



# MILLION

## Young people, and gun and knife crime: a review of the evidence

16 March 2009



**“The 11 MILLION children and young people in England have a voice”**

Children’s Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Albert Aynsley-Green

## Acknowledgements

11 MILLION, the organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Sir Al Aynsley-Green, is grateful to the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies for producing with us a timely, independent review of evidence on a key topic of public concern. Our thanks go also to Chris Austin and Mariana Oliveira for their assistance with the collation of material and the organisation of referencing of our very numerous sources.

## The authors

The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) at King's College London is an independent charity that informs and educates about all aspects of crime and criminal justice. CCJS provides information, produces research and carries out policy analysis to encourage and facilitate an understanding of the complex nature of issues concerning crime. It is a membership organisation working with practitioners, policy makers, academics and students, the media and the voluntary sector, offering a programme of events, publications and online resources.

CCJS has considerable and recent experience of research on knife and gun crime. It published authoritative briefings on knife and gun crime, as well as a substantive report for a major non-government inquiry into street weapons in the UK. It can also draw on in-depth knowledge of systematically reviewing evidence on young people's complex needs and appropriate interventions to meet them.

Members of the CCJS project team for this project were: Dr Mark Oldfield, an independent researcher; Arianna Silvestri, Research and Policy Officer at CCJS; Peter Squires, Professor in Criminology and Public Policy at the University of Brighton; and Dr Roger Grimshaw, Research Director at CCJS.

## Foreword by Sir Al Aynsley-Green, Children's Commissioner for England



There is no shortage of people – from Government, the police, statutory agencies, third sector and others – working to reduce gun and knife crime in England, and to keep children and young people safe from violence.

Indeed, this is what children and young people themselves want, demonstrated by their choice of gun and knife crime as the issue they most wanted me to focus on in 2008-09.

Many of the above organisations are working together, drawing on, and then adapting and improving existing policies.

But what has perhaps been lacking is an authoritative examination of all these many and varied solutions.

It is vital that, with the level of resources – time, money, people and effort – being rightly spent on this area that we are clear about what can best keep children and young people safe, and what can best keep them from offending or re-offending.

So this report, commissioned by 11 MILLION from the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, is timely. It provides a detailed overview of what the highest quality research evidence tells us about gun and knife crime interventions for young people. As far as the evidence allows, it tells us what works. Equally importantly, it also identifies gaps in the evidence or where evidence is inconclusive. We still have some way to go before policy and practice in England and Wales in this vital area can truly be called evidence-based. I therefore hope this report stimulates further research, as well as new debate.

My thanks are due to the team at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, in particular Doctor Roger Grimshaw and Arianna Silvestri, who have been meticulous in their assessment and presentation of the evidence.

During the next few weeks I will be publishing a full report on gun and knife crime, specifically focused on solutions.

That report will draw on the findings of this research, a survey of the views of more than 1,700 children and young people, and the lived experiences of more than 100 children and young people from London, Merseyside, Manchester, Leicester and Birmingham – just a few of the vast majority of children and young people of whom we can be proud. I am sure you will share my view, and their view, that we must all do everything possible to ensure that they stay safe from gun and knife crime.



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## Who are we?



**11 MILLION is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green. The Children's Commissioner is a position created by the Children Act 2004.**

### **The Children Act 2004**

The Children Act requires the Children's Commissioner for England to be concerned with the five aspects of well-being covered in *Every Child Matters* – the national government initiative aimed at improving outcomes for all children. It also requires us to have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC underpins our work and informs which areas and issues our efforts are focused on.

### **Our vision**

Children and young people will actively be involved in shaping all decisions that affect their lives, are supported to achieve their full potential through the provision of appropriate services, and will live in homes and communities where their rights are respected and they are loved, safe and enjoy life.

### **Our mission**

We will use our powers and independence to ensure that the views of children and young people are routinely asked for, listened to and that outcomes for children improve over time. We will do this in partnership with others, by bringing children and young people into the heart of the decision-making process to increase understanding of their best interests.

### **Our long-term goals**

1. Children and young people see significant improvements in their wellbeing and can freely enjoy their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
2. Children and young people are more highly valued by adult society.

### **For more information**

Visit our website for everything you need to know about 11 MILLION:  
[www.11MILLION.org.uk](http://www.11MILLION.org.uk).



## Executive summary

**This report is the outcome of an extensive review of English-language evidence about the effectiveness of interventions designed to tackle children and young people's involvement in gun crime and knife crime.**

The issue is currently at the forefront of public attention, and a number of anti-knife and anti-gun initiatives are taking place internationally and in the UK. The purpose of the report is to find out which strategies have been submitted to rigorous analysis and assessment, and what the evidence says about their impact on children and young people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours.

This review also examines the research evidence about what factors in the lives of children and young people make them more or less likely to become involved in weapon-carrying and violent behaviour, and considers the perceptions, values and motivations of the children and young people involved.

We have also outlined some of the interventions which have been rigorously assessed in the field of youth violence prevention generally. Gun and knife crime are expressions of wider phenomena of youth crime and violence, so need to be viewed in more general contexts of disaffection and youth offending. These are complex products of inter-related individual, family, social, biological and environmental factors.

### Key findings

#### The impact of interventions

##### Weaponised violence prevention: what the evidence suggests works

- Some rigorously assessed US interventions appear to have had positive impacts in the short term: "hot spot" approaches have shown promise in reducing gun violence among children and young people, though they may suffer from problems in sustaining approval and acceptance among local communities.
- Multi-agency, multi-focus approaches, which are locally based and combine both prevention and suppression, have been shown to be more effective in combating gun violence among young people than single interventions by agencies working in isolation.
- The only evaluations of anti-knife initiatives in the UK so far to have been carried out at a scientific level show the success of hospital-based, nurse counselling programmes, although these measure reductions in alcohol abuse rather than in injuries caused by knives and other weapons.

### Youth violence prevention: what key evidence suggests works

- Strategies, such as therapeutic foster care, that seek to influence knowledge, attitudes and behaviour seem promising in their impact in reducing involvement in violent behaviour.
- A public health approach, characterised by a multi-agency approach and early identification of problems, aims to address multiple risk factors and to introduce protective factors, and underpins some of the most promising youth violence prevention strategies.
- Some preventive interventions, such as nurse visitation programmes, that target family-related risk factors in early childhood seem to be having a long-term positive impact on reducing offending and violent behaviour.

### What the evidence suggests does not work

- Of the few US anti-gun initiatives that have been subjected to the most rigorous analysis, none have shown significant long-term reductions in young people's gun violence.
- Zero tolerance and deterrent approaches within the criminal justice system do not appear to be effective. 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.

