

# **CENTRE FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE STUDIES**

**Arianna Silvestri, Mark Oldfield, Peter Squires and Roger  
Grimshaw**

## **YOUNG PEOPLE, KNIVES AND GUNS**

**A comprehensive review, analysis and critique of  
gun and knife crime strategies**

## **The authors**

Arianna Silvestri is Research and Policy Associate at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. Dr Mark Oldfield is an independent researcher. Peter Squires is Professor in Criminology and Public Policy at the University of Brighton. Dr Roger Grimshaw is Research Director at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

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Produced by:

Centre for Crime and Justice Studies  
King's College London  
Strand  
London  
WC2R 2LS  
Tel: 020 7848 1688  
Fax: 020 7848 1689  
info@crimeandjustice.org.uk  
www.crimeandjustice.org.uk

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## Foreword

A version of this report, which was commissioned by 11 Million, the organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Sir Aynsley-Green, was originally published by 11 Million in March 2009.

At the time of its publication, the report was the subject of a good deal of inaccurate media reporting, the most egregious of which we corrected with a statement on our website. Since then, interest in street violence and weaponry has remained high on the political agenda, as the publication last week of the Home Affairs Committee report on knife crime illustrates.

We have now decided to publish a revised edition of the research we originally conducted for 11 Million. Given the ongoing interest in street violence and weaponry, we thought this would be a timely contribution to a complex area of contemporary policy making. The revised edition also allows us to establish very clearly what the findings of our research are and to remove as far as possible any grounds for misunderstanding or misinterpretation of our findings.

This edition retains the results of our comprehensive international review of research on young people, knives and guns, spanning over a decade and up to the end of 2008. It does differ in some respects from the original version. First of all, we have made some layout changes to the main body of the report to aid greater comprehension of the content. A revised executive summary follows more closely the structure of the full report than it did in the original version. The concluding chapter has also been expanded, to draw out the broader context for the issues examined in the report.

We remain grateful to 11 Million for giving us a timely opportunity to undertake an independent review of evidence on this area of public concern.

Richard Garside  
Director

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## **Executive summary**

This report is the outcome of an extensive review of international (English language) evidence about the effectiveness of interventions aimed at tackling young people's involvement in 'gun' or 'knife crime'. Such issues are currently at the forefront of public attention and a number of 'anti-knives' and 'anti-guns' initiatives are taking place in this country. The purpose of our research was to find out which strategies had been submitted to rigorous analysis and assessment, and what evidence was consequently produced about their impact on young people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. Studies published between 1998 (or earlier) and 2008 are covered. Our review also examines the research evidence about what factors in young people's lives make them more or less likely to get involved in weapon carrying and violent behaviour, and about the perceptions, values and motivations of the young people involved. Additionally, we have outlined some of the interventions which have been rigorously assessed in the field of juvenile violence prevention generally: we think these provide useful contextual knowledge, as weapon use is a form of violent behaviour and cannot be understood in isolation.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

#### **The evidence base**

- Remarkably few interventions on youth knife and gun crime, nationally and internationally, have been subjected to rigorous research and/or independent assessment.
- A large number of locally based initiatives are being piloted or undertaken in the UK which aim to affect young people's carrying or using of weapons. In some cases, initiatives are recent and evaluations are therefore premature; in others, the lack of (independent) assessment of their efficacy is due to a shortage of funding.
- Independent evaluations seem particularly important in helping establish whether new strategies can claim to be successful, and the degree (if any) of their impact on levels of gun or knife crime.
- Unsurprisingly, most research about gun carrying and use comes from the United States. Evidence from the US shows that multi-agency, multi-focus strategies are more successful than single-focus interventions in combating gun violence among young people. Approaches by a variety of agencies working in co-operation, which are locally based and combine both prevention and suppression, are more effective than single interventions by agencies working in isolation.
- The majority of firearms programmes studied in the US have however not been subject to the most rigorous, quasi-scientific validity tests (experimental, controlled trials with comparison groups). Of those who

have undergone such rigorous analysis, none have shown significant long term reductions in youth gun violence.

- Some strategies appear to have positive impacts in the short term. 'Hot spot' approaches have shown promise in the US in reducing gun violence among young people, but they may suffer from problems in sustaining approval and acceptance among local communities.
- Despite the wealth of anti-knife crime initiatives being carried out in the UK, there is very little research about their impact on knife use. The only evaluations so far which have been carried out at scientific level show the success of hospital based nurse counselling programmes, but these measure reductions in alcohol abuse (admittedly one of the causes behind violence) rather than in injuries caused by knives and other weapons.
- There is an absence of clear evidence about whether we need to tailor interventions specifically to the issue of guns and knives.

## **Risk**

- Gun and knife crime are expressions of wider phenomena of youth crime and violence. They need to be viewed in more general contexts of disaffection and delinquency, which are in turn the complex products of inter-related individual, family, social, biological and environmental factors.
- Professionals designing interventions for young people need to take into account the variety of influences and exposure to 'risk factors' (to do with family, school, peers and the community/ local environment) that shape children's behaviour.
- Each risk factor is likely to have a different impact, depending on children's developmental stages and their social conditions; e.g. neighbourhood features can have negative effects on those otherwise less at risk.
- There are also factors that can have a 'protective' role, i.e. which can help young people avoid offending and entering deviant lifestyles. Although research in this area is less developed than risk factor research, protective factors appear to include good academic achievement, non-delinquent peers and caring and supportive parents or other adults.
- However, predictive methods aiming to identify which young people are likely to become deviant or violent are not infallible. They can be over-deterministic, lead to labelling children and young people as potentially criminal and therefore have a negative impact on their lives.

## **Disadvantage**

- Research shows that high rates of crime and violence mostly affect disadvantaged areas. People living in deprived localities do not just experience higher levels of crime, but also suffer from various other problems, including poverty, low social capital and limited social mobility.
- Research on moving young people at risk out of their areas has discovered mixed outcomes.

- Violence causes fear and stress and being exposed to it – as a victim or by seeing someone else being victimised – makes people more predisposed to commit violence themselves.
- Where neighbourhoods are threatening, weapon carrying may make young people feel safer. However, the presence of weapons may escalate conflicts and increase the likelihood of injuries or death.
- Inequality, lack of opportunity, poverty and (relative) deprivation are conducive to thwarted aspirations. The development of criminal careers can therefore also be understood as a way of satisfying material aspirations.

## **Meanings**

- The complexity of circumstances affecting behaviour is coupled with the complexity of social meanings, values and behaviour which young people experience and re-negotiate, individually and in groups.
- Notions of 'street credibility' and 'respect' can become very significant to young people who may lack legitimate access to other forms of status achievement. Yet this 'street social capital', while it bonds young people closer to their peer groups can also serve to distance them from the wider community and societal values.
- Acting to maintain one's local reputation and the 'respect' of others can provoke conflict and violence.
- While young people say they carry weapons to protect themselves in areas they perceive to be unsafe, it is the presumption that others are armed that helps (re)produce fear and insecurity.
- In this light, policies to disarm weapon carriers are restricting themselves to symptoms, unless they also tackle the fears and insecurities articulated by young people and the concentrations of violence in particular areas.

## **Perspectives and directions**

- Interventions need to concentrate on 'what works' for whom, and in which circumstances, rather than simply on finding 'what works' in some general sense. However, the complexity of circumstances affecting behaviour (coupled with the complexity of social meanings as (re)negotiated by young people), are bound to make it difficult for researchers to isolate and identify the direct effects of specific interventions, especially for behaviour involving 'everyday' implements such as knives.
- Focussing upon the weapons themselves may prove something of a distraction. A long-term and multi-faceted approach is needed to understand and tackle the conditions in which weapon carrying and use comes to be considered an option - or a necessity.
- A public health approach underpins some the most promising youth violence prevention strategies. It is characterised by a multi-agency approach and early identification of problems. It aims to address multiple risk factors and to introduce protective factors.

- Some preventive interventions that target family-related risk factors (e.g. nurse visitation programmes) in early childhood seem to be having a long term positive impact on reducing delinquent and violent behaviour.
- Strategies that seek to influence knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (such as therapeutic foster care) also seem promising in their impact in reducing involvement in violent behaviour.
- 'Zero tolerance' and deterrent approaches (e.g. prison tours) have been shown to be ineffective in reducing violence among young people at risk of offending (or re-offending) – in fact, they can be counter-productive.



# Introduction

**The purpose of this report is to examine what evidence exists about the effectiveness of interventions aimed to tackle young people's involvement in 'gun' or 'knife crime'. In order to find out, we reviewed rigorous research in this area for at least the past ten years, looking at studies carried out not only in this country but also in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and in Europe.**

Our aim was to identify research of high quality (see below for the standards we used) which had been carried out in the field and what it could tell us about the impact (i.e. changes to offending/re-offending behaviour, attitudes and knowledge) of a range of anti-gun or anti-knife strategies.

The interventions we have taken into account are both universal (aimed at all children and young people in a certain area, school, region or country) and targeted (aimed at particular groups, like those at risk of becoming offenders or those who have already committed offences). They take place in a variety of contexts (schools, communities, homes, streets, criminal justice institutions) and range in scope from awareness raising (e.g. public information campaigns) to attempting to modify behaviour and attitudes (e.g. counselling, (peer) mentoring, parent training) to enforcement strategies (e.g. stop and search, street sweeps, targeted surveillance), to changes in the law and in sentencing.

The remit of our review was to look at all children and young people under the age of 18. Our use of the term 'young people' in the report includes everyone in this age range, unless stated otherwise (although, in practice, very young children are rarely the subject of anti-gun or anti-knife initiatives; rather, they tend to be targeted in general violence prevention initiatives). For details of these and other terms used in this report please refer to the Glossary (Appendix 1).

## **SETTING THE CONTEXT: WHAT IS 'GUN CRIME' AND 'KNIFE CRIME'?**

Young people and 'knife' and 'gun crime' are at the forefront of public attention, and an almost constant focus of the media and policy makers in this country. Yet what exactly do people mean when referring to 'knife' or 'gun crime'?

'Gun crime' and 'knife crime' are not discrete entities, but encompass a variety of unlawful behaviours. Such weapons can in fact be used in actions which fall under a range of offences in the UK legal context, e.g.:

- robbery
- violence against the person
- burglary
- sexual offences and domestic violence
- criminal damage.

'Gun' and 'knife crime' are therefore an amalgam of different sanctioned behaviours. Interpreting such apparently simple, and misleadingly unifying, concepts is further complicated by the way offences are officially recorded.

Police recorded data are generally limited in their reliability because of a number of factors, including: much criminal activity does not get reported to the police, is not detected, or does not get recorded by the police. Moreover, changes in recording practices (which may mean, for example, that more or new offences are included in the records) make it difficult to compare data historically. Trends in police data are also susceptible to changes in the way the police go about their activities, in Home Office requirements and in the way suspected crimes are recorded. Victimisation surveys (like the British Crime Survey (BCS) in England and Wales and the Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey (SCVS)) were developed in part because of the recognition that police recorded crime data can only provide a partial picture of crime levels and trends. Most commentators agree that such surveys provide a more reliable estimate of the offences they cover than that given by police recorded data. However, the range of offences covered by the BCS is narrower than police data. It also tends to underestimate some of the offences it covers (e.g. domestic violence), and, importantly, persons under 16 have not so far formed part of the survey.

Official figures are also problematic specifically with regards to knives and guns related offences. In England and Wales, the recording of 'knife enabled' offences did not start until April 2007 (with the exception of London, where such records started to be collated in 2003), which makes it impossible to make any comparison with preceding periods (Eades et al 2007). Moreover, the Home Office category of 'firearm enabled' and 'knife enabled' crime excludes offences of possession (Squires 2008a). The fact that offences of illegal knife and gun possession are not routinely collected for the Home Office makes it difficult to establish the impact of strategies aimed at deterring young people from carrying weapons, including searches and detectors, public safety education campaigns, knife amnesties (Squires 2008b). Current initiatives in the UK are outlined in Chapter 4.

Official records have until recently not distinguished the weapon by which an offence is committed, and the official definition of 'wounding' comprises acts where the skin is punctured or cut, which is likely to mostly involved stabbings by knives, but includes other means by which such injury may be caused. Official wounding figures show that 'knife crime' is nothing new. Knives/sharp objects/ stabbings have always been the primary means by which young men have killed one another in peace time in England, Wales and Scotland. The overall trend of killings from stabbings rose fairly consistently throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It began to increase more rapidly from the mid-1980s and, then again, after 1998 (Home Office 2007).

Although guns are far less common, and far less easily accessible, than knives, the overall trend of gun-related offences follows a similar pattern to knife-related offences, increasing since the mid-1960s and then again in the late 1980s.

## **Young people and homicides**

Despite current public concerns about 'kids killing kids', official figures show most young people under 16 are killed by their parents. In 2007/08, 62% of all homicide victims under 16 were killed by their parents, an increase from 51% in 2006/07. The group most at risk overall for homicide are very young children, i.e. those under one year of age. In 2007/08 this group had a homicide rate of 36 per million population (Povey et al 2009).

The second most at risk age group in 2007/08 (and consistent with previous years) were males aged between 16 and 29. Within this group, those most at risk are young males aged between 16 and 20 inclusive (Povey et al 2009).

## **WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS**

When considering 'knife' and 'gun crime', we need to understand the context in which young people carry and use such weapons: the areas they live in, the schools they go to, their families and upbringing, their social and economic position, their friends and their personal experiences. In this report we have therefore looked at what in children and young people's lives exposes them to the risk of carrying weapons, perpetrating and being the victims of violence, coming to the attention of the police and being processed by the criminal justice system. We have also considered any research that would tell us if there are any protective influences which help young people stay away from 'trouble' and crime. We cover these issues in Chapters 1 and 2.

We also wanted to know why young people feel they need to carry knives or guns, and/or the reasons why they use them to harm or, in some cases, kill. We have therefore examined research about their own perceptions of their identities, their environment and their motivations. This research is carried out via surveys, interviews, focus groups and sometimes involved researchers observing young people's everyday activities. Chapter 3 covers these issues and looks at how concepts like 'youth culture', 'gangs' and 'gang membership' help us understand young people's relationships with guns or knives.

Chapter 4 critically examines the interventions which have shown to be promising in reducing weapon use by young people. Most of the research around guns and young people has been carried out in the US, with policy interventions being influential in Britain. Despite the fact that there have been lately in Britain a raft of initiatives aimed at tackling knife related crimes, there has been little independent evaluation of such projects. It is therefore not possible to scientifically assess their effectiveness. The chapter however also examines interventions where knives and knives-related injuries are involved, even though crime reduction may not be the priority aim of the strategy in question.

### **Firearms research: a cautionary note**

Most of the research into young people's use of firearms that our review has uncovered is specific to the United States (US). When considering such studies and their results, we need to be mindful of the social, cultural and legal differences

between that country and the UK. Just because a strategy seems to work in the US does not necessarily mean it can be successfully translated into a UK context.

A primary difference is that the availability of legal firearms is extensive in the US: it has been estimated that around 45% (52 million) of US households legally own at least one gun. This contrasts with less than 5% of households in England and Wales and in Scotland (Squires 2000). The availability of guns seems likely to have an impact on young people's access to and use of them. Moreover, we need to bear in mind that debate about guns in the US is strongly polarised (the 'right to bear arms' argument v. the argument that gun ownership needs to be controlled and regulated for the public good) and politicised, and this controversy tends to influence research as well (see e.g. Spitzer 1995).

### **Race and gender**

A significant amount of research (especially around guns and in the US) tends to concentrate on young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Likewise, a number of interventions aiming at reducing use of weapons or gang membership focus on such groups, thereby treating race as an almost independent variable in the relationship between young people, weapons and violence. Whether this is a profitable approach is a moot point. In fact, according to many commentators (e.g. Hagedorn 1988, Kramer 2000) race is but one variable in a complex social context characterised by disadvantage and deprivation (or at least relative deprivation), in which people from ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented. For example, work on gun crime in Chicago by Cook et al (2007) shows that the most likely perpetrators of gun violence – and the most likely victims – are young black males, but that they are also undereducated, unemployed and living in disadvantaged areas.

Most of the research we have covered concentrates on young males – perhaps unsurprisingly as this is the gender overwhelmingly represented among offenders. This means that the impact of guns and knives on girls has not been thoroughly explored. The impact of interventions is likely to differ between genders (see e.g. the effect of the Move to Opportunity intervention in Chapter 2), but most of our knowledge to date tends to be anecdotal. A number of important areas are therefore still unexplored and would benefit from rigorous in-depth research, including: girls as weapon 'minders', their role in peer group dynamics (e.g. as mediators or initiators of violence), or the connection between sexual violence against females and weapons.

### **Beyond weapons: youth violence in general**

A lot of studies we have examined as part of our review focus on preventing youth violence (rather than specifically gun or knife use), and we have outlined those in Chapter 5. We think these provide useful background knowledge, as weapon use is an expression of violence in general. We have selected some authoritative sources which incorporate analyses of multiple pieces of research (systematic reviews and meta-analyses - see Appendix 2 for more information), but we do not purport this to be an exhaustive review of the general youth violence prevention literature, which is clearly a much larger task and which was outside the remit of our report.

## **STANDARDS APPLIED TO ASSESS THE VALIDITY OF THE EVIDENCE**

Our aim was to find and assess the best available literature in our field of concern, published (or, in some cases, not published) within the last ten years (unless particularly significant). We only considered evaluations of interventions which had been carried out externally and independently.

To help us identify the best quantitative (measurement-based) research, we used the 'Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods' (SMS), a well known set of standards used for assessment by academics and researchers. SMS categorises such studies according to a hierarchy of rigour and reliability. For the purposes of this report we were considering research which fell within the top three levels of the scale (levels 3-5), i.e. studies where a comparison group (people receiving an intervention are compared with those not receiving it) has been used at the very least (level 3). At level 4, multiple comparators and a quasi-experimental design are used, whilst the 'gold standard' is constituted by studies using a randomised control design (level 5: here the assignment of individuals to control and intervention groups is carried out in a random way to help avoid bias).

To help us establish the validity and applicability of qualitative (experience-based) research we used a rating system called the 'Global Assessment of Evaluation Quality' (GAEQ). For information about these two evaluative tools please see Appendix 2.

Only a small minority of the hundreds of studies we examined during our research met the highest categories of either SMS or GAEQ. However, quite a number of studies (from the US and about firearms) met our minimum quantitative standards (presence of a comparison group), and we have selected the most relevant of those for inclusion in the report. In some circumstances we have included studies (specifically longitudinal studies and surveys of young people carried out in the UK) which were lower than our set minimum standards; we did so not only because of the paucity of relevant, good quality research in the UK, but also because we thought such surveys were important in giving us a clear picture of young people's own views and reasons for carrying a weapon (see Chapter 3).

## **LEARNING FROM BOTH QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDIES**

Both quantitative (measurement-based) and qualitative (experience-based) methods can yield useful insights.

A great deal of youth crime research, especially contemporary 'risk and protection factor' studies (see Chapter 1), have been based upon quantitative methodologies seeking to assess the impact of a given range of social influences in shaping youth behaviour. Quantitative analysis is valuable as it can provide detailed evidence of the social and psychological circumstances which are conducive to criminality. It addresses the links between social, cultural and emotional deprivation (dimensions of social exclusion) and patterns of criminalisation. However, this

approach is not without its critics, partly because its focus on social determinants appears to challenge the idea of criminal responsibility, a notion central to the criminal justice process and the 'right to punish'. It also cannot shed much light on personal experiences, perceptions and choices. Qualitative and interpretative evidence is better placed to capture these dimensions. (Good quality research relevant to our project is outlined in Chapter 3.)

Our view is that combining the two approaches can provide us with a fuller and deeper understanding of young people's circumstances and motivations. Quantitative approaches can allow us to see where, when and which social conditions are most likely to create the situations in which young people come to be drawn into violent lifestyles. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, can help us develop an understanding of the complexities of young people's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs in the context of their lived experiences.

## **TERMS USED**

In this report we use a number of crucial terms, which are repeated throughout the chapters. We aim to explain these whenever they appear, but here are a few general points about terminology.

