UCL JILL DANDO INSTITUTE OF CRIME SCIENCE

Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1

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1 Introduction

The Home Office report that the number of crimes involving a firearm increased year on year from 1997/98 to 2003/04[1]. Much of this increase is widely seen to be the result of armed gangs competing for a lucrative drug market. However, there is also evidence of the emergence of a weapon carrying culture among young people with nearly one in four 15 to 16 year old boys admitting to having carried a knife or other weapon in the past year.

Significant resources have been invested which have funded a number of research projects and police operations targeting gangs, guns and other weapon-related crime. The Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science has been commissioned to review the findings emerging from these projects in order to rationalise what work is currently being done and to contribute to the development of a strategy to guide future research and interventions. In particular, it aims to:

- highlight consistencies and tensions in findings between selected projects;
- clarify social and demographic trends from the existing research, identifying consistent risk and protective factors; and
- identify gaps in existing knowledge and suggest areas for future research.

This project represents one part of a larger programme of work being undertaken by the Home Office Police Standards Unit to provide guidance to law enforcement agencies in tackling guns, gangs and weapons.

1.1 Structure of the report

The report begins by outlining the methods employed in conducting the review and briefly describes the nature and scope of the projects included. Section three then discusses the emerging findings from the projects, in order of complexity. This starts with a discussion of what these projects tell us about 'gang' phenomena followed by the findings surrounding the use of firearms and then moves on to a discussion of the relationship between these issues.

Finally, the emerging consistencies and unresolved issues are summarised, gaps in knowledge identified and potential avenues for further research highlighted.

2 Methodology

This report draws mainly on twelve research studies. These comprise current or recently completed projects, covering a broad range of topics within the general remit of gangs, guns, and other weapons. Between them, they take different approaches and use a range of methodologies to reach their conclusions. A comparison of the scopes and methods used by these projects is shown in Table 1.

Where possible, reports from each project were obtained and relevant data and findings extracted. In many instances the projects were still 'work in progress'. In these cases we sought to extract as much information about the research as we could through speaking with the project managers and through examining any available documentation such as project proposals and interim reports. Discussions with project managers also helped to clarify uncertainties in the research and methodologies used, and gave each project manager the chance to discuss issues not covered in the reports including gaps they feel should be addressed by further work. This helped maximise the value of each project and ensured that the projects were not misrepresented.

As shown in Table 1, eight of the twelve projects encompassed the illegal use of firearms within the scope of their work, eleven included some discussion of gangs, and five paid particular attention to the problem of knives. The eight projects that encompass gun crime illustrate the broad range of projects that have been commissioned in relation to the problems associated with gangs, guns and other weapons. Two of these (1 and 4) involved surveying the opinions and attitudes of school children or youths, aiming to identify risk and protective factors that influence young people's involvement with weapons and other criminality. Four (7, 10, 11 and 12) involved an analysis patterns of recorded gun crime offences and canvassed the opinions and experiences of those convicted for firearms-related offences. Two projects (2 and 11) are analyses driven by police operations are not, therefore, *research* projects in the purest sense. Finally, one project (6) involved no field work at all but focused instead on a desk-based review of the literature, covering international gun and gang related issues.

It must also be noted that the projects relate to seven different geographical areas in England. Five projects are London-based (1, 2, 3, 5 and 10), one in Manchester (11), one in Nottingham (12), four have national coverage (4, 7, 8 and 9) and one is international (6). The diverse scope of these projects in terms of their methodologies, geographic relevance, and robustness of data means comparisons between them can only be indicative, <u>not</u> conclusive. Readers are advised to keep this in mind.

Throughout the report, where information is taken from one of the projects, even if it is referencing another source, a number is given in square brackets denoting the project number as given in Table 1, e.g. [3]. In some cases, two or more numbers may be given, where consistencies between projects are highlighted, e.g. [5, 9, 11]. In instances where two or more projects included in the review refer to the same piece of research (such as amongst those that involving reviews of the literature), care was taken to ensure that the findings refer to only one of the sources referenced to avoid them giving impressions of consistency.

Table 1. List of projects; their scope and methodological approach

	Project	Methodological Approach	Geography	Guns	Gangs	Knives
1	Communities that Care (unpublished) Risk and protection audit 2004-2005	School Survey, year 7-10	London	●	●	●
2	Metropolitan Police (in progress) Operation Stabiliser: Problem profile of gangs in Hackney	Analysis of crime data, intelligence reports and other documents; interviews with gang members, agency workers and practitioners.	London	●	●	●
3	Homicide Prevention Unit (in progress) Knifepoint murder review	Analysis of crime data	London			●
4	Youth Justice Board The Group Offending of Young People (in progress); 2004 MORI Youth Survey	Youth survey, inc youth excluded from mainstream education, lit review, practitioner /offender interviews, various data analyses.	National	●	●	●
5	Lemos & Crane (2004) Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people	Literature review, practitioner survey, e-survey	London		●	●
6	HO Strategic Policy Team (unpublished) A strategic response to violent gangs	Literature review, Practitioner interviews	International	●	●	
7	HO RDS (in progress) The use and possession of illegal firearms: Interviews with convicted firearms offenders	Face-to-face offender interviews	National	●	●	
8	HO Violent Crimes Unit (unpublished) Violent Youth Offending	Literature review, practitioner interviews	National		●	
9	HO Drugs Strategy Directorate (unpublished) Drug dealing networks in British South Asian Communities	Analysis of crime data, offender, agency and practitioner interviews	National/ South Asian Community		●	
10	Brent Council & Metropolitan Police (2005) Gun Crime in Brent	Analysis of crime data, Face-to-face offender interviews	London	●	●	
11	Manchester Multi-Agency Gangs Strategy (MMAGS) (on going)	Analysis of crime data; Multi-agency gun/gang prevention programme	Greater Manchester	●	●	
12	Schneider et al. (2004) Biting the bullet: Gun crime in Greater Nottingham	Analysis of crime data, practitioner interviews, offender interviews	Greater Nottingham	●	●	

3 Gangs

3.1 Definitional issues

Debate surrounding what a 'gang' actually is has been ongoing for decades. Sometimes the term seems to include all the problems posed by young men who gather together and appear threatening in some way [2]. However, the stereotypic image portrayed by the media is one of organised groups of violent offenders (mostly of Black Afro Caribbean descent), brandishing guns, dealing drugs and constantly involved in bloody inter-gang conflicts [4].

Until recently there has been a dearth of research looking at the specific problems of 'gangs' in the UK. Instead, research from the US has been drawn on, despite there being little evidence to suggest there are many US-style gangs in the UK [6, 4].

