Home Office Research Study 298

Gun crime: the market in and use of illegal firearms

Gavin Hales, Chris Lewis and Daniel Silverstone

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate
December 2006

Home Office Research Studies

The Home Office Research Studies are reports on research undertaken by or on behalf of the Home Office. They cover the range of subjects for which the Home Secretary has responsibility. Other publications produced by the Research, Development and Statistics include Findings, Statistical Bulletins and Statistical Papers.

RDS is part of the Home Office. RDS staff are embedded within delivery groups working closely with front-line staff. The HO Chief Scientific Advisor, who is also Director of RDS, oversees professional development for RDS teams, quality assurance and strategic R & D issues.

The Home Office's purpose is to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced and the protection and security of the public are maintained.

RDS includes staff within the Government Statistical Service (GSS). One of the GSS aims is to inform Parliament and the members of the public about the state of the nation and provide a window on the work and performance of government, allowing the impact of government policies and actions to be assessed.

Therefore -
Research Development and Statistics in the Home Office improves policy making, decision taking and practice in support of the Home Office purpose and aims, to provide the public and Parliament with information necessary for informed debate and to publish information for future use.

First published 2006
Application for reproduction should be made to the Communications and Development Section, 1st Floor Northwest, Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.
© Crown copyright 2005
ISBN 10 1-84726-132-9
ISBN 13 978-1-84726-132-8
ISSN 0072 6435

Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to a large number of people for their assistance in making this research possible, notably the convicted offenders who agreed to be interviewed and the prison authorities who made those interviews possible.

Dr Tom Williamson of the University of Portsmouth and Dr Janet Stockdale of the London School of Economics provided invaluable advice, insight and editorial guidance from the outset.

Dr Daniel Silverstone was ably supported by Anders Lustgarten, Tommy Offe-Amoyaw and Dr William (Lez) Henry in conducting the research interviews. Alex Morgan of the University of Portsmouth made a significant contribution to the (at times inexorable) task of transcription.

Particular thanks to Dr Jonathan Smith and Corrine Charles at the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) for overseeing the project and being consistently supportive from day one. Corrine played a pivotal role in identifying the research sample and negotiating access to the 11 prisons that were visited and was endlessly patient in helping the authors access information to support the research. Thanks also to Corrine and her colleagues Alana Diamond and Gurchand Singh as well as a number of others within the Home Office for their comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this report.

RDS would like to thank Professor Trevor Bennett of the University of Glamorgan and Professor Ben Bowling of Kings College, London who acted as independent assessors to the report.

Gavin Hales
Chris Lewis
Daniel Silverstone
University of Portsmouth, Institute of Criminal Justice Studies

Contents

Acknowledgements		i
Contents		iii
Boxes, figures and tables		v
Executive summary		vii
1.	Introduction	1
	Recorded gun crime in England and Wales	3
	Legislation and public policy	7
	Policing, community engagement and activism	8
	Existing research evidence	9
	Aims of this research	14
2.	Methodology	17
	Introduction	17
	Sampling strategy	18
	Recruiting interviewees	19
	Sample achieved	20
	Interview schedule	20
	Research ethics	21
3.	The offenders interviewed: demographics and backgrounds	23
	Demographics	23
	Family, education and employment	25
	Drugs and alcohol	26
	Social lifestyles	27
	Gang or crew membership	29
	Offending	34
	Victimisation	36
	First contact with firearms	37
	Conclusion: the offenders interviewed	38

4. The market in illegal firearms and ammunition 39
Firearms used 39
Firearm supply 41
Firearm procurement 44
Choice and costs: different types of firearms 46
Ammunition procurement 56
Ancillary items 58
Keeping and disposing of firearms 58
Conclusions: the market in illegal firearms 59

5. The possession and use of illegal firearms: contexts and attitudes 61
Development of a criminal career 61
Illegal drugs markets 65
Robbery and burglary 74
Violence including gangs 81
Possession offences 91
Gun culture? 95
Conclusions: criminal gun cultures 103

6. Preventing gun crime 105
Tackling the market in illegal firearms and ammunition 106
Criminal justice system 108
Diversion from crime 109
Harm reduction within the criminal economy 110

7. Conclusions 111
The market in illegal firearms 111
The possession and use of illegal firearms 112
Policy implications 114
Further research 116

Appendices 119
A. Glossary 119
B. Eight case studies 127
C. Additional information about the methodology 135
D. Letter to potential interviewees 141
E. Research participation consent form 143

References 145

Boxes, figures and tables

Box 1.1	Firearm types, 'gun crime' and firearms legislation	2
Box 5.1	Robbery of drug dealers: case study	67
Box 5.2	Robbery and burglary: case study	78
Box 5.3	Violence including gangs: case study	86
Box 5.4	Possession offences: case study	92
Box 5.5	Possession offences: legal considerations	94
Figure 1.1	Recorded offences involving use of a firearm in England and Wales 1991 to 2004/05	4
Table 1.1	Recorded offences involving use of a firearm in England and Wales, where injury was caused, by degree of injury, 1998/99 to 2004/05	5
Table 1.2	Recorded offences involving use of a firearm in England and Wales by type of principal weapon, 1998/99 to 2004/05	6
Table 3.1	Offenders interviewed, by region and average age	23
Table 3.2	Offenders interviewed, by self-defined ethnicity	24
Table 3.3	Offenders interviewed, by region and self-defined ethnicity	25
Table 3.4	Offenders' offence type, by region	34
Table 3.5	Offenders' offence type, by self-defined ethnicity	34
Table 4.1	Firearm types used in convicted offence	40
Table 4.2	Firearm types used in convicted offence, by offence type	41

Executive summary

1. Introduction and aims

Crimes involving the use of firearms comprise around 0.4 per cent of all recorded offences in England and Wales and have doubled since the mid to late-1990s (Povey and Kaiza, 2006: 81). This increase has occurred against a background of increasingly restrictive legislation and ever more sophisticated public policy responses. At the same time, a small number of high-profile and shocking firearm homicides have raised considerably public concerns about the problem of illegal firearms. Police, politicians and media reports have described the emergence of a criminal 'gun culture', particularly in some inner-city areas in England. Relatively little is known, however, about criminal attitudes towards and the market in illegal firearms, limiting the development of policy, policing practice and an understanding of the impact of firearms legislation.

Research aims

A number of gaps can be identified in existing literature, e.g. a lack of evidence concerning:

- the market in illegal firearms, including ammunition;
- the attitudes of offenders towards illegal firearms, including in relation to a supposed 'gun culture';
- the relationships, if any, between gun crime, illegal drug selling and use and gangs;
- the impact of firearms legislation, including its impact on offender decision making.

This research seeks to address these gaps with reference to the contexts within which firearms are used illegally. It will also attempt to identify appropriate interventions and deterrence strategies.

2. Methodology

The Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) commissioned research based on in-depth prison interviews with 80 recently convicted male Firearms Act offenders aged from 18 to 30. These focussed on London, Greater Manchester, Nottinghamshire and the West Midlands, in which collectively more than half of recorded gun crime in England and Wales takes place. The sample is broadly in line with the national

picture for gun crime in England and Wales, although the West Midlands is slightly over-represented and 'other' areas under-represented.

3. The offenders interviewed: demographics and background

Demographics

The 80 offenders included 36 who described themselves as White, 28 Black, 11 mixed race, four Asian and one Chinese. Their average age was 23.7 years old.

Family, education and employment

With few exceptions, the 80 offenders had grown up in disrupted family environments, under-achieved in and been excluded from mainstream education and had poor work histories. Fifty-nine reported a disrupted family life, including 35 who had grown up in a single parent household. Forty-three had been excluded from school, 22 permanently; only 15 reported any post-16 education. Ten offenders had never worked; 49 only in unskilled or manual occupations.

Social lifestyles

Three broad social lifestyles are identified, distinguishing between followers of dance music and urban music on the one hand and dependent drug users on the other. Nightclubs emerge as particularly significant, with only six interviewees reporting that they did not go clubbing. The three groups are:

- dance music / clubbing / dance drugs / pubs;
- urban music / clubbing / cannabis;
- dependent drug users.

Although these are not mutually exclusive some clear differences between them are seen, notably in relation to music and drug preferences and levels of violence; followers of urban music were more likely to report firearms violence in and around nightclubs and parties. In all groups some individuals offend – typically drug dealing and/or robbery – to fund their lifestyles.

Gang or crew membership

Around half of the interviewees indicated that they had been in a gang or crew and most described other such groups where they lived. Many indicated that they had been part of a group but insisted that this was not a gang or crew, nevertheless conceding that was how outsiders might have seen them. A number of collective structures were described and four 'ideal types' identified:

- *Close friendship groups:* a social focus, but offering safety in numbers and physical backup if required.

- *Associates:* known to each other but not close friends, typically interacting socially, sharing spaces such as estates, and engaged in low-level criminality; an important interface with local criminal cultures.

- *Criminal crews:* focussed on activities like controlling local drugs markets and, for some, conducting armed robberies and other offending.

- *Organised crime networks:* almost always engaged in drug market participation, e.g. middle-market level activities, in addition to other offending such as more serious armed robberies and quasi-legitimate enterprises such as door security.

The gang or crew cultures and structures reported varied considerably by region, being well established in parts of Birmingham and Greater Manchester, but to a lesser extent elsewhere. Drug market activity appears to have been of particular importance in all regions.

Offending

Looking at their primary offence, half the offenders had been convicted of robbery, 25 of firearm possession, eight of violence, two each of burglary, drugs and false imprisonment and one of theft. On average, they had been sentenced to six years and eight months and had already served two years, with 23 having served a year or less. Fifty-eight had previous convictions, of which at least six had convictions for firearms offences. Most had been stopped by the police in the year before being arrested for their most recent offence, about half on multiple occasions.

Victimisation

For most of the 80 offenders the distinction between offender and victim was significantly blurred. Forty had previously been threatened with guns, 29 shot at and eight had been shot; 28 had been stabbed, 17 injured with other weapons, 34 had been robbed and three had been kidnapped. Additionally, 26 reported friends or family members shot and injured and another 26 reported friends or family shot dead. Victimisation generally only came to the attention of the police in the case of fatalities or serious injury requiring medical attention. Otherwise, interviewees reported a preference for personal retributive action and a fear of being labelled a grass.

First contact with firearms

Almost half of the offenders interviewed had first experienced firearms in the context of crime, notably associating with criminal friends; another quarter first experienced airguns and BB guns, typically in their early teens. Six offenders had first used guns in legitimate contexts and a further six had encountered them during violence in their countries of origin.

4. The market in illegal firearms and ammunition

Interviewees were asked how they obtained their firearms, generating a range of insights into the market in illegal firearms and ammunition. Nevertheless, some questions remain that would require further research, for example to explore in greater detail the mechanisms by which some illegal firearms are imported into the UK.

One hundred and six firearms were involved in the offences of 76 offenders (four claimed no firearm was present). Seventy-one of these were described as 'real' guns, 13 imitations, six BB guns, four converted imitation firearms, four blank firers, two airguns, one deactivated firearm and one reactivated firearm. Four firearms were of unspecified type. The 'real' firearms were 41 handguns, 20 shotguns, six automatic weapons, three stun guns and one CS gas canister.

Firearm supply

Broadly, eight mechanisms exist by which firearms may come to be possessed and/or used illegally, of which all but the first and sixth were referred to in the 80 interviews.

i) 'Administrative' offences such as failing to renew a firearms certificate.

ii) Legally-owned firearms or imitation firearms used in an illegal manner by their lawful owner.

iii) Misappropriated legally-owned firearms used illegally.

iv) Legally purchased imitation and deactivated firearms and airguns illegally converted to fire live ammunition.

v) Firearms that have legitimate origins in the UK that have been retained illegally.

vi) Firearms that are prohibited in the UK that have been legally imported by registered firearms dealers, e.g. for subsequent export, but which are then diverted into criminal hands.

vii) Firearms that have been illegally imported/smuggled into the UK from overseas.

viii) Firearms that have been improvised or illegally manufactured from scratch.

It should be noted that there is a significant relationship between firearm types and supply mechanisms.

Only limited insight was offered in relation to cross-border sources of illegal firearms, although a degree of corroboration was evident, highlighting in particular recent conflict areas as sources of firearms and Ireland and Liverpool as entry points for illegal importation. Generally, where the origins of illegal firearms were known this was in the form of the illegal conversion of imitation firearms or through leakage from existing legal sources in the UK, for example shotguns obtained during burglaries; one offender referred explicitly to military contacts.

Firearm procurement

Overall it may be appropriate to describe the presence of markets in illegal firearms in the UK, operating under closed conditions. Criminal contacts are pre-eminent in determining firearm availability and at least 12 offenders referred to individuals who specialised in supplying firearms ('armourers'), including several specialist imitation firearms converters.

Choice and costs

Choice was generally limited, although a well-connected minority reported having access to a range of firearms. A degree of price consistency emerged in the course of the interviews although overall prices varied, sometimes markedly.

Price appears to be determined by a combination of:

- Firearm type and availability: more desirable and less numerous makes/models fetch premium prices.
- Leakage from legal sources: particularly relevant to shotguns, but more generally to converted imitation firearms, which serves to keep prices lower.
- Location: reflecting local levels of supply and demand.
- Quality: purpose built lethal firearms are typically more expensive than converted imitations, new guns are more expensive than those that show signs of use.

- Firearm provenance: guns believed or known to have been used in crime can be extremely cheap (less significant with shotguns).
- Criminal contacts: better contacts typically mean lower prices (and more choice).
- How quickly the gun is required: urgency allows the seller to dictate the price, pushing prices higher.
- Whether the seller is a dependent drug user: in which case prices are expected to be lower.
- Ammunition availability: lack thereof may lower prices.

In addition, there is some evidence of positive feedback loops complicating the picture, with firearm supply fuelling violence, which in turn increases demand for further weapons.

Shotguns

Shotguns (particularly 'sawn-off' versions) tend to be chosen for their availability and significant intimidatory value; they appear to be the weapon of choice for more serious armed robbers. Prices appear to be generally very low, in the region of £50 to £200, although some prices as high as £700 to £800 were mentioned. The low price appears to result from on-going leakage from legitimate sources and ammunition is relatively easy to obtain.

Purpose-built lethal handguns

Handguns are more concealable than shotguns, making them ideal for individuals who possess firearms for their own protection. Prices appear to vary considerably, from around £150 to £200 for a gun known to have been used in a crime, to a typical £1,000 to £1,400 for a new 9mm model. These guns are generally sold with one full load of ammunition included.

Converted imitation firearms

Overall converted firearms appear more widely available and cheaper than purpose built firearms, although they are also considered inferior and indeed dangerous to use. New prices seem to fall within a £400 to £800 price range, with .38" revolvers at the lower end.

Imitation firearms

Imitation firearms are highly available and often very realistic. Costs ranged from £20 to £110 from legitimate outlets.

Automatic weapons

Five offenders had been caught with automatic weapons, in all cases related to violent conflict; the symbolic value, overwhelming power and often indiscriminate aim of these guns seems to conform to a 'gangster' stereotype not aspired to by the majority. Costs ranged from £800 to £4,000.

Ammunition procurement

Ammunition is generally bought in small quantities when a gun is purchased, both priced as a package. Ammunition appears to be a limiting factor and harder to obtain than firearms, with the exception of shotgun cartridges. In some cases, criminals are exploiting a legal loophole to manufacture ammunition themselves or are using improvised ammunition such as blank firing ammunition combined with a ball bearing. Prices varied widely, from £2,000 to £3,000 for a box of .45" ammunition to £0.50 a bullet for a .38".

Ancillary items

Three offenders were convicted of offences relating to stun guns, with one also being convicted of possessing CS gas. There were ten references to bullet-proof vests, four to sound moderators ('silencers') and one to night vision goggles.

Keeping and disposing of firearms

Only four offenders described keeping their gun with them at all times; in general guns were kept at home, buried, or otherwise accessible – typically being minded by third parties. In many cases used guns are sold on, keeping them in circulation.

5. The possession and use of illegal firearms: contexts and attitudes

The four principal offending contexts of those interviewed are first contextualised with a consideration of criminal career development. Finally, attention turns to a discussion of 'gun culture'.

Development of a criminal career

The broader socio-economic context to the possession and use of illegal firearms as described by the offenders can be summarised as follows. Social pressures to attain a conspicuously material lifestyle in the context of economic hardship are reconciled by some through involvement in the criminal economy, in many cases facilitated by the availability of criminal opportunities. This is reinforced by the presence of criminal role models and other visibly 'successful' criminals demonstrating the viability of criminal careers that in some

cases are more lucrative, at least in the short term, than the likely legitimate labour market alternatives. In relation to firearms, it is significant that this wealth serves to magnify existing economic inequality, and that the criminal economies into which these offenders are entering are unregulated.

Illegal drug markets

Illegal drug markets appear to significantly underpin the criminal economy and represent the single most important theme in relation to the illegal use of firearms, characterised by systemic violence that appears to increase towards the street (retail) end of the market. Firearms possession was reported in relation to robberies of drug dealers (that appear to be increasing), territorial disputes, personal protection and sanctioning of drug market participants.

Robbery and burglary

Half of the offenders had been convicted of robbery, and a further two of aggravated burglary. Five groups of offenders involved in armed robbery are identified, notably including robberies against drug dealers. The other four are: specialist armed robbers, most demonstrating a degree of target preference; mixed offending robbers who committed robberies in the context of other offences; opportunists, including individuals who had obtained imitation firearms that facilitated serious offending and individuals associating with criminals who involved them in unplanned robberies; and, debtors, who used armed robbery to try and pay off debts, typically owed to other criminals, sometimes under duress. Significantly, readily available realistic imitation firearms enabled robberies to be committed by individuals who otherwise lacked the necessary criminal contacts to obtain real firearms.

Violence including gangs

For many interviewees, conflict appears to form a significant dimension of their social relations, especially disputes related to status and respect – so-called 'beef'. In the context of firearm ownership, even quite trivial disputes may result in shootings as the presence of guns elevates threat levels and the so-called 'shoot or be shot' scenario precipitates pre-emptive violence. Gang structures serve to escalate and perpetuate violence, which may transcend individual incidents and become generalised.

Nightclubs and other public social venues are significant first and foremost as shared social spaces in which rivals meet and an individual's status may be publicly challenged, necessitating retaliation. Where such individuals are engaged in armed criminality, trivial disputes may quickly escalate into fatal violence, access to firearms and a public audience both raising the stakes. Meanwhile, those involved in the door security industry may be

drawn into these conflicts, or even targeted by rival firms seeking access to potentially lucrative security contracts.

Possession offences

Twenty-five offenders had been caught in possession of firearms, including eight minding firearms for other criminals. The other contexts include protection – typically in the context of drug markets or violence – and absolute (strict liability) offences in which a firearm is retrieved that the offender denies any knowledge of. The highly constrained legislation concerning firearms possession raises a number of issues, including that accused persons facing the mandatory minimum sentence appear to have no incentive to enter an early guilty plea or co-operate with wider investigations, and that individuals may be set up, for example by rivals.

Gun culture?

Two 'ideal type' criminal gun cultures are identified:

- An *instrumental criminal gun culture* in which guns are used only for offensive criminal purposes such as armed robbery.

- A *complex criminal gun culture* in which the role of firearms is more generalised, including offensive, defensive and symbolic functionality.

The latter is more recent, appears to reflect changing criminal cultures and is becoming increasingly significant. Three consistent themes, often hand-in-hand, appear to underlie complex criminal gun culture:

- the ascendancy of criminal role models;
- the market in illegal drugs;
- cultures of gang membership.

Significantly, firearms appear to have become increasingly normalised in relation to systemic violence in the street-level criminal economy, including the possession of firearms for offensive and defensive purposes in the context of complicated offending and victimisation histories. Firearms also appear to have assumed a symbolic significance as they have become associated with criminal affluence related to activities such as drug dealing and robbery and have been conflated with respect, status and violent potential. The extent to which this symbolism may be attributed to popular cultural sources such as the urban music industry and media more generally is unclear but on balance appears peripheral.

Conclusions

The 'gun culture' debate needs to develop to reflect the complexity of the issues raised by this research. Those working on crime reduction in communities affected by gun crime must engage with young people's decision-making processes, especially where the local criminal economy, fuelled in particular by illegal drugs and armed robbery, is outcompeting the legitimate labour market for some individuals. This process has serious consequences, not least because it legitimises crime as a career path and removes participants from the regulated mainstream, exposing them to serious risks and encouraging informal and illegal strategies. The challenge is to resist these processes and keep would-be gun criminals within mainstream civil society, something that requires long-term, credible, legal alternatives to entrenched social and economic problems.

6. Preventing gun crime

A number of policy suggestions are proposed under four headings.

Tackling the market in illegal firearms

- Ongoing efforts are required to tackle the manufacture and sale of convertible imitation firearms and the conversion process itself. It may be possible to better exploit criminals' concerns about the dangers of using converted imitation firearms.

- Consideration should be given to further controls on realistic imitation firearms.

- The legal loophole allowing criminals to legally obtain ammunition components and tools should be closed and further controls on blank ammunition should be considered.

- The legal loophole allowing shotgun ammunition to be transferred to and possessed by non-certificated individuals should be addressed.

- It may be possible to better exploit criminals' concerns about buying firearms that have previously been used in crime.

- Enabling the use of discretion in relation to mandatory sentencing may be effective in encouraging the co-operation of individuals caught minding firearms.

- The use of further amnesties should be considered to try and reduce further the existing stock of illegal or unwanted firearms.

- Publicity might be used to make offenders and others aware of the likely consequences of getting involved with illegal firearms, particularly in relation to conflict escalation.

Criminal justice system

- The five-year mandatory minimum sentence for possession of a firearm was well known; longer sentences might produce counter-productive outcomes, such as offenders trying to 'shoot their way out' if challenged by the police.

- Greater availability of witness protection resources should be beneficial, as should greater use of independent intermediaries such as Crimestoppers.

- Expanding the use of Independent Advisory Groups should help police better understand the communities they are policing.

- There may be scope for increasing the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) to disrupt gangs, criminal networks and drug dealing.

Diversion from crime

- Further research would shed light on the economics of drug dealing; empirical evidence may represent a lever with which to deter young people from entering drug dealing.

- Publicity targeted at young people should highlight successful convictions and criminal asset confiscation to undermine criminal role models.

- There may be scope for better promoting the advantages of legitimate employment to young people and educating them about their options, particularly outside their immediate area.

- Greater provision of youth services should be supported, particularly in deprived inner-city communities.

- Gang disruption and mediation programmes may be beneficial in some areas.

Harm reduction in the criminal economy

- A public health/harm reduction approach would seek to minimise levels of violence within the criminal economy; at times the public interest may be better served in protecting criminals than prosecuting their offending if that prevents downstream violence, robberies and other crime. This might include the provision of safe houses.

7. Conclusions

The illegal use of firearms is not a singular problem, but is complex, entrenched and poses significant challenges to communities, police and policy makers. Some of the findings point to clear recommendations, such as greater efforts to tackle the availability and conversion of highly realistic imitation firearms. Most, however, are more challenging and require social and economic rather than technical solutions.

The emergence of a complex gun culture in which firearms have become embedded within broader criminal lifestyles suggests significant limitations to interventions based on a rational choice understanding of offending and highlights the need to address the social and cultural significance of offending behaviours such as gang conflict, armed robbery and drug dealing. Furthermore, the relationship between illegal firearms and crime is dynamic, and as a consequence ongoing efforts are required to keep abreast of changes to ensure that they are responded to appropriately.

A number of areas for further research are proposed, including further research on the origins of purpose-built lethal firearms in the criminal economy and the role of women in relation to the possession and use of illegal firearms.

References

Povey, D. and Kaiza, P. (2006) 'Recorded crimes involving firearms'. Chapter 3 in **K. Coleman, C. Hird and D. Povey** (Eds.) *Violent Crime Overview, Homicide and Gun Crime 2004/2005 (Supplementary Volume to Crime in England and Wales 2004/2005*) (pp 71–93). Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/06. London: Home Office. <www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/hosb0206.pdf> 6 June 2006

1. Introduction

Although rare, firearm homicides such as those in 2003 of Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespeare in Aston, Birmingham, and seven-year-old Toni-Ann Byfield in Brent, London, have served to raise significantly public concerns about the problem of illegal firearms. Police, politicians and media reports have described the emergence of a criminal 'gun culture', particularly in some inner-city areas in England.

The legislation concerning firearm possession and use in the UK has been progressively tightened, especially since the late 1980s. In the summer of 2005 the government published the Violent Crime Reduction Bill, which amongst other changes will, at the time of writing, prohibit the manufacture, importation and sale of realistic imitation firearms and restrict the sale and purchase of ammunition primers.

Relatively little is known, however, about criminal attitudes towards and the market in illegal firearms, limiting the development of policy, policing practice and an understanding of the impact of firearms legislation. This research addresses these questions by interviewing 80 recently convicted and imprisoned gun crime offenders about their offences and firearms. The focus is on London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Nottinghamshire, in which collectively more than half of recorded gun crime in England and Wales takes place.

This report is divided into seven main sections. The remainder of Chapter 1 reviews existing data and research evidence concerning the market in and use of illegal firearms in England and Wales and states the research aims. Chapter 2 describes the research methodology, including consideration of the sampling strategy, interview schedule and research ethics. Chapter 3 presents information about the offenders interviewed, including demographic data and details of their backgrounds such as their social lifestyles and gang membership. Chapter 4 presents evidence about the market in illegal firearms and ammunition, including considerations of cost and availability. Chapter 5 examines the contexts in which illegal firearms were possessed and used by the offenders interviewed, considers their attitudes towards firearms and discusses the existence of criminal gun cultures; four illustrative case studies are included. Chapter 6 presents policy suggestions for tackling gun crime. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions, highlighting key themes, discusses some policy implications and proposes subjects for further research. Finally, the appendices include a glossary of key terms, eight further case studies, further details regarding the methodology, selected research documentation and a list of references.

Box 1.1 Firearm types, 'gun crime' and firearms legislation

The language used to define and discuss firearms is often quite technical and can be confusing to a non-specialist. In this regard, the publication 'Firearms Law: Guidance to the Police' is a useful resource produced by the Home Office (Home Office, 2002). In this report definitions of terms used can be found in the Glossary in Appendix A.

Firearm types

The key practical distinction to be understood is between firearms that are capable of inflicting a lethal injury and those that are not:

(i) *'Real' lethal firearms* (so-called 'lethal barrelled firearms'), including purpose built lethal firearms, reactivated firearms and converted imitation firearms. This includes pistols (handguns), revolvers, rifles and shotguns and further includes semi-automatic and fully automatic weapons. It also includes airguns, although only more powerful models require a firearms certificate. It should be noted that 'lethality' is subject to court interpretation as to 'whether any particular weapon is capable of inflicting a (potentially) lethal injury' (Home Office, 2002: 3) but it is generally accepted that anything with a 'muzzle energy' below 1 joule lacks this capability and should not therefore be classified as a firearm.

(ii) *Imitation firearms* that closely resemble real lethal firearms in appearance but cannot discharge a projectile capable of inflicting a lethal injury. This includes 'airsoft'/BB guns (low-powered weapons firing plastic pellets), blank firers (that fire a 'blank' cartridge lacking a projectile), deactivated 'real' guns (modified to prevent firing and certified as such), decorative imitations and some toys.

'Gun crime'

'Gun crime' is a generic term used to encompass all instances when firearms, including shotguns, airguns and imitation firearms are used illegally.[1] This includes illegal possession offences when no other crime has been committed. In most cases, firearms are used as 'offence enablers' – that is as a means rather than an end. In this research 'gun crime' will be used to refer generically to the illegal possession and use of real and imitation firearms; the terms 'gun' and 'firearm' will be used interchangeably. Wherever possible, distinctions will be drawn between the different forms of 'gun crime', highlighting the diversity of this group of offences. In particular, distinctions will be drawn between real lethal firearms and imitation firearms.

1. It should be noted that although shotguns are defined by the Firearms Act (1968 and amendments), they are treated differently to other firearms for the purposes of licensing. In this report the terms firearm and gun include shotguns.

Illegality is a question of one or more of the following: (a) firearm type, (b) possession of an appropriate firearm/shotgun certificate (if required), (c) any illegal modifications to a firearm, and (d) where and how the firearm is used. The latter can include a firearm being fired, shown, used as a blunt instrument, possessed or merely inferred.

Firearms legislation

Legislation concerning firearms is complex and will not be reviewed in any detail here. The key legislation is the Firearms Act (1968 and amendments); reference also needs to be made to the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. The most recent government thinking is contained in the Violent Crime Reduction Bill.

It should be noted that in addition to guns the Firearms Act (1968 and amendments) also encompasses other weapons such as stun guns and CS sprays with which this research is not directly concerned.

Recorded gun crime in England and Wales[2,3,4]

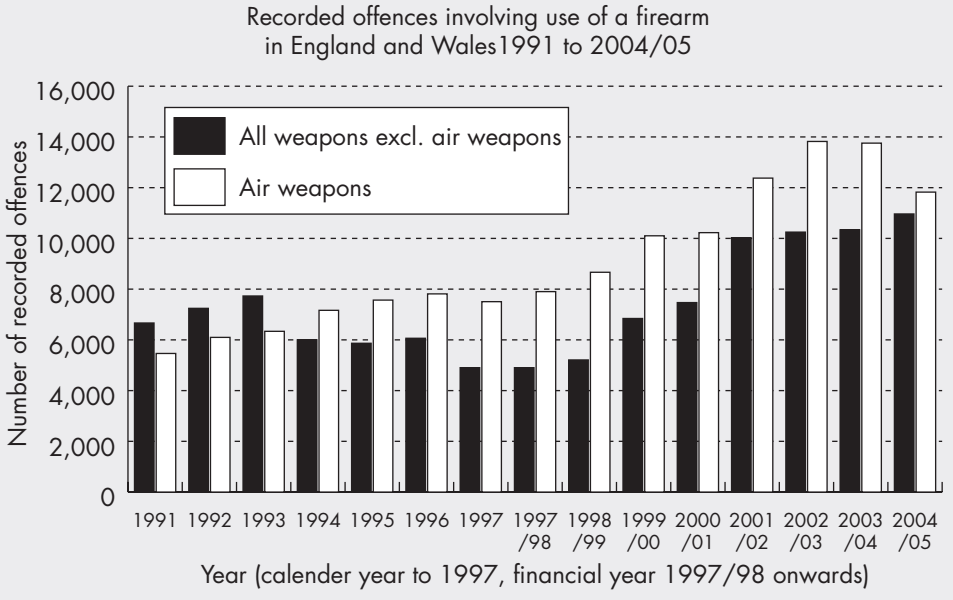
Gun crime trends

Against a background of a small number of shocking individual incidents of fatal violence involving firearms, the overall number of gun crime offences recorded by police forces in England and Wales rose significantly between 1997/98 and 2001/02. It then continued to rise more slowly until 2003/04, before a slight fall in 2004/05, the latter driven mainly by a 14 per cent reduction in air weapon offences (see Figure 1.1). In 1997/98 there were 12,805 offences recorded by the police in England and Wales that involved a firearm (including air weapons), including 54 offences recorded as homicide and 696 offences of attempted homicide and other acts endangering life (including wounding). By 2003/04 the total had risen to 24,094 offences, before falling back slightly to 22,789 offences in 2004/05. This latter figure amounted to 0.4 per cent of all recorded crime that year, and

2. Unless stated otherwise, the data presented in this section relates only to crimes recorded by the police that involved the use of a firearm: that is firearms being fired, used as a blunt instrument to injure a person, or used as a threat.
3. Statistics on the illegal use of firearms are compiled by the Home Office on an annual basis, and will not be recreated here in full. At the time of writing, the latest information is contained in Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/06 (Coleman et al., 2006): chapter 3 (Povey and Kaiza, 2006) forms the principal source for data presented in this section, except where indicated otherwise.
4. A number of limitations to recorded crime data should be acknowledged. (i) Police crime recording practices changed in both 1998/99 (Povey and Prime, 1999) and 2002/03 (Simmons et al, 2003). These changes served to increase the overall number of incidents reported to the police recorded as crimes. The impact on offences involving firearms is unknown, but likely to be more significant in relation to less serious offences. Others factors that may have impacted on the number of recorded offences include (ii) the introduction of new laws; (iii) changes in the crime reporting practices of the public; and (iv) changes in policing activity, for example prioritising the policing of firearms offences.

included 78 firearm homicides and 1,378 attempted homicides and other acts endangering life (including wounding). Excluding air weapons, recorded firearms offences in England and Wales more than doubled in the seven years between 1997/98 and 2004/05 from 4,903 to 10,964 offences (data for 1997/98 from Povey and Kaiza, 2005: 39).

Figure 1.1 Recorded offences involving use of a firearm in England and Wales 1991 to 2004/05



Sources for Figure 1.1:
Data for 1991 from Table 2.03 in Gray (2003: 33) in Flood-Page and Taylor (2003) HOSB 01/03.
Data for 1992 to 2003/04 from Table 2.03 in Povey and Kaiza (2005: 39) in Povey (2005) HOSB 02/05.
Data for 2004/05 from Table 3.03 in Povey and Kaiza (2006: 83) in Coleman et al. (2006) HOSB 02/06.

Crime types

When considering all recorded gun crime in England and Wales in 2004/05, including air weapons, 44 per cent of these crimes were recorded as criminal damage, 35 per cent as violence against the person and 16 per cent were robberies. Excluding air weapon offences, 53 per cent were recorded as offences of violence against the person, 33 per cent were robberies, six per cent were criminal damage and three per cent were burglaries.

In 2004/05, 5,358 firearms offences (24 per cent) involved an injury to the victim (see Table 1.1). Overall, the number of offences involving injury by firearms has more than doubled since 1998/99, the upward trend being most marked for slight injuries, but also evident for serious and fatal injuries.

Table 1.1 Recorded offences involving use of a firearm in England and Wales, where injury was caused, by degree of injury, 1998/99 to 2004/05

Year	Non-air weapons				Air weapons				Total injuries
	Total	Fatal injury	Serious injury[a]	Slight injury	Total	Fatal injury	Serious injury	Slight injury	
1998/99	864	49	162	653	1,514	0	133	1,381	2,378
1999/00	1,195	62	200	933	1,977	0	171	1,806	3,172
2000/01	1,382	72	244	1,066	1,821	1	166	1,654	3,203
2001/02	1,877	95	392	1,390	1,915	2	165	1,748	3,792
2002/03	2,179	80	416	1,683	2,377	1	156	2,220	4,556
2003/04	2,367	68	437	1,862	2,395	0	157	2,238	4,762
2004/05	3,856	77	410	3,369	1,502	1	143	1,358	5,358

Source for Table 1.1: Table 3b in Povey and Kaiza (2006: 76) in Coleman *et al.* (2006) HOSB 02/06.

a A serious injury is one which necessitated detention in hospital or involved fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds.

Firearm types

During 2004/05, 52 per cent of all recorded gun crime offences involved air weapons (as the principal weapon involved in the offence), 19 per cent handguns, 15 per cent imitation firearms, six per cent 'unidentified' firearms, five per cent 'other' firearms, three per cent shotguns and <0.1 per cent rifles (see Table 1.2). It is worth noting that these classifications are subject to some ambiguity: in many cases there is no forensic evidence to categorically determine the classification of a firearm used in the course of a crime. For example, a supposed handgun shown but not fired during a robbery, and not retrieved for analysis, could be a real handgun, an airgun, an airsoft/BB gun, a toy gun or a purely decorative imitation.[5] As a result, these figures may be particularly sensitive to any changes in recording practices.