As stated above, the term 'young people' for the purposes of this report is inclusive of 'children', unless stated. (Please also see the Glossary in Appendix 1.)

The research on young people and weapons often refers to 'delinquency' as well as to 'crime'. To some extent the two terms are interchangeable, in the sense that they both tend to be used to refer to behaviour which, if detected, would lead to arrest and probable sanction by the courts. 'Delinquency' however specifically refers to criminal actions by young people or, a term often used in the US, 'juveniles'.

Apart from 'delinquency' and the more general 'crime', a number of other terms are used in the literature, and in our report, to describe behaviour which is sanctioned by law and/or to be repressed or socially disapproved of: 'deviance', 'anti-social behaviour', 'youth violence', 'nuisance', 'offending' (=committing an offence) etc. The way these terms are used or intended, and whether they carry a legal 'tag', will often vary by jurisdiction. For our purposes they generally delineate behaviour by young people which is legally and/or socially sanctioned.

In our report we sometimes refer to 'lack of evidence of effectiveness'. These terms are inclusive of a variety of circumstances, i.e. where (a) research was not of good enough quality to enable us to reach a conclusion; (b) research of high standards did not establish effectiveness of intervention; and (c) topics where no research had been carried out. When we mention lack of evidence of effectiveness, therefore, this does not necessarily mean that there is evidence that an intervention does not work; it could also mean that a strategy has not been analysed/researched/studied to a sufficiently rigorous standard to enable us to reach any grounded conclusions about it.

## Chapter 1: Predicting who is most likely to be involved in violent crime

- Evidence derived from quantitative research represents the most extensive base of social scientific knowledge about criminal 'careers'. Quantitative research into criminal careers is often referred to as 'predictive'.
- Findings suggest that there are problem areas, known as 'risk factors', which can predict the likelihood of future violent criminal behaviour among young people.
- Important risk factors for young people committing violent crimes include individual characteristics (e.g. whether they are male or female), their relationship with parents and family, their behaviour and their performance in school, whether they have friends who carry out violent offences, whether they carry out other types of crimes, drug and alcohol use and also whether they have been exposed to violence, either as a victim or as a bystander, witnessing violence against other people.
- Risk factors are cumulative: the more a young person has, the greater the likelihood of violence.
- A body of research identifies factors which can have a 'protective' role against delinquency (see Glossary), i.e. which help young people avoid offending and entering deviant lifestyles. Although this research is less developed than risk factor research, protective factors appear to include good academic achievement, non-delinquent peers, good relations with parents and caring and supportive adults present in the young people's lives.
- Social crime prevention programmes have sought to tackle the 'causes of crime' by removing or neutralising risk factors impinging upon young people's lives and/or bolstering their protective factors – for example, by attempting to reduce poverty, enhancing educational and training opportunities or offering family support.
- Predictive methods are not infallible: they may over- or under-predict what young people are likely to become deviant or violent (what researchers call 'false positives' or 'false negatives') and should be therefore used with caution.
- An over-deterministic reading of predictive research may lead to labelling children and young people as potentially criminal, and this may actually impact negatively on their outcomes.
- Although there is considerable research on youth violence and the factors which are likely to engender or restrain it, much less is available on specific forms such as gun and knife crime. However, the social scientific knowledge produced by predictive research provides an important backdrop to understanding the phenomena of weapon carrying and use by young people.

**This chapter looks at ‘predictive’ or ‘risk factor’ research, which studies the kinds of backgrounds, experiences and socialisation processes which are more *likely* to produce high rates of offending by young people. This research has on the whole been conducted in the field of youth violence generally. Much less exists which focuses specifically on the instruments by which such violence can be inflicted, like knives or guns. Some of the material reviewed in this chapter is therefore focused on a more encompassing conception of violence than the use of particular weapons. However, such material is relevant to our focus on gun and knife crime as it provides the wider context to young people’s contact with and use of such weapons.**

## **PREDICTING YOUTH OFFENDING: RISK FACTOR RESEARCH**

How do we gain a better understanding of the young people who commit gun and knife crime? Some research focuses on children’s early years, before they commit a crime and aims to identify groups who *might* become involved in violence. These studies are referred to by researchers as ‘prediction studies’ or ‘risk based approaches’.

Understanding the characteristics in some young people’s lives and environment which put them ‘at risk’ of offending, is thought to be important as it can enable policy makers to target these problematic areas in a preventative way.

Risk factor research does not seek to predict exactly which young people will commit which types of offences, but indicates the kinds of backgrounds, experiences and socialisation processes which are more *likely* to produce high rates of offending. Young people whose early lives show evidence of multiple risk factors are generally thought to be more likely to become involved in persistent criminal activity.

Research findings show that, although it is possible to identify factors which are likely to play a role in later offending amongst young people (Farrington 2002, Andrews and Bonta 1994), it is harder to predict serious or violent offending and specific forms of violent behaviour like use of weapons. Moreover, some people are violent and will be so whether it is with a gun, knife or anything that comes to hand.

When considering prediction research, we have to bear in mind that most of it is based on US data, and that predicting which young people may carry a weapon has not been addressed in the UK as yet.

These issues, and the need to be cautious about the results and what we do with them, are explored in the following sections of this chapter.



## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

As we have seen, many researchers working in the field of prediction are interested in what is often referred to as a 'risk-factor' approach to preventing crime. However, most children and young people at risk of violence or crime do not actually manifest such behaviour, even though they may well have been exposed to a variety of risk factors. This has led to attempts to identify those factors in young people's lives which reduce or negate the impact of risk factors. These factors are referred to as 'protective factors' and their contribution to young people staying out of trouble is known as 'resilience'.

Protective factors include positive relationship with parents, high academic achievement, positive friendships with non-delinquent peers, extracurricular school activities, belonging to smaller (in terms of numbers of children) families, good problem solving skills and empathetic skills. Some protective factors can be seen as being the opposite of risk factors – for example, young people *not* being exposed to violence compared with young people who *are* exposed.

While many risk factors have been replicated in numerous studies, more research is needed around the relative importance of protective factors and how they can be introduced into the lives of young people at risk of violent behaviour (Farrington 2002, Loeber and Farrington 1998). The way in which protective factors impact on children at different ages would also benefit from being studied in greater depth.

## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PREDICTIVE FACTORS FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE: WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Meta-analyses (see Glossary for details) of relevant studies into predictors of violent crime delineate the most significant factors in serious and violent offending among young people. For the purpose of this chapter we looked at two such meta-analyses, which combined examined the results of 92 high quality studies into the genesis of youth violent behaviour (Lipsey and Derzon 1998, Derzon 2001).

Research evidence shows that the major predictors of young people committing violent crimes relate to:

- individual characteristics (e.g. gender, age, age at first offence, impulsivity, academic performance or IQ: that is to say, being male and/or low performing at school, and/or emotionally unstable, and/or with a low IQ are factors which increase the likelihood of violence during adolescence and into adulthood)
- their relationship with parents and family
- their behaviour and their performance in school
- whether they have friends who carry out violent offences
- whether they carry out other types of crimes
- drug and alcohol use
- whether they have been exposed to violence, either as a victim or as a bystander
- witnessing violence against other people.

Risk factors are cumulative: the more a young person has, the greater the likelihood of violence.

Table 1 below thematically summarises the key risk factors for serious and/or violent offending among young people, as revealed by the literature.

**Table 1: Key risk factors for serious and/or violent offending among young people**  
(Source: Howells 1997)

<p><b>Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- family management problems</li> <li>- family conflict</li> <li>- parents take part in problem behaviour/approve of it</li> </ul>	<p><b>School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- early and persistent anti-social behaviour</li> <li>- academic failure beginning in early school years</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rebelliousness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- friends engage in serious and/or violent juvenile offending</li> <li>- early initiation into such behaviour</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- availability of firearms</li> <li>- norms favourable to crime</li> <li>- low neighbourhood attachment and community disorganisation</li> <li>- extreme economic deprivation</li> </ul>

**Risk factors for different age groups**

Risk factors change over time, with different age groups being affected by the same factors to varying degrees: a risk factor that predicts a 7 year old will be violent later in life may not be a good predictor when that individual is 12. As an example, the most significant predictive factors of serious and violent offending among young people aged 12-14 (as established by Lipsey and Derzon’s meta-analysis) are shown in Table 2 overleaf. These factors, when present among young people aged 12-14, are likely to predict (further) violent offending when they are aged 15-25. The factors are ranked according to their statistical strength, with group 1 containing the most reliable predictors and group 5 the least reliable. (Within each group, the factors are also ranked according to statistical strength, e.g. ‘weak social ties’ being a relatively stronger predictor than ‘antisocial peers’.)

**Table 2: Predictors for serious and violent offending for young people aged 12-14, in descending order of statistical reliability**

(Source: Lipsey and Derzon 1998)

1. Weak social ties (engage in few pro-social activities; low popularity with friends/acquaintances)
1. Antisocial peers (i.e. peers engaging in criminal activities)
2. Carrying out other types of crimes
3. Aggression (aggressive/disruptive behaviour; verbal aggression toward others)
3. Negative attitude toward school, poor performance and behaviour at school
3. Having a one or more of the following psychological conditions: problematic behaviours, high activity levels, impulsiveness, poor eating habits, high levels of daring; psychopathology, short attention span
3. Having a poor relationship with parents
3. Being male
3. Being physically violent toward others
4. Having antisocial parents
4. Previous crimes against people using threat or force and including sexual offences
4. Problem behaviour such as aggression, antisocial behaviour, temper tantrums
4. Low IQ (e.g. learning difficulties, verbal and non-verbal reasoning problems, low language ability)
5. Coming from a 'broken home', where either the parents have separated or the young person is living separately for some reason away from the parents
5. Being a member of a poor family (as indicated by measures of socioeconomic status, housing stock in one's neighbourhood, parental and siblings employment status)
5. Experience of childhood abuse - emotional, physical, sexual, neglect or other maltreatment
5. Other family characteristics (e.g. high family stress, large family size, discord between parents)
5. Using drugs/alcohol
5. Ethnicity - youth from ethnic minorities had a greater risk of offending

Lipsey and Derzon (1998) found that, for children aged 6-11, the strength of the relationships between risk factors and violent offending were different. For example, having anti-social friends for 6-11 year olds was the weakest predictive factor of all those identified. For 12-14 year olds however, having anti-social friends was one of the strongest predictors of serious and violent offending. This means that we must be careful to relate research evidence to young people according to their age: what helps prevent violence in younger children may not do so in older children or teenagers. For other notes of caution about using predictive factors see the last section of this chapter.

Between ages 14 to 16, gang membership is a significant predictor of involvement in violence (Hawkins et al 1998). Having friends who commit crimes and acts of violence is also a predictor of the likelihood of gang involvement (Thornberry 1998). (Gangs are discussed in further sections below.)

### **Other risk factors**

As well as the risk factors mentioned above, other experiences in young people's lives increase their likelihood of themselves becoming violent. These experiences often occur for young people who live in the most deprived areas with high levels of social exclusion. (Chapter 2 examines further the relationship between neighbourhood disadvantage and violence by young people living in and around that neighbourhood.)

Living in a neighbourhood where there is violence makes it likely that at least some young people will actually see a violent act or will be victims of violence. Both these types of experience can have long lasting effects. Experiencing violence - either as a victim or witness - in fact increases the likelihood that young people will experience mental health problems such as depression, abuse drugs and alcohol or perform poorly at school. It also increases the likelihood of them being violent and carrying weapons (Patchin et al 2006, Sieger et al 2004).

Research has also highlighted that young people who experience multiple victimisation as traumatic often end up seeing the world as fundamentally unsafe (Cicchetti and Toth 1997) and perceive existence as lacking meaning. They may come to think that their own life could end at any time and therefore disregard how current actions will influence their future (Reebye et al 2000).

Research in the United States into the impact of adverse childhood experiences demonstrates the cumulative impact in adult life of experiences which include emotional, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, witnessing parental violence and/or drug abuse, family mental illness, parental separation or divorce or a member of a household being sent to prison (ACE 2009).

Different forms of parenting may act as risk or protective factors. Research in the US has found that low parental control and monitoring are associated with increased likelihood of gang involvement (Thornberry 1998). Better quality parenting, however, has been identified as a protective factor that reduces the risk of young people exposed to violence becoming violent themselves (Gorman-Smith et al 2004). By contrast, some American research has shown how parents may 'condone' their children resolving disputes violently because this accords with certain values associated with toughness and masculinity (Solomon et al 2008).

### **Risk factors as interacting**

Risk factors do not operate in isolation, but interact with one another in a complex set of social, economic and cultural circumstances. They therefore need to be understood in their relationships with other factors. For example, gangs have been shown to be associated with an increased risk of criminal behaviour (e.g. Thornberry 1998). However, membership of a gang in itself does not necessarily cause a young person to commit crime. Apart from the fact that 'gang' is an all-

encompassing term which covers all sorts of groupings and behaviour (see below), it is the involvement in certain activities, as well as the sharing of certain beliefs and values held by gang members, which may dispose them toward offending.

The more we can develop an understanding of the way risk factors interact, the better we may be able to understand how we can intervene to prevent violent offending using guns and knives. Qualitative research (explored in Chapter 3), which looks at young people's attitudes, experiences and feelings in the context of their daily lives, can shed light on the reasons why people join gangs, carry weapons and why they use them.

## **WHAT ABOUT KNIVES AND GUNS SPECIFICALLY?**

Whilst it is relatively straightforward for researchers to identify the risk factors which are likely to play a role in future offending by young people, difficulties arise in predicting specific *types* of offending. Predicting the likelihood of young people committing some sort of offence is much easier than being able to say what that offence will be.

In any attempt at predicting behaviour, a key issue is the extent of such behaviour in the population. If certain behaviour was carried out by 90% of the population, it would be easy to predict, since nearly everybody would be behaving in that way. Violent offending is relatively rare and therefore is likely to be harder to predict. This difficulty in prediction is likely to be worsened for girls and young women, where the occurrence of violence tends to be lower than that for boys and young men (Monahan et al 2001).

Knife and gun crimes form specific categories of violent crime and are therefore rarer than occurrences of violence generally. This means that such complex actions are still less prevalent in society and therefore more difficult to predict.

Some predictive research has however been carried out in the US, where it was found that strong predictors of weapon carrying include having been shot at, threatened or injured, being involved in drug dealing and having the belief that their parents did not care about them (Kingery et al 1999).

Research also shows that those who carry weapons are likely to become victims themselves. In fact, many of the risk factors for being in a gang and carrying a gun were also risk factors for being shot (see e.g. Loeber, Kalb and Huizinga 2001). In the UK, a study of shootings in Manchester (Bullock and Tilley 2002) found that both perpetrators and victims of gun crime tended to be black males, with criminal records and often a previous history of involvement in gun crime.

### **The significance of 'gangs'**

Discussion of serious, weapon-involved violence raises the question of the role of gangs as facilitators of criminal involvement and escalators of violence. A range of

American research confirms that gang membership is itself a significant risk factor for increasing violence (Hagedorn 1988, Thornberry et al 1993, Klein 1995, Decker and Van Winkle 1996, Zimring 1998, Huff 2002, Braga 2003).

When considering gang related issues, however, it is important to bear in mind that both the general understanding of the concept of 'gangs', as well as their criminal significance in the British context, remains a contested issue. Understandings around what gangs are and what they do vary greatly, from simple groups of young people congregating in groups, to conducting minor nuisance behaviour, to involvement with organised criminal activities (see e.g. Hallsworth and Young 2008, Alexander 2008).

It is also important to remember that 'gang activities' are not the only reason behind gun and knife crime. Violence and injuries can be inflicted for a number of other reasons, including the perpetrator's mental health state or, in the context of public disorder incidents, especially in connection with the heavy consumption of alcohol in city centres at weekends.

See also Chapter 3 for a discussion on involvement with and exiting gangs.

## **USING PREDICTIVE TOOLS: A CAUTIONARY NOTE**

Agencies working in criminal justice use predictive tools which assess how likely somebody is to offend. Usually these tools are scales based on factors identified as having a statistical relationship with offending, such as those discussed above. Such predictive tools score a person according to how many and which risk factors are present in their lives.

However, there are problems with relying on statistical risk prediction alone, as they can lead to people being dealt with unfairly or can lead to potentially dangerous people being ignored or over looked. In reality, someone identified as likely to offend may not in fact actually do so; on the other hand, some people identified as low risk may go on to carry out a violent crime.

It is important to bear in mind that 'risk factors' are just that – factors which put some young people at 'risk' of carrying out violent behaviour. This does not mean that they will they inevitably do so. Derzon's findings exemplify the need for caution when trying to predict violence. Derzon (2001) carried out a meta-analysis combining and analysing the results of 60 prospective studies of juvenile violence. He examined whether it was possible to establish a link between early anti-social behaviour and later violence. Whilst predicting some violent crime, his findings did not support the notion of an underlying trait in individuals that would make them bound to commit violence in later life. Many of the young violent offenders in the studies had not previously exhibited any of the general risk factors for crime. Predictive methods had failed to identify 66% of those who later became violent. This calls into question the notion that there is an immutable progression toward violent behaviour for many young people who engage in antisocial behaviour.

Caution needs to be used, therefore, in trying to apply these types of predictive tools to groups of young people. Treating all those who have a high number of risk factors as potential criminals may actually draw more of them into the criminal justice system – what is referred to as ‘net widening’. There is no evidence that early intervention by the criminal justice system has a positive impact upon young people and, indeed, the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime found that early contact with the criminal justice system was a predictor of later, more serious contact (McAra and McVie 2007).

## Chapter 2: The impact of where children and young people live on their involvement in violent crime

- Research shows that high rates of crime and violence mostly affect disadvantaged areas.
- People living in deprived areas do not just experience higher levels of crime: they suffer from other problems, including poverty, low social capital and limited social mobility.
- The impact of multiple problems is cumulative: the more social problems are encountered by families and individuals, the more likely they are to remain in poverty.
- Violence in such areas is a complex product of the way opportunities and lives are shaped for people living there, and the way that people respond to their situation and to their environment.
- Violence causes fear and stress: it can result in various forms of mental illness and even lead to suicide. Being exposed to violence – as a victim or by seeing someone else being victimised – makes people more predisposed to commit violence themselves and to carrying weapons.
- Although research is still limited in this area, where young people live seems to affect whether they get involved in crime, and whether (or how difficult) it is to stop.
- Where neighbourhoods are threatening, weapon carrying may make young people feel safer. However, the presence of weapons may escalate conflicts and increase the likelihood of (serious) injuries.

**This chapter examines the characteristics of areas where violent crime is especially prevalent. As we have already noted, while violence is researched widely, specific forms such as gun and knife crime are much less so. Therefore some of the material reviewed in this chapter is based on a conception of violence that is inclusive (although not always explicitly so) of specific activities, like use of weapons. Such material is relevant to our understanding of the concentration of gun and knife crime in certain locations and neighbourhoods.**

Research has endeavoured to identify why and how certain (mainly urban) areas are associated with higher levels of crime than others. Studies typically compare measures of disadvantage (e.g. census data and unemployment statistics) in a certain area with local crime rates in order to establish a statistical relationship between the two. Some research also tries to link these measures to individual factors, in order to establish the ways in which social and economic disadvantage can impact on young people and make them more likely to offend.

Such research confirms that areas with higher levels of social disadvantage (for example, run down or poor quality housing, high levels of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, low rates of educational achievement and high levels of excluded pupils and truancy) also have higher rates of crime and violence than better off areas in the same city or locality. However, in these studies the link between social



disadvantage and violent crime is well established without being necessarily adequately explained.

Perhaps one reason for this is the nature of quantitative research. Variables in such research routinely draw on sources such as income levels or welfare take-up to use as proxy measures of socio-economic deprivation, or they utilise complex formulae to estimate the effects of living in a deprived area (Geronimus 2006). However, these are aggregate and abstract data and provide little insight into the lives of those individuals living in deprived neighbourhoods.

We have also not encountered research that specifically examines any causal relation between the nature of certain areas and the carrying and use of guns and knives amongst young people living there.

