

## 15, dumb and dangerous

### The slaying of a York Region police officer and a string of alarming, London-area incidents put new focus on the problem of rogue teens

By DALE CARRUTHERS AND ADELA TALBOT, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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One 15-year-old boy is on the lam, wanted by police for a brazen shooting in a London variety store brawl.

Another London boy, also 15, faces a string of charges after the OPP had to use a spike belt to blow out the tires of the pickup he was driving on the highway.

Everyone's heard of the terrible twos, but the frightening fifteens?

At 15, kids aren't old enough to legally drive, vote, drink or buy lottery tickets — but that doesn't seem to stop some teens from finding trouble.

Is this week's spate of reckless acts in which 15-year-olds were implicated a trend or just coincidence?

One expert observer says such events don't necessarily signal a trend.

"When these tragedies hit the front page, it's important to remember that there's a million other teenagers who have summer jobs or are finishing exams," said Peter Jaffe, a psychology professor at the University of Western Ontario.

Teenagers aren't wired to get into trouble, he added.

But Jaffe, who spent more than two decades working with young offenders, said teens' brains aren't fully developed — and that could trigger short-sighted behaviour.

He cited research indicating teen brains haven't completely matured, particularly in the area responsible for judgment, foresight and reasoning.

"Some teens, more than adults, may be impulsive," he added.

There's even a difference between girls and boys. Teen girls aren't as impulsive, have more control and are able to better navigate social situations, Jaffe said.

Meanwhile, TV, movies and other media encourage boys to take more risks, said Jaffe, pointing to the popular TV and movie series Jackass, in which a group of males perform dangerous stunts.

Because teen brains aren't fully developed, Jaffe said, it's important the justice system takes age into account, with a separate penal system for minors.

“It takes some time for teens to grow up and really develop good judgment for the consequences of their behaviour,” he said.

“That’s why we have different laws for youthful offenders than we do adults.”

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