What is consistently clear is that 'gangs' are not a singular phenomenon. Across the literature, distinctions have been made between 'street gangs' and 'crime firms' [6] with street gangs being loosely organised, informal groups of delinquents and crime firms being organised criminal networks involved in the grey/black markets and/or drugs trade. One project goes a step further and makes a distinction between delinquent peer groups and 'gangs' [2]. This gives three levels of 'delinquent collective': the peer group, the gang and the organised crime group. The following offers a brief description of each of these collectives as described by Hallsworth and Young [2]. A more detailed description is given in Section 7.3.

- *Peer Group* – Relatively small, unorganised and transient groups composed of peers who share the same space and a common history. Involvement in crime will be mostly non-serious in nature and not integral to the identity of the group. Peer groups are thought to be the most pervasive of all delinquent groups [2, 4]
- *Gang* – Relatively durable, predominantly street based groups of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.
- *Organised Criminal Group* – A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (financial or otherwise). For most however, crime is their 'occupation'. These groups operate almost exclusively in the grey and illegal marketplace where market transactions are totally unregulated by the law

While these distinctions seem to us to be clear and sensible, the criteria for identifying instances of each in practice are less clear. To make matters worse, types of gangs and gang activities vary over time and place [4, 6, 8]. This makes stable definitions particularly difficult, especially for operational purposes. This issue will be returned to in Section 7.3.

Table 2 describes the different interpretations of the term 'gang' used in each project, and how membership is characterised. Clearly any comparison of these projects and any conclusions drawn must be made with the appropriate degree of caution. While in some cases robust internal definitions are used of what should be defined as a gang, gang member or gang-related incident, from an external perspective, they are clearly not all looking at the same thing.

Table 2. Scope of interpretation of 'gang' by project

	Project	Scope of gang	Defining criteria
1	Communities that Care	Peer groups and gangs among school children	Self-reported. Heavy involvement requires name and territory
2	Operation Stabiliser	Peer groups, gangs and organised crime groups	Unclear
3	Knifepoint Murder Review	n/a	Agency perceptions, self-reported
4	Youth Justice Board	peer groups, gangs	Various
5	Lemos & Crane	Peer groups	Group offending
6	HO Literature Review	Gangs, organised crime groups	Various
7	HO Interviews with firearms offenders	Unclear	Self-reported
8	HO Violent Crimes Unit	Peer groups, gangs and organised crime groups	Various
9	South Asian Drugs Networks	Organised crime groups	Unclear
10	Gun crime in Brent	Not specified; Offenders' interpretation	Self-reported
11	MMAGS	Gangs	Self-reported, and peer identified gang membership corroborated by Police intelligence
12	Biting the Bullet	Gangs	Agency perceptions, self-reported

In the projects involving self-report definitions of gang membership, i.e. whether or not an individual considers themselves as belonging to a 'gang', a common theme emerged that many individuals who may easily have been 'perceived' to be part of a gang by the police, media, etc., did not actually consider themselves to be 'gang members' [6, 12]. Other 'gang members' rejected the term 'gang' but described themselves as being in one nonetheless[6]. Indeed, it has been noted that in some cases intelligence reports create a cycle of misinformation causing gangs to be created by police that may not actually exist [2]. This, along with the liberal use of the word 'gang', may lead to events which may not be gang-related at all (such as interpersonal arguments), being redefined as gangland conflicts.

It is the opinion of the authors that, with such ambiguity surrounding 'gangs' and continuing problems of definition, a solution might be to abandon the use of the term and focus instead on the problem *behaviour*, i.e. prolific offending of varying type and seriousness amongst associated networks of individuals. The word 'gang' conjures up stereotypical images that are misleading at best, and destructive at worse. Certainly not all groups of young people are violent, gun carrying drug dealers.

This concern is shared with practitioners tasked with reducing the problem. YOT managers expressed considerable concern with the blanket application of the term gang and stressed the dangers of 'gang' talk, that is, of buying into a criminalising label which was not only permissively applied, but which distracted the public and politicians away from the real problems [4]. Some police officers also suggested the term 'gang' may

provide street-based groups with a 'street kudos' and therefore exacerbate the problem [4].

This issue will be returned to in Section 7.4. For the purpose of this review, however, reflecting as well as we can common parlance and the literature reviewed, the term 'gang' will still be used. The specific meaning will largely follow the distinction between 'peer group', 'gang', and 'organised crime group' already referred to. The reader is urged, however, to remain alert to the problematic nature, ambiguities, and potential dangers at work in discussions of 'gangs' in research literature, in policy and practice discourse, and in everyday conversation.

3.2 The prevalence of gangs

In view of the definitional problems discussed above, any assessment of the extent of the 'gang problem' in a particular area will vary depending on the criteria being applied to identify gangs.

Police intelligence suggests that gangs as discernable groups, with names, with some persistence over time, and with members who routinely engage in violence and crime, do sometimes operate [4]. In Manchester, for example, a number of identifiable gangs with names and territories were said to be causing disproportionate amounts of crime in the area [11]. Academic research into the problem in other areas, however, paints a slightly different picture. In Brent and Nottingham networks amongst the criminal community were recognised, but 'gangs' were not thought to be so evident [10, 12]. In Nottingham, the media and to some degree the police were thought to have overstated the extent of the 'gang' problem [12]. Interviews with practitioners also revealed the media's obsession with gangs was considerably divorced from reality [4].

Surveys of school children found that one in five (19%) students in years seven to ten described themselves as belonging to a 'gang', 9% said that they belonged to a gang with a territory, and 7 % said their gang had a name [1]. However, since questions were not asked specifically about whether criminal activity was integral to the identity of these 'gangs', it is difficult to know the extent to which these are gangs as understood here rather than delinquent peer groups.

3.3 Nature of gangs

Despite the definitional issues, a number of common factors emerge. The literature suggests that street gangs are groups that share a particular identity, which may be based on age, location, ethnicity, peer networks or blood relationships [6]. Although there is some evidence to support the emergence of different types of ethnic gangs at street level [6], one consistent finding, is that gangs appear to be grounded more on territory than ethnicity [4, 6, 8]. The degree to which gangs are mono-ethnic may be more to do with local resident demographics than the deliberate congregation of individuals from the same ethnic group though living in different areas [10]. In support of this, research looking at the South Asian drugs networks suggests that while networks may be mono-ethnic at the bottom of the chain, they become more multiethnic at the top [9].