5. In 2004/05 4,347 offences were recorded in England and Wales in which the principal weapon was a handgun: only 576 (13 per cent) involved a handgun being fired, while 3,310 (76 per cent) involved a handgun used as a threat only (Table 3.05 in Povey and Kaiza (2006: 85) in Coleman et al. (2006) HOSB 02/06).

Table 1.2 Recorded offences involving use of a firearm in England and Wales by type of principal weapon, 1998/99 to 2004/05

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Shotgun	642	693	608	712	671	718	598
Handgun	2,687	3,685	4,109	5,874	5,549	5,144	4,347
Rifle	43	67	36	64	52	48	55
Imitation firearm	566	823	787	1,245	1,815	2,146	3,333
Unidentified firearm	665	762	950	1,176	1,431	1,356	1,462
Other firearm	606	813	980	952	730	926	1,169
All weapons excluding air weapons	5,209	6,843	7,470	10,023	10,248	10,338	10,964
Air weapon	8,665	10,103	10.227	12,377	13,822	13,756	11,825
All weapons	13,874	16,946	17,697	22,400	24,070	24,094	22,789

Source for Table 1.2: Table 3.03 in Povey and Kaiza (2006: 83) in Coleman *et al.* (2006) HOSB 02/06, which includes further details on firearm types, e.g. shotguns are subdivided into long-barrelled and sawn-off sub-types.

Victims and offenders

At a national level relatively little information is available on the demographics of gun crime victims and offenders. Age data from eight police forces were analysed by the Home Office for the financial year 2002/03 (Dodd et al., 2004). This analysis found that the peak age for victimisation in relation to firearms (excluding air weapons) was 20–24 years, compared to 40–44 years for air weapon offences (ibid.: 35, Figure 2.9), and that 'Younger victims of both firearms and air weapon-related offences were more frequently victims of offences relating to violence against the person and to robbery' (ibid.: 36). In relation to those charged with offences involving the use and possession of firearms, 48 per cent of firearms offenders were aged between 15 and 24 years, while 62 per cent of air weapon offenders were aged between 10 and 19 years, 39 per cent being aged between 15 and 19 years (ibid.: 39, Figure 2.12).

Analysis of homicides in England and Wales for the period 2001/02–2003/04 finds that, 'Black victims (31%) were much more likely to have been shot than White (6%) or Asian victims (12%)' (Home Office, 2004: 20). Research conducted in London shows that men are significantly over-represented as both victims and particularly offenders, and that certain ethnic groups, particularly Black men, are over-represented as victims and offenders, while others, notably Asians, are under-represented as offenders (e.g. see Hales, 2005: 20–56). According to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), 'Gun crime is mainly committed by young men aged 16–25. Offenders and victims are getting younger, and a disproportionate number are African Caribbean' (MPS 2004: 9; see also 'Criminal cultures'

below under Existing research evidence). It should be noted, however, that the picture varies between locations and individual offence types (Hales, 2005).

Geography

Finally, gun crime is not evenly distributed across England and Wales. In 2004/05, 34 per cent of recorded gun crime (excluding air weapon offences) occurred in the London area (at a rate of 50 offences per 100,000 people), 12 per cent in Greater Manchester (50/100,000), nine per cent in the West Midlands (37/100,000), four per cent in Merseyside (36/100,000) and two per cent in Nottinghamshire (19/100,000). This research is focussed in particular on London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Nottinghamshire, in which 56 per cent of all gun crime in England and Wales, excluding air weapons, took place in 2004/05 (down from 63 per cent in 2003/04 and 66 per cent in 2002/03 (Povey and Kaiza, 2005: 49)).

Legislation and public policy

Since the mid-1980s, a number of significant changes have occurred to the legislative and public policy responses to gun crime and firearms more generally. Automatic weapons having been banned by the Firearms Act 1937, semi-automatic rifles were banned by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 after the massacre of 16 people in Hungerford in 1987. Then a ban on handguns was introduced by the Firearms (Amendment) Acts 1997. This followed the Cullen Inquiry (Cullen, 1996) into the 1996 school massacre in Dunblane, Scotland, in which 16 children and a teacher were shot and killed.[6] Both the Hungerford and Dunblane massacres were committed by lone gunmen with legally owned firearms. The UK now has some of the most restrictive firearm laws in Europe (Broadhurst and Benyon, 2000) and, indeed, the world (Bryan, 2001d: 3), although in advance of the Violent Crime Reduction Bill (VCRB) the same cannot yet be said in relation to imitation firearms (submission from the office of the Mayor of London in All-Party Parliamentary Group on gun crime (APPGGC) 2003: 64).

More recently:

- a Great Britain-wide firearms amnesty was held between 31 March and 30 April 2003, resulting in 43,908 guns and 1,039,358 rounds of ammunition being surrendered to the police (the figures for England and Wales were respectively 40,507 and 839,963) (Home Office, 2003);[7]

6. In both the Hungerford and Dunblane massacres the gunman also took his own life.
7. This was the sixth national firearms amnesty held since 1946; in total over 250,000 firearms have been handed in (National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) 2003:59). The previous amnesty was held in June 1996.

- a five-year mandatory minimum sentence came into force in January 2004 for unlawful possession of certain types of prohibited firearm (Criminal Justice Act 2003);
- tighter controls were placed on air weapons, including the outright ban of certain models and raising the age at which air weapons can be possessed and used (Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003);
- further restrictions were introduced concerning the possession of air weapons and imitation firearms in public places (Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003);
- at the time of writing the Violent Crime Reduction Bill (tabled in June 2005) seeks to, amongst a range of proposals, significantly tighten the law concerning 'realistic' and other imitation firearms, modify legislation concerning air weapons and the sale and purchase of ammunition primers and introduce a new offence of 'using someone to mind a weapon'.

It should be said that the impact of firearms legislation is notoriously difficult to measure (e.g. Squires, 2000).

Policing, community engagement and activism

Alongside legislative developments, changes have occurred in relation to the policing of gun crime and public engagement with efforts to tackle these offences. This has included:

- the creation of specialist police units to investigate shootings within distinct communities, such as Operation Trident in London;
- the development of local multi-agency responses, such as the Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy (MMAGS, see Bullock and Tilley, 2002) and the London Borough of Brent's Not Another Drop (NAD) initiative;
- the creation of the Home Office 'Connected' programme, which provides funding to support local community groups working to reduce gun crime (see: www.connected.gov.uk);
- the development of closer working between the police and 'critical friend' community representatives, such as the Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) developed in London to work with Operation Trident;
- the emergence of local and national pressure groups and anti-gun crime activities, such as the Gun Control Network, Mothers Against Guns, the Disarm Trust, the Peace Alliance (North London), the Street Pastors initiative, and the development of school-based projects, vigils, peace marches, community days and other grass-roots events.

Existing research evidence

Relatively little is known about either the market in illegal firearms or the attitudes of those using such weapons in the UK, constraining both the development of effective policies to combat gun crime and meaningful discussion of the impact of firearms legislation. Existing evidence about the illegal use of firearms in England and Wales is available from a number of sources, including recorded crime data, academic research, strategic assessments, crime reduction evaluations, reviews of legislation, police intelligence and media sources, and is reviewed below.

The extent to which international sources relating to firearms crime are of relevance to the UK is open to debate, most notably in relation to the United States (e.g. Squires, 1997, cited by Squires, 2000: 178) and a review of non-UK literature has not been attempted here. Substantial structural differences in terms of firearms legislation (e.g. see Broadhurst and Benyon, 2000), firearm ownership rates, cultural attitudes towards firearms and the availability of both firearms and ammunition all mean that research on the illegal use of firearms should be seen as substantially context-specific. For example, on one estimate firearms are owned in the US at approximately eight to ten times the rate in the UK (Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2003).[8]

Nevertheless, US research into subjects such as the operation of illegal drugs markets is relevant and informative (e.g. research in St Louis, Missouri by Jacobs, 1999 and 2000), as is evidence about the significance of a lack of legitimate opportunities and the attraction of a criminal lifestyle in marginalised communities (e.g. research in Philadelphia by Anderson, 2000, and in East Harlem, New York by Bourgois, 2003). In terms of tackling gun violence, the United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has published a detailed evaluation of a wide range of gun violence reduction strategies (OJJDP, 1999) and the United States National Criminal Justice Reference Service has published research into 'crime gun markets' (Pierce et al., 2003). Also of relevance are a number of international comparative studies, for example examining the relationship between firearm availability and gun-related crime rates (e.g. Killias, 1993).[9]

8. The Graduate Institute of International Studies estimates legal and illegal firearms ownership rates in the US as 83 to 96 guns per 100 population in 2002 and the figure for the UK as 10 guns per 100 people in 2000 (GIIS, 2003: Chapter 2, pp 57–95). It is worth noting, however, that the estimated figure for the UK of a minimum of 4 million unregistered firearms seems likely to be too high (Bryan, 2001b: 3). UK-based estimates of illegal firearms numbers have ranged from 200,000 by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in 1996 to 10 million by the Shooter's Rights Association in the same year (both figures House of Commons: Home Affairs Committee, 1996, cited in Bryan, 2001b: 7). Latest figures for legally owned firearms in England and Wales show 342,213 firearms and 1,372,712 shotguns owned in 2003/04 (Coleman and Kaiza, 2005).
9. It should be noted that international comparisons have largely relied on quantitative measures (e.g. Killias, 1993; Mauser, 2003). The reliability of some of the variables used, most notably data on firearm ownership rates, has been disputed (e.g. see the discussion in Squires, 2000: 179–186). Furthermore, quantitative analysis struggles to measure or account for the impact of cultural and other behavioural differences between countries, as well as inconsistencies relating to factors such as crime recording practices.

Some key themes in relation to England and Wales, although not an exhaustive review, include the following.

Impact of legislation

- The level of gun crime recorded by the police in England and Wales, particularly involving handguns and imitation firearms, has increased significantly since the late 1990s (Povey and Kaiza, 2006) against a background of highly restrictive legislation. Although some argue that this suggests the legislation, particularly the two Firearms (Amendment) Acts of 1997, has failed (Bryan, 2001d: 34; Mauser, 2003), the counter-factual – the picture today if the legislation had not been enacted – is unknown. Furthermore, in a significant proportion of these offences the gun is not fired, no weapon is retrieved or no forensic evidence available to allow the unambiguous classification of the weapon used as a legislated for 'lethal barrelled firearm' or otherwise.[10]

Market in illegal firearms

- There is limited evidence about the sources of and market in illegal firearms.

- The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) report that, 'The relatively small numbers of firearms seized at importation suggest that it is unlikely that criminal demand is being met to any significant degree by the smuggling of genuine firearms into the UK' (NCIS, 2003: 62). However, UK-based criminals involved in organised illegal firearm trafficking have been reported in the Netherlands (Europol, 2004: 14). There are on-going, albeit limited, concerns about the potential for 'battlefield trophies' being imported by armed service personnel returning from overseas operations, and also some indications that guns are being smuggled with other illegal commodities such as drugs (e.g. NCIS 2003). Another area of concern is abuse of the postal service (ibid.: 62–3).[11]

- There is some evidence of prohibited firearms and ammunition being obtained by criminals having previously been legally purchased and imported by registered firearms dealers (NCIS, 2003: 62).

10. From 1997/98 to 2001/02, increases in offences involving handguns accounted for 63 per cent of the total increase in the illegal use of firearms, excluding air weapons (Povey and Kaiza, 2005: 39); between 2001/02 and 2004/05 crimes involving imitation firearms rose by 2,088 (up 168 per cent) whilst those involving handguns fell by 1,527 (down 26 per cent) (Povey and Kaiza, 2006: 83). Changes to recording practices cannot be ruled out as an explanation for the latter change, for example scrutinising more closely the classification of firearms that appear to be handguns in relation to recording them as imitation or otherwise.
11. NCIS reports that, 'Between five and ten packages containing suspect firearms or components requiring further enquiries are detected per day on average' by postal service providers (NCIS, 2003: 63).

- Individuals with basic engineering skills have been able to circumvent firearms legislation by converting legally-obtained air weapons and blank-firing imitation firearms and reactivating deactivated firearms, so that they fire live ammunition, which in some cases is home-made. There are documented examples of individuals conducting these illegal conversions in considerable numbers (many hundreds or more) (McLagan, 2005: 131-142). There is some emerging evidence to suggest that the innovation of converted firearms has changed the dynamics of illegal firearms markets and the crimes in which such guns are used (Hales and Silverstone, 2005). It seems likely that the conversion of imitation firearms, including blank-firers and self-contained gas cartridge airguns, started in numbers in the mid to late-1990s, at about the same time as a number of reactivated machine pistols, such as MAC-10s, were being recovered by the police (Bryan 2001c: 29, 2001d: 16; personal communication with the MPS Armourer, 16 June 2005).

- The significant presence of converted imitation firearms, and to a lesser extent reactivated and home-made firearms, as well as home-made ammunition, may suggest that made-for-purpose lethal firearms and ammunition are not available in sufficient numbers or at a low enough cost, to meet demand (e.g. see NCIS, 2003: 59). Alternatively, the presence of these weapons may be creating demand that did not previously exist, for example by increasing levels of violence and creating 'arms races'.

- Highly realistic imitation or replica firearms, including blank firers and so-called airsoft/BB guns and other 'toys' are in many cases sufficiently realistic to be used in the commission of crimes such as armed robbery and pose a considerable challenge to policing, particularly when in the hands of youngsters. There is evidence that the market in imitation and replica firearms has grown rapidly (NCIS, 2003: 60), accompanied by an increase in the quality of manufacture, in part as an industry response to tighter controls on lethal firearms (Taylor and Hornsby, 2000). The police report fearing that they may one day shoot and kill a child or teenager playing with one of these imitations (Greater Manchester Police Deputy Chief Constable Alan Green speaking at the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) annual conference in May 2005, quoted in BBC, 2005).

- The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has previously estimated that as many as 50 per cent of all illegal firearms used in crime in London are conversions or imitations (APPGGC, 2003: 14). Of the 1,381 firearms seized by the MPS during 2002, 425 were 'viable lethal-barrelled firearms', of which 174 were handguns, 150 were conversions and 11 were reactivated firearms. Six hundred

and thirty seven of the total were unconverted imitations and 114 were other weapons such as stun guns (MPS, 2003: 21).[12]

Criminal cultures

- There have been changes to the way firearms are used. A number of sources refer to the emergence of 'disorganised' (as opposed to organised) criminals using firearms in ways that did not occur in the past, for example to settle relatively trivial disputes (notably the MPS, see APPGGC, 2003:24). It is particularly in the context of these changes that references have been made to the alleged emergence of a 'gun culture' in the UK; NCIS, for example, refers to, 'a gun culture in which possession of firearms is related to image and machismo' (NCIS 2003: 61). It has, however, been argued that the term 'gun culture' is overly simplistic (Hales, 2005).

- In some parts of the country the most serious violence involving firearms is disproportionately concentrated within certain ethnic communities. Data from the MPS, for example, shows that between April 2001 and October 2005, 63 per cent of the victims of murder and attempted murder involving firearms in London were Black/IC3 (MPS Performance Information Bureau, unpublished data).[13,14] Nevertheless, all ethnic groups are affected by gun crime. The West Midlands Police, for example, highlight the significance of both British Asian and White gun crime offenders in addition to Black individuals (APPGGC, 2003: 37). Gender and age comprise two important variables, the vast majority of offenders being male and aged between the late teens and early 30s, although this differs by offence type, type of firearm used and geographical location (Hales, 2005: Chapter 2, pp 20–56).

Illegal drugs markets

- There is growing evidence about the links between illegal drugs markets and the criminal use of firearms. Research into the way these markets function highlights the significance of the illegal status of drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin,

12. No information is available on the remaining 205 firearms. All figures on firearm seizures need to be treated with considerable caution due to potential inconsistencies with recording practices.
13. Between April 2001 and October 2005 the Metropolitan Police recorded 609 victims of murder/attempted murder involving firearms (London, excluding the City of London Police and British Transport Police services). In relation to these: 381 (63%) of the victims were Black (police Identity Code IC3); of 1,250 suspects, 786 (63%) were Black; of 306 persons accused (i.e. arrested and charged) of these crimes, 227 (74%) were Black. All data: MPS Performance Information Bureau, unpublished data, as at 1 December 2005.
14. Census data shows that in 2001, 12.4% of London's residents were Black Caribbean, Black African, Other Black, Mixed White and Black Caribbean or Mixed White and Black African (Greater London Authority, 2005: Table 1, pp 2–3). The census categories do not, however, directly correlate with the Identity Codes used by the Metropolitan Police.

implying high potential profits and no recourse to conventional risk management strategies such as legally-enforceable contracts, calling the police and purchasing insurance (Jacobs, 2000; Topalli et al., 2002). Violence within such markets is therefore endemic (Goldstein, 1985), and evidence is emerging of territorial disputes in some areas, the significance of the criminal victimisation of drug dealers, and the use of violence to enforce debts and sanction informants (Lupton et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2002; Bennett and Holloway, 2004a; Hales and Silverstone, 2005). In other cases, dependent drug users may use firearms, notably imitations, to facilitate robberies in order to finance their drug taking (Matthews, 2002; Hales and Silverstone, 2005).

- A number of sources refer to the significance of particular communities in the UK in relation to both illegal drugs markets and firearms violence (e.g. Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; ACPO, 2002; NCIS, 2003). This includes Turkish groups in relation to heroin importation and Caribbean, particularly Jamaican, groups in relation to cocaine importation and crack cocaine production in the UK.

- Involvement in drugs markets and other criminal activity represent perceived routes to realising material expectations in some deprived communities. This is particularly where there is an active local criminal economy and legitimate employment prospects are significantly limited because of poor educational attainment or a constrained legitimate local economy (Hallsworth, 2005: 168; Hales and Silverstone, 2005).

Gangs

- There is evidence of collective (gang) violence involving illegal firearms in a number of cities (ACPO, 2002; Bullock and Tilley, 2002; Shropshire and McFarquhar, 2002; Hoggarth and Wright, 2002 and 2003; Schneider et al., 2004; Hales and Silverstone, 2005). It must be noted, however, that UK-focussed research on gangs is limited to the extent that no clear definition(s) can be agreed upon of relevance to the UK picture (Marshall et al., 2005). It should also be said that external perceptions about 'gangs' may differ from the perceptions of the individuals involved and so-labelled (Schneider et al., 2004; Hales and Silverstone, 2005). In some cases, collective violence appears to be related to (loosely) organised crime structures, such as drug dealing networks. Significantly, these collectives or gangs provide a focal point for violence, including long-running feuds that draw in gang members and their families.

Night-time economy

- Nightclubs, parties and other social venues represent significant focal points for firearms violence, particularly in relation to retaliation for perceived incidents of disrespect or previous violent acts, but more generally as locations at which rivals may encounter each other (MPA, 2004: 55; Hales and Silverstone, 2005: 70, 101).

Policing

- Much current gun crime poses significant challenges to policing, particularly where it occurs within distinct communities. Witness intimidation (whether feared or actual), normative cultures of non-co-operation with the police, previous experiences of (alleged) police malpractice and other factors serve to hinder criminal investigations and successful prosecutions (Bullock and Tilley, 2002: 33; Schneider et al., 2004: 58-9, 65; Hales and Silverstone, 2005: 74-5).

- Additionally, certain types of converted firearm do not leave conventional forensic evidence. This includes for example, converted blank-firing handguns being muzzle-loaded with a ball bearing (personal communication with the MPS Armourer, 2 December 2004). Similarly, shotgun pellets cannot be linked to a particular shotgun, although recovered spent cartridges and wadding can in some cases.

Overall, then, available sources clearly suggest that the picture is complex and dynamic. There appear to have been changes to both the market in illegal firearms and criminal cultures, not least because of the growing significance of converted imitation firearms. More generally, gun crime poses clear difficulties for policing for a range of reasons including forensic challenges and negative cultural attitudes towards law enforcement.

Aims of this research

As the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Home Office jointly state:

> *"…recent events… have pointed to the need to examine every possible means of tackling both the supply and use of firearms, and the circumstances which lie behind the increasing propensity of some individuals to carry and use guns… The response must focus on both gun crime and gun culture, addressing issues to do with the supply and availability of illegal firearms, their movement within communities and amongst criminals and the factors that can influence the*

> *perceived desirability, willingness or propensity of some people to illegally own, carry or use a firearm."* (HMIC, 2004: 94)

A number of gaps have been or can be identified in existing research literature, strategic assessments and other documentation. In general terms, there has been a focus on recorded crime data and a lack of evidence concerning:

- the market in illegal firearms, including ammunition;
- the attitudes of offenders towards illegal firearms, including in relation to a supposed 'gun culture';
- the relationships, if any, between gun crime, illegal drug selling and use and gangs;
- the impact of firearms legislation, including its impact on offender decision making.

This research seeks to address these gaps with reference to the contexts within which firearms are used illegally. In addition, it will attempt to identify appropriate interventions and deterrence strategies.

There are a number of reasons why it is appropriate to be concerned with offender motivation and the market in illegal firearms.

- Understanding how and why illegal firearms are obtained and crimes involving them happen makes the development of effective interventions more likely.

- Gun crime is rare and interventions need to be both proportionate and appropriately targeted (i.e. not impact unfairly on the law-abiding majority).

- A significant proportion of gun crime offences take place in street settings and other locations that are less amenable to situational crime prevention measures such as metal detectors (MPA, 2004: 32; Hales and Silverstone, 2005: 61).[15] Although in some areas high-profile targeted stop-and-search operations have been conducted, for example supported by Automatic Number Plate Reader (ANPR) technology[16], some police officers have expressed concerns at both the cost and potential risks to community relations of these tactics (MPA, 2004: 22, 26–7).

15. Although the Commissioner of the MPS, Sir Ian Blair, has recently called for legislation to compel certain licensed venues to search all customers for metal objects such as knives and guns (Muir, 2005).
16. ANPR uses roadside cameras to read the number plates of passing vehicles. In the context of policing, the cameras can be linked to computer databases to identify e.g. stolen vehicles or those belonging to known firearms offenders.

- Much recent discourse has centred on the apparent emergence of and need to tackle what is described as a 'gun culture' without clearly defining what that means and with very little supporting evidence.

- The full impact of the UK's highly restrictive firearms legislation cannot be understood in isolation from understanding offender motivation, the market in illegal firearms and the contexts within which illegal firearms are possessed and used.

Attention now turns to how these aims have been addressed with a consideration of the research methodology.

2. Methodology

Semi-structured prison-based interviews with 80 male convicted Firearms Act offenders aged 18 to 30 have been used to explore the market in and use of illegal firearms. This chapter will describe why this method was chosen and how the research was undertaken. Further details of the interview themes can be found in Appendix C, along with a fuller discussion of the conduct, dynamics and analysis of the interviews and the limitations to the research methodology used.

Transcript material appears as supporting evidence in verbatim form throughout Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Where more than one quotation is included to support a point, the different quotations originate from different interviews, unless specifically stated otherwise. In general, the only identifying information provided is the region in which the offender quoted committed his offence.

Introduction

This research is concerned with examining the market in illegal firearms, the contexts in which such firearms are possessed and used and the attitudes of offenders towards them. It will consider the presence and characteristics of criminal 'gun cultures' and examine the relationships between gun crime, illegal drug selling and use and gangs. In so doing, it will shed light on the impact of firearms legislation.

A number of approaches to addressing these themes can be envisaged (some of which have been previously deployed), including examining crime data trends, scrutinising police intelligence, surveying the general population, surveying the known offender population and using ethnographic (participant observation) methods.

In relation to possible quantitative approaches, gun crime is rare and the population of gun crime offenders is both largely unknown and likely to be only a very small proportion of the total population of England and Wales; any statistically robust sample would therefore need to be very large. Furthermore, correlating crime data that includes drugs offences is limited by the fact that drug crime levels are significantly associated with police activity against drug markets and are not therefore representative of underlying drug crime rates (e.g. see Hutchinson, 2004: 14).

Research conducted in the London Borough of Brent during 2004 for the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) demonstrated the viability and value of researching gun crime from the perspective of convicted offenders using in-depth qualitative interviews (Hales and Silverstone, 2005). That study used local Probation and Youth Offending Service records as sampling points, with 15 convicted Firearms Act offenders interviewed out of a total of 38, including five interviews undertaken in prisons. The offender interviews element of the Brent research has effectively acted as a pilot for this larger study. Elsewhere, offender interviews were independently proposed as being particularly helpful in gaining a better understanding of the possession and use of illegal firearms by the authors of a study based on arrested offenders in police custody (Bennett and Holloway, 2004a: 250).

Qualitative interviewing allows the in-depth exploration of gun crime with individuals who have been involved in person, producing rich evidence about attitudes and context that quantitative methods and interviews with criminal justice professionals often lack. This approach also enables the researcher to relate experience of gun crime to other socio-economic, cultural and criminal experiences. There are some deficiencies however, such as the fact that interviews with convicted offenders are necessarily skewed towards individuals who have been caught, and that where such interviews are conducted in prison establishments, other factors may be important, such as the institutional environment (e.g. Polsky, 1998). In the absence of comprehensive data about the gun crime offender population the extent of any sample bias remains unclear.[17]

For the present study the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) Violent Crime Research Group commissioned research based on in-depth prison interviews with 80 recently convicted male Firearms Act offenders aged between 18 and 30. A focus on London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Nottinghamshire was stipulated because of the national concentration of gun crime offences in these areas. The age range was selected to coincide with the peak ages for offending and a focus on men determined because of the overwhelming dominance of men in gun crime offender statistics. In addition, research on illegal firearms and gangs being undertaken for the Youth Justice Board covered 11–17 year olds and an overlap with this project was deemed undesirable.

Sampling strategy

The Home Office RDS interrogated the Prison Service *Inmate Information System* (IIS) database to identify prisons that housed convicted male prisoners, were not maximum

17. For a fuller discussion of the limitations to the research methods used, see Appendix C.

security establishments[18], and held at least ten Firearms Act offenders from the four principal research locations aged between 18 and 30. These sampling criteria were intended to limit reasonably the number of prisons to be visited, minimising bureaucracy. Sixteen prisons were identified, of which 14 agreed to participate and 11 were visited.

In an effort to make the research as up-to-date as possible, interviews were sought with the most recently convicted offenders who fitted the sample criteria (male, aged 18–30, convicted of a Firearms Act offence). The sample was not stratified, except in relation to ensuring coverage of the four key research locations, although some interviews were conducted with offenders from other parts of the country. It was felt that any attempt to quota sample within subgroups, for example stratifying by race or age, would be both impractical and potentially inappropriate; it would result in some very small groups that would both offer little insight and risk compromising the identity of interviewees.

Recruiting interviewees

Prison staff approached all potential interviewees identified in the sample, providing them with a letter from the research team inviting their participation and detailing the conditions under which they would be participating. This was to ensure that informed consent was obtained (see Appendix D).[19]

A consent form was included for potential interviewees to sign to indicate their agreement or otherwise to participate in the research (see Appendix E). In addition, interviewees were asked to confirm verbally on the interview recording that they had received, read and understood the letter inviting them to participate and were happy to proceed. The consent form also included a request to access the interviewees' case files held by the prisons; this was granted in 30 cases (37.5%) where both the prison authorities and interviewee consented, allowing a consistency check between the official account and the interview. No significant differences were encountered, except that often the interviews went well beyond the information on file.

18. A decision was taken to exclude maximum-security prisons from the sample after a recent marked tightening of security in relation to research access to such establishments had been identified as a significant barrier. It was felt that the additional effort required would not be proportionate to any potential research benefits accrued from interviewing particularly dangerous offenders.
19. The Prison Service guidelines concerning research in prisons and detailing limitations to confidentiality can be found in HMPS (2004).

Sample achieved

To achieve the Home Office's quota target of 80 interviews a total sample of 202 offenders was identified at the 14 prisons that agreed to take part, including 166 at the 11 prisons visited, all of whom were invited to participate in the research. In the end 84 interviews were conducted with 81 individuals, including two who had not been in the original sample and were interviewed having approached the research team and indicated their wish to participate. Two offenders were interviewed twice after moving between prisons in the sample and a third was purposefully interviewed a second time. Finally, one interviewee proved uncooperative when being interviewed, necessitating the removal of his interview from the research, leaving a total of 80 offenders' interviews to form the basis for the analysis presented in this report.[20] Fuller consideration of the achieved sample is included in Chapter 3.

A wide variety of reasons for non-participation can be identified, the main one being potential interviewees transferring out of the prison after agreeing to an interview, or even before one could be requested. This and similar problems were exacerbated by delays between prisons and prisoners consenting to the research and access being gained to the prison, often because of time-consuming security clearance procedures.

Interview schedule

The research team initially developed the interview schedule used in the Brent study (Hales and Silverstone, 2005). The Home Office RDS then circulated this amongst the membership of the *ACPO Criminal Use of Firearms - Gun Crime Research* working group for consultation and a number of additional themes were proposed and agreed upon.[21] The key themes under which questions were organised are below. Further details can be found in Appendix C, along with a discussion of the conduct, dynamics and analysis of the interviews and the method used to analyse them.

A. Introductions
B. Background information – personal
C. Background information – criminal record
D. Experiences of crime as a victim

20. Eighty offenders interviewed out of a sample of 168 (166 from the original sample, plus two who approached the research team in prison) at the 11 prisons visited gives a response rate of 48 per cent.
21. This group was comprised of representatives from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the Youth Justice Board (YJB), the Government Office for London (GOL), the Home Office RDS, and the Home Office Public Order and Police Co-operation Group.

E. The offender's firearm – type, cost etc.
F. The offender's firearm continued – intentions of possession
G. The offence
H. Firearms in general
I. Prison and gun crime
J. Preventing gun crime
K. Any other comments

Research ethics

The research ethics were informed by the considerations of the University of Portsmouth Research Ethics Committee and by the limitations to confidentiality specified by the Prison Service in Prison Service Order 7035 (HMPS, 2004).

Protecting the anonymity of interviewees is of paramount importance. To that end, records of interviewee names were kept separate from interview recordings and transcripts at all times, and in such a way that the two could not be cross-referenced. Neither prisons nor interviewees will be named in this report. Furthermore, where transcript material is presented, the only identifying information will be the area in which the convicted offence took place. From time to time references are made to the ethnicity or age of a quoted interviewee, but only where that information is directly relevant to the point being made.

3. The offenders interviewed: demographics and backgrounds

Throughout this report it should be recalled that this research is qualitative and the findings cannot therefore be considered to be representative of all firearms offenders.

Demographics

The offence location of the offenders interviewed (in all but two cases also their residential location) is broadly in line with the 2003/04 national picture for gun crime in England and Wales, as can be seen in Table 3.1. However, the West Midlands region is slightly over-represented and 'Other' areas (all other areas) under-represented.

Table 3.1 Offenders interviewed, by region and average age

Region	Number of interviews	Average age (years)	% of Sample	*% of Gun Crime in England & Wales (2003/04)*[a]
Greater Manchester	10	23.4	12.5	*12.3*
London	31	22.4	38.8	*37.6*
Nottinghamshire	3	22.7	3.8	*2.3*
West Midlands	19	26.3	23.8	*11.0*
Other	17	23.6	21.3	*36.8*
Total	80	23.7	100.0	*100.0*

a Povey and Kaiza (2005) in Povey (2005) HOSB 02/05. These figures exclude the criminal use of air weapons and were the latest figures available at the time the interview sample was generated.

The national ethnic composition of all firearms offenders is not presently known. Table 3.2 illustrates the self-defined ethnic composition of the research sample: White offenders make up the largest group of those interviewed, followed by Black offenders, those of mixed ethnicity, four Asians and one Chinese interviewee.[22]

22. In relation to debates concerning ethnicity and crime, it should be noted that the police ethnic Identity Code (IC code) 'IC3 – African/Afro-Caribbean' encompasses individuals recorded in the Census ethnicity codes as 'Black or Black British' and those of mixed ethnicity including some visible Black heritage.

Table 3.2 Offenders interviewed, by self-defined ethnicity

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
White	*36*	*45.0*
British	31	38.8
Irish	1	1.3
Other	4	5.0
Mixed	*11*	*13.8*
White and Black Caribbean	2	2.5
White and Black African	0	0.0
White and Asian	0	0.0
Other	9[a]	11.3
Asian or Asian British	*4*	*5.0*
Indian	2	2.5
Pakistani	1	1.3
Bangladeshi	0	0.0
Other	1	1.3
Black or Black British	*28*	*35.0*
Caribbean	15	18.8
African	6	7.5
Other	7[b]	8.8
Chinese or other ethnic group	*1*	*1.3*
Chinese	1	1.3
Any other	0	0.0
Total	*80*	*100.0*

a Includes four individuals describing themselves as of 'mixed' ethnicity with no further details and two describing themselves as 'mixed' including Black, without further information.
b All described themselves as 'Black British', but gave no further details.

Table 3.3 shows the ethnic composition of the interviewees by region. It is worth noting that the 17 offenders whose offences took place in 'Other' areas included 16 who were White and only one who was Black – a profile that differs from the four main research locations. All four Asian interviewees were from the West Midlands region.

Table 3.3 Offenders interviewed, by region and self-defined ethnicity

Region	Asian	Black	Chinese	Mixed	White	Total
Greater Manchester		2		2	6	10
London		16	1	6	8	31
Nottinghamshire		1		2		3
West Midlands	4	8		1	6	19
Other		1			16	17
Total	*4*	*28*	*1*	*11*	*36*	*80*

Family, education and employment

With a few notable exceptions, the offenders in this study had grown up in disrupted family environments, under-achieved in and been excluded from mainstream education and had poor work histories in legitimate employment.

Family

Only 22 of the 80 offenders grew up in a household that included both natural parents. Overall, 59 reported having had a disrupted upbringing, including (note: one individual may be counted more than once):

- 35 had grown up in a single parent household;
- 8 had a step-parent in their household;
- 3 had grown up with other relatives;
- 17 had half- or step-siblings;
- 20 had at least 5 siblings (6 had more than 10);
- 8 had lived in care;
- 2 mentioned having been physically abused by a parent;
- 5 mentioned criminal siblings, more than one in three cases;
- 2 mentioned a father in prison;
- 2 reported that family members had been murdered.

Furthermore, 31 of the offenders reported having children of their own, all of whom were therefore growing up with their father in prison.[23]

23. Both the Cambridge study in *Delinquent Development* (Farrington *et al.*, 1996) and the more recent *Pittsburgh Youth Study* (Farrington *et al.*, 2001) identify paternal conviction as one of the most significant predictors of a child's future offending.

Education

Forty-three of the 80 offenders had been excluded from school, including 22 permanently excluded and three who were imprisoned before completing their pre-16 education. Only 15 reported any post-16 education (including training in prison), including two that were university undergraduates at the time of their offence.

Employment

Ten offenders reported having never worked in legitimate employment, including one who was 27 years old at the time he was interviewed; another aged 30 had not worked since the age of 19. This reflects the fact that for many interviewees, criminality – notably drug dealing and robbery – supplemented any legitimate earnings, which in any case were often irregular and limited. Those who had worked included 49 in unskilled or manual occupations, 15 who had a trade, three who had worked in clerical positions and one who had worked in accountancy. The two remaining offenders had respectively been a soldier and a semi-professional sportsman.