### Reflections on intervention strategies

- The complexity of circumstances affecting behaviour, coupled with the complexity of the social meanings negotiated by children and young people, are bound to make it difficult for researchers to isolate and identify the direct effects of specific interventions, especially for behaviour involving implements such as knives which are readily available.
- Policies to disarm weapon carriers are restricting themselves to symptoms unless they also tackle the fears and insecurities of children and young people, and the concentrations of youth violence in particular areas.
- Focusing upon the weapons themselves may therefore 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 usage come to be considered an option, or a necessity.
- Interventions need to concentrate on what works for whom, and in which circumstances, rather than simply on finding what it is hoped works for all.

### Risk and protective factors

- Professionals designing interventions for children and young people need to take into account the variety of influences and exposure to risk factors, around family, school, peers and the community/local environment, that shape children and young people's behaviour.
- Violence causes fear and stress, and being exposed to it – as a victim or by seeing someone else being victimised – makes people more pre-disposed to commit violence themselves.

- Each risk factor will have a different impact, depending on the child's developmental stage and their varying social conditions. For instance, factors in the neighbourhood can have negative effects on those otherwise less at risk.
- Although research in this area is less developed, there are also factors that can have a protective role, helping children and young people avoid offending. These appear to include good academic achievement, having peers who are not offending or involved in anti-social behaviour, good relations with parents, and the presence of caring and supportive adults.
- However, predictive methods – which identify that children and young people are likely to become offending or violent on the basis of their risk factors or lack of protective factors – are not infallible. They can be over-deterministic and lead to labelling children and young people as potentially criminal, which can have a negative influence on their outcomes.

### Growing up in disadvantaged areas

- High rates of crime and violence tend mostly to affect disadvantaged areas. People living in these areas do not just experience higher levels of crime but also suffer from various other problems, including poverty, low social capital and limited social mobility.
- Inequality, lack of opportunity, poverty and relative deprivation are likely to generate stifled aspirations. The development of criminal careers can therefore also be understood as a way of satisfying material aspirations.
- Where neighbourhoods are threatening, weapon-carrying may make young people feel safer, and children and young people say they carry weapons to protect themselves in areas they perceive to be unsafe. But it is the presumption that others are armed that helps reinforce fear and insecurity, and the presence of weapons may escalate conflicts and increase the likelihood of injuries or death.
- Notions of street credibility and respect can become very significant to young people in deprived communities, who may lack legitimate access to other forms of status achievement. Yet this street social capital, while it bonds young people closer to their offending 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.

### The need for more research

- Remarkably few interventions on youth knife and gun crime, nationally and internationally, have been subjected to rigorous research and/or independent assessment: experimental, controlled trials with comparison groups.
- Although there are many anti-knife initiatives underway in the UK, there is very little research about their impact on knife crime. A large number of locally based initiatives have been established or are being piloted in the UK, which are designed to affect children and young people's carrying or using of weapons. But in some cases



they are recent and evaluations are therefore premature, while in others the lack of independent assessment of their efficacy is because of a shortage of funding.

- Independent evaluations of interventions are crucial in helping to establish the impacts of these interventions and whether they have been successful in reducing levels of gun or knife crime.
- Most research into gun carrying and gun use comes from the US, but the majority of firearms programmes studied there have not been subject to the most rigorous, quasi-scientific validity tests.
- 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.
- There is an absence of clear evidence about whether interventions should be tailored specifically to the issue of guns and knives.

## Introduction



**This report examines what evidence exists of the effectiveness of interventions aimed at tackling the involvement of children and young people in gun or knife crime. The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) has been reviewing rigorous research in this area for at least the past 10 years, looking at studies carried out not only in the UK but also in the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and in Europe.**

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

The interventions we took into account were both universal (aimed at all children and young people in a particular area, school, region or country) and targeted (aimed at particular groups, such as those at risk of becoming offenders, or those who have already committed offences). They take place in a variety of contexts, like schools, communities, homes, streets or criminal justice institutions, and range in scope from awareness raising, for instance public information campaigns, to attempting to modify behaviour and attitudes, such as counselling, mentoring or parent training, to enforcement strategies, like stop and search, street sweeps or targeted surveillance, and 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 from hereon, includes everyone in this age range, unless stated otherwise. 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 in appendix one.

### **Setting the context: what are gun crime and knife crime?**

Gun crime and knife crime are not discreet entities but encompass a variety of unlawful behaviours. Guns and knives can in fact be used in actions which fall under a range of offences in the UK legal context, for instance:

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

Gun crime 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.

This is a general problem of measurement, in the sense that police recorded data – because of under-reporting or lack of recording – can only tell us so much. 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 police approaches in Home Office requirements and in the way suspected crimes are recorded. Victimization surveys, such as the British Crime Survey (BCS) in England and Wales, 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. 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, such as domestic violence and, importantly, persons under 16 have not so far formed part of the survey.

Official figures are also problematic, specifically with regard to gun- and knife-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 have been collated since 2003. This means direct comparisons with preceding periods cannot be made (Eades et al 2007). The Home Office category of “firearm-enabled” and “knife-enabled” crime also excludes offences of possession (Squires 2008). The fact that offences of illegal knife and gun possession are not routinely recorded 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 and knife amnesties (Squires 2009). Current initiatives in the UK are outlined in chapter four.

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 largely to involve 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 long 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. The latest Home Office figures show that in 2007-08, “of the firearm offences (excluding air weapons) in which the ages of the victims were known, half (50 per cent) of victims were aged under 30

years... 22 per cent were aged between 21 and 29 years followed by 16- to 20-year-olds at 15 per cent” (Povey et al 2009:42).

### Young people and homicides

Despite current public concerns about “kids killing kids”, official figures show that of those young people under 16 who are killed, most are killed by their parents. In 2007-08, 62 per cent of all homicide victims under 16 were killed by their parents, an increase from 51 per cent in 2006-07. The most at risk group overall for homicide is that of very young children, in other words 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 crime and gun crime, we need to understand the context in which young people carry and use such weapons: the areas in which they live, the schools to which they go, 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 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 one and two.

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 three 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 four 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 the UK. There has been little independent evaluation of the many initiatives recently aimed at tackling knife-related crimes in the UK. It is therefore not possible to scientifically assess their effectiveness. However, the chapter also examines interventions where knives and knife-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 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 45 per cent, or 52 million, of US households legally own at least one gun. This contrasts with less than five per cent of households in England and Wales and in Scotland (Squires 2000, 184). Moreover, we need to bear in mind that debate about guns in the US is polarised and politicised, and this controversy tends to influence research as well (see e.g. Spitzer 1995).

## A note on 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.

Similarly, 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 proportionately more likely to be under-educated, unemployed and living in disadvantaged areas.

Most of the high-quality research we have concentrated on covers young males, who tend to be the offenders and the victims. 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 also, for example, the effect of the Move to Opportunity intervention in chapter two – but most 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 “mindors”, their role in peer group dynamics, for instance, as mediators or initiators of violence, or the connection between weapons and sexual violence against females.