While gang formation may not be based on ethnicity, there is evidence to suggest that those from certain ethnic groups are more likely to become gang involved. A survey of secondary school students in London, for example, found White British and Black Caribbean students to be more likely than Black African and South Asian students to say

they belonged to a gang. Black Caribbean students were more likely than all other ethnicities to say they belonged to a gang *with a name* [1].

Gangs are mostly male [2, 4, 6]. Although school surveys suggest that just as many girls as boys claimed to be part of a gang, such gangs were not ones with a territory or name [1]. This suggests that girls may be more involved with peer group collectives than street gang-level collectives. The literature supports this with little evidence to support the speculation that female involvement is increasing [6]. Where females are involved in gang activities, it is thought their role might be one of support, such as carrying or storing weapons [6].

The literature suggests most street gang members are under 18 years of age, 25 appears to be the oldest [6]. Young people become involved with street gangs between the ages of 12 and 14, although sometimes this can be as young as 9 [6]. There are also suggestions that age of involvement is decreasing [8]. It is generally accepted that gang members belonging to higher level collectives are older and are involved with more serious offending [6].

There are mixed views about the degree of organisation within higher level criminal groups. Some suggest that high levels of organisation are involved while others believe they are less cohesive with individuals working largely for their own benefit [2]. Much of the literature suggests that most gangs resemble small fluid networks rather than a organised criminal hierarchies [6, 10]. Research in Manchester and Birmingham suggests that gangs are likely to comprise a 'core' of main players surrounded by ordinary members [4, 6]. This would point to an element of organisation, with gangs or networks becoming less organised at the periphery. An analogy might be to look at the structure and organisation of a small business. Such a business may comprise a core of permanent staff and a network of contacts who are associated with the group, but not members of it, and who work when needed on a temporary basis.

It has been suggested that there might be a continuum of gang involvement from peer groups through to the organised crime groups [6]. However, little is known about the degree to which individual members progress up and down this continuum. The relationship between each level of gang activity is also not clearly understood [2]. But it is likely in part to be related to the drugs market, with more organised crime groups involved in drug trafficking, lower level street gangs involved with street dealing [2, 6], and peer groups providing the users (who might purchase from street gang members) [2]. There is a perception that higher level collectives use street gang members for more visible, 'risky' positions in drug dealing. This helps criminals higher up the chain avoid unwanted police attention. Further, gang members may also use younger members to drive vehicles, store drugs and weapons, or act as look outs [4].

The relationship between young and old appears very much an exploitative one [4]. For young people, the gang offers access to a world of thrills and excitement and high status material goods such as mobile phones, jewellery and trainers. In reality, they get little more than pocket money [4]. Fear and intimidation may also be used to compel compliance of the young, scare them into not providing evidence against them [2], and make it difficult for them to disengage with the group [4].

The overlap between levels of collectives makes it very difficult to determine which group a particular activity can be attributed to. Conflicts between organised crime groups,

for example, might be reflected at the gang level where gangs align themselves with particular crime groups [2]. Instances have occurred where an organised crime group has been attacked by a particular street gang, which may have been contracted to do so by a rival organised group [2]. There is clearly a need to understand more about the relationship between levels of delinquent collectives.

While drugs and drug markets appear to be a common factor across all levels of gang activity, the exact relationship between drugs and gangs is not clear [10, 12]. Indeed, the consensus is that while they are clearly involved in many gang activities, they are not thought to be the primary driver for gang involvement [6]. In Nottingham, for example, the majority of firearms offenders did not believe that gangs were responsible for the drug trade [12].

The motivations for joining a gang are suggested to include social reasons (for something to do), a sense of belonging to a 'family', for status (power and respect) [2, 4, 6], or for protection in numbers [4, 10]. However, it is likely that some people also become involved in gangs inadvertently through peer pressure or circumstance (family members for example) [6]. Interestingly, in a survey of young offenders, only 14 per cent claimed to have attached themselves to a group in order 'to do illegal activities' [4]. Whichever way individuals become involved with gangs, gang culture is then perceived as a suitable and viable alternative lifestyle [6].

3.4 Gangs and crime

Gang members commit over five times as many offences as non-gang members [6]. Gang members in Manchester had, on average, 12 previous arrests and 2.1 convictions [11]. These figures are supported by the Communities that Care school survey which reports that 21 per cent of those claiming to be part of a gang with a name and territory claim also to have sold and/or dealt drugs, 38 per cent to have attacked someone, and 55 per cent to have vandalised property. However, while this indicates significant criminal activity, it also suggests a large proportion of self-reporting gang members do not engage in criminal activities [1].

In Hackney, it is thought that the main offences of the peer group and gang tend to be robbery and/or street crime, although some members deal in drugs. The main business of organised crime groups, however, is the importation/supply and distribution of class A drugs, namely cocaine and heroin [2].

The proportion of crime attributable to gangs is difficult to determine due in part to the difficulties in defining and identifying 'gangs', and also because of a high rate of underreporting associated with gang offending [2]. There are also difficult issues in determining whether a crime committed by a gang member was gang-related. For example, it might have been for personal reasons and thus be unrelated to any gang activity [2]. With these caveats in mind, 15 per cent of arrestees aged 18 or over described themselves as either current or former gang members [6]. Fourteen per cent of young offenders also claimed to be part of a 'gang', though this figure drops to 8% when a 'gang' must have a name [4].

There is a strong social science research literature which shows that individuals in groups behave very differently than they do when alone. They take more risks[2], they feel pressure to conform with the majority[3], and they feel less personal responsibility[4]. It is, however, the group processes that are important rather than gang membership per se,

which means that disrupting gangs may not have the desired effect on criminality if individuals continue to 'hang out' in groups which may not be conceived as gangs.

The relationship between gangs and criminality is neither simple nor straightforward. It is conceivable that a group which routinely engages in criminal activity may eventually generate codes of honour or rules of membership to try to ensure loyalty amongst members. In this case, the group's criminality preceded its development of one of the defining attributes of a gang. The issue is akin to the 'drugs causes crime' debate where it is noted that many drug users were engaged in offending prior to their drug taking. Like the drugs and crime relationship, the gang may 'amplify' offending rather than cause it.

3.5 Risk factors

A consistent finding throughout the projects is that individuals who have relatives and peers with a history of problem behaviour [1, 6, 8] are also likely to be involved in problem behaviour. Individuals whose peers are not involved in guns, drugs or gangs are very unlikely to be offenders themselves [1].

Related to this, it has been suggested that an absence of suitable male role models, such as a responsible father, might promote gang involvement with young individuals seeing the older criminal/gang leader or brother as a substitute [2, 6].