## **RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN 'NEIGHBOURHOODS' AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR**

We use the term 'neighbourhood' to refer to an area that people generally tend to recognise as an entity – this may well be an estate or a block or blocks of flats. (Some researchers talk about the 'environment' where people live, others may refer to a 'community'.) For young people, their locality – their 'endz', as some refer them to as, may be mapped out around a shared conception of what constitutes 'their' territory (Chandiramani 2008). But, however defined, the area which surrounds the places in which people live provides 'a transactional setting that influences individual behaviour and development both directly and indirectly' (Elliot et al 1996).

There have been concerns about high levels of crime in certain areas of towns and cities for over a hundred years (Mayhew 1865, Thrasher 1927, Shaw and McKay 1942, Morris 1957, Cloward and Ohlin 1960, Bottoms et al 1987, Davis 1990, Campbell 1993, Taylor et al 1996, Walklate and Evans 1999, Hayward 2004, St. Jean 2007). The high number of negative outcomes associated with areas with concentrated disadvantage alerts us to the impact that such deprivation has on the well being of those residents (Sampson 2004).

People living in deprived areas do not just experience higher levels of crime, but also suffer from other problems, including poverty, low social capital and limited social mobility. The impact of multiple problems is complex and cumulative: the more social problems are encountered by families and individuals, the more likely they are to remain in poverty (Department for Work and Pensions 2004). Many areas of concentrated deprivation comprise housing stock that was owned and administered by local councils – 'council estates'. Although originally intended to improve the lives of working class people, it has been argued that an unintended effect was 'the virtual ghettoization of some estates' (Ravetz 2001).

### **Neighbourhoods, economic conditions and social identities**

The ways localities respond to economic downturn and recession differ from place to place (Taylor et al 1996). Research has mainly focused on urban areas characterised by industrial decline and loss of industry – e.g. Hagedorn (1988)

describes the consequences of the loss in the late twentieth century of semi- and unskilled labour markets in what are now referred to as the 'Rustbelt' cities in the US. Conditions in those areas which no longer have access to employment have frequently deteriorated, with rising levels of social problems, increased crime and disorder and, more recently, the emergence of gangs and rising levels of violence.

Poverty and inequality have become entrenched in areas where, in the absence of employment or meaningful material assistance, involvement in various forms of crime may be one of the few ways to actually make a living (Elliott et al 1996). The lack of economic opportunities for young people has stimulated the growth in both the US and the UK of illegal economies around drugs, stolen goods and protection (Klein 1995, Braga 2003).

A UK study of convicted gun offenders concluded that illegal drug markets appear to 'significantly underpin the criminal economy [representing] the single most important theme in relation to the illegal use of firearms.' Violence levels connected to drug markets operations appeared to increase significantly 'towards the street (retail) end of the market' (Hales et al 2006).

Moreover, the masculine identities traditionally associated with jobs in heavy manufacturing or iron, steel or coal production become for some young people only primarily achievable through crime (Campbell 1993, Newburn and Stanko 1994, Hall 1997, Hall et al 2008). In communities suffering from 'capital disinvestment' and lack of social capital, young people are more likely to drift into 'cultural adaptations' that bring short term status and material benefits, but which longer term consequences include diminished life chances (Hagan 1994; see also James 1995 and Kramer 2000).

The 2006 UN Report on Violence Against Children noted:

*...physical violence between peers tends to be more common in urban areas characterized by lack of employment, education and social amenities and low standards of housing, where youthful and rapidly growing populations express frustration, anger and pent-up tension in fights and anti-social behaviour. Much of the violence involves personal disputes between friends and acquaintances, and is strongly associated with the use of drugs and alcohol. Where guns and other weapons are available, fights often lead to severe injuries and death.*  
(United Nations 2006: 20)

### **Territory**

Young people frequently complain of 'boredom', frustration and a lack of age-appropriate and affordable social and leisure facilities. They often describe a distrust of adults and authority figures. While neighbourhoods can generate loyalty and a sense of belonging (as in postcodes gang identifications), a recent study of young people in British cities has shown how territoriality can both compound disadvantage and social exclusion as well as promote conflict and violence. Thus, territoriality has a potential 'to block access to opportunities, to foment violence and to act as an escalator to more serious forms of crime, including involvement in criminal gangs' (Kintrea et al 2008).

Fear of leaving one's estate can also fundamentally restrict a young person's social and geographical horizons. A telling assessment of a young person's view of neighbourhood came from a young black man from the Prince's Trust being interviewed by members of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (at a seminar organised by the Committee in November 2008): 'These estates are like cages', he said.

For young people, being born into such areas is likely to offer them a narrower set of life-opportunities than for young people in more affluent areas. With limited options, few resources and little support, residents of such areas – especially young people, may feel that they have little hope of living a more comfortable life, like that perceived to be enjoyed by people outside their area or portrayed in the media.

There may be few recreational facilities locally and young people who go outside their area may be treated with suspicion, distrust or hostility by other young people they encounter there. Especially when they 'hang out' in groups, they may find themselves the object of police attention (Anderson et al 1994, Loader 1996, Measor and Squires 2000). To some extent this has now become part of official policy, with the introduction of dispersal orders, primarily targeted at young people gathering in public locations (Crawford and Lister 2007).

### **The effects of violence on a neighbourhood**

Violence, along with all the other negative aspects of living in deprived areas, tends to erode what researchers call 'collective efficacy' (Sampson and Raudenbush 1997), i.e. the capacity of a neighbourhood to manage itself. In a neighbourhood with 'collective capacity' people are more inclined to act in a collectively minded way: e.g. to stand up for others, to report crime to the police and to let wrongdoers know that someone is watching. In areas of concentrated deprivation, such informal mechanisms of control may be weak or absent. Research found that, controlling for a wide range of individual and neighbourhood characteristics, collective efficacy directly predicted lower rates of violence (Sampson and Raudenbush, op cit).

## **THE EFFECTS OF NEIGHBOURHOODS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S OFFENDING**

There is limited research evidence on the relationship between living in deprived areas and individuals' violence. The major reason for this would seem to be a polarisation of research focus: 'researchers interested in neighbourhood influences have generally not adequately measured individual and family influences, just as researchers interested in individual and family influences have generally not adequately measured neighbourhood influences' (Farrington 1993). Another reason lies in the difficulty in demonstrating that a deprived neighbourhood 'causes' those living in it to commit crime; it is extremely difficult to isolate the various elements that combined together constitute environmental facilitators to offending. In any area, young people will have different risk or protective factors (outlined in Chapter 1), different life experiences and different perceptions of their possible choices, actions and futures. These differences are likely to affect and mediate - positively or negatively - the experience of severe disadvantage.

The most pertinent research which covers this area tends to be in the form of longitudinal studies (see Glossary) – we outline some below.

Wikström and Loeber (2000) found evidence of the differential impact of neighbourhood effects in an analysis of data from the Pittsburgh Youth Survey. The research found that, for those young people who had a high number of risk factors, there was no discernible neighbourhood effect upon serious offending. However, young people who should have been better placed to stay out of trouble (because of protective factors, or of risk factors being balanced by protective factors, in their lives), nonetheless tended to become involved in serious offending, although starting at a later age: this was found to be a result of neighbourhood effects. This suggests that even for young people with many positive aspects in their lives, prolonged exposure to the various risk factors that are present in areas of concentrated deprivation may ultimately have a negative impact on behaviour.

Such findings are echoed in a study of delinquency in Edinburgh, where the main factor associated with whether a young person continued to offend or not was found to be the neighbourhood where the young person lived. 'Continuing to offend was more common in deprived neighbourhoods, whereas desistance was more common in advantaged ones. Also, desistance was less likely in neighbourhoods perceived to be disorderly, and where residents were dissatisfied with the neighbourhood' (Smith 2006:4).

Other indications that the urban environment can influence individuals' behaviour, in ways not reducible to individual characteristics, come from a large-scale longitudinal research project carried out in the United States (Lieberman 2007). The study involved repeated interviews with more than 6,000 young people and their caregivers, combined with a survey of almost 9,000 residents and systematic observation of social and physical disorder in 80 neighbourhoods. The main findings from this research were that young people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods were more likely to carry firearms illegally and those who had been exposed to violence were more likely to commit violence themselves. Importantly, the study also found that differences in offending patterns between different racial/ethnic groups were largely explicable in terms of neighbourhood and family: young people of different race/ethnicity who lived in similar neighbourhoods had similar patterns of offending (Lieberman 2007).

### **'Moving to Opportunity'?**

There is other evidence to suggest that crime may vary by area, due to individual responses to the areas in which they live. In The United States, the 'Moving to Opportunity' experiment enabled families in the experimental group to relocate to less disadvantaged areas. Researchers found that violence amongst young men and women aged between 15-25 who had been relocated as part of the experiment between 4 and 7 years previously initially fell. However, longer term results showed that the reduction in violence amongst young men was offset by an increase in property crime. For young women however, the results were more positive, showing a decrease in crime and also other outcomes linked to education, substance abuse and mental and physical health (Kling et al 2004).

These findings are an indication that the relationship between neighbourhood context and crime is considerably more complicated than it seems. Moving from

one area to another does not guarantee that the move will necessarily result in better opportunities than before, nor that the inclination to commit crime among those moving will diminish – although in this case, the *type* of crime committed by young males, while increasing in frequency, changed from violence to property crime.

The different outcomes for young women in ‘Moving to Opportunity’ are not unlike those achieved following the adoption of educational integrationist ‘bussing’ policies in some US cities. Whilst some of the African American girls prospered, the experiment seemed to reinforce the gang affiliations of many of (early teenage) African-American males, who clubbed together for self-protection against white student majorities or began to avoid school attendance altogether. Moving the young people to new areas and new schools in different communities fractured the young people’s links with their own families and communities (thereby weakening important protection factors) and left them in schools where they were perceived, at best, as unwelcome outsiders. At the same time these policies also contrived to increase substantially the role of their own peer groups in their lives, a widely acknowledged youth delinquency risk factor (Hagedorn 1988).

### **Exposure to violence**

As we saw in Chapter 1, violence in neighbourhoods is a risk factor for young people. Research shows that when young people are exposed to interpersonal violence in their neighbourhoods, that experience can have a damaging effect on them. This exposure may be witnessing someone else being a victim or themselves being attacked or injured. The greater the exposure, the greater is the risk of this exposure doing harm to young people’s well-being (Sieger et al 2004).

Being exposed to violence - either as a victim or witnessing others being the victims of violence - increases the likelihood of some young people committing violent acts themselves (Patchin et al 2006, Sieger et al 2004, McGee 2003). This could happen for a variety of reasons. For example, where people fear attacks by others in the neighbourhood, they may resort to carrying knives or even firearms. Simply having these weapons means that if these young people get into conflict with others, there may be a violent outcome. It is also possible that some young people who have witnessed attacks on friends or relatives arm themselves in order to get revenge or for protection.

Being involved in violence is also a risk factor for being a victim of violence as well (Loeber et al 2001, Bullock and Tilley 2002). Research outlines that victims of gun or knife crime have very similar characteristics to the perpetrators (see e.g. Squires et al 2008). A large-scale longitudinal survey of gun crime victims in the US showed that many victims were also serious and violent offenders (Loeber et al 2001). The authors suggest that being victimised leads some young people into a cycle of retaliatory behaviour – ‘tit-for-tat’ shootings that sustain and prolong violence between rival groups.

### **Weapons and neighbourhoods**

Knowing that other people are carrying weapons makes young people consider new and different ways of seeing their surroundings. Where you go, who you talk to, how you talk to them – are all surrounded by the need to evaluate and consider risk and threat. Similarly, in an area where reputation may be very important to the way people see themselves - as well as how others see them - that reputation

needs to be preserved if challenged and 'losing face' becomes something to be avoided at all costs.

Often the only way to preserve a local reputation is through being violent and using weapons (Hales et al 2006, Heale 2008, Pitts 2008, Sandberg 2008). Similarly, as the survey results considered in Chapter 3 show, carrying a knife may appear to make sense to a teenager worried about being attacked, especially in an area where stabbings or threats with knives are common. However, while protection may be an initial motivation for weapon carrying, 'aggression may be the result' (Lemos 2004).

The dynamics of local street youth culture (allied with the fact that knives carried for self-defence will certainly be regarded as 'offensive weapons' should a young person be stopped and searched by the police) are such that the presence of weapons may serve to escalate conflicts and increase the likelihood of serious injuries (Fagan and Wilkinson 1998, Marfleet 2008). It can also create a kind of vicious circle: 'knife carrying by [some] teenagers who are seen as a threat, appears to directly influence the likelihood that others will carry in response' (Marfleet, 2008: 84).

Associating with people who frequently carry weapons as a means of protection may feel useful to some young people but it can also involve them in violent situations as a result (Irwin 2004).

In areas with a large number of young people carrying guns, the ways they behave with one another change. Arguments that might have resulted in a fist fight or scuffle rapidly become something much worse when the participants can pull out firearms to settle the matter. Dealing with someone who has disrespected you in some way can end in murder. Guns escalate the violence between young people who carry them. When a rival group shoot a member of another group, the other group are likely to want to retaliate in the same way – or worse.

The increase in weapon carrying in an area also tends to affect how other crimes are carried out. Robbery is made easier with a gun because people are less likely to argue when it is pointed at them. People committing other crimes may well go armed 'just in case'. Drug dealing is frequently carried out whilst carrying a weapon and, since those selling and buying drugs tend to have a low amount of trust in one another, violence can soon erupt in disagreements over transactions (Squires 2000).

We discuss these issues more extensively in Chapter 3, which reviews qualitative data.

## Chapter 3: How young people's relationships, perceptions and choices affect their involvement in gun and knife crime

- Qualitative and ethnographic research shows that peer groups are significant in promoting and facilitating much youth offending. This makes it important to understand the nature of young people's relationships with their peers, the ways in which violence is produced within a group and the meanings attached to it.
- Notions of 'street credibility' and 'respect' can become very significant to young people in deprived and excluded communities and who may lack legitimate access to other forms of status achievement. An alternative value system can be developed which structures relationships, behaviour and language.
- Yet this 'street social capital' can also be a trap, for as it bonds young people closer to their peer groups it can also alienate them from the wider community and societal values.
- While some research suggests that learning the 'code of the street' can ensure that young people are streetwise and therefore safer, there is also evidence to show that acting to maintain one's local reputation and the 'respect' of others can provoke conflict and violence.
- Similar dilemmas pertain to young people's perceptions of self-protection strategies. For while virtually all surveys produce the response that young people carry weapons to protect themselves in areas they perceive to be unsafe, it is precisely the presumption that others are armed that produces fear and insecurity in the first place. A vicious circle is thereby established.
- The perceptions of risk and fears for personal safety also cement peer group loyalties and can foster hostilities with perceived rivals. In turn this can provoke attitudes condoning anticipatory or proactive violence – '*bust him before he can bust me*'.
- In this light, policies to disarm weapon carriers are restricting themselves to symptoms, unless they also tackle the fears and insecurities articulated by young people.
- Focussing upon the weapons themselves may therefore prove something of a distraction. The concentrations of youth violence in particular areas and the young people's perceived need for them and, above all, their willingness to use them ought to be the policy focus.

**This chapter outlines some of the major themes that emerge from qualitative studies (as well as some representative surveys) into young people's perceptions of their identity and place in the social realities that surround them. It aims to set the use of guns and knives into context and at making sense of the 'weaponised relations' which some young people experience as almost inevitable in their daily interactions and surroundings. By looking at what we can learn from qualitative studies, the chapter also aims at completing the picture which has emerged from the quantitative studies which have been the main focus of Chapters 1 and 2.**

Qualitative research and social survey methods enquire into how people make sense of the world, of the people around them, of the environments in which they live and how these influence the decisions they take. Without an explanation from the actors themselves it is arguable that we cannot really know why someone may have performed an action, made a choice or committed a crime. Even if we know about collective risk or protection factors, and may be able to calculate the likelihood of any given individual in a certain group making a particular choice, the reasons given by individuals help to complete our picture.

## **PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

Most youth offending is undertaken in the context of groups and/or with co-offenders. Researchers (e.g. Zimring 1998) have argued that such group contexts are essential to the understanding of youth offending and antisocial behaviour.

A good deal of youth peer group research has revealed how group members urge one another on to demonstrate their bravado, masculinity, or 'coolness' by committing offences or undertaking risky behaviours. The more reflective respondents might also add that they were attempting to impress their mates.

In a 'peer group' context it would then be possible for a researcher to conclude that certain narratives about violence, risk taking, status and 'respect' when acknowledged and given credibility by others have the power to create conflict, violence or offending behaviour. Some gang literature, for example, refers to rituals of initiation (e.g. drug deliveries, weapon 'minding') whereby young people have to prove their worth or reliability. In a similar sense, demonstrating a command of 'the rules' of the street/gang context can work to dissuade others from challenge one – although it can also be the case that confident displays by one young person can be seen by others as a challenge (Stewart et al 2008).

'Youth' is generally understood as a period of rapid social, physical, and emotional change when a number of vital 'social transitions' (Furlong and Cartmel 1997) are undertaken. Young people have left (and are in some respects keen to leave) the securities of childhood but have not yet achieved the resources (confidence, maturity, status, strength, independence/ or judgement) of adulthood. Group formation is seen as offering a number of supports to young people, from companionship to protection (Corrigan 1978). Especially in disadvantaged areas these resources may be hard to come by and the first 'gang' studies (Thrasher 1927 to Hagedorn 1988) emphasised the support and protection characteristics of youth street socialising – safety in numbers.



The attitudes of adults, compounded by criminal justice policies and antisocial behaviour management strategies, may contrive to further exclude and restrict young people; in turn they may be turned inwards to their own peer associations. A comparative study of 23 European countries found that teenagers under 16 in the UK spend the most time outside their home and in the company of peers.

*The combination of less time with parents plus few affordable or easily accessible alternatives of adult-led activities has resulted in some of the most-at-risk groups of young people being “freer” to socialize unsupervised with peers in public areas than in the past.*  
(Margo and Stevens 2008: 20)

This finding, combined with Zimring's earlier observation about the essential 'group context' of juvenile offending suggests a possible potent mixture of area deprivation, social exclusion and youth withdrawal. This combination becomes all the more acute when one takes into account that an estimated 12% of 14-16 year-olds in England and Wales claim to be members of a 'gang' (Sharp et al 2006).

### **Growing out of crime and exiting gangs**

The term 'juvenile delinquency' infers the partly transitory nature of youth offending: put simply, most young people simply 'grow out' of crime. This is borne out by figures which show that it is young men under 25 which are the most represented group among offenders (see e.g. Goldson 2000, Rutherford 1992).

Academic attention has also focused on 'exit' dynamics in gang membership among young people. Sanchez-Jankowski (1991) suggested six routes by which people left gangs: (i) aging out, (ii) dying, (iii) going to prison, (iv) getting jobs, (v) moving to other organisations (vi) or a pattern of declining involvement as the gang itself divides or diminishes. No significant pattern of gang desistance emerged however from research. Although a number of event types (getting shot, getting arrested, death of a close family member or friend) tended to prompt 'exit', the research findings were rather few and far between (Decker and Lauritson 2002).

Once involved in gang and/or violence and/or weapons, young people may have a hard time stopping such behaviour. In an interesting (US) study of re-offending (not confined to gang members), Maruna (2001) interviewed 150 young men after they were released from prison. He found that those most likely to stay out of trouble after release were those who were able to maintain a constant vision of a crime-free life and to see their criminal behaviour as being something which they had done once but which was now no longer a part of their lives. The men acknowledged their wrong doing but were now focused on leading crime-free lives. Characteristic of those who had ceased offending was a strong sense of being in control of their destiny. Those who were less positive and could see no way out of a life involving offending and who could not imagine that things would change, were more likely to reoffend. Maruna's non-recidivists were described as being optimistic and positive, even when the researcher himself could see little reasons for such a positive outlook.

In areas where a gang is dominant, gang members are likely to react badly to someone who says they wish to leave (Decker and Lauritson 2002). Additionally, a young person may not wish to leave a gang which provides a sense of belonging and also of having someone to “watch your back”.