Positive experiences of work included having responsibility, a sense of self-worth from providing for themselves and their families, the fact that work kept them away from crime, the sociable element of working with colleagues and the opportunity to pursue their interests – e.g. working with cars. Negatives included boredom, poor pay and unsociable hours. For many, crime provided autonomy, excitement and instant wealth, at least in the short term. For individuals whose employment prospects are limited by a lack of qualifications and an existing criminal record, a criminal lifestyle can be seen as an attractive proposition.

Drugs and alcohol

Seventy-two of the 80 offenders had ever tried an illegal drug, of which 21 had been problem drug users – that is, their drug use interfered with their quality of life. Furthermore, 18 had been heavy drinkers (of which 12 were White and two Asian).

Total reported drug use was as follows (one offender can be counted more than once):

- 63 had smoked cannabis at some point (including 36 who had used the drug at least daily);
- 44 had taken ecstasy;
- 32 had used powder cocaine;
- 16 had smoked crack cocaine;
- 9 had used heroin;
- 9 had used amphetamines.

Overall, 27 offenders described a link between their drug use and their offence and 11 described a link between alcohol and their offence.

Social lifestyles

Analysing the interviews, three broad social lifestyle groups can be identified within the offender sample, and although they are not mutually exclusive some clear differences between them can be seen, with music and drug preferences forming the most important distinguishing variables. In all three groups some individuals use crime – typically drug dealing and/or robbery, but also a range of other offences such as theft, burglary and 'car ringing'[24] – to fund their lifestyles. Overall, nightclubs emerged as particularly significant, with only six of the 80 interviewees reporting that they did not go clubbing prior to their arrest.

Dance music/clubbing/dance drugs/pubs

This predominantly White group notably included a number of the older offenders whose early experiences of nightclubs coincided with the 'rave' scene in the early to mid-1990s. This included exposure to the prevailing dance drug culture, notably using ecstasy in large quantities, alongside LSD and amphetamines. Their more recent experiences of clubbing saw them sharing social spaces with younger alcohol, cannabis, ecstasy and occasional (powder) cocaine users, and frequenting dance music clubs that often featured alcohol-fuelled violence, including the use of bottles as weapons and occasionally knives. Several had worked in nightclub door security roles, immersing them in a distinct organised criminal culture centred on weightlifting, violence and drug dealing and use, and enabling them to develop a network of criminal contacts capable of supplying drugs, weapons and other illicit goods.

Away from nightclubs, individuals within this group typically socialised in pubs and drank regularly, frequently to excess in a few cases – a factor underlying much of their offending behaviour. Many smoked cannabis on an occasional basis, some more heavily. For those involved in powder cocaine and ecstasy dealing, the pubs and clubs they frequented often represented market places in which they sold to people similar to themselves.

Urban music/clubbing/cannabis

Individuals in this group were more typically from deprived inner-city areas and were more likely to be from Black ethnic minority groups, although many were White and a smaller number Asian. Almost all had smoked cannabis, typically stronger 'skunk' varieties, on a

24. Replacing a car's identification numbers with those from another vehicle, e.g. to conceal the fact that it has been stolen or written off.

regular basis since their early to mid-teens, in some cases heavily. For some, this was supplemented occasionally with powder cocaine or ecstasy when partying, and on rare occasions crack cocaine smoked in a 'spliff'. Alcohol use was less socially significant and some did not drink at all.

Music represented an essential dimension of their identity and lifestyle and many, particularly the younger offenders, wrote lyrics and/or produced music at home and with friends. The interviews suggest that American 'gangsta rap' has a relatively insignificant profile when compared with R'n'B and British and Caribbean music, including hip-hop, drum and bass, garage and dancehall.

For most individuals in this category, nightclubs and parties (including 'pay parties'[25]) represented a key focus of their social lives when they were not simply spending time with friends in public spaces or at home. These venues were significantly associated with constructing and defending a public identity, displaying conspicuous material wealth and responding vigorously to social challenges, notably including disrespect and masculine honour issues concerning girlfriends and peers. Violence was frequently witnessed and occasionally experienced. Many individuals in this group reported having seen firearms used in or near these venues, typically in violent confrontations, but also in a small number of cases in the context of robberies committed against revellers. More generally, ostentatious behaviours exposed this group to the risk of robbery, particularly where their wealth was known to have criminal origins; a prevailing culture of jealousy ('red eye') and rivalry seems to have 'legitimised' the act of robbery and a few individuals fell victim to their own success. Numerous references were made during interviews to considerable social pressures to conform to norms concerning clothing and other material goods. For some, particularly younger individuals, the inherent tension between these codes and economic hardship was resolved through crime – either directly acquisitive offences such as robbery, or for profit via drug dealing and the wider criminal economy.

Finally, and particularly outside London, some individuals described high levels of mobility, being prepared to travel considerable distances to attend nightclubs in other cities. Where gang members were involved this could lead to conflict as local gangs reacted to the influx of rivals from elsewhere. Travelling was associated with increased risk, which could be offset by weapon carrying or group socialising.

25. Pay parties are unlicensed private parties to which entry is gained by payment of an admission fee.

Dependent drug users

The last group was comprised of dropouts from the other two, for whom drug dependency, typically involving cocaine, heroin or crack cocaine (or the latter two in combination) had come to dominate their lifestyles. Twenty-one of the offenders reported problem drug use prior to their arrest. For these individuals, the entrenchment of drug dependency was associated with a withdrawal from their normal social activities, in a number of cases because they were consuming the profits earned from drug selling activity, which would otherwise be spent on a consumer lifestyle. A particular risk for this group concerned becoming indebted to other criminals, particularly drug dealers.

Gang or crew membership

Definitional issues complicate any consideration of gangs or crews (Bennett and Holloway, 2004b; Marshall *et al.*, 2005; Hallsworth and Young, in press). Acknowledging this, interviewees were asked whether they had ever been in a gang or crew, without being offered a definition of what that meant. They were then asked about the structure and activities of any such group, including conflict with other similar groups. Further consideration is given to the relationship between gangs and violence in Chapter 5.

Around half of the interviewees indicated that they had been in a gang or crew and the vast majority described other gangs or crews where they lived. Importantly, many of those interviewed indicated that they had been part of a group or collective, but insisted that this was not a gang or crew; nevertheless, some conceded that is how outsiders might have seen them. Furthermore, not all of the groups described were engaged in criminal activity.

> *"Yeah, you could say that. They are just mates like, you know. But you know what people's perception is like, if they see more than two people it is a gang, you know what I mean?"* (Greater Manchester)

A number of collective structures were described and a hierarchical typology of four 'ideal types' has been identified. Although they are presented here in the past tense most cases have a contemporary relevance: the average time already served in prison for the 80 offenders was only two years at the time of interview and 23 of the offenders had served a year or less.

- *Close friendship groups* with a social focus, but offering safety in numbers and physical backup if required. These were typically comprised of individuals who knew each other from school and who had grown up in the same neighbourhood.

Conflicts at this level tended to be localised and time-limited, although they occasionally drew in other family members and associates, leading to more serious violence.

"…mostly just my friends. Do you know what I mean? If anything happened to them I'd go and help them or they would help me… Same schools, same estates. Like most of the people I hang around with I have knew since I was about six." (Greater Manchester)

"No not a gang, I wouldn't say a gang… it is just a group of friends… in London I don't know any gang that exists really and truly, it is just a bunch of friends… just local people who went to the same school and things like that… It was a group not a gang, like ten of your friends for example, and you all live close by." (London)

- *Associates* who were known to each other but were not close friends, typically interacting socially, sharing spaces such as estates, and periodically engaged in low-level criminality. For non-criminal individuals, such 'associates' provided an interface with local criminal cultures, including gangs. Individuals may be drawn into violent conflict by association.

  "…you've got associates that – they're people that just run around in a team like, they're not going college or nothing… They don't do nothing; they just smoke weed and girls and that's it." (London)

  "I only go places with my close friends. My associates, I just see them in the estate or something, just say hello to them, whatever. That's it." (London)

  "I started doing various things with associates; bad associates spoil useful habits. So I got involved in a bit of crime, I got used to making money quite easily and disposing of it and using it just as easily." (Other)

- *Criminal crews* that focussed on activities such as controlling local drugs markets and, for some members, conducting armed robberies and other offending. They sometimes became involved in disputes with rival crews over drug market activity, but more generally rivalries encompassed various levels of conflict, including personal disputes that spilt over into group violence. Crew members assumed a degree of collective responsibility, both in providing backup and as targets for rival

groups. A number of offenders described organisations at this level involved in long-standing endemic violence, in several cases without an understanding of its origins. Violence sometimes appears to have been symbolic as much as instrumental.

"Mostly these gangs were selling drugs, and hanging around in crews, smoking drugs, going out. It was heavy drug dealing – a lot of drug dealing." (West Midlands)

"Sell drugs, rob places, that's it. We didn't think about social things, it's was all about paper. You know what I'm saying? About the money." (West Midlands)

"…when you're in a group of people you get yourself involved in their arguments. You know what I mean? You stick together like. I back certain people up and they back me up at the end of the day... They know if you're moving with a certain crew, it's not only one person you got to worry about is it? It's everybody." (London)

"Yes, there were a lot of other crews, about six or seven… [They were doing] The same things – robbing people, robbing places." (West Midlands)

- *Organised crime networks* whose activities almost always included a degree of drug market participation, for example encompassing middle-market level activities, in addition to other offending such as more serious armed robberies and quasi-legitimate enterprises such as door security companies. The latter were sometimes used to control venue-based drugs markets. Typically, violence was only used sparingly and instrumentally.

  "…there's these certain rules you know, and like you got in jail where you got a structure in place, you'd have certain people abide to it out there as well… We're not really a threat to anyone, unless someone threatens us." (Greater Manchester)

This typology reflects very closely the findings of recent research on 'Urban Collectives' in the UK, which independently arrived at a tripartite classification, distinguishing between 'Peer Groups', 'Gangs' and 'Organised Crime Groups' (Hallsworth and Young, in press).

Local social geographic conditions, including the built environment, the local economy – including the criminal economy – and the presence of distinct communities, appear to be instrumental in creating the conditions within which cultures of gang membership and gang

identity can develop and become entrenched. They appear to thrive where clear spatial or social boundaries can be identified, such as town centres or housing estates, and where there is a reasonable degree of community stability, such that people locally know (of) each other and gang identities can bridge generations. In the context of economic deprivation, the development of a local criminal economy – notably in relation to drug dealing – appears to provide a stimulus for collective criminal behaviour, including building market structures and defending commodities and territory. Over time the consolidation of such markets seems to result in younger members being drawn into gang activity such as delivering drugs, as more senior criminals offset risk onto junior colleagues.

The gang or crew cultures and structures reported varied considerably by region, being well established in parts of Birmingham and Greater Manchester, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. In almost all cases, drug market activity appears to have figured centrally in gang activity.

In Greater Manchester, clear differences were described between Salford on the one hand, and on the other the City of Manchester areas of Longsight and Moss Side in the South and Cheetham Hill in the North (reflecting the findings of Bullock and Tilley, 2002). Salford was described as having a closed, predominantly White, organised crime firm culture with consolidated links to security work, drug dealing, a particularly strong armed robbery culture, and a network – and reputation – that extended across the Greater Manchester region and beyond. Criminals from Salford were described as generally not engaging in conflict with other groups. By contrast, the five principal City of Manchester gangs described by interviewees (Doddington and Gooch in Moss Side, Longsight Crew and the smaller breakaway Pit Bull Crew in Longsight, and Cheetham Hill) were described as more racially diverse, less organised and more prone to violent conflict with each other. Violence was described as being particularly related to drug dealing activity, including turf wars, but more generally to long-standing conflicts and tit-for-tat violence. Membership was described as being predominantly based on residential location, to the extent that it may identify an individual with a particular gang irrespective of whether that person plays an active role.

In London, two particular areas stood out. In North London, clear evidence emerged of a long-standing rivalry between the so-called 'Tottenham Man Dem' and the 'Hackney Boys', based on borough affiliations and tit-for-tat violence. By contrast, the picture in South London appears more complex, with town centre and/or housing estate locations being instrumental. Brixton, Peckham and New Cross were all mentioned, with rivalries existing both between these areas and also within them – notably in Peckham and Brixton, where rivalries between local estates were reported. Elsewhere, housing estates appear to be significant in defining local territories in parts of West, North West and East London.

In the West Midlands, evidence was presented of numerous small criminal crews in Wolverhampton and Birmingham, including Asian individuals and groups, reflecting the apparently more recent involvement of Asian groups in gang structures and criminal activity in the region. These contrast with the large-scale Johnson Crew, focussed on Handsworth, and the Burger Bar Crew, focussed on Aston and Newtown, both reported as having wider influence within the West Midlands and beyond.

In Nottingham, the areas of St. Ann's, Bestwood, The Meadows and Radford were mentioned as defined gang territories, with gang activities focussing particularly on drug dealing, but also conflicts based on long-standing disputes over historical acts of violence.

Finally, a number of interviewees described inter-regional gang affiliations; for example, links between South Manchester and Birmingham, and Northampton and Birmingham were described based on kinship links, with each providing backup to the other in the event of conflict.

> *"…if they have got like trouble they'll come or we'll go down there and we will help them. If we've got trouble some of them come and help us, which is just like having another part of the gang really within another city."* (Greater Manchester)

The resulting gang mobility occasionally resulted in conflict.

> *"They were just, these people from the [Manchester] crew, I used to know quite a few of them, especially from prison, and I used to get on with them, most of them, but they was coming into our club in Wolverhampton, they're from Manchester, they're coming Wolverhampton trying to take over the clubs... some of my mates didn't, wouldn't put up with it like."* (West Midlands)

> *"I was in Sheffield – we used to go Sheffield cos we know like most of the Leeds boys from [area] and that. We would be with them but the Sheffield guys don't like them. So we'd go to like [a nightclub] in Sheffield. And they'd be like staring at the Leeds guys and we'd be with them so it could get quite heavy, you know what I mean? …there were loads of people outside waiting and with shooters and that... it was like the doors and that, they were run by people from Sheffield. And they don't like other people going in their clubs."* (Greater Manchester)

The significance of collective structures and behaviours to violence, particularly when formalised into gangs or crews, will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

Offending

Half the offenders in the present study had been convicted of robbery as their primary current offence, 25 had been convicted of firearm possession and eight had been convicted of a violent offence (see Table 3.4). More detail is given in Chapter 5.

Table 3.4 Offenders' offence type, by region

Offence	Greater Manchester	London	Nottingham-shire	West Midlands	Other	Total
Burglary		2				2
Drugs		1		1		2
False imprisonment		2				2
Possession	4	5	1	7	8	25
Robbery	4	18	1	9	8	40
Theft		1				1
Violence	2	2	1	2	1	8
Total	*10*	*31*	*3*	*19*	*17*	*80*

The relationship between the ethnicity of the offenders interviewed and their offences can be seen in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Offenders' offence type, by self-defined ethnicity

Offence	Asian	Black	Chinese	Mixed	White	Total
Burglary		1	1			2
Drugs	1	1				2
False imprisonment		2				2
Possession	1	10		3	11	25
Robbery	2	12		5	21	40
Theft					1	1
Violence		2		3	3	8
Total	*4*	*28*	*1*	*11*	*36*	*80*

Sentence

All 80 offenders had been tried and sentenced at Crown Court. Of the 61 who discussed their plea, 29 indicated that they pleaded guilty to all charges, 17 pleaded not guilty and 15 had plea-bargained or pleaded not guilty to some offences. On average, the 80 offenders had been sentenced to six years and eight months and had already served two years, 23 having served a year or less.

Forty-four indicated that they felt they had been dealt with fairly or had received a more lenient sentence than they had been expecting, particularly where they had been initially charged with a more serious offence or where their legal counsel had told them to expect a longer sentence. Thirty-one indicated that they were unhappy with their sentencing outcome, most of whom had pleaded not guilty, while two expressed mixed feelings. A number expressed the view that sentencing was somewhat inconsistent, having compared their own experiences with fellow prisoners and criminal associates. Three had appealed their sentence, two successfully, while two had had their sentences appealed by prosecutors.

Previous contact with the criminal justice system

Fifty-eight offenders had previous convictions, including six who had previously been convicted of firearms offences. Forty had previously served prison sentences and a further five had previously spent time on remand only without then being found guilty. In most cases their offending appears to have become more serious over time.

> *"I would say it did change, yes in a way. For me to like pick up a gun, obviously it kind of changed… a lot of things happened, lots of things were changing quickly you get me? A lot of people were getting shot in the area and stuff like that."* (London)

> *"When you get older you're into bigger things, you're not into little stupidness. I'm not looking at going to prison for no cheap thing."* (Other)

In a few cases, however, the offender had committed a very serious offence as their first offence, typically armed robbery, although also one instance of serious wounding with a firearm (for which the offender concerned was convicted of aggravated burglary).

Of 63 who discussed it, 58 had been stopped by the police in the year before being arrested for their most recent offence, about half on a regular basis. Most explained that they or their associates were well known to the police. A significant minority reported negative experiences of policing, including provocation, harassment, the use of excessive force and racial stereotyping, although these could not be substantiated by the research team.

> *"Yeah, they know me very well man… I get stopped all the time. Because once you get done for firearms the car gets stopped all the time."* (West Midlands)

> *"Nuff times: 20, 30, 40 times… Their policy out there was if you see two Black geezers in a car, or a Black geezer and girl, pull them over… [I felt] Victimised. I felt a lot of hatred towards them for keeping on stopping me."* (West Midlands)

"At least once a week… I'm a known face to them an' all." (Other)

"I mean some of them are doing their job. Some of them just start on you because you're Black or because you're walking certain ways or, I don't know, the way you dress or something… I was walking with my girlfriend; just me and my girlfriend are on the road, no-one else. They just stopped me for no – I mean they were driving that way and we were walking [the other] way; they did a big U-turn just to ask for my name. That pissed me off because I'm not going to say my name straight off. That pissed me off, so boy I told them about themselves before I told them about my name." (London)

Research conducted in the United States has highlighted a relationship between antipathy towards the police and social attitudes that encourage the informal resolution of disputes, for example in the form of direct retaliation (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003). It may be the case that similar issues apply in the UK, particularly where relations between police and communities have been problematic.

Victimisation

The vast majority of the 80 offenders had been involved in criminal cultures within which the distinction between victims and offenders was significantly blurred. Forty had previously been threatened with guns, 29 shot at and eight had been shot. Furthermore, 28 had been stabbed, 17 injured with other weapons, 34 had been robbed and three had been kidnapped.

The risk of victimisation appears to have been highest for drug market participants, significant levels of violence being used in the context of robberies of drug dealers, debt enforcement, territorial disputes and gang violence. One individual who had worked in a crack (dealing) house had been kidnapped, seriously assaulted and dumped in woodland, seen shots fired in the crack house during several robberies, been shot at and seen a man shot. In addition, he had been robbed at gunpoint in public on several occasions. None of these attacks were reported to the police.

This violent culture extends to the friends and families of those interviewed; 26 reported friends or family members shot and injured and a further 26 reported friends or family shot dead.

Responding to being victimised

Victimisation generally only came to the attention of the police in the case of fatalities or serious injury requiring medical attention – although even then, victim co-operation appears to have been minimal. Otherwise, interviewees reported a preference for taking personal retributive action and a fear of being labelled a grass, reflecting the findings of previous research (e.g. Hales and Silverstone, 2005).

> *"You have to deal with certain people in a certain way. So the word gets round so that no-one else tries robbing you or tries and pulls a fast one."* (West Midlands)

> *"Like if someone gets shot, obviously the someone who shot them will have to get shot. Like tit for tat really."* (Greater Manchester)

> *"I didn't report it to the police because I was frightened for myself. If I reported it, the only person who would be hurt is me. I thought they might come and shoot me or my kids."* (Other)

Two offenders from Greater Manchester referred to informal 'compensation' payments being made respectively in relation to a robbery and being shot in a case of mistaken identity.

First contact with firearms

Airguns and BB guns

For 20 of the offenders interviewed, their first contact with guns involved airguns or BB guns, typically when they were in their early teens, and almost all with friends. At least two had been convicted of shooting people with airguns, and several referred to shooting wildlife.

Crime

Many first experienced guns through associating with other criminals – either friends (19) or family members (six). Eight had first experienced a gun in the context of committing crime, including one who had been involved in a rural burglary during which a shotgun and ammunition were stolen. Three had first experienced guns as victims, in all cases in the context of drug dealing disputes over debts.

Sport/army

Three offenders had first used guns in the context of legitimate shooting sports, and a further three had some military training, two of whom had been in the cadets and one formerly a soldier.

Violent cultures

Finally, six offenders first experienced guns in their countries of origin, including two from the Balkans, three from Jamaica, and one from Africa. The levels of violence personally experienced were exceptional, including family members being murdered; one 20-year-old from Jamaica had seen his father killed in front of him and his aunt had also subsequently been murdered.

Conclusion: the offenders interviewed

The sample of 80 interviews is broadly in line with the national picture in relation to the location of offences involving firearms, with the West Midlands being slightly over-represented. Although only limited national data on the demographics of firearm offenders are available, that information suggests that the focus on men aged 18 to 30 years reflects the key profile for both offending and victimisation (whilst also avoiding an overlap with research being conducted elsewhere by the Youth Justice Board). The extent to which this sample – based on prison records and the offenders' willingness to participate – is biased is unknown, and it needs to be borne in mind that this research may have missed important details or overstated some findings. Nevertheless, it is a qualitative piece of work and is not intended to produce statistically robust findings.

The men interviewed for this research typically (although not exclusively) grew up in disrupted family environments, had unsuccessful and adversarial relationships with education and have poor legitimate work histories. A majority had previous convictions and most had been the victims of crime, including some very serious offences involving firearms. Against this background their social lives provided an important focus and three broad 'social lifestyle' groups have been identified with individuals in all three having used crime to fund their leisure activities. These in turn often formed a significant dimension of their public identity, to be defended if challenged.

Membership of gangs, crews and other collectives was considered and four structures were identified, distinguishing between close friendship groups, associates, criminal crews and organised crime networks. Further details were provided illustrating regional differences in gang cultures, notably distinguishing between the more established and consolidated groups in parts of Birmingham and Greater Manchester and the more complex picture found elsewhere.

These details provide an important context to the procurement, possession and use of illegal firearms that will be considered in more detail in the next two chapters. Significantly, they have already begun to illustrate the complexity of the issues involved.

4. The market in illegal firearms and ammunition

Chapter 1 provided a summary of existing evidence concerning the market in illegal firearms and ammunition in the UK and highlighted the paucity of such information. Evidence was presented that the smuggling of firearms into the UK appears to be relatively insignificant, suggesting that other sources of illegal firearms may be more important (NCIS, 2003: 62). These include the circulation of existing illegal firearms, the reactivation of previously deactivated firearms, the conversion of imitation firearms and airguns to fire live ammunition and, indeed, the criminal use of otherwise legal unconverted imitation firearms in offences such as robbery. All of these factors are elucidated by the present research.

The offenders were questioned about firearm and ammunition procurement, including considerations of choice, cost and location, generating a body of evidence that offers a range of insights into the market in illegal firearms and ammunition. It should be said, however, that this study has focussed on individuals convicted of offences relating to firearms possession and use rather than supply; that is to say individuals at the consumer level of the market. Illegal firearm suppliers were not specifically excluded from the sample but none were present in the 80 offenders interviewed. Thus, although this research provides a number of insights into the origins of illegal firearms, it is the case that some questions remain that would require further research, for example to explore in greater detail the mechanisms by which some illegal firearms are imported into the UK.

Firearms used

Technical expertise regarding firearms appears to be the exception rather than the rule – only a very few of the 80 interviewees volunteered any depth of technical knowledge, notably including the two former cadets and one former soldier. One consequence is that a health warning must be attached to firearm descriptions – particularly when references are made to 'real' handguns. It was often unclear whether the label 'real' was applied generically to mean a gun capable of discharging a lethal bullet rather than, for example, to distinguish between made-for-purpose lethal firearms and converted imitation firearms. Where conversions are skilfully completed even firearms experts can occasionally find it difficult to distinguish between the two, at least from their initial physical appearance (personal communication with the MPS Armourer, 27 September 2005).[26]

26. Tell-tale features that distinguish a purpose-built lethal firearm include the material from which the gun is manufactured (a ferrous gunmetal vs. the softer alloys typically used in imitation firearms) and the presence of rifling in the barrel (personal communication with the MPS Armourer, 27 September 2005).

Four offenders insisted that there was no gun present during their offence. The remaining 76 had been convicted of offences that they reported had involved a total of 102 firearms, three stun guns and one CS gas canister (total 106). These firearms are classified in Table 4.1 below. The total includes 67 described as 'real' firearms (plus three stun guns and one CS gas canister), four converted imitation handguns (that is, converted to fire live ammunition), two airguns and one reactivated handgun (a real gun that has been deactivated and then reactivated). Non-lethal firearms included four blank firing handguns, six airsoft/BB guns, one deactivated firearm and 13 further imitations. A further four handguns were of unspecified or unknown type (they had either been possessed by a co-offender of the individual interviewed or the interviewee denied prior knowledge of the firearm).

Table 4.1 Firearm types used in convicted offence

	Shotgun		Handguns				Other				
	Complete	Sawn-off	9mm	8mm	Revolver	Other/ not stated	Rifle	Automatic weapons	Stun gun	CS gas	Total
Real	4	16	20	1	13	7		6	3	1	71
Reactivated			1								1
Converted			2	2							4
Blank firer						4					4
Deactivated		1									1
Airgun						1	1				2
Airsoft/BB gun						6					6
Other imitation						13					13
Not specified						4					4
Total	4	17	23	3	13	35	1	6	3	1	106

Table 4.2 below gives an indication of the relationship between offence types and firearms types, using a simplified classification of the latter and excluding CS gas and stun guns. The primary distinction is between offences involving non-lethal firearms and those involving lethal firearms, the latter then being subdivided to distinguish between airguns, handguns, shotguns and automatic weapons.

Table 4.2 Firearm types used in convicted offence, by offence type

Offence	Number of offenders	Offence involved non-lethal firearm(s)	Offence involved lethal firearm(s)	*Offence involved airgun*	*Offence involved lethal handgun(s)*	*Offence involved lethal shotgun(s)*	*Offence involved automatic weapon(s)*
Burglary	2	1	1		*1*		
Drugs	2		2		*1*	*2*	*1*
False imprisonment	2	1	1		1		
Possession	25	4	18		*14*	*5*	*3*
Robbery	40	11	25		*19*	*6*	*1*
Theft	1		1	*1*			
Violence	8	2	*5*	*1*	*2*	*2*	
Total	80	19	*53*	*2*	*38*	*15*	*5*

Note: One offence can involve more than one firearm. The non-lethal and lethal firearm columns (columns three and four) do not add up to the overall total number of offenders (i.e. 19+53 does not equal 80) because:

- 4 offenders said no firearm was present;
- 3 offences involved handguns of unknown/not stated type;
- 2 offences involved CS gas/stun guns with no other firearms;
- 1 offence involved an imitation firearm and an unknown/not stated type handgun;
- 1 offence involved real firearms and imitation firearms.

Firearm supply

Determining the origins of firearms used in crime is often not straightforward, a fact compounded by the longevity of most firearms (e.g. Kleck, 1991, cited by Squires, 2000: 190) and the lack of an 'audit trail' within the criminal economy. Indeed, one offender in the present study reported that he specifically did not ask about the origins of the sawn-off shotgun he obtained from a local criminal armourer to commit an armed robbery:

> *"I would not ask him that sort of thing. [If I had asked] him them sort of things probably I would be in a grave by now."* (Greater Manchester)

Broadly, eight mechanisms exist by which firearms may come to be possessed and/or used illegally, of which all but the first and sixth were referred to in the 80 interviews.

i) 'Administrative' offences such as failing to renew a firearms certificate.

ii) Legally-owned firearms or imitation firearms used in an illegal manner by their lawful owner: e.g. an air weapon used to intentionally injure someone; an imitation firearm used to commit a robbery.

iii) Misappropriated legally-owned firearms used illegally: e.g. a shotgun burgled from the home of a shotgun certificate holder and then used in crime.

iv) Legally purchased imitation and deactivated firearms and airguns illegally converted to fire live ammunition.

v) Firearms that have legitimate origins in the UK that have been retained illegally: e.g. armed service weapons; handguns not surrendered after the ban introduced by the Firearms Acts of 1997.

vi) Firearms that are prohibited in the UK that have been legally imported by registered firearms dealers but which are then diverted into criminal hands (see NCIS, 2003: 62). This might arise, for example, if a prohibited firearm is imported to be deactivated but is then kept in a 'live' condition or if a firearm imported to be subsequently exported goes missing in the interim.

vii) Firearms that have been illegally imported/smuggled into the UK from overseas: e.g. by criminal networks or armed service personnel returning from overseas service with 'battlefield trophies'. This also includes illegal imitation and other firearms, such as 'readily convertible' blank firers and CS sprays, which can be purchased on the internet from international retailers.[27]

viii) Firearms that have been improvised or illegally manufactured from scratch.

It should be noted that there is a significant relationship between firearm types and supply mechanisms, an observation that is reinforced below when the interview evidence concerning pricing, procurement and choice factors relating to different types of firearms is discussed.

More generally, in relation to cross-border sources of illegal firearms the offenders interviewed were able to offer only a limited degree of insight. This suggests some combination of at least three factors: (a) the interviewees did not include individuals who had been exposed to or understood the original sources of illegal firearms; (b) only a (potentially very) small proportion of illegal firearms in the UK originated outside the UK's borders; (c) the longevity and circulation of illegal firearms means that their origins are often obscured from their eventual possessors.

27. A national police operation called Operation Bembridge was launched in 2004 to recover prohibited weapons, including firearms, purchased over the internet and illegally imported into the UK (e.g. see BBC, 2004b).

Where references were made to cross-border sources, however, a degree of corroboration was evident, highlighting in particular recent conflict areas as sources of firearms and Ireland and Liverpool as entry points for illegal importation. Nevertheless, the small number of offenders able to provide this type of insight means that this evidence should be treated with caution.

At least three offenders referred to links between Liverpool and Ireland in relation to firearm sources and a fourth to his own links between Manchester and Ireland.

> *"Get them from Liverpool… they [had] just come in… I drive up to Liverpool with a few of us like. Pick them up like… most of them come in there."* (Greater Manchester)

> *"If you go to Liverpool… they are coming in from Ireland. Somebody says from Poland, from Italy, from France, from Albania."* (Other)

> *"A lot of them are coming in from Liverpool."* (Greater Manchester)

A fifth offender, this time from London where he had been involved in drug dealing, but who had spent time as a child growing up in Ireland and had family links with Belfast in particular, reported links between Ireland and a number of conflict areas:

> *"A lot of them are coming [via Ireland] from places like Iraq and Kosovo… Afghanistan, Russia…"* (London)

Another had been part of a long-standing organised crime group that had been heavily involved in drug dealing; he had most recently been convicted of multiple armed robberies:

> *"When we got ours they all came through the Ireland link, the terrorist links. But, you see a lot here, you see a lot of the civil war places – Czechoslovakia, the Eastern Europeans… there's a lot of them coming from Eastern European countries."* (Other)

He later also referred to Liverpool, from where his group had sourced large quantities of drugs:

> *"I could leave the gates of this prison now, be in Liverpool and I wouldn't be there 20 minutes and I could have a gun… Because I know people there."* (Other)

It will be seen below that more generally where the origins of illegal firearms were known this was typically in the form of the illegal conversion of imitation firearms (originally legally obtained), or through leakage from existing legal sources in the UK, for example shotguns obtained during burglaries, while one offender referred explicitly to military contacts.

Firearm procurement

Although ambiguous, the interview evidence suggests that illegal firearm availability for any one offender is highest in Greater Manchester and Liverpool, followed by Birmingham and London. Criminals in Nottingham seem to need to travel to buy guns that are not already circulating within the city. This may reflect what appear to be more consolidated criminal economies in Greater Manchester and Liverpool, dominated by a relatively small number of criminal organisations, and with criminal links between the two cities: three offenders from the Greater Manchester area described having procured guns in Liverpool. By contrast, London appears to be too big for this level of regional organisation, and as a consequence the picture is much more fragmented. Indeed, overall it may be appropriate to describe the presence of markets in illegal firearms in the UK, rather than a single consolidated market.

Criminal contacts

Criminal contacts are pre-eminent in determining the ease with which illegal firearms can be obtained (their *availability*); the better connected someone is, both in terms of numbers and seniority of contacts, the easier it is to get hold of a gun. One implication of this is that a very well connected criminal will be able to obtain an illegal firearm even when overall supply is very low, while someone without the necessary connections may find it difficult to obtain an illegal firearm even when supply is relatively high.

It appears that for those involved in the criminal economy, notably drug dealing, the commodity chain that supplies drugs and other illicit goods also facilitates the buying and selling of firearms, although there is also evidence of specialist illegal firearms dealers ('armourers' – see below). For a well-connected criminal, this can mean having ready access to a selection of firearms that can be bought relatively cheaply. Paradoxically, however, more senior criminals may not handle guns themselves, employing 'henchmen' to protect them, or junior criminals to carry guns on their behalf, in some cases under duress.

Where criminal contacts extend beyond any one particular region, firearms may be sourced from further afield, reflecting earlier comments:

> *"I got it off a mate in Manchester… It wasn't really that easy to get – that's why I had to resort to getting it from Manchester"* (London)

> *"We was getting our stocks from out of Brum [Birmingham]… Cos it was a family thing…"* (West Midlands)

In two cases, one an ex-soldier, this included criminal contacts in the military:

> *"It was just connections in the army, you come across them things. Buckshee kit, or spare kit…"* (West Midlands)

Importantly, it appears that in most cases guns are sold under closed market conditions; informal referencing systems are used, in which guns will only be sold to people known to the seller, or introduced by people known to the seller. There are suggestions, however, that in some areas guns, notably converted imitations, are being sold more indiscriminately, including to younger offenders, resulting in highly volatile local criminal cultures.

Criminal contacts are also significant in relation to the circulation of firearms within criminal networks – particularly within gangs. It appears that the number of criminals who have access to a firearm is much greater than the numbers owning their own firearm, guns being shared, borrowed, or indeed rented out. One implication is that relatively few guns can have a considerable impact on perceptions about the scale of illegal gun possession and indeed a devastating impact in terms of violent crime.

> *"…let's say there's a crew of 20 people and one person's got a gun, all of them will think that they've got a gun…"* (London)

> *"We was getting them on loan still, so we wouldn't have to buy them. Cos it was a family thing…"* (West Midlands)

> *"He lent it to me. I never paid him; he just let me have it for a bit."* (London)

> *"…these days, even if you haven't got yours you can phone up a friend and he will borrow you his…"* (West Midlands)

> *"You can hire 'em… there's plenty of places you can get them from."* (Greater Manchester)

> *"I had a choice: if I wanted to go and pick them up, I go and pick them up, I knew where they were stashed… To be honest with you they wasn't my guns. They was just, I had access to them. I used to use them whenever I needed them…"* (West Midlands)

> *"[The gun was] Mainly mine, but other people would use it as well."* (Greater Manchester)

Overall, 66 offenders indicated that they personally knew other people with guns.