It is suggested that gangs may form through processes of social exclusion [4] and/or discrimination with people coming together for self-defence and a sense of 'safety in numbers' [9, 10]. Immigrant populations, or those excluded from mainstream education, are therefore likely to be particularly at risk. Indeed, young people who have been rejected from institutions such as school, are thought to be at increased risk of involvement with gangs where delinquent values are celebrated and where engagement in problematic behaviour is normalised [4, 6, 10].

Consistencies:

- Gangs are not a singular phenomenon
- There is a distinction between peer groups, street gangs and organised crime groups
- Gangs are based more on territory than ethnicity
- Gang members commit a wide variety of offences
- Crime in groups is disproportionate to what would be expected from the sum of its members if not in groups, i.e. gangs 'amplify' offending
- Street gangs are typically made up of young boys in their teens and early twenties. Higher level crime groups tend to involve older members
- Those with peers or family members with history of problem behaviour are at increased risk of involvement in gangs and guns
- Gang leaders may compensate for an absence of close male role models
- Social exclusion and rejection from institutions may contribute to gang involvement
- Gang members are not always drug users
- Gang members are more likely than non-gang members to be drug dealers.

Unresolved issues:

- Criteria defining different levels of 'gang' involvement are unclear

- Movement between levels of gang involvement is largely unknown
- Clarification is needed on the level of 'organisation' of 'organised' crime groups
- It is difficult to determine the prevalence of gangs, and gang membership or the proportion of crime attributable to them
- More research is needed on the relationships between peer groups, gangs and organised crime groups
- The term 'gang' has no singular, agreed meaning or method of identification
- Clarification is required regarding the relationship between different levels of gang involvement, drug misuse and drug dealing
- There is little to explain the apparent regional variations in the prevalence of certain 'gang' types.

4 Guns and other weapons

4.1 The prevalence of weapons

Knives and weapons have for years been objects of fascination for children, especially boys [5]. There is a general aspiration to hold, possess and brandish what only the adult, brave and qualified soldier is entitled to carry legally. There is a general perception that the possession of firearms is increasing [6]. It is possible, however, that this increase is largely a matter of an increase in the availability of such weapons rather than changes in youth culture per se.

The actual availability of firearms appears to be overestimated. While young people are susceptible to the allure of carrying weapons and are becoming prone to brandishing imitation firearms in street crime, it is thought they rarely possess accurate working firearms or ammunition [6] and that the perception of such is magnified [10]. Criminal contacts are thought to be significant in procuring live-firing firearms and that these weapons are not 'readily available' [10]. Moreover when live-firing weapons are brandished, they are not always loaded since live ammunition is thought to be just as difficult to obtain as the guns themselves and prohibitively expensive [12].

Conversely, imitation weapons, air guns, BB guns (those firing ball bearings) and converted blank firers are not thought to be difficult to obtain, are relatively easy to convert, and are becoming increasingly available [1, 10, 12]. In Nottingham, air weapons were associated with young offenders (mean age 19), while pistols and shotguns were more associated with older criminals (mean age 26 and 31 respectively) [12]. Over one in five (21%) students in one survey claimed to have ever carried a BB gun [4]. This is not much lower than the 28% of school children who admitted to having carried a knife. It must be noted, however, that the vast majority of these knives are penknives, which could be used for a variety of legal purposes as well as for more dangerous motives [4]. The London school survey suggests weapon possession is considerably lower than this with 10% of students carrying a knife and 6% a gun in the past year [1]. However, the difference between knife and gun carrying is again small.

The prime age of gun-related offending is between 17 and 24 [4]. This age-group accounted for 43% of the total number of incidents recorded in 2003/2004. While young people aged 10-16 accounted for 21%, is it important to note that the kinds of weapons used by this group differed considerably from the 17-24 year olds. Of those carrying firearms, MPS figures suggest that 17-24 year olds were five times more likely to be carrying lethal weapons than those aged 10-16 who more often carry non-lethal firearms such as airguns.

One of the problems in assessing the prevalence of firearms appears to be that the type of firearm used in offences is frequently unknown. When there is no discharge, for example, identification relies solely on witness descriptions of what, if anything, they saw [12].

Knife carrying is thought to be more common in youth clubs than in schools [5], due to schools offering some kind of protection to students. It is likely that the same processes mean gun carrying is also more prevalent out of school. However, there is also a

perception amongst practitioners that many schools do not know, or are in denial, of the extent of these problems [5].

4.2 Reasons for 'carrying'

As with 'gangs', the possession and use of firearms is not a simple problem. One report suggests "there is no such thing as a single gun culture" [10]. Guns are carried partly for kudos and status, partly for protection and partly for instrumental uses such as robbery [6, 10, 12]. Interviews with offenders convicted of firearms related offences suggest that the main reason for carrying guns is for personal protection [12]. It has been suggested that a vicious cycle of gun ownership has emerged as the increased prevalence of weapons on the street raises levels of anxiety amongst non gun-carrying individuals who then feel the need to arm themselves for protection [6, 2]. Practitioners suggest that it was a similar vicious cycle that led to an increase in knife possession [4].

It has been suggested that guns are symptomatic of an unregulated cash-rich market in which participants do not have recourse to the criminal justice system for protection, such as the drugs market [4, 10]. Drug dealers are desirable targets for robbery and will therefore arm themselves primarily for protection [6, 8, 12]. Consequently, however, robbers will arm themselves in order to overpower the armed drug dealers.

Drug dealers and traffickers may also use firearms to enforce debts [10] and to protect their territory [12, 2]. Drug users on the other hand may use firearms and other weapons for acquisitive crime to fund their habit [10]. Importantly, while the drug market might be significant in relation to the presence of firearms, it is likely that such firearms are then used in many non-drug or gang related contexts, such as armed robbery or for interpersonal conflicts [10].

Although there is clear evidence that a proportion of gun crime has links to the drugs market, not all gun crime is about drugs [10]. In Nottingham, the number of incidents where drugs and firearms co-existed was found to be relatively small [12]. The most common crime type where a firearm was involved was criminal damage, followed by robbery [12]. In Brent, the most common crime types where guns are evident are robbery, violence against the person and, as with Nottingham but to a lesser extent, criminal damage [10].

4.3 Weapon use

Despite the number of individuals admitting to carrying weapons, the majority are never used. The 2004 MORI youth survey suggests that 21 percent of young people in school admitting to carrying a weapon but never using one. This compares to three percent who admit to having used a weapon against another person [4]. Certainly firearms, although carried, are rarely fired. In a study of firearms-related offences in Nottingham, in only five of 320 cases of armed robbery over a period of three and a half years was an injury sustained though shooting, and two of these involved airguns. Over the same period, of all 1584 firearms-related incidents reported, only 30 (1.9%) incurred serious injury, three of which (0.19%) were fatal [12]. Firearms are therefore principally used as a threat [4].