Punishment alone is unlikely to deter gang members: being wanted and apprehended by the police and imprisonment can add to gang members' reputations and in turn reinforce their attachment to the gang. Deterrent and enforcement led initiatives aimed to suppress gangs in the US have been found to isolate gang members by detaching their members from mainstream social institutions (e.g. by imprisoning them). Police enforcement actions tend to cultivate an 'oppositional culture' within the gangs which 'encourages bravado' and 'incentivises crime': this in turn 'legitimises violence' in gang rivalries and in battles with the police and authorities (Klein 1995).

US research since the mid 1980s has also consistently argued (see e.g. Hagedorn 1988) that the post-industrial society, the collapse of lower-skilled labour markets and thriving local drug economies have conspired to make gang exit strategies more difficult and demanding. Gang membership has traditionally been understood as being on the whole a transitional phenomenon, associated with adolescence and 'rites of passage'; there were few old gang members (Thornberry et al 1993, Esbensen and Huizinga 1993). Instead now, 'gangs' seem to have taken on a less age-limited and a more economically-motivated character: 'the gang has become an institutionalised feature of poverty communities': it serves to reproduce a particular lifestyle which can be economically viable. As a result it has been argued that young people – gang members – no longer 'mature out' of crime (Hagedorn 1988).

Given the relative novelty of 'street gangs' in the UK, issues of exit are likely to be the least well researched (and at the time of writing no systematic UK studies have been discovered).

## **YOUTH CULTURE(S)**

Youth cultures are the product of many factors: global media influences, resistances to adult authority, reactions to particular social and public policy pressures, collective experiences of policing, education and family, and patterns of choices and preferences made by young people in a range of localities and neighbourhoods. There is not a single youth culture – and, despite media hype - it is certainly not founded upon any given weapon (Presdee, 2000), but it forms part of the context within which young people negotiate their identities, meanings and relative autonomy. It contains a series of resources they draw upon to negotiate the dilemmas and choices they face; in resorting to it, referencing it in their actions, language, behaviour and aspirations young people also reproduce it.

Many commentators (e.g. Hebdige 1979) have argued that youth sub-cultures constitute a kind of 'resistance' and develop in reaction to adult mainstream society. Some of the early studies of gangs/youth peer groups fall into this 'tradition', with 'gangs' or youth peer groups seen as offering a kind of solidarity

and security in the face of adult authority, exclusion or hostility. This was especially so in some of the early youth street-gang studies which situated gang and youth culture development in the context of urban social geography, immigration and demographic settlement patterns (Thrasher 1927).

These ethnic, mobility and settlement dynamics of youth culture development remain relevant today: contemporary preoccupations with gangs, weapons and violence certainly centre more directly upon ethnic minority youth than white youth. One interesting phenomenon here has been the enthusiasm with which young white males have taken up the language, styles, postures, movements and behaviour typically associated with young black men: perceptions or stereotypes around 'blackness' seeming to imply a 'hardness' which may be worth emulating (Sandberg 2008).

More recent work (Pitts 2007 and 2008, Hagedorn 2008) refers to a 'globalisation' of youth cultural forms which has travelled in the wake of a commodified youth media marketplace which includes the TV, radio, music and film, video-gaming, and fashion industries. We do not have to subscribe to the familiar condemnation of 'gangsta rap' music to point to this important cultural relation.

## **ECONOMIC AND OTHER MOTIVATIONS**

Commentators have highlighted that the use and symbolic meaning of weapons among young people are embedded in and symptomatic of macro-system issues that need to be taken into account: the effects of poverty, poor education, unemployment, substance abuse, racism, the glamourised portrayal of violence in many sections of the cultural realm (Rushforth and Flannery 1999) – and how these are mediated by young people into their own norms, values and lifestyles.

Cultural factors therefore need to be understood within a wider web of motivational factors in young people joining gangs and carrying weapons. For example, it is arguable that economic decisions are being taken by young people when taking on unlawful activities or criminal careers, e.g. when participating in drug dealing. This can be understood in the context of their social positions of disadvantage and relative deprivation. (See also Chapter 2.)

## **CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Weapon carrying tends to be especially prominent in the more deprived and excluded of young people with previous experiences of victimisation and living in high crime areas.

As victimologists have known for a while (Mawby and Walklate 1994, Goodey 2004, Lee 2006), personal perceptions of risk – like the fear of crime – result from influences other than the *actual* risks people face and they have to be addressed by other forms of policy. People act in accordance with these perceptions and experience the consequences. Young people carry weapons because they think it makes them feel safer; in a culture which stresses the virtues of individual self-

reliance this should come as no surprise. One consequence, especially in areas where violence and conflict are not uncommon, is a higher rate of weapon-involved violence and injury.

Fagan and Wilkinson (2002) pick up this point about youth gangs, violence and weapon use (admittedly in a deprived, inner-urban, US context, where rates of youth violence have reached chronic proportions). They describe a 'developmental ecology of violence': only those who develop the abilities, ruthlessness, willingness – or peer group supports – and acquire the weapons to meet force with force are likely to survive on-street encounters.

This research contrasts, to some extent, with Anderson's work on the *Code of the Street*. While adoption of some 'streetwise' behaviours may help young people to avoid trouble, other correlates of that behaviour may make them appear as a challenge (Anderson 1999, Stewart et al 2006).

Young people mentally prepare themselves to take extreme action (either evasive, defensive or aggressive) to cope with what they perceive to be a hostile and dangerous environment. According to Fagan and Wilkinson's study, beliefs about weapons and the perceived dangers of everyday life are internalized since early childhood and 'shape the cognitive frameworks for interpreting events and actions during adolescence'. In turn, such a mental landscape 'shapes and highly values scripts skewed toward violence' (Fagan and Wilkinson 2002).

This 'ecology of violence' produces a 'get him before he gets me' mentality or, the 'shoot first and ask questions later' approach. As Pitts argues, now discussing the British context, 'young people come to occupy a far bleaker, 'alternative cognitive landscape', developing distrust and what is sometimes referred to as a 'soldier mentality', characterised by a heightened sensitivity to threat and a constant preparedness for action (Sampson and Lauritson 1994). And this, as Decker and Van Winkle (1996) have demonstrated, tends to isolate gang members from the social and cultural mainstream to the extent that they can only feel at ease in the neighbourhood gang' (Pitts 2008). Hales et al (2006) further discuss other 'weapon effects' related to living in dangerous areas where many other people are presumed to be carrying weapons and likely to act in threatening or aggressive ways.

### **Firearms as facilitators for violence**

Researchers have observed that firearms tend to increase the morbidity of violence because they 'make some attacks possible that simply would not occur without firearms' (Zimring and Hawkins 1987) or they make 'incidents much more lethal than they otherwise would be' (Alba and Messner 1995). The availability of handguns in the US has been seen as a facilitator of the high level of lethal violence there (Zimring and Hawkins, op cit).

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.

(This 'retaliation' scenario also featured in a number of the case studies discussed by Fagan and Wilkinson 1998, 2002).

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 Hales et al (2006) call a 'shoot or be shot' scenario, when even trivial precipitating incidents (particularly those in which a relevant peer audience is present) may result in fatal violence. Such scenarios are 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 (Hales et al, op cit).

*"...you just have to bust [shoot] in their face before they bust at you."*

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

(from Hales et al 2006)

### **What about knives?**

Although young men tend to claim that they carry knives 'for protection', the presence of weapons may serve to escalate and perpetuate conflicts and increase the likelihood of serious injuries (Fagan and Wilkinson 1998).

Protection and self defence may be an initial motivation for weapon carrying, but they also establish a potentially fatal vicious circle and networks of social relations from which, over the longer term, young people find it difficult to extricate themselves. Although some claim that carrying weapons is an attempt at presenting a tough exterior to the world (i.e. adopting what is called the 'code' of street behaviour), others have argued that this very behaviour can be perceived as threatening, challenging and as likely to instigate violence as it is to deter it (Stewart et al 2008).

While protection may be an initial motivation for weapon carrying, 'aggression may be the result' (Lemos 2004). According to what has been referred to as a form of 'replicative externality', 'knife carrying by [some] teenagers who are seen as a threat, appears to directly influence the likelihood that others will carry in response' (Marfleet, 2008:84).

## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THE CHOICES THEY MAKE**

### **Risks and dangers**

Young people polled or surveyed by researchers often report their concerns about threats, risks and dangers in their immediate neighbourhood or community (see e.g. Figure 1). Journeys to and from school are often particularly difficult and can lead to taking complicated routes to avoid threatening areas or even to truancy. The Metropolitan Police head of Operation Blunt in London has stated that the period 3pm to 7pm, just after the end of school, is the peak period for knife crime

incidents<sup>1</sup>. Research has also identified school journeys as particularly problematic for young people (Hayden 2008), implying that initiatives focused on making schools more secure and weapon-free may not be addressing the main issue, which concerns journeys to and from school. Broadhurst et al (2008), undertaking a survey on behalf of the teacher's union NASUWT produced accounts from some young people about the protective and self-defensive practices they followed on the way to school.

*"It's not a bad thing to bring a weapon into school. You might get attacked on the way to school, on the way back. It's protection."*  
(in Broadhurst et al 2008)

### **Carrying weapons and confidence in the police**

The reasons for using a weapon can be many: 'challenges to identity status, jealousy/competition over females, self-defence, robbery, drug business transactions, revenge or retaliation, defence of others, rumours (he said, she said), territory or neighbourhood honour, money or debts, unfair play (e.g. sports and gambling situations), misunderstandings, and fun or recreation.' (Wilkinson and Fagan 2002a)

Some people have weapons to help them carry out particular crimes or to protect their criminal activities – such as robbery or drug dealers – sometimes in the context of a 'gang'. In one US study, young gang members interviewed said they thought that carrying a gun offered better protection than the police. Even so, these youths also overwhelmingly thought it was wrong to shoot someone to get respect or material gain, but tended to think that shooting was more justified in cases where they or their families had been hurt or offended (Goldberg and Schwabe, 2000).

Surveys in the UK tend to confirm an emerging picture of weapon carrying by some young people, socially excluded young people noticeably more than others. Notions of protection and self-defence appear to predominate in accounts of weapon carrying, however dangerous this may prove to be for those who do so.

*"I can protect myself with a knife or a gun. I would rather be arrested than dead."*  
(Broadhurst et al 2008)

MORI has been surveying school age children about their weapon carrying since 2002. Their more recent work suggests around 30% of young people carry knives sometimes. At the same time, a large proportion of the knives carried by young people are penknives, although there are important distinctions between the patterns of knife carrying by children in education and those 'excluded' from school. Only nine percent of those in school said that they had carried flick knives, whereas 30% of those excluded from school claimed to have done so (MORI 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> Oral evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee on knife crime, 17 November 2008

The Home Office Offending Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) began to consider these issues in 2004 and 2005. This survey specifically asked young people whether they had carried knives during the past year either 'for protection, for use in crime or in case they got into a fight'. Only four per cent of young people admitted to doing so (Budd et al 2005).

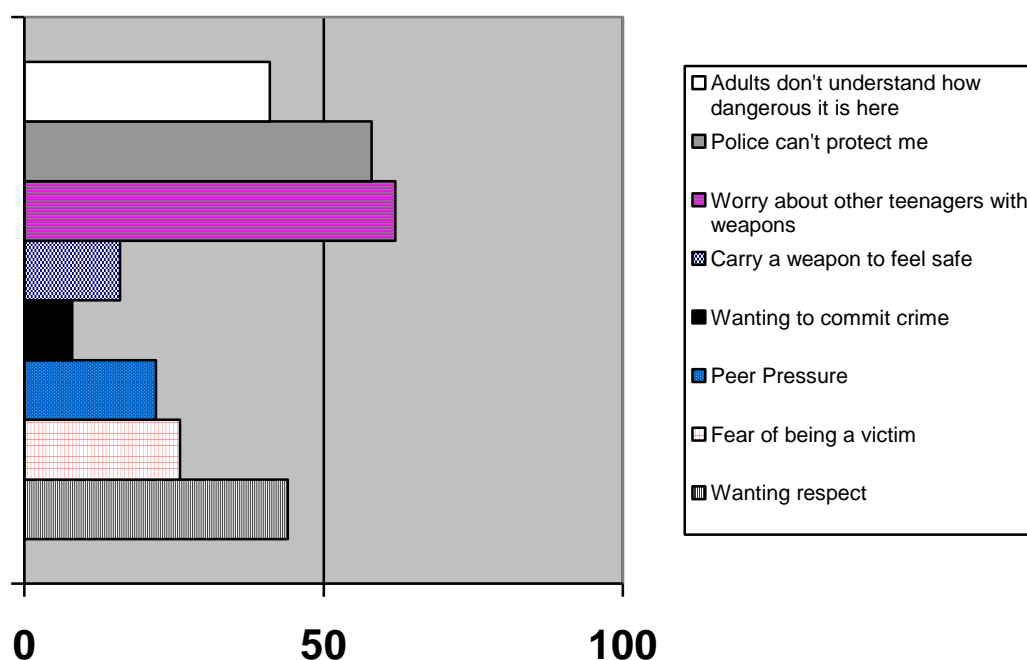
The following year the OCJS sought more information about youthful knife carrying, its nature and frequency. They found that 4% had carried a knife in the previous 12 months, with 16-17 year olds (at 7%) being the most likely to do so. And of those who carried knives 41% had carried a penknife, 29% a flick-knife and 10% a kitchen knife. Most of the knife carrying young people did so only rarely, 'once or twice' in the past twelve months and only 16% claimed to do so 'ten times or more'. As many as 85% of those who had carried knives said that they did so in order to protect themselves but only 7% said they had used their knives to threaten anyone and only 2% said they had used knives to injure someone (Wilson et al 2006).

By 2004 a number of surveys were beginning to fill in some of the blanks relating to young people's motivations for weapon carrying. One of the first of such reports concluded that fear of crime and experiences of victimisation 'played the most significant role in a young person's decision to carry a knife or weapon' (Lemos 2004). The report was entitled *Fear and Fashion* and also drew attention to a range of more diffuse cultural pressures influencing young people's choices, including exposure to media violence, music videos and computer games, an 'almost inherent' fascination of young boys with weapons, the desire to assert strong gender identities, and aspirations towards street credibility and 'respect'.

The 2007 London BBC survey went a little further to explore these weapon carrying motivations. The survey covered 500 young people living in five boroughs (Brent, Croydon, Hackney, Lambeth, Southwark), where weapon-involved violence had been most evident. It was based upon a closed questionnaire in which young people were asked about their fears, concerns and preoccupations and their weapon carrying behaviour. The results are presented in the following Figure 1. (We are not making a strong claim for the quality of this research; rather, it provides a broad indication of youth attitudes. Yet, by virtue of its focus on the five London boroughs seemingly most affected by knife and gun crime, its general conclusions are worth noting.)

**Figure 1: BBC London Youth Survey: Weapon carrying attitudes and motivations, the whole sample**

(Source: ComRes 2007)



16% of the 500-strong sample agreed with the statement “sometimes I have to carry a weapon to feel safe” (not just knives). The survey also went on to enquire about the respondents’ experiences of weapon-based victimisation (just over a third had either experienced knife based victimisation directly, or knew of someone else who had but only 20% likewise of gun crime), their intimidation by gangs (claimed by 21% of the sample), fears about other people in their neighbourhood carrying weapons (a comment made by 62%) and their doubts about the ability of the police to provide adequate protection (claimed by 58%). Around 45% of those polled in the BBC London Youth Survey did not think that adults had any understanding of how dangerous young people felt their residential area was. Fear was allied with a distrust and lack of confidence in the police and other adult authorities.

In addition to ‘lack of confidence’, deprived and excluded communities as a whole may tend to share anti-police attitudes, which can be compounded for the young by a sense that they are routinely ‘over-controlled and under-protected’ (Loader 1996). Other studies report the existence of ‘no-grassing’ rules, sometimes sustained by threats, intimidation or reprisals (Hales et al 2006, Pitts 2007, Heale 2008). These sub-cultures of anti-police sentiment may be reinforced by having experienced some of the least satisfactory forms of ‘community’ policing. For more information about issues of legitimacy around police activities targeted at specific communities or areas, see Chapter 4.

All the surveys explored here confirm significantly lower rates of weapon carrying by young women - although there is anecdotal evidence to the effect that women are sometimes (both willing or unwilling) participants in the concealment of weapons.



## Chapter 4: Anti-guns and anti-knives interventions

- There are a variety of anti-knife (especially) and anti-gun crime initiatives currently being undertaken in the UK. Many follow a 'hot spot' approach, focusing on specific areas and at risk youth.
- Despite the wealth of anti-knife crime initiatives being carried out in the UK, there is very little research about their impact on knife use and carrying by young people and very few interventions are independently assessed. The only evaluations so far which have been carried out at scientific level show the success of hospital based, nurse counselling programmes, but these measure reductions in alcohol abuse (admittedly one of the causes behind violence) rather than in injuries caused by knives and other weapons.
- Most research about gun carrying and use comes from the US. The majority of firearms programmes studied in the US have not been subject to the most rigorous, quasi-scientific validity tests (experimental, controlled trials with comparison groups). Of those who have undergone such rigorous analysis, none have shown significant long term reductions in youth gun violence.
- Nonetheless, some strategies appear to have positive impacts. Hot spot approaches are promising in reducing gun violence among young people, but are short term in nature and effect. They may also suffer from issues of legitimacy among local communities, depending on how they are handled.
- Evidence from the US also shows that multi-agency, multi-focus strategies are more successful than single-focus interventions in combating gun violence among young people. Interventions which are locally based and combine both prevention and suppression approaches by a variety of agencies working in co-operation are more effective than single interventions by agencies working in isolation.
- There is an absence of clear evidence about whether we need to tailor interventions specifically to the issue of guns and knives. It seems important to be addressing the factors which motivate some young people's desire, or perceived need, for weapons. Addressing the violence, victimisation and risk that affect their lives would seem an essential starting point.

**In this Chapter we provide an outline of current policies and interventions in the UK. We then examine the best international research evidence available about the impact of anti-guns and anti-knives interventions (or anti-weapons more generally) on young people's attitudes and behaviour.**

## **CURRENT UK INITIATIVES**

A spate of killings of teenagers and children in London and other inner cities in the last few of years has sparked off significant public anxiety and media attention, which in turn have precipitated a wealth of initiatives to tackle gun and knife crime among young people. Such highly publicised tragic events have also raised concerns that violent crime among young people is rising. However, evidence seems to indicate that this is not a uniform problem around the UK, but tends to be concentrated in certain, especially urban, locations (Squires et al 2008).

Current anti-knife and gun policies in the UK draw on a 'hot spots' theoretical framework (see below for details) as they target areas identified as being at particular risk of violence. For example, the Government's Tackling Knives Action Programme is focused on ten areas – see below. The Tackling Gangs Action Programme, which targeted gang-related firearms offences, focused on four police force areas (London, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester). Anti-knife operations (e.g. Operation Blunt, Operation Shield) have also been concentrated on areas where (young) people gather and crime tends to occur, like transport intersections or in city centres at night during weekends.

In **Scotland**, the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is a national police body which targets all forms of violent behaviour using a public health approach. Today, Scotland is the only country in the world which has adopted such an approach and the VRU are the only police members of the World Health Organization's Violence Prevention Alliance.

To achieve long-term violence reduction the VRU believes it is necessary to address societal and attitudinal aspects, and that closer links with health, education and parenting agencies are needed to change behaviour. A key part of its work is developing early years' initiatives that support parents and those involved in teaching young children. (Squires et al 2008)

Most of the violent crime in Scotland is concentrated in the Strathclyde Police Area and especially around Glasgow. VRU is trying out a number of initiatives to deal with the city's persistent knife crime problem (frequently involving young people's fights), including the anonymised recording of violence-related injuries at Glasgow Royal Hospital. Given that 25% of those treated for a serious facial injury in Glasgow dental hospital return for treatment for a second injury within a year, the VRU has set up a project in two maxillofacial units, whereby nurses offer counselling to patients to help them understand how they got the injury in the first place and to help prevent them coming back. (For evaluation results of this and similar hospital based interventions see section headed 'Knives and other weapons' below).