## Beyond weapons: youth violence in general

Many 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 five. We believe they 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 one and two for more information), but we do not present this as an exhaustive review of the general youth violence prevention literature, which would be a much larger undertaking, 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 10 years unless particularly significant. To help us identify it, we used the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS), a set of standards commonly used by academics and researchers when assessing quantitative, measurement-based studies. SMS categorises such studies according to a hierarchy of rigour and reliability.

For the purposes of this report we considered research which fell within the top three levels of the scale (levels three to five). In other words, studies where a comparison group – where people receiving an intervention are compared with those not receiving it – has been used at the very least (level three; in level four multiple comparators and a quasi-experimental design are used), with the “gold standard” constituted by studies using a randomised control design (level five: here the assignment of individuals to control and intervention groups is carried out in a random way to help avoid bias).

To help establish the validity and applicability of qualitative, or 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 two.

We also only considered evaluations of interventions which had been carried out externally and independently.

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, in other words there was the presence of a comparison group, and we have selected the most relevant of those for inclusion in the report.

Specifically for longitudinal studies and surveys of young people in the UK, we have included work which falls below our set minimum standards. We did so not only because of the shortage 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 three.

### Learning from both quantitative and qualitative studies

Both quantitative or measurement-based, and qualitative or experience-based, methods can yield useful insights.

A great deal of youth crime research, especially contemporary “risk and protection factor” studies (see chapter one), has 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 – known as 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. 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 three.

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 previously stated, the term “young people” for the purposes of this report is inclusive of “children”, unless stated, and is used for all those under the age of 18. Please also see the glossary in appendix one.

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 that they both tend to be used to refer to behaviour which, if detected, would lead to arrest and possible 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, in other words 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



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 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.

### Summary

- 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 – for instance, 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 youth offending (see Glossary), in other words, factors 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-offending peers, good relations with parents and the presence of caring and supportive adults in young people’s lives.
- Social crime prevention programmes, in particular, have sought to tackle the causes of crime by either removing or neutralising risk factors impinging upon young people’s lives and/or bolstering their protective factors – for example, by attempting to reduce

poverty, enhance educational and training opportunities or offering family support.

- Predictive methods are not infallible: they may over- or under-predict which young people are likely to become deviant or violent – what researchers call “false positives” or “false negatives” – and should therefore be 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 essential backdrop to understanding the phenomena of weapon carrying and use by young people.

### 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 which *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 more likely to become involved in persistent criminal activity. Moreover, some risk factors appear to be more likely to influence young people’s involvement in violence.

Research findings show that, although it is possible to identify factors which are likely to play a role in later offending among 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-offending 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, such as 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 one 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 seven-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 to 14, as established by Lipsey and Derzon’s meta-analysis, are shown in table two below. These factors, when present among young people aged 12 to 14, are likely to predict (further) violent offending when they are aged 15 to 25. The factors are ranked according to their statistical strength, with group one containing the most reliable predictors and group five the least reliable. Within each group, the factors are also ranked according to statistical strength, for example, weak social ties being a relatively stronger predictor than anti-social peers.

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

(Source: Lipsey and Derzon 1998)

<p>1. Weak social ties (engage in few pro-social activities; low popularity with friends/acquaintances)</p> <p>1. Anti-social peers (i.e. peers engaging in criminal activities)</p>
<p>2. Carrying out other types of crimes</p>
<p>3. Aggression (aggressive/disruptive behaviour; verbal aggression toward others)</p> <p>3. Negative attitude toward school, poor performance and behaviour at school</p> <p>3. Having 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</p> <p>3. Having a poor relationship with parents</p> <p>3. Being male increased the risk of serious and violent offending</p> <p>3. Being physically violent toward others</p>
<p>4. Having anti-social parents</p> <p>4. Previous crimes against people using threat or force and including sexual offences</p> <p>4. Problem behaviour such as aggression, anti-social behaviour, temper tantrums</p> <p>4. Low IQ (e.g. learning difficulties, verbal and non-verbal reasoning problems, low language ability)</p>
<p>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</p> <p>5. Being a member of a poor family (as indicated by measures of socioeconomic status, housing stock in one's neighbourhood, and parental and siblings' employment status)</p> <p>5. Experience of childhood abuse - emotional, physical, sexual, neglect or other maltreatment</p> <p>5. Other family characteristics (e.g. high family stress, large family size, discord between parents)</p> <p>5. Using drugs/alcohol</p> <p>5. Ethnicity - youth from ethnic minorities had a greater risk of offending</p>

Lipsey and Derzon (1998) found that, for children aged six to 11, the strength of the relationships between risk factors and violent offending were different. For example, having anti-social friends for those aged six to 11 was the weakest predictive factor of all those identified. For those aged 12 to 14, 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 also is a predictor of the likelihood of gang involvement (Thornberry 1998). Gangs are also discussed in further sections below.

### Other risk factors

As well as the risk factors mentioned above, other experiences in young people's lives also 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 two 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, worse, will be victims of violence. Both these types of experience can have long-lasting effects. Experiencing violence - either as a victim or witnessing other people being the victims of violence - in fact increases the likelihood that young people will experience mental health problems such as depression, will abuse drugs and alcohol, or will perform poorly at school. It will also increase 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 also come to think that their own life could end at any time and therefore disregard how their current actions will influence their future (Reebye et al 2000).

Research in the US into the impact of adverse childhood experiences also demonstrates the cumulative impact 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, upon a wide range of outcomes in adult life (ACE 2009).

Research indicates that 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 US 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, 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 three, 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?

While 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 a certain behaviour was carried out by 90 per cent 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 US 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 UK context, remains a contested issue. Understandings around what gangs are and what they do vary greatly, from simple groups of young people congregating together, 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 three 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 overlooked. In reality,



someone identified as likely to offend may not 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. While predicting some violent crime, his findings did not support the notion of an underlying trait in individuals which 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 per cent 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 anti-social 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



This chapter examines the characteristics of areas where violent crime, including knife and gun crime, is especially prevalent. As we noted in the last chapter, 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.

### Summary

- 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, but also 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, the neighbourhood in which young people live seems to affect whether they get involved in crime, whether they stop offending, and how difficult it is to stop offending.
- 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.

Research has endeavoured to identify why and how certain areas are associated with higher levels of crime than others. Studies typically compare measures of disadvantage – for instance, 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, such as 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 more affluent 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 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 has specifically looked at any causal relation between the nature of certain, mainly urban, areas and the carrying and use of guns and knives among young people living in these areas.

### **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 to them 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 more than one 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 disadvantages 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 areas and localities have responded 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 – for instance, Hagedorn (1988) describes the consequences of the loss in the late 20th 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 localities 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: xiv).