As with gang-related offences, a large proportion of weapon-enabled crime goes unreported [2, 5, 10]. Underreporting may be due to negative attitude towards the police, fear of retribution for 'grassing' or a culture of enacting informal retribution [2, 10].

While research in Brent suggested perpetrators of gun-related offences were disproportionately Black, they suggest that the profile of offenders in terms of age, gender and ethnicity differs across offence types suggesting that the relationship between gun crime and these individual characteristics is nuanced [10]. Gun crime in London was certainly not found to be by or against one ethnic group [10]. In fact, in a London school survey, White British students were more likely than all others to say they had carried a gun in the past year [1].

Geographically, the distribution of gun crime is uneven and concentrated in particular places. From a broad perspective, according to Home Office figures (2002/2003), two thirds of firearms offences (excluding air weapons) occurred in just three metropolitan forces – the Metropolitan, Greater Manchester and West Midlands. Gun crime is further concentrated within these areas [4]. Gun crime appears highest in areas with far higher than average levels of deprivation and unemployment [4]. It is of note, however, that situational characteristics of the offence sites themselves is not considered in any of the research.

4.4 Risk factors

A risk factor that consistently emerges is that of the overlap between victimisation and offending. Young people who have been victims of violence are three to five times more likely to have offended than other young people [8]. Fear and victimisation is said to play the most significant role in a young person's decision to carry a knife [5]. In support of this, the Youth Justice Board youth survey found that 36% of victims of knife crime carry knives compared to 18% of non-victims [4]. Those victimised felt justified in carrying a knife for defence.

Interviews with fifteen offenders convicted of firearms-related offences found that all had been victims of crime with 11 (73%) victims of gun crime in particular [10]. This is supported by the observation in Nottingham that victims and offenders of firearms related incidents were remarkably similar in terms of their demographic attributes and their extensive and wide-ranging criminal records [12].

Consistencies:

- Weapons are carried for a number of reasons, the main being for protection
- The vast majority of knives carried by young people are penknives
- Most firearms are air guns, BB Guns or (converted) imitations
- Live-firing weapons are not 'readily available'
- Live ammunition is not easy to obtain
- There is a consistent link between victims and offenders of gun crime
- Not all gun crime is about drugs
- Drug dealers are desirable targets for robbery and arm to protect themselves
- Drug dealers may use guns to enforce debts and protect their territory
- While involvement in the drugs market may encourage the possession of firearms, their use may not always be drug related
- Much crime involving weapons goes unreported.

Unresolved issues:

- The extent and nature of weapon possession, guns in particular, is unclear

- Due, in part, to underreporting, the extent and nature of crime involving weapons is unknown
- The proportion of firearms-related offences that involve the use of firearms capable of discharging live ammunition is unclear
- The channels of supply of live firing guns and of live ammunition are not well understood
- There is little to explain the apparent variations in patterns of firearms offences by place.

5 Weapons and gangs

The literature suggests that gang members are much more likely than others to carry weapons and guns [6]. There is a suggestion that possession of firearms has become the norm amongst gang members and that they are increasingly being used to settle even the most 'minor' of arguments [6].

Analyses of arrestee data show that gang members are five times as likely as non-gang members to report owning a gun [6]. London students claiming to be gang-involved were nearly seven times more likely to have carried a gun in the past year than students claiming not to be involved with a gang (27% compared to 4%) [1].

A similar pattern is seen with the possession of knives; 39% of self-reported gang members admitted to carrying one within the past year compared to 7% of non-gang members [1]. Most offences involving knives are thought to be carried out in the company of friends with peer pressure commonly cited as a motivating factor [5]. Indeed, over a quarter of knife-related homicides involved more than one offender and there is a feeling that gang culture or peer pressure may be involved in some way with these murders [3]. Interestingly, the Crime and Justice Survey suggests that the majority of violent assaults are committed alone with peer pressure only cited as a motivating factor in 1% of cases [8]. This suggests that many acts involving knives and weapons are qualitatively different from other acts of violence and aggression, requiring an audience to intimidate or to impress.

It is suggested that involvement with weapons is very much dependent on the level of gang involvement with street gangs rarely using guns to kill each other, preferring knives [2]. Organised crime groups, on the other hand, invariably use guns, often over issues of respect [2]. Contrary to popular belief, it is suggested that gang related shootings are not meticulously organised affairs but are opportunistic incidents such as drive-bys [11].

Evidence is mixed as to whether gangs comprise the major factor behind shootings that lead to serious injury. In Manchester, it is thought that at least 56% of all shootings involve gangs [11], however, in Nottingham the evidence is not so compelling with less than half of offenders saying they thought that gangs were responsible for shootings [12].

5.1 Risk factors

Practitioners suggest that some young people carry knives with the knowledge and even consent of their parents [5]. Condoning parental attitudes were found to be significantly related to drug dealing and gun possession. However, it must be noted that disapproving parental attitudes were not found to be a protective factor [1].

Another consistent factor appears to be early involvement in problem behaviour and youth offending [1, 4, 6, 8]. The London school survey found that involvement in problem behaviour when 13 years of age or less is highly related to involvement in drugs, guns and gangs [1]. There is also a link between the severity and prevalence of violent offending and the age of first offence [4, 8]. It must be stressed that by no means do we wish to imply that all individuals involved in problem behaviour at a young age will progress into more serious and violent offending inevitably. But these statistics do

emphasise the importance of considering opportunities to implement early intervention strategies to target likely offenders of the future.

Interestingly, aggressive behaviour, while strongly related to violence in general, is not as strong a risk factor for gang membership or gun possession [1]. This concurs with the finding that violence and the use of weapons appears to be qualitatively distinct. This has implications for the appropriateness of using anger-management strategies in tackling weapon possession and use. Such strategies were found to be the most popular interventions used by YOTs in tackling troublesome youth groups [4].

In terms of interventions into gang and gun-related problems, it is clear that little evidence exists on what works and what does not. Interventions are generally focused upon three strategies: Law enforcement strategies, diversionary interventions and community mobilisation programmes [4]. Anecdotally, it is suggested that effective interventions were those that included both proactive diversions for young people alongside reactive law enforcement ones. Such a 'carrot and stick' approach was thought to drive the success of gang interventions in the US [6]. Other good practice taken from mostly US-based interventions include taking a problem-solving approach which targets problems specific to each situation rather than merely importing an intervention that was successful elsewhere. Targeting behaviour (gang violence) rather than gang membership, and effective marketing of the strategy were also considered important[6]. Clearly, there is a need to establish an evidence base of good practice for problems within the UK.