Armourers

At least 12 offenders referred to individuals who specialised in supplying firearms, including several that specialised in converting imitation firearms into lethal weapons. These individuals may be instrumental in feeding new guns into the criminal economy, if not then involved in their onward circulation.

> *"…there are a couple of people like that who sell guns. If I wanted a particular sort of gun now I'd know where to go in Birmingham."* (West Midlands)

> *"…if you want guns people go to Birmingham. So like sometimes there is a shipment of guns… and someone will say they have a load of guns there…"* (West Midlands)

> *"Yeah it does all deal down to like one man."* (London)

> *"…there are people who specialise in guns… and [converting] replicas into guns…"* (Nottinghamshire)

> *"There is [in Manchester]. But he's not one of our guys, so we can't really get 'em off him."* (Greater Manchester)

> *"…he had a variety of guns… I'd say, yeah, regular gun dealer. Lots of guns, makes lots of money… A lot of criminals knew him."* (Greater Manchester)

Choice and costs: different types of firearms

For most of the offenders interviewed, choice was limited to what was available at the time, and at least two offenders had WWII-era firearms (one a revolver, the other a submachine

gun). Nevertheless, a well-connected minority reported having had access to a range of firearms, either in a personal collection or more commonly through criminal contacts, most notably where they had been part of a criminal crew or organised crime network. One individual, a drug dealer, reported having been arrested in possession of seven firearms, including a submachine gun, a MAC-10 submachine pistol and a very substantial quantity of ammunition.[28]

The key distinctions to be drawn are between shotguns and handguns on the one hand, and then in relation to handguns, between real purpose-built lethal handguns, converted imitations and unconverted imitations. Automatic weapons, notably the Uzi submachine gun and the MAC-10 submachine pistol form a distinct sub-group, and appear limited to those involved in violent conflict such as gang violence. There were no references to rifles, except one air rifle.

Pricing variables

Whilst a degree of price consistency emerged in the course of the interviews, the overall impression is that the market in illegal firearms is relatively illiquid, resulting in sometimes marked price variations.[29]

Price appears to be determined by a combination of the following:

- Firearm type and availability: more desirable and less numerous makes/models fetch premium prices, e.g. certain handgun models, automatic weapons, pump-action shotguns.

- Leakage from legal sources: particularly relevant to shotguns, but more generally to converted imitation firearms, which serves to keep prices lower.

- Location: prices appear to vary by region, reflecting local levels of supply and demand.

- Quality: purpose built lethal firearms are typically more expensive than converted imitations, new guns are more expensive than those that show signs of use.

28. Media reports appear to corroborate his account.
29. In this context liquidity is an economic term that relates to the ease with which something can be bought and sold, the likelihood that consecutive purchases/sales of that thing (in this case, illegal firearms) will occur at the same price and price transparency to market participants. The more buyers and sellers and the greater price transparency in a market the greater the liquidity.

- Firearm provenance: guns believed or known to have been used in crime can be extremely cheap (less significant with shotguns).

- Criminal contacts: better contacts typically mean lower prices (and more choice).

- How quickly the gun is required: urgency allows the seller to dictate the price, pushing prices higher.

- Whether the seller is a dependent drug user: in which case prices are expected to be lower.

- Ammunition availability: lack thereof may lower prices.

In addition, there is some evidence of positive feedback loops in relation to supply and demand further complicating the picture. On the one hand, supply appears to fuel demand as the introduction of firearms into a local criminal economy serves to destabilise it. On the other hand, there is some suggestion that demand is driving innovation such as the conversion of imitation firearms, pushing up supply. It is also worth repeating that the relationship between supply and demand appears to be significantly mediated by availability variables such as criminal contacts and financial resources.

Finally, there is also evidence of bartering, with guns being obtained in exchange for a stolen motorbike in one case, and a quantity of cocaine in another.

New versus used

Offenders are often acutely concerned about the provenance of illegal guns. In the absence of a large legal gun market, boxed new guns appear to be the rare exception rather than the rule. For example, a career armed robber from London who admitted to having owned several firearms, including handguns and sawn-off shotguns, commented:

> *"I've never seen a new gun, put it like that, never."* (London)

Furthermore, firearms have a long 'shelf life', their relative simplicity in engineering terms ensuring that they can remain serviceable for many years (e.g. Kleck, 1991, cited by Squires, 2000: 190). Nevertheless, there were a few references that suggest new guns are sometimes available:

> *"It has to be in the box innit. Brand new. When you cock it back, when you look through the barrel it has to be clean. As you cock it back and you see the muzzle it has to be clean. Because, if you cock it back so many times in an old gun, it gets stuck."* (London)

Despite a general awareness of the risk of purchasing a gun that could have been used in previous offences, many offenders appear to have to trust their seller and their personal judgement about whether a gun is 'dirty' – that is, that it has been used in previous offences.[30] This may be a significant point of weakness in relation to policy interventions intended to change attitudes about illegal firearms.

> *"…you have to be very careful, cos you can buy a gun that killed people… You can get life for that, for things that you haven't even done."* (London)

> *"…you try and ask for as new as possible or as clean as possible; that's how the price goes up."* (Nottinghamshire)

It is interesting to note that two contexts in which offenders reported guns being fired were testing new purchases and, rarely, practising shooting; such behaviours only serve to further obscure the history of any particular firearm.

One implication of the preoccupation with provenance is that a newly converted imitation firearm can cost more than a second-hand purpose built lethal firearm, the lack of quality offset by peace of mind.

Shotguns

Shotguns, particularly of the illegally shortened ('sawn-off') variety, tend to be chosen for their availability and significant intimidatory value, the latter reinforced by the apparent absence of imitation shotguns (although one offender from the West Midlands described a shotgun that had either been deactivated in some way or was an imitation: "it was blocked"). To this end, they appear to be the weapon of choice for more serious armed robbers; one commented that the only time victims had resisted was when he used a handgun:

> *"I prefer to use shotguns. I have used handguns before, and you know, I have gone into places, and people think it is a fucking toy, do you know what I mean? And you have to let it off."* (London)

30. It is worth noting that all purpose built lethal firearms are test fired at the point of manufacture.

Shotgun prices appear to be generally very low, in the region of £50 to £200, although some prices as high as £700 to £800 were mentioned. A career armed robber from London mentioned pump-action shotguns costing around £450.

The low price appears to result from on-going leakage from legitimate sources, most notably rural burglaries[31]:

> *"…most of them come out of burglaries from out in the sticks…"* (London)

Furthermore, ammunition appears to be relatively easy to obtain as there are no controls on shotgun cartridges once they have been sold by a registered firearms dealer:

> *"…I know some old men who go to gun clubs, and they give me shotgun ammunition."* (London)

Finally, in contrast to rifled-barrel firearms that fire bullets singly and for which bullets can be matched to particular guns, shotguns do not leave forensic evidence related to the projectile:

> *"…you can't get ballistics back off a shotgun…"* (London)

Forensic evidence can, however, be obtained from spent cartridges and also from the wadding discharged from the cartridge if it is plastic (personal communication with the MPS Armourer, 27 September 2005).

Purpose-built lethal handguns

Handguns are more easily concealed than shotguns and appear to be preferred within certain circles for their image:

> *"The 9mm – because everyone's always, '9mm this, 9mm that'. It's a little gun you can stash away in your waistband."* (Other)

> *"Yeah, it's easier to conceal innit. The last thing you want is a fucking shotgun if you're going out or something."* (London)

This ease of concealment makes them ideal for individuals who possess firearms for their own protection, typically because they are involved in drug dealing activity and exposed to

31. Home Office figures indicate that 403 shotguns were reported as having been 'misappropriated' in England and Wales during 2004/05 (Povey and Kaiza, 2006: 90). As at 31 March 2004, 570,000 shotgun certificates were on issue, covering 1,400,000 shotguns (Coleman and Kaiza, 2005: 3).

the risk of being robbed, or because they are involved in a violent dispute. Two offenders referred to owning derringer pistols, the small size of which makes them ideal for concealing, for example to evade nightclub security:[32]

> *"Yeah, we have these things called derringers; they are small and you can put them in your shoe."* (Nottinghamshire)

Finally, at least one offender expressed a preference for revolvers because they do not discharge spent ammunition, and therefore retain important forensic evidence. In this regard, semi-automatic handguns present a particular problem:

> *"...if you're gonna shoot... you're gonna have to pick up your spent shells... any evidence left behind after that, you're gonna have to take your chance then."* (West Midlands)

The types of handguns described as having been owned or available to the offenders included:

- 8mm, 9mm, .22" and .38" calibre handguns with no further details given;
- Glock 17 and 19, Beretta, Browning, "385 Magnum", .38" Special, .57" Magnum, WWII-era Smith and Wesson revolver, derringer pistols;
- one offender reported that he had been offered a hand-made gun.

In addition to models already mentioned the following types of handguns were described as having been owned by other people they knew:

- Desert Eagle, SIG Sauer;
- "Mini single shot".

Prices appear to vary considerably, from around £150 to £200 for a gun known to have been used in a crime, to a typical £1,000 to £1,400 for a 'new' 9mm such as a Glock or Beretta. These guns are generally sold with one full load of ammunition, which is included in the price. Specific information about the origins of these weapons was limited, reflecting a lack of knowledge on the part of offenders as to how they entered the criminal economy and the circulation of these weapons within it. Nevertheless, a number of the more informed accounts referred, as documented above in relation to firearm supply, to the significance of Liverpool and Ireland; another had obtained his handgun through military connections.

32. Note that Derringer is a US gun manufacturer and that the term 'derringer' is used generically to describe a small pocket pistol.

Converted imitation firearms

The illegal conversion of imitation firearms such as 8mm blank firers and .38" self-contained gas cartridge revolvers (a type of airgun) is both well known and evidence that controls on purpose built lethal firearms have significantly limited the supply of real guns: why go to the effort of converting an inferior imitation firearm if the real thing is available? Numerous references were made to them during the interviews, such guns generally being referred to as 'rebores' by the offenders. One reported having paid £200 to have an 8mm blank firer (modelled on a Walther PPK) converted to fire live ammunition, another paid £250 to have an airgun converted. A third reported owning a "converted Browning 8mm". Finally, another offender referred to 'imitation Uzis' being illegally converted in large numbers by a father and son team (see: Automatic weapons, below).

The overall impression is that converted firearms are more widely available and cheaper than purpose built firearms.

> *"You are seeing these rebores more than you are seeing real guns."* (London)

> *"…a converted gun is still a gun isn't it? But out there the easiest to get is the converted weapon, because they sell like sweets man."* (West Midlands)

Twenty-two of the 66 offenders who knew other people with guns referred to converted imitation firearms, in some cases downplaying the quality of firearms owned by others:

> *"Most people have replicas; they are replicas that have been drilled out… And some people have home made bullets…"* (London)

Many referred to potential problems with converted firearms, notably the risk of injury to the firer:

> *"They're shit; it's just a ball bearing on the end of a blank cartridge innit. Them guns ain't meant to fire fucking live cartridges."* (London)

> *"…a lot of them were blank firers, converted… and they're pieces of shit, blow your hand off."* (West Midlands)

> *"…they always used to jam…"* (West Midlands)

Nevertheless, at least one commented that sufficiently high-quality conversions were available that were at least fit for purpose:

> *"…they were good, good guns. I mean, at the end of the day, criminals, they're not getting guns to be accurate, really, as long as they shoot straight. And they can kill someone. That's the main thing they're looking for, you know."* (West Midlands)

Other reported advantages associated with these weapons included the fact that converted imitations do not leave the same degree of forensic evidence as conventional rifled-barrel firearms – particularly when firing improvised ammunition:

> *"…they're easier to get hold of, they cost less and they're non-traceable."* (Greater Manchester)

Converted imitation firearms seem to fall within a £400 to £800 price range, with .38" revolvers at the lower end.

Imitation firearms

The term 'imitation firearm' encompasses anything manufactured to look like a lethal firearm, but incapable of inflicting lethal injury. This definition could reasonably be understood to encompass low-powered airsoft/BB guns that fire small plastic pellets and are modelled on lethal-barrelled firearms, deactivated 'real' firearms, blank firers, toys and other items modelled on real guns, including cigarette lighters. Although they are 'lethal firearms', it is also worth noting that some airguns are designed to accurately resemble much more powerful firearms, such as semi-automatic 9mm handguns (airguns are dealt with separately below). In the context of this research, the key is the ready availability of highly realistic imitation firearms.

The use of imitation firearms in committing armed robberies has been well-documented elsewhere (e.g. Morrison and O'Donnell, 1994; Gill, 2000; Matthews, 2002). In this research several offenders described having obtained imitation firearms when they could have got real firearms, particularly for committing armed robberies, reflecting findings from previous research (e.g. O'Donnell and Morrison, 1997). For these individuals, the firearm is simply a tool to ensure the compliance of victims and there is no intention of shooting anyone – although there are occasions when such weapons are used to 'pistol whip' (hit) victims. One armed robber who did just that commented:

> *"Tried to scare 'em and that, tried to scare 'em. I ain't into shooting people, you know what I mean?"* (West Midlands)

Meanwhile two offenders who had used, respectively, a blank firer and a BB gun (in separate incidents, the latter with an accomplice also armed with a BB gun), commented:

> *"I'd rather have been caught than have shot someone… It wouldn't have been hard for me to get a real gun… but I chose not to."* (West Midlands)

> *"I seen a real gun, but no need to buy one. No one really need to be killed."* (London)

Another remarked that blank firers are often indistinguishable from real guns, to the extent that they may be used in an offensive capacity. His comments were made in the context of arguing for a ban on imitation firearms:

> *"Most people buy the replica thing yeah. It won't be a real gun, they will just go to the shop and buy the replica... Cos when you are firing at someone, they are not sticking around to find whether you are firing real or not... Not saying, 'what's that?' You get me? They're running for their life..... [They fire] Blanks and it makes the same exact sound that sort of [real guns make]."* (London)

Finally, three offenders reported having cigarette lighter imitation firearms that were sufficiently realistic to be used to intimidate:

> *"It looks real, everything looks real, but it's a lighter. It's heavy and you can cock it, it looks real."* (London)

Imitation firearms were reported costing between £20 and £110 and were typically bought from Army Surplus shops, mail order vendors and other similar legitimate outlets.

Airguns

Two offenders had committed offences with airguns, at least one of which was a rifle. One was used in retaliation for an assault, the second to threaten a car driver, forcing her to hand over her car.

Automatic weapons

Finally, five offenders had been caught with automatic weapons, in all cases related to violent conflict. These were a Sterling submachine gun, two Uzi submachine guns, and two MAC-10 and one MAC-11 submachine pistols. Including all references to these guns, the interviews suggest that MAC-10s may be the more numerous models (mentioned in 19

interviews), followed by Uzis (mentioned in 12 interviews). There were also two references to AK47 assault rifles and one to an MP5 submachine gun, all owned by other people.

For the few criminals possessing these weapons the symbolic value, overwhelming power and often indiscriminate aim of these guns seems to conform to a 'gangster' stereotype not aspired to by the majority. One of the latter referred to these weapons being impractical and expensive, as well as excessive for most offending:

> *"I had a MAC-10 back in 2002 – well, I was offered it. But the only thing was the price of the fucking bullets; it is not viable, you know what I mean? …I was offered a £5 a bullet. And you know you have got 30 in a clip. One spray is £150. Because it is a road sweeper. You don't use it for shooting someone or doing a robbery, it's a waste of time… you can't aim it, it goes everywhere, so it is stupid."* (Greater Manchester)

However, one offender who had been caught with a MAC-10 claimed that he was locked into an arms race with his adversaries who also had MAC-10s, which they had previously fired at him:

> *"I wasn't planning nothing, but you see, I don't know, let me see if I can put it simply enough. You see, guns like now are getting upgraded. Because you can be out there chatting with somebody and you get into an argument or something like that, and you pull out a 9mm and they pull out a MAC-10. People came to kill me… you know with MAC-10s, three MAC-10s."* (London)

The costs mentioned for automatic weapons included £4,000 for a Sterling submachine gun, £2,500 for an unidentified 'machine gun', £800 to £2,000 for a MAC-10, £950 to £2,000 for an Uzi and £3,000 for a MAC-11.

With one exception – the Sterling submachine gun had been a military weapon – the origins of these firearms were either not known or not stated by the offenders in this study. One offender from the West Midlands referred to a father and son team who he alleged had imported 'imitation Uzis' from America, which they then converted by 'reboring' them, although it is not clear whether his account was first-hand information. Certainly a number of cases of large-scale firearm conversion operations have been reported on publicly (e.g. see BBC, 2004a; McLagan, 2005: 131-142).

John Bryan, a former Head of the Metropolitan Police Firearms Intelligence Unit, refers in his study for the Countryside Alliance to the emergence in 1995 of reactivated MAC-10s being used in crime, such weapons having been 'lawfully produced in this country and sold in a deactivated condition' (Bryan, 2001b: 6). He later refers to the illegal reactivation of automatic pistols 'exclusively restricted to pre-1995 deactivations and normally involving Uzi or MAC-10 weapons' (Bryan, 2001d: 14). Elsewhere, in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee in 2000, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) stated that 96 per cent of all submachine guns recovered by the police had been reactivated (although no time-scale was provided to which this data applied, nor was the total number of recovered weapons stated) (ACPO, 2000: para 34.1.2).

The technical specifications for deactivating firearms were first set in 1989; they were then significantly enhanced in 1995 in response to evidence that many weapons were being illegally reactivated. The changes did not, however, apply retrospectively (Home Office, 2002: 5). Internet searches conducted by the authors indicate that a range of firearms deactivated to pre-1995 standards, including handguns and submachine guns, are presently on sale in the UK; many are historically significant (e.g. WWI and WWII era), but a significant number are not. Since they fall outside of the licensing regime once they have been certified deactivated, no controls are imposed on their ownership, sale or transfer.

Ammunition procurement

The market in illegal ammunition is less transparent than the market in illegal firearms, but on the whole ammunition appears to be a limiting factor and harder to obtain (a fact that may be exacerbated by the limited shelf-life of ammunition (e.g. NCIS, 2003: 60)). The exception is shotgun cartridges, with leakage from legitimate sources ensuring that supply appears not to be a problem (see 'Shotguns' above).

In general, ammunition is bought in small quantities at the time a gun is purchased, with the gun and ammunition being priced as a package:

> *"He'll give you enough bullets for the actual gun itself and then you have to buy more after."* (London)

> *"Yeah we all had ammunition; it was ready in the gun."* (London)

One reason why ammunition supply may be less limiting than might be expected, bearing in mind the limited legal market for ammunition, is that criminals are manufacturing or improvising it themselves.

> *"They're shit; it's just a ball bearing on the end of a blank cartridge innit."* (London)

At least one offender referred to an anomaly in the law, which makes it legal to possess the unassembled component parts of ammunition without a firearms certificate:

> *"Ammunition is easy to obtain. Cos you buy all the equipment, and it's legal to buy it… it's legal to buy the equipment, it's just illegal to make the bullets… Yeah, people make bullets and that. …that's why I think the law is funny because you are allowed to provide the equipment for bullets, but you are not allowed to make bullets…"* (London)

Indeed, another offender described this illegal manufacture as an indication of a shortage of commercially manufactured ammunition:

> *"In Birmingham they [guns] were easy to get hold of. You could get guns, but the ammunition was more difficult. People used to make bullets themselves."* (West Midlands)

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that one offender had been caught in possession of more than 700 rounds of ammunition. Although his case appears exceptional, it does nevertheless suggest that very occasionally larger supplies of illegal ammunition do become available.

Ten offenders gave indicative prices for ammunition, which varied considerably, although the pricing variables remain obscured: it may be that higher prices indicate professionally manufactured and/or unusual ammunition or that the market in ammunition, such as it is, is so fragmented that price consistency cannot emerge. The prices given were:

- £2,000 to £3,000 for a box of .45" ammunition;
- £800 to £900 for a box of unspecified ammunition;
- £200 for 100 rounds of unspecified ammunition;
- £150 for a 'full clip' for a converted 9mm handgun;
- £100 for two to three rounds of unspecified ammunition;
- £50 for a set of ammunition for a "385 Magnum";
- £5 a bullet for a MAC-10 (mentioned by two offenders);

- £3 a bullet for a converted 8mm blank firer;
- £1 a bullet for a MAC-10;
- £0.50 a bullet for a .38".

Ancillary items

Three offenders were convicted of offences relating to stun guns, with one also being convicted of possessing CS gas, which cost about £25. One of the stun guns had been purchased from a French mail order company for £100; another had been bought in this country for around £50. One of the stun guns had been used in the course of a robbery.

Although these were not specifically asked about, ten offenders referred to either having worn bullet-proof vests themselves, or having known people who had done so, in at least one case as a signifier of status rather than because of a specific threat. In addition, the co-defendants of one offender were caught in possession of 'night vision goggles' and four offenders referred to having seen sound moderators ('silencers').

Keeping and disposing of firearms

Keeping firearms

Understanding where offenders keep their guns is important from a policing perspective, both in terms of risk assessments and also in relation to retrieving firearms. Only four of the offenders described having their gun with them at all times – except, interestingly, when at their mothers' houses. All were involved in drug dealing and had been involved in violent disputes.

More generally, however, the offenders described keeping guns in one of three locations: at home, buried, or otherwise easily accessible but not actually at home or on their person. The latter included leaving the gun with girlfriends, using other people to carry the gun, and even paying people to look after the gun, in one case paying £100 a week, issues that will be considered further in Chapter 5 in relation to possession offences.

> *"…it was at various different girls' houses."* (London)

> *"[The guns were] In a house… it was a girl's house, but not my girl's house."* (London)

> *"If I was walking down the street I wouldn't have it on me. I'd have other guys with me and like they could have it… So if the police came we'd split up and most probably they would go for me, cos they all know me… they'd get away with the gun; I'd stop and have nothing on me…"* (Greater Manchester)

These behaviours indicate the owners of illegal firearms displacing risk onto other people. This suggests that attempts to retrieve firearms, for example based on intelligence, need to consider offenders' associates, who may themselves be potential points of weakness.

Disposing of firearms

As already discussed, the offenders interviewed demonstrated a general awareness that individual firearms may be linked forensically to particular crimes. There is also evidence of offenders pleading guilty to imitation firearm offences – notably in relation to robberies – when real guns were used but not retrieved by the police. Both of these issues are relevant to the disposal of firearms once they have been used in criminal contexts.

There were many references to guns being sold on having been used in crime, reflecting what appears to be an important difference between 'disorganised' criminals and 'traditional' organised crime groups. The latter appear to almost invariably permanently destroy used guns, for example having them crushed in a car at a scrap yard, whereas the former are more likely to sell guns on, or even keep them:

> *"…sell it on and make out it is clean…"* (West Midlands)

> *"Just sell them on; someone always wants one. It's been used, but you don't really care if they get knocked up with it."* (Greater Manchester)

The important implication of this behaviour is that guns are kept in circulation, underpinning the supply side of the market, but also presenting the opportunity for forensic evidence to be retrieved, even at a much later date.

Conclusions: the market in illegal firearms

This research has been able to shed light on many of the processes by which illegal firearms and ammunition are obtained, particularly by the end users of those guns. Questions remain, however, and further research will be required to build on the findings presented here in order to develop a more complete picture of the structure of illegal firearm markets and some

of the processes within them, most notably in relation to supply. Interviews with individuals convicted specifically of firearms supply offences may be informative and it would also be useful to draw on police and other intelligence sources, where these are available.

On the basis of the 80 interviews conducted and analysed for this research, the market in illegal firearms appears to vary considerably by location with a number of variables determining supply, availability and cost – indeed it may be more accurate to describe the presence of markets in illegal firearms. For well-connected offenders a range of firearms may be available, allowing a degree of choice to be exercised based on the context within which the firearm is to be used. For the majority, however, supply is patchy and they are forced to buy whatever is on offer – including converted imitation firearms that are considered unreliable and dangerous and guns of unknown provenance that may have been used in serious crimes.

The fact that many used guns are kept in circulation serves to underpin the supply side of the market, as do the legal sale and illegal conversion of imitation and (to a lesser extent) deactivated firearms, illegal importation of prohibited weapons, ongoing leakage from legal sources such as shotguns and shotgun ammunition, and the illegal manufacture of ammunition from legally obtainable components. Availability, the ability of any one individual to obtain an illegal firearm, is significantly mediated by criminal contacts: involvement in drug dealing, gangs and other criminal networks facilitates access to firearms and means that many more individuals have access to guns than own them. One implication of this is that relatively few illegal firearms may have a considerable impact on violent crime and perceptions about levels of illegal firearms ownership. Finally, demand is reinforced in particular by involvement in drug dealing, armed robbery and violent disputes, as will be seen more clearly in the next chapter.

For those with the necessary contacts, around £100 will buy a stolen shotgun and £1,000 – around the price of an ounce (28.4 grams) of crack cocaine – will buy a 'new' 9mm handgun with ammunition. Whether it should be a cause for concern that these prices are not higher remains unresolved as the economics of the market in illegal firearms continue to be at least partially obscured. Nevertheless, this research has contributed to developing a better understanding of the market in illegal firearms and has highlighted a number of appropriate points for intervention to tackle supply and availability. The next chapter aims to achieve the same in relation to demand factors.

5. The possession and use of illegal firearms: contexts and attitudes

For some of the offenders interviewed, the relationship between their offending and firearms was unambiguous, including a number of individuals who specialised in armed robbery as their sole criminal activity and some for whom their most recent offence was also their first. For the significant majority, however, their offending as it relates to firearms was frequently more complex, mixing offence types and offensive and defensive behaviours, which may be instrumental and/or symbolic.

In order to make some sense of these offending behaviours, this chapter opens with a consideration of the criminal career development of those interviewed for this research, as they themselves described it. These background details – material expectations, economic hardship and the credibility of crime as a career option – provide an important backdrop to the offenders' criminality. Attention will then turn to the specific contexts within which firearms are reported by the offenders to have been possessed and used, dealt with in four (somewhat overlapping) groups:

- illegal drug markets;
- robbery and burglary;
- violence including gangs;
- possession offences.

Four illustrative case studies are included in this chapter in Boxes 5.1 to 5.4 (with a further eight located in Appendix B), demonstrating some of the inter-relationships between these otherwise somewhat artificially disaggregated offences. The chapter then concludes with a consideration of the evidence concerning the presence, or otherwise, of a criminal 'gun culture'.

Development of a criminal career

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, with few exceptions the men interviewed for this study reported growing up in communities characterised by economic deprivation, an active and visible local criminal economy and personal opportunities limited by a lack of qualifications, criminal records and poor work histories. It is significant that against this background, many reported explicitly material aspirations, the visible signs of criminal economic success in their communities and contact with local criminals.

Material expectations and economic hardship

The aspirations expressed by the majority of the offenders in the present study were focussed on the accumulation of conspicuous material wealth, significantly related to prevailing cultural attitudes and associated peer pressures, and against a background of family economic hardship:

> *"It's the whole rat race thing, you know. We're living in that age now, where if you ain't, like, wearing Nike Shox for example, then you know, you're a tramp. And Shox ain't cheap, they're like a hundred and thirty quid trainers… a lot of people can't afford it, but they see it, and if they ain't got em, they ain't part of it…."* (West Midlands)

> *"No-one wants to look stupid. Everyone wants the big chain, everyone wants the big watch, everyone wants a nice car, all the girls, that's how it is."* (London)

Crime as a career option

Significantly, crime was perceived by many to be a viable career option (notwithstanding the fact that all 80 interviewees were in prison at the time they were interviewed), enabling these material aspirations and social/peer pressures to be realised, overcoming through illicit means their otherwise structurally disadvantaged socio-economic status. This appears to reflect a social process by which young people learn from what they see in their communities and the experiences of their peers. Significantly, family members may not actively discourage criminal activity where illegal earnings are contributing to family income.[33]

> *"…like if your mum's living off benefits and she's got to pay all the bills, and she's got like seven kids and she can't make ends meet, the kids are going to see what the mum's going through and think, 'Yeah, I'll sell drugs and help my mother'. That's it. So the mums respect what the son is doing; she knows it's wrong, but he's helping them out to live and get food on the table."* (London)

> *"One of my co-d's [co-defendants], he was constantly at the job centre, he was really trying to get a job. At the time we all laughed at him. He actually got a job, he was working nights packing but the wages were silly. He was really willing to work but that was the best he could get. He couldn't read or write; that was the best the job centre could offer him. It just broke him when he came round and we were counting the money [from the armed robberies], the wages that he would work for a year. It's not a contest there."* (London)

33. For a discussion of many of these issues in relation to drug dealing, see May et al. (2005).

> *"Like, in the poor areas, yeah they look up to them [drug dealers]. They see them with like nice cars, superbikes, like um, chains, jewellery, lots of money, they see that and they just want to be just like them. And that's really educating the kids really, it ain't the schools, it's really them."* (London)

> *"…when you're young and all you can see is older guys driving cars, living a life that you see, it may look good to you. You've got nothing else to do, so just start doing that."* (Greater Manchester)

Furthermore, local criminals (sometimes referred to, apparently deferentially, as 'olders') may supplant family members or represent role models to be looked up to:

> *"I used to hang around with some big guy, he was well known, well respected. So, boy, I looked at him as a dad cos I never had a dad; he used to take care of me."* (London)

> *"From my age, from when I was young – Mark [surname] is 33 – he's been my top number one guy. Only because, he was on top, he had respect, the police couldn't chat shit to him. The police didn't even stop him. The police couldn't stop him. He was my ideal guy like. He got respect off everyone. And like, I wanted to be him for a while."* (London)

It should be said, however, that these relationships may be exploitative:

> *"…it's more olders like, giving younger people false promises. Like, 'You sell for me like, I'll make you anything, you can have anything you want, if you have any trouble call me'. Little kids buy that man… He said he'd be there for you, but when it comes to you in that police station and you say, 'Ask this guy if I was at home,' and he says, 'I don't know you'. When you get arrested, they hear that you've been arrested… they already have another helper so [the drugs are] in his house… That's the way it is, like the way it is, when you are young and naïve, only 16. Like you think, like, 'Fuck that, he totally sold me out'… Olders will always pick on the kids that were vulnerable."* (London)

Nevertheless, for some in the present research the dividends of crime went beyond simply accommodating peer pressure (notwithstanding the fact that all had since been caught and imprisoned); they financed a lifestyle that would probably not have been attainable in the short to medium-term had they been pursuing a legitimate career:

> *"I liked it... I was making money and I was driving cars that certain people weren't even driving... Certain people are working hard for a good ten years, and I am pushing cars that they aren't driving. And my clothes are expensive, I was spending £200 or £300 on clothes, just on trainers, a T-shirt and trousers, that's it. You can't not like it brother."* (London)

> *"...the most I have earned in a week is about 52 grand..."* (Greater Manchester)

Finally, it appears that for some this 'career' view of crime is underpinned by an ignorance of the alternatives available to them:

> *"There's a lot of people in the area like um, with guns, and live the gun sort of culture... Because that's how they was growing up, that's all they know really innit, is that, that, when they was little all they wanted to be really was drug dealers. That's all they think, that's the best thing in life... they didn't know nothing else."* (London)

The broader socio-economic context to the possession and use of illegal firearms as described by the offenders interviewed can be summarised as follows. Social pressures to attain a conspicuously material lifestyle in the context of economic hardship are reconciled by some through involvement in the criminal economy, in many cases facilitated by the availability of criminal opportunities. This is reinforced by the presence of criminal role models and other visibly 'successful' criminals demonstrating the viability of criminal careers that in some cases are more lucrative, at least in the short term, than the likely legitimate labour market alternatives. In relation to firearms, it is significant that this wealth serves to magnify existing economic inequality, and that the criminal economies into which these offenders are entering are unregulated.

A question that this may prompt is why more people (particularly young women) do not get involved in armed criminality? To fully answer this would require a different piece of research, for example examining both individuals who end up involved in gun crime, as here, and a matched group who shared the same social, cultural, educational and economic structural positions, but who resisted this outcome. Nevertheless, it will be seen that this research hints at some explanations.

Illegal drugs markets

Illegal drugs markets by definition operate outside of the regulated legal economy, and therefore exclude participants from conventional risk management strategies such as calling the police, taking out insurance and using legally enforceable contracts. In many cases, it is violence or the threat of violence, so-called systemic violence (Goldstein, 1985), that regulates illegal drugs markets. This includes amongst other things the enforcement of contracts such as debts, territorial disputes, sanctioning informers and robberies targeted against dealers (Jacobs, 1999 and 2000; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Lupton et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2002).

In this research, illegal drugs markets represent the single most important theme in relation to the use of illegal firearms – in effect a 'golden thread' that runs through all of the interviews to some degree. They are a significant economic generator within the street criminal economy, and as such represent a contested environment within which competition is high, at times with fatal consequences.

The evidence here suggests that violence increases towards the street (retail) end of the market, where relationships between buyers and sellers appear to be more numerous and ephemeral, placing a greater emphasis on trust, and dealing activities are more visible. By contrast, criminal relationships higher up the commodity chain appear to be more robust and to eschew violence, reflecting the findings of previous research on middle market drug dealers (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001). One offender in the present study commented:

> *"I know quite a lot of very high up the scale lads who won't have anything to do with firearms, anything. And they won't even deal to people who carry firearms."* (West Midlands)

This research has found considerable evidence about the relationship between illegal drugs and illegal firearms, much of which suggests that the latter are becoming increasingly important, at least towards and at the retail level. Nowhere is this more the case than in relation to the criminal victimisation of drug dealers.

Robbery of drug dealers

Drug dealers, particularly those operating at or close to street (retail) level, were widely considered by the offenders interviewed for this study to be both ideal criminal targets and vulnerable to victimisation. Significantly, they deal with cash and valuable commodities, are often visible, and because their activities are illegal they will generally never call the police.

> *"… all people are interested in now, and I've even thought about it myself, is robbing shotters [drug dealers]… Because it's quick and easy money, yea, and nine times out of ten, the feds [police] ain't gonna give a fuck."* (London)

> *"If you are robbing drug dealers they are not exactly going to call the police. I can deal with being shot at. But I can't deal with 15 or 20 years behind the door and that."* (London, see case study 1 in Appendix B)

Needless to say, those involved in drug dealing activity are aware of the risks, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that they seek in many cases to arm themselves, particularly where they have been robbed already (see 'Protection' below).

> *"I've had a shotgun pointed at me… they knew that I was making a little bit of change out of whatever."* (West Midlands)

It follows, therefore, that anyone planning to rob drug dealers must consider the need to be armed. At least five of the offenders in this study had been involved in robbing drug dealers, and all had used firearms to do so.

> *"Basically the reason I wanted a gun was so it would be easier for me to rob people, mainly not like nine-to-five people but people who sell drugs and things like that. And it would make me more money and I'd have it for protection… as soon as they see a loaded gun cocked back, ready… It just makes your job easier really."* (London, see case study in Box 5.1 below)

The guns also offered a degree of protection in anticipation of recriminations, of which there is a further consideration below (see 'Sanctioning').