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 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 that “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 gangs’ postcode identifications – a recent study of young people in UK cities has shown how territoriality can 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 during evidence to the Home Affairs Select 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 enjoyed by people outside of their area or 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), in other words 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: for instance, to stand up for others, to report crime to the police and to let offenders know that someone is watching. In areas of concentrated deprivation, such informal mechanisms of control are weak or absent and support for conventional activities may be lacking. 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 and alienated 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 one), 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 youth offending and anti-social behaviour 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 US (Lieberman 2007). The study involved repeated interviews with more than 6,000 young people and their care givers, 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 US, the Moving to Opportunity experiment enabled families in the experimental group to relocate to less disadvantaged areas. Researchers found that violence among young men and women aged between 15 and 25, who had been relocated as part of the experiment between four and seven years old previously, initially fell. However, longer-term results showed that the reduction in violence among 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. While some of the African-American girls prospered, the experiment seemed to reinforce the gang affiliations of many 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 offending risk factor (Hagedorn 1988).

### **Exposure to violence**

Violence in neighbourhoods is a risk factor for young people. Research shows that when young people are exposed to inter-personal 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 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 – also 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 (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 three 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 be useful for some young people but 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 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 while 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 three, which reviews qualitative data.

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



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 in context and makes 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 one and two.

### Summary

- 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, their significance to those involved. We also need to understand the ways in which violence is produced within a group and the meanings attached to it.
- Notions of street credibility and respect – effectively, forms of street social capital – 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 (offending) peer groups it can also alienate them from the wider community and societal values.
- While some research suggests that learning and acting according to the codes 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 safety and 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.
- Focusing 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. These questions can only be meaningfully approached via qualitative and interpretative research.

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 friends.

In a peer group context it would then be possible for a researcher to conclude that certain narratives or stories about violence, risk taking, status and credibility, or 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, such as drug deliveries or 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 challenging 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, in terms of confidence, maturity, status, strength, independence – financial, legal, emotional – 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 socialise 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 per cent of 14- to 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

Most young people simply “grow out” of crime. This is borne out by figures which show that it is young men under 25 who are the most represented group among offenders (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: (a) aging out, (b) dying, (c) going to prison, (d) getting jobs, (e) moving to other organisations (f) 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 gangs and/or violence and/or weapons, young people may have difficulty in 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 wrongdoing 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 re-offend. 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".

US research since the mid-1980s has also consistently argued (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 who are 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 cultures

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 pre-occupations 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. One does not have to subscribe to the familiar condemnation of “gangsta rap” music to point to this important cultural relation.

### **Economic and other motivations**

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 glamorised 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, for instance when participating in drug dealing. This can be understood in the context of their social positions of disadvantage and relative deprivation. See also chapter two.

### **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 reactions, 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 also contrasts, to some extent, with Anderson’s work on the Code of the Street. While adoption of some “streetwise” behaviours may well 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 what the perceived dangers of everyday life are, internalise 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 UK 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. Equally, other young people may well be the bearers of real or imagined grudges which, when guns are involved rapidly turn into “shoot or be shot” scenarios.

### Firearms as facilitators for violence

Researchers have also 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

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been seen as a “proximate cause”, or 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 many 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. Therefore, 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).



Although some claim that carrying weapons is an attempt at presenting a tough exterior to the world – in other words, 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).

## 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 figure one below). Journeys to and from school are often particularly difficult and can lead to taking complicated routes to avoid especially 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 designed just to make schools themselves 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 already followed, or maybe just subscribed to, even 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.”**

### Confidence in the police

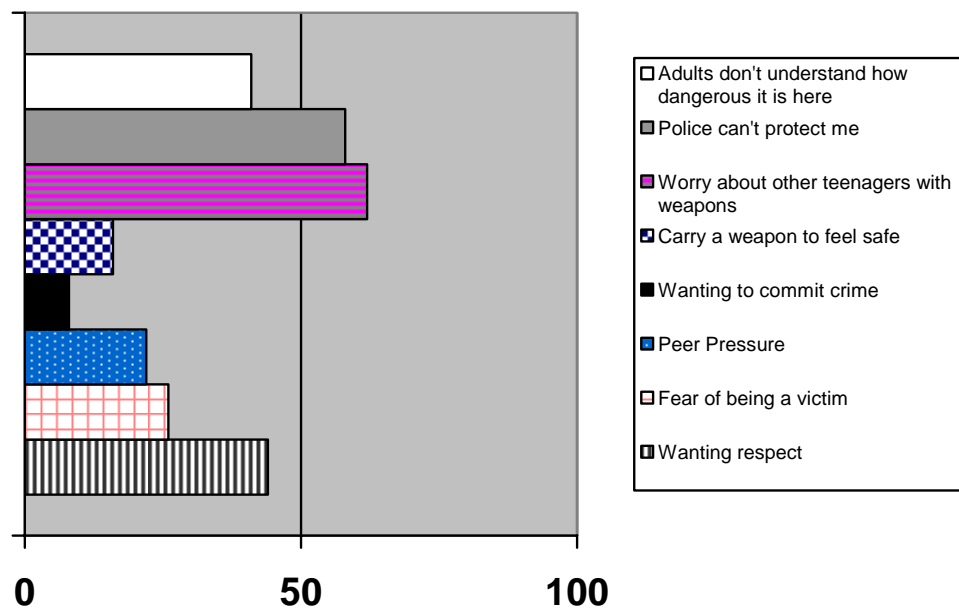
A survey carried out by BBC London in 2007, which involved 500 young people living in the capital, puts the question of trust, respect and confidence in the police into wider perspective. This survey covered the five London boroughs of Brent, Croydon, Hackney, Lambeth and Southwark in which weapon-involved 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 graph. This survey did not meet our minimum standards but it does provide a useful, broad indication of youth attitudes. By virtue of its focus on the

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

five London boroughs seemingly most affected by knife crime, its general conclusions are worth noting.

**Figure 1: BBC London Youth Survey: weapon carrying attitudes and motivations, the whole sample**  
(Source: ComRes 2007)



Around 45 per cent of those surveyed did not think that adults had any understanding of how dangerous young people felt their residential area was, and nearly 60 per cent did not think the police would be able to offer them adequate protection. The diagram indicates the other contextual factors shaping young people's view of their area, but the most significant driver of their fears was, apparently, the likelihood, perceived by 62 per cent of those surveyed, that other young people might be carrying knives. In other words, a self-perpetuating arms race on these streets both motivated young people to carry knives in the first place, and, allied with a distrust and lack of confidence in the police and other adult authorities, caused fear among the others, ultimately making it more likely that they, too, would carry knives. This is not to claim that all, or indeed most, knife carriers are part of a gang; often they are not (Sharp et al 2006).

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 four.

### Carrying weapons

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).

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). Some people say they carry 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”.

Surveys in the UK tend to confirm an emerging picture of weapon carrying by some 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.