Consistencies:

- Peer pressures or 'gang' involvement encourages possession and use of weapons
- Offenders who are gang members are more likely than non-gang involved offenders to carry guns
- Young offenders are strongly associated with later involvement in gangs and weapons
- Crimes involving weapons appear qualitatively different from general violence and aggression in that they appear to need an 'audience'
- Many shootings are gang related, but many are not.

Unresolved tensions:

- The extent and nature of the relationship between gang involvement and the use of weapons is unclear
- There is a need to investigate the circumstances surrounding shootings that are not gang related
- The degree to which there are real variations in the relationship between gangs and weapon use in different cities and parts of cities is unclear.

6 Summary of findings

This section summarises the consistencies, unresolved issues, risk and protective factors highlighted by the twelve projects reviewed. As already discussed, there are a number of factors that render comparisons between these projects risky and as such should be borne in mind when interpreting these findings.

6.1 Consistencies

Gangs

- Gangs are not a singular phenomenon
- There is a distinction between peer groups, street gangs and organised crime groups
- Gangs are based more on territory than ethnicity
- Gang members commit a wide variety of offences
- Crime in groups is disproportionate to what would be expected from the sum of its members if not in groups, ie gangs 'amplify' offending
- Street gangs are typically made up of young boys in their teens and early twenties. Higher level crime groups tend to involve older members
- Those with peers or family members with history of problem behaviour are at increased risk of involvement in gangs and guns
- Gang leaders may compensate for an absence of close male role models
- Social exclusion and rejection from institutions may contribute to gang involvement
- Gang members are not always drug users
- Gang members are more likely than non-gang members to be drug dealers.

Guns and other weapons

- Weapons are carried for a number of reasons, the main one being for protection
- The vast majority of knives carried by young people are penknives
- Most firearms are air guns, BB Guns or (converted) imitations
- Live-firing weapons are not 'readily available'
- Live ammunition is not easy to obtain
- There is a consistent link between victims and offenders of gun crime
- Not all gun crime is about drugs
- Drug dealers are desirable targets for robbery and arm to protect themselves
- Drug dealers may use guns to enforce debts and protect their territory
- While involvement in the drugs market may encourage the possession of firearms, their use may not always be drug related
- Much crime involving weapons goes unreported.

Weapons and gangs

- Peer pressures or 'gang' involvement encourages possession and use of weapons
- Offenders who are gang members are more likely than non-gang involved offenders to carry guns
- Young offenders are strongly associated with later involvement in gangs and weapons
- Crimes involving weapons appear qualitatively different from general violence and aggression in that they appear to need an 'audience'

- Many shootings are gang related, but many are not.

6.2 Unresolved issues

Gangs

- Movement between levels of gang involvement is largely unknown
- Clarification is needed on the level of 'organisation' of 'organised' crime groups
- It is difficult to determine the prevalence of gangs, and gang membership or the proportion of crime attributable to them
- More research is needed on the relationships between peer groups, gangs and organised crime groups
- The term 'gang' has no singular, agreed meaning or method of identification
- Clarification is required regarding the relationship between different levels of gang involvement, drug misuse and drug dealing
- There is little to explain the apparent regional variations in the prevalence of certain 'gang' types.

Guns and other weapons

- The extent and nature of weapon possession, guns in particular, is unclear
- Due, in part, to underreporting, the extent and nature of crime involving weapons is unknown
- The proportion of firearms-related offences that involve the use of firearms capable of discharging live ammunition is unclear
- The channels of supply of live firing guns and of live ammunition are not well understood
- There is little to explain the apparent variations in patterns of firearms offences by place.

Weapons and gangs

- The extent and nature of the relationship between gang involvement and the use of weapons is unclear
- There is a need to investigate the circumstances surrounding shootings that are not gang related
- The degree to which there are real variations in the relationship between gangs and weapon use in different cities and parts of cities is unclear.

6.3 Risk Factors

From the projects included in this review, a number or risk factors have been identified that appear linked to involvement with gangs and the use of weapons. These are:

- Victimisation
- Family/peer involvement
- Absence of role models
- Parental ambivalent/condoning attitudes
- Youth offending
- Rejection from institutions

It must be stressed that the mechanisms behind these risk factors are not likely to be straightforward but are likely to interact with each other and, no doubt, with other risk factors. Indeed, with some 'risk factors' the direction of causality may even be equivocal.

Furthermore, the risk factors identified are not dissimilar from established risk factors known to be associated with offending in general. Many of these factors, however, present themselves in cases where individuals do not enter into gangs or partake in criminal activity. The scale of this 'false positive' problem needs to be quantified in order to assess the likely efficiency of this approach to prevention. More detailed analysis of these factors is therefore required to reach a better understanding of the dynamics specifically surrounding gang and gun involvement. The authors are aware that such analyses is currently being planned by the Communities that Care team.

6.4 Protective factors and prevention strategies

Very few protective factors were highlighted amongst the projects. This represents one area where research might be effectively focused. For example, it would be useful to conduct an analysis of the differences between peer group collectives that become involved in criminal activities with groups sharing similar socio-demographic and cultural characteristics that do not become involved in such activities.

In relation to preventative strategies, a number of points can be made:

- The risk factors and drivers that draw young people into gangs and involvement with guns and other weapons also make it difficult for them to leave [6]. Since these factors are wide ranging, preventing gang and gun involvement requires a wide ranging response strategy, which will involve well organised partnership working [5, 6, 8]

- Responses should be problem-oriented to the specific issues that present themselves in each area. This will require a thorough analysis of the problem to determine what interventions and measures should be put in place [6]

- Responses should target behaviour and not gang involvement

- Common types of intervention to date include:
    - Early intervention [6]
    - Mentoring [6]
    - Improved community leadership [6]
    - Education of risks and social implications of drug-dealing and crime [5,6]
    - Enhance provision of safe youth facilities that provide opportunities for alternative forms of activity [6]
    - Tighter gun control regulations (including that of imitations and air weapons) [1, 6, 10]
    - Improve accessibility of formal retribution to victimised criminals [10]
    - Intelligence led stop and search policing [6]
    - Provision of safe exit strategies for gang-involved individuals [2]
    - Improvement in opportunities for meaningful, legitimate sources of income [6].

