

# Knife Crime: What's Mental Health Got To Do With It?

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# A Question

- ▶ What would you do if someone said “take this package or I’ll stab you”?



# Whose discourse is “knife crime”?

- ▶ Absent from mainstream CAMHS
- ▶ Which problems become understood as mental health?
- ▶ Whose problems become articulated as criminal?



# A Psychological Renaming of “Knife Crime”?

- ▶ What if “Knife Crime” became
  - Knife Stabbing
  - Knife Wound
  - Body Wound
  - Body Trauma



*Body-Mind Trauma.....*

*...for the victim, the perpetrator, their family, their community.*

# Sense making

- ▶ “Adolescence” - risk taking (e.g. RTAs)
- ▶ Attachment and relationships
- ▶ Emotion regulation - neuroscience?
- ▶ ACEs
- ▶ Trauma-informed approaches (fear)

theguardian

## Maternal absence cited as major factor in rise of youth violence

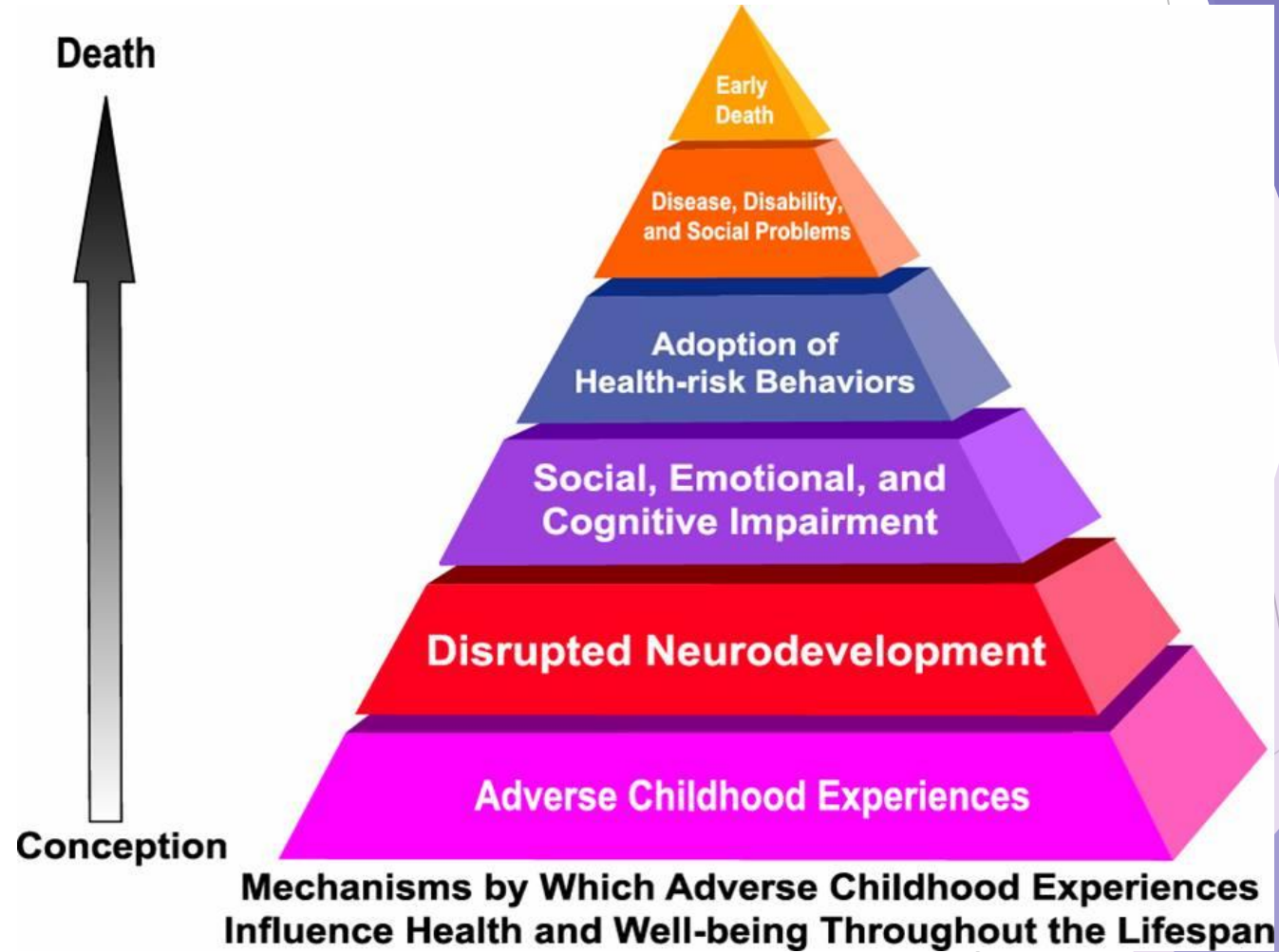
Findings emerge in week in which five people were stabbed to death in London