MORI has surveyed school-age children about their weapon carrying since 2002. Their 2004 survey noted important distinctions between the patterns of knife carrying by children in education and those “excluded” from school. 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 four per cent had carried a knife in the previous 12 months, with 16- and 17-year-olds, at seven per cent, the most likely to do so. And of those who carried knives 41 per cent had carried a penknife, 29 per cent a flick-knife and 10 per cent a kitchen knife. Most of the knife-carrying young people did so only rarely, “once or twice” in the past 12 months and only 16 per cent claimed to do so “10 times or more”. As many as 85 per cent of those who had carried knives said that they did so in order to protect themselves but only seven per cent said they had used their knives to threaten anyone and only two per cent 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: 9). 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 outlined in Figure one went a little further to explore these weapon carrying motivations. Finding that 16 per cent of their 500-strong sample agreed with the statement "sometimes I have to carry a weapon to feel safe" (not just knives), they also went on to enquire about their respondents' experiences of weapon-based victimisation, their intimidation by gangs, fears about other people in their neighbourhood carrying weapons and their doubts about the ability of the police to provide adequate protection. Just over a third had either experienced knife-based victimisation directly, or knew of someone else who had, while it was 20 per cent for gun crime. Some 21 per cent of the sample claimed intimidation by gangs, 62 per cent had fears about other people in the neighbourhood carrying weapons and 58 per cent had doubts about the ability of the police to provide adequate protection.



**"I can protect myself with a knife or a gun. I would rather be arrested than dead."**

**(Broadhurst et al 2008)**

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

## Chapter 4: anti-gun and anti-knife interventions



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-gun and anti-knife interventions (or anti-weapon more generally) on young people's attitudes and behaviour.

### Summary

- There are a variety of anti-knife, especially, and anti-gun initiatives currently being undertaken in the UK. Many follow a “hot spot” approach, focusing on specific areas and at-risk young people.
- Remarkably few interventions on youth knife and gun crime, nationally and internationally, have been subjected to rigorous and independent analysis and assessment.
- 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 which 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 approaches, which are locally based and combine both prevention and suppression, are more effective in combating gun violence among young people than single interventions by agencies working in isolation.
- Despite the many anti-knife initiatives underway 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.
- There is an absence of clear evidence about whether interventions should be tailored specifically to the issue of guns and knives. It seems important to address 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.

## Current UK initiatives

The killings of a number of young people in London and other cities in the UK in recent years has led to public concern and media attention. Such tragedies also raised concerns that violent crime among young people was rising. However, evidence seems to indicate that this is not a uniform problem across the UK, but tends to be concentrated in certain, especially urban, locations (Squires et al 2008).

Current anti-knife and anti-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 (TKAP) is focused on 10 areas – London, Merseyside, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Nottinghamshire, Essex, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, Thames Valley and South Wales. The Tackling Gangs Action Programme, which targeted gang-related firearms offences, focused on the four police force areas of London, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester. Anti-knife operations, such as Operation Blunt and 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 Organisation'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 violent crime in Scotland is concentrated in the Strathclyde Police area and especially around Glasgow. The VRU is trying a number of initiatives to deal with the city's knife crime problem – which frequently involve young people's fights – including the anonymised recording of violence-related injuries at Glasgow Royal Hospital. Given that 25 per cent 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 the section headed "Knives and other weapons" below.

In England and Wales, the Government's Tackling Violence Action Plan and the Youth Crime Action Plan, both in 2008, include measures specifically targeting weapons, including:

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- A presumption that anybody aged 16 and over who is found carrying knives should be prosecuted.
- That anyone using a knife “should expect to receive a custodial sentence”.
- Making home visits and sending 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 the 10 TKAP force areas (Home Office 2008b).
- Running 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.
- Putting in new controls on deactivated firearms.

The remit for TKAP, launched in June 2008 and due to run until the end of March 2009, is to deliver “tough enforcement combined with education, prevention work and information campaigns” (Youth Justice Board 2008a). Its initiatives include 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 and there are plans to publish a good practice guide in spring 2009<sup>2</sup>.

### Policy and evidence

The Government announced in October 2008 that “more than 2,200 knives have been seized following targeted stop-and-search operations”. However, it is not clear what impact, if any, stop and search have on overall 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 amnesties may raise awareness, 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 increasingly severe criminal justice responses. Anyone aged 16 or over 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

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

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 is ineffective in reducing crime or changing attitudes – see also chapter five. Moreover, putting more young people into custody seems ineffective. Ministry of Justice figures from 2008 show that young offenders released from custody have the highest re-offending rates of all those who have been dealt with through the criminal justice system.

During the course of our research we have come across a large number of locally based initiatives – by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, youth offending teams, 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 and police workshops, and are intended to increase awareness of the dangers and implications of carrying weapons, such as stART2, Be Safe, No To Knives.

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, it is down to budgetary restrictions or 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 US. This is not surprising, given the level of ownership of firearms in the country and the high levels of young people killed by guns. A US national survey of high school students found that family and friends were the sources from which young people obtained their guns. Only five per cent asked someone else to buy a gun for them from legal or illegal sources (Sheley and Wright 1998).

A report by the US National Academy of Sciences indicates that, although violence because of 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).

Our extensive searches show 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 two).

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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, such as targeted enforcement activities which are multi-pronged, community-based and multi-agency; at those which have not, which mainly are those which are purely enforcement based, or which entail tougher sentencing; and those initiatives where either evidence is insufficient or mixed, like behavioural programmes, aiming at changing perceptions or increasing awareness.

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 of 1998 to 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 for which they were originally created.

### [Problem-oriented policing and community safety initiatives](#)

There is some evidence that these measures have a positive impact on gun carrying and use. Problem-oriented policing and community safety initiatives have shown to be promising in terms of gun violence prevention.

Such programmes include the following characteristics:

- they target hot spots and high-risk groups, especially serious young offenders and/or gang members through, for example, searching or surveillance;
- they involve collaborations with other agencies, for instance probation, community leaders, and local authorities/social services;
- they are locally-tailored, research-based interventions (Koper and Mayo-Wilson 2006).

### [Places, crime and hot spots interventions](#)

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 for the large part meant focusing on 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.

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 and so on (Braga 2008b). The most generalised 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).

### Effects of policing practices on residents' perceptions of police legitimacy

There is some evidence that residents of areas that are subject to hot-spot 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 are 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).

### Problem-oriented policing and pulling levers: focusing on high-risk individuals

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 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, such as by targeting illegal gun 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, in California, where the Comprehensive Homicide Initiative “significantly reduced homicide, particularly those involving guns”, in Minneapolis, and in Indianapolis, where the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership is credited with homicides reduction of 42 per cent (Braga et al 2008).

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 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1999).

The pulling levers strategy is therefore based on policing and deterrence, but not exclusively so. It involves various agencies, such as state departments, probation, prosecutors, clergy, social services and community-based organisations. In Boston, community centres’ 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).

### [Community safety gun violence reduction](#)

The Boston model has proved internationally influential and has been tried and developed across and outside the US. Collectively, the strategies which have been adopted in US cities following the Boston model are known in the US literature as “comprehensive community safety gun violence reduction” initiatives.

Such systematic approaches are characterised by common principles, which are that:

- 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, offending peers, drug trafficking, and unemployment” (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 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, such as changes to bring in “tougher” sentencing, and “enhanced prosecution” (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1999).

