

CRIME AND JUSTICE COMMISSION

# Rise in stop and search could save the NHS at least £2.5m a year

A return to previous stop-and-search rates targeted at crime hotspots could lead to 30 fewer knife murders each year



Met said that stop and search was one of the most contentious policing tactic

[David Woode](#)

Friday April 11 2025, 12.01am, The Times

More use of stop and search in crime hotspots in London could “significantly reduce” knife attacks and save the NHS at least £2.5 million a year, a study has found.

Criminologists analysed 4.3 million stop-and-search encounters (SSE) conducted by the Metropolitan Police between 2008 and 2023, when 57,380 knife injuries were recorded.

Statistical modelling was used to examine correlations between stop and searches and trends in non-fatal stabbings and knife homicides. At least 45,000 stop and searches were conducted each month in London between 2008 and 2011 but numbers have plummeted in recent years.

There were 11,116 stops recorded in the month to April 4, according to Met data. Frontline officers said that they “weren’t confident” deploying their powers in case a complaint ruined their careers.

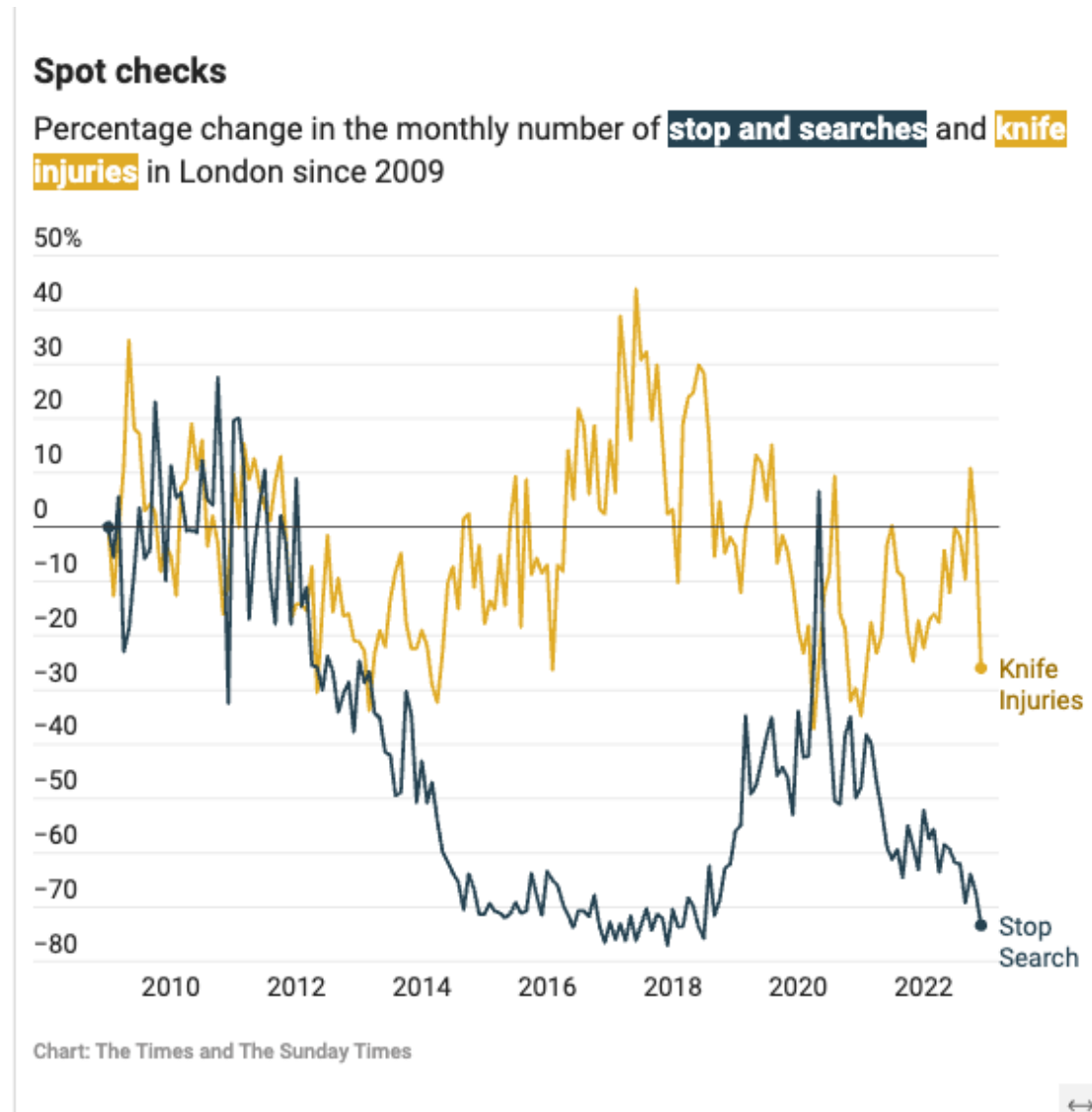
Analysis of the 15-year data set showed that there were “significant reductions in knife attacks and fatal stabbings in response to increased stop and search encounters”, according to a study

in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*. The reduction translates into £216,000 of preventable health costs each month.

Criminologists said that returning to 2008-2011 rates of stop and search could lead to 30 fewer knife murders each year.

Professor Lawrence Sherman, a former Met chief scientific officer who co-authored the study, said: “This is the strongest evidence we have that stop and search at a city level can make a difference to knife injuries.

“It’s highly likely that there would be a much lower frequency of knife injuries city-wide if we were back [at] 2008 levels.”