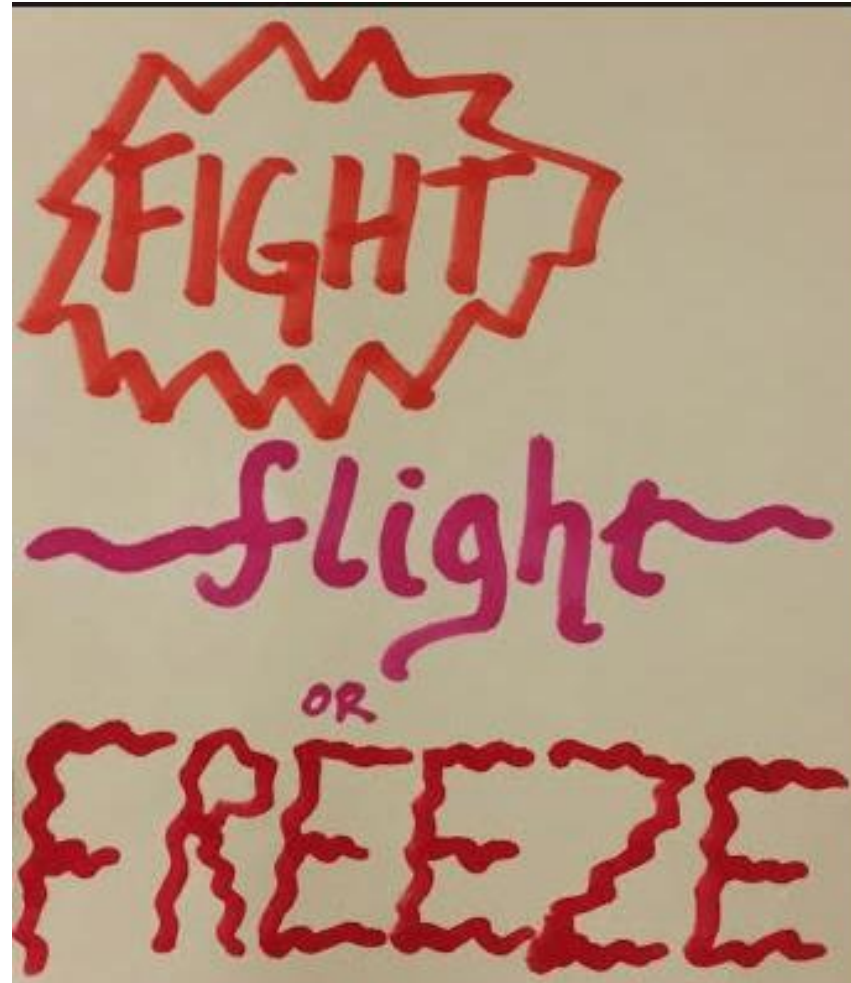
# ACES

► Context?



# Internal Emotions: Fear

- ▶ What has fear and anger made you do on impulse?
- ▶ What does fear look like across age, class, gender etc?



# A question...and an answer

- ▶ YP: What would you do if someone said “take this package or I’ll stab you”?
- ▶ Adult: I don’t know.... what would you do?
- ▶ YP: I would take the package...I don’t want to die.





# Fear: beliefs and emotions

- ▶ Fear may be the most significant factor in a young person's decision to carry a knife or weapon (Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, 2013)
- ▶ Fear of crime (actual or perceived) + belief that a knife will protect against victimisation
- ▶ Moral panic?
- ▶ Media responsibility?



# Power Threat Meaning Framework

- ▶ Emotional distress & troubled or troubling behaviour are **intelligible responses to a person's history and circumstances**
- ▶ **Distress ↔ social injustice**
- ▶ Helps to create validating narratives which inform and empower



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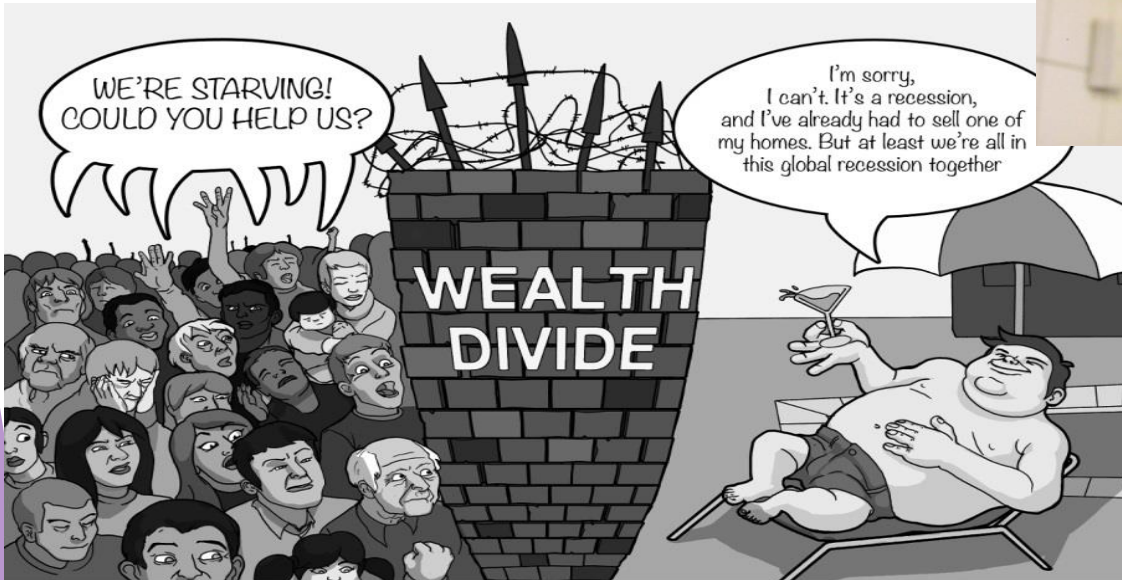
# Adversity & Mental Health