The positive aspects of comprehensive community safety initiatives have been detailed earlier. The main limitations are:

- They are resource intensive, in terms of both finances and staffing.
- They are intended to have a substantial impact on crime reduction in the short term, perhaps because they are resource intensive. 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).

- They therefore do not, or 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 (see above).
- 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 randomised controlled trials reported no “substantial immediate spatial displacement” of criminal activity, although 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 (BBC News, 12 December 2008).

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 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.

Manchester became part of the Tackling Gangs Action Project established by the Home Office in 2007, so accounts of MMAGS activity and outcomes can be found in its monitoring data and guidance (Home Office 2008d, Home Office 2008e).

Gang-related shootings in the city fell by a third in the three years since MMAGS came into operation, although directly attributing this change to the programme is difficult. 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 socio-economic factors underpinning the reasons why youths join gangs was an “impractical strategy”. MMAGS was originally based on the Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire, which focused on preventing and deterring specific gang-related violent behaviours but 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 (2008), the development of preventive intervention had diverted attention from the enforcement aspect of the project.

### **Behavioural programmes**

Carried out mostly in the US, programmes 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 programmes include initiatives like:

- Educational initiatives focusing on keeping young children away from guns (e.g. Hardy 2002, another randomised study: no significant effects) and encouraging youth to resolve disputes

without using weapons (e.g. Shapiro in Arredondo 2003, a quasi-experimental study: no significant effect on weapon component).

- School-based programmes, such as counselling, peer mediation and conflict resolution, focusing on violence prevention generally have shown overall much more success (e.g. Welsh 2003, Harper and Ibrahim 1999). (See chapter five.)
- Community-based campaigns have included initiatives such as gun-free school zones and community revitalisation efforts. 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.
- Media promotions, such as Just Say No advertising campaigns, mass mailings or public announcements. 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).
- Laws and programmes encouraging parents to store their guns safely (e.g. Grossman et al. 2000, a randomised study at SMS level 5), showed no significant effects.
- Most programmes using peers as educators have not been adequately evaluated, and those that have show mixed results (Hardy 2002).

Behavioural programmes typically focus on alternative activities to weapon carrying and violent conflict but have been criticised by some researchers 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 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 winning 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 behaviour” as interactions with offending peers, even formerly offending peers, can provide meaning and motivation for future criminal acts (Dishion et al 1999).

Some educational/awareness raising/motivational programmes dealing with guns are outlined below. They show, at best, mixed results.

### [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, for example a weaker belief that guns give control in threatening situations, a stronger belief that gun fights could be avoided, and 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, as it was subjected to independent evaluation and its effectiveness measured against a comparison group, was Options, Choices and

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Consequences, also known as Cops and Docs. It is a two-day, two-hour programme targeted at grade seven and eight pupils, and is 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

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, in Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Newham, Lambeth and Southwark, since 2005. The programme is aimed at achieving a change in attitudes among young people aged 11 to 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

The Safer School Partnerships (SSP) programme is one of the UK interventions implemented in recent years, aiming to tackle behavioural issues in or around schools, improve attendance and build positive relationships between pupils and police. It is now part of the 2008 Youth Crime Action Plan in England and Wales. The national evaluation published in 2004 of a six-month pilot looked at, among others, the effects of placing a police officer in 100 English schools in 10 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 pioneered in Seattle – the Youth Firearms Violence Initiative – in the mid-1990s (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1999). Police officers in some schools are also being trialled in Scotland.

The 2004 study found that although young people thought that the environment had improved in SSP schools, there had been no actual decrease in problematic behaviour, such as bullying, drinking, use of drugs, truancy and anti-social behaviour, or in rates of victimisation (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).

### Interventions with limited proven effectiveness

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There is little evidence of the effectiveness of the following US programmes, when 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, in gun trafficking and theft for example, or in suspicious activities by gun dealers (Braga 2002).
- Gun buy-back or exchange programmes. Evaluations, such as the SMS level 4 study of the St Louis Police Department Gun Buy-back 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 that:

- 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, such as in Project Exile, adopted in a number of US states and entailing mandatory minimum sentences for gun-involved offences (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1999).

## 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 – or indeed 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. In this section we delineate those 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 randomised controlled trials have been carried out in UK hospitals – one in Scotland, one in Wales – in relation to delivering brief motivational interventions, such as 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 anti-social lifestyle, to be offenders”; and because it “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 brief period of between five 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 12 months afterwards.

They each show consistently promising results in terms of a “significant” reduction in alcohol consumption, especially at the 12-month 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, the fact 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, for instance, 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 victimisation, 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 an offending 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>3</sup> In the context of

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<sup>3</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 **11 MILLION** Young people, and gun and knife crime – a review of the evidence [www.11MILLION.org.uk](http://www.11MILLION.org.uk)  
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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 or early 2010.<sup>4</sup>

### **Social marketing/campaigns**

A survey was carried out in the summer of 2008 to establish the effectiveness of the Home Office's £3 million anti-knife campaign which is part of the Tackling Violence Action Plan. Five hundred 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 advertisements had made them more fearful of crime. Some 32 per cent thought the adverts would stop young people carrying knives but 48 per cent said this was unlikely. Opinions on the adverts' effectiveness varied according to age. While nearly half of those aged 11 to 13 thought the shocking images portrayed would work, only a quarter of 14- to 17-year-olds agreed. The figure fell further for those aged 18 and 19, with only a fifth of them thinking the adverts were likely to stop young people carrying knives (Smith 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 1,000 young people aged 10 to 16 who had viewed or heard the adverts, 73 per cent said they had made them "less likely to carry a knife".<sup>5</sup>

However, 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**

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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>4</sup> Correspondence from Violence Crime Unit, 21 October 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence from Home Office, 7 January 2009.

Mentoring programmes were first developed in the US, with Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) being an influential model. In BBBS, mentors meet with young people aged six to 18 from single-parent, disadvantaged households, at least three times a month for three to five hours. A randomised 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. 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 an SMS Level 4 study showed that young people participating in Caught in the Crossfire were 60 per cent less likely to have an adverse outcome – for instance, being re-arrested, placed on probation or 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 10 programmes known as Mentoring Plus (Shiner et al 2004). Based on the 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 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 “multi-modal treatment” and involved behavioural and other programmes (Jolliffe and Farrington 2007).

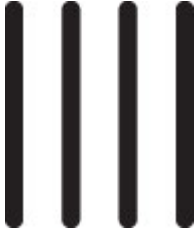
Despite their widespread popularity and acceptance, there is very little other empirical evidence about the efficacy or otherwise of mentoring programmes. There is also no common understanding of what “mentoring” actually involves and what activities are included under what is an umbrella term, encompassing a range of strategies (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 youth offending 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 and is therefore not necessarily representative of all mentors and participants (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1998).