> *"It is something that is needed to rob a drug dealer. You are not going to go there with a baseball bat or a knife, because they have possibly got a gun, innit… it was about money, it is all about money, and self-protection. Because I am doing high risk crime, because I don't want to be walking down the street, and someone recognises me or information is leaked that it was me that done this, and I am you know, stuck with nothing and this geezer has got a gun."* (London)

The types of drug dealer robberies reported by the offenders took many forms, including direct attacks on crack (dealing) houses, attacks against drug dealers in their cars (including at least one case of mistaken identity), and also, interestingly, honey traps. One offender, for

example, worked with a drug dealer to rob his clients and also lured dealers into attacks:

> *"…he would basically sell about… three grand [of drugs] to somebody and phone me up and say, look, I will be here and I am doing a deal and blah, blah. And basically, I would jump in there and take the money, and take the gear and then we would meet up later to carve it up… other times I would go to Yardies with substantial sums of money, and I would say, 'Look what can you get, blah, blah?' And they would make like, a couple of phone calls, and cos they had seen the money on the table, they would bring their shit there and then I would just fucking take it, pull it [the gun] out and say get off mate…"* (London, see case study 1 in Appendix B)

The overall impression from the interviews is that drug dealer robberies are both common and also increasing. At least one offender suggested that this might in part be a reflection of saturation levels being reached in some areas with respect to dealing:

> *"Everybody is selling drugs, and there is not enough money. So people start robbing drug dealers cos they get the drugs and the money."* (London)

Significantly, perhaps, it appears that increasing opportunities for robbery within drug markets may be leading to displacement away from 'traditional' armed robbery targets, reflecting a trend noted previously in the United States (Jacobs, 2000: vii).

The case study presented in Box 5.1, based on an interview with a 23-year-old from London, illustrates a number of themes, both in specific relation to robbing drug dealers, but also to the wider context within which firearms are used illegally. These include gang behaviours, drug use and violent conflict. Two further case studies on drug markets are presented in Appendix B (case studies 1 and 2).

Box 5.1 Robbery of drug dealers: case study

All names have been changed.

John was a 23-year-old White male who lived on a locally-notorious estate in London. He had been excluded from two local schools for "basically playing truant, being disruptive in class and not turning up". At the time of the offence he had no fixed address and described himself as "just on the move basically". He was a member of his local crew by which he meant, "a tight group because we have all grown up together", of around eight key members with a number of associates, for whom "race wasn't a big deal". John was a poly-

drug user but felt that what had influenced his offending the most was the fact that since leaving Feltham Young Offender Institution, "he had really started to get bad on crack".

John and his crew "specialised in robbing people who don't live within the law, we rob people who sell drugs". In his area it meant they "were mainly robbing Yardies in the crack houses and Black boys who sold crack". His brother-in-law, who was Black, had recently been sentenced for murder after shooting a man he had attempted to rob of drugs. John and his crew were currently in dispute with another local gang who they had robbed. This had escalated and the rival crew had fired on a car that John was in outside a nightclub, but the gun had jammed.

According to John, "Most of the things nowadays is with guns, it's mainly through drugs because a lot of people who are carrying guns are mainly drug dealers to protect themselves from getting robbed". He had witnessed the arrival of a succession of guns on the estate from "the end of 1999, beginning of 2000, with the first one we bought was a 8-millimetre, rebored, we paid £250 for that". Since then, "after about two more years, the guns started getting better and they weren't converted, they were proper guns" and when he was arrested John "had the .38 [revolver] and my co-defendant had the 9-millimetre. The .38 was £800 and the 9-millimetre was £1,100", He stated that, "nowadays all the .22s and shit guns, they get passed on to the 15 to 16 year olds".

John was convicted of several offences, which related to robbery, burglary and witness intimidation, all aimed against a recently arrived Jamaican crack dealer. John confessed that during his time on the estate he or his co-defendant had robbed this man on four separate occasions and damaged his car, even though John used to buy crack from him. The offences he got convicted of related to the robbery of a 'crack house'. He and his co-defendant had stripped the man at gun-point and "we got just under £1,500 worth of drugs, we took his 6oz chain, his gold watch. All in all, no more than £3,500". On a separate occasion John came back as a warning to his victim not to press charges and took his passport, more drugs, stolen car radios and a Berretta firearm.

Despite the victim's criminal occupation and the intimidation he received, he reported the attacks to the police and John was convicted and sentenced to six years in jail. John feels bitter about the nature of his conviction: "It's like he's broken a code – that's exactly what he's done, he ain't stuck by the street rules". However, he is glad that it happened, "because I don't smoke crack any more. If I'd never come away with that six [year sentence], probably I don't know where I'd be now. Probably on a bigger charge or I could be dead or something like that".

Territorial disputes

Drug dealers are exposed not only to direct physical threats, but also to economic competition, something that manifests itself most clearly in territorial disputes, many of which were reported. These included physical territories such as estates, as well as smaller-scale rivalries, for example between nearby crack (dealing) houses. These disputes were played out in a variety of ways, including robberies against rivals, threats and violence (including gang violence and attacks on friends and family members), protection rackets and other market protection techniques.

> *"…they see it [as], you can't come into my territory and you can't go into their territory. That's within the drugs, because they'd get robbed and whatever else. Everyone seems to stick to their own patch."* (West Midlands)

> *"I get phone calls saying someone's just done a drive-by and killed a couple of my friends. That's how it is. If you sell drugs on a different cruise patch, expect hassle, something to happen."* (West Midlands)

The degree of territoriality appears to mirror other socio-cultural variables, not least the presence or otherwise of gangs, crews and other criminal organisations. Indeed, where such groups are formalised and entrenched, it may paradoxically be the case that territorial disputes are minimised, or at least limited to peripheral areas, as the level of organisation implies a degree of stability.

Protection

In light of the informal nature of the illegal drugs economy and the risk to dealers of victimisation including robberies and territorial disputes, it is unsurprising that many interviewees who had some involvement in drug dealing described the acquisition of firearms by drug dealers or their associates for self-defensive purposes.

> *"You have to carry a gun when you are in this kind of game… [for] protection."* (West Midlands)

This generally took two forms, either guns being owned personally, or the 'employment' of what in effect were bodyguards.

> *"…when you are making that much money, a lot of people try to rob you… And because people were hearing about the money that I was making, that is why I bought the gun and started carrying it… solely for protection."* (London)

> *"I had people around me with them [guns]… how I was living on the road, at that time, I probably had to be around people like that who had things on them…"* (West Midlands)

It is interesting, however, that several interviewees referred to the absence of firearms in crack houses.[34] One was an individual who specialised in robbing crack houses and commented that guns were never encountered:

> *"Mostly they don't really like having guns in the crack house because if police come in and there are guns in there, you know what I mean? They do sometimes, but a lot of the crack houses – we've robbed quite a few crack houses – every time we've gone in there, there haven't really been any guns in there."* (London)

Another had worked in one and carried a gun at all times except when in the house:

> *"…when I go in the house I put it away… I felt safe; I was working with people I trust… [And] that house, it's kinda hard to get through cos there's a load of fucking people and things, a metal fence round the house. If you kick the door in you're going to have to kick this metal thing, so you are not getting in, so I was safe there."* (London)

In considering the relationship between drug dealing and firearms it is therefore important to consider the context in which dealing is taking place. Fixed dealing venues such as crack houses afford the occupants some protection and also expose them to a significant risk of police intervention, both of which appear to inhibit the presence of firearms in these locations. By contrast, those engaged in other forms of dealing, such as telephone sales and delivery, are exposed to a different set of circumstances and risks and seem to adopt slightly different strategies as a result. It would be inappropriate to over-generalise, however: a number of individuals involved in drug dealing were also involved in conflict not directly related to their dealing activities, further complicating the relationship between their criminality and their firearm. This notably included a drug dealer who had also been involved in gang violence in the West Midlands, during which he, his brother, a friend and a cousin had all been shot.

34. According to a report by the Greater London Alcohol and Drug Alliance (GLADA), 151 police raids on alleged crack house addresses in Lambeth, South London, between August and November 2002 resulted in the recovery of six firearms (GLADA, 2003: 17). This would seem to support the assertion that firearms in crack houses are relatively rare.

Sanctioning

Violence involving guns and other weapons was reported in a large number of contexts in which sanctions relating to drug market activity were carried out, notably in revenge for earlier victimisation, or to recover debts.

Recovery of debts

According to many of the offenders interviewed for this study, and as found in previous research (e.g. Edmunds et al., 1996), a proportion of drug dealing at all levels is done 'on tick', that is to say that the buyer effectively gets given the drugs on credit pending future payment. In the absence of legally-enforceable contracts, however, problems related to payment are dealt with informally, often to restore the reputation of the seller as someone not to be 'messed with'. At more senior levels, this may be professionalised:

> *"…when I was arrested I was employed by people to go out and recover substantial amounts of heroin, and collect bits of money and that, that people are owed…"* (London)

Nevertheless, a number of accounts illustrated the way that serious violence is sometimes used to recover even quite small amounts of money:

> *"…it was like £200 and because they wouldn't pay me... They must think I'm some idiot. So I just went round there and tried to take my money back… [I] started hitting the people with the gun…"* (Nottinghamshire)

For robbing from dealers

Revenge was also exacted against individuals who were known to have committed robberies (or thefts) against dealers, in some cases with fatal consequences:

> *"…one of my mates, who is dead now, took a load of gear [drugs] from some West London boys, and they found out who he was and they shot him dead when he was picking up his kid from school. His girlfriend got a couple of shots but she managed to survive… the person died who done it… he is dead, it was a retaliatory shooting."* (London)

In at least one case, this direct retribution was intended to avoid future victimisation:

> *"[They were] taking my customers and trying to rob me. So I deal with it, come back from that, otherwise they'll just try it again."* (Other)

In another case, the objective was more complex, combining revenge for a previous attempted robbery, an assertion of status and the opportunity to take a significant quantity of money:

> *"These were the people that tried to rob me; I robbed them with my gun... [I got] about six to seven g's [thousand pounds]."* (Other)

These themes reflect findings from research in the United States on recently robbed, active drug dealers in St. Louis, Missouri (Topalli et al., 2002). This found that drug dealers preferred to respond to being robbed by retaliating directly as this served to maintain or restore their reputation, recover financial losses and satisfy their desire for vengeance.

For putting a dealer's name about

One offender described being threatened with a firearm by a dealer who had discovered that his name was being circulated:

> *"Basically it was a Yardie who sells crack and a bit of fucking dope [cannabis]... I was going round, I was saying, 'Yeah this bloke's got drugs', and he found out I was mentioning his name to people... he had a silver 9mm I think. He pulled it out and he actually told me to open my mouth; I opened my mouth and he put it in my mouth and basically threatened me and said if I ever mentioned him again he'll shoot me..."* (Other)

For selling 'dud' drugs

Finally, although not directly involving firearms, an offender from London who was convicted of resisting arrest with a firearm described using violence to sanction dealers who sold him 'dud' drugs:

> *"I have had two people sell me some dud stuff, and I took the machete to them... it is the norm when you are living that kind of life."* (London)

Conclusions: illegal drug markets

In this research, illegal drug markets represent the single most important theme in relation to the use of illegal firearms, the key to which is the illicit status of controlled drugs; this ensures that potential profits (equating to risks) are high, which in turn implies competition, whilst participants must largely operate without the 'safety net' of the criminal justice system. The relationship between drugs and firearms is complex and the challenges for policy makers are many; three stand out.

Firstly, dealing in illegal drugs appears to significantly underpin the criminal economy in many locations and seems to be instrumental in legitimising crime as a career option for some individuals; there are many indications in this research that drug dealing and other criminality are 'out-competing' the legitimate labour market alternatives for some young people, particularly those in more structurally marginalised positions, reflecting the findings of research elsewhere (e.g. May *et al.*, 2005). The extent to which drug dealing is actually more rewarding (economically and otherwise) than the legitimate alternatives, rather than that simply being a widely-held but otherwise erroneous perception, remains to be fully answered.[35] Furthermore, the fact or perception that drug dealing offers a potentially rewarding career may adversely impact on attitudes towards policing, even perhaps at a community level.[36]

Secondly, given that drug dealing and use takes place, the fact that it does so outside of the legal economy exposes market participants to unregulated competition and victimisation and necessitates informal solutions to what would otherwise be legally-resolved problems, including debt defaults, criminal victimisation, adulterated products and so on. In this regard, firearms offer the ultimate levels of both protection and empowerment. This raises a difficult question about whether more can or should be done to protect drug market participants – in effect whether some form of 'harm minimisation' approach would offer a net benefit to wider society?

Thirdly, because the absence of legally-enforceable contracts and so on dictates that illegal transactions depend heavily on trust (and/or the threat of violence) stable market conditions take time to become established and are vulnerable to external forces, including rival dealers and law enforcement operations. Market disruption by police and other agencies may come at the cost of destabilising markets, breaking relationships and potentially making markets more violent (Maher and Dixon, 1999; Aitken *et al.*, 2002; May *et al.*, 2005). Reflecting the harm minimisation theme above, this raises the question whether drug markets can be 'managed' in such a way as to make them less violent, and whether such an approach can be made compatible with supply and demand reduction strategies?

35. To date there has been only limited research into the economics of drug dealing in the UK: e.g. on street-level dealing, May et al. (2000) and May *et al.* (2005), on middle-market dealing, Dorn, Murji and South (1992) and Pearson and Hobbs (2001). Evidence from one study in the United States, based on an analysis of the financial records of a drug selling gang covering a four-year period, suggests that average gang members' earnings were 'somewhat above the legitimate labor market alternative' (Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000: 755). However, the authors argue that the risks of drug selling significantly offset this wage premium and that it was the prospect of higher future earnings that was the primary economic motivation for gang membership, earnings being highly skewed towards senior gang members.

36 May *et al.*, for example, highlight some of the benefits that local drug markets may bring to communities, including 'the supply of cheap stolen goods' and drug sellers 'putting money back into their local areas in other ways by supplementing incomes or giving money to family and friends' (2005: 33).

It is clear that these problems pose considerable ethical, political and practical challenges and that they cannot be easily or quickly resolved. Nor, it should be said, are drug markets the whole story in terms of tackling the criminal use of firearms.

Robbery and burglary

Armed robbery is the one context in which the illegal use of firearms has been subject to sustained research in the UK, although much of the research evidence is now at least ten years old (e.g. Morrison and O'Donnell, 1994; Gill, 2000; Matthews, 2002[37]). Firearm legislation has changed substantially in the intervening period as, it appears, has the market in illegal firearms (see Chapter 4). More recently, research on personal robbery examined 2,000 police reports and witness statements from seven police force areas in England and Wales and found that gun use was rare: firearms were displayed in only three per cent of cases (Smith, 2003: 48).

In the present study half of the offenders had been convicted of robbery (either robbery of personal property or of commercial property), and a further two of aggravated burglary – one of which was in the context of a series of offences including robberies. Five groups of offenders involved in armed robbery have been identified, notably including robberies against drug dealers, which have already been dealt with in the context of drug markets and appear to be increasing. The other four are: specialist armed robbers, mixed offending robbers, opportunists and debtors.

This typology overlaps significantly with that developed by Matthews (2002) in particular, the differences perhaps in part reflecting the broader coverage of the present research, encompassing both personal and commercial armed robbery. Matthews's study of armed commercial robbers uses the degree of professionalism to distinguish between 'amateurs' (including a number of debtors and drug users), 'intermediates' (subdivided into 'diversifiers' and 'developers') and 'professional and persistent' armed robbers, the latter being the most likely to use firearms (Matthews, 2002: 22–30). Gill, analysing the same interviews, is more circumspect, distinguishing primarily between 'professionals' and 'amateurs', but acknowledging significant overlaps between the two 'ideal types'; he then goes on to propose further research on the degree of rationality displayed by armed commercial robbers as more useful in terms of developing situational crime prevention interventions (Gill, 2000: 149–156). By contrast, Morrison and O'Donnell distinguished in an earlier study between types of armed robber on the basis of the type of target attacked (Morrison and O'Donnell, 1994).

37. Both Gill (2000) and Matthews (2002) include analysis of the same dataset, interviews with 341 imprisoned armed commercial robbers conducted between 1992 and 1995.

Putting drug dealer robberies aside, in the present study guns were only reported as having been used during armed robberies to ensure the co-operation of victims and were never actually fired at people; they were, however, sometimes used to pistol-whip non-compliant victims, and were also sometimes loaded:

> *"Because you can still have fucking arsehole, have-a-go heroes, who – it ain't their money or nothing – who still want to fucking try and that, get you nicked. I'm not being funny but if people want to do that, then that's their problem mate."* (London)

Indeed, two armed robbers admitted to having fired shots 'to intimidate' (but not injure) their victims, one of them on two occasions.

Specialist armed robbers

Eleven of the offenders appeared to specialise in armed robbery, most demonstrating a degree of target preference, for example banks or motorway service stations. One who targeted betting shops explained:

> *"I had done them before and it was just something that I was familiar with. If I went to do a post office it would be like stepping on new ground."* (London)

In general they had committed a series of offences but had only been caught and prosecuted for some or just one. One had been investigated for 17 but only convicted of one on the basis of forensic evidence:

> *"A bit of laziness, I was gonna say, got us caught."* (Other)

This group includes a few of the most professional criminals interviewed, including one who rented flats in a number of towns and cities with his co-defendant, using them as bases for committing robberies. These offenders tended to only use their firearms in the context of their armed robberies, doing so instrumentally as a means of minimising victim resistance. One, who with his accomplice had used two loaded sawn-off shotguns, commented:

> *"Well, obviously it's just a part of the fear factor… If I went into somewhere, I want to get money, I'm not going to stand there fighting 'til the police turns up, you know what I mean? I'm going to go in there the quickest way and then go out."* (Greater Manchester)

Further evidence of the rational approach adopted by these individuals to their offending can be seen in the following example, when the offender had been asked whether he had ever fired his gun during a robbery:

> *"No, cos that'd make the difference between an eight-year stretch [prison sentence] and a fucking 14."* (London)

This group also includes a small number of younger offenders (in their late teens) who had committed a large number of offences in a relatively short space of time, often taking considerable risks and openly drawing attention to their newly acquired wealth. One 19-year-old had been a getaway driver for a group of armed robbers having previously acquired advanced driving skills on a rally driving course:

> *"…they were barely getting away with it, like foot pursuits and stuff like that and getting chased and shit… what they said, if we get chased and I get them away then I get seventy per cent and so that is most of the money. But if we don't get chased but we still get away then everyone just gets fifty–fifty…"* (see case study 4 in Appendix B)

His group's crimes funded a compelling and lavish lifestyle for the short time before they were apprehended (analogous to Shover's 'life as party' typology (Shover, 1996) and highlighting many of the seductions of this type of criminality (Katz, 1988; see also Wright et al., 2006)):

> *"…loads of girls and buying Moët in clubs and just living the life... I was like top dollar, everything, loads of women, the most money, and everybody wanted to know me…"* (London)

Finally, at least two offenders, one a cocaine addict, the other a crack addict, specialised in armed robberies to feed their habits:

> *"Basically I was robbing to feed my addiction… Two hundred pounds a day to feed my cocaine habit."* (Greater Manchester, see case study 3 in Appendix B)

Indeed, it appears that in some areas burgeoning drugs markets may present a more attractive criminal proposition than armed robbery:

> *"Most of the people I know who started off doing robberies, by the time they got to 21, them sort of ages, most of them stopped doing it and started selling drugs…"* (London)

It will be seen that for many offenders in this study, armed robberies were but one of a range of criminal behaviours exhibited at various times, representing what appears to be a possible move towards diversified criminality exploiting a range of opportunities as they arise.

Mixed offending

For eight of those convicted of armed robbery, their robberies were committed in the context of mixed offending behaviour, often including drug dealing and violence. This group is analogous with the 'criminal diversifiers' identified by Matthews in his study of armed commercial robbers (Matthews, 2002: 26).

A 19-year-old from London illustrates this typology, having previously served two prison sentences for burglary and driving while disqualified, and presently serving an eight-year sentence for armed personal robbery, supplying cannabis and intent to burgle.

An important feature described by several offenders in this study is that guns obtained for purposes such as protection then get used to commit armed robberies. This is most typically where the offender in question is involved in drug dealing and/or violent conflict:

> *"I started getting in certain mix-ups and said to myself I will keep it [the gun] there and if anything happens I can draw for it."* (London)

This interviewee's cousin's girlfriend worked for a chain of betting shops and helped set up a series of robberies, giving background details about the shops. Needing an accomplice, the cousin invited the interviewee along and the gun was used to pistol whip the principal victim.

Finally, reflecting some themes discussed above in relation to specialist armed robbers, two of the offenders had been involved in a mixture of armed robberies, aggravated burglaries and car-jacking that supported particularly hedonistic and ostentatious lifestyles.

In the first of these, the offender and his accomplices – all in their teens – engaged in a range of violent acquisitive crimes, including robbing off-licences and banks and stealing luxury cars, either by car-jacking or aggravated burglaries. They were also involved in a long-running feud between two criminal crews.

> *"I was into stealing superbikes and stuff. From there we started experimenting… we did off-licences and then moved onto petrol stations …it progressed to more daring robberies and faster cars and then it got so cars weren't easier to steal no more and that's when the car-jacking started."* (London)

In the second case, the offender and his accomplice, again in their late teens, had simply decided one day that they would go and commit armed robberies and aggravated burglaries as a quick way to make some money:

> *"I thought I think it needs to be done and I can't just sit around on my arse because the money won't come to me, so I'll have to go to the money."* (London, see the case study in Box 5.2 below)

It is interesting that all of these offenders were in their teens and all exhibited a degree of recklessness. Almost none had legitimate sources of income, and most were fully immersed into a criminal culture.

Box 5.2 Robbery and burglary: case study

All names have been changed.

Dean was an 18-year-old mixed race male from London. He was an only child who lived with his mother and had completed his schooling at 16. At the time of the offence he was working as an office apprentice for £50 a week. Dean didn't take illegal drugs and neither was he a member of any local gang. However, he described himself as someone from the "streets". He had been robbed at gunpoint and had witnessed shots being fired outside a private party he had attended. He had an adversarial relationship with the local police who he accused of "hounding" local youths due to their way of dressing with "hooded tops".

Overall, Dean felt the label 'gun culture' was a politically motivated attempt at criminalising a broader urban Black culture. In his opinion, the prevalence of gun crime in his area was exaggerated and local gangs were prone to claiming they all had a gun when in fact only one or two of their number did. He thought the reason why a few of his peers wanted guns was to gain a reputation "cos they're selling drugs or something and staying in competition with other people". Dean himself stressed that he bought his imitation firearm solely for the purpose of committing the crimes he was charged with.

Dean committed a series of aggravated burglaries and car-jackings with a co-defendant who was 16 and lived in a local hostel. He described their actions as motivated by wanting to get some money "because the money won't come to me". They were arrested with two imitation firearms bought locally, which were chosen because they "looks real and it has weight". The victims were picked on a "first come, first served basis" and the

one who resisted was dismissed as "a have-a-go hero" who was pistol whipped over the head by his co-defendant.

Dean and his co-defendant were quickly caught and were sentenced to eight years each. Reflecting on his offence he said, "I don't have any regrets, but I feel like I let my mum down innit? Little bit. Cos everyone's mum expects them to do better". However, Dean didn't think there was much that could be done to prevent the prevalence of gun crime; for him, "It can't be stopped. It's like trying to stop binge drinking. That can't be stopped. It's just one of them things".

Opportunists

The third category of armed robbers includes seven individuals convicted of opportunistic or spur of the moment robberies and who were neither professional criminals, nor engaged in other criminality. This includes two sub-groups: firstly, four individuals who had obtained imitation firearms, which then facilitated serious offending; secondly, three individuals who associated with offenders and got involved in an armed robbery involving a real firearm, but with little or no planning.

In relation to the first group, the key is that many imitation firearms that are widely available through retail outlets are sufficiently realistic to facilitate armed robberies. This precludes the need for existing criminal contacts to obtain a real firearm.

> *"Basically, one day I was really drunk, I'd been drinking all day … I went to KFC to go and get some food… this was about midnight… and I remember getting to KFC, noticing that I had the [BB] gun on me. Then I said to my mate, 'Look wait there, I'm going to go down to the garage and get some cigarettes'. And then that's when I done it like, I put the gun up to him [the garage attendant] and I said give me your cigarettes and money…"* (Other)

The second group includes an offender who was invited to participate in an armed robbery and another who was being driven home in one of two cars when the people he was with decided to rob a businessman waiting for a bus with a gun they had with them:

> *"I was with my girlfriend; she has a kid with me. I needed money. So a fella came and said if we do a robbery we can get some money. I thought I would go along with it. He gave me a gun and said use this. We went to a post office, tried to rob it, couldn't get anything and ran round to some flats and ended up getting nicked there… It wasn't planned or anything we just turned up."* (West Midlands)

> *"Coming home, our car broke down… So I phoned some of my friends to say come and help me shove it off the road… they come and they help us, and they bring us [gave us a lift]… on that road I see a man stand up at the bus stop, early morning innit… They said, they said they're gonna rob this man… It's only when they stand and stop there, I see the guy take the gun from his car and then rob the man…"* (London)

Debtors

This final group of ten offenders used armed robbery to try and pay off debts, typically owed to other criminals – notably drug dealers – but also including at least one individual who owed money to banks and credit card lenders. For all of these individuals, robberies were an act of desperation, in some cases under the threat of serious violence.

The first example had been working for a drug dealer and had ended up using the drugs he was supposed to be selling:

> *"I was doing loads of coke and smoking loads of puff… and then I started smoking it, like, smoking the rock [crack], and then it went downhill, and then I got myself a big debt, that's why I'm in here… Cos then I owed the geezer who I was working for, I owed him about two, three grand… He done me a couple of times with a baseball bat and then I got a phone call the morning of this that, 'I'm gonna fucking shoot you in the leg if you ain't got the money'. And I panicked, went and got the thing and done the robbery, which was the muggiest armed robbery ever."* (Other)

In a second case, the interviewee had found a stash of drugs. The owner of the drugs found out and forced him to act as a getaway driver. The interviewee felt he had been "stitched up", but that he had no choice:

> *"I owed about three grand or four grand… They find out it's me… They come and see me and say, someone can pay the debt back… [Or] They are gonna shoot me innit? … They said I should drive to pay off the debts. Like when it was happening, I wanted to drive away, but I thought, no I can't, this is the only way to pay off me debts. I can't go to the police and all, cos you know what I mean, my family would just get it."* (Other)

The use of threats against debtors' families is not uncommon in these cases:

> *"They had threatened to shoot me; if they couldn't get me, they would get my fucking wife, and I thought, I can't, I can't live with that… they were very serious people. It's either me killing them or paying them. It's either that or one of the two. Um, I wasn't prepared to kill them."* (West Midlands, see case study 2 in Appendix B)

Nevertheless, the final example involved the daughter of a sub-postmaster, who agreed to help set up a robbery against her father's post office in lieu of a debt she owed:

> *"She couldn't cover the debt so she thought she'd put her old man up to do it… she gives the details of the deliveries of the money and how to go about it and whatever. Give us the run down of the place…"* (London)

These cases raise a number of questions about whether assistance can or should be made available for individuals who become indebted to criminals, and what, if any, protection may be afforded to them and their families.

Conclusions: armed robbery

A typology of five types of offenders involved in armed robbery has been identified. The over-riding conclusion is that there is no such thing as a 'typical' armed robbery with a firearm, and it has been seen that even within a relatively small study a wide variety of armed robbery contexts can be found. This extends from professional criminals with real firearms at one end to desperate and disorganised criminals with imitation firearms at the other. In all cases, the firearms used, whether real or otherwise, terrorised the victim(s) into compliance. Significantly, realistic imitation firearms enable robberies to be committed by individuals who otherwise lack the necessary criminal contacts or money to obtain real firearms. This diversity clearly poses a number of challenges to police and policy makers working to tackle armed robbery and highlights the need for context-specific responses.

Violence including gangs

Many instances of violence have been described above in relation to illegal drugs markets and robbery. Accepting an inevitable degree of overlap, this section will focus in particular on gang conflict and nightclub violence, which themselves may occasionally be co-located. Firstly, however, consideration is given to a social function of conflict and the nature of violent conflict in the context of firearms ownership.

The social significance of violence

Within the social worlds of many of the offenders in this study conflict appears to form an essential dimension of their peer social relations. Some offenders felt that this is getting worse and more likely to involve firearms. This is most clearly expressed in the phenomenon of 'beef', which may be broadly defined as ongoing dispute, but more specifically appears to relate to disrespect or perceived challenges to someone's (social) status – broadly analogous to masculine honour (Daly and Wilson, 1988). Indeed, such conflict may actually be used as a way of attaining social standing, engaging rivals in conflict as a way of usurping them and enhancing personal status:

> *"…the only way to get attention is if their name's stepped up, and [to do] that they get a thing called beef and they have to get a reputation."* (London)

Such conflict may be sustained as any loss of face necessitates retaliation, which if successful may then give rise to a counter-reprisal, and so on. Friends, associates and gang members may also be drawn in, to the extent that groups such as gangs may be engaged in 'beef' at a collective level. Importantly, this type of violent conflict can be distinguished from more instrumental violence, such as armed robberies and retrieving drug debts, being at least in part expressive.

Shoot or be shot: firearms and the dynamics of violence

In his analysis of the relationships between firearms, violence and society, Squires (2000) refers to research that argues firearms increase the morbidity of violence because they 'make some attacks possible that simply would not occur without firearms' (Zimring and Hawkins, 1987: 15, in Squires, 2000: 195) and they make 'incidents much more lethal than they otherwise would be' (Alba and Messner, 1995: 400, in Squires, 2000: 199). Most importantly, Squires (2000) cites the later work of Zimring and Hawkins (1997) that describes the significant availability of handguns in the US as a 'proximate cause' (facilitator) of the high level of lethal violence seen there (Zimring and Hawkins, 1997, in Squires, 2000: 199). These themes are reflected in the work on homicide in Victoria, Australia by Polk (1994) in which he describes the significance of weapon availability in instances of 'confrontational homicide', particularly when the victim of an initial confrontation leaves the scene and then returns with a weapon, killing the original aggressor (Polk, 1994: chapter 4, pp 59–92).

This literature is highly relevant to the present research: in the context of a criminal culture in which conflict and firearms are to some extent normalised, conflict can quickly develop into what is effectively a 'shoot or be shot' scenario and even very trivial precipitating incidents

may result in fatal violence. This scenario is particularly likely if either party to a dispute knows or believes the other to have access to a firearm, the probability of which is increased with gang membership because of the circulation and sharing of firearms within such groups.

> *"…you just have to bust [shoot] in their face before they bust at you."* (West Midlands)

This mentality of striking the first blow is reflected in the widely-held view that firearms ownership is acceptable if there is a risk of being shot.

> *"If you actually know someone's out there to kill you, what choice [have] you got?"* (London)

These comments suggest that the presence of illegal firearms changes the nature of violent conflict, both in terms of the way violence escalates and also in relation to the likely outcomes of disputes with even very trivial origins: in situations of conflict, firearms raise the stakes for all concerned.[38] It is therefore imperative that any opportunity to intervene is exploited before violence escalates, for example through the use of independent intermediaries and mediation services or even an enhanced policing presence. In this regard, the relationship between police and other agencies and the communities they serve is critical in providing an 'early warning' where there is a risk of conflict escalating, whether that is in relation to personal conflict, gang violence, drug dealing disputes, or indeed any scenario in which a violent outcome may be anticipated.

Gang violence

About half of the offenders interviewed had been involved in gang conflict of some sort. Chapter 3 presented evidence of four levels of 'collective' organisation, repeated here, in each of which violence was reported to some degree but differing subtly in its nature:

- Close *friendship groups* with a social focus, but offering safety in numbers and physical backup if required. These were typically comprised of individuals who knew each other from school and who had grown up in the same neighbourhood. Conflicts at this level tended to be localised and time-limited, although they occasionally drew in other family members and associates, leading to more serious violence.

38. It has elsewhere been argued that firearms can, in certain circumstances, be less lethal than other weapon types in confrontations involving strangers. It is argued that the power imbalance created by only one party having a firearm discourages victim resistance (Kleck, 1991, cited by Squires, 2000: 198–9). It is likely that this is most relevant to confrontations such as armed robbery in which the primary motive of the aggressor is not to cause injury.

- '*Associates*' who were known to each other but were not close friends, typically interacting socially, sharing spaces such as estates, and periodically engaged in low-level criminality. For non-criminal individuals, such 'associates' provided an interface with local criminal cultures, including gangs. Individuals may be drawn into violent conflict by association.

- *Criminal crews* that focussed on activities such as controlling local drugs markets and, for some members, conducting armed robberies and other offending. They sometimes became involved in disputes with rival crews over drug market activity, but more generally rivalries encompassed various levels of conflict, including personal disputes that spilt over into group violence. Crew members assumed a degree of collective responsibility, both in providing backup and as targets for rival groups. A number of offenders described organisations at this level involved in long-standing endemic violence, in several cases without an understanding of its origins. Violence sometimes appears to have been symbolic as much as instrumental.

- *Organised crime* networks whose activities almost always included a degree of drug market participation, for example encompassing middle-market level activities, in addition to other offending such as more serious armed robberies and quasi-legitimate enterprises such as door security companies. The latter were sometimes used to control venue-based drugs markets. Typically, violence was only used sparingly and instrumentally.

Significantly, a number of interviewees reported violent conflict where the cause appears to be based on longstanding gang rivalries that had transcended any particular precipitating event, most notably in the 'associates' and 'criminal crews' levels of organisation:

> *"My opinion? I don't think any of us know why we don't like each other… It was over girls, it was over this and that. But it's just a bigger escalation."* (Greater Manchester)

For example, one individual from London who had been involved in a series of armed robberies was a member of a gang engaged in a long-standing feud with a rival group:

> *"…there was something that started back in '94 and is still going on now. Some guy slept with the next guy's baby mother*[39] *when she was pregnant and his boys found out about it and shot that one guy. And his friend then shot his friend, and*

39. The term 'baby mother' is used to refer to the mother of a man's child or children.

then everyone started shooting each other... That is what it is over, a fucking girl. Now it is just stupid, they are all dying because they know a person who knows that person who knows that person, so I am going to kill you for that..." (London)

While others from Nottinghamshire and Greater Manchester highlighted similar issues:

"It's to do with the older people [when they were] …young and they used to argue and it's just escalated from there. It's got bigger and bigger and that's the kids just [saying], 'Oh yeah I'm going to shoot him'." (Nottinghamshire)

"…even like when I was at school, these conflicts have been going on for years... I mean, it gets handed down and handed down…" (Nottinghamshire)

"…If one gang walks in another gang's area – say, for instance the [A] walked into the [B]. The [A] hate the [B] and the [B] hate the [A] and if one of the [A] walked into the [B] area he will be killed... Because they don't get on with each other. It's been like that for twenty-odd years and they don't get on with each other… There's probably a killing every year." (Greater Manchester)

Meanwhile, another account from Greater Manchester underlines the fact that in a climate of firearms and violence, even the most apparently trivial slights can result in shootings, reflecting previous research (e.g. Polk, 1994; Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003):

"…my cousin… someone said his motorbike was rubbish. That's how trouble got started. Argument broke out. Stood outside my gran's house; there's loads of kids there. Someone sent someone for a gun while the argument was taking place. The gun reached there, and they started shooting…" (Greater Manchester)

Significantly, it appears that gang structures serve to perpetuate violence as conflict is triggered and then reciprocated, often building momentum as further gang members and their associates are drawn in. In relation to violence, gang membership can be seen as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, gangs confer a degree of protection to members, affording backup if trouble starts; on the other hand, the very fact of gang membership makes violence both more likely in the first place and also more likely to be sustained.