All types of adverse events and circumstance seem to raise the risk for all types of mental health presentations (+ criminal & offending behaviour, physical health problems, & a range of other problematic social outcomes)....

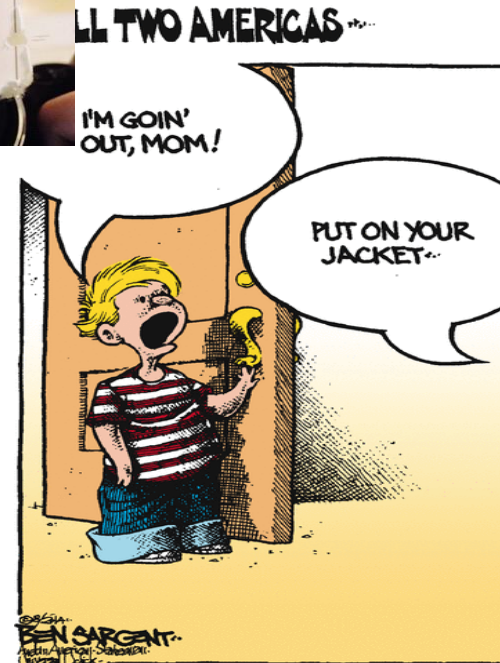
(Johnstone & Boyle, 2018)

# PTM Framework

- ▶ “All forms of adversity are more common within contexts of inequality and other forms of deprivation, discrimination, marginalisation and social injustice”
- ▶ This is science too!



The world's 85 richest people have the same wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion people.



# Social context

- ▶ Gender - masculinity
- ▶ Social class & poverty
- ▶ “Race” & ethnicity
- ▶ UN report: shift of focus from “chemical imbalance” towards “power imbalance” (2017)

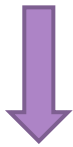


# Changing the narrative

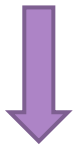
'What has happened to you?'  
(How is **Power** operating in your life?)



'How did it affect you?'  
(What kind of **Threats** does this pose?)



'What sense did you make of it?'  
(What is the **Meaning** of these experiences to you?)



'What did you have to do to survive?'  
(What kinds of **Threat Response** are you using?)



# POWER

## Negative Power:

Increased levels of insecurity

lack of cohesion

fear

mistrust

violence and conflict,

prejudice discrimination,

▶ Interpersonal

▶ Coercive

▶ Biological or embodied

▶ Economic and material

▶ Social/cultural capital

# Changing the narrative



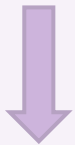
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# Threats

## Threats ...

- ...of rejection, abandonment, isolation
- ...of overwhelming emotions/loss of control
- ...to self in the eyes of others, social status
- ...to financial security, basic needs
- ...to safety & security, links to natural world

Relational

Emotional

**Social/community**

Economic/material

Environmental

Social Threat:

Who's Afraid of  
Who?





# Changing the narrative



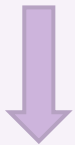
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# Meaning

Meanings are complicated; they are constructed from:

- ▶ Language
- ▶ Memories
- ▶ Feelings and bodily responses
- ▶ Expectations about what is 'normal' in a given society

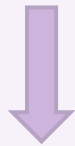
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# Threat response

Needed to adapt, survive, endure, and keep safe

They reflect:

- ▶ What has happened to people
- ▶ How they have coped (what they did to survive)
- ▶ Their circumstances (what it was possible to do)

Evolved and acquired. They are simultaneously a product of:

- ▶ present circumstances
- ▶ past experiences
- ▶ bodily (biological) capacities
- ▶ cultural and social standards and norms
- ▶ the possibilities and limitations in our environments

# Changing the narrative



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# Changing the narrative

- ▶ Important to also ask

**‘What are your strengths?’ (What access to Power resources do you have?)**

...and to integrate all the above:

‘What is your story?’



# What do we do?

- ▶ Social context is key to understanding distress and resilience
- ▶ Stay aware and connected



# A question...an answer...and a solution

- ▶ What would you do if someone said “take this package or I’ll stab you”? (11yr old boy)
- ▶ I don’t know.... what would you do? (parent)
- ▶ I would take the package...I don’t want to die
- ▶ Well, let’s think about that.....

**Talk to young people**