In **England and Wales**, the Home Office 'Tackling Violence Action Plan' and the 'Youth Crime Action Plan' (both 2008) include measures specifically targeting weapons, including:

- a presumption that anybody aged 16 and over who is found carrying knives should be prosecuted
- anyone using a knife 'should expect to receive a custodial sentence'
- home visits and letters to parents of young people whom intelligence suggests carry weapons, 'bringing children's behaviour to their parent's attention and making them understand their responsibilities', plus a confidential helpline for advice
- providing the police with portable knife arches and search wands, with a specific focus on ten 'hotspot' areas (London, Essex, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, Merseyside, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, Thames Valley) (Home Office 2008b)
- a £3 million anti-knife campaign (using billboards and web-based resources like Bebo and YouTube) and provision for workshops on the dangers of weapons
- new controls on deactivated firearms.

The Government is also implementing a 'Tackling Knives Action Programme' (TKAP), launched in June 2008 and due to run until March 2009 and to deliver 'tough enforcement combined with education, prevention work (Youth Justice Board 2008a) and information campaigns'. It is also targeted to ten areas in England and Wales and counts among its initiatives the introduction of after-school patrols and dedicated police officers in schools (intended to promote safety and work with young people at risk and part of the Safer School Partnerships programme, which is outlined below) (Home Office 2008c). A monitoring programme is under way at the time of writing and findings are planned to be published in spring 2009<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Correspondence from the Home Office, 1 December 2008

## **Policy and evidence**

The Government announced in October 2008 that 'over 2,200 knives have been seized following targeted stop and search operations'. However, it is not clear what impact, if any, stop and search and other seizures have on levels of carrying and use. Research sponsored by the Home Office cast doubt on the effectiveness of stop and searches in reducing violence, and concluded that police actions alone are unlikely to have a major impact on the carrying of knives (Brookman et al 2003).

Other measures used to reduce knife supply have included reminding retailers of their obligations not to sell knives to minors and knife amnesties. Although it is arguable that amnesties have an awareness-raising function, no evidence is available about whether they have an impact on changing attitudes or behaviour, or on reducing crime (Eades et al 2007).

Anti-knife policy has been marked by increased punitiveness. Anyone aged 16 or over who is caught carrying a knife is now 'likely to face criminal charges' and 'now for the first time, everyone over the age of 16 who is found carrying a knife can expect to be prosecuted and those under 16 can be expected to be prosecuted on a second offence' (HM Government 2008:6). Previously, first-time offenders under 18 tended to be given a caution (Home Affairs Committee 2008).

However, research evidence (e.g. Lipsey and Wilson 1998; TFCPS 2005) indicates that a 'zero tolerance' approach to weapon possession/punitiveness is ineffective in reducing crime or changing attitudes – see also Chapter 5. Moreover, putting (more) young people into custody seems ineffective: Ministry of Justice (2008) figures show that those released from custody have the highest re-offending rates of all young offenders who have been processed by the criminal justice system.

During the course of our research we have come across a large number of locally based initiatives (by Crime Reduction Disorder Partnerships, YOTs, volunteers, schools and other organisations) implementing central government guidance and being piloted or undertaken in order to affect young people who carry weapons or are involved in gangs. These include educational and recreational programmes, social marketing campaigns, police workshops and are intended to increase awareness of the dangers and implications of carrying weapons (e.g. stART2, Be Safe, No To Knives).

However, what is striking is that the vast majority of these initiatives have not been independently evaluated, and most have not been evaluated at all. In some cases, initiatives are too recent and evaluations are therefore premature; in others, this lack is due to budgetary restrictions/absence of funding. Independent evaluations should provide rigorous and impartial assessments: they seem particularly important in helping establish whether new strategies can claim to be successful, and the degree (if any) of their impact on levels of gun or knife crime.

## **RESEARCH ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND GUNS**

Most of the research about gun use by young people and interventions to control it comes from the United States (US). This is not surprising, given the scale of ownership of firearms in the country and the high levels of young people killed by guns. It has been estimated that around 45% (52 million) of US households legally own at least one gun. This contrasts with less than 5% of households in England and Wales and in Scotland (Squires 2000). The availability of guns seems likely to have an impact on young people's access to and use of them. For example, a US national survey of high school students found that family and friends were mainly where young people obtain their guns; only 5% asked someone else to buy a gun for them from legal or illegal sources (Sheley and Wright 1998).

### **Some notes of caution**

A report by the US National Academy of Sciences indicates that, although violence due to guns leads to the deaths of tens of thousands of people in the US annually, key intervention policies such as gun ownership laws and strategies for firearms education are based on 'poorly gathered or incomplete data and badly designed trials'. There are 'few established facts' about the effectiveness of gun control or educational programmes intended to steer young people away from firearms (Coghlan and Cohen 2004).

As a result of our extensive searches, we can confirm that although a great number of US strategies have been assessed, not many of these assessments meet our criteria of independence and quality (for details see Appendix 2). The results of the most rigorous assessments are examined below. We will look in turn at programmes which have demonstrated some positive impact on young people's behaviour or attitudes towards guns or weapons (targeted enforcement activities which are multi-pronged, community-based and multi-agency); at those which have not (mainly those which are purely enforcement based, or which entail tougher sentencing) as well as those initiatives where either evidence is insufficient or mixed (behavioural programmes, aiming at changing perceptions or increasing awareness, tend to fall within this category).

When considering such research, however, one needs to be mindful of the social, cultural and legal differences between the US and the UK. Such differences are likely to have an impact on whether policies and interventions are transferable across national boundaries. This section also includes an outline of UK strategies that have been independently evaluated within our timeframe (1998-2008). In general UK interventions tend to follow US models, which raises questions about whether they can be successfully applied to other socio-economic contexts than the ones they were originally created for.

## 1. SOME EVIDENCE OF A POSITIVE IMPACT ON GUN CARRYING AND USE: 'PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING' AND COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVES

'Problem-oriented policing' and community safety initiatives (outlined in the following sections) have shown to be 'promising' in terms of gun violence prevention. Such programmes combine the following characteristics:

- they target hot spots and 'risky' groups (especially serious young offenders and/or gang members)
- they involve collaborations with other agencies (e.g. probation, community 'leaders', local authorities/social services)
- they are locally-tailored, research-based interventions (Koper and Mayo-Wilson 2006).

### **Focusing on high-risk areas and individuals: 'problem-oriented policing' and 'pulling levers'**

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a range of area-based studies (e.g. Weisburd et al 1992) increasingly recognised that violence and crime are not spread evenly, but concentrated in small areas in cities – 'hot spots' that generate a disproportionate number of incidents. Violent street crime in particular came to be regarded as a geographically and demographically concentrated problem – which on the main means young males, often of ethnic minority origins (but see note on race in the Introduction), living in disadvantaged and run down inner city neighbourhoods characterised by poverty, educational failure and limited employment opportunities (Klofas et al 2007). Many interventions have since tended to address crime according to this approach.

A number of US jurisdictions have been experimenting with '*problem-oriented policing*' to respond to gun violence among gang members and serious young offenders. These interventions are based on the '*pulling levers*' deterrence strategy, which involves focusing criminal justice and social service attention on a small number of chronic offenders, deemed to be responsible for the bulk of urban gun violence problems (Braga et al 2008).

In contrast to broad-based "zero tolerance" policing initiatives that attempt to prevent serious offending by indiscriminately cracking down on minor crimes committed by all offenders, the 'pulling levers' strategy therefore seeks to control violence by focusing on 'a very narrow and specific audience' and subjecting it to a range of criminal justice interventions. It is important to communicate effectively and directly with such an audience, to 'demonstrate cause and effect' and ensure that word is spread to other young people and groups' (Braga et al 2008).

Evaluation research has shown that the pulling levers deterrence strategy is effective in reducing gun violence among serious young offenders, with a correlation between increased arrests and reductions in gun-related homicides (Sherman 2001).

The strategy was pioneered in Boston in the mid-1990s, where the Boston Gun Project (of which Operation Ceasefire was the operational intervention) operated it alongside efforts to disrupt guns supply (e.g. by targeting illegal gun and trafficking

and traders selling to unlicensed people). The project has been credited with a two-thirds reduction in youth homicides, and 'significant reductions' in non-fatal gun violence. It was replicated in a number of other sites, for example in Richmond California (where the Comprehensive Homicide Initiative 'significantly reduced homicide in Richmond, particularly those involving guns'), Minneapolis and Indianapolis (Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership, credited with homicides reduction of 42%) (Braga et al 2008).

### **How the 'Boston model' worked**

In Boston, research by Harvard University had provided local information (including gang membership and territory) about a small number of prolific serious offenders. Such young people were then warned that if they continued behaving violently they would face concerted enforcement action. Fliers were distributed and forums held with this target group. When violence occurred, non-complying individuals and gangs were targeted with 'aggressive enforcement of public drinking and motor vehicle violations, outstanding warrants, and probation surrenders' and numerous arrests were made (OJJDP 1999).

The 'pulling levers' strategy is therefore based on policing and deterrence, but not exclusively so: it involves various agencies (state departments, probation, prosecutors, clergy, social services and community-based organisations). In Boston, community Centers' street workers worked alongside probation and parole officers, sought out at risk youth and offered them support and training, 'as the best way to change some offenders' behavior may be to offer them substance abuse counseling, job skills training, recreational opportunities' and 'special education'. When the risk to drug-dealing and other illegitimate activities increases, 'legitimate work becomes more attractive, and when legitimate work is more available, raising risks will be more effective in reducing violence' (Braga et al 2008:20).

The Boston model has proved influential and has been tried and developed across and outside the US – see below.

### **Following the Boston model: 'comprehensive community safety gun violence reduction' initiatives**

Collectively, the strategies which have been adopted in US cities following the Boston model are known in the American literature as

*'comprehensive community safety gun violence reduction'* initiatives.

Such systematic approaches are characterised by common principles, i.e.:

- crime problems and their solutions have uniquely local features
- knowledge of crime at local level is essential to formulate or adapt interventions to suit local circumstances
- problem solving is a process, learning from intervention and building on it: knowledge is generated via evaluating the intervention and goes back into refining the intervention itself
- the above is helped by a multi-agency approach, where information sharing and co-operation at local, federal and state levels is encouraged (Klofas et al 2007).

Comprehensive community safety interventions are multi-modal as well as multi-agency. This is because they aim at addressing multiple risk factors, 'including aggressive behaviours at an early age, conflicts with authority (...) gang membership, substance abuse, depression, exposure to violence, poor parental supervision, low academic achievement, truancy, delinquent peers, drug trafficking, and unemployment' (OJJDP 1999:18).

These types of intervention combine suppression and prevention approaches and can include a variety of strategies like:

- police enforcement action targeted at particular groups or particular areas
- surveillance of probationers and monitoring of previous offenders (especially serious young offenders)
- parental supervision
- peer mediation and conflict resolution
- school-based interventions
- gang-related information gathering
- law making (changes to bring in 'tougher' sentencing) and 'enhanced prosecution' (OJJDP 1999)

Police enforcement strategies to prevent crime in 'hot spot' areas vary from increased uniform police patrols to street crackdowns and preventative patrols, stop and searches, 'safety frisks' carried out during traffic control activities etc. (Braga 2008b). The most generalized strategies, for example, preventive patrols and raids, are likely to have less (long lasting) impact than approaches that include more focused problem-solving elements, such as working with landlords, local business owners and residents (Skogan and Frydl, 2004).

Studies into police interventions (e.g. Braga 2002, Weisburd and Eck 2004) appear to show that *focused* strategies, such as directed patrols, proactive arrests, and problem-oriented policing, can produce significant crime prevention in 'hot spots'. For example, the Kansas City Gun Project (Sherman et al 1997), and its replications in Indianapolis and Pittsburgh, successfully used police patrols and safety frisks at traffic stops to target illegal gun carrying. Such patrols were found to reduce gun violence in high crime urban areas at high risk times (Koper and Mayo-Wilson 2006).

### **Shortcomings of 'comprehensive community safety' initiatives**

The main shortcomings of comprehensive community safety initiatives are outlined below.

They are *resource intensive*, in terms of both finances and staffing. Perhaps because of this, they are intended to have a substantial impact on crime reduction *in the short term*. Violence patterns typically appear to re-establish themselves once a particular intervention concludes. In some cases it was hoped that these interventions would operate as 'firebreaks', interrupting a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and thereby ultimately having a sustained violence reduction effect. However, there are no compelling studies demonstrating this longer lasting effect (Braga et al 2001).



Such strategies therefore do not/cannot effectively engage with structural factors and with the deep rooted problems of the environments where young people live, which may not be conducive to non-violent means of settling conflict and may not inspire motivation to change one's behaviour (Arredondo 2003). 'Interventions where we seek an immediate effect will not address issues such as poverty or criminal culture, or perhaps even drugs or guns, directly' (Klofas et al 2007:125).

There are questions about the effects of policing practices on *police legitimacy among local communities*. There is some evidence that residents of areas that are subject to hot spots policing welcome the concentration of police efforts in problem places (Koper and Mayo-Wilson 2006). On the other hand, aggressive police enforcement strategies have resulted in increased citizen complaints about police misconduct and abuse of force (Greene, 1999).

Perceptions of police legitimacy are greatly influenced by whether community members perceive that they were treated fairly and with respect and dignity by officers (e.g. Tyler, 2001). Even when there is a demand for tough law and order enforcement and reassurance in a community, very robust enforcement is likely to alienate residents unless there is a strong sense that the policing is community led (rather than externally imposed) and performed with residents' consent (Fagan and Wilkinson 1998).

Whether hot spots policing is regarded as legitimate and fair 'may depend in good part on the types of strategies used and the context of the hot spots affected.' However, not enough is known about the effects of such approaches on the communities that the police serve (Braga et al 2008).

Intensive targeting of specific places and groups may lead to crime being *displaced* to outlying areas and neighbouring groups. A systematic review of hot spot policing in the US and Australia (not specifically targeted at young people) showed that five randomized controlled trials reported no 'substantial immediate spatial displacement' of criminal activity, but four suggested it was possible. Crime displacement is, moreover, difficult to detect and its potential manifestations can be quite diverse (Braga 2008b).

### **The Boston model in the UK**

In Scotland, Strathclyde Police is currently piloting targeted interventions on known gang members in Glasgow, along the lines of the Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire<sup>3</sup>.

In England, an initiative which has been externally evaluated and which was also inspired by the Boston 'Ceasefire' project is the 'Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy' (MMAGS). MMAGS was undertaken following a Home Office study in 2002, which examined violence, guns and gangs in Manchester. The study had found that:

- gun violence and fatal shootings were mostly concentrated in specific, small

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<sup>3</sup> BBC news 12/12/08

areas of the city and 'weaknesses in services such as social services, health and education contributed as much to the problem as criminal justice issues'

- victims of gun violence were mainly young, black or mixed race males who had criminal records
  - perpetrators tended to have similar demographic and social characteristics to victims
  - shootings victims were at increased risk of repeat incidents
  - young black and mixed race male victims of shootings were generally known to have been involved in gangs
  - the carrying of firearms by gang members is partly protective and partly symbolic, though they are sometimes used in the commission of violent crime.
- (Bullock and Tilley 2002, 2008)

The objectives of the MMAGS project were multi-faceted and included:

- enforcing the law through multi-agency, targeted action, to secure convictions and deter from gang and gun crime
- providing young people with education and employment opportunities as positive alternatives to gun and gang crime
- giving support to victims, witnesses and to the most vulnerable young people and families
- rehabilitating those convicted of gun crime and gang-involved offending.

Gang-related shootings in the city fell by a third in the three years since MMAGS came into operation, although there is no evidence that this change can be directly attributed to the programme. The MMAGS team claim to have worked with around 200 'targets' and scored some notable successes in turning gang members' lives around. Some have gone on to higher education or employment away from Manchester (Squires et al 2008).

However, the evaluation of the implementation of MMAGS concluded that its attempt to address the socioeconomic factors underpinning the reasons why youth to join gangs was an 'impractical strategy'. Although MMAGS was originally based on the Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire (which focused on preventing and deterring specific gang-related violent behaviours), in the evaluators' opinion the Manchester project suffered from a 'mission drift' to focus on gang membership as a social problem and diversion of individuals from gangs. The MMAGS process evaluation highlighted implementation problems, such as differences between practitioners about determining gang membership and unresolved concerns about stereotyping young people as gang members. In addition, according to Bullock and Tilley, the development of preventive intervention had diverted attention from the enforcement aspect of the project (Bullock and Tilley 2008).

## 2. MIXED RESULTS ON IMPACT ON GUN CARRYING AND USE: BEHAVIOURAL PROGRAMMES

Programmes (carried out mostly in the US) intended to change the personal behaviour of parents and/or of children have on the whole not been proven to reduce youth gun violence or access to guns. This does not necessarily mean in all cases that the interventions do not work: in some instances there is simply not enough evidence of good quality to demonstrate effectiveness.

Such behavioural programmes include initiatives like:

- Educational initiatives focusing on keeping young children away from guns<sup>4</sup> and encouraging youth to resolve disputes without using weapons<sup>5</sup>
- School-based programmes, such as counselling, peer mediation and conflict resolution<sup>6</sup>
- Community-based initiatives such as gun-free school zones and community revitalisation<sup>7</sup>
- Media promotions, such as Just Say No advertising campaigns, mass mailings or public announcements<sup>8</sup>
- Laws and programmes encouraging parents to store their guns safely<sup>9</sup>
- Programmes using peers as educators<sup>10</sup>.

Behavioural programmes typically focus on alternative activities to weapon carrying and violent conflict, but have been criticised because they mostly fail to provide such alternatives and do not confront many of the reasons for carrying guns, like attaining status, 'getting attention, retaliation, fear for personal safety' (Hardy, op cit). As some qualitative research has shown, moreover, it may be unreasonable to ask young people to use non-violent ways to settle conflict when they operate in an environment where 'social interactions are perceived as

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Hardy 2002, a randomised study at SMS level 5, showed no significant effects.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Shapiro in Arredondo 2003, a quasi-experimental study, showed no significant effect on the weapon component.

<sup>6</sup> Focusing on violence prevention generally has shown overall much more success (e.g. Welsh 2003, Harper and Ibrahim 1999) - see Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> A quasi-experimental study of after-school programmes showed 'no significant effects' (SMS level 4; Davidson et al, in Arredondo 2003). See the introduction and Appendix 2 for an explanation of SMS levels.

<sup>8</sup> Just Say No programmes are based on the Just Say No To Drugs message but there is no evidence that they have an impact on behaviour. One randomised experiment empirically investigated the Just Say No approach in relation to firearm use among children. The study looked at the Just Say No message as directly delivered to pre-school children and their parents by a community police officer, rather than via a media advertisement. It found that the group of pre-school children who had been exposed to the Just Say No message were "just as likely" to play with firearms as the control group and "just as likely to play with the guns after the intervention as before". "It is not clear why Just Say No approaches are ineffective. A possibility is that children have difficulty resisting temptation, and temptation increases as objects are forbidden" (Hardy 2002:110).

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Grossman et al. 2000, a randomised study, showed no significant effects.

<sup>10</sup> Most programmes using peers as educators have not been adequately evaluated, and those that have show mixed results (Hardy 2002).

threatening or lethal, and where individuals are normatively seen as harbouring hostile intent and the willingness to inflict harm' (Fagan and Wilkinson 2002:130).

Young people may not be ready to change their attitudes or behaviour because they do not perceive it as being inappropriate; indeed, it may be successful in getting them respect and status among their peers and in reinforcing their sense of identity (Arredondo 2003). Some research warns that peer-group interventions may actually be conducive to crime, as 'high-risk peers will support one another's deviant behavior' as interactions with (even ex) deviant peers can provide meaning and motivation for future acts of delinquency (Dishion et al 1999).

Some of the more promising educational/awareness raising/motivational programmes (showing at best mixed results) dealing with guns are outlined below.