Box 5.3 presents a case study of gang violence from Manchester and illustrates the sometimes complex relationship between gang membership and other criminality, in this case including drug dealing, armed robbery and attempted murder. Two further case studies

on violent conflict, respectively from the West Midlands and London, are presented in Appendix B (case studies 5 and 6).

Box 5.3 Violence including gangs: case study

All names have been changed.

Andre was an 18-year-old Black male from Greater Manchester. He was one of five children and had been excluded from school for "hitting the head teacher". At the age of 14 he had been sentenced to four years in prison for possessing a loaded firearm. Andre was a member of a local gang, which he estimated included around 100 people of differing ages. Andre was an active criminal in his area, operating as an ounce-level crack cocaine drug dealer and participating in armed robberies. He had been attacked several times, and both his convictions related to ongoing disputes with other gangs. His brother was a senior gangster in the local area and had been shot three times; he was currently facing a life sentence.

Andre was very well networked with the local criminal fraternities; he had familial links with a gang in Birmingham and reported driving a motorbike to collect firearms from gun dealers in Liverpool. Andre's part of Greater Manchester was strongly territorial; only his group could sell drugs on his estate and disputes relating to other members of his gang were seen as a personal affront to Andre. Andre went out regularly with large groups of well-armed gang members and he had access to a wide variety of real firearms which made him feel "safe". However, he no longer routinely carried one as he was frequently stopped by the police.

Andre's offence relates to a failed shooting of two rival gang members. According to Andre, he and a friend had seen the men who had shot and wounded his friend in a previous confrontation on his estate. They had returned home, armed themselves and then with another man set upon the rival gang members. After badly beating the men, Andre was affronted that as they fled, they warned that they would come back and kill him. Andre decided to shoot them there and then, but he missed. A few minutes later armed police arrived and he was caught and eventually sentenced to six and a half years in prison.

Andre was surprised that the police were called by a worried onlooker: "That's what the shock was. Like, police have never been called on us before". Now in prison, he was still seen as a representative of his gang and concluded, "they have got all the Manchester boys in here and there is a lot of conflict".

Nightclubs

Nightclubs, along with other social and party venues, are significant for the fact that they are shared social spaces in which rivals – individuals and gangs – encounter each other and construct and defend their public status and reputation. Almost all of the interviewees had experienced or witnessed violence in and around nightclubs; half reported having seen guns, including guns being carried, brandished, fired into the ceiling and fired at people, most often at urban music venues. A significant minority, including three that had worked in door security roles, reported door security staff being targeted and shot.

Door security

Reported conflict involving nightclub door staff and firearms took one of four forms. First and foremost, there is violence directed at door staff by members of the public, typically in response for perceived slights such as refused entry.[40] This may have fatal consequences:

> *"…someone rolled up and blew a guy's head off with a shotgun. One of the doorman… it was just from argument… nothing to do with drugs, just two people who have had a difference of opinion over whatever… Someone went away and came back with a shotgun and blew his head off."* (London)

Secondly, one offender reported that he and his friends were threatened by a doorman with a shotgun when they forced their way into a club having been refused entry:

> *"One time I was with a couple of my boys… the [doorman] was saying, 'no you can't come in', because there was so many of us and we was arguing at the door and that. And in the end we pushed our way and ran through and I was at the front, and one of the doormen pulled out a shotgun… [It was] not good."* (Nottinghamshire)

Thirdly, there are incidents in which door staff are caught up in violence:

> *"Drive-by shootings, attempted murders… Some of this is to do with rival groups who will both come to the club and a fight will break out… Maybe one party has gone outside, drawn guns and tried to come back into the club to come and shoot the other people. Had an altercation with the doorman and the next thing you know they are shooting up the door."* (London)

40. An example of such a shooting at a music concert occurred in the West Midlands in March 2006 (BBC, 2006).

Finally, there are conflicts related to organised crime, such as competition for door contracts. These include competing for access to and control of venue-based drugs markets, so-called 'control the doors, control the floors' strategies (Morris, 1998):

> *"…to be honest, in Manchester it is usually rival door groups. I say it was the door groups but it was more like 'enforced security firms' in Manchester. And to be honest there was more trouble in Manchester on the doors with other door groups trying to take over venues etc. Cos a lot of the door groups ran the drugs in the clubs…"* (West Midlands)

These issues reflect the findings of previous research (e.g. Winlow, 2001; Hobbs et al., 2005). The 'door' can itself be seen as representing a contested space: on the one hand, door staff may be drawn into conflict with revellers they are trying to regulate; on the other hand, control of the door itself is an economic asset and may be competed over by rival security firms. Firearms are reported featuring in both.

It is expected that the increasing regulation and professionalisation of door staff introduced by the Private Security Industry Act (2001) will be addressing at least some of these issues, not least in relation to tackling links between organised crime and door security.

Revellers

It bears repeating that half of the offenders in this study reported having seen guns in or around nightclubs, including guns being carried, brandished, fired into the ceiling and fired at people; this was most often at urban music venues.

> *"I've seen enough guns fired man… I went to a hip-hop dance in Manchester. And I was there for about half an hour in the corner drinking some liquor with my brethren and there were people just firing into the ceiling man, know what I'm saying. They had to big up the tune what was playing."* (West Midlands)

> *"[my cousin] got shot next to me… He died… He had a beef with someone and he was dancing and stepped on a Yardie's trainer and they shot him five or six times."* (West Midlands)

One offender who had been involved in drug dealing for a number of years described the way that conflicts may develop between revellers. His comments echo the accounts of numerous others:

> *"A man can be shot over anything yeah. You can go to a club, and you don't know this person and you look at him funny, and the geezer says, 'What are you looking at?' And it is obvious that if you are with your girl you are not going to take that, so you are going to stand up. And if you stand up, the geezer is going to think, 'What the fuck? This prick, this geezer is standing up.' So he could take out his thing and do what he is doing, and you could easily get shot over things like that. Or most time people get shot over girls..."* (West Midlands)

'Masculine honour' violence of this sort is not unusual (Daly and Wilson, 1988), and the presence of a public audience is often significant (Polk, 1994; Tomsen, 1997). The presence and use of firearms is, however, unusual in the UK. In general, it appears that the latter can be explained by reference to the criminal activities of the gunmen: for example, involvement in drug dealing or gang violence may explain the presence of a firearm, but have nothing to do with the context in which it is eventually used. Where criminals share social spaces, these sorts of triggers for violence – arguments over girlfriends, spilt drinks and so on – are particularly likely to result in potentially fatal violence, not least because of the 'shoot or be shot' issue raised earlier. As discussed above, because rivals engaged in gun crime, including gangs, are often demographically and socially alike, these encounters are more likely because they frequent the same venues.

> *"Once when I was about 17... because I lived in a certain area, me and my people dem, we didn't get on with certain people in the certain area. Just like, one night, we must have gone to a certain dance. Because people must have seen us – there was only about three of us at the time – because the people must have seen us, they must have started calling up their people. There was about 15 of them... they have tried chasing us and we have like run, and as we were running they let off a couple of shots."* (West Midlands)

> *"Because you're raving, you're round other gangs; you are round other people like you aren't you? There are other people like you and you could step on someone's shoe and they'd want to fight you... If you go raving and you want to feel safe, you want to feel alright, you've got to have a gun on you."* (London)

Beyond inter-personal violence related to disputes, venues such as nightclubs are also important because of their significance as places in which wealth is ostentatiously displayed, whether in the form of material possessions such as expensive clothes, watches and jewellery, or in the consumption of expensive drinks such as vintage champagne. Behaviours such as these expose revellers to the risk of being robbed, either individually or

on occasion collectively when entire venues are held up. In this regard, several references were made to 'red eye' (jealous) people:

> *"…red eye people… If somebody sees you doing better than them, or you've got something better on yourself than them and they want that, you know what I'm saying, so they're gonna come and try and rob you."* (West Midlands)

Retribution

As in the case of drug market sanctioning, firearms are used to take informal violent retribution in a range of contexts. Two cases stand out. The first, and most serious, was an attack on a man who had raped the interviewee's sister and received what was perceived by the interviewee to be a lenient sentence when prosecuted (see case study 5 in Appendix B).

In a second case, the offender's partner had been involved in an argument in a local pub that ultimately resulted in her being threatened with baseball bats and the offender's work van being vandalised. The offender had obtained a converted blank firer, intending to "scare the living daylights out of" the aggressor. This case again illustrates the 'strike first' mentality:

> *"…you're brought up round it and about it [illegal firearms]… it's always going through the back of your head when you're in a place like that, what about [if] he's gonna get one. Or he's gonna bring one to you. So you always jump on the bandwagon and take one to them first."* (Greater Manchester)

Other cases included an offender exacting revenge for a sexual assault on his girlfriend by threatening the perpetrator with an imitation firearm and a university undergraduate who had been attacked by a fellow student and who obtained a firearm to, in his words, "squash" the dispute.

Other violence

Other contexts in which firearms were used violently include a street robbery that involved a sexual assault and which was committed with a cigarette lighter imitation firearm, a road rage incident involving a toy BB gun and a case of witness intimidation in which the only witness to a robbery was shot and had to be placed under police protection.

Conclusions: violence including gangs

For many of the offenders, conflict appears to form a significant dimension of their social relations, most notably in the form of disputes related to status and respect – so-called 'beef'.

In the context of firearm ownership, even quite trivial disputes may result in shootings as the presence of guns elevates threat levels and the so-called 'shoot or be shot' scenario precipitates pre-emptive violence. Gang structures serve to escalate and perpetuate violence, and violent conflict may transcend individual incidents and become generalised.

Nightclubs and other public social venues are significant first and foremost as shared social spaces in which rivals meet and an individual's status may be publicly challenged, necessitating retaliation. Where such individuals are engaged in armed criminality, trivial disputes may quickly escalate into fatal violence, access to firearms and a public audience both raising the stakes. Meanwhile, those involved in the door security industry may be drawn into these conflicts, or even targeted by rival firms seeking access to potentially lucrative security contracts.

Possession offences

The final group of offences concerns 25 individuals caught in possession of firearms and is second only to robbery in numerical terms. In these cases the primary offence is possession of an illegal firearm with which no other offence has been either committed or detected. This includes an individual who was arrested on his way to commit a robbery, and another who was caught in possession of a firearm he was planning to sell for profit. Box 5.5 below presents a number of legal considerations relating to the law on possession of firearms.

Carrying or minding firearms

The most significant theme concerns carrying or minding firearms for other criminals and covers the offences of eight offenders; a ninth, involved in gang violence, was prosecuted when the three people minding his guns and ammunition gave his name to the police subsequent to their arrest.

In three cases, the offender was effectively given no choice about minding firearms, two being financially indebted to the owner in relation to drug dealing and the third because of the criminal seniority of the firearm's owner.

> *"I got meself into debt and like I had to mind the guns for someone… they said they would fuckin' do something to me mum or something or to the house or something, so I just didn't even think. I just grabbed them and took them innit… It was either that or go into selling drugs [for them] and I am not into that…"* (Other)

In a fourth case, the offender had agreed to transport a gun for a senior criminal associate he looked up to (see Box 5.4 below). The fifth and sixth cases involve offenders being paid to mind firearms, while a seventh claims to have been in possession of a firearm he was disposing of for an associate.

Finally, the eighth offender had been forced to take possession of a firearm by a gang of armed robbers that had stormed the nightclub he was in at the time. The police had been called. The offender says he knew the robbers, knew they were in a criminal crew and felt he would have been in danger had he refused the firearm:

> *"…they have basically said to me when I was in the toilet yeah, 'Alright take this'. Now obviously I didn't want to take it, but then you don't really have much of a choice, not to take it. Because if you don't take it, then something is going to happen."* (West Midlands)

Further fearing for his safety, he had refused to name the robbers when he was arrested. This refusal to 'grass' is a consistent theme, typically because of the risks to an offender and his family and/or friends if he is identified as someone who has talked to the police.

Box 5.4 presents a case study of an 18-year-old from Greater Manchester who was willingly being paid to mind and transport two firearms for local criminals and was caught transporting them with an accomplice. Two further case studies of offenders convicted of possession offences, respectively from London and the West Midlands, are presented in Appendix B (case studies 7 and 8).

Box 5.4 Possession offences: case study

All names have been changed.

Leo was an 18-year-old mixed race male from Greater Manchester. He was born and brought up on a local estate and had four siblings. According to Leo, his estate had initially been quiet but had deteriorated in the last few years, with the arrival of both crack cocaine users and what he described as "gang bangers". Leo was part of a local mixed race crew on the estate but did not admit to being a member of any of the large Manchester gangs, although he knew their names and their localities.

Leo had been excluded from school at the age of sixteen for "messing around, fighting" and was a regular cannabis smoker. According to Leo, he was paid £200 to look after a

loaded Uzi submachine gun and a shotgun for a couple of local men. He agreed, and the next day his co-defendant was driving them both to a pre-arranged place when they pulled out in front of a police car that subsequently stopped them. Leo and his co-defendant fled while pointing their loaded weapons at pursuing police officers. However, one of them recognised Leo from a previous encounter and he was arrested an hour later.

Leo refused to tell the police who had asked him to drop the weapons off and was convicted of possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life and jailed along with his co-defendant, each receiving four years. Leo denied being bullied into transporting the guns but admitted he lacked foresight, "I had done it for them for a favour for a bit of change and it went all wrong didn't it?"

Protection

The possession of firearms for protection most clearly demonstrates the difficulty posed by trying to disaggregate complex and overlapping offence types into limited typologies. Most of these cases – approximately ten – are substantially covered by the sections in this chapter on drug markets and violence including gangs (five each). The essential point is that individuals get caught and prosecuted for possession of firearms that are owned for self-defence purposes in the context of their other illegal activities:

> *"Well, because people wanted to kill me… the gun is for protection."* (London)

Nevertheless there were also two cases of individuals who had been previously victimised in the context of living substantially legitimate lives, including one who had been threatened by local drug dealers when he reported them to the police and another who had suffered a punctured lung in an attack:

> *"…after I got stabbed I was told to keep it in case someone came to my house."* (London)

'Absolute' possession offences

This final group relates to four cases in which the police found a firearm the offender denied any prior knowledge about, typically in a building or car owned by the offender. According to current case law, possession of a firearm is an absolute (strict liability) offence and, unlike with controlled drugs, ignorance as to the presence of a firearm is not a defence (Home Office, 2002:17). In all four cases in the present research, the most significant fact is that the offender was associating with criminals who owned firearms. Box 5.5 raises some legal considerations that arise in relation to firearms possession offences.

Box 5.5 Possession offences: legal considerations[41]

The offence of possession of a firearm is unusual for the convergence of three factors:

i. The broad interpretation of what constitutes 'possession': including the concepts of 'custody or control' and 'proprietary possession' (owning and having access to a firearm).

ii. Strict liability: *mens rea* (knowingly committing a criminal act) does not apply and there is effectively no defence to the charge of possession of a firearm once possession has been established. Duress is one possible exception.[42]

iii. The five-year mandatory minimum sentence (three years for under-18s): which may be reduced only in truly exceptional circumstances (there is no 'good mitigation').

In relation to someone facing the mandatory minimum sentence, these factors have a number of apparent consequences, including that there is no incentive to enter an early guilty plea (as no sentence discount is available), and that someone caught minding a firearm has no incentive to co-operate with an investigation into the owner of such a firearm. Furthermore, individuals may be easily 'set up' by having a firearm planted into their 'possession' without their knowledge, for example by criminal rivals.

Conclusions: possession offences

The fact that 25 individuals interviewed for this research had been convicted of firearms possession is an indication that the police are having an impact on the circulation of illegal firearms. Nevertheless, these cases also raise a number of challenges, not least because policing successes appear to be coming at the cost of illegal firearm owners displacing risk onto others by using third parties to carry or mind their weapons.

In the way the law is structured, it appears that individuals are being convicted of possession of firearms they claim no knowledge of, which at least raises the possibility that some have been set up. It also appears that individuals charged with possession and facing a mandatory minimum sentence have neither the incentive to offer an early guilty plea, nor to co-operate with broader criminal investigations, both of which may be considered counter-productive outcomes of highly constrained legislation.

41. The authors are grateful to Guy Vassall-Adams (barrister) of Doughty Street Chambers, London, for his thoughts on this subject.
42. In lay terms, duress applies when a defendant commits an offence because of the imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm if they do not do so. At least one offender in this study reported being subject to threats of violence in the context of being given two firearms to mind to repay a £2,000 drug debt accumulated by a girlfriend; he received a 5-year prison sentence.

Gun culture?

Finally, the offenders were asked whether and under what circumstances it would be acceptable to carry a firearm, how it felt carrying and firing a firearm (where relevant) and what the term 'gun culture' meant to them. Their answers shed light on a number of key themes featured in recent discourse regarding 'gun crime' and 'gun culture', including the significance or otherwise of race and certain genres of music.

Morality of firearm possession

Almost half of the offenders interviewed indicated that it was acceptable under some circumstances to carry an illegal firearm, typically when someone was either engaged in illegal activities that exposed them to the risk of violent victimisation, or where they were directly being threatened and feared for their safety. Several drew a useful distinction between acceptability and need:

> *"I wouldn't say there is ever going to be a time when it's acceptable but there's always a need… The need is when you're under pressure and you're threatened."* (West Midlands)

Many commented on the perceived inability of the police to protect them – generally because of their own involvement in crime:

> *"If your life was in danger… You know the police are not on your side and there's nothing you can do… That's self-defence, right. Then you have to protect yourself, any way you know of."* (London)

Finally, for some it appears that the decision to obtain a firearm is based on a worst case scenario consideration in which the perceived risks of personal injury or death make the risks of arrest and imprisonment for firearms possession tolerable:

> *"…I'd rather carry it with a chance of getting a prison sentence than getting killed, or something happen to me where I get badly hurt."* (Nottinghamshire)

All of these issues need careful consideration in relation to changing attitudes towards illegal firearms. Increasingly punitive approaches may only have a marginal impact on individuals who perceive a high credible risk to their personal safety. Indeed, where such individuals feel they may be killed it is conceivable that no reasonable criminal justice sanction would deter them from carrying firearms. In such instances, it appears that policies

should focus on a range of interventions and not be limited simply to potential sentencing outcomes. Issues such as conflict resolution and diversion from involvement in the criminal economy would be two such areas for consideration.

Carrying a firearm

It is perhaps unsurprising that carrying an illegal firearm is associated with a range of emotions and a number of the offenders became quite animated when describing their own responses. For the majority, carrying a firearm was associated with feelings of safety and/or empowerment. Importantly, this was often coupled with comments about having control over other people.

> *"You feel like you got power when you got a gun… Yeah, you feel safer. Cos you know if anyone comes to harm you or anything, you know you can defend yourself properly."* (Greater Manchester)

> *"Power man, powerful, that is the addictive side of it. It is like, you know, the control, the power you have got when you have got that [gun] in your hand. And the way people react to it; that is a buzz in itself. You know, it is like, 'I am the fucking man. You are not going to say nothing to me; no-one is going to say anything to me, because if you do I will put one [a bullet] in you.' It's just crazy powerful…"* (London)

Several offenders who had been members of more entrenched local gangs referred to the normality of carrying a gun within their social circle (it is important here to distinguish between the relatively narrow social circles of these individuals and the wider community):

> *"Just normal really… cos that's how it is around there. It's just an everyday thing innit?"* (Greater Manchester)

> *"Normal, it's like everyday life now. Well recently I've been in prison, but before it's like having a packet of cigarettes. I would have felt more different by NOT having a gun."* (West Midlands, interviewee's emphasis)

A minority of offenders indicated that carrying a gun either had no positive impact on how they felt or indeed made them fearful, typically of being arrested or having to use it:

> *"No, it made me feel edgy. Loads of things running through your head, like if you see the people these threats are coming from, if you're driving and a police car stops you, what you're going to do. Those sort of thoughts always running through your head."* (London)

Finally, at least one highlighted the fact that both fear and empowerment can co-exist:

> *"When you have got a gun you feel that you are the man and no one can touch you. A gun makes people feel powerful, untouchable… Now I realise that you are not seeing the whole point: that there are other guys carrying guns. When people know you're carrying you got an issue, they are coming to kill you. So if you carry a gun you must be able to use it."* (London)

This last point, that firearms raise the stakes in violent conflicts, reflects and reinforces the earlier comments about the 'shoot or be shot' dilemma that may confront individuals with access to firearms. Policy interventions concerned with tackling firearm possession might usefully highlight this negative consequence by way of a deterrent. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that possession of a firearm can be exciting and empowering, both of which may reinforce firearm carrying behaviours.

Firing a firearm

Thirty-nine offenders admitted that they had fired a gun, including ten who had fired shots in anger at other people and six who had fired guns in legitimate contexts, including at a wedding in Pakistan, as a cadet, as a soldier and in the context of shooting sports. The remainder included individuals practising shooting (nine offenders), testing new purchases (seven offenders) or simply 'messing about'. Importantly, in most cases the offenders had only fired a gun a few times – it was not something that was done with any regularity (which may reflect what appears to be the relatively limited supply of ammunition – see Chapter 4).

Although many of the offenders' comments relating to firing guns reflect similar themes to those above relating to possession, the two experiences appear, perhaps unsurprisingly, to be qualitatively different, with the realisation of a gun's power being variously exciting and sobering:

> *"Powerful man, it was a rush, a pure rush mate. It is frightening, there is a bit of fear there as well, because like, it is fucking mad, there is this loud noise and you know the thing is jumping in your hand. That is when you realise – it is not until you fire a gun that you realise the power and the magnitude of what you have in your hands."* (London)

> *"I wasn't trigger-happy. It is not a nice feeling – it is either you or them."* (London)

> *"When I did that, that's when I knew to myself that I didn't have no feelings for certain people, cos it was just so easy. It was like an adrenaline rush… I just started thinking to myself, like, you don't want to be doing this…"* (London)

Nevertheless, several offenders described a neutral response to having fired a gun:

> *"I didn't feel anything really. Some people, it excites them and they have to go and tell everyone what they did. But for me it was nothing really."* (London)

As in relation to firearm carrying behaviours it may be possible to stress the dangers and costs of firearm use in the context of educational and publicity campaigns.

Gun culture: offenders' views

Much of the recent debate about the emergence of a 'gun culture' in the UK has focussed on two themes: the significance of race and the symbolic value of firearms (fashion, status), with popular cultural sources – notably certain musical genres – periodically singled out for vilification. In the present research the possession of firearms for symbolic purposes was mentioned, but the picture is equivocal and overall it appears that instrumental motivations are far more significant in relation to illegal firearms, for example for protection or to facilitate crimes such as robbery. As might be expected, therefore, there were many references to gangs, drug markets, robbery, violent disputes and the need for protection, reflecting themes already discussed above. There were also a few comments expressing regret:

> *"I'd call it a sad state of affairs man. It's not no culture, it's not no fashion… look at the state really that the ghettos are in…"* (West Midlands)

Symbolism

Where offenders did mention people carrying guns for the image, it was typically in references to younger offenders associating themselves with the lifestyles of older and more serious criminals:

> *"…the youth today just want to have a gun because someone else has got a gun. Or because you're seen as some sort of bad boy or big man…"* (London)

> *"A lot of the young ones have got them… But that is only because they are trying to come up, they are trying to make themselves look hard…"* (London)

> *"…you've got these youngsters who see older boys using them, so it's a fashion thing with them."* (London)

There were also several references to young people imitating media representations of criminals (particularly from the United States), a subject that will be returned to below in specific relation to music:

> *"They think they're gangsters don't they? They've been watching too much hip-hop, watching like too much gangster films, shit like that."* (West Midlands)

> *"I think it's a collaboration of videos, TVs, media, music, you have got all these rappers who glorify gun crime and the lifestyle behind it. And these kids haven't got any role models in their lives. Some of these kids have single parents. They ain't got no fathers, they are just listening to music, and this music is having a big influence on them, and what they are seeing as well… They don't see nothing wrong with it, they just see it as becoming normal."* (London)

The development of a criminal career was discussed at the start of this chapter, during which the ascendancy of local criminals to role model status in some communities was raised as a significant factor. The comments reported above seem to reflect this process and reinforce the need to challenge such perceptions, most significantly where they are conflated with firearms possession. There is a suggestion that for some individuals this process may be reinforced by exposure to media representations of successful (in the broadest sense) criminals.

The role of music

The significance of music in the lives of the offenders was documented in Chapter 3. In relation to 'gun culture' 14 offenders referred to the role of music: six were White, six were Black, one was Asian and one was mixed race. All six of the White offenders referred in general terms to hip-hop, rap or 'gangsta rap' as an underlying cause of gun crime, limiting their analysis to broad statements about such music 'glamorising' gun violence.

> *"…also you've got rap music as well, that plays a part as it glamorises it."* (Other)

Several of the Black offenders offered a more considered analysis, notably highlighting the materialism portrayed by certain genres of music (particularly American rap/hip-hop) that conflates crime and material success, and also referring to fact that some young people do relate to the lyrics.

> *"We're getting a gun culture over here now where, you know, hip-hop's big… And associated with hip-hop is certain things like getting cash fast, getting guns to get cash, selling drugs to get guns to get cash. And you know, it's a whole culture now, that's coming over here from the States… Nowadays, right, if you ain't got money man, you ain't fuck all man. You won't get a girlfriend if you ain't got a decent car, if you ain't got no turnouts…"* (West Midlands)

> *"… [the musicians] are just saying about everyday life, their struggle… and what they are going through and a lot of the youths ain't saying I am going to pick up a gun because the hip-hop people have got a gun, they are just listening to the music and some of them are thinking, well boy, the life they are speaking about, even though it is not in detail, is the kind of life that they have got, so that is why they are relating to the music more, to that kind of music."* (West Midlands)

Others, however, rejected the significance of music, including one individual who highlighted a generational effect, a subject discussed further below in relation to changing criminal cultures:

> *"Some people put it down to rap music; it's nothing to do with the music. You [the interviewer] listen to that. Every generation looks to the last generation and even if they don't think they are being influenced they are being influenced. They don't realise it: look at that guy who's made it big, I can be that guy. And that's it, you are there and you are into crime and gun crime and that's it."* (London)

On balance, while music – particularly urban music (hip-hop, garage, R&B) – does provide an important cultural reference point for the majority of the offenders interviewed, be they Black, White or Asian, its relationship to crime and violence remains unclear and appears peripheral. It seems likely that if anything the most significant factor is the aspirational lifestyle portrayed by some sections of the music industry, rather than the specific lyrics of any particular artist or genre.

The ability to live up to this lifestyle will inevitably depend on an individual's structural position in society. The fact that much 'urban' music speaks of life in inner-city communities may well mean that those to whom the lyrics carry the most significance are also those least able to recreate the consumer lifestyle presented by their cultural icons and the industry that promotes them. This is reflected in the tensions highlighted earlier in this chapter between material expectations on the one hand and economic hardship and structural marginalisation on the other, which for some individuals are reconciled through involvement

in the criminal economy. It goes without saying, however, that consumerist/materialist pressures do not arise only from the music industry, but are significantly more generalised. As a consequence, while the music industry may have an important role in influencing young peoples' attitudes and aspirations, it is by no means uniquely responsible.

Race

In relation to race the offenders highlighted three themes. Firstly, that all racial groups are involved in and affected by the illegal use of firearms. Secondly, that selective coverage of gun crime has contributed to it being identified as a Black community issue, which some of the Black offenders found especially galling:

> *"They just think all these gangs in Birmingham are all Black. Some are not even Black, some are White geezers, some have Asians, but they think it's Black, Black, Black."* (West Midlands)

> *"It's like a stereotype, like it's only young Black men who carry these guns."* (West Midlands)

Thirdly that the substantive issue is one of economics, including significantly the area in which someone lives, as much as it is of race (an observation reflected in four references to 'ghettos' and one to 'slums' in relation to answering the question about gun culture):

> *"…it just happens in the poor environments innit…"* (London)

A few of the White offenders expressed explicitly racist views. More generally, however, several contrasted what they saw as their own instrumental and sparing use of firearms with what they perceived as more reckless and expressive behaviour on the part of Black offenders:

> *"The white community have been carrying guns for a few generations haven't they? And it's usually been firms or hardened criminals carrying guns. But the Black community now are starting to carry guns as an 'it' thing…"* (West Midlands)

This view was supported by the comments of a few Black or mixed race offenders:

> *"Especially the Black kids growing up nowadays. As far as I'm concerned it's mashing us up. We're all running around with guns and we think it makes us hard…"* (London)

In the use of language such as 'Black-on-Black gun crime' by statutory agencies and the media, it could be argued that race has often been positioned as the most significant variable in explaining involvement in gun and other criminality. The evidence collected for this research suggests that such an analysis is significantly limited. Nevertheless, the importance of race, ethnicity and culture remains to be fully explored, and while some insight has been provided by this research it has by no means been conclusive.

Changing criminal culture

More generally, comments focussed on generational changes to criminal culture without specific reference to race:

> *"Guns always been about, they are just more open now."* (Nottinghamshire)

> *"…the old school guns are for business, where for young lads the guns are fashion accessories…"* (Greater Manchester)

> *"…the younger youths will use it any old time these days, they are just letting off shots for fun, you get me? But the older heads now will only use them when they need to use them."* (West Midlands)

> *"It's an evolution, from fists to knives, from knives to guns…"* (London)

> *"See back in the day there used to be like being big, like big muscles and that… Yeah being hench and that. Then it moved on from that to carrying knives and then from knives it moved on to guns innit… It is just a thing innit. The way young people are these days."* (London)

> *"This younger generation, they don't give a fuck. When I was younger I used to be nicking motor bikes and stuff. This is an all-new ball game, they are out armed robbing and everything, you know what I mean? It has just got worse."* (West Midlands)

One offender suggested that these changes may in part be explained with reference to changes in the availability of firearms, in particular because of the innovation of converted imitation firearms:

> *"I'd say it's due to all these 8 millimetres [8mm calibre firearms] arriving and being able to convert them etcetera, and even kids being able to work out how to convert them. There's more knocking about… there's more able to get hold of [them] than there was, so I would say there's an increased gun culture…"* (Other)

Overall, the interviews provide a clear and consistent message that criminal cultures have changed, with an escalation in violence. Importantly firearms appear to have diffused down to younger offenders who are reported as being less restrained in their use of these weapons.

Conclusions: criminal gun cultures

Taking this chapter as a whole, it is clear that the possession and use of illegal firearms is too complex to be explained by reference to a single unifying criminal 'gun culture', and that it may be more useful to describe the presence of plural criminal gun *cultures*.[43] Specifically, two 'ideal types' may be identified, distinguishing between an *instrumental criminal gun culture* in which guns are used only for offensive criminal purposes such as armed robbery, and a *complex criminal gun culture* in which the role of firearms is more generalised, including offensive, defensive and symbolic functionality. The latter is more recent, appears to reflect changing criminal cultures and is becoming increasingly significant.

Three consistent themes appear to underlie complex criminal gun culture: the ascendancy of criminal role models, the market in illegal drugs and cultures of gang membership, which themselves very often go hand-in-hand. Significantly, firearms appear to have become increasingly normalised in relation to systemic violence in the street-level criminal economy, including robberies against drug dealers, territorial disputes and informal sanctioning of drug market participants. This includes the possession of firearms for offensive and defensive purposes in the context of complicated offending and victimisation histories. Firearms also appear to have assumed a symbolic significance as they have become associated with criminal affluence related to activities such as drug dealing and robbery and have been conflated with respect, status and violent potential. The extent to which this symbolism may be attributed to popular cultural sources such as the urban music industry and media more generally is unclear but on balance appears peripheral.

As firearms within the criminal economy have become increasingly normalised, so they have raised the stakes more generally in the context of disputes and violent conflict. This is most clearly manifested in violence in nightclubs and other shared social spaces, in which firearms possession may significantly contribute to violence quickly escalating to the point where adversaries feel locked into a shoot or be shot situation. In this respect, group strategies such as gang membership may afford participants a degree of backup, but may also escalate and sustain violence as group rivalries transcend any particular precipitating event.

43. The term '*criminal* gun cultures' is used to distinguish from what might be described as legitimate gun cultures, for example hunting, shooting sports and militaria collections.

The 'gun culture' debate needs to develop to reflect the complexity of these issues. In particular, it is imperative that those working on crime reduction in communities affected by gun crime engage with young peoples' decision making processes, especially where the local criminal economy, fuelled in particular by illegal drugs and armed robbery, is outcompeting the legitimate labour market for some individuals. This process has serious consequences for communities, not least because it legitimises crime as a career path and removes participants from the regulated mainstream, both exposing them to serious risks and encouraging informal strategies independent of the legal system. The challenge is to effectively resist these processes and keep would-be gun criminals within mainstream civil society, something that requires long-term, credible, legal alternatives to entrenched social and economic problems.

6. Preventing gun crime

As discussed in Chapter 1, considerable efforts have been made, since the mid-1990s in particular, to tackle the availability of illegal firearms and the criminal possession and use of such weapons. In other areas of public policy, much is being done to tackle issues such as school exclusion, poor housing and community confidence in the criminal justice system. This research brings some of those issues into sharp relief, while also highlighting new areas for possible intervention.

It has been seen that the market in and use of illegal firearms are multi-dimensional problems, one obvious consequence of which is that they require complex and sophisticated solutions, tailored to meet local needs. A number of policy suggestions are proposed here under four headings:

- tackling the market in illegal firearms and ammunition;
- criminal justice system;
- diversion from crime;
- harm reduction within the criminal economy.

It should be noted that the proposals presented here deal with specific issues that have arisen in the course of this research and do not represent a review of existing literature on tackling firearms crime. Nevertheless, it should be said that published research concerning programmes to tackle gun crime in the UK is limited to only a few examples (e.g. Bullock and Tilley, 2002; Hoggarth and Wright, 2002 and 2003; Shropshire and McFarquhar, 2002).

By contrast, there is an extensive literature on tackling illegal firearms crime in the United States where a large number of programmes have been evaluated, albeit in a context that differs markedly from the UK, particularly in relation to rates of legal and illegal firearms availability and ownership. Useful examples of US research include the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention publication 'Promising Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence', which presents a summary of 60 'demonstrated and promising gun violence reduction strategies' (OJJDP, 1999: xiii), and more recently Lawrence Sherman's review of the literature on tackling gun violence seeking to identify 'What works, what doesn't, what's promising' (Sherman, 2001). A key message repeated throughout the literature is the importance of developing and implementing contextualised strategies that address local problems.

Tackling the market in illegal firearms and ammunition

'The market' in illegal firearms is a misnomer and it may be more accurate to describe the existence of local markets in illegal firearms with questions of supply and demand largely manifested at a local level. Nevertheless, a number of strategic issues have been raised by this research that merit consideration.

Converted imitation firearms

Converted imitation firearms appear to have substantially underpinned the supply of illegal firearms, itself evidence that controls on purpose-built lethal firearms are significantly limiting supply. This criminal innovation implies the need for dynamic policy responses, in the present case tackling both the manufacture and sale of convertible imitations and the conversion process itself. In addition, it may be that the anxieties of criminals about the safety of these weapons can be exploited in tackling their use, ideally citing real examples of injury to the users of such weapons.