### **Metal detectors in schools**

Fear of violence has been particularly acute in US schools, which have been the scene of a number of high-profile shootings. US schools have developed a range of responses, including the installation of security systems and metal detectors, the checking of lockers, the introduction of see-through bags and the hiring of police officers. These measures were evaluated by the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders, a group of 22 researchers convened by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. 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: youth offending and youth violence prevention (non-weapon specific)



**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 youth 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.**

### Summary

- Gun and knife crime are expressions of the wider problem of youth crime and violence, and need to be viewed in context. Disaffection and youth offending are in turn complex products of inter-related individual, family, social, biological and environmental factors.
- Youth violence is a huge field of investigation, and 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 offer exhaustive and comprehensive coverage.
- The need for prevention is the trademark of “public health” approaches to violence. These stress the importance of intervening as early as possible to keep harmful and negatively influential events or circumstances from happening in children and young people’s lives.
- 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 offending or re-offending. Such interventions can be at family, school or community levels, or in criminal justice institutions when young offenders are involved. Tertiary prevention is concerned with the 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 in early childhood, such as nurse visitation programmes, seem to be having a long-term positive impact.
- Cognitive and behavioural based strategies, such as therapeutic foster care, seem promising in their impact on violent behaviour.

- Zero tolerance and deterrent approaches, such as prison tours, have not been shown to be effective. In fact, they can be counter-productive.
- After-school recreation, and 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 effective in helping serious young offenders deal with conflict without resorting to violence and re-offending.

Preventing violence rather than intervening, usually via the criminal justice system, once it has occurred is a trademark of what is known as a public health approach. Such an approach focuses on early interventions, with the aim of minimising or annulling those circumstances in some young people's lives which are likely to have detrimental effects.

A primary prevention approach to youth violence would focus on the larger structural, socio-economic conditions that shape and underline it – such as poverty, inequality, social exclusion – by interventions on the labour market, in child care and social care. These interventions are usually universal in type, in that 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. Others, such as Currie (1998) have highlighted the need for “more generous, universal social services” while Barkan (1997) underlined the need for “better integration of housing and urban planning.”

Secondary prevention strategies involve interventions with 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 interventions which have been evaluated to rigorous standards, within our remit period of the last 10 years. For a review of the most promising youth violence strategies, as well of what does not work, see the US Surgeon General's report on youth violence. Its key findings include:

- Most highly effective programmes combine components that address both individual risks and environmental conditions.
- Programme effectiveness depends as much on the quality of implementation as on the type of intervention.



- Effective interventions are age appropriate, so that, for example, the changing impact of peer influence is taken into account (USDHHS 2001).



**“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)**

### **The public health approach**

According to the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders, the research group convened by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, a public health approach, addressing multiple risk factors and introducing protective factors, underpins the most promising prevention and early intervention strategies (Catalano et al 1999).

Most European literature on youth violence tends to follow this line of thought and emphasises the importance of secondary prevention, which would include:

- 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)

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.

The following quote exemplifies the public health approach: “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 for more on early parent training.

## Nurse home visitation programmes

Some interventions that target family-related risk factors in early childhood seem to be having long term positive impact. Randomised clinical trials of nurse home visitation programmes have in fact shown that they reduce the risks of early anti-social behaviour and of child maltreatment, maternal substance abuse and maternal criminal involvement. These are all problems associated with future youth offending and violence (TFCPS 2005). Programme evaluations have identified long-term positive effects. These include, 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, though not necessarily violent offending (Farrington and Coid 2003). For example, a programme devised by Webster-Stratton, called The Incredible Years was shown to reduce childhood anti-social 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 three to eight, who had been referred for aggressive and anti-social behaviour. After the intervention, not only had the anti-social 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 up to and including three also found seven high-quality relevant studies 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 offending behaviours. MST focuses on multiple risk factors and systems of influence: schools, peers, family and 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 crime which has been subjected to randomised 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 re-arrested and to spend fewer days in custody (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 to 18 and considered to be “chronically delinquent”, are placed in strictly monitored and supervised foster homes and isolated from offending 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. These are youth violence prevention programmes which have been endorsed by the US Justice Department as they meet rigorous criteria, for example they have undergone experimental design trials which have provided evidence of a statistically significant effect on youth offending, lasting at least one year after treatment (CPYV 2000). A systematic review carried out by the US Task Force on Community Preventive Services (TFCPS) 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 per cent compared with control groups (TFCPS 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 (TFCPS 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 drop-out 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 psycho-social 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, such as rewards or good behaviour contracts.
- Cognitive techniques, which focus on changing thinking skills, for instance problem solving or anger control.
- Social skills training, for example communication skills or conflict management.
- Counselling and therapy, in group, individual or family settings.
- Peer mediation.
- Parent training, including skills training and family group counselling.

The interventions covered by the meta-analysis were both targeted and universal and involved the whole range of ages, from pre-kindergarten to 14 years old 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, the universal programmes seemed particularly to benefit “students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds”, while in the targeted programmes “it was students already exhibiting problematic behaviour” who showed “the largest effects” (Wilson and Lipsey, op cit:141-142).

For children aged three to 14, Roots of Empathy, a classroom-based cognitive programme originally from Canada but also delivered in Australia, New Zealand and the US, 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 the eighth grade. 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 randomised 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 programmes 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 over-exposure of certain studies over others, to be too small actually to affect 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 randomised controlled experimental studies, the most effective social skills training interventions use a cognitive-behavioural approach, such as skills building, teaching identification and avoidance of potentially violent situations or problem solving (see also Mentoring Plus, mentioned in chapter four, where this approach proved the most effective) and are applied to young people aged 13 and over and to high-risk, or higher risk, groups 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

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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.

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

Programmes where students are supervised and where positive behaviour, like attendance and academic progress, are reinforced are among the ones which have been proven effective in decreasing youth offending and improving educational performance. Such programmes tend to address a variety of risk factors, for example academic failure, social alienation, low commitment to school, violent peers or aggressive behaviour, and to introduce protective factors, such as social and cognitive competencies, bonding to school or 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 offending experiences, and cash incentives for disadvantaged students to graduate – would be twice as cost effective in reducing crime than California’s then punitive policy of three strikes and you’re out, meaning custody 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 youth offending or crime (Welsh 2003). However, the very small number of rigorously assessed interventions means 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 youth offending 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 offending behaviours can be reduced 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 offending and violence by conducting randomised 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 with an average age of 14 to 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 re-offending (Lipsey and Wilson 1998).

Interventions which were found to be most effective for non-institutionalised young offenders, such as those under supervision in the community, included the following:

- Individual counselling.
- Inter-personal 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:

- Inter-personal skills training.
- Teaching Family Home, a programme aimed at changing behaviour, where a small number of young offenders, six to eight, 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 young offenders aged 10 to 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 involvement, or 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 a “day in prison” in Australia and Germany (Welsh and Farrington 2006).

A systematic review of randomised 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 in fact likely to increase the chances that children exposed to them will offend or re-offend. In other words, they have a criminogenic effect. Despite this, such programmes continue to be used.