### **Examples of behavioural programmes**

#### *Detroit Handgun Intervention Program*

The Detroit Handgun Intervention Program (HIP) was designed to prevent handgun violence in black urban neighbourhoods. HIP targeted young African-American males who had been arrested for a concealed weapon offence. It was based on a 'therapeutic jurisprudence' model: a specialised 'treatment' court in Detroit required young offenders charged with possession of handguns to attend a four-hour class (held in the courtroom) as a condition of pre-trial release.

The programme included showing slides of victims to impress upon participants the nature of handgun violence. It also provided information on guns and the high risk of violence that comes from carrying a gun as well as presentations by older offenders. The evaluation research used a randomly selected experimental group and a control group to determine whether the programme achieved a change of attitudes in seven categories: risks/benefits of guns, inevitability of gun violence, ethical considerations, status motivations, personal responsibility, situational avoidance, and knowledge of gun risks. Based on a before-and-after measurement of attitudes among HIP participants, the study found statistically significant movements in the anticipated direction for 19 of 21 attitudes (e.g. a weaker belief that guns give control in threatening situations; stronger belief that gun fights could be avoided; greater knowledge about the risks of injury and death from gun use). These suggested that HIP did change participant attitudes regarding handguns and handgun violence *over the short term*: discussions with focus groups of HIP participants, however, suggested that they may have difficulty over the long term, given the strong pressures in certain urban neighbourhoods to use guns (Roth 1998). The programme was therefore found to lead to little corresponding change in behaviour, partly because it did not 'address dangers in the community that led youth to feel they needed to carry guns for protection' (Fagan 2002).

#### *Cops and Docs*

Another US educational intervention falling within our parameters (it was subjected to independent evaluation and its effectiveness measured against a comparison group) is 'Options, Choices and Consequences (Cops and Docs)'. It is a two-day, two-hour programme targeted to grades 7-8 pupils and presented by a doctor, a police officer and prosecutor, who explain the medical and legal consequences of

gun violence. It uses graphic depictions of gunshot victims and aims at deterring children by 'shocking' them into resisting future gun use. However, its impact appears to be limited: similarly to HIP above, the (unpublished) evaluation indicated that although Cops and Docs 'significantly' increased young people's knowledge, it did not impact on their attitudes and behaviour (Hardy, Arredondo, both op cit).

#### *'Calling the Shots' (UK)*

'Calling the Shots' is an educational package, delivered in schools and designed to inform about the consequences of having guns and of gang membership, which has been developed in parts of London (Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Newham, Lambeth and Southwark) since 2005. The programme is aimed at achieving a change in attitudes among young people (aged 11-18) involved, or at risk of being involved, with gangs. A process evaluation, carried out to assess the implementation of the programme, established that the vast majority of the participants had enjoyed the sessions and found them informative. However, operational difficulties meant that no research was carried out into whether the programme had a measurable impact on the participants' behaviour or attitudes in the long term (Sadler and Arnall 2005).

#### *'Safer School Partnerships' (UK)*

The Safer School Partnerships (SSP) programme is one of the interventions implemented in recent years to tackle behavioural issues in or around schools and is now part of the Youth Crime Action Plan in England and Wales (see above). The national evaluation (published in 2004) of a six month pilot looked at inter alia the effects of placing a police officer in 100 English schools in ten 'crime hot spots', areas characterised by 'street crime', including illegal possession and use of firearms. Use of police officers in school follows an American model which was pioneered in Seattle (the 'Youth Firearms Violence Initiative') in the mid-1990s (OJJDP 1999). Police officers are also being trialled in Scotland in some schools.

The study found that although young people thought that the environment had improved in SSP schools, there had been no actual decrease in problematic behaviour (bullying, drinking, use of drugs, truanting and antisocial behaviour) and in rates of victimization (Bhabra et al 2004). A later study was unable to determine the impact of SSP on offending because of the weakness of existing data sources and the unavailability of suitably disaggregated records (Bowles et al 2006).

### 3. INTERVENTIONS WITH LIMITED PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS ON GUN CARRYING AND USE

There is little evidence of the effectiveness of the following US programmes, carried out in isolation, in reducing gun violence among young people:

- Purely suppressive approaches (like untargeted crackdowns, street sweeps)
- Supply side strategies which attempt to disrupt illegal supply of firearms by intervening e.g. in gun trafficking and theft, or in suspicious activities by gun dealers (Braga 2002)
- Gun buy-back/exchange programmes. Evaluations (e.g. the SMS level 4 study of the St Louis Police Department 'Gun Buyback' scheme by Rosenfeld, in Arredondo 2003) have shown that they have no observable effects on gun crime or gun-related injury rates. Even though such programmes may reduce the risk of firearm violence among *some* participants, they suffer from a number of shortcomings, including:
  - participants in these schemes are usually older and therefore at lower risk of gun violence
  - many of the guns returned are not in working order and therefore pose little potential for violence in the first place
  - the characteristics of guns returned do not generally match those most frequently used in crime (Romero et al 1998).
- Guns searches and seizures (Braga 2002)
- Gun bans, restrictions on acquisition and on licensing (TFCPS 2005)
- Tougher sentencing (as in 'Project Exile', adopted in a number of US states and entailing mandatory minimum sentences for gun involved offences (OJJDP1999)).

## RESEARCH ABOUT KNIVES AND OTHER WEAPONS

Perhaps surprisingly, in view of the high profile they have in this country, there is very little research in the UK (and in Europe, the US and other English speaking countries), about young people and knife-related crimes specifically. This may be because in some nations 'knife crime' is either not viewed as a major issue per se, and/or because it is regarded as but one expression of juvenile anti-social behaviour or violence. The latter is a huge field of preoccupation for policy-makers and academics worldwide, and many studies have been carried out to establish 'what works' in preventing delinquent and violent behaviour: we have outlined some trends and characteristics of this area of study in the following chapter. In this section we delineate the few relevant studies related to knives which have been rigorously evaluated. We also look at some other pertinent research which covers weapon use by young people more generally, either as a main or secondary part of the studies remit.

### **Knives, alcohol and violence**

Two randomized controlled trials have been carried out in UK hospitals (one in Scotland, one in Wales) in relation to delivering brief motivational interventions (nurse counselling/psychological support) to patients, including young patients aged 16 and over, who attend hospital with an alcohol-related facial injury (often caused by knives) (Smith et al 2003; Oakey et al 2008). This group was targeted because: 'a large majority of assault injuries are to the face'; 'this group is also prone, as part of an antisocial life-style, to be offenders' and 'comes to the attention of other public services – such as the police and criminal justice system – much less frequently' (Smith et al, op cit:44).

The interventions consisted of a session with a specialist trauma nurse for what is a remarkably (given the results) brief period of between 5 and 65 minutes. The aim was for nurses to offer counselling, advice and information to patients to help them understand how they got the injury in the first place and to help prevent them incurring further injuries.

Both studies adhere to the most scientifically rigorous methods of testing interventions, using substantial samples, randomly selected intervention and control groups and testing patients' alcohol intake at three points in time: at the time of the counselling, then at three and twelve months afterwards.

They each show consistently promising results in terms of a 'significant' reduction in alcohol consumption, especially at 12 months follow-up when the most marked differences between intervention and control groups manifested. The findings illustrate that behavioural change takes time, but also that brief interventions can be cost effective and not necessarily labour intensive.

Although most of the serious facial injuries of the young people (over 16) participating in these studies were likely to have been caused by knives or other bladed instruments, that the interventions concentrated on injury type rather than the inflicting weapon reminds us that violence and harm occur irrespective of the means by which they are inflicted. In those cases, the facial injuries could have

been caused in a number of other ways, including a smashed bottle or glass, bare fists, being pushed and falling over.

The studies point out the need to go beyond the presenting problem and of addressing the causes of violent behaviour and victimization, in this case alcohol abuse. By treating young (especially male) people who get hurt often in brawls after a drunken night out, they illustrate the link between alcohol abuse, violence and knives. This also disengages with the notion that weapon carrying or use is necessarily associated with habitual criminal behaviour and/or gang membership. For example, according to the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, 49 per cent of young people - aged 10 to 25 – surveyed in 2004 who had admitted carrying a knife were not in a delinquent youth group, nor had friends in trouble with the police (Sharp et al. 2006).

The influence of alcohol on use of knives or other weapons by under-age people has not been specifically researched.<sup>11</sup> In the context of current public worries about increasing alcohol consumption among young people and concurrent violence, this appears an area worth exploring.

Although the scientific evaluations of the hospital based, nurse counselling programmes show their effectiveness, they have measured reductions in alcohol abuse (admittedly one of the causes behind violence) rather than in injuries caused by knives and other weapons. However, building on the 2003 study, Smith et al are currently undertaking another randomised controlled trial in Scotland. This newer study is aimed at testing the efficacy of brief interventions not only on alcohol consumption but also on the violent behaviour of male patients with facial trauma. Results are due to be available in late 2009/early 2010.<sup>12</sup>

### **Social marketing/campaigns**

A survey was carried out in the summer of 2008 to establish the effectiveness of the Home Office £3m anti-knife campaign which is part of the 'Tackling Violence Action Plan' (covered above). 500 young people aged 11 to 19 took part, 70 per cent of whom had seen the adverts about the dangers of knife crime. Of those, 62 per cent of young people said the ads had made them more fearful of crime; 32 per cent thought the adverts would stop young people carrying knives but 48 per cent said this was unlikely. Opinions on the ads' effectiveness varied according to age. While nearly half of 11 to 13-year-olds thought the shocking images portrayed would work, a quarter of 14 to 17-year-olds agreed. The figure fell further for 18 and 19-year-olds, with only a fifth of them thinking the ads were likely to stop young people carrying knives (Smith 2008).

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<sup>11</sup> The Home Office is piloting a number of alcohol arrest referral programmes, which will be evaluated to establish their impact on alcohol-related offending. Under the scheme, adult offenders undergo one or two sessions with an alcohol specialist, who offers help and advice as well as assess the individual's health risks of the drinking behaviour. Depending on the seriousness of the cases, more in-depth sessions can be offered (Home Office 2008d).

<sup>12</sup> Correspondence from Violence Reduction Unit, 21 October 2008



An online survey carried out on behalf of the Home Office in August 2008, however, offers a more positive picture of the effects of the anti-knife campaign: of the 1000 young people (10-16 year old) who had viewed or heard the adverts, 73% said they had made them 'less likely to carry a knife'<sup>13</sup>. Surveys are however not a methodologically reliable source of evidence and our review did not reveal any rigorous research (using at least a comparison group to help assess the effects of an intervention) which had been carried out specifically about social marketing or campaigns with regards to weapons and young people.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring programmes first developed in the United States, with 'Big Brothers Big Sisters' (BBBS) being an influential model. In BBBS mentors meet with six to 18-year-old children from single-parent, disadvantaged households, at least three times a month for three to five hours. A randomized controlled analysis found that the scheme had a positive impact on reducing the likelihood of drug and alcohol use, violence and truancy, especially among young people from black and ethnic minorities (Tierney et al 1995).

A US peer based mentoring and case management programme which has shown 'promising' results is 'Caught in the Crossfire' (Arredondo 2003). It was originally designed as a hospital-based prevention programme, where staff worked with young people with violence-related injuries and with their families (for studies of hospital-based interventions in the UK see above). It later employed young adults, who had grown up in the same communities, to help both victims and perpetrators to avoid retaliation and develop non-violent plans for the future. The findings of the evaluation (an SMS level 4 study) showed that young people participating in 'Caught in the Crossfire' were 60% less likely to have an adverse outcome (being re-arrested, placed on probation, breaching probation conditions) than those in the comparison group (Becker et al 2004).

In the UK, the largest mentoring evaluation was published in 2004 and examined the implementation of ten programmes known as 'Mentoring Plus' (Shiner et al 2004). Based on the acclaimed Dalston Youth Project, which aimed at improving the basic education, employment skills and confidence of disaffected young people, Mentoring Plus constituted one-to-one mentoring with adult local volunteers, plus structured education and careers support. The evaluation found that the programmes had been 'reasonably successful' in re-engaging socially excluded young people with education and training. During the period covered by the evaluation, there was also a downturn in offending, especially in the carrying and use of weapons: however, this 'could not be attributed with any confidence to the programme', as it was experienced among both participants and non-participants (ibid:62).

A meta-analysis carried out in 2007 examined 18 studies of mentoring programmes, two of which from the UK. It found, rather unsurprisingly, that mentoring was more likely to reduce re-offending the longer the contact it offered with mentors. Schemes were also more likely to be effective if they were part of

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<sup>13</sup> Correspondence from Home Office, 7 January 2009

'multi modal treatment' and involved behavioural and other programmes (Jolliffe and Farrington 2007).

Despite their widespread popularity and acceptance, there is very little other empirical evidence about the efficacy or otherwise of mentoring programmes. There is also no common understanding of what 'mentoring' actually involves and what activities are included under what is an umbrella term, encompassing a range of strategies (see e.g. Philip et al 2004). A thorough review conducted in 1997 concluded that 'even with the encouraging findings from the most recent controlled test of community mentoring, there is too little information for adequate policymaking' (Sherman et al 1997).

Information about the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP), with its rather anecdotal assessment of the programme impact, is fairly typical. JUMP is a US nationwide initiative aimed at decreasing delinquency and gang participation, improving academic performance and reducing drop-out rates. Both the mentors and the young people being mentored reported that mentoring had been a positive experience, that young people had benefited from the experience and that it had helped them, especially in avoiding alcohol, drugs and fights, keeping away from gangs and not using guns or knives. However, this information was provided by people who voluntarily provided feedback; it is therefore not necessarily representative of all mentors and participants. (OJJDP 1998)

### **Metal detectors in schools**

Fear of violence has been particularly acute in US schools, which have witnessed high-profile shootings like in Columbine. US schools have developed a range of responses, including the installation of security systems and metal detectors, checking of lockers, see-through bags, hiring police officers. These measures were evaluated by the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders, a group of 22 researchers convened by the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The Group could not find evidence to back up the efficacy of these initiatives. For instance, they found that, 'while metal detectors reduced the number of weapons [guns, knives or other weapons] brought into schools, they did not seem to decrease weapon carrying or violence outside schools' (Catalano et al 1999:2).

## Chapter 5: Delinquency and youth violence prevention (non-weapon specific)

- Gun and knife crime are expressions of wider phenomena of youth crime and violence. They need to be viewed in the wider contexts of disaffection and delinquency, which are in turn the complex products of inter-related individual, family, social, biological and environmental factors.
- Youth violence is a huge field of investigation; many studies have been carried out to establish 'what works' in preventing it. This chapter outlines some trends and characteristics of this research, but does not purport in any way to offer an exhaustive and comprehensive coverage.
- The need for prevention is the trademark of 'public health' approaches to violence. These stress the importance of intervening in children's lives as early as possible, to control or avoid harmful events or circumstances.
- Primary prevention focuses on structural conditions like poverty and economic inequality. Secondary prevention focuses on early intervention for at risk children and their families (or young people at risk of (re)offending). Such interventions can be at family, school or community level (or in criminal justice institutions when young offenders are involved). Tertiary prevention is concerned with rehabilitation of people with established violent behaviour.
- This chapter provides a brief illustration of secondary and tertiary prevention approaches to youth violence, outlining some of the most rigorous assessments of effectiveness which have been carried out in this area in the last ten years.
- Some interventions that target family-related risk factors (e.g. nurse visitation programmes) in early childhood seem to be having a long term positive impact.
- Cognitive and behavioural based (e.g. therapeutic foster care) strategies seem promising in their impact on violent behaviour.
- 'Zero tolerance' and deterrent approaches (e.g. prison tours) have not been shown to be effective – in fact, they can be counter-productive.
- After-school recreation, physical activity and sport cannot currently demonstrate evidence of proven effectiveness in reducing violence. Further research is needed to clarify their impact.
- Conflict resolution programmes have been shown to be effective in helping serious young offenders deal with conflict without resorting to violence and reoffending.

**Gun and knife crime are particular expressions of wider phenomena of youth crime and violence. In this chapter we outline some of the interventions which have been rigorously assessed in the field of juvenile violence prevention generally. We do not aim to be exhaustive or to come to firm conclusions about what works best, but simply to provide an outline of areas of intervention in this field and investigations of their effectiveness.**

## **PREVENTING VIOLENCE**

As we have seen, there is very little research in the UK, Europe, the US and other Anglo-Saxon countries about young people and knife-related crimes specifically; nor, outside the US, has there been much research attention to young people's relations with guns. This may be because knife and gun-related crimes have not been perceived as major issues in themselves, or because they are regarded as but one expression of juvenile anti-social behaviour or violence.

A vast amount of literature on youth violence looks at preventing violence rather than intervening (usually via the criminal justice system) once it has occurred. The most comprehensive approaches focus on early interventions, with the aim of minimising or annulling the circumstances in young people's lives which are likely to have detrimental effects. Such 'public health' approaches are examined in our next section.

### **Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention strategies**

A 'primary' prevention approach to youth violence would focus on the larger structural, socio-economic conditions that shape and underline it -poverty, inequality, social exclusion – by e.g. interventions on the labour market, in child care and social care. These interventions are usually 'universal' in type, i.e. they are aimed at whole swathes of the population (World Health Organisation 2002, Farrington and Welsh 2007).

Primary prevention approaches to violence encourage policy to go 'upstream', to address social factors rather than simply 'downstream', towards factors that appear more tangible but may not be as significant (Stockard 2003). Commentators have therefore indicated the need for interventions such as public jobs creation, policies to tackle low wages and pay differentials, redistribution of work time and other employment related policies; 'more generous, universal social services' (e.g. Currie 1998); better integration of housing and urban planning (e.g. Barkan 1997).

'Secondary' prevention strategies involve instead interventions on families, schools and communities (Kramer 2000) and tend to be aimed specifically at individuals or sections identified to be 'at risk'. 'Tertiary' prevention is concerned with rehabilitation of people with established violent behaviour. Outlined in this chapter are some of the secondary and tertiary type of interventions which have been evaluated to rigorous standards, within our remit period of the last ten years. For a review of the most promising youth violence strategies (as well of what does

not work), see also the US Surgeon General's report on youth violence (USDHHS 2001) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Youth violence: A report of the surgeon general, United States Department of Justice, Washington, DC)

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

*We must move from looking at individual children to looking at the toxic environment.*

(Deborah Prothrow-Smith, Harvard Public School of Health in CPYI:7)

According to the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders, a group of researchers convened by the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), a public health approach underpins the most promising prevention and early intervention strategies (Catalano et al 1999).

Such an approach stresses the importance of positive family and community influences, promotes early intervention for those at risk and argues for improved access to health and mental health services. It aims at addressing multiple risk factors and introducing protective factors.

Most European literature on juvenile violence tends to follow this line of thought and emphasises the importance of 'secondary' prevention (see also above):

- an early identification of problems and of at risk individuals and families
  - tailor-suited assessments
  - treatment of the family as a unit
  - coordination of services among different agencies
  - training of frontline workers
  - the inclusion of a programme evaluation
- (Seifert 2000).

*Educators, social service workers, police and probation officers, policy makers, mass media, judges, teachers, health and mental health care professionals, community leaders, youth workers, activist, clergy, parents, youth, survivors...Whoever is not at the table from Day One represents a potential stumbling block down the road. (CPYV 2000:18)*

### Childhood and the family

As we have seen in previous chapters, witnessing or coming into contact with abuse and violence in one's immediate environment, including family, school and neighbourhood, is one factor which may be linked to carrying out criminal activity and abusive behaviour in the future (e.g. Osofsky, 1999). Stress and trauma are reported to be associated with specific types of conduct, like assaults, weapon carrying and use, participating in gang violence and being arrested (Calvert 1999). For example, one well designed study which controlled for age, sex and race, found that people who had been abused or neglected as children had a significantly greater likelihood to be arrested for a violent offence than people in

the control group (Widom 1989). Interventions that focus on early family life aim to defuse or neutralise such risk factors as poor child rearing or poor parental supervision – see below.