Realistic imitation firearms

The wide availability of non-lethal imitation firearms manufactured to be as realistic as possible, including deactivated real guns, blank firers, airsoft/BB guns and cigarette lighters, gives rise to the use of these items to threaten, for example during armed robberies.[44] In particular, they facilitate the commission of crimes such as robbery by individuals who lack the criminal contacts necessary to obtain lethal firearms such as shotguns and handguns. Consideration should be given to further controls on these items, while bearing in mind potential counter-productive outcomes including possible increases in the use of real guns or other weapons such as knives. Evidence presented in Chapter 5 suggests that some individuals with access to real guns use realistic imitations as a preference.

Ammunition

Home made ammunition

The law as it presently stands only legislates for assembled ammunition, allowing criminals to legally obtain components and tools and then illegally manufacture ammunition. This loophole should be closed. There is also evidence of criminals modifying blank firing ammunition to fire projectiles such as ball bearings, suggesting that further controls on the sale of blanks should be considered.

44. Airguns manufactured to accurately resemble much more powerful firearms such as semi-automatic 9mm handguns should also be considered here. Although they are potentially lethal and therefore not strictly speaking 'imitation' firearms (they are covered by the Firearms Act (1968 and amendments)), they are normally available without a firearms certificate (subject to maximum muzzle energy levels).

Shotgun ammunition

The law as it presently stands includes a loophole that allows shotgun certificate holders to lawfully pass on shotgun ammunition to non-certificated individuals and the possession of shotgun ammunition without a shotgun certificate. This appears to be contributing to the supply of shotgun ammunition to criminals and should therefore be addressed.

The circulation of illegal firearms

There is a general awareness amongst criminals of the risk of buying a firearm that has already been used in a crime, which may be a point of leverage in tackling attitudes towards firearms that can be better exploited.

In addition, it has been seen that criminals sometimes use others to mind weapons on their behalf. Such individuals should be considered in relation to operations to recover illegal firearms, and may be a significant point of weakness when targeting the guns' owners. Enabling the use of discretion in relation to mandatory sentencing may be effective in encouraging the co-operation of such individuals to participate in wider investigations, for example into the origins and owners of illegal firearms.

Finally, the use of further firearm amnesties should be given consideration. Although it is not clear whether amnesties are particularly effective at collecting illegal firearms from current offenders, at least two offenders in the present study referred to occasions when they had wanted to dispose of firearms but were unable to do so for fear they might get into the wrong hands. It should also be said that at least one offender reported having used a previous amnesty as a cover story for carrying a gun. Nevertheless, any measures that contribute to a reduction in the existing stock of illegal or unwanted firearms – be they fully functioning lethal weapons or otherwise – are to be encouraged. In this regard, it may be appropriate to reconsider the current approach to amnesties, in which surrendered firearms may be subjected to forensic examination. Although this point was not touched upon in the offender interviews, it may be an obstacle to achieving the overarching aim of holding amnesties, namely to reduce the existing stock of illegal or unwanted firearms.

Tackling attitudes

More publicity could be given to case studies such as those in Appendix B, so that potential offenders are made aware of the likely consequences of getting involved with illegal firearms.

Education about the role of firearms in escalating conflict may help discourage young people from carrying guns, although individual feelings of vulnerability may outweigh such considerations and require more sophisticated solutions.

In terms of tackling the attitudes of individuals around someone involved in or at risk of getting involved in gun crime, the interviews suggest that offenders are already aware of the disapproval of family members, while friends and associates are more consensual. For most of the offenders, the latter appear to be the primary attitudinal reference point. The significance of peer groups may be usefully leveraged. It is felt that more needs to be known about the role of the partners and other family members of those possessing and using firearms, for example the degree to which they provide logistical support (e.g. minding weapons, laundering money) or are instrumental in relation to precipitating violent conflict.

Criminal justice system

Sentencing

The present five-year mandatory minimum sentence for possession of a firearm was widely known about by the offenders interviewed (all of whom, it should be remembered, had been convicted and imprisoned). Several suggested that this served to deter the routine carrying of firearms, although this appears to have been context-specific: some individuals indicated that their personal risk of violent victimisation and the protection firearms could afford them in this regard offset the risks of arrest and imprisonment. Others indicated a failure to consider the consequences of their actions. The consensus was that longer sentences would be disproportionate, and might result in counter-productive outcomes, such as offenders challenged by the police trying to 'shoot their way out' rather than giving themselves up. The same issue arises in the context of two and three 'strikes' laws where mandatory or minimum sentences apply.[45]

Victim/witness protection

Many offenders described the risks in their communities posed by being identified as 'a grass' as a significant barrier to co-operating with police and several gave examples of families having had to move after being so-labelled, the implication being in response to threats. Greater availability of witness protection resources should be beneficial, as should greater use of independent intermediaries such as Crimestoppers.

Policing

Two particular issues arose in relation to policing. The first concerns the need for better police/community relations, specifically the need for the police to better understand the communities they are policing; expanding the use of Independent Advisory Groups may support this process. Secondly, many offenders expressed concerns that more armed police would result in more shootings by both police and criminals.

45. For example, Section 109 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 that imposes a mandatory life sentence on an offender convicted of a second serious offence, including possession of a firearm with intent to injure, resist arrest or commit a crime and robbery with a firearm or imitation firearm.

Civil law

There may be scope for increasing the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) to disrupt the activities of gangs and criminal networks, for example preventing gang members from associating with each other or visiting particular areas. There may also be further scope for using these instruments to disrupt criminal activity such as drug dealing.

Diversion from crime

An important point raised by many of the offenders is that they perceive that people are getting involved in crime such as drug dealing at increasingly younger ages, for example during their early to mid-teens. In as much as this is a choice, it implies that young people need to be educated about the decisions that they are taking at an early stage in their secondary education.

Perceptions about drug dealing

Drug dealing is perceived in many areas to be a lucrative form of employment but very little is formally known about the economics of drug dealing in the UK, a gap that might usefully be addressed by further research.[46] In particular it would shed light on whether the rewards for drug dealing are short-term and limited to only a small minority of drug market participants, and the degree to which risks such as violent victimisation and imprisonment offset any economic benefits. Empirical evidence may represent a significant and effective lever with which to deter young people from entering drug dealing in the first place, particularly in relation to raising awareness about risks such as systemic violence.

Criminal role models

Evidence was presented in a number of areas of prominent local criminals being looked up to as role models, contributing to the development of criminal aspirations in young people. Such views might usefully be challenged by greater use of publicity targeted specifically at young people concerning convictions and, where possible, the confiscation of criminal assets. This would need careful handling, however, because of the possibility that highlighting the potential profits to be earned through criminal activity could result in counter-productive outcomes such as the promotion of criminal lifestyles. Further research on this subject would be beneficial.

46. For a notable exception from the United States, see Levitt and Venkatesh (2000). Some research has been carried out into the economics of drug dealing in the UK: e.g. on street-level dealing, May et al. (2000) and May et al. (2005), on middle-market dealing, Dorn, Murji and South (1992) and Pearson and Hobbs (2001).

Employment

Perceptions about employment prospects are significant and legitimate employment must out-compete illegal alternatives. In addition to job creation schemes, which should include the promotion of employing local people, there may be scope for better promoting the advantages of legitimate employment and educating young people about the options available to them, particularly outside of their immediate area.

Youth services

Many of the offenders highlighted the need to keep young people occupied in constructive activities, in relation to which a number referred to the lack of youth service provision in their areas. Evidence about the recruitment and exploitation of young people in relation to drug dealing, particularly under the patronage of older offenders, gives such efforts a greater significance. The entrenchment of gang cultures in some areas suggests that efforts encouraging young people to mix with peers from other areas may be beneficial, although not without difficulties. Greater provision of youth services (by statutory and non-statutory providers) should be supported, particularly in deprived inner-city communities.

Gang disruption and mediation

The significance of gangs in relation to perpetuating violence in some areas, even to the extent that current gang members do not know how their particular conflict started, implies that efforts to break down social barriers between gangs may be beneficial. Where gangs are engaged in conflict, there may be scope for mediation to address grievances before they reach a violent solution.

Harm reduction within the criminal economy

Involvement in the criminal economy generally precludes participants from calling the police and exposes them to the risk of violent victimisation – systemic violence related to illegal drugs markets being a case in point. It also results in the use of informal sanctions and retribution. A public health/harm reduction approach would seek to minimise levels of such violence, which implies supporting criminals, for example where they are subject to violence or at risk because of debts owed to other criminals. This might include the provision of safe houses analogous to witness protection schemes. This is a subject that would benefit from further research.

7. Conclusions

The illegal use of firearms in the UK has attracted substantial public concern, highly restrictive legislation, and increasingly sophisticated public policy responses, particularly since the mid-1990s. One consequence is that the UK now has some of the most restrictive laws regarding firearms to be found anywhere. Yet despite these developments, the market in and use of illegal firearms has been subject to relatively little research attention, leaving important gaps in our understanding. This research has contributed to addressing these gaps by interviewing 80 recently convicted gun crime offenders about their firearms and the contexts in which they were obtained and used. It has necessarily been a wide-ranging study that has touched on much of the criminal spectrum as well as criminal justice and other public policy responses. Consequently, it is relevant to a diverse readership, including (but not limited to) policy makers, police and their Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and Community Safety Partnership (CSP) partners, courts and legal representatives, education and youth service providers, firearm lobbyists (from both sides), media commentators and indeed anyone concerned with understanding and tackling the illegal use of firearms. It should also be of interest to an international audience, providing as it does a context to the UK's legislative approach to firearms. Whilst it is the case that overall recorded gun crime in England and Wales increased substantially between the mid-1990s and 2001/02 in particular, it has to be recognised both that many of the firearms used in these crimes are not purpose-built lethal firearms and also that the criminal economy and accompanying criminal cultures appear to have changed substantially.[47] In particular, innovations such as the conversion of imitation firearms and the illegal manufacture of ammunition suggest that the criminal availability of purpose built lethal firearms and ammunition is significantly constrained. This is to be welcomed and suggests that had the restrictive legislation not been enacted, the picture today could be much more serious. Nevertheless, it should not be a cause for complacency.

The market in illegal firearms

This research has been able to shed light on many of the processes by which illegal firearms and ammunition are obtained, particularly by the end users of those guns. Questions remain, however, and further research will be required to build on the findings presented here in order to develop a more complete picture.

47. Note that (a) crime counting and recording practices have changed twice during this period (see: Povey and Prime, 1999, and Simmons et al., 2003), and (b) in 2004/05 only 24 per cent of all firearms offences resulted in an injury to the victim (Povey and Kaiza, 2006: 85).

The market in illegal firearms appears fragmented with prices being sensitive to a number of variables, notably including the type, age and alleged provenance of any particular firearm. Supply is reinforced by a number of processes, including illegal importation, leakage from legitimate sources and the conversion of imitation firearms. Criminal contacts are significant in relation to availability, and a well-connected offender may be able to exercise a degree of choice; the majority, however, are limited to whatever is available at the time. Around £1,000 will buy a 'new' semi-automatic handgun with ammunition and as little as £50 will buy a shotgun. Converted imitation handguns are available in increasing numbers priced in the region of £400 to £800 and home-made ammunition appears to be important in maintaining ammunition supplies. Meanwhile, for those using guns to threaten, such as armed robbers, highly realistic imitations that are readily, cheaply and legally available are sufficiently intimidating to ensure victim compliance. Automatic weapons are rarer and seem to be limited to those involved in ongoing violent conflict.

The possession and use of illegal firearms

> *"Guns have always been about; they are just more open now."* (Nottinghamshire)

The illegal use of firearms cuts across the crime spectrum and to argue that all gun crime arises from a shared or consistent criminal 'gun culture' is an over-simplification; it may be more accurate to discuss the existence of plural criminal gun cultures. In this respect it is useful to distinguish between the following 'ideal types', while accepting that these are neither comprehensive nor entirely mutually exclusive.

- *Instrumental gun culture:* criminals who only use guns instrumentally for committing specific offences, such as armed robbery.

- *Complex gun culture:* those for whom firearms play a more generalised role, particularly where their offending becomes an integral part of their lifestyle.

The former has always existed and is relatively transparent. Meanwhile the latter, about which this research has shed particular light, appears to be a more recent phenomenon; the evidence suggests that it has consolidated since the mid-1990s. In relation to this group's possession and use of illegal firearms, it is the co-existence of offensive, defensive and symbolic functionality, coupled with complex offending and victimisation histories, that gets to the heart of recent debates concerning the emergence of an apparent criminal 'gun culture'.

A number of changes reported by the offenders interviewed appear to have been significant:

- The criminal availability of lethal firearms has increased, particularly because of the innovations of converted imitation firearms and home-made ammunition and the re-circulation of firearms that have been used in crime.

- The availability of highly realistic imitation firearms has increased; these are sufficiently realistic to facilitate crimes relying on the threat of violence, such as armed robbery.

- Illegal firearms have become increasingly accessible to younger offenders who appear more likely to use those firearms recklessly.

- The entrenchment of a competitive consumer culture has placed increasing pressures on young people to conform to explicitly materialistic social norms.

- The growth and increasing normalisation of illegal drugs markets and other offending has provided a credible alternative career path to the legal mainstream for some individuals, particularly in many economically deprived communities, and has stimulated violent crime.

- In many areas, the operation of the local criminal economy has become conflated with cultures of gang membership.

Some of the consequences of these changes include the following:

- The nature of violence has changed as access to illegal firearms has increased; greater insecurity has in turn increased demand for access to firearms creating positive feedback pressures.

- The possession of illegal firearms gives rise to 'shoot or be shot' situations, even when the events precipitating conflict are very trivial.

- Levels of systemic violence within illegal drug-based criminal economies have increased, most notably in relation to robberies against drug dealers.

- Incidents of lethal violence in social venues such as nightclubs have increased as rivals with access to firearms encounter each other in shared public spaces.

- Gang cultures have become entrenched in some areas as violence and territoriality precipitate collective strategies; gang structures appear to catalyse and sustain conflict while also facilitating access to illegal firearms.

Policy implications

The illegal use of firearms is not a singular problem, but is complex, entrenched and poses significant challenges to communities, police and policy makers. Two particular issues arising from this research concern firstly the direction of policy development and secondly understanding the relationship between legislation and recorded crime statistics.

Policy development

Some of the findings of this research point to clear recommendations, such as greater efforts to tackle the availability and conversion of highly realistic imitation firearms; most, however, are more challenging and require social and economic rather than technical solutions. The emergence of a complex gun culture in which firearms have become embedded within broader criminal lifestyles suggests significant limitations to interventions based on a rational choice understanding of offending. As cultural and lifestyle factors appear to have been assuming greater importance, policy development must address the social and cultural significance of offending behaviours such as gang conflict, armed robbery and drug dealing, as well as any economic imperative (see e.g. Wright et al, 2006). This further underlines the need to understand criminal cultures at a local level, facilitating the identification of context-specific interventions. It should also be noted that the relationship between illegal firearms and crime is dynamic, and as a consequence ongoing efforts are required to keep abreast of changes to ensure that they are responded to appropriately.

Legislation and recorded crime statistics

This research also raises a number of issues of relevance to broader discussions regarding the relationship between legislation and firearm crime rates, both within the UK and elsewhere. First and foremost, innovations such as the conversion of imitation firearms and the illegal manufacture of improvised ammunition suggest that the UK's highly restrictive controls on purpose-built firearms do significantly constrain the ability of criminals to obtain them. This raises an important hypothetical question, namely what the position would be today had existing legislation not been enacted. For example, apparent changes to criminal

cultures and the criminal economy appear to have increased levels of violence, most notably in relation to illegal drugs markets and gang conflict, which in turn appear to have increased demand for illegal firearms. Had these changes occurred in an environment that was more permissive of firearms ownership, it could be argued that the picture today might be much more grave.

Furthermore, this research challenges simplistic interpretations of recorded gun crime statistics by underlining the need for a detailed understanding of crime recording practices and other compounding variables. In doing so it highlights the contribution of qualitative research to contextualising quantitative data. This is arguably most pertinent to discussions of the impact of the two Firearms (Amendment) Acts of 1997 that banned virtually all handguns in the UK.

In many cases the unambiguous classification of a firearm for crime recording purposes is either difficult or impossible. Take the example of a supposed handgun used to threaten the victim of a robbery, where no shot is discharged and the weapon is not subsequently retrieved, a scenario described by a number of offenders interviewed for this study. For the police crime registrar it is all but impossible to determine whether such a weapon was capable of inflicting a lethal shot or was in fact simply a highly realistic imitation firearm, and the implications of how this weapon is recorded for any discussion of the impact of the handgun ban should be obvious: lethal handguns were banned, imitation handguns were not.

It should also be said that in discussing the relationship between legislation and firearm crime rates, particularly in relation to changes over time, the requirement to consider this level of detail is not limited to handgun offences or the distinction between real and imitation weapons. A range of mediating factors must be considered, including, but not limited to: crime counting and recording practices; crime reporting rates; legislation; policing; and the rate at which illegal firearms are used (that is, how often any one illegal firearm is used). In the UK, for example, crime counting and recording practices have both changed since 1997, new laws have been introduced (which, all else being equal, will have resulted in more offences being recorded), police units focusing on firearms offences have been established, efforts have been made to strengthen community confidence in and co-operation with the police, and this research has highlighted factors such as the sharing of firearms within groups. All of these factors underline the difficulties inherent in trying to understand the relationship between firearms legislation and recorded firearms offences, even within a single jurisdiction. The implication for making comparisons between jurisdictions, for example comparing trends in the UK and the US, is that factors such as these must be considered for each and every jurisdiction. It is to be expected, therefore, that

more often than not this should result in any conclusions being framed by a number of detailed caveats, which themselves will require careful handling.

Further research

It is inevitable that this research has both left some existing questions unanswered and unearthed new issues that merit further investigation. The most significant include the following:

- The origins of purpose-built lethal firearms in the criminal economy. Interviews with individuals convicted specifically of firearms supply offences may be informative and it would also be useful to draw on police and other intelligence sources, where these are available.[48] This would shed further light on questions such as importation routes, the role of specialist imitation firearm converters and the internet, and the extent to which there are distinct levels within illegal firearms markets.

- The role of women in relation to the possession and use of illegal firearms. This could address questions such as the degree of female participation in minding weapons, helping launder criminal assets and precipitating violent conflict.

- The economics of drug dealing. This could address the extent to which drug dealing is a realistic alternative to mainstream legal employment for some individuals, in particular seeking to quantify the risks and rewards of drug dealing in greater detail. It is anticipated that such information, if collected and presented in a credible way, could provide a significant lever with which to deter young people from getting involved in drug dealing.

- Violence within the criminal economy. This could seek to identify appropriate 'harm minimisation' interventions to reduce violence, for example within drug markets and between gangs and other criminal organisations.

- Gun crime inhibitors. The research presented here has focussed on individuals who have been convicted of firearms offences and has provided information on how they reached that point. Further research is required to understand how the vast majority of people in communities affected by gun crime avoid getting involved in gun and other criminality.

48. It is expected that the National Firearms Forensic Intelligence Database (NFFID) may be a particularly useful resource in this regard.

- An evaluation of the impact of criminal assets confiscation. In relation to evidence about the significance of criminal role models, this could address questions such as the extent to which the greater use of and enhanced public awareness of criminal asset confiscation might tackle such processes.

- An evaluation of the impact of the Violent Crime Reduction Bill.

Appendix A: Glossary

Please note: these are not legal definitions.

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers.
Airgun/air weapon	A firearm that uses compressed air or carbon dioxide (CO2) to discharge a projectile, typically made from lead. Exempt from licensing, subject to maximum projectile kinetic energy levels (so-called 'muzzle energy': 6 ft/lbs for pistols, 12 ft/lbs for rifles); above these levels an air pistol is banned and a firearms certificate is required for an air rifle (see also: muzzle energy). Note that some models, particularly many pistols, are manufactured to accurately resemble more powerful firearms, such as semi-automatic 9mm handguns.
Airsoft	A low-powered form of airgun that typically fires 6mm plastic pellets with a kinetic (muzzle) energy of 1 joule (0.7 ft/lbs) or less: they do not generally come under the control of the Firearms Act, except to the extent that they are imitation firearms. The pellets are often referred to as 'BBs', but see the discussion of 'BB guns' below. Airsoft guns are used in simulated combat known as 'skirmishing' and analogous to paintball games. They are typically highly realistic 1:1 scale replicas of real lethal firearms, made of inferior materials and use springs or compressed gas (cartridges or generated by an electric motor) to fire the projectiles. (See also: BB gun)
Ammunition press	A tool used to assemble the component parts of ammunition (see also: loading press).
ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition. ANPR uses roadside cameras to read the number plates of passing vehicles. In the context of policing, the cameras can be linked to computer databases to identify e.g. stolen vehicles or those belonging to known firearms offenders.

APPGGC	All-Party Parliamentary Group on gun crime.
Automatic weapon	A firearm that discharges multiple shots with a single press of the trigger (see also: machine gun).
Ballistics	The science of firearms and projectiles; may be used forensically e.g. to link particular firearms to particular crimes.
BB gun	The term 'BB gun' is problematic in that it is used loosely to refer to several things. Strictly defined, 'BB' was originally used to describe the size of lead shot used in a shotgun shell: 'BB' is the size between 'B' and 'BBB' and has a diameter of 0.18 inches (approximately 4.6mm). In current parlance, the term 'BB gun' typically refers to low-powered imitation firearms that discharge plastic pellets which are generally 6mm in diameter and 0.2 to 0.4 grams in weight. These so-called 'airsoft' guns are typically fired by way of a spring action or compressed gas such as air or CO2 (see also: airsoft). These low-powered weapons are to be distinguished from certain powerful airguns that fire ball bearing shaped lead pellets and which are lethal.
Beef	Conflict/dispute (slang).
Blank firer	An imitation firearm that fires 'blanks', that is ammunition without a projectile. Subject to stringent regulations in the UK, including the substantial obstruction of the barrel.
Calibre	The diameter of the inside of the barrel of a firearm.
CDRP	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership: statutory partnership between police, local authority and other agencies in England.
Clip ('full clip')	Ammunition magazine (slang).
Converted imitation firearm	An imitation firearm that has been modified to fire live ammunition (see also: imitation firearm).

Crack	Crack cocaine: a crystalline derivative of cocaine that is typically smoked, during which it 'crackles'.
Crack house	An address at which drugs, typically crack cocaine, are sold and may also be consumed (see also: crack).
CSP	Community Safety Partnership: statutory partnership between police, local authority and other agencies in Wales.
CS spray	An irritant spray used for self-defence. Possession and use by civilians is illegal in the UK.
Deactivated firearm	Originally a real purpose built lethal firearm that has been modified to permanently prevent it being fired. In the UK it has to be certified deactivated by a proof house (see also: proof house).
Dealing house	See: crack house.
Derringer	The name of a US gun manufacturer; also used generically to describe a small pocket pistol.
Dirty gun	A firearm that has been used in the commission of a crime, particularly where the firearm has been fired and forensic evidence may implicate the owner or possessor of the firearm in that crime (slang).
Firearms Act	Legislation covering the licensing and use of firearms in the UK; currently incorporates the Firearms Act 1968 and amendments.
Gear	Drugs (slang).
GOL	Government Office for London.
Handgun	A firearm designed to be fired with one hand (see also: pistol).
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.
HMPS	Her Majesty's Prison Service.

IAG	Independent Advisory Group: a lay group set up to be consulted by and advise the police on policing matters – a 'critical friend'.
IIS	HM Prison Service Inmate Information System database of all inmates.
Imitation firearm	A non-lethal firearm manufactured to closely resemble a purpose-built lethal firearm (see also: airgun, airsoft, BB gun, blank firer, converted imitation firearm, realistic imitation firearm).
Lethal barrelled firearm	A firearm capable of discharging a projectile that could cause a fatal injury. Note: lethality is not absolute but subject to court interpretation (see also: muzzle energy).
Loading press	A tool used to assemble the component parts of ammunition (see also: ammunition press).
Machine gun	A firearm that discharges multiple shots with a single press of the trigger (see also: automatic weapon).
Middle market	A loosely-defined term used in relation to illegal drugs markets, for example to indicate the link between importation or production and retail markets. For example, a middle market drug dealer may be someone who supplies drugs to street-level or retail drug dealers who then sell the drugs to users. See Pearson and Hobbs (2001) for a fuller discussion.
MPA	Metropolitan Police Authority.
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service.
Muzzle energy	A measure of the kinetic energy possessed by a projectile at the point it leaves the barrel of a gun, stated in joules or foot/pounds (ft/lbs). It is generally accepted that a gun capable of firing a projectile with a muzzle energy above 1 joule (approximately 0.7 ft/lbs) is capable of inflicting a lethal injury and therefore comes under the control of the Firearms Act.

NCIS	National Criminal Intelligence Service.
NFFID	National Firearms Forensic Intelligence Database.
Nine/9mm	A 9mm calibre firearm, typically a semi-automatic handgun (slang).
Paper	Money (slang).
Pepper spray	An irritant spray used for self-defence. Possession and use by civilians is illegal in the UK.
Percussion cap	See: primer.
Piece	A firearm (slang).
Pistol	A firearm designed to be fired with one hand (see also: handgun).
Pistol whip	To hit someone with a gun, using it as a blunt instrument.
Primer	An ammunition component: a small charge that explodes when struck, detonating the gunpowder or other explosive. Also known as a percussion cap.
Proof/proof house	"Proof is the compulsory and statutory testing of every new shotgun or other small arm before sale to ensure, so far as it is practicable, its safety in the hands of the user" (source: The Birmingham Gun Barrel Proof House, www.gunproof.com/Proofing/proofing.html). Proving can only be carried out at a 'Proof House', of which there are two in the UK, one in London and one in Birmingham. They also certify ('prove') deactivated firearms as such (see also: deactivated firearm).
RDS	Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (Home Office).
Reactivated firearm	A deactivated firearm that has been reactivated: i.e. modified to fire live ammunition (see also: deactivated firearm).

Realistic imitation firearm	An imitation firearm that cannot be easily distinguished from a real lethal firearm (see also: imitation firearm).
Rebore	A converted imitation firearm – particularly a self-contained gas cartridge airgun that has had its barrel drilled out to enlarge it (slang; see also: converted imitation firearm, 'self-contained gas cartridge' system).
Registered firearms dealer (RFD)	An individual registered to sell, transfer or manufacture firearms. Does not require certificates for the purchase, possession or acquisition of firearms and ammunition in the course of conducting business.
Revolver	A pistol with a rotating cylinder containing several cartridges (typically six) which can be fired in succession without the firearm being reloaded.
RFD	See: registered firearms dealer.
Rifle	A long-barrelled firearm with a 'rifled' barrel, designed to be fired from the shoulder (see: rifling).
Rifling/rifled barrel	Spiral grooves along the inside of a gun barrel which cause a fired bullet to spin. Leaves unique markings on the bullet which can be used to forensically link a bullet to a gun.
Road ('on road')	'Living on road': living a street life/participating in the street criminal economy (slang).
Rock/s	Crack cocaine (slang; see: crack).
Sawn off shotgun	A shotgun that has had its barrel illegally shortened, typically to make it easier to conceal (see: shotgun).
'Self-contained gas cartridge' system	A type of airgun in which the compressed air and projectile are both stored in the same self-contained unit, which is then loaded into the airgun.
Shot/shotter (drugs)	To deal/a drug dealer (slang).

Shotgun	A smooth-bore, long barrelled firearm that fires a charge of pellets (shot). May be single or double-barrelled.
Silencer	See: sound moderator.
Skunk	A high potency type of cannabis.
Sound moderator	A device either attached or integral to the barrel of a firearm that reduces the noise generated by firing (also known as a silencer).
Spliff	A home-made cigarette containing cannabis.
Strap	A firearm (slang). Hence 'strapped up': carrying a firearm; 'strap man': gunman.
Stun gun	A device that discharges a high-voltage electric current to temporarily disable a person. Possession and use by civilians is illegal in the UK.
Tick ('on tick')	Credit: e.g. drugs may be bought 'on tick' with the money to be paid at a later time (slang).
Yardie	A Yardie is the term in common usage in the UK for African-Caribbean gangsters, predominantly Jamaican.
YJB	Youth Justice Board.

Appendix B: Eight case studies

A total of 12 case studies are presented in this report. Four are located in Boxes 5.1 to 5.4 in Chapter 5, and a further eight are presented below. In total there are three for each of the four themes:

- illegal drug markets;
- robbery and burglary;
- violence including gangs;
- possession offences.

The case studies have been selected as broadly representative examples of the offending described by the offenders interviewed for this research – they are neither statistically representative, nor extreme cases. As such, they are intended to give the reader a flavour of the research subjects, illustrating the complexity of the issues involved and the overlapping nature of the four themes listed above and somewhat artificially disaggregated in Chapter 5. All names have been changed.

Case study 1: Drug markets

Tommy was a 31-year-old mixed race male from London. He had been excluded from school at the age of eight and sent to a school for children with behavioural problems. Having just turned 14 he was then sent to a detention centre. He had a long and varied criminal career and was initially part of a small crew based on an estate in London. Throughout his life, he had owned a variety of firearms and remembers as a teenager being fascinated with guns; he had given up his share of the proceeds from a burglary for a stolen shotgun and some cartridges. This remained his gun of choice as he felt it was more intimidating and less likely to be seen as a fake than a handgun. He was well informed about firearm prices, where they could be bought and where in London shooting could be safely practised. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he was an avid 'raver' and took large quantities of dance drugs. However, after serving four years for armed robbery he started to smoke crack cocaine and also heroin, which he tried at the age of 23. Throughout his adult life he had alternated between the two substances and at the time of the offence he blames his smoking of crack cocaine for inspiring an over-confidence that led him to being caught.

For Tommy the criminal life wasn't "just about the drugs, it was about the lifestyle, wearing designer clothes, being able to spend £1,500 on a weekend, and drive a nice car as well". He had a reputation in his part of London and always carried a gun. He enjoyed being "confident and secure, even arrogance to a certain degree", as a result of owning guns. He described the addictive nature of "the control, the power you have got when you have got that in your hand". Though he knew the risks, in his late 20s he had started to specialise in armed robberies of other drug dealers. In his own words he felt that, "If you are robbing drug dealers they are not exactly going to call the police. I can deal with being shot at. But I can't deal with 15 or 20 years behind the door and that". These risks were very real for Tommy; a close friend had been killed in revenge for a robbery and he had exchanged several shots with a group of drug dealers after raiding a 'crack house'.

More recently, he had also linked up with a wayward member of an established London crime family involved in the importation of heroin. They would set up deals and then Tommy would burst in with his shotgun and rob them. During the offence for which he was convicted, Tommy, on crack at the time, had successfully robbed both the buyers and sellers engaged in a drug deal of their money and two kilos of heroin. He had been chased out of the shop; as he fled in his car, the robbed buyer took down his car number-plate and passed the information onto the police. He was later arrested after a long chase in which he threatened the police with his shotgun. The shop owners all gave conflicting statements over what he looked like and he was only ever convicted of resisting arrest with a firearm. He was sentenced to nine years and in Tommy's opinion he was fortunate, as, "I was expecting a life sentence, because of the two strikes, because I had a previous firearms [conviction]".

Tommy ruefully described the friend of his "16-year-old stepson getting shot the other day". In his opinion gun crime was now less about "the money and more about 'banging' ['gang banging': gang violence] for the sake of it", which he concluded was "mindless stupidity". In his opinion guns were more available than in his day and had become "a fashion accessory, kids doing it just to look good, to get a name, to get themselves a little reputation". He was pessimistic about future efforts to reduce gun crime, though he himself was committed to doing something.

Case study 2: Drug markets

Paul was a 28-year-old White male from the West Midlands. He had been excluded from school at 14, after which he had pursued an active social life and worked fitting cables. He and his friends used to get into conflicts with other groups, but he denied being part of a

gang, though he had been in prison three times before this offence. Aged around 20, Paul got "mixed up with the wrong people and started to smoke drugs, crack, and that's where it went down hill".

At this point, "Crime started taking over, crime expanded to bigger and bigger things." He left his job and was constantly shoplifting, spending the proceeds of up to £400 a day on crack cocaine. He was travelling across the country and was mixing with criminals from both the Birmingham and Manchester gangs. Meanwhile, Paul was also getting into bigger and bigger debts to local dealers. One dealer had shot at him in a pub, over a debt of £7,000 but Paul felt he could ignore this individual and refused to pay up.

However, as his habit increased, Paul incurred further debts to "very serious people" who made "threats to me and my family". Paul thought, "It's either me killing them or paying them and I wasn't prepared to kill them". Instead he carried out a spontaneous and disastrous robbery with an imitation firearm of a nearby post office. Though Paul escaped with the money and paid off his debt, he was followed by members of the public. He ended up kidnapping them and fled after a succession of car-jackings. Paul was caught soon after, his home was raided and several real firearms were retrieved, including a submachine pistol.

Paul was charged with "armed robberies, firearms, kidnapping, section 18 [intentionally causing grievous bodily harm], unlawful imprisonment, car-jackings, um, just a load of minor charges", pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 18 years in prison. He found the interview process painful and concluded, "I feel sick. I don't like talking about it to be honest… Brings back memories you know, it wasn't the real me that's done them things, that was somebody who was basically a lunatic".

Case study 3: Robbery and burglary

Wayne was a 24-year-old White male, born and brought up in Greater Manchester. He was one of five children and had been excluded from school at the age of 14 after being sent to a secure unit for committing an armed robbery. He had robbed an off-licence for "fun or money", and since then, he "was moving with other people who are twenty-odd, getting in with the wrong crowd, wrong sort of people, taking drugs". At this age he owned a shotgun, a bullet-proof vest and was often armed as there were a spate of kidnaps and robberies in the area.

After being released from prison Wayne developed a cocaine habit that ran into hundreds of pounds a day. He knew a local armourer and had access to a wide variety of real firearms, which included machine guns and grenades. Wayne kept on committing armed robberies with his gun of choice, a pump action shotgun, and at least three of his close friends had been badly hurt or shot dead.

At the age of 18, Wayne was caught robbing another off-licence. He was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment with a two and a half year tariff. At the time of the interview he had been in prison for five years and was still unsure when he would be released. He felt that if he had known about the severity of his sentence he would "have stuck to petty crime"; however he also felt that "ten years" was the most appropriate sentence for gun possession.

Case study 4: Robbery and burglary

Bobby was a 22-year-old Black British male with Jamaican ancestry. He was born in London into a family of seven. He lived with his mother, had left school at 16 and found work in his family's business, earning around £250 a week. He was part of a local crew of around 20 people. In his spare time, he was a keen rally driver, went to garage raves and had a two-year-old son with his current girlfriend. He accounted for his offending by referring to the nefarious influence of a cousin who had previously embarked on a spate of armed robberies.

According to Bobby, his cousin's crew "took home about six or seven grand in about fucking 20 minutes, and they were barely getting away with it, like foot pursuits and stuff like that and getting chased and shit". So after agreeing on how the money would be split, he joined the team as an armed getaway driver. According to him his life suddenly improved, owning a gun made him feel "like superman, innit? You feel untouchable". He and his new friends were the envy of "other people from other areas, who would come down and see us with loads of girls, and buying Moët in clubs, and just living the life, you know? …we had everything, trainers, new cars everyday, we had all sorts".