While these types of intervention have been advocated, there is little to indicate how they can best be implemented. There is also no British evidence to speak of, of their outcome effectiveness. It is also clear that they are dominated by measures aimed at diverting offenders from involvement in crime. The next section proposes a framework which enables more comprehensive strategies to be developed, and identify the gaps in knowledge that need to be filled if such strategies are to be developed and implemented effectively.

7 Discussion and Recommendations

Gangs and the use of firearms and other weapons are complicated issues. While there is no doubt some degree of overlap, they remain distinct problems. There is a need to move away from crude stereotypes of drug dealing, gun wielding gangs and towards acknowledging the considerable complexity of the issues involved [10].

In this section, a framework to guide future research is described and avenues for potential future projects are suggested. Finally, recommendations are given so as to promote considered, consistent use of the term 'gang' within the context of different forms of delinquent groups and the behaviours they present.

7.1 Establishing a research framework

It can be useful to consider current knowledge within a framework that enables knowledge gaps to be identified. The framework suggested here is Cohen and Felson's Routine Activity Theory[5] (RAT). This framework posits that for a direct contact predatory criminal event to occur three critical components must come together in space and time: a likely offender, a suitable target and absence of a capable guardian. Prevention is possible by the removal of any one of the critical components. Many crime problems are analysed using the Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT) which, following RAT, identifies significant attributes and characteristics of victims, offenders and the locations where offences occur.

Two other factors are also mentioned by Felson[6, 7] as contributory, though not critical, factors – the co-presence of an 'intimate handler', a known and significant third party who may either inhibit or egg on criminal behaviour and what Felson termed 'props' – items which help produce or prevent crime. While neither of these factors may be 'critical' for a crime to take place in the general sense, in the case of firearms and knife-related crimes, a prop (being the presence of the weapon itself) is clearly a necessary factor.

Table 3 summarises those risk factors that have been identified in the research reviewed here under RAT/PAT headings. There is no distinction here between guns and gangs. Rather the risk factors relating to both are rolled together. None of the risk factors is so strong that its presence indicates more than somewhat heightened risk. It doesn't make a weapon-related crime highly likely, just more likely than its absence.
In relation to the mooted protective factors, it must be remembered that the outcome effectiveness of the measures listed has not so far been systematically evaluated.

Significant gaps in knowledge are indicated in two ways:

- from the lengths of the lists - Table 3 clearly shows that the bulk of research effort to date has been concentrated on identifying risk factors for offenders, and that other elements of this framework have been relatively neglected.

- from the asterisks – three asterisks indicate where there are areas of significant uncertainty, either because the studies looked at have had little to say or because the findings are contradictory.

Table 3: Identified Risk and Mooted Potential Protective Factors

	Identified Risk factors	Mooted Potential Protective factors
Likely offender *(gang member/ weapon user)*	Fear of victimisation Being male Being teenager or in early 20s Relatives/friends criminal involvement Parents condoning criminal behaviour Absence of strong male role model Social exclusion/rejection from institutions Frequent general offending Early involvement in criminal and other problem behaviour Gun glamorisation*** Participation in drugs markets Being the victim of violent crime Living in a high crime area Youth gang/organised crime group membership***	Absence of risk factors Tighter gun control Early intervention Mentoring Improved community leadership Improved accessibility of formal retribution for victimised criminals Safe exit strategies for gang-involved individuals Improved opportunities for meaningful legitimate sources of income Enhanced provision of safe youth facilities that provide opportunities for alternative activity
Suitable target *(victim of weapon use)*	Membership of a gang/mixing with gangs*** Frequent general offending Carrying a weapon Being a perpetrator of violent crime Participation in drugs market	Absence of risk factors Education of risks and social implications of drug dealing and crime Enhanced provision of safe youth facilities that provide opportunities for alternative activity Improved accessibility of formal retribution for victimised criminals
Absence of capable guardian *(risky locations for weapons offences)*	Youth clubs*** High levels of intimidation***	Schools*** Enhanced provision of safe youth facilities that provide opportunities for alternative activity
Presence of intimate handler *(significant others encouraging or inhibiting weapons use)*	Membership of delinquent peer group approving or encouraging weapon use***	Absence of risk factors
Props *(availability of weapons)*	Easy access to imitation weapons, air guns and BB guns Access to live firing weapons*** Individuals are more likely to carry more 'lethal' weapons as they get older Fear and victimisation promote weapon possession	Schools***

7.2 Avenues for future research

Table 3 shows some clear gaps in the evidence base. There is clearly a dearth of research which considers the risk factors associated with specific locations, the positive and negative influences of significant others and factors which encourage and discourage the presence of weapons. More knowledge about risk and protective factors in relation to these factors may well lead to the development of more effective and practicable preventive strategies

There are, in addition, other key areas where more research is needed:

- We know little about the differences between gangs that are involved with firearms and those that are not. More research is also needed on the vertical relations between peer groups, gangs and organised crime groups, and the movement of individuals between them. Operation Stabiliser provides interesting hypotheses to these associations and movements, but more evidence is needed on a wider scale in order to form a better understanding.

- Whilst there have been area based studies in London, Manchester and Nottingham, the nature, extent and sources of variations in risk factors and potential protective factors by place are, as yet, unclear. This shows a marked gap in identifying and understanding offence locations in terms of their situational properties. Consideration of the location has so far been done only on a macro level and has highlighted the clustering of gang activity and gun crime to particular cities and neighbourhoods. However, there appears to have been no analysis of the location from the micro level, for instance the level of natural surveillance.

- In future, distinctions may usefully be developed between different problem behaviours involving guns, knives and groups. There are, for instance, variations in types of weapon (live ammunition firing pistols, sawn off shot guns, replicas air weapons, knives of various sorts etc), weapon use (for protection, threat, feud, instrumental crime, fashion accessory etc), types of crime in which weapons are used (street robbery, bank robbery, corner shop robbery, criminal damage, contract killing etc), and forms of group setting where weapons are carried and used (peer group, street gang, drug market, organised crime group etc). It is unlikely to be helpful to either understanding the issues or to the development of responses to think of a single, uniform problem with one set of solutions. Focusing on specific behaviours is likely to be more fruitful.

Finally, there may be value in reviewing the number and distribution of gangs, but before any of this should proceed, a clear definition of what constitutes a 'gang' is imperative (as is highlighted by [2, 4, 6, 8]).

