lunch with some young people at a cafe in my electorate not long ago. One young man of 16—let's call him James—decided to pull out a knife and show me then and there in the cafe that he was carrying a knife. Of course I was shocked. Why did James have a knife? What was he intending to do with it? It was very clear from his action that he was showing me because he wanted to gain my respect—that he wanted to show it off. He thought carrying it was a medal of honour. When I asked him why he was carrying it, he told me that he did carry it for self-protection. As a result of carrying this knife, he had been expelled from school and found himself then participating in a youth justice early intervention program. I could see how this knife had caused this spiral in this young man's life—taking it to school, getting expelled, then interacting with Youth Justice—and I could see it was having a really detrimental impact on his life, but at the same time he was sitting there thinking it was a badge of honour.

Young people trapped in cycles of violence carry knives with the intention of retaliating to previous verbal or physical attacks, and that is what James told me he was carrying it for. Although it is not possible to predict when and whether a violent crime will occur, research into the psychology of violent behaviour has uncovered the individual and situational factors that increase the likelihood of a violent act. James told me that his parents carried knives, that his dad had carried a knife his whole life as a means to protect himself, so it really was a case in this situation of 'monkey see, monkey do'. James had been raised in a family where carrying a knife was the norm, and this in turn impacted the way he was going about his own life.

With children and young people going through adolescence, we need to consider all of the social, family and economic impacts that lead to them committing crime, and I think about the importance of taking away the availability and accessibility of knives from our shops. I have seen knives for sale in shops in my electorate, and it scares me. It scares a lot of people in our community. I think removing them from these stores will give people some comfort that they are not readily available for children to buy at shops. As a parent, I would be absolutely shocked and horrified if I knew that my daughter had a knife or was carrying a knife. What would I do? I think these are all questions that a lot of parents in here might consider because it is a growing phenomenon. We are seeing more children buying knives and carrying them, and that is exactly why we have introduced this bill: to try to reduce the accessibility and availability of knives to young people in our community because they should not have knives—they do not need knives. I think our community will feel safer as a result of this bill being passed. I commend the bill to the House.