However, after committing a series of armed robberies of "post offices, banks, bookies" his cousin was arrested. He confessed to his crimes and implicated the rest of the group in return for a reduced sentence. Bobby was eventually sentenced to 14 years in prison along with seven co-defendants. His two uncles no longer speak to each other and his cousin is in a separate jail.

Case study 5: Violence including gangs

Spencer was a Black male brought up in a poor part of the West Midlands in a large family who were of Jamaican heritage. He had been expelled twice from school for fighting, and from the age of 16 to 22, he had been a member of one of the region's large criminal gangs. At the time of his offence he did not have a previous criminal record and was in legitimate paid employment with the prospect of a successful career. However, he had been both shot at and shot before. He had reported neither of these shootings as he had a strong aversion to the police whom he accused of racism.

Unfortunately, Spencer found out that his mother's boyfriend had committed a serious sexual assault on his 13-year-old sister. The man was convicted of the offence and according to Spencer, subsequently sentenced to two years probation. Spencer felt this was insufficient punishment, and in his own words, "it's my sister, it's my blood, at the end of the day, so I had to go and do something. I had to, I had no choice, it's my blood". For Spencer this meant acquiring a firearm, which for him was easy, "like going to the paper shop and ordering a pack of cigarettes over the counter".

He then went round to the man's house, kicked the door down and "entered a full clip in him". The man survived, picked Spencer out from an ID parade, and six months later Spencer was taken to court. He pleaded not guilty on the grounds of diminished responsibility. However, he was found guilty of possession of a firearm and aggravated burglary and sentenced to six and a half years.

Spencer has refused to show any remorse for the shooting and he is still a serving prisoner after more than five years. He was angry at having his career ruined and saw the sentence the judge gave him as racially motivated, "So he thought 'fuck that, fuck him off into jail. He's just another fucking Black man".

Case study 6: Violence including gangs

D was an 18-year-old of mixed Black and Chinese parentage. He lived in London and was excluded from school after completing his GSCEs. At the time of the offence he had been working as a mechanic as well as being mentored. D had no previous criminal record and lived at home with his mother and sister. However, D's life had been extremely violent. D had been a victim of a racially motivated attack; his sister had also been attacked and his brother was currently in a psychiatric institution as a result of his inability to convalesce after being stabbed. D had subsequently assaulted his brother's attacker who a short while later hung himself.

D was a chronic cannabis smoker. He mixed in different circles, some of his friends were "smart and went to university", but he also had "associates" who he described as part of a gang of around 40. He was very well informed about several high profile murders and the activities of career criminals in his area. He also described key actors in his offence as his "elders". He knew that they were setting up younger kids with mobile phones and offers of "two or three grand a week" selling drugs. In particular, he alluded to the seductiveness of being known "as a bad guy in his area", for the respect conferred both by local women and other local boys.

D accounted for the two gunpoint robberies he was convicted of as being a product of stress, drug induced confusion and encouragement by an older criminal. On the day of the robberies his girlfriend had miscarried, having been raped by someone D had thought of as a friend. He then started to chain smoke skunk, and met up with an older criminal he admired, who unbeknown to him was both armed and smoking crack. D had become enraged by someone on the train and had started to threaten him; his co-defendant had encouraged D to rob him and had provided a firearm to do so. They then smoked more skunk mixed with crack and took another man's phone at gunpoint outside a tube station. D had tried to hand the firearm back to his co-defendant, who had refused to take it. When D was arrested, his co-defendant denied knowing anything about the firearm.

D clearly told the truth about his offending and informed the police of the actions of his co-defendant. D was sentenced to five years and voiced concern that he was now embroiled in a dispute with his co-defendant that extended to his family, which would continue once he left prison.

Case study 7: Possession of a firearm

Ahmed was a 24-year-old of Somali descent born in London. He had completed his GCSEs and left school aged 17. Subsequently, he had studied and trained to be a mechanic and at the time of the offence was working at a local garage. He rarely went out raving, eschewed hard drugs and had been convicted of driving offences only. He described himself as a quiet person who spent a lot of time with his peer group of ten friends, some of whom worked and others who were involved in criminal activity. He was conscious that he lived in the "ghetto" and had been the victim of acts of violence such as being stabbed. He was very frequently stopped by the police whom he felt were targeting him because of his race. He had seen several guns in his life and felt it was easy to get one in his area, but was adamant that he had never previously come into close contact with one before.

Whilst visiting his aunt and her child, Ahmed was approached by what he described as some "Jamaican guys" who offered him crack cocaine to buy. Annoyed, and feeling protective of his family, he saw a police car at the end of the road and told them about the offer. However, he felt the police were preoccupied and their advice to "go and report it down the station" was unhelpful. Worse for him, he was seen talking to them by the Jamaican group. A week and a half later he returned with a group of friends and family to visit his aunt and was confronted by the same group of Jamaicans. They challenged him about his conversation with the police and they eventually got into a "little fight". Later that day they returned in two cars and pulled up at the top of the road. Both groups approached each other anticipating a confrontation and Ahmed was handed a weapon in a sock by someone he knew to be a local criminal. This person advised him, "Here protect yourself with this". When he unwrapped it, he was surprised to see it was a firearm. The next minute, he was "hit up by the firearms police". Ahmed was arrested for possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life and the firearm was verified in court as a loaded handgun.

Ahmed gave the police details of the person who had given him the firearm and according to him the police knew this individual well. Ahmed was found not guilty of intent to endanger life but he was convicted of possession of a firearm and sentenced to five years. He later appealed his sentence and it was reduced to three years nine months. On reflection, Ahmed is certain that he was informed on but does not know by whom or how.

Case study 8: Possession of a firearm

Daud was a 28-year-old Asian male from the West Midlands. He "used to bully people" at school and was excluded at the age of 16 for the possession of a 'Rambo' knife. Daud had a varied criminal history, which included possession of stun gun, fraud and a variety of driving offences. Aged 16, his family had encouraged him to get married, "because I was going the wrong ways". He moved to Pakistani Kashmir and on his return started his own second-hand car business. He now had four children and specialised in selling "good cars, Mitsubishi Evo's and Subarus", some of which he "bought damaged, fixed them and sold on".

Daud was by his own account well known in his community and the area. He described how two friends he knew from the mosque had been shot dead recently and he was candid about the offers he had received, "to come and run things, and come and be a major name" in the drug business. However, he was resolutely against this and had already come to the attention of local police who often employed armed police to stop Daud and his family. At the time of his offence, he thought the police, "were really after me, they thought I was the main man".

According to Daud, he had rented out his garage to an Asian man who had some contact with two Jamaican nationals who were subsequently arrested and convicted of possession of several firearms and related equipment such as bullet proof vests. In the course of the investigation a dismantled converted 9mm handgun was recovered from Daud's garage. Daud pleaded not guilty and though there was no forensic evidence to link the gun to him, he was found guilty of possession of a firearm and sentenced to seven years.

Daud felt his sentence was unduly severe and he took his case to the court of appeal where it was reduced to five years. In his own words, though "something did happen" he personally felt "he had been stitched up" and was going to try and sue the police when he left prison. More generally Daud thought that gun crime could best be reduced by "finding out who are all the main drug dealers and then take them out" and that the appropriate sentence for possession of a firearm was "a big sentence, ten, thirteen years".

Appendix C: Additional information about the methodology

Appendix C is intended to provide additional material to that which is contained in Chapter 2: Methodology. It includes further details about the interview schedule topic guide, in addition to discussions of the conduct and dynamics of the interviews and the method used to analyse them.

Interview schedule topic guide

A. Introductions
   - Informed consent, including confidentiality limitations

B. Background information – personal
   - Personal demographics
   - Education and employment
   - Social life
   - Gangs
   - Drugs and alcohol

C. Background information – criminal record
   - Sentence and criminal record
   - Contact with and attitudes towards the police
   - Criminal self-classification

D. Experiences of crime as a victim
   - Victimisation – personal
   - Victimisation – friends and family – firearms

E. The offender's firearm – descriptive details
   - First contact with firearms
   - Current offence firearm – descriptive details: type, cost etc.
   - Choice
   - Procurement
   - As evidence in court

F. The offender's firearm continued – intentions of possession
   - Intentions of possession
   - Influence of family, friends and others
   - Inhibitors

G. The offence
   - Offence details
   - Relationship to victim(s)
   - Reflecting on the offence

H. Firearms in general
   - Gun culture
   - Other people with guns
   - Witnessing guns being fired
   - Morality of firearm possession
   - Ease of procurement
   - Disposal

I. Prison and gun crime
   - Prison dialogue (talking about guns in prison)
   - Prison as facilitator

J. Preventing gun crime
   - General
   - Specifics

K. Any other comments

Conducting the interviews

Most interviews were conducted in prison legal visits areas; however other venues included rooms on prison wings, education department facilities and drug treatment rooms. These arrangements were not always ideal, although it is not felt that any interviews were significantly impeded. Importantly, despite occasional interruptions, no interviews were conducted in a manner that left open the possibility of prison staff or other inmates overhearing the conversations.

Four male interviewers were used of whom three conducted the majority of interviews, ensuring a high degree of consistency. Interviews were conducted with one interviewer and one interviewee per interview and typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Although a fairly structured interview schedule was prepared, the interviewers were briefed to explore issues in detail and to deviate from the interview schedule if appropriate. One consequence was that not all sections of the interview schedule were given equal weight during all interviews.

Three issues that inevitably arise when conducting research in prison establishments are, firstly, why prisoners would agree to participate at all. Secondly, the degree to which their accounts are institutionalised and/or simply represent the account they believe the research team wants to hear (Matthews, 2002: 9–10). And finally, the degree to which interviewees are employing neutralisation, that is a retrospective rationale for why their offending was understandable or not so serious (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

These matters are not easy to address, although several comments are worth making. The first is that most of the interviewees were extremely candid about their experiences of family life, victimisation and drug use, which suggests trust in the process and honesty and openness in their accounts. Secondly, it was possible to corroborate a sample of the interviewee's accounts by checking case files and searching for media reports on the Internet, both in relation to their own and others' offending. One notable example was of a firearm homicide committed by an interviewee's brother-in-law (for which convictions have been secured). Importantly, wherever these methods were possible, all details concurred, albeit the offenders' personal accounts often went beyond the formal documented version. Thirdly, where appropriate, interviewees were asked about illegal drug prices and firearm details as a check on reliability (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001: 5). Finally, there was a degree of cross-examination during the interviews, where accounts seemed to be confused or self-contradictory; the collection of a large body of factual evidence in the early stages of the interviews supported this process, providing a resource for interviewers to use during later questions.

As in previous prison-based research (e.g. Matthews, 2002: 10) it was felt that several interviewees might have participated in the hope that the interview process could contribute to their cases being reviewed, although direct assistance was never requested. This was particularly the case when an interviewee pleaded innocence or ignorance, or in cases when allegations were made about police malpractice, police corruption or legal misrepresentation. In several cases, these accounts highlighted naïvety concerning the law, particularly regarding possession offences, a point that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

More generally, many interviewees seemed to relish the opportunity to tell their story, documenting their lives in detail. It has been observed that criminals rarely have the opportunity to discuss their experiences with an independent audience, and that such opportunities may be both enjoyable and even therapeutic (Wright and Decker, 1994, cited and agreed with by Maguire, 2000: 144). Furthermore, as in previous research, several interviewees expressed concerns about developments in their communities and a desire to see armed criminality tackled (Hales and Silverstone, 2005: 67). A number reported having grown up in environments in which they felt it was difficult to avoid involvement in or contact with criminality and many reported considerable experiences of personal victimisation, including robbery, kidnap, torture and attempted murder. Against this background some interviewees either gave the impression or stated that they hoped their involvement in the research might contribute to these problems being more effectively tackled.

Finally, a significant limitation should be mentioned that concerns Prison Service rules about reporting any disclosure of unconvicted offending to Prison authorities (HMPS, 2004). In a number of cases, it was difficult to establish a full account of the background to the convicted offence because that would have involved the disclosure of unconvicted criminal activity. This was most notable in relation to convictions for possession of a firearm where the offender had not been convicted of other offences. To some extent, it was possible to navigate these limitations by talking in the third person and counselling the interviewees against providing specific details such as locations and dates.

Interview dynamics

Although semi-structured interviews were used, the research approach was based on ethnographic insights (Hobbs, 1998; Silverstone, 2003). Therefore, attention was paid to the dress of the interviewers, their use of language, their knowledge of the criminal milieu under investigation and their familiarity with the prison environment. To this end, the interviewers were chosen as people who felt comfortable interacting with the research participants. Some initial training was given, including a session discussing the questionnaire and an introduction to selected relevant background literature (e.g. Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Matthews, 2002; Walsh, 2005). To some extent this enabled the team to garner insights normally limited to studies outside the prison environment (see Wright and Decker, 1997) as conversations covering criminal minutiae were anticipated and understood.

The research team was conscious that ethnicity is an important cultural determinant within criminal and non-criminal associations (Bowling and Phillips, 2002) and all of the

interviewers were either themselves from an ethnic minority background or had spent substantial periods of time working within ethnically diverse settings. Interviewers and respondents were not, however, matched by ethnicity and no significant differences in the quality of the interviews due to ethnicity were observed. A number of White interviewees did, however, express racist views and used racial slurs when being interviewed by White interviewers. Although none of the four interviewers experienced racism directed at them, this at least raises the possibility that racism may have compromised some interviews.

Analysing the interviews

All interviews were transcribed verbatim (word for word). The transcripts were then reviewed and corrected by the research team in order to remain faithful to the interviewees' accounts and to ensure a consistently high level of quality throughout the research material. This also served as a first level review of the interviews, starting the process of identifying key themes.

The transcripts were analysed using a modification of the Framework approach (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) in which qualitative data are tabulated, with columns representing themes, rows representing individual interviews and cells being populated with transcript material and accompanying comments. This approach allows all interviews to be considered either on a case-by-case (rows) basis, or thematically (columns), ensuring minimal loss of narrative. Microsoft Excel 2003 was used to tabulate the transcript material.

In the first instance, the interview schedule was used to structure the analysis. This was supplemented with a number of additional themes, including drug markets and criminal culture, about which material arose at various stages in the interviews. A key words section was also added for reference. The resulting table was then used to identifying typologies within themes, for example the types of gang structures encountered or the contexts in which firearms were used.

Transcript material appears as supporting evidence in verbatim form throughout Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Where more than one quotation is included to support a point, the different quotations originate from different interviews, unless specifically stated otherwise. In general, the only identifying information provided is the region in which the offender quoted committed his offence.

Appendix D: Letter to potential interviewees

Dear Potential Research Participant,

This letter is being sent to you because you have been identified as a potential participant in research about gun crime. We would like to ask you about your offending and the reasons why you had a gun – even if it was an imitation. The interview will last about an hour or so. If you have to miss paid work to participate then you will be compensated for any lost earnings.

Some information about the research:

- This research is being conducted by the University of Portsmouth on behalf of The Home Office. They want to understand the reasons why people carry and use guns, including imitations. By doing so, they hope to be able to reduce the use of guns.
- We are recording the interview for the purposes of research only. The recordings will not be made available to anyone else*.
- Your answers today will be treated in **strictest confidence** – at no stage after this interview will your identity be revealed to anyone*.
- A research report will be published. It will not reveal the identity of anyone taking part in the research.
- You don't have to answer all the questions.

- **Please note that under Prison Service rules any disclosure by you of any of the following must be reported to the Prison by the research team. In such instances, the confidentiality assurance will not apply:**
  - Risk to yourself or another person
  - Crimes for which you have not been convicted
  - Issues concerning prison security

We would be grateful if you could indicate whether or not you are willing to participate using the attached consent form.

Thank you for giving this request your consideration,

University of Portsmouth
Institute of Criminal Justice Studies

Appendix E: Research participation consent form

Dear Potential Research Participant,

There are two parts to this research. The first is the interview itself. In addition, with your permission we would like to review your prison records in order to confirm information about your criminal record.

To ensure confidentiality and protect your identity:

- Information from your records will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.
- At no stage will your name be recorded – merely an interview number.

We would be grateful if you could indicate your consent to proceed by signing below. If you are not happy to give your permission then please leave the box blank and the research team will take no further action. Please note that this letter will be held separately from any research material in order to protect your identity.

Please sign

- I am happy to be interviewed and for the interview to be tape-recorded. . [✗]
- I am happy for the University of Portsmouth research team to review my prison records . . . . . [✗]

Many thanks,

University of Portsmouth
Institute of Criminal Justice Studies

References

Please note: internet references were correct as at 22 March 2006 but may be subject to change.

Aitken, C., Moore, D., Higgs, P., Kelsall, J. and Kerger, M. (2002) 'The impact of a police crackdown on a street drug scene: evidence from the street'. *International Journal of Drug Policy* 13, 193–202.

Alba, R.D. and Messner, S.F. (1995) 'Point Blank against itself: evidence and inference about guns, crime and gun control'. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 11:4, 391–410.

All Party Parliamentary Group on gun crime (2003) *Combating the threat of gun violence: A report of parliamentary hearings*. London: Saferworld.
See: www.saferworld.org.uk/images/pubdocs/APPGGunCrimeRepEmbargoed.pdf

Anderson, E. (2000) *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: Norton.

Association of Chief Police Officers (2000) 'The Submission to the Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Controls over Firearms'. Appendix 2 in **House of Commons: Home Affairs Committee** (2000) *Second Report: Controls Over Firearms*. Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence. HC 95-II. London: HMSO.
See: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmhaff/95/95ap08.htm

Association of Chief Police Officers (2002) *Strategic Assessment of the Impact of Caribbean Gun Crime on the UK*. Unpublished report. London: ACPO.

Bean, P. (2004) *Drugs and Crime* (2nd edition). Cullompton: Willan.

BBC (2004a) *Pair jailed for selling gun kits*. BBC News On-line, 8 March 2004: news.bbc.co.uk.
See: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/derbyshire/3543887.stm

BBC (2004b) *Police raid internet gun owners*. BBC News On-line, 30 June 2004: news.bbc.co.uk.
See: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3853995.stm

BBC (2005) *Police 'must act' over gun youths*. BBC News On-line, 19 May 2005: news.bbc.co.uk.
See: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/4563067.stm

BBC (2006) *Stewards shot at Kanye West gig*. BBC News On-line, 1 March 2006: news.bbc.co.uk
See: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/west_midlands/4761326.stm

Bennett, T. and Holloway, K. (2004a) 'Possession and Use of Illegal Guns Among Offenders in England and Wales'. *The Howard Journal* 43:3, 237–252.

Bennett, T. and Holloway, K. (2004b) 'Gang Membership, Drugs and Crime in the UK'. *British Journal of Criminology* 44:3, 305–323.

Bourgois, P. (2003) *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. 2nd Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bowling, B. and Phillips, C. (2002) *Racism, Crime and Justice*. London: Longman.

Broadhurst, K. and Benyon, J. (2000) *Gun Law: The Continuing Debate about the Control of Firearms in Britain*. Occasional Paper No. 16. Leicester: University of Leicester Scarman Centre.

Bryan, J. (2001a) *Illegal Firearms in the United Kingdom. Working Paper 1: Definitions*. London: King's College London, Centre for Defence Studies.
See: www.countryside-alliance.org/images/stories/pdf/cfs_paper1.pdf

Bryan, J. (2001b) *Illegal Firearms in the United Kingdom. Working Paper 2: Identification of 'Threat Indicators'*. King's College London, Centre for Defence Studies.
See: www.countryside-alliance.org/images/stories/pdf/cfs_paper2.pdf

Bryan, J. (2001c) *Illegal Firearms in the United Kingdom. Working Paper 3: Sources of Illegal Firearms*. London: King's College London, Centre for Defence Studies.
See: www.countryside-alliance.org/images/stories/pdf/cfs_paper3.pdf

Bryan, J. (2001d) *Illegal Firearms in the United Kingdom. Working Paper 4: Possession and Use*. London: King's College London, Centre for Defence Studies.
See: www.countryside-alliance.org/images/stories/pdf/cfs_paper4.pdf

Bullock, K. and Tilley, N. (2002) *Shootings, Gangs and Violent Incidents in Manchester: Developing a crime reduction strategy.* Home Office Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 13. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/crrs13.pdf

Coleman, K. and Kaiza, P. (2005) *Firearms Certificates: England and Wales, 2003/2004.* Home Office Statistical Bulletin 09/05 (online only). London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hosb0905.pdf

Coleman, K., Hird, C. and Povey, D. (Eds.) (2006) *Violent Crime Overview, Homicide and Gun Crime 2004/2005 (Supplementary Volume to Crime in England and Wales 2004/2005).* Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/06. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/hosb0206.pdf

Cullen, W.D. (1996) *The Public Inquiry into the Shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996.* London: The Stationery Office.
See: www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/scottish/dunblane/dunblane.htm

Daly, M. and Wilson, M. (1988) *Homicide.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Dodd, T., Gray, A., Smith, J. and Charles, C. (2004) 'Recorded crimes involving firearms'. Chapter 2 in **D. Povey** (Ed.) (2004) *Crime in England and Wales 2002/2003: Supplementary Volume 1: Homicide and Gun Crime* (pp 25–55). Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/04. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb0104.pdf

Dorn, N., Murji, K. and South, N. (1992) *Traffickers: Drug Markets and Law Enforcement.* London: Routledge.

Edmunds, M., Hough, M. and Urquía, N. (1996) *Tackling Local Drug Markets.* Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 80. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/fcdps80.pdf

Europol (2004) *2004 European Union Organised Crime Report* (Open Version: December 2004). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
See:
www.europol.eu.int/publications/EUOrganisedCrimeSitRep/2004/EUOrganisedCrimeSitRep2004.pdf

Farrington, D., Barnes, G. and Lambert, S. (1996) 'The concentration of offending in families'. *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 1, 47–63.

Farrington, D., Jolliffe, D., Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M. and Kalb, L.M. (2001) 'The concentration of offenders in families, and family criminality in the prediction of boys' delinquency'. *Journal of Adolescence* 24, 579–96.

Gill, M. (2000) *Commercial Robbery.* London: Blackstone Press.

Goldstein, P.J. (1985) 'The Drugs/Violence Nexus: A Tripartite Conceptual Framework'. *Journal of Drug Issues* 39: 143–174.

Graduate Institute of International Studies (2003) *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
See: www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications/yb_2003.htm

Gray, A. (2003) 'Recorded crimes involving firearms'. Chapter 2 in C. Flood-Page and J. Taylor (Eds.) (2003) *Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume* (pp 23–40). Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/03. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb103.pdf

Greater London Alcohol and Drug Alliance (2003) *London: The highs and the lows.* London: Greater London Authority.
See: www.london.gov.uk/mayor/health/drugs_and_alcohol/docs/highs-lows-rep.pdf

Greater London Authority (2005) *A summary of ethnic groups in London.* Data Management and Analysis Group: Census Update 2005/09, September 2005. London: Greater London Authority.
See: www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/factsandfigures/DMAG-Briefing-2005-09.pdf

Hales, G. (with Silverstone, D.) (2005) *Gun Crime in Brent.* Portsmouth: University of Portsmouth.
See: www.port.ac.uk/newsandevents/news/filestorage/filetodownload,27967,en.pdf

Hales, G. and Silverstone, D. (2005) 'Interviews with 15 convicted offenders'. Chapter 3 in G. Hales (2005) *Gun Crime in Brent* (pp 57–110). Portsmouth: University of Portsmouth.
See: www.port.ac.uk/newsandevents/news/filestorage/filetodownload,27967,en.pdf

Hallsworth, S. (2005) *Street Crime.* Cullompton: Willan.

Hallsworth, S. and Young, T. (In press) *Urban Collectives: Gangs and Other Groups. A report prepared for the Metropolitan Police Service and Government Office for London.* London: Metropolitan Police Service.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2004) *Guns, Community and Police: HMIC Thematic Inspection into The Criminal Use of Firearms.* London: HMIC.
See: http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/inspect_reports1/thematic-inspections/gcp-thematic/

Her Majesty's Prison Service (2004) *Prison Service Order 7035: Research Applications and Ethics Panel.* Update 26/01/2004. London: HMPS.
See: www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/resourcecentre/psispsos/listpsos/

Hobbs, D. (1998) 'Going Down the Glocal: The Local Context of Organised Crime'. *The Howard Journal* 37:4, 407–422.

Hobbs, D., Hadfield, P., Lister, S. and Winlow, S. (2005) *Bouncers: Violence and Governance in the Night-time Economy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoggarth, L. and Wright, D. (2002) *Partnership Against Crime: Targeting Violence in Handsworth. Year 1: Evaluation Report, September 2002.* Unpublished Crime Concern report. Swindon: Crime Concern.

Hoggarth, L. and Wright, D. (2003) *Young Disciples: Research and Evaluation Report, July 2003.* Unpublished Crime Concern report. Swindon: Crime Concern.

Home Office (2002) *Firearms Law: Guidance to the Police 2002.* London: The Stationery Office.
See: www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/HO-Firearms-Guidance.pdf

Home Office (2003) *Firearms and Ammunition handed in during the Firearms Amnesty – 2003.* London: Home Office.
See: www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/figures.pdf

Home Office (2004) *Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System – 2004.* London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/s95race04.pdf

House of Commons: Home Affairs Committee (1996) *Fifth Report: The Possession of Handguns.* Volume II, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices. HC 393-II. London: HMSO.

House of Commons: Home Affairs Committee (2000) *Second Report: Controls Over Firearms.* Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence. HC 95-II. London: HMSO.
See: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmhaff/95/95ap01.htm

Hutchinson, P. (2004) 'MPA Gun Crime Scrutiny – Exploring the Link Between Guns and Drugs (version 1.1)'. Appendix A in **Metropolitan Police Authority** (2004) *Gun Crime Scrutiny: Final Report.* London: MPA.
See: www.mpa.gov.uk/downloads/committees/cop/cop-040206-04-appendix01.pdf

Jacobs, B.A. (1999) *Dealing Crack: The Social World of Streetcorner Selling.* Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Jacobs, B.A. (2000) *Robbing Drug Dealers: Violence Beyond the Law.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Katz, J. (1988) *Seductions of crime.* New York: Basic Books.

Killias, M. (1993) 'Gun Ownership, Suicide and Homicide: An International Perspective'. In **A.A. del Frate, U. Zvekic and J.J.M. van Dijk** (Eds.) *Understanding Crime and Experiences of Crime and Crime Control.* UNICRI Publication 49. Rome: UNICRI
See:
www.unicri.it/wwk/publications/books/series/understanding/19_GUN_OWNERSHIP.pdf

Kleck, G. (1991) *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Kubrin, C.E. and Weitzer, R. (2003) 'Retaliatory Homicide: Concentrated Disadvantage and Neighbourhood Culture'. *Social Problems* 50:2, 157–180.

Levitt, S.D. and Venkatesh, S.A. (2000) 'An Economic Analysis of a Drug-Selling Gang's Finances'. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics.* August 2000: 755–789.

Lupton, R., Wilson, A., May, T., Warburton, H. and Turnbull, P. J. (2002) *A rock and a hard place: drug markets in deprived neighbourhoods*. Home Office Research Study 240. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hors240.pdf

McLagan, G. (2005) *Guns and Gangs: Inside Black Gun Crime*. London: Allison and Busby Ltd.

Maguire, M. (2000) 'Researching 'Street Criminals': A Neglected Art'. Chapter 4 in **R.D. King and E. Wincup** (Eds.) (2000) *Doing Research on Crime and Justice* (pp 121–152). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maher, L. and Dixon, D. (1999) 'Policing and Public Health: Law Enforcement and Harm Minimization in a Street-Level Drug Market'. *British Journal of Criminology* 39:4, 488–512.

Marshall, B., Webb, B. and Tilley, N. (2005) *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*. London: Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, University College London.
See: www.jdi.ucl.ac.uk/downloads/pdf/gangs_and_guns_2005.pdf

Matthews, R. (2002) *Armed Robbery*. Cullompton: Willan.

Mauser, G.A. (2003) 'The Failed Experiment: Gun Control and Public Safety in Canada, Australia, England and Wales'. *Public Policy Sources* 71: November 2003. Vancouver, British Colombia: The Fraser Institute.
See: www.fraserinstitute.ca/admin/books/files/FailedExperiment.pdf

May, T., Harocopos, A., Turnbull, P.J. and Hough, M. (2000) *Serving Up: The impact of low-level police enforcement on drug markets*. Police Research Series Paper 133. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/prs133.pdf

May, T., Duffy, M., Few, B. and Hough, M. (2005) *Understanding drug selling in communities: Insider or outsider trading?* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
See: www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859354181.pdf

Metropolitan Police Authority (2004) *Gun Crime Scrutiny: Final Report*. London: MPA.
See: www.mpa.gov.uk/downloads/committees/cop/cop-040206-04-appendix01.pdf

Metropolitan Police Service (2003) *Tackling Gun Crime in London: A Strategic Analysis (Version 1).* London: MPS.

Metropolitan Police Service (2004) *Tackling Gun Crime in London: 2004-07*. London: MPS.
See: www.met.police.uk/gun_crime_strategy/guncrime_brochurev2.pdf

Morris, S. (1998) *Clubs, Drugs and Doormen*. Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 86. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/prgpdfs/fcdps86.pdf

Morrison, S. and O'Donnell, I. (1994). *Armed Robbery: a study in London.* Occasional Paper No. 15. Oxford: Centre for Criminological Research, University of Oxford.

Muir, H. (2005) *Met chief seeks law to rid clubs of guns.* Guardian Unlimited, 16 June 2005: www.guardian.co.uk
See: www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1507320,00.html

National Criminal Intelligence Service (2003) 'Firearms'. Chapter 7 in **NCIS** (2003) *UK Threat Assessment: The Threat from Serious and Organised Crime 2003* (pp 59–63). London: NCIS.
See: www.ncis.co.uk/ukta/2003/ukta2003.pdf

O'Donnell, I. and Morrison, S. (1997) 'Armed and Dangerous? The Use of Firearms in Robbery'. *The Howard Journal* 36:3, 305–320.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1999) *Promising Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence.* Washington: OJJDP.
See: ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/gun_violence/173950.pdf

Pearson G. and Hobbs, D. (2001) *Middle market drug distribution*. Home Office Research Study 227. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hors227.pdf

Pierce, G.L., Braga, A.A., Koper, C., McDevitt, J., Carlson, D., Roth, J., Saiz, A., Hyatt, R. and Griffith, R.E. (2003) *The Characteristics and Dynamics of Crime Gun Markets: Implications for Supply-Side Focused Enforcement Strategies*. Rockville, Maryland: National Criminal Justice Reference Service.
See: www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/208079.pdf

Polk, K. (1994) *When Men Kill: Scenarios of Masculine Violence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Polsky, N. (1998) *Hustlers, Beats and Others.* (Expanded Edition). New York: Lyon Press.

Povey, D. (Ed.) (2004) *Crime in England and Wales 2002/2003: Supplementary Volume 1: Homicide and Gun Crime.* Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/04. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb0104.pdf

Povey, D. (Ed.) (2005) *Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004: Supplementary Volume 1: Homicide and Gun Crime.* Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/05. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hosb0205.pdf

Povey, D. and Kaiza, P. (2005) 'Recorded crimes involving firearms'. Chapter 2 in **D. Povey,** (Ed.) (2005) *Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004: Supplementary Volume 1: Homicide and Gun Crime* (pp 27–50). Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/05. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hosb0205.pdf

Povey, D. and Kaiza, P. (2006) 'Recorded crimes involving firearms'. Chapter 3 in **K. Coleman, C. Hird and D. Povey** (Eds.) *Violent Crime Overview, Homicide and Gun Crime 2004/2005 (Supplementary Volume to Crime in England and Wales 2004/2005)* (pp 71–93). Home Office Statistical Bulletin 02/06. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/hosb0206.pdf

Povey, D. and Prime, J. (1999) *Recorded Crime Statistics: England and Wales, April 1998 to March 1999.* Home Office Statistical Bulletin 18/99. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1899.pdf

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (Eds.) (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice.* London: Sage.

Schneider, J., Rowe, N., Forrest, S. and Tilley, N. (2004) *Biting the Bullet: Gun Crime in Greater Nottingham.* Unpublished report for Nottinghamshire Police, Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham Connexions.

Sherman, L.W. (2001) 'Reducing gun violence: What works, what doesn't, what's promising'. *Criminal Justice* 1:1, 11–25.

Shover, N. (1996) *Great Pretenders.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview.

Shropshire, S. and McFarquhar, M. (2002) *Developing Multi Agency Strategies to Address the Street Gang Culture and Reduce Gun Violence Amongst Young People.* Briefing no. 4 in the series Young People, Gang Cultures and Firearms Violence. Manchester: Steve Shropshire & Michael McFarquhar Consultancy Group.
See: www.iansa.org/documents/2002/gang_culture_and_young_people1.pdf

Silverstone, D. (2003) *The Ecstasy of Consumption.* Unpublished PhD thesis. London: London School of Economics.

Simmons, J., Legg, C. and Hosking, R. (2003) *National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS): an analysis of the impact on recorded crime. Part One: The national picture.* On-Line Report 31/03. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr3103.pdf

Smith, J. (2003) *The nature of personal robbery.* Home Office Research Study 254. London: Home Office.
See: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hors254.pdf

Squires, P. (1997) 'The irrelevance of America'. Paper to the British Criminology Association Conference, International Symposium on Gun Control, Queen's University, Belfast, July 1997.

Squires, P. (2000) *Gun Culture or Gun Control? Firearms, violence and society.* London: Routledge.

Sykes, G. and Matza, D. (1957) 'Techniques of Neutralization'. *American Sociological Review* 22, 664–670.

Taylor, I. and Hornsby, R. (2000) *Replica Firearms: A New Frontier in the Gun Market.* Durham: University of Durham Department of Sociology and Social Policy.
See: www.gun-control-network.org/Replica%20Firearms.pdf

Tomsen, S. (1997) 'A top night. Social protest, masculinity and the culture of drinking violence'. *British Journal of Criminology* 37:1, 90–102.

Topalli, V., Wright, R. and Fornango, R. (2002) 'Drug Dealers, Robbery and Retaliation: Vulnerability, Deterrence and the Contagion of Violence'. *British Journal of Criminology* 42:2, 337–351.

Walsh, P. (2005) *Gang War: The Inside Story of the Manchester Gangs.* Chatham, Kent: Milo Books.

Wilson, A., May, T., Warburton, H., Lupton, R. and Turnbull, P.J. (2002) *Heroin and Crack Cocaine Markets in Deprived Areas: Seven Local Case Studies.* Supplement to Home Office Research Study 240: 'A Rock and a Hard Place: Drug Markets in Deprived Neighbourhoods'. CASE Report 19. London: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics. See: sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASEreport19.pdf

Winlow, S. (2001) *Badfellas: Crime, tradition and new masculinities.* Oxford: Berg.

Wright, R. and Decker, S. (1994) *Burglars on the Job: Streetlife and Residential Break-ins.* Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press.

Wright, R. and Decker, S. (1997) *Armed Robbers in Action: Stick-Ups and Street Culture.* Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press.

Wright, R., Brookman, F. and Bennett, T. (2006) 'The Foreground Dynamics of Street Robbery in Britain'. *British Journal of Criminology* 46:1, 1–15.

Zimring, F. and Hawkins, G. (1987) *The Citizen's Guide to Gun Control.* New York: MacMillan.

Zimring, F. and Hawkins, G. (1997) *Crime is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America.* New York: Oxford University Press.