### **Nurse home visitation programmes**

Some interventions that target family-related risk factors in early childhood seem to be having long term positive impact. Randomized clinical trials of nurse home visitation programmes have shown that they reduce the risks of early antisocial behaviour and of child maltreatment, maternal substance abuse and maternal criminal involvement – all problems associated with future delinquency and violence (TFCPS 2005). Programme evaluations have identified long term positive effects: for example, according to a 15-year follow-up of home visitation programmes in Elmira (New York) and Memphis (Tennessee), children who had been included in the interventions displayed ‘relatively few serious delinquent and violent behaviours’ (Jenson and Howard 1999).

### **Early parent training**

Different types of early parent training are used, including coaching, peer modelling, role playing and reinforcement techniques. Evidence shows that parent training is an effective method of preventing offending (not necessarily violent offending) (Farrington and Coid 2003). For example, a programme called ‘The Incredible Years’ and devised by Webster-Stratton was shown to reduce childhood antisocial behaviour in an experiment conducted in the UK. Training (covering praise and rewards, setting limits and handling misbehaviour) was given to the parents of 58 disadvantaged children aged 3-8, who had been referred for aggressive and antisocial behaviour. After the intervention, not only had the antisocial behaviour of the children ‘decreased significantly’ compared to that of the control group, but the parents who had received the training gave their children more praise to encourage desirable behaviour and used ‘more effective commands’ (Scott 2005).

However, systematic reviews of parent training in families with children under three years of age have found mixed results. One, which looked at the impact of group-based parenting programmes (as researched by five high quality studies) found that there was ‘insufficient evidence to reach any firm conclusions regarding the role that such programmes might play’ in the prevention of emotional and behavioural problem in children (Barlow and Parsons 2003). Another review of training for parents of children aged 0 to 3 also found only a limited number of high-quality relevant studies (seven) and concluded that the beneficial effect of the interventions, as identified by such studies, was ‘modest’ (Bernazzani and Tremblay 2006).

### **Multi-systemic therapy**

Multi-systemic therapy (MST) is a rehabilitative programme for young people who exhibit serious and chronic delinquent behaviours. MST focuses on multiple risk factors and systems of influence: schools, peer, family, neighbourhood. It uses family therapy and parent management training and consists of brief, intensive treatment sessions carried out by one therapist operating across all the different domains.

MST has been one of the first clinical interventions addressing serious, violent offending and delinquency which has been subjected to randomized trials. Evaluation results have been mixed. A 1999 study found positive outcomes: families which had been randomly assigned to it showed increased cohesiveness compared to those receiving other interventions, and young people given MST were found to be less likely to be rearrested and to spend fewer days incarcerated (Jenson and Howard 1999). However, a large scale independent evaluation, carried out in Canada, did not find MST better at reducing convictions than traditional probation-based programmes (Leschied and Cunningham 2002). While a meta-analysis found that MST was effective (Curtis et al 2004), a systematic review of the evidence concluded that the efficacy of the programme was not proven (Littell 2005). Littell's methods and analysis were criticised by the originators of the treatment (Henggeler et al 2005).

### **Therapeutic foster care**

In what is known as 'intensive therapeutic foster care', young people aged 12-18, considered to be 'chronically delinquent', are placed in strictly monitored and supervised foster homes and isolated from delinquent peers. The foster parents are trained to provide a structured environment for learning social and emotional skills and the adolescents undergo weekly individual therapy. At the same time, their biological parents learn behaviour management techniques.

Therapeutic foster care forms part of 'Blueprints', youth violence prevention programmes which have been endorsed by the US Justice Department as they meet rigorous criteria (e.g. they have undergone experimental design trials which have provided evidence of a statistically significant effect on delinquency, lasting at least one year after treatment). (CPYV 2000) A systematic review carried out by the US Task Force on Community Preventive Services (TFPCS) found sufficient evidence to recommend the use of this intervention: violence among young people in therapeutic foster care was found to have reduced by an average of 72% compared with control groups (TFPCS 2005).

An 'intensive fostering' programme based on this model is currently being piloted in England (Youth Justice Board 2008b).

## **SCHOOLS**

School programmes which aim at addressing or preventing violence include a variety of initiatives, for example: social skills training, tutoring, anger management, impulse control and bullying prevention. Several programmes have parent training and teacher training elements (O'Donnell 2001).

A popular policy in US schools is 'zero tolerance', which in practice means suspension or expulsion for incidents of violence, or for carrying a gun to school (TFPCS 2005). However, there is lack of evidence that this is effective in changing behaviour or improving safety. In fact, some studies have shown that zero tolerance is related to increases in community crime, exacerbates problems in schools and adds to dropout rates (Peterson et al 2001). On the other hand, schools which encourage a sense of collaboration and involvement and a common

set of goals and norms endorsed by young people tend to experience less violence (Hilarsky 2004).

A meta-analysis of school-based psychosocial prevention programmes found overall positive effects on aggressive and disruptive behaviour (Wilson and Lipsey 2007). The study examined 249 experimental and quasi-experimental studies of the following type of programmes:

- behavioural strategies (e.g. rewards, good behaviour 'contracts');
- cognitive techniques (which focuses on changing thinking skills: e.g. problem solving, anger control)
- social skills training (e.g. communication skills, conflict management)
- counselling and therapy (group, individual or family)
- peer mediation
- parent training (including skills training and family group counselling).

The interventions covered by the meta-analysis were both targeted and universal and the ages involved ranged from pre-kindergarten to '14 and up'. The authors concluded that:

- overall, the above school-based programmes (which had been studied by researchers to a rigorous standard) have 'positive effects' on 'aggressive and disruptive' behaviours
- 'the most common and most effective approaches' were: universal programmes 'delivered to all students in a classroom or school'; and programmes targeted to specific children, who participated 'outside of their regular classrooms'. In both situations the most frequently used were cognitive programmes
- 'In the absence of evidence that one modality [universal programmes] is significantly more effective...than another [targeted programmes], schools might benefit most by considering ease of implementation when selecting programs'.

The meta-analysis also established that 'larger treatment effects were achieved with higher-risk students'. Additionally (and unsurprisingly), the universal programmes seemed to particularly benefit 'students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds', while in the targeted programmes 'it was students already exhibiting problematic behavior' who showed 'the largest effects' (Wilson and Lipsey, op cit:141-142).

For children aged 3-14, Roots of Empathy, a classroom-based cognitive programme originally from Canada but also delivered in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, has proven effective in reducing violence and aggression, as well as increasing emotional knowledge and pro-social behaviour (Hosking and Walsh 2005). The programme aims to increase 'empathy' and 'emotional literacy' among schoolchildren from kindergarten to Grade 8. It involves a baby with her/his parent, visiting the classroom every three weeks in an academic year, with a trained instructor helping the schoolchildren to observe the baby's development and identify the baby's feelings. Various evaluations have been 'positive' and a randomized controlled trial conducted in 2002 in Canada confirmed a reduction in



aggression and an increase in social and emotional competence among the students who had received the programme (Roots of Empathy 2008).

A US meta-analysis of 42 studies looked at the effectiveness of school based anti-bullying programmes specifically. It concluded that overall anti-bullying programs produced ‘an effect that is positive and statistically significant’ – that is, they seemed to have an impact on violent or bullying behaviour. However, the authors thought this effect may be in practice (after accounting for ‘publication bias’, or overexposure of certain studies over others) too small to actually effect a ‘meaningful’ change in behaviour among schoolchildren (Ferguson et al 2007:412).

For a systematic review of the ‘effectiveness of universal interventions which aim to promote emotional and social wellbeing in secondary schools’ see Blank et al 2008.

### **Social skills training**

According to a meta-analysis of 55 randomized controlled experimental studies, the most effective social skills training interventions use a cognitive-behavioural approach (skills building; teaching identification and avoidance of potentially violent situations, problem solving etc) (see also Mentoring Plus, mentioned in Chapter 4, where this approach proved the most effective) and are applied to children aged 13 and over and to high(er) risk groups who are already showing some behavioural problems (Loesel and Beelmann 2006). A previous quasi-experimental study of one such programme for middle schools in the US had shown positive short-term effects as violence by students declined (Durant et al 2001). Social skills training has also been shown to be promising in relation to serious young offenders and as part of after-school recreation – see the further section below.

### **Behaviour monitoring and positive reinforcement**

Programmes where students are supervised and positive behaviour (e.g. attendance and academic progress) reinforced are among the ones which have been proven effective in decreasing delinquency and improving educational performance. Such programmes tend to address a variety of risk factors (e.g. academic failure, social alienation, low commitment to school, violent peers, aggressive behaviour) and to introduce protective factors (e.g. social and cognitive competencies, bonding to school, positive behavioural norms) (Catalano et al 1999).

### **Cost effectiveness**

A RAND Corporation study (Greenwood et al. 1996) found that three diversionary programmes (parent training, monitoring of high school students with delinquency experiences and cash incentives for disadvantaged students to graduate) would be twice more cost effective in reducing crime than California’s then current punitive policy of ‘three strikes and you’re out’ (incarceration after three offences).

## **AFTER-SCHOOL RECREATION**

A systematic review of the impact of after-school recreation found three programmes which had been tested to a rigorous standard: each programme was community based and had 'desirable' effects on delinquency or crime (Welsh 2003). However, the very small number of rigorously assessed interventions meant that after-school recreation does not, at the present time, demonstrate evidence of proven effectiveness. Nevertheless, this community based approach is regarded as 'promising' in preventing delinquency or crime, especially when it includes skills training for participants (Herrenkohl et al 2001).

## **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT**

It is a commonly held belief that participation in sport or physical activity has the potential to improve the life chances of disaffected young people and to bring about psychological and social benefits. Some current UK policies and funding streams are based on the notion that young people's deviant behaviours can be reined in this way. However, 'the link between physical activity interventions and developing pro-social behaviours is not straightforward, and there is a lack of credible research evidence to support many of the claims made for physical activity (...) to inform decisions about effective intervention design'. There is therefore a 'pressing' need for 'credible' monitoring and evaluation of physical activity programmes and of their outcomes (Sandford et al 2006).

## **INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT YOUNG OFFENDERS**

Systematic reviews have been conducted in the US which examine interventions effects on youth delinquency and violence by conducting randomized controlled experiments involving young people who have already offended (Welsh and Farrington 2006).

A meta-analysis of 200 experimental or quasi-experimental studies examined intervention programmes for serious juvenile offenders (average age 14-17) conducted between 1970 and 1999. It found that deterrence and punishment do not appear to have an impact on recidivism. Conflict resolution programmes, on the other hand, were found to be effective in helping serious young offenders (most of whom had a history of aggressive behaviour) deal with conflict without resorting to violence and to reduce reoffending (Lipsey and Wilson 1998).

Interventions which were found to be most effective for non-institutionalised young offenders (e.g. under supervision in the community) included the following:

- individual counselling
- interpersonal skills training
- behavioural programmes.

Interventions which were most effective for young offenders in institutional custody (meaning criminal justice institutions or in residential social services care) included:

- interpersonal skills training
- 'Teaching Family Home', a programme aimed at changing behaviour, where a small number of young offenders (6-8) would live in the community with two 'teaching parents'. The young people would go to local schools and be supervised by the teaching parents, and would be able to go to their own homes at the weekend.  
(Lipsey and Wilson 1998)

According to a systematic review of family and parenting interventions for juvenile delinquents (aged 10-17) and their families, such interventions have beneficial effects on reducing the time they spend in institutions. The authors also stated that these interventions 'may' also reduce rates of later arrest, 'but at present these results need to be interpreted with caution, because of diversity in the results of studies' (Woolfenden et al 2001).

### **Prison tour programmes**

Prison tour programmes in the US (the oldest of which is called 'Scared Straight') aim at deterring young offenders or children at risk from (further) involvement with crime. They tend to adopt an aggressive style, with graphic presentations by inmates of life in prison aimed at increasing young people's awareness. 'Kids visit prison' programmes have been used in other nations, including 'day visits' in the UK and 'day in prison' in Australia and Germany. (Welsh and Farrington 2006)

A systematic review of randomized controlled experiments of Scared Straight and other US prison tour programmes found that not one of this type of interventions was effective in preventing offending. In fact, young people who underwent the Scared Straight intervention were found to be more likely to engage in criminal activity than those who did not receive the programme (Petrosino et al 2006). Petrosino et al show clear empirical evidence, over 25 years and in eight jurisdictions, that Scared Straight and similar programmes have a harmful effect and are likely to *increase* the chances that children exposed to them will (re)offend – i.e. they have a criminogenic effect. Despite this, such programmes continue to be used.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

**This international literature survey has examined the available published research evidence on children and young people's involvement in weapon facilitated violence, specifically their carriage and use of knives and firearms. The work is prompted by a growing concern about weaponised youth violence.**

Such anxiety has significantly affected the UK of late: initially through perceptions of a new, violent 'gang' phenomenon taking root in a number of our major cities, involving younger and younger people as both victims and perpetrators; and, subsequently, by the unprecedented alarm and concern occasioned by the so-called 'knife crime epidemic' of 2007-2008, which saw 36 teenagers fatally stabbed between January 2007 and August 2008 in England and Wales (Marfleet 2008) and a doubling of the year-on-year homicide rate in London among 17 year-olds between 2005 and 2007 (Squires et al 2008).

These are urgent concerns which generate much heat and controversy and provoke some searching questions. In such a context it is important to assess what the available research evidence tells us. At the outset it is worth acknowledging that social science research often evolves according to a dynamic of its own. It may not 'keep up' with the fast pace of political events. Even in a supposedly 'evidence-led' political culture, the best evidence may only follow the policy development.

### **A note on age, gender, race and the media**

Since the 1980s, disorder, violence and criminality have become one of the primary lenses through which youth problems are viewed, encouraging the projection of negative stereotypes and simplifications "onto the motives and character of young people" (Zimring 1998). In turn, this can influence law enforcement responses and distort public policies and priorities. The possible role of media amplification in reinforcing a sense of fear seems an area worth exploring, especially in relation to the carrying of knives.

Sociologists coined the concept 'moral panic' to describe the life cycle of a social problem; it is worth recalling that moral panics thrive best where clear evidence is either lacking or ambiguous. Yet, simply pouring evidence into a moral panic will not miraculously clarify matters: facts do not speak for themselves, especially where the evidence may contradict a position taken up by a substantial proportion of those participating in the debate. Things are rather more complex, although nothing in the foregoing remarks is intended to detract from the importance of obtaining good evidence. It is simply that effective dissemination and an audience able to listen are also important.

It is also important to state that the great majority of the evidence on weapon use and involvement typically refers to young people, focussing on adolescence and the teenage years rather than 'children'. Looking at the longitudinal, development and 'risk and protection factor' literatures certainly brings a wealth of information

about risk factors (deprivation, dysfunctional families, criminal family members, trauma and victimisation and so on) that may have impacted in early childhood, although the consequences of these experiences mainly manifest themselves in violence as the young person enters their teenage years.

Despite evidence of the positive impact of early environment and parenting on violence and delinquency, the great majority of interventions are still criminal justice-oriented and focused on young people rather than children. (The Mayor of London's recent *Time for Action* strategy is typical in looking almost exclusively at young people.) It can be argued that the anti-social behaviour agenda (including anti-social behaviour orders – ASBOs - and acceptable behaviour contracts) is an example of early intervention, in that it targets children before they actually commit serious offences (Squires and Stephen 2005). However, early encounters with the criminal justice system (e.g. by the breach of an 'ASBO') are themselves a key risk factor in the lives of young people. For young people, 'becoming involved in official responses to crime could actually make continued career criminality more rather than less probable' (Hudson 1993).

Another point worth highlighting concerns the limited evidence available about the involvement of girls and young women in weapon related violence. In recent years there has been a certain amount of academic interest exploring the role of 'girls' in the 'gang' (although rather more media interest). Most of this work has emanated from the USA (for example Miller 2002). Gang involvement exposes young women to specific risks, including violent and sexual victimisation from male gang members. In the UK evidence on female gang involvement has not been thoroughly explored.

Evidence on young women's roles as either mediators or initiators of violence, or the connection between sexual violence against females and weapons are all areas that are only becoming known anecdotally and deserve in-depth research. Further questions include the emotional and psychological impact on girls of violence between males, the role of girls in conflictual relationships. What we do know from work on girls and bullying is that the impact of interventions can differ significantly between the genders.

Studies looking at weapons and youth gangs tend to have an ethnic dimension, as do surrounding policy debates, bringing with them the danger that ethnicity will come to be considered in isolation. This would be misleading and simplistic. Race is articulated with other social, cultural and economic factors. For example, race, social exclusion and community deprivation are correlated and compound each other.

### **Social contexts**

In this work we have examined the contexts in which young people grow up to carry and use guns or knives: the areas they live in, the schools they go to, their families and upbringing, their social and economic position, their friends and their personal experiences. We have looked at what, in their lives, appears to expose them to the risk of carrying weapons, perpetrating and being the victims of violence, coming to the attention of the police and being processed by the criminal

justice system. We also considered any research that would tell us if there are any protective influences which help young people stay away from 'trouble' and crime.

We have explored the research which asks why young people feel they need to carry weapons, and/or the reasons they use them to threaten, harm or, in some cases, kill other young people. We have examined research that looks at young people's perceptions of their identities, their environments and motivations and their membership of 'gangs' or violent youth groups. This is done via surveys, interviews, focus groups and had sometimes involved researchers undertaking longer term ethnographic work, observing young people's everyday activities 'on location' and interviewing them about their activities. The research has also explored how concepts like 'youth culture', 'gang membership' and notions like 'respect' help us understand young people's relationships with guns and knives – and each other.

While it seems possible to predict offending fairly accurately amongst young people it is harder to predict serious/violent offending and we need to be cautious about the results and what we do with them. Predicting which young people may carry a weapon is generally possible (Kingery *et al* 1999) but this challenge has not been effectively addressed in the UK as yet. Furthermore, much prediction research is based on US data. Some people are violent and will be so whether it is with a gun, knife or anything that comes to hand. Trying to predict very specific behaviours – such as carrying a weapon – is inherently difficult. Nevertheless a good deal of prediction research focuses on what goes on in children's early years, before they commit a crime. If we know what factors make young people more likely to carry out violent criminal acts, we can take steps to change those factors so that they are much less likely to offend. This can be an important aspect of what is called 'social crime prevention'.

### **Neighbourhoods and violence**

When the Government established the Social Exclusion Unit in 1998 it drew attention to the 'sink estates' and deprived areas which were often, simultaneously, the worst crime and anti-social behaviour hotspots identified by police and other agencies. Some commentators began to refer to such areas as 'communities of fate' (Hope 2000, 2001) noting that such areas were enduring an increasingly disproportionate share of reported crime and violence.

Risk factor research has tended to confirm that areas with higher levels of social disadvantage (for example, dilapidated and run down housing, high levels of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, low rates of educational achievement and high levels of excluded pupils and truancy and so forth) have higher rates of visible crime and violence than better off areas in the same city. Many offenders live harsh, deprived, dangerous and unpleasant lives with limited opportunities for education, training, personal advancement or social mobility.

Research also consistently shows links between deprived neighbourhoods, high levels of violence and weapon use. It is likely that the impact of reduced opportunities (especially exacerbated where the consequences of racial discrimination and social exclusion have accumulated over the years) in poor

neighbourhoods and existing levels of violence contribute to shaping young people's behaviour. Where neighbourhoods are threatening, weapon carrying may occur because doing so makes young people feel safe. Weapon carrying can become relatively 'normalised' in certain groups. Worryingly, being exposed to violence – as a victim or seeing someone else being victimised- also predicts weapon carrying and violence by those who are victims or who witness violence.

Since the 1980s – in both the USA and the UK – the collapse of large scale semi- and unskilled labour markets in staple manufacturing industries has stimulated the growth of illegal economies around drugs, stolen goods and protection. These illegal activities have also stimulated a demand for weapons. Whereas once, youth groups and perhaps especially gangs were seen as a transitional phenomenon (which young people grew – or matured – out of) American research is pointing to gangs becoming a permanent structural feature of poor communities. In the UK a similar sense that young people were no longer 'growing out of crime' (persistent offenders) came to be articulated. Yet more than purely economic motivations are involved, the new 'illegal economies' also provided a credible 'hard' masculine identity and the symbols of 'success' perhaps now only achievable through crime.