Data supplied is from a forthcoming article in the *Journal Of Quantitative Criminology*.

Chart: The Times and The Sunday Times

Source: Professors Alex Piquero and Lawrence Sherman

Sir Mark Rowley, the Met commissioner, said during an interview last year that “two-thirds of London has no knife crime. It’s concentrated in a small number of locations.”

His claim was borne out of a Met analysis of weapons crime in public places in which London was divided in 15,772 hexagons — 200 metres per side — and monitored for 24 months. It found that 61 per cent of hexagons did not record a single incident during that period.



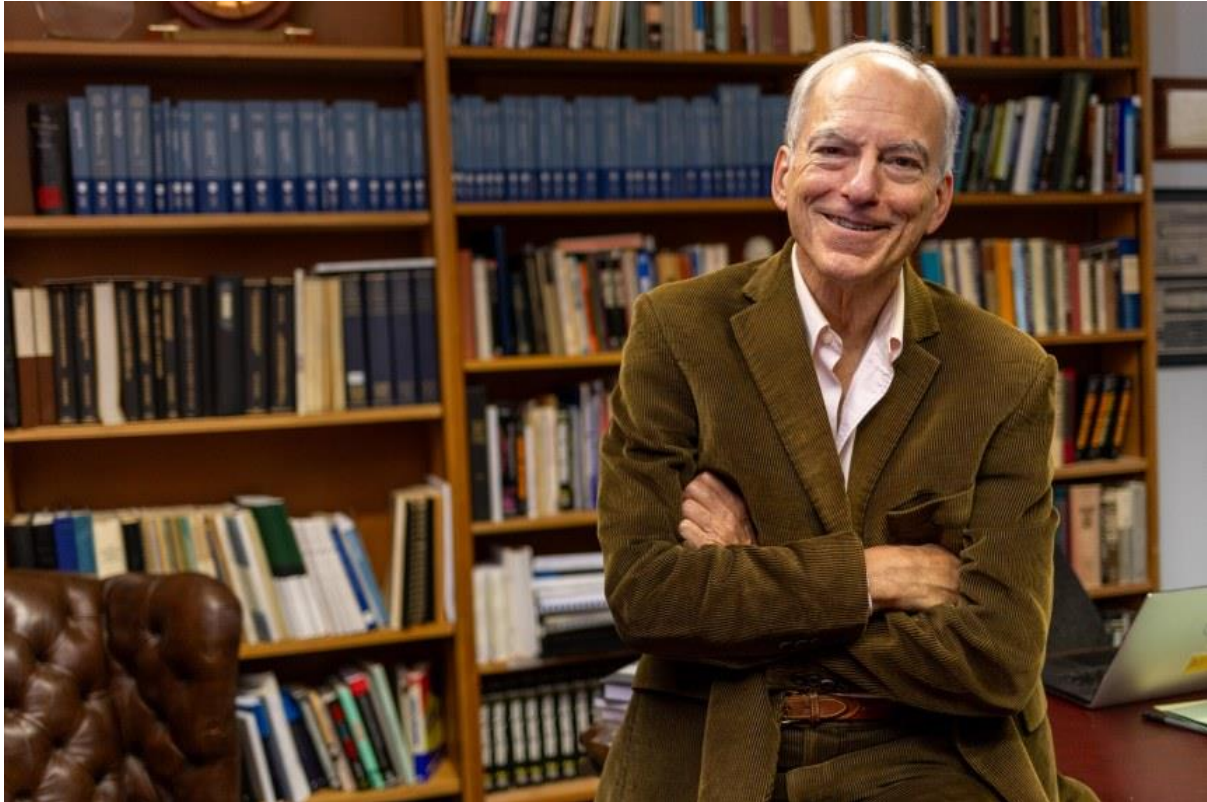
Sir Mark Rowley said that knife crime in London was more prevalent in certain locations

The City of Westminster, a student and tourist magnet that is home to Theatreland and exclusive shopping districts, recorded some of the highest rates of knife crime per square foot.

Sherman, the chief executive of Benchmark Cambridge, a firm which provides evidence-based management systems, said: “Leicester Square had 120 knife crimes in two years — that was the highest in the city. If we concentrated even half of those searches in the 5 per cent of London that has most knife injuries, it could make a difference.”

Figures show that black people accounted for 40 per cent of the 122,580 SSEs carried out across London over the past 12 months, while 34 per cent of these stops resulted in a “positive

outcome”.



Professor Lawrence Sherman said the data showed that there was a racial disparity in knife injuries (photo: TERRY HARRIS FOR THE TIMES)

Sherman said: “It’s highly likely that young black men are more likely to be suffering from [knife] injuries than young white men.

“This has always been an issue in which racial disparity in stop and search has been the focus as opposed to the racial disparity in the knife injuries. The extremity of disparity is greater for victimisation than it is for policing, and the challenge is to minimise it.”

He suggested that this could be achieved by a combination of “tighter precision in where stop and search is focused” in violence hotspots and marrying the two with “procedural justice” — a theory which emphasises officers explaining the reasons why a person has been stopped in a high-crime area. “I think this would give officers greater confidence that they won’t lose their jobs,” he said.

The Met said: “Stop and search is an essential policing tactic but also one of the most contentious. This report is an interesting contribution to the ongoing debate around its use.

“If we are to take the fight to those intent on causing serious violence, fear and intimidation across London, then stop and search must form part of that effort.

“We know that done badly, it has the potential to damage trust with those we are here to protect. Done well, however, it takes dangerous weapons and drugs off our streets and in doing so, it saves lives.”