7.3 Towards a working definition of 'gangs'

An agreement on a clear definition of the term 'gang' has not been reached for several decades and the issue is unlikely to be resolved shortly. However, there is clearly a need for consensus on a working definition that can ensure that projects across different agencies from different parts of the country are looking at the same things. A clear definition will also limit the tendency of political commentators and the media to blur boundaries between groups which can exaggerate the problem.

Hallsworth and Young's [2] classification of delinquent groups provides very detailed descriptions of the different groups and the types of criminal behaviours each group are typically involved with. This provides a good opportunity to establish consistent terms of reference for forthcoming 'gang' research. Table 4 describes Hallsworth and Young's three tier typology and identifies defining features that help to distinguish between each level.

Table 4. Suggested typology of crime-involved groups and associated problems

	Description	Defining criteria
Peer group	Relatively small, unorganised and transient groups composed of peers who share the same space and a common history. Involvement in crime will be mostly non-serious in nature and not integral to the identity of the group. Peer groups will rarely have names for themselves and will not engage in overt membership rituals. There will also be no clear leaders, hierarchical structure or group symbolism (unless symbolising a larger group such as a religion or local football team) Involvement in peer groups is not pathological, but a natural expression of 'bring human'. Motivations for involvement include comradeship, friendship, being part of something and not being alone. For most, adulthood will stabilise young people's identity in the direction of law-abiding behaviour. Some, however, will move on to become 'gang' members.	Crime is not intrinsic to the self-identity of the group Delinquent behaviour will be rare and intermittent Not all members of the group need to be engaged in crime
Gang	Relatively durable, predominantly street based groups of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity Presence of an organisational structure, defined leadership, group rituals, symbolism and a definable territory are features of some gangs, but these are supplementary not essential characteristics. As with the peer group, gang members are likely to be bound together because of a shared history or place. The gang is a derivative of the peer group and for most of its existence, it will be indistinguishable from street-based peer groups.	It has a name It has a propensity to inflict violence and engage in crime Violence and delinquency performs a functional role in promoting group identity and solidarity Delinquent behaviour and violence is mobilised as a currency to acquire social capital (status, respect, power, etc.) ALL members of the gang will be engaged in crime

Organised crime group	A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (mostly financial, though could be otherwise, sexual gratification as with child paedophile rings). For most, crime is their 'occupation'. These groups operate almost exclusively in the grey and illegal marketplace where market transactions are totally unregulated by the law. Organised crime groups exercise disproportionate control over the illegal means and forces of crime production. Members are likely to have mutated out of gang-members who are often used to service their needs. Motives that impel membership of these groups are similar to those that motivate business people in the legitimate economy. Organised crime groups are not homogenous. Some will be amateur affairs operated and managed by incompetent people. Others, however, will demonstrate more market acumen and more ruthlessness. These individuals may be difficult to trace because they will be more competent at hiding their activities. They may also have the financial muscle to acquire considerable legal protection through well paid solicitors, barristers and accountants.	It owns or controls the means of illegal production Its primary motivation is for personal gain (financial or otherwise), not for status.

Unfortunately, while on a conceptual level, Hallsworth and Young's typology makes a lot of sense, it has limited applicability from an operational perspective. Identifying which type of 'gang' problem exists in any given area, measuring the prevalence of 'gangs' or determining the extent of 'gang' membership of specific individuals are all hard to determine due to the considerable overlap between the behaviour of peer groups and gangs and the behaviours of gangs and organised crime groups. Knowing whether an act of low-level violence for example, was or was not integral to the *raison d'etre* of the group, is very difficult to determine from the behaviour itself. Further, knowing whether a drug dealer's primary motivation is one of making money or one of gaining respect is also problematic.

It is the opinion of the authors that more focus needs to be given to the actual antisocial and criminal *behaviours* that occur, since these are the problems that affect society. Groups of young people *per se*, are not the problem. Collective offending differs qualitatively and in severity, with some groups involving themselves in the drug market, while others are content with causing criminal damage and graffiti. It was by taking a *problem*-oriented approach to gun crime that produced such good results in the Boston gun project[8]. Further, by focusing on the groups and not the behaviour, there is a risk of aggravating the problem, concentrating on the wrong problems altogether and potentially persecuting individuals on the basis of their associations rather than their actions. Table 5 provides a conceptualisation of varying levels of group-related delinquent or criminal behaviour. While these levels can be loosely matched with levels of delinquent collectives, it must be remembered that different levels of collective can be involved in more than one level of offending just as any individual can be involved in more than one level of collective.

Table 5. Description of levels of collective offending.

	Description	Example behaviours
Peer-induced offending	Offences that are borne out of peer pressure, bravado, etc. ALL these offences will be committed in the presence of a group. Weapons possession is for status, so rarely used. Where firearms are possessed, these will be of the air gun/ BB gun kind. Very few will be live firing.	• Low-level ASB and intimidation • Street robbery • Criminal damage • Expressive acts of violence not involving the use of weapons • Drug-use.
Gang-related offending	Offending associated on behalf of, or for the benefit of a 'gang'. This might include conflicts over territory (geographical or commercial) or pride, and are likely to be characterised by expressive acts of violence. Unlike peer-induced offending, it is possible that an individual acting alone may commit a gang-related offence, (selling drugs, for example) Possession of weapons will be the norm rather than the exception. With firearms being of the firing kind. In many cases, however, it is likely these will be 'converted' from imitations or blank-firers (starter pistols for example)	As above plus: • Expressive acts of violence involving the use of weapons • Street dealing of drugs.
Organised offending	Offending will be purely instrumental. Either for financial gain or for other 'rewards' (such as child pornography). This involves more organised criminality than gang-related offending and may not involve stable groups of individuals. Where there is violence, it is likely this will be more instrumental than expressive in forcing out, or protecting themselves from competitors. Weapons possessed will be live firing guns. They are possessed for a purpose, not for status.	• Violence will be serious and will frequently involve guns • Drug dealing.

It is clearly important to maintain focus on group involvement in some instances, especially in terms of devising preventative strategies. Understanding group dynamics, how groups develop, evolve and break down, why some groups tend to be disproportionately responsible for offending, and what differences between these groups may account for the different behaviours displayed is clearly an important avenue for future research.

Depending on the objective of the research or intervention, it needs to be determined whether focus should be on levels of *collective* or levels of collective *deviance*. For example, in areas where peer group delinquency in the form of low-level antisocial behaviour and intimidation is the particular problem, the focus should be on targeting that behaviour, whether or not those involved are members of peer groups or involved with gangs. Conversely, where 'gangs' are known to be causing a wide range of problems, the focus might need to be switched so as to target and disrupt the group dynamics, rather than focusing specifically at any one of the problem behaviours.

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