## 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 carrying and use of knives and firearms. These concluding comments indicate the limits of the literature, draw out key themes, and suggest policy directions.

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

Evidence on the involvement of girls and young women in weapon-related violence is limited. 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 US (e.g. 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 yet 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 involve the emotional and psychological impact on girls of violence between males, and the role of girls in conflict relationships. What we do know from research on girls and bullying is that the impact of interventions can differ significantly between the genders.

The great majority of the evidence on weapon use and involvement typically refers to young people, focusing 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 can affect early childhood, although the consequences of these experiences may manifest themselves in violence as the young person enters their teenage years. Despite evidence of the impact of early environment and parenting on violence and delinquency, most interventions are still criminal justice-oriented and focused on young people rather than children.

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.

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.

## Social contexts

We examined the contexts in which young people grow up: the areas in which they live in, the schools they go to, their families and upbringing, their social and economic position, their friends and their personal experiences. We 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 dealt with by the criminal justice system. We also considered research that would tell us if there are protective influences which help young people stay away from trouble and crime.

We explored the research which asked why young people felt they needed to carry weapons, and/or use them, looking at young people’s perceptions of their identities, their environments and motivations and their membership of gangs or violent youth groups. We explored how concepts like youth culture, and respect help us understand young people’s relationships with guns and knives – and each other.

While it seems possible to predict offending fairly accurately among young people, it is harder to predict serious/violent offending and one needs to be cautious about the results and their use. Predicting which young people may carry a weapon is generally possible (Kingery et al 1999) but this challenge has not yet been effectively addressed in the UK. Furthermore, much prediction research is based on US data. Trying to predict very specific behaviours – such as carrying a weapon – is inherently difficult. Some people are violent and will be so with a gun, knife or anything that comes to hand.

Much of the risk-factor literature conveys a consistent message that many offenders live harsh, deprived, dangerous and unpleasant lives, often in poor areas with limited opportunities for education, training, personal advancement or social mobility. In 1998, the Government’s Social Exclusion Unit pinpointed so called sink estates and deprived areas which were often, simultaneously, the worst crime and anti-social behaviour hotspots. 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.

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Risk factors in these areas tend to have a cumulative impact: low incomes and family problems tend to affect family and parental capacity and discipline – abusive, neglectful or harmful parenting, especially young people’s exposure to violence in the home, appears to have a particularly strong criminogenic influence. 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 negative peer-group influences. The presumption that a locality is dangerous and other young people a potential threat appears to promote ostensibly defensive weapon carrying and use.

Since the 1980s, in both the US and the UK, the collapse of 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. US research points to gangs becoming a permanent structural feature of poor communities. In the UK, similar concerns have been expressed that young people are no longer “growing out of crime”. More than purely economic motivations are involved; the new “illegal economies” provide a credible “hard” masculine identity and symbols of “success”.

Research shows links between deprived neighbourhoods, high levels of violence and weapon use. 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.

Quantitative risk and protective factor approaches have been criticised as simplistic and deterministic. Qualitative and ethnographic studies argue 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. Understanding these reasons will be a key target for researchers if we are to better appreciate issues around knife and gun crime and reduce violence.

Peer groups, especially gangs, can be significant accelerators of criminal involvement. This makes it necessary to understand 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

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 a 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.

In order to produce a sound evidence base for intervention in the field of young people and weapons, new strategies and practices would benefit from independent and rigorous evaluations. Ideally comparison groups should be used and impact measured over time.

The complexity of circumstances affecting behaviour, coupled with the complexity of social meanings, values and behaviour which young people experience and re-negotiate can make it difficult for researchers to isolate and identify the specific effects of interventions. This underscores the case for evaluation research to comprise a qualitative, rather than merely quantitative element.

Multi-agency, integrated strategies that are locally based and that combine various approaches to prevention and suppression have proved more successful, at least as regards youth gun violence in the US, than single agency-based enforcement-led interventions. This makes good sense, as multiple risk factors place children at risk of becoming offenders, violent or otherwise.

Professionals developing interventions for young people need to approach issues in a holistic way, addressing the variety of influences that shape children's behaviour (Solomon et al 2008). 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).

## Gun and knife crime in context

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 de-personalise violence would therefore seem important. Quick fixes are unlikely to be successful.

There 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.



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## 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.

**Anti-social behaviour** = Behaviour which straddles the legal/non-legal divide. “Anti-social 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 anti-social behaviour order, a civil order which breach constitutes a criminal offence.

**Children and young people** = In law, a “child” is anybody 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” and “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 10 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 to 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, and 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 focusing on CSA we were not missing out on vital information and that were 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 the 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 keeping up to date with 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 more than 100 search strings. The searches were grouped thematically, according to: i) risk and protective factors; ii) 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; and iii) 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 offending generally we focused on the various intervention strands, including social marketing, situational crime prevention, including search tactics and technologies, risk reduction strategies, such as family support services, training and employment, and peer-delivered interventions. We also designed our search strings around other main keywords, including: (crime) control; crime (or violence) prevention planning; (crime) deterrence/deterring; 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, for example 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, while 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-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 at which we had already arrived.

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, (in other words, author, title, descriptors) returns. We cut down these initial findings 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), in other words, 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 randomised 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, or 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 Scientific Methods Scale (SMS), which 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

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demonstrated comparability (= which characteristics, for instance 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, or 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. These 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 pro-formas – 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, for example frequency of weapon carrying, fear of weapons	
Group, for example 10-year-old 'Caucasians', or 17-year-old 'Hispanics', or male/female, etc	
Sample size	
Intervention/programme/prevention type etc	
<p><b>Code</b></p> <p>- 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.</p> <p>-If a qualitative study:</p> <p><b>A-</b> specified data collection tools;</p> <p><b>B-</b> adequate representativeness of sample;</p> <p><b>C-</b> adequate sample size;</p> <p><b>D-</b> appropriate data capture and analytic methods;</p> <p><b>E-</b> external or independent evaluation.</p>	
Power of the statistical analysis/statistical robustness	
Overall relevance	
Overall assessment and comments	

## Prediction studies and risk factors: some methodological notes

In chapter one we discussed 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.

### 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 eight 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 among 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 while female offending is depicted as being the result of social factors (Moffitt et al 2001).

### Coverage notes about chapter one

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.

Much of the material reviewed in this chapter has come from the US. That said, a key influence on many studies that seek to identify factors predicting the risk of offending amongst young people has come from the UK, for instance the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Behaviour (Farrington 2002, 1992) that we mentioned above. The Cambridge Study has generated a very large number of papers and articles since it began in the early 1960s. For the sake of clarity, we have included just two articles by the lead researcher of the project, David Farrington. Similarly, in the US, large-scale surveys of young people's behaviour over time create data sets which are accessible to researchers – again generating a large number of papers, articles and reports. We have not incorporated all the literature generated by these surveys. Instead, we have focused on those studies which relate directly to violent behaviour among young people.



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