

Street gangs in Britain

1 Statistics: Get the picture?

a) Describe what you see in the pictures.



 b) Now read these statistics. Do any of them surprise you? Talk about it with your class.

There are more than 170 gangs in London. Three of them are for girls only.

As many as 50,000 teenagers belong to gangs in the UK.

In 2007 one teenager was killed every week in Britain. Half of them lived in London.

In Britain 11–16-year olds are responsible for 40% of robberies.

About 60% of murders are knife crimes.

There are 66,000 reports of anti-social behaviour¹ every day.

c) What is the situation in Germany? Find some statistics, you can use the Internet, and compare them to the ones in Britain.

¹**anti-social** [æntɪ'səʊʃl] **behaviour**: e.g. drinking alcohol on the streets, damaging a car/a house (e.g. with graffiti), being aggressive, cruel towards others, carrying a knife/a gun, using violence, taking drugs

2 Causes and solutions

- a) Before you read the texts below, make a list of reasons why some teenagers might join a gang and get involved in crime.
- b) Now read the stories. Make notes on some of the causes of teenage violence. Do they match your list?

Leroy, 18, ex-gang member

My dad left when I was 5. My mum started taking drugs and had a violent boyfriend. I was taken to live in a care home² when I was 8. My mum doesn't really care about me. I've been in so much trouble. I fight because I'm bored and it's exciting to be in a gang. When I was at primary school, we waited outside another school for the kids to come out. Then we beat them up. At secondary school I was arrested almost every day. We robbed shops and people on buses. I always carried a knife to scare people and to protect myself. It's safer to be in a gang. If you go to the 'wrong' area, you'll be killed. The police can't do anything. It might help if there was more to do, like football teams or something. When I was 15 I was put in a programme where I learned job skills. I work as a mechanic now, but I also help other boys like me.

Fiona, 29, victim³

I was walking home one day from the station when I saw a group of four young people who were kicking an older man on the ground. I didn't want to get involved, but I couldn't just leave him there. So I shouted at them to leave the man alone. They ran towards me like wild animals. One of them pushed me so hard that I fell. Then they started kicking me and they hit my head against the ground. It hurt so much and I thought I was going to die. After a few minutes the boys took my mobile and ran off. Somebody finally saw us and rang the police. We were both taken to hospital. It was shocking for my family when they saw my face. I'm now too frightened to go out at night, especially in the city. Sometimes I think I shouldn't have stopped to help. But you have to, don't you?

John, 35, police officer

We've started the 'Safer Neighbourhoods' project. We spend six hours a day walking the streets. Most of the time we go out together because it's too dangerous to be alone. There are typical areas in the centre of London where you'll see young men selling drugs and large groups of teenage kids making noise and causing trouble. We rarely catch them. The neighbours are usually too frightened to go outside at night. Even for us it's scary. There are some no-go areas. I know most of these kids are from poor families with no fathers and no support at home. They aren't good at school and these gangs are all they've got. But I believe after someone is 13 or 14 years old it's too late. You can't help them. You can only put more police on the streets and arrest the worst ones.

²care home [ˌkeə 'həʊm] – *Kinderheim* • ³victim ['vɪktɪm] – *Opfer*



- c) What are the solutions to this problem? Find some suggestions in the texts and think of a few others. Which ones do you think are the best solutions? Why? Discuss them in class.