Risk factors in such areas tend to have a cumulative impact: for example, low incomes and family problems tend to affect parental capacity and discipline. Abusive, neglectful or harmful parenting and young people's exposure to violence in the home appear to have particularly strong criminogenic influences. In turn this helps to produce overt anti-social behaviour and school avoidance, further limiting positive social supports (social capital) and furthering the hold of peer-group influences over the behaviour of young people.

### **What we can learn from qualitative and interpretative evidence**

Youth crime research, especially contemporary 'risk and protection factor' studies, is mostly based upon quantitative methodologies seeking to assess the impact of a given range of social influences in shaping behaviour. This research is capable of specifying the groups of young people most likely to become seriously delinquent. However, a number of alternative (qualitative and ethnographic) approaches have criticised the determinist character of the explanations offered by the risk factor perspective, suggesting that there is much else that remains to be explained. They have shown that, in order for criminal choices to be understood (and, hence, responded to effectively) we have to see these choices from the perspective of those who take them.

Qualitative research looks at young people's attitudes, experiences and feelings. As we have noted, violence and violent crimes are not all the same, and people carrying weapons may have very different reasons for doing so. Understanding these reasons will be a key target for researchers if we are to understand issues around knife and gun crime and to reduce violence in the future.

Peer groups, especially gangs, have been shown to be significant accelerators of criminal involvement. This makes it necessary to understand the nature of peer group contexts and relations, their significance to the young people involved in

them as well as the ways in which violence is produced and performed and the meanings attached to it.

### **Strategies and interventions**

Gun and knife crime need to be viewed in context, as expressions of wider phenomena of youth disaffection and violence. Violence is a complex product of inter-related individual, family, social, biological and environmental factors. For example, young people who experience violence early in childhood often fail to develop trusting relationships. Interventions that instil empathy and aim to reduce a tendency to depersonalize violence would therefore seem important. Interventions lacking such features would appear, at face value, deficient even though they may be responding to the immediacy of a perceived crisis. Quick fixes are unlikely to be successful.

Multi-agency, integrated strategies that are locally based and combine various approaches to prevention and suppression have proved more successful (at least as regards juvenile gun violence in the US) than single-based enforcement-led interventions by agencies operating in isolation. This stands to reason as multiple risk factors place children at risk of becoming (violent) offenders.

As well as the obvious need for more rigorous assessments and evaluations, there appears to be a need to approach the issues in a holistic way, and to look behind and beneath the presenting problem. Professionals developing interventions for young people need to address the variety of influences (e.g. parents' attitudes) and exposure to risk factors that shape children's behaviour (Solomon et al 2008). Moreover, each risk factor is likely to have a different impact, depending on the child's developmental stage and their varying social conditions. Intervention research therefore needs to concentrate on what works for whom, why, and in which circumstances, rather than simply on 'what works' (Catalano et al 1999). This also underscores the case for evaluation research to comprise a qualitative, rather than merely quantitative element.

However, the absence of definitive, 'scientific' level evidence that interventions are effective limits the recommendations which can be made about replicating specific initiatives. Evaluations carried out in the UK at scientific level have shown the success of hospital based, nurse counselling programmes, but they were measuring reductions in alcohol abuse (admittedly one of the causes behind violence) rather than in injuries caused by knives and other weapons.

Moreover, the complexity of circumstances affecting behaviour, coupled with the complexity of social meanings, values and behaviour which young people experience and re-negotiate, individually and in groups, makes it however very difficult for researchers to isolate and identify the specific effects of interventions. This makes it all the more important to conduct independent and rigorous evaluations of current practices, if possible using a comparison group and measuring impact over time. As Sherman et al pointed out in relation to the US back in 1997, rather than investing money into 'yet more unevaluated and unproven programmes', policy makers should 'pay much greater attention to understanding and measuring outcomes' (quoted in Shiner et al, op cit).



A wide range of interventions are taking place locally across the UK but few have had their impact evaluated (yet); even fewer have been independently assessed. Some of the programmes we examined suffered from implementation difficulties (e.g. problems with work co-ordination among different partners, delays, 'mission drift', staff turnover) which affected their ability to deliver positive outcomes (Shiner et al, op cit).

There also seems to be a lack of (clear) evidence about whether we need to tailor interventions specifically to the issue of guns and knives. Weapon availability is a clear factor in weapon involved crime, but attempts to deny young people access to knives (as opposed to guns) would seem a strategy doomed to failure. More important is addressing the factors that motivate young people's desire, or perceived need, for weapons. Here, addressing the violence, victimisation and risk that currently surrounds their lives would seem an essential starting point.

Weapon-related crime needs to be dealt with 'on all fronts: the structural, the local and the individual' (Hayden et al 2008:171). If the long term future of areas and neighbourhoods is to continue to create the conditions for the repetitive social exclusion of successive youth cohorts, then a core responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of policymakers. The use and symbolic meaning of weapons among the young people who carry them are embedded in and symptomatic of macro-system issues that need to be taken into account: the effects of poverty, poor education, unemployment, substance abuse, racism, the glamourised portrayal of violence in many sections of the cultural realm (Rushforth and Flannery 1999) – and how these are mediated by young people into their own norms, values and lifestyles.

## Appendix 1: Glossary

This short glossary does not purport to be an authoritative coverage of legal and technical terms. It is designed to define and explain the way certain terminology is used in this report.

**Antisocial behaviour** = behaviour which straddles the legal/non legal divide. 'Antisocial behaviour' is an umbrella term which is used to describe a variety of activities, usually by children and young people, ranging from nuisance to intimidation and harassment. It was codified in law by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which created the antisocial behaviour order, a civil order which breach constitutes a criminal offence.

**Children and young people** = in law, a 'child' is someone who is under 18 years of age. However, 'children' are commonly understood to up to 12 years, with 'young people' being used to indicate teenagers, from 13 upwards. In this report we use the term 'young people' to include anyone under 18 years-old.

**Delinquency** = behaviour, usually sanctioned by law, which is committed by people who are under age. Often referred to in US literature as 'juvenile delinquency'. In this report the terms 'delinquency', 'crime', 'offending' are used interchangeably to describe such behaviour.

**Juvenile** = a term mainly used in US literature to indicate minors (people under age).

**Meta-analysis** = a research technique employed to examine large numbers of quantitative studies, using sophisticated statistical techniques to arrive at an overall conclusion about a topic. It provides a systematic overview of quantitative research which has examined a particular question, for example the effectiveness of an intervention. The appeal of meta analysis is that it in effect combines all the research on one topic into one large study with many participants. The danger is that in amalgamating a large set of different studies definitions can become imprecise and the results difficult to interpret meaningfully.

**Social crime prevention** = an approach that focuses on social means to prevent crime, as opposed to (reactive) criminal justice interventions. In this context, identifying those with a high risk of committing crimes is important: knowing what factors make young people more likely to carry out criminal acts can enable policy makers to take steps to minimise the impact of such factors.

## **Appendix 2: Methods of research**

### **What our review covers**

In order to undertake an international review of literature on young people and knife/gun crime, we examined a vast range of documents produced over the last ten years: this included relevant research which had been published (as well as some unpublished material) not only in the field of criminal justice but also in other areas like psychology, sociology, social geography and health.

Our priorities were systematic reviews of relevant research and evaluations, as well as UK and European literature of good quality and North American and Australian literature of the highest quality. We used the multiple database CSA, a number of other relevant databases, plus a variety of journals and governmental publications, both in hard copy and web-based.

Although our search was primarily focused on the period 1998-2008, we retained discretion to include earlier research if it was of particular importance. Materials were obtained electronically or via library loans. Some material, especially PhD theses, was in microfiche or film format.

### **How we looked for the information**

In searching for the relevant, high standard work we utilised the multiple database CSA (which includes search results from ASSIA, NCJRS Abstracts, CSA Social Services Abstracts, CSA Sociological Abstracts, ERIC, CSA Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts, CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts, Management & Organization Studies, BHI).

Initially we also consulted the online libraries of the US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs (OJJDP) and of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), but discontinued doing so as we confirmed that relevant results from such sources tended to be picked up by CSA.

Because of the predominance of US based studies returned by the searches, and in order to establish whether we could gain access to more studies from other jurisdictions, we tried searching other databases like IBSS and PsychINFO. We also looked for relevant studies in the online library of the European Crime Prevention Network. We found a variety of UK and European based studies in these additional sources, but they mostly dealt with youth violence prevention generally rather than specifically with gun and knife crime, or were about below standard studies. This seemed to confirm that by focussing on CSA we were not missing out on vital information and that we are instead unearthing fundamental trends in relation to intervention research about youth gun and knife crime.

We supplemented the results obtained via the academic database searches with personal and organisational knowledge of programmes and of researchers carrying out relevant work and by keeping up to date or in contact with relevant literature, initiatives and practitioners. We also monitored relevant bulletins, websites and media reports to ensure we were aware of the latest developments in the subject area.

In order to find the relevant, high standard research (see below) we carried out thousands of searches, broken down by over 100 search strings. The searches were grouped thematically, according to: 1) risk and protective factors; 2) characteristics of areas with high levels of youth gun and knife crime (in terms of family structures, levels of deprivation and social disadvantage, housing, employment and ethnicity); 3) prevention and intervention strategies and programmes.

The third strand (prevention and intervention) constituted the core theme of our work. After undertaking searches about anti-gun and anti-knife prevention in the field of youth crime and delinquency generally we focused on the various intervention strands, including social marketing, situational crime prevention (including search tactics and technologies), risk reduction strategies (family support services, training and employment, peer-delivered interventions). We also designed our search strings around other main keywords, including: (crime) control; crime (or violence) prevention planning; (crime) deterrence/detering; environmental design or environmental modification; social skills (training); (public) information; education (campaigns); conflict-resolution education; mentoring; parenting, peer (education/delivered); preschool education; after-school programmes; therapeutic day care programs; recreational opportunities and employment; counselling; recreation; legal and regulatory change.

Non weapon-specific searches in the general youth violence field were also carried out: these were not exhaustive but were meant to give us an appreciation of current research directions, especially some of the significant systematic reviews and meta-analyses in this extensive field.

All search strings were first applied to 'keywords', so that the multiple database CSA would search for titles, abstracts and descriptors. This made for a powerful search, as it covered three fields of obvious relevance and avoided capturing irrelevant material. The fields were refined with additions of other fields other than 'keywords' (e.g. country of origin; country of publication; abstract; publisher) only when the topic and/or string searches returned too many (and not necessarily relevant) results.

Making the search strings too exclusive can however have its disadvantages. For example, refining searches in terms of jurisdiction proved not to bear significant results when looking for studies outside the US. We also found that, whilst there was a wealth of firearms-related, US based research, there was a dearth of knife-specific studies, across jurisdictions. We therefore decided not to limit our searches in terms of jurisdiction in CSA when looking for knife/knives related studies.

Given the vast extent of firearm-related and gang research in the USA, on the other hand, we applied a notional 'saturation point' principle: having reviewed what we thought was the best available material, we stopped searching when the literature appeared largely to replicate findings we had already arrived at.

The combination of these approaches to searching gave us a large number of potentially relevant sources, estimated to average around 2,000. This was obviously a large – and potentially misleading - number, based as it was on 'keyword – only' (i.e. author, title, descriptors) returns. We cut down these initial findings substantially (by about three quarters) by going through the actual abstracts and hence gaining a much clearer idea about the most potentially relevant studies. However, these selected studies needed to be further weeded by examination of the actual source (article/book/report). This process resulted in about 180 studies falling within our exact topic remit. In turn, these were sieved in accordance to our pre-established standards (see section below) –i.e. good qualitative studies (in accordance with GAEQ) and quantitative studies conducted at SMS levels 3 and above. This refinement process ended with a substantial number of firearm-related studies about young people (mostly originating in the US) and of studies dealing with (non specific) weapons and young people. Very few relevant studies about knives transpired anywhere, with only two SMS5 randomized controlled trials (indirectly) related to knife violence. Searches about youth violence prevention studies generally were only carried out to discover indicative findings and our search results numbers are not necessarily representative of the research field.

### **Standards used for assessment**

Once identified (using the methods outlined above), the relevant studies as brought up by our search were assessed to ascertain whether they fit within certain quality standards.

To help us identify the best available quantitative (measurement-based) research in our field of concern, we sought to apply the standards of the Campbell Collaboration ([www.campbellcollaboration.org/resources/guidelines.shtml](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/resources/guidelines.shtml)) and used the 'Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods' (SMS). SMS categorises such studies according to a hierarchy of rigour and reliability. For the purposes of this report we were considering research which fell within the top three levels of the scale (levels 3-5).

*Level 1.* Correlation between an intervention and a measure of outcome at a single point in time.

*Level 2.* Temporal sequence between the intervention and the outcome clearly observed, or the presence of a comparison group without demonstrated comparability (= which characteristics, e.g. age, social background, family and other influences, cannot be said to be clearly and unequivocally similar or equivalent) to the treatment group.

*Level 3.* A comparison between two or more comparable units of analysis, one with and one without the intervention.

*Level 4.* Comparison between multiple units with and without the intervention, controlling for other factors, or using comparison units that evidence only minor differences.

*Level 5.* Random assignment and analysis of comparable units to intervention and comparison groups.

At level 3 and above, it is possible to discern what difference a given factor makes to the outcome, because a clear comparison has been made between a group affected and one not affected by the factor.

To help us establish the validity and applicability of qualitative (experience-based) research we used a rating system called the ‘Global Assessment of Evaluation Quality’ (GAEQ) (as devised by Moran et al 2004 – see table below), which criteria include:

- the quality of the specified data collection tools;
- whether the sample is adequate in its size and representativeness ;
- the appropriateness of the analytic methods used and the adequacy of the data captured;
- the presence of an external or independent evaluation.

#### **GAEQ: ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

(Source: Moran et al 2004)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Qualitative studies</b>
Measures/ data collection tools	Specified and standardised data collection tools (e.g. written topic guides, aide-memoirs etc.)
Sample representativeness	Adequate representativeness of sample relative to analytic dimensions (in sense of cross-section, not statistical representativeness) e.g. not all ‘volunteers’; not all one type of person when intervention is delivered to a range)
Sample size	Adequate sample size in relation to conclusions drawn (especially re: sub groups: not less than n=5)
Analytic methods	Proper data capture methods (tapes, notes) & appropriate and specified methods of analysis (e.g. grounded theory; content analysis; framework analysis; thematic etc)
Type of evaluation	External or independent evaluation

When assessing both quantitative and qualitative studies we used tailor-made proformas – the template is shown below. We assessed in this way at least 73 studies identified as potentially relevant and of suitable quality. Given time constraints we were unable to conduct two or more independent scrutinies of the materials so as to eliminate the possibility of error. However by using data collection forms we tried to make each assessment as objective as possible, while being unable to carry out all the cross-checking required of a systematic review.

More details about the assessments can be obtained on request by the authors.

## **RESEARCH ASSESSMENT FORM**

**Type of study**

**Area and jurisdiction of the study**

**main outcome - e.g. frequency of  
weapon carrying, fear of weapons**

**Group - e.g. 10-yr-old  
'Caucasians'/17-yr-old  
'Hispanics'/male/female, etc.**

**Sample size**

**Intervention/programme/prevention  
type etc.**

**Code**

**-If a quantitative study, Levels 1-5  
(correlations at one point in time,  
cohort study, control groups, etc.);  
or meta-analysis, systematic  
review, etc, aiming to include only  
studies scoring 3 or higher.**

**-If a qualitative study:**

**A- specified data collection tools;  
B- adequate representativeness of  
sample;**

**C- adequate sample size;**

**D- appropriate data capture and  
analytic methods;**

**E- external or independent  
evaluation.**

**Power of the statistical  
analysis/statistical robustness**

**Overall relevance**

**Overall assessment and comments**



### **Prediction studies and risk factors: some methodological notes**

In Chapter 1 we discuss 'prediction studies' or 'risk based approaches'. Such a research stream tends to produce what are called *aggregate* and *probabilistic* findings. This is to say, it does not seek to predict exactly which young people will commit which types of offences, but it indicates the kinds of backgrounds, experiences and socialisation processes which are more likely to produce high rates of offending. In turn young people whose early lives show evidence of multiple risk factors are generally more likely to become involved in persistent criminal activity and some risk factors appear to be more likely to influence young people's involvement in violence.

The chapter uses some 16 published pieces of research, although there are other studies which cover very similar ground. We have also included two meta-analyses: Lipsey and Derzon 1998 and Derzon 2001. (Meta-analyses examine large numbers of studies using sophisticated statistical techniques to arrive at an overall conclusion about a topic.) The findings of these studies, which relate to predicting violent crime by young people, summarise 92 research studies. Even so, there are limits to what meta-analysis can tell us about a particular topic, particularly since the results are affected by the quality of the studies that are meta-analysed. In particular, such studies are unable to address complex relationships or detailed questions relating to gender or ethnicity, since information on these issues is lacking in the original studies. We have taken the findings of these studies to be useful, although we do not consider them the 'last word' on the topics they address. We have also included some of the literature which itself reviews the findings of research (e.g. Sieger et al 2004, Hawkins et al 1998, Howells 1997) - although much of the literature on prediction tends to be repetitive.

### **Longitudinal surveys**

In order to identify relevant risk factors, many researchers in the field of prediction believe that the best way to study how and why young people come to engage in delinquent and criminal behaviour is to study them *before* they reach their teens, often from a very early age. Researchers refer to these studies as 'developmental' or longitudinal' surveys (Farrington 1992, 2002).

The data collected in such surveys may include details of the issues and problems faced by the young people in the sample, and of any offences they have committed. Statistical analysis is employed to ascertain which factors have the strongest relationship with crime. Using the pieces of information which have strong relationships with offending, researchers can then build up a predictive scale – the more factors a person has present in their lives, the greater the chance of them committing an crime.

The strength of longitudinal research lies in its ability to identify how offending emerges over time and to record the sequences of events and circumstances that precede the emergence of delinquency. This enables researchers to get a better picture of how prior events may impact upon later delinquency and offending and to better understand how risk factors and protective factors may operate in shaping behaviour. However, these studies take a long time to produce results, since they are collecting data as the children in the studies grow up.

In this country, probably the best known longitudinal survey is the 'Cambridge Study of Delinquent Behaviour' (Farrington 1992), which followed a cohort of 800 boys from South London between the ages of 8 and 32. In a large number of books, journal articles and papers, Farrington and colleagues have detailed the findings relating to the emergence and continuation of delinquency amongst the boys. Similar studies in the United States – in particular, the Denver Youth Survey, the Pittsburgh Youth Study and the Rochester Youth Development Study have been carried out since 1986 (as part of the Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency) (Krohn and Thornberry 2003).

The findings from such research exhibit broad similarities, in particular noting continuities between early problematic behaviour and later, more serious criminality. Common to most studies are findings that focus on the importance of parenting, school, the criminal behaviour of peers and relatives, and the role of gang membership in facilitating criminal behaviour. Social structural disadvantage also emerges across these studies as impacting upon the likelihood of offending. Perhaps the most consistent finding is that the earlier children begin offending, the more likely they are to go on to commit more serious offences as they grow older (Krohn and Thornberry 2003).

Once the results of these surveys are gathered they can also be analysed together, using meta-analysis (see the Glossary) to examine whether findings from research on young people in one city are similar to those in other areas (Lipsey and Derzon 1998).

There are criticisms raised of these research methods. A key area relates to the issue of social change over time. If we consider Farrington's Cambridge Study, it is quite clear that boys brought up in South London during the late 1950s and early 1960s experienced a very different social world to that experienced by young people born in the same area in the 1980s or later. Social norms, activities and values change over time and so do criminologists' areas of interest. For example, the focus of the Cambridge study was limited to white boys: this study did not look at girls or minority ethnic groups. More recent studies such as the Pittsburgh Youth Study have samples of young people which are more representative of the diversity of contemporary society (Thornberry and Krohn 2003). Although there remains a tendency to focus upon male behaviour (e.g. Loeber et al 2003), the Dunedin study in New Zealand has produced a detailed examination of gender differences between males and females in the study, linking male offending to genetic and other biological influences whilst female offending is depicted as being the result of social factors (Moffitt et al